



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

February 10, 2009, to November 26, 2009
and Index

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker



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Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

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

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated January 28, 2009, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

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

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

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

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

Ladies and gentlemen and hon. members, I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to join in in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Speaker: Well done. Please be seated.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

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

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen and hon. members, the history of Alberta does not recall an occasion when two Premiers from other Canadian provinces have been present for the presentation of Alberta's Speech from the Throne. Today two Premiers, both the 31st in the history of their respective provinces, are with us.

Premier Shawn Graham was elected as Premier of New Brunswick on September 18, 2006, and his government holds 32 of 55 seats in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly. Premier Graham, would you please rise and receive the welcome of all present.

Premier Robert W.J. Ghiz was elected Premier of Prince Edward Island on May 28, 2007, and his government holds 24 of 27 seats in the Prince Edward Island Legislative Assembly. Premier Ghiz, would you please rise and receive the welcome of all present.

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

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

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

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

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

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

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

His Honour: Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

This is my fifth year delivering the Speech from the Throne, and it occurs to me that I've never taken the opportunity to thank all the members of the Assembly for the kindness and support that you've shown my wife and me throughout this term. Serving as Lieutenant Governor is really one of the best jobs in the province because it's a chance to quarterback and coach a championship Alberta team that does a wonderful job of governing our province and a chance to give back to a place that I'm incredibly proud to call home. So from both myself and my wife, Mary, thank you all for your support.

I was also going to thank the Premier for making this year's speech shorter, but he didn't, so I'll get right to it.

I would like to extend a special welcome to our guests from Canada's east coast: the Hon. Shawn Graham, Premier of New Brunswick; the Hon. Robert Ghiz, Premier of Prince Edward Island; and the Hon. Jack Keir, New Brunswick Minister of Energy. Premier Graham, Premier Ghiz, and Minister Keir, we're most pleased to have you join us not only in our province but also here in this House, where the business of the people of Alberta is conducted.

Speech from the Throne

His Honour: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Second Session of the 27th Alberta Legislature. Today it is my honour to deliver the Speech from the Throne as it is my honour to serve this province and its people as Lieutenant Governor.

Facing the Future with Confidence

Ours is a beautiful and blessed province. It has always attracted people of courage and determination, dreamers who saw opportunity here and worked together to realize all the possibilities our land offers. Together the people of this province have faced many challenges over the past century. Tough times bring out the best in Albertans. We always pull together and emerge from adversity even stronger than before. In tough times we have learned the value of

self-reliance and hard work, the need to plan and prepare for the future, and what it means to stand together as a community that looks after its most vulnerable members.

These lessons will guide Alberta as it faces yet another challenge, the global economic uncertainty that is unfolding all around us. Our province is not immune from the turmoil. Far from it. Alberta will face its share of challenges, and government needs to make prudent and realistic decisions to ensure it delivers the things Albertans need at an affordable cost.

But despite the volatile economic times Albertans can face the future with confidence and optimism. We will do what we have always done: adapt, set goals for the future, and move forward in confident pursuit of those goals. Prudent fiscal management has positioned Alberta well. Our province is debt free and has more than \$7 billion set aside in the sustainability fund to help protect core programs from roller-coaster revenues. Tax changes, including the elimination of health care premiums this year, will save Albertans and Alberta businesses over \$1 billion annually, putting extra money in the economy, a welcome stimulus at a critical time.

These actions are part of your government's economic vision, steps that were taken long before the economic downturn began. They will serve Albertans well by helping our province weather the downturn and positioning our province to be ahead of the curve of the next growth cycle.

Our plan as we navigate through these uncertain times will focus on protecting Albertans and the things that matter most to them while preparing the way for growth to resume as quickly as possible. Our commitment to core programs such as health and education will remain strong, and we will continue to implement the strategic capital plan and other long-term initiatives that form our investment in the future to ensure that Albertans will have the infrastructure and services they need for a return to sustained growth and an increasingly diverse economy.

Creating Opportunity

As a trading province Alberta's future economic success will be built on our ability to compete in a world marketplace. Your government will protect and nurture the business conditions that will allow Alberta companies and entrepreneurs to thrive in markets here at home and around the globe. It will also continue to aggressively promote Alberta products nationally and internationally and bolster Alberta's reputation as a place that welcomes those who want to live, work, invest, and trade with us.

Alberta has advocated strongly for the elimination of interprovincial trade barriers and led by example with our agreement with British Columbia to improve competitiveness and bolster the national economy. Removing these barriers will make Canada more competitive and a more desirable place to invest.

Alberta is also developing a comprehensive new strategy to strengthen international relations with long-time economic partners and identify new markets for Alberta. Of course, our biggest international partner is also Canada's closest friend, neighbour, and ally, the United States. We will build positive relations with the new U.S. administration and support our healthy trading relationship. We will continue to help the U.S. meet its need for a stable and secure supply of energy to power a return to prosperity, and we will demonstrate our commitment to developing our resources in an environmentally responsible way.

Foundations of Our Economy: Energy

Alberta is blessed with world-class energy resources. These have provided broad, sustained wealth creation for Albertans, and they

offer long-term energy security for Canada and North America. The royalty changes introduced by government at the beginning of this year set the stage for a renewed partnership between industry and Albertans, the owners of our resources. It is a partnership in which both the rewards and the risks of this volatile industry are more equitably shared.

As outlined in Alberta's first-ever provincial energy strategy, opportunities for further value-added development in Alberta will be pursued in the oil, gas, and petrochemicals industries. This will include a review of Alberta's competitiveness in the energy sector, comprising everything from the cost of materials to the efficiency and effectiveness of regulatory regimes. The goal is to ensure that Alberta continues to attract investment that diversifies the economy, creates good jobs for Albertans, and provides revenues to pay for important programs and services.

The aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines on land management and resource development will be reviewed this year with input from First Nations and industry to ensure the approach to consultation is beneficial to all Albertans.

One area of significant government focus is the oil sands, North America's most promising source of energy for decades to come. While global economic uncertainty has slowed the pace of oil sands development, there is no doubt that this abundant resource will play a key role in building long-term economic growth and energy security for Alberta and Canada. Consumers and businesses around the world will be looking for fossil fuels for generations to come, even as the search for alternatives intensifies. Our goal must be to provide the energy the world needs with an environmental footprint that grows lighter and lighter over time.

Your government will release and implement a comprehensive plan that will responsibly manage the economic, environmental, social, and infrastructure impacts and opportunities of oil sands development. The plan will set out strategies to optimize economic growth in the oil sands while reducing their environmental impact. It will increase co-ordination across all levels of government and stakeholders in developing the oil sands responsibly and enhance accountability in the management of the oil sands. It will foster innovation in science and technology that can solve the unique challenges of oil sands development. There will continue to be an increased emphasis on planning in high-growth communities in the oil sands regions.

With these improvements in mind we must recognize that no leading source of energy today and no source of fossil fuel comes without some environmental consequence. Our goal must be nothing less than to partner with our customers in meeting their energy needs and honouring our mutual commitment to protect the planet for future generations.

Forestry

Our province is blessed with forests that provide social, economic, and environmental benefits for Albertans: protect watersheds, provide fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, and support industries, jobs, and communities.

Forest companies and the communities they serve have been hit hard by global economic uncertainty, the slowdown of the U.S. housing market, and ongoing business challenges. The Alberta government is working with the province's forestry sector to implement recommendations from the Forest Industry Sustainability Committee's interim report to improve global competitiveness, increase value-added opportunities, and pursue the evolving bioindustry.

Programs to promote healthier forests will include the healthy pine

strategy to manage the spread of the mountain pine beetle, use strategic harvesting to diversify the age of the timber, and lessen the risk of catastrophic wildfire and insect infestations.

Agriculture

Alberta's agriculture and agrifood industries are key economic drivers of our province. However, Alberta's livestock industry continues to deal with many challenges that threaten its sustainability. Your government is working closely with all sectors to implement the Alberta livestock and meat strategy, a long-term plan that will lay the foundation for a profitable and competitive future.

Alberta has already provided significant support to this valuable industry, more than any other jurisdiction across the country. It is important that we uphold the reputation of Alberta beef, pork, and other meat and livestock products as the best in the world. To do this, we must meet the demands of our customers for food safety, public safety, and animal health and welfare.

Building for Tomorrow

Modern, well-maintained infrastructure plays a vital role in our province's economic success and in supporting the high quality of life Albertans enjoy. Infrastructure projects support essential services and represent important economic activity that encourages employment and business across the province.

Unlike many jurisdictions that are going into deficit with infrastructure stimulus packages, Alberta has more than \$6 billion in its capital account to continue an aggressive infrastructure program that began years ago. Your government will follow through on its commitment to make significant investments in hospitals, schools, and other public infrastructure to strengthen our communities and help municipalities address growth pressures.

In today's economic environment, now more than ever, this means investing strategically and building responsibly. Keeping a close eye on project scope and budgets, we will work with stakeholders to ensure that facilities are appropriate for the needs of the community and delivered in a timely, cost-effective, and efficient manner.

Showing Environmental Leadership

Albertans live in one of the most spectacular, diverse, beautiful, and healthy natural environments in the world. Generations of Albertans have grown up with an appreciation of and respect for the environment. Our province is a place of many blessings, including landscapes that are both extremely productive and incredibly beautiful.

With the increasing demand for resources felt from all corners of the globe, Alberta's landscapes face increasing pressure for habitat protection, housing, recreation, jobs, and economic growth. To address these pressures, Alberta is pioneering planning tools and new environmental management approaches that consider our province's landscapes across entire regions. The land-use framework will help promote environmental priorities alongside social and economic goals. Cumulative effects management, already being used in Alberta's Industrial Heartland northeast of Edmonton, will be applied next to the oil sands area in conjunction with the land-use framework.

A Plan for Parks

Among Albertans' most cherished spaces are our province's parks and protected areas. Like the rest of the province these areas are also impacted by a growing population and increased use. A new plan for parks will be introduced this year to ensure the long-term

sustainability of our natural landscapes, enhance recreational opportunities, and help to improve the quality of life for Albertans. We want to ensure that Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, enjoy, and value the natural world.

Clean Water, Air, and Land

In 2003 Alberta's water for life strategy became North America's most comprehensive water management strategy. Five years later this province has changed: more people, more buildings, more business, and more demands on our water resources. The renewed water for life strategy addresses those changes and provides clear direction for addressing some of the water challenges facing our province. It will ensure that Alberta's precious water resources are the focus of thoughtful, long-term planning and stewardship.

Your government will redouble efforts to ensure that as we meet the needs of energy consumers here and around the world, we provide them with products that are made with environmental care. We will maintain a long-term focus to invest in clean, low-carbon technology, reduce emissions from industry, and support energy-wise choices for consumers.

Alberta pioneered North America's first regulatory system to reduce industrial greenhouse gas emissions. Our system has already generated more than 2 and a half million tonnes of real reductions, but this is only a first step to regulate and reduce emissions. We will continue to learn from our actions, adapt, and grow, and we will continue to work with the federal government to support a cohesive national framework to limit greenhouse gas emissions and do our part as a responsible, sustainable North American energy leader.

This spring the government of Alberta will introduce legislation to facilitate the development of technologies that will help not just Alberta but countries around the world meet the challenge of climate change. The carbon capture and storage implementation act will establish a \$2 billion investment in carbon capture and storage. Funding for between three and five projects will be announced this year, resulting in greenhouse gas emission reductions of up to 5 million tonnes annually in Alberta, the equivalent of taking a third of Alberta's vehicles off the road. Even more importantly, these initial projects will set the stage for technological developments that will make carbon capture and storage, real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, possible in other jurisdictions, including those whose emissions are substantially larger than Alberta's.

Albertans want to do their part to conserve and be energy efficient. Your government will develop an energy efficiency policy framework to help Albertans be wise energy consumers. A consumer rebate program will be introduced to encourage individual actions and energy-wise decisions.

People Thriving in a Skilled Workforce

Inspiring Education

The freedom to create our own future and achieve our dreams so often rests on our enthusiasm for education. This year we will reach out to Albertans to explore their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for their children and learn how we can enable each child to reach his or her full potential. This conversation, called Inspiring Education, will create a long-term vision for K to 12 education in Alberta and develop better ways to offer educational opportunities to our children.

An Environment Where Innovation Flourishes

Your government will help innovation flourish in Alberta. Our province's international reputation is increasingly linked to our

commitment to technology as Alberta becomes known as one of the world's preferred destinations for turning ideas into value-added products and services. New technologies will set the pace of our competitive success and will both harness and fuel our imaginations. We must be prepared to compete with and win against the best in the world when it comes to matching education, capital, and ingenuity to make better products, solve bigger problems, and create a better quality of life.

The Alberta research and innovation act, to be introduced this session, will strengthen and align the entire research and innovation system to help Alberta researchers and entrepreneurs, especially new entrepreneurs, better realize their potential as creators of world-class discoveries and products.

As part of Alberta's action plan for bringing technology to market, entrepreneurs will have access to a new suite of innovation services this year, including more efforts to help spur new product development and match young talent with experienced technology development advisers. A new connector service will help bring companies and international partners together with the many outstanding innovators and organizations in the province, and the Alberta Enterprise Corporation will encourage and leverage international investment.

Our new Campus Alberta philosophy will help nurture this culture of innovation by expanding young minds through our exceptional postsecondary institutions. A revised funding approach will better align resources with learner and labour market demand, focusing on areas that support Alberta's strategic advantage and long-term plan to win in the next generation economy. Alberta's outstanding education system and trades and technology excellence will be showcased to the world at the September WorldSkills competition in Calgary.

Adapting to a Changing Business Environment

Alberta's labour force has a long history of adapting to a changing business environment. Working from the past success of the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy, government will set the future direction for investing in our workforce. We will develop a long-term strategy that will look ahead, anticipate growth, and take the steps needed to ensure that Alberta has the talents and skills to create value-added activity, increase innovation, and expand and diversify the Alberta economy.

Your government is also committed to working with First Nations and Métis leaders on a government-to-government basis to increase labour market participation and economic opportunity. This summer the government of Alberta in partnership with Treaty 7 First Nations will present a first-of-its-kind international symposium that will bring together aboriginal and business communities to share and encourage indigenous economic development strategies. The event, called Gathering for Success, will feature over 500 community, business, and aboriginal leaders and high-profile speakers from around the world.

A Healthy Approach

Your government recognizes that Albertans want and deserve an excellent health care system that will be strong and sustainable for the future. Alberta has developed a forward-looking five-part plan for health called Vision 2020. This plan is about meeting the needs of individual patients, their families, and communities in a way that recognizes the role of all Albertans in maintaining their health and improving the way health services are organized, delivered, and used. Under Vision 2020 a primary health care strategy will be introduced to promote the use of interdisciplinary health teams and

more flexible workforce arrangements. The strategy will also focus on recruitment and retention of the health workforce needed to deliver high-quality and accessible care.

Rural health care will be enhanced through the integration of ambulance and emergency medical services with other parts of the provincial health system effective April 1, 2009. This will result in improved access to high-quality care in rural areas.

Your government will pursue a three-year action plan on children's mental health, a partnership among government, schools, and communities that will support services and resources for optimal mental health and well-being.

A new drug programs benefit act will be introduced during this session to support the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy. It will make drug coverage more accessible and affordable for lower income Alberta seniors and other vulnerable persons.

The Public Health Amendment Act, also to be introduced this session, will lay a solid foundation for improving public health by strengthening the role and authority of the chief medical officer of health in protecting and promoting Albertans' health.

A health research strategy will be developed and implemented to guide Alberta's investment in health research and ensure that research focuses on innovation and improving health service efficiency and effectiveness.

Strong Communities

Alberta, as we know, is made up of vibrant, inclusive communities, places of opportunity, culture, and belonging where families and children are supported, where the vulnerable are cared for, and where people feel safe. Strong and sustainable municipalities are a key ingredient of strong communities. To foster strong communities throughout the province, your government will provide significant funding to Alberta municipalities through programs like the municipal sustainability initiative.

A Culture of Creativity

Nurturing a culture of creativity and inclusiveness in our province will give Albertans the edge we need to remain competitive with other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world for residents and visitors alike. Last year Alberta hosted its first-ever Arts Day, with events held in communities across the province to celebrate the arts in all its forms. This year the celebration will be expanded to a three-day event called Arts Days, between September 18 and 20. A province-wide campaign will also be launched to promote Alberta's creativity and artistic excellence.

Supporting Children and Families

Your government will support children and families through improvements in high-quality, accessible, and affordable child care options. The government of Alberta has made a commitment to support the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces in our province by 2011, and it is well on the way to reaching that goal. More than 5,500 spaces have been created so far.

This year accreditation will be extended to out of school child care programs to raise the standard of care these programs provide. Accreditation will provide operators with access to grants and wage top-ups to help recruit, retain, and develop staff. It will also help families find quality care for their school-aged children.

Helping Albertans through Tough Times

Your government recognizes that economic uncertainty is putting pressure on Albertans, and some are worried about their futures. We will be there to help Albertans through tough times.

Alberta will deliver on its commitment to develop 11,000 affordable housing units by providing capital funding assistance to municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. With more than 5,600 affordable housing units supported since 2007, we are on track to meet this goal.

Alberta Works programs provide a hand up to employment, and these programs will become both more visible and more important in the year ahead. People with barriers to employment will receive information, advice, and assistance. People facing layoffs will receive help in identifying their options, looking for work, or moving into other careers. People wanting to take occupational upgrading will get help to learn new skills for a changing workforce, and new Albertans will be supported as they settle into community life and move into the workforce.

Supporting Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

Your government recognizes and appreciates the contributions seniors have made and continue to make to our province. Alberta will ensure that seniors who need support, persons with disabilities, and others who are vulnerable or in need are well cared for.

Alberta will continue to pursue its new continuing care strategy to help Albertans to age in the right place by increasing access to home care and providing more choice in supportive living options. It will upgrade the physical and functional condition of long-term care facilities. We are committed to improving quality, supply, and client choice in the continuing care system.

This session the supportive living accommodation licensing act will be introduced. This updated legislation will improve the quality of care and monitoring of standards in supportive living facilities.

The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act will also be introduced to better protect adults who receive care and support services from government-funded agencies from abuse by improving prevention, monitoring, and follow-up when abuse has been reported.

Bill 1, Protecting the Jobs of Those Who Serve

Albertans value the tremendous sacrifices Canadian military personnel make to protect our freedoms. Along with leaving family and friends when they are called into active service, those in the reserves also leave their civilian jobs. Your government believes those who defend our security should have job security so they can continue to support their families.

We are privileged to have three members of the Canadian Forces reserves with us today: Corporal Tyler Myroniuk of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Corporal Nathan Goisnard of 41 Combat Engineer Regiment, and Master Corporal Kevin Fensom of the King's Own Calgary Regiment.

In order to ensure that they and other Alberta reservists are properly protected under the Employment Standards Code, the government will introduce the Employment Standards Amendment Act to provide job-protected leave. The legislation would require the reinstatement of a reservist into the position he or she held prior to the leave or into a comparable position.

Safe Communities

The government of Alberta will push forward on its commitment to strong communities. We will continue to advance initiatives that respond to and build on the recommendations of the safe communities task force. In the year ahead safe communities initiatives will focus on families in crisis, mental health services, immigrant support programs, and addiction and recovery projects.

A new framework for law enforcement will be developed to ensure equitable police funding across the province, improve service delivery, and enhance police governance. Negotiations with the federal government will continue to ensure that the RCMP remains our provincial police service.

Your government is taking a hard look at the impact organized crime is having on Alberta, including the tremendous pressure it puts on the police and the courts. Alberta will host a gang summit this year to address the problem of gangs and gang activity and the impact on our justice system. Your government will introduce a legislative package to disrupt and dismantle organized crime activity. It will include amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act to give police another tool to help bar owners and staff deal with gang activity. It will also consider tightening the rules around vehicle modification methods used by gang members such as armour-plating and installing bulletproof glass and surveillance cameras.

A key aspect of the work Alberta is doing requires changing legislation at a federal level. Alberta will continue to take the lead in advocating for changes to federal laws to ensure that those who commit serious crimes, including youth, do serious time.

Conclusion

These are certainly challenging times, but Albertans can and should face the future with confidence. Your government remains committed to implementing its plan to support a bright and prosperous future. That plan builds on the steps Albertans and their government have already taken to put our province on a sound footing. It's a plan that goes beyond weathering the current global economic storm to build a springboard to sustainable, diversified long-term growth. It's a plan for education and employment, public health, strong communities, and a culture of innovation. It is a plan that will position Alberta as a committed partner in providing consumers here in Canada and around the world with the energy they need while respecting the environmental values we all share.

Your government will undertake these actions knowing that even in tough times, especially in tough times, it is essential to keep investing in our province and its future. We must continue to welcome people to Alberta to pursue their dreams and build our communities. We must continue to share Alberta's story with people around the world.

Government must do these things, all the while recognizing that its role, while important, is limited. As always, the real authors of our province's success, those who will carry our province forward to an even greater future, are hard-working and innovative Albertans. It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded, people who share the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve. It is Albertans who have made our province great, and together we will continue to build our province for those who will inherit this land that we love.

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

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

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

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

Hon. Members and Guests:

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on December 13, 2008, the Alberta Liberal Party announced that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View had been elected its new leader. On December 15, 2008, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview advised me in writing that he was resigning his position as Leader of the Official Opposition effective that date and further requested that the newly elected leader of the Liberal Party of Alberta, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, be recognized as the Leader of the Official Opposition. Please join me in thanking the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for his service as Leader of the Official Opposition. [applause]

As of this day the Chamber recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View as the Leader of the Official Opposition in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View becomes the 29th different person in Alberta's history to serve in that capacity and Alberta's 30th Leader of the Official Opposition. One person served twice, at two different times. That is the reason for the difference in the numbers. To the new hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, congratulations and welcome.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

Tablings

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

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Bill 1**Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009**

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have a deep respect – a deep respect – for all those who serve our country in Canada's armed forces. They help during times of emergency, they protect our borders, and they serve abroad to bring safety and preserve freedom around the world. For reservists this is a calling pursued by those who are otherwise civilians and who have careers outside the military. The need for regular training and the call to active service sometimes require absences from nonmilitary careers. We value the contributions that these brave people make and think it is only fair that they have jobs to return to when their service to Canada is done.

Mr. Speaker, therefore I request leave to introduce Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

This amendment will provide Canadian Forces reservists in Alberta with unpaid, job-protected leave while they're away from their civilian jobs serving our country. In addition, reservists will be entitled to leave of up to 20 days each calendar year for training. The government of Alberta already offers these provisions for reservists who are members of the Alberta public service. If passed, this bill would ensure that all Alberta reservists will have similar protections in place, and they will know that they can continue to provide for their families by having jobs to come home to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Motions

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I now move that the speech of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration Wednesday, February 11, 2009.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:01 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Issue 2

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our citizens. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day and every day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What a great pleasure it is to introduce to you and through you some of Alberta's very brightest students who are here today from my constituency, from the wonderful Donnan elementary school. There are two classroom groups here visiting us today with their teachers and group leaders Ms Fiona White, Mr. Larry Goodwin, Mrs. Donna Machinski, Mrs. Claire Titus, Mr. Cory Packard, Miss Danielle Belanger, Miss Tennille Oppen, Mrs. Nadine Oszytko, Mrs. Jacque Verenka, and Mrs. Melinda Robertson. I would ask all of the students, their teachers, and their helpers to please rise, and why don't the rest of us greet them with a warm welcome. Thank you for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me as well to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 29 grade 6 students from Westbrook elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students is their teacher, Chantel Oswald, along with parent helpers Mrs. Shelley Richmond and Mr. Rami Bader. All of the grade 6 students from this class have been currently participating in the School at the Legislature program in this school year.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the privilege of visiting Westbrook school and speaking with four classes of grade 6 students, and I can assure you that they ask the best questions on all of the relevant current issues. They raised excellent questions. They're very engaged. The School at the Legislature program is doing well for these students.

My guests are seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: I suspect that the answers were of equal quality.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one very special introduction this afternoon. It is a great pleasure today for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Hunter Wight. Many members will likely know Hunter from his role at Mount Royal College as vice-president of external relations, which happens to be in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow. I'd ask all members to join me in extending the warm welcome of this Assembly to Mr. Wight.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two very important people from Covenant Health: Mr. Patrick Dumelie, president and CEO, and Dr. John Brennan, board chair. They're here today to raise awareness for the World Day of the Sick, which occurs every year on February 11. This day acts as a reminder to Catholics to ensure that people in need have special quality access to health care. It is also created to promote reflection and appreciation of the importance of each volunteer and individual effort to heal the sick.

On Monday, February 9, I attended an event at St. Joseph's Basilica for Covenant Health celebrating their missioning. Over 400 people attended this event, including the hon. Premier and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

I would like to thank Covenant Health for their work in spreading their message and their awareness and ask these two gentlemen to rise to receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a fine young man from Lethbridge, Alberta, Mr. Luke Malcolm. He's a student at the University of Lethbridge, lives in my riding, is very involved in politics and all sorts of good things on campus and in the community. He's studying finance and political science and finishes his degree this year. I'd like to pass on a warm welcome to Luke if he'd just rise, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you definitely the most beautiful person in this Assembly: my girlfriend, Ashley Millar. As many of the members know, in this job you need to have a strong support system, and Ashley has been with me since – we actually had our first date a year and a half ago today. She wanted to come and see what we actually do here. I would like the Assembly to give her the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a friend and supporter in my constituency office, Mr. Marcel Durand, president of the constituency, in fact a great, thoughtful, and committed person for democracy and for the future of this province. I'd ask him to stand and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my constituency assistant from my Calgary-West constituency. Laura Wells is in the gallery, and I'd ask that she rise and receive the applause of the members.

Members' Statements

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

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week Albertan innovation proved second to none as educators came together to showcase new ideas for improving student learning. On February 9 and 10 teachers, school administrators, school board trustees, parents, and community members participated in the eighth annual Alberta initiative for school improvement, or AISI, conference. The conference showcased over 50 creative, locally tailored projects developed by school jurisdictions from across Alberta. These projects ranged from focusing on technology and literacy to at-risk students and high school completion.

The 2009 AISI conference was a great success. Over 800 people attended, including government and school representatives from Alberta-accredited schools in Macau and Hong Kong, who came to experience the outstanding work of our schools. The 2009 conference marked the end of AISI cycle 3, and school jurisdictions are now in the planning process for cycle 4. AISI has become an important part of maintaining Alberta's position as a leader in learning. It has changed the way the education system works to improve student learning and achievement.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to recognize all the partners in AISI and all those involved in this year's conference. Their commitment and dedication to AISI is the reason this initiative is such a success and has such a positive impact on student learning in our great province.

Thank you.

Charles Darwin's Birthday Bicentennial

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, February 12 marks the bicentennial of the birth of a remarkable naturalist and scientist, Charles Darwin. Charles Robert Darwin was born in the small English town of Shrewsbury in 1809. In 1831 as a 22-year old Cambridge graduate he set sail on a five-year voyage on His Majesty's Ship the *Beagle*, a voyage which gave him new insights into the nature of living things and which would change the course of biological sciences forever.

On this voyage Darwin's keen observations led him to notice relationships of fossil species and living species of animals. On the Galapagos Islands he noted that each island in the small archipelago was inhabited by tortoises with different-shape shells and by closely related finches, differentiated by the dimensions of their bills. These and many other observations led Darwin to discover natural selection as the fundamental force in the evolution of species. Darwin knew that these ideas would challenge the religious dogma of those days, and he did not publish his conclusions until 1858 when a contemporary biologist, Alfred Russel Wallace, was independently developing the same ideas.

1:40

In 1859 he published his most famous book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. This epic-making work quickly sold out, went through five more editions, and at the time was both violently attacked and energetically defended but in the end was almost universally accepted by the scientific world. Since his death his ideas have been vindicated by modern fields of science, including paleontology, taxonomy, biogeography, animal behaviour, and especially by genetics and the ability to read the genome of man and other living creatures.

Charles Darwin died on April 19, 1882, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, where he reposes amongst the greatest minds of the English-speaking world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Voter Participation

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Voter apathy continues to be a big concern not only to me but to many Albertans. In fact, I have received correspondence from several constituents expressing their concern regarding voter apathy, particularly among younger Albertans, and they have suggested a number of ways to help make the electoral process more inclusive, from the creation of a citizens' assembly on electoral reform to the introduction of proportional representation.

It is well known that in the last election only 41 per cent of eligible Albertans cast their ballots. This is certainly a challenge that is complex yet important to the future of this province. It's tempting to look for quick-fix solutions, but we must take a more balanced, steady, and ultimately conciliatory approach to this challenge. We must do whatever we can to encourage young people to become involved in communities and in the election of governments even if that means looking at new and innovative ideas within our current government and democratic processes.

However, Mr. Speaker, I also challenge more young people to take the lead and be the first of their friends and peers to become involved in what I consider to be the purest and most fundamental democratic institution in our political system. The concept of political parties is a mechanism to mobilize similar-minded individuals in the form of a formal electoral coalition, and I mean formal electoral coalition, not an unelected coalition, which we were recently exposed to. I would encourage the many young people in Alberta that are frustrated to get involved in these institutions. It is this action that I believe will have the greatest impact on the future of this province. With both sides working together, more of Alberta's young people will see the value in investing in the mechanisms of government and democracy that will help ensure future success for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

International Disability Film Festival

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the opportunity to take part in the eighth annual Picture This international disability awards festival. Picture This is Canada's first and biggest international disability film festival. It promotes films that focus on any area of disability culture as well as films on any subject that are produced, directed, or written by a person with a disability. The basic idea is to create a greater understanding of the culture of people with disabilities. It is also an excellent opportunity for the cultural community in Calgary to connect with others around the world and to promote an international understanding of these issues.

This excellent festival is organized by the Calgary Scope Society, a nonprofit organization that has been improving the lives of persons with developmental disabilities in the Calgary area for over 25 years. I was thrilled with this gala evening, and I'm sure the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, whom I was pleased to see in attendance, also appreciated this amazing event. It was held at La Joie de Vivre, a wonderful, accessible venue, and I thank the hosts for their hard work and help.

Supporting these kinds of initiatives, events that are both fun and worthwhile, is one of the things I enjoy most about representing downtown Calgary. Furthermore, projects that raise awareness about the challenges and experience of individuals with disabilities in Calgary, in our province, and, in fact, around the world are an important part of building inclusive communities. This event helps us all recognize the true strength of our diverse cultures, and I want

to congratulate all the filmmakers for their sterling efforts. Each one has made a significant contribution to our artistic heritage.

Picture This also tours in Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and rural Alberta, so I strongly encourage Albertans to watch for it. You'll have a great experience.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

EarthRenew Manure Processing Facility

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak of an important and exciting bioenergy innovation taking place in my riding of Strathmore-Brooks. As Albertans are doing their part to reduce greenhouse gases, an Alberta-based company is taking the lead in environmental stewardship in our agriculture sector. One week ago today I attended the official opening of EarthRenew's Strathmore 1, the first agricultural waste processing plant of its kind in the world. Strathmore 1 is located at Cattleland Feedyards and is owned and operated by EarthRenew, a privately funded Calgary-based company that continues to grow throughout North America with new facilities under construction in western Canada, California, and the U.S. Midwest.

An industrial gas-powered turbine cooks cattle waste – feedlot manure, the proverbial – to 530 degrees, in the process killing all weed seeds and pathogens while preserving the all-natural organic matter. Organic matter fertilizer is a product used to increase yields for organic and our conventional farming. The output from the efficient gas-powered turbine generates enough electricity for approximately 3,000 homes and recaptures 80 per cent of the fuel used for the further process.

EarthRenew's Strathmore 1 employs 20 staff, and in total this operation expects to invest about \$3 million this year in labour and supplies in the Strathmore economy. In addition, this plant achieves a substantial reduction in carbon emissions, up to 100,000 tonnes per year, by processing the proverbial.

This green, cutting-edge technology illustrates the innovation and entrepreneurial spirit so important to Alberta's success. I look forward to further application of this technology in other areas of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

John Kucera

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend John Kucera of Calgary skied his way into the history books. He became the first Canadian man to win the downhill gold medal at the world alpine championships in Val d'Isère, France. John started second and crossed the finish line after a breathtaking and nearly flawless two minutes, seven and one one-hundredth seconds. He then had to wait patiently while each of the world's best downhillers tried and failed to beat his time. Kucera's tight line down the mountain was the difference between him and his closest competitor, who was only .04 seconds behind.

John was born in Calgary to parents who had recently immigrated from the Czech Republic. In order to fund his skiing, they took out a second mortgage on their home, and was it ever worth it. The young Kucera made his World Cup debut at age 20 on home snow in Lake Louise in November 2004, and just two years later at the very same location he won his first World Cup GS. John's most recent win comes exactly one year before the opening of the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics and the games' first medal event, coincidentally the men's downhill.

The path to the podium starts in this province, Mr. Speaker. Our Alberta government has committed nearly a hundred million dollars to renew Olympic legacy facilities at Canada Olympic Park and the Canmore Nordic Centre. Funding also supports the building of Canada's first centre of sports excellence, and Canada's Sports Hall of Fame will soon call the city of Calgary home, with the government of Alberta as an integral partner. Because of these provincial projects and efforts like those of John Kucera, I believe that Canadians will win Olympic gold on Canadian soil for the first time next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

The Lobbyists Act prohibits individuals from providing paid advice to government at the same time and on the same issue as they are paid to lobby government. Amendments in Bill 2 will strengthen and clarify the application of this prohibition against a dual role. Amendments will also limit the concept of associated persons, so spouses are not included, and will add to the list of individuals who are considered to be public office holders. Along with some housekeeping amendments Bill 2 also gives the Ethics Commissioner authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties. Bill 2 will enhance the functioning and enforceability of the Lobbyists Act and ensure it meets the needs of Albertans.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Global Economic Downturn

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are six months into one of the worst economic downturns in our history. Albertans are anxious about their jobs, investments, and opportunities, looking for leadership – clear, strong leadership – on the economic woes that are hitting Albertans hard. In the last two months we've seen 20,000 jobs lost. To the Premier: why hasn't the government acted decisively to support these people, getting them back to work as soon as possible?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, allow me to congratulate the newly elected Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to express feeling toward those that have lost their jobs in the province of Alberta. That's why we've articulated a three-point plan to ensure that we move very decisively during this difficult period. Part of that, of course, is tightening our belt during these economic times, looking at our spending. We will continue to invest in people and infrastructure and make sure that our economy is ready to bounce back when things improve. Most importantly, we will draw down on the emergency savings that we've set aside especially for times like these.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just last week the Premier announced tax credits for parts of the oil and gas sector, will he take immediate similar action with other struggling sectors in the province?

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to any tax credit announcements, there weren't any. I made a commitment at the very same speech that the hon. leader was at to work with the oil and gas industry. They're in a credit crunch. They cannot access capital, and that translates to significant job losses not only in Calgary, not only in Edmonton but in every small community in this province right down to the tire shop, down to the motel and the restaurant. That's why we're working with the oil industry to make sure that we provide the right environment for them to move ahead and create jobs in Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Many thousands recently laid off and many thousands more who feel increasingly fearful and vulnerable need to see action today. They need certainty. When can they expect real action from this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we've taken action. Part of that is the fact that we're the only jurisdiction that I know of in North America that actually has cash set aside for situations like this, so that's really good planning on our part. Secondly, we're committed, as I said before, to investing in people programs: retraining, making sure that we have the skills necessary as we come out of this recession, that we have the people in place to fill the many job vacancies that will be here. In terms of specifics, other ministers can give all of the specifics with respect to the programs we have.

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

Health Care Spending

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a point where this government needs to show confidence and sound, responsible leadership, the Ministry of Health and Wellness is projecting a \$1.3 billion deficit. To the Premier: how can the Premier account for this to Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as far as the accounting of last year's expenses, that goes to the Public Accounts Committee, and they'll review that. But I just want to clearly state to Albertans that we are committed to publicly funded health care in this province, and we're committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about sound fiscal management of our health system. It's very clear that there has been no plan or foresight in our health reforms. Does the Premier himself or the minister take responsibility for this astonishing financial fiasco?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the current budget in health is over \$13 billion. That's about \$36 million a day. I've asked the minister to work with our health care providers – the doctors, the nurses, the professionals – to come together and put on the table opportunities to gain efficiencies, improve access, improve quality of care in this province. I think there's a lot of money. Let's make sure that we're getting the best value for the dollar that's there. We have to improve programs. We'll certainly do that, but overall I'm looking to health care providers to join us, because we're in this together, and deliver a plan that will build those three objectives that I talked about.

Dr. Swann: Does the Premier believe he has the confidence of Albertans in relation to a related critical service Albertans have come to stake their lives upon? I'm referring to the restructuring plan for the ambulance system. How much is that going to cost?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in working with municipalities, our health minister is working towards, of course, the government taking over these services and is working very hard. To the specifics, the minister can answer that directly.

The Speaker: The hon. minister to supplement.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think what we need to do is not look at the transfer of governance and funding for ambulance as a cost but an improvement in efficiencies. We have already budgeted – it's in the budget that was passed in this House last year – the allocation for the transfer of ambulance services. As I say, I think we need to look at this as part of efficiencies.

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

Provincial Budget Release

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People the world over are scared by this fast and deepening recession, and they're looking to their governments for leadership, leadership that will make people feel confident again. This government continues to dither and delay the budget and won't provide Albertans with a date for its release. British Columbia and Saskatchewan already have release dates for their budgets. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: when will the minister be releasing her budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as everybody in this Assembly knows, the date of budget release is something that we do not announce until we're prepared to come forward with a budget and table it for Albertans. That should not breed any disrespect or lack of confidence among Albertans. That, in fact, should state quite clearly, as the Premier has articulated, that we look first at the federal budget, that we're watching very closely what the Americans, who are our largest market for exports, are doing, what the outcomes are from a number of the issues that we have been working on resolving both with Canada and with other governments. We're monitoring very carefully on a daily basis exactly what's happening in the most volatile time in our history for the economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that cities, universities, schools, hospitals, and for that matter a lot of private businesses and not-for-profits are impeded in their own planning as they wait for this government to release its budget, will the minister admit that any further delays will only worsen the situation and commit to releasing the budget this month?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I will not commit to releasing the budget this month. I think our Premier has articulated the three-point plan we're working on. Those kinds of assurances of reduced spending, of looking at our budget prudently, of looking at what the other circumstances are as we look over the global economy and the things that I've just cited should give Albertans the confidence that we're acting responsibly. Our throne speech yesterday and the people in this Assembly that want to speak to it will I think convey the

confidence we feel in Albertans for the outcomes that will follow with or without that budget within the next couple of months.

Mr. Taylor: Within the next couple of months, Mr. Speaker? Given that briefly two years ago this government did commit to releasing its budget in February, two weeks following the throne speech, and last year that got delayed because the election got in the way, is the minister proposing to this House this year that she's going to wait until the recession is out of the way?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member opposite knows exactly what every Albertan no doubt knows, and that is that last year in July we had \$147 oil. Last year in August we were anticipating that we would have much higher surpluses than were obvious and have continued to be obvious over this period of time. I think that Albertans, being sensible people, will want us to get the story as right as possible in this budget rather than rush it.

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

Global Economic Downturn (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Around the world governments of all political stripes are recognizing that we face the greatest economic threat since the Dirty Thirties. These governments are making major commitments to restart their economies and put their people back to work. This is happening everywhere, Mr. Speaker, everywhere except in Alberta. Why has this Premier, almost alone among political leaders, ignored the rising storm and left Alberta families to fend for themselves?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the big difference between the province of Alberta and the other jurisdictions is that we are not going to put the next generation back in debt. Those are his friends. That's not prudent budgeting on behalf of this government, so we're not going to follow the advice of that individual or any other government. We will do our own budget based on the most recent evidence we have both from the federal government and from the United States, and we're going to make a budget that ensures that we don't again put the next generation in debt.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, while upgrader after upgrader gets cancelled in Alberta's Industrial Heartland, those in the U.S. are still building. Entirely dependent on Alberta bitumen these U.S. projects are stealing Alberta jobs. It's a crime, and this government is driving the getaway car. Why won't this Premier keep his promise to end the export of unprocessed bitumen together with thousands of Alberta jobs down that pipeline?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I made a commitment some time ago in terms of upgrading our resources in Alberta. As a government we remain committed, and we will very soon be communicating the plan in terms of how we're going to add value to our resources. It's not only in the oil sands but forestry and agriculture, by the way, where we've taken just a monumental step, the only jurisdiction, I believe, in Canada to take the leadership we have in agriculture and selling that product around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is a deer in the headlights. Faced with looming economic disaster, it doesn't know which way to turn. This economic crisis is like an 18-wheeler bearing down on Albertans. Will this Premier give his head a shake and take immediate measures to create real jobs before Alberta families become roadkill?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know why it's so difficult to get through to some on that side of the House that we're the only jurisdiction in North America that is debt free and the only jurisdiction to have cash in hand to help deal with this critical global recession. There is no other jurisdiction. Let's use the resources wisely and not allow it to drop through our fingers. We have time to budget prudently. We will. We'll do whatever we can on our part to make sure that we take care of all Albertans.

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

Employment Supports

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hardly a day goes by when we don't hear about another company laying off its workers. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is the government doing to create new jobs in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although we are seeing some increases in unemployment, we know that Alberta's labour market will remain quite strong for many years to come. With unemployment rates around the 4 per cent level, at least statistically that's still a very, very tight labour market. Individuals need to move around the province to be able to find additional opportunities. As the hon. member knows, it's really not the government's role to create new jobs, but it is our role to create the environment in which the private sector might create jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact remains that there are people who are out of work, including many from Edmonton. What are you doing to support them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To help those who are not working, my department helps workers find other jobs now or train for jobs in the future. We connect the unemployed people with employers through proactive workforce adjustment strategies such as recruitment fairs. Just today, for example, we're connecting potential workers with Wilco Industries. They are looking for workers in one of our Edmonton offices. We assist the unemployed with career planning, some job searching skills, resumé preparation, and job interview skills.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: are you taking any specific steps to support our most vulnerable citizens or underrepresented groups in the workforce?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, yes is the answer. Very specifically, we are offering training partnerships between employers and aboriginal people, for instance. As an example, that includes our aboriginal training to employment programs, which has now more than 50 projects on the go. We do support people with disabilities in their quest for training and employment by providing them with supports such as assisted services and technologies. We support immigrants by assessing how their foreign qualifications compare to Alberta standards. We'll also still be offering some summer employment programs to give our young people meaningful employment opportunities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Pharmaceutical Benefit for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the economic times that we are facing, middle fixed-income seniors feel that they're under attack because of the government's proposed changes to the pharmaceutical coverage for seniors in Alberta. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the minister admit that the proposed plan for seniors' pharmaceutical coverage is flawed and will disadvantage seniors on fixed middle incomes when they have seen a significant decrease through no fault of their own in their RRSPs?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the pharmaceutical strategy that was announced last fall clearly is part of aligning the health system. All of the government assistance programs – and let's ensure that we understand that this is a government assistance program; this is not something that is covered under the Canada Health Act – are aligned with income. What we have done is simply move the seniors' pharmaceutical plan to align with other government programs.

Ms Pastoor: Will the minister admit to Alberta seniors that many of them are going to be paying significantly more for their needed medications as compared to their former prescription plan and other provinces?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that some 50 to 60 per cent of seniors will actually pay less, and in many cases many seniors will not have to pay anything for their prescription drug plan. We can look at it as a half empty glass or a one-third empty glass as the member may be looking at it; I look at it as a benefit to those senior citizens who do need the assistance.

Ms Pastoor: For those on middle fixed incomes would the minister consider raising the threshold so that more seniors would qualify for the zero per cent deductions?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's no question that since the program was designed and announced, we have seen quite a different situation relative to income in the environment we live in today. I have asked our folks to take a look at all aspects of the drug program. Let's keep in mind that nothing has changed; the implementation date is January of 2010. We want to ensure that we've got it right. If there is a situation that has changed since that time, we want to re-examine it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Infrastructure Spending

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The global economy is in the midst of an uphill climb. Alberta is in a better position than most jurisdictions, but we are not immune to the current economic pressures. There has been a lot of talk about stimulus packages and job losses. My question is for the Minister of Transportation. What is his department doing to counteract these economic pressures and help to stimulate the Alberta economy?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as you know, Alberta's three-year capital plan is more than \$23 billion – \$23 billion – and as Minister of Transportation my job is to build the roads and other projects that Alberta needs. My department will be tendering projects and moving ahead with those jobs this year. As a government we believe it's important to continue investing in our highway network, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure: can the minister comment on what Alberta Infrastructure is doing despite the global economic downturn to stimulate infrastructure investment in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. High levels of infrastructure investment are more important today than they've ever been before. We as a government will continue to be a leader in stimulating the economy with these activities in Alberta. Alberta currently spends two to three times per capita that of any other province or territory in our nation and arguably more than anywhere else in North America. Our current three-year capital plan includes \$5 billion for municipalities for their infrastructure support, \$3.3 billion for health facilities and equipment support, \$1.6 billion for schools, and the list goes on and on. We continue to invest at top levels to help Albertans.

Mrs. McQueen: Finally, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Transportation: can the minister elaborate on what initiatives will support construction activities in local communities?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, right now we're working with the federal government and municipalities to move ahead with much-needed projects. Last month along with the federal government we announced the building Canada communities component. That program has already invested more than \$76 million towards 22 municipal infrastructure projects throughout the province. The funding will help all smaller communities throughout Alberta meet their pressing infrastructure needs, support economic growth, and help stimulate the economy, and then all these communities can still apply up until March 15 for much-needed programs for them.

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have learned two things since the fall session: one, that even large companies like Nortel fail and, two, this government consistently fails to require that enough money is held in reclamation funds to

pay for the cost of the cleanup. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given the example of the Swan Hills waste treatment plant costing \$71 million to clean up, double the amount set aside, what action is the government taking to boost other reclamation funding to realistic levels so that the cost of future cleanups are covered and not borne by the taxpayer?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's important to consider when you look at reclamation not only the cost of the actual reclamation itself but the requirement that the taxpayer be responsible for the entire costs should it be necessary. The member is pointing out a worst-case scenario, where we have a situation where the taxpayer is ultimately responsible, but at the same time there are a number of other sites throughout the province that remain and will continue to be the responsibility of the owner of those sites, and in those cases it's a different situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Well, given that if a company, whether it's an oil sands developer, a coal mine, or a gravel pit, collapses, fails, goes bankrupt, goes under, their promissory note isn't worth very much, why doesn't the government ensure that enough cash is held so that any liability for cleanup does not revert back to the public? An IOU from a failed company is worth nothing, and it all defaults back to the taxpayer.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's like everything else that we do in Environment: it's a balancing act. It is necessary for us to hold security, and we do hold security. We hold a significant amount of security, whether it be in cash or whether it be in irrevocable lines of credit that are backed up by banks. We have been working with industry to ensure that that level that we hold is appropriate and is adequate, and I can assure the member that there are ongoing discussions as we speak on ways that we can improve that program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister. The annual report of the security fund states that for all the oil sands \$645 million is held for reclamation, all in the form of guaranties, little IOUs, pieces of paper. Is the government telling us that these IOUs are sufficient to cover the cost of cleanup for the entire oil sands? Really, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. These are not IOUs. These are irrevocable lines of credit. These are notes that the province holds that are secured by the bank, not by the individual companies. To answer the member's question, we believe that we hold adequate security to ensure that we protect the public in case of long-term disaster from a financial perspective.

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

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the downturn in our economy many employers and workers are confused about the requirements and options for temporary foreign workers and Canadian workers. My first question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Is there still a need for temporary foreign workers when layoffs are happening?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our labour market is definitely changing, and we recognize that layoffs are happening in some businesses while others are still looking for people. The temporary foreign worker program is a federally run program, and it's based on employers identifying and providing a need for workers in very specific occupations. Temporary foreign workers still have a very, very important role to play in our workforce, but as employer needs change, so will the number of temporary foreign workers coming in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. If temporary foreign workers still have a role in our workforce alongside Canadians, how does the treatment differ?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that all workers make very valuable contributions to this province, including our temporary foreign workers, and these temporary foreign workers have the same rights as any other worker. They are all provided for and protected under a number of pieces of legislation that we have. Presently we've got ads that are running, campaigns to raise the awareness of temporary foreign workers' rights in the workplace. Employers and workers can find a lot more on our website.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What support does the government provide to temporary foreign workers who are having their hours cut back or losing their jobs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are hearing of that more and more. I want to indicate that temporary foreign workers can remain in Canada for the duration of their work permit and apply for work with other employers with federal hiring permits, or staff can assist in making those connections and in helping foreign workers move from one job to the other. If they cannot find work, one of the options is that they can return to their home country.

Environmental Charges against Syncrude

Mr. Hehr: Today, Mr. Speaker, I hope to appeal to the Justice minister to take the necessary steps to protect Alberta's wildlife and its habitat. Specifically, I was going to discuss section 155 of the Alberta environmental protection act. My math tells me that a \$500,000 fine is 1,000 bucks a duck. Seeing that this is a multibillion-dollar industry, does the hon. minister figure that this maximum fine is an effective deterrent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that although the hon. member has addressed that question to me, this falls under the policy area of the Minister of Environment.

The Speaker: The hon member has the floor.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Anyway, I was asking about section 155 and the maximum penalty allowed under there, which is \$500,000. Do you think this is an effective mechanism for actually keeping this industry from being negligent?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, the purpose of question period is not to solicit personal opinions.

2:20

Mr. Renner: As the member knows, the amount of fine that's assessed is the responsibility of the courts. I want to remind this member that this case is before the courts.

As to the legislation itself and the policy with respect to fines I do believe that we have adequate penalties within our legislation to ensure that we can hold polluters responsible. Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that there are two sides that need to be taken into account. One is the actual penalty itself, and one is the effects that these kinds of incidents have on the customers' and the public's perception of the way these companies do business.

Mr. Hehr: To the Minister of Environment: can you honestly tell me that a \$500,000 fine to an industry that is making billions of dollars in profits is adequate to actually keep these guys in check?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, using that kind of logic, one would say that a hundred dollar speeding ticket issued to an NHL hockey player has no effect. I would suggest that we don't at this point in Alberta adjust our fines to the level of income. This is a piece of legislation that applies to all members of the public, and a \$500,000 fine is a lot of money in my books.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Job Creation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday at the same time that this government was delivering a throne speech full of vague platitudes, Millar Western laid off nearly 140 workers and warned them that more cuts were coming. This pulp and lumber company has been in business for more than a century, and this government has no strategy to help them with their workers. The only specific thing this government offered to people like these losing their jobs was Alberta Works counselling. To the minister of employment: why have you failed these workers and left them struggling to feed their families?

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

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The announcement certainly was made yesterday. We do as a government extend our greatest sympathy to the people who have lost their jobs because of these closures and to their families as well. We understand that the facility closures are a business decision based on market conditions and long-term corporate strategy. We have been working with and have contacted people from Millar Western, and we are just assessing now and actually are working and seeing what we can do to help the staff cope.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in January we lost 5,700 jobs in Alberta. Instead of creating jobs, government is telling the

unemployed that it's going to make welfare more visible. What Albertans need are real, long-term jobs because, believe me, Alberta's future generations will have debt if the only thing this government can offer their parents is resumé-writing courses. To the same minister: will you push investment and stimulus spending that creates jobs at living wages instead of merely putting up more signs in our welfare offices?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. One is that in January of this year we, in fact, had 23,000 more people working in the province of Alberta than we had a year ago in January. Although our numbers in unemployment are increasing, I need to remind the hon. member that our unemployment levels at present stand at 4.4 per cent, and although we're heading in the wrong direction, that is still considered a very, very tight employment situation. As I indicated, we still have a lot of companies looking for people.

Ms Notley: Well, interestingly, this morning, Mr. Speaker, Grande Cache Coal gave walking papers to 100 employees, so clearly that's not one of those companies. Globally, meanwhile, at least \$650 billion has been committed by governments to stimulus spending that will create real jobs. Even this government's federal cousins were forced to pledge \$12 billion for job-stimulating infrastructure, yet not one new job creation initiative was discussed yesterday by this government. To the same minister: do you really believe that all these laid-off workers need are directions to the nearest welfare office, and if not, why is that all that your government is offering?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, my responsibility as minister responsible for Employment and Immigration is to help people that are in need. We provide employment and training supports. We help with basic living and basic costs if that's what's required. We'll cover some of their household costs. We'll even support health benefits. We'll do everything to try to transition those individuals from having lost their jobs into finding a new position.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

RCMP Traffic Enforcement Duties

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent media reports have suggested that the province is toying with ideas of pulling the RCMP from traffic duty on Alberta highways. The RCMP has had a long history in this province and serves my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne very well. I'd like to clarify these media reports when I go home this weekend. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Is the minister planning to replace the RCMP's traffic services with Alberta sheriffs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that question is no, absolutely not. What we are doing is testing four different service delivery models for traffic enforcement over a six-month period. This will help us to evaluate what works best on Alberta's highways to ensure that those motorists remain safe. The RCMP will always have a role in traffic enforcement on Alberta highways, and they are in full support of these pilots.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Again, pilot projects are being announced throughout this province about some good working relationships between sheriffs and RCMP, but again my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne keep saying to me: is this the first step to replace the RCMP? Is this the first step, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I've said it many times, and I'll say it again: we are not replacing the RCMP as Alberta's provincial police force. We are proud to have them as our police force. The RCMP are a very highly skilled force, which helps ensure safe and secure communities for all Albertans. The RCMP and our traffic sheriffs, however, regularly participate in joint forces traffic operations with local police services and other government ministries. This pilot is a good example of the excellent co-operation between the RCMP and our traffic sheriffs.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister. The traffic pilot projects are being done in some cases to enhance the services, but in other cases media reports said that it's there only because of a cost-saving measure. Is this true or not?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, these pilots are not about cost savings at all. What they are about is ensuring our highways are safe for all Albertans to travel on. Accidents on our highways cost over 450 lives last year and billions of dollars worth of expenses to our medical system. These pilots are aimed at improving our highway safety for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Public-private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first contract for P3 schools was negotiated at the height of the boom, when materials and labour were at their most expensive. The government has claimed that P3s will save over a hundred million dollars, but those figures were made assuming inflated construction costs. Trustees, taxpayers, and opposition parties have no idea what the real cost of these schools will be over the contract's 32-year lifespan. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why won't the minister release documents showing the price tag for the construction and proposed 32-year maintenance of the first 18 P3 schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On our government web page we set out the conditions for payment throughout the contract. There is proprietary information that's contained within the agreements. The last agreement that we did saved Alberta taxpayers \$118 million, to be exact, based on comparative studies that are checked by third parties. It would disadvantage Albertans, the taxpayers, the people that are paying for this, to release information that would take the people that give us the best deals in the province out of the game.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The minister is treating taxpayers like mushrooms under a load of we all know what. The contracts have already been signed. The competition is over. There is no need to hide the details. Given the current economic downturn and the lengthy delays in construction does the Minister of Infrastructure

still claim that these schools are being built faster and cheaper than they would have been through traditional methods?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, absolutely.

Mr. Chase: Table the documents. So far it's all chat, and we all know what that's worth.

Given that the costs of labour and materials have fallen, will the government reconsider using P3 financing for its second phase of building 14 schools?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, our government will take a look at every innovative way to provide infrastructure to Albertans, including P3s and everything else. Those things that work best for Albertans to deliver to Albertans in an effective, efficient, time-sensitive manner those facilities that they need: that's what we'll use, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:30 Air and Water Quality of Industrial Development

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during the throne speech we heard that this government is committed to develop energy with environmental care, and we've heard that an oil sands strategy is coming, but we also have areas of the province that are involved in upgrading and processing the crude. My question is to the Minister of Environment. My constituents want to know what action your department takes in the Industrial Heartland to ensure residents are not forced to live with dirty air because they live close to industrial development.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, some time ago we announced that we would establish through policy and legislation eventually overall emissions targets and thresholds that would be applied through a process of cumulative effect management in the Industrial Heartland. Just last month we finalized the targets for SO₂ and NO_x. Those targets are now in place. It will be up to industry working in partnership with Environment to ensure that we're able to expand the industrial activity within that region but still live within those predetermined caps for air emissions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Water is also clearly a priority as water for life was profiled in the throne speech yesterday. Can you tell my constituents what your department does to monitor the quality of our rivers, specifically water being returned from industry to the North Saskatchewan and the Athabasca?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, like we have ambient air quality monitoring as it affects the overall quality of air, we also do similar kinds of monitoring on the overall quality of water in the river. There are really two levels of monitoring. One is at the site of the discharge, be it city of Edmonton municipal discharge or industrial discharge, to ensure that that discharge is within the allocations that have been determined in their approval. Then the other is to have ongoing monitoring in the river itself to ensure that we're maintaining the quality of water within the river.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Some of my constituents echo that the water for life strategy is not just an environmental document but also an economic one. They've heard that a large majority of the North Saskatchewan's water flow has been allocated, yet a very minor percentage is actually being used. Can the minister tell us why that is and how your department is working to ensure that a situation like this does not become a barrier to new opportunities for economic development?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not uncommon. In years past when water licences were issued, there really wasn't a lot of need to be concerned with whether or not the exact amount of allocation that was required was within that licence, and in fact for administrative ease I suspect that licences were issued that exceeded the amount to allow for expansion over time. At this point in time we're looking at things a little differently, so one of the things that we need to work on over the next period of time is a better accounting of the water that's actually being used. That will be very much a part of our go-forward strategy as we discuss water allocation policies.

Environmental Charges against Syncrude (continued)

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on Monday evening on CBC radio I heard our hon. Justice minister discussing section 155 of the Alberta environmental protection act and the \$500,000 fine plus additional things judges may or may not do under the act. My math tells me that a \$500,000 fine is a thousand bucks a duck. Can the minister tell me whether this fine plus any additional things judges may or may not do is reasonable to protect Alberta citizens under the act?

The Speaker: Well, I'm going to repeat that personal opinion is not the purpose of question period.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I submit that this question has been asked and answered.

Mr. Hehr: So, basically, is the hon. minister telling us that she'll share her opinions with CBC radio and will not answer this question in this House right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister?
The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough. I'm done on this questioning if those are the answers we're going to receive.

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

Ambulance Services

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. As part of the restructuring of the health care system communities have been given the option as to whether or not they would like to transfer their delivery of ambulance services over to provincial health services, the Alberta Health Services Board, as of April 1. The Camrose ambulance service, I believe, was one of the first to choose that option. I sense that there's some anxiety developing over whether or not everybody's going to be ready for the transfer on April 1. I'm wondering if the

minister can advise as to whether or not this transfer of ambulance services can be ready by April 1.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the plan to transfer ambulance services is on track for April 1. As you know, we passed the Emergency Health Services Act in this House last fall, which set out the regulatory framework for the new model. Alberta Health Services will shortly be rolling out the dispatch plan, and that consolidates dispatch to three services from the current 10 or 12. So, yes, it is on track.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. If I can maybe be a little more specific about what the concerns are for the local municipalities there. Knowing that they may be ending the service, they're having to terminate contracts. They are not able to budget for delivery of those services. So I'm just wondering if there's a contingency plan in place for who will pay for that if we're not ready on April 1.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear that come April 1, if there is a municipality where there has been difficulty reaching agreement, whether they want to get out of the business or whether they want to contract with Alberta Health Services, there will be no interruption in patient care. A municipality will have to make a decision whether they're staying in the business or they're not, keeping in mind that on April 1 funding for municipalities is going to be covered 100 per cent by the province on the basis that we have contracts in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. I have a question about STARS. I think we'd all agree that STARS air ambulance is an integral part of the EMS team in Alberta, particularly from a rural point of view. I'm just wondering if the minister can share with us any information on the status of STARS in terms of how it will be supported during the transition and after.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that while each one of us has our favourite providers, if you might, and STARS is probably a favourite provider of many in this Assembly, we have a number of air ambulance service contracts. STARS is no different than any of the other providers that have contracts with Alberta Health Services. They all provide a very integral part of ambulance provision. What we want to do initially is ensure that we get the ground ambulance right, and then we move on to discussions relative to the remainder of the services that are available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Temporary Foreign Workers (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that over 20,000 Albertans have lost their jobs recently – as a matter of fact, 140 forestry workers in and around Whitecourt were laid off yesterday – my first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is the government of Alberta continuing to go abroad and recruit temporary foreign workers to this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to recognize that although there are certainly people being laid off, those individuals as Albertans will always have first priority in terms of getting a job in this province. We automatically want to make sure that our priority goes to Albertans first, then Canadians and those people who are normally not necessarily represented in the workforce, including some of our aboriginal communities. Having said that, there are still some people out there and some jobs that remain unfilled, and we depend on the expertise and help of temporary foreign workers to fill those.

2:40

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how can this government recruit more temporary foreign workers when steelworkers in Edmonton are being laid off, construction workers across the province are being laid off, forestry workers in Whitecourt are being laid off? Why are you undermining the job market here by recruiting more temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I have to reiterate that the temporary foreign worker program is a federal program and not a provincial program. But the important thing to keep in mind is that before a temporary foreign worker position is approved, the employers have to go through a very stringent process of advertising and trying to find Canadians to fill those particular jobs. Only when those cannot happen can they be allowed to bring in a temporary foreign worker.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. minister that he is the Minister of Employment and Immigration. You're in this up to your eyeballs. Again, will the government terminate the temporary foreign worker program now, allow the workers that are here on the temporary foreign worker program to finish the time left on their visa? Considering the large number of Albertans that have been laid off, and these Albertans include landed immigrants, why don't you protect landed immigrants and citizens of this country when they need job protection from you?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, people from around the world are welcome in Alberta. Shutting the door to temporary foreign workers and immigration is not always the way to respond to economic challenges. This province was built by immigrants. Immigration will continue to be our future source of economic growth and population growth, and we want them here.

An Hon. Member: Don't treat them like second-class citizens.

Mr. Goudreau: We don't. They have the same rights.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're going to return to the Routine with Introduction of Bills.

Introduction of Bills (continued)

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

Bill 3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009.

This legislation modernizes voting rules for credit unions by allowing members to vote for directors in advance of their annual general meeting. The amendment also makes minor administrative

change that would give credit unions more flexibility in reporting requirements of credit union committees to their board.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 3 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce and move Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009.

Two amendments are being proposed. The first amendment ensures further consistency with the roles and mandates policy framework for publicly funded postsecondary institutions. The second amendment is a housekeeping matter relating to clarifying designation powers for graduate faculty councils and faculty councils. The proposed amendments will allow baccalaureate and applied studies institutions to have the option of applying for the use of the term "university" in their names. They will also ensure further clarity around the governance of colleges offering degree programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 4 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009, the so-named Bill 5.

This act will amend the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. No substantial changes have been made to the act since 1987. The proposed legislation will update the act, simplify wording, eliminate duplication, and make minor amendments to clarify regulatory powers, including moving the review and appeal process into regulation. The proposed amendments are the result of a review of the existing legislation and extensive industry consultation and will reduce the regulatory burden on producers and make the legislation easier to understand and use.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Bill 6
Protection of Children Abusing Drugs
Amendment Act, 2009

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce first reading of Bill 6, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009.

A number of amendments to this legislation are proposed to address issues identified during the program's implementation and subsequent operation. Feedback from parents, guardians, treatment program staff, police, and others indicates that the proposed amendments will enable the program to better support children and families. The amendments include increasing the length of the confinement period from five days to 10 days for the purpose of expanding support services, enhancing the involvement of parents and guardians, addressing pressure on police transportation services, strengthening the review process, and allowing for the extension of a court order by an additional five days.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 7
Public Health Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce first reading of Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009.

This legislation supports the implementation of a new model for public health in the province, and the amendments include clarifying the role of the chief medical officer of health; transferring regulation-making authority for routine public health standards, guidelines, and rules to the Minister of Health and Wellness; and providing for better communication with parents and their school-aged children about public health programs.

It is my pleasure today to move first reading of Bill 7.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

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

Bill 8
Feeder Associations Guarantee Act

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. This being

a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Like the previous legislation the new act supports the growth and development of feeder associations. The new act will allow government to better meet the needs of the livestock feeding and marketing value chain, and it is the result of a review of the existing legislation and stakeholder consultations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

2:50
Bill 9
Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009, schedule 12.

This bill will enhance the governance of the registry agents network and increase accountability and service delivery. This will be accomplished by clarifying accountabilities and consequences for registry agents, formalizing a process for audits and inspections, and providing regulation-making authority for further regulations to be developed.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 9 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 10
Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act.

The new act recognizes and reflects the changing needs of Albertans who want to live as independently as possible while they continue to have access to the accommodations and services they need. The proposed legislation gives government the renewed authority to monitor for compliance to the accommodation standards and investigate complaints from residents, their families, or the general public. This act also clarifies what a supportive living setting is and when an operator requires a licence to operate such a facility. The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act gives residents the opportunity to age in the right place, to stay in their communities, close to their family and friends, their best support system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 10 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 11

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009, for first reading.

These amendments will introduce creative sentencing options to deter actions that damage the province's fisheries. Through these amendments Albertans will continue to see high-quality fishing opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 11 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 12

Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 12, the proposed Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009.

I'm bringing the act forward on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. This legislation will help the Surface Rights Board improve service to Albertans by simplifying its processes. This will enable the board to implement more informal and flexible forms of dispute resolution and allow the board to better manage its workload. The proposed amendments are entirely procedural and do not address other matters such as compensation.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 13

Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009.

The bill will allow a justice of the peace to sit past the age of 70 up to a maximum of 75 or until his or her appointment expires. Currently justices of the peace are appointed for a term of 10 years but cannot sit past age 70 even if their appointment has not expired.

The proposed legislation is consistent with provisions in the Provincial Court Act applicable to judges and provisions being introduced to the Court of Queen's Bench Act applicable to masters in chambers.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to table responses to questions raised during debate of supplementary estimates on November 26, 2008.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today, one series from a Dorene Rew lamenting Alberta taxpayers being hung on the hook for pay to ousted health executives; another from a Mr. Ali Amini relating the dissatisfaction with the way officials and licensing bodies are treating foreign-trained physicians; another on the revamp of the seniors' drug program from a J. Faminoff; and another set of tablings from Allan and Rose Marie Dahlen, again relating to the seniors' drug legislation.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two news releases which relate to my questions today. One is from Millar Western Forest Products, dated February 10, announcing the layoff of 138 workers. The other is from Grande Cache Coal Corporation with today's date, announcing that 100 workers have been laid off.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of six reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. One of these workers reports that in spite of taking only two five-minute breaks, there was still not enough time to get all the residents out of bed for breakfast and lunch.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I have three tablings today. Pursuant to section 39(3) of the Legislative Assembly Act the chair wishes to table with the Assembly five copies of the following Members' Services orders: Members' Services Committee order 1/09, Executive Council salaries, No. 4, which came into force on February 4; Members' Services Committee order 2/09, members' allowances amendment order, which came into force on February 4; Members' Services Committee order 3/09, members' committee allowances amendment order, which came into force on February 4; Members' Services Committee order 4/09, members' allowances amendment order, which will come into force on April 1; and Members' Services Committee order 5/09, constituency services amendment order, which will come into force on April 1. All of those either have come into effect or will come into effect in the year 2009.

The chair is also pleased to table five copies of a brochure produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta entitled Page Biographies, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 27th Legislature, Second Session, Spring 2009. This outlines the current and new pages that we have.

Pursuant to section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly

the annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 2007. The report includes the office's financial statements as at March 31, 2008.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hancock, Minister of Education, school jurisdictions' audited financial statements for the year ended August 31, 2007, sections 1, 2, and 3.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta 2008 annual report; pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2008 annual report; pursuant to the Land Surveyors Act the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association report of proceedings of the 99th annual general meeting.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs, a letter dated January 6, 2009, from the hon. Mr. Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs, to Ms Pastoor, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, responding to questions raised during debate on Bill 51, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act (No. 2), regarding the tank site remediation program.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report for the year ended March 31, 2008.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) now kicks in.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

2. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the following changes to the following standing committees be approved.
 - (a) Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: that Mr. Fawcett replace Mr. Rodney, that Mr. Rogers replace Mr. Snelgrove;
 - (b) Standing Committee on Private Bills: that Mr. Bhardwaj replace Mr. Xiao, that Mr. Rodney replace Mr. Fawcett, that Dr. Taft replace Dr. Swann;
 - (c) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: that Mr. Mitzel replace Mr. Bhardwaj;
 - (d) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: that Mr. Campbell replace Mr. Olson;
 - (e) Standing Committee on Public Accounts: that Mr. Quest replace Mr. Griffiths as deputy chair, that Mr. Olson replace Mr. Griffiths;
 - (f) Standing Committee on Community Services: that Mr. Doerksen replace Mr. Rodney as chair;
 - (g) Standing Committee on the Economy: that Mr. Campbell replace Mr. Allred as chair, that Dr. Taft replace Ms Blakeman;
 - (h) Standing Committee on Resources and Environment: that Ms Blakeman replace Dr. Swann as deputy chair;
 - (i) Standing Committee on Health: that Dr. Taft replace Dr. Swann.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Yesterday I received from the hon. member and the hon. member's colleague two letters indicating they wanted to resign from committees. As I understand it, the motion now put forward by the Deputy Government House Leader does not contain those two changes. Now, a letter was sent from my office and conveyed to the Government House Leader with respect to that. I understand as well, though, that this motion was already on the Order Paper. So there's a question of either having to deal with this matter now or of coming back to it another day. An additional motion would have to be made. Right now we just have the one in front of us.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. I have not yet received a copy of those particular letters, but with the concurrence of the House we could certainly bring this back at a later time.

The Speaker: That is a possibility. Do you want to proceed with the current motion as it is now and bring the subsequent matter back later?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, please.

The Speaker: The motion in front of us is debatable. No participants, then? Okay.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

The Speaker: Before we move on, might we just interrupt the ordinary routine to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, you sent me a note that you have guests.

Mr. Cao: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the three representatives of TUXIS Parliament of Alberta who are visiting the Legislature today. The TUXIS Parliament is a nonprofit youth parliament open to Alberta youth between the ages of 15 and 21. It provides youth with an opportunity to improve public speaking ability, to become capable leaders, and to learn about the workings of parliamentary procedure. Natasha Soles and Kelsey Earle are currently members of the group, and Benjamyn McKay is a member of the alumni society. Now, I was wondering which gallery they were sitting in. I would like to ask the Assembly to give them a traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Leader of the Official Opposition, you have some very special guests.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the House I want to introduce my mother, my sister, and two cousins who are here today to see my inaugural speech: my mother, Margaret Swann, a graduate of McKay Avenue school in the early days in Edmonton – she lives in Calgary now with most of my family – Susan Saracini, a sister, who lives in Calgary; Gary and Loris Webb, Edmontonians and supporters. I would ask them to stand up, and we'll give them a warm traditional welcome to the Legislature.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to move acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, and it is an honour to do it on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-Hays. I know my constituents will be very pleased with the direction our government is taking. For the fifth year in a row His Honour the Lieutenant Governor delivered the Speech from the Throne with eloquence and style. His words were not only touching but inspired us. His Honour showed us a picture of the Alberta that we all want to achieve and be a part of.

In the speech we saw an Alberta that is dedicated to building local, national, and international relationships, driving its innovation to higher levels, and leading in environmental management. We also saw a province that will continue to take care of its most vulnerable, a province that supports its communities, strengthens its education system, and leads an efficient and effective health care system. This is an Alberta that I'm pleased to be part of. The Speech from the Throne provided us with a map of how we will achieve this Alberta over the months to come.

But, Mr. Speaker, the speech struck me because it showed us how we are going to excel during these uncertain times. If we follow the plan set out in the Speech from the Throne, we can triumph over any possible barriers ahead. It is apparent that only Albertans can look at today's economic uncertainty and see the path to prosperity. Looking back to remember all the steps we took to ensure a stronger today is a good reminder that it takes a solid plan and discipline to secure a safe tomorrow.

Indeed, with a long-term plan as was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, anything is possible. If we are dedicated enough, we can not only get through anything, but we can shine as we come out of it. If there is anyone who is going to overcome the challenges ahead of us, it is Alberta. That is the essence of what it is to be Albertan. Not only do we work hard to meet our goals, attain greatness, and enhance our lifestyles, but we go above and beyond to achieve more than is expected from us. We create opportunities out of adversity.

Eliminating the deficit was no easy feat. We all had to make sacrifices, but we knew why we were doing it. We stuck to it, and we achieved our goal and are better off for it. Today we sit a little more comfortably because of the sacrifices we made in the past. We are one step ahead of the game. Now we can continue to save for the future and cut taxes like the health care premium to make a little more room in our wallets.

We know that every penny counts, so our government will continue to be efficient with taxpayer dollars. Funds will be used responsibly to reach as many Albertans who need it. Albertans can continue to count on receiving value for their hard-earned money. It is because of careful planning that we are able to head into the times ahead with a positive outlook. We have a strong foundation that is going to ease us through the months to come. Albertans can breathe a little easier because of their government's prudence and foresight.

Because of the fiscal discipline that permeates all decisions that this government makes, we are able to develop new technology, enhance the security of all Albertans, and continue to take care of those who need it most. These are the things that matter to Albertans. We will continue to plan for the future by investing in our people, our infrastructure, and our innovative technologies so that we can continue our tradition of being a leader. This government knows where Alberta's strengths are. The Speech from the Throne showed us that these strengths will increase as we continue to work on them and improve them. We will continue to aim for perfection in our leading industries. We will continue to focus on innovation in the energy sector, technology, and on our most valuable resource, our people.

3:10

Through new initiatives like Inspiring Education, which I am looking forward to bringing back to my constituency, we will make Alberta's education system as accessible and inviting as possible. All students will be able to flourish and find their passion. Once young Albertans have grown through the first level of their education, they will be able to look forward to the next step. Our outstanding postsecondary institutions, honed by Campus Alberta, will specialize their skills so that they can be among the most competitive in the world. The future looks bright.

We know that the way to become the best is to focus on our strengths, so Albertans have worked to develop our natural resources responsibly, and for that reason we are world renowned. We have earned the status of a safe and secure producer of energy. We will continue to profit from that place in the world. We will compete in the global market for our place. We will promote our products and their advantages through the relationships that our government has been building. We will grow and break down any barriers. As a result, our careers will continue to prosper.

We were blessed with natural resources, but what separates us from the rest is how we work with them. Alberta develops partnerships to grow expertise in the energy sector. This has allowed us to develop our resources and meet the global demand for energy. Through the partnerships we have created, we can be confident that our resources are being extracted with state-of-the-art methods and in the most environmentally conscious way.

Our resources and innovations will continue to be competitive around the world as our government will pursue the promotion of our goods. Continuing to build on our successes and innovation will help us continue our strong standing on the global stage. The relationships we build with our resource partners on the international market will ensure that our economy continues to prosper. The world has already started to learn about our environmental focus and leadership. Our innovation is showing the world how it is possible to have clean water, air, and land while supplying the world with forestry, agriculture, and energy commodities.

As has been laid out in yesterday's speech, the government of Alberta will continue to work to maintain the high quality way of life we enjoy as Albertans. Programs and services will continue to be among the best available. Our highest standard will be upheld. Thanks to the past investments we have made in infrastructure, we can now rest assured that the ones we love are receiving the best care in our world-class hospitals. I recently experienced our hospitals first-hand when I spent the day at the Peter Lougheed hospital as a patient. I was very impressed with the level of care I received from all of the providers involved. Calgary-Hays is looking forward to being home to the new south hospital, a ring road, and already we have new schools being built. These investments are vital and truly enhance our quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, we have the tools and resources, but it is the spirit of Alberta that has made the most of them. It is our people who have brought our province to a level of excellence. We will continue to attract the best people to come work and live in Alberta to sustain our growth and drive our development. No matter what the future holds, it is our people who will make the difference. It is our initiative that will sustain us.

Our continued dedication to enhancing the quality of life of Albertans is put into action in Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 1 will protect those who protect us. Many Albertans leave their friends and family behind to serve their country. Some of these people are soldiers by career. They are employed by the Canadian Forces on a full-time basis. However, there are soldiers who have regular civilian jobs and volunteer with the Canadian Forces on a part-time basis. These reservists are only called upon when the Canadian Forces are in need of help.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is proud to be home to 25,000 reservists, who at times have had to leave their family and their careers to assist the Canadian Forces. Reservists expand, sustain, and support Canada's forces in times of need. They play a vital role in operations abroad and in emergency situations within Canada. Locally, reservists have been called upon in Alberta to help extinguish our forest fires, and they were able to supplement our forces and give them relief. They must be given the flexibility to leave work in these sorts of challenging situations.

As the Canadian Forces mission to Afghanistan has been extended, more and more reservists are required. Reservists are needed to create stability and peace in countries which face turmoil. These brave men and women build much-needed infrastructure, protect innocent civilians from extremists, and help build strong relationships to ensure that diplomatic progress is maintained. While they leave Alberta to achieve this, there have been occasions when reservists have come back to Canada only to find that their jobs are no longer there, that they have been filled by someone else. Needless to say, this is a disheartening reality.

Bill 1 will change that situation. The legislation will ensure that service to one's country and bravery are rewarded. Those who dedicate themselves to peace should not have to choose between a career and serving our country. We should encourage them in any way possible.

The legislation will make sure that the transition from a conflict zone to Alberta is as smooth as possible. Bill 1 will amend the Employment Standards Code to establish unpaid job protection leave for the reservists who take part in military activities and operations. When reservists have shown their dedication to a job by spending 26 consecutive weeks with an employer, they will be able to take a protected leave. They will be able to pick up where they left off, and they will be able to continue achieving their career goals. They won't have to worry about career growth and paths when they are considering whether or not to volunteer to be a reservist.

According to the Canadian Forces there are currently over 400 primary reserves personnel serving on peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. These people are crucial to the proper functioning of the Canadian Forces operations. Bill 1 will help the Canadian Forces maintain the reputation of having the best and brightest soldiers and will allow soldiers to get the proper training they need to face difficult situations.

While reservists usually train during their time off work, on weekends and on holidays, they also need two weeks of full-time service a year to keep their qualifications current. Bill 1 will allow this to happen much easier. Whether they get deployed to a Canadian Forces operation abroad, help with an emergency in

Canada, or take part in crucial training, their jobs will be here for them when they get back to Alberta. Therefore, if reservists leave their family, they can rest assured that when they come back from the call of duty, they will be able to provide for their loved ones in the same way they once did. Job security is not a burden that reservists should have to bear on their shoulders when they are in the service of their country.

Further, Bill 1 will help reservists get back to their home lives a little easier. They will simply be able to continue in a job that they are good at and comfortable in. This will help provide some sense of continuity for reservists and their families. As a former soldier I realize how important it is to have reservists to augment the Canadian Forces numbers. They allow our military to successfully complete their missions.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Premier for bringing this legislation forward. I know that Bill 1 will make a world of difference in the lives of reservists and their loved ones. Bill 1 makes it possible to balance life and duty. I am honoured to be part of a government that is so focused on the needs of its people. Our dedication to fiscal prudence and growth development will serve us well. Based on the Speech from the Throne, it is clear that all aspects of our economy and our lives have been considered to make sure that Albertans' lives are as seamless as possible during this time of uncertainty. Albertans can look forward to a healthy, happy, and prosperous future thanks to the strong leadership of our government, and I look forward to the days ahead and the accomplishments to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and a privilege to rise in the House today to second the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne. It's hard to believe that almost an entire year has passed since I sat in this House to give my first throne speech as a Member of this Legislative Assembly. I felt tremendously honoured to be elected by the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar as part of one of the strongest governments this province has ever seen, and every day I continue to be very proud to serve my constituents.

Again I felt privileged when I was asked to take on the role of parliamentary assistant for Environment. I can tell you that I am enjoying this role very much, working with the exceptional team headed by the hon. Minister of Environment. It is indeed a pleasure to work on the environmental issues and challenges facing Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier inviting me to second the Speech from the Throne is among those great honours. I stand here today very proud to represent my constituents and my province. Reminiscing about this time last year reminds me of the excitement I felt in anticipation of what was to come and the challenge I would face as a new MLA. In many ways this new session is no different. I still look forward to what is to come.

As we all know, there have been significant changes in the past year, bringing along with them new and unique challenges. With all of the challenges in the global economic climate we as Albertans, Canadians, and global citizens will experience new pressures. Our government is aware of this and is harnessing its innovative skills and thinking ahead and is finding solutions. Mr. Speaker, my cup is always half full. That is how I tackle challenges, by thoughtfully considering what we need to do but also exploring what opportunities exist in meeting our challenges. It is important to ensure that the decisions we make today will indeed consider the impacts on the future as well.

3:20

In light of these changes and challenges we face, the Alberta government has created a plan to protect Albertans and what matters most to them. In the 2008 budget the hon. minister of finance announced that health care premiums would be eliminated for all Albertans, and as of January 1, 2009, we carried through on this promise. This tax change is just one example of measures taken by our government to stimulate the economy, saving Albertans and businesses alike over \$1 billion annually. Our government was taking measures like this long before the economic downturn began to prepare us for when times are tougher.

As we heard yesterday in the Speech from the Throne, the government's plan is inclusive of all Albertans. It is clear that Alberta's unique qualities are protected, our resources are valued, and most importantly, that our people, from our youngest to our eldest, are cared for. For our youngest and families the throne speech reiterated a goal of 14,000 new child care spaces by the year 2011, and the province is well on its way. My own community of Drayton Valley has taken part in this initiative through the development of an early childhood development centre. This is an excellent example of how communities work to meet the needs of children and families in collaboration with the province. It was a privilege to have the hon. Premier, Mrs. Stelmach, and the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services attend the grand opening of the centre. I know that the children and families present were thrilled to have them in attendance on that very special day.

Our commitment to Alberta's youth and families continues with the Department of Education and the launch of Inspiring Education, which gives Albertans the unique opportunity to shape the future of education in our province. Now is the time for Albertans of all ages to express their vision for the future of education in our province so that we can ensure that it indeed reflects their hopes and their dreams.

In addition to children and youth, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also recognizes our seniors, the significant place they hold in our society and our communities and the importance of ensuring that they have the opportunity to live comfortably and to age in their place of choice. The ministers of Seniors and Community Supports and Health and Wellness recently rolled out comprehensive continuing care standards which ensure that quality services are delivered across the entire system, including home living, supportive living, and facility living.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, in continuing to pursue Alberta's continuing care strategy, the government is working to ensure that seniors have a strong voice in planning their future, enabling them to preserve their independence and quality of life. Having this choice is so important for our seniors in all geographical areas of our province. As a rural MLA it is extremely important for me to have those choices available to my seniors in Drayton Valley-Calmar and throughout the province. I know that as we make decisions affecting our seniors, I keep my mom, 87 years young, who is living in continuing care, and all seniors in my constituency close to mind. They and others like them have helped mould our province into the wonderful place it is today. It is our duty to ensure that we make our decisions with this mind, to be forever grateful for what they have done and continue to do today to build our communities and our province.

In ensuring quality and service for our youngest to our eldest, the throne speech delivers with a focused commitment to advanced education. Albertans will have the opportunity to pursue their learning and career goals through Campus Alberta, a vision encompassing all of our province's postsecondary institutions, ultimately

providing Albertans with lifelong learning opportunities. Through this framework Albertans can pursue their career goals within the province. In my constituency an educational consortium helps to deliver these educational opportunities. This ensures that my constituents can receive their education in the location of their choice. Many of my constituents are happy to remain at home in rural Alberta, and the consortium allows them to do this.

Investments in education will keep Alberta on the cutting edge of science and ingenuity, increasing our intellectual capital and driving our business sector. Mr. Speaker, we heard in the throne speech that there is a plan to protect our business sector as well. An example of a measure already undertaken by our government to boost Alberta's economy is the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement. This agreement eliminates trade barriers between Alberta and British Columbia, allowing for nearly seamless access to labour, transportation, and energy between the two provinces.

This government is dedicated to maintaining strong ties with our biggest trading partner, the United States, as our province and our country welcomes the new administration, but it will be very important for us to continue to broaden the number of trading partners we have. This government will work hard to ensure that open communication and support mutually benefit business deals with all of our trading partners.

In the marketing of Alberta's energy the government has developed a plan to ensure responsible and sustainable prosperity for the province's future. The provincial energy strategy works towards the goal of providing energy while at the same time minimizing the impact on the environment. In addition to harnessing technology, the development of renewable energy, the strategy encourages the responsible and prudent use of current energy sources. Further, this government is working to reduce the impact of current emissions through the announcement of a \$2 billion investment in carbon capture and storage.

With these initiatives Alberta is demonstrating an ardent commitment to protecting our energy and the environment, two of our greatest assets. Mr. Speaker, the pristine beauty of our environment and landscapes are legendary. The commitments made in relation to the energy sector are complemented by initiatives to further protect our environment. The newly developed land-use framework will help to ensure that the uniqueness of Alberta's many different ecosystems is preserved. A renewed water for life strategy will make certain that we are conscious of our water as a resource and that we have a plan to protect it in the long term.

The Speech from the Throne also addressed Alberta's parks, promising the release of a new plan that will ensure the sustainability of these areas, enhance recreational opportunities, and continue to attract many individuals to our province both as tourists and as residents.

Mr. Speaker, our communities are vibrant and are continually becoming stronger and more secure. Recent initiatives such as the enactment of the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act demonstrates this government's commitment to community safety.

We also believe that it is extremely important to continue to invest in infrastructure throughout our province to position us well once we emerge from this economic downturn. It is our belief that an important part of our continued economic success will be intimately tied to our investments in our province's infrastructure. Not only does this create jobs at a time when it is incredibly important, but it also improves the quality of life of all Albertans.

Many other jurisdictions in Canada and, indeed, around the world are going into massive deficits in order to finance their projects. However, Alberta is ahead of the curve and has allocated more than \$6 billion as part of the capital account. These investments will

improve our hospitals, schools, and other public infrastructure to help address the needs of our province as we meet the challenges of a booming, growing, and changing population, ultimately encouraging individuals to stay in Alberta. We recognize the unique challenges the economy places on our infrastructure growth plans, and as such we will ensure that funds disbursed are delivered efficiently and in an effective manner, providing the best dollar value for Albertans. Taking care of our infrastructure will ensure that we are ready for the opportunities that the future will bring.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when I heard the hon. Lieutenant Governor say that tough times bring out the best in Albertans because we pull together through adversity and emerge with strength, it struck me on such a personal level as I was deeply touched by these words. My own community's motto is Pulling Together, and it drives our sense of community. Our businesses, volunteer groups, and associations enrich my region's quality of life based on this very motto. It has seen us through thick and thin. Not only is pulling together what Albertans do, but it is clear that this government will help provide the structure and opportunity for us to do just that. It is the people that make the area so rich. Their can-do attitude is what makes my constituency such a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family.

With Bill 1 we as Albertans can continue to show our support to the reservists who make great sacrifices to protect our freedoms by supporting them through job security while they are on leave.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I saw all Albertans reflected yesterday in the throne speech, from our youngest to our eldest to our volunteers, from the businessman to the developer, from the oil sands in the north to our beautiful parks, the importance of our agriculture and forestry industries, and our emerging bioeconomy.

This government has a plan that will keep Alberta in its leadership role despite the global economic climate. It's true that we're not immune, but we are still very fortunate. We will continue to do what we have always done: we will adapt to the realities of our situation, set goals for the future, and move forward in pursuing these goals. Our priority, as always, is to protect Albertans and what matters to them most. As the hon. Lieutenant Governor said yesterday, we remain committed to core programs that Albertans value deeply, such as health and education.

Albertans are not immune to the financial situation around the world, and we understand that Albertans are worried about their futures. We have made a promise to protect Albertans in these tough times, a promise we will keep. We are debt free, and we have over \$7 billion set aside in the sustainability fund to help protect our core programs. We have low unemployment and low income and corporate taxes.

The strong fiscal management we have shown and the difficult decisions made in the past have positioned Alberta well. This has not happened by mistake, Mr. Speaker. It is because of great leadership that ensured that money was set aside in good times to be there when Albertans need it. I for one as a new MLA am grateful to the leaders who had the vision to pay down our debt and to put these savings funds in place.

Our decisions may still be tough, but they will be made easier because of the vision for the future. Mr. Speaker, our plan is a holistic, comprehensive approach for Alberta and includes measures to protect what matters to Albertans. With an ardent commitment to protecting our environment, we will successfully market Alberta's energy to an environmentally conscious world, and we will ensure that our forestry and agricultural industries continue to be supported and valued and that new and emerging opportunities in value-added and bioeconomies will be supported.

By providing Albertans with quality service and opportunities from childhood through to retirement, not only are we securing a high quality of life for current Albertans, but we are attracting many new ones who, too, are so called and will be so proud to call Alberta home.

Overall this plan allows Albertans to face our future with a great deal of confidence. It gives us hope, opportunity, and a vision of where Alberta and Albertans are headed. It embraces the many opportunities our great province has to offer, and it speaks to and is grateful for all Albertans' pulling together to make this the best place in the world to live, work, play, retire, and educate and raise our families. There is no place in the world like Alberta, and it is because of the wonderful spirit and the can-do attitude of Albertans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the confidence and certainty in his delivery of the Speech from the Throne and in the manner in which he serves our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: As I call on the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. leader under our rules has up to 90 minutes to participate. At the conclusion there is an offering of a five-minute question-and-answer response.

It's my great pleasure to introduce the new leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition in the province of Alberta. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in the House to respond to the Speech from the Throne as Leader of the Official Opposition and an immensely proud, lifelong Albertan. My privilege and duty today is to challenge the government's flawed premises and outdated assumptions as outlined in yesterday's Speech from the Throne.

With no disrespect I offer an alternative vision of our future, a future of a great province with unparalleled opportunity and potential. I acknowledge good ideas within the speech, but it fails to answer the questions most Albertans are asking. Where are we going? What is the long-term vision to a better and a different future, a future that even now is being written by profound economic, environmental, and social realities, a future that we must step forward to guide or be left behind as other civilizations have been? Other societies have anticipated this future. They have already seen the dangers and the opportunities, and they are taking action now. Several European nations over the past 15 years have wisely chosen to develop their resources more carefully, to save more prudently, and to determine environmental limits and live within them, and they are living well.

Change is possible. Change can work even for Alberta. Albertans know that we need a change, that the treadmill of boom and bust and dependence on a single unsustainable industry is getting us nowhere fast. We're running in place, burning energy without moving forward, when we should be conserving and reusing renewable forms of energy and exporting our product to the rest of the world. We need to get off the treadmill and start running in the real world, charting our own course, one based on a sustainable energy policy, a diverse economy, and finding a new pride and hope in leading the way.

Albertans are sophisticated, educated above the average in Canada. They want a more thoughtful approach to government based on good science, including the new science of systems, sustainability, and careful planning that includes the long-term future of our children and their children. Albertans are discouraged not by the excellent science in Alberta but by the lack of careful analysis of

options and the corresponding lack of openness to new ideas that have come to characterize this government. Our approach to energy, the environment, health care, and education must begin with an end goal in sight. For me, that goal is simple. Begin with health as the fundamental principle on which we build all of our systems: healthy persons in healthy relationships in healthy communities in healthy environments.

The primary purpose of government must be to serve the long-term public interests. This cannot be defined merely as gross domestic product or jobs alone. We are failing growing numbers of Albertans who are not reaping the rewards of Alberta's promise: the young mother in my neighbourhood in a coffee shop that works two jobs to earn enough to take care of her children; the young engineer working for a local oil company who wants to be proud of his work but feels he cannot; an elderly woman, a personal friend, who feels abandoned because of her complex health needs and now avoids the health care system until an emergency happens; the mother of a mentally disabled boy who presented her story on the steps of the Legislature last fall about her continuing battle – eight years, in fact – for decent care for her son; and the ranchers in the southwest slopes who believe they've lost their basic rights as owners to influence development decisions affecting not only their livelihoods but their groundwater and their landscapes for the future. We need to keep Alberta's promise for all these people and so many others. The promise is so demanding, yet it is possible if we manage well, if we manage differently.

It has become very clear, however, that our society cannot fulfill Alberta's promise without a dramatic turnaround, a fundamental change of course, a new way of looking at our purpose as government, that includes engaging people as citizens to co-create the conditions for healthy people in healthy communities. The government's throne speech reveals no such turnaround. It is a prescription for more of the same: a dependence upon resource extraction at breakneck speed, an education system too focused on training for that sector, a reactive health care system that treats people after they break down, and social supports that fail to respect both the workers and the citizens trying to get help. Most troubling of all is the lack of substantial commitment to cherishing, protecting, and restoring our environment: the land, the water, the air that sustain our lives and our very business opportunities.

Albertans from all over this province from every walk of life are telling me they are losing trust in the ability or the willingness of their politicians to do their job, to understand and defend and enhance the public interests long term. Albertans want politicians to take the mantle of leadership very seriously. They want leaders who will ask tough questions of themselves, leaders who are capable of flexibility, co-operation, and imagination. They want leaders who will listen to citizens not just for politeness' sake but because their voices actually influence public policy. Albertans want leaders who do the hard work of measuring progress with the best scientific tools available and who are willing to change course when the evidence demands it. Examples include our growing mental health problems, our lack of savings in this province over the last 15 years, our unmanaged oil sands development.

3:40

These are extremely challenging times. I don't minimize this. They demand honesty and transparency about what government policies are working and what are not and our willingness to redress those. We must speak frankly and respectfully of what we've learned or failed to learn from the past and how government must do things differently to protect future generations and ensure our continued prosperity.

It's now even more urgent that we rise above partisan differences and seek the public good in our debates and our committee work. I commend the Premier's decision to form all-party committees in the last two years. We know they can do good work. Now let us ensure they address the most compelling and vital issues of our day, making the best public policy possible.

Public trust is at an all-time low, as illustrated in the last provincial election. With it, public participation has been reduced because of the loss of a sense of responsibility. We all must take responsibility for that. This is not rocket science. When people do not feel they have influence, they get depressed, and they give up. That's what, I'm afraid, I see today.

We can rebuild trust in the political process by being open about what we think and being open to new ideas. We can build trust through talking frankly about what we've learned and how we will do things differently to protect future generations. Perhaps most fundamentally, we could build trust by walking the talk. As many of our mothers taught us, say what you mean, mean what you say, and follow through.

For many decades now Albertans have had it pretty good. Our vast oil and gas wealth have allowed us to build remarkable programs and infrastructure. Really, these are world class. I would not deny that. We have strong programs in science and technology, including the emerging field of nanotechnology. We can be proud of groundbreaking medical innovation. I commend the government for increasing the number of medical graduates in the last few years. We have a world-class arts and culture sector. We have a good life here, and much of it is owed to the wealth we have created through the oil and gas sector. But it would be unwise to assume that we can continue to depend on an industry, one industry, to keep Alberta prosperous forever. We need to prepare for a healthier, more diverse legacy for tomorrow's children, an Alberta in which a bust in the oil and gas sector does not lead inevitably to recession in the province. We could be so much more than the world's gas station.

The Easter Islanders of history, the Mayans, the Romans are among civilizations that self-destructed because of lack of vision, loss of honest, critical thinking, and environmental overreach. Ronald Wright describes these problems in his thoughtful, eloquent little book *A Short History of Progress*.

I quote Ronald Wright. Things are moving so fast that inaction itself is one of the biggest mistakes. The 10,000-year human experiment of the settled life will stand or fall by what we do and don't do now. The reform that is needed is not anti-capitalist; it's not anti-American; it's not even deep environmentalist. It is simply the transition from short-term thinking to long-term thinking, from recklessness and excess to moderation and a precautionary principle.

I continue the quote. The great advantage we have, our best chance for avoiding the fate of past societies, is that we know about these past societies. We can see how and why they went wrong. Homo sapiens has the information to know itself for what it is, an ice age hunter only half-evolved towards intelligence, clever but seldom wise. We are now at the stage when the Easter Islanders could still have halted the senseless cutting of their last trees and the failure to plant the seeds out of reach of rats. We have the tools and the means to share resources, clean up pollution, dispense basic health care and birth control, and set economic limits in line with natural limits. If we don't do these now, we may prosper, but we will never be able to do them when times get hard. Our fate will twist out of our hands. And this new century will not grow very old before we enter an age of chaos and collapse that will dwarf the dark ages of the past. Now is our last chance to get the future right. End of quote.

While trees were the engine of development on Easter Island, a resource that their civilization exhausted through shortsightedness

to its demise, our island, if I can put it that way, called Alberta has oil as its engine of development. But for how long? At least the trees were renewable. Oil and gas clearly are not. How much greater our responsibility to lead on the single greatest threat to health and the economy on the planet: climate change.

My response to the Speech from the Throne is directed at fellow members in this House and to all Albertans. I'm very aware that we have many caring, bright, and competent people on all sides of the House. Today I'm asking all of us and all Albertans outside these walls to let go of our defensiveness over the change we need to make and consider the options for our province, our people, our future.

Many Albertans believe there's nothing wrong, that the status quo is good enough. I do not and cannot accept this judgment. Consider the realities that we face. The oil cannot last forever. We know that. Our present approach to fossil fuel development is not serving progressively the long-term interests of people and the environment. It's not even serving industry. We have failed them in terms of their international reputation and the way we've allowed it to develop.

We know the industry is a cyclic industry. When public programs depend so heavily on oil and gas revenue, they become vulnerable with every downturn in the industry. Our schools and hospitals, roads and water treatment plants, our care for seniors and Albertans with disabilities: all of these fundamental elements of society are threatened because we have for too long depended on one industry, oil and gas, to pay the lion's share of our bills. And now, at a time of economic decline and a war on carbon, we are hurting our number one industry, losing reputation and international markets. In some respects we have not treated that industry fairly, just as we have not been fair to future generations. We need to help all Albertans, including the oil and gas sector, to see, explore, understand, and adapt to new realities.

We have spent virtually all the nonrenewable resource wealth that has come out of the ground in the last 16 years. Instead of saving and living off the interest from this wealth, as Norway has done and other oil producing countries, we've been left very vulnerable to this unguided growth. To compound this challenge, we've accumulated a huge environmental debt. Thousands of contaminated sites and well sites have not been reclaimed, some for over 50 years. Many of these will fall to the public purse to reclaim instead of being remediated by those who created the damage. This is a crime, literally. If I were leading, we would not be leaving this legacy to future generations.

3:50

If we as a people are serious about building a better Alberta for our children and theirs, then we must take responsibility for that future. We must take back our lives from the market. The task of envisioning and shaping is ours and ours alone. When did we stop believing in the future? When did we give up on a better future, on the need for change? Every parent, worker, artist, farmer, student, teacher, entrepreneur, scientist, truck driver, social worker, police officer, community organizer, and public servant: all of us are in this together. The clock is ticking, and tomorrow is rushing towards us. Will we be prepared? Will the foundations for a better tomorrow be in place? Plan we must and seriously, especially those of us who have taken it upon ourselves to lead. Every member of this Assembly has stood before Albertans and said, in effect: place your trust in me. Now we need to earn that trust. Few gifts are as precious.

Several months ago I had the privilege of having my grandsons stay overnight with us. They're aged two and three. In the middle of the night I heard one of them rustling around and realized that I'd better go and find out what was going on. I found him wandering around in a different room and carried him back to his bed. Without

a word we lay there in the dark. Suddenly his hand reached out and grabbed my face, and he spent several minutes making sure that I was the person he thought I was. After several minutes of exploring and ensuring and reassuring himself, he turned back to sleep. Without words my grandson was asking me: "Are you there for me? Will you be there for me? Are you taking care of things for my future?"

Thoughtful Albertans, including elected representatives, asked similar questions about Alberta's promise. Are we being good stewards for the future? Will future generations enjoy the opportunities we have had today? How committed are we to ending poverty and homelessness, to diversifying our economy for continuing prosperity? Will our children's children face a diminished future with fewer opportunities, less hope, less democracy, less freedom?

Without a turnaround in thinking and behaving our long-term prospects are uncertain. I would say they are dim. Please do not dismiss this as partisan, radical rhetoric. I believe this at a deep level.

My experiences here and in a number of other countries around the world over 35 years, as well as the calls of much brighter leaders than I, demand decisive, courageous leadership at this time. We must conserve and shepherd our resources better. Other jurisdictions have taken on the challenge. They are moving towards a more sustainable future, they are living within their means, and they are creating the culture and organizational infrastructure required to see and shape the future. It's time for Alberta not only to join the parade but to earn the right to lead.

I'm one of the more fortunate Albertans. Born in Taber, raised in Calgary in a secure and loving middle-class family, I had opportunities to travel, play many sports, labour on the farms of southwestern Alberta, and even spend a couple of summers in a gas plant. I studied music, took up the guitar, which I still enjoy today, and singing. I continue to marvel at the great opportunities and the great artists of Alberta. Perhaps above all I grew to love this place. I want it to be there, as you do, for our children's children: the pristine mountains, the rivers and lakes, the incredible natural capital that we have taken in some ways so for granted.

My family worked hard, valued honesty and community service. These values steered me towards my eventual career in medicine. But even as I was growing up, I couldn't help but notice that while many people in Alberta thrived, others suffered injustice and lost opportunities because of family or financial circumstances beyond their control. For these people Alberta's promise was and in some cases continues to be unfulfilled. Back then I didn't see the connection between politics and health, between politics and success, but I did begin to see how all of us as citizens are responsible for taking care of each other. My security depends on the people around me feeling secure. Health work, like politics, is really about creating the conditions for health and security individually, collectively.

In the mid-1970s I practised medicine in South Africa in mission hospitals with my future wife and partner, Laureen Ross. There I began to understand the connections between politics and health. It was a difficult, first-hand education in the politics of discrimination and exclusion. With my eyes and ears and hands I felt the impact on the black people of South Africa, their limited opportunities and, in fact, their shortened lifespans. I watched many of them, mostly children, die from preventable causes. They lacked the most basic elements of life: food, clean water, sanitation, education, and access to basic health care. That's when I learned the difference between good politics and bad politics.

I returned to Alberta deeply affected by my experience, married, and began my family in Pincher Creek, Alberta, as a family

physician. But the lessons of Africa remained. I paid close attention to how children's family experience, their education opportunities, and their environment either helped or weakened their chances for success, their chances for health, their opportunities or chances for injury or illness or addiction. Long ago I gave up blaming people for their problems. We are all responsible for each other.

Too many people are not benefiting from Alberta's promise: Albertans with disabilities, single parents, seniors on fixed incomes, homeless Albertans, Alberta's First Nations. Even middle-class families pressured by the lack of affordable child care and care for their aging parents struggle with combinations of health problems, overwork, stress, and a degrading environment. Now many of our citizens are worried about whether they'll have a job or not. Again, I'm not blaming. We are all responsible. Together let's find a way to reduce the pain.

There is still an abundance of hope and opportunity in Alberta. Perhaps the greatest lesson of my work in South Africa was that positive change is possible even when things seem hopeless. Black South Africans won their freedom and continue to move forward. Nelson Mandela continues to symbolize hope and courage to move hope to action.

A responsible government, a responsible society does not take a hands-off approach to business, to the environment, or to increasing social problems. We need a different approach, a hands-on, hands-together approach, treating each other as partners in this great new enterprise of Alberta in the 21st century, in the evolution of our society into something healthier, more compassionate, more sustainable.

I have fundamental disagreements with the Premier and his government's direction though I still respect their service. I respect their humanity. As Leader of the Official Opposition I have a duty to present an alternative vision of the future, which I share with you: we work together in the public interest, or we all go down and sacrifice future generations. The Good Book says: a people without vision perish. Perhaps historians of the future will say of this time: markets without moral guidance collapse. Surely, we are experiencing this reality today.

4:00

Albertans do not support the idea that wealth is the true measure of a life or a province. Albertans tell me they seek leadership that walks the talk, honours life, and guides the market to serve people and the planet. Yesterday's throne speech talked of a positive future without a sense of what it will take to take us there. Along with our friends to the south we need to pull together in ways we have not seen since our great-grandfathers settled here. We need to give people not more political fast food, you know: it feels good now, but you pay for it later. We need to give Albertans the hard truth that we cannot have it all. We cannot have unlimited growth and pristine environments. We cannot have genuine progress without genuine sacrifice. We cannot have the lowest taxes in the country and the best public services in the land.

People need hope; they don't need false hope. We need markets; we don't need blind faith in the markets. We need a larger goal than our gross domestic product and our bank accounts. Our fondest dream must be healthy people in healthy communities and a plan to get there. Government alone cannot deliver these. We can, if we work together, help create the best conditions for health in all of its dimensions: physical, mental, social, economic, and environmental.

As our forefathers knew too well, a vision alone without hard work, sacrifice, creativity, and a shared sense of moral purpose will not result in change. These values are alive and well in our families. I've heard them expressed in this House on all sides, and now we

have to translate that into action not only here but in our communities and in our workplaces. For example, the single mother who manages to scrimp and save and achieve her bachelor of arts in social work. After several years working on behalf of the disadvantaged, she realized that she couldn't survive on her salary and has been forced to take other work. Another example is a First Nations man who confronted his broken childhood and alcohol addiction and became not only a small businessman but ultimately the chief of his band. Two courageous farm workers injured at work without compensation who have rallied other vulnerable farm workers to demand basic standards for health, safety, and compensation. These people and so many others would gladly support a longer term vision and a plan for the future of their fellow Albertans.

Our vision includes four elements. Firstly, a statement of principle: health must be the goal. As a physician I know what good health is. It's hard to define, but I think each of us knows when we are experiencing health as a result of many, many factors. As a politician I want to work in a government that recognizes and addresses all of the factors needed to create a healthy Alberta.

As for health care, the system itself, we need to take a step back and ask: what is the system supposed to do? Health care is fundamentally a relationship, a relationship of trust based on also the best of science to provide quality of care, access to care, and reasonable benefit for the cost. Therefore, we must measure changes that we make to that system on the basis of how they affect quality, how they affect access, how they affect the cost-effectiveness. That means we must set goals. We must gather evidence, examine it carefully, and listen to the professionals who are working in the system. We must work in the trenches with the vulnerable citizens who are experiencing the system and learn from what they are saying to us. We must be prepared to make the practical changes needed to improve the quality, the access, and the affordability. Professionals and institutions are important, but equally vital are trust, openness, flexibility, and the willingness to develop solid plans with a follow-through monitoring system that makes the necessary changes.

I applaud the government's progress on increasing the health workforce by increasing the number of spaces in our postsecondary institutions, doctors and nurses and the expanding role that they've been given. We should pay more attention to the family physician and expanding nursing practice as well as public health and prevention, which can pay back \$7 for every dollar we spend in prevention. We should develop more specialized surgical centres, which deliver superior treatment with reduced costs by focusing on specific procedures.

We need stronger mental health care, especially at these times of increased stress. We need to help with issues such as homelessness, domestic violence, and depression, among the highest in the country. We must look at those indicators and see the writing on the wall. We have to change the way we are addressing the long-term health of Albertans, and we must remember the old wisdom: better to spend wisely on prevention than to pour dollars into expensive cures after the fact.

Our second principle has to do with freedom for responsible business to thrive. It's a crucial element of our vision. My father worked in the oil patch. I know the contributions he and his business made to Alberta. Alberta is built on the backs of hard work and entrepreneurial spirit. Business will be our most important partner in the crucial future we're entering, especially the work of diversifying our economy. The focus must be on improving our green technology, research and development, and moving away from our dependence on fossil fuels. Many more jobs than will be available for resource extraction can be created with a green economy, long-term jobs, renewable jobs.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are essential to fuel our journey, but they are not enough. We must create the conditions for all Albertans to participate and thrive and create wealth responsibly; that is, within limits, within rules that serve the long-term public interest. Business must be accountable to the community and to the future. Government's role is to ensure that business is accountable. When power determines success rather than fairness and morality, people lose hope and they drop out. They at least drop out of the political process where, increasingly, we need their input. Again, government must ensure that higher values than profits determine our development agenda.

Because of the importance of business to Alberta's prosperity and social development, we need to systematically review and reduce unnecessary red tape, those rules and regulations that do not provide better products or services or more accountable business. Business needs certainty. It needs a return on investment. It's up to government to ensure that we are not standing in the way of reasonable, responsible business. Business is an important partner, and with business we must play fair.

When it comes to climate change, the most serious threat of our time, most businesses want to do their part. We need to show leadership. We need to, with them and with Ottawa and with our neighbours to the south, harmonize our targets and timelines for emissions. We should also consider within that context a cap and trade system that moves beyond Alberta, new building code regulations, and public transit investments. We need to send a strong message to the private sector and to all Albertans that all of us are part of the problem; we are all part of the solution. Leadership is desperately needed now. We should be leading the world, not dragging our feet and catching up. A fair, consistent set of rules and standards from government gives business the freedom to thrive.

4:10

Our third principle as part of a vision for Alberta is a smart, hard-working government. The fundamental purpose of government is to manage and distribute resources in the long-term public interest. The complexity, however, of our lives and development demands a much higher level of knowledge and analysis than we have in history. It requires the best science balanced with grounded practitioners and infused with public values. Good public policy, healthy public policy looks beyond immediate gain or loss to the long-term implications for a secure and prosperous future. This includes consistent support for our most vulnerable: seniors, disabled, and the low-income. We have yet to live up to that moral imperative.

Effective, efficient programs and services arise from careful plans developed with a clear understanding of the issues. Alberta's embarrassment of oil and gas riches has made it far too easy for government to throw money at problems. That's not smart management, and it's not sustainable. Money does not solve problems; people do. We have spent virtually all of our nonrenewable resource revenues in the past 15 years. That is not smart.

For more effective and efficient government we must have openness and accountability of decisions and spending. We must move beyond closed-door meetings and decisions that fail the test of transparency. How can we be more focused on understanding and respecting each other and less focused, too, on scoring political points? The all-party committees, as I've said, are a welcome addition to a more constructive process in policy-making. Question period is a time for tough questions. How can we make it more productive?

In the end our work will be measured in terms of whether people are inspired, engaged, and empowered to work for healthier

communities. We will never have the resources and services our growing population may need if we are not fundamentally contributing to caring, respectful, and secure communities. Clearly, that has to start here.

Finally, our fourth pillar in our vision: our promise to Albertans must include a fairness to future generations. For too long we have embraced short-term goals, cut programs in bad times and spent heavily in good times, the very reverse of what prudent economists and advisers have done in the last 50 years. We cannot do this again. This shortsightedness is an abdication of this generation's duty to the next to provide a lasting legacy for our children and our grandchildren that all of us will be proud of. The next generation has the same desire for prosperity as we, the same need for clean air, water, and land, the same fundamental right to a vibrant democracy, the same urge to live and grow and learn to reach their full potential as citizens.

As soon as feasible we must implement a savings plan that's serious and an investment strategy for future generations. We must set aside a portion of nonrenewable resource revenue. That remains a key part of the Alberta Liberal philosophy even in these most challenging of times. The changing economic reality means that we cannot save as much as we would like, but the fact remains that oil and gas are running out, and we must turn some of that temporary wealth into sustainable income. We must invest in our future. Every dollar of nonrenewable resource wealth we save today means revenue for our future, sustainable revenue our grandchildren's children can count on.

The situation we find ourselves in today is precisely the kind of predicament my immediate predecessor, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, wanted to avoid. That's why he aggressively championed the need for a savings plan for Alberta since his time in the Legislature, one that would have left us with billions of dollars in savings and investment for the future, allowing us to live off the interest.

Our current economic challenges in the context of climate change, then, compel us to move quickly to green our economy. We have suggested the creation of a Premier's council on a green economy. Very complex. We need the best of minds provincially, nationally, and internationally to help us move on this agenda. We need to diversify energy and reduce our environmental footprint. It can be a win-win-win for energy, the economy, and the environment. Such a plan will require our best minds from every sector: industry, academia, government, and nonprofit organizations. We need these minds to move us into a postcarbon future, where everything from urban planning to public transportation, housing, electricity, and especially water management must be handled differently. We know too much to be carrying on with business as usual.

In conclusion, it's time for courageous and visionary leadership that renews public trust, that builds a sense of confidence and hope in the future. Many people I meet these days are anxious about the future for themselves and for their children. They want to see a larger vision of the Alberta they have dreamed of. They want a leader with commitments to new energy and technology, research and new jobs, and a commitment to a lasting quality of life.

Over and above our fiscal responsibility to future generations is that response to climate change. No matter how many billions of dollars we manage to save in our heritage fund, that wealth will be useless if we fail to protect the environment. If we do nothing, climate change will imperil our water supply, our food security. It will put our entire society at risk. It will impact tourism. It is already impacting forestry and agriculture. Our emissions threaten our fellow Canadians, indeed the planet.

We are not the bad guys, but we must take responsibility for our share of the problem. Let's work with industry to set targets and develop technology that will lead to real reductions in emissions, not intensity reductions, which our present targets are about. As I noted earlier, let's start a serious commitment to building green infrastructure and reduce our overall dependence on fossil fuels.

We have a duty to ensure that Alberta's promise can be kept for our grandchildren. We have embraced one way of thinking for the last 40 years. It's time to change course, to pursue aggressively the approaches that will meet tomorrow's challenges. The great philosopher Wayne Gretzky said: I don't go where the puck is; I go where the puck is going to be. We need to think like that.

A new approach is necessary for the continued health and prosperity of our people, and together we can restore hope and purpose. Together Albertans of all cultures and ideologies, including Conservatives and Liberals and New Democrats, can work as one to realize Alberta's vast untapped and endangered potential. Together Albertans can refresh and reinvigorate not only the political landscape and discourse; we can refresh and invigorate our economy, our public institutions, and our relationships with the rest of Canada. Only by working together will we move forward and build a better Alberta that we can be proud of.

We have challenges. They must be met, and for us the government, this is the greatest gift we can give to our society. No one is going to meet the challenges for us, not solely us under the dome. We need to engage every citizen of Alberta in this great enterprise. When we recognize the enormity of this task, we cannot but be humbled and, hopefully, open to listening to each other more fully and finding a better way together.

4:20

I know that many Albertans believe that change is impossible. They've given up. I've met them at the doors. I don't feel that way at all, and I know most of you don't either. I believe that change is inevitable. The question is whether we will take charge of change or that change will take charge of us. I know Albertans. I know how they will put themselves out to build a better tomorrow. They will make sacrifices for the sake of family, friends. Even for strangers we make sacrifices. We are Albertans, after all.

In my work and in my travels from South Africa to the Philippines, from Nepal to Iraq to Africa, I've seen the depths of human misery. I've also seen the heights of nobility and heroism. Human beings can accomplish miracles. Albertans can and will transform ourselves from a people living from boom to bust to a healthy, interdependent, innovative, and sustainable society.

The Alberta Liberal caucus stands firmly with the people of Alberta and is here to put this government on notice. If it is not prepared to enter the 21st century with some humility, courage, and a bigger vision for us and for our children's children, then do not expect to be government next time. Easter Island is a symbol we understand, and it is rousing conscious Albertans to action. Albertans may be discouraged, they may be cynical about politics and politicians, but they are not impotent, and they are not stupid. After discouragement comes anger, and with anger comes empowered men, women, and children who will not be intimidated by the trappings of power. They are increasingly prepared to speak the truth to power and to take back control of their future if we are not prepared to lead.

Alberta Liberals are here for all Alberta, and we will leave no one behind. That is the promise of Alberta, and that is our promise to Albertans. Fellow legislators, fellow Albertans, in the name of sanity and humanity let us move forward together.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Vandermeer: Mr. Speaker, I just have a simple question for the new hon. Leader of the Opposition. You talk about that we should have more of a savings plan. In order to save more, that means we need to spend less. So if you were Premier, I would like to know where you would cut. Would that be in education? In health care? Seniors? The homeless? The Calgary ring road? Children's services? I'd like you to be specific, and I don't want you to give us any political fast food. You have a long list that would require more spending, yet on the other hand you say that we need to save more. Can you explain that to me and be really specific where we would save?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure it's about spending more; it's about spending smarter. We are spending 23 per cent more than any other jurisdiction in Canada for government services today. How much do we know about the impacts of that spending, especially in the health care system? How is it that we had a \$1.3 billion overspending in the last year? Where is that money going? How is it that we were in such a rush to pay off the financial debt of this province that we were willing to take on a massive environmental debt and a social debt? Those are the kinds of smart business decisions that I think Albertans expect, that we spend during down times like this; we save during boom times. We have not seen that kind of leadership, and Albertans want that. That's what I'm hearing.

The Speaker: Additional questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed probably about three-quarters of the way through the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's speech that he mentioned something about the embarrassment of riches with oil and gas revenue and that the current government was just throwing money at problems and that money does not solve problems; people do. Does that symbolize a change in direction in your caucus in that we will not be hearing questions about spending money on the various programs in almost every single department that we have in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think the question really should be: how are we spending our wealth? How much do we know about how the dollars are translating into better outcomes for families, better health, better business opportunities and generating the kind of sustainable energy resource that we say we need? That is the focus, really, of what our caucus will be challenging the government on: not spending more, spending smarter.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond here. I've always felt that this member's heart is in the right place even though we may not agree on every issue. He mentioned a couple of times about spending smarter. I guess I would echo the concerns of my friend the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and I would ask again where he would cut if he were Premier or where he would tax more, what types of taxes he would introduce.

Dr. Swann: I think one of the key questions that is behind this question is: when will we see a more transparent government that will allow us to see more details about why the money is being spent so heavily in the health care system with so little result? What's happening to the P3s? What is the actual short-term benefit and the longer term cost to the public purse? Our investment in the environment: what is the investment per saving of water and air? Let's start putting some indicators out there and giving us access to the details of where the money is actually going and how you are actually measuring the results of the spending.

As far as tax is concerned, clearly a progressive tax would actually move us towards a much more fair opportunity for managing within our limited means and not being so dependent on fossil fuels. Why are we adding taxes to the Blue Cross program and to seniors' drug programs when what they're really doing is . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I think we've now exhausted that portion of the agenda.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you wish to be recognized?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of Alberta's NDP I'm very pleased to respond to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne and the government's plans for the coming session. Our province's economy is quickly headed downhill, but this government's answer is business as usual. Yesterday's speech begged Albertans to have confidence in this government but offered them nowhere to find it. There appears to be absolutely nothing in this government's plan about refocusing our economy on renewable energy, a fundamental change Alberta needs if we are to keep from falling into the abyss of a prolonged recession. They refuse to follow the example being set by other countries around the world. The Conservatives are sleepwalking towards disaster, and their arrogance threatens to take thousands of working Albertans down with them.

This Speech from the Throne ignores the global transition to economies based on renewable energies. Alberta is at a crossroads, and everyday Albertans are looking for leadership from their government. While virtually every other jurisdiction in the world is announcing stimulus packages to help people face the inevitable job losses that are coming, this government announced nothing. Instead, it remains steadfast in its naive hope that the market will take care of itself.

Mr. Speaker, that's what has got us into this mess in the first place, and I'm sure that it won't help us get out. We are set to take in significantly reduced revenues from the oil and gas sector, from business taxes, and from personal income taxes as unemployment continues to rise, yet this government insists that Alberta is cushioned from this downturn. The government insists it will not consider any new ideas. The Premier has said that his plan is to stay the course. Those words are reminiscent of former U.S. President George W. Bush, whose disastrous environmental policies this government has slavishly followed for the last eight years. We are in a new era, and we must change our course if we do not wish to be left behind. The free ride on greenhouse gas emissions that the Conservatives were given during the Bush years is over. It's time to plan ahead for a new economy, for new jobs for Albertans based on renewable energies that we can show to the world.

4:30

Working Albertans will not stand by idly as this government continues its path towards economic ruin. We do not believe that we can just wait for things to right themselves. It is a time to change

our course, to create an Alberta whose fortunes are sustainable well into the future. To that end, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's NDP caucus has identified three areas of focus, all of which will serve to represent the interests of regular Albertans and their families.

First, we will fight to protect real jobs and show that thousands of long-term jobs, real jobs, can be created by investing in forward-looking industries that are based on sustainable business practices, technological innovation, and environmental stewardship. Second, we will continue to expose this government's secret health care agenda to delist and privatize health services. We will counter the myth they try to peddle to the people of this province about the unsustainability of the public system. Finally, Mr. Speaker, we'll pull back the curtains on this government's so-called environmental plan.

It's clear that behind the closed doors of government there is no desire or initiative to clean up the tar sands or the tar ponds. As each day passes without a real plan, the tar sands become a growing liability to our province. Unless this government commits to change, what was once a story of 500 dead ducks will soon become the story of 50,000 unemployed Albertans. Mr. Speaker, investment in education, publicly funded infrastructure, and a green economy all create more jobs per dollar than investments in handouts to the oil and gas industry. Albertans are already facing record job losses because of the slowdown in the oil and gas sector. Most plans to build upgraders and new extraction sites in Alberta have been mothballed or cancelled. The results are increasingly regular announcements of job layoffs, and it is government's role to step in and offer alternatives for Alberta's families.

An obvious starting point would be the reduction and eventual elimination of the sale of unrefined bitumen from this province. This government is actually working with American oil companies to allow unprocessed bitumen to continue to flow to the United States and along with it thousands of construction and long-term jobs. Even the Premier likened the sale of unprocessed bitumen to scraping the topsoil from the farm and selling it, and he promised to end the practice, a promise he has since ignored.

It has become clear that the world's future economic basis needs a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. Mr. Speaker, about a year ago Barack Obama said: the question is not if a renewable energy economy will thrive in the future; it's where. Alberta as the energy capital of Canada should be leading the transition and ensuring that jobs that go with the transition are here, in this province. However, this government remains fixated on the status quo. This lack of foresight will have tremendous impact on our future wealth as a province. This environmental foot-dragging threatens to deny Alberta a seat at the table when it comes to negotiating sustainable energy agreements with the United States. Real job creation comes from innovation and government support of new technologies that will serve an economy based on renewable energy.

The \$2 billion corporate handout government has earmarked for carbon capture and sequestration should be redirected towards small businesses to develop green technologies. This money would create thousands of full-time jobs and help Alberta position itself to become the hub of a North American green energy economy.

Investment in other sectors, like child care and agriculture, also creates jobs and stimulates a sagging economy. Working Alberta families need more affordable child care spaces. While the government claims to have created a number of new spaces, what they don't tell us is how many have been lost and what the costs to families are. What we don't need is more doublespeak and misinformation from this tired old government.

Mr. Speaker, farming families have been the backbone of our province since it was founded, but they are virtually ignored in this throne speech. We need a government that puts family farms ahead of big packing plants and agribusiness. We need to stop subsidizing big corporations and invest in local producers. That's how you stimulate an economy and keep Albertans working.

Publicly funded universal health care is one of Canada's international hallmarks. It is, in my view, the greatest gift from our party to the people of Canada. Ordinary Canadians and Albertans rely on the services our health care system provides. Albertans don't want to pay for private health insurance. They do not want to be forced to forgo necessary medical treatment for fear of huge bills, and they certainly do not want to be placed in a position where they have to choose between buying the drugs they need or paying the rent.

What Albertans do want, Mr. Speaker, is a health care system that is fully funded, accessible in both urban and rural communities, and properly staffed. They deserve to know that the truth is that such a system is not only affordable but is also sustainable now and into the future. Unfortunately, we are continuously being sold a bill a goods by a government that is morally and intellectually bankrupt. They try to tell us that a system such as this is an impossible dream. They're wrong. We will continue the fight for universal health care that everyday Albertans want.

Upon his election this Premier promised Albertans a more transparent and accountable government, but nothing has changed. The government has yet to demonstrate how the establishment of a superboard benefits ordinary Albertans. Mr. Speaker, it eliminates the last vestiges of local control over the health care system. The truth is that study after study has proven that investment in public health care services creates more jobs and saves more lives than private health care, and it does so for much less money. Until this government starts listening to Albertans and stops promoting U.S. style health care, Alberta's NDP will continue to fight for publicly funded, publicly delivered health care that meets the needs of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, finally, reclaiming our environment and setting a better example of environmental stewardship on the world stage is essential to any plan aimed at stimulating our economy and preparing it for the transition to sustainability. Prior to the recent election of President Barack Obama the Alberta government took advantage of an eight-year free ride under the disastrous environmental policies of the Bush administration. President Obama has made it clear that those days are over.

Alberta must quickly change its course, or it will be isolated and left behind. There is growing discontent throughout the world, including in the United States, about Alberta's lack of environmental protection for the tar sands. Alberta has a black eye that can be seen from space, and it is now putting working Albertans' jobs at risk. The Obama administration has committed \$55 billion for the development of green technology, which is four times the per capita amount that Canada has promised. This government has a lot of catching up to do, and the time to start is now, in this session.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP's green strategy promotes several initiatives that would set a new course for repairing Alberta's environment and preparing for its future. Immediate funding for home retrofits would not only save homeowners money, create jobs in the construction, service, and retail sectors, but it would also reduce Albertans' environmental footprint. Our green energy strategy calls for the establishment of a fund to provide interest-free loans and grants to individuals, groups, and municipalities that make energy-conscious choices.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, this government must rewrite legislation to include appropriate penalties, not mere slaps on the

wrist, for polluting industries. Too often we have seen instances in which companies continue to pollute the air and water and put wildlife and human health at risk because they know the current legislation is weak and the consequences of violations insignificant.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take a moment to speak about Bill 1. The men and women who bravely serve on our behalf in the Canadian armed forces deserve our greatest respect and honour. It seems obvious that we should protect the jobs of reservists who have been called up to serve on our behalf. Yet after nearly six years, perhaps seven years, of fighting in Afghanistan, Alberta has dragged its feet on this issue and is the last province in the country to bring forward legislation to protect reservists' jobs. I think we can do better. We should have done better for those people who are willing to serve.

Our province faces greater challenges today than it ever has, and it's clear by their delays that this government has no idea of what is needed to address the looming recession. We are concerned by government's constant references to the delisting and privatization of health care services and by their ongoing failure to take the issue of environmental protection seriously. The actions of this government show that they have absolutely no commitment to end their unsustainable dependency on fossil fuels or to shield Alberta's families from this recession.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, this has become perhaps the most secretive government in Canada despite clear assurances to that effect over the last year, including the last throne speech. Alberta's NDP will continue to demand openness from this government regarding its plans for health care, we will insist that it take responsibility for its environmental record, and we will fight to protect jobs against a government that would prefer to increase the welfare rolls.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of everyday Albertans, who deserve better and demand more, Alberta's NDP will be voting against this throne speech.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I fail to see anyone wanting to participate, so I shall proceed and recognize the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne. First, I want to thank the government for a good, comprehensive look at our present and our future. The themes identified in the speech given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, Norman Kwong, emphasized just how great a province Alberta is and how fortunate we are to be able to call ourselves Albertans. Over the last 100 years thousands of people in waves and at different times throughout the century have left their respective homelands and migrated here to start new lives. I cannot imagine the thoughts and fears these people must have felt in those early days when they made decisions to leave their families in some cases and everything familiar and travel into the unknown. All they knew was that this was a land of opportunity.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I remember my grandfather and grandmother coming here from the steppes of Russia, and I remember the stories he told me of what it was like when he arrived here, homesteaded, and started to raise a family. I also remember that he, like others I knew, were often reluctant to talk much about their life in the old country. He only spoke of a couple of instances that confirmed their resolve to

emigrate to the new world. One story had to do with an attempt to assassinate one of the members of the Russian monarchy as they were travelling in a parade in the city of St. Petersburg. Mr. Speaker, my grandfather, instead, focused on his life here in Canada and here in Alberta. His absolute, unwavering intent was to be Canadian and Albertan. He talked about how he had to work to be a part of the community, to work together in order to make it through those early years.

I grew up listening to my grandfather and watching and learning from my father as I was constantly reminded of how they lived through the Dirty Thirties and how they had to tighten their belts and make do. I was forever reminded of the importance of saving for a time when things might not be so good and these savings would be needed in order to make it through the tough times.

Mr. Speaker, living through those tough times had a very strong impact on their lives. My family was very reluctant to spend any money they didn't have. My dad only went into debt for a short time if he was positive he could pay that debt off and at the same time acquire something necessary for his farm, like a new tractor to replace the worn one or a piece of machinery that made farming more efficient. At the same time, we didn't do without as we grew up. I think it gave us a greater appreciation of what we had. I thank my dad now for being that way, even though when I was small, I was envious of some of the things kids my age had.

No one predicted the Dirty Thirties, at least not to the extent they were. Likewise, this global recession was not predicted even as short as six months ago. We as Albertans have learned from our grandfathers and our fathers, and I feel so fortunate that our government put savings away just in case. This is indeed going to help us, as was mentioned in the throne speech, weather the downturn, and it will indeed position us as a province to come out ahead of the curve when the economy does turn around again, and it surely will, just like the second half of the last century did. Alberta led the country in so many ways just last year, and we will lead the pack again.

Mr. Speaker, as I travelled to various state capitals in the Pacific Northwest this last month, I was constantly reminded of perhaps where we would be if we had not saved for this rainy day. Of the jurisdictions I had an opportunity to visit, only one other has the same opportunity as Alberta. Alaska also has a savings account set aside for such a possibility. They are also, like us, the only other jurisdiction who will be able to move forward without making devastating cuts to their budgets. They, like us, are tightening their belts and moving on.

I'm constantly reminded of the poem *If* by Rudyard Kipling and a couple of lines from it, which I paraphrase.

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you . . .
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools . . .
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it.

Mr. Speaker, over the last while there's been so much discussion and negative reaction as to where Alberta has gone in these past years, but I can only say that I am proud and thankful for what we have done and where we have gone. As I mentioned, we are in an enviable position. This comes with leadership, with leadership and common sense, something that also comes from our forefathers. We have a great deal of opportunity to improve the successes we have with our economic future. As Alberta is an exporting jurisdiction, our opportunities for the future do hinge, as was outlined in the throne speech, on ensuring that we increase our ability to trade and

compete in the world marketplace. I believe that we've been doing a much-needed job not only for North Americans but also our trading partners globally as to the safety of our agricultural products and the environmental responsibility we take with all our energy resources.

As the present Alberta lead for the Pacific Northwest Economic Region I'm fortunate to be a part of an organization that is focused on just that: supporting and enhancing our already healthy trade relationship with our largest trading partner, the United States. There's a good reason why the world's second-largest energy producer, Alberta, is right next door to the world's largest energy customer, the United States, and we are good neighbours and allies. As we go forward, it only makes good sense to improve that relationship and to streamline the efficiency of trading back and forth between our jurisdictions and to increase the security and safety of such trade as well. That is why I believe that it is vital that we improve our ability to do this.

I'm speaking about the fact that at present Alberta does such a high volume of trade with the United States, all funneled through only one 24-hour commercial port of entry at Coutts-Sweet Grass. To improve this element, it's imperative that another similar port be established at Wild Horse at the southeast corner of our province. I'm encouraged that the Alberta government is fully supportive of this and continues to urge the federal government in Ottawa to implement this as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the new provincial energy strategy is a work that's long overdue. Natural gas plays from southeast Alberta have made up the largest percentage of royalty revenues for Alberta for many, many years. This area will be a major player for many years to come. Southern Alberta is also an area that has the best potential for wind energy anywhere in North America. Perhaps that's why many of us from there also walk with a permanent lean to the west. I don't know.

The opportunity for alternative energy production is enhanced by the world concern for more green energy, and I believe Alberta is poised to be a major player in not only wind energy but solar as well, with Medicine Hat as the sunniest city in Canada.

As was mentioned in the throne speech, agriculture and agrifood industries are large economic drivers. I'm proud to be an Albertan and proud to be an agriculture producer. Our forefathers who migrated here and homesteaded here proved that agriculture is an important mainstay in our economy. They settled this land and made it what it is today. I look forward to the future with the support that our government is showing in the agricultural industry.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, as I drive through all parts of Alberta, it's easy to see how much development and activity is going on. You can't help but notice all the development in and around our two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton. Medicine Hat, which hit 60,000 in population last year, has now also come of age and has moved ahead with a great deal of development, both residential and commercial. The big box stores that have gone up this last year are providing service options and employment opportunities that previously could only be had in the big cities.

I also look forward to the redevelopment and expansion of the Medicine Hat regional hospital, which was announced last year. In my mind, the priority is there, and I'm waiting for the shovel to be put in the ground. Likewise, the small expansion that was announced over three years ago for the Bow Island hospital in my constituency is one that has to be started and completed.

Mr. Speaker, there are perhaps two main reasons that people move to Alberta: jobs and opportunity. It's the best place to live, work,

and raise a family. The reason they stay here is because it's the most beautiful land in Canada. I'm encouraged by our government's approach to our land, namely the land-use framework, which will allow everyone, no matter who they are or from what walk of life, to pursue their respective interests and enjoy and share our land but not to the detriment of any others' interests.

Mr. Speaker, water or the future limitations and lack of it is perhaps the biggest single issue facing where I live in southern Alberta. The water for life strategy, championed by my predecessor, Dr. Lorne Taylor, from Cypress-Medicine Hat, has set the stage for addressing Alberta's water challenges. With the new watershed advisory committees I'm very hopeful that good water management will sustain us in southern Alberta long into the future. Quite frankly, water or the lack thereof is the limiting factor for growth. I'm aware of and fully supportive of the needs of our environment as well as our economy.

Innovation and technology are great to talk about. Even if I don't understand most of it – and I'm sure I'm not alone – I believe it must be embraced. As an example, you don't need to show me how the new computers or the BlackBerrys work. I don't need to know that and wouldn't understand anyway. Just show me how to use them, and I'll make them a part of my life. I find it amazing that the things that were considered science fiction not so many years ago are now so commonplace. I often wonder what my grandfather or father would think of things like cellphones and nanotechnology.

Speaking of technology, I'm pleased that our government saw fit to support the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems, which is located in Medicine Hat in southeast Alberta. The innovation and technology breakthroughs that are coming from our universities and colleges regarding such things as nanotechnology and artificial intelligence will make the companies that now utilize this centre better able to expand their developments, provide the incentives for more companies to locate here, and be the leading edge in world markets in the future.

Mr. Speaker, our population is aging, and it's estimated that a full 25 per cent or more will be seniors by the year 2020. A commitment to build so many affordable housing units and to also be able to offer options for housing is also encouraging. I may need one of those types of units myself in the future. I'm glad we recognize our seniors, the people with disabilities, and those most vulnerable.

I'm also pleased that our government is committed to keeping the RCMP as the official police force for Alberta. At the same time, the implementation of the Alberta sheriff program to supplement is a bonus that is definitely helping improve safety on our highways. I do drive a lot of miles on Alberta highways in a year, and I did speed. I'll admit it. I was strongly encouraged to slow down, and I've done so, and I think I'm a much safer driver now. I set out on each trip just a little earlier.

Mr. Speaker, many will say that we are in the most challenging time of our lives, and I tend to agree. As I look through all we have done and all we have before us to do, I think I can say that we as Albertans still have that spirit that we inherited from our ancestors, and we're up to the task. As my grandfather and my dad used to say when they talked about the Depression of the Dirty Thirties, you just have to tighten up your belt and work hard with a continuity of purpose. Or as in the words of Rudyard Kipling, "If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run, yours is the Earth and everything that's in it."

Thank you, Mr. Premier. Thank you, Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of question and comment. Would any hon. member like to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise in this House today to offer my response to the Speech from the Throne. As you and this House are aware, this is my second opportunity to listen to a Speech from the Throne delivered by this government. Again, much like the first one, it was chock full of references to this government's past glories, alleged and otherwise, and it at least in rhetoric seemed sure of the wisdom of its present course. In fact, when I left the throne speech yesterday afternoon, I thought for a second that as a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition I could take the rest of the session off as once again the Progressive Conservative government has this province firmly going in the right direction, and the past decisions of this government have left this province of Alberta as a modern-day equivalent of Shangri-La.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Now, for those of you who don't know, Shangri-La is a fictional place described in a 1933 novel by James Hilton. In the book Shangri-La is a mystical, harmonious valley gently guided from a lamasery enclosed in the west end of the Kunlun Mountains. Shangri-La has become synonymous with an earthly paradise but particularly a Himalayan utopia, a permanently happy place isolated from the outside world.

To be honest, I left the throne speech a little shaken up. Have I gotten it all wrong? Does this government really have everything under control as indicated in the throne speech? Like a good little student of history I went back over the last number of years to throne speeches in the past, and guess what? I feel better now. I really have not gotten it all wrong. You know why? Those throne speeches were full of the same colourful language, juicy sound bites, and false bravado that this one had.

[The Speaker in the chair]

They contained statements like: Alberta will never go into debt again. Or how about this one: protecting our environment is job one of this government. How about this: we have an exciting plan for health care. That was in the throne speech back when the now-infamous Bill 11 was introduced. That exciting plan was to move Albertans to private health care. After reading those throne speeches, I can only conclude that historically Conservatives' throne speeches are either replete with mere platitudes or that this government does not really follow through on what it lays out at the beginning of the new legislative year.

With this being the case, I took a more critical look at yesterday's throne speech, and now it seems to me more of the same, a bunch of sound bites attempting to hide the fact that the government is unsure of where it has been and equally unsure of where it wants to go. At its core this is a government with no true vision of what Alberta should be and, more importantly, what Alberta could be. It's a government that doesn't appear to have a plan.

Let's just come clean here for a second: we didn't have a plan for the boom. That was and, in fact, has been admitted. Unfortunately, it now appears that with some tough times facing us, it is equally true that we do not have a plan for the bust either. Despite the flowery language in the throne speech Alberta is no Shangri-La, though ironically yesterday's throne speech was a nice piece of fiction.

Let's talk about how Alberta really is. As we are all aware, currently and going back for some time much of Alberta's good fortune is a product of our abundant supply of fossil fuel resources. Truly, this has been manna from heaven. Fossil fuels have allowed us to become a have province since 1947. During the past 10 years no other provincial government has brought in near the per capita revenue stream that Alberta has. This abundance has in turn led to the fact that last year Alberta spent approximately 23 per cent more per capita than Ontario did. Pretty astonishing for the belt-tightening, conservative province we allegedly are.

5:00

These statistics highlight how much resource we bring in and then spend. With this spending one would think Albertans could expect that our infrastructure, hospitals, public education system, for example, should be heads and tails above other provinces. Looking at these statistics, we should expect that Alberta would have the lowest wait times in emergency rooms, that we have shown leadership on the environment and made tough decisions on green investments to diversify our economy, that per capita our cities were adequately policed. They would assume that in Alberta no child went to school hungry.

However, that is not the case. Alberta is in the middle of the pack when it comes to hospital wait times. Environmental groups do not applaud us for our vision of protecting our water, forests, or air. Compare Calgary's and Edmonton's policing per capita numbers, and they are dramatically lower than for other large cities in Canada. Estimates are that 70,000 children in Alberta go to school hungry every day. Given all this, it's a fair question for people to ask: are we getting value for our hard-earned tax dollars? I can only say that from my perspective the answer is no. We are spending, but we are not investing.

I am even going to go out on a limb and tell you the reason why. Economists will tell you that economies are cyclical, that economies have a pulse and beat of their own. Sometimes they perform well; sometimes they falter. When economies are performing well, goods, services, labour, and the like are all more expensive. When economies falter, these goods, services, and labour become less expensive. Yes, I remember that from economics 201.

Now, given that this is how things work and given that governments can choose to spend money, that can and does influence these economic cycles, I am of the belief that government should do more of its spending when the economy is not doing well and less of it when it is booming. Call me crazy, but this makes sense. Governments all over the world, in fact our own Conservative government in Ottawa, have now returned to this philosophy.

I hope I won't get any of my right-wing friends in this House too upset by using the term "Keynesian economics," but that's essentially what it is. However, instead of following this basic principle, the Progressive Conservative government in Alberta has insisted on doing things backwards. Time and time again this government spends itself silly in the boom cycle of the economy. Just take a look at our spending over the last five years.

Now, we all know why this happened. The spending was done in a frantic effort to erase the mistake of Klein-era cuts. Where does this leave us now? Well, I guess it leaves us back at the beginning. We are now at a point where we can rectify this spending glitch. If I were in this government, I would try to do more of my spending when the economic cycle called for prudent investment and spend less when the economy was performing well and costs were high. Like all things this current economic situation will pass. However, what I am hoping has also passed is this government's haphazard manner of spending money at the wrong times in economic cycles.

In other words, like Keynesians say, government should spend money when necessary and save money when times are good.

Please do not interpret what I just said as a licence to simply go throw money around willy-nilly in this current downturn. As noted, we already spend 23 per cent more per capita than Ontario. I am not suggesting that we need to increase this, but here's what I am saying: given these economic times, we may find Albertans looking for work, and if this turns out to be the case, this gives us possible opportunities. We can do some things if this government shows some leadership.

Just as an example, we could bolster our long-term economic health by keeping more of our oil and gas wealth here at home. Right now we ship countless tonnes of unprocessed bitumen to the United States for upgrading. We could add thousands of well-paying jobs to our economy by building more upgraders here in Alberta and selling upgraded oil rather than raw bitumen. This brings more money to Alberta, money we can use to upgrade our infrastructure, improve public programs, and keep taxes low. The second thing I think is important is that we build more upgraders in Alberta.

As a general manner of course we have to do better on our green economy. We can do this by building more wind farms, capturing carbon, creating new building codes, requiring environmentally friendly office towers and factories, investing in public transit, and creating opportunities for every citizen and industry to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Alberta is home to some of the world's most brilliant entrepreneurs and corporations. We could make a fortune on green technology. Better yet, if we invest in green technology and become leaders in this field, we can export that technology to the world, enhancing our prosperity, protecting our environment, and creating jobs at the same time.

The third priority in my eyes if those opportunities are created is to possibly speed up our 10-year plan to end homelessness. Albertans need homes, tradespeople need work, and there's no time like the present to deliver on our commitment to end homelessness here in Alberta.

As time is short and I've gone on far too long already, I'd like to add that now also may be the time to bolster our police forces. Currently when we crunch the numbers, our cities' police forces are not adequately staffed. Edmonton and Calgary are in the middle of a gang war. Organized crime is active and thriving in our province. One way we can fight this is by acknowledging the fact that Alberta's major cities are just that: major cities. We need well-supported police forces large enough to address this reality. Our citizens deserve adequately funded police services, and they deserve safe communities.

These would be my priorities. I think they're priorities for many Albertans who simply want jobs, good health care, a place to call home, a healthy environment, and an assurance that their tax dollars are being invested wisely. Call it a common-sense Shangri-La.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always my great honour to represent my constituency of Calgary-Fort. Today it is my great pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Facing the Future with Confidence was the theme in the speech that His Honour delivered, and it is truly confidence that will help us persevere through this uncertain economic time.

My constituency of Calgary-Fort is made up of hard-working citizens. Many of them are my neighbours and friends. A number

of them have living and working experiences in many parts of the world. My constituents, like every one of us, strive to have a place to call their home, to make their living, and to raise their family. We all want a safe and prosperous Alberta.

The large Calgary Foothills industrial park in my constituency is the home of many businesses and manufacturers. They have been helping to create wealth for Albertan workers and for the public coffers through their products and services, which are for Canadian consumption and many export markets. Like all Albertans they are most concerned with the current state of the global economy. I know they fear for their job stability and worry about the well-being of their family and about what the future holds.

Calgary-Fort is an industrious and diverse community that will benefit from the public investment that the province is continuing to make in Albertans now and for the future. As with all the communities across the province it will benefit from the investments in infrastructure, education, health care, and most of all from the investment in safe communities. By showing our government's leadership and confidence during this global economic downturn cycle, my constituents will be able to take full advantage of the investments being made in them by the province.

My constituents need assistance in job transition and retraining. My business constituents need supporting measures for their problems with cash flow and credit availability. I'm very pleased that our government pays attention to and invests in this area. This investment will lead us through the challenging times and launch us in the coming cycle of growth.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has faced many hardships in the past and has always persevered and come out stronger than before. I have confidence that we will once again rise above today's challenges and be triumphant because we Albertans have the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve. The Alberta government has a comprehensive plan that will lead us through this challenging time and will continue to make our Alberta the best place to live and work, a place of hopes and dreams.

It is important that we continue to invest in our province. A key investment being made is in new technologies and research and development projects. Research and development attracts talent and investment in our province, helping us to become a leader on the world stage. I'm excited to see new ideas and new discoveries that will be found in places such as the Calgary University Research Park, where I had the privilege of working for a number of years, and the Edmonton Research Park just south of here.

Businesses conduct advanced research in every field, such as medicine technology, biotechnology, telecommunications, software, and petroleum. By continued investment in research and new technology, we are protecting Albertans and also preparing our launch into the next growth of the economic cycle.

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward, we need to act with what I call the 4-E principle: acting in an ethical, economical, efficient, and effective manner. Within this 4-E principle is a need to invest in a way that achieves a big bang for the public buck, the need to do what is right for our citizens, and the need to build and invest in a responsible way.

I applaud the investments that have been outlined in the Speech from the Throne. One investment that particularly stands out to me, Mr. Speaker, is the government's commitment to military reservists. The Canadian Legion plays a large role in the Calgary-Fort constituency. Many reservists call Calgary-Fort their home. I have built a close relationship with the veterans and current reservists and cadets. I respect and admire their dedication to the security of our country

and of our province. In the past I have made suggestions for some ideas to honour and appreciate our military men and women, such as naming the Alberta veterans highway, creating scholarships for cadets, and accepting training and skills in the military as equivalent qualifications in civilian jobs.

I'm very pleased that the government is taking initiatives along this line. Bill 1, introduced this spring, will amend the employment standards act, protecting the jobs of those who serve our country. With this the government will be recognizing the invaluable contribution that Canadian military reservists make to ensure Canadian security at home and abroad. It will ensure that reservists who work in Alberta will be able to return to their prior employer upon return from their deployment. With this bill the government is showing respect for these reservists and their families, and they duly deserve that. Like all Albertans they are most concerned with the state of the economy as well.

I have been very passionate about the cause of reservists for many years as they are true heroes. They leave their families behind to defend our freedoms and help to make the world a better place. By providing job security, we can help the transition back to civilian life and provide peace of mind for the reservists and their families.

Mr. Speaker, it's my great honour to be here today responding to the Speech from the Throne. I believe that the government has outlined a plan that will help this province and all Albertans to cope with the current uncertainty and launch ourselves in the next growth economic cycle. I look forward to the implementation of the government plan ensuring Alberta's continued success and a productive spring session. Let's work together, making Alberta a place ample with freedom to create and a strong spirit to achieve. That is *Fortis et Liber*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

I'll recognize, then, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether I consider yesterday's throne speech from my point of view as the grateful husband of Heather, my very tolerant, hard-working, loving, and supporting wife of 40 years; whether from our shared roles as parents of an incredible daughter, Christina, and backed by her extremely devoted, hard-working husband, Vivek, both of whom are in turn very fortunate to have the support of his caring parents, Sothi and Achu, which all together provide Christina the luxury of being able to choose to stay at home to raise our two incredible preschool grandsons, Kiran and Rohan, upon whom the Alberta sun rises and sets, a fact to which my father, Bryce, will attest to any and all interested parties; whether I view the throne speech from the dutiful perspective of the twice-elected Member of the Legislative Assembly representing Calgary-Varsity, which is home to a large number of seniors, students, AISH recipients, persons with disabilities either physical or intellectual, their aging parents or care providers struggling to keep their home or a high-rented roof over their heads, who are the first to feel the recessionary effects; whether in my role as the official Alberta provincial opposition critic for Education, Children and Youth Services, and Tourism, Parks and Recreation; as a five-year member of the Public Accounts committee; or in my more recent role as a member of the all-party Standing Committee on Community Services, I am disappointed with the thin gruel the throne speech contains and the more sustaining meaty chunks that it is missing.

The throne speech is the latest in a long line of missed opportunities by a passive, noninterventionist government without a plan

which has squandered its opportunity to govern a province rich in both human and natural resources. Some members of this government have watched from the sidelines. Others have aimlessly ridden the boom and bust roller coaster that has twice rolled over this province within their 38-year governance mandate. With the first economic downturn of the 1980s the Alberta government's excuse or scapegoat was the national energy policy, which was not only vilified as being responsible for lost jobs in Alberta, but it was apparently also the sole cause for sky-high mortgage rates across Canada and hitherto inexplicable global misfortunes. After more than 25 years of dragging this skeletal blame from under the bed as the cause for everything that ails Alberta from the past to the present, it is time for this government to bury the bones and look into the mirror for more localized explanations of our current conundrum, explanations which were as absent from yesterday's throne speech as were solutions.

This government's backpedalling prowess, its denial of fiscal reality, its ongoing inability to sustainably manage both Alberta's renewable and nonrenewable resources, its attempts to cover up or divert attention from its failures are rapidly losing the confidence of the majority of Albertans: 79 per cent of eligible voters rejected the March 3 menu that this government was offering. That massive March 3, 2008, rejection occurred when times were good for the majority of Albertans, when the government's apparent challenge was how fast it could spend the \$147 a barrel that each of millions of barrels of oil was bringing in.

5:20

The 1980s bumper sticker "Please, God, if I get another oil boom, I promise not . . ." was a faded memory although the NEP sticker of the same period dusted off by Alberta's Premier was sufficient to scare the remaining 21 per cent of eligible voters with Tory-blue blood flowing through their veins to give him an amazing majority in the form of 72 seats this past March. I wonder how many of those individuals, many of which now find themselves unemployed for either the first or the second bust time, were impressed by what they saw on their TVs yesterday as they sat at home contemplating how this throne speech would improve their re-employment chances. They were probably also wondering whether, if they were eligible for employment insurance, it would tide them over for the next two months while the Alberta government holds them ransom by withholding the budget.

It is said that if we don't learn from our historical mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them. The fact that this government adopted the concept of creating the Liberal stability fund, which they renamed the sustainability fund, will with its \$6 billion and change buy both itself and Albertans a little time.

Unfortunately, other Alberta provincial Liberal plans, which included inflation-proofing the heritage savings trust fund, Peter Lougheed's marvellous invention, were ignored by this government. Instead of building up the fund when times were good, especially when we experienced surpluses, which has been the case for the past 15 years, this government drew down the account. This government made poor investments. This government decreed that only one-third of surplus dollars would go to the fund.

Had this government heeded the advice of contributing to the fund annually when the Liberals recommended setting aside the equivalent of 10 per cent of all oil and gas revenue, not just one-third of the surplus, the fund would have grown to the point where interest alone would have replaced our financial dependence on nonrenewable traditional oil and gas revenue. Another 10 per cent of oil and gas revenue set aside as we recommended would have established a postsecondary endowment fund to promote intellectual research,

leading in part to much-needed economic diversification. The remaining 10 per cent of oil and gas revenue, if set aside as recommended, could have established a fund to catch up on deferred infrastructure projects and create a sustainable endowment fund for promoting arts and culture.

These Alberta Liberal fiscal strategies, unfortunately, were ignored by this government, who as recently as last fall believed that Alberta was insulated from the global recession. My esteemed colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the past leader of the Alberta provincial Liberal Party, who received his doctorate in economics, foresaw the signs of a potential economic downfall more than a year ago. Realizing that a more dramatic savings plan was needed, he suggested that a full 30 per cent of all oil and gas revenue be dedicated to the heritage trust fund. The government rejected his foresight, as it has previous Liberal fiscal and democratic recommendations.

While hindsight is 20/20, foresight is considerably more challenging. The first step in overcoming a problem begins with the admission that you have one. There is no doubt that Alberta has problems. Currently 40 per cent of Albertans are considered functionally illiterate. A fall 2008 Statistics Canada figure revealed that over 77,000 Alberta children were living below the poverty line. Given our current recession, unless the government intervenes quickly and efficiently, that number of vulnerable children will grow dramatically. Last year 19,000 women, many with children, sought refuge from abusive relationships but were turned away from women's shelters in Alberta. With the additional pressures of recession family stress will grow.

Last year this government ignored the plea from Inn from the Cold organization, which supports homeless families, for funding its downtown shelter. The primary reason for rejection was the proposed location although the government offered no other alternatives or support. The Inn from the Cold asked for a \$3 million government grant, which at that time was turned down. Fortunately, an anonymous philanthropist provided an interest-free loan, which means fewer families will have to move from church basement to church basement each night.

If this government is serious about a sustainable future, then it needs to start by protecting children, reducing poverty, and increasing educational opportunities. Currently programs like Breakfast for Learning, which receives no government funding, and Meals on Wheels, which through its duck soup program provides lunches for a very few fortunate schools and receives limited funding, are trying to bridge the crevasse left by this government's inaction. Due to the Calgary community's generosity and credit Breakfast for Learning reaches 50,000 disadvantaged Calgary children each year.

Despite continuing to be Canada's wealthiest province per capita, based primarily on our nonrenewable resources rather than government economic stewardship, one-third to one-quarter of high school students drop out with very costly results. One-quarter of eligible Alberta university students who have the required grades and can afford the inflated tuition are turned away due to lack of space. The government must begin to view education as a preventative measure, as a proactive investment, rather than as a fiscal liability. The best way to start is by establishing programs which identify children with learning disabilities before they arrive at school. The government has yet to live up to its Learning Commission's recommendations to fund optional full-day kindergarten or half-day junior kindergarten for children at risk. If the government is serious about addressing the dropout problem in high school, then it needs to take proactive preschool measures.

Putting a greater emphasis on not only protecting but nurturing children would reap tremendous benefits in the future. Currently

front-line children and youth workers are struggling under unmanageable caseloads. The recent deaths of two young children in the custody of the province tragically testify to the province's failure to protect children, to support families, whether birth or through fostering. Children's caregivers, especially those looking after children with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable. The worth, the strength of a government is based on how well it protects the most vulnerable, which include children, seniors, and the disabled. The plight of the most vulnerable Albertans was again not addressed by this throne speech. Albertans deserve better. It is our elected duty to deliver.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, and after that I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Calder to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne. When I learned last March that I was the MLA for Edmonton-Calder, I knew this government was going to do great things for the people of Alberta, and I wanted to be part of that greatness. Indeed, it seems that people in Atlantic Canada want to be part of it as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am a man of my constituency with roots that go back to my time in high school. Having most recently lived there for nearly a decade, my constituents appreciate that being a resident of Calder makes the issues personal and close to home. I take these issues very personally, and I am proud to know that our government and our Premier do as well. I would like to thank the hon. Premier for introducing Bill 1 into the House this session. It is a bill that is extremely important to the members of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. The Loyal Eddies are an integral part of Edmonton-Calder constituency and deserve the protection of Bill 1.

I find reassurance in the fortunate position that Alberta has in the global economy. Prudent fiscal management has allowed our province to be debt free. This has permitted the government to set aside over \$7 billion in the sustainability fund. No other jurisdiction has actually done what Alberta has. Even though the market growth has slowed, we are better off here than in provinces with deficits, debts, and unsustainable programs. I feel confident in this government's ability to convert long-term savings into long-term growth. It will ensure that our position in the global economy remains unscathed and will create opportunities when Albertans need them most.

Mr. Speaker, this plan will allow Alberta to continue to build our communities responsibly. Maintaining Alberta's infrastructure and strategically building new projects will strengthen the connections in and outside of each community. Edmonton-Calder is the centre for rail, air, and road transportation in the Edmonton area. We like the sounds of propellers, locomotives, and trucks because if these sounds are missing in Calder, everyone is in trouble. This government's vision and commitment to infrastructure will keep the planes, trains, and automobiles of Edmonton-Calder busy moving the goods and services that everyone needs.

5:30

The expansion of the Anthony Henday is an exciting development not only for my constituency but all of Alberta. Strategic building like this has led to the creation of another major artery in Edmonton. Dispersing traffic over several major arteries will increase the safety of all Albertans on the roads. As a long-time member of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering I value the importance of safety on the roads, in the household, and in the workplace.

As a government it is our job to ensure the safety of Albertans. By committing to increase Edmonton's police force by 300 officers over the next three years, we have proven that safety is a fundamental priority in our communities. Crime prevention is also an important aspect of this commitment. It is crucial that we keep gangs off our streets, ensuring the safety of our honest, hard-working Albertans.

By creating spaces for addiction and recovery services, we can help to improve the lives of those affected by drugs and alcohol. Several months ago I attended a meeting in the Sherbrooke community hall. Residents of the Sherbrooke community were concerned about the George Spady Centre opening a recovery house to give people with a troubled past a safe place to stay while preparing to enter the rehabilitation process. I attended this meeting out of concern for both parties.

At the end of the evening the George Spady Centre was welcomed by the community because the residents saw that the folks who were in that centre needed a safe place to live. They saw that they needed a hand up and that they needed a place to be where they would not be punished just for being different. Mr. Speaker, I saw the true compassion of my constituents that night. Ensuring the safety of every member of the community, not only for themselves, was a huge step forward for the folks in Sherbrooke.

This unconditional support is something that our government does for Albertans and is something that we must continue to do: to provide a safety net and support for each person in our province no matter how big or how small. In Edmonton-Calder one of the largest groups in need of this particular support is seniors. As the demographic of Alberta changes, there will be more seniors in need of support from this government. Seniors are a vital part of this province, and it is crucial that we continue to care for them by creating legislation and policies that will improve their standard of living.

The drug program benefit act is an example of a way that the province can provide continuing support to lower income seniors, and I know that many of the seniors in my constituency are particularly grateful for the support of this program. I have told the seniors in Edmonton-Calder's five major centres – Shepherd's Care, Rosslyn lodge, Venta Care, Extencicare, and Rosedale – that this province is fighting for their interests and, Mr. Speaker, I am fighting for the interests of Edmonton-Calder seniors.

We're all fighting for the strength of this province to improve the quality of life for those living here. While the current uncertainty in the global markets challenges us, it does not threaten us. Our province has always been a global leader in developing industry, and today is no different. This government is committed to continuing to build industry and provide jobs for Albertans. Nothing will change. We continue to be a major player in the world market.

As a member of both the Forest Industry Sustainability Committee and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute I know that there will continue to be challenges in Alberta's forestry sector. I was very sad to learn this week, Mr. Speaker, that my former employer, Millar Western Forest Products, the largest Alberta-owned forest products company, had been forced to reduce shifts in both of its facilities. This decision had to do with market demand, I might add. The forestry sector in Alberta is in trouble and must now face the challenge of constantly reinventing itself.

From nanotechnology to the development of modular floor materials for Sea-Cans, development is progressing. So from those things that are very, very small to those things that are very, very large, we must never forget that lumber is still the only building material that grows back. As this industry continues to advance, I am proud to say that this government will continue to find new ways

to reduce its footprint on the environment. Carbon capture is an incredible technology developed just to do this. We need to continue to ensure that future Albertans are left with the same rich, resourceful, and beautiful province that we have today.

Our advancing industries entice hard-working people to move to Alberta, and this is something we can continually be thankful for, but as our province grows, we must continue to ensure that services are provided to Albertans. We must continue to increase the accessibility of health care, education, affordable housing, and other vital needs and services. This year has seen a lot of change in the structure of Alberta Health, and these changes were designed to increase the accessibility of health care for all Albertans. The elimination of health care premiums is an example of the commitment to increased accessibility.

The same is true of education. Alberta's schools and postsecondary institutions are amongst the best in North America, and Edmonton-Calder is home to a great many schools. Particularly, we're proud of NAIT. NAIT is a remarkable institution that teaches people to succeed in industry and in the trades. By ensuring that postsecondary education remains affordable, we can be confident that future generations will take advantage of the opportunities. We can be assured that students will get the best education possible and will utilize this to become the future leaders of our province.

Another area we must strive to maintain affordability and accessibility to is housing. As a member of the capital region I'm well aware of the growing pressures of urban sprawl and the increasing costs of living in the city. Affordable housing is an issue that the people of Edmonton-Calder are quite familiar with, and I am proud to say that our government is continually providing additional living spaces for those who cannot afford a home of their own and providing means for Albertans who aspire to home ownership.

Now more than ever we must continue to work together to provide the support and the strength that the people of Alberta need. Having learned to play and work as a member of a team for my entire life, I value strength in numbers and the strength of unity. The strength of unity has always guided Alberta through uncertain times, and it will continue to do so today.

On behalf of my constituency I trust my elected peers to be fair and honourable stewards of the public purse, to take action to help and to protect those in need of our assistance, and to continue to make Alberta the most desirable place to live in Canada.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. member, then, for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my sincere privilege to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

Like many others I am an immigrant but from another province. Many times when I meet people, one of my first questions is where they came from. The fact that so many people have moved to our province of their own choice and volition and want to be here makes for a very incredibly positive environment. This is not a new development in my generation, Mr. Speaker. From our earliest history individuals have banded together to work for common goals to help those in need and to stand together to preserve and improve upon the safety and the well-being of others.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the historic success of this great province of ours can be attributed to many factors, an important one being the strength and courage of our people and another being our commitment to sound financial management, that this government clearly follows. This management has enabled us to eliminate health care

premiums, which will save Albertans over \$1 billion annually starting on January 1 of this year. This step was taken long before the global economic downturn began. Many other jurisdictions are going into debt with infrastructure stimulus packages, but fortunately we have more than \$6 billion in our capital account for this purpose.

Moving to another topic, Mr. Speaker, I'm also encouraged that the throne speech was not silent on seniors, many of whom live in my constituency of Calgary-Egmont. The Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act will be introduced this session with the goal of better protecting our seniors from elder abuse, which sadly often comes from members of the senior's own family. As someone with grandparents aged 91 and 92 living in Calgary, I recognize the importance of this legislation for our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, I must also mention Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, which will provide job-protected leave for military reservists in Alberta. My father served in the military. I know the sacrifice that our servicemen and -women make for our country, and I'm proud to support our troops through this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I've addressed several issues briefly, but now we should talk about a particular threat facing Calgary-Egmont and, in fact, all of our province, that being crime. My constituency includes several inner-city communities as well as some suburban areas. I first moved to this constituency when I came to Alberta, and I often remember my first day there; it was May 29. It's a great area in which many people were shocked by three murders on New Year's Day not too far from where I live. Far from the downtown core, it was on 94th Avenue.

Crime and, in particular, gang violence is not an issue localized to the downtown core or to particular neighbourhoods, Mr. Speaker. It affects every one of us regardless of our gender, race, colour, creed, religion, socioeconomic status, the location of our residence, or any other personal factor we may have. Make no mistake: gang violence in particular poses a serious threat today. Gangs operate in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation and are a stain on the fabric of this great province of ours.

5:40

Even if you are not a direct victim of crime, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to consider the cost to society. Consider the cost of fraud to businesses that is passed on to consumers through higher prices, fees, or interest rates. Consider the danger gang violence poses to police and others. Consider the pressure all crime places on our court systems. Consider that it is our tax dollars that fund these operations. This simply cannot be allowed to get out of control. I put to this Assembly that people who have nothing but disregard for law and order in our society simply belong behind bars. Last night I was speaking to a Member of Parliament in Ottawa, and I'm pleased that this message also resonates there as well.

I have nothing but the utmost respect for our police services in this province. In fact, I'm friends with several of them in Calgary. Along these lines I'm happy to see our continued commitment to enforcement. Last year this government announced a province-wide increase of 300 police officers, many of whom were directly assigned to the role of targeting gang activity. Since police officers are on the front lines defending our communities from crime, funding and supporting them is the greatest step we can do to combat gang activity in our province. I applaud this government's previous actions for targeting crime and commend its forward-thinking and modern strategy to continue commitment to safe, strong, and secure communities, Mr. Speaker.

But there is more to be done now and in the future. There is another equation upon how we must work as a government, and

that's tackling the financial proceeds of crime. During the previous session, Mr. Speaker, I was proud to support Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. This piece of legislation was specifically crafted to hit criminals where it hurts, in their wallets. Bill 50 now allows courts to seize and sell any property or asset that was used during the crime, including items such as vehicles, cash, or even houses, the proceeds of which go to the victims of crime fund. By targeting the things that criminals value most, the impetus for most crime being money, we are sending a clear message that criminals and criminal behaviour will not be tolerated in our communities.

In this way, Mr. Speaker, I find it most uplifting that in the Lieutenant Governor's speech is the continued commitment that this government has to preserving the safety of our society. Along these lines I look forward to the opportunity to support further legislation aimed at halting gang activity, including forthcoming amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act as well as regulations assessing vehicle modifications made primarily for gang-related purposes such as bulletproof windows on a car.

It is almost impossible, Mr. Speaker, to talk about crime without mentioning the illegal drug trade, and I recognize that the purchase of illegal drugs fuels crime and that the fewer people who consume these substances, the less money is in the hands of organized crime. That's why as a member of this Assembly I'm proud to support the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, located in Calgary-Egmont, where I have attended. I also know there are other supporters here. I saw the Member for Calgary-Glenmore there this summer as well as the previous Member for Calgary-Egmont, Mr. Denis Herard, who introduced me to the centre. This centre has graduated over 400 people that have suffered from substance abuse addictions. Along these lines it is noteworthy that the safe communities initiative includes support for programs for addiction recovery projects, something that goes hand in hand with crime.

Mr. Speaker, we must also not forget that it's not just today's people who benefit from getting a handle on crime in our province. This came to mind last Friday, when I had the pleasurable occasion to speak to Ms Dawn McGuckin's grade 6 class at St. Matthew school in Calgary-Egmont. By getting a handle on crime, it hit me that this generation will also benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I built my dream in Alberta, and I often think of what a privilege it is to be an Albertan and a member of this Assembly. As His Honour said yesterday, "We must continue to welcome people to Alberta to pursue their dreams and build our communities." My vision of this province is one where future generations can walk the same streets today in pride and free from fear. I know our government shares this vision, and I'm pleased to support this throne speech.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my hon. colleague. It's been nearly a year since you've been elected. What one insight of humanity would you say that you have really uncovered in this past year?

Mr. Denis: That's quite a broad question. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Montrose. One thing that I've realized is how much this Assembly and everything we do, regardless of our partisan affiliation, actually affects people outside this Chamber, whether or not they know or appreciate it. All of us regardless of our partisan stripes should realize just the gravity of our actions in this province.

The Speaker: Additional questions? Participants?

Then the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne. This past year the government has been working very hard to meet the needs of Albertans, and I've been working very hard to ensure that the constituents of Bonnyville-Cold Lake remain a priority of this government.

For the last three decades I've called my constituency home. I raised two children there. I helped raise other people's children there. As a former teacher in Bonnyville I know that it truly takes a village to raise a child, and in this case it takes a province. It takes a province to provide the services that each resident is in need of, it takes a province to encourage the growth and development of its population, and it takes a province to provide opportunities for all. Mr. Speaker, this government has done all of these things for Albertans, and it's imperative that it continue to do so.

I can identify the issues that are of concern to my constituents, and I'm confident that our government is able to make these concerns a priority. The uncertainty of the global economy is not only a concern for the people of my constituency but for all Albertans. It is my hope that this government's action plan will act to preserve the state of industry and help to continue to experience growth in and outside the province.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency is a major hub of industry in Alberta. There are major oil production facilities in Bonnyville-Cold Lake: Shell, Husky, CNRL, EnCana, Imperial Oil, and Devon. It is home to an overwhelming majority of workers from these companies. In my constituency we count on industry, and industry counts on us. It is a codependent relationship of growth, and this relationship is crucial to the future development of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The major issue that gravely affects my constituency is how this industry is affecting our land, the land that farmers need to grow our food and herd our cattle, the land that farmers need to provide for their families and ours. I am glad that we are taking the necessary steps forward to protect and maintain the family farm.

As a rural population the people of Bonnyville-Cold Lake rely on these resources to generate revenues, revenues that we can put back into the constituency to provide the services that our residents need each day. We need industry, but we do not want to see our beautiful landscape fade away. I am confident that this government has taken these interests to heart and will continue.

Over the last few years government has developed several ways of reducing our impact on the environment. Carbon capture technology is the most dominant. Through my position as co-chair of the Alberta Energy Research Institute I believe that research is a very important part of this progress. It is needed to develop new and innovative ways to not only extract resources but to reduce the impact of this extraction on our environment. This preservation of land is a fundamental priority for the people of my constituency and for all Albertans. It is important for us to give future generations an opportunity to experience the beauty of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, opportunity is something we value tremendously in this province. It's something that we are very fortunate to have a lot of. It attracts people from all over the world who are in search of a better quality of life.

The First Nations and Métis settlements in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are in need of this opportunity. A few months ago two constituents approached me about supporting a business proposal that they had created for their community. They wanted to start up an agency that would train First Nation and Métis people in Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

They would help them develop the skills necessary to become more active in the Alberta workforce. Mr. Speaker, it was an incredible idea. It would give this community a means to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. It's ideas like this that make Alberta unique. This government has always been there to provide support and encourage growth within our community, and it must continue.

In Bonnyville-Cold Lake another group that needs our support is the seniors. They make up a large part of our constituency. A few weeks ago the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports came to visit the Cold Lake seniors. They were so appreciative of this opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns to the hon. minister. Providing seniors with the attention and care they need makes a world of difference to them. This government is committed to meet the needs of our province's seniors by improving quality and choice in a continuing care system.

5:50

We must also increase accessibility to essential services like health care for this growing part of our population. As a rural area we need to forge better connection between our residents and major care facilities like hospitals. This can be done by enhancing the emergency medical service in rural areas, which our government plans to do. There are two hospitals in my area, one in Bonnyville and one in Cold Lake. My constituents need to be able to get to one of them quickly in a life-or-death situation. We also have a problem with retention and recruitment of medical staff. It's imperative that we continue to improve the connection between our population and the services they need. Accessibility for all Albertans needs to be a major initiative of this government.

As a teacher for over three decades I know that our educational system requires this very same accessibility. Creating dialogue between students and teachers and parents will help to do this. It'll give kids the same opportunity that I had to receive a great education. The great education will help them establish a clear direction in life, inspire each student to meet their full potential. With increasing innovations in education, more doors are opening up for students to take advantage of. For this I applaud our education system. It is my hope that this province and government will

continue to support students by providing this opportunity and choice to them.

Mr. Speaker, all of these groups – seniors, students, industry workers, farmers, Métis, First Nation people, and many others – are part of my constituency, my community. It is a home to many diverse groups of people with different cultural backgrounds: French, Ukrainian, First Nations, Métis. As a woman of Ukrainian ancestry I believe that culture is a huge part of who you are and how you interact with others. It is important for our government to foster this culture through participation in events like Arts Days. These events bring communities together to create strong, vibrant municipalities, and these sustainable municipalities are needed to create strong, vibrant communities.

Cold Lake is experiencing difficulties maintaining its sustainability. It is such a diverse population in need of different services and support from this government. I'm committed to improving this sustainability because communities like Cold Lake are everything to Albertans. My community is everything to me, and I will continue to fight for it in any way that I can to ensure that their needs are being met each and every day, to ensure that they have every opportunity available to them.

Mr. Speaker, this government, this province, is a part of a community, and when this community is challenged, we must stick together to ensure stability, growth, and sustainability.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there additional participants this afternoon?

If not, I'll recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What an inspiring first day of great debate in this House on many, many valuable points that we should all reflect on. That having been said, I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

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

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Issue 3

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Minister of Employment and Immigration
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
Minister of Education, Government House Leader
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),
Minister of Infrastructure
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (L)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Energy

Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Leader of the NDP Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,
NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
Government Whip
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Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
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Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L),
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Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
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Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
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Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L)
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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
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Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 12, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a thrill it is today to introduce two French immersion classes from Campbelltown elementary school, which in fact is the first elementary school that was erected in Sherwood Park, in my constituency. The enthusiastic students today and visitors, including four parents, number 38. Thirty-eight are here with us. Teachers Annick Jean and Tandy Wilson are accompanied by four ladies, four moms, along with the class: Jennifer Kennett, Sandra Prior, Tanja Nelson, Sharon Midbo, and the wonderful students of Campbelltown elementary. What a bright class they are. I'd ask them to please rise so that we can show them the proper salute of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you five postsecondary students from right here in Edmonton, four from Grant MacEwan and one from the University of Alberta. Their names are Laura Young, Timothy Smith, Jacquie Lycka, Daniel Larson, and Jon Mastel. They were gracious enough to join us for lunch and really had a lot of questions on what we're doing in Alberta around the environment and greening our economy. I'd really like to have them welcomed here with the traditional warm welcome from this House. Rise, guys.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and advise the Assembly that the government today announced a bold and visionary plan to guide the future development of the Alberta oil sands regions. The release of Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands represents a significant milestone in achieving a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach in the continued development of this world-class resource. It is a part of a province-wide public policy framework that supports our plan for a growing and greener economy built around the Premier's commitment to deliver safe and livable communities for families and clear and realistic regulations for industry.

This vision looks ahead 20 years while taking into account the environmental, social, and economic impacts and opportunities of the oil sands. It reflects increased co-ordination across all levels of government and with stakeholders and signals enhanced accountabil-

ity in the management of this resource. Our strategy will work towards improving the quality of life of our oil sands communities and encourage innovation in science and technology. It will strengthen environmental stewardship and foster relationships with community organizations and the aboriginal communities.

Mr. Speaker, this strategy builds on the continuous efforts undertaken since development first commenced in the oil sands regions. It recognizes that, certainly, just like the challenges of development were very different 30 years ago, factors impacting development may change considerably in the years and decades ahead. This is a clear and realistic road map to the future. It will guide us in optimizing economic growth while reducing environmental impacts. It will increase co-ordination across all levels of government and stakeholders in developing this resource responsibly and enhance accountability. It will foster innovations that can solve the unique challenges of the oil sands development, and it will continue this government's emphasis on planning in high-growth communities in the oil sands regions.

With these improvements in mind we recognize that no major source of energy today comes without consequences. Our goal must be nothing less than to partner with our customers in meeting their energy needs while honouring our mutual commitment to protect our environment for future generations. I don't suggest that it will be easy. There will be some who will oppose this way forward, but we have faith in Albertans. The people of this province have faced together many challenges over the past century, and through tough times Albertans have learned the value of self-reliance, hard work, the need to plan and prepare for the future, and above all what it means to stand together.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my thanks to everyone who worked on this plan for their efforts on behalf of Albertans. I am confident that through these responsible actions we can position our province for success in developing this unique resource, making the foundation for a prosperous and sustainable future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise to the ministerial statement and acknowledge that this is the industry of the province. It's been the engine of our development. It has been an important part of the history and even the culture of Alberta. It has been one of the most controversial energy sources since I became a member of this Legislature.

Clearly, we have to learn from the past 50 years that the lack of planning has had a tremendous impact not only on this province and on this country but on this industry's reputation internationally. A plan is always welcome. A plan should have clear objectives, clear timelines, a clear budget, a clear set of outcomes. How else can we evaluate what a plan is to achieve?

Albertans have sought and demanded management of their oil sands. Former Premier Peter Lougheed has weighed in on the issue repeatedly over the last decade asking for leadership, asking for a plan, asking to include the social, the environmental, as well as the economic issues. We don't yet see a plan here, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans are reminded of the 1999 document through SREM that sounded awfully similar. So we yet wait in hope of seeing a concrete plan of action that respects First Nations issues, long-term water needs in the area, a commitment to climate change globally, and a different way of developing energy in this province. The industry itself waits in hope of seeing their reputation restored by a more sustainable and thoughtfully paced development in the oil sands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I suspect you'll be requesting an opportunity for your colleague to participate in this ministerial statement.

Ms Notley: That is absolutely correct.

The Speaker: That would require unanimous consent, so I'll ask just one question. Does any member object to providing an opportunity to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to participate?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to members of the Assembly. The strategy document, Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands, that was released this morning by the hon. President of the Treasury Board is thin gruel indeed. Contrary to what the minister has told the House, I believe that this document is neither bold nor visionary. In fact, it represents more business as usual from this government.

1:40

There are six strategies identified at the beginning of the document, and I'd like to address some of them because I think it is a case of attempting to close the barn door after a number of horses have already escaped. First of all, the document talks about the development of the tar sands in an environmentally responsible way. It's a bit late for that, Mr. Speaker, given the government's rejection of hard caps on CO₂ and their failure to clean up the tailings ponds. The second one talks about healthy communities. Tent cities and cancer in Fort Chipewyan do not represent healthy communities. Number 4, proactive aboriginal consultation, is another horse that has left the barn. There are broken relationships with aboriginal groups, and their concerns around their own health have been ignored. Finally, it talks about developing long-term value for our resources. This flies in the face of the government's policy with respect to the export of unprocessed bitumen from this province and the job losses that it entails.

Mr. Speaker, we have called for a long time for a comprehensive plan for the development of the tar sands. This document, in fact, does not represent that type of plan and represents, as I said, simply more business as usual. Nothing has changed, and nothing will.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you rose just as the Clerk rose.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to be able to speak also, as a member who calls Fort McMurray his home, about the oil sands strategy as a member's statement.

The Speaker: Hon. member, this would require unanimous consent of the Assembly. I'll ask the question. Is there any member who would object to providing the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo an opportunity to respond? If so, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of the government party as well as across the way. I came to Alberta 31 years ago from a farm in a small, rural community in Nova Scotia and have called Fort McMurray my home for the past 31 years. I've had the honour and privilege of serving those residents in the community of Fort McMurray and then the Wood Buffalo region as a city councillor, as their mayor, and of course now for almost the past 13 years as their MLA.

In Fort McMurray we pride ourselves on the fact that we call it home. We believe that there are many people across Canada and around the world and even here in Alberta who don't quite understand Fort McMurray. I want to say today that I thank each and every one of the members from all political parties who have taken the time to visit our home over the past number of years because of their interest in the oil sands but also their interest in so much that is going on world-wide relative to the oil sands. I also want to say that it's time, a challenge for all of us in terms of the fact that we have a plan.

I want to share this with you. Three years ago at the time when I was a member of the government and Minister of Environment, I went to the then Premier and asked him if I could intervene at an Energy and Utilities Board meeting, and I said I would resign as the minister to represent the citizens of my community as their MLA. He granted me that right, and I did. I shared with them at this EUB intervention the feelings of what citizens were saying.

At the time the Premier of the day made a comment that he didn't have a plan, and that really reflected what was taking place in Fort McMurray. I just want to say today that my wife and I are proud to have a 20-month old son. We breathe the air every day in Fort McMurray. We enjoy the river. There is much work to be done, but I believe that the actual plan that was talked about today is really about a road map of the future. It has to be a living, breathing document that will have to be amended, will have to be changed, but it is an important step in the right direction from three years ago when the government admitted that at the time it didn't have a plan.

This is a plan. Let us embrace it. Let us eliminate the rhetoric. Let us work together from all corners because at the end of the day the name-calling doesn't really matter. Let's not disenfranchise each other. Even more important than politics, let us do what is right for Albertans and for the people in Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, that we call our home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

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

Calgary-Montrose Block Watch Programs

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to recognize some people who have been instrumental in keeping Calgary-Montrose a safe and vibrant community. These are individuals that are willing to fight for their neighbourhood, so much so that they are willing to devote their own time to ensure that criminals are aware that illegal activity is not welcome in their community.

Mary Ryan is one of these people. As president of the Marlborough Park Block Watch her work with other residents and community partners has resulted in previously crime-ridden homes being vacated and kept clean, free of drugs and other illegal, illicit materials. Mary and her husband have even cut the lawns of residences so that they give the appearance of a vibrant community, and they have helped create a vibrant community. If she sees graffiti, she takes it off. If she sees garbage, she picks it up. Her proactive work has prevented these places from becoming crime-ridden once again.

Mary's dedication and success has inspired others in the community to become involved in the Block Watch program. Elaine Gordillo has been a similar leader in her community of Abbeydale. Mr. Speaker, while some people might find it easier to ignore crime's presence or pass the responsibility on to someone else, Mary and Elaine have shown that they will not ignore crime. Rather, they will be proactive about keeping their communities safe and vibrant.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to have such constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

National Anthem

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a very proud Canadian and a very proud Albertan, and I'm very proud to sing *O Canada* in this Assembly every Monday. To me our national anthem stands for many of the great things about Canada: the beauty of our country, our principles of justice and democracy, the bravery of Canadian troops, who are willing to sacrifice their lives to preserve freedom.

I was very dismayed to learn that a principal in New Brunswick has discontinued the singing of *O Canada* prior to classes in his school. Some people claim that the lyrics to our national anthem are unfitting, are unsuitable, and they can contravene the rights of some. Nothing could be further from the truth. Canadian children should be encouraged to celebrate our country's values and pay tribute to the strength and vitality of our democracy. To ban *O Canada*, in my mind, is not only poor judgment; it's also disrespectful to those who have fought and worked so hard to make our great country what it is today.

I'm looking forward to joining my colleagues in celebration of our Canadian spirit in the Assembly again by singing *O Canada*. Our national anthem is a reminder of what Canada is, what it stands for, what it means to be a proud Canadian, and what it means to be free.

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

Statement of Appreciation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to thank you, my colleagues on both sides of this House, and all the staff who extended their best wishes of good health to me during these past few months. I'm pleased to be back. [applause] Thank you.

I'm pleased to be back in the Legislature, and I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all of you who sent flowers, cards, chocolates as well as your prayers during these trying times.

I also want to thank the dedicated health professionals who saw to it that I'm able to fight another day here in the Legislature. Your individual and collective efforts were truly remarkable.

I also want to thank my beautiful wife, family, and friends for their love and support. These times would have been far more difficult without their help and compassion. It was great to have my grandchildren's love and warm smiles during the cold days of Christmas. My friends from Calgary-McCall and across Canada phoned me on many occasions with words of encouragement and support, for which I'm grateful.

I also wish to thank the constituents of Calgary-McCall who sent their best wishes to my office, and I look forward to meeting you at the doors this spring during my 2009 outreach campaign. With a strong and revitalized heart I am ready to resume my responsibility as your MLA and shadow minister for transportation and government services. My office staff have advised me of the pressures of layoffs, the need for increased social assistance pressures, the Calgary airport tunnel, the health and educational concerns of my

constituents, and the impact of crime and gang violence in our communities. With these issues in mind I look forward to representing the constituents of Calgary-McCall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government released what it called Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands. This report contains not one timeline and not a single costing. It is cosmetic rather than effective. To the Premier: how can the Premier call this a plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is blessed with world-class energy resources — it really is a blessing — and I can assure this House and all Albertans that we'll continue to develop those resources responsibly to ensure that the next generation enjoys the benefits of that development, ensure that we protect our air, land, and water. We're going to do that by working with other Albertans, including the companies that are involved, and with those other interest groups that have input into the plan for the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: how will Albertans know if the government has passed or failed without measures of success?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing I can tell you that is done, especially in the community of Fort McMurray, is monitoring of air quality 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Ninety-eight per cent of the time the air quality in Fort McMurray is better than in any Canadian major city. That's one measurement. There's also the monitoring of water: since the early '70s, when the oil sands development began, daily monitoring of the quality of water in the Athabasca River. Once again, these are done by third-party individuals rather than government. That's the kind of openness and transparency we have with Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, after so many years of unmanaged development this document is profoundly disappointing. Is this all Albertans can expect to see for oil sands planning? When will we get something with real teeth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things that we did, with the support of Albertans, was to move a considerable amount of money into Fort McMurray, and that was not only into infrastructure, but it was supporting social programs. It increased the monthly allowance for teachers and nurses and doctors.

We also worked closely with the community of Fort McMurray to make sure all the services were there, to increase as more people moved into the community, and we continue to do that. The mayor is working very well with the ministers responsible, and I can see nothing but good things. The initial investment was 450 some million dollars and, again, the commitment of over a billion dollars for four-laning highway 63. That's a major commitment in dollars.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands image is under fire across the world and with it Alberta's key economic engine. This is a serious issue and demands real action. The glossy vision document released today, Responsible Actions, fails to adequately address the key issues affecting Albertans and Canada. To the Premier. Albertans have seen many vision plans come and go; for example, the wetland plan of 2005, which still has seen no action to date. How can Albertans believe that something is going to happen?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, they have our word as a government that we're going to proceed with the plan. At the next election Albertans will check-mark; they'll measure our performance and also our commitment to the environment of this province.

For the purpose of Albertans watching here today, I did have a meeting with the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We had a very nice chat over – well, he had some water; I had some tea. We had a good discussion. I said: you know, I want to work together. We're in this together. I'm glad that he has recognized the importance of the oil sands not only to the future economic security of Alberta but to all of Canada. That's why we're going to work through all of these challenges together. As I said, it's all for the good of Canada as well.

Dr. Swann: Well, I was pleased to see, Mr. Speaker, that this document addresses the issue of groundwater risk. This is 50 years into the development. I would like to ask the Premier: when will the groundwater issues be settled?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of advancement on the use of groundwater in the oil sands. Consumption has been reduced dramatically per barrel. Also, with the new technology coming forward, we're looking at how we can use CCS, carbon capture and storage, to extract resources, again, environmentally responsibly. That's why on behalf of all Albertans we're very strong proponents of whatever policy our federal government reaches with the American government. We have the money to invest in technology in this province, and we can share that technology with those other countries that are producing a considerable amount of greenhouse gas emissions and help them clean up the atmosphere around the whole globe.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier admit that a plan to deal with the economic, social, and environmental issues relating to the oil sands was tabled in 1999 through the SREM program, sustainable resources and environment management plan, and received unanimous consent in the House seven years earlier, 1992? Will you or will you not manage the oil sands in the long-term public interest of Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we have made tremendous progress in the management of the oil sands. We have to remember that in the early '70s there were many detractors from the project that said: well, the resources are much too remote, and it'll take much too much money to extract the resources, so it'll never, ever go ahead. Yet there were those entrepreneurs, Albertans who put their money forward, invested a tremendous amount of money into research and technology. Now not only Albertans benefit from that investment but all Canadians. That's important.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has more consultation work to do. Many seniors have contacted myself and expressed that they believe that serious changes need to be done to the seniors' pharmaceutical plan. Seniors have worked and budgeted for their retirement only to have the government change the rules that they had planned on. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister admit that the seniors who will be hardest hit by this change will not be low-income or high-income but the middle fixed-income seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand by what I said yesterday, that some 50 to 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors will be better off with the proposed pharmaceutical program. In fact, many of them will pay absolutely nothing under the new program. This hon. member needs to ask seniors in her constituency who are on a very low income, who are struggling today because they have to pay a percentage of their prescriptions every time they go to the drugstore. Have her ask that question.

Ms Pastoor: That isn't actually who I was speaking about. I think I made it clear that low-income seniors will be looked after.

It's well known that living on your own can be almost twice as expensive compared to living as a couple. Does the minister agree that this plan could unfairly place a larger burden upon single seniors, most of whom could well be widows?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the member should have a discussion with her new leader because we continually hear from the Leader of the Opposition that this government should be saving more and spending less. I think what the member is suggesting is that we cover all drugs for all seniors, and quite frankly that is not the policy of this government and, furthermore, hardly affordable.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, what I was suggesting is perhaps revisiting as you had indicated that perhaps you will do in your remarks from yesterday.

Will the minister commit to changing the pharmaceutical coverage for seniors to really reflect their contribution to Alberta and the economic circumstances that they face today?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as with any government program when it's announced, we want to ensure that before we implement it, it is right. We have had significant input from seniors, suggesting things that they feel may not be fair. I have asked my department to take all of this input from MLAs, individuals that have written to me, and others to ensure that we have it right. We have until January 1, 2010, to ensure that what we're bringing forward is in the best interest of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been urging this government to start managing the tar sands properly for decades. The President of the Treasury Board released a sham PR document today that has the words "responsible" and "plan" in the

title, but that's where it ends. The real title should be Look Busy: Obama's Coming and We're in Trouble. This question is to the Premier. Why won't you level with Albertans and admit that this so-called plan is just window dressing to placate world opinion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, what was made public today was a very responsible environmental and production plan for the oil sands. I reaffirm the position we've taken as government on behalf of all Albertans, that this is of mutual benefit to Albertans to develop their resources responsibly but, as well, ensure that future generations enjoy the benefit of this resource. It is a blessing. Let's work together to ensure that we develop it responsibly, and we will have a kind of quality of life that we can offer to the next generation as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I know it does have "responsible" in the title, but that doesn't make it so.

Plans set directions, and it's even more obvious today that this government has none. Page 26 of the report talks about leveraging bitumen to develop value-added, upgraded products, yet the same page says that you will encourage more pipelines to new markets. What's missing is a commitment to stop pipelines from shipping our raw bitumen out of the country. To the Premier: why did your leadership campaign promise this if you have no intention of doing it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to adding more value to bitumen in the province of Alberta. It is long-term jobs, and quite frankly it's a wealth creator that will pay for many of the programs we enjoy. What I don't understand from the leader is that he first said Obama doesn't want the oil, yet the President is accepting the oil. I'm not quite sure where this oil has been going if it's leaving Alberta. Again, we have to work together to resolve some of the issues, to improve the image. We're doing that with the industry. We're doing that through focus groups not only in Alberta but in Canada and other countries because we do need a significant investment from other jurisdictions to help grow the oil sands. On the other hand, it's very difficult to do when in this very same room, in this Legislature day in and day out they keep trying to drag down the province through those kinds of comments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When this government shows a clear commitment to cleaning up the tar sands, capping emissions, and making sure that our jobs stay in Alberta, then he can count on our support. Until then, no.

Mr. Speaker, it's impossible to enforce measures when there are no means to enforce them in the report. My question is again to the Premier. Why don't you set meaningful goals, such as cleaning up the tailings ponds in a relatively short period of time or putting hard caps on CO₂ emissions, with clear performance measures in place so your government can be held accountable for its performance?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again I just saw a complete disconnect from reality. There are 3 and a half million people in the province of Alberta. He wants Albertans – Albertans – to shoulder all of the blame, whatever it is, for greenhouse gas emissions and not look to the fact that 75 per cent of the emissions coming out of the States are coming from coal-fired generation. He wants us to pay for it? I don't think so. Let's get serious about this ongoing problem.

The other thing – sorry, Mr. Speaker, to get going on this. However, let's invest in technology. Taking money out of the province, sending it to other countries in a kind of a wealth transfer – oh, by the way, giving the exchange . . . [interjection] Just selling the credits – remember, it's got to go through some authority – not able to even set the level of those credits. We're going to give it to the same bandits that put us into this economic recession? That's what he wants.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that today our government released a document called Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Can the minister advise the Assembly what impact this plan will have on oil sands development?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the oil sands development that's under way has been ongoing for 40 years. The oil sands development, in all fairness, is really just getting started. What we need to send is a message to the other provinces that are at that trade show today from all across this country. They're looking for business in Alberta. To the people in Wisconsin building the shovels and the people in Mexico building the Terex trucks, that count on responsible decisions from Alberta, this document says that we're going to develop this resource responsibly. Regardless of who wants to hang banners in Ottawa or Washington, it's our resource. It will be done responsibly environmentally. These provinces are here to share in that end of things.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, that's great news.

My next question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Given the current economic situation and deferral of so many energy projects, are continued oil sands developments still viable?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as cited by the hon. President of the Treasury Board, at least 600 visitors from all across North America believe so. They were there last night at the trade show and at the national buyer-seller forum to take part in some \$15 billion worth of maintenance activity, maybe as much as \$18 billion worth of maintenance activity that will be happening in the oil sands even as we have this business of slowing down because of the world economy. Many of the industries that were present were really captured by the thought that speakers like Mr. Southern expressed to them: this is a time to hold onto your dreams, to vision what can be, to work towards those targets. And they're so engaged.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Given the importance of the oil sands and energy resources, what measures is government taking to ensure that Albertans are receiving optimal value for them?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in December my colleague the Minister of Energy released the provincial energy strategy, which cited the first ever bitumen royalty in kind policy, which will be the sponsor of much of the value-added refining and upgrading, which will in fact be part and parcel of the extension of the new Alberta frontier of economic development. So what have we started? We've started a way to manufacture and to follow through on the promise of our Premier to take bitumen to a whole new level, to be the manufacturing centre for pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and many other commodities that are needed right in Alberta and in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Provincial Budget Release

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the finance minister stated that the budget will not be released this month and that the minister did not feel that delaying the budget would “breed any disrespect or lack of confidence among Albertans.” Well, many Albertans are upset with the delay, and the only way to instill confidence, in my opinion, is to be honest with people about what’s going on. I will ask the Minister of Finance and Enterprise again: when will she release the budget?

2:10

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there’s been a grand tradition of not announcing the date for the budget until one is prepared to table the budget and is fully apprised of it. I think our Premier spoke quite eloquently to the fact that we were waiting for, first of all, the federal budget, which came later than we anticipated, in January, that we’re waiting to see where we’re at with the American public under the new President in terms of all of the planning and the kinds of impacts it might have on our energy sector. In many parts of Canada the third leg of the tax stool, if you will, is a provincial sales tax. Here we are heavily dependent on that third leg being the revenue from energy resources. Isn’t it responsible for all Albertans to know what we expect those to be? That, in effect, is the best reason for not tabling a budget today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I’m wondering which of those three legs the minister has to stand on, quite frankly.

Since she herself has experienced the constraints of waiting for the federal budget before she could complete her own – and I don’t know if she’s even started yet – why is she now putting those same constraints on cities, towns, rural municipalities, universities, nonprofit and other private-sector companies, school boards unless there’s something to hide or at least avoid as long as possible?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I think our Premier has established a tone of mutual respect in this Assembly, and I think that’s an important and very valued commodity. We respect that people out there are waiting for budget targets, but it’s not unusual for people in the kind of economy that we’re faced with today to take a second look at budget, to take a look at spending targets, to take a look at all of those revenue streams that might feed into the budget. It hasn’t stopped anything. In fact, not one Albertan has written to me to say: table the budget today; table the budget tomorrow. The only place I’m hearing it is from the opposition and in questions from the media. We will table it in due course when we’re ready.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, that is probably because they’re too busy standing in line at the bank to pay their bills.

Can the minister explain why, in a time when markets are responding to people’s fears over uncertainty, this government continues to perpetuate that uncertainty by refusing to provide any details on the release of the budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, throughout the fall we’ve been engaged in business planning processes. Every minister and every MLA has consulted with people in their sectors, in their communities, in their constituencies. They have determined what the policies and priorities are. I think it’s been clear that we won’t spend as much,

no doubt, this year as we did last year in some capacities. We are looking very carefully at expenditures, at revenue streams. We’re trying to get it right. When oil prices change by \$16 U.S. per barrel per day, isn’t that reason to pause and reflect on how we can do it as well as possible? We’re releasing the information that Albertans need today. When we’re ready tomorrow, we’ll release the more detailed coverage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Highway Construction in the Oil Sands

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Minister of Transportation. The economic growth of Alberta’s oil sands region is dependent on the ability of goods to get to Albertans living in those areas of the province. It’s equally important that Albertans are able to travel safely on the highways and the roads in those regions. My question: what is your department doing to ensure that Albertans and Alberta businesses have the safe roads that they need in the oil sands regions?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as we speak and from last year on, we’ve got more than \$600 million of road projects going on in the oil sands region near Fort McMurray. Among other things, that included the first 16 kilometres of twinning that opened last fall south of Fort McMurray, from highway 69 to south of highway 881, at a cost of about \$53 million. We also did the initial grading work on major interchanges on highway 63 at Thickwood Boulevard and Confederation Way, an estimated cost of about \$300 million. Construction also continues on the \$127 million five-lane bridge across the Athabasca River. We also opened 17 kilometres of highway 63 twinning north of Fort McMurray last year at a cost of \$80 million.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: these projects may be addressing the immediate transportation concerns in the region, but can the minister highlight any initiatives his department is pursuing to make certain that future transportation needs are met in a timely and effective manner?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we’ve got road projects planned throughout the regions, also with Peace River, Cold Lake, Wood Buffalo, and beyond that. For example, we’re in the initial planning stages for a future east-west connector road that would connect Fort McMurray to the northeast with Peace River in northwestern Alberta. We realize the north is our future. These are the kind of long-range planning projects that we’re looking at now to meet our future transportation needs within the Wood Buffalo region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Safety on Alberta’s roads is imperative with my constituents, particularly highway 63, and with the recent rash of accidents there, it is a big concern. With the negative stigma that’s currently placed on that highway, what’s the minister planning to ensure that Albertans are safe when travelling that particular highway and highways to and from the oil sands?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, safety is a very, very high concern within our ministry. One of the most important safety improvements to the oil sands region that we’ve done is pave highway 881, which allows another alternative safe route. We’ve

also increased our highway maintenance and the number of snow-plows that are working on highway 63. The provincial sheriffs and the RCMP officers have also increased enforcement along highway 63 to keep speeds down. Last month in one day they gave out 255 tickets. I'd please urge everyone to drive safely, pay attention, use defensive driving, and drive according to the conditions.

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

Carbon Emissions Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. U.S. President Obama has campaigned and been elected on an energy plan weighted toward reducing carbon emissions and investing heavily in renewables and a green economy, and this new reality has serious consequences for Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. The President and the Prime Minister are beginning the process of a North American cap and trade system. Is Alberta planning to take its usual tactic and opt out of a national system to reduce emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report to the member that Alberta, in fact, is working with the federal government and is very much looking forward to our opportunity to engage with the new U.S. administration to talk about the need for a North American strategy with respect to climate change. We have to have a North American strategy because Alberta simply can't go it alone.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much. Again to the same minister. Given that the Americans expect specifics and will not just accept a \$25 million PR plan . . .

Mr. Mason: Or talk.

Ms Blakeman: . . . or talk, is the minister telling us that he's going to expand the Alberta cap and trade program into a national system, or is this just a general discussion? What exactly are you going to do to reduce absolute carbon emissions?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, in the member's preamble she referred to the need for investment in technology, and she identified exactly what the strategy needs to be for Alberta. We need to have a system that allows for investment in the technology here in Alberta, and how that fits into any kind of a cap and trade system really remains to be seen. Clearly, the Premier has indicated already today that we're not interested in a scheme that is going to be taking funds and flowing funds out of Alberta and not allowing us to make that much-needed investment in technology. We're looking for an opportunity for Alberta to be part of a North America-wide scheme. We're looking for an opportunity for Alberta to invest in the technology that allows us not only to solve the problems for Alberta but for North America.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. To the same minister: given that the oil sands have come under international scrutiny for their impact on the environment, what specific actions besides carbon capture, which so far is the only tool in your tool box, can the government use to improve environmental sustainability?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently the member wasn't around when I talked about the fact that in the first six months of our emissions management program we've already identified 2 and a half million tonnes in savings in related activity. But specific to the oil sands, because apparently she wants to concentrate on the oil sands, there are a number of opportunities for reductions in CO₂ that don't involve cap and trade, one of which is the emerging new technology for in situ production that is starting to find alternatives to steam-assisted gravity drainage. We're looking at ways of significantly reducing the amount of water, which in turn reduces the amount of steam, which in turn reduces the amount of heat that's required. So there's one very good example of how technology will change and the future will be different from what we do today.

Oil Sands Development Strategy

(continued)

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, the land-use framework was released in December of 2008, and the plan for Alberta's oil sands has just been released. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In an effort to create a greater level of understanding for Albertans, what is the connection between the plan for Alberta's oil sands and the land-use framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil sands plan is a welcome addition to our government's policy development process. It joins nicely with the energy strategy and the land-use framework, and the common denominator and the foundation for all three of those plans is that no decisions will be made about energy development without taking into consideration not just the economic consequences but also the environmental consequences and the consequences for Albertans and their communities. The land-use framework is about greening our growth, not stopping it. In the current recession striking that balance is important. The oil sands plan strikes that balance, and I'll take this opportunity to thank the minister and the others who contributed to that oil sands plan for striking the right balance.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Today the opposition leaders appear to be concerned about monitoring and enforcement issues. Are these related to the oil sands plan or the land-use framework?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to answer that question. The land-use plan and particularly the regional plan will in fact be the implementation mechanism for the oil sands strategy. Its focus is obviously more than just oil sands; it's the rest of the lower Athabasca.

But I get the impression that the new Leader of the Opposition – I congratulate him – and also the old leader of the third party, who we congratulate on that, are not keeping up with things. They are concerned about tailings ponds. Well, didn't they read last week that the Energy Resources Conservation Board has just set out strict new guidelines going into the future about reduction of tailings ponds? The leader of the third party complaining about emissions: what other jurisdiction in North America, what state, what province, has actual caps and penalties for exceeding those caps? Only the province of Alberta and only because of this government.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. How will the government ensure that the goals and strategies identified in the plan for oil sands are being met through the lower Athabasca regional plan?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that the regional advisory committee for the lower Athabasca has not only been established and appointed; they had their first meeting in Edmonton last week. I met with them for dinner and spoke with them. I stressed the importance of their work, not just for their local communities but for the entire province and now in the recession for all of Canada, and I told them that the oil sands plan would be available in the near future. It's come even more quickly than I thought. I told them it would have to be an important information piece to inform their deliberation. Will that happen? I'm very confident it will. The chair of that regional advisory committee is Ms Heather Kennedy. Heather Kennedy played a key role in the development of the oil sands plan. The pieces fit together nicely.

Enforcement of Environmental Laws

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Justice minister did not want to discuss the enforcement and prosecution of Alberta law in this House although word on the street is that she has been musing about creative sentencing regarding environmental violations. But as today is another day, I will try again. Will Alberta Justice commit to amending the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act so that fines adequate to prevent industry negligence are levied regardless of whether the courts employ a tailored sentence or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in this House – and I did at that time defer to my hon. colleague the Minister of Environment – I believe that question has been asked and answered.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Environment. Yesterday you said that current measures are adequate to hold polluters accountable and that one deterrent was that any incidents negatively affect the customers' and the public's perception of the way these companies do business. So I ask: what about the perception of Alberta's soft environmental rules?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, for anyone to suggest that Alberta has soft environmental rules, they're clearly not paying attention to what's going on here. The day that this incident occurred, the government responded immediately, began an investigation. The investigation has been under way – an investigation that I might point out had up to two years to come to a conclusion and came to a conclusion after eight months – came to the conclusion that there was reason to lay charges. Charges were laid. We take these incidents very seriously in this province.

Mr. Hehr: Well, anyone who could have concluded after one day with 500 dead ducks that something went wrong, so congratulations.

The federal government recently spoke about plans to introduce legislation that would significantly increase penalties into the multimillion dollar range for large companies that commit environmental crimes. Does the Minister of Environment support such an initiative?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this minister respects the law. Appar-

ently, this member, who purports to be a lawyer, doesn't respect the law because in the law of the land in Alberta you need evidence before you lay charges, you need evidence to win a case, and you need evidence before you find someone guilty of a charge.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Oil Sands Tailings Ponds

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's new directive for managing tailings in the tar sands is ridiculous. It outlines a plan for oil companies to come up with a plan to create a future plan unless, of course, they later amend the plan at which point the plan would be re-planned and a new plan would be created to see how the plan could be planned for the future. To the Minister of Environment: isn't it obvious that you're putting your friends in big oil before Alberta's environmental future when all your ministry does is make plans to make more plans?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, technology is constantly changing, and it would be pure folly on our part if we were to assume that the rules that were in place last year would be appropriate next year given the fact that technology is constantly changing. The objective that we have in Alberta Environment is to ensure that we push industry to the maximum, we push industry to improve the outcomes, to improve the standards, and above all to protect the environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the ERCB admits that oil companies have done next to nothing over the last three decades to reduce tailings and reclaim tar ponds notwithstanding their promises to the contrary. How are they penalized for this? They're given more time to come up with plans for new tailings and absolutely no directive to clean up the old ones. To the Minister of Environment: how much longer will Albertans wait and how many more animals will be killed and how many more plans will be made before your ministry forces oil companies to clean up their 40-year-old toxic waste there now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the preamble is absolutely loaded with incorrect information. I won't use unparliamentary language because I'm sure the member didn't mean to be unparliamentary, but the fact of the matter is that she's just misinformed. There is a 40-year history of operation in that area, and for anyone to suggest that there have been no advances during that 40 years or that nothing has taken place over 40 years, they're either intentionally trying to mislead Albertans or they are terribly misinformed. The fact is that there are tailings ponds that are in their very final stages of being retired. There will be many more to come.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm just quoting from the ERCB's own press release, where they said that very little has been done and promises were broken by the oil companies.

Every day the tar sands create enough tailings to fill 720 Olympic-sized pools. Astronauts can see the tar ponds from space, and the rest of the world can see them on Google Earth. Your so-called plan completely fails to address the environmental disaster that has taken place over the last 40 years. To the Minister of Environment: if you can't clean up the current tar ponds, can you at least come clean with Albertans and admit that you're moving full speed ahead on tar sands development with no plan to undo the current ponds?

2:30

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's exactly the current tailings ponds that I'm talking about. If the member would care to know the facts, she would learn that at two of the original projects that are under way, there are significant advances in retirement of ponds. In fact, I believe it's Suncor that is in the final stages. Within the next 12 months or thereabouts the original pond will be completely covered over, and revegetation will be under way. So, again, misinformed or just not caring to learn the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Oil Sands Development Strategy (continued)

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased along with many, I would believe most, Albertans to see the President of the Treasury Board release the oil sands strategic plan early today. Now, of course, the real work begins in implementing these important recommendations. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. What role will his ministry have in implementing the recommendations of the Responsible Actions strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, very clearly this is a government-wide plan. It's no different from the climate change strategy or our provincial energy strategy or, for that matter, our government's fiscal policy. Although there is one department that leads the initiative, we're all working together to coordinate our efforts and deliver results. My department and I have been involved in this strategy as it was developed, and as we move forward, we will remain at the table to help implement the recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Energy minister: given that he just released the provincial energy strategy less than two months ago, how would he respond to suggestions that we're seeing a lot of talk and not enough action when it comes to the oil sands file?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's not underestimate the power of the talk that is in both the oil sands and the provincial energy strategies. These documents set bold new directions and a long-term vision with specific deliverables for oil sands development in our province. At the same time, we're seeing real action such as the recent tailings ponds initiative from the ERCB, as has been mentioned, which proves that Alberta can do long-term planning and also make progress now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The Responsible Actions report refers to well-defined and stable regulatory structures as a key success factor. Again to the Minister of Energy: given the criticism that we may have heard about how the Energy Resources Conservation Board handles oil sands applications, what is he prepared to do to ensure the plan is successful?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I believe, as do the board and members in the ERCB, that there's always room for improve-

ment, and we continue to work with the ERCB to ensure that we're successful. That said, it's important to take a close look at how the ERCB has handled oil sands applications, particularly in recent years. They have included stringent conditions in approvals that respond to environmental protection, public infrastructure, impact on communities: all important issues. That is the ERCB operating as it should and considering the public interest.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta workers in the construction industry and in the transportation industry are, unfortunately, getting laid off. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is the government going ahead to recruit foreign workers in these industries in these recruitment drives that are going on abroad when we have willing and able Albertans who are unemployed and would like the first chance at these jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in the House yesterday, before temporary foreign workers are brought in to fill certain positions, the employer must advertise right across Canada to assure himself or herself that no Canadian can fill that particular position. It's only after that that they will receive a permit from the federal government to bring in temporary foreign workers to fill those particular positions.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that last month alone 129,000 Canadians and landed immigrants joined the rolls of the unemployed, why is the government now going to Essen and Leipzig, Germany, in early March, recruiting workers in the construction, hospitality, and transportation industries, when so many people not only in Alberta but across this country are unemployed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we need to reiterate the fact that our priorities are to Albertans first and to make sure that any Albertan that wants to work and is capable of working in a particular occupation will have that option. We also want to make sure that Canadians have the option of filling whatever jobs are available in the province of Alberta. But we need to also remind ourselves that we need to be very prudent and very flexible so that our short-term requirements will not impact our very long-term goals of making sure that we've got enough people with the right skills in the right places when we do need them.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Your priority is to drive down wages not only in this province but across the country.

Given that the total value of residential, industrial, and commercial building permits in this province is down over 35 per cent between November 2007 and November 2008, why are you going at this time to Germany to recruit more construction workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that we're out in Germany recruiting construction workers. We're out there recognizing that we're very, very focused on responding to the needs in Alberta where we have experienced some shortages.

If I can use an example, in the health field we are still recruiting people to come in and fill the voids, that we all feel is necessary. We constantly hear of need for additional workers in our long-term care facilities, as an example, so we are targeting some of those individuals. The demographic work that is done across the world indicates whether there are people that might fit those needs, and those are the groups that we're targeting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Oil Sands Development Strategy (continued)

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A key goal of the oil sands strategy released earlier today is ensuring that we're developing the oil sands resources in an environmentally responsible way. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. With over 40 years of development already under way why are you just now looking at putting rules in place to make sure these giant mines get cleaned up?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I've already pointed out earlier this afternoon, we're not putting new rules in place. The rules have always been there. What we're doing is recognizing that those rules can be stronger, and we're committing to make them stronger. We're putting in place a system we've identified as progressive reclamation that says that as new areas are opened up, the previous areas need to be closed in. That's how we believe we can increase and speed up the process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what kind of consequences will companies face if they don't clean up as they move forward?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the most obvious is that we hold all the cards. We're the ones that make the approvals and issue the licences. If the expectations that we set down are not met, we simply don't issue the licences and grant the approvals. We have a number of other tools in our box that we're prepared to use as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will these new rules ensure that tailings ponds get cleaned up in a timely manner?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we envision in the area of progressive reclamation is putting benchmarks in place. The opposition members and other critics of oil sands development often point out to say: well, with no reclamation certificates obviously no reclamation is under way. Clearly, these are long-term projects, so one of the things we need to do is establish benchmarks and say, "After five years this is where you are; after 10 years this is where you should be; after 15 years this is where you should be," because clearly these guys just don't get it over here.

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

2:40

Graduated Drivers' Licences

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some time now constituents have raised concerns about the number of drivers on graduated licences between the ages of 16 and 18 involved in serious accidents on Alberta roads. This is an important safety concern. To the Minister of Transportation: will the minister commit to revoking the graduated licence of anyone caught exceeding the posted speed limit by 30 kilometres an hour or more?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, with the stats we've done, we've found our graduated driver's licence program has been working very well for new drivers to Alberta, not just young drivers but anyone who hasn't driven for two years in Alberta. We're in the process right now of completely doing a full review: do we need to make changes or not to the graduated driver's licence? When that review comes in, I tell the hon. member that I will gladly let him know, share the information on what we should do or whether we will leave it the way it is.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about young drivers here.

To the minister again: will the minister commit to restrictions on anyone holding a graduated driver's licence if they have more than three speeding offences under the 30-kilometre-per-hour ceiling under this probationary driving term?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, on our graduated driver's licence they couldn't even get three speeding tickets or they'd automatically lose their licence. They're only allowed seven points under the graduated driver's licence.

Mr. Kang: So will they lose their driver's licence if they get seven demerits? That's what you're telling us, sir?

To the minister again, Mr. Speaker. Changes to the graduated licence program have been talked about forever. When will we finally see some action on this?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it couldn't be forever. The graduated driver's licence has only been in effect for a few years in Alberta.

I think we have a great system with our graduated driver's licence, and safety is a huge concern. Yes, the people he is speaking about are our most vulnerable and create the most accidents right now. That's why we have a graduated driver's licence, and that's why we're reviewing it.

The Speaker: That was 90 questions and answers today compared to the 102 yesterday. We're going to move on very quickly because we have a standing order rule about 3 o'clock.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Outstanding Calgary-Mackay Constituents

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the achievements of some outstanding Calgarians and Calgary-Mackay constituents.

Children and youth under 19 make up about 30 per cent of Calgary-Mackay's population. Eighteen-year-old Calgary-Mackay

constituent Jane Wu has earned Canada's top teen philanthropist in Canada's first national contest in December 2008. As a volunteer since she was 12, Jane has logged thousands of volunteer hours, including serving as chair of the Calgary Youth Foundation and co-chair of the Mayor's Youth Council. She has helped to raise tens of thousands of dollars for projects like opening doors rental subsidies for youth, a program which makes schools, churches, and community halls cheaper to rent for organized activities. Jane also received the Alberta great kids award and Calgary immigrant of distinction's youth scholarship in 2008. I am certain we'll be hearing more about this remarkable young Albertan in the years to come.

Ten days ago Alberta celebrated a golden moment when Kurtis Wenzel, a grade 12 student athlete at the Calgary board of education's National Sports School, won Canada's first gold medal in the youth men's 7.5 K sprint at the youth and junior world biathlon championships at the Canmore Nordic Centre. This is traditionally a sport dominated by the Europeans, and winning gold is quite a coup for Canada and Alberta.

Then members of Calgary's Hung Mon Athletic Club brought home one gold and one silver medal from the world cultural sports competition held in Korea.

Last but certainly not the least, Ms Sandra Rhodes, principal of Sir William Van Horne high school of the Calgary board of education, is the only Albertan who won Canada's outstanding principal award. Her partnerships with the community and parents as well as successful change and innovation have resulted in improved student achievement.

Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to have this opportunity to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of these outstanding Albertans today. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Six hundred and fifty people are gathering in Edmonton over the next two days to learn about innovative strategies for the prevention and treatment of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD. Over 23,000 Albertans have FASD. The social and economic impacts of the disorder directly or indirectly touch every Albertan.

That's why our government is funding community-based supports, research, education, and awareness programs to keep more babies from being born with this completely preventable disability. A cross-ministry team of nine ministries has developed and is taking action on a 10-year strategic plan for FASD. We're beginning to see the results, but we know that there is much more work to be done. The Alberta FASD Conference is just one of the ways government, community organizations, educators, health professionals, and families are working together to promote healthy lifestyles during pregnancy and give hope to those affected by FASD and their caregivers.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to learn more about the role they can play helping people in our communities who are affected by FASD and supporting the FASD 10-year plan by visiting the website www.fasd-cmc.alberta.ca. By working together our province will continue being a world leader in supporting people and families affected by FASD.

Thank you.

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

Delisting of Health Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Every now and again individual Tory MLAs slip and give Albertans a glimpse into this government's secretive agenda for health care. Last week the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace mused to reporters about delisting health services that everyday Albertans need. Clearly, he spoke out of turn. The Premier's spin doctors quickly swooped in to distance themselves from his comments.

We've seen them try this song and dance before. During the devastating Klein cuts of the 1990s the government delisted eye exams, wart removal, and local anaesthetic for dental procedures, all to shave a mere tenth of a percentage point from the health budget. What happened? Private companies began selling insurance for the delisted services. The fee for eye exams rose 17 per cent in the first year. Lower income families were gouged, and the government looked the other way.

Last summer the government looked the other way again as the Copeman clinic opened in Calgary, providing medical services to those who are wealthy. Those who can afford it get premium health care services while regular folks wait in longer lines at greater expense to the taxpayer.

This government continually spins the yarn that our health care system is unsustainable and that it must change. However, study after study shows public health delivery of health care is affordable when properly prioritized. Poll after poll shows that Albertans want no part in the slow dismantling of the services that they rely upon. My party's most important contribution to our Canadian way of life is a public health care system that is accessible to every Albertan and every Canadian in spite of what his or her income might be. Mr. Speaker, it's the envy of the world. We will not allow this government or any other to take it away, and we'll fight against any incremental attack that this government has planned behind closed doors.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the Social Care Facilities Review Committee's annual report for 2007-08. The report includes feedback the committee received during visits to daycares, women's shelters, group homes, and other facilities and is very invaluable in ensuring the provision of quality, appropriate services to Albertans. I'd also like to take a second to thank the committee and express appreciation to those who took the time to share their views.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we're one year from the opening of the 2010 Olympic Games. As minister responsible for the Alberta Olympic and Paralympic Secretariat I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Celebrates Vancouver 2010 supplement that was included in today's *Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald*. This supplement highlights our own Olympic legacy and informs Albertans about the various pre-Olympic events and also introduces and profiles some of Alberta's athletes, who we'll be watching and cheering for next February.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is in regard to the questions that I asked the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration earlier in question period. This is from the Employment and Immigration website, and it is a calendar of events indicating that on March 3 the Alberta government will be in Essen and on March 5 in Leipzig, Germany, to recruit construction and transportation workers.

The second tabling I have is a letter that I have received from Alberta Culture and Community Spirit dated December 9, 2008. It is a follow-up from questions that were asked by members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on November 5, 2008. I would encourage all hon. members of the Assembly to please have a good look at this. It explains where some of our tax dollars are being spent.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. One of these reports states that some residents did not get their breakfast until mid-morning, and care that should have been done in the morning was not completed until the afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair will table in the House today the appropriate number of copies of two letters dated February 10, 2009, from the members for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and Edmonton-Strathcona advising my office of the resignation of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood from the Standing Committee on the Economy and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona from the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund and the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services effective February 12, 2009. However, I do believe that it requires a motion of the Assembly to in fact put this into place, and one would look forward to that.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to please share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week beginning February 17, which is Tuesday because Monday is Family Day and a statutory holiday.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my anticipation that we'll spend the bulk of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday next week in response to the Speech from the Throne. On Tuesday afternoon day 2 of throne speech reply and under Government Bills and Orders potentially second reading of bills 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 could be brought forward.

On Wednesday we would proceed again with throne speech reply, and for second reading bills 2, 3, 4, and 5 would be available, and perhaps Bill 1 might be in committee.

Thursday, February 19, again predominantly in throne speech reply, but we might anticipate second reading on bills 4 and 5, committee on bills 2 and 3, and potentially third reading of Bill 1.

The Speaker: This particular message is essentially to three members: the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. As events transpired this afternoon, I received a series of seven notes with respect to a matter which, I think, after reading all the seven notes becomes very self-explanatory. So what I will do is later on this afternoon simply make a copy of the seven notes, numbered in the order in which they arrived here, I'll give you all a copy of it, and you can unravel the mystery over the weekend.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 11]

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Rutherford I am very pleased to join other hon. members in replying to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. Not unlike other speakers that preceded me, my focus is on the opportunities I see for my constituents as a result of the direction government has set out for the province and the legislative agenda for the coming session.

Seniors and others living on fixed incomes look for reassurance, Mr. Speaker, that government will protect them through difficult times. Postsecondary students are concerned about future career prospects. Families worry about the impact of potential job loss. Small businesses wonder how they will fare in the face of reduced consumer spending. So when I consider the throne speech, I look for evidence that the government is providing meaningful hope that families and communities will emerge not only intact but stronger from the economic circumstances we find ourselves in today. I submit that His Honour has made a very strong case in this regard.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We can begin by looking at the base we're starting from. Albertans have built the strongest balance sheet of any government in North America. We have no provincial debt, a strong investment portfolio, and more than \$13 billion in the sustainability fund and capital accounts to cushion us from deficit and sustain investment for future growth. We have the upper hand on taxes, with personal, corporate, and fuel tax rates among the lowest in the country. The elimination of health care premiums means Albertans and their employers have an additional \$1 billion to invest in savings, education, recreation, or other priorities. And let's not forget for a minute, Mr. Speaker, that we are in the midst of implementing a capital plan worth no less than \$22 billion over three years. As His Honour illustrated, prudent economic leadership, innovation, and most importantly the hard work and perseverance of Albertans have prepared this province to succeed in virtually any economic market.

For small businesses in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest sources of hope is the Alberta-British Columbia trade,

investment, and labour mobility agreement, known as TILMA. In addition to increasing the size of the marketplace in which small businesses operate, the agreement makes it easier to source skilled labour, attract investment capital, and in several sectors can be expected to reduce the costs of goods and services Albertans use every day. Alberta has established many strong and reliable trading partners internationally, that will ensure our province can rely on a broad range of trade and investment relationships. Indeed, global demand as well as the United States' urgent need for a stable and secure supply of energy present unique opportunities with respect to how we deploy and develop our most abundant natural resource.

The Alberta energy strategy outlines a clear path to position Alberta and Canada as global leaders in the supply of clean energy from both existing and alternative sources. It addresses improved innovation through increased investment in research, development, demonstration, and deployment of energy technology. Perhaps the best example of late, Mr. Speaker, is this government's commitment to an investment of \$2 billion in the development of carbon capture and storage technology. This has tremendous potential to significantly reduce not only our own greenhouse gas emissions, but, as I think was acknowledged a few times in the House today, it's especially important in helping to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of developing countries.

In addition to adding value and increasing revenue from traditional resources, His Honour's speech highlights the very significant progress Alberta continues to make in diversifying our revenue stream. The development and nurturing of knowledge-based companies is critical to Alberta's ongoing success in the new global economy. A prime example of this attitude in action is the Alberta action plan for bringing new technology to market. As members will know, Mr. Speaker, the plan assists Alberta entrepreneurs in developing their ideas and creating products for consumer use. It builds on the strength of advanced technology we have developed in sectors like clean energy, information and communications, life sciences, and nanotechnology, using a wide range of co-ordinated actions that take place in the early stages of technological development, where the help often means the most.

As an example, small technology companies are now eligible for access to vouchers worth between \$10,000 and \$50,000 in order to help get their ideas and products to market. In addition, the Alberta scientific research and experimental development tax credit benefits all businesses in sectors that conduct research. The credit is worth 10 per cent of a company's eligible expenditures up to \$4 million for a maximum credit of \$400,000. This will be refundable for all companies.

For my constituents, Mr. Speaker, they need look no further than the capital region, home to one of the largest academic health centres in North America. Here in Edmonton researchers, clinicians, and educators are building knowledge capital that will form the foundation for Alberta's future economy. The upcoming health research strategy announced in the throne speech will guide Alberta's investment in health research and ensure that the knowledge that we're developing here at home links to measurable improvements in our public health care system.

Mr. Speaker, seniors in my constituency were also pleased to learn that Alberta's continuing care strategy will improve health and personal care service options for seniors and persons with disabilities by enhancing supports that enable them to live independently within the community. To many of my constituents that is the highest priority of all. The increased availability of home care, more supportive living options, and upgrades to long-term care are all very welcome news.

3:00

Not only is the government of Alberta providing essential social programs, but it's also protecting Albertans where it matters most, in their own communities. Mr. Speaker, last month I hosted a public forum on crime and safe communities in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. The expert panel included two members of cabinet, the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security and also the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Justice. But much more than highlighting the government's safe communities initiative, such as the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act and the safe communities innovation fund, it was really the discussion that followed the presentations which impressed me most.

I say this because individuals and community groups who attended the forum left the hall not talking about where they wanted government to invest more money or how they wanted government to change programs. They left speaking and planning about how to use the components of the safe communities initiative to facilitate their work collaboratively in our schools and our neighbourhoods to improve community safety. They left believing, Mr. Speaker, that government had provided them with the tools and empowered them to determine their own solutions and to implement them with appropriate assistance. One way Albertans can get involved in initiatives such as this is through the safe communities innovation fund, a \$60 million fund which has been announced and is available for local organizations to pilot projects designed to improve community safety in their areas.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I believe it was Napoleon Bonaparte who said that a leader is a dealer in hope. His Honour's address provides an inspiring mix of hope, realism, and confidence and a commitment to creating opportunities for the future, that we as members of the House can choose to model or not as we work through these uncertain times with our constituents.

Alberta's financial fundamentals are sound, the political will to adapt to the future is there, and most importantly the resilience and determination of Albertans is stronger than ever before. Let's make the most of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to join the debate today regarding this government's throne speech, ably delivered in the House by the hon. Lieutenant Governor on Tuesday. Unfortunately, while the delivery of the throne speech was able, the construction and substance of this government's blueprint is a deep disappointment to everyday Albertans concerned about the turbulent economic times we are entering.

There are four major problems with the government's stated approach to Alberta's future. Firstly, it doesn't acknowledge the serious implications of the current economic climate for Alberta's families and provides no vision for Albertans faced with the prospect of missing mortgage payments and struggling to provide for their kids. Secondly, it's premised on an outdated and backward-looking approach to building Alberta's economy. Thirdly, it maintains Alberta's position as the jurisdiction with the most ineffective environmental protection scheme in the developed world. Finally, it misses the opportunity to transition our province toward a truly renewable and green future. Any one of these flaws on its own is a matter of grave concern to ordinary Albertans. Combined they leave Alberta families with no hope that they will be able to ride out the economic storm we are entering.

This government seems to believe that if they don't talk about it, maybe it just won't happen. They acknowledge in words that Alberta is not immune to the economic crisis that the world finds itself in, but they do absolutely nothing to mitigate the circumstances. Mr. Speaker, Alberta had 5,700 job losses in January alone. In the two days since this session opened, we had 240 more workers given pink slips, with nothing more than expressions of regret from the Premier. Of course, those are only the ones that happened to be reported in the media. These men and women don't need the government's sympathy; they need a transition strategy. They need to know that their government has a plan to get them back to work in jobs that will provide for their families, that will not force them to look outside of Alberta for work or to have to rely on the social safety net or, as mentioned, resumé-writing classes.

Mr. Speaker, every forecast is that the situation is going to get worse before it gets better. Now, I'm not suggesting that we alone can stop the global economic downturn, but I am suggesting that if we don't admit that we have a problem and begin to use every available resource to address it, then the impacts of a bad situation will be far, far worse.

Mr. Speaker, the old ideas upon which the Tories are relying are the worst of their old ideas. The government plans to invest everything we have into maintaining Alberta's role as the nonrenewable fossil fuel dealer for the American oil addiction. Nowhere is this more clear than in the government's provincial energy strategy released last December, a document that clearly informed Tuesday's throne speech.

This government's strategy is flawed in a number of ways. For one, it assumes that Alberta will benefit from the U.S. administration's desire to gain independence from overseas oil importers, but at the same time it fails to discuss at all the risk that the U.S. will abandon Alberta's future oil exports on the basis of environmental costs. What this government refuses to recognize is that our biggest customer for our major retail item is not as sure that it wants it anymore. Mr. Speaker, even McDonald's was forced to sell salads when the market for Big Mac sales dropped off. The U.S. has said that they may not want our oil if it comes with a huge environmental price tag and will be working towards a system that demands less. All environmental arguments aside, this should put fear into the heart of the President of the Treasury Board.

This government's plan is for nonrenewable fossil fuel exports to be the primary focus of our investment strategies at least to 2040. Let me read directly from the provincial energy strategy, page 15:

For Alberta in the coming 30 years, no other activities will have the scale or impact of energy development. Agriculture and other sectors are important to Alberta and diversification is good for us, but energy's impact is pervasive. It is, and will be, our province's dominant economic engine.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, inherent in this statement is the dismissal of the concept of meaningful economic diversification strategies.

Not only are diversification strategies being ignored, but the government plans to focus the education of Albertans to support this unsustainable vision. On page 17 of the Alberta energy strategy the government writes:

The energy sector has endured periods where it was not among students' top choices when it came to choosing careers. This is unfortunate and must be addressed given that Alberta's future will be shaped around energy. We need to bring more people into the industry at all levels in order to fully tap the opportunities in years to come [through our education system].

In short what this says is that this government wants to spend taxpayers' dollars educating young Albertans to take on a career in an industry with no long-term sustainability because that's what their friends in big oil want. What about what's best for Albertans and, in particular, for the young people of Alberta?

To further support this fossil fuel energy future they are seeking, they want Albertans to also consider adopting a reliance on nuclear energy. The environmental costs, the safety costs, and the exorbitant costs to taxpayers can't be defended. As well, they fail to note that the world's supply of uranium is set to run out a mere 10 years past their current planning window. In short, this government's vision is to have Albertans become even more dependent on an unsustainable economic plan. They are not only without vision; they have handed out blindfolds to their caucus with matching earplugs.

Now, the third concern we have is that the throne speech seeks in several places to characterize Alberta's efforts of protecting the environment as somehow "showing environmental leadership." Mr. Speaker, this is simply not true. Our environmental protection efforts are an insult to current Albertans and are the true debt this government will leave to future generations. As discussed today in the Legislature, we have no clear, identifiable, enforceable plan to clean up the current tar ponds. We have a greenhouse gas emission control strategy which is laughable when compared to the federal scheme, which is itself a black eye for Canada on the international stage. We have a regulatory scheme premised on self-policing and self-reporting, and we have a penalty scheme which has no deterrent effect and which might even turn into a tax writeoff for the affected corporations if creative sentencing becomes an element. Make no mistake: in the same way we are now paying for the infrastructure deficit left by this Premier's predecessor, this government's irresponsible environmental stewardship will be the debt that our children and grandchildren will have to pay.

Finally, the throne speech is bereft of new ideas or initiatives to face the growing challenges about to confront Albertans. Indeed, by my calculation the only component of the throne speech that had not already been announced to the public and/or discussed in this Legislature was the creation of a two-day arts festival in September. Art is good, but unfortunately the throne speech missed a very important opportunity of our time, and that is the opportunity to make an investment of resources, technology, and most importantly, political will into an economy based on renewable energy.

3:10

Again I quote from excerpts of the provincial energy strategy. It says that this government only recognized the potential for renewable energy to become part of our mix some time "this century," and doesn't believe it could replace fossil fuels "any time soon." Well, I have a news flash for them: renewable energy plays a significant part of energy use and production in a number of developed countries now. It is deeply disappointing to see the government so shockingly out of touch with this fact.

A recent report released by the Pembina Institute shows how it's possible, if we start now, to entirely replace coal from our electricity energy mix within 20 years. They aren't proposing some sort of knee-jerk, all-or-nothing, get-it-done-yesterday approach but, rather, a measured phase-in of renewable energies, but it is phase-in that has to start now with investment now. They believe in a full transition that can be made in 20 years, well before the end of the 40-year window that this government is looking at. Yet none of the inspiring and exciting opportunities that were identified in that report have found their way into the government's plans for the future.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, anyone who is in tune with the conversation throughout the world knows that we aren't going to have a choice in the matter. The world is demanding that we do our part to clean up the environment, and sooner rather than later we will have an economy that is based on renewable energy. The question is: do we wait until we're forced into it, or will we be leading the way?

Now, the added benefit to an investment in the transition to a

green economy, of course, is the massive job creation that comes along with it. In an economic climate where layoff announcements are becoming commonplace, wouldn't investment in real jobs that will take us into the future be a no-brainer? For instance, a recent U.S. study showed that the U.S. solar industry had the potential to create almost half a million jobs in that country by 2016, and these were in comparison to the 79,000 jobs in coal mining and the 136,000 jobs in oil and gas extraction.

The combination of no new ideas and their stubborn reliance on fossil fuels to the exclusion of all else means that this government insists on proceeding with what will likely go down in history as perhaps one of the biggest boondoggles ever: their \$2 billion investment in carbon capture and storage, slash, giving lots of money to their friends in oil and gas. Now, this plan was referenced in the Pembina report, but in so doing, it was clearly shown to be the most expensive option of those being considered, and this is within the context of most experts acknowledging that the effectiveness and the sustainability of the technology is not yet proven. At a time when money is short, the lost opportunity this scheme represents to Albertans is a cost that grows at exponential rates.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the government's plan for Alberta as outlined in Tuesday's throne speech is very disturbing. It shows no innovative thinking, relies on the very, quote, the market will take care of us, unquote, economic principle that caused the downturn, and fails to take advantage of obvious opportunities that are under our noses; that is, when it recognizes that there is any problem whatsoever.

I fear that if this is all we have to offer, Mr. Speaker, everyday Albertans are in for a much rougher ride over the next several years than they need to be. All around us governments are acting to help people through their tough times. They are investing in new economies and creating real jobs for people so that they can make sure that their families' needs are met. The only hope this government offers, however, is that oil prices will rebound. Well, we've all seen how unreliable the markets can be, and it's foolhardy to rely on them for our answer.

Regular Albertans are looking for government leadership, and I suggest that it is time this government showed some. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to ask the member a question. During the 1990s there was an NDP government in Saskatchewan. This government allowed oil production around the Estevan-Weyburn area to keep on going. In fact, that's how it balanced its budget largely. I'm wondering how she feels about her own party's development of oil and gas when it is in power?

Ms Notley: I have no difficulty with the development of oil and gas, but they were not developing in the tar sands, and they were not doing that development to the exclusion of the rest of their economy. I would also point to Manitoba, where they have the greatest level of nonrenewable energy production ongoing.

Ultimately, it's a question of dealing with what we're faced with now, and what we're faced with now in 2009 is much different than what all of us were faced with in the mid-90s. There are threats to our environment. There is no tar pond the size of the city of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, but there is one in Alberta. I would suggest that probably if the NDP had to deal with a tar pond the size

of the city of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan, they probably would have, but it hasn't been done here. We need to move forward dealing with the real, long-term environmental costs that our current strategy is creating because they are liabilities. On a balance sheet they are real and they will cost us and we will pay for them. The longer we wait, the more expensive it will become. So it's irresponsible to suggest that it's not an issue. That's my short answer.

The Speaker: Others?

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite what I just heard, I still rise today with a renewed sense of optimism, vigour, and pride. I have pride in having the distinguished pleasure of representing the hard-working and industrious citizens of Calgary-North Hill. I have the pride of working with a diverse, passionate, and dedicated caucus, whose discussions and deliberations of the most challenging issues in our province today are done on behalf of their constituents with tenacity and humility, all along being mindful of a role as being good stewards for this great province for younger generations.

Our Premier is a man of extraordinary vision, someone who fails to fall into the trap of regressive thinking during challenging times. He is a steady hand at the wheel of the ship in turbulent times. When others retreat, he has the optimism to search for the light at the end of the tunnel, the beacon of hope that all Albertans aspire to. He has the dogged determination to push forward to establish this province's place in the new world paradigm when the negativity of others is enough to stop progress dead in its tracks.

On February 10, this past Tuesday, Mr. Speaker, people from across the world and this great country, including the hon. Premiers from P.E.I. and Nova Scotia, were exposed to the blueprint of this extraordinary vision, a foundation of moving forward that rests on the pillars of confidence, optimism, and strength. As always, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor delivered this vision with humour, dignity, compassion, and conviction, exemplifying what it means to be Albertan.

The new Leader of the Official Opposition is a very intelligent and compassionate man. Yesterday we were exposed to his different hallucination, which was full of pessimism, negativity, and uninspiring and unconstructive rhetoric. For an intelligent individual I find it puzzling that he referred to the current global economic situation as simply a

need to prepare for a healthier, more diverse legacy for tomorrow's children, an Alberta in which a bust in the oil and gas sector does not lead inevitably to recession in the province. We could be so much more than the world's gas station.

I'm so disappointed on behalf of all Albertans and on behalf of my constituents that he thinks of Alberta as the world's gas station.

For a compassionate individual I also found his antihope message depressing and frustrating, and I think we've heard more of that today. His comments: "Our long-term prospects are uncertain. I would say they are dim. Please do not dismiss this as partisan, radical rhetoric. I believe this at a very deep level." Now, I would suggest to all members of the opposition that just the mere mention of the name "Obama" doesn't necessarily mean that you bring hope to all Albertans.

Then he went on to say: "We cannot have unlimited growth and pristine environments. We cannot have genuine progress without genuine sacrifice. We cannot have the lowest taxes in the country and the best public services in the land." I would suggest that we can and that we will if we work together. That's the attitude that Albertans want to see in their government, and it is in stark contrast to the Premier's Speech from the Throne that was delivered by the hon. Lieutenant Governor on February 10. Take the first few

paragraphs of the throne speech, and we'll see that contrast, phrases that reference individual Albertans as dreamers who see opportunity here, that talk about the collective Albertans that "will emerge from adversity even stronger than before" and that "face the future with confidence and optimism."

3:20

Well, I do understand the challenges and trials that have emerged over the last few months, and I express my sincere condolences to those that have been negatively affected by the global economic crisis here in Alberta and right across the world. While expressing this sorrow, I do so with great gratitude and appreciation. I will not apologize for the success of this province. Our wealth and security is not a circumstance of dumb luck. Such an assertion is an insult to the people of this great province, to my constituents, who have secured a bright future for this province through hard work, innovation, and sacrifice.

As we move forward in these uncertain times, we must face the challenges with unwavering confidence, a confidence that over the last 15 years of sacrifice and prudent investment has placed Alberta in the enviable position of being able to stay the course through tough decisions and sacrifices of all Albertans right across this great province in the 1990s. This was done by a vision and desire to create an Alberta where we don't have to sacrifice the wealth and opportunity of future generations to deal with the issues of the day. The current environment is proof that these decisions were tough but necessary. Where other jurisdictions are struggling to balance their budgets and provide services to citizens, debt service payments can have a real limiting effect.

In the last 15 years, particularly over the last several years, this government has been investing substantially in the infrastructure that Albertans demand. The current capital plan supports \$22.2 billion in capital spending, an average of \$7.4 billion per year, which is three times the average of Canadian provinces. In 2008-2009 this province, this government will spend over \$8.7 billion, or about \$2,460 per person, on capital projects, compared to just a paltry \$726 throughout the rest of Canada. While other governments are finally talking about infrastructure investment under the guise of economic stimulus, this government has been doing it because Albertans demanded it and because it's the right thing to do. Not only has this government made tough, prudent decisions and invested in infrastructure; this government has also been saving for the future. The sustainability fund helps protect government programs and infrastructure spending plans from unexpected drops in revenue, costs of emergencies and disasters, which sits at \$7 billion.

Now, I know that many Albertans today are very thankful for such a fund. The capital account, which currently sits at approximately \$6 billion, has allowed us to continue with our capital infrastructure plans. Again, at times when government revenue is not as stable and not as certain, we can continue on with our plans and not have to go into debt like so many jurisdictions, putting the burden of today's decisions on future generations.

The heritage savings trust fund: to provide prudent stewardship of the savings from Alberta's nonrenewable resources by providing the greatest financial returns on those savings for current and future generations of Albertans. As of September the value of this fund was \$15.8 billion, which is down from the end of last fiscal year, but as we know, there are some current challenges with some of our financial markets, and that's to be expected. This fund is not to be looked at over six-month periods. This is a long-term investment fund that will be there to benefit future generations of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to suggest that we are in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that we have as a result of past prudence in investment, and our Premier has laid out a vision for

this: to place Alberta as a leader in Canada and across the world. This is a relatively new world, a new world of increased trade and investment, of the liberalization of trade and investment, an increased concern for the environment, and an increased focus on securing energy for quality of life and economic sustainability and growth.

Mr. Speaker, over the Christmas holidays I decided to do some reading and exercising at the same time. You might not be able to tell, but I did. I picked up the November issue of *Policy Options* from the Institute for Research on Public Policy. It was a postmortem on the federal election, and in one of the articles Charles McMillan, a professor of international business at York University, made these comments about globalization and in reference to the past federal election. He said:

Even a casual perusal of party platforms during the last election shows that most politicians are thinking in terms of the late 1980s or 1990s. Critical 21st-century issues such as education and training as a lifelong pursuit, broadband and Internet access, excelling in new environmental and energy technologies, demographics and immigration policies, and cultivating Canadian companies in trade and high technology so they can sell in overseas markets were not on the political radar screen.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to suggest that our Premier must have read this before he developed the Speech from the Throne and the blueprint for this year's legislative agenda because I believe that in the Speech from the Throne he addressed all of these issues, putting Alberta into the 21st century and into this new world, where we can be leaders, where people are looking to us. One could easily make the argument that the current economic situation is a natural consequence of this shifting new-world paradigm, a reality check to ensure that our decisions are prudent and account for the long-term sustainability of our fundamental natural, economic, and governance systems in society.

This current situation calls out for leadership, and through the vision of our Premier our province is stepping up to the plate. Our Premier has delivered a vision where we don't talk about the economy, the environment, energy in silos, where these are parallel issues that affect all Albertans, all Canadians, and everybody right across the world. He has set out an aggressive agenda to deal with breaking down trade barriers through the trade, investment, and labour mobility act. Such policies are examples of where this country and this world can go to break down the barriers to make quality of life for individuals that want to trade or practise their own profession in different parts of not just this country but the world.

3:30

Personally I have been fortunate to represent this great province at the Pacific Northwest Economic Region table. I had the great fortune to travel to both the state capitals in Oregon and Washington, and the message was clear that people see Alberta as an opportunity, a beacon of hope in this current economic situation. They see Alberta as someone to partner with. Our message is clear to them that we're going to do this in a way that's responsible to all citizens and to the environment.

On the environment part our Premier has shown great leadership, and to anyone who wants to argue that Alberta is not a leader in this field, I would suggest otherwise. The \$2 billion investment into carbon capture and storage is something that is unprecedented across the globe. [Mr. Fawcett's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. I was just wondering if the hon.

member could finish what he was saying there. I was listening very intently, and I missed that last little bit. If he could just complete that for me, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. I appreciate that. I know that the Member for Lethbridge-West knows that I'm never at a loss for words.

I was just saying that this government has taken significant initiative on the environmental side. Carbon capture and storage: unprecedented investment. The regulatory system of capping greenhouse gas emissions for large industrial emitters: again, not one jurisdiction on this continent has done that. That's leadership, folks, and anybody who says otherwise must be dreaming. I don't know. I just don't get it.

You look at some of the energy strategies that have come forward: the recently released report on oil sands development, the provincial energy strategy. Weaving through all of those is the ability that we as Albertans can effect change through action, through harvesting our energy resources and making sure that they're valuable for others across this great globe in a way that's responsible and environmentally friendly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank my friend the Member for Calgary-North Hill – I got it right this time – for such an invigorating speech, but I wanted to ask him one question. Like him, I represent a largely inner-city constituency in Calgary. I'm wondering what he thinks about the government's safe communities plan and plan to deal with crime in our cities.

Mr. Fawcett: I think it's a very good plan. I think it's a comprehensive plan that deals with some of the major challenges around organized crime, that uses a number of tools. What I particularly like most about this government's plan is that it invests money in developing community-based solutions. I believe, unlike other members of this Assembly, that the government can't be everything to everybody and that security and safety in our own communities rests mainly as a responsibility in the hands of the people that live in those communities. We will do our part as a government, I believe, to support them in doing that. I think that if we can use what tools are at our disposal to assist them, we have a great strategy for making sure that people feel comfortable and safe.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and respond for the 13th time to the throne speech. I want to say what a gift I think this is and how much I view my ability to represent the people of Edmonton-Centre as a great honour and also a great gift. It's a job that I enjoy doing, particularly because of the constituents that I represent.

Now, I am very fortunate in being able to represent the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, which, in fact, has the Legislature Building as part of it. We have some wonderful infrastructure in this constituency: a baseball park, the downtown area, Grant MacEwan College. We've got the beginning of the LRT; please, dear God, we get more of it. There are a number of wonderful places to visit in this constituency: the arts district, various recreational opportunities through the river valley park system. But, really, for me the most joyous part of it is representing the individuals that live here.

I, as always, have consulted my constituents through a variety of means to solicit their views on what they wanted me to bring forward and look for in the throne speech but also to speak about in response to the throne speech. I've had an additional honour in that being named a deputy leader, I've heard from people outside of my constituency and from across Alberta that also wanted me to talk about some things.

If we may, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to back off to the 10,000-foot level and speak more generally about some of the issues that people have identified as being really key. I have to say that jockeying for first position are the environment, particularly water, and the economy. In fact, I think that's appropriate because the two things are very much tied together in this province. That is our legacy: trying to find that balance between where we put an emphasis on economic development versus our incredible natural environment.

I have been very amused and have taken great delight in listening to the last couple of days' worth of responses to the throne speech and listening to a number of the members on the government side talking about the fabulous sustainability fund. I recognize that most of these members are new to the Assembly, but I cannot tell you the immense satisfaction I take in knowing that, in fact, this was an idea that was developed and brought forward by the then Leader of the Official Opposition, Dr. Ken Nicol. At the time the proposition that we brought forward as part of our Official Opposition position was met with hoots and howls of derision, snorts of disdain. "Oh, my goodness; what a stupid idea," they all said. And here we are years later with newly minted backbenchers crowing in delight of exactly that idea.

Now, granted, there is a significant difference, Mr. Speaker. We called it a stability fund, and the current government calls it a sustainability fund. I'll admit that that's a significant difference. Aside from that, it's the Liberal idea, lock, stock, and barrel. You're welcome to go and check it out in any of our documents from the time. So I take some delight in that.

The second thing that I keep hearing about as I hear my hon. members on the opposite side make their responses to the throne speech is the plan, the great plans for the future that they see inside of the throne speech. Again, another idea brought forward, pounded forward every day by members of the Official Opposition. Where was the plan? Exactly what was the plan? Where were the performance measurements? How did we measure this? Day after day after day after day. Again, howls of derision, snorts of disdain. How dare we? If I've got the quote right, "Only a Liberal would want to plan" was the insult that was thrown back at us. Indeed, only a Liberal would want to plan. So I thank you very much for the accolades that have come our way indirectly from the members of the backbench when they talk about how impressed they are with the plan.

The environment and the economy. You know, one of the other things I've noticed is in some cases a sort of petulant demand from some of my hon. members opposite that the Liberals insist on telling everybody exactly what it is that we would cut from the budget. If we can't do that, then we should just put up or shut up, and since we can't put up, then the obvious should follow. An interesting idea, but I would have expected a bit more support, then, from those very same members for our proposal that was brought forward in Members' Services to get additional funding to help us do research because, to be honest with you, we're a little short-staffed on that side of things.

3:40

Two things I would like to improve but am unable to do so at the time. One is research support to help us be able to go through things like the budget documents and pick out those kinds of numbers or

those particular programs that we felt should go on a list of things to be reviewed and perhaps cut or eliminated. More than that, I'd like to get more information. I've been watching budget documents for 13 years now, and I have to say there's less information available in budget documents today than there was 10 or 12 or 15 years ago. I went back to '92-93, and the amount of information that was available in those budget documents is significantly more than what's available to us today. So when there's a demand and a little stamping of feet that they want to know exactly what programs we'd like to cut, I'd like to help them, but frankly that's very difficult to do. Perhaps they'd like to work on my behalf and correct those two oversights. We have seven research support staff now to do 24 ministries and five policy field committees, so that's a heck of a lot of work.

A couple of other pieces around the economy. I think it's important to point out – and I represent a lot of small businesspeople in downtown Edmonton – how important it is to recognize those small businesses as major drivers of our economy. We do tend to look at those monolithic structures, those huge organizations, but still in Alberta and across Canada it's small- and medium-sized businesses that really provide most of the jobs for people.

I urge the government to go back and look, to try – they had a red tape commission, and once again we never heard what came out of it. I never saw what was being reduced or done. [interjection] Well, yeah, supposedly that was a plan, but it's a plan that doesn't exist if you don't share it with the rest of the people. So I'm wondering again what is being done and what is in this throne speech for my small businesspeople and small businesspeople across the province.

We are at a really interesting point in Alberta here. We have an economic entity in the oil sands. Various deals have been struck over the years to have an exchange of money that comes back to Albertans to compensate them for the use of and access to their assets, but I also think that increasingly people feel that there needs to be much stronger environmental protection. It's a challenge to us. I remember a friend once talking about the war on carbon and the fact that it's not so much that our oil and gas reserves will run out – they will. They just get more expensive to produce and get out of the ground. But it's not so much that. The war on carbon is about other people saying that they don't want it anymore. And we may move faster than we expected to a point where that oil and gas, a nonrenewable natural resource, may not be as much of a significant force in our budget as it is today.

I think we need to look very strongly at developing a greener economy and investing in other forms of renewable energy as quickly as possible. We continue to make the same mistake over and over and over again. Peter Lougheed nailed it: we have to diversify our economy. That was 35 years ago that he said that, and frankly we haven't gone very far down the road to diversify that economy. So that is a continuing concern for me.

Perhaps a tightening of economic times will encourage us to be more creative and to look toward investing in some of the renewable energy resources that we can produce here. I'm looking at these tougher economic times and that whole debate about: run a deficit, don't run a deficit, cut, don't cut. What has come back to me from the people that have contacted me is that we need to be careful to maintain an investment in certain things. What's the criteria on that? I think the criteria is: if we don't invest in this now and continue to invest in this given entity, will we be in better or worse shape when we come out of this economic recession? I think the areas that we need to continue to invest in include infrastructure for two reasons. One, because it is a stimulus for the economy; it is jobs for our citizens. Also, we need that infrastructure when we come out of this. If we don't continue to invest in it and to have bridges and public

transportation and municipal buildings ready, we will truly be in a challenging place when the economy starts to pick up on us and we the government have not been able to provide that infrastructure that we need to really move forward. So infrastructure is one.

Health, clearly. For those of us that have dealt with these issues recently, if you don't have health, you have nothing. All the money in the world means nothing to you if you are ill or dying. It means nothing. We really have a pressure upon us to provide our citizens with the best possible health care.

Beyond that, I think we need to have the discussion with our citizens and encourage them to have the discussion about what kind of health care. How far? What is the continuum of health care that they expect us to provide? There are trade-offs involved in that. You can't expect citizens to be happy with the result that's handed to them if they didn't get to be involved in the discussion, and I think we need to have a discussion. When I watch some of the public discussions they have in Holland, I'm amazed. I mean, they actually had a public discussion that went on for several years on euthanasia and came to a decision on it. That's their societal expectation, that's what they've set down as a policy, and they all bought into it. Pretty brave. I wish we could get closer to that because I think that in some ways we set ourselves up in that we don't allow the citizens to have that discussion about exactly how much health care is enough.

I would also challenge the minister of health, as I have before, rather than saying "This is how much money we're going to spend on health care; make everybody healthy for that amount of money," to say "How healthy do we want people to be? What are the benchmarks that we want to hit? What kind of delivery of programs are acceptable to us?" and then fund to that. That also includes that discussion with the citizens; that's a part of that.

I think we have to continue to invest in education and in children. No question. I would also argue that investment in the arts – okay, it's near and dear to my heart, so sue me, but I think an investment in arts and culture continues to have a considerable payback. We know it's between \$3 and \$7 for every dollar invested.

I think that there's also a role of government to provide what no corporation will provide unless there's a profit that comes out of it. That's areas like protection of vulnerable people; housing, particularly around mental illnesses services and programming; seniors; and AISH. One of the people that contacted me was really concerned because her son is on AISH. She's experiencing a situation where AISH will subsidize this fellow for a bus pass but they won't subsidize him for a DATS pass. Well, lots of people on AISH require a DATS pass, so this is an interesting discrimination. I would ask the government to look to this, and I'll also provide additional documentation to the relevant minister. Honestly, that's one of the areas that needs to be looked at. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just wanting to learn more about what the views of the Member for Edmonton-Centre are on the throne speech.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. One of the other areas that I have had a significant amount of correspondence on – and if I have, everybody has – is around seniors' unhappiness with the plans for changes in pharmaceuticals and in long-term care and assisted living. I've had a lot of correspondence, and people have phoned me on it. There is a real sense there that middle-income seniors, particularly on a fixed middle income, are being dinged in a way that

they did not expect. They feel it's unfair and it's a breaking of that contract with them of what they expected to be available to them when they retired.

3:50

Let's face it. I mean, the government has always looked after truly vulnerable, disadvantaged, bottom of the heap, absolutely no- or little-income seniors. They always have. This is now adding to it a small number of other seniors that are equally low income. But, you know, my mother has a teacher's pension. She would get covered and be paying full freight on this one for a fairly small teacher's pension, and she's some 20 years into it. So this is a real concern for seniors.

I think the other issue that is of real interest and concern here is the relationship with the municipalities. I am bringing forward Bill 204 later in the session, which I hope will provoke a discussion – well, I know it will provoke something – about how we fund municipalities. I'm asking the government to consider allocating a portion of income and corporate tax directly to the municipalities for them to use in their operating funding because they're being expected to carry a lot of the load, and they do not have access to the same amount of funding in order to do that.

I'd also like to see the status of Edmonton as the capital city upheld. I know that when a lot of my colleagues from the government side were elected in Edmonton, somehow Edmonton was to be highlighted again. I would argue that that's happening less and less. Increasingly press conferences and big announcements happen just about anywhere but Edmonton, and this is the capital city. The Legislature Building is here in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and I think that the respect that is due this institution and this building should be upheld.

I've had a lot of feedback on that from people, as well as on the Legislature Grounds renewal themselves, which is a project that has now, I think, been tried 12 times, three times to my knowledge. We have an opportunity here to create a real jewel of a building and of a Legislature grounds, and I hope that the members will support the plan when it comes forward. It could be quite fabulous, and I hope it will be, but thus far all other attempts have failed because it didn't have the support of the very members that are elected to sit in this House.

Those are some of the issues that I wanted to raise in addition. Thank you for the question, Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The final issue is around support and stabilization for the not-for-profit associations, that we depend on so much to deliver many of the programs that government, in fact, is legislated to provide. At this point they need some stabilization. They need contracts to be written with cost-of-living increases in them and some sort of wage parity for their staff.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Other questions?

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to address the Chamber and express my commitments to the plan for Alberta set forth by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor in his Speech from the Throne on Tuesday. Over the past year I have appreciated the opportunity to serve the citizens of Lethbridge in this Assembly, work with our great Premier and this wonderful group of colleagues that I have here.

I can't help but think back to a year ago, when oil prices were at a record high and our economy was white hot. Of course, we know now what a difference a year can make in light of the global

uncertainty. Oil prices have dropped lower than anyone could have predicted, but our future remains bright under the steady direction of this government. Mr. Speaker, while we are not immune to the impacts of the global economic conditions, Alberta is still the envy of much of the world. Today we're seen as an example of how smart policy and wealth management can weather an economic storm and even take advantage of the downturn. Thanks to policies put in place by this government years ago to eliminate our net debt and thanks to our unswerving commitment to saving and reinvesting Alberta's wealth, we are in a perfect position for continued prosperity in today's global economy.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident in His Honour's Speech from the Throne that this government is committed to marketing our energy resources to economies around the world while at the same time continuing to expand and diversify our economy. I believe my hometown of Lethbridge is a perfect example of the diversity that can strengthen our economy. As you know, Lethbridge is less dependent on the energy sector than most cities in Alberta. We are known as an agricultural city serving farm communities from Pincher Creek to Taber, north to Claresholm, and all the way to the U.S. border. We are the irrigation capital of Canada and are committed to farmers, livestock producers, and the food processors who turn it all into the food we can eat every day.

I was pleased at this government's continuing support of these areas as a priority in the Speech from the Throne, particularly the livestock and meat strategy, but Lethbridge is much more than just a farm town. Light manufacturing is the foundation of our industrial sector. We are also home to a thriving retail and hospitality sector. Lethbridge is the hub of shopping and entertainment for many rural areas surrounding the city. As a small businessman myself I know that small business is the engine that drives southern Alberta and the entire Alberta economy. Support for and from this sector will be critical to Lethbridge and Alberta's continued prosperity. We rely on small business and Lethbridge alone to generate 8,000 jobs, and small business in turn relies on us to buy locally. As Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce's Dennis Hatt put it last fall, as long as everyone continues to spend locally, Lethbridge and Alberta will make it through these tough times relatively unscathed.

Lethbridge is also world renowned as a hub of advanced education and research, which I believe is another driving force behind our diverse economy in Lethbridge and Alberta. I'd be willing to bet that my city has more PhDs per capita than any other city in Alberta. University of Lethbridge president Bill Cade likes to refer to Lethbridge as a smart city, and I agree one hundred per cent. We're home to two world-class agricultural research centres and two excellent postsecondary institutions. It's no exaggeration to say that U of L is a leader in the areas of behavioural neuroscience, water conservation, and much more. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge College is taking a lead in wind power. The school recently became the first institution in North America to offer wind turbine technician training in addition to its many other programs.

Obviously, this is the kind of work referred to in the research and innovation act mentioned in His Honour's speech, and I believe this government will continue to support that attitude of staying on the cutting edge. Research and postsecondary education will continue to provide Albertans with local opportunities to advance their skills and remain competitive in today's economy, and I expect both the U of L and Lethbridge College to see increased enrolment over the coming semesters.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure my constituents were also encouraged by the promotion of the arts in Alberta. Lethbridge may not be a big city, but we have a thriving arts community that would be the envy of a city twice our size. I know that many of these folks, particularly

on the city's allied arts council, will be impressed with the government's efforts to boost arts across Alberta.

As a senior-friendly community, Mr. Speaker, Lethbridge has also been a leader in seniors' care, and I'm encouraged by the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act put forward in His Honour's speech. I firmly believe that we must continue to do everything that we can to give Alberta seniors a level of care they deserve when it's needed and where it's needed, and long-term sustainable support for seniors' drop-in centres is critical to their long-term viability. I'm proud that some of the initiatives being considered by Alberta Health Services are based on models developed in my home area.

Mr. Speaker, I was also encouraged to see this government's commitment to continue with infrastructure projects throughout Alberta. There is the obvious benefit of job creation, but at the same time we can use this opportunity to update aging structures and build much-needed new ones at a time when costs are lower and prepare for future growth, which we know will come. In Lethbridge I know that a number of infrastructure projects are eagerly awaited, including building new schools and renovating the old ones.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly an historic time in Alberta. We're facing our first economic challenge since wiping out the debt and creating our sustainability fund, and we are being put to the test. Global economic conditions are putting incredible pressure on Canada and Alberta, but I have every confidence that this government's policies – past, present, and future – will allow us not only to survive global uncertainty but to thrive in it. I believe that this government will continue to be innovative and think outside the box in our quest to maintain that excellent quality of life we enjoy here in Alberta, and I believe the can-do attitude that built this province from the ground up will continue to sustain us as it always has in the past. To repeat something I said last year in my maiden speech – and I believe it even more relevant today – when all Albertans work together towards a common goal, there is nothing we can't accomplish.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, I believe the perfect example of that attitude is Lethbridge's own High Level Bridge. As many of you know, it's the highest and longest bridge of its kind in the world. When it was built, at the turn of the century, it was a true marvel of both engineering and sheer willpower, built by brave folks who understood the value of what they were doing. There were no guarantees about the future of that bridge, but those men and women understood that it needed to be built. This year Lethbridge is celebrating the hundredth anniversary of that High Level Bridge with a number of community events, including conferences, tournaments, and community parties. I doubt that the folks who built that bridge could have possibly imagined that their handiwork would not only be standing today but would still be used for its original purpose: to speed trains across the expanse of the Oldman River and increase the efficiency of the railroad.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to invite the members of this House and everyone in Alberta to make Lethbridge a destination this year, see this great steel monument of innovation, iron will, and hard work. When they see it, I hope they will take some time to ask themselves this question: if Albertans could build something like this a hundred years ago with only the tools available at the time, with all our resources and ingenuity what incredible feats could we accomplish today for our future generations?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the discussion

going on today, wide-ranging issues. I wanted to start with an issue that I've not heard raised in this Assembly before but that I think is appropriate to raise when we're discussing a throne speech, and it goes to the structure of our government. Now, my comments are not in any way meant as a reflection on the performance of the Lieutenant Governor or the Governor General or the Royal Family or anything like that. Frankly, I think it's time for us to begin a discussion of whether we want to continue in this country under the form of a constitutional monarchy, that leads to the process through which we actually have a throne speech. I'm just beginning to open this up to get people to think about it before I shift to other comments.

Through my life I've always been a loyal and supportive monarchist, so up until the last year the idea of a Speech from the Throne was to me not only something to debate and something to look at the government's agenda but also was a sort of charming and delightful and functional process of our government. In the past year I've found myself actually questioning the wisdom of our country continuing to be governed under the Queen of England. I suppose a year ago I would have been surprised to even hear myself say this, but I am increasingly coming to the mind that we need to replace the monarchy with some other form of government if we are to actually fulfill our destiny as a nation.

I think that having a Speech from the Throne, i.e. from Her Majesty's representative, continues somehow to reflect and inject a sense of colonialism into our society and into this Chamber. I think that we're at a point in our nation's history that we should open the debate again about whether it isn't time for us to move beyond being a constitutional monarchy and move towards having a structure of government in which the monarchy in Britain is replaced by something that's actually Canadian. I think that would be an important psychological step for our fulfilling our destiny as a nation. So I open up a little discussion there, which may or may not go anywhere.

I was disappointed in the contents of the throne speech. I don't think that'll be a great surprise to anybody. I am concerned that the government is not showing any great foresight in terms of anticipating where we need to be going. I am concerned, when I go through the throne speech, that this government is not taking the necessary steps to secure the long-term future of this province.

I'm going to start by just talking briefly about spending. This is an issue that I've raised many times. I actually began raising this concern, I think, when I was first elected as an MLA. It was certainly a consistent theme when I was Leader of the Opposition, and it will remain that way because I believe it. We as a Legislative Assembly year after year approve budgets and approve the plans laid out in the throne speech that in the long term are not sustainable. Last fall we had the Premier of the province saying in this Assembly that we have the highest spending, lowest taxing government in Canada. He said it with great pride, and he's right, but there's a problem with that. That's going to catch up to us, Mr. Speaker. There's just no way around it. If we don't begin addressing those issues, there's going to be a very, very rude awakening for the people of Alberta and for future members of this Assembly.

I was particularly disappointed in the throne speech when there was absolutely no mention of what I think was the most important document to come out of government in the last year, and that was the Mintz report. I thought, in fact, that the whole handling of the Mintz report was indicative of this government's bad attitude toward addressing the fundamentals of Alberta's sustainability. I don't know how many members of this Assembly have read the Mintz report, but everybody should. You should read it carefully because it lays out in very careful detail and very thorough analysis the fact that this spending and tax regime that we have in this province is not

going to work, that if we continue to spend and proceed in the way we are, there is a foreseeable point, as the Mintz report points out, where there will need to be a 40 per cent increase in taxes in Alberta. It's not going to work, Mr. Speaker, and there is nothing in the throne speech to give me any sense that that issue is being addressed.

When I look at the spending and behaviour patterns of this government compared to other provinces, I'm left astonished. We are spending – and the Premier freely admits it – far higher than other provinces. We're spending, I believe, 23 per cent higher than the average of other provinces. It's even more astonishing when you compare to other have provinces. You go to British Columbia; we are spending 28 per cent per capita higher than British Columbia. Now, it'll all get thrown back at me: well, where would you cut? You know, talking out of both sides of my mouth because we want to have strong public health care and good education and so on. But my point is this: where's the management of this money?

You go to B.C., and – you know what? – B.C.'s highways are actually pretty good. You look at the rankings of universities, and the UBC consistently ranks higher than any of Alberta's universities. You look at their provincial parks. You know what? They're a heck of a lot nicer than ours. You look at their environmental standards. You look at things like B.C.'s pharmacare program: considerably more comprehensive than Alberta's. They deliver public auto insurance. They actually own their own electrical company. They manage to do all of that at a standard that across the board is comparable to Alberta's – some places a little higher, some places a little lower – but they do it spending 28 per cent less per citizen. That raises a really big question: where's the value-for-money issue in this throne speech? It doesn't exist. It's like it hasn't dawned on the members of this government that we need to pay closer attention to how we're spending money.

4:10

There's a Chinese proverb, Mr. Speaker, that goes something like this: "Govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish." I think it's worth thinking about that for a minute. It tells you that the best way to govern a great nation is to pay close attention to the tiniest details. Cooking a small fish. Those are about the only kind I've ever caught in my life. I'm going ice fishing this coming weekend; maybe I'll have better luck.

Cooking a small fish, you know, you've got to attend to it every minute. You've got to attend to every detail. That's the whole point here. We need a government that has value for money front and centre. We're spending more than we need to. The only people who have real access to this information are the people sitting in the government benches, and it doesn't even appear in the throne speech.

We've heard comments today about how wonderful the government's strategy for savings is. I think that's delusional. If you want to see an effective strategy for savings, of course, Norway is always brought forward. Look at Alaska. Look at a number of countries in the Middle East. You can even look at Russia. They all have more effective strategies for savings than Alberta.

In fact, if you want to ask yourself, "How good is our strategy for savings?" just compare the value of the heritage fund today to what it was 20 years ago. The only long-term savings vehicle we have in this province is the heritage fund. If we have a good strategy for savings, surely you would think that the value of the heritage fund would be increasing. Or even go back to the time, Mr. Speaker, when you were first elected, and go back to the time when the Premier of Alberta was Don Getty. You know what? You'll find that the heritage fund was worth more then than it is today.

Now, we have a sustainability fund, which is a great idea. It's

open to some abuse as a slush fund, that I'm not keen on, but at least the sustainability fund is there. That will secure us through this year. There's the capital fund, which is pretty well fully allocated. But the harsh reality is that if we don't get a lot more serious, if we don't take a hard-core value-for-money audit of everything this government does, we're spending our way to a disaster. It's not sustainable. The government's own report, the Mintz report, proves that. I was disappointed and deeply troubled, in fact, that that issue isn't addressed anywhere. There doesn't even seem to be a consciousness of it anywhere on the government benches.

I think, as well, we need to look at how the government moves with booms and busts of the resource cycle. This is a time to be investing in capital expenditure. I think that countercyclical spending is good. We've not done that historically. I'd like to see something more explicit laid out in the throne speech to address that. The fact is that these booms and busts that we go through in Alberta are wasteful. All you need to do is go back 20 years. I can show people the figures for this. You go back to 1986. What was the highest spending government per person in Canada? Well, no surprise there; it was the Alberta government. The year that Peter Lougheed handed the torch to Don Getty, he handed Don Getty the most expensive government in Canada: 1986.

Well, Mr. Getty began cutting, and we all know that Mr. Klein, the next Premier, cut more drastically. So we went from the biggest spending government in the country in 1986 to 1996, when we were spending the lowest per person in the country. We weren't sustaining our infrastructure, and we weren't training the doctors and nurses. We found that that was unsustainable. Move forward to 2006, and who is the biggest spending government in the country again? Us, this government here.

Those kinds of swings are incredibly wasteful. They're wasteful in terms of infrastructure. They're wasteful in terms of the human resources that make a society work. That kind of swinging should be brought to an end. I hope that this government understands that.

Where do we find ourselves now when we surf on these booms and busts and when we don't have a long-term savings strategy? Well, we find ourselves terribly exposed to international swings in oil and gas prices. We're at a point a mere few months after the price of oil dropped and the price of gas dropped. What are we doing? Well, there's a freeze on hiring new cancer treatment doctors, for example. There's a freeze on hiring new positions at the university. We're actually looking at a serious retrenching here. Where was the strategy to protect us from those swings in the value of world petroleum prices? It wasn't there, and we need one, Mr. Speaker.

There is a way to respond to that, and that is to have a long-term strategy to build up the heritage fund to a point where it can generate enough investment income to offset the royalties that come from oil and gas. It's absolutely doable. All kinds of groups have demonstrated that, but somehow this government doesn't get it. I would have been thrilled, Mr. Speaker, to have seen a throne speech that addressed those kinds of issues, a throne speech that said: we are going to review our spending carefully, and we are going to put in place a long-term savings strategy so that the next time the price of petroleum drops, we don't care because we've saved enough to have investment income that offsets it.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length, but I'm out of time. I hope I've given some food for thought to the members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. God bless technology. I was able to listen to the member on the Tannoy, and I'm wondering if he can just expand on the last series of points that he was making.

Thank you.

Dr. Taft: Sure. I'd be thrilled to. I love this 29(2)(a). I was a skeptic of it at one time, but it's actually quite useful.

I think, really, what I wanted to complete saying was just a little bit about a vision of where we could be going, Mr. Speaker, if we had a different kind of strategy. If we had a long-term strategy to build up a savings account to earn enough investment to offset royalties, that would be a huge step forward.

At the same time we need to understand that we have to invest in other resources of this society, the people and the infrastructure. I would have loved to have seen in the throne speech a plan for an endowment for postsecondary education so that we could actually turn Calgary and Edmonton and Lethbridge and Red Deer and every place in this province with a college or a technical school – Grande Prairie, Vermilion, and on and on – into bigger centres of excellence and invest in the one thing that we can be sure will secure the long-term prosperity and vibrancy of Alberta, and that's education. As it is right now, our universities and colleges and technical schools are having to tighten down the hatches because in the last few months the price of oil dropped. It doesn't make sense, and that's not a way to secure our future. We should work to ensure that our postsecondary institutions are independent of those pressures.

We also, of course, will need to attend to the vulnerable at this time. I was working near the front lines of that sector in the 1980s, when the bottom fell out of the economy, and I expect we're going to see this similar pattern in the next year, which is a huge increase in unemployment in Alberta, and that ripples through to family members, to children, to seniors. We need to as a government of conscience make sure that the vulnerable are well taken care of.

I'd suggest that we can rearrange a few priorities, which I questioned last fall. For example, why the heck are we channelling money to golf courses, to semi-private golf courses, or to drag racing strips or to horse racing or to a whole bunch of other things when there are much more severe needs? I think the public would agree with me and would probably get behind any member of this Assembly who says: "You know what? Let the people who drag race their cars pay their own bills. We're going to make sure that seniors who are needy or hungry kids going to school are looked after. That's a core business of government. Supporting golf courses and drag races and so on is not."

Those are a few of my comments, Mr. Speaker, and that's what I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech. Thank you.

4:20

The Speaker: Are there others with a question? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. One of the concepts that is coming around again is the idea of intergenerational debt. I heard that mentioned in the throne speech, and it's certainly something we heard a lot from the former Premier. Yet I had always found that in the choices that were made by that government, they shifted the debt onto the next generation instantaneously, mostly by affecting postsecondary students in the amount of their tuition fees and the entire set-up of the way their loans were working, the fact that they had to get more commercial loans. Do you see a transfer of debt intergenerationally continuing to happen or happening anew?

Dr. Taft: That was a complicated question, but I think it comes down to understanding that education is an investment not just for the students who are going to university or college or a school but

for us as a society. Having a well-educated citizenry is absolutely crucial to being a developed society. If we take that attitude, then we understand that this as an investment, and we don't want to burden the future generation with debt for that investment when we're the ones ourselves who are reaping its benefits. I think we need to be very alert to issues of intergenerational debt transfer, whether it's on education or whether it's in the environment or whether it's on finances.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, might I just convey thanks to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure for coming into this Assembly between Christmas and New Year's and climbing up there on his big ladders and replacing all the light bulbs. I think they're all functioning today.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and given my fear of heights it was quite a task.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to be able to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne today. I feel that even though the time has been shortened and this, in fact, also is my maiden speech, I could have passed off until next week to have done it, but I think it's important to Albertans that we finish today on a very strong and very hopeful note because that's exactly what Albertans are known for, and that's exactly what has been spelled out in our Speech from the Throne. So I'm going to take the few minutes that I have and speak a little bit about that.

The wisdom that I've seen in the Speech from the Throne speaks strongly to me, and it speaks strongly to the people of Drumheller-Stettler. My family has had a long history in that area. Next year we will celebrate the hundredth birthday of our farm. I am so proud of the things that have taken place in this province because of the leadership and because of the wisdom that have been shown throughout the years and that have been shown again in the Speech from the Throne and the directions that we've been taking. My grandson Luke this past year travelled with me on the tractor to go out and look after our livestock, and my grandson Luke is the sixth generation of my family to have done so on our property.

The area and the people of Drumheller-Stettler have so many things to celebrate because of the advantages that this province has brought to them, and this goes way back. I carry a reminder to let me know our place in this world and the significance of the things that we do but also to try and refocus that we have to do the positive things and that it's a big world and that many things have happened and that there have been many challenges that were faced. One of the things that I carry with me is a piece of petrified wood from the Drumheller Valley. One hundred and fifty million years ago it was a tree. At the time that this piece of petrified wood was a tree, tyrannosaurus rex travelled in the valley in Drumheller. Scientists nowadays say that it was a meteorite strike that, in fact, sent them to their extinction, which puts into perspective the difficulties that we face today. Mr. Speaker, I don't find them to be difficulties; I find them to be challenges. As we've gone through time, at about the time the dinosaurs disappeared, the great wealth this province has in the oil industry appeared, and we today are enjoying that.

In my constituency we contribute greatly to that wealth in the province, and the people in my area appreciate it. My constituency is 420 kilometres across, and at the time that I was elected, I represented 28 elected bodies within my constituency. These people have given me a wonderful amount of insight into the things that they would like me to bring forward. They're very free with the information that they give you and with their opinions. Some of my colleagues in this room have relatives down there, and they could attest to that.

They go by a lot of things that they've thought about in the past, and one of the things that I'm always reminded of when I represent them is that they love the area that they're in, and they were the first environmentalists. The reason that we have people clamouring right now to save this pristine environment is because these people have been the environmentalists that saved that pristine environment over the last hundred years, and I thank them for it. Were it not for them, we would have nothing to protect, Mr. Speaker.

It was an anonymous poet that wrote this, but one of my constituents gave it to me many, many years ago to hang on the wall. The poem goes:

Sweet, clean air from east to west
And room to go and come.
I loved my fellow man the best
When he was scattered some.

They still believe that out there, Mr. Speaker. They like their open spaces, they like the pristine environment, and they like living in Alberta.

The Lieutenant Governor closed with: "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded, people who share the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve." Mr. Speaker, that's what an Albertan is. That's what an Albertan has always been. With that type of guidance and the type of guidance and the groundwork that have been laid out in the Speech from the Throne, Albertans need not fear the future no matter what they hear from some people.

They need to celebrate the past, celebrate the future, and prepare for it because what's happening right now, Mr. Speaker, is a correction globally. As we come out of the correction, because of the good decisions that have been made in the province and this groundwork that's been laid before us, we will come out of this stronger than we have ever come out before, with opportunities for my grandson that no other generation has ever seen. I am extremely optimistic and know and have confidence in the people of Alberta to

make the right decisions, to do the right things so that we go forward stronger than we ever have in the past.

The leadership that's been shown has shown so many results, and I've seen them within my community. As I look back through history, right back to a rather significant archaeological dig that was done on my property, I will talk about one other spot in history that I find extremely interesting. Six thousand years ago there was a volcanic eruption in a similar area to where Mount St. Helens took place. As the archaeologists work around the province, they hit an ash layer as they went down, and that ash layer signifies 6,000 years ago. Aboriginal peoples made their living off the land right where I live on the farm going back what they consider to be about 10,000 years ago, so approximately three times as long ago as when the pyramids were created.

This province has in the past, as it does right now, provided the things that people needed. We've seen so many changes. We've seen new approaches. At the time that my great-grandfather and my great-grandmother and my grandfather came to Alberta and homesteaded and went out where there were no trails and used oxen to drag the wagon out into the area, there were no trees where I live right now. Back in the days before the homesteaders came in, the aboriginal people used fire to bring the buffalo back. When the grasses grew old and needed renewal, they actually set strategic fires to burn the grasses away to bring back the green grasses so that the buffalo came to them instead of them trying to search them out.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. The hon. member should know that he'll be recognized next. He still has seven minutes and 50 seconds to participate in the Speech from the Throne if he so chooses, but the House now stands adjourned until next Tuesday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to February 12, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

- 1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)**
First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
- 2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

Issue 4

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 17, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back. I would ask all hon. members to remain standing after prayers so that we may pay tribute to former colleagues who passed away in recent days.

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

Mrs. Alice Hanson

May 6, 1927, to February 7, 2009

The Speaker: Hon. members, on February 7, 2009, Mrs. Alice Ann Hanson, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away. Alice Hanson was first elected in the election held June 15, 1993, and served until March 10, 1997. During her years of service she represented the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly for the Alberta Liberal Party. During her term of office Alice Hanson served on several select standing committees on Public Accounts, Public Affairs, and Private Bills.

Mr. Nick Dushenski

September 4, 1920, to February 13, 2009

The Speaker: Mr. Nick Dushenski, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away on February 13, 2009, at the age of 88 years. Mr. Dushenski was first elected in the election held August 5, 1952, and served until May 9, 1959. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Willingdon for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, or CCF, Party. During his term of office Nick Dushenski served on several select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; Law Amendments; Municipal Law; Public Accounts; Privileges and Elections; and Railways, Telephones and Irrigation.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families, who shared the burdens of public office. Family members of Alice Hanson are with us today in the Speaker's gallery. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. members Mrs. Alice Hanson and Mr. Nick Dushenski as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I would invite all to join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you guests who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. These guests are family members of our former colleague Alice Hanson. Son Chris Hanson and his spouse, Laura Kemp-Hanson, are joined by their daughter Sabrina and her partner, Trent Wilkie. I would ask you all to receive the warm welcome and the sympathies of this House on the passing of your mother.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you my friend and constituent the hon. Brent Rathgeber, MP for Edmonton-St. Albert, and his partner, Ms Katrina Black. Mr. Rathgeber is a member of the federal justice committee, and knowing that he is a law and order guy, I look forward to his support for Saskatchewan Yorkton-Melville MP Garry Breitkreuz's private member's bill to scrap the decade-old long gun registry. I would invite Brent and Katrina to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of students from Meyonohk elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. These students are participating in the School at the Legislature program this week. I had the privilege of meeting them during the reading week in September and as well in the rotunda just before the session. I would now ask the students, teachers Mr. David Fairfield and Miss Melissa Griswold, and parents Pauline So and Mrs. Gloria Goldthorpe to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a thrill today to introduce 10 of Sherwood Park's finest, the Divine Divas, the Red Hat ladies that have joined us today in the members' gallery. Their names are Marie Rossi, Carole Eastaugh, Maxine Richardson, Ingrid Brisebois, Juanita Brisebois, Gail Matheson, Judy Neuman, Eve Cockle, Shirley Hingley, and Norma Aksenchuk. Would they please rise, and would we all please now give them the warm welcome they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my constituent Mr. Ken Jones. Mr. Jones is not only a good supporter of myself and the community; he also has the distinguished honour of being the deputy fire chief and manager for Strathcona county. Mr. Jones has just today been presented with the Alberta emergency services medal from the hon. Cindy Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation and long-time friend. It's a great honour. We're all very appreciative of the great services that Mr. Jones has provided our province. He's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you 10 visitors from the Central Lions senior citizens' association. Central Lions is a newly renovated facility that carries a unique variety of services and activities for seniors throughout Edmonton, and I just happen to be fortunate enough for it to be within my constituency. I would ask the group to please stand and receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

1:40

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Mike Hoffman. Mr. Hoffman is manager of resuscitation education for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut. The Heart and Stroke Foundation is responsible for quality assurance in ensuring the reduction of incidents relating to cardiovascular disease through the provision and continued development of emergency care. Mr. Hoffman is a resident of Viking, Alberta. I'd ask him to stand and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very dedicated group of citizens, mostly from the Turner Valley-Black Diamond area, who have come to the Assembly today to bring their concerns about an overdue cleanup of the Turner Valley gas plant. As I call your name, would you please rise: Judyann Niemi, Sandra McCrone, Bonnie Commandeur, Julie Walker, Hedda Zahner, Sheryl Watson, Bob Niemi, Linda Abrams, and George Wallace, who is also a town councillor from Turner Valley. The group has been organized and headed by Roxanne Walsh. They're standing. If you would please give them the usual warm welcome to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you a very special person who has been like a brother to me, my cousin Michael Donovan. He's here in the members' gallery. He's president of Donovan Creative Communications, a very successful company here in Edmonton. I'm happy he came to join me for lunch even though I had to pay. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly the owners, investors, and operators of Green Power Solutions Inc. GPS electricity strives to create new, renewable electricity resources using, quite literally, horsepower. This product has applications for residential farm and business uses. I'd now ask my guests Sukhbir Bachhal, Frank Ignacio, and Jaspal Kalher to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly nine people from the Spirit of Edmonton. This group made history by recreating historic flights in an open cockpit biplane to celebrate 100 years of flight in Alberta. If you've been watching these historic re-creation flights, you'll know that there are few people as dedicated to their cause as these are: two in particular, Mr. Tom Hinderks, my friend, constituent, and pilot; and Mr. Curtis Peters, copilot. However, these two could not have done it alone. Seven other people made this historic celebration possible: Dr. Rod Macleod, Art Breier, Ed Doucette, Dave Heathcote, Bram Tilroe, Greg Mockford, and Nikki Cox. I'll be expanding more upon their roles in this in my member's statement this afternoon. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm greetings of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Black History Month

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to stand up in front of this House to talk about Black History Month. As you know, February is Black History Month in Canada and the United States of America. Many people talk with pride about the new President of the United States and the fact that he is the first African-American to hold that office, but Canada has its own rich heritage and traditions with respect to black history as does as Alberta.

A motion was established back in 1995 by the hon. Jean Augustine to create Black History Month as a way of recognizing the contributions that were made by black Canadians in Canada. They're more than escaped slaves and athletes and entertainers. Black Canadians have been explorers, translators, soldiers, scholars, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and, indeed, politicians from a time long before Confederation. Alberta's black pioneer heritage dates back to the mid 19th century, when several black pioneers found jobs in the untamed west. By the turn of the 20th century hundreds of individuals, many accompanied by their families, left their homes in Oklahoma and other nearby states to begin a new life in Canada. Anxious to purchase affordable homesteads offered by the government of Canada and desperate to escape a life of racial strife and discrimination, Alberta's black pioneers travelled north to Manitoba and eventually settled in scattered homesteads throughout northern Alberta.

The rich heritage includes black Americans who established farming communities like Amber Valley, where Samuel and Beulah Carothers brought with them their eight children. Having crossed the Canadian border at Emerson, Manitoba, they continued by train to Edmonton. From Edmonton the family along with several others formed a mule train and travelled another hundred miles to Athabasca Landing, where they blazed a trail to Pine Creek, later known as Amber Valley.

In Breton, where there is now a museum that was built in 1948, there were similar tales, also in Wildwood and Campsie. A heroic figure like southern Alberta rancher John Ware, if you can imagine back to the turn of the 19th century, was actually so revered that a thousand people turned out for his funeral, and many of us would love to be able to do the same today. Our own Jarome Iginla became the first black player in the National Hockey League to be a captain of an NHL team.

Like Alberta's many ethnic and racial groups, black Albertans have carved their unique place in Alberta's history with persistence and courage. I'm proud to be able to stand up here as the first black

minister and to be able to read a ministerial statement on Black History Month. It is also a privilege to be here with the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who was the first black MLA in this House. Like many of these people, Mr. Speaker, I understand what it's like because I moved to Alberta eight and a half years ago to look for a better life for my family. Even though I wasn't running away from racial discrimination, I knew it was a great opportunity to raise my family. We will work hard as members of this Legislature to ensure that future generations of Albertans, having learned the lessons that we have through our black history and the history of many other ethnic groups, strive to make sure that we continue to support the diversity and economic well-being of all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure indeed to rise in response to the minister's statement on Black History Month. If I may take this as an opportune moment to congratulate him on his wonderful accomplishment as our first black minister in cabinet.

The minister is correct in noting that the history of black people in Canada is multidimensional. It's a fascinating, sometimes tragic but ultimately uplifting story that continues to this day. As we celebrate the halfway point of Black History Month, we should take special note of the Alberta communities most directly shaped by black Canadians, places like Amber Valley, Breton, Wildwood, and Campsie, all started primarily by groups of black immigrants, many of whom left those communities to fight for Canada in the First World War and who later left those tiny communities hoping to find new opportunities in Alberta's big cities. Black Albertans certainly took full advantage of those opportunities. They have become our teachers, health care professionals, skilled trades, engineers, and community leaders, including, as already mentioned, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, who was once the mayor of the city of Leduc. They are entrepreneurs, scientists, lawyers, and artists.

In fact, one of Alberta's black artists is Patricia Darbasie, and I would encourage anyone interested in Alberta's black heritage to check out her play *Ribbon*, a one-woman show she wrote, performed, and directed. *Ribbon* explores the experiences of black pioneers who left the United States to settle in Amber Valley. Originally performed in 2005, *Ribbon* is going to make a comeback to the stage this year.

Black History Month is a time for all of us to reflect on how race, culture, religion, and sexual orientation can sometimes still divide us, even in these relatively enlightened times. We have had black mayors, a black minister. One day we will have a black Premier and Prime Minister, and another day, a little further in the future, such an event won't even be remarkable at all, just another citizen stepping up to serve the people.

Black history teaches us that bitter winters or economic downturns are impartial. They are challenges we must face together as one people united in our efforts to build a better future for our children. Black, white, or red; straight, gay, or transgendered; Christian, Muslim, or atheist; Liberal, Conservative, or socialist: we are all Albertans making history together.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I am thinking that you're probably rising to see if permission would be granted by the Assembly to allow your colleague to participate. Hon. members, we're going to need unanimous consent for two

things. One is to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to participate and, more importantly, to allow us to waive Standing Order 7(1.1), which says that the question period shall start at 1:50. I'm going to ask one question together with the same intent: is anyone opposed? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of the House. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak about Black History Month. The history of Canada that many of us learned in school had little to say about the contributions of Canadians of African and Caribbean origin, and the world history we learned was really European history. We did not learn much about Africa or its diaspora.

More recently historians have worked to uncover the stories of black Canadians. Through such research we can learn about the black Loyalist settlement in Nova Scotia and men such as John Ware, who played an important part in the early days of ranching in Alberta. We also know other prominent Canadians such as Clarence Miller, better known as "Big" Miller, who was an internationally renowned jazz artist from Edmonton. I had the honour, Mr. Speaker, of meeting Mr. Miller one evening at a black history event a number of years ago, and also I know that the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon was a regular attendee and has been honoured there as well.

There's much yet to be learned about the experiences of black Canadians as communities, as immigrants, as professional businesspeople and artists, and that's an area of history in which we need to know more about Canadians of all origins. That level of history is more difficult to uncover than the lives of notable individuals, but it is an aspect of history that we need to study if we are truly to understand the values that shape our communities. We all benefit from the attention paid this month to the history of black Canadians. It leads to a better understanding for all of us about the world we live in and share with all the peoples of the world.

Thank you very much.

Oral Question Period

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

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's health care system is in turmoil, and the minister of health is not making a positive contribution to the situation. The minister stated this weekend, and I quote: he is sick and tired of people whining about not enough health care facilities. End quote. My first question to the Premier: does the Premier stand behind the minister's comments?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I stand behind the decisions of this government to invest more than 50 per cent of the total capital fund into one city – and that's the city of Calgary – over the last four years, since 2004. That has been a substantial investment in health care facilities. We're continuing to invest more right across the province of Alberta, if at least once the hon. member would get up and at least acknowledge that in terms of the investment that went in, and we'll continue to do whatever we can to reinvest dollars across Alberta into health care.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When people have genuine concerns with a health care system, a health care system in turmoil, they have a right to be listened to and have their concerns addressed. Will the Premier tell Albertans who they should contact, then, if this minister dismisses unwelcome feedback?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health does not dismiss unwelcome feedback. In fact, he's been travelling the province corner to corner listening to Albertans to see how we can improve the quality of care, access to health care. You've got to remember that we're spending \$13 billion annually – that's about \$36 million a day – and we have to ensure that we constantly work together to improve the system.

In terms of the comments made, the minister can reply to that member in the next question.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister of health consider it unreasonable for citizens to demand that capital projects be delivered on time, on budget?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. This government committed some 222 million dollars to completely build out three floors of the expansion at the Peter Lougheed hospital. We will be completing that project at the end of August. At that time an additional 140 beds will be on stream in the city of Calgary, and that is in addition to all of the other projects that the Premier just mentioned.

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

Health Services in the Calgary Region

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many areas in Alberta – Calgary, Fort Saskatchewan, Grande Prairie – are expressing concerns over proposed delays and lack of funding for hospitals and health services. Communities, both urban and rural, are unsure about the state not only of existing services but planned facilities. To the minister: why will the minister not commit to full completion of the Lougheed expansion when Calgary is already facing capacity limits?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've stated several times in this Legislature that we are in the process of reviewing our overall capital plan for health care. I anticipate that that review will be completed sometime around the delivery of our budget. As the member is obviously well aware, there are significant cost escalations that have occurred in health care projects in this province, and we need to ensure that we are prudent with taxpayers' dollars before committing any additional funds.

Dr. Swann: Will the minister at least commit to a 2011 completion of the south Calgary hospital?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker, I cannot at this time.*

Dr. Swann: The town of Cochrane is facing the distinct possibility of losing radiology services. Why will the minister not support the town of Cochrane in ensuring continuing radiology services there?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that comment is not warranted. This government supports all Albertans in the achievement of equitable health care. What has happened in Cochrane is that there was a private – a private – provider of diagnostic services who has determined that it no longer was cost-effective to operate that facility. We have through the publicly funded health care system plenty of diagnostic facilities in the surrounding area, and the residents of Cochrane will be served very well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Returning Officer Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This past Friday in testimony to the Legislative Offices Committee the Chief Electoral Officer painted a disturbing picture – and I urge everybody to read the *Hansard* – of the run-up to the last election. He testified that he asked the government for a list of returning officers but was ignored for months. When he finally did get a response, it wasn't from the Premier or a minister but a political operative from the Progressive Conservative Party. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government hand off the selection of returning officers to a PC Party official?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, for that hon. member to ask the question in the House – I thought he was the one that was going to send the Chief Electoral Officer to be reviewed by the Auditor General because he was all upset with the operation of the Chief Electoral Officer. So kind of ironical.

Anyway, when this issue came up about appointing returning officers, even though the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of the Legislature, not of the Premier's office or anybody here – he's an officer of the Legislature – I said: if the Chief Electoral Officer wants to appoint returning officers, go ahead; please take that responsibility. I said that not once but twice. He still hasn't – I don't know – picked up on it, but I guess it's an issue for him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier, then, make an irrevocable commitment in this Legislature today, now, to change the legislation so that the appointment of returning officers is in legislation, put directly and solely in the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer? Will you make that commitment here and now?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of the Legislative Assembly, and all of the recommendations that come forward from the Chief Electoral Officer through the legislative reporting process will come forward to government. We'll scrutinize every one because they are important, because we constantly want to improve democracy in the province of Alberta. We'll take all of the suggestions that come forward, scrutinize them. If it requires legislation, it comes here to the floor of the Assembly at the most appropriate time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I hope everyone noted the Premier did not stick to his commitment.

My last question is again to the Premier. Given that a PC member, who left Friday's meeting early, stated unequivocally that

*See page 99, right column, paragraph 10

the Chief Electoral Officer's contract would not be renewed, has the government directed its members to terminate the Chief Electoral Officer's job because he spoke out about the role of the PC Party in appointing returning officers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't make the decision on the employment of the Chief Electoral Officer. He has a contract. That contract was agreed to by the Legislative Offices Committee of this Assembly. He's responsible and answers to the Legislative Offices Committee. Both sides of the House nominate members to that committee; they make that decision.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, very much in the same vein my questions are to the Premier. The last election in this province was a shambles. Nearly a quarter of Albertans were left off the voters list, disorganization was everywhere, and irregularities were widespread. It's clear that the Tory patronage system and the government's failure to provide lists of local returning officers until the last minute are to blame. The question to the Premier: instead of blaming scapegoats, why won't the Premier take responsibility and end control of Alberta's election machinery by the Tory party and do it right now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, during the last election the Chief Electoral Officer received the names of nominees for the position. He interviewed each and every one of them. He had refused some of the nominations. He might have hired new people as returning officers on his own. That process was in place, and I believe he must have been following that process in preparing for the election.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't know who the Premier is kidding. It's well known that the government was repeatedly asked to supply lists and failed to do so until the last minute, so the Chief Electoral Officer was unable to organize an enumeration because the Tory party didn't supply the names until the last minute. Having just conducted a leadership contest, the PC Party did not need a new voters list to identify its support, putting the other parties at a very large disadvantage. Will the Premier admit that this government sabotaged the enumeration to give his party an advantage in the last election?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member makes, actually, a very serious allegation in this House, and I would ask him to reconsider what he just said. First of all, you know, he can play politics to a degree because he has the immunity of this House, but if he's saying that some list that I had in my possession of those people that bought memberships in the PC Party to vote for me obstructed the succeeding election, I can't put those two together. I'd have him reconsider what he just said because we're treading on very serious ground here.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier commit to ensuring free and fair elections in Alberta by ensuring that legislation is changed so that it is the Chief Electoral Officer that is responsible for appointing local returning officers and do it now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've said it at least twice, perhaps three times. When the issue first came up, I said – for whatever reason, it

was like the government preventing it. I said to the Chief Electoral Officer: if you want the responsibility, go ahead; take it off our hands. Especially when, you know, you're trying to find people to work, to dedicate months to this particular role for the Chief Electoral Officer, it does take a considerable amount of sacrifice on behalf of those that do sign up. It is a very important responsibility. To tell you the truth, it was difficult to find people to do that, but we did. We worked with the Chief Electoral Officer. He interviewed all the people, made sure that they were trained well, and they did the job extremely well in this last election.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. member for Calgary-Varsity.

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations (continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Peter Lougheed Centre serves the fastest growing quadrant of the city of Calgary. In 2005 this government allocated \$222 million to fund the expansion of this facility. However, it appears that the funding is insufficient for the completion of this project. The residents of northeast Calgary are concerned that this noncompletion will affect the quality of the services that they will be receiving. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: when can we expect funding to come through so that northeast residents can access the quality services that they deserve?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, there was inaccuracy in the preamble, Mr. Speaker. This government committed \$222 million to complete the project, which was the completion of three floors in the expansion of the Peter Lougheed Centre. I want to also ensure that the hon. member doesn't leave the impression that somehow residents of northeast Calgary are not receiving quality health care. The Peter Lougheed hospital has been in existence for some – I don't know – 15, 20 years now, and what this expansion will do is add another 140 beds.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three of the six floors of the expansion appear to be unfunded. If a project is incomplete, then the services will be inadequate. In the throne speech Albertans heard that there is \$6 billion in the capital account allotted to infrastructure plans, including hospitals. To the same minister: will any of these funds be allocated for the completion of the Calgary Peter Lougheed Centre?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question earlier in question period. I cannot project what will be in the budget that will be introduced in this House.

However, I think it is very important to recognize what has been committed to health care in the city of Calgary in the last four years. Let me read this list: the South Calgary health campus, \$1.4 billion; the McCaig tower at the Foothills medical centre, \$389 million; the east addition to the Peter Lougheed Centre, \$247 million; the Highwood Tower expansion at the Rockyview general hospital, \$227 million; the Sheldon Chumir health centre in downtown Calgary, \$95 million. I'll finish it in the next answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The first floor is supposed to be the busy emergency room within the

hospital as well as provide access to the other already developed floors. However, it is sitting as an empty shell. Can the minister commit to providing funding for the first floor in the very immediate future for at least a partial operation of the expansion?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is somehow an impression left that emergency services are not being provided today at the Peter Lougheed hospital, and that is not correct. The Peter Lougheed hospital has had emergency services since the day it opened. Is the emergency facility in the right place? Maybe not. But as we will soon find out when the minister of finance brings forward a budget, much to the amazement of our friends in the opposition the money flow has stopped.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's children and youth are the most valuable and amongst our most vulnerable members of society. I'm sure that the minister charged with the protection of children and youth in Alberta has been informed of the disturbing allegations of abuse raised by CBC's *The Fifth Estate* program this past Friday concerning the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, AARC, in Calgary. To the minister: if AARC is, in fact, a recipient of government funding for the treatment of drug- and alcohol-addicted children and youth in Alberta, how many hundreds of thousands of public dollars has this private institute received?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did see the story that you are referring to, and I have to say that it is concerning to hear those kinds of allegations. It's certainly my job to encourage people to come forward with their allegations of abuse. I also want to say that I've heard from many families who have used AARC after terrible years and have seen some great success. I think the most important thing is that in terms of AARC my department does not have any capabilities or mandate to license nonresidential addiction treatment centres, so you may want to direct your questions to health.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The end does not justify the means.

Again to the minister: please explain if and how AARC, a recipient of public funding, is licensed and monitored to ensure that children and youth are safe and assure us that public dollars are actually helping, not harming, children and youth. If you're not able to provide those answers, I would pass it to the minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll answer that question. The Department of Health and Wellness through the former AADAC agency does provide funding to AARC. It receives about \$300,000 annually. The service is accredited by the Canadian Accreditation Council of Human Services.

I didn't have the opportunity to see the particular production, but I can tell you that you can talk to many people who have gone through the program in Calgary, and I'm not so sure that they would necessarily agree with this Mother Corp program out of Toronto.

Mr. Chase: I think you should be looking in the mirror at your own accountability rather than the public broadcaster.

Will the Minister of Health and Wellness, whose superboard has taken over for the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, reveal to Albertans what other unlicensed and unmonitored programs his ministry funds with public dollars?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think what is important here is that the member, who happens to be from Calgary, jumps on every opportunity he can to criticize that city and the volunteers who do outstanding work in that city. I will leave it up to him to not stand in this House and make these comments. Go back to Calgary, go to the AARC facility and make those comments in the AARC facility. He's pretty brave when he stands here, Mr. Speaker. I challenge him to go right to Calgary, to the AARC facility, and make those comments.

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

Summer Temporary Employment Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the current economic situation the youth in my constituency have expressed concerns about job prospects this upcoming summer. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is your department doing to increase the chances of these youths finding employment this summer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're making the summer temporary employment program even bigger and better this year. We've added more resources, and more jobs will be supported. The increase will be 450 new positions over last year. I know that last year we didn't have enough positions to cover all the demand, so we have added more positions this year. We provide \$7 an hour to help not-for-profit employers top up their STEP employees' wages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplement to the same minister: what kind of job experience can young Albertans expect to gain from a STEP employer?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, STEP positions offer a tremendously wide range of jobs, from university researchers in the areas of science, the environment, and medicine to caseworkers in criminal, civil, and family law as well as even tourism ambassadors or heritage interpreters with not-for-profit museums. These jobs provide summer experiences for young people that might lead to long-term careers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What is the benefit of this program to Alberta employers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the wage subsidy, STEP helps employers find very enthusiastic workers with fresh ideas, some new perspectives. The program can also result in an employer

finding a future full-time employee. So this is win-win for both employers and employees.

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

Oil Sands Development Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One thing that can be said for this government is that they like drafting strategies. But they always forget one key component: actual implementation. The oil sands strategy is a complicated matrix and one of so many plans that have been released that no one is sure exactly how it all fits together. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board. Given that over the years we've seen the SREM commitment, the Radke report, water for life, the energy strategy, and the land-use framework, what's new with the oil sands strategy? Particularly, which takes precedence to provide maximum protection for the environment?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear and has been very clear that in this government Environment takes responsibility to ensure that we manage our environment appropriately. The land-use framework merely identifies all the players that are involved in the development of the oil sands as a whole. The responsibility for funding for infrastructure remains with Transportation, land use with SRD, health issues with the health minister. This simply is the organization that brings them all focused on one path.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Given that oil sands production is targeted to reach 3 million barrels per day by 2015 and lease sales currently cover 65,000 square kilometres, with more in the pipeline, can the minister tell us if any of these new strategies apply retroactively; in other words, to what's already in the pipeline or only to new projects?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the land-use framework applies to what we're doing going forward. It just doesn't make sense to say that 20 per cent is the right number to set aside. Go find out what the biodiversity is that we need to protect and then implement it as we go forward. We can't change the past, but we can learn from it. The Department of Environment working with the Department of Energy has identified that we're going to change how we deal with tailings ponds. That's a go-forward. We can spend time dwelling in the past or use this document and go forward.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. Given that government has already rejected calls from CEMA to suspend new lease sales in sensitive areas, thereby establishing conservation offsets, why is the government including the same recommendation in the new oil sands strategy? You've already said no to it once. Now you're going to say yes to it when you propose it? Explain how that works.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure if the hon. member means that you get more done by listening to people who aren't very positive or sure about what they want or who are more negative. Or do you sit down with people who would like to see balanced, environmentally responsible progress, like industry, like the municipalities, like the environmental groups that want to work to make it better? We don't put all of the report onto a single entity. It's not an industry report. It's not an environment report. It's an all-encompassing report.

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

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations

(continued)

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. This past weekend, as we know, there were several reports about construction at the Peter Lougheed Centre. Many of the reports indicated that Calgary was somehow being shortchanged. Can the minister explain to my constituents and to Calgarians the rationale for only completing three of the floors at the Peter Lougheed Centre?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this will probably give me an opportune time to let Calgarians know what else we've invested in this city in the last five to eight years. I remind the hon. member that we just a few years ago opened the new Alberta Children's hospital, which cost taxpayers \$241 million. There's the south diagnostic treatment centre, at \$10 million; the Okotoks community health centre, at \$10 million; the Wing Kei centre, at 4 and a half million dollars. I could go on, but it's all documented in government budget documents. I guess all I can say is that we will make decisions as a caucus. The decisions on capital planning in this government will not be made by contractors and columnists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I'd like to shed more light on this issue rather than heat. I'm just wondering if this is standard practice. What criteria are used to determine whether a facility is fully built out or not?

Mr. Liepert: Under the previous regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, each regional health authority provided us with their three-year capital plan, and then it was aggregated across the province and then budgeted for. We've been working closely with Alberta Health Services to ensure that the capital we do invest meets the way we need to deliver health care in the 21st century, and that is an ongoing process. In this particular case, as I've mentioned previously in question period, 140 beds will come on stream at the end of August.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the hon. President of the Treasury Board. Alberta has invested significantly in capital infrastructure over the past several years to a tune of approximately three times over the average of most Canadian provinces. Many of these capital projects are seen as one-time investments, but in reality capital projects have ongoing operational costs. To the hon. President of the Treasury Board: before capital infrastructure projects are approved and funded, does the government assess the long-term operational costs of the project?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, yes, we do. Have we done a good enough job in the past of identifying all of the costs that go with institutions? Probably not, and the difference is extreme. If it's a replacement hospital, for example, you may save money in operational costs from better heating and better efficiencies, so there may not be as great a cost. If it's a new hospital or a teaching hospital or a specialized hospital, like Mazankowski, or one with research components, the operating costs, obviously, are higher. We try to

put as much of the information as we have into the equation so that the departments can budget on a go-forward basis for new capital projects.

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

Turner Valley Gas Plant

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1988 the Alberta government bought the Turner Valley gas plant for its historical significance. However, they have ignored the very real problem of the plant contaminating water sources. Citizens have had to struggle with the government to take real action for years, and they are here today looking for answers. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Government documents state that the ministry has accepted responsibility for the historical preservation of the site and also responsibility for the cleanup, so why has the government abdicated its responsibility to ensure proper cleanup of the site to residential parkland standards?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member has mentioned, we did take responsibility under Culture and Community Spirit for remediation of the site. We spent over \$11 million to ensure that there was a membrane and a boundary put in to make sure that no contaminants were exposed to the Sheep River. We have remediated the site in parts to residential standards and in some to industrial standards. The residential standards are for those areas that people will be walking through. It hasn't been determined what we're going to do with the site in its complexity. Right now, until we make a decision, we're not going to go and spend an untold amount of dollars to make sure that we remediate that to a residential site if it's not prudent.

Ms Blakeman: Well, back to the same minister: how long are these residents expected to wait while the department figures all of this out? When are you going to make a decision and implement an actual plan that will help the people living there?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's amazing. The hon. member should know that right now we're in tough economic times not only in Canada but throughout the world. It's prudent right now to see where we're going forward as a government to determine what our priorities are on expenditures. We have made sure that the site is safe and that the site is contained. When we are in a position to be able to go forward, if we're able to go forward, then we'll make that decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, my next question, then, will be to the Minister of Energy. How on earth, if the government cannot even clean up one little historical site after 21 years, can anybody believe that the government would be capable of cleaning up the oil sands or a tailings pond or a strip mine or an abandoned well or anything else? How can we possibly take you seriously when you can't even clean up one little historical site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Albertans can see the difference between a plan that the Alberta government has put together cross ministry – SRD, Environment, Energy, and others in this government – to address environmental

issues that we have relative to our production. Albertans can see the difference between a positive plan like that and some rhetoric that's hyped by somebody that wants to create an issue that isn't there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Peter Lougheed Centre Renovations (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend when the minister of health was criticized for failing to complete upgrades to the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary, he petulantly replied that he was, quote, sick and tired of his, quote, whining constituents. Actually, it's Calgarians who should be sick and tired. This minister is failing them, and when they called him on it, he acted like a bully.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

Ms Notley: His name-calling is an embarrassment to every other member of this government. To the minister of health: why won't you apologize for calling Albertans whiners?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the member lives in Edmonton so probably didn't have the opportunity to read the quote as it was. In fairness, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who is also a resident of Calgary, actually got the quote correct. Quite frankly, I'm not even going to respond to the question.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's pretty clear that Albertans were called whiners by this minister. The Peter Lougheed Centre expansion project has turned into this health minister's personal bridge to nowhere. It's an empty shell: no ground floor, no upper floors, no permanent emergency room, and no capacity to deliver the essential health services expected from an upgraded hospital. As I noted, when he was questioned, he called people whiners. To the minister of health: why won't you accept responsibility and apologize to these Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, maybe the member needs to take a look at how some of those questions are asked and determine who I may have been referring to and who I may have not been referring to. What I was referring to was not the vast majority of Calgarians who recognize and appreciate the investment we have made in that particular city in health care. It certainly wasn't the 60,000 constituents of mine, which she alleged that I claimed were whiners. You know, we have a couple sitting over in the corner right there, and they're doing a good job of it right now.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Premier. His minister just implied that the only people who might deserve an apology are those who agree with this government's proposals and that those who might actually say that they need more in health care deserve to be called whiners. Will the Premier ask his minister to apologize to the Albertans that this minister called whiners for raising legitimate concerns about health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member is a lawyer, I guess, by profession. You and I can read the same thing, but if we're both lawyers, we have different interpretations. I thought I'd get a laugh out of that, but I guess not.

You know, how much time of the Assembly is spent here actually debating what was said, what wasn't said, what did you mean? The fact is that the original plan called for six storeys. The first three storeys to provide 140 beds: that'll be completed this year. The

other three: while the crane is at the hospital, rather than dismantling it and bringing it back later, we shelled in another three floors for future expansion. That to me, Mr. Speaker, is a very good capital plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Victims Restitution and Compensation Legislation

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not a whiner, but I do have a question today. Albertans are growing increasingly concerned about gang-related violence in their communities. In Calgary alone there have been several shootings since the beginning of this year linked to organized crime, including one that claimed the life of an innocent bystander in my constituency. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. We are all very proud of the passing of Bill 50 last session, but how will Alberta's new Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act address the growing problem of gang activity?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to stand here and provide some information to the House with respect to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act. This legislation, of course, was a tremendous success for this House, which supported it unanimously. It was a co-operative effort between chiefs of police, Crown prosecutors, and people in the community, who know that drugs are a problem. Drugs lead to a great deal of violence. Anything we can do to try to help the police to stop this activity from taking place and to pre-empt criminal activity is going to be a success for this province, and that is what we've done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:30

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. How does this legislation differ from powers already available to police and prosecutors pursuant to the Criminal Code?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is important legislation because what we did last year as part of our safe communities initiatives was sit down with police officers, and police officers told us that while the Criminal Code did give them some powers, they needed to be able to pre-empt this criminal activity. They know what's going on on the streets, and they need to be able to stop criminals who they anticipate will also get involved in violent crime. This legislation has allowed them to do that. Since it was proclaimed, on the 16th of December, we've had tremendous success in seizing property, all sorts of property, and it's stopped people who are committing crimes from profiting from their business.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister: is this simply legislation on paper, or is this being put into action?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had tremendous success with this legislation. We've strengthened the civil forfeiture office in Calgary and in Edmonton. We've dedicated special prosecutors to this activity. We've provided resources to police agencies in the major cities. We've made sure that the police have the resources that they need to seize property. We have been able to seize a tremendous amount of property, and over the next couple of weeks we'll be able to announce exactly how successful this has been in dollar values.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Third-quarter Fiscal Update

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer, when the surplus was projected to be 8 and a half billion dollars, the finance minister said, and I quote, you don't wear the bearskin till you've shot the bear, end quote, as a rebuke to those who were demanding that the government plan for the future by reducing spending and increasing savings. Well, the bear is alive and well as I speak. The minister took aim, fired, and missed her target by a mile. To the minister of finance: since the minister is so concerned with getting the story right, as she puts it, before announcing the budget date – and that's good; budgets shouldn't start with the words "once upon a time" – when will the third-quarter update be released to at least give Albertans some idea of where our economic future is headed?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the third-quarter update, as it always does, will come at the end of this month, and in due course we'll publicize the date and the time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will the minister be announcing the savings plan that the Mintz report stated was necessary in order to avoid huge tax increases in the years to come?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in the future, again, I will make sure that the hon. member gets adequate information so he's aware of when we will talk further about our response to the investment and savings strategy.

Mr. Taylor: Gosh, Mr. Speaker, is that going to be, like, a private conversation, or is she going to share it with the people of Alberta?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we always publicize the dates. I thought that perhaps the hon. member was concerned that he might miss it, so I'd be very pleased to just make sure that he gets a call to let him know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Legislation

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December 2008 the new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act received royal assent. Despite extensive public hearings by the Standing Committee on Health and a report that was tabled in the House with recommendations that were accepted by government, I continue to hear from constituents expressing concerns that the legislation removes the right of represented individuals to make their own decisions. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Are my constituents' concerns well founded?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would like to set the record straight. The Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is a very good piece of legislation. It is designed to enhance the protection of Albertans who are not able to make their own decisions. The act was created in the best interest of those who need it most, focusing on a least-intrusive approach to respecting Albertans' right to make decisions for themselves for as long as possible. This act increases the choices available to people who need help making decisions, providing a continuum of choices. The AGTA presumes adults are capable of making their own decisions until proven otherwise.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that. An additional concern of my constituents is that the legislation did not go far enough to address the potential abuse – physical, financial, and otherwise – of elderly Albertans and persons with disabilities. To the minister: what measure specifically is her department taking to address this issue?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the abuse of vulnerable citizens is a huge concern of this government, and we are taking real, measurable steps to continue to protect them through three new pieces of legislation. The new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act makes improvements by requiring more safeguards to protect assisted or represented adults, the new Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act will help ensure that Albertans receive quality accommodation and services and requires operators to adhere to the accommodation standards, and the Protection for Persons in Care Act will continue to ensure the safety of all Albertans in care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister. The final and most frequent concern my constituents express pertains to capacity assessment and the question of criteria and who specifically will be permitted to perform capacity assessment. The legislation left this issue to regulation. I'd like to ask the minister if she'd advise the House what progress her department's making to enhance the capacity assessment process?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the new AGTA provides for a more standardized capacity assessment model, that includes informing the adult about the purpose of the assessment and their rights to refuse to participate if they wish. The capacity assessor meets with the adult and conducts an in-depth interview after ensuring that a medical evaluation has been conducted. In addition, training is being provided to capacity assessors, and guidelines will be publicly available to further standardize and enhance the capacity assessment process. Once the new AGTA is declared later this year, it will replace the 30-year-old Dependent Adults Act.

Taser Use by Law Enforcement Personnel

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, recent survey data from the University of California showed a sixfold increase in deaths among detainees during the first year after California police departments deployed tasers. The RCMP recently toughened guidelines to restrict deployment of tasers unless there is an immediate danger to an officer or a member of the public. Will the Solicitor General commit to imposing these same standards for Alberta enforcement agencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to inform the hon. member and all members of this House and all Albertans that Alberta already has some of the strictest guidelines regarding the use of tasers, certainly in North America. We will continue to review those, and if there's a need to change them, we will. That being said, they're doing the job.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, last month the minister reported that 100 X26 tasers could be tested per week at a cost of \$15,000. Can the minister inform Albertans how many of the remaining 300 tasers have been tested?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated a couple of weeks ago, we have tested the first hundred of the 340 tasers that are the X26 model. We're reviewing the results of that first 100 that have been tested, and when that review is completed, we will decide what course of action to take to test the remainder.

Mr. Hehr: Well, given the University of California study and given the fact that these X26 tasers could be firing outside of range, wouldn't it be more prudent for the Solicitor General to simply pull these tasers off the street and commit to not putting them on the street until they are tested?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, again, when we made the decision to allow those 340 tasers to remain in active use, we balanced that against the risk of somebody getting a jolt that would exceed 50,000 volts. When you weigh that against the fact that in Alberta since 2005 that particular instrument has been used 2,300 times, there have been two deaths that have been associated with the use of that instrument. That being said, there are probably hundreds of lives that have been saved because the only alternative in a number of these instances would have been lethal force.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development announced a new direction to facilitate the sustained success of our livestock and meat industry when he announced the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. This strategy was met with reservation from several of my constituents. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: is there now broad support for the strategy, and can my constituents be assured that the industry-wide consultation is going on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly am confident in saying that, yes, there is support through Alberta's livestock and meat industry, and it continues to grow. It certainly is growing with support from the federal government. The industry's involvement is absolutely critical to creating a more profitable future. A number of industry advisory committees have been formed to ensure that industry input is there for us as we move forward. I also met with a group of producers from the hon. member's constituency last week to discuss exactly these problems.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the greatest concerns for my constituents is the mandatory component of age verification. To the same minister: is industry still concerned about this component, and why is it so critical that livestock be age verified?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, industry clearly demonstrated its support for the initiative. Earlier this month we announced that more than 83 per cent of the calf crop, or about 1.5 million calves, has now been age verified. Key markets, including many of the Asian countries, now insist that all animals be age verified. We now will have a critical mass for the offshore markets as they become available. The federal government has recently secured an agreement in principle for the sale of age-verified beef in Hong Kong, so we have to be able to provide assurances to these markets on food safety and traceability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you. Many primary producers feel that the responsibility to age verify rests completely on their shoulders, yet it's the upstream industry players like feedlots and packing plants that reap the benefits and the premium. To the same minister: is there an unfair balance here? What's the benefit that cow-calf producers will see when they age verify their beef?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right: cow-calf producers are the ones that are age verifying their animals. But everyone in the value chain will reap the benefits of this, including the cow-calf producers. As I said before, 83 per cent of the calves are now age verified. Age verification will and already has allowed some new markets to open. Increased market access means more demand for the products and increased profits, and it means a future for our industry. The status quo just was not working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Recruitment of Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this House we asked the Minister of Employment and Immigration about a proposed trip to Germany to recruit workers to this country. We find out that the only firm from Alberta that is interested in attending at this time is from Edmonton, and they are trying to recruit five cabinetmakers. My first question is to the minister. How much is this trip to recruit these five cabinetmakers going to cost the taxpayers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the exact details of how much it's going to cost us. I want to mention to the member that Alberta has been working with the German government on recruitment since the year 2000. Over the years – and that comes and goes – we've had as many as 40 employers from across Canada participate in the job fair. This year we've got less, and we anticipate that these will vary from year to year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that Service Canada on their jobfutures.ca website

advertises current conditions for cabinetmakers as having limited work prospects because the hourly wages are below the average and the unemployment rate is 10 per cent, above the 2004 average of 7 per cent, when there are limited job opportunities for cabinetmakers now, why are you spending tax dollars recruiting cabinetmakers in Germany? It doesn't make sense.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the fact that in order to get a federal permit to hire a foreign worker, a Canadian company needs to show that it has made every effort to find workers locally. Participants, certainly, are down in the fair that we are going to in Germany, and it's sort of a reflection of what's happening. But those individuals are short five cabinetmakers, so they are going over to find them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt in this hon. member's mind that the Premier certainly needs a good cabinetmaker because the present composition over there is a little bit lax, including the hon. member in that department. You're certainly not doing your work.

Before you scheduled that visit to Germany, to Essen and Leipzig, why did you not look at Service Canada's outline and see that we do not need any cabinetmakers from abroad because of the current conditions, as advertised on the Service Canada website?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the Canada job fair is a partnership that we have between the governments of Germany and Alberta and with many other provinces in Canada. Germany will identify areas where they've got surplus workers; we identify areas where we've got a lack of workers. The employer participating does pay a fee to be there to offset costs. Generally our travel costs, if I remember, tend to be around the \$4,000 mark to send a few of our employees over there to do that. That is what we're doing in Germany at this stage.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

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

Spirit of Edmonton Flight

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The year 2009 is the 100th anniversary of aviation in Alberta. The Alberta aviation heritage museum, located in the City Centre Airport in the Edmonton-Calder constituency, has taken on a fascinating project to honour our aviation heritage. They have re-created both the first airmail flight from Winnipeg to Edmonton and, most recently, the diphtheria vaccine flight to Fort Vermilion, which I understand we will be hearing more about in a moment.

Many of us have flown in small, enclosed aircraft in the winter; none, I suspect, have flown in an open cockpit biplane at 20 below zero. When you take the wind chill from the propeller into account, it is absolutely remarkable that the aircrew were able to survive the journey. It explains, too, why my friend Tom chose to sit in the back.

This tells us a lot about aviation enthusiasts in Edmonton today and in the past, and it tells us that they are extremely dedicated to their cause. It also tells us a great deal about the value people place

on being able to make aviation a public event. International media attention was paid to that tiny airplane and those two intrepid pilots. The community kicked in the money, the van, the repairs, and the fuel.

Mr. Speaker, it is no accident that Edmonton-Calder should be home to the *Spirit of Edmonton*. Aviation is key to my constituency and to this province, so it is great to see nine people celebrate this province's rich history and engaging Albertans in this celebration. They are truly connecting Alberta's past with its future, and I thank them for doing so.

The Speaker: As the flight went north to Peace River, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Peace River.

Spirit of Edmonton Flight

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past week I had the honour to visit the community of Fort Vermilion and partake in the re-creation of the mercy flight. It marks a series of events that began in December of 1928, when Mr. Bert Logan, the Hudson's Bay Company factor, was taken ill in the community of Little Red River. His wife, who was a nurse, recognized what she thought were the symptoms of diphtheria and, greatly alarmed, dispatched Billy and Bobby Gray to drive a team of horses up the river to Fort Vermilion. It took three days. They had to probe the ice ahead of the horses to make sure the river would bear the weight. They returned, another three-day trip, with Dr. Hamman, who confirmed the diagnosis of diphtheria. Three days back again to the village of Fort Vermilion, where Dr. Hamman dispatched Joe Lafleur and William Lambert to drive a dog team up the river to Peace River, a 12-day journey, all of which occurred in 30 and 40 below weather.

Once the Peace River authorities were alerted, they contacted authorities in Edmonton. Pilots Wop May and Vic Horner were dispatched in an open cockpit biplane and flew with no instruments, no maps up to the community of Fort Vermilion with stops in McLennan and Peace River, an unbelievable feat, Mr. Speaker, re-created by two of the gentlemen sitting in the gallery opposite in just phenomenal conditions of brutal turbulence and cold weather just this past week.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, it's quite a remarkable series of events marked by the feats of remarkable people. It's remarkable in one instance in that it's the first use of aircraft in Canada for a medical emergency and, of course, the first time that the Edmonton City Centre Airport was used in a medical emergency.

We in the north have come since that event to rely on the Edmonton City Centre Airport, and medevac flights from the north are a crucial part of our health care infrastructure. We'd sure like to see it continue, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Heart Month

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February is more than Valentine's Day and Family Day; it's Heart Month. During this month organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation focus on raising awareness of heart disease and informing Albertans of the risks and warning signs associated with heart disease.

A heart attack is caused by the interruption of blood flow to the heart. A stroke is caused by the interruption of flow to the brain or the rupture of blood vessels in the brain. It's estimated that 70,000 Canadians have heart attacks and 50,000 have strokes each year.

Today our children are at greater risk of developing heart disease. Youth obesity rates are increasing while activity levels are decreasing. In Alberta about 22 per cent of children and youth are overweight or obese. Kids as young as six are being diagnosed with high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. This can be prevented by having a healthy diet and a more active lifestyle.

The government of Alberta supports the Heart and Stroke Foundation by encouraging Albertans to stay healthy, make wise nutritional choices, and maintain an active lifestyle.

Please join me in congratulating the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta, NWT & Nunavut for raising awareness of heart disease and stroke and for the contributions they have made towards achieving their goal of eliminating death and disability from heart disease and stroke, and a special thank you again, Mr. Speaker, to Mr. Mike Hoffman, who was in here earlier today.

Thank you.

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

West Edmonton Skateboard Park

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to participate in an announcement last week regarding funding for the west Edmonton skateboard park. Our government, through the major community facilities program, is providing a matching grant of \$415,000 to help with the construction of this park. Now, this might seem like your average funding announcement, but this project is a testimony to the strength and the spirit of our communities and to what can be accomplished when we work together. It's an example that we all have the power to make a difference no matter how old we are.

The idea behind this skateboard park came from some teenagers in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. These young people saw a need for kids to have a safe place to skateboard. They went door to door to raise money. They got not one but four community leagues interested and involved: the Callingwood-Lyburn Community League, the Lessard community league, the Willowby Community League, and the Westridge/Wolf Willow community league. That sparked interest from the city of Edmonton and our government.

Mr. Speaker, these young people had a dream, and they have worked hard to see it realized. People of all ages will benefit from their efforts when the park opens this summer. I'm delighted our government has been able to help support the communities of west Edmonton and add to our quality of life through this important community investment program.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Volunteer Community Policing Patrols

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So many of us go to sleep at night unaware of the many services that protect our safety. These services also protect us from crime. We forget the hard work 24 hours a day that the police service, sometimes under dangerous and stressful conditions, accomplishes. The police across the province are assisted in their duties by many volunteers, who help with community-based policing by providing extra eyes and ears for crime prevention.

The Ottewell community patrol in Edmonton-Gold Bar was one of the first volunteer community patrols. It started in 1993. In April 2008 the patrol changed its name to the Southeast Central Community Patrol to better represent the southeast-central neighbourhoods of the fine city of Edmonton.

In the last 15 years the Southeast Central Community Patrol can take credit for many things, including 39 warrants executed, 105 arrests confirmed, 566 patrols completed, 2,352 suspicious persons reported, over 31,000 hours volunteered, and over 293,000 kilometres driven protecting our communities. The volunteers continue to patrol 15 communities and 14 industrial areas in southeast Edmonton. The volunteer patrol welcomes new members who are willing to contribute time, energy, and their own vehicles and gas expenses in exchange for the satisfaction of helping the Edmonton Police Service keep our neighbourhoods safer.

Community patrols across the province, Mr. Speaker, need more volunteers. Interested citizens over 18 years old need only contact their local police to apply. I would urge all hon. members of this Legislature to consider a tax credit for citizens who volunteer for community crime prevention patrols. This provincial tax credit could really help community patrols recruit needed volunteers.

Thank you.

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

National Homelessness Conference

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to let you and other members of the Assembly know that tomorrow the University of Calgary is hosting the second annual National Homelessness Conference, which will bring together 800 of Canada's leading experts in the field of homelessness. This three-day conference will provide an opportunity for policy-makers, researchers, service providers, and people experiencing homelessness to come together and share research, ideas, and best practices.

Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to attending this important conference along with the MLA from Red Deer-North, and I'm pleased to inform the House that the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs is a keynote speaker at the conference and is participating in the panel discussion on policies and issues related to homelessness. Several members of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, including Dr. Gayla Rogers, dean of the Faculty of Social Work and my former professor at the U of C, and Mr. Larry Scarbeau, executive director of the Alberta secretariat, will deliver presentations at the conference.

Homelessness, Mr. Speaker, is a matter of great concern for Albertans. We know that there are ranges of factors both structural and personal which can result in someone being homeless. We also know that managing homelessness through a network of emergency shelters will not break the homeless cycle for people. As the number of homeless people increases across the country, so does the cost to communities and governments to care for these individuals. Many of Alberta's municipalities and Alberta governments have been developing 10-year plans to end homelessness as we know it today in our province. This is important work, and I commend the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and hundreds of Albertans who have contributed thousands of hours to resolving homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a province built by inspiration, hard work, and communities caring for friends, family, and neighbours. Alberta is moving aggressively to end homelessness. I would like to ask the Assembly to join me in wishing all organizers and delegates a very successful conference.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests in the public gallery have waited a long time. I am very pleased to

present on their behalf a petition with some 2,130 names on it. Most of the signatures are from people living in Turner Valley, Black Diamond, and Okotoks, all very fine places in southern Alberta. These members are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to ensure that sources of contamination at the Turner Valley Gas Plant site are properly identified and the site is remediated and reclaimed in accordance with Alberta Environment's standards for residential and parkland land use." Thank you very much for all your hard work.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of nine reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short staffed, including one report which shows residents were served their breakfast late and cold because of the lack of staff that day.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling today. This is from earlier in question period. It's from jobfutures.ca. It's the current conditions for employment for cabinetmakers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're now up against Standing Order 7(7): "at 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." However, there's one aspect that we have to deal with, and that has to do with points of order and points of privilege. The chair will exercise the authority given to him under Standing Order 2 to call on the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to deal with the point of order he wanted to raise.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h): a Member will be called to order by the Speaker if that member "makes allegations against another Member."

Earlier today in question period the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona stated:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend when the minister of health was criticized for failing to complete upgrades to the Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary, he petulantly replied that he was, quote, sick and tired of his, quote, whining constituents.

Like all members in this Assembly and, I would hope, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I take my constituents very seriously, and I take what they say very seriously. Under no circumstances did I make that quote.

I would expect that this member, with the legal training that she has, would have verified those accusations before uttering them. In fact, I would like to table five copies of a *Calgary Herald* article which seems to have been the main research document for the two opposition parties today for question period. In it I am quoted as saying that I'm sick and tired of people whining about not enough health care facilities in this city.

Unless this member can provide me with additional quotes that I didn't make but may have been alleged to have made, I would ask that she withdraw those comments. I would even suggest that she might be apologizing to me rather than me apologizing to her.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't aware that this was coming up.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. You were aware because the hon. minister raised it during the question period.

Ms Notley: Sorry. I must have missed it then, Mr. Speaker. Nonetheless, I will say this much in looking over my questions, that I may have forgotten to say "end quote." I noticed that when I was responding to *Hansard's* request. In my question what I'd meant to say was, "quote, sick and tired, end quote," then subsequently say, "quote, whining, end quote." To the extent that I was not clear on that, I apologize to the House and to the minister. I will say, however, that as far as I'm concerned, for the minister of health all Albertans are constituents with respect to that. To the extent that there was a misunderstanding with respect to my meaning, I'm sorry for that. I think that's the extent of what I have to say.

The Speaker: Our tradition is that when an apology is offered, it is accepted, and we move on.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 12: Mr. Hayden speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Infrastructure, as I recall, you had nearly eight minutes.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. For the constituents of Drumheller-Stettler I believe many wonderful things have happened in this province. I think we are at a point again where it is time to celebrate. The Speech from the Throne gives direction that's proven to work and has put us in the enviable position of being the best positioned jurisdiction in North America to enter into the situation that we face today.

Mr. Speaker, this global economic correction that's taking place will without question affect Albertans, but the preparation that this government has taken on will put us in a better position and a better situation with respect to how we come out of the global economic crisis and the opportunities that it brings forward. We're talking about a situation where there will be opportunities for Albertans. Absolutely there will be difficulties that we have to face, but with the type of quality direction that we have, I know we'll do very well.

On Thursday I spoke about the history of the province and a bit of the history in my constituency and the fact that next year my family will be celebrating 100 years on the family farm. I get a great deal of advice and a great deal of direction from my constituents. This year I will be attending 14 celebrations of centennial farm awards, and those folks have been through the tough times.

I mentioned previously that we've seen tough times, and I went back in history last week to talk a bit about it. Of course, the

toughest time would've been the meteorite hit when we lost the dinosaurs in Drumheller-Stettler. It pales in comparison to what we're dealing with today.

When I go back in the history of our constituency and our province, my family arrived at about the time that our province was formed. At that time the prairies in our area had no tree cover because of a practice that the native North Americans used in burning off the grass to bring the buffalo back. There was not habitat for the biodiversity that we have nowadays. It's greatly improved.

Our health care system. Throughout the years, with the direction that this province has taken, we've seen Albertans' life expectancies increase dramatically.

We've seen unbelievable opportunities, Mr. Speaker, for education, of which my family have been beneficiaries.

We've seen difficulties in our area. When I look back at our history and the times of the First World War and the actions that the provincial government took coming through that, I think that today we're faced with similar challenges. We have had other challenges on top of that. As you travel throughout the community and hear the history, in 1918 there were many Albertans that we lost to the flu pandemic.

I say these things, Mr. Speaker, to put into perspective what we're faced with today. We have a very rich abundance of opportunities in our province with our energy, with our agriculture, those being our two largest industries, and, of course, with the tourism possibilities. I think that going forward, I would like to say that this is a defining moment. The direction that the Speech from the Throne has given us gives us an opportunity to position Albertans for better prosperity than they've ever seen before.

We will, Mr. Speaker, be judged by history, by the decisions that we make going forward. The positive and progressive approaches that we're taking are going to create opportunities for Albertans, and I suggest that we will be remembered for those. I think that we are blessed with new ideas from some of our members, new ways of looking at things. I quote our Edmonton-Meadowlark representative as an example that helps us with health and how we look at health, where he says that being 75 or 85 is not a health condition; it's a condition of health. Albertans have always been good about looking after their most vulnerable. I expect we will continue to do that. I know Albertans are concerned about that.

I ask everyone in the House to work towards the solutions that are going to be necessary for us to come out of this global economic correction in better shape than we went into it. I believe that those that are negative and disruptive in this process will be remembered only as a speed bump on the road to prosperity.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Calgary-McCall to respond to the Speech from the Throne. Calgary-McCall is a diverse constituency, home to many families, retired and working seniors, businesspeople, blue-collar workers, and new immigrants.

Many constituents in Calgary-McCall have language, social, and cultural issues and are the first ones to be affected by any downturn in the economy. Since the global economic downturn began, countless citizens of Calgary-McCall are under tremendous stress from the pressures of job loss. Unfortunately, these stresses can and do lead to an increase in family tensions, violence, alcohol consump-

tion, and related drug abuse. The economic crisis is having a huge impact on the daily lives of my constituents. Single mothers are worried. How are they going to put food on the table? Fathers are worried about next month's mortgage payments. The children of these families are confused and frightened by the events happening in their homes and those of their friends. For many children in my constituency these are very tough times indeed.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have seen significant portions of their retirement savings disappear overnight. Albertans living on fixed incomes are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. They must make impossible choices: buy food or prescriptions, pay the rent or buy gasoline.

The Speech from the Throne makes many promises, but it is short on details. It outlines a blurry vision for the future at a time when Albertans are demanding clarity from their leaders. It is like saying, "Don't worry; be happy; everything is going to be okay," with soft, tropical music playing in the background. Mr. Speaker, wishful thinking alone won't solve the economic problems Albertans face today. The government has failed to create and enact a long-term strategic plan to address the challenges facing Albertans of the present and the future.

Mr. Speaker, I do commend the government for recognizing the tremendous sacrifices made by the Canadian military personnel to protect not only our freedom but the freedoms of those who are worlds away. The Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, to protect and provide job protection leave for our reservists is long overdue, and I congratulate the government for correcting this oversight.

I came to Canada from India in September 1970 and arrived in Calgary in that December. My family and I are proud to call Calgary home. Since coming to Alberta, I lived through both boom and bust. Countless Albertans lost so much during those busts. Many walked away from their homes because they could no longer afford them. I remember the new subdivision of Falconridge, which is in my constituency. It came to be known as Foreclosure Ridge while the subdivision of Abbeydale was called Abandonale.

Mr. Speaker, without a long-term plan for our future Albertans could very well face even harder times. At least the government of the day had the wisdom to set up the heritage trust fund. There was a glimmer of understanding that oil and gas would not last forever, but that understanding seems to have disappeared. The heritage fund is stagnant, and we have spent over 90 per cent of our nonrenewable resource revenues, saving only the smallest fraction of nonrenewable wealth. Indeed, the global liquidity and credit crisis has caused the fund to lose \$873 million in 2008 and 2009, a further example of this government's lack of financial oversight and accountability.

Mr. Speaker, for years the Official Opposition has strongly recommended that government save aggressively for the future. Our calls for action were ignored by this government. What a lost opportunity. Had this government saved aggressively, the interest from the heritage fund investments would have eventually replaced declining oil and gas revenues. Future generations will rightly criticize us for not planning for their needs.

During the 1981-82 session we heard that nothing was going to happen in Alberta. I remember those comforting claims very well, but we were the hardest hit. That's why this government's similar claim troubles me again. There's a feeling out there today that an economic meltdown in Alberta is unlikely. I believe this false sense of security could hurt Albertans again. Far better to be prudent, to plan for the worst, to plan for the future.

Mr. Speaker, we don't know the full extent of job losses or when the layoffs will stop. I had a constituent come to my office on

Friday, and he told me that the company he was working for had over 1,000 employees not long ago, but there are only 100 employees left working today, and their future is also uncertain.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans paid a big price when this government slashed public programs and infrastructure in order to balance the budget and pay down the debt. With the cutbacks our education suffered. We lost hospitals, doctors, and nurses. The government created a massive infrastructure deficit and a record \$1.3 billion health care deficit now. These are all consequences of this government's utter failure to plan for the long term.

The former Premier even admitted that he didn't have a plan for Alberta's growth. Albertans are living with the consequences of that failure. Albertans are waiting for hours in the emergency rooms of our hospitals. Rural Albertans are losing their local hospitals. The government does not have a financial plan or budget to complete the extension of the Peter Lougheed hospital, a facility desperately needed in Calgary's northeast. Albertans are losing their jobs, losing their homes, bankruptcies are going up, and the demands for social assistance will continue to rise.

Mr. Speaker, since oil prices are below \$40 a barrel and natural gas is hovering around \$4 a gigajoule, there's going to be a much bigger shortfall in nonrenewable resource revenues than this government budgeted for. Just last year the finance minister boasted about the potential for an 8 and a half billion dollar surplus. Who knows what kind of surplus we will see this year if any?

With businesses cutting back, with job losses occurring across the province, there may also be a shortfall in personal and corporate taxes. Will this send the government into deficit? Albertans are desperate to know, but this government seems reluctant to bring a budget forward. We need to know now what this government is thinking. Does this government intend to use the savings of the sustainability fund and the capital fund as part of their stimulus package? What happens when that money is gone and Albertans still have a huge infrastructure gap to fill?

Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne this government said that all the projects will continue as planned. If that is true, why is one very badly needed emergency room at the Peter Lougheed hospital being put on hold? Now we hear that the top two or three floors will not be completed. Why is Cochrane going to lose their X-ray clinic? Why are some P3 school building projects in question? How many more vital projects across Alberta will face a similar fate?

This government has to learn to be proactive, not reactive. They have to come up with a long-term plan to free Alberta from these boom-and-bust cycles. The need for safe streets, a strong education system, and sustainable public health care never goes away. We will always have these expenses, and the government needs to plan to pay for them.

Mr. Speaker, the so-called Alberta advantage, one that never extended to all Albertans, has been turned into a series of foggy plans by this government without the necessary detail as to how they will assist Albertans. As the shadow minister for Transportation and for Service Alberta I urge the government to ensure that the budget contains provisions to build the necessary roads and transportation infrastructures across our cities and rural Alberta. Alberta citizens and businesses need those vital public infrastructure projects to continue.

Now is the time for legislators to work harder and smarter for the citizens of Alberta in this time of economic uncertainty. My constituents support my work in this House, and I will continue to speak out on their behalf with a revitalized heart and strong commitment to all Albertans to improve their quality of life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I will call on the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered on February 10 by His Honour the Honourable Norman Kwong, our Lieutenant Governor, and may I say what a great job he does representing our Queen here in Alberta. It was with great pride that I listened to the progressive plans of this government as it steers our province through very difficult economic times.

Mr. Speaker, I want to elaborate on our government's plans to ensure that our communities and our homes remain safe for all Albertans. All Albertans are concerned about their safety, and we have taken and continue to take action to deal with gangs and organized crime. Our plans in regard to how we're going to tackle gangs and organized crime start with a number of initiatives brought forward with the safe community recommendations.

In regard to more police, since last April we've already added more than 300 police, already fulfilling our Premier's commitment to bolster policing ranks. However, we are still planning on adding a hundred more in the next two years. I will say that these additional police officers also include four integrated gang enforcement units, operating across our province, comprised of 83 officers.

We also launched the safer communities and neighbourhoods investigative units, where we use civil legislation to shut down properties such as drug houses and gang dens. Presently we have two teams who are doing those duties, Mr. Speaker, and we hope to have more in the near future.

3:20

We're also targeting prolific offenders, those 15 per cent of criminals who are responsible for approximately 60 per cent of the crime. Again, we will be targeting 60 individuals, and they're going to be given every opportunity to contribute to society, but again if they decide to continue their ways and take from society, they will find themselves back behind bars, Mr. Speaker.

But we're not stopping there. We passed legislation last fall to allow police to seize instruments of crime. Bill 50, the victims of crime restitution act, allows our police to seize property and goods used or intended to be used in criminal acts acquired through criminal activities. That's a great new tool for our police officers, Mr. Speaker. This government is also committed to continue to target gangs and organized crime by any and all means possible.

I will bring forward Gaming and Liquor Act amendments, hopefully this session, to give police, again, more tools to deal with gang members in our licensed establishments. We have plans being made to tighten rules around vehicle modifications such as armour-plating, which is becoming prevalent among gang members, including such things as bulletproof glass, surveillance cameras. These vehicles, as I mentioned, are being used by gangs in our province. We're also looking at methods to make it illegal for gang members to wear body armour, Mr. Speaker, armour that gives them a false sense of security and also increases the danger to our public. We're also asking our federal counterparts to help us in any way they can in those regards.

Crimes and criminal activity are more sophisticated. Criminals are operating in other jurisdictions while victimizing Albertans through Internet crimes. Gang violence is occurring in broad daylight with tragic consequences. Our police are doing a great job to deal with this issue, but more needs to be done.

My department is leading the development of a new comprehensive law enforcement framework, a framework that will look at

service delivery, funding, and governance. Service delivery is critical. We need increased integration and collaboration between policing jurisdictions. We've got to make sure we have the right people doing the right job, and there is a need to operate more effectively and efficiently. Enhancing integrated law enforcement teams operating across our province can more effectively target, disrupt, and dismantle organized crime operations. We will also hear from stakeholders during consultations this month about equitable funding for police, and through this new framework we will also engage communities to address issues of governance and oversight that will also help set local policing priorities.

My ministry is also co-leading a gang suppression initiative as part of our ongoing efforts to tackle gang problems. A number of government departments as well as police are looking at strategies involving enforcement, prevention, intervention, and awareness in regard to this. We also need to take a multifaceted approach to tackle gang issues. We can't just arrest our way out of this problem, Mr. Speaker. We need to do other initiatives as well. We will also be holding a gang summit later on this summer to validate what is being proposed through the initiative and will bring forward a report to this government at the conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, there's no quick fix to these problems. However, this government is committed to working with law enforcement and communities to turn the tide on gangs. We have made safe communities a priority, and we will continue to follow the road map we have developed while looking at new and innovative ways to achieve our goal.

Part of our commitment is to continue to negotiate a new contract to retain the RCMP as our provincial police force. The RCMP have a long and proud history in Alberta, and we expect that to continue. There's probably no other police force that is as well trained as the RCMP. We also anticipate and expect the great co-operation and collaboration that exists today between our RCMP and our sheriffs. The four pilot projects with our traffic sheriffs will look at the most effective model to deliver traffic enforcement services on Alberta highways. This pilot is all about making our highways safer, reducing the carnage and the 450 deaths we see every year on our roadways.

Some other things that we're doing, Mr. Speaker. Over the next two years we will be adding 110 new probation officers to better supervise those offenders who are in our communities and also to give them the support that they need to turn their lives around. Two new sheriffs teams are apprehending people out on outstanding warrants and doing an outstanding job on that and, again, bringing some of those dangerous offenders to justice. We also have sheriffs supporting police by performing surveillance activities, and these activities free up our police to focus on more serious crimes.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring our communities remain safe. The \$470 million that we've committed to the safe communities task force recommendations is evidence of that. We are committed, we will stay the course, and we will make Alberta a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be questions.

There being none, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the discussion this afternoon on the Speech from the Throne, delivered February 10 by His Honour the Lieutenant

Governor of the province of Alberta. I certainly listened with interest and thought last week that this is a rather lengthy document, but one shouldn't conclude that because it's long, it's detailed and is providing us with a blueprint to this year's activities by the government. When you look at this document, you have to be careful because it's what's not in it that one should be concerned about.

However, there are some things, I must say, that I'm very pleased the government has accomplished. One of those is, of course, the tax cut that was initiated in January of 2009, and I'm speaking directly, Mr. Speaker, to the elimination of the Alberta health care premiums. That was a tax cut at a time when individual families were paying their share of the Alberta health care premium. It is also a time when many businesses who pick up that contribution on their payroll, whether it be monthly or twice a month, certainly appreciate that billion dollar tax cut. School boards, certainly, that use a portion of that money to pay for their employees on their paycheques, appreciate that. Hospital boards appreciate that. Many municipalities who have been kind enough to pick up that portion of the health care premium for their eligible employees appreciate that as well. That has been a long time coming, and I think it is a very good measure at this time of economic uncertainty. People need all the support they can get.

Now, on some of the bills that were discussed in the Speech from the Throne, it's going to be interesting to follow their debate through this Assembly: the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009, from the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, the carbon capture and storage fund act. We're talking about the establishment of a \$2 billion fund committed to commercial-scale carbon capture and storage.

3:30

I had the opportunity two weeks ago of attending a luncheon where an engineer outlined how this could and will work. I have after study and, certainly, listening with keen interest to the presentation found that this is a major part of our solution in this province to increased CO₂ emissions.

Now, we are also going to deal with the Alberta public agencies governance act, and this is going to come, I believe, from the Premier's office. This proposed legislation will improve transparency and accountability and promote good governance of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions. I find this so interesting in light of the fact that this document, well before it became a proposed statute or a drafted statute, was used in the memorandum of understanding which set up our super health board, when we fired the nine regional health authorities, and changed how AADAC, changed how the Mental Health Board would operate. That document, this public agencies governance framework, was used, oddly enough, in the drafting of the memorandum of understanding that gave the minister of health such ultimate power over how public health care is delivered in this province. So it's going to be interesting to see how that is explained by the hon. members across the way.

Certainly, we're also going to see some necessary changes to other statutes. We're going to have, yet again, another look at TILMA. One piece of legislation that interests me is the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act from the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. That legislation has been discussed and talked about at length, and it's going to be interesting to see how seniors across the province feel about this proposed bill. Certainly, the previous bill, Bill 24 from the past session of this Legislative Assembly, has gotten significant interest from many seniors who

question the direction all of us have taken with that legislation. It will be interesting to see how that legislation works out.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, certainly, I look at various sections of this, and I want to get to page 9, which is the government's outline of where we're going with public health care in this province. I'm concerned. The constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar are concerned. We're not satisfied to date with the answers that have been provided by this government. Now, earlier today in question period the hon. Premier was talking about the budget and the fact that we spend I think \$36 million a day was the quote and that we have a \$13 billion budget.

Absolutely, those numbers would be correct, but I know the Minister of Energy over there would never, never contemplate making any substantial changes without doing a cost-benefit analysis. Yet this government, the minister of health under the Premier's leadership, changed how we operate health care delivery in this province without a cost-benefit analysis. We received this admission in Public Accounts last spring from the deputy minister, who has since resigned and gone on to a high-paying job with Alberta Health Services as a senior executive. The deputy minister at that time admitted that there was no cost-benefit analysis done to see how this new health ministry, this one board would work, how we would fire nine boards and create one board and that this was going to control costs and improve services at the same time.

No reasonable person that I know would restructure any organization, let alone a \$13 billion health budget, without a cost-benefit analysis, yet this government went ahead with this, and we know what the consequences are, Mr. Speaker. The consequences are that we're a further \$1.3 billion in the hole with Alberta Health's budget. I was astonished to read the papers before Christmas and see that the Premier in a year-end interview acknowledged that this was the case. One point three billion dollars, and we still see emergency room lineups. We still have hospitals that are understaffed. In fact, we have the Mazankowski centre in Edmonton that, well, is not in darkness, but certainly it's going to be September at least of this year, I'm told, before it's going to be accepting patients.

Ms Pastoor: But it's costing a fortune to keep the lights on.

Mr. MacDonald: It would cost a lot of money, hon. member, to keep that facility just sort of at a low idle.

I must say that the constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar are not satisfied. They expressed their opinion at a town hall meeting we held before the session started. They're not satisfied with this government's directions regarding public health care. They don't have confidence in the minister of health. They certainly do not. I'm disappointed to say that, but they do not in the direction that we're going in.

They also have issues around how we're nickelling and diming seniors and that we're shifting the burden onto middle-income seniors. Now, these are individuals who worked hard all their lives, saved money, enough money, they thought, for their retirement, and they see one of the biggest financial meltdowns in their working lives, probably the biggest. It's probably bigger than 1980 through 1982, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the costs that they have on their monthly utility bills – I want to get to that in minute – and you look at their reduced investment income, now is not the time to hit them with increased pharmaceutical costs. But this is exactly what our government, unfortunately, has done, and I have to get on the record as stating that the solid majority of seniors who have contacted our constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar are totally dissatisfied with what the government has implemented here.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm curious. When I came here for the throne speech, I opened my desk drawer, and inside I saw a red candle, a very small candle. There are no matches in here. I would suspect that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has got some in his pocket. But I got this little candle here, and I was puzzled as to what it was for. I quietly sat here. I looked over at the government benches, and I was almost going to send the Minister of Energy a note because I'm certain that the hon. Minister of Energy is responsible for the candle because he is worried. He's not sleeping at night because our electricity system is teetering on the brink.

In fact, in the month of January – the same thing occurred in December – we had two energy emergency alerts just about supertime, 5:30 I think it was, not two days in succession but certainly two days within the same calendar week, where we essentially didn't have enough electricity to meet our demand. I would just like to be on the record as saying that I sincerely appreciate the candle that the Minister of Energy left for me in my desk. I'm sure he must be worried that we're going to lose all power in the Legislative Assembly and be in the darkness. That must be the purpose of the candle, and I appreciate that. It's a sign of his significant concern about electricity deregulation.

3:40

Now, we have to ask again: why are Albertans paying so much for electricity? Electricity consumers in Alberta on average during 2008 paid over 9 cents per kilowatt for electricity. This is the wholesale price adding transmission and distribution costs. This is double the actual cost of generation for 2008. Total cost means the return on investment, fair profit, administration, depreciation, and fuel. Four or 5 cents per kilowatt may not seem very much for each household to pay, \$25 to \$30 per month for the average electricity consumer, but it is \$25 or \$30 out of a family budget for which the consumer gets absolutely nothing, and it's totally unnecessary.

We should have left our system the way it was. I remind all hon. members of this House again that the promise was made by the government that if only we would be patient and wait, we would see the benefits of deregulation. Has Wall Street seen the benefits of deregulation? No. Have the consumers of electricity in Alberta seen the benefits of deregulation? No.

We should be very concerned about this. These are some of the questions that have been provided to me regarding this issue, and I'm very pleased to get them on the record. I'm pleased that the Minister of Energy is taking such an active interest in the deregulation of our power supply. Now, why is the wholesale price of electricity being established by the generating companies in a price-fixing auction system rather than in a fair, transparent, and efficient producer-consumer market? I would like to get, through the course of discussion on our throne speech, an answer to that question, Mr. Speaker. Again, why are Alberta electricity consumers subsidizing the cost of fuel for oil sands production? [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm very sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I cede the floor.

The Deputy Speaker: We now have five minutes for comments and questions. Anybody? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the speech was quite interesting to listen to. I have only one question, and that's with respect to the candle that you were referring to in your speech. I don't know if you recall that you would have received that candle in November from fellow members of the Legislature in celebration of the Festival of Lights. I wonder if you recall that.

Mr. MacDonald: No, I do not. As a matter of fact, my desk was completely cleaned out between November and now. I don't know why, but it was completely cleaned out, and this is something that was put back in there. I only assumed that it was from the Minister of Energy because of his concern over power deregulation and potential blackouts.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that I've just received some notification from EPCOR that once again they're increasing the administration side of their bill and that, in fact, I will now be paying probably \$40 a month for electricity that I don't even use because I've turned it off in my country home, I wonder if we could get my hon. colleague to make a comment on the oil and gas that he was speaking about and just how we address this business of actually paying more for administration costs for a commodity that we're not even using or receiving.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question. Why are Alberta electricity consumers paying higher costs, costs that just seem to go up and up and up, and there seems to be more costly add-ons to the bill while there are windfall profits to EPCOR, Enmax, and other generators? I think we need to have a look at how we provide electricity and the middlemen or the middle persons or the ones with their hand out with all these costly add-ons that have nothing to do with electricity. In fact, on some of the power bills that constituents take into our office, the administrative costs are more than the actual charges for electricity. This has got to stop.

We have a low-cost power plan that is on our website that I'm going to once again ask the government members to have a look at and consider adopting as policy. We do know that the stabilization fund that, thank goodness, we have – and there's close to \$7 billion in it – is another fine idea from this side of the House. We have no objections if our low-cost power plan was to be adopted by the government because it would be yet another example of the members on this side of the House coming forward with positive contributions to public policy in this province.

Now, I have no idea where we would be if the government finally had recognized that it was spending far too much and saving very little when they adopted the stabilization, or stability, fund. Whatever you want to call it, it's the same thing. Now we have this money set aside. I hope it will be enough, Mr. Speaker, but it may not be.

When you look at some of the financial reports that have been issued recently, in fact, one from a financial company in Calgary, ARC Financial, indicates – and this is from the third week in January – that in Alberta the government is likely to realize \$5 billion less in royalties in 2009 as compared to 2008. Combine that with our corporate income tax, which is certainly going to be reduced from the targets that were estimated in the budget for this fiscal year. If we look at what was estimated for personal income tax, that's going to be significantly less. If we look at land sales and what's going to be gained from the sale of oil and gas leases, we're going to be down a lot of money.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today as the representative of the constituents of Calgary-Mackay to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. The Speech from the Throne for the Second Session of the 27th Legislature was set within a rapidly changed context, both locally and internationally. The speech focused around the government's intention to protect Albertans and the things that mean the most to them. These include conditions and economic opportunities through maintaining and enhancing our competitiveness at national as well as international levels.

Albertans are not only blessed with an enviable level of resources; we are also blessed with the comfort of knowing that we'll face our share of the challenges anchored with firm foundations set by well-defined policy and program frameworks such as the provincial energy strategy, the royalty framework, the aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines, the plan for Alberta's oil sands, the forestry industry sustainability report, and the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. The prudent measures exercised by this government in the past will now enable us to continue our infrastructure program, which would encourage economic activity as well as address the needs of a growing and changing province, again with a well-defined, long-range plan with designated funds. These directional and strategic blueprints combined with responsive pro-implementation programs will help position the people and industries of Alberta well when the economy recovers.

Mr. Speaker, constituents of Calgary-Mackay have told me that the environment is an area that warrants greater attention and protection. I'm very pleased our government clearly recognizes this and responds to our citizens' expressions by putting in new environmental management approaches, renewing Alberta's water for life strategy, establishing the carbon capture and storage implementation act, introducing a plan for parks, and implementing the land-use framework.

Mr. Speaker, as I had stated in my maiden speech last year, Calgary-Mackay is a young constituency, with most of its community still between 10 to 18 years old. It has a population almost 30 per cent made up of children and youth under 19 years of age, 30 per cent immigrants, and pockets of households living in poverty. Constituents of Calgary-Mackay have to travel above the average distance for health services. There aren't community-based social services within the riding currently. The government's commitment to supporting health and educational programs and services is immensely important to the citizens of Calgary-Mackay.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I had organized a visioning and consultation session with invited Mackay stakeholders and constituents on February 6 this year. It comes as no surprise that health care and education were issues the participants felt strongly about. Participants identified that while responses from fire, police, and emergency are excellent, they also felt that access to health services and the allocation of health care resources are issues that call for greater attention and discussion. Supports for quality education and the need for more schools was another hot topic. While participants recognize and appreciate that the schools in the riding are new, strong facilities with future potential, the growth and need for space is fast outgrowing supply. Keeping our citizenry informed as the government continues with health reform and engaging the citizens to partake in formulating the future vision for our educational system through the Inspiring Education conversation will be strong focus areas for the Mackay constituency office in the coming year.

Participants in the Calgary visioning and consultation session included representatives from police services, public libraries, school

systems, city transportation, housing developments, service organizations like Block Watch, family resource services, the food bank, seniors, and immigrant-serving agencies.

In terms of desire to change, changes, and people's hopes for the future of their communities, the group discussed the importance of infrastructure to quality of life in our communities. While there is a variety of infrastructure in our communities, the most prominently discussed was the need to improve social infrastructure and improve community cohesion. Some of the specific recommendations included increasing housing affordability, increasing capacity for community services, ensuring easy access to community services, more child care facilities, taking preventative measures for social isolation, greater focus on social and economic issues for the working poor, and developing true wraparound services where the community is involved in the process.

A great deal of time was spent on the issue of community standards. Participants felt that there has been an eroding of shared community values and standards in previous years or decades. The group felt that the quality of life in our community has been negatively affected by these trends. Some of the important issues discussed included diminished connections among citizens and communities and that these issues of community standards are multigenerational and multifaceted matters. As a community and a society we need to re-establish how to live and work together, especially in light of the increasing diversity of our communities, which is evidenced in Calgary-Mackay.

Our government's continued commitment to fostering strong communities through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, support for child care, employment, and housing programs, and the declared dedication to looking after the most vulnerable members will enable a wide spectrum of Albertans to face the future with a greater sense of security. Our government's pledge to build on the recommendations of the safe communities task force is another aspect of building strong communities. Premier Stelmach's leadership and commitment to cross-ministry collaborations and the Ministry of Justice's dedication to creating safer and more vibrant communities through comprehensive approaches that range from prevention to intervention and through legislative changes to address root causes are much welcomed by the constituents of Calgary-Mackay.

A key theme that emerged from the Calgary-Mackay community session was connections, strengthening connections at the family as well as community level, Mr. Speaker. Participants recognized the importance of taking a holistic approach to solving the issues of our communities. Many of the issues that were deemed important were connected to one another. It was the view that ultimately the improvement of our communities requires a collective effort and that new ways of establishing connections amongst elected officials, citizens, institutions, and organizations is the most effective way to do this. This belief and desire for building connections and strengthening our collective efforts, when supported and transformed into actions, would be a firm basis for the creation of strong social capital amongst our citizens, hence stronger, more vibrant, and healthier communities.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the throne speech communicated the government's focus and commitment to ensuring that core programs and services will be there for Albertans, that our vulnerable citizens will be cared for, that our government has been strengthening our legislative groundwork to provide direction for principled developments and to help ensure that our economic fundamentals remain strong so that all Albertans can face the future with confidence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. Any hon. member?

Seeing none, I would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Decore it is truly an honour and a privilege to rise today to join other hon. members to provide a response to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on February 10, 2009. The Speech from the Throne is regarded as a foundational document in that it sets the direction for the actions of our government in the coming year. While this is the main function, I believe that it serves other purposes as well. I believe that it prompts all of us as Members of the Legislative Assembly to reflect on the big picture. It compels us to look back at where we have been and also to look forward to where we want to be. It is a two-way road, and in light of some of the changes in the world economy I believe that it is more important than ever to look both ways.

Mr. Speaker, generations of men and women, young and old when they arrived on the lands of our great province, remind us that their stories and destinies were not prewritten. Those who live in this province know that Alberta has endured tough times in the past and has consistently found ways to rise to the challenge and to build the foundation of a province that continues to be the envy of many. The Speech from the Throne gave more than the sense of this, too, shall pass and emphasized that Albertans will again rise to the challenge.

There are reasons for a thoughtful optimism in regard to our province and its prospects based largely on leadership. Our province's leadership in the past has provided us many of the unprecedented opportunities that we have in the present. Previous provincial governments had a vision for Alberta, one that would eventually include eliminating the debt and saving for the future. As we heard in the throne speech, Alberta has \$7 billion in the sustainability fund and another \$6 billion in the capital account.

Mr. Speaker, just as the actions of the leaders in Alberta's past have made a difference in our present, our actions today will shape our future. As a recent publication articulated, we must be thoughtful in our attempt to determine the changing landscapes of the next Alberta. Indeed, now is a time of enormous opportunity. To paraphrase British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, the secret of success is to be ready for an opportunity when it comes. Increasingly, success in the modern world economy is based on factors related to our people, their level of education, their work ethic, but above all their creativity, ingenuity, imagination, and the ability to be innovative. The areas that do best in developing, nurturing, and harnessing what writer Richard Florida called the creative class will be the areas that have the best chance to capitalize on and optimize the opportunities presented by this changing new context.

Mr. Speaker, how do we create the new conditions in our modern economy that will allow the growth of these much-needed innovation-based approaches, creativity, and entrepreneurship in the energy industry, the health care sector, the arts, science and technology, and in all areas of the economy and our communities? Much of the answer lies in a determined, comprehensive, and unrelenting commitment to supporting lifelong learning in all of its forms to enrich the lives of all Albertans. Our children, youth, and adults all have their own gifts, talents, and enormous potential. As a government we must continue to play a role to create, promote, and support their lifelong learning.

This past fall we launched Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans, which in 2009 will engage Albertans in a dialogue about how education in our province can help tomorrow's children and youth find their passions and prepare for success. This is just one

way that the Alberta government will be crossing boundaries to ensure that we are thorough in collecting a diversity of viewpoints and perspectives to help us create a new vision for K to 12 education and a policy framework that will guide the ministry and inform legislation.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, the government is also supporting Alberta students with their endeavours through our postsecondary education system. The continued development of Campus Alberta provides opportunities for any Albertan to find the right fit and pursue higher education. Campus Alberta allows for learning opportunities to be flexible in design, allowing alternatives to classroom learning such as online learning and workplace learning, helping to improve geographical barriers. This facilitates the pursuit of a career at any age or location by a method that is best suited to the individual. Campus Alberta is inclusive of all of the province's unique postsecondary schools. This kind of development increases the number of options that Alberta students have and reflects the government's ability to adapt to the new realities of educational flexibility.

In August of 2008 \$73 million in funding was provided to create student spaces in universities, colleges, and technical institutes across the province. This will allow for more students to attend Alberta's postsecondary schools in the coming years. Mr. Speaker, these initiatives demonstrate the government's commitment to learning opportunities and to a strong investment in Alberta's intellectual and social capital. As Albertans continue to utilize these opportunities, the growth of our educated and skilled workforce will help our communities be creative and innovative as we compete in the world economy.

Mr. Speaker, if success is based on the confluence of social and human capital, our devotion to harness its development must be paramount. In order to do so, we must take the broadest possible approach to fostering value-driven learning in all of its forms. In this regard we should follow the lead of the Canadian Council on Learning, which has been instrumental in promoting a broadly based view that includes UNESCO's four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. It's developing the full potential of every citizen in each of these four areas that will allow us to succeed in these challenging times. I've said before that the greatest wealth this province has is generated by the diverse and talented contributions of all the people. Each day, year-round Albertans make a piece of history by inspiring today, seizing tomorrow, and building a brighter future for all to enjoy.

Above all, Mr. Speaker, the government must work in systematic and smart ways to shape our future by mobilizing the collective knowledge base of the people in our province and provide the inspiration and tools to meet and strive beyond the expectations of the shifting world realities. This means making investments to better support and stimulate creativity, ingenuity, and the ability to be innovative in approaches. These are some of the new skills and talents that are necessary to rebuild momentum and to sustain our competitive advantage – growth, quality of life, prosperity – and, more importantly, are needed to revitalize our communities and society.

These activities also mean building on a foundation that recognizes that our province's growing diversity is not a problem to be overcome but, rather, is the source of our greatest strength. It is precisely this diversity of culture, experience, ideas, and insights that will provide the basis for the new thinking, the innovative ideas, and the imaginative entrepreneurialism that is so badly needed in a hypercompetitive and uncertain world. Nowhere is this diversity of

untapped talent more evident than our growing numbers of new Canadians. Let's remember that they are the ones who took a chance and left their old situations behind; Mr. Speaker, that is the bravest kind of entrepreneurialism.

Our important task is to create the kind of conditions where their courage and talents can meaningfully contribute to supporting their families, communities, and our province. Our job as legislators is to recognize this untapped potential in our people, support it, nurture it in smart ways, and then let the gifts and talents of our diverse people and communities do the rest.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne rightly talked about leadership, leadership to make a difference in times that are indeed troubling and challenging but also stimulating and exciting in terms of huge opportunities that await those people in places that can provide the right solutions here. If we take the long view and continue to make wise investments, support our people and organizations in their efforts, and focus on developing the enormous potential that is in our families and communities, Alberta will be one of the few places in the world that will continue to be in the vanguard, resilient and leading the way.

Despite these uncertain times we are in the midst of a fundamental, long-term transformation, and our province's future is not prewritten. It is ours to chart and to define. Albertans have always looked forward, not back, and surprised the world with a far different motivation. Albertans are a people with unparalleled vision and wisdom coupled with determination and confidence in their abilities to shape a preferred future for our province. I'm looking forward to being actively involved in the changing landscapes of the next Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There is five minutes for comments and questions if any other member would like to take that.

Seeing none, now I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on February 10, 2009. When listening to the throne speech, I was inspired by the way in which it envisions Alberta's future. Indeed, the speech reflected optimism, determination, and in true Alberta form the value of standing together to protect our future.

These are uncertain economic times, to be sure, but it is important now more than ever that as a government we maintain our prudence, our pragmatism, and our commitment to sound and responsible fiscal management and also that we remain optimistic about the times ahead. There are many reasons to be optimistic. Our unemployment rate in Alberta currently sits at 4.4 per cent, much lower than the national average of 7 per cent and very near the 5 per cent benchmark that indicates a balanced labour market.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, the job market in our province is regarded as still among the best in North America, all of which continues to provide Albertans with opportunities to be the champions of their own success. I can speak about this opportunity first-hand. I first arrived here in this great province in 1982 with no more than \$100 in my pocket, and after years of hard work and determination I now have the privilege of being a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods.

These opportunities are an attractive prospect in my native land, the Philippines. In fact, on average, 75 per cent of Filipino foreign workers decide to come to Alberta. In 2007 alone this meant that 6,000 Filipinos decided to call Alberta their new home.

In my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods immigration is one of the most emerging, important issues. Mr. Speaker, immigrants continue to play a significant role in Alberta, and our province's ability to continue to expand our growth lies not only in maintaining our current international relationships but also in cultivating new ones. Indeed, it is one of the best investments that we can make.

In fact, in the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor alluded to this government's commitment to investing and securing Alberta's future growth. As we consider what this growth will mean for our province, there will surely be a need for skilled and hard-working Albertans. In this way there's a unique role for foreign-trained workers to be part of the solution. Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that Alberta may need as many as 95,000 international workers in the next 10 years to meet our growing labour demands. We continue to welcome immigrants to Alberta to pursue their dreams, help build our communities, and share in the advantages that this province has to offer.

4:10

I was glad to hear that the Alberta government will continue its commitment to building and developing Alberta's workforce and supporting innovation in all areas of the province's labour market, all of which helps us continue to adapt to the changing business environment and grow with it. This includes capitalizing on the success of the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy, a key initiative that was highlighted in last week's throne speech. In many ways this 10-year provincial strategy sets the future direction for investment in Alberta's workforce. It is based on extensive consultation with business and industry, professional and labour organizations, education and training providers, and also aboriginal people. Most importantly, it recognizes that Alberta's people are the driving force in sustaining the province's continued economic growth and quality of life. This makes investment in people one of the most important priorities for this government.

Ultimately, continued success for Alberta in the global economy requires an ongoing commitment to developing the knowledge and skills of our workforce, ensuring that all Albertans have access to learning and training opportunities. Indeed, the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy is one of the supporting pillars of Alberta's 20-year strategic plan, which has as one of its goals to support the development of immigrant Albertans and the attraction and retention of immigrants in Alberta.

This includes helping new immigrants with some of the challenges they may face when finding jobs that fully utilize their existing skills and experience. In this way this government recognizes that Alberta's immigrants may have unique education and training requirements that need to be addressed in order to help them achieve their full potential within both the labour market and society at large. All Albertans, including immigrants already here in Alberta, should have the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills, and talents, and the Alberta government remains committed to these tasks.

To this end, the building and educating tomorrow's workforce strategy has identified a number of priority actions in this area. This includes developing partnerships with other government ministries and stakeholders to recognize the credentials, competencies, and prior learning and work experience of immigrants as well as continuing to promote Alberta as a destination of choice for international immigrants and showcasing the opportunities that can only be found here.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, since the strategy's implementation a number of actions have been taken by this government, and they have made great strides in this very good area. This includes a Canada-Alberta working group that was established that not only reviewed many of

the current processes in place but also took an active role by delivering regional seminars around hiring foreign workers. It also helped establish an Alberta temporary foreign workforce hotline to respond to inquiries by employers and foreign nationals. In addition, the off-campus work permit program for international students was also created in 2006, making it easier for non-Canadian students to apply for work permits which now allow them to work off campus while they complete their studies.

Perhaps one of the most significant actions in this recent implementation was the recent trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, or TILMA, signed with British Columbia, which will allow for, among other things, a greater movement of our skilled workers across the provincial boundaries. Taken together, these and other steps will continue to help and support new immigrants as they move into the workforce and settle in Alberta's communities.

Mr. Speaker, as the throne speech revealed, communities remain at the forefront of the government's plan for the future. Maintaining safe, strong, and sustainable communities has played a key role in Alberta's development over time, and they remain vital to the province's future. Programs like the municipal sustainability initiative were in fact created to help municipalities address growth-related challenges and support long-term sustainability. In 2007 alone municipalities received a total of \$400 million to support them in their efforts to ensure the level of service delivery Albertans have come to expect.

The things that I have identified are only part of the comprehensive and exciting plans for Alberta's future. They will continue to impact and enhance the lives of Albertans in real and positive ways. Whether we are Albertans by birth or we have come to this great province from another part of the world, we face this future together with optimism and hope. To me the Speech from the Throne confirms that the Alberta advantage remains alive and well, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, I would like to recognize the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hope, encouragement, and the future: these are the messages outlined in this year's Speech from the Throne. The speech included plans to help Albertans meet the challenges of tough times and lay a foundation for future growth. The government of Alberta recognizes that times of economic uncertainty put pressure on Albertans. We understand these challenges and are committed to working with Albertans to provide the necessary leadership to support them through such times.

In times like these Albertans turn to their neighbours and communities for support, so it goes without saying that our communities must be strong now more than ever. The Premier has stated his firm belief that strong municipalities are the key ingredient to strong communities. This shapes my ministry in everything we do. Alberta is blessed to be made up of vibrant, inclusive communities. They are truly places to be envied. They are places of opportunity, culture, and belonging, places where citizens are supported and cared for and feel safe. Above all, they are places that Albertans can be proud to call home.

To foster these strong communities throughout the province, the government of Alberta remains committed to supporting municipalities through the municipal sustainability initiative. This initiative delivers on the Premier's commitment to build strong communities.

The funding is having a real impact to help our communities plan for the future. Throughout our great province Albertans are enjoying the benefits of the municipal sustainability initiative. They are seeing new roads, recreation facilities, fire halls, and libraries. I need to emphasize the critical role that libraries play in the well-being of our communities. Especially in tough times, they are connectors to new jobs and help new generations of Albertans become literate.

4:20

In addition to promoting strong communities, my ministry is committed to ensuring that Albertans are safe and secure. New building and fire codes are being finalized that reach a balance between safety, affordability, and technically sound practices. These will buy time, when there is a fire, for people to get out of their homes and for firefighters to respond. We also know that training first responders is a critical component to our emergency response system. We need and we will support these volunteers, who play such an important role in keeping our communities safe.

Albertans will always need strong communities and will continue to look to them for support. My top priority is to ensure that we have sustainable municipalities in which strong communities can thrive. This is a priority for our Premier, for my ministry, and for the government of Alberta today and into the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak about the throne speech as well. Our government under the leadership of our Premier has committed to forging ahead in the best interest of Albertans. We will look forward to taking on the challenges that we face and that the world faces now with the economic downturn, but under the leadership of our Premier we've made plans to deal with some of these.

We've got a \$7 billion sustainability fund and \$6 billion in capital. While many in this Legislature would dismiss that as some sort of luck, there is no other jurisdiction in North America that has that type of benefit, and there's no other jurisdiction that had foreseen that there could be problems and had planned for them. Anybody who tells you they did otherwise is just looking in hindsight.

We have a couple of things that we have to do, that we focused on in our department, to help with the initiatives that are outlined by the throne speech. Alberta Arts Days, expanding that – and I'll talk to that in a minute – but most importantly, I think, from our perspective is that we look at what our department represents. Culture and Community Spirit is the quality of life that all Albertans enjoy. It's the fabric of who we are and what we are, where we've been and where we're going. We show that through our interpretive centres and museums and historic sites.

We look at that through how we support our not-for-profit and voluntary sector through the ANVSI, or the Alberta nonprofit, voluntary sector initiative, where we're going to work with other ministries to ensure that we put our resources and our abilities together to work on behalf of Albertans and the 19,000 not-for-profit-sector organizations in this province that assist those in need, less fortunate, and in need of special care. We recognize the fact that most of those organizations do so with the ability to do that in a more cost-effective manner than government could ever do.

We also have responsibility in the strong and safe communities, and I fervently believe that any safe community has to be a strong community first. I've had the pleasure of visiting over 65 communi-

ties across the province – hamlets, villages, towns, small cities, and large cities – and I can tell you that the spirit of Albertans is alive and well. That's what will carry us through this. It's not just the money that we have set aside. It's the indomitable fighting spirit of Albertans, who always give more per capita than anyone else, who take care of the less fortunate with their time and money more than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

We have several programs that will help with that. We have our major community facilities program, which has provided over \$280 million over the last two years. That helps with the enhancement and construction of community facilities from rec centres to rinks, hospices, Ronald McDonald House, humane society, skateboard parks for youth, drug and alcohol addiction centres, and the like. You can see, Mr. Speaker, that those are the fundamental units that we have in our communities. It's not just Edmonton and Calgary; it's rural Alberta.

I've learned a great lesson from there: it's about collaboration. Our programs are grant programs with matching dollars. That means that the government gives a hand up, not a handout. We contributed through the major community facilities program \$280 million, but that means that Albertans have put up at least that much. In fact, we've got requests now for \$484 million and programs of \$196 billion in infrastructure. That is a stimulus, not something that was designed out of fright, not something designed out of reaction. That's something that this government through my predecessor, now the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, had initiated under the direction of the Premier.

We will continue to fund programs. We will work with the Minister of Justice and my seven other colleagues to collaborate on programs and utilization of dollars. Many times we hear that there's 480 some-odd million dollars that we've put towards safe communities. In fact, if you look at the collaboration between Health, Children's Services, Housing and Urban Affairs, Seniors and Community Supports, and Municipal Affairs, there is probably well over a billion dollars that we spend on safe communities. It takes the efforts of all of us to be able to do that. Our Premier has a vision to encourage that, and he has the support of the cabinet and our caucus to make that happen.

Lastly, I'll touch on Alberta Arts Days. Even though that was the one item that was mentioned in our budget, our government is no less committed to arts than it was before. It was our Premier's vision to create the first department or ministry of culture in over 20 years and put money towards that: \$36 million towards the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and money also for the implementation of the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture. And we've just begun. We're taking an inventory of what we have across the province and looking at where we're deficient. We're integrating programs such as MCFP and the community facilities enhancement program and CIP along with AFA money. In fact, we've spent probably well over \$46 million on arts and culture through either capital or programming, and I would probably put us per capita on a third ranking in the country.

Arts Days. Arts Day last year on September 6 was enjoyed by 30 different communities across the province from Westlock to Fort McMurray, Whitecourt, I think Lac La Biche, Wetaskiwin, Camrose, High River, Calgary, Edmonton, St. Albert, a great cross-section of big and small. What it wasn't was just a celebration of what we told the communities Albertans were all about with respect to arts. It was an example of totality, what those communities believed it to be. They got involved, just as rural Alberta always does or small communities do, and they decided themselves that they wanted to show pride in the area in which they live. They showed that Alberta has an interest in arts that's pervasive across the country. It didn't

require dollars from the province. It was just to showcase their pride in their own artists, whether visual arts or literary arts or performing arts. Art is something that's different for everybody, and that's what it showed.

What we're going to do this year is enhance that by moving from one day to three days. In the three days with the help of the Minister of Education we're going to try to engage every K to 12 student across this province. We are going to have each one of them on that Friday, September 18, either write a poem, read a book, write a story, draw a picture, do a piece of sculpture, engage in a play, a musical performance, or a physical recreational sporting activity because we envision that arts and culture is inclusive of sports and recreation. We don't want to minimize ourselves or exclude anybody, so we're going to do that.

The other two days will be opportunities, again, for the communities to show what Alberta has to showcase in terms of arts and culture. I'm quite confident that we will have several hundred communities and a thousand different activities. If the responses from the different municipalities are any indication, it should be great. Now the Canada Council for the Arts and different arts organizations in different provinces around the country want to come to Alberta – yes, Mr. Speaker, Alberta – to ask us how we did it. Again Alberta will take the lead. I tell you that before this Premier it's been a long time since anybody used "leader" and "Alberta" and "arts" in the same sentence.

Thank you.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes allowed for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I could ask the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to comment on exactly how sports and recreation fits in under arts and culture and what the difference is in terms of the dollars. You did mention it, and I thought perhaps it should be out of a different department.

Mr. Blackett: Well, in Spirit of Alberta, our cultural policy, we defined the goals as including arts, culture, recreation, and sport. When we talked about the four things, creating access for all Albertans irrespective of geography or irrespective of their socioeconomic status, we talked about building capacity in the community. In rural Alberta especially you can't differentiate because that hockey rink may be where you have to use one of the rooms for a rehearsal. The community halls have multipurpose facilities, so you can't just say that it's a sports facility and not a cultural facility, not a community facility; they're all integrated as one.

In terms of the actual dollars, when I mentioned \$50 million, that's a portion out of CFEP and MCFP. Sporting organizations take another envelope out of that, and there's obviously funding through Tourism, Parks and Recreation. It's just that we thought that when the cultural policy was created, it was to be inclusive of all of those because there is much overlap. We thought that there's more benefit in trying to be inclusive than in trying to separate the two.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I certainly appreciate that answer, but it's not so much facilities I was thinking of in terms of where the dollars actually are separated because there is nothing that can beat 40 hockey moms as opposed to five moms who may want their daughters to learn pottery. I just find that sometimes the dollars

between the sports and the actual arts aren't levelled out, I guess, in the way that I think that they should be. The squeaky wheel gets the oil.

Mr. Blackett: Well, I'll tell you one thing: I'm a hockey dad, I'm a soccer dad, and I love the arts. I love theatre. I love all of those things, and I don't see any difference in one or the other. Applications come to our department under CFEP or CIP or MCFP; our CLOs don't discriminate for those. Now, there are sporting dollars, and there are AFA dollars, but in terms of the other portion of it I think there are enough dollars to go around. Everybody would love more money, but I don't think there's anybody in the arts community that would say that we're not stepping up and taking care of those interests. If they want to have pottery, there's an opportunity to have pottery. In any one of those instances where they don't, I'd love to hear about it and see what we can do about that.

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

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks. Now the minister's got me a little puzzled because he's been quite clear that he believes that sports and recreation is part of his understanding as the minister of culture and arts – sorry, let me be correct: arts. If he's including sports and recreation under his department, then what is the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation funding exactly?

Mr. Blackett: I'm not talking about organized sports. I'm talking about recreational activities, whether it's in a playground or in a community environment. If that's puzzling to you, well, if you looked at the cultural policy – and it's been tabled in this House – it clearly states that recreation and sport is inclusive of that. My main priority, obviously, is arts and culture. I'm not trying to replace the minister responsible for sport by any sense of the imagination. I'm just saying that when there are communities and there are dollars and we look at facilities and helping with those and programs with those, there's a lot of overlap.

When we created our Premier's Advisory Council on Arts and Culture, you will notice that Diane Jones Konihowski, a well-known pentathlete, a former Olympic champion, a big advocate for sport, and John Short, who is another big advocate for sport, are included in that. That's not by accident; that was by design, and I don't see that there is any contradiction there. We're not talking about any organized programs. We're talking about recreation that happens naturally.

Ms Blakeman: But the minister is talking about using funding from a department that's called culture to fund recreational groups but evidently not organized recreational groups. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] I'll have to let this go for the time being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the members opposite, you quickly realize that every silver lining has a cloud, doesn't it? Which takes me to my comments on the Speech from the Throne. Olivier Blanchard writes in the most recent issue of the *Economist*: "Crises feed uncertainty. And uncertainty affects behaviour, which feeds the crisis." That's what I'm hearing a lot of. Sometimes when I'm listening to some of the comments and responses to the Speech from the Throne from the aisle opposite, I'm wondering if they have heard the very same speech that I have heard.

Indeed, there are certain and sudden shifts in the economic markets throughout the world, not only in Alberta, contrary to what some would have us believe, but when you look at Alberta in the context of the world, when you look at Alberta in the context of Canada, North America, the European Union, you soon realize that, as we always have known, Alberta is in a very privileged position indeed. Things may not be as economically sound or blessed as they have been perhaps a year from now, but again, putting it in relative terms, Alberta is doing quite well.

Let's just take a look at the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Speaker, I would challenge you today to look at any budget of any G-8 country, which includes Canada, frankly at any budget of any European country or Asian developed country and see the spending on a per capita basis that Alberta is doing on infrastructure. To bring it down to a more human level, as a member representing the riding of Edmonton-Castle Downs, I don't recall as many dollars being spent in my riding on infrastructure as I'm seeing right now, at this very moment.

As a matter of fact, it's almost to the point where it's inconvenient for residents of Castle Downs because we have roads dug up. We are having a highway put in. We're having various provincial and municipal structures being built at the same time, which is unprecedented. Now, these structures not only will serve Albertans for many years to come, but what they also do is provide valuable jobs. They provide jobs to Edmontonians, to Albertans of various sorts, skilled and unskilled work that is going to keep Albertans employed for many years to come as these are not short-term but long-term projects.

Mr. Speaker, not only are these large structures being put in, but I can tell you right now that just in my riding of Edmonton-Castle Downs three separate playgrounds are being built. One might say: Well, what's the big deal, a playground? But it is a big deal because that's what makes our community stronger; that's what keeps our kids fit. And playgrounds no longer are little frivolous pieces of infrastructure because they all cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1 million each, and a large portion of this funding, direct and indirect because some is via the municipality, is provided by this government. Again, many governments have already cut out any such spending, which would be considered frivolous by others, yet in Alberta we're enjoying this.

4:40

Now, looking at jobs, as a consequence of this investment in Alberta but also as a result of some wise decisions made by Alberta businesses, our unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, is relatively very low. I don't think there is another province or state in the United States or country in Europe that can boast having such a low unemployment rate as Alberta does. What that means is that in conjunction with the Alberta government Alberta businesses have made some wise decisions and are able to weather the economic storm that the rest of the world is facing at this time.

As a matter of fact, I have had the honour and the privilege of travelling the province over the last few weeks and meeting with many, many foreign workers, skilled and unskilled workers. I know that there are employers still looking for employees in certain parts of the province. They simply can't find either Albertans or Canadians to fill those positions, and they are still seeking workers from outside of Canada. What's really encouraging, Mr. Speaker, is that when you sit down and you speak with these foreign workers, you quickly find out that even though they are here on a very limited visa only to work, by a preponderance a majority of them want to stay here in Canada.

Now, that's a good report card because this is from individuals who have skills, skills that we value, who come from another part of

the world, so they can compare Alberta to another jurisdiction, and they would rather move their entire family and their lives here to Alberta because comparably they find Alberta a good place to be at and would like to build their futures here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, that's something that I'm not hearing from the other side of the aisle, and I think we should be talking more about that because we should be positive at this time.

Also, when I travelled throughout the province meeting with not only foreign workers but community members that welcomed them, what I have learned is that by and large Alberta is a very welcoming community. Foreigners still are attracted to this province. They know about this province, and it is a province of choice not only to foreigners but to other Canadians, Mr. Speaker. We still have a positive growth of other Canadians coming to Alberta as opposed to leaving Alberta. Now, that's something that we should be looking at because that is the measuring stick by which we should be measured.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to take the time and speak to mayors and reeves and other elected officials in municipalities, I take comfort in knowing from them that even though of course they have needs, and if you ask them, "Do you get enough money?" the answer will always be no, that means they're doing their job. Their job is to advocate for their respective jurisdictions as much as they can. But if you look at our provincial spending for municipalities, again, on a per capita basis I don't think that there is any other jurisdiction in Alberta or perhaps even the United States that spends more money on municipalities and the services that municipalities can in turn provide to their residents. This is something that we can boast about at this point, and no other jurisdiction really can. [interjections] I know, Mr. Speaker, that my being positive is having some adverse effect on the Member for Edmonton-Centre, but please bear with me and try to stomach a little bit more positive news. You will have a chance to ask me negative questions later.

You know, listening to the other side of the aisle, I always try to keep track in my calendar: is it a spending day or saving day? Walking into the Chamber, one never knows because up until recently there were very many spending days: more money for this, more money for that. You know very well, Mr. Speaker, that no matter how much money the government would allocate to an expenditure, it would never be enough. But then there was a shift, and we were being advised and the President of the Treasury Board and our minister of finance were being advised: "Enough spending. Save money. We're getting into a critical area." But in question period – Mr. Speaker, you can mark your calendar – today was a spending day. Today we can spend more money.

But you can't run a government like this, and the Speech from the Throne was very clear on that, that the government of Alberta will strike a balance between saving and spending. We will make sure that we don't spend borrowed money. We recently had a federal budget, Mr. Speaker, and I must tell you with some degree of dismay that many of the packages put in place right now to stabilize the Canadian economy are packages made out of borrowed money. Either you and I will pay those dollars back in the future or our kids will, but they are made out of borrowed money.

When you look at the Speech from the Throne and, I imagine, the subsequent budget, we will not be spending borrowed money. We will be spending money that we have set aside exactly for the situation that we are dealing with right now. Again, if we were to listen to advice from the aisle opposite, we would right now be spending borrowed money. I think we can be positive on that front, Mr. Speaker, as well. [interjections] The chirping goes on, Mr. Speaker, but you will give, I imagine, the opposition their time.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the Speech from the Throne, also, there is some very, very good planning for the future. As you know, our Premier has shown leadership in striking the TILMA agreement with British Columbia. No longer does a welder welding a pipeline to the B.C. border have to stop and drop his tools, and a new welder picks up on the other side of the border. Now we recognize that our welders, electricians, and other professionals can practise their trades across the border. They don't all of a sudden magically lose their skills when they cross the border.

Now, as you know, our Premier is a leader on this front and is encouraging such movement of labour and goods and mobility of materials from east to west throughout Canada. This will make Canada a stronger place to do business in, a stronger place to trade with, and definitely will make Canada an attractive place to invest when we achieve a measurably larger degree of labour and goods mobility throughout the province.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been always very aggressive in attracting and forging new markets. Even though we have a partner to the south who has been a long-term, trusted partner in trade and in many other alliances, Alberta realizes that there is a world outside of North America. We have been very active in attracting investment from foreign parts of the world and marketing Alberta's products – be they agriculture, timber, and carbon fuels – throughout the world. The speech makes it very clear that we will be on the forefront of promoting Alberta throughout the world, and we shall continue doing that.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the positive highlights from the Speech from the Throne. This is how I heard the Speech from the Throne. I can tell you that I am very confident in the Premier and the leadership of our cabinet and our caucus members, that we will be able to get through this difficult economic time in much better shape than any other jurisdiction on this continent and throughout the world. I know that Albertans can focus on their lives and can rest assured that if there is a government in this land that will get them through this hard time, this will be the government under the leadership of this Premier.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn the debate at this point.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, there are guests in the Assembly. Could we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real great pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly an Alberta government employee who has served the last 27 years as a reservist with the Canadian Forces. Major Chris Chodan serves with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment and recently completed a six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. He's a proud member of our military, and I'm honoured to have him as a member of our communications branch. I would ask all members to offer our most warm welcome to Major Chris Chodan.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the hon. Premier.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

I'm sure all members of this Assembly agree that Canada's reserve forces are an important part of Canada's national heritage. The primary function of our reserves is to augment, sustain, and support the regular forces.

4:50

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, reservists have made substantial contributions to Canada's international efforts and domestic relief operations. I've just introduced Major Chris Chodan, who's been in the reserves for 27 years and recently returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan. I did spend a few hours a couple of weeks ago with him, when he shared his experiences overseas. I appreciated the fact that, you know, he was willing to talk to me about his experiences. I'm very proud and very honoured to say that Chris is an employee of my department and one of 2,500 reservists in Alberta.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Across the country there are over 9,500 reservists on full-time employment within the Canadian Forces. Since the year 2000 more than 4,600 reservists, including Major Chodan, have been deployed for Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Croatia, Haiti, and other international hot spots.

At home reservists have contributed in numerous ways over the years. They have assisted during search and rescue operations and forest fires right here in Alberta. They responded to public needs following severe snowstorms in British Columbia, aided during the flood relief operations in Quebec and Manitoba, the ice storms in eastern Canada, Swissair flight 111 crash recovery operations, and a host of other situations. Thousands were standing by in the event of disruptions following the year 2000 rollover. Mr. Speaker, in addition, reservists often help at or participate in cultural events, parades, festivals, and other public events in communities across Canada.

Our proposed legislation gives us the flexibility to extend the scope of reservist leave to cover one-off events as required. For example, there's a good possibility that reservists may be required for security at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

Service in the reserve forces is voluntary and is for an indefinite period of service. Reserve forces units are located in hundreds of communities across Canada, including Major Chodan's Loyal Edmonton Regiment here in Edmonton and nine other units in Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer. Those who are in the reserves receive valuable trade and technical training, they receive leadership skills, they receive access to educational programs, and of course they feel satisfaction from serving their country.

Primary reservists usually train on evenings and weekends; however, most of them need two weeks of full-time service every year to keep their qualifications current. From time to time they also need to attend courses to prepare for operational missions. That's

why this bill is recommending 20 days of unpaid annual leave. This would be over and above the amount of vacation a reservist receives through an employer. In discussion with the Canadian Forces Liaison Council we're told this should be an adequate period of time for a reservist to receive the annual training they need to keep their skills current. In comparison, the government of Canada allows up to 15 days of leave for annual training. Manitoba and Saskatchewan provide leave for training but don't cap the number of days.

Of course, the other large component of Bill 1 is proposing an indefinite period of unpaid leave to serve either overseas or here at home for domestic emergencies. Major Chodan's leave began one year prior to his six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan. In this case that's the amount required for active military training, training that could very well mean life or death while on tour. Some provinces place a cap on the amount of time a reservist can be away on leave. New Brunswick's, for example, is 18 months, including any training that might be required. While a year and a half should be enough time for reservist leave, the Canadian Forces Liaison Council tells us there could be extenuating circumstances in any given mission. It's not likely, but it could happen, and I for one would hate to see a reservist lose his or her job here at home while serving our country abroad.

These proposed amendments strike a balance that we believe is fair for both the employer and the reservist, and we believe these amendments, if passed, stand to be among the most comprehensive in the country. Members of our military, whether they're with the regular forces or the reserves, have long been willing to make tremendous sacrifices. These sacrifices over a great number of decades provide us with the freedom of democracy, the very freedom that we exercise in this House each and every day. These proposed amendments are a small way of extending our gratitude along with the gratitude of all Albertans and are, quite simply, the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. Certainly, it is time that this province presented to this Assembly legislation of this nature. If you look at the background of reservists in this country, not only have they been part of our military history, but also we forget that sometimes many of these individuals help out in time of domestic need. Whether it be an ice storm or a forest fire or any other emergency, including plane crashes, reservists come forward.

Certainly, I think this has been recognized in this bill. As I understand it in section 53, anyone who has completed 26 consecutive weeks of employment is eligible for this proposed leave. Not only is it to possibly have a deployment with our armed forces outside Canada in military operations but also operations within Canada relating, as I said earlier, to an emergency, annual training of up to three weeks in one given year, or any activity that is going to be set out through the regulations.

Now, I too have had on occasion an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with Major Chris Chodan, and certainly that individual is a fine example of many of the citizens not only in Alberta but across the country who are members of our reserve forces. I've had an opportunity in the past to be a participant along with the major in Remembrance Day services at a couple of locations, one, to be specific, the McNally high school in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The gentleman's sense of duty and the sense of duty that is obviously coming forward from all reservists is reflected in this bill.

When we look at this bill, we can't forget and we have to be mindful that we've seen other provinces, we've seen the federal government enact similar legislation in recent years. Again, it is a pleasure to support this bill at this time in Alberta. Our reservists deserve job protection, and this bill will set out to do just that.

Now, during this economic time if one was contemplating helping out in the effort in Afghanistan, knowing that this legislation was in this province may make the decision easier for some of those individuals. The decision may be easy, but certainly the job is tough. Whether it be on an active war front, like Afghanistan is, or in a peacekeeping measure, those are very, very difficult jobs. They're tough jobs, and I admire the men and women of this country who are willing to step forward and do those jobs.

5:00

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by saying that this is a bill that I think we, hopefully, will pass in this Legislative Assembly. I think it is reflective of the times. I'm glad the government has come forward with it, and I look forward to further discussion from all hon. members of the Assembly. Please, this is a good bill, and I hope it has speedy passage through the Assembly. Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great satisfaction to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. This is really about ensuring that the men and women who protect our country and our province have their jobs to return home to. I fully support the commitment of reservists to the integrity, security, safety of our homeland, Canada, and peacekeeping in the world. I have always felt strongly about this, and I'm grateful that its recognition has now come as Bill 1, sponsored by our Premier for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, earlier in the legislative process I submitted two motions for this 2009 session. The first is Motion 516, which urges the government to amend the Employment Standards Code to ensure that reservists who work in Alberta are reinstated to their civilian positions, earnings, and other benefits for the duration of time they serve on active duty in the Canadian armed forces. I'm very pleased that Bill 1 captured the very essence of the motion. This is a salute that we can give to all men and women who serve in the Canadian military to protect our wonderful province and our beautiful country.

Mr. Speaker, I also submitted Motion 599, which urges the government to recognize the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and personal development that a soldier receives while in the Canadian armed forces as job training, work experience, skill certification for comparable civilian employment. Now, annual training is necessary to update a reservist's knowledge and skills and is generally required in order for a reservist to be eligible for deployment. It only makes sense that if service people obtain skills or qualifications during their military duty, they be applicable to civilian occupations. Practising a trade or knowledge of operating heavy equipment, management of logistics, planning, and various engineering skills are a few examples. The cross-recognition of training and certification would allow employees to put their skills to use in the civilian workforce.

This would also allow employers to benefit from the knowledge that their reservist employee is bringing. In return this would also help compensate the employers for allowing reservists time off from civilian work to serve and train in the military. This is something that I also feel very passionate about, and I hope that there would be some consideration towards it, if not during this session, perhaps at some point in the near future.

From what I understand, in most cases an employer must reinstate a reservist to the same or an alternate position of a comparable nature without reduction in the grid of earnings or other benefits. This is the sense of security that these fine people and their families need and truly deserve.

Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago I proposed the increase in parental leave that parents can now take. Like parents caring for their child on parental leave, military reservists care for their country on military reserve leaves. There are approximately 500 reservists in Calgary. I'm confident that these reservists and their employers are in full support of Bill 1. This is a significant step in the right direction to protecting our families, friends, and neighbours who in turn protect us.

As I have spent time in many other countries, I have witnessed first-hand places in the world that don't have the opportunity to observe the freedom and the security we enjoy in Canada. I'm very proud to be a Canadian. I'm even prouder to be an Albertan. This is why I speak so passionately about this. I give my full support to Bill 1, and I recommend Bill 1 for your full support and voting for the bill in the coming stages.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone who wishes to comment.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak with respect to Bill 1 and also to rise in support of this piece of legislation. We believe in the NDP caucus that we must do everything that we can to support the good people who make the types of sacrifices that our reservists make and also the sacrifices that their families make when they sign up to serve their country. It is a great testament to their commitment to both their community and to the country in which we all live.

The only real significant point that I want to make beyond the fact that this is a much-needed piece of legislation is that it is a bit disappointing to see how late it came. We are, of course, the second-last jurisdiction in the country to enact this legislation, and it's a bit unfortunate that our reservists had to wait this long. Notwithstanding that fact, we do know that it is absolutely an important addition to the range of supports that we can provide to people who make the choice to serve their community in this way.

We know that roughly 50 per cent of reservists currently hold civilian jobs and that it is very difficult for them to fully engage in that volunteer activity if constantly trying to balance the demands of work. So where possible and where there are more specific duties that can attract leaves, that's a good thing. It's a good thing that they can take the time to provide their service, knowing that in so doing they come back to a secure workplace and a job that remains theirs without any type of compromise.

This is also, as already has been mentioned, a benefit to employers because our employers can benefit from the training that they may receive and from the experience that they may receive through their voluntary efforts. I hope that employers in Alberta will recognize and appreciate that fact. There have been some concerns at different times raised that the leave might actually result in employers being more hesitant to hire reservists if they feel that they may at certain points have to provide leaves. However, I know that that, of course, would be something that would be illegal, and I hope that the Ministry of Employment and Immigration in enforcing this statute and the protection that it provides to reservists will be vigilant in ensuring that the rights of our reservists are protected and maintained through this legislation.

That is really the extent of what we want to say except, again, to congratulate the government in bringing this forward and to advise that we will be supporting the passage of this bill. Thank you.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone for comments or questions for five minutes.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, one that ensures that those with civilian jobs who leave to serve our country or attend domestic emergencies have a job to return to.

These proposed revisions before us remind me of a saying that goes something like: if you don't want to stand behind our forces, then feel free to stand in front of them. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no desire to stand in front of our forces, and frankly even standing behind them, I'm fairly easy to spot. However, stand behind them I will. That's why I'm very pleased and proud to support these amendments. It only makes sense that if our military reservists leave their families, leave their homes, put their careers on hold, they have a job to return to. Due to the extension of the Afghanistan mission Albertans who are reservists will continue to be deployed, and we need them to know just how much we support them.

The only caveat I can think of, especially while we're in the midst of these challenging economic times, is that an employer might be in the midst of a downsizing, and there may not be a position to return to. I understand – and perhaps the minister can correct me if I'm wrong – that an employer cannot terminate employment with a reservist once the leave is under way. However, if the employer suspends or terminates business, then clearly there is no position for the reservist upon his return, but then there wouldn't be anyway. There are provisions that the reservist does have hiring priority if the business starts up again within 12 months after the end of the leave, and I think that's pretty fair.

I'm also in favour of these provisions applying to domestic emergencies as well as to operations outside the country. Reservists are essential when it comes to assisting in massive fires, floods, ice storms, and other natural disasters. Fortunately, we don't require the domestic emergency reservists here at home very often – and we should be thankful for that – but it is nice to know that they're here if we need them.

The government will have the ability to authorize other reasons for leave depending upon what happens in the future. I think it's very good that we don't tie our hands in this regard. For example, it could be that reservists are asked to provide security for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver next year. By leaving these options open, the government may decide to include this event or any other event in reservist leave.

If these proposed amendments are passed, Alberta will be the final jurisdiction in this country to adopt reservist leave. In preparing for these amendments, we have studied what other provinces and the federal government have done. We've talked with the Canadian Forces Liaison Council and active members of the Canadian Forces to receive their input. We can adopt what could very well be one of the most comprehensive and effective pieces of legislation in all of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see that these provisions will also apply to reservists who are rangers. Rangers provide a military presence in remote, isolated, and coastal communities of Canada. There are rangers in several Alberta communities, including Fort Vermilion, Grande Cache, High Level, Peace River, and Valleyview.

I understand that there may be some concern from Alberta business over having to find a cover-off while a reservist employee is away on a mission or training, but from my previous experience with human resources I can tell you that any concern is not likely over the six months or year or year and a half that a reservist might be away. In many respects it's managed similar to the way that vacation and maternity leaves are covered.

The concern will likely be over the 20 days of leave a reservist is entitled to in each calendar year for the purposes of his annual training. This, of course, is over and above any vacation that they might usually receive. Many managers will tell you that backfilling for that short period of time is not an easy task, and I would guess that many companies, depending upon their size and resources, will just divide any extra workload amongst others while the reservist is away.

I don't think that the concern is going to be widespread. I have not heard from any business in Edmonton-Calder, and I'm just bringing it up as a point to consider. The bottom line is that if a reservist is making the selfless sacrifice to defend my freedom abroad or to assist in an emergency here at home, I want the reservist to be as well trained as possible. If that means we need to cover off for a couple of extra weeks, then that's the least that we can provide.

I'd also like to provide a dimension on how this proposed reservist leave will benefit Alberta families. It's one thing for spouses and children to say goodbye to a loved one who might not be back for quite some time, but it's quite another for the same family to have to concern themselves with whether their husband or wife is coming back home to the same securities that come with a regular pay-cheque. I know that the government of Alberta, through its agreement with the AUPE, already provides its employees with some form of leave for military service. If Bill 1 is passed, reservist leave will extend for all Alberta employees who are under provincial jurisdiction.

As a former volunteer firefighter I can't begin to tell you how proud I am of our reservists, those who dedicate a good part of their lives to the betterment of this country, to a more peaceful world, and to a safer society. Providing job protection for this service is common sense, and I for one do not hesitate to throw my support behind Bill 1. It is a very important bill for the Edmonton-Calder constituency as the home of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. I would encourage all of my legislative colleagues, regardless of where you sit in this House, to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for any questions or comments.

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my voice to the support for this bill. It has been a while in coming, but at least it's finally here, and we in Alberta will be able to recognize the contribution that our military personnel give to this country.

One of the reasons that I feel quite strongly about this is because I have within the last year and a half made the acquaintance of a young woman who is in our reserves and who has actually served two terms in Afghanistan, both of which were outside of the wire. I think we all know that that requires just that extra little bit. I do recall spending time with her when she was going back to Afghanistan for her second tour and the great apprehension that she had going back knowing again full well that she probably would be outside of the wire. It wasn't necessarily based on fear, but it really was based on the experiences that she had had, and there were a couple of close calls. How could we possibly not expect her to do that?

One of the things that we talked about was jobs. I knew what she did as a job. It was a federal job. She said that she had enough to worry about when she was over there and didn't want to have to worry about coming home and not knowing if she would have a job or how she was going to get her bills paid. It's always stuck in my mind, and this is why I believe that this bill is so important.

I'm sure that we're all aware of the equipment that they wear. They've got helmets and goggles and flak jackets and equipment over and above and on top of that and on top of their uniforms and under their uniforms. Quite frankly, I don't know how they move with all of that heavy equipment on plus their guns and their protective equipment. She has very, very long blond hair, and one of the things that she sort of was allowed was that she could let her hair show outside of her helmet. She said that when she walked down the street for the first time on her second return, the women and children would yell her name because they recognized her hair. She realized why she was there: because she spent most of her time outside of the wire with women and children, bringing them in, a lot of negotiations, just working towards having them protect her and trust her. There was a sense that our troops were being protected in a fashion by the people that they served. It didn't always work that way, of course, but they did feel that the people they worked with closely really did appreciate what they were doing and did want their safety.

I'd just like to make a few other comments. In no way do I want them to diminish the positive effect that this bill would have, but I would just like to add perhaps a little more to the discussion. I believe that we should also recognize the sacrifices that will be made by our employers. Certainly, we can speak about Alberta employers. They often lose educated and experienced staff for very lengthy periods of time, in particular those personnel that are officers.

Our employers are very aware of the importance of the activity and feel an obligation to be a small part in the protection of our freedom and that of others in other parts of the world. Certainly, they protect our way of life. I wonder if perhaps there might be some way that we could publicly thank our employers – maybe a website or a newspaper notification, something along that line – and, in particular, small business owners, who may feel and probably would feel a disruption in their business as they release their very valued employees and ensure that our military personnel will have jobs upon their return. We should support our small businesses because it really could be our indirect, small part that we would work towards, that we would pay towards, that we would support towards the people who fight for our freedom.

5:20

I trust that the bureaucratic process will be very quick in implementing this bill. I know that there has been some lagging with some of the other Bill 1s that have been brought forward, and I would hate to see any lagging of any kind. I would like to see this bill passed – we probably know it will be passed fairly quickly, I would assume – and I would like to see that bureaucratic process being put into place so that right away our military reservists, rangers, that have been mentioned, will feel protected and know that when they come home, they will have a job. By having that job, they will know that they are valued in what they do to protect our freedom.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing none, are there any other members who wish to speak?

The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the hon. Premier to close debate.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to thank Major Chris Chodan, who is here this afternoon representing all of our reservists. It's individuals like him that allowed us to bring Bill 1 forward. I also want to acknowledge the kind comments that I received from our government members as well as the comments received from the opposition.

With that, I want to call the question in support of Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 2 on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General and to make a few comments about the Lobbyists Amendment Act, which is, of course, Bill 2.

Lobbying is a legitimate activity, and it is more important for Albertans to see that lobbying activities are being conducted openly. The bill deals with strengthening the prohibition against a dual role. The Lobbyists Act prohibits individuals from providing paid advice to government at the same time and on the same issue as they are paid to lobby government. This prohibition against a dual role is essentially a conflict-of-interest provision and is intended to ensure the objectivity of advice given to government. Originally this prohibition applied to associates. Not only was an individual prohibited from holding these two roles, but two individuals associated with each other could not do so.

During debate in Committee of the Whole last year many members agreed that spouses should not be considered associates. Following this debate, an amendment was proposed and passed. With the passage of this amendment the concept of associate was deleted from the prohibition, and a loophole was inadvertently created. For example, a person who lobbies under his or her own name would not be prohibited from providing paid advice to government under a corporate identity. Amendments in Bill 2 will close this loophole. Amendments in Bill 2 also give effect to the intent reflected in debate and limit the concept of associate so that spouses are not included.

The proposed amendments in Bill 2 will also make it clear that this prohibition applies to individuals who are paid to lobby on behalf of organizations regardless of their obligation to register as an organization lobbyist. Without this amendment an individual who is not required to register because the threshold of 100 hours per year has not been met could argue that the prohibition does not apply. Bill 2 will make it clear that an individual must comply with the prohibition even when the threshold has not been met. These amendments will provide clarity for lobbyists and will increase compliance and aid enforcement activities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 also contains changes to the definition of public office holder. Public office holders currently include all MLAs, their staff, and department employees and employees, officers, directors, and members of prescribed provincial entities. A revised definition includes individuals who are appointed to government committees.

Bill 2 also deals with the office of the Ethics Commissioner. Mr. Speaker, the Lobbyists Amendment Act will provide the Ethics

Commissioner with authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties. In addition, the Lobbyists Amendment Act will provide that the registrar, after conducting an investigation, will prepare a report of the investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 also deals with appeals from administrative penalties. Amendments are proposed to allow an existing body to hear appeals from administrative penalties instead of establishing a new body to hear appeals. Bill 2 also contains a number of relatively minor housekeeping changes, including clarifying language and correcting cross-references.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments in Bill 2 will strengthen and clarify the application of this prohibition against a dual role, limit the concept of associated persons so that spouses are not included, will add to the list of individuals who are considered to be public office holders, allow an existing body to hear appeals from administrative penalties, give the Ethics Commissioner authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties, give the registrar the ability to prepare

reports of investigations, and address a number of housekeeping matters.

Mr. Speaker, with the passage of Bill 2 the Lobbyists Act will better meet the needs of Albertans.

At this time I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 2. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a good afternoon of progress, and on that note I would move that we now call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

Issue 5

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome. I would ask all hon. members and those in the galleries to remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to a former colleague who has passed away.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Mr. William (Bill) Mack

April 1, 1924, to February 17, 2009

The Speaker: On February 17, 2009, Mr. William (Bill) L. Mack, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away. Bill Mack was first elected in the election held March 14, 1979, and served until November 1, 1982. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Edmonton-Belmont for the Progressive Conservative Party. During his term of office Bill Mack served on several committees: standing committees on Public Affairs; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Offices of the Auditor General and the Ombudsman; the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act; and Legislative Offices.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember hon. Member Mr. William (Bill) Mack as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Rafet Akgunay, ambassador of the Republic of Turkey, and his wife, Mrs. Akgunay. This is the ambassador's first visit to Alberta. We are very pleased to welcome him and his wife to our beautiful province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Turkey have a strong connection through our trade and through our people. Our two-way trade is valued at about \$75 million annually. The Turkish community is a vibrant part of Alberta's dynamic cultural mosaic.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that His Excellency and Mrs. Akgunay please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very talented and successful young Albertan, Myranda Stewart of Strathmore. Myranda was chosen from among 90 of the province's top 4-H members as the 2008 Premier's award winner, the highest accolade in the 4-H program.

Myranda has been a member of 4-H for several years, specifically the Cheadle 4-H club, where she held several executive positions. Her community involvement and exceptional leadership skills as

district key member have earned her this great honour. In addition to her duties as the Premier's award recipient Myranda is currently serving as a 4-H ambassador promoting the opportunities available through 4-H. Highlighting her year as the 2008 Premier's award winner, Myranda is here visiting us today and to meet the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of listening to this young girl speak, and I'm quite pleased that she's not down here on the floor speaking, or there might be 83 of us that might not look to be the best speakers in the world. She's very exceptional. Myranda is seated in your gallery with her parents, Michelle and Darcy; her sister Kaity, who can give the best hugs in the world; and her brother Colten. I now ask that they rise to receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to introduce two people from very different parts of my life that I'm very happy to see here today. It is first of all a great pleasure of mine to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Sharon Robins, who I know as my Auntie Sharon. Of course, I've known her since I was born. It was a great pleasure to see her today and a great surprise. She is a woman who has had an accomplished career as a senior manager in the department of municipal government and was a senior manager in emergency preparedness for the province of Alberta. I'd ask her to rise today and receive the warm welcome of this House.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, the second person that I'd like introduce today is a very good friend of mine, who I've known throughout much of my life overseas. His name is Mr. David Ennis. He is a lawyer who has spent a number of years in interesting places, as I have, such as Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Afghanistan. I think his greatest claim to fame is that he is a very profound legislative drafter who helped me in drafting the first electoral law in Afghanistan in 2005. I'd ask him to rise today and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some of our members of the Department of Energy in the province of Alberta. I don't have to remind you that it's all about energy. These good folks know that as well. We have as guests today Margaret Winters, Chandra Kanta, Lori Kutschinski, Patricia Gannon, Anas Khan, Beverly Smith, Sherry Harder, Larisa Wozna, Lorna Villeneuve, Eleanor Wang, Vida Ramos, and Mila Jucutan. I would ask them to please rise and have the members give them the warm welcome that they deserve.

Ms Evans: Well, not to be outdone by my colleague, Mr. Speaker, you know, we're wonderfully blessed to have people in Finance to look after all of the wonderful attributes of Energy. Well, not all of them perhaps but at least some of them. Ashleigh Campbell, representing strategic and business services; from tax and revenue administration Benjamin Evans, Brynne Anderson, Christopher Sharpe, and Kehui Auyong. I hope I have pronounced that properly. We also have from risk management and insurance Maria Ramirez, Kelly York, and Guy Forest. I'd ask them to please rise and for us to extend our warmest welcome to them all.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today and introduce to you and through you a group of students from Holy Family school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. These students are part of a group called O Ambassadors, who raise funds for development projects in developing countries and increase awareness of global issues at their school. I would like to thank the education assistant, Ranée Laporte, for her leadership on this project as well as Marlene Lecky Perron, teacher at Holy Family school, and two parent volunteers, Anne McClintock and Sharlynn Clark, for helping the students joining us this afternoon. I'd ask that teachers, parents, and students seated in the members' gallery please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Mark Zemp from Raymond, Alberta. Mark has raised his family in Raymond and owns an insurance and registry business there. He's in Edmonton today on business in his capacity as president of the insurance agents' association of Alberta. I would ask Mark to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly one of my constituents. Jacqueline Biollo is married to a member of our armed forces. She's the mother of two exceptional children. She serves as a town councillor for the town of Beaumont, and she is the executive director of Seniors United Now. She is seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through to members of this Assembly a number of seniors and friends and family with us today from the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, Elder Advocates of Alberta, Public Interest Alberta, Seniors Helping Seniors, the Seniors' Action Liaison Team, Seniors United Now, and Friends of Medicare, every one of these Albertans deeply concerned by the health issues directly impacting seniors, including prescription drug costs, the availability of quality long-term care, emergency care, and more. I would ask them to rise in the House now and be welcomed by the Legislature.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mahamad Accord, executive director of the Alberta Somali Community Center. The Alberta Somali Community Center is a broad-based, nonprofit organization that enjoys very strong community support and is well respected by other service providers as well as by funders. The centre was established in 2007 in response to a large influx of Somali newcomers to Alberta. The vision of the Alberta Somali Community Center is to integrate the Alberta Somali community fully into Canadian life by removing barriers and to build bridges between the Somali community and mainstream

Canadian culture. I would ask that Mr. Accord now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly five students representing the students of Newton Place, a University of Alberta residence. In the past three years the students of Newton Place have experienced a 27 per cent increase in their rent. Their rent is far above what student loan regulations provide. Affordable housing is desperately needed. I'd now ask that my guests rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly: Nicholas Boers, Stephanie Au-Yeung, Usha Hemraz, Amanda Nelson, and Xiye Wang.

Members' Statements

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

O Ambassadors

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to rise today and speak about the O Ambassadors group who have joined us this afternoon from the Holy Family school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Over 2,000 schools in North America are contributing to the O Ambassadors. This program helps to raise awareness and funds to support the United Nations' millennium development goals. These four goals focus on important issues such as poverty, hunger, education, and sustainable development. I had the honour and privilege of attending their fundraiser on January 30 along with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I'm proud to report that the group here today has raised \$5,939 to date. The group is working towards a goal of \$8,500 in order to build a school in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, any extra money will go towards textbooks, teachers' salaries, and clean water.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the O Ambassadors from the Holy Family school and from all over North America for their selfless work in helping to create opportunities for students in developing nations. Thank you to all the teachers, organizers, parent volunteers, and students who contributed to the work to make this program a success. Your work is inspirational to all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to provide an update to hon. members on the activities of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Last fall we undertook a recruitment process, which saw nine new members appointed to the council. The personal and professional accomplishments of these new members and the diversity of their expertise made for a very impressive table at the council's three-day strategic planning session last month.

Joining the six returning members are Dan Bojarski of St. Brides, a certified industrial technologist with experience in hiring employees across a range of disabilities; Bryce Clarke of Ardrossan, a member of the Edmonton Police Service; Dr. John Latter, head of the division of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Calgary; Brad Robertson of Calgary, who brings the perspective of persons with developmental disabilities; Amber Skoog of Stirling,

who lives with reduced vision and works as an alternate format editor at Lethbridge College; Kuen Tang of Edmonton, an active volunteer and the first student with quadriplegia to graduate from the University of Alberta's bachelor of education program; Pamela Wagner of Medicine Hat, who offers an employer perspective through her work with REDI Enterprises Society; Tammy Winder from Lethbridge, a parent who brings over 20 years of experience working with people with mental illness; and Carmen Wyton from St. Albert, the president and CEO of Special Olympics Alberta. Mr. Speaker, as deputy chair of the council it is an honour to work with such a distinguished group of Albertans.

Looking ahead, we see opportunities for our team to provide advice and leadership in areas such as enhancing employment opportunities throughout the Alberta economy and ensuring standards are in place for best practices in universal design.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to providing a further update on council's strategic plan when it's finalized and, more importantly, to working in earnest with all members of this House on its implementation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring to the attention of this Assembly the significance of the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, or Bill 24, which received royal assent in December. The new act arose from a process of extensive public consultation as well as thorough legislative review involving both sides of the House and received strong support.

The Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is progressive legislation that balances individual rights with assessment of capacity and replaces the 30-year-old Dependent Adults Act. There is no question that adult Albertans who require assistance to make personal decisions will benefit from this legislation. The act is designed to help people remain as independent as possible as long as possible. It provides more choices and safeguards to protect Albertans who can no longer make all their decisions.

Importantly, the act is designed to enhance the protection of Albertans who are not in a position to make decisions for themselves. It increases the choices available to people who need assistance in making personal decisions by providing a continuum of decision-making authorization to more formal, court-ordered guardianship. Guardianship will be used when other least-intrusive options have been tried and not been successful or the adult's incapacity to making decisions is more long term and permanent.

The new act makes significant improvements in the protection of vulnerable adults. The new legislation provides more safeguards to protect assisted and represented adults while providing more protective and investigative measures when there is concern about their safety. The act presumes adults are capable of making their own decisions unless determined otherwise through proper assessment.

The act provides for a more standardized capacity assessment model, which includes informing the adult about the purpose of assessment. The capacity assessor meets with the adult and conducts an in-depth interview after ensuring that the medical evaluation has been conducted to rule out temporary or reversible cause of incapacity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Medications are essential and a daily cost for seniors. Money spent on medications to keep seniors healthy, like controlling blood pressure and diabetes, can be considered money saved through preventing both complications and hospitalization. They are protecting health and saving health dollars. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that the new pharmaceutical plan is a further tax added to seniors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our government cares deeply about seniors. We know that our seniors are looking at their investments that have diminished dramatically over the last number of months. We're working together with all ministers to ensure that we maintain one of the best programs for seniors in the country of Canada, from long-term care to various housing options to home care, and we'll continue to provide those resources to our seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the government using total income and not net income for determining seniors' annual income and as a basis for their expenses for health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health has all of the details on the program. I want to mention to the House and to the seniors that are present here today and many that are watching that those who cannot afford to pay for badly needed drugs, we'll have a program in place that they can apply for assistance to make sure that no Albertan, senior or younger person, can't get the drugs that they need for improving their health.

Dr. Swann: My final question to the Premier: will the Premier admit that this is his own policy and not that of the minister of health, to charge seniors more for their pharmaceuticals?

Mr. Stelmach: This is a government policy. It had considerable input into formation of the policy, all towards maintaining the badly needed services tied to health to, we know, a senior population that will be increasing dramatically over the next number of years. I mean, I'm part of the baby boomer generation, or getting there. I know I look much younger. This is what we're working towards: make sure that it's sustainable, that we provide the best services, and to ensure that the next generation can also have the same kind of quality of life that we're enjoying in Alberta today.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next questions are for the minister of health. We have a minister of health who believes that, quote, there should not be a sense of entitlement when you turn 65, end quote, and who dismisses the legitimate concerns of Albertans as whining. This attitude in a cabinet minister is extremely disappointing. To the minister: does the minister admit that by using income from 2008 we seriously underestimate the income seniors will be facing in 2009?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has mentioned and I stated in the House earlier to a question, the economic situation in the world has changed since we brought this policy through. The policy is still the right policy, but we've had a number of seniors raise issues such as the one the hon. leader has raised relative to: are some of the mechanics, if I could, right relative to what line of income? We're taking a look at all of those situations, and we'll make a determination as we go forward.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the minister's explanation for removing premium-free Blue Cross coverage for seniors, a plan that's been in place for over a decade?

Mr. Liepert: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is not correct. Currently, today, every senior pays 30 per cent of their prescription costs up to a maximum of \$25 no matter how poor or how wealthy seniors are. I think this is a perfect time for this question because on the news this morning we had a situation where General Motors and Chrysler are back at the table for more money. We have Air Canada on the verge of going into bankruptcy. All of these companies fundamentally have problems with their business models.

Now, if we take that into health care, Mr. Speaker, we have to change the fundamental business model of health care certainly in this province and, I believe, in this country because – I'll finish this story in my answer to the next question.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's indeed revealing that the minister of health sees health care as a business. That says a lot about what we're headed for in the next decade in health care, Mr. Speaker.

How does the minister justify it? The largest jump in Blue Cross premiums occurs when a person turns 65.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll complete my story. This has nothing to do with business. This is about comparing where we are in health care. So let's take a fundamental business model in health care today. I tell you, if General Motors and Chrysler go broke, we can still buy a Toyota car. If Air Canada goes into bankruptcy, we can fly WestJet. But if publicly funded health care, which this government stands on, goes broke, as some of these members would like to see it go, we will have exactly what they don't want to have: American-style health care. So we want to change the fundamentals to preserve the publicly funded health care in this province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Long-term Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seniors and often their families are concerned about their ability to find a long-term care bed when they need it, and the government's continuing care strategy has done little to reassure our Alberta seniors. My questions would be to the Premier. Mr. Premier, I too look a little younger than I am. Does the Premier feel that the first-bed policy for long-term care placement, that allows seniors to be moved from family, friends, and community, is a fair way to treat our frail Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do agree with the member that she is very young looking. Never get caught in that debate; I can tell you that.

The hon. member raises a good question. Without a doubt, long-term care rates in Alberta compared to other jurisdictions are lower. However, I do know, representing a rural constituency where sometimes when a person suffers some catastrophic event – perhaps a stroke or they fall in their home; something happens – where husband and wife now are separated for a period of time, where they're put in a long-term care situation, perhaps not in the very same community for a period of time, a few miles away, that it is difficult for the senior that's at home. The spouse possibly doesn't have a driver's licence. How do you visit? You depend on family, or you depend on that home-care nurse. I know that situation. We understand that situation very, very well. That's why we're increasing the number of long-term care beds.

Also, let's give seniors choice in terms of assisted living, additional home care, all of those different models, rather than for whatever reason always institutionalizing our seniors. That's not a quality life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the Premier that warehousing seniors is really not where we want to go.

My next question would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Would the minister commit to remove the first-bed policy, which is still going on today, as part of the continuing care strategy so that seniors can age and live out their lives in the right place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess my answer would be that I would hope that we could provide the options that we wouldn't need this policy. If we had the appropriate options, that seniors had the choice, we wouldn't need that particular option. But keep in mind that if we were to remove that option today, we would be in many cases doing exactly what our opposition folks keep telling us they don't want to see in health care, and that's jumping the queue. If there is no facility available in this town and there isn't going to be one for 10 years, we need to ensure that if that senior needs care, it's provided within a region. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

Ms Pastoor: Actually, I think you can have it both ways.

My next question would be to the same minister. Does the minister consider it fair that by allowing seniors' facilities to charge for increased services, low-income seniors may not receive the necessary care that they require; in other words, sort of a two-tier service within the same facility?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess we have choices and options that seniors make every day when they enter facilities. In some cases it's assisted daily living, that provides a certain level of service, and you pay in some cases more in some facilities than others. Is this government going to move to a system whereby everybody gets treated exactly the same and government funds everything? The answer is no.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party in the House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This evening the axe hovers over the head of Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer. He stands charged with the capital crime of embarrassing the government, specifically that the accused pointed out that partisan appoint-

ments of those who run Alberta elections are inappropriate, unfair, and undemocratic. To the Premier: will you drop the charges against the accused and table legislation this session to end Tory patronage control of Alberta's electoral system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. member asked a similar question. Again I repeat to the hon. member that the person he's talking about is an officer of this Legislature. He's not employed by the Premier of Alberta. I don't assess his performance. The committee assesses his performance, and it's up to the committee, which has representation from all three parties.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the accused, being the Chief Electoral Officer of the province of Alberta, stands further charged with the crime of embarrassing the government by pointing out that the government has systematically failed to prosecute charges brought under the act by him. The question is to the Premier. Will you drop the charges against the accused and tell Albertans why your Justice minister has failed to prosecute these violations of the Alberta Election Act?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, first of all, just listening to the question, he's got most Albertans baffled because he doesn't know who is being charged with what, I would think. It got me a bit baffled as well.

Anyway, if he's imputing motives to the Minister of Justice, saying that she did something inappropriately, not pursuing the charges because a Crown prosecutor says that we should, that's a different story. If he has evidence of that, get up in the House and say that with the protection of the immunity of the House.

But to go back to yesterday, saying that because I was elected Premier and that Albertans who wanted to vote for the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party bought a membership, voted, and then he tried to put that together and say that somehow that created a difficult situation for the next election – you know, I had calls yesterday from people wondering: where is this guy coming from? What voters list? We don't go through the voters list for election of a leader of a party. I'm sure the Liberals didn't do that, and if you did, you can tell us that. Well, I don't know when you're coming up for re-election, but I'm sure you're not going to grab the Alberta list and go through an election. I mean, he's got everybody baffled, but if he's got hard evidence of impropriety, get up in the House and say it.

Mr. Mason: I certainly have the Premier baffled, Mr. Speaker.

The accused stands charged with the crime of embarrassing the government by pointing out that 25 per cent of Albertans were not on the voters list in the last election because the government could not provide the required nominees for deputy returning officers in a timely fashion. Will the Premier drop the charges against the accused and give the Chief Electoral Officer the authority and resources he needs to run an effective, well-organized, and nonpartisan election campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget is agreed upon by the Assembly, by the committee, not by the Premier.

Secondly, there were issues raised by at least two parties, that being the opposition, and I know that we had some issues that we wanted to talk about, but to say in this House that somehow as a Premier or as a government we manipulated the election is just pure junk. In fact, maybe – well, no. I won't make any comment because I don't want to dig the hole deeper than what this guy is digging for himself.

Thank you.

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

South Calgary Health Campus

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Calgary-Hays have been waiting for some time now for the completion of the south Calgary health campus. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the south Calgary health campus being built in phases when the need for a new health facility in the area is so great?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify an answer that I gave yesterday in the House to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He had me so worked up about the expansion at the Peter Lougheed that I didn't hear his question properly.

Mr. Mason: What a surprise.

Mr. Liepert: I was probably being interrupted by the leader of the third party, and I couldn't hear him. In fact, actually, the leader of the third party could take some lessons from the Liberal opposition, who have been behaving very appropriately in this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And at that point in time we'll move on.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will each of the phases be completed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll finish the rest of the story. Yesterday the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked me: "Will the minister at least commit to a 2011 completion of the south Calgary hospital?" My response was: "No, Mr. Speaker, I cannot at this time." As I said, I had mistakenly thought that he had asked me about the third phase of the Peter Lougheed hospital.

That being said, I cannot commit that it will be completed on time; 2011 is a long time away. But what I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that we have allocated a billion and a quarter dollars to this particular hospital. It is on schedule, on budget. I see no reason why it shouldn't be completed in 2011.* That's the first phase.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: what services will be provided by the south Calgary health campus when phase 1 opens?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, phase 1 of the south Calgary campus will be a full acute facility which would have some 260 beds, an emergency department, intensive care units, 11 operating rooms – I could go on and on. I just want to reiterate that phase 1 of the south Calgary campus is part of some \$2 billion, \$3 billion, \$4 billion worth of health care projects that are either just completed, under way, or about to be completed in the next couple of years in the city of Calgary, which is some 50 per cent of our allocation of health care capital dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Turner Valley Gas Plant

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, who is

*See page 68, left column, paragraph 13

responsible for the Turner Valley gas plant historical site, told us that because of tough economic times “we’re not going to . . . spend an untold amount of dollars to make sure that we remediate.” The message that I got is that Albertans should just stop whining if a contaminated site is affecting their water. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Is the minister saying that in the upcoming budget there will be a decrease or an elimination in reclamation funding; in other words, no cash for cleanups?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as everybody in this House knows, I have no idea what is in the next budget. That’s the privy of the minister of finance, and we’ll be informed in due course.

As far as reclamation, there is money being spent there. What I said is that we have remediated that site to an industrial standard. There will never be residential activity on that site; there’s an operating gas plant adjacent to it. The site has been remediated to a residential area from where there are walking paths to the individual buildings. At this time it’s prudent for us to take a look at our financial position. If we are going to go forward with further remediation or further expansion or an interpretive centre adjacent to that site, we’ll do so in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister so that I can clarify: given that the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act states that where a substance that is causing or has caused an adverse effect is released into the environment, the person responsible, that being the minister representing the department, shall – not may but shall – take all responsible measures to repair, remedy, and confine the effects of the substance, is the minister saying that he won’t follow the act?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’m saying that we have done, indeed, all of those things. We have confined the site, we have remediated the site, we have enclosed a membrane, and we have made sure that there was no danger of contamination going to the Sheep River. There’s no seepage of contaminants into the groundwater. It is a site that’s remediated, and it could be used today, if we so choose, in a manner that is appropriate.

2:10

Ms Blakeman: I don’t think the 2,000 petitioners believe that.

My next question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the minister responded to an issue raised by these same 2,000 people by saying that it’s an issue that isn’t there – and that’s in quotes – is the minister denying the seriousness of a contamination for which Alberta Health had issued a directive that pregnant women and children should be restricted from the site?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issuance of a directive around citizens that may or may not find it to their benefit to visit different industrial sites around the province of Alberta, I would suggest that there are probably a number of places that certain individuals may find it uncomfortable and perhaps not in their best interest to visit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the CBC interviewed President Barack Obama. The President is obviously

better informed on Alberta’s energy production than our CBC anchor, who misleadingly referred to the oil sands as tar sands. Informed Canadians note that this area might easily be called the job sands. Equally as impressive, the President agrees with Alberta and believes in the viability of carbon capture and storage. To the Minister of Energy. Alberta’s carbon capture and storage funding was announced in July. Can the minister advise when we’d expect to see these projects move forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I was very pleased, of course, with President Obama’s support for carbon capture and storage. I think that this is a thoughtful leader that’s looking for real solutions. We have one. We have carbon capture and storage moving ahead. What this does, in my opinion, is that it adds another very strong voice to the many voices around the world who now recognize that Alberta is a leader in carbon capture and storage technology. We’ll move ahead in the very short coming months and get our programs in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much is made of the carbon emissions from the job sands development. My question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us what the potential reduction in oil sands emissions could be from carbon capture and storage?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I think that it’s important for us all to understand that when you look at the oil sands specifically, that’s not necessarily the largest emission of CO₂ in the province of Alberta. Coal-fired electrical generation is actually the largest emission. That said, there are significant opportunities for us to reduce emissions from oil sands and other areas in the province of Alberta, particularly on the oil sands issue with respect to upgrading and refining and the ability for us to capture CO₂ in those locations.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if Alberta taxpayers share in the cost of construction, infrastructure, research, costs for these large carbon capture and storage projects, will they also share in the rewards once these projects are operating and potentially generating revenue streams?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, most certainly, when we look at the situation that we have in Alberta, we are very blessed with the resources in Alberta that help build this province, but also we’re blessed with geology that allows us to store CO₂. In certain circumstances enhanced oil recovery projects from CO₂ sequestration do result in a very large benefit to Albertans with respect to additional production of conventional reserves, which leads to wealth generation and also additional royalty collected.

Prosecutions under the Election Act

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, today I’m hoping for some answers regarding allegations that 19 electoral violations were ignored by the Minister of Justice. This might be of help to the Chief Electoral Officer, too, since it seems that he may lose his job for doing it too well. Will the Justice minister tell Albertans why Alberta Justice refused to adequately prosecute 19 violations of the Alberta Election Act as recommended for prosecution by the Chief Electoral Officer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Premier has made it very clear that we treat any concern expressed by the Chief Electoral Officer seriously. Our responsibility is always to determine – and this is a very important thing for people that, perhaps, aren't lawyers to understand. When we are prosecuting, we have two things that we must consider: one is what is in the public interest and, secondly, whether or not there is a reasonable likelihood of conviction. This is a fundamental principle of fair justice. It is at the core of what the Crown prosecution service does. It is part of their work on a daily basis. It is the difference between fair prosecution and persecution.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you for that answer, but do not these violations of the Election Act and the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer said they should be prosecuted lead us to believe in this House that the protection of democracy needs these violations prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, in our very complicated system we all have jobs to do. One of the things that the Chief Electoral Officer must do is see whether or not people have followed the rules. One of the things that the Department of Justice must do and which prosecutors must do in the Department of Justice is determine whether or not in absolutely every circumstance it is in the best interests of the public to prosecute. Part of the consideration for that is whether or not there is a reasonable likelihood of conviction.

Mr. Hehr: Do you not deem it to be in the public's best interest that we prosecute election violations regardless of a conviction or not?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is in the public's best interest to ensure that we have a transparent electoral system. We have that system. I also believe that it is within our jurisdiction as the Department of Justice to make decisions about what we need to prosecute to ensure that people are living in a democracy and living in a safe and secure community. The decision was made by prosecutors in the Department of Justice that in some cases it is not necessary to prosecute. It is only necessary to ensure that the behaviour does not happen again, and that is what we did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Climate Change Policy

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Environment. The minister has just returned from the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment meeting in Whitehorse where, it appears, climate change and the policy relating thereto was a major topic of discussion. Can the minister advise the House whether the meeting dealt with Canada's position in preparation for President Obama's visit to Canada tomorrow?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and all members of the House that this meeting was planned well in advance of our finding out that the President was going to be coming to Ottawa tomorrow. I think it also should be said that, quite naturally, given the fact that the President is coming, that was a topic of some discussion. We talked about issues related to climate change and our policy respecting climate change. We also talked about other things, such as the tripartite air framework that we're working on and a

national strategy for our waste water and effluent. This is an ongoing, regularly scheduled meeting of Environment ministers.

Dr. Brown: Given that climate change was the topic of discussion, can the minister explain Canada's and Alberta's position on the North American policy, particularly since we have expressed in the past that we are against a cap-and-trade system?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd prefer to talk and discuss not so much what we are against but what we're for. That was the subject of discussion at that meeting. That was the subject of discussion of President Obama in his interview last night. We're looking for a North America-wide regulatory system that will allow the much-needed technology that is recognized by both the U.S. and Canada to develop our energy in a responsible way by the implementation of technology. Whatever that regulatory regime is, we will be doing our utmost to work with the Americans to bring it about.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise whether there was any discussion about Alberta being able to influence the upcoming Conference of the Parties negotiations in Copenhagen?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that particular issue was the subject of much discussion at the meeting. To be frank, in the past the involvement of the provinces at the Conference of the Parties has been very limited. All ministers, myself included, were very much enthused and encouraged by the comments of Minister Prentice when he indicated that the provinces will be very much part of the development of the Canadian position at the conference in Copenhagen. We put together and agreed to a process of developmental meetings at the officials level, leading to a number of meetings of ministers so that when we get to Copenhagen next December, we will indeed have a Canadian team at that event.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20 Returning Officer Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. From June to October 2007 the Chief Electoral Officer wrote repeatedly to the government asking for local returning officer nominees, and the government never even replied. Eventually the PC Party gave him a list of names heavily biased, of course, with PC Party members. My question is to the Deputy Premier, who was intimately involved in this process. How does he justify to this Assembly a policy in which written requests from an officer of this Assembly are ignored and a key responsibility for an election is handed over to a political party?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I was here during that time period, but I don't recall the specifics of the question. What I do however remember is that following the election, the hon. member who has asked this question was sufficiently distressed with the circumstances surrounding the election that I think he called for an investigation into the conduct of the officer. So I do note that you weren't particularly pleased with what was going on.

Dr. Taft: You know, Mr. Speaker, that was about as pathetic a response on a serious issue as this Assembly has ever seen. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Again to the same Deputy Premier. When he finally got a list of 83 names, the Chief Electoral Officer discovered that only one

person, 1 out of 83, had been contacted to see if they were interested in the position. How does this minister defend such a pathetic performance on such a crucial matter?

Mr. Stevens: Well, part of the difficulty I'm having in defending anything, Mr. Speaker, is that I don't have specifics of the particular event that the hon. member is asking about. It's incredibly difficult for me to respond to something that I don't at this particular point in time have any recollection of.

Dr. Taft: Ignorance is no defence, Mr. Speaker. This is shocking. This is a matter of profound public policy importance. This minister was intimately involved. He was the minister responsible. He is now the Deputy Premier.

Will the Deputy Premier tell this Assembly – maybe he can get his memory cells going – who it was in the PC Party he asked to provide names to the Chief Electoral Officer? If he won't tell us, why won't he tell us?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can say about this hon. member is that ignorance is not a problem when it comes to asking questions in this House. That certainly is true.

I can tell you that I do not answer questions that I don't have a factual basis to answer, and that is the situation I find myself in. The hon. member can say that I should know the answer, and perhaps I should, but I don't know the answer, hon. member, so I can't provide you with one.

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

Student Housing

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Alberta south campus student residence appears to have been mothballed. Meanwhile, students are facing rent increase after rent increase. U of A residence rates went up 10 per cent in 2007, almost 9 per cent last year, and 8 per cent this year. That's almost a 30 per cent rent increase in three years. Postsecondary students deserve accessible, affordable, safe places to live. To the minister of advanced education: why won't you fight for a new undergrad residence at the U of A so students can study and sleep knowing that they'll be able afford to live there next semester, too?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, indeed, we are working with the university and with CAUS and the University of Alberta Students' Union on a number of different proposals: one being the south campus, one being the east village, and a number of other proposals which I'm currently working on with the executive of the University of Alberta. So I don't know where the hon. member is getting her information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. From the students.

My understanding is that you've got a couple of grad residences online, but there's absolutely nothing in the works for the undergrad residence. Students get \$429 a month from student loans to cover rent, but a suite at the U of A residence goes for almost \$700 a month, and that's \$700 for a building that recently had broken elevators and was infested with bedbugs. As a result, students are working at several jobs and taking on crippling debt to make ends meet. To the same minister: how could you let student costs balloon

in the boom but offer no help to students who were and still are struggling to make ends meet?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I would put the student financial assistance that we provide in this province up against any province in the country. The facts are the facts, and simply that is the truth. The University of Alberta and our department have been working on additions to student residences, and the hon. member is correct on deferred maintenance issues as it relates to that. We guarantee the funds for the loans for student residences, but we do not fund the student residences themselves. The institutions do that as a business case, and we're working with them on several different business cases right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is the fact that, basically, students receive about \$300 less a month than they need to get a simple place to live. These days in Alberta the average undergrad student takes six years to complete a four-year degree because they can't afford to study full-time. We know that students who go into debt more than \$10,000 per year have only a 20 per cent chance of completing their degree. Postsecondary students are suffering because this government is putting corporate tax breaks before public education. To the same minister: why won't you commit today to providing real affordable housing for students at the U of A campus, including the south campus residence?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I look after Campus Alberta. I don't as a rule look after the individual campuses and the individual day-to-day operations of those institutions. The University of Alberta has a board, a chair, a provost, a president, and an entire senate that look after the day-to-day operations of the university campus and, as well, the actual infrastructure that's on that. We work with them, and we are working with them today and will continue to work with them throughout Campus Alberta. Accessible, affordable education is a priority of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Tourism Marketing Opportunities

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Whitecourt Trailblazers Snowmobile Club and the Alberta Snowmobile Association held their annual jamboree in Whitecourt. Whitecourt and area hosted thousands of riders and guests from throughout the province, from Canada, and from the United States and filled our hotel rooms and restaurants. My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Does your ministry value events like this that happen outside the better-known zones like Jasper and Banff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer to the hon. member is: yes, we do. We were pleased to be able to partner with the Whitecourt Trailblazers and other area businesses to support this event to the tune of about \$40,000, and with that commitment we understand from the early economic returns that it was close to a \$4 million return to this community. As he said, 1,350 rooms were let. We think that's marketing money well spent, and we're doing our best to keep people travelling throughout the province of Alberta even in these uncertain economic times.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the support given by the ministry. She mentioned the economics of these kinds of event. During unsettled economic circumstances in the global economy what are you doing to entice people to travel and, more importantly, entice them to communities like mine, that have been hit hard by the economic downturn?

Mrs. Ady: Well, the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne makes a really good point. Because of the great work of the tourism industry and also Travel Alberta we've really been not doing so bad. When it comes to direct entries, we're faring better than other provinces around us. We're into what I'll call the second year of the Stay campaign, where we encourage Albertans to travel in Alberta and to enjoy this province. We think it's been going very well. It's kept us in a pretty good, solid position compared to others. When we look at last year, at 2008, we think the Stay campaign projected about another 40,000 visits, worth about \$17 million in income, to the province.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the minister mentioned the Stay program. Over the weekend the hundreds of volunteers expressed an interest to me about an expanded trail system. We need to expand that product here in our province in order to keep people in Alberta. What is the minister doing to expand our trail network in this province?

2:30

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that we have been hard at work on the trail system. I've asked the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater to chair the Recreation Corridors Coordinating Committee, and they're busy at work trying to find goals that create a sustainable network of trails in the province. I know they've had their first meeting, and they're looking for best ways to achieve the goals. We've got hundreds of thousands of Albertans that want out on these trails. They want to recreate in the province of Alberta.

I'm also working together with the minister of sustainable resources on this to help ensure that trails used in Alberta are sustainable and responsible, both public and in parkland.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Submetering for Energy Use

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Service Alberta's written responses to the questions asked on submetering last spring showed that instead of taking action, she's leaving it to the landlords to make their own business decisions. This is simply unacceptable. To the Minister of Service Alberta: when will the minister be introducing legislation on submetering to protect renters?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to protecting renters, Service Alberta has a number of programs in place. One of the best ones is the residential tenancies dispute services program, which is a wonderful place for tenants and landlords to come together to solve problems, whether it's relating to rent or things like that. So Service Alberta is very much engaged in protecting renters and making sure renters know that rental increases are only allowed to be given once a year. We are always looking at and wanting to hear back from Albertans on issues they are concerned about.

Mr. Kang: We are talking about unregulated metering, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about rents. Again to the minister: why is the minister allowing submetering to continue unregulated? Where is the protection for renters while they wait?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the whole issue of submetering, I am concerned about that issue, as is the hon. member. I have instructed my department to look at that issue and how it relates to the renter. It is federal and provincial jurisdictions, so we are currently looking at that area. I have written a letter to Minister Tony Clement on this issue just to indicate that some of the measurement standards are regulated federally, and we should be looking at those jointly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will we get the response on that? Given that the minister wrote that regulations weren't a necessity because landlords have their own incentives to keep costs low, why are the needs of landlords put before renters who are forced to pay submetering charges without protection?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the whole issue of submetering has positives and negatives in that it does encourage renters to be more aware of the costs of energy and those kinds of areas but balances that with respect to landlords being able to give the right information to the tenant so they know what they're getting into. As I said, that's something that I am looking into as we speak, and I'm currently working on developing a tipsheet for consumers so that they know what they're going into when they are faced with this choice.

Abandoned Gas Lines on Deeded Land

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, recent questions at my constituency office and at a southern Alberta mayors and reeves meeting have been around abandoned pipelines, gas lines, and the associated federal and provincial regulations. My question today is to the Minister of Energy, and I would like him to give me an answer to the question that was asked most frequently. In the event that an oil or gas pipeline is abandoned on deeded land, Minister, what is the landowner's liability?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Certainly, the patience of the hon. member is appreciated. With respect to provincial legislation around abandonments even after a pipeline in Alberta is abandoned under provincial regulation and an order is issued, the licensee is responsible for the pipeline, and under no circumstance does this responsibility transfer to a landowner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question, that I thought was a most pertinent one: what is the landowner's responsibility and involvement in the abandoned line on deeded land when it's abandoned and going to be reclaimed?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, if a licensee of a pipeline seeks an abandonment order, it must be done through the ERCB. Certainly, there is usually a hearing involved, particularly when there's a directly affected landowner, and the landowners must be notified in advance. At a hearing a landowner would be able to rise and present his concerns with respect to the abandonment process, and the ERCB is required to take these concerns into account.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. My final question along the same line, Minister: does the original agreement made between a landowner and the resource company with respect to the compensation get altered in the event of an abandonment?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the answer to that question would be: under normal circumstances, no, unless the leaseholder and the landowner had agreed previously that on abandonment the contract would expire. The contract would have terms in it relative to the length of the contract and when the contract would be terminated. Just because the line is abandoned doesn't mean that the contract is null and void. The contract would be in place until such a time as these terms of the contract are completed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, when questioned about her ministry's responsibility to protect addicted children and youth, the minister flipped the concern to the minister of health, who first blamed CBC for reporting allegations of abuse at the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre in Calgary. The health minister then, rather than responding to my questions, accused me of not being supportive of Calgarians, whose concerns I raised. To either minister: whose ministry has the primary responsibility for protecting Alberta's children and youth?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate my messaging from yesterday, which is that I will always – and it's my role – encourage people that if they know of children that are being mistreated or abused, they report to me, and I and our ministry will make sure that there is immediate follow-up investigation. I can also say again that we do not license addiction treatment facilities, so anything that has to do with those services I would direct to the minister of health.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Rather than a passive approach of "call me," how about you calling them?

Has either minister begun an investigation into the allegations of abuse raised by the CBC's *The Fifth Estate* or their accountability to taxpayers for the annual grants of \$300,000 to this facility?

Mr. Liepert: This is the second day in a row that this particular member has raised unfounded allegations. If there is a specific allegation, he owes it to call the police. Report it to the police. That's their job. If he doesn't have it, I would suggest that he quit raising it and quit smearing the reputation of an organization in Calgary that is doing outstanding volunteer work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the ministers, will the Premier remove the cloud of doubt hanging over this facility, over their government's duty to protect the physical and mental well-being of children, and over their fiscal responsibility to Albertans by conducting a public inquiry?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the only cloud is raised by this member, and it's got a hole in it bigger than the hole in the ozone layer. He continues to raise allegations, has no facts to back it up. All he has is some trash journalism by the CBC out of Toronto.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Door-to-door Sales of Energy Contracts

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in my constituency tell me that door-to-door salespeople have come to their homes and used questionable tactics to promote and sell energy contracts. Can the Minister of Service Alberta inform the House on what is and isn't allowed when selling energy contracts and how Albertans can be aware of these regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Salespeople who do come to Albertans' homes must abide by the energy marketing regulation. It has specific requirements as to when they can access homes; that is, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. The regulation is very clear, and we do take action if the requirements are not followed. We also have detailed information on the Service Alberta website and the Utilities Consumer Advocate website about the regulations so that Albertans are informed of what door-to-door energy salespeople can do.

Mr. Quest: My first supplemental to the same minister: what options are in place for consumers if they sign an energy contract with a door-to-door salesperson and then change their mind after the salesperson has left?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best thing Albertans should do is to consider their options very carefully and do their homework before signing an energy contract. However, in the event that someone does change their mind, they have 10 days to cancel the contract and provide notice to the retailer. The contract can be cancelled even if the 10 days have passed, depending on situations. Consumers can call our department, and we're very happy to help them through the process.

2:40

Mr. Quest: My final supplementary to the same minister: what has the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate done to inform Albertans about what to be aware of when signing an energy contract?

Mrs. Klimchuk: The good work of the Utilities Consumer Advocate and their staff is that they have been very active about informing consumers about door-to-door salespeople. We have calls that come to a call centre, we have good website information, and as well we take calls from consumers. We also successfully mediate disputes, and we work closely with the retailers to ensure they're meeting our regulations. The bottom line is that there are good protections in place, and we will enforce them as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now I'm going to call upon the first of several hon. members to continue with members' statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Diamonds and Denim Sweetheart Gala

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on Valentine's Day I attended the third annual Diamonds and Denim Sweetheart Gala in Red Deer, a fundraiser to support the vital programs and services of the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta. Alberta businesses, including Mitchell & Jewell of Red Deer, were very generous in supporting the fundraising auction. I was also pleased to see the Member for Red Deer-South and the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports at the event. Marlin Styner, the chair of the Premier's council on disability, and his wife, Diane, were also present. I would also like to point out the hard work of Paulette Vanoosterom and her amazing group of volunteers, who organized this gala evening.

The Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta, helps ensure that Albertans with disabilities have the help and support they need to address their specific issues, giving them a chance to reach their full potential as human beings and active citizens. As an Albertan with a disability I can tell you that I am very grateful to have had such wonderful resources and terrific people to draw upon.

I have served on the CPA board for nine years, and I can tell you from personal experience that I have seen remarkable progress Albertans with disabilities have made in that time. Don't get me wrong. We still have a long way to go when it comes to improving accessibility and availability of opportunity, but many positive steps forward have been made thanks in great part to the folks working at CPA and their generous supporters.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank Paulette and her amazing group of volunteers once again and to offer a shout-out to the fine Albertans who gave generously at the fundraiser.

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

Norma Bastidas

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise today to share an incredible story of an Albertan who is an inspiration for us all. Norma Bastidas lives in southwest Calgary, and she's a single mother of two. Now, her 14-year-old son suffers from cone-rod dystrophy. It's a progressive condition that often results in significant vision loss. Rather than waiting for someone else to do something about this, Norma has taken it upon herself to search to the ends of the earth for a cure.

Along with Operation Eyesight Universal, the Foundation Fighting Blindness, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind she has launched an initiative to help combat vision loss. Norma is an ultramarathon runner, and to bring attention to a cause that affects more than 160 million people, she will literally run all over the world. Norma will compete in seven ultramarathons on seven continents in seven months, seven-on-seven-in-seven. She will run 1,400 kilometres through some of the most hostile environments: the thick jungles of Brazil, the subzero temperatures of Antarctica, and the hottest deserts on the planet.

When she completes her journey, the 777 Run for Sight, she will be the first person in history to do so. It won't be easy, Mr. Speaker. Ultramarathons are one of the toughest challenges in sports. The first race alone is equal to running up and down Mount Everest. In this effort Norma will express how lucky we are to have the gift of

sight and how we need to share our good fortune with others who need support in dealing with vision loss. The project will focus on helping to find the causes and ultimately the cure for inherited retinal diseases that cause vision loss. Twenty-five years ago finding a cure for retinal dystrophies was considered impossible, but today research has led to promising treatments to prevent and in some cases even restore vision. People can follow along on normabastidas.com in her quest for \$100,000.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Labour Mobility of Land Surveyors

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise today and relate one of the first of many success stories to come from the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, commonly referred to by its acronym, TILMA. The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association and the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors have recently announced that the first Alberta land surveyor to apply under the new TILMA rules has completed and passed the jurisdictional examination for British Columbia and will be commissioned as a British Columbia land surveyor at the annual general meeting of the Association of B.C. Land Surveyors being held next week in Vancouver. Congratulations go out to Richard Nixon, Alberta land surveyor from Fort St. John, B.C.

Both associations signed an agreement on April 26 of last year that provides for the labour mobility of their members as of January 1 of this year. This agreement complies with the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement of the two provinces. Under this agreement, Mr. Speaker, a land surveyor in good standing in one association may apply to become a land surveyor in the other association and will have to write a nonmaterial jurisdictional examination. By writing and passing this nonmaterial examination, the land surveyor will prove that he or she is knowledgeable in the statutes, regulations, and survey practices of the other province. Once completed, the land surveyor will be sworn in as a commissioned land surveyor in the other jurisdiction. This revised process for entry will ensure compliance with both provinces' labour mobility requirements in a fair and transparent process for land surveyors in each province. The two associations are looking forward to working together in this new relationship to share ideas and projects to save time and resources in ongoing activities.

The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association and the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors are the self-governing professional associations established by provincial legislation. The associations regulate the practice of land surveying for the protection of the public and the administration of the profession.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Bill 15

Dunvegan Hydro Development Act

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 15, being the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

Mr. Speaker, on December 22, 2008, an independent joint review panel determined that the Dunvegan hydroelectric project, a 100-megawatt run-of-the-river hydroelectric project on the Peace River is in the public interest. Our own Hydro and Electric Energy Act requires that a bill be prepared in order to authorize a construction order for the hydro development. Passage of Bill 15 would authorize the Alberta Utilities Commission to make an order for the construc-

tion and operation of Glacier Power Ltd.'s Dunvegan hydroelectric project. While this act meets our legislative requirements to grant the appropriate authority to the Alberta Utilities Commission, it does not remove any of the regulatory duties of that body.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good-news story. Renewable energy production already accounts for 13 per cent of Alberta's total electricity generation. This project will add to that total.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 15 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

2:50

Bill 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, effective May 1, 2009, the Peace Officer Act will restrict the use of terms and symbols used to represent auxiliary or volunteer police officers to differentiate them from sworn police officers. An unintended consequence is that auxiliary policing programs are required to make changes to their uniforms and insignia, incurring extra costs. The proposed amendment would allow police services to ask for an exemption to this section of the act so that similar uniforms and titles can be used within the same police service when both auxiliary and police constables attend scenes together. Making the amendment now ensures police services or auxiliary police programs don't incur these additional costs.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Bill 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009.

Alberta and all the provinces and territories in Canada with the exception of Ontario have made a commitment to ongoing reform and harmonization of our securities regulation under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. Bill 17 builds on this work, Mr. Speaker, and Alberta has taken a leadership role to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta securities law.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. I look forward to the further debate and discussion on this issue as we move forward.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 17 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce private member's Bill 201, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009.

The purpose of this amendment is to stem the tide of gang and gun violence in our towns and cities. These additions to the Traffic Safety Act will make it an offence to drive on a highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm. Provided that the police officer has reasonable grounds to believe an offence has been committed, they may request the surrender of the driver's licence and detain the vehicle. The licence suspension is for a 24-hour period, and the vehicle is impounded for the same length of time. At this time the government may use new legislation provisions to rescind the individual's driver's licence for up to one year and fine the individual up to \$25,000.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the table officers, members of our staff, and everyone who aided in the creation of Bill 201 for their assistance. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and to table a list of 150 students from J.C. Charyk school in Hanna in the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. These students have written this Assembly asking for a prohibition on the sale of flavoured tobacco products in Alberta. I just briefly have a quote here that they indicate is from a U.S. smokeless tobacco executive: "Cherry Skoal is for someone who likes the taste of candy, if you know what I'm saying." I have five copies here which I will pass to the Clerk. I think we should congratulate these students on their initiative in writing our Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday, Valentine's Day, the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, and I participated in the first annual march to honour the lives of more than a hundred Alberta women murdered or missing over the last 10 years. Among the names of the women remembered were: Sharene Oswald, Jane and Kathryn Johnson, Mary Jane Serloin, Barbara Eyapaise, Starr Solway and her daughter Daniha, Christine Ackabee, Annette Leger, Elaine Krauscher, Sheila Ritchie, Joanne Shover, and Shauna Vanderbosch.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Paul Hawirko, who notes that he's approaching his 80th birthday and has been moved to write a letter expressing his concern, which he sees as an assault on the drug coverage benefits available to seniors in Alberta. He would like to see that changed.

The second tabling on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition is from Wayne Hampton, who resides in Lacombe, who is also expressing his vehement opposition to the proposed changes in the Alberta government's pharmaceutical strategy.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. One of these reports shows that because of short-staffing residents missed baths, were fed late, and were not toileted when needed.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of 105 letters from residents of Newton Place, a University of Alberta residence, which relates to my questions today. The letters highlight the lack of affordable housing for U of A students.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Architects Act the Alberta Association of Architects annual report, 2007.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

3. Mr. Hancock moved:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, neither motions 3 nor 4 are debatable. I'll call the question on the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

4. Mr. Hancock moved:

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

[Government Motion 4 carried]

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 17: Mr. Lukaszuk]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, do you wish to continue?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, just a couple of words in summation to what I had the pleasure of saying yesterday on the speech. It is very important that we as leaders in this Assembly focus on the positives that are happening in the province of Alberta. If we as elected officials representing our constituents in this Chamber cannot focus on the positive and cannot underline what great work not only this government but this Chamber as a whole and all Albertans have done and how far ahead we are of all jurisdictions, it would be very difficult to expect that of Albertans in turn.

Mr. Speaker, we're at a time right now when we need to pull together and when we need to show the strength of Alberta and when we need to forge new markets and when we need to market Alberta in foreign markets. The world is watching us. If we're here knocking down the work of this government, if we're here knocking down, in turn, the work of Albertans, I am not sure what kind of a picture we are painting in front of the rest of this world. Hence, I suggest to you and through you to all members of this Assembly that when discussing the Speech from the Throne, we should perhaps focus on the realities and less on the partisan objectives and highlight the positives and the opportunities that exist in this province because it is indeed a province like no other in this country and like no other state further south of us.

The Speech from the Throne definitely is meant to inspire Albertans, it's meant to boost our economy, and it's meant to show all Albertans and the world that this province is open for business, that this province is going to develop its natural resources in a very responsible way, that this province is going to take care of those who need assistance but will not do any of that frivolously. This province will continue with a very sound small "c" conservative fiscal plan, and this province will be probably, if not definitely, the first one to rebound from this economic turmoil that we're in.

Mr. Speaker, with this, I will close my comments and tell you that I have confidence in all members in this chamber and in this government that we will lead Alberta through this turbulent but also challenging time full of opportunities.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you. I'm very pleased to rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by His Honour on February 10. Mr. Speaker, let me say that it's my pleasure to respond to the speech both as a proud Albertan and as the Environment minister.

In these uncertain times when we face so many unknowns, what we do know for sure is that this government remains committed to managing the environment for now and for our future. Albertans take great pride in our land, our ecosystems, and our natural resources. It transcends government, communities, and the economy. Our love of the land is as Albertan as this building or cowboys or, indeed, free spirit. It's simply a part of who we are.

Managing our impact on the land is very much what my department is all about. One of the phrases used in the speech resonated strongly with me; I think it really captured what Alberta Environment is all about. His Honour talked about conducting business with an environmental footprint that grows lighter and lighter over time. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more.

Everything we do has some impact. Every change we go through, economic or otherwise, has some impact. We recognize that Alberta has changed. The province is growing. More people, more demand for Alberta resources means that our proverbial footprint is larger. It's the reality of today's Alberta. Society as a whole will dictate the

size of the foot. It's really beyond the scope of any government or any industry. What we can control, however, Mr. Speaker, is how deep that footprint goes. Alberta Environment is doing just that. Albertans have told us that this is what they want.

As I said before, we share a common pride for the natural beauty of Alberta and the diversity of our environment. Albertans value a high quality of life. Some people may think it's a choice between one and the other. We know that both can be achieved by finding the right balance, and we know that Albertans demand both from us. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. Finding this balance is a continuous work in progress. We don't have all of the answers in the Ministry of Environment. We never have had, and frankly we never will. But we are focusing our efforts to get better every day and to make sure that with every step we take, we move further and further down the right path. Albertans would accept nothing less.

Albertans want to know that someone is considering all the impacts of a development when making decisions, so we are and in a way we have never done before. Alberta is pioneering new tools and approaches that will determine what our environment can handle and how we manage within those limits. This approach takes us beyond project-by-project planning. It considers all sectors that exist on a landscape: residential, agricultural, industrial, and commercial. At the same time it balances these sectors with what is required to maintain an ecosystem. Ecosystems, Mr. Speaker, are interconnected, and so should be our planning.

Our air emissions will be capped to ensure that air emissions remain safe and that our air remains safe to breathe. Water withdrawals will be limited to protect aquatic systems. Land disturbances will be minimized by putting the right developments in the right places. Just as importantly, all of us will know what these thresholds are. We can ensure that we live and work within these limits.

The cumulative effects approach is already in place in the Industrial Heartland. Our ministry is taking what we are learning in the heartland and will be applying it throughout the rest of the province. Much of our ministry's work on cumulative effects is happening behind the scenes, changing the internal processes and policy reviews to ensure that we align the department to this new approach. We're examining our own environmental impact assessment process to determine how we can reimagine it to fit under cumulative effects planning.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to take action against climate change, and they want us to show that we are part of the global solution, so we will continue to refine our greenhouse gas emission regulations, which are already the first of its kind in North America. We've always said that we have much more to do in this area, and we're going to act on that commitment.

Alberta is in a unique role as a global energy supplier. We have the ability to produce energy the world demands, but with that we are also the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Canada. So Albertans have a challenge ahead of us. We're ready and willing to do our part, but climate change is not just Alberta's issue; it belongs to everyone who drives a car, heats a home, or buys consumer goods. Any climate change strategy must reflect this reality. It must take steps to limit emissions at all points in the fossil fuel life cycle, not just the production side. This is why we'll continue to focus on reducing the emissions that come from the production of energy in Alberta, especially those that come from the oil sands, while also taking action to promote wise energy use, such as the consumer incentive program that we will be introducing and announcing soon.

We've made great strides, but this is a race that's just getting started, Mr. Speaker, and we know we have much more to do. Technology investment is priority one. It provides long-term

solutions to how we can reduce emissions and make energy production more efficient. An investment in technology development here at home is also an investment in jobs in our economy. It shows the rest of the world that we take our responsibility as a global energy supplier seriously.

Decisions that will soon be made on how to invest the \$2 billion earmarked for carbon capture and storage will be announced. While carbon capture and storage alone will not solve the world's greenhouse gas emission issue, it's a critical and important tool in our tool box. It has the support of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and, as we heard last night, the Obama administration. This is where we have much to offer. Frankly, I think we have the most to offer, Mr. Speaker, not only to make real, lasting emission reductions in Alberta but to take what we learn in the coming years and share this valuable knowledge with others. For a province of 3 and a half million people to commit this significant amount of dollars is a tremendous commitment to the world, particularly in times like these.

This year will be an important one for climate change policy in North America. President Obama is meeting our Prime Minister tomorrow. Climate change will certainly be on the agenda, and speculation persists that Canada will be looking for some sort of free pass for the oil sands. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, to you and to all Albertans that Canada and Alberta are not looking for a free pass. The oil sands do not receive a free pass from our own regulatory system, and we don't expect one from a North American system.

What we do want, Mr. Speaker, is a common North American system that respects jurisdictional differences and efforts under way. We expect our \$2 billion commitment to CCS to be recognized. So, too, would be our regulatory system that directed and led to real emissions, a price on carbon, and an offset credit market. A system that works for one place does not necessarily work for another. Each province and each state has its own challenges and its own means to find solutions, and everybody has a set of experience and expertise to bring to the table. But it can be one that shares the same common outcome: real, lasting emission reductions. For Alberta this means that money generated by an emission regulatory system should stay here where it can nurture the greatest change.

3:10

Let me talk for a few moments, Mr. Speaker, about water. Albertans want to know that there will be enough water in the future for people, for ecosystems, and for the economy. It is by far the greatest environmental concern for many Albertans. Living on the prairies, Albertans realize how important the supply of fresh water is. Like other natural resources water must be managed appropriately.

In 2003 we introduced water for life. At the time it was a groundbreaking framework for a province in the northern hemisphere. In five years it has accomplished much. Our knowledge of Alberta's water systems has increased dramatically. We've forged many partnerships with on-the-ground organizations across the province. We've made safe drinking water even safer. But with every accomplishment another challenge arises, so we are implementing the renewed water for life strategy. We're going to look at important and, in many ways, challenging questions about how we allocate and use this valuable resource. Priorities coming forward will include continuing to find ways to support regional drinking water and waste water solutions, managing and understanding the health of our aquatic ecosystems, and building our water monitoring and evaluation public reporting through the Water Information Centre so that Albertans know the state of their water.

Renewed water for life is also setting the stage for dealing with two converging fundamental truths about water in Alberta: on one hand, our growing population and an economy that continues to put upward pressure on the demand for water; on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, scientists agree that a warming climate in Alberta will probably mean less supply available in the future. These converging themes are taking our water management planning in new directions. Alberta will ensure that we have the right system to manage the balance with these realities. We have a system that has served us well, but it's time that we take a hard look and ask ourselves if it will still serve us into the future.

More than anything else, Mr. Speaker, Albertans want balance. They want a robust economy but not at the expense of the environment. They want confidence that the land they love will be the land that they pass on to future generations. That is our goal, and it's a goal that I am very proud to be part of meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from the minister. I think the minister knows that on this side we share the vision, or at least we have the vision of developing the oil sands but in a sustainable, sensible manner. I'm sure the minister has that same vision.

My question is particular to oil sands development and habitat protection. The plan released the other day – I don't have a copy in front of me – what was it called? Responsible directions or something, you know, the big plan released the other day that talks specifically about committing to habitat protection and to working with groups like CEMA.

Now, CEMA last year made a recommendation, endorsed by industry and environmentalists, to set aside, protect from development some areas in the oil sands region. Despite a strong, comprehensive recommendation the government denied that. So I see a gap between the commitment to CEMA that the minister talks about and the commitment to habitat protection and the actual actions of this government which overrule the recommendations of CEMA. I'd be interested if the minister can tell us how this government is moving. Is it for CEMA or against CEMA?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's clear. It's important to understand that what is so fundamentally important about the oil sands strategy, in addition to what is specifically within it, is that this strategy provides the framework for a number of different ministries throughout government to work together, to have the framework to know that no longer is it acceptable for Environment to head off in one direction, Energy in another direction, and SRD, for example, in a third direction. This is the document that brings it all together.

To specifically address the member's question, we have before us the land-use framework, which is under the direction of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, referred to in the oil sands strategy document. That process has within its own regulatory regime and within its own process right as we speak a board that has been struck to talk about land-use issues in the lower Athabasca. That will, among many other things, be the way that the issue that the member refers to can be addressed. At the same time Alberta Environment will be talking about issues related to water, groundwater, ecosystems around water. We can guide and bring what we need from a scientific, environmental point of view by way of advice into that regional planning.

That's, I think, what the member and what Albertans have to understand is so monumental in bringing forward this overall strategy: not specifically what's in the strategy but what the strategy brings to the planning process. It brings a commitment on the part of government and the tools necessary so that we have cross-government initiatives, cross-government planning. This is a government of Alberta planning document, not an Alberta Environment or an SRD document. This is across all departments. That's what I'm looking forward to working on.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have three questions for the minister. You mentioned water for life, which is a legacy of former Minister Taylor, which I very much appreciate. What percentage of aquifer mapping have we accomplished to date? That's my first question.

Also, the government and the opposition have different views about capping intensity versus capping overall emissions. The government has committed \$2 billion toward sequestration. What practical steps have been taken to ensure that that process begins?

Then just a fairly simple question as number three. Is Sustainable Resource Development the quarterback for all ministries in balancing resource, environmental, and economic issues? Are they the chief ministry?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I thought I just made myself clear.

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time apportionment has now left us.

Hon. Minister of Energy, did you wish to participate?

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do wish to participate. I'm very pleased to take the opportunity today to respond to the throne speech. As His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor made very clear in his speech, I believe that this is a speech for our times. Alberta is not immune from the global economic slowdown and the challenges facing all sectors of the economy. Now more than ever Alberta needs a plan to help our province respond to the challenges of today while positioning us to succeed during the year to come. I believe that the tone and direction are not only in the throne speech but also in the provincial energy strategy, which was released last December.

His Honour indicated in the throne speech that our goal must be to provide the energy the world needs – the energy the world needs – with an environmental footprint that grows lighter and lighter over time. Mr. Speaker, the energy strategy puts us on a path to do exactly that. As the Energy minister I'd like to focus for a couple of minutes on a couple of the things that are in the energy strategy.

3:20

First, as was clearly outlined in the throne speech, our goal over the coming year will be to ensure that our province remains a competitive and secure place to invest and do business. We will maintain the high quality of life that Albertans have come to expect, and that will depend in large part on the continued responsible development of energy resources. Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot of comments, often from across the way, that criticize the way that this province addresses these issues. I think it's very important to look a little more closely at the plans and at exactly what we have put in place.

As you know, to name a few, the plan that we have relative to responsible development includes air quality – first in legislation,

first in regulation – a working model that has reduced 2.6 million tonnes of emissions into Alberta's atmosphere. Water for life and the new water for life: a plan that's working today to decrease the amount of fresh water and brackish water used in energy industries and in other industries in the province. The latest land-use framework and the oil sands strategy, with mandates to assist developers, overarched by the energy strategy, will last this province for three decades of solid, responsible development. Mr. Speaker, all of these policies will work together to ensure that Alberta's energy resources are developed in a way that pays close attention to the impact on individuals and our environment.

When we talk about the environment, the biggest challenge, of course, that we have in the immediate future are greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. We strongly believe that we can mitigate these impacts with the advancement of what we would like to call the science of solutions, carbon capture and storage being one of them, another key topic that was mentioned in the throne speech. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this government has committed \$2 billion to carbon capture and storage to develop three to five large projects. Keep in mind that the province of Alberta, about 3.2 million people, committed \$2 billion to CCS projects. The President of the United States has recently indicated that they will commit \$2.5 billion to projects for carbon capture and storage development. That represents a \$2.5 billion investment for about 350 million people. The province of Alberta will justly be seen as a global leader with respect to this issue.

In short order, Mr. Speaker, we believe that we will have legislation to formally commit to the funding, and we have a development council currently finalizing research with respect to the issue. Make no mistake: Alberta is on the international radar, and this throne speech sends a strong, clear message to those audiences.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we're very, very pleased to hear the President's comments and particularly his recognition of the enormous benefit that carbon capture and storage can have on a global problem. To me it's further proof that Alberta is on the right path. We've seen a lot of rhetoric about our province directed toward the President in recent weeks, but his comments make it clear to me that he's a thoughtful leader interested in real solutions.

I was also pleased to see his comments relative to clean coal because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the use of technology to sustain our economies, which, of course, is a key focus of the provincial energy strategy, deals with coal as well. This message is so important now, especially during a time of economic slowdown. Now is the time to find ways to sustain our province's economy. How will we do that? We will do that by moving forward with the key outcomes of the provincial energy strategy. We will pursue clean energy production. That doesn't only mean seeing enhancements in things like renewable energy, including projects like the hydro legislation being considered before the House. More importantly, clean energy production means finding better ways to produce our vast energy resources and ways that we can market these improvements to other jurisdictions. It means exploring clean coal technology, bioenergy, gasification, in situ development, and so on.

We will also focus, Mr. Speaker, on wise energy use, something that is referenced in the throne speech and which I along with the Environment minister are dedicated to working on for the benefit of all Albertans and, we think, Canadians and people around the world. By securing the outcomes from this work, we believe that we will sustain Alberta's future. Make no mistake: I believe that energy remains the driver of this province, and if we can find solutions to enable our province to develop resources in an environmentally responsible way, we will continue to have a steady stream of

revenue and economic activity and wealth generation that will benefit Alberta for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the minister participating in this discussion and responding to the throne speech. He alluded, indirectly at least, to some of the differences of views on both sides of the Assembly, but I think in important ways there are common desires as well. The minister used the phrase, referring to the throne speech, about Alberta having the energy the world needs. Fair enough. I like to look at this from a different perspective, which is not thinking about Alberta having to deliver the energy the world needs but healthy development that Alberta needs. I think that's what the government should be about.

My question, just elaborating on that, to the Minister of Energy is just concerning royalties. There has been an awful lot of debate around royalties in the last couple of years, and we've all had an earful or several earfuls on this one. Is the minister satisfied that the people of Alberta are now in a position to get the best value for the bitumen that's being produced from the oil sands through the royalty system? Is the royalty system as it is now – it has settled down – delivering the best possible value for the people of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister if you wish.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the question is, I think, quite pointed and, I would suggest to you, very easy for me to answer because the short answer to the question is absolutely. A few of the issues around what we've done recently in my opinion enhanced the opportunity for Albertans with respect to their participation and their ownership of the resource.

I would point to one, just to answer the hon. member's question, and that is bitumen royalty in kind. I think that as we look out over the next decade and we look at the opportunity that Albertans will have relative to bitumen royalty in kind, what this does in fact is put Albertans as citizens of this province in control of someplace in the range of 20 to 25 per cent of bitumen production over time. As these projects mature, move into their second phase of the royalty structure, we're talking here about hundreds of thousands of barrels of bitumen production on a daily basis that will be handled by the province of Alberta for the people. So do I believe that we moved in the right direction? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I certainly do.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In his response to the Speech from the Throne the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, made the point that Alberta is more than the world's gas station. I would question the minister as to our priorities. Are our human resources more important, or do they take first place over our nonrenewable resources? I would specifically give the example of the small town of Tomahawk, where sour gas is being drilled within the emergency evacuation zone because of the ERCB's approval to drill for this sour gas. We need to have a balance, obviously, between economics, environment, and human resources. Could you attempt to answer the question: should Alberta's first priority be our human resource served by our nonrenewable resource, or is the tail wagging the dog in this case?

3:30

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, my first response to that particular bit of rambling, I might say, is that I actually have a 12 gauge at home that spreads wider than that, but I'm not sure how much wider. Nevertheless, there were a number of questions in there. I don't know which one it is that I'm actually supposed to address.

Mr. Speaker, I'll start with the first one relative to Alberta being the world's gas pump. I would suggest to the hon. member that Alberta doesn't even produce enough gas for our own requirements, never mind the world's, so, you know, I'm not sure what the thrust of that was.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the development of the energy industry in the province of Alberta, we have in the province of Alberta . . .

The Speaker: Alas, hon. minister, the time has expired.

The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as the Member for St. Albert to speak in favour of the Speech from the Throne given by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. As we commence the second session of the 27th Legislature, it is essential that this government continue on its steady course. We must invest in our province and its people while maintaining fiscal prudence in our spending.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Speech from the Throne demonstrates the importance of this balance as we push forward. With a number of planned projects and investments across the province and a variety of important interests we must continue to be mindful of the short- and long-term implications of our funding decisions. Some of these projects that I'm particularly mindful of are projects like the northwest section of the Anthony Henday ring road and the P3 funding for our new schools. These are projects that are required to serve the needs of the growing capital region, and St. Albert is certainly supportive of both projects.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta is well positioned financially compared to many jurisdictions, but we must not take our good fortune for granted. We must invest strategically in infrastructure and other capital projects to secure the prosperity of our province for many years to come, and we must acknowledge the hard work of Albertans in building our great province.

Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign there was a lot said about plans, particularly in the negative, that the Premier did not have a plan. This Speech from the Throne clearly demonstrates that the Premier does have a plan, in fact a lot of plans, a lot of good plans. There are plans for health care, such as Vision 20/20, plans to end homelessness, the provincial energy strategy, the climate change strategy, water for life, and the land-use framework, to name a few. As well, last week the President of the Treasury Board released a plan for Alberta's oil sands. This brings me back to the days of Great Canadian Oil Sands in 1963, when I did the original topographic survey and was witness to that area prior to any development.

Today one of things that particularly irks me is the frequent reference to dirty oil by members on my far left and short-sighted environmental groups. Mr. Speaker, that gooey substance is not dirty oil; it is, in fact, oily dirt, and it has been there as part of the landscape around the Athabasca River and beyond for centuries. In fact, in 1783 the explorer Peter Pond was led by natives to the place where they gathered this gooey substance to waterproof their canoes.

It is only in the past 50 years that we have learned how to capture it and upgrade it into a viable, marketable commercial product.

Mr. Speaker, this oily dirt plays a significant role in the future of this province, and we need to continue to improve our methods of extraction and upgrading, taking into consideration any potential environmental impacts. We can and we will improve our techniques through proper planning, taking into consideration all relevant factors. The Speech from the Throne addresses both the economic and the environmental considerations relevant to the Athabasca oil sands, Alberta's most important natural resource, that will sustain our province and our economy in the years ahead of us.

I'd now like to turn to another issue that is of concern in my constituency and I'm sure in many others, and that is the concern of seniors. Seniors have in many cases lived here their whole lives. We also have families who have firm roots in this province and are spreading their branches today, growing a strong and enthusiastic new generation of Albertans ready to embrace the many challenges on the horizon. Mr. Speaker, seniors must be able to maintain a fair standard of living. We must remember that seniors are becoming a larger portion of the population, especially with so many baby boomers on the verge of retirement. However, we must keep in mind the needs of all Albertans and avoid prioritizing one group at the expense of another. Therefore, we must be mindful of our spending to ensure efficient use of our money for seniors while we also invest in our younger generations and build on the opportunities for Alberta's future.

I recently read a book by Sherry Cooper, the chief economist for the Bank of Montreal, called *The New Retirement*, which talks about the growing number of baby boomer retirees, that will peak by the year 2025. This is not necessarily a new revelation. Her analysis reminded me of another book, *Boom, Bust, & Echo* by David Foot, which was written some 10 years ago and described the very same phenomena. Ms Cooper, however, takes the analysis one step further and describes the effects of this wave of retirees on the labour and financial markets and talks about what this new retirement will look like to both retirees and society in general. I find her points especially relevant to our economic situation today. With the increasing potential for seniors to live longer and enjoy more prosperous times, some interesting challenges arise that we must consider carefully in Alberta as our baby boomers retire. As I said, issues for seniors are amongst the most common concerns I hear from my constituents in St. Albert, so I think that an innovative analysis like Cooper has made in her book can provide insight that will be very useful for our province.

While seniors certainly deserve great facilities and great health care as they move along in age, we must ensure that our programs are well planned and our spending commitments do not unduly constrain our spending priorities in the future. Young people just starting out in the workforce, for example, will be the support base for years to come. Today we have 10 workers for every retiree. In another 10 to 15 years we will have only five workers supporting that same retiree. These young people will contribute significantly to the prosperity we so thankfully enjoy, and in turn we must support their opportunities and recognize that we will be relying on the younger generation to support us in the future. This is why it is so important to be balanced in our approach, Mr. Speaker. We must maintain an ethic of care for our seniors while also acknowledging our responsibilities to future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne has indicated that our expenditures must reflect these priorities, and we must ensure that we do not put the next generation back in debt. The matters related to seniors in the Speech from the Throne, such as Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act and the Protection for Persons in

Care Amendment Act, are some of the necessary government measures that ensure the well-being of seniors, so I will be pleased to support them.

3:40

The throne speech also talked about a strong and sustainable health care system. Providing adequate health care is another important priority. People are living longer, and new medical technology allows people to live longer, more productive, and healthier lives. Unfortunately, advances in medical technology never seem to bring the cost of health care down, unlike technological advances in other fields of endeavour. I am confident that we can improve service delivery through innovative thinking and efficient management of technology.

One area, Mr. Speaker, where we can reduce the cost of health care is through the promotion of wellness and prevention. We must do everything we can to ensure wellness from an early age, developing good nutritional habits and keeping fit with proper exercise to prevent those illnesses that creep up on us as we age. The catch health program, for example, is one we can all participate in. It can be fun and need not be expensive.

Health information is also important, Mr. Speaker. Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2008, is one such example of this government's commitment to enhanced service delivery and research through accurate and complete electronic records and improved information flow. Accurate and current health histories are so important these days for a number of reasons. Should we have a mishap while on vacation, for example, it is essential that our health records be available for medical treatment in an emergency. Medical information can also be a boon to tracking and detecting disease that is geographically related. With up-to-date medical data and geographic information systems we will be able to monitor and detect the outbreak and spread of disease and catch epidemics in their infancy. I fully agree with the intent of this bill, but the privacy concerns must be adequately addressed. By working with stakeholders such as the Alberta Medical Association and other health care practitioners, we can ensure continued improvements for a patient-focused health care system.

The Speech from the Throne emphasized the need for us to have a plan that allows us to maintain our course in the current global climate and to build a springboard for sustainable, diversified, long-term growth. This is our commitment to all Albertans. Programs such as the affordable housing and Alberta Works programs mentioned in the throne speech will help ensure the long-term sustainability of success for individual Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see in the throne speech that the government is committed to effective social spending along with a renewed commitment to fiscal prudence as called for in the Mintz report. It is critical that the long term remains a priority.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident from the throne speech that our government's priorities go beyond our finances, recognizing the ever-important role of our military. I am proud to call many military personnel my constituents, including my oldest son, who recently retired from the military after 20 years. It is through their great sacrifice that we are able to assemble here today in peace and debate the Speech from the Throne. In return for their great sacrifice we must support them and help them in any way we can. This is why Bill 1, Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, which was highlighted in the Speech from the Throne, is something I'm very proud to support.

This bill will ensure that a reservist will be reinstated into the position he or she held prior to their leave or into a comparable position at their civilian jobs whenever possible when they return.

A reservist's challenges do not cease when they come home. Their civilian job should not have to be another sacrifice while serving this country. Mr. Speaker, we must remember that reservists are often called out not just for overseas duties, but they also stand on guard in the event of natural disasters or other emergency situations.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support the Speech from the Throne. The items presented in this speech demonstrate diligence, balance, and support for those who need that support. I'm confident that the vision laid out in the Speech from the Throne will make sure that Alberta continues to be well situated for years to come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. Does any hon. member want to take that?

Seeing none, now I would recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour to rise today and respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong. There's no question that Albertans face global economic uncertainty, and I'm proud that this government has presented a bold, future-oriented vision to address this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the very strength and the foundation of our economy comes from the success of small businesses and entrepreneurs, and I'm pleased that the throne speech acknowledged the importance of providing an environment where they may continue to thrive. I'm confident that we will accomplish this goal by maintaining competitive taxes, building the infrastructure that will facilitate growth, educating our youth, and fostering research and development.

Due to the prudent fiscal management of this government Albertans and Alberta businesses currently enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada. Furthermore, the elimination of health care premiums this year will save Alberta families up to \$1,056 and up to \$528 for individuals. This timely and substantive tax relief will no doubt provide a welcome stimulus to our economy.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of this government's continuing commitment to building infrastructure that provides jobs and ensures our high standards of living and facilitates our economic growth. A major component of this infrastructure strategy is the municipal sustainability initiative. This initiative, a 10-year program, was designed to provide long-term, predictable funding for capital projects identified by municipal councils. Under the program guidelines this can include roadways, bridges, railway, or light rail transit infrastructure. In 2007, when the program launched, \$400 million was provided to municipalities, and funding increased it to \$500 million in the 2008 fiscal year. This funding is scheduled to increase to \$1.4 billion per fiscal year by 2010.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are reaping the benefits of this program. Edmonton alone is scheduled to receive \$2.2 billion over the next two years. Projects have included waste management facilities and recreation facilities. As a proud Edmontonian I'm enthusiastic about the possibilities infrastructure provides for citizens and businesses. For example, the ongoing construction of the Anthony Henday ring road will connect all corners of our great city, allowing for free flow of goods and services. I commend this government and our Premier for their forward-thinking commitment to building the infrastructure that will ensure our place as an economic leader in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to ensure that Albertans are the best educated and skilled workers in the world. By doing so, Alberta will continue to be a beacon for investment while attracting the best

and the brightest to lead the industries of the future. To this end I am enthusiastic that this government announced a new initiative called Inspiring Education, that will look at ways to develop educational opportunities for children. In addition, the government intends to work with our world-class postsecondary institutions to prepare young Albertans for the next generation economy. We will do this by implementing a new funding formula that will align our resources in areas that support market labour demands and future opportunities.

3:50

This government will also work to provide the tools for our educated workforce to harness their entrepreneurial spirit. The Alberta research and innovation act will strengthen and align the entire research and innovation system to better assist aspiring entrepreneurs in realizing their dreams.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to serve in a government that had laid forth a bold strategy that will keep our economy on the right track in these uncertain times while embracing future opportunities. By providing a world-class education, low taxes, investing in infrastructure, research, and development, we will continue to promote the entrepreneurial spirit that will keep Alberta strong and free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, I now recognize the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor a few days ago. Listening to the Speech from the Throne, I was reminded yet again how from humble beginnings this great province has grown into the best place on earth to live, work, and play. Alberta has always been a place of opportunity, drawing in people from across the country and the world.

In October 1966 my father, a veterinarian, arrived from the U.K. He heard from a friend that Alberta was an amazing place in which to settle. My father was persuaded by his optimism and moved our family to a place where he could fulfill his dreams for a better life for all of us. At the time I was two years old, so my recollection is a little fuzzy. My father partnered in his first practice in Calgary at the Macleod Trail Animal Hospital, and a few years later he moved to open three practices in the Edmonton area, two in Edmonton and one later in Ardrossan.

Alberta is a land of opportunity, where skilled people can achieve their dreams in a strong business climate. My father's story is a true example of this. Growing up, my father taught me that with hard work and planning anything is possible. This inspired me to set my own personal goals and take advantage of the opportunities Alberta has to offer.

As we're all aware, the economic climate in Alberta varies, and this is why our government has applied a prudent and long-term approach to spending and saving. As stated in the throne speech, more than \$35 billion has been saved, over \$7 billion of which is part of the sustainability fund to protect Albertans from temporary drops in energy revenues. In addition to prudent saving, our government also remains committed to our core programs and services, such as health, education, infrastructure, and environment. These programs are important to all Albertans, and our government will not abandon them because of a short-term drop in revenues.

Alberta is well positioned because of its commitment to planning and saving, and we are prepared to face the future with confidence and optimism. It's important in a time when the world is facing

economic uncertainty that our decisions not be made out of fear but instead through a commitment to a well-thought-out vision for the future. Our government will rise above this current challenge and will continue to position Alberta as an economically stable and prosperous province. As His Honour highlighted, this stability will come by continuing to create an environment which allows business to thrive.

As part of this stability, however, rests our commitment to the environment. To this end we are prepared to invest \$2 billion for three to five carbon capture and storage projects. This investment will reduce 5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of taking a third of Alberta's vehicles off the road.

Alberta will be on the cutting edge of technology, making us the envy of other jurisdictions and further securing our position as an innovation leader. I strongly believe carbon capture and storage is more efficient than a cap and trade system, which entails a transfer of wealth to a certain degree, and I'm unconvinced this will solve the problem of reducing emissions. Our government is prepared to move forward to invest in and develop new technologies. This willingness will make Alberta more competitive and allow us to compete and excel on the international stage. Furthermore, these advances will no doubt lead to a better quality of life for Albertans in generations to come.

Our government has also committed to moving forward with an aggressive investment into our current and future infrastructure projects. Infrastructure has always been part of our long-term strategy in planning for our future. I'm proud one of these new infrastructure projects includes a new hospital in Sherwood Park that will serve my riding of Strathcona. Mr. Speaker, the Strathcona community hospital will open with plans for 72 acute-care beds and has been designed to allow for the eventual addition of 36 more. In addition, 80 per cent of these beds will be in private patient rooms, which will help not only reduce the risk of infection but will ensure patient privacy. Furthermore, this facility will link to a health services centre which provides services such as community rehabilitation and mental health support. This further demonstrates how our government is committed to ensuring that all Albertans have adequate health care now and in the future.

In addition, our investment strategy includes a multibillion-dollar savings account which funds infrastructure and other capital projects for both the provincial and local governments.

In the Speech from the Throne the Lieutenant Governor clearly highlighted our commitment to taking care of our most vulnerable. Seniors have long contributed to Albertans' prosperity, and we should take the time to step back and honour them for their hard work and integrity. Our government is committed to providing long-term care facilities as part of the continuing care strategy. The critical objective of this strategy centres on the goal of building and improving infrastructure. As part of this the government has pledged to refurbish over 7,000 long-term care beds by 2015 and support the development of 1,225 supportive living spaces. This government's dedication to our seniors further highlights the important role they play in shaping and guiding this great province.

It's our responsibility as members of this House to build upon the legacy they have left to us, and perhaps this responsibility is best exemplified through our commitment to the environment. It is imperative that our government works to ensure Albertans have access to an abundant and safe water supply. Our water for life strategy is North America's most comprehensive water management plan, and it focuses on improving our water efficiency, productivity, and management practices.

Albertans can continue to be proud of the many qualities that draw people to our province. We understand that Albertans are facing

uncertain economic times and will look to our government for leadership and assistance. Rest assured that Alberta is well positioned to face the challenges of today due to prudent financial planning. My father instilled this in me with the values of hard work, planning, innovation, and optimism, values that helped me become president of my own General Motors dealership at 31. I'm proud to say that I see these same qualities in our government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comments or questions.

Mr. Chase: I did not have the opportunity to watch the full Obama interview last night on CBC, but my understanding is that the United States government has set aside approximately 2 and a half billion dollars for their entire multimillion population for sequestration. The only example we have of sequestration is the Weyburn field in Saskatchewan, which receives CO₂ from North Dakota. Do you have through your government connections significant faith in the sequestration process that it warrants \$2 billion of government funding, which has yet to be matched by industry?

Mr. Quest: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not, obviously, intimately familiar with the technical side, but I have great faith in the technology. I have great faith in this province and the very skilled and technically capable people in this province. If it can be done on a small scale in Saskatchewan, it can absolutely be done on a large scale in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question to my hon. colleague would be: do you really feel that the number of beds that you mentioned are going to be adequate in the future in Sherwood Park to cover that large area? Out of those number of beds – I realize that they are acute – there will be a number of seniors in those beds. Do you have adequate beds to be able to move those seniors forward? I guess my main question would be: do you really feel that those numbers that you quoted are going to be adequate for the future?

4:00

Mr. Quest: Yes. Strathcona, of course, is part of the greater capital region, so it probably fits into some larger plans. In my constituency in the eastern part of Sherwood Park there are a number of private and semiprivate and subsidized facilities that are also under construction right now. The population in my own constituency is a bit younger than the average in Alberta, so, yes, I believe that certainly in my own constituency there will be adequate long-term care.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members?

Seeing none, I would now recognize the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take a little bit different tack in responding to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to pay tribute to the gentleman who gave the speech because in many ways the hon. Lieutenant Governor is so symbolic of many things in Alberta. What an honour for all of us to be in the Chamber and hear the speech from that man. The last statement in the speech said: "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people

who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded." I doubt that there's anyone in this province who doesn't believe that the Hon. Norman Kwong suits that to a T.

He was born in Calgary in 1929, one of six children, to parents who emigrated from Taishan, China, to open and operate a grocery store. He's been married to his lovely wife, Mary, for 48 years. They have four sons and five grandchildren.

What I can safely say in the confines of this House is that if he has made any mistakes in his life, it was probably back in 1948 when he joined the Calgary Stampeders. Mr. Speaker, Alberta as a young province made some mistakes, too, so I can clearly see that it's possible. In doing so, he became the first Chinese Canadian to play in the Canadian Football League and later the youngest to win the Grey Cup. In total he won four cups with Calgary and Edmonton after he was traded here in 1951. [interjection] You know, it's not a real surprise that a lot of good things happened in this province in the '50s.

An Hon. Member: When were you born?

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm just not trying to fool you.

You know, known across Canada as the China Clipper, he rushed for over 9,000 yards, averaged 5.2 yards per carry. It does make you wonder why they needed anybody else on the football team; just give it to him twice and have a first down. But they did use other players, which could explain why he didn't win all the Grey Cups he played in because some of those other players weren't that good. He won the cup in '54, '55, and '56 with the Eskimos. He was a western all-star running back, winner of the all-Canadian fullback award five times, named the CFL's most outstanding Canadian in 1955-56, and was Canada's male athlete of the year in 1955. At the time of his retirement he held over 30 CFL records and was the all-time CFL touchdown leader.

Like many others in Alberta he had to do other jobs while he competed in the sport he loved, and he did. He sold real estate and got involved with other ventures. He sold cars and did what he had to do, as many Albertans have over the years to provide for their families. The CFL didn't pay a whole lot back then. He said that in his first year of football he earned \$6,000, but by the end of it he was pulling in a whopping \$15,000 a year. I think that most people that achieve the greatness he has do it for the love of the game, and that's probably much like why we're in Alberta. We love it here and for many good reasons.

After he retired from the CFL His Honour spent the next few decades in the private sector in sales, commercial real estate, and eventually became the vice-president and general manager of Torode Realty.

You know, it seems like the good people, the really hard-working people, get asked to do a lot of things, and I think his love of the province and his love of sport encouraged him to become the general manager back at the Calgary Stampeders from 1988 to 1991. He also was a co-owner of the Calgary Flames hockey club, actually, back when they used to win games, from 1980 to 1984. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that Calgary still has a professional hockey team, but certainly not because Mr. Kwong didn't try to bring one there. Anyway, on to something more pleasant.

His Honour is a former national chairman of the Consultative Council on Multiculturalism, former honorary chairman of the Easter Seals campaign in Calgary, a member of the Order of Canada and Alberta Order of Excellence as well as a knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. He holds an honorary doctorate of law from the University of Alberta and was appointed Lieutenant Governor on January 20, 2005.

Now, the gentleman, as we all know, has a very quiet demeanour, but he has a wonderful sense of humour. Sometimes you have to listen carefully to hear it. I recall one particular fundraiser in Edmonton. He has an ongoing battle with Danny Hooper, and Hooper kids him. I remember him walking by in front of the podium, stopping and saying quietly enough that we weren't supposed to hear but into the microphone so we all could hear: Hooper, Zwozdesky is a better auctioneer than you.

Like our province, some things are a contradiction, like our Lieutenant Governor. He may be small in stature; he's certainly larger than life. When you look at our province maybe with a sense of humour, just south of here a couple of hours we have the Drumheller badlands, world renowned, a place where we go look at old, big, dead things. In Alberta we also have the most powerful nanotechnology microscope in the world where we can look at really small new things. One is the connection to our past, and obviously one is the future. In my riding I can go down to Paradise Valley, and I can go into their elevator museum. They call it travelling back through time. Like many elevators that have been restored around Alberta, it has a great history of the families and the activities of that community, and now that's what it does. Or I can go over to the elevator in Vermilion and climb on top of it now, and I can see the future of agriculture where Lakeland College is working at growing crops that are more specialized for the biodiesel, biofuels, supporting the ethanol plant in Lloydminster, and teaching the young people that go there a whole new way of agriculture.

It's a province that contradicts itself in many ways. We have a city, Medicine Hat, that's called the city with hell for a basement. We have natural gas in this province thousands of metres down where we go looking for it, and at the other end, as the hon. member mentioned, we've got oil running right out of the riverbanks, as it has for generations, into the Athabasca River. You'd have to think: well, you know, it maybe was a government committee that planned this province, but they didn't get it all perfect.

To go into our history right in Edmonton, we can stand in Fort Edmonton Park and feel the history of this area, where the settlers started and crossed the river, and we can see the University of Alberta, where our future is, the medical research that's ongoing, the understanding that innovation, technology, and knowledge are going to take us from the riverboats that landed here to wherever the future goes.

We've got so much to be so thankful for. I live in a wonderful part of the province. We used to occasionally have to go down to Kananaskis for conferences and conventions. Well, in that drive I go across land so flat that, like the Member for Drumheller-Stettler would say, you could see your dog run away for two days, then through the badlands and then through Calgary, the gorgeous city of Calgary – it needs a good hockey team but, nevertheless, a gorgeous city – and then into the mountains. No matter how many times you drive that highway towards Banff and Lake Louise, you have to admire the beauty of it.

If you get the opportunity, walk in downtown Banff and realize what an international province we've become when the signs are in German and Japanese and French and English, and the people look more like a movie set. That's right here, and it's very much the same in Jasper.

Or you can drive north. I had the great pleasure to be up to the Peace Country. I'd never been there as a young person. I don't know what the heck I've got about climbing up on elevators, but I'll tell you, climb up on the elevator at Falher and you can see for miles. That country, the Peace Country, is the hidden gem of Alberta. It is as flat and productive as can be. There is more arable land in the Peace Country than there is in the entire province of

Manitoba. So, you know, we've got all of these opportunities. Mr. Speaker, in this job I've had tremendous opportunity to travel to virtually every corner of Alberta and see these things. In the summers we've travelled to some with our family.

4:10

The things that I'll remember the most: I think, one, the day the Queen came to our Chamber and spoke. That was one of the most inspiring things. I mean, I sat over in that chair and thought: what the heck is the big deal? I wasn't a real monarchist. And then you see her in this Chamber, and you understand what majesty means. To be here for the pomp and ceremony of a throne speech that our Lieutenant Governor delivered, that's special. So to him I say: "Right on. Good health." Good luck, Alberta. With people like him we're on the right track.

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I make my comments, I'd like to very much thank my hon. colleague. That really was a rah-rah speech, but it was very moving, and I thank you for that. I was listening. I may have missed this, but I think you missed it: Normie Kwong also is the only one to have both a Grey Cup ring and a Stanley Cup ring, the Grey Cup as a player and the Stanley Cup ring as an owner. I'm not sure if it's in Canada, but he certainly is the only one to have that in Alberta. I was at a do with him, and he let me try both of them on. His wife kept her eye on me the entire time to make sure that he got them back.

So thank you very much.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. I appreciate the comments. I would have had to admit, though, that he won the Stanley Cup with Calgary, and you know, there are just some things . . .

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I, too, would like to commend the hon. President of the Treasury Board for his tribute to Normie Kwong. When we lost Lois Hole, there were large shoes to fill, and a search was undertaken. Normie Kwong has done an extremely admirable job I wouldn't say in filling but sort of standing beside in similarly large shoes.

I was also very impressed by the travelogue, the beauty of Alberta, and also the history that Alberta has experienced, to a degree, through Normie Kwong's eyes. When Normie Kwong's parents first arrived, there was a terrific amount of prejudice in this province, and over the years the racial prejudice has diminished tremendously due to the warmth in which Albertans have supported each other. However, pockets of prejudice still exist, particularly for individuals of a lesbian, homosexual, or a transgendered nature, and until we get past those prejudices, we still have some history to cover.

As a grandfather I'll ask the question: do you think the glories of the future will live up to or potentially surpass our glories of the past? Are we handing over to our next generation an Alberta that they can be proud of and that will sustain them?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. What we're passing on is changing. The world lived in an agriculture commodity environment for 5,000 years, and then they got into an industrial age, that kind of ran the economy of the world for 150. Then the information age has taken probably a 70-year span, and it's not over yet,

although I wish it was when I hear some of the sounds in here, but it's not over yet. What's the next great thing? It's going to be genetics, and it's going to be nanotechnology, and this province is leading in both of those.

The most important of a lot of the solutions that we're going to give our children is, I would think, health. It's okay to take care of people, but it's best if they don't need the hospital, if we can keep them well and understanding what makes us sick: the curse of cancer, of MS. That's what I think we are going to pass on. There will be issues, and there will be problems. There are in any country and any province at any time. You have more people moving in, and there's change.

I've talked some about the great big jigsaw puzzle we're all building here in Alberta. Just when we get it pretty close, they dump another 60,000 pieces on. If you put your puzzle together so loosely that you can fit the pieces in, nothing is holding it together, yet if you put them together tightly, how do you fit them in? It's that balance. Do we have the opportunity to pass on so much more to our children, their children, and the rest of this world? I can tell you that I think yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in debate to the throne speech, assuming that the five-minute question period is over? Thank you so much.

Mr. Speaker, this particular throne speech is of great value and of great importance to all Albertans. Just as I look at the headlines, the main categories of Creating Opportunity and Showing Environmental Leadership and People Thriving in a Skilled Workforce and A Healthy Approach and Strong Communities and a sterling Conclusion, I thank God that I'm in this province, where I can live the lifestyle that I wish to live and my family can as well, because it truly provides us with boundless opportunities.

Taking a look at this throne speech from another perspective, I look at what it means to other people as well. I look at some of the people who are impacted, for example, through the ministry that I'm privileged to serve, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, and at some of the outstanding initiatives that we'll be pursuing here. I'm going to comment a little bit at length about two because time wouldn't permit me to comment about all of them.

On page 3, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, we referenced the aboriginal consultation policy and guidelines, which are going to be reviewed this year. This policy and these guidelines have been in place now for five or more years, and it has just come time to refresh those particular policies and guidelines with a view to creating greater certainty for First Nations people, for Métis people, for industry, for provincial government purposes, for municipalities, for the federal government as well. We're going to do that.

Everybody wants some certainty and some clarity with respect to consultation. I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker: primarily because the lands that traditionally First Nations and Métis people have occupied are precious to this province and precious to them. They are precious because land, air, and water are three of the basic things that we must strive hard to protect, and we must have very clear guidelines surrounding their use.

One of the significant growth areas, of course, is our oil sands. I have to tell you that I was extremely pleased to accompany the hon. President of the Treasury Board last Thursday when we went up to Fort McMurray with the MLA from that area, and we unveiled that particular strategy, the new plan, as it were, called Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands.

Mr. Speaker, there are six objectives in this particular document, and one of them as a strategy is dedicated to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, where we are going to promote clarity and consistency in our consultation process, where we're going to enhance collaborative government-to-government relationships, where we are going to continue to work with Métis settlements in the oil sands region, and where we're going to involve a series of related government strategies on First Nations protocol agreements and strengthening our relationships through the aboriginal policy framework and the land-use framework and a number of other things. It is just loaded with opportunities which we're trying and working very hard with First Nations and Métis communities to do whatever they can to capitalize on.

4:20

Another area that we're interested in pursuing – and I hope we can get to some clarity as we do this consultation piece – is on differentiating between consultation, compensation, and accommodation. Anyone here who has ever been involved in any of those negotiations knows full well how intricately woven those three concepts are. Consultation about treaty rights, for example, compensation for potential adverse effects on the land, or compensation in a partnering way: none of this is negative. This has all to do with empowering greater strides toward self-reliance and autonomy for all aboriginal communities.

We can talk about economic opportunities from the labour side. We can talk about economic opportunities from the skills training side and the mentoring side. I just want to highlight a couple of them for you because our ministry has been involved in these in one way or another. The single-largest bitumen upgrader facility on First Nation land anywhere in Canada is going to be right here in Alberta. In fact, it's already running. I was up in that neck of the woods last summer with the hon. Member for . . .

Ms Calahasen: Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Lesser Slave Lake – thank you – when we cut the ribbon, as it were, on a joint venture project with Bronco Energy out of Calgary partnering with the Bigstone Cree First Nation just around the Wabasca area. Mr. Speaker, that one project alone, which came about as a result of very careful consultation and strategizing and partnering, is already looking at 6,000 barrels of flow per day, and it can go up to several thousand more. We'll see how that develops in the future, but it's a huge project that they can well capitalize on as they move forward with their strides for self-sustainability.

Another one is a project on the Alexander reserve straight west of Morinville. I believe it's in the lovely constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. The hon. member knows it because he's been there as well. This is the single-largest database collection, retrieval, and storage system anywhere in western Canada, and I wouldn't be surprised if it's even larger than that. This is a joint project between eNation out of Calgary and the Alexander First Nation.

Now, I mention these just as two very high-profile success stories that the world needs to know about, not just Albertans. Frequently our aboriginal communities get a rough rub, and I think we're all familiar with that. Sometimes our friends in the media tend to focus a little too much on the negative stories, but here are a few that are very positive. The Fort McKay First Nation, north of Fort McMurray, has an incredible project called the Creeburn Lake Lodge, and that, too, has come about as a result of some of the capacity building that we as a ministry, that we as a government have been doing over the past few years.

It's time to review those policies and those guidelines, and that's what this throne speech has indicated we will do. I'll just quote for you from page 3, where it says: "with input from First Nations and industry to ensure the approach to consultation is beneficial to all Albertans." We're very committed to that. One of the commitments that we have in that respect, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the recently signed protocol agreement on government-to-government relations between the government of Alberta and First Nations in our province.

As you would know, there are 47 First Nations in this province. We value and respect each and every one of them. On their behalf the three grand chiefs – the grand chief of Treaty 6, the grand chief of Treaty 7, and the grand chief of Treaty 8 – along with their vice grand chiefs signed an official protocol agreement on May 22, 2008, with our Premier and myself. That protocol agreement among other things sets up a true new relationship on a government-to-government basis that will allow at least two formal meetings with eight or nine consultation ministers and the grand chiefs and their vice grand chiefs, and it guarantees one formal meeting as well with the Premier and the same grand chiefs and vice grand chiefs. That's very significant, Mr. Speaker, because no other agreement exists in this country today on a government-to-government relationship basis such as our protocol agreement. There will be other meetings, of course. All the ministers are having other meetings, and so are MLA colleagues having meetings of their own. But that is a formal process that has arisen out of the true meaningful consultation aspect that we're pursuing here and reviewing.

I'm also pleased to tell you that as part of this aboriginal policy framework and the policy and guidelines document that guides us, we have been able to conclude a longer term operating agreement with the Métis Nation of Alberta Association. That's a seven-year agreement, Mr. Speaker, worth about \$1.5 million per year. At the same time, we've also recently concluded a three-year interim funding agreement with the Métis Settlements General Council and their eight councils. That will be about an \$18 million project over three years as we work toward completing long-term governance and long-term funding arrangements for their benefit. Those are a few of the things that we'll be talking about.

The other point that I want to mention very quickly, Mr. Speaker, is on page 8 under the headline Adapting to a Changing Business Environment as outlined in the Speech from the Throne by His Honour. The second paragraph from the end on that page says:

This summer, the Government of Alberta, in partnership with Treaty Seven First Nations, will present a first-of-its kind international symposium that will bring together Aboriginal and business communities to share and encourage indigenous economic development strategies.

This will be not only the first of its kind here but the first of its kind anywhere with a specific focus on indigenous or aboriginal economic development success strategies. We will host well over 500 people at the end of June in this province in Banff, just in the Treaty 7 area, in partnership with Treaty 7, I should stress, one of the largest and most impactful conferences that we've ever had with and for aboriginal people.

We will have world leaders here, keynote speakers who will be talking about economic success stories that are adaptable by or should be considered by anyone, everyone, but specifically by aboriginal communities. In that respect we have a program in our ministry called FNEPI, First Nations economic partnerships initiative, and that's where this idea sprang to my head to pursue something on an international level that would bring world experts here to help facilitate even greater economic growth and economic partnering between First Nations, Métis settlements, MNA folks, or

whomever in the aboriginal community, with so many other possible partners not only in Alberta but across Canada and throughout the world.

The symposium is called Gathering for Success. I'll just note for everyone's attention that it takes place in Banff on June 28, 29, 30 of 2009, and if they're interested, they can punch it up on the website at gatheringforsuccess.ca. That's a very important part of this throne speech. I'm so pleased that it was able to be highlighted and commented on in this particular throne speech this year.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about the aboriginal components, but my point in raising these is to simply say how inclusive our government of Alberta is on aboriginal issues and on aboriginal consultation, meaningful consultation, I should stress, and on other matters affecting aboriginal communities. I say that because I not only believe it and feel it in my heart, but I know that it's the true way to go in order to help us succeed more in our dealings with and in the empowerment of aboriginal communities and aboriginal individuals and aboriginal organizations in this province.

Mr. Speaker, just before I leave that point and wrap up my comments, I think everyone here should be reminded that the aboriginal community across Canada but specifically here in Alberta is growing on a percentage basis at a rate of 2 to 2.5 times faster than the combined population of Alberta. In other words, if the population of Alberta is growing at a rate of 3.5 per cent, whatever it is – I've just forgotten the exact number – the aboriginal percentage is two times higher than that. That's a tremendous opportunity.

4:30

It's also a challenge to handle, if you will, but it's a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of a growing population that will soon become a potential labour source, even greater than it already is, and one that we would do well to pay great attention to. The other point is to realize that almost 60 per cent of our aboriginal population today is already under 30 years of age, so it shows you what the growth potential there is and can be.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't mention a few comments about health care, and I'm delighted that we have a section in here called A Healthy Approach. I know and I think everybody here knows that health care still tends to be the number one issue on Albertans' minds – it certainly is in my constituency, particularly from the aspect of seniors – so we have some work to do there, that's for sure. There's an entire page dedicated to some of the broader initiatives that we'll be pursuing.

Similarly, there are issues that affect another part of my portfolio, which is the Strong Communities section on page 10, where we talk about cultures of creativity such as the Arts Day. I have a large component of constituents who are artists themselves or are arts supporters, and I'm delighted to see them in there along with the antigang summit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My time has run out.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the minister pointing out not only the potential for First Nations to take their rightful place in Alberta but the challenges surrounding them having that full right of citizenship. I'm just wondering if you can comment upon educational opportunities, providing opportunities for First Nations people, and where they stand in terms of our dependence, it seems, on temporary foreign workers. How can we better provide a sustainable future for our First Nations, who basically were the founders of this province?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much. You know, you've hit the heart of the matter in terms of what my first priority is in this portfolio. I indicated very early on – well, I've met now with over 300 or 400 aboriginal communities just in this last not even year. I said that the number one priority is education, that number two will be economic development because it leads one into the other, and number three is resource management and all of the stuff that goes with the treaty rights and the aboriginal rights, be they asserted rights or constitutional rights or whatever.

But to come back to your question, it might warm your heart, hon. member, to know that for the first time ever we are having an aboriginal education summit comprised of ministers of education, comprised of ministers of aboriginal relations or whatever their local title might be, and the federal minister of INAC, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. It'll be next week in Saskatoon. I'll be joining the Minister of Education from Alberta, for example. We've already caucused with the grand chiefs of treaties 6, 7, and 8 and with the MNA president and with the Métis Settlements General Council president to strategize what issues we want put on the table.

I'll share with you what some of those issues are. I was just down south at the Blood reserve this morning, and I gave this speech there, so I'm somewhat fresh on it, and it talks about what is commonly referred to as a statistical funding gap. That's specific to the amount of money that the federal government pays for on-reserve education on a per-student basis versus what we as a province present as off-reserve, if you like, education; in other words, for the general population. It is conventionally known – and, again, I'm not criticizing here; I'm just pointing out a statistic – that there's a statistical gap of somewhere around 2,000, sometimes a little bit higher, between those two systems and those two forums. So we're going to be talking about that.

Another issue we're going to be talking about is the transition rate that we have from high school into postsecondary, which ties in with the skills training, and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has commented on some strategies that he has in that respect. Our job as provincial ministers is to bring this matter to the attention of the federal government and to see where there might be an opportunity for us to not take over federal responsibility but to augment where we see an opportunity to do so. I know that the Minister of Education is focused on that, as I was when I was Minister of Education. We live with the consequences of not handling it properly if we don't handle it properly, and we want to avoid that. In brief, those are a few of the issues that are there.

I should mention one other issue that they've asked be mentioned, and that is that at the reserve end, the Indian reserve end or First Nations end, they are questioning how the growth figures on the one hand don't yield a lifting of the 2 per cent increase per annum on the other end. To put it differently, the federal government is generously giving a 2 per cent per annum increase for on-reserve education, but that 2 per cent, First Nations would tell you and I would agree, is not keeping pace with their needs and their growth and the evergreening they need and the equipment they need and so on. So I've advanced the concept of a triple E approach, equal education for everyone, and we'll see where that goes next week.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The First Nations have demonstrated a large degree of integrity in saying that they will not allow their standardized achievement test results to be broadcast because it's their personal business, because it's the personal business of the family. How do you feel about that as a provincial-wide trend?

Mr. Zwozdesky: One of the things that we have talked about with the First Nations chiefs is the need for honesty and openness and for accessing those kinds of things. We have to know where we're at in order to move forward, so I hope they'll start releasing those.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, our five minutes are up.

I will now recognize the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week His Honour the Lieutenant Governor rose in this House and delivered Alberta's Speech from the Throne. As he did that, I pondered the fact that the first time that I heard the Lieutenant Governor deliver a Speech from the Throne, I had been an elected MLA for less than a month and had sat in this House for a very short time. I was so pleased to see His Honour the Lieutenant Governor again offering not only views with respect to the future of this province and what the government agenda was but also his own personal perspective and his own personal insight into how he cares about this province. I thought that over the past year as I have been able to spend time with him, very small amounts of time, his charm and his love of this province have always been reflected in everything that he has done. I feel very honoured to have been able to be an MLA at the time that he has served this province as Lieutenant Governor.

I also thought a great deal about what life has been like for me and probably for many of my new colleagues this year and about the changes that we have gone through as we have become more knowledgeable and more involved in the work of this government and this House with respect to the future of this province. I am very grateful to be here, I feel very honoured to be here, and I wanted to take a moment to thank my constituents and my colleagues and my family for allowing me to serve this province.

His Honour spoke of facing the future with confidence and of the value of safe and strong communities. Challenges lay ahead. In the last year we have faced many challenges as a government and as a province, and I guess the challenge of government is that we don't know what those will be. They have been unexpected, and I think the test that we must face as a government is how we respond to events that arise without knowing what those will be. I believe from my experience as an Albertan and as my experience in this government has shown me that Alberta will rise to these challenges and that we will build an even stronger future for our children.

Here, Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am very grateful for the direction that our Premier has shown and his passion toward future generations and ensuring that what this province will look like and what our children will inherit will be worth inheriting and will be similar if not better than what we as young Albertans inherited.

4:40

A strong and healthy future can only be achieved when Albertans feel safe and secure within their homes and in their communities. Albertans must have confidence in their government, and it has been very clear to me in the past year that from my perspective and from the perspective of many Albertans that translates into confidence in their justice system. As Minister of Justice and Attorney General it is my responsibility to ensure that government is doing enough to prevent crime, to intervene and provide support for those in need, and to enforce the laws that we all live under.

Alberta's safe communities initiative is now into its second year. That initiative, as I referred earlier to the work that we have to do, is a shared responsibility amongst my colleagues and amongst this government. Our first year focused on building a foundation. We added more police officers. We enhanced the role of the Crown

prosecutor and bail hearings. We hired more prosecutors, both special prosecutors and general Crown prosecutors. We developed legislation to combat crime. We added more treatment beds for Albertans struggling with addiction.

Through the recommendations of the safe communities task force we've identified the areas where we need to be better, stronger, and more focused. We know that the roots of crime can very often be traced back to families in need that sometimes will become families in crisis. Substance abuse, family violence, mental illness, and lack of community support are all common underlying factors for criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, those are the areas where we need to focus as we move forward. Those are the areas where we can make a real difference before crimes are committed and before anyone becomes a victim of crime. This is important not only because it addresses the root causes of crime, but I believe that when we travel this province as members of this Legislature and we talk to people that live in communities, their pride in their community is reflected and is tested and judged by how communities take care of people in need. I believe that that is an underlying philosophy of this government, and I believe it's a very important reason that the Premier has been able to lead so effectively on the safe communities plan.

Our world may be changing, but our values are not. Albertans today share the same values that we did in years past. We want to raise our families in safe and caring communities, and we look out for our neighbours and for those in our communities who need help. But we also want to protect our homes and protect our property. We respect the law, and we expect others to respect the law, and we expect accountability and compassion from our justice system.

We expect the actions of our government to reflect those values, and that's a very complicated set of values. The safe communities initiative has nine government ministries that work together to find realistic, tangible crime reduction strategies. The police, the courts, community leaders, and municipalities all have key roles to play. We can't eliminate crime and social disorder overnight, but if we chip away at this issue with meaningful approaches and meaningful partnerships, I think we'll be surprised at what we can achieve.

Even in this past year through the approach that we've been able to take through the safe communities initiative, through integrated partnerships that involve helping people in need, we've been able to support people who perhaps have come into contact with the justice system, unfortunately, and need more help than simply being incarcerated. We can speak to programs that have been a success even this year: Pathways in Calgary, Rapid Exit in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, we need to take a look at that full paradigm of what safe communities means. We need to look at education, prevention, diversion, and then enforcement and prosecution. It's very important that while we speak about the enforcement and the prosecution piece, we also understand that if we don't deal with the first issues, we will only ever be dealing with those last issues.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that our world is changing. Alberta is changing, and I think Albertans know that. What was once considered big-city crime is taking root in smaller communities. As I visited a number of small communities to talk about the safe communities initiatives, I have been struck at how open people are about their concerns as to what's happening in their communities.

The other side of that is that big-city crime in Alberta is truly big-city crime these days. The issues that we're facing in Calgary and Edmonton and the five other urban centres are particularly acute at this moment. I think it's very important as we move forward that we acknowledge the leadership that police services, police agencies across this province have taken in enforcement and take a moment to thank them for the work that they do and the high-risk work that they are doing.

There's a real concern out there about crime and the effect that it's having on our society, and much of the work within Alberta Justice now is focusing on organized crime. Mr. Speaker, gangs are not going away. Organized crime is one of the world's oldest industries. It's an industry based on selling drugs, victimizing vulnerable people, and making money. Unfortunately, as we see not only in Alberta but across the country, business is booming. In a strong economy or a struggling economy, unfortunately, there is a market for illegal narcotics. It's a sad reality. In good times and bad it's a competitive market. Today's gangs are sophisticated, well organized, and mobile. They don't respect our provincial boundaries.

In order to disrupt and dismantle gang activity, we have to act now, and we have to act smart. We're working within our provincial legislation and introducing new laws to address gang-related crime. Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, gets to the heart of what Safe Communities is trying to do. The new legislation hits gangs where it hurts the most: their cash flow, their profitability. The act allows us to seize, hold, and sell property connected to unlawful activity and to return the proceeds to the communities and the victims that are affected by these crimes.

In the two months that the civil forfeiture office has been operational, we're seeing great promise in this initiative. Police agencies have been extremely receptive and are submitting files for review under this act on a daily basis. This is a true partnership between the police and the Crown. Alberta currently has seizure orders on vehicles, guns, drugs, cash, and homes, including a property used to house a large-scale grow operation in a rural community. The total value of illegal profit connected to the seized property in the last seven weeks is 4 and a half million dollars. As I mentioned, this legislation hits organized crime hard, and it removes some of the profit from the gang activity. Mr. Speaker, we believe that when you're dealing with people that are prepared to commit heinous criminal acts, we must hit them where it hurts the most, and we believe that that's affecting their ability to do business in this province.

Mr. Speaker, as a Calgary MLA I hear the concerns about violent crime. I share those concerns. We've seen a number of examples in Calgary in the last two months of armoured vehicles being observed. The police know where these armoured vehicles are. This is the reality of organized crime, and eliminating rivals is a part of doing business. Firing guns in public places is a part of doing business, and innocent people are getting caught in the crossfire. Gangs are not concerned with collateral damage. All they care about is hitting their target. As I mentioned, gangs are getting more sophisticated. The risk of being shot is just the cost of doing business if you're in a gang.

Police are finding an increasing number of vehicles on our streets equipped for battle. Today's gang members are driving around in virtual tanks. Bulletproof glass, hidden compartments for guns and drugs, and body armour are all ways that vehicles are being modified. These, Mr. Speaker, as long as they're allowed to be on the streets, allow gangs to operate or feel that they can operate with protection and impunity. Bill 50 ensures that we can take those vehicles off the street. The best way to make sure that someone's not driving is to get rid of their vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne referred to a gang summit. We're very excited about this. The Premier has asked government to come together with community partners and police agencies to find ways to ensure that gangs are not impacting the justice system adversely. Gang activity puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the police and the courts, it puts innocent lives in danger, and it ensures a constant supply of drugs within our province. This is a problem that needs to be addressed, and the summit, which will be held in Calgary in June, will address that.

We need everyone on board. Mr. Speaker, this summit will be an opportunity for us to explore with our partners the development of a provincial gang strategy, a strategy that will deal with all the pieces of this issue around safe communities. We will deal with prevention, we will deal with education, we will deal with enforcement, and we will deal with prosecution. We know that this is a problem that is part of a wider organizational issue around western Canada specifically, so we will also be organizing a meeting of Attorneys General for western Canada to ensure that we are working together on this program so that gangs are not able to cross borders and operate outside of jurisdictions.

4:50

We also, Mr. Speaker, will be introducing some work with respect to witness protection. We believe that there are people out there that are afraid and intimidated. They are not people that necessarily need to be hidden from outside of their community, but they need to be given the confidence and the support to come forward and to feel that they will be protected during prosecutions.

We are also doing a lot of work with respect to federal legislation, Mr. Speaker. We believe there need to be fundamental changes to the Criminal Code. We need strong laws around drive-by shootings, any murder committed in connection to gang activity should automatically be considered first degree, and we want to see gang-free zones enforced to help stem the tide of recruitment into these organizations.

We also believe that it's very important, Mr. Speaker, for us to aggressively amend the Criminal Code to deal with bail, to change the test for bail so that judges have the test that they can move forward with in order to keep people that should be in jail in jail. We also think that it's important to impose the reverse onus. We need to ensure that if people have committed a breach of a court order, the next time that they go to court, the onus is on them to prove why they should be allowed out on bail as opposed to the court making an assumption that they should be allowed out on bail.

Mr. Speaker, we need to deal with all of these issues, the root causes of crime, provincial and federal legislation. We also need to deal with the pieces of our society that need support to ensure that they're protected from people that are involved in criminal activity. Government has an important role to play in ensuring that safety. Preventing and reducing crime is no easy task.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to ask just a short question to the hon. minister. You talked about the confidence in the justice system, and you indicated that because of some of the backlogs, et cetera, you have added Crown prosecutors and judges, but there seem to be continuing delays in the whole justice system, both in the civil and criminal divisions. I was wondering if your department is taking any steps to do an evaluation of the whole system to see if you can determine if there can be improvements in removing some of the bureaucratic delays that seem to be inherent in the judicial system.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. We believe that within the provincial court system, which deals with most of the primary charges dealing with bail and criminal offences, while we have augmented the number of prosecutors and the number of provincial court judges, one of the

other pieces we need to look at is the way that we actually organize the work the courts do. We need to organize what we call and you will know, my friend, as the administration of justice. We need to look at how courtrooms are booked, how those systems work, whether or not lawyers are coming to court prepared. If they're not coming to court prepared, there must be a consequence.

We continually find that if you look at federal legislation, if you look at some of the disclosure requirements under the Criminal Code, there are a number of pieces of legislation and common law that create duplication. Now, under the jurisprudential piece of this it is possible for defence counsel to require disclosure at a number of different stages in the process. Our point as a justice department is that we believe that the administration of justice must be fair. We believe that everyone must be able to receive a fair trial. But we also believe that if you're going to talk about making the system effective and ensuring that people receive a fair trial in due time and that there aren't unnecessary delays, everyone, every stakeholder in the system, whether it's the Crown or defense counsel or judges, has a responsibility to ensure that the administration of justice proceeds in due course and allows for a fair trial so that everyone is served by the system.

I think that that is a new way of looking at the administration of justice. It's not something that's only happening in Alberta. It's part of what we're seeing around civil procedure reform across the country. Because we need the public to know that this justice system also serves them, we need to ensure that everyone feels that the system is working toward a resolution. When I say that, I don't mean a resolution that will always end up in a guilty plea but a satisfactory resolution that respects the rights of the accused but also understands that people need to have confidence in the system. If they no longer have confidence in the system, then we have failed. So it's very important, as we have these discussions and we involve stakeholders, that everyone understands that they have a role to play. It's about access to justice, and it's about access to justice for everyone because the justice system has to serve our entire community.

Mr. Hehr: I appreciate the hon. minister's comments on, you know, we've got to help people along and support them along the way, or else dealing with them at the endgame is where we're always going to be. But just two quick questions on that. Do you find that our policing numbers, even though they seem to be less than other major centres, are adequate going forward? The second thing: what is the status of the Calgary drug court and the province's role in the future of that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you. The first thing I'll say is that I have found the discussions and the partnership that I have developed as Minister of Justice with the chiefs of police, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, in the last year to be probably the most important part of the work that we have done around safe communities. Both Chief Rick Hanson and Mike Boyd have a very firm understanding of all pieces of this. What I find interesting is that we have been able, I think rightly, to move the discussion from being about X number of boots on the street to what those police are doing. Our discussions and our partnerships with the Calgary Police Service and the Edmonton Police Service talk about targeting police officers in those areas that are involved with kids in schools, prevention, and families at risk. I know that people sometimes synthesize this down to a simplistic approach of saying: oh, there aren't enough police on the streets. The chiefs tell us that that's not all they need. What they

need and what they're getting from us is targeted police officers to deal with the front end of these challenges.

Mrs. Klimchuk: I move that we adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate February 17: Mr. Stevens]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

The Deputy Speaker: My apology. It was moved yesterday by the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, so, Minister, you are not allowed to speak until all the others speak. Thank you.

We'll keep speaking on the bill, then, please. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

5:00

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009. You know, it's nice to see that Alberta has moved a long way from where it was some 10 years ago, when they denied the need for this type of, I guess, transparent and open government. I'll say more on that towards the end of my speech. Although we still have a long way to go, this is, I guess, an important beginning, and these amendments are adding to that piece of the puzzle which will one day, hopefully, get Alberta to the place where we really can be. What we are seeking is open and transparent government. Like I said, we're not there yet, but we seem to be plodding along that path. If we could plod along a little faster, that would be appreciated, but we're getting there.

I guess what these types of bills are really trying to balance is representative citizens being able to go forward and meet with their government officials and discuss the business of the day and discuss what ails them or what ails their communities and what governments could do to make things better on their behalf, make the environment better, make the justice system better, make our postsecondary system better.

At the same time, despite the fact that these are often made in the public interest, we have many people or many organizations who are acting in the private sphere or in their private interest that then go forward to government members and people in power and put forward an agenda that may be slightly different than a version that would be in the public interest but more fosters a private interest, the private interests of, for example, farm owners or private interests of oil companies or private interests of schoolteachers, whatever it may be.

That's where the Lobbyists Act tries to balance and cut some rights or comes to a balance of what, in fact, is the rightful, sort of appropriate amount of time private interests or private organizations should be spending with government officials and trying to keep an account of when this occurs and who's meeting with who because, really, access to power enables you to influence it. That's just how it is.

We have a long-standing tradition in democracy where we try to sort of have this open government principle. It goes back to the days of the Magna Carta, where it was not expressed but implied that people would have the right to go see their governments. We see in the English Bill of Rights in 1689 that you have the right of the subjects to petition the king. We see that also in our federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the freedom of association and the freedom of expression, where our ability to go see our government officials is implied there. But, again, it's really back to that balance between what is too much influence and how that influence is being wielded, and that's what our Lobbyists Act is trying to come to terms with.

Now a little bit of not really a history lesson but sort of where we are. The federal government first came in with a lobbyist registry in 1986. Then Ontario came up with their Lobbyists Registration Act in 1998, Nova Scotia in 2001, British Columbia in 2001, Newfoundland and Labrador in 2005, and Quebec in 2002. With us coming up with our first cut of this back in 2007, we're a little bit behind the curve.

We would suggest that our Lobbyists Act isn't quite as good or doesn't have as many teeth in it as some of these other legislations that are on the books. That's where we would like to go, and that's where we would like to get to. If we look at our act right now, it's primarily based on what was talked about back in 2001. Really, we haven't seen a lot of movement from there. Back at that time, of course, the Klein government was against any kind of registry, so in fact, like I mentioned earlier, we have made some progress.

Of course, the Alberta Liberals campaigned for a lobbyists act back in 2004. We actually supported it all the way along, every step of the way from back in 1996, when it was introduced in this House, I believe, in the Tupper report. Is that what it is? Maybe someone else could explain that. We were calling for it as far back as then. We've been at least calling for it for some period of time. Those are the things that we'd like to see.

While I'm talking about things we'd like to see, we think there has to be an onus on more government officials actually reporting when people are in fact meeting with them and more of, you know, an approach of the government official telling a lobbyist: "Don't call us. We'll call you when we need the information." We think that approach would go a long way to limiting lobbyists and people who are trying to curry favour with the government or have their special interest put forward that may or may not be in the public interest. It would be much better served. Just an open and transparent lobbyist registry is where we should be getting to. Like I said, these are moving along that direction.

You know, I read the hon. former Leader of the Opposition's last book. It's very good reading, actually, if any of you want to go into it. It shows sort of the access to the corridors of power that people like Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois enjoyed at some point in time in our past. You look at that and look at how people like that had unfettered access and undue influence and, really, maybe had more private interests instead of public interests at heart. That is sort of where it is. I don't know if that book would still be on the shelves or if you could get some members of this Assembly a copy, but it's really a history of what can happen when you don't have a lobbyist registry or have a stopwatch or a guard at the door, so to speak. So I'll leave you with that plug.

I'll have some more comments on this, where we'd like to improve the bill, at that stage of the game. I'd just invite you all to read that book and see why we have a Lobbyists Act and why we're going in that direction and why it needs to be strengthened even further.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Like my hon. young colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, I too and all my colleagues support the notion of a lobbyists registry. As my young colleague pointed out, we've been calling for a lobbyists registry for some time. I welcome this opportunity to engage in debate on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

I also want to give a tremendous amount of credit to the all-party standing policy committee that reviewed what had been the government's flagship bill from, I believe, almost two years ago. The process, unfortunately, is far from complete, and I welcome this opportunity to discuss some of the missing parts of this bill that need to be addressed.

5:10

One major loophole, probably the largest loophole, is a notion that I put into rhyme, and that's: if the government comes courting, there's no reporting. In other words, if the government member actually does a reverse lobby and says to an individual in private industry, "Would you be interested in a contract for building this particular bridge or building this particular hospital, or are you interested in providing some P3 financing for a particular government project?" no reporting takes place. In other words, the government can initiate a deal that could be in the millions or, in the case of how the carbon sequestration project goes forth, could be potentially in the billions, yet there would be no reporting required of the initial effort on the lobbying that goes behind it.

Some of these holes were dealt with by the standing policy committee in terms of the concerns that nonprofit groups had, the concerns that community associations had, wanting to understand what the rules are so that they wouldn't have to file a lobbyist application when they were talking to their local MLA. The all-party standing policy committee addressed those concerns, and a number of amendments were made. But when it comes to the biggest concern that this bill has yet to deal with – and that's conflict of interest – Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, doesn't meet the test.

For example, a recent appointee to the health minister's superboard, Tony Franceschini, is a wonderful man. He's a very capable entrepreneur. He has built Stantec up to the point where it's a multimillion-dollar company. His company has built wonderful infrastructure projects throughout the province. However, to have him appointed to the superboard and for him to carry out his role within that superboard, does he have to leave the room every single time a question is asked with regard to a hospital renovation, a repair on an operating room, the final building or the shelling-in, as it was described, of the Peter Lougheed hospital, the well-received – when we finally get it – south Calgary hospital? This is a man whose fortunes to a large extent have been derived from working on projects for this government. For an individual who has so closely profited by connections with this government to be now a member of the superboard which, amongst other items, will be deciding on future infrastructure projects, the conflict of interest is so glaring.

Members have spoken to our Ethics Commissioner. We've had to declare what holdings we have that could potentially influence government outcomes. I would suggest that Mr. Tony Franceschini has probably not been required to give up any of his what I would think must be thousands of shares in Stantec.

An Hon. Member: Hundreds of thousands.

Mr. Chase: Potentially hundreds of thousands. So through no fault of his own he has been placed in a position of conflict of interest by his appointment.

Now, the Ethics Commissioner, Neil Wilkinson, whom we met with, doesn't have the authority to investigate the appointment and

to balance the need for strong, entrepreneurial, potentially business-focused – and I'll be the first to argue that health care delivery is not a business; it's a service. However, this man is qualified. He's qualified, but he's in a position where he's been placed in conflict. The Ethics Commissioner's latitude or designation doesn't allow for that kind of a conflict, so that's a large concern that I have.

We also asked the Ethics Commissioner: how does the reporting of a potential lobbyist occur? For example, one of the things that Neil mentioned was that, you know, if a lobbyist, say, from a packing plant sees a person from a competing packing plant talking to the minister of agriculture at the bar, is that actual lobbying? Can he report the person for having this discussion with the minister of agriculture, who might potentially be directing cattle towards this particular slaughterhouse or packing plant facility? Again, he didn't really have an answer for that, but that was one of the ways he suggested that this lobbying reporting could take place.

I very much appreciate Neil Wilkinson's desire to talk to our caucus and give us a heads-up on his role as Ethics Commissioner. One of the other concerns that he brought up was: exactly how do you define a lobbyist, and when exactly is a lobbyist on or off duty? This was a very large concern. My feeling is that I'm paid as an MLA. Yes, there's an expectation that at some point I'm allowed to sleep and somehow I'm allowed to eat, but my job, as far as I'm concerned, is a 24/7 responsibility, and I'm paid a very fine sum to do that representation of my Calgary-Varsity constituents. Unless a person receives no funding whatsoever, how could they possibly fit the description of an unpaid lobbyist?

Sometimes when we look at things, we have to flip them over. Is a person who's having a beer after their 8 to 5 company job somehow able to distance themselves from the fact that they work for that particular company and any of the discussions are not of a lobbying nature? They're simply off the record, and it's a friendly, you know: "Can I buy you a beer?" "Sure. I'll get the peanuts on the next round." That remains elusive in terms of definition.

Another example of lobbying. It was very difficult for a number of members of the opposition and, I would think, for members of government to sometimes spend a Wednesday night in this Legislature because Wednesday nights were the wine-and-dine nights. The limousines pulled up and whisked the members away to be wine and dined and lobbied. So this lobbying has taken place. What I am saying is: where does the friendly camaraderie, the exchange with entrepreneurial friends, end and the lobbying begin?

Another problem that we discussed with the Ethics Commissioner, Neil Wilkinson, is the MLA's duty to report the potential of a lobbying influence. The rules are so vague that an MLA could honestly not be aware that they were being lobbied or pushed in a particular direction. Possibly it was just a discussion of mutual interest. But as soon as dollars or potentials come up, is an MLA responsible for reporting to the Ethics Commissioner that this discussion was held? Again, just from where I started off, if the MLA initiates that discussion, then there's no reporting required. I can just imagine the situation where an MLA comes in: "Don't say anything. Let me begin, and then the reporting isn't required." I believe that in order for this well-intentioned latest version of the Lobbyists Act to come forward, Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, there are still holes, as individuals have indicated, that we could drive a truck through or, maybe, the high-speed train that we've long waited to surface in this province.

5:20

Speaking of the high-speed train and trains in general, we had Rod Love riding along on a government plane to talk to government ministers about the private rail company that he was recommending for the extension to be built in northern Alberta. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo brought up the famous Kelley Charlebois, the

several hundred thousand dollar man who had his contracts broken up into a series of small pieces so that the bidding process of \$100,000 or less never entered into it until you started adding up the series of contracts.

If we are truly going to be transparent and accountable, then there is a lot of work to be done on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for questions and comments. Any hon. member wish to do so?

Seeing none, I will now recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak on this bill. I was on that committee that worked very hard and put many hours into trying to get this right. I think that often we don't know if we've really got it right until we start to use it and have an evaluation of it. I was disappointed that the original bill hadn't gone into practice much quicker than I was hoping it was going to. Hopefully, with this amendment act it will be put into practice, and further down the road we can have an evaluation to see if it really is meeting not only the mandate but also the intent of what this bill should be.

One of the things that I see in the amendment, that I questioned the first time around, is that sometimes I think the question should be: who is the lobbyist? Everybody else seems to be exempt – we're almost hard-pressed to find out who actually is going to be in this bill – and the revised definition will include individuals who are appointed to government committees, so now we have even less numbers of people having to register as lobbyists. I think that the bill is weak in many ways, but let's get it going. At least this amendment, hopefully, will make it move forward. I do think that there still are some loopholes left in this bill.

One of the things that was interesting was that a private citizen who came forward in the deliberations in the committee had suggested that perhaps we should have a reverse lobby so that the onus actually falls on the MLAs. I believe that it wouldn't be difficult to do that because I think we all know and have executive assistants that in fact know where we are every minute of the day, who we're meeting with, and if they don't know, certainly it's in our BlackBerry somewhere. I think that it might be easier for us as MLAs to just keep track of whom we've spoken to and why we've spoken to them. I think it's an idea that still bears keeping in the back of our mind when we do the evaluation on this bill.

One of the reasons that this lobbyist bill is very important, I believe, is because this government does a great deal of business behind closed doors. I think that Albertans need to know and should know who's meeting behind those closed doors. I don't think that they need to know every single detail, but I certainly think that they should know what the gist of the conversation was to be able to see which companies are lobbying the government and to see if, in fact, perhaps it's weighted, as we know it probably is, to friends. It's always good to know people in high places. I think it's fine as long as we know who those people are in those high places that are talking to the other people in high places.

Often, as my colleagues have already pointed out, the government's connections to industry and business go beyond the norm of professional relationships that come with wanting to support a competitive economy. There's nothing wrong with that. In fact, when I see the division in this House, the division between the government and the opposition, when the opposition can be considered the enemy, which I've had quoted about myself on more than one occasion, I think that's why we have to have open communication.

That's not the way it should be in this House. We should be able to work together. That's our job; that's what we're getting paid for. Whether we have different points of view is part of that process. I think that having closed-door meetings is not right when, in fact, we could be working together. The fact that the government would work with businesses is their job as well. But it's also the citizens' job to understand and know which companies are being given perhaps even an unfair advantage as to whom they actually have access.

I will probably speak again on this bill as we move along through it. At this point in time those are, really, all of my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comment or questions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: On the debate. It didn't seem like anybody was leaping to their feet to engage the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This legislation is long overdue. We'll do a section-by-section discussion in committee. In my reading of it, some of the amendments that are brought forward make sense. We'll see how it goes through debate. I am concerned with the delays. I'm losing track now of how long it has been since we've had the lobbyist registry promised.

I should point out that there is a bit of a record with Bill 1 – I think this was the flagship bill a year ago – in being slow to be implemented. If I go back before that, the access to the future fund I think was the result of Bill 1. That stalled. I mean, the legislation went through, but the promises there were never fulfilled. There was also a cancer legacy act, something to that effect, which was a Bill 1. Again, the legislation went through, but it was never fulfilled. I'm concerned that on bills 1 the track record of this government is a bit iffy. Considering that Bill 1 is supposedly the flagship bill, it's a concern for me. I'd like to keep this moving and get on with it. I think the Member for Lethbridge-East makes the point that we won't really know how this works until we try it. There are issues. Some of us will get caught up inadvertently, probably, in problems. We're going to have to test drive this.

I will say that it's a piece of legislation that brings Alberta into the 20th century, and for this government that's progress. It'd be nice if we were moving into the 21st century, but I'll take it as I get it from this government, one century at a time.

5:30

Clearly, we've called for a lobbyist registry for years. The Member for Calgary-Varsity quite properly linked this to broader issues of conflict of interest. But let's get on with it, Mr. Speaker. Let's get on with it.

With those comments I will move adjournment on this particular piece of legislation. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009.

The main purpose of this amendment is to give credit unions the ability to allow their members to vote for directors in advance of their annual general meeting. The Credit Union Act was amended in the spring of 2008, which among other things allowed for credit union member participation at meetings through electronic means.

As a result of subsequent discussions related to electronic participation, it was discovered that several credit unions, including some of the large credit unions, have allowed their members to vote for board members at their branches in advance of credit unions' AGMs. The use of advance polls in other circumstances, including provincial elections, is becoming commonplace. We feel that the ability to use advance polls could further credit union member participation at credit union meetings.

We are also proposing that this amendment retroactively validate those formal processes used by credit unions in the past that have counted voting done at advance polls. In doing so, we will preserve the past choices of credit union members for their board members and preserve the decisions made by boards and voted for in this manner. This will also reduce the possibility that these credit unions could be exposed to legal challenges based on the premise that since their board was not appointed in the Credit Union Act, the decisions made by that board are not valid. As these challenges would have the benefit of hindsight, the uncertainty surrounding a legal challenge could paralyze a credit union. We have not received any complaints regarding tampering or other concerns from members of credit unions that held advance polls.

As a matter of expediency we are also proposing a minor administrative change that would give credit unions more flexibility in the reporting requirements of credit union committees to their board. Credit unions have sufficient corporate governance policies in place such that this can be managed by the board.

Thank you, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009.

The first amendment ensures further consistency with the roles and mandates policy framework for publicly funded postsecondary institutions, and the second amendment is a housekeeping matter relating to clarifying designation powers for graduate faculty councils and faculty councils.

As you will remember, the roles and mandates policy framework, approved by government in November of 2007, was developed to ensure that Alberta's postsecondary system aligns with the needs of students, taxpayers, and society at large. Furthermore, the framework enables sound decision-making to strategically and effectively invest public resources to address critical skilled labour shortages while at the same time creating a more educated society to respond to the growing need for knowledge workers. The framework also fosters broader and increased collaboration among institutions with a view to enhancing learner access through program and delivery mechanisms as well as pathways and transitions that maximize learner opportunities.

As you will know, Bill 7 was approved on October 21, 2008, to enshrine key components of the policy framework such as the six-sector model in the act. The six-sector model designates the roles and mandates of postsecondary institutions into six different sectors based on program responsibility, research activity, and regions served.

Among institutions identified are comprehensive academic and research institutions. This includes institutions like Athabasca University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. They have an academic focus, pure

research, where the majority of undergraduate and graduate programs are offered.

Baccalaureate and applied studies institutions, institutions such as Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan. They have an emphasis on baccalaureate degrees, teaching, and applied research.

Polytechnical institutes, institutions such as NAIT and SAIT. These institutions provide the full range of technically related training such as baccalaureate and trades training as well as vocational education.

Comprehensive community institutions such as Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and NorQuest College. In many respects they are stewards for that reason, responsible for ensuring a full range of programming from foundational learning and apprenticeship to certificate, diploma, and in some cases collaborative degrees.

Independent academic institutions. These are primarily faith-based with an emphasis on undergraduate programming with some graduate degree offering capabilities.

Specialized art and cultural institutions such as ACAD and the Banff Centre can grant baccalaureate and graduate degrees. Their focus, as their sector's name suggests, is very narrow. These are not institutions that are intended to be comprehensive teaching and research institutions.

Today's proposed amendment is a continuance of the alignment of the act to the policy framework, that of the use of the term "university." Currently the act restricts the use of the term "university." The original intent of this provision was to maintain control over the use of the term, including restricting Alberta's college system from using it in an effort to preserve the foundation of the community college system. However, with the implementation of the roles and mandates framework, it is timely to consider modernizing this provision by giving consideration to the broader use of the word "university." This amendment would allow institutions within the baccalaureate and applied studies sector such as Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal the option to apply to the minister for a formal name change that may include the term "university" in their title.

Without this amendment there are no other mechanisms to allow these institutions to use the word "university" in their name without dissolving them and establishing them as a university under the comprehensive academic and research institution category of the six-sector model, which would not be sustainable in Alberta. The proposed amendment has been intentionally restricted to baccalaureate and applied studies institutions because of that sector's focus in the policy framework. Specifically, this sector of the framework may grant diplomas, certificates, applied degrees, and baccalaureate degrees and may conduct applied research related to approved programs of study provided by the institution that led to the granting of baccalaureate degrees.

The second amendment is a housekeeping matter to ensure consistency and clarity for universities' processes related to the operation of their academic governance model. Stakeholders, in particular the Alberta Universities Association, have indicated that the authority to delegate is unclear in the current act other than for student discipline. In the Universities Act, one of the predecessors to the Post-secondary Learning Act, there was an overarching delegation power that allowed any body constituted or continued by or under this act the power to delegate. With the amalgamation of the legislation into the Post-secondary Learning Act, this overarching provision was not retained for the universities. This amendment returns those powers to the current act and is consistent with the request from stakeholders.

I'd ask that members support Bill 4, and I move to adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:40

Bill 5
Marketing of Agricultural Products
Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009.

This act will amend the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. No substantial changes have been made to the act since 1987. The proposed legislation will update it, simplify the wording, eliminate duplication, and make some minor amendments to clarify regulatory powers, including moving the review and appeal process into regulation.

The proposed amendments are the result of a review of existing legislation and industry consultations. In 2006 the Agricultural Products Marketing Council began an industry governance review, including a review of this act. The consultations included the 20 ag boards and commissions, a survey of producers who are not actively engaged in industry organizations, and, of course, meetings with other agricultural organizations in Alberta and across Canada. Over 400 individuals participated in the consultation process.

The review also included an examination of what changes other jurisdictions, including Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Netherlands, have made to their ag industry governance. The feedback from the consultations has been compiled into 50 recommendations for change. Although many of the recommendations can be implemented through governance practices, others indicated a need for some legislative updates, which this amendment will do, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009. The act, as the mover indicated, is largely a clerical sort of act, an act of correcting or updating wording and sorting out administrative issues.

It's actually great to see an agriculture bill come forward or any bill, frankly, these days that has minimal cost implications. We're not increasing spending here. We're actually probably streamlining. I think that's a good thing to do, and I'd like to see more of that from the government, to be honest with you. As I've said in here before – and I'm going to keep saying it because it's a profound concern – as a government we're spending per capita way more than most other provinces, dramatically more than B.C. and even more dramatically more than Ontario per capita. So if we're streamlining things here and making things move more efficiently, that's all to the good.

All of us rely heavily directly on the success of our agriculture sector. Supporting that sector in terms of marketing is a good thing. This bill, if you go back, actually has its roots way back, I think, in the 1960s, when significant steps were taken by the provincial government to support marketing of agricultural products. The system has gone through a series of overhauls and shifts and so on. This is more of a fine tuning. I don't think you'll get any particular objection from our caucus on this piece of legislation.

As the minister said before me, there was a lot of consultation. Given that it seems to be based on a lot of consultation, that it has very few cost implications, that it's largely a matter simply of administration and cleanup – I'm not going to go through section by section at this point in second reading – I expect that this legislation will receive the support of the opposition.

Given the hour I don't know that we need to prolong the debate a whole lot, but I know at least one of my colleagues would also like to speak to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out, we are supportive of this initiative, which is to streamline the process to market the made-in-Alberta agricultural products. One of the things that I'm glad doesn't enter into this bill is the discussion about who's best placed to market agricultural products. I know there are varying degrees of antagonism against the Canadian Wheat Board, for example, in terms of marketing not only wheat but barley internationally, and sometimes we get into the arguments of co-operatives versus competitive and individual rights versus collective rights. Fortunately, we don't get mired in those kinds of debates within this particular bill.

It is important to note how far we've come. In Public Accounts when we were talking with the ag ministry and in some of the discussions within the House it has been pointed out that we have made major strides in age verification of our animals, and that has been one of the biggest barriers for trade. I believe the figure that I heard – and I know the minister of advanced education, who has a strong ag background, can tell me if I'm wrong – is that 85 per cent of animals are now age verified. With the concerns that we had with regard to BSE and when the potential BSE would show up in an animal and all the research that's been done on prions and so on, I think Alberta has made some major strides since that first breakout of BSE, when the animals weren't tested for a three-month period because we only had one person doing the testing, and that person was preoccupied with CWD.

We're at a point where we can say to the world that our products are superior. We can verify the age of the beef we export. We can take on protectionist outfits in the States like R-CALF and say that Alberta beef is number one. We can verify for expansion markets, such as Japan, that we have taken strong safety measures to protect our animals. I'm hoping that with all of the research that is taking place in Alberta, we'll very soon be able to announce to the world that through Alberta research we have a live test for BSE in animals. Once we can do that, verify in an inexpensive manner, then for a large part of our agricultural product, our shipping of beef in the box, to quote the advanced education minister, we can sell our finished product as opposed to a live product, and that's the key to success in Alberta.

We started off as an agricultural province. That's where our roots are. We have that proud tradition. Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009, will only tend to strengthen our reputation as one of Canada's top agricultural producers, with the best product the world can buy.

Thank you. I would like to call upon the Assembly to adjourn debate on Bill 5 if that is their wish.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, February 19, 2009

Issue 6

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 19, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. As we close this week and we look forward in anticipation to going visiting with our constituents, may we also take this opportunity to thank all the people of Alberta for the wonderful benefits this province receives on a daily basis. Amen.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest seated in your gallery, Mr. Krishan Joshee. Mr. Joshee has a long record of volunteer community service and is a recipient of numerous awards, including the Order of Canada. He has been a pillar of the community and a truly outstanding Albertan. All of us are fully aware of his unbelievable service as the chair of the Wild Rose Foundation, that has helped so many groups not only in Alberta and Canada but in countries around the world. He's been a tremendous ambassador for the province of Alberta.

I just want to thank you on behalf of all Albertans for your years of dedicated service, and we wish you all of the blessings of continued good health.

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very special guest who's seated in your gallery. My guest today is Mr. Clint Dunford. Clint was a member of this Assembly for approximately 14 years, served in numerous cabinet posts, continues to be a community activist and a great volunteer in Lethbridge. We're just happy to see him here in Edmonton. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm reception of this House.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you a very prominent developer in Alberta, Dr. Prem Singhmar, sitting in your gallery. Dr. Singhmar's contributions to this province are too numerous to list. A couple of highlights include donating significant amounts of money towards establishing the Singhmar centre for education inside the Art Gallery of Alberta as well as donating to the University of Alberta to create a new chair in classical Indian polity and society and supporting countless other programs and organizations. Thank you, Dr. Singhmar, for everything you have done for this province and no doubt will continue to do. I would ask that you please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we also have in the Speaker's gallery today three very distinguished individuals: Ms Coleen Neita, the honorary consul of Jamaica in the province of Alberta; Mr. Broodhagen, president of the National Black Coalition of Canada;

and Ms Cheryl Allen, the business coordinator for the National Black Coalition of Canada here in Edmonton in the province of Alberta. These three distinguished people are now a part of Black History Month in Canada and North America.

Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a real privilege again today to introduce three classes of students from Sherwood Park. They come from Lakeland Ridge school. Lakeland Ridge public school is one of the first schools to be built for Catholic and Protestant students as well as two government departments dealing with employment and also dealing with income supports as well as having the children's services there. It's a school that offers a great deal to the community. Today there are 72 students. They're accompanied by teachers Jay Robertson, Lindy Mair, and Sonya Bushell along with parent helpers Jenn Gray, Karin Solberg-Wells, Karen Boyle, and Corrine Thompson. I would ask if they would please stand and the Assembly please give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly today Mr. Darby Tchir, a resident from the county of Lac La Biche who is currently attending Concordia college in Edmonton. Darby is an active citizen who is involved in youth politics.

With Darby are his friends Stephen Boutin and Brittani Rael from the United States of America. Two years ago Darby and Stephen participated in an internship with a presidential classroom in Washington, DC, which prepares young men and women in the roles of leaders in public service and private enterprise. Stephen and Brittani have travelled to Alberta to visit Darby and to see what our great province is about.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the three individuals rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is my pleasure to make an introduction on behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly seven hard-working members of our public service. They are joining us today as part of the public service orientation tour. These individuals work in the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports in the area of freedom of information and privacy and legislative services. I'm pleased to welcome Kent Ziegler, Cindy Want, Janice Rechlo, Sunny Menon, Jennifer Inda, Sharon Getty, and Kathy Robinson. On behalf of my hon. colleague I would ask our guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 14 members of the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Canada led by Cathy Baas. Cathy is a role model for all of us. She's a long-term member of the society, she's a volunteer instructor, and she happens to be in her mid-80s. You may have noticed as you entered the Chamber today that they, myself, and other hon. members of this Assembly were

demonstrating how to cultivate the mind, body, and soul through the art of Taoist tai chi. We would like to thank them for helping Albertans to maintain healthy and independent lifestyles by improving their health, their fitness, and their balance, thus preventing falls and reducing injuries and hospitalizations. Mr. Speaker, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two outstanding volunteers from St. John Ambulance. Last week I attended a ceremony recognizing the top three volunteers for 2008. The third place volunteer, Kathie Robinson, could not be with us today. However, I have to say that she volunteered 12,000 hours in the last eight years for St. John Ambulance.

Second place went to Dean Smith. While volunteering countless hours for St. John's, Dean has always displayed an enthusiastic and positive attitude towards the program. In 2008 he volunteered over 480 hours of patient service while attending 64 community events.

First place went to Melanie Peters. In 2008 she accounted for over 7 per cent of the total volunteer hours in Edmonton.

I'll be discussing more about St. John Ambulance in my member's statement later this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, it takes very special people to do what these people have done. I would ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very good friends of mine from Cardston, Alberta. Melvin and Elva Pitcher are long-time residents of Cardston. They raised a great family there, they've run a successful business there for many years, and they are pillars of that community. They are accompanied today by their grandson Tanner Allred, who is a university student in Edmonton. I'm very happy to welcome them here today. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased and honoured to have some special people from a very special organization joining us in the public gallery today. A little bit later I'll be doing a member's statement to celebrate an achievement of theirs. For now I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three people who are associated with the Greater Edmonton Foundation Housing for Seniors. The chairperson of the board, J. Lawrence Tymko; Raymond Swonek, the executive director; and Susan McCarthy, who is the public relations manager with the Greater Edmonton Foundation are joining us. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy today to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two members of my family, one of my immediate family and one of my extended family: my son, Scott Taylor, who is home

for reading week from the University of Victoria, where he is a third-year history major and poli-sci minor; and my nephew, his cousin, Chris Bowden of Edmonton, who graduated from Concordia university with a bachelor of arts in history and a minor in political science and is currently completing an after degree in secondary education at the University of Alberta with a social studies major and a language arts minor. He has completed his first practicum at Crestwood junior high, and – I should say this for my colleague – he's a resident of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Chris Bowden and Scott Taylor, if you would rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 21 individuals, sponsors and supporters of Camp fYrefly and from the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services. Camp fYrefly is the major community outreach initiative of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. The camp, which is now expanding nationally, was founded in 2004 by Dr. André P. Grace and Mr. Kristopher Wells and is now supported by many community, individual, government, and corporate donors. Camp fYrefly provides vital support for queer and questioning youth in need, and this should be a source of great pride to all Albertans. I would now ask my 21 guests seated in the public gallery representing both the institute and Camp fYrefly to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

St. John Ambulance Volunteers

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 10 I attended an event celebrating volunteers for St. John Ambulance, more specifically the two volunteers that I introduced earlier, Melanie Peters and Dean Smith. I was excited to attend an event that recognized the commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm of volunteers in this province.

Volunteers help to relieve the pressures that arise from the changing demographics of our communities, the rapid growth of our urban populations, and the lack of adequate services and manpower necessary to accommodate all of these needs. Volunteers are what make a difference in our communities, and for all of this we are very thankful for their time and effort and energy.

Before I was an MLA, my background, among other things, focused on occupational safety. I am a huge health and safety guy, but I was also a volunteer firefighter, and I know what it takes to do this kind of work. That's why I think it's so incredible for the volunteers of St. John Ambulance and other organizations to do what they do. The volunteers of St. John Ambulance donated approximately 80,000 hours last year. It's an incredible number. Their contribution to the province is simply unmeasurable.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers in Alberta and especially the two here from St. John. Thank you.

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

Alberta 55 Plus Winter Games

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to the House about a very special event taking

place in Lethbridge this week. The city will play host to the first-ever Alberta 55 Plus Winter Games and the thousand-plus athletes that will descend on Lethbridge for the four-day event.

Now, you may be aware that the games have been held many times before under the banner of the Alberta Seniors Games before changing their name to 55 Plus. This is the first formal 55 Plus games and will attract an active and vibrant group that competes in all sports at a very high level of competition with the primary goal of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

A group of core volunteers has been planning the logistics of the games for the past six months, and that's no easy task when you have over a thousand competitors coming to town. You have to make sure those folks have their needs taken care of: a roof over their heads, food to keep them going, and directions on how to reach the venues and competitions. That's even more difficult when you factor in the broad range of activities from curling, bowling, hockey, table tennis, cross-country and downhill skiing, snooker, badminton, shuffleboard, cribbage, and many, many more.

The community has truly risen to the challenge, Mr. Speaker. More than 700 tireless volunteers have been working day and night to make sure the games come off without a hitch, not to mention the many people who have opened their homes to the athletes. As well, both the Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization and Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre have been instrumental in bringing the games to fruition. I'd like to also thank the University of Lethbridge for donating their downtown building as the headquarters. I would especially like to thank Chairman Paul Stevenson, Games Manager Collin Beazer, and their dedicated board and volunteers for over 20,000 volunteer hours already invested in the games.

The opening ceremonies are planned for today, with the games continuing until closing ceremonies on Monday. Our Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation will be opening the event. I'm looking forward to attending, and I invite everyone to join us in Lethbridge for exciting games and a great party.

Thank you.

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

Greater Edmonton Foundation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to celebrate and congratulate the Greater Edmonton Foundation Housing for Seniors, or GEF, as it is more informally known. In January GEF received a ranking of 29 out of 50 for the best small and medium employers in Canada. The winners were chosen from over 250 participants who registered in the study. Study partners include the Queen's School of Business, Queen's Centre for Business Venturing, and Hewitt Associates.

Joining us in the public gallery today are representatives of the Greater Edmonton Foundation: Board Chair Lawrence Tymko, Executive Director Raymond Swonek, and Susan McCarthy, the public relations manager.

The finalists in this study are a pretty impressive group, ranging from car sales to video game and software providers to telecommunications and biopharmaceutical research, but I'm proud to say that the Greater Edmonton Foundation is the only not-for-profit service provider on the list. Tough competition, so it tells you just how good this organization is. Running a small- or a medium-sized business is a steep hill to climb, but running a not-for-profit service organization is like climbing Mount Everest.

That leads me to the best part. This award really honours the staff. The ranking the organization receives is based on employee surveys and opinions, so it's about how they feel about the organization, and

it's about their leadership. According to what I've read, staff are pretty pumped about the executive director, Raymond Swonek, and I know he is a big fan of the work, dedication, and compassion that the staff bring in the door every day.

This year, 2009, also marks the 50th anniversary of GEF operations. This wonderful nonprofit provides affordable housing and supportive living services to senior citizens in Edmonton in 11 apartment buildings, some of which are in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, nine lodges, and two duplex homes. GEF is a management body created by the province of Alberta and legislated by Alberta Housing.

Please join me in applauding this example of excellence in the nonprofit sector and seniors housing sector. Thank you so much for your leadership, compassion, and exemplary performance.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the finance minister gave a news conference that repeated previously announced economic initiatives to cloud the fact that this government has mismanaged the Alberta economy. For years this government has ignored the advice of experts to save during times of plenty, and now, once again, Alberta is in trouble. A former Premier admitted there was no plan for the boom. Will this Premier admit there is no plan for the bust?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Treasurer today delivered a report that shows that our savings fund, the heritage savings trust fund, has taken a loss, but I would submit that if we would have listened to the advice of the member across, we would have lost even more money through this unbelievable economic turmoil. On the operational side – the hip replacements, policing – all of the operational costs of government are balanced. This is the loss on the savings account, the heritage savings trust fund.

Dr. Swann: Well, let me try that again, Mr. Speaker. Will this Premier admit that there was no plan for the bust?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to set aside close to \$14 billion in cash, liquidity: we're the only jurisdiction in North America to do that, to have this fund to cushion the rapid drop in oil and gas prices and forestry and agriculture. We're all feeling the effects of the economic downturn, but this is cash that now will cushion. We can use that over the next few years so that we don't have to continue to run large debts like other jurisdictions are going to do.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the heritage fund today is worth less in real dollars than it was 20 years ago. To the Premier: how does this reflect our commitment from nonrenewable resource wealth to future generations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, since '93-94 we've seen a net gain in this province of over \$50 billion. That's paying off an accumulated debt of about \$22 billion, \$23 billion; about 3 and a half billion dollars in endowments; \$14 billion in the savings account. We have another \$13 billion or so in the heritage savings trust fund. That was a lot of gain, a net gain of \$50 billion over the last 15 years. You know, we've done well. The other thing is that last year we had the

unbudgeted surpluses, and we asked that they go into the sustainability account. Had we put them into the heritage trust fund, we would have lost even more. So this is a very good plan.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province had an amazing opportunity over the last five years to set itself apart from boom-and-bust cycles by saving its resource revenue. We could have continued on with balanced budgets. We could have been protected from uncertain times like now. Instead almost \$10 billion has come and gone within the last year. Our health care is in dire straits. Our savings are shrinking to preboom levels. To the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: will she admit that it was wrong for this government to ignore the warning signs to reduce Alberta's reliance on oil and gas and to stop relying on those dollars to fund core programs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the line of questioning today misses the very obvious fact that all Albertans know: with the downturn in the economy your investments aren't going to make money. That's global. That's reality. That's what happened today. There's no mismanagement. That's what's happening. What we have done with the savings, as the Premier has identified, has been responsible. We've brought up our standards of teaching to the efforts that the Learning Commission asked for, a thousand new teachers, policemen. We've accommodated a hundred thousand people in one single year, built extra infrastructure. Anybody in this Assembly should be proud of that record.

Mr. Taylor: Now, Mr. Speaker, by the finance minister's own admission earlier today at the media conference, this government is in effect rounding up the empties to take back to the bottle depot, going through the sofa, looking for the loose change that slipped between the cushions to pay for the rest of the spending for this year. What's it going to do next year? The few billion in the sustainability fund is not going to last very long.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, stay tuned. We will be delivering a third-quarter result. Subsequent to that, in a few short weeks, we will be delivering a budget, and we will talk about next year. Today's efforts were to enlighten Albertans about what is happening in this state of economy so that we reduce that expectation of the good times of fast-growing revenues and the kinds of things that they may have seen in the past that we are seeing coming to an end. The industries that are calling in to look for help from this government and are getting counselling about where to go for advice for industry skills training and so on are appreciating the fact today that we've come forward to set the tone for Albertans so they understand our economic realities.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me like the minister spent the day pouring cold water on the sunshine and puppies outlook of the throne speech 10 days ago.

If, as the minister stated, there won't be any cuts to programs, why is the minister continuing to delay releasing the budget? We've already heard the worst, haven't we? What else are you hiding?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's almost a daily question except when the hon. member doesn't bring it forward. I have indicated that we're working very carefully on the budget. I think today's comments to the media and to Albertans was an effort to let them

know how very difficult it is when we get into a constricted economic situation. We are gearing down from a tremendously high boom to a situation where we've got to make tough choices, targeted, intelligent choices about reallocations. Ministers are doing that every day. Ministers are talking about it. The Minister of Service Alberta identified an expenditure that was not going to be spent this year. We're making some of those choices. We'll have those ready for Albertans very soon.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Returning Officer Appointments

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Deputy Premier failed to answer basic questions about the appointment of returning officers for the last election. On an issue that important the Deputy Premier needs to be open and accountable to Albertans. My question is back to the Deputy Premier. How does he justify to this Assembly a policy in which six written requests from the Chief Electoral Officer, an officer of this Assembly, are ignored and the key nonpartisan responsibility of appointing returning officers is turned over to a political party?

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think the Justice minister should respond to this.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had the opportunity to review the suggestions that have been made by the hon. member. Our records do indicate that responses were made appropriately at the time, that requests made by the Chief Electoral Officer were responded to, and that's all we could do.

Dr. Taft: That's pretty pathetic, then, isn't it?

Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer contacted this government six different times in writing about appointing returning officers, and the Deputy Premier was the person receiving those submissions. Does the Deputy Premier really expect Albertans to believe that he cannot remember this happening, or is he simply hiding the truth?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about a Previous Responsibility

The Speaker: Well, actually, if we look at Beauchesne 409(6), it says:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

So it's appropriate that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General be the one who responds.

Returning Officer Appointments (continued)

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understood the suggestion to be that the government did not respond to the request, and I'm advising the House that it is my information as Minister of Justice that we did respond to the request.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Justice: is she saying that in testimony last week the Chief Electoral Officer lied or misled the Legislative Offices Committee when he indicated that he did not receive a response from the then Justice minister?

Ms Redford: I won't draw a conclusion either way, Mr. Speaker. I will simply advise the House that it is my information and I have been advised that we did respond to the request.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Resource Revenues

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The finance minister today announced that Alberta is facing a \$1 billion deficit this year. While I am happy that the minister has found a definition of deficit that will keep her out of jail, she can't hide the economic mismanagement of this government. Money and jobs are flowing out of Alberta in torrents, and the government doesn't care. My question is to the finance minister. Why won't she admit that the world's lowest royalty rates have already cost the Alberta government billions upon billions of dollars and have thrown the province into deficit?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will not admit that. In fact, the reason that we have a declining revenue picture today is totally attributable to the global recession and the fact that our investments have not made the money that we had hoped they would make. In fact, on the investment picture, they have lost money. We have not been in that situation for well over a decade, where collectively we haven't seen the heritage fund generate sufficient revenue to support budgets or support other kinds of activities. Unfortunately, this year that's the harsh reality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The other harsh reality is that we've lost billions of dollars because the government has the lowest royalty rates in the world.

Now, this government knows that other governments around the world are recognizing the need for stimulus spending except the hidebound Tories in Alberta. This government believes in business as usual. My question is again to the finance minister. How can you look Albertans in the eye who've just lost their jobs and tell them that you are not going to have a stimulus package in the next budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly the loss of a job is something that we feel compassionate about and we really don't just overlook. Our Ministry of Employment and Immigration strives very carefully to make sure that programs are in place to counsel people and to find other opportunities. In my own ministry, Finance and Enterprise, we look for ways to help businesses that might be floundering. But the situation that we find ourselves in with our economy spending more per capita than any other province in Canada is that if we sustain this level of the economy, as the Premier has committed relative to reducing our expenditure but keeping our contracts in place, we are still doing more in this province for the people of Alberta than they are in any other single place, on a background of the lowest taxes in any place in Canada.

Mr. Mason: Frankly, I don't think that statement would have any credibility with an unemployed person, Mr. Speaker.

This Tory government has always been prepared to cut programs for people in tough economic times while protecting subsidies to their friends in big oil. We heard that again today. The government will be cutting the Green TRIP program, which supports public transit, but it is going to keep the \$2 billion subsidy for carbon capture and storage. Again to the finance minister: why is this government cutting support to municipalities for public transit and maintaining at the same time a \$2 billion subsidy to some of the biggest polluters on the face of the planet?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when I talked about what we would be doing, I said that we would be taking down the barriers that were barriers to doing business, that we would be increasing the dollars available for green technologies. Ultimately, that will see the phase-in of the Green TRIP. But the lighthouse, the single most important pinnacle, I believe, that Albertans should be justifiably proud of, echoed, by the way, by the President of the United States of America, is our commitment by our Premier to carbon capture and storage. We will be the leaders in technology that will support better and greener industry.

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

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents along with many other Albertans value the services provided by the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, or AARC, located in my constituency. Many people are upset with the recent accusations made against this facility, and I am one of them. To the minister of health: can you tell us how many youth benefit from attending this facility?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can't specifically because it is not a facility that the Alberta government owns and operates, but it's my understanding that several hundred have. What I can tell you is that I've had conversations with, I would say, at least a dozen different parents who have chosen to have their child admitted to the facility, and they speak glowingly. In fact, what they will tell you is that they believe it saved their child. I think one of the things that probably many of us in this Assembly do not have the ability to comprehend is the feeling that a parent has when they believe they have probably reached the end of the line and there is only one ray of hope and that's to seek these kinds of services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can this minister please explain how youth end up being admitted to AARC?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said in my first answer, Mr. Speaker, parents do commit their own addicted children to the program. In some cases they are referred to the program by the judiciary. There may be some involvement with government services that might be seeking placement for troubled adolescents. There are a variety of ways, but there is certainly always parental involvement that is part of the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: how does this facility fit into the government's overall strategy to provide treatment services for the youth of this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don't know that there's much else that I can add to what I've said in my previous two answers, Mr. Speaker. I do want to add one thing, though. I was in contact this morning with Dr. Dean Vause, who is the executive director of AARC, and he wanted me to know that at his own initiative he has asked the Calgary Police Service to come in to conduct any kind of an investigation they want to conduct, to interview, talk to anyone they want to within the program. I encouraged him to continue to do that, and by doing that, I wouldn't make any further comments.

Prosecutions under the Election Act

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, when allegations of tampering with evidence emerge in a freedom of information case relating to flight logs, the Minister of Justice appointed a special prosecutor. This move, for which I applaud her, ensured that someone separate and apart from the government investigated these concerns. To the Minister of Justice: given having free and fair elections, the protection of democracy, should be priority one for any Justice minister, why wasn't a special prosecutor brought in to investigate the 19 election violations recommended for prosecution by the just-go Chief Electoral Officer?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in this House, we have a process with an independent prosecution service that conducts their work efficiently and effectively. They balance the needs of the justice system. They balance the needs of prosecutions. They make decisions as to whether or not prosecutions should take place, and in cases where there could be a perceived conflict of interest, a special prosecutor could be appointed. That is not the case in these circumstances.

Mr. Hehr: I understand what the minister is saying, but why wouldn't there be a conflict of interest when we have election violations that could be happening with any party, including the hon. minister's party, that runs the government? Why wouldn't there be a perceived conflict of interest?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it is very important, as I said yesterday in this House, to recall that one of the conditions that prosecutors must consider when they're deciding whether or not to prosecute a case is to look at the circumstances and determine whether or not the situation can be corrected without a prosecution so that we are not inadvertently persecuting people that perhaps made honest mistakes. It is my understanding from discussions with my department and the advice that I've received on the conversations that were held with the Chief Electoral Officer that in the cases where the Chief Electoral Officer brought this information to the attention of the prosecutors, the situations were resolved, inadvertent errors were corrected, and the matters were dealt with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. Nevertheless, it didn't quite answer the question. What I asked was: how can it not be a conflict of interest when the minister's department is investigating alleged election violations that could have been committed by her own party? How is it not a classic case of a conflict of interest?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would start by saying that the question has been asked and answered, but I will actually supplement. I will say that within the Department of Justice we have strong prosecutors who make decisions on their own, of their own volition, as to whether or not to prosecute cases, and they made decisions not to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Forest Industry Sustainability

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, over the past several weeks a number of Alberta forest companies have announced production curtailments and staff layoffs because of continued weak markets. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. My constituents are asking: what can this government do to assist this sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the hon. member for Athabasca-Redwater for a very timely question. There have been a significant number of closures, curtailments, and layoffs in the industry over the past number of months, and I want all of those companies and affected communities to know that their MLAs have been very diligent in communicating the distress of their communities to myself and to the rest of cabinet. We're working closely with the companies in affected communities to deal with those issues. We have a number of proposals on the go, but we're doing this all the while respecting the softwood lumber agreement with the United States.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us what immediate measures are under way to restore the health of Alberta's forest industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can. When I was appointed a minister with responsibility for forestry, I immediately appointed a committee, the Forest Industry Sustainability Committee. I've received two reports from that committee, an initial interim report and a final report. Last September we accepted all 11 recommendations of the interim report. We're implementing those now. Some of those include using community development trust money for putting unemployed workers to work on things like the FireSmart projects. My honourable colleague next to me with Employment and Immigration has \$8.2 million dealing with worker retraining and retention. These programs focus on communities and individuals affected by the downturn in the industry.

The final report from FISC we've received. I'm working now with other cabinet ministers to see which of those recommendations for medium and long-term reform we can achieve this year, and I'll be releasing that report later this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Sadly, I have constituents who have lost their jobs in this sector even in the last two weeks. What programs and supports can Albertans expect from your department to help them get back to work as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our staff are helping workers to look for new jobs or set up educational or retraining plans for themselves. We're also making full use of the community development trust fund to help forestry-dependent communities. We're in the communities. We're working with their communities. We've earmarked a fair amount of resources for forestry initiatives and economic development in the most hard-hit communities, and we plan a lot more activities in the upcoming year. As the hon. minister of SRD has indicated, we're also supporting retraining of forest workers at various colleges and foundations and institutions as well as working with them on projects to increase their productivity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Returning Officer Appointments (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning we learned that the government has a financial deficit. Last night we learned, unfortunately, that the government has a democratic deficit when they fired the Chief Electoral Officer of this province. Mr. Gibson was fired for working hard to fix the democratic deficit.

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

Mr. MacDonald: My first question is to the Premier. How can the provincial elections in this province be considered to be conducted in a fair and independent manner when the Progressive Conservative Party has sole authority to appoint the returning officers for the provincial elections?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, as the Government House Leader rose on a point of order, I'm sure it's in relation to the misinformation contained in the preamble to the question. The issue that occurred last night was before a committee of this Assembly – it is not the government – and it was the decision of that particular committee going through the usual process that that committee goes through that gave rise to the decision that the hon. member is talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's very interesting given that a government member on that committee announced to the press last Friday, when we initially had a meeting, that the gentlemen was going to be fired the following week, and you know, that turned out to be true.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier: when Mr. Gibson refused to sign the recommendation . . .

The Speaker: Hold on, hon. member. Just a second.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity . . .

The Speaker: No, no. Are you rising on a point of order?

Mr. Xiao: Yes.

The Speaker: And the Government House Leader?

Mr. Hancock: Same one.

The Speaker: Okay. I'm putting them all down, and we'll deal with them later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Again to the Premier: when Mr. Gibson refused to sign the recommendation for the order in council to appoint returning officers for the two by-elections which occurred in 2007, what did the government tell Mr. Gibson?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, those are specifics of which I have no knowledge.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, they're in the testimony that was provided to the committee that the hon. member referred to earlier.

Who at the Progressive Conservative headquarters was given the responsibility by the government to appoint the returning officers on Mr. Gibson's behalf?

Mr. Stevens: Well, the aspect that deals with the government, Mr. Speaker, is that ultimately I believe it's an order in council that appoints the returning officers. That is a government responsibility that I can comment on.

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

Recreational Access Management Plan

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The University of Calgary recently held a working group of interested parties to look at increasing hunting and fishing opportunities on private land and encourage wildlife stewardship. There are many Albertans who are concerned about the recreational management program, acronym RAMP, resulting from that workshop. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What will the department's recreational access management plan do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The main goal of RAMP is a three-year pilot project starting this fall, one, to increase public access to private lands for hunting and angling and, secondly, the protection and maintenance of habitat. Landowners in two wildlife units in southern Alberta will receive financial support from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to provide recreational access to their land and stewardship of wildlife habitat. Two-thirds of the land in southern Alberta is private land. If you care about wildlife, you have to care about the habitat that they depend upon for healthy

populations. This is about wildlife, the habitat they depend upon. That's what RAMP is about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Are you not concerned that RAMP will be seen as a paid hunting and fishing program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The law of Alberta is very clear on this. It prohibits absolutely any payment for access for hunting. RAMP does not do this. The only money that will pass here is between the government of Alberta and landowners for habitat maintenance and public access. There'll be no privileged access for private hunters of any type based on the RAMP program. The law, as it always has been, will be enforced on a go-forward basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my last question to the same minister: how will RAMP enhance Alberta's wildlife habitat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Half of the compensation module that will be paid to landowners is based on habitat protection and management. The key to healthy wildlife populations is good habitat. As I've already stated, two-thirds of that habitat is on private land. That will be the focus of half of the RAMP program. If this is done properly in the pilot project – I'm confident that it will be, and of course we'll monitor the satisfaction with the pilot project before we go forward. Healthy habitat, healthy populations: this has the opportunity to be a win for landowners, a win for Alberta's hunters and anglers, and a win for Alberta's environment.

Thank you.

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

Primrose East Bitumen Spill

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In January 2009 about 500 barrels of bitumen seeped from the CNRL project at the Primrose East field, north of Cold Lake. There are questions around what is happening at the site now and whether the cause of the spill has been contained and if there has been any groundwater contamination. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister confirm that such a release occurred at the CNRL Primrose East site, and can we get a firm figure on how much bitumen was spilled into the environment?

2:20

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that I don't think that anybody could confirm the absolute amount of leakage from any containment reservoir across the province of Alberta, so I'm afraid that at this point in time I'd not be able to answer such a question. She wouldn't have the answer, and neither would I.

Ms Blakeman: Well, you could've tried harder.

To the Minister of Environment: what involvement has the ministry had in ensuring that there has been no contamination of

groundwater from the leak? Is the ministry on-site with the ERCB, or is the company self-monitoring?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with this specific incident. I'll be happy to get some briefing from my officials to find out the specifics on this case. But I can talk about how we deal with such incidents in general. Yes, there is a degree of self-reporting that's involved in these things, but there's also an auditing provision that is part of the ministry. There is a responsibility on the part of industry to report any incidents. Once that has taken place, there's an ongoing monitoring. There's groundwater monitoring that would come into effect. I'm satisfied that our officials have the matter well in hand.

Ms Blakeman: Well, good. I look forward to what the minister can report back to us on that.

While he's at it, if he could also answer this. Given that kill fluid is being brought in day and night to the site, can the minister tell us if the leak has been successfully mitigated by this fluid, and if not – I'm sorry. This question should be directed to the Minister of Energy. My apologies.

Okay. Kill fluid is brought in day and night. Can the minister tell us if the leak has been mitigated by this fluid, and if not, is the cause of the leak a fracture in the formation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest that the direction of that question was more appropriate in her first instance, so I would ask the hon. Minister of Environment to respond.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as with the first question, I'm not familiar and have not been briefed on this specific example. I'll get the information and provide it to the member.

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit told the Legislature that he wants to "strive to make sure that we continue to support the diversity and economic well-being of all Albertans." Unfortunately, this commitment has not yet been extended to sexual minorities as he continues to refuse to add sexual minority status alongside ethnicity, race, or religion to the Alberta human rights code. The organizers and youth involved in Camp fYrefly were here today because they demand better from their government. To the minister: why won't you ensure that sexual minorities are protected under our human rights code by amending the legislation this session?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I had mentioned before, we've undertaken a review of the Human Rights Commission in its entirety since April of last year. We are looking at the different recommendations made by the Sheldon Chumir foundation and others. We have just appointed a new chief commissioner as our first step at looking at reforming the administrative process. Looking at the process, legislation is one particular aspect of that, and we are looking at that. When we have a proposal to make to my colleagues with respect to cabinet and caucus, then we'll go ahead and look at that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This process has been going on under this minister for almost a year now. On Tuesday the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit stood in the House and said that Alberta offers “a great opportunity to raise my family.” I wish this was the case for all, but it’s not. Homophobia has not ended, even 10 years after the Vriend decision. To this minister: why does the government continue to give a wink-wink, nudge-nudge to homophobes and gay-bashers by refusing to include sexual orientation in our human rights code?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, it pains me, actually, to have to even respond to that. The fact is that the Supreme Court had written in protection for gays and lesbians in the province of Alberta during the Vriend decision. There has not been an instance – and I dare the opposition member to come up with an example – of one person in this province who has not had a chance to take their case before the Alberta Human Rights Commission and has not seen their complaint dealt with in a proper, efficient, and equitable fashion.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans should not have to look to a bunch of judges out in Ottawa to provide the human rights protection that every other Canadian receives from their provincial government. It sounds like the minister is unaware of the struggles that sexual minority youth and their families face. There is name-calling, vandalism, social exclusion, and bullying. While education is great, how can you expect Albertans to take it seriously when this government itself is not prepared to stand up to homophobes and do the right thing and change the legislation now?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we do not make changes to legislation or look at forming legislation or making amendments to any particular body just because of the whim of one particular individual in this House. We took the time and we will take the time to get it right. We took a year to come up with a chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission. I ask you: is anybody in this House saying that that person is not above reproach, is not a qualified person, is not the best that we could do? Albertans demand that we get it right and we take the time to do it. Unlike yourself, we do not believe in knee-jerk responses for the betterment of 3 and a half million Albertans, and it’s 3 and half million Albertans that we have in mind.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Redrawing of Municipal Ward Boundaries

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 9 Calgary’s city council voted to redraw the boundaries of the city’s wards, which has resulted in a significant shift in the location of ward 10. The residents of this ward are furious that they were not consulted. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: are there any rules or regulations that govern the redrawing of ward boundaries in Alberta’s municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, our provincial legislation is very clear. Bylaws can be made under the Municipal Government Act to establish, alter, or eliminate wards. I want to say that bylaws must be advertised by the municipality prior to being passed by council. Also, the public can make presentations to council on any bylaws that the city brings before its

council. I also want to say that the Municipal Government Act gives municipalities the autonomy and the flexibility to respond to local priorities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Provincially when boundaries need to be redrawn, an Electoral Boundaries Commission is struck, which consults with the public and makes recommendations to the Legislative Assembly. Would the minister consider amending the Municipal Government Act to include public consultations in decisions made regarding the redrawing of ward boundaries?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act already ensures that the public is part of the process by advertising the bylaw. Also, council meetings are able to be attended by the public. Again I say that the key principle of the Municipal Government Act is that it gives municipalities the authority to make local decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public can attend, but they cannot make presentations.

To the same minister: is there a process that the residents of ward 10 can follow to appeal this decision?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, as I stated earlier, Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place. Further to that, individuals can submit a petition to the municipality asking for a vote on any proposed bylaw or plebiscite on any issue.

Councillors are accountable. Elected officials are accountable for the decisions that they make. It is essential that municipalities have the ability to make those decisions that meet the priorities of their citizens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:30

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer the government promised funding for carbon capture and storage and also public transit. Obviously, the economic times have changed since then, but while all the funding for carbon capture and storage remains, the funding for public transit has dried up. To the Minister of Transportation: why has the minister failed to advocate for the necessity of funding for public transit?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Green TRIP, which the Premier announced last July, is going to be the most funding put into public transit in Alberta’s history, and we’re moving ahead with Green TRIP.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, I’m talking about the same green economy the hon. minister is talking about. Where is the funding for public transit in this budget? We want to see it.

To the minister again: does the minister have a cost-benefit analysis to justify why this government is not as committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through taking cars off the roads as it is to burying carbon underground?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that’s exactly what Green TRIP is all

about. I would ask the hon. member to stay tuned until we bring out the budget. We'll know where it's at. We've been consulting. I've met with the mayors of both major cities. We've met with the AAMD and C. We've met with AUMA. I do have to say that the consultation process is taking a little longer than we expected because everybody has a different idea. We're having a little bit of a problem coming to consensus on what we're actually going to have for a program, of what the criteria will be, but I can tell the hon. member that we're working on that criteria, and we're moving ahead.

Mr. Kang: We are talking about \$2 billion dollars that was promised by the Premier, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister again: how will Alberta ever move towards a more sustainable cleaner, greener economy and lifestyle when the government runs away from public transit, which has proven immediately effective, and shelves the technology for reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that one thing he said is right: our Premier did commit \$200 million. I will say that what our Premier says has always happened in this province. I agree that we do want to reduce tailpipe greenhouse gases, as the hon. member was saying, and that's exactly what we're going to do. We do have a bit of a problem here with everybody so keen on wanting to increase their public transit that they're not coming up with the greatest innovative ideas to reduce that greenhouse gas from the tailpipes. That's what we're working on.

Security of Provincial Energy Resources

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, despite the current global economic slowdown Alberta's oil sands will continue to play an important role in Alberta's long-term economic growth and provide a secure energy source for this province, our country, and North America. In order for the oil sands to fulfill these roles, government must ensure that the oil sands are secure and protected. My first question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What measures are in place to protect Alberta's energy resources such as the oil sands?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government does have a plan in place to protect all critical infrastructure in our province. The Alberta counterterrorism crisis management plan emphasizes the use of intelligence from a range of sources to identify, mitigate, or prevent a security threat before it occurs, and the Alberta Security and Strategic Intelligence Support Team gathers, analyzes, distributes critical intelligent information to industry and law enforcement. Partnership and collaboration between government, industry, and law enforcement is the backbone of our counterterrorism plan.

Mr. Marz: My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. There have been several pipeline bombings in northwestern British Columbia in the past few months. What assurance can the minister provide that pipelines in Alberta will be protected from attacks such as the ones in B.C.?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government takes the security of our energy resources very seriously. There is no indication that Alberta Energy infrastructure is at risk, and our threat level remains low. However, we will continue to work with the oil

and gas industry and law enforcement agencies to ensure the security of the industry. Our counterterrorism and crisis management plan is regarded as one of the most comprehensive in the country and is continually reviewed to make sure it meets the stringent requirements of both government and industry.

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

Health Care Privatization

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation in Cochrane regarding radiology services is an example of one of the problems with private delivery of health services. If a clinic providing health services can't make a buck in the community, then they are out the door. I'm not necessarily advocating public dollars to bail out failed private businesses. My question would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How will the minister ensure that the citizens of Cochrane are not left in the lurch?

Mr. Liepert: Through our universal, publicly funded health care system, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pastoor: That was the system. I wanted something perhaps a little more specific to the problem that we have at the moment.

Has the minister thought that this situation could apply to communities with private long-term care facilities, which, if they left because they can't make a buck, would leave vulnerable residents at risk?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what answer the member is looking for. Is she asking me if somehow we can guarantee that a private business will not at some point in time make a business decision? I'm not exactly sure what the essence of the question is. At the end of the day any private business has the ability to determine how they do business.

Ms Pastoor: No, I don't think we should be telling business how to do business. What I want to rely on is that we're not relying on private business to deliver public health care.

Will the minister agree that transportation to Calgary for needed radiology services could be an issue for seniors in Cochrane who may not have family support or, in fact, whose children may themselves be seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to a situation. You know, I respect the fact that it's a 15-minute drive from Cochrane to the city of Calgary, but I'm not sure what the essence of the question is. Is she asking us to ensure that we have full medical facilities publicly paid for in every community in Alberta? It's unrealistic.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Vancouver 2010 Olympics

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation announced an Olympic and Paralympic Secretariat. Just last week a publication celebrating the one-year countdown to the 2010 Olympics was tabled in the House. The publication focused on athletes, artists, and Alberta's facilities such as the Canmore Nordic Centre. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. What is the status of Alberta's

involvement, and does the minister plan to continue this initiative given the current financial uncertainties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. The Olympics are less than one year away now. I think the country more than ever is going to enjoy being able to watch these Olympics. Here in Alberta we're going to take advantage of these Olympics to showcase our athletes, our culture, and our province. We think it's a very important thing when it comes to tourism and tourism investment.

As well, last week the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and I were out in British Columbia watching our Olympians perform. They did a fabulous job. As well, we signed an MOU with the province of B.C. about what we're going to do with these facilities after the Olympics and how we're going to use those in the future to inspire new Olympic athletes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this significant provincial investment what opportunities will Albertans have to get involved in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics here at home?

Mrs. Ady: Well, another great question, Mr. Speaker. We have nine World Cup events that will be coming to this province in the next year. We're going to be able to see the world come here. We'll almost have, if you will, the pre-Olympics in this province. It gives us a chance to showcase this province to the world, which helps us in tourism.

As well, we're going to have the torch relay coming through this province. I think it goes to some 73 Alberta communities, with 17 of those communities having celebrations where we get to showcase our artists and performers in this province. Some really great opportunities for this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why is the province investing in cultural activities at these Olympic Games in B.C. when there are pressing financial issues right here at home?

2:40

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason is that arts and culture is important to Alberta. It's the fabric of our entire province. It shows our diversity; it shows the multidimensional nature of what we are. It's who we are and what we are. The government of Alberta through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is working with the Vancouver organizing committee to showcase our cultural talent, and all of that money is coming out of existing funding. The events of the Cultural Olympiad will allow people to see the great cultural artists that we have.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today.

In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three remaining members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Psychology Month

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. February is national Psychology Month. Throughout the month organizations like the Psychologists' Association of Alberta take the opportunity to let people know what psychology has to offer and the contribution that psychologists make to the overall health of Albertans.

Over 600,000 Albertans, or approximately 20 per cent of the population, will experience a mental illness during their lifetime. When individuals with mental health issues visit a health practitioner, they may only talk about physical complaints like pain, fatigue, and sleep problems; therefore, mental health issues like depression may go unrecognized and untreated. Psychologists can help individuals make good plans and decisions, manage their life more productively, communicate more effectively, and take better care of themselves emotionally. This may help reduce the risk of more serious illnesses.

The government of Alberta is committed to mental health service and has made significant new investment since 2003. Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions with a comprehensive mental health plan, including a children's mental health plan.

The purpose of this month is to raise awareness about the role psychologists play in promoting the well-being of all Albertans. Please join with me in recognizing February as national Psychology Month.

Thank you very much.

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

Jan Hudec

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to recognize one of Canada's top male downhill skiers, Albertan Jan Hudec. Jan developed his passion for skiing at a young age in the Austrian mountains and then later in the Canadian Rockies when his family emigrated to Alberta in 1986. He exploded onto the world downhill ski scene with a silver medal at the 2007 world championships and followed that up with an historic win at Lake Louise that same year.

A few weekends ago Jan tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee while competing at the world championships in Val d'Isère, France. He has suffered through the same injury to his right knee three other times. Despite this setback he is determined to compete in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, and he is aiming for a podium finish. His perseverance, courage, and indomitable spirit truly represent what is great about our province and our people. I wish Jan a very speedy recovery and all the best in his quest for Olympic gold in Vancouver.

I would also like to recognize five other Alberta athletes for their medal finishes in various international events last weekend. Canmore's Mike Robertson won a silver in snowboard cross, Spruce Grove's Jennifer Heil a silver in freestyle moguls, Calgarian Kaillie Humphries a silver in women's two-man bobsled, Eckville's Mellisa Hollingsworth gold and bronze in skeleton, and, of course, a few weeks ago Calgarian John Kucera gold in the world championships at Val d'Isère, France, in men's downhill.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members of the Assembly to join me in saluting Jan Hudec and all the other Alberta-based winter athletes who train so hard to achieve their dreams and to make us proud.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, are you participating today? Proceed.

Climate Change

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a significant day for Canada as the new President of the United States makes his first official visit. President Obama is steering his country on a dramatically different course than his predecessor. He has recognized the responsibility we all have to the global environment and has already taken action to counter the threat of climate change. He has acted quickly and decisively to create jobs, save homes, and deal with the uncertain economic times that face both our countries.

While George Bush coveted Alberta's oil no matter what the environmental cost, President Obama's environmental adviser said just this morning that Alberta's PR campaign to greenwash the tar sands isn't working in Washington. The tar sands will not be exempted from America's new environmental policy. President Obama knows that the tar sands have a massive carbon footprint, and he knows the United States must reduce its dependency on foreign oil. Our energy industry and the jobs of Alberta workers are in jeopardy.

This House can act quickly and decisively if we decide to. We can use our resource wealth to develop a strong green-energy sector and diversify our economy. We can preserve our wilderness with dry tailings technology and managed, responsible growth. We can create good jobs by refining bitumen here in Alberta and by investing in public health care, public transit, and green infrastructure, or we can continue the policies of the past and be left behind as the world changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, as this is the last day the House will sit in the month of February, I think it's important to draw the attention of all members to what other events are planned and are taking place in February so that recognition is appropriately paid to all of them.

February is Heart Month, national Psychology Month, as we've heard today, and, as we've heard earlier this week, Black History Month. It's also Junior Achievement Month. February 1 to 7 was White Cane Week, as it was International Development Week, as it was Eating Disorder Awareness Week, as it was National Therapeutic Recreation Week.

February 2 was World Wetlands Day, as it was Groundhog Day. February 2 to 8 was World Salt Awareness Week. February 4 was World Cancer Day. February 7 to 14 was Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week culminating in Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day on February 14.

February 9 was Tu B'Shevat. That's the Jewish Arbour Day. February 9 to 15 was Random Acts of Kindness Week, as it was World Orphan Week. February 11 was Winter Walk Day. February 12 was Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Day. February 14, as we all know, was Valentine's Day, but it also was Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day. February 15 was National Flag of Canada Day, as it was International Childhood Cancer Day.

February 15 to 22 was Scout-Guide Week. February 16 was Heritage Day, as it was Family Day in other parts of the country. February 19 to 22 is the Alberta 55 Plus Winter Games, being held in Lethbridge, which we heard about. February 20 is United Nations World Day of Social Justice. February 21 is International Mother Language Day. February 22 is World Thinking Day.

February 22 to 28 is Freedom to Read Week. February 23 is International Corporate Philanthropy Day. February 24 is Shrove Tuesday. February 25 is Ash Wednesday. February 25 to March 1 is Canadian Landmine Action Week, and February 26 to March 7 is National Engineering & Geoscience Week.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition to this House today. The petition is of roughly 80 signatures from throughout southwestern Alberta requesting:

We, the undersigned resident of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce amendments to the Health Professions Act that would recognize marriage and family therapists as a regulated profession [pursuant to this act.]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 14

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, clean energy production and wise energy use are the keys to Alberta's sustained economic prosperity. Passage of this act will authorize the Minister of Energy to expend \$2 billion for a number of large-scale carbon capture and storage projects, ensure that Alberta pursues clean energy production as outlined in the provincial energy strategy, and allow Alberta to exercise its leadership in forwarding the science of CCS as part of the global greenhouse gas emissions solution, a solution endorsed by the G-8, G-20, the United Nations, the European Union, the International Energy Agency, and most recently the President of the United States.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

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

2:50

Bill 202

Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009.

The objective of this bill is to create an office of the municipal auditor general under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The municipal auditor general would work with Alberta's municipalities to improve business practices and would create a mechanism for Albertans to determine whether they are receiving fair value for their business and property taxes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to file a consumer tipsheet on the issue of utility submeters for rental units.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition I would like to table an open letter from the mayor of Cochrane, Truper McBride, who is registering his community's concerns about the removal of radiology services from Cochrane.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon that I would like to present to the hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly from the Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. This is an open letter to members of the Assembly regarding the price of tuition, housing, and textbooks for students.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of some of the images included in an article from the current issue of *National Geographic* titled The Canadian Oil Boom: Scraping Bottom. These images convey the deep environmental scars of the tar sands to the world.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts where they were short-staffed. One of these reports shows that although staff missed their breaks, they also had to rush the meals, and they were, again, unable to toilet or put the residents to bed on time.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to kindly provide the Assembly with the projected government business for the week commencing March 2, with government business commencing March 3.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to do so and, in fact, would anticipate that on Monday, March 2, after Orders of the Day are called, I will be requesting unanimous consent of the House to allow the minister of finance and the President of the Treasury Board to present messages from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on motions for supplementary and interim supply and to table the appropriate documents. Of course, with the privilege of the House, we would then table those at the first available opportunity after the end of the third quarter and the requirement that the minister of finance has to make a public report on the finances of the province before the end of February. So the first day that's available to us, we will ask for unanimous consent to table those messages and reports.

That would lead to Tuesday, March 3, on which we would have the opportunity to continue in day 6 of the reply to the Speech from the Throne and second reading of bills on the Order Paper. There are a number of bills on the Order Paper – bills 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,

11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 – and we anticipate that bills 2 and 5 would be in Committee of the Whole. Bill 1 may be in third reading or may be in Committee of the Whole. That's a long list of bills, Mr. Speaker, but many of them are fairly short, so we anticipate that we may be able to deal with a number of them on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, March 4, we would anticipate asking the House to go into Committee of Supply on the supplementary estimates.

On Thursday, March 5, in the afternoon we would anticipate asking the House to resolve into Committee of Supply on the interim estimates.

The Speaker: Hon. members, during Oral Question Period today several points of order were raised. We'll deal with the first one. The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Questions about Legislative Committee Proceedings

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of citations that I could give you, but I think I would start with the citation of 23(1) of our standing orders, which suggests that a member should be called to order if they "introduce any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." While technically, I suppose, question period is not debate, I think the context of the rule covers the suggestion, as do the general rules with respect to the privileges of members of the House, that we know that the committees of the House are committees of the Legislature and are not an extension of government. I think that's an extremely important distinction for the privileges of members of the House and for the operation of parliamentary democracy. Now, the fact that there are majorities of one party or another on a committee is not, in my view, relevant to the operation of the committee and the privileges of the committee and the understandings that we need to have about the roles and functions of the committee.

Mr. Speaker, it was very unfortunate, in my view, when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rose in the House during question period to raise a question to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations under the guise that he was asking a question to the Deputy Premier and, as you quite rightly pointed out, inappropriately in terms of asking about a subject matter that he was really asking about in terms of his former role as minister of justice, but you dealt with that.

The question that I want to deal with is a clear admonition to the hon. member who raised the question and a reminder to members of the House that the committee – the formal name of it, I think, is the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices – is a committee of this House and is not a government committee. It's not an extension of government. Each member of that committee attends that committee and participates in that committee as a member of the House and acts as a member of the House in carrying out his duties. So for the hon. member to say that the government last night did something at that committee is absolutely, totally inappropriate and wrong, and he must be admonished, Mr. Speaker. We must make it abundantly clear. I mean, I heard the news reports this morning where the media got it wrong.

I am not a member of that committee. As I understand it, that committee went in camera for discussions. I am not privy to the discussions that that committee had as a member of this House. That role, that oversight for legislative offices has been delegated to that committee. It's the purview of that committee. I'm not privileged to know what discussion happened at that committee. I can make assumptions that members opposite raised at that committee the same objections and concerns they had about the Chief Electoral

Officer and the process of the election that they raised after the election in public quite vociferously. I assume that they were consistent in their representation before the committee, but I'm not privileged to know that.

So for the hon. member to rise in his place and to say that the government did something last night, when he is referring to what was done by a committee of the House with the full responsibility of the House placed upon that committee, is absolutely and totally wrong. Mr. Speaker, he should be asked to retract that remark and apologize to the House.

The Speaker: Anybody else want to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, listened with interest to the hon. Government House Leader in this matter, and it would be my view that there is certainly not a point of order here under 23(1). It would be my duty and my role as a member of the opposition to bring forward at the earliest time a matter in this Assembly.

As a member of the Official Opposition I would refer all hon. members of the House to *Beauchesne* 409 and the roles and duties and the guidelines around question period. Certainly, I would look at 409(4) and explain to the House that this is certainly a very, very important matter. It is not a frivolous matter, and it should be dealt with accordingly.

3:00

I certainly have a right to ask the Premier. I didn't ask the Deputy Premier a question. I directed my questions to the Premier, and it is my understanding of the rules of this House that any member opposite can respond if they so choose.

The hon. Government House Leader said that the proceedings of the Legislative Offices Committee occurred in camera, and he's right about that, but after the committee went back into public discussion, there was a rather lengthy debate by all members of the House regarding this matter. It's on the public record. Comments are already on the public record from each and every member who was in attendance and interested to participate. Now, it's difficult to determine that the committee is not supposed to discuss these matters in the House. I certainly have not heard anything like that in my time here, Mr. Speaker.

I would refer hon. members to the Order Paper for today. There is no notice of motion here from any of the government members, including the Government House Leader, on this matter that was discussed at Legislative Offices last night – and not only discussed, but there was a motion, which I opposed – to seek a search committee to find another Chief Electoral Officer. I'd like to point out that it has to be a government motion that appears on the Order Paper. It's not a motion from an individual member; it's a government motion, as the chairman of the committee, who is present this afternoon, indicated when we were discussing this last night. I don't see that motion on the Order Paper.

I would again state that I have every right to bring this matter forward as soon as possible. Now, I might be wrong, but I see notices on here for government motions 5, 6, 7, and 8, and none of them are dealing with this matter. I think I brought it up in a timely fashion. When it does appear as a government motion, I'm sure there will be more debate on it. For the hon. member to indicate that we don't have the right to bring this forward, I think, is an error.

I can understand where he's coming from, but – I'm sorry – the testimony from Mr. Gibson to the committee is directed to the

government's actions or in some cases their inaction. The government, in my view, is responsible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. members, the point of order raised by the Government House Leader particular to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I believe, had to do particularly with the usage of a certain word and a particular phrase where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said: "This morning we learned the government has a financial deficit. Last night we learned, unfortunately, the government has a democratic deficit when they fired the Chief Electoral Officer of this province." I believe in listening attentively that the point of order basically surrounds itself around "the government has a democratic deficit when they fired the Chief Electoral Officer." Précis, bringing it down, that the government fired the Chief Electoral Officer I believe is the crux of the matter of this particular statement. The Government House Leader contends that that was inappropriate language, was wrong, and the chair agrees. It was inappropriate, and it was wrong.

Committees are committees of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is the long-standing chair of such a committee. Just to bring it to the attention of all chairs of all committees, then, I want to read a paragraph from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which is one of the documents we use in the Assembly, on questions concerning matters before committees.

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to chairs of committees.

And we've permitted that in the past.

Questions to the Ministry or a committee chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee may not be raised.

And we've dealt with this in the past.

Thus, for example, a question would be disallowed if it dealt with a vote in committee, with the attendance of Members at a committee meeting, or with the content of a committee report. Questions to the Ministry on legislation or on a subject matter that is before a committee, when appropriately cast, are normally permitted as long as the questioning does not interfere with the committee's work or anticipate its report. When a question has been asked about a committee's proceedings, Speakers have encouraged Members to rephrase their questions.

In this case I would suspect that if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had used phrases other than that the government did this, then perhaps we would not be having this discussion at this particular point. So it's the utilization of the word. We're bringing it all down to one thing. The committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly, not a committee of the government. If there's any misunderstanding about this, I suspect that later on this will lead to great discussion. If there's going to be misunderstanding about this, then why have these kinds of committees? But I don't think that's the intent of any of this.

The point is that I believe that this is an appropriate rising on a point of order. The question: the use of "the government" and "they fired." Well, I don't know. First of all, I'm not even going to comment about "fired" because I haven't seen the report yet of the legislative committee. It has not been brought to my attention, and I haven't seen the *Hansard* of it. But it was a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, not a committee of the government, and that has to be very, very clear. Is that clear to everyone? It was an appropriate point of order raised, dealt with.

We have a second point of order. Hon. Government House Leader and hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, you both rose at the same time. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Point of Order Clarification

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to respond to the allegation. I have to say this. When we finished the meeting, when we walked out of the meeting, because no decision was made in that meeting, I came out . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's appropriate to have a citation. I gather the hon. member is rising on a point of order dealing with something that affects him personally that would come under Standing Order 23.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah, 23(h).

You know, I said to the reporters in the corridor – they all wanted to ask me the question. I simply said one word, “no,” before I stepped into the elevator. I said it in English, not in Mandarin; I can assure you of that. If that one word caused anybody to misunderstand, I'd like to make an apology. But I will take that as a lesson as a rookie politician. Next time I will say more than one word.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Anyone else choose to participate? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member has clearly indicated that the allegation made by I believe it was Edmonton-Gold Bar that a member of the committee breached the in camera nature of the committee and that it was reported in the *Edmonton Journal* – or reported in the media, I guess you said. I don't know if you quoted the *Journal*. That was what prompted both myself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to rise because anybody who read the *Journal* report knows exactly who he was referring to and prompted the hon. member to clarify that he did not intend to comment on what went on before the committee but that he was, rather, saying no to the request for him to comment. I believe that's been clarified.

I think it's very important that people not raise questions to besmirch the reputation or to otherwise impugn the integrity of a member in a nature like that very lightly. Therefore, it would have been appropriate for the hon. member to ascertain the facts before he made the allegation in the House as a side-swipe in a question.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I'm certain that I just said a government member. I didn't mention the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung or anyone else. In reality, as a member of that committee, for any member to leave the proceedings even before a motion to adjourn from the in camera portion is made is unusual. I've got no control over that. I do know what questions not only this member but other members on all sides of the House were asked following the adjournment of that meeting. I don't think there is a point of order here.

I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments, but I think we've got bills to debate this afternoon, and we should get on with that.

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair does have the Blues and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar quote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's very interesting given that a

government member on that committee announced to the press last Friday, when we initially had a meeting, that the gentleman was going to be fired the following week, and you know that turned out to be true.

Okay. That statement is made. Then all of a sudden there's movement. The chair is listening very attentively. No member is mentioned. There is no name of any member in here. The chair would have no idea who you're talking about unless you read certain newspaper articles. The chair doesn't read any newspapers, so he doesn't have any problems with any of this now. Life is good. Life goes on. There is no controversy in my life.

It says that “. . . we initially had a meeting, that the gentleman was going to be fired.” Well, I have no idea who we're talking about, which gentleman is going to be fired. There may be a lot of flurry out there, but as far as flurry in the views and the eyes and the mind of the chair, it's difficult to see this being a valid point of order when no member has been mentioned. Nothing in here is talking about in camera or not in camera. This all seems to be secondary to another world other than the world we live in here.

I appreciate the clarification. I've now become illuminated with respect to this whole matter. I suspect, however, that there's clarity in the air, and we can move on to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate February 18: Mrs. Klimchuk]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the legendary Norman L. Kwong. It's a privilege every day to serve the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and all of the people of Alberta in my capacity as Minister of Service Alberta.

I would like to take this opportunity to give a special thanks and incredible appreciation to my family, colleagues, and constituents for the opportunity that I have been given in representing the people of Alberta. Even with all of this global economic turmoil, Alberta is well positioned to weather the storm, and the Speech from the Throne displays the opportunities we have in Alberta to weather this storm.

As the Minister of Service Alberta it's my job to support the plan that our Premier has to navigate through these uncertain times by supporting the other government departments and by providing essential services to Albertans. Since becoming Minister of Service Alberta, I've become more and more impressed by the depth and breadth of my ministry, especially the front-line staff who serve Albertans so well each and every day.

Service Alberta is an incredibly diverse ministry that delivers a range of public services that touch the daily lives of Albertans. The staff in the ministry work very hard to help Albertans solve problems, find resources, and get their questions answered. It's vital

work, and it's work that often goes unrecognized or is invisible.

At Service Alberta our ministry is responsible for helping Albertans in a variety of ways. We enforce consumer protection laws. We inform Alberta consumers of their rights and responsibilities through the consumer information branch. In registries we deliver motor vehicle, personal property, vital statistics, corporate registries, land titles, and licensing services. Through the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate we work with consumers and utilities to help resolve utility billing problems. We assist public bodies with matters related to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Copies of legislation are provided to Albertans through the Queen's Printer. Our services also enable schools, postsecondary institutions, health care facilities, libraries, and municipalities to connect to the Internet via the Alberta SuperNet.

Service Alberta's services to government include the purchase and contract of goods and services for ministries and other government clients: print, mail, courier, payroll, accounts payable and receivable, telecommunications, and library services. We also manage government-wide record keeping, and we lead the standardization of information and technology services across government.

Some "Did you know?" Last year the ministry answered more than 220,000 calls and e-mails through our consumer contact centre about consumer issues, registries, utilities, and landlord-tenant disputes. We returned more than \$750,000 to Albertans through consumer investigations. We facilitated 18 million registry transactions. We resolved more than 3,600 disputes through consumers and utility companies and 4,300 landlord-tenant disputes; responded to more than 220,000 inquiries about consumer issues, registries, utilities, and landlord-tenant disputes; purchased more than \$400 million of goods; printed almost 28 million documents; and processed and delivered 24.8 million pieces of mail to support all government operations.

Now moving on to my other responsibility, as the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora this past year has been exhilarating, and I have learned a lot about my constituency, my department, and myself. There is a line in the Speech from the Throne that I would like to quote. "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded, people who share the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve." To me, this is what my constituency is all about and the incredible energy that every person represents.

When I have been out and about in the riding, it is in my capacity as the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora. I'm determined to visit every school in the constituency, and I'm well on my way. I have spoken with brilliant grade 6 students who asked me piercing questions about government and the democratic process, a process we sometimes take for granted in our country, especially when you look around the world and see what many others experience. These grade 6 leaders of tomorrow and future voters certainly inspired me.

I've also had the privilege of meeting with many seniors in my constituency, community leaders, nonprofit groups, and business leaders. Their input and perspectives are invaluable and necessary to assist me in my job as their MLA. Just today the Taoist tai chi group gave a demonstration in the rotunda of the Legislature Building. The Taoist tai chi group and one of their instructors, who happens to be 88 and led the class, is a great example of an organization from Edmonton-Glenora that makes a difference for health and wellness for seniors in the entire Edmonton area.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just summarize my goals moving forward. I would pledge to continue to be available to the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora and the people of Alberta as Minister of Service Alberta; to listen, respect, and bring back all

issues of concerns, which can be both positive and negative; to advocate vigorously on matters of priority to my constituency; and to best represent the people of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is being recognized as the 37th participant in the Speech from the Throne.

Ms Blakeman: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is not available?

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. There has been such a lack of attention to that one recently. Please, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, start the clock now.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's always an interesting exercise for me to listen to the various responses to the throne speech that are given. I've enjoyed this part of every spring session for the last 13 years. But I'm noticing something new this year, and that is the number of ministers who are using this opportunity to speak. With a few exceptions – and I'm thinking of the President of the Treasury Board, who used his time as a tribute to the Lieutenant Governor – there have been almost a dozen ministers who used this time mostly to lay out their plans and priorities and policies. It strikes me that that is what the throne speech is: a collection of various ministries, their plans, policies, and priorities.

This minister has now done the same thing, talked about Service Alberta. Since this is a new thing that's being done in the House, I'm wondering what the end result of this is. What exactly will her little ad for Service Alberta be used for?

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, certainly, being the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora and the Minister of Service Alberta, to me it's an obvious opportunity to acknowledge the role of all the employees who support me in my role as minister. I think we all too often forget the front-line workers, the people who are working very hard on my behalf as minister. So part of that is what I wanted to bring forward, and the Speech from the Throne is an opportunity to be flexible, to talk about what's going on, and to pass along, you know, the good work that's going on. That's why to me it's a great opportunity to vision and to talk about what I felt about the Speech from the Throne and, as well, as Minister of Service Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: Fair enough. I'm just interested in the duplication that we have: all of the ministers giving input, one presumes, to the throne speech itself, and then you get sort of an addendum, an added opportunity to get up and take your 15 minutes to talk again about what your ministry is doing. So we get it twice.

I was trying to ask what the end purpose of it was. Will you use it on your website for your ministry or put it out in brochures? What's the end result of how this extra little bit of ad time you get is going to be used in your role as minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, certainly, that there are many ways to pass on information. The thing about communicating, which the hon. member is well aware of, is getting the message out and being able to put something in *Hansard* so individuals can read it, see what's laid out, see the facts. This is a

wonderful opportunity to be able to do this in the House. *Hansard* transcribers work very hard to make sure that what is said in *Hansard* is clearly printed and reflects what is said in the House here. That's what I view this opportunity as.

The Speaker: Others?

Then the 37th speaker now on the Speech from the Throne, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Special thanks to the hon. Lieutenant Governor for his inspirational speech to begin this Second Session of the 27th Legislature. I'm honoured and humbled to reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, we live in challenging times, so I would like to talk about hope, realistic hope. Anne Lamott said that "hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up, and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: You don't give up." This accurately describes the attitude of the pioneers of this province: people who came from afar for the promise of life and liberty who were greeted by cold winters and harsh winds; traders, trappers, farmers, and homesteaders who braved the elements, settled with their families, and forged new communities; and roughnecks like Vern "Dry Hole" Hunter of Imperial Oil, who had more failures than successes. He looked down more than a hundred empty wells before hitting it big with Leduc No. 1, providing the key to Alberta's petroleum success.

This determination did not vanish with the passing of these pioneers. In fact, it inspired others from around the world to venture to Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I want to share a story about an Alberta family that conquered adversity by working hard and believing in a better tomorrow. The story begins with a young farm girl and her family fleeing as the fabric of her country is torn apart by civil strife. After becoming refugees in their own homeland, her family settled in a remote village and started a new life. She then married, and after the birth of her third son her husband left for Canada to make a better life for his young family. During his seven-year absence she not only raised, educated, and nurtured her children, but she also attended college to further her own education and pursue her dreams.

She dreamed of reuniting her family here on Canadian soil, where she yearned for better opportunities so that her children could carry the baton of her dreams in order to fulfill theirs. No sooner had they arrived than they encountered a shocking reality. The Canadian winter was extremely cold. They had to buy new clothes, learn a new language, incorporate themselves into a new community, and welcome a new son. Her husband worked what seemed like endless hours in the mill, while she and her children spent their summers working long hours in farmers' fields. When all the children were school aged, she sewed clothes in a factory and cleaned hotel rooms in order to make ends meet. Times were tough, but this young family remained hopeful, holding onto the promise that if you work hard and believe in yourself, anything is possible.

Then came the '80s. House prices had fallen. Interest rates were alarmingly high. Jobs were scarce, and if you were lucky enough to have one, the pay was scarcely enough to sustain a family. After her children graduated from high school, they headed to Alberta in the hope of opportunity. They carried with them lessons learned from their parents: a humble and stubborn perseverance to work hard and never give up. Eventually, through education the eldest son became an electrician for the railway, the second a computer technician, and the youngest of the four an engineer. She was relieved to see her children finally settled.

After years of backbreaking hard work her devoted husband and father to her children fell ill. As he clung to life, she and her

children clung to hope. The boys took the lead by loading up the moving trucks and moving the parents to Alberta, where I'm proud to say the father received world-class medical care. Ten years later he survives to watch his eight grandchildren grow, aspire, and dream, a vision he had missed in the formative years of his own children's lives.

Mr. Speaker, this family's journey of obstacles is not uncommon. Rather, it's the story of many Alberta families. In the words of Samuel Smiles, "Hope is the companion of power, and mother of success; for who so hopes strongly has within him the gift of miracles."

Now, once more the world is facing uncertain times. Today mankind flirts with terrorism, wars, a global banking, trade, and economic crisis that some fear will lead to a global recession, maybe even a depression. Hopes, dreams, and lives have changed around the world. The naysayers often play on the people's fears by embracing extremist views. These actions serve only to shackle our spirit to despair and cause divisions.

Mr. Speaker, I plead for a more hopeful approach. Sometimes our world is not a just and fair place. It is our collective responsibility to make it so, to help where we can and to comfort where we cannot. Indeed, the truest test of a people's character is not how they fare during the good times; rather, it is how they react during the tough times.

The kind of discourse and planning Alberta revealed in the Speech from the Throne strikes a fine balance between optimism and pragmatism. Indeed, here in Alberta we have many areas on which to pin our hope. Alberta's debt-free status is unrivaled by any jurisdiction in North America. Despite job losses we have the highest employment rates, the lowest personal and corporate income taxes, and the highest savings in Canada, with which Alberta is on track to implement one of the largest infrastructure projects in the land.

Alberta's enviable position is due in large part to the vastness and diversity of Alberta's resources, the revenue from which we are able to continue to invest in teachers for our schools, staff for our hospitals, roads and bridges for our municipalities. Its productive farms and plentiful fields nourish not only its own people but also many around the globe. Its parks, lakes, and rugged mountains capture the imagination and stimulate recreation and tourism, while its energy and industry sustain a nation. Now more than ever, Mr. Speaker, Albertans need to continue on the path to produce in an efficient and conscientious manner while at the same time promoting responsible environmental stewardship. On the issue of the environment are we doing better? Yes, we are. Can we improve? Yes, we can.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's most valuable asset is neither its beauty nor its abundant resources; rather, it is its people, people like the pioneers who ventured here, like that young family who came in hopes of realizing their dreams, industrious and motivated people from a variety of backgrounds, all who call Alberta home.

Mr. Speaker, the wealth of Albertans depends on the health of Albertans. We've all heard of the wait times to see a family doctor, for long-term care, for elective surgery and emergency care. Personally, I'm encouraged by the hiring of our new CEO of the Health Services Board. He brings with him a wealth of international experience that will engage the front-line staff, will define what health care actually costs, and improve the efficiency of our acute-care system. We are on par to educate more family doctors, nurses, and other front-line staff than we had yesterday, and with the help of technology they will be able to deliver and improve the quality of care for Albertans. However, the real solution to improving access to quality care lies in engaging Albertans in a conversation to live

happier and healthier lives by not getting sick or injured in the first place. Mr. Speaker, in the past simple measures such as access to clean water and vaccinations were seen as the greatest advances in preventative care.

3:30

There is no doubt that we should be personally responsible for our health. However, we need to translate evidence-based knowledge into policy and action on the street to reduce injury and chronic disease by addressing other factors beyond health care services which have an even greater influence on health, such as lifestyles that lead to stress, inactivity, and overeating, excessive use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, which all ultimately lead to poor mental and physical health. Today the World Health Organization estimates that 80 to 90 per cent of all cases of type 2 diabetes could have been prevented through minor lifestyle changes. Today in Alberta we have 150,000 diabetics, and we get 10,000 diabetics every year.

We also need to find ways not only to reduce the need to take expensive drugs but also to improve patient compliance when these drugs are prescribed. With the restructuring of public health and the expanded role of the chief medical officer of health, Alberta is on the right track. We will not see results overnight, but in the years to come our children and seniors will live healthier lives and our health care system will be sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, much of this commitment begins with educating Alberta's adults and children. We have an opportunity to leverage the strength of our education system, to create and attract the best and brightest minds, to harness their abilities, and to allow them to lead us into the future. I am reassured of the commitment of this government to advanced education every time I see the multitude of cranes lining the skyline as I drive past the University of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about responsibility. In order to sustain our core programs, now more than ever we need to think prudently about our spending so that Albertans get the best services for their tax dollars. We would be naive to suggest that governments have all of the answers to all of the problems all of the time. This is where the NGO sector and the business community play a vital role in our province. Albertans have long embraced the virtues of volunteerism and sense of personal responsibility and collective responsibility not only for themselves but also for their community as we lead the country in volunteer hours and funds donated. Earlier today Melanie Peters and Dean Smith from St. John Ambulance were good examples.

Also, the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark are prime examples of this. The Westend Seniors Activity Centre helps over 1,300 seniors live independently as they participate in programs so that they can enjoy their golden years. It's driven by the energy of its community members, who volunteer their time and services to the operation of the centre. I invite Albertans to join me and my seniors at the Silver Hair Gala event on April 18.

Similarly, the Kids on Track program in the west end educates young people, especially those from immigrant and low-income families, about leadership, spiritual guidance, and, more importantly, to believe in themselves.

Covenant Health manages the Misericordia community hospital campus, where hundreds of health care workers and volunteers are able to provide quality care for the people of the west end.

We have many fine elementary and junior high schools in addition to Jasper Place and St. Francis Xavier high school which educate the next generation of Albertans.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, for employment, retail, and recreation we need to look no further than the jewel of my constituency, West Edmonton Mall, which provides employment to over 23,000

Albertans and has lured international attention and millions of visitors to this province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has always attracted dreamers, people with big ideas, big ambitions, and big plans. All they have required is the proper environment in which to prosper, a place where dreams and preparation meet opportunity. Alberta has been and will continue to be such a place.

Alberta is a place where the third son of the young lady I told you about stands before you today thankful for his parents' sacrifices so that his children may create and achieve their own hopes and dreams. Mr. Speaker, I'm appreciative of every gift that this province has given to me and my family. I'm unwavering in my commitment to Alberta. To the good people of Edmonton-Meadowlark who have placed their trust in me: thank you. To my mom and dad: thank you; I love you both.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, yes, Albertans will face challenging times ahead. The world will face tough times ahead, times our pioneers, my family, and all Albertan families have seen before and have overcome only to see a better tomorrow. The U.S. President, President Obama, is visiting our country. While our neighbours to the south pick themselves up and dust themselves off, in his words, we stand steady with our sleeves rolled up, backs straight, and our heads held high with a firm resolve to take on any challenge that confronts us.

I would like to close with some thoughts from my constituents Murray and Donna Armstrong. When we hope that the present economic recession won't get too bad or won't last too long, we put our hopes outside of ourselves, that a world which seems out of control will somehow not be what it is but will somehow make itself better. Our hope comes from knowing that no matter how scary these times are going to be, we get to choose our response to this scary situation. We choose to stay in gratitude for the love our family has for each other, for puff issues, for having a choice between eating out or staying in, for having the Rocky Mountains so near, and for knowing that of the 6 billion people on this planet we have been given so much. For us hope is not a wish born from fear but comes from knowing that our inner choices keep the blessings we have in our lives bright within us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May God bless you. May God bless Alberta. May God bless Canada. May God bless the Queen. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, and thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. That was certainly a heartfelt statement, and I'm sure we all appreciate it. But there is something that is fascinating me that I have heard repeatedly. I have never heard so many Conservatives quote and reference a Democrat politician before in my life. I've listened carefully to most of the responses to the throne speech that have happened in the House, and the member himself has just done it again. So please share with us: was it in briefing notes from the Public Affairs Bureau to mention President Obama? I'm fascinated that so many of the members of the government caucus have mentioned or referenced the new President of the United States. Could you share with me why so many of you are referencing him? I'm just fascinated.

The Speaker: The hon. member, if you choose. You don't have to.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, to answer that question: not at all. This speech was written by myself and my assistant, and the lesson here

to learn is that we as elected members are here to solve problems. Whether we reference the President of the U.S. or not reference the President of the U.S., we're here to solve problems for Albertans. It shouldn't be our political affiliations that dictate these problems. One party or one belief system, they don't have the monopoly to quote or not quote anybody. I think the President of the U.S. is a respected man internationally by everybody. He's respected by members of this caucus, and I hope he's respected by members of that caucus as well. But I thank the member opposite for asking that question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, really, relates to the throne speech and the comments in the throne speech concerning health care and healthy communities and so on. Given the member's position – I think he's parliamentary assistant, if that's correct, on Health – and his own medical background I'd just like him to discuss the issue of staffing for health care, particularly the long-term manpower shortages of nurses. We are in a position in Alberta of having a deliberate strategy of recruiting nursing staff from outside of the country, particularly underdeveloped countries, and I think that's a poor long-term strategy because I just don't think it's right to be recruiting nurses from countries that need them even more than we do. I'm wondering if the member could discuss that issue. It's not actually mentioned in the throne speech. I wish it had been. Is it appropriate for Alberta to have a long-term strategy of recruiting nursing staff from Third World countries?

3:40

The Speaker: The hon. member if you wish.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for asking me that question. That's a very good question in fact. In Alberta today we have 1,000 more nurses this year than we had last year. The real solution is education. We are educating more nurses, more LPNs, and more nurse's aides. The solution is not simply more nurses; while we do need more nurses, it is actually to give the nurses support. I work with 600 nurses, and these are highly-qualified people. I see many of the nurses pushing stretchers, cleaning blood off the stretchers, cleaning floors, changing diapers, jobs that they ought not do.

On the immigration issue we do have teams looking for nurses internationally in countries that have a policy where they create an oversupply of nurses. That is their business and immigration policy. The ones that are qualified and have worked in hospitals that have the standards that we have, we bring them into our country. They have an opportunity to help their families back home and in doing so help their local economies.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the hon. member asked about those resources because these were the people – initially, when we came to this country, my grandfather came here, he worked here, and he supported his family back home. When it was convenient for the whole family to come here, we were the new Canadians. This is how we get new Canadians.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere honour to rise today in response to the Speech from the

Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. I believe that the strength of this province stems from the education system we have built together over the years. As His Honour stated, "The freedom to create our own future and achieve our dreams so often rests on the enthusiasm for education." Prior to being elected by the wonderful people of Edmonton-Ellerslie, I taught in this province for 18 years. As such, when it comes to providing the best education for our children, I have seen many initiatives that have worked and many that have not. In the spirit of the discussion we have heard in the past few days, I would like to share some of the recent government initiatives that have given me great hope for the future.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that public involvement is crucial to continually improve Alberta's education system. In order for the education system to truly be successful, it needs to be viewed as successful for everyone involved, from the students and parents to the teachers and administrators. That is why I'm so pleased to see current government initiatives that are focused on public consultations and input from a wide variety of perspectives.

Mr. Speaker, one of these initiatives that is close to my heart is setting the direction for special education in Alberta. I was honoured to be named the chair of the steering committee for this project on July 21, 2008. As many of my colleagues know, setting the direction takes a bold new approach to education, one that creates a transparent system that is accountable for every Alberta student's success. Our task is to examine the foundation of special education in Alberta and look at making systemic changes in order to provide the best environment for education in this province.

Mr. Speaker, our team, which includes the steering committee, a stakeholders working group, and representatives from Alberta Education, recently completed phase 1 of our consultations. We went to 10 towns and cities in Alberta and accepted online and written submissions in order to get the broadest and most complete views on how to improve the education system for our most vulnerable students. In total phase 1 consultation involved input from approximately 4,000 Albertans representing the views of students, parents and guardians, teachers, teacher assistants, school administrators, school authority staff, school board trustees, community support organizations, and health care professionals.

Both as a teacher and a father I have seen and heard many points of view on education. However, there were several issues that had never crossed my mind and never entered into our conversations. This is a perfect example of why I believe in the value of public consultation: to bring perspectives to the forefront and raise awareness of previously unidentified issues.

Alberta Education is also asking for students' perspectives in innovative ways through the Speak Out initiative. Students can log on to the web page for live discussions and blogs and send in 60-second videos of what students themselves feel about the education system. Alberta Education is also travelling to several towns and cities in order to interview students and get their feedback as part of the Speak Out initiative. All of that information will then be collected and analyzed in order to continually make improvements to the already strong education system in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as His Honour the Lieutenant Governor pointed out in his Speech from the Throne, Alberta Education is currently developing a long-term plan to determine what it means to be an educated Albertan 20 years from now. That plan is called Inspiring Education. This initiative is unique in that it is a dialogue with Albertans, who will bring their own distinctive perspectives to the conversation. Outcomes from both the Speak Out and setting the direction initiatives will be integrated into the dialogue as a new vision for education in the 21st century is crafted.

These are just three examples of government initiatives aimed at improving the education system in this province.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, as His Honour highlighted, innovation is critical to ensuring the continued success of Alberta as a whole. This government's support of postsecondary institutions demonstrates a heartfelt faith in the promise of future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has also continued with the ambitious registered apprenticeship program. I served as a RAP co-ordinator for J. Percy Page high school for two years before being elected. I can say from experience that this program is a great tool to help train a skilled and educated workforce in Alberta. The program is a way for high school students to become apprentices and earn credits towards an apprenticeship program and a high school diploma at the same time. I think it is very important both to the student and prospective employers to make sure that people are trained before entering the workforce.

These are just a few of many projects that the current government is embarking on to improve the quality of education in Alberta for everyone. I applaud this government's continued commitment to education and stand in the conviction that Alberta will continue to provide the best education system possible in the coming years.

I look forward to the upcoming session and opportunities to engage in debate on these important issues. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the enthusiastic support for education in Alberta. I and the entire Liberal caucus are enthusiastic supporters of education as well. In fact, I happen to believe that the key to the future of this province is education, right from prekindergarten to postgraduate.

I agree that there is a good, respectable school system in place in Alberta, and we always need to work to make it better. I wish Alberta's postsecondary institutions ranked more highly, and at some point I would like to see the throne speech make an overt commitment to, for example, the U of A's objective of being one of the top 20 public universities in the world by 2020.

My question to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie concerns achievement tests, particularly for grade 3s. I would have liked to have seen in the throne speech a commitment to eliminating those. I'm wondering if this member has a perspective on that particular issue, whether he believes that the government should continue to support achievement tests for young children or not.

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. member if you wish.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a former educator I've always believed in accountability. I've also believed in assessment for learning. As a government and as a former teacher I think having assessment for learning is a wonderful tool. As a government I think we will continue to do what's in the best interest of all Alberta students.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the member, in view of his speech, how he feels about the members across the aisle, who remind me of the two old men in *The Muppet Show*, who scrape the bottom of the barrel to try to find anything negative in the Speech from the Throne and try to show Albertans what a terrible province it is that they live in. How do you feel about that in reference to your speech?

Mr. Bhardwaj: I have no comment on that. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I commend the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for the wisdom of his response to the last question.

I'm actually trying to engage in genuine discussion here, so I'll just return to the issue of achievement testing, particularly in elementary schools. The member was a little bit general in his response. Does he hold the position that achievement tests for younger children are as valid and useful as they are, say, for high school students, which he taught for many years?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much. In general, depending on the level you're talking about, achievement tests at grade 3 or grade 6 or grade 9 or grade 12, which we are all familiar with, I think serve a purpose. I think it gives the teachers and the parents and the government basically an understanding of where we place ourselves. How are we doing internationally? How are we doing globally? How do we compare ourselves with other provinces? It sets a criteria and gives us the opportunity to really look at ourselves, look at the curriculum itself, look at evaluation strategy, look at, you know, assessment for learning. Of course, I think it's good.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

The Speaker: Others, if they choose to participate?

Mr. VanderBurg: I'd like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie for his lifelong achievements in teaching and helping youth. Out in Whitecourt this man made a big difference to a lot of young people, my sons included.

Now that you've had the opportunity to see the difference in the rural system versus the system here in Edmonton, can you tell me about the importance of the industrial arts programs, the programs that you've been so valuable in, and compare rural to Edmonton opportunities?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I started out teaching in Pincher Creek. Then, of course, I taught in Whitecourt for four years. Recently, as part of my assignment on setting the direction, I had the opportunity to visit a lot of schools. I think we're offering wonderful and excellent programs in our rural schools. Recently I was in St. Paul, I think one of the best programs.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the Speech from the Throne. There is no doubt that much has changed in the past year since our last throne speech. However, if economic certainty is our rarest commodity around the world right now, we must still remember that there is much that we can be certain about.

We can be certain about the fact that we are debt free, certain in the fact that we have the lowest overall taxes in the country, certain that we have made the right decision to save. Like one of my constituents recently said to me: you have the good times to save for the bad. Well, Albertans can be pleased that our government had the

foresight to save for days like today. We have \$14 billion set aside in our sustainability fund and our capital account. We can also be certain in the fact that we are a people that will pitch in to help one another. We can be certain in the fact that Albertans will dig in and be bold in re-energizing our province, ensuring that it remains a place where we enjoy a high quality of life, where we have safe communities, respect our seniors, and pave the way for a new culture of innovation to flourish, inspired by the brightest minds in the world.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind us all that our uncertainty is economic. It does not affect the core of who we are as a people. We are a compassionate people. We understand that diversity makes us stronger, that people of different faiths can come together in unity for common pursuits of harmony and opportunity. We are a generous people, generous with our time and generous with our money. There are no limits to our greatness. There are no limits to what Albertans will do to assist one another. There are no limits to what we can achieve collectively.

I'm always so excited to meet with the young families in my constituency. Hearing their dreams and frustrations, alike, inspires me. I'm proud to say that we promised the young families in my constituency and across Alberta to help support the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces in our province by 2011. Mr. Speaker, we are well on our way. More than 5,500 new spaces have been created so far.

The hard-working parents of Calgary-Montrose have produced so many wonderful young people, like Simon, a University of Alberta medical student who I recently met with. Those hard-working families will be pleased that we eliminated health care premiums, which will put nearly a billion dollars in the pockets of Albertans at a time when they need it the most.

The hard-working families of Abbeydale, Applewood, Penbrooke, Marlborough Park, and Monterey Park will also be pleased that the northeast leg of the ring road will soon be complete. They'll be pleased that myself and my counterparts on the east side from city council took the time to meet with our Minister of Transportation to show how important the southeast leg of our road is to the people of east Calgary. Thank you for the thumbs up there, Minister. We understand how much you value the southeast leg of the ring road.

This year, Mr. Speaker, has given me an opportunity to spend more time with my friends in the community of Chateau Estates. They are hard-working people that will be greatly affected by the creation of the new northeast section of the ring road. I'm proud of the fact that I was able to press Alberta Transportation to restart negotiations with landowners around their community to attempt to create a new road between 84th Street and 100th Street. A recent e-mail from a resident of Chateau Estates said: thanks for sticking up for our little community. Well, your little community has a big place in my heart because the people are so driven to common pursuits to ensure that their community is vibrant. I want to take this opportunity to thank the people of Chateau Estates, who have given me so much encouragement and gratitude. I am humbled and proud to be your representative.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a believer that in times of great change it is important to reflect on and perhaps reshape our collective aims and pursuits as a people. The age of pure materialism may be shifting. This may be the time to move our societal focus to innovation, where we as a society move to place more value on resolving our collective problems as opposed to focusing on consuming. Alberta shall be known as a beacon of innovation in the world, where the greatest minds come together to resolve the world's greatest challenges, where our schools are composed of young people learning to be creative and innovative problem solvers, young people that know no limits to their dreams.

4:00

The culture of innovation must be embedded in our societal values. It's a culture that transcends income levels and current levels of education. The culture of innovation involves the greatest minds exploring new frontiers in science and technology. It involves the average Albertan picking up a book and continuously learning and expanding and finding better ways to run their life and better ways to contribute. It encompasses those Albertans with low literacy skills seeking to empower themselves by learning and entering new frontiers for themselves. The culture of innovation should propel our society to great new heights by those cutting-edge new technologies and propel the lives of those struggling to remarkable new levels.

Mr. Speaker, the empowerment of our society's most challenged should be our highest aspiration as a people. I have had the opportunity to visit with some folks that have faced many challenges in their lives. I heard from a man who late in his life embarked on building up his literacy skills. He wrote a piece, a poem almost, on love. He said that you can never tell when love will change your life, and he's right.

I say to all of us that in these times of economic turmoil – some of our friends may be affected more than others – we must ensure that each of us reaches out with our heart to our friends and neighbours. I met a man who was in a dark place when he reached out to better himself through building his literacy skills. He's been clean from using drugs for over a year, and he told me that centimetre by centimetre, newspaper by newspaper, he finally started believing in himself.

These are people that suffered from addictions and now are building literacy skills at the John Howard Society. They're not only recovering but empowering themselves. My message to all Albertans is that just as these individuals reached out and bettered themselves in their darkest hour, we as a collective can better our world during this time of economic uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, last year I spoke of my commitment to promoting education amongst the young people in my constituency. Well, I set out to visit as many schools as I could in my constituency, and I asked the young people to dream. I asked them to dream their biggest dream. I said that when you feel like your dream is out of reach, you dream some more. When someone tells you that your dream can never come true and that it's outrageous, you dream some more. I said that in the process you also dream of the world you want to see. Don't just dream about your individual life, but dream about the collective. Dream about how you are going to shape our future.

I must confess that after my visits the phone started to ring. Parents would call and say: hey, we heard you speak, and we thought maybe we'd talk to you about the fact that our son or daughter isn't reading at grade level or really doesn't plan on pursuing postsecondary. Or the single mother who said: you know, I've got three; I think two of them are going to pursue it, but I don't think this one is going to finish high school. Mr. Speaker, that was very encouraging for me because it showed that my simple message was getting across.

I hope to continue to bring awareness to new areas such as helping recruit foster parents from various different ethnic backgrounds. A child being taken out of his or her home is perhaps one of the most traumatic experiences in their life. Imagine a young child of 4 or 5 or 6 who's only known one way of life, who's only known one food, who's only known maybe one culture. Imagine that child, first of all, being taken away from their parents and, secondly, being placed in an environment that's absolutely different, an environment that they're not accustomed to. My hope is to help recruit foster parents from various different ethnic backgrounds all over the province to

help make that very difficult situation maybe a little bit better for those young people.

The past year has given me an opportunity to meet so many wonderful people, like Mary, whom I spoke about in this House just a week ago, who would not permit her block to appear to be rundown, so she cut the lawn of her neighbours, who picked up garbage on her street, who went out and personally removed graffiti from her community.

The young guy from G.W. Skene school, who after I spoke came up to me. I remember this vividly. He was wearing a white T-shirt and grey jogging pants. He put out his hand, and he looked at me pretty much eye to eye although I was looking down, and he said: sir, that was very inspiring. I could see in his eyes the fact that this young man had seen more than his years should allow him to see. I could see that he'd seen things that young children probably shouldn't see. I could sense from him that he had this maturity and this wisdom that, to be quite honest, I think we don't represent in this House on many days.

There was a young woman who had just finished high school and said: you know, I don't know what I want to do with my life, so instead of sitting idle, I'm going to contribute. She went to Africa to contribute.

The 80-year-old woman I visited on her birthday looks after her son who, I believe, is in his 50s. This 80-year-old woman looks after her son who's in his 50s because he has a mental disability. She says: he belongs at home with me.

Absolutely remarkable people.

The seniors in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, the people that have spent years building the community and then see it changing in front of their eyes, the seniors in Penbrooke, seven of them on one street, that have lived in the community, they tell me, for over 35 years, and they see it change and change, sometimes not for the best. You know what? They reach out, and they try to do what they can to preserve and to nurture their community.

Mr. Speaker, they're proud of the steps that we've taken as a government in the area of safe communities, and they appreciate the fact that we're working . . . [Mr. Bhullar's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Montrose for the rather riveting speech. I know this member works very hard and is likely one of the best campaigners I have ever seen.

I recall that when I gave my speech to respond to the throne speech last week, he had a question for me. I also have one for him. I just checked his Facebook a moment ago. A gentleman named Matt Mitschke wrote something. There's reference to the first name of the minister of finance here. It says that this minister is going to post a \$1 billion deficit: I demand that – again, a reference to the name of the Solicitor General – do his job and arrest her; we all know that it is illegal in Alberta to run a deficit; help me out and reinstate some good old-fashioned Chrétien Liberal values to our fiscal insanity. Now, when you talk about Chrétien values, that is synonymous with insanity to me. I'd like to ask the Member for Calgary-Montrose if he could differentiate between, obviously, the values of our Conservative government and that of the provincial and federal Liberal parties.

4:10

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, I must confess that my friend and hon. colleague is, indeed, very smooth. You see, the common denominator between my friend Mr. Mitschke and the Chrétien-era Liberal

Party is the fact that they all look for cheap ways of getting attention. So, Mr. Mitschke, if you're listening, you've won. He's got his 15 seconds of fame.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I have a question for the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. Is the hon. member aware that in the mid-90s the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont was a member of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party and, I believe, a staffer for the leader of the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, Lynda Haverstock?

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, this very discourse we're having right now in the House is again reason for me to state the fact that that young man I met in that elementary school has more maturity and wisdom than we do in this House sometimes. We continuously choose to not rise to the highest common denominator but instead belittle ourselves to the lowest common denominator. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont is a good man. He's a good friend. The hon. member is a strong MLA with some very strong Conservative policies. I invite you to have a conversation with him about the past because I sure as heck don't want to.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoyed the speech from the Member for Calgary-Montrose, and I think there are some good-news items in there. The ring road – I see the minister is here – that's great. Eliminating health care premiums, which is a very good move, we supported and had encouraged for many years. I did have concerns when he endorsed the throne speech and its claim to having the right strategy for savings because I, as the member probably knows, think that this government does not have the right strategy for savings, and I'd appreciate any comments this member has on the Mintz report.

My biggest comments are around your deep compassion for children and education and the disadvantaged. You will know that I have a strong, strong feeling that we should bring an end to child hunger in this province; there's far too much of it. It's inexcusable that thousands of schoolchildren in Alberta sit at their desks hungry. I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Montrose will be championing in his caucus the idea that there be a program supported by the provincial government to end hunger in Alberta's schools.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member would be interested to know that I've actually spent much time with many schools in my constituency asking the very question: do we have children that need breakfast? I identified one, and then we furthered the conversation by saying: who provides this service out there? There was an absolutely wonderful institution called the Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary, that does an absolutely phenomenal job.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Nonmember

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you very much. During that last interchange a very interesting thing developed in this Assembly, which to my knowledge has never happened before. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont gets up and has an electronic device in front of him and quotes an individual's name and also quotes a

message. Now, what transpires if the Speaker's office gets contacted in the next number of days from such an individual saying, "Listen; somebody used my name; the message is incorrect"? What access do I have in order to make a decision? Perhaps we might all think about: do you have to table your BlackBerry? What message is tabled? How do we deal with this? We're going into a new age, hon. members.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, take us to the end.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: The end is near.

Mr. Prins: The end is near. Correct.

Thank you very much. I am also pleased and honoured to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. As we move forward in 2009, Alberta's position will remain strong. This is clearly reflected in the optimistic vision outlined in the throne speech. The throne speech covered a wide cross-section of interests for most Albertans. We have heard many great speeches on various aspects already, so I'll limit my comments to a couple of key issues that are of interest to myself and my constituents in Lacombe-Ponoka as well as the rest of Albertans.

Despite the economic uncertainty currently facing the world, I am encouraged that our government's continued support for fiscal management, market access, and innovative technology will help Alberta forge ahead with confidence. As a former rancher I've had first-hand experience working in the livestock sector. I say former, Mr. Speaker, because in the last week I sold the last of my herd of bison, so this is the first time in probably almost 40 years that I don't own a dog or a cat or a cow or a horse or an elk or a bison or anything else.

While I no longer run a full-time operation, I'm still very involved and connected to the industry through neighbours, friends, and constituents. In addition, my wife and I still live on our farm, where we board animals for other farmers. We board right now bison, cattle, horses, and, at times, elk. I am optimistic for my farm friends that they will continue to thrive in their industries, even though I'm no longer an active livestock farmer. Being a rural MLA, I'm fortunate to be able to hear the feedback about successful initiatives the Alberta government has put forward. Most of the feedback is positive, but it also comes with some critical and constructive suggestions for continued improvement, and this is good.

I was extremely pleased to see that the government is continuing its commitment to implement the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. This strategy is a long-term plan that involves provincial funding, which provides direct and indirect support to livestock producers. Several principles guided the development of this strategy. We want to avoid the creation of market distortions. We want to improve information exchange and market transparency. We want to avoid short-term ad hoc programs.

In addition, we want to reduce unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy and create an environment that allows the industry to be adaptable to changing conditions so that they can be profitable and contribute to rural prosperity. Ultimately, this strategy will help strengthen Alberta's livestock industry and ensure that our agricultural sector is competitive in a global marketplace.

Much of this will be achieved through the creation of the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, or ALMA, which is an integral part of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. This agency will receive provincial funding and will act as a vital link between industry and government. Its role will be to align and redirect government funds, resources, and programs in order to revitalize the livestock sector.

Essentially, the ALMA will act as the catalyst to ensure industry competitiveness, market access, and profitability. It will focus on initiatives that range from creating a shared vision between government and the livestock industry to developing a comprehensive livestock information system that forms the basis of our traceability and age verification efforts, called the Alberta livestock information system, or LISA.

LISA requires livestock producers to provide updated premises identification information and age verification information. This traceability system is essential in ensuring international market access, and some countries already require this type of identification information. In doing so, Alberta will remain competitive not only in traditional markets such as the United States but also in emerging markets such as China, Korea, Japan, and other Pacific Rim countries. Indeed, LISA makes it easier to meet animal and human health requirements both nationally and internationally.

I've also had the opportunity to meet with stakeholders representing key sectors within the livestock industry, and I am encouraged by what I'm hearing. Stakeholders all want the same positive outcomes, but some may have different opinions on how to get there. They're all very aware of the importance of developing a united front to ensure that Alberta producers can maximize their opportunities and enhance the investments made by themselves and our government in the industry. Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe that the livestock and meat strategy, with all its components, will enhance the success of Alberta's livestock industry.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech also highlighted this government's commitment to investing in developing technology that will help to reduce our environmental footprint. As we all know, Albertans live in one of the most beautiful and healthy natural environments in the world, which is why we need to sustain it not just for ourselves but for future generations as well. It is clear that this government is committed to developing technology that will reduce emissions in order to combat climate change while at the same time enhancing oil production from existing mature oil fields in parts of our province. This will be achieved through carbon capture and storage, or CCS.

4:20

For those who may not know, carbon capture and storage is a process that captures carbon dioxide, or CO₂, emissions and stores them in geological formations deep inside the earth. CO₂ can be captured inside of the gasification vessels, or in the case of many existing plants CO₂ is captured at the flue stack. These specific geological formations where CO₂ is stored are often the same formations that contain oil and gas in Alberta. CO₂ acts as a solvent that is used to flush oil from these formations. These formations may also contain saline water. Experience in Canada and around the world has shown that carbon capture and storage can be done safely while producing positive environmental and economic results.

In fact, the capture and storage of CO₂ is not new to this province, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been developing carbon capture and storage for well over 25 years, and there are a few examples worth mentioning. One of these is the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, which was an Alberta Crown corporation funded by the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. In 1983 – that's more than 25 years ago – in fact, it provided funding towards Alberta's first experimental pilot project that captured, injected, and stored CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery.

In 1984 the NOVA Chemicals plant in Joffre, which is located in my constituency, started to supply Penn West Energy Trust with captured CO₂ for an enhanced oil recovery project.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, in 2005 both NOVA Chemicals and Dow Chemical, which is located in Prentiss, just southeast of Lacombe,

reached an agreement to capture CO₂ from their petrochemical plants and transport it by pipeline to Glencoe Resources, near Ponoka, for storage in their oil fields. This should increase production from their mature fields and add millions of barrels of oil to their long-term production targets.

These are a few examples of carbon capture and storage projects that have been successful. It is a positive sign for Alberta's future. Ultimately, carbon capture and storage will diversify our economy and provide substantial reductions of CO₂ emissions and add hundreds of millions of barrels to our inventory of producible or recoverable oil in Alberta.

Moreover, the Alberta government has gone one huge step further to ensure that this province is environmentally green. This very afternoon the hon. Minister of Energy introduced Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act. This act is groundbreaking because funding for a number of projects will be announced in the future, resulting in greenhouse gas emission reductions of millions of tonnes annually in Alberta. There are already plans by private corporations that specialize in CO₂ sequestration and secondary and tertiary enhanced oil recovery.

At an open house in Fort Saskatchewan some months ago a company announced that they plan to build a major CO₂ pipeline system in central Alberta that will take CO₂ from large producers and transport it to oil fields that can store it and use it to enhance their oil production. This project has the potential to pick up CO₂ from existing plants as well as future plants that may be gasifying coal and upgrading bitumen as well.

Mr. Speaker, exciting new proposals such as these are further proof that industry and the environment can exist simultaneously to the benefit of all Albertans. Ultimately, carbon capture and storage will help lead this province into the 21st century as energy-producing and environmental leaders. I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that bright future for all Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start off once again with something positive. I can see that the President of the Treasury Board is thrilled. I hope I'm correct in this, Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. I believe that Bles-Wold yogourt is produced in that constituency. I am proud to say that in my refrigerator right now there are some large containers of that yogourt. I recommend it to anybody who likes yogourt. I will add that I try whenever possible to buy it at Sunterra Food, which is a local success story. The best value is the largest container, which I think is actually four litres. It's quite a lot of yogourt, but it's great yogourt, great value, a great success story out of central Alberta. So there you go. Good news.

I have a question for the member since he spoke at length about agriculture. I wasn't sure if I heard any reference to elk farming or not. I did hear bison and cattle. I have a question. This didn't appear in the throne speech, but elk farming for years has been, from everything I know about it, pretty marginal, and there are serious and growing concerns, which were flagged years ago, about elk farming being a vector for chronic wasting disease. I'm wondering if the member has any thoughts on the future of elk farming in Alberta. I think there are, in fact, elk farms in his constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to comment on that. Like I said, I have an elk farm right now. I'm a licensed elk producer although I have no elk on my farm at this point in time, so I'm not actively doing this.

In terms of the CWD problem there was one elk in Alberta in 2002 that was found to have CWD. Since that date all heads of all elk slaughtered or that have died from other reasons on elk farms: every one of these heads have been tested. To date about 45,000 heads of both elk and deer on farms have been tested, and there were two deer and the one elk found in 2002. Since then no more elk or deer have been found with CWD in Alberta.

Now, I know that there are people out there that would like to blame the cervid industry for CWD. There is no use blaming somebody for the past. That would be like blaming somebody that had the flu for the flu epidemic. You don't blame the past; you work toward the future.

In Alberta today we are free of CWD within domestic herds. We continue to test in areas of the province where they have CWD in wild herds. The wild herd CWD actually threatens some elk farms. There are probably about 30 to 35 elk farms that can no longer export into other jurisdictions because they are near the area where there are CWD cases in the wild. So to blame the elk ranches for a problem that's actually a natural problem – it has been known in the States and other jurisdictions for many, many years – is completely wrong.

I would want to encourage people to get informed, find out what's going on, and support our farmers out there that are trying to make an honest living and developing rural Alberta with a wonderful new opportunity in the elk ranching business. You know, they can grow elk on a patch of bush that you couldn't raise a cow or a beef cow or anything else. Elk can live out there and actually produce a good living for rural families. I think it's just a wonderful way to develop all the resources that we have out there in rural Alberta. I hope that answers your question.

Dr. Taft: That was a good response. I didn't appreciate that the member had such a strong personal background in the industry.

My other question is also related to agriculture. Over the last 25 years or so there has been a real narrowing down of the choice that beef producers have in terms of slaughterhouses and meat packers. I know that my father-in-law 25 years ago or so could bring a load of cattle to Edmonton, and he could shop around at the stockyards, Gainers and Swift and Burns and two or three other places like that, and there was a real market. Of course, that's gone now. Does this member see any hope for a genuine diversifying of the meat-packing industry in Alberta?

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. members, we must move on.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on March 2.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Monday, March 2, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to February 19, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)

First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)

- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 2, 2009

Issue 7

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 2, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all of the citizens of Alberta. Amen.

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

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Her Excellency Miriam Ziv, ambassador of Israel, and her husband, Mr. Ariel Kenet. I was honoured today to host a special lunch in honour of Her Excellency's first visit to Alberta. Alberta and Israel have a solid, two-way trading relationship that accounts for about \$100 million annually, and we have a strong connection through our people as well. Over 15,000 Jewish people call Alberta home.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government and a Legislature that recognizes Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. This Assembly passed this bill unanimously on Thursday, November 16, 2000, and this year Yom ha-Shoah will be recognized on April 21. I'm proud to say that Alberta is a province with a vibrant multicultural heritage and that our Jewish community makes up an important part of our cultural mosaic.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that Her Excellency and Mr. Kenet rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you constituents of mine and very bright young people from the Annunciation Catholic elementary school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Miss Panaro, as well as Mrs. Anne Bagan. We had a good conversation downstairs. We have a future teacher in the crowd, a future veterinarian, a physician . . .

Ms Calahasen: And a future politician?

Dr. Sherman: No politicians but also a future member of the armed forces in the crowd. Mr. Speaker, I'd like for the young people there to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if my classroom, Eastwood school, is here, but I will introduce them and hope that they are. I would like to introduce 21 students from Eastwood elementary school – they're in grades 5 and 6 – and their teacher, Mrs. Patti Lorentz. The helper is Mrs. Jeanne Randell. They're here for the School at the Legislature this week, and I'd like the Legislature to give them a warm welcome. If they would please rise.

I have a second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Jacques Trepanier. Jacques raises honeybees and grows cereal crops near Wembley, Alberta, and has been farming since 1974. Like many farmers in the Peace Country, Mr. Trepanier's farm was hard hit by the drought in the summer of 2008. Jacques is seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would now ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature Alberta government employees from Alberta Employment and Immigration's workplace health and safety staff. We have Sharon Chadwick, Lisa Chen, Ming Wu, Celia Chiang, Rose Ann McGinty, Michelle Mbazo, Cailin Mills, Karlene Johner, Vicky Qualie, Cody Sharpe, and Kathy Elniski. Yes, Kathy is a cousin to our Member for Edmonton-Calder. They're all dedicated professionals who develop ways to keep Alberta's workers healthy and safe on the job, and I'm honoured to have them here today. I would ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several very special individuals who are sitting in the public gallery today: Jamie Zuffa, my delightful and hard-working executive assistant from Calgary-Buffalo; Mizcha Fourie, a friend and supporter from Calgary; Madeline and Connor Rainey, friends and supporters from Edmonton. I would ask my guests to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the members of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Summer Temporary Employment Program

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the Assembly today to speak about an excellent program that helps young Albertans gain exciting work experience and provides employers with energetic and bright staff who bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to the workplace.

The summer temporary employment program, STEP, saw an increase of \$1.9 million this year for a total budget of \$9.1 million. The program is bigger and better. More jobs will be available to students and unemployed Albertans. Over 2,100 STEP positions will be created this summer, Mr. Speaker, an increase of over 450 positions from last year.

As someone who previously consulted with the nonprofit sector as well as was a STEP summer student at one point, I can attest to

the immeasurable help that STEP students provide organizations and the benefits that they receive from holding these positions. It gives organizations the resources to hire talented staff to work in the summer programs that benefit Albertans. For example, STEP jobs have included positions like tourism ambassadors and museum interpreters. These and other positions can help young Albertans carve out a career path and help employers find full-time employees for the future. The program offers a wage subsidy to encourage higher salaries for short-term temporary employment opportunities for students. I remind Alberta not-for-profit organizations that this week is the deadline for applying for STEP funding. All applications must be postmarked by March 6 in order to be considered.

I know that members of this Assembly have hired STEP students as constituency and research assistants, and I thank members for their continued support of this valuable program in giving work experience to young Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**1:40 Ukrainian Youth Association
Verkhovyna Ukrainian Song and Dance Ensemble**

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two very impressive milestones for Edmonton's Ukrainian community. Last month the Edmonton branch of the Ukrainian Youth Association celebrated its 60th anniversary and the Verkhovyna Ukrainian Song and Dance Ensemble celebrated its 50th anniversary with a banquet celebration that I along with the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs was fortunate enough to attend at the Ukrainian youth unity centre in Edmonton-Decore. Both the Ukrainian Youth Association and Verkhovyna ensemble have been fixtures on Edmonton's cultural landscape for decades.

With the motto God and Ukraine, the youth association has spent the last six decades fusing Ukrainian, Christian, and patriotic values to nurture, educate, and unify local Ukrainian youth. The association offers a variety of programs to members, including organized sports, camps, discussion groups, and lectures, all aimed at preserving the Ukrainian identity through the youth. Verkhovyna song and dance ensemble is the youth association's cultural arm, and its members range from those new to Canada to third- and fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadians. Mr. Speaker, the ensemble is comprised of three groups: the Verkhovyna Choir and the Dunai Dancers, which perform together and separately, and the Verkhovyna Ensemble School of Ukrainian Dance.

Mr. Speaker, both the Ukrainian Youth Association and the Verkhovyna Ukrainian Song and Dance Ensemble have done an admirable job preserving and promoting Ukrainian heritage in Edmonton while providing first-rate cultural entertainment for Edmontonians. I'd like to extend my congratulations to both groups for their many successful years in Edmonton and look forward to what these truly precious cultural treasures will do in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Personal Directives

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An estimated hundred thousand Albertans currently have personal directives. I would like to announce today that an awareness campaign is currently under way to encourage more Albertans to write and register a personal directive. A personal directive is a legal document that allows adults to write out their instructions and/or possibly name an individual to decide on personal matters if due to injury or illness they become unable to make a personal decision. A personal directive can

include instructions on matters such as health care or who will care for their minor children on a temporary basis if a parent suddenly loses their ability to care for their children.

Recent changes to the Personal Directives Act also allow personal directives written outside of Alberta to be recognized as long as they meet the criteria in Alberta. Additional changes include allowing an individual, agent, or service provider to request a reassessment when mental capacity appears to have been regained.

We are encouraging Albertans to register their personal directives on a new personal directive registry. The personal directive registry is an online voluntary tool for Albertans to register their personal directives. The first of its kind in Canada, the registry is currently being developed to give access to health care providers so they will know if the individual has a personal directive. It also tells health care providers how to get in touch with the individual's agency if they have named someone to speak on their behalf in case of medical emergencies. Registering your personal directive is easy, free, and it's your choice, your option. Please be assured that this information will be treated with respect and confidentiality.

To assist Albertans preparing personal directives, information kits are available free of charge at any office of the public guardian. Please join me in encouraging all Albertans to write and register a personal directive to ensure that their wishes are followed when they can no longer make personal decisions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, having worked with, taught, and coached both children and adolescents for over three decades, I believe very strongly in the axiom that there are two sides to every story. With this in mind I gratefully accepted the invitation this past Friday to visit the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre located on Forge Road in southeast Calgary. I was cordially received and provided the opportunity to watch a rap session involving the students in discussion as part of their treatment.

Over lunch, after receiving an overview of the program by the director, counsellors, parents, and teachers, I asked a variety of questions of concern ranging from program methodology to parent and participant responsibility and liability as well as government oversight and accountability for the program. There is no doubt in my mind that the program's director, the parent counsellors, and the teachers with whom I met on Friday are dedicated to assisting adolescents and their parents in overcoming problems related to addictions and at-risk behaviours. I also laud the efforts of the philanthropists whose donations of energy and funding backstop the program.

My continuing concerns have to do with what I see as a lack of government oversight and accountability for the well-being of the young individuals enrolled within the program; the type of programming, that severely restricts both the privacy and quality of access that parents have to their highly vulnerable children during lengthy months of treatment; the heavy reliance on at-risk young people, who themselves are at various stages of treatment within the program, to serve both as counsellors and keepers; the requirement placed on parents to turn their homes into barred cells for which they are forced to play both the roles of warden and prisoner for a program that is not an accredited residential treatment centre.

Desperate times for both vulnerable youth and their distraught parents do not justify desperate measures. Much stricter government regulation and accreditation is required to ensure that the AARC program achieves its laudable goals.

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

Southeast Calgary Ring Road P3 Project

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today was an important day for residents in my constituency. It's almost been a year since I was elected as the Member for Calgary-Montrose, and there's no better way to celebrate an anniversary than by bringing results to your constituents. I was pleased to see that after advocating the importance of the southeast section of the Calgary ring road, including holding a meeting with east Calgary aldermen and the Minister of Transportation, the minister this morning announced that the Stoney Trail southeast section will be the next portion of the ring road to be completed. This announcement was also attended by the mayor of Calgary, Mr. Bronconnier, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Applewood and Penbrooke will be pleased to know that there'll be an interchange on 17th Avenue S.E., also known as the wonderful International Avenue. The total length is 25 kilometres of six-lane divided highway, with 29 total bridge structures. This is a very important project for all Calgarians. I've heard from people in communities like Applewood and Penbrooke how important the southeast section of the ring road is. These are people that are excited to spend less time in what is so often a very long commute in Calgary.

After advocating for the construction of this section of the ring road for the past year, I look forward to seeing the groundbreaking for this project and eventually the benefits the completed ring road will bring to my constituents and other Calgarians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Weyerhaeuser Grande Prairie Pulp Mill Safety Award

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to announce that Weyerhaeuser's Grande Prairie pulp mill was recognized as the safest pulp mill in Canada in its size category in 2008. *Pulp & Paper Canada* magazine, which has been recognizing exemplary safety efforts since 1926, has awarded Weyerhaeuser's Grande Prairie pulp mill this honour.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008 the pulp mill had a workforce of 315 people, and during that time the mill did not have a single recordable injury among its staff. Essentially, this is roughly 675,000 hours worked without a recordable injury. In fact, the employees and contractors at the mill are now approaching 1.5 million hours worked without a recordable injury. In this way Weyerhaeuser's Grande Prairie pulp mill is a role model to all companies, demonstrating the importance of a safe work environment.

As we all know, on-the-job dangers can have lasting consequences. In fact, the Grande Prairie pulp mill was previously a recipient of this award in both 2000 and 2004. I commend Weyerhaeuser's Grande Prairie pulp mill for its remarkable achievements and its leadership in ensuring safe work.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Economic Strategy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's third-quarter update painted a grim picture for Alberta. Without saving, without limiting spending increases, and without planning for the inevitable bust, government has driven this province right into another deficit. A budget is absolutely necessary, but it is only the first step out of

the mess that this government has created. To the Premier: will the Premier tell Albertans what the long-term plan is to remove Alberta from these devastating booms and busts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the plan is, of course, over the next number of years to be very careful and pragmatic in our spending. Secondly, over the next year or two we will have to dip into the emergency savings fund that we have set aside especially for situations like this. Thirdly, we are going to keep investing in people, meaning education and health, and fourthly, quite frankly, is to ensure that we maintain the momentum and have all of the infrastructure in place so that as we come out of this, we're not left behind again.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how has this government changed its budgeting procedures now to avoid the consequences of budgeting based on volatile commodity prices?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the changes were made a few years ago, when we changed quite dramatically the accounting practices, allowing us to set aside money in what we call the sustainability fund and also in the capital fund. The Leader of the Official Opposition said, "Yes, we have to plan for volatile revenues," and that's what we did. So we've got \$7.7 billion in sustainability, and that's helping to cushion the dramatic drop in oil and gas revenues. We also set aside \$6 billion in cash for infrastructure. I'm not aware of any jurisdiction in North America that actually has cash in hand, very liquid, that they can rely on over the next couple of years to offset the dramatic revenue loss.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the Premier is reprofiling, quote, rescheduling millions of dollars of capital projects, what guarantee is there that there'll be money for these projects available next year or the year after that, when we've spent everything that's come out of the ground?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our capital plan is a five-year capital plan. The first three years are committed. The capital plan is \$22.2 billion. That is far greater, no matter how you measure it, per capita, two to three times that of any other jurisdiction in Canada. We're well on our way to ensuring that the infrastructure is in place.

The other is that we'll be very pragmatic. We want to ensure that we not only provide the schools and the hospitals that are necessary but also ensure that our water and sewer systems are constantly maintained, so we keep upgrading them. Those will be very wise investments given the fact that we will have some people that may have some job losses, and this will put them back to work.

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

Oil Royalty Agreement

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Corporate financial filings show that this government recently gave multinational oil sands companies a huge cut in royalties. Payments formerly would have gone to the public purse. For Syncrude alone this sweetheart deal will be worth over \$18 billion, greater than the value of our heritage fund, our children's legacy. Eighteen billion dollars to industry

while this government can't even fund cancer care appropriately: does the Premier think this is a good deal for Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is talking about something that appeared in the paper the other day that forecast 40 years into the future. I don't know what price structure they used, whether they put oil at \$150 a barrel or a hundred dollars a barrel. But it's funny, you know, how they can forecast 40 years in the future, and only a few months ago nobody forecast this whole world-wide economic turndown. Now all of a sudden they're making these predictions 40 years down the road.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: whose interests was this government acting on when it decided to reduce the royalties for this company? Eighteen billion dollars went back to the corporate profits.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the Minister of Energy answer the part of the agreement that was reached back in 1997.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that there was no reduction in royalties. In 1997 a Crown agreement was reached with two of the major players, the initiators of this great business in the province of Alberta, and part of that Crown agreement was an option for them to choose to pay royalties a decade down the road either on bitumen or on synthetic oil. They have made a choice of an option to pay on bitumen royalty. It will at the end of the day be a very, very good piece of business for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: whose interests were you choosing that decision on? Whose interests?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may be in the hon. gentleman's interest to settle down a little bit. You might have to call in some emergency staff. [interjections]

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

Mr. Knight: I thought they were calling.

The interest with respect to the agreements that were made is in the interest of and to the benefit of all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of situations that will arise where bitumen pricing and pricing of synthetic oil, the differentials, may close and, in fact, could be a very good deal for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will deal with the point of order at the end of the Routine.

Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier and this government agreed to a royalty deal that sees an expected \$18 billion transferred from the public to Syncrude. The corporate filings of Syncrude shareholders spell this out in detail, and I'm sure the minister is aware of that. This government, which is supposed to be managing the resource in the best interest of Albertans, barely gave a hint of it. To the Premier: why does this government conceal

information from its citizens instead of providing the full, plain, and true disclosure required of corporations and recommended by the Auditor General?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, nothing is concealed and especially not the growth that we've seen in this province since 1997. It has given us infrastructure. It has given us good health and education programs. It has given us wealth not only in this province but wealth that's shared right across the country of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The \$18 billion figure actually applies only to Syncrude. This government must know how much more forecast revenue they also signed over to Suncor. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Did the minister or his department do an analysis of how much these royalty deals were likely to cost Albertans, and if he did, will he confirm that about \$18 billion more in public wealth was transferred to Suncor through this deal?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I do know is that we have just spent a considerable amount of time and effort to renegotiate the Crown agreements that Syncrude and Suncor have with the province of Alberta, with the people of Alberta. I'll tell you this as a fact, not a number that came from a newspaper but a fact: Syncrude will pay the people of Alberta an additional \$975 million in royalties due to that agreement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister maybe should go back to math school or something because he transferred \$18 billion to Syncrude to get \$975 million back. Does the minister actually think that was a good deal for the people of Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I do know is that both of the Crown agreements that have been reached by the government of Alberta with respect to the two major initial players in the oil sands have opened up tremendous opportunities for all Albertans and all Canadians, as the Premier has stated. They are very good, solid agreements that will net benefits to Albertans for generations to come, decades to come.

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

Provincial Economic Strategy (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning Statistics Canada announced the sharpest quarterly decline in Canada's gross domestic product in 18 years, and still this government refuses to create an economic stimulus package. Alberta is not an island, but this government doesn't get it. Ordinary Albertans are losing their jobs and declaring bankruptcy while this government stands alone in the world in refusing to launch a stimulus package. My question is to the Premier. Why is this Tory government failing Albertans at risk of losing their jobs or facing bankruptcy by refusing to stimulate Alberta's economy?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the policies of the government over the last couple of years have really stimulated growth in the economy. In fact, we've seen unprecedented growth. We've seen – what? –

600,000 new Albertans move to this province. We've seen investments in infrastructure, education, and health, and we'll continue to do that. We are, as I said before, the only jurisdiction in all of Canada, if not North America, to have cash in hand to work through this economic global downturn, that was totally unpredicted by even the best economists. We're in the best position to weather this storm.

Mr. Mason: That was yesterday, Mr. Speaker. This Premier is not preparing the province for tomorrow.

The federal infrastructure program will match one-third of what provinces and municipalities chip in to stimulate their economies, up to \$2.2 billion for Alberta. Many of Alberta's municipalities have already committed substantial funding to new infrastructure and cannot afford more. Our proposal is that this government should pay the municipalities' third as well as its own third to leverage the federal cash and get Albertans working. My question is to the Premier. Will you adopt our proposal and commit the municipal portion of funds for the federal infrastructure program so that Alberta can . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Mason: I'm not finished yet, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, no, no. You are finished. I have called on the hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for being so kind. I know that there is no provincial jurisdiction in Canada that supports municipalities as much as this government. There is \$1.4 billion of new money every year going to municipalities to help them with infrastructure. For some of the smaller municipalities it helps with their operation. It is unprecedented in Canada. We'll continue to keep our solid commitment and good working relationship with all municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The only positive contributor to total GDP last quarter was public-sector investment, according to Statistics Canada, yet this government refuses to listen to good ideas and refuses to invest money in ways that will actually create real jobs for everyday Albertans. Municipalities cannot afford more spending on infrastructure, and this government will not step up to the plate. Why, Mr. Premier, will you not take advantage of this opportunity for federal funding and commit to paying the municipal share to keep Albertans working?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just having met with the president of AUMA and having had a long discussion with the president of AAMD and C, both associations are very satisfied with the plan we have in place. You know, the other part of the plan that we have worked out with municipalities is that they are simply delighted because they can stand anywhere in Canada and say that Alberta is the only province that works closely with municipalities and allows municipalities to actually prioritize their projects, the only jurisdiction in Canada to do that.

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

Grizzly Bear Management

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've heard that communities in Alberta are adopting BearSmart practices, and the Foothills Research Institute is finishing a DNA population study that will give us an idea of grizzly bear populations from south of Grande Prairie to the Montana border. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the government doing on the landscape to ensure that grizzly bears remain part of Alberta's wildlife?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the BearSmart program and the DNA population study are government of Alberta programs, and they are focused on keeping grizzlies on the landscape. The BearSmart program reduces human/bear encounters to the benefit of both parties. The core grizzly bear habitat is the focus of the DNA study, which will work into the regional plans under the land-use framework. There are many other programs associated with our grizzly efforts. I can assure you that this government does not have a grin-and-bear-it attitude towards grizzlies. We are bearing down and making healthy grizzly populations a high priority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My first supplemental is to the same minister. My constituents have insisted that there are plenty of grizzly bears in the foothills. What can the minister tell me about the population numbers and the influence that they have on managing access in grizzly habitat?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there are two different stories about grizzly bears out there at the moment. The Foothills Research Institute is doing the DNA sampling study based on a scientific technique. That is projecting fewer bears than we expected: less than a thousand. There is another study out there, done by the Willmore Wilderness Foundation, that involves both a film and also a very extensive database, that reports a higher frequency of sightings around the province in the last year. We've listened to both of these groups. We're putting them together, and I'm optimistic that when those databases are integrated, we'll get a satisfactory result.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. To the same minister. I've heard reports that the grizzly bear counts are only being done in areas that are close to settled areas and access points, where it would be easier or more convenient to set up sampling points, yet I'm also told that most sightings, especially large multiple sightings, are in the backcountry. Can the minister explain how the counts are being done?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. The reports that the hon. member has heard are not accurate. The individuals conducting the DNA study are professional scientists, and they're using the very same techniques that have been used by wildlife habitat scientists in Yellowstone park and other places in North America. This focuses on a random grid sample, and then within those grids the catchment areas are placed where grizzlies are most likely. At the end of 2009 the

grizzly bear population survey will be done. Mr. Speaker, those are the bare facts, and I'm sticking with them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Carbon Emissions Reduction

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the government created a carbon tax of \$15 per tonne for all major industrial emitters of greenhouse gas in Alberta. The Auditor General in the report for Environment says that the ministry's statements do not verify the completeness of the reporting toward meeting emission intensity targets. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given that Budget '08 estimated \$155 million from the climate change fund yet the annual report only has \$40 million, can the minister explain this \$115 million difference?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there are, actually, two reasons for it. First of all, the \$155 million that the member refers to is for 18 months, and we've to date reported six months. So there was \$40 million in the first six months of the program. After the 12-month period, which has now just ended, we anticipate that it'll be around a hundred million.

The other reason, frankly, Mr. Speaker, is that it was at best an estimate. There's no way of knowing exactly what the savings may have been, that industry may not have had to come into compliance. We also didn't know what uptake there would be on the opportunities for emissions credits to be taken up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The \$155 million figure appears on page 30 of your budget documents.

To the same minister: given that the Auditor General states that the ministry cannot verify amounts owing because it doesn't have the systems in place to check who is meeting the targets and who isn't and then collect the money that's owed, can the minister not agree that that's the real reason for the difference? You don't have the systems in place to know how much money is out there.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, clearly, that is not the case. This is an instance where it was necessary for us to as quickly as possible come forward with something that we knew was the right thing to do. There is and was a lot of work needed to be done to the compliance mechanisms. We have that work in place. Frankly, we felt that it was more appropriate that we get the legislation up and running and develop the details after the fact rather than wait for two or three years and do nothing in the meantime.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister. Budget 2008 estimates for the next three years total \$328 million in the climate change fund for new initiatives in emissions reduction. Can the minister tell us if this is still accurate, or will the new budget see a massive decrease in the Budget 2008 numbers?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the numbers that are in the budget are reflective of projections for growth, that may or may not be seen as we all know that there have been a number of projects that have been

put on hold. It also is dependent upon, as I mentioned earlier, the degree to which companies are able to acquire offsets, which would reduce the amount that they pay. It would also depend upon the actual results that they record at the end of the year. So I can't predict whether or not the numbers that are in the budget will be achieved. It's a three-year budget, and as everyone knows, forecasting any more than three months these days is extremely difficult. I can assure this member and I can assure all Albertans that the numbers that are reported are accurate, are audited, and are accountable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Support for Communities in the Oil Sands

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents see Bonnyville-Cold Lake as a major hub for industry in Alberta. Communities like Cold Lake are dependent on this industry. As a result, this community faces challenges to its growth and sustainability. My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. This government is providing additional support to oil sands communities like Fort McMurray. Will communities, like Cold Lake, who are experiencing the same challenges receive this additional support as well?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's a good point. I think many Albertans don't realize how massive the oil sands – better described by our Member for Athabasca-Redwater as the job sands – are under Alberta, approximately 20 per cent. So the communities of Cold Lake, Bonnyville, St. Paul, and Lac La Biche as well as the Peace Country are all affected and will be affected over time by the tremendous opportunities this oil energy has. The oil sands secretariat has met with and will continue to meet with the different representatives from those communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. How will this government improve the quality of life for communities like Cold Lake that are directly impacted by the oil sands?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, in many ways the report on responsible development of the oil sands is a way to attack most of the issues that face major development around any community, whether it be the future development in our Industrial Heartland or the oil sands development around those communities, by addressing it in a government-wide manner, where all the departments are brought together, where we look at the issues raised by that community, and we use whatever means are necessary to include all the relative ministries to handle the issues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. The First Nations and Métis comprise a large portion of the population of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. How will this government increase the participation of the aboriginal communities in the development of the oil sands?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, for one thing, aboriginal input to date and well into the future figures very prominently in our recently

released energy strategy, our recently released land-use framework, and, of course, the mostly recently released Alberta oil sands plan, which is called Responsible Actions. To date we know that approximately 1,500 aboriginals are already employed in the oil sands development. That's about a 60 per cent increase since 1998, and I think it's going to go even higher. That figure, by the way, does not include construction-related jobs.

The final point, Mr. Speaker, is that more aboriginals will be employed as local industries' initiatives kick into place to hire local aboriginal grads and as our First Nations economic partnership initiative continues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The strengths of the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre are its dedicated teachers, its generous philanthropists, and its desperate, dedicated parents, who are willing to sacrifice, surrender so much to recover their lost children. The weakness of the program is that the Alberta government has allowed an underregulated facility to operate as though it were an accredited residential treatment centre. My questions are to the minister of health. Is it acceptable to you that each night throughout Calgary at-risk adolescents are locked in bedrooms with fixed bars on the windows, in direct violation of fire safety codes?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to acknowledge the comments that were made in the preamble. I will say that the member took my suggestion of a couple of weeks ago and actually went and visited the program and, if I understood his member's statement correctly, acknowledged the great work of the parents, the great work of the teachers, and the outstanding program. Unlike the opposition, we don't believe that it's necessary to have civil servants hovering over all of the programs in Alberta.

Mr. Chase: I think you should be concerned about firemen hovering over these facilities with barred windows in direct violation of safety codes.

How do you justify the fact, Mr. Minister, that the keepers of the bedroom cell keys for the at-risk newcomers are themselves at-risk old-comers who have been in the program only a few months longer than those over whom they wield authority and for whom they assume the liability that this government has left?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think I challenged the member a couple of weeks ago as well that if he had some issues that he thought were criminal in nature, then he should report them to the police. If he has some issues that he thinks violate fire codes, then report it to the fire chief. He has the responsibility instead of just standing here making a bunch of unfounded allegations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I spoke to the deputy fire chief, he expressed concerns, and I'll be meeting with police officials this Friday.

Why hasn't the government provided AADAC the funding to build, operate, and regulate adolescent residential treatment centres instead of foisting its responsibilities onto the shoulders of untrained parents and at-risk adolescents? Who's in charge of Alberta children's welfare?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, in the last budget we allocated some hundred million dollars to AADAC, so for this member to stand here and make those kind of comments is just incorrect.

Again, unlike the opposition we don't believe that government does everything. We believe there is a role for the volunteer and nonprofit sectors to get involved. If this member has an issue with it, then let him say so, but all he does is stand here and make unfounded allegations, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Single Wide-base Truck Tires

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago my Transportation Advisory Committee in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne made me aware of new technology that can assist some sectors of the trucking industry to save fuel, up to 15 per cent. I thank the Minister of Transportation for his quick response to Alberta's trucking industry by allowing super single tires with a slight weight reduction as a use of condition. My questions are all to the Minister of Transportation. The province of Ontario has now announced that they will allow full parity between the new generation wide tires and a set of dual tires. This means now that Ontario and Quebec are the only provinces to allow fuel efficient single . . .

The Speaker: Thank you. The hon. minister. [interjection] Hon. minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Ouellette: I wanted to hear the question because I didn't want to make the answer wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You have 35 seconds.

Mr. Ouellette: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell the hon. member that it isn't quite that simple. Yes, we have been running some pilot projects with super single new-generation tires, but I have to also go by what the technical people in the department say. The technical people are telling me that if you overload or heavily load the superwide tires, we don't have the surfaces strong enough to handle it, and we create more damage. But for the hon. member I will recheck with our technical guys to see if there are some new-technology tires out there that maybe we could load a little heavier.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, I'll make it shorter this time. Due to the recent change in legislation, Minister, are you concerned that there will be an advantage to national carriers operating in Ontario versus operating in Alberta?

Mr. Ouellette: That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you, most of our truckers here and especially any of our long-haul truckers, which is about 65 per cent of our trucks in Alberta, are interprovincially licensed. Saskatchewan and Manitoba have the exact same weight ratio as we do, so you couldn't get across from Ontario or Quebec into Alberta and cross those provinces. I think we continually try to do everything we can to make economic benefits for our truckers in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Safety of Secondary Suites

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While safe secondary suites are a low-cost option that could quickly increase the stock of affordable housing, right now many people in Alberta are living in unsafe, unhealthy secondary suites because that's all they can find. While a substandard roof over your head is better than no roof at all, a suite that is unfit or unsafe can put the tenants' lives in jeopardy. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. A violation of the Alberta fire code can cost a landlord \$15,000 in fines or six months in jail. Given that a fire code violation such as a locked or barred window can lead to the death of a tenant who cannot get out of his or her suite in time, will the minister commit to a review of the penalties?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, I want to say that Alberta has strong building and fire codes to help residents in secondary suites. I also want to reiterate that municipalities choose whether to permit secondary suites. The standards for new secondary suites have been in force since December of 2008. At this time the penalties that are in place for safety codes I believe are adequate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of health this time: given that housing regulations fall under the Public Health Act and the penalty a landlord faces for violating that act is only \$2,000, will this minister commit to a review of section 73 of the act?

Mr. Liepert: There's none planned at this stage, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Justice: in cases where tenants die in fires as the result of possible negligence by the landlord, is it possible to lay criminal charges against the landlord, and if so, why is this apparently never done? If not, what can she do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that question under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Impact of Oil Sands Development on Water Resources

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By treating our watershed like a bottomless well, this government is jeopardizing the environmental future of Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and both territories, and this government doesn't care. Canada's House of Commons has noticed, and their environment committee wants to know why this government is letting their friends in big oil soak up Alberta's water resources unchecked. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why won't you protect the resource that Alberta's future depends on most?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the hon. member that that's exactly what we do. She talks about the water

that flows through Alberta that ends up in the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, or Manitoba. We have in place agreements with our eastern neighbours on the South Saskatchewan and North Saskatchewan, and we are just about to enter into a trilateral discussion with British Columbia, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories to deal with the northern watershed basin.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's the job of this provincial government to oversee our environment, and the feds are getting involved because the job is not getting done. The tar ponds already span over 130 square kilometers and are filled with toxic chemicals that industry doesn't know what to do with. It's estimated that 170,000 litres of toxic water from the tar ponds leach back into Alberta rivers each day, yet the government is doing nothing about them. To the Minister of Environment: why has this government continued to turn a blind eye to the black eye it's created in the tar sands?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, and this member knows that. She's taken the opportunity to make a political statement, ignoring the facts. The facts speak for themselves. I welcome other authorities to review our legislation and review our regulatory regime because I'm sure that the House of Commons committee will find that Alberta is doing everything that is expected of us and then some.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, the minister doesn't seem to understand the very basic need of every Albertan for a fresh water supply. The government has failed to implement the changes that would actually make CEMA effective, the water for life strategy has no teeth, and your directives to clean up the tar ponds won't have any effect for years to come. In short, lots of talk; no action. To the minister: why should everyday Albertans be denied access to clean water tomorrow because of your ministry's negligence today?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this member obviously has a different crystal ball than anyone else that is involved in dealing with these important issues. The fact of the matter is that we have rigid legislation in place. We have accepted that there can be more technology changes. On an ongoing basis we're committed to continually increase the degree of protection that we have in place. I can assure this member and I can assure all Albertans that there is no risk for the future of the water in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Southeast Calgary Ring Road P3 Project

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier in my member's statement, the Minister of Transportation announced this morning that the Stoney Trail southeast portion of the ring road is the next section of the Calgary ring road that will be completed, which is something I've been long advocating for. While my constituents are happy with this news, they're also eager to see results. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. What is the timeline, such as the start date and estimated completion date, of the construction of the Stoney Trail southeast section?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to tell the hon. member that our start date is planned right now for 2010, and we

will have traffic driving on it by the fall of 2013. This is great news for Calgarians. The project will make a full free-flow six-lane freeway, and it will significantly improve traffic flows on the east side of Calgary.

Mr. Bhullar: Great it is, Mr. Speaker. Great it is.

My second question to the same minister: how is this project being paid for and what is the department doing to ensure that this project is cost-effective?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the last two to three, I guess, ring road legs that we've done in Edmonton and Calgary were done as a P3, and we saved hundreds of millions of dollars for taxpayers of Alberta. We plan on doing this one under a P3. Once that road opens, that will make our contractor responsible for the maintenance for 30 years. One thing for sure we always will do: a comparative bid. We will always make sure that when that comparative bid is open, we're getting the best deal possible for Alberta taxpayers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the completion of this section the ring road will be 75 per cent complete. When will the last quarter be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, can you believe that? We just announced such a great project of a six-lane freeway with 29 separate bridges, two flyovers, and – wouldn't you know it? – I guess it isn't enough. But let me tell you that our Premier, who is a great Premier, has announced that he wanted all the ring roads done by 2015, and I really like my job, so I'm going to do everything I possibly can to make sure that they're all done by 2015.

The Speaker: I'm sure that with these hundreds of millions of dollars we're saving, you can help some of your other colleagues out.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Prosecutions under the Election Act

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The integrity of the democratic process should be a priority concern for all governments; however, it seems that for this government ensuring the integrity of the electoral process by prosecuting violations is not really a concern. To the Minister of Justice: can the minister provide any details as to why in the case of 19 election violations recommended for prosecution by the Chief Electoral Officer, it was concluded that a special prosecutor not be appointed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The integrity of the democratic system in Alberta is of paramount concern to this government. It's of particular personal interest to me both as a minister and as an individual that has spent a lot of time looking at democratic systems around the world, and I believe that we have a very strong system in Alberta that is completely transparent. We have a system in place where we have independent prosecutors who make decisions about whether to prosecute cases. I would actually suggest and I would ask the hon. member opposite to think about whether or not it would even be appropriate for me as Minister of

Justice to speak to the specifics of cases since the whole point of this system is that there are prosecutors in the Department of Justice who are independent, make the decisions independent from what the minister may or may not think.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the minister has the final say on whether cases should be investigated and prosecuted, as you are the head of the department – de facto, you know, that's like the fox being in charge of the hen house – should you not in these cases get an independent prosecutor?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have said in this House time and time again, we have a system that works in this province. We have independent prosecutors with integrity, and I think that it is very important for colleagues in this House who are lawyers, before they ask questions such as this, to think and understand how the Department of Justice actually works and is managed.

Mr. Hehr: Well, since I am a lawyer and maybe a slow learning one, I'll try and figure this out sooner or later.

Let's take a look at this. The Department of Justice receives 19 election violations from the Chief Electoral Officer that say: please prosecute. Tell me where I'm wrong with thinking: hey, maybe let's get an independent prosecutor. Would this not be more reasonable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our prosecutors are independent, and they made the decision not to prosecute.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

English As a Second Language Programs

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the fall of 2006 the Ministry of Education contracted Howard Research & Management Consulting Inc. to conduct a review of English as a second language K to 12 program implementation in Alberta. Among the key findings were that some 64 different instruments were used across the province to assess ESL students, and only 21 per cent of the schools used a comprehensive curriculum plan for these students. Some 64 per cent of the schools relied on subject teachers who lacked specialized ESL training to teach ESL in the classes. My question is to the Minister of Education. How has the ministry responded to the identified issues in the review with respect to identification and assessment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important topic. We are seeing an increasing number of ESL students in our schools, a better identification of those students and those students' needs. Of course, it's a diverse population of students, so it's much more difficult to develop resources that would be in the nature of a mandatory curriculum. However, there is an ESL Guide to Implementation, kindergarten to grade 9, which provides definitions and descriptions of students and information on intake procedures. We

produced a list of assessment resources for English as a second language, and in terms of curriculum development we're progressing on that as well.

Ms Woo-Paw: My first supplemental is to the same minister. Would the minister consider introducing or reintroducing reporting mechanisms to ensure that ESL funding is used for ESL instruction?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As is the case in a number of our funding mechanisms, what we provide is a global budget to school boards, and the calculation of that budget takes into account certain factors. In this case the number of ESL students provides a factor for extra funding for school boards. What we don't do is tell the school boards how to apply those funds, and we would be reluctant to do that unless it could be shown that they were not achieving the outcomes. We are developing a piece of the accountability pillar which will tell us whether we're achieving those outcomes, and if we find that's not successful, we will consider changing the funding to fix it.

Ms Woo-Paw: My last supplemental to the same minister: would the ministry consider auditing schools and school boards for the allocation of ESL funding?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do conduct audits of certain types of grants such as the credit enrolment unit grant, student transportation, and enrolment numbers, et cetera. But, again, because this is block funding, because it's up to the school boards to determine how best to apply the funding, it wouldn't be appropriate to audit specifically this funding at this point. However, I'd indicate again that we are developing an accountability pillar piece which would show whether boards are achieving the outcomes that are desired, and if they're not achieving the outcomes that are desired, we would consider whether the funding formula needed to be changed to effect that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, workplace deaths in Alberta have risen 34 per cent in the last three years. My first question is to the minister in charge of occupational health and safety. How can the minister contend that Alberta is overall a safer place to work today than in the past when one Alberta worker per week in 2008 lost their life as a result of a workplace fatality?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I do agree that workplace injuries or fatalities are totally unacceptable, and our government is constantly working to see those numbers go down. What the hon. member failed to indicate is that our numbers, in fact, per 100 person-years are decreasing. We are heading in the right direction. We do have more people than ever working in this particular province and we've got more vehicles on the roads, so it seems that more things will happen. But our overall numbers when it comes to the disabling-injury rates or the lost-time claim rates are in fact going down.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister could tell that to the family of a deceased worker.

Given that workplace deaths from occupational diseases have doubled since 2002 from 31 deaths per year to 64 deaths in 2008, why is an accident investigation report from the government not admissible as evidence for any purpose at a trial arising out of the injury or accident, an investigation, or a public inquiry under the Fatality Inquiries Act?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the details of that particular question, so I'd be pleased to get more information and then respond to the member accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That's incredible that you don't know why that has occurred under your watch, sir.

Again to the same minister: why is it not a legal requirement under Alberta's occupational health and safety laws to develop an OH and S policy or to have one posted at a work site?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we encourage active participation between employers and employees to minimize any type of injuries or incidents on the work site. We continue to work with industry. We encourage them to protect their employees, and we've got a number of campaigns and initiatives across the province to have that happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary McCall.

Oil Sands Development

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Environment. The March 2009 issue of *National Geographic* contains an article entitled The Canadian Oil Boom: Scraping Bottom. The article has been held out as being very negative towards the Athabasca oil sands, but in reading the article, the text in particular, I find the article overall gives a very reasonably positive impression of this engine of Alberta's economy. To the minister: have you read the article, and does it accurately reflect the facts?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I have in fact read the article, and to a large extent I agree with the observation that the hon. member has made. This is one of the more balanced representations that we have seen in some time. That being said, it's a representation of the past, and this government and this ministry are focused on the future. As I've said a number of times, I would be very interested if I could turn the clock ahead two or three years and have that same reporter come back and see what changes have taken place as a result of what the government is doing today.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we're dealing with policy.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A concern was expressed in the article with regard to the amount of overburden that has to be removed to extract one barrel of oil. How is this concern being addressed by your department?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of overburden is not unique to oil sands; it's really something that goes along with any surface mining operation. Our department, as you know, has been working very hard on developing a new way of dealing with reclamation and speeding up the reclamation. We talked in the Speech from the Throne about a need to speed up the reclamation. Progressive

reclamation is something that we feel very strongly about: setting benchmarks in time, creating some benchmarks that need to be met and perhaps some incentives to help to achieve them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the hon. Minister of Energy. The *National Geographic* article states that the oil sands industry is wasting the cleanest fuel, being natural gas, to make the dirtiest fuel. What is your response to that statement?

2:40

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, let's be very clear about this. Fuels derived from bitumen meet the same standards as any other fuels delivered in the province of Alberta or anywhere in North America. An independent analysis would show that from ground to gas station fuels derived from oil sands are marginally more carbon intensive than fuels from Middle Eastern oil, and they are actually comparable to fuels derived from California heavy oil.

In terms of the natural gas required in bitumen extraction, the very same article that's being quoted here states that, in fact, the energy produced from a barrel of synthetic oil is five times the energy that's required to produce it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today.

Statement by the Speaker

Alberta and Manitoba Question Period Comparison

The Speaker: Just by way of information, last week I hosted a delegation from the province of Manitoba, including the Speaker and House leaders, and we talked about question period. The Manitoba question period is 40 minutes. Ours is 50 minutes. They have no time factor refereed by the Speaker, and oftentimes they'll get between 15 and 18 questions and responses for question period. We had 94. It's not at all uncommon for a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition to be upwards of five to 10 minutes and the response from the leader of the government to be the same. After about 25 or 30 minutes they'll have had two or three exchanges, and you know what happens in the Assembly in such an environment.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

We're now just a few weeks away from fully ushering in Canada's most comprehensive interprovincial trade agreement, effective April 1, 2009. Bill 18 is an omnibus bill that amends 11 acts to ensure that the government statutes are consistent with the TILMA. In large measure they are administrative in nature. Colleagues in the Legislature, I would urge you to ultimately find favour with this particular legislation, particularly with the state of the global economy. It will be one way that we can ensure that Albertans have an advantage.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Bill 19

Land Assembly Project Area Act

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act.

This legislation will improve the process for government to designate and assemble large tracts of land for major infrastructure projects such as transportation utility corridors. The legislative framework enhances transparency and accountability when dealing with numerous landowners for large-scale land acquisitions over a long term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

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

Bill 20

Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act.

Currently individuals who purchase RRSPs sold by a bank or a credit union, also known as noninsurance RRSPs, have no creditor protection for their retirement savings. This bill will change the law so the creditors will not have access to the funds in noninsurance RRSPs, deferred profit savings plans, or registered retirement income plans. However, creditors will have access to payments out of these retirement plans. This proposed legislation, of course, brings us in line with B.C. and Saskatchewan. Also, a provision is being added to exempt registered disability savings plans from creditors. These plans are intended to help individuals with disabilities and their families plan for future needs of the individual.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 20 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of four annual reports with the Assembly. The first is the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2007-08 annual report. The second document is the Wild Rose Foundation 2007-08 annual report, third is the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation 2007-08 annual report, and finally, the fourth document is the Alberta historical resources fund 2007-08 annual report.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 15 of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it

is my pleasure to table the third-quarter update on the fund. Copies of this report were distributed to all members last Thursday, February 26, 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, both from constituents. The first is from constituent Crystal Fisher. She is very concerned that rising costs of tuition, housing, textbooks, and child care are keeping students away from postsecondary education. She believes that we need to continue to invest in postsecondary education even in difficult economic times and that this will help us meet challenges for the future.

The second tabling is from constituent Mary Mumert. She has a number of different concerns, primarily focusing on rent control needed to help cope with the high rents that are impacting a lot of the constituents in Edmonton-Centre, particularly vulnerable groups. She feels, additionally, that there's inadequate funding for supportive housing and group homes and that young offenders need community supports as well as safe housing to prevent them from reoffending.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter that I received from the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration dated January 12, 2009. It's a response to my letter dated December 15, 2008, requesting an update on the workplace health and safety compliance investigation into the accident that occurred at the CNRL Horizon oil sands project on April 24, 2007, which, unfortunately, took the lives of two workers.

My second tabling is a letter that I wrote to the hon. Minister of Labour in the federal parliament. This letter is dated February 25, 2009. It's requesting that the federal government make some changes to the employment insurance structure in Alberta in light of the unfortunate rise in unemployment in this province. There are some background tables to accompany this letter as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is from the Calgary Police Association president, Mr. John Dooks, wherein he thanks the provincial government for instituting Bill 50, the victims of crime legislation, as well as noting that Bill 201, that I'm speaking on this afternoon, is also necessary to finish the loop, so to speak, in that legislation.

I also have a letter from the Community Life Improvement Council, whose executive director is former police officer Barry Davidson. Therein he, again, supports my initiative in Bill 201.

I also have a letter of support from Mike Colle, MPP from the Ontario Legislature, where he supports fully Bill 201. He notes in the letter that they, too, have victims of crime legislation similar to ours but, nevertheless, the need for the bill to close off the loop, so to say, to the criminal element that's out there.

2:50

The Speaker: I'd just like to remind the hon. member that this is tablings, not debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. One of these reports, for example, shows that some residents were left in their beds for the morning and part of the afternoon.

The second tabling is a report referred to by the leader of the NDP opposition in his questions today. It is titled Canadian Economic Accounts: Fourth Quarter 2008 and December 2008. Of particular interest is chart 4, showing that the public sector was the only main industrial sector to significantly contribute to total growth in December of last year.

Thank you.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence regarding the public health care structure. This tabling is signed by Helen Pollard, Helen Butterfield, June and Tony Feist, Alex Chiasson, Fern Bougie, Marjorie Andrusiak, Lloyd Doering, Jean Madlung, and Margery Warchola, all on the board of directors of the Whitecourt Seniors Circle.

Thank you, sir.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Groeneveld, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, response to Written Question 20 and return to order of the Assembly 16, both asked for by Dr. Taft on October 20, 2008.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on a point of order.

Point of Order Provocative Language

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll give you a number of citations, but just so that everyone can follow along with this, this point of order is arising out of an exchange between the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Minister of Energy during the second question from the Leader of the Official Opposition. In fact, to be more specific, the exchange was around the second supplemental and the response to that question.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in *M and M* on page 365 and also throughout pages 416 to 433 it outlines the purpose of question period and the role of the Official Opposition within that to request information from the government and to hold the government to account by asking questions, clearly. According to *Beauchesne* 409 and other references in *M and M* appearing on pages 426 to 427 and also 432, the minister is to answer if it is within their administrative responsibility, and I would say that in this case it was clearly within the ministerial responsibility of the Minister of Energy to answer the question. He hadn't been asked a question about child care; he'd been asked a question directly relevant to policies in his department.

Interestingly, as I went through this, Mr. Speaker, nowhere in here in the question period sections does it say that the point of question period is to not answer the questions. We just need to be very specific about the way we do ask the questions, but there is some expectation that they will be answered.

In addition to that, I'd like to raise the parameters that are set in *Beauchesne*'s 409 to 411 and specifically 417, in which it says that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the

matter raised and should not provoke debate.” Indeed, that could not describe the exchange that happened here, Mr. Speaker. What’s interesting is that this is an adversarial setup. People are expected to punch above their weight here, and I think that for the most part they do. There’s no expectation that this is a friendly exchange, but there is an expectation that we adhere to a tone of civility, at a minimum. That’s why all of these various parliamentary books refer to decorum in its different ways.

What happened in this exchange was that rather than answering the question, the minister made an observation, and it was of a personal nature, Mr. Speaker. It was clearly directed back to the Leader of the Official Opposition. It wasn’t a general statement that was made about all members of the opposition or all members of the House. It clearly identified the Leader of the Opposition as the person that he meant to be on the receiving end of his statement. He made a personal observation, and I would argue that it was not a personal observation made out of a genuine concern. Certainly, the tone that accompanied the observation was one of derision.

I would go further and say that it was meant to trivialize the concerns that the Leader of the Official Opposition had raised by intimating that in some way the leader was ill and was in need of assistance. [interjections] Once again, I am helped to prove my point by the members of the Assembly. I can always count on you folks to come through and make my point perfectly clear by doing exactly the same poor behaviour. Well done.

The point of order that has been raised, Mr. Speaker, was to call attention to the Minister of Energy, encourage him to in fact answer the question that has been put to him. I know that’s a rarity in this House, but nonetheless I continue to encourage the ministers opposite to do that and as is set out in a number of places in *M and M*. Let me go to 432 specifically. There are a number of options that are given to a minister: to decline to answer the question, to say they’ll take it under advisement, to answer the question. Nowhere in there does it say to turn this into a personal attack, trivializing the Leader of the Official Opposition and making it out as though he were somehow ill or in need of aid or required medical attention.

So I would in all good humour ask the Minister of Energy to withdraw that statement, and I would be very happy to continue on with the business of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did not neglect to answer the question, and secondly, what you see in front of you is an individual that was very genuinely concerned for a member of this House and only indicated that concern. In that I see no point of order.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the hon. Opposition House Leader in indicating that members of the House helped make her point clearer overstated the help that the members of the House gave her because her point was very far from clear.

She started her point of order by giving us a summary of some of the rules relating to question period, and she missed a few that were really quite important. “It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.” That would be 409(1). “A preamble need not exceed one carefully drawn sentence.” That would be 409(2). “A long preamble on a long question takes an unfair share of time.” That would be 409(2) as well. “Cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise.” That would have been a point of order on another question today.

Those are very important rules that the hon. member left out in her recitation of the various rules around the House before she got to what I think was her eventual point, which was that the hon. Minister of Energy referred to – in response, I might add, because this might not appear in *Hansard* – the hon. Leader of the Opposition appearing very agitated and a bit explosive in his supplementary questions so that we should be careful because he might be having a heart attack. I think the observation was a very, very clear concern that was raised.

You know, if we’re going to have decorum in the House – and I think we ought to have decorum in the House – then much of that decorum has to come from not loading preambles with things that don’t make sense or are not accurate, not being argumentative, and not, quite frankly, being explosive in the supplementary questions. Supplementary questions, by the way, in 410(8), should flow from the answers of the question. We seldom see that in the House, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to the hon. Official Opposition House Leader and the citations that she quoted from, as she calls it, *M and M*, or *Marleau and Montpetit* for the rest of us, and *Beauchesne* 409 through 411, which are frequently cited by both sides of the House.

The Minister of Energy is responsible for questions, not all questions; the President of the Treasury Board is quite capable of providing information and answers as well, and the minister of finance, and the Premier. Specifically, in the questions that were asked by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, it was inappropriate and disrespectful for the hon. Minister of Energy to respond that perhaps it was necessary for an emergency department to be called. It certainly is not in tune with what has been going on in this House in the last two to three weeks.

I would quite simply say, Mr. Speaker, that I thought it was inappropriate for the Minister of Energy to refer to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in the manner that he did in his suggestions that perhaps his health was delicate and that he needed attention from emergency medical officials or that an ambulance was to be called. With that, I would just encourage the hon. Minister of Energy to please consider withdrawing those comments, which I feel were at the time inappropriate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to participate?

Well, that has only been, like, 15 minutes. I thank all hon. members for their contribution to this very important part of the people’s business. I’d just like to quote one paragraph from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It’s actually on page 526, and it says:

In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber.

In this instance the hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition was somewhat uncharacteristic in the manner in which he addressed the question. He was louder than normal and more forceful than normal. *Hansard* does not record the tone, but the chair was here to observe the tone, and it was uncharacteristic of the demeanor of the hon. gentleman, who I believe is very, very well and healthy.

The minister's response, while not dealing with the question, would not seem to have been out of line. It doesn't seem to have been out of line in the context of the cut and the thrust of parliamentary debate. Perhaps I'm being subjective and reaching for this one, but it may very well have been the case that the minister was trying to be a bit humorous.

There is a situation in baseball, if anybody is a baseball fan. A powerful hitter is at the plate, a powerful pitcher is on the mound, and the first pitch thrown is – what's it called? – the brushback. That's what it's called. Perhaps that's what we've had today.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had conversation with the opposition House leaders and I believe have concurrence that it would be appropriate to ask for unanimous consent of the House at this time to revert to government business, notwithstanding that today is reserved for private members' business, for the sole purpose of allowing the tabling of certain documents relative to the supplementary supply estimates and to interim supply estimates and to attend to the concomitant for government motions 5, 6, 7, and 8. So I'd ask for unanimous consent of the House to do that.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Transmittal of Estimates

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

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: There are two messages, hon. members. The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

In the second the Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when a second or subsequent set of estimates is to be tabled, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that an amended fiscal plan be tabled. Accordingly, I wish to table the 2008-09 quarterly budget report for the third quarter, which serves as the amended fiscal plan. This quarterly report has already been provided to all MLAs. I have also made the report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the quarterly report tabled by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise provides the framework for additional spending authority for the Legislative Assembly and three departments of the government. I now wish to table the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates. These will provide additional spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and three departments of government. When passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$128 million in voted expense and equip-

ment/inventory purchases. These estimates will also authorize transfers of \$7.4 million of the previously approved spending authority between departments.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to table the 2009-10 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government from April 1, 2009, to June 30, 2009, inclusively. During that period it is anticipated that the spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2010. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$9 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$581 million for capital investment, \$50 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$409 million for lottery fund payments. Interim supply amounts are based on department needs to fund government programs and services until June 30, 2009. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and the beginning of the fiscal year. Some payments are seasonal.

Government Motions

Referral of Supplementary Estimates to Committee of Supply

5. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to concur with Government Motion 5, which is to refer the supplementary supply estimates to the Committee of Supply.

I think that what is also important as part of this process on supplementary supply – and I have put this idea forward a number of times with my colleague the Government House Leader, but I would also like to put it forward in the context of the supplementary supply referral request today – is that we do come up with some sort of a formula by which we can determine the number of days that we take out of this Assembly to debate supplementary supply in the future. We've had a very uneven history of this over the time that I've served in this Assembly, and we have reached the point of extreme difficulty for the Official Opposition and, I'm sure, the third party to be able to try and bring meaningful debate to supplementary supply estimates debates when we are looking at almost a billion dollars and, I think, last time 14 different departments. We were not able in the time allotted to debate each and every one of the ministries that had money added into its budget.

3:10

I would argue that is a requirement of this House that we do allocate enough time to thoroughly debate what is in front of us. I know that at the time the President of the Treasury Board and myself had quite an extended exchange on policy, and then later he took me to task as I raised this very same request for a formula for having wasted all that time on policy discussion. In fact, I think that was an important part of what we were trying to do. Who says that we're not allowed to discuss policy as part of this?

As part of my concurrence and, I'm sure, my caucus's concurrence with referring these estimates to Committee of Supply, I would ask the House to please consider developing some kind of a formula and, if I may, suggest that we look at something that would be more than one day's worth of debate if the amount were over a billion

dollars or if more than six departments were involved in receiving additional funds.

Thank you for allowing me to add that into the concurrence motion on the referral. I appreciate that opportunity, and I'm happy to support the government motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Anyone else to participate?

The hon. Government House Leader to close the debate, or should we call the question?

[Government Motion 5 carried]

6. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 61(2) this is not a debatable motion, so I'll call the question.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

7. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2009-10 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 18(1)(a) this is a debatable motion, so if any member wishes to participate, please draw yourself to my attention.

There being none, shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

8. Mr. Snelgrove moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2009-10 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund shall be two days.

The Speaker: Under the standing order identified by the hon. President of the Treasury Board this is not a debatable motion.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that we've had a couple of individuals join us in the gallery who are very

interested in the debate that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is about to launch into. Joining us in the gallery today is Laura Young, the president of the Grant MacEwan Young Liberals club. By the way, there is a Grant MacEwan in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I know there are others elsewhere as well, but we wanted to acknowledge Laura's presence here. Also, Zach Jeffries is joining her. He's a friend and supporter from Saskatoon. I'd ask if they could please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Bill 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: Well, now I'm happy to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you for this opportunity to speak to Bill 201, which I had the privilege to introduce on February 18. My private member's bill, if passed, would give police officers the authority to impound a vehicle and suspend the driver's licence of a driver who was unlawfully in possession of an illegal firearm in a vehicle. The suspension and impoundment would occur immediately and last for 24 hours. In addition to charges laid and proven in court, there will be possible further fines of up to \$25,000 or imprisonment of up to one year. For further offences an accused would face suspensions of up to five years or possibly even a lifetime ban from driving in this province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As recent events show, gun violence affects many communities. Albertans have seen repeated attempts by police forces, victim advocacy groups, and Legislatures – federally, provincially, and municipally – to stem the tide of violent crime. I hope this legislation can provide police with another tool to combat the scourge of gun violence. This act has the potential to deter individuals who choose to arm themselves before taking to the streets. These individuals must know that there will be immediate consequences if they drive around on our streets packing heat.

A string of recent tragedies in my own community and, indeed, across the province makes this bill more relevant and necessary than ever. Since 2007 Calgary has endured five very public gangland shootings. Neither innocence nor the conscious choice to not participate in gang culture is adequate protection from becoming a casualty of this siege. Casualties such as Keni Su'a, who was shot dead during a meal because he was an innocent witness to a gangland assassination on New Year's Day, are becoming more frequent. One of the most appalling incidents occurred in my own constituency of Calgary-Buffalo. On September 14 of last year Jose Neto, a Brazilian student, was blinded when he was an innocent victim caught in the crossfire. This event led Chief Hanson to explain how tired he was of politicians trotting out the same old solutions, banning or restricting weapons. "They're not getting it," said the chief.

Today I'm bringing forward a new and innovative solution, one that Alberta's police officers have rallied to support. The bill has received support in principle from the Calgary Police Association and its president John Dooks, who has been very supportive during the process of bringing the idea to fruition. It is also supported by

Calgary's Community Life Improvement Council, which has voiced approval for Bill 201 through Barry Davidson, the executive director, a former law enforcement professional currently active in Calgary's inner-city community.

The bill is an attempt to use our provincial law-making power in a forward-thinking jurisdiction. As you know, there is a limit to what we as members can accomplish. Provincially we have jurisdiction over motor vehicle licences. Similar community needs have led to these types of amendments to the Traffic Safety Act so that we can control the solicitation of sex and habitual and dangerous driving practices.

Some of the ideas for Bill 201 came from an MPP from Ontario, Mike Colle. His bill was essentially trying to do the same thing. The legislation Mr. Colle proposed also takes dead aim at gun-toting gangbangers, attempting, as I am, to suspend their licences and impound their cars. I will point out that Ontario, like us, also has a victims of crime bill, yet they saw the need to pass a similar bill in Ontario to the one I am proposing. His bill has passed third reading there.

Bill 201 also has great personal importance to me for obvious reasons: I have been a victim of a drive-by shooting. Maybe – just maybe – if legislation like this were in place, things could be different. It is too easy to carry a gun in a car in Alberta. Again, I want to help police make it harder for thugs and gangbangers to carry weapons. After unlawful firearms, the ones with serial numbers removed or those in possession of known gang associates, I want to help police deter potential criminals to stop crimes before someone gets hurt. This bill is aimed squarely at those who would try to bring harm to others.

Provincially we do not have all the powers over firearm control, but we do have powers over motor vehicle licences. This bill, if passed, would give us another tool in trying to make our roads and streets safer. It is not going to completely eliminate gun violence, but it's a useful step forward. The people on the street that I've talked to, the lawyers I've talked to, and the rank-and-file police officers in our cities seem to think that this would give them an effective tool to reduce gang and drug crime.

3:20

It's too easy for an accused to say: "That gun in my car? I didn't know it was in my car. I borrowed the car. I didn't realize my trunk had three guns in it. I just lease the car." I'd like to take away those excuses. The sad thing is that given the state of the law, this excuse enables them to get off scot-free. Why are they driving down 17th Avenue with an unlawful gun in their car? Where are they going with that unlawful gun? This is not a measure to restrict people who have the legal right to carry guns, whether they're hunters, target shooters, or police officers. Bill 201 is aimed at thugs who shouldn't be carrying guns.

I'm well aware that private members' bills brought to this Assembly are rarely successful, but consider the good that can be accomplished when politicians of all parties work together. Just recently the federal government implemented tougher sentences for gang-related murders and drive-by shootings, legislation that was supported by all three opposition parties. Our provincial government passed victims of crime legislation that will hit criminals where it hurts, in the pocketbook. I was proud to speak in favour of that legislation, and my colleagues and I in the Alberta Liberal caucus were glad to vote in favour of the bill last year.

Still, call me a skeptic, but I have a feeling that some of the hon. members in this House are planning to vote against today's legislation. I got that hint maybe at the surprise press conference that was held this morning. They'll probably object to this legislation for one

of the following three reasons: one, we can already accomplish the goals of this bill with the existing victims of crime legislation; two, we can't pass this bill because it falls outside provincial jurisdiction; three, what about the long gun? Won't it be caught up in this legislation? I'll deal with each one of these objections in turn.

First, the Victims of Crime Act. I've already indicated that this is an excellent piece of legislation, but it doesn't address the specific cases I'm trying to solve here today: gangbangers driving around with illegal guns. Let me offer a scenario. The police pull over a vehicle with three gangbangers in it. In the back seat of the car the police find an illegal gun. They lay charges under existing legislation. What happens? The gangbangers all deny that the gun belongs to them, and there's no conviction. Without a conviction the Victims of Crime Act is rendered virtually useless. It can't come into play.

I did attend with great interest the Minister of Justice's press conference today, where she stated that even without a conviction the Department of Justice could conceivably proceed civilly against individuals. Well, let me be the first to tell you something. The hon. minister, although I really do appreciate her efforts, is dreaming in technicolour when she believes that this will be enabled to happen. Just to repeat that because I'm serious here: she's dreaming in technicolour that we'll be able to get the people we're going after in this bill.

The way we need to effectively deal with this crime is by the legislation in Bill 201. If we continue to leave the bill as it is, it will not be able to go after the people who are driving around on our cities' streets. That's why we need Bill 201. It will close this loophole. This is why a similar bill passed third reading in Ontario even though they have a victims of crime legislation very similar to our own. It closes the loophole. Let's make sure that we do the same here.

What about provincial jurisdiction? Some of you will no doubt argue that this bill is in pith and substance a law directed toward criminal activity and should therefore be dealt with by the feds. But here in Alberta we've never been shy about the limits of our jurisdiction regarding the regulation on transportation and motor vehicles and how such regulation can enhance public safety. What we would be doing here in the implementation of this bill we have done before. We passed Bill 206, which allows the seizure of johns' vehicles. If we were really worried about it being outside of our jurisdiction, we would not have passed the Victims of Crime Act.

What I am saying here . . . [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm not sure whether the chair heard you stating that you moved second reading of the bill. So if you have done so, please state that.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I've moved second reading of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was making my notes for this speech last week, I recalled being at a luncheon where the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere was the guest speaker. His comment was that, quote, the safety of our streets is one of the most important responsibilities of any government. This obviously rings true. Accordingly, it's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 201. This bill is intended to give police officers new tools in fighting gang and gun crime in Alberta, and I support this intention. Specifically, this legislation would allow police to seize the vehicle of an individual if he or she is found to be in possession of illegal

firearms as well as give police officers the discretion to issue a \$25,000 fine to the offending individual and up to six months in prison.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support any reasonable measure that would prevent or hinder the activities of organized crime. However, while the intentions of this bill are undoubtedly noble, this legislation falls short of providing any additional tool that is not already in place. This past fall we saw a very important piece of legislation debated and passed unanimously in this Assembly. That, of course, as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo referred, was the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. This was amended to achieve what Bill 201 intends to accomplish. Our existing legislation takes into consideration all assets of crime, not simply illegal firearms and vehicles. This was a direct result of consultations between this government and community leaders, Alberta police chiefs, and Crown prosecutors. In fact, I spoke with police chief Rick Hanson last Friday about this very issue.

Let's talk about what our existing legislation also covers and how it covers every measure dealing with Bill 201, Mr. Speaker. First, Bill 201 proposes to allow police officers to seize the vehicle of anyone carrying an illegal firearm in it. However, under our existing legislation police officers can immediately seize a suspect's assets if they believe the suspect is involved in criminal activities. This is not limited to vehicles; it also includes houses, land, industrial facilities, cash, and unauthorized firearms and is also intended to effectively disrupt the activities of crime by removing the financial and material incentives to commit criminal acts.

Now, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo referred to a press conference earlier. I do have a copy of the press release today. It is in black and white, not in technicolour. It indicates that since this new law has actually come into place, we have seized \$4.6 million of illegal profit taken out of criminal hands. That includes seven vehicles, one of which was even used to attempt to run down a police officer. For shame. The minister's quotation I wholeheartedly endorse: "This law has real teeth. If you are involved in criminal activity, you need to be aware that we have the power to come and take away your luxury SUV, your home or your bag full of drug money. You will lose that property." Now, to ensure that an individual's property is not wrongly seized, of course, there has to be due process, and in this case a court-ordered extension is required to hold the suspected proceeds of crime for more than 72 hours.

Secondly, Bill 201 seeks to impose a \$25,000 fine for those charged with the possession of an unauthorized firearm. Currently the existing legislation allows for a fine of up to \$10,000 to be levied against an individual if he or she fails to follow the orders of a police officer or the court. This, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, is a broad application, not just to illegal firearms but to many aspects of crime. It may be assumed that by increasing the fine on a narrow basis, for example the possession of firearms, we would be increasing the financial deterrent to carry illegal firearms in this province. However, simply imposing a fine for one piece of the puzzle, illegal firearms, will have little effect on disrupting the activities of organized crime. A more comprehensive approach is required, and that is what this government has done.

Third, I must also add that not only does our existing legislation actively target organized crime; it also works to provide financial support to those affected directly by crime, the victims, who must always be our paramount concern, Mr. Speaker. At present all of the funds received from the sale of all assets and levied fines are directed to the victims of crime. Under our current legislation a property disposal hearing is held to ensure and to determine which proceeds of crime should be sold and how they would be collected.

This hearing is based on a civil standard of proof, which of course is a balance of probabilities, much less onerous than the standard in the criminal proceedings, which is beyond a reasonable doubt.

3:30

Fourth, Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 would allow a police officer to suspend the licence of an individual charged with carrying an illegal firearm. Now, looking elsewhere to the gun registry introduced by the federal Liberal government in the mid-1990s, a major flaw is that criminals aren't going to register their guns or worry about using an unregistered weapon in committing a crime. Similarly, I submit to this House that the suspension of a driver's licence is not going to deter a criminal from using a vehicle in a subsequent criminal act. Criminals will continue to operate motor vehicles, if they are in their possession, for their purposes.

Mr. Speaker, as a government we need to have, again, a comprehensive approach if we want to truly impair the activities of organized crime in this province. Such an approach, reflected by this government, has been conducted to the recommendations of the safe communities task force, chaired by a former Solicitor General, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in this Assembly. Since the final report was delivered to the then Minister of Justice, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, this government has aggressively implemented new measures to deal with gangs and other criminal activity in our communities, and our Solicitor General has been strong.

These include an increase in nearly 300 front-line police officers province-wide, 42 new prosecutors in the city of Calgary – yes, us lawyers can do good, Mr. Speaker – 50 new probation officers with a total of 110 more over three years to enhance supervision of repeat offenders, and of course the Pathways to Housing program through the Alex Community Health Clinic in Calgary, focusing on taking Calgarians with mental health problems and addictions off the street.

I also wish to add, Mr. Speaker, that last year the Member for Calgary-East introduced a motion for the government to consider innovative tools in crime reduction. Our legislation does just that. It gives our courts and police officers powerful new tools to disrupt the activities of organized crime.

Now, I must also note that our legislation is supported by many parties throughout Canada despite what label you may have. The ideological underpinning, of course, is rooted in classical liberalism, with a small "l", as discussed in the writings of John Locke, Adam Smith, or Thomas Jefferson. Classical liberalism doesn't just deal with matters of economics but also addresses the principles for dealing with crime. Goodman, from the National Center for Policy Analysis, writes about substantive rights versus police powers for the state. "In order to prevent crime, catch and punish criminals, settle disputes and carry out other duties necessary to protect rights, every government will necessarily exercise police powers." Mr. Speaker, our government understands and employs this philosophy. Indeed, this is the underpinning of our existing legislation that we introduced last year.

Looking to other governments, Mr. Speaker, the B.C. Liberal government, to our west, also seems to understand this approach to crime, having hired additional police officers and Crown prosecutors and targeted gang activity. You'd think that such an approach would come from a Conservative government, but this is from a Liberal government.

As well, to our east many consider the most conservative Premier in Saskatchewan's history to have been Ross Thatcher, who carried the provincial Liberal label. Years after he left office, as a teenager I got to know one of his successors, who espouses several of the philosophies of classical liberalism, including principles of fiscal

responsibility and crime control, not gun control, not dissimilar from our government's positions on these issues. This is far different from the gun registry policies of the past federal Liberal government that simply waste money that could be otherwise put towards crime reduction and law enforcement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo seems to get this whole philosophy about crime control, and I have to commend him for taking this initiative that affects citizens in his constituency and throughout the province. Clearly, crime is an important issue to him, and he sees this as something that crosses party labels. I have to personally thank him because I saw him take an interest in my constituency, as he mentioned, with the murder of Keni Su'a, when I saw him at the memorial shortly after the year turned for 2009.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, my submissions are not meant to be unduly caustic or self-serving but to commend the member for taking crime as a serious issue not just in downtown Calgary or in downtown Edmonton but throughout our entire province. My submission to this House is that our existing legislation already provides measures for our courts and police to bring violent criminals to justice, and as such I will not be supporting Bill 201. I look forward to the rest of the debate, but I encourage all of my colleagues to take a similar approach. I will table my references to the page.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in support of Bill 201 in second reading and to make mention at the beginning that I would think that the death of 43-year-old Keni Su'a, an innocent bystander who was shot in a gangland-related slaying at a restaurant in the constituency of the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont on New Year's Day in 2009, would prompt the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont to want to support this legislation and all legislation that has to do with making our streets safer, our citizens safer, innocent people safer, and cracking down on gangs, guns, and crime.

Classic liberalism, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont knows because he used to consort with Liberals in his home province of Saskatchewan, as has been raised in this House before, does take a holistic approach to serious matters, social and otherwise, and I don't think you'd find anybody – well, I don't know that I can speak for everybody in this House. But I don't think you would find many people in this House who would disagree that we have a serious enough problem with guns, gangs, and crime in this province in our two big cities, Calgary and Edmonton, on at least one First Nations reserve, Hobbema, that we need to tackle it in any way, I think, that we can see fit.

It's not only this province. My colleague from Calgary-Egmont made reference to the efforts of a number of other provinces in his rather quickly delivered 20-minute speech in the space of 10 minutes, but it goes to the issue that gang violence, fuelled by the drug trade and enabled by the ease with which gangbangers can transport their weapons of death and destruction from point A to point B, is an issue in many cities across this country, in many locations across this country. It is a big enough issue, in fact, that the federal Conservative government brought in antigang legislation just last week.

It is an issue that all of us should be concerned about, whether we are Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats, members of any other political party of any other stripe or jurisdiction or philosophy or ideology in any part of this country because it is a problem that

affects Canadians in many locations across this nation. It affects people in Toronto, and so it is that the MPP from the Ontario riding of Eglinton-Lawrence, Mike Colle, brought in a bill very similar to Bill 201 in the Ontario Legislature and wrote a letter supportive of the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo's Bill 201. It is a problem in Vancouver. It's perhaps an even bigger problem in Vancouver than it is in Calgary and Edmonton.

It is a problem that we need to do something about. It is a problem that our constituents, whether they live in Calgary-Egmont, Calgary-Currie, Calgary-Montrose, Calgary-Cross, whatever constituency, expect and demand that we do something about. They have every right, Mr. Speaker, to make that demand and to have that expectation. They expect and demand that they live in a safe and civil society in this country, in this province, and they expect and demand of their elected representatives at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels that we take steps to make that happen.

This bill in and of itself is perhaps not – I don't know – the omnibus legislation that the Member for Calgary-Egmont or perhaps other members in this House would like to see, but this bill, I believe, fits very nicely with other legislation, whether it be Bill 50 passed last year in this House, the federal legislation that is now up for debate in the House of Commons, other legislation probably yet to come, in making it more difficult, less desirable for gangbangers to try and transport their illegal, unlawfully possessed firearms in a car of which they have possession at the moment – it may not be their lawfully possessed car either – from wherever they were coming from to wherever they're going to to commit their mischief and their mayhem and very possibly cost innocent lives or at least quasi-innocent lives in the process.

3:40

The Member for Calgary-Egmont knows that Keni Su'a was an innocent bystander. I suspect he also knows that 22-year-old Aaron Bendle was not a gang member. He was merely someone who knew 22-year-old Sanjeev Mann, who was the third victim – or perhaps I should say the first victim – of that New Year's Day shooting in Calgary-Egmont.

Calgary police say, quite rightly, that you no longer need to be a gang member to get killed if you happen to be caught in the crossfire of the ongoing gang war that has been raging in my city since 2002 at least, in which 20 homicides have occurred, eight in 2008 and another three on New Year's Day of this year. All you have to be is somebody close to a gang member. That could be close in the friendship or associative sense, or it could be close, as in the case of Keni Su'a, in the sense of physical closeness, having been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Calgary, the people of Edmonton, the people of Hobbema, the people of Alberta, the people of Canada deserve protection from that kind of wanton violence, and this Bill 201 will add to the tool kit of police officers in this province and to the criminal justice system to deal with these people who do not respect our laws.

You know, I feel like I'm picking on my hon. colleague from Calgary-Egmont today. It's true what he said, that criminals aren't going to register their guns. I get that. They're not going to comply with the gun registry. But he seems to be implying that if we pass Bill 201, we're going to cause some kind of huge and very costly problem in the province in Alberta where gangbangers won't willingly give up their Acuras or their souped-up Mazdas or whatever they happen to be driving. That's not the issue. We take the vehicle, we take the licence if we find the gun in there.

If the police officer has reasonable and probable grounds for believing an offence has been committed, an offence of having this

unlawfully possessed firearm in the car, the officer can require the surrender of the driver's licence and can detain the vehicle on the spot for 24 hours. The licence is suspended for 24 hours. The vehicle is impounded for the same length of time. There is an investigation or there can be an investigation at that point as to whether the vehicle actually belongs to the person it was seized from or whether, in fact, the vehicle had perhaps been stolen from its rightful owner, in which case it can be returned right then to its rightful owner. Upon conviction the vehicle can be taken away permanently. The licence can be suspended for one year, I believe it is, on the first conviction, five years on the first subsequent conviction, and indefinitely on the second subsequent conviction.

Mr. Speaker, by merely taking away a person's driver's licence, you do not guarantee that that person will not drive again. We know this very well, tragically well, in the case of multiple repeat impaired driving offenders, yet we do not stand in this House and talk about the need to stop taking away the licences of drunk drivers just because they won't comply. We need to put in our tool kit whatever tools we can that will help us to maintain a safe and civil society for the protection of all law-abiding Albertans. I don't know whether partisan politics is being played here or not, but to say that this bill is somehow inadequate or not up to the task is, I think, either misinformed or disingenuous.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to this bill, and I assume that there will be more debate. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Calgary-Egmont, and I'm genuinely sorting this out as we go along.

I think this is a bill worth serious support, and from what I've heard so far, I plan to support this bill. To me this bill is common sense, and I have to wonder why it's running into opposition. That's why I listened to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Egmont, and I hope I'll hear other comments on the issue. It strikes me as common sense, and I have to ask us as MLAs why we wouldn't support this bill. I don't understand why this bill doesn't sail through the Legislature, frankly, with unanimous support, so it's a bit of a surprise to me that there is so much push-back on this particular bill.

One of the things I've wondered is if it's because it has links to the gun registry issue, and maybe there's a reluctance to support this particular bill because it legitimizes the gun registry, and we know how strong resistance to the gun registry is. [interjections] Okay. I'm getting some indications from members that, in fact, that is the case, that the opposition to the gun registry is why they aren't supporting this bill. Gee, I think that's regrettable. I think putting ideology ahead of public safety is impractical. [interjections] I'm getting the Minister of Municipal Affairs challenging me on this and the Member for Foothills-Rocky View and others.

Frankly, I think if we put this to a vote of the citizens of Alberta, this would sail through because the citizens of Alberta consistently, actually, support the gun registry, and the citizens of Alberta consistently express concern. [interjections] They do. If the members wish, I will table all kinds of polling. All right. We've gotten a real debate going here. I think it's shameful or sad that we're in a Legislature that's putting ideology ahead of public safety.

There are plenty of circumstances, as the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* listed, where we already allow police officers to seize vehicles, the cases of johns soliciting prostitutes. We certainly allow it if there's somebody impaired or suspected of being impaired, so I don't know why we wouldn't do it in these circumstances.

Now, the question and the points made by the Member for Calgary-Egmont around Bill 50 are, I think, worth bringing in here. What Bill 201 proposes isn't just granting the right to seize a vehicle but also suspending a driver's licence. I think we need to put ourselves in the position of a police officer. You know, you're on patrol on Saturday night in Fort McMurray or Calgary or Edmonton or Medicine Hat or anywhere else in Alberta, and there's a vehicle that you see, a suspicious vehicle. Maybe there's a traffic violation by this vehicle. Maybe it doesn't stop at a red light or is speeding or racing or something. You pull the vehicle over as a police officer, and you run the driver's licence through your computer. It comes up that the owners of the vehicle are suspected gang members, so you approach the vehicle. You go through the process. You get the driver's licence and so on. You search the vehicle, and you find guns. You ask the driver, "Whose gun is this?" They say: "Oh, I don't know. I didn't know there was a gun here." You ask everybody else in the car, and they all say: "Gee, what gun? What a surprise. We didn't know there was a gun here. Gee, it doesn't belong to any of us." So you as a police officer are caught. You know, the laws restrict your capacity to act.

3:50

Now, I would like police officers to have the capacity to do in that situation exactly what they would be able to do if they had pulled over a john soliciting for sex or if they had pulled over an impaired driver: seize the vehicle. And I would like them to also have the capacity to immediately seize the driver's licence of the person behind the wheel. I think that sends an important message, and I think it actually would discourage this kind of criminal behaviour. It might push some of this business of gang activity to other jurisdictions because suddenly as a gang member – maybe you're a dial-a-dope operator or something – you run the risk of losing your car and losing your driver's licence. Without a driver's licence there's a whole series of other problems.

Let's say you're a member of a big gang, Hells Angels or something, and you're operating, you know, sort of just around the fringes of the law. Mostly you're doing legal things, but maybe you're laundering money, or you're doing sort of the business side of the deal. Well, losing your driver's licence is just, as the Member for Calgary-Currie said, one more tool in the hands of the justice system to help deal with this problem. I think it discourages crime. I think it would help us put a damper on this outburst of crime that we're experiencing in this province.

I think it's worth mentioning, Mr. Speaker, a couple of references here. One is a position paper done by the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians. It speaks directly to the benefits of the gun registry, and this is just from January 2009. I quote from this paper, which I can table if we wish. It says: "Since the implementation of Canada's gun registry in 1995, there has been a significant reduction in firearm-related suicides and intimate partner homicides." Then they go on. They actually demonstrate this with various charts, clearly showing over the last decade a decline in gun crimes.

I would also ask all members of this Assembly to consider the letter written just about a week ago, dated February 26, 2009, from the president of the Calgary Police Association, specific to Bill 201. He goes through his reasons for supporting Bill 201. He begins, "On behalf of the police officers in the Calgary Police Association," so he's speaking on behalf of police officers, and I know there are members of this Assembly who once were police officers. He concludes by saying, "As a citizen of Alberta I am asking the members of our Legislature to unanimously support Bill 201." I don't know why we wouldn't. I don't know why we wouldn't support giving the police another tool to constrain criminal activity, criminal activity that's most focused among gangs.

There's a rise of gang activity in this province, and it cuts right across society. It's not limited to any particular ethnic group, and it's not limited to any particular community. There are undoubtedly gang members operating out of the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. In fact, there's a particular stretch of my constituency which is generally highly educated, white collar, but there's a particular stretch where organized crime is flourishing. I want to give those police officers, the officers who I've gone on foot patrol with, every chance I can to make this community safer.

So I just don't understand. Despite the eloquence of the Member for Calgary-Egmont, I don't understand what the resistance is here except that I think what's telling is the jeering and heckling I got when I mentioned the gun registry. I think what we're seeing here, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, is the triumph of an ideology and politics over public safety and common sense. I think that's regrettable, and I think everybody here should search their souls a little bit.

You know, I go back to my days as a university undergraduate. A good friend of mine lost her brother at an intersection because there was a little bit of a set-to, people on both sides got out, and he ended up being killed. There was nothing the police could do about it. In the end nobody was convicted.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member as well as the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont did for his initiative in bringing forth the bill. I know that there are very laudable and worthy objectives in Bill 201, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but I'm afraid that I must oppose the legislation. I hope that I can convince even the Member for Edmonton-Riverview that there are some very valid reasons for opposing this legislation.

I think that the hon. member is quite right in seeking to have more tools to attack serious crime in our communities involving the use of firearms. According to the news reports, the hon. member is also particularly aiming his legislation at the activities of criminal gangs, and I would support endeavours in that direction.

However, the measures proposed in Bill 201 include permitting police officers to suspend driver's licences and allowing the courts to impose a fine of at least \$2,500 and up to \$25,000 upon a conviction under this proposed section of the highway traffic act. In addition, the bill proposes to allow a police officer to seize the vehicle of anyone carrying illegal firearms in that vehicle. Again, according to news reports purporting to quote the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo believes that the bill is going to quell gang violence and that it will save lives by stopping gangsters before they hunt down their rivals and gun them down in the streets and that it will stop a criminal before they kill somebody, not after the fact. So the measures are aimed, as I understand them, at preventing crime, particularly gang violence.

Now, I know the hon. member is someone who believes in the rule of law and order, as I do, both of us being members of Her Majesty's bar and officers of the court and who have taken an oath to uphold the laws of Her Majesty the Queen in Canada. I think that all of our constituents would agree that we should do whatever we have within our power to make our streets safer, to rid them of the low-life vermin who use violence and firearms to terrorize their fellow citizens, to enrich themselves, the parasitic criminals who seek to prey upon and profit from crimes perpetrated on their fellow citizens. All of us agree with those objectives, but I believe that this bill is an ill-conceived instrument to accomplish those ends.

Mr. Speaker, my opposition to the bill rests on two broad bases. First, I oppose this measure because it casts the net too broadly in the proposed offence under section 5, where it defines an unlawfully possessed firearm as "any firearm whose possession is not authorized under the Firearms Act (Canada)." Now, the danger is that this broadly worded definition is going to result in the seizure of vehicles and levying of fines against not only the purported targets of the hon. member's bill, the violent gang members and the vermin and the parasitic criminals, but also honest, hard-working, and law-abiding citizens who are long gun owners as well.

To illustrate the point, I'm going to give a couple of examples. A couple of weeks ago I got a letter from the RCMP which notified me that my firearms licence had to be renewed. Being a law-abiding citizen, I sent in my renewal form, and I duly got back my new five-year firearm certificate. Even though I may not agree with the outrageously expensive long gun registry, I did so because that is the law.

4:00

Now, what would have happened had I as a law-abiding citizen neglected or forgotten to renew my licence and next fall I was pursuing my quarry of *Anas platyrhynchos*, which is a mallard duck, for those who are not biologists, and I was stopped for a check by a peace officer? Then I suppose that under the proposed bill I would or could lose my licence, I could lose my vehicle, and I would be subject to a minimum fine of \$2,500 and up to \$25,000. Would that be just? Well, I think not.

To use another example, my late mother lived on a small farm until she died in her 80s. She always had firearms, like a .22, for dealing with gophers, coyotes, raccoons, and other pests. What if she neglected to register that weapon and carried it in her pickup and was pulled over for speeding, as she was on a few occasions? She could have been subjected to the loss of the vehicle, the loss of her licence, and a large fine. She wasn't a gang member. She wasn't about to deal drugs. She wasn't about to rob a bank or to threaten or to murder someone, yet she would be caught by the provisions of this bill because she was technically carrying an unlawfully possessed firearm.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully submit that there are thousands and thousands of Albertans, perhaps even a majority of gun owners, who have neglected to register one or more of their firearms and perhaps don't even have a firearms licence but have perfectly legitimate uses for them, including hunting or controlling rodents and vermin. Why should we include them in the broad ambit of a bill which is ostensibly aimed at gang violence?

As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview stated, you know, how could we object to seizing these vehicles when they have unlawfully possessed firearms and are driving down the street? Well, what if I were out with a couple of my hunting buddies in the fall and I was unaware of the fact that they, riding with me in my vehicle, had an unlawful weapon? I suppose I would have to check with the firearms registry to make sure every gun they brought along on the hunting trip was registered, number one. Number two, I'd have to make sure that their firearm certificate had not expired. The consequence of not doing that and finding out that somebody in my vehicle had an unlawfully possessed firearm would be that I could lose my vehicle, I could lose my licence, and I could pay a very large fine.

Now, if the hon. member had worded this bill in such a way that he was targeting restricted or prohibited weapons under the Criminal Code of Canada, then I might be disposed to support the legislation. Under the Criminal Code of Canada restricted weapons include weapons like handguns, and prohibited weapons include weapons

like sawed-off shotguns, fully automatic weapons, snub-nosed handguns, machine guns, grenades, and so on. Criminals seldom use long guns, like hunting rifles or shotguns, in the commission of their crimes. Typically they use handguns, which are easily concealed and easily smuggled into the country. Mr. Speaker, to simply include in the broad net of the bill someone with a shotgun or a .22 rifle who may happen to not be in compliance with the federal long gun registry would create a gross injustice upon an already gross injustice, so I cannot as a matter of principle support it.

The second point that I want to make is one to reiterate what the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont has already stated, and that is that the government already has legislation which enables a seizure of vehicles or other property which are instruments of criminal enterprise. The government amended the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act in 2008, which empowers police officers to immediately seize vehicles and all property that has been or may be used to commit a crime and, after judicial process to have that property sold, deprive criminals of the means to further their criminal enterprises. This is much more broadly worded legislation, that gives wide powers but, at the same time, doesn't ensnare the honest, ordinary gun owner. This act has received broad support from the citizens of Alberta. It's doing its job. As has been mentioned, there's been a considerable amount of seizures already that have resulted from that. The legislation, in short, Mr. Speaker, goes above and beyond what is proposed in this Bill 201.

Mr. Speaker, again I would like to commend the hon. member for his willingness to support, as he has in the past, strong measures to fight gangs and criminal activity. However, it is for these two reasons – because this bill is such a blunt instrument and could ensnare law-abiding long gun owners and, secondly, because the measures proposed in it have already been superceded by the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act – that I cannot support Bill 201, and I urge hon. members to defeat it at second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: According to my speakers list here the next hon. member is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak today to Bill 201. I have just a couple of points to make. Generally speaking, I think it's been said before that this is a bill that requires some consideration. It has different implications, and it is something that our caucus is still thinking about and reviewing, but it's certainly worthy to have it carried forward for additional conversation and additional analysis and examination by this Assembly. For that reason I will definitely be supporting this bill passing through second reading.

Basically, let me start with my concerns about the bill because I sort of struggle with a couple of concerns, although at this point I'm still leaning towards supporting it. I suppose the primary concern comes a little bit from my background as a lawyer who's, you know, kind of hung up on that whole due process issue, sometimes to the annoyance of those people around me when I start to go on about it for too long. Nonetheless, it is one of those things. There is no question that what this bill will do is it will take property from someone who has not yet been convicted of a crime. Of course, it's really quite fundamental that we distinguish between someone who is charged and someone who is convicted of the crime. So that, of course, is a concern.

The other thing that is a concern is that whenever we talk about crime prevention, we always talk about adding more police officers, giving police officers more tools, and while 9 times out of 10 I will

actually support those initiatives from a very sort of pragmatic community-based approach, I'm also very conscious of the fact that we don't do anywhere near enough work on prevention. We don't do near enough as a community, as a society, and certainly as a province on the issue of prevention. So I get a little bit frustrated when I hear all this hardline stuff, "Oh, we've got to go after the gangbangers, blah, blah, blah," when you know, at the same time, that there are root causes to gang behaviour that go back a good decade before someone is actually that gang member in a car with an illegal gun, a long gun or anything else. Those root causes are things that we don't do a very good job at, so I really want to put it on the record that that is something that always needs to be addressed first.

Just this morning, for instance, there was a discussion on the radio about the prevalence of people suffering from FAS involved in the drug trade. Think about what we could do with respect to our health care system and with our child protection system and with our family enhancement supports that we are not doing in any kind of a proactive preventative way to reduce crime. People will think that I'm reaching here, but really the research will say that I'm not, that in fact a comprehensive public daycare system results in reduced crime activity. No, I'm not reaching because that's what the research says.

Having said that, though, let's go back to this, which, of course, is an immediate tool that we're talking about. I have a bit of a concern about the idea of taking an item from somebody before they are convicted. At the same time, I think that we do need to balance issues, you know, and there's no question that civil liberties always have to be balanced against public safety and sometimes the collective good. It is a constant balance that we need to do as we legislate and discuss issues, and neither is absolute. I think that the member who is proposing this bill has done a very good job of outlining the very significant public safety issues which are related to the prevalence of people driving around in cars with illegal guns. If you put a car and an illegal gun together, it's not likely to end well for folks, notwithstanding all those law-abiding long gun toters who apparently are adhering to the law even though, actually, they're not. The fact of the matter is that it's a very dangerous combination.

4:10

We have in this Legislature, as has already been noted, made this kind of assessment before and engaged in this balance before in that we can take away people's vehicles, if we suspect them of impaired driving, before they've been convicted of the same. Why? Because there's a public safety issue. We can take away or impound people's vehicles who are engaged in prostitution. Again, that's before there's a conviction. We can do these things because we've decided from the perspective of public safety and prevention that the balance falls on that side of things.

So it surprises me to see all these Conservatives saying that it's totally reasonable to take a car away from somebody who, you know, may be a wonderfully joyful, lovely person who's just coming home from a baby shower and had one too many glasses of wine. You know what? They're still driving impaired maybe, so you take the car away. It doesn't matter how nice they are or what their intention was or if they knew that they were impaired or not. It happened, or it might have happened, and it's a public safety issue.

Frankly, the same thing is in play if someone is driving around with an illegal gun. Researcher after researcher and criminologist after criminologist will tell you that guns increase crime, that guns increase the acuity of crime and the likelihood of people being injured or killed, particularly in urban situations. That's why we don't have anywhere near the fatality rate due to guns in Canada,

where we have control over guns, that they do in the States, where they don't. That's just the way it is, folks. It may annoy you, and you may think: geez, we're all great people. You know what? The gun laws that we have do allow for people to engage in the lawful use of guns, and that's the law that is the law of the land. Whether you agree with it or don't agree with it, we all as members of the Legislature need to respect the law that is the law of the land, even if we advocated against it before it came into place.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is exactly correct: the real issue here is that we're talking about guns versus prostitution or impairment. There's a sensitivity in this Legislature about the issue of guns, but I think that there's also a sensitivity in the communities that are being racked by gun violence and the fatalities and injuries that are occurring there as well.

As a result, at least making serious note of the concerns I have around the distinction between a charge and a conviction, I think this is something that really does need to be better discussed and warrants more consideration and potentially being open for amendment through a meaningful, good-faith attempt on the part of all members of this Assembly to get the best piece of legislation through this body that balances the needs and concerns that have been identified by all the speakers to this point. So I certainly hope that the bill will proceed from this current stage.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is a very interesting discussion. I have a few prepared remarks. I gave some thought to this over the weekend and have been very aware of the work that my hon. friend from across the way has done on this legislation. I want to thank him for bringing this bill forward.

I guess that as of tomorrow I will have been elected to this Legislature for a year, as will many of us. I think that for all of us what we have learned in this year and what we take very seriously is listening to the concerns of our constituents and the stakeholders on the issues that we care about. I think that probably there are some issues that we talk about in this Legislature as new members that we didn't think we would talk an awful lot about before we got elected, but as we learned more about the issues and as we thought more about the implications of certain pieces of legislation for our communities and the people that we represent, I think that a lot of people have become more passionate about those issues. For me that has certainly been the case.

We have learned a lot this past year in the Safe Communities Secretariat about what the community thinks about what it means to be safe, and what I've learned more than anything is that it's a very emotional issue for people. People want to see leadership from government on this. They want to know that the people in this Legislature live in the communities that they live in. They want to know that the people who are here understand the impact of what is going on in communities with respect to crime.

What I find troubling – and I've had a number of conversations and listened to a number of speeches, not just today but in the past year and from many people who've been elected to public office – is the tendency to speak in platitudes about these issues. I think there are a number of points that have been made today by members who have spoken in support of this legislation and members who have advised that they will not be supporting this legislation. Ironically, they're the same points: communities don't feel safe, we need to do something about it, seizing cars is a good idea, we want to make sure that there aren't illegal weapons, and it's really important to try to stop gang members from committing crimes.

What we know is that Bill 50 has accomplished that. Our core values around this are important. We're on the right track. Bill 50, which was unanimously supported in this House – and I certainly thank the opposition for supporting it – has allowed us to achieve what we're talking about wanting to do today. We're already doing it. The Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act was introduced with the specific intention of targeting profits and instruments of crime. It dismantles and disrupts the business; it allows us to seize, hold, and sell property connected to criminal activity. As of this afternoon we have seizure orders for seven vehicles, including a car that was used in an attempt to run down a police officer.

Now, there may be people that quibble as to what the ultimate impact of this legislation will be, but, Mr. Speaker, we have seized over 4 and a half million dollars' worth of saleable property in less than two months. Lawyers with our civil forfeiture office are currently working on files to seize a number of other vehicles, including a Hummer, a BMW, a Lexus. At least one of these vehicles belongs to a person who is known to police as a drug dealer. More than one of these vehicles was carrying a loaded firearm. This is already the essence of the law that is in place in this province.

I want to say, because I've been involved now in a number of discussions in this House where people throw out the police and say that the police support this and that the police support that, that as a government the Solicitor General and I as the Minister of Justice have worked very closely with police agencies across this province. What they have told us is that this is the legislation, Bill 50, that they needed to do their job. We passed this in this House, and they're able to do their job. The message is that if you are involved in criminal activity, you run a real risk of losing your property and anything else that you might use, instruments of crime, in carrying out your criminal activity, and I have to say again that our police partners asked for this law. They deserve every possible opportunity to seize weapons that are the arsenal that gangs currently have.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that as we move forward and as my friend from Calgary-Egmont has said, it is very important as we approach gang issues and criminal activity that we do not respond in an emotional way to it, that we do not look for the emotional buttons that will get people in the community excited in a way that doesn't allow us to take a step back and think strategically about how we are approaching this issue. I have to say that that is a lesson that I have learned this year. I think that everyone who takes on new responsibilities wants to see change happen immediately. We want to get everything right at once. But what I will say is that with respect to Bill 50 we did act quickly, it is strategic, it is comprehensive, and I believe that we got it right.

4:20

The face of crime in Alberta is often drug related, and drug crime breeds violence. The sale of illegal drugs is the bread and butter of gangs. You can't stop a dial-a-doper from peddling drugs by suspending his driver's licence. You can't convince me of that. Our laws take away his car. Our laws take away their guns. Our laws take away their houses, that they're using to make and grow these drugs in.

There's no cheap and easy fix when it comes to crime, but government is committed to putting a meaningful set of changes into place. Our legislation, Bill 50, which is now the law of this province, is a very important part of that commitment. It expands and extends the scope of powers already available to police and to prosecutors under the Criminal Code. Police have embraced this approach. They support the streamlined civil procedure that allows these powers to be used faster and more effectively. Vehicles

transporting weapons are already prime candidates for restraint and forfeiture. This is the reality of what we now have in place. We can target organized crime.

Eliminating rivals is part of how gangs do business. Firing guns in public places is part of how they do business, and innocent people are getting caught in the crossfire. We know that, and as a Legislature and as a government we've responded to that. We've seen success already. We're going to stay the course. This law exists to ensure that people who are participants in criminal activity run a risk of having valuable property taken away from them.

Mr. Speaker, under this act, the crime victims compensation and restitution act, the property and the profits gained from that criminal activity will be used to repair the harm that is caused to victims of crime in this province.

In light of the reasons that I've stated, I cannot support this bill today. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I am pleased to have the opportunity to support my colleague's Bill 201, the Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill is designed to be proactive; it's designed to be preventative. It's designed to take guns away from the offenders before the offence actually occurs, and that is its strength. It could work very much in concert with as opposed to Bill 50. A considerable amount of what Bill 50 is about is compensation for victims of crime. What Bill 201 attempts to establish are preventative measures that would not require victims of crime to be compensated because of its early detection and removal of a prohibited weapon. While it's extremely important to provide compensation for victims, being proactive and preventative is considerably more important, and that's what Bill 201 attempts to do.

Now, for those members who don't believe that Bill 201 in its present format does the job, provides police with another tool which they have indicated that they want to see, and if they felt so strongly supportive of Bill 50 alone, why wouldn't they, then, have provided unconditional support for this amendment to the Traffic Safety Act which would improve the police officers' opportunities for removing illegal weapons?

It concerns me when we ignore the fact that we have procedures in this House. We have first reading, we have second reading, we have Committee of the Whole, and we eventually with support have the approval of the Lieutenant Governor, and the bill is proclaimed. The sense I get today and ever since this bill was introduced is that government members aren't willing to go through the entire procedure. They aren't willing to make the amendments that would potentially sharpen this bill. We've heard examples of concerns about long guns being seized. Well, if that's the concern that you have, introduce an amendment and restrict it to handguns if you feel that's going to protect law-abiding long gun owners, but don't just simply throw out the procedure because it has been brought forward by a member of the opposition. Be sufficiently open minded to work with the bill and try and improve its outcome.

The very day that we were asked in the House, "Should this bill proceed to second reading?" we had two individuals, so-called young Tory guns, say no. It's important to note on the record that those two young guns were the member who spoke first, the Member for Calgary-Egmont, and the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who thought it was quite amusing to say no to a bill that was designed to protect individuals and remove illegal weapons. [interjections] There was a smirk, followed by a no, followed by knowing smiles. That was sufficient.

Then today we have further undermining action taken by the Minister of Justice, the Member for Calgary-Elbow, to hold a press conference basically explaining what a wonderful bill Bill 50 is and how it's a stand-alone bill and how it couldn't possibly be improved upon although Bill 201, the Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009, doesn't suggest that Bill 50 is not a good bill. That has been recognized by the hon. Justice minister. We all voted for it. We thought it was a good bill. It was a good start, but no one ever suggested that that was the end and that there would be no further discussion. It concerns me, as I say, when partisan politics get in the way of good legislation.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferlo is a hard-working individual who did not allow a shot, a bullet, to end his life. He did not allow it to provide shortcomings for his life. He overcame that circumstance that so many of us could not imagine. Not only did he overcome that initial injury. He went on through university, and he got his degree in law through much hard work. Here he is in our Assembly as the elected Member for Calgary-Bufferlo, trying to prevent what happened to him from happening to other members, and it seems that for very partisan reasons – the idea didn't come from the government side – this bill is being questioned and its legitimacy is being questioned, and therefore the mover of the bill's legitimacy to bring forward protective legislation supported not only by police officers but by community associations is being held up for question but not in a complete circumstance, without the opportunity to provide amendments, not the opportunity in the Committee of the Whole to make adjustments, to carry on the debate to a higher level, to achieve what Bill 50 and what now Bill 201 have as intent, and that is to make our communities safer.

With regard to legal versus illegal weapons, registered versus unregistered, trying to muddy the waters and suggest, as the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill mentioned, that his sort of packing grandma would potentially be arrested in a rural situation and lose not only her .22, if that's what she was using on the varmints, or her .303 or her shotgun, whatever her rifle/long gun preference was, suggests that police have no discretion. It suggests that there's no such thing in Alberta as judicial prudence. This whole business of the reaction to the long gun registry, which police forces across this province have found to be an extremely important tool – at least for those guns that were registered, they were traceable and they were trackable. If a person were accidentally to forget to have that licence to own that weapon renewed, if they've had a responsible hunting career to this date, the chances of losing their vehicle and getting an increased fine are ludicrous. No judge, no police officer is going to pursue a legal gun-owning individual whose licence has expired to have all these terrible losses taken against them.

4:30

I don't know how many people have ever faced an individual with a loaded weapon, but I have. I doubt very much that that weapon was legal. It had a short stock. It was of a military nature. It had a clip on the outside of the barrel. It was a pump-action, short-barreled shotgun. I came across it and the individual who was carrying it in his backpack in Cataract Creek. Obviously, my only arm was my golf pencil for registering individuals, but because of the safety of the individuals who were entrusted to my care . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join debate on Bill 201, Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully

Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009, which is sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The purpose of this bill is to help address weapons-related crime in our communities by seizing the vehicles of persons transporting illegal firearms. In addition to seizing vehicles, Bill 201 proposes to suspend the offender's driver's licence as well as issue a fine of up to \$25,000 or imprisonment for up to six months. Essentially, this bill is attempting to target crime by hitting criminals where it hurts, their wallets.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly applaud the intentions and goals of this bill. After all, ensuring the safety of all Albertans is of paramount concern for this government. However, I feel as though the goals of this bill are already being addressed by a more comprehensive piece of legislation, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. This act was amended and passed by this House last session and clearly allows for the seizure of property used to carry out criminal activity. This can include assets such as cash, guns, vehicles, and even property. These assets can then be sold, and the proceeds from these sales can be used to support the victims of crime. In this way the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act goes beyond the measures proposed in Bill 201 by providing compensation for victims.

Mr. Speaker, with this in mind, it's important that we have a firm understanding of the property disposal hearing procedures. This is the process that determines the fate of property seized during criminal arrest under the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. Simply because an asset is seized by a court or a police officer does not necessarily mean it ultimately becomes the property of the Crown. A property disposal hearing determines whether or not a property victim or respondent is entitled to any of the seized property, any proceeds from restraint of property, or any compensation for having been deprived of property.

When property is seized, police officers are required to obtain a restraint order. A restraint order is a court order that grants police the authority to seize and hold property that may have been used during an illegal act. This restraint order must list a date, time, location for a property disposal hearing. This date can be set for no later than 45 days after the seizure. Mr. Speaker, it helps guarantee that property seizure disputes will be addressed by the courts within a reasonable period of time. This order must include a section pertaining to the identity of respondents. A respondent is defined by the act as "any person who appears to be a property victim or who may have an interest in the property that is . . . before the Court." If a respondent fails to attend the property disposal hearing, all property seized is deemed to become the property of the court.

The Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of both the court and the respondent once a date for the hearing has been arranged. It's the responsibility of the court to establish that the seized property is an instrument of illegal activity. This guarantees that only property directly involved with criminal activity is seized at the time of arrest. Furthermore, it becomes the responsibility of the respondent to prove to the court that they were not involved in carrying out the alleged illegal act with the property. As well, they must establish that they could not reasonably be expected to know that the property was used in carrying out an illegal act. These responsibilities help to ensure there is a fair and balanced approach to dealing with seized property.

Mr. Speaker, in cases where the court determines that the seized property was not used in carrying out an illegal act, the court must immediately release the seized property. In addition, the court has the discretion to order that compensation be made to any respondent for any losses that may have resulted from that seizure. It helps to ensure that individuals who have had property seized are not unduly

punished or have property seized that's not connected to criminal activity. In this matter it only aims to target the tools of criminals.

In cases where the property disposal hearing determines that the seized property was, in fact, a tool of criminal activity, there are several potential outcomes. In some scenarios the court may return the seized property to the respondent. This most likely would occur in cases where the respondent was not directly linked to the criminal activity. The property could be critical to the well-being of family members linked to the respondent. In other cases the court could determine that the seized property be sold and that the proceeds be distributed amongst the respondents. This could occur in cases where several individuals have made claims on the seized goods.

The final outcome of the property disposal hearing is the court ordering the sale of the seized property and declaring that all of the proceeds go to the government. Mr. Speaker, in these cases the funds obtained through the sale of seized property would be used to support the victims of crime. I can see no better use for the tools of crime than to have them sold off for the benefit of those who have suffered directly from criminal behaviour.

I applaud the hon. member for the spirit and motivation guiding this bill. However, I feel as though the spirit is best addressed through current legislation, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. Moreover, unlike Bill 201, this piece of legislation provides for direct compensation for victims of crime. Therefore, I will not be voting in support of 201, not because of the ideals it tries to project but because these ideals have already been acted upon by this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to have some words on the record pertaining to Bill 201, Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009. I have some questions as I've listened to the very good debate that has been going on in the House up until this point. What's happened to Alberta? Why are our streets not safe? When I moved here 40 years ago, I thought I had sort of probably moved into a bit of heaven, and now actually, quite frankly, probably for some of the first times in my life I am actually afraid to go out into particular areas and, particularly, alone at night. Probably I could handle a one-to-one; however, a gang I certainly wouldn't be able to.

4:40

I think that Alberta probably is a bit of a reflection of what's going on in society today. Certainly, violence has increased. There is no question about that. It isn't just in Alberta; certainly, it is throughout the world. However, I question some of the mentalities that we're creating here in Alberta, and then put a gun on top of that, and we have some very disastrous results that go along with that. I'm thinking of advertisements that I see in Lethbridge. It's called, I think, Rumble in the Cage or any other name that that might be. In it we throw a pugilist and many who think they are to actually beat the whichever word you'd like to put in there out of each other. This is considered sport and certainly is a viable commercial enterprise because there is money in it. Blood, gore, and guts: it's great. I would suggest that everybody go to watch one of these Rumble in the Cage sorts of entertainment, but please don't watch the two men in the cage pummel each other. Look at the faces of the people in the crowds that are watching this type of entertainment. I think it would scare you. With some of those faces, put a gun on top of it, and I think you'd be doubly scared.

The purpose of the bill, of course, as brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, who, as I think we all know, certainly has a personal interest in this, is to promote public safety and suppress conditions that lead to criminal activities by adding to the Traffic Safety Act to make it an offence to “drive on a highway a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm.” I really do believe that Bill 50 is probably one of the progressive bills that has been well received in this House, certainly passed easily, and so it should have been. I really believe that this is an adjunct. I think it’s just that little extra that adds to Bill 50. It will help us contain the gang violence that we see.

As has already been recognized in the House, certainly the federal government has recognized that gang activity is out of control not only in Alberta but in our country, our country that sort of prides itself on being a peaceful nation, which is why we made our military have a peaceful arm that, of course, we’re recognized throughout the world for. Even the feds have recognized how out of control these gangs are.

The bill is based on Ontario MPP Mike Colle’s Bill 56. Actually, after second reading it was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. We don’t particularly have one named specifically like that. But as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has mentioned, I really believe that this bill is worth putting through to the Committee of the Whole stage. I do believe that there are other people that want to speak on it. I think that in a way I’m disappointed because I do believe that I hear and see in this House a bill this good and a bill this right being divided along partisan lines, and that to me is a big disappointment. This is a private member’s bill. Depending on the draw, of course, we all have private members’ bills. I really believe, because it’s the rule of the House, that we can have nonpartisan voting on private members’ bills. From what I have heard so far, I find it disappointing that this is going to go along partisan lines when, in fact, it really, really doesn’t have to. We all have the ability to have a free vote on a private member’s bill.

As I’ve mentioned, I think Bill 50 does accomplish some of the same goals, but I really believe that this is the adjunct, that it can be a little bit more specific.

Given the ongoing number of crimes in our communities – and I know that Edmonton, Calgary, and Hobbema have been marked as an example – some of our rural areas are certainly not immune to this kind of behaviour with guns. Unfortunately, I think some of the smaller communities, certainly mine included, have a lot of violence with knives. Last summer a young man was shot and killed in Calgary-Varsity, very close to my colleague’s constituency office. So crime isn’t in areas. I think that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview said that he has a strip in his constituency. These are the kinds of crimes that, if they are specific to an area, certainly spill over into any area. It isn’t just necessarily related to a particular district or downtown. Urban versus rural: I don’t think that that really is an argument. This is throughout our society and, certainly, throughout our province.

Gun ownership in Canada. There are almost 7 million firearms registered in Canada. As of March ’07 more than 1.9 million Canadians held firearm licences, and 1.6 million owned at least one registered firearm: 76 per cent owned a rifle, 67 per cent owned a shotgun, and 12 per cent owned a handgun. Owning rifles, perhaps shotguns for geese and ducks – I certainly can understand that when we have such a large rural population, we would have those kinds of numbers.

Restricted firearms refer to nonprohibited handguns, semiautomatic long guns, and other firearms restricted by the Criminal Code. Some handguns, sawed-off long guns, fully automatic guns, and other firearms are prohibited by the Criminal Code. Then the

question is: why are they increasing? Why do these even exist in our society? We have to have something specific to go after these guns, particularly, of course, the ones that are illegal.

My colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill, I believe, used an example of he and his hunting buddies. I really believe that he and his hunting buddies wouldn’t even register on any kind of a statistical analysis of people with guns. Surely, he sort of expressed his fear that he might be picked up because one of his hunting buddies wouldn’t have registered their rifle. I could not believe that my colleague from Calgary-Nose Hill would possibly associate with anybody who would have a gun that wasn’t registered. That would be beyond my comprehension. If he was picked up and he’s not sure that his hunting buddies have guns that aren’t registered, it would create an inconvenience, and it would certainly be probably a small embarrassment. However, I am sure that it’s a situation that would be cleared up exceedingly quickly. His buddies – I’m assuming that none of them would be lawyers – would register their guns, and they would continue to be able to shoot and play big man in the outdoors.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise this afternoon to join in the debate on Bill 201, the Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009. I do want to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his intention in bringing this bill forward. He certainly highlighted an issue that’s important to all of us and important to all of the members of our communities. He also needs to be commended for his vigorous pursuit of trying to get his bill passed. I certainly, like many of the members here, was privy to a number of e-mails, that were sent through his innovative means of getting them sent out to members of this Assembly, of those that support this piece of legislation, and it was good to dialogue with those people.

4:50

In fact, having dialogued in getting those e-mails and having dialogued with the Minister of Justice on Bill 50 and having talked to a few other members in my constituency of Calgary-North Hill, after explaining what Bill 50 does and the approach that this government has taken, a lot of these people that had sent me these e-mails asked me the question: well, why is this bill coming forward, anyways, if it’s already taken care of? You know, I did get quite a bit of correspondence on that. In going back and forth with those constituents, there was a clear understanding that this government has already acted on this bill and that in essence it’s redundant.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 from last session, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, is actually a more comprehensive approach than this Bill 201. It allows police to seize property that has been acquired as a profit from crime and also gives them the ability to apprehend any property or instrument that they believe has been used or is likely to be used to carry out a criminal act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my major concern is not so much the intent of this bill but the means it uses to accomplish the end, and I’m not sure it’s justified. The core of the bill is solely aimed at illegal firearms as defined under the Firearms Act. We’ve heard members of the opposition stand up and talk in support of this bill and not once use the words “gang” or “violence on our streets.” In fact, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, for whatever reasons, decided to digress into why some members didn’t support this bill at first reading. I think that it’s a privilege of being a member of this House not to do so, and I do so on a very principled basis. I believe that Bill 50, as brought in by this government last session and unanimously passed

by this House, I must add, is a more comprehensive approach that deals not just with a broad definition but deals with the act of committing violent crimes.

Now, should we take someone's firearms or vehicle away from him because they possess a firearm, broadly defined, or should there be some sort of test, some sort of mechanism put in place that says that the police need to have suspicion that this instrument has been used or is intended to be used in a criminal act? To me that's due justice, and I think that's very important in our system.

I wish that we could come into this Assembly and propose very simplistic solutions to very complex problems. The hon. member over there will have his turn to get up and speak to the bill, but I think it's very important that we look at this and realize that this government has already acted on this issue and is continuing to act and is already seeing results.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very, very important when we bring forward legislation to this House that we go through careful due diligence. If there's one thing I've learned since almost a year that we've been elected to sit in this Legislature, it's that there are always unintended consequences to every piece of legislation. It's part of our role in this House to bring those forward.

Now, if I was truly convinced that this bill was going to be a tool that would take guns out of the hands of criminals and save the lives of innocent bystanders and other individuals, I would certainly support it. But I'm not sure that when you balance that off with the fact that this bill takes the right – the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned that he wasn't sure where this opposition was coming from and that it could be possibly because of the long gun registry. Well, this is an extension. This is a logical extension of, quite frankly, a piece of legislation that I don't agree with and that a significant portion of Albertans don't agree with. This is legislation that's being built off something that fundamentally I disagree with to start with.

The simple fact, Mr. Speaker, is that we have an organized crime and gang problem in this province. We don't have a gun problem. People kill people, not guns. There are numerous ways in which these criminal acts can be perpetrated on innocent bystanders as well as those involved, and it doesn't just focus around guns. Now, that's not to dismiss the significance of these guns getting into the hands of wrong individuals. What I'm suggesting is that this government has already brought in legislation as part of its safe communities task force and the work being done there that takes a more balanced approach to the individual rights of citizens in Alberta in trying to do the most effective job of dealing with the violent crime and gang issues that we see on our streets.

Mr. Speaker, it's for those reasons that I'm fundamentally opposed to this bill. I'm not opposed to the intent, or the end, and I will do whatever I possibly can in my role as the Member for Calgary-North Hill – not Nose Hill, I might add, Member for Calgary-Varsity – to work with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo to advance the cause of disarming our gangs and disengaging them so that our streets are safe. However, I will not support a solution that I believe is simplistic to an issue that is very, very complex.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to more debate and would urge all the members of this Assembly to look at this in a much broader lens. Thank you.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 201 as the whole purpose of the bill is to make Albertans feel safe when they are out and about, doing their shopping and enjoying life on the street and in the park. This bill should be supported by all

sides. Everybody agrees that we should be tough on crime. Albertans are crying out loud for the legislators to be tough on crime. My colleagues here, you know, have been advocating that we should be tough on crime. Yet, you know, I don't know why there is so much opposition to this Bill 201. This is another, I think, nail in the coffin of gangsters, in the coffin of criminals. I think we should all support this bill unanimously and pass it without further delay.

This bill is only about making the life of criminals hard, giving our law enforcement agencies more tools to deal with criminals, to deal with gangsters. This will only make life difficult for the criminals, not for the law-abiding citizens of Alberta. There has been concern raised that anybody caught with a gun in their vehicle will be put in the slammer, and they will have no legal recourse to prove them innocent. Everybody is innocent, you know, until they are proven guilty. They will be given that opportunity to prove themselves innocent. Every day citizens are stopped with expired insurance, with expired drivers' licences. You know, maybe they forgot their pink cards at home, and they are stopped on the road, and they are given tickets.

The Deputy Speaker: I hate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall. It's 5 o'clock, so Standing Order 8(1) requires us to move on to the next item.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Infrastructure Spending

501. Mr. Doerksen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue judicious and aggressive spending on infrastructure projects that are aligned with long-term government priorities.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to open debate on Motion 501.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, if I may interrupt you, I just got a note here that asks for us to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, and thank you very much to my hon. colleague for allowing us to introduce. I did send two notes, actually, to the Speaker, so I guess the first one got lost.

I'm delighted to welcome to the Assembly and to introduce to you and through you to all members of this fine Chamber three individuals who make my life much more media savvy. Joining us in the public gallery today is Tamara Gorzalka. Tamara runs my Facebook page and is working with David Streat, who's also in the gallery. David is working on making my website more interactive. We're looking at moving into some forum work and policy development. The two of them are working together and pushing that boundary in new media, and I really appreciate their support. [interjection] I can tell that somebody is jealous in here, so we're happy to help out. Of course, they're accompanied by the ever wonderful Peter Marriott, who is my constituency assistant. I would ask the three of you to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, please continue.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Infrastructure Spending (continued)

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will begin again. It is a privilege for me to open debate on Motion 501. While on the surface or at first glance Motion 501 may be considered to deal with motherhood issues for this province, I believe it is significant that we stay on course and turn what will be challenging times for most jurisdictions into opportunity for Alberta. As Alberta moves confidently through this current period of economic uncertainty, Motion 501 aims at taking advantage of the opportunity before us today.

In the past decade unprecedented growth in this province has required significant infrastructure investment. This government has invested in new or renovated hospitals, schools, roads, and other capital projects in our communities, anticipating and responding to Alberta's unprecedented growth. Motion 501 is intended to focus on projects that will benefit Alberta and sustain economic growth for the long term.

Anticipating growth, this government established a detailed plan that identified priority infrastructure needs for the next two decades. Alberta's 20-year capital plan laid out short-, medium-, and longer-term infrastructure plans and priorities, and this government has committed to invest an average of roughly \$6 billion annually for short- and medium-term objectives of the plan.

Mr. Speaker, today's economy provides the opportunity to accelerate the priorities of our plan. Whereas six to eight months ago it was difficult to find contractors ready to take on more work, today the workers and the contractors are available and looking to go to work. In addition, lower input costs resulting from lower commodity prices make the cost to undertake infrastructure projects more affordable. In my constituency, and I expect across this province, there have been numerous municipal infrastructure tenders contracted well under budget: several mid-size paving tenders bid and awarded at 20 to 30 per cent below cost estimates, an arena tender bid and awarded at one-third below the budgeted estimate.

Now is the time to get bang for the infrastructure buck, so to speak, and provide needed and important opportunities for Albertans to stay in the workforce. The economic stimulus provided by continued investment in infrastructure by this government today is both timely and significant. Prudent infrastructure spending in today's economy will provide jobs that keep Albertans on the job.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 501 is not about reckless or cavalier spending. Alberta faces uncertainty on the revenue side of the equation. However, today's economy provides us the opportunity to get more work done with less dollars. This motion advocates prudent investment based on sound budgeting principles for Alberta. Judicious and aggressive investment in infrastructure speaks to me of focusing on higher priority projects, and this motion supports the continued scrutiny and review of our priorities. Infrastructure spending must be balanced against affordability and support projects that are sustainable within our fiscal plan.

There will be opportunities to further stretch Alberta's investment by partnering with municipalities and other jurisdictions on projects that are aligned with our priorities. I know of some that would be completed for half the cost to the province as a result of today's economy and of municipalities offering to partner with the province of Alberta on projects on our list. Mr. Speaker, the building Canada initiative of the federal government will likely be an opportunity to further stretch Alberta's investment.

Motion 501 urges the government to continue judicious investment in projects that build communities, enhance competitiveness, and add to the strategic development of Alberta's infrastructure requirements for the future. These include roads and highways, hospitals and schools, and other projects important to further developing our energy sector and environmental sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, while the duration of the current economic slowdown is uncertain, Motion 501 would have this province emerge from this challenging time in a stronger position than ever before. We are privileged to live in a province that is in a strong financial position. Alberta is debt free, we have the lowest overall tax regime in Canada, and we have money in the bank. This government has almost \$14 billion in our sustainability and capital funds that can relieve budget pressures and be expended to continue judicious and aggressive investments in priority infrastructure projects, projects that build our capacity to support the growth that is expected in Alberta for generations to come.

This motion supports the continued strategic development of the province of Alberta. I ask all hon. members here today to vote in favour of Motion 501. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the leader of the third party.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to provide my next-to-unconditional support for the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who had the foresight to put forward Motion 501. Motion 501 follows in the historical footsteps of great individuals like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or FDR as he was affectionately known, as he tried to pull America out of the worst depression it had ever experienced. Similarly, it has shades of what President Barack Obama is trying to do right now by investing in infrastructure, in public works, in putting money into investments which will reap rewards for years to come. It's for reasons like this that I have my support without reservation for Motion 501.

5:10

What I would like to suggest is prioritizing the public infrastructure that needs to be built, the areas where we're likely to get the most bang for our buck. In doing so, I would point out how important it is to have infrastructure that supports public education. The average age of schools throughout this province is now in the area of 41 to 42 years. We've seen schools in Calgary, Marlborough elementary, come very close to a roof collapse, which, fortunately, was structurally examined while the children were out and repairs were able to be made. In my own constituency of Calgary-Varsity Brentwood school two summers ago suffered very great damage due to leaks in the roof. First, it was tiles that came down in the library, and those tiles contained asbestos. Then in the second rainstorm the entire ceiling of a hallway, fortunately on a weekend, collapsed. The wires holding the ceiling buckled as the roof came crashing down in the hallway. Had there been elementary children present at the time, there is no doubt that there would have been injuries.

So let's start with an investment that is going to pay high dividends in the future. Let's start with schools. Let's recognize, for example, that in the Calgary public board alone the infrastructure deficit now is in the neighbourhood of \$630 million because money, for whatever reason, even in times of good fortune through royalties and nonrenewable resource revenues, has not been spent.

As the hon. mover of the motion noted, now is the best time to spend to get the economy going again. Take advantage of the fact that we have workers who, unfortunately, have been displaced by oil sands projects. Let's make a sad circumstance into a positive

circumstance by turning their skills to the repair and the construction of schools. Let's take advantage of the fact that with the downturn in the economy, supplies for construction are less expensive. People are making bids, private processes but public traditional bids, for construction that are considerably lower than what we've experienced.

Let's learn from what we've seen with the building of the southeast hospital, where the cost of that building tripled because it was delayed. It went from an original estimate of approximately \$500 million to very close to \$1.5 billion, and that is with a reduced building, without a mental health ward. We've seen examples of, and the minister of health has talked about, the wisdom of shelling in hospitals for future usage. Well, I'm suggesting that given this Motion 501 that says, basically, full speed ahead on public infrastructure, let's get the economy going, let's do the right thing for years to come. What it's suggesting is that instead of building shells of hospitals, like the Mazankowski institute or the Peter Lougheed in Calgary or the not sure whether it's going to be completed or at what time hospital in Grande Prairie, let's take the energy from Bill 501, and let's get on with the building.

The government has boasted that thanks to its following the Liberal's idea of what we called a stability fund – the government chose to call it a sustainability fund, but I'm not going to argue over the wording – we have approximately \$7 billion in that fund. So let's prioritize where we're going to build. Let's build the schools first. Let's build the hospitals. Let's build the public infrastructure that we need, postsecondary institutes. Let's build where our investment is going to bring us a threefold return. In the case of hospitals we're being proactive. Let's build the seniors long-term care. Let's do what the Auditor General suggested we do back in 2005 and be more responsive for the type of facility and the care that we provide for seniors.

Let's finally finish off the twinning of highway 63 up to Fort McMurray. As the former critic for Infrastructure and Transportation I would love to see that highway twinned. It serves our economic purpose, but it also saves lives. While we're at it, let's go down to Medicine Hat. Let's look down in Lethbridge. Let's get on with the process of twinning highway 3. We've talked about the economic value of our north-south access. Let's talk about the economic value of our east-west. We will soon be receiving legislation from this House talking about making TILMA successful. If we want to make TILMA a success, let's start with highway 3. Let's get those goods flowing back and forth. Let's provide stability and sustainability for the economics of southern Alberta.

For years we've concentrated on the wealth of the extraction of resources in the Fort McMurray area. We've created a boom, a Klondike rush mentality, which has not been sustainable. Here we have a chance. We can do it with the labour that's available, with the materials that are available. Let's take a negative circumstance and turn it into a positive one.

I am so pleased to see this government recognizing the importance of investing in public infrastructure. My caution is: don't do it as a P3 because P3s take us into debt for 32 years. We have no idea whether we're going to be able to pay those bills at the end of 32 years. What I am saying is: let us go back to the dependable, traditional style of building, pay as you go.

If you've got the money, build it now. Now is the time to build as our economy goes deeper into a recessionary period. We hope not to get into the types of depression that were suffered throughout the world in the Dirty Thirties. We have a chance to benefit from the opportunity that has been presented. Not only do we have a sustainability fund of approximately \$7 billion; we also have a capital fund. I don't want to be accused of saying: let's drain the

funds. But I am saying: let's be strategic. Let's prioritize. Where are we going to get the best investments? As I've indicated, in my top three priorities for investments I start with schools, public and postsecondary, go to hospitals, and then on to roads.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and speak to Motion 501. Now, Motion 501 says, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue judicious and aggressive spending on infrastructure projects that are aligned with long-term government priorities." I'm going to be supporting this motion. I'm going to be supporting it, but I have some reservations.

I just want to start with some of the language, which I think is a little misleading. That the government is going to "continue judicious and aggressive spending on infrastructure projects" assumes, Mr. Speaker, that the government has been judicious and that it has been aggressive, and I think that's not really putting the case exactly the way it is. I think it's pretty clear that the government has allowed a very severe infrastructure debt to pile up in this province, perhaps in excess of \$40 billion, to correct infrastructure deficiencies, to bring it up to date, and to build new infrastructure for growth.

5:20

I also have a little trouble with aligning it with the government's long-term priorities because that covers things like carbon capture and storage and so on. Since the government's priorities are muddled and misguided, having more spending or continuing present spending on those priorities is a problem.

The reason I'm going to support this motion, Mr. Speaker, is because it does talk about the need for infrastructure spending in a period where the economy is in decline. If you look around the world, you'll see that governments are embracing spending on infrastructure as an important part of fighting the deepening worldwide recession that we are facing, and governments around the world have turned their back on the traditional conservative mantra that in times of recession you have to cut your spending. Of course, what we've seen is the history in this province during the last recession, probably considerably milder than the one we're now facing, where the government slashed to the bone, and still the implications for people are echoing throughout our society, and the damage that was done has just begun to be repaired.

Now, the government finally got the message that it had to do something about the infrastructure deficit at the peak of the oil boom in this province. They were spending a premium of up to 50 per cent more for infrastructure projects at that time. That was because they didn't spend when prices were lower for labour and for materials and when people needed work. Now we're getting back into that situation, and now is the time when we should be spending on infrastructure to stimulate the economy and because it's more economic to do so. Prices will be coming down, and it is the time to do that.

If you look at what the government is doing, unlike governments in the United States or the federal government or other provinces or governments in Europe or anywhere in the world, for that matter, this government has failed to embrace its responsibility to stimulate the economy, and it's a business-as-usual approach.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, not only are they going to continue with just the current level of spending on infrastructure; they've actually made some serious cuts. We've already announced the demise of the

Green TRIP program, that was going to bring \$2 billion in spending to transit and transportation issues in municipalities in this province. I think they're going to spend slightly under \$200,000, but they've cut it from \$2 billion. This is exactly the time that we should be making that spending. Far from increasing their infrastructure spending, in fact they're cutting it already by \$1.8 billion from what had previously been announced.

But they're keeping that biggest boondoggle, carbon capture and storage, with \$2 billion for that, Mr. Speaker. That is their prize cow. It's a sacred cow for them, but all it represents, frankly, is a subsidy to some of the biggest polluters on the face of the planet with public money. I think that if carbon capture and storage, which is purely experimental and needs a great deal of work to make it work, is going to be an approach to temporarily landfill your carbon instead of reducing your emissions, then fine, but let the polluters pay. Let the people who are producing the carbon pay for that. We should not be forcing the taxpayers to do it. We've called it a subsidy, and it is.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what we've announced are some other proposals that I think are far more innovative and far more effective. We'd take a billion dollars of that carbon capture and storage money and invest it in a green revolving fund that could be used to invest in retrofits and alternate energy applications for homes, for small business, for farmers, and for every public building and facility in the province. When they retrofit their buildings, they'll get savings on their power bills and on their water bills. They can use those savings to repay the loans that they get from that fund. Now, that will produce 10 times the jobs per dollar invested than the government's carbon capture and storage investment, and it will actually reduce CO₂ emissions, unlike carbon capture and storage, which just landfills the carbon. It will create jobs, it will reduce our energy consumption in a very significant way, and it will actually cut the amount of CO₂ that this province is putting into the air.

The second proposal we made with a half a billion dollars of that \$2 billion was to create a new research council similar to the Alberta Research Council but dedicated entirely to the research, development, and commercialization of alternative energy solutions. There are literally hundreds of businesses in this province that are waiting for new technology and for support from this government to get involved to help us solve our CO₂ and climate change problem. Those businesses need to be supported with research and development, and we should be commercializing that research, Mr. Speaker, and making it available. We think that a good place to put that new research council would be in the city of Calgary, where many of those businesses are located.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the other infrastructure proposals that we have made. We would restore funding for the Green TRIP program to the full \$2 billion originally announced by this government, and we would make sure that public transit gets the kind of support that it needs to offset the use of automobiles, which would also have a significant reduction on the output of CO₂ from the transportation sector. I think it's a shame that the government has cancelled that program, and we would put the money back.

We would go further, Mr. Speaker. There's a new federal infrastructure program. According to the calculations we've made, Alberta's share is approximately \$2.2 billion, which must be matched equally by the provincial government and by municipalities. But, unfortunately, municipalities are saying in Alberta and across the country that they have already invested heavily in infrastructure and that money that they've invested doesn't count, so they have to invest again. They don't have the financial capacity to do that. What we're saying is that the province should not only pony up its share but should cover the municipal portion as well and get

that federal infrastructure money here and get it working for Albertans. The province needs to get behind that program and drive it and make sure that we're putting our people back to work.

Mr. Speaker, I think the twin problems of a faltering economy and growing unemployment and dealing with the environmental issue, particularly of climate change, are two parts of the same problem, and the solutions, by putting them together, magnify our ability to deal with these questions successfully. I see it not as a challenge as much as I see it as an opportunity for a government that has vision, wants to do something about the environment, wants to stimulate the economy, and make sure Albertans keep working. I don't see this government doing that. I think it's very unfortunate, and I think we're going to pay the price in one or two years. Families will lose their homes and people will lose their jobs because this government doesn't care and hasn't taken the right action today when it could have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am standing today to speak in favour of Motion 501, introduced by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. The purpose of this motion is to encourage our government to continue investing in our province's infrastructure. Our government has always prioritized improving our hospitals, schools, bridges, roads, water and waste water, and other projects across the province. We campaigned on it, and Albertans overwhelmingly agreed, electing our government one year ago tomorrow.

Albertans want and deserve the best services we can offer, and in a time when our economy is slowing down, this investment would not only provide an excellent stimulus but would as well continue to invest the much-needed infrastructure that has been identified in our capital plan. By supporting projects that are ready to go, we are creating jobs and purchasing building material at a time when the prices of these commodities are lower than they have been in the past years. This could allow projects to come in at a lower cost than originally forecasted. Job creation ought to always be an important objective of our infrastructure investments. These projects would create jobs in the engineering, construction, and resource sectors, jobs for trained professionals, skilled and unskilled labourers alike.

5:30

Motion 501 encourages the government to continue pursuing projects, to improve our economic competitiveness, productivity, and trade, and to add to the strategic development of Alberta's valuable resource sector. As well, our government will continue to lead the way through meeting stringent environmental standards in our own infrastructure projects.

Motion 501 also promotes the strategic development of Alberta's energy resource sector. Our energy resources are an economic powerhouse for this province, and we need to ensure their viability for years to come. For example, investments in carbon capture and storage will be leading edge in dealing with our CO₂ but also in creating jobs in the resource industry. This motion does not in any way suggest that our government ought to increase spending excessively but continue to invest in projects that are ready to go and that make good economic sense at this time.

We are working within the framework of Alberta's 20-year capital plan and 2008-11 capital plan. Budget 2008 included funding for these ongoing plans. The 20-year capital plan maps out where we

are going in the short, medium, and long terms. Through this planning, we know where we are and where we want to be. We understand what the infrastructure priorities of Albertans are, including our schools, health facilities, and our roads, to name a few. We believe it's important to set these goals, and we will meet them. This is no small task, but we have earmarked the funding, and we will get things done.

Our government has committed to investing an average of \$6 billion annually for short- and medium-term objectives over the 20 years of the capital plan, which is no small investment, by any means. The 2008-11 capital plan increases infrastructure spending by \$3.9 billion over the 2007 budget figures, to about \$22.2 billion spending in total over this period. This includes spending for health facilities and equipment, schools, postsecondary facilities, provincial highways, housing, and municipalities, indeed, the priorities of Albertans. Coming from a municipal background, I can tell you that municipalities have never had access to these kinds of dollars that they have today, through the commitment of our Premier and our government, with the \$1.4 billion investment to municipalities over the coming 10 years.

There are many exciting projects that our government can invest in to drive Alberta's competitive advantage. One of these is through the development of Port Alberta into a major North American inland trade and transportation hub, which I'm very happy to say will run through some of the municipalities in my constituency. We understand that highway and road upgrades are very important considerations. It is a tangible investment for all Albertans that use them on a daily basis. Some need upgrades sooner than others to ensure that they are safe for travel.

Mr. Speaker, the current economic challenges we are facing give us an opportunity to invest our money wisely and to come up ahead of the curve once they have passed. The intent of Motion 501 is to reiterate the importance of spending money on building and maintaining our province's infrastructure. This, indeed, benefits all Albertans. Not only would it mean better facilities and roads for their use on a regular basis but job creation at a time when it is getting increasingly more difficult to find a new job and cheaper costs for project completion as many building materials have had significant drops in their costs. These investments would strengthen the local, regional, and provincial economies. Our government understands that this would provide a much-needed economic stimulus at a time when it is very necessary.

I will be supporting Motion 501 because I believe these investments that we are making now will provide a boost to our province both now and in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is, indeed, a privilege to rise and speak in support of Motion 501, that indicates: "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue judicious and aggressive spending on infrastructure projects that are aligned with long-term government priorities." The sponsor of this is Mr. Doerksen. I commend him on the foresight of this motion.

In fact, I've enjoyed the comments of the member of the third party, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, who also spoke, as well as the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. It's nice to see that at least three and I believe even one other speaker from the governing party have spoken on basically what they call Keynesian economics. [interjection] Well, it may have or it may not have, but I'm glad to see that your government is embracing this philosophy as it appears

that the rest of the world has, including our federal government. It's nice to see that some of that reigns supreme and some of that ideology is shared by members of that party. One might ask what, in fact, the logic of belonging to that party is, then, if you believe in Keynesian economics, but then again I've long stopped asking such questions myself given that it is Alberta and whatnot.

Anyway, back to the motion at hand. What I would like to say is that I agree, in particular, that the timing of this motion is really outstanding. I believe that to build an Alberta, we've got to get off our roller coaster of spending when times are good and cutting when times are bad. We should more or less reverse those things. When times are in fact bad, that's when people need jobs. That's when infrastructure projects are cheaper. That's when the opportunity to open up a space at your university for people who need education is best because – guess what? – that's when the economy is slow. That's when people need to be employed. That's what government's role is. Government should have a role in building a society, putting people to work if they need jobs, opening spaces at school if people need a place to go to improve their education, and improving our prospects in the province for the future.

I did hear the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont who said that Keynesian economics is dead. Well, then again, if it's dead, I'll tell you what: someone has got to tell me because if you look around the world, it looks like it's back, baby, and back with a vengeance. I'm not sure what he's calling dead because it looks to me like it's had a rebirth, but, hey, I might not know what the definition of dead is. Maybe he'll enlighten us with what the spending world-wide is because, really, it amused me, that comment. I guess some people say that Elvis is dead, too, but he might come back again sometime in the future.

I'll get back to the synopsis of the motion. Actually, I'm reading a book right now. Yeah, it might surprise some people that I do read as my pastime, but nonetheless I do. The book I'm reading is called *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. Really, what it goes into in the last third of the book are the commitments to what we're going to need as a society to move ahead: actual reducing of our global consumption of CO₂. That will take investments in carbon capture and storage, which this government has done, and it's going to take investments in our LRT lines, which I'm hoping this government will continue to do. It's going to take investments in opening up a greening of our grid.

I will note, in particular, to the Minister of Environment today that Ontario recently came forward with what I would call some very forward-thinking legislation that allows the grid to become a smart grid, that allows people to feed electricity back into the grid for resale, that allows those economies to grow in Ontario and green their economy. Maybe we'll see this type of legislation coming from the Minister of Environment pretty soon, hopefully in the next legislative session. I think that spending on those types of things right now when the economy is slow can lead us not only to a more prosperous interim but can really look to the long term where we can diversify our economy and really get on with the needs of the day, which the overriding issue is.

5:40

I believe that numerous people have had children in recent times. I know that many members on the opposite side have children, and the issue facing their kids in the long-term future is global warming. It's repercussions that may be felt. I've said before that I'm 40 years old; I'm probably going to make it out all right because I'm going to be dead by the time the repercussions hit. But for the other people who are still around, I tell you what: it's what we do today. Get those things going.

Anyway, I appreciate the spirit of this motion, and I would urge this government to try to do some of these projects to keep our people working, to maybe open up some spaces at universities for people, to green our economy and do some legislation like Ontario did on greening the economy that can start that aspect of the Alberta advantage or the Alberta – can anyone give me a heads-up on what it's going to be now? Anyone? No takers. Anyway, you get the point.

An Hon. Member: Alberta: the Liberals' dream.

Mr. Hehr: There we go.

Anyway, I really appreciate this motion and the intent of it, and I speak in favour of it. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 501. This motion encourages the government to continue judicious and aggressive investment in infrastructure projects that are aligned with the priorities of government. While Alberta's economy is certainly stronger than most, the current global economic situation will have impact on this province and on many jobs in this province, which is a major concern to many Albertans and many of my constituents. However, I'm pleased that Alberta is in a strong position not only to weather this downturn but to capitalize on it. If we choose to, we can continue to aggressively invest in building viable and necessary infrastructure projects to help the economy at all levels.

Investment in these infrastructure projects will keep Albertans – most notably, the engineering, construction, and resource fields and their suppliers – employed. This encompasses all professionals, from highly trained specialists to skilled and unskilled labourers. Our skilled labour and construction workforce has been built up with great effort and cost. By keeping people working, more Albertans will continue to be net contributors, taxes and otherwise. Investment in infrastructure projects will also help the students we are training find placements for their apprenticeships and employment as they enter the workforce. When the economy regains momentum, will we be quick to capitalize if our capacity has been diminished, diminished by labourers taking other jobs even outside of the province or after companies downsize, move, or even close their doors?

Keeping both experienced and inexperienced workers in the trades will also help us avoid another labour gap in the near future and improve the long-term sustainability of Alberta's economy. Our economy, jobs, and provincial revenues will not return to 2007 levels at the flick of a switch. By keeping Albertans working, we will be prepared to capitalize when the economy strengthens again, which will ensure the shortest possible downturn for Alberta. We need to work to retain as much capacity as possible to be positioned to generate economic development.

Mr. Speaker, another advantage to continuing aggressively investing in infrastructure right now is that it provides the greatest value for Alberta taxpayer dollars. By taking advantage of today's lower commodity, labour prices, and more competitive bids, we can complete these important projects at a lower cost to Albertans. Concentrating on projects aligned with the priorities of government will address many of the province's present and upcoming infrastructure needs. These priorities respond to the increasing need for more roads, schools, health facilities, water and wastewater systems, and other vital infrastructure. I'd like to emphasize that this motion

does not encourage excessive increase in spending but, instead, a continued investment in projects that are shovel ready so that stimulus can be injected into the province's economy as soon as possible.

Strategic investment in infrastructure enhances Alberta's economic competitiveness, productivity, and trade opportunities. This includes projects that support industrial developments in Alberta's energy sector, such as the extraction and refinement of oil sands, which favourably positions Alberta in the global market. Good infrastructure is a competitive differentiator and an enabler for value-added projects in particular.

With infrastructure we can pay now, or we can pay later. It is important for future generations that we pay for as much as we can now at a lower cost. This is not an expense; it is an investment, an investment in Alberta and Albertans not only for us today but for our kids and our kids' kids. Mr. Speaker, this type of investment can not only have great benefit for specific areas of the province, such as Alberta's Industrial Heartland, which is located in my constituency of Athabasca-Redwater; this type of investment will also continue building the infrastructure we need to ensure Alberta's continued economic success by showing new industry that we'll provide the support and infrastructure they need to flourish. Other infrastructure initiatives, such as developing Port Alberta and working to position it as a major North American inland trade and transportation hub, would greatly enhance Alberta's long-term economic viability and global competitiveness.

Motion 501 proposes a continuation of strategic and aggressive investment in infrastructure projects, which would stimulate Alberta's present and future economy. This is a good motion for the three reasons I have outlined. Job loss mitigation: this will keep people working, and employed taxpaying Albertans are able to be net contributors. Retain our capacity: our industry and skilled labour are well developed, and we need them active to ensure a quick recovery from economic slowdown. Value for taxpayer dollars: we can get a great return on investment.

We need to look at the current economic situation not as a storm but as a glorious opportunity. I support Motion 501 and urge all members to consider its merits. I look forward to the discussion to follow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I just got a note that an hon. member from the opposition wishes to speak on this. I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise in favour of Motion 501. We have been advocating from this side for more funding for schools, for bridges, for roads, and for expanding the LRT system not only in Calgary but right across the province. I know that during the cutbacks in 1993 we fell way, way behind on all the infrastructure spending. There should be continued focus on infrastructure spending. It's the right time to do it because of the costs of material and labour. I think we can save lots of money on that; our buck can go a long way in getting things done. I think that this is the right time to catch up on our infrastructure deficit. Let's not get piecemeal work done. Let's start it and finish it off. I remember that when the General hospital was imploded, we could have replaced the hospital for \$180 million. Now the south hospital is costing \$1.4 billion. That was the right time to do it.

I congratulate the government on this southeast leg of the LRT, but my concern is about the P3 way the government wants to go. I think we should have the government pay for the southeast leg of the LRT and not give the debt to our grandchildren 30 years down the road. Who knows what economic conditions we will be in by then.

5:50

I also look forward to funding for the airport tunnel. I hope seriously that we get the airport tunnel put in place. It's going to affect 250,000 Calgarians. If we build the airport tunnel now, it will be cheaper, and it will go a long way to cut down on the traffic jams in Calgary. If we don't build the airport tunnel, the airport will have only one access from the Deerfoot, and then we will have to travel all the way down to Country Hills. All the Calgarians from the southeast or Langdon or Chestermere or Strathmore, anybody coming from southeast Calgary will have to drive all the way down to Country Hills on a ring road and then get back to the airport. There are going to be big traffic jams, you know, if you don't build the airport tunnel. Deerfoot is already at capacity, and we need a better roadway system so we can move the traffic faster. That will help the environment, and that will help, I think, Calgarians to spend more time with their families. I think that will be a good investment for the future. There's no doubt in my mind that this is the right time to do it.

There have been some indications that there will be some funding cutbacks like on the Grande Prairie hospital and the south Calgary hospital. They have been kind of pushed back. There are rumors about that, but I think we shouldn't be pushing anything back. We should be just going full speed ahead, as the motion proposes. The Tom Baker cancer centre and, you know, all the renovations on the schools, we should finish all those. Even in northeast Calgary they were expanding the LRT to Saddle Ridge. I think the government should be funding all those projects so we could get them done on time and with a lot less cost.

For those reasons I support Motion 501. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and speak in support of Motion 501. The purpose of this motion is to encourage the government to continue judicious and aggressive investment in infrastructure projects that are aligned with the long-term priorities of the government.

Investing in infrastructure creates jobs and keeps people working. Providing strategic investment into shovel-ready infrastructure projects can create jobs in many different sectors throughout Alberta. Jobs created through infrastructure construction, whether it is highly trained professionals or skilled and unskilled labourers, strengthen the local and regional and provincial economies. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government spends significantly more per capita on infrastructure than any other province or territory in Canada.

Alberta's population has grown significantly in the past decade. This unprecedented growth has required substantial infrastructure investment to build the necessary roads, schools, and hospitals. By 2028 Alberta's population is expected to increase by 40 per cent, or 1.4 million, to nearly 5 million people, requiring significantly more infrastructure investment. Last week I was reminded of just how quickly our population changes when my granddaughter Tory Lynne Sherene Johnson was born. Investing in key infrastructure priorities is important to all Albertans but is especially important to the future of our children and our grandchildren. Investment will help meet the future infrastructure needs of the province and will help attract business innovators and entrepreneurs to Alberta. It will have a ripple effect by creating new opportunities in communities all across the province.

Currently the Alberta government has about \$14 billion set aside in the sustainability fund and capital account to cushion the province from losses in revenue and to support announced capital projects. This motion will help support the infrastructure projects that are

important to my constituents in Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the province. Highway improvements increase the ability for Albertans to take advantage and benefit from our established and developing trade corridors.

Another infrastructure focus would be the strategic development of Alberta's energy resource sector. We will all benefit from the infrastructure projects that support the industry developments necessary for the development and extraction of oil sands and the refinement of developments throughout the province. Not only is it important that these infrastructure projects proceed, but these projects are also environmentally sustainable to minimize the extent of Alberta's environmental footprint on the world.

We should focus on projects that align with Alberta's 20-year strategic capital plan. The plan lays out short-, medium-, and long-term infrastructure plans and priorities of the Alberta government. The priorities it has set are in response to the increasing need for infrastructure investment in Alberta's roads, schools, health facilities, and other infrastructure needs. The Alberta government has committed to investing an average of about \$6 billion annually for short-, medium-, and long-term objectives over the next 20 years. The 2008-11 capital plan released as part of Alberta's Budget 2008 delivers on the short-term commitments made in the 20-year strategic capital plan.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the key highlights of the 2008-11 capital plan, we should take note of an overall increase of \$3.9 billion, or 21 per cent, from Budget 2007. The capital plan has significantly increased spending in infrastructure, delivering on the short-term commitments of the 20-year capital plan. Throughout 2008-2011 it is projected that \$22.2 billion will be invested in infrastructure. Continued and well-thought-out investment in infrastructure would stimulate Alberta's economy today and in the future.

This motion would support projects that will stimulate Alberta's economy and help the province recover from the economic slowdown much earlier than other provinces and jurisdictions. Mr. Speaker, with the continued investment in infrastructure proposed in this motion, I know Alberta will remain the best place to work, to live, and to raise a family.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have, really, 12 seconds left, so I would now like to call the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to close the debate. You have five minutes.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all of my hon. colleagues who spoke in favour of this motion. I think we've covered the bases with regard to the intent of this motion. It's about building the Alberta that we all know and love. It's about building the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the transportation infrastructure that's important to our future. I think it's important to note that this province has an unprecedented history of significant investment on a per capita basis in all of those types of projects.

I thank my colleagues for their consideration of this motion and ask you to support Motion 501.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

Issue 8

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta and of its citizens. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of 2008 Provincial Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is one of those anniversaries that we would like to acknowledge. One year ago today, on this date, 31 members were elected to this Assembly for the first time, and two members were re-elected after a slight absence from the Assembly. I would like to acknowledge the hon. members for Calgary-North West, Edmonton-Glenora, Calgary-Elbow, Airdrie-Chestermere, Athabasca-Redwater, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Calgary-Egmont, Calgary-Mackay, Calgary-Montrose, Calgary-North Hill, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Edmonton-Calder, Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-McClung, Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Rutherford, Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Lethbridge-West, Livingstone-Macleod, Red Deer-South, St. Albert, Strathcona, Strathmore-Brooks, West Yellowhead, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Calgary-Buffalo, Calgary-McCall, Edmonton-Strathcona, and the members for Cardston-Taber-Warner and Edmonton-Beverley-Clareview. March 3, 2009, is the one-year anniversary of your participation in this very esteemed body.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 31 very special guests. They are from the Field home-schooling group. They are seated, I believe, in both galleries, but I know that there are a number in the members' gallery. They are accompanied today by teachers/group leaders Mrs. Kathy Ansell, Mrs. Paulette Field, Mrs. Patty Marler, Mrs. Lianne McDonald, Mrs. Michelle Flim, Mrs. Roxanne Theroux, and Mrs. Kimberly Walker. The students and parents had an opportunity to visit the Premier's office, and we had a very good, hearty discussion about the province of Alberta. I can tell you that we are in good hands. I know that the students participated in the mock Legislature and learned a lot about the operations of their government. Thank you so much. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 27 students and four leaders from Guthrie school, which is just north of Edmonton on the military base. They are led by their teachers Chris Layton and Becky Williams and their parent helpers Selina Robb and Rosita LaFrance. I'd like to thank them for coming today

and ask them to please rise and enjoy the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce the students from Eastwood school along with their teacher. I think they were in the Assembly yesterday as well. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Ken Kent, who is the president of Harley-Davidson of Edmonton. Ken was the first Canadian to run 200 miles per hour, or 320 kilometres per hour, in the quarter-mile top fuel motorcycle drag racing event in the States. He likes to ride fast, and he does that each year at IHRA, International Hot Rod Association, racing events throughout North America and the world. His local Harley-Davidson business on the Yellowhead and Fort Road is where I bought my first Harley, so I thank Ken for introducing me to the world of Harleys. Ken is seated in the members' gallery along with our friend Brady Whittaker. I'd ask Ken to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two staff members from my department. I'm truly blessed to lead a department that is so passionate about education and research in our province. Here are two of our great staff members: Monica Pysko, human resources project assistant, and Simon Underwood, administrative assistant, human resources. They're taking part in the public service tour. They're seated in our public gallery, I believe, this afternoon, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Likewise, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 13 staff members from Sustainable Resource Development. They work in our lands division taking care of our public lands, two-thirds of this province, and dispositions related to its use. They, also, are on a public service orientation tour of the Legislature today. They are Christine Giurisevich, Mel Palmetier, Kevin Ball, Susan McGillivray, Karen Scott, Lizette Kaba, Blair Stone, Barb Grunau, Kali Hennessey, Francine Duret, Rubena Hassan, Annette Krumm, and Donna Bambrick. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five very special guests. They are registered social workers who are here to represent their profession as we recognize

National Social Work Week. Social workers are a compassionate and dedicated group of individuals who touch the lives of many Albertans and build brighter futures, and for that we thank them. They are sitting in the public gallery. I would ask the following people to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Lina Filomeno-Melchionna, representing the Alberta College of Social Workers; Sarah Banick, from our Didsbury office; Melissa Zimmer, from our Wetaskiwin office; Rhonda McKinnon, from the Edmonton and area CFSA; and Bailey Puchyr, from the Edmonton and area CFSA. Please join me in welcoming them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My friend and colleague from Calgary-Foothills alluded to it, and I wanted the House to specifically recognize our friend Brady Whittaker. On behalf of the forest industry, as executive director of the Alberta Forest Products Association he's working very hard to support a very troubled industry right now, and he's been a great friend to this Legislature.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Fallen Four Memorials

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Four years ago today, four brave young RCMP officers full of promise and hope were shot and killed near Mayerthorpe in the Whitecourt-St. Anne constituency. It was a terrible tragedy when the lives of constables Peter Schiemann, Leo Johnston, Anthony Gordon, and Brock Myrol were taken. Today my thoughts go to the families, friends, and co-workers of these four officers plus the communities in the Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt RCMP detachment areas, and all uniformed officers.

The Fallen Four Memorial Society in Mayerthorpe determined early that these communities will neither be defined nor defeated by the killings. They organize a yearly memorial candlelight ceremony to remember Brock, Anthony, Leo, Peter, plus all uniformed officers who have died in the line of duty across Canada. There is also a hockey game between the RCMP and the Mayerthorpe Wranglers to bring the communities together in a fun way to celebrate the once-vibrant lives of our four officers.

This year, unfortunately, the Mayerthorpe Arena burned down, but with some help from Northlands the memorial moved to Rexall Place on Sunday, March 1. It was a very special day, and I appreciated assisting our Solicitor General in the lighting of the centre candle for all peace and police officers and soldiers. Thank you also to the Member for Calgary-Hays for joining us that day. I congratulate the many volunteers from the Fallen Four Memorial Society, the Mayerthorpe Arena Operating Committee, minor hockey, the RCMP, Whitecourt Wolverines, and all donors. I also join the organizing committee in recognizing the generosity of the Edmonton Oilers, Oil Kings, Northlands, Rexall Place, and Ticketmaster.

To the families of Peter, Brock, Anthony, and Leo and to all of those who have lost a loved one who wears a uniform, I assure you that the brave are never forgotten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [applause]

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

Setting the Direction for Special Education

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you. As chair of the Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta Steering Committee I would like to

use this opportunity to provide an update on this important initiative. Mr. Speaker, 3,500 Albertans contributed input towards a vision and principles for a new special education framework. They told us what parts of the current system worked well and shared visionary ideas that demonstrated a considerable appetite for change.

We're now entering phase 2 of Setting the Direction. On Saturday I had the pleasure of attending a consultation session in Red Deer, and today, as I speak, approximately 100 people in Medicine Hat are participating in the session. I would like to encourage all Albertans to contribute to this work. Phase 2 consultation can take place online, in person, or through a group or individual print submission. This phase of work is about engaging in even more challenging conversations about the elements required to build an inclusive education system.

Following the second round of consultations, recommendations for a new special education framework that includes policy, accountability measures, and a funding model will be developed. On behalf of my colleagues on the Setting the Direction Steering Committee I will present the framework to the Minister of Education at a forum to be held on June 8 and 9 in Edmonton. After the June forum is complete, I am confident that we will have a policy framework in place that will propose near-, mid-, and long-term challenges to build one inclusive education system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight the important work that has been accomplished under the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. The strategy was announced last June and is a framework designed to strengthen the industry and create a more profitable and competitive future.

One important component of the strategy is the agency itself. ALMA's role is to act as a catalyst, and it is responsible for implementing specific parts of the strategy. ALMA was created shortly after the announcement, has recently become incorporated, Mr. Speaker, and already it has created five industry advisory committees that will help guide their initiatives and ensure the livestock industry's input.

Another working group has been formed as well between Agriculture and Rural Development and the cattle industry that will play an important role in shaping the future of traceability initiatives. The group has already started developing a traceability implementation plan for 2010 and beyond. The creation of these working groups demonstrates this government's commitment to revitalizing the livestock industry. It also highlights the importance of industry consultation and involvement as the Alberta livestock and meat strategy is implemented. We all know that change is not easy, but there are already signs that we are on the right track. New markets are beginning to open to Canadian cattle; however, this access comes with the condition of age verification. Because Alberta's producers have been able to adapt to change and have begun age verifying animals – indeed, 83 per cent of the livestock has already been age verified, which is an incredible success, Mr. Speaker – we will be able to respond and take advantage of these opportunities as more borders open.

I encourage all members of our livestock and meat industry and all of my colleagues here to continue to support the strategy. I also want to thank the minister and the Premier for their clear vision and determination, that have shown that this is incredibly important and

that working with a progressive industry, Mr. Speaker, has had great successes, that are critical to the future success of the industry in our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is becoming a dangerous place for workers. Workplace fatalities in this province have risen 34 per cent in the last three years, yet the employment minister claims that our workplaces are safer today than they were in the past. The numbers are far too high. Last year there was an average of one workplace fatality per week. The government has not made sufficient progress in reducing accident rates. Immediate action is needed.

First, the government must create mandatory joint work-site health and safety committees. These committees, composed of representatives from labour and management, identify and resolve health and safety concerns in the work site. They conduct regular site inspections, accident investigations, and safety education programs, and they meet every month to assess workplace safety.

In Alberta employers are not legally obligated to form these committees. That needs to change.

Second, the government must amend the fact that it is not a legal requirement for employers to develop occupational health and safety policies or to post such a policy at the work site. A clear, well-communicated OH and S policy can save lives and prevent accidents. The government should require high-risk industries to create and communicate OH and S policies.

Finally, accident investigation reports should be admissible in court. The fact that they are not admissible shields wrongdoing and unsafe practices from exposure. Unsafe practices should be brought to light so that they can be corrected and further accidents can be prevented. Last year dozens of Alberta families were confronted with the horror and grief of the loss of a loved one due to an avoidable workplace-related death. This government is not doing enough to bring these numbers down. I urge the government to strongly consider the options we have discussed here today.

Thank you.

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

Persons Case Scholarship Recipients

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On February 27 of this year the Alberta government announced that 27 Alberta students will receive financial assistance in their postsecondary studies through the Persons Case scholarship. I'm very proud to say that two of my constituents are among the recipients: Ms Barbara McLean, undertaking her master of arts in political science degree at the University of Alberta, and Ms Patricia Orizaga-Brooks, who is enrolled at Grant MacEwan College in the diploma in social work program.

Mr. Speaker, these scholarships were established in 1979 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Persons Case victory. In 1929 Alberta's Famous Five – Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby – successfully led the landmark legal case in which the British Privy Council confirmed that women in Canada were eligible to be called to the Senate and therefore qualified as persons under the law. This year marks the 80th anniversary of that monumental decision.

The Persons Case scholarships are awarded each year to students whose studies and career goals will ultimately contribute to the advancement of women or to those who are studying in fields where members of their gender are traditionally few in number. Mr. Speaker, this year the government was pleased to announce that the scholarships' total funding increased from \$20,000 to \$100,000 annually.

On behalf of all members of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I congratulate all recipients of the scholarship and thank them for their continued contribution to life in Alberta.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Oil Royalty Agreement

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the release that Canadian Oil Sands Trust put out last year when Syncrude signed on to the new royalty system, the company states that their after-tax future net profits will go up 12 per cent as a result. Syncrude signed the royalty deal, and the sum of money is vast, over \$18 billion extra to Syncrude on top of already projected \$153 billion profits. To the Premier: why did the Premier sign this deal that costs Albertans so much?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to take us back to the royalty review, we had made a commitment that we would not tear up any Crown agreements that were made back in 1997. In fact, the opposition there asked us not to, and we didn't do that. We honoured those agreements. Both companies came to the table, and we renegotiated. As the minister said yesterday, we're actually getting more money from the development in the oil sands.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A government that was managing this resource in the public interest would have numbers, and they would have told Albertans what it's costing us. What about the Suncor deal, Mr. Premier? Did we lose more than the equivalent of our heritage trust fund in that agreement as well?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday when this question came up, I made the comment: how did you come up with the figure of \$18 billion 40 years out if no one – no one – as little as seven months ago predicted this whole economic downturn around the globe?

Some Hon. Members: We did.

Mr. Stelmach: I hear across the way: oh, we did. Wow, they must have done it and kept it very secret because, you know, there wasn't one economist in the world. So all of these figures that are being bandied around today are projections. I can't tell you, Mr. Speaker, 40 years from now what the price of oil will be, but I do know the agreement we have, especially the ability to keep some of the bitumen in kind. We'll be able to process that here in Alberta, and we can also sell it to other countries, not only to the United States. We might have other markets.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, these are public documents Canadian Oil Sands Trust put out to their shareholders in trust. They did their homework. The question is whether this government is doing its homework.

Since the Premier yesterday did not give figures about what the deals are going to cost Albertans, is he saying that the government signed away these billions without working out the implications, or is the Premier hiding from Albertans the scale and the scope of this giveaway?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is referring to an agreement that was signed in 1997. When we renegotiated the agreement over a year ago, all of the information was made public in terms of how both companies came to the table and what the new agreement is, and that was communicated to the public.

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

Royalty Reporting

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again, this was put out just last year, 12 months ago. Canadian Oil Sands put out the information because they have to update their shareholders, the owners of the company. But the government of Alberta, which manages the oil sands on behalf of the owners, Albertans, does not provide even remotely adequate information on such deals. To the Premier: why do Albertans have to go through corporate filings to get this information? Why isn't the government reporting openly, transparently, to the owners of the resource, Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe we continue to be the only jurisdiction in Canada that legally has to issue quarterly reports – that's on our revenue stream and our expenses – and we're proud to do that. That is the best, I think, information stream that there is in Canada. We'll continue to do that. Also, we're able to predict to a degree what the next three months will be in terms of some either unanticipated price increases or when the price keeps dropping on our resources. It's very concise. It's information that is available to all of the public, and I believe the public is satisfied with the kind of information we're giving them.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Royalty Review Panel, the Auditor General, even Peter Valentine told this government that their royalty reporting was weak and inadequate. Why has their advice to fix this serious failing continued to be ignored?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are not ignoring any advice. In fact, before the Auditor General talked about the royalty process that we have in place, we already undertook the royalty review in the province, and we followed it up, of course. Coming from the panel was some advice in terms of how we can improve the system and also from the Auditor General. That's why Mr. Peter Valentine, who is a former Auditor of Alberta, was asked to review. He came up with a report, and we're following all the recommendations.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is an example where clearly they haven't been following the recommendations. When will the government fix the broken royalty reporting system and start providing Albertans, the owners of this resource, with comprehensive, detailed, transparent information on their natural resource royalties?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are. But as I said before, following the new royalty framework, there will be a new information system put in place to capture all of the necessary information to ensure that

we are collecting the royalties on the right volumes that are produced by oil and gas producers. Of course, the oil sands agreement is different from the conventional oil and gas. It is a complex area, but we're doing whatever we can to make the information clear and concise to the shareholders, which are all Albertans.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Blue Cross Premiums

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Starting this July the premiums for Albertans, singles and families, with Blue Cross coverage will increase, and by July 2010 the premiums will be three times what they are now. To the minister of health. This minister is making changes to Blue Cross premiums so that they're more comparable to private insurance. This could be interpreted as the direction the rest of Albertans' health care changes will go. Do Albertans not have the right to worry about the direction of increased comparisons to private health care?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is purposely trying to put words in my mouth, because there was never a comparison to private health care. What we did say was that the Blue Cross program that we offer to all Albertans needs to more clearly be aligned with employer-based plans because currently, today, we have a situation where a number of plans that employees have with their employer cost significantly more than the government plan does, and that's inequitable. The taxpayer should not be subsidizing that.

Ms Pastoor: Will the minister agree that by making this change to Blue Cross premiums, private health insurance may look like the better option for Albertans, making them decide to opt for private health insurance?

Mr. Liepert: Again, Mr. Speaker, the member is having some difficulty understanding the situation because what I just said was that the private-sector employers in this province and, quite frankly, public-sector employers have insurance plans, benefit plans, that are aligned with the Blue Cross plan, which is provided to those who do not have employer benefit plans. The only difference in the two is the amount of premiums that are paid.

Ms Pastoor: Many letters and e-mails that are coming to my office say that there is as much public concern about Alberta's Blue Cross premiums as there has been about the seniors' pharmaceutical change. Will the minister commit to re-evaluating the change to Blue Cross like he has for the seniors' pharmaceutical change?

2:00

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this particular member and that particular party want to campaign in the next election on the fact that the taxpayers of this province should be subsidizing a Blue Cross plan which has premiums that are less than those of employer plans, let them go ahead. The problem is that this particular member and members of that particular party never tell the truth when it comes to how these plans work.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order.

The Speaker: I think we're definitely going to have – no. As a matter of fact, I want to deal with this right now.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, would you retract what you just said?

Mr. Liepert: I'll retract that statement, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Election Commitments

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a year after the election, and it's report card time. Today an evaluation of this government's performance gives them a failing grade. The Premier promised to stop shipping raw bitumen and jobs to the U.S. One year later this government has failed. Will the Premier stand here today and explain why he has failed to keep his promise and why he continues to ship bitumen and the jobs of Albertans to the United States?

Mr. Stelmach: I hope he said "ship" bitumen.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our record over this past year. We've completed Canada's first land-use framework. We've undertaken this past year in Infrastructure the most kilometres of highway repaved in the last at least dozen years that I'm aware of, maybe even 15 years. We've made tremendous progress with our aboriginal community in signing a first-time agreement with the three treaties. We have accomplished a lot, and in the next question I'll be able to tell him how much more we've accomplished.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This Premier promised to renegotiate deals with Suncor and Syncrude to keep a fair share of royalties for Albertans. Instead, we have a massive increase of \$18 billion going to Syncrude alone. One year later this government has failed. Why did this government fail to stand up to two of the most profitable operations in the world to get a fair share for Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before in previous questioning, the agreement is fair. It was a Crown agreement that was signed in 1997. We said that we were not going to tear up those agreements, and we kept our word. We have renegotiated those agreements. You know, finally, across Canada, especially after today's poll, all Canadians are realizing that the oil sands are very, very important to the economic well-being of not only Alberta but the rest of Canada, and that speaks a lot for what we've done in this great province to support the economy of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just over a year ago this Premier said, "Our government will invest \$300 million for 600 new beds . . . in seven new long-term care centres across the province." Just 11 months later they admitted that the number of long-term care beds will remain at the current number of 14,500 for the next several years. Once again this government has failed a year later. Will the Premier stand up today and explain to all Albertans why he has failed to create a single new long-term bed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think the member has his information a bit mixed up. We're continuing to construct housing for seniors. I know that there's a propensity by that party there to institutionalize seniors. That is not what we want to do. We want to give our seniors a good quality of life in their last years, so we are increasing support for home care. We are providing options in housing, and these are the kinds of options that are going to improve the quality of life and have our seniors, the seniors that helped build this province, enjoy their last few years in comfort.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Home Renovation Contractors

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new federal home renovation tax credit has many Albertans thinking about renovating their homes this year to make the most of tax savings. This is certainly good news that will help keep people working in our province. Unfortunately, there are some contractors who see this as an opportunity to take advantage of consumers. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. How is the government protecting Alberta consumers from contractors who may try to take advantage of them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly true that a lot of Albertans are considering home renovations. Before signing a contract with a renovator, people should first get written estimates from more than one contractor, and after choosing a renovator, they should get a written contract with all the necessary details listed. As well, any contractor who takes payments in advance must be listed by Service Alberta as a prepaid contractor. They also must pass a criminal record check and provide monetary security. Consumers considering hiring a prepaid contractor can call us to find out if a contractor is licensed or not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. It's fine to have rules in place, but they're only good if enforced. What is the government doing to make sure that contractors are following these regulations?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Service Alberta is very active in enforcing the laws and helping Albertans when someone takes advantage of them. Since 2003 we have dealt with more than 1,000 files regarding prepaid contractors. We have recovered nearly \$1.3 million for consumers who have been wronged by prepaid contractors. The courts have also fined prepaid contractors more than \$225,000 under the Fair Trading Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure that Alberta consumers are aware of their rights when hiring a contractor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While most contractors are indeed trustworthy and responsible, we want to warn Albertans

about the risks and what they can do to protect themselves. We have a lot of good information. Our website includes tipsheets on choosing contractors for home renovations. We also have news releases warning consumers on a regular basis. We have also information booths at many of the renovation trade shows. There is good protection in place, but I would encourage all Albertans to do their homework and choose a contractor very carefully.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

School Bus Safety

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A tragedy involving a child causes everyone to question how to prevent it from happening again. It is within this government's control to ensure that standards are in place to protect children who take the bus to school. To the Minister of Transportation: will the minister implement legislation that requires school buses to drop off children at their driveways rather than putting them at risk by having to cross the secondary highways?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, any time that we have an accident or a fatality involving a child, it's very, very heart-wrenching for everyone involved. We did have a fatality by Millarville recently, and my heart goes out to that family. I don't know all of the exact details about what happened there, but we are investigating within our highway Traffic Safety Act, and we will do what's necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: how will the minister be working with the school boards to implement best practices for school bus safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall, with our co-operation the Ministry of Transportation did a bus safety report. It had a number of recommendations with respect to what could be done with school buses to make sure that they were visible to drivers. I can say that I have met with superintendents and chairs of boards across the province, and I've always emphasized bus safety as part of our discussions. In the end it comes down to drivers on the road being careful and being aware that at certain times of the day our buses are out with our children and that we should be paying attention to the fact that buses are out there with our children. We need to be more careful on our roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: will the minister specifically target funding to school boards to address school bus safety concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation may wish to address this because he has graciously indicated to boards that his department would provide some of the funding necessary to outfit buses in accordance with the report that was prepared. That work is ongoing. In fact, some school boards have been ahead of the game in that process in terms of making sure that the reflector tapes and the strobe lights and those sorts of things have

already been installed on their buses. Yes, funding has been provided through the Ministry of Transportation to accommodate that.

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

2:10

Nanotechnology

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May of 2007 this government announced the Alberta nanotechnology strategy aimed at capturing a share in the world's nanotechnology market. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why has this government chosen to invest in nanotechnology?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the government chose to invest in nanotechnology based on a partnership with our federal government partners in the National Institute for Nanotechnology. Nanotechnology is what they call platform technology that crosses a number of different disciplines. In Alberta, obviously, we're interested in environmental impacts, energy and alternative energies, health, imaging. All of these things are part of what nanotechnology can build in this province. That's why we're very, very interested in that world market.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. As part of this strategy this government announced their investment in the National Institute for Nanotechnology and the Alberta Centre for Advanced MNT Products, or ACAMP. How do these two organizations differ, or how do they complement one another?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, NINT, as I mentioned, is the partnership between the provincial government and the federal government and really has a national connection. It's the institute, if you will, that is going to do the research on building nanosystems, on materials that can be constructed from nanomaterials. ACAMP, or the advanced micronanotechnology products institute, is really to take the research that NINT develops and turn it into a package that our entrepreneurs can commercialize in this province, turn it into a wealth generator of business here in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister: how do we plan to ensure that Alberta remains a world leader in nanotechnology?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's all about partnerships. Even today at a Prion Research Institute meeting with a number of my colleagues from the Legislature we were talking partnerships. Nanotechnology is no different. We are attracting world-class researchers who have connections around the globe. We're investing in the infrastructure that is critical to nanotechnology. We now have companies that graduate students can work for in our province. So as you build the cluster here in the province, you build the economy around nano. You also build those products and services that are related to it, and that provides for sustainable economic development.

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

Secondary Ticket Sales

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the spring I raised my concern that this government does not protect ticket buyers, artists, and stagehands from Ticketmaster's scheme on Internet and secondary sales. Since then governments in the U.S. and Canada have both convened inquiries and have introduced legislation on this issue. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. What steps has the minister taken since the spring to protect Alberta ticket buyers, artists, and stagehands from Ticketmaster's scheme of secondary sales?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this whole issue Service Alberta is monitoring it on a daily basis. Protecting consumers is very important. When the act is proclaimed – indeed, that is going to be happening. The legislation that we have in place, the Fair Trading Act, does protect consumers, but we are monitoring it on a daily basis because of the ongoing cases that are before the courts.

Ms Blakeman: No, it doesn't protect them, and my question to the minister is: why? When it has the chance to protect its citizens, to protect ticket buyers, to protect artists, and to protect stage workers, why won't this government step up and protect them?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we are stepping up. We've got Bill 18, that has yet to be proclaimed, that will indeed do what the hon. member is asking for. In the meantime, ticket selling and scalping of tickets is illegal, and when that Bill 18 is proclaimed, we'll be addressing the issues that the hon. member mentions.

Ms Blakeman: So the minister wants us to rely for protection on a bill that has not yet been proclaimed. How is that protecting ticket buyers in Alberta, artists in Alberta, and stagehands in Alberta? You haven't even proclaimed the legislation. It does not protect them.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that as the hon. member who has been in this House a lot longer than I have knows, everything doesn't work as quickly as we would like, but we'll take time, and when the bill is proclaimed, then we will have the protection that you are looking for.

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

Regionally Produced Construction Products

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, the forest products companies of Alberta have fought a valiant fight to stay afloat in these trying economic times. Commodity lumber prices have never been lower, yet the industry has never asked for direct support. With the limits of the softwood lumber agreement the best thing we can do to help is to buy lumber. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Can you please tell me what the government of Alberta is doing to ensure that the wood used in GOA construction projects is sourced from Alberta mills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. member. Albertans, their businesses, their jobs, and Alberta's forestry industry are at the heart of our province, and we must

support them where we can. In 2006 Alberta Infrastructure actually incorporated a clause into its design guidelines that encourages the use of Alberta forestry products, and using the wood certification system is recognized in Alberta. It's important to note that we must comply also, though, with building codes in the construction of our facilities. While wood products may be suitable for many projects, we have to follow the codes in other areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. What is the government of Alberta doing to ensure that the maximum amount of wood possible is being used in government of Alberta construction projects?

Mr. Hayden: Well, Mr. Speaker, my ministry is committed to environmentally sustainable standards in our building, and government of Alberta construction projects find that using the LEED environmental design standards is one way to meet that commitment. Through our LEED guidelines we put a strong emphasis on the use of regionally produced materials for construction such as wood. The more local products you use, the more credits you get for the LEED standard. We use regional materials to minimize the energy emissions related to the transportation of products.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Will you commit to using wooden framing materials for the interior partitions of the federal building renovation?

Mr. Hayden: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, building codes require us to use steel studs in the framing construction of interior walls for structures like the federal building. As part of our efforts to recycle materials, the existing wood trim within that building is going to be saved and restored and reused.

Wood is extensively used in many of our projects throughout the province. A couple of recent examples are the Royal Tyrrell Museum, their field station, and the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation in Slave Lake.

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

Public-private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the Minister of Infrastructure stated that the government's failure to disclose P3 school contract details benefits "Albertans, the taxpayers, the people that are paying for this." Albertans, especially during these penny-pinching times, want to know how much of their money will be used to pay for the 18 P3 schools. They also want to know how much of their children's money will have gone to pay for these schools over the next 32 years. The competition is over. The contract has been signed. To the Minister of Education: whose private interests are your ministries protecting, and why?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has dedicated itself to making information available to its citizens, but it also has in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act specific protections for commercial information. The P3 project with respect to phase 1 is not a one-off. There are other opportunities for people

to build in this province, and when they build in this province, when they bid on jobs in this province, they want to know that their commercial information, their competitive information, is protected. So it's very clear that in a commercial contract certain pieces of information are not made public.

Mr. Chase: Alberta taxpayers could well be on the hook for bailing out the failing Australian consortium of Babcock & Brown, the main P3 lenders for this project. Given that according to a recent study, a P3 in British Columbia will cost taxpayers 130 per cent more than it would have had they followed traditional building methods, will the minister commit to releasing the actual costs of building and maintaining the 18 schools?

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's premise is absolutely wrong. Babcock & Brown Australia has nothing whatsoever to do with the P3 project in Alberta, and there would be no circumstance in which taxpayers in Alberta will bail out Babcock & Brown in Australia.

Mr. Chase: The minister stood with me in southwest Calgary when the lender Babcock & Brown's initial financing was announced, so how he can deny that connection is news to me. I guess it's more of the secrecy associated with the deal.

Without knowing what the details are of this particular P3 contract, we have no way to know if taxpayers are getting a deal or being hosed. Will this minister commit to transparency and release how much these schools will actually cost taxpayers, and if it's not Babcock & Brown, if they've been erased, who is it?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member indicates that he was standing beside me. Clearly, he had his earmuffs and his blinders on. The information that was released showed directly what the relationship was between Babcock & Brown in England and the consortium partners that are operating the consortium in Canada, and if he looked at it, he'd have seen that there is no relationship. There is a very small relationship between Babcock & Brown Australia and Babcock & Brown Britain that has absolutely no impact on the contracts in Alberta and no exposure or risk to the taxpayer of Alberta. He would also have known, had he been listening at that particular time, because we did include him in the process and he was there – he could have heard if he'd been listening – that the funding was put in place prior to the contract being started. Again, there is no risk to the taxpayer of Alberta from that particular partner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Election Commitments

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to this government's report card. A year ago today everyday Albertans went to the polls hoping for a government that would take climate change seriously and actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One year later this government has failed. Alberta is alone in the world in relying on intensity targets that encourage the increase of greenhouse gas emissions. To the Minister of Environment: will you stand up today and explain why you are still letting Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions rise for at least the next 30 years?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is clearly committed to reducing greenhouse gases. [interjection] I remind the

hon. member that intensity targets are related to global experience, not individual operators. [interjection] So for each of the 100 large industrial emitters in this province our legislation remains the only legislation of its kind in North America that has legislated mandatory reductions of CO₂. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, you made a couple of interjections. Your colleague made a couple of interjections. Are we clear now? Are you okay now? Have you finished everything, or do you have some more questions now?

Ms Notley: I do.

The Speaker: You do have a question.

Ms Notley: Yes, I do.

The Speaker: To the hon. colleague sitting right beside you, you listen to what your colleague says, okay?

Mr. Mason: Oh, I do, Mr. Speaker. I do.

Ms Notley: There's a reason why there's only one jurisdiction on the continent that has it: because it doesn't work, your particular code.

Anyway, the government also promised everyday Albertans it would invest \$2 billion in green transit. One year later this government has failed. Instead, the government cut and run. They got a fast headline, and they axed the Green TRIP program. They're failing to create new jobs, and they're failing to take any cars off the road. To the Transportation minister: why won't you stop failing Albertans and follow through on your promise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjections] Hon. minister, you've been recognized.

Mr. Ouellette: You know, I don't know where you're getting statements like saying that we've axed the Green TRIP. It's straight imagination somewhere that people dream these things up. In fact, last Friday we were in Calgary meeting with the Calgary Regional Partnership, and we talked all about Green TRIP. You know what? Stay tuned to budget day, and you'll find out how much we're going to spend on it this year.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion to \$200 million is what most people would call axing.

Last spring many motherhood statements were made about protecting Alberta's children. One year later this government has failed. They've failed to create enough child care spaces for working Alberta families. They've failed to protect children in care from abuse. They've failed to take the Child and Youth Advocate from under its thumb. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how can you justify your government's repeated failure to meet the needs of children throughout Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased, actually, to address this. You're right: one of our promises was to create child care spaces. I can tell you that between April 1 and February 20 we created over 5,900 spaces. We helped 148 communities create spaces. I've got all kinds of statistics. Currently we have 2,500 people registered in our online orientation course.

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Initiative

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta nonprofit and voluntary sector initiative was officially announced in 2007 with commitment from the government of Alberta and the sector to forge ongoing dialogue and enhance collaboration. I have spoken previously about the roles, challenges, and contributions of this third sector in our modern-day society. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Would you please tell us what has taken place under this initiative? What key developments have taken place under this initiative since the announcement was made on the project charter?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, this is a groundbreaking initiative as for the first time we are talking directly to this sector about challenges and opportunities and how we can face them together. This sector is important to all Albertans and to our government. The purpose of the framework is to engage the government of Alberta and the not-for-profit and voluntary sector in a collaborative effort to discuss matters of mutual interest. Some of the activities currently under way are developing a comprehensive knowledge database of the Alberta not-for-profit and voluntary sector, 19,000 organizations, which we didn't have, implementing a workforce strategy for the nonprofit and voluntary sector, and co-ordinating discussions between the sector and funders looking at the impact of the current economic climate and how it affects the sector.

Ms Woo-Paw: What will the minister do to ensure this important sector has the capacity and resources to continue to support our communities and vulnerable citizens in these challenging economic times?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the work we are doing to help the nonprofit and voluntary sector make it through these economic times is not just in our ministry. Working collaboratively with several other ministries of interest, the comprehensive database that I mentioned will help us to identify the needs that exist in the different subsectors, whether it be sports, whether it be faith-based organizations, whether it be social or arts and cultural organizations. The workforce strategy will help the sector attract and retain the people they need, and discussions are not limited to the government alone. We're talking with all different people, and that just goes on top of the different programs that we have that are available for funding.

Seizure of Illegal Firearms in Vehicles

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I've heard from members of law enforcement and legal practitioners, and they have told me they are unable to get convictions in instances when illegal firearms are found in vehicles. The people charged simply deny that the gun was theirs. Accordingly, can the Minister of Justice explain how the victims of crime legislation will work against gangbangers in a rental car or a stolen car with illegal firearms therein when they deny ownership and knowledge of the guns being there?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This legislation is two months old. We've been working with the police on this. We believe that as the police begin to make investigations with respect to these circumstances, they'll have perfect opportunities under the Criminal Code to charge these people with appropriate violations.

Mr. Hehr: That's contrary to what my people who are working in those institutions tell me. [interjections] Well, thank you.

It is common knowledge that oftentimes these gangbangers are generally young individuals, not the criminal masterminds of an organization. Given that these individuals probably have no assets to take under the victims of crime legislation, what will be their punishment in Alberta?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speculate or make presumptions about whether or not people that are committing criminal acts may or may not hold property. The intention of this act is to seize property, to seize instruments of crime, to seize property that is likely to be used as an instrument of crime, and to sell it to compensate victims. If we spend the next three months in this Legislature trying to come up with every particular scenario that may or may not work, we might as well all be back in law school again.

2:30

Mr. Hehr: I think it is wonderful legislation as well, and I applaud the minister for implementing it. However, we're not talking about something hypothetical. We're talking about guns on the streets and that people are dying in constituencies like mine. How can we close this apparent loophole that is present in your bill, which again I applaud?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this government does not need to be lectured on what's going on in the streets and in communities across this province. We are taking steps under safe communities legislation. We have passed legislation that has been asked for by the police within six months to take action against what is going on. It is wrong for us in this Legislature to be debating and to be crying out about the panic in the streets. We know what's going on. We're responding to it, we're doing it in partnership with the police and with Crown prosecutors, and we're having an impact.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Carbon Capture and Storage

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Carbon capture and storage is a popular subject around the water cooler and in the media these days for good reason. Some are questioning why we are continuing with such a significant investment in a time of financial uncertainty. Others are focused on the proposals of President Obama to spend \$2.5 billion on carbon capture. Now, my question is to the Minister of Environment. How is the province justifying spending \$2 billion in such a narrow field when the world's fiscal situation is so uncertain?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the simple answer is that if it was the right thing to do prior to an economic downturn, it's still the right thing to do during an economic downturn. The purpose of this investment is to contribute our efforts that will lead to real reductions in CO₂, real effects on global efforts related to climate change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My support of carbon capture and storage is because it's a very economical thing to do in terms of the payback that we will be getting, but there are

questions around what impact CCS will have in reducing emissions in the oil sands. I, unfortunately, read a recent media report that the potential capture rate for the oil sands is possibly as low as 10 per cent. How does the minister respond to these statements?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that the report that the member refers to was perhaps based on the past and forgetting about the future. Let's not forget that the future of oil sands is not in the giant mines that everyone associates with oil sands today, but it's in situ. There are huge opportunities for CCS for in situ operations. There are huge opportunities for the application of CCS at the upgrader level, at the refinery level. There are a myriad of ways that CCS will apply not only to electrical energy but also to oil sands within Alberta. Our estimates – and we stand by them – are that there should be application of CCS for anywhere from 60 to 70 per cent of CO₂ emissions from oil sands operations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister. The Americans are expected to come out with aggressive climate change policies soon that could have an impact on Alberta. In fact, the federal Minister of the Environment is in Washington as we speak to discuss the U.S.-Canada clean energy dialogue. Why is the province putting its eggs in the carbon capture and storage basket if we don't yet know what is going to come out of the U.S.?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has not been waiting for the U.S. to get engaged in this file. We've been actively involved in CCS and the climate change file now for quite some time. It's encouraging for us to see that the Obama administration is now working towards, among other things, the application of technology. It's also encouraging to us that there is an agreement between our national government and the U.S. national government to engage in a North American dialogue that will eventually lead to the application of much-needed technology in this field.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Employment Insurance Benefit Program

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December 2008 only 1 in 4 unemployed Albertans was eligible to receive EI benefits. My first question is to the minister of employment. Will the hon. minister support the Official Opposition to request the federal government to change the EI rules for Alberta by lengthening the benefit period and reducing the barriers to qualify for EI benefits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As labour ministers, the ministers responsible for employment in Canada, we don't need to rely on the opposition to move forward with our work. We're continuously working with our federal counterparts to make sure that the employment benefits are applicable to Alberta. We've made some suggestions to our federal counterparts and are continuing to work with them to assure ourselves that benefits come to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the unemployment level for construction workers in this province is now over 9 per cent, the unemployment level for young people is over 9 per cent, how can the province work with the federal government to increase job skills training through the EI benefits program?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we've got a number of agreements that have been signed with the federal government, and those agreements were signed a year ago and are being added to as we speak. The intent of those particular agreements is to provide ongoing training, ongoing support to those individuals who are losing their jobs. It's always sad to hear of individuals losing their particular positions, but our mandate is to help them try to find additional work experiences, additional training and to try to move them on to other jobs that they might be suitable to do.

Mr. MacDonald: Speaking of finding work, Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: will the minister organize a job fair – it's something you're very good at – in Borger, Texas, to showcase the skills of the unemployed construction workers here in Alberta who specialize in heavy industrial construction so that they can participate in the boom that's going on in Texas with the upgrader construction? We're exporting our bitumen, building the upgraders in Texas. That's where the jobs are. Will you go to those places?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think we're doing our best to make sure that Albertans are working. You know, to go where this particular member is going, I don't believe that his comments are worthy of additional responses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipal sustainability initiative is an unprecedented program, to the tune of \$1.4 billion if I recall correctly. This MSI funding assists municipalities to manage growth and also long-term planning and sustainability. My question today is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How does the government ensure the MSI dollars are spent effectively on high-priority projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to supporting municipalities. The province has set project categories: transit, underground infrastructure, roads and bridges, police and emergency facilities, recreation and cultural facilities like libraries. Municipalities decide what the projects should be on their priorities. Municipalities are accountable to their ratepayers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. My constituents in Calgary-Fort would like to know how much money Calgary has received under MSI and some of the projects that have been funded.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, MSI is having a real impact on helping municipalities plan. Calgary has received \$270 million.

The mayor in his State of the City address at noon today stated that one of the centrepieces of the Calgary infrastructure program is the west leg of the LRT. Fifty-four million dollars of that expansion comes from MSI. MSI helps build strong communities each and every day.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. My constituents also would like to know if the provincial MSI program will be affected by the decrease in public revenue due to the current downturn of the economy.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, April 7 is budget day. I would like to say to the hon. member that at that time we will reveal the ministry's budget, but I want to stress that this government will continue to support municipalities, as it has in the past.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period. There were 94 exchanges today. In 30 seconds from now we will continue with our Routine. I'll recognize the last of six members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Business Awards of Distinction

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to draw attention to some of Alberta's top businesses that were honoured last Friday during the 18th annual Alberta business awards of distinction. The event was hosted by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and featured awards spotlighting the exceptional achievements of 10 businesses.

The evening's most prestigious honour was the Premier's award of distinction, presented by the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The Premier's award went to Rogers Insurance of Calgary for its innovative human resources strategies.

Other winners included Muskwa Productions & Consulting of Tsuu T'ina for the aboriginal woman entrepreneur award; Hy-Tek Computer Sales and Service Ltd. of Rocky Mountain House for the aboriginal youth entrepreneur award; Frito Lay Canada of Lethbridge for the diversity leadership award; Canada Safeway Limited of Calgary for the employer of persons with disabilities award; Good Earth Coffeehouse and Bakery of Calgary for the employer of youth award; Mathieu Hryniuk of Peace River for the small business award; Spindle, Stairs & Railings of Calgary for the marketing award; ESS Support Services of Calgary for the aboriginal relations best practice award; and last but not least, Samson Management Ltd. of Hobbema for the aboriginal relations eagle feather award.

I'd like to ask all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the winners of these awards for their exceptional performance.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Premier it's my pleasure to table copies of the Alberta's Promise annual report.

This report summarizes the fifth year of this project's activities and highlights the achievements of our Promise partners.

Today 1,164 service organizations, businesses, and communities throughout the province are working together to do more for Alberta's children as partners in Alberta's Promise. The work of our dedicated Promise partners over the past five years has resulted in many outstanding success stories that have had a positive impact on the lives of Alberta children and youth. I know the hon. members will enjoy reading about these activities and achievements. The annual report is also available at www.albertaspromise.org.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission annual review for April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of the responses to motions for returns 10 and 11, both asked for by the Member for Calgary-Varsity on October 20, 2008.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you may recall, on February 19 I rose pursuant to Standing Order 29(2)(a) to speak to the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose's response to the throne speech. In doing so, I rose with my BlackBerry and I quoted from it, which was from a page from the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose's Facebook. I have a copy that I'm tabling with you, which is a quote dated the same day, February 19 – it's on page 3 for this House's reference – and which I'll pass to the page. I trust that this will conclude this new chapter in the history of this Assembly. I'm proud to do so, to make some sort of history, however small, being referenced as a young gun.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table a number of working-short reports. These forms are to draw attention to the issues of short-staffing in extended facilities. I have several to table which indicate in many cases that baths, in particular, and urgent personal care for residents of long-term care facilities were not provided as a result of short-staffing those facilities.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is Evaluation of Public Private Partnerships in B.C., the 130 per cent cost overrun which I referenced in my question. I'm very grateful to the Auditor General for looking into the 18 P3 schools.

My second tabling. This past week my wife and I had the pleasure of attending the updated, augmented Alberta Ballet's production of Joni Mitchell's and Jean Grand-Maitre's creative collaboration of *The Fiddle and the Drum*. The ballet dealt with the troublesome themes of war and environmental degradation but, true to Alberta tradition, ended on a note of hope and possibility.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board annual report 2008 and pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta Dental Association and College 2008 annual report, the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta 2008 annual report, and the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta annual report 2007-2008.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be the first opportunity in the month of March, basically, to talk about what events will be celebrated this month, but prior to that, a few comments with respect to the year 2009 as members oftentimes wish to stand up in Members' Statements to do recognitions.

The year 2009 is the International Year of Reconciliation, the International Year of Astronomy, the International Year of Human Rights Learning, and the International Year of Natural Fibres. It's the Year of the Ox in the Chinese zodiac. It's the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. It's the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. It's the Decade to Roll Back Malaria in Developing Countries, Particularly in Africa. It deals with the United Nations Literacy Decade, with the theme Education for All. It's also part of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and it's part of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. It's also part of the International Decade for Action with Respect to Water for Life.

March is National Liver Health Month, National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, National Kidney Month, National Nutrition Month, National Social Work Month, Fraud Prevention Month, Youth Science Month.

We're part of and have just finished participating in Canadian Landmine Action Week. This week, February 26 to March 7, is National Engineering and Geoscience Week. It's also Social Work Week in Alberta, as it is Pharmacist Awareness Week. March 2 to 8 is International Women's Week, culminating on March 8, International Women's Day. March 2 to 8 is also Health Ethics Week. March 6 is the World Day of Prayer. March 6 to 22 is Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, or National Francophonie Week.

2:50

March 8 is also daylight savings time initiation. From sunset on March 8 to sundown on March 9 is Mawlid an-Nabi, the birthday of Mohammed. March 9 is also Commonwealth Day. March 9 and 10 are Purim, part of the Jewish tradition. March 11 to 14 is Canadian Music Week. March 11 to 17 is Canadian Agriculture Safety Week. March 12 is World Glaucoma Day, as it also is World Kidney Day. March 14 to 20 is National Farm Safety Week. March 15 is World Consumer Rights Day. March 16 to 22 is Brain Awareness Week. March 17 is St. Patrick's Day. March 20 is Journée internationale de la Francophonie. It's also the spring equinox. It's also International Sun-Earth Day, and it's also World Storytelling Day.

March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as it is World Poetry Day, as it is the first day of the week from March 21 to 27, known as the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination. March 22 is World Water Day. March 23 is World Meteorological Day. March 23 to April 12 are the Easter Seals Paper Egg campaign weeks. March 24 is World Tuberculosis Day. March 25 is the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. March 27 is World Theatre Day.

Before we go to Orders of the Day, I believe, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, that we dealt with the point of order that you were going to raise? It was cleared?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Debate adjourned February 19]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today with my response to the Speech from the Throne and to thank His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for delivering the Speech from the Throne that opened this session, the Second Session of the 27th sitting of the Alberta Legislature. I also want to pass along my best wishes at this time to all of my constituents in Calgary-Currie. It is a great honour to represent you in the Alberta Legislature.

We have many challenges before us, but the people of Calgary-Currie continue to demonstrate the type of resilience and willingness to work together to solve problems that I think gives this province its character. As was noted in the Legislature earlier today, Mr. Speaker, one year ago today we were elected to serve the people of Alberta. Many of us were re-elected; 31 of us were elected for the first time. How things have changed in that past year, especially on the economic front.

It is true that we are going to experience some tough times this year. Albertans have overcome huge challenges in the past, and we will get through this one, too. But if I have one message as Official Opposition finance critic today, it is this: there is a right way and a wrong way to overcome challenges. We need a plan, Mr. Speaker, a strategy to lighten the impact of this crisis, to stimulate the economy, to support people who are hurt by the downturn, and to keep people working. We need to keep investing in infrastructure – roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, and public transit – because infrastructure puts people to work in real jobs, building and maintaining real things that we can use. We need to diversify and green our economy. We need to invest in health, education and workforce training, housing, and human services so that no Albertan gets left behind. To do that, we need to cut out all the wasteful and unnecessary spending and reallocate those dollars to the programs and the priorities that work, to the programs and the priorities that count.

The government of Alberta spends 23 per cent more per capita than the national average, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's time we had more to show for it. Let's learn from this. Oil and gas is not stable at any price and will not stay stable at any price. This means we need to start saving our nonrenewable resource revenues when prices are soaring so that we have a cushion when times get tough. It's the only way we're ever going to get off the boom-and-bust roller coaster. I know there are some experts who have said that the

government of Alberta, quite frankly, can't afford to embark on a savings program this year. I would suggest that they can't afford not to.

Were this a family that we were planning a financial plan for, we would understand that you have to do three things simultaneously. You have to pay your debts, and you have to make those debt payments on time. That's an obligation you have to your creditors. You have to meet your daily and monthly expenses. And you have to set aside something for the future for whatever purpose you're saving for, whether it's your retirement, your kids' education, a down payment on a house, whatever. Sometimes when times are tough, when the money is a little bit thin, you can't save as much as you would like to. You can't put as much into your retirement plan as your salary would indicate that you could, but you have to put something in there because it's about getting into the habit as much as anything. We need to get into the savings habit in this province in a way that we never have.

Mr. Speaker, the Holy Cross centre in Mission has been a valued community landmark and health services provider in my constituency for years. This is why the fate of the site remains a top concern of mine as plans proceed to attempt to have it rezoned and perhaps to redevelop the site. I've heard from many of you, many of my constituents, who wish to have a continued health care presence in the community, and I agree. The province has invested millions of tax dollars in the Tom Baker cancer centre. The people of Calgary-Currie must see a return on their investment. They deserve to have the current health care services preserved in any redevelopment plans. Furthermore, with the economy cooling and job losses beginning to mount, the need for affordable housing will continue, and the Holy Cross site is a perfect candidate to help address this need.

On the topic of affordable housing, Mr. Speaker, it's true that housing prices have started to decline, but a \$280,000 condo now is no more affordable to someone on the street or someone without a job, someone without prospects than a \$300,000 condo was last summer. We are going to see an increased demand for housing as the economy slows, and we're going to have to use ever more innovative ways to help the economy recover, I think. It therefore makes sense to preserve construction jobs – and, as my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out a few minutes ago, construction unemployment in this province now tops 9 per cent – and at the same time get people out of the shelter and off the street. So let's make affordable housing development a moral deed that pays this year.

Like most Calgarians I am tired of having our city's reputation tarnished by reports of gang violence. That's why I support initiatives to give law enforcement more of the basics: more cops, tougher penalties, more stringent bail conditions, and passing my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's Bill 201 to allow police to take additional effective action against gangbangers who transport guns in vehicles, whether that happens to be a vehicle they legitimately own or a vehicle they stole from somebody else.

In Calgary-Currie we're also especially interested in cutting gangs off at the source by ensuring that our kids aren't being recruited into the gangs, recruited by gangbangers. We need more after school programs, Mr. Speaker. The minister for children's services gave some statistics in the House earlier today about the number of child care spaces, daycare spaces that have been created. We have made progress on that file. Where we really need to make progress, I believe, in the coming year is in before and after school care. I repeatedly hear from law enforcement and social service workers who tell me that unsupervised youth are the biggest targets for gang

recruitment. While mom and dad are at work, our kids need something to occupy their time. Let's make sure it's safe and supervised.

About health care, Mr. Speaker. In the 1990s the people of Alberta were told repeatedly that if we made some short-term sacrifices, we would see long-term gains. We are still waiting. Health services were cut, hospitals closed, doctors lost, nurses fired, and now the health minister is telling us to stop whining about the fact that these things haven't been replaced, these things and these people. Well, if hospitals don't get built and if beds don't get staffed, Albertans don't get the health care that they deserve for their tax dollars. End of story. Times are tough enough without having to worry about our health care or that of a loved one. Let's not burden Albertans with another worry. Let's continue to invest in health care.

Mr. Speaker, to end, I just want to note that it's good to see legislation in this session that will allow postsecondary institutions in the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions sector to finally apply to be able to name the elephant in the room; that is, to become authorized, on jumping through the necessary hoops, to call themselves what they are, universities, if they wish. Bill 4 will finally allow the rest of the nation and the rest of the world to recognize Mount Royal, of which many of my constituents are proud to call themselves students, faculty, support staff, alumni, and their families, for what it has already effectively become, an excellent undergraduate university focused on teaching. It has been a long time coming, and I know my constituents and I look forward to the day when Mount Royal becomes officially Mount Royal University.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I'll call on the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

3:00

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I'm very happy to be able to stand today to respond to the 2009 throne speech delivered by His Honour Norman Kwong, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. I would like to thank His Honour for his work as our Lieutenant Governor. In the throne speech he read: Alberta is a beautiful and blessed province that has attracted people of courage and determination, dreamers who saw opportunity here. I wonder if His Honour realized that he was describing himself, a person of courage and determination, a dreamer, an Albertan who saw the opportunity and seized the day. He is an inspiration for all Albertans, one of only a very few that have won both the Grey Cup and the Stanley Cup. Thank you, Your Honour, for being an inspiration to all Albertans and Canadians. You have shown us that whatever the mind can conceive, the person can achieve.

I wonder sometimes if we ever thank our families enough for supporting us in our roles as MLAs. In many ways it is as if the Crown receives two persons for the price of one as our spouses and significant others support us in the many activities that we undertake to meet and greet our constituents and their concerns. I want to now once again let my family know how much their love and support mean to me. I would not be able to help other people as an MLA or as a minister without their unconditional love. Bob, Jeremy, Amy, Krystin, Amber, Tyler, and my five incredible grandchildren – Taiya, Hannah, Kaden, Camryn, and Morgan – thank you for your love and support. You are the wind beneath my wings.

I would also like to thank the people of Red Deer-North for allowing me to have the privilege of serving them in a fourth term as their MLA, and a special thanks to all the volunteers who have

stood by my side for the past four elections and nominations. Helen Keller was right when she said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

I came to Red Deer in 1980 thinking that one day I would return to Ontario, the place of my birth. It didn't take me long to realize that if I was searching for paradise on earth, I had found it. Although I believed that Red Deer was paradise, as I have come to know Alberta better, I realize that Red Deer is the centre of paradise. Red Deer is like living in the country in the middle of a city. The friendly wave from your neighbour or a friendly wave from a complete stranger, a warm smile from the commissioner as he places another parking ticket on your windshield, and the helping hand of a passerby as he stops to open a door for you tell you that you are in the right place.

Nowhere else in Canada can you live only an hour and a half from two NHL teams, two CFL teams, two international airports, and two Jubilee auditoriums and not have to put up with rush hour traffic jams or drive-by shootings. Although things are changing and the innocence and charm of our city is threatened by increasing criminal activity, I take great comfort in the safe communities program, that will provide a new law enforcement framework that will make it very uncomfortable for gangs and organized crime to grow and prosper in Alberta.

Alberta has drawn a line. We have drawn a line not in the shifting sands but in solid rock, in the foothills of the Rockies and in the fields of wheat and in the cities and in the towns. Albertans will not put their heads in the sand and ignore the signs all around us. We will take a stand to make our communities strong and safe, for what is the worth of a village that cannot protect its own?

The throne speech states that Alberta "is made up of vibrant, inclusive communities, places of opportunity, culture, and belonging where families and children are supported, where the vulnerable are cared for, and where people feel safe." Fostering strong and sustainable communities includes supporting children and families, helping Albertans through tough times, and supporting seniors and persons with disabilities.

As Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I'm very honoured and humbled to represent seniors and persons with disabilities in Alberta. I would like to thank my very competent and dedicated staff in my office and throughout my ministry, who work so hard to serve seniors and persons with disabilities. I know how important it is for a community to care for its most vulnerable members, and I know that our ministry, with the help of many others, is doing just that. You have all heard the quote that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, I say to you that it takes a village to raise a child to care for an aging person and to care for a person with disabilities. Together we have a shared responsibility, a shared responsibility between the person, the family, and the village.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

One shared responsibility of my ministry is to help Albertans to age in the right place. We have found through consultations with Albertans through the Demographic Planning Commission, chaired by the very capable MLA for Whitecourt-St. Anne, that Albertans want to live in their homes for as long as possible. One day on my way to my office a gentleman stopped me and told me about his wife of 45 years. He told me that she was showing signs of Alzheimer's disease. Then with great passion he said that he would crawl across broken glass to be able to keep her at home. He would look after her and care for her, only he needed some help, and he asked if I could help him. Between the family, the community, and the government we will find a way to help this man love and care for his wife in their home for as long as possible.

This is where the new continuing care strategy becomes so important to Albertans. This new strategy is in response to our Premier's mandate to improve the quality, improve the supply, and improve client choice in the continuing care system. Improving the continuing care system is a top priority for me, and because of this strategy we will have more community living supports in place so that seniors like the couple that I just spoke about and those with disabilities can receive care in their homes, where they are most comfortable, and have a place to go when they need some more help.

Along with the new continuing care strategy our government understands the importance of seniors' centres in our communities. I've had the opportunity to visit many of these centres in Alberta, and I'm very impressed by the number of people who work together to help seniors maintain a good quality of life. In Cold Lake I met a gentleman who told me about moving to this community and going to the seniors' centre for the first time and sitting alone in the back of the room. Another senior noticed him and asked him what he was doing sitting at the back of the room all by himself. He said he didn't know anyone, so she invited him to sit at her table. She asked him if he knew how to dance, and he said, "I can't remember," so she got him up to dance and discovered that he was indeed a good dancer. He hasn't missed a dance since and is always the first one up, encouraging others to get up and dance. I hope he keeps dancing. Being active with other people helps seniors to remain healthy and happy. Health and happiness are both essential elements to a good quality of life.

To further support our shared responsibility, as you heard in the throne speech, we will be presenting updated legislation this session. The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, sponsored by the very competent MLA for Red Deer-South, introduced as Bill 10, will promote the safety and security of seniors by updating legislation that oversees residential living, lodge living, assisted living, and enhanced assisted living. The act will also continue to require facilities to comply with the accommodation standards. I've spoken to many seniors in Alberta who have requested and encouraged this legislation.

In addition and related to our efforts to increase the supply of supportive living units, we are providing more than \$92 million to create more than 870 new units, to modernize 200 units, and to improve seniors' lodges across Alberta. This funding will provide more options for people to remain in their communities and have more affordable alternatives.

Another piece of legislation that will be brought forward by Seniors and Community Supports during this session is the Protection for Persons in Care Amendment Act. This legislation will continue to highlight the shared responsibility that we all have within our village by strengthening the existing legislation to ensure the safety of adults receiving care by making it a duty for a person to report abuse.

There are also several other initiatives related to our commitment and shared responsibility of assisting both seniors and persons with disabilities within this village known as Alberta. This includes preparing for an aging population. Did you know that research in the United Kingdom shows that people who prepare a will will live on average 10 more years than those who don't? This is one good reason for you to prepare a will. That looks after your wishes after you die, and a personal directive takes care of your wishes when you're not able to speak for yourself and you're still alive.

3:10

My ministry is promoting personal directives and has developed an online registry, the first of its kind in Canada, to encourage adults to detail their wishes in case they become unable to make personal

decisions. We will continue to support Albertans with disabilities through programs like the assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, and the persons with developmental disabilities program, or PDD. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, chaired by Marlin Styner and the capable MLA from Edmonton-Rutherford as the deputy chair, is a very important connection to the disability community and to the future.

I know that we have a long way to go to make our communities more accessible to those with disabilities. Just last week I had the very humbling experience of needing a wheelchair to get around after I tore a ligament in my knee. Do you know how many places in Alberta do not have universal access? Although I was in the wheelchair for only two days, it became very clear to me that there are many places in Red Deer and Alberta that are not wheelchair accessible. I was forced to cancel a number of appointments because I had no way of going up and down stairs. As baby boomers age, we will add to the numbers of those who require universal access just to make a day.

The throne speech states: "It is Alberta's people that make our province unique: people who are dynamic and genuine, optimistic and open-minded, people who share the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve." Alberta is all of this and more. Alberta is a big village where people share responsibility with courage and determination, where dreamers see the opportunity and work together to seize the day. Peter Seeger, the American folk singer who wrote *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, said, "I want to turn the clock back to when people lived in small villages and took care of each other." I would tell Mr. Seeger that instead of turning the clock back, all he needs to do is move to Alberta – Alberta – a big village where people live and take care of each other.

I am proud to be Albertan. I am proud to be Canadian. As we continue to build this province for those who will inherit this land that we love, I hope that we will always remember to dance like no one is watching, sing like no one is listening, and to love with all our hearts.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Five minutes are available under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today in response to the speech delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. The Lieutenant Governor showed considerable emotion in starting his speech and noted that it was his fifth. I can only say in starting a response that we have been well served by this particular Lieutenant Governor and that he has done well for both the institution and office and for the people of Alberta.

One year ago today was Alberta's 27th general election. I was honoured and privileged to be returned to this Assembly for a fourth term by the constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud. It remains a privilege for me to continue to serve those constituents and all the citizens of Alberta as a member of our Premier's government. Anniversaries are always an opportune time to reflect, and the past year has certainly provided ample food for thought. The past six months have been particularly difficult for many Albertans as events in the global energy and banking sectors have brought unexpected uncertainty into our homes and businesses. While today we are concerned about how the economy will impact our families and our neighbours, we must continue to look to the future with the certainty of better times ahead. Now more than ever is the time for faith and foresight as we form that future.

A great challenge for Alberta is to ensure that our future is economically and environmentally sustainable. There is no better way to succeed in tackling this challenge than to invest our resource-based wealth into our people so that we become a key part of the global knowledge economy. A knowledge economy depends not just on the creativity of people but on the facilities, the institutions, the universities and colleges, where knowledge is developed.

In recent years Edmonton has become a world-renowned centre for nanotechnology, energy and natural resources technology, diabetes, cardiology, cancer prevention and treatment, and ambulatory care. Of course, many other parts of Alberta are renowned for what they deliver to the research agenda and the knowledge agenda. The cutting-edge research conducted at our universities, our community facilities, our businesses is garnering international acclaim while generating economic spinoffs and reducing our environmental impact while improving the daily lives of Albertans.

Of course, continuing to build an economy based on knowledge will not be easy. We can and must build on our successes – the best schools, world-class universities, a province-wide fibre-optic network, unique endowment funds, and state-of-the-art facilities for medical, science, and engineering research – to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to succeed to the best of his or her abilities.

Alberta has a strong record on which to build a better future, but there's more work to do. In all of this there is one crucial foundation, our basic education system. Leading in learning is central to a successful story. This means making certain that our educational opportunities are second to none, that every child can find his or her passion and grow up to be a caring, contributing, confident member of society. When all Albertans strive together in a shared desire for our children to succeed, we will ensure that our province reaps the benefits of maximizing its human potential.

The timeless promise of education everywhere is to nurture and stimulate, to enrich and fulfill the innate potential in every human being, and that is why we strive to ensure that every child looks on the world with wonder, is fascinated by constant surprises, and is challenged and uplifted by the search for truth in all things. That's why our schools must be places of delight and dedication, diversity and depth, places of dignity and vitality in which we can gather and celebrate, aspire and achieve.

Yet education is not solely about what happens in schools. It infuses and informs the whole of life. It is about preparing each student for life as a citizen, teaching them to appreciate their entitlements, capitalize on their opportunities, and fulfill their responsibilities. Instilling hope, respect, dignity, and humility in our young people is thus a task that cannot be undertaken solely by educators. The entire community must actively contribute.

Mr. Speaker, education exists not just for the child but for the community. Every Albertan has a stake in what happens in our schools today. Years from now the toddler you passed on the street today may be the nurse caring for you in a hospital, the youngster ahead of you in line at a grocery store may be the police officer keeping your community safe, and the teenager who helps you with your computer may employ you at the next big Alberta company. Education does not become any less important when our children and our grandchildren graduate from school. It is a never-ending and noble task for only through education do we bolster the shared bonds of community and citizenship.

Our province is unique because of the content of our characters and the sense of purpose of our souls. It is therefore imperative that our children learn to honour our heritage and dedicate themselves to the future. Only in an education system that is open to all Albertans regardless of gender, race, religion, class, or geography can our

students come to appreciate the value of diversity and to learn to make judgments about things that truly matter. People come to Alberta from all over the world because of the opportunities that are available here, especially in our schools. That is why it's essential that every person has the opportunity they need to learn, adapt, and develop new knowledge and new skills, and it makes it absolutely critical that those learning opportunities are high quality, accessible, affordable, and sustainable for all Albertans.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the Lieutenant Governor said, "The freedom to create our own future and achieve our dreams so often rests on our enthusiasm for education." To this end we've undertaken a project called Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans, ably chaired by the Member for Athabasca-Redwater and an Edmonton school-teacher, Brent McDonough, a former U of A senator. We undertake this effort not because there is anything wrong with our schools. Indeed, education is one of those things of which Albertans can be rightfully proud. People come to Alberta from all over the world to see our school infrastructure and to observe how our children learn. International tests often place Alberta as one of the top five education systems in the world. Clearly, the hard work of students, teachers, parents, administrators in our school communities are deserving of celebration. However, new times demand new approaches, and the time has come to establish what educational excellence looks like in the next part of the 21st century.

Inspiring Education is both a process and a product, an invigoration of learning in our province and a legacy to leave to the next generation. We seek to renew public appreciation for the value and importance of education in Albertans' lives and to build understanding of how education is increasingly the basis of a prosperous society and economy. We must develop a broadly accepted and clear understanding of what it will mean to be an educated Albertan 20 years from now, and we must look beyond our immediate needs and interests to develop a policy framework which describes the overall direction, principles, and long-term goals for education in Alberta over the next two decades.

Mr. Speaker, by reaching out to Albertans to explore their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for their children, we will ensure that education enables every one of our citizens to face the future with confidence. We will know that we have succeeded when our children are inspired to be imaginative, inventive, inquiring, inclusive, informed, independent, and industrious. With education Albertans will continue to have the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes are available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Earlier during question period the hon. Minister of Education suggested that this past summer, when sod was being turned for a P3 school in southeast Calgary, I was potentially wearing earmuffs and blinders because I confused the Babcock & Brown financing. I would just ask the minister: was I wearing earmuffs and, potentially, blinders during the Speech from the Throne? I don't recall having heard any reference about full-day funding for kindergarten. I don't recall hearing any reference to funding for half-day junior kindergarten. I don't recall any references being made to catching up on defrayed infrastructure for schools. The Calgary public board of education, for example, is \$630 million behind.

If I was in fact missing these points, as I obviously did in the summer, were these ideas mentioned in the Speech from the Throne? Was there any mention, Minister, of getting rid of the publication of achievement test scores? Could you please clarify if I somehow missed those points in the throne speech?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as has been just said to me, there is absolutely no way to tell how many ideas this fellow has missed. But, in fact, if the Speech from the Throne was simply a litany of programs and things to be done, if that's all that was in the Speech from the Throne, the true meaning of a Speech from the Throne, in my view, would be missed. The Lieutenant Governor when he delivers the Speech from the Throne, yes, talks about the agenda for the next year, but what he's really talking about are our hopes and dreams for the future of the province. In Inspiring Education, which was mentioned by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, he truly encompassed the things that we need to do to plan that future for the children of this province to make sure that they get the kind of education that they need.

The hon. member can list all of the issues, and certainly there are issues in education. No one is denying that there are things that need to be done. Notwithstanding the comment from Red Deer-North earlier, Alberta, although a wonderful place, is not necessarily a perfect place. There are things that we can do to make it better. There are things that we can do to make education today better. But what I was addressing my remarks to was about making sure that as we move forward into tomorrow, we understand what the world of tomorrow for our children is going to be like and what things we need to do to make sure that our children and our grandchildren can live here and work here and enjoy the environment here, the place that we've come to know and love.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that I was at a conference in London, England, with 65 ministers of education from around the world, one of the few subnational ministers of education there, and it was very affirming because those ministers of education were aspiring to have what we have in Alberta: wide broad-band connectivity for all of our schools, good curriculum, strong teaching, those things which make the education system strong. Do they have challenges as we have challenges of keeping up with the school infrastructure? Absolutely. Are there more things that we could do on a day-to-day basis? Absolutely. Do we need to work more on early childhood and addressing issues, identifying concerns? Absolutely. But we've got a pretty great place, and we're going to make it even better.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When you were in England attending the conference with the 65 ministers, did they mention a program where children who scored very poorly in standardized achievement tests in Britain received grants of £9,000 apiece, each school, to raise the level of the children who were having such difficulties with testing as opposed to simply publishing their test scores?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of publishing their test scores, I would have to say this: the government of Alberta does not publish children's test scores. We have a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which allows people to get access to information, and members opposite, including that member, routinely ask us to give out more information. Well, one of the pieces of information that we, unfortunately, have to give out are the test scores, and then the Fraser Institute publishes them and ranks schools. But I routinely say, when asked, that those reports ranking

the schools is a wrong use of the data, inappropriate use of the data, and I will continue to say that.

I will say in response to his other question, about what I learned, that I learned a lot about things we could do, things that we could do better. In fact, I had the opportunity to go up to Sheffield in England – and I know you're wanting me to wrap up. They're rebuilding their secondary system, and in doing so, they're mandating wrap-around services. There's a thing we could learn from them.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise on behalf of the constituents of Airdrie-Chestermere and respond to the Speech from the Throne. It really has been a very interesting first year and a very memorable first year. I learn lots every day from my constituents, and it's been an honour to serve with the members from this House.

Mr. Speaker, these are sobering times. Today Albertans and the rest of the world are experiencing feelings of great anxiety and feelings of unease at the state of the world's economy. Jobs are being lost, and incomes are tightening, and a mountain of consumer and government debt is piling up. I know that many Albertans, including many of my own constituents, are hurting, and many more are worrying that they or their loved ones might become the next casualty of this economic downturn. However, we must not allow undue pessimism or negative thoughts to become self-fulfilling prophecy. As Albertans we must do what we have done in times before: we must stand up, we must get to work, and we must turn these daunting challenges into opportunities. It is these opportunities that I wish to address today.

The hardships we face present us with a chance, I think, to refocus, to replan, to set goals, and to aspire to new achievements. As government revenues shrink, we as a fiscally conservative province should re-examine the ways in which we deliver core services to Albertans. Throwing around more money and regulation at tired and antiquated ways of delivering health care, education, and infrastructure will not solve our problems. Rather, we must without preconception, as we are doing in these areas right now, learn of the best and most innovative practices from around the world and have the courage to implement them.

Similarly, crippling our resource-based economy with overregulation and wealth redistribution schemes will do nothing to help the world's environment and certainly will not stimulate an economic recovery. As our Premier has indicated, committing Albertans' hard-earned money to an international trading scheme run by the same kinds of geniuses that brought us the credit crisis and subprime mortgage meltdown is simply not a sensible course of action. Rather, the key to dealing with our environmental challenges will be found in new innovation and new technology. It's funny. Where many critics see the oil sands as a threat to our world's environment, Albertans see the potential wealth and technology derived from the oil sands as the very solution to the environmental challenges the world faces.

3:30

It is this sort of innovative thinking and leadership that has made Alberta today one of the best positioned jurisdictions in the world to successfully weather the current economic storm. We have in times turned challenges into opportunities, and we need to do so again. For example, in the recession and commodities bust of the early 1990s, while governments in this country and around the world increased spending, increased taxes, and built up debt, Alberta took a very unique and decidedly different approach. The Progressive

Conservatives under then Premier Ralph Klein curbed spending, lowered taxes, and began implementing a plan to pay down the provincial debt. The result: the economy recovered and a prolonged boom ensued.

But our party did not stop there. Our government stuck to the plan to pay off the debt and paid off the entire balance. It also invested close to \$14 billion in our rainy day sustainability fund and capital account for exactly this sort of economic downturn. In short, Albertans and we as their government made the fiscally prudent and innovative decisions necessary to place ourselves in the enviable position we find ourselves in today. We turned a fiscal downturn into an opportunity to become better fiscal stewards for the long term.

Now, not everything was handled perfectly, obviously. First, it is safe to say that some core programs were cut too deeply. It is likely that almost the same cost-cutting could have occurred without so much pain had the cuts been better planned and focused. Our current Premier has made it clear that he will take a more prudent and measured approach during the current downturn.

Second – and this is a problem that I believe we're still facing today – is the issue of bringing government spending under control and to do so permanently. This is the key to the long-term success of our province, and it is this opportunity that we have before us today. That is why I will be urging our government to legislatively limit overall government spending to the rate of inflation plus real GDP growth.

This type of legislation has several advantages. It ensures that spending does not get out of control, while providing the funds necessary for continued strong core social programs. In fact, if former Prime Minister Paul Martin had kept his promise while then Finance minister in 2000 to cap government spending to the rate of inflation plus growth, the federal government would be expecting a surplus this year rather than a \$34 billion deficit. In Alberta, where our total provincial spending has increased 140 per cent since 1996, it is clear that had we instituted adequate spending controls, we would be announcing surpluses even during this world-wide recession and corresponding low oil and gas prices.

Another advantage to spending control is that it would provide clear benchmarks and have the effect of curtailing the size and scope of government bureaucracy as departments look for innovative ways to provide more efficient and better services by reallocating existing funding rather than simply asking for more funding while outdated and wasteful programs linger on.

Most importantly, though, this type of legislation could act as a cornerstone of a new, long-term financial plan for Alberta. By controlling spending in this way, it will only take a few short years of modest growth and commodity price recovery for our provincial revenues to greatly outstrip expenditures. This would allow us to grow the heritage fund substantially by investing unbudgeted surpluses therein, and as the fund grows over time, the annual interest returns from the fund would eventually eliminate our reliance on oil and gas revenues, which are both volatile and nonrenewable.

This sort of forward thinking will save our children and grandchildren from having to either substantially raise taxes or cut core social programs. Wouldn't it be a wonderful gift to our children and to our grandchildren if by enacting such a plan, we turn what was once a sea of nonrenewable oil and gas revenue into a mountain of permanent investment capital compounding with interest each and every year? From that point the possibilities are endless. We could grow the heritage fund further for the purposes of substantially lowering income taxes. We could invest in infrastructure, health care, education, and other core programs in degrees that other

jurisdictions could only dream of. In short, we could elevate the Alberta advantage in unprecedented ways, attracting the best people, the best entrepreneurs, the best businesses and technologies from around the world and for decades to come.

With those thoughts and aspirations in mind, Mr. Speaker, but, obviously, recognizing the feelings of unease and uncertainty that many of us in the province feel right now, I want to conclude by expressing to my constituents and each and every Albertan my faith that our province is prepared to weather this economic storm and that the spirit and drive of our people will turn these struggles and challenges into new levels of opportunity. I would say with unequivocal certainty that Alberta's best and brightest days are still to come.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the comments and the hope for Alberta to survive this economic recession. I would like to know if you support the notion behind Motion 501 of investing in public infrastructure in schools, in hospitals, in roads and under what circumstance you would limit any expenditures to inflation. For example, if there was a circumstance where a hospital desperately needed to be completed or major infrastructure repairs suddenly became necessary, are you flexible on that inflationary sort of limit?

Mr. Anderson: Well, I would say that it would probably be an important idea to keep spending – and that would include all increases in government spending – under that cap. But we have to realize that, yeah, there are situations where infrastructure is needed, and sometimes, perhaps, that might take us over the cap. Where I think that money would come from in that case is the capital account, money that had already been set aside for that purpose. Whether we put all the money into a heritage fund and build that up for the purposes of eliminating our dependence on oil and gas revenues or whether we put a portion of that into kind of a capital heritage account so that when there's a downturn, we have money to spend on and stimulate the economy through infrastructure projects, et cetera, that's definitely a way of doing it. But the point is that on a year-over-year increase, operational government spending would only increase by inflation plus growth. If we did that, we could put away money for those types of infrastructure projects as well as the heritage fund.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In a fashion, I think, what you're talking about is almost the equivalent of a COLA clause, where you adjust expenses by inflationary measures. I'm wondering: with regard to savings do you think that even during this time of recession it is important to sock money away for the future? Do you think it's possible to both save and responsibly spend at this recessionary time?

Mr. Anderson: I think it's very important to make sure we're controlling our spending, but there's no point, in my view, in borrowing money to save money. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me. There is some case to be made for it in some circumstances, but I don't think that that's what we should be looking at. What we should be looking at and what the Premier, I believe, has done is laid out a specific plan for getting us out of this recession, on the road to recovery, and part of that includes controlling our

spending. Then, once we are out of recession and once revenues start to again outstrip expenditures, I think that point would be the time to implement an aggressive saving strategy. That would be my feeling.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I agree with you. The idea of borrowing money to save money is questionable, but that's the underlying principle of P3s. The idea is that rather than use your own money now, if you borrow that money, you can get a better price for construction. Do you feel free to comment on P3s, which, in fact, borrow money against future prospects?

Mr. Anderson: Well, as I said in the response to the throne speech, we need to be looking at innovative solutions that maybe we haven't looked at before, and I think actually P3s fit the bill quite well. They do lead to an overall savings for taxpayers if they're done appropriately. What I would like to see – and I think that it could be argued that the heritage fund and the other funds do this – is make sure that those future obligations are backed up by money set aside for that purpose so that we're not mortgaging our children's future on P3s. But the concept of P3s as a way of saving money for Albertans I think is a very solid initiative so long as we're backing up those obligations for the future.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: No one else wishes to speak?

The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and to make a few remarks in response to the Speech from the Throne delivered by His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor. As was noted earlier today, we are celebrating one year since the last election, and I can only remark that after listening to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and other hon. members that form a part of the majority in this House, there were 72 gold stars handed out a year ago, and the hon. member is but one of them.

What struck me about his opening comments was that after a year he has noted that this job is most interesting. I'm part of the class of '97. I'm in my 12th year, and indeed those of us from that particular year will be celebrating 12 years next week. I can tell you, hon. Speaker, that after 12 years I still find this job most interesting. It continues to be an honour. It has always been an honour. Indeed, it has always been a matter of waking up each day and saying: this is a privilege, and I look forward to what I am doing. I can tell you that all of us in this House, I believe, feel that way most of the time. I can think of no exception to it, but to have somebody after a year say that and to be able to say it after 12 years I think speaks well, even when we've gone through, in my case, 12 throne speeches.

What I would like to say about the hon. Lieutenant Governor is that it would appear that his reading of the throne speech this year may be his last. He is in his fifth year. I'm not sure that his term will take him through another one, but if it does, that would be great. If it does not, however, I would like to join others in thanking him for his grace and good humour – and indeed there has been great grace and great good humour for his regular travels throughout this province – and for all he has done for the people of Alberta.

The Lieutenant Governor in his remarks stated that Alberta is a trading province and that our economic success depends on competing in a world marketplace. Well, Mr. Speaker, trading and competing in a world marketplace is part of the critical work of my

ministry, International and Intergovernmental Relations. Alberta has advocated for the elimination of barriers to interprovincial trade, and we have been very successful.

With the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, otherwise known as TILMA, Alberta and B.C. have shown tremendous leadership in breaking down interprovincial barriers. No other Canadian jurisdiction has made a commitment like this. On April 1 of this year Alberta and B.C. will have achieved full labour mobility for all certified tradespeople and a majority of other occupations, reconciled business registration and reporting requirements, and the reconciliation of several regulations that have impeded trade and investment. As a result Albertans will be able to pursue career, business, and investment opportunities in B.C. without going through needless red tape.

The TILMA has been and will continue to be a catalyst at the national level. The pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade has recently been amended to incorporate TILMA-like labour mobility and dispute resolution provisions. There has also been significant progress to bring the TILMA principles to the AIT chapters on energy and agriculture.

Alberta is also a strong and consistent supporter of trade liberalization at the international level. We believe success at the Doha round, where Canada and other member countries of the WTO have been negotiating to liberalize international trade, is the best way to gain international market access for Alberta exporters. Alberta's priorities in the WTO Doha round negotiations have been liberalizing trade in agriculture – in other words, eliminating export subsidies – liberalizing trade in the industrial goods and services, and reducing unnecessary red tape surrounding international trade. Alberta intends to remain fully engaged to ensure that its interests are reflected in the approaches taken by Canada in these negotiations.

Of course, the current economic market has had an impact on trade. Exports and imports dropped in December amid the global economic downturn, with exports falling at a faster pace than imports. Canada recorded its first trade deficit since March 1976. Alberta's exports dropped 14 per cent, from \$8.25 billion to \$7 billion, from November to December. It was inevitable that the global economic recession and the economic crisis in the United States would affect our exports. That said, 2008 was an exceptional year overall for Alberta as our exports reached \$109 billion, which is up from \$81.8 billion in 2007. Alberta continues to supply goods that countries around the world need: food and energy. This puts us in a very favourable position on a go-forward basis. Alberta continues to be a net exporter and will be into the foreseeable future.

The effects of the economic downturn on global trade are a further indication that the work International and Intergovernmental Relations does to promote Alberta business and attract investment abroad is all the more crucial. There's no question our province's economic success is tied to our ability to market our goods, services, and people globally. My ministry will continue its outreach to Alberta companies, gaining their input on international business, providing information on international trade and export opportunities through our trade offices.

The trade offices help the province compete in the global marketplace and showcase and market Alberta to attract tourism and labour. In '07-08 our international offices facilitated more than 3,300 networking sessions and participated in almost 200 trade shows to promote trade and investment in Alberta. We also promote foreign investment in Alberta through direct contact with key multinational corporations to encourage expansion into our province. Alberta will continue to diversify our export base and will target international markets that offer solid export opportunities.

To ensure that the message about Alberta's leadership, commitment, and action on the environment reaches an international

audience, international travel by the Premier and cabinet ministers is vital. We cannot wait for international opportunities to come to us. We are an export-based economy, and creating linkages with other countries is essential for Alberta. Particularly during this time of economic uncertainty it's important that the Premier and cabinet ministers meet face to face with government and business leaders. We need to demonstrate that Alberta's investment climate remains strong.

International activities also expand beyond business. We nurture strong international relations in other areas of importance to Albertans: culture, sport, education, technology. One of our most important relationships is with our biggest trading partner and neighbour to the south, the United States. The election of President Obama was an historic event and has brought a renewed sense of purpose and vigour to the American people and to the U.S. government. The new U.S. administration has the potential to directly impact Alberta's economic fortunes. The oil sands are an important key to North American energy security, and we know the world demands that the resource be developed with great care and especially great care to the environment. We demand it from ourselves, and we will reinforce to the new administration that we are committed to continuous improvement on the environmental front.

During these difficult times it is prudent for all governments to weigh and re-evaluate the economic impacts of any policy decision. Discussions over cap and trade systems as well as carbon taxes are not new for Alberta. Right now that is what they are, discussions. Alberta believes that the key to addressing climate change is unleashing technology, specifically carbon capture and storage. President Obama has talked about the importance of clean coal and alternative energy. Alberta is pursuing clean coal, and we have committed some \$239 million to bioenergy development. It should also be noted that we are leaders in Canada in wind power production.

Our Alberta Washington office is at the front line of ensuring that the relationship with our top economic partner remains positive. It focuses on key areas, including energy and the environment, agriculture, forestry, and technology. The office also ensures progressive energy-related initiatives under way in our province are understood and factored into new U.S. rules and regulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make some comments in response to the throne speech.

3:50

The Acting Speaker: Five minutes are available under Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I believe that the hon. Deputy Premier is a man of integrity. In discussions we had with regard to affordable housing, he indicated to me that affordable housing wasn't a top priority for the individuals he represented in his constituency. I'm just wondering, with regard to the Speech from the Throne and the government's actions, are you confident that in the nine years that remain in the 10-year plan, the government will have taken every opportunity to provide affordable housing for Albertans? Can we reach that goal?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always encouraging to know that this hon. member believes that I am a person of integrity. It's helpful to hear that in this place or any other place.

I think that what I would say about our efforts in the area of homelessness is that our Premier and the minister responsible have taken significant leadership in developing this particular plan. I have

every faith in the ability of Albertans to focus their attention and their resources on this. I have no doubt that as we go along, we will see incredible progress being made and that when we look back upon this, as we march towards that 10-year mark, we will be most proud of what we have accomplished, and we will have accomplished a great deal.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I do want to acknowledge that the government has contributed, for example, to the Mustard Seed structure, that the government has contributed to the drop-in centre, and those are very much appreciated expenditures. Does the hon. Deputy Premier believe that the government has done enough in terms of supporting organizations like Inn from the Cold and women's shelters? In the last year we had over 19,000 women turned away from shelters. Could the government, during this recessionary period, armed by Motion 501, be even more aggressive on eliminating homelessness and providing shelter?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, as has been noted in one of the previous responses to this hon. member's questions, the government always acknowledges that we can do more. There are always matters that need to be attended to, and while I'm not specifically aware of what is happening with the organizations that he alludes to, I have no doubt that in that area there's always more that can be done. What I know is that when budgets are presented – and one will be presented in early April – we have the opportunity to measure the amount of money that is available and the choices that are made by government and debate that at that time, and that would be an appropriate time to deal with the specifics of the question that the hon. member has put forward. But from my perspective, we have come a long way in addressing many of those necessary and important social issues. Almost assuredly there is more to be done. We will wait and see what the budget ultimately says on April 7.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members who wish to speak?

Hon. members, if no one else wishes to speak, in order to move on in government business, we have to have someone who has not spoken in response to the Speech from the Throne adjourn debate on this. Perhaps the hon. government whip would wish to adjourn debate on this?

Mr. Oberle: I would be pleased, Mr. Speaker, to move that we adjourn debate on the throne speech.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate February 18: Mr. Berger]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 3, the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009. I will be brief on this. [some applause] What? You wanted me to go on? [interjection] Well, you know, in my own opinion, I don't think there's 20 minutes' worth of talking for me to

do on this one, hon. member. I believe that when the bill is mostly in order, which I feel this one is, I should just get down to the business of saying so and express a couple of concerns that we do have.

This bill will allow credit union boards to use advance polling to elect board members, and it will also remove the time frame when credit union committees are to submit reports to the board. Credit Union Central Alberta, which is the central banking facility service bureau and trade association for the credit union system in Alberta, requested the ability to use advance polls in order to facilitate the participation of credit union members. Thus, in the spring 2008 sitting Bill 13, the Financial Institutions Statutes Amendment Act, was passed, which partially dealt with modernizing amendments to the Credit Union Act. These changes allowed for the increased use of technology, privacy enhancements for directors. It gave the option for directors to apply for loans with their credit unions without having their peers on the board be involved in the approval process.

Now, what this amendment act, Bill 3, seeks to do is allow vacancies that are filled during annual general meetings to be filled in another manner provided for by the bylaws, for instance advance polling. Some credit unions did advance polling in the past, so this bill would have retroactive validation of their elected board members, which would avoid any legal action that could be undertaken for those elected in advance polls before it was actually legislated.

The other thing that this bill does, as I said, is remove the time frame when credit union committees are to submit reports to the board. The original legislation stated that reports are to be submitted after meetings forthwith or at least once a month or at least once a quarter. The proposed amendments will simply state that reports should be submitted forthwith after each of the committee's meetings.

Mr. Speaker, we have checked with stakeholders. Those who have responded to our requests have no complaints with the bill and see it as cleanup legislation. We're still waiting for a response from one particular stakeholder, but we're not anticipating that that response is going to be different.

I really only have a couple of questions, which I think we can probably deal with in committee stage. The questions are these. These amendments state that members can only be appointed or elected outside of annual general meetings "in another manner provided for by the bylaws." What I'd like to know around that is: what will determine quorum, if anything? Does this open the door for problems, with the elections being seen as fair or unfair? On the reporting by committees, how will the reporting back to the credit union boards be monitored to ensure that it happens? Really, all it says now is "forthwith" under Bill 3, and while this certainly allows for some flexibility, there's a potential danger, I think, that forthwith might be too vague and may lead to delays in reporting.

If we get satisfactory answers back to the above questions, then I would imagine that our response to that is probably going to be that the amendments as proposed in this bill are fairly minor and probably won't be contentious. Of course, if we get answers back that we don't like, it might be a different story.

That's my take on it at this point. I will take my seat now and see if any other members wish to join debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie's brevity. I think he was potentially allowing me more time to speak on the bill. However, I agree with him and

do not see great concern with this bill. Basically, what it does is facilitate a democratic electoral process, and that's very much in need in the province of Alberta, even though it's at the credit union stage as opposed to adopting I think it was 182 recommendations made by our former Chief Electoral Officer, Lorne Gibson. By the time he'd finished with his recommendations, I think they'd come up to 250. However, the election of a credit union board is considerably simpler.

4:00

The concerns that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie brought up with quorum, making sure that the votes were accurately counted and reflect the wishes of the credit union membership, are extremely important. Just recently I had an opportunity, for example, to vote for the board of First Calgary Financial, and I appreciated that opportunity to simply mail in my ballot and first and second choices. I'm sure that the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009, Bill 3, will facilitate that process.

It's unfortunate that in this province it's so hard to have your vote registered and have your vote counted in general, but within Bill 3, Credit Union Amendment Act, regulations of voting procedures will be set out, and hopefully, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, the "forthwith" comment will be replaced by a specific time, at which the election of the new board will be noted and, hopefully, celebrated.

Being as this is a bill of facilitation, a bill, basically, of cutting red tape, eliminating bureaucracy, encouraging credit union participation, at this point I am supportive of Bill 3.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close debate.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wish to close debate at this time. I'll bring forward answers to those questions at committee.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 8

Feeder Associations Guarantee Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act.

As shared during the introduction of Bill 8, Mr. Speaker, this bill provides a rewrite of the existing act. Like the current act, the proposed legislation supports the growth and the development of feeder associations. We all know that the agriculture industry makes an important contribution to Alberta's economy and the development of our rural communities. Under the leadership of the Premier, our government has committed to ensuring that Alberta's agriculture industry has effective financial services. Like any industry or business sector, financial services are critical to business development opportunities. This also applies to our livestock producers and feeder associations, who want to be competitive and enjoy some long-term success. Specifically, the current and proposed acts authorize government loan guarantees to financial institutions that lend money to local feeder associations.

This bill adds clarity to several sections of the act and refines the text, such as using current legal language, updating definitions, and

clarifying roles. I will highlight a few of the updates and clarifications proposed. The bill clarifies the joint roles of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. It also clarifies the ministerial powers to inspect and audit records of feeder associations and lenders. This will align it better with other legislation. The new text makes the ownership position for feeder associations clear, and it enables regulations that will define requirements that must be met for a producer to be recognized as a member of a feeder association. The bill also removes the requirement for the act to be renewed every five years, and it aligns with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

As noted earlier, creating opportunities is at the heart of this legislation, and this bill enables improved and new regulations that support program enhancements. For example, it allows the program to be expanded, extending what and who is covered. The appropriate regulations would accept agricultural partnerships and corporations as feeder association members. It would also enable extension of the feeder association program to include financing the processing and marketing of products from feeder association-owned livestock. Mr. Speaker, this has significant potential to encourage the development of producer-driven supply chains.

Another business benefit that would be supported by the new legislative framework would be improving cash flow. It would enable payments to be provided to members on a portion of the equity they have created in the livestock during the feeding period. Flexibility, of course, is often the hallmark of an effective program. As a government we continue to be focused on the accountability of the programs we support. That is why we proposed additional risk mitigation and protection measures. The new act would enable protecting a feeder association security deposit account for the benefit of all its members.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Together these administrative changes and additions will allow the program to meet the needs of industry in the current business climate. I'm confident that the livestock industry will be very pleased with this proposed act, Mr. Speaker. This bill is a product of extensive stakeholder consultation, which included feeder associations and other livestock industry groups as well as the financial institutions. We have already witnessed how this program has assisted our livestock sector. Currently 56 feeder associations representing over 2,000 Alberta producers are benefiting from the program. In 2008 over 19 per cent of Alberta's annual calf crop was financed under the program: 375,000 head of cattle valued at \$216 million. There has been over \$6.7 billion worth of cattle financed since the beginning of the program in 1936.

Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to continue with this program and look forward to improving its ability to make our agriculture industry even more competitive. The proposed legislation strengthens and expands financial services to our agriculture industry. It allows government to better meet the needs of the livestock feeding and marketing value chain, which will ultimately create a strong industry and a strong provincial economy.

I would therefore encourage all members of this House to support Bill 8 at second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak at second reading to Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. I will admit that I'm subbing in for my

colleague who is the critic for Agriculture and Rural Development, so I hope I don't disappoint him.

I do have some questions and concerns around this act. I listened very carefully to what the sponsoring minister had to say, and the first question that comes to mind as I look at the act and I listen to what the minister says is: why did you repeal the previous act if all you were looking to do was sort of clarify and update a few things? That's not the usual process that I see this government follow. We usually have an amending act that goes back and adjusts the existing one but not to repeal it flat out and then to bring in a new act. I think, in fact, they might even have exactly the same name. The Feeder Associations Guarantee Act of 2000 is repealed, according to section 12, and we have the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. Okay. So they even have exactly the same name. Now, that's interesting. I'm wondering what is the strategy behind that. That is an unusual process for the government to be involved in, and I'd like an answer to that, please.

4:10

I also note that what's being covered here is only feeder livestock, not cow-calf operations. We've got a very specific piece of legislation that is about a loans program to a very specific sector and not even the entire sector, just a section of it. These are only cattle that are coming up through these feeder associations, as I said, feeder livestock, not cow-calf operations. That's also one of my reasons for hesitation.

I think that what is most concerning me from what I'm seeing in this act is that, essentially, two major things are being accomplished, and the minister mentioned both of these. One, it's essentially moving everything into regulations, and I'm seeing the same language and the same phrases that have become such a trademark of this government. It's a trademark about moving accountability and transparency and a sort of open process behind closed doors, where regulations can be worked out by the minister and by an order in council and then they pop out the other end, and if you search really hard, you might be able to find out what they are. But it removes the process from the discussion in this Chamber, which also means that it makes it harder for members of the public or even members that are concerned in this particular sector to have any input on the debate and even to be able to track what's going on.

The big difference I can see from repealing the previous act and putting this one in place is to be able to take everything that was in legislation and stuff it under regulation, and I am never going to support that. I am one of those who is now coming up to the end of my 12th year of service in this House, and I cannot say that I have seen very much benefit for the public and the citizens of Alberta from having a number of different programs and pieces of legislation which remove discussion in an open and public manner to behind closed doors by way of putting them into regulations. I do not believe that that has been a good move on behalf of this government, and they've done it over and over again and not to the benefit of citizens. So the first thing that I see happening with this legislation is moving it into regs.

The second major point – and, again, the minister raised it; he sees it as a plus, but I see it as a minus – is removing the five-year renewal. Again, that raises real issues for me because I think we're talking eventually about tens of millions of dollars that are used to guarantee these loans. The government itself in its press release notes that these changes are to reflect current economic times, but I don't know that removing the requirement for a five-year renewal is going to make anything more accountable. I think it makes it less so, and I think it weakens this program. I would like to know what the justification is for moving that other than to say that the minister

thinks this is great. I want to know what the technical details are that would give me a good reason to support this because I don't see it right now, and it's certainly not in the information that I've been supplied with.

I have some additional questions that I would like to have answered when we get to committee on this bill. I'm wondering if the government is anticipating that loans are going to be guaranteed exclusively for processing and marketing livestock products. You would remember that previously this was only for purchasing livestock, and now we have language that talks about marketing, and there's some other new language I heard the minister using. Basically, previously it was for purchasing livestock. Now I'm wondering if the government is looking at guaranteeing exclusively for the processing and marketing of the livestock and even separating that into different components, if you will.

I'd like also to have the minister give us some examples of specific cases where it would be necessary to extend the loan guarantee to processing and marketing of livestock products. I'll come back to that when I get to the end.

If the minister could also provide us with information about the benefits that the members of the feeder associations are most likely to anticipate seeing. I mean, does this benefit a smaller operator? Is it mostly going to benefit a larger scale operation? What members of feeder associations will benefit most from these changes?

Finally, has the minister or the department done any studies at all to anticipate how these changes may increase the number of defaulted loans and the cost to government as a result of guaranteeing these loans?

As someone that represents an urban riding, I'm looking to see how I go back and justify this to my constituents. That's why I'm asking the questions about... [interjection] Well, the minister looks confused. Don't you expect that legislation would be justifiable to all citizens in Alberta or just to the special ones that somehow qualify under his determination? He should be able to make this legislation make sense to every single citizen in the province. That's his job, and I'm looking forward to seeing him do it.

The major difference with this is that it seems to me there are two added components of this production line, if you want to call it, being added in and being made eligible for a loan. To me this starts to sound like an expansion of what we had before. Before it was about purchasing them, I think, and now we're talking about marketing and processing. Those, to me, are two more components along an assembly line, if I may, if you'll allow me to describe it that way. That starts me thinking that we're actually starting to be funding these operators for additional parts of this that they weren't funded for before, that they couldn't get loans for before.

So if this is part of a larger scheme where we're looking for value-added and we're trying to encourage more value-added processing, okay – fair enough – but I'd like to see the minister be able to lay this out. What it looks like to this city slicker is that we used to grant a loan for the purchasing of livestock and that now we're talking about also granting loans for marketing of this livestock and also for processing of it, and those are very different things than the purchasing.

I also understand that these feeder associations are essentially co-ops, and I tend to be supportive of the co-op movement because it's a group of people. Contrary to the way a number of people like to describe this province as though it was all these mavericks, these lone cowboys that showed up on their single horse and somehow, without working together, managed to produce this province, it's simply not true. What it came from was groups of people that chose to work together to help each other to build things, and of course the ultimate example of that is a barn raising.

We have a long and very proud history of a co-op movement here in this province, and it strikes me that that's, in fact, what these feeder associations are supposed to be. But once you start to get into loan guarantees and particularly loan guarantees where all of the criteria can be decided by the government behind closed doors, by a minister, and then executed through an order in council, it starts to cause me great concern.

I am not willing to support this bill at this point. I will look forward to hearing the rest of the information that is forthcoming from this minister, and if he is able to explain it in a way that the citizens of Edmonton-Centre can understand it, well, good on him. If he can't, then perhaps there's a problem with this bill.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this bill in second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quite brief. Like my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Centre, I too consider myself a city slicker. However, each day in this Assembly I attempt to grab the bull by the horns but often sort of am the recipient of the tail end of things. With that delightful analogy I'll continue.

A concern I have with regard to this bill is the concern of the government tending to move back into being in the business of being in business and, in that being in business, selecting winners and losers, and I'll refer to that a little bit later. We're in a time when we're saying to the world: don't get protectionist. We've gone to battle with groups down south like R-CALF, who have tried to limit exports of Alberta beef south. Here we are potentially setting a dangerous precedent of subsidizing to a fairly large extent through loans Alberta cattle, and hopefully that won't be a problem when it comes to GATT and free trade and so on. I'm hoping that the minister is much more knowledgeable about the protectionist forces we may face when these cattle are ready to be processed. If they're just simply going to be turned into beef in the box, then we probably won't have to deal with those problems.

While I'm a city slicker, I have a degree of background or at least experience in and around areas. For example, my wife's cousins were operating a 9,000-head feedlot in Boise, Idaho. Their location was right in the area along the Owyhee range, which our Alberta hero Ian Tyson sings about. My wife's cousin Sheila Lincoln is married to Bob Lincoln, who in turn is related to Abraham Lincoln. He ran a very successful business pretty much on his own without subsidies right up until the time that the recession hit. Then what he found was that in trying to sell his business and potentially look forward to retirement, the individuals who would potentially have bought his feedlot couldn't find the financing.

I know that part of Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, is finding the financing for organizations, for feeder co-ops. I'm sure that based on the quantity of the cattle that these organizations own, there are a significant number of feedlots involved, so the magnitude is extremely important.

I also have referenced in this House my uncle, Dave Chase, who married Patsy Cross. The Cross family, as I'm sure most Albertans know, were one of the founders of cattle business in Alberta, and also that same Cross family is connected with the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. My uncle David through marriage inherited the beginnings of an Angus herd, which he built up and then passed along to my cousin, unfortunately, who bought cattle from the Saskatchewan farmer who was later traced to have BSE, and his whole Angus herd was culled. Now, I believe that he received compensation from the province, but what I'm concerned about:

even though we're getting a much better handle on feed and even though we're getting a much better handle on testing for BSE, getting a much better handle on age verification, which is especially important for export, we're putting out the potential of a lot of taxpayers' money to promote a singular industry.

In terms of other experience that I believe is relative to this bill and the idea of supporting livestock producers, my wife's family is from the Ottawa Valley, and my father-in-law operated a very successful dairy farm out in Bells Corners. Again, he did it, basically, on his own. He worked off the farm in order to get the money to make the farm successful, and he wasn't reliant on loans. He was very much a self-made man. I'm proud of those connections.

I'm also concerned when the government, in the best interests of supporting agriculture, puts out loan guarantees. Look at what happened with a number of beef producers who invested an awful lot of money into Rancher's Beef so that there would be a Canadian competitor in Alberta that could potentially go head-to-head or toe-to-toe or, if not, at least give ranchers a choice of not having to take their beef to American-owned slaughterhouses. Rancher's Beef went belly up, and the government lost a significant portion, millions of dollars of taxpayer subsidies and grants to that organization. So I have concerns there.

The government during the height of the BSE epidemic compensated the greatest amount of compensation in terms of large chunks of millions of dollars, \$32 million to one particular outfit, I believe, an American feedlot. The justification was that those American feedlots, which slaughtered their own cattle first, incidentally, had large numbers, and we were compensating based on a per cattle situation. A lot of the smaller producers did not receive the compensation. In a number of other cases they were overcompensated, and now they're having to pay back those loans. I'm hoping that Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, has considerably greater oversight in terms of tracking the money, and hopefully people don't get in such debt in terms of the loans that they've been allowed to take out that they suffer the circumstance of repossession, which seems to be occurring more and more. It's primarily failed housing in the States where repossession starts happening, and it's going to start happening here, north of the 49th.

I am also concerned, as I mentioned earlier, about picking winners and losers. We have decided through this Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, that the winners are going to be the beef producers, the collectives, the co-operatives. To the minister of agriculture, who is much more knowledgeable of these areas than myself: has there been a degree or a percentage of equivalency in terms of compensation or support or loan guarantees for cow-calf operators? I mean, that's where it all begins, obviously. Even I as a city slicker know that.

I'm also concerned, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, about one more example of moving legislation into regulation. What are we hiding? Why is it being left up to the minister, at the discretion of the minister, whoever they may be at the time, to determine what the regulations will be? If we're going to be transparent and accountable and if we're going to be able to follow each one of those dollars that gets loaned out and repaid in a timely fashion, then accountability is of the absolute essence. If it's just simply buried in regulation, why should taxpayers from Calgary-Varsity, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, have faith in something that is murky through its location and regulation?

4:30

I'm hoping that the cloud of potential suspicion or just simply the fact that we don't know what the answers are in terms of the auditing

process, the loan guarantees – how will we know how these subsidies will be reacted to by other producers, whether they be American or European? We seem to be constantly in a battle over the amount of subsidies, and considering how important the beef trade is to this province, we'd better get it right. Obviously, the minister felt that we hadn't gotten it right before because he repealed the entire act and substituted it with Bill 8. I look forward to the explanations. Turning this city slicker into a better-informed Albertan will be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have Standing Order 29(2)(a) available. Did the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod catch my eye?

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like it if Calgary-Varsity could clarify for me and for this House what relevance Cousin David, Uncle David, married to whom, married where, Boise, Idaho, and all these other things actually have to this bill, the intent of this bill, and the Alberta cattle-feeding industry. Basically anything? I fail to get where the connections come in here. Could you clarify that, please?

Mr. Chase: I welcome this opportunity to proceed with my family history and connections. What I was trying to establish is that although I'm a city slicker, I do have some limited knowledge of the beef industry. I have worked on farms. For example – a family extension here – when we were stationed at Namao air base, I worked on a mixed farm. The Croziers were very good friends of my mother and father. I participated in feeding the cattle. I participated in bringing in the bales.

What I was trying to establish in my family narrative is my ability to have a relationship to this bill and to beef production and my concerns for the well-being of not only my own family members who have been engaged in beef and cattle and dairying, but I want to see Albertans' interests well protected within this bill. I don't want to see whole herds, as was the case with my uncle, being culled. I want to see that the oversight within this bill is going to not only subsidize and support farmers and ranchers but that it's going to protect them.

I thank you for the opportunity to clarify my family experience.

Mr. Berger: Well, I have to say that I feel no more enlightened now than I did three minutes ago. In saying that, I appreciate the name-dropping and all the other comments, but would it not be more productive to actually study the bill, the intent of the bill, and what effect it actually has rather than all that? I rest with those comments.

Mr. Chase: That's a very fair comment. Unfortunately, because it's being moved from legislation to regulation, I'll never have an opportunity to know the exact details and, therefore, not be able to debate them.

The Speaker: Are there additional comments or questions?

Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Bill 8. I also appreciated the opportunity that the minister, through the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, and the minister's staff gave me to get a briefing on the bill. Thank you very much. It makes things easier at our end.

I think I've got a sense of what this bill is intended to do. It's intended to expand loan guarantees to members of feeder associa-

tions to get them further through the production cycle of beef and not just to support the purchase and then initial sale of the animals but to support the process through processing and marketing. I can see the logic of that. You know, the system has worked pretty well. The feeder associations have been around for a lifetime, a long lifetime. Not every cattle rancher uses them. That's fine. If they want to join, I don't think it's that difficult. If they don't want to and they can find their own financing elsewhere, they don't have to.

Also, as a couple of my colleagues have pointed out, the idea of supporting a co-operative is a good idea. The history of co-operatives on the landscape of the prairies is very deep and very broad. I think it's interesting that this government is prepared to support co-ops in this case but in many other cases doesn't seem to. I wish there was more support for housing co-operatives, for example, or for utility – power and gas – co-ops and a whole range of other ones, but that's a different issue.

Our concerns with this have been mentioned before, and I'm just going to mention them briefly. I think that, speaking as the critic for this area, we'd like to support this bill, but we need some reassurances, thinking about this as a liability that's being expanded for the citizens of Alberta, for the government of Alberta. Both the members for Edmonton-Centre and Calgary-Varsity have raised the issue of oversight and accountability, and I think that's a real concern. As the scale of the loan guarantees grows, how large is that liability going to get? How will that be disclosed? If and when there are defaults and when that guarantee is called, as it occasionally is – I mean, that's the purpose of it – how will that be disclosed to the public and explained to the public, who, after all, will end up covering that loss? These are concerns and questions we have. I hope the minister takes them seriously because I think we would be speaking on behalf of every citizen of Alberta when raising those sorts of concerns.

The vagueness of what's going on here is also a worry. You know, there is the possibility for abuse when things are left so vague. I'll try to walk the minister through a possible situation, and maybe later in debate, in committee, he can respond. If I were a member of a feeder association and got a loan guarantee to acquire a herd and I sold those animals to a slaughterhouse, as things stand right now, at that point the slaughterhouse would have to pay, and the loan guarantee is over as soon as I sell the herd. Under the new system the guarantee would continue through the processing of the animals and meat and right through to the marketing. That marketing might be in Medicine Hat, or it might be in Tokyo, or it could be in Mexico City. We don't know.

My concern is that the bill could in effect be a prop-up for processors and marketers to handle their cash-flow problems. What we're really doing here may not be supporting the producer but supporting, let's say, the slaughterhouse because the slaughterhouse, then, doesn't really need to pay the producer right away because the producer's loan is still guaranteed. So is this really a backdoor way of propping up cash-flow issues for processors and for marketers? I'm not just trying to make up imaginary problems here, Mr. Minister. I'm just trying to understand. Is the effect of this bill to make life easier for the ranchers, or is it to make it easier for the processors or the marketers?

4:40

Other issues, of course, arise. What's the time frame? How long might it take for the marketing to occur and for the conclusion of this life cycle to be reached if we're dealing with beef that may be going to any corner of the world? Those are all issues that through a loan guarantee the taxpayers are going to be on the hook for, and I don't think it's unreasonable to be asking on behalf of the taxpayer for an explanation on that.

I think the other issues to a large extent have been raised by other members in the Assembly. As I say, nothing would be more satisfying than for all of us to see a more diverse, broadly based, secure, stable beef sector in Alberta. This bill might help organic beef develop. It might help very specialized sectors in the beef industry develop. We'd all love that, but we'd like to know the full story here. So I'm going to count on the minister to in later stages of debate help us acquire that full story.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would ask my hon. colleague if he is as concerned, as has been formerly mentioned by his colleague from Edmonton-Centre and myself, about moving from legislation to regulation. Is that a concern when it comes to transparency, accountability to this House and to Albertans in general?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my beefs with this bill is that it moves a lot of items from legislation to regulation. Yes, we are steering in the wrong direction. You know, I won't pursue those anymore, but it's part of a trend. I think that we need to be alert to what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar described a few days ago as the quiet overthrowing of this Assembly by the cabinet. That's what we're seeing here, and we see it over and over and over. The legitimate topics for debate and decision and accountability of this Assembly are taken out of the hands of this Assembly into the hands of cabinet. This is just another example, and of course it goes without saying that that is a concern of mine.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Shall I, then, call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for participation?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That would be great. I'm pleased to stand and speak to Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. I want to just say a few words to start with about feeder associations. Feeder associations were set up to help ranchers who may not be able to afford their own livestock for whatever reason and to continue them in business. All of the farmers that we spoke to believe that these local feeder associations play an important role in the industry and that they should continue. Obviously, by providing the credit or guaranteeing the loans that people involved in this business need, we ensure that the industry remains as stable as possible under the difficult circumstances that they now face. Certainly, it is an important part of the cattle business, and I think that it needs to continue.

The basis of the act is quite simple. It allows the government to secure or guarantee the loans that would be made to a feeder association. It requires that a guaranteed loan can only be made to a feeder association that is incorporated.

I think the concerns that have been raised about the role of regulation in this legislation and other pieces of legislation are valid and a continuing concern that more and more power is in fact being placed in the hands of cabinet and cabinet ministers and less here in the Legislature.

I do want to say a few things about feeder cattle. This is, I think, a broad principle with respect to the operation of the industry that is touched on by this act, so I think that it's relevant here. That has to

do with the role of very large packing plants. There are just a couple of very large ones that pack about 80 to 90 per cent of the cattle in this province and a significant majority of that in the country as a whole.

One of the things that I find interesting is that the new President of the United States, Mr. Obama, is proposing to implement a ban on packer-owned cattle. This is what his website says:

When meatpackers own livestock they can manipulate prices and discriminate against independent farmers. Strengthen anti-monopoly laws and strengthen producer protections to ensure independent farmers have fair access to markets, control over their production decisions, and transparency in prices.

What happens – and we've seen this in this province; certainly it became apparent during the whole BSE crisis and the government bailout package, that ended up largely in the pockets of the two biggest producers – is that those producers, by maintaining their own herds in feedlots, can control the prices that they have to pay for cattle. When prices get too high and they're having to pay too much for the cattle, they just bring more of their own cattle into the market, and the price comes down. So they're able to manipulate prices at the expense of the small producer, Mr. Speaker. I think that that's an issue that this government needs to grapple with.

We would propose that the government follow the suggestion of the American President and implement a ban on packer-owned livestock. I think that that would help the small producers as much as any of the provisions in this particular bill.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we will be supporting this bill. We think that the feeder associations are an important institution within our cattle industry and will help producers stay in business, have some stability, and have access to the capital that they need.

One of the concerns that has been raised with us, however, is that corporations can join the feeder associations, companies like Cargill and so on. I think that that is causing considerable concern among small producers, who are concerned about the role that these companies play in the market already and the power that they have. Mr. Speaker, in principle we believe that the policy of the government should be to continue the support for small operations and for the family farm. That is not their policy. They have a policy, in our estimation, of encouraging large-scale production and corporate control of agriculture. That's not where we want to go. But I think that with respect to that matter, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act is still something which is generally positive and something that we are prepared to support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Are there additional speakers who wish to participate?

Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to close the debate? The hon. minister.

4:50

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I got quite an education myself here this afternoon. Kind of surprising. Clearly, the hon. opposition people don't understand the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. The feeder association does relate very much to the small operators and the cow-calf producers, by and large. In fact, these are most of the people that do participate in the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act.

I'm quite amazed how the two people talked about their 12th year in the House – the one on this side of the House was so positive, and the one on the other side of the House was so negative – how that could happen in that 12-year period, how people could get into that process.

I listened to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and I think I probably looked surprised about Edmonton-Centre. One of the hon. members said that he was a city slicker. I guess I'm a country bumpkin because I didn't realize there were any feeder associations set up in Edmonton-Centre, but perhaps there are. I'll have to check that out. I wouldn't know.

I was quite enlightened and heartened to listen to my opposition critic over there because he did spend some time to look at what the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act is all about, obtain an understanding of where we're at. Some of the questions you ask are very legitimate, and in Committee of the Whole we will address those ones, particularly the ones you talk about with the packers perhaps not paying and whatnot. There are safeguards in there that we can handle.

The hon. member from the third party, certainly I can tell him that some of his original comments were very legitimate and insightful. This has nothing to do with the large operations or, perhaps, a whole lot to do with the President of the United States, this Feeder Associations Guarantee Act, but I can appreciate that.

One thing I would like to touch on, the default rate on the act to this point. I'd be trapped if I said the number, but I think it's less than 1 per cent. It's quite amazing, to be honest with you.

We certainly will go through the answers, check out the questions, and in committee address these.

With that, I would like to move that we pass the bill on.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 14

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Energy to move second reading of Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act.

Mr. Speaker, this act will expedite the design, construction, and operation of three to five large carbon capture and storage, or CCS, projects in Alberta, projects that will demonstrate the effectiveness and safety of CCS. The \$2 billion is an investment in our environment and our future and a continued signal of our commitment to the responsible development of Alberta's resources. CCS is being done around the world and is a proven technology. It may not be a technology that is well known in North America, but it is an evolving science that is used around the world.

During U.S. President Obama's visit to Canada in February he reiterated his support for our two countries working together through co-operation and co-ordination of research and demonstration of CCS projects. President Obama knows that this technology is key to developing large-scale CCS projects. To illustrate this point, one need only look at a unique Canadian-U.S. joint venture. EnCana's Weyburn project pipelines CO₂ from Beulah, North Dakota, to its aging oil reserves in Saskatchewan. Since 2000 there has been a 65 per cent increase in oil production in what was really a depleted reserve.

CCS is not just in the domain of North America. The European Commission has proposed up to 12 large-scale CCS demonstration projects. These projects have been endorsed by the European Council. Contrary to what you may have heard in the media, there are other full-scale CO₂ projects operating throughout the world. In the North Sea StatoilHydro's Sleipner project has been injecting since 1996. StatoilHydro also has been injecting at its Snøhvit project since 2007. The British Petroleum Salah project in Algeria

has been operating since 2004. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the notion that this technology is unproven is unfounded.

Despite the current uncertainty in the global economy long-term forecasts estimated that oil production will grow from about 1.4 million barrels per day now to 3 million more by 2016, and despite improvements in oil sands development and reductions in carbon emissions intensity, as production levels increase, so will emissions. The question is not if oil will be developed, because world oil supplies will be developed, Mr. Speaker. It's a question of how oil can be developed in cleaner ways. Carbon capture and storage can answer that question, scientifically proven technology that will reduce carbon emissions from large-scale operations like oil sands extractions, value-added upgrading, and coal-fired generation. Carbon capture and storage will significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. This is an initiative that all Albertans can be proud of. As a safe and secure supplier of energy with a growing presence on the global stage, our focus on carbon capture and storage is not only good for Alberta, our investors; it's also essential to our future.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Industry, government, and consumers need to tackle this problem together. We need to invest in cleaner energy technologies and new and greener sources of energy. We need to reduce emissions and reduce energy use. Alberta's economy and, frankly, much of Canada's, in fact, is largely reliant on energy development. This act will give Alberta a very powerful tool with which to meet the unique set of challenges we face and further cement Alberta's leadership in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you. In debate, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to rise to discuss this particular bill, Bill 14, Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act. I am certain that this will be a highly contentious bill. It's a topic that's highly contentious in the public, and that's healthy. I think debate is good. I expect that if the information coming from the government is okay, we'll probably support this bill. I don't expect that everybody in the Legislature will, and that's great. Such is democracy.

I will say right off the bat that one of the matters that complicates our support of this expenditure is the not unrelated matter of the royalty structure for the oil sands. I know – and I'll talk about this in a few minutes – that a lot of the efforts around carbon capture and storage are actually going to go to coal-fired power plants, which are a legitimate priority. Nonetheless, one focus of this is the oil sands. I'll be straight in saying that when we are giving royalty deals – the corporate filings of shareholders in oil sands companies indicate a worth of tens of billions of dollars – when we're giving concessions on that level, then it's pretty hard for us to support a bill that's spending another \$2 billion in subsidies to the energy industry. I would much prefer and be much more comfortable if we had a system in which we were collecting the full value of the royalty resource for the people of Alberta. Then I would be more comfortable in defending a bill that has up to a \$2 billion price tag on it. As it is, it's tougher to defend morally. It's tougher to defend politically. It's tougher to defend financially when this comes on top of massive royalty breaks. The government makes it hard for people to support it when it structures things this way.

5:00

I want to run through a few of the facts. The Minister of Environment touched on some of these. There are debates around the viability of the technology. Probably all of us in this Assembly rely on a range of experts. I don't think any of us here are expert in the

technologies of carbon capture and sequestration. The people whom we have consulted tell us that the technology is viable, that, as the minister says, it's proven in a range of settings around the world in a number of countries and that its viability and economic – well, its viability will only increase, and the costs will decrease. I know that there are people around who question the viability of the technology. Again, that can be debated, but we have gone out of the way to consult a number of people who are disinterested, who have no financial vested interest in whether the technology works or not, and they're telling us that, yes, this is viable technology.

I also want to make the point about the security of the sequestration because we've had this discussion in our caucus. If we are pumping vast millions of tonnes of CO₂ into underground formations, how do we know it's going to stay there? How do we know that in 10 or 20 or 50 years it's not just going to start re-entering the atmosphere? That's, again, a legitimate question. I guess there are a couple of responses to that. One is that there are vast amounts of all kinds of things that are dangerous to humanity that are trapped underground and are kept there. An obvious example would be sour gas. Sour gas, when it's underground in those formations, stays there at very high pressures indefinitely until we actually deliberately seek it out. So that's some reassurance that when the CO₂ is pumped into the ground, it will also stay there, and when those wells are properly capped, they can be successfully sealed indefinitely. In addition, of course, there are chemical processes that occur; gradually the carbon dioxide actually bonds with minerals in the rocks and forms carbonates and other materials that will stay safely underground. So we're prepared to accept our advice that the technology is viable and that the CO₂ is secure and move forward from there.

I think it is worth trying to shift this debate a little bit away from the oil sands to where the largest CO₂ emissions still occur, and that's in the coal-fired power plants. Alberta is very fortunate. Our coal-fired power plants, particularly concentrated west of Edmonton in the Wabamun area, are also in the area of some massive and now largely depleted oil reserves, oil fields: the Pembina field, the Devon field, and others. Somehow I wish that the public in Alberta at least would understand that this isn't just about the oil sands. This is about capturing emissions from coal-fired power plants, which are single emission sources. They're fairly, relatively speaking, easy to work with, and they're close to viable sequestration sites, so that makes this more workable.

I think it's regrettable and a bit of misinformation on the part of the public that this issue is thought of strictly in terms of the oil sands because somehow the coal-fired power plants in Alberta seem to continually get under the radar when, in fact, they remain the largest emitters of CO₂. We understand that that's where the biggest impacts are going to be and fully support that. Of course, that doesn't mean that the oil sands should be left out of this. While they are not yet the largest source of CO₂ emissions in Alberta, they are the most rapidly growing source. That needs to be reduced, and technologies developed through this program will help address that problem.

I think a point that has to be made, if for no other reason than that at least we need to think about it, is that because the largest benefit of this will be to the coal-fired power generators, this really amounts to a subsidy to electricity consumers, and the largest electricity consumers in Alberta by far are big businesses. There's issue upon issue layered here with deregulation and other matters, but I think that what we are really looking at here is a subsidy to power consumers.

I think it would be interesting to at least consider an alternative approach, which would be to tag a levy on power rates so that those

who use the most electricity paid the most. Rather than the taxpayer at large being on the hook for up to \$2 billion, the people who are actually using the electricity and therefore driving the emissions pay the bill. I think that would be at least worth a debate in this Assembly. I don't know what the levy would have to be to pay for this, but I think it would be worth working out and looking at a different approach.

In the end we have to ask ourselves: what is in the best interests of the public and of the people of Alberta? In this case that's not an easy question to answer. We're here as taxpayers who are looking at a bill of \$2 billion over the next decade or more. Obviously, we have to look at it from that perspective. We're here as people whose economy depends more than almost anywhere in the world on fossil fuels, whether that's coal or oil sands or conventional petroleum. So we have to look at it from that perspective.

We're also here as citizens of the planet, a planet that is increasingly endangered because of global warming. I think that that ultimately, for me at least, trumps the other concerns because long after the world has moved to other fuels, what we are doing to our atmosphere in our lifetime will echo through the future for potentially a thousand years and shape the lives of countless generations. They will be living in a different world than the one we inherited because of the very things we've done. When I think of it in those terms, I think, you know, that we need to do whatever we can to address this issue. That \$2 billion spread out over 10 years is not an unreasonable investment to make in protecting our planet. Ultimately, that is the perspective that informs my support for this sort of initiative.

I was able to discuss this issue in a briefing with some officials from the minister's office and department. One of the issues I raised was around intellectual property. We're putting \$2 billion into this. It will be going to undoubtedly create all kinds of patentable processes and equipment and a significant investment in intellectual property, and some of the questions I have are: who's going to benefit from that? How's that going to be managed? Will we as investors in these patents then reap some kind of benefit? Will we get a royalty from that? Will we be able to sell that intellectual property? Actually, it led to an interesting discussion and reframed my thinking about that.

I understand that the government's plan – and I hope that the minister will ultimately address this – is that it will be kind of an open architecture approach to the intellectual property. In other words, whatever is developed in terms of intellectual property will be made freely available to anybody in the world to adopt. Actually, when I think that through, I think that may be a brilliant idea.

5:10

I want to at least discuss that. Particularly, if the Norwegians and the Americans and the Japanese and everybody else who are working on this also share all that intellectual property, then who benefits? Well, humanity benefits. The planet benefits. If we get a really great idea that can benefit the Norwegians on this, let them have it. If they have a really good idea that can benefit us, well, we'll draw on that as well. I hope that comes up for some discussion at later stages of this bill. We need to hash that one through and figure out if that really is the best way. It's at least worth some serious thought.

I also think that it's worth noting with the enhanced oil recovery, which the minister alluded to in his opening comments, the fact that tired, old, depleted conventional fields can actually be rejuvenated through this process. That has a range of benefits, including increased royalties for the citizens of Alberta and extending the life of conventional fuel fields, which have lower environmental impacts often than unconventional energy sources.

The cost of this grabs everybody's attention. I just saw in the last day or two the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, in concert undoubtedly with the New Democrats – I know how much Danielle Smith and the New Democrats work together; maybe it's just coincidence – urging the government to stop this expenditure. Again, given the financial times, given a government that is heading into deficit, that's worth a debate. I think one of the important things is that people are informed that this is an expenditure that's going to occur over more than 10 years. The \$2 billion will go out in phases over more than a decade. It's not a single expenditure at once; it's phased over many years. I think that that needs to be put out to the public.

The public will also want to know and for very good reasons the selection process for the projects that will get funding. How are these partners chosen? Who will the partners be? How much are they going to contribute? What are the deals? Will they agree to an open-architecture approach to the intellectual property? If EPCOR, for example, turns out to be a partner and in research that is supported in part by them and in part through this funding they come up with some spectacular intellectual property, are they prepared to share that openly or not? Will that be a condition of this funding? What will be the conditions of this funding? I hope that in the course of the debate the government is forthcoming in addressing a number of those issues.

I think that this is the kind of bill that could swing either way for this government. Right now I think it's very much hanging, with the public undecided. Do they see this as yet more massive subsidy particularly for the oil sands industry, which, they quite rightly see, doesn't need any more subsidy? On the other hand, do they see this as a legitimate gesture in addressing profound climate change issues? The way we conduct the debate in this Assembly will shape the public view, and I think we all need to keep that in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I've tried to outline a whole range of issues. I've tried to plant some thoughts in the mind of members who are here today and in the mind of government officials, who, I hope, will read *Hansard* carefully and help the minister come back and inform debate in Committee of the Whole.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move adjournment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour today to rise to move second reading of Bill 15, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

In December of 2008 a joint review panel of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the Alberta Utilities Commission, and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency reviewed a proponent's power proposal on the Peace River just west of the Dunvegan bridge, and they found that that project was indeed in the public interest and should proceed.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

That triggers a legislative requirement on our part, and that legislative requirement flows from our own Hydro and Electric Energy Act. As soon as a panel prepares a report and submits it to the minister, section 9 of our act requires the minister to prepare a

bill which allows the AUC to authorize construction of the plant. The commission cannot authorize construction of the plant without the passage of that bill and cannot do so, in fact, until that bill receives royal assent. The bill in question, of course, is Bill 15, that's before us now. There's an additional provision in the Hydro and Electric Energy Act. Under section 10 the commission has to authorize operation once the plant is constructed, and they cannot do so until they are granted the authority to do so through an order in council.

Bill 15 has two clauses in it. The first one grants authority to the AUC to authorize the commencement of construction. The second section authorizes the AUC to approve operation, obviously once construction is completed.

Mr. Speaker, this legislative requirement that flows from our Hydro and Electric Energy Act comes from a time when hydro projects were perhaps controversial in our country. There was James Bay in Quebec and the Bennett dam and the site C dam in B.C., in fact others around the world. People came to realize that the construction of dams comes, in fact, with environmental consequences, as does any form of power generation, so there was some controversy. Even in Alberta we had some controversy around hydro projects, and it was thought at that time that projects should come back to the Legislature so that the Legislature itself could grant approval to the Alberta Utilities Commission. So that's why the legislation, in my understanding of it, is structured that way.

It's important to recognize that in this particular case although we have that legislative requirement, we're not talking about a dam here. This is a run-of-the-river project that does not have the significant environmental consequences of a dam, a much smaller project with a much smaller footprint. As I mentioned, the joint review panel, in fact, found that this project was in the public interest.

It's also important to say two things, Mr. Speaker. One, the bill does not remove any of the regulatory authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission. All we're doing is granting that body the authority to approve construction and, eventually, operation once all of their conditions have been met. Secondly, although, as I point out, this particular project is small – it's a run-of-the-river, not a dam – this bill only addresses the Dunvegan project. If in the future another hydro project were to come along, a dam perhaps, we would again be required to go through the same process. We're not proposing that we remove the requirement for all future projects. It only relates to the Dunvegan project.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a good-news story for Alberta. It'll broaden our renewable energy portfolio. It's a low-impact project, and it adds to an already significantly large alternative energy proposal. I'm really keen on it.

In closing, I want to maybe congratulate the company. This project has been on the books for a very long time. The company was consulting and working with municipalities back before 2004, when I left the Peace River town council. I was a councillor at the time. Well before then the company was out consulting and working with locals. They've met whatever requirements, mitigation requirements or public consultation requirements, they had to in order to pass the joint review panel. I know it's a tremendous amount of work and expenditure on that company's part.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'll conclude my remarks, and I look forward to the debate on Bill 15.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to discuss Bill 15, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act, in second reading. I appreciated the opportunity to get some information about this matter from the Member for Peace River and some officials. This is a pretty interesting initiative, and I think it's worth very careful observation. The member in his opening comments talked briefly about the impact of hydro dams, and I think it's worth reflecting on that.

Many, many times I've been by Lake Abraham in the Rockies west of Nordegg. It's a spectacular lake. There's no doubt about it. But it wiped out what was a beautiful valley and what was also a very sacred spot for our First Nations people there. It has had benefits as well as hydro. It helps with flood control downstream, including in Edmonton. Nonetheless, you know, the member is right that the idea that hydro dams are somehow benign is a bit out of date now.

I think we understand more of their impact, and unfortunately we've had to learn that sometimes in more painful ways than with the Bighorn dam. An example would be the Bennett dam on the Peace River. Last August I was up in Fort Chip and flew in and flew out, as you have to do to get to Fort Chip in the summer, over the Peace delta. That was at one time the largest freshwater delta in the world. I don't know if it still is, but it has suffered profoundly, and it has shrunk because of the effects of the Bennett dam way upstream in B.C.

So this feels like we're moving to, no pun intended, the next generation of hydro generation. This is a technology that has been demonstrated around the world, and I hope it continues to develop. I very much support the idea of Alberta shifting even this little bit of its power supply away from fossil fuels to hydro in this case. I'd love to see a very aggressive campaign to reduce demand for electricity. That's another issue. I don't know why this government doesn't get more serious about reducing demand, about supply-side management on power supply. Anyway, that's a different issue. This is a little bit of an advance in terms of bringing a zero emissions or near zero emissions project to Alberta's electrical grid.

The Dunvegan site is beautiful. It's genuinely beautiful. I think many of us here will have crossed that bridge. It's a glorious drive. I also note in the background that there will be an adjustment to the ferry that runs in that area. I'm glad to hear that because two summers ago, I think, I drove along the Peace River Valley to that ferry, and it's something worth preserving. It really is.

I'm glad to see that all of those issues will be considered in this. I look forward to what I hope will be a straightforward debate. I think that there might be a question or two. I'm not going to raise them right now because I want to do a little bit more background research, but I expect that this bill will move through fairly straightforwardly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to speak on Bill 15.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Peace River wish to close debate?

Mr. Oberle: I'd just call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to move for second reading Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, similar to Bill 1 from last year, Bill 18 will ensure that Alberta's legislation and the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, otherwise known as TILMA, are consistent. This particular bill is nuts-and-bolts technical legislation but, nonetheless, extremely important for Alberta. It's important because it is the last piece of legislation before Canada's most comprehensive interprovincial trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement becomes fully in force April 1, 2009.

TILMA is a bilateral interprovincial trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement between Alberta and British Columbia. Its goal is simple: make life easier for Albertans by removing the duplication, overlap, and unnecessary regulatory differences between our two provinces that have evolved over decades and have negatively affected our competitiveness, both domestically and internationally.

The agreement itself was signed in April 2006 by the two provinces and came into effect for certain sectors in April 2007, with full implementation on April 1 of this year. It means seamless access for businesses and workers in both provinces to a large range of opportunities across all sectors, including energy, transportation, and agriculture. For example, Mr. Speaker, a business incorporated in one province will be deemed registered in the other if it wants. There is no residency required, no added administration, reporting, or fees.

Alberta and B.C. companies will have increased opportunities to bid on government contracts in both provinces, particularly in engineering, architectural, and related services, which will be in greater demand as infrastructure construction projects get under way. More importantly, these firms will compete on a level playing field regardless of whether the company is based in Alberta or British Columbia. If they are qualified to do the work, they will have an equal opportunity to bid on these contracts, whether they are from Alberta or B.C. Mr. Speaker, this is good news in these challenging times, when companies will be faced with looking outside of their traditional markets for business opportunities. As well, all skilled tradespersons like plumbers or welders or highly trained professionals like nurses or teachers certified in Alberta or B.C. will be able to move between these provinces and keep working without having to go through extensive recertification or retraining.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 18 itself is critical to Alberta in order to fully implement this groundbreaking interprovincial trade agreement, one that is already a catalyst for how Canada and all provinces look at interprovincial trade and labour mobility. It is because of TILMA that every province, territory, and the federal government are working towards full labour mobility across all provinces under the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade. The TILMA model for full labour mobility has essentially been incorporated into the national agreement, and that was a very significant development last December.

The AIT has been around since 1995, but it has begun to show some real progress within this last year largely because of what Alberta and B.C. have done under TILMA. The AIT is also being amended to contain an effective dispute resolution mechanism,

which, Mr. Speaker, is another concept that the TILMA introduced into the domestic trade context.

Bill 18 is an omnibus piece of legislation that amends existing statutes and ensures that provincial legislation and the TILMA align. Most of these amendments deal with jurisdictional provisions like residency requirements. Alberta and British Columbia agreed under the TILMA that residents of both provinces would be treated equally. Just because someone happened to reside in one province, they would not be barred from accessing opportunities in the other. Again, this is good news for Alberta businesses and workers.

In total, 11 acts will be amended, Mr. Speaker. For example, the Marriage Act will be amended to allow a resident of B.C. to be appointed as a temporary marriage commissioner. At the moment only an Albertan is eligible. So if you happen to have an uncle who's a marriage commissioner living in Victoria, once this legislation is passed, he will be able to come to Alberta and perform your marriage should you need that. The same would be true for an Alberta marriage commissioner performing the ceremony in British Columbia.

5:30

Bill 18 will also amend the Charitable Fundraising Act to provide extraprovincial charitable organizations and businesses the option of keeping deposits and records in their province of residence, minimizing additional administrative duties and paperwork.

Other changes include amending the Agriculture Financial Services Act. The act may currently leave the impression that commercial loans can only be made to Alberta firms. That's not the case. The change will make it clear that provided the operation is in Alberta, the security is in Alberta, and the direction is in Alberta, commercial loans can be made to a person from Alberta, B.C., Nova Scotia, or anywhere else in Canada.

The Business Corporations Act will be amended to broaden the existing appeal provisions available for an Alberta company registering in B.C. It will include a cancellation of an extraprovincial incorporation in B.C. pursuant to the new TILMA business registration process.

A change to the Government Organization Act will empower the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to temporarily amend noncompliant legislation. This will occur when prompt change is required to implement a TILMA panel ruling or for Alberta to avoid a challenge from B.C. under the TILMA when the Legislature is not in session. Some examples of where temporary regulations can be made to deal with unforeseen circumstances or regulatory deficiency already exist in Alberta legislation, including the Municipal Government Act and the Animal Health Act.

We expect that we will continue to make changes under the existing legislative process. However, there may be a situation where others that have authority to make regulations are unwilling or unable to bring their regulations into effect on a timely basis. This could have serious repercussions for Alberta under its TILMA obligations, so these provisions will be short term and would expire after three years. This is something that would only be used in extraordinary circumstances to bring Alberta into alignment with its TILMA obligations.

The Insurance Act will be amended to eliminate barriers facing a small subset of fraternal insurance companies from B.C. when they seek to operate in Alberta.

The Legal Profession Act will be updated to remove the current requirement that as a condition of recognition an individual be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident of Canada. Similar requirements in B.C. were struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada, so this amendment will bring Alberta's act into conformity

with the Supreme Court ruling and increase compatibility with B.C. legislation.

Both the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act and the Residential Tenancies Act will be amended, and the requirement to have an address in Alberta will be removed.

Finally, the Business Corporations Act, the Cooperatives Act, and the Partnership Act will each be amended in the same way to remove a current limitation on the ability to modify policies and other measures to conform to the TILMA.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this omnibus bill represents the final series of technical amendments to improve our trading relationship with British Columbia. Once fully implemented, TILMA will mean seamless access for business and workers in both provinces through a larger range of opportunities within a single economic region. It will create Canada's second-largest market, with more than 7.7 million people and a combined GDP of more than \$400 billion. In just a few short weeks more than 120 regulated occupations, including virtually all trades in Alberta, will have full labour mobility in B.C. Alberta businesses will have a broader pool of skilled professionals and tradespeople to meet their needs without having to worry about a lot of red tape to bring a B.C. person onboard.

Mr. Speaker, breaking down trade, investment, and labour mobility barriers is as important during the current global slowdown as it was before. We need to allow businesses and labour to go where they find the opportunity without artificial, unnecessary constraints imposed by government.

So that is the nature of this bill. It is an important bill. As such, I would encourage all members to consider it favourably when the votes come.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate February 18: Dr. Taft]

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and address a few brief remarks around second reading of Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009. This is a really important bill for this Assembly but also for citizens. I'm going to keep my remarks brief because I'm more interested in participating in the debate in Committee of the Whole.

As to the principle of the bill that we have in front of us, there are a number of things that I support in the bill. One of those is adding the agencies, boards, and committees, those individuals that are appointed by the government to an agency or a board or a committee or a council, that they would also fall under the auspices of this act, and that all parts of it would then apply to them. So if someone is lobbying somebody on the northern development council, for example, that's going to count.

I think that's important because what we've seen from this government over a long period of time is an increased reliance on what used to be called delegated administrative organizations. That's certainly a preferred method of operation that this government has engaged in, where they set up an arm's-length, or supposedly arm's-length, agency which is to deliver the service. But it is still delivering a government service. It still is attached to government, and ultimately government and the minister are responsible for

it. I think we need to be clear that when you're lobbying one of those organizations or an individual connected to it, you are involved in a lobbying activity.

I also am pleased to see the clarifications around "persons associated with." I'm aware that part of that is flowing from the amendment that I had proposed during the original debate of this act. My concern there was that we had to understand that we were in a new millennium, that we have a number of – I can see this debate is going to be longer today than I anticipated. There are a number of those that seem to be very eager to join in the debate, which would include the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Member for Peace River, who seem to be very keen to get in on the debate. I'll be looking forward to their erudite comments.

The persons associated. My concern is that we understand that it would be, I would argue, more common than not common to have people that are sharing a household or are spouses that are each engaged in their own professional careers, and to say that because one of them is associated – and I'll put that in quotations – with the other, who may be engaged in a lobbying effort, they get captured in that is just not realistic in this day and age. We have to be very careful about how we designate those associations and who we capture under that net. That's why I made the original argument.

In test driving the act, there have been some difficulties that have been encountered around what we ended up with, so we're seeing a section here that is clarifying that particular part, which is good. I'm glad to see it. We're moving ahead on that.

There's been a clarification around the reports so that if there was to be an investigation, the registrar, one, is to prepare a report; two, there was an expansion of what was to be in the report and that, in fact, that report would be submitted to the Ethics Commissioner, who then submits it in care of the Speaker to the Legislative Assembly. Perfectly appropriate.

5:40

I'm also glad to see that the disclosure of personal information section, which was the old section 18, has been eliminated. I think we have to be very careful, when we are collecting, using, or disclosing personal information, that there is consent that is attached to that. So if the disclosure has been removed from the act, fine. If it's turned up in a different place, which is possible – I haven't gone looking for it – I think we need to be careful with that.

I'm pleased to see what has been done with the act. I know my colleagues have brought forward their concerns and some of the things they were pleased to see. I'm looking forward to expanded debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) a five-minute question-and-comment period is available for anyone who wishes.

Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to start my comments on Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009, by noting that the act has not been proclaimed. We also understand that the Ethics Commissioner expects to have the lobbyist registry ready to launch in September of this year. It includes a clause for review of the act two years after it is proclaimed.

Now, the NDP has generally been supportive of the bill that created the Lobbyists Act. The former MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, Mr. Ray Martin, sat on the special select committee of the Legislature which, in its review of the conflict-of-interest

legislation, recommended that the province establish a lobbyist registry. We criticized the act for including a loophole that allows lobbyists to avoid disclosure of any contact with officials where the contact was initiated by the official being lobbied. A similar loophole existed in the federal legislation from 1995 to 2004.

Mr. Speaker, when the act was being debated in 2007, an amendment was introduced by the Official Opposition, which was passed, which changed the definition of an associate. The original version of the Lobbyists Act introduced by the government stated that an individual could not lobby the government on a particular issue if at the same time they were being paid to provide advice to the government on that issue. Paid advice mainly refers to the government practice of establishing multiple stakeholder advisory bodies, such as the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, which is made up of business, government, and environmentalists. It further stated that nobody associated with a lobbyist, such as a spouse, could provide advice to the government on that issue so that people would have to choose between either being a lobbyist or providing paid advice to the government. They could not do both at the same time if they were married.

Now, the amendment brought forward by the Official Opposition at that time removed the reference to spouses in the definition of an associate. The Liberals argued that the law has to recognize that spouses have independent careers and that, therefore, one spouse should not be penalized by the other spouse's career activities. The Conservatives agreed with that proposition, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP did not agree, and we attempted to have that amendment reconsidered. Our argument was that it's a conflict of interest if someone is lobbying government while at the same time their spouse is providing advice to the government on the same issue. Furthermore, the Conflicts of Interest Act recognizes the common interests of spouses by requiring that spouses file their financial interests with the Ethics Commissioner. We asked the question: why should the Lobbyists Act pretend that such common interests do not exist?

Bill 2 seeks to fix the loophole that the Liberal amendment unintentionally created, while maintaining the amendment's original goal of treating spouses as having separate interests in terms of lobbying and of being paid advisors of the government. Now, it does that in a couple of steps. First, in section 2(b) on page 1 the bill amends the act's interpretation clause by removing the clause "the person's spouse or adult interdependent partner" from the definition of an associated person. It also in sections 4(a) and (b) undoes the Liberal amendment by putting the reference to associated persons back in section 6 of the act. The remainder of the bill fixes parts of the act, just some general administrative and minor changes to language and so on.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the Lobbyists Act is an important piece of legislation that will when proclaimed and in force increase the overall degree of transparency in government. Alberta is considerably behind other jurisdictions in Canada in having no legislation governing the activities of lobbyists, so the implementation of this act should be a high priority.

The government's use of multiple stakeholder bodies to provide advice represents a considerable opportunity for individuals to be in a conflict of interest. We would like to avoid any loopholes which would undermine the purpose of the act. We don't understand why someone should be allowed to lobby the government on a particular issue while their spouse is being paid to advise the government on the same issue. There is a clear conflict of interest here. The Conflicts of Interest Act recognizes that spouses share certain interests, and therefore the financial interest of spouses must be declared. There is no reason why the Lobbyists Act should ignore

these common interests. So we would like to support this with an amendment to include spouses in the definition of associated persons.

Mr. Speaker, proclamation of this act is long overdue. Alberta has lagged significantly behind other jurisdictions in failing to recognize conflicts of interest with individuals lobbying government and the potential to undermine the democratic process in our province by powerful and well-financed special interests, and we think that at least with the proclamation of this act, there will be a degree of transparency. We don't have any illusions about this stopping. We are pretty clear it's going to continue, and powerful special interests will use their considerable resources and influence with this government. We don't expect that will change, but at least we will have a small window in on that activity, so we will strengthen the democratic process in our province, and hopefully that will lead to further reforms down the road.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a) five minutes are available for comments and questions.

Hearing none, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate February 18: Mr. Chase]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to make amends by calling for the vote, if we may, at this time. I mistakenly adjourned debate, and I have the opportunity to correct, so I would call for the vote at this time, please.

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

Mr. Mason: Yes, well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member is going to have to make amends another time because I would like to address this particular bill, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009.

I want to just indicate that we want to raise some of the issues. You know, while the bill is mainly administrative and does not make major changes, I think it's still significant. The biggest change is that the appeal and review process is now moved to regulations, and I think that's unfortunate. We've addressed that repeatedly in this House, and the government continues to do that.

5:50

Section 43.1 is added, which specifies that the Minister may make regulations

- (a) providing for or establishing an appeal tribunal;
- (b) respecting reviews and appeals, including the charging of a fee and the recovery of costs.

By condensing the definitions of councils, boards, and commissions, they remove details and put more into regulation. This fits in perfectly with the government's move towards more secrecy because

really we don't know what the plan for marketing associations is going to be. There will be no debate on their function because it's all been moved into regulation.

At two points the proposed act takes out the specifics, in describing the roles of commissions and boards and then review and appeals of decisions. The Lieutenant Governor in Council is then allowed to make regulations on the composition and process of negotiation agencies. A group would use an appeal board if they had a problem with the plan that had been approved by the council; for example, if it cost the producer too much money.

In the current act a council member who does not need to be a producer cannot sit on an appeal board. This is amended in the new legislation, and a council member can sit on an appeal board. By allowing nonproducers to be members of a council, it means people making the decisions are not necessarily those who are being affected by the outcomes of these decisions.

Mr. Speaker, in 2006 a government discussion paper regarding MAPA stated that the review is necessary because the industry needs to consider moving away from producer-run commodity organization. We believe the opposite. In order to protect family farms, we need to continue to develop producer-run commodity organizations. For example, a producer-owned and -operated packing plant would have provided an alternative to big packers like Cargill. Now, while MAPA does state that you must be a producer to sit on the board, the statement does not eliminate the ability for agribusiness to become members or from setting plan regulations.

Again, Mr. Speaker, big corporations already have an advantage when it comes to producing and finishing, and this allows them a chance to control marketing as well. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity pointed out during a debate on Wednesday, the 18th of February, this bill does not directly mention who is best suited to market the agricultural products. However, we know the Alberta government is very opposed to the Canadian Wheat Board single desk, and while this particular bill may not bring it up, we know that the intention is still there. I think I should mention at this time that in the recent Wheat Board elections in western Canada five of the six directors who were elected favour single desk. These are elected by farmers themselves, and it proves once more how out of touch with real farmers this government is. They can't tell the difference between a family farm and a corporate farm, and that's the bottom line.

No one representing the Wheat Board was on the list of participants during the industry governance review. Perhaps the sponsor could let us know if they were even asked to participate.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta spent over \$1.1 million on the Choice Matters campaign to end the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk system. Clearly, their direction has been rejected by farmers across western Canada.

There are no explicit changes in this legislation that are directly linked to the Alberta livestock and meat strategy, but it's hard to imagine that the government would pass up any mechanism that would allow implementation of this plan, a plan which will ultimately lead to the destruction of Alberta's family farms. Mr. Speaker, we do worry about who is marketing our agricultural products because if the marketing and governance mechanisms are in favour of the corporate farms and allow continued corporate concentration and if they ignore the needs of the smaller farms, then once again the result is the progressive destruction of the family farm.

Mr. Speaker, we need more than just administrative bills to fix the ballooning farm debt. There need to be protections in place for small producers who do not receive the same handouts that are given to big agricultural business. While this bill does not make any major

changes, it is ultimately a part of the government's agriculture plan, and this plan, this vision, does not include a space for family farms. So we are going to oppose this bill on that basis.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour I would like to congratulate members on making considerable progress this afternoon and at this time move to adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

Issue 9

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the consul general of India, Mr. Ashok Das. I had the privilege of hosting a lunch today in honour of the consul general's first visit to Alberta.

Alberta and India have a very strong connection, and we value very much that relationship. I think it would be appropriate to say that our Assembly has a strong relationship with India in that five of our 83 members are, indeed, of Indian heritage. We have a well-established trade relationship that goes back 25 years, and it's a significant one. In 2007 our two-way trade was valued at over \$300 million. We know that there's great potential for that to grow in the years ahead. Alberta and India also have a very strong friendship and a connection through our people. Over 72,000 people of Indian descent call Alberta home, including, as I've indicated, five members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta appreciates our strong relationship with India as a key trading partner and as a friend. I would ask that the consul general now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of individuals from my constituency who are visiting the Legislature today. I think it is so important for these bright kids to visit the Legislature. As you know, they will all be tomorrow's leaders. We have with us today 23 students from Spruce View school, who are seated in the members' gallery, and they are accompanied by their teachers and parent helpers Ms Teri Patterson, Mr. Peter Wiersma, Mrs. Jeanne Rasmussen, Ms Sharon Johannsen, Mrs. Bonnie Schweer, Mrs. Shelley Newsham, Mrs. Gaylene Dolphin, Ms Shauna Wills, and Ms Bren Gairdner. I would like them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two classes from Holy Cross elementary and junior high school from the most vibrant constituency in the province, the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. The students are here on a tour, and they've

been visiting the Legislature today. I would like to acknowledge the teachers and the parents who are here. We have Ms Brigitte Levasseur, Mr. Gilles Beaudoin, Ms Manuela Wagner, Ms Connie Versluys, and Ms Jadeene Wheaton. I hope you've enjoyed your experience today. I would encourage you to give a warm welcome to these future leaders.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some wonderful children from Abbott elementary school. They are here with their teachers Mrs. Christian and Miss Rouault and also a parent helper with the same name, Mrs. Rouault. I believe they are in the members' gallery. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly a number of students from R. J. Scott elementary school. These are bright and intelligent young people. I had a great chance to have just a little chat with them as we got our picture taken at 1 o'clock this afternoon in the rotunda. Their teacher is Miss Adele Edmondson and the parent helper is Mrs. Marci Baril. I would ask that they and all the kids from the class please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make another introduction. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly someone that most of you have met from time to time over the years, a good friend of mine and a former colleague, Mr. Jeremy Chorney. Jeremy was with me as my executive assistant from 2001 to 2007. He came out of the research ranks of our government caucus. Over those years he taught me much. I taught him a great deal more. As a public servant I can tell you that it's nice to have somebody from the private sector who is in government relations who from time to time has access to a free beer or so. I would ask Jeremy to please rise and receive the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to have all these school classes here today because Alberta Education has initiated a project called Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans to build understanding of and enthusiasm for education, to develop a vision of an educated child, and to develop a policy framework to guide education in Alberta over the next 20 years. Inspiring Education is led by a steering committee comprised of enthusiastic, diverse, and very busy Albertans. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, the members of the steering committee.

In addition to my MLA colleagues the Member for Athabasca-Redwater, who is the co-chair of the steering committee, and the members for Edmonton-Decore, Calgary-Hays and Calgary-Montrose, we have with us today in the gallery Mark Anielski, who is the author of *The Economics of Happiness* and a professor at the

University of Alberta; Lance Carlson, president of the Alberta College of Art and Design; Sharon Carry, president of Bow Valley College; Dr. Sharon Friesen, chairman of the Galileo project; Jim Gibbons, the superintendent of Chinook's Edge school division; Dr. Wilton Littlechild, regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations for Alberta; Deborah Lloyd, an educator from Medicine Hat; John Masters with Calgary Technology Inc.; Dr. Jane O'Dea, who is the dean of education at the University of Lethbridge; Brant Parker, president of University School in Calgary; Anne-Marie Pham, who, among her other talents, is known for working very closely with the various communities in Calgary; Zuhay Sayeed from Lloydminster, who is a community activist, I think, is probably the best way I'd describe her; Laurie Thompson, principal of the Kikino school of the Kikino Métis settlement; John Tiemstra from your own constituency and town of Barrhead, Mr. Speaker, who is retired now as a CTS or, as we used to know it, a shop teacher and, actually, the head of their CTS department at the school in Barrhead; Don Iveson, who is an Edmonton city councillor; and the one steering committee member who is not with us today, Mary Hofstetter, the president of The Banff Centre.

I'd ask that the steering committee please rise and that all members of the Assembly give them our thanks for taking time out of their busy lives to help improve education in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure for me to rise today. Speaking of education, I don't have a long list like my colleague; however, I can make up in quality what he gave us in quantity.

Mr. Speaker, seated in the gallery I have a very good friend, a gentleman that spent his career in the education scene in northwestern Alberta, a very dedicated individual. Upon retirement he committed himself to volunteering efforts in and around the city of Grande Prairie and the region of northwestern Alberta. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Dennis Grant. I would ask Dennis to please stand and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Moneca Melan, who is visiting the Legislature today. As a result of the tragic loss of her daughter Melissa in a motor vehicle collision in 2006, Ms Melan has worked tirelessly to ensure that other families do not have to face the same loss. Since 2007 Ms Melan has collected more than 1,500 signatures that urge the government to introduce legislation to suspend a graduated driver's licence if the holder of the licence is involved in a collision resulting in serious injury or death. This issue was first raised in this House on April 10, 2007. Later today I'll have the pleasure of presenting an additional 770 names that have signed the petition. She's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a good friend and a proud Albertan, Mr. Preetam Sharma. Mr. Sharma is the president

of Council of India Societies of Edmonton, which is an umbrella organization for 15 different organizations. He also served as chairman for the India pavilion at the Edmonton heritage days last year and will serve again this year. I would ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our constituency staff of Edmonton-Mill Woods. With us today in the members' gallery are Ms Kae Espedido, our constituency assistant, and Mr. Reginald Petines, our deputy constituency manager. They serve the community well, and I'm very proud of the service they're extending to Edmonton-Mill Woods. I would like to ask Ms Espedido and Mr. Petines to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak today about a very special initiative, Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. Inspiring Education is fundamentally about the future of our province. We must educate our students not for the world of today but for the world into which they will graduate.

During these dynamic and challenging economic times it's increasingly apparent that if we are to remain successful individually and collectively as a province, we must rely on the virtues that have made Alberta strong. Beginning from the core values of opportunity, fairness, citizenship, diversity, and choice, Inspiring Education will work to increase public appreciation for education, a clearer understanding of what it will mean to be an educated Albertan 20 years from now, and ultimately a policy framework to guide activities and decisions in the education sector.

It's my honour to co-chair the project's steering committee along with Brent McDonough, an outstanding teacher from Holy Trinity high school in the Edmonton Catholic school district. Along with three of my legislative colleagues – the members for Edmonton-Decore, Calgary-Hays, and Calgary-Montrose – we are working with 16 accomplished and diverse individuals from across the province who round out the committee and bring a great breadth of perspectives to the projects.

Inspiring Education is a dialogue, not a traditional stakeholder consultation. It's a discussion to explore the perspectives of all Albertans rather than reviewing key stakeholder positions. It's an exciting visionary exercise focusing on the outcomes of our education system rather than the system itself. In short, it's about our kids and giving them what they need to be successful in a dynamic world that we cannot predict.

Inspiring Education is about engaging all Albertans so that we can understand what education needs to deliver for Albertans. Very soon the Minister of Education, my steering committee co-chair, and I will be announcing further details about Inspiring Education and how all Albertans can get involved.

I want to thank the minister and all the members of the steering committee for their dedication to this initiative. I look forward to continuing to share the important work being done on this project with my colleagues and with all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health System Reform

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has created chaos in Alberta's health care system, the result of rushed, hasty changes made without careful examination of the evidence and without proper public and professional consultation. This lack of planning and the failure to invest in the past 15 years in more health professionals, beds, and hospitals has left the system on the edge of breakdown. We're spending more money per capita in this province than across the country, but what do we have to show? Long wait times in the emergency room, ambulance service delays, equipment putting people at risk, delays getting needed operations, and a decline in professional morale.

To discover and correct the underlying causes of the breakdown in our health system, we need careful, comprehensive analysis of planning and planning based on evidence. My experience of 25 years in public health is quite simple. We need to carefully examine what is working for people and what is not. We should start with the health professionals, who are quite able to identify where the system is efficient, where it is not, and have made suggestions for years. Patient experience, too, needs to be communicated and acted upon to improve the key indicators of quality, access, and the best use of resources.

If I were Premier, I would reassert stability and control over this chaotic situation now with four steps. First, I would bring together research, citizens, and professionals in Alberta from across the system to identify key barriers and opportunities for improving access, quality outcomes, and health professional well-being. On the basis of sound evidence we would develop a plan with ongoing measures of success and make appropriate changes as needed. I would ensure that all available resources, human and material, are delivering the best results. Third, I would examine all health professionals and where they can best be used to maximize long-term benefit in the health care system, including a greater focus on prevention. Finally, I would focus more effort into the front end of our health care system, including early intervention and home supports. Albertans demand the best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Olds College Fine Arts & Multi Media Centre

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday was the long-awaited grand opening of the Fine Arts & Multi Media Centre in Olds at the Olds College campus. This Fine Arts & Multi Media Centre will provide a wide range of learning opportunities to both high school and college students as well as entertainment opportunities for art patrons in central Alberta. Other rural communities such as Elnora and Hanna that are linked through the Alberta SuperNet, that provides regional access to the community learning centre arts programming and large group presentations, will also benefit from this centre.

The fine arts centre is the next but not the final stage of completing the vision of the CLC. The final stage will be in the opening of the new high school located just next door, and that will happen later this year. The treasure of the CLC was made possible through the co-operation and collaboration of the Chinook's Edge school board, Olds College, the town of Olds, Mountain View county, and, of course, the Alberta government, which has invested over \$55 million in this project to date, as well as corporate Alberta.

I'm pleased to see in the gallery today one of those members – he was introduced earlier by the hon. Minister of Education – Mr. Jim Gibbons, superintendent of the Chinook's Edge school board. Jim can be identified because he's wearing the same I Love the Alberta Arts necktie today.

Mr. Speaker, the Bell e-Learning Centre, which provided the linkages to other rural sites to enjoy the day's festivities, was made possible through significant contributions from Bell Canada. The Fine Arts & Multi Media Centre has also benefited from the generosity of a \$500,000 donation from TransCanada Pipelines corporation, and the centre will now be called the TransCanada Fine Arts & Multi Media Centre.

I'd like to thank all those who contributed their time, money, and expertise to this project. I'd also like to thank my colleagues the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, the hon. Minister of Transportation, and the Member for Rocky Mountain House for being on hand to help celebrate this event and also for their past and ongoing support. The CLC is certainly a learning treasure that all Albertans will benefit from and can be proud of.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Auditor General Office Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The extent to which the government has worked to muzzle the Auditor General is clear. On November 28 last year two government members confirmed in *Hansard* and to the Legislative Offices Committee that the President of the Treasury Board instructed them to limit the Auditor General's budget. To the President of the Treasury Board: at a time when Albertans want to know their money is well spent, is the minister telling members not to give the Auditor General the resources he needs?

Mr. Snelgrove: That's just blatantly untrue. There are obvious changes in the financial position our government finds itself facing. When ministers or MLAs or the general public ask me what I see going forward, I say that I see belt-tightening, unfortunately, some from inside. But the fact of the matter is that anybody with a clue would understand that all of us in this government at every government board level, at every agency are going to have to share in the go-forward operational dollars of this government.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the impact of this direction to restrict funding to the Auditor General is a 34 per cent reduction in planned audits, including audits of Conservative friends of Horse Racing Alberta and disgraced Highwood Communications, why is the minister denying the Auditor General the means to ensure that the government uses taxpayers' dollars in the most efficient way?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I know we all said that we'll try to be nice – and I will try very hard – but it's very simple for the hon. leader to stand up and say that these are Conservative friends who we're not auditing. The Auditor General runs a very, very independent office, and I think he would probably be insulted that the hon. Leader of the Opposition would infer that anything I do or anyone

on this government does directs him where to look, who to look at, how hard to look. We live with his reports. We don't always agree with the suggestions from him because, obviously, we think he sometimes may be into policy, but his independence is essential, and that's the way it's going to stay.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's hard to be independent without money, Mr. Speaker.

Another cancelled review is that of food safety in the province, basic food safety. This review was cancelled because the President of the Treasury Board ordered government members on the committee to deny the Auditor General adequate funding. Why was this funding blocked?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, once nice, twice – I did not order anyone what to vote. I have never ordered anyone what to vote at any committee I have ever attended. But the funny thing that the hon. member seems to be missing is that the Auditor General of this province says that Alberta is one of the best-audited provinces in Canada and has been for years. So for that hon. member to make some kind of allegations that somehow I have instructed or ordered anyone on that committee or anyone to do with the Auditor General to stop, start, or overlook an audit is absolute crap.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the November 28, '08, *Hansard* would suggest otherwise. The Auditor General plays a vital role in ensuring that government spends public dollars wisely; in other words, making sure we get value for our money. But this government is deliberately handicapping the Provincial Auditor by denying year after year his office funding for important audits. To the President of the Treasury Board: is it this minister's policy to deny the Auditor General additional financial resource to ensure that the public doesn't know how the money is being handled by this government?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General and his office work through the government through an independent audit committee, which I don't chair but which I sit on. This group of very intelligent and informed businessmen and -women deal with the Auditor General's department, and they assess priorities. The Auditor talks to them about where he could be looking, issues that he might be going forward to. Together they put forward an audit plan for the coming year. He then has the same responsibility as every other officer of the Legislature to go back and prioritize his budget to where he feels it's the most effective, and that's exactly how it should work.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that on November 28 in the Legislative Offices Committee, when asked why the Auditor General funding was restricted, two government members made it clear in this *Hansard* that the instructions were from the President of the Treasury Board. Why were these instructions given to the Tory members?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member might want to write a letter to the hon. members he talked to. I don't know what hon. members said in that meeting and have no question that they have said that. But the fact is that in the context of ever suggesting that it was my right or authority to tell them how to vote at a committee meeting for any level of this thing is simply not true.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent years this government failed to manage infection control in the health care system: Vegreville, High Prairie, Vermilion, Lloydminster hospitals, all subject to serious health scares. Residents are worried, but the government wouldn't fund the Auditor General investigation. Why did the President of the Treasury Board block funds for infection control in the province?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, this goes from the sublime to the absurd. I'm not sure what the Auditor General knows about infection control in hospitals, but I know that we have a Health Quality Council, that does know quite a bit about it and does a very effective job.

The other inference the hon. member makes is that somehow I would use my influence to not have them look at a hospital in my riding or any other riding. This is, Mr. Speaker, simply a dog chasing his own tail. It don't bite.

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

Hospital Services in Banff

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At a time when Albertans have given birth to a record number of babies – in 2008, 50,543 – expectant mothers in Banff are facing what to them seems a crisis. It has been reported that the Mineral Springs hospital is considering an indefinite suspension of obstetric services. To the minister of health. Over 70 women are expecting babies in the next five months in Banff, and the lack of planning by this government is directly affecting a core service. What is the minister's response to these citizens?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it is correct that the Alberta Health Services Board has issued a statement that said that there would be a temporary closure of obstetrical services at the Banff hospital strictly related to the fact that for the staff that are required, the decision was made that the hospital was not adequately staffed. They have attempted to recruit staff. The decision was made that for safety reasons there would be a temporary suspension of obstetrical services. It should be noted that services are supplied at Canmore, which is some 15 minutes away.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there are services available beyond Banff, but has the minister considered the extra burden on an already overburdened system of delivery in Canmore and also in Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, both facilities are quite capable of handling the extra cases. I think that it's somewhat of a stretch to call a 15-minute drive a crisis situation. I would suggest that there are many places that residents of this province would be actually quite happy to have to only drive 15 minutes to services.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, without obstetric services many physicians will stop providing other services in the community. They will move to a community where they can provide the services they're trained to deliver. What is the plan, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't understand how this particular leader can make that statement. He's basically coming up

with a premise that something is going to happen where there is no evidence that it's going to happen. You know, it's typical fearmongering.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is proposing a bill that gives them unprecedented power to control all activities on any land in the province it designates, and it would lock them in jail if they protest. Joseph Stalin would be proud. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why is your government implementing a policy that tramples the rights of rural property owners?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, the bill is before the House. It would be inappropriate to talk about it before we've had an opportunity to debate the bill and take it through its proper democratic process.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, that's a disingenuous way to get out of answering the question about this government's policy.

It is a policy that tramples the rights of rural property owners. It claims that this is a harmless tool which will streamline infrastructure, but it threatens two-year jail terms and hundred thousand dollar fines for noncompliance. The winners in this proposal are this government's P3 partners and private energy companies. The losers are everyday rural Albertans. To the Minister of Infrastructure: how long has it been this government's policy to threaten dissidents with imprisonment?

2:00

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, when we do discuss the bill, the members in this House will see that there are no additions that are any different than already exist with respect to enforcement of regulations.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this policy permits virtually unlimited state control over private property belonging to hard-working farmers and ranchers. This government's policies claim that government will consult with landowners but promise jail if they don't co-operate. Threatening to lock up owners who would stand up for their rights is undemocratic. To the Minister of Infrastructure: why are you stripping the rights of rural Albertans?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, when the bill goes through the proper process, the members of this House will see that, in fact, this gives notice to landowners and to people far ahead of what we've done in the past and will be a great benefit to those landowners in Alberta.

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

Incentive Programs for Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hon. Minister of Energy announced a three-point incentive program to stimulate additional activity in the province's conventional oil and gas sector. This is good news as investment by the oil and gas sector has a huge multiplier effect throughout the entire Alberta economy as our province continues to suffer the consequences of the current global economic disaster. Could the hon. minister provide this House with the rationale behind his three-point incentive program and what Albertans can expect to see as a result of its implementation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, the programs that were announced yesterday have one and only one goal, and that is to put Albertans back on the job this coming year. These initiatives are intended to keep drilling and service crews at work. Remember that the only time that any access to these programs takes place is when Albertans are at work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Governments around the world have tossed around unprecedented and substantial amounts of taxpayers' money over the last six months in the form of corporate bailouts and economic stimulus packages. I'm curious how yesterday's announcement compares to these strategies that have been implemented by other governments in jurisdictions across the world. To the same minister: how much money will yesterday's announcement cost taxpayers?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, there is no cost to taxpayers for these programs. Unlike other jurisdictions the member has mentioned, this government is not spending taxpayers' dollars. Rather, while the pressures we are facing are outside of our control, we are using the means that we have available to us to address pressures on our province's key industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the announcement yesterday was welcome news by many in the junior oil and gas sector investment community, I have heard from some that they are concerned about the frequency of changes to the royalty structure in the junior oil and gas investment environment in the last year. I'm hearing that in a time of great uncertainty the sector needs stability. To the same minister: how does the recent announcement create an environment of stability and certainty within the oil and gas sector?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, let me be very clear about this. The announcements made yesterday have nothing to do with the royalty structure. The announcements made yesterday were in response to a global economic situation that is not of our making. What we've done here is use the levers we have available to us in the government of Alberta to put Albertans back to work. Over the long term we continue to look at the investment climate in Alberta and elsewhere. What we've done here is put Albertans to work, and it's very important from that point of view.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Cleanup of Orphan Wells

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the prosperity of our oil and gas wells comes a price: thousands of abandoned wells, pipelines, and facilities with a billion dollar cleanup price tag. The companies get their resource and walk away. The big question is: who will pay to clean up these sites? My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister tell us why taxpayers are paying \$30 million to clean up orphan wells? They mess it up; we pay to clean it up.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there are two reasons. First of all, this government is committed to keeping Albertans at work. That's the

underlying reason for having this expenditure put in place at this point in time. There are thousands of service rigs and individuals that work on those service rigs that are looking for work at this point in time. So that's part of the reason.

The other part of the reason is because it's an opportunity for us to address some long-standing issues that, yes, industry is responsible for, but at \$10 million a year it's going to take a lot longer than what we can accomplish at \$40 million.

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister: given that the \$30 million taxpayer subsidy is only for the upstream oil and gas industry, are taxpayers going to be on the hook for the downstream facilities as well?

Mr. Renner: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. Companies that are currently operating in this province are and will continue to be responsible for the reclamation of everything that they do. Orphan wells are different. Orphan wells are wells that were drilled long ago, and for numerous reasons the company that was responsible for drilling those wells is no longer in business, has gone bankrupt, or for whatever reason is not in a position to be held responsible and liable. Industry pays into a fund to address orphan wells. All this does is speed up the rate at which those wells are reclaimed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the Minister of Energy: given that for '07-08 industry contributed only \$13.6 million to the orphan wells fund and there are over 37,000 abandoned sites, for which the ERCB estimates that more than \$9 billion will be needed to reclaim them all, why is the fund set up to only collect a fraction of the cost of what is needed?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, it's interesting that we stand and answer questions relative to newspaper articles and articles that other people publish relative to the business related to energy in the province of Alberta. It's very true that there is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$12 million or \$13 million a year collected. The fund actually has about \$110 million in it currently, and they spend about \$12 million a year working on orphan wells. The Orphan Well Association, of course, directs that work, a much different situation that we're talking about here. These are not abandonments. These are orphaned wells. There is an obvious disconnect between what the member is talking about and what it is we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Incentive Programs for Oil and Gas Industry (continued)

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that many of my constituents and their families will be pleased with yesterday's announcement of an incentive program for the energy sector. This sends a very positive signal to Albertans who are concerned about their jobs during this economic downturn. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. Do we have any idea what impact the energy incentive program will have on job creation?

Mr. Knight: Well, yes. Mr. Speaker, we know that with the incentives that we had in front of us yesterday, drilling activity should be buoyed by about the amount that we see the decline projected. There's a projected decline from the original estimates of

about 27 per cent this year over last. It relates to about 20,000 jobs. PSAC has indicated in a news release, which I will table at the appropriate time, that this relates to about 20,000 workers in their membership back in the field at work.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, that's certainly good news, and I'll take it back to my constituents.

My constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar and the hon. member's constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne make up many of the orphan wells in this province. Can you tell me how this announcement as it pertains to orphan wells will help create jobs but also reduce the environmental footprint?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, thank you very much. It is refreshing to know that there are members in the House that understand the situation that we're talking about here. This is a one-time investment that will help reduce the environmental footprint created through the abandonment of decades-old sites by aiding and returning them to their former state. In doing that, what we do is hire additional service rigs, additional equipment operators, and provide employment across Alberta for these individuals.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can the minister please advise the Assembly how we will know if the incentive program has been successful?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, in the end success will be measured in the jobs created and most certainly in money continuing to be spent in the province of Alberta. Even more success can be measured by new resource pools brought on by this particular initiative. Long after these incentive programs have ended and have been forgotten, we will continue to collect royalties on these pools that will produce long after these incentives are gone. A win-win situation: with these actions we save jobs now, and we will continue to collect resources in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-four per cent of the audit projects between October 2008 and March 31, 2010, by the office of the Auditor General have been deferred or cancelled. One of the audit projects deferred until April of next year is on workplace health and safety. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given that workplace fatalities have risen 34 per cent in the last three years, what is the Minister of Employment and Immigration doing to have this necessary audit by the office of the Auditor General done right now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not the one that controls what the Auditor General chooses to audit. All I want to indicate is that workplace incidents, whether they're fatalities or injuries, are totally unacceptable. We recognize that as a ministry. We have inspectors of our own on-site. We do go out to do spot inspections, and, yes, we work with those individuals that are poor performers to try to improve their performance. As a ministry we take a very, very

active role in trying to minimize any of those activities from happening.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. One hundred and sixty-six workers died last year in Alberta because of their jobs. Why did the government limit the Auditor General's resources, preventing a necessary audit at this time which would ensure safe and healthy workplaces throughout the province?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier response, I don't control the audits that the Auditor General may choose to do.

I do want as well to indicate that although our numbers are climbing with the amount of Albertans working in this particular province, our rates are pretty constant in terms of our historical averages. Our disabling injury rates are actually decreasing per 100 full-time jobs as well as our lost-time claim rates. Those numbers are going down, and we're still attempting to do better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how can the hon. minister justify sporting around the globe at taxpayers' expense when the office of the Auditor General has to defer for one full year a life-saving audit on workplace health and safety throughout this province?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, those are two different priorities. Inasmuch as we are very, very concerned about workplace fatalities and injuries, we do have some priorities in terms of making sure that we have the right people at the right place with the right skills to do the work that's expected in the province of Alberta.

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

Incentive Programs for Oil and Gas Industry

(continued)

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government collects zero corporate taxes from the oil and gas that companies do not produce and sell. Our government collects zero personal taxes from jobs that are not there. My question is to the Minister of Energy. How much royalty does your department collect on wells that are not drilled?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the question correctly, the amount of royalty that Albertans would get from wells that are not drilled is zero.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was why I was so pleased to hear about the programs that were announced yesterday and wonder if these programs that were announced yesterday are related to the other programs that were announced last year for deep drilling and transitional royalties.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is no. Again I've got to be very clear. These incentives that were discussed yesterday and the programs released yesterday are in response to a very steep decline in oil and natural gas prices and, most certainly, a squeeze in the global credit markets. These programs, these incentives are

in response to a crisis that we have today, and they are not in any way, shape, or form attached to the royalty structure we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Ms DeLong: No further questions. Thank you.

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

Secondary Ticket Sales

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The prohibition against ticket resales has been removed from the new Film and Video Classification Act with the government arguing that consumers are protected under the Fair Trading Act, and this is simply not true. The Fair Trading Act only ensures that tickets are legitimate and that there is disclosure for why they're charging such high prices. This is not the same thing as protecting consumers from the ticket reselling practices of Ticketmaster. I'll ask again to the Minister of Service Alberta: what is the minister doing beyond daily monitoring to protect Alberta ticket buyers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, daily monitoring is ongoing. As well, with respect to the Fair Trading Act there is protection for consumers under that if a consumer has been misled or been sold a fake ticket or other unfair trade practices. What's really important here is that the conversation is happening. We need to hear from people out there who are being misled or consumers who are not getting the right information. That's why this conversation needs to happen, so we can do the right thing and handle it properly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Ontario's act actually protects ticket buyers and artists and workers by prohibiting secondary ticket sales, so why doesn't the minister introduce legislation to do the same thing here?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, right now we're going through the regulations as opposed to Bill 18 before we have it proclaimed. What we have done is that we've talked to Ticketmaster, and we've had indications from them. We asked them to cease and desist. We did that months ago. TicketsNow is not operating in Alberta. None of our artists or our consumers are at risk on this particular issue.

Ms Blakeman: Boy, did you get taken.

Back to the same minister: if he doesn't want to bring in legislation that prohibits ticket reselling, why doesn't the minister take the same steps that the Attorney General from New Jersey took; that is, to stop Ticketmaster from steering customers to its secondary sites, they legislated that Ticketmaster could not resell tickets on TicketsNow until after a delay of up to one year. Why don't you consider that?

Mr. Blackett: Well, I will take that under advisement. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Long-term Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last January the Premier said, and I quote: "Our government will invest \$300 million for 600 new beds . . . in seven new long-term care centres across the province." A year later this promise is broken. Not one single new bed exists, and the government's continuing care strategy includes no increase to the number of long-term care beds for at least six years. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: when hundreds of seniors are lining the hallways of our hospitals waiting for care, how can you show them so much disrespect?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the preamble was, as is customary, not correct. There are a number of projects around this province in long-term care that are under way. I would encourage the member to leave her office in the Legislature and travel to some of the communities west of Edmonton and down to Calgary. There are several facilities that are under construction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. None of these new facilities are part of what was announced.

Now, approximately 750 seniors are taking up acute-care hospital beds because they're on the waiting list for long-term care. Meanwhile, the government is planning no new beds that will provide the level of care these patients require. These seniors don't need new apartments with new fees; they need qualified care. To the minister of health again: will you admit that the only way your strategy can succeed in getting these seniors out of hospitals is by waiting for those currently in long-term care to pass away?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: No, I won't, Mr. Speaker, because what we are doing and what we will be doing – and I would encourage the member to listen carefully to the minister of finance's budget delivery on April 7. We don't believe that the answer to those particular patients is to simply to house them, institutionalize them in long-term care. We want to provide some options. We will be ensuring that there are additional dollars for things like home care, where these particular patients can actually go back to where they want to be, not where these two want to send them to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Yeah. Well, indeed, yesterday when asked about the 600 long-term care beds he promised Albertans, the Premier started talking about housing. Home care won't cut it for the 1,500 Alberta seniors waiting for long-term care beds and neither will new apartments. Alberta's senior population is growing, and so is the long-term care wait-list. To the minister of health: wouldn't it be wiser to build the new long-term care beds you promised rather than leaving it to overcrowded hospitals and overworked Alberta families to do your job for you?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat what I said in my first answer. We are.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Research and Innovation Funding

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I attended the Ingenuity in Our Community event last week in Edmonton, where

the government provided an update on the innovation framework. Given the state of the global economy I've heard questions about whether we should be rethinking some current initiatives that could perhaps wait until after the economic storm has passed. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Could the minister please explain why he's proceeding with his work to define the role and mandates within Alberta's research and innovation system at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question. Given the current economic situation that we find ourselves with globally, I think it was actually quite a good vision of the Premier to embark upon this kind of realignment and refocusing of our research system and our research and innovation framework. Last year is when we started this. What that's going to do is give us a leg up on many other jurisdictions around the world that are currently looking at how they can become more accountable, more focused, and more aligned, and that's exactly where we're headed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again to the same minister: the audience last week was very supportive of the youth techno entrepreneurship program, but given the circumstances would the \$3 million be better spent on bolstering another part of the research and innovation system?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the youth of Alberta are the future of Alberta. The youth of Alberta are the future entrepreneurs of Alberta, and our techno entrepreneur program, which was part of what came forward in the task force last year, is something that we're not going to pull back on because it's exactly the type of investment we should be making in this type of climate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. There seems to be a great deal of emphasis on entrepreneurs and not so much on the research side of things. Is this a signal that Alberta is moving away from its past support for research?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I do hear this question a fair bit; that is, are we moving away from the tremendous strengths that we have in basic research in our postsecondary institutions and our research institutions? The answer is absolutely not. What we are doing is building upon that strength and building upon the areas of focus and alignment that we have so that we can take that basic research and turn it into the good that it should do for society.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Homelessness Initiatives for First Nations People

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. The aboriginal community accounts for about 5 per cent of Edmonton's population but constitutes a startling 40 per cent of Edmonton's homeless population. The statistics for Calgary are similar. The difference, it seems

to me, between the two cities is that Edmonton's new 10-year plan to end homelessness proposes programs that are specifically geared to housing and supports for aboriginal people, and Calgary's plan seems not to do that. Does the minister agree that for any 10-year plan to end homelessness in Alberta to be successful, the plan should include culturally specific programs to address housing and supports for homeless First Nations people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question. Yes, the Edmonton 10-year-plan, which was just released, as you know, approximately three weeks ago, has identified that the aboriginal population in Edmonton that is homeless is at 40 per cent when, really, it's 5 per cent of the Edmonton population overall. I do agree, as I've indicated even that day when we did the announcement, hon. member, that I very strongly support culturally sensitive housing programs, and that would include those for the aboriginal community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. What is the minister doing to ensure that the 10-year plans that have already been adopted by cities or municipalities have programs that are specifically designed to get First Nations people out of homelessness and into housing?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the 10-year plans that we've received as a ministry have been from the seven major municipalities in the province, which would include Lethbridge and Red Deer, Edmonton, Calgary, the ones that the member has named. It's really the local communities that put forward what is important in their communities into their plans. Edmonton has addressed the aboriginal housing component, and as I said, I will be supporting the Edmonton plan strongly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that we are still waiting for the release of the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness – and maybe the minister can shed some light on when we might expect to see it – will the minister tell us what programs, if any, are being developed at the provincial level that specifically address the overrepresentation of aboriginals in Alberta's homeless population?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the provincial 10-year plan to end homelessness will identify long-term strategies, as I've indicated here in the Assembly before. I am looking forward to that release once the government process has been completed. As for the aboriginal community over the past three years, we've allocated about \$45 million through a federal program to the communities overall, and they've been for student housing at Mount Royal College and other colleges; also for aboriginal home ownership programs for aboriginal communities – some are applying for Habitat for Humanity, for example – a number of ways that we're assisting communities with that money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Cattle Age Verification

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of the Alberta government's ongoing plan to assist our livestock industry, a second portion of a benefit will be available to Alberta livestock producers. In order to receive this benefit, cattle producers were required to age verify their 2008 calf crop by the end of 2008. My first question is to the minister of agriculture. How much of our calf crop has been age verified to date?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, we certainly are pleased with the response from the Alberta cattle producers. We now have about one and a half million, or 83 per cent, of our 2008 calf crop age verified. All livestock producers who meet the requirements, including premise identification, receive a second benefit under the AFRP 2 in early March. We now have a total of a hundred million dollars which is available to the qualified producers.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much for that answer. Mr. Speaker, my next question to the same minister. I know that there are some producers that have questioned the value of the age verification program. Can the minister tell us how age verification will be of benefit to this industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, certainly, there are some questions about it, but simply put, age verification will increase our market access. Key markets, including many of the Asian markets, insist that our animals now be age verified. The federal agriculture minister, Ritz, was recently able to secure some market access in principle for the sale of Canadian beef to Hong Kong. This is a staged approach, and it will open other markets for age verified animals only. Just as important, probably, in the event of a disease outbreak age verification will help us identify the animals at risk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: age verification is now mandatory under the Animal Health Act, and I would wonder what assistance is available to producers to help them to comply with this mandatory function.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Since October Agriculture and Rural Development field staff have been assisting producers age verify their animals and complete their premise ID identification. I believe Alberta ag at this particular time has about 61 field staff available for them, so help certainly is available over the phone or in person by calling the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Early Childhood Services

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of the Minister of Education's mandate as specified by the Premier is to "increase . . . early intervention initiatives." One such initiative, early childhood services, provides programming for children under the age of six.

But a letter a parent received from the minister states, “The School Act does not give [the minister] the authority to review decisions related to the special education programming of a child in an ECS program.” To the Minister of Education: if the minister is not responsible for ECS programming, will the minister please tell us who is?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Well, luckily, Mr. Speaker, this government works well together. I work with the ministry of health and the ministry of children’s services to make sure that children have access to the services that they need not only to do well but to be ready for school at an appropriate time. That means early diagnosis, that means talking about early childhood programming, and it means co-operating with our school boards, many of whom have put forward programming in the areas of early childhood work. There are a lot of people in this province who care about kids, and a lot of them are working together to make good things happen.

Mr. Chase: I am pleased to hear that that co-ordination exists. I’d like to see concrete examples of it. I’ve asked questions to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, who’s passed it on to the minister of health, and you’re sort of flipping it back to both of them, so I’m still not sure.

Does the minister acknowledge that children younger than six years old should be protected with the same rights as children who are six years old or older, and who’s going to ensure that that protection occurs?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that’s a very broad question. Should children under age six have the same rights as children over age six? Absolutely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Inappropriate clustering, misuses of funding, and record mismanagement are just a few problems this particular parent has had to face recently with the ECS programming without any course of redress. Will the minister admit that the School Act must be changed to better protect children under the age of six? Specific care.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, luckily, we’re engaged in a process of Inspiring Education, which is going to review entirely the process of providing educational opportunities to students in this province to make sure that every child has the opportunity to maximize his or her potential. In the course of that process, as I’ve indicated both in the Legislature and outside the Legislature, we’ll be looking at the legislative framework for education, and we’ll be happy to consider all aspects of education and all potential amendments that might be needed to the act. I’d invite the hon. member to engage his community in the discussion and to bring forward suggestions as to how we might do things better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Municipal Taxation

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of my questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Some cities are suggesting that they need to keep all of the education property taxes that they’re collecting in order to meet the growing demands of municipal

budgets. Can the minister please advise the House whether he’s contemplating any such change?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we all benefit from the funds collected for public education. Let me be very clear that education taxes are not municipal revenue. They are collected on behalf of this province. The funding of education through the general revenue fund and property taxes strikes a balance: property taxes, approximately 31 per cent; GRF, approximately 69 per cent. There are no plans to change.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, many municipalities are feeling budgetary pressures associated with increased costs and the deteriorating economy. Can the minister please tell us how municipalities can manage these challenges?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, strong municipalities are the key ingredient to strong communities. One of the ways, of course, is the municipal sustainability initiative. But this government is supporting municipalities, supporting them through transportation grants, infrastructure, health projects, savings through the health care premiums, ambulance savings. Municipalities need to prioritize, and they have the responsibility to the citizens of their municipality to prioritize.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, recently the city of Calgary proposed implementing new ways for municipalities to raise revenues, including a real estate transfer tax. Can the minister tell the House whether there are any plans to amend the Municipal Government Act to allow any new fees or taxes by the municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the simple answer is no. We are not considering providing new taxation powers, especially in these economic times. We will continue to talk with municipalities about the importance of sustainability, their challenges, and possible solutions. But in the end, no, we are not considering providing new taxation powers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Syncrude Royalty Agreement

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In the private-sector world corporate reports to shareholders must meet the test of full, plain, and true disclosure. This government, sadly, has no such requirement. Information filed by one of Syncrude’s shareholders indicates that the royalty deal Syncrude just negotiated with this government is worth many billions in increased profits. To the Minister of Energy: what was the makeup of the government team that negotiated this deal? Who were its technical leaders, and who were its political leaders?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, as has been the case over a number of years, the people that are responsible for negotiating and continuing the health of the Crown agreements on behalf of the province of Alberta are individuals in the Department of Energy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government was hosed by Syncrude negotiators. It ignored the advice of its own experts and gave Syncrude an unbelievably generous deal. Again to the

Minister of Energy: did the Department of Energy conduct detailed analysis of the impact of this royalty deal before agreeing to it, and if so, did he accept the full and complete advice of his department officials in agreeing with this deal?

Mr. Knight: Again, it's interesting to note that a number of individuals, and particularly some of the individuals here in the House, think that it's just kind of a simple little arrangement when you go and make a Crown agreement relative to a 40-, 50-, 60-, 80-year business proposal for the people of the province of Alberta. These agreements are very complicated and complex agreements. Have I had an opportunity to sit with people from both sides of the negotiating? Have I sat at the table with people on both sides of the negotiations when it is going on? No. But have I accepted and read and concurred with people from both sides of the negotiating team? Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that the President of the Treasury Board has directed government members to limit the Auditor General's budget, leading to a deferral of the audit of royalty collections, will the President of the Treasury Board take this multibillion dollar issue seriously and request the Auditor General to conduct a special audit of the royalty collection system?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, from *Hansard* from our Auditor General, who says, "Alberta is unique also in that it is the only jurisdiction that publicly reports on every ministry." A little further down the line it says:

where we go more in depth beyond the financial statements and into the actual operations of an organization and how they conduct their work. We do . . . more [than a] thorough examination . . . Since I am statutorily required to do all the financial statement audits, then I'm only left with what is left over to do the systems audits. Therefore, we have to reflect upon that as to how much you can do in the year with the resources that you have available.

From Mr. Fred Dunn.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, that was a direct quotation from what I believe to be a document that already is the purview of the House and has been tabled in the House before. Is this correct?

Mr. Snelgrove: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. It doesn't have to be done again, then.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Education Consultation

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some people may say education in Alberta has sometimes been everyone's whipping boy: reports of students failing, testing stressing students out, and parents writing letters to media and trustees saying that they do not understand what their child is learning in school, all at a time when according to some corners about 70 per cent of our population do not have children in school. My question is to the Minister of Education. Earlier you introduced a number of individuals who are serving on the steering committee for Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. They are well-respected members coming from many parts of Alberta. Are you expecting these people to solve the problems of the education system today?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it should be clear that Albertans have a right to be very justly proud of the education system they have today. By some accounts, very credible international accounts, we rank among the top five in the world. In fact, people come from all over the world to take a look at what we're doing here in terms of our curriculum, our assessment processes and accountability processes, our teacher education and teachers, the standardized curriculum. There are many things that speak up for the value of education today. There are issues, obviously, but our committee is about tomorrow, about the long term.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Education: is it wise to be undertaking such an ambitious task at a time of economic uncertainty?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely. A time of economic uncertainty is a time when you invest in looking to the long term and the big picture and where the province is going so that you can be ready and have your citizens ready to engage in the opportunities that they have for tomorrow. That's the important part: to make sure that our children and their children have the opportunity to be Albertans tomorrow and to seize the opportunities at home and in the world. Looking at what we're doing, the Inspiring Education process and getting the public to understand the value of education to the future are absolutely essential.

Ms Woo-Paw: My final question is again to the same minister. Is this process a roundabout way to eliminate locally elected school boards and establish a school superboard to run everything out of one office?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that's a question that was raised with me at the Alberta School Boards Association and many other venues. This is about public engagement in a discussion, a dialogue of Alberta. It's about public involvement. A locally elected school board should be part of that process of involving the public in the discussion. The Alberta School Boards Association in the next week or so is holding a conference to do exactly that. The Public School Boards' Association is engaged as well. This is about involving the public.

However, the discussion will be about the future of education, and obviously part of that will be governance structure and the appropriate governance structure. Form will follow function. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not about eliminating the school boards; it's about involving the public in education.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 106 exchanges today. In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of three remaining members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Strathmore Youth Exceptional Service Awards

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to acknowledge the Strathmore youth exceptional service awards that were celebrated and presented on Saturday, February 21, 2009. This marked the fifth anniversary of the awards, that were initiated thanks

to the inspiration of society president Valerie Heck. This year 10 young people were nominated for and received the awards based on their significant and exemplary volunteer service in the Strathmore community.

Thirty-six young people have been recognized in the five-year history of the awards, ranging in age from 4 to 18 years. Sponsored by local businesses and service clubs, the awards highlight the positive volunteer actions of young people in a wide variety of areas, young people whose actions and commitment are the fabric of what strong communities are made of. I highlight the initiative of 9-year-old Erin Waterchief, who, among other achievements, collected over \$100 at her last birthday party in lieu of gifts. With her young friends Erin donated and delivered the money to the Strathmore hospital.

Volunteer services at the community library, the seniors' lodge, and fundraising for a skateboard park were among other achievements highlighted during the awards. Mr. Speaker, at a time when some are concerned about the loss of commitment to volunteer service, I am proud to congratulate the Strathmore Youth Exceptional Service Award Society and the 10 young nominees they recognized last week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Social Work Week

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and recognize social workers in our province during National Social Work Week, which is March 1 to 7. Social workers are heroes in our society. They're ordinary people who do the extraordinary by responding to children and families in crisis, counselling patients in hospitals, giving guidance to our children and youth in schools and universities, and working with families in family courts and elsewhere. Their contributions to our communities have far-reaching and positive effects on Albertans from all walks of life, and we are a stronger province because of their vital care and support.

However, their work is often behind the scenes and isn't always acknowledged. I applaud the work social workers do each and every day to ensure that Albertans are receiving the help they need to be successful. I hope that this week and throughout the year we can all take the time to say thank you to social workers for the valuable role they play.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Multilingualism

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on the value of learning international languages. It has been long recognized that language is one of the most powerful instruments for communication, the preservation and development of our tangible and intangible heritage, and positive human connections. As our world and societies become increasingly pluralistic, global, and multilingual, there's a corresponding increase in the recognition and appreciation for the benefits of learning international languages and maintaining heritage, or mother, languages. This is deemed so important for human development that UNESCO proclaimed February 21 of each year as International Mother Language Day 10 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, having a multilingual population yields benefits in all aspects of life in our society. It helps learners to develop greater ability in thinking, problem solving, as well as improved ability to

learn. Multilingualism is also linked to reduction in school dropout rates and enhanced social integration. In our global knowledge-based economy the ability to speak in multiple languages is crucial for conducting business in the international community and critical for advancement of business goals. Having a shared language also strengthens family connections at home as well as relationships around the globe.

The United Nations also recognizes multilingualism as a way to demonstrate respect and inclusion and develop better understanding and appreciation for those from different cultures, countries, and nationalities, which in turn helps reduce racism, xenophobia, and intolerance.

Here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, international and heritage languages are taught to students in both our public schools and community-based language schools. At the community level over 40 languages are taught to over 12,000 students every weekend by many dedicated leaders, teachers, and volunteers from our diverse cultural and linguistic communities.

As an Albertan who has devoted more than a decade to running community-based language programs and raised three multilingual young Albertans, I look forward to seeing greater development in international programs in Alberta in the years to come. Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on its 2008 activities. Additional copies of the report have also been provided for all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition this afternoon. This petition is signed by 770 individuals, many of whom are residents of the Sherwood Park and the Strathcona constituency. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce legislation that will ensure the following:

1. where a person who holds a graduated driver's licence is operating a motor vehicle that is involved in a collision resulting in serious injury or death, that person's licence shall be suspended immediately and notification shall be provided to the Alberta Transportation Safety Board; and
2. the Board shall immediately conduct a review of the incident to determine whether the person's licence should be reinstated, and if so, under what conditions.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the correspondence to and from the Minister of Education which I referenced during question period today.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first two relate to documents referred to in my questions. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of excerpts from the government's December continuing care strategy, which related to my questions today, wherein the government's plan to build no new long-term care beds is clearly stated.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of speaking notes for the Premier dated January 29, 2008, available on his website, in which he promises that his government will spend \$300 million on 600 new long-term care beds and more than 200 replacement beds.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of a news release from Public Interest Alberta regarding the opposition expressed by a number of seniors' groups to the government's continuing care strategy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Energy.

2:50

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As I'd indicated earlier in question period, I would like to take this opportunity to table a news release from the Petroleum Services Association of Canada in which they indicate that the Alberta energy initiatives program will save jobs.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, response to a question raised by Mr. Taylor, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, during Oral Question Period on March 2, 2009, regarding fires caused by the negligence of a landlord.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, victims services branch status report 2007-2008.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of Supply to order. The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2008-09, No. 2 General Revenue Fund

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund. These estimates will provide additional spending authority to three departments of the government and the office of the Auditor General. When passed, the estimates will authorize an increase of about \$128 million in voted expense and equipment inventory purchases. These estimates are consistent with the third-quarter fiscal update, which updated the 2008-09 fiscal plan for all government entities. While specific ministers can speak to the details related to their individual budgets, I can outline the overall requests for additional spending authority.

The increases include \$70 million for higher than anticipated producer claims for the 2007-08 year of the Alberta farm recovery program, phase 1; \$49.7 million for employment and training programs, health benefits, and income supports; \$8 million for the off-site service work for the Fort McMurray community development plan; and \$750,000 to the Auditor General for increased audits

and requirements from the March 2008 restructuring of the government and several special-purpose audits requested by the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure, an honour, an experience is perhaps the best word, to rise and kick off the debate of the 2008-2009 supplementary supply estimates, version 2.0, I guess we could call it because we dealt with version 1.0 on November 26. That was worth pretty close to a billion dollars, and now we're looking at adding another \$128,477,000 to that. The hon. President of the Treasury Board gave a brief, specific breakdown of where that money would go. Over the course of this afternoon, Mr. Chair, we will debate this further, and we will see what kinds of questions we can come up with and what kinds of answers the government can provide to our questions.

Of course, the first question for the 2008-2009 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, is: how come we keep doing this over and over again, at least once a year, often twice a year, going back 10 years now, going back \$13,843,000,000 worth of additional money requested within the budget year? I mean, Mr. Chair, I'm sure there was a time when we actually had budgets that small to get us through a year in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Taft: Not long ago.

Mr. Taylor: My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview says that it actually wasn't that long ago although I must confess that I have no historical memory from being here in this House of a time when the budget was only \$13.8 billion. The first budget that I think we debated after I was elected in 2004 – that would be the fiscal 2005-2006 budget, I guess – was about \$25 billion. About this time last year, a little later than this, we were debating the '08-09 budget for \$37 billion, \$12 billion, or nearly 50 per cent, more than it was just four years earlier. Mr. Chair, on top of that – on top of that – we need to keep going back to the well, you know.

Mr. Chair, I've got two kids in university. I know a little something about the experience of being the bank of mom and dad. I know what it's like. If my kids kept coming back to me the way this government keeps coming back to this Legislature with its hand out and its pockets turned out, pleading poverty and saying, "Please, sir, I need more," I think I'd tell them to go get a job.

Ms Pastoor: You might tell them to get a job.

Mr. Taylor: Exactly. Go stand out on 17th Avenue in Calgary with a squeegee.

Ms Pastoor: Teach them how to budget.

Mr. Taylor: Well, yeah. My hon. colleague from Lethbridge-East actually just nailed it there, Mr. Chairman. What I would do, what I have done, is teach our kids how to budget.

Mr. Denis: How conservative. Very conservative.

Mr. Taylor: That from a former Liberal, a former Saskatchewan Liberal, the Member for Calgary-Egmont. I'll take that comment about conservatism with a lowercase "c". [interjections] Oh, the sparrows are starting to chirp again from the other side.

An Hon. Member: Absolution is good for the soul.

Mr. Taylor: Bless you, my son.

There is just no way around the fact that this is like the *Seinfeld* show. It just went on and on. It was never about anything in particular. It was about the same thing every episode. Nothing ever really changed. Nothing ever really was accomplished. No progress was ever really made. No accountants were apparently hurt in the making of this movie.

The simple, sad, inescapable fact of the matter, Mr. Chairman, is that this government cannot live within its means, cannot budget properly for a 12-month period, and that is why it continues to come back to this House once or twice a year asking for more.

Now, in the grander context of the requests for more this is only a request for a little more – a little, tiny bit more – just \$128,477,000. Not much more than beer money when you're talking about it in the context of a \$37 billion budget. But the combination of this increase that's being asked for now and the increase that was approved in November and the original budget of \$37 billion – and we're not quite finished this year yet. We've got – what? – 27 days left in it. I think this brings the actual increase in expenditures from fiscal '07-08 closer to 13 per cent than the 9.7 per cent increase in spending that was advertised when we did the budget debate last year. Of course, that budget – we're coming to the end of that budget period – estimated spending increases of 12 per cent over the next three years and admitted that that was going to be front-loaded onto this year's budget because of a pretty massive increase in capital spending that would level off over the years to come.

3:00

There was some acknowledgement in Budget 2008, Mr. Chairman, that going forward from that point, things were a little dicey; it was going to be a little difficult to predict what the world economy was going to do. I quote from the fiscal overview from Budget 2008. "The actual surplus over the next three years will depend on factors largely outside the control of the Alberta government." Well, may I say in a totally nonpartisan way: we've all discovered that. We've all discovered that all kinds of things outside of the control of any or all of us in this House have had a massive impact on the budget, on the economy, and on the way things look going forward.

The way things look going forward is a bit dark, a bit cloudy, a bit scary, a bit bleak, and understanding that I'm talking now a little more than a month in advance of the beginning of debate on the budget for fiscal '09-10, which may present – we don't know yet because we haven't seen the budget – a very different picture than what we've been used to, we are here debating a hundred and some-odd million dollars in requested supplementary supply money in a context that says that nothing is being reined in yet. So I guess my first question to the President of the Treasury Board would simply be: what is this government's plan to curb spending increases?

Now, I'm not asking the President of the Treasury Board to steal the finance minister's thunder or spill the beans in advance of the finance minister's budget or anything like that. I understand the requirement to wait for April 7, to stay tuned, as is often said, for the details. But in broad, general terms I think this is an appropriate time in this Assembly for the question to be asked about what the government has in the way of a plan, if any, to curb spending increases. I think this is an appropriate time to ask whether we will be going through this exercise again twice next year. I think this is an appropriate time to find out whether the government is even prepared to acknowledge that it perhaps needs to change its ways and learn to come down with a budget at the beginning of the year that it is going to stick to.

If this were the budget that any one of us in this House were drawing up for our own family, Mr. Chairman, outside of the possibility that sometime during the fiscal or calendar year of our family's existence somebody in the family might get a little bit of an increase in their pay, though I doubt that's going to happen in very many cases, in very many families in Alberta over the course of the next 12 months, we would have to create a budget that did the best job we could of projecting what our costs and our expenses were going to be over the next 12 months as against what our income was going to be over the next 12 months, and we would have to stick to that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess, to follow the logic, if you don't want to come back here and monitor the expenditures you've set out for departments, you just give them more than they need. You just write cheques until they absolutely don't have to come and see you. We'll say: see you next year. We could get our spending up to \$50 billion, but we won't have to come back here and hold departments to account for changing their spending.

So there's a method. You can say: let's budget tight. Let's think in perfect circumstances that the ship sails along fine and we don't have to come back. But in a situation like most governments are in and certainly most provinces are in, the chances are that the circumstances you set out with in the spring aren't going to be exactly the same year-round, nor are the needs and the demands of the different departments, and the interrelationship between some of the departments certainly needs to be understood better.

I have two kids in college myself, and I know that if I don't have them coming back looking for money, I've given them too much money. It's pretty simple. How their mother and I keep track of them as best we can is to make sure that there is a definite need in the pocket of the college kid. I make no apologies for being a bit of a skinflint with that.

The hon. member asked about what we are doing. Two years ago we set forth on value reviews, making departments work together, trying to understand things they may do that may have costs in other departments or things that they could do better to actually deliver what we're trying to do better to the people, doing it more efficiently by identifying overlaps and lapses. This is a very good example of where the Premier allowed us to create the safe communities fund, which demanded that all relevant departments had to come back for money to the issue. Instead of just automatically increasing the baseline funding to all departments, who may have some kind of an influence on how we solve some of the crime and addictions and drug and gang issues we've got, we said, "Here's the issue. Here's the money. Come to us with good ideas, and we'll make sure that we're getting value for our money as we address it," as opposed to the old form of just raise the base and measure it at the end of the year.

We've also put together in this government ministerial working groups, which are very effective at making sure that our policies and programs go forward in a very synced method, so that Energy and Environment and Aboriginal Relations and Treasury all understand where the energy programs and the environmental programs fit together. I can quite proudly say that this started two years ago. So as we have to address the obvious change in our financial situation, we have benefited greatly from some of the work of our Premier and the ministers that have been involved.

I make no apologies for having departments come back to account to this House for the dollars that have been either transferred from

department to department or have been required for special circumstances that have arisen. I would think the hon. member would appreciate that the accounting systems, the accounting responsibilities in this province are second to none and that he should probably appreciate the fact that even down to the \$740,000 that the Solicitor General got, he gets to come back and comment on it.

I don't get his point that we've done nothing. It's a political argument that, of course, he would do better, but it sounds like his better would be to write the cheque so big that no department would have to come back.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A very interesting and quite a theatrical opening we had here; however, we're not in a theatre here today.

An Hon. Member: Great.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yeah, it would be nice.

I'm certainly pleased to speak about this government's ongoing commitment to Alberta's agriculture and food industry. Mr. Chairman, in 2008 this government responded to the challenges facing the livestock industry by creating the Alberta farm recovery plan. This plan saw the distribution of \$165 million to all Alberta livestock producers to help them to cope with the disaster as a result of increased input costs.

What is before you today relates to the original Alberta farm recovery plan, where producers already enrolled in the CAIS program were automatically registered and those that were not had until December 2007 to apply. I'm pleased to share that a significant number of livestock producers were helped through the AFRP program 1, considerably more, in fact, than we expected, which is a good thing.

3:10

However, our cost estimates for the program were based on the number of producers who participate in the CAIS program and the information provided at that time. The number of new participants and the extent of revision requests to change livestock numbers after the announcement far exceeded our expectation. Instead of getting the additional 1,000 new claims that we projected, we received 3,600, and almost a third of the 16,500 total claims we received had to be revised due to producers adjusting their information, which resulted in cost increases under the plan. As a result, we require \$70 million more to cover the benefits to those additional producers who are eligible.

Originally we expected that this increase might be offset by a reduction in claims under the AgriStability program due to unprecedented increases in commodity prices in 2008. However, the economic downturn resulted in a steep decline instead. Moreover, we had one of the worst years in terms of crop losses due to hail storms. As a matter of fact, it was the worst year ever recorded at AFSC. As such, adequate funding is not available this year through AFSC.

Mr. Chairman, agriculture is the backbone of our province, and it's imperative that we support livestock producers through the challenging times. We are pleased that so many were able to benefit from the first AFRP program because it was a resounding success, ensuring that they and their families were able to weather the storm of rising costs.

The hon. member across has left the room, but I apologize that we in ag, I guess, don't have a crystal ball to look into to tell the future or, more importantly, a crystal ball to tell what the weather is going to be. I know he talked about a plan, and he always talks about a plan. Maybe that particular member could come up with a plan that would control the weather for the next five years. I would love to sit down with him and see where we could get to with this type of plan. However, we have no such luxury in this world.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Chairman, I am requesting you to favourably consider the request for the supplementary budget.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciated the comments, at least most of the comments, from the minister. We're looking here at an additional \$70 million for the farm recovery program. I think it's really worth emphasizing that this is actually a supplement not to this year's expenditures but to the '07-08 benefit year. So it's kind of an unusual situation, where we have this amount of money that's being requested for a program for a budget year that has actually been behind us for 10 or 11 months.

I'm concerned, as I think probably an awful number of Albertans are concerned, that no matter how many years go by, no matter how many promises are made, that, well, with just one more year of support, one more round of support, the agriculture sector will not need subsidies anymore, will not need supports anymore.

I don't think anybody takes issue with insurance sorts of programs, like hail insurance or other programs like that, but we're talking here about a lot of money. We talk every year about a lot of money for farmers. I don't dispute that farmers play an important role. Obviously, they're a vital part of our society, but I know that an awful lot of Albertans wonder: when is this flow of subsidies to the agriculture sector going to peter out; when is it going to come to an end? They flow to this sector in a way that they don't flow to any other sector. They don't flow to the housing sector, even though housing is a necessity. They don't flow to other sectors nearly as much.

There is a broad social concern out there that somehow or another we need to figure this out. You know what? It's a concern shared by an awful lot of farmers. Farmers I speak to often say that they don't want to be taking this money; they wish the system didn't work this way. Maybe it's a necessity of living in a world where many of our agricultural competitors subsidize their farmers – the Americans, the Europeans, the Japanese, and so on – so we just have to play that game, and maybe we're caught in that dynamic. I do want to get on the record the ongoing concern of an awful lot of Albertans that payments of one kind or another to the agriculture sector are unending, and it would be nice to get to a point where they didn't need to occur quite so much.

I am concerned by the nature of this particular \$70 million request because under the Alberta farm recovery plan announced a year and a half ago almost, there was \$165 million allocated, and that was expected to be enough. We then see that's \$165 million just for phase 1, and we see \$70 million more coming on top of that. The minister tried to explain that, and he gave a sincere explanation, but it does raise questions about how the program is managed. We're talking about an overrun in estimated budget of 40 per cent or perhaps more than 40 per cent. That's a pretty major overrun for a government program, and inevitably it asks questions about how the program is designed and managed and evaluated. A 40 per cent overrun on anything ought to raise very serious questions.

So it would be good to hear from the minister some reassurance, some explanation, some commitment to holding the line because if

there's a 40 per cent overrun in phase 2 of this program, it's going to be a much bigger number. I don't know if the minister would be prepared to address the question around what assurance he can give this Assembly that there won't be a similar overrun on phase 2 of the Alberta farm recovery plan. Are there provisions in place? Are there safeguards that have been implemented since phase 1 so that phase 2 won't go 40 per cent over budget?

Does the minister want to respond now? I appreciate that. Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and I certainly have no quarrel with what he said. Farming, I guess, is a gamble right from day one. I don't have to explain that to you or anyone here. It doesn't matter what portion of farming we get into. That's the nature of the beast, and it's a pretty hard one to tame.

You did hit the nail on the head somewhat when you talked about the subsidies from other countries. If we could get the WTO issues settled, that I think would certainly help us. The overrun, of course, as you correctly identified, comes from the '07 program, and the weather played a big portion of that. We thought we probably had it covered quite easily, which we usually do, but the hail issue pretty much depleted our fund.

Probably the bigger issue is the number of producers out there that we never knew were out there. I can honestly say that it concerns me very much because we had to take the numbers from the CAIS program, which we struggle with at the best of times. We knew that there would be more than that, but we didn't know how many more than that. Unfortunately for us, the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency knows how many cattle are out there, but because of the – what do you call it? – secrecy or whatever issues . . .

3:20

Mr. Rodney: Privacy.

Mr. Groeneveld: Privacy issues. That's the one.

. . . they won't share those numbers with us. Had they done that, we would have known. Hence the \$70 million overrun.

Probably more important yet are the AFRP numbers of this particular year, which are no secret: we put out \$300 million. Three hundred million dollars it is. We put out \$200 million more on the first. We thought we were going to do \$150 million and \$150 million. There were more subscribers, particularly on the hog side, but we paid out \$200 million on the first portion. All that's left in that kitty is \$100 million, which we are sending out in March at this time. So there'll be no overruns this year. That's the number. We prorated and divvied the money up accordingly. I can pretty much guarantee you that that particular program will not be back. Because of the nature of the beast of agriculture, something else may jump up and bite me. I don't know. But that program will be done when we're paid out.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I appreciate the comments and the response from the minister. One of the questions I think from comments I've read of the minister that has come to his mind – it has come to my mind – is a fundamental one about the balance between supply and demand. We in Alberta have a huge productive capacity, produce a huge supply of red meat. There are questions to be made when

that sector needs this kind of support that maybe it's just too big. Maybe it's producing more than it can sell at a profit. And then when it can't sell it at a profit, it turns to us to pay the difference.

I would be interested to hear if the minister or this government has any strategy for managing the productive capacity of the red meat industry, for limiting the productive capacity, for saying: "Okay. Enough cattle being produced. You're producing yourselves to bankruptcy, and we're tired of picking up the pieces." Or not. Maybe the whole idea is just to stimulate this industry until there is even more cattle and even more hogs. I don't know. But is there a strategic way that this government foresees to bring the balance of supply and demand into closer alignment?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate those questions because, you know, we wrestle with that problem all the time. The truth of the matter is – you made it easier for me because you reduced it to beef production – that we in Alberta supply over 60 per cent of the Canadian beef that is consumed or exported. Indeed, there's no way we can eat our way out of this problem. Unfortunately, our neighbours to the south, they can do that.

An Hon. Member: I try.

Mr. Groeneveld: Yeah, it appears that we do sometimes, too.

The BSE crisis, you know, was a big reason for the big bulge in cattle numbers in the country because there was no place to ship them out. So breeding stock that should have been culled and disposed of stayed and reproduced with the rest of it. It's interesting to note that I think we're down about 10 per cent in Canada, particularly in Alberta, this year already, which does help the situation. But what you were kind of referring to was, you know, should it be smaller?

I'm glad you didn't say the words "supply management" for beef because I don't ever want to go there with beef. It's a big portion of Alberta's export market and should be making money as an export market. As you know, supply management, we would have to go out and tell probably 60 per cent of our producers: either cut your herd by 60 per cent or 60 per cent of you will have to go out of business. We don't want to go there, and I don't think you were intending that that was the nature of the beast at all.

We've talked about it in the House here, and you people across have mentioned the Alberta livestock and meat strategy, which, hopefully, is going to start to address that problem. I'm trying to assist personally by going overseas and getting some market access. I'm proud to say that Minister Ritz probably has done that in Hong Kong, particularly because we in Alberta have been there twice. We knew that they were going to offer him that before he ever got there. The trick was pushing him there, to get him there and get that done. I dare say that if he would go to China and Japan, I think we could get the same. Although it's only incremental, it certainly would help the whole process. That's where we're trying to go.

We've got to take charge of our own industry in the red meat industry. You're absolutely right; we haven't done that. When you start putting out ad hoc programs, eventually the entitlement sort of creeps in there and distorts the whole issue. I think probably I'm pleased that the Treasury Board has said: "Lookit. You have these X many dollars for AFRP 2, but that's it. Come up with a long-term plan." They said: don't bother coming back here. Now, we're endeavoring to do that with the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. Hopefully, we're going to see some gains within the next year. It

will be incremental, but we have to get so that we're self-sufficient in there.

Hopefully, that answers some of your concerns.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I appreciate the candid discussion with the minister.

Of this \$70 million that we're being asked to approve here in supplementary expenditures, the level of detail provided is, frankly, pretty limited, as is normal in the reports we get. I'm looking at page 15 of the estimates. I'm just wondering about the \$70 million. It's a remarkably round number, which always is curious to see something quite so exact for an expenditure, and I'm wondering if we can get any more detail on that \$70 million. Is some of it for administration? Will it all flow through to farmers? I mean, how did we end up with exactly to the last penny \$70 million in this vote? How does it break down? Can we get some detail?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, there is a reasonably good answer for that. It's because these programs, of course, we run through the business risk management suite of programs that are already there. We run them through those programs because if we just made ad hoc payments, we would be, you know, in danger of having countervail. We don't want to run that risk. We don't want that border shut off a hundred per cent.

What we actually do is run it through the AFSC, you know, lending institute. In some cases, we can rob Peter to pay Paul. I guess it's kind of a bad analogy, but we do that, and that's what I said. We had hoped to cover this off with some of the hail premiums and whatnot – and farmers are quite happy to see us work it that way – but we got that account cleaned out this year. There is a certain amount of administration, very, very little administration cost because we do run it through our own program at AFSC. So, you know, to sit there and say that there isn't some administration cost – but the farmer virtually gets all the money. In the last program, AFRP 2, of the \$300 million AFSC charged no administration costs. All of those dollars went to the farmer.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. You know, I appreciate the exchange with the minister. I'm going to have to read that last response from him because I'm not sure I quite followed it all. I mean, in general I understood that the very, very large majority of this is going to flow through to farmers. It would be interesting to know a little bit of detail: how many and what the average payment is, that sort of thing. None of that detail is here, so it's a little bit hard to hold government to account, to be honest with you.

I think I'll wrap up my comments here by just reiterating some of the concerns from the Member for Calgary-Currie. We're in an Assembly where it has become the habit of the government to come back, a couple of times anyways, to augment the budget. It's not a great way to run the organization, despite the comments from the President of the Treasury Board earlier. Certainly, if there's an unforeseen disaster – you know, I remember a few years ago there was a catastrophic fire season, and almost six years ago now, I think, there was the BSE crisis. Okay. In those circumstances we understand. It's hard to accept that all of this was some kind of an

emergency – and I'm not just meaning the \$70 million; I'm meaning the whole thing – that twice all of this was unforeseen.

Is it, in fact, the product of a government that has become a bit complacent? I describe it sometimes as a latte attitude: you know, when there's just too much money in somebody's pockets and you stop paying attention to the quarters and the loonies, and you go into a coffee shop and you end up spending five bucks on a cup of coffee. You don't think about it because, you know, you've developed that latte attitude, when in fact it's still the taxpayers' money. There's nothing wrong with \$1.49 for a Tim Hortons coffee instead of five bucks for a fancy latte.

I'm concerned that in general we have a government that outspends all others. We have a leader of that government who has actually boasted in this Assembly about being the highest spending government in the country. When that tone is set from the top, it becomes very casual and relaxed. They just keep coming back: "Well, we blew through the budget; we'll come back for more. Oh, we blew through that extension; we'll be back for another one." I'm really hoping that if there's one benefit at least to a tightening of the global economic scene, it's an attitude from government that returns to a bit more pinching of the pennies.

I've said in this Assembly a number of times that I was working in the public service in the 1980s when there was a real belt-tightening. It became a career move for a public servant to allow their budget to overrun more than 1 or 2 per cent, and it was not a favourable career move. If you were charged with a program that cost \$100 million and you were over by, you know, \$3 million and had to come back, it was a pretty unpleasant scene. I think we need to return to some of that sort of discipline or else we're going to spend our way into a real mess. Value for money is the issue here.

People understand, I hope, that when we were taking the government to task 10 years ago for spending too little and we were saying that you've got to spend more, it was a matter of understanding that for a modern society governments do have a significant role to play, and you can spend too little. You can spend too little on your health system, your education system, or your infrastructure. But you can also spend too much. We're in a government that in 1986 spent the most in the country per person, in 1996 spent the least in the country per person, is now back up to spending the most. That's no way – no way – to run an efficient system in the long term.

I just wanted to get those kinds of comments on the record, Mr. Chairman, because the habit that I've seen this government develop of repeated supplementary supplies raises serious flags for me as a taxpayer and as somebody who is trying to hold this budget to account. I do appreciate, once again, the comments from the minister. I hope we can tame some of these tigers. Maybe we can't tame the weather, but we can tame some of the other issues, and I'm happy to try to help out.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I understand that the hon. member was taking a broader stroke at the rest of the government, other than agriculture, in his last comments. I think, probably, that when you look at the total number we're talking about today, agriculture is by far the largest part of the request. I think the hon. member across actually voted with us last year.

We are now putting in a cattle insurance program that will take out some of this risk. The cattle producers, all of them that are involved – but it's going to be incremental, whether it's going to be feeders or cow-calf operators – will be able to participate in livestock insurance in which they will have to pay a premium as

well. I think they are going to welcome that, and that's going to help our big swings. As the hon. member says, we can't control the weather and whatnot. We're going to try this. I think that the important part to note in the estimates here today is that agriculture is the largest part of that. So I think that as a government we're doing very well getting the whole issue under control.

The Chair: Who of you wishes to speak on agriculture? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on Agriculture and Rural Development.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate on the supplementary estimates and, at this point in particular, with respect to the requested addition of \$70 million to the department of agriculture's budget. There are a number of points that have been covered to some extent with respect to this additional \$70 million. I'm afraid that to some extent I may be asking one or two of the questions again, but I think we could actually use a little bit more clarity of explanation with what occurred with respect to the Alberta farm recovery plan 1 in the 2007-08 year.

Before we get to that, though, I would just like to talk a little bit more globally, as has already happened, with respect to the issue of the beef market in the world and the role that our beef industry plays in it and how we can play a role in terms of enhancing the profitability opportunities of many of our producers in Alberta. I certainly understand that there is a need for us to establish and develop a market and to diversify our market as much as possible so that there are greater opportunities for our producers outside of Alberta. There's a certain degree to which the efforts in that regard can be supported.

I also, however, think that one of the other factors and processes that seems to impact what our producers are actually getting for their beef is the structure of the industry in Alberta and the way in which many of the packing companies and packing plants are able to exercise more control than one might expect in the classic Conservatives'/Liberals' view of the free market.

3:40

In particular, I refer to the fact, for instance, that just yesterday, I believe it was, one of the major packing plant companies, XL Foods, bought Tyson, so now we basically have XL and Cargill. Those are the only two packers in Alberta that are buying the beef. Then, of course, Tyson and Cargill have many, many feedlots, so they're able to play around with the amount of cattle that go to the auction mart on any given day in order to impact the price that the small producer is getting when they get to the auction mart. This in effect creates a very unhealthy monopoly which greatly benefits one player in the industry and greatly compromises the success of the other player in the industry. I believe that the other player is actually a player that, you know, this government historically has aligned its interests with and had great support for, which is, of course, the small beef producer, the farmer, the Albertan who lives and makes a living in rural Alberta.

I note with interest – and people probably get a little bit tired of us every now and then, particularly very recently, over the last month, when we have been inclined to refer to the United States with a whole new level of respect, and again I'm going to do it – that President Obama has in fact reviewed this issue of vertical integration within the agriculture industry and in particular with respect to the beef industry and is considering legislation to ban that kind of vertical integration and to ban the packing plants from being able to also have feedlots and, therefore, manipulate the market and manipulate the price that the local producer is receiving.

I think that that's not by any means the only answer. I do think that there is an issue with respect to expanding our market. I absolutely think that that's the case, but I don't think that that's the only issue. I think that we need to be wise when it comes to making sure that the process that we are subjecting our own citizens to is as fair and as balanced as possible. I think we've got lots of examples out there. Even the biggest supporters of the free market will acknowledge that every now and then corporate concentration and the concept of monopolies grows so significantly that the free market has lost its ability to fairly compensate those who are operating within it. In terms of the global kinds of ideas that were already being discussed, I want to make that point.

With respect to the extra \$70 million in AFRP 1 I think it has already been noted that we're basically looking at roughly a 40 per cent increase there. There's no question that that is rather significant. Apart from some of the comments on what I just offered, I'd also be interested in hearing from the minister – and I know that he did already answer this question once, but I think I actually heard that there was a desire to get a little bit more detail on it; certainly, I wasn't able to catch everything – just a little bit more of an explanation beyond that which we see in these documents around how it is that we went from what was \$160 million to an additional \$70 million in terms of how that plan operated and what pieces of the calculation resulted in the amount going up so much. Was it simply a question of more applications, or were there changes in the calculations as a result of external forces that resulted in more money going to individual applicants?

If I could get a few answers to those questions, that would be very helpful. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's unfortunate the member opposite wasn't here when I gave my opening statements because those questions have been answered, and of course the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked those same questions. I guess I'll take the time in the House to reanswer them.

A couple of comments. We are changing our industry. Some of the concerns you bring up I'm not going to address in detail because there are other issues that we have to deal with today.

The Alberta livestock and meat strategy is intended exactly for that, to make some changes out there, and they will make some changes out there.

On your comment about XL beef and Cargill and trying to limit what they can do, particularly maybe with feeder cattle – I think that was your main point – that has certainly been tried in various states in the United States. They've tried to legislate it that they can't own cattle, and it's failed miserably. If you think about it very closely, you can see how easy it would be to get around that and how you would control that. It didn't work.

President Obama certainly is saying some of the right things, but let's not forget that the truth of the matter is that a Democratic government is traditionally a very protectionist government. If you look at what's happening with the MCOOL issue right now and if you've been following that, hon. member, very closely, what President Obama said when he was in Canada differs very much from what his Secretary of Agriculture is actually doing. Who's going to win that battle I'm not sure. I hope the President does.

I'm sure you've heard of the R-CALF group south of the border, that love what's happening out there. Their entire mission is to stop all cattle from coming out of Canada. So we've got to be very careful about how we start to criticize in this case XL and Cargill and try and limit them. If we drove them out of Canada right now,

which wouldn't take a whole lot to do, to be honest with you – I'm not so sure how much money they're making doing what they're doing right now – then we have a big problem, a huge problem.

I will address your last questions there. I'm just going to go over it very roughly because we've dealt with it, and you can read it in *Hansard* as well. The issue was that there were 4,600 cattle people out there that we didn't realize were going to qualify for the AFRP program, the first one. That changed our numbers dramatically because we didn't have a ceiling on how much was going to go out that time.

The other issue with it, of course: traditionally out of our crop insurance programs there's an excess of money that probably could cover a lot of that deficit that was in there. As I said before, 2008 was the worst hail year that we've ever recorded through AFSC in Alberta. That completely wiped out our crop insurance kitty, I guess you might say. Those were the two combinations that hit us right between the eyes that took us to the \$70 million.

As I said to the hon. member before – you know, I haven't said this, but he brought this up – I guess that if you wanted specificity, actually, on where the dollars went, we have nothing to hide there. We could probably find those numbers for you if you wanted.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

3:50

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. This will probably be my last question for the minister today. [interjections] Given the applause maybe people want me to ask more. I don't know.

One of the questions, of course, that comes up is: is there anything that the minister or the department considered coming to the table for and didn't? Or even – and this has to be put in context with my previous comments about sticking to the budget – are there pressing issues that ought to be here that aren't? There is one in particular that comes into my mind – and that responsibility is shared between this minister's department and the Minister of Health and Wellness – and that is food safety issues. Of course, there's been serious national concern about food safety because of the problems at the Maple Leaf plant and elsewhere, and there are serious global issues around food safety because of exports out of China and other issues like that. The food safety system in Canada and in Alberta has come under some serious question, and it is an area where I think that even those of us who are the tightest of tightwads would say that, you know, good food safety is worth a bit of expenditure.

I am raising this issue in part because the Auditor General has had to defer some of his work on the food safety system and following up on food safety audits. I would just look for the minister's comments on whether he is satisfied that the food safety resources of his department are adequate and if they are supported by other activities elsewhere in the government in other departments. Particularly, since we've been focusing on red meat issues, are there any food safety matters that ought to be addressed that aren't being addressed through this particular budget expenditure?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. A timely question indeed. Food safety is probably the most important issue out there for all producers and consumers. Of course, if the consumers aren't happy, the producers are not going to be happy. I was in Asia. That was after they told us that the price of our beef is too high. They always tell you that. That's their opening statement in every country you go to, but that's just normal procedure. But

then it's food safety. It's absolutely food safety. Even in China, with their consciousness of what happened with the milk issue last year and their reputation, they talk about that as the number one issue.

To answer your question, we certainly have not made any cuts in funding for the inspectors that we have here in Alberta. As you're fully aware, of course, we have two types. We have the federally inspected plants and the provincially inspected plants. Absolutely, we've been stepping up that process, and I can guarantee you that we are not going to cut the dollars back in that area because it's something I'm after my people all the time about. That, as I said here, is the number one issue.

If we want to really have a problem in this world, it's to have some of the issues that came up with the Maple Leaf situation and whatnot, so we're constantly working with the CFIA. If I had my druthers in this world, I would like to bring all the standards up to the same height. I'm not so sure about us in Alberta. We would have to change some of the facilities a little, but the standards are just as high or maybe higher even than the federal ones. Some of the conditions in the facilities are a little more stringent maybe under the federal program, and it would be quite costly, but we monitor them very closely to make sure that they're within the guidelines. Rest assured that we're not going to cut back in that area. There are times when you spend money wisely, and there are times when you should tighten the belt, as the minister said, but that's not going to be one area we're going to do it in, that's for sure.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are other areas that, obviously, we want to go to and ask questions about and other ministers and ministries that we would like to ask some questions of, and we will do so as we carry on with debate this afternoon.

I'd like to return for a few minutes, if we could, to some of the comments that the President of Treasury Board made in response to my remarks. I don't know if he was confused, if he misheard me, if he doesn't speak Liberal, or exactly what his problem was. He seemed to get out of my remarks or seemed to want to leave the impression that he got out of my remarks – and I'm sure that if he really wants to leave that impression, you can cherry-pick the comments that we all make that are recorded in *Hansard* and, you know, take out a little portion and put it on your website or whatever to make up what you will – that I had somehow said in my remarks about the spending habits and the budgeting habits of this government that if I had my druthers, I'd just cut everybody a big fat cheque and I'd spend \$50 billion, I think was the number he used, that I wouldn't hold anybody to account, and that he had two kids in college, too, just like I do, and he wants them to come back and ask for more money because that's how he keeps a rein on their spending. I refer back to what I said before, that our preferred approach was to actually teach the kids how to budget.

Mr. Chairman, the notion that I want to spend or that we want to spend on this side of the House \$50 billion a year I think couldn't be further from the truth unless there is a way to justify spending \$50 billion a year or any number – \$5 billion a year, \$500 billion a year, whatever the number is – so that you can justify it on the front end and account for it all the way through to the end of the fiscal year.

When you start out the fiscal year with your budget, that's what you have to spend, more or less, and you've got to live within those means. If you're only making X number of dollars a year in income, then that's what you've got to play with. Out of that, you've got to set some aside for saving and investments, you've got to set some aside as appropriate to your own situation to pay your debts, and

you've got to cover your monthly and your daily obligations with the rest of it. You've got to find the money from time to time to put on a new roof, to redo the bathroom, whatever kind of repairs the house requires, but you've got to do it within those means.

We all understand, Mr. Chairman, at least all of us except perhaps the President of the Treasury Board – he didn't seem to get it in his response to what I had to say. Most of us in this House understand that over the course of a 12-month period, be it a fiscal year or a calendar year, your situation may change, your priority may change, that priorities may change. That may be due to circumstances under your own control; it may be due to circumstances completely beyond your control. Think of the thousands of Albertans who started out 2008 thinking that things were looking really good and ended 2008 on the unemployment lines. It happens. That's a dramatic example perhaps, but it happens.

Circumstances change. Halfway through the year you need a plumber for a major plumbing repair that you weren't anticipating at the beginning of the year. Something else comes up, major car repairs, something like that. You've got to find the money to do those things, but you have to find that money by taking it from someplace else where you thought you would spend the money if you got the opportunity. It's called reallocation.

Within the context of \$37 billion plus a billion on the first go-round of supplementary supply plus another hundred million in loose change on this go-round of supplementary supply – and who knows what's coming down the pike on April 7, Mr. Chairman? – common sense dictates that there has to be room for some reallocation. Common sense dictates that if we're going into troubled times and given that the finance minister is already on record as saying that we will run a deficit next year, I guess we will be debating, when it's time for the budget debate, the size of the deficit that you need to prioritize your spending requirements and reallocate money from things that you don't need to spend the money on to things that you do need to spend the money on.

4:00

That is a far cry, Mr. Chairman, from, you know, saying that there's some mythical figure that I'm going to pull out of the air here or somebody else is going to pull out of the air here and say: we'll just write cheques *holus-bolus* till we hit that amount, and we won't require anybody to be accountable. Quite the contrary. What is required, what is necessary, what we are not seeing from this government is that kind of accountability.

The President of the Treasury Board says that the way he keeps his kids accountable is by not giving them enough money so that they have to come back and ask for more so he can check up on them. Well, you know, I'd support three, four supplementary supply debates a year if I really honestly felt that that's what we were doing. If we were starting out with a budget of \$25 billion or \$20 billion or \$15 billion for the year, and we knew it wasn't going to be enough and we were going to require everybody come back to the House in three months and say, "Okay, this is what we did for the last three months; now we need to do it again" – it's a lot of extra work, I suppose, doing all that debating – I might be supportive of that kind of supplementary supply debate with these kinds of supplementary supply estimates. But, no, we start with \$37 billion and then just pile onto that. That, Mr. Chairman, was my point.

I don't know if these comments of mine are going to elicit a response at this time or not, Mr. Chairman. I will leave it up to the members opposite to decide on that. But I wanted to get that on the record, and now I'm prepared to turn it over to others who want to probe the specifics of some of the supplementary estimates here with some of the ministries and ministers we haven't talked to yet.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Employment and Immigration

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We're one of the ministries that is requesting an additional \$49.7 million. When the economic downturn hit Alberta, our caseloads went up in a number of areas. Nobody was able to foresee that those things would happen with the dramatic change in the economy, and we are responding to the changing conditions.

Mr. Chairman, our unemployment levels a few months ago were at 3.7 per cent. Then a month later they had moved up to 4.1 per cent and eventually 4.4 per cent. We're predicting, and I think that the key thing here is trying to anticipate in the future what our numbers might be. Nonetheless, with more Albertans getting laid off, we've seen an increased utilization of our programs, the Alberta Works employment and training programs. These programs help unemployed people find and keep their jobs and adapt to changing labour conditions. To do this, we work with people very much on an individual basis and match them up with employment or training according to their unique skills and their unique needs. Increased use of these programs accounts for \$8.3 million in additional funding that was required.

Our caseloads, as well, for income supports were also higher than originally anticipated, requiring an additional funding of \$31.5 million. The biggest caseload increase, Mr. Chairman, was in the category of people that were expected to work, which can be expected given the number of layoffs that we've seen over the last few months. Our caseloads for people expected to work have increased from 14,200 families in January of 2008 to close to 17,000 families in January of this year. So we've seen about increase of 3,000 in our caseload. Unfortunately, it looks like those numbers seem to want to continue to rise.

We've also seen increased utilization of our health benefit programs, which include the Alberta child health benefit and the Alberta adult health benefit as well as health benefits for people on income supports. These benefits provide low-income Albertans and their families with medical benefits they would not otherwise be able to access such as prescriptions or drugs or glasses and dental care. These programs require an additional \$15.8 million in funding.

The increased costs I've outlined amount to just over \$55 million. We've carefully reviewed our spending and found some administrative areas where we could cut back, and we've reduced our spending in those areas by about \$5.5 million. Mr. Chairman, Employment and Immigration is requesting the remaining \$49.7 million to go towards these programs. The economic downturn has impacted many Albertans, and these support programs are imperative in helping them through these difficult times.

Mr. Chairman, I'm prepared to respond to some questions.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate those comments from the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Certainly, if we look at the monthly economic review issued by the department, we can see first-hand the changing economic conditions in the province and the unemployment levels, whether they are in Calgary or Edmonton or throughout the entire province. We see for January 2009 an unemployment level of 93,500 citizens or workers. That's a yearly change of 25,000. It's significant. We look at youth employment. We look at male unemployment, female unemployment. Youth unemployment is now close to 10 per cent. It's 9.8 per cent. We look at the construction sector. We look at transportation

and warehousing, manufacturing, mining, and oil and gas extraction. There have been some rather quick increases in the number of unemployed workers.

I can understand and have significant sympathy for the minister. I look at the last annual report for the department, and we can see significant overexpenditures in other areas in program spending. They vary in amounts from \$6 million to \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4.7 million, so there is certainly a need for this supplementary supply. I look at the past annual report, which I just made reference to, Mr. Chairman, and one would have to think that perhaps this program is one of the ones that is chronically underfunded. I hope that's not the case.

Certainly, when we have a look at this amount of money, \$50 million, it's just about the same amount that we put into subsidies to the horse-racing industry through grants. If economic conditions were really tight, it's certainly one program – and I'm speaking specifically about horse racing – that could be scratched, as they say, and the money put into the minister's request. If money was an issue, certainly that's one place that I would encourage the government to look if we were not able to provide employment and training programs or health benefits or income supports for those who for one reason or another could not, if they wanted to, work for any length of time.

Now, could the minister explain in detail what higher contract costs are involved in the \$8.2 million request for employment and training programs? I know the Auditor General had some things to say, Mr. Chairman, about some of the training programs and the responsibilities of the training providers and the performance expectations of training providers. Is this \$8.2 million amount in any way a reflection of the Auditor General's report from October 2008 and complying with that report?

4:10

Now, the client numbers. What increases have we seen? In what areas of the province?

The case management fees. I would be interested in a detailed explanation of those case management fees, please, and also the \$15.8 million for health benefits due to higher caseloads and cost per case. Where, again, are these higher caseloads occurring? Is it in rural Alberta? Is it in Fort McMurray? Is it in Grande Prairie or Edmonton and Calgary, in metro regions? Again, the cost per case, why at this time is that going up? Is that due to prescription drug costs? If we could have some details from the hon. minister on the \$31.4 million request for income supports due to higher caseloads and cost per case, Mr. Chairman, I would be very grateful.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much for those questions and the comments. My first comment is that this province is certainly not immune to the world-wide changes that are occurring out there. The changes in economic conditions certainly are affecting us although maybe less than a lot of other jurisdictions across Canada, other provinces, and other countries around the world, including the U.S. There's no doubt that our unemployment levels are trending upwards, and we're seeing that right across most jurisdictions. The member is right. Individuals that tend to be laid off first are those individuals that maybe have the least education. They tend to be our youth, naturally. There's always a challenge with the aboriginal community and those that are trying to participate in the workforce in the province of Alberta.

The member did allude to the fact that there were certain industries that are harder hit. There's no doubt that the forestry industry,

the construction industry, the oil and gas industry: there's a number there that are hit hard. Some individuals have been able to move on to other jobs, and they've been able to be retrained to be able to accept different responsibilities, so they've been absorbed in other areas. We still have in this province a number of areas where we still have a shortage of people. I'm thinking specifically of those areas in the tourism industry, the hospitality industry – our hotels, our restaurants – as well as in the health industry as well as other areas, including engineers in certain parts of the province, where we still identify a strong shortage.

Although on one side we're seeing an increase in unemployment levels, we're seeing still a demand on the other side. Overall as a province we're faring better than others although as was indicated, our numbers are trending towards higher unemployment levels.

The question was asked about training programs and the increasing cost there. There's no doubt that because of more people coming to us, we are experiencing more people requesting additional support and a lot of the other benefits as well as an increasing need for more training for more individuals. I think the member is alluding to the fact that there was a request from the Auditor General that we monitor maybe a little closer the results of our training programs. We're not adding more money to do that. We're in fact adding more money to train more people.

On the health benefits side we're working very, very closely with our federal people, Revenue Canada. As they're issuing cheques to our lower income families, there's also notice being placed in there where individual members and family members are being made aware of some of the additional supports they can get from my ministry. So we're doing a much better job of reaching out to more people. We've identified more people. We're doing better contacts with individuals and, no doubt, are getting more people qualifying for a lot of the benefits that we are offering.

Just a quick comment on horse racing. I see horse racing as a benefit to the province whereby the revenues generate more funds for the province. They're not a cost to us. They provide additional dollars to our overall budgets, and some of these dollars are channelled to meet some of the needs that we have as a particular province.

The hon. members will realize that we did some increases to income support in 2008. That was an across-the-board rate increase. We did that in the fall of 2008. We increased the amount of money that single people can earn while receiving full benefits. So we're working to help people in need. We've increased the availability of total dollars that individuals can qualify for. We've brought up our rates for those that are learners, for people that are expected to work or who are working, and, as well, for people who are not expected to work. Aside from increased levels of support, we're getting increased numbers of individuals that require our support.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I appreciate that from the hon. minister.

Now, I have a question specific to the Alberta child health benefit and the Alberta adult health benefit. They are part of that \$15.8 million request. I'm right, I believe, in assuming that in 2007-08, last year, on a monthly average almost 8,000 Albertans, or 3,722 households, received the Alberta adult health benefit. We are looking for an additional \$4.1 million here. What is that monthly average now? With the Alberta child health benefit the monthly average of children who received the health benefit was 77,375. Has the department seen a significant increase in both those monthly averages since economic conditions have changed?

Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that I've got the exact numbers in terms of averages, but I've got some numbers that I can share here with the member. Under the Alberta child health benefit program – and that's for children in low-income families; we always talk about that – the qualifying income levels have been raised, with the threshold for a two-parent family with two children increased, for instance, to \$34,346 from \$33,460. There are 94,000 children that benefit from the Alberta child health benefit, and those numbers are constantly increasing.

4:20

There are about 5,000 households that access the Alberta health benefits. The Alberta child health benefit covers things like eyeglasses, prescription drugs, emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies, and dental care. Again, it's for children up to the age of 18 and can include children up to 20 if they're still attending school or living at home. Now, with children not being able to access as much employment at times, we will be probably seeing more children staying in school a little longer.

Under the Alberta adult health benefit program – and that's for all the family members – those families are eligible when they leave income support and have income from employment or self-employment or a Canada pension plan disability. Families with high prescription drug costs in relation to income are eligible. That program is available to individual ladies in low-income households that are expecting. Those individuals from the assured income for the severely handicapped, for instance, the AISH program, or who have income from employment or self-employment, again, or the Canada pension plan disability, are also eligible as they transition out. Similar kinds of coverage are there with support for things like drugs or eye exams or glasses or dental care.

I regret that I don't have the specific average for individuals at my fingertips here.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I appreciate that information from the hon. minister. That indicates to me that as economic conditions have changed, those necessary benefit programs are being accessed by more families, certainly.

Now, I'm a little confused about the numbers I keep hearing, so if the hon. minister could clarify this not only for myself but for members of the House and people throughout the province. I recognize the changes that have been made to some of the programs, particularly people expected to work or working and allowing AISH clients, if they can do a little bit of work, extra income.

We welcome the small changes that have been made in the minimum wage. There was an announcement earlier today. Who exactly is included in the minimum wage numbers? Is it just individuals, for instance, who work in the service industry, or does it include some of the individuals who may do part-time work at the minimum wage to supplement their AISH benefits? There are a lot of numbers going around, some as high as 70,000, some as low as 20,000 working Albertans who work for the minimum wage either full-time or part-time. I know that when we were debating this a number of years ago in the Assembly with a former minister of labour, I think there were around 27,000 individuals working for minimum wage.

If the hon. minister could clarify that, give us the numbers of those who actually are working, for instance, in a restaurant as a waiter and getting minimum wage plus tips. Exactly how many are there? If the department has an indication as to how many individuals may be working part-time to supplement their AISH benefits when they

can. I stress "when they can" because many of these individuals can't work for very long because of an issue with their health.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As the members are aware, the minimum wage – and we took that particular position some time ago now – would be set on the average weekly earnings based on what has happened over the past year. Our minimum wage – it was announced today – is going from \$8.40 to \$8.80 per hour.

The minimum wage is directed at anybody and everybody working at that particular level, so it doesn't exclude any particular category. If you're working, the minimum that you can earn is \$8.80 now. When we talked about who is involved, those individuals that are working at this stage as a server in a restaurant or a front desk attendant, whether they're working full-time or part-time, will be expected to be paid \$8.80 per hour.

It's often quite difficult to get exact numbers to the last individual, but generally speaking in this particular province we have anywhere from about 19,000 to 20,000 or 21,000 people at the minimum wage level, and those tend to be, the majority of them, individuals working part-time. They're our youth. They're often people between 15 years of age and 19 years of age. They're more often the individuals who are working for the very first time away from home. It's their first experience in the job market, and a lot of them are at an entry point in the job market. For a lot of them it's a learning experience; it's an opportunity to join the workforce.

There have been a lot of studies that have indicated that raising minimum wages, you know, certainly causes a hardship at times on the employer and that if the minimum wages were to go up too high too quickly, employers would actually, in fact, quit hiring individuals or even start to lay off particular individuals. There was a study out of B.C. that indicated that an increase in minimum wage of \$1.50 to \$2 a hour would actually cause them to lose about 40,000 or 50,000 jobs in British Columbia. So we're conscious of that particular fact as well as the fact that individuals require a certain amount of resources to be able to live on a day-by-day basis.

Most of the people earning minimum wages are those individuals, as I indicated, that work part-time. A lot of them are students. A lot of them are still living at home and are not dependent often on the full amount of that minimum wage to pay their full room and board, for instance. Although we do have some individuals that depend on that particular level for their full day-to-day living, the majority of them are living with another adult or living with a spouse who may or may not be earning some money as well.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's again a pleasure to be able to rise and talk a little bit about the extra money that is being requested to be added to the budget for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. It does appear as though in essence what we're seeing here is a request for additional money for three areas and that in order to I suppose minimize that request to some extent, we are seeing two other areas that will be losing money. So I want to focus on all of those points.

We've been talking a bit, of course, about the income supports, and you've outlined that we've had roughly 3,000 new families or individuals go on welfare and that that's been in association with the increase in unemployment rates in Alberta. You'd started to talk about some of the rates – and I appreciate there was some mention

of the increase in rates – but I just want to first inquire as to whether or not the current rates are the ones that are on the website or if, in fact, they've been raised from this. My understanding from the website is that we're now looking at a single employable individual, which, of course, would be the majority of the individual people who had come onto the rolls in the last year because, clearly, they were added as a result of losing a job in most cases, at \$583 per month. That's the information that I have, and I'm just curious as to whether the increase that you noted in the fall is different from that.

4:30

You know, another example of an income support rate is for a family, a mother and a father with two children. My understanding is that between the money provided through your department and the money provided through the child credit benefit through the federal government, that family of two adults and two children would receive \$1,700 per month. I suspect you can imagine where I'm going with this. Both of these amounts are not enough for people to live on. You know, if you imagine the family of four living in a two-bedroom apartment, assuming that they can't possibly have more people living with them in a way that is healthy, and then you look at what is allowed for food, you can't even begin to imagine how they will keep themselves from getting ill. You know, I don't know what they're going to do, frankly.

It's interesting because I'm sure you would have had various officials within your ministry at least alert you to the CBC interviews that were done a couple of days ago with people who had engaged in the working-poor diet and had attempted to feed themselves on the basis of the amount of money that was allotted to them through the amounts identified through your ministry. All three of them described losing between 10 and 15 pounds in the course of a month. This is deeply concerning to me. I appreciate that, on one hand, you're coming back here looking for more money because there are more people in need of the benefits, but I think we're also in a position where we have to seriously look at whether we can humanely, with a view to having respect for basic human rights, ask people to try and ensure that their kids are not malnourished and ensure that they get enough food so that they can actually continue their efforts to find employment. I'm deeply concerned that no one really can with this amount of money; you just simply can't ask people to live on this much.

One of the reasons I talk about the family of four is because that's a family that you're not really going to expect will invite other people to come live with them in their two-bedroom apartment, which, I think most averages at this point tell us, is going at about \$1,100 or \$1,200 a month. So those folks can't rely on that. They're living with themselves. What are they doing to feed their kids and themselves? That is a very, very significant concern that we have.

In some respects I'm just wondering, as we come closer to the next budget, if you anticipated – I think that you in fact articulated that you did – the number of people who are forced through no fault of their own to seek income support because of the downturn in the economy. Are we really doing our best for them? We know that these are people that were working up until very recently, and they are not working because the economy has changed. These are people who are not, you know, sitting at home sipping mai tais and chuckling at the fact that they really put one over on that big socialist welfare state and having a grand time. No. These are folks that were working until very recently. With the change in the economy they've lost their job, and until they can find a new one, this is all they've got to take care of themselves and their family. I think this is an issue that's going to come back, and it's going to

continue because nobody can explain how anybody can live on these amounts of money.

Another area where you were talking about looking for money is with respect to employment and training programs. Again, it makes perfect sense. These are initiatives that are going to take on a much, much larger role. We've talked about it a lot. As people lose their jobs in our current economy, we need to look at helping them transition to new skills, new jobs, new areas. There are certain parts of the economy that may not recover, so employment and training initiatives are critical because we want people to get retrained, and we want to give them the skills and the tools to be able to find re-employment in a different sector if necessary. That's good. Again, I think that there's going to be a much bigger draw on this program than is currently the case.

At the same time, then, I go back to the questions that were raised by the Auditor General about the quality of the programs that are being funded, the monitoring of those programs, and the criteria that are being used for those programs to be approved. I have some significant concerns about this because I've had constituents come to me and describe, frankly, quite unfortunate circumstances where they are theoretically in an educational institution, but the conduct in those institutions is not what I would ever expect to see from any kind of traditional postsecondary institution.

I think that there will probably be a lot of quick and dirty start-up companies that are going to come looking to get government funding for more employment and training initiatives as the government looks to support folks. I think that the key thing that needs to happen when those requests come is that your ministry needs to be very vigilant in terms of how these groups are assessed and monitored and what kind of standards they are abiding by. The last thing we need to do is take that very teeny pot of money you have and give it to folks that aren't effectively training the people they're supposed to be training. I think that that is an issue. I think the Auditor General raised it for that reason, and it's going to become a more significant issue as time passes.

A couple of points with respect to the items that are being pulled from in order to deal with the increase that you're talking about with us today. I see that there is another reduction in the health work-force development line item. I'm a little surprised by this, and maybe you can give me some explanation for it. It seems that, you know, as recently as last year there was a press release talking about the health care centres that were being established for health care professionals. In those press releases there was talk about the ongoing shortage of health care professionals in Alberta. I know, of course, that there's been a shift with the change in the economy, but I suspect that if there is any place left in the economy where there's still a shortage, this is one of them. This is, of course, with respect to helping foreign-trained health care professionals learn what they need to learn in order to be able to function safely and effectively and professionally within our system. I'm a little concerned . . . [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] I guess I'll have to come back to it.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just to start off, I know that it is a challenge in our own budgeting when we see constant changes in people accessing our services. You know, we try to anticipate as much as we can what those levels will be, but we really don't know in the end how many people will be accessing our individual services and how we'll be able to respond to them. Suffice to say that the increase in requests that we have here is basically due to the increase in caseloads that we're having as well as the increases, albeit small, to income support that we approved in

the fall. The rates on the website, I would think, should be up to date. I haven't checked them to really compare, but I would expect that those rates would be up to date.

4:40

I know that the changing conditions will create individuals that will be faced with more challenges financially. Really, in any society, whether they're here in Alberta or elsewhere around the world, we know that there are people that are struggling to make ends meet. As a government and as Albertans we want to support them as much as we can. There are a couple of philosophies that we use. The programs that we have are very important even in good times. There are people that struggle all year round, people that struggle whether our economic conditions are very poor or very, very good. So those programs are important in good times, but they're also important in times of difficulty, in times when things get tough. We try to provide benefits and support when we do our budgeting to help people that are most in need. That's our primary target, to try to look at that. We want to safeguard as much as we can the vulnerable Albertans.

So we work on a number of fronts. Employment and Immigration is involved in helping people in need. As I indicated and you've alluded to, we provide employment and training supports, and we provide the basic living and household costs. We provide some support for their health requirements and much more. I think the important thing is that Alberta's approach has always been to help people increase their income through work as much as possible. So we're going to try to provide the proper training. We're going to try to move people on so that they can certainly gain and get ahead more by work. It's more of a hand up rather than a handout.

Our mandate is to try to say: well, if there's an opportunity for you, we're going to encourage you to work through that system to take advantage of that opportunity, recognizing that some individuals are not expected to work. They're in a category where they're maybe facing a little bit more difficulties, and because of particular situations or circumstances we don't expect them to work today, but maybe as things change in the future, they'll be expected to work. We're trying to incent them rather than disincent them. There are times when things are tough, and we're saying: we're going to support you during those tough times, but to really get ahead, we're going to have to work with you to move on to try to do something a little better in that way.

Again, you know, we're trying to increase revenue for those individuals through income from work. We recognize that on the short-term basis income support is the answer and is needed, but in the long run our mandate is recognizing that a job eventually is the better solution for everybody. That's our goal in that way.

When it comes to the training programs, you know, certainly we're responding to the Auditor General. He did indicate that we needed to monitor things maybe a little better. I think we've been doing a much better job over the last little while, and I'm anxious to see what the Auditor General is going to say next year or the next time he reports. We have tightened up considerably in terms of our expectations out there from those who are contracting with us. We certainly have some strong outcomes that we want them to meet, and we do monitor those.

When it comes to maybe some declining dollars – and I don't have the specifics in front of me here – I would suspect that some of those dollars are based on some of the agreements that we've had with the federal government. Some of those agreements were signed partway during the year, so the declining dollars reflect the fact that we weren't able to use a full year's revenue because of some of the labour market agreements, for instance, that we've signed with the federal government.

Under health workforce development we're still very actively involved with the Bredin Institute. We're working with that particular institute. We're working with a college in Calgary to help facilitate the movement of those individuals that have backgrounds in health, that have experiences there but are not fully qualified or do not know how to fit into our system. We are in fact taking them by the hand and helping them work through the process of qualifying and seeing what additional educational experiences they require to be able to work in the health field in the province of Alberta.

In Calgary, for example, we're helping about 60 internationally educated health care professionals over the next two years to obtain training for health care jobs responsible for things like the sterilization of medical equipment, so we're able to do some of that. I could list quite a number of examples where, you know, we're working with individuals not only in the health care professions but in other professions to make sure that if it's a language impediment or if it's a requirement for workplace upgrading, we can provide that and make sure that they have access to that.

I think that might respond to most of the questions that you had.

Ms Notley: Well, if I could raise just a couple more, then. I understand what the programs were doing with respect to the health workforce development group, but my questions were more sort of that it seems as though the level of work that's being done through that department is decreasing because the budget keeps decreasing for it, so that is a concern.

I don't know why it is or if it is just unique to my particular riding or if it's the case for all the members of the House, but certainly it seems that I do have a whole bunch of unemployed foreign doctors in my riding. It continues to perplex me, the degree to which roadblocks are put in place with respect to their ability to be able to practise. I know there is a program through the provincial government to try to work with them. It is very backlogged; I know that as well. As a result, I don't know if, really, this is the time to be reducing that if it's actually paid for through this program. My understanding is that last year we had a decrease of \$1.7 million in that program and that we've got a net decrease from when it first started of about \$4.4 million. It would seem to me that there's actually greater need for it at this point, certainly not less.

The other issue. Again, I appreciate that you are monitoring more with respect to the education programs. I would be interested, maybe through correspondence after this, to hear what that monitoring looks like since it does appear, and you've noted, that there's no actual budgetary adjustment to account for that monitoring or those monitoring efforts. Again, we have some concerns about shall we just say the efficacy of those programs for the people that they're purporting to serve.

I still go back, of course, to my first comments around the income supports. I mean, we agree with you very much that the idea is for these folks to get back to work; no question. But we know we're in a situation where there's a downturn, and clearly, through no fault of their own, that may not happen right away. I go back to the original question that while these folks are trying to get back to work, how they can do that if they can't afford to feed themselves in a way that will keep them from fainting halfway through the day. I don't say that facetiously. Again, I refer you to recent interviews with people who've tried to feed themselves on the budget they're currently allocated.

4:50

The last thing I want to mention is that I see, again, that the money that's going towards the needed increase in income supports and education and employment is also coming out of the section under

WCB appeals. It appears as though there's a reduction in that part of your budget. I'm assuming that that relates to the appeals advisers. Maybe I'm wrong. I know that WCB is self-funding, but I believe the appeals advisers are funded separately. I believe that's where that's coming from.

I have to say as one who has done not a small amount of work in this area that the last thing that that area needs is a further reduction. Workers' compensation law and law related to any issue associated with disability, on one hand, and eligibility for income, whether it be through workers' compensation or insurance or anything else, is increasingly complex in today's world.

Workers' compensation law in and of itself is increasingly complex in today's world, and I can say with probably a great deal of certainty that as a province we offer the least amount of support for worker advocacy when they are attempting to navigate their way through an incredibly complex system, which is workers' compensation. That is a substantial income issue and a substantial worker right issue. I say this from having observed files over the last few years. I am repeatedly shocked at how obvious the issues are that should be addressed with respect to injured workers that are not in any given file because they are just simply not able to access the kind of expert advice they require to ensure that their rights under the act are actually honoured. So there's a real difficulty there.

Other jurisdictions fund WCB advocacy through their legal aid system. Our legal aid system really doesn't, for all intents and purposes. Again, the worker appeal officers are pretty much the only resource that injured workers have at their disposal, and I know full well that you could probably hire 20 of them tomorrow, and they would all be working overtime within about a week.

So I have some very serious concerns if that's where it is. Maybe I'm wrong, in which case I'm doing this whole ramble for nothing, but I would be very interested to know how it is that it could be thought that there was any room to reduce that budget if that's what the budget is.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Going back to the unemployed health professionals that are coming to this province, we're working very, very closely with the minister of health and the minister of advanced education and, you know, coming with various initiatives to recognize foreign credentials. We've got a very aggressive file on this along with the recognition of the various educational institutions around the world. We know now for a lot of people that come with a particular certificate or a particular diploma from another country where they might fit within our systems and if there are additional training requirements or not for them to move into their field of interest or their field of practice. Often it's not a question of qualifications specifically, but it's often their understanding of English as a new language and making sure that they're very comfortable in being able to practise and to understand our system and to be understood.

We are working with them. We've got some very, very good success stories. I went to the Bredin Institute here, which is just a few blocks from this particular building. Talking to some individuals that have gone through that particular process shows us that there is a lot of good work that's being done. We've got some foreign-trained medical individuals that have been able to navigate through our particular system. At times it can be very cumbersome, but they're now practising in Alberta.

We recognize that there are still a lot of challenges. We recognize that there's still lots to do. We are very aggressively working on that

particular file, and we would hope that we'd be able to streamline it yet that much more with any new individuals that are coming to Alberta.

When it comes to training, again, and monitoring of those particular training programs, I can send you a letter maybe in the next few days to indicate what we're doing, the various steps that we've done to look at the particular training, to indicate how we're trying to achieve particular objectives when it comes to the training of individuals under those particular programs.

Going back to income supports, you've alluded to it as well that a job is probably the ultimate goal for a lot of people, yet there are people that will take some time to be able to get to that particular level. We recognize that. The income levels often are just to meet the bare necessities, and we recognize that there are some hardships there. We encourage those individuals to keep on working with our staff. Our staff have been given some flexibility, and if there truly are some hardship cases, we will work with them.

As an example – and I'm not suggesting that that's happening in all cases – we've had individuals in particular communities where rents have in fact gone down. There is an expectation that individuals will try to help themselves by maybe at times moving from a particular facility where they're having to pay fairly high rent to other facilities that might provide the same type of accommodations but that, you know, will require less commitment to rent and rent payments. We are working with them to have those kinds of things happen. We are working in areas where we've seen, actually, vacancies climb and rents go down. If landlords are not prepared to accommodate those individuals, then we will encourage them to move, to try to get better facilities or similar facilities at lower costs to increase the overall residual income that they've got to spend on other necessities.

With WCB I think the only reason our numbers are going down is the fact that our appeals are in fact going down. We are probably getting less appeals. We can move them through the system a little quicker. We are getting lower numbers.

We do provide support with the changes that have happened with WCB over the last few years. I know there are a number of reports that came through the system where changes were accepted by the government, where we've got different appeal mechanisms. We do provide support to individual clients that request that. We will put an adviser to work with a particular individual that has concerns with WCB and help them work through that process as well. Those are independent advisers or independent supports that are there. You know, if there's a need to understand the process or to get some decision made, those individuals can literally hold the applicant by the hand and help them work through that particular process.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. When the boom times were here, kids were just dropping out of school because they could find very good jobs, had no problem making money. When the economy is slowing, I think all those kids, you know, will be coming back. They'll probably want to further their education, and they'll want to go back to school. Lots of others, say new immigrants, too, will want to upgrade their skills. It was easier for them before to find jobs when jobs were plenty. Some of them will probably be upgrading their language skills. Probably they want to go to SAIT or upgrade their education.

5:00

The way things are going – this \$40 million share is going to go towards everything – is there any kind of plan in place to put those

kids back in school or all those new immigrants who want to improve their language skills, their professional skills? How fast are we moving on the foreign credentials recognition program? I think it would be a good idea to put all those people through school so we are ready for the next boom. Those are my concerns. If not, are we going to put the cart before the horse, or are we going to leave the horse before the cart, that kind of thing?

Do we have any number in place, you know, that this is how much we will be needing for next year's budget? I'm sure you must have some idea. The way things have been going lately, what kind of a flood of students are we going to have in our education system?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think I need to remind the Member for Calgary-McCall that we are dealing with interim supply and the required dollars that are needed here. We're really not dealing with next year's budget or the budget that will be tabled then, so I'm not in a position to be able to share numbers that will be coming out. Nonetheless, your comments are taken very seriously about the economy and the changes in what we're faced with: a slowdown in the economy and more people becoming unemployed.

As I indicated earlier in my comments, we're still in a pretty enviable position. We're doing quite well as a province, where our unemployment levels are hovering around the 5 per cent level. We still don't know where that's going to be. For most areas in the world 5 per cent would be basically considered full employment; for us it's not. It means that in certain sectors we do have individuals that are looking for work and that in other sectors there is still a demand. We will keep on providing support for training, and we recognize that those individuals that maybe had not finished their high school level are coming back and wanting to finish their high school level. We are working with the Minister of Education to make sure that they have the opportunity to do that. If there's a need to improve skills so they can move to a better job for themselves, we will work with them.

Some of the things that we've done. For full-time students the employment income is a hundred per cent fully exempt, and we've looked at the employment income exemptions. We're looking at bursaries, those bursaries that are available to students. We're looking at the assets that individual students can have. We've relaxed that. We're providing various supports all along in terms of making sure that they can upgrade themselves and improve their skills. That's not any different for anybody in this particular province, including our immigrants. Once they're immigrants and are here, they've got access to similar kinds of support. Even with our immigrants, through our ministry we do provide at times additional support to improve their language skills, whether it be in English or in French, so that they can work and be fully functional in the province.

Mr. Kang: I think it takes me a step further. The minister mentioned something about unemployment hovering around 5 per cent. This is just the tip of the iceberg, I believe. You know, I think it's going to be much higher. When we look out there, all the economists are predicting for the States 11 and a half per cent unemployment. I don't know what kind of ripple effect that's going to have on us. Are your projections based on 5 per cent unemployment, or is there some different number the minister has in mind? Would he like to share it with the House if he has it? Those are the questions we are asked every day. Last week, when I was in my constituency, those were the questions. At every door everybody is asking

questions: "Where are we going? Do you have any clue? You guys are in there." So do you have any idea, sir, what our unemployment numbers will be like at the end of the year 2009? The year 2009 is being predicted to be the worst year.

I remember '81, '82. We had the same kind of gloating feeling that nothing is going to happen here, but we were the hardest hit. We have the same feeling out there again, that nothing is going to happen in Alberta, that we are okay at 5 per cent. I'm not trying to portray a doom-and-gloom days scenario here, but there's a concern out there, and it's a big concern for everybody.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Chairman, I guess it's the same thing. You know, there's no doubt that if we could predict the oil prices in a few months, we would be much better off. We do have some indications as to how things are going. We know that our unemployment levels are slowly creeping up. We're monitoring it. We're keeping an eye as to our numbers. We're working very, very closely with Finance.

We know that Alberta's labour market did extremely well over the last year except for the last few months. We know that it's not immune to some of the global changes that are happening out there, but we also know that this particular province is very well positioned to weather that particular storm. I think the message that I want to leave with you is the fact that we do have, say, 4.7 per cent of people unemployed, but we still have 95.3 per cent of the people working, and that's incredible. [interjection] That's right. Is the glass half empty or half full?

As a province we're doing well. We're monitoring it. I don't know where those numbers are going to peak and where they're going to go, but through our particular programs we recognize that our unemployment levels are a little higher than they were in the last few years. Fifteen, 20 years ago these numbers would have been considered just excellent numbers, and as I indicated, most jurisdictions would just love to see the types of numbers that we have. Certainly, we're seeing some short-term unemployment numbers. We're gearing up for increased caseloads. You know, I guess you'll have to wait till our budget is tabled to see where our numbers are heading.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to maybe do some questions on Transportation. The supplementary amount that's being asked for is \$8 million to provide off-site servicing work.

The Chair: Hon. member, we have to have the Minister of Transportation speak first.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Transportation

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's been a long afternoon here already today. As Minister of Transportation I'd like to provide one supplementary estimate requirement. My department requires \$8 million in the expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote. This is actually a reallocation of funding from the capital investment vote, for which approval was previously received, so this is not new money.

5:10

The \$8 million requested for '08-09 is for projects related to the Fort McMurray community development plan. As you know, Mr.

Chairman, the community development plan is aimed at addressing the housing pressures in Fort McMurray, and this government, our government, is committed to helping the community deal with the pressures of their huge economic growth. I believe this plan is a very important cross-ministry initiative, and I ask all members to support the request for the \$8 million supplementary estimate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, your turn now.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. The \$8 million that's asked for at this point in time is reallocated money, not new money, but last December the department also asked for \$86 million. I have to assume that that was new money and partly for the same reason, relating to Parsons Creek, the Fort McMurray development, the advisory board, the community development board there, comprised of many different representatives – provincial, municipal, Alberta social housing, et cetera – because of part of its experience with land development. My question, I think, relates to why the money would have been necessary. When the plan was put together in the first place, why would it not have been included in the original development? I mean, surely, when you do a development, one of the first things you look at is off-site servicing.

As a rule the developers pick up – and I think that more and more in the province developers are picking up – off-site levies in terms of their cost to get their developments in. What was the off-site servicing in question? I'm assuming it's services to get the development going. Is this all that will be required for the off-site work, or is there more on the way? Would this be part of a P3, and if it is part of the P3, why wouldn't it have been a part of that contract that would have been included in the RFP for whoever did the bids on the P3 part? We haven't seen any agreements on the development signed with any companies. How is the money accountable, and who's in charge of this? As a former municipal alderman I just find it peculiar that the off-site part of it wouldn't have come first, before anything else.

Mr. Ouellette: You have to remember, hon. member, that right from day one all we've heard from that side of the House was how we needed to help Fort McMurray more, how Fort McMurray was in so much trouble. I even went up there and toured and saw people that were actually sleeping in the garden sheds in the backyards, so I believe this is a very important initiative.

I did say that this money was approved. I have to tell you, though, that there are other ministries involved. We haven't even got anywhere near the position of RFPing or RFQing for a P3 at this point. My department at this point has been more involved in the planning of where the roads are going to go, how we're even going to get the services, and how much cost there will be in getting the services and stuff there. This was approved in capital. We had to move it over to operating, and that's basically all I'm asking for.

It is a good cross-ministry initiative. It's being led by the President of the Treasury Board, that ministry, because the oil sands secretariat falls under that. We're really not ready to go out with a P3 yet on this project.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that, Mr. Minister. This money, then, that you're asking for is actually to do the planning part of it, where you're still working on that? I'm just not sure where this money is going if you're not even up, you know, into the developing part of it. Are these sort of the pre preliminary

monies, and you need more to run through the actual process of getting it done?

Mr. Ouellette: Oh, I mean, we're not talking about a little project here. There's going to definitely be more by the time you start putting people in houses there. There's a great deal of funding required to do all of the servicing for both Parsons Creek and Saline Creek. I myself today don't know how far my own department is along the lines of getting that done, and I can get that information for you at a later time. I'll get you a letter out on that thing.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will just take the minister back here a little bit to the growth of Fort McMurray. The population growth in the last eight years was about 9 per cent. It was growing at a rate of 9 per cent, and by the year 2012 the population would be a hundred thousand people. There were lots of other studies done. Currently there are about 1,800 new housing units being built in Fort McMurray in each year. This is not going to be enough to meet the demand, you know, the way things are going. The serviced land will be depleted by 2010. We won't have any more land after that. There were some studies done by the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo in March 2007, and they identified Parsons Creek and Saline Creek Plateau as the top priority of their new development areas. My question is: how come it took us so long to get to this point? You're asking \$8 million today.

Mr. Ouellette: I'm going to have to keep repeating this. I'm transferring \$8 million. I'm not asking for \$8 million. I'm transferring \$8 million that was approved before. I also want to remind the hon. member that I look after Transportation. My job is to plan roads, make sure that all of our interchanges are safe, make sure that when they do a development, what the impact is going to be on the intersections, that sort of thing. As far as actually building the houses or building the lots, that's not my portfolio and not anything to do with this \$8 million. But they are interesting questions. In a short few weeks' time here – I'm not exactly sure when – there will be budget deliberations, and they are probably very good debating questions to ask at that time.

Mr. Kang: Where is this \$8 million coming from? Are you reallocating money from some other program into this? You said that it's old money, so where is the \$8 million coming from if you're not asking for new money?

Mr. Ouellette: Previous approvals from the capital investment fund.

Mr. Kang: So the Transportation department is working with provincial and municipal representatives and the other community stakeholders and CDB. You're working with CDB. Where is the money going to go? Is it going to go to CDB, or is it going to go to Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs? How will that fund be, you know, distributed to develop the area?

5:20

Mr. Ouellette: We're also working with the CDB, but I'm trying to explain to you that I'm not building any houses. I'm not building any lots. I'm looking after getting servicing done because water and waste water are under my department, and I'm looking after making sure that wherever they do these developments, we can access them by our roads and highways and that it's safe to do so.

Mr. Kang: My question, sir, is: who will be accountable for the money your department is spending on roads and highways? Will it be your department accountable for the money, or will it be some other outfit hired by the department that will be accountable for the money? That's what I'm getting at.

Mr. Ouellette: Guaranteed that our department is always accountable for the money that we spend that's in our budget. This \$8 million is going to be in our budget, and I and this department will be accountable for it.

Mr. Kang: Coming back to the 2007-2008 budget under Alberta cities transportation partnership expenses, I think your department was \$106 million over budget. So only \$8 million here. I congratulate you for that. You're doing better. But will you be coming to ask for more later on, or will this be it?

Mr. Ouellette: Stay tuned. There's going to be a new budget coming out soon.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to follow up on something that the Minister of Transportation had spoken about, and it's something that I think is very important to be putting in his planning. It's about waste water. It's about the waste-water treatment, you know, to be able to put it back into the rivers. I can speak from representing Lethbridge at one point in time. We have an amazing tertiary treatment plant, where the water that we take out basically goes back in probably cleaner than how we took it out.

This may seem sort of off topic, but it really is part of how they set up a tertiary water treatment plant. In fact, for the houses that have garburators, part of what the tertiary treatment plant counts on is to be able to get that garbage, so to speak, that's already been fairly pulverized through the garburators, through the system. That causes the bacteria to work that much better. I'm just wondering if you could share how much of a priority good waste-water treatment is and particularly at the tertiary level. Again, this is, I think, more on the housing side, but it does tie into the tertiary treatment side about having garburators, that (a) it cuts down on your garbage, that (b) it does help the tertiary treatment system work better. Are you looking at these kinds of things, especially at this very ground-level planning for servicing? Are you planning for tertiary water treatment.

Mr. Ouellette: I'm glad to hear that you're concerned about how we get clean water back into the river. This is the first time I've heard somebody talk about garburators adding to our bacterial system to make the bacteria work better within a system. I know exactly what you're saying, but I don't know, if it is as good as you say – I'm not a biologist or whatever – how much will come out of that garburator. I also know that in some cases garburators do create problems with blockages and stuff within systems. I don't think that I'm qualified or that my purview would be to say that I want to mandate garburators in houses somewhere to help with a system. I think that would have to be designed by the engineers that design those systems.

I know that today we're spending an awful lot of money together with municipalities in the province. Most municipalities have been applying for new treatment systems for their potable water and also for their waste water. You know, I'm completely scraping all the time and having our guys say: can you make sure that they're designing these systems in the most feasible manner possible that will still do the best job? We can't keep up with budget for the

amount of systems we're trying to get done out there to clean up our whole water system because of how important our watersheds and our fresh water is to us today. I mean, it's a real gem to make sure we keep fresh potable water available in Alberta.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to direct my questions to the Minister of Transportation. I have to confess that I'm somewhat confused by this. What I'm looking at here is a supplementary estimate, a request for money in the amount of \$8 million. The minister is referring to this amount of money as a transfer, so I'd like to know where it's being transferred from. If he can't answer that question, then it, you know, goes to what is apparent here, that this is, in fact, \$8 million of new money. If it is \$8 million of new money, we are trying to get a handle on this side of the House on what this new money is for. It's described as being requested "to provide for off-site servicing work related to the Fort McMurray Community Development Plan."

Now, you know, I know it's kind of labyrinthine on your side of the House, and things that one would think from a common-sense point of view would live in one ministry end up living in a ministry at the opposite end of the building. This seems to be one of those cases where this is clearly a housing development project, both market priced housing and affordable housing, yet somehow it has ended up in the lap of the Minister of Transportation, who doesn't from his answers so far seem to be much interested in actually having it in his lap. I would really like to know what this is for. What is the off-site servicing in question? How does this relate to the Community Development Board, the advisory board that's been set up to have some part of the management of this plan.

I don't know. Maybe the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs should get involved in the discussion here. Maybe she can shed some light on it. It would sure seem to me that it would be logical that all this would live in her department, but it lives in your department, sir. I guess I want to have a clear answer as to just what is the scope and limit of the Ministry of Transportation's involvement in the Parsons Creek development plan.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Chair. To explain where the money comes from, the money came to this House originally under the capital investment fund vote. I'm asking for the reallocation of \$8 million from the capital vote over to the operating vote. My department should be involved with getting the services to the site but not developing or building houses or doing whatever. You can call it whatever you want. My department builds the roads and gets the services to the development, and that's what this is all about. It's figuring out how we're going to get the services to the site and doing the job. At the start of this there were no services going to Parsons or to Saline Creek.

Mr. Taylor: So the services would be roads. What else?

Mr. Ouellette: Water and sewer.

Mr. Taylor: That's it?

Mr. Ouellette: Yeah. For us right now that's all we're doing.

5:30

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Then bear with me. Maybe this is particularly difficult terrain. I know that depending on where you are in the Fort

McMurray area there are certainly some challenges. You've got to work your way around muskeg, sometimes through muskeg, all the rest of that. But we are talking, now, a supplementary request for \$8 million. For argument's sake, if nothing else, I will accept that this is not really new money, that you're just moving it over from the capital plan into here. I'm not really sure why it then goes as a supplementary estimate, but, okay, I'll accept it for now. But it's \$8 million to go with \$86 million before. You know, the city of Fort McMurray doesn't take up that much geography relative to the size of the Wood Buffalo region, relative to the size of the province of Alberta. Are you paving the streets with gold that it's costing so much to build a road from where the road is now to where the houses will go?

Mr. Ouellette: To service those areas: very, very, very expensive. We have to take services across the river, for one thing.

I agree with you that when money is already allocated – if I was running my own little business, I would be able to just move that money wherever I wanted at any time. The way we report in this House: if it's been voted on in the House one way and you want to change it, you have to come back and vote on it again within this House. That's what the Auditor General requires of us on how we report things, and that's being accountable to this House and to the taxpayers of Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: I'm resisting the temptation to say "bravo" right now for your accountability. Oh, I guess I didn't resist the temptation. I used it, didn't I?

I guess what I'm trying to get at here is that first there was \$86 million. Now there's another \$8 million, which, I mean, you know, is 10 per cent. It's a plus or minus sort of thing. I'm trying to get a handle going forward on where this is going and how much more cost escalation we might be looking at in this project as far as the off-site servicing component of it is concerned. What are some of the challenges?

Mr. Ouellette: Today I'm not ready to take myself through a number. If you want a bigger breakdown, I was going to get one for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, so I'm sure she'll pass it on to you. We can itemize what we're doing there. I'll get that information for you.

Mr. Taylor: To the minister: thank you. I'd like a sense of some of the challenges that you are facing and whether there are unanticipated challenges that have occurred, you know, whether something happened on the route, kind of thing, that you didn't know was there, that you had to work your way around or through or however it goes. I'd like some sense of the difficulties, the challenges that you're encountering as you go forward with this project. Maybe that will give this House some idea of what to expect in fiscal '09-10.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: I'm very happy to do it. I will say that at this point in time it's not that we've run into obstacles. Long before we were involved with this project, everyone knew it was very, very expensive to service those lands. That's why the community of Wood Buffalo didn't get involved in it before because they just couldn't afford it. It was time, with your help of always saying, "Do things for Fort McMurray," that we got involved as a government to help out that region.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, I am so happy. I am so happy that you did that. I'm so happy that you heeded our call on behalf of the

88,550 some-odd residents, as of the Alberta census of April 1, 2008, in Fort McMurray. I am so happy you did the right thing, and I am so happy that you're being accountable for it. It is so rare that we have such an open and transparent display of accountability that I'm going to run with this one, okay?

What I want to know, because clearly the project is not on budget, is if it's on time, because you're providing the off-site servicing that is going to allow the construction industry, the home building industry, the development industry to get into that area, to get into Parsons Creek and start digging holes and pouring basements and building houses, some of which are very-much-needed affordable housing units in the Fort McMurray area. I want to know if this project is on time or if we're running well behind schedule here.

Mr. Ouellette: I'd really like to thank the hon. member for all of those kudos that he was giving us. I am getting back to him with the information on paper.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any others? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you wish to speak?

Mr. MacDonald: No, Mr. Chairman. I was going to have a discussion with my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie on the frost levels that occur in Fort McMurray and the length of time you have for construction that are frost-free days, but we can do that on our own time.

I would prefer if we could now move to and perhaps have a brief discussion, before time expires, on the requisition for the AG.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Office of the Auditor General

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you very much. It's not that the Transportation discussion, or debate, wasn't interesting, Mr. Chairman, because it certainly was.

In light of the time that we have left, I think it's important to have a discussion on the supplementary amount of \$750,000 that is requested to provide for increased auditing requirements related to the March 2008 government restructuring, the new Alberta Health Services entity, plus various special systems audits such as Alberta mental health, the Alberta Treasury Branch, climate change, protecting information assets, and, of course, the asset-backed commercial paper. These are very, very important issues.

The Auditor General has in the past certainly been very prudent with the budget that is provided through the Legislative Assembly. The Auditor General is always very, very busy. He provides timely information to all Members of the Legislative Assembly and various committees, one of which I serve on, of course, the Public Accounts Committee. The work that's done in the office of the Auditor General is done, in my opinion, in a very effective and efficient manner.

There are now two public reports that are provided to this House and to the taxpayers of the province. If we look at these reports closely, we can see where there are many major systems audits, and they have recommendations which are to be followed up by various departments. There can be many assurance audits done on the 35-plus billion dollar budget of the Alberta government and its reporting entities.

Now, if we look at some of the activities in 2007-08, we can see that of those assurance audits, Mr. Chairman, 190 were completed. There were 97 smaller systems audits. It should be noted that each

requires a management letter or internal controls or reviews or advice.

Of course, the Auditor General is a very active participant in Public Accounts meetings. He and his staff came to 21 during that time period, Mr. Chairman. They also do work analyzing and prioritizing Alberta's infrastructure needs, child intervention services, the Department of Energy's royalty review system, revenue forecasting systems. I'm certainly looking forward to next month when the Auditor General's office will be providing an update, as I understand it, on postsecondary institutions, noncredit programs, seniors' care and programs, managing information technology risks. There are a number of issues. The office of the Auditor General is very busy.

5:40

When we look at this three-quarters of a million dollar request, we also have to be mindful of, again, just how prudent this man and his office are. Last year, as I understand it, \$408,000, or 2 per cent, of the entire budget of the office of the Auditor General was returned to the Legislative Assembly. I believe that in the previous four years there was at least this amount, if not slightly more, also returned.

When we look at this government, we look at the changes that were made since March. We had at our Public Accounts meeting this morning the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation. Next week we're having Municipal Affairs come by and some of the folks from Housing. The reason why we're doing this is that prior to this year the size of the cabinet was different. Since the election in March, of course, the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Infrastructure are completely separate departments. So the size of government has grown. The budget has certainly grown. We look from one fiscal year to the next, and we see where the budget has increased by 13 per cent.

The easiest way for me to get a handle on this is that when I was first elected, Mr. Chairman, the provincial budget was \$14 billion. Now it's well over \$40 billion. We certainly have not seen an increase in the office of the Auditor General's budget to correspond with that, and I think he would be the first to agree that that's not necessary.

The Auditor General does excellent work to make our government and our province and the policies that are initiated by the government for the taxpayers – he does an excellent job to make sure we're getting value for money and points out in a diplomatic manner how we can improve our systems.

Now, I'm surprised at the workload that the Auditor has. I learned at Public Accounts this morning that he has some audit projects that he would like to complete. Many of them, we have to be mindful, Mr. Chairman, are not in this current fiscal year, but he does have some projects going back to October of last fall that he would like to see followed up. Some of these projects are on his deferred or cancelled list.

There are 80 projects, and it's surprising that 27, or 34 per cent, of them have been either deferred or cancelled, and some of them are major, major projects like food safety, a follow-up. This was deferred to this fall. In Culture and Community Spirit Horse Racing Alberta is deferred, and the report date is to be determined. Education: improving school performance. In Employment and Immigration, again, we're having this, to my surprise, follow-up or audit on workplace health and safety deferred until this time next year, April 2010. The homeless and eviction fund is going to be deferred to this fall. Ensuring the collection of royalties: incredibly, this has to be deferred to a report date that is to be determined. We need every dollar that we can get for the provincial treasury now that this economic downturn has exposed our provincial savings plan to be inadequate. Highwood Communications, Executive Council, a

follow-up or an audit on the Public Affairs Bureau: this is deferred again until October 2009. In Health and Wellness we have a deferral again to October 2009, a follow-up on food safety. Infection control is also deferred.

This list certainly indicates that the Auditor General not only has his usual work to do, which he does very effectively, again, but we have increased his workload and that of his staff. I'm sure that this \$750,000, if a small portion of it is not used, it will certainly be turned back to us. I would encourage all hon. members to have a good look at how the Auditor General wisely spends our money.

The Chair: I shall now call on the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the hon. member for fully explaining all of the duties and all of the functions of the Auditor General's office.

Certainly, to bring it back to what we are discussing today, the \$750,000 that is required in supplementary supply is a significant number. But we must remember, too, as the hon. member mentioned, that the Auditor General also is returning \$408,000.

When we look at the numbers – and I'd like to thank the hon. member for sharing the whole list with me of the 27 out of 80 projects that he had planned, and some of those were deferred. That \$408,000 that is being turned back, I would only have to assume, was turned back for the reason that perhaps he didn't plan on doing that particular job, some of those that perhaps could have been done. So now we're talking about, maybe, the lack of contracts or lack of manpower to be able to handle those or a lack of agencies that he would contract with to do those jobs.

What we're looking at is almost \$1.3 million worth of shortfall. He's turning back \$408,000. We're looking at – and I'm rounding the numbers there, Mr. Chairman – \$750,000 as a shortfall in order to be able to balance his budget for 2008-2009. The \$750,000, as the member mentioned, was to cover the costs of the consolidation or the dissolution of the health regions. He mentioned the Treasury Branches, and he mentioned the Mental Health Board and the others. There was a significant cost to be able to have to look after those. That's part of the shortfall.

Also, I'd like to mention: who audits the Auditor General? You know, the Auditor General does his job. He looks after some 200 different agencies, including all of the departments of the government. Who audits him? There's also an external auditor, an accounting firm, who audits the Auditor General to make sure that he does his job and he spends his money properly. So I think there's a good set of checks and balances there.

Really, what we're looking at here is \$750,000 that the Auditor General has requested, and it was approved by the Legislative Offices. He came and spoke for approximately half an hour, explained the entire process that he had and explained the supplement that was required. It was approved, probably not unanimously, but it was approved that we recommend that the supplementary estimates be also presented and approved.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

5:50

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I appreciate that from the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the chairman of the Legislative Offices Committee. When we look at the request for more money to have a look at how Alberta Health Services has been set up since April, I would urge everyone here to strongly support this initiative. We look at how the budget for Alberta Health has changed. The Premier in his end-of-the-year

interview with the Canadian Press indicated that that budget is \$1.3 billion higher than what it had been anticipated to be. So we fired the regional health authorities in the spring, and by the following Christmas we have an additional \$1.3 billion. The Auditor having another look at Alberta Health Services, in my opinion, is a very good use of our money.

The Alberta Treasury Branches management. Certainly we need to have a look at that. Some of the documents that were left with us at Public Accounts today: there were three different documents. I referred to the deferred or cancelled projects or audit projects earlier, Mr. Chairman, but certainly the mandate of the Auditor General is spelled out in detail, and it makes for very interesting reading. This was prepared for the ATB Financial audit committee on February 17 of this year. I don't know why this was necessary, why it was needed, but it's a very interesting document. I would encourage all hon. members to read that. We look at the Treasury Branches and we look at their investment in asset-backed commercial paper. I was startled to learn that there was over a hundred million additional dollars set aside to cover losses in that. I believe that was announced with their financial report that was made public last week.

We look at climate change, the carbon taxes initiated by this House for certain oil sands producers, some of whom are paying, I think, about 10 cents a barrel right now, or they were, into that fund. So the Auditor is planning on having a look at that.

Protecting information assets. I don't know exactly what that is, whether it's dealing with health information or dealing with issues around the security of the government's intranet. I was startled to learn that there may be people cruising around our internal intranet that are violating our security codes. Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm not nearly as sophisticated as those hackers are because sometimes I even forget my own passwords to get into our LAO computer system.

There are any number of issues here where the Auditor General, I think, would very wisely spend the taxpayers' money to ensure that we are getting value for our government programs and policies.

It is true that next year the budget is going to be limited to 3 per cent. We had quite a debate at the Legislative Offices Committee last fall. Everyone was involved in this: the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House on down to the hon. Member for Calgary Centre.

An Hon. Member: There's no such riding. Calgary-Buffalo?

Mr. MacDonald: No. Pardon me. Edmonton-Centre. Did I say Calgary Centre?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. MacDonald: I apologize.

Mr. Taylor: She won't think that's too fabulous.

Mr. MacDonald: Actually, Calgary Centre is fabulous.

Mr. Taylor: It's a federal riding.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it is.

Calgary-Buffalo is a provincial riding, and I'm proud to say that after it was so ably represented by Mr. Chumir and Mr. Dickson, it

is now represented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is an Alberta Liberal Party member.

In closing . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2008-09, No.2 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. members, it's 5:55. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) and Government Motion 6, agreed to on March 2, 2009, I must now put the question. Please occupy your own seat.

Those members in favour of each of the resolutions relating to the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.
The committee will rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

All resolutions relating to the 2008-09 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, have been approved.

Office of the Auditor General: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$750,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$70,000,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$49,727,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$8,000,000.

The Committee of Supply has also approved the following amounts to be transferred.

Transfer from Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, (\$7,400,000).

Transfer to Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$7,400,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another excellent day of debate and discussion in the House, rather inspiring, I should say. In view of the hour being nearly 6 p.m., I would move that we now call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 5, 2009

Issue 10

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Leader of the NDP Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,
NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
Government Whip
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L),
Deputy Official Opposition Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 5, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 17 students from Minchau school in Edmonton-Mill Woods. The group is led by their teachers, Ms Linda Manson and Miss Joan Newman, together with a parent helper, Mr. Dan Rea. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the House my very first constituent guest from Calgary-Mackay. Mr. Danny Ng is a second-generation Albertan Canadian. An engineer by training, he is now an entrepreneur focusing on building trade between Canada, Alberta and his family's ancestral village, Xiaolan, Guangdong, China. Mr. Danny Ng is in Edmonton to attend the Chamber of Commerce import-export seminar, and he is the mastermind behind the Xiaolan-Alberta International Business Conference to be held on March 18. Mr. Ng, please stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege and pleasure today to introduce to you and through you two constituents from the riding of West Yellowhead, in particular the town of Edson, Mrs. Ruth Martin Williams and Ms Joan Olson. Mrs. Ruth Martin Williams is the executive director of Reflections. Professionally she has collaborated with stakeholders from the provincial, municipal, and territorial governments and colleges and universities in developing and delivering educational programs. She was the assistant games manager for the 2006 West Yellowhead Winter Games involving over 2,000 athletes and 3,000 volunteers.

Ms Joan Olson has lived in Edson for 32 years, and she and her husband, Bob, have raised three sons and have been very involved in the community. She has volunteered with the Glenwood community club for 21 years. She is a founding member with the Edson and District Recycling Society since 1990 and has been with Reflections since its inception in 2001. She has been for the last three years and still is the president of Reflections. I will be talking more about Reflections in my member's statement.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a group from my constituency. They are a group from a truly outstanding facility, Canterbury Court and Manor. Like true pioneers they didn't let something as small as a March snowstorm stop them from coming out. I would like to introduce them briefly by name. You know, as I give your name, why don't you stand up: Mrs. Wildgoose, Mrs. Grisdale, Mrs. Patrick, Mrs. McConnell, Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Chostner, Mrs. Crossman, Mrs. Hussey, Mr. and Mrs. McCannel, Mrs. Maltby, Mrs. Norton, Mrs. Stenson, Mrs. DraBot, Mr. and Mrs. Ray Pierzchajlo, and they are accompanied by two wonderful supporters, Greg Lyderik and Donna Zipse. Please give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a group of guests here today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House, who braved the elements to come up from Calgary today to make an appearance on behalf of a cause that they believe in very deeply. My guests are all connected in one way or another to cancer patients who are being treated or who will be treated with the drug Avastin. I will be talking a little bit more about that in a couple of minutes in a private member's statement. But let me introduce my guests to you now. As I call out your names, if you would stand up, please, and remain standing: Michelle Graham, Nel Christoffersen, Jeanne DeVetten, Kan Pattar, Satbir Cheema, Lori Creech, Monica Istvan, Jeremy Judge, Andie Christenhusz, Tom Henderson, Debbie Woods, and Judy Dunbar. Many more are with them here in spirit today. If everybody would give them, please, the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have an anniversary today. On this day 17 years ago, in March of 1992, the hon. Member for Little Bow was elected to this Assembly in a by-election for the first time.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Reflections Empowering People to Succeed

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Reflections Empowering People to Succeed was incorporated as a society on April 9, 2002. Reflections' objective was to develop and promote a day program for adults with mental illness and other disabilities, including brain injuries. Since their incorporation Reflections has had a major impact on improving the lives of their members, which in turn has had a positive impact on the community of Edson. Through Reflections' employment program 20 members who were unemployed, some for as long as 25 years, are now in the workforce, increasing their economic participation and financial independence in Alberta's economy. One client went from being unemployed for years to being a supervisor due to the support of Reflections' employment assistance program.

Reflections' programs work as relapse preventive therapy. The success of these programs has impacted families as there are families who still have their family members, including fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, uncles and aunts, because individuals received support when considering suicide.

Reflections' nutrition program provides 200 meals monthly to members living with the reality of hunger. The nutrition program includes active participation by members in all aspects of nutrition: menu planning, shopping, and food preparation.

Reflections encourages its members to support the communities that support them. Members give back to the community of Edson by volunteering, including the 2006 Winter Games in West Yellowhead, literacy tutors, the food bank, and extended care facilities. Reflections does not just want to improve their members' lives; they want to reduce society's stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness. Reflections' community education programs work to reduce stigma and discrimination. By doing so, barriers to treatment are removed and paths to recovery are opened for Reflections members.

Reflections' work is critical. National statistics show that 20 per cent of Canadians live with mental illness. Support for Reflections is support for individuals, for the community, and for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, did you want your guests to rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my excitement to introduce them, I forgot to ask my guests, Mrs. Ruth Martin Williams and Ms Joan Olson, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Dr. Brendan Croskery

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 14 the Calgary board of education held a retirement celebration for Dr. Brendan Croskery highlighting his 10 years of service to students in Calgary and his exceptional leadership record as the chief superintendent for the Calgary board of education. Dr. Croskery came onboard with the CBE in 1998 and became the acting chief superintendent in 2001. By 2002 Brendan became the permanent chief superintendent. There is little doubt that at this time the Calgary board of education was seeking to regain the public trust of Calgary citizens.

Brendan was the right man for the job. His focus on student learning outcomes and providing strong support for a governance model shows in the outstanding academic success of Calgary students. CBE students' results are higher than the provincial average on almost every measure. Mr. Speaker, this is an outstanding accomplishment considering that the CBE is Alberta's largest school district and would be considered a mean setter. All students succeeded under Dr. Croskery's tenure. The CBE educates 45 per cent of Alberta's ESL students; they scored above the provincial average on 95 per cent of the measures, again a statistical phenomenon. Also, special education students in the CBE exceeded the provincial average on 100 per cent of the special education measures.

This past year the CBE celebrated its seventh consecutive year of improving the overall learning outcomes of its students. This is unprecedented for any school jurisdiction in the history of Alberta, and it all happened under the leadership and direction of Dr. Croskery.

On a personal note, I've come to know Brendan as a kind, caring, and compassionate individual whose intellectual capacity far exceeds anyone I've had the pleasure of working with. I believe Dr. Croskery plans to stay in Calgary. I hope that students in this province benefit from his future line of work either as a consultant or an academic.

Mr. Speaker, I hope all members of this Legislature can join me

in recognizing Dr. Croskery's exemplary service provided to the students of this province through his 10 years with the CBE.

Thank you.

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

1:40

Drug Coverage for Avastin

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The continuing miracle of the last hundred years or so has been that we have beaten so many of the diseases that used to kill us. Many we have cured outright. Most of the rest we've learned how to manage. So it is that now almost everyone is touched by or will know loved ones who are touched by cancer in their lifetimes. And not all cancers are the same. Not all cancer patients have the same experience when fighting the same kind of cancer. There's really nothing fair about cancer.

Take colorectal cancer, for instance. It is one of the most curable cancers, if I can use that word, if it's detected early, which is why this province actively promotes colorectal cancer screening for people over 50. If you haven't been screened, talk to your doctor about getting screened. When colon cancer is not caught in time, it can be deadly. It kills close to 600 Albertans a year.

There is a relatively new and promising treatment called Avastin approved by Health Canada some three and a half to four years ago for use in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer and recently some forms of breast cancer and lung cancer. Avastin works by cutting off the blood flow to tumours, slowing their growth and sometimes shrinking them to the point where a previously inoperable tumour can be removed surgically or sometimes to the point where they disappear altogether. Like I said, it doesn't work equally well for every patient because there's nothing fair about cancer.

My message today, however, is about bringing fairness to cancer treatment. An advanced colorectal cancer patient in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and several other provinces will receive Avastin for free because it's covered by those provinces' drug plans. The same patient in Alberta will pay \$2,000 every other week because in this province Avastin is not covered.

Some of my guests in the gallery today have responded very, very well to this drug. The husband of one of my guests has had seven treatments. It cost him \$14,000 to get the tumours to the stage where they can be operated on, and shortly he will undergo surgery for that. For others the bill can be thousands and thousands of dollars higher. It causes people to burn through their life savings, lose their homes, cash in their RRSPs. That's the most unfair thing of all.

Mr. Speaker, someone in the fight of their lives, the fight for their lives, should not have to worry about financial ruin for their families. It is time Alberta funded Avastin.

Thank you.

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

International Women's Day

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to stand today and note that Sunday, March 8, is International Women's Day. International Women's Day is recognized by citizens around the world to celebrate past progress toward equality for women, reflect on the challenges women continue to face, and consider what action we can take in the future to ensure girls and women achieve equality in all aspects of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta women contribute to every part of our society. We are honoured and proud to have countless exceptional women leaders acting as role models for our province's girls and

women, including Alberta's Famous Five but also the incredible team of cabinet ministers and MLAs from all parties serving this province. These are, indeed, remarkable women.

As we know, women have made great strides in today's world, but we also know they may still face challenges in many parts of their lives. This is why we must continue to take action on women's issues so that our daughters and granddaughters will not have to face these same obstacles. From working to prevent family violence to providing scholarships for students whose studies contribute to the advancement of women, our government has many programs and services that support women. On behalf of all women in Alberta, thank you.

I rise today not only to recognize this day and the importance of strong and supported women to our province but to encourage all Albertans, women and men, girls and boys, to honour International Women's Day and reflect on the steps they can take to support women's equality each and every day and to thank those past and present for their contributions.

Thank you.

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

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors from all across Alberta have been sharing their concerns with me about this government's proposed changes to our health care system, in particular the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy. They're telling me how the Conservative government is not doing enough to meet the health concerns of today's seniors. Proposed changes to the seniors' pharmaceutical plan will significantly increase the amount that middle-income seniors have to pay out of pocket for the medications they require.

Let's be very clear about this, Mr. Speaker. It is yet another attack on universal health care by this government, and we intend to oppose it. We need to reduce health care costs for all seniors, not just some seniors. Placing a greater financial load on our seniors is simply not the answer.

Seniors shaped this province, yet it was the seniors who sacrificed during the cuts of the 1990s, and it is again the seniors who are being told to shoulder an unfair portion of the burden today. Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. This is not what Albertans voted for.

I am tremendously proud that my party brought medicare to Canada under Tommy Douglas. This was a true victory for Canadians. This system, which is one of our nation's proudest, is under constant pressure from private interests, and the current government cannot be trusted to defend it. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you and all Albertans, both young and old, that when it comes to the strong delivery of health care in the province, the Alberta NDP will continue the hard-fought battle of a visionary leader and ensure that health care remains as it should, universal and public.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie

Dr. Brown: Merci, M. le Président. Je me lève en Chambre aujourd'hui pour le lancement des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie albertaine, une célébration nationale de deux semaines soulignant la culture, la langue, et le patrimoine français, qui se tient du 6 au 22 mars. Ici en Alberta les communautés françaises lanceront des célébrations avec des cérémonies de lever des drapeaux partout dans la province, suivies de deux semaines de festivités pour tous les

albertains. Il s'agit d'une magnifique occasion pour nous tous de célébrer notre diversité et notre patrimoine unique.

La Francophonie albertaine, une des plus importante et ayant la plus grande croissance au Canada, joue un rôle important dans l'habileté de notre province à créer des communautés accueillantes et inclusives. Les centres de carrières et d'emploi francophones ainsi que les centres d'accueil et d'intégration pour les nouveaux arrivants et les immigrants débordent d'activités. Un joueur clé dans ces réussites est le Secrétariat francophone du gouvernement de l'Alberta. Le secrétariat joue un rôle important en développant des partenariats positifs qui renforcent le bien-être et l'autonomie des franco-albertains.

M. le Président, je remercie les membres de cette Chambre pour leur appui continue, et je les invite à profiter des célébrations qui soulignent notre histoire unique et nos riches traditions et culture.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the Assembly today to kick off Alberta's Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national two-week celebration of French culture, language, and history that runs from March 6 to March 22. Here in Alberta francophone communities will start celebrations with flag-raising ceremonies across the province, followed by two weeks of celebrations for Albertans. This is a great opportunity to celebrate our diversity and our unique heritage.

Alberta's Francophonie, one of the largest and fastest growing in Canada, plays a key role in the province's ability to build welcoming and inclusive communities. Francophone career and employment centres as well as francophone settlement and integration services for newcomers and immigrants are bustling with activity. A key player in this success has been the government of Alberta's Francophone Secretariat. The secretariat plays an important role in building successful partnerships to enhance the well-being and self-reliance of French-speaking Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I thank members of this House for their continued support and invite them to take part in the two-week celebrations that salute our unique history and our rich traditions and culture. [As submitted]

Presenting Petitions

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2).

- (1) the petition of Beverly Anne Cormier for the Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act;
- (2) the petition of W. John Brennan, board chair of Caritas Health Group for the Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; and
- (3) the petition of Les Filles de la Sagesse for the Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Bill 203

Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009.

Bill 203 would define province-wide standards for municipal election finance and disclosure requirements, allowing for greater

transparency and ultimately enhancing the integrity of the democratic process in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Restructuring

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health needs to answer for the situation that's facing Edmonton and other Alberta emergency rooms: unacceptable wait times, more complications, and preventable deaths as admitted by some emergency physicians. To the minister: will the minister provide the Assembly with the exact number of people who have died while waiting for treatment in Alberta's emergency rooms in 2008?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it has not been drawn to my attention that any have. You know – and I'll table five copies of this – as is so often typical of headline writers and those who do their research through the headlines, we only take certain parts of a story. We're referring, I presume, to this morning's local newspaper, where a local doctor was making some comments. What the Leader of the Opposition did not refer to is that this same doctor says that the Edmonton region of Alberta Health Services has done a good job in trying to reduce waiting lines, that triage liaison doctors so on and so forth, that these policies are evidence that Alberta Health Services "is trying and is really dedicated to make our emergency care in the city tenable."

The Speaker: Later in the Routine there's an opportunity to table such documents.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been 10 months since the minister's rushed restructuring of Alberta's health care system. The experiments continue. When can Albertans expect to see improved quality, access, and basic lifesaving services?

Mr. Liepert: I'll go on, Mr. Speaker, to quote the particular gentleman that the Leader of the Opposition has done his research on, who says, "The problem is that there is no easy solution." However, we have brought forward a number of initiatives, including our continuing care strategy, our pharmaceutical strategy, our Vision 2020, all measures that we brought forward late last year that as we implement into the system will go a long way.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order.

Mr. Liepert: I should say that on April 1 we will be incorporating the EMS services into our health care system, so we are taking a number of actions to make access more efficient.

The Speaker: There's a point of order that will be dealt with at the end of the Routine.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What specific plans does the minister have to reduce the number of people in acute-care beds so that people in the emergency room can be transferred to other areas, freeing up treatment centres for emergencies?

Mr. Liepert: A good question, Mr. Speaker, because that was the essence of our continuing care strategy that we brought forward last fall. I hope that we are successful through our budgeting process to ensure that we have additional funds available so that we can have more provision of home care in seniors' homes, in lodges, in areas where they don't have to be in acute care or they don't actually have to be in long-term care if we can provide the quality of health care that they require. That, to me, is the more immediate solution that we need to try and get to.

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

Obstetric Services in Rural Alberta

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the response that the health minister provided yesterday to the concerned citizens of Banff and to all Albertans clearly showed a lack of understanding and sensitivity to the frustration over what is happening to their most cherished health system, including obstetric services, in rural Alberta. To the minister: how has the minister allowed the steady decline in obstetric services in the face of increasing demand since 2000?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have not done that. In fact, we probably lead the country in terms of the provision of services. We took a very significant step several months ago when we announced that starting with this budget year, we are going to publicly fund midwifery services. All of these initiatives go exactly to address what the leader is raising.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, obstetric services have gone down from over 80 to the mid-60s in the last six years.

My next question is for the Premier. What is the Premier doing to ensure that citizens in rural communities will have access to good-quality obstetric services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the good news. The province of Alberta is one of few provinces in Canada that has seen this unbelievable increase in births, which speaks well for the confidence that people are showing in this great province. I believe the increase in the number of births has far exceeded those of the last record, that was set way back in 1983. As a result it has put some additional pressure on neonatal and all of the other obstetric services. As I said before, even in these economic times we're going to continue our education programs for nurses and doctors to make sure that we have the necessary people to meet the demand.

Dr. Swann: My final question, again to the minister of health. February 18 in this House the minister compared our health system model to the American auto industry business model and the need for change. Is this decision on Banff obstetric care a business decision?

Mr. Liepert: Well, just to be clear, Mr. Speaker, I was not comparing it to the American auto business. I was comparing it to the Canadian auto business and said at that time that one of the issues I believe is predominant in some of these situations is that the fundamental business model is wrong and that if you keep throwing money at the wrong model, you're going to continue to get the same results. I believe that in health care we need to ensure that we have the right model. Just simply throwing more money at it is not going to solve the problem.

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

Drug Coverage for Avastin

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. On November 25 of last year, when I asked the minister to consider funding the cancer drug Avastin, the minister indicated the drug status at that time; that is, that a couple of years earlier the appropriate committee of physicians had reviewed Avastin and concluded that it should not be covered under the drug plan. However, since then, Avastin has gone through all but the final step of a reconsideration process, and it is my understanding that the minister now has on his desk or will have in a few days a recommendation to fund Avastin. My question is: will the minister agree to fund Avastin?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, a little bit of history. Avastin was first introduced to the marketplace in 2005, and at that time the Alberta Cancer Board's Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee considered whether it should be on the drug benefit list or not. It did not recommend inclusion on the drug benefit list, but during the ensuing couple of years Avastin has been prescribed by physicians in a number of instances. Last November, as the member raises, I did promise to have the committee re-evaluate in light of the new evidence whether we should be considering it. The committee did recommend in January of this year to the Alberta Health Services Board that they consider the recommendation, and I can say that this morning I received a letter from the Alberta Health Services Board recommending that they fund the drug. As of April 1, with the new budget year, Avastin will be added to the drug benefit list.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my guests in the gallery and many other Albertans I wish to thank the minister. I have no further questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Protection of Children in Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Two years ago a boy in the Alberta foster care system was abused and ultimately died. Last year the minister told us that her hand-picked review board concluded that the foster care system in Alberta was working well. However, information I've recently received suggests that a recent incident suggests otherwise. Will the Minister of Children and Youth Services confirm that a young child very recently apprehended in southern Alberta just sustained life-threatening injuries while in foster care?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure what the member is speaking to. It is true that we did have that tragic incident that you referred to not too long ago, but I can tell you that we have 2,300 foster families in this province doing a wonderful, wonderful job. While those tragic events are exceptionally tragic – one death is one too many – I can say that after the incident that you referred to, we did do the foster care review. It determined that we do have a good system and that we can make it better, and we are doing that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, last year the minister promised after the last fatality that she would immediately implement the panel's recommendations to end the practice of overcrowding foster homes.

It appears as though this promise was broken. Will the minister admit that this very recent tragedy occurred in a government-approved foster home that had been allowed to exceed the maximum number of children in care once again?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The foster care review last year, as I said, was a very extensive review, had internal and external experts. They did say that the foster care system was good, but they also came out with eight very good recommendations, which we adopted. All are to be fully implemented by the end of this spring. As well, internally we're taking a look at and have started a review on our kinship care.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this doesn't relate to kinship care. This is a different incident.

This tragedy is further evidence that serious steps need to be taken immediately to protect kids in government care. Last year's public relations exercise that masqueraded as a review of the system just didn't cut it. To the Premier: will the Premier today announce a full public inquiry into Alberta's foster system and commit to implementing its recommendations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible is very passionate with respect to her responsibility for the children under care of this government and has done an excellent job. She'll continue to do that on behalf of those children. Some have been abandoned by their families and are in the government's care. She'll continue to help those families and individuals to the best of her ability and the ability of this government. We take child care very seriously and will continue to do that as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Highway Safety and Maintenance

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with many of my constituents I travelled the Queen Elizabeth II highway this morning from Leduc to Edmonton, and there was not a snowplow in sight in the midst of the snowstorm this morning. To the Minister of Transportation: where is the highway maintenance when we need it the most?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very surprised that this hon. member didn't see a snowplow this morning on his way. I can tell you that the weather has been very, very bad out there this morning, causing havoc on the roads. I made a call myself to my department this morning to find out where our plows were. They looked it up on the GPS screen, and we had over 500 plows on the roads this morning in this province. There were 25 of those plows in the Leduc area and another 35 between Red Deer and Leduc. By GPS today we can tell, even when there's an accident – we can trace back – exactly what time a plow was in that exact position.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly hope they weren't camouflaged in white because they were certainly hard to find.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents have consistently told me that over the years the maintenance standards have dropped significantly. Could the minister tell us why?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that our government, our Transportation department, sets the standards of maintenance in this province. I've been told that from way, way back when, when the government was doing the maintenance themselves, our standards are exactly the same or better. We have inspectors that go out and make sure that these contractors do the work. I'll tell you what. I'm sure this hon. member has done business at some time in his life. These contractors don't get paid unless they go to work. They're businessmen, and they go to work so that they get paid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Mr. Minister, I was constantly passed on my way this morning by many drivers who must have thought this was a summer's day. Are there any enforceable laws that would slow these careless drivers down?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. In fact, I want to take this opportunity to remind drivers in our province that the posted speed limits are the maximum. When we have conditions such as today, with icy roads and poor visibility, drivers who put themselves and others at risk can be charged with a number of offences, including driving with undue care and attention. We do have the laws in place, and we do enforce them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon was just snowed by the Minister of Transportation.

Off-road Vehicles in Natural Areas

Mr. Chase: One fantastic aspect of Alberta that is sometimes lost in the oil sands debate is the pristine beauty of many natural areas that Albertans cherish and enjoy. Last month the government was talking about expanding off-highway vehicle access into natural areas, further disrupting environmental integrity. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: is it the policy of your ministry to expand trail systems to allow for more off-highway vehicle access to natural areas as a way to increase tourism in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a trails committee, that's looking at this issue right now. The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater is currently chairing that committee, both for myself and the hon. Minister of SRD, to ensure that we have the right answers to these questions. We are having more and more vehicles. In fact, they will tell you that the province of Alberta sells more of those off-road vehicles than in all of North America. We need a management plan in place for all of these vehicles, and the trails committee will come back and report to me.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The start of that plan should be compulsory helmets for ATV operators.

Given that in a 2008 survey of Albertans' priorities for provincial parks 41 per cent of Albertans were opposed to increased support for

off-road vehicle use compared to only 17.3 per cent for increased support, can the minister explain why she is striking a committee to expand the off-highway trail network in direct opposition to what your survey has indicated?

Mrs. Ady: Well, that is a good question as well. As I just stated, more and more of these vehicles are out there in the province. We want to make sure that there's good management of those, or they will go to places that we don't want them to. We want to make sure that there are trails there so that they stay on those, that they use our environment appropriately, so we will continue to look at this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Hopefully, part of the looking at the issue is the hiring of more conservation officers to enforce those trails.

Your survey results are clear: 61.3 per cent of Albertans want more land left undisturbed compared to 3.6 per cent wanting less. Why is the minister ignoring what Albertans want, thereby ignoring what the majority of Albertans have clearly told you to do? How successful is this ATV lobby?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say that you're right: people do like to. I would say that this government has been well at work when it comes to expanding more parks. If you were to look at our track record, you know, just in the last year with the River Valley Alliance, we're looking at Lois Hole park. We've also just brought in the Doc Seaman piece – that was a wonderful thing – the OH Ranch. We are at work on this, we're doing more, and we intend to continue this work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

East Calgary Transportation Utility Corridors

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary parks foundation is looking to make pathways and green space along the transportation and utility corridor in east Calgary. The first leg of this project runs behind the community of Monterey Park, which I proudly represent. I have met with the community, and the community and myself strongly support this project. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. What is the process for determining what transportation utility corridor land can be used for establishing pathways and green space?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is an application process. It's outlined in the transportation utility corridor policy, and it's posted on Alberta Infrastructure's website. Essentially, the proponent submits an application for ministerial consent to my department. The department will review it, speak with the city involved, and we'll determine if it would qualify as a pathway.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I strongly support this project. Does the minister support the proposed plan to utilize the undeveloped transportation utility corridor land in east Calgary to construct recreational pathways?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I very much support that as a use where it's appropriate. We are in meetings now with city parks. The east

Calgary greenway project is on the table now, and we're considering the request, taking it through the proper steps. If it does in fact qualify, we certainly will support that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that as a yes.

My final question to the same minister: once Alberta Infrastructure hands land over for this use, who takes care of the maintenance of that particular property?

Mr. Hayden: I think I should clarify that if it does qualify and it's safe enough to do it, of course, it will happen, and then it would require a licensing agreement. Generally speaking, in this particular case the licensing agreement would be with the city of Calgary, and they would be the ones that would enforce it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

2:10

Blue Cross Coverage

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Corporate filings from Syncrude shareholders indicate that this government's royalty deal will transfer billions in public wealth to an already profitable oil sands company. At the same time, the government is jacking up costs that many families and seniors must pay for medically necessary drugs. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister support government priorities that grant huge benefits to a highly profitable oil sands company while forcing ordinary Albertans to pay so much more for medically necessary drugs?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, if you wish.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have said right from day one that we are going to deliver a more efficient, effective health care system, and we plan to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Corporate filings show that the royalty deal this government struck with Syncrude is worth an additional 12 per cent in net, after-tax profits to shareholders. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why doesn't this government increase Blue Cross benefits for families and seniors by a similar 12 per cent, just like it increased the after-tax profits for Syncrude shareholders?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been no increase in Blue Cross for seniors, and what the member is probably confused about is that, as I outlined to his colleague to the left there the other day in the House, the premiums that we charge in our nongroup plan have fallen behind. They have not increased since 1993. What we are proposing are increases that will bring it in line with those plans that are offered by employers both in the private and public sectors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's clearly stated in a government news release of December 8, 2008, that this government will drive Blue Cross rates up to the same level as private insurance. The winners in this, of course, are the private insurance companies, and the losers are the regular Albertans, like those in the gallery today. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why doesn't this

government stand up for ordinary Albertans instead of selling them out to private insurance?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we stand up for ordinary Albertans every day in this House, and I think it was proven just over a year ago on March 3.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Gang Violence

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in concert with the many Albertans who are concerned about gang violence in this province. This week Calgary police revealed details of a drug bust where they seized the same type of body armour used by police along with other police paraphernalia. My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is this minister doing to keep body armour out of the hands of criminals in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed a very disturbing trend. There's absolutely no legitimate reason for anybody outside of law enforcement to have body armour. I've contacted the federal Minister of Public Safety and the federal Justice minister, urging them to take action on this issue. I've requested that the federal government consider tabling amendments to the Criminal Code that would make body armour a restricted device that can only be sold, purchased, and possessed in accordance with provincial law or regulations. The changes I am proposing will give police another tool in their ongoing efforts to disrupt and dismantle gangs and organized crime in Alberta and make our communities safer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to stop gangs from other jurisdictions, British Columbia or otherwise, from doing their dirty business in this province?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, again, this province has moved on the gang issue by providing more police in Alberta and recently announced four integrated gang-enforcement units. I can assure you that police in Alberta are working closely with police in other jurisdictions to fight gang crime. One method is by sharing gang intelligence. In fact, last week several gang members were arrested in Vancouver in connection with a murder investigation. I can tell you that the Edmonton and Calgary police services along with members of the integrated response to organized crime unit in Alberta worked with police in British Columbia to make those arrests. It's through this type of co-operation and innovation that police will continue to reduce gang crime and the illegal drug trade in our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Calgary Airport Tunnel

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is not regarding the highway today. It is about my constituents telling me very clearly that they want this government to ensure a prosperous future

for their local area. An infrastructure system is needed that will be able to handle the growth of this rapidly expanding community, and a key part is a tunnel under the new runway at the Calgary airport. That is to provide better access from the east of the city. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. What is the status of this project?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't tell the hon. member the status of that project because it's not a government of Alberta project. That's a municipal issue; it's a local municipal road. I don't know where the city of Calgary is on whether or not they're going to fund that tunnel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that there have been some meetings going on with the minister and the city of Calgary. This is the fastest growing part of Calgary, and it needs proper infrastructure planning. Does this government support the building of this tunnel, and will this minister be advocating strongly to get the funding needed for this project?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're speaking of an awful lot of money here to build this tunnel. We have a couple of different issues, and I mentioned it to the aldermen that I met with from Calgary. First of all, the road where they want that tunnel is a dangerous-goods road, which is Barlow Trail. As you know, for safety reasons alone we cannot have dangerous goods in a tunnel, so the whole plan would have to be revised. You'd have to change that from dangerous goods. Also, I'm not a hundred per cent sure yet how happy the airport authority is with a runway over and above a tunnel.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about infrastructure funding again. Does this minister agree that this is clearly a viable stimulus project that will create much-needed jobs and one that is a necessity to ensure the current and future prosperity of my constituents and all Calgarians?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we just announced this week a huge project in southeast Calgary. The ring road in the southeast, Stoney Trail, will create lots of jobs. We plan on doing a lot of other necessary highway work in the province, which again will create jobs. We really do want to make sure that your constituents are looked after and we have economic growth that goes on in Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Long-term Care

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's failure to create long-term beds has created a backlog in hospitals so horrific that patients are dying in waiting rooms. Emergency departments are overcrowded because patients can't get a regular hospital bed because too many are occupied by long-term patients. Instead of creating the long-term care beds it promised, that would ease the emergency room congestion, this government has created a hospital backlog that is costing lives. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will you admit that your failure to keep your promise to add 600 new long-term beds has created a backlog that is costing lives in emergency rooms?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister isn't being straight with Albertans by suggesting that people who have long-term requirements can be housed in independent living options or in their own apartments. The fact is that there are far more people who have been assessed as requiring long-term care in Alberta than there are beds. That is creating a backlog in hospitals, and people are dying in waiting rooms. The choice the minister is really offering to Albertans who need long-term care is to get the level of care they need or not. To the minister: why won't you admit that the backlog in Alberta emergency rooms is a direct result of your failure to create new long-term beds?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the congestion in emergency is far greater than just the inability to move patients into beds. It is one of the reasons; there's no doubt about that. We are working diligently to try to resolve that. I believe also that on April 1, when EMS becomes aligned with health care and not municipal transportation services, that will go a long way towards easing some of that burden. There's a whole bunch of other initiatives that we are going to be pursuing that eventually we want to have access to in emergency.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll conclude with a simple question for the minister. How many Albertans have been assessed as requiring long-term care beds, how many long-term care beds are there, and how many are required in order to make up that difference?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that if he wants an answer to that question, he should put it on the Order Paper.

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

Edmonton Crime Rate

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Maclean's* magazine ranks Edmonton as one of the most dangerous cities to live in Canada. The province's capital is number 5 on the list and is number 2 in the number of homicides. My first question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Year after year Edmonton ranks high on this type of list. When are we going to see Edmonton rank high on safe communities lists?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want all Albertans to live in communities where they can safely live, work, and raise their families. I want to point out that the rankings in this particular *Maclean's* article were based on 2007 figures. Since then we have added significant resources to reduce crime and support safe communities. Over the past year, for example, we have added more than 300 police positions in Alberta, including 70 front-line officers in Edmonton, plus an additional 24-member integrated gang enforcement unit and a SCAN unit to target property used for illegal activity. We're also putting 20 more probation officers in Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: can the minister tell us what her department has done to make Edmonton a safer city?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe in the government that the best way for us to deal with this issue in Edmonton is to work in partnership with the police, in partnership with the Solicitor General, and to make sure that police and Crown prosecutors are working very closely together to track prolific offenders and to ensure that once the police have been able to arrest people, we're able to track them through the system and make sure that they're held on bail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Final supplement to the Minister of Justice again: what is her department doing in the long term to ensure that Edmontonians can raise their families in a safe and secure community?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of what we have to do under safe communities is not just talk about crime and touching people once they've been impacted by crime but deal with work that communities are doing in partnership with the police and on their own to build institutions and structures and confidence in their own communities. The safe communities innovation fund, which the Premier announced last fall, will be putting \$60 million into those sorts of activities. We'll be announcing the first of those results in about two months, and those will continue over the next three years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Extending Municipal Council Terms of Office

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs recently voiced his disinterest in extending the terms of municipal councillors from three years to four years. I don't believe I'm doing this, but I'm actually going to quote from the media, that I have a great deal of respect for. This is from the *Edmonton Journal*, where he was quoted to say that he hadn't heard an overwhelming push, desire, or communication in that regard. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why does the minister consider the AUMA representing 99 per cent of Alberta municipalities an underwhelming representation? What number would be necessary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to add clarity to the question, not prior to the last election but prior to the election before that we did a general review of the Election Act. We did not do that this term. What we did do is send letters to the AAMD and C and the AUMA and contacted both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary asking them what they felt were the main concerns. Residency identity is one that came up, and I feel that the area that the hon. member is talking about needs to have further consultation.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. Perhaps we could move back a little bit more to where I thought I was aiming. Municipalities fight

every day to make sure that every dollar counts, and extending council terms would save considerable taxpayer money in these cash-strapped times. Would the minister consider this a money-saving opportunity?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this would be a dramatic change in the Election Act for Albertans and for Alberta municipalities. We have not done a full consultation on that proposal. Now, the AUMA did bring that forward. Would it be a cost savings? It may be a cost savings, but would it be a focus or a direction that the citizens of this province want to see?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 – and I think you've alluded to this: the Local Authorities Election Act review – actually, your colleagues had recommended extended terms of office. I'm wondering if there has been further work done and if you've gone outside of the Local Authorities Election Act review looking for extra input because it doesn't seem to jibe.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't see where we have gone past the extensive review that we did in 2005. I would also like to say that our intentions are to do a review after the next municipal election, and that could be on the agenda at that time, but it needs to have a full consultation after the next election if the people so desire.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Recycling Industry

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents who has been in the business of scrap metal recycling for more than 13 years regularly employs from five to 35 employees, but because of a serious downturn in the recycling market he's had to lay everybody off. My question is for the Minister of Environment. There is strong evidence from right across the province suggesting that Alberta's recycling market is showing extreme volatility. What is the province doing to address this?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me say that I think we should all empathize with both the employer and the employees in this situation, but I think what it shows is that even the recycling market is not immune from the economic downturn. In December of this year Alberta Environment brought all of the various stakeholders together to discuss this very issue. I'm somewhat disappointed to report that the consensus of that group at that time was that this industry is extremely volatile and there really are no short-term solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry to hear that that meeting could not provide any short-term solutions. What does the future of recycling look like for my constituents and others involved in the recycling industry across the province?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there are no short-term solutions, hopefully we need to find some longer term solutions. There still is a market for high-quality material, albeit that it's a commodity market when you're talking in this case about scrap metal. I understand that there's a problem in the steel industry right now, and the two of them are coinciding. Consumers really have a role to

support recycled products, products that are manufactured from recycled material. We have regulated programs, and I think that in the long term we need to incorporate both sides into those programs, not only the collections side but also the recycling side.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with this downturn in the recycling market what are you doing to ensure that more waste is not going into landfills?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that I need not remind all members that when it comes to recycling, that's only one of the three Rs. There's also reuse and reduce. We can have significant emphasis on reduction in landfills by concentrating not only on recycling, which is laudable, but also a commitment to reuse through recyclable bags and simply making a point of reducing. We can do that through some of the work that we're doing on demolition and waste material, for example.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Workers' Compensation Board Investments

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The market value of the investment portfolio of the WCB was worth \$6.6 billion at December 2007. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is that WCB investment worth now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I don't have those figures at my fingertips. I would indicate to the member asking the question that I could get those numbers and share that with him.

2:30

Mr. MacDonald: You should have those numbers, but I'd be grateful if I could have them.

Again to the same minister: why did the WCB hire new external investment managers in 2007 when this government was planning to implement for all investment pools AIMCo, or the Alberta Investment Management Corporation?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the WCB operates very, very independently of a lot of the other activities that this particular province is involved with. I can say that WCB has done over the last few years a tremendous job in making sure that they're solvent, that they can meet their future obligations. If we look at what happened in other provinces and where our WCB is, I'm very, very pleased to see that the WCB has enough resources to meet all of their future commitments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: we've got to be aware that the WCB reports to this hon. minister and that the WCB's activities are included in the annual report from that department.

My third question is: will employers' WCB premiums or will workers' benefits go up or down as a result of this latest investment strategy by the WCB?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, and I think the answer is both. Generally speaking, the benefits with

better financial positions accrue to both the employers and the employees themselves. Every year there are rebates that are given back to those employers that have shown to have done a great job, and they are rewarded with a refund on their cost. As well, the WCB is mandated to look at increasing benefits, at least to offset inflation costs.

Fire Safety Standards for Secondary Suites

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, regulations enacted this January provided new fire code standards for existing suites, including the requirement for adequately sized windows and interconnected smoke alarms. A recent fire in an illegal secondary suite in Calgary caused the untimely death of three tenants. The tragic event highlighted the plight of many people living in substandard and illegal secondary suites across the province. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given the changes to the Alberta fire code which came into effect, can the minister explain what prosecution measures are in place to make sure that existing suites comply with all of the fire code regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Violations of the safety codes are taken very seriously by our ministry. If the suites do not meet the safety standards, the owner can be charged under the Safety Codes Act or under the Public Health Act. The penalties are serious for violating the Safety Codes Act: \$15,000 for a first offence or six months in jail or doubling that for the second time. This enforcement provision demonstrates our commitment to keeping Albertans safe.

Dr. Brown: Strong provincial building and fire codes aren't of much use if they're not being followed. Will the minister undertake measures to inform landlords what these new fire code regulations are regardless of when the suites were built?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a website that's available. Safety is everyone's responsibility. We have also developed a guide. When individuals are building or, let's say, enhancing a secondary suite, they can look at what is necessary. Also, when there are development permits that are given by the cities, they also give that information to those individuals who are doing renovations or developing a secondary suite.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister please explain where the buck stops and who's going to be responsible for ensuring that these codes are being adhered to?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, safety is everybody's concern. The province does have very strong building and fire codes and safety codes. It is the municipalities' responsibility to enforce provincial standards, investigate, and lay charges. Again, property owners have responsibility, the municipality has responsibility, and the province has responsibility.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm hoping that the Minister of Municipal Affairs will show concern over the children who are locked in residential treatment centres each night in Calgary in barred circumstances.

Child and Youth Advocate

Mr. Chase: It is of the utmost importance that this government takes whatever means necessary to ensure the safety of children in its care. Last year it was revealed that there are serious issues regarding the role and functions of the Child and Youth Advocate. A review was undertaken, a review which the Minister of Children and Youth Services should have received by now. To the minister: will the Child and Youth Advocate report directly to the Legislature or, at the very least, to an all-party policy committee?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right that before Christmas we had talked about having a review done, taking a look at what different provinces across the country do as well as reporting mechanisms. I have had a committee that's been taking a look at those exact issues, a really good committee. We've had external and internal experts on this committee as well as, and probably most importantly, youth. I do expect that report to be on my desk, hopefully, within the next week or so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to it being tabled and shared.

Will an advisory committee be established that would include community stakeholders to help address systemic problems in our youth protection system?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, like I said, I won't have that report for another week or two, so I'm not sure exactly what the contents are. But I think it's really important to say that we all want the same thing. We want a really strong voice for our children, we want a really accountable advocacy system, and as well we want reporting to the public that is meaningful and timely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When will the minister table and, more importantly, implement the recommendations of the review so that Alberta's youth will not be placed at further risk of neglect or abuse?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I do expect that in the next week or so, and my intentions would be to move on it quite quickly.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was recently announced that Alberta's minimum wage is increasing on April 1 to \$8.80 per hour, up from the current \$8.40. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. My constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods is wondering: how is the minimum wage determined by your ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in 2007 this government decided that the minimum wage should be linked to

Alberta's average weekly earnings. In 2008 these earnings increased by about 5 per cent, and this increase will bring Alberta's minimum wage to a rounded figure, as the hon. member indicated, of \$8.80 per hour. This rate will at least temporarily place us second highest amongst all provinces. But it's my understanding that other provinces are also adjusting theirs to where we'll be in the middle of the pack.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister. We're already hearing from at least one business association that says that its members now have to completely revise their budgets with less than a month's notice. Is this fair, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, this increase to the minimum wage should not come as a surprise to anyone. We have not changed our mind, not wavered from a system that has been in place for a couple of years now. Our policy calls for the minimum wage to be reviewed every year and that it would be indexed to the weekly earnings, with any change to take effect on April 1. I re-emphasize that that is to happen every year. In doing so, we ensure that new entrants to our workplace are entitled to an entry-level rate of pay that strikes a fair balance between the workers and the business community.

Mr. Benito: Again to the same minister. When some say that the minimum wage is too low and should be a living wage and others say it's too high and could create layoffs, can you please explain: who are we to believe?

The Speaker: Find an answer to that. It's not a question.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right in that we regularly hear from a number of small businesses and retail associations that suggest that raising the minimum wage might cause hardships for companies trying to make ends meet. The opposite happens on the other side, where labour associations and social agencies repeatedly suggest that the minimum wage should be higher. We're sensitive to both of these, and we're trying to strike a fair balance.

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

2:40

Ambulance Services

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are now very close to the effective date for the transfer of ambulance service from municipalities to the province. Many people in Lethbridge have been calling me to find out the status of negotiations. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister provide us with an update on where we are in this process?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that with the exception of one very small provider where some loose ends need to be tied up, we have now in place contracts with all 65 jurisdictions in Alberta to provide ambulance services as of April 1. Of those 65 contracts we have 12 which are integrated services with municipalities. The remainder are where Alberta Health Services will direct-deliver ambulance services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness again. Lethbridge has an integrated fire and ambu-

lance service and has been concerned about the quality of future ambulance service. What words of assurance can the minister give the people of Alberta that their emergency services will not be compromised as a result of this transfer?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that what we have in Alberta today are incredibly dedicated professionals, paramedics delivering ambulance services in Alberta. We have just as dedicated firefighters and police. At the end of the day these individuals work well together whether they are part of the same system or doing the job that they need to do to ensure that patient safety is paramount. I'm very confident that we will have a better system as of April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Emergency workers have said that their work is unique and that they need a separate way to be represented in collective bargaining. Will the minister ensure that these workers' interests are protected?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between now and April 1 we'll continue to work to ensure that a system will be developed that is very inclusive and fair. We've met with a number of stakeholders, and we've received numerous submissions from others. We are reviewing them carefully before making any final decisions about the new process that will be in place. We expect to have these recommendations for government within the next coming weeks and for a decision to be made before April 1. There's no doubt that there will be changes, but while there will be those changes, employees will continue to be covered by collective agreements, and they will have access to union representation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 109 questions and responses today. Two hon. members did quote from certain documents during the question period. I'm going to ask that they table the documents they quoted from, the Minister of Health and Wellness being one and the Member for Lethbridge-East being the second, if you would deal with that.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters regarding the government's pharmaceutical strategy. These are from the CN Pensioners' Association, Denny May of Edmonton, and Wayne Hampton of Lacombe. They express concern about the replacement of a universal program with income testing, which is effectively a tax on the sick, and the privacy of their income information that will have to be shared with pharmacies.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate that some residents' baths were missed, toileting was late, and there were not enough staff to keep track of those residents who sometimes wander and are at risk of falling.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is the program from the 45th annual Night of Music presented by the Edmonton public schools over at the Jubilee Auditorium last evening. I was joined there by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and we were both impressed by the performances from elementary, junior high, and senior high students.

The second tabling I have is a document from Employment and Immigration here in Alberta. It is a discussion of who is eligible among temporary foreign workers for health care benefits.

The third tabling I have is titled the Capital Region New Upgrader-Related Property Tax Revenue Estimates. It's a document from Alberta municipal affairs and housing, local government services, dated November 27, 2007. It is the scenarios of the money that would have been collected if we had built upgraders in the capital region.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I'd like to table two sets of letters. The first letter is from Michael and Kelly Moynihan, and this is regarding the closure of the obstetrical unit at the Banff Mineral Springs hospital. They are both very concerned and are rebutting some of the comments that were made by the minister of health.

The second is a very thorough letter from Chad Kerychuk, who is also expressing his great concerns about the closure of that unit at the Banff Mineral Springs hospital. He is feeling that expectant parents are having to make last-minute changes in plans that they had worked out for some time. This is immensely stressful, and he's asking that this closure be reconsidered.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a document I referred to in question period today.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to please share with the members the projected government business for the week commencing on the 9th of March.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be delighted to advise the House that on the Order Paper for next week we anticipate on Tuesday being in Committee of Supply on the second day of interim supply estimates.

On Wednesday we would anticipate doing debate on a number of government bills: bills 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20; in other words, most of the bills that are on the Order Paper. Some of them we don't anticipate a lot of debate on. It's hard to

know just exactly how many might proceed, so all of them are there. We also have Committee of the Whole on 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 15, and as per the Order Paper. I might indicate to the House that we anticipate that bills 21 and 22, which are on notice, the appropriation bills, would be available to the House next week after Committee of Supply completes.

On Thursday, March 12, in second reading the same bills and the same bills in committee.

Speaker's Ruling Quoting Documents Legal Opinions

The Speaker: Hon. members, I received several notes during question period from members inquiring whether or not it was permissible for people to quote from newspaper articles. The answer to that question is yes. What the rules do prohibit, however, is questions which inquire whether statements made in a newspaper are correct. The rules also prohibit, though, any question which requires an answer involving a legal opinion, and we must have had half a dozen of these this week from all sides of the House, including some of the members who sent me the most notes asking how come those questions are permitted.

2:50 Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

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

Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am very pleased to move the 2009-10 interim supply estimates for the general revenue fund and the lottery fund.

On March 2 the hon. President of the Treasury Board tabled the 2009-10 interim supply estimates, which contain a schedule of interim amounts to be voted to support operations of the offices of the Legislative Assembly and departments of the government of Alberta and the lottery fund from April 1 through to June 30, 2009. Mr. Chairman, that motion was carried and referred those matters to this committee.

Mr. Chairman, interim supply estimates provide funding authorizations until the new budget is approved. This is not unusual for government. In fact, it's required whenever spending authority is required to bridge the gap between the prior fiscal year and the passage of a new budget. Authorization is needed so that government can continue to provide services until the budget is passed.

These estimates are based on the departments' needs to fund government programs and services. Government spending is typically higher in the early months of the year. This pattern occurs because some payments are due on April 1 for the first quarter and some annual payments are also due on April 1. Members will note that the interim supply is inordinately high compared to what is expected from the overall government budget simply because there are a lot of front-ended costs that need to be paid out in the first quarter.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$9 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$581 million for capital investment,

\$49 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$409 million for lottery fund payments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to discussion throughout the afternoon.

The Chair: Before we proceed, I would like to ask if members want to use 10 minutes each back and forth or 20 minutes combined. Let me know, and then we'll have the time.

Mr. MacDonald: Ten minutes, I believe, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: All right. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Ten minutes.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I rise to participate in the annual interim supply budget discussion or debate for 2009-10, the fiscal year that we're looking at. Certainly, as we go through this document, we see that we're making budget requests for each and every department and office of the Legislative Assembly, which is, I guess, considered normal in this province. I for one would have much preferred to have seen the entire budget now. [interjection] Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is making a suggestion. I have had various meetings with groups not only in the city but across the province who get funding from the province, and they're very anxious to see what happens when we do, finally, get the budget on April 7, I do believe. There are a lot of questions.

Yesterday we heard in this House that the President of the Treasury Board and his associates had no idea that there was a recession on the horizon. We only have to look, Mr. Chairman, at the budget from last year to realize that that series of statements from the President of the Treasury Board was incorrect. It is a reflection of how our economic affairs have been managed by this government.

Last year when we did get the Budget 2008 fiscal plan, one only has to look at page 11, and you can see where this province was planning to have financial issues around the looming U.S. recession. To stand up in question period and say that they had no idea that this was coming – we're losing tax revenue. We're losing resource royalty revenue. We are losing significant revenue through our investments, if we're going to have any revenue at all.

On page 11, Mr. Chairman, it states that "the outlook for the U.S. economy has deteriorated sharply since the beginning of the year and it appears to have entered a recession." It goes on to state that the "weakness in the U.S. economy [is] expected to lead to slower Canadian export growth." In this document it indicates that 90 per cent of all exports from Alberta are to the U.S. I looked at the latest statistics, from February of this year, and 88 per cent of all exports are to the U.S., \$95.7 billion according to the latest economic update. Did we shift away from having all our export eggs in one basket? No. Unfortunately, we didn't. It was clear that we were relying on the American economy for the majority of our exports. We knew there was a recession coming, but it's apparent to me after looking at the third-quarter update that we did very little to prepare for it. I'm sorry.

Now, if we go on further in the fiscal plan, the three-year document, this is on page 61, the "possibility of a US recession in 2008 would reduce demand." This is concerning nonrenewable resource revenue. Also, it's interesting to note here, Mr. Chairman, that there's an indication that "royalties paid on bitumen prices expected to reduce 2009-10 revenue." So last year there was a lot of detail in the fine print about the looming recession, and I can only conclude that many government members, many cabinet ministers across the way did not read the fiscal plan that was presented by the minister of finance.

Now, on page 118 it is indicated, Mr. Chairman, that “despite the likelihood of a U.S. recession and turbulent global financial markets, Alberta’s economic outlook remains positive.” That was this time last year. The storm clouds economically were on the horizon. It’s reflected in the drafting of this fiscal plan, but it was not reflected in this government’s fiscal policy.

Now, for the next indicator you only have to go a few pages further in the fiscal plan. On page 127 we are talking about the three-year economic outlook.

Global Growth Picture Mixed

- Key economic indicators in the United States have deteriorated sharply since the beginning of 2008. The U.S. economy is likely already in recession as the slump in the housing market appears to be spreading to the broader economy.

Hello? The economic conditions in the U.S. and in the global markets come as a surprise to the government members across the way? I just can’t accept this because, certainly, your fiscal plan last year gave good solid warnings pretty well in every chapter and verse of it of what we are experiencing today.

3:00

Now, again on page 138, Mr. Chairman, I’m going to quote.

Fallout from the U.S. Housing and Credit Markets

The impact of the U.S. housing market on the sub-prime mortgage and broader credit markets represents a notable risk for both the U.S. and global economies. The United States appears to have already entered a recession although the extent and likely duration remains highly uncertain. The United States remains a key export market for Alberta, accounting for about 90% of our total international exports.

We have yet again another example that someone in this government knew that there was trouble on the horizon, but we did nothing about it. The minister of finance only a few short months ago, this past fall, was indicating that we would have an \$8 billion surplus, which turns out not to be true. How we are going to manage our financial affairs is another question.

In the interim supply budget there is no mention of the price sensitivities for our nonrenewable resource revenues. I think we should spend a few minutes talking about our price sensitivities for nonrenewable resource revenues, Mr. Chairman. If we look at last year’s fiscal plan, we can see where there is significant detail on the price sensitivities and what they mean. Alberta’s new royalty regime, which was effective January 1, 2009, is more price sensitive. The effects of energy price changes on Alberta’s royalty revenues will also increase. The revenue impact of a \$1 change in the price of oil will increase from \$130 million in 2008-09 to \$211 million in 2009-10. For natural gas the revenue impact of a 10 cent change in the Alberta reference price will increase from \$114 million in 2008-09 to \$166 million in 2009-10. So when we look at what was presented in the third-quarter update last week, we see that there are significant changes in those sensitivities. If an hon. member across the way in the government, in the cabinet, could clarify what numbers we will be dealing with not only in this interim supply budget but also in the budget for the entire province, I would appreciate it, and the taxpayers of this province would appreciate it as well.

The oil price sensitivity will change now by \$105 million. That means that when the price of oil goes up or down, before, whenever the fiscal plan was tabled last year, the net change would be \$130 million. [Mr. MacDonald’s speaking time expired]

Ms Blakeman: That’s 20?

Mr. MacDonald: That’s 10. May I continue, Mr Chairman?

The Chair: Other members who wish to speak?

Ms Blakeman: I’ll let him go ahead.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I would really appreciate this, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: You go ahead, Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Now, the net change in the fiscal plan that was introduced last year was \$130 million, and it has changed post-January 2009 by \$105 million to bring it to \$235 million. This may not be of interest, and I’m not trying to confuse the House here, Mr. Chairman. But I would like to know: do we collect \$105 million less for every dollar if conventional crude oil declines that amount in price? If conventional crude oil goes down, do we collect \$105 million less for every dollar it goes down with the new price sensitivity chart, which is noted as \$235 million for conventional oil?

Now, with natural gas if the annual change was 10 cents, the net change would be \$114 million in royalties. With the new, post-January 2009 sensitivity it is \$158 million, or a change of \$44 million. My question – and I hope I can get an answer on this – is: do we collect \$44 million less with a 10 cent drop in the price of natural gas per gigajoule in Canadian currency?

We know that the new royalty structure that was implemented in January of 2009 is price sensitive. We collect more whenever conventional oil and natural gas are significantly higher, but how much less are we going to collect now that the price of natural gas is much less than was anticipated? I think it’s \$4.20 a gigajoule at the moment. I hope it’s a lot higher than that. Crude oil before question period was \$41 and some-odd cents. [interjection] Since question period it started to drop? [interjection] Yes.

If I could have clarification on that I would be really grateful, if I could have an estimate of exactly how much money at these current prices with these current sensitivities with both conventional oil and natural gas the government anticipates in this budget year to collect with this royalty regime. Things have changed. These sensitivities are sort of mentioned here in passing on page 8 of the third-quarter fiscal update, but these are very, very important questions as we debate the entire interim budget and also the budget on April 7, 2009.

Now, I would like to point out to the House, Mr. Chairman, footnote C on page 8 of the third-quarter fiscal update: “2008-09 sensitivities include 9 months under the current royalty regime and 3 months under the new regime. After January 1, 2009, sensitivities for an entire fiscal year will increase as shown.” I hope I explained this in a manner that is understandable. These price sensitivities are certainly different, but they’re very, very important, and if I could get an answer from an hon. member across the way, I would be very grateful.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Chairman, it’s very difficult to provide specific answers as they relate to budget and forecasts and projections because all of that, as I’m sure the member is aware, is the essence of the budget itself and is the responsibility of the minister of finance and the President of the Treasury Board. What we have before us are interim requirements that essentially bridge the gap between the point at which our fiscal year ends, March 31, the expenditures for which have already been approved by this Legislature, and a reasonable and foreseeable point in the future following March 31, at which point the new budget would be passed. All of the details with respect to that new budget are very much part of that budget process, and it would be (a) inappropriate for anyone to comment on forecasting and the like at this point in time, and (b) I would suggest

that it would also be almost impossible for someone to provide that kind of information in the absence of all of the detail that will accompany the budget documents.

3:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I'm surprised at that. These price sensitivities are very, very important, and they do concern not only this interim supply budget but also the fiscal year 2009-10. Certainly, in the past the province has had no problems whatsoever making a forecast. Last year, for instance, we had a three-year forecast of anticipated revenue not only from nonrenewable resources but also corporate income tax, personal income tax, investment revenue, et cetera. So I just don't understand why the hon. members across the way wouldn't have the information available in this interim supply budget debate which would indicate to us the changes that these price sensitivities are going to have on the fiscal year which we are discussing with the interim supply. These numbers are significantly larger than the previous price sensitivities, and if we are with the changes on an annual basis getting \$235 million less in royalty revenue on conventional crude oil, and if we are getting \$158 million less when the price of natural gas on an annual basis drops by 10 cents, this is a significant loss of resource revenue. If I could have that clarified, Mr. Chairman, I would be grateful.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Chairman, without getting into debate, I think I answered the question, and if the member doesn't like the answer, there's nothing I can do about it. The fact remains that the detail that he is requesting is the very essence of the detail that accompanies the budget. That level of detail is not available when we deal with interim supply.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I must say that I'm disappointed in that. Whenever we go through this interim supply budget line by line, there's billions of dollars here in allocations. When one can't get an answer as to how all this is going to be funded, I find that unusual. With that I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to join in debate on Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, and kick around a few ideas about how we're going to spend our first \$10 billion this year, I guess, because that's about what the dollars add up to. I understand that this involves some front-loading of programs and you have to put more than just a few weeks' worth of dollars into the interim supply budget to get things going and keep things going and all the rest of that. So we won't go down that road. And I'm not going to quibble about whether the interim supply bill should be concerning itself with \$10 billion in spending or \$6 billion in spending or how many billions of spending we should be concerning ourselves with. It is what it is, and it is a big number, \$10 billion.

Of course, it's still, in my mind, a number that we ought not to have to be dealing with because – and I'm sure if I'm wrong about this, Mr. Chairman, someone opposite will correct me – it seems to

me that we wouldn't have to deal with interim supply at all if we could just get organized around budget day, just get organized around bringing in a budget and having it approved and ready to go by April 1 of every fiscal year.

We came back into this House – excuse me; I'm going to have to look on the calendar – on Tuesday, February 10, with the throne speech. We sat for three days that week. Well, the 10th was throne speech day, so that's really all we did that day. We listened to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor give the throne speech, and then we all repaired to the rotunda for cookies and milk and those little sandwiches without the crusts. Then we came back into the House and did some business on the 11th and the 12th, and then we went for the Family Day weekend, which was a long weekend. Then we came back in on Tuesday the 17th, and we sat three more days. Then we took a week off for a constituency week. Gosh, if I was a taxpayer sitting at home listening to this or at work monitoring this on my computer, I'd be getting just a little bit hot under the collar right now that these guys have been back at work since February 10, and they've already taken a long weekend and a week off.

Now here we are at the end of the third week of actual legislative work, and we're debating this great big interim supply bill because we're not even going to have a budget to debate, we're not even going to have the budget read into the record by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, until Tuesday, April 7, a full four weeks after we came back into the House. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman; I don't have those old standing orders – and they were temporary standing orders – at my fingertips because they go back a couple of years, but there was a brief period, a brief, shining moment in the history of our standing orders not too many years ago when we actually committed to, you know, coming back into the House at a specific date in February and then, I believe it was either 10 days or two weeks later, delivering the budget. It seemed like a good idea at the time. I don't think we ever actually got around to doing it that way because those temporary standing orders never got final approval at the end of the year, and then we were into an election cycle and so on and so forth, but that idea, which I think was a good idea, has never come back.

I think it was a good idea, Mr. Chairman, because when you start your fiscal year on April 1, I think it's a good idea to have your budgeting process worked out by then. I think that, you know, if we were to come back on Tuesday, February 10, and rather than take a week off two weeks after we came back because we were just so overworked – and please note for *Hansard* that I said that with every ounce of sarcasm and cynicism that I could muster in my voice – if perhaps we had brought down the budget on February 24, two weeks later, we'd be well into debate on the budget now. I'm willing to predict – and I don't think that I'm taking much of a psychic flyer here at all – that we'd be through the complete Committee of Supply process in terms of debating the budget and through first, second, committee, and third. The budget would be approved, passed, set, and ready to go before we hit the end of this month and the beginning of April and the beginning of the next fiscal year. I'm willing to bet that, if we had just shown a little bit of discipline in terms of when we were going to start the process. We should have done that.

3:20

Now, I know that the finance minister and, I suspect, the President of the Treasury Board and probably the Premier and maybe everybody on the government side of the House feels the same way, that, oh, that's just too tough to do in a year like this because we're on such a roller-coaster ride as far as the economy is concerned. We don't know from one day to the next what's happening with the markets, with the credit crisis, with the real estate slowdown – can't

call it a meltdown in this country, and thank goodness for that, but it certainly is a slowdown, and if you're trying to sell your house right now, you know that all too well – with the rise in unemployment, with slipping into a recession, with running a deficit for this fiscal year that the finance minister had to report in her Q3 fiscal update. Only a few months after she was touting a projection of an 8 and a half billion dollar surplus, now we're into a 1 and a half billion dollar deficit.

Of course, we have 2009-2010 coming, and we know that we're looking at a significant shortfall in revenue relative to what we brought in this year, in the billions of dollars, I think, maybe in the \$5 billion or \$8 billion or \$10 billion range according to some of the people that I've been talking to. We're into a very, very different situation. We're into a situation where nobody knows whether we've hit bottom or when we're going to hit bottom or how we're going to know when we've hit bottom until we've already started coming back out of it, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

But, really, Mr. Chairman, what would prompt anybody to think that things are going to be any more stable on Tuesday, April 7, than they would have been on Tuesday, February 24? This is a roller-coaster ride. It's a seven-ticket ride on the Conklin midway at the Stampede. It's going to go on for a while yet. There are a few loop-the-loops in there and some nasty surprises. There are going to be times when your stomach is above your head. We just don't know what all the twists and turns on the ride are and when and where it's going to end. But it doesn't change the fact that our fiscal year starts on April 1, 2009, just like it started on April 1, 2008, just like it started on April 1, 2007, just like it's going to start on April Fool's Day 2010.

Preparing a budget, Mr. Chairman, is not an April Fool's joke. It's a serious business. It doesn't matter when you do it. Pick a date. You're going to be dealing with some uncertainty, some instability, some not insignificant amount of instability, and you're going to have to take your best shot at it, which should not be a stretch for this government, taking a shot at it, because their budgeting process is about as accurate as EPA mileage figures for new cars. You know: your mileage may vary. Our spending may vary. We'll have to come back to this House once or twice anyway for more supplementary supply for things that we went and spent money on that we didn't think or we didn't have the guts to tell people we were going to spend money on back when we were bringing in our \$37 billion budget.

Mr. MacDonald: How about those 525 snowplows on the GPS?

Mr. Taylor: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, we could use a few of those snowplows out on the roads today. This may be one time that I might be in agreement with the Minister of Transportation. I see him smiling over there, and I'm going to make a note of that. [interjections] Yes, I know we're all out.

Anyway, back to the matter at hand. If we brought the budget down in time for the beginning of the new fiscal year, if we brought the budget down in February a couple of weeks after we come back into this House and listen to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor read the throne speech and started debating it then, we would have a budget in place in time for the fiscal year, and we wouldn't even have to be doing this interim supply stuff. The members opposite complain they can't go into detail anyway.

Okay. I'm going to take my seat now and see who else wants to jump up and join the debate. I'll be back.

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

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased

to make a few comments with respect to the interim supply estimates. I'm going to make them fairly general. As we know, with the schedule of interim supply, they're very broad numbers to get the government through until they can actually get a budget before the House, so there are not a lot of specific line items that you can really point to. So I'd like to make a few comments, I guess, on the interim supply in the sense that it's anticipating the next provincial budget.

I'd like to start with the economic outlook. The Minister of Finance and Enterprise a couple of weeks ago had an economic update – this was about a week before her financial update – and one of the things that she talked about was losses in the heritage savings trust fund to the extent of about \$3 billion, that that would not be restored in order to avoid a technical deficit. I've argued in the past that we shouldn't have deficits in Alberta, that we don't need to have deficits in Alberta, and indeed, Mr. Chairman, if we had got the level of financial contribution from our petroleum industry that we could have – I'm particularly referencing the tar sands – I don't think we would have to be running a deficit today.

So I guess the first point that I would like to make is that having amongst the lowest royalties in the world really hamstringing this government in terms of being able to survive the ups and downs in the price of oil and natural gas. The less you retain as the owners of the resource and the more you allow the people who extract the resource to have, the more difficult it is for the owners of the resource – that is, the people of Alberta, represented by the government – to actually accommodate and survive in a healthy fashion the ups and downs that are so typical of that industry.

The second point that I'd like to make is that the economic update indicated a difficult time for the province financially next year but predicted a recovery the year following; that is, in 2011. This absolutely is flabbergasting, Mr. Chairman, that the provincial finance minister would tell Albertans that she expects the recession to be over in a year. That's essentially what she said. The result is, as we saw from the fiscal update a week later, that the government really has no plans to counteract a recession longer than one year.

My view is that that is going to create considerable hardship and economic dislocation in this province because the consensus among governments outside of this province and among economic experts is that we may in fact be in for a fairly prolonged recession and a fairly deep one. In fact, the free fall of the markets and the rapidly growing lists of layoffs outside of this province indicate that. The layoffs within the province will build and continue to grow, especially in 2011, when the minister is predicting we are going to be in recovery. I suggest that because of major projects winding up in the next year or so, unemployment in this province is actually going to be considerably worse a year out and beyond. If the government is betting that the recession is going to be a very short one, then they are gambling with Albertans' jobs and prosperity, and I want to go on the record as saying that this is an extremely dangerous assumption and that the economic strategy of this province clearly needs to extend beyond one year.

3:30

Now, I want to say something also about the priorities of the government. As they have been battenning down the hatches for the economic storm that lies ahead, the government has given a few hints of what its priorities are. Now, they had campaigned in the last election on creating at least 600 new long-term care beds and five new long-term care centres in the province. They have now stated that they're going to retain the current number and not expand it as promised, but there is a wide gap between the number of people who need long-term care and the number of beds that are available. The result is that people who need more care are in places where they

can't get the care they need, first of all, and secondly, they displace other people from those beds. We've seen that with respect to emergency rooms, which I talked about a little bit in question period today. Because there's a shortage of long-term care beds, people are in acute-care beds. Then when people come into emergency, they can't be put into an acute-care bed because it's occupied by a long-term patient, and as a result we have backlogs in our emergency rooms, and people are dying. So that's not a priority. Obviously, long-term care in the broad sense is not a priority of the government.

I think another thing that's not a priority is public transit. While the government had allocated \$2 billion towards public transit as part of the Green TRIP, they cancelled that at the first sign of reduced government revenues. They've cut that back now to \$195 million, so approximately under 10 per cent of what they had committed. Clearly, public transit is not a priority of the government.

What is, then, Mr. Chairman, a priority of the government? What things have they given priority to? Well, I think the first thing that we can say is that they are committed to the carbon capture and storage program and have retained the \$2 billion in previous surpluses that they had allocated towards that. Now, that is not something to reduce emissions but to bury them, and it is something that places the taxpayer on the hook for at least the first \$2 billion, when the very wealthy corporations, like Syncrude, Suncor, and in fact the power companies that produce electricity from coal, are being essentially subsidized. The subsidization of power companies and tar sands operators is a priority of the government, unlike seniors.

I think we saw some other priorities the other day. It's clearly a priority of the government to support the oil industry and the conventional oil industry in these times of economic downturn. I think we can see a pattern. We begin to get an inkling of what the priorities are going to be when the actual budget comes down on April 7.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. If the Minister of Environment is willing, I would like to combine our two 10 minutes into one 20-minute exchange. Is the minister willing to do that?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm more than willing to do anything that the member desires. However, I think I made it pretty clear that I don't really know that there is an opportunity for exchange because of the nature of the business at hand. I don't know that there are any questions that I can answer beyond those that I already have. If the member wishes to speak for 20 minutes, that's fine with me. I don't know that I have enough information to contribute to go back and forth for 20 minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Fair enough.

The Chair: Hon. member, do you want to take the 20 minutes?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, I will. Definitely.

The Chair: All right.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. If the minister signals that he's interested in answering, we'll let 'er rip.

I think that a number of my colleagues have already spoken of their frustration over the process, and I have certainly been on record

a number of times over the years expressing my frustration. I mean, the government has complete and total control over how this House runs. They can call us in any time they want. They can add on night sittings if they want. With a 72-member majority they can pretty well have their way any way they want it. There's not a lot we can do about it. [interjection] I can see that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill is excited about that thought.

The truth of the matter is that this budgeting process is up to the government, and they can do better. Any sort of feeble protestations that there have been a number of things that have stood in their way – well, they could have just decided to get around it.

I remember once the Government House Leader getting up and saying: "Well, I mean, who says that we have to have a budget as of this date? You know, budgets can come in any time. They can come in all year." True enough. But we have a fiscal year that starts on the 1st of April, and there's an expectation that there is money to pay for things as of the 1st of April. The logical response that flows from that is that the budget would be passed prior to that. We need about a six-week run, so you're really looking at the need to have a budget come in by the middle of February.

What we've seen is that this very, very late budget – we're now talking into April – has become the new norm. The result of that is that it makes it very difficult for groups that have to then perform their budget process to be fiscally responsible and have their planning completed as per the timelines that are placed on them. I'm talking about what used to be the RHAs but would now be the sort of local hospital boards, how they're going to use their money.

School boards are another group across the province that are expected to have plans in place that are reflecting the government's, and they can't do it because they don't know how much money they've got coming. I mean, in starting this budget process at the beginning of April, it will be almost the end of May before we're done. So that's two full months into the fiscal year. At that point the school boards will know how much money.

We've got a number of previous school board trustees that are now elected members, and I'd be very interested in hearing what they have to say about, you know, their experience on a school board and how not getting your budget figures would affect you. The Member for Calgary-Mackay was on the school board. The Member for Edmonton-Decore was on the school board. Oh, yes, there's the Member for Calgary-North Hill, who was on the school board. Bonnyville-Cold Lake was a school board trustee, I think. There are lots of people in here with direct experience of the effect of that. I never hear them say anything, and I'm sure that their former colleagues that are still on school boards would appreciate it if they would say something.

I want to move on and look directly at the interim supply budget for Environment. As I went through this, what I noticed is that the interim supply for the Ministry of Environment is substantially lower than most of the other supply amounts that have been requested for the other ministries. We've had a \$63 million request for Environment and \$1 million in nonbudgetary disbursements. I mean, aside from very small ministries like International and Intergovernmental Relations – we don't mean to diminish in any way the importance of International and Intergovernmental Relations. It's requesting, like, \$10 million. Fair enough. Obviously, the Environment request for \$64 million is higher than that, but in comparison to a number of the other ones – you're looking at Education, which has a request of \$1,143,000,000. Employment and Immigration is \$255.8 million. Health and Wellness, of course, is huge; it's asking for, you know, over \$3 billion. Even Housing and Urban Affairs is asking for \$133 million. Municipal Affairs, \$588 million; Seniors, \$640 million. Then you have Environment at \$64 million.

3:40

One of the questions that I would like the minister to answer if he's able to – this is a noticeable difference – is why the supply request from his department is so much smaller than the supply request from other departments that are of equal size in total budget and in many cases even of smaller size in total budget. They've actually requested more money. I know that sometimes ministries need upfront money. You know, they've got projects that happen during the summer, and they need to pay for those before they get there. Fair enough. But you'd think that there would be activity in the Environment department that was happening during the summer, yet it is still, I think, next to International and Intergovernmental Relations the smallest supply request that we've got here this year. I'm just wondering if the minister can comment on that.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Chairman, I will comment on that. I think that the member actually answered her own question. The reason is that because of the nature of the business that we have in Alberta Environment, we don't have the degree of granting and that subsequent front-end loading that many other ministries have. The details of the budget will come out on budget day, when the budget document itself is tabled. I can assure the hon. member that there are more than adequate funds included in this appropriation so that we will not be out of business before the Legislative Assembly gets around to passing the budget.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you very much for responding to that question. We don't know what the budget amount is at this point, so when I look at the request of me as a member of the Assembly to grant money to the government, my question is always: what for, and is there a way of sort of verifying that? Often that's about having standards set, it's about monitoring the work that's going on, and it's about enforcement of the work that's going on. Obviously, we don't have the budget, so I can't ask some of those questions. I thought: well, what is a way that I can look at this and say, "Is it reasonable to grant this money?" Okay. It's about performance. All righty-ho.

I went back and I looked at the Auditor General's recommendations for the Environment ministry. These appear, by the way, in the October 2008 report, and specifically I'm looking at page 382. These are recommendations that have been raised in the past that have not been successfully met or implemented. Two of the ones that are raised here, in fact, have been raised multiples times. One of them originally was from the 1998-99 report, and that is about enhancing approval systems. Now, in '98-99 there wasn't a system of numbering or of grading and giving priority to certain Auditor General recommendations; they all sort of came out the same. So this doesn't have a number on it, but that doesn't mean that it wasn't important.

This is appearing on page 159 of the '98-99 report under Environmental Protection. "It is recommended that the Department of Environment enhance the systems that support the Approvals process. Attention should be directed to issues of management information and data completeness." Now, this recommendation was originally brought forward, as I said, in '98-99. It was repeated in 2000-2001. It was repeated again in 2004-05. So three times the Auditor General has followed up and said that there has been unsatisfactory progress on implementing this.

It is specific to financial security for land disturbances because what this was talking about was the environment management system, that automated system that supports an approvals process. Staff have to rely on this environment management system, and the information has to be complete and accurate and timely. The work

at the time suggested that there were a number of issues that had not been completely addressed around the timeliness of the approval process.

There was no system, for example, to track how long it takes to process an approval, and some approvals cannot be reviewed on the EMS document viewer. That has yet to be accomplished. And I thought: "Well, okay. I'm being asked to approve money to a department to operate for a period of three months." But when I go back and look at performance and I say, "Well, is there anything outstanding there that I should be bringing to attention and saying: you need to do this before I, you know, can support your request for additional money?" there's an example of it.

Second example was in 2002-03. On page 103 was a recommendation. We're now numbering the recommendations, so it's recommendation 12 recommending "that the Ministry of Environment implement an integrated information system to track contaminated sites in Alberta." Well, Mr. Chairman, what goes around comes around because I'm pretty sure – well, yes, it would be just yesterday that I asked a question in this House about contaminated sites and how taxpayers were now going to get the honour and the privilege of forking out \$30 million more than they did the day before to help pay for contaminated sites that oil and gas companies had walked away from. So here was the beginning of this recommendation that has yet to be implemented to the satisfaction of the Auditor General and is turning up again in the October '08 recommendations. That originally, as I said, came up in '02-03, and the recommendation was made again in '05-06.

Then there are a series of other ones that were brought forward in '05-06, which tells me that there was a concentration on that department in that year, and most of these are around drinking water. I'm just guessing that this is probably following along on Walkerton and the one in Saskatchewan, wherever that was. On page 37 we've got recommendation 1 recommending

that the Department of Environment make its system to issue approvals and registrations more effective by:

- Strengthening supporting processes such as training, manuals, checklists, and quality control . . .
- Ensuring that applications are complete and legislatively compliant,
- Documenting important decisions in the application and registration processes,
- Processing applications and conversions promptly,
- Maintaining consistency in the wording of approvals and registrations across the province, and
- Following up short-term conditions in approvals.

Environment issues place-based drinking water approvals. Registered facilities follow a provincial code of practice. Mechanisms to promote consistency in approval writing.

3:50

Their findings were: training, support materials, and mentoring can improve; template not updated for five years; a quality assurance function would promote best practices in approval writing; resourcing issues have caused backlogs; not all applications were legislatively compliant or complete. It goes on for several pages. As I say, that recommendation has still not been dealt with to the satisfaction of the Auditor General. It continues to be noted in outstanding recommendations, which means that they're outstanding; they haven't been fulfilled.

When we look at page 43, we see a key recommendation, and that's recommendation 2, that the department

improve its drinking water inspection processes by:

- Applying the same inspection frequency targets to all water-works regulated by the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act,

- Ensuring inspectors receive sufficient training in waterworks systems and operations,
- Revising documentation tools and practices, including making them more risk focused, and
- Informing operators promptly of inspection results, ensuring operators respond appropriately, and concluding on each inspection.

That's a highlighted recommendation. So it's a key recommendation, meaning very, very important and a high priority, coming from the Auditor General, and that is still outstanding.

We go to page 49 of the report of '05-06. Again, recommendation 3, a numbered recommendation, that the department update its strategies to deal with the Province's needs for certified water treatment operators.

Going to page 52, a key recommendation, recommendation 4: improve the information systems used to manage its drinking water . . . by:

- Updating EMS forms and improving reporting capacity,

Where have we heard that one before? That would be in '98-99.

- Co-ordinating regional, district, and personal information systems to avoid overlap and encourage best practice, and
- Using data to improve program effectiveness and efficiency.

Moving on, we had recommendation 5, which is actually not leaping off the page at me here, page 48, recommending that the department

at the district level expand its communication with partners involved in drinking water matters.

Volume 2, page 84, recommendation 28, that the department improve its system to regulate water well drilling by:

- Ensuring that drillers and drilling companies meet approval requirements;
- Implementing controls to ensure that water well drilling reports are:
 - received on time,
 - complete and accurate, and
 - accurately entered into the Groundwater Information System.

There we had six unmet recommendations on drinking water, one on water well drilling and then on contaminated sites and financial security for land disturbances. So a fair number of things that are outstanding, and the requirements have not been met there.

I realize, Mr. Chairman, that my time is running out, and I will endeavour to negotiate with my colleagues to get back on the speaking list again because I think one of the great concerns that Albertans have identified to me and to other members and to the government is the issue of water: clean, safe, fresh drinking water for Albertans.

Then we look at a request from the government, "Please, give us more money in order to operate," essentially unscrutinized at this point, because once we grant that interim money, they're good to go until the end of June. They have enough operating money there. Yet this issue of largest concern to people, which is drinking water, fresh water for Albertans to use, Albertans first, there are a number of recommendations from the Auditor General that have not been met, nor could I find – and perhaps the minister can point it out to me – any reasoning from the department as to why those recommendations are still outstanding. This was as of October 2008, so it's not as though I'm way out of date on this. Yes, some of the recommendations have been brought forward from past years, but they continue to be unmet as of October 2008. I think the concern that's expressed to me is our capacity to . . . [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] Shoot.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will get back up

and rejoin the debate here. I want to get back to a few general points and a few general questions if I can at this point, and depending on how long it takes me to elucidate the specificities of my obfuscation or whatever, I may get onto some specifics here in this round as well.

I was talking earlier about the notion that we wouldn't even need to be doing a debate on interim supply if we could just fix a date on an annual basis that the budget would be brought down and fix it about two weeks after we come into this House so that we could debate the budget and pass it in time for it to take effect at the beginning of the fiscal year. What a revolutionary concept. However, that hasn't been done yet, so we are in debate on interim supply, a debate that brings with it the issue of the granting of money without a sufficient amount of detail on the amounts being debated. We have \$10 billion worth of very vague spending requests here.

We know that Advanced Education and Technology, for instance, needs \$744,300,000 to get it through the next few weeks in expense and equipment/inventory purchases and another \$34,900,000 in nonbudgetary disbursements. We know that Culture and Community Spirit needs \$97.2 million for expense and equipment/inventory purchases and \$300,000 for nonbudgetary disbursements. We know that Energy needs almost \$134 million. We know that Education needs \$1.142 billion. We know that Health and Wellness needs \$3,238,000,000 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases and another \$4.8 million for capital investment, but we don't really know any of the specifics involved there. We just know that Health and Wellness needs a lot of money because Health and Wellness always needs a lot of money because it's a very expensive portfolio. We know that Housing and Urban Affairs needs \$133,100,000, but all we know that it needs that for is as an expense. We don't even have the line "expense and equipment/inventory purchases" there. And on it goes. It all tallies up, totals up, to about \$10 billion.

It's very difficult to get into any kind of meaningful debate. I think the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has conceded as much in some of his comments here this afternoon. It's very difficult to get into any kind of meaningful debate about these significant monetary amounts when there's no information to go along with it, no detail.

Another point that has to be made is about the lack of budget management, which was highlighted yesterday when we debated the second supplementary supply request of the year. We know going forward that whatever comes down on April 7 will be a budget that will be somewhat different from recent years for no other reason than the government has already admitted that there will be a deficit in fiscal '09-10 and we have significant declines in revenue from oil and gas.

I'm going to throw out some questions and see if we get any answers back today or any time before April 7. It's not likely, but one should live in hope, especially on a Thursday afternoon.

4:00

What is the estimated deficit for the 2009-10 fiscal year? [interjection] The minister of health just said: there's the \$64 million question. However, hon. member, I'm willing to bet that the deficit is going to be more than \$64 million. Call it a crazy hunch.

How does this interim supply reflect the current economic situation? Now, there's a question I would love to know the answer to before we start debating the budget. How does this \$10 billion here, the upfront money, the down payment on our operations for the year, reflect the current economic situation?

I mean, I leaf through this skinny little book, and I see that Employment and Immigration needs \$255,800,000 for expense and

equipment/inventory purchases. I note that we debated some money for Employment and Immigration in supplementary supply yesterday. I note that the Minister of Employment and Immigration gave some answers yesterday that indicated, not surprisingly, that there were areas where extra spending needed to be undertaken by his department because of the change in our economic conditions and the subsequent job losses, the need for more retraining money and things like that. But I cannot tell from the interim supply document how the \$255,800,000 request from Employment and Immigration in interim supply reflects the current economic situation. I would like to know that. I would like to know that specifically of the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

I'd like to know specifically from the health minister how the \$3.2 billion interim request in his department plus the \$4.8 million in capital investment reflects the current economic situation. What does the \$4.8 million in capital investment mean? It's a very small percentage. It's about 1 per cent of the amount of capital grants in his department, in his ministry, that the finance minister told us last week in the Q3 fiscal update have been delayed, are being postponed, are being rescheduled and reprioritized and all of that.

She said at the time that those repositioning and reprioritization issues from capital grants are based on the notion that for one reason or another that was money they intended to spend on capital projects this year that they just couldn't get around to. I don't know. They couldn't get the building permit. They couldn't find the guy to pour the concrete pad. I'm not sure what it was, you know, but the point remains that whatever the reason for not getting around to it this year, there's going to be one heck of a lot less incentive to getting around to it next year, when there isn't nearly as much money to play with, I would think.

I hear this government talk repeatedly and I've heard the finance minister talk often about the notion that this government is going to continue with its infrastructure spending. I hear them talk about it in terms of regarding infrastructure spending as an economic stimulus program that is already well under way, that anticipated this downturn, I guess. But when I hear talk about infrastructure spending, it sounds to me like roads and sewer lines and waterlines and that sort of thing. It doesn't sound like there's a tremendous commitment to capital projects involving, you know, hospital facilities that the people of this province need: long-term care, continuing care, assisted living, whatever level you want it to operate at. There doesn't seem to be the commitment to involve itself in economically stimulating infrastructure or capital projects, built things, public works for the public good that the public of Alberta need, that you can't make out of asphalt or gravel, and I would like to know about that.

Do these estimates include the department belt-tightening that the finance minister stated was necessary for the upcoming fiscal year, or will cuts not be reflected in spending until the budget is released? Well, really, Mr. Chairman, there's no way to tell just looking at these documents – is there? – whether there's any cutting of spending happening or not. Can't tell. I'd like to know. I'd like to have known before this.

I come back to the point that I made earlier, that it doesn't really matter whether you bring the budget in on April 7 or you bring the budget in on February 24 or you put it off until August, you know. The day you bring the budget down, things are still going to be uncertain and unstable because that's just the nature of the times we live in. You've got to make the call or get out of the phone booth. Unfortunately, when you've got a government to run, you've got to make the call because they need the money.

How does the list of capital investment reflect the third-quarter fiscal update's stated reprofiling and rescheduling of capital grants?

[Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired] How could that time have flown by so soon? I leave it to others.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms Blakeman: Well, how lucky can you get? I get another chance at this. I would have thought there would be all those people that wanted to get up and speak about this budget.

Mr. Taylor: You were about to shoot something when the clock went off, weren't you?

Ms Blakeman: Well, no. The "shoot" was an expression of my disappointment that I couldn't keep going.

Okay. I'm going back again following on my concept that if I'm going to give somebody more money, I'm going to look at how well they're doing with the money I gave them last time.

Going back to the October 2008 Auditor General's report. Now, of course, you will remember that there was a very large report done in here on climate change, Alberta's response to climate change. There were a number of recommendations that were made as a result of this. Let me be clear: I'm not finding fault with the Department of Energy for not having accomplished all of this because, frankly, they've had six months, and I wouldn't require that of them. It does tell you the amount of work that needs to be done.

Let me just take a step back here. I think one of my concerns and one of the things that I would like to know is if the money that we're allocating here today is going to go to a change in direction. Because what I've seen from this department is that it's not about protecting the environment; it is about sort of getting out of the way of the Department of Energy and what the Department of Energy wishes to do. I think we need to change that.

We need to refocus so that our Department of Environment is about protecting the environment: first of all, for Albertans, the people; secondly, for our biosphere, literally the environment that we have here, our wetlands and our water, and allowing those particular bioenvironments to stay healthy; and third, for an economic development.

Don't mistake me and don't get all upset and go run around saying: oh, the Member for Edmonton-Centre got up and said, you know, that we should stop all oil and gas and nonrenewable natural resource development in the province. That's not what I'm saying. But we do need to put a focus on protecting the environment while that development happens. In some cases maybe the development might have to take a step aside while we put some protections in place.

I've already identified water as a key concern of Albertans. It has been something where the department has not met the requirements and met the recommendations. That's about an attest auditing. That's about recording what you've done and how you've spent the money. As we start to move into systems audit, it is about: did you get value for money? Did you accomplish for the money you had what you said you were trying to do? It's a much more complicated way of looking at it, but ultimately it gives us tools as legislators to be better able to answer the questions of our constituents as to: did we get what we thought we were paying for? Did we get it? Did we get healthier babies and fewer low-weight babies? Did we get that? Well, you might have to do a number of things to achieve that. Did we get, you know, clean drinking water for every Albertan? That may be harder to achieve than it sounds at the first go.

We did have a systems audit done on Alberta's response to climate change. I would have to say that the biggest thing that comes out of this is that we don't know because we are not keeping track of things well enough and monitoring things well enough to be able to give ourselves a benchmark from which to measure that.

4:10

Some recommendations were set out by the Auditor General, in this case recommendation 9. Again, it's a numbered recommendation, so that's a serious recommendation. It recommends some areas of improvement for the department.

- establishing overall criteria for selecting climate-change actions.
- creating and maintaining a master implementation plan for the actions necessary to meet the emissions-intensity target for 2020 and the emissions-reduction target for 2050.
- corroborating – through modelling and other analysis – that the actions chosen by the ministry [actually] result in Alberta being on track for achieving its targets for 2020 and 2050.

So what we're learning here is that we actually can't tell how well we're doing in moving forward on climate change.

The government did not consistently consider cost-effectiveness when it decided to establish climate-change programs to fulfill the 2002 Plan.

I'm looking at the bottom of page 98 in the October 2008 AG report. It did consider cost-effectiveness for the energy retrofit program and for the Specified Gas Emitters program . . . [but the cost] of Me First! and the Bioenergy programs were known at the planning stages, but the amount of emissions reductions expected at the planning stage . . . was not documented.

So we have no way of knowing.

We've started implementation plans, but we don't know how we're progressing along with that. We don't have the overall criteria for selecting the projects to fulfill the 2002 plan and haven't developed overall criteria for selecting projects to fulfill the 2008 strategy. Well, that's gone.

The ministry does not know the best route to achieve reductions. The actions will achieve target, but we can't corroborate them. Major actions were not modelled, and where they did model action, it wasn't included in the plan.

We have an additional numbered recommendation 10, that "for each major action in the 2008 Climate Change Strategy, the Ministry of Environment evaluate the action's effect in achieving Alberta's climate change goals."

Recommendation 11 is that the ministry "improve the reliability, comparability and relevance of its public reporting on Alberta's success and costs incurred in meeting climate-change targets."

If I could recommend this to anybody that's trying to track along, you can download this from the Auditor General's site and read it yourself. It's a good way of understanding where we're at and gives us some standards to measure the progress of the department.

Here we have a department that is requesting \$63 million plus a million dollars in nonbudgetary disbursements. We've been told by the minister, in response to one of my questions earlier today, that there's no front-end loading on this, that most of their projects just roll through, and that this \$64 million plus a million dollars is going to be enough to take them through. But we have no sense of this and, as a number of my colleagues have noted, no details to understand what exactly is going to be done in those first three months. Actually, by the time the budget will be approved, now by the end of May, two full months will have passed in which we did not know what the government was going to be doing.

The reaction I usually get about this point from members of the government is: well, hang on; we have a three-year process here, so you can tell what's going on if you go back and look at the three-year budgeting process. Yes, she said cautiously, but every time I look at that, it has shifted so much that you really cannot compare year to year. One of the ways of watching that is the performance measurements, which, again, absolutely disappear. You look and there's a whole new series of performance measurements which all say that there is no benchmark because they're developing it. The

idea of this three-year rolling budget is one that we should be attempting, but we've got to try a little harder to get closer to actually sticking to it.

Of course, we've now had a huge change in our finances. Part of what I'm trying to dig out from everything I can read about the department's plans is: will this change in the economy, will the change in the price per barrel of oil affect what the Department of Environment is going to be doing to protect our environment? How are they going to end up moving forward? Will there be cuts in what the department is going to be doing during this fiscal year?

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Taylor: And the hits just keep on coming, Mr. Chairman. Up again. When the little beeper went off last time, I was just starting to ask about the third-quarter fiscal update and the reprofiling and the rescheduling of capital grants therein and asking if we can draw any kind of relationship or correlation. I'm hoping I will get an answer back from somebody on the government side sometime before the budget, but not holding my breath, on how the list of capital investments in the interim supply reflects the third-quarter fiscal update's reprofiling and rescheduling of capital grants. Will there be a significant slowdown in capital spending in the upcoming years? How much of this interim spending, how much of this \$10 billion, is the result of the budget being delayed? I know the easy answer – all of it – but in real terms how much of this spending is as a result of the budget being delayed?

Here are a couple of things I'd like to know. Given that we are in such perilous times, such unpredictable times that the government has had to put off the budget until early April, will the government be reducing travel expenditures and hosting expenses and vehicle allowances and nice-to-do, nice-to-have things like that, fluffy, perky things that perhaps ought not to be indulged in when times are not good? I wonder if we'll get an answer to that. This is something I would love to know. This is something I would love for someone on the government side . . .

Mr. MacDonald: The details on the health care budget?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, that, too. I'd like to know that.

This is what I'd love to know if somebody on the government side of the House will spill this before budget day: what kind of cost-cutting advice was given to all these ministers from the Finance minister? Were there any specific areas highlighted for reducing expenditures? Do we see any of that reflected in these interim reports?

Ms Blakeman: Is that what he's waiting for with bated breath?

Mr. Taylor: Is somebody waiting for something with bated breath?

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. The minister of health.

Mr. Taylor: The minister of health is waiting for something with bated breath. How can I help him?

Mr. MacDonald: The budget.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, he's waiting for the budget with bated breath. The minister of health says he doesn't know how much money he's going to have. Gosh, I'd have to ask him back: when does he get to find that out? Do you get any clue before budget day?

Mr. Liepert: April 7.

Mr. Taylor: April 7. So what do you do as a cabinet minister between now and April 7? Do you just kind of sit there, you know, twiddling your thumbs and wondering what's going to come? You rely on interim supply, obviously, to pay the bills between now and then, so when all of this is said and done and when we're finished asking questions and you're finished not answering them, you're going to have, Minister, your \$3,242,800,000 to get you through until the new Visa card comes in the mail – I mean until the budget comes – but you're still not going to know what the situation is for the new fiscal year. What are your spending plans? I will put this to the health minister: what are your spending plans for this money, for the \$3,242,800,000, the \$3,238,000,000 in expense and equipment/inventory purchases and the \$4,800,000 in capital investment? What are your spending plans for that money from the time this gets approved?

4:20

Mr. Liepert: Avastin.

Mr. Taylor: It's not all going to go to Avastin, and you know that very well.

Mr. Liepert: Part of it will.

Mr. Taylor: Part of it will, but one would think a fairly small part of it. One would think a fairly small part of it. Do you stay the course with the spending that you've been doing? Do you cut back? Do you save some of this in case it turns out that you're going to need it because you've had your spending cut in some other area as your budget has been reduced? What kinds of thoughts go through the health minister's mind, I wonder, when he's in this situation, when you're heading out to get yourself and your department through the next few weeks until we've finished the budget debate, till we have the budget? I'm very curious – very curious – as to what that would be like. I would love to be a fly on the wall, you know. I would love to be a fly on the wall.

You know, you look at the health budget, for instance, and I keep coming back to the \$400 million in capital grants reprofiled from the '08-09 budget. What was that? What's being delayed? Are we going to get three floors out of a six-floor expansion of the Peter Lougheed hospital in Calgary? Is that going to go ahead or not? Is this going to have an impact on construction of the new south Calgary hospital? Are things going to come to a grinding halt, or are they going to slow down there? What other hospitals in what other communities, Grande Prairie for instance, are right off the books as a result of this or delayed? Who gets to move to the back of the line again is really the question. There are many health facilities that are under review – Fort Saskatchewan, Grande Prairie, the south Calgary campus, the Lougheed expansion – and there's \$400 million in delayed projects, so you've got to figure something's not going ahead that we thought was going to go ahead.

Now, if I can refer back to the example of the city that I know best, Calgary, you think back to the experience with the expansion of the Rockyview general hospital and how they built that. They opened all the new beds, and then they closed all the old beds because they didn't have the staff to staff the expanded facility. So

they basically moved the patients from the old beds into the new beds, moved the staff from the old beds into the new beds, closed down the old beds with a net loss of five or six beds. When all that capital money was spent on the expansion of that phase of the Rockyview, we ended up with a smaller hospital than we had before we started building.

I'd love to know how that happened or why. I would love to know because, I mean, a hospital is not like putting a new granite countertop on your counter in the kitchen. It's not something you just do in a day or so. It's not like laying new carpet, right? It takes a while to build a hospital. It takes a very long while to build a hospital in Calgary, and it takes a fairly long time to expand a hospital.

The Calgary health region, which no longer exists because of the restructuring that we're going through, came to the realization four or five years ago now that: "Holy bleep. We don't have enough beds for our population. We'd better start building some more hospital facilities." They embarked on an ambitious and unquestionably expensive program to try and expand the Rockyview, to try and expand the Peter Lougheed, to put the new Sheldon Chumir urgent care centre downtown, to put urgent care centres in various other parts of the city, to do a pretty significant rebuild on part of the Foothills hospital. All that, Mr. Chair, was just to get us through till the new hospital opened.

The Chair: It's 4:25. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3), which requires that the Committee of Supply rise and report prior to the time of adjournment, the Committee of Supply shall now and rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, the general revenue fund, and the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Does Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:27 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to March 05, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft., adjourned)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
- 18 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 9, 2009

Issue 11

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 9, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance with our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow it. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I would invite all here to join in and to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the consul general of Greece, Mr. Georgios Ayfantis. Mr. Ayfantis is on his first official visit to Alberta, and I was pleased to be able to host a lunch with him today. As he pointed out, one thing we do share is that we're both great places for tourism. With the weather outside I know the hon. members would like to perhaps be visiting Greece today. There are almost 12,000 Albertans of Hellenic descent, and they help enrich the Alberta culture. Every summer Calgary holds a Greek festival to promote Hellenic culture with food, dance, and music. I'd ask Mr. Ayfantis to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, des leaders de la communauté francophone de l'Alberta. Ils ont participé ce matin à la cérémonie dans la rotonde de la Législature à l'occasion des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, une célébration nationale annuelle de l'histoire et de la culture françaises.

Je suis heureux de vous présenter les membres exécutifs de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. L'association, connue sous l'acronyme l'ACFA, est l'organisme porte-parole des francophones. L'ACFA a son bureau provincial à Edmonton et chapeaute 14 bureaux régionaux ou cercles locaux à travers la province. Le gouvernement de l'Alberta est fier de la relation positive qu'il a construite avec l'ACFA, et ensemble nous sommes engagés à améliorer le bien-être et l'autonomie des francophones en Alberta. Présents parmi nous aujourd'hui sont Mme Dolorèse Nolette, vice-présidente de l'ACFA, représentante du nord-ouest; Mme Jeanne Robinson et Reed Gauthier, représentants du nord-est;

Mme Carole Anne Patenaude; représentante de la région du centre, Mme Omayra Issa; et M. Denis Perreux, directeur général.

Les accompagnants pour cette journée spéciale à la Législature sont M. Denis Tardif, Cindie LeBlanc, et Manon Hamel, membres de mon équipe au Secrétariat francophone. Je leur demanderais de se lever et être reconnus par l'Assemblée.

Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

Merci, M. le Président.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a number of leaders from Alberta's francophone community who participated this morning in a ceremony in the Legislature rotunda as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, a national two-week celebration of French culture and history.

I am pleased to introduce executive members of the French Canadian Association of Alberta. The association, commonly known as the ACFA, is the provincial organization representing all francophones. The ACFA has a provincial secretariat in Edmonton and 14 regional, or affiliate, chapters across the province. The Alberta government is proud of the positive relations it has built with the ACFA and commits to supporting initiatives that will enhance the well-being and self-reliance of French-speaking Albertans. I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: Vice-President Mrs. Dolorèse Nolette, representing the northwest; Mrs. Jeanne Robinson and Reed Gauthier, representing the northeast; Mrs. Carole-Anne Patenaude; representing the central region, Mrs. Omayra Issa; accompanied by Director General Mr. Denis Perreux.

Also joining them on this special day at the Legislature are members of my staff at the Francophone Secretariat: Mr. Denis Tardif, executive director; Ms Cindie LeBlanc, assistant director; Ms Manon Hamel, community liaison officer for southern Alberta.

I would ask all of the members of the Assembly to give these guests a very warm welcome to our Legislature. [As submitted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is also Commonwealth Day. All hon. members will have on their desks a message from Her Majesty the Queen, head of the Commonwealth.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth, which is comprised of 53 member states and over a third of the world's population. I'd like to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly three directors of the Edmonton branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society of Canada who are seated in your gallery. These individuals work diligently in carrying out the important work of the society in Alberta and across the globe. They are Major Alexander Tsang, Mrs. Sheri Paquette, and Reverend Joshua Phillpotts. I'd ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young gentleman with a genuine interest in Alberta politics, and that is Mr. Dawson Wikkerink. He is seated in the members' gallery. I've had the pleasure of meeting Dawson on several occasions both in Lethbridge and in Raymond. Dawson and his family, Wayne and Anne and his brother J.R., live and farm just 15 kilometres outside of Lethbridge. Dawson is currently in grade

3 at Fleetwood Bawden school and has been a keen follower of our political process. In fact, when it's his turn for sharing with his classmates, he provides regular updates of our political processes, including both the recent leadership and the general election. I know that farming is in Dawson's blood, and so is politics.

A memory that I will always cherish. I had made a comment to the media when I was in Lethbridge, correctly put by the media, that we sold our cow herd and that I kind of missed early spring, you know, when the calves are running around the field with tails up in the air, really spirited. He was kind enough to send me a picture to my office of their first-born calf last year. Dawson, I would welcome you and your dad, Wayne Wikkerink. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a wonderful group of 37 grade 6 students from Brander Gardens elementary school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students are their teachers, Natalie Gago-Estevés and Daniel Lemieux, along with teacher aide Mrs. Carroll. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today a number of Alberta Education employees whose innovative work on Speak Out, the Alberta student engagement initiative, has gained momentum across Alberta and high praise with education stakeholders, parents, the media, and, most importantly, the students themselves. Seated in the members' gallery and representing Alberta Education are Jennifer Keller, director of student engagement; Litzy Baeza, manager of student engagement; Sandra Dyal, Speak Out forums co-ordinator; Jamie Stewart, co-ordinator of student engagement; and Greg Kuzniuk, public affairs officer. These fine individuals are responsible for motivating Alberta's youth to participate in an ongoing province-wide forum on education, and they deserve the appreciation of the Assembly and all Albertans for raising the level of discussion in an engagement of our students. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups to introduce today. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 32 visitors from Boyle school, who are in all week for the School at the Leg. They are led by their parents and teachers Emily Thomson, Tracey Currie, Bonnie Antal, Karen Douglas, Cheryl Snyder, Curtis Gunderson, Dale Bencharsky, and grandpa Tom Ghostkeeper, who worked in this building for five years. I believe they're in the members' gallery behind me, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 14 visitors from the New Horizons seniors' club in Radway: Allan and Cecilia Holt, Norm West, Esther West, Lena Chykerda, Helen Kuchmak, Mike Halun, Alphie Delorme, Martha Delorme, Joy Langley, Nick Kuchmak, Harold Moffitt, Nestor Buryn, and Ruby Burkosky. They will be entering and leaving during question period, but I'd like to acknowledge their presence here today and welcome them to the Legislature.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a number of very special guests from my constituency. They sang for us here this morning during the symbolic Franco-Albertan flag-raising ceremony in the Legislature rotunda as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, the national two-week celebration of French culture and history. It is with great pleasure that I introduce the grade 6 students from l'école Père-Lacombe, who I believe are in the public gallery: teacher M. Mathieu Brosseau-Tremblay and parent helpers Mme Lise Roy-Maxwell and Mme Adeline Viens. I'd ask them all to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this House 24 very brilliant students from Patricia Heights elementary school and from my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. Accompanying them is their teacher, Mrs. Beverly Oldford, and parents Mrs. Angela McEwen, Mrs. Lisa Hamdon, Mrs. Tina Choucair, and Mrs. Krista Leddy. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two introductions. My first is to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two representatives from the University of Calgary: Mr. Gary Durbeniuk and Mr. Brian Wik. Gary is the vice-president of development at the University of Calgary. In 2007-08 his department raised over \$82 million to support scholarships, bursaries, research, and new learning spaces at the University of Calgary. Brian Wik, University of Calgary's senior director of government relations, is responsible for maintaining effective working relationships with the provincial government. I would like to thank them both for their ongoing commitment to the University of Calgary and to students in Alberta and abroad. They're seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

It is also an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly members of the Council of Alberta University Students, or CAUS. They are an advisory group of presidents and vice-presidents of students' unions from universities around the province who are meeting with the members of the Assembly all this week. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask that they would each stand as I call their name to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They are Beverly Eastham, CAUS chair and recently re-elected vice-president external at the University of Alberta; Jenn Prosser, CAUS vice-chair and U of L Students' Union vice-president academic; Janelle Morin, University of Alberta Students' Union president; Dalmy Baez, University of Calgary Students' Union president; Alastair MacKinnon, University of Calgary Students' Union vice-president external; Lauren Webber, recently elected as external commissioner at the University of Calgary and daughter of the Member for Calgary-Foothills; Adam Vossepoel, University of Lethbridge Students' Union president; Kendall Yamagishi, University of Lethbridge

Students' Union academic commissioner; and Duncan Wojtaszek, executive director of CAUS. They are now standing in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that you give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Stanley Swensen, seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. Mr. Swensen is a memorial counsellor for Remco Memorials in Didsbury, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. He earned his doctorate of veterinary medicine in 1971 from Western College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan. What a great school. He is also a graduate of Rocky Mountain College, biblical studies, where he earned his bachelor of arts in education. He and his wife, Linda, have two daughters, Cynthia Dawn and Amanda Jane. He's joining us today to get a better look at how things operate in this Legislature. I'd ask that Mr. Swensen please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and all members of the Assembly one of the true statesmen of Alberta business, chairman of the board of the ATCO Group of companies, truly a family that shares with many, many communities in Alberta. It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Ron Southern. Would Ron stand and please accept the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Legislative Assembly my brother John MacDonald and his wife, Pam MacDonald. John is a farmer, and Pam is a teacher. They're visiting Alberta for an entire week. Last week they were in Calgary to attend the annual meeting of the Canadian Horticultural Council. John is a past president of that council. They are proud parents of three children. They're expecting their first grandchild at the end of May, and they're very much looking forward to being grandparents. They have already risen. They are in the public gallery. I would now ask that hon. members give them the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many brave and determined people come through the galleries to watch the proceedings, none more brave or determined than those I'm going to introduce to you today and to all members of the Assembly. First is Lorna Chandler, whose husband died in a farm accident. The fatality was the subject of a recent inquiry. I'd ask Lorna to stand. Second is Philippa Thomas, who is here with her husband, Bruce. Philippa is permanently disabled because of a farm accident. With them are two tireless crusaders on this issue, Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop. I'd ask them all to rise. Please give them a warm reception. Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two engaged and concerned citizens of our province who I met with earlier today and who have presented additional signatures to a petition originally presented to the Legislature in August of 2006. My guests are Mrs. Diane Martin, president of the Alberta Lymphedema Association, and Mrs. Theresa Storm, a Calgarian who suffers from primary lymphedema. Earlier today I met with Diane and Theresa to discuss the closing of the only clinic in southern Alberta which treats non cancer-related lymphedema patients. I want to thank these two individuals for coming to the Legislature to raise their concerns today. I would now ask that they both rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have as my guests seven individuals representing Women in Black Edmonton, an organization that opposes violence in all its forms, whether it be in the home, in our communities or cities, or full-scale military action. In 1975 the United Nations proclaimed March 8 to be International Women's Day, a day on which women around the world should commemorate their struggles and celebrate their achievements in attaining justice and equality for women throughout the world. Women in Black Edmonton were the recipients of the Salvos peace award from Project Ploughshares for 2006. My guests are seated in the members' gallery and I would ask them to rise as I call their names: Marilyn Gaa, Sarah Miller, Susan MacEachran, Jean Ure, Anna Radyo, Peggy Folinsbee, and Barbara Sykes. I would ask that they now receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Borrowing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the midst of a boom Alberta was spending 23 per cent more per capita than the national average. Now, in the midst of a bust, the Premier is thinking about taking out a loan rather than taking a serious look at the rampant, often wasteful spending this PC government has gotten so used to. To the Premier. Never mind the great rates at the bank. The fact is that putting Alberta back into debt is against the law in this province. Is the Premier planning to do away with the Fiscal Responsibility Act?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is picking up on a headline that was in the *Edmonton Journal* following a discussion I had with a financial analyst Sunday morning. I put forward the situation where the province of Alberta has a triple-A credit rating – we can't have a better credit rating than the country of Canada, so we will always stay at the triple-A credit rating – and we also have \$6 billion cash in the bank to spend on capital. My simple question was that if we were to borrow against the \$6 billion, keep that cash in the bank but borrow against it at very reasonable rates or even still borrow cheaper than what we're getting for return in interest on the cash in the bank, why wouldn't we do it? To me, I think that's a good business decision.

Mr. Taylor: Gee, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. Maybe because it's illegal.

If Alberta is going to be taking out loans, does that mean there

isn't enough in the sustainability fund and the capital account to cover your expenses, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, first of all, they're not my expenses; it's providing programs for people in this province. The sustainability fund is different. Again, this is not truly the whole understanding of the opposition. There are two funds that we have in the bank: capital, which is for construction of infrastructure – roads, schools, hospitals – and the sustainability fund, which is in place to cushion the dramatic drop in the price of oil and gas.

Ms Blakeman: We know what it is. It was our idea.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, if it was your idea, then you should know more about it.

What happens is that the sustainability fund stays in place, and we will draw on those savings as necessary if oil and gas prices do not increase over the next year or two, and the reason being that we always were clear with Albertans. This is like putting money between the mattresses. We'll draw on it when our revenue drops. That's very good planning, and the only jurisdiction in North America that actually has cash in the bank to do that.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, he's talking about using somebody else's money from somebody else's mattress. That would be the taxpayers of Alberta, ultimately, who are going to have to pay this money back with interest.

Has anyone in the government made a serious attempt to spend smarter before the Premier started thinking out loud about taking out a loan so that he doesn't have to take his fingers out of the cookie jar?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, complete misessaging there on behalf of the person asking the question. This is for capital. What a good opportunity to finally catch up with the roads and the schools and the hospitals we need at one-third or even half of the cost we were paying in this high inflationary period that we just went through. It makes sense. Let's throw some figures. If we're getting, let's say, 3 per cent on the money in the bank, and we can borrow at 1 per cent and make 2 per cent on the money in the bank, man, I think that's a good business decision.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has failed once again to protect a vulnerable young child in their custody. The government's pretense of not holding a public inquiry as an excuse to protect the child's identity rings hollow. It's too little too late for this child. To the Premier: to honour the memories of the three children most recently killed or critically injured while in custody of the ministry of children's services as well as to provide some degree of closure for the parents and family whose children were apprehended, will the Premier conduct a complete and transparent public inquiry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to the families, both the birth families and also the thousands of foster families that open their doors, their homes, to foster children in this province. This is a matter that the minister is investigating thoroughly. There is legislation in place to protect the identity of the children and the families. I think that legislation is appropriate.

Last year we gave the opposition an opportunity to sign a waiver and open up the files to those two individuals that are opposition critics. I believe maybe one had accepted; the other one refused. Then to use this House to now debate a situation that the minister is thoroughly investigating – once again, I have tremendous trust in our minister to investigate fully.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Premier, you and I are both grandparents. We can be empathetic. We can be sympathetic. But you're the one that needs to take action. Given the disproportionate number of aboriginal children taken into custody, what assurances can the Premier provide that he is working with his federal counterparts to support aboriginal families within their home so that fewer children will have to be placed into foster or kinship care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to working with aboriginal and Métis families, this province has shown great leadership in the country of Canada in terms of building relationships with the First Nations. In fact, we have entered into agreements with a number of chiefs that offer children's services on reservations. We believe it is culturally right, and we're working with the First Nations to do whatever we can to improve the quality of life and also reduce the number of children that are under the care of the government. It is much better for them to stay within their families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We have one recent aboriginal child dead, another barely hanging onto life in the Foothills hospital while his mother maintains a vigil. Why, having made the decision to apprehend these children, was more thought not given to the conditions of their placement, including support for and oversight of the foster parents?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the department has a very thorough way of assessing foster families. As was the occasion this weekend where the foster families got together for a celebration, one of the foster families said that, you know, 99 per cent of the time things go right. Occasionally, you do have a situation like this, but let's not point a finger at all of the foster families in this great province because without them we wouldn't have anyone to assist us in dealing with . . .

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Farm-related Accidents and Fatalities

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On average, there are 18 deaths and 1,500 significant injuries from farm-related accidents in Alberta every year, yet most farm workers have no protection under the Occupational Health and Safety Act or workers' compensation or the labour code because of the deliberate policy of this government. To the Premier: when will paid farm workers have the same protection under Occupational Health and Safety as other workers as recommended by a judge in a recent fatality inquiry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a judge has made a decision. The two ministers responsible – the minister of agriculture and also Employment and Immigration – are now looking at how to hold consultations and work with the public to see what we can do in this particular area. It'll take a little time to work out the various situations, but we're moving ahead.

Dr. Taft: It doesn't need consultations. There are off-the-shelf solutions in every other province in this country.

The fatality inquiry notes that neither the Department of Employment and Immigration nor the department of agriculture normally investigate farm deaths because, unbelievably, there's no legislation to require it. The judge noted that investigations of deaths allow for the incorporation of standards to prevent similar deaths in the future. Again to the Premier: will this government implement changes to automatically require investigation of all farm worker deaths?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the letter of the law, but I know that all deaths on family farms – and other farms are investigated if there's a death and an accident – are certainly investigated by the police. But this is looking at how we can work towards preventing not only deaths but accidents where, you know, there is loss of limb or some damage to one's individual health. As I said, progress is being made, and we'll be able to report to the House at the most appropriate time.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Enacting work standards for paid farm workers was done long ago in other provinces, so people are wondering why this government won't act. The Premier, who is key in this, failed to disclose the names of major supporters for his leadership campaign covering \$160,000 in donations. It's widely known that huge feedlot operators granted him an airplane and a helicopter for his leadership bid, but those donations were not filed. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that his government won't budge on this life-and-death policy because he doesn't want to offend the backers of his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member is bordering on a question of privilege, and I would ask him to withdraw those comments in the House or I shall proceed with one.

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

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's proposed Bill 19 will give them total and unchecked control over private property owned by Albertans, and if they dare to protest, this government would throw them in jail and fine them hundreds of thousands of dollars. Rural Albertans are furious that a rural Premier and his cabinet would propose such a Stalinist law. To the Premier: why won't you admit that this policy tramples the land rights of rural Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, looking back in history, we could have done things better in terms of acquiring land for public infrastructure or possibly right-of-ways for pipelines and electrical transmission lines as well. We want to work with landowners to ensure that they are treated fairly as we develop long-term corridors in the province of Alberta. The province will grow. We will require more electrical transmission lines. We want to make sure that when we're crossing someone's property, when we're buying land for the purchase of that public use, all landowners are treated fairly. That's the purpose of the bill.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Premier thinks that black is white.

Ordinary Albertans won't stand for a government that tramples on their rights even if they're threatened with prison time. This policy is a disgrace, landowners know it, and they're furious that this government would propose such measures. The government will rue the day that it betrayed rural Albertans. To the Premier: how can you claim to respect the 600,000 rural residents of this province when you're about to throw their land rights into the meat grinder?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's one thing to go to someone to write these questions and add offensive language, but this is a serious matter. We want to work with landowners to make sure that they are treated fairly. There is huge room for improvement in the way we buy land for public infrastructure, and we want to ensure that all landowners are treated fairly. It is a complex issue. In some cases a municipal government or the provincial government may want to almost, like, sterilize land for the future for years and not appropriately deal with the actual cost of that land because we've sterilized it for years on end. How do we deal with that situation fairly? That's the whole discussion through this Bill 19.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the principle of fairness is entirely absent from this bill. It empowers government to make more sweetheart deals with their P3 friends and their energy company buddies to build whatever they want on farmers' land. It might be a power line, a ring road, or a nuclear power plant. It is an authoritarian policy brought forward by an arrogant government that takes everyday rural Albertans for granted. To the Premier: will you do the right thing and withdraw Bill 19?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the power lines that are built through agricultural lands, farmers' own land, are there to supply energy to the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary. If you don't want to supply energy, just tell us; we won't have to build the transmission lines. But I don't know how you will get energy to the major centres without building new transmission lines, simple as that.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Legislation

The Speaker: Hon. members, nearly four minutes has transpired in this last set of questions. The chair is a bit concerned because the chair does not believe that this bill has been moved yet for second reading in this Assembly, and we're now debating bills in question period. Questions related to policy are one thing, but questions with specifics to a bill are quite another thing, particularly when the bill has not been moved for second reading.

The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Victims' Restitution and Compensation

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been issues raised recently about a perceived loophole in the government's new Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. My first question is not for the Premier but for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Could the minister provide some clarification regarding this concern?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been much discussion about this issue in the last couple of weeks in many places that I've been. I wanted to take the opportunity today to talk about Bill 50 with respect to what it achieves and compare that to what the Canadian Criminal Code tries to do. What we see is a Criminal Code that requires a conviction before property can be seized and sold. It also has a loophole where, if a person who owns property has their property seized, the police are not able to move forward and ask the Crown to make an application to sell the property. Our provincial legislation does not have that loophole and therefore is more effective.

Mr. Quest: My second question to the same minister. This law is also being questioned for its ability to seize property before a criminal conviction has been obtained. Aren't all Albertans considered innocent until proven guilty?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our legislation does not speak to innocence or guilt. Our legislation speaks to property. What we are doing with our legislation and with Bill 50 is nothing more than what a citizen in Alberta could do who felt that property should be seized and sold. We believe that if the citizens of Alberta think that something should be done, it's entirely appropriate for us to pass legislation to not only support them in what they would like to do but to assist them and in some cases step into their shoes and take the same steps.

Thank you.

Mr. Quest: No supplemental.

Opening of Calgary Courts Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of Justice advertised a political fundraiser to raise money for his re-election at the opening of the publicly funded Calgary courthouse in January 2008. This was just weeks before an election call. Although the event was put on the back burner, questions still remain. To the Deputy Premier: isn't it problematic that the most senior lawyer in our province was soliciting partisan donations at an event that was to be held at the Calgary courthouse on the same day as its grand opening?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must say that I recall the court opening. I don't recall doing any solicitation at all at that event.

Mr. Hehr: Well, fair enough. I'll table these documents after, but just to give you a highlight of them, you were soliciting donations through the PC Association. Nonetheless, I'll move on.

To the Minister of Justice: as that's the background, why did taxpayers pay for an event, the opening of the Calgary courthouse, that was being advertised by the Progressive Conservation Association as a fundraiser for the then Attorney General?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whenever we open a courthouse, we have an event. I know that as Minister of Justice I've been to a number of events where we've opened different clinics within courthouses, where we've opened different courthouses throughout the province. I know that opening the courthouse in Calgary was a very important event. From my department I'm advised that people believe the Calgary Courts Centre is one of the

top three courthouses on this continent right now. I think that it's important for a lot of people to have the opportunity to see it, and I believe that they did so on that day.

Mr. Hehr: I agree one hundred per cent with what the minister said. However, do you think it's wise, believing in the separation between government responsibility and court responsibilities, that the PC Association should be advertising fundraisers at the courthouse for an Attorney General, that are going for partisan goals?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that when courthouses are opened, we have an event. I can't speak to the specifics or the allegations that the hon. member has made.

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

2:10 Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to a recent report by the Educational Policy Institute some institutions may have to increase tuition by as much as 25 per cent in the future due to losses to their endowment funds and declining revenues as a result of the global economic slowdown. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Do you foresee adjusting Alberta's current tuition fee policy to help students and institutions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am somewhat familiar with the report that the Educational Policy Institute did. It was a national study. In Alberta we take great pride in the affordability framework which we put together in consultation with the students, and at this time there are no plans to change our current tuition fee policy. Currently students in Alberta pay somewhere under 25 per cent of the cost of their postsecondary education with Alberta taxpayers making a very good investment of upwards of 75 to 80 per cent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First supplemental to the same minister: how is the government supporting institutions in their effort to provide affordable student housing?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we're working with other members of this government in terms of their portfolio responsibilities in housing and students finance in my department. Affordable housing is one piece of the puzzle, and living on campus is one piece of the puzzle, but even living on campus is not necessarily desirable for all students. Some of our students are perhaps a little older when they come into our institutions than they used to be. Perhaps more of them are married with children. Perhaps the environment that they would like to live in while they attend our postsecondary institutions might not be conducive to on-campus. So we're looking at the whole package, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the

same minister: does the federal government's deferred maintenance program have potential to help Alberta students?

Mr. Horner: Very much so, Mr. Speaker. You know, our guests in the gallery would recognize that we've chatted about deferred maintenance at our postsecondary institutions many times over the last few years. It's certainly one of the priorities of our department. I have been in discussions with our federal counterparts on how we might be able to work together to reach mutual priorities on campus, which would include the deferred maintenance. That deferred maintenance, if we can utilize some of those federal dollars, obviously frees up dollars in other areas of the postsecondary budget that we hope would help the affordability framework for students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Long-term Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural seniors are concerned that they may have to leave the area that they have called home for most of their lives when they find that they are unable to live independently. The seniors may in fact be second generation to the community. To the minister of health: what commitment is the minister willing to make to rural seniors so that when they have need of a long-term care facility, they will not be moved far from family and community?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as the first part of that preamble, the member referred to living independently. That's exactly what we want to try to do: ensure that if seniors want to live independently, they can have the health care provision that they need to retain that ability to live independently.

Ms Pastoor: I think that, clearly, the minister of health knows exactly what I'm trying to say. What I'm saying is that they are going to need long-term care. That is not independent living. No matter how you cut it, they need care, and they need the facilities.

The minister has proposed incentives for private and nonprofit investment in long-term care facilities. Will there be a provision for a percentage of these facilities to be developed in rural Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what incentives the member is referring to. I'm not aware of any incentives. However, the provision of long-term care by nonprofit and private providers has been in this province I think probably as long as the province has been incorporated, and we don't intend to change that.

Ms Pastoor: In fact, extra beds were promised in that area.

On February 18 in the House the minister stated, "I would hope that we could provide the options that we wouldn't need this policy," referring to the first-bed policy. What details and timelines can the minister give Albertans that he's really taking action on this issue, that it hasn't been put on the back burner?

Mr. Liepert: Well, clearly, one of the timelines will be the provincial budget that comes on April 7, Mr. Speaker, to see what funding we have available in Alberta Health and Wellness. We are working diligently every day to ensure that seniors have the accommodations that they need in their community, and we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Pigeon Lake Fishery

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents continue to be concerned about the whitefish fishery at Pigeon Lake. They are worried about the stocking of walleye and the special walleye licence program. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is he doing to support Pigeon Lake's whitefish fishery?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the battle for Pigeon Lake continues. On the one side you have the walleye and their backers; on the other side, the whitefish. I say good. The fact that they're fighting each other – not the humans but the fish – is a good sign that our walleye stocking program has succeeded. We've succeeded in re-establishing a balanced fishery with all species of fish and better angling for humans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why has the minister allowed Pigeon Lake to be taken over by walleye to the detriment of whitefish, according to the long-time residents of the Pigeon Lake area?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there's something fishy about that question. The restocking of walleye has benefited the whitefish fishery. Before the restocking program the whitefish were quite small. Now our fall netting survey shows that the average weight of the whitefish has doubled between 2003 and 2007, and the average length has increased from 42 to 49 centimetres. In the battle for Pigeon Lake size matters, and the whitefish are rising to the occasion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. My constituents in the Pigeon Lake area ask the minister if he will consider scrapping the special walleye licence and allow a one-walleye-per-day limit for all anglers at Pigeon Lake.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar to know that I'm all for scrapping; scrapping between the whitefish and the walleye, that is. Opening up Pigeon Lake to an open season would quickly take us right back to where we were in the 1960s, with no walleye being left in the lake. The special walleye licence has made Pigeon Lake a premier walleye fishery and is helping to rebalance the population. Let the battle for Pigeon Lake continue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Infrastructure Costs

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In comments this weekend the Minister of Transportation indicated that construction costs have dropped 40 per cent in six months in the province of Alberta due to the recession. When I look back six months, I see the following: a \$650 million, 30-year contract to build schools and a \$1.4 billion, 30-year contract for the north Anthony Henday Drive. That's a total of over \$2 billion in P3 projects. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Does the hon. minister now see that tying Alberta taxpayers to a 30-year P3 payment at peak construction costs is a very bad deal for taxpayers?

Mr. Hayden: No. In fact, Mr. Speaker, to the contrary. If you look at the agreement on our website and the payment schedule for the maintenance over the period of the contract, it's tied to labour costs and the consumer price index. When things get tough, the price comes down, and we as Albertans enjoy that break.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, that is untrue.

Again to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given the falling construction costs, will the government still be giving out those sweetheart deals where you've got overrides, cost-plus contracts for 15 per cent and 20 per cent on those contracts? Those details are on your website. It's obvious that you haven't read them.

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, that's completely incorrect. The agreement and the schedule for payment is posted on the website, has been posted on the website since the P3 was first announced. It's there. It dictates that the costs for maintenance on an ongoing basis are tied to those factors that I mentioned earlier. When we go forward with a project, there are no sweetheart deals unless it's a sweetheart deal for Albertans. We get the best price and get efficient and effective delivery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would advise the Minister of Infrastructure to read closely the changeover portions of the contracts that he mentioned.

Again to the same minister: if the province can borrow publicly at just 1 per cent, as the Premier mused yesterday on radio, why is this government tying Alberta taxpayers to 30 years of high private-sector debt with these P3 contracts?

2:20

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it was referred to earlier today by the Premier that, in fact, we have money in place within our provincial coffers for sustainability funds for our capital for the future, and it is actually receiving interest rates that exceed those that we pay in our agreements. It's only good business on behalf of Albertans to make sure that we get the most effective, efficient delivery of our infrastructure in a timely manner.

The Speaker: During that last exchange one hon. member used the phrase "untrue," and another one used the word "incorrect." The chair considers that a draw. There will be no points of order arising out of the last exchange, but I'd ask members to try and find other words to use.

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

Foster Care Review

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Minister of Children and Youth Services pledged to immediately implement a recommendation to stop arbitrary placements that ignored the four-child limit for foster homes. This weekend a director from her ministry said that there's at least one foster home in Alberta that has eight children. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: how many foster homes in Alberta are in excess of the four-child maximum? Or is that yet another issue about which the minister is unaware?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member does mention the foster care review. I can say that the foster care review last year was extensive. It had internal and external experts. There were eight recommendations that stemmed from it. We accepted all of them. I mentioned last week that we're at various stages of implementation. Later today I do plan on tabling a report that will say what the status is of all the recommendations.

Ms Notley: Well, we have not however received an answer to my first question with respect to the number of homes in excess of four children.

As you mentioned, the minister pledged to immediately implement the recommendations of the hand-picked panel to clean up the foster care system. Thursday, as mentioned, the story changed, and we were told that the recommendations would be implemented by this summer. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: given that you don't appear to have the slightest idea of what's actually going on in your ministry, how can Albertans trust that you are competent to protect the children in your care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I've always been very consistent with any information that I shared about the foster care review. That was a very extensive review last June. We accepted all of the recommendations and started to implement them. Like I said, this afternoon we'll have full information on the status of all of the recommendations.

Ms Notley: Well, last year we were told that they'd be implemented immediately. Now we're being told that they might be implemented by this summer. Last week the minister appeared unaware that a foster baby was clinging to life in a Calgary hospital. She gave us vague platitudes, and then she went into hiding. Indeed, last Thursday this minister told the Legislature that Alberta has a good foster care system. If this poor baby dies, however, he will be the third to suffer such a tragic fate under your watch in just over two years. To the minister: have we not yet reached the point where, in good conscience, you will do the right thing and resign?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, as the member mentioned, we do have a serious incident where we have a little boy fighting for his life in hospital. I can tell you that the police are investigating this. At this point they have not said or determined whether this was an accident or whether it was because of wrongdoing, but I can tell you that I'm not waiting for any deliberation to take action. There are things I am doing. There are things I will not do. What I will not do is be irresponsible and speculate and interfere with the police investigation.

What I am doing: last week I talked about that I already had called a special review on this very case; today I'm announcing that I plan on making the findings of that review public. As well, I'm going to have information in the next couple of days and will make sure that there's a co-chair of that special case review who is an external expert. I think the bottom line is that we will always stay committed to continuous improvement of our child intervention and our foster care system.

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

Registered Education Savings Plans

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both the federal and provincial governments give grants and tax shelters through programs like registered education savings plans to encourage and assist parents to save for their children's advanced education. Many Albertans are concerned about the financial well-being of their savings and the investment of the money contributed in these programs. My question today is to the hon. minister of finance. In light of the global economic situation what guarantee do parents have that that money is safe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 in celebration of a special event in Alberta, the centennial, we offered parents up to \$800 as an incentive for saving for their children's future education. It was open to people to make their own selection of financial institutions. The private businesses that are banks do not receive any kind of insurance or guarantee from the provincial government, but the federal government under the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation has such a guarantee. When the institution fails, there's a hundred thousand dollars available for up to a hundred thousand dollars. People have to make sure that they have that kind of protection when they deposit money.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Madam Minister. The Alberta government has invested, like you said, tens of millions to supplement our young people's registered education plans. To the same minister: what assurance do taxpayers have that this money is invested wisely and protected against mismanagement or bankruptcy by the institution that it's invested in?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Yes. Mr. Speaker, first of all, when you provide a deposit to any financial institution – and Canadian financial institutions are among the best in the world, and I think that that's a real tribute to both our federal government and the institutions themselves – the first thing to do is to find out if that insurance, the CDIC program, is in place. Choose well your financial institution and rest assured. There are some things that are not insured for – scam, fraud, theft, or in fact a situation where the institution itself falters on its investments – only the hundred thousand . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many new Canadians have friends and relatives in their former lands who have lost their investments in the recent economic downturn. What protection do we have for fellow Albertans against such happenings?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, as long as they invest in an institution that's CDIC insured, if that insurance is provided by the bank, then there's no further action that has to be taken to guarantee that particular protection. They don't pay extra insurance; that's provided by the bank. It is, in fact, automatic.

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

Oil Sands Area Groundwater Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Academy Award short-listed documentary *Downstream*, about the impact of

the oil sands development on the Athabasca River, has again raised a number of issues important to Alberta and, more importantly, questioned how this government has managed the resource. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister tell us whether the government has conducted research on resource extraction in the oil sands region and any increase in the levels of toxic chemicals in the water?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned on numerous occasions in the House that the government has an ongoing monitoring system to monitor not only the water that is within the Athabasca River itself but also at various points throughout the watershed to assess the ongoing quality of groundwater as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I think most of that is industry led, and it's self-reporting.

Next question to the same minister: given that this minister stood in the House last year and stated, when asked if groundwater had been contaminated, that "there is no evidence to indicate that there is any impact on the Athabasca River," is this still the minister's position?

Mr. Renner: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Can the minister tell us why neither he nor the Minister of Energy nor the Premier has ever met with the people in Fort Chipewyan or Fort MacKay to listen to their concerns? The industry had the intestinal fortitude to go and speak with them, so why hasn't this government?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I can't say it's untrue, I guess, so I'll say that I think the member is misinformed. In fact, I have met with the people and the leadership of Fort Chip. I have personally been there twice. I know that the Minister of Aboriginal Relations has been there at least twice, perhaps three times. We have had a good working relationship, and in fact at the last meeting that I had in Fort Chipewyan, we agreed in principle to the implementation of a community-based monitoring system. I understand from my staff that the details for the implementation of that community-based water monitoring system are moving well along, and we should have it up and running sometime this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:30

Packaging Waste

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently bought a gift and ended up with a small item wrapped up in a substantial amount of packaging. Unfortunately, I'm sure that we've all had similar experiences. I understand that packaging is necessary to preserve and transport products, but the material is often used just once. I'm sure that I'm not the only one who finds this unnecessarily wasteful. My question is for the Minister of Environment. What is the province doing to reduce unnecessary packaging?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as many members are aware, we have the document *Too Good to Waste*, which is a strategy that allows us to deal with waste of all kinds. We have shown leadership in this

province with respect to beverage containers, tires, electronics, paint, and used oil. The issue of packaging is something that we now need to deal with. However, unfortunately, because of the relative size of our market in relation to the national market it's difficult for us to act unilaterally on an issue such as packaging of materials.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. If the problem of packaging waste cannot be solved by Alberta alone, then are you working with other jurisdictions on the issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The CCME, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, has been engaged in this file, and I'm pleased to report that at our most recent meeting in Whitehorse about three weeks ago we reconfirmed our commitment to develop nation-wide national standards for packaging that will be geared towards reducing the amount of waste that's generated through the retail sale of goods.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. It's good to hear that progress is being made to reduce this type of waste. Can the minister tell us what Albertans can do right now to help ensure that this kind of packaging does not end up in landfills?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we always have to resort back to what we all learned in school, and that's the three Rs. There needs to be a commitment on behalf of Albertans to reduce the amount of waste, and that's partly through the program that I just made reference to, some standards, but we can reuse material. There's nothing to prevent individuals from reusing packing material that they have in their possession for one reason or another, and we can also recycle that material. I encourage Albertans to do all three.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Public Transit

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the recession bites, more and more Albertans will be turning to public transit, which provides the most affordable way of getting around cities and towns. For many Albertans public transit is their only means to get groceries, to get to work, to see family and friends. To the Minister of Transportation: what is this government doing to provide support for the increased ridership that public transit will undoubtedly experience in this recession?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, all public transit has been looked after by the municipality that public transit is in. We don't really have public transit as a province. We look after all the roads and everything that public transit can run on. But we did announce a program for Green TRIP which is going to deal with a lot of public transit. We've been having meetings on that already. We're doing our last consultation right now on what type of programs we need to not only put people on public transit but to reduce greenhouse gases from the tailpipe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that Green TRIP hasn't left the station yet.

To the same minister again. In its report titled Plan It the city of Calgary has made very clear the vital importance of an upgraded public transit system to Calgary's future prosperity. Does the government agree with the report's conclusions, and will it be committing to projects accordingly?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we won't be committing to projects unless they meet the criteria we've come out with within Green TRIP, and the very best ones, the most innovative and what's going to reduce the most greenhouse gases and get the most cars off the road, are the projects that are going to win, that we will be able to supply some resources to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As with so much, the commitment of this government will be measured in funding, not words, and the funding for public transit through the Green TRIP initiative has already been cut by over 90 per cent. Will Albertans ever see the full \$2 billion that was promised for public transit? That is so important even before considering the economic stimulus impact it would have.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't say what our revenues are going to be in this province, but I can say that we have committed to \$2 billion. What the hon. member is referring to is the hon. finance minister's third-quarter update, stating that there was only \$195 million within Green TRIP. She's talking the '08-09 time. We don't know what we're going to have in this year's budget. I'm sure that because of the way our economic downturn has been and the way that our income isn't as high as it was, we may have to stretch Green TRIP out a little bit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Flood Damage in Calgary

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Calgary neighbourhood of Sunnyside experienced flooding, with many of the residents sustaining water damage to their homes. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Since the minister is responsible for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, can he please explain to this House how the province responded to this serious incident?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The safety of Albertans is paramount for this government. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency was on scene immediately, and we continue to provide technical expertise with cleanup and damage assessment. We are working with the residents and also the municipalities to determine what support is necessary and what support is needed.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, my next question is for the same minister. A number of residents in Sunnyside have lost personal items and experienced property damage as a result of this disaster. What is the

province doing for a disaster recovery program for these flood victims?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, they should contact their insurance provider. Secondly, they need to contact the city, and that can be reached at 311. Also, I'd like to suggest to individuals who do have damage to dispose of carpets or whatever damage they have appropriately. We will continue to work with the city and the residents to collect information that's necessary to see if the flood does qualify for support.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Investments

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not everybody took a bath in last fall's market meltdown. Last week it was revealed that the city of Calgary's 2 and a half billion dollar capital fund performed extraordinarily better than the heritage fund in 2008. The province's savings lost 15 per cent of their value. Calgary's fund lost only one-tenth of 1 per cent. To the minister of finance: can the minister explain why the heritage fund underperformed Calgary's fund by so much?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have to do some type of analysis. The heritage savings trust fund was 14 and a half per cent. There was a slightly larger per cent of loss given to some of the other funds that are managed by Alberta Investment Management Corporation on behalf of the province. One would have to undertake an analysis. I could give you a list of funds that performed less well than the heritage fund, but it's embarking on a very dangerous precedent. It depends entirely on the mix of assets. It depends entirely on the manner in which those assets are bought and sold. Some of those losses may in fact be paper losses which can be reaccrued at a later date.

Mr. Taylor: As Calgary's fund did so well by staying away from derivatives and, instead, investing in safer bonds, will the minister be changing the government's investment practices to safeguard the heritage fund in the future?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, a great deal of analysis is undertaken before there's any change in the mix of assets and the mix of products that are purchased. In fact, in endeavouring to discover what sort of science is used in that regard, I have consulted with a number of people, including the Canada pension plan principles that talked about maintaining exactly the status quo. We have looked at the schedule of assets for this coming year, and when we deliver the budget, we'll be able to report accordingly.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How does the minister plan to recoup the losses in the heritage fund over the next few years, or does this government consider savings a luxury we can no longer afford?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when you speak to the board members that are responsible for the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, they are very clearly bright, assertive policy-makers. They have every intention of being aggressive with the fund within the limits

that we define in terms of a risk. I'm very satisfied that they will come up with the right strategies to continue the unprecedented record over the last 30 years of management of the heritage savings trust fund. Albertans should be proud of our track record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 98 questions and responses.

In a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of six members to participate in Members' Statements. In the interim can we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three officials from the Grande Cache Coal company that are here today visiting with officials from Employment and Immigration and Energy. I'd like to introduce Mr. Bob Stan, CEO and president of Grande Cache Coal; Mr. Lloyd Metz, vice-president of mining from Grande Cache Coal – we go back to 1981 in Estevan, Saskatchewan, with the Estevan Coal Corporation – and Mr. Bernd Martens, the vice-president of environment. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Lethbridge and District Exhibition

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is March madness for Lethbridge and District Exhibition. There's Ag Expo, the North American Seed Fair, extreme pro rodeo, and the home and garden show. There will be an expected 50,000 guests through the gates in March. Ag Expo is western Canada's premier agricultural trade show. The North American Seed Fair has been held annually since 1897 and is the oldest seed fair in western Canada. There were 50 different classes in pedigree seed, open classes, and junior classes. There were 13 judges, 17 committee members, all of whom are volunteers, who put in many hours to ensure its great success, in addition to a very dedicated staff. Products of agriculture are important exports for Canada. It supports our rural communities, which we are in danger of losing. Rural or urban, we are all dependent on agriculture. After all, we all eat.

Our Aggie Days is an agricultural education show: 3,000 school-children came to learn about agriculture in a fun and interactive environment. It is an annual event provided free of charge by the Lethbridge and District Exhibition. To further highlight the importance that agricultural exhibitions play in communities, Exhibition Park was privileged to host both the federal minister of agriculture, Gerry Ritz, and the Alberta Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the MP Rick Casson. The ministers attended, participated, and toured the seed fair and exhibition. I'm sure they were both left very impressed.

Mr. Speaker, on another note, it is a very great honour for someone to receive a special name from our First Nations. The Member for Lethbridge-West received just such an honour last week at an international powwow in Lethbridge. The name translates to "sees many things." I know he will wear his name proudly. Please join me in congratulating him and thanking him for his work with First Nations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Student Engagement Initiative

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say a few words today about Speak Out, the Alberta student engagement initiative that was launched by the government last fall. The role of the student engagement initiative is to motivate Alberta's youth to participate in an ongoing province-wide discussion on education. Asking for students' input and taking action on their ideas will create more actively engaged citizens and a stronger education system. To date the Speak Out team has conducted 30 Speak Out forums in high schools across the province. The Speak Out interactive website is being actively used by students. In fact, there are over 3,500 posts on the discussion forum, and the numbers grow daily.

On May 3 and 4, 2009, the first Speak Out Annual Student Conference will bring together approximately 200 youth from all over the province to explore and discuss recommendations for the education system. At the forum the Minister of Education will be announcing the three winners of the Speak Out video contest, the theme being What I Want, What I Need: My Vision for Education. The deadline for the video contest submissions is March 31, so interested students still have a few weeks to enter a video.

Students have an opportunity to apply to become a member of the Minister of Education's student advisory council, which will be formed in May after the first annual conference. This council will explore new and innovative ways to improve learning opportunities, and council members will act as representatives for Speak Out in their communities and schools.

More information on the conference, video contest, advisory council, and Speak Out in general can be found online at the Speak Out interactive website at speakout.alberta.ca.

Youth can and should influence the decisions today that affect the rest of their lives. Their perspectives are essential to future changes and decisions being made in education. I'm excited to hear what students have to say because every single voice counts. I urge all young Albertans to become involved and to speak out.

Thank you.

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

Marlborough Park Boy Scout Event

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This February 22 I had the opportunity to attend a Scouting event at the Marlborough Park community hall. It was a wonderful event that brought out dozens of people and inspired young people. The event involved three Scout troops: the 174th Marlborough Park, the 71st Marlborough, and the 161st Forest Heights. Every year they gather to celebrate the birthday of the founder of the Scouts, Lord Baden-Powell.

Scouting offers young people an opportunity to do many things that they might not have had a chance to do on their own, everything from canoeing to Cub car building. The Scout law is something we can all take into consideration when we go about our daily lives even though we and even the youngest member in the House have long passed the age range. A Scout is helpful and trustworthy, kind and cheerful, considerate and clean, wise in the use of all resources.

I was proud to present an award to Brian Swan, who has served the Scouts for over 25 years and has mentored many young people in living up to that motto. In helping run the Scouting program, he has taught many youths in my area valuable life skills from community service to outdoorsmanship. I thank Brian for his service and hope that he continues to serve our community.

I also want to thank everyone that is involved in Scouting in our

community. Your service makes a profound difference in the lives of our young people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Rotary Club 104th Anniversary

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to honour the 104th anniversary of the Rotary Club, which was celebrated on February 23, 2009.

For five years I have also been a very proud member of the Rotary Club of Edmonton. The club's four-way test is an important ethics compass for the things that we think and we say and we do. It is a guide in both my personal and my political lives. The four questions we must ask ourselves are: is it the truth, is it fair to all concerned, will it build goodwill and better friendships, and will it be beneficial to all concerned? This test is indicative of how the Rotary Club and its members conduct themselves through service to their community.

The 104 years of remarkable Rotary Club service have provided resources for park systems, accommodations for the homeless, food programs for schools, seniors' residences, and aid to medical causes such as the effort to eliminate polio globally.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to congratulate the Rotary Club on the celebration of 104 years of service and commitment to bettering Alberta's communities and communities throughout the world.

Thank you.

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

Kidney Disease

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. March is National Kidney Month, and this Thursday, March 12, is World Kidney Day. World Kidney Day is recognized in over 100 countries. This year the focus of World Kidney Day is on the importance of high blood pressure as one of the key symptoms and causes of chronic kidney disease. This is an incredible opportunity to raise awareness about the potential risk factors for kidney disease. By properly educating ourselves on the risk factors, we are more likely to take the steps to prevent this disease from affecting our health. Over the last year I have attended several events for the Kidney Foundation, a constituent organization in Edmonton-Calder.

On March 12 the Kidney Foundation is hosting its first annual World Kidney Day radiothon at Southgate shopping centre. It will be on air with EZ Rock 104.9 FM and The Bear 100.3 FM throughout the day. You may have already heard the radio commercials we recorded a couple of weeks ago. It's a great opportunity for this organization to share stories of those affected by kidney disease, raise awareness, and encourage Albertans to support this remarkable cause. An estimated 2 million Canadians either have chronic kidney disease or are at risk of developing it. It is important that we encourage awareness to prevent more from being affected by this disease. I encourage everyone to support the Kidney Foundation in any way that they can.

Thank you.

2:50

Commonwealth Day

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of Commonwealth Day. The Commonwealth was formed 60 years ago, and Canada was one of the founding members of this association, which now comprises 53 nations and nearly 2 billion people, one-third of humanity. Today all hon. members have before them a message

from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, our head of state, our Queen, and the head of the Commonwealth. As Her Majesty has noted, it is the belief of the Commonwealth members in values like democracy, freedom, human rights, and equality which binds us together today as in 1949.

Mr. Speaker, it is one of these values, democracy, which I wish to acknowledge in particular today. That is the genius of the British parliamentary system of government, a proud legacy which has served this province so well for over a hundred years, a system in which the executive and the legislative functions of government flow from the same electoral mandate, a system where individual parliamentarians represent citizens of electoral districts and carry their voice to parliament for fixed terms, a system of ministerial responsibility in which the first minister and ministers in council exercise the powers of the Crown and the state and govern in the name of the people. It is our parliamentary democracy, which has never been equalled by any other form of government, which binds so many of the member nations of the Commonwealth today.

On the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth I'm sure I speak for all hon. members of this House in thanking Her Majesty the Queen for her message and for her more than 50 years of faithful service as the head of this proud association of nations. May God save the Queen.

The Speaker: Thank you for that last statement, hon. member.

I will advise hon. members that this year, in 2009, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association annual meeting in Canada, the Canadian region, will be held in Toronto, Ontario, in the third week of July. I'll be advising members of such as we go into early April.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Bill 21

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 21, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Under the November 2007 memorandum of agreement the government agreed to pay the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded liability payments until August 31, 2009, and then assume the total pre-1992 unfunded liability on September 1, 2009. The goal of this amendment act is to ensure that the implementation of the pension agreement occurs in a timely manner.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document showing where our ministry is in implementing the recommendations made during last year's review of our province's foster care system. There has been much discussion over the last few days about the status of the recommendations made by the review panel, whose members were well-respected experts internal and external to government. It has been suggested that some of the recommendations have not been acted on. I do want to set that record straight. All eight of the recommendations made by the committee were accepted, and this document shows that implementation in every one of the recommendations is either complete or well under way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and myself had an opportunity to participate in a Poverty Talks! workshop. In 2008 and 2009 in over 45 community meetings approximately 350 participants answered the following questions: what would make a difference for low-income Calgarians, and as a low-income person what would I like to see change?

The Speaker: Hon. member, this is tablings.

Mr. Chase: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I have two other tablings. They are both from child care workers concerned about the decertification of their profession. The first is from Maureen Thompson, who writes, "I am writing in regards to the sudden loss in my recognition as a Fully Certified Child and Youth Care Counsellor with Children and Youth Services within the Government of Alberta."

From Morag Rempel: "I am writing to you out of concern for the future of the quality of care offered to some of our most vulnerable children." She points out that "in 1984 the government took bold steps to protect the children in care by implementing strict hiring standards, a move applauded by child care providers across Canada, U.S.A. and Britain." She'd like us to continue to lead in our child care services.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a story from the *Edmonton Journal* dated June 11, 2008, which relates to my questions today. In the story the minister of children's services is quoted as saying that the recommendations on foster care would be implemented immediately as opposed to many months later.

The second one is on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It is the appropriate number of copies of two documents from the Alberta Lymphedema Association which describe the closure of the Calgary clinic and the result that non-cancer lymphedema patients have no place to receive treatment in southern Alberta.

The third, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed, including where residents were left in

bed well into the morning and received late meals and had scheduled baths missed.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five sets of documents in the House today regarding my questions in question period. The documents note on them: "Please join Deputy Premier Ron Stevens and other distinguished guests [to] celebrate a Milestone – The opening of the new Calgary Courts Centre" and "Please make cheques payable to Calgary Glenmore PC Association." We note that the . . .

The Speaker: Okay. Let's get on with the tabling.

Mr. Hehr: All right. Nonetheless, I am tabling some more documents which list the costs to the taxpayer of the event, including \$5,000, it looks like, in the amount of food and drink as well as the costs, then, of some 32,000-plus dollars to the taxpayer to open the courthouse on that day.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, please remember that we have Standing Order 7(7), that basically says: at 3 o'clock. That's the reason why the chair is trying to push this ahead, so that we don't run up against that, because you still have the Clerk.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of Ms Pastoor, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, an *Edmonton Journal* website article dated January 7, 2009, entitled Gov't Rejects 4-year Council Term.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today the chair interjected on one occasion with respect to what he considered mildly intemperate language and then listened very, very attentively to the member's statement given by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. We now have an additional reason why temperate language in this Assembly is so important. In the member's statement the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder made it very, very clear with respect to kidney problems, kidney concerns. He said that high blood pressure leads oftentimes to kidney problems. So temperate language in this Assembly reduces the blood pressure, reduces the kidney problems, helps the Alberta health care system. We should all be part of it.

3:00

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned March 2: Mr. Kang speaking]

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today again in support of Bill 201. The purpose of the bill is to promote public safety, to make Albertans safe on the streets. The penalties associ-

ated with the offence are a fine of not less than \$2,500 and not more than \$25,000 or imprisonment of not more than one year or both and a driver's licence suspension of one year for a first conviction under the section, five years for a second conviction, and indefinitely for a third conviction.

To go down further, it says that if a police officer has reasonable and probable grounds for believing an offence has been committed, the officer shall request the surrender of the driver's licence and detain the vehicle. The licence is suspended for 24 hours, and the vehicle is impounded for the same length of time. The new section applies to drivers' licences issued both inside and outside of Alberta.

Like I said, the whole purpose of the bill is to make Albertans feel safe when they leave the house, to make their quality of life better than they have now. It is about suppressing the conditions that lead to criminal activities by gang members who are carrying illegal weapons in their vehicles, and it is about protecting the lives of innocent Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I think that Albertans are worried about their safety. They are worried about the safety of their children. They're worried about the safety of their neighbourhoods. More and more people are concerned about drugs being pushed in the schools, on the streets. I've got the example of a 7-Eleven store in Calgary-McCall. It was getting out of hand, and luckily we were able to get things under control with the help of the police and the neighbourhood around the 7-Eleven. I'm hoping that the problem is solved and we don't run into that problem again.

We all know there have been shootings in B.C. – in Surrey, in Vancouver, in Abbotsford – every day almost, every week. There have been tragic incidents in B.C., and even in Calgary-McCall there have been gang-related shootings. Deaths have been occurring in Calgary-McCall, too, in the past year. One doesn't feel safe on the streets of Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, I remember when I came here in 1970. There was a time we could leave the doors unlocked. We used to go shopping, leave the windows unrolled, go shopping, and come back. We didn't have to worry about cars being stolen. We didn't have to worry about houses being broken into because, you know, criminals were not running rampant, I would say, on the streets. Now there are gang members, they're pushing drugs, there are new drugs coming every day, and they're shooting each other on the streets. We have to get tough, I think, on the gang activity so our streets are safe before it's too late to get our streets back. It has been happening, the way things have been going.

I had a meeting with the police inspector, and the concern is out there. We should have more resources for the law enforcement agencies so they can investigate properly, they can prosecute, and they can head off the criminals before they commit any crimes. I believe Bill 201 is one more step in the right direction. It is proactive, and it's going to prevent crime, seizing guns before a crime is committed.

The present law, Bill 50, is a good law, but there are some loopholes in it, as well. It's just very vague as to who to charge when the police find illegal weapons in the vehicles because the occupants may deny that the guns belong to them. Mr. Speaker, the vehicles are a mode of transportation of illegal drugs and guns. Vehicles are used in criminal activity.

We heard the argument from the hon. members from other side of the House last week that as owners of unregistered long guns hunters and farmers would be charged under this legislation. Instead of having a clear intent of the bill, despite what the police officers are telling us would happen – it simply is not the case with this legislation that owners of unregistered long guns would be at risk of being charged. I think we can deal with any concerns raised by amendments to this bill.

Let's not be partisan about the bill. Let's bring all the genuine concerns forward, and let's amend the bill so we can strengthen the hand of our law enforcement agencies.

Bill 201 goes further to close the loopholes which arise in Bill 50. Passing Bill 201 is not going to harm law-abiding citizens. It's only going to hurt the criminals where it hurts. It will send a clear message to gang members that drive around with illegal guns in their vehicle that it will not be tolerated; it will be unacceptable. So if you're caught with a gun, you will be paying a heavy price for possessing an illegal weapon. This is just to strengthen the hand, again, of the police. I stress that point again and again because we're all concerned about gangs. You know, we are all concerned about the criminals, so I don't know why there's a big hesitation from the other side to proceed with Bill 201.

Bill 201 is being painted as such a draconian measure, that anyone with a gun in their vehicle will be put in jail or lose their car. What happened to "people are innocent until they're proven guilty"? You know, they will have to be proven guilty before they're charged.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member.

Hon. members, we have eight minutes remaining for this portion of business, three of which I will use to recognize an additional speaker if one wishes to participate, because I have to allow five minutes for the mover of the bill to close. Any additional member wishing to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join second reading on debate of Bill 201, the Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The intention of this bill is directed at reducing gun crimes in our communities, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for the spirit of this legislation. We on this side of the House very much appreciate support in our fight against crime.

As has been mentioned, this government amended the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, or VRCPA, in 2008, which empowers our police officers to immediately seize vehicles and all property that has been or may be used to commit a crime. This act received wide support from police forces, victims organizations, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. This hon. member stated on November 20, 2008, that the amendments to the VRCPA "would allow for us to deal with seizing vehicles of people who are driving around with guns unsafely and who are transporting them for use in crime." Further, the hon. member said, "this type of legislation would ensure that guns and gangs are kept in their place," and the hon. member is absolutely right to emphasize how the VRCPA empowers police.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the amendments to the VRCPA were designed to protect the safety of Albertans, as it prevents criminals from driving their vehicles to carry out illegal activities. As the hon. member for Calgary-Buffalo said, the amendments to the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act "would ensure that guns and gangs are kept in their place." That's what the act is currently doing and why I, too, support the amendment. This strong government legislation goes well above and beyond what's proposed in Bill 201. Although I very much appreciate the hon. member's concern for tackling gun crime and, again, the spirit of this bill, perhaps he did not expect that our police and prosecutors would be so very effective employing this legislation. I'm sure that, along with all the members on this side of the House, he is very relieved to hear the reports last week of \$4.6

million in illegal profits removed from criminal hands. Perhaps in view of the reports he's heard, he may even wish to withdraw his bill himself in respect for the more effective government legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I have to urge all members to reject this redundant though very well-meaning bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today we vote on whether my private member's bill, Bill 201, the Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009, passes second reading. I've heard a number of MLAs speak on this bill. Although I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed, I think I know which way the wind is blowing on this.

Nevertheless, I've heard basically two major objections to this bill, and one I can really appreciate. It was brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who was really worried, actually, about law-abiding citizens possibly being caught up in this, as my bill said that illegal firearms would be cracked down on. One of the unintended consequences of this, I believe he said, was his grandmother would be out with her .22 in the back round and possibly get picked up, which was, honestly, a concern. It could have happened under my bill.

However, I wish we would have taken this a step further; we could've gone and maybe, as the hon. member said, looked at revising this bill to have been to unregistered or restricted firearms. I appreciated his intellectual honesty in at least attacking the bill in that format and framing it as such because that is one of the unintended consequences that maybe we could get rid of, although police officers said they wouldn't be going after that, yada yada yada. But I appreciate that.

Now, moving on to the second argument, and it was that Bill 201 is redundant as it was brought up by the victims of crime restitution act. By all means, I hate to say it: that is not being, from my point of view, intellectually honest. Here's why. There's a loophole here, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont should know this.

Right now if a police officer pulls over a vehicle, a gangbanger who's driving a vehicle either stolen or rented, which many people are, with one of these restricted firearms, that are illegal, you know what happens, sir? What happens is the police officer lays a charge under the Criminal Code. Guess what? I've been told by police officers that going to court, the person denies that the gun was there. Well, guess what? No charge. Now we're supposed to, through the victims of crime legislation act, go through an in rem proceeding, attach that illegal gun found to a guy who's not criminally convicted of anything to maybe find some property or something like that out there to attach to him. Well, you know, more power to him if we're successful in this. I really don't think it's going to happen.

Further, what happens to the individual, the young gangbanger, who really doesn't keep his assets on paper in a nice little stockbroker report that says: I own 47 shares of this company, that company? It just doesn't work.

What this bill was intended to do was cover off the loophole from albeit a wonderful bill, the victims of crime restitution act, which is great work by the government, that I applaud them for. This was merely to close a loophole. That's all I'm here saying. Please, I hope that some other MLA, maybe from the governing party, comes up with this idea and goes to the Justice minister and says: hey, maybe we should bring this amendment in. I would applaud it, I would stand for it, and I'd say: that's another good piece of work by this government.

I wish we could maybe go to committee stage and have some of these resolutions changed. I think we really could make it workable, could maybe make those minor changes that would put some touches

to the victims of crime restitution act, again a wonderful bill, that would allow for this loophole to be covered off.

I thank you for your time here today and for your commitment. Please vote in favour of what I think is a worthwhile initiative for this government to undertake.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:17 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Pastoor
Chase	MacDonald	Taft
Hehr	Notley	Taylor

Against the motion:

Allred	Evans	Olson
Anderson	Forsyth	Prins
Benito	Horne	Quest
Blackett	Jablonski	Redford
Brown	Jacobs	Renner
Calahasen	Klimchuk	Rogers
Campbell	Leskiw	Sandhu
Cao	Liepert	Sherman
Dallas	Lindsay	Snelgrove
DeLong	Marz	VanderBurg
Denis	Mitzel	Vandermeer
Drysdale	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Elniski		

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 37
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

3:30

Bill 202

Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to open debate on Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009.

I have met with many stakeholders who believe that this piece of legislation has the potential to greatly help municipalities. They have also been consistently pleased that this bill would make municipal spending practices as transparent as other levels of government. Many people have pointed out that the federal and provincial governments are both audited by their respective Auditors General. They want municipalities to be held to the same account.

Bill 202 creates the office of the municipal auditor general under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The municipal auditor general would work with Alberta municipalities and their external financial auditors to assist municipalities with making their operations both as effective and efficient as possible and to make sure that Albertans get value for their money. It would also create a mechanism for Albertans to determine whether they are receiving fair value for their business and property taxes. The municipal auditor general would conduct a performance audit of any municipal system or program

that is deemed appropriate. It would subsequently provide the municipality with detailed recommendations for improvement and potential actions that may help achieve this. These measures would help to ensure that a municipality's operations and services are executed in a way that makes the best possible use of public funds.

Currently a municipality is required to submit annual financial statements and a financial information return to the provincial government. This helps to provide the government with the information needed to ensure that a municipality is operating within the parameters set out in the Municipal Government Act. When an external auditor completes a municipality's audited financial statement, they also provide the municipality with a management letter. This letter may identify areas where a municipality could improve financial controls or where different accounting procedures and processes may reduce costs or improve services.

It is my understanding that a management letter given to a municipality is not always made public and may not provide a municipality with in-depth analysis of their operations. On the other hand, the recommendations from the municipal auditor general would be made available to the public as soon as possible. This would provide for an additional level of oversight and accountability as the public would have access to these recommendations. In addition, the municipality would be required to notify the municipal auditor general within a specified time on the actions a municipality intends to take with respect to the recommendations. If a municipality does not take adequate or appropriate action on these recommendations, the municipal auditor general may report these concerns to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this office would work with municipalities to help ensure that their operations are sustainable in the long term. This bill is not intended to remove the operational freedoms that Alberta municipalities currently enjoy. Rather, Bill 202 simply seeks to give municipalities the tools they require to ensure that they are providing their residents with the highest possible value for the money they receive. Any recommendations provided by the municipal auditor general would take into consideration the long-term vision of a municipality.

Mr. Speaker, a performance audit would be particularly beneficial for Alberta's rural municipalities who may not have the capabilities to conduct an independent performance audit themselves. Bill 202 would provide rural municipalities with the expertise necessary to ensure that they can continue to meet the increasing demands of their residents in the long term. As the province continues to grow, we are all aware of the pressures municipalities are under to ensure that their operations and services consistently meet the needs and expectations of their communities.

Mr. Speaker, the province launched its 10-year funding commitment, the municipal sustainability initiative, MSI, to help address these pressures. The amount given to municipalities totalled \$500 million in 2008, and it's scheduled to increase to \$1.4 billion annually by 2011. The office of the municipal auditor general would ultimately seek to answer the question: are the funds received for property taxes and from the province creating appropriate and sustainable value within a municipality? This is not to say that Albertans are not receiving value for their taxpayer dollars at the municipal level. However, with property taxes increasing and the amount of financial assistance the province is currently giving the municipalities, Bill 202 seeks to create an additional level of support and accountability at the municipal level. This would seek to ensure that Albertans are receiving the maximum value for money for municipal services and programs. The municipal auditor general would have the authority to conduct an objective performance audit of any area within a municipality deemed appropriate.

To be clear, Bill 202 does not intend to conduct a yearly performance audit of all Alberta municipalities. Municipalities would have a performance audit conducted at the discretion of the municipal auditor general. This discretion would be based on consultation with the financial auditors, municipalities, or concerns from the public.

In summary, the municipal auditor general would help municipalities ensure that they are spending taxpayers' money in the most efficient and effective way possible. I anticipate the municipal auditor general to become a centre for best practice of municipal operations. The office would encourage intermunicipal co-operation by recommending areas where municipal partnerships would benefit both parties.

Mr. Speaker, the auditing process is crucial to all areas of our society as it gives us an objective perspective on spending. I think that any measure we can take to strengthen auditing at the municipal level is good for our province. I look forward to hearing my colleagues' comments and urge them to support this cost-saving measure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to Bill 202. It's certainly an interesting bill, obviously geared, I suppose, in some respects toward improving certain areas of functioning within municipal government, but it is a bit surprising to see a bill like this coming from someone from this particular government caucus, I would suppose, just based on, you know, some of the attitudes that we tend to have here provincially vis-à-vis our own relationship with the federal government.

It is a bill, of course, as has already been mentioned, that would empower the minister to appoint a municipal auditor general, who would then engage in audits of municipalities that would ultimately be reported to the provincial minister, and then there would be various authorities with respect to following up on that. I think that in the introduction of this bill the member spoke about how provincially we have an Auditor General, and federally we have an Auditor General, although I'm pretty sure that provincially we don't have an Auditor General that audits us and then reports to the federal government or vice versa. I can't imagine that as a province we would agree to that kind of arrangement, so I find it a bit interesting that municipally we would appoint an auditor general and then have municipal governments having audits that were being reported back to us, the provincial body.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

At the end of the day this is a bill that impinges rather significantly on municipal autonomy. This is something that I think is problematic. Municipal government is growing and developing across the country. Municipal government is not a level of government; it's actually a separate order of government. That independence to a large extent needs to be acknowledged notwithstanding the way in which it first came about. We also need to look at, politically, how these municipalities have evolved. We know that municipalities have been asked to take on larger and larger levels of responsibility within our communities and within our societies. We know that they have in many cases stepped up to the plate in that regard. We also know, frankly, certainly in Alberta, that the level of engagement at the municipal level for the average person is as high as it is provincially.

I am concerned about the idea of exercising even sort of more

centralized control over individual municipal governments. I respect the need for having high standards and ensuring that there are high standards and transparency and all those kinds of things, but it would seem to me to be a little arrogant and a little wide-reaching to march into the municipal sector and ask for this level of oversight and control.

3:40

The Municipal Government Act already has provisions for independent audits of municipal finances. As it is, municipalities must already submit annual financial statements and auditors' reports to the minister, and the minister already has the power to set requirements for financial reporting and auditing. A minister may at this point appoint an auditor to audit the books of a municipality at the request of at least one-third of the council or on petition by the electors. I think that these kinds of limits allow for intervention where necessary, but it ensures that the intervention is only where necessary as described or as acknowledged by either the municipal councillors themselves in any given municipality or at the request of the electors. Finally, where the auditor is appointed under this process, again the legislation already gives them access to these municipalities' records and their data.

I'm not sure exactly how this bill will move forward, but at this point we have some concerns about the apparent intrusion that this might represent into the political autonomy of municipal governments across our province. It is for that reason at this point that we are unlikely to consider supporting the bill. Although, again, we certainly invite the opportunity to hear and consider and weigh the debate as the bill progresses, if it does.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very interesting bill for someone who has come out of the municipal sector and actually was elected as a municipal councillor. I think my first and foremost comment on this would be that should there ever be such a person, I certainly would be opposed to their reporting to the minister. If there's going to be such a person, they'd have to report to this House. That is far too narrow a scope that the minister would have over the municipal actions. It has to come to the House. It has to be someone that we could feel very confident in, that was actually independent and had done their homework without any oversight or the feeling of being overseen by a minister of the Crown. It really has to come to the House.

My other question would be: who would pay for this? I'm just wondering if there's any level of government at this point in time that has any extra money. I believe that one of the costs that I heard was \$700,000. I know it doesn't sound like a lot when we're talking in billions, but it's an awful lot to create 700,000 new dollars. So that would be a question: who's going to pay for it? Certainly, I don't think any of the municipalities, including the big cities, would want to absorb that kind of cost, nor do I think that the provincial government at this point in time can drag up that kind of money out of the sustainability fund or any other little slush fund they may have hidden somewhere.

Auditors usually can't fix the messes that they find, but they can identify them and make very specific recommendations based on analytical data. So there is an argument for having an auditor. Auditors can't make policies, good or bad, and certainly auditors can't reflect on the behaviour of a particular municipality. That really is the responsibility of the elected people. Again, it's up to the people that elect them if they think that their behaviour has not been what it should be.

However, there is an argument to be made for smaller municipalities that, as has already been mentioned, really can't afford to have these extreme audits and the time that it takes to actually dig through books and go back in time and actually compare the audit against the bylaws or the laws that they have made at that level. So there is an argument to perhaps help those municipalities in some fashion, particularly if the citizens of that particular municipality are complaining. I believe that in the province today there is one municipality that is certainly having difficulties, and the citizens are getting a little excited about the accountability of their council.

It has already been mentioned, too, that it could interfere with the autonomy of municipalities. It has also been mentioned over the last 10 years, certainly since I was elected, that there is more and more – the word used, I believe, from my colleague was “responsibility.” Of course, I'm calling it downloading. There have been responsibilities downloaded onto municipalities without the dollars to follow to ensure that those programs, particularly on the social side, are actually adhered to. So, certainly, money would be a question.

I think this bill is interesting to me as well because I can actually argue both sides. I can argue for and I can argue against, which doesn't really put me out of line with anyone that I've spoken to nor with some of the groups that are out there: the city of Calgary, the AAMD and C, and the AUMA. If I'm correct, the AUMA has come out with a position against. CFIB and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation are in support of a provincial municipal auditor general. I believe that, of course, their approach would be from the taxation point of view: are they really using their dollars wisely so that they can control the mill rates in a better fashion?

From the people that I've spoken to, I believe that there is a mixed bag out there, some for and some against. I guess what I'd like to say is that this is a bill that I would like to see go maybe even to the committee level where there could be more discussion and perhaps a longer time to have a chance to take a look at this because people out there really aren't either firmly for or against. They actually can sort of argue both sides. I think this bill needs more time to have stakeholders look at it and get some more information on it. When I spoke to people, the reaction was mixed for and against, but the reaction was also mixed, which interested me, as to whom it actually should report. Some thought the minister was fine, and others thought no, that if there was somebody, it should report to the House. That's why I think that this bill does require more time.

I know that from Lethbridge's point of view the politicians down there and the chamber of commerce and some of the other people that I've spoken to and, in fact, some of the auditors that belong to the firm that actually audit the books for the city of Lethbridge are, again, mixed in their reaction to this. I think that our mayor had a good point in that many people don't realize that out of a Canadian tax dollar municipalities only get 8 cents, and we're at the level that's most accessible to the people. I think that people, particularly at the municipal level, really have more access to information on how the money is spent at the municipal level than the provincial or federal levels. It's very difficult at the two upper levels to actually get the information readily that you need unless you're FOIPing it, which, of course, costs a lot of money, too. At this point in time, you know, I'm speaking as having spoken to people with mixed reactions but also from my own experience. I think that Lethbridge has always had good audits and, certainly, has won many awards for the way they keep their books, the way that they are open and the way that they present them. I guess they don't find mistakes.

3:50

I really think it's a bill worthy of further discussion than we know private members' bills get, which probably won't get past second reading, unfortunately. I would like to see it go to committee. I'd

like to have more time for people to take a look at this. There are some people in Lethbridge who write regularly to our newspaper who are most concerned with the fact that they think that the audit wasn't done properly and that it wasn't done on time nor presented on time, which is actually a legislated provincial law. That's something that an auditor would be able to make recommendations to or to look into why it happened that that particular activity didn't happen on time. There are other municipalities, I know, in that same situation.

Mr. Speaker, I will speak to this again. Again, I would hope that it would go to committee because I think it's worth while having a discussion and trying to get some kind of a stronger, definitive feeling from the community of where they'd like this to go.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to speak to Bill 202. In challenging economic times Albertans turn to their neighbours and communities for support. The Premier has stated his firm belief that strong municipalities are the key ingredients to strong communities. This shapes my ministry and everything we do. To foster strong communities throughout the province, the government of Alberta remains committed to supporting municipalities through a variety of programs, including the municipal sustainability initiative. This support is having real impact. It is putting Albertans to work right away, addressing vital infrastructure issues and needs, and helping our communities position themselves for the future. Provincial funding is helping to build new roads, recreation facilities, fire halls, and libraries.

Strong communities also need to be accountable to the ratepayers. That is what Albertans expect. That is what this government expects. Ensuring that we have financially stable and accountable local governments is a priority for us. As such, I appreciate the hon. member bringing forward this bill. It is critical that municipalities be prudent and responsible with taxpayers' money. Many municipal financial reporting processes are already in place. For example, the Municipal Government Act already requires municipalities to conduct annual financial audits. The Premier also gave me a mandate to build an accountability framework to ensure that funding provided to municipalities is used to meet agreed-upon objectives. The framework will increase our accountability to Albertans so that they can see how these funds are being used.

Mr. Speaker, as accountability is such a strong component of what we already expect of municipalities, this bill could nicely complement the existing financial reporting process. It could offer Albertans another tool to evaluate the performance of their local councils. Using resources wisely is always important. In times like today it becomes even more critical to ensure that each dollar collected from taxpayers is spent wisely.

I'd like to thank the hon. member for drawing attention to the issue of accountability through the introduction of this bill. While there remain a few questions, as mentioned by the hon. member opposite, to be worked on on the terms of how this bill could be implemented, the member clearly recognizes that we need to respect taxpayers' hard-earned dollars and use them wisely to invest in and build strong municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a pleasure to speak to Bill 202 and make comments on how, as I said previously, we can work with municipalities to make those municipalities a strong component of a better Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to participate in the discussion today on Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. Bill 202 seeks to create an office within the provincial government whose mandate would be to assist Alberta municipalities in ensuring efficient use of their resources. The municipal auditor general would help municipalities conduct performance audits. The broader goal of the bill is to help improve the operations process of municipalities in a manner that would allow them to retain their current degree of autonomy. The office of the municipal auditor general would also be able to share and expand the network of practical knowledge amongst municipalities.

It's important to note that any recommendations made by the office of the municipal auditor general would operate within the scope of the municipality's own vision and specific circumstances. Individual municipalities may have differing financial, operational, and mobilization considerations when recommending the best course of action. For example, it may be more cost-effective to lease gravel road grading equipment in one municipality than it would be to purchase it. However, in another municipality it may be more cost-effective to purchase equipment than it would be to lease it. The point to take from this example is that each Alberta municipality is going to have unique needs and individual circumstances, and it's important to take these unique considerations into account when providing recommendations for improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 aims to create a stronger network and improved service delivery for municipalities in Alberta. The provisions that Bill 202 seeks to establish are intended to help facilitate the sharing and implementation of best practices for municipal operations. There's a wealth of information that can be obtained from robust, objective performance audits. If deficiencies exist in a municipality, they can be revealed and assessed with comparative measures that would be developed and collected by the municipal auditor general. While there exist some inherent differences between municipalities in the province, useful comparative measures can, when properly assessed, shed light on any performance issues. These comparative and standardized measures can be very useful as a municipality seeks to improve its operations and service delivery.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of forums where Alberta municipalities can share best practices, such as municipal zone meetings. The municipalities within these zones meet frequently to share ideas, address concerns, and learn from the successes of other similar municipalities. By having comparable municipal performance measures, as Bill 202 seeks to establish, the dissemination of valuable information at these meetings would be further enhanced. Furthermore, the municipal auditor general would serve as an additional forum to share and recommend best practices with municipalities.

The recommendations given by the office of the municipal auditor general would be publicly accessible so as to provide full disclosure of the performance audit recommendations. In addition, a municipality would be required to notify the municipal auditor general of the actions it intends to take in relation to the recommendations given.

Mr. Speaker, it's well acknowledged that local governance is most suitable for the effective delivery of a great number of services. Residents of Calgary or Edmonton, where two-thirds of Alberta's population currently live, will have different service delivery requirements than residents of rural municipalities. Further to this, factors affecting service delivery can also vary, with the local council being best suited to adapt their municipal operations to accommodate any region-specific circumstances, but the basic

guiding principles for efficient operations, management, and service delivery remain consistent among municipalities. It's important that each municipality in Alberta get the most value for its tax dollars in order to make its goals achievable.

4:00

I'm pleased that Bill 202 continues to acknowledge the importance of local governance. For sufficient diversity to exist amongst our municipalities, their autonomy must be at the forefront. Similarly, municipal councillors wish to provide the range of services most closely aligned with their constituents' overall performance and needs. It's important, then, for municipalities to maintain a sufficient degree of autonomy so that efficient adaptations of local governance are possible.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe Bill 202 infringes on any part or any important aspect of municipalities' autonomy. Rather, it seeks to assess the municipalities' operations and make recommendations, if necessary, for improvements that can assist the municipality in better actualizing its own goals. For example, the information compiled through the performance audit process by the office of the municipal auditor general can reveal where grant dollars can be better allocated. Municipalities may learn of extra funding opportunities through these recommendations, which may be very helpful for a municipality in their initiatives. Furthermore, the municipal auditor general would provide an additional level of accountability for the money allocated to municipalities from the government of Alberta, ensuring that they're used appropriately and for what they were intended. This would include funds received through such programs as the municipal sustainability initiative.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the aim of the recommendations made by the office of the municipal auditor general is the long-term sustainability of municipal autonomy in operations and budgeting. Bill 202 is truly a win-win proposition for both levels of government and, indeed, for all Albertans. The office of the municipal auditor general would act as a network to communicate best practices and improve the operating efficiencies of municipalities across the province. Municipalities will retain their autonomy in setting their priorities in budgets and can do so more effectively with the measures proposed in Bill 202.

I wholly support Bill 202, and I urge my fellow members to do so as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. This bill proposes to create an office of the municipal auditor general, which would assist municipalities in conducting performance audits. I'd like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward the bill.

Mr. Speaker, as a long-time municipal councillor and reeve, when I first heard of this bill being proposed, I had some serious reservations. I thought that all we were going to do was add another layer of bureaucrats for councillors to deal with. Closer examination of the bill has revealed to me that it does make some points which would be beneficial to municipalities. I'd like to just mention a few of those points this afternoon.

First, performance audits would assist municipal governments in maximizing their efficiency by revealing areas for improvement and providing recommendations for action. These recommendations may suggest various actions such as the need for additional investment for better long-term sustainability. Mr. Speaker, the measures proposed in Bill 202 will greatly benefit municipalities in finding

shortfalls in the operational capabilities and would assist in providing the province with information regarding these shortfalls.

Performance audits would be independent of the municipalities, and the recommendations would be focused on achieving the greatest value for taxpayers. Objective performance audits conducted by accounting professionals would further strengthen the ability of municipalities to seek additional funding for improvements that would enable them to carry out long-term strategies and increase sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, all municipalities want to ensure that their operations are being conducted in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, and in some circumstances the efficiency can only be achieved by making further investments. For example, if a municipality is underperforming in one area, for example garbage pickup, the performance audit may be able to identify exactly how this operation is falling short of expectations. It could take into consideration every aspect of the municipal garbage pickup process and reveal where inefficiencies exist and how they can be improved upon. The recommendations may include a change in operational practices or if further capital investment is needed.

One of these identifiable inefficiencies could be old machinery constantly requiring repairs or machinery that consumes considerably more fuel than newer models. A performance audit could compare the cost benefit of maintaining the current equipment to that of investing in newer, more efficient equipment. If investing in new garbage pickup equipment would save the municipality money in the long run, the performance audit could make this recommendation. The performance audit report and recommendations could analyze all aspects of this operation. This would offer a substantial benefit to a municipality in determining the most efficient action to be taken.

Further to this, a municipality could use the recommendations from the performance audit report to support its current position and past decisions. If past decisions come into the spotlight, municipalities would be able to use the credibility of the performance audit to support their past decisions. Additionally, if current decisions come under scrutiny, the performance audit could assist the municipality to explain in detail why they made those decisions. A performance audit could also provide information on which programs, operations, or activities have been effective and explain how the past decisions of a municipality are reaping a benefit in the present.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 could also strengthen a municipality's argument for further funding when lobbying other levels of government. The recommendations provided in an objective performance audit would give municipalities a great deal of credibility when pursuing provincial or federal grants. Additionally, a performance audit may recommend where intermunicipal co-operation or provincial partnerships would lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness in their operations. For example, if a performance audit determined that a municipality's snow graders were costly to rent but that the neighbouring municipality owned one, it may recommend that they pursue a partnership with one another and share the cost of snow removal. The municipal auditor general might find the current funding allocations to this area insufficient to achieve the desired results and that a larger, multilevel strategy may be needed.

In another example the public transit network within a municipality may need to be modernized or perhaps bus routes reassigned. If it is determined that modernization is required for efficiency, that new buses need to be purchased, and that new transit stations are needed, the modernization endeavour may cost well beyond what the municipality itself could afford. It could be determined that transit routes need to be reassigned to transport people to other areas. Both

of these examples display how it would be mutually beneficial for different jurisdictions to work together to make this initiative efficient. Further, the benefits of an efficient public transit network would spill over into those other jurisdictions and areas such as environment, energy, and transportation.

Mr. Speaker, performance audits would also be useful in communicating to the public a municipality's decision to invest in certain areas as well as communicating to the public the areas that are efficient and the areas that are not. This would strengthen the argument of municipalities. Communication with the public is an essential component within government operations. As it is the public that elects governments, it is also the public that should be fully informed of government decisions. Bill 202 would enhance this stream of information by strengthening the municipal performance audit process, giving all municipalities a hand up when accounting for their decisions.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 fully recognizes how performance audits would assist municipalities in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. For those reasons I believe that members of this Assembly should give Bill 202 serious consideration for their support.

Thank you very much.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and engage in debate on Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for bringing forward this well-thought-out, forward-thinking bill. The goal of Bill 202 is rather straightforward, that the government create an office of the municipal auditor general, and in turn the office of the municipal auditor general would assist municipalities in completing performance and value-for-money audits. Creating a municipal auditor general would serve to strengthen municipal operations.

Now, before I dive into the advantages proposed by Bill 202, I'd first like to applaud and recognize the phenomenal job currently done by our municipalities, especially Strathcona. The audit practices currently employed at the municipal level provide clear and concise information, which is critical for ensuring an open and accountable government. Stemming from my appreciation for accountability, I feel as though I must clarify the motive driving this bill.

In no way should Bill 202 be viewed as an affront to municipal transparency. Bill 202 is designed to improve upon not only an effective but enviable accountability system. The measures proposed by this legislation are intended simply to assist municipalities. After all, the purpose of a performance audit is not to find fault but, rather, to find opportunities. Analyzing best practices data can clearly highlight strengths in planning as well as single out areas or programs that fall short of expectations. Simply put, effective audit systems promote and support effective value-for-money planning.

Mr. Speaker, the success of a government program is not based on whether or not they can achieve results but on achieving results in a financially sustainable fashion. Successful program planning requires that attention be paid to both costs and results. Performance audits are simply a program-by-program account of these two factors. Therefore, by improving audit practices, we are at the same time improving overall program and services planning. Bill 202 addresses the goal of improving municipal financial planning by creating a standardized information resource that allows municipalities to make clear, performance-based decisions.

The advantage of creating an office of the municipal auditor general is that all performance audit data would be centralized. In turn, a centralized body of information is easier to access and interpret than collecting performance data from several unconnected communities. With the measures proposed by Bill 202 in place, all of Alberta's municipalities would more easily be able to compare their services to their contemporaries'. An example of this could be a comparison of garbage pickup services between Lacombe and Ponoka. With a centralized body of a municipal auditor general the citizens and administrators in Lacombe could review the garbage removal practice of Ponoka and compare it to their system. If one municipality is found to have a superior system, the reasons for that superiority could be investigated and then applied to other municipalities looking to improve services. In this way having a central office to conduct performance audits can build stronger communities through the detailed sharing of program performance information.

In addition, performance audits could help foster co-operation at the municipal level. One example is if both Lacombe and Ponoka were interested in creating a facility designed to convert garbage into energy but neither could afford to construct such a facility on their own. The municipal auditor could recognize this joint desire and encourage the municipalities to look toward creating a co-operative program. In this example the cost of the waste-to-energy facility could be shared between the communities, and in turn both could benefit from a service they could not provide independently.

The strengths of this province will always come from the fabric of co-operation diligently interwoven with threads of kindness, dedication, and hard work. Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that the idea of an audit does not normally generate feelings of co-operation and unity. However, municipalities in this province are committed to providing the best services to their citizens, and I believe that co-operation between municipalities, which Bill 202 would help facilitate, would only serve to strengthen these services. Therefore, it's our duty to encourage the exchange of information to best promote strong communities and to ensure that the values of hard work and unity that help make Alberta great are encouraged in the future. In essence, I believe this is the strength of Bill 202. Creating an office of the municipal auditor general would create a system designed to foster information exchange and community co-operation. Sharing information and best-practice procedures would benefit all Alberta's municipalities.

I would like to close by again thanking the hon. member for bringing forward this bill. I urge all members gathered here to join me in support of Bill 202. Thank you.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the second-reading debate on Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill was brought forward by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Hays, and I would like to thank him for presenting this valuable bill.

By this point in the process most of us have a firm grasp on the goals of this proposed legislation. Bill 202 aims to create an office of the municipal auditor general to help municipalities conduct performance audits. This proposed bill has many benefits, from assisting municipalities in obtaining provincial grants, to ensuring and promoting accountability, to helping to guarantee municipal autonomy. While these benefits are a strong endorsement of the legislation in and of themselves, what I find most advantageous about Bill 202 is the commitment it makes to municipal co-operation.

Community co-operation, of course, is one of the cornerstones this

great province of ours was built on. In fact, from the early days of settlement Albertans have recognized the value of co-operation and helping those in need. When homesteaders came out west and were given their quarter section of land, survival often depended upon the help of the community. Plowing, harvesting, maintaining a homestead were difficult tasks, many requiring the efforts of more than one family. Recognizing this, community members would step in and assist each other to ensure the success of all households.

Fast-forward a hundred years, and it is still apparent just how important co-operation is to the fabric of Alberta. We're blessed to have a significant number of volunteers who recognize that strengthening a community is not an individual effort but, instead, one that demands co-operation and hard work. Mr. Speaker, this is why I take great pride in this great province. On one hand, we're fiercely independent, advocating self-reliance and the idea that through hard work Albertans can fulfill their needs and desires, but at the same time we have always been a people willing to pitch in and become involved with other communities, ensuring the welfare of others.

Now, to tie all this back to Bill 202, it is important that we understand just how an office of the municipal auditor general could promote community co-operation and involvement. After all, when I think of community unity, seldom do I think of accounting and performance audits. Basically, it all comes down to an exchange of information. If a community is informed about the needs of another community that match their own, they might be more interested to pursue dialogue and possibly work toward a mutually beneficial relationship. Likewise, if a community excels at one aspect of their municipal operations, the reasons for their success could then be shared with other municipalities looking to improve specific aspects of their own operations and services.

Instituting a system that overlooks and encourages municipal best practices would create a body of information that could easily be shared between those communities. This is not to imply that communities are currently not talking to their neighbours; however, if information pertaining to operations were to be centralized in one body, municipalities might be more inclined to access this information and engage in dialogue with their peer communities.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, an example might help this best. Consider inner-city road construction and maintenance, which falls under the jurisdiction of municipal governments. Providing these services requires heavy equipment. These machines all have one thing in common: they require considerable amounts of capital. Now, say, for example, that two nearby communities were interested in expanding or improving their internal road systems but both were apprehensive about the cost of this equipment. The office of the municipal auditor general could then determine that these two communities were facing similar problems and recommend some form of community co-operation. In this example the cost and use of heavy road equipment could be split between the municipalities. In this way a community would be able to offer an increased level of service to their citizens while at the same time being able to stay within budget constraints. In this example the solution to these communities' problems rested on information exchange, and because the municipal performance audit information was stored under one roof, it was possible for the auditor general to make recommendations based on their joint needs.

The strength of this bill really rests on the idea of bringing all municipal performance review information under one roof. Currently although municipalities may institute performance and/or value-for-money audits, they are limited because they might not have access to the performance standards of their contemporaries. And even if a municipality had access to the performance informa-

tion of their neighbours, they might not have the ability to compare themselves to other communities. Bill 202 recognizes that the value of performance audits is to ensure Albertans that they are getting value for their money. After all, information is the cornerstone of both good governance and good service delivery. With clear and concise knowledge municipal governments can be better positioned to make good decisions on behalf of their constituents.

I would like to once again thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays for recognizing not only the benefits of information exchange but the value and the historical precedent of community co-operation in Alberta. I thank you all for the opportunity to rise today, and I certainly look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and privilege to rise and continue debate on Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, as sponsored by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Hays. The municipal auditor general would work with municipalities and financial performance auditors to co-ordinate and develop financial statements, make recommendations on how to improve business practices and make them more sustainable. Ultimately, this would provide a powerful tool to our municipalities to create more openness and transparency at the local level for all Albertans regardless of where they live.

I'm a supporter of this bill as it recognizes the positive relationships our provincial government maintains with our local counterparts. Local governments are in the best position to truly understand local issues and how to implement solutions. To this end, this government maintains a host of municipal grant programs which provide billions of dollars of funding for our cities, counties, and municipal districts each year. Much of this funding is used to develop priority projects that municipal councils can identify. These projects can include roads, bridges, facilities, and other necessary public service that allows us to maintain our high standard of living. Bill 202 would expand on this relationship by providing municipalities with a powerful new tool to ensure they are getting the greatest value for money for their operations and their services.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides an opportunity to discuss and determine exactly which programs might benefit from performance audits. One such program is the municipal sponsorship program. Introduced in 1998, its objective is to provide grant-based financial assistance to smaller municipalities with a population of between one and 20,000. Once a municipal council has identified their project needs, they can apply to the municipal sponsorship program for financial assistance in the form of a conditional grant. These grants are calculated on population size, with additional funding available for intermunicipal projects or shared provincial-municipal projects. Before these funds are released, the municipality and the provincial government enter into a conditional grant agreement that ensures appropriate oversight and accountability measures. These measures include reporting requirements and the minister's right to audit any project receiving a provincial grant.

I am of the opinion that Bill 202 would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of this program for the following reasons. First, it would assist municipalities in ensuring that funds from the municipal sponsorship program are used effectively for approved projects; second, through the information-sharing mechanisms that the municipal auditor general would foster, municipalities would be better positioned and informed to embark on intermunicipal projects and could further take advantage of conditional grants provided for such projects.

Mr. Speaker, in 2007 the government expanded on its vision of the municipal sponsorship program by introducing a 10-year initiative, the municipal sustainability initiative, to assist municipalities with the challenges of unprecedented population growth. This program is an excellent example of the kind of co-operation this government is fostering with our municipalities. The goal of the municipal sustainability initiative is to provide predictable, long-term funding for municipalities. The funding will increase from the \$400 million initially distributed in the 2007-08 fiscal year to \$1.4 billion annually by 2010.

The funding process was designed in a relatively straightforward manner and aims to hold municipalities accountable for the funds allotted to them while allowing flexibility. Following the passage of the provincial budget, municipalities will be advised of their annual MSI contribution based on 48 per cent per capita, 48 per cent education property tax, and 4 per cent based on kilometres of local roads.

Further to this, municipalities must forward a proposed project profile to Municipal Affairs by April 1 each year. In addition, they must submit a multiyear capital infrastructure plan that outlines all proposed capital expenditures over a five- to 10-year planning period.

In addition, grants received under the municipal sustainability initiative must be held in a separate account, and the municipalities must submit a statement of funding and expenditures for the previous fiscal year. Bill 202 could improve the successful program through increased information sharing between municipalities, which could foster greater co-operation on major infrastructure project such as roads, public facilities, and more.

Mr. Speaker, another innovative municipal support program is the regional partnership initiative. This program provides assistance to municipalities who express interest in forming a partnership around a specific opportunity or set of opportunities. Specifically, municipalities can be eligible for funding grants under this program when they explore possible opportunities for co-operation and when they work out the specific role for each municipality in this agreement.

Bill 202 would improve the effectiveness of the program in two ways. First, through information sharing municipalities would be better equipped to understand the infrastructure and service needs of the neighbouring communities. Second, these municipalities would be better able to gauge the resources and capabilities of other municipalities and the potential role that may be played in a prospective agreement.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 has the potential to make regional and intermunicipal co-operation stronger and more effective. Alberta's strong economy depends on the long-term sustainability of our municipalities. This is why I support Bill 202, and I encourage my colleagues all to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure today that I rise to speak to Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. Bill 202 proposes to create an office of the municipal auditor general, which would implement standardized performance audits for municipal operations.

Albertans expect that their hard-earned tax dollars will be spent wisely at all levels of government. I'm glad to say that we experience that today, but, certainly, improvements are always good. Bill 202 is designed to meet this expectation by having the municipal

auditor general work with Alberta's municipalities to improve business practices and assist Albertans to determine whether they are receiving fair value for the taxes paid to their municipalities.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, performance audits help governments and other administrative bodies by revealing areas for improvement in their operations that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Implementing standardized performance audits as proposed in Bill 202 would assist municipalities in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in their operations, which would provide greater value for the taxes paid to communities.

The Alberta Treasury Board's performance auditing process is based on two principles. Firstly, public business should be conducted in a way that makes the best possible use of public funds, and secondly, people who conduct public business should be accountable for the prudent and effective management of the resources entrusted to them. Mr. Speaker, these principles illustrate this government's commitment to efficiency in Alberta's public sector. They recognize the importance of achieving value out of every tax dollar spent and providing a level of accountability with these tax dollars, all of which instill confidence in Albertans that their tax dollars are being spent as they would have their leaders do.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 would provide a standard for municipal performance audits that could ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in their operations. Performance audits look in depth at both the organizational and operational elements of a government. It can then be determined if that body is achieving the desired results for the dollars allocated to each initiative.

To understand the benefits of the measures proposed in Bill 202, it is important to understand the process of a performance audit and how it helps to ensure that best practices are used in all aspects of an operation. Performance audits, like most audits, are carried out in four standard stages: a planning stage, fieldwork, reporting, and, of course, a follow-up stage. Mr. Speaker, a preliminary study may be undertaken for a performance audit to gather sufficient information to decide if and whether the audit is warranted.

If the audit is deemed necessary or it is a part of required procedures of an entity, the planning stage of the audit will then be undertaken. The planning stage involves establishing the criteria for the audit such as the scope, objectives, and, of course, the approach of the audit, Mr. Speaker.

Once the planning stage is complete, fieldwork begins by gathering and analyzing information relative to the specific performance audit. Mr. Speaker, this procedure will gather information on the actual performance of the entity in question and compare it to past performances and the current situation.

At the reporting stage the performance auditor makes recommendations to enhance the performance of the entity. This report starts at the beginning of the performance audit process and evolves throughout the undertaking. A first draft of a performance audit report will be issued to management in order to ensure the accuracy and the validity of the information, Mr. Speaker. Subsequent drafts will provide greater detail of how to implement the changes recommended by that performance audit. The final performance audit report provides an action plan to bridge the gap between the current and the expected performance.

Further to this, there would also be a follow-up stage to report on the progress being made on the recommendations of the performance audit report. The specifics of the procedures of a performance audit may vary, but the goals of all performance audits are to identify waste, ensure that best practices are being used, and ensure that these hard-earned funds are being put to the best use.

Mr. Speaker, performance audits are of particular importance when they are government related. When tax dollars are allocated to a project, department, or other entity, taxpayers expect that the tax revenue is used for that intended purpose. Furthermore, taxpayers expect that their tax dollars go as far as possible to maximize the goods and services that they receive from government.

Performance audits are helpful for both the private and public sectors to identify current shortfalls and how they can improve efficiency of these operations. Mr. Speaker, in the private sector it is essential that efficiencies are maximized to ensure the continued success of a firm. Likewise, we would expect the same in the public sector. Improved efficiencies in the private sector can maximize profits and return greater dividends to the shareholders. In the public sector efficiencies are just as important and desired. Public funds are entrusted to governments, and it is the responsibility of these governments to ensure that a maximum utility of every tax dollar is received. These efficiency improvements can result from even in many cases a small procedural change which can reveal and offer suggestions where funds can be better spent.

Bill 202 intends to ensure that Alberta's municipalities are given the tools that they need to effectively on our behalf analyze their operations. This office would play a key role in working with a municipality's financial auditor in identifying strategies for future planning as well as the cost-effectiveness of their current long-term goals. Mr. Speaker, like a performance audit in itself the municipal auditor general would assist in making sure that Albertans are receiving fair and just value for the tax dollars that they entrust to our governments.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing further debate on this bill and how it will improve transparency and how it will enhance the auditing process to ensure that our tax dollars are being most effectively used. Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by my constituency neighbour the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I must first commend this member for bringing this bill forward. This member has a long history of wanting to improve accountability, and I'm pleased to support his bill. It must be something about southeast Calgary.

This government has put forth initiatives and legislation to make sure that accountability and transparency are achieved in everything it does. This bill is an additional tool, Mr. Speaker, that would help make sure that accountability and openness are achieved in all levels of government in this province. The objective of Bill 202 is to create a municipal auditor general, which would ensure that municipal operations are both efficient and effective. As a result there will be a standardized, objective body for municipalities to receive valuable information on how to improve their operations and services.

Mr. Speaker, strong local governments are one of the foundations of a prosperous province, and there are many quality people that are attracted to municipal governments, such as my alderman, Mr. Ric McIver. Bill 202 intends to streamline municipal operations and create a mechanism for Albertans to determine whether they are receiving a fair value for their business and property taxes.

Bill 202 is not the first of its kind. Looking to other provinces, Nova Scotia recently passed legislation that is very similar to what Bill 202 intends to put forth. Mr. Speaker, the province of Nova Scotia passed their Bill No. 138, which is an Act to Amend Chapter

18 of the Acts of 1998, the Municipal Government Act, which achieved royal assent in 2008. Nova Scotia's legislation created an independent municipal auditor general to oversee spending in municipalities. This legislation provides the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations – I guess the ministries are named slightly differently there – the power to appoint a municipal auditor general to undertake the value of the money audits in all municipalities.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, the municipal auditor general must be a qualified auditor, which I presume typically is a chartered accountant, and may hold the office for a term of seven years. The municipal auditor general may examine the accounts, procedures, or programs of a municipality. They may also examine to the same extent persons and bodies receiving a grant from a municipality. The municipal auditor general is entitled to access books, accounts, financial records, electronic data, processing records, reports, files, and all other papers in the broadest sense as well as property belonging to or used by the municipality or municipal body.

The municipal auditor general is scheduled to take office on April 1, 2010. Now, of course, those of the members who know me, Mr. Speaker, know that April 1 is probably my favourite day of the year, and indeed it is. I'm thinking that we've chosen April 1, 2010, however, for opposite reasons, and I'll let the Member for Calgary-Hays talk about that in his conclusion.

The municipal auditor general will evaluate municipalities on whether the rules or procedures applied are sufficient to ensure effective control of money, if authorized expenditures are made with regard to economy and efficiency, and, most importantly, if the money has been spent with proper authorization and according to appropriation. This is similar, of course, to what this government deals with with its own Auditor General, Mr. Speaker. In addition, the municipal auditor general will evaluate whether municipal policies and procedures encourage efficient use of resources and discourage waste and inefficiency, two things that I detest.

The effectiveness of programs, operations, and activities will also be evaluated, Mr. Speaker. The municipal auditor general will report annually to the council in a public meeting if a value-for-money audit is completed and will submit a report to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In this report the municipal auditor general will make recommendations for improvements in the efficiency of the municipality. Of course, much like our government, this must be done on an ongoing basis in each municipality in order to ensure economy and effectiveness.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw this Assembly's attention to the current legislation in Quebec that promotes accountability and transparency at the municipal level and in advance apologize to this House for my terrible French. Under an act representing the *ministère des affaires municipales*, the bureau of examining auditors may visit the offices of the municipal councils at the discretion of the minister. The examining auditors determine if books, registers, and archives of the offices are being kept correctly and in accordance with the law. Furthermore, they make sure that the security for the secretary-treasurer is valid and is sufficient, and they ensure that public monies are administered according to law. I put to this House that this is something that we would like to see also in Alberta.

The laws respecting the revenues and expenses of municipal corporations in Quebec are observed by the examining auditor as well, Mr. Speaker. Examining auditors complete reports to the Minister of Municipal Affairs detailing each of the inspections and include their remarks regarding the office in question. The auditor

is required to include the changes that he or she deems necessary in order to obtain uniformity in the accounting of the offices. In addition, they are also to include the recommendations that deal with the safekeeping of the municipality's funds and the accomplishments of the secretary-treasurer and all of the other municipal officers.

Mr. Speaker, upon receiving the report from the examining auditor, the Minister of Municipal Affairs may give the municipal council instructions as he or she deems it to be in the interest of the municipality and, obviously, also in the interest of the citizens of that municipality. Next the municipal council will acknowledge the minister's instructions and may order steps it believes are necessary to carry them out.

The last jurisdiction which I would like to discuss is Ontario. In 2006 the Municipal Act of Ontario was amended under the title municipal statute amendment act. This amendment grants municipalities the opportunity to appoint an auditor general; however, it does not require the municipality to do so. Several municipalities in Ontario have already acted on this opportunity, including Ottawa, Toronto, Oshawa, and Markham. These cities believe that an independent perspective can help them identify ways in which they can do an even better job for their citizens.

Mr. Speaker, under the legislation the auditor general reports to the municipal council and is responsible for assisting the council and holding itself and the administrators accountable for the quality of stewardship over public funds and for the achievement of value for money in municipal operations, value for taxpayers. In short, these are just a few examples of how some jurisdictions have reached a new level of openness and accountability to reflect the wishes of their citizens.

I'm reminded of a constituent of mine named Oscar Fech, who always talks about accountability. I think that he would endorse this act. He's a proud resident of Kingsland, where I also reside.

Bill 202 intends to take the best practices of each jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has had many exceptional individuals who perform at the highest level when it comes to the management of municipal coffers. We recognize and praise our cities for achieving accountability measures that are currently within our own municipal governance, but we do not doubt our municipalities' successes and accomplishments. Rather, Bill 202 will give municipalities the tools they need to effectively and efficiently provide Albertans with enhanced accountability and transparency, which is why I support this bill and urge others in the Assembly to do the same.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona indicated that municipalities are a level of government. In fact, they're created at the pleasure of the provincial government, the body in which we sit now, pursuant to the Municipal Government Act.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, proposed by my colleague from Calgary-Hays. I am speaking in favour of the passage of this bill in second reading, which is the passage of the bill in principle.

Now, municipal governments are creatures of the province of Alberta by virtue of the Municipal Government Act. Of course, we do accord them a large amount of financial support, and I think it's reasonable to have the tools to ensure that the funds are properly spent, that those funds that are sent to the municipalities are properly directed to the programs which are intended to be targeted by the provincial government. Very large sums, as I mentioned, are

allocated by the provincial government, hundreds of millions of dollars, in fact.

I must say that large cities like my own, the city of Calgary, have very effective audit programs to make sure that those funds are properly spent and that they're spent in the manner in which they were intended to be spent. They have very stringent auditing procedures in the city of Calgary and also in the large cities like Edmonton, Lethbridge, and so on. I also want to commend the city of Calgary for some of their auditing procedures which have worked towards performance measures and efficiencies. I would like to mention a couple of those which have been very notable and, I think, which have been exemplary as far as municipal governments go not only in the province of Alberta but right across the country.

One I would mention is the 311 call centre implemented by the city of Calgary. This 311 call centre is a unified call centre which takes care of all of the departments of the city of Calgary. Whether it's a planning matter or a bylaw enforcement matter – it could be a pothole in the street, a barking dog; it could be concern with the municipal tax assessment; it could be almost anything to do with the civic government – when one calls the 311 number, they have trained employees on the other end of the line. Rather than being redirected by an operator and going through to different departments and perhaps getting connected with the wrong department, one is connected with a knowledgeable person on the other end of the line that can usually give answers straight away. That is one example where efficiencies have been very marked and improved upon and, I think, have set an example for many municipalities across the country.

4:50

I also want to mention the 911 call centre in the city of Calgary, which is a tremendous facility. That one integrates the dispatch of police, fire, and emergency medical services from one centre. It is presently in transition, and some of the operators that are in the 911 call centre are already trained to take calls in all three of those areas and to dispatch the necessary services. Those take a tremendous amount of training. They're highly skilled people. The efficiencies are obvious to anyone. Rather than taking time to talk to a 911 operator who has to ascertain what the nature of the problem is and then go through to the appropriate department – fire or EMS or the police – one is immediately dispatched according to what the requirements of the caller are.

Another efficiency that has been gained in terms of performance that I want to mention is in waste collection in the city of Calgary. Formerly we had waste trucks coming down the alley which were manned by three persons. Now we have a new type of vehicle which only takes two persons to operate, and it's much more efficient. Obviously, eliminating one of the three positions resulted in quite a considerable cost saving to the city of Calgary.

I think that the cities, large cities particularly, do a very, very exemplary job in terms of their auditing procedures and their performance audits. Now, having said that, I think the bill as presented by my colleague from Calgary-Hays suggests that performance audits could be of assistance in the case of many municipalities for maximizing efficiencies and that perhaps some of the smaller centres and some of the rural municipalities in particular might benefit by having the input of a municipal auditor general.

The measures proposed in Bill 202 could benefit municipalities in finding shortfalls in operational capabilities. It might assist them in providing information on where those shortfalls exist and what might be done to correct them. Those performance audits, of course, could be done independently from the municipalities, and the recommendations could be given to the municipalities in order to

maximize value for taxpayers' dollars. These objective performance audits could be carried out, of course, by professionals. They would enable some long-term strategies to be implemented.

Mr. Speaker, all municipalities, of course, want to ensure that their operations are being conducted in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. In some circumstances one might envision the fact of further investments, like the example that I gave about the city of Calgary, where they invested in a new type of vehicle to do the garbage collection. There are ways in which those efficiencies might be recognized and appreciated, and there might be recommendations made to make things much better.

Another example might be the cost of maintaining older equipment that is less efficient, upgrading to new practices, and of course technology is changing all the time. In particular an outside auditor might be able to have cognizance of what's going on in other jurisdictions, not only in the province of Alberta but right across the country, and be able to recommend some of those best practices to the particular municipality.

Performance audit reports and recommendations such as we receive here in this House from our Auditor General could analyze aspects of any particular operation or public service provided. They might enhance, for example, the delivery of social services by the city or municipality. Particularly in the case of small municipalities there could be efficiencies by joining forces and having some interjurisdictional co-operation between municipalities and delivering those services or perhaps having a centre for treatment or a centre for providing a particular type of social service in one municipality and sharing it with another.

Mr. Speaker, performance audits would also be useful in communicating to the public the municipalities' decisions to invest in certain areas. I think it's important for ratepayers to have some justification when their money is being expended, and a performance audit would certainly help in that regard. It would enhance the stream of information by strengthening municipal performances in their audits. It would give, as I said, guidance when accounting for decisions.

In summary, Bill 202 recognizes how performance audits might assist some municipalities in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. For those reasons I am supportive of Bill 202, and I would encourage my fellow members to support this bill in principle on its second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to participate in today's discussion in second reading of Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. Alberta has a large number of far-reaching municipalities, many of them rural. Their continued success is a crucial factor in the long-term prosperity of the province. Our municipalities have grown. As such, we as a government have committed to helping municipalities address such growth with the municipal sustainability initiative.

Our government is also committed to low taxes, efficient spending, and a sufficient degree of local autonomy as many important public services are provided at a local level. Bill 202 helps ensure that these goals are met by establishing a framework that will improve the communication and learning process between the government and Alberta municipalities. Mr. Speaker, this will be achieved through the office of the municipal auditor general as proposed by Bill 202. Municipalities across the province will benefit from the office proposed by Bill 202 as it will serve as a central node between all municipalities.

Currently there exist a number of forums for collaboration between municipalities, such as the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, or the AAMDC, and Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association. These organizations are co-operative bodies comprised of membership from Alberta's various municipal districts, especially in the case of the AAMDC, which includes each municipal district and county within the province. In the case of the ARMAA representation is composed of five broader geographic zones.

Mr. Speaker, co-operative associations such as those I just mentioned can serve as productive forums for discussion of municipal matters and as an effective liaison between the province and its municipalities. The AAMDC, in particular, maintains a good perspective of the operational aspects of the province's numerous rural municipalities through its organizational structure of five districts and representation by each county or municipality. Indeed, such an association can serve as a useful conduit for the office of the municipal auditor general. Bill 202 seeks to build upon this collaboration and would provide recommendations to improve operational efficiencies and effectiveness as well as documents and new implementations for future reference.

The proposed office of the municipal auditor general can work with these associations, thereby taking into full account the diverse needs of our rural areas while also promoting a transparent reporting process and accountability for municipal operations. Moreover, the standard performance audits compiled by the office of the municipal auditor general could enhance grant allocations and aid the implementation of best practices in municipal operations. This could ultimately help stabilize local taxes and increase budget flexibility.

Mr. Speaker, the municipal sustainability initiative funding criteria could also be enhanced as a result of information compiled by the office of the municipal auditor general. This can benefit municipalities that face unique challenges in their ability to conduct internal performance audits due to the geographical size of the municipal district or a staffing shortage. Rural municipal districts, for example, may not have the same administrative resources as large cities. Given the number of rural municipal districts in the province, their diversity, voluntary and independent information sharing may not be constant due to lack of resources. Rural municipalities can conduct ad hoc performance assessment from time to time; using external consultants when recruiting, for example.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The time limit for consideration of this item has been concluded. We will continue it next time.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Official Mushroom of Alberta

502. Mr. Benito moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Emblems of Alberta Act to designate *Leccinum boreale*, also known as northern roughstem or red cap, as the official mushroom of Alberta.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce Motion 502. I acknowledge that there are pressing economic issues that currently exist; however, this motion is important to my constituents and 2,500 Albertans who have

chosen this mushroom to be designated as Alberta's provincial mushroom emblem. In fact, Her Honour Lois Hole, the former Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, believed it was a worthwhile goal and a way to recognize an important part of our heritage. She also believed that mushrooms play a crucial role in Alberta's ecosystem, history, medicine, culture, and cuisine.

By recognizing *Leccinum boreale* as Alberta's official mushroom, we would be continuing a long-held tradition. There are a number of official emblems that reflect Alberta's rich history, its people, and its biological and geographical diversity. Currently the Emblems of Alberta Act recognizes a number of environmental emblems.

For example, the wild rose was designated as Alberta's floral emblem in 1930 to recognize the valuable role it plays in Alberta's ecosystem. Also, rough fescue was adopted as Alberta's official grass in 2003, recognizing the vast amount and variety of this grass in the province. The lodgepole pine was established as Alberta's official tree in 1984, recognizing its value in constructing railway ties during Alberta's settlement as well as being the preferred wood for teepee poles, which I'm sure the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake knows very well. Petrified wood is found in gravel pits across this province and was made Alberta's official stone in 1977. As you can see, Alberta has recognized a variety of environmental emblems to symbolize this great province.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of support behind this motion. One of the major proponents is the Alberta Mycological Society. This society plays an invaluable role in promoting the awareness of fungi in this province, and it is the only such organization in a western province. The mission of the Alberta Mycological Society is to raise awareness as well as to educate and promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the kingdom of fungi. Their awareness and education activities include seasonal trips, mushroom identification workshops, mushroom expositions, and an annual president's dinner, where a gourmet mushroom meal is served.

In 2004 the Alberta Mycological Society launched its Pick a Wild Mushroom, Alberta! campaign to choose a mushroom as Alberta's new provincial emblem, which was funded in part by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. The society received over 2,500 votes, with the *Leccinum boreale* emerging as the mushroom of choice for a new mushroom emblem of Alberta. This mushroom was chosen because it is found across Alberta, most commonly under poplar and trembling aspen trees. It is edible, easily identifiable, and has a long history of human use. It also has a long growing season and has been valued highly in a cultural sense as an edible mushroom by immigrant communities, especially the Ukrainian and Polish communities which populated this province.

Mr. Speaker, a great deal of time and effort has been put forward to establish a mushroom emblem for this province. Alberta would be the first province in Canada to establish an official mushroom emblem and would join a handful of American states that have already done so. Currently Oregon recognizes the Pacific golden chanterelle as the official state mushroom, Minnesota has established the sponge morel as the state's official mushroom, and legislation was introduced in Missouri in January 2008 to recognize the morel as their state's official mushroom.

It is important to point out that the mushroom industry contributes \$30 million annually to the Alberta economy – a \$30 million dollar annual contribution to the Alberta economy. By recognizing an official mushroom, we may help promote this valuable industry as well as inspire additional mushroom business ventures. It may lead to additional investment and diversification of the Alberta economy.

Mr. Speaker, this idea was brought to me by constituents in my riding. As their elected representative I have the responsibility to bring forward their concerns, petitions, and economic ideas, which

is exactly what this motion represents. It is not just an emblem but a symbol that could encourage the growth of Alberta's \$30 million mushroom industry. It is for this reason that I have brought forward Motion 502, and I encourage all hon. members to join me in urging the government to make *Leccinum boreale* Alberta's mushroom emblem.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to commend the member for bringing forth the motion regarding the designation of the red cap mushroom as the official mushroom of the province of Alberta. I appreciate the fact that this motion has brought some recognition to not only members of the House but to the Alberta public for mushrooms and the world of mycology in general. I would also like to commend the Edmonton Mycological Society for the same reasons, in bringing forth all of these various mushrooms, including the red cap mushroom, to the attention of the public in Alberta and particularly for the participation that they engendered by virtue of having a public election or choosing one of the three finalists that they put forth to the Alberta public for the official mushroom of the province of Alberta. All of this information has created people's awareness of these fascinating vegetables.

Now, for most people wild mushrooms are largely a dark and unknown subject. Hence, we often hear the simile that someone who is deprived of knowledge or information is said to be like a mushroom: they're kept in the dark, and they're fed manure. But to those of us who love nature and spend time in the outdoors, mushrooms are not only beautiful things but a fascinating part of the environment, and for those of us who appreciate eating mushrooms, they're even more fascinating because they make a wonderful accompaniment to meats, great soups. They're great fried in stuffing. I use them in all of my wild game stuffings, and they're just great.

Mushrooms, as people may not know, are only the fruiting bodies of fungi. They belong to a particular phylum of fungi called the basidiomycetes. Basidiomycetes are fungi that have these particular fruiting bodies above ground, which we know as mushrooms or toadstools or puffballs or things of that nature. [interjections] Pardon me?

5:10

Mr. Liepert: It sounds like an opposition question.

Dr. Brown: No, those are different kinds of puffballs.

These basidiomycetes, as are all fungi, are part of a very healthy environment. They help to break down vegetable matter. Of course, the fruiting bodies that we see on the surface are only a very, very small part of the fungi. In fact, the vast biomass of the fungi lies either beneath the ground or inside of decaying vegetable matter, things like trees and fallen leaves. Anything that's moist and in an environment that has lots of moisture tends to have a lot of fungi invading it. It helps to break it down, and it helps to create soil.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do love mushrooms, but my difficulty with this particular motion is choosing one of these wonderful basidiomycetes over all of the other basidiomycetes that we have in the province of Alberta. I thank the hon. member for providing us with a poster of some of these particular mushrooms.

I must say that I have some other favorites. I'm not too familiar with the red cap mushroom, but one of my favorites is the shaggy mane mushroom. I see on here that the Latin name for it is the *Coprinus comatus*. For those of you who don't know shaggy mane

mushrooms, they grow in disturbed areas, quite often along the roadsides. They're one of the most common mushrooms in the province of Alberta, and they're absolutely delicious. They have a very short shelf life, however. They have to be picked very early in the morning, and they tend to go black, which doesn't mean that they can't be used, but they become quite inky after a day in the sun. Shaggy mane mushrooms are extremely edible, extremely tasty. They have a very, very pungent flavour, so a few of those fried up in a little bit of butter help to flavour almost any dish. They're a wonderful mushroom. That's one of my favorites, and I'd be hard-pressed to pick the red cap over that one.

Another one of my all-time favourite mushrooms is the puffball, *Lycoperdon perlatum*. A lot of people don't know that puffballs are actually very edible. In fact, my aunt Frances Borgal used to love picking puffballs, and she often brought them to our house when I was a youngster. They can grow quite large, and sliced up and fried in a little bit of butter, they are also very, very tasty. Incidentally, puffballs were also used by the native Indians in making war paint. After they were dried out, the spores are very fine, and they used to adorn their faces with this extract from puffballs as part of their war paint.

There are other mushrooms that I could talk about. The field mushroom, *Agaricus silvaticus*, again, is another one that's a very tasty one. It's also very, very common in the province of Alberta, and it's the one that we would most commonly associate with being edible. A lot of the other ones people are reluctant to use because of the fact that they're afraid that they might be poisonous.

I want to thank, again, the member. As I said, the reason that I'm unable to support the motion is simply because there are too many other ones, and I would hate to pick one over the other. But I want to thank him for his efforts in bringing the red cap mushroom and all of these basidiomycetes to the attention of the Assembly and the public.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I must comment that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill makes the debate delicious.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you wish to speak?

Ms Notley: It's a moderate kind of pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this particular motion, the emblem debate. It's, I guess, very important that we have a conversation about the province's emblems. We have a lot of emblems, actually, in Alberta. We have, of course, the wild rose, which we've heard about. We have a grass emblem. Rough fescue is our grass. We have an official tartan and an official dress tartan. We actually have two separate tartans. We have an official bird. We have an official stone. Petrified wood is apparently our official stone, which is kind of interesting. We have an official tree, the lodgepole pine. I'm not sure how many of those are left yet, but there you go; we have an official tree. We have official colours, which are remarkably similar to other well-known colours, blue and gold, with quotation marks around it, not at all similar to, say, orange, so no similarities there. We have, of course, the official mammal, the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. Of course, this I don't think made it into the rousing debate in question period involving the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, but we also have an official fish, the bull trout, a type of trout. Anyway, we certainly have a lot of official things, and I wonder how much debate went into the establishment of those particular official things.

Now we're talking about the official mushroom. I guess my first question is a little bit along the lines of the previous speaker. Why is it that we're picking this particular mushroom? You know, as soon as you pick one mushroom, you, of course, exclude all the

others. As soon as you recognize one thing, you inadvertently insult the others. If you pick this mushroom, do other mushrooms not get their day in the shade, as it were? What about the other important fungi out there? For instance, one might say that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is a fun guy. Why can't he be on an emblem, for example? There are a lot of other things that could be on an emblem. The puffball was already identified by these folks over here. Clearly, if you were to actually do a vote, I'm sure that would be a mushroom that a significant unnamed group of government backbenchers would be inclined to want to support. So, you know, we have all these various and sundry overlooked fungi that will be, I'm sure, very deeply hurt through their failure to be included on this list.

Moving away from maybe the slightly more lighthearted reasons why one might not want to identify this particular mushroom as an official mushroom, I'm compelled to quote, actually, a member of the government cabinet, which is not something I do often. In this particular case I thought it was very interesting that the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, I believe, was quoted in one of the newspapers, saying, "Bless them all for their enthusiasm, but do we really need any more official anythings?" I've gotta say that I was kind of inclined to agree with that. "Every time we do one of these things it costs money, and it's not a cheap proposition. I think we can spend our money elsewhere right now."

I have to say that that kind of leads into sort of my key point in this particular discussion. Members here may recall that we had a debate about changing the standing orders in the last session. One of the issues that members from the opposition put forward with respect to standing orders was the process through which members of the opposition managed to get either private members' bills or private members' motions onto the agenda. Of course, as you all know, right now we do it through a lottery. If you don't happen to be one that is very successful at lotteries, then you don't get a private member's motion or a private member's bill.

5:20

At the time we suggested a different approach, one where maybe the numbers of motions and bills would be split in half, and the opposition could take their half and divide them up on a pro rata basis. At the time I was told: no, no, there are very, very burning, important issues that all backbench members of the Assembly need to be able to address, very important issues, and that it's not partisan, and we all need to be able to have very important discussions about the really key issues of the day. So here we are today, having one of those conversations, apparently.

I would suggest that given the discussions we've had in the House over just the last three weeks, if I – well, in fact, I don't even have to. I was going to say that if I were to go into the sponsoring member's constituency and ask those constituents what they thought was a burning issue, but I don't actually have to go there because I often get mail from people outside of my riding. I believe I've received some from the hon. member's riding. Some of the things that they might talk about or in some cases have talked about would include their fear with respect to keeping their job over the next year or whether they will fall into that 15,000 and probably much, much higher number that the finance minister has said will lose their job.

They might talk about whether their grandparents will be able to find a long-term care bed with the appropriate level of care when they become ill and need that care. They might talk about the unfortunate state of our foster care system and whether or not we can keep our children safe in Alberta. They might talk about the issues of our environment and the fact that we appear to have no plan to meaningfully clean up the tailings ponds which are threatening the

water system in the whole northern part of the province. There's not a shortage of things that people contact my office about that this Legislature has responsibility over that they are concerned about. There is not a shortage of important issues for us to discuss.

That's why I think it's a bit unfortunate that today, because of the process we have in place, we're not able to bring these matters forward in the form of private members' bills or in the form of motions. Instead we're in this process where today we're talking about this particular mushroom.

Having said all that, I will of course also say that, you know, were I to actually have to choose one, I would have to say that the puffball, reflecting this Legislature, would definitely be the more appropriate choice. But I won't take any more time because I think I've made the point that we're really taking too much time dealing with this particular issue.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have much more to add to this debate. My friend the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has made most of my comments.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has mentioned colours. I look at the colour of this mushroom, and it actually is red. I'm not sure if that is her favourite colour or not. It definitely is not mine. It's not something that I like to wear on a regular basis.

Just before I get to a couple of comments, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to mention that I do appreciate the motion that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has brought forward. He's a very hard-working MLA. He's intellectually honest. Obviously, he was elected the same time as me.

I do engage in a bit of direct democracy every now and then, Mr. Speaker. Some of my favourite constituents have talked to me, and they've asked me why we actually are debating this when we have a world-wide economic crisis, when we have gang shootings in my own constituency, and some of the other issues that people have mentioned.

If we are going to debate this, the one thing I'll mention is that I've looked through this list, and I don't see any shiitake mushrooms here at all. Secondly, I also have started to look through some of the other motions here, other issues, as the previous speaker also did, and I notice that there are other motions, like Motion 523, which talks about deterring frivolous costs for the Human Rights Commission. That's another thing I'd like to debate, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the comments I'm getting about this just on my Twitter account. There's one person who is allergic to mushrooms, and she wonders if the government is trying to kill her. Somebody here also owns a mushroom farm in Sherwood Park, and someone takes it quite seriously here as well. On top of that, the press even is looking at this. But the most important thing that I will mention is, again, from one of my favourite constituents. She says: "Oh, come on. With the economy and infrastructure in disarray someone thinks you have to debate mushrooms?"

I will pass my hat to the next speaker and table these photographs that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has been so kind to provide.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 502, Alberta's provincial mushroom,

brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Motion 502 urges the government to amend the Emblems of Alberta Act and declare the red cap Alberta's provincial mushroom. The mushroom would be grouped into a category of natural symbols along with other provincial symbols: the flower, grass, stone, bird, mammal, and fish.

Mushrooms not only play an important role in our natural world, but they also play a role in my culture. Mr. Speaker, I am a supporter of this motion for one major reason. There are approximately 300,000 Albertans of Ukrainian descent in our province today, and mushrooms are very important to the Ukrainian culture, especially in our cooking. When I got married, I participated in mushroom picking near Smoky Lake. This activity is something that my husband's family has always participated in and still does. We get on our quads, we go into the bush, and we look for mushrooms. We pick all sorts of mushrooms, including the red tops, the type that we are discussing here today. Mushroom picking was a way to bring our family together to enjoy and appreciate the beautiful Alberta landscape. We then used these mushrooms in many of the Ukrainian dishes that my family cooked. I still use a lot of mushrooms in my cooking today, in dishes like nalesniki, which are mushroom crepes, mushrooms and cream, everyone's favourite. Plus, a mushroom dish is one of the 12 dishes that we serve on Ukrainian Christmas Eve.

Mr. Speaker, while it may seem strange at first to declare a provincial mushroom for Alberta, it makes a lot of sense, especially when it's such an influential ingredient in our culture. Legislation that creates provincial symbols of our heritage is very meaningful to the province and its citizens. It's very meaningful to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, his constituents, and people like myself.

I am supportive of Motion 502, Alberta's provincial mushroom, because the mushroom is a great symbol to myself. This is very important to Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to discuss Motion 502.

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

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 502, Alberta's provincial mushroom, brought forth by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Originally I was skeptical about having an official provincial mushroom, but then I thought that we have a provincial flower, the wild rose; a provincial tree, the lodgepole pine; a provincial grass, rough fescue; and I just recently learned, this afternoon, that we also have a provincial stone. While I can see that as important as fescue and roses and stones have been in my life, trees and mushrooms have been much more so.

There are persons in this House who have on occasion today said that they felt like they were being treated like mushrooms. We've used that phrase to describe population explosions. The humble mushroom itself has taken on a new prominence in Alberta. Veggie burgers often feature a portobello mushroom, that tastes, I am told, almost like beef. As a cheeseburger-in-paradise kind of guy I confess I don't have any first-hand knowledge of that. Mushrooms have transcended the range of culinary delights from pig-snout truffle to the chanterelle to the barn-raised little white ones. They are a delight.

For those of us who could not wait to leave home when we were young, we quickly discovered that mushroom soup was perhaps the most versatile food in the cupboard. It ranked right up there with macaroni and cheese as a staple of youth poverty. In those dark days leading up to payday, when we had to make a decision between beer

or groceries, we'd often buy beer, knowing that our environmental sensibilities meant that we would recycle the empties instead of discarding whatever it was that lettuce morphed into after two weeks in the fridge. We ate mac and cheese without milk, and we drank a little bit of beer. Mushroom soup could be soup, but often as not it was gravy in a can. My favourite meal, once I learned about ovenproof pans, was a little creation I called the SPAM filet. You open a can of SPAM – and, please, don't do this with corned beef; I'll have to talk to you about that – stand it on end, butterfly it, a couple of slices of pineapple, cover it liberally with mushroom soup, bake it in the oven, and that's excellent, excellent eating.

5:30

Of course, as every man in this room will know, once you entertain the thoughts of love, you will be called upon to show your new love interest your culinary skill with that old standard, pork chops and mushroom soup gravy. It is also at this dinner that you will discover your commitment to living the simplistic life and modelling yourself after Thoreau, which means that you don't own a corkscrew. The girl, if she shares an interest in you, will likely have one in her purse and will save the evening. You will of course be enthralled by this, and she will vow that while she appreciates the efforts, once you're living together, she will teach you how to cook real food. You will not fully comprehend what this means until you trade in your Camaro on a minivan and are expected to develop an opinion on things like the various shades of blue for the nursery.

Now, in British Columbia they have a slightly different affinity for mushrooms of the psychotropic kind. I can certainly understand how it might take that kind of fungus to make life more bearable, but as an illegal substance we can no more support the cultivation or harvesting than we can the consumption.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, about this motion. This motion is for the law-abiding good people of Alberta, who know the difference between a red cap and a toadstool and who can be judged to act responsibly in their pursuit of the perfect fungus. I believe that the hon. member is an excellent representative of his constituents for whom this is an issue, and while there are those here who will attempt to silence his voice on this issue, I remind this House that we represent our constituents in this place and not the other way around. Give the hon. member his due. He's fulfilling a promise to a constituent, and we must respect this because, I am told, although admittedly the line has been just recently used, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is a real fun guy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What more is there to be said about this mushroom? We've had cooking lessons. We've had eating-the-special-mushroom lessons, that apparently some people may be more attuned to than myself.

Mr. Speaker, I know that some will say and some have already said: is this the most important task at hand for this government right now? To that end I must admit that it is not. But this is a private member's motion. It's normal practice for a private member's motion to come forward to urge the government to consider doing whatever is in the motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods' Motion 502 urges this government to adopt the red cap as the official fungi emblem of Alberta. That's important to this member, and he has come back with quite a bit of backup, insight, and knowledge as well as many reasons as to why he feels this is important.

Some things were touched on earlier, one of which was the

education benefits to Albertans on these mushrooms because of their significant value, that the average person is unaware of. One of those examples is how mushrooms contribute to medical research. In addition, they're a great source of protein, fibre, minerals, vitamin B, and ascorbic acid. They also help Alberta's ecosystems by decomposing organic matter. The mushroom, by growing around the roots, as was mentioned earlier by Calgary-Nose Hill, actually feeds many plants beneficial to our ecosystem, and the plants in turn supply those fungi with sugars that are required for them, that are picked up through photosynthesis.

In addition, mushrooms are a valuable industry. In fact, Alberta's mushroom industry contributes \$30 million in annual revenues. The industry helps ensure a diversified economy and creates jobs. The mushroom as a fungus is underestimated, and this motion can help promote that importance. Although the northern red cap does have some things in common with the opposition, just the red part, if we were going to consider fungi as an emblem, that mushroom would be the one to pick because of its abundance in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I close by urging everyone just to take a look at the motion and think of its importance to our fellow Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I urge them to support his efforts to make this mushroom our provincial emblem.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'm delighted to stand and speak to having a mushroom named as an emblem of Alberta, the red mushroom, not blue, not green, but red. Wonderful. I was pleased that one of my colleagues across the way alluded to psychedelic mushrooms. Now, that, of course, is what I thought we were going to talk about, which would have been a lot more fun. From what I understand, magic mushrooms really can expand your mind, and I'm sure the debate would be quite interesting around that.

However, we already in Alberta have armorial bearings, which includes the arms, the crest, the supporters, and our motto, of course, which is *Fortis et Liber*, which means strong and free. We also have the flag of Alberta and the floral emblem of Alberta. We have a grass. We have a pattern, which would apply to our tartan. We have a bird, we have a tree, we have a colour, we have a mammal, we have a fish, we have symbols of distinction, we've got regulations, and we also have some legislation for anyone using the official emblem in the wrong way. So I just think it's very interesting that the mushroom would be another object that we would have as an official something in this province.

I will just close with this thought: I would give you your mushroom if you would give me my rodeo. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I would call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to close the debate.

Mr. Benito: When I accepted this idea from a constituency member, I spoke to my daughter, and my daughter told me: "Daddy, you have to be careful in presenting this to the House because many people may not see this as a traditional emblematic symbol. They might think that this is not a serious issue, that this is frivolous or funny." So that's the risk, and I'm willing to take that risk to represent the views and interests of my constituency members. I think that as an elected member of the House it is my responsibility to bring forward whatever issues they think might be important to this province.

There is an opportunity in this. There is a qualitative value to reinforcing provincial pride and legislation that builds on existing symbols and heritage which are meaningful in the life of the province and its citizens.

I just want to mention also that a study of nontimber forest products estimates the value of wild mushrooms to be \$100 million in Canada. A study of the pine mushroom in B.C. estimates revenues of \$10 million to \$40 million annually. There have been no specific studies of the economic value of wild fungi in Alberta. There are no regulations in place requiring permits. In 2001 in Montana, where mushroom-picking permits are required, 3,642 commercial permits and 3,750 personal permits were issued. The annual value to that state is \$200 million to \$500 million per day in the high-peak season.

I would still request everybody to support this motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

5:40

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour, I would like to move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:41 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Issue 12

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's truly my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two individuals from the Russian presidential academy for state service, Dr. Nikolai Volgin, professor of Economics and dean of the Labour and Social Policy Department; and Dr. Vera Smorchkova, head of the northern program at the Russian Academy of Public Administration and assistant to the chairman of the Northern and Indigenous Affairs Committee. Accompanying Drs. Volgin and Smorchkova is their interpreter, Andre Dimitri. I'd also like to introduce somebody who is no stranger to this Assembly, Dr. Mike Percy, dean of the University of Alberta School of Business.

The delegation is here representing the Russian presidential academy for state service, which trains and provides professional education for all levels of Russian state service. Alberta is proud to host these guests and to assist them in learning more about our postsecondary education system. I would ask that our honoured guests please rise at this time and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of students from Springbank community high school. Accompanying them are eight parents and teachers: Mrs. Deanna Ring, Miss Natalie Casey, Mr. Dave Fraser, Mrs. Tammy Hodgson, Mr. Terry Stein, Ms Cynthia Johansen, Mrs. Christine Whitney, and Mr. Ron Klippert. They're taking a tour of the Legislature and studying how the government of Alberta works. I'd like them to please rise and receive the traditional warm reception and welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean. The Campus Saint-Jean, which just celebrated last year its 100th

anniversary, is among the top francophone postsecondary institutions outside of the province of Quebec. It offers more than 650 students a variety of very unique undergraduate and graduate programs in French, ranging from education to business to nursing to engineering and much more. The campus is also home to the University of Alberta's Canadian Studies Institute and the largest French language library collection in western Canada, a real gem.

I would ask our guests in the members' gallery to stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as I introduce them. They are dean Marc Arnal, Mr. Denis Fontaine, associate dean responsible for recruitment, and Dr. Claude Couture, director of the Canadian Studies Institute. I would ask all members to give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Janet Ryan-Newell. I had the pleasure of meeting Janet last Friday at the Crossroads Family Services Foster Parent Banquet. Mrs. Ryan-Newell founded Crossroads Family Services since 1997. Crossroads is a nonprofit foster care agency. Their mandate is to recruit, train, and support high-quality foster families. Prior to this new opportunity she had worked as a child psychologist and a teacher in Edmonton for many years. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Foster Parents

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are more than 2,300 foster homes in this province caring for some of our most vulnerable children during what can often be troubling or difficult times in their lives. Each and every day they demonstrate dedication, generosity, patience, compassion, and strength.

This past Friday I was truly honoured to take part in the Crossroads Family Services Foster Parent Banquet that was organized by Mrs. Janet Ryan-Newell. It was a wonderful opportunity to visit with a number of dedicated foster families. It brought me great warmth and hope to know that there are people like them who open their homes and hearts to children and youth in need.

I also had the opportunity to hear about the terrific turnout at the foster parent recruitment information session hosted by my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. We need more families like them to help us care for young Albertans. People of many backgrounds and situations become wonderful foster parents. I encourage Albertans to visit fostercarealberta.ca to learn more about foster parenting and if it's right for their family.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Alberta foster parents. Without a doubt, your kindness, skill, and commitment are making a difference in the lives of young people and in helping to create a stronger, more vibrant Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about a very special place within my constituency of Calgary-North Hill,

Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre. The centre was founded in 1973, beginning as a small group of seniors who wanted to create a place for seniors to stay connected with their community and maintain an active lifestyle. What began as meetings at St. Giles church grew to 125 members in their first year. Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre now boasts over 900 members.

On February 25, 2009, I attended the centre's annual general meeting, where it highlighted the past year's successes and challenges and looked forward to the upcoming year. From the tea and conversation program to the camera club and fundraising events, the Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre is an outstanding example of the kind of community that Calgary-North Hill is. The centre is even being used now by the family care centre in a pilot project for Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers.

Confederation Park seniors' centre averages 339 volunteers monthly who put in over 38,000 hours a year. The volunteers, who are the lifeblood of this facility, make me proud to be their MLA.

Mr. Speaker, just last month the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports met with myself and the president of Confederation Park seniors' centre, Claire Crierie, regarding some of the operational challenges facing the centre. We had a welcome and good discussion about how to keep such a needed resource for our seniors in our communities accessible and affordable.

I'd like to commend this facility for another amazing year in operation and wish them even more success in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Ethics Week

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Alberta's eighth Health Ethics Week, which took place from the 2nd to the 8th of this month.

According to the Provincial Health Ethics Network an ethical issue arises in any situation in which people face choices about how to act that will have an impact on others. Health ethics is the branch of ethics that deals with ethics issues arising in the fields of health care, medicine and biology.

Making ethical decisions within a public service context is becoming increasingly complex because of the advancement of technologies, evolving demographics and trends, and greater citizen interest in decisions that affect our lives and demand for better information to make informed decisions.

1:40

Health ethics issues are surfaced from all aspects of health services from the delivery of health care such as making decisions on end-of-life matters, to health promotion – an example would be allocating resources to preventative versus acute care – to conducting health research on matters such as gene therapy and informed consent.

Mr. Speaker, the key goals for the designated Health Ethics Week include highlighting the importance of examining values underpinning the health system, offering health ethics education, and profiling health ethics issues across the province. One of the objectives of Health Ethics Week is to engage citizens of Alberta in discussions about the meaning of respecting human dignity, promoting well-being for all, and advocating fairness.

The theme for the 2009 Health Ethics Week was Nurturing Respect and Caring in Times of Transition, which focuses on promoting respect between health care providers, patients, staff, and the public. Highlights from this year's events include lectures on subjects such as apology legislation and health care, ethics across

cultures, human dignity, and medical technology. I believe most people can appreciate the level of complexity and controversy involved in these discourses just by the titles of the events.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

North East Centre of Community Society

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to offer my sincerest congratulations to the North East Centre of Community Society for acquiring funding for their new Genesis centre in northeast Calgary. This facility will provide an 18,000 square foot library, fitness centre, large gymnasium, multipurpose meeting room, community kitchen, food and retail services, and a new high school. The entire project will cover 225,000 square feet developed in the communities of Martindale, Taradale, and Saddle Ridge.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of this building are numerous, such as immigration assistance, youth and family support services as well as employment and training assistance. It will also give young people a place to go in their spare time, and we all know that the more time spent on positive activities such as recreation and cultural pursuits, the less likely these young people are to experiment with drugs or get swept up in gang life.

The NECCS facility will also serve to break down cultural and ethnic barriers. Those seeking assistance with employment issues as well as English as a second language will be able to find support agencies here. This will also help new Canadians integrate into both the workforce and society, allowing them to participate fully in their communities to the benefit of all Calgarians.

This facility will serve as a jewel in the crown of northeast Calgary. I want to congratulate the NECCS board and their members and their partners in the community: the YMCA, the city of Calgary, the United Way of Calgary, Genesis corporation as well as all of the local community groups for their hard work and dedication. I would also like to thank the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, who graciously offered his help when I met with him to promote this facility. I would like to thank the Premier and other hon. members who were in attendance. Without the efforts of all of these people this initiative would not have been possible. The legacy they have created will last for many generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Young Worker Safety

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in October I had the privilege of attending the launch of Alberta's young worker safety campaign called bloodylucky.ca. Along with the Minister of Employment and Immigration I had the honour of speaking with young workers at this event. I am strongly behind this web-based campaign, one that garnered significant media attention and had over 60,000 website visits in the first week alone. Now, we will never know for sure whether bloodylucky.ca can be directly credited with saving lives or limbs, but I am a firm believer that when we can encourage young Albertans to discuss workplace health and safety with their employers or they can talk about it amongst their peers, it is well worth it.

I was very pleased to hear that bloodylucky.ca has now been recognized by the Advertising Club of Edmonton. At its recent ACE awards bloodylucky.ca received the fearless client award, which is most fitting. I am told that the award is for a campaign that demonstrates a willingness to stretch boundaries and to take creative

risks in an effort to deliver effective communications. This campaign pushed the boundaries because it had to, it went beyond the usual government messaging because it had to, and it made young Alberta workers sit up and take note because they had to.

I would like to commend everyone involved in bloodylucky.ca for having the courage to move forth with this campaign, for having the passion to reach out to such a hard-to-reach audience, and for being, as the ACE awards proclaim, a fearless client.

Congratulations.

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

Agricultural Service Board Awards

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2009 agricultural service board annual supper and community services volunteer appreciation night was held this past Friday, March 6. It was hosted by Mayor Jim Rennie and the council and staff from Woodlands county. The evening started out with an official greeting by our Speaker, MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. After a fantastic home-cooked meal the first recognition went to John and Mabel Baxter. The Baxters won the Northlands farm family award in 2008 for Woodlands county.

I would also like to mention the Golden Heart award winners for 2008: Helen Kluin and Pauline Thompson from Fort Assiniboine; Bill Jackson, Kaj Christensen, Don and Bonnie Myers of Blue Ridge; and Lorraine Yagos, Toni Meyers, and Diane Hagman from Anselmo.

This year's civic award was won by the Whitecourt Woodlands Flying Club. The club hosted an air show, with attendance of nearly 10,000, Mr. Speaker.

Our volunteers are the real movers and shakers in our communities. They make things happen and ensure that events run smoothly. Mr. Speaker, on both your behalf and mine I would like to congratulate the award winners. A big thank you to Woodlands county for treating us to a great evening at Topland hall, which is located just kilometres from the geographic centre of our province, Mr. Speaker, as you know.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented Thursday, March 5, 2009, and I can advise the House that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94. Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to request the inclusion of Complex Decongestive Therapy in the list of accepted therapeutic procedures covered by Alberta Health Care.

This petition adds 246 signatures to the 335 signatures on a similar petition which was presented in 2006. The signatures were gathered by the Alberta Lymphedema Association, members of which were my guests in the House yesterday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 24

Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009.

This new act allows Alberta to better prepare for and respond to an outbreak of a highly contagious livestock disease, and it also allows the government to respond to emergency disease situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health. The amendments to the act are being sought for minor improvements to the Animal Health Act. The proposed changes are completely aligned with the Alberta livestock and meat strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 24 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 26

Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009, for first reading.

The Wildlife Act governs the management of wildlife as a Crown resource and enables the hunting and trapping of wildlife while providing protections and controls where necessary. Wildlife management is challenging and continuously changing, and these amendments will eliminate certain challenges in administering and enforcing the act. These miscellaneous amendments will clarify legislation to avoid confusion in courts and deal with offences. The amendments will also allow fish and wildlife officers to deal with offences, monitor hunting activities, respond to wildlife issues, and conduct wildlife control measures more effectively. These amendments will strengthen our wildlife management legislation to ensure the protection of our wildlife resources for current and future Albertans.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 26 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Speaker's Ruling

Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to Oral Question Period, I just want to advise all members that I have been receiving complaints. In the recent letter that I put out to all hon. members with respect to laptop computers and other electronic devices, including BlackBerrys, I indicated they were not to be utilized

during question period. There's something going on in virtual wonderland called twittering, and it seems that even as the question period goes on, some hon. members have been accessing their BlackBerrys to put some messages in the virtual world before the question is even answered by another person. Come on now. We agreed on certain things, certain decorum. I've even noticed today that prior to this point in time several members had BlackBerrys out. Please.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In these uncertain economic times uncertainty is dominating the markets. This uncertainty is only heightened with the Premier continuously giving different messages about the plans for Alberta and what Alberta is facing. We've heard a different message from this government on the economic plan every week. To the Premier: why isn't the Premier providing a consistent economic message to Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are. I've said that part of our three-point plan will be to tighten up our spending in the upcoming budget. The second will be the necessity to dip into the savings that we've managed to set aside in the bank for times like these. The third is to continue to invest in people and infrastructure in this province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the budget is coming down within weeks, and we've heard from this Premier at various times indicating the possibility of dramatic spending cuts, public-sector debt, then no debt, then deficits, then no deficits. To the Premier: what principles will guide our economic plan in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our goal is to come out of this global recession stronger, meaning that we'll have to continue to invest in people and infrastructure, as I've said before. We don't want to lose the nurses, the doctors that we've attracted to the province nor all of the other people that have moved to Alberta. So that means continued investment in our programs and also in infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier believe he's inspiring confidence in Alberta's economic outlook by continuing to speculate about the course of this government's take on the economic downturn?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no speculation. The plan is very clear cut. We will tighten up our spending, as I said. However, as I said before, we will ensure that we take care of the most vulnerable Albertans. That is, you know, the history of this government, and we will continue to do so.

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

Provincial Borrowing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Premier some simple questions around his musings about borrowing

money and putting this province back into debt. Instead of straight answers, what I got was more musings about how we maybe could get a lower interest rate on the loan than the rates we're getting on our investments. This from a government that lost 15 per cent on its investments last year, so forgive me if I'm skeptical, given the Premier's ability to buy high and sell low. I'll try again, same question as yesterday: is the Premier going to change the Fiscal Responsibility Act so he can put Alberta back into debt? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, even though Alberta has lost some of its savings, I will say that AIMCo has done a marvellous job. Where other jurisdictions have lost as much as 35 to 40 per cent, the overall loss to the investments we've had is about 16 per cent. So that's a pretty good performance compared to other jurisdictions. The other is that we are looking at all options in terms of ensuring that we have the necessary infrastructure in place as we come out of this recession. I don't want to put this province back in the same position we were before, where we're building infrastructure at 20, 25 per cent inflation a year and trying to catch up with that. We have an opportunity to put people to work. We have an opportunity to build infrastructure that's going to support continued quality of life in this province, and it's the best time now than ever.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the Premier undertaken any review of his government's current spending practices, be it on capital or core programs, because you can spend stupid on both, before he started to think out loud about taking out a loan?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, I have. In fact, with respect to our operational side of the budget – the operational side of the budget, Mr. Speaker, is what we pay for on a daily basis, whether it be surgeries in hospitals, educating our children – that part of the budget will be balanced; however, on infrastructure we may be looking at alternative ways of financing that infrastructure because concrete is about half of what it was before in price and steel has dropped dramatically.

You know, it's funny. I know that yesterday the hon. member expressed real anger. He was kind of agitated, and I can see why. If you're sitting on the fence all that time, it's kind of hard to take that. But here's the thing. It wasn't that long ago when the opposition planned to spend the entire sustainability budget before the last election on new boondoggles in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's the real question. How did we go – how did we go – from 15 years of surpluses in this province to six months after the economy goes south on us, this government has to talk about borrowing money?

Mr. Stelmach: That's the point that the hon. member is missing. As I said yesterday, there is no jurisdiction that has \$14 billion in cash in the bank to help offset the difficulties as we're working through this global recession: \$6 billion of that is for capital, and \$7.7 billion is for supporting the programs that Albertans enjoy – again, that's in health and education, social services, children's services – ensuring that we maintain quality of life as we move through this very difficult economic period.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Farm Worker Safety

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government has laws to protect the welfare of pigs and cattle and chickens and sheep and other livestock. The law covers abuse and illness, food, water, ventilation, and transportation, and it provides for inspection, enforcement, and penalties. This same government deliberately exempts paid farm workers from WCB, occupational health and safety, and the labour code. To the Premier: why does this government protect farm animals but not paid farm workers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's the same question that was raised by the member a few months ago. I said yesterday that both ministers are looking at consulting with various farm organizations, trying to bring about legislation or policy that's going to make sense in terms of the operation of our farms in the province, and I'm awaiting the results of that consultation. It will come back here to the House, and we'll have a chance to further debate it.

Dr. Taft: Well, it's taking too long, Mr. Speaker. This Premier when he was minister of agriculture strengthened the protection for livestock and said, and I quote: in Alberta we must show the public by our actions that the humane treatment of the livestock in our care is a priority, and we want to have a system that places Alberta in a leadership position world-wide with regards to the humane treatment of farm animals. This same government explicitly exempts paid farm workers from basic protection. Again to the Premier: why doesn't this government give all human beings the same rights?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the two ministers are meeting with farm organizations and others to discuss options with respect to this issue and will bring the consultations back to the Legislature.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, it's taking too long. This Premier was minister of agriculture 10 years ago when he brought in the Alberta livestock protection system. He could also have brought in legislation to protect farm workers. He refused. In the years since he became agriculture minister, 223 people have died in farm accidents and there have been over 15,000 significant injuries. To the Premier: will he act now to bring in equivalent protection for paid farm workers as is provided for farm animals?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Riverview made quite a serious allegation in this House. What he said was, of course, wrong because in the years that I've served in this House as a member of this government and also the government that I now lead in Alberta, there has been no connection between support of the political process and my government's decision on public policy. I've always made it clear that I govern for all Albertans and that donors cannot expect any special treatment.

I also had a meeting with the hon. Leader of the Opposition before this session was convened, and we reached an agreement during that meeting that we were going to maintain decorum in the House. I expect the Leader of the Official Opposition to maintain the agreement that we reached a few weeks ago. I just hope that all sides of the House will be respectful of this agreement that we reached, and I wish the hon. leader success in obtaining that agreement.

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

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier claimed that future power supplies to Edmonton and Calgary depended on giving the government almost unlimited and unchecked control over privately owned land. Previous Alberta governments have managed economic growth quite well without resorting to such draconian measures. The question is to the Premier. Why can't this government manage growth and development without taking away the rights of Alberta landowners? What's wrong with this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the preamble was, but he's totally wrong. I've made a comment that as we look to the future in this province and as we have more people moving in, we have the need to supply more electricity to the larger urban centres, which we know is definitely necessary. We want to ensure that all landowners in Alberta are treated fairly and that there is a fair process. That's the objective, of course, of the bill. I am going to work very hard together with our cabinet and caucus to ensure that all landowners, no matter where they live in the province of Alberta, are represented fairly and treated fairly and that there's a very fair process as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Landowners should not be subject to unchecked government control of their land, even more so when this control can exist for an unlimited period of time and without compensation. My question is to the Premier. Why is it the policy of this government to sterilize the land of Albertans without time limits and without compensation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the issue that I raised yesterday. That's what we want to avoid. There were landowners that in prior years, the last 35 to 40 years, have had to resort to the courts to settle some of their differences. We want to make sure that landowners are protected in legislation as opposed to how we purchase land, perhaps, in the future for long-term corridors. That's why I'm looking forward to a good discussion of this matter because this is the time to put that legislation in place that will help carry this province forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this legislation will take away those rights to access the courts by giving the government almost unlimited power. Just one year after the election this government is already out of touch with Albertans. Giving the government the power to control the land of private citizens without due process flies in the face of Albertans' traditions and principles. My question is to the Premier. Will you admit that it's wrong to give the government almost unlimited power over private land, including two-year jail time for those who refuse to comply, and do the right thing and withdraw Bill 19?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this is all about fairness and a process that's clearly laid out in legislation so that landowners are treated fairly in the province. What I will say is that yesterday the hon. leader was giving me a lesson, I think, through his preamble on how not to approach rural Albertans for support. I say that you should be the last person I would be consulting to see how to win more seats in this province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Landowner Compensation for Government-acquired Land

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently received a number of calls and e-mails from constituents regarding compensation for landowners when government identifies the need to acquire land. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. What policy is currently in place regarding landowner compensation when government acquires land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our policy, of course, is to pay fair market value, with negotiation being the preferred method that we use to determine the selling price. We obtain an independent appraisal before negotiations begin, and we suggest that landowners do the same. These appraisals form the basis of our negotiations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. To the same minister: at what point during the process of identifying the need for land does the landowner have the opportunity to sell the land for fair market value?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it's in our best interests to buy the necessary land as quickly as possible. When we approve a project that requires land, we must prepare to buy that land in a timely fashion. If a landowner is ready to sell us the land, we're very happy to start negotiations right away.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: is the government going to ensure that these principles are considered in future legislation that involves acquiring land for large projects that benefit Albertans?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Our policy is to compensate landowners fairly and to pay fair market value. That policy will continue. Once a project area has been designated by government, we'll begin buying that land, and priority will be given to the landowners who want to sell their property as soon as possible. That will be covered in all of our actions forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that has consistently failed to manage its relationship with private landowners. Bill 19 is about this government's latest attempt to acquire property necessary for utility corridors, pipelines, and roads. This latest government policy is a direct result of the bungled spying incident in Rimbey in the summer of 2007. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given the government's history of tolerance toward the EUB practice of hiring spies to watch over landowners, how is this bill now going to do anything other than inflame the very groups of landowners that were spied on in the first place in Rimbey in 2007?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I disagree with many things that have been said there. I think it's important to note that the new legislation that is being brought forward and that we anticipate will pass is being put in place to give us a more open and transparent process than we've had in the past. It will ensure that landowners and those that are affected will be spoken with, will be in on the conversations of our requirements far before we ever move towards acquiring that land so that we get the opinions of those most affected and they get an opportunity for meaningful input.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if this government was open and transparent, why did the government fail in this case to consult with the very groups that were spied on in Rimbey before they drafted this policy?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it's in the best interests of Albertans that their government move forward, improve their legislation, and make a more open and transparent government and a more open and transparent process that takes into consideration their needs and their wishes. That's what we do. That's what we're doing. That's what we'll continue to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. This policy proposal is extremely controversial, and many Alberta landowners want to raise their concerns and propose changes. If you're open and transparent, should we not refer it now to this Assembly's all-party Standing Committee on the Economy so that we can have true public consultation even before it's debated here in the Legislative Assembly?

2:10

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, legislation travels through the system in the way that is designated by that system. We ensure that we speak to the people that are affected and the people that can give us the proper input. Then we're going to enjoy a wonderful debate in this House that is going to show Albertans that what is being brought forward is in the best interests of Albertans, all Albertans, especially those who are the landowners, who need to be treated fairly and compensated properly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Online Exploitation of Children

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was recently reported that 1 in 50 Canadians access child pornography on the Internet, a shocking and disturbing figure. Child pornography is a multibillion-dollar industry and one of the fastest growing criminal segments on the Internet. We must ensure that our children are safe from online predators who use the Internet to anonymously fulfill their twisted fantasies. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Mr. Minister, what are you doing to ensure that here in Alberta we can track down and find those who try to sexually exploit our children using the Internet?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. I can tell the hon. member that this government funds an integrated police unit

whose sole purpose is to track down and arrest online predators. The 22-member integrated child exploitation unit is made up of investigators from the RCMP and Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge regional police services. These dedicated men and women work closely with local, national, and international police and law enforcement agencies to investigate complaints that range from the making and distribution of child pornography to the luring of children on the Internet.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What evidence does the minister have that will assure this House and all Albertans that the integrated child exploitation unit is making a difference?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, our integrated child exploitation unit investigates complaints anywhere in this province. Since the unit was established in 2006, ICE members have investigated over a thousand complaints, and they've laid over 500 charges here in Alberta. The ICE unit members have also been involved in a number of high-profile international cases that have resulted in the dismantling of child pornography rings and the apprehension of children who were being sexually exploited.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard police say that you can't arrest your way out of this problem. What else is the ICE unit doing to combat online child exploitation?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, finding and arresting those who try to exploit our children is the ICE unit's mandate, but the unit also serves another very important function. ICE investigators have made presentations to school and community groups to raise awareness about the potential dangers of lurking online. As the hon. member has mentioned, we might not be able to arrest our way out of this problem, but we can provide our children and parents with information that will protect them from Internet predators.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Ambulance Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's March 10, and the minister of health has only three weeks to clear any confusion regarding the transfer of ground ambulance authority to the province. There have been many concerns raised about the province's ability to properly plan and execute the ambulance transfer by the April 1 deadline. To the minister: has the province signed contracts with all the ambulance providers in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat what I said I think last Thursday to the Member for Lethbridge-West. We have now concluded all 65 contracts with municipalities in this province. At that time – and I haven't had an update since – there were some loose ends to tie up with a small provider, but in essence everything is a go on track for April 1. Unlike the comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition, it is a smooth transition that is happening, with everybody co-operating, and I see no reason that it shouldn't proceed as planned.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how many municipalities will continue providing ambulance services after the April 1 date?

Mr. Liepert: Again I have to go from memory because I was prepared for the question last Thursday, but I wasn't today. My recollection is that I think 12 are going to be direct-delivered by Alberta Health Services, and the remainder are integrated services, but I'd have to get the numbers, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Again to the minister: does the province have the funds necessary this time to make the transition?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the dollars for this transition are in the current budget that we're in, the current year. The member was here when we passed the budget last spring, and I would ask him to take a look at the budget documents. They're clearly laid out in this year's budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Amber Alert Program

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent abduction of the young lady from Penhold has raised Albertans' awareness of as well as concerns with the Amber Alert program. My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. In light of some of the perceived problems that have arisen from this case, is the minister considering any changes to the Amber Alert program to make it even better?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, let me first say that we're all relieved and grateful that this incident ended with the return of the child and also the arrest of the perpetrator. Alberta's Amber Alert program has proven highly successful in helping police find abducted children because it quickly mobilizes the eyes and ears of the community. All nine Amber Alerts issued since this program started in 2002 have resulted in the safe return of the children. We have no plans to change this very effective program.

Mr. Marz: To make it better, would the minister consider allowing the RCMP to use their own discretion to trigger an Amber Alert within the first 24 hours of receiving a report of a missing person?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, to supplement a number of other investigative procedures, the police use the Amber Alert as a tool of last resort to find missing children. The Amber Alert program is effective because police throughout Alberta apply four consistent criteria when deciding whether or not it needs to be activated. Those criteria include whether or not there is clear evidence of an abduction; that police believe the child to be at risk of physical harm or death; that there is sufficient information to allow the public to identify the child, the abductor, and the mode of transportation; that the Amber Alert can be issued quickly enough for a reasonable expectation of success. It is critical that all police in Alberta apply the same criteria consistently for the Amber Alert program to continue being effective.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: would the minister consider implementing an Amber Alert based on the

description of the victim only instead of waiting for a description of the perpetrator and their vehicle?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the success of this program is based on the four criteria that I described. That being said, the police use other methods, such as in the case recently in Red Deer, where they do get on the airwaves and in the newspapers and on TV with the description of the person who's missing to ensure that we can find them as soon as possible.

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

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fraser Institute recently released their rankings of Alberta schools based on the province's achievement test scores. Commenting on the ranking, the Minister of Education stated, and I quote: in my view, it is a totally inappropriate way to measure whether you have a good school or good teaching. To the Minister of Education: if the minister is opposed to ranking schools based on their test scores, why does the minister release the results for publication each year under the pretense of accountability?

Mr. Hancock: Every year, as I understand it, we receive a FOIP request, a freedom of information and protection of privacy request, under the act. Under the act, unless we meet one of the exemptions to withhold information, we're required to make information available to the public.

Mr. Chase: This government uses FOIP very much to their advantage. Usually it's a cloak.

Given that the minister himself questions the validity of using the test scores to rank schools and teaching, in what way does publishing the scores hold schools and teachers accountable or improve student results?

Mr. Hancock: First of all, it should be clear that we neither rank the schools, nor do we publish those results. We provide the results to the school boards for their use in doing assessments and for improvement of their system's approach to the delivery of education in the province. They're part of our accountability pillar. We do not publish the results, but we follow the law, and the law requires that information that does not impinge on a contractual obligation or release personal information is made public. That's the law of the province of Alberta. I have to admit that I've asked whether we can amend that law so that these results not be released, but that's the law as it stands, and we comply.

Mr. Chase: Interestingly, First Nations children's test results aren't revealed because they already know what the results will be. These are tests of economy as opposed to education.

The minister seems to acknowledge that there are other, more effective ways to hold schools accountable than provincial achievement tests. Does the minister also acknowledge that the \$5 million spent on questionable testing at the grade 3 level alone is not good value for that money?

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, with respect to FNMI results I would make this clear: one of the things we don't have to do under the freedom of information and protection of privacy rule is release any information which could be harmful or detrimental to an identifiable

group of people. Because there are minimal results or much fewer results in the FNMI population, we can use that exemption, and we do creatively use that exemption to not release information where we don't think it should be released and where we can stop the release. So that would be the answer to the preamble.

With respect to the costs the hon. member has them wrong. It's about \$540,000, if I remember correctly, for the administration of the PAT 3 tests. The \$5 million is more like the budget for the administration of all of the provincial achievement tests.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Foster Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister for children and youth refused to answer my question about the number of overcrowded foster homes in Alberta. Instead, she began damage control, announcing a status update of unfinished recommendations she'd promised to implement last June. Everyday Albertans don't need more promises or updates; they need the minister to tell us the answer to a very simple, very important question. To the minister: how many Alberta foster homes currently exceed the four-child maximum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the exact number, but I can tell you that in this province we have a ratio of two foster children per foster home, and that is either the lowest in the country or one of the lowest rates, so I do know that the percentage of anyone with more than four children has to be awfully small. I can also tell you that if we have more than four children in a foster home, it means that they have been licensed to do so, so I would not call that overloading. That means that the training is there, that the supports are there. I just think it's very important to make that point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, last year your recommendations were that you needed to change that process because the licensing wasn't good enough. Common sense tells us that children in overcrowded foster homes are at greater risk of suffering injury or death. You told us you'd take action to reduce that. Nine months later it hasn't been done. To the minister: in the nine months since you made but did not implement your initial promise, how many more foster homes were allowed to exceed the four-child maximum?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, this member yesterday tabled an article that was in the paper last June. The foster care report had just been released. I automatically accepted all eight recommendations and said that we would immediately start implementing, which is in this article. The article also pointed out that it praised the province's system overall and said that it was envied by foster parents across the country. I think, again, we have to realize that we started implementing the eight recommendations, but what that entailed over the last several months is taking a look at options, taking a look at best practices, developing the policy, creating working committees, going out there and consulting, and then training staff. What I tabled yesterday shows that many of the eight recommendations are complete or close to being complete, so it's quite remarkable what has been accomplished.

Ms Notley: Those recommendations came a year and a half after the death that first prompted them, so I don't think that you should give yourself too much of a pat on the back.

The news about the most recent tragedy in foster care did not come through the minister. The news about the delay in your implementations only came as part of a damage control exercise. To the minister: what will it take to convince you that a co-chair that you call independent is not enough and that we need a fully independent, transparent public inquiry into Alberta's foster care system?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I was not giving myself a pat; I was congratulating the thousands of very dedicated individuals in this province that we have working on behalf of our children.

Yesterday I also made it very clear, when we were talking about this tragedy, that I would not be irresponsible, that I would not get into speculating, and I would not interfere with the work of the police. I can also tell the House that I called the special case review last week, and it was yesterday that I came out with the news that we would make the findings public and also involve some external expertise. Again, to make things clear, it was not because of this member.

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

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I've had a number of conversations with concerned constituents with regard to postsecondary education. I know that Albertans and specifically Albertan parents and students are well aware of the benefits of being able to save for education after grade 12. My first question, therefore, is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. During these economic times, that are quite difficult and daunting for many, what is the minister doing to ensure that middle and lower income Albertans can save for their children's postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of programs that can help Albertans realize postsecondary education. It's a very high priority for this government. This past year, as an example, we expanded the Rutherford scholarships to include those high school students who recorded averages between 75 and 80 per cent. It used to be above 80 per cent. There are numerous nonrepayable provincial government grants and bursaries available for students who demonstrate financial need, and a lot of our programs are targeted to those students or those adults who have a financial need. Our Alberta student loan program is one of the finest in the country, and our scholarship and bursary program is probably the largest in the country.

Mr. Rodney: My second question is to the same minister. That will answer some of the constituent questions but not others. In light of the downturn of the economy I wonder if the minister can ensure that the Alberta incentive programs for postsecondary savings such as the Alberta centennial education savings program will continue to support Albertan students.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point the ACES

program remains consistent with past years of the program. Awareness and access are both on the upswing. I would admit that in the initial years of the program awareness by parents wasn't really all that high. At present 53 credit unions, scholarship foundations, and other financial service providers are processing ACES applications, and that's a fourfold increase since 2005. So, as I said, awareness is coming up. One of the greatest investments that any Albertan can make is in a postsecondary education, and our government works to ensure that that dream is possible for every Albertan.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister, and it has to do with student loans and applying for them. Parents are often required, of course, to fund a wide range of costs to help children through postsecondary education regardless of these aforementioned affordability programs that are available. I'm wondering and my constituents need to know: are there plans to further reduce the financial commitments required by parents when students are applying for student loans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as part of the affordability framework two years ago the government of Alberta and the federal government made significant investments to reduce those parental contributions. At present parental contribution is required from, really, a very small proportion of students who require financial aid. In 2007-08 only about 5 per cent of funded students in Alberta were required to have a parental contribution. That's only about 2,400 students. Forty per cent of those parental contributions were less than a thousand dollars. Within the Alberta student financial assistance program we do have an appeal mechanism if students need to appeal that process, but we're working to make it better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Provincial Wetland Policy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 Alberta formed the Wetland Policy Project Team to develop a provincial wetland strategy. Well, here we are four years later and still waiting for the government to deliver on a promise made to Albertans in the original water for life strategy. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Thousands of hectares of wetlands continue to be destroyed in the absence of any policy. Can the minister tell us just how long we will have to wait for the government to come through on this?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct that this process of development of a wetlands policy has been the subject of much discussion over a considerable period of time, but the answer to her question is a difficult one to give simply because this is such a critical issue. This is a very complicated issue. There are a number of considerations that have to be taken into account. I am in receipt of a report from the Water Council, and we're giving it due consideration, and I'll be coming forward very briefly.

2:30

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that over 90 per cent of the respondents in the wetland policy workshops overwhelmingly supported maintaining and even increasing wetland area and function in Alberta, will the government policy reflect this desire for even increasing wetland area and function?

Mr. Renner: I'm not going to get into a situation where I'm now speculating on what decisions are or are not going to be made by my

colleagues. I know what recommendations I'm prepared to take forward. There is a process that needs to be dealt with through the regular channels of policy adoption within government, within cabinet and caucus, and until all of that process is completed, it would be, I think, irresponsible on my part to try and predict what the outcomes are going to be.

Ms Blakeman: With due respect, we need you to hustle up on that one.

To the same minister: given that there will be a cost to maintaining wetlands in Alberta and most evidently in the oil sands region, will the government require industry to bear these costs as part of doing business, or will the taxpayers be on the hook for some of these costs, as has already happened with the reclaiming of orphan wells?

Mr. Renner: Well, the analogy is totally inappropriate and doesn't apply at all. Clearly, we have an interim policy that's been in place with respect to wetlands, and it's been applied primarily in southern Alberta. The costs of that policy are directly borne by the developers. I don't see any reason why an extension of a wetlands policy across the province would be dealt with in any other way.

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

Rural-to-urban Transition of Aboriginal People

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many aboriginal people living in my constituency, and more are moving there every day. Transition and the ability to adapt is a very important issue for aboriginals coming off reserve or off settlement to live, learn, or work in urban centres. Oftentimes many aboriginals and, in particular, aboriginal youth encounter various barriers to a smooth transition into urban life. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What is your ministry doing to help aboriginals address and overcome potential transition barriers such as isolation, housing, and other support services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we provide about \$0.3 million annually to urban centres such as Edmonton and Calgary for our urban aboriginal strategy. We provide an additional \$0.7 million toward about 20 friendship centres across the province, where transitioning aboriginals frequently come for help with job training, life skills, upgrading, access to health and employment and recreational and cultural programming. Those programs are having quite a positive effect to date.

Mr. Vandermeer: What processes, checks, and balances do you have in place to measure the effectiveness of these urban help and self-help initiatives?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question because at the heart of all of our government programs is accountability. Specific to the question in terms of aboriginal relations we require audited financial statements for these grants that are going out. We require activity reports. This year we're adding a stricter requirement for performance measure reporting, which will help us fill any voids or loopholes that might exist, to help improve those programs for the transitioning people being asked about.

Mr. Vandermeer: Given that Alberta's aboriginal population is already the third largest in Canada and continues to grow rapidly, what are your plans to address the additional impact of aboriginals in transition?

Mr. Zwozdesky: In brief, Mr. Speaker, my ministry is working very aggressively with municipalities across the province – that includes many urban centres, obviously – with aboriginal organizations, aboriginal communities, and indeed with the federal government to ensure that the programs we are currently designing and those that will be designed going into the out-years will have the maximum benefit for aboriginals in transition. We're also working very aggressively with other ministries on cross-ministry initiatives – for example, with Housing and Urban Affairs, with Children and Youth Services, certainly with Employment and Immigration, and, of course, with Advanced Education and Technology – to help design the best programs possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Asset-backed Commercial Paper

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January it was reported that Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Ottawa had agreed to provide 3 and a half billion dollars' worth of loans to restructure frozen asset-backed commercial papers, yet this commitment came before the finance minister announced that this year's surplus is gone and that Alberta is going to run a deficit. To the minister of finance: how much of this \$3.5 billion will come from Alberta, and where exactly will this money come from?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This money is, in fact, a backstopping of another backstopping already being provided by the investors in the asset-backed commercial paper. It was a request that was made by the Alberta Treasury Branches on behalf of the investors in Alberta. Throughout Canada, with Quebec mostly affected, Alberta in part, Ontario in part, we believe that a partnership with the federal government would assure that the overseas funders that were primarily responsible for the loans would get confidence that we were not going to leave those loans out for dissolving.

Mr. Taylor: That was an interesting answer but not to the question I asked. I'll ask it again. How much of this \$3.5 billion will come from Alberta, and where exactly within that context will it come from?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a paper support for roughly \$300 million, but it is, in fact, not something that is actually going to be spent provided that all of the bridges that are already in place are protected as we believe them to be. It is a support for the already in place backstopping being provided by the banks and the investors. It's just one additional piece of surety that we were able to provide the investors overseas. It is not something that is actually cash being put on the line today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Alberta government originally resisted this restructuring plan given that it had

already provided ATB with \$550 million in additional collateral for its exposure to the asset-backed commercial papers, what made the government change its mind?

Ms Evans: I think, Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question because you wonder how we were thinking when we met as ministers at a finance meeting with Minister Flaherty. What we were thinking of was the Canadians that made investments. We were thinking about the people that had put their life savings on the line, the fact that we had confidence in the banks that were going to restructure this type of management in the asset-backed commercial paper. It was a show of confidence that our institutions would manage well. Here in Alberta we had universities, credit unions, and ATB all as investors accessing these funds, and we said that we're confident. Much more contribution was made by Quebec and obviously the federal government as well.

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

Charter Schools

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1995 as a strategy to improve education, the Alberta government introduced charter schools. Each of these schools, of which there are 12 in Alberta, has a unique charter mandate providing innovation and choice to parents in our education system, but because of the charter terms these schools have no guarantee that their charter will be renewed when their five years are up. To the Minister of Education: I know the minister recognizes the value of charter schools, so when will he grant them permanency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have indicated to charter schools in meetings with their organization that we do appreciate the role and function of charter schools in the public education system, and we do appreciate the fact that they were set up to push the education system to explore new or alternative approaches to teaching and learning. That being said, what we need to do in order to move to the stage where they have permanent charters rather than renewable charters is to find a way to make sure that that innovation, that standard is continued. It is of absolutely no value to have just another school board; they have to be able to continue in their role and function.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The operation of charter schools is additionally complicated by the insufficiency of their facilities. Specifically, these schools cannot purchase facilities because they have no access to capital funding due to their charter status. Rather, they must lease their school campus. To the same minister: what are you doing to alleviate these financial barriers so that charter schools can create long-term visions and operate without the burden of a facility lease?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, that is one of the primary purposes why we would try and move to a permanent charter, if we can accomplish that and still maintain the purpose for which they've been established. In the meantime we work very closely with the charter schools to make sure that if there are other public school facilities available, they can be made available on a timely basis to

charter schools, and we'll continue to do that. We want to work to a permanency for charter schools that are working well but in a manner which ensures that they continue to push the edges of knowledge and edges of education and keep new, exciting ideas for education alive.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By supporting students whose second or even third language is English, the Almadina charter school academy in my constituency contributes significantly to the quality of education in Alberta. This school has a student population that is capped by the Minister of Education at 600. To the same minister: will you consider raising this cap so as to provide more students with the unique opportunities that this school offers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an area that's very important as an intersection between where the charter schools operate and where the public schools operate, and we have a dialogue on education in which we're discussing those very issues of how we do education in the future of the province. Charter schools can be assured that their role will not go away – charter schools are still very important to the education system – so the Inspiring Education dialogue is not about that. But the purpose for sizes and caps on charter schools initially was because you needed a cohort of students necessary to be able to prove the concept that the charter school was engaged in. That's a discussion which needs to be had with public schools, with the public, and with others as we go forward in education in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

Statements by the Speaker

Visit by Speaker of the House of Commons Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, several days ago I conveyed a message to the three House leaders advising that on Monday next Mr. Peter Milliken, the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, will be visiting Alberta and, further, that next Tuesday morning I'm going to provide an opportunity for members of the Assembly who wish to meet with Mr. Milliken in a consultation process. The memo has gone out to everybody today advising them of this opportunity next Tuesday morning.

Next Monday I would like to invite Mr. Milliken, the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, to join in our procession and to sit at the clerks' table. To have a stranger upon the floor of the Assembly requires that the Speaker seeks consent of the members, so I need unanimous consent because it's not part of our rules. Would anybody object to my request? If so, please say no. I think I didn't hear anything, so thank you very, very much.

I do have to convey another item. Contrary to my admonition prior to the question period today about the use of electronic devices and BlackBerrys during Oral Question Period, six of you were observed to have been utilizing these devices. Now, we have whips in each of the caucuses. Please, I've bent over backwards to try and assist in this. I don't want to get complaints from members. If we're going to have whips and they're going to be on the payroll, let's deal with this, or else I'm going to have to deal with this in an

entirely different way, which would be to the regression of all remaining members.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table the requisite number of copies of the Confederation Park seniors' centre 2008 annual report, that I made reference to in my member's statement today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a document provided to me by the National Farmers Union, and it is titled *The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions*.

The second tabling I have is with permission from Mr. Ervin Eccleston of 2511 109th Street here in Edmonton, and it is a letter from last fall that he wrote to the hon. Premier regarding his ongoing issues with WCB.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short staffed. These indicate the difficulty of taking care of residents who wander and are in danger of falling and keeping up with each resident's schedule of care when there are not enough staff to go around.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Albertans are suffering whiplash based on this government's economic policy. They cannot figure out the direction this government is going when it comes to protecting their assets, and it's very important that we spell that correctly. This government has in its predecessors Ralph Klein, who openly admitted that he didn't have a plan, and as a result we no longer see Ralph Klein in politics. But we have a Premier who makes up the plan on the spot and leaves individuals wondering, reeling, as to what the long-term plan is.

In September in Public Accounts, for example, when we were talking about ATB, the Alberta Treasury Branches, there was this overwhelming feeling being given out that Alberta was somehow insulated from the realities of the global recession. Yet with each

intervening month and lately, never mind on a weekly basis, it's become on a daily basis the Premier changes his tune. We've gone from "No, we can't run a deficit" to "Yes, we can run a creative deficit."

Now, I don't know where the Premier is getting his financial information from, although I do admit I have much greater faith in the head of AIMCo than I have in the government's own ability to manage. But when the Premier speculated this past weekend that somehow he could get a really good deal on borrowing money and save any kind of expenditures from, I'm assuming, the sustainability fund or the capital fund and when he talks about running technical deficits, it becomes a real concern.

It's been pointed out in this House by a number of individuals from both the Liberal opposition and from the NDP that this government is currently spending 23 per cent per capita beyond what other governments are spending. There doesn't seem to be any long-term thought as to when we will pay the bills that we're building up nor how we'll be able to pay the bills. This government is racking up billions of dollars, for example, in P3s. The rationale behind these P3s is that we get to keep the money now, and we only have to let it out a little at a time, and be assured, Albertans, you'll be able to sleep tonight knowing that we're in charge, that at some point in the future, as we have to pay these bills, we'll still have the money to pay them.

2:50

Now, in terms of saving versus spending and lending versus spending the money we currently have, we've taken a 2 and a half billion dollar hit this year alone, this past fiscal year ending April 1, on the heritage trust fund. I don't know the average interest rate percentage that we have on our other funds, but on the Premier's comment that we can make better money saving our current money invested in the sustainability fund, in the capital fund, if any of that money is invested in the way the money invested in the heritage trust fund has been affected, then I think he's totally out to lunch on his economic calculations. This is a great concern.

Another concern that I have is the fact that the Auditor General, our financial watchdog, has had his own spending limited. He's had to either defer or cancel 27 out of 80 projects, or 34 per cent of his projects. Now, this government is very selective at listening to what the Auditor General has to say, but further limiting his budget so that he is not able to investigate constitutes a cover-up. It's one thing to not follow through or implement his recommendations; it's another thing to not allow the Auditor General to have the opportunity to make the recommendations.

Those recommendations face a number of areas and concerns. For example, in Children and Youth Services he's not going to be able to look at financial support for children with disabilities, look at the systems, until 2010. When it comes to monitoring daycare and day home services, protecting children, that's deferred until some unknown time. We don't even have a date for that. When it comes to deferred follow-ups on education, improving school performance, what could be more important than validating the way in which we measure school performance? Yet that's been deferred until goodness knows when. School board budgeting. Just yesterday an hon. member introduced the idea of having municipal oversight. This government is great at looking at everybody's records except their own. That's why the Auditor General's business is so absolutely important. Another area that we won't be able to look at – fortunately, it's one of the more recent deferrals. At least by October 2009 the Auditor General will report back to us on P3s. I look forward to that latest update.

When the Auditor General did report, for example, on royalties, his concerns that we hadn't for a number of years been collecting

what was due were not only basically ignored, but the government, in order to, as much as anything else, discredit Fred Dunn's findings, brought in a former Auditor General, Valentine. Interestingly enough, a number of the recommendations that Valentine made paralleled those that were made by our own currently employed, hopefully for some time into the far future, Auditor General.

The government was criticized in the Auditor General's report for the way in which it collected the royalty information. At the time the Auditor General did his report, there was one person in the department controlling the flow chart information from which the royalties were assessed, and that one individual was basically just doing a sampling. He wasn't looking at each of the various companies flows upon which our royalties are judged. So I'm extremely concerned that the Auditor General is being limited in his oversight role.

The Premier at one point blames the global recession, and then the next day he comes up with his latest creative idea. He must sleep well because he certainly has interesting dreams, that are revealed in newspapers and on radio. He goes from deficit to dream to borrowing to P3s. There must be an awful lot of tossing and turning, talking about wrestling with angels, each night. We're left as Albertans wondering, for example: are the P3 school projects going to come in on time? It has taken a year and a half for them to even get to the point where the bids were made and the shovels started to get into the ground. We were told that because of the delays in building the southeast hospital . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

I'll look forward to continuing.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Interesting amounts of money that are being asked for in the interim supply. Again, I guess, probably the mantra from this side of the House is that if you'd budgeted properly in the first place, we wouldn't need all these extra dollars. If I ran my budget like this – unfortunately, I don't have a sugar daddy called the taxpayer to look after me, so I have to make sure that I do it right the first time.

There are some interesting questions out of Agriculture and Rural Development. I just read I think today in the paper or yesterday that, very unfortunately, more and more of our farmers are having to work off of the land to be able to make a living. I personally am very dismayed with that. I just think that it's a crime that we're losing our rural communities and that we can't in some fashion be able to help our small farmers. In fact, I think it was the federal minister of agriculture who said that he's a third-generation farmer and doesn't think that his son will be able to farm. I think that's a crime. I think it's very sad, when we do have probably some of the most arable land and excellent soil in the world, and unfortunately a lot of it, even just around the Edmonton area, is going under cement.

Questions out of Agriculture and Rural Development. The money that they're asking for is \$190,200,000. Exactly what is that going for? Will that be creating funds? My questions would be: is some of that extra money going to rural development projects and if those projects would include the field staff that they have or have not increased? From some of the people that I speak to, I think they would be pleased to have the agricultural field staff numbers increased because a lot of it is expert resources for the farmers to go to not only for field questions, but also it can take them through how to set up books and other advice that they can give them that would actually keep our farmers on the fields, where they want to be and, certainly, where I think they should be.

3:00

The other is: how much of it is going to the AFSC, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, and if the money is going to that, what programs is it going towards, and how much of that money would actually go towards the insurance programs? I know that, certainly, there were huge payouts last year for the crop damage. It was an unusual year in terms of hail damage. What would be the breakdown for these monies that would be going to the livestock and meat agencies, and how much? I know that there's been, again back to the field staff, helping and working with the farmers to make sure that they can age verify their cattle. I know that it's had a tremendous amount of push-back, but I think, unfortunately, the bottom line is that if we want to compete in a global market – and I'm sure that we do – then our cattle have to be age verified whether we like it or not. We need our field staff to help set up the monitoring systems to make it as cheap and as efficient as possible.

The other question might be: how much of the funding would be going towards the renewal process for the farm fuel program? I know that that's had quite an overhaul, and they've cut back on the number of people that are actually allowed to use purple gas, so to speak. That's another thing that would have to be overhauled.

I'm not really sure that it's clear where all of these dollars are going to go. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity has referred to the fact that the Auditor General, I believe, is not going to get nearly the amount of money that he asked for, that clearly he needs because he's had to put a number of audits on hold. In the Agricultural and Rural Development department he's had to put the ARD systems on a follow-up, food safety is deferred until October '09, and certainly the grant management program is a follow-up in October '09. I know that that doesn't sound – at least it hasn't been cancelled.

Food safety, in my mind, is something that we shouldn't be playing with. I know, for one, that I wouldn't go to the grocery store and not read the label to see where it comes from, and there are certainly certain countries that I would never buy products from. It's not so much that I think that I don't, perhaps, trust those countries; my trust at this point in time should be in the federal government. But I think that as a province we also have an obligation to make sure that the foodstuffs that are coming into this country are safe for us to eat.

I think we have to look at the way we label things that come into this country. Just because it says that it's a product of Canada doesn't mean to say that, in fact, it is. Bits and pieces can come from other places. I don't have to go through the litany of some of the tainted food that has got into this country and, quite frankly, made a lot of people sick. The fact that we are not giving the Auditor General the money that he needs to follow through on food safety I just don't think is the proper thing to do.

I don't know where answers to these questions would come from – of course, the agricultural minister isn't here – but I think these are things that I would like on the record. Before we can say to you, "Yes, I'm going to give you \$190,200,000," I really think that we should have at least some kind of an idea of where these dollars are going to be spent. Clearly, it's new money coming from somewhere. Again, my question is: why is this money necessary if the budgeting was done properly the first time? There may well be a very plausible explanation for it. Things do happen within a 12-month period, but I think that the people of Alberta should know, if this kind of money is going out, where it is going and why.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: In fairness to the hon. member, this is not extra money going out. This is to run the total ag department until the budget is passed. We dealt with and do have supplementary supply

estimates that are for expenditures that occur throughout the year after the budget.

In some of the statements you make, you've questioned: where is this money going or why this extra money? This particular interim supply amount is a consistent amount for all departments to manage their responsibilities at least through the first quarter so that we can have the broader discussion during budget about those issues that you talked about. This keeps government running until the budget is passed.

Supplementary supply, on the other hand, is for expenditures that happen throughout the year if that will clarify it. To get into the wherefor of this is not exactly what the interim supply is, but I appreciate your concern, which I think is genuine.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I was talking about concerns that I have with regard to overruns on infrastructure projects, the prime example, the most recent example, at least the one that we're still waiting for, being the southeast hospital in Calgary. Originally that was to have been costing taxpayers approximately \$500 million. Then it gained and gained and gained until it was very close to tripling the budget. As a cost-cutting measure the government decided to whack the mental health part of the southeast hospital. That's a large concern, and I'll be talking about what I see as cuts or poorly run funding for mental health programs.

In terms of other projects that we're yet to see that have been long promised, we were promised in Calgary by former Premier Klein that we would be seeing an expansion to the Tom Baker cancer centre. There had been a degree of controversy as to its location, whether it would be built on the existing site along with the Calgary Foothills hospital or whether there would be room for it found on the U of C campus. There was even a suggestion that it might go out somewhere towards the veterinary college in the Spy Hill area. Premier Klein had committed at that point \$500 million towards that expansion. Nothing has happened since.

In terms of incomplete projects in Calgary that we're still waiting for funding for – and I realize that this is just interim funding – the reality is that this province, I believe, will be the last province to announce a budget. It's almost like our minister of the Treasury Board and our finance minister are looking for some type of divine or global intervention, that the price of oil and gas will suddenly rise in our nondiversified economy to save us all, but I wouldn't bet on that one.

In terms of other incomplete Calgary projects, as I began, the Sheldon Chumir health on 12th, for example, is shelled in to a large extent, but it is far from being a fully operating facility. We have the Rockyview hospital, where we built a whole number of new beds. Then we transferred patients from the old beds to the new beds, and now the old beds aren't being staffed. It was moving day, but in terms of the ability to improve the health outcomes, that didn't happen. We've had recently raised the controversy over the shelling in of the Peter Lougheed, doing the first floor and doing the third floor but skipping the other floors. The justification was: well, we'll shell it in now so that we can actually operate in it at a later time.

Here in Edmonton we've got the Mazankowski heart hospital waiting for its first occupants. The people in Grande Prairie don't know, as don't a number of rural districts, whether they're even going to get their hospital. This uncertainty is not being addressed at this point in this carry-over budget, which does not sort of direct or suggest where the April 7 budget is going to go, and therefore it's a large concern.

3:10

In terms of sort of great initiatives but a failure to follow up, I was pleased to be able to attend this past year the official opening of the Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the Calgary Foothills hospital. Wonderful. But, again, a lot of that particular operation is a shelled circumstance. The walls are there, but in order to pay for the researchers and to carry out the research, the majority of that operating budget comes from philanthropic donations. It's great that we have some very wealthy philanthropists like the Hotchkiss family; however, it is the responsibility of the government to deliver health care. Unfortunately, that's not happening.

When it comes to schools, the government has decided that the way to go is P3s. I talked about the deferred debt. What we have with schools is a reality. The average age of the schools across the province is over 40 years, and the defrayed deficit on the repairs is now approaching \$2 billion. We've seen a series of Band-aids, partial roof repairs, rather than the absolute repairs that are necessary. The defrayed deficit for school infrastructure alone – and I'm not talking new construction – is in the area of \$2 billion. For the Calgary public board alone it's over \$630 million dollars. Each day that we defer putting in the necessary repairs, we're putting students at the potential of physical risk.

We're not dealing with their educational quality. For example, in terms of budgeting we had the Learning Commission recommendation to reduce class sizes. The government has yet to live up to its primary grades, the 1 to 17 average, and kids are being stuffed into staff rooms. Their gyms and stages are being compromised. Their libraries are only partially functioning because permanent classrooms are having to be placed in these areas because there has been basically a moratorium on school construction, and when the province finally did decide to go full speed ahead, they picked the most expensive point in the boom to finally sign those contracts.

Now, I look forward to the Minister of Infrastructure's qualifying the fine print, where it says, apparently, within the contracts that if somehow there's a dip in the economy, then the cost of labour will be considered, and if for some reason materials are less expensive, then somehow this will be factored in. What has not been factored in, at least to my satisfaction or to the satisfaction of Alberta taxpayers in general, is how the interest rates fluctuate over a 32-year period and how by borrowing money at the height of the boom and then paying it back if we can over a 32-year period we'll be able to do that.

When it comes to health, it's absolutely unacceptable that we have patients in hallways. It's unacceptable in terms of financial efficiencies that we've got EMS people basically biding their time in hallways instead of being out with their ambulances on the road. As a result we're seeing red, yellow, and burgundy alerts far too frequently, which puts patients at risk. Of course, in Calgary since we lost half our hospitals, the response time has gone up considerably, again putting individuals at risk. It concerns me when it comes to Children and Youth Services, for example, how so many needs are not being met. Hopefully, with regard to Children and Youth Services somebody can provide answers. The amount that was requested is 25.9 per cent of the total budget from the estimates of 2008-2009. How much of the \$284,100,000 is going to the Child and Youth Advocate, who was too busy to submit annual reports for three years? How much is going to the ministry's support services? What allocation is there to family support for children with disabilities? How much is allocated for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives? In 2008 funding was announced, but we haven't seen it.

Mr. Snelgrove: It's interesting. The hon. member wants to talk about capital projects, especially Health capital projects, where the

interim supply amount to be voted on is \$4.8 million. Granted that's double what it was last year. Nevertheless, it probably wouldn't even put the signs up on the number of the ones he wants to talk about. I mean, he talks about what the people want. The consistency is very clear; we're within \$8 million on the operational budget from last year – \$8 million. I think that's pretty consistent on a \$9 billion ask. Overall with some of the infrastructure requests – in this one we've nearly doubled the infrastructure request. Transportation is within a few million dollars. This is probably the most consistent year to year.

The Auditor. It's amazing how we would consider that the Auditor is being hamstrung when his total budget in '06-07 was 18 and a half million dollars. That was the total budget. Now for the first quarter we're going to give \$7 million. Well, do the math. Do the math. The office of the Auditor General has grown exponentially. He does a very thorough job, Mr. Chairman, but he cannot nor should he attempt to do all departments and all initiatives all the time. It hasn't been his request at the audit committee. His request has been to fulfill his mandate to audit the ministries, and he puts a shopping list out of other things that would be nice to do.

Mr. Chairman, in today's economic climate there's going to be a whole province full of people who will have to reassess their nice-to-dos. I don't think the average Albertan is going to accept very well that they all have to accept a reduction in their nice-to-dos, but the Auditor would just continue to spend at whatever level he felt. I don't think the Auditor thinks like that. I know that he's reasonable. I know that he spends countless hours working with us to understand where to focus. Where is his money best spent? Where is there some duplication from some of the internal audit processes we have?

Somehow the hon. member would like you to think that there's a sinister plot here, that we've identified the Auditor as somebody we don't want to give money to. All of the officers of the Leg. are going to have to live within the current financial situation we find ourselves in. For him to pick and choose, virtually, statistical information, that doesn't accomplish anything except waste 20 or 15 minutes at a crack. The discussion around interim supply is interesting from their perspective, Mr. Chairman, but it is accomplishing precious little.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me pick up on the remarks from the President of the Treasury Board. This interim supply represents, in the Treasury Board president's own words, enough money to get us through at least the first quarter of the new fiscal year, I believe he said a little earlier on, and perhaps a little bit more than that. I understand that there's some front-end bloating that occurs in some departments and all the rest of that.

3:20

Given the President of the Treasury Board's comments that, you know, every single one of us in this province is going to have to reassess our nice-to-do and nice-to-have lists in light of the current economic reality – and, by the way, I agree wholeheartedly with the President of the Treasury Board that that's true – I wonder if the President of the Treasury Board can speak to the numbers in the interim supply estimates, which are designed to carry us through until we pass and debate fully the new budget. I understand that, and I understand as well that some of the debate on the new budget has to wait until the budget has been presented in terms of some of the details. But I wonder if the President of the Treasury Board can give this House any insight, any clue into whether any of these numbers – be they for his own department, be they for the Ministry of

Infrastructure, be they for any or all of these ministries or for the legislative offices – have taken into account the need to start taking a good hard look at our nice-to-dos and our nice-to-haves.

As it's presented to us, Mr. Chairman, it's just a bunch of numbers, really, next to a bunch of portfolio names and next to very broad, generic descriptions, like expense and equipment/inventory purchases or capital investment or nonbudgetary disbursements, these sorts of things, or lottery fund payments. I mean, it's a bit difficult to look at this book, to stare at a booklet and to stare at it really, really hard and try to somehow psychically glean from this paucity of information what it is that we're actually voting on, what it is that we're actually debating, what the intention of the government is here.

I'm looking for, I guess, a fairly straightforward answer. Is interim supply, then, for this upcoming fiscal year just maintenance of the status quo from the fiscal year about to end at the end of this month, to get us through the first quarter of '09-10 exactly according to the plan that was laid out in Budget 2008, or has the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, and in fact the entire government of Alberta started to take into consideration that financially, economically this is a very, very different world from the one that we were talking about a little less than a year ago, when we were debating Budget 2008, and that the nice-to-dos and nice-to-haves that were kicking around 10, 11 months ago need a very real revisiting? I wonder if I could get an answer from the President of the Treasury Board to that question.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, while it's not an exact science, one could go back if they wished to the interim supply requests for '08-09. Now, in '08-09 we were later and expecting to be somewhat later. Those requests at that time were \$8.9 billion, \$9.01 billion. If one wanted to take the time and go line by line on what is being asked for now as opposed to what was being asked for last spring, they may see an indication that there are some areas where the ask is down and some areas where the ask is up.

Overall, by simply going back to the '08-09 supply requests and transposing those numbers over beside the call on what we ask for now – and it's easier this year than maybe some years because departments have stayed consistent. Although the interresponsibility from departments is getting better and the opportunity for departments to work on initiatives overall are certainly going to show probably better support for those who need it and certainly some internal efficiencies, they could surmise a trend. I wouldn't want to do too much for them on that side; nevertheless, I think that you will see a trend.

The other part that the hon. member talks about is: what have we done to ensure that this isn't just the status quo? That's actually an interesting question. We've had a great deal of success, but it started long before this budget process. It started with our core value reviews of over two years ago when things looked absolutely wonderful out there. The government with all of the departments involved was asked to take a critical look at what they do and what they do with each other. In many ways it's just baseline funding increases, the most appropriate way to address some of the situations that Albertans find themselves confronting.

In our last go, with the Premier's guidance we developed the crime and safe communities initiatives, where all of the departments have to come back to the trough, so to say, for dollars to address that issue because it does not just rest with Justice or Sol Gen or Children's Services or Health; it rests with us all. Making it the responsibility of that department to come in with a plan that is measurable quite quickly: if you want more than just funding for a quarter or more, we have to see the results, and we have to see how

it fits the solution to the issue. With the overview of the peers of the different ministries there and the deputies having to understand the limited amount of money and the issue to get a better bang for our buck, I think that, truly, it might not be the easiest accounting thing to follow. But that doesn't matter to the person who's affected by a child with an addiction or a community where gangs or crime have taken over or someone with a mental illness. I don't think they care about the accounting part of it. They just want to get it fixed. The ministerial working groups and the issues pot to fund to make sure that there's clear, quick results to go to that thing I think is a very solid move.

The other part that's showing more things – and it will be apparent in the budget as we go forward – was the opportunity to do significant departmental reviews, not just have a quick look but get back to “What are you doing? Can someone do it better? Can you do it better together?” and come forward with suggestions. Mr. Chairman, we have a binder full. Once again, this wasn't just started in response to the economic downturn but over two years ago. Dumb luck or whatever. The fact is that government should continually be in a process of reviewing itself. The times change, the needs of the people change, people's priorities change, and sometimes the world changes and forces that change on us quicker than we might be ready for, but I can sit here with confidence and look Albertans in the eye and say that we have been working on making our government better for at least the last two years from a financial point of view.

It's a work in progress, obviously. I think that to answer the hon. member, sometimes when you're dealing with billions, a million seems insignificant or 10 million is ha, ha, ha, an Oprah ha or whatever. But we found literally hundreds of millions of dollars internally, and we found a new process to get the ministers, whether it's seniors or housing or issues around mental health, all at the table working on the issue collectively. It's far, far better for our processes. It's far better for the people that are getting our support.

3:30

So we have done a great deal and proudly say that this isn't a result of the economic downturn. I think it's a result of the fact that we have an obligation to ensure to the people that are paying not only our salaries but are paying the way – it's not our money; it's their money. They want to know that we're spending it appropriately. We're maybe not where you'd like us to be, if that world exists, but we're a long ways from where we were.

Mr. Taylor: I appreciate that rather impassioned defence of a government reorganization that the President of the Treasury Board just undertook, complete with the little dig at whether I'll ever be happy with where you're going. You know what? Chances are that I might be, but in order for me to determine whether I can be happy with where you're going, I've got to know where you're going.

A couple of things stood out in what the President of the Treasury Board had to say there. Yes, you will see some numbers up, some numbers down in terms of the dollar figures beside the various ministries when you compare '09-10, the interim supply estimates, to '08-09, but when you kind of look at the bottom line, it's basically status quo. It's \$8.972 billion on expense and inventory purchases, \$581 million on capital investment, and so on and so forth. Not a lot has changed there from an evidentiary point of view.

Now, I agree with the president. Is the President of the Treasury Board listening closely to this? He should perhaps check it in black and white in *Hansard* later because it's going on the public record that I agree with the President of the Treasury Board that the average Albertan cares a heck of a lot more about getting the problem solved,

getting the issue fixed, than they do about the intricacies of the accounting involved in all that. I understand that. Nevertheless, I still feel as though I'm being called upon here to accept as an article of faith that you guys are working on things and, you know, that the cross-ministerial meetings around whatever table, cabinet or otherwise, that you have your meetings around for these sorts of things are so much more rewarding and fulfilling and enjoyable and presumably productive as well.

Cross-ministerial issues have been a real problem historically, not just in this government. There are always interministerial rivalries and turf protection and so on and so forth. To undertake a reorganization that seeks to specifically address some of those problems and say, “Lookit, if we're talking about safe communities, we are talking about the territory of the Solicitor General, the territory of Housing and Urban Affairs, the territory of Children's Services, the territory of Seniors and Community Supports, Municipal Affairs,” and who knows how many other ministries – perhaps you can in one way or another involve just about every ministry in government in safe communities. To get the right parts of the right ministries working together on the right issues is not only the right thing to try and do, but it's a fairly Herculean task to pull off. To use a phrase that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has used in this House before, mad props to the government of Alberta for even attempting to do that.

However, we're here today talking about boring old intricacies of accounting, much as I would far rather stand here and talk about fixing stuff. I don't think that there's anybody on this side of the House who's on record more often in terms of talking about the need to solve problems, move forward, and get 'er done than myself. I'm very much into that. But at the same time, when we're talking about in total \$10 billion, we need to have some sense of, I guess, the accounting issues behind it, whether this is the maintenance of a status quo or whether there's real, hard evidence in here, coming back to what I said before, that the government gets the change in economic times and realizes that it, like everybody else in this province, is going to have to re-examine and re-evaluate its nice-to-dos and nice-to-haves.

The thing is that if the ask for interim supply in ministry A goes down by \$10 million this year over last and the ask in ministry B goes up by \$20 million and the ask in ministry C goes down by \$10 million, that doesn't really tell me anything except that we've moved the money around. It's kind of a shell game. It's kind of rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. It doesn't say to me, it doesn't say to the people of Alberta: hey, we get it that times are tough; we get it that we have to really, really, really do a serious job here of reordering our priorities and reallocating our spending.

I'm coming back, Mr. Chairman, to what I asked the President of the Treasury Board before, which is: show me the evidence in this booklet that you've started to address the nice-to-dos and the nice-to-haves and started to reorder your priorities there. I'm sorry, but I can't see them here. I can put '09-10 beside '08-09, and I can see differences in line item numbers beside different departments, but I can't see a trend developing here.

I can't see evidence yet – and I'm prepared to acknowledge that there may be a great deal more evidence when Budget 2009 comes down; I'm also prepared to acknowledge that there might not be – that the reorganization that started nearly two years ago, according to the President of the Treasury Board, which may have paid off in nonmaterial, nonmonetary ways significantly already, is having an impact on bottom line. The reason why I keep coming back to that, Mr. Chairman, is because I think bottom line becomes an issue going forward in this very, very different economy and very different economic situation than we found ourselves in about a year ago.

Mr. Snelgrove: I may want to apologize in advance. I may have been wrong, Mr. Chairman. If the hon. member is starting to agree with me, maybe I'm straying into an area that I shouldn't be.

The difference between the cross-ministry issues of before was that it was very simple to identify the issues that affected the ministries. This process gets to the solution of the problem. I can accept that, yeah, you can't get it out of this book, and I don't think the intent of the interim supply was to drill down to where the hon. member would like to go.

We may even have to go back a couple of more years, probably take a five-year growing total of what interim supply estimates were. While I appreciate that you weren't here, they were growing just as fast as the end of the year spending. Maybe not quite. Your colleagues will be able to tell you that we were routinely coming in for sup estimates for things. There was growth and sups. You may have to go back and see what the numbers were then to see the flat line now.

When you consider that approximately half of what we get as a government or what we spend or is spent on our behalf is the boards and agencies, the health authorities, the children's education, it's the biggest chunk of what we do. We just collect it from wherever, and we give it to them. They're in the same boat as we are, that a huge chunk of what they spend is salaries, is wages.

I think our Premier made it abundantly clear, certainly made it clear to me, that this year we needed to go forward with the agreements we have in place, with our teachers and our nurses and all, and that as you know, we should be the first to show restraint. I think it's fair enough to say that if this continued downturn or situation we're in is worse or shows no sign of abating, it's time then to sit down with our unions and with others and say: "Okay, here's the reality of today. Here's the simple fact. Albertans don't want operational deficits." They have made that clear for generations in this province. They don't want them. So to continue to provide services that Albertans also think are important, we're going to have to work with our service providers to get where we have to go.

3:40

Now, I think the hon. member would agree that a couple of years ago it would have been, I would say, impossible to have the head of the CAW at a news conference announcing that they'd actually sat down with GM and given something back. We saw it here. I think most people who live outside of the industrial part of Ontario, the auto sector, looked at the union agreements over the years and said: "That can't last. There is no way that those industries can stay competitive paying two or three times up front." It didn't seem to matter. The unions were there to do a job, to get the most they could get, and for some reason the senior executives in the car industry seemed more than willing to sell their future into agreements that couldn't be sustainable. Couldn't be. If GM and Chrysler disappear, there will still be cars. Somebody is going to build them, but it might not be those guys that were building them and priced themselves out of them.

As we sit down with our service providers and unions, I think we have to have a pretty clear indication of where we're going. I can appreciate that the longer we can go with a budget, the better chance you have to use the process we have for forecasting revenues. Not to say that it could make a great deal of difference, but you're in here when they're picking away about being out \$10 or \$20 on the current price of oil or a dollar on gas, and somehow, magically, we're never supposed to get that wrong. So the longer you can go to get your projections right, the better and the more notice we can give all the people involved in this government – the nurses, the teachers, the janitors, the whole thing – that we're at a serious piece

of business here. It wasn't about taking out existing contracts. It's about sitting down and saying: "Okay. Here's the situation. Where to from now?"

Where will budgets go? A lot depends on the circumstances that unfold around us. But there shouldn't be any mistaking the fact that if our revenues continue to tumble and no prospect of them coming back at any time soon, we will do as other governments in the past have done: you make the decisions you have to make. It gives me absolutely no pleasure or thrill to suggest that people may have to do with less. I find it difficult myself when I get a raise; I wonder how I lived without it before. But you can, and one of these days we'll get the pleasure of finding out.

The business of governing is sometimes based on audits. Sometimes it's based on outside sources. Sometimes it's based on a gut feeling. In this particular circumstance I think we have made a very conscious and prudent decision to say: let's take a time out. Let's go forward. We know we've been working internally on streamlining what we do. We know Albertans want to see and maintain confidence in the government. The commitment to them before, you know, was: "Work with us. When we get rid of the debt, Albertans will benefit." They've benefited greatly. They're going to benefit greatly down the road because there is the \$14 billion or \$15 billion available to cushion this. But we can't let it get to the day where we're still running deficits without a sustainability fund to do it.

We don't want to sink the ship. This is a course correction. The ship we're all on has kind of slowed down. I think if most people were to look at this, they would say: "Okay. They've managed to get their spending somewhat under control. It's not the final product, but according to this it looks like they've accepted the seriousness of the financial situation they're in. Let's see what's in the budget." More importantly, I believe that Albertans very, very clearly are more interested in what we do than in what you or I or anybody says in here. This is a vehicle in here to pass time. When it hits the ground out there, when the senior or the person in a waiting room or the student going to university gets their service, that's what it's all about.

I can appreciate that, yes, there is not much in this document. As we get into the fuller discussions on budget, then they're very appropriate questions. The ministers will be there, I think, to maybe not satisfy but explain where their priorities have changed. Until then I can only say as Treasury Board that on indications that we give to departments, their response has been overwhelmingly consistent: "We'll do the right thing. We'll look very closely at what our expenditures are. We'll keep an eye on the future." We learn from the past. We don't live in it but learn from that past. Once again, don't get caught looking in the rear-view mirror when there's nothing that can be helped by that.

My good friend and colleague Dr. West, who would be well known to the walls in this building, having gone through some of the most serious restructuring in probably any democratic country's history, said: don't panic; don't overreact. Even by his admission he said that maybe they overstated the need to get rid of the debt, and it came at the expense of infrastructure at the time. Now, hindsight is a wonderful thing. I'll someday hope to pick a barrel of it up myself and then use it whenever I want. But he said: don't overreact.

There are people that won't be happy. Some of the goofballs that run the Taxpayers Federation, whatever, won't be happy until every civil servant is laid off and they're not paying any taxes, I guess. I don't know what the hell they think the world is going to look like, but they're not going to be happy till then.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of points, and I may go backwards instead of forwards because some of the things that the President of the Treasury Board has just said I found quite interesting and I think also disturbing in some ways. I have been around politics for a long time, on the inside, outside. I've run in elections. I've done a lot of things. I've been around a long time. I've watched – I've watched – what I feel to be the losing of democracy. To have a minister stand up in the House and say that we're just passing time: that's not why I got elected, that's not why I believe in this House, and it's not why I believe in democracy. So I found that quite upsetting.

This is where things should be happening. We shouldn't have the attitude in here that one side is the enemy and one side isn't. That's not how it should work. Because an idea happens to come from the other side of the House, it should be respected for what it is, and that goes all ways. So, yeah, I'm a little disappointed in that because I put a fair amount of work into this House.

However, after I have said that, I'd also like to thank the same minister for the explanation regarding supplemental versus interim. Of course, I thought I understood it before you had actually said those words, but I wanted to make this clear. Does this money that these different departments are asking for just go into a pot? How did they know specifically to ask for these numbers of dollars? How did agriculture know to ask for \$190,200,00? How did they know? I'm sure you guys aren't just saying: okay, we've got X number of dollars, and we'll just kind of spread it out. That ministry had to have come and said, "This is how much money we need and for these reasons," which is why I had asked the question of what this money is going to be used for. Somebody has to know what it's going to be used for. You can't just throw it into a pot; at least, I don't think you can.

3:50

You had made some remarks also about the Auditor General and that many things that we were going to have to do might be nice to do. I totally agree with the concept of nice to do and that it will be the difference between want and need. Certainly, there will be some needs out there. But I believe that the Auditor General is a little bit different because he reports to the House. He isn't sort of a part of this House, and I believe that what he does is necessary to do, not nice to do. We need him to do what you have said right from when the Premier was elected: be open, transparent, and honest. If those three things are there, it automatically equals trust, and I'm not altogether sure that there is a great deal of trust out there. There are too many questions that aren't being answered. So I do think that he is a little bit different and that by doing what he does, he's actually pushing forward your message of openness and transparency.

The other remark that was made was about the CAW and about unions per se. Again, I believe that both sides are to blame. Unions are to blame and the employer and the employee are to blame because they're not sitting down at the table looking at a problem as a solution. Again, we've got that us-and-them mentality, and it truly doesn't work. I think we all know that. But there's another thing, I believe, from way back when particularly in manufacturing and certainly in our textile industry part of what happened was that because the union demands were so high, then, most of our stuff went offshore, not just in Canada, certainly in the United States.

There's also another thing to factor in there, in my mind. When you have a difference of a thousand per cent between the guy on the line and the guy at the top, that is the tipping point of where huge problems start coming in. So there is blame on both sides. Again,

I think it's an attitudinal change, and I think that part of the attitudinal change is going to come whether we like it or not. Certainly, what's happening out there in the world on the economic side of it will make us all sit down, take a couple of steps backward, take a deep breath, and hopefully we'll all sit down at the table and be talking about the same things.

Back, I think, to the questions at hand, which are really about the interim dollars: how did these ministries ask for those dollars if they don't know where it's going to go?

Mr. Snelgrove: The ministers don't actually have to ask for what's in here. Their targets are achieved by the process we go through to build a budget. When the targets are set, then the offices of finance and Treasury Board would simply look at the departmental expense for a quarter of the year. This looks after their expenditures in the first quarter. Some have different financial obligations where they fund outside agencies, and they may need a certain amount of front-load, so theirs might be more than what would be a quarter. Some may have no other obligation or may know that they have greater expenditures. Historically it's pretty straight, but for the sake of your questions it's simply stating that this will cover expenditures for these departments for a quarter of the year. It's not that the department comes in and says: well, I need about that much. Once their targets are set and budgets are set, then they do it.

The other thing I want to get back to is that I'm surprised the hon. member would take anything from my statement around the unions other than that it is not about us or them. I made it very clear that we needed to sit down to engage them and on a go-forward basis, with the same information, start to talk about what we can do differently, if we have to, to stay in sync. I know that newpeople like to take what you say and then say what you didn't, but the hon. member doesn't normally do that. If she took from my approach that I was looking for a confrontation thing with unions: absolutely not. I think we made it clear. We need to sit down with them and on a go-forward basis see what we can do, and we'll see how it goes.

To pick out the Auditor. The Auditor's position is critical to the functioning of our trust in a process – I agree – but so is the office of the Ombudsman, who's in the same category; so is the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, whoever he might be; so is the office of the Ethics Commissioner; and so is the office of the Privacy Commissioner.

To anyone who has ever read the Auditor's report from front to back, my most sincere sympathies for a life wasted. But to somebody who's got an issue around FOIP or somebody who's got an issue around ethics, that's just as important or more important than the nerd who has to spend his days thumbing through the Auditor General's report. I don't put a higher value or a lesser value on that office. It makes no difference to me whether you rank them more or less important. Our responsibility is to fund them at a consistent, fair level as it relates to everyone else in the government.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, and would appreciate the opportunity to have some interaction with the health minister on some of the issues that this relates to, depending on how he feels today. We have 20 minutes between us. Otherwise, I could just ask questions, and he can respond at the end of the whole array. What is the minister's preference?

Mr. Liepert: Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are we doing 20 minutes jointly, or are you doing 10 and 10?

Dr. Swann: That's the question I'm asking. I'm willing to interact.

Mr. Liepert: Whatever he wants to do.

Dr. Swann: Twenty minutes interacting, if that fits with the minister, is all right.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Fine. Thank you.

Dr. Swann: I very much appreciate the opportunity to talk to this. It's an issue on many people's minds today. It's the major budget item. It's the major area where we see some real danger, from a sustainability point of view, and the lack of control and the lack of understanding of where the extra funding has gone and why the budget has almost doubled in six years. I, for one, haven't seen enough of the evidence and would love to see more of just where the money has been going. I'm hoping that the minister can shed some light on it.

This is interim supply, so we are making up what is necessary to continue to the time of the budget. It does reflect, again, that we haven't had a budget to put into context some of the decisions in this interim supply. What we can say is with declining revenue from oil and gas and that there's likely to be a deficit, this year's budget will be a very different one from past years'.

I guess the primary role of the ministry of health is to prevent, intervene early, investigate, and treat and rehabilitate people to maximize their productivity, health, and opportunities. In that context it would very nice to know just where our budget is going in the context of prevention versus treatment and whether we are going to see a shift towards investment in more prevention and early intervention so that we can actually reduce the impacts of a burgeoning demand on the health system that's not only taking a toll on our budget, that's taking a toll on the health workers, who can't keep up to the demands and are increasingly on stress leave and are increasingly doing overtime and charging accordingly.

That's adding significantly, I'm sure, to the budgets that we're dealing with, the kind of overtime spending that I've heard about in nursing, particularly as we shifted from 80 per cent full-time nursing in Calgary to now roughly 20 per cent full-time nursing and how that came about and what kind of savings that's resulting in. As I indicated at the outset, we've gone from a budget in 2002-03 of \$6.8 billion and in this past year \$13.2 billion. There are some serious changes that are occurring within the system, and I think we need more detail to understand just where this is happening. Is it salaries? Is it equipment? Is it overtime? Is it new technologies? Is it pharmaceuticals? Are we changing significantly the way we're charging for lab tests? I heard one physician in Calgary say that when he orders a test, the standard bill is \$130, whether it's one test or a battery of tests. There's just the standard fee. If that's the case, there is some serious gouging going on in the laboratory services that I think we need to know more about.

4:00

What about radiology and imaging? What's happened to those services, and how is it that they may or may not be contributing to a massive increase in investigative budgets? I've heard the same remarks made about MRIs, that we have increased the number of MRI scans exponentially the last few years and that many of these

are unnecessary. I guess the question is: who is allowing this unnecessary use of very expensive technology, especially at a time when people who most need it are having to wait or pay privately to get those services done? What about long-term care and costs there? What are the impacts of some of the changes that the minister is planning to make in the long-term care setting, and how is that affecting both the capital budget and the operating budget? It would be helpful if the minister could make a few comments about that, and I'll come back with some follow-ups.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure where to start, but let me try and give it a shot. The Leader of the Opposition asked a very basic question: the fact that we have one of the highest cost health systems in the country, and where is the money going? I just jotted down a few notes here as he was speaking. Let me mention some of these. On average we have the highest paid professionals in the country. We have the best senior coverage programs in the country. Overall we have the widest coverage of services in the country. We have the highest inflationary capital costs in the last five years. We have some of the best research. We have union contracts that, quite frankly, don't allow a lot of flexibility in some cases, and the hon. member mentioned a couple of examples.

I think we have a failed system in the way we compensate, especially the way we compensate our medical community. We pay doctors to have people be sick, not keep them healthy. That's where we have to make some changes relative, and I think that in the new contract that we just signed with the Alberta Medical Association, some of those changes are going to happen.

I would say, however, that two of the reasons why we have seen the highest costs in health care in this province are because we probably have some of the highest expectations in the country in this province, and we have what I believe is a lifestyle that has developed when we've got a booming economy. I refer to it as driving fast and drinking hard. You know, Mr. Chairman, all of these sorts of things lead to situations where the system is being used probably more than it should.

In just kind of a general way I think that if you take all of those particular issues in this province and start to drill down into each one of them, you're probably going to come up with a collective reason why we have some of the highest costs in North America and where the money is going. I won't go any further into that.

The leader talked a bit about prevention, and he is much more of an authority because of his past career in the area of prevention. However, there's no question that, as I said earlier, our system is designed to treat the sick, not to keep people healthy, and part of our changes are exactly around that area.

I think we need to have a renewed emphasis, bought into by all Albertans, around the importance of wellness. I've had a number of Albertans come to me, some fairly prominent Albertans, who want to lead an initiative in this province around wellness, and I hope that in the next few months we can put something together that will not be a government-initiated wellness program but will be actually an Alberta-initiated program. I hope to have a little more to announce in the next few months. That would be working with the parliamentary assistant, the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who takes a great deal of interest in this particular area.

We also have, as the member is well aware, a new chief medical officer of health, who is coming onboard here in the next couple of weeks, and I think that he will bring fresh thinking to the area around public health, wellness, and prevention. Then, finally, in that area we have Bill 7 before the House, which is going to change some of the ways that we actually handle public health and, again, the preventative side of things. I look forward to having the discussion on Bill 7.

Finally, the question relative to long-term care. Mr. Chairman, I've had this exchange with the Member for Lethbridge-East on a couple of occasions. You know, we have a fundamental problem that health care is built around the system and not built around the patient. A bit off topic. In a meeting yesterday with the two ladies from Calgary who were introduced in the House with the Lymphedema Association – lymphedema is an ailment, and I guess they formed a small association. The majority of lymphedema is caused after cancer. Our system says that if you've been fortunate enough to have cancer and then get lymphedema, we cover everything, but if you happen to be born with it and don't have cancer, well, you're on your own. That tells me that we've got health care in this province that's built around the system and not built around the patient.

Getting back to long-term care, we have a system that says that if you live either on your own or you live in a lodge or in assisted living and you get to a point where, let's use an example, you can no longer bathe yourself, the operators of that particular facility or you if you're in your own home have really no choice but to move all the way over to the most expensive outside of the acute system, which is long-term care. Again, why wouldn't we build health care around the patient and not around the system? Why don't we provide more actual patient care and not say: "There's the system. You need to fit into the system"? I hope that when we get to deliver our budget on the 7th of April, we can start to put more emphasis, more funding into actual delivery of care and less money into the standard system.

I hope I didn't take too much time, Mr. Chairman, but I wanted to try and deal with those three subject matters.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments very much. I wonder if the minister can make any comments at all about some of the trends in laboratory testing, diagnostic testing, and the potential for overuse of some of these. It's my understanding that there has been such a burgeoning of testing because to some extent we haven't funded the primary care system in a way that physicians are taking the time to do a careful analysis of the individual and the context and the probability of a diagnosis. They're depending so heavily now on doing a battery of testing, including expensive imaging, that we are in danger of bankrupting the system just through inappropriate testing in some cases.

4:10

Obviously, that may apply to pharmaceutical use as well. Instead of taking the time, having a thorough team assessment of a particular problem, we're coming to the wrong diagnosis, treating with the wrong approach, and ending up with complications and more and more demands on a system that is already overburdened. That's one aspect of what I might ask for more clarification on.

The other has to do with the budget in particular, which identifies \$3.2 billion allocated to expense and equipment/inventory with only \$4.8 million allocated to capital investment. I wonder if the minister could comment more specifically on why there's such a discrepancy there.

Mr. Liepert: Let me deal with the last one first because it's a very simple answer. The capital flow of dollars to Alberta Health Services over the past year or two has exceeded the ability to actually spend the money, so Alberta Health Services has, I think, in reserve about a billion dollars. Let's take the south Calgary hospital as an example. We have advanced it in our capital plan, but they are not yet at the point where they pay for the work that's been done. It

hasn't got to that point yet. So we're actually kind of ahead, and for that reason we don't require any additional capital dollars in the short term.

Equipment. I think that what we are attempting to do on equipment is try and catch up on some of our equipment. We have an issue around equipment that hasn't been allocated in capital the way it should have been for the past number of years, and the health regions previously had been attempting to get as much equipment as they could possibly get funded out of operating. As we all know, there's a lot of pressure on operating dollars, so there has been a tendency to have some squeeze there.

The leader is absolutely correct in terms of the overburden and in many cases probably overuse. One of the issues that we believe is going to be absolutely imperative to ensuring that we don't have multiple tests being prescribed by multiple practitioners, as an example, is our electronic health record. As the members know, it's currently before the policy field committee led by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. We've heard presentations that I believe were about to resurrect the bill, if that's the right terminology, and get it back into the Legislature, get it approved. The electronic health record is clearly the tool going forward so that we can start to try and get a better handle on who's prescribing what for whom and the same thing relative to pharmaceuticals.

I can't comment specifically around the lab use, but I believe that the majority of our labs are owned by Alberta Health Services in any event, so really you're kind of taking it out of one pocket and putting it into the other. I'm not so sure that that in itself is an actual expense that is burdening the system, but I think that in many cases what is being overburdened is the patient.

One final comment relative to a team approach in primary care. Clearly, that's our objective. That's part of our AMA agreement. But you know what? We can't force doctors to practise in a primary care network. We can't force doctors to practise as part of a team. I think that what is very important is if you have a team. I visited several of the primary care networks, one recently on the south side of Edmonton that I recall. You know, the diabetes patient comes in, gets assessed by the doctor. The physician then prescribes a program that that patient is on for the next year, and every visit subsequent to that is with a nurse. It's not back to see the doctor. We have to have more of the team concept. There's Taber; there's Pincher Creek. There are a number of primary care networks that work well. That's the direction we're heading. But one thing I've learned in the short period of time I've been here: this is a tough industry to change.

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

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much. My final comments, then, would simply relate to the need for, as I've indicated in the House before, some concrete measurables in relation to the restructuring that has occurred so that in the next 10 years we'll have some sense of whether quality, access, and cost efficiency have improved or decreased as a result of the structural changes which I understand the minister is trying to achieve through this restructuring. Will there in fact be some measurable parameters in which we can assess this latest restructuring in the next 10 years and say yes or no to what has been happening here?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think the answer is that we absolutely have to because if we don't and we continue to plod along like we are for the next 10 years, we won't have a system in 10 years. I'm very confident, hon. leader, in the new CEO that we've chosen, Dr. Stephen Duckett. If there are 20 things that the leader and I would

put on a list that we wanted to see out of our new CEO, many of them are the same sorts of things: performance measures, physician engagement, and I could go on and on and on. He absolutely epitomizes those 20 things that we need to see out of the system. So, yes, there will clearly be some measures put in place.

I would just like to conclude with these comments, Mr. Chairman. I believe that the nine-month restructuring that has taken place in Alberta Health Services, despite the consternation of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on occasion, you know, quite frankly, has far exceeded any of my expectations. [Mr. Liepert's speaking time expired] I guess we're done.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was listening with interest to the minister of health, and he forgot to mention that the restructuring bill, or the tab for that restructuring of his, is \$1.3 billion according to the Premier in his year-end interview. However, it's not that his issues aren't important; they are. They're significant. He has a significant portfolio and a \$12 billion budget. But I have questions for the only cabinet colleague of his with a town named after him, the President of the Treasury Board. [interjection] Lloydminster. [interjection] It's in your constituency.

Now, I, like many others, have been following the financial plan of the government and the interim supply estimates and how our interim supply estimates are going to fit into the budget that we're eventually going to receive on the 7th of April. We look at the allocations and the requests here, and I can understand where it's a budget to tide us over, but as we spend this money or next year's money, I would like an explanation, please, from the hon. minister.

I heard him speak earlier about the ups and downs of oil and natural gas and what they will mean to our budget. Everyone in this House is concerned about whether we'll have adequate revenue from nonrenewable resources or whether we'll have adequate revenue from corporate tax or personal tax. Certainly, I don't think we can expect too much in investment income from the heritage savings trust fund this year. There are a number of revenue streams that are going to be significantly reduced. I would estimate between \$6 billion and \$8 billion less that the President of the Treasury Board is going to have to count this year.

Specifically, now we're not only in a different budget year, we're also in a different calendar year. This is reflected in the third-quarter update, where we now have a new price sensitivity post-January 2009 for oil prices and natural gas. If the Treasury Board president could tell me and taxpayers throughout the province what all this means, I would be very grateful.

4:20

Now, we know that oil price sensitivities will change now, according to the third-quarter fiscal update, by \$105 million. I asked questions about this last week, but unfortunately I didn't receive any answers. When we look at the old price sensitivity for oil – and by old I mean prior to January 1, 2009 – the net change was 130, so if there was an annual change of \$1 in the price of oil, we would either collect an additional \$130 million or, if the price went down, we would be unable to collect that \$130 million. The change now, or the sensitivity, is 235, or a change of \$105 million. With the new royalty rates as oil decreases in price – the rate is price sensitive – we collect less. My question to the hon. minister is: how much less will we collect in oil royalties in this year of 2009-10 than we would have under the old royalty regime?

The same, Mr. Chairman, would apply for natural gas, where we see a price sensitivity that has changed since January 2009. If the

price of natural gas was to increase or decrease by 10 cents, we would collect an additional \$114 million or we would have a reduction of \$114 million in revenue. We see that change by 44. I'm led to believe that if there was an annual change in the price of natural gas in Canadian dollars per gigajoule of 10 cents, if the price went down 10 cents, we would see \$158 million less in our projected nonrenewable resource revenue. I'm referencing page 8 in the third-quarter fiscal update, where I'm getting these post-January 2009 sensitivities. If the minister could enlighten me and taxpayers and members of this House on these questions, I would be very grateful.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, if I could with absolute certainty tell you what we were going to get from oil or gas revenues next year based on price fluctuations and without knowing how much of it we're going to sell – I mean, it's great to say that we're going to get \$100 a barrel, but if we're only going to sell 20,000 barrels a day, you can add up on one end of the equation, and you can lose her all on the other – if I could put a number on that, I've got a hunch I would have a lot better job than I've got right now. Even Mr. Buffett admitted just recently that he got it all wrong, and he's considered one of the great forecasters.

The hon. member is absolutely right that the price sensitivity of our royalty regime right now does make the government more exposed to price fluctuations. It means that if the price of oil goes up dramatically, our income follows, which was a flaw in the previous royalty, particularly on natural gas, where we capped out and the price could go to \$30 and we were stuck at \$3.50. So we took a risk. We said: "We're with you in the oil industry. If it's down here, you've got to keep making enough money to pay your families. We'll take what's there. When it gets good, we get a fair amount, and when it gets great, we get a lot." That was a conscientious choice we made.

I mean, besides the oil and gas we are at a very strong influence of the Canadian dollar. I think it's close to \$273 million now that a 1-cent change makes in our budget. I mean, there's an enormous amount of variable factors that go into it, where you could take a snapshot in time on any day and say that if this and this and this and this are here and we've sold that much, that's what it is. But to just guess forward and say, "Well, you know, what are we going to be, up or down or otherwise?" doesn't suit any reasonable purpose for me to speculate.

The royalty structure in place is fair. It will return to Albertans an appropriate amount for their resource. But I wouldn't want to give the hon. member a dollar figure about what it actually means to our revenues. That would simply be a guess.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I'll be quite frank: I don't understand that. In any budget document, in any of the fiscal plans from past budget years, certainly, the government has made revenue projections at a set price for both oil and natural gas. I'm not talking about synthetic crude but conventional oil production and natural gas production. There are lists of columns.

With the current prices and with the new royalty regime the price sensitivity is obviously spread wider, so we would collect more at higher prices, but we would collect less at lower prices. My question simply is: how much less at lower prices does the minister anticipate we will collect under the current royalty regime which came into effect in January of 2009? Previous government documents certainly would give projections on how much revenue was to be anticipated.

Mr. Snelgrove: What's that ad they have now? The accountants put it on, you know: if life was that simple. If the hon. member wants to pick a day and tell me what the price of oil is going to be, what the price of gas is going to be, and how much of it we're going to sell, I'll tell him how much of a difference it is from the projection.

The budget projections are not just done by us. We have the same process that we've used for years, where a multitude of energy forecasters look at their best-guess scenario, they put the figures out there, and they anticipate. We take a blend of those numbers, we put it out, and we suggest that's what the number will be for the coming year.

As the hon. member knows, we can think we're very low one day and all of a sudden find out we might be very high the next. It's irresponsible for me to say that we're going to be down \$2,000, \$2 billion, \$3 billion. The hon. member can do the math as well himself. If we don't sell any oil, then the price really doesn't affect us very much. The simple fact is that we know that given the economic situation both our volume and our price are expected to be lower than we would have anticipated last year or the year before.

Mr. MacDonald: We're getting somewhere now, Mr. Chairman. The hon. minister is telling us that it will be lower.

Now, if I look at the fiscal plan from last year, certainly, there is nonrenewable resource revenue. There's an actual, there's a forecast, there's a budget, and there's a target through to 2009-10 and 2010-11. The target revenue for 2009-10 was \$10.7 billion, and the target for the year 2010-11 was \$10 billion. How much less than this target from last year's fiscal plan does the minister anticipate he will be counting in this fiscal year for the budget we're discussing in interim supply?

4:30

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, he can come right back to that desk at this time on April 7, and he'll get his answer.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Mr. Chairman, when we're discussing interim supply, and we are . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: We're discussing expenditures.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, the document that I'm looking at is an estimate for interim supply. Certainly, the hon. minister is right. They will be calculated into or totalled into all of the expenditures for the entire year. How are taxpayers to have confidence in this government and in this budget process when the minister is indicating that we will have to wait because no one on that side of the House has a number? I do not believe, Mr. Chairman, that no one, particularly this hon. minister, who has a town named after him, knows. I know he works hard, and he works long hours. We're not that far from April 7, and I think someone on that side of the House has to know what the target for next year's revenue will be under the royalty regime that came into effect in 2009, considering the prices that we're getting now for natural gas and conventional crude oil.

The Deputy Chair: I have to ask: are you sharing 20 minutes? The clerk is trying desperately to keep up with the switches on this. You hadn't let me know.

Mr. Snelgrove: Might I ask for unanimous consent to make it 25?

The Deputy Chair: Okay. You are sharing 20.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, interim supply is strictly and simply

the expenditure side of our budget. We make no representation in here whatsoever about what the revenues may or may not be. That's completely within the purview of the minister of finance in consultation with the Department of Energy and the Sol Gen and gaming, that have revenue streams in there. The hon. member would also know that we have to take a certain amount of our lead on revenue projections from the federal government, who collects our taxes for us and remits. We have to use their trending to identify. This particular process we're in is strictly on the expenditure side, which is part of the responsibility of government.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I would remind the hon. minister – and he knows this full well – that you earn money before you spend it. The hon. minister is telling me that this is just what we're going to spend.

Now, I would like the minister, please, to note that there is a significant difference in these price sensitivities post-January 2009 than what was anticipated in last year's fiscal plan. This is concerning, Mr. Chairman, because the sensitivities to fiscal year assumptions for 2009-10 this time last year when we were dealing with the budget was for the oil price of \$211 million. We see now that it's \$235 million. There is a wee difference there of \$24 million, and I suspect that it is because the price of conventional crude oil has declined more than what was anticipated by the province. I would agree with him that at this time last year it would have been very difficult to recognize that we were going to have such a significant decline in the price of conventional crude oil, but we did, and we have to be prepared for it – we are in sort of a modest way with our plan, which is a stability fund – but also for natural gas.

The government is not nearly out as much, when you compare last year's fiscal plan, because you knew what the calculation was on the new royalty structure, than what is in the third-quarter update as the price for natural gas has gone down. There's an \$8 million difference in the price sensitivity for natural gas. I think we need to clarify this before the government members build the budget for this province. It's clear that as prices go down and we now have this price-sensitive royalty structure, the people who own the resource, Albertans, are going to be collecting significantly less.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, my kids and my wife are living proof that you do not have to wait until you make money before you spend it. As a matter of fact, I would think anybody with kids in college or university or a wife whose husband spends most of his time in Edmonton has a propensity to spend far more money and far faster, although we are very well paid and the compensation is terrific in this particular House. I would suggest to President Obama that he could save a lot of this frivolling around he's doing. Give my wife a MasterCard, start in New York, and by the time she hit L.A., their economy would be rock 'n' rolling like no one's business. The idea that you can't spend what you don't have may be foreign to everyone in my family but me.

Back to the sensitivities. It wouldn't matter, Mr. Chairman, if nothing in our royalty structure had changed. The prices have collapsed far past anything that any projector, any business analyst, any energy analyst had even contemplated. As a matter of fact, the governor of the Bank of Canada I think in July said that oil would hit \$200 within a year – \$200. He is a pretty high-paid, smart, informed guy, and he got it that wrong. So any suggestion that the projections on going forward stuff is a complete science would be incorrect. Any suggestion that simply because we have a different royalty structure in effect, it's going to have a worse or a greater effect will be a point for discussion after the finance minister tables her budget with the different modelling included in it to arrive at our final budget.

I'm not going to get into a debate about revenue with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who, I might add, also has some facilities named after him. I think I've heard of the Gold Bar power station and the Gold Bar sewage treatment facility. Like, it's a start. Don't lose faith. I'm sure somewhere, someday, sometime some people will get incredibly drunk and name their town Hughie-minster.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We were discussing price sensitivities here. The only thing I can draw from our exchange is that perhaps the hon. minister is going to be . . .

An Hon. Member: Sleeping on the couch.

4:40

Mr. MacDonald: Not only sleeping on the couch, but he might be having a sandwich instead of a hot meal. Anyway, that was quite interesting.

I was expecting more information on the anticipated royalty revenue than the spending habits of the hon. minister's family. However, I think this is a very, very important issue. These are very, very important questions because of the significant change in these price sensitivities and what they will mean to the treasury. I'm disappointed, again, that I'm not getting the answers that I seek. I would certainly suggest to the hon. members across the way that they have a look at last year's fiscal plan and see what was anticipated in revenue and what in the small, fine print the third-quarter update is anticipating before we go any further with the discussion on interim supply, Mr. Chairman.

With those words, I will certainly thank the minister for his time. I'm disappointed with the information that he has provided to me and to the taxpayers, but I guess I'll have to just put my patience hat on and wait until the 7th.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the hon. President of the Treasury Board, I realize the difficult position that you're in. We're on this side making an assumption that you've actually worked with the minister of finance and you've got a reasonable sense of where things are going. If that's not the case at this point in terms of prediction of the assumption of the price of a barrel of oil or a gigajoule of gas, then maybe we're asking too much of you.

Also, it's very hard to limit discussion strictly to interim supply without trying to get a sense of the forecast of where we're heading. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated, we can only reference what has been in the past, so going back into the past – this is for Children and Youth Services – how much is allocated for child and family services authorities? In the '08-09 the total was \$749,336,000. Again, how much is allocated to child intervention services? The '08-09 total was \$377,825,000.

It is very difficult, no doubt, to create a budget when we are so absolutely, inextricably dependent on the price of oil and gas. We have a growing population with growing demands. We can count on certain taxes. Although we have eliminated the health premium tax, which I would think the majority of citizens are grateful for, we've also seen a large portion of that space that was left and the savings left being foisted onto middle-income seniors in the form of increased pharmaceutical costs, especially if they're not on a group plan, as is the case with most seniors, and they're having to pay Blue Cross amounts that have doubled.

One of the concerns that I have is that in terms of trying to save money, we're trying to do things cheaply. It's the equivalent of putting a cheap fix, a partial patch as opposed to dealing with the entire roof if we just keep patching things. I've seen examples of cheaper approaches, and I'm extremely worried in the cheaper approach that's being applied to Children and Youth Services in the form of decertification. We've got seniors and children, our two most vulnerable members of society, and we're going to have child care workers that aren't certified, that won't have had the education and won't have had the experience. That's a concern, and it seems to be a pattern.

This government instead of bolstering municipal police forces, instead of standing behind the RCMP for example, has decided to do policing on the cheap. They've hired a tremendous number of sheriffs, who are considerably less costly than RCMP because they don't receive the same amount of training, and therefore the cost of their education is considerably lower and their salaries are considerably lower. Again, this is an example of doing things on the cheap. I'm concerned that when you operate that way, in the long run you end up paying out a whole lot more money.

Now, on the positive side the government has realized and gotten behind the 10-year plan to end homelessness. Forget the moral business of being your brother's keeper, but they've realized that it makes financial sense to provide 24/7 care for the people who are most costing of the system, whether it be through mental illness, whether it be through addictions. They've realized that for approximately \$30,000 a year they can provide 24/7 care for those individuals. They can support them. They don't just put a roof over their head. I wish that sort of all-inclusive support and care notion that's being provided for the hardest to house was applied to other areas.

In this recessionary time frame I'm extremely worried for Alberta's children. The latest StatsCan indicated that we have 78,000 Alberta children living below the poverty line, and poverty very much restricts your choices. As the recession grows and more and more Alberta families are put under the pressure of either a husband or a wife losing a job, tensions increase within the family. And it won't be over, necessarily, whether you have a gold card and you're travelling across to solve President Obama's expenses; it will be whether you can just plain survive.

Last year almost 19,000 women, with children in arms in many cases, were turned away from women's shelters, and there has not been a significant increase in funding for shelters. The Sheriff King Home did receive some funding. The Inn from the Cold received a small amount of funding. But in terms of interim supply and tide-over funding there's not a whole lot there when it comes to sheltering individuals.

Also, the way the government directs its funding. We had the example, I believe, for the homeless and eviction fund of having paid out \$121 million – and probably that was months ago – instead of putting pressure on landlords to charge reasonable rents. As a result taxpayers are out a tremendous amount of money, the rents are guaranteed to the landlords, and the prices don't go down. Part of our recession is being very much experienced by anybody who builds houses. There's a tremendous downturn in housing starts, and that again affects affordable housing.

In terms of education, if we don't deal with the approximate \$8 billion in total of the unfunded liability for teachers and pay that down on a regular basis, then that's going to multiply. Again, I don't see within this interim supply a specified amount. The government can get away with just paying I believe it's \$85 million to the fund, but if that's all they pay, then these fees are going to increase.

4:50

Another concern I have and I don't see reflected in the interim supply but hopefully will be dealt with in the budget is school psychologists. There has been some troubling discussion about doing away with coding for children, and it's based on coding that aides are provided for children with learning disabilities.

We're opening our arms, as well we should from a Canadian standpoint, to a number of individuals seeking refugee status, which is very much dramatically affecting pressures on English as a second language. A number of the children that we're receiving from war-torn areas such as Darfur don't have literacy in their first language, and therefore dealing with the emotional trauma that they've gone through and trying to give them some sort of English as a second language structure when their own language structure is limited is extremely challenging. It requires funding and support. Unless we address this in the early ages, have children reading by the time they complete grade three, then the cost to the system is just going to skyrocket.

Also, in terms of where the government spends money, it's sometimes questionable. For example, the amount of money spent on standardized achievement tests is higher than the amount spent on developing curriculum. There are good expenditures. There are good investments. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I'll look forward to talking about some of them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Some of those good expenditures that I'm looking forward to talking about are doing such things as working on eliminating child poverty. I indicated the figure of 78,000 children. Now, poverty costs a tremendous amount because those same children who are living in poverty are also suffering nutritional difficulties. Since good nutrition is a key to good health and, obviously, a key to good learning, the cost of poverty when combined with the cost of illiteracy is very much affecting our ability as a province to move forward. It has been estimated by a number of literacy organizations that 40 per cent of Albertans are functionally illiterate. If they're functionally illiterate, their ability to perform within their jobs or to increase their employment possibilities, and therefore their ability to pay taxes, is a concern. So, obviously, investment in education and literacy is extremely important.

We have to be looking for greater efficiencies where the money can best be provided, where we would receive less risk. Now, I agree with the hon. minister of the Treasury Board that we have to live within our means. Although the minister of the Treasury Board indicated that, you know, we should be as concerned about, for example, the Ethics Commissioner, as concerned about the Ombudsperson, the roles that the various departments face, it's the Auditor general who creates the fiscal map. If we followed the Auditor General's recommendations, then we would be saving great amounts in terms of efficiency and putting ourselves at considerably less risk.

Just an example of recommendations the Auditor General made in his October 2008 report – and it would be interesting if someone could comment on to what extent these have actually been embraced – on page 15 of his report under AIMCo, internal control certification, recommendation 32. Keep in mind that AIMCo is the outfit that manages our finances. I believe that they're in the area of approximately, in terms of assets, \$72 billion, although at the rate we're losing lately, that sum may have gone down. This is what Auditor General Fred Dunn, our pilot, suggested:

We recommend that Alberta Investment Management Corporation introduce a process to prepare for internal control certification by:

- ensuring that its strategic plan includes internal control certification.
- developing a top-down, risk-based process for internal control design.
- selecting an appropriate internal control risk-assessment framework.
- considering sub-certification processes, with direct reports to the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer providing formal certification on their areas of responsibility.
- ensuring that management compensation systems incorporate the requirement for good internal control.
- using a phased approach to assess the design and operating effectiveness of internal controls.

That was recommendation 32. Hopefully it's being followed.

Recommendation 33 has to do with ensuring completeness and accuracy of private equity partnership investments. This recommendation has been repeated because, obviously, it wasn't followed the first time. "We again recommend that Alberta Investment Management Corporation reconcile its investments in private equity partnerships to the audited partnership financial statements."

Recommendation 34, international swaps and derivatives association agreements. We know how many of us have gotten burned with derivatives.

We recommend that Alberta Investment Management Corporation regularly review its International Swaps and Derivatives Association agreements to ensure that they protect it from the risk of default by its counterparties. We also recommend that the Corporation document the reasons for any changes to the standard form of the agreement.

Just think how many of us within this House who had sufficient funds to invest wish that those same precautions were taken by our supporters, our auditors, our financial advisers.

Now, the Auditor General also had a whole pile of recommendations – and I won't share them all – for the Alberta Treasury Branches. The Alberta Treasury Branches, upon which so many Albertans are dependent for loans because the larger banks are less likely to lend than the Alberta Treasury Branches, made some very questionable investments with asset-backed commercial paper. It's no wonder that the Auditor General is recommending that they rein in their risk.

This is what he's saying to them to implement as soon as possible. He's saying to ATB to

- develop and document the business rules and operating procedures required to implement the improved investment policy being developed.

In other words, don't go risking, as you have done before, with asset-backed commercial paper. Make sure that your obligations – possibly invest more in bonds seems to be a recommendation that financial advisers are suggesting. Be less risky. You may not get the same interest increase, but at least you won't lose from your principal, as so many people have witnessed.

- improve its process for establishing Global Financial Markets' performance targets by discussing the targets with senior Asset Liability Committee (ALCO) and maintaining evidence that supports decisions made.
- implement the updated investment and derivative policies for changes arising from its recent review of those policies. We also recommend that ATB undertake a review of the financial risk management policy.

Now, considering that ATB is one of Alberta's main bankers and the dependency that people, especially in rural areas, have on this financial institution and the fact that Alberta taxpayers are on the hook for any of its failures, these are very good recommendations that the Auditor General has made.

He also goes on to suggest: "complete its business rules on how variable pay is calculated for Global Financial Markets' staff by

clarifying how to deal with revenue not collected and investment losses.” What he’s referring to there has to do with the fact that even though head individuals within the Alberta Treasury Board made some very poor financial risk decisions, they still received significant recompense for the bad decisions they made. He’s also suggesting, as soon as possible is the key here, to “review the role of the Asset Liability Committee (ALCO) and consider restructuring it into two tiers.”

5:00

Now, I realize that everyone here has the opportunity to read the Auditor General’s report, and although the minister of the Treasury Board suggested that only geeks would enjoy this type of reading, I don’t consider my honourable chair of the Public Accounts Committee a geek. I actually see him as a role model. This is, in his estimate, required reading if you’re going to be on top of your finances.

One of the areas that I think the government could potentially save some money on is either to get rid of its task forces and public consultations or actually listen to the results. If we go back to 2005, we had the long-term care task force. If we’d followed those recommendations, we wouldn’t have so many seniors taking up bed space in hospitals. There would be long-term care homes for them, and the care that they would receive would be grade A. There would be proper pay for individuals, there would be a recognition that medications should be decided by registered nurses, and there would be greater care provided. Unfortunately, the Auditor General has recommended year after year after year. . . [Mr. Chase’s speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate these opportunities.

Another task force that unfortunately brought back great ideas but was rejected was the Affordable Housing Task Force. Now, in terms of rejection there were a number of members, some still present, others now gone, who travelled the province, held forums. They spent an awful lot of time and effort and, in the process, money consulting with Albertans. What could be better? But then when they brought back all their recommendations, the government rejected 38 out of the 50 recommendations. They rejected the idea of a temporary freeze on rents, and instead we’ve seen the government pay out \$121 million to subsidize landlords and keep the prices high.

The most recent example of consultation is the parks survey that the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation put out. That survey went out, and people who filled it out and took the time to engage in the process said: we don’t want more availability for ATVs into park areas. The numbers were extremely large, saying: “We don’t want greater access into parks. In fact, we want less access. And while you’re at it, how about fixing up the trails that are currently deteriorating in the parks?” These were recommendations, yet we had the Member for Athabasca-Redwater talking about increased access for ATVs and snowmobiles. Again, there are trails. We’ve got cutlines. We’ve got so many forestry roads. We’ve got so many extraction roads for a variety, whether it’s timber or whether it’s for oil and gas. There are places for people to play. If we’re going to survey, let’s take them and actually act upon the survey.

In terms of surveys we’ve had the minister of sustainable resources. He has certainly surveyed people considerably on grizzlies and protecting grizzlies, yet we have him currently talking about potentially restoring the hunting and taking away the protected status. We’ve had input on pine beetles and whether clear-cutting,

particularly in parks and protected areas, is the way to go to combat the insect. Each time I give the government credit for having sent out the survey or asked for feedback or held the public forum. But when you ignore what Albertans have asked for – and it’s not pie-in-the-sky types of things. Four per cent of our land is set aside for parks and protected areas. Actually, protecting that is not a horribly large expectation. We have opportunities to not only listen to Albertans but to wisely take their suggestions, implement them, legislate them, and in so doing, save money, create efficiencies.

Again, I’m very grateful for the Auditor General. The Auditor General has made a number of recommendations, whether it be for improving our mental health systems or for postsecondaries, for example, making sure that the money that taxpayers send to institutions is not placed at risk. If we’re going to diversify, if we’re going to move forward, then spending money investing in postsecondary, investing in research and development is going to be extremely important.

Here’s just a very brief recommendation that the Auditor General made with regard to postsecondary. Here’s his first recommendation.

Clarify standards and expectations.

We recommend that the Department of Advanced Education and Technology:

- clarify its standards and expectations for non-credit programs and clearly communicate them to public post-secondary Institutions.

So where should the government start? It should start increasing its own efficiency and thus provide a better product for the postsecondaries. Set the example. The Auditor General, within that same recommendation, says:

- work with Institutions to improve the consistency of information that Institutions report to the Department.

I didn’t see anything within this interim about increased postsecondary seats, for example. I’m hoping that that will come out in the main budget. Promises were made that haven’t been fulfilled. As of last fall we were supposed to have received 15,000 more university seats. That hasn’t happened. We’re supposed to by 2020 have an increase of 60,000 seats. If we want to diversify our economy and create opportunities and have people paying the taxes that we need to sustain this province and sort of wean us from our resource dependency, then being well educated and moving up the wage bracket is one way to achieve that.

Now, the Auditor General, to his credit, has made recommendations in a variety of areas. That is why I am concerned, as where I began, that by undercutting the Auditor General as opposed to following his recommendations, we’re going to be wasting more money instead of conserving it. One of the things the Auditor General found he talks about on page 17 of his April 2008 report. “We found, for example, Institutions that did not include all incremental overhead costs of providing a non-credit program in their analysis of whether to provide the course, or what to charge for it.” Now, considering how tuitions have gone up, you would think that it would be very important for an institution to know what the cost of its program was going to be. Potentially it’s overcharging the students who are working three jobs just to be able to attend the institution.

The Auditor General suggests, for example, that “the approval processes were not well defined, and the same person often initiated and approved a course. This resulted in courses proceeding with only a few students,” – and that’s certainly not economically viable at the postsecondary level although class reduction at the primary level would produce great investments – “and sometimes just one student, or without a signed contract.”

5:10

Now, the amazing thing about the Auditor General's department is the depth and breadth of the individuals within the department and the fact that we don't have enough money for him to do his reporting. I can't think of a single department that's more important.

Anyway, the Auditor General:

We recommend that the Department of Advanced Education and Technology

- clarify . . . expectations . . .
- work with Institutions . . .

We recommend that the Department of Advanced Education and Technology implement effective processes to:

- monitor whether Institutions report information consistent with its expectations.

How can you tell that you're getting the output without the correct input? Are we making wise investments? What is the expectation?

Under implications and risks with regard to postsecondary the Auditor General says, "Lack of effective monitoring of non-credit programs may result in poor decision-making and programming quality." Well, having paid a tremendous amount for inflated tuitions, some of the highest in Canada, students should be guaranteed quality course work. The Auditor General goes on to say, "It also exposes the Institution to unmitigated risks and liabilities." Like, if you're not providing the education that you're stating that you're providing, you know, you're wasting students' money; you're wasting students' time.

I'll allow one of my other members to participate.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) the question must now be put on the motion for consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech. I'd therefore invite the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress so that the Assembly may vote on this motion.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, it'll be my pleasure to in fact move that very motion, that the Committee of Supply now rise and report progress as noted.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, general revenue fund, and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: On the motion does the Assembly agree with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

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

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

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

[Adjourned debate March 3: Mr. Oberle]

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

9. **Mr. Zwodzesky** moved on behalf of Mr. Stelmach:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Acting Speaker: This motion is a debatable motion. Does any member wish to speak?

Hearing none, does the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wish to close?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the support, hon. members. On that note, I would move that we close the debate.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Back under consideration for Committee of Supply are the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates.

Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund (continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. An area that I would like to talk about because I am concerned that it's being compromised in this interim budget is mental illness. I am very concerned that as part of the superboard's restructuring it has taken over the responsibility for mental illness as well as for AADAC as well as for the Cancer Board. I'm concerned that one centralized organization has potentially bitten off more than it can chew and that the various organizations such as mental illness may not be provided for to the extent that is required.

We've seen the first proposed – well, it's not proposed; it's out there. We've seen the first cutback in mental illness and treatment with the reduction of mental illness beds at the new south Calgary hospital. Before it's even up and running, it's already been cut. Likewise, we've seen that same type of reduction of beds with regard to the children's hospital in Calgary-Varsity. It barely has more beds than it had back in 1950, when the population was about one-third of what it currently is now.

Again, a statistic that I have concern about is that mental illness can strike up to 40 per cent of the population. If mental illness is to strike an individual, there's a 50 per cent chance of it happening before the person reaches 14 years of age, so early diagnosis and treatment are absolutely essential.

The Auditor General, in talking about mental illness, presents some very important and to some extent shocking cases directly relevant to the Alberta situation. Mental illness and the onset of mental illness can be triggered by a variety of circumstances, but the pressure that individuals and families are under during a time of recession, during a time of job loss, during a time of downsizing can very much trigger mental illness. The Auditor General states on page 65 of the April 2008 report:

It's hard to overstate the impact of mental illness on our society. According to recent estimates, one in five Canadians will suffer from mental illness. In 2002-2003, over 500,000 Albertans were treated by a physician for a mental health related problem. This represented over 2.25 million visits to a physician and accounted for 39% of all general practice physician billings. Overall, about \$472 million in public funding was spent on mental health services, about 7% of the total amount spent on healthcare services in Alberta in 2002. As many as 15% of police contacts are with people with mental illness.

For example, the drop-in centre. It's suggested that a third of the individuals within the drop-in centre are suffering from mental illness. It's assumed that approximately 30 per cent are suffering from addictions.

Suicide is strongly linked to mental illness and remains one of the leading causes of death in Canada, higher than deaths by homicide or motor vehicle accidents.

Alberta has amongst the highest suicide rates. Therefore, investments in trying to provide security and stability from a very early age are going to produce tremendous results both in decreasing the cost of treatment but also in increasing productivity.

5:20

This is from page 68.

We found that the [Alberta Mental Health Board] and Department have systems intended to monitor progress on the Plan's implementation priorities, but those systems are not well designed and cannot determine whether the Plan as a whole has successfully progressed. We made two recommendations that will strengthen systems for the second round of provincial mental health planning.

This is a concern because we've gone from regional autonomy, a regional authority treating individuals with mental illness close to where they can receive the access and the treatment, and the authority for that treatment was at a local level. Now, unfortunately, that's been put into the blender of the health superboard, and I'm not convinced that those local needs are being met. I know that when we get calls to the office in Calgary-Varsity, people are asking: "Well, who do I go to? If it's no longer under the responsibility of the Calgary health region, then who's going to look after this?"

When it came to assigning responsibilities, the Auditor General pointed out:

We would have expected a summary from the central entities with the priorities listed and responsibilities assigned. The summary would have defined who was responsible for the various stages in the accountability cycle. Such a summary was not created. However, staff at the central entities understood who was in charge of implementing each priority. They were less certain about who monitored, reported, and adjusted each priority or the Plan in general.

Now, doesn't this make you think in terms of what happened in Vegreville? Who was in charge when the infections broke out? Then we had to try and get ahold of the people who had received treatment there.

In terms of trying to provide some stewardship to the Mental Health Board, which, as I say, is now part of the responsibility of the superboard, on page 72 the Auditor General recommends his third recommendation.

We recommend that the Alberta Mental Health Board and the Department of Health and Wellness, working with other mental health participants, strengthen implementation of the Provincial Mental Health Plan by improving:

- implementation planning,
- the monitoring and reporting of implementation activities against implementation plans.

You've got to have something to judge against.

- [and] the system to adjust the Plan and implementation initiatives in response to changing circumstances.

Well, recessionary times and increased pressure are definitely a new circumstance.

He goes on to say on page 76 that this is what could happen if his recommendations aren't carried out.

Implications and risks if recommendation not implemented
Without a documented implementation planning system (especially in a collaborative field like mental health), there is a risk that:

- Deliverables, timelines, targets, and resourcing may not be established;
- Activities may not be co-ordinated;
- There may be no foundation for monitoring and reporting priorities for the Plan as a whole;
- It may be difficult to determine whether progress is being made.

I mean, having taught for 34 years, I checked out the progress of my students with a variety of tests. There was an expectation from the parents that I would have checks and balances, that there would be reporting procedures.

But the Auditor General has concerns. He says:

Without monitoring the implementation of such a large undertaking, it's possible that priorities may not be actioned or unfold as planned. As well, those responsible will not have a system to alert them to issues that require remediation. Without a system of remediation, momentum on Plan implementation may stall.

Well, that's hardly surprising. If you don't have a plan, how will you know if you achieved it? This is what we're seeing more and more.

His fourth recommendation, found on page 77 of his April report:

We recommend that the Department of Health and Wellness ensure there is a complete accountability framework for the Provincial Mental Health Plan and mental health services in Alberta.

I'm picking and choosing. I'm by no way reading this document in detail. But he goes on:

Develop regional mental health plans. Within the scope of this provincial plan, regional health authorities should begin to work immediately on identifying priorities, service gaps and regional mental health plans.

So he's saying that even though a superboard is under way, local input and responsibility and oversight are absolutely key.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Chairman, the last hour has been comparable to constant fingernail scratching on blackboards. You know, we have an opposition here who goes on at length about democratic reform and democracy, and then we have this member standing here for the last 15 minutes reading a three-year-old report by the Auditor General. Now, this just is the absolute – I mean, what is the old saying? The definition of insanity: keep doing the same thing over and over again and getting the same results. I would suggest that, actually, it kind of fits because he's talking about mental health. I would suggest that maybe some of us, you know, have no desire to sit here until 6 o'clock tonight, but we're relegated to be here. So let's actually make some use out of this time and quit listening to somebody who talks a good story and then stands there and reads out of a three-year-old Auditor General's report line for line. Just absolutely bizarre.

I'm going to talk for my full 10 minutes because I'm sick of listening to you guys. When my time expired, Mr. Chairman, I was being asked, actually, I must say, some very relevant questions by the Leader of the Opposition. I wish he would instill some of his relevancy into the member who has just been I was going to say speaking but I would say droning on for the last hour, I think it has just about been.

You know, when we first embarked on changes to our health care system in this province some nine months ago, we made some decisions that I know will change the way we do health care and deliver health care in this province. During the past nine months I, frankly, expected that we would have some issues. Any time you go through a restructuring, Mr. Chairman, you expect there are going to be some issues. But I would say that the health care delivery in this province in the last nine months has far exceeded what I thought we would be getting delivered. It has certainly been as good as or probably in many cases better than what was being delivered prior to the amalgamation on May 15 last year.

I'll give you a couple of examples, Mr. Chairman. I was meeting with one of the CEOs of a major hospital in one of our two major cities. I won't say which one or who it was, but we went down to the cafeteria, and I said: okay, no BS; tell me how this is going. She said to me: this is the first time since I've been working in this system that Calgary and Edmonton actually talk to one another, that we actually have a working relationship between Calgary and Edmonton. She said: "You know, when it comes to neonatal care, it had gotten so bad between Calgary and Edmonton that when Capital Health needed assistance on neonatal care, their first call was to Saskatoon, and in Calgary the first call was to Montana. As a result, we have quads in Calgary who are American citizens not by choice but because there wasn't a working relationship between Calgary and Edmonton." Well, Mr. Chairman, we fixed that, and we're not going to let that kind of stuff happen in this province going forward.

5:30

Mr. Chairman, we had a situation in the Chinook health region where some seven years ago the board and the CEO in Chinook decided that they could no longer with an aging population continue to provide long-term care to patients the way they had previously been doing it. They embarked on a new model. It's called designated assisted living. I know the Member for Lethbridge-East doesn't like to hear this because it's working.

Well, Mr. Chairman, in the seven years since they adopted that model in Chinook region, they have not had to increase their long-term care beds. The capacity with designated assisted living, if anyone is prepared to go have a look at it, provides equal or better care for some of these seniors at a significantly reduced cost in an environment that they feel much more comfortable in. My question to them was: why don't other regional health authorities adopt this measure? The answer to me was: we tried, but nobody seemed to be interested because it happened to originate in Lethbridge. Well, we're going to fix that, too. Under our new model in this province we're going to provide options for our seniors. We're going to provide options so that the seniors will have some choice. They will have additional care where they feel comfortable. We're not going to simply continue to build long-term care and institutionalize our senior citizens.

I think what we need to now start to see happen in this province – we had a very ambitious 2008. We brought forward a number of strategies, including continuing care, children's mental health, a pharmaceutical strategy, and several others that we now have to see seep into the system and start to be implemented in the system. The

one thing we don't want to continue to do is trot out policy and not give it a chance to be implemented. Despite the fact that some of the members of the opposition want to always look in the past and live in the past, we're not going to move backwards. We're going to continue to move forward.

Mr. Chairman, this health care system 10 years from now will look different than it does today. I'm not exactly sure what it's going to look like 10 years from now, and I don't think anybody in this House can predict what it's going to look like. I can tell you that it's not only going to look different, but it's going to look better, and it's going to preserve our publicly funded health care despite all of the opposition that will come from across the floor.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I'll listen to some more scratching on the blackboard.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's very difficult as an elected individual who believes in facilitation and collaboration to, instead of receiving answers on the topic of mental health, be subjected to put-downs and character assassination as opposed to focusing on issues raised. The issue that is being raised is mental illness. The minister talks about my droning on and dealing with historical documents. Mr. Minister, this is from April 2008. The date today is March 10, 2009. This wasn't three years ago. The fact that it seems like ancient history to you is a large concern to me.

I'm going to share one more mental health recommendation. I think it's extremely important, and hopefully the minister doesn't shrug this off as he has shrugged off other comments that have been raised. On page 89 of this less than a year old document, April 2008, this is the alarm the Auditor General raises. He says:

Take immediate action to establish a province-wide suicide prevention strategy. Suicide is a serious problem in Alberta and work should begin immediately on a province-wide suicide prevention strategy targeted at the general population, school aged children and vulnerable populations, especially Aboriginal youth.

To the minister: where are you at in the immediacy of dealing with suicide prevention under your superboard?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health? No?

Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to be able to stand up and be a part of this discussion, and I promise the minister of health that I won't read out of the book.

First off, I totally agree with him, and I think that moving into a one-board situation is probably one of the best moves that has happened in this province. From my experience in long-term care and working within that system, it was quite clear that I couldn't move someone from one region to the next and have them assessed the same way. I have many stories that are quite heartbreaking around that, so yes, absolutely, one board. No problem.

However, it has been mentioned that – and I realize that this will take time because they're trying to straighten it out. I did have occasion to try to find somebody specific within the Chinook region, if that's what they're still called, so I called just the general number and said who I was. "Can you tell me who the hell is running the joint?" They said, "Well, that is such a good question." So I went to about three people until I finally found the person I needed, which I realize is working out the kinks. We really do need someone regionally that we can go to rather than having to try to go through Mr. Hughes' board. Through the way he sent letters to us, I'm

assuming that he'll have somebody assigned to MLA offices so that when our MLA offices have concerns, it'll go through a specific, probably government liaison that would be under the board. I'm just assuming that that's the way it'll be.

Continuing care. I think that the minister of health and I have often been speaking sort of at odds when, in fact, we're on the same page. Continuing care includes all of the things that he has talked about, and it does include long-term care. I'm not necessarily advocating that it has to be a separate, stand-alone building. What I'm saying: it goes along with the designated assisted living, assisted living, enhanced lodges, lodges, or apartments for seniors.

The whole idea is that people can age in place, but beyond that, I think we need them to be able to live out their lives in place. For instance, in Lethbridge we will be getting new designated assisted living because I think that's the way the board will probably push them. But my contention is that part of that designated assisted living still should be for long-term care because it's not the housing that's the problem. It's the care that's the problem. If someone comes in one end of the building and they're walking and they go out the other end of the building feet first – they walk in vertical; they go out horizontal, feet first – they should be able to receive the care that they need so that they're not being moved around like bags of potatoes from one place to the other side of town to the other side of town or, in fact, could well be moved out of their community. I think that this is all underneath continuing care, and each place has its own need and its own use in how we can help our seniors move through this.

The word "warehousing," of course, comes up many times, and the last thing that I would ever ask for is that we warehouse our seniors. I want them to receive the care that they need. Now, when we deregulated long-term care, it was divided into two ministries, so again that makes it complex. But the housing side isn't necessarily the problem; it's the care side. The housing actually can make money, and that's why so many private operators are going into it. What they don't want is the care side because the care side has heavy, heavy expenses on the labour side. We need people that are trained, and we need many of them, particularly towards the end, from the extreme designated assisted living into the long-term care, when the care levels certainly increase.

It does become very complex. At this point in time I think we've got almost 200 people in a hospital tying up beds because they need that care and there's nowhere for them to go. There's no reason that they couldn't go to designated assisted living, because that's the next level up to where they would be, for long-term care, but in that building they should be able to get that extra care. You can move staff. If you need extra staff on the long-term care side, you could move that staff in, but they could still work in other parts of the building.

5:40

From my own experience I think it's good for staff to move around so that you're working with different people all the time. It's very easy to get burned out. You're overworked, you're understaffed, or you're working short, whatever. You do give so much of yourself in that line of business. So to be able to move around and have different kinds of people that you're working with – you do get burned out if you're always on an Alzheimer's unit. Let's move into something that may be lighter care and where the people are a little bit more copacetic in terms of being able to respond to you on a cognitive level.

One thing, again, with the changes – and I may not agree with it, but I can understand it. When they made the changes to the long-

term care and into designated assisted living, it certainly decreased the cost to the system, but it did increase the cost to the residents. I think that that's something that would have to be looked at, certainly, in terms of the medications. Again, I guess a pharmaceutical plan would probably be good, and we'd have to look at the Blue Cross coverage. Many of these people, of course, would qualify for benefits anyway.

One thing that I used to always say to the staff at Edith Cavell, where I worked – and I really had very good staff. People considered me competent and good at my job, but the only reason I was was because I had excellent personal care aides that worked under me. When they came to me with problems, I understood them. You knew the ones that you could trust totally. I didn't have to go double-check. I knew exactly what they were talking about. Part of that was because there are some people that still work at Edith Cavell that have been there for 20 and 25 years, and (a) that speaks to a good employer, and (b) it speaks to people who are really dedicated to their jobs. I always used to joke when I was at Edith Cavell that I was probably going to be there until I moved in and that I wanted to make damn sure that the staff was good so that they would look after me and that I would have a good room.

Those are just some of my comments. I would be interested in the reciprocal comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would be delighted to respond. Again, I appreciate the positive comments made by the Member for Lethbridge-East. In many ways I do agree with her that we are attempting to get to the same end.

The very first part of her comments was around communications and communications relative to the new board. If you speak to the chairman, Ken Hughes, he will openly admit that if there's one thing that he feels they could have done better during this whole administrative change, it's in the area of communication. [interjection] You know, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you might want to have a discussion with your friend right behind you because she just complimented us on moving to the one board. You have an internal problem over there. What was the company that he used to be on all the time? Enron. That was the company. I suggest that you maybe take your colleague out for dinner tonight. She could actually tune you in a bit on this whole health thing, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Chairman, I absolutely accept the comments relative to communications. As a matter of fact, my colleague to the right, the Minister of Environment, had mentioned to me one time something very similar to what you said, that when I need to call somebody in Medicine Hat, I'm not exactly sure who to call anymore, and that's fair.

Now, I think it's safe to say that what the board did not want to necessarily do is put into place a permanent structure that the new CEO was going to have to inherit. They want to let him build his own structure. I would suggest that as we move forward, that's something where we need to ensure that as part of the structure that the new CEO builds, there is that contact point for MLAs in their particular region. I can guarantee you, Member, that I will get as much hassle from back here as I will from over there if we don't have that contact in the local community.

To talk a little bit about continuing care, the member made a comment that I think I have to take exception with. She was referring to the fact that under our current model, with our caps on residency in long-term care private operators can make money. I'm not sure who she's talking to, but every indication I receive con-

stantly from providers, whether they're public, nonprofit, or within the health services system, is that one of the challenges we face is that we have caps for accommodation and then we fund the care side of it separately through Alberta Health and Wellness. That has been a challenge. In fact, this past year, in this budget year, our combination through my colleague the minister of seniors, from an increase in accommodation rates to an increase in the amount of funds we've provided for the care side of long-term care – I don't know the exact figure, but I think that combined, long-term care operators have received increased funding in the range of 12 to 15 per cent to try and catch up on some of those issues. Of course, they've had issues around shortage of human resources, competing with private industry, that could pay a lot more for those kinds of positions.

I happen to think, hon. member, that there's always some good that comes out of tough times. I think we're going to have an opportunity as we move forward in the next year to have the ability to catch up on some of these human resource issues. We're going to have a situation where there are going to be job losses in this province. The one area where there probably aren't going to be job losses and there are still going to be opportunities is in health care, so I think we've got a great opportunity to start to fill some of those roles.

I've mentioned before in some of my comments that the college of registered nurses told me in my office one day that on average 35 per cent of a nurse's day is spent doing non-nurse stuff. Well, I'm afraid it's non-nurse stuff at the low end of their training, not at the high end. If we can start to shift and fill that lower end, get an appropriate number of aides, then move the chain up so that we've got the appropriate number of LPNs so that they are doing that 35 per cent of a nurse's work, that nurse can take that 35 per cent and actually do things that the physician can start to hive off, moving everything up and actually having professions practising to the full scope of their profession. Actually, I don't believe that there's a nurse in this province that that 35 per cent of what she or he is doing is giving any satisfaction to. They want to be doing what they're trained to do.

We have an opportunity in long-term care, in assisted daily living, in all of our provision of services to our senior patients to integrate, as I said earlier to the Leader of the Opposition, to start to have health care in Alberta, deliver health care to the patient and not have the patient have to fit the system every time.

With those, I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I am pleased that the hon. minister recognizes that integrating health teams is going to lead to greater efficiency. That's extremely important. I'm also pleased that the minister acknowledges that there has been a difficulty in communications with the restructuring. I want to toss out a bouquet to a lady by the name of Lynn Redford, who was the government relations contact for the Calgary health region. Lynn did a tremendous job. If you called her, within the hour she would be back and giving you the information and who you needed to call.

5:50

One of the areas I hope the minister can potentially give me an answer to is guaranteeing the transference and the equivalence of care. For example, a child in Medicine Hat suffering from severe autism moves to Red Deer, but there are different hours of care provided in Red Deer than they were receiving in Medicine Hat. Is this something, hopefully, that's going to be resolved?

Then if the minister could please give me an update on the progress, if there is progress, on the Tom Baker cancer centre, if that's moving forward. I would appreciate it.

Mr. Liepert: I'll start with the last comment. I can't comment relative to capital because we're in the process of bringing forward our capital plan, and it's tied into the budget. I just can't get into the capital plan at this stage.

Relative to the level of care, I guess one of the things that convinced me that we had these artificial borders between regions and there was clearly a differentiation between the care you received in some cases if you lived on this side of the road versus that side of the road – ideally, we should be striving for a system that provides equitable care across the province. It's never going to be the same in Edmonton as it is in La Crête, but we need to ensure that folks in La Crête and other communities have equitable access to care. It's obviously becoming a greater challenge. We have to take into account that professionals are individuals who can choose to locate where they want. I think that municipalities have to take a bigger role in making it convenient for professionals to locate in their community.

I answered questions at the AUMA forum, and I had someone from one of the municipalities say: what are you going to do to get a doctor in my town? So I said: what are you doing to get a doctor in your town? Because this is all of our responsibility. It's not up to us as government to provide doctors in every community, but it is very much up to that community to say: what can we do to ensure that we have an attractive place for physicians?

Many of these are physicians from out of country. In fact, we've got a couple of pilots going on right now where a physician comes from another country and they almost, if you might, have their hand held for the first six months to ensure that if there's a language issue, that's dealt with, that they have a familiarity with the community they're going to. Because, quite frankly, up until now, or still today, someone lands in this province and they're sent to a small community, and not only is it a new community to them, but it's a new country and in many cases a new language.

These are the kinds of things we simply have to do better to ensure that we are offering equitable care across the province.

The Deputy Chair: Anyone else wish to speak?

Mr. Chase: I realize, Mr. Minister, that you can't talk about the costs associated with the Tom Baker cancer centre. Can you give us any hopes as to the concept? Is it still within the drawing board or the planning board? That's what I'm looking for. I'm not looking for a dollar commitment. I'm just looking for a commitment to a cancer treatment centre expansion in Calgary.

Mr. Liepert: I just simply can't respond to that right now, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Certainly, there are very interesting discussions going on here regarding health care. But whenever we are having a look at this interim supply budget, the questions still remain of how we compare this year with last and how we are going to manage with reduced revenue. Again, I'm looking at this request, Mr. Chairman.

Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) and Government Motion 8, agreed to on March 2, 2009, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, general revenue fund, and the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: That motion is carried.

Pursuant to the standing order the committee now rises and reports.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'm sorry. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. [interjections]

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I could follow that act with any humour whatsoever, whether it was in yellow or pink or any colour on the page.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

All resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, the general revenue fund, and the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$29,300,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$7,100,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense, \$900,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,800,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense, \$300,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,500,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$14,100,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$744,300,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$34,900,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$190,200,000.

Children and Youth Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$284,100,000.

Culture and Community Spirit: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$97,200,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$300,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,142,900,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$255,800,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$133,800,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$63,000,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$9,000,000.

Finance and Enterprise: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$94,200,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$11,000,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,238,000,000; capital investment, \$4,800,000.

Housing and Urban Affairs: expense, \$133,100,000.

Infrastructure: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$157,300,000; capital investment, \$159,300,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$10,700,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$135,100,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$588,100,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$640,900,000.

6:00

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$91,500,000; capital investment, \$23,200,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$128,500,000; capital investment, \$8,800,000; lottery fund payments, \$409,400,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$109,600,000; capital investment, \$10,000,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$103,600,000; capital investment, \$4,400,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$590,600,000; capital investment, \$370,600,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,700,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$16,900,000.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that we have no time left on the clock, I move that we now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:01 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

Issue 13

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Werner Brandstetter, the ambassador of the Republic of Austria. Accompanying the ambassador is the honorary consul of Austria, Mr. Nikolaus Demiantschuk. This is His Excellency's first official visit to Alberta, and I was very pleased to host a lunch reception for him earlier today.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Austria share much in common. We've got well-developed market economies, we've got a very high standard of living as well as majestic mountains and world-class skiers. Alberta looks forward to welcoming Austrian skiers who will compete in the World Cup events prior to the Vancouver 2010 games.

I would now ask the ambassador and the honorary consul to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 11 very special visitors from Vegreville composite school who drove out on this very cold day to visit us in the Legislature. They are seated in the visitors' gallery. They are accompanied today by teachers Ms Tracy Cook and Mrs. Donna Stepanick. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 24 students from John Paul I school in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The group is led by their teacher, Mr. Dave King, and parent helpers Mr. Albert Pubantz and Mrs. Boshia Joyce. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very distinguished grade 6 class and their teachers from Richard Secord elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-

Rutherford. The class is here today to tour the Legislature and see the democratic process in action. They are accompanied by teachers Deb Colvin-MacDormand and Richard Bonneville and parent helpers Rhonda Peter and Nick Smith. I'm very proud of all of these students, and I'd like to ask them to please rise along with their teachers and parent helpers and receive our warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Merci, Mr. Speaker. Today is part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from Alberta's vibrant francophone arts and cultural community. Since 2005 the government of Alberta has proudly recognized Regroupement artistique francophone de l'Alberta, RAFA, as one of 11 provincial arts service organizations. This has led to enhanced support for local francophone artists in their professional development and marketing their cultural talent.

Indeed, 2008 marked an important year for French language artistic and cultural products in Alberta with numerous albums, book releases, popular festivals like the cinéMAGINE international film festival in Fort Macleod, and participation of Alberta artists in national tours. This year I'm proud to announce that Edmonton will host the 20th annual Chant'Ouest showcase, highlighting the best of our French language singer-songwriters from western Canada.

I want to ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: Mrs. Josée Thibeault, president of RAFA and member of the Premier's Council on Arts and Culture; Mrs. Mariette Rainville, director of RAFA; Mrs. Daniele Petit-Chatelet, visual and literary artist; and Miss Ariane Mahryke Lemire, singer-songwriter and winner of the 2008 western Canadian music award for outstanding francophone recording. I would ask all members of this Assembly to give these guests a warm welcome to our Legislature.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Education I have the distinct privilege of introducing to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly members of the Alberta federation of francophone school authorities. Alberta students recognize the importance of second language. Alberta has the largest francophone program in western Canada and one of the strongest French immersion and FSL programs, totalling more than 180,000 students. This represents 1 in 3 Alberta students learning French, and we can be proud since our French-speaking students are achieving at the level of proficiencies that are recognized by many national and international standards.

I am very pleased to welcome our guests representing francophone education in our province and would ask them to stand as I introduce them: Mr. Fred Kreiner, president of the federation; Mr. Gérard Lavigne, executive director of the federation; Mr. Martin Blanchet, school trustee, Greater North Central Francophone Education Region No. 2. I would ask all the members of the Assembly to give these guests the very warm welcome of our Legislature.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in the House today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four women who are important to me. First, behind every successful man is a great woman, and in the public gallery today sits my wife, Kamal. Kamal and I just celebrated our 25th

anniversary at the end of January 2009, and I thank her for putting up with so much over the years. Second, I have Rupinder Sandhu. She was very helpful to me during my election campaign. She knocked on doors no matter how cold it was. Next, my sister-in-law Manpreet Sandhu is also here today. Finally, Kiran Pujji is visiting my family from New York. Even with how cold it is, she has braved our winter and is here in the gallery today. I would ask these four women to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Emrys Jacobs, who is a second-year social work student at Grant MacEwan College and currently doing her placement work at my constituency office in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Emrys also volunteers as a relationship abuse prevention educator for the Canadian Red Cross violence and abuse prevention program, a program that does valuable outreach to Alberta youth. I really do appreciate the work that she does in my constituency office, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly eight people from the Edmonton Neighbourhood Watch program: Merv Swityk, past president; Arlene Kemble, vice-president; Olive Sydor, treasurer – and I'd just like to add that Olive was a runner-up for this year's SAGE awards for outstanding volunteer contributions to her community – Mr. Ralph Sell, the south director; Ms Linda Chasse, the central director; Mr. Lance Lamond, director at large; Miss Denise Thursby, program director; and, of course, my lovely wife, Barbara Grodaes, communications director. I will be discussing Edmonton Neighbourhood Watch and what they do for our community in a member's statement in a few moments this afternoon. For now I would ask the group to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Statements by the Speaker Average Length of Service of Members 12th Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta has now been in operation for 104 years, and nearly 800 different members have had the privilege of being here. The average length of service is about 8.1 years per member. Today I'd like to acknowledge nine individuals who were elected for the first time on March 11, 1997. They have now served almost 50 per cent longer than the average length of service for an hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and Minister of Education; the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and our Deputy Premier and Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations; the hon. Member for Sherwood Park, our hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise; the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, our hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services; the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo; the hon. Deputy Speaker and hon. Member for Calgary-Fort; the hon. former Deputy Speaker and hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills; the hon. deputy Leader of

the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre; and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar are nine members who've now served 12 years in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Members' Statements

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

Neighbourhood Watch Program

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton Neighbourhood Watch Program Society is an organization that gets citizens involved and engaged in their communities. We all value safe communities, and we all strive to live in one. The volunteers of Neighbourhood Watch report suspicious activities in their neighbourhoods and reduce crime by ensuring that everyone is aware of their surroundings and looking out for one another. Having more people involved in neighbourhood watches increases the safety of the community. I want my constituents to feel safe in their homes, neighbourhoods, and workplaces, and I am sure that all my fellow MLAs would agree.

Albertans want to feel protected from crime and the fear associated with it, and I believe that Neighbourhood Watch plays an important role in ensuring that each community is secure. If you aren't already a member of Neighbourhood Watch, join. I am proud to say that my wife has been actively involved in Neighbourhood Watch for many years, as are the visitors in the gallery that I introduced earlier. Crime prevention and safety start with involvement, so let's get started.

Thank you.

Agricultural Safety Week

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, March 11 to 17 is being celebrated as Agricultural Safety Week across Canada. In Alberta our agricultural legacy has a wide-ranging influence across our province for the great economic benefit and the employment it provides. I'd like to encourage all Albertans to recognize and participate in Agricultural Safety Week. This year's theme focuses on: Personal Protective Equipment Only Works If You Use It! It is one thing to have the tools at hand to adequately protect yourself from danger, but it's quite another to take a proactive approach and use protective equipment all the time, every day, and in every area of farm operations. We have all seen the tragedy of injuries and death that can occur due to lack of attention, lack of awareness, or from not using personal protective equipment.

Agriculture and Rural Development staff work with many groups, such as the Grande Prairie safe communities society, Red Deer safety city, Safe Communities Central Alberta association, Alberta Fire Chiefs Association, the Progressive Farmer Foundation, the Environmental Farm Plan Company, and many others to raise farm safety awareness and promote workplace safety best practices. Safety partners include 69 agricultural societies, agricultural service boards, 4-H clubs, schools, the Alberta Farm Safety Centre, and the Ag-Info Centre to deliver prevention programs and workshops.

In Alberta we promote farm safety through a number of initiatives and a variety of awareness programs during Agricultural Safety Week. These range from displays on hearing safety and protection to reminders to wash chemicals from contaminated clothing. Family and child safety is also a key component of the initiative. Among the notable events that occurred during Agriculture Safety Week is a series of safety sessions developed to run with 4-H clubs and rural youth. More importantly, this government also believes that farm safety goes beyond this week of commemoration and is a year-round priority.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I call on all Albertans to promote farm safety during the week of March 11 to 17 and to reinforce good farm safety habits all year long.

Thank you.

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

Neighbourhood Revitalization Project

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize and celebrate a special project taking place in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre between two communities, Queen Mary Park and Central McDougall. Neighbourhood revitalization is a project to help communities identify their strengths, capacities, and resources and to then use these to revitalize their neighbourhoods. Residents set their own goals and plan on how they want to do this. The project takes place over three to five years and is a long consultation, planning, and implementation process.

The revitalization is guided and supported by the wonderful folks at the city of Edmonton community services. I'd like to single out Wai Tse Ramirez as the project co-ordinator and her colleague Marian Bruin as well. In addition to these two, I've seen a number of other community services employees helping out as animators, session recorders, and facilitators. My thanks to all of them.

We're pretty excited about this process as we've seen it used to great success in the Alberta Avenue area. They have completed their planning and implementation stage, and it has brought great changes to their area. A local coffee shop featuring nearby artists is now in operation, a winter festival, a summer folk festival, and the list goes on.

For Queen Mary Park and Central McDougall we have great hopes. Both of these neighbourhoods have long, proud traditions. Queen Mary Park is built on the old Hudson's Bay reserve land. It is a strong, tight community which has been home to many Ukrainian and eastern European immigrants and is now welcoming newcomers from Cambodia, Sudan, and Somalia. Central McDougall is also home to a United Nations of different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and faiths and has a large, long-standing aboriginal community.

Residents look to this process to help build a stronger, safe, welcoming neighbourhood in which to raise kids and grow old. Many thanks to the city of Edmonton for investing in us and for committing to this process which allows the people who live there to define and build their own futures.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Consumer Champion Awards

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge the winners of this year's Alberta consumer champion awards. The awards were presented Monday morning by the hon. Minister of Service Alberta, and I had the pleasure of attending the ceremony.

The consumer champion awards are unique in Canada. They recognize and honour individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond to advocate for Alberta consumers and to contribute to a fair marketplace. This year nine individuals, journalists, businesses, and organizations received an award in recognition of their outstanding efforts to help consumers make informed decisions. As well, three bright and talented young people received an award as part of a poster competition challenging

teenagers to raise awareness of consumer issues facing Alberta's youth.

Monday's award recipients each demonstrated a clear commitment to informing consumers and businesses of their rights and responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, their contributions have made a tangible difference to our province, and they deserve to be recognized for that. I was very impressed by the array of different ideas and initiatives highlighted during the awards ceremony. This was especially true of the young people, each of whom designed an impressive poster that helps raise awareness about a specific consumer issue. They all showed some incredible creativity and innovation, and it makes me proud to see what young people can accomplish. Youth today face more challenges with consumer issues than ever before, so having this specific award program is a good way of encouraging young people to become more involved in consumer awareness and education.

Mr. Speaker, it's exciting to see the variety of ways that Alberta organizations are doing their part to educate and inform consumers. The consumer champion awards are a great way to acknowledge and celebrate those in our province who are working hard to make a difference.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

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

Release of Partially Treated Waste Water at Suncor Site

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Athabasca River is without doubt being contaminated from releases related to resource activity. Last year a million litres of oil and grease leaked into the Athabasca River from a Suncor facility. Now Suncor has been charged with 90 counts of dumping untreated waste water into the Athabasca River. To the Premier. Self-monitoring alone by industry has led to two years of crap going into the Athabasca River – two years. When will the Premier do the right thing to protect our most precious resource and fully fund government capacity to monitor and enforce standards?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right: what went into the river was crap. It wasn't any leak from the tailings ponds. These are sewage lagoons on-site for the camp and some of the other related activities.

We have increased the dollars for monitoring. This shows that the system is working. Anybody that abuses the law, especially environmental law, and regulations will be charged and brought to justice.

The Speaker: I take it that we're talking about human refuse.

The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday this week the minister stood here and repeated once again that the Athabasca River has never been contaminated from resource activity. Well, given the million litres of oil and grease last year, the now revealed two years of untreated waste going into the river, and decades of tailings ponds leaking into groundwater, how can the minister stand up and support these statements? The evidence is overwhelmingly against it.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's get this straight. The issue that is at hand, the issue of this court case that is being heard, is over the

release of contaminants from domestic sewage systems. It's no different than a similar kind of occurrence that might happen with the city of Edmonton in their domestic waste sewer or any other municipality in the province. The fact of the matter is that it is not directly related to industrial development. It is, however, a serious offence. We take it very seriously, and that's why we laid charges.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These charges were laid a year ago, in February 2008, right in the middle of an election. Can the Premier tell us why the public was never informed of two years of contamination? Was this buried for political advantage?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the charges were laid against the company. I would think that at least in this province under a Conservative government people are innocent until proven guilty. I think that that's the premise of the law that we follow.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The whole point of a Fiscal Responsibility Act is to make sure that the government is fiscally responsible. Of course, the legislation worked well when the government was rolling in money. But now, just months after things started to look bad, we're changing the rules. If this government had been fiscally responsible from day one, we wouldn't even be having this discussion today. But they weren't, so we are. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that the Fiscal Responsibility Act was nothing more than a stunt in the first place since it was never actually effected?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government is very fiscally responsible. This question came up yesterday from the media. We talked about the \$23 billion of debt that we paid off and also the money that went into the heritage savings trust fund and the billions that went into endowments. We also invested over \$42 billion in infrastructure between 1993 and 2008. We set aside \$14 billion both to the capital and sustainability funds. The most important thing is that yesterday I was not able to determine how much money during this period of time, our net contribution, went to Ottawa to support programs across this country, which I would think would be in the billions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier be introducing a long-term fiscal strategy along with the legislation to scrap the Fiscal Responsibility Act to make sure they get it right next time around?

Mr. Stelmach: We will continue to do what we have done: be very fiscally responsible and lay out long-term plans for the province in terms of keeping up with our infrastructure and maintaining our health and education and social programs. We are, I believe, still the only jurisdiction that's mandated by law to report on a quarterly basis. This is very open and transparent and gives information to Albertans, and they are able to track both the expenses and the revenue stream of the province.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that it was a mistake to spend wildly rather than saving more aggressively when we had the money so that changing the law could have been avoided in the first place?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that if one was to look at *Hansard* over the last 15 years, he would see that the members opposite had been asking for even more spending. Whenever we brought forward budgets, I never heard at all, not once recorded in *Hansard*, the opposition say: "Oh, no. Please, no more. No more; this is just the right amount of spending. No. You're spending too much." I haven't seen that as yet. However, they will have a chance when the budget is introduced on April 7. We've listened to Albertans, who said to tighten up the spending, and we will. They want to see reductions in spending. They will see that, and I'm sure that they will be supporting the budget.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that the government policy set out in Bill 19 is extremely controversial. Landowners across this province are stating that its powers are far too great. They're also furious about the arrogance on the part of this government in introducing this bill without consultation. In the face of this uproar the Premier is now talking about amending the bill, a lack of confidence, certainly, in his own legislation. To the Premier: what amendments will the government be introducing to this policy?

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, this bill has not even been moved in second reading, and we're already talking about amendments. Surely there's a process for dealing with policy and nothing specific about any of this bill.

Mr. Stelmach: I won't talk about the amendments but the policy. The policy is to obviously assure Albertans with clarity in wording that we will be open, we will be transparent, and we will be fair to all landowners. Speaking about changes, when this question came up yesterday in the news media, I said, you know, this Legislative Assembly is where we debate legislation that comes forward. And about the only bill that I know we didn't do – sorry, Mr. Speaker – amendments was when we talked about songs or mushrooms. The rest of the time we did make changes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Given that the government is already talking about changing its own bill, it's indicating that the bill is seriously flawed. Now, we need to discuss improving the system of land acquisition, and we need to bring in affected and interested parties to a committee of this Legislature in order to do so. Again to the Premier: will the Premier refer this bill to the Standing Committee on the Economy so that they can have a look at it and make changes that would be representative of the views of landowners?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't direct legislation to the all-party committee. This Legislative Assembly makes the decision.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't believe that.

Why is the government afraid of the detailed study and the

consultation that would come from a committee's deliberations? What does this government have to hide regarding this flawed policy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is improve on the policy, entrench in legislation clarity so that all landowners feel comfortable as to how we'll acquire land in the future for public roadways, transmission lines, infrastructure that the public benefits from. We have a duty to work with landowners, to treat them fairly, and at the conclusion of the debate I know that we'll have a very good piece of policy and maybe some legislation.

Thank you.

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

Release of Partially Treated Waste Water at Suncor Site (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government tries to hide its black eye in the tar sands by insisting that oil and gas companies are not polluting Alberta's waterways. This government has trusted those companies to police themselves and lets them go on filing neat and tidy annual reports about how they run wonderful, clean operations. It's all very warm and fuzzy until we learn that this government allowed Suncor to dump raw sewage into the Athabasca River for three years while it looked the other way. My question is to the Premier: why did you hide it from Albertans that Suncor has been lying to the government about polluting the Athabasca all along?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member uses language that's quite offensive to people that are not in this Legislative Assembly, infusing language so that he gets a headline in the paper. This is serious. We are prosecuting. At the moment this is before the courts, and I would just suggest to let the courts do their work. We'll monitor it as it's proceeding through the court system, but it's improper to talk about the charges in this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, what went into the Athabasca is not too dissimilar from that answer.

The government has avoided its responsibility to protect the environment, which has given this province an international black eye. It has not hired enough inspectors to police industry, depending instead on self-regulation by polluters. The question is to the Premier. Why does this government naively trust in some of the biggest polluters in this province to turn themselves in instead of getting serious about enforcing Alberta's pollution laws?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the first things as elected Premier was to move on hiring additional environmental monitoring staff in the area around Fort McMurray. We've done that. We've also ensured that we brought more infrastructure dollars into the community. Most importantly, we did hire more people in Environment to monitor the situation, inspect, and as a result we're able to of course track some of the alleged infractions. Again, we'll let the court decide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government likes to hide the truth about pollution in the Athabasca River

from Albertans. It denies that there's cancer in the water in Fort Chipewyan, and it looks the other way when Suncor flushes raw sewage into the river and then lies about it. It took four years to swear some of the charges, and no public announcement was ever made. My question is to the Premier. Why did you take up to four years to bring charges against Suncor, and why did you fail to let Albertans know what was going on?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, to give you an example of how some ramp up some of the stories around Fort McMurray, water in the Athabasca River has been monitored since the first day the oil sands were developed, well over 30 years. In fact, air quality is monitored 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You know, it wasn't that long ago there was a fish, a goldeye, that was caught in the Athabasca River. In the headlines everywhere was this double-jawed fish. Finally, the investigation has been completed, and I think a University of Alberta professor has confirmed that the appearance of a second jaw on the fish is a natural phenomenon. Did we see that in the headlines? No. But it's the continued assault on industry. We're trying to grow jobs. We're trying to do the best job possible in terms of monitoring and controlling our environment and finding the balance between development and environment, and you hear this every day. It does get frustrating sometimes.

Farm Worker Safety

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, today marks the start of Agriculture Safety Week, which runs until March 17. With more than 49,000 farms, more than 52 million acres of farmland, and more than 50,000 Albertans employed in primary agriculture, farm safety is important to many Albertans. We all know that education and awareness are vital components of farm safety. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development tell this Assembly what new steps are being taken to deal with farm safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier has so patiently explained over the last two days, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Employment and Immigration are working together to actively seek input of our agriculture industry. So we'll look closely at the options of running nonfarm businesses operating on farmlands, such as construction workers. We will also examine ways to distinguish between family farms and corporate farms for regulatory and legislative purposes. However, we've said all along that we would not make changes to this legislation without ensuring that all interested parties have a chance to provide input.

Mr. Drysdale: To the same minister: what farm safety training opportunities and resources are currently available to Alberta's farm employers and operators?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, we do have some new materials out there. We have a variety of print publications, of course. We have CDs, DVDs, and fact sheets that are all available free of charge. The *Farm Safety: It's No Accident* CD provides farm operators with safety information and a series of checklists to ensure that their operations are safe working environments. Our farm employer's guide to job orientation and training takes employers through a step-by-step process to ensure that new and young workers are properly trained.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, farms tend to be family or communally owned operations in Alberta, employing a mix of family members and hired staff. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What protection do farm workers have under provincial legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farm and ranch employees are covered by the Employment Standards Code as it pertains to termination pay or maternity or parental leave as well as for payment of agreed-upon wages. Farm employers may apply to have voluntary WC coverage for their farm workers as well, and that's a choice that they can make. If there is a mechanized process for packaging on site, then the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act apply. Employers are required to assess hazards and have mechanisms in place for dealing with them, and our occupational health and safety officers investigate any incidents that may happen.

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

Groundwater Contamination near Calling Lake

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect this government to protect water, our most important natural resource. An environmental protection order was issued against a chemical company yesterday, and it raises a number of questions about water protection systems in Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Groundwater monitoring at Ward Chemical's brine facility showed high chlorine levels in 2006 which exceeded both the provincial and the federal guidelines. Why did it take the government three years to issue an environmental protection order?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of tools that are available to our compliance officials in Environment. Like any kind of a regulator role or a policeman role, it's important that you work with the offender and try to resolve an issue as amicably as possible. If in some cases it's an ignorance of the law, then sometimes it's as simple as advising someone what it is. In this particular case we've worked with this company on an ongoing basis, and we found that it's necessary to issue a compliance order.

Ms Blakeman: Well, there's always someone downstream.

To the same minister: given that potential sources of contamination include the brine storage pond and surface runoff from the facility, does the minister accept that other industrial sites likely have these same contamination issues and that self-monitoring from industry is not working?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear: this is about dealing with the site that is contained within the bounds of the facility. If there was any reason to believe that the actions of the business were contaminating adjacent land, then we would be acting much more aggressively. In this particular instance I am assured by my officials that we're dealing with a contamination that is confined solely to the land that is operated by the industry. The efforts that are put in place now are to get them to clean up their own act.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Minister, groundwater doesn't stay in one place, so if these people, this company has contaminated groundwater in one place, it is going to be moving somewhere else. Given this

contamination of groundwater that is near Calling Lake from Ward Chemical, does the minister accept that if it can happen at a brine facility, it can happen in a tailings pond? So far today we've talked about sewage, we've talked about oil and gas leaching, and we've talked about brine contamination. Someone is always downstream, Mr. Minister.

2:10

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that in this particular instance we're not talking about groundwater; we're talking about surface contamination. We're talking about soil contamination. There are plumes associated with soil contamination. They're highly predictable; nevertheless, it's important that we deal with them. So in this particular instance we have put in place compliance orders that will require the industry to do what they have been politely asked to do in the past. Now we're not being nearly so polite.

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

Personal Directives

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. End of life is a difficult time for the many Albertans who built this great province. Many seniors of Edmonton-Meadowlark tell me that there is confusion and anxiety over changes to the Personal Directives Act that came into effect in June 2008. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is the minister going to do to educate Albertans about personal directives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is currently an education and awareness campaign under way encouraging Albertans to make their personal wishes known by writing and registering a personal directive. New tools have been developed that make it even easier for Albertans 18 years and older to write a personal directive, and these new tools include an online registry and a personal directive information kit. This kit includes a personal directives form, instructions to help you complete the form, a wallet card to show that you have a personal directive, and who to contact in an emergency. To date we've put 200,000 copies of these information kits in different offices, including doctors' offices.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. My colleagues on the front lines in health care tell me that in life and death emergency situations we need to utilize technology, specifically the electronic health record, in order to make the right decision. Is there a requirement for personal directives to be registered online, and if not, why not?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the online personal directive registry is the first of its kind in Canada. When this new tool was introduced last June, we chose not to force Albertans to register their personal directives because our approach is to respect the choices of Albertans and to have a voluntary registry. However, we do encourage Albertans to voluntarily register their personal directives to help ensure that their wishes are followed if they become unable to make decisions for themselves due to an injury or an illness.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also to the same

minister. How are you going to overcome the challenge of educating not only Albertans but also Alberta's health care providers about these changes?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, a new guide to assessing capacity has been developed and distributed to health care professionals across the province as part of the changes to the Personal Directives Act. Over 40 training sessions on capacity assessment were held in communities across Alberta this past fall, and over 1,000 health care professionals were in attendance. Alberta is the leader in the area of capacity assessment. Changes to the Personal Directives Act and the introduction of the new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act ensure that capacity assessments are done using standardized and credible assessment tools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Ambulance Services

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health's assertion that the transition of ground ambulance authority is happening smoothly leaves some questions regarding changes that he's proposing. To the minister of health: will the minister explain what extra education emergency medical personnel will be required to have so that they can properly diagnose and triage patients that are in the field?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that currently one of the frustrations that paramedics have is that they don't have the ability on most occasions to use the training that they already have. I don't think it's a matter of extra training; it's making better use of what training they have. Let's also make it clear that diagnosis will be done by phone in consultation with a physician.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Being an RN, I can understand the paramedics' frustration in not being able to work to scope. But are all levels of emergency medical personnel going to have the authority to triage patients in the field?

Mr. Liepert: Well, obviously not if they don't have the training, Mr. Speaker. There are several levels of paramedics. Any diagnosis or any treatment will be comparable to the level of training that they have.

Ms Pastoor: Not quite clear enough.

Will the minister provide a list of the exact types of facilities that possible emergency room patients are going to be diverted to?

Mr. Liepert: I could, Mr. Speaker, but by and large what we're talking about are urgent care centres. It may be even just a clinic that is required. In some cases – who knows? – it may be other facilities. But, by and large, that would be in consultation with a physician and to make the decision then.

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

Environmentally Friendly Affordable Housing

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Friday I attended the affordable housing announcement in Calgary where

Kanas Shelter Corporation received \$7.5 million to build 100 units of affordable housing. Last year Kanas received the green building award at the platinum level from the Canadian Home Builders' Association. My question is to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. How are you and your department encouraging other affordable housing developers to follow similar environmentally friendly procedures in this province?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Egmont is absolutely correct. Kanas Shelter Corporation is leading the way, and they set the bar pretty high for private developers.

Through our RFP process, hon. member, we have asked that developers use green technologies, and that would include the conservation of nonrenewable resources, minimizing the environmental impact. It would include building components that would reduce operating costs over the long term. I want to assure you that we are working with developers to utilize best practices.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of discussion in my community about the housing market and its condition these days. My question to the same minister: has the changing market affected the need for new affordable housing developments?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the housing market has changed. There's a lot of discussion throughout Alberta about the market change. We know that the cost of purchasing a home or a condo is normalizing with the mortgage rates coming down and the number of homes, more homes, on the market. We know that affordability is increasing for some people, hon. member, especially for first-time homebuyers. Having said that, our low- to moderate-income individuals still are unable to purchase homes in this market, which is why we are developing our affordable housing units and why they've remained a priority, 11,000 units by 2012.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister: we've talked a bit about affordability, but how does this impact low-income housing or people of meagre incomes in this province?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've had this discussion with the hon. member. We know that there has been an impact on the rental market for low to moderate income, which I know, hon. member, is your interest. You'll recall that two years ago rent increases were approximately 20 per cent. I can tell you that those kinds of increases are no longer there. They have stabilized, hon. member, at around 2 to 3 per cent. Having said that, though, as I indicated to you in my second answer, there are more units becoming available for the rental market through condos that are being placed on the market, and putting them on the market has had a positive impact and will have on our low- to moderate-income individuals.

Opening of Calgary Courts Centre

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, eight days before the last election the Deputy Premier, then Justice minister, had planned a partisan pre-election soiree at the Calgary courthouse, this in violation of the general rule that there's a complete separation of the judicial and political branches in our democracy. This party cost us \$37,000, by the way. To ease the financial burden on taxpayers during these

tough times, will the Deputy Premier commit to refunding all proceeds collected from ticket sales before the cancellation of this partisan fundraising event on January 20, 2008?

2:20

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, you know, what really interests me is that in January 2008 there was this incredible celebration of the opening of this North American best-of-its-breed courthouse in Calgary. I know I was there. I know that representatives of the courts were there – the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal, the Chief Justice of the Queen’s Bench, the Chief Judge of the provincial court – the Premier, hundreds of lawyers; not this one, I suspect. Fourteen months later for the first time you hear about this. I can tell you that that courthouse opening was well received. It was well covered by the media. None of these allegations that the hon. member makes today were hinted at then, but 14 months later he has some crystal ball that he is looking at that allows him to stand, figuratively speaking, in this House and make these allegations.

Mr. Hehr: I filed the documents yesterday on the courthouse. They’re not allegations; they’re truisms.

Turning to the question now, my question is again to the Deputy Premier. You know, last year the opening of the courthouse was delayed several, several times. Then this big party was to announce the opening of the courthouse eight days before an election. Was the delay in opening this courthouse for you guys to have this announcement eight days before the election?

Speaker’s Ruling

Questions about a Previous Responsibility

The Speaker: It is customary, hon. members, that questions are directed to the minister of the day, not a previous minister in their capacity or activity with respect to their previous ministry. If we’re going back, when the hon. Deputy Premier is not the Minister of Justice, asking him about activities when he was the Minister of Justice, that would violate most of our traditions in the House.

I’m not sure if the hon. Deputy Premier wants to proceed, though.

Opening of Calgary Courts Centre

(continued)

Mr. Stevens: Well, unlike this particular member, I have some involvement in this particular aspect. Once again, he wasn’t there. I was, so I can explain matters. This was a good-news story, Mr. Speaker. Now, I recall that the opposition, over the course of the courthouse being built, didn’t see anything positive about it. But I can tell you that there was reason for celebration in January. The reason that January was chosen is because the courthouse became available to us as a government for move-in towards the end of August, September. Over the course of the balance of that year, which would be September through December, the five locations in which the courthouses in Calgary were located moved into this facility. Then you were into Christmas. So it only made sense that the celebration be held in January 2008.

Mr. Hehr: Clearly, it made sense to me: eight days before an election.

Anyway, moving on, I’d like to ask the Minister of Justice whether she would find it appropriate for the Progressive Conservative Party to advertise for a fundraiser in the Calgary courthouse. Would the Ministry of Justice find this proper?

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

It deals with personal opinion, hon. Minister of Justice. Do you want to comment or not? You can let it go if you don’t want to.

Ms Redford: I won’t comment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Environmental Self-monitoring

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Suncor and its subcontractors illegally dumped dirty waste water into our rivers and lakes, and then they lied about it to the government over and over again. Even while he knew about this, the minister stood in the House and on the topic of industry self-monitoring told us, “We have the utmost confidence that that system is secure.” To the Environment minister: how can you possibly have confidence in a system that asks the fox to guard the henhouse and then self-report on how many hens it had for breakfast that day?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we have literally hundreds of such facilities operating around this province. The system that we operate is based upon monitoring, self-monitoring, and self-reporting. It would be, I think, inappropriate use of valuable resources within Environment if we were to send one of our employees out to every one of these hundreds of facilities around the province every day to do the monitoring. Our role is one of auditing. Our role is one of holding the operators accountable. We take very seriously the instance that in this case led to charges being laid, where that reporting and monitoring is apparently not taking place appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the system didn’t work in this case. They did it for two years before you realized they were lying. Who knows how many other times industrial polluters falsified reports to the government? I don’t know, and neither does this government. Even after laying these charges, this minister insists that industrial self-reporting and the occasional spot check are good enough. To the same minister: given that they may have lied more than 90 times, how can you possibly think that spot checks can ensure the safety of our environment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, everything we do in a civil society is based upon personal integrity. I would suggest to the hon. member that there is probably the odd person in this nation that falsifies records on their income tax returns. That’s why we have audits. That’s why we prosecute when we find them. I would suggest to this member that, in fact, the system did work. We did an audit; we laid charges.

Ms Notley: They had two years to dump waste water into the river. They could have destroyed a whole water system in that time. It didn’t work.

Industry is responsible to their shareholders. They’re here to make a profit. This Environment minister is supposed to be responsible to ordinary Albertans. He’s supposed to be here to protect the environment. When industry pollutes, it’s not because they hate the environment. It’s because it’s cheaper, and it’s because this government lets them. To the minister: how can you be so naive

as to think that industrial polluters will just admit to environmental degradation when they clearly now have a track record showing that they won't?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I can't get into the details of this specific case. The fact remains that the penalties are extreme, and we take as seriously, if not more seriously, falsifying records as we do the offence itself. That's why this court case is being heard. I cannot comment any further because there's evidence that's before the courts. It would be inappropriate to discuss details in this House until after the courts have dealt with it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Inspiring Education Public Consultation

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Minister of Education announced a number of ways in which citizens of this province can participate in Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. In addition to daylong sessions around the province, Albertans can also join the conversation online or use conversation kits to host a discussion in their own community. My question is to the Minister of Education. What is he doing to ensure that disadvantaged Albertans are being reached out to, those such as the homeless, to ensure that their voices are heard as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of your comments yesterday in the House I would advise members that they can also Twitter me or send me a message on Facebook.

I don't want to diminish the importance of this question because it is absolutely, vitally important that we get all Albertans involved in the conversation. We know that some people will not necessarily either be aware of or be able to find ways to participate, so we're having what we're calling personal conversations, working with social justice agencies to identify groups that might otherwise be left out and going out to seek out those groups and have those conversations. I've seen the results of the group from Calgary, some street youth that were involved in the discussion, and the comments that they made were, quite frankly, powerful.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister has outlined a very ambitious agenda for Inspiring Education, and I can't help but think that at the end of this process we're going to have a very comprehensive report with an extensive list of recommendations attached. Can Albertans really expect substantial change from this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're in a very blessed time, actually, when it comes to education. The Premier had the foresight to work with the previous Minister of Education and the ATA to resolve a five-year agreement with teachers in the province to deal with labour issues, leaving us an opportunity to focus on the policy issues and focus on professionalism in education. So it's a great time to have this discussion. We've asked the steering committee not to come back with an extensive list of recommendations but, rather, to come back with a profile of what an educated

Albertan looks like in 20 years and what policy framework and policies and government structures we need to get there from here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Looking into the future is very important, and as the minister says, this is a good time to do that. However, I'm hearing a number of issues about our current education system from my constituents. How does this Inspiring Education dialogue help fix those issues?

Mr. Hancock: Well, we need to be perfectly clear, Mr. Speaker, that Inspiring Education is about the education system of the future. We need to be planning now and implementing now so that we can be sure that not only do we have a great education for our children today but that that great education and all the aspects that are needed will be there for our children tomorrow. There are issues, and we're not overlooking the issues. We're not stopping the work on the day-to-day work. We have the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, for example, chairing Setting the Direction for Special Education. That's very important. My parliamentary assistant, the Member for Edmonton-Decore, is looking at transportation issues in the province. There's a lot happening, but Inspiring Education is a very, very important dialogue about the future not just of education but the future of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

2:30

Submetering for Energy Use

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Boardwalk stated today that they would no longer be imposing submetering on their tenants, yet the government still has not taken any action on their part to protect the tenants. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how is it that Boardwalk is being more responsive to the concerns raised over submetering than this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to be able to clarify some issues here. It's important that Boardwalk has come forward and indicated to the tenants that they have made a mistake.

With respect to this whole submetering issue, we are entering a whole new territory, especially in the area of heat submetering. Since last fall I've begun to check into this matter because I was very concerned about how this was going to affect tenants, and we are indeed moving forward in a number of areas, firstly writing to Minister Clement of Industry Canada to get his concerns on the measurement issue. That's one of the first steps.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again: why is the minister proclaiming the wonders of their consumer tipsheet when commercial landlords don't even consider it to be worth the paper it's written on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great that individuals are reading the tipsheet. That's what it's about. That's the input that

I certainly need. I should mention that right now there is a pending legal process under way with the residential tenancy dispute resolution service on this whole issue. We are monitoring that issue very carefully, and that's something that we will bring forward to make sure that tenants are protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've been monitoring this issue for too long. It's about time the minister took some action.

Given that Boardwalk acted so quickly, when will this government stand up for tenants and introduce legislation on submetering?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, it is important as a minister that we do not do anything that's viewed as a knee-jerk reaction. We have to do things right. I will be meeting with the Alberta residential tenancy advisory committee in the next couple of weeks on this issue to talk with stakeholders, to get the input from the tenants and from the landlords as well, to see what the conversation is out there. This is an opportunity for us to look to see if legislation is required, and I'll be looking at every option.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Animal Health Act was proclaimed in part on January 1 of this year, 2009, along with three regulations. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. How does the Animal Health Act support the Alberta livestock and meat strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, one of the priorities of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy is animal health and food safety. The goal of the Animal Health Act was to ensure rapid and effective response to an animal disease emergency. This is done through age verification, traceability, reportable and notifiable diseases regulations that we have out there. Together these regulations will help validate the safety of Alberta's herd to meet international standards and achieve the priorities of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: by imposing these new regulations, isn't the government just adding to the regulatory burden already being felt by the livestock industry?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, certainly not. The goal of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy is to reduce the unnecessary regulatory burden currently on the livestock industry. We're continuing to work with industry to reduce regulations that are burdens and not necessary. There may be some initial extra work required up front; however, we're only talking perhaps a couple of hours spread over a whole year. We can't forget the fact that these requirements that have been introduced are the ones that our trading partners are certainly demanding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is there support or what kind of support is available to producers to help them to comply with the age verification and premises ID?

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there certainly is. In June 2008 the Alberta government announced \$300 million in disaster funding through the Alberta farm recovery plan, which was and is being distributed in two instalments. To help to make the process easier, we dedicated 30 department staff members as well as additional staff from livestock identification services to visit producer operations and help them age verify those animals. We've also reopened 13 hub offices so that our producers have better access to knowledgeable staff.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Results of Education Achievement Tests

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Education claimed that results from FNMI students are not included in the averaging and reporting of school results because it "could be harmful or detrimental to an identifiable group of people." Setting aside the harm done to all students by making grades public, it seems to me that the chief motivation for excluding the results of FNMI students is that it would highlight the ministry's failure to adequately support aboriginal education. To the minister. ESL students and students with special needs are identifiable groups of students, yet their results are included in the school success rate, which is made public.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member misses in the equation is that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy law does not protect identifiable groups per se. It protects against people who could be identified if they're in a group that's so small that by releasing the results, they could be personally identified. That's the issue. My preference would be not to release the information in the manner in which it's being utilized but to use the information for the improvement of the school system in the way we do release it to the school jurisdictions. The hon. member will know from discussions that have happened in public and will certainly know from discussions in the future in this Legislature that we're working very hard to get appropriate data relative to the FNMI population so that we can be held accountable.

Mr. Chase: The school results can be improved internally without beating them over the head externally with the publication of their results. Given that a private school's higher test scores can be partially attributed to the limited enrolment of ESL or special-needs students in their school, will the minister commit to exempting these definable groups of children from taking provincial achievement tests?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we do not publish the results. We provide the results to school jurisdictions so that they can use them within their jurisdiction for appropriate purposes. We release the results when required to do so under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy law. With respect to the students that are included in the assessment processes, we should be very clear that I'm absolutely open to talking about whether we're doing assessment in the most effective way possible and, if it's demonstrable that we're not, to moving to more effective ways of doing it. But assessment has been one of the pillars of our system, accountability is a pillar of our system, and it's extremely important to our results.

Mr. Chase: If we're talking accountability, diagnostic would achieve a much better result. It sounds like you're passing the blame on to school boards for releasing results that you control.

If the minister will not exempt children that are learning English as a second language or children with special needs from taking the stressful provincial achievement test, then will the minister at least commit to not including those results in school averages?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't have been more clear. We do not publish the results. I'm not accusing school boards of publishing the results. The results are released to the Fraser Institute because they demand those results under our Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy law. That's how those results get out into the public domain. They use them inappropriately, and I've said that over and over in the public. We do an accountability process within our system so that we can both provide tools back to school jurisdictions and schools to improve their systems and so that we can account to Albertans for the effectiveness of their investment in education.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Seniors' Benefits

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of Alberta's seniors have seen their financial situation drastically affected by the recent downturn in the economy. My questions are for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Is there assistance available to help these Albertans, especially those seniors with low incomes, to assist them with their monthly bills?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta seniors' benefit program provides more than \$21 million each month . . .

Mr. Prins: How much?

Mrs. Jablonski: That's \$21 million each month.

. . . in direct financial support to approximately 138,000 low-income seniors. Generally, single seniors with an annual income of \$22,700 or less and senior couples with a combined annual income of \$36,900 or less are eligible for assistance. This program supplements federal income programs. Additional assistance is available to seniors who reside in long-term care facilities or designated assisted living facilities.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Some of the more common expenses for seniors are dental work and eyeglasses. Does the province provide any assistance for these types of expenses?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we assist low- and moderate-income seniors with up to \$5,000 towards dental work every five years and up to \$230 towards the purchase of prescription eyeglasses every three years. More than 200,000 seniors are eligible for benefits from the dental and optical programs, which are available to single seniors with incomes of \$31,325 or less and couples with combined incomes of \$62,650 or less.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also for the same minister. Key to seniors being able to remain as independent as

possible is the ability for them to continue living in their own homes and being able to afford the upkeep. Is there any assistance to help seniors maintain their own homes?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we're also very proud of the special-needs assistance program for seniors, which provides assistance to low-income seniors with one-time or extraordinary costs such as appliances and essential home repairs as well as some medical expenses. Low-income seniors can receive up to \$5,000 per year through the special-needs assistance for seniors program. A senior's income level and the type of expense applied for determines the amount that is funded. Almost 26,000 seniors received this special benefit in 2007-2008.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 exchanges today, questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now we'll call upon the remaining members under Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

National Nutrition Month

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about National Nutrition Month. The wealth of Albertans depends on the health of Albertans. It's often said that we are what we eat. Never before has there been such high public awareness about food and nutrition and what impact our daily eating habits have on our health and well-being.

Nutrition Month is recognized each year to provide access to reliable and accurate nutrition information and tips that will motivate Albertans to make sound, informed food choices. This year's theme is Stay Active, Eat like a Champion by making healthy eating and physical activity choices a part of our daily lives.

Government supports and encourages Albertans to stay active and make wise nutrition choices. In 2008 Alberta was the first province in Canada to release nutrition guidelines to equip facility operators of daycares, schools, and recreational facilities with the tools that they need to give young people healthy food choices. While the guidelines are not mandatory, we are encouraged to see more schools and facilities adopt policies that promote better nutrition choices.

Mr. Speaker, despite the wealth of information available on nutrition about 22 per cent of Alberta children and youth are overweight or obese, leading to adult obesity rates of 30 to 40 per cent. Our children are at greater risk of developing chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes or heart disease or hypertension. Today in Alberta we have 150,000 diabetics and 10,000 extra diabetics every year. The World Health Organization states that 80 per cent to 90 per cent of type 2 diabetes could be prevented through simple changes in lifestyle and eating habits. Most chronic diseases like these can be prevented by having a healthy diet and being physically active.

Individuals, families, organizations, and communities all need to work together to increase the availability and appeal of healthier food choices. As adults and parents we need to take greater responsibility for our own health and be good role models for our children. Making the effort to eat healthy and be physically active every day means we can all enjoy better health and reduce our risk of preventable chronic disease.

Thank you.

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

**ACT Foundation CPR Program
Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association**

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Creating vibrant, safe, and inclusive communities is a key priority for the government of Alberta. I rise today to speak on the unique work of two Calgary-based nonprofit, voluntary organizations I had the privilege to get to know recently.

In celebration of Heart Month the ACT Foundation and the Kiwanis clubs of Calgary organized an event to celebrate the life-saving ACT high school CPR program in Calgary schools. ACT has worked in partnership with Alberta Education since October 2001 to help senior high schools and school divisions throughout the province implement a CPR program where teachers are trained to teach CPR to all students prior to graduation. Today more than 45,000 Alberta youth from more than 300 schools in 200 communities are empowered to save lives each year. In Calgary the Kiwanis clubs along with Calgary EMS and the STARS Foundation have played key roles in implementing the program.

Mr. Speaker, in recognition of International Women's Day Calgary's Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association invited me to moderate an interfaith symposium entitled Solutions of Modern Social Problems According to My Faith, with presenters and guests from the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, and Sikh faiths. It was enlightening to listen to these women sharing perspectives on issues such as poverty, injustice, drugs and addiction, the environment, loss of faith, and lack of equality for women, to name just a few, and their belief in the need to be compassionate, have good knowledge and strong faith in their own religion, and develop critical thinking and analysis on issues and policies through a justice and impacts perspective. The sharing of a meal afterwards just allowed everyone to experience the sense of connection through our diversity.

Mr. Speaker, with dedicated citizens, our collective willingness to give and contribute, and people's commitment to work in collaboration, I think our desire to have a safe and vibrant community is being reached in different ways every day in this province.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and to the government from April 1, 2009, to June 30, 2009, inclusive. During that period it is anticipated that spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2010. When passed, the interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$9.01 billion in expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$581.1 million in capital investment, \$48.9 million in nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$409 million in lottery fund payments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. This past December 5 I was able to participate in the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. This upcoming December 6 will be the 20th anniversary of the murder of the 14 women at l'école Polytechnique in Montreal. It's important that we eliminate violence.

My second tabling has to do with International Human Rights Day, which took place in Calgary on Monday, December 8, 2008. Among the memorable speakers was the Member for Calgary-Montrose. I appreciated the opportunity to listen to his comments about international rights.

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

2:50

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Laura Franceschini regarding Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. The letter expresses concern for the financial effect on property owners and urges the government to assemble the project land in ways that do not impinge on citizens' rights.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Kirsten Goa, a friend and resident of my constituency, expressing her opposition to TILMA and Bill 18. She's concerned about the undemocratic process under which the agreement was reached.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts – they were short staffed – including residents receiving their meals late and not receiving personal care until after lunch.

Finally, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of court documents related to the charges against Suncor for allegedly dumping undertreated water into the Athabasca River. These documents were referred to in the questions asked by our caucus today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I'm in the right spot here as to tablings. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of 54 postcards that were delivered to my office. These postcards were sent in by residents of St. Albert in support of chiropractic services in Alberta, including many people who urged the government to keep chiropractic services as a listed service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a purported point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period today in a question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, repeating a theme that he raised, actually, Monday in the House as well, the hon. member made allegations against another member, which is a violation of our Standing Order 23(h). I would say that he also imputed false or unavowed motives to another member under 23(i) and certainly was abusive and insulting, which, as you know, always causes disorder under 23(j).

The topic, of course, was the alleged party that – well, it's not an alleged party; there was actually a celebration of the opening of the courthouse in Calgary, I believe on January 28, 2008. It could have been the 25th. I don't think there's any question of the fact that one of the best, if not the best, courthouses in North America opened in Calgary in August of 2007. The courts, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore indicated, moved in over the course of the fall. Then in January, as is normal with public buildings and certainly normal with courthouses, there was an official opening. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who was then the Minister of Justice, as would have been expected in accordance with his office, attended that opening. I don't think there's any question about that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo tabled documents the other day which are all, most if not all, matters of public record in terms of the costs that need to be disclosed from time to time with respect to those sorts of issues. Again, not a problem at all.

What becomes a problem is when the hon. member fails to do even the most elemental of research and tries to drag in a political fundraiser, which is an entirely different event at an entirely different time on the same date, perhaps, but in an entirely different location, not using a public building, not using public funds, and not in any way related to the courthouse opening other than the fact that it happened to be a fundraiser for the Minister of Justice. All of us as political personae need to raise funds for campaigns, need to raise funds for organizations. It was, as I understand it from the documents that the hon. member tabled, hosted by Brownlee LLP. That's a matter of public record because the hon. member tabled it.

He has deliberately confused in his questions a fundraiser hosted by Brownlee LLP with a court opening, that happened legitimately at a courthouse, which is a normal process of government, and by confusing the two – not confusing the two; deliberately entwining the two – suggested that the hon. Deputy Premier, then Minister of Justice, now Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, did something inappropriate and improper.

So under 23(h) there were allegations that were absolutely false against another member. They impute false or unavowed motives to another member, the motives being to use a public facility and public money inappropriately, and quite frankly are close to a breach of the personal privilege of that member under *Beauchesne's* because, as you know and as all members of this House know, it's extremely important that members are seen to have integrity. The one thing that each and every one of us needs to have as we go out and talk to the public is our personal integrity and our honesty. Our public needs to know that we treat them with dignity and respect, that we act in their best interests.

We may have differences of viewpoint. Absolutely we would expect, with 83 members in the House, that each of us would bring our personal viewpoints and the viewpoints of our constituents to the table here, that we would have disagreement on matters of public policy. But to intentionally try to besmirch the character of a member, having done not even one iota of research, is absolutely, fundamentally foul and against the rules of this House and should be a point of privilege. I'm asking you as Speaker of the House to rule it out of order under our standing orders and to ask that hon. member to do the honourable thing and to retract the allegation.

If he wants to suggest that we spent too much money on the grand opening of the best courthouse in North America, that would be a policy issue, and he'd be fine to do that. If he wants to suggest even, quite frankly, although illegitimate as it is, that the celebration was too close to an election, although the people who planned that operation planned it well in advance – how they would know that an election would be called a week later is beyond me. I think that if the hon. member had any – any – investigation into the idea at all,

he would understand that. So making the allegation of the closeness could be a policy issue or an appropriate suggestion, but to stoop to the depths of impugning the integrity of a member for the sake of trying to make some political point on which he's absolutely off base is actually reprehensible, Mr. Speaker. I would ask this member to apologize to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and to the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Government House Leader. That was certainly an impassioned point of order that he brought forward, but I'm going to disagree with my hon. colleague because I do not see – well, I don't always disagree with him, so it's worth noting when I do. I'm afraid I don't agree with him that there have been allegations brought against the member, that there were any imputed motives, or that there was abusive language used.

What is concerning my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is the interlinking and the closeness of two different events. That's what those questions were about. At no point, in my understanding of the questions that were asked – and, again, I don't have the benefit of the Blues – was the integrity of the Deputy Premier and his work in this House brought into any kind of question. It may be that my colleague improvised a bit and I'm not aware of it, but certainly I don't see anything in his written questions that would indicate that anything that was uncomplimentary was said about the Deputy Premier.

It is of concern to us when we look at documents where the line is clearly, to us, being blurred and where you have a partisan event that is set up to be in the same place at an interlinking time. That is of concern to us.

I mean, at one time my hon. colleague the House leader for the government, the Minister of Education, you know, somehow tried to say that elections are dropped from God on some sort of strange timing schedule. In fact, election timing is chosen completely and entirely by the government, and despite our best efforts we've not been able to convince this government to go away from that to something like fixed election dates. No, indeed, the timing of elections is completely under the control of this government. Yes, they work through the Lieutenant Governor to have those announced. Timing of things is completely under the control of this government.

3:00

The questions that were being asked were around trying to ensure that there was an understanding and a separation of a partisan event and a public event paid for by the tax dollar in a public building. To us, the questions we raised were around whether in this planned event – and let me underline that – there was not too close an interlocking and there was enough separation. I think that's a perfectly legitimate question to ask, particularly when we look at things like the Conflicts of Interest Act. It's outlining the way a member would breach, if they participate in a decision that they know would further a private interest of that member. That's our concern, and we just want to make sure that the government shares that level of concern with us.

I would argue that the event that we were discussing – again, we tabled documents on Monday which clearly showed that there had been an event that was planned. We were not able to find confirmation that the event took place, but certainly according to the sessional documents, there was an event that was planned. It was clearly a partisan event. You know, cheques were to be made payable to the constituency association of the home riding for Calgary-Glenmore.

It was advertised heavily on the Progressive Conservative association website, and it does not distinguish on that website that this is a different event than the opening of the Calgary courthouse. If anything, it goes in the other direction and seems to say that it's all part of the same thing.

To us, when we looked for what exactly this event was, we felt, as is often required of us, that we should be clear about what was the government piece of this and what was not. [interjection] Well, we are often questioned by members opposite to provide the documentation, so we were very happy to do that when the original question was asked and did so, so it's on the record.

I argue again that there has been no name-calling of the member. There was no disrespect shown to the member. Certainly, his integrity in the position that he occupies now and the work that he does in this Assembly has not been called into question. I think there were legitimate questions asked by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and I would argue that there is no point of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've listened very attentively to the overtures of the Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader, but I need more information with respect to this matter. This is not clear to me at all. Very serious questions were raised on Monday. Documents were tabled. Questions came again today. The rules are very clear about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. There are some pretty serious allegations being made in here, but what is not clear to the chair at all – and the chair will need clarification; it's going to invite the Deputy Premier, and it's going to invite the Member for Calgary-Buffalo – is: did a political partisan event occur? It's not clear to me that one did. Did a political partisan event occur in a taxpayer-funded building in the province of Alberta, which seems to be the gist of all of this? That's not clear either to me. There's a lot of stuff going around and round and round here.

Hon. Deputy Premier, I would certainly invite you to participate.

Mr. Stevens: Two or three points, Mr. Speaker. First of all, a perfectly legitimate celebration of the opening of the Calgary Courts Centre occurred in January 2008. The ceremony, which involved the courts, the lawyers in Calgary and across the province, the Law Society, members of Alberta Justice, the Premier, members of Alberta Infrastructure, and others, took place starting formally at around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, ending probably around 4:30 in terms of presentations and whatnot, followed by a brief reception.

There was no political fundraising at this event, which involved, as I've indicated, the Chief Justice of Alberta, the Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench, the Chief Judge of the province, the head of the Law Society, and others. It was well advertised. It was covered by the media. We probably could go back and find numerous reports from the media, reported in newspapers. We could probably find numerous television clips associated with this. In any event, I was there and, as I have indicated earlier, the hon. member was not. This is 14 months later, so something, obviously, has given him insight that others who were there in the hundreds did not have at the time.

There was no fundraising by me or anyone else at that event. There was on that evening at a different place, at a different time a fundraiser that I was involved in, Mr. Speaker, so later that day, a different place. As you know, that does occur. Those of us who are on this side do work hard, and sometimes our evenings are not work but other matters. That was that time.

The way I look at this, Mr. Speaker, is that those who were part of this celebration include the people in this government, this civil service, the Justice department. They were the ones that were

looking forward to this. They are the ones that organized this, referring to the celebration. What I'm going to do, candidly, when this is all finished – I don't really much care what happens – is that I'm going to take a copy of the transcript, and I'm going to send it to the people who were there, the people I know that were part of this, so that they have some sense of how this party, that member, feels about this. I think the best way to deal with a person's reputation is to establish that reputation firmly, and hon. member, you will have your reputation firmly established by the way you conduct yourself in this House. This is but part of that, but it is going to be a significant part.

There is a reference on the other side to a conflict of interest. I encourage you to pursue whatever avenues you want – bring it on, if you will – if you think something was done that was improper. Go ahead. Do it. It will force him, Mr. Speaker, to articulate clearly as opposed to innuendo and suggestion and sleight of hand about whatever he thinks went on. He will maybe have to make some inquiry.

Once again, he wasn't there; I was. Hundreds of reputable people were there. He wasn't. That happened 14 months ago, and he has insight today.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, you will make your ruling accordingly, but from my perspective there are other opportunities the hon. member can pursue. I encourage him to do that. I'd be happy to take it on. It will also force him, I think, to be a bit more focused in his perspective on this matter if he wants to take it outside.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you need to say something. [interjection] Well, I've challenged the hon. Deputy Premier. I've raised a couple of questions. Did an event occur? The only information I have is that the opening of a courthouse occurred at a courthouse. Did a partisan event take place in a provincial taxpayer-funded building? I've been advised that none did take place, but an event that evening at a different time and at a different place has nothing to do with the opening of a courthouse.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you on Monday and today again very clearly in the Blues said words to the effect that the Progressive Conservative Party advertised for a fundraiser in the Calgary courthouse. This is the gist of what we're talking about. We're saying that no event occurred. Go ahead.

3:10

Mr. Hehr: Sir, I thank you for the opportunity, and I do appreciate that the member opposite, the hon. Deputy Premier, has served the Alberta people well and honourably.

The Speaker: Sorry, but that's not the issue. I want to deal with the issue of the integrity here right now, okay?

Mr. Hehr: And that's fair enough. Let me tell you that from my perspective this was one of those situations where when you look at this, this was advertised on a Progressive Conservative website. It says at the top:

Please join Deputy Premier Ron Stevens
and other distinguished guests
celebrate a Milestone – The opening of the new Calgary [court-
house]

It's a public event but at a location that is the judiciary, a place that is supposed to be separate from the political process, and that was my point in these questions. It appears that that line has been crossed. That is what I asked those questions around, and that's what I centred the debate on.

This was being solicited: it was \$100 to support, you know, the

Ron Stevens election campaign. Also take a look at the location of this event. I note under this, Friday, January 25, that it was supposed to be the new Calgary Courts Centre. You will realize that in my preamble I said that this event was pulled on January 20. Nonetheless, it was scheduled and put out on a PC Party website that this event was supposed to be held at the new Calgary Courts Centre.

What I'm highlighting and trying to bring forward is the fact that we need a separation between the judiciary and our political process. It shouldn't be advertised. I'm not suggesting, maybe, anything. I don't know how this happened; nonetheless, it did. It was advertised to be handled in the new Calgary Courts Centre, and it was to be a fundraiser for the Hon. Ron Stevens. That's what it says on page 2 of the document, and that's what I'm bringing.

I'll wait for your ruling, but I was just trying to argue that it seems that there has to be a separation between the judiciary as well as the political process. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. member, it's way too premature for me to provide a ruling. There are a lot of questions here.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Let's get to the gist of this.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, the gist seems to be exactly what's being debated, so I am presenting for all MLAs to review printouts here that say:

Please join Deputy Premier Ron Stevens
and other distinguished guests
celebrate a Milestone – The opening of the new [courthouse]
To Support Our Justice Minister and Attorney General

The date is here. It's hosted by Brownlee Fryett.

Please make cheques payable to the . . . Glenmore PC Association
On the next page, the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta printout, for Friday, January 25, it describes the event, and it says:

Location: The new Calgary Courts Centre

Mr. Speaker, this is the evidence that we're bringing forward.

Some Hon. Members: Read the next line.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. It says:

Join Minister Ron Stevens and . . . other MLA's, MP's, and PC
Candidates at Brownlee LLP.

The location indicated here is the new Calgary courthouse.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member has acknowledged from the beginning that the event in the end didn't occur as described. The point here is that it is inappropriate in our view – and this is the question – for an event like this to be tied so closely to the courthouse. That's the point here. I would argue that it's simply inappropriate for a partisan event raising money for the Justice minister to be linked at all to the Calgary courthouse.

The Speaker: Fair game, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, but you did not raise that as a point of order or a point of privilege. You only raised that in argument with respect to this.

The hon. Government House Leader. We're going on until 6 o'clock if we have to. We're going to clear this up.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think because the member was goaded into it, he read past the piece that he wanted to stop at and got to the piece which any idiot could determine on the face of it. It says right on here . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, we'll assume that there are no such people in this Assembly.

Mr. Hancock: I wasn't suggesting that, just suggesting that anyone . . .

Ms Blakeman: Why are you referring to it like that? That's not being respectful.

The Speaker: Will you please proceed?

Mr. Hancock: I'm sorry. I will take that back.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: It is obvious to anyone who wishes to read with any discernment that in posting an event to this website, somebody made a very tiny mistake. That mistake is so obvious, if you read the whole thing, that anyone reading it could discern it. Now, I understand that that was discerned early and was corrected very early.

When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview reads the location line – and he's right – it does say, "the new Calgary Courts Centre," but given that we asked him nicely to read further, it's very clear in that very statement that the event is not at the Calgary courthouse, that in fact it's at Brownlee LLP. Anyone reading that could discern on the face of it exactly what was going on. The other piece of paper that was tabled is, in fact, an invitation to an event hosted by Brownlee LLP. That's clear on the face of it.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that people who are elected to this House have a higher duty than just picking up pieces of paper and tossing them around. They actually ought to read with discernment. They actually ought to understand, particularly before they make allegations that impugn a member's character. It goes to the fundamentals, and the fundamentals are this. If these hon. members want to drag politics, governance, and the Legislature into disrepute, they're doing a very good job of it, but it brings us all down, not just the people – in fact, I don't think it probably harms at all the person that they hurled the allegations at because he's above any allegation of disrepute. He's a very highly respected person. But it does bring us all down.

It's very clear on the face of even the documents that they filed in the House, very clear on the face of it what happened.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, one of the arguments that the hon. member put up was, "Oh, well, we're trying to keep the separation of political life and judicial life," in the same statement where he made allegations against the Deputy Premier. It would be incredulous to assume or expect that the Chief Justices, the judges of this province, and all of the supporting cast would attend, would ever have put themselves in that situation.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know them personally, but I know this hon. member personally, and I know that neither he nor anyone else in this government would put themselves in a position so completely asinine as was tried to be portrayed by the opposition. Even if you had nothing, none of the documents that back up very clearly that there were two separate events, for the hon. member over there to suggest that the Chief Justices would even allow in their courthouse a provincial PC fundraiser is absolutely past anything I can imagine.

The suggestions they've made not only bring disrespect to us, but if they were even slightly true, they would bring huge disrespect to the judges that have been referred to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River on this point of order.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to point out – and I believe it's an important point in this argument – that the allegation was about an event occurring. In his response to the point of order the hon. member himself admits that no such event occurred. The allegation was about our Deputy Premier, a man of very high integrity, having conducted a political fundraiser in a public building, which, he obviously and rightly pointed out, never happened. The hon. member in his response agreed that no such event ever happened.

I believe that this is a legitimate point of order and that an apology and a retraction are due immediately, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to add additional information of pertinence to this matter? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:20

Mr. Chase: To the point of order, Mr. Speaker. In defending the Deputy Premier's choices, the government has suggested that we are somehow impugning the reputation of the judges, of the lawyers. They are suggesting that somehow we are opposed to the courthouse or that we're opposed to celebrations taking place in the courthouse.

I have stated – and it's in *Hansard* from last week – that I believe in the integrity of the Deputy Premier. It is not the integrity of the Deputy Premier that is being brought up, that is of concern. It is the confusion that resulted from a Progressive Conservative website suggesting that they should meet and celebrate and then at some point drop a hundred dollar cheque for the benefit of the hon. Deputy Premier. The problem exists in the separation. It is not in the integrity of the Deputy Premier. It is in the mistaken connections that have been made by a Progressive Conservative Association working hard to get this member of great integrity re-elected. It's the overlapping and the muddying that is causing confusion. It isn't the gentleman's integrity that's called into question; it's the co-ordination of the supporters of the individual who have caused this confusion. Whether it's 14 months later or 14 minutes later, the timing was questionable, the way it was advertised was questionable, and confusion has resulted.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, what appears on a Progressive Conservative website, I hesitate to point out, is not the purview of this Legislature. If the hon. member wishes to make some allegations to the Ethics Commissioner or, as our Deputy Premier pointed out, to any other party out there that might have some jurisdiction here, go ahead. That was not the original accusation that was made in question period. The accusation directly attacked the integrity of this hon. member. I again point out that it is a legitimate point of order, and I ask for an apology and a retraction.

The Speaker: Are there additional comments, involvement that additional members would like to make with respect to this point of order? There being none, okay.

On Monday of this week I sat in this chair, and I was particularly moved – and you can interpret what I mean when I say “moved” – when this series of questions came up. They came up again today. Documents were tabled the other day. Now, there could have been intervention by the chair as early as Monday. If one looks at *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, Oral Questions, section 409(6), it very clearly says:

A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government. The Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decisions taken in a previous portfolio.

This question, raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on

Monday, was directed to the Deputy Premier. The chair could have intervened immediately and ruled it out, and that would have been that. The question would have never come back again, presumably, other than in a different form.

In addition to that, I'd like to advise and draw to the attention of all members the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. This is something in question period that's not appropriate: a question is out of order if it addresses “a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities.” Very clearly on page 427: ruled out again.

The chair listened very attentively to find what this punch was going to be with respect to all of this. As best this chair can understand, some day in January – and I'm not sure yet if it was January 25 or January 27 – a very important building was opened in the city of Calgary, a new provincial court building. It was a big deal. I know because years ago when I was the minister of public works, supply and services, I think we started opening that file. It seemed to be a 10- or 15- or 20-year venture.

An Hon. Member: Twenty-four years.

The Speaker: A 24-year venture to get this Calgary court. So it was a big deal event.

I would suspect as well that virtually every Chief Justice in the province and every Chief Justice probably in Canada was invited or attended. The event would have been taxpayer funded; there's no doubt at all about that in my mind. The cost of that means absolutely nothing. It's had no significance to any of this discussion here today.

We've heard about why the date was there. Clearly, this member was a candidate in the provincial election in the spring of 2008, and this member did not know the date of the provincial election until it was called. If other members in this House had been privy to other information, they could have raised it in here, saying that they knew that January 12 or January 14 or November 23 or some other date was when the election was going to be. So that is a point of no significance to the discussion at hand in here.

What is very, very clear to the chair, though, is that the event is important. Closeness has nothing to do with it. Cost of it has nothing to do with any of this. The suggestion is being made very, very clearly by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that a member of this Assembly, in this case the Deputy Premier, the former Minister of Justice, willingly somehow organized a political event at the Calgary courthouse. From what I've heard, that didn't happen. It would suggest to me that there are lots of violations of 23 in here that really go in.

I think there's a requirement here that if there was an issue that was moving the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo might have had a few minutes of conversation with the Deputy Premier, the hon. MLA for Calgary-Glenmore, about this as a discussion to basically verify this, to have authenticity, veracity, truthfulness. Then if it was true, the hon. member absolutely, clearly, could go for it in the Assembly or any other place. In this case it seems that the research was less than what would have been expected. Clearly, if I were the hon. Deputy Premier, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, I would have been the one rising a lot earlier than today with respect to a point on this matter, and I would have sought clarification for this before today.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and hon. Government House Leader, I do believe that this is an infringement on the integrity of the hon. Deputy Premier. This is a matter that we're dealing with in a point of order. The point of order could be dealt with now, this

afternoon. I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who I do believe is an honourable member, to find the words to convey a message that basically says that this matter is behind us.

Now, you've heard other members demand certain things. I'm asking the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to find the appropriate words to make sure that we're not impugning anybody's integrity, that the integrity of this Assembly is sacrosanct, and then move forward. Would you do it, sir?

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank you for the opportunity. I apologize to the hon. member for what was asked. I do respect his contributions to Alberta political life and all that he's done in that regard. Does that suffice?

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. member.

The Speaker: This matter is now behind us.
Let's go forward with Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 3: Mr. Stevens]

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill basically is to harmonize the various Alberta legislations in an effort to remove the barriers to the trade and labour mobility act that will become TILMA and is necessary for the signing of such to have it come into effect as of April 1, '09. This side of the table doesn't necessarily support TILMA, mainly because it was developed in a very fundamentally undemocratic manner. There wasn't a proper debate on it in the House, and there are certainly some genuine concerns about how TILMA's measures on various levels of government will be effected in Alberta.

3:30

Ultimately, it really comes down to the argument of what I've just spoken about, whether TILMA is good or not. That's not what this bill is about. This bill is about being able to enable the aspects of TILMA that will become in effect within less than three weeks.

Some of the aspects of this bill will be that it will remove the term "Alberta" and insert "Canada" from legislation where its use would be counter to the province's TILMA obligations.

It allows for loans and income pools to reflect the new TILMA impact on certain agricultural and charitable institutions.

One of the other things that the amendments will do is provide extraprovincial charitable organizations and businesses the option of keeping records in their place of residence. For instance, if the Canadian Cancer Society has an office in Alberta, it wouldn't be necessary for them to have an address in B.C. as well. They'll be able to keep it in both.

It will give the authority to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to temporarily amend noncompliant legislation. I think that that provision probably could have received a little bit more debate in this House; however, it is very similar to provisions adopted by the B.C. Legislature in the spring of '08, and these are to jibe with each other.

The other one is the Marriage Act. It would amend the act to enable the minister to appoint any adult resident of Canada as a temporary marriage commissioner in order to solemnize marriages in Alberta. It will not change the rules under which any marriage must take place. It doesn't change the rules. It just changes who, in fact, might be able to perform the actual ceremony. As we all know, any MLA in this House can get permission to perform a marriage ceremony, and it is as legal as any.

The Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, which will be the same as the Residential Tenancies Act, requires that a landlord provide a postal address and a street address and a physical location in Canada for serving tenants with a notice of landlord. That really just tidies things up and is consistent with Alberta's and B.C.'s regulations that they will have together.

Basically, as I've said before, the discussion isn't about the right or wrong of TILMA. It is that this will allow this TILMA agreement, that has already been signed between B.C. and Alberta, to go forward. These were amendments that they found later that needed to be addressed in order that it would be a smooth transition on both sides of the border.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to participate on this bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to be long. The benefits of TILMA could be that, for example, if Alberta and B.C. shared a pharmaceutical plan, a pharmacare plan, based on sort of riding on the back of B.C.'s population, we could tremendously lower our drug prices. So there is a wonderful potential there.

Another potential would be that we could jointly provide much greater environmental protection, particularly for our shared waterways. So, again, TILMA has tremendous possibilities.

The event of our signing the TILMA agreement will hopefully lead to the province of Alberta, in particular the Ministry of Transportation, working more committedly on the twinning of highway 3 to facilitate our east-west transportation of goods, which are primarily rail and highway.

A concern that was originally brought up with TILMA is the labour and the trade negotiations. Now, the city of Calgary recently, for example, published and adopted a living wage policy whereby basically each individual who is employed on a permanent basis for the city of Calgary earns something in the area of \$13 plus an hour, which is considerably above even our increase in the minimum wage. Concern has been expressed that someone from B.C. who is wanting to do a contract-out service for the city might suggest that this wage requirement that the city had for its own employees would be a disadvantage, and therefore in order to provide service for which the \$13 is being paid by the city, they should be allowed because of TILMA to provide that same service for \$8. It can have very negative effects on contracting out by the city of Calgary. So this is one of the areas of TILMA that we'll have to very carefully watch and have legal provision for. In very similar ways as to under GATT and the free trade agreement there are possibilities for trade lawsuits to be filed and penalties in the millions of dollars being awarded.

Hopefully, this will be a very peaceful, amicable, economically and environmentally sound project. With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Questions, comments under 29(2)(a)?

There being none, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I just want to speak really briefly here because both the process and the content of TILMA, I think, is not always in the best interests of Alberta, the process particularly. A number of people have spoken at length about that, the fact that Albertans were not allowed to be consulted in this, that in fact the agreement itself never came before this House, which I think is a real insult to all of the people that elected us to be here. To not even give duly elected people here representing folks the opportunity to comment on this agreement was really pretty shabby.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As I watch these various bills come through that are to implement TILMA and give the government the tools that it feels it needs to adhere to the various parts of the agreement, frankly, the hairs on the back of my neck are starting to go up. There's just some stuff in here that does not sit right. I mean, first of all, let's look at this process of today. Prior to when the standing orders were changed at the insistence of the government – I certainly didn't agree to it – this would have been considered an omnibus bill because we're looking at amending the Agriculture Financial Services Act, the Business Corporations Act, the Cooperatives Act, the Charitable Fundraising Act, and the Government Organization Act, all of those. Yet members are restricted to 15 minutes and whatever use they can make of the 29(2)(a) provision.

3:40

Some of the things that are starting to come off the page for me are particularly around what I'm seeing in the Government Organization Act. I would like to get some answers back about this. This was brought to my attention by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona. It looks to me as though cabinet can make regulations that relate to the implementation of this agreement. If as part of that they believe that they need to suspend or modify a provision of an act or a regulation, they can do so under this act. In other words, cabinet would then have the power under regulation, which as we all know happens behind closed doors, is not debated in this House, and the people have no say in it, to go and modify an act of this Legislature by regulation behind closed doors. So what we have done in this Assembly would be undone by cabinet behind closed doors. That, I would argue, is very undemocratic.

More than that, it appears in the next section that it can do that retroactively. So without our concurrence in this House, without the input of a number of you members here, these changes could be made to an act, actually change an act of legislation, and make it retroactive to April 1, 2007. How do you like them bananas?

Let's say you're operating out there under an act of this Assembly. You're doing your business. You're adhering to the law exactly the way it's written, and presto bingo, this thing passes. All of a sudden you're illegal – you weren't supposed to be doing what you were doing even though at the time you did it, it said you could – because the government, the cabinet behind closed doors, has now changed what is possible.

So I am happy to be corrected on this one.

An Hon. Member: That should be no problem.

Ms Blakeman: I would be delighted to be corrected on this one, but it sure looks to me like that's what's happening.

Whoever is getting lippy over there, you can get up and start making these justifications about how you would interpret this differently. It's saying that the Lieutenant Government in Council can make regulations in respect of this matter to

- (a) . . . suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision, and
- (b) may specify the circumstances in which a suspension or modification of or substitution for a provision of an Act or regulation provided for . . . is to operate.

So it can change it, take it away, put in a new version, and it's a done deal, and it never came through this House. Maybe I'll go back and start to look, but I would have called that contempt of this House to be able to have cabinet, through a regulation, change a piece of legislation. Legislation that's made here comes back here. It doesn't get fiddled around with behind closed doors by members of cabinet who are trying to adhere to an international agreement. So I am looking very much forward to having some answers back on this one.

This same regulation goes on with a number of other sections, but to me this is very problematic. Aside from all the other problems that we have with TILMA about being able to make sure that our workers – a number of them have raised concerns with me that, you know, their higher standards of certification for work would now be lower and all those other issues we've heard brought up around TILMA. Aside from all of that stuff, what I just described is truly horrifying. What's next? We don't even come into this House, and cabinet can change anything it wants behind closed doors? That's the essence of what I'm hearing here.

So I absolutely cannot accept in principle what is before us in this bill today, and I will look forward to continued debate and additional information from the sponsor of this bill, but I'm sure not liking what I'm seeing here.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and participate in debate on this bill at second reading. As has already been stated by other speakers, of course, this is a bill that purports to provide some administrative nuts-and-bolts support to the TILMA legislation, which we've already passed. Now, as a global statement, of course, our caucus is opposed to TILMA. We talked in the past about why that is in particular, generally and specifically. The key element, of course, is that the TILMA agreement itself will, we indicated in the past, potentially supersede the control and authority of this Legislature and certainly of municipalities.

We previously pointed out that the specific TILMA agreement that this government agreed to, to be distinguished, for instance, from NAFTA, had enforcement clauses in it which specifically exempted certain areas rather than specifically included certain areas. By adopting that approach, what it results in, then, is that as the document is interpreted by the adjudicative panels that implement and make decisions around TILMA, it actually allows for a broadening of its impact, a broadening of the degree to which it impinges on the public-interest decisions that are presumably made within this Legislature or within municipal bodies. We had a problem with it very generally in that way because, frankly, it was structured in a way to be a great deal more invasive and a great deal more limiting of the public interest than even NAFTA was. So that was our concern at the outset.

Now we're presented with this bill, which we're told is a nuts-and-bolts bill. There are a number of nuts and bolts in it, frankly, that to me already signal a bit of a loss of our authority and jurisdiction and ability to focus on the public interests of those whom we are elected to represent.

I think the key thing to just primarily highlight about it at this

point is the proposed amendments with respect to the Government Organization Act. I was really quite shocked to read the government briefing note which stated very clearly that this is designed to give the government temporary ability, by way of regulation, to amend legislation that's already been passed. I find that absolutely shocking – absolutely shocking. It's in order to bring us into compliance with TILMA, the very elements of which may change as it's interpreted by this panel that I just discussed, with a document that, frankly, is designed to have TILMA cover more and more areas of our governance and of what we do in this province and through this Legislature.

It really absolutely amazes me that today we have been presented with a bill by this government that would allow them to go behind closed doors and make regulations about any legislation which, ultimately, at some point between now and for however long this was in place, might be deemed to be noncompliant with TILMA. I'm not even sure we have the authority to do that. I'm actually not sure if we in the Legislature do have the authority. I wish I had done more legal research in this area, and I haven't. You know, Legislatures will have legislation struck down if it's ultra vires sometimes, and I can't help but wonder if this piece of legislation is effectively ultra vires our own authority. I don't know.

It's certainly to me way beyond what anyone would ever expect to happen inside this Legislature, that we would agree to give the government the ability to go behind closed doors and amend any legislation deemed necessary as defined by an agreement that's not in legislation but which may be interpreted by a panel sometime in the future as having priority over that legislation. It's so uncertain. I mean, it would fail, frankly, for uncertainty let alone fail for whether or not we actually have the authority to pass such a piece of legislation.

Getting away from the legality of it, I think that from the politics of it I am against – you know, we always joke around about how politicians, particularly opposition politicians, are prone to using the phrase “shocked and appalled.” Really, I have to say that this one deserves that well-worn phrase. Unlike many other things, this one really does. I am absolutely shocked and appalled that we would be talking here about such an undemocratic process within this Legislature. It is absolutely amazing.

3:50

I realize that this government won 72 of 83 seats and I realize that they're very popular and I realize that they will have been in government for, well, it will 40 years by the time we get to the next election. I realize all of these things. Even in the face of all that, I don't believe that Albertans actually thought we would move to the point where we'd just have those 72 Albertans go into a big room and have a discussion and then have the decision quietly recorded as an OIC at some point after that discussion. I just don't think that's what anybody bought into on March 3. I really don't.

You know, I certainly need more information about this. If we're somehow misinterpreting what appears to be written on the face of this, then, by all means, tell us and change it. Frankly, if we're misinterpreting it, I think there's a possibility that a judge may at some point down the road misinterpret it or that maybe a wayward cabinet minister may misinterpret it. It ought to be pulled very quickly because it is representative of a very, very serious and significant departure from the principles of democracy – dare I say it? – even in Alberta.

There are, of course, other areas in this bill which also raise some concern with me. I have a bit of concern around the issue of amending the Alberta Agriculture Financial Services Act so that we would now be allowing the body constituted under that act to

provide loans and potentially other financial support – I'm not entirely sure – to people, farms, businesses outside of the province. I'm not always necessarily for enhancing trade opportunities at the expense of other things, but I'm not entirely sure why something that may or may not be taxpayer funded would be used for people outside of the province.

I'm similarly concerned about the notion of changing things so that charities, presumably charities which may well benefit from the donor program that we have in Alberta, where government dollars match other donations, can take that money and park it outside of the province. Again, I'm not really sure where the public interest of Albertans is in that one, not really convinced yet that that's going to help Albertans. So those are a few of the concerns that I have.

I find the amendment to the Marriage Act also kind of amusing because it seemed to me that we had gone through this whole process of limiting the number of people who might perform marriages. I'd always sort of wondered if that might be because there was a discomfort with the number of people who were interested in performing marriages of same-sex couples. In any event, we went through a process of limiting the number of people who could perform marriages, and now while we're not going to open the door to more Albertans, we certainly are going to open the door to more non-Albertans. Again, you know, I like my province. I'm kind of Alberta-friendly. I'm not sure why we're doing all this stuff to give our money away to people from outside the province. I just don't see it.

Anyway, that's really a small piece. At this point I'm looking for some information about the proposed amendments to the Government Organization Act because, as I say, it can't possibly be allowed to stand on its own, separate from the merits of TILMA. That provision needs to be seriously reconsidered.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm referring to 29(2)(a) because I've already spoken in second to TILMA. I was just going to ask: given your legal background are you concerned that a fair amount of Alberta taxpayer dollars may be expended to defend Alberta institutions, municipalities?

Secondly, had you wished to adjourn?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate both questions. I believe that we've reached an agreement with respect to how this bill will proceed over the course of the next two days, so it hadn't been my intention to adjourn.

Having said that, I am concerned, and what I did say with respect to the original bill around TILMA is that there's a tremendous amount of uncertainty around the agreement. It's crafted in such a way as to open up a plethora of opportunities, particularly for businesses unhappy with any sort of public-interest regulation, to challenge that regulation of the business in the interests of the public and to do so under TILMA because of the way it's structured, whether it's, you know, municipalities or others.

This is, of course, one of the things that we raised last fall, that TILMA is a recipe for disaster. The way it's structured is far too open. The ramifications go well beyond what was initially discussed in this Legislature by government advocates saying that it's all about making sure that, you know, lawyers in one province can work in another province. Well, it's a darn good thing because we're going to have a lot of lawyers working all over the place trying to figure

out this one. I think that's because the bill has much greater implications than what we've been asked to accept to this point.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We still have 29(2)(a).

Mr. Kang: I have a question for the hon. member. What kind of impact is TILMA going to have broadly on the contractors, on the transporters? How big do you think the impact of TILMA will be on Alberta businesses?

Ms Notley: Well, I think that goes to some of the concerns that our caucus had raised at the outset with respect to TILMA. I think that where we try to regulate in the public interest and perhaps sometimes try to engage in government funding to support particular industries or to subsidize particular industries, all those things become subject to challenge under TILMA. Again, because the structure of TILMA is one where we simply identify those things which are excluded from it, that sort of structuring of an agreement allows for people to make a living out of trying to get other things included under its coverage. By doing that, the implications for transportation, the implications for a number of different businesses are great.

Again, at the end of the day I think we need to govern in the public interest, and giving a lever to business to challenge regulations which may modify the right to do business because of a public-interest objective is not in everybody's public interest. So it's for that reason that we objected to it. To the extent that this bill supports the pursuit of that agenda, which it certainly does through the proposed amendments to the Government Organization Act, then we just can't support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members who wish to join the debate on Bill 18?

Seeing none, I would like to recognize the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to close the debate.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. members for their interest in this bill and for their comments. I'd like to just make comment with respect to some of the points that have been made in second reading. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East said that she was disappointed that there had been no proper debate with respect to TILMA – in other words, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement per se – when or about the time it was entered into. The answer to that question has been given in this House a number of times, and the answer is that we don't debate agreements that the province enters into with other provinces or other government entities. I don't have the statistics for last year, but I do know that in 2007 this government entered into over 100 such agreements. The volume of that type of work writ large is very, very significant. But that's the way it is. We, I guess, debate motions and legislation or bills.

4:00

The impact of the TILMA has been significant. Ontario and Quebec are currently engaging in a discussion that sounds like the TILMA. I believe it was just within the last month that New Brunswick and Nova Scotia made an announcement that sounded TILMA-like. We've had lots of approach from a number of provinces and territories, for that matter, across the country interested in what we are doing with British Columbia.

More importantly, I can say, Mr. Speaker, that just this past December, December of 2008, the ministers like me gathered in Ottawa. At the instruction of Premiers across the country that was

given to ministers like me and to ministers like our hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, we entered into an agreement which has the agreement on internal trade as it relates to labour mobility and dispute resolution associated with it and modified for the first time since 1995 regarding something that I would describe as TILMA-like.

I am absolutely certain, Mr. Speaker, that that would not have occurred but for the fact that B.C. and Alberta led the way with the signing of the TILMA in the first place. It not only gained a great deal of attention internally; it gained a great deal of attention internationally. Indeed, the purpose of this is to develop the second-largest economic region that works in a largely compatible manner in Canada after Ontario, with some 7.7 million people and a very large GDP. That is the purpose of this exercise.

Calgary-Varsity speculated with respect to what might come out of the TILMA. The TILMA is a very straightforward agreement to read. It has things that are included and excluded. Indeed, many of the points, I believe, that the hon. member mused about are specifically excluded from the TILMA. I would encourage anybody who is interested to access the TILMA on the Alberta government website. It's there to be seen. It's not a long document. It's extremely straightforward and easy to read as agreements go.

From my perspective, one of the significant things is that we have been working very closely with B.C., with joint cabinet meetings and the like, since about 2003. The TILMA experience has brought us closer in terms of trying to find common matters, whether they are TILMA, TILMA-like, or something else. I think that type of collaboration among provinces, among governments in Canada is a valuable thing.

The hon. members for Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Strathcona both made reference to a proposed change in the Government Organization Act which will empower the Lieutenant Governor to make regulations to temporarily amend noncompliant legislation. I made my opening remarks, Mr. Speaker, relative to this bill in second reading last week. I specifically covered that particular matter. It's in the *Hansard*. If hon. members wish to go back, it's very clear that that's what we intend to do. Indeed, there is precedent for it, so it's not as if this is something that has not been done. It has been done before. It has been argued in this House. The Municipal Government Act and the Animal Health Act are two examples of that. But I hear the hon. members, and I'll see if I can gain a little more detail on the history of it. I did spend some time talking about it. In fact, I would say that I anticipated the interest of those two hon. members in that particular aspect, so we did attempt to, you know, at least raise it as a significant point.

I do appreciate the hon. members' interest in this. If you do have additional questions, hon. members, as I've indicated to both parties, we are happy to hear from you. The only way we can answer them is if we hear your questions. Indeed, we've been experiencing over the last two years and even before that ongoing discussions with many groups that are impacted by this. We have worked very closely with the professions, with occupations that are regulated, with municipalities both on the individual and umbrella-group basis. We have spent a great deal of time answering questions. We are set up to answer questions, so please share them with us, and we would be happy to provide answers to you in some form or the other. We have within my department experts in this area, people that understand nuances that I never will, candidly, because they have been dealing with trade policy for years and years and years, and this is effectively trade policy we're dealing with.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we now vote on the matter. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

Bill 4**Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009**

[Adjourned debate February 18: Mr. Bhullar]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009. This bill will allow postsecondary institutions in the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions sector to by order of a minister apply to use the name “university.” It also allows for the delegation of powers by a faculty council.

I’m particularly pleased that this is now going to happen to my former, I guess, alma mater. I was lucky enough to go to Mount Royal College in 1990 as a somewhat recalcitrant and lackadaisical learner back in that time, and I began my studies at that time. I was also fortunate enough, though, to play on the hockey team. I was a little bit better at the hockey than I was at the studies, needless to say.

It is perfectly clear that Mount Royal has come a long way since those days. I know that when I go back to the college now and I see how the college has grown and the variety of students and the difference in programs that are going on at the college, it truly amazes me because it was only 18, 19 years ago that I did attend there. I do want to commend Mount Royal College’s continued efforts. They came to the government presenting an argument time and time again to make them a university, and I agree with the decision to make them a university. They have been providing the requisite learning tools to students for a long time, so this has been a long time overdue. This may open the door for other recognized institutions like Grant MacEwan College and some others to maybe go through.

That said, with this allowance having Mount Royal become a university, which I said earlier was warranted and, I believe, needed also in this province given that we want to graduate more people from university with more information, more abilities to deal with the changes that are coming down the pike here in Alberta, hopefully a movement towards a more learning economy, a more greening economy, and a smarter economy, we’re going to need these graduates. At the same time, I hope we never lose, I guess, the punch of what university is.

4:10

In Alberta, when we go to a place that has the university designation, we can be sure that that place has respected credentials, respected programs, and respected teachers that are going to enable the student/learner to get a quality education and become prepared, hopefully, for a job in their chosen field or to at least develop the skills and ability to compete in the workforce. That’s what I mean by that. We can’t simply grant university status to any johnny-come-lately who wants to put up a shingle and say: “Hey, I think there’s some money to be made in this university business. I might call myself a university and start running some programs here.” The next thing you know, they’ll get some funding from this organization, that organization, and the provincial government. The next thing you know, they’ll be handing out degrees at various colleges or universities all around Alberta that maybe aren’t worth the paper they’re printed on. This opening to university worries me a little bit. Although maybe it hasn’t happened yet, some of the stuff that’s in play seems to give me an inkling that some of this stuff may be in the pipeline, and I’m hoping that that is not the case.

Getting back to generally what this is, it’s nice to see this government bringing in more Alberta Liberal policy with this piece of legislation as I know it has been one of our policy positions for a

long time that Mount Royal should be a university and that more university spaces should be at play here in the Alberta landscape. Hey, what the heck? It’s basically good government. If you guys see an idea that’s out there and something that’s worth doing, whether it’s our idea, your idea, as you guys are always thinking, or whether we spin it out first really doesn’t matter.

You know, it’s definitely time we see provisions in place for baccalaureate institutions to achieve this status albeit with the proviso that we are guarding the registration of the name “university” for those institutions that are truly universities, places of higher learning where people can get the skills they need and the programs they want, I guess, to learn maybe even a profession or to in fact just simply become a higher learner.

Anyway, those are my comments, Mr. Speaker, and it has indeed been a privilege to rise and speak in favour of Bill 4. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009. I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose for sponsoring this very, very important bill.

Based on my humble personal and professional experience I truly appreciate the impact and importance that teachers have on students at every grade level. I have a little experience with a BA, a BEd, and an MPE that were hard won, also in the classroom in three countries for well over a decade as an educator and administrator. It’s a time that I truly treasure. I’m humbled and proud to say that most of my involvement in education occurred right here in Alberta, so I’m confident in the understanding that education is one of the cornerstones of what it means to be a successful Albertan. I have every reason to believe that our commitment to education is a great factor in our economic success. The results speak for themselves.

Thankfully, during this time of world-wide economic uncertainty Albertans can be confident in the knowledge that our commitment to education will not waver. Inherent in the offering for Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan to exercise the option of applying to use the term “university” in their name is the recognition of the high level of learner-centred, teaching-focused baccalaureate degree programs that students receive. This bill is not about correcting a problem within these institutions. Instead, it’s about recognizing the high level of instruction offered at these facilities. Allowing these postsecondary institutions to issue baccalaureate degrees serves to improve upon an already strong educational system.

A new name will not change how these schools operate. Having visited both of these fine institutions, I know that they’re extremely effective postsecondary institutions offering unique and innovative learning environments just as they are, and I’m satisfied that both organizations will continue to offer high-quality, personalized learning in smaller classes. Again, because of experience with similar situations in my own humble academic background, I’m convinced of these realities.

I’ve seen that students choose programs and institutions based on their own learning style, on their needs. Smaller universities enjoy the advantage of offering smaller class sizes which allow students to learn in a more intimate and possibly less intimidating environment. Undergraduate universities also allow for more one-on-one interaction with professors and teaching assistants. This is of great benefit to students who may require additional help with concepts or ideas and could be instrumental in helping to create strong student-teacher bonds.

Undergraduate universities also enjoy the advantage of allowing for flexibility when it comes to full-time or part-time studies. Undergraduate universities grant administrators the freedom to offer courses and programs at unconventional times and in unconventional ways that can often be of great benefit to the student. Just ask those who attend. They can attest to it even better than I. I know, because they've told me, that students can enrol in courses during one semester and obtain work experience in another, or they can enrol in part-time studies while working during the evening. It really benefits not only the individual but Alberta as a whole. Alternatively, people returning to school or who are employed full-time might find it advantageous to attend night courses or even study online.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 highlights the advantages of undergraduate universities and recognizes the need to provide for a variety of unique learning environments. Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan offer excellent undergraduate degree programs in conjunction with the diploma and certificate and transfer and open studies programs. Allowing undergraduate institutions to grant baccalaureate degrees also eases the transition of these students into graduate studies at other universities. I've spoken with many dozens of parents and teachers and educators who are very pleased about that.

It's important to note that these universities will not offer graduate study programs and will not become comprehensive academic institutions. Graduate studies are cornerstones of innovation and technology industries, and these industries in turn drive our green initiatives and support our world-class health care system. Everyone wins. Offering undergraduate degrees at undergraduate institutions allows the comprehensive academic institutions to focus more of their attention on research and innovation. Again, there are no losers in this mix.

Finally, even though these institutions will offer baccalaureate degrees, they will still offer the range of opportunities that were previously enjoyed. No one has to worry about that. That will include, of course, diplomas and training certifications.

Mr. Speaker, in many capacities many of us have been working very hard towards this day, and I am proud to count myself as one of those in that number. It's a culmination of a great deal of effort on the part of many, including the hon. member bringing this forward and the hon. minister. It's a day we should all celebrate together. I anxiously look forward to the future for both of these institutions and others in the future of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes.

None taken, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I, too, am celebrating Bill 4, Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, and the bringing forth of Mount Royal College to have university status. The Alberta Liberal opposition has been pushing for this event to occur, and it's with great celebration that we see that its day has come. Again I want to credit the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose for attaching his name to the bill. I know how much he values postsecondary education, based on his schooling in Calgary and his pursuit of a law degree that was interrupted. But I see him smiling, so he's pleased with where he has found himself.

4:20

One of the areas that I am concerned about in terms of the university and status is what has happened with the urban campus. It was originally proposed to take place in the East Village, and at

various times Mount Royal was part of the possibility, the idea being that now a Mount Royal university as part of Bill 4 would have shared space with the University of Calgary, would have shared space with SAIT, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, would have shared space with Bow Valley College as part of not only an academic one-stop-shopping circumstance, but also it would have served as a major project and major step in the revitalization of Calgary's East Village.

I do appreciate the fact that the government has made significant granting increases not only to the University of Calgary, also to SAIT. Obviously, in recognition of Mount Royal College now being a university, the funding will follow. But I am concerned, amongst the various university announcements, that the University of Calgary's sort of downtown, so to speak, infrastructural contribution from the government is basically leased space in a very old building, which I know is going to be renovated but was the former location of the 8th and 8th clinic, which, interestingly enough, is just basically around the corner from where the first Mount Royal College took place.

My hope was that all the academic institutions would have had that central downtown base in the East Village of Calgary. I know that Lance Carlson of the Alberta College of Art and Design was hoping to have a separate space within that East Village complex to recognize the distinct nature of the programs offered by ACAD. I'm hoping that the changes will not necessarily affect ACAD's dream, that instead of basically leasing space from the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, they will realize their hope and will be supported by the provincial government in a move to have their own unique space and be part of the redevelopment of the East Village. Having an art-based centre there, I think, would be wonderful.

On Monday members of the Alberta Liberal caucus met with representatives from CAUS, the Council of Alberta University Students. In that Mount Royal is now a university, the next time around there will be representatives of Mount Royal university at the meeting of CAUS. The council and their representatives from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge brought up three concerns. One concern was the high cost of tuition. That continues to be a concern. We asked how many students were forced to work during their university experience, and it was pointed out that each of the individuals was trying to juggle three jobs with their academic program when they were full-time students in order to meet the tuition requirements.

The second area that the university students put forward – and I'm sure this will be similar to those experiences of Mount Royal when Bill 4 is enacted to make them a university – is residence space. The University of Alberta is able to accommodate approximately 11 per cent of its overall student population. The University of Calgary is barely able to accommodate 7.4 per cent of its population. To have a vibrant university, you need to have dormitory space on campus so that the value of the campus is recognized on a 24/7 basis. This was a large concern for students.

I've been at presentations at Mount Royal College, soon to be Mount Royal university, where over 70 per cent of the students who were part of a rally indicated that they were spending well over 70 per cent of their income on accommodation whereas government policy recommends that people, particularly in subsidized living accommodations, only pay 30 per cent. So housing was a concern of the students.

The other is a concern shared by all universities. Although Lethbridge is relatively new in the scheme of universities, the University of Alberta has just celebrated its 100th year. It's an aging facility. While I'm pleased to see cranes not only at the University of Alberta but at the University of Calgary on a much more frequent

basis now – the University of Calgary, of course, is celebrating its 42nd anniversary – the deferred maintenance is causing difficulties. It's particularly noticeable in the two dormitories just south of the Dining Centre. The University of Calgary students appreciate the fact that the government has provided some funding to create new residences where the parking lot now exists just west of the Dining Centre, but it will not change the number of rooms available for students to be accommodated on campus. So the infrastructure deficit that has been created continues to be a concern for university students, who want to receive value not only in terms of their academic achievements but value in terms of the environment in which this learning takes place.

Without going into great detail, it's very important that this government recognizes that there could not be better investment in the future than the investment in education. It has been noted that for every dollar we invest, we have a \$3 return.

I celebrate Mount Royal College becoming a university. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose for lending his name to this wonderful bill. With that, I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments, answers.

Seeing none, I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. on Bill 4.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. It, of course, is an issue that's important to me, having a university and a number of students in my riding. The way in which we approach our advanced education efforts is very important.

Basically, as other speakers have already identified, there are essentially two elements to this legislation. One appears to be an effort to simply correct an oversight that was made when this legislation was first brought in vis-à-vis the authority of general faculties councils to delegate their functions. My understanding through consultation, certainly, with the U of A is that this was something that they were seeking to have corrected and were very pleased to see this change being put in place in the legislation. So, too, are we.

4:30

The other element of the legislation, of course, does relate to the decision to essentially rename Grant MacEwan and Mount Royal as universities. They're not being moved from one category to another under the learning framework, but simply their name is being changed for the purposes of, I'm assuming, attracting students. It seems to me that there's no obvious reason why you wouldn't go ahead with that. Both of these institutions do a good job of providing university-level education and full degrees to their students, so it should be acknowledged accordingly. I know I had the brief pleasure of working as an instructor at Grant MacEwan, and I felt that it was an institution that provided good education to the students who attended it.

Just as an aside, I know that it's not actually covered by this legislation, that this particular decision would be made in a different venue, but I also had the great pleasure of doing the first two years of my university degree at Grande Prairie College, which I personally think also should be seriously considered for degree-granting status so that we can provide a northern Alberta university centre. I know that everyone in Calgary sees Edmonton as part of northern Alberta, but I can tell you that growing up in the real northern Alberta, it's a long ways away. In terms of developing that part of our province, I think a key strategy that would work in that process

would be matching the initiative made by British Columbia and potentially putting a university in Grande Prairie to recognize the good work of that institution.

Anyway, I too had an opportunity to meet with students, quite regularly, actually, but also this week as the Council of Alberta University Students were touring the buildings and talking to people. Like my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, I also heard the same positions and submissions with respect to the kinds of things that they would like to see. I think it's really important that we listen to the views of our student leaders with respect to the work that we do in improving our system of advanced education.

We are in a position now, as many speakers in this House have referred to often, where we should be transitioning the economy. I mean, we almost have no choice but to transition it at this point and, certainly, to support diversification in a way that is more meaningful than our efforts to date. Part of that process, of course, will involve bringing people back into the system of advanced education.

You know, we've had conversations in this Legislature already about the fact that Alberta has the lowest university participation rate in the country. Of course, one of the things that has been said to contribute to that – I don't know if I necessarily agree – has been the degree to which young potential students can go work in the oil sector and earn a lot of money. So why would they go to university? But I think we know now that that's probably not going to continue. So it's important for us to make our postsecondary education system accessible to young Albertans because, again, there is a collective benefit. The more we educate ourselves and our young people, the better we will do in the long run.

I think that there are several critical pieces to this. One of them, certainly, is accessibility, and that's why, again, I support this – well, I wouldn't go so far as to say "symbolic" – move to rename these two institutions.

I also think that, in a more meaningful way, as far as increasing accessibility for people to our postsecondary education system, we need to look at the cost of attending university. We know that from 1990 to now the average tuition has gone up not quite fourfold, just slightly less than fourfold, slightly less than 400 per cent since 1990, such that what was once an amount of money that showed or demonstrated student commitment has now become a barrier for many students in terms of their making the decision to enter university. Where we used to have one of the lowest tuition rates, we now rank among one of the highest tuition rates in the country. I appreciate that a great deal of this is due to the 1990s decisions of the Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin federal governments to cut the transfer, but nonetheless we are now in a position where we have what I would suggest are the beginnings of an inaccessible education system.

We have students who come out of school with tremendous debt and not only have maxed out the amount of debt they get from Alberta student finance, but they also have private debt on top of that, and they need to get private debt on top of that because they cannot pay their tuition, pay their accommodation costs, feed themselves, and participate as students with the amount of money that they're given. Of course, we have, I think, a problem that we are going to see more extensively over the course of the next year, which is that those students who've relied on those private sources of credit are not going to be able to get them anymore. Apparently, it's roughly around \$5,000 or \$6,000 over the course of an undergraduate degree that a student may owe when they get out. Well, if they can't get that credit, that's about one year's tuition. So what's going to happen to our completion rates?

I really think that it's not just enough – I know this government has given itself a pat on the back for tying tuition rates to the

consumer price index, but as far as I am concerned, if we're really serious about getting more young Albertans into our university system, what we need to do is significantly roll back our tuitions and make those rollbacks fully funded. If we want to invest in reigniting and maintaining economic growth, most research will show that investments in advanced education have a very effective impact in terms of job creation, actually more so than the oil and gas industry, just as an aside.

In any event, the other thing, of course, that these students were talking about is the issue of residence. Again, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity already raised that. I want to talk just a little bit about what's going on in Edmonton-Strathcona. As has been noted, 11 per cent of the U of A are able to live in residence, and the rest of them have to live off campus. Many, many of them live in Edmonton-Strathcona, which is a good thing because it means they're not driving big vehicles around; they're actually using our transit system and walking and all that good stuff.

As much as we're heard about some real estate prices coming down and rents coming down, be clear: it's the high-end real estate and the high-end rents that are coming down. When you're looking at the cost of a one- or two-bedroom apartment in a 40-year-old walk-up in the area around the university, those rents are not coming down. So these students are still paying \$800, \$900, \$1,000, \$1,100, \$1,200 a month just for their accommodation. It doesn't include their food. It doesn't include, you know, any other things that they might need in order to effectively participate in their university education.

So we have a problem with respect to where these students are living. There have been projects brought forward to potentially build additional residential spaces on campus at U of A. I would urge this government to look seriously at that type of investment as an infrastructure investment because it's a form of affordable housing. It increases accessibility overall to our system of advanced education and through that mechanism helps the community and the economy as a whole.

I know that pretty much everyone we've consulted with does support the changes which are reflected in this piece of legislation, and it is for that reason that we will support the piece of legislation. At this point I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

4:40

Bill 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 6, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009.

The Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, or PCHAD, is a specialized initiative designed to help a child under 18 years of age whose alcohol or drug use has caused or is likely to cause significant physical, psychological, or social harm to that child or physical harm to others. The program serves children who refuse voluntary treatment and currently operates out of five protective safe houses throughout the province. To access the program, the parent or guardian of the child must apply for a court order to have the child placed in a protective safe house for up to five days. The child is then assessed by Alberta Health Services staff and treated for detoxification. Further treatment programs can then be recommended.

PCHAD reflects a commitment to improve the safety, the security, and the well-being of children and families in Alberta. It speaks to the responsibility of families, communities, and this Assembly to help children overcome problems with alcohol and drug abuse. This initiative has been well received from its commencement. From July 1, 2006, to the end of 2008 more than 1,500 children were admitted to the program. As we have gained experience with the program, areas in which the program can be strengthened were identified. The proposed amendments address these areas, and I'd like to briefly outline the improvements recommended.

Extending the program time frame. Currently children can be placed in a protective safe house for up to five days. The amendments will change this time period from five days to a maximum of 10 days. Feedback from the program counsellors, parents, guardians, and even the children indicates that an extended time period will be more effective for providing treatment for detoxification and for stabilizing the child. Detoxification and stabilization are two critical components of the recovery process. Voluntary treatment programs also use a 10-day time period, so PCHAD will be consistent with these programs.

Currently a PCHAD court order cannot be extended. However, experience with the program indicates that the period of time required to assess, detoxify, or stabilize a child varies depending on the child's circumstances. The amendments recognize this and allow an application for a five-day extension. This extension will be granted only if the court is satisfied that an additional period of confinement is required to assess or stabilize the child.

Early discharge. Given these initiatives to extend the time period of the program, a provision is included that authorizes the program co-ordinator to discharge a child earlier. This may occur if the co-ordinator has assessed the child and believes it is in the child's interest and if the child, parent or guardian, and director of the protective safe house agree it is appropriate. For example, this might happen if the child indicates he or she is willing to transfer to a voluntary program. This provision is important because the detention of a child is an extraordinary step. Care must be taken not to unnecessarily detain a child. It is especially important given the proposed extension of the confinement period to 10 or 15 days. Together these time frame amendments will better assist children on the path to recovery.

Enhancing the involvement of parents and guardians. The involvement of parents and guardians is an important feature of this program. There are a number of proposed amendments that provide better support to parents and some that clarify their responsibilities.

Application process. A new provision is proposed that requires a parent or guardian to attend an information session about PCHAD before applying for a court order. The information session will provide guardians with detailed information about PCHAD and outline the guardians' obligations. The information session will also provide parents and guardians with information about other addiction and rehabilitative programs. It will make families aware of other options, options that they may wish to access on their own.

Treatment program information. The amendments also enable the program co-ordinator to provide the child's guardian with recommendations for the child's treatment. Parents and guardians have told us they need more information to better support their child outside of the PCHAD program. This change responds to their feedback.

Discharge. In addition, the amendments establish the parents' obligation to pick up their child when the child is discharged from the program. Good discharge planning and co-ordination with parents and guardians is an important part of the child's continued stabilization.

Police support. Currently a PCHAD court order may direct police to apprehend and convey a child to a protective safe house. Experience with the program indicates that this provision is widely used. Yet police departments report that their involvement is not required in most cases, and using police to transport children puts a strain on their resources. While the provision for police transportation remains, an additional provision enables the court to direct police to assist the family with transportation. This assistance may include using police to discuss transportation with the family and child or being present when the family is taking the child to the protective safe house. Regulation-making authority is included to further define what is required of police when they are ordered to assist.

This amendment is modelled after the Edmonton Police Service approach. Edmonton police help families plan for the child's transfer to a protective safe house, even booking a specific date for the child's admission. Planning for the child's admission into the program helps ease the transition, reduces unnecessary use of police services, and supports families.

Review of the court order. Currently only a child can apply for a review of the court order, and the court must hear the review application within one day of the application being filed. As a result of the review, the judge may confirm, vary, or terminate the court order. There are practical challenges with this tight time frame. Parents or guardians may not be aware of the review hearing and in some cases may be unable to pick up the child if the application is successful.

To address these challenges, the amendments provide for the following. A child can continue to request a court review of the PCHAD order, and the review must be held within two days of the application being filed or within a shorter or longer period ordered by the court. A parent or guardian may also request a review. In a few cases parents have had second thoughts about putting their children in PCHAD. The PCHAD program co-ordinator may request a review as well. In some cases a child may not be suited for PCHAD. In these situations the program co-ordinator should have the ability to apply for termination of the order. As well, the amendments allow the court to hear evidence by telephone, audiovisually, or by other means. These amendments will better provide for the review process while ensuring that review hearings occur on a timely basis.

Expiry of PCHAD orders. Presently a PCHAD order has no expiry date. The amendments specify that a PCHAD order that has not been acted on will expire in 50 days. The 50-day time period provides sufficient time for a bed to be booked for the child and arrangements made for the child to enter the program. It is not advisable for court orders to be outstanding for an uncertain period of time. Circumstances change. If for some reason an order expires before it can be acted on, a parent or guardian can make a new application to the court.

PCHAD is an important program for many Alberta families and will continue to be with the amendments proposed in this bill. I ask all members to support this bill and to move it to the next stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. While I support the intent of this bill to provide treatment for adolescents who are addicted, I don't believe this bill has the tools to accomplish its intent.

To begin with, I'd like to take us back to 2005. I want to talk about the abnormal circumstances that surrounded the fast dealing with the crystal meth bill. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North

proposed a bill that would be a major arsenal in the fight against drug addiction. Her bill focused primarily on crystal meth, which is an extremely damaging, highly addictive drug. We recognized the importance of the intent of the bill. We debated it. We put it through its paces very quickly. From second reading it went into committee. This was a negotiated agreement between all parties because we saw the importance of treatment for children as being absolutely essential, and we had many wonderful speeches delivered about saving our young people, treating them for addictions, preventative measures.

4:50

It's very important to note that both the members of the Liberal caucus and the members of the NDP caucus – I'm pretty sure that my information is correct – were supportive, especially at the second reading level, of the notion of 90-day compulsory treatment. However, when it came to Committee of the Whole and eventually to the last stages of the bill and the various amendments that the government members put forward, that 90-day treatment was reduced to five days.

Now, I very much appreciate what the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is proposing. She's trying to go back in time, as it were, and correct the mistakes made by not dealing with the full treatment that was suggested in the crystal meth bill of 2005. Unfortunately, the five-day to 10-day – and I understand from the explanation that this is just designed to be an entry period, at which time that would be your first step. You'd walk in the door, and you'd be able to access services. Then there could be a potential transfer to the services you need.

Well, if this is just a holding facility as opposed to a swift movement into treatment, then what we have is the equivalent of a one-star marijuana motel or a five-star heroin hotel. What happens: you walk in, you are asked by the clerk to leave your drugs at the desk, and check-out time is 10 days. I do not believe that in 10 days sufficient professional help and parental counselling can occur that will turn around the individual, the adolescent, who is addicted.

I do believe that you have to have a much stronger backup than what we currently have in this province. We do not have sufficient treatment beds under the direct authority of AADAC, so the idea that after 10 days we would be able to transfer the individuals into treatment does not really realistically exist at this time. While it's a good entry concept, the follow-up and the transfer and the PCHADs and the types of treatment, we don't have the beds in secure, accredited institutions. We don't have the treatment beds available in secured areas of hospitals right now. We recognize the tremendous problems that addiction poses, but we do not have the infrastructure at this point. We do not have the number of accredited, trained professionals – psychologists, doctors, nurses, social workers, counsellors, degreed individuals – to make sure that this treatment takes place. Now, what we do have are unaccredited institutions competing for grants from the province to provide degrees of treatment.

I have brought up in this House the concerns I have for organizations like the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre. I also pointed out the good intentions this program had, but the reality is that it lacks the professional accreditation. It basically has a business licence to operate as opposed to a medical recognition. It is not a residential treatment centre. It does not have the status that is required to have professionals on a day-to-day basis providing the one-to-one treatment that is at times necessary in the stages of overcoming addiction.

What it does have is a requirement on parents to at some point keep in their custody in a barred-window bedroom someone else's

child, and it is the responsibility of their child, who has gone months further into the program, to be the guardian for the child. The new person who has recently been introduced to treatment is referred to as the newcomer, and the other student, who could be maybe 14, with four months more of experience through the program, is referred to as the old-comer. The old-comer holds the keys and becomes the jailer for the other member.

Now, in that this program has gone on for over 20 years in the city of Calgary, the number of barred bedrooms – illegally barred bedrooms, I would add – is probably in the area of 200-plus. This is not an accredited type of treatment program. Therefore, if there is a suggestion within Bill 6 that there would be a referral to a program, a nonaccredited, nonresidential treatment centre program such as this, then I would have great difficulty. It is putting undue emphasis, undue liability on a child to be a counsellor for another child and for a parent to act as a warden and at the same time be a prisoner to their own institutional responsibility. While the other child is in their care, they can't go anywhere because they have to be the supervisors. Now, these are untrained parents. These are not psychiatrists. These are not psychologists. These are not, in general, doctors although some of those professions may come into it by coincidence. There's nothing to say that because you're a professional, your child isn't going to become addicted to drugs.

The point I'm making is that if this program is going to work, it's got to be longer than 10 days. It has to be more than just an entry. There has to be an exit, and that exit has to involve treatment by accredited professionals in facilities that, if not currently under construction, have to be a priority. If Bill 6 increases the speed at which suitable clinical facilities are provided to treat these young individuals and support their families, then I can be supportive of that portion of the bill, but right now, unfortunately, it is all about good intention and not about the funding that is sustainable, that is needed to build the infrastructure, to pay the wages of the psychologists, the psychiatrists, the professionally trained clinicians, the social workers involved in the follow-up. That is not apparent to me in Bill 6.

5:00

I cannot emphasize how important it is for Alberta, partly due to its, you know, fast lifestyle – yes, the recession has slowed it somewhat – that the children have the proper treatment. When I say proper, I'm talking about government regulated. AADAC falls under the superministry of health, and I am concerned about some of the authority and the integrity and the capability of AADAC to run as an independent organization. It has done some wonderful work, which I have experienced directly by having had my grade 9 students attend sessions on addictions, particularly on driving while drunk and some of the terrible circumstances. They've had individuals within the AADAC program, who themselves have been severely injured, talking one-on-one with students, warning them against the possibility of addiction. That is a strong program, and I am not convinced that Bill 6 will provide the funding or the stand-alone support for tried-and-true programs such as AADAC.

Again, I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek having brought this forth. She has a heart that is very concerned about children and youth. She is a former Minister of Children and Youth Services. She cares. There's no doubt about the fact that she cares. The Member for Red Deer-North cares. But to take care and love and concern and turn that into action takes a commitment beyond 10 days. Unfortunately, I do not see that commitment.

Therefore, at this point, until amendments are potentially brought forward to secure the funding both for clinical, continuous support and infrastructure, I will not be able to support this bill.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to Bill 6. You know, it's an interesting bill because it deals with an issue that, obviously, everyone is very concerned about. The idea of children being addicted to drugs and there not being the capacity for those around them or for themselves to access service and treatment is very troubling. Certainly, I have no question in my mind that this is what this act is intended to try and address. I'm not, however, for many reasons already identified, convinced that this is the route to get there.

First of all, just to sort of clarify a little bit of the position of the NDP caucus with respect to this bill in the past. In fact, when the bill first came forward with the 90-day mandatory security element in it, our caucus actually raised a concern about whether that would in fact potentially attract legal challenge and what that meant for the rights of the child. It was ultimately taken out, as was noted, and then our caucus did support it, at the time noting that it could only work if that piece of legislation was accompanied with a commitment to creating the beds that were necessary to provide the treatment which is contemplated within this act, both while the act is in place as well as after the act's impact is complete. What I mean is that after the mandatory confinement period, where does the child go? What's the point of all this if there is no place for the child to go once the mandatory confinement period is completed? I note that that, you know, has been raised before and was raised at the time, and it seems, unfortunately, as though it really has not been effectively addressed.

The Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force, which made the recommendation that forms the foundation of this act to extend the maximum length of detention orders, also identified the very urgent need for more treatment beds for youth abusing drugs. The task force itself had heard that there was a tremendous lack of treatment options for youth with addictions. That was associated as well with the fact that we have a tremendous shortage of options or treatment for children with mental illness. This doesn't surprise me at all. I have absolutely no difficulty saying that the province is failing children when it comes to the issue of providing comprehensive, substantial mental health services and support.

We had the bill that was here before, and now we have to look at what's happened since that bill was introduced. Well, when it was introduced, it looked as though AADAC had brought its total number of youth beds up to 68 when the protection of children abusing drugs program started. As of June 2008 it's my understanding that they had added four stabilization and detoxification beds for youth with addictions, and that brought their total number of beds up to 61. So we now seem to have a net decrease in beds. Over that same time period we appear through AADAC to have a net decrease of eight beds for youth seeking voluntary treatment in that it went from 48 to 40. At the same time we actually have seen a drop in the number of beds that treat children with addiction problems.

Now, another was that AADAC in September of 2007 surveyed the effectiveness of the PCHAD program, and one of the findings they made was that about half of the youth who actually sought voluntary treatment after going through the protection of children abusing drugs program couldn't find beds. There were basically no voluntary beds available for them. Again, this raises a question. I mean, we can make all the grand statements we want, but if we are not putting our money where our mouth is and actually providing the service that is necessary, then this really just creates a very costly and frustrating circle for the families that are caught up in it.

The AADAC survey notes that there were a significant number of parents and guardians who came through the protection of children

abusing drugs program who were not satisfied with the support that they or their children were able to receive in the community. Again, this is absolutely no surprise to me. So do we carry on adding the number of days without doing part two, which, I would say, is the far, far, far more important part of this process?

5:10

I also want to raise, you know, an additional concern, that was also raised by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, with respect to the reliance of—well, I don't know if it's the government; we don't know yet—some people on the ARC program, the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, in Calgary. Now, I've been invited to go down and visit that centre, and I will be doing that. But I will say at the outset that I have some significant concerns. Those concerns are very similar to those that have already been raised. They are concerns about the level of qualification and the level of oversight and the level of skill that is brought to bear in that setting and the degree to which it has any similarity to best practices that are identified through peer-review processes by professionals who work in the field. I suspect, unfortunately, that there appears to be quite a bit of divergence from what is considered best practice on one hand and what happens at ARC on the other. Then, of course, we also have numerous allegations which at this point nobody wants to acknowledge or actually investigate, which is deeply concerning to us.

All of that aside, what I do see in that program is a number of very well intentioned and often almost desperate parents who are supportive of that program because they need a place for their children to be. What concerns me is that they have to turn to a program that may be fairly flawed. Frankly, we provide nothing through our ministry of health—and I think that's where it should be provided—in a way that is or can be effective or accessible. We just don't have the proper number of beds or the level of expertise.

On top of that, what we're now hearing is that there is a plan to lower the certification standards for child and youth care counsellors. We know that for child and youth care counsellors in forensic settings a good portion of their job deals with the issue of addictions management. What we're actually doing as a government is reducing the level of qualification and training that people working in that area need to have. Again, what's the likely outcome? A reduction in the quality of support and assistance that we can provide to children in crisis.

Then you add this to the global issue, which we tend to raise quite often, about the unjustifiable disparity in income in the overall social services sector. People that work in nonprofit counselling, community-support venues working with kids are being paid, you know, \$12, \$13, \$14 an hour, and we wonder why there's such a drastic shortage of people in that field and why we have such a drastic inability to provide the support and service that children need. Well, it's not a big surprise to me. We don't care enough. There's not enough money being put to this, and there's not enough political will behind solving this problem.

Instead, what we have is an act here, which is great, but I have some concerns about the act at this point, the actual element of the act. I'm unsure whether we'll support it or not. I look forward to hearing more about it. But at the end of the day whether we support it or do not support it is irrelevant if it is not accompanied by meaningful financial investment in providing the kind of care and beds and support that these children need. At this point we're not seeing any of that within either the health or the children and youth services system. It just does not appear as though those resources are there.

Anyway, that's our concern at this point. As I say, we look

forward to listening to the debate over the course of this bill's journey through the Legislature. We will then make our determination on whether or not we can support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions or comments.

Seeing none, I'd like to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays to debate on the bill.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 6, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009. The Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, or PCHAD, was originally passed to help parents and their children effectively deal with the challenges of drug abuse. PCHAD allows parents to apply for a court order to have their child placed in a protective safe house for detoxification. This gives parents the powers they need to successfully intervene on behalf of their children and to treat substance abuse. Since its inception this act has successfully helped over 1,500 children. To be clear, Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 is not about improving a system that is broken. Instead, it is aimed at improving an already effective piece of legislation. Bill 6 clearly highlights how this government is actively working to continually improve all levels of service delivery.

In light of this, Bill 6 proposes several important amendments that I believe will improve the operational practices and the effectiveness of this valuable program. These amendments include increasing the duration of the confinement period to allow for more effective stabilization services, improving the review hearing process, introducing an expiration date for unexecuted orders, and addressing the circumstances of children who are abandoned by their guardians.

While these amendments will clearly offer substantial benefits to Alberta's children, what I think is most commendable about Bill 6 is the direction it gives regarding police transportation services. Currently PCHAD allows the court order to stipulate whether or not a police officer is required to apprehend and transport a child to the detoxification centre. This section was created to help parents who are not physically able to transport their children due to extreme behavioural issues. Police transportation can also be ordered in cases where a child might be living in a drug house, outside of the care of a parent or guardian.

Mr. Speaker, these are all valid reasons for having this policy in place, and I believe that we need to be clear that Bill 6 is not proposing to remove police intervention. Rather, Bill 6 is proposing to allow police to assist parents in transporting their children, which may include the creation of criteria to help determine if police intervention is warranted. Therefore, this amendment would primarily eliminate cases where police transportation and intervention are simply not needed. This minimizes the strain put on police resources in situations where their services are not required, like when parents are more than capable of escorting their child to a protective safe house for stabilization. In this case, it would make little sense to call in the services of a police officer.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to providing criteria regulating police intervention, Bill 6 also proposes to allow for standardizing procedures in cases where children are in fact transported by a police officer. Over the past two and a half years it has been determined that the transportation of children is most effective when there is an established co-ordinated effort made by parents, the police, and the program co-ordinator. Delivering a child into a detox program is a stressful and draining ordeal. It is in the interests of both children and guardians to have this take place as smoothly as possible. Bill 6 simply proposes amendments to help ease this difficult transition.

However, entering a protective safe house is not the only time when children need to be transported. After the allotted detoxification time has passed, children are returned to the custody of their parents or guardians. Before this amendment was proposed, it was unclear as to who was responsible for picking up and returning children to their homes. Bill 6 would require parents to promptly pick up children who had successfully completed the detoxification process. In addition, parental pickup is required in cases where a child is released early to be transported to a voluntary residential treatment program or as a result of a court order.

This amendment is intended to address a very sad reality that occasionally affects these children's lives: abandonment. Approximately 5 per cent of children introduced into the PCHAD program are not picked up by their parent or guardian. The amendments proposed by Bill 6 offer guidance to the program's operators, requiring them to call Children and Youth Services, who will then take the child into protective care. This is a sad reality in many children's lives, but I feel comfort in knowing that we live in a province committed to helping those who are most vulnerable.

Protecting our children is the ultimate goal behind PCHAD, and I believe that the amendments proposed by Bill 6 help us work towards this goal. Creating a standardized police transportation process will dramatically help ease the transition into the program, and I believe that standardizing this transaction will ultimately assist children undergoing a stressful and challenging time. Furthermore, requiring children to be picked up from the program by their parent or guardian helps to clarify a previously undefined responsibility. This clarity will in turn help address child abandonment and further highlights the province's commitment to protect the children in its care.

I commend the government for introducing this valuable and well-thought-out piece of legislation, and I applaud the commitment to improving upon an already successful program. It is for these reasons that I will be standing in support of Bill 6 and urge all members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 9

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009.

Albertans have received exceptional registry services for the last 15 years through the registry agent network. A recent customer survey indicated that 86 per cent of Albertans are satisfied with the quality of registry services they receive through the registry agent network. Since the inception of the network 15 years ago, there have been a number of advancements in technology and a growing awareness over the protection of personal information. As a result, Service Alberta felt it was time for a major review of the registry agent network.

These amendments both formalize policies and practices that have been developed over time and include new provisions created in response to stakeholder feedback. The amendments will enhance support for registry agent operations and increase the accountability of registry agents.

Specifically, the proposed amendments will provide the Minister of Service Alberta additional control over the services that a registry agent can provide and the location where those services can be provided. They will also allow the Minister of Service Alberta to approve the sale or change of ownership of a registry agent and impose any necessary conditions, recover costs incurred by the government on behalf of the registry agent and recover any government fees not submitted by a registry agent, and allow the Minister of Service Alberta or her designate to enter a registry agent's premises to conduct an audit or inspection to ensure compliance with the legislation, the registry agent agreement, and government policies or to recover government property after a registry agent agreement is terminated.

The bill would enhance the offence section to stipulate that any contravention of the act or regulations is an offence. It would establish the period of time Alberta Justice has to charge someone with an offence under the act; this period of time will be nine months from the date the offence is discovered or six years from the date the offence occurred, whichever is less. It would change the maximum fines and penalties from \$2,000 or imprisonment for up to six months to \$10,000 or imprisonment for up to one year.

The bill will ensure that it's clearly understood that each registry database and all of the records and information in the registry's database are the property of the government.

Lastly, the bill will provide ministerial regulation-making authority regarding the requirements to become a registry agent; the background checks required on the applicant for a registry agency and on their spouse or adult interdependent partner; the ongoing duties of registry agents; that consideration be taken into account by the Minister of Service Alberta when approving the location in which a registry agent will provide services; the access, manner of access, and use of the information accessed from a registry database; audits and inspections of registry agents, their staff, and other authorized registry service providers in providing the necessary powers to complete these tasks; an appeal process for decisions made under the act and regulations, contravention of the regulation when it constitutes an offence, which contravention of the act or regulations must be reported to the Minister of Service Alberta by a registry agent; the temporary restrictions of access for noncompliance with the legislation; the cost and government fees that may be required from registry agents; the exemption of a registry agent from a rule set out in the regulations if the registry agent has a valid reason when they need the exemption; access to registry services for Albertans when their local registry service is discontinued; and any administrative matters necessary to carry out the intent of this act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to speak on Bill 9, sponsored by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. I know that the intent of the bill, according to the sponsor, is to enhance the governance of the registry agent network and to increase accountability and service delivery. This will also accomplish clarifying accountability and consequences for registry agents, formalize a process for auditors' inspections, and provide regulation-making authority for further regulations to be developed. It is also true that the changes make the government's ability to control registry agents

much stronger with much greater powers for monitoring. The impact of the bill is clearly that it will deal with the registries and registry agents and the requirements placed upon them in their relationship with the government.

The system was privatized in 1993 and, you know, as of now nearly 12 million transactions are conducted through Alberta Registries each year, including issuing and renewing drivers' licences, registration of births, marriages, and deaths, land title searches and transfers, registration of corporations, vehicles, and liens. The majority of these services are available at registry agencies located in communities throughout the province. Also, there's an increasing number of services available online. Albertans now mostly renew their passenger vehicles through the Internet, and there are many other regular services provided online through the Internet as well.

All of the registries hold very sensitive, private data. It is a necessity for the government to have strong control over registries so that the data does not get into the wrong hands. This bill empowers the government to do this; nevertheless, the fact that such significant powers are seen as a necessity calls into question the existing security system. That's my concern about the existing security system, you know, what kind of security system we have in place. I'm concerned about all the sensitive and private data the system has, although the government is putting these controls in place. You know, were there serious problems?

We also have to know what will be the impact of these additional regulatory administrative burdens on the public service that registries provide. How much time will it take to make all those changes? Will there be any financial impact on the registry agents? How much will it cost them to buy the new equipment, to get the new technology? Will there be any financial impact on the government, on the ministry, and on the taxpayers? Will the users of services, Albertans, see an impact on their hip pockets? Will the service be slower? Will they have reduced options? These are the questions that have to be answered.

Those are the concerns I have. Although I'll support the bill, these concerns have to be answered during the debate. I want to have some satisfactory answers for those concerns I raised.

With those concerns, I adjourn my debate on the bill, sir. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 9 this afternoon. I'm basically in support of any bill that would improve customer confidence in the registry agent network that we have, and I believe that Bill 9 will do that.

5:30

In the last number of years there has been growing public concern over the security and integrity of the private information system. In a survey commissioned by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, it was found that privacy protection is a serious issue with Albertans. Most Albertans support the importance of protecting the privacy of their personal information, and many are already taking steps to do so themselves. This survey indicates that 74 per cent of Albertans felt it was very important that the private information they provide to government registries be protected.

The proposed changes to the act indicate that the government takes the privacy of Albertans' personal information very seriously, and therefore increased accountability measures for registry agents are being implemented in order for Albertans' personal information to continue to remain safe. I feel these amendments are necessary

in order to continue to increase public confidence in the registry agent network, and therefore I support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on it this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that we adjourn debate on Bill 9.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10

Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, and to support this important piece of legislation through second reading and the remainder of the legislative process. Bill 10 is a good piece of legislation, that is needed in Alberta. It is needed to help ensure a minimum level of accommodation and accommodation services in the province's supportive living facilities, to place additional emphasis on areas that impact residents' security and safety.

The new act clearly defines supportive living, which is a new and evolving concept that provides support to individuals, allowing them to live as independently as possible while they continue to receive the services they need. The act provides direct authority for Seniors and Community Supports to carry out the full range of activities associated with licensing supportive living facilities, which includes monitoring, compliance management, and investigating complaints of noncompliance with the legislation.

The new legislation moves forward, builds on and improves existing legislation that requires updating to address the licensing needs of today, to reflect the changing needs of residents in supportive living facilities, and to promote and help ensure the safety and security of residents in these facilities. The legislation is also a critical step to promote the aging in the right place concept. This approach helps seniors to stay in the communities they helped build and develop, close to their friends and family, their very important support system.

This legislation is about being responsive to the needs of today while we continue to prepare for the future. It's about having modern legislation that recognizes that changing times require innovative solutions, solutions that help meet the needs of an aging and diverse population in an industry that continues to grow. This legislation reflects the priorities of our government to increase the quality of life in our communities and assist our most vulnerable citizens. This new legislation supports the mandate of the Seniors and Community Supports ministry: specifically, to improve the quality, supply, and client choices in the continuing care system.

I strongly recommend that all members support the passing of Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a

delight to be able to stand up and speak to this very necessary bill. It's particularly of personal interest to me because of my background in geriatrics and also because I sat on the MLA task force and have worked fairly closely with the minister as this bill has gone forward. I certainly thank her for including me in some of the discussions as this came forward because I do believe that there's a good piece of work here. There are a couple of things that I have concerns about and will bring them forward at this time.

Certainly, as my colleague previously has stated, the important thing is that people can age in place, that they're in the proper place at the proper time. I always like to add a little adjunct to that to say that I not only want them to age in place but that they could live out their lives in that place with respect and dignity and, certainly, safety. This is what this bill is accommodating. It isn't accommodating on the care side. This is strictly about the accommodations that they live in and how they are treated and how they are protected in these accommodations.

It gives the ability to license – in fact, these places will have to be licensed – but it also gives monitoring ability so that the government can go in and will be allowed to go in unannounced. I think that's very important because I think we've all worked at different jobs where, when we found out the inspectors were coming, the place was spic and span by the time the inspectors got there. So I think that that's a very important part of this bill. There's certainly an accommodation in here where people can come forward with complaints. As I've mentioned, it really is a huge step forward to be able to have inspections, investigations, and complaints all under one piece of legislation.

One of my problems is that I believe there's too much leeway left to the regulation regarding what is exempt from the application of the act. There are issues around how a complaints officer may dismiss a complaint. It's section 10(3). I believe it's just too subjective that one person, the complaints officer, can actually stop the complaint going forward to an investigator based on just that one person's assessment of what the situation is. I understand, of course, that there will be criteria. It was mainly put in to be able to sidetrack or be able to stop vexatious or frivolous complaints, and I can understand that. But I still think that the power that is given the complaints officer under section 10(3) is too subjective.

The other concern that I would have is that in section 17 they are using the words "peace officer." When this complaint should go forward, they have the ability, it says, for "any peace officer to assist the director." I would like that to say police officer, not peace officer. I believe that some of these things could well end up being criminal, and I think that if it was given to a police officer, it doesn't move through the system quickly enough. Unfortunately, when we deal with this segment of the population, they often pass on, and the problem, of course, is now dead, so to speak, and it never goes forward. There are many complaints that I think are not heard because of that reason. I think that by giving it to a police officer, it elongates the period when these complaints would be handled. That would be my concern there.

5:40

Under 24, regulations, some of these can be made exempt, and I believe that it should be in the legislation. This power of exemption should not be in regulations alone.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my place, but those are my concerns at this point in time. The general point to be made is that the shift from legislation to regulation lacks the public oversight that I believe some of these complaints should come under.

I would like to reiterate that I think it's a bill that's certainly important, certainly has been a long time coming. As I've said, I

think the minister has done a very good job of working on this. The information had, of course, been taken out of some of the work that we had done on the MLA task force.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn Bill 10.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise before this Assembly and move Bill 11, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009.

Fish are an important sustainable natural resource, and they belong to all of us. Fish and fishing provide us with many social, recreational, and economic benefits, like I've explained to the minister of parks and tourism many times. Consequently, there's a great demand for this limited resource. Alberta has only about 1,500 fish-bearing streams and 1,100 lakes. As a result, very careful management is required to balance the use by the estimated 300,000 anglers, 160 commercial fisheries – that's a lot – and 2,000 domestic or food fishers, as some may call them, competing for fish in provincial waters.

Fishery stakeholder groups and the public have let us know that they expect tougher penalties to deal with those who break our fisheries management laws. Mr. Speaker, this amendment is about providing stronger protection for our fish resources and more effective deterrents against actions that damage our fisheries. At present the act limits the court's ability to impose penalties other than fines and short licence suspensions. Fines from convictions, which are directly directed to the general revenue fund, are not adequate to cover the cost of restoring lost fisheries, and all the cost is currently being borne by the government and the fishery stakeholder groups.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments would add creative sentencing provisions to strengthen our compliance program. For many years the courts have been successfully using creative sentencing under the Wildlife Act and the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to deal with serious offenders. For example, through creative sentencing offenders have been ordered to report their subsequent hunting activities or make payments to the minister's programs for wildlife conservation.

The amendments to the Fisheries (Alberta) Act will follow existing creative sentencing models. Creative sentencing options will include issuing orders to stop new offences, suspending or cancelling licences, and ordering restoration actions. Through creative sentencing offenders could also be ordered to make additional monetary payments to fisheries management or habitat enhancement programs. Mr. Speaker, not only will this creative sentencing allow the courts to better match the punishment for an offence; it will also allow government to direct payments for repairing damages to fish and their habitat.

For example, ongoing court proceedings involve numerous serious Fisheries (Alberta) Act violations resulting from a successful undercover operation in the Lac La Biche and Athabasca areas. Some trials have resulted in convictions. There have been 10 accused persons convicted as a result of this investigation, who have been fined a total of \$140,000, Mr. Speaker. If creative sentencing were available, a portion of that amount or an additional amount could be assessed in the form of an order for payment to support fisheries management programs. In addition, orders could be issued

to the convicted persons requiring that they report future fishing activities.

Mr. Speaker, creative sentencing will also help deter the illegal stocking of fish. Estimates to restore trout fisheries affected by illegal stocking of perch have ranged from \$100,000 to \$500,000 depending on the size and complexity of the water body. As I stated earlier, fines from convictions which are directed to the general revenue fund are not adequate to cover the cost of restoring lost fisheries. All of the cost is currently being borne by the government and the fishery stakeholder groups. For example, the costs for the last proposed rehab project in southern Alberta were estimated at more than \$75,000 for purchasing chemicals and treatment for cleaning up the resulting fish kill. This was for a small trout fishery that had been illegally stocked with perch.

We would be mistaken to think that this is a small problem, Mr. Speaker. As of 2008 there were 28 stocked trout lakes that were victims of unwanted perch introductions. Creative sentencing would introduce an option to order an offender to pay the full cost to re-create the stocked fishery as it was prior to the illegal fish introduction.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the amendments will also provide for automatic forfeiture of seized items. An example would be if a person who was unfamiliar with the regulations was found fishing in a stream that was closed to all fishing during the spawning season. The officer could seize the fish that were caught illegally, issue the warning, and then dispose of the fish to a needy person. Disposal of the fish would ultimately be reported to a justice, but a justice order for their forfeiture and disposal would not be required in advance. As another example of automatic forfeiture, illegal fish or equipment could automatically be forfeited when an officer issues a specified penalty ticket and the accused person pleads guilty by paying the specified fine without appearing before a justice. Again, forfeiture is carried out without it having to be brought before a justice.

These amendments would ensure that our fisheries legislation meets with public expectations and better equips the courts to protect our fishery resources. Most importantly, through these amendments Albertans will continue to see high-quality fishing opportunities. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I thank the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development for taking the initiative to allow me to move this bill.

Thank you, sir.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to rise in support of this bill, that will have more punitive penalties for fisheries violations and will equip the courts to include penalties that can fine offenders to return fisheries back to a healthy state, which are both good things. I applaud both the minister and the mover for their excellent work in bringing this bill.

It was also highlighted earlier that probably the need for this bill stems from the fact that Alberta's fish stocks have been declining steadily since 2000, probably a lot earlier than that but let's just say since 2000. The main reason for this has been overfishing and the loss of fish habitat due to the rapid development that has taken place in the last nine years. This bill hopes to address the issues of overfishing by introducing these punitive measures to discourage overfishing. In the event that an angler is charged under the Fisheries Act, strict penalties are introduced. Essentially, this serves as a deterrent. We all know that sometimes a deterrent or getting a slap on the wrist or the whole thing keeps people in line.

5:50

If you look at this, there are severe pressures in Alberta that affect the fish population. Alberta has only about 1,500 fish-bearing streams and 1,100 lakes, as was mentioned earlier by the mover of the bill. So careful management is one of those necessary steps that has to happen with Alberta. As also indicated in some of the recent literature coming out of sustainable resources, we're also entering a bit of a tipping point where we possibly are reaching Alberta's capacity to carry both our population as well as our wildlife. We really have to manage that going forward, recognizing that there's only so much land for us to live on and that that's for us and our animals and our fish and all the populations of Alberta.

This is a much-needed step. Probably we'll need to have it monitored whether these penalties are doing a good job in keeping people away from overfishing and destroying our fish stock.

Let's also look at some other factors that are contributing to the declining fish stocks. Besides overfishing, there are other factors that can contribute to fish mortality. For instance, runoff from septic tanks and overfertilization can lead to what is referred to as summer kill. Basically, this is where contamination causes algae blooms in a lake, and where algae die, micro-organisms break down the algae in a process that requires oxygen. If enough dissolved oxygen is removed from the water, an oxygen deficit occurs, causing aquatic organisms to suffocate.

Now, that was a long definition, but nonetheless, I think it brings home a point that it's not just overfishing; it's our entire use of our industrial land mass that is causing some of the decline in fish stocks. Again, it's our recognition here in Alberta that we probably have reached a tipping point and that more stewardship is going to be needed to protect both fish and wildlife from, I guess, man's incursion into their typical regions.

Damaging land-use practices can also cause destruction of habitat, such as altering shorelines and creating sand beaches, and that can reduce the amount and quality of fish spawning and rearing habitat. Again, this has been due to the rapid development in Alberta. This, too, will need to be managed going forward. We see some of that happening in the land-use management, which I note does have some timelines and, hopefully, some teeth to it when it does fully get implemented. It could really serve Albertans well.

Without going too much further into this, I can say that I am pleased to speak in favour of this bill. It goes a long way to trying to keep our rivers, streams, and definitely our fish . . .

Ms Blakeman: Healthy and strong.

Mr. Hehr: Healthy and strong, yes. There we go.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With that, I would adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 12, 2009

Issue 14

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (L)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 12, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all my colleagues a wonderful group of students, their parents, and a teacher from the Morrin school, which is situated in the west side of my constituency, just north of Drumheller, a proud, proud community. Over the years I have been able to attend some graduations there, and it's an amazing school and some amazing students. They're very proud of their school, proud of their heritage. They have a sod house, actually, in the town of Morrin that celebrates the pioneer spirit from the area. There are 22 grade six students who are led by their teacher today, Mr. Harvey Saltys, and their parents – there's one grandparent in this list, and I defy you to pick her out – Kandice Adams, Kendra Kiemele, Melanie Nelson, Lisa Wolf, Jolynn Kopjar, Leanne Framingham, Jo'Ann Telford, and Tami Lawrence. I invite you and all members of the Assembly to greet these people as they rise.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you have two introductions to do?

Ms Blakeman: Indeed I do, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted that I have two introductions today. The first introduction I'd like to make to you and through you to all members of the Assembly are two people who are very special to one of our pages, Kelsy Edgerton. The first person is Janet Edgerton, who is one of those moms that you see driving back and forth in their minivan taking their wonderful children to many different activities. Well, I want to note that Janet is also literally a lifesaver. She has now passed the 150 mark in the number of times she has donated blood. [some applause] Thank you for that. With her is her youngest daughter, Amber. Amber is a student at Windsor Park school and is also a really good downhill racer. She should be because she has been doing it since she was four. Both Janet and Amber are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second introduction is to a wonderful group of seniors, but a pretty active bunch of inquiring minds is a better way to describe this group who are joining me from Minerva studies, which is housed in the Grant MacEwan Community College in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We have 13 visitors who are with the Minerva group, which is essentially a study group, and they're seated in the public gallery. I would ask them all to please rise and accept a rousing good welcome from the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 19 hard-working members of the Alberta Health and Wellness staff, who are here as part of a public service orientation tour. I don't think that we get the opportunity often enough to thank those who work for us on a daily basis. I would ask members if they would please welcome our 19 guests in the members' gallery today. I'd ask them to stand.

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

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past year staff from Housing and Urban Affairs have worked very hard to administer our homeless and affordable housing programs, and they've made a real difference in the lives of some of our most vulnerable people. I can tell you that they've done a fantastic job, and I'm just very proud of what they've accomplished. This is the first anniversary of our Premier's creation of the Housing and Urban Affairs department. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Marcia Nelson, deputy minister; Mike Leathwood, assistant deputy minister; Line Porfon, executive director of policy and urban affairs; and Faye Rault, executive director of corporate services. Barb Korol is here as well, our director of communications. I would ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very special Albertans: two Albertans with disabilities and their service dogs, trainers, and a dog in training. Someone once said that dogs are not our whole life, but they can make our lives whole, and I'm sure that the people in the gallery that I'm introducing to you today would agree with that statement. The Alberta government is continually trying to improve the lives of the most vulnerable Albertans, and the new Service Dogs Act is just one of the ways that we are doing this. I would like to introduce to you Larry Pempeit and his dog, Charly; Greg Carrier and his dog, Chase; John Wheelwright, executive director for Dogs with Wings; Elisa Irlam, director of training at Dogs with Wings; and Everest, a service dog in training. Our guests are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise or give a wave and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly nine University of Calgary students and their instructor. They're on a field trip to the Legislature today as part of their political science course in electoral behaviour. Their names are Shadi Abuid, Danon Danesh, Leah Fawcett, Tierney Fitzgerald, Dustin Franks, Daniel Greig, Kathryn Kitchen, Nicolas Krause, and Tessa LaBastide. They're here with a good friend of mine and their instructor, Keith Archer. Dr. Archer and I worked together for 20 years at the University of Calgary. Somehow he ended up teaching at the Banff school, and I ended up in Edmonton. Please rise and receive this Assembly's traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a unique group of individuals who are visiting the Legislature today. The Palliser Triangle management group is made up of young farmers who meet regularly to share ideas and discuss things that impact all of them. Discussions regarding marketing, new varieties, commodities, and best practices are routinely brought up. They're on a three-day tour of this area, and this morning in particular they toured the Leduc incubator. Following that they came to this Legislature Building to meet with individuals from the department of agriculture. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and stay standing as I call their names: Gerard Oosterhuis, John Van Tryp, John Hopkins, George Poole, Ard Oldenzijl, David Geldreich, Koos Wysbeek, and Cory Nelson. I would ask the Assembly to greet them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to this House a group of leaders of Alberta francophone multicultural groups. Alberta's Francophonie has grown significantly in the past 10 years, and although French-speaking Albertans share one common language, they represent more than 30 different cultures. Francophones contribute to our province's ability to be welcoming and inclusive communities through francophone settlement and integration agencies, youth centres, and a variety of integration projects aimed at raising awareness and fostering greater intercultural dialogue.

1:40

I would like to ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: members of the French-Canadian association of Alberta's strategic committee on immigration, including Mr. Gérard Bissonnette, president; Mrs. Marie Rose Bukuba; and Mrs. Ida Kamariza. Accompanying them are Mr. Lundja Okuka, director of the francophone multicultural association of Alberta; Mr. Georges Bahaya, director of Edmonton's francophone settlement agency; and Mr. Luketa M'Pindou, co-ordinator with the society of French-speaking immigrant youth and families. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have guests that I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. These guests have come to visit the Assembly this afternoon to observe the proceedings and express their concern about the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act. These individuals are Bill Pelech, Mary Pelech, Irene Stein, David Doull, Darrell Clarkson, May Opstad, Albert Opstad, Louis Adria, Ruth Maria Adria, Pauline Bizuk, John Bizuk, and Terry Hufnagel. They're all in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Eighth Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, eight years ago today, on March 12, 2001, a provincial election was held in the province of Alberta. At

that time 11 members who are currently members today were elected to this Assembly for the first time. Would you join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and our Minister of Transportation, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul and our Minister of Municipal Affairs, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and the President of the Treasury Board, the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace and our Minister of Employment and Immigration, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and our Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky and our Minister of Energy, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, who also serves as the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and the distinguished members for Calgary-Bow, Edmonton-Castle Downs, Whitecourt-St. Anne, and Edmonton-Riverview. Happy anniversary; it's eight years. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has been around the circuit twice.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games

Mr. Allred: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to recognize that today represents the one-year countdown to the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games. Next year from March 12 to 21 approximately 1,350 of the world's best Paralympic winter athletes from 40 countries will compete in five events.

We all know about the stories of Olympic heroes like Alberta's Beckie Scott, and we often refer to athletes like Wayne Gretzky and Tiger Woods as people we look up to. I would like to add a few more names to the list of athletes we admire, Paralympic athletes with inspiring stories of courage, hope, and accomplishment, people like Edmonton's Matt Cook, a sledge hockey player who lost both legs to cancer and had surgery to remove a cancerous spot in his lungs, or 60-year-old Bruno Yizek from Cardston, a paraplegic who is one of the top wheelchair curlers in the country, and Calgary's Brian McKeever, a world-ranked blind cross-country skier who is seeking to compete in both the Paralympic and the Olympic Winter Games. These athletes are among the eight Albertans seeking to represent Canada at the Vancouver 2010 Paralympic Winter Games.

Mr. Speaker, I commend these athletes and others for their quest to be Paralympians and for showing Albertans the possibility of achieving one's goal in any situation. I ask the members of this Assembly to join me in saluting all of our Alberta-based Paralympic athletes, who train so hard to achieve their dreams and to make us proud.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Legislation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors from across the province have expressed their concerns regarding the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act. The intent of the act is to ensure that seniors can enjoy their golden years, for which they've worked so hard.

Recently, a group of seniors met at the Old Timers' Cabin to discuss the act and reveal serious flaws in it. They claim that section 103, for example, gives courts the ability to compel seniors to undergo capacity assessment, whether they agree to such an assessment or not. This is an assault on the human dignity of seniors. I hope that when I'm 70 or 80 years old and I tell a

government psychologist to get off my lawn because I don't feel like being analyzed, he or she will respect that demand. This act could rob seniors of that fundamental right.

Under the act seniors can be assessed in their absence. Imagine the idea of a stranger determining whether or not you're competent to take care of yourself without any kind of assessment at all, determining your fate at a distance without your consent.

They also revealed that any interested person can apply for the guardianship of any senior. Imagine a disenchanted relative taking guardianship in bad faith. Imagine the consequences for the senior. Why should the state have the power to place one citizen at the mercy of another without proper checks and balances? Perhaps worst of all, there is no ironclad guarantee of right to counsel.

This act must be re-examined by this House. There are seniors who can no longer take care of themselves, and we do need a process that puts legal guardians in place for those newly dependent adults. As the legislation stands, the potential exists to strip away the human rights of seniors who retain or regain their mental capacity.

I urge this government to please reconsider this legislation in order to return dignity and human rights to the men and women who have spent their lives building the province. They deserve no less.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Doug Spurgeon

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some Friday the 13th is a day of caution, reluctance, anxiety, and sometimes fear. However, in my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake this Friday the 13th is a day of excitement, celebration, and tribute because one of our local heroes, a radio show host, is celebrating four years since his arrival in High Prairie at The Fox radio station. That's Doug Spurgeon.

Radio hosts have always come and gone in most areas; in our town, gone usually in a short time, three months, six months, never staying longer. Not our Doug. In fact, rumour has it that he wants to stay in High Prairie forever, and we want him to stay. We want him to stay not only because he has one of the greatest and sexiest voices on air, but he spends his personal time volunteering with the RCMP, Métis settlements, various towns, First Nations, and nonprofit organizations. In fact, last year when he found out that the food bank was in trouble, he and his good friend Brian Holmberg brought in 6,000 pounds of food and \$8,000 in cash in four days. They worked day and night. There was no sleep for dear old Doug.

This sweet, sweet man takes every opportunity he can to showcase and promote the people and organizations that form the fabric of the High Prairie region. As you can see, Doug recognizes the importance of community involvement and takes his position with The Fox as an opportunity, an opportunity to connect all people of the High Prairie region to each other as they build on strengthening the foundation of our communities.

Doug, as our friend, thank you for all the work that you have done in our communities. We want you to stay longer and to continue to make a difference in our world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Today, March 12, is the anniversary of his arrival in this world, so join me in congratulating the hon. MLA for Stony Plain, the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Happy birthday.

Congratulations, too, to two of our members who were also

elected in 2001 but haven't gone that eight years yet: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. Congratulations to both of you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Disclosure of Information on Environmental Charges

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's office is clearly involved in information suppression concerning the 90 charges laid against Suncor. The Public Affairs Bureau, which reports to the Premier, chose to enforce a policy to not inform the public at the time that these charges were laid, thereby avoiding an election campaign controversy and leaving the public uninformed. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier accept responsibility for the actions of the staff and admit the obvious, that there was political meddling in the public's right to know?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment will answer this question.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I just had a discussion with the media outside. As I indicated to them yesterday, I was under the impression that there was, in fact, a process for advising the public and the media any time charges were laid as a result of an investigation. I subsequently found out that there is a long-standing policy in Alberta Environment, that was put there by a minister previous to me, that is to the contrary, that disclosure does not come until after the court case has been decided. I also just advised the media that I made a decision yesterday afternoon and have advised my staff to the same, that that policy shall be revised immediately, and in the future there will be disclosure and transparency.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the Public Affairs Bureau wants the public to know something, it tells the world. Witness the hoopla over the charges that were laid over the 500 ducks. But when the government wants to keep it a secret, its lips are sealed, even from its own MLAs. Again to the Premier: who in the Premier's office enforced that policy to not let people know what was happening in their own community? Who was responsible for burying this issue?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the minister explained, nobody was responsible for holding back any information. There was a policy in place. In fact, quite frankly, when the issue with Syncrude came up, we probably broke the policy that the Department of Environment had. I wasn't aware of the policy, and the minister wasn't aware, but now in keeping with openness and transparency, we'll change the policy. When any issues like that come up, they'll be made public as soon as we can, as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Going back to the Premier again: given that the Crown has to be pretty certain of its success before it is encouraged to lay any kind of charges, why would the government choose a policy to not disclose, to hide information in other words, especially information that was available around an election campaign? Why would you choose a policy to not disclose on water contamination until the conclusion of a court case? That runs contrary to why you send a Crown prosecutor out there.

Mr. Stelmach: The member is going in circles. Actually, they keep going to the election and saying that this was for some reason suppressed. Documents are public. Any time there is a charge laid, those documents are public.

The fact is that during a campaign there is a firewall between the government and the people operating the government during that period of time, and that's the way to do it. They followed the policy that was in Environment. You know, this is I don't know how many days now that the opposition is pointing to factors other than their very own issue of not being able to win the trust and confidence of Albertans, and that's why they're in the position they're in. They lost a whole bunch of members, both of those parties, because they didn't gain the trust and confidence.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Environmental Monitoring and Self-reporting

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Albertans expect a government to be open and transparent, and Albertans expect answers, especially in cases of water contamination. Albertans are not getting that here in this Assembly, and the public's right to vital information about their water has been violated. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. People living downstream from the oil sands have been subjected to oil and grease spills, to tailings ponds leaks, and inadequately treated sewage. Can the minister explain how any of these fit into his oft-repeated mantra: "That's okay; this is a naturally occurring process"?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the incident that led to this question is the matter of a case before the courts, so I cannot talk about the details specific to this.

Let me be very, very clear to this member and to all members of this House. There are two separate issues that need to be dealt with. One is to advise and be sure that anyone possibly influenced by downstream is informed when an incident takes place. Whether or not charges are laid subsequent to that is something entirely different. And they were informed when the incident took place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, to the same minister. Yesterday the minister stated that water contamination near Calling Lake was not groundwater but, rather, surface contamination, but his department's own press release states: high levels of chlorine in the groundwater as a result of the contamination. So which is it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this instance has to do with contamination within an industrial site. There are wells that have been ordered as part of the compliance order to determine whether there is any need for further containment and also to delineate where the contamination took place. The fact is that this is leaching from the surface. We have concern that it could perhaps get into the groundwater, but at this point there's nothing to indicate that anything has left the property itself.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah, right, because water doesn't flow anywhere.

Back to the same minister: given that the government's wholehearted support of industry self-reporting is clearly resulting in significant delays in the public getting information on spills, leaks,

and releases in their water sources, will the minister move immediately to a system of government monitoring and enforcement?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if there were sufficient resources and people to have a policeman on every corner. We don't have that luxury, and in some cases, frankly, I'm not so sure that it would be a better world if we did. The fact of the matter is that we rely upon individuals being honest in order to maintain society. You gave the example the other day that we rely on individuals to be honest on their tax returns. We audit them from time to time, and when we find that they're not, we come down very hard on them. When we find that people are not reporting appropriately, we come down very hard on them as well.

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

Effects of Economic Downturn

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about the economic downturn in here, we talk a lot about dollars and percentages and statistics and projections, but the downturn is really about people and how their government plans to help them get through what RBC is forecasting will be the sharpest contraction of all the provincial economies this year. To the Premier: within the context of the dollars he has to work with – I'm not asking for additional funding; I'm asking for some reallocation – what is the Premier prepared to do to protect our seniors, many of whom have seen a good chunk of their retirement savings evaporate?

Mr. Stelmach: The member raises a good point, and that is that many of our seniors that have been retired for a while or just recently retired within a few months or maybe just looking at retirement this year have seen a good portion of their investments diminish considerably, whether they be RSPs or other investments. As mentioned in this House before, our budget will be working to reflect the most vulnerable in terms of programs and do what we can to support those that have seen a considerable reduction in their investments over the last number of months.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, given that you have to anticipate that students will have a harder time finding well-paying jobs this summer and that knowledge is the key to our long-term prosperity, what is the Premier prepared to do about the cost of postsecondary education so our students don't have to go deep into debt to get one?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said, part of our plan is to support both secondary and postsecondary education. There will be details in the budget coming forward on April 7 which will deal with all of these matters.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some of the first people to lose their jobs are the lower skilled working poor, who were some of the last people hired during the boom, what is the Premier prepared to do to help them cope? Or is it back to shelters and food banks for them?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, this is the conundrum that the member is going to have. When you have a limited amount of

revenue, you try to look at all of the needs within the province and decide which part is the most vulnerable, requires the most help. I'm sure that as the budget is delivered on April 7, he will be able to participate in that debate and impart some of his wisdom on where some of these dollars should go.

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

Auditor General Office Funding

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General needs a mere \$2 million to carry out planned audits that could save taxpayers many millions more. Just last October he identified \$25 million in oil and gas royalties that were not collected. This \$2 million that he needs is the best investment government can make, and by denying the Auditor General proper funding, the Premier is creating a false economy. My question is to the Premier. Why won't you make the smart choice and give the Auditor General the \$2 million additional that he needs to do his job?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the office of the Auditor General is, obviously, an office of the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly receives a budget. The committee that's been put together, of course, through a motion of this House will make the decisions on how the money that is coming to the Legislative Assembly will be divvied up amongst the many legislative offices.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's evident to anyone who watches closely that a government policy with respect to budget guidelines for these offices is being implemented. The Auditor General will be unable to complete his audit plan. In his 2003 report he identified up to \$4 million given to contractors who didn't provide the services they promised to people with disabilities. My question is to the Premier. Since giving the Auditor General the \$2 million he needs to complete his full audit program could save taxpayers many more millions, why doesn't the government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, on March 4 as part of supplementary supply the office received an additional \$750,000, so there was an increase in the budget. It's incorrect to say that he has not received any additional in-year revenue going to his department. That's incorrect on behalf of that member.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I didn't say that. He needs \$2 million more than the government is prepared to give him. The following audits will be deferred or cancelled: water quality, food safety, infection control, child care, persons with developmental disabilities, and 22 others. How can this Premier claim to be a smart spender when he sanctions the waste of millions of tax dollars by refusing to properly fund the Auditor General?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, according to Leg. Offices the Auditor General has the money in place to do the audits that had been specified but, you know, a \$750,000 increase mid-year. I believe this House decided to support the third party. We are supporting them in office budget based on a membership of four. There are only two. I don't know how much money that is. I thought it was around \$350,000. I may be wrong. Maybe he wants to take that money out of his budget and give it to the Auditor General.

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about a Legislative Committee

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is question period. This has to do with government policy, and I as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta need to make a clarification for anybody out there who may be listening. This Assembly creates a number of all-party committees called legislative committees. There is such a committee called Legislative Offices. It's chaired by a member of this Assembly. It has representation from all parties in this Assembly. That committee determines the budget of all the legislative officers, which includes the Auditor General, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Ethics Commissioner, the right-to-privacy commissioner, and the Ombudsman.

Should it come to pass that the government is influencing any member of that committee as to what they have to do, then that would offer that particular member an opportunity to stand in this Assembly and raise a very distinguished and serious point about interference. To my knowledge this has never happened since I have been the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and I as the chair of the Members' Services Committee know this has certainly never happened to the chairman of that committee.

To suggest that it's the government that's setting the budgets for the Legislative Offices Committee begets the importance of the Legislative Assembly and denigrates the Legislative Assembly. As the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I cannot allow that to happen. So I want everybody to be very, very cautious about this line of questioning, which leads to nothing but innuendo. Innuendo is not what we're about; truth is what we're about.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect . . .

The Speaker: No. There's no point of order or anything else. The Speaker made a statement.

The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Service Dogs

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I was very happy to see the proclamation of the Service Dogs Act January 1 of this year. It's, I think, a great example of proactive steps that our government has been taking to help Albertans with service dogs. I actually have a number of constituents who had been waiting for this legislation. Now, of course, they're looking for more information. I'm wondering if the minister might just describe some of the benefits that this act provides to Albertans with service dogs.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is committed to assisting Albertans with disabilities. The Service Dogs Act ensures that Albertans with disabilities who use a qualified service dog are guaranteed access to all places open to the public. This includes buses, taxis, restaurants, and even the Alberta Legislature. These are the same rights awarded to individuals with visual impairments who use guide dogs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the same minister. There are always, of course, detailed questions that come up. For example, in my constituency I have a constituent who has a service dog, but it's not certified. I'm getting some questions: how do we know

when a dog is properly trained for the safety of the person who needs it? On the other hand, how do we know when there's no issue of public safety? Are there minimum standards, and what's the process for certification?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there is a comprehensive training process to certify service dogs, which takes approximately six months. During this time they're trained daily and receive between 120 and 360 hours of training from an accredited school. For service dogs that have not been formally trained by an assistance dogs internationally accredited school, the province is establishing a pilot project to assess and determine if service dogs trained by other schools or their owners can be certified. With the training and pilot project as well as an application process for service dog owners to obtain ID cards . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, time is short. This is a good act, which has lots of good elements to it, so in the interest of just educating our members and members of the public, I'd like to offer the minister the opportunity to just expand a little bit on what benefits this provides.

Mrs. Jablonski: With the training and pilot project as well as an application process for service dog owners to obtain ID cards, Albertans can be assured that these dogs are properly trained to both assist their owners and not pose a risk to the public.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out that these service dogs are especially trained to assist individuals with disabilities in everyday activities. For example, Charly is here with Larry, two guests that I introduced earlier today. Charly helps Larry by picking things up for him and retrieving things. Greg is here with his dog, Chase. Chase helps Greg by giving him balance and stability. So this is a great act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Long-term Care for Rural Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health dodged my questions regarding the future of long-term care for seniors in rural Alberta. The minister says: wait for the budget. However, hundreds of seniors are at home or in acute-care beds waiting to get into long-term care placement. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: again, what commitment is the minister willing to make to rural seniors so that when they need long-term care, they will not be moved from their family and community?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there hasn't been any dodge in anything. I've been very clear in this House that what we need to do is a better job of ensuring that our senior patients have the kind and quality of care that best meets their needs. I think that in the budget we will be bringing forward you will see some initiatives so that, hopefully, we can provide care and not necessarily just provide facilities that we have to have seniors move out of their community to reside in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:10

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The goal of the continuing care strategy is to "encourage non-profit and private investment in

the development and operation of long-term care facilities." Will the minister include a provision so that a percentage of those encouraged facilities will be in rural Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: One of the options that we're looking at, Mr. Speaker, is working with the nonprofit and private sectors to say: how can we together have the facilities, whether they're long-term care, whether they're assisted living, daily assisted living, or designated assisted living, where it meets the need? I would suggest that there's really no differentiation between rural, urban, Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge. We need to have the facilities where the need is.

Ms Pastoor: Well, Mr. Minister, there really is a huge need in the rural area.

My next question would be to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Helping seniors, especially rural seniors, stay in their communities is an integral part of the continuing care strategy. In the 2007-2008 annual report rural affordable supportive living was unspent by \$3.7 million. Could the minister explain why?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the member across the way that having assisted living facilities in our rural areas is very important, and we are trying to focus on that. All the money has been appointed. There have been delays in construction, and this is because of delays in receiving permits. The availability of construction personnel delayed the start of construction on some of the projects. It's necessary to understand that at the beginning of a project we only give out half of the money, and we don't give the rest of the money until halfway through and at the end of the project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Foster Care

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been much discussion recently in this House and in the media about the supports and services that the government provides to foster parents and foster children. Foster parents are a critical part of any successful foster care system because they care for some of our most vulnerable children and youth. I was privileged to recently attend the Crossroads Family Services celebration, where many foster parents from my constituency and other areas were recognized for many years of dedicated fostering. I believe it is critical that we support these dedicated men and women.

The Speaker: I'd sure like to know what the question is.

Mr. Rogers: I'm getting to that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, you're running out of time.

Mr. Rogers: Okay. My question is to the minister of children's services. Can the minister advise the House what types of supports are provided to foster parents in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you it's a priority of ours to give foster parents the appropriate supports, and while provinces report differently, I understand that we do rank among one of the highest in Canada. Our financial reports can be found on our website. They vary depending on the age of the child, skill level of

the parent. I think the average is just over \$1,400 per month per child as well as some recreation and vacation allowances. In addition, we know that every child and every foster family is unique and that they have different needs and different resources and capacities. We also have available assistance with child care costs, equipment, in-home assistance, mentorship, and training.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that level 1 foster parents can have up to two children in their home, level 2 foster parents can care for up to four, and that in the first year new foster parents can only care for no more than two. Can the minister explain how often and under what circumstances there could be more than four children in a foster home?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we have around 2,300 foster homes in Alberta, and our average is two foster children per home. Of the 2,300 foster homes about 120 of them are licensed to have more than four children. In order to be licensed, certain criteria have to be met. Obviously, there has to be a desire on behalf of the parents to want additional children. As well, we have minimum standards in terms of skills and training and capacity. They have to have an appropriate home environment and proper supports in place. I can say that larger home placements work really well in a number of situations, including accommodating siblings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: Madam Minister, what kind of success are you seeing with your ongoing foster parent and aboriginal caregiver recruitment program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we're seeing great success. Since the launch of the recruitment campaign in October we have approved 234 foster homes and kinship care homes. I think a lot of this success has been due to some really innovative approaches taken by staff in our communities as well as others, like the Member for Calgary-Montrose, who just this past weekend hosted an information session in Calgary with over a hundred attendees, which is wonderful. We're going to continue with this campaign. We all know that the more foster parents we have, the better able we'll be able to match children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary students in Alberta pay the fourth-highest tuition fees in the country despite a promise by this government four years ago that Alberta's tuition would be the most affordable. At the University of Calgary tuition will be increasing by another 4 per cent this year. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: having failed to keep the promise to Alberta's postsecondary students, what does the minister have to say to those students who have to take on additional work, reduce their course load, drop out, or who can't afford to attend in the first place?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have one of the most beneficial student finance and student assistance programs in the country. I think the member has obviously been chatting with the CAUS students who were making the rounds of MLA offices this week, and I encourage them to do so. In fact, I met with them earlier this week. We had a very open and frank discussion about the world economy and what was happening with some reports generated out of eastern Canada touting a possible 25 per cent increase in tuition. I gave them the commitment that our policy of capping tuition at CPI was not changing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The best investment we could possibly make, whether in a recession or during a boom, is in postsecondary education. One of the biggest costs for students is housing. With low vacancy rates and high rents many students cannot afford accommodation. The very limited residences at Alberta's universities and colleges are full, forcing 90 per cent of students to look for accommodation elsewhere. When will the minister be building new resident spaces which will provide students with affordable and safe places to live?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm curious whether the hon. member has been away the past few weeks because in the city which he represents, they've recently announced some 600 new spaces by the University of Calgary. We are the backstop for those residences. The government of Alberta does actually backstop the borrowing for those residences.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that I agree with the hon. member. Investment in postsecondary is the best investment that either the government or the student can make.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The new residences of which the minister speaks will not increase the ability to house only 7.4 per cent of University of Calgary students on campus. Eastern campuses on average are able to accommodate 21 per cent of their students. We can do better; we have to. For many students who rely on student loans to finance their studies, the expected parental contribution reduces their ability to access support. This is magnified in this economic downturn, with many families not able to afford the expense. When will the minister make changes to the student loan system to reduce the requirements for parental contributions, making it easier for students to access student loans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm curious about where the hon. member has been. We actually dealt with this question in this House a couple of days ago, and I would encourage the hon. member to review *Hansard* for his answer regarding parental contributions. I would also like to advise the hon. member, if he wasn't aware – and I recognize he's not the critic for the department – that the student finance system is a national system: 60 per cent federal government, 40 per cent provincial government. In order for us to make drastic changes – granted, Alberta has stepped out on its own in a number of areas, but it is a national system – we'd have to have federal government support.

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

Changes to Building and Fire Codes

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's devastating MacEwan fire in 2007 highlighted the importance of fire safety. In 2008 this government committed to take action to help protect Albertans from high-intensity fires. Today it was announced that the province is updating its building and fire safety codes. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs please explain what the new building codes changes are and when they are coming into effect?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The updated building codes will make Albertans safer from fire. Also, the building codes come into effect on May 3 of this year. They are going to include fire-resistant requirements for buildings that are built close to each other or close to property lines. Also, there will be new sprinkler systems for multifamily units and fire-resistant requirements for homes with attached garages.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Yes. My second question is for the same minister. Exactly how will these updated codes reduce the occurrence and severity of these fires?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, these changes buy time for people to get out of their home and also for firefighters to respond. These new codes prevent the spread of fire. I want to say that when you prevent the spread of fire, it gives, as I said before, time for firefighters to be able to come to the fire scenes and be able to respond to smaller fires.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. My final question to the same minister: although these changes are important, they will certainly impact Albertans by adding to the cost of building a new home. Can the minister please explain who was consulted before these new codes were introduced?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we did was an extensive study with stakeholders. The stakeholders did include, of course, the fire departments, the fire chiefs, also the builders in the province. We also included the Safety Codes Council. We included municipalities. This was a gathering of all the interest groups for the building of residences and because the high-intensity fire is a concern to all residents. It is critical that we bring that direction forward, as we have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question will be to the minister of agriculture. This government continues to ignore calls to include paid farm workers under the province's labour laws. Almost three years ago we asked the then minister of human resources to take action. He said that he was, quote, working closely with the minister of agriculture on the issue. Today we still see consultation and still no action. To the minister of agriculture: why has this government stalled this process for so long?

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, if the hon. member had been listening for the last three days this week – the Premier talked about it, and I talked about it – the Employment and Immigration ministry and myself have been coming up with a plan that we're working on. But we have to involve the agriculture industry. We're not going to move ahead without doing that. That's going to take some time. Let me be very clear: I've never gotten a request from the agriculture industry to do that.

Dr. Taft: You know, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the kind of answer we've been getting for years. People are dying. People are getting seriously injured. We know the stalling to protect paid farm workers is not because of financial constraints, that it's not because of a lack of resources, and it's surely not because of a lack of calls for action on the issue, so we're left to assume that it's because this government is protecting someone's interests though certainly not those of farm workers. To the minister: just who is opposed to stronger safety standards for farm workers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not protecting anyone at all and the big secrecy of the whole thing. I would like the member to sit down with me and look at the last – he's talking about the farm. I think he brought up a figure of 220 the other day. I'd love to sit down with the hon. member, go through them, and have him show me where legislation would prevent these accidents. He just has to stop looking at the headlines, and he has to start getting to the facts.

Dr. Taft: It's shocking. You look at B.C. You look at Saskatchewan. You look at every other province that has legislative standards, and they have better safety records than this province. I cannot believe this minister.

A Provincial Court judge recently recommended in a public fatality report that "paid employees on farms should be covered [under] Occupational Health and Safety . . . with the same exemption for family members and other non-paid workers that apply to non-farm employers." A judge of Alberta is saying that in a fatality inquiry. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: when will he be introducing legislation to amend the act as recommended and at last – at last – protect the health and safety of paid farm workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development indicated that we are working together to look at the input from the agricultural community. The member opposite alluded to the fact that the judge made some recommendations, but evidence at that particular inquiry found that this particular fatality in question would not have been prevented by regulations. So we need to balance all of these as we move forward.

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

Meat Packer Owned Cattle

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Family farms who sell livestock are at the mercy of the big packers. If the packers want to pay less for cows from the family farm, they can just drive the price down by flooding the market with their own supply because

this government lets packers keep captive stock. The question is to the minister of agriculture. Why won't you stand up for Alberta's family farms and implement a ban on packer-owned cattle?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I find that a little tough to take, that I don't stand up for family farms. The hon. member would like to check the statistics of the slaughter capacity in western Canada and find how many people are involved. Then he wants me to go after those people, perhaps try and take them out of business if I possibly can, and we would be down to one slaughter plant. What if that slaughter plant goes on strike? Think about it, hon. member. Just think about it before you just spout off what you hear out in the hinterland.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I wonder if the minister can guess who said this: "When meatpackers own livestock they can manipulate prices and discriminate against independent farmers." The answer is that it's a direct quote from U.S. President Barack Obama, who wants a ban on packer-owned cattle. This government will not do it because they support the monopoly of Cargill and XL Foods and not the family farm. To the minister of agriculture: once again, why won't you protect the family farm and ban packer-owned cattle?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, this is something that was brought up south of the border a few years ago and many times. Some of the states have tried to pass this type of legislation. If the hon. member would think very shallowly, he would find how easily that could be circumvented – how easily that could be circumvented – and it was.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Food safety, quality, and the food supply would all be better off if the livestock market was more competitive, not to mention the price of beef in grocery stores. This government has given two Alberta companies a stranglehold on the entire Canadian beef market. They put nearly 3,400 family farms out of business between 2001 and 2006. To the minister: why don't you support a competitive market that will benefit both farmers and consumers and put a stop to packer manipulation of prices?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see the statistics that show that the packers put 3,400 farmers out of business. If he would share that material with me that has some basis, I'd gladly look at it. I would refute that. It's pretty easy to pick numbers out of the air, but I've watched this gentleman before, and he's excellent at it.

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

Agricultural Research and Development

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last several months several of my constituents have voiced their concerns over the need for agricultural research into improved varieties of grains and increased oilseed yields. Last year this government made a decision to discontinue malt barley variety testing and, instead, focused on feed barley varieties. I fully understand the quality component of Canadian grains for the export markets, but we've fallen behind with varieties of many grains and oilseeds where we should be trying,

instead, to increase quality and production. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Will your department support our agricultural farm industry by providing tools for more research and development?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely we will do that. Agriculture and Rural Development is involved in many projects as a funder and research provider. We certainly will continue to support research and development. Some of the examples I might like to bring up are the barley genetic improvement and variety development research that we're doing at the Field Crop Development Centre and development of the new crop-based foods and beverages at the Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc. Some of the people were there today.

Thank you.

2:30

Mr. Mitzel: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. I know Alberta agriculture continues to test pulses and grains and oilseeds in many areas of the province. Given that every area of the province is better suited to specific types of crops, will the minister inform this House how he plans to use these results gained to assist our agricultural producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Agriculture and Rural Development's role is to co-ordinate the regional variety testing program, or RVT, as we like to call it. Our support ensures that research continues without any interruptions. It's so important to keep that research going on a continuing basis. The results of the regional variety testing are made available to producers through a number of channels, including hub offices that we have out there. They certainly are on our website as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how, then, does your department plan to continue to support future research and development in such areas as dryland beans, for example, to help ensure sustainability through better diversity opportunities for our farming industry?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a good question because research money becomes harder and harder to find as we move along. But we'll continue partnering with other groups that are out there to ensure that the research continues and that the results are accessible to our producers. We're also working with the U of A and the minister of advanced education and the Alberta Research Council on developing water use efficient and drought-tolerant crops and ways to improve nitrogen efficiency in barley, all potential impacts that could move our fertilizers along and keep these projects on a valuable footing.

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

Freedom of Information Fees

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A former manager of the freedom of information and protection of privacy unit of Alberta Infrastructure has stated that it was the general policy of the former

Minister of Infrastructure that there would be no FOIP fee waivers. To the Minister of Service Alberta, responsible for the FOIP Act: why are ministers of this government allowed to set policies that block legislative rights of Albertans to have FOIP fees waived? Why was there political interference in the public's access to information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the freedom of information act it's a very important act to protect Albertans' information. It's there to balance the right to information and the right to protection of information. With respect to the fees, there are fees charged for that, but the act is there for a very important reason, and we ministers all abide by that act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you don't abide by the act. I have documents showing this, which I will be tabling today. Thank you.

To the Minister of Infrastructure: why did the ministry have a policy to block fee waiver requests? Why was the minister making it financially impossible for Albertans to use the FOIP Act?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the member is referring to in this instance. If he'd like to send me a copy of what he's referring to, I'd be glad to look into it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be tabling the document showing that.

To the Minister of Service Alberta: which other ministries have policies to block FOIP fee waivers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to fee waivers, if individuals apply and want some information, there are many situations where we will waive the fees for access to information. There are definite fees in place for that. But, as I stated before, if an individual has a particular situation where we have to waive the fees – we look at every situation and take everything into account.

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

Changes to Building and Fire Codes (continued)

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recently announced updated building codes will help slow the spread of fire among new homes, but I understand that many fires happen during the construction phase of the home. My questions are all for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please explain what measures have been taken to protect Albertans from fires that start on construction sites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Individuals in the construction industry will have to do things just a little bit

differently, but that will help make a lot of individuals a lot safer. Those construction companies will have to ensure that vulnerable properties next to their sites are safe, to ensure access for emergency personnel. Also, the hot materials that are used on roofs: some of the regulations around there need to be changed.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say one thing. These updated . . .

The Speaker: Well, I'm sure you do, but we do have a time policy. The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investigations have indicated that the high-intensity residential fire that started on the MacEwan Green construction site was caused by arson. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs please explain how the updated fire code will enhance security on construction sites?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the new code will have tougher security, and it will protect work sites better. Safety is the responsibility of everyone. I encourage Albertans to visit our website to learn more about fire safety and what our regulations are bringing forward.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, my final question: can the minister please explain how the public will be educated about these same code changes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I do want to say that these code changes are two years ahead of the national safety council code. We are going to use radio and print ads to inform the construction industry on the role they play – I believe that education is the key to keeping Albertans safe – and, as I said before, our website, Mr. Speaker. Safety is paramount for this government, and we are very committed to Albertans' safety.

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

Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the Rhinestone Cowboy, Glen Campbell himself, my office has been receiving cards and letters from people I don't even know regarding the grizzly bear and particularly its fate. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: are you going to extend the moratorium on the spring hunt of the grizzly bear, or will you allow this animal to be hunted for sport?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Rhinestone Cowboy I won't comment, but with respect to the grizzly bear, as I have explained numerous times to this Assembly, we're completing the final phase of the DNA study. We'll wait for those results before we make any final decision. We did extend the suspension of the hunt for another year. This is an important decision. We'll take our time and make it when we have all the information.

Mr. Hehr: The government's own scientists indicate that grizzly numbers are far below what is considered minimum for a healthy population. Can the minister tell us whose evidence he relies on: the scientists' or that of sport hunters reporting bear sightings? Which does the ministry consider more accurate?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Rhinestone Cowboy is referring to a very interesting report that was put together by the Willmore Wilderness Foundation. These aren't just a bunch of

yahoos. They're outfitters, backcountry people that spend a lot of time in the woods, and they reported a variety of sightings, 350 different sightings. They've put it both into a great film, which I'd recommend—I even appear in that film—but also a database. We're going to compare that database with the DNA database. We've got them working together, and we're going to get good results.

Mr. Hehr: There is no disputing that grizzly numbers in Alberta are low, well under 500, yet there is still no plan in place despite the recommendation of the government's own scientists. When will this minister put in place the recovery plan recommended by its own grizzly bear team?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, that's simply not accurate at all. We spent the entire last year doing a fairly detailed mapping of both primary and secondary grizzly bear habitat. We have the BearSmart program and a variety of programs, and the grizzly bear habitat will fit into the regional plans under the land-use framework. Things are moving ahead on plan, as they should be.

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

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers (continued)

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Statistics from other provinces related to farm death have been presented to this House. However, I understand that the way Alberta collects its data is very different from other provinces. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Is it accurate to compare stats from other provinces like B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba to ours?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard innuendoes from the other side of the House about this before. The short answer is no, it's not possible. The numbers that have been presented are WCB statistics. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and B.C. WCB collects data on paid workers only. Alberta data includes paid workers and everyone else: paid, unpaid workers, deaths that result from activities not work related. It's impossible to accurately compare jurisdictions and irresponsible to suggest that you can.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, my next questions are both to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. I've been hearing a lot about our farmers being left unprotected in the workplace. At one time I was self-employed, and I was able to voluntarily buy compensation coverage. I understand that all self-employed people in Alberta have that opportunity. To the minister: is this true for our farmers and ag producers? Can they buy coverage?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, any business may apply for voluntary workers' compensation for both owners and workers. This coverage provides income replacement and any necessary medical and rehabilitation services for injured workers. This no-fault insurance coverage is the only kind that offers protection from lawsuits for employers, workers, and other parties covered by the Workers' Compensation Board.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the same minister. Again, when I was self-employed, I paid a rate of so many dollars per thousand of my payroll that I took myself. What would the coverage be for my agricultural producers, Mr. Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Individual rates would depend on the type of operation and the producer's safety performance. The average premium rate for agricultural producers in 2009 is \$3.31 per \$100 of insurable earnings at present.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. In a few seconds from now we'll call upon the first of three other members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and talk about the exceptional work of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Earlier this week my colleagues and I were fortunate to participate in a tour of the government's agency response readiness centre, or ARRC, and the emergency operations centre, the GEOC, located in west Edmonton. We saw the inner workings of how the government's emergency system works to keep us safe and secure.

Through the ARRC, staff are there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, ready to respond. When an emergency occurs, be it a flood, a fire, a chemical spill, or a severe storm, the ARRC staff are there to collect and share critical and timely information with emergency agencies, police, municipalities, MLAs, and Members of Parliament. The ARRC serves as the single point of contact providing everyone with the information they need to co-ordinate the emergency response. If the emergency escalates, the GEOC is activated. GEOC provides a critical service by co-ordinating a government-wide response to the incident when municipalities or industry require assistance.

During the tour I was impressed with the expertise and dedication of agency staff in providing support to Albertans in municipalities during a crisis. The importance of timely and decisive response to potential emergency situations cannot be overstated, early and effective intervention to mitigate potential disaster situations. By working in partnership with other provincial departments and local emergency response teams, we are truly creating a government-wide response to emergencies. Thanks to the agency's focus our province is seen as a leader in emergency response management across the country.

I want to acknowledge the staff of the agency and the proactive decisions of several years ago that resulted in the establishment of the agency to mitigate potential disaster situations for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Long-term Care

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today there is a crisis in our province's hospitals. Emergency rooms are overcrowded, sometimes dangerously so. With no long-term care beds available over a thousand patients wait in hallways, supply closets, and expensive acute care beds. Worse, seniors are being moved from long-term care beds to private supportive living facilities that they cannot afford and are inappropriate for their needs. This

government promised to invest \$300 million to create 600 new long-term care beds to help these patients, and this government broke that promise.

Not only are few spaces available, but our Auditor General has found that their staff are underpaid and overworked. As a result vulnerable seniors have again and again been left unfed, untoileted, and unbathed because there are simply too few health care workers to handle everyone. Front-line personnel report that because of the short-staffing they fear for the safety of residents. Hiring and training staff in this critical sector would raise standards to an acceptable level and create good jobs in a time of rising unemployment.

The government charges its critics in this issue with wanting to institutionalize people. This is false. We want sufficient long-term care beds available but only for those who require them. This government has so far failed to provide these. Mr. Speaker, unless this government lives up to its commitment to our seniors, long-term care facilities will still be bursting at the seams while hospital emergency rooms remain packed and in crisis. Meanwhile, our seniors wait on long lists for basic health services they need while this government continues along its path of broken promises.

Once again everyday Albertans are raising their voices and waiting for the government to solve the problem, but the government is not listening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Foster Care

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday I was pleased to host a foster parents information session at the Monterey Park Community Association. This event was very well attended by families interested in becoming foster parents, members of the cultural media, and community leaders from a multitude of different backgrounds, including the Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Somali, Pakistani, Lebanese, and Indian communities.

My desire to raise awareness about the foster parent program is simple and stretches back many years. I want to help recruit foster parents, and I want to raise awareness about the program amongst different ethnic communities in an effort to help add diversity to our foster parent system. Being separated from parents can be a difficult process for all children. For a young child three or four years old from a cultural background, who has only been exposed to one type of food, one culture, one language, this process can pose additional challenges. My hope is that through my efforts we can help add diversity in our foster parent system and make a difficult situation just a little bit better for young children.

I would like to thank everybody involved, including the Calgary and area child and family services and the Alberta Foster Parents Association for their involvement. Mr. Speaker, I will continue to encourage Albertans from all corners of the province and all different backgrounds to consider becoming foster parents and ask all members to do the same.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm here today to table not a Twitter or Facebook page but, rather, a petition regarding the recognition of marriage and family therapists under the Health Professions Act. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce amendments to the Health Professions Act that would recognize marriage and family therapists as a regulated profession under that Act.

Mr. Speaker, there are 31 signatures, and they are primarily from Calgary but also from southwestern Alberta.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Relating to my earlier questions, I would like to table five copies of statements given to the RCMP by Frances Cruden, former manager of FOIP.

The Speaker: I think, hon. member, we're into petitions right now. We'll come back to you a little later.

Mr. Kang: Oh, sorry.

The Speaker: Not a problem.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, March 16, the government will accept written questions 4 and 15. Additional written questions shall stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

I'd also like to give notice that on Monday, March 16, 2009, Motion for a Return 16 will be dealt with that day, and additional motions for returns will stand and retain their places.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill Pr. 1

Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, the Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Bill Pr. 2

Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 2, the Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Bill Pr. 3

Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 3, Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of a schedule proposed for the 2009 main estimates. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2) the schedule is to be prepared by the Government House Leader in consultation with the opposition. With your leave I'd just like to advise that while we haven't got full agreement on everything, we have had consultation.

We've attempted to make sure and, I think, made sure — there's extra information on the schedule to show that we've met with the request from opposition relative to making sure that, first of all, estimates are scheduled in committee rooms A and B. There had been an indication that estimates for larger departments might be scheduled on the floor of the House in the committee, but opposition requests were that we have them in adjacent rooms for ease of members moving back and forth, so all committees are scheduled for committee rooms A and B. We've also made sure that opposition critics are not scheduled for two committees at the same time, which obviously makes sense.

I would note that under Standing Order 59.01(2)(d) the estimates for Executive Council will be heard in Committee of Supply in the Assembly Chamber on April 15 and that pursuant to Standing Order 59.03 the votes on the estimates are scheduled for May 7.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, in addition to tabling that document, will you be circulating one for all members this afternoon as well?

Mr. Hancock: We'll arrange to have that done.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on tablings?

Dr. Taft: Tablings, yes. First of all, I want to begin this comment just in response to what we just heard. The opposition takes great, great concern with the schedule that's being tabled right now.

I do rise on behalf of two of my colleagues with two other tablings. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-McCall this is a document that was referred to in the question raised by the Member for Calgary-McCall. It's five copies of a statement given to the RCMP by a former manager of a FOIP unit at Alberta Infrastructure. It says, "The general policy from the Minister Ty Lund's office was that there would be no fee waivers." That's what the member was referring to in his concerns about political meddling in FOIP.

My second tabling is on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East. It is the continuing care strategy put out by the Alberta government. There are five copies here. It's the document that she referred to in her question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: We don't mention members' names in the House.

Dr. Taft: I was quoting from a document.

The Speaker: Well, you can quote the document all you want, but we still don't mention names.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document from Statistics Canada dealing with the family farm in Alberta. The document indicates that between the 2001 and the 2006 census of agriculture

the total number of family farms declined from 48,590 to 45,195, a drop of 3,395 farms, or 7 per cent of the total in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 7(6) requesting, please, from the Government House Leader the projected government business for the week commencing Monday, the 16th of March.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in general it's our anticipation that on Tuesday and Wednesday of next week the primary orders of business will be the appropriation acts, Bill 21 and Bill 22, and the bill that I would refer to as the TILMA Act, Bill 18.

On Tuesday, March 17, under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of the Whole Bill 18, Bill 21, and Bill 22, as I just referenced, and for third reading Bill 18; second reading of Bill 7, Public Health Amendment Act; Bill 12, Surface Rights Amendment Act; Bill 13, Justice of the Peace Amendment Act; Bill 16, Peace Officer Amendment Act; Bill 17, Securities Amendment Act; Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act; and Bill 20, Civil Enforcement Amendment Act. Other than Bill 7, which we anticipate being debated, those others for second reading are primarily to move them at second reading.

On Wednesday, March 18, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 18, 21, and 22; second reading of Bill 24, the Animal Health Amendment Act; Bill 25, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act; and Bill 26, Wildlife Amendment Act. In Committee of the Whole Bill 1, Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act; Bill 2, Lobbyists Amendment Act; Bill 3, Credit Union Amendment Act; Bill 5, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act; Bill 8, Feeder Associations Guarantee Act; and Bill 15, Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

On Thursday, March 19, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading bills 17, 19, 20, 24, 25, and 26, as previously referenced; in Committee of the Whole bills 7, 8, 12, 13, and 15, as previously referenced; for third reading bills 1, 2, 3, and 5, as previously referenced; and as per the Order Paper.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 21

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 21, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009.

On March 2 the government of Alberta tabled supplementary supply estimates for just over \$128 million for three departments and the office of the Auditor General. The estimates, when approved by the Legislature, will provide spending authority to departments only in order to deal with the issues arising from that fiscal year. They are consistent with the third-quarter fiscal update, which updates the 2008-09 fiscal plan for all government entities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Taft: Yes. I think, Mr. Speaker, that it's very important to repeat on the record our concerns about a budgeting process that needs at this point now two supplementary supply bills, this one running, as the President of the Treasury Board said, well over \$120 million.

3:00

We spent some time on this in earlier debate, so I don't need to prolong this, but I need to register as a member of this Assembly my very, very deep concerns about the budgeting processes of a government that seems unable to stay within its budget. We have seen over the years huge budget overruns, and there are as a result much more serious constraints on a capacity to deal with this foreseeable downturn in the economy.

There has been a singling out of the Auditor General's expenditures in the comments from the President of the Treasury Board, and I think it's worth noting that those expenditures are not going to allow the Auditor General to proceed with the audits that could very easily end up saving the taxpayer a lot of money. I think there's a real risk in that particular decision that we are being penny-wise and pound-foolish.

I am increasingly uneasy, as I now enter my eighth year as an MLA, with a budget process that every single year is hundreds of millions and sometimes billions of dollars off the target on the spending side. I wanted to drive that home. I'm sure the President of the Treasury Board is paying close attention. I'm sure he's not thrilled with going over budget, but I sure as heck wish that this government would get its budgeting process in order so that we don't have so many supplementary supply bills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Certainly, I listened to the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. When we look at the supplementary supply here and we quickly go through it, we see Agriculture and Rural Development, we see Employment and Immigration, we see the modest amount for Transportation, and we see a three-quarters of a million dollar allocation for the office of the Auditor General.

I think of this supplementary supply, Mr. Speaker, and I go back to what was discussed in question period this afternoon regarding the Auditor General and the budget. I believe it was the question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, in that order. It's not Norwood-Highlands; it's Highlands-Norwood. Correct? When we look at the past budgets of the Auditor General, we see where in any given year the Auditor General has been very prudent in his budgeting. In fact, in the last number of years there has been a significant amount returned to the legislative office, the LAO, in some cases up to \$400,000 and in some cases I believe – and I could stand corrected – \$500,000. So the office of the Auditor General is a very prudent office.

I sit on the Legislative Offices Committee, and I had no idea that we would be asking for this appropriation. Maybe I wasn't paying attention, but I certainly was paying attention when government members of that committee suggested that they had instructions, in this case from the President of the Treasury Board, to limit and restrict further increases to the Auditor General.

Now, I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood speak at Public Accounts yesterday regarding an additional sum of \$2 million that will be needed for the Auditor to ably carry on his

necessary work. So when I look at the three-quarters of a million dollar amount, it's alarming to me in the first place that the Auditor would have to ask us for this money, but it's obvious that it's going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, we all recognize in this Assembly the good work that the Auditor needs to do. I know the government initiated this CIA. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview can correct me, but I believe CIA in this case stands for the chief internal auditor or perhaps the committee of internal auditing. It's not affectionately called on this side of the House the CIA.

There is an internal audit function that was expanded about four or five years ago, and perhaps the hon. Deputy Premier can refresh all members of the House if my information is inaccurate on this. There was an expansion of this CIA function, and how the committee of internal auditors works remained a bit of a mystery. I at one point had been referred by a cabinet minister, if I had any questions, to seek out this committee and see what auditing they had done or had not done. I don't have the confidence in that internal audit function that I have in the office of the Auditor General. I have a great deal of confidence in the office of the Auditor General.

As I said before, this amount that we are looking at here will certainly be used wisely to ensure that we are receiving value for the taxpayers' dollars in the delivery of programs. It would also identify waste. What the Auditor is going to do with that money, I don't know, but I do know what is on the Auditor's wish list that needs to be done and cannot be done. These are deferred or cancelled projects. I was startled as Public Accounts chair to receive this information that had been requested by the committee, which as we know is an all-party committee, and the committee voted. I believe it was unanimous. I'm not sure, but the committee did vote to receive this information from the Auditor.

We can just go through the departments alphabetically. We can start with advanced education. A follow-up audit on Mount Royal has been deferred to October of this year. Postsecondary institute facility capacity and utilization project: the Auditor had something in mind there. That was cancelled. Postsecondary institute program planning: that audit has been cancelled. As was discussed in question period earlier today, in Agriculture and Rural Development a food safety follow-up has been deferred to October 2009. I can't believe that that would occur with the issues that we have around food safety. Children and Youth Services: financial support for children with disabilities system. This project has been deferred until 2010. Monitoring daycare and day home services: this is a knowledge of business audit project, and it has been deferred and no date given.

Culture and Community Spirit, Horse Racing Alberta: deferred and – I was talking about this earlier – the report date to be announced later. The \$50 million that we grant to the horse racing industry: I fully expect that the President of the Treasury Board is finally going to put his foot down and say that enough is enough. I will be very surprised if that's a line item in the budget on April 7. In fact, I'm willing to bet that it won't be. Those days are gone. I think the Premier sort of suggested that yesterday.

Education: improving school performance. That was to be a knowledge of business audit project. That has been deferred, no date given. Employment and Immigration: in here we are looking for an additional \$50 million. We discussed that at second reading on this bill. We had quite a discussion on that. The homeless eviction prevention fund: because of a shortage of resources that audit project is being deferred to October 2009. I believe, from the Minister of Employment and Immigration – and industry has been removed from that department. I'm not going to go there, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The homeless eviction prevention fund: we're going to have a look at that. Of course, workplace health and safety. We've seen a recent report in the newspapers where 166 workers in this province, unfortunately, as a result of their jobs lost their lives in the last year, but the Auditor doesn't have money to have a look at that program. Now, speaking of money, in the Energy department: ensuring the collection of royalties. This has been deferred, and it's to be at a later date. I know the hon. President of the Treasury Board is worried about the resource royalty stream that we're going to have. I can't imagine why we would not allow the Auditor to have a very good look and a follow-up to his excellent work that he did in the fall of 2007.

In Environment there are some issues around water quality. Executive Council: again the Public Affairs Bureau comes up. That doesn't surprise me. With Executive Council the Public Affairs Bureau always seem to be coming up, and this is in regard to some contracts with Highwood Communications. Finance and Enterprise, measuring the effectiveness of the fiscal regime: this is a knowledge of business audit project, and it's deferred until 2011, Mr. Speaker, 2011. I can't believe it.

Health and Wellness is a department that gets more money all the time, doesn't know how to handle it. In fact, we're \$1.3 billion additional dollars in the red in that department this year. Now, in Health and Wellness the Auditor doesn't have the resources to deal with academic medicine governance and accountability, and the follow-up is not going to occur again until this time next year. Food safety, a very important issue. Infection control: I talked about that a little earlier in debate.

Seniors and Community Supports, persons with developmental disabilities persons in care: this knowledge of business audit has been cancelled. I think we should have a look at this.

I would urge all hon. members to consider the resources that we're providing to the office of the Auditor General, and I would say that we should change our minds because if there's any money left, and I'm confident with the office of the Auditor General that there will be from the additional allocation that is desired, it'll be returned to the taxpayers through the LAO.

Service Alberta: the network security review is deferred. Now, we know what the Auditor had to say about some of the security systems that we have or that could work better. This is a key recommendation from the Auditor on Service Alberta. The Auditor points out:

We recommend that the Ministry of Service Alberta consider providing internal control assurance to its client ministries on its centralized processing of transactions." How are taxpayers to have confidence in the department if something as necessary and as basic as network security reviews are not being done?

The Auditor also has other projects, interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, going on in Service Alberta that I'm glad to see are being done: protecting information assets, the registry agencies, Service Alberta contract management, Service Alberta performance measurement systems, and TILMA implementation and compliance.

Dr. Taft: TILMA. Now, does that cover farm workers?

Mr. MacDonald: TILMA I don't think would cover farm workers. Certainly, if the minister of agriculture and food and the Minister of Employment and Immigration can't get together, maybe there will be some good come out of TILMA. It could be a regulatory method to make farm workers in this province have the same level playing field as far as workplace health and safety and labour laws as they

do in B.C. and in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. But we're only talking about B.C. here, Mr. Speaker; I realize that. Saskatchewan and Manitoba are a little bit cautious and nervous about TILMA, and I think they have every right to be nervous.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't want the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to be distracting me in my discussion and my participation in this debate, but certainly whenever we look at these supplementary estimates and we look at where the money is to be provided, it's a modest amount when you compare this request to previous supplementary estimates. It certainly is a modest amount when you review the list that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about earlier. It certainly is, however, a concern that this government never can stick to a budget that it introduced.

When you look at past budgets – and I know that the President of the Treasury Board wasn't involved in this. I'm confident that if the hon. minister had been involved, this wouldn't have happened. It's only two or three years ago when . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time has now elapsed. Standing Order 29(2)(a), however, is available. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member in his opening statements and through his whole thing spoke to a bunch of the audits that were not done, and he spoke to them under the assumption that these weren't done because of the lack of money. The hon. member might want to comment on whether the Auditor General perhaps decided that he didn't want to do them at this time or that there weren't enough other contractors, other auditors and other consulting firms, available to be able to do these. Also, as the hon. member knows and might have put on the record, the Auditor General returned \$408,000. If he really wanted to do any of those, perhaps a few of these audits that he mentioned – he went through the whole list of, I think, 23 out of the 80. Perhaps some of these audits could've been handled with this \$408,000.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate those questions. Certainly, the hon. member is right that the Auditor General returned I think it was \$403,000 in the last budget that I had information from. In previous years he has returned equal amounts, if not greater. That's what I said earlier in my comments, that the office of the Auditor General is very prudent and wise and manages money very well.

I would also like to point out to the hon. member that with the change in economic conditions, regardless of whether it's a construction worker or an auditor, there are a lot more of both available now. I'm not putting words in the office of the Auditor General on the floor of this House, but from what I understand from the discourse we've had with the Auditor General, it's much easier now to hire and retain outside audit staff for the office. There are certainly peaks in the auditing season, which the Auditor General has explained to us very well, and these resources are available. But it was clear in Public Accounts yesterday that an additional \$2 million is needed for this vital work.

Now, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, of course, is the chair of the Legislative Offices Committee, and he was present when other hon. members – one from Rocky Mountain House, one from Calgary-Montrose – clearly discussed on the record that there was a government direction from the hon. member regarding the budget of the Auditor General and what was to be expected. I believe it was a 3 per cent increase. That's all on the record, Mr. Speaker. It's for every member to review.

3:20

Certainly, when we look at the good work and the work that can be done by the Auditor, I would just like to again put on the record that the \$750,000 that has been requested here is different than the amount – and maybe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood can also clarify this. Yesterday in order to fulfill this work, we needed an additional \$2 million. None of this money, if it was to be provided to the office of the Auditor General, would be wasted.

We have a large government budget here. In fact, Mr. Speaker and hon. member, since I was elected – I didn't know this, 12 years ago, and thank you for informing me of that, Mr. Speaker; the years go by really fast – the provincial budget has expanded from \$14 billion to over \$40 billion. Now, that's a lot of cash. That is a lot of cash. This is a Conservative government who acts like a New Democratic government on steroids. The budget is just going up and up and up, you know. [interjections] I'm sorry.

Mr. Speaker, we look at all the money that this government is spending, and we have to make sure that we're getting value for that money and the programs and policies that that money is financing . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, the Q and A session is finished. You're participating on the debate?

Mr. Hancock: Yes. I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move second reading of Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009.

On March 2, 2009, the interim supply estimates were tabled in the Legislative Assembly. These estimates are to provide funding authorization until the new budget is approved. I would, Mr. Speaker, like to apologize if I miss some comments. I have an ear infection, and I have a very difficult time hearing. Although I do have to admit that with that certain malaise that I'm suffering, it does make some of the speeches far more presentable.

The Speaker: We've moved the bill, have we?

Mr. Snelgrove: I did, yes.

The Speaker: Others?

Dr. Taft: Well, I'm sorry if the President of the Treasury Board won't hear every single word that we say over here.

Again, my main comments on this particular bill, interim supply, are about process, Mr. Speaker. There was a commitment from this government under the current Premier to try to move the budget cycle earlier. I thought that that was a great idea. It's something I had supported for a long time. I think we have to be very clear, and I want all government members to understand this because what their process is doing is causing real problems for other organizations.

The fiscal year begins April 1. All kinds of organizations depend on provincial funding for them to make plans for their fiscal year.

Some organizations have fiscal years that begin in September, like many school boards. Regardless, all of those organizations depending on provincial funding have to plan. If they, as many of them do, begin their fiscal year April 1 and they do not know how much provincial funding they're going to get, they cannot properly plan. So we are building inefficiency and difficulty into our public financing system because of this process.

I was very pleased when the Premier announced – I think it was two years ago – that one of his priorities was to move the provincial budget process earlier in the year. It's an easy way to make the public sector across the board in Alberta more efficient. It's just basic good sense. Unfortunately, we have not achieved that. In fact, we haven't even come close.

I would like to have seen a budget brought in, you know, by no later than the middle of February, and if possible, even earlier. I know that the world is in uncertain times economically, but that hasn't stopped other governments in other jurisdictions from bringing forward budgets, and I don't know why it should have slowed this government down. As a result, instead of voting on a full budget, we're voting on interim supply. We are being asked as members of this Assembly to approve a very substantial sum, many billions of dollars here in spending, more or less on trust. We don't know how this fits into a larger agenda. We don't know what goals are hoped to be achieved because of this. This is sort of asking us to just give a blank cheque for many, many billions of numbers to the government. I am uneasy, I am unhappy about that.

I think this government could do better. I look at the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, for example, who at one time chaired a regional health authority. I don't want to speak for him, but I can well imagine that setting the budgets for that regional health authority would have been easier if the regional health authority had known before they were well into their fiscal year what the provincial funding would actually be. Maybe that's one of the reasons that they're still waiting for hospital renovations in Medicine Hat after some two decades or more. I don't know. In any case, this is an easy way to make the public sector more efficient. I don't know why this government can't get its act together on this.

I'm not happy about having to debate this bill. I look forward to maybe next year not having an interim supply bill because by this point we'll have actually dealt with a budget. In the meantime we're stuck with this bill. I don't like it, and I've explained why.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always interesting when members want to debate interim supply by saying that we'd really like to debate the budget. The budget is coming. They will have the opportunity to debate it.

The interesting piece in it, of course, is that in almost every year you will have interim supply if you have a lengthy budget debate as we provide for in this Assembly. We now provide, for this year, I think it's 75 hours of debate in committee on the estimates. That's up from many hours of debate. I think last year it was 60, and previous to that it was shorter. So certainly an improved budget debate, lots of opportunity to look at the numbers.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Well, I will certainly move to the adjourn debate thing, but we have this interesting little quirk called Standing Order 29(2)(a). On the previous bill the hon. Government House Leader got up and simply adjourned the debate. In this one he proceeded to be involved in debate, so we have now five minutes of questions and

responses if anybody would like to direct a question to the hon. Government House Leader. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I think the Government House Leader missed the point. My point was that the date for bringing the budget to this Assembly should be moved up ideally into January, in my mind, certainly no later than the middle of February.

As to his comments concerning the hours of debate, I think it's important to get on the record that, in fact, the process for budget debate that we're looking at this year in my view is reprehensible. It pulls the rug out of what little bit was left of accountability over this budget. The opposition is looking at a situation where we will have a responsibility for debating upwards of 30 bills, maybe by then 40 bills, in addition to handling two government department budget debates in the evening. We begin the very day after the budget is tabled, so there's no time to prepare. If you compare the 75 hours that's allocated for budget debate in Alberta to what's allocated in many other provinces, it amounts to next to nothing.

3:30

So I want it to be on the record, and the Government House Leader is welcome to reply, that as an opposition we think the proposed budget process is a complete and utter failure and a betrayal – a betrayal – of good public accountability.

The Speaker: Additional questions or comments, or shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Bill 18 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I thought that I would start out with a bit of overview, then introduce some amendments, and then provide some answers with respect to points that were raised in second reading. So that's going to be generally where I will be going with this.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, are you moving an amendment?

Mr. Stevens: I will be.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Stevens: I was doing one of those, you know, speech tricks, where you tell people what you're going to tell them and then you

tell them and then you tell them what you told them. I'm still in the telling them what I'm going to tell them, in a very introductory way, phase. So with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move into that.

Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased that we're just a few weeks away from fully implementing Canada's most comprehensive interprovincial trade agreement. As I'm sure most members in this House now know, by April 1 more than a hundred regulated occupations will have full labour mobility between Alberta and British Columbia. All skilled tradespersons such as plumbers or welders or highly trained professionals like teachers or nurses certified in Alberta or B.C. will be able to move between provinces and keep working without having to go through extensive recertification or retraining.

Businesses will have one set of requirements for registering and reporting in Alberta or B.C. or in both. Alberta and B.C. companies will have increased opportunities to bid on government contracts in both provinces, particularly in engineering, architecture, and related services, which will be in greater demand as infrastructure construction projects get under way. Unnecessary differences between regulations in the two provinces will be eliminated. This means that Alberta businesses face less red tape and can be more efficient and productive.

Full implementation of TILMA comes at an important time for Alberta and British Columbia. As all provinces in Canada work to combat the effects of the global recession, TILMA will improve our competitiveness both domestically and abroad. Investors, businesses, and workers will look to Alberta and B.C. because we have reduced government red tape. In short, TILMA will do great things for Alberta.

Now, Mr. Chairman, Bill 18 amends existing statutes and ensures that provincial legislation and the TILMA align. As I've indicated previously, Bill 18 really is a nuts-and-bolts, technical piece of legislation. In total 11 acts will be amended. Indeed, we're going to provide some additional amendments at this time to this otherwise technical legislation, which is the way these things sometimes go.

Mr. Chairman, at this point in time if the amendments could be handed out. I'll make my comments with respect to the amendments after everybody has them before them. In the interim, with your permission, I'll just carry on and answer some questions that were raised in second.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Fine.

Mr. Stevens: Okay. While the amendments are being handed out, I'll address some of the points that have been raised. I actually addressed some of those in second reading in my closing remarks, so these really are supplementary to those answers I provided at that time.

One or more of the hon. members raised concerns over the misconception that there was no debate over the TILMA. The fact of the matter is that every step toward reaching the TILMA has been made public in one way or another. There were website postings, news releases, consultations with affected groups. In fact, Mr. Chairman, there was consultation with over 200 representatives from the MASH sector.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to also note that we issued a press release out of my ministry last year – I believe it was on June 25 – where we dealt with the municipalities. In that we clearly indicated that the AUMA president on behalf of his organization, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, was satisfied that municipal concerns that his association raised on behalf of its members had been addressed through the negotiation process regarding the MASH provisions. Indeed, in that very same press release the president of

the AAMD and C on behalf of his organization also indicated that the consultation process on TILMA gave them the opportunity to bring the concerns of the membership of that organization forward and that, as a result, revisions arising out of that collaborative process would better meet the needs of local government. They were very pleased with the consultation process.

In essence, Mr. Chairman, the TILMA process has been transparent. It has been open. While the agreement itself is not the subject of debate in this Assembly, for the reasons I stated the other day, the process itself has been open and transparent. Many people that wanted to be involved have been involved. We did very much the same thing with previous bills 38 and 1, that relate to the TILMA, and now Bill 18.

Another concern yesterday, Mr. Chairman, was raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. The hon. member wondered if the TILMA could somehow be used to circumvent Calgary's wage policies. The answer to that is no. A B.C. company that's looking to operate in Alberta still must follow Alberta laws just as Alberta companies must follow B.C. laws. The simple example I'd like to use is speed limits. The B.C. speed limit is 90 kilometres on the highways. In Alberta it's 100. If an Albertan who is in B.C. on business is caught speeding, they will not be able to say that B.C.'s lower speed limit is an impediment to trade or investment and use the TILMA as a defence, and vice versa should that arise.

Mr. Chairman, during the debate it was suggested that the TILMA will lower labour standards. The answer to that is: not true. In fact, both Alberta and B.C. have specifically committed to promoting high labour standards. We've worked together with more than 60 regulatory bodies that represent the hundred professional and skilled trade occupations covered under the TILMA. These regulatory bodies are directly involved in these negotiations, which is why we are very confident that high standards will continue. In most cases we are finding that mutual recognition is the option most regulatory bodies are going with.

3:40

I believe that everybody now has the amendments, so I'll just deal with that at this time, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move these four proposed amendments for the consideration of the Assembly. They will make Bill 18 a better bill.

The first one is to the Legal Profession Act. The proposed amendment is to allow this specific portion of Bill 18 to be proclaimed at an appropriate time. This flexibility will provide the necessary time for the Law Society to update its own rules as well as its professional oath of office. The Law Society is unable to make these changes until the next convocation of its benchers, or in other words, the next meeting of its benchers, which will occur in mid-April.

The second and third amendments apply to the Business Corporations Act, Cooperatives Act, and Partnership Act. In principle this amendment is required to ensure there is full authority for Alberta to make the regulatory changes necessary to implement an integrated system of seamless corporate registration for businesses in Alberta and B.C. Currently the act permits regulation regarding collecting information and documents from corporations, co-operatives, and partnerships. The amendment would allow regulations to be developed that would cover documents provided by the other registry. We also need to improve the wording of these acts to set regulations that are consistent with the requirements of an integrated business registration system in Alberta and British Columbia. The wording in our existing acts was never originally developed with these requirements in mind.

The last proposed amendment is intended to modify the definition

of "extra-provincial limited liability partnership" contained in the Partnership Act.

Those, Mr. Chairman, are my comments with respect to the amendments. I'll just go back to answer some of the points raised by hon. members during the debate in second reading.

It is important to point out that all provinces have followed Alberta's and B.C.'s lead, agreeing to full labour mobility under the AIT. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in her remarks indicated that she was a bit concerned we would give loans "to people, farms, businesses outside of the province." I can tell you this: the only way access to money will be had is if your shovel is in the ground in Alberta. Your business address may be in B.C., but the work you do must be in Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona also reraised a common misconception that TILMA will negatively affect the public interest, especially in municipalities. Mr. Chairman, I can tell you that the TILMA does not affect a municipality's ability to make laws such as zoning bylaws, height restrictions, signage rules, and land-use decisions that they believe are in the best interests of their citizens. It also does not interfere with social housing programs or assisting the less fortunate. I referred to the press release of June 2008 earlier in my remarks, where the representatives of the two municipal umbrella organizations here in Alberta clearly indicated that they were satisfied with the consultation process and that their concerns had been addressed.

TILMA preserves each government's right to establish regulations relating to public policy objectives such as public safety and security, environmental and consumer protection, and protection of the health, safety, and well-being of workers, such as workplace safety standards.

Mr. Chairman, after our extensive consultation with the MASH sector we reached agreement on new procurement thresholds under the TILMA. The thresholds are now \$75,000 for goods and services and \$200,000 for construction. Under the AIT, agreement on internal trade, thresholds were \$100,000 for goods and services and \$250,000 for construction projects.

Mr. Chairman, finally, I'd like to refer to the changes to the Government Organization Act. I made remarks to this effect also in my comments in second reading. I want to clearly outline how this change will work and why we need it. Changing the Government Organization Act will empower the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to temporarily amend noncompliant legislation. Temporary means for only a maximum of three years. Ideally, we would be able to bring legislation forward much sooner than that. Examples of when we would need this anticipatory ability might occur when prompt change is required to implement a TILMA panel ruling or for Alberta to avoid a challenge from B.C. under the TILMA when the Legislature is not in session. Mr. Chairman, I must point out that there is precedence for this to the Government Organization Act and that it is not inconsistent with past parliamentary practices. There are, for example, similar provisions in the Municipal Government Act and the Animal Health Act. Let's be clear about this: we will continue to make changes under the existing legislative process. This change to the Government Organization Act is anticipatory and will only be used as a last resort.

Mr. Chairman, those are some comments I have with respect to the bill generally, the points that were raised by the hon. members in earlier debate on this matter, and with respect to the amendments I'm putting forward for consideration. TILMA will in fact create Canada's second-largest market, of almost 8 million people, and a combined GDP of more than \$400 billion. It will eliminate duplicate and overlapping government red tape between the provinces, making the flow of goods, services, and people much easier. In the

end TILMA is designed to help Albertans. With that, I would ask for the hon. members to give favourable consideration to the amendments and Bill 18, ultimately, as amended.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: Shall progress on Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 12

Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to listening to Albertans and making legislation more effective. With that commitment in mind, it is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 12, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, these changes address administration and dispute resolution processes to improve the efficiency of the Surface Rights Board and make it more responsive, flexible, and cost-effective. The Surface Rights Board is a quasi-judicial board. It currently conducts hearings when operators and landowners or occupants can't agree on entry or compensation related to resource activity on privately owned or occupied public land.

The Surface Rights Act has a number of outdated provisions that prevent the board from operating as responsibly as it could. The current act defines the roles of a number of the board positions. The amendments remove these restrictions and allow the board to be more responsive in how it uses its human resources. For example, the duties of a secretary can be determined by the needs of the board rather than defined by statute.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, board hearings can be lengthy and costly for both parties involved and for the board. With the amendments formal hearings will not be compulsory. Instead, the board will have the flexibility to assist parties to resolve disputes outside of a formal hearing process. Clients will have the option to use more informal and flexible forms of dispute resolution that will save time and money. These changes will pave the way to a higher level of satisfaction for all parties and make for more efficient use of board resources.

The amendment will allow for a process that responds to the needs of Albertans. Alternate dispute resolution is being used in other jurisdictions across Canada. For example, the Manitoba Surface Rights Board, the Yukon Surface Rights Board, the B.C. Mediation and Arbitration Board, and the National Energy Board use similar processes. Closer to home, alternate dispute resolution is used by the Alberta Utilities Commission, the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the Environmental Appeals Board, the Alberta Labour Relations Board, and the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal.

The Energy Resources Conservation Board has a variety of options available to concerned parties to manage disputes. These include direct negotiation between affected parties, ERCB staff facilitation, third-party mediation, arbitration, and an ERCB public hearing. The ERCB has been very successful with its appropriate dispute resolution program. In 2007 it had a success rate of 92 per cent using dispute resolution options that involved staff facilitation or third-party facilitation. Moving to alternative dispute resolution will bring more efficiency to the Surface Rights Board, which will in turn provide a better service to Alberta landowners and all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I emphasize that alternative dispute resolution is entirely voluntary, not mandatory. The landowner or the operator may still choose to have and hold a formal hearing. Also, the proposed amendments are entirely procedural, and they do not address other matters such as compensation. The power to issue compensation orders will be preserved. The amendments simply enable the board to use processes other than a hearing to determine compensation.

As a government we are committed to ensuring Albertans receive fair and timely processes from tribunals. These amendments will help us reach that goal for the Surface Rights Board and will bring it into line with other legislation governing tribunals in Canada. Having an efficient Surface Rights Board is extremely valuable. I ask you to support the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 12, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009. I appreciate the work that the MLA sponsor has done on this bill. He was very prompt with providing me an overview of the bill, and I really appreciated him doing that. Nevertheless, at this time I'm still somewhat hesitant to offer full support, but I'm sure that with some questions asked and talking to a few more stakeholders, this could be a bill that we could support.

As was indicated by the mover, this bill has some good intentions to it. If we look at attempting to deal with the administration procedures and to in effect streamline them in order to expeditiously resolve surface rights disputes, clearly, this is an admirable goal.

The amendments to the act are on the procedural side generally and are aimed at making the process of the board more efficient.

Again, these are very laudable goals that should no doubt be pursued in any regulatory model that we here in Alberta pursue. That being said, it needs to also ensure fairness and a chance for people to be heard and all of those good things that we consider that a regulatory body should have to ensure that procedures of natural justice are recognized.

Here's a little background. As indicated, the Surface Rights Board is a quasi-judicial board authorized under the Surface Rights Act to determine compensation related to energy activities. Parties are encouraged to use mediation as the primary way to resolve disputes that come before the Board. Unlike a formal hearing, the parties have control over the outcome and are more likely to be satisfied with mediated results than with decisions imposed by the Board.

Those, again, are tremendous goals. If we can have people solve problems for themselves, well, it's a much better way to go.

That being said, let's face it. Surface rights is often a balance of competing interests, much like this House sometimes. The landowner wants to get as much money as he can from the ratepayer, utility provider, energy company, whoever you may have, and that energy company, whoever it is, wants to pay the least amount that they can. That's just the simple nature of the way these businesses or individuals operate. The Surface Rights Board is there to try and manage these types of situations.

You know, if we look at what we're talking about here, too, it also extends primarily to the right of entry that may be granted by the board on both private and Crown land for the following activities that are happening all over our province: mining, roads connecting to mines, construction and operation and removal of pipelines, construction of tanks and other structures related to mining and the oil and gas industry, exploration on public lands, drilling or operation of a well, and enabling reclamation in limited circumstances. You see, this bill affects the way that Albertans both do business now and into the future.

Obviously, some people are not always happy when an energy company says: I want to drill on your north 40. Sometimes they don't even want the well there despite the fact that it may offer them some financial reward. Nevertheless, that's why we have the system in place, to try and deal with these tensions.

Surface rights boards are very busy places. If we look at even just last year, the Surface Rights Board had 898 scheduled hearings: 403 of those were heard, 293 settled, 193 rescheduled – so I assume that they're going to be heard sometime in the future – six withdrawn, and three adjourned. As we can see from these statistics, the caseload for the Surface Rights Board is increasing every year, and only around half the cases are actually heard. The result of this has been the drawn-out process. This causes expenses for both the drilling companies as well as the farmer or landowner, as the case may be.

Let's look at the sectional analysis. In section 2 the current change in the new act repeals sections 3(3) to (7). The section deals with the composition of the members of the board. The major change here is the substance of the new section, and this allows the chair of the SRB to select a member or a panel of members to deal with any matter or class or group of matters. It also gives the member or the panel all the powers and jurisdictions of the board in many matters.

Well, that opens up the case of: what is the panel? If you look at the way this act is now put together, a panel can be one person.

4:00

This may in certain cases, sometimes, be a good thing, but also I think it can be fraught with difficulty. There seems to be too much authority vested in one individual member, and I'm cautious about

delegating all the powers of a surface rights board hearing to one member. I'm not sure if industry supports this or if landowners support this. I'd like to actually hear if that has come forward, that they feel comfortable that one person can decide these cases, generally. If that's the case, well, that's the case. Nevertheless, it gives me some cause for concern.

There's another. If we look also at section 3, what basically this does is repeal the appointment of "a secretary, an assistant secretary, inspectors, land examiners and any other employees required to carry on the business of the Board." Now, what I'm primarily worried about is, you know, the elimination of the secretary. We've all been in many board meetings. We never really think that the secretary is doing much until we get to the next board meeting, when we try to figure out what we did at the board meeting before. Then we read the secretary's notes, and it becomes clear: "Well, yeah, I guess we did do something. Now let's follow up: did we do any of these things we said we were going to do in between the meetings?" Having some record, some care and control of the documents, what decisions have been made: maybe you can just enlighten us as to how that's now going to occur as I'm sure that somehow the decisions are going to be carried forward. It's probably a very simple answer but, nonetheless, a question I ask.

Section 5. In the old act one of the things was that the board was allowed to make decisions based on both written and oral hearings instead of just written submissions. Now the change has occurred where we only go to written submissions. We all know that all individuals aren't the best at writing down concerns, but most of us can bring our concerns in a verbal fashion much more easily and clearly. It's much more forceful when we're given an opportunity to meet with an adjudicator or meet with the other side face to face and to actually have our 15 minutes in the sun or however long the board would allow. I think this has the great potential, of course, of speeding things up, but it also has a serious potential for impeding a landholder's or a company's right to be heard and right to speak up and right to present their case. To be honest, I'm more worried about the individual landowner in this case than I am about the companies. The companies will find a way to hire a wordsmith to write a very eloquent reason as to why they're right. Sometimes that may be lost if we take away the oral arguments section.

Those are my primary concerns with the bill. Like I said, we are reserving our judgment right there. We'll see what some of these answers to the questions are. There are some things in here that are good, that seem like they're going to streamline the process.

Here's one more thing I'd like to mention on the record here before I close. It's section 12. It amends certain parts of section 28 on the termination of the right of entry. This section allows an owner to apply for the termination of right of entry if the operator has not commenced operations within two months. If we look at this amendment, the only problem that could be inferred is that if the board decided not to grant the termination order, there is no mandatory hearing for the owner of the land to present their arguments. This could potentially have the impact of depriving a landowner of their right to a hearing. You can see that in section 12 if you could take a look at that. Maybe that's another concern that we have.

Other than that, we're waiting to hear from a couple more stakeholders, like I said. This is a very important bill as it relates to compensation for landowners who have resource activity on their land. Any changes to it must carefully consider and must achieve the best balance possible between the rights of the owners of the land and the rights of the operators and the owners of the minerals or otherwise on the land. There's no doubt that streamlining this process, if it can be done to expedite matters but still allow individu-

als to be heard, would be appreciated. Like I said, we'll see what answers come back. We'll hopefully hear from a couple more stakeholders, and then we'll give our opinion from there as to whether we can fully support this bill or not.

Thank you very much for allowing me to get those concerns on the record. At this time I will adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 13

Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to move second reading of Bill 13, the Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009.

Currently the Justice of the Peace Act authorizes justices of the peace to be appointed for a 10-year term. However, the act contains a provision for mandatory retirement at age 70. This bill will permit a sitting or presiding justice of the peace to sit past age 70 up to a maximum of age 75 or until his or her original 10-year appointment expires, whichever occurs first. The bill will ensure that highly experienced justices of the peace who are willing and capable of serving in a part-time or full-time capacity for their full 10-year term are not prevented from doing so simply because they've reached the age of 70. This bill ensures consistency with the similar provisions in the Provincial Court Act applicable to judges and the provisions of the Court of Queen's Bench Act applicable to masters in chambers.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice and the Attorney General strive to make Alberta's civil and criminal justice system more effective, efficient, and accessible. The Justice of the Peace Amendment Act will help to further that goal by retaining the knowledge and experience of justices of the peace with many years of service for their full year term. I would ask members of the House to support Bill 13.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise and speak to this bill and, in fact, support this bill as I believe it will allow justices of the peace to serve up to their 10 years, even past, say, turning 70 if they're competent and able and willing to do the job. It will allow them to sit up to a maximum of age 75 or the end of their 10-year term, whatever comes first. This proposed amendment would be consistent with other provisions in the Provincial Court Act applicable to judges and to provisions in the Court of Queen's Bench Act on the masters in chambers. Again, I believe that this is a good bill. It harmonizes much of the legislation that is out there. Like I mentioned, we will be voting in favour of this.

However, there are a few additional comments I'd like to get on the record here that show that possibly our justice system could be working a little more harmoniously with some more foresight and thought into the process of what is actually going on.

4:10

Just some background here. In addition to conducting bail hearings and presiding over traffic court, justices of the peace provide other front-line judicial services. These JPs work around the

clock to grant search warrants, approve the apprehension of children in danger, and authorize emergency protection orders that keep abusive family members out of the home.

At the end of January – that's this most recent January – the number of experienced justices working in Edmonton fell from 17 to three because their 10-year appointments had expired on January 31. Clearly, this really can't be excused other than the fact of a lack of planning or a lack of planning around the appointments of most of these people and not realizing that a staggering would be necessary to keep some of these justices of the peace working beyond this drop-dead date that is apparent in the legislation. In the *Edmonton Journal* last month Brian Hurley, the president of Alberta's Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, noted that the poor planning on the part of the Justice officials was "horrendously irresponsible."

Sources within Justice note that their biggest concern is the backup of bail hearings. Because an accused has the right to a bail hearing within 24 hours of their arrest, delays may allow criminal defence lawyers to launch Charter applications to have their clients' charges stayed due to delays. Clearly, that is something we don't want happening here in Alberta.

Part of the issue for those who may consider hearing applications as a JP is that unlike outgoing justices, new appointees can't work as defence lawyers while they serve in the positions. Assistant Chief Judge Allan Lefever said that provincial court judges are expecting an influx of hearings in their court but concerns about Charter violations arising from backlogged bail hearings are unfounded.

Anyways, we are hoping that this addition and changes to the court system will allow for our justice system to run more smoothly. Nevertheless, I think something has to be done towards the planning of when these terms end so that we don't have 14 of our 10-year terms ending at the same date and leaving us with a void of experienced prosecutors to deal with the day-to-day goings-on in Alberta's court system. So we support this as it will be a measure to ensure the smooth operation of the courts. It does boggle the mind how it took the government quite a while to get moving on this even after what has just happened.

Anyway, those are my comments. I will adjourn debate on Bill 13.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16

Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, on behalf of the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

This bill is important for the many police services which benefit from the work of auxiliary constables. There are currently about 360 of these auxiliary constables in Alberta. They volunteer their time and work with the RCMP throughout rural Alberta and with police services in Taber, Medicine Hat, Lacombe, and the Blood tribe reserve.

Auxiliary constables are not fully sworn police members. They have limited authority granted to them under the Peace Officer Act. They help provide community policing at safety events, become involved with schools, businesses in the local community, and help engage the community in crime prevention awareness. Their services play a vital role in helping police throughout Alberta.

**Bill 21
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009**

**Bill 22
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009**

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the question to the House on every appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; bills 21 and 22 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to continue.

**Bill 16
Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009
(continued)**

Dr. Morton: Thank you. Continuing. When section 25(3) of the Peace Officer Act comes into effect on May 1, 2009, it will restrict the terms and symbols that can be used to identify these auxiliary constables. This section was included in the act to prevent anyone except fully sworn police officers from calling themselves constable or special constable. The intent was to establish clear, distinct identities for sworn officers and auxiliary constables and to keep the term “constable” exclusively for sworn officers.

However, complying with section 25(3) would require police services with auxiliary programs to change their auxiliary constables’ uniforms and insignia, creating extra costs for those services. Mr. Speaker, this was never the intent of the Peace Officer Act, and these extra costs would be especially burdensome in these uncertain economic times. For example, it would require the RCMP auxiliary program to purchase new uniforms or uniform markings for their 335 auxiliary officers, similarly for the 26 auxiliary constables in other police services.

This proposed amendment would allow police services to ask the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for an exemption to this section of the act. They could then use similar uniforms and titles, both sworn and auxiliary constables who attend scenes together. Passing this amendment now, before section 25(3) comes into effect on May 1, will ensure police services with auxiliary police programs do not have to use limited budget dollars to make changes to their uniforms and insignia. There are no costs related to this amendment to the government.

Mr. Speaker, the passage of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, will allow Albertans who dedicate their personal time to supporting their local police services to continue to do so without incurring any extra costs.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. It again gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009. At this time I’m somewhat hesitant to offer our full support as it appears that under this, although it seems to be a relatively straightforward procedure, just simply allowing for a change to what you call yourself on a uniform, there may be, in fact, more at play. Now we are going to a level of bureaucracy. In fact, our sheriffs and constables and whatever, the public security peace

officer program, all that stuff we’re raising here is creating, at least to my mind, a little bit of confusion and delay. I stole that from Thomas the train, if anyone was interested there. Yes. Yes. Confusion and delay. Yes.

But, anyways, on that note, we’re still unsure. Let me just give you a little bit of a reasoning here. The original Peace Officer Act in 2006 replaced the term “special constable” with “peace officer.” The act established new levels of authority for peace officers. These levels were the Alberta peace officer levels 1 and 2 and community peace officer levels 1 and 2. Now it appears that they will once again be utilizing the term “special constable.” I remind people that this was changed back in the original act.

4:20

The question, for me anyway, is: why is this being done? It’s not an overly burdensome change, but if the intent of the original bill was to change the name of the special constable program to public security peace officer program to raise the profile of this aspect of law enforcement, establishing various levels of authority based on the peace officers’ roles and responsibilities and ensuring effective communication between peace officers and other law enforcement agencies, then why reintroduce the phased-out terminology?

Where we just changed the bill back in 2006, we’re implementing the same language that we phased out at that point in time. Really, maybe this is much ado about nothing, but it’s a concern for what in fact appears to be happening out there in that we’ve got 47 different levels of police officers out there, or quasi-police officers or sheriffs or peace partners. We haven’t included the Guardian Angels yet under this amendment, but it seems that someday that, too, may be coming. It just gives me some concern as to where in fact we’re going and what is in fact happening out there.

If we look, we’ve had a tremendous expansion of our sheriffs program, and many people, including myself, would say that they’re doing a very good job out there. Nevertheless, was the continued growth of this sheriffs program really what the people in our cities and in our small towns needed? When you look around, our policing numbers in Calgary and Edmonton are significantly lower per capita than when we look at other major cities. You look at places like Toronto, Vancouver, and places like that, that have higher numbers of police officers, boots on the streets, like people like to say. I’m just wondering at this time, with the expenditure of dollars, value for money, why we went down this path when maybe the support was more needed with our local police officers and with the troubles our local communities were having.

That’s nothing to take away from what our sheriffs are doing. What it is representing is maybe a choice of what our government expenditures and priorities should be. I leave that out there for us probably to continue discussing at some other time in this honourable House. Let’s face it; at least on its face most police agencies are at least saying that they’re enjoying the use of the sheriffs, and I take them at face value. Let’s hope that this decision continues to ensure the safety of Alberta’s citizens. I’m hopeful it will, but I’m just cognizant that maybe the timing of these real expenditures was maybe not made on enough of a priority basis. They should have been made to our civic policing unit.

Nevertheless, those are my comments, and on that note I adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 17
Securities Amendment Act, 2009**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 furthers the work that Alberta has done in modernizing, streamlining, and harmonizing securities legislation over the last five years, work necessary to support the passport system for securities regulation. Before I outline the proposed amendments, I'd like to address the federal budget proposal to establish a single federal securities regulator and federal securities legislation.

I understand that the federal government has invited all provinces and territories to participate in this federal initiative. Alberta is strongly opposed to the federal move to a single regulator. Securities regulation is a provincial responsibility, and this federal initiative would be an intrusion into an area of provincial jurisdiction. We continue to believe that the passport system is a practical model that provinces and territories can implement to create a national regulatory system that is flexible, responsive, and which respects provincial jurisdiction. As such, it is important that we continue our work to develop the passport system, which includes making the necessary changes to our legislation to keep it strong. The move to a single regulator could take years, Mr. Speaker, and we're ready to move with the passport system now. This is not the time to consider the significant structural changes required to move to a single regulator, given today's turbulent economic climate, which could further unsettle capital markets.

Alberta has taken a leadership role in reforming Canada's securities regulatory system and will continue to do so. For this reason Alberta is prepared to consider these aspects of the Hockin report designed to improve Canada's regulatory system, provided they respect provincial constitutional authority over securities regulation. We have identified eight Hockin report recommendations that merit further consideration and 16 recommendations that are already implemented or on which work is well under way.

Returning now to Bill 17, Mr. Speaker. The proposed amendments will further harmonize enforcement sanctions, improve

disclosure to consumers, and restore rescission rights to mutual fund investors until harmonized rules for those are adopted. The amendments will support a joint project of securities and insurance regulators known as the point-of-sale project. The point-of-sale project will improve disclosure to consumers by requiring that they receive short, simple, and clear documents called fund facts.

Other amendments to this legislation will expand the commission's power to reprimand registrants to include others and to extend the power to revoke or vary orders to include the executive director. This means that the commission will be able to reprimand any market participant, not just the registrant. It also clarifies that the executive director may revoke or vary any decision the executive director has made.

Lastly, the amendments will restore on an interim basis, Mr. Speaker, rescission rights available to investors purchasing mutual funds. Rescission rights mean that an investor has the right to cancel their purchase without penalty. These rescission rights were inadvertently repealed in 2008 as part of the larger process of removing nonharmonized prospectus provisions from the Securities Act. The harmonized prospectus rules implemented in 2008 did not contain harmonized rescission rights, but the Alberta Securities Commission advises that the harmonized rule requirement will be adopted within the next two to three years. So this step is just an interim measure.

I urge all members of this Assembly to give their support to Bill 17, and I move to adjourn debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to March 12, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)

- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 18 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft., adjourned)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, March 16, 2009

Issue 15

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 16, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, would you please remain standing now, and we'll participate in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Her Excellency Gintė Damušis, ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania. I was honoured to host a special luncheon today in honour of Her Excellency's first visit to Alberta. Alberta and Lithuania have a solid trading relationship, and the Lithuanian community has strong roots in our province. We value the Lithuanian culture as one of the many cultures that greatly contribute towards our quality of life and help bring stronger communities and a stronger Alberta. I'm proud to say that the Alberta government is committed to creating a society where all people feel welcome and are included in all aspects of the life of the province. We are going to be richer because of our friendship and our historic trading relationship, and we hope to enhance that. I know that Her Excellency has had several meetings and will have others with many of my colleagues today. I would like to ask that Her Excellency please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the Clerk's table today is the Hon. Peter Milliken, Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons. Mr. Milliken is currently serving in his seventh consecutive term as the Member for Kingston and the Islands, a federal riding in the province of Ontario. He was elected for the first time on November 21, 1988. On January 29, 2001, he was elected as the 34th Speaker in the history of the Canadian House of Commons, and on October 12, 2009, he will become the longest serving Speaker in the history of that body, the Canadian House of Commons. A fuller biography of Mr. Milliken is located at each member's desk. Mr. Milliken has agreed to meet with any Member of this Legislative Assembly that wishes to attend a special seminar. It will be put on tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock for one hour in the Carillon Room.

Mr. Speaker, would you kindly rise and receive the warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 45 very special guests from Fort Saskatchewan elementary school, 29 visitors in the members' gallery and 16 in the public gallery. They're here visiting the Legislature, and I'm looking forward to our visit to Fort Saskatchewan elementary in the early part of April. The students are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Beth Budd, Mrs. Shirley Cockburn, teacher assistant Mrs. Joanne Brown, and parent helpers Mrs. Amanda Peck and Mrs. Gail Davies. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have at least 14 more introductions.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 39 visitors from the Greystone Centennial middle school out of Spruce Grove. They're a very keen group. They're here for the week at the Legislature, a great program put on by your office. They're very keen. They responded to my questions in the House in unison. They're accompanied by teachers Mrs. Katy Rogal and Ms Amanda Brouwer and parent helper Ms Michelle Westendorf. I believe they're in both of our galleries. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My students are from Sifton elementary school. There will be 28 of them. They will be accompanied by their teacher, Tracy Bradley, and teacher's aide Nancy Brown. However, they won't be in here until about 2 o'clock, but I'd still like to extend them a warm welcome today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very special group of 48 grade 6 students that are here today visiting from the Wye school in Strathcona. I can say without a doubt that this class is one of the brightest in our constituency, and this has nothing to do with the fact that my son Jack is one of the students. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Tanya Jordan, Mrs. Corey Kropp, and Ms Lisa Schlegel, teachers' helper Mrs. Daniela Eskow, and parent helpers Mrs. Star, Mrs. Veeneman, Mrs. Flathers, Mrs. Johnston, and my lovely wife, Fiona Beland. They're seated in the public gallery as well, and I'd ask that they all rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend of mine from Vermilion. Lorne Maier is the local ATA representative there. Like many teachers, he's very active in the community. He's a Rotarian, he's coached football, and he's always

made his classroom open for us to go in and speak to him. Lorne is here today with an interest in Motion 503. I'd like him to rise and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four friends, supporters, and constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud. First, Mr. Balbir Sharma and his wife, Rama, are very proud Albertans and have been so since 1981. Balbir worked as a draftsman for many years. He now volunteers as treasurer for the Council of India Societies of Edmonton, an umbrella organization of over 15 organizations. I might say that our own colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie was an executive member and past president of that organization. Rama also volunteered for nonprofit organizations in Edmonton. Their son, Dr. Sanjay Sharma, is a cardiologist here in Edmonton based out of two hospitals, including the University of Alberta hospital, where he was trained. His wife, Suvidha, has recently been appointed as a Crown prosecutor for the province of Alberta. Balbir, Rama, Sanjay, and Suvidha came down to the Legislature today to visit with the member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and I had an opportunity to meet with them in my office. I want to thank them for their contributions to the volunteer sector in Edmonton and in Alberta. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly Tracey Bowes from the Highwood constituency. Tracey is in the House today for the debate on Motion 503. It certainly is excellent that Tracey is so interested and has taken the time to come to Edmonton. Tracey is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask her now to rise and receive the usual warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the executive director of Homeward Trust. Susan McGee is here with us. I want you to know that Susan is also the newest member of the secretariat, and we're looking forward to her wisdom, her passion, her energy, and just her involvement with the secretariat, as well. Susan, would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is part of Rendez-vous. I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you representatives from the francophone economic development council of Alberta. Since 2003 my department and Travel Alberta have been working with the council to develop a successful marketing strategy to attract visitors and tour operators from francophone regions, such as Quebec and France. The council has also worked with the province's private sector to develop a francophone Alberta tourism corridor. Here today are members of the council. I'd ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: Mr. Randy Boissonnault, president; Mr.

Frank Saulnier, CEO; Mr. Patrice Gauthier, development agent; and Mr. Roch Labelle, development agent. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine who is visiting the Legislature today. Mr. Chris Coleman is a special education teacher from the Irvine school in beautiful southeast Alberta and president of the Prairie Rose local of the ATA. He's joining us today as we discuss Motion 503. He has previously taught in Texas, where he saw first-hand the problems with high-stakes testing and the failures of the No Child Left Behind policy of the United States. He's here today to show his support for this motion, and I appreciate his dedication. Mr. Coleman is seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask him to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two Saskatchewan boys who, to Alberta's great benefit, decided years ago to move here and make Alberta their home. They are Dr. Roger Epp, dean of the Augustana faculty of the University of Alberta in Camrose; and Mr. Brian Hesje, chairman of the board of Fountain Tire and member of the board of directors of ATB Financial.

Dr. Epp has been a professor and an administrator at Augustana for some 19 years, and he's a distinguished political scientist with a special interest in rural Alberta and the rural west. Mr. Hesje, as I mentioned, is chair of the board of Fountain Tire, but he also has a very important connection to Augustana in that he is its most recently designated distinguished alumnus. I'll have more to say about him in a few moments in a member's statement.

Both Dr. Epp and Mr. Hesje are here in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour today to introduce an intrepid group of young Albertans, the Carrington-Morris family. Eleven-year-old Mahala is a great singer and future superstar, and nine-year-old Jonah is a long-distance running champion and a superb orator. They both enjoy playing hockey and are both home-schooled by their parents. That's why they're here today, to learn a little bit more about how our Legislature works. They've enjoyed a great tour of the Legislature, and a couple of unexpected highlights, including meeting our fine Premier and the Speaker of our federal House.

Dr. Natalie Carrington and Dr. Greg Morris are their fabulous parents. They are accomplished athletes, and they are great servants of their community. Together they run the Diamond Valley chiropractic, acupuncture, and optimum health clinic in the foothills of the Rockies. They keep our hard-working Alberta ranchers and oil workers healthy, happy, and on the job.

One final note. Dr. Natalie Carrington was of invaluable assistance for every minute of my wife, Jennifer's, long labour, which resulted in the birth of our first-born son, Dawson, last April.

I would ask our fine friends, the Carrington-Morris family, to please stand now and accept the warm wishes of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House a group of Edmonton Lithuanian members who are here honouring the visit of Her Excellency Gintė Damušis, who is visiting Edmonton, as you've learned earlier today. With us today are Erwin Kilotat, Andrea Smidtas, Al Smidtas, Marty Wilson, Adriana Podberskis, Gloria Bartkus, Rimas Siulys, Paul Stanaitis, and Nejolla Korris, who is currently being considered by the Lithuanian government to be appointed as honorary consul of the Republic of Lithuania to Alberta and perhaps western Canada. I would ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to rise and introduce four constituents, that are also very close friends of mine from St. Albert, who are seated in the public gallery. These gentlemen have been close associates for over 30 years in quite a variety of activities. Perhaps the most memorable of them is our wine group called the Weinguts. Those of German tongue will recognize that to mean good wine. I would ask my guests Les Johnston, Joe Sombach, Lawrence Hermanutz, and Larry Wyatt to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Brier Curling Championship

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek and all members here to recognize the world's best men's curling team, Alberta's own Kevin Martin rink. Last night the Kevin Martin team defeated Team Manitoba and established a new record of 26 consecutive Brier game victories. The atmosphere in Calgary's Saddledome was electric as Alberta's all-star team of Kevin Martin and Ben Hebert from Edmonton and John Morris and Marc Kennedy from Calgary clinched the 2009 Brier.

On behalf of all of my MLA government colleagues I also want to salute and thank the Calgary hosts and organizers, who carried off an incredibly successful Brier. For nine straight days curling fans in Calgary and from across Alberta and the entire nation were treated to an amazing display of skill and sportsmanship as portrayed by all the Brier teams. Breathtaking shotmaking, perfect brushing and strategizing resulted in a legacy of great memories and excitement.

Mr. Speaker, we all watched proudly as Alberta rose to the top once again and as 700 local volunteers extended a warm western welcome to Calgary's Pengrowth Saddledome. Viewers from around the world also tuned in on their televisions to watch history being made right here in Alberta. This year's Tim Hortons Brier attendance topped 140,000 spectators, an amazing tribute to the sponsors and organizers and, of course, to the curling fans. Now we can all look forward to the next great week of curling excellence, the Roar of the Rings Olympic qualifying tournament in Edmonton this December.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Job Losses

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month Alberta lost another 24,000 jobs, bringing the losses for 2009 to 30,000. Just a month ago the government projected 15,000 job losses for the entire year, averaging 50 per day. The reality is that 500 jobs per day were lost in January and February, 10 times what the government projected. To the Premier: how can Albertans be confident this government is prepared to deal with the economic downturn when it so grossly misjudged the severity of this economic recession?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, even if it's a hundred people out of work in this province, it's of great concern to this government. As I said before, what we're going to be doing is ensuring, when we deliver the budget, that there'll be supports to ensure that the people programs are in place and also invest significantly in infrastructure so that we keep the people working in this province.

Dr. Swann: The Bank of Canada has adjusted its policy to deal with the prospect of a longer economic downturn, yet this government persists in its rosy projections of job losses. Again to the Premier: what exactly is this government basing its job loss projections on?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't think these are rosy job loss projections. I don't know why we would use the word "rosy." I'm sure all Albertans want to contribute positively to the province. Year over year we've actually created more jobs in the province February to February, but we know that we are going to have some difficulty over the next year or so as the economy rebounds in our biggest market, and that's down south in the United States.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, thousands of Albertans are out of work, and on average only 1 in 4 is qualifying for employment insurance benefits, 1 in 4. It's clear that there are changes needed to the EI system. To the Premier: will he be calling on the federal government to make the changes to ensure that those who are unemployed are getting the support for which they've paid billions of dollars each year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I already delivered that position at the Premiers' meeting, at which the Prime Minister was present. I said that Alberta has been through good fortune, through a good, robust economy contributing to Ottawa a net contribution of \$18.3 billion just last year alone. That is one – that is one – interregional transfer and a difference in policy. The other one is, of course, the EI benefits. We have to work more hours in Alberta to earn, actually, less benefit than those in other provinces. We're not discounting the fact that, you know, we are going to be seeing some difficulties, but the message I delivered to the Prime Minister is that unemployed families, whether they're in the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario, or Alberta, are equally unemployed.

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

Support for the Oil and Gas Sector

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the government provided incentives for the energy sector to keep Alberta working. However, this covers one industry, leaving thousands of workers in other sectors without support from this government. To the Premier: why is the Premier choosing to support one industry when there are thousands of Albertans in other sectors losing their jobs? Are you picking winners and losers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're meeting with all industrial sectors. I'll tell you that the oil and gas sector is one that has probably seen the greatest drop in the commodity prices. Forestry has been having significant issues, and we're meeting, actually, with the forestry sector this afternoon. For agriculture my hopes are up. Fertilizer prices are dropping, fuel prices are dropping, canola is still hanging around that \$9 to \$9.50 a bushel, so there is some hope. Beef prices are stabilizing a bit although they're not anywhere near where they were two years ago. There are some bright areas in the upcoming economy, but certainly oil and gas and forestry will be going through some difficult times.

Dr. Swann: The construction industry has posted significant job losses in recent months. Unemployment in this sector has already exceeded 9 per cent in January, and half of February's additional job losses are in construction. To the Premier: will you be providing specific support to the construction industry as you have to the oil and gas sector?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what we will be doing is continuing on a very robust capital construction plan in this province. As we entered this fiscal period, we spent about two to three times more per capita on infrastructure than any other province, and we'll continue to do that into next year so that we employ as many Albertans as possible.

Dr. Swann: Investment in green jobs provides short-term and long-term benefit to Albertans and per dollar creates more growth than investment in other sectors, including the oil and gas sector. To the Premier: why is this government not investing more in green projects, which will not only create more jobs but improve our international reputation and improve our environment?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's at least \$2 billion in carbon capture and storage, which is going to provide a number of green jobs, especially related to the construction of the pipeline. There's another I believe \$239 million in a program that's assisting ethanol and biodiesel production in the province, which has a double benefit: it would not only employ people, but it will clean our air. So there are a number of dollars going in. We do produce the most wind power in the province of Alberta compared to other jurisdictions. I also might say that all of that wind power that we're producing is unsubsidized compared to other jurisdictions that are actually using taxpayer dollars to support wind power.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Bitumen Exports

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In the leadership race for the Tory party the Premier said, and I quote: shipping raw bitumen is like scraping off the topsoil, selling it, and then passing the farm on to the next generation. Yet the portion of raw bitumen shipped to the U.S.A. for upgrading is rising, and thousands of jobs are going south of the border in the process. My question is to the Premier. Why is Alberta's upgrading construction stalled while in the U.S.A. it's booming?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I didn't know that that was such a good speech. That's the second member that has actually referenced it here in the House.

As I said before when comments were made about jobs going south, if you look at the unemployment rate in the United States,

they're having similar difficulties to what we are experiencing in Canada. With respect to adding value to bitumen, we are looking at different processes. In terms of adding value, we know we have to add value to bitumen. We changed the policy significantly in terms of bitumen in kind; that's bitumen that all Albertans own that we can sell to a merchant upgrader. There are a few more details to work out, but we do want to increase the amount of bitumen upgraded from 60-some per cent to closer to 70.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Independent industry analysts are coming to the opposite conclusion. While Alberta is hemorrhaging hundreds of jobs a day, there's a boom in upgrader construction south of the border. For example, BP and Husky have created thousands of jobs in Ohio by building an upgrader there to process raw bitumen from Alberta. Once these upgraders have gone to the U.S.A., they're gone forever. Again to the Premier: does the Premier agree with a recent analysis by CAPP that the proportion of bitumen upgraded here is going to substantially decline?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're, I believe, shipping about 1.3 million barrels of oil a day. If everything goes well over the next few years and our production increases to closer to 3 million barrels, that is a substantial increase in production but also a substantial task in adding upgrading to the increased production. That is what we're looking at. We're not anywhere close to 3 million barrels a day. I think the plan is 3 million by 2015, and we're working very carefully through policies that will ensure that we increase the amount of upgrading in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Eight hundred Albertans a day in February were losing their jobs, yet Conoco and EnCana created thousands of jobs in Borger, Texas, by building yet another upgrader to process raw bitumen from Alberta. As with the plant in Ohio, once those upgrader jobs have gone to the U.S.A., they're gone forever. To the Premier: when will this government be taking real action to get Albertans back to work building upgraders here? What are the timelines?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're working on a policy to ensure that we increase the value of upgrading. There is, of course, the issue of ensuring that we do it in a very environmentally sound manner, find a balance. We also need a number of additional transmission lines to the areas where upgraders are going to be built. There are transportation corridors to be dealt with. But, you know, now, when the oil sands expansion has slowed down, all of a sudden attention is paid to the job loss. Unfortunately, that same attention wasn't paid to the job losses in the oil sands when the party opposite to me wanted to shut the whole thing down.

2:00

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, point of order, please.

The Speaker: The point of order will be recognized later.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Provincial Economic Strategy

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a stretch to say that the Liberal opposition has cost anybody their job. You can't

say the same thing about this crew, though. Last month alone nearly 24,000 Albertans lost their jobs. The government remains paralyzed by denial and still says only 15,000 Albertans will lose their jobs. Either the government is misleading Albertans about what our economic future holds, or it's dangerously misinformed. Which is it, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said before, whatever the statistics are, whatever the projections are, it is of serious concern to the government. As in a previous question, we're going to do whatever we can to provide the dollars to support not only people programs but also investments in infrastructure so that we can keep people working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, there were two other politicians who claimed that everything was just fine and that people should stop worrying. One was George W. Bush, and the other was Stephen Harper in the middle of the last election campaign. You'll remember that both of them were forced later to admit reality. Everyday Albertans need more than rosy, pie in the sky economic predictions to see them through this difficult time. My question is to the Premier. When will you offer some comfort to worried Albertans by unveiling a stimulus package that will keep Albertans working through this deep recession?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our capital plan alone is \$22.2 billion over the next three years. I would say that that is quite a substantial stimulus package for Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, that's the same capital plan they had when things were good, and they've cut \$2 billion out of public transit.

Regular Albertans facing unemployment, sometimes for the first time in their lives, need more than empty promises from this government. What they need are good jobs so that they can care for their families. Again to the Premier: when will you admit the seriousness of the problem and give everyday Albertans what they need, a humane economic policy that allows breadwinners to keep a roof over their families' heads and put food on the table?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're going to maintain the resources in our capital plan. One comment that I would like to make is that given today's economic climate – the fact that concrete is down considerably in price, steel is down, we're getting many more bids per tender call – I think we're going to get tremendous value for the dollars that we're going to invest in infrastructure. It will give us an opportunity to catch up with some of the new infrastructure, catch up with some of the maintenance that we have delayed over the last couple of years, so I think this is the opportunity to do the things that we need to do. I'm just looking forward to co-operation as we deliver the budget on April 7 and have the opportunity for the opposition to debate the dollars going in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Heat Detectors for Garages

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province has recently updated its building and fire codes to keep Albertans safe from the effects of fire. From my own past experience in the home building industry I know of three incidents when fires have started from an

attached garage. Initially it was agreed that the new code would include requirements for a heat detector in the garage. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please indicate why this was not included in the new code change?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer is that there is no heat detector on the market that works in extreme cold conditions. The change has been deferred until technology catches up. I need to also say that the new codes very much do include fire-resistant requirements for homes with attached garages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. How soon can we expect industry to design the heat detectors?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, if you're that wise.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the heat detectors need to comply with the national standards, and they need to be effective. Currently there is no national standard. We are working with the national body to ensure that the testing does take place because we believe that this is very important for safety. We will continue to work with the national council. When the standards are developed, this province will be adopting the heat detectors for garages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. The minister said that there are fire-resistant requirements for the garages. Can the minister please tell us what they are and their benefits?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that slowing down the speed of fires in garages is very critical. We have enhanced fire protection that we have put into the codes, one of them, of course, being to ensure that gypsum is put into those garages on all surfaces. These changes will make homes safer. Also, these changes buy time for individuals to get out of their homes and for firefighters to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month another 24,000 Albertans unfortunately lost their jobs along with many temporary foreign workers who were working here. Although some temporary foreign workers are eligible to apply for EI benefits if they meet the requirements, like many Albertans they are not receiving them. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: what are these workers supposed to do if they cannot draw EI benefits when they are unfortunately laid off?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is asking a question that a lot of people are also

asking. We continue to work with our temporary foreign workers. We identify additional positions that may be available to them, and we will work with them to see if they can move into other jobs. But I think we need to recognize that the word “temporary” is exactly what it says, and if it’s impossible for them to move into other occupations, then there’s an expectation that they should go home.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The minister has recently admitted that the province cannot track the 57,000 temporary foreign workers in the province. Why, then, is the hon. minister continuing to promote the flawed temporary foreign workers program when you don’t even know where any of those workers are or what they’re doing?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we know that there are some issues with a few of our temporary foreign workers. I need to indicate to the rest of our members here in the Assembly that for the 57,000 that are in the province, the majority are here doing the work that they’re meant to do, and they’re providing a tremendous service to the province of Alberta. We do know where the majority are. We are still expecting some areas where we have labour shortages where temporary foreign workers are providing a very, very useful benefit to our province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There’s certainly no shortage from that side of the House, but other people say that there is.

Again to the minister: since the minister has no idea where many of the temporary foreign workers in this province are located, how can he possibly continue to recruit workers through the program when there are already thousands of unemployed people in this province ready, willing, and able to go to work?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member indicates that, you know, there are people willing and ready to go to work, and I don’t deny that. But there are still some occupations out there where we do have some definite shortages. One of them specifically – and I met with that particular group this weekend – is beekeepers. Before our people have the ability to hire temporary foreign workers, they must advertise right across Alberta as well as Canada. There’s no doubt that in the agricultural sector there are some huge concerns that we might close down the temporary foreign workers and they would not be able to operate their facilities over the next summer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10

Bail System Reform

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The release of individuals charged with serious crimes has raised concerns about the bail system. My questions are for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. What is Alberta doing to ensure that potentially dangerous criminals aren’t being released on bail?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member may know, the issue of bail reform and the role of bail in our justice system has been a very important piece of what the Premier has talked about with respect to justice reform in the past year. As part

of our Safe Communities Secretariat we’ve developed a number of projects in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary where we have partnered prosecutors with police so that they’re working in tandem to ensure that we have the most effective bail packages available for the court to hear considerations with respect to bail.

Mr. Doerksen: A follow-up question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how can Albertans be assured that, in fact, our bail system is as effective as it can be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past year we’ve increased the number of prosecutors in the justice system. We’ve also increased the number of prosecutors that are arguing bail applications. In the past we have had police officers argue many of those cases, and we’ve made a decision in conjunction with the police that we think we can make more effective applications for bail to be withheld when we have Crown prosecutors making those applications. We’ve also introduced a system where bail applications can now be heard 24 hours a day in the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. We believe that that will ensure a fair hearing but also a very sound hearing and arguments that are being argued by prosecutors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: how is the Minister of Justice working with other jurisdictions, particularly the federal government, to make the Alberta bail system more effective?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of the day it will be a judge’s decision as to whether or not to release someone on bail. But what we have been saying and the discussions that I’ve had with my federal counterpart are that we believe that the bail tests need to be changed. We think the Criminal Code needs to be amended so that there are more opportunities for reverse onus so that people who have demonstrated at one time that they are not prepared to honour a court order are not given the benefit of the doubt the second time and they’re not released on bail.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Public Education Exemptions

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit spoke publicly about proposed amendments to the human rights act. The amendments would give parents the right to dictate what is taught in public schools. The minister speaks of tolerance, but this amendment seems like an appalling step backwards. To the Minister of Education: does the minister support amending the human rights act to make it a fundamental human right for parents to exempt their children from science education and other teachings that may be contrary to their beliefs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of

Education is under the fundamental belief that we're all born with a full basket of rights and that everything the government does in terms of enacting laws in the interests of the community diminishes those rights, hopefully for justifiable purposes. What I'd say to the hon. member is that we have rules in place in this province, both in the School Act with respect to religion and with mandated policy with respect to education with respect to sexuality, that a parent can choose to have their child exempted from such education if they don't believe it's in the best interest of their child from their personal value system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The minister anticipated my next question. As a teacher for 34 years I know that parents already have the right to excuse their child from classes that are contrary to their beliefs, such as sexual education. Given that there is no need, therefore, for such legislation, will the minister commit to not supporting any amendment that would enshrine a parent's right to ignore curriculum?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to commit to anything of the sort. If the government brings forward legislation and I'm a member of the government and House Leader, I think it's my duty to bring forward legislation to support what the government does. What I have to say in terms of the formation of that legislation would be counsel that I would hold to myself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The last time I checked my calendar, Mr. Minister, this was 2009 Alberta, not 1929 Tennessee.

Given that parents already have the right to home-school their children or to place their children in private schools, what is the point of a public curriculum that is developed to provide a full breadth of education if this government makes key sections of it optional? Create your own curriculum?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what's not optional in this province is that parents have the right to raise their children. They not only have a right; they have a duty and an obligation to those children to bring to those children moral values. It's not in the government's hands to dictate moral values to parents. What the government does is make sure that there's a good, strong public education system with a good, strong curriculum, and then parents can have the choice on certain areas, certain areas only, relative to religion and sexuality and whether their children should participate in those specific sections of the curriculum or not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The forest industry continues to face many challenges, both economically and naturally. Alberta recently experienced severe cold winter temperatures across most of our forests. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will this cold weather affect mountain pine beetles in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the Member for West Yellowhead will agree with me when I say: thank God for global cooling. Cold temperatures have helped against the beetle, but precisely how much we won't know until this spring. We have computer models that predict, but I'd rather rely upon the field surveys of the dead beetles that we do in the spring. When those surveys are done, that'll be the basis for the next stage of our pine beetle strategy. I'll be happy to report the results of those surveys when they're in.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. How significantly is overwinter mortality affecting Alberta's fight against mountain pine beetles considering the work that is being done at other times of the year, such as increased logging and burning?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The long-term health of Alberta's forests demands a long-term strategy. That's exactly what we have. Regardless of the impact of the cold winters, we will continue our healthy pine strategy. The goal there is to simulate a natural, age-balanced forest with younger, medium, and older aged trees. An age-balanced forest is much more resistant to insects and to wildfire. That's our long-term strategy, and we're sticking with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. How many more cold winters do we need to end this threat to our forests, or is there an end in sight?

Dr. Morton: How many more cold winters do we need, Mr. Speaker? I say the more the better. Bring 'em on. Bring on the global cooling. The facts of this matter are quite simple: wood is good, cold is bold, and beetles are bad. I'd ask all hon. members to join me in wishing for another couple of weeks of minus 30 until we get to Easter.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I want more cold weather, too.

Ambulance Services

Ms Pastoor: Last Wednesday the minister was anything but clear with his answers regarding the ground ambulance transition happening on April 1. There are three levels of emergency medical personnel, each with different levels of education. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister provide an exact answer? Will EMRs, EMTs, and EMPs all be given the authority to triage patients in the field?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the exact answer I'm going to give to the member is the fact that on April 1 we will make a significant move in this province to ally our EMS system with our health system. Everything that has happened to date has been a smooth

transition. I would suggest that the member is trying to find something wrong with what's happening on April 1 and is not having a lot of luck.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Minister. If I don't have the information, I have no idea if it's wrong or right.

Does the minister not see a problem with having a doctor tied up on the phone with ambulance crews when Alberta is already facing a shortage of doctors?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, where I see a problem is with ambulance emergency medical personnel being tied up in emergency rooms for hours on end. That is our problem. That's what we are trying to fix.

Ms Pastoor: In response to a question regarding the types of facilities that nonemergency room patients would be diverted to, the answer was neither clear, open, nor what I felt to be transparent. Where will these people who require care but not emergency care go at 3 o'clock in the morning? What is the answer?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have an outstanding health system in this province such that Albertans will receive health care when and where they need it. What we don't have is good alignment in the system. This is one initiative that this government is taking to align the system within health care. I would suggest to the hon. member that she should be patient, a little more positive with what's going on in this move on April 1. I believe that she will be pleasantly surprised and that all her worries will be put to rest after April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Homelessness Initiatives

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness has been a major problem in Alberta for years, and this government has failed to address the primary causes. Indeed, in many cases it was their primary source. Today the minister of housing held a photo op to introduce a plan to end homelessness in Alberta, but it has no targets, no timelines, and most important, no money by which anyone can hold the government accountable. To that minister: without your government committing the funds necessary to do the job, how can you possibly claim that you'll end homelessness any time soon?

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

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. We did release a plan for Alberta ending homelessness in 10 years this morning in Calgary. I was pleased to have the secretariat, who prepared the plan, there at the release. I can tell you that we as a government strongly endorse the plan. We are adopting it in its entirety. The intent of the plan is to have a province-wide direction but also to work with the very good community organizations that have developed 10-year plans of their own. As I said, too, we have Susan McGee here – she's still here – who was very instrumental in developing the 10-year plan for Edmonton ending homelessness and who is on the secretariat.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, at least two of the cities, Edmonton and Calgary, have asked for, I believe, almost \$4 billion, and we've yet to hear anything on that.

Now, last month, as we've heard, 24,000 Albertans lost their jobs due to the recession, and according to anyone with any credibility, the recession is going to get worse before it gets better. Today the photo op touted a plan that includes no reference to the recession, that should have been right in front of the minister of housing at that time. To the minister: will the minister admit that her plan fails to contemplate or make any provisions for the tens of thousands of Albertans who are wondering how they are going to pay their mortgages or rent on April 1?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very good-news plan. Actually, it is. Hon. member, I can tell you this: if you had been at the second national homeless conference that was held at the University of Calgary, you would have very much heard about the principles that are in the plan. There are five principles. They are: better information systems; aggressive assistance to people that are homeless; co-ordinated systems, where all levels of governments work together to address the needs of the homeless; as well as more housing options, which we are accomplishing; and effective policies that will bring down barriers for homeless people.

Ms Notley: Well, of the 27,000 Albertans who lost their jobs this year, only one-third are eligible for EI, leaving the rest to rely on government income support of \$583 per month. Clearly, these are the people who are on the verge of a new wave of homelessness that the minister's plan completely misses. To the minister: will she commit today that these Albertans will not be told they have to sell off their retirement savings at record low levels or their automobiles or anything else before they can get help with rent? If not, why not?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, we have an excellent rent supplement program, Mr. Speaker, which is over a hundred million dollars helping 65,000 Albertans. Hon. member, you know about the affordable housing because we made an announcement in your area on Friday of \$1.9 million for affordable housing. That includes students, families, and individuals, and you know that that will help people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Inspiring Education Public Consultation

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last couple of weeks the Minister of Education has rolled out his plan for Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. It was just a couple of weeks ago that the minister had the steering committee panel here and introduced them to the Legislature, and it was quite the impressive compilation of distinguished Albertans. I was wondering if the minister could share his methodology in selecting the members of that panel.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important, when you put together a steering committee of this nature for this type of project, that you not go to representatives of organizations who bring, by the very nature of that term, representation but that you bring Albertans together who bring perspectives. So we looked across the province to get a dynamic of people coming from across the province from a geographic perspective and from a variety of areas within the province so that they could bring their expertise, their knowledge, and their passion to the task.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that inspiring answer from the Minister of Education. However, I'm deeply concerned that this panel has left out two very obvious participant groups as part of this discussion, one being members of our current youth here in Alberta, who are the ones being educated and the ones that are relying on this education. Can the minister comment on why that specific group was left off this panel?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have a parallel process happening called Speak Out Alberta. We had sessions in schools right across the province back in the October-November time frame and again in the February-March time frame. That will culminate in a conference in early May here in Edmonton. We'll be setting up, as I was mandated by the Premier to do, an advisory council for youth that will have an ongoing participation in discussion with the ministry and with the minister directly on issues pertaining to youth in the process. All of that input will go into the Inspiring Education process as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that answer as well, as the chair of the Youth Secretariat for the province. However, there is an additional group that I believe has been left out of this advisory panel, and that is business and industry, who very much rely on our education system to provide people with the skills and education that they require to be competitive on a global level. Can the minister explain how this issue is going to be addressed through this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't agree that business has been left out. I think one of the co-chairs, our own colleague from Athabasca-Redwater, brings a background and perspective in small business from his previous life. We also have Mark Anielski, who is a professor at the University of Alberta in business and advises businesses across North America, actually, and provides strategic counsel to business. John Masters is president and CEO of Calgary Technologies Inc., which helps entrepreneurs grow small- and medium-sized businesses. However, I have at the request of the co-chairs begun to look to see whether we might add additional business perspective to the council.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Emergency Room Wait Times

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of progress on emergency wait times is more than regrettable. There's additional risk of complications and even preventable deaths, as physicians have been saying for months in Alberta. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. The minister through his annual report has targets and reports on issues such as the percentage of Albertans who consume at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. When will the minister commit to setting a suitable benchmark for average wait times for emergency room patients and report annually?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that those who are involved on a day-to-day basis with the emergency departments are working with Alberta Health Services to see exactly what can be

done to ensure a smoother transition through our emergencies in our various health facilities. We have in the Department of Health and Wellness initiated the conference that the hon. member referenced about a week ago in this House. By the admission of some of the participants good progress is being made, but it is clearly something that needs to be improved.

Dr. Swann: It's about reporting, Mr. Minister.

In the interest of being open and transparent, will the minister commit to posting wait times for all emergency facilities on the Alberta wait-list registry?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess one of the concerns that I have about this whole wait time issue is that somehow there is an acceptable wait time. Wouldn't we be trying to get to a point where there wasn't a necessity to post wait times, where Albertans were accessing the system in a multitude of ways, not just in emergency rooms? There's this falsehood that somehow if you put an artificial wait time up there, that's the best we have to do. We can do better than that.

Dr. Swann: We're talking about reporting on progress, Mr. Minister.

One way to relieve the bottleneck in ERs is to ensure that there are enough beds outside of the ER to transfer patients. Why are we so short of necessary infrastructure in our health care system?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we may or may not be short of infrastructure. What we have is a system that, quite frankly – and I've said this on many occasions in the House – is not as efficient as it should be. Some of the beds that are being taken in our acute-care facilities don't necessarily need new infrastructure; they may need some provision of care. I could go through the same answer I've given several times to both the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Lethbridge-East. It's all part of our action plan that is unfolding. This is not going to be fixed quickly, but we're going to fix it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:30

Farm Recovery Plan Payouts

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Alberta livestock and meat strategy program \$300 million was made available to livestock producers through the Alberta farm recovery plan 2. Producers received their first instalment in June of '08, and they were informed at that time that the second instalment would be mailed out to qualifying producers in January of this year. My question to the minister of agriculture: what is the status and timing of these payments being made under the second instalment?

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second benefit is on the way to the producers as we speak. As many of you know, the first instalment was provided to producers with no strings attached, but in order to be eligible for the second benefit, there were conditions that needed to be met: premise identification for cattle and for cattle producers and age verification. As well, we also require cattle move-in information by feedlots who feed more than 5,000 animals a year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I'm hearing a number of concerns from constituents, not all from the cattle industry, that their second benefit may be a little less than the first. Can you explain, Mr. Minister, if this is the case and how this is happening?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, livestock producers told us they needed assistance as soon as possible. In order to do that, to get the cheques in their hands quickly, we estimated how many producers would be eligible. So we were able to provide immediate transitional funding for an additional 5,000 producers. If we'd waited to receive all applications first, producers' first instalments would have been smaller; instead, the second instalment is prorated. A total of \$300 million was approved, and \$300 million will be paid out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that 5,000 got a payment, but how many producers complied with the requirements and will be getting the second instalment?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, I'm certainly pleased to say that the AFRP 2 was a huge success, that we had an overwhelming majority of Alberta's livestock producers recognize the importance and the requirements, and they complied. More than 83 per cent of the 2008 calf crop has been age verified. It was an incredible accomplishment. But better yet, Mr. Speaker, in all 97 per cent of eligible producers complied with all the requirements and are now receiving their second instalments.

Plastic Bag Ban

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this week Sean Graham, a grade 11 student, and Councillor John Vyboh of Fort McMurray proved that they were willing to take the lead on environmental issues. Now I'm hoping the hon. Minister of Environment will follow. The council for the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo moved a motion to draft bylaws for a bag ban. Will the minister commit to giving the rest of the nation something to be envious of by following suit?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we've had discussions in this House on a number of occasions with respect to plastic bag bans. I've indicated before and I'll indicate again that municipalities are taking the lead on this and that we are certainly reviewing opportunities to implement on a province-wide basis, but at this point in time we are not proposing to do so.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Recently this government stood by and watched virtually every city, town, and hamlet in the province make legislation banning smoking in public places. Are we expecting the same thing to happen now on plastic bags?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I have indicated that when you talk about reducing the waste stream, plastic bags are just one of thousands of opportunities. We've been encouraging Albertans and have a very successful program in place of Too Good to Waste and encouraging people to reuse their waste, to recycle, and I would encourage them to do the same thing with respect to plastic bags as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Yes. I've been encouraged to reduce, reuse, and recycle since grade 3 as well, but do you think we can get to banning plastic bags sometime in the near future here in Alberta? Let's take some leadership on that issue. Don't you think that would be better?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I just answered the same question. Restated one more time, the answer is that we have that matter under consideration. At this point in time we do not have any plans to move forward with banning plastic bags.

Tripvincial High-security Remand Centre

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, almost daily we hear of gang-related violence and murders in communities across Canada. Here in Alberta we are not immune to the bloodshed. I was pleased to see that gang violence was one of the items discussed at the trilateral cabinet meeting in Vancouver last week involving B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Mr. Minister, you attended the trilateral cabinet meeting in Vancouver, and I note with particular interest that a regional remand centre for gang members is being explored. Why would we explore such an option when we're building a new 2,000-bed remand centre here in Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by saying that we're always looking at ways to ensure that we can protect the citizens of this province, so we have agreed to look at the feasibility of a shared high-security remand centre for high-risk adult gang members. I want to say that gangs do most of their recruiting within remand centres across our country, and if we can keep them isolated in an area where they would be away from the general population and not allowed to do that recruiting, that would be a good thing. We also recognize that these gangs do not respect our provincial boundaries and travel interprovincially, so again it makes sense to take a look at an interprovincial remand centre.

Mr. Dallas: Well, again to the same minister: when might we expect to see movement on such a project as well as any other initiatives to tackle gang crime?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, last week's trilateral cabinet meeting was a first step in that process. Further discussion on building such a facility will take place at this week's western Attorneys General and Solicitors General conference, which we're going to be holding in Calgary. The regional remand centre concept is only one area that we'll be looking at. We also want to see greater collaboration on intelligence sharing for example, also more co-operation between law-enforcement agencies. We're also going to start work on a memorandum of understanding so that we can effectively fight crime between our provinces.

Mr. Dallas: My final question. Again to the same minister: what assurances can this minister give Albertans that this government is still taking action to stop and prevent gang violence?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to commend the excellent job that our policing agencies do across our province targeting and arresting gang members in our communities. I can also assure the hon. member and all Albertans that this government

is taking action on gang crime. A number of initiatives are under way to reduce and prevent gang crime in our communities, including the development of a gang crime suppression initiative. We're also moving forward on the establishment of four integrated gang enforcement teams announced by our Premier last fall.

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

Intrabasin Water Transfers

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In June of 2008 the Minister of Environment received recommendations on intrabasin transfers from the Alberta Water Council. They recommended that a new policy was needed. On November 8 the minister admitted that he had received the recommendations, that he was still considering them, and an answer was coming sometime in the new year. So to the Minister of Environment: can the minister tell us what the holdup is in his response to the Alberta Water Council's recommendations and when we can expect an answer? We're now three months into the new year.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue with respect to intrabasin transfers of water is that there are already numerous instances where such transfers are taking place and they have historically for a long period of time. It is very difficult to implement a simple solution to this very complex problem. As this member should be aware, we are engaging into a broad consultation with respect to allocation of water. Intrabasin and interbasin transfers obviously are important parts of that.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. The Water Act defines "basin" very broadly, with only seven basins covering an area of almost 700,000 square kilometres in Alberta. My question to the Minister of Environment is: will he change the definition of a major river basin to redesignate the three subbasins in the South Saskatchewan River basin?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. Our policy is abundantly clear: we do not allow for interbasin transfers of water. As the member knows, any such contemplation requires an act of this Legislature. Once you get into subbasins, it gets very, very difficult to distinguish between subbasin rivers and subbasin creeks. The definition required to actually determine what is and is not intrabasin becomes much more complicated, so I can't give that commitment to this member.

Ms Blakeman: All right, then, to the same minister. He mentioned public consultation that he is already holding on this issue. Would he add to that public consultation the assignment to decide whether or not the three subbasins in the South Saskatchewan River basin should be reclassified into major river basins? This would solve a problem like we have with Balzac.

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not prone to making policy decisions on the fly in the Legislature. I'll take that under consideration, and we'll be announcing appropriate legislation in due course.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today. Our question period is 50 minutes. Out of interest, the length of question period in the Canadian House of Commons is 45 minutes.

In 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of five remaining members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Provincial Plan to End Homelessness

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Alberta became the first Canadian province to develop and approve a 10-year provincial homeless strategy. This 10-year plan, called A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years, was released earlier this morning in Calgary by Alberta's Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs and Steve Snyder, chair of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness. It was only a little over a year ago that the Premier established the secretariat and gave them the mandate to deliver a provincial plan to end homelessness in 10 years. This plan, I'm pleased to say, represents the collective wisdom, experience, and determination to get the job done, and its public release and endorsement by the government is an important step forward in our goal to end homelessness and make our communities safer, stronger, and more sustainable.

Albertans care about our families, friends, neighbours, and those in need. Alberta's 10-year homeless plan is rooted in a set of principles that we all share. I will highlight just a few here: addressing root causes of homelessness is essential to ending homelessness; everyone has access to safe, affordable, permanent housing; and preventing and ending homelessness is a shared responsibility. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our Premier and the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs for their leadership in developing this 10-year plan and moving it through government.

I had the opportunity to spend three days attending the national homeless conference held in Calgary a few weeks ago and to listen to people who are currently homeless. What I heard and what I learned is that homelessness is not simply a matter about housing; it's essentially about belonging. Our commitment to ending homelessness in Alberta is also about defining the character of our province.

Today is a great day, and I do believe that this plan will chart the way on our journey to end homelessness in Alberta.

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

Brian Hesje

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Augustana faculty of the University of Alberta, originally Camrose Lutheran College, is an institution that's played a significant role in the lives of many thousands of Albertans and others around the world. In the coming year it will be celebrating its centennial. Over the last century the typical profile of an Augustana student has been that of a kid from the farm or a small prairie town. It started out as a high school for children of Norwegian Lutheran immigrant farmers and has evolved into a world-class liberal arts and science faculty of the University of Alberta known for its excellence in teaching and its small, intimate classes set in a beautiful, small city.

For many of those small-town kids Augustana was their springboard to greater accomplishments. I can think of no better example of that than Brian Hesje, who was introduced earlier today. He's Augustana's most recent recipient of its distinguished alumnus award. Brian Hesje grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan, and after a bit of a false start at a large university he decided to try Augustana,

or at that time Camrose Lutheran College. He has described his time there as a life-changing event. The rural community spirit and overall intimacy and culture of the school made him believe in his ability to make a difference. In other words, Augustana gave Brian Hesje confidence.

His accomplishments are too numerous to mention. I'll just say that he has a bachelor of education and a master of business administration from the U of A. He's a chartered accountant. He's currently chair of the board of Fountain Tire, which is recognized as one of Canada's 50 best managed companies. He's also a member of the ATB Financial board, the STARS board, and is past vice-chair of the NAIT board. His business philosophy reflects Augustana's belief that the spirit of co-operation so crucial to rural life invigorates human endeavour. What a wonderful role for us all and, in particular, those students who might be wondering if they can make a difference in their lives.

Congratulations and thanks to both Augustana and Brian Hesje.

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

Robin and Brian McKeever

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is blessed with truly inspirational citizens, including Robin and Brian McKeever. Robin was a member of Canada's 1988 Olympic cross-country ski team, and following in his ski tracks, literally, is his younger brother Brian. When Brian looks straight ahead, he sees nothing. He has Star-gardt's disease and is legally blind, but that's not stopped him from winning four gold, two silver, and two bronze medals in previous Paralympic Games. He also won two gold medals last month at the International Paralympic World Cup, and that sets him up well for his bid to compete in the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympics.

You heard right, Mr. Speaker. Brian McKeever could well become the first person in history to compete in both the Winter Paralympics and the Winter Olympics for able-bodied athletes. In the Paralympics Robin skis in front of Brian, but in the Olympics Brian would be on his own, honing in on other skiers, at least until he blasts past them at the finish line. Brian made history at the regular cross-country ski world championships in 2007. Not only did he finish the 15-kilometre race; he did so as the top Canadian, an impressive 24th.

The McKeever story strikes close to home for me, Mr. Speaker. Both of my grandfathers were blind. Many of my relatives live with many visual maladies, and each has gone on to do great things. Some of you may know that a climbing mate of mine, Eric Weihenmeyer, is the only blind person in history to successfully scale the summit of Mount Everest. He's ever gracious in crediting his teammates for his success, and similarly Brian McKeever has enjoyed great support from his brother Robin. But now Brian is trying to prove that blind and alone or not, indeed the sky is the limit.

I invite all hon. members to join me now in expressing appreciation to the McKeever brothers for their inspiration and in wishing them continued success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a nurse I cannot count the number of times I've seen overwhelming gratitude and respect for our dedicated emergency medical personnel. I was in a serious car

accident, and the time waiting for their arrival was terrifying. I can't describe that feeling of complete trust, that I let go of the fear and stress, and that I was safe when they arrived.

Now there will be an additional burden on these professionals. They'll be expected to perform triage in the field. These professionals will rise to the occasion, but we must examine the government's proposal very carefully before moving forward. Albertans need to know exactly who will be responsible for which decisions made by the emergency medical services.

In emergencies there's very little room for error. First, Albertans must know if all levels of EMS staff will be given the authority to triage patients. Emergency medical responders take a 160-hour course. Emergency medical technicians take 300 hours of EMT theory, a 40-hour hospital practicum, six hours of classroom instruction, and an eight- to 16-week ambulance practicum. Emergency medical technicians, paramedics, have all of this training plus the two-year program. Will triage authority be given only to those with the highest level of training? Rural areas have volunteer services. Will they be retrained?

2:50

My constituents ask where they may end up: doctors' offices, medicentres, or primary care centres. Clearly, the government is hoping to reduce ER wait times by decreasing the numbers presenting to ER. The government hasn't produced any evidence to show that wait times at ERs will change. In fact, the government finds it hard to admit that the problem even exists. ERs are clogged because patients are waiting for beds in hospitals. Seniors in those acute beds should be in long-term care.

Mr. Speaker, health care demands extreme attention to detail. Quick fixes may not help. Additional beds in and out of hospitals would be a good start.

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

Support for Victims of Sexual Assault

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I attended a press conference for the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton. The centre is launching a campaign called March into the Light. This campaign seeks to increase the support and awareness for victims of sexual assault.

Today I learned that in Canada 39 per cent of women over the age of 16 experience a sexual assault at some point in their lives and that only 8 per cent of all sexual assaults are reported to police. These are just two of the many appalling statistics regarding sexual assault. Help is needed to improve and expand the services the centre is able to offer to children and adult survivors of sexual violence. The Sexual Assault Centre is inviting us all to light a candle, actual or virtual, and to make a donation to help improve and expand the support services for victims in need.

You can also support this cause by participating in their annual Take Back the Night March, where everyone will carry candles of hope. The march will meet at 7 p.m. at the Alberta Avenue Community Centre on – I don't have a date. Together we will reach out to victims and help to reduce the impact of sexual assaults on Albertans. Light a candle in the darkness. Dare to be aware.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Bill 23**Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009**

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill introduces changes that are necessary to improve Alberta's assessment complaints and appeals process. These changes are a result of a comprehensive consultation with stakeholders and will result in a more understandable, effective, and accessible system for everyone involved.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. I guess I haven't had my morning coffee yet. I'm rising with respect to Standing Order 70(a).

Some Hon. Members: Bill 29.

Mr. Denis: Yeah, Bill 29, the Family Law Amendment Act. I'm rising with respect to Standing Order 70(a) . . .

The Speaker: I think we'll move on, then, to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Bill 30**Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009**

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 30, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill will amend the Traffic Safety Act. The proposed changes include the following. A wording change related to the maintenance enforcement program replaces "cancellation" of an operator's licence regarding the maintenance enforcement program and defaults to "suspension" to address administrative processes resulting from the different definitions of terms. This change eliminates confusion and appropriately identifies those who fail to make support payments as suspended drivers.

The second one is investigator class. This creates a new class of investigators for the carrier and vehicle safety programs and driver training programs. These investigating officers will be dedicated to carrying out specialized technical functions under the Traffic Safety Act and its regulations.

The third one, peace officer definition change. This amendment amends the definition of peace officer in the Traffic Safety Act and clarifies the definition of peace officer to include the new classification as well as police officers created under the Police Act, including First Nations police officers. Mr. Speaker, this gives police officers who were inadvertently not included in the peace officer definition under the Traffic Safety Act the authority to enforce the act.

The fourth change is conduct of driver examiners, driving instructors, and the operation of driver training schools. This clarifies the authority to make regulations about the conduct of driver examiners, driving instructors, and the operators of driver training schools.

The fifth change is that administrative penalties may be levied in the case of driver examiners, driver instructors, and the operators of driver training schools. Mr. Speaker, this adds the driver examiners, driving instructors, and operators of driver training schools to the definition of regulated persons and thereby provides the further compliance tools.

These two amendments I just mentioned, related to driver training

and the operation of driver training schools, stem from a 2008 court case and legal advice from Alberta Justice.

The sixth change is the definition of intersection safety device. It clarifies the definition of intersection safety device introduced in the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007. It is necessary to specify that these devices are capable of gathering evidence for traffic signal red-light infractions or speeding infractions or both. Without the amendment Justice believes that the definition may be interpreted that an intersection safety device may be able to gather evidence for a traffic signal red-light infraction and a speeding infraction.

The last amendment, Mr. Speaker, is the capping of vicarious liability of vehicle rental companies. Finally, this amendment adds vehicle rental companies to the list of businesses whose vicarious liability will be capped under the proclamation of the 2007 Traffic Safety Amendment Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, that was a rather exhaustive first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 30 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Back to the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for introduction.

Bill 29**Family Law Amendment Act, 2009**

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't state the standing order this time. I request leave to introduce Bill 29, the Family Law Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill relates to the child support recalculation program, which will improve access to justice by offering a simple and low-cost way for parents to have their child support orders recalculated annually based on changes in the parents' income without returning to court. The proposed amendments respond to feedback received by this government in recent consultations and will improve the incentive for parents to provide their income information to the new program. This bill will better encourage parties to be open with the recalculation program and ensure that if they are not, Alberta's children will still receive the support that they deserve.

I, therefore, move first reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 29 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, we now come up against Standing Order 7(7). It's now 3 o'clock. If we want to proceed with the remainder of the Routine, we'll need unanimous consent. I will ask if all hon. members will permit the Assembly to continue the Routine. If you are opposed, simply say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

3:00

Bill 31

Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to request leave to introduce Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, the *Rules of Court*, which govern practice and procedure in the Court of Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench in this province, are going through major revisions, and this bill will consolidate the authority for the *Rules of Court* in one statute, the Judicature Act. Most provisions relating to the enforcement of money judgments will be relocated from the *Rules of Court* to the Civil Enforcement Act and regulation. This bill will also make housekeeping and other consequential amendments to various statutes related to the new rules. If I ever decide to practise law again, I will have to learn these new rules as well.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 31 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness report. A Plan for Alberta represents a dramatic shift in focus from finding homeless people a place to sleep each night to providing homeless people with a place to live. This plan adopts a Housing First approach. This approach provides immediate housing along with the support services needed to break the cycle of homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, I do applaud our Premier for his personal leadership and for his commitment to end homelessness, and I thank the members of the secretariat for this wonderful plan. It's good news. I encourage all members in this Assembly to review the report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a document to table today to the Legislative Assembly. It's the Alberta heritage savings trust fund business plan 2009-12. It's a draft from the heritage savings trust fund meeting that occurred earlier this morning in the Legislature Annex.

I don't have another tabling, but to the hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands: I would remind him that the Speaker of our Assembly has been elected in nine consecutive elections while you are still working on that. You should be proud of your record of seven. I guess Speakers very often get elected for a long period of time.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating a variety of specific problems on different shifts that were

short staffed. These indicate that some residents did not receive their morning care until mid-afternoon, and once again scheduled baths were missed.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on a purported point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under a number of sections of the standing orders, the usual suspects of 23(h) and (i), but I would also like to add to that (j) and (l). Section 23(h) reads, "makes allegations against another Member"; (i) reads, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member"; (j) refers to using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder"; and (l) says, "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly."

I'm referring, Mr. Speaker, to the comments made by the Premier. You will have the advantage of the Blues, but they were to the effect of alleging that the position of the opposition has been or perhaps still is to shut down the oil sands altogether. I want to argue on two different lines, Mr. Speaker. One is a matter of truth, and the other is a matter of respect.

First, on the issue of truth I'm just going to cite a couple of examples that completely contradict the Premier. This, first of all, is from the election platform of the Alberta Liberals in the last election, page 16. I'll just keep this quote very brief. "Unleash 'the Western Tiger' by encouraging the building of bitumen upgraders in Alberta." I repeat that: "encouraging the building of bitumen upgraders in Alberta." Okay? It's a matter of clear print in the platform.

I will also refer briefly to the text of a speech that I delivered many times in the fall of September 2007 that was widely reported. The Premier has actually referred to it a number of times. I just want to make sure it's on the record. It's an outstanding speech, I think, Mr. Speaker, but I'll just quote from it very briefly.

In fact, there are at least three other upgraders of Alberta bitumen planned for the U.S. They're being built there for various reasons, things like lower costs and readily-available labour. I don't blame the companies. Everyone knows our economy – Alberta's economy – is overheated. Labour is scarce. Construction costs are skyrocketing. But it got me to thinking: Is this the best we can do? Or are we letting a tremendous opportunity pass us by? Is there a better way to build Alberta's future? I think there is.

That's one quote.

I will quote again, and this was in a very favourable context. I said that at an oil sands conference just last winter former premier Peter Lougheed said, "I just find it completely unacceptable that our resource involves shipping jobs down the pipeline with bitumen to the United States." In this speech I was agreeing with that position.

I will finish with a last quote here from that speech, which was known to the Premier.

Earlier this year, in discussing the potential flow of bitumen south to the US, the Canada West Foundation reminded all of us of a well-repeated insult. They said that shipping bitumen to the US for upgrading "would solidify Canada's embarrassing label as a hewer of wood and drawer of water."

We can do so much better. We can have a sustainable and secure economic future. We can solidify Alberta's place in Canada. Rather than just shrugging our shoulders and letting things go, we can think strategically. We can imagine the future we want. We can plan for that future. Corporations flourish by reaching out . . . by working together. Business gets it. So can government. Imagine what we can do with the resources we have here. Here in Alberta . . . I'd rather this prosperity benefit Albertans.

Those are two clear documentations of the fact that this caucus has stood strongly for developing the oil sands and that the Premier has known that because he has referred to this speech. Mr. Speaker, on that basis I would argue – and it's clear in black and white – that the Premier in his comments has taken a position of falseness against us. [interjections] I would ask for order, Mr. Speaker. I'm getting a lot of heckling from the minister of health, and I'd ask for some order in this point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, would everybody listen attentively.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

Secondly comes the matter of respect. Now, I raise this issue, Mr. Speaker, because the Premier made exactly the same or substantially the same allegation on November 3, 2008, and at that time it was also a point of order. That's where I bring in 23(j) and (l) from the standing orders, because this is important. I believe that if you as Speaker do not come down clearly on this issue and enforce it, we are allowing a continual repeating of these points of order, continuing abuse.

I will say to you, Mr. Speaker – and I want to quote from your comments and from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 433, which says, among various things: "The Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue." Well, there is no disagreement over the facts surrounding the issue. The facts are in black and white. I put it to you that by repeatedly raising this issue, the Premier is in fact undermining your authority and is using language of a nature likely to create disorder. If he repeatedly brings forward the same matter, the same deceit, the same lies, the same misrepresentation, and if he's allowed to get away with it time and time again, then we will get disorder.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I would also say that the Premier's behaviour and comments offend the practices and precedents of this Assembly. This point of order has been raised repeatedly in the past. This Premier has repeatedly made the same false allegations, and I would challenge you as Speaker to come forward with a forceful ruling to make it clear – to make it clear – to the Premier that continuing to make blatantly false comments and imputing false motives and allegations to us is unacceptable. I would say further that if you do not make that ruling, we are inviting complete disorder in this Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the only thing I can think of is that the hon. member is trying to get himself unshackled from the dictums of his own leader, saying that there should be order in the House, because he wants to unleash disorder by exhorting you to make a ruling on an issue for which there is no good reason to do so.

First of all, I guess probably the only thing I would need to say is that his point of order is about making an allegation against another member, and in his first line he indicated that if there was any such allegation, it was against a whole caucus, not against a member. You've ruled on that so many times, Mr. Speaker. No member was singled out by the Premier. He basically pointed out something that I think has been apparent to every member of this House and many members of the public, and that is that the Liberal opposition time after time for the last three years have exhorted a viewpoint that, taken to its natural conclusion, would have had the oil sands shut down, and there would have been no bitumen for upgraders.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that the hon. member in his

questions this afternoon was talking about upgraders, and all of us in this House, I believe, and Albertans want the upgraders to proceed. They want to have the opportunity for bitumen taken from the oil sands to be upgraded here at home and the value added here at home, and that's, I think, very fair.

But it's interesting that in the questions raised today really about the building of upgraders, the Premier made a very valid point. There's no point in having upgraders if you don't have bitumen, and you won't have bitumen if you put a significant constraint against, if you participate in the maligning of the resource that we have. That, I think, was the point that the Premier was making. It has nothing to do with an allegation against another member. No member was mentioned. In fact, I think the reference was to the position taken by the opposition caucus. There was no imputed or false or unavowed motive to another member. Indeed, the Premier was referring to positions taken by the opposition caucus over the past number of years.

You know, the hon. member talks about truth and respect and quotes himself from his various speeches to show that he has been talking about bitumen. Fair enough. I'm glad to hear because I hadn't heard it before and I guess neither had most Albertans heard before the views that he was expressing, that he was so positive about the oil sands of Alberta and the value of those oil sands to the future of Alberta and the need to upgrade the bitumen here at home and create jobs and value for Albertans.

It appears we're all on the same page, and we'll work together going forward to create that kind of opportunity for Alberta, Mr. Speaker, but no one has had their integrity or their motives called into question here. It's really a question of really, truly understanding the position of the Liberal opposition when on one day they attack vociferously the oil sands, which underpin the economy of this province, and the next day attack the government for not having upgraders in place to upgrade the bitumen that they wouldn't want us to extract.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on this point of order.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In addition to the speeches the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview quoted, we have pages and pages and pages of *Hansard* supporting the fact that we believe in the oil sands. Where the disagreement occurs, Mr. Speaker, is on the pace of development and the style of development. We've talked about environmentally sustainable development. You'll not have heard – and you can search *Hansard* – a Liberal having talked about a moratorium. You will find examples where we talked about putting on the brakes as opposed to full speed. We've talked about economic, sensible development as opposed to the rate, but you will never find any suggestion that the Alberta Liberals are opposed to the sustainable environmental and economic development of the tar sands. That is the basis of this point of order. The Premier has impugned motive. The Premier has suggested that we are opposed to the development of the oil sands.

It's a good opportunity that we have today for those members who have not heard this repeated to actually plug in the term "Liberal" as it connects with oil sands and do their research and their homework. You will see that we believe that this is sustainable if the proper environmental precautionary moves are taken. We have brought up concerns such as the 500 ducks dying in the tailings ponds. We have brought up concerns about leaching.

The Speaker: Try and zero it in very, very specifically to the point of order, okay?

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Alberta Liberals are on record as supporting the oil sands sustainably, economically, environmentally.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to point out – and I'm sure you're aware – that the subject of the original point of order was not what the Liberal policy on the oil sands was. Clearly, there's some confusion around that, and I suggest we might not be able to clean it up today. The original point of order referred to 23(h), (i), and (j) and whether an allegation was made against a specific member. The member in his comments admitted himself that a sweep of the arm indicated a party across the House. I see three parties across the House. I suspect the Premier was indicating one of two of them. Whether the language was intended to or did in fact cause disorder in the House: I suggest that the tone of the question period, which was perhaps one of the quietest we've had in months, answers that question directly.

I submit that the ensuing debate, while useful, might help to clear up in some regard the Liberal position. It does nothing to speak to a point of order, which is frivolous, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, that was 16 or 17 minutes. Hon. members, our standing orders are very, very specific. We have Standing Order 23(h), which was alluded to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, which says, "makes allegations against another Member," and (i) says, "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," and member is capitalized. There's nothing in 23 which refers to a party or a caucus or anything else. That order is raised when it deals with a member.

Now, in the question period, which was a very calm, quiet, soothing question period today, the Premier, in responding to a question that came from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, said the following: "Unfortunately that same attention wasn't paid to the job losses in the oil sands when the party opposite to me wanted to shut the whole thing down." We certainly had an opportunity to clarify positions of various parties in the House this afternoon. The chair cannot see any allegation against any member that was raised.

I'd just like to refer one more time to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*. If you go to order 409, basically dealing with oral questions, which really is the cause of most of the responses, unfortunately, if they get too long, the following should apply:

- (1) It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate.
- (2) The question must be brief . . .
- (3) The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.
- (4) It ought to be on an important matter, and not be frivolous.
- (5) [There] ought to be . . . some urgency.

The only reason the chair raises those again is because invariably they lead to the kind of responses you get. So, you know, if I'm going to start ruling on some of these responses, then I'm going to start ruling on a whole series of questions, and I suspect that nobody wants that to happen. There's got to be some flexibility in here.

3:20

The chair is concerned, though. The chair is very, very concerned that an hon. member would stand up on a point of order and say: if you, the Speaker, do not agree with what I'm saying, then there's going to be chaos in the House. Whoa. If that isn't threatening, if

that isn't intimidating, if that isn't exhorting, if that isn't pushing, I'm not sure what it is. The chair will not be pushed by any member of this House. If there are arguments to be made with respect to a point of order, they must be intelligent arguments, they must be factual arguments, they must be comprehensive arguments, and they must deal with the point.

This is not a point of order. There was no allegation made against another member in this House.

Before we move on, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a constituent, Mark Ramsankar, the president of the Edmonton public teachers local 37, who is visiting the Legislature today. Mr. Ramsankar has lived in Sherwood Park for the past 10 years, during which he has worked tirelessly to ensure that Alberta's educational system remains one of the best systems in the world. He is here today to observe debate on Motion 503 later this afternoon. He's seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two friends, neighbours, and constituents of mine who are visiting the House today and have been up in the public gallery for a good part of the afternoon. George and Jan Armstrong from Bassano are a third-generation ranch family who've raised their three children in the Bassano area and have been strong supporters of the community for many years. Jan, a sonographer who works in Medicine Hat as an ultrasound technologist, and George, a rancher and a member of the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, have been strong community supporters, involved in hockey and a whole range of community supports that make our community very rich. I'd like to ask George and Jan to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Service Alberta Request Wait Times

- Q4. Mr. Mason:
For the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 what was the average wait time each year for Service Alberta to process a person's request for a service or for information?

Government Environmental Inspectors

- Q15. Ms Notley:
In January, May, and September of the years 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 how many full-time environmental

inspectors permanently employed by the government were permanently assigned to the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo?

Motions for Returns

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 16.

Environmental Inspectors in Wood Buffalo

M16. Ms Notley moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence between environmental inspectors in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, their managers, and the government regarding the inspectors' workloads and ability to complete assigned tasks for the time period between January 1, 2006, and February 10, 2009.

Ms Notley: I'm seeking guidance. Is this my opportunity to outline the rationale for same?

The Speaker: Absolutely.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thank you. The reason we are pursuing this information is because we are of course trying to find out whether there are a sufficient number of environmental inspectors in the Fort McMurray area. As we've already discussed at some length in this House in the course of discussing the most recent point of order debate, this is an issue that's very important to Albertans and about which and around which there's a great deal of debate. On one hand, we have what many people see as the sole economic engine of the province, and whether that is or isn't the case, it's certainly an important component to Alberta's economic structure and success. On the other hand, we have some very, very serious concerns about the toll that that activity takes on our environment. So as Albertans we are looking to see with great detail whether or not the government is successfully balancing between the economic interests and the environmental, the need to protect the environment.

One of the issues that was raised in this House very recently was, of course, the issue of some charges that were laid against companies working in the area identified by this motion, and one of the allegations – granted, it's only an allegation at this point – was that in some cases the company in question was able to engage in environmental breaches for two or three years before the government was able to stop them. The key element to that, of course, and the reason why that was happening comes down to whether or not there really is any kind of comprehensive system of spot-checking or proactive monitoring going on in that area.

Now, we are concerned that, in fact, what's actually happening is that the staff working for the Ministry of Environment up there are actually way behind even their ability to respond to industry notification of incidents, which they're required to make under the act. In that case, they're not even keeping up with that work, and they have virtually no capacity to do any kind of proactive monitoring or safeguarding. This is a matter of extreme public concern and extreme public interest.

In response to estimates debate last spring I had previously received – and I thank the Minister of Environment for this – some information with respect to the number of inspectors up there in that area. I think that at one point there was a bit of confusion. There was talk about four inspectors and one investigator, and then there was talk about increasing that to eight, depending on whether or not they're operating under the oil sands group, but that group actually does a different job and doesn't actually monitor. Anyway, there

was a bit of confusion, but in any event there is a great deal of public concern about whether there are enough people up there.

What this motion does is ask for disclosure of discussion between these inspectors and their managers and their managers' managers on the degree to which they are able to meet their obligations under the acts which they are required to enforce, acts that arise from decisions made in this Legislature: the environmental enhancement act and the water protection act. We are concerned that they are not able to meet those needs and that the acts are not being properly implemented, and as Members of this Legislative Assembly we should be very gravely concerned about that fact. It is with this concern in mind that we ask to have more information about the degree to which the inspectors employed by the Ministry of Environment in the Fort McMurray area are able to meet the obligations of their job.

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you may have deduced by now since this motion for a return was not listed as one that the government is prepared to accept, I am going to be recommending to members that the motion before us be rejected. There are a number of very logical reasons for making that recommendation. I was struck by the member's presentation, in which she indicated that she speculates on what is actually happening and wants this motion to perhaps formulate in her own mind whether or not her speculation is real or imagined. I would suggest that I, too, speculate that the reason why we have this motion before us is because this member wishes to engage in a bit of a fishing expedition. For that reason among others, I would suggest that this is a motion that we should not and cannot accept.

I also want to point out that the motion itself is worded in a rather nebulous form. It's extremely broad and talks about environmental inspectors, and environmental inspectors include a broad spectrum of individuals. It could include employees of Alberta Environment, but it also could include the ERCB, the local health board, inspectors for the regional municipality, and other public bodies such as fish and wildlife.

3:30

Records that may form part of any kind of disclosure that this motion requests may include records that relate to open investigations and planning or details of prepared or announced or unannounced inspections. As I've often said in this House, this department engages in audits. Those audits can take the form of announced or in many cases unannounced inspections, so it would compromise the ability for us to do the important work that we do. It also could relate to an open investigation that could harm the effectiveness of the investigative techniques and procedures currently used or likely to be used in law enforcement, or it could reveal information relating to or used in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion.

In summary, the request is far too broad. It would involve other public bodies and likely encompass certain types of information which must be protected as identified in various legislation under environmental legislation, the Water Act, and the Oil and Gas Conservation Act.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the members reject this motion.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have a contrary viewpoint that this request is extremely specific both in time and the information it's looking for, what it's questioning regarding the inspectors' workloads and abilities to complete assigned tasks. It's a very defined

time period, January 1, 2006, to February 10, 2009. It seems to me that it would be in the government's best interests to indicate that they have sufficient personnel on hand up north, where a fifth of our land is subject to either in situ or mining of our extremely important oil sands, if the government were to refute charges of dirty oil. It's very hard to refute dead ducks when there are 500 of them floating or sinking below the surface. The member here is saying that if the government is true to its claims of transparency and accountability, then we should be able to find out if the inspectors, in their own words, are able to carry out their assignment.

I also have a degree of sympathy for the Ministry of Environment because my understanding, unless the Environment ministry has received an increase of funding, is that their ministry operates on less than 4 per cent of the entire budget assigned to the various ministries. If the inspectors' workload is such that they can't do their job and if they can't protect the Athabasca River and if they can't carry out Lorne Taylor's hope for the water for life strategy, then this whole oil sands development is at risk not only from external attacks and accusations of dirty oil but from internal stewardship.

Therefore, very specifically, the time period January 1, 2006, to February 10, 2009, workloads and the ability to complete assigned tasks. If the report comes back in the full transparent disclosure and indicates from the inspectors, those who are on the job, basically expected on a 24/7 basis, that they're saying to us, "Help; we cannot perform our job; we cannot provide environmental security," then we need to be listening to those pleas. Unfortunately, if this request is denied, so is transparency and accountability.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to participate, or should I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude the debate?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess, you know, the hon. minister has suggested that we're on a fishing expedition, and I would like to say that were I to go fishing, I think the last place that I would go fishing would be in water around the oil sands at this point. Notwithstanding that, we're not speculating. We had discussion in this House very recently about allegations levied by this minister's own staff, very clearly, that illegal activity was going on for two years, not caught by the so-called adequate monitoring. So it's quite reasonable for us to assume that that the monitoring is not going on as it should be.

With respect to what was characterized as the nebulous wording, I would just like to say that were the wording that much of a problem, we, of course, would be quite open to discussing ways to amend it in order to meet the public interests as well as the objectives of this Assembly, yet unfortunately that invitation has not been forthcoming.

Finally, as I say, I mean, we'd be also very happy if there were memos indicating that the workload was just okay-dokey and there was no need for additional assistance, but again we can't know that because it appears as though we won't be provided with this information.

I just want to renew my point that this is a matter of grave public concern and grave public issue. It is something that is discussed every week in this Legislature over and over and over again and also within the public. I think there is a significant obligation on the government to be a great deal more forthcoming in terms of the exact details around the efforts that are being made or can be made to protect the environment in the oil sands area.

I urge all members to consider supporting my motion. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 16 lost]

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

Bill 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned March 9]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, did you have additional comments to make with respect to this matter?

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, when this bill was presented, I had a number of concerns about it, but I still sort of was on the fence in terms of the aye or nay. However, as I sat here and listened to some of the words that were said by my fellow members of this House, it became quite clear to me that I would be against it. The reason that that would be . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you've already participated in this debate. You did it earlier. You're ineligible. You can't do it. Please sit down.

Well, we'll go to the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, on a rotation basis.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. Bill 202 proposes to create an office of municipal auditor general which would assist municipalities in conducting performance audits. As I understand this bill as introduced by the hon. member, it will allow the municipal auditor general to work with municipalities and financial auditors to conduct performance audits that could make recommendations for municipalities on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of municipal operations. Bill 202 would require publicly accessible follow-up reports outlining actions taken on recommendations for improving business practices. The objective body of a municipal auditor general would assist municipalities to improve efficiency in their operations and create more openness and transparency for all Albertans.

Currently the MGA, or Municipal Government Act, defines parameters in which municipalities operate. Given that municipalities must fulfill numerous requirements set out by the act in regard to financial reporting and auditing, among these requirements is that Alberta municipalities must submit a financial information return as well as audited financial statements. The financial information return provides details on the overall fiscal position of a municipality within a given year as well as any transactions within that year. Mr. Speaker, further to this, the municipal financial information returns include information that is separated into operating, capital, and reserve fund categories. It also provides details of the municipal property taxes that are levied in that municipality. Furthermore, it outlines a municipality's debt, including current debt levels, total debt service charges, and total debt service limit.

3:40

Also required by the MGA, Mr. Speaker, is an annual submission of the municipality's audited financial statements. These financial statements must be in accordance with the generally accepted accounting principles as recommended by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. The audited financial statements must include any modifications established by the minister through

regulations. These financial statements reflect the assets, liabilities, revenues, expenditures, changes in fund balances, and the change in financial position of the municipality. The purpose of both the municipal financial information return and the financial statement is to ensure the transparency of the fiscal position of the municipality.

Beyond the Municipal Government Act the 10-year MSI commitment by this government has provided Alberta municipalities with predictable and sustainable funding that helps municipalities to meet growth pressures. Keeping this in mind, I can see why the hon. member would like to strengthen the provincial and municipal partnership in the interests of citizens and taxpayers. However, sometimes in this House we try to create a policy solution that goes looking for an issue. Now, this might not be the case in this instance. However, I'm not convinced that we have appropriately defined the problem here, Mr. Speaker, and without clearly defining the problem, I cannot be convinced that this bill is the best solution.

Mr. Speaker, I can't help but think, being a member from the city of Calgary, that some of why this bill has come forward has to do with an issue of \$25 million footbridges. In speaking with a number of constituents as well as city councillors in the city of Calgary, we need to be very careful that we're not looking for a solution that is not going to address the issue of just making purely bad political choices. I don't think that that is the role of an Auditor General. I think we need to be very careful that we're not looking for a solution to a problem that, quite frankly, doesn't exist or where the solution is actually, rather, something different than what is being proposed.

I also have some concern about whether this actually deals with different sizes of municipalities in a different way. In fact, I think we have some school jurisdictions that have greater operating budgets than a lot of municipalities in this province. Would this be a requirement that we would want to put on school boards as well?

Additionally, since becoming a member of this House, I've become keenly aware of unintended consequences of policy decisions. We need to be careful that like our current provincial Auditor General – and I think we've seen this proliferation of the role of Auditors General, particularly some of the heroic work done by Sheila Fraser, the national Auditor General, and some of the stuff that she has been able to bring to light. We've also seen the expanding creep of the mandate of the Auditor General sometimes going beyond that of just performance auditing and getting into policy setting. I think we need to be very careful of that, Mr. Speaker. I don't want that to be an unintended consequence.

Beyond the last few comments that I've just made, it is a red flag that the AUMA does not support this bill. However, I'm sure that they and the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays and myself support the idea of increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of the allocation of taxpayers' money. Mr. Speaker, I believe that there is an opportunity to further define and accurately define the challenge that we are trying to address here and explore all policy options available for this issue.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services under temporary Standing Order 74.2.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this amendment is being circulated. I do not believe there's such a thing as temporary Standing Order 74.2. There is certainly Standing Order 74.2. This Assembly codified these rules.

Okay. We have an amendment before the House. I'll wait a few seconds as it gets circulated to all the members, and those who would like to participate on the amendment, I'll recognize you. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We're on the amendment. It's very specific.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I was just going to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'll do my utmost to speak to the amendment.

The Speaker: Well, you can be assured. The amendment says: referred to a committee. That's the only thing we're talking about.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. To read the amendment, as you so noted:

Bill 202, Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a second time but the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I support the amendment, Mr. Speaker, because I do believe greater discussion is required. This particular municipal government bill, 202, is proposing basically a provincial regionalization power grab, the undermining of local autonomy, undermining local authorities . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm going to make it very clear. This is referral to a committee. That's what we're talking about. We're not debating the bill now.

Mr. Chase: I understand that.

The Speaker: Okay, then. It's committees. It's the only thing you've got to talk about. Nothing else.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. That is why the sober second thought, the extra input that a committee provides is warranted. Therefore, I thank the Member for Calgary-North Hill for bringing forth this amendment.

Thank you Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to discuss.

The Speaker: Now, two hon. members – Peace River rose first and the hon. Deputy Government House Leader – both have their Standing Orders in front of them. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I just want to get some clarification from the chair with respect to the standing order. As I understand, this is a referral motion under Standing Order 74.1.

74.1(3) Any motion made pursuant to this Standing Order shall be decided without debate or amendment, and if the motion is decided in the negative the Bill shall be ordered for second reading.

So I'm not so sure that we should be engaging in debate at this point.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the amendment was moved during second reading. It is debatable. If it was moved after second reading, it would not have been debatable. It's moved during second reading, and that's why we're debating it.

Hon. Member for Peace River, if you want to continue the debate on the amendment, please proceed.

Mr. Oberle: I guess I have the same confusion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No. There's no confusion. The clarification has been given by the chair. Please proceed on the amendment.

Mr. Oberle: In 74.1(3) it says "if the motion is decided in the negative . . . shall be ordered for second reading." How could we do that if we'd already had second reading?

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've already explained the process of how we deal with this. During second reading if there is an amendment, it's debatable. If after second reading a vote has been taken and an amendment comes in, in essence in committee, it's not debatable. We're in the process according to the rules that the members wrote. We're dealing with this. It's a very simple question. You have a question to refer it to a committee or not. It's debatable. It's an amendment.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: On the amendment, Mr. Speaker, indeed. I certainly would support this amendment. I'll be very brief. I believe that in my remarks when I spoke to this before, I had suggested that very procedure should happen, so I thank my hon. colleague for Calgary-North Hill for bringing that forward.

The Speaker: Others on the referral amendment?

Okay. I take it the hon. member from Calgary is happy with the procedure. We'll call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

3:50

The Speaker: This matter is now referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services.

This is quite an unusual procedure. Hon. members, if such an amendment was done during a debate when there hadn't even been a vote on it, in essence you've got an ultimate guillotine that I'm not sure any members here in this Assembly have ever suggested they should have. Every bill would in essence come up for an ending of it without any debate.

Bill 203

Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and begin second reading debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009.

The intent of Bill 203 is to define province-wide standards around financial contributions in municipal elections and to ensure comprehensive and timely disclosure of those campaign financial records. Amendments to the Local Authorities Election Act would see rules for the municipal level mirror legislation that already exists to guide provincial election campaign finances and federal election campaign finances. This will achieve consistent accountability and transparency and increase confidence in fair election financing at all levels in the province. To be fair, some municipal campaign rules already exist in the province today, but they are only implemented with local bylaws, they are inconsistent, and they are few. Only a handful of our approximately 360 municipalities have them.

Mr. Speaker, I would point out that other jurisdictions – Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec – have already created legislation

around municipal election campaign finance, and theirs are more restrictive and farther reaching than Bill 203. That being said, Bill 203's provisions would set fair and reasonable province-wide standards that I believe would be relevant for all Alberta communities.

I also believe that the fundamentals of this bill are strong, that it will be effective to protect the voter, the contributor, and the candidate. For example, the voter will be protected in several ways, including allowing them to be informed by giving them the ability to access full disclosure of who's contributing to any campaign and at what level, by limiting the size of donations, which will ensure that undue influence will not be gained by a small number of supporters making large financial contributions, by helping to encourage a wide slate of candidates, ensuring any citizen has a fair opportunity to run regardless of their economic status or the level of influence they have with potential contributors or by incumbency, and by prohibiting donor organizations in potential conflict or those owned or financially supported by taxpayers from using any part of their resources to contribute to political campaigns. It will also protect the voter by only allowing entities that have legitimate interests in Alberta to invest in political campaigns here and to influence our democratic process and, finally, by helping to ensure that elections will be run and won on broad-based support.

It will protect the contributor by ensuring that their donations will only be used for the purpose for which they were proposed to be used, the candidate's municipal election campaign, by giving them assurance that their input and support counts and that their investment can be just as valuable as the person next door's, and by protecting them from pressures or expectations to make donations that are more than reasonable.

Lastly, this transparency will also protect the candidate by minimizing or eliminating their exposure to unsubstantiated insinuations or allegations of undue influence benefiting perceived large contributors or unknown contributors, by ensuring that they will indeed not be exposed to indebtedness to large contributors, and by ensuring that they have a legitimate shot at winning an election. With a level playing field every Albertan has an equal opportunity to make a difference. They can be successful regardless of their wealth, incumbency, or their ability to network with wealthy or influential Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, to achieve this, Bill 203 has a few key elements: limit individual contributions to a total of \$5,000 within any campaign period, define organizations that would not be eligible to make municipal campaign contributions, define the campaign period for reporting purposes, specify the duties of a candidate, require that a candidate file a campaign disclosure statement within a specific period and automatically disqualify any candidate from elected office if they fail to file a disclosure statement within the prescribed time period, and require that any surplus exceeding \$500 be paid to the municipality and held in trust in an interest-bearing account.

Mr. Speaker, it is not the intent of Bill 203 to impose retroactivity of these provisions of contribution caps, full disclosure, or prohibited corporations on existing campaign funds. I think we all realize that those existing campaign funds have been built up in good faith and over many years and that it would be unfair and impractical to try and impose these provisions on those existing funds. Therefore, Bill 203 has a one-time transition provision that will allow candidates or potential candidates to declare and transition their existing campaign funds. Once declared and put into trust, those existing funds would be eligible for future campaigns without full compliance to the provisions of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, that outlines the intent and the key elements of Bill 203. It is also important to emphasize what Bill 203 is and what it

is not. Bill 203 is not an indictment of municipal elections in Alberta today or of municipalities or of municipal candidates. However, it is an affirmation that the legislation governing federal and provincial elections has proven very valuable and that they are working and working well. It is a recognition that a gap exists today, a gap in how we handle election campaign finance in Alberta. It is also a recognition that by filling in this gap, we can and should do for municipal elections what B.C., Ontario, and Quebec have already done, which is just what has been done through the strict provincial and federal campaign finance guidelines; that is, to strengthen the integrity of our democratic system and, more importantly, the confidence of voters in their hard-working elected officials.

Ultimately, Bill 203 will also increase the opportunity for all Albertans to get better informed, more engaged, and potentially run in the elections in their communities. To that end, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking for support from the Assembly for Bill 203. I look forward to the very important debate on this private member's bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to be part of debate on Bill 203 today. First, I want to thank the member for the work that he has done to bring this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, we know that strong municipalities are the key ingredient to strong communities. The Premier and myself have reiterated that numerous times. I know that all strong municipalities also believe in accountability. Accountability and transparency are things Albertans expect for all municipalities regardless of size and all levels of government. Accountability is a priority for my ministry and for this province. Bill 203 is consistent with this priority. That is why I'm happy to support it.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a sound election process in place. In 2005 the Local Authorities Election Act was strengthened after a major review. Another comprehensive review is anticipated following the 2010 municipal elections. In the meantime these changes suggested by my hon. colleague are welcomed and worthy of consideration.

The Local Authorities Election Act does contain rules about campaign finances. These rules also give local authorities the ability to pass bylaws on campaign expenses. Bill 203 strengthens and brings consistency to these rules. Disclosure and what happens to surplus campaign funds are specifically looked at. I look at the fact that it would also make these rules consistent across the province, improving accountability for all Alberta municipalities. I support these changes.

However, as this bill moves forward, there's one point that I would like to see further discussion on, and that is the issue of school board trustees. The Local Authorities Election Act applies to both municipal councillors and school board trustees. I would be interested in hearing from this member if this was something he considered when drafting the bill.

4:00

As I conclude my remarks today, Mr. Speaker, I would once again like to thank the member for bringing forward this bill. It brings attention to the importance of accountability and transparency, something we know Albertans expect from all levels of government.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am speaking primarily in support of Bill 203, Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I have a reservation, which I will get to a little bit later.

What I am in favour of in terms of the transparency and accountability the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs brought forward, I would like to echo. I would like to see the type of control for elections throughout the province have a uniform set of rules, and this is what Bill 203 attempts to accomplish, to put requirements on municipal elected officials, whether they be school board trustees or councillors at the local level, aldermen, alderwomen, and so on. I would like to see the same types of rules that are being suggested in Bill 203 also be required of leadership races.

We've had an example in this province where the successful candidate failed to disclose where \$163,000 of donations came from. We did not get a strong sense of where that \$163,000 of donations went. Another leadership candidate refused to disclose any of the donations, never mind the amount received. We had no sense of what their total donations were. That is far from being transparent and accountable. What this does: the intent is to bring local municipalities into closer accountability such as we as elected Members of this Legislative Assembly experience in terms of the donations, the reporting. It also puts restrictions on how these donations can be kept, collected, and potentially accessed, utilized should that individual wish to run again.

Now, the difference for us provincially, at least, I would think, for a number of us, is that when we have been successfully elected – I know that in my particular case and that of members of my Liberal opposition our monies, whatever monies are left over after an election, go back into our constituency associations for their use and their distribution. The reality is that if we have saved a sufficient amount of money, that money can then be transferred during the next provincial election. Obviously, it's to our potential advantage, but also it provides a starting point for the next individual running in that particular constituency because the money is very carefully accounted for through the Elections Alberta process. Applying that kind of transparency and accountability to the municipal level would create a much more even playing field and give individuals who didn't have large corporate sponsorship an opportunity to compete on a more equal basis.

The fact that the money is held in trust for specifically the municipal election means that that individual couldn't potentially use the money they'd collected for representing their ward and then walk off with that pot should they decide to retire or should they, say, decide to run provincially, have several thousands of dollars collected on their behalf, which would then not translate back to necessarily good work for their entire ward but just for that part of the constituency that they might be provincially elected to represent.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I very much support the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater in terms of trying to after a fashion universalize the rules that are expected of elected members, whether it be as leader of the government, as leader of the opposition, or provincial MLAs, in this case municipal representatives.

The one area that I have a degree of difficulty with has to do with disenfranchising certain organizations, in particular members of a union. It seems to single out individuals who belong to a particular union from contributing to a candidate whom they believe will bring up issues such as a living wage. Reducing that degree of influence causes me a degree of concern.

I also would like to point out that when Prime Minister Jean

Chrétien was in power, he dramatically reduced the contributions that either individuals, unions, or corporations could provide. He basically set the federal bar in terms of disclosure, transparency, and accountability, and that is not a partisan circumstance. It's trying for transparency and accountability and taking away undue influence based on the size of your wallet.

Bringing accountability to local officials such as Bill 203 proposes I think brings them into line with already established provincial standards, and therefore I am very supportive of Bill 203.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss.

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

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, sponsored by the person to my left, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. In my past life I handled many matters of an electoral nature, and I often thought that laws like this should come in.

Just before I begin, I did have a constituent contact me about this, and he mentioned to me: "You know, today is St. Finian's Day. How particular that this would come out on March 16. His motto was to live as others did." This is quite consistent with that mantra, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend the Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing this legislation forward because it's really a long time coming.

Now, as my hon. colleague mentioned, this legislation brings us in line with rules governing federal elections in Canada as well as our own provincial elections in this province. Mr. Speaker, this bill will enhance the integrity of our democratic process for our municipal elections in four key areas: one, limiting the size of campaign contributions; two, dealing with surplus campaign funds; three, improving public disclosure; and four, prohibiting certain types of contributions.

First, I want to speak about the proposed limits on the size of the campaign contributions that this bill proposes. This proposed bill will cap the size of individual contributions at \$5,000. If you look at a comparison to other jurisdictions in this country, it makes sense to put a limit on these contributions. There may be some argument as to exactly where this limit should go, but I think this bill sets an adequate compromise between the two paradigms.

There already are limits in Ontario and Manitoba, specifically in Winnipeg. However, their limits are much more restrictive. The limits in Ontario, Mr. Speaker, are \$750, the same for Winnipeg except that that limit is doubled to \$1,500 for their mayoral candidates. Now, there's also a limit in place in Quebec, \$1,000, and the same thousand-dollar limit applies for our federal elections, roughly. I think it's about \$1,150.

Alberta's provincial elections limit contributions to \$1,500 to a party; to a thousand dollars to a constituency association, or \$5,000 as aggregate, as the Member for Athabasca-Redwater has corrected me on; and to \$2,000 to a candidate, or \$10,000 aggregately. As you can see, this brings us in line for municipal elections in this province, Mr. Speaker, with other jurisdictions in Canada but sets less restrictive limits, a trait that Albertans value.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, another main goal of this bill is how to deal with surplus campaign contributions. One thing that I've often thought of is that in a civic election we don't have parties in this province. I'd argue that there's nothing in the Municipal Government Act or our Election Act that prohibits parties from getting involved in

municipal elections, but it doesn't happen here. It does happen in B.C. and Quebec; it doesn't happen here. As such, there's no constituency organization. For example, if I were to retire after the next election and there's money left over in the Calgary-Egmont association's account, it would typically go on to the next candidate for the purposes of electing a candidate of a particular party in that association. But when you're running for alderman or mayor, there are no political parties, and that's why this bill is important.

The bill proposes that surplus campaign funds exceeding \$500 are to be paid to the municipality and held in trust in an interest-bearing account. If a candidate doesn't run in the following election, the money is donated to a registered charity, or it becomes property of the municipality.

Again, the proposition also brings us up to speed with several other jurisdictions in Canada. Ontario and B.C. have laws that are nearly identical to this proposition with the same threshold, \$500, Mr. Speaker. Manitoba also designates that excess funds are held in trust but does not allow a \$500 threshold to be deemed part of the candidate's personal expenses. In none of those jurisdictions are any candidates allowed to donate excess funds to a charity if re-election is not sought. Instead, the money in those jurisdictions is always deemed to be a donation to the municipality.

I find this to be rather absurd. Again, this bill deals with this. When people donate to a particular candidate or party, they don't want it to necessarily go to the government. That essentially becomes a tax. I'd argue it's an abuse of their own donations. The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater in his legislation has given an option to have a leg up on other provinces who have gone down this route, allowing people to have their money donated to a charity if they do retire.

Now, Mr. Speaker, for our provincial elections we have several different options for how we deal with surplus funds. As I mentioned earlier, you can have these funds held in trust until the next elections, or if a candidate is not seeking re-election, as I mentioned, they can be transferred to the party, transferred to the constituency association, or transferred to the Crown. I somehow don't think the last option is taken advantage of that often. Obviously, our municipal elections do not have parties, as I mentioned. Once again, though, we're falling in line with strong legislation on provincial election financing with respect to these surplus funds.

Mr. Speaker, the next main component of this bill deals with public disclosure. The proposed bill will mandate that a campaign account must be opened at a financial institution. The campaign would then be responsible for filing a campaign disclosure statement with the total amount contributed from all contributors, the contributor's name and address when total contributions are over \$100 for the campaign period, and, of course, a list of campaign expenses, similar to what any member of this House would have to have done within our campaign last year.

If we look at other jurisdictions, we can also again see that this change will bring us in line with Ontario, Quebec, and B.C. Manitoba, again, has similar legislation, but their threshold for providing the name and address of a contributor is \$250 as opposed to \$100, kind of a *de minimis* rule, wherever you want to draw the line.

Mr. Speaker, in our provincial elections we have that same provision, but the threshold is much more stringent at \$50 as a total contribution before the name and address of the contributor need to be disclosed. Federal elections have even further restrictions, with a threshold of \$20. That cannot be cash and necessitates that a receipt be issued. Also, any gifts over \$500 must be included. Once again, I believe this bill will bring our municipal election laws in line with other jurisdictions in Canada and increase the transparency of our whole election process.

Now, the fourth main component of Bill 203 is prohibiting certain types of entities from contributing towards candidates. The bill seeks to propose those entities who receive municipal funding in nonprofit organizations. This goes a step further than other jurisdictions in Canada such as Ontario, B.C., or Manitoba, who only have restrictions disallowing contributions from anonymous contributors. As well, Quebec only mandates eligible voters who are able to contribute in municipal elections.

However, our provincial elections already have strong legislation. No prohibited corporation or person normally resident outside Alberta or trade union or employee or organization other than as defined in the act can make any contributions to a party, association, or candidate. This proposed change is a proactive step, setting reasonable and province-wide standards for all of Alberta's communities. Mr. Speaker, this bill is an attempt to bring our municipalities up to speed with our provincial and federal finance laws and follows several other jurisdictions, as I have mentioned.

I do want to mention a couple of other things. It was referenced earlier that this is not retroactive. Legislation is typically not retroactive; it applies from one point forward. We're not doing this to try to punish anyone but, rather, to have a set point forward. A further note that I have here is that within the three months following Bill 203 coming into force, persons who intend to be candidates in the 2010 municipal general election must declare existing campaign funds, so it's not intended to be a punishment to anyone who is currently in office.

I mentioned earlier the positive duties of a candidate that it also defines. Also, interestingly enough, this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, talks about a campaign period. It defines what a campaign period really is. That can be somewhat nebulous in a municipal election campaign because it's usually held in October every three years. For the purpose of this legislation for a candidate in a general election the period of time from January 1 immediately following the general election to December 31 immediately following the next election is deemed to be a campaign period, and for a by-election, which, of course, has happened before, the period from January 1 immediately following the general election to 60 days immediately following the by-election.

One of the last items I want to deal with, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of voter turnout. Many members of all three parties in this House have talked about low voter turnout. I know that in my maiden speech it was something that bothered me. Well, the turnout in municipal elections is much worse than in provincial or federal elections. For example, in 2007 voter turnout was 27 per cent in Edmonton, 33 per cent in Calgary. In 2004 voter turnout was registered at 27 per cent in Red Deer, decreasing further again in 2007. I think that by setting better rules and by allowing more contributors and encouraging candidates to have more individual contributors, you're going to get more people involved in the process. When more people donate, obviously, I think more people are going to get involved. More people are going to vote.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up that the federal Chrétien government had brought in some finance reforms. A lot of these reforms, though, were brought in just in the 11th hour, as the former Prime Minister was leaving. It was interesting that he did not bring them up before. He had 10 years to do so, and he didn't. Rather, this member is doing this on a go-forward basis without any ulterior motives and without... [Mr. Denis's speaking time expired] Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you indicated to me that you wish to speak on this bill. Please, go ahead.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act. I have to start by sort of noting with some amusement the irony of this piece of legislation being introduced, particularly as it's being framed so repeatedly already in relation to our provincial election laws.

I think that in general it's a good piece of legislation. What it attempts to achieve is good, and it's something that we should all support. But it is deeply – deeply – ironic in that it is being introduced in a Legislature and in a province where it will stand alongside our provincial election financing rules, which are not actually like what you see in other provinces. In fact, our provincial election financing rules are quite a Wild West sort of scenario, where there are nowhere near the numbers of rules and limitations and prohibitions that you would see in other provinces. Put another way, there is nowhere near the protection in our provincial election laws against, shall I say, the possibility for undue influence.

Of course, we've just gone through a very open process of certain members of the Assembly who happen to all be associated with a certain caucus within the Assembly having voted on committee to get rid of the Chief Electoral Officer after he made a range of recommendations about what needed to be changed in our provincial legislation, a good deal of those recommendations, of course, linking specifically to the problems with our election financing provincially. It's within that context, then, that I find this very good piece of legislation designed to put in place a very excellent set of rules for our municipal politicians coming here into this Assembly, but at the same time it's just deeply ironic that we're prepared to legislate for municipal politicians a set of rules that we are apparently not prepared to play by ourselves.

4:20

There are a couple of elements within this bill that I have some concerns with, having said that, generally speaking, it's good and the objectives it seeks to achieve are also good. Just a couple of points. You know, it would be nice to see or hear whether there was room for those to be amended.

The first point relates to the issue of how trade unions versus corporations are being treated under this legislation. Now, I appreciate that the language defining trade unions in this piece of legislation is very similar to the language used in the provincial act. The difference, of course, is that under the provincial act there is a lot more money that can be given. There's a much, much higher threshold before bodies which are donating money to political parties or to political candidates run up against the prohibitions.

This act attempts to significantly limit the financial contributions that can be made to candidates. I think that that's a good thing. But the difficulty is that it treats trade unions and corporations differently in that all sort of subsidiary parts of a trade union are for the purposes of this legislation being told that they have to be treated as one, yet the same thing does not happen with respect to subsidiary corporate entities.

My view of how it ought to work is that the trade unions ought to be defined in the same way they are defined under the Labour Relations Code. If there is a local that is certified at a certain employer through which there is a certain collective agreement, where that particular group of workers have come together collectively to negotiate a particular set of circumstances, and then that particular local as a group has decided that they want to make a donation to a particular candidate or campaign or party or whichever, then so be it. That's what they are. But to suggest that that local is part of the same local with a completely different employer in a completely different part of the province, where they've never

talked to those members, they've never discussed the merits of that particular candidate, they can't co-ordinate among themselves whether it's more important to give \$5,000 to candidate A in Calgary versus candidate B in Edmonton, that is, I think, an onerous position to put these locals into.

That's fine if we are doing it for everybody, but the same rules don't apply to corporate subsidiaries. They can make donations all over the place, depending on how they are organized and depending on how their subsidiaries are organized. To me, that's not a level playing field because what you're doing is putting in place a substantial rule which, I think, has merit – i.e., keeping the limit to \$5,000 over the course of the whole three years – but then you're applying it differently to two different potential donors. Ironically, one of those groups of potential donors happens to be more likely to donate to the governing caucus than the other group of potential donors, which is more likely to not donate to the governing caucus. That is on the face of it an inequality and inequity which, I think, needs to be corrected. I'm perfectly happy for it to be corrected by closing the loopholes for corporate donations so that everybody truly is limited to the \$5,000. But it's got to be one or the other. So that's \$5,000.

Again, it's interesting. You compare it to the provincial legislation. As an MLA for the riding of Edmonton-Strathcona I represent about a third of the number of people as the two councillors that represent my ward. It's interesting that my limitation that just as an individual MLA I can receive, I believe, is about \$30,000 to \$40,000 – I don't know the exact amount, but it's about that much – in total between the two elections, yet a candidate for alderperson could only receive a maximum of \$5,000 in that same period of time. That is, again, an interesting irony, that we've got those two different sets of rules in place.

The other concern that I have is that there was mention already about the expansion of prohibited bodies that can contribute, and there was a discussion about the issue of ensuring that nonprofit organizations who had received grants of some type from a municipality were banned from contributing to that municipality. Well, again, a perfectly reasonable approach to take. Absolutely reasonable. Lots of good reasons to put that prohibition in there.

But then I say: why just nonprofits? Why not for-profits? The fact of the matter is that there are circumstances under which for-profit organizations/corporations will receive money, grants, enter into business relationships in a variety of different ways – of course, the opportunity for that is expanding every day through this government's insistence on pursuing a P3 agenda – so there are lots of opportunities where those corporations do have a vested economic interest, a relationship with the government specifically, a direct relationship, are receiving direct funding. So why are we prohibiting a nonprofit group from donating, but we are not prohibiting a for-profit corporation, and we're not prohibiting that for-profit corporation from donating through a variety of subsidiaries in order to maximize their donations?

Now, I appreciate that you've put the \$5,000 limit in place, so it does bring it into a more reasonable conversation because the maximum sort of inequity is \$5,000. Well, it's more, depending on how many subsidiaries there are, but, you know, we're not looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars, as it is, for instance, under the provincial Election Act, but it is still a concern.

That is the kind of thing that I would like to see corrected as this bill is considered. Again, I would like to be able to say to municipal politicians who raise concerns about this that we're not in a position of, you know, one set of rules for us and another set of rules for them. I think that if we want to have some legitimacy in terms of talking to municipal politicians about how they should run their

elections, we need to very clearly say that we're looking at the same rules for ourselves.

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my sincere pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, sponsored by my colleague from Athabasca-Redwater. I would like to commend the hon. member for bringing forward this very important piece of legislation.

I would like to know what election rules the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is looking at or is abiding by. The maximum allowable donation to an individual constituency or individual candidate is actually \$2,000 in an election year, \$1,000 in a nonelection year, so it is not \$25,000 or \$30,000.

Ms Notley: It's \$10,000. Check the act.

Mr. Anderson: Well, to an individual candidate it is definitely \$1,000 in a nonelection, \$2,000 in an election.

Ms Notley: To a party it's \$100,000; to a candidate it's \$10,000.

Mr. Anderson: Luckily, as we know, we do not have parties in municipal elections, so it would be the individual candidates that are important here. I just wanted to remind the hon. member of that.

I believe that this legislation is long overdue and will strengthen our democracy and the democratic processes we have here in Alberta. Ultimately, the objective of Bill 203 is to bring municipal election standards in line with much of what currently guides our provincial elections in Alberta and allows for greater fairness in municipal election campaigning. This would include regulating the size of campaign contributions, creating clearer standards for dealing with surplus campaign funds, and requiring full public disclosure of all finances related to a campaign. As well, Bill 203 would prohibit entities who receive municipal funding and nonprofit organizations from contributing to municipal campaigns.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the manner in which this bill would regulate the size of financial contributions made to municipal campaigns. Fundamentally, I believe that this measure is essential and that it would help create a more level playing field for both candidates and the electorate during municipal elections. Regardless of financial means, campaign donations from individuals and groups would be limited to a maximum total of \$5,000 during a campaign period. I would suggest that this is a key component to fairness in free elections as it reduces the ability of large financial contributions to influence candidates and, perhaps, the outcome of a municipal election.

4:30

Further to this, individuals or groups who may not have the means to donate significant financial amounts may find that, in fact, smaller donations would have a greater impact in support of their preferred candidate being elected. In short, by regulating campaign donation size, donation amounts, Bill 203 would effectively provide a more equal opportunity for individuals or groups to make meaningful financial contributions to a campaign. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this may actually enhance the ability of candidates to raise the funds necessary to run a successful campaign.

At the end of the day Albertans are less inclined to become involved in municipal elections if they feel their contributions, financial or otherwise, will have a limited impact when compared to

massive contributions made by the community's more powerful and influential donors. Indeed, over and over when individuals who do not vote are asked why they fail to do so or what prevents them from becoming more involved in politics, the most common answer they give is that they believe that their vote or their contribution won't count towards changing the final outcome. In this way a limit on contribution size in municipal elections I believe demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that the voices of all Albertans have a more equal opportunity to be heard. Ultimately, citizens are more motivated to donate when they believe that their contribution to a campaign is truly needed and valued.

Further, Mr. Speaker, size restrictions on financial contributions would not only level the playing field for the electorate during a municipal election but would also do so for those actually seeking to run for municipal office. Given that individuals or groups would be limited to the \$5,000 donation maximum during a campaign period, the financial advantage of candidates who rely on a smaller number of significant donations to fund their campaigns is greatly reduced. In order to stay competitive, all candidates would then have to turn their attention to raising funds beyond a small existing base. I would submit that this could lead or should lead to more development and discussion of policies that benefit the majority of a constituency in a municipality rather than a select few. In short, candidates would need to broaden their horizons and their fundraising activities.

Ultimately, this is certainly a more attractive prospect for Albertans who may be considering the idea of running in a municipal race. Mr. Speaker, because of the level playing field that Bill 203 creates with respect to contribution size, such would allow for a greater range or number of new entrants into public office on the municipal level, broadening the scope of ideas and providing Albertans with more choice when deciding on political leadership. Indeed, it helps ensure that the system is free and fair for all candidates and voters alike.

Even more, regulating the size of campaign contributions would help protect candidates and elected officials from allegations of undue influence. Indeed, it can sometimes be simply the appearance of wrongdoing that gives voters pause even where nothing untoward exists. By reducing this real or perceived influence, candidates and elected officials are less likely to find themselves in a situation where their decisions are weighed against who donated significant funds to their campaign. As a result, we are likely to see greater confidence in our municipal governments and locally elected officials, allowing them to focus on important local issues. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the strength of regulating the size of campaign contributions is that it presents a win-win situation, benefiting both candidates and electorate.

The amendments contained in this bill only seek to raise municipal standards to the same level of transparency and fairness already experienced at the provincial level. That is to say, Mr. Speaker, this bill is not imposing unique or far-reaching regulations for municipal elections but simply extending a standard already followed provincially.

It is for these reasons that I will be supporting Bill 203, and I encourage all members of this House to do so as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall indicated that he wished to speak.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and pleasure to speak in support of Bill 203, brought in by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, and I would like to congratulate

the hon. member for bringing the bill, which is long overdue. Currently municipalities have the power to create their own bylaws regulating whether the candidate running for any office discloses an account for their campaign contributions. In Calgary the reporting for many members was \$101; Edmonton, \$300; Red Deer, \$100; and Lethbridge, \$300. There are no maximum limits for contributions in any of the cities, and most cities don't include provisions about what to do with the contribution surpluses. In large municipalities like Calgary the surpluses are huge, and candidates, you know, can do whatever they want with the surpluses. They can pocket it; they can walk away with it.

The penalty in Calgary is no more than \$1,000; in Edmonton it's \$750 or \$100 per offence, depending on the type of offences; in Red Deer it's \$500 or \$100 each, depending on the offences; and in Lethbridge it's at least \$500 and no more than \$1,000. This bill, you know, will ensure that there is a level playing field across the province by requiring that all municipalities must abide by the same standard as everywhere else. People have been calling for this bill for a long time. It was not clear if the financial statements are checked for accuracy. It was very vague.

There was great concern about campaign contributions. We need to regulate what happens with the surplus contributions. In some communities the surplus goes to the municipalities. In Edmonton it goes to nonprofit organizations. In Calgary the aldermen get to keep their surpluses. You know, some aldermen have surpluses over \$50,000. I think this is important. Perusals should be standardized right across the province so that there is, you know, the same level playing field for all the contributions.

Another argument goes that these contributions or surpluses are private funds; they are not public monies. I think that making these donations tax deductible would stop that argument right in its tracks as well. In Calgary, for instance, campaign contributions are collected during the tenure of a councillor, and that can be pocketed by the person if he chooses not to run in the next election. He or she is able to raise funds under false pretenses. You know, those funds, clearly, should be spent on the elections. If they are not, then it becomes clearly unethical. Those funds should be formally regulated.

As it stands now, the current fines in some cities are not severe enough to disclose the contributions or for misfiling the financial statements. This bill will help, I think, to address some of those concerns as the bill will regulate maximum donations by individuals, corporations, or trade unions to \$5,000. The minimum disclosure limit will be \$100, and that will be right across the province. It will also address the issue of campaign surplus funds. The funds should be held with the municipality until the next election. A candidate may decide to use the funds for the campaign, or if they decide to not run again, the funds can go to some nonprofit organization.

Also, the audit that will occur with the spending of over \$10,000 is a step in the right direction as well. It says that the maximum fine that candidates will pay to the municipality for late filing of financial information is \$500. I think that the fine should be a little bit higher. You know, I think that it should be more than \$500. I think the rest of the fines are appropriate.

4:40

I think that these contributions should be tax deductible. By making the contributions tax deductible, I think it will make it more accountable, more transparent for everybody, and it will create the same level playing field for all the candidates who are running for office.

This bill goes some way to making municipal elections more transparent and candidates more accountable. I think I'm going to

support this bill. It's going to strengthen democracy as well. My main concern, you know, is making the financial contributions tax deductible. We need to ensure that all the funds given to the candidates running as municipal candidates are used for municipal elections only, that they are not used for federal or provincial elections. Those are some of the amendments we should have in there. If we address those, I think I'll support Bill 203.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 203, Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. The objective of Bill 203 is to define minimum standards for financial contributions during municipal elections. This would include ensuring comprehensive and timely disclosure of campaign financial records and creating a clear set of rules regarding surplus campaign funds. Much of this not only brings municipalities in line with what candidates are required to do at the provincial level but also in other jurisdictions across the country. In short, Bill 203 introduces consistent accountability and transparency standards that would improve our democratic process during municipal elections. Bill 203 is just one more way to ensure that our electoral process continues to work for Albertans.

The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary defines democracy as "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections," in short, a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians and Albertans cherish and value democracy, which forms the foundation of our governmental institutions, and all democracies support the core values of equality of opportunity, accountability, and fairness in our political systems. I think it's safe to say that Canadians can identify themselves by their shared belief in support of democratic governments, procedures, and institutions. A number of municipalities across Alberta have in fact passed bylaws that ensure campaign finance disclosure and that surplus contribution funds are handled properly. The examples set by these municipalities are excellent examples of the way in which greater transparency has benefited both the candidates and the public.

However, to ensure the same level of transparency in all municipal elections across the province, we need to have legislation that guarantees adherence to consistent procedures. One key way to establish this consistency is by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of candidates and contributors. I believe this allows the public to have greater confidence in the democratic process as this increased knowledge allows the public to make better and more educated decisions.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would also regulate the size of campaign contributions and ensure full public disclosure of all financial accounting in campaigns. This would go a long way to increasing the opportunity for more candidates to run in municipal campaigns by lessening the likelihood that a particular candidate may raise a large donation from a single supporter. Other candidates may not be able to compete in an election if they cannot do the same and/or raise campaign funds to the same degree. In this way regulatory limits on campaign contributions do not limit the amount a candidate can raise or spend in total. It just allows contributors to have a more equal role in the campaign process.

In short, Mr. Speaker, I believe this means that each contributor

would be valued to a greater extent. In part this is because a candidate's success would be based more on their ability to earn the support of and raise funding from a greater number of voters. This would better support our democratic system by ensuring that a few large contributors would not be able to fund a candidate's entire campaign. Indeed, when a single person or organization is the main contributor, there's a risk that a candidate may later feel indebted to these individuals. If the candidate is elected, the interests of these individuals could then later take future precedence over the good of the majority.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 addresses this by limiting campaign contributions by any person, corporation, trade union, or employee organization to \$5,000 within a campaign period. Ultimately, this element of Bill 203 would help ensure a more democratic electoral process, allowing the majority to play a greater and more direct role in the campaign process. In my experience in municipal politics perhaps fundraising was not an issue because in many rural municipality elections the vote is based on the individual, not how much campaign money he or she could raise. At the same time, the legislation in Bill 203 would require that candidates disclose their financial contributions to voters no matter what the amount is, helping to provide Albertans with greater transparency when it comes to candidates.

Furthermore, I believe that this bill would create a clear directive for dealing with surplus campaign funds, requiring these funds to be declared and held in trust until the next election or donated to the municipality or a registered charity. Here, too, we would see a more enhanced democratic process as this directive ensures accountability and allows Albertans to be assured that their donations are being used for election purposes.

Mr. Speaker, improving and enhancing democracy is always a good thing, and Bill 203 sets a standard for accountability and transparency that will enhance our electoral system at the municipal level. It is vital that we do everything possible to make sure that elections and campaigns in Alberta remain open, fair, and democratic so that voters are not only informed about the candidates they support but have faith in the system. Because of this, I support Bill 203.

I look forward to the remainder of the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and continue debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, as sponsored by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. If passed, this legislation would amend the Local Authorities Election Act to provide minimum campaign finance standards in municipal elections. These would include regulating the size of campaign contributions, creating standardized guidelines for dealing with any surplus campaign funds, and ensuring full public disclosure of all financial accounting in a campaign. Proper campaign finance disclosure is essential to ensuring transparency and accountability. It allows voters to infer what contributors may influence a successful candidate's decision-making in future years.

Mr. Speaker, as outlined in the Canadian Constitution, provincial governments are responsible for providing legislation and structures that direct our municipal governments. Though several municipalities have passed legislation regarding campaign finances, Bill 203 would provide enhanced standards that apply to all Alberta municipalities. This would ensure accountability that stretches to all reaches of our province.

4:50

Several other provincial governments have already implemented province-wide municipal campaign finance legislation similar to what Bill 203 seeks to accomplish here in Alberta. These include Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. Ontario's Municipal Elections Act provides rigorous minimum campaign finance standards that apply to municipalities province-wide, with some exceptions for the city of Toronto. Many of these standards are similar to the measures proposed in Bill 203, including contribution limits, full and complete disclosure statements, and the handling of surplus funds following an election. For example, contributions to candidates are permitted from individuals, corporations, and trade unions but must not exceed \$750. The exception is Toronto, where mayoral candidates may accept contributions up to \$2,500.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Like Bill 203, however, in Ontario anonymous contributions to local candidates are prohibited and must be turned over to the clerk to become part of general funds in the municipality. In terms of disclosure all candidates, including those who withdraw their nomination for office, are required to file a complete and accurate financial statement with the clerk to report all contributions and expenses. These forms must include the names and addresses of all those who contribute more than \$100 to a campaign. In addition, an auditor is required to review campaigns that record expenses or contributions that exceed \$10,000.

Ontario's municipal election law also carefully regulates the handling of surplus campaign funds. Campaigns with a surplus in excess of \$500 must pay the surplus in its entirety to the clerk responsible for conducting the election. Following an election, any surplus amount with a value lower than \$500 is deemed the candidate's own funds. Surplus dollars are in turn held by the municipality in the event that the candidate runs in the following election. If the candidate doesn't seek re-election, the surplus becomes the property of the municipality. Mr. Speaker, Ontario's comprehensive yet targeted legislation can serve as a useful template as we examine the concerns Bill 203 is designed to address, from the handling of surplus funds to ensuring full and accurate disclosure statements.

Quebec also carefully regulates municipal election finance through An Act Respecting Elections and Referendums in Municipalities. This act also reflects the unique nature of Quebec municipal politics as political parties are prominent actors at the municipal level. However, unlike Ontario only individuals who reside in the municipality are permitted to contribute to the campaign. Corporations and trade unions are excluded. Individuals may contribute a maximum of \$1,000 per fiscal year to a municipal political party or independent candidate. Disclosure statements must be filed annually no later than April 1, in an election year no later than 90 days following polling day. All contributions must be recorded, including the number and total amounts of contributions \$100 or less and the names and addresses of those who contribute more than \$100. Moreover, political parties and independent candidates must appoint an auditor. Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 recognizes these measures already in place in Quebec and incorporates many of its goals, such as the contribution limits and full disclosure.

In British Columbia both the Local Government Act and the Vancouver Charter provide standardized municipal campaign finance regulations for all municipalities. All campaigns must complete and submit a comprehensive disclosure statement and must record the total value and number of contributions less than \$100. For contributions greater than \$100 the name, type of contributor, and contribution dates must be provided. If the contributor is a

business organization, the address of the contributor and the names of two directors or principal officers must be disclosed.

Moreover, the handling of surplus campaign funds is similar to that of Ontario, plus funds of \$500 or more that remain in a candidate's account following an election must be donated to the local government. These funds are held in trust in the event the candidate chooses to run in a by-election or subsequent general election. If the candidate chooses not to run, the funds are considered a donation to the revenue of the local government. In fact, all handling of surplus funds must be clearly indicated on a candidate's disclosure statement. This includes how the surplus was dealt with, the total amount of the surplus or deficit after payment of expenses, and any surplus funds used from a prior campaign. British Columbia also sets serious penalties for those who fail to comply with campaign finance laws. Punishments can include disqualification from holding elected office for up to five years and a \$5,000 fine.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years there has been a renewed effort amongst all levels of government to implement stronger elections finance legislation. Legislation such as the Federal Accountability Act and, here in Alberta, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act helps to ensure confidence, trust, and accountability in our electoral system. As we see in other provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, comprehensive yet targeted legislation can ensure that our citizens enjoy the same level of confidence in our municipal elections as we do in our provincial elections. This is why I support Bill 203 and encourage my colleagues on both sides of this House to vote in favour as well.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realize that I just have a few minutes, but there are a couple of things that I wanted to say. I think this is a very good bill. Certainly, we have to be able to have more accountability at this level. Unions feel that the maximum contribution is too restrictive at \$5,000. My question would be that if a person is a member of a union that has already made that contribution, does that exclude them from making their own personal contributions? I'm not sure that was clear in my mind.

The surplus funds certainly have to be accounted for. The concern that I would have with this is if somebody would be collecting money at one level of government with the idea that they would run again at that level but, in fact, then use the money that they had collected, let's say, on a municipal level for a run at a provincial level seat. I'm not clear on how that would be sorted out. I think that would be very wrong. I think that once the money is collected at one level, it should be used at that level or else forfeited, and then they have to start again if they've moved up to the next level.

The other thing is, I think, an important controversy that I believe should be addressed and discussed – and I apologize for not being here for the whole debate – that it would help if municipal donations were made tax deductible as are the other two levels of government because, really, the municipal level is a legitimate form of government, so it would fit under that provision.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the remaining few minutes I'm pleased to rise and join the debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to join my colleagues in congratulating and thanking the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing forward this bill.

As members are aware, this bill would include regulating the size of campaign contributions, the handling of surplus campaign funds, and ensuring full public disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures. These measures would help to ensure, as others have pointed out, public confidence in all candidates who choose to run for political office in municipal elections. It would also help to protect candidates from accusations of conflict of interest or other charges by providing strict limitations on contributions.

Bill 203 also gives us the opportunity to examine and discuss Alberta's comprehensive campaign finance legislation, which governs provincial elections. In respect to the comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I think it would also accommodate a discussion on some of the issues that she has raised, which are unrelated to this bill but which, nevertheless, deserve discussion. In doing so, we can see what aspects of provincial legislation may be useful and which may not if translated to the municipal level.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans can take pride in the fact that our provincial elections are conducted with the highest degree of accountability and transparency. This is accomplished through adherence to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. A careful look at the act reveals that our provincial legislation addresses many of the concerns of Bill 203.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allocated for consideration of this item of business this afternoon has now concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair has a long list of members who wish to participate this afternoon, so please govern your comments according to that. This is a remarkable turnout late on a Monday afternoon.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Provincial Achievement Tests

503. Mrs. Leskiw moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to eliminate provincial achievement tests for grade 3 students and consider alternative assessments for learning.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and a privilege to stand today and open debate on Motion 503, urging the Alberta government to eliminate the provincial achievement test for grade 3 students and consider an alternative assessment for learning.

Mr. Speaker, for me kids always come first. That is why I have dedicated many years of my life to Alberta's classrooms, providing our children with the foundation necessary to help them succeed and build Alberta's future. Now as an elected representative it is my responsibility to work with my constituents and assess measures that will improve Alberta's world-class education system. That is why I have introduced this discussion on whether provincial achievement tests, PATs, for grade 3 students are the best mechanisms for learning assessment. Part of the effectiveness of our world-class education system is based on the willingness to continuously improve to better meet the needs of our children, and I believe that reviewing and enhancing our method of assessment would further strengthen our education system.

Mr. Speaker, I have observed how the grade 3 PATs have placed a burden on grade 3 students, teachers, and parents. For teachers a great deal of time is spent preparing each of their students to write the achievement exams. This is time that could be spent on teaching

the curriculum rather than teaching for a test. The achievement test interferes with the responsibility of teachers to determine curriculum emphasis, design learning activities, and develop and administer their own evaluation procedures.

Teachers are ultimately responsible for evaluating and reporting students' progress. Further to this, the PAT does not provide an individual assessment of students' academic achievements or progress. Rather, it only tests information that can be assessed through pencil-and-paper examination. Factors such as that a child is well nourished or had a good night's rest can strongly influence test performance. Teaching methods need to be tailored directly to the students' needs, particularly in the earlier grades, where students from all walks of life have different challenges and may require modified teaching methods to advance their academic achievements. Mr. Speaker, a one-size-fits-all teaching method may not educate students in a way that corresponds to their individual needs.

Timing is another drawback of this exam. Provincial achievement tests are currently written near the end of the school year, but the results are not handed back until the fall, after most students in the grade have moved on to the next grade. This does not provide teachers the ability to offer additional support to individual students, nor does it give students the ability to improve. It's just a snapshot of how a particular student and/or school performed on a certain day.

I believe along with many other teachers across this great province that the funding spent on administering these tests could be better spent on curriculum enhancement and on developing more effective methods of evaluation. In 2001 the Alberta Teachers' Association surveyed teachers about the provincial achievement testing program and found that only 6 per cent of teachers believe that grade 3 achievement testing should continue as it is. Alternatively, 33 per cent of teachers wanted the tests replaced with diagnostic tests, and 44 per cent of teachers believed that the tests should be abandoned altogether.

Accountability is very important within the education system and helps to ensure that the curriculum standards are met. However, the PATs for grade 3 may not be an effective method of accountability. Statistically, similar tests could be collected through sampling procedures which would be less expensive and disruptive.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that in my experience as a teacher we are not doing our students a favour by the continuation of this exam but, rather, a disservice to both our students and teachers. I also want to emphasize that we have one of the best education systems in the world, and this is clearly demonstrated by both my teaching colleagues and our students. In this province we know that our students have the ability to compete with any students from anywhere in the world. Education is the foundation of our province's success. I look forward to exploring the possibilities of how we can continue to improve our exceptional education system, in doing so enabling us all to act and realize the unmatched potential that exists in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, once a teacher, always a teacher. Students have always come first for me, and I will always promote what is best for our kids. I'm encouraging both Albertans and this Assembly to consider alternative methods for assessing our students in grade 3, and I ask that you stand in support of Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Motion 503, the elimination of grade 3 provincial achievement tests. I'd like to express my

appreciation to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing forward this very important motion.

Mr. Speaker, we need to acknowledge the positive direction of Motion 503 and what it means to our youth. Since the introduction of grade 3 standardized provincial achievement tests in 1992 our society has changed a great deal, and in the past 17 years school curriculum has been amended to reflect not only these changes but the standards and expectations placed on our students.

Currently achievement tests are designed to determine if students are learning the information that they will need to succeed in the future. However, at the age of 7 or 8 years these young people are all learning at their own pace, and it's imperative that our children have the ability to experience their own individual strengths and weaknesses and grow into well-rounded citizens. I believe that it's very important that students in grade 3 are assessed. However, it needs to be on an individual basis.

Currently teachers are working closely with interested parents regarding the personal assessment of their students. For example, on a daily basis there are quizzes, essays, projects, and the observation of students by teachers that can help to judge the personal progress of students. Assessments of a child's progress cannot be focused on their test-taking abilities. This is true particularly in the third grade, where the test-taking experience has not yet been fully developed. Teachers in schools have recognized the need to have students learn at their own pace. If this is what they want, then why would we try to judge this on a standardized scale?

Over the past few weeks, Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to visit 15 schools in my constituency as part of their grade 6 curriculum to learn about government. During this time I took the opportunity to discuss the issue proposed by Motion 503 with teachers directly, and most have said the same thing: testing of students is important to ensure there is progress and that schools offer a standardized level of instruction; however, there needs to be an alternative test.

Instead, I'd like to see students being tested at the beginning of the year and again at the end to judge their progress. This diagnostic type of test is very different from the standardized tests currently in place. Diagnostic testing is generally accepted to be an in-depth evaluation of a relatively narrow scope of analysis aimed to identify specific conditions or problems. In this way diagnostic testing can be the best answer for assessing students learning at different paces. In my opinion, this is the best type of testing for our students. It not only evaluates their abilities, but I believe that we can take the results from these tests to ensure that Alberta teaching standards are being upheld. With this common-sense approach I believe the emphasis will be then on the students versus on the test. After all, it should be the student that is evaluated, not the school.

It is for these reasons that I support Motion 503. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake introduced Motion 503. I'm not only pleased, but I'm relieved and I'm celebratory that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat stood up and so eloquently supported this motion. I really appreciate the fact that even though he doesn't have a teaching experiential background, he does his homework. He, as he pointed out, visited 15 schools, and he talked to stakeholders. I'm sure that in his dealings with children he's got a sense of what their best interests are.

Now, it's extremely important that this motion doesn't say: let's

toss tests and forget about testing. What it says is: let's consider alternative assessments for learning. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake gave examples of a variety of instruments that have considerably greater validity than a student's ability to fill in a very narrow space with an HB pencil, because that is one of the chief skills that is required on a multiple-guess test.

5:10

Well, beginning at the grade 3 level is a very interesting place to start because that test is particularly torturous on young individuals, but where it is most repulsive is at the grade 12 level for the various reasons the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake pointed out. Why, on the basis of a two-hour multiple guess, is this given the same evaluation credibility as an entire year's work of very diverse assignments? What this standardized achievement test does very effectively is test a student's family's wealth. It also tests reasonably effectively the students based on their advantage and the length of time they've had in an economic well-being circumstance with English as their first language. It also, because of its heavy language basis, will test wealth and language.

What it fails to test are the creative areas. What it assumes – and maybe that assumption can be applied to math – for language arts, social studies, and science is that there is a single right answer, that by picking B, then A, C, and D have no value. Now, having taught elementary math, I gave students more marks for how they got to the right answer than for the right answer itself. That's, unfortunately, the thing that standardized achievement tests do not do. They test a very basic level of understanding, the assumption that there's only one way that it can be done.

What happens is that students who are intellectually diverse will overthink a particular answer, believing that what they have come up with as their first thought can't possibly be right. The way you're supposed to pick an answer on these multiple-guess tests is that your first impression is usually your best one. They will overthink it and as a result fail because they work so hard at coming up with: "How could this possibly be the answer? I must be wrong. I must look for other possibilities." When you've got little introductions of about 12 words leading up to the question from which you're supposed to choose the A, B, C, or D, then it doesn't test their ability. What it does test is a person's ability to read the length of a stem. Any of us who have taken statistics or sampling at some point in university know how to do well on these particular tests, and it's of large concern that such value is given to these tests.

What is even more disconcerting is the way in which these tests are administered. It was pointed out by both the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who is introducing Motion 503, that these are end of the year tests. They are tested when a child is leaving grade 3, leaving division 1, going into division 2. They occur at the end of grade 6, when a child has not only left the division but in most cases has left the school. How is that end result going to help them when they transfer into junior high school? It's again tested at the grade 9 level, where up to a quarter to a fifth of a student's mark is based on this two-hour one-shot wonder, and then of course by the time it hits grade 12, they're gone. What good is this test that they have no longer any opportunity to improve upon unless, of course, they fail it, in which case they'll be doing summer school and trying again to be a better guesser in the exam they write over the summer?

If the government is truly concerned about the level of learning, then they've got to give some credit to the teachers, who have spent a minimum of four years getting their education or in the case of a master's of education have spent six years and in their practicums have gone through a whole variety and coursework on different

methods of assessment, including students' own self-assessment, which is extremely important that students learn to evaluate themselves on a base of understood criteria.

I am hoping that government members are going to be supportive of this motion as a first step. It's not saying that evaluation isn't important, but it's saying: let's put the emphasis, as the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat put it, on the learning end of things as opposed to the testing end. You know, the old axiom of the tail wagging the dog is what standardized achievement tests are all about. Hopefully the motion passes.

The next step is that the results are used internally, that they're not used as a hammer externally to beat down children. That is what standardized achievement tests do in schools with multi-ethnic populations. That is what happens in schools where the poverty levels run high. That is why First Nations schools are exempted. They are a definable group.

If the results are important, then let's work within the schools to improve those results, find the schools that fit in the bottom 200 of the testing results and provide the funding and the support, the reduced class size, the one-on-one type of teaching that will bring them up to the level that can be achieved primarily at the private school, where they have the option to select what children are allowed to enrol. They have the funding to provide reduced class sizes.

Motion 503 is just the beginning, and I hope the story will continue. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join the debate on Motion 503. Since the last election I've had the pleasure of sitting beside the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake in this Assembly. This means that we are often able to share ideas on debates that are taking place. It doesn't, however, mean that we always agree. We sometimes find ourselves supporting the same goal but differing on how to get there, or we just don't agree, period, but we respect each other's opinion.

Mr. Speaker, I do agree with my colleague on Motion 503, and I want to thank her for representing the interests of eight- and nine-year-olds. As a former teacher she brings a great deal of perspective and expertise to this issue, and I greatly respect her opinion.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, I got a letter from a constituent of mine who is also a teacher. The writer argues that the tests place a lot of stress on an eight- or nine-year-old child. She has seen children lose sleep worrying about their performance and being unable to perform to the best of their abilities. At such a young age even good students can be derailed by their anxiety surrounding these tests. I hear stories from my constituents about their own children. One constituent told me that her child said: "When my teacher told me to take out my pencil, I started to sweat. I got cramps in my tummy, and I thought I was going to throw up." I have to ask myself: what's the point of this test? Is it going to make our children smarter? When I'm old, is my doctor going to be better qualified to care for me because they took an achievement test when they were eight or nine years old?

5:20

I'm all for accountability in our education system, Mr. Speaker, but I think that our resources might be better spent developing new diagnostic tools. An achievement test is a snapshot of how that student is doing on a given day. It may have some value, but is it

worth the expense both financially and in terms of stress on our students? Maybe we should do away with the expense of snapshot and continue working to create a scrapbook, one that takes into account a wide variety of factors and allows students to develop over a period of time, an approach that recognizes that children have different learning styles and they have different skills. Some children have skills that measure up well on an achievement test, and others have different skills. This type of tool would really allow us to evaluate how our education system is doing and establish a way to improve it.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this motion forward and lending her considerable expertise to this Assembly. I also want to urge my colleagues to support Motion 503.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I currently have 13 members on the list. We have 35 minutes.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief based on some of the very excellent comments that have been made by members from all sides of the House this afternoon.

I want to compliment the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and I applaud her. I say that also as a former teacher. I want to say that at the end of the day the outcome that we are looking for is, quite simply, for students to reach their full potential. I'm proud to say that I have an almost two-year-old, and some day when he is eight or nine years old and in grade 3, I'm looking forward to being a teacher's greatest advocate and not a teacher's worst nightmare.

I'm very pleased to say that I have spoken to many grade 3 teachers in my community of Fort McMurray, where we have 23 schools. I value their opinion. At the end of the day Motion 503 says, "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to eliminate provincial achievement tests for grade 3 students and consider alternative assessments for learning." I believe in diagnostic teaching, which has been talked about, as well as: how do we spend our energy? I believe we can spend our energy in a more efficient manner for our teachers and for parents and for students in helping them reach their full potential.

I want to say that alternative assessment is really a dialogue with teachers, with others that are involved in this, shall I say, important venture. This is about a dialogue. Last week you heard the Prime Minister and the President of the United States talk about a dialogue on clean energy. I think it is healthy in enhancing our system by not saying that we just simply eliminate, but we're looking at enhancing an already excellent system in our province.

With that and from what I have heard from grade 3 teachers, I fully support Motion 503. In my former life as a teacher and without any fear of contradiction I encourage all members from all sides of the House to support this important motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Minister of Education.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will try to be briefer than usual in light of the number of people that want to speak.

I want to of course start by commending the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for her use of her opportunity to bring a motion before the Legislature with respect to one that has generated

so much interest. I can definitely say that we will be voting in favour of her motion because I think it is a very wise initiative and one that demonstrates a great deal of common sense. In my own constituency, I can report to my colleagues, I have received a phenomenal amount of feedback from people even with just the recent amount of press attention that this issue has gotten. The response has been very solidly on one side of the issue, basically, also supporting this initiative that's being brought forward by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

There are a number of really good, important points that have already been made by many speakers. I can say, you know, that I have a son who took the grade 3 test last year, and I have a daughter who will take it next year. One of the things that is most important to me is that I worry about the degree of stress that this process can in some cases impose upon kids and also upon the school. I also worry about the impact that this test can have on the quality of education that's actually provided in the classroom. I do know that time is taken out from other educational activities in order to prepare the students for this test. I think that we ultimately experience a loss in terms of the overall education that goes on in the class because of the need for the children to be prepared properly for these tests. Also, I have several different schools that provide immersion in my riding, in my area, and of course the children in those programs have to take the test twice, so there's additional stress and anxiety there.

I think what's really important is that children in the classroom do get assessed and that their progress is clearly identified. I do want to make that very clear. I think that assessing is very, very important. I think the incredibly patient teachers at my own school would on a good day call me a high-needs parent when it comes to wanting to know how well my kids are doing. I have nothing against proper assessment, but I do think that that assessment should be done in a way that allows for the natural variance from day to day that children will experience and also allows for it to be used in a functional way so that if there is assessment done and then there are deficits identified, the teachers have the ability to respond in a reasonably timely fashion to change what's happening. I think, particularly when kids are at this age, you know, seven, eight, nine years old, that so much changes between the time they write the test and the time they get the results back that the opportunity has long since been lost for teachers to do what they do best, which is to help our kids learn as much and as well as they possibly can when they're in school.

As I said, there have been a number of very, very good points already made in favour of this motion, so I won't go on any longer. I do urge my colleagues here to join our caucus in voting in favour of the motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Motion 503, the elimination of grade 3 provincial achievement tests, or PATs. Motion 503 urges the government to consider alternative assessments for learning for Alberta's grade 3 students.

As the father of three daughters I know the dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm that students in Alberta put into their education. I was always there to help each one of them finish their homework, complete a project, or study for a big test, and I saw the anxiety that they went through each time they had to prepare for a major test like a PAT, not that a little anxiety is always a bad thing, Mr. Speaker.

Overall, the PAT is used to determine if the students are learning what they are expected to learn. There's a lot of pressure put on a student as a result of the exams. Concerns with disappointing results and even failure can lead a student to doing not as well as they could or can lead a student to doing much better.

Mr. Speaker, I think that testing in schools is extremely important. I absolutely believe that you cannot manage what you cannot measure. However, I am not convinced that PATs in grade 3 are the best way to measure eight- and nine-year-olds. Perhaps it would be beneficial for all parties – students, teachers, and parents – to take another look at the standardized testing in Alberta. I wholly support that we need to catch them by this age so that they don't fall behind. This motion is providing an opportunity for alternative methods of evaluation to be considered, methods that focus more on the individual needs of the student, methods that will inevitably contribute more to a student's long-term academic success.

Our province has always been a major advocate of education. It is important for us to develop a testing mechanism that best meets the needs of Alberta's students and one that will continue to meet those needs. In an era where it is so important for our children to continually further their education, it becomes essential for us to start with the basics and make sure that our children learn what they need to. Taking another look at the grade 3 PATs in this province could help us understand and help us improve our already world-class education system.

Mr. Speaker, our children are so vital to the success and vitality of this province that we must do everything we can to ensure that they learn and grow into Alberta's future leaders. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to the motion brought forward by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I want to start by thanking the hon. member for raising what I believe to be an exceedingly important issue, not just the issue of the provincial achievement tests at grade 3 but the issue of education and its importance to our students and to our community as a whole.

5:30

As you'll know, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the House will know, we're engaged in a very strong discussion about education over the course of the next year, talking about where we need to be as we educate our students in this province so that they can be ready for a global economy and a global community and so that they can be ready to participate locally as citizens in their local community and in their local economies. As we talk about the 21st century learner, we talk about the knowledge, skills, and attributes that our learner needs to have to be successful.

We also need to determine how we know when we've achieved those essential elements of learning. I would start by agreeing and by putting forward the concept that teachers are in the best position to assess the learning and the progress of the students in their classrooms. Teachers are professionals. They're trained as teachers, and they are in the classroom with the students on a day-to-day basis, both promoting learning of concepts and assessing how that learning is going. Assessment for learning happens, I would submit, Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis in the classroom. It has to. Teachers have to know whether the concepts that they're putting forward and the methodology that they're using to instruct the students in their classrooms, who come from diverse backgrounds and who come

with diverse abilities – whether they're grasping the concepts, whether they're learning, and whether they're moving forward.

There should be no argument at all, in my view, about whether assessment for learning is important – absolutely it is – and whether assessment for learning is best done in the hands of teachers, who are the professionals. Absolutely, it must be.

There are also, though, two other assessment processes: assessment as learning and assessment of learning. I'll not speak about assessment as learning at the moment because that might just confuse the issue, and I have a short period of time, and you have a long list. But assessment of learning is also important. In my view, it's not discrete from or distinct from assessment for learning. All assessment has to be used for learning in some manner or form. But assessment of learning so that we can report to the community that our school system is working, that the investment that we're making in our children is a valuable investment, and that we are moving forward as part of the larger community is very important.

At lot of the discussion around provincial achievement tests has been around the concept of high-stakes testing. I want to just speak for a moment about that because I think it's very important that we not allow provincial achievement tests to become high-stakes testing. They're not a measure of the teachers. The PAT 3s, PAT 6s, PAT 9s are not a way of determining whether our teachers are doing a good job.

All you need to do is be in any classroom in any community in our province to know that each classroom is made up of a different group of students, that bring different talents and abilities, different abilities and disabilities, different backgrounds and perspectives, even different languages to the classroom. They bring their social problems both from home and from their community to the classroom. So it cannot be used as a measure of teachers, nor can it be used as a measure to rank schools, as some purport to try and do. That's not the purpose, and that's not a useful result for provincial achievement tests.

However, there is a value to achievement tests in terms of understanding across the spectrum of our learning system how well we are doing and to be able to report back to school jurisdictions for their use within their schools on trends within the teaching and learning that's happening and in other ways in which the curricular leaders in the schools, the principals and other curricular leaders, can work within their school community to determine if there are things that need to be changed within the system, if there are ways that we can do things better.

There's a role and function for provincial achievement tests. There's an appropriate way to use the results of those provincial achievement tests. I would argue that there are even ways to use them effectively for student learning. We have some 13 years of experience with PAT 3 tests, and one of the things which I've learned from looking at the results is that they're entirely predictive of outcomes for those students in later years. Mr. Speaker, what that tells me is that the tests are reliable, but it also tells me that we're not using them appropriately because if they are predictive of the result, we're not changing the result as a result of the tests.

That's sort of a convoluted way of saying it, but I would say this: should we be looking for improvement in our assessment processes? Absolutely. I've committed to work with the ATA and others in the education community to find better ways to do assessment. There's a new project being headed up by Dr. Barry McGaw of the University of Melbourne to look at how we assess 21st century skills to be able to assess them in an appropriate way. I think we should be engaged in that project because we need to move our assessment practices and we need to make sure that our assessment practices are useful practices for the student, for the school, for the system, and to be able to report back to our public.

Mr. Speaker, while I understand the sentiment behind the motion that the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has brought forward and I understand the concerns that are being raised about people teaching to the test and about the stress of the grade 3 students, I think those are issues that can be overcome. I do think we need to make sure that we have ways of recognizing the testing standards and assessment standards and outcomes across the spectrum of our system. We have to appreciate that our system is held up as being one of the best in the world because of its strong curriculum, because of its strong teaching standards, because of its strong teachers, and because of our accountability pillar in our assessment processes.

Before we change what we're doing, we ought to know what we're going to. That would be my comment to the hon. member. Should we look at the PAT 3 tests and, presumably, in the future the PAT 6 and PAT 9? Perhaps we should. But let's know and understand what assessment we need to make sure that we're effective not only for the students, which is most important, but for the system, know that we're doing the right thing and investing in our system across the province so that our students can be ready for the 21st century – we're into the 21st century now, so I'd better say for the latter half of the 21st century – so that they can participate in a knowledge economy, a global economy, and be good both global and local citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and add to the debate on Motion 503, which urges the government “to eliminate provincial achievement tests for grade 3 students and consider alternative assessments for learning.”

Mr. Speaker, we're very fortunate to live in this province. We have an exceptional education system, that allows our children to succeed. I have a child that's in that system, and he and his classmates are all very successful. In addition, we've got exceptional teachers, and they should all be commended for the exemplary role they play and how they perform in building Alberta's future by educating our youth.

However, it's necessary to review our system to ensure that it continues to reflect the needs of our students, our teachers, and all Albertans. This provincial testing program, as mentioned earlier, was introduced in 1992. The first objective is to determine if students are learning what they are expected to learn at a particular grade level. Fair enough. The second is to provide Albertans with a report as to how well students have achieved provincial standards at these specific points of schooling, and the third is to assist schools, authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning. These objectives are very important; however, there have been some concerns about the effectiveness of this testing model. The hon. Minister of Education has already explained the difference between assessments of learning and assessments for learning, so I won't go into that.

In discussions with teachers in my own constituency they've admitted that, often, in grades where provincial achievement tests are administered, they end up teaching to the test. By focusing primarily on teaching to the test, valuable time is spent just preparing students for the test rather than simply covering the curriculum. Further, teachers are less able to tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs of individual students. Mr. Speaker, I believe we must ask ourselves if the current model of testing is the most beneficial way to determine if students are learning what they're

expected to learn. I also feel it's important to consistently revise our assessment program and put greater emphasis on alternative methods for learning testing, such as diagnostic testing, which enables teaching methods to be tailored directly to those students' needs, which is vital for their long-term academic success.

It's important that we continually examine our education system to make sure that it's operating effectively for our children and all Albertans. That, Mr. Speaker, is why I stand before this House wholeheartedly in support of Motion 503.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to speak in favour of Motion 503, eliminating provincial assessment testing for grade 3. It's also an honour for me to speak today because my grade 9 teacher and, actually, the head of the Alberta Teachers' Association, Frank Bruseker, is here this afternoon to witness that a recalcitrant and lackadaisical student in his grade 9 class has been able to participate in a debate of this stature in Alberta at this time. So I thank Mr. Bruseker for his work with me back then and his current work on behalf of the Alberta people.

5:40

If we get into the merits of the debate, my father served as a teacher in the Calgary public system for 25 years. My mother served in the Calgary public teaching association for another 30 years. So my experience with provincial exam testing is mostly anecdotal. When it came to things that came up in the classroom, I would tend to believe things my mother said a little more than my father not because my father wasn't a great teacher – he probably was – but my mother was one of those hard-working schoolteachers who paid attention to students, who really did everything by the book and looked at what worked best with students. I think my dad sort of cut corners the odd time. But I'm telling tales out of school and probably shouldn't be doing that.

I'd get back home after a day of school, whenever it was, or from university, and I'd see my mom the odd time – you know, rarely did I see her like this; it was usually toward the end of the year – and she'd come home; she was all stressed out and was all upset. I'd say, "Mom, what's the matter?" and she said, "We had those exams again." What "those exams" was referring to were the exams that her students would have to take in grade 3. My mother was an educator, a principal primarily in the K through 6 grades for the majority of her last 15 years of teaching.

I'd explore with her. I'd say, "Well, what's so bad about them, Mom?" and she'd say, "It distracts my teachers' and my children's time and my student learners for the last month of preparations before the exam." She found this a loathsome experience not only for the students and the staff, but it didn't lead to learning in a productive manner that added anything to the kids' self-esteem, self-worth, or ability to learn anything that was remotely, to my mother's thinking, valuable to them for the course of their lives.

You know, what happens afterwards with those things is what I think is even more reprehensible. I understand that this is not the government's fault, but when these test results get FOIPed by the Fraser Institute for their publishing results, what occurs in our communities is that people cross-compare and analyze what their kids' scores were in one section of town vis-à-vis another. Then assumptions are made that teachers are better over at this district than that district. This is the type of combativeness and divisiveness that I don't believe defines Alberta and shouldn't continue, at least at the grade 3 level.

Given that many people would wish to speak on this issue, those are my reasons primarily for supporting this motion. God bless the teachers of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member, just so I understand. Mr. Bruseker, a former member of this Assembly who is in the gallery, is your former teacher?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Speaker: And you are now in the Assembly.

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Speaker: I now understand.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to speak in support of Motion 503, sponsored by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. First, I'd like to state that I believe in regular testing, whether it is the assessment of learning or assessment for learning. I believe that they both are important parts of education. While I believe in the value of regular testing, I believe there are strong merits in re-examining how assessment tests for grade 3 students are conducted as well as the communication of such tests with the students' parents, education systems, and the public.

The grade 3 provincial achievement test is currently structured in such a public and formal manner that teachers are teaching to the test, spending disproportionate amounts of time on the PAT. Eight-year-old children are put through unnecessary substantial and emotional stress in preparation for as well as responding to the test and the outcomes, and the bigger context of the student population is not integrated into the overall interpretation of the test results.

Mr. Speaker, while I have received input from constituents and stakeholders, with a high majority of them in support of the motion, I myself as a parent believe in the need to develop our children's ability to handle stressful, demanding situations and have put my own children in music programs as additional discipline to experience structural learning, competition, and examinations. Arriving at the decision to support this motion was not the easiest one for me. It took some back and forth.

As a first-generation Canadian, having come from a highly conformative and competitive educational system in Asia, I have seen many times over the psychological scar from intensive examinations linger on many people for years. People have recurring nightmares about examinations. Remembering the view of my grandfather, the first of three generations of educators in my family, about Canada to immigrants, that this country is purgatory for the middle-aged but that it is heaven for the young, I believe that efforts to alleviate unnecessary and sometimes unfair stress on our young students are worthy considerations and act in keeping our children's childhood experience as heavenly as possible.

I'm pleased to support Motion 503 today. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to speak this afternoon as well in support of Motion 503. I certainly thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for her work on Motion

503. Our excellent education system, the importance of teachers, the great opportunity that students have in Alberta to learn, I think, is evidenced by the keen interest in the matter that Motion 503 draws our attention to. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake makes a compelling argument for an alternative approach to assessment for learning. I think that certainly her experience and the interest that she has generated in this issue speak well and make a compelling argument for our reconsideration of the way we do these tests.

I would not support this motion if it were only seeking to eliminate all assessment measures. This motion does not do that. I have some concern about the wording regarding the elimination of achievement tests. That's been mentioned by other speakers. However, I think that this being a motion urging the government to consider this provides opportunity to deal with this in a reasonable manner. I have no problem with testing. However, the fact that students learn in different ways says to me that alternative assessment measures are warranted.

I speak from experience both as a student and as a parent that not all students convey their grasp of a subject matter based on a point-in-time test. There must be better ways of considering this. I believe there can be a more effective and better assessment for learning done, and on that basis I support this motion. The motion urges the government to eliminate the PATs and to consider alternative assessments for learning, and on that basis I support this motion.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief because I know that there are others and that we're going to run out of time. I just would actually make sure that I'm on record as supporting this and thanking the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for bringing this forward. Clearly – clearly – by the support we have in the gallery and the number of phone calls that I've been receiving, this is a motion that really must be passed.

I just would like to share one personal story. When I was in high school, your whole year was based on a two-hour exam. I didn't really do all that well on those exams, so I came away with the idea that I was stupid. I came away with the idea that I was stupid, and I quit after high school. I ran into a prof that I was having coffee with after I'd had my children and gotten married, and she said to me: "Bridget, you're intelligent. What you aren't is educated."

I went back to school when I was 45, and I took that attitude with me. I said to the teacher that had to get me through grade 12 chem that they made me repeat and that I couldn't understand that. Just because they hadn't split the atom when I went to school didn't mean I had to repeat chemistry. However, what I had said to this fellow was: "I don't give a damn if I learn anything. Just get me through this exam." That's the attitude that I think sometimes testing brings. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have some kind of an evaluation, but I truly believe that we can damage little eight-year-old psyches that will follow them for the rest of their lives. Those test results follow them with every single teacher that they will get from grade 3 to grade 12, so please, please, let's pass this motion.

5:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, then Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and speak to Motion 503, the elimination of grade 3 provincial achievement

testing as sponsored by my colleague the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I want to thank and compliment the hon. member on doing so, on bringing this motion forward. She's a passionate teacher, and she's passionate about our kids and about our students.

I think that there are good things and bad things – I'll keep this short – about standardized testing. I think the benefits are that you have an opportunity to assess the system, how it's working, if information is getting to students. It makes the system somewhat accountable, and I think that's good. It's also good to have some information for parents out there. However, I have to say that I've always thought that timed standardized testing is just a real silly way of assessing student achievement. I mean, all it really does is test the ability of a child to regurgitate points of information as quickly as possible. I just don't see how on earth that can show that somebody is learning a subject. I've felt that way for a long time, so I'm going to support this motion.

I would like to suggest, before the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity gets too excited that I'm agreeing with him on something, that I still do very much . . . [interjection] This is harder for me than it is for you.

I would like to very much say that I do think there should be some sort of standards in the testing. It's just that this timed testing just does not make sense, doesn't cut it. So I will be supporting Motion 503.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to rise in support of the motion to eliminate the provincial achievement tests for grade 3 and to consider alternative assessments for learning.

I think a lot has been said about, you know, putting eight-year-olds through the tests. It's very stressful not only for them; I believe it's stressful for the teachers as well. You know, I think the teachers can pass on the stress to the kids, too, and the poor kids have to live with that for the rest of their lives. Even the teachers, with the time taken away for the tests, end up teaching the kids only eight and a half months instead of 10 months. There's a cost involved in this. The money going towards the tests could be spent elsewhere.

The teachers do their assessments throughout the year, and I think that they are the best judges to test the students. There are a lot more other reasons, you know, to support Motion 503, but since there is not much time, I will be supporting it. I want to congratulate the member for bringing forward Motion 503.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, according to our rules at 5:55 it's my pleasure to call on the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to conclude the debate.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank my hon. colleagues who spoke to this motion. I would like to again emphasize that part of the effectiveness of our world-class education system is based on our willingness to continually improve it to better meet the needs of our children. That is why I have introduced this motion on whether provincial achievement tests for grade 3 students are the best mechanism for learning assessment. This past hour we have discussed the many challenges with this assessment test: its timing, its effectiveness, and the impact it has on our children.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that other assessment methods would better meet the needs of our children, teachers, and the educational system as a whole. Therefore, I thank my colleagues for their consideration

of this motion and ask all members from all parties to support my Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:55 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Elniski	Notley
Anderson	Forsyth	Olson
Bhullar	Groeneveld	Pastoor
Boutilier	Hehr	Quest
Brown	Jacobs	Rogers
Calahasen	Johnston	Sherman

Chase
Denis
Doerksen
Drysdale

Kang
Leskiw
Mason
Mitzel

Taft
Weadick
Woo-Paw

Against the motion:

Allred
Bhardwaj
Blackett
Campbell
Dallas
Danyluk

DeLong
Fawcett
Fritz
Hancock
Horne
Jablonski

Johnson
Liepert
Lukaszuk
Oberle
Renner
Vandermeer

Totals

For – 29

Against – 18

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:09 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 17, 2009

Issue 16

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 17, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibility laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Goudreau: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui j'ai le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, deux parlementaires élus par les expatriés français qui représentent les Français vivant au Canada. La France et l'Alberta sont membres de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, une association de parlementaires francophones qui représentent plus de 64 pays et régions.

Nos invités sont de passage à Edmonton aujourd'hui pour la signature d'une très importante entente de collaboration avec Edmonton public schools et qui, comme le test d'anglais international, TOEFL, permettra aux étudiants de recevoir une accréditation reconnue sur le plan international pour leur compétence en français. Cet après-midi j'aurai l'occasion de discuter avec eux plus sur les opportunités qui existent pour rehausser davantage les relations culturelles et économiques avec la France.

Je demanderais à nos invités de se lever pour que je les présente: l'Hon. Christian Cointat, Sénateur de la France représentant les Français à l'étranger vivant au Canada, et M. Jacques Janson, membre élu de l'Assemblée des Français de l'étranger, une assemblée parlementaire qui représente plus de 2 million d'expatriés français à travers le monde.

Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

[Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly two parliamentarians elected by French expatriates to represent French citizens living in Canada. Both France and Alberta are members of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, an association of French-speaking parliamentarians representing more than 64 countries and regions.

Our guests are in Edmonton today for the signing of a very important collaboration agreement with Edmonton public schools, which, like the Test of English as a Foreign Language, or TOEFL, will allow students to receive an internationally recognized accreditation for their French-language proficiency. This afternoon I will also have an opportunity to meet with them and discuss opportunities to further strengthen cultural and economic ties with France.

I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: the Hon. Christian Cointat, Senator of France representing French expatriates in Canada, and Mr. Jacques Janson, an elected member of the Assemblée des Français de l'étranger, which is a parliamentary assembly representing more than 2 million French expatriates around the world.

I would ask all members of the Assembly to give these guests a very warm welcome to our Legislature. [As submitted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 66 very special guests from Our Lady of the Angels school in Fort Saskatchewan. They've had a tour of the building and are now seated in both galleries. They're accompanied today by teachers Miss Erin Gillies, Mr. Greg Marenick, and Mrs. Abbey Farhat; Miss Holly Tollefson, a teacher assistant; parent helpers Mrs. Annalise Yuzda, Mr. Justin Boehm, Ms Christine Davis, and Mrs. Rhonda Hold. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly 17 students from the Rockyview Christian school in Pincher Creek along with their teacher, Miss Paula Schultz, and some parent helpers. This is my first class to visit the Legislature. I'm very proud of that. They've taken a tour of the building this afternoon, asked some good questions at lunch. I want the Assembly to give them a warm welcome. Would they please rise.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My guests are not currently in the gallery, but I'd like to make the introduction. They're 21 students joining us from NorQuest College. These are ESL students and, of course, always a really inquisitive bunch and very interested in how democracy works. They are new citizens and new Canadians. They will be accompanied by their instructor, whose name, I'm afraid, I don't have at the moment. The instructors are always very hard-working and are very good about bringing their students down to the Assembly to watch us at work. They'll be in the gallery between 2 and 2:30. I would ask you all to give them a rousing welcome now that will last until 2 o'clock.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 14 hard-working members of our public service. They are joining us today as part of the public service orientation tour. These individuals work in my ministry in the supportive living and long-term care branch. Their important work assists the ministry in establishing accommodation standards as well as monitoring and licensing supportive living and long-term care facilities. I will ask them to please rise as I introduce them: Marjory Sutherland, our executive director, and her staff Danielle Laporte, Allison Ruud, Arden Casault, Carmen Grabusic, Catherine Douglas, Debbie Whitehead, Erica Olson, Erin McKinley, Jessica Krechuniak, Judy Erickson, Marlo Fieseler, Pamela Marcoux, and Patricia Guzman. They are in the members' gallery. I would ask that we give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature representatives from the francophone Parent Link Centre and the francophone provincial health network. The network is one of the Parent Link Centres we support across the province. This centre connects parents to more than 30 francophone preschools, daycares, and early childhood resource centres across the province and is an excellent example of several partners working together to meet the needs of francophone Albertans. With us today are members of the centre and the network. I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them. From the centre they are Ms Corinne Arabeyre, executive director; Mrs. Marie-Chantal Daval-Bérillon, assistant director; Mr. Arsene Muamba, co-ordinator of the French resource centre; and from the network Mr. Luc Therrien, executive director. I would ask all members to give these guests a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four members of the board of directors of the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, or CASA. The alliance is celebrating its 15th anniversary this month, and I must say that they've had an extremely successful 15 years bringing together stakeholders to protect Alberta's air quality. On behalf of my colleagues in the Legislature and my staff within the ministry I wish all of them the very best for another 15 years of success. Joining us in the public gallery today are Kerra Chomlak, CASA's executive director; Myles Kitagawa from Toxic Watch Society; John Squarek, representing the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada; and Mr. Peter Watson, who is the Deputy Minister of Energy but was instrumental in this organization in his role as Deputy Minister of Environment in years past. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the House.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you two hard-working Albertans. The first is Kim Budd, an Edmontonian who is also a hard-working public servant with our Department of Education. The second is Mr. Aaron Miller, a financial analyst with Enerplus. In his spare time he does many philanthropic endeavours, such as being a leader with the United Way leaders committee and organizing a Stampede committee for a youth speech contest, and he's on the board of directors for the Canadian Paraplegic Association. I can also advise that about every second Saturday he helps me poll Calgary-Buffalo and various locations in and around that constituency. I'd like my two friends to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this August Assembly.

1:40 Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Clean Air Strategic Alliance 15th Anniversary

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it's celebration time. The Clean Air Strategic Alliance, or CASA, had its 15th anniversary on Saturday, March 14. CASA was created by the government of Alberta as an advisory committee for clean air issues in 1994. CASA is a successful partnership between government, industry, and nongovernment organizations. This partnership works by consensus and develops innovative solutions for air quality issues in Alberta.

CASA's award-winning approach has been replicated by several multistakeholder organizations. In fact, the Water Council has been modelled after CASA. CASA developed the Alberta approach to reducing solution gas flaring. CASA and its membership have successfully addressed many air quality issues of concern to Albertans. In fact, CASA is currently working on recommendations to help the government of Alberta review the provincial clean air strategy to ensure that the air quality remains good for all Albertans. Oil patch flaring and venting, acid rain, power plant emissions, smog and pollution prevention: these are the issues tackled by CASA.

Congratulations to CASA on its 15th anniversary. I wish this very fine, very dedicated organization continued success and thank everyone involved for all their hard work.

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

Poverty Talks!

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of an excellent organization operating in Calgary, an organization I've had the privilege of working with for some time. Poverty Talks! encourages political and democratic participation for all Calgarians but, in particular, those experiencing poverty.

Under the leadership of Lisa Hari Poverty Talks! is working to increase the presence of poverty issues on the political agenda, whether it's local, municipal, provincial, or federal. They have increased awareness about the electoral process and how government works. They have encouraged people to vote and participate in our democratic process. This is so important given how many Albertans seemingly feel disconnected from the voting process.

I know that Poverty Talks! has been at the forefront demanding living wage policies in our governments and communities. They have been strong advocates for those living on social assistance and AISH, and they have articulated so many of these challenges that beset these populations. Further, I know they watched with interest yesterday's announcement regarding the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness. They are hoping that the province continues to follow through with this commitment to see that more individuals have homes.

In Calgary Poverty Talks! is a voice for the voiceless. Tireless volunteers like Grant Neufeld, Denise Young, Derek Cook, Colleen Houston, and John Donovan and a coalition of really great organizations like the Calgary and District Labour Council, the Alberta College of Social Workers, Calgary Democracy, Calgary Low Income Coalition, Calgary Scope Society, the Centre for Newcomers, Vibrant Communities Calgary, the Disability Action Hall, and the Calgary Women's Centre have made Poverty Talks! the organization it is today. They have put poverty on the radar for many policy-makers, and I congratulate and commend them on the good work that they do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Market Access for Cattle

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express support for and recognition of the importance of market access for our livestock and meat industry. Though there may be some opportunities to grow domestically, they're not significant enough so that we can only count on that for our industry to survive and be profitable. The global markets hold endless opportunities, however. Alberta's industry must continue a collaborative approach throughout Canada.

I also rise, however, Mr. Speaker, to express some concerns. The National Farmers Union of Canada, or NFU for short, is an organization claiming to have the best interest of Canada's farm families in mind, and it appears to be cozying up to R-CALF, an organization that has repeatedly – repeatedly – tried to destroy our cattle industry. The National Farmers Union representatives were recently quoted as saying: "I can totally understand and defend R-CALF in public now. We need to be allies with R-CALF."

R-CALF has repeatedly tried to close the U.S. border to Canadian cattle. It's troubling that the National Farmers Union would support R-CALF. What is even more concerning is the suggestion in this House from members across the way that we take advice from the National Farmers Union on how to save Alberta's industry. It does not make sense to take advice from an organization that supports another organization that seeks to close our borders to our industry.

The Alberta livestock and meat strategy was designed to return the industry to profitability, Mr. Speaker. It has the support of the federal government, and we are already seeing some results. More market access means more demand, and that will result in money in producers' pockets. I encourage all members to continue to support the strategy and recognize the beneficial impact it is already having on our industry in local markets and markets abroad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Evelyn Gutierrez

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize an outstanding citizen in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods who passed away on February 5 of this year, Mrs. Evelyn Gutierrez. On behalf of the members of my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods I would like to recognize the positive contributions Evelyn Gutierrez has made to this great province.

Evelyn had been a nurse at the Grey Nuns hospital since it opened in 1988 and is remembered for her organizational abilities and her kind and loving ways with patients. She had cared for many members of my constituency during her service at the hospital and helped to train and mentor many aspiring nurses that continue to provide care to many Albertans.

She is survived by her husband, Ruben, her daughter, Ruby Lyn, as well as her mother and six sisters. Family was very important to Evelyn as she spent most weekends with her family and made every day spent with them special.

Even after her passing Evelyn will continue to bring joy to many. Mr. Speaker, she had her organs donated, with three individuals being given a new lease on life thanks to her selfless act. Mother Teresa once said that kindness is a language we all understand; the deaf can hear it, and the blind can see it. Evelyn understood this universal language, and her kindness will resonate well into the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Metropolis Conference

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over a century ago immigrants to the prairies realized their dream of making a home in a great frontier. There are now new frontiers to explore and new challenges to overcome. Migrants are arriving from nontraditional source countries representing a vast range of linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Smaller communities, including rural and francophone minority communities, are now experiencing

unprecedented growth through immigration. These are part of the backdrop for the 11th National Metropolis Conference, Frontiers of Canadian Migration, to be held March 19 to 22 this year in Calgary, a city poised to become one of Canada's major immigrant-receiving cities.

Mr. Speaker, the Metropolis conference is part of an international and Canadian national initiative involving a network of policy officials and researchers from more than 20 countries. The Prairie Metropolis Centre, established in 1996 in Edmonton, is one of five university-based centres of excellence in Canada. This consortium represents the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Manitoba, Regina, Saskatchewan, and Winnipeg. The Prairie Metropolis Centre coordinates the multidisciplinary research team of over 116 affiliated researchers who study the complex issues of immigration and integration. These researchers also work in collaboration with community groups in applied research.

Mr. Speaker, the upcoming conference will bring together researchers, policy-makers, and community practitioners to explore research and practices in six policy priority areas: citizenship and social, cultural, and civic integration; economic and labour market integration; family, children, and youth; housing and neighbourhoods; justice, policing, and security; and welcoming communities, the role of the host communities in attracting, integrating, and retaining newcomers and minorities.

The Metropolis initiative and the Metropolis conference offer excellent opportunities to enhance our understanding of immigration diversity in the prairies and facilitate our national aspiration of becoming equitable, diverse, and innovative.

The Speaker: Well, to all hon. members of Irish descent, happy St. Patrick's Day. To those who are not of Irish descent, you all know how you can become an Irishman for one day, but tonight, okay?

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

McKinsey & Company Consulting Firm

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a time when health spending is out of control, Albertans are demanding more spending accountability. McKinsey & Company, a U.S. health consultancy firm, has been paid 2 and a half million dollars from the Department of Health and Wellness up to September '08. This is over and above \$620,000 they were paid in the fiscal year ending March 31, '08. Like the health system restructuring, the bill taxpayers are given keeps getting larger with no end in sight. To the Premier. McKinsey & Company have been given a total of \$3.1 million so far. Can the Premier tell us if McKinsey is still providing services and how much the final bill will be?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister will know the exact amount. But to put it into perspective, currently the taxpayer is funding health care in this province to the tune of \$36 million a day.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In six months McKinsey & Company were paid 2 and half million taxpayer dollars in consultancy costs. To the minister of health: what are they providing for this?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it was a few weeks ago that this

particular member stood up in this House and said something to the effect that before you take action, you should have a diagnosis. That's exactly why we've hired this internationally recognized consulting firm, to take a look at our system in this province and give us a diagnosis.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the minister: will the minister tell us what they are still providing and how much the final bill will be?

Mr. Liepert: I can't give that information, Mr. Speaker, but the member is well aware that all government expenditures are accounted for in a public way, and we'll be doing that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Lottery Grants

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a FOIP regarding lottery grants it is clear that government members, especially or specifically cabinet members, not only get to choose the recipient, specify the amount of the grant, but they also have control over the timing of the announcement. An e-mail sent on January 25, '08, states that the ministers of SRD and children's services wanted to delay their announcement of a \$3 million grant for a rec centre in Cochrane to the following week "for obvious reasons." The announcement of that grant was made on February 1, '08, just four days before the election was called. My question is to the Premier. Why are government members allowed to manipulate the lottery grant system to their advantage?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question came up before from a member that was the former leader of the opposition and made some allegations. All lottery grants go through a very, very strict approval process. They're made based on the merit of the application. There are, of course, when the announcements are made – take, for instance, the one we did in Calgary the other day, where one of the members opposite gave a very impassioned member's statement on the value of that grant to his community. He is a member of the opposition. He was invited to attend, and I believe that we even have a picture to prove it.

Ms Blakeman: A totally new issue. It has not been raised before. Check the background.

To the Premier: given that at this very same time opposition members were told that any inquiry had to be directed to the minister of gaming's office, why was the constituency staff of these cabinet ministers regularly included in the e-mails between lottery and gaming staff on the specifics of this grant?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the process for approving grants is done independently through the ministry staff that are assigned to follow the guidelines very carefully. In terms of the announcements, we try and work out announcements, I would think, with the group that's receiving the grant, also looking at how we can have all members of the Legislature and those constituencies that have received the grant be there for the presentation. Sometimes, in fact, the groups receiving the grant request representation from their MLA, and it doesn't matter if the MLA is in government or the opposition.

Ms Blakeman: In this FOIP that group wasn't even consulted about when the announcement was.

Again back to the Premier: given that this FOIP gives the appearance if not actually the advantage to government members, who are able to manipulate lottery grants prior to an election to set themselves up for re-election, will the Premier scrap this partisan process and return to the community lottery board style of grant allocation?

Mr. Stelmach: No, we're not. In fact, I hope the member would look through *Hansard* and see that this question was raised before in terms of whether we go back to the system of community lottery boards. We're not going back to that system. This is a system that's very fair. We put additional millions of dollars into a large project grant that has been shared across constituencies, communities right across Alberta. All Albertans are benefiting from it, and we'll continue to follow the same policy.

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

Health Promotion and Disease Control

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the minister of health created one provincial health board, one of the reasons he gave was that it would allow innovative ideas and policies from one health region to spread to others. He knows that money put into health promotion and disease prevention reduces costs to the health care system. Regrettably, the minister has not shown much interest in prevention and health promotion since taking office. Why did the minister reject the innovative policy of banning trans fats in Calgary restaurants when Alberta Health Services took authority? Has he learned nothing from the tobacco reduction strategy?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, nobody banned anything. There was a policy that was put in place by the former Calgary health region but had not been in place elsewhere across the province. As the member correctly points out, we now have one health board in Alberta. But more important than that is the fact that we believe strongly that these types of policies should be national in scope, so I have taken the initiative to write to the federal minister and ask her when there would be federal initiatives coming forward and strongly encouraging that. I'd be happy at the end of question period to table that letter.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister had an opportunity to lead the country by expanding the policy to the rest of Alberta, and he did not take it. Why did the minister not direct Alberta Health Services to follow the lead of Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this government happens to believe that if there's voluntary compliance, it's much preferable to the route that the opposition would take, which is having a cop on every corner. What we have found is that there has been significant voluntary compliance with this initiative, and that, coupled with encouraging the federal government to lead this initiative nationally, I would say, is taking a lead role.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear this minister has no commitment to prevention or to managing health costs through those processes. How can the minister justify spending less than 2 per cent of the health budget on health protection and disease prevention last year?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that that's a good question to ask during our budget estimates, that will be coming up in this House shortly. We can debate what are the appropriate dollars and cents. But, you know, this is a member who was just talking yesterday about savings; now he's talking about spending. This particular opposition can't figure out whether they're conservatives or socialists or whether they're black or white. I'd suggest, in fact, there's a shade of grey over there. I know that there are some members over there looking for a new name for the party. I'd suggest that the Grey Party is a pretty good one. Doom and gloom.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Alberta Job Losses

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The finance minister's rosy optimism in the face of the worst world recession in half a century has made her the Jim Cramer of the Alberta economy. Last month the minister told Albertans that only 15,000 jobs would be lost, thus justifying the economic inactivity of this government. With job losses in the first two months running double that figure already, will the minister admit that her don't worry, be happy job-loss prediction is already hopelessly obsolete?

2:00

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, with what we know at this time, our job prediction is right on. It was always quoted as an average one year over another. On average – we take the number of jobs in 2008; we take the number of jobs expected in 2009 – the difference is 15,600. That's what we said at the start. We were not commenting about it as being desirable. Any job loss is of material concern. I'd just point out that in terms of how we're facilitating the economy, the infrastructure development in this province is two to three times what it is in any other part of the country. That will retain jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's already 30,000 in just two months. Like Jim Cramer of CNBC, the finance minister is making predictions that many people will believe. Unfortunately, they may face big losses if they do. Given that the minister's predictions will influence the decisions of Alberta businesses and families, will the minister reconsider her misleading advice and provide Albertans with a realistic economic update?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in January Alberta added 3,300 jobs overall; Canada lost 129,000. The people in the opposition that would like to claim that statistically we're off base should reflect on our oil price last year, which was budgeted at \$78 per barrel and will come in very close to that, a shade more. I had a lot of criticism on numbers last year from that same opposition. Maybe at the end of this year they'll be proven correct, but chances are we'll be proven correct.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Thirty thousand people, not 30,000 statistics, Mr. Speaker.

Referring to hopelessly wrong economic predictions by Jim Cramer and others, *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart said, "If only I'd followed CNBC's advice, I'd have a million dollars, provided I'd started with a hundred million dollars." If Albertans follow this

minister's advice, how many jobs will they need to start with in order to end up with just one?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member says over there crashes on the rocks of common sense. Let's look at what economists are saying. BMO is forecasting 1.5 per cent growth next year; CIBC, 2.3 per cent; Conference Board of Canada, 4 per cent. RBC, Scotiabank, TD, Global Insight, and the Centre for Spatial Economics all have publicly stated similar forecast growth for Alberta. We're not in the dire circumstances you claim. You're wrong, dead wrong.

Trilateral Premiers' Meeting

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I don't have any pearls of wisdom to share from Jon Stewart, but I'll do my best.

One of the clear lessons from past world recessions and booms is that economic and trade isolationism exacerbates economic decline while free trade and labour mobility spur investment and economic recovery. I and many of my constituents therefore believe it is key for Alberta to be a leader in spearheading the interprovincial co-operation necessary to help our country and province emerge from the current economic downturn. Now, I know that Alberta recently participated in the first trilateral . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're moving on.

Mr. Stevens: I think I get the drift of where the hon. member was going, Mr. Speaker. I'll see if I can address it. He's quite right that last week we had the first trilateral meeting between the Premiers of B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan, and there were some very good initiatives that came out of it. It only makes sense that the three provinces which have been leading this country's economy should do this. One of the very good initiatives was something called the western economic partnership. The view there is to increase employment to increase opportunities for all Canadians.

Mr. Anderson: It's amazing to see his ability to read my mind like that.

Now that these initiatives have been discussed, what is the next step in the process? In other words, how long before we see some of these initiatives come to fruition given that they are needed to overcome our current economic climate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, with respect to the western economic partnership, I anticipate that the ministers from these three provinces will be working hard over the next few months having a discussion as to what that would look like. I think by the fall or thereabouts we should be finished that discussion and perhaps be able to move on to the next step. There will be discussions with respect to opportunities in leveraging the various trade offices that we have. B.C. has trade offices; Alberta has trade offices; Saskatchewan would like to participate in that. We're all natural resource provinces, and we think that there's a lot that we can do marketing to the Asia Pacific.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. I understand

that a regional pension plan was also discussed at this meeting. Can the minister provide more detail about the proposed pension plan and how Albertans would benefit from that?

Ms Evans: Currently, Mr. Speaker, very few workers retire with the security of a pension plan. We know that statistically a lot of people aren't putting sufficient dollars away for their retirement. B.C. and Alberta have been working on such a plan. With the addition of Saskatchewan, who already have a supplemental pension plan, we'll be having more discussions around some of the elements, but we've done a consultation thus far. We've got some very positive reactions from a number of people, both employers and employees, who see the opportunities. For stay-at-home housewives there's even a tax-free savings component. If we can work with the federal government on some changes in the law, we're on our way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bitumen Exports

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Between the Alberta Clipper and the Keystone pipelines over a million barrels per day of capacity will be coming on stream shortly to carry unprocessed Alberta bitumen to the U.S.A. No wonder there's a boom in upgrader construction in the States. To the Minister of Energy: with these pipelines opening their taps and upgrader construction in Alberta at a standstill, how is there any chance that the proportion of bitumen upgraded in Alberta will increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's remember something: the pipelines that are being constructed today that connect Alberta to a major market are not constructed specifically for one product. SCO can go down the same pipeline as bitumen, and by the way no bitumen leaves Alberta all by itself in a pipeline. There would be 20 per cent diluent or 20 per cent synthetic crude mixed with that bitumen in the first place. There's plenty of opportunity for us to expand.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The pipeline may be able to carry various products, but the contracts the companies are signing are for bitumen. In fact, oil sands companies are signing long-term contracts right as we speak to supply bitumen to pipeline companies feeding these upgraders in the States. Back to the Minister of Energy: at a time when thousands of Albertans are being laid off, how is this government going to reverse the trend of more and more upgrading jobs being piped south of the border?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, what we have in place, a cross-ministry initiative with Finance and Enterprise and the Department of Energy, is a very aggressive value-added project and projects for the province of Alberta. We'll continue with the plan that we have in place. Sure, it may take a few years to get these things back on stream. I can tell you that at the end of the day Albertans will be very well served by the plan we have, and value adding and maximization of value for the commodity that Albertans own will in fact be true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I think, first of all, we all want the same thing, Mr. Minister, but I would say that your aggressive value-added strategy is in the ditch. I don't see it working out. This government's oil sands document has no details, it has no timelines, and without those, Albertans have no ability to check the performance of this government. To the minister: when will the first bitumen in kind project be operational?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, what I do have to say is that something has become very clear to me in that last question, and that is that the hon. member opposite is obviously in the ditch looking for something.

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

Municipal Taxes on Student Residences

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I was privileged to visit with representatives from the U of C and the U of A who told me that Alberta's postsecondary institutions are expanding their on-campus residence accommodations to meet student demand. On the surface that sounds like a great idea, but I know there is more to the story. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs with respect to property taxes. Do these affordable housing projects at postsecondary institutions qualify for municipal property tax exemptions?

2:10

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, local municipalities make local taxation decisions. Under the provincial legislation, the Municipal Government Act, the dorms are exempt from both municipal taxation and education taxes. That said, municipal councils can by way of a bylaw make dorms taxable for municipal taxes only. It is up to the municipalities to decide what their local priorities are.

Mr. Rodney: My only supplemental, then, is to the same minister. It's very beneficial that the province exempts all dorms from paying education taxes, but if councils can choose to levy municipal taxes, I just have to wonder – and my student representatives would, too – how many are taking advantage of the opportunity. Can the minister please clarify for everyone across the province how many student dorms in Alberta are actually exempt, then, from paying these municipal property taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I say that it's a local decision. But with that I want to say that 16 out of 17 municipalities do charge their educational institutions. The only one that does not charge education taxes is the town of Olds.* Through this taxation municipalities do collect in the neighbourhood of \$2.5 million of taxation.

Appointment of a Special Prosecutor

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in an effort to ensure fairness and maintain public confidence, Manitoba and British Columbia have developed clear policy guidelines for the appointment of a special prosecutor when government conflicts exist. Albertans deserve the same. Given the shenanigans at the former Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. Will you commit to writing the conditions and policies for the appointment of a special prosecutor here in Alberta?

*See page 436, left column, paragraph 10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what the hon. member is referring to with respect to shenanigans. What I do know is that we have a prosecution service in this province that serves the public well, and we'll continue to rely on it.

Mr. Hehr: An interjurisdictional comparison done in 2007 for the province of Manitoba reveals Alberta's lack of policy planning for the appointment of a special prosecutor and highlights the role of the assistant deputy minister in appointing prosecutors even when a government department is accused of inappropriate conduct. That's like leaving the fox to care for the hens. Accordingly, will the Justice minister guarantee the public confidence by taking decision-making out of the hands of the ADM?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope that the gist of that question is not to bring into question the independence of the assistant deputy minister of prosecutions in my department. I believe he is a man of great character. I believe he undertakes his responsibility seriously. He understands what his legal obligations are, he understands what his job is as the chief prosecutor in the department, and I think he does a very good job.

Mr. Hehr: I'm certain he does a good job as well. That does not diminish the need to have a developed set of policies regarding when a special prosecutor will be put in place. On that note, why don't we get one in order that we can maybe get a special prosecutor to look after the 19 election violations that were forwarded by the Chief Electoral Officer just to ensure that the public have, really, no need to worry about this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It struck me over the last couple of months that whenever the opposition sees something that they don't like, they decide that it's somehow the fault of some part of a government department. What I know is that the government departments in this province and particularly the one that I am minister of take the responsibilities very seriously. They are not involved in making decisions that are in any way other than in the best interest of the public. That is what I have said on a number of occasions. I believe that the prosecutors take those positions seriously, and I stand fully behind them in the decisions that they make.

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

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to hear you over the heckling.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs released a very good report aimed at ending homelessness in the province of Alberta. The city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary have already released their own individual reports aimed at ending homelessness. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: why is it that Alberta is releasing a third report now that we have the Calgary and Edmonton ones released prior?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that Edmonton and Calgary have released plans. But most other municipalities

have not. Communities have been asking for this plan, that was developed by the secretariat, for some time. This 10-year plan does provide communities with greater certainty and clarity for the future. It has five major strategies – along with the principles there are another 17 major strategies – and it will enable communities across the province to be moving in the same direction.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this report as well there is a definite shift from the shelter model to the Housing First model. My question to the same minister: what will then happen to the current shelters that we have in existence?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, people always need to have a safe place to stay during emergency situations. We have 34 shelters that are providing that now, and in the future our shelters will be providing short-term stays for people. The 10-year plan calls for rapidly rehousing people from shelters within seven to 21 days and, along with that, to provide support services that are needed by people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. My last supplemental to the same minister. There are very, very definitive and very ambitious targets and timelines in that report. How can the minister assure Albertans that the money and the resources that will be spent on implementing this plan will be money well spent and that value will be delivered?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, shelter operators and related agencies across Alberta have been very responsible with the funding that they receive. Under this new initiative we will be establishing outcome measures and related information systems to track those measures and will also be reporting on our progress through the secretariat every year. So you can see and I can assure you that we will be using our funding in a cost-effective manner.

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

Public Education Exemptions

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Assembly the Minister of Education provided Albertans a glimpse into the proposed enshrining of parental rights within provincial human rights legislation. While parents can ignore standardized curriculum, their children, according to the minister, are still required to write provincial standardized achievement tests. What continues to be missing from this government's agenda is the protection of children's rights. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: will the minister tell Albertans if or when the province signed the United Nations convention on the rights of the child?

Ms Tarchuk: Yes, we did, Mr. Speaker. I would have to get back with the exact date of that.

Mr. Chase: Actually, Mr. Speaker, this province is the only province in Canada to not have signed the agreement. The former Premier sent a vague letter in support of the idea, but it was never signed.

Again to the minister: do parental rights as proposed in this new human rights act supersede children's rights?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, there is no new act at this time. I would suggest that we have this kind of conversation when an act has been introduced.

Mr. Chase: My hope is that that act will never be introduced.

My third question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services: does this questionably regressive legislation enshrine parents' rights to discipline their child through the use of corporal punishment lest sparing the rod should spoil the child? How far back in time does this legislation propose to take Albertans?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I think I would say the same thing. We're talking about something that is coming up in the future. It's hypothetical, and I'd leave that discussion until that time.

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

Child and Youth Advocate

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the children's advocate rewrites his annual reports to remove statements critical of the government, he's acting to protect the minister and not vulnerable children. For example, draft reports found this statement removed from the advocate's '06-07 report, quote: our commitment to outcome measures has been more lip service than concrete endeavour. To the minister: why won't you admit that the advocate is working to cover up your failings, make the review of his office public, and make him an independent officer of this Legislature?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I've been very consistent when I have said that I have agreed to and have undertaken the exercise of taking a look at how the advocates from provinces across the country do report to the public. I have said that I would like it to be very timely information, very meaningful information. We do have a committee with internal and external experts that have done that work. Just in the last couple of days I received a copy of that report. My intention is to take a look at it. I've asked the department to also come up with some responses to recommendations. I do plan on sharing that information publicly.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the advocate so far has been clearly censoring himself to protect this government instead of children. From his '07 report he deleted this, quote: for reasons unknown to the OCYA, there are more families leaving fostering than there are families signing up to foster; and this one: all of this results in decreased placement resources for children and youth in an environment with increased needs. To the minister: why won't you admit that the effectiveness of this office has been fatally compromised and act now to make the advocate independent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I've been very clear that I have wanted more timely, more meaningful information in that reporting. We did have a situation last year where we had one report on time, one report a year late, one report two years late. We brought them all up to date and have a commitment on behalf of the advocate that that'll never happen again. As well, I will make sure, through the review that we're doing and the response to the review, that that does not ever happen again.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, last fall the minister told the Legislature she'd only received the advocate's report in October; however, in response to FOIP requests from the NDP caucus, the advocate was later forced to release documents showing that the reports had actually been sent to the minister in May. He then threw himself on his sword, claiming that his reports had somehow been waylaid by the deputy minister. The advocate seems more concerned about protecting the minister than the children under his watch. To the minister: why won't she commit today to making the advocate an independent officer of the Legislature?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, there are actually a couple of things I want to address there. When I said in the fall that I had received that report the week before, that in fact is the truth, so I'd like to say that again. Again I'll go back to the review. We have had people take a look at what occurs across this country in terms of advocacy generally as well as reporting to the public. Really good work has been done. I do plan on taking a look at the recommendations, and we'll come forward and make those recommendations public in the next several weeks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Health Workforce Strategy

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, over the past decade we've had a lot of rapid population growth here in Alberta, and it has led to increased health service needs. A question I have for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology – and it's one that's being asked of me by my constituents – is: how are things going? How are we doing in terms of ensuring that Alberta is generating the health care professionals needed to meet our needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in light of the current global economic conditions I think it's a very good question to be asking at this time. Since 1999 we as a government have made a commitment to increase new spaces. We've increased by approximately 8,000 new student spaces in the health programs. As part of the Premier's mandate my department has been working with public postsecondary institutions. We're on target for registered nurse programs to increase to 2,000 graduates. We're on target with licensed practical nurse programs up to, I believe, 1,000. The doctor of medicine programs have been increased dramatically, and in fact we're a little beyond the target for those.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. I have a second, more specific question for the same minister which relates to the health workforce action plan. I'm wondering if the minister can advise how the ministry is supporting the plans to increase health care graduates with the workforce.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this truly is a good-news story when you get three departments working together in a collaborative way. Alberta Health and Wellness, the Employment and Immigration department, and the Department of Advanced Education and Technology are working collaboratively with the health care professionals, with the people on the front lines, to determine the needs. Certainly, as the economic challenges that we face hit the

ground floor of our health services system, we need to be able to respond to that. In addition to the new spaces for nurses and doctors, which I've already mentioned, we're also working in other health related fields, like the bachelor of sciences and MRI techs, all of the fields.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. My third question is to the same minister. I'm wondering about any time targets that you might have. Are we able to act fast enough to bring these people onboard when we need them?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it takes a certain amount of time, obviously, for students to move through their various programs. To give you an example of what can happen in a very short period of time, I believe it was April of last year when the province sat down with NorQuest College and talked about an expansion for them. We provided I believe it was \$4.9 million. Within five months they were opening the doors on a brand new Health Education Centre, which is just to the north of us here in this building. That was in the span of five months. When we work collaboratively together, we can make things happen rather quickly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Freedom of Information Fees

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A former manager of the freedom of information and protection of privacy unit of Alberta Infrastructure has stated that it was a general policy of the former Minister of Infrastructure that there would be no FOIP fee waivers. Last week I tabled documents showing this to the Minister of Service Alberta responsible for the FOIP Act. Why are ministers of this government allowed to set policies that block a legislated right of Albertans to have FOIP fees waived?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I was able to review the document that was tabled last week by the hon. member. I want to say that this document appears to be related to an ongoing court case, and it's one page out of many documents. I'm not going to comment on those specific details; however, I will comment in general on the issue of FOIP fees. Departments should not have a blanket policy about waiving fees. Each request should be considered on a case-by-case basis. As Minister of Service Alberta that's what I certainly do encourage with respect to FOIP requests.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was a clear case of political interference on behalf of the minister in the document.

To the Minister of Infrastructure: why did this ministry have a policy that made it financially impossible for Albertans to use the FOIP Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Infrastructure does not have a policy on waiving of fees. There are situations that

present themselves. They're covered in the act. If they meet that requirement, then, of course, the fees would be waived.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Service Alberta again: will there be a full review of FOIP procedures to discover how many ministers are blocking FOIP fee waiver requests?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I meet on a regular basis with respect to FOIP with the commissioner. Again, fees are waived in certain circumstances: if the applicant cannot afford payment; if there's another reason to look at it, as I mentioned before; and if the record relates to a matter of public interest, including the environment, public health, or safety. As minister I am prepared to monitor this issue and to encourage that we look at every situation and respect what every Albertan brings to the table.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. member, the gist of that last question had to do with a document that was tabled in this Assembly on Thursday last. The chair has had an opportunity to review that document and has considerable concerns about the authenticity and the source of it and tomorrow in the House would like to comment with respect to tablings and returns in the future.

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

Multilingualism

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We live in an increasingly globalized world. Within Alberta there are many diverse language communities: our First Nations and Métis language communities, our established heritage language communities, and emerging language communities of new Albertans. Our children need to become global citizens and be able to compete with others around the world for jobs and business opportunities. Within our own borders we need to expand our children's understanding of the different cultures and communities. Essentially, it is obvious that we should have international language education as a staple of our education system. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Can the minister advise us as to what strategies are currently in place to ensure that Alberta students have the opportunity to access additional language . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do support K to 12 second-language programming throughout the development of programs of study and supporting resources. Alberta provides the widest range of language programming choice in all of Canada, and our school authorities can choose not only from the provincial programming, but they can also choose to do locally developed language programming in appropriate circumstances. In addition to French language programming, we have provincial programs in Blackfoot, Cree, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Punjabi, Spanish, and Ukrainian. It's important to note that it's not just the language but the cultural understanding and appreciation for

diversity that's particularly critical. I'd end by saying that I met with the commissioner from Greece last week, and he's interested in promoting the Greek language in Calgary.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what value does the minister see in second-language learning?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of answers to that question. The first is that studies would show that learning a second language has a positive benefit for students, a positive impact on their scholastic achievement. Language students tend to have higher test scores in reading, language, and mathematics. Each additional year of second-language learning increases a student's capacity for success, and students with second-language skills also, as I said, develop greater cultural sensitivity.

There's also a benefit for Alberta. We have friends and relatives from all over the world that make up our population here. We trade out into the world, and as anyone knows, trading in the language of the people that you're trying to trade with is a very big benefit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. I've heard from school boards that the biggest obstacle they face is hiring second-language teachers. Can the minister tell us what additional supports are in place to increase the supply and expertise of language teachers in Alberta schools?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, that is always an issue, trying to find teachers that are specially trained in a particular language and able to teach that language. We are monitoring school jurisdictions to determine their capacity to teach second languages. We're providing teacher resources, print and digital, and support for professional development. Through international agreements we host language advisers from China, Germany, Japan, Spain, and the Ukraine. As I just mentioned, we're also looking at the possibility of a relationship with Greece.

The other thing we should talk about is technology.

The Speaker: I'm sure we can, hon. minister, but we're going to move on now, okay?

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

Water Transfers

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. If there's one thing we should've learned from the Balzac horse-racing track fiasco, it is this: the current system for managing water in the South Saskatchewan River basin is broken. Piping water from a municipality in one subbasin to service a horse-racing track and a mall in another subbasin is not sound water management. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Will government policy be established to expand a water market in the South Saskatchewan River basin? In other words, is the government's policy direction going to be to allow irrigation districts to sell water to whomever they choose?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. Water is not the property of any individual or company to sell. The water in this province is owned by the Crown. We do allocate water through various forms

of water allocation mechanisms, and there are water rights that are traded. The member knows perfectly well that there already is an opportunity for a limited amount of trading to take place. So the answer to her question is no, water won't be sold, and yes, water rights are being sold.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Well, contrary to the commitments that were made in water for life, the government has only committed to consultations with the Water Council. Before committing Alberta in any new system of water allocation, will the minister conduct full public consultations with Albertans, not just the Water Council?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I made a very public presentation last week – and it was covered quite broadly by the media – at which I indicated that we are entering a process now to explore opportunities for dealing with water allocation. The process is going through the Water Council and through a number of other opportunities to seek advice which will then culminate in the development of an overall policy which we will then broadly circulate and invite public comment on later on this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister: in areas where water is scarce and to help prioritize water allocations, will the government consider setting up regional public utilities commissions integrated with regional planning boards under the land-use strategy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue that we have here in Alberta is not unique in the world. There are a number of other jurisdictions throughout the world that have already dealt, some more successfully than others, with some of the challenges that we face here in Alberta. The short answer to the member's question is that we'll consider everything. We're looking at anything and everything. At the end of the day we want to have a solution that will serve Albertans the best.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Economic Benefits of Tourism

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend Alberta's Kevin Martin claimed his second consecutive Brier championship in front of an enthusiastic audience in Calgary. By all accounts the Brier championship was deemed to be a great success by the organizers, the teams, and the fans. My first question to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: now that the 2009 Brier is in the history books, can the minister tell us what kind of economic impact the event had for the city of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. She's right. The 2009 Brier was a huge success both on and off the ice. First of all, there was the tremendous win by Kevin Martin's rink, which we are all very proud of in this province. Tourism Calgary estimates that it brought in some \$25 million to the city of Calgary. These are hotels, restaurants, bars that all enjoyed this economic activity. Just like the Brier that was held in Edmonton in 2005, Calgary had a very successful Brier, and it brought a lot of economic interest to the city.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: how do these types of major events benefit Albertans?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, when you look at our partner to the south of us that is having a hard economic time and is one of our biggest trading partners with tourism, these kinds of major events have a huge benefit. Whether it is the Brier or the Roar of the Rings next year or the two Grey Cups or the nine World Cup events, it brings the eyes of the world to this province and really helps us in tourism. But more important, it also brings us a volunteer legacy. It took over 800 volunteers to lift this event, and two weeks ago in Lethbridge about that many volunteers to do the 55-plus games. These volunteers help us so much, and we want to thank them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when Alberta hosts national curling championships like the Brier or the Scotties, how does this benefit the sport?

Mrs. Ady: Well, that's a great question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: But I don't understand what this has to do with government policy.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Provincial Economic Strategy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You intervened just in time, just as question period was going on the rocks.

We're not blaming the government on this side of the House for the global financial meltdown, although we might blame them for that last set of questions, but we are blaming the government for not taking preventive actions to protect Albertans when they still had the chance to do so. The government refused to listen to what everybody was saying. Now we're going to pay the price. Back-of-the-envelope calculations with the government's own numbers on price sensitivities on oil, gas, and exchange rates show that revenues will decline in fiscal 2009-2010 by something in the neighbourhood of seven and a half billion dollars. To the finance minister: how is the minister going to deal with the \$7.5 billion decline in revenue next year?

Ms Evans: April 7, budget day: stay tuned, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, one should always live in hope that something – something – will be revealed.

Given that almost one-third of revenue for this province comes from oil and gas, what plans does the minister have, if any, to reduce our dependence on the revenue stream so that Albertans don't have to continue to be at the mercy of the fluctuating price of oil and gas?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can talk a lot about that in the budget, but I will not be provoked into giving a snappy retort to the kind of cryptic messages that are coming across the aisle in the hopes that we're going to reveal our budget and our fiscal plan for next year. Let's wait until the budget is tabled.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I protest. I wouldn't try to provoke the minister.

Given that the Bank of Canada is now lowering its projections of a quick recovery from this economic recession, will the minister be showing the same prudence by limiting spending increases in the upcoming budget, or is that a big secret, too?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, our Premier has been very clear on this. There are four points that are being developed around our budget for 2009: number one, to respond to the reductions anticipated in revenue by reducing our spending; number two, by spending from our emergency savings to supplement the dollars that we expect to get in revenue; number three, to continue to build on the infrastructure and ensure that as much as possible we protect jobs; and number four, a key platform, developing our economy and exposing our strengths to the rest of the global market.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Identity Theft

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently one of my constituents was the victim of identity theft, and she has suffered greatly as a result. It seems that the criminals are getting smarter with the ever-increasing use of technology, and they always seem to be one step ahead of the authorities. My questions today are for the Minister of Service Alberta. Given that your ministry is responsible for consumer protection, why aren't you doing more to educate Albertans about the dangers of identity theft and how to prevent it?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Identity theft is indeed one of the fastest growing types of fraud today. Service Alberta works with the Solicitor General, local police, and law enforcement agencies and other groups to help prevent identity theft, investigate, and prosecute cases. We have a number of resources in place that educate Albertans about how to identify theft; for example, the award-winning DVD and information kit called *Changing Faces*, which teaches Albertans how to protect themselves from identity theft. There is also a wealth of information on the Service Alberta website. But the hon. member is, indeed, correct. We always have to stay one step ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Madam Minister, documents such as drivers' licences and birth certificates contain information needed for someone to steal someone else's identity. I know that Alberta has improved the security of these documents, but given that identity thieves adapt so quickly, what is your ministry doing to ensure that these documents are as current and as secure as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's drivers' licences, identification cards, and birth certificates are among the most secure documents of their type in North America. In 2008 we introduced a secure, state-of-the-art birth certificate and a secure driver's licence five years ago. Some of the latest security features were just added to the driver's licence last month. In essence, the

technology used by counterfeiters is always improving, so we're always reviewing and trying to make sure we're staying ahead of them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the minister: how do the security features of Alberta's information documents compare to other jurisdictions in Canada and North America, for that matter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were one of the first to introduce a completely redesigned driver's licence five years ago, and we introduced further improvements to it in February this year. We've been well ahead in many other areas that I've mentioned. As well, we have worked with jurisdictions across Canada to introduce a state-of-the-art birth certificate, so we're well ahead of the game, and we're ensuring that Alberta stays in front of the line. It's important that as we move forward, we keep looking at new ways to protect Albertans' information.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, do you wish to supplement an answer? If so, that will allow the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed to raise a supplementary question.

Municipal Taxes on Student Residences (continued)

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I've been waiting for the Blues, and they're not here. Can I do it tomorrow?

The Speaker: Tomorrow?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was just brought to my attention that I might have inadvertently substituted "education taxes" for "municipal taxes" in one of my answers.* I just wanted to have the clarity of the Blues, and I haven't got them yet. If it was the case, then I am apologizing for inadvertently substituting those two.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, do you have a supplementary?

Mr. Rodney: I do not. Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Well, hon. minister, you and I have a little communication problem there because you asked me if you could do it tomorrow, and I said "tomorrow." Then you got up and gave the response, so as far as I'm concerned, this is tout fini.

One hundred and five questions and answers here today. In 30 seconds we'll proceed with the remainder of the Routine.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Immigrants of Distinction Awards

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to draw attention to the 2009 immigrants of distinction awards gala held in Calgary last Thursday, March 12. This annual event was hosted by Immigrant

Services Calgary. It recognized exceptional new Albertans for their impressive contributions to our society. Also, youth scholarships were presented to recognize contributions made by new Canadian youth. It was a privilege for me to attend this event along with the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration and a number of my colleagues: the members for Calgary-Montrose and Calgary-Mackay. This government is proud to support the efforts of Immigrant Services Calgary to create welcoming communities for new Canadians to adapt to a new society and new way of life. The spirit of diversity in our experiences, cultures, languages, and beliefs makes us richer.

On behalf of the Assembly I congratulate the following award recipients for their achievements: Ms Lyn Pflueger for the arts and culture award, Mr. Raymond T. Chan for the business award, Mr. Cesar Cala for the community service award, Dr. Tadeusz Dabrowski for the distinguished professional award, Mr. Peter Wong for the Hadassah Ksienski distinguished service award, and Bow Valley College for the organizational diversity award. Our congratulations also go to the youth scholarship recipients: Ms Valez Lumi, Ms Bani Turkmani, Ms Fariha Ahmed, Mr. Di Mo, and Ms Angela Lopez Quiroz.

I congratulate the new Canadians for making a difference in their workplace and in our society as well as for contributing to the success of our outstanding province of Alberta, our great country of Canada.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bill 52

Health Information Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 52 be moved onto the Order Paper to be listed under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five sets of documents that I referred to variously during my question to the Premier earlier today. This is information mostly received through a FOIP application and also includes various other factual documentation to back up what I was asking for but concentrates on e-mail correspondence between the staff of the then gaming ministry, the then culture ministry, and constituency staff from Foothills-Rocky View and Banff-Cochrane around a joint allocation of \$1.5 million from Rocky and \$1.5 million from Banff-Cochrane towards a recreation centre in Cochrane and the various arrangements about timing of the announcement of that, et cetera.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

*See page 430, right column, paragraph 9

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table copies of a letter that I referred to in the answer to the hon. leader's question to the minister of health.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings. I'd like to first table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate numerous examples of residents being served meals late and not receiving necessary personal care.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of two documents from the Child and Youth Advocate which my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona referred to today in her questions.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

2:50 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009

10. Mr. Renner moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that Bill 52, Health Information Amendment Act, 2009, the contents of this bill being the same as Bill 52, Health Information Amendment Act, 2008, be reinstated to the same stage that Bill 52 had reached at the time of prorogation of the previous session; namely, the bill standing referred to the Standing Committee on Health following second reading.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a relatively new feature in our standing orders that allows the good work of the Assembly and committees that's done on legislation to be carried forward into future Legislatures. I think that members are to be congratulated for getting the bill this far, and it's helpful that we don't have to start all over again in bringing legislation forward. We look forward to the committee coming back with the recommendations, and we can proceed from there.

The Speaker: This is not a debatable motion. Hon. members, the chair has had the opportunity to review the contents of this bill and confirms for the Assembly that the bill is in the same form as Bill 52 was at the time of prorogation of the last session of this Legislature.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

The Speaker: As has already been mentioned, this is the first time that this procedure has been used in this Assembly since the provision to reinstate bills from a previous session was added to the standing orders in 2001.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009.

The proposed amendments address five aspects of the Public Health Act, and I'll try and go through each one of them. The first is clarifying the role of the chief medical officer of health. The amendments clarify the authority of the chief medical officer of health. This position is central to efforts to improve the health status of Albertans. The chief medical officer of health is responsible for monitoring the health of Albertans and for making recommendations to the minister and Alberta Health Services on measures that protect and promote the health of the public and that prevent disease and injury. The chief medical officer of health also acts a liaison between the government and Alberta Health Services, medical officers of health, and executive officers in the administration of the Public Health Act. The provisions in Bill 7 clarify that the chief medical officer of health has all the power and authority conferred on a medical officer of health or an executive officer under the Public Health Act. This clarification is important because the scope of the chief medical officer's authority needs to be fully understood.

Number two, disclosure of information by the chief medical officer of health. A second provision authorizes the chief medical officer of health to disclose information to public health officers in other governments or agencies for the purposes of addressing public health matters, patient safety, quality of care, or the general public interest. This amendment allows public health officers from different jurisdictions to work together to address pandemics and other public health matters. This is important because a transmittable disease may affect residents across jurisdictional boundaries. This amendment will operate under the current provisions of the Public Health Act, which requires the information to be treated as private and confidential at all times.

Thirdly, public health programs for students. This third area of amendment addresses the provision of some student and parent contact information to medical officers of health. Currently under the School Act a medical officer of health can require public and separate school boards to provide some student information and parent or guardian contact information. This information enables the medical officer of health to tell parents and guardians about immunization, hearing, vision, speech, and dental health programs available to their children. It also assists in communicable disease control to address or manage an outbreak of transmittable disease. The amendments are modelled on existing provisions in School Act regulations and extend the application of these provisions to the operators of early childhood services and to private schools.

With this amendment the same requirements will apply to public, separate, and private schools as well as early childhood programs. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the parents and guardians of children in private schools and early childhood programs have the same information about public health services as other parents of school-age children. It also provides greater transparency to include these provisions in the Public Health Act, where the provisions have a direct relationship to the purpose that they serve.

Fourth, publication of health inspection reports and orders. A new amendment enables Alberta Health Services or the minister to publish public health inspection reports or orders. The public expects that inspection reports affecting public health and safety will be made available, and public health inspectors view the publication of these reports and orders as a way to improve compliance with public health regulations. Under those regulations, Mr. Speaker, the act also provides a legislative framework for the application and enforcement of public health standards, guidelines, and rules in a variety of contexts.

Currently regulation-making authority under the Public Health Act rests with cabinet. The amendments will move some regulation-

making authority to the minister for those regulations that are technical in nature. These are matters such as water quality, food standards, and safety standards. They become more complex and specialized, and the regulations become more technical and are based on expert advice. For example, the regulation of swimming pools is focused on maintaining safe water quality and pool safety. The regulations address such things as the pH levels of water, water turnover rates, and safety factors such as anti-entrapment devices.

These regulations need to be revised occasionally in response to changing technology and safety standards, and by addressing technical matters through ministerial regulation, the minister can respond to emerging issues in a more timely way. This amendment also makes it easier to incorporate a number of standards and guidelines into the regulations, where they are more easily accessed and which improve the transparency of the regulatory system.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, there is one housekeeping matter which concerns the Public Health Amendment Act, 1996. This act was passed in 1996 to address the transition from public health units to regional health authorities. The legislation was never proclaimed and is now outdated, so we propose to repeal that particular act.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, contains a number of important amendments that will strengthen public health in this province. I'm sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition would agree that this is an important piece of legislation. I look forward to his comments and so would move that we adjourn debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 19

Land Assembly Project Area Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act.

There's been a lot of discussion around this bill and, frankly, a number of misconceptions. I as a farmer and a resident of rural Alberta understand what it means to be a landowner. It's a special connection that Albertans have with their land, with its beauty, its abundance, the valuable role, of course, that it plays in supporting our way of life and our economy. Bill 19 respects this connection, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of the proposed legislation is to ensure that landowners are well informed and treated fairly and, at the same time, to allow government to plan for the future and the developments that are going to be required in this province and to acquire the land that is needed for those major long-term infrastructure projects.

Transportation and utility corridors around Edmonton and Calgary are prime examples of where large-scale land assembly can be very beneficial. The ring roads would not be under construction today if the government had not started buying land for these projects more than 30 years ago.

Our proposed legislation does not grant government a list of new land acquisition powers, Mr. Speaker. It improves the process that we've used in the past for major projects. The emphasis is on transparency, accountability, and fairness when dealing with landowners over the long term. Advanced consultation will be mandatory before final decisions are made, and landowners will have the same protection that they have under existing legislation to ensure that they are fairly compensated for the acquisition of their lands.

The legislation will be applied to major infrastructure projects similar in scale to the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. Projects

are going to share some common characteristics. It'll be projects that are 10 or more years out before these projects are needed and constructed. Of course, this is going to require a significant amount of land, and it's going to involve multiple landowners.

3:00

Our ultimate goal is to benefit Albertans within a region or across the province. This could include water management projects like reservoirs and, of course, the future multi-use corridors. It will not replace the existing process to establish routes for highways and transmission lines by themselves, and I think it's important for people to know that.

Under the terms of the legislation the government is going to have the ability to apply a project area designation to the land that's going to be required for these large-scale projects. It'll also allow us to regulate future development within that project area with the understanding that the government will ultimately purchase the land. The same authority was available under the restricted development area legislation, and existing land uses within a designated project area will be allowed to continue. As an example, of course, in the case of farmers they will be able to continue farming until the land is eventually required for the project.

New developments will require approval to ensure that they are compatible with the intended infrastructure of your project, and approval will depend on factors such as location and the size of structures in some cases. It doesn't make sense to allow major industrial development in the path of future transportation utility corridors.

Regulations on the development are not a new practice. All landowners already have some form of development restrictions on their property through zoning and municipal bylaws. It's important to note that the province does not take this responsibility lightly, and the responsibility of consultation is first and foremost. There are provisions for accountability and transparency which will help ensure that government uses its authority wisely. Government cannot consider approving the designation of land as a project area until the project plan has been prepared and made public and until all registered landowners within the proposed area have been notified and have had the opportunity to provide input. In other words, advance consultation is mandatory.

This provision did not exist when we assembled land for the ring roads, but this legislation will make it the law. This ensures that there are no surprises for landowners. All of the information is on the table, and people will know what type of project is being considered, where it may be located, and who, in fact, will be affected. Landowners and the public will be well informed and can plan accordingly. They will have ample opportunity to review the plans and to provide input before any final decisions are made. The government can only consider approval of a project area after there has been thorough discussion. Of course, a final decision is going to take into account all of these factors, including, of course, the anticipated long-term benefits of the proposed project and, obviously, the input from Albertans and property owners who will be directly impacted.

Compensation, of course, is a subject that comes up. If a project area is approved, landowners will be fairly compensated. Our policy is to pay fair market value for the land, and that can be established through independent appraisals and negotiations. Priority will be given to people who want to sell their land as soon as possible. Many landowners may choose not to sell their land right away. They can continue using the land in the manner that they always have until it's eventually needed for construction and purchased by the government. Let us be clear: Bill 19 does not remove any

protection landowners currently have to receive fair compensation for their land. If a negotiated purchase is not possible and the project is imminent, expropriation is used only as a last resort. All of the provisions in the Expropriation Act will apply, including the right of a landowner to have the purchase price determined by an independent third party.

There has been conversation on penalties, and there have been concerns raised about the enforcement provisions in the proposed legislation. The penalties and enforcement orders outlined in the act were already in existence when we set aside the land for the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. Our experience with the ring roads has been very clear, and that was that enforcement orders are extremely rare. In fact, Mr. Speaker, over the last 30 years only one order was issued in response to unauthorized placement of materials within a transportation utility corridor by an adjacent landowner. The order was withdrawn after the two sides came to a mutual agreement. The penalties in Bill 19 are a last resort to deter unauthorized development within a project area. Maximum penalties, of course, would be reserved for any wilful gross violations. However, property owners will not be without recourse. An appeal process will be established for landowners who are subject to an enforcement order.

As I noted earlier, there have been a lot of public discussions regarding Bill 19 along with a lot of fearmongering. As a farmer I understand that landowners are concerned that they are treated fairly and that their rights are respected. I want to thank my colleagues from across the province who have also been listening to those concerns and collecting input. We are listening, we all want to be certain that we get this legislation right, and we will make the necessary adjustments to clarify the bill and to reassure landowners that they will be treated in a fair manner and in an open and transparent manner. This legislation must strike the right balance. Not only must landowners be respected and consulted, but it must recognize that there are occasions when large parcels of land are required for large infrastructure projects that benefit all Albertans.

Essentially, the part of long-term planning and land-use and infrastructure planning is so important to us. Our province will continue to grow, and we need to plan ahead to meet those needs for the Alberta public. I urge all members to support second reading of Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, 2009.

That concludes my comments, and I'd like at this time to move adjournment of second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7
Public Health Amendment Act, 2009
(continued)

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Liepert]

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, my first opportunity to do so. This bill amends the former Public Health Amendment Act, 1996, strengthening the role of the chief medical officer, expanding the reporting of public health matters to the minister, and transferring some of the regulations that were formerly under the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the minister.

On the face of it it appears to be a constructive set of changes to the Public Health Act, providing more efficiency, I think, focusing attention where it needs to to ensure that we have jurisdictional responsibility where it should be, in the hands of medical professionals. The medical officer, the chief medical officer in this case,

oversees the monitoring of health, the reporting on health status, the management of infectious disease, the involvement with environmental health risks, food inspections, the handling of dead bodies, a number of vital issues to Albertans, including the food regulations, the housing regulations, and institutional regulations as well as swimming pool matters, work camps regulations, wherever people are congregating and potentially have the risk to be exposed to disease or to transmit disease and need to be regulated.

This is an important piece of legislation and in the main, as I say, I think moves things forward in terms of public protection. That's really what this is all about, protecting the public.

The transfer of regulatory power from the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the minister raises some concerns because the Lieutenant Governor in Council is not a political decision-maker, and the move to the minister raises the question, I guess, of whether the chief medical officer will be truly independent, whether he or she can act completely in the interests of public health and safety. That's one concern we had. I mean, it's a move up from reporting to the deputy minister or assistant deputy minister, in the case of the medical officer now, to the minister. That's a step in the right direction.

Our preference would be that the chief medical officer would actually report to the Legislature, where there would be no opportunity for political interference on issues that might be politically charged and difficult and reflect badly on the government of the day yet need direct, prompt action from the health authority. An example would be the syphilis outbreak, where if the independence of the medical officer was assured, we might have heard much sooner than three years into a syphilis outbreak that we were not managing it well, that we are dealing with a very preventable illness that got out of control, and that for whatever reasons we didn't have the intervention that we needed.

3:10

On the issue of liaising between government and Alberta Health Services, the medical officer clearly has an important role. There is a need to communicate between the ministry and the Health Services Board some of the key elements on the prevention agenda. I guess one of the questions I've raised repeatedly in this House is the lack of commitment to prevention. The ministry of occupational health and community health back in the '80s was a separate ministry. We have now merged this into Health and Wellness, and we've lost the focus on prevention. As a result we've gone from what I recall back in the '80s being about 5 per cent of our budget invested in prevention. Now according to the annual report of last year less than 2 per cent of our health budget is going into health protection, health promotion, and disease prevention. That's a serious concern, especially at a time when our health system is struggling under the load of demands and unprecedented concerns about access and quality and cost-effectiveness. Clearly, prevention, promotion, protection are areas where we could be spending more and potentially relieving some of the load on our system.

I hope the minister will not take this as an endorsement entirely of words contained in this amendment because they're certainly not. I don't believe this government has made a serious commitment to prevention, and we need to see that. I think Albertans want to see that. We have focused so much attention on high-tech, specialized medicine that we have lost the focus on prevention, primary care, and early intervention, and we are paying a dear price for it.

There's a real opportunity in discussions around this bill to move this ministry and the Alberta Health Services Board away from what appears to be a diminution in support for prevention and a need for real, substantive support for this new chief medical officer, whom

we have not had in place for over a year and who will be acting pretty much alone in the ministry, having lost four public health officers in the last year. We have created a situation where I think we are not only jeopardizing the health of Albertans by the lack of commitment here, but we are also creating some liabilities for those who are remaining in the field and must deal with the issues as they arise, whether they be a pandemic or issues around infection control in institutions or whether they be an immunization program that develops problems with it, either problems with a vaccine or problems with the results of the vaccine. All of these have to be overseen in a very scientific and rigorous way, or they open themselves up to serious risk, not only health risk but litigation risk.

I will be supporting the bill, and I hope most colleagues will. I am concerned, however, that we are papering over in some ways the progressive erosion of preventive and public health services in this province and that we are the losers in this case.

With that, I'll adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker, and take my seat. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

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

Bill 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 21, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009, in Committee of the Whole. I have already spoken to this bill in Committee of Supply, as have a number of my colleagues, and I know that there may be some others who want to speak to this bill as well, so we'll get down to it.

Of course, there's not a whole lot in this bill on the surface of it, on the face of it, to speak to. It simply brings a request before this House for an additional \$127,727,000 from the general revenue fund to pay for additional expenses incurred by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Employment and Immigration, and the Ministry of Transportation from the general revenue fund; \$750,000 to the office of the Auditor General is in there as well.

We have discussed in Committee of Supply to some extent what those expenses are for and what the justification for those extra expenses is. I think there is some justification there, although, you know, justification is in the eye of the beholder, I guess, and some of us may feel that those requests are more or less justified than others do. Nevertheless, those justifications are in the public record now, so I won't go over them again.

However, this gives me one more opportunity to state what is very obvious to me, anyway, what I think is more obvious with every passing day, probably, to the people of this province as the economy struggles along, that this is a government with a spending addiction. This is a government that saw its spending in fiscal 2008-2009, which is almost over – we have two weeks to go in the fiscal year – increase by 13 per cent. This is a government that has brought in budgets that have been increasingly bigger year after year. In the time that I have been in the House – and I've pointed this out before,

Mr. Chair, in this debate and others, in debate on supplementary supply, in debate on other issues – we have gone in fiscal 2005-06 from debating a budget of about \$25 billion to this past year debating a budget of \$37 billion.

Of course, in about three weeks' time the Minister of Finance and Enterprise will stand in this House and deliver the budget for fiscal '09-10, and we'll see if the spending addiction is still there, if they've been able to rein in their spending habits at all. But the plain, inescapable fact of the matter is that with the budgets brought in, those budgets over the course of, really, three fiscal years, I guess, four different budgets, put up spending by nearly 50 per cent.

Then, of course, Mr. Chair, on top of that, at least once a year in good years and twice a year in, I don't know, really good years – I don't know, really, how they think about this – we find ourselves back here on the floor of the Legislature debating requests for supplementary supply, for supplementary spending, for additional spending for: well, you know, we asked for the sun and the moon when we brought in the budget, and now we've discovered that we need a couple of stars to go along with that.

This particular supplementary supply request in Bill 21 on the face of it is modest: \$127,727,000 as against a total budget of \$37 billion for this fiscal year. I mean, I think any reasonable person, if this was a one-off, could look at this and go: that's well within, you know, an acceptable margin of error. People can be off by that amount. There can be emergency expenses that weren't foreseen at the beginning of the fiscal year. There can be unforeseen developments that require this kind of supplementary expenditure. You know, if this was all there was, I wouldn't have a problem with it, I don't think. Oh, I might quibble with some of the details, but I wouldn't have a problem with the overall philosophy of it.

3:20

In fact, Mr. Chairman, this is in addition to another billion dollars worth of supplementary supply that we debated, that the government came to this House and asked for and, of course, got – with 72 government members in the House government usually gets what it asks for – back in November of last year, which was part of this fiscal year. When you go back over the last 10 years, the various supplementary supply requests – and it's an annual event and sometimes a semiannual event; it's kind of like a sale in retail – have totalled \$13,843,000,000 in supplementary supply requests, \$13,843,000,000 in addition to what this government predicted over the last 10 years that it was actually planning to spend. It went over top of it by this much.

Mr. Chairman, I will say much the same thing that I have said in supplementary supply debates in fiscal '07-08, fiscal '06-07, fiscal '05-06, which the pessimist in me or perhaps the realist feels that I will be saying again in fiscal 2009-2010, that I hope this government begins to see that this is not sustainable spending, begins to live the words of the President of the Treasury Board, when we were debating, I believe, interim supply a few days ago, that the nice-to-haves and the nice-to-dos may have to be cut out this year, begins to actually live that philosophy.

Mr. Chairman, I think that there's probably within the context of the total budget of the province of Alberta a great deal of wasteful spending, unnecessary spending, spending that is not on projects or programs that need to be absolutely the top priority in difficult times. I'm looking to see if the Minister of Finance and Enterprise delivers on this on April 7. When I look at the government's finance figures, there looks to me to be a great deal of room to reallocate spending, to take it away from projects and programs that aren't particularly doing the people in the province of Alberta a whole lot of good and put them towards projects and programs that work and that keep

Albertans working and that keep the economy going and keep the economy working and keep it moving forward and evolving to a stronger economy when we come out of this recession.

I think that there's room to do a great deal of that within the context of the money that this government is spending already. Probably, Mr. Chair, if we really wanted to be hard-nosed about it, we could find \$127,720,000, at least we could have if the government hadn't already spent it, that we could have reallocated from existing budget allocations and existing government ministries to cover this supplementary supply request.

There may be the necessity for spending cuts, for budget cuts. I don't know. We'll see what the Minister of Finance and Enterprise brings forward on April 7. There may be the need to go into deficit. There may be the need to engage in some real stimulus spending in hopes that that gets our economy going again. And there is the need to develop the savings habit. Mr. Chairman, no matter how many times the President of the Treasury Board or the minister of finance or anybody else on that side of the House says it, I don't believe this government has developed the savings habit because relative to the tremendous flow of nonrenewable resource revenues through the provincial government's coffers over the last 15 years, the last 10 years, there just isn't that much that has been set aside. We've been the provincial equivalent of a family that makes \$250,000 a year and saves 25 bucks a week in a savings account at the bank. It's not good enough.

Mr. Chairman, this government needs to get a handle on its spending, its spending habits, its spending addiction, its spending priorities. I know this government knows because I've sat here on this side of the House, and I've looked at the fear in the eyes of the occupants of the front benches when they've been talking about economic projections and the economic meltdown that we've been going through. There is a need for this government to develop some priorities and start sticking to them, which they haven't done in the entire time that I've been in this House, they haven't done, I don't think, in the last 10 years, they haven't done since they declared that they had defeated the debt and balanced the budget because they've never had till this point an act 2. What they've had is a cushy circumstance where when a problem cropped up, they could throw enough money at it to make the critics and the people who were complaining go away for a while, and that kind of crisis management, if I can even dignify it with that much of a description, ain't going to cut it in fiscal 2009-2010.

Mr. Chairman, I know full well that Bill 21 is going to pass in committee today. I know full well that it's going to pass third reading. I know full well that the ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Employment and Immigration, and Transportation are going to get the extra \$127 million that they need. Nevertheless, it needs to be said and it needs to be put on the record that this is a government that has not spent sustainably, has not planned wisely, and doesn't budget worth a tinker's damn.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and talk about Bill 21, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009. Certainly, I listened with interest to the comments from other hon. members of the Assembly. We look at what is requested here, whether it's in Agriculture or Employment and Immigration or Transportation, and these certainly look like modest sums. One would think that in light of the tight economic times that we're in, this is a supplementary supply bill that has restraint all over it. Whenever you look at previous supplemen-

tary supply bills or you look at the interim supply bill, we would come to the conclusion after looking at these amounts of \$70 million and \$50 million and \$8 million, respectively, that this is modest, but certainly there is nothing modest about the budget of this government. It has grown in leaps and bounds in the last number of years. How this money is allocated and what processes are in place to ensure that it's spent wisely and prudently: well, that's another matter.

Today, Mr. Chairman, I had the honour to attend a meeting out in the west end of the city before question period. It was a group of seniors who were meeting to discuss the pharmaceutical strategy that was implemented in the middle of December by this government. The seniors, down to each and every individual that attended, were very concerned that these changes would mean so much to them on a monthly basis because they would have less to live on after they paid for their prescription drugs. In fact, these changes, if initiated, would save the province, I believe, \$30 million.

3:30

When we look at the budget and the budget process and we look at some of the places where the government is spending money, I was interested to note that last week in Public Accounts there was a question from an hon. member to municipal affairs and housing, who were in attendance, regarding achievement bonuses. That department in that year had, Mr. Chairman, \$1.3 million in achievement bonuses. It was sort of buried in the financial footnotes, if I could speak in that way. The \$1.3 million was buried in the financial footnotes of I think it was schedule 5 or schedule 6 of the annual report.

It was interesting to learn from that meeting that there are quite a criteria regarding these achievement bonuses. There are different levels of achievement bonuses. These are achievement bonuses that are for managers and opted-out and excluded staff. From what I can understand, my research would indicate that there are 3,000 plus individuals that would be eligible for these kind of bonuses in the government. The majority of the money goes to deputy ministers and officials that are appointed at a senior level by the government party.

Now, if you could, take the time, which I did, to go through the entire series of annual reports for 2007-08 and look up what each department granted in achievement bonuses to senior managers. I was astonished when I finished 10 departments, and the bill was over \$15 million. When I finished each and every respective department and had the researchers put them in alphabetical order, the bill from the taxpayers for this bonus system was \$38 million plus. That's for the fiscal year 2007-08. That's, ironically, just a little bit less than what we're asking for in the Employment and Immigration program here this afternoon in the debate on Bill 21.

Now, in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development we couldn't find the achievement bonus listed in the fine print, nor could we find it in Executive Council. If we took the averages from the two previous years for those respective departments and added them to the total, Mr. Chairman, I'm surprised: it's \$41 million. If we go back to 2006-07 and we go back to 2005-06, the total for this program, this million dollar mystery program, is in excess of \$110 million. That's an enormous sum when we're asking seniors to do with less, when we're asking other individuals to expect less.

I did some more research on this whole bonus system. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought it up in the Assembly eight years ago, asking detailed, pointed questions when the bonus system was much smaller than what it is, and there were no answers from across the way. There were motions for returns. There were written questions. There was budget debate. The hon.

member was earnest in her efforts to get to the bottom of this bonus system, and she was given the political brush-off.

Now, this is a program, as I understand it, that started close to 10 years ago, and there was a policy change in this program in July 2005. What are the guidelines around this achievement bonus? This is what I have been provided, what I found on the Internet. In order for achievement bonuses to be granted, the government must meet its debt reduction target before any money is released for the achievement bonus. It goes on to say that each ministry is required to report on its business plan achievements. Its annual achievement fund allotment will be determined by the Deputy Minister of Executive Council in consultation with an outside panel of private-sector representatives.

Well, Mr. Chairman, who are the people on the panel of private-sector representatives? Does this panel still exist that determines the achievement fund?

Now, it goes on to say here that the ministry is given a lump sum in recognition of its contribution to the success of overall government business goals. In recognition that it is a team of managers that lead to success, at least half the achievement bonus allotment is distributed as an equal amount to all managers who have performed at a satisfactory level over the past year. The remaining funds will be used as variable achievement payments to managers based on the criteria set out by the ministry.

Well, before we vote on Bill 21, the government should explain exactly what these criteria are, Mr. Chairman. How does all this work? I understand this document to indicate that half is given to the managers as an equal amount. Now that we are debt free, at least for the moment, how would the government explain to the taxpayers that this was a bonus system that was set up to meet debt reduction targets? And after the debt was paid in full, why did this not only continue but expand? We could certainly use \$110 million. It's not like the high-end individuals that are receiving these bonuses are getting by on a very modest salary because they're not. Hopefully we're going to get an opportunity to go into detail on that.

When you look, for instance, at the Department of Justice, in the last three years there was close to \$15 million given out in these senior management bonuses. Did the Department of Justice have a good three years? Well, if you talk to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, he would have exceptions to that, and I would agree with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

We look at Alberta Finance and Enterprise, over 3 and a half million dollars in bonuses given out in the last two fiscal years and a little less than that in 2005-2006, \$200,000 less.

We have to look at Health. I don't know whether the hon. Member for Calgary-West put his foot down when he became the minister or not, but certainly the department of health is not one of the leaders in this race to provide bonuses. I would have to agree that the last three years in the ministry of health have not been very good years.

We look at Education: again, there's a \$3 million bonus this year.

Employment, immigration, and industry: the very department that's looking for \$49 million here gave out over \$3 million in senior management bonuses.

Children and Youth Services gave out a few dollars as well, 1 and a half million dollars.

When you go through this, it's a significant amount of money. I must confess that when we look at the deputy ministers and their salaries and where all this is going, I didn't think it was necessary that we would provide a bonus. When we have the members of Executive Council determining what these bonuses are and when they're paid – for the record they're usually paid out in June. I assume that's at the end of the fiscal year.

We look at some of the salaries that are provided to these individuals. I don't want to pick on Executive Council, but I will. For instance, the base salary for the Deputy Minister of Executive Council in 2008 was \$288,000. The base salary two years previous to that was, actually, \$250,000. When we look at the total compensation package, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council in this fiscal year that just ended received \$460,000 in total pay, and that doesn't include the car. For the same office the year before the total pay package was \$401,000. In 2005 it was \$100,000 less, at \$301,000. That is just an example. Tory times aren't tough times for these senior managers; that is for sure.

3:40

Ms Blakeman: That's P.E.I. humour, right?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, you could say that, hon. member.

When we look, Mr. Chairman, at the orders in council that set this all up, whether it was 1998, 2004, or the current one, July 30, 2008, we look at the list here and the salary rates. We look at the salary rate for deputy ministers. It's set at \$253,000. Then we look at the different ranges for representatives: salary range D, salary range C, salary range B, and salary range A. Salary range A is a maximum of \$133,000, and that's members of the Land Compensation Board. Salary range B, where the maximum is \$150,000, would include the deputy chief of staff, office of the Premier; director of communications, office of the Premier. The next salary range, C, where it goes up to \$192,000, would be the chair of the Labour Relations Board; the deputy secretary to cabinet; the director, office of the Premier, southern Alberta; the managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau; the controller; the deputy chief, policy co-ordination. Then salary range D, which is, again, a maximum of \$253,000, is the Alberta representative in Washington, DC; the chief of staff, office of the Premier; the chief executive officer of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission.

Ms Pastoor: How much?

Mr. MacDonald: The maximum salary, hon. member, would be \$253,000. The minimum would be \$188,000. That's salary range D.

All of these individuals are eligible to participate in this bonus system. Again, it's a mystery because there are rating levels. You don't get a bonus; you need improvement. You get a bonus if you meet a standard. You get a bigger bonus if you have superior performance. Then you have exceptional performance, and you could get, I guess, the maximum bonus. I don't know whether there is a discretionary amount in there. I would like to know specifically, Mr. Chairman, before I vote on Bill 21, an explanation from the hon. members across the way if there is ministerial discretion to this program. If so, how does it work?

I would also like to know, please, considering that there have been modest increases over the years for these senior staff, given the economic times we're in, if it is necessary to continue this program, if there have been discussions in cabinet, because it's cabinet that calls the shots here, if this program is to be eliminated or reduced in some form or fashion.

I'm mindful, Mr. Chairman, of the time, but I listened with a great deal of interest, as did the Member for Lethbridge-East, to the seniors this afternoon. How could the government find \$30 million to change the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy so that seniors could on their income at this time, with their costs as high as they are and their investment income reduced – is there not some way the government could find the money to fund their prescription drug costs? Well, I think that this is one thing that we should do.

I think that over the years we have developed some very lavish habits here. This is a lavish perk that surely cannot continue. At least, if it's going to continue, the government owes the taxpayers of this province an explanation as to how these achievement bonuses, quietly buried in the financial footnotes of each individual annual report, work and why we can't have full disclosure, why we can't have in the disclosure statements, in the total benefits and salary section of the annual reports exactly how much each individual receives in his achievement bonus and why.

It also, in my view, Mr. Chairman, raises the question about the independence of the high-ranking officials of the public service. How can they be truly independent when we've got this bonus system set up and these different levels of service? I would like some answers regarding these questions.

In conclusion, I would be quite willing to share with anyone who was interested any of the figures. I can certainly let you know what pages you can look at in each respective annual report, and you, too, can draw your own conclusions regarding this information. We look at the Department of Energy. We look at the department of health. We look at the department of children's services. They haven't had very good years, and it puzzles me why we would be giving out millions of dollars to senior management in these respective departments when we have issues around royalty collection. We have issues around protection of children in care. We've had issues around not only the delivery of health care but also controlling the budget.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Shall the progress on the bill be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just pausing there briefly to see if anybody on the government side wanted to jump up and join in the debate on interim supply, but I guess not.

Now, this is Bill 22, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, Mr. Chairman, at the Committee of the Whole stage. This is somewhat bigger than the bill that we were just debating before the hon. minister of health moved adjournment of debate. I'm not really sure why he did, but anyway he did. That one was worth \$127 million. This one is worth \$10 billion – 10 billion, with a “b” – hon. members.

Mr. MacDonald: Is there any room in there for an achievement bonus?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was wondering if there's any room in there for an achievement bonus. Oh, I'm sure that there's room for a bonus or two.

So here we are again, two weeks to go till the end of this fiscal year and the beginning of the next, three weeks to go until the

minister of finance and the Starship Enterprise, because sometimes it seems like a work of science fiction, this government's budgeting prowess, stands in this House to deliver the budget for fiscal 2009-2010.

3:50

I will point out again, as I did the last time that we had a kick at the interim supply can, that if this government had stuck to the temporary standing orders that it brought in a couple of years ago, which would have had us seeing the introduction of the budget – I believe it was two weeks, but it might have been 10 days; I'm not sure which – 10 days or two weeks after the throne speech. This year that would have been February 24. We would be just about through debate on the budget by now and certainly in a position to vote the budget and have the budget in place in time for fiscal '09-10, which starts on April 1. I'll resist the temptation to say anything about April Fool's Day.

Of course, if we had done it that way, then we wouldn't actually be sitting here or standing here debating interim supply because there would be no need to ask the House for \$10 billion, you know, to get us through until payday. It's kind of like Wimpy on Popeye: I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today. That's a hell of an expensive hamburger, Mr. Chairman, \$10 billion. Even the Alberta meat and livestock strategy doesn't foresee the price of beef at that level.

As it is, we're debating – well, let's see – \$29 million in support to the Legislative Assembly, \$7 million for the Auditor General, \$900,000 for the office of the Ombudsman, \$1.8 million for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Do we have one of those currently, a Chief Electoral Officer?

Mr. MacDonald: No. We've got a deputy.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. I guess we have some office expenses to pay there, but gosh we should be able to save a couple of weeks' pay there anyway for the actual officer.

For the office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$300,000; \$1.5 million for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner; \$14.1 million for the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations; \$744 million and a little loose change in equipment and inventory purchases for advanced education and almost another \$35 million in nonbudgetary disbursements there; \$190 million for Agriculture and Rural Development; \$284 million for Children and Youth Services; \$97.2 million in expense, equipment, and inventory purchases and another \$300,000 in nonbudgetary disbursements for the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit; \$1,142,900,000 to the Ministry of Education, and because it's \$900,000, round it off to \$1.143 billion.

For Employment and Immigration about \$256 million; \$133.8 million for Energy; \$63 million for Environment; \$9 million for Executive Council; \$94 million in expense, equipment, and inventory purchases and \$11 million in nonbudgetary disbursements for the ministry of finance; \$3.238 billion in expense and equipment and inventory purchases and another \$4.8 million for Health and Wellness; \$133 million for Housing and Urban Affairs; \$157 million for Infrastructure on the expense, equipment, and inventory side, \$159 million for Infrastructure on the capital investment side; \$10.7 million for International and Intergovernmental Relations; \$135 million for Justice, but still no money for an independent prosecutor; \$588 million for Municipal Affairs; just about \$641 million for Seniors and Community Supports; \$91 million in expense, equipment, and inventory purchases and \$23 million in capital investment for Service Alberta. Does that include the licence plates we're not going to do now, or did that get pulled out of there?

For the Solicitor General and Public Security \$128.5 million in expense, equipment, and inventory purchases, another \$8.8 million in capital investment for the Solicitor General's ministry, and \$409,400,000 in lottery fund payments; about \$119 million, almost \$120 million for Sustainable Resource Development; about \$107 million for Tourism, Parks and Recreation; for Transportation quite a bit here, too, \$590 million for expense, equipment, and inventory purchases, \$370 million for capital investment and \$1.7 million in mad money—I mean nonbudgetary disbursements; \$16.9 million for Treasury Board.

It all adds up to just about \$10 billion. Even though standing orders say that I'm not supposed to really read a whole lot of stuff into the record in debate, Mr. Chairman, I have, in essence, read almost the entirety of Bill 22 into the record in the last few minutes just going down that shopping list of dollar allocations because there is nothing in here.

I know that the President of Treasury Board in Committee of Supply seemed to take great umbrage to the fact that a number of us on this side of the House pointed out that there is nothing in this bill to justify any of that spending. It's like: well, you know, we have to have this money in order to get through the next several weeks until we get the budget passed and proclaimed, a budget that's not ready because we've been sitting around twiddling our thumbs hoping that our muse would strike us and part the clouds and show us what the economy of the province of Alberta is going to be like for the rest of the fiscal year. So we'll just wait and wait and wait and hope that the muse strikes.

Mr. Mason: A chorus of angels.

Mr. Taylor: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood suggests we throw a chorus of angels in there, too. Or maybe they were waiting for a chorus of angels. Well, I don't know.

I mean, the plain and simple fact of the matter is that the budget is coming down on April 7, and on April 7 it will likely be no clearer where the economy is going for the next 12 months than it would have been had we started this on March 7 or February 24. But in the interim—and, funnily enough, this is interim supply—we're asked to just vote \$10 billion and trust the government that this money won't be wasted.

Well, you know, we don't know whether it'll be wasted or not because we cannot tell from the absolute paucity of information that comes along with this bill whether this is \$10 billion to support the same old same old spending habits or whether this is \$10 billion to support a radically reformed approach to budgeting. We don't know, and we're told to stay tuned. We're told to wait until April 7 until the Minister of Finance and Enterprise puts her new shoes on, or not, and delivers the budget. I don't even know if she's going to wear new shoes. In times of restraint perhaps she shouldn't.

Mr. MacDonald: Maybe she's going to wear flip-flops.

Mr. Taylor: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar just suggested that maybe the Minister of Finance and Enterprise is going to wear flip-flops on budget day. That certainly would be in keeping, hon. member, with this government's out-loud musings about what their economic management and financial management and budgeting style are going to be going forward from this point. So we await April 7, Mr. Chair, with hope but not much faith that we will actually see a changed attitude or a clear attitude one way or the other.

In the meantime we're asked not to debate too fully because, gosh, we wouldn't want to put a government minister in the position of

actually having to answer a question that might reveal what's going to be in the budget that we should be debating now, but they couldn't get around to bringing it down in time. We're just supposed to go: "Okay. Ten billion? Yeah, that sounds reasonable. Okay. Let's go for that. Why not? Are you sure you wouldn't like \$11 billion?"

I think I've made my point, Mr. Chairman. I'll let somebody else speak. Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 22, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, at Committee of the Whole. I just want to make a few general comments with respect to this. One of the things that I think is most important when we're looking at money and the expenditure of money is a clear definition of what it is you're trying to accomplish. As we anticipate the upcoming provincial budget, I think it's a good time to review this.

4:00

In my view, what you need to start with is an appreciation of the circumstances in the economy; that is to say, not the big statistical numbers and so on but the actual effect of the economy on the ordinary people of this province: the working families, the middle-class people. I think you'll find that while the overheated economy that we have been through in this province over the past number of years has benefited some of those people, it's been very uneven. As people have had secure employment, until recently, at the same time they've also had increasing bills for a number of things, you know, higher utility costs. I don't know what the latest figures are, but we have had in this province some of the highest inflation rates in the country. Rents, of course, have been a huge issue.

It's interesting that an overheated economy affects different people in different ways, and it doesn't always have a positive effect on people. For example, in a rapidly overheating economy you will often have, as we certainly have had in this province, a serious shortage of housing, and it means that rents go through the roof. That means, even though it seems to be contradictory, that in a period of very rapid growth and full employment you may actually have more people who don't have housing because there's just a real shortage of it. Some people actually go backwards; not everybody moves ahead. It's not a consistent process when you're in that sort of economy.

Now, it certainly seems to me that when we're in an economy of that kind and we have very high prices for oil and natural gas, there's a real opportunity which presents itself. That has to do, of course, with how you manage the economy in the good times. When you have, I guess, some of the very lowest royalty rates in the world and extremely high prices for oil and natural gas, then it means that the take, if you will, of the people who extract, refine, and distribute those resources is going to be much higher. In other words, the price goes up but the royalties not as much. The result is that the increased value is captured by the companies that extract the resources and those that distribute it and refine it. That means that it's more difficult for us to manage in the tough times, which we're now entering in this province, notwithstanding some people's view that Alberta is somehow exempt. This province is very, very dependent on its ability to find markets for its goods, particularly oil and, increasingly, bitumen as well as natural gas.

We're now in a difficult time, when we need to increase our spending in certain areas, not in all areas. I wouldn't argue with the government that in some areas we need to show additional restraint

in some of the expenditures, but if we want to make sure that people keep working in this province, then in a very strategic way we need to be making sure that government expenditures make that happen. This is the approach that's been adopted in the United States by the Obama administration. It's interesting, Mr. Chairman, that, you know, you can spend untold billions of dollars, which they have done in the United States, but the real question is: where do you do that in order to maximize employment and maximize economic benefit?

Recently the NDP caucus organized a round-table on the economy and the budget – that was a couple of months ago now – and it was very useful. One of the things that we talked about there was the different places where a government can get involved in a stimulus. One of the things that, I think, one of the presenters made a very compelling case for is that certain expenditures produce a stronger economic benefit and create more jobs than other kinds. Resource extraction industries, being very capital intensive, do not provide a lot of employment per dollar spent compared to other things, including health care and education. Interestingly, expenditure on the arts had one of the highest impacts in terms of GDP growth and jobs created per dollar invested by government. I think it's interesting to take a look at some of that.

We've done some work as well around the green energy plan that we rolled out a couple of years ago in the province. I think the NDP were, really, pioneers here in Alberta in terms of talking about a green jobs strategy. What we proposed more recently was to fund a billion dollar green energy fund by transferring some of the money that the government had earmarked for carbon capture and storage.

Now, we don't want to just dismiss carbon capture and storage outright. If it has benefits and if you can capture the CO₂, then that's fine, but it's the polluters, the people that produce the CO₂, that should pay for it and not the general taxpayer. What we proposed instead was to divert that money to a revolving fund that would allow homeowners, businesses, farmers, as well as government buildings and facilities to do complete retrofits of their facilities with a view to reducing energy and to add additional components that would actually generate power – for example, solar power and geothermal power and that sort of thing – to dramatically reduce the amount of energy that we currently use in this province and to pass the savings from that on to the farmers and the small businesspeople and the homeowners as well as to the government for public buildings. We include in that libraries, school boards, universities, hospitals, seniors' facilities, court facilities, and so forth.

The savings to the taxpayers as well as to individuals would be very substantial, and the jobs that would be created from that investment exceed 10 times the number of jobs for an equivalent investment in carbon capture and storage. It creates more jobs, it reduces our energy footprint, it reduces our CO₂ output, and it saves money for both the government and the people of Alberta. That would be something that we think would be stimulative and would help transition the province towards a green energy economy and away from the hydrocarbon-based economy.

Now, we don't propose for a minute that Alberta should abandon the hydrocarbon-based economy, but we also think that we need to look down the road and see that there are real storm clouds on the horizon with respect to the government's economic development strategy. Their economic development strategy is very, very much focused on the tar sands and the development of the tar sands, but there are real threats to that. In the long run we run the risk of an obsolete type of economy because the rest of the world is moving past us. We have these tremendous riches in terms of hydrocarbons, but if we just focus on that and we don't realize that the world is changing, then we are going to strand a future generation of this

province with an obsolete economy and a commodity that people will not use. I think the government has some responsibility in this. If you look at what's going on in the world today, increasingly Alberta oil is being seen as dirty oil, and there is increasing and organized pressure on governments to restrict the use of Alberta's oil.

4:10

I know that some members opposite get kind of excited when they see Greenpeace activists rappelling down at their fundraising dinners or off bridges and so on, but they would be making a mistake if they thought that those publicity stunts represented the majority of Greenpeace's activity. Greenpeace's activity is primarily focused in the United States and is primarily focused at convincing decision-makers that they should not buy Alberta oil, or oil from the tar sands.

If you look at the history of the seal hunt in Newfoundland, there were very high-profile stunts out on the ice that brought world attention to the seal hunt, including Brigitte Bardot and other famous people coming out on the floes and trying to interfere with the seal hunt. But that was just the visible piece of their activity. The vast majority of their activity was in Europe, attempting to undermine the primary market for seal pelts that existed at that time. They were so successful in doing that, they were able to stop the seal hunt entirely for a number of years.

I don't think the government understands how this is going down or that Greenpeace is not the only organization that has these concerns. For example, the U.S. Conference of Mayors has passed a resolution against tar sands oil. I think that we're going to see more of that. I put the responsibility for this on the government.

Mr. Chairman, we are not opposed to the tar sands or the economic activity that takes place there. However, we think that the government has given Alberta a black eye by disregarding environmental considerations in their headlong rush to develop the tar sands as quickly as possible. For example, what we would propose is that the government bring in a plan to clean up the tailings ponds over a relatively short period, 10 years to 20 years at the very most to clean up the existing tailings ponds, to insist that new projects use dry tailings technology, which is available and is already incorporated in some of the proposed developments, that there be some serious work done to clean up the Athabasca River and to prevent the downstream pollution that exists, and that the government insist that there be hard caps on CO₂ emissions related to tar sands development.

In other words, if the government would work seriously to clean up the tar sands environmentally, it would reduce our risk of having governments and other institutions and companies outside of Alberta refuse to buy Alberta oil in the future. I think the government has failed to do that, and as a result they have put their own basic, fundamental economic development strategy for this province at risk. We think that the first step is to clean up the tar sands and make sure that we have a very good environmental record in terms of the development of that.

Secondly, we need to invest in green energy and the development of green energy and technology, including the commercialization of that technology, so that Alberta uses its financial capacity as a result of its being blessed with hydrocarbons at this time to become something different, to change to a different type of economy. We see Alberta as retaining its position as the centre of energy in Canada, to be the energy leader but in a different kind of energy. That, in our view, not only helps safeguard the planet in terms of climate change but positions Alberta as the economic leader in these technologies in Canada.

As it now stands, we are falling farther and farther behind.

Europe is farther ahead by a long shot and has been for some time. Increasingly states in the United States are getting very far ahead of us as well, particularly California, which is leading the way. Alberta risks becoming a dinosaur, in fact, not just based on fossil fuel but having a fossilized economy, something that really leaves future generations with very little to count on in terms of some of the things that we've been able to enjoy as Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to conclude by suggesting that the government needs to get some of these things right. They need to recognize that, in fact, we are facing a deeper and longer recession than they're expecting and that there needs to be investment in things which will create jobs and sustain the employment that's necessary for Albertans as we go forward. Just simply expecting everybody else to do the right thing and that that will somehow drive up the price of oil and that everything will be right again is not, in our view, a responsible course of action from this government.

Secondly, we need to recognize the link between the environment and the economy and the tremendous opportunities that we have to develop our economy and to create good, high-quality jobs for future generations by taking the environment seriously and changing the kind of energy economy that we have. I think Albertans have tremendous expertise and knowledge when it comes to energy. I think we need to put that to new uses in order that as the world changes and develops, Alberta is well positioned as a sound environment, as a sound economy, and continues to have a great quality of life and a high standard of living. I think that if the government continues in the present direction, future generations will not enjoy that. They will not have the advantages that we have, and this government is to blame if that happens, clearly, Mr. Chairman.

With those comments, I'll wrap up my remarks for Bill 22, the interim supply appropriation act, and look forward to lots of other great debate on this issue. Of course, as all members, I am looking forward to the provincial budget coming down on the 7th of April. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 22.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Shall progress on the bill be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: We have amendment A1, so the debate is on A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Citing *Beauchesne* 688, I'd like to request that this amendment be severed into its various parts for the purpose of voting. There would be a vote for section A, section B, section C, section D, so four separate votes for each of the sections of this amendment. This is following with the precedents of this House.

Thank you.

The Chair: We now have amendment A1. The debate will be on the whole amendment as a package, but when we call for the vote, we'll call it by sections. Does the committee agree with that? I see no opposition, so go ahead.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

4:20

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are some things in this amendment, but it mainly is, if I could use the word, housekeeping to keep some of it going forward. One of the important ones is to be able to accommodate the proposal where the legal profession needs time to delay the implementation, the proclamation, so that they can put it through their society that lawyers would then be able to be considered I believe it's fellow citizens. They change it so that they don't have to be a citizen or a permanent resident in order to be admitted to the Law Society of Alberta. I think that that's probably one of the main ones that they are looking for in this amendment. The rest of it, I think, was really, as I've said, just housekeeping.

There's one thing that I would question – and I will question it at this point – on the amendment. With the credit unions there still isn't a really clear process whereby B.C. credit unions can come in and set up insurance arms of their credit unions. They have them in B.C., but our credit unions on this side are not allowed to establish an insurance arm to go with their credit unions. I'm thinking that that's a very unlevel playing field. I don't think the government's job is to pick winners and losers, but I think their job is to create the rules of the game, so to speak, so that when everyone is on the playing field, it is level, the rules are very clear, and it's also very clear who would enforce those rules.

That's just one thing that I don't think is clear. It's not in these amendments, but I think it's something that has to be looked at. Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand and speak to Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. The bill would amend 11 statutes, most of these by removing references to Alberta, where the law will now apply to individuals and corporations outside the province.

The Agriculture Financial Services Act is amended by removing the reference to Alberta in the definition of a commercial enterprise. That would be section 1, pages 1 and 2. The Agriculture Financial Services Corporation would not be limited to making loans to individuals or corporations for the purpose of developing or diversifying the Alberta economy. The Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations explained the amendment in the House this way.

Other changes include amending the Agriculture Financial Services Act. The act may currently leave the impression that commercial loans can only be made to Alberta firms. That's not the case. The change will make it clear that provided the operation is in Alberta, the security is in Alberta, and the direction is in Alberta, commercial loans can be made to a person from Alberta, B.C., Nova Scotia, or anywhere else in Canada.

Now, the Business Corporations Act is also amended in this section under extraprovincial registrations. This is to allow for an appeal when extraprovincial registrations are cancelled – that's in section 2(2) on page 2 – and to replace the word "requirements" with "matters." Now, "requirements" limits action to regulatory change while "matters" allows for broader ability to make amendments so that the rules for registration conform with TILMA.

The Charitable Fundraising Act is amended to allow trustees or

charitable funds to deposit the money in any financial institution in Canada rather than only in Alberta. That's section 3 on page 4. Some charities offer donors the option of directing that their donation be spent within Alberta. In the bill briefing we were told that this does not infringe on a charity's right to make such an offer.

The amendments to the Cooperatives Act are the same as those to the Business Corporations Act.

Now, the Government Organization Act is amended to allow the government the power to temporarily for a maximum of three years amend noncompliant legislation. That's section 5, pages 6 to 8. The government argues that a similar provision exists under the Municipal Government Act. However, that provision only allows the government to temporarily increase a municipality's power to make bylaws.

The government also points to temporary law-making powers in the Animal Health Act, but that act only allows the government to make temporary regulations due to unforeseen circumstances not covered by the act and in consultation with the chief provincial veterinarian. The provisions in this bill allow the government to change any law temporarily so that it conforms to the business-first requirements of TILMA.

The Insurance Act allows fraternal societies from other provinces to provide insurance. That is section 6 on page 8. Some fraternal societies provide insurance for their members. Some societies outside of Alberta are allowed to provide insurance for their members in Alberta, but there are restrictions, and this lifts those restrictions. Now, Mr. Chairman, I just want to talk a little bit about that because I think that's a good idea. Fraternal societies' providing insurance is a long-standing practice, something that is, I think, to the social good. The restrictions that are in place may not be in the best interests of the society as a whole or the members of these societies, so I think that that's something that's probably not a bad thing.

Now, to move on a bit, the Legal Profession Act is amended to remove the requirements that to be recognized by the bar, a person must be a citizen or permanent resident of Canada. That's section 7, pages 8 and 9. Similar requirements in B.C. were struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada. That's interesting.

The Marriage Act is amended in the bill to allow any resident of Canada, rather than only Alberta, to be appointed as a temporary marriage commissioner. That's section 8, page 9. Now, Mr. Chairman, we asked during the bill briefing whether this will lift Alberta's restriction on who can be a temporary marriage commissioner. A few years ago the government changed the regulations so that only MLAs, MPs, judges, and a few others are eligible to be temporary commissioners. Now, the answer was that the rest of Alberta's eligibility requirements will not be affected. That's interesting.

You know, one of the things that I've very much enjoyed doing since becoming an MLA is marrying people. I was already married before I became an MLA, but in this case I actually have been able to perform the marriage ceremony, and that is one of the nicest things that I've been able to do since becoming an MLA. It really tends to, you know, lift your spirits and make you feel good about the world and feel like you've actually made a real contribution. I've enjoyed that.

4:30

Now, a few years ago they restricted the number of marriages that MLAs could perform, and they put some real limits on it. I gather that there was some concern on the part of permanent marriage commissioners, who do this sort of thing on a regular basis, that there was a little bit of competition. But I also understand that there

had been some problems with some of the MLAs, maybe, – and this may include a former leader on the other side; I don't know – where some of the paperwork got kind of messed up, so people weren't actually married when they thought they were. I think that that's one of the things that I was very scrupulous about after I performed the ceremony and double-checked and made sure that, in fact, we had crossed the t's and dotted the i's and not the other way around.

Maybe that's a little bit of an aside, but it's certainly something that I think is one of the best parts of the job, as far as I'm concerned.

The Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act is amended to allow landlords based outside the province to operate within Alberta. That is section 9, page 10. Now, in the bill briefing we were told that the provisions requiring an agent for service – that is, someone who is physically present to deal with tenants' issues – can still be enforced. We're interested in that.

Also, the Partnership Act is amended in the same ways as the Business Corporations Act and the Cooperatives Act. The Residential Tenancies Act is amended in the same way as the Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we understand that B.C. is passing similar legislation, but we do have some other concerns with respect to this. I just want to express my general view of TILMA. I would have to say that TILMA is a solution in search of a problem. The whole question of what it is exactly that we're solving through this act is a real question in my mind. I don't believe that there exist prior to TILMA significant barriers to trade, to investment, or to labour mobility between Alberta and British Columbia. I think the government's claim that the agreement will create billions of dollars in trade investment in Alberta and B.C. is without any factual basis. The real danger, in my view, of TILMA lies in its impact on local governments, public services, and procurement processes.

I think that it's kind of a wannabe thing. You know, I know that the Conservatives like free trade agreements, and they were very, very proud of, first, the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement and then the North American free trade agreement. I know that the conservatives in the United States with support of federal Conservatives in Canada really wanted to expand the North American free trade agreement to Latin America, interestingly enough, and there was some talk about Colombia. They wanted to extend this throughout South America.

But it was interesting that the South American countries themselves – and there was some leadership here in Latin American countries like, for example, President Chavez in Venezuela – wanted to make sure that this wasn't just simply opening up those countries' economies to more domination by American companies. They've set up an alternative there that is based on fair trade as opposed to free trade. Most countries in South America and Latin America have now joined that, and it has brought to a grinding halt the dreams of conservatives in Canada and the United States to extend free trade to the whole western hemisphere and, I think, with significant benefits to small producers in those countries, peasants, workers, all of whom were at risk of being put out of business as a result of this drive to create a hemispheric free trade arrangement.

That's actually who suffers most, Mr. Chairman. It's the small producer. It's the small farmer. It's the small businessperson. Local procurement rules are prohibited, and it severely damages the mom-and-pop operations, who lose out to the Wal-Marts of the world, and that is exactly where this gets us. It gets us to large corporate entities operating from the States or even from Canada or Mexico perhaps and putting local small businesses and local farmers out of business. It creates more unemployment, not less. It undermines labourers' rights and initiates a race to the bottom type of mentality.

Where the standards are different between one country and another or in this case between one province and another, generally it is the lower standard that tends to be adopted. What these agreements do is give unlimited freedom to capital to move wherever and whenever they want in order to maximize the return on capital but at the expense of the basic underlying community economy that exists, at the expense of the environment, and at the expense of people being gainfully employed.

In a general sense TILMA is an attempt to recreate these bigger free trade agreements on the provincial level, but the problem is that the fundamental barriers to trade and the free movement of capital exist at the national level, not at the provincial level. I know that the government really likes to play in the leagues with the big guys, but in this particular case, you know, a lot of this is just pretending that we're actually sweeping away barriers to trade and labour mobility, which have never existed in a very significant way between provinces, as opposed to those that exist sometimes between countries.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to take my seat for the moment, but I want to indicate that this particular piece of legislation with or without the amendment is not, in our view, in the interest of the people of Alberta, however much it might be in the interest of some of the corporate friends of this government and their friends in B.C. and Saskatchewan. We don't think this is either desirable or even necessary and will not be supportive of this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to amendment A1. I'm interested in what is included in the government's amendment but also what's not in the government's amendment. I'm particularly interested in the timing because this is Bill 18. I think we're up to something in the low 20s now for the introduction of government bills overall, so this is a fairly recent addition to the House, recently come out of the government's sort of bill production pipeline, if I may put it that way. It was introduced into the Assembly and had first and second reading within the last 10 days, I think. I don't even think we've debated them. Yeah, we did debate very briefly in second. We get into committee, and already there are amendments. You know there's a story there, and I'd love to know what the story was, Mr. Chairman. We've got a bill that is fairly recent to the House, and already there are three pages of amendments that have been brought forward by the government to amend this bill.

It is amending a number of the bills that are already being amended, so this is an omnibus bill, as I've mentioned. It's always a little confusing to track, and I wonder if that isn't deliberate on the part of the government. But, really, what we're amending in this act is the Agriculture Financial Services Act, Business Corporations Act, Cooperatives Act, Government Organization Act, Insurance Act, Legal Profession Act, Marriage Act, Mobile Home Sites Tenancies Act, Partnership Act, Residential Tenancies Act. So it's a fair number of bills that are being changed inside of one bill. Then we now have amendments that I'm looking at that are amending the section on the Business Corporations Act, amending the section on the Cooperatives Act, amending the section on the Government Organization Act, and some fairly numerous amendments to the Partnership Act.

I sometimes think that this is a deliberate strategy of government to just make it so difficult and complex for others to follow, going

back and forth between what was in the bill and now what's in the amendments. I think it's sometimes deliberate obfuscation of what's going on. People just give up and walk away from it.

What I'm interested in is what I'm not seeing in these amendments that I did expect to see in these amendments. One is that I believe that this bill has what I will term a fatal flaw because it's constitutionally incorrect. It goes against our Constitution and our parliamentary process in what it's anticipating inside of this act. I spoke of this during second reading. I expected to see a fix for that in the amendments, and I'm not seeing it.

The second thing that I'm not seeing either in the original bill or in what's being proposed through these amendments is any attempt to offer harmonization for farm workers. It's my understanding that farm workers are protected in British Columbia. They're not protected in Alberta, very clearly. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview has raised the issue repeatedly in this House of the lack of benefits and protection for farm workers here. I was thinking that here's the opportunity to fix this, but the fix isn't here.

I think what we always want to be mindful of is consequences. When you reshape something as dramatically as we are doing with TILMA, it will have consequences. The trick for legislators is to try and figure out what those consequences might be and try to ameliorate any of the negative consequences. Then you go back to the drawing board, literally, in the way you do the legislation. Of course, you always start out to try and do good things when you bring in legislation. The amelioration is for when you have unintended consequences that will have a negative effect.

As I go looking through here, I agree with my colleague from Lethbridge-East that, essentially, we're looking at administrative or housekeeping amendments for the most part. I am still really questioning the timing. We don't see an issue with the amendment that is proposed in section A, which is around the Business Corporations Act. It looks like it's a fairly minor wording change, and it's also adding in a clause that provides that "a provision of this Act or a provision of a regulation made under another section of this Act does not apply in respect of extra-provincial corporations." So there is a protection being offered there.

In section B, which is affecting the Cooperatives Act, which appears on page 4 of the original bill in the paper copy, we are striking out "requirements referred to," and what we're doing is changing it from "requirements" to "matters," which has fair consequence, I must admit. I mean, you're going from something that is a requirement to just referring to it as a matter, so you're downgrading it. You're taking it from a requirement to simply referring to it as a matter. Does that have huge import in what we're doing here? Not that I'm personally aware of, but I don't come from a co-operatives background. We have not heard from anyone in our consultation loop that has expressed a particular concern around this. I've got to assume that we're going to be okay.

The next section that's being amended is section C, which is affecting the Government Organization Act. Essentially, this section appears to be coming in under the regulations section, which is very long for the regs that are being allowed. This, I think, is where the problem is happening in this act, by the way. This is where we've slipped over a constitutional problem. Essentially, what it's adding in is: "This section comes into force on Proclamation." So that's now setting it up that there could potentially be different enactment dates throughout this legislation, depending on whether it's coming through on proclamation of the act itself or whether there has been a designated proclamation put into the different sections.

The final section, D, that is being amended here is the Partnership Act, which for the most part, I think, is affecting our legal profession. That's who makes the most use of this. A number of changes

where we're changing wording, going from what had already been "requirements referred to" in a certain subsection, and we're now substituting "matters." So, again, it's a downgrade. This is looking to add "from limited partnerships" into it, and also again adding in that "providing that a provision of this Act or a provision of a regulation made under another section of this Act does not apply in respect of extra-provincial limited partnerships." We've seen that used here before, and that appears in a number of sections. Obviously, there were a couple of mistakes that were consistently made throughout the original document that the government is attempting to correct.

What does strike me is that the government is in an all hellfire hurry about this. I think what has happened is that the government is behind on this. There is a guillotine date upcoming on the 1st of April. The government for whatever reason is behind on this, and now they're in a huge hurry to get this done, literally, by the end of the week because then we go into two constituency weeks in which we're not sitting in the House; we're back in our constituencies. So if the government is going to have this particular implementation act for TILMA done to meet that deadline of April 1, it has got to do it by Thursday. I think that, perhaps, in that rush to get the bill before the House, there have been some mistakes made that would have been caught if there had been a more studious, painstaking approach to it. That's what I've got to assume.

4:50

Once again the House is being pushed or rushed because the government has chosen to be slow on the uptake on a particular deadline. That's the history of this government. We see that regularly with the budget. I mean, everybody knows that we have a fiscal year. Now, who picked the fiscal year? Well, the government picked the fiscal year. They set it at the 1st of April. With that goes an expectation that there's a budget that we would operate under. So you'd expect that the government would have the House sit and would have the budget prepared and brought before the House long enough in advance that we could have the budget in place before we actually are into the fiscal year. You know, of the 13 budgets that I've been here for, I don't think the government has ever done that. Maybe once. I'll err on the side of caution and say: maybe once. But the rest of the time they haven't.

Then they're in a great hurry to get through the budget debates and get it passed. And you say: well, whose fault is this? If the government, who has all the decision-making power about when the House is called, how many people speak to the bill, how fast it's going to move through the House, even whether we're going to sit at night or not in order to be able to deal with legislation – the government holds all the cards in the decision-making there. They choose to organize that time badly so that we end up in a rush. I have very little patience with that, frankly.

Mr. Mason: Maybe they would do a better job if they had more opposition.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I suspect they would do a better job if they had more opposition, to be honest with you.

My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood had raised the reference that, really, this is being a provincial version of a free trade agreement that exists already between countries. We have the free trade agreement between Canada and the U.S. and the North American one between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. This is about a Wal-Mart economy. This is about local decision-making and how far we get away from local decision-making and who is controlling that decision-making and how far away they are from the effect that

their decision has. I would argue that we need to be more cautious about this.

I am very supportive of lifting red tape problems and dealing with that. As someone that worked in the not-for-profit sector, I can tell you that I am very sympathetic with the small businesspeople because, oh, my Lord, everybody that has got a great idea, they want to have us do it three times and in three different versions: one for the municipality, one for the province, and one for the federal government. When you're running a small business or a small non-profit, you don't have very many administrative people, and to have different forms where this one wants, you know, your postage and your printing together in one category and the next one wants it split out, it's an unbelievable amount of time, which for a not-for-profit means that it's not going into producing what your service or your program actually is. For a small businessperson it means that it's costing them money, and that may well be somebody's paycheque or the question of whether there are two paycheques in that small business or one paycheque in that small business.

I'm sympathetic to anything that could be done to reduce red tape, but did we need to move to something like this? I'm not so sure. I think that there was a way to work away at this in a methodical and reasonable fashion without having to do this overlay of an agreement.

Just to go back one more time about how far away we get from control and give you a small example of this, I'm going to use food and food safety. What we're starting to understand is that although we can get food from all over the world, it's not necessarily the best thing for us physically or economically to get food from all over the world. By the time it travels that far to get to us, it may not be the best thing for us to eat, and it may not be the best thing for their economy to have had it shipped away from them. We end up with these sort of push-back campaigns like the 100-Mile Diet, where people are trying to practise finding their food within a hundred miles of where they live. That's a challenge because so many of our small artisan food producers have been forced out of business by ever-larger and ever-farther away producers of food. That is what we get into with TILMA. Granted, we're only talking about the next province. You know, it's not the other side of the world. But this is a trend towards that, and we lose control at a local level every time that happens.

To go back to the specifics of what has been proposed in the government amendments, aside from what is missing and the fact that the issue that I raised in second reading has not been dealt with – and I will talk about that outside of specifically addressing this amendment A1 – and the fact that we're missing a harmonization around protection of benefits for farm workers, I'm fine with what I know and understand of the amendments that have been brought forward. As I say, we haven't had a lot of time to do a feedback loop with the groups that would be affected by this, but I haven't heard anything back from them. So at this point we have to assume that either they didn't have time to respond or they have no problem with it. I'm going to assume that it's the latter, and move forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to amendment A1, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party, on amendment A1.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I see the amendments that the government has brought forward. For example, in part A section 2(6) is amended in clause (a) by adding "from corporations" after "section 293.1(b)(ii)." It says that we would add "providing that a provision of this Act or a provision of a regulation made under another section of this Act does not apply in respect of extra-provincial corporations."

Well, you know, I think that these amendments really indicate that the government had not thought through this act when it brought it forward. It is beyond me. Mr. Chairman, looking through this long list of changes from the government to the government's own bill really says to me that they're not really on the ball here. They've had a long time to deal with this bill. This is their baby. They've created this particular piece of so-called trade agreement with British Columbia and have been behind this from the beginning. It never ceases to amaze me how ill prepared the government is when it's dealing with something that's exclusively under its own jurisdiction.

I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking a bit earlier about this issue, and she talked about the budget. She talked about how it takes the government much longer to produce a budget than it did years ago under other Conservative governments. You have to wonder what's really kind of wrong over there. It's admittedly a complex area, but this is not a new thing. They've been talking about TILMA for years and years, and it really strikes me that amendments here ought to have been incorporated in the legislation in the first instance.

5:00

I want to just really follow up some of the comments that I made earlier as well. This is something the government has brought forward which doesn't really have a purpose. They've never really made the case, in my view, that there are enormous interprovincial barriers that exist. They've gone through, you know, in great detail all of the different aspects, but what this really says to me is that this is an attempt to prevent municipal governments in particular and other government agencies from implementing purchasing policies that support local businesses. I can't help but think that these kinds of restrictions don't benefit local communities. They're the kinds of policies that create ghost towns, that put whole sections of the economy out of business.

We've seen the limitations of these conservative ideas as we enter this tremendous economic crisis right now, Mr. Chairman. All of the pillars of conservative ideology that were almost unchallenged have come tumbling down. We could hardly stand in this House and contradict the prevailing wisdom of the neo-cons that dominate this government. You know, regulation is a bad thing; that was one of them. You have to deregulate everything. You've just got to get out of the way of the market because the free market is omniscient and omnipotent. It can decide all questions. All economic questions can be decided if you just leave the market alone. If you just get out of the way, get government out of the way and let the market go, you'll always get the best possible results and nothing can possibly go wrong. Well, we've seen that things can actually go terribly wrong. We've seen that.

I mentioned this a little bit in question period today. I was watching TV late on Thursday night, and I tuned in to one of my favourite shows, which is *The Daily Show*. The host, Jon Stewart, had an interview actually for the whole program, which was unusual, with Jim Cramer, who is on CNBC and who talks about all of the things that you should be investing in. He was encouraging people just days before Bear Stearns' collapse to get involved and get into Bear Stearns.

You know, what those ideologues opposite miss is that the market is not a perfect mechanism. It's made up of individuals, and some individuals have a lot more knowledge and ability to manipulate things in their own interests. We've seen that over and over again, where essentially corporations, boards of corporations and management teams of big corporations, especially in the United States, have essentially looted their shareholders. They've given themselves hundreds of millions of dollars worth of bonuses at the expense of

the shareholders, whose interests they were sworn to uphold, and this is unchecked by regulators.

It's unchecked by government, which in its appropriate role should be overseeing these things and making sure that this doesn't happen, that the greedy and the powerful don't triumph over the weak who have been enticed by people like Jim Cramer and many others in the media and in politics and in business to invest their money, their retirement money, the stuff that they've worked so hard to build and to save. They've been enticed into a market where they were essentially blindfolded, gagged, tied up, and robbed by these people. These corporate thieves were operating in a system that was created by the conservative ideology that says that the market can solve all problems if government just gets out of the way.

It's pretty clear to me that in that particular case the ideology of deregulation has completely failed on a world scale. You know, I can't imagine anybody sitting in this House who's a real conservative that can't see what's happened and can't see that some of the fundamental ideological underpinnings of the conservative movement have completely collapsed. They just don't understand, I think, some of the fundamental realities faced by people, which is that in a free market system without appropriate oversight and without appropriate regulation, the big get bigger and the small get smaller; the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

What happened when they deregulated electricity in Alberta, for example? I've been around for this part. I've seen it with my own eyes. Well, one of the things that happened is that the price of electricity for people in this province almost doubled almost overnight because the appropriate role of government was removed, and the people that can make a killing made a killing because they can manipulate a market. So we've seen people paying way more for electricity than they should.

Another important principle of conservative ideology, Mr. Chairman, is, of course, privatization. It was a maxim that the private sector can always do it better. You know, government is inherently inefficient, and it just can't do anything. Government can't even tie its own shoes according to some of these conservative ideologues that we have in this place and around the world, so you should privatize everything because it'll be better off.

Now, Mr. Chairman, all we have to do is look at what happened with Air Canada. Boy, was that a success, was that a great success. You know, I can remember when you had good service. They still lost your luggage from time to time, but not as often as now. You've got the privatized Air Canada, which has worse service. If it wasn't for WestJet and a little bit of competition there, it would be even worse. But Air Canada is a clear example of how privatized service has made things worse, not better.

There are other examples. You've got privatization and the competition for telephones. Take, for example, telephones. Well, now do you get better service? You don't get better service. What you've got is people phoning you and bugging you to change your phone service every couple of days.

We switched our phone service at our house about a year ago to a different provider, and then the phone service went out. So I phoned, and I sat on hold for a couple of hours, and I finally got through to somebody, to an actual person in India who was going to try and help my phone service. They told me, in fact, that it would take four days before they could reconnect my telephone service. Now, keep in mind that this was their fault that the phone service went out, not our fault at our house. In actual fact, four days without telephone service is completely unacceptable. In the old days when you had Alberta Government Telephones, that never would have happened, Mr. Chairman. That never would have happened.

So the Conservatives have made things worse again, you know,

over and over. I think there's a pattern here, Mr. Chairman. I think that there's a real pattern that's developing here as I'm going through some of these experiences, whether it's airlines or telephones or any number of other things.

5:10

I haven't even got to health care yet and the government's plans to privatize health care. Let's compare in a broad sense the health care we have in Canada, with all its many flaws, and the health care system they have in the United States, which is the most privatized health care system in the world. Now, you'd think that free enterprise in health care would help save costs. You know, we've heard that from the minister from time to time, that more private delivery might help us save costs. But in the United States, if you look at the per capita costs of health care under that most private system in the world, they are double per person, per capita, the health care costs in Canada, and there are 50 million Americans with no health care coverage whatsoever. If you compare a private delivery for health care, on the one hand, with one on the very same continent, right next door, where it's not entirely but mostly public, you'll see better outcomes, lower costs, and just generally a better health care system. So there's a third example of how the privatization ideology has come tumbling down.

We have other places to go, I think, Mr. Chairman. The government is continuing to try and push the envelope of privatization through such things as P3s and so on.

Ms Blakeman: Because they believe; they really believe.

Mr. Mason: Well, I don't know if they believe. This is the thing, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I think some of them believe it in spite of the apparent facts that are there. But what I can't understand is – there is a connection here – who benefits from privatization, and who benefits from deregulation? Not me. Not ordinary families in this province. I don't think that they benefit; I think apparently they don't benefit. But some people do benefit.

Now, one of the questions I've always asked myself is that given that all the polling across Canada consistently shows that the public wants public health care – and that includes the public in Alberta. This is a fairly consistent finding in public opinion polls, that the majority of people in this country, including in Alberta, want to have, want to retain the public health care system. Yet governments around the country, not just this one but other governments across the country, including the current federal government and the previous Liberal federal government, have continually attempted to push the envelope with more and more privatization. You would think that that would be illogical. If the public wants public health care and public health care is better than private health care, then why wouldn't governments just do that?

The fact is that there are 100 or more big corporations that are insurance companies, drug companies, and private hospitals and health care delivery companies that take a look at the \$10 billion a year that we spend on health care in Alberta and, you know, probably 10 times that nationally every year, and they just drool. Mr. Chairman, when they look at the amount of money that we spend on our health care system, they can't contain themselves; they just start to drool. They want that money to pass through their balance sheet and end up on their bottom line before any sick person gets helped. They see an enormous amount of money that they can make if we could increase privatization, so they relentlessly pressure governments around the country and lobby them and spend money on them and give them campaign donations to try and convince them to have more private health care delivery.

That's the only reason that I can see, Mr. Chairman. There's no reason to have private health care when you've got a public system that's cheaper and works better and the public wants to keep it. What politician in their right mind would want to bring in private health care? But that's why. It's more than ideology; it's the interests. It's the vested interests that keep continuously pushing for private health care in our country and in our province and, of course, the ideology of . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I wish to remind you that we are talking about amendment A1.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was getting to that. Thank you for that.

I just want to indicate that the amendments to Bill 18 simply strengthen the bill, strengthen it from the point of view of the people proposing the bill, which represents one of the precepts or pillars of conservative ideology in our province, which is that, you know, you need to just let capital flow as freely as possible without any limits. These amendments, I think, simply serve to further that particular agenda, which I don't share and which, I believe, is historically bankrupt. I think the government is flying in the face, swimming upstream in the current of history. I don't think that they are going to be proven to be acting in the public interest on this particular approach. I don't believe that substantial impediments to trade actually exist, but this will have the effect of eliminating local procurement laws, which I think is a mistake.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I will conclude my comments on the amendments proposed by the government to this bill and take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A1. The chair shall put the question on the four parts of amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on Bill 18.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much. I just wanted an opportunity to raise my concern again about what I see as something that has been put into this bill that will make this bill very ripe for a constitutional challenge, and I cannot speak with enough urgency to try and convince this government to withdraw and amend this particular section of the bill because I think it is going to get us in a whole passel of trouble. Now, what I'm specifically referring to is the section in the Government Organization Act that I raised during second reading. I listened to see if there was a response coming back from the government explaining the choices that they had made, but there has been no response, which generally means that the government is not going to take any action.

5:20

Here is where the trouble is. Let me make sure that I've got the right section here; I can't be doing this wrong. It starts at the bottom

of page 6 of the hard copy of the bill. It's in section 7(1); the heading there is Regulations. It's saying that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is cabinet,

may make regulations in respect of matters relating to the implementation of the Agreement that the Minister considers are not provided for or are insufficiently provided for in this Schedule or any enactment.

It goes on in the next section:

(2) A regulation made under subsection (1)

which is the one that I just read,

(a) may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision.

That's where the problem is. It's the fact that it says that it essentially is delegating the power of this House to the cabinet. In the parliamentary tradition what is created by a Legislature or a Parliament must come back to that Legislature or Parliament to be amended or changed in any way. What we create only we can change.

You even see that with things like the private bills. I had a staff member come to me with one of the private bills that's before us right now, going: what is this? I said: well, this is what happens. The example I used was that it was an adult adoption act and that those at one point were always passed through the Legislature, so in order to undo an adult adoption act, it had to come back before the Legislative Assembly. At this point we don't see these very often anymore, but that was the example I was using. Then, lo and behold, we had one come up through private bills. So what we create we have to undo. What we create we have to modify.

The excuse the government uses so often about why they are not putting specifics in legislation anymore, why they're putting it in regulation is because they have to bring it back to the House to change it if they put it in legislation. If, for example, they put a timeline or an amount of money for a fine, let's say, in the legislation, in order to change the amount of that fine, it has to come back to the House, and it has to have an amending act to change that.

What this little tiny section, what that one little word does is say that the Government Organization Act, which is how these guys organize themselves, you know, which ministry is responsible for what piece of legislation, et cetera, et cetera – it basically all flows from that. The only thing more important in this Assembly is the Alberta Act, which is our Constitution. It's essentially saying under a regulation section that the cabinet can change an act without it being brought back to this House, which is wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong.

Further, there is one precedent to do this and, aside from that, generally a prohibition against doing it. I've already given you examples of how what we do has to come back to us to be changed. There is an example where this was not used. I talked about it last time. I was sort of guessing then, but I'm right. The only time it's been challenged and upheld in a court is in *Re Gray*, which essentially was around legislation that had been passed in 1914 in which the federal Parliament exempted farm workers from military service. They weren't required to serve. Then when the War Measures Act was implemented, the War Measures Act passed by the federal Parliament, it said: we are going to delegate our powers for the term of the war to the cabinet because we need those decisions made quickly, so we will agree to do that from this House. It was an entire House debate. They delegated it.

Under the cabinet that was operating under the auspices of the War Measures Act, they in 1917 went back to that same piece of legislation and deleted, removed, the exemption for farm workers. So then farm workers were subject to military draft. That exemption was challenged. Essentially, it was upheld because the Assembly

had delegated that authority under the War Measures Act. But that's the only time. Essentially, what the ruling said was: we will tolerate this only because these are extraordinary circumstances and we are under the War Measures Act. That, my friends, is the leading authority on what we're talking about here.

There was a second example from the middle of the last century in which the Canadian Tax Foundation essentially challenged a change in the Income Tax Act because they'd had the very odd thing where tax avoidance is okay, but tax evasion is not okay. By regulation the federal cabinet changed a particular proviso from being tax avoidance to being tax evasion and caught a number of people out as a result.

So this is a constitutional problem. It's called abdication. In other words, the Assembly has abdicated, walked away from, given over its control to a lesser, minor, power. That's exactly what's being contemplated here. My argument is that this is unconstitutional because we are not involved in extraordinary circumstances, like a war. It feels like it some days in here, but it's not. There are no guns; there's no artillery. Nobody's declared war on anybody else. We are not in a war situation. There is no reason why the government would need to give itself the power to change an act without it being able to come back into this Assembly. I believe this is a very, very bad precedent of the government to start to move in this direction.

I know that the government doesn't have a lot of time for sitting in this Assembly. I know that even today there was great irritation expressed by government members because we had a number of members in the opposition that wanted to speak to an appropriation bill: "Well, you know, why are they doing this? They've already spoken once before. Why do they need to speak again?" Well, frankly, the rules that we have in this House and other parliamentary Houses say that if members want to speak, they can speak. It's not up to the government to say: well, we're going to allow you one or two speakers here. As long as a member who's in good standing rises to speak and indicates their wish to speak, they are recognized, outside of very specific timelines that are preset. We this afternoon will run into one of those timelines.

We have two appropriation bills in front of us. It says that those appropriation bills must be voted on 15 minutes prior to the normal time of adjournment, so at 5:45 those votes will indeed be called. That will interrupt the rest of the business and curtail other debate, if you will. What is being anticipated and proposed in this Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 – I cannot emphasize enough how wrong this is.

What is the reason that has been given by the sponsoring member for this? He said: oh, well, you know, I talked about it when I introduced the bill. Well, indeed, he did. On March 3, 2009, on page 212 of *Alberta Hansard*, the paper version, at approximately 5:30 in the afternoon his reasoning was to

empower [the cabinet], the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations to temporarily amend noncompliant legislation. This will occur when prompt change is required to implement a TILMA panel ruling or for Alberta to avoid a challenge from B.C. under the TILMA when the Legislature is not in session.

Well, guess what? It's the government. They have 72 members. Whenever they want to call us into session, they can call us into session. That to me is not a good enough reason to say: oh, it's inconvenient for us to call the House into session; therefore, we should give ourselves the power to change an act of this Assembly by cabinet. Then he goes on and talks about regulations that would deal with unforeseen circumstances or regulatory deficiency which already exist in legislation. Well, it's a regulation; cabinet is empowered to do that already.

He said to me at the time: well, this was dealt with because there's a time limit. I do not see the time limit in this bill. What I do see is the government giving itself the power in the very next section, subsection (3), that "a regulation made under subsection (1) may be made retroactive to a date not earlier than April 1, 2007," and then a number of specifics around what happens if it is made retroactive.

5:30

I don't see this timeline that he's talking about until you get down to section (4), which, again, is specific to regulations but not to an act. Section (4) says, "A regulation made under subsection (1) is repealed on the earliest of the following" and then goes into, you know, "the coming into force of an amendment," the coming into force of a regulation that repeals it, or the expiration of three years from the day that the regulation, et cetera, et cetera. It does not include the act. It does not comment on changing an act. Once it's changed that act, it's changed, and there is no time limit that automatically expires on any change that cabinet might make to an act.

The minister's explanation. I have checked what he said, and in fact his expiration time limit does not apply to changes that cabinet would make to an act. Again, this is so wrong on so many levels. The government is in control of this. They control the timing of everything here, including their negotiations in the timing of the implementation of TILMA itself. If they couldn't get ready in time, then they should have negotiated better with B.C. around the implementation dates.

If they're worried that somehow we will be found lacking in some of our legislation and that a tribunal will then find us at fault and in need of changing something, then call the Legislature in and change it. Frankly, you're going to get enough of a lead time in the process that is set out for going to tribunal that you could hustle in and make those changes. But there is no reason to be circumventing the power of this Assembly in order to cover up your own problems with scheduling. It is unacceptable for the government to do that.

As part of my research I had looked at a couple of things around a bill and, you know, could you change or alter or delegate down a bill. With the help of the excellent staff from the Legislature Library I found two references. The first is appearing in *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 661, which is around the abandonment of a bill, that if a committee has presented a report to the House that a bill be withdrawn or informs the House that the committee has agreed that a bill will not be proceeded with, the committee has basically notified that it's decided not to proceed with the consideration of a bill without reporting it to the House.

Okay. There's a provision for it when you're talking about a bill, but we're not talking about a bill. In this amending act we are talking about the cabinet being able to change acts that we live by and, worse than that, that they can do it retroactively and forever. There is no time limit on this.

A number of really important tenets of our Westminster parliamentary system are being violated here. I start to think: "Okay. Why does nobody in the government seem too concerned about this?" It's not as though they hustled forward immediately with an amending act to change this. I think: "Well, it's going to work for them. It's going to be dang convenient because if they can get this through, they've now given themselves a tool where they can change any act of our Legislative Assembly without bringing it back here." Just imagine the consequences that that is going to have for this province.

Mr. Hancock: We won't need an opposition. You'll be out of work.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yeah, eventually it means that the House wouldn't sit because the government would not be required to bring changes forward to the Assembly to get the agreement of the Assembly to change it. The only reason it would need an Assembly would be to create new legislation, and at that point they may well be able to try and get around it by doing something with regulations. I'm assuming that's what they would try.

Now, I understand that the government, you know, has so many people that they're a bit bored sitting in here. They've already made decisions in their backrooms, and they've decided they want to get on with it, and they don't want to hear what the other people have to say. But you know what? This is still a democracy. As shabby and struggling as it is, this is still a democracy in Alberta. There are a number of people who did not vote for the ruling party, and their voice has as much right to be heard in this House as those who did support the party that formed the government.

I live in hope that even people who did support the government would recognize this for what it is. It is tyrannical. It is an enforcement of the majority upon a minority. It is legislating by stealth. It is doing through the back door what it is not allowed to do through the front door. I cannot emphasize enough how much this needs to be changed. It's also signalling to me that if the government does not bring forward an amending act or change this in some way, what is being signalled by this government for the rest of time is that it will have passed and given itself the ability to do something that's very wrong.

I know that for many of you in the backbenches of government, you think this is funny and amusing and kind of cute because the government has pulled a trick on all of us. But there may well be something that's very important to you or to your constituents that you want to be heard on, where you want to be able to raise the voices of your constituents in this House. If this passes, you will lose the opportunity to do that because they can decide to just slide it through as a cabinet OC, and you will never hear about it until it's published in the *Gazette*, if you happen to be someone who regularly reads the *Gazette*. How many people do that? Unfortunately, not as many as should, but that's not a fault of theirs. It's pretty obscure.

Thank you very much for the opportunity in Committee of the Whole to be very specific about what I have identified as an issue here. I have gone and gotten my legal references. For those of you who would like to follow along with it in *Re Gray*, it is referenced in *Constitutional Law of Canada*, written by Peter W. Hogg. I have here the 2004 edition. It's referenced in a couple of places. One is section 14(2), limitations imposed by a constitution, delegation of legislative power, which is appearing on page 334, and that goes through that particular example that is the exception to the rule. I mean, essentially, we cannot delegate our power. We are here to do this work, and we cannot delegate our power to a lesser authority unless there is an overriding reason like war, and we are not in a war position.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the bill.

Ms Pastoor: No, not on the bill.

Mr. Chair, thank you. I have a notice of amendment to Bill 18, that it be amended by striking out section 5. If that could be passed out, then we could discuss that, please.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has an amendment to Bill 18. It shall now be known as A2.

Please continue, hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm asking that we

strike out the whole section 5, which is found in the bill itself on page 6 and goes on to page 7. This amendment covers exactly what my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has been talking about for the last 20 minutes. This truly is, in my mind, something very scary if it goes through. After having listened to the Member for Edmonton-Centre and knowing full well that there were probably two people actually listening, I would venture to say that of the majority of the people in the . . . [interjections] Well, such a clever opposition we have because they can talk and listen at the same time.

5:40

However, I would suspect that there are many people in this House that don't realize or really understand the actual ramifications of being able to change an act in this House in the backrooms and not have it come back into this House. I believe that there will be consequences. Unfortunately, one of the things that I might hear coming from the opposite side is, to use a well-worn phrase: oh, well, that's collateral damage. Well, collateral damage may well go on for many, many years. I'm very passionate about the fact that everybody really, really understand what they're doing by not taking out section 5.

The regulations that I take particular interest in – and I'm going to try not to repeat everything that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre said only because she certainly had the quotes from the law books and also from the legislative books themselves to be able to back up what she was saying.

One of the things it says under 7(2) is:

A regulation made under subsection (1)

- (a) may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision, and
- (b) may specify the circumstances in which a suspension or modification of or substitution for a provision of an Act or regulation provided for under clause (a) is to operate.

I just really, really hesitate when I see that kind of language and that kind of an attempt to push this through a House that I'm not actually sure has really taken a look at this in depth to see what would happen in the end.

The reason for striking out the section, one that is a great concern to me, is the retroactivity of regulations. How can you change the rules of the game in the middle of the play? This is exactly what's happening here. How about all of those people that are going to be affected by thinking that they're playing by the rules? They've gone back two years and changed the rules. It's just incomprehensible why this would even come forward.

I really do believe that the ethics of the thinking behind this have to be questioned. Any consequences from this bill should go forward from the proclamation of the bill, not necessarily from the date of passing but from the proclamation. Then people can go forward. To go back two years and say, "Oh, sorry; we've changed the rules" is just, in my mind, ethically unacceptable.

To rely on a government to repeal a regulation or for the three-year period to expire with nothing but a smile and a promise is, again, very unwise. I believe that when somebody looks at this – and other people will look at this because, clearly, there will be consequences – they will see that there was, I think, a huge lack of respect for this House from the other side, which doesn't surprise me. I'm not sure that they have a great deal of respect for it when they make remarks like: it's really a waste of their time to be here.

I think that it'll show a great deal of lack of respect for the House and for the way that democracy truly should rule. Democracy should be based on trust. I don't believe that anything I see in this section 5 anywhere . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put a single question proposing the approval of the appropriation bills referred to Committee of the Whole.

Before I do that, I would like to call on the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that when the committee rises and reports, progress be reported on Bill 18.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In fact, I would like to do exactly that. I would like to put a motion on the floor that when we rise, the committee report progress on Bill 18.

[Motion to report progress on Bill 18 carried]

Bill 21

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009

Bill 22

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009

The Chair: The chair shall now put the question on appropriation bills 21 and 22.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 21, Bill 22. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, does the Assembly concur?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move, given the hour, that we now call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:48 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

Issue 17

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 18, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our citizens. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly today a great diplomat and a friend, Mr. Tom Huffaker, consul general of the United States of America in Calgary. I was honoured to host a farewell lunch and pay tribute to Mr. Huffaker today. We've been very, very fortunate to have the consul general at his post strengthening Alberta-U.S. relations since the summer of 2006. We're grateful to him for helping to build knowledge and understanding of Alberta as a secure, reliable, environmentally responsible, and growing energy supplier to the United States. He has also helped improve border efficiency through the introduction of the NEXUS program at both the Edmonton and the Calgary airports. I can tell you that Mr. Huffaker's hard work and dedication have been appreciated and have gone a long way to illustrating that Alberta and the United States are more than just neighbours; we're business partners, and we're friends.

It was a pleasure to host Mr. Huffaker and his wife, Claire. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, accompanied by Tim Marriott from protocol. I would ask that they rise and receive the very friendly and traditional warm welcome of this Legislative Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We'll proceed with school groups. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you a very proud Albertan who lives in my constituency, Pastor Dan Dressler. Pastor Dressler moved to Alberta in the 1940s. He was married in 1947 right here in Edmonton. He spent the better part of the next 50-plus years in various communities in Alberta as a pastor and now resides comfortably in Edmonton-Ellerslie. As you know, Mr. Speaker, nine of those years were spent serving the community of Barrhead. Although he is officially retired, he remains spiritually active in the community. At this time I would like to thank Pastor Dressler for his service to this province and ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

For my second introduction it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a school group from my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. They are joining us today from Meadows Baptist Academy, which I had the privilege of visiting a couple of times to educate about the Legislature and to present scrolls for various

academic and fine arts achievements. I want to thank the parents, teachers, and pastors who came down with the students today: Pastor Kevin Williams, Pastor Aaron Pollock, Kristi Taylor, Darren Esayenko, Deisy Campos, and principal Alex Antoniak. I would like them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly my guests Madeline Rainey and her 16-year-old son, Connor, who are seated in the public gallery. Madeline and Connor presented a petition to the Edmonton public school board on January 13, 2009, seeking more immediate benefits for the district's special-needs students. Madeline is pleased to participate in the board's Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta consultations. I would now ask both Madeline and Connor to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Secondly, I have a group of wonderful, bright students from St. Nicholas Catholic junior high school. There are 50 grade 9 students, Mr. Speaker, as well as their teacher and assistant principal, Norma Jani, teacher Severina Rossi, student teacher Kristen Mackie, and teachers assistants Lois Witteveen and Fresia Pilquil. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 18 visitors from the Public Affairs Bureau. They are seated in both galleries, and I'm very proud of the work that they're doing for the government of Alberta and all Albertans. They are Miss Chelsea Gowing, Ms Stephanie Brown, Mr. Jac MacDonald, Ms Dawn Astbury, Ms Ellen Rowsell, Ms Jacqueline Gibson, Mrs. Tawnya Crerar, Mr. Steven Hodges, Ms Nikki Booth, Mr. Derek Cummings, Ms Meagan Badger, Mrs. Pam Sharpe, Mrs. Josephine Lamy, Mr. Clayton Filkohazy, Ms Julia Smail, Ms Amanda Costanza, Ms Carolyn Gregson, Mr. Paul Marck, and Ms Brenda Fiske. Sorry if I didn't pronounce all of the names properly, but I do want this Assembly to welcome our guests.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. First, it's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly members of the Alberta College and Technical Institute Student Executive Council, or ACTISEC. This organization represents 120,000 postsecondary education students in our province. They're an excellent partner and stakeholder of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology.

This week eight students from across the province have been meeting fellow MLAs and department officials. They're seated in the members' gallery. I want to commend them for the good work they do. I would like to ask each to stand as I call their name and receive the warm welcome. First, Matt Koczur, the chair of ACTISEC; Maigan van der Giessen, president of the Students' Association of MacEwan; Heather MacBeath, vice-president academics of SAIT; Rory Tarant, president of the Grande Prairie

Regional College Students' Association; Geoff Tate, vice-president external and apprenticeship, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology; Stephen Griffith, director of policy of ACTISEC; Lisi Monro, vice-chair of ACTISEC; and Adam Boechler, executive director of ACTISEC. Mr. Speaker, these students do a yeoman's work for the students across our province. I would ask that the Assembly give them a warm welcome in our traditional way.

Mr. Speaker, I do have another introduction. I don't believe my guests are in the House just yet, but I would like to read their names into the *Hansard* and also have members give them a warm welcome. They are eight members from our postsecondary excellence division from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology. They're currently on tour of the building to get a better feel for what happens here. They'll be seated in the gallery shortly. They are Anne Ryton, Kevin Shufflebotham, Bradley Burroughs, Kelly O'Donnell, Meghann Eagle, Roya Damabi, Janet Tully, and Lisa Fox. They will be accompanying us shortly, and I would ask that members recognize their attendance here.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from Alberta's three officially bilingual communities. Francophones have deep roots in Alberta's history, and the francophone community is a vibrant part of the economic, social, and cultural life of Albertans. Francophones have established schools, communities, and cultural centres and other services in more than 35 communities. Of these, three municipalities are officially bilingual: Beaumont, southeast of Edmonton; Legal, north of Edmonton; and Falher, in the Peace Country.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: the mayors of these municipalities, His Worship Camille Bérubé, the mayor of Beaumont, accompanied by Mr. Marc Landry, the town administrator; His Worship Albert St. Jean, mayor of Legal, accompanied by Mr. Ken Baril, deputy mayor; Mrs. Donna Buchinski, deputy mayor of Falher, accompanied by Mr. Gerard Nicolet, the town administrator.

The town of Falher has provided a pin for each of the members, representing Falher as the honey capital of Canada. The town houses the world's largest honeybee, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the members of this Assembly to give our guests a very warm welcome to our Legislature.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a few young friends of mine from Edmonton-Meadowlark. Their names are Ms Agnes Primrose, Mrs. Marjory Young, Mrs. Alice Fraser, Mrs. Bertha Goldberg, Ms Phyllis Johnson, and Ms Ethel Ward. They're accompanied by their group leaders, Ms Christine Okrusko, Miss Kristen Fulton, and Mr. Ted Mortimer. The Waterford of Summerlea retirement home specializes in excellent independent and assisted living services while providing an active and healthy environment. Andrew Carnegie said: "As I grow older, I pay less attention to what [people] say. I just watch what they do." That's why my guests are here today to view our House proceedings before touring the beautiful Leg. Building. I hope they're pleased with what they see. I look forward to joining them at 2 o'clock for

a picture. They are seated in the members' gallery above, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly five veterans of the 418 City of Edmonton Squadron. Established in 1942 as an Intruder squadron, 418 became the highest scoring Mosquito squadron by the end of the Second World War, scoring being a polite way to say that they shot down more enemy fighters than any other RCAF squadron. Today, March 18, is the 65th anniversary of the squadron. I would like to recognize the veterans here today seated in the public gallery: Mr. Jim Gillespie, Mr. Art Maskell, Mr. Terry Champion, Mr. Bernie Sheppard, and Mr. Monte Stout. I will be discussing the 418 Squadron more in depth later this afternoon in a member's statement. I would ask all five men to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if my guests are here now or not, but I'd like to introduce them to you and through you to this Assembly. It's a very bright group of political science students from The King's University College who are visiting the Legislature today. They are learning about political systems and are eager to observe government in action. Later this afternoon I will have the honour of meeting with them and sharing with them my experience as an MLA. They are accompanied by their professor, Dr. John Hiemstra. They would be seated in both galleries, and I would like that they would rise if they're here and get the traditional warm reception of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend and constituent of mine, Billy Franklin. Billy lives in Brooks and among other business interests runs a very successful outfitting business called Silver Sage Outfitters. He's accompanied today by a fellow outfitter, Gord Burton. They're in Edmonton, drove up today to attend a meeting in the building later this afternoon. They're seated up in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Calgary-Montrose Scholarship Recipients

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fostering a culture of innovation in our province requires us to support our young people so that they are the brightest, most innovative young minds in the world. I am proud to say that many young minds reside in my wonderful constituency. I am proud that 197 of my constituents have received the Alexander Rutherford scholarship for high school achievement, the Louise McKinney postsecondary scholarship, or the Jason Lang scholarship. That is a remarkable \$286,000 in scholarship dollars distributed in Calgary-Montrose alone. They are some of the 41,000 students in the province that will receive \$77 million in government scholarships this year. These are investments in the future of students that have worked hard to succeed.

I continually advocate the importance of education, and I'm pleased to see my constituents recognized for their academic achievements. My constituents never fail to fill me with pride, and these students are certainly an example of this. I hope I am able to encourage more young students to pursue postsecondary education, and I wish the recipients and all other students in my constituency success in their postsecondary studies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Crossroads Business Association

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize and support some innovative work being done by the Crossroads Community Association. The Crossroads Community Association is situated just east of the Deerfoot in northeast Calgary and is at the very eastern part of my constituency. It is comprised of the communities of Vista Heights, Mayland Heights, and Belfast. I share this community with my hon. colleague from Calgary-East, who represents the Mayland Heights portion.

Mr. Speaker, this is a relatively small community, but what most people don't realize is that this community encompasses a large number of local businesses. As a result the Crossroads Community Association has endeavoured to form a business association for its community. On February 25 I attended the inaugural meeting of the Crossroads Business Association, and I was very impressed with the turnout for the first meeting. The community association leaders who are organizing this endeavour – president Tony Wooster, membership director Jamie Johnson, and Larry Leach – need to be commended for recognizing the important link business and entrepreneurship have to the health and vibrancy of communities.

At a time when businesses are facing extraordinary challenges, becoming an active and involved partner in the community will enhance productivity and competitiveness. Additionally, the Crossroads Business Association will be able to be used as a vehicle to identify important issues in the community that impact business operations and competitiveness as well as to develop collaborative strategies to address these issues.

Mr. Speaker, quite often, even in this House, businesses are criticized and maligned for being profit driven above all else. If there is one thing that most business owners and operators know, it is that a successful business has close ties to its local community and vice versa. I see business and industry as an agent of change with strong community values, and I'm glad that the Crossroads Community Association does as well. I am looking forward to seeing how this association grows over the years as it has the potential to develop and cultivate innovative and collaborative solutions in the Crossroads community.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Tabling Documents

The Speaker: Hon. members, on several occasions the chair has risen in this House to discuss the issue of tablings. On Thursday, March 12, 2009, an hon. member tabled a document on behalf of one of his hon. colleagues, and this document has been brought to the chair's attention for several reasons. The issues are as follows. It is not clear what the document is about. There's no cover page, no title, and no heading. The document is not dated nor signed, nor is there an author identified. While the document appears to be an excerpt from a document that is part of legal proceedings, there is no indication of what the document is an excerpt from.

Hon. members, it is important to note that all documents tabled in the House become official records of the Assembly. They are available to the public through the Legislature Library. The description of sessional papers in the Votes and Proceedings is an actual description of the document and is not based on the comments of the member tabling the document. If there is no way of identifying the document, it is difficult for those producing the official records of the Assembly to be accurate in their description of the document. Staff should not be expected to waste time trying to decipher these documents.

1:50

There is a need to set additional guidelines, and the chair would ask all hon. members to follow them. One, copies should be of good quality and legible: five copies collated, stapled, or clipped together. Two, letters should be signed, and the name of the sender should be legible. Three, website articles should clearly indicate the name of the website so that we can properly quote from that website. Four, responses to written questions and motions for returns must indicate that they are such. Please do not table only a set of documents. It should be clear to all of us that the documents are provided as responses. Five, reports, charts, and similar items must have a title or heading on the document. Six, the general rule is that members should table documents under Tabling Returns and Reports.

The chair will be advised when tablings do not meet these guidelines, and those purported tablings will be returned to members and forever be forgotten by this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Achievement Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has in the past three years given out over \$110 million in achievement bonuses to selected senior officials. The vast majority of civil servants don't even qualify for this pool of money. To the Premier: why is a select group of senior staff getting tens of millions of dollars of bonuses from this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the achievement bonus system is put in place to reward achievement. That means bringing budgets into line and helping government deliver the programs that it wants to be delivered. The number of people that participate in the bonus are those that we would call out of scope. These would be people working for the public sector who are no longer a member of a union. The number of people eligible for achievement bonuses is 6,100. The average bonus for the year prior was about \$5,300 each.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government hands out these millions to very generously paid government officials, Alberta's seniors are told by the same government to pay for basic drug costs. Why is the Premier asking seniors to sacrifice when he's not asking the same of richly paid senior government officials?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. leader is referring to this fiscal year that's ending here in a couple of weeks. We made a commitment as a government that we will honour the remuneration obligations that this government has made to this fiscal year-end, which is March 31. Starting April 1, there is a new

budget. There will be changes. As I said earlier, we'll monitor the revenue stream very carefully, but we may be coming and asking both out of scope and in scope and even members here at the Legislative Assembly to contribute equally to balancing the budget.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: will the Premier today commit to suspending this bonus pool?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, for next year the bonus pool is suspended. I will say that the reason that we had the achievement bonus in place is that I believe it dates back to 1999, when our public sector, especially the management ranks, were much lower paid than other equal positions in other provinces. So we asked a private-sector committee to review how we could look at a bonus system and narrow the margin. We did incorporate many years ago the suggestions and, actually, recommendations of the committee.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Deputy ministers, the most senior government officials, have particularly high pay levels. Cabinet, a political body, signs off on the bonuses of this group. Again to the Premier: does the Premier not see that a political body signing off on the bonuses of senior staff jeopardizes the independence of the civil service?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure where the member is coming from, but it doesn't really matter if the recommendations come from a private-sector committee or from negotiations. At the end of the day cabinet signs off on all salary-negotiated supplements. It is the responsibility of government.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the bonuses themselves are more than the average Albertan makes in a year. To the Premier: how are these bonuses determined?

Mr. Stelmach: They're determined on achievement. To give an example, this year, as our revenue was dropping dramatically towards the latter part of the year, I instructed my deputy to meet with the deputies and other management to ensure that we do balance the budget this year, and the budget will be balanced. For next year we will be, as I said before, suspending, and we will be looking at other public-sector salaries. But, like I said, we're going to do it very fairly. We're going to meet with them. We're going to gauge our revenue stream and our expenses, and we may have to approach everyone to contribute to balancing the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last July cabinet approved significant pay increases for this April to deputy ministers to a basic rate of \$265,000 per year. That's before bonuses. This salary was set in the midst of a boom, when the government was expecting huge surpluses. Now we're facing a deficit. Again to the Premier: will these pay hikes be continuing?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I can tell you that for the next year there won't be any pay hikes, not for elected officials and not for any of the senior officials. But, again, there's the discussion: then what do we do with other public-sector people? I've said that we want to keep our nurses, doctors, teachers working. We do have an agreement with teachers, and we're going to live up to that agreement. It's

based on average weekly earnings. We just signed it last year, so we're committed to that. We'll hold discussions with union leaders, if necessary, to see how we can bring our budget into line. Can we balance the budget based on the backs of the public sector for next year? No, we can't. It's impossible because the revenue drop is substantial. But we'll look over the next couple of years. If the economy does recover, then we won't have to go through the pain, but if it doesn't, we will have to sit down and have discussions with our public sector.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Transparency was one of the Premier's priorities when he signed off on the 2007-08 annual report of Executive Council. My first question is for the Premier. Why in this report did the Premier fail to disclose the bonuses paid to senior officials within the Ministry of Executive Council?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I would ask the chair of the Public Accounts Committee as to how that was missed. You know, it's obvious that today he recognized it, but when it did occur, he didn't notice it. But we did immediately post on the website a little, tiny omission. It's a little line in terms of the accumulated bonuses for the year. But the bonuses are not something that just came up this past fiscal year. The bonuses have been in place since I believe 1999, when, again, the private-sector committee came forward and gave recommendations to government to close the gap.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Given that the former Premier, Mr. Klein, as President of Executive Council always made sure that there was full disclosure of the bonuses, I expect better from the Premier next year.

Now, again, given that the Deputy Minister of Executive Council calls the shots on the annual achievement bonus fund allotment, what is set aside now for the fiscal year that's going to end March 31 for achievement bonuses? Is it \$40 million? Is it \$45 million? What is the amount?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is a pool set aside for achievement bonuses. One incorrect statement. What happens is the Deputy Minister of Executive Council does meet with the deputies. There is a pool for deputies, and then there is a separate pool for other management staff. He also meets with ministers. But we also consult with the committee to ensure that the bonus that we have, the pool that we have set aside, is consistent with their recommendations. The deputy minister will decide in consultation with ministers to see if the objectives of the business plan were met.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taxpayers of this province have the right to know. Again to the Premier: what amount has been set aside by cabinet for achievement bonuses for the fiscal year that's going to end on March 31? Is it \$40 million? Is it \$45 million? Why won't you tell us?

Mr. Stelmach: The problem in informing the House – he's part of the Public Accounts Committee; he should know that. The pool for this year, for '08-09 . . . [interjection] I'm sorry. He asked the question, and I guess he doesn't want to hear the answer.

The pool for this year, for '08-09 – the budget year '08-09 is ending on March 31, which is in a couple of weeks – is \$40 million and, again, shared by 6,100 people.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government tells hardworking Albertans to tighten their belts, but it's handing out \$40 million in bonuses to bureaucrats this year. [interjection] It deserves more than one question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood does have the floor.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I'll get an answer. Witness the outrage of U.S. politicians about unjustified bonuses paid to AIG executives and contrast it with this government's justification of handouts to their top bureaucrats. When will the government show some respect to hard-pressed taxpayers and cancel these extravagant bonuses?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it looks like the leader of the opposition knew of the pool, and the chair of Public Accounts didn't, but that wasn't part of this question.

As I said before, for next year, in keeping with the belt-tightening, the bonuses will be suspended, number one. Number two, we will look at other settlements. We want to be fair. We don't want to do something overnight, and that's why we're committed for all public-sector staff to keep our commitments to March 31 of '09. As we proceed, it may be a different story. I don't know what that'll be as we'll have to watch the revenue and expenditure sides very carefully.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Most provincial employees don't get big fat bonuses.

More than 300 lumber workers were fired last month at the Tolko, Millar Western, and Weyerhaeuser plants. Meanwhile, Sustainable Resource bureaucrats made \$2 million in bonuses. To the Premier: how can you look in the eyes of Albertans who've just lost their jobs when you're handing over these extravagant bonuses to top bureaucrats?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is one omission on behalf of the member. Most public-sector employees are covered by union agreements, and we're not breaking them. This is another commitment we made, not a union agreement but a commitment we made to Albertans. They work for the public sector. They're not in a union; they're out of unions. There are approximately, as I said, 6,100 people that share in the bonus package.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, ConocoPhillips and other oil and gas companies let 200 people go just last month. In the meantime, Energy bureaucrats are making \$1.5 million in bonuses. Again to the Premier: how can you look in the eyes of these Albertans who have just lost their jobs and tell them that you've forked over 1 and a half million dollars in bonuses to Energy bureaucrats?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're suspending the bonuses for next year.

You know, looking in the eyes? Have that member look in the eyes of all the people that lost their job and still stand in this House and tell me why he wants \$330,000 more for office expenditures for two members – \$330,000 more. We treated that party very fairly because this Assembly – this Assembly – the committee, gave him expenditures for four members, not to reflect the two members he has now but for four members, plus he wants even more money.

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

Provincial Economic Strategy

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economic situation has been significantly affected by the current downturn, particularly as it relates to low energy prices. As a result, we know that government revenues this year will be significantly lower than they were last year. Can the Minister of Finance and Enterprise assure Albertans that the government will do all it can to keep Albertans working?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're aware that our infrastructure expenditure in Alberta is two to three times what it is anywhere else. For every billion dollars that we spend in infrastructure, it supports 11,600 jobs. We have identified that the infrastructure spending is part of our four-point platform this year that will help us retain jobs and keep Albertans working.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, my first supplementary to the same minister. That's well and good, but we see other governments raising taxes to pay for new infrastructure. Can the minister assure Albertans that they won't lose their tax advantage as a result of this massive investment in public infrastructure?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, we intend to keep the lowest public taxes of any regime in Canada. Just today New Brunswick, for example, announced that they were going to make moves on taxation, still with their intent to 2012. It is not as much advantage as Albertans have. Albertans pay between \$3,000 and \$5,000 less than any other Canadian in taxes, and this year they got the added advantage of \$1 billion returned to their pockets from the health premiums.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, if we're in such a good position, why would we consider borrowing to pay for this infrastructure if we have the money available?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at borrowing as another way to lever from our triple-A credit rating to look at smart expenditures for capital, to look at ways of investing in Albertans. Today the Young Presidents' Organization talked about this being an ideal time to use our leverage as a triple-A credit rating to find projects that would be worthy of borrowing, with payback not only to Albertans in infrastructure but, particularly on the short-term borrowing that we have been looking at, to take advantage of opportunities to build Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Water Management

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public needs to trust the government to protect our most precious natural resource, water. However, the Balzac fiasco has brought one thing into the light: that trust was violated. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. The 2006-07 supplementary estimates allocated \$8.3 million to support waste-water elements for the entire Balzac project. They specifically mentioned the horse-racing track and the equine centre. Now that only the mall is being built, where is the money?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the allocation of funding to various water and waste-water projects throughout this province is not dependent upon what develops in the area but, rather, on the participation of the municipality. So the project is facilitated through a cost-sharing agreement with the municipality, and the development that comes forward is at various paces. I'm sure that this particular development will be fully built over a reasonable period of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Given that this money for a horse track and an equine centre came from a program restricted to a confirmed agricultural processing investment, meaning food and beverage processing, and there is no longer any connection to this at all – there's only a mall left – why have Albertans paid for water treatment for a privately owned mall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the agriculture component of this doesn't relate at all to what the hon. member is talking about. It was the transfer of water to Balzac, which met the criteria at that particular time from the municipality.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Environment. Giving a water allocation to a horse-racing track and a megamall through a completely unrelated agricultural food processing program is subverting sound water management principles and betraying the public trust. To the minister: how can Albertans trust that you will make proper decisions about our water, based on this past history?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I made a commitment at the beginning of this session that I would not allow myself to be baited by inflammatory preambles, and I hold firm to that, but this member is coming very, very close.

The fact of the matter is that the water allocation is to the municipality. The municipality of Rocky View is the one that holds the licence. It has nothing whatsoever to do with racetracks or malls. She should ask the municipality of Rocky View what they intend to do with the water that they have on their licence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:10

Farm Equipment Hauling

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received numerous calls and complaints from some of the farmers in my constituency regarding a new farm equipment policy. In fact, in today's local

paper there was an editorial that it must be pick on farmer week. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Is the minister seriously considering bringing in regulations that will increase the cost farmers have to pay to operate their own equipment?

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Our government knows how important farmers are to this province and how challenging it is for them to operate today. We're actually doing everything we can to help farmers to make sure that they're able to transport their equipment safely and efficiently on our highways, but at the same time we have to make sure that all Albertans and the travelling public are safe. That's why we have always had safety standards on hauling farm equipment from one piece of property to another.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I'm being told that the farmers are now being required to have a permit to operate their equipment. Some farmers have a dozen pieces of equipment on their land. Do you honestly expect them to get a permit for each piece of equipment?

Mr. Ouellette: No, Mr. Speaker, we certainly do not expect them to have to do that. We have made it very easy for farmers. They're only ever going to have to go out and get one permit. They're just going to have to have a permit that shows that they're a farmer, and they're not going to have to list all that equipment. We just want to make sure that they do it safely. All they're going to have to do is make one phone call. There's no charge for the permit, but we do require that large equipment is properly marked and that other drivers use the road safely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Is it true that as we speak, your law enforcement officers are out ticketing farmers who don't obey these new rules?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, one thing is for sure: my department is not trying to make life difficult for farmers. In fact, I haven't heard of one ticket being handed out to a farmer for moving farm equipment. But I've got to tell you something. There are people out there trying to masquerade as farmers, and they're doing commercial operations. We can't have that. [interjections] It is not fair to other commercial operators. We can't have commercial equipment running with purple fuel and on farm plates. Commercial operators will be ticketed. [interjections]

The Speaker: And we have passed the full-moon phase.

Achievement Bonuses

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I'm not the only witness to the daylight robbery being perpetrated by Alberta Justice on Alberta taxpayers. This government claims to represent all our interests. Obviously, you need a reminder that Robin Hood gave the loot to the poor, not to appointed senior civil servants. Those same people who decided that it wasn't in the public interest to prosecute 19 electoral violations are likely getting a \$5.8 million windfall. My question is for the Minister of Justice. Can she explain exactly what types of department savings merited such largesse in bonus payouts?

Ms Redford: I'd like the hon. member to repeat the last part of his question. I want to make sure I understood exactly what he said, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That counts as a question and an answer. We'll go on to the second question.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Mr. Speaker, Biggie Smalls would rap about this heist if he were still with us. To the Minister of Justice again: what input do you have around the cabinet table into how this \$5.8 million is disbursed and to whom these bonuses are paid?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't get all of the first question, but I got enough of it to know that the hon. member is treating something which I take very seriously in a humorous way. I have said in this House over and over again that the prosecutors in the Department of Justice prosecute in the public interest. I believe that, this government believes that, I believe that the people of Alberta believe that, and I do not believe that it is appropriate to make political hay with something that is so serious.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much for that response, but I'd still like an answer to my second question. As the Minister of Justice how do you decide who gets the bonus payments, and on what is this based?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question. Our prosecutors have integrity. Our prosecutors, as far as I understand my job, are compensated according to an agreement that allows them to be compensated sufficiently for the important and independent work that they do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Provincial Economic Strategy (continued)

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are in the midst of a global economic recession, and Alberta is being affected along with most other jurisdictions around the world. My question to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: during these difficult times what is the government's plan for preserving prosperity and quality of life for Albertans?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, again I reference our four-point plan. The first part of the plan is to reduce our spending. I think you've heard our Premier relate to that, that we're going to tighten our belts. We're going to make sure that infrastructure, health care, education are priorities for Albertans, that we provide those services as much as possible. That emphasis will be reflected in this budget. Again, with the comments that I made previously about infrastructure, keeping Alberta moving, keeping Alberta's goods going to market will be a good part of our expenditure targets this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: that takes care of the present, but what about the future?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's been very interesting today to hear somebody talk to us about the alphabet to determine whether Alberta

is going to go into a deep V and come right back up or whether we're going to go down and spend a little while in the bottom of the trough. I believe Alberta's record is that when we hit a recession period, as we have, we look very carefully at what pays our way, and that's the commodity prices, essentially oil and gas. Regardless of what industry you are in, oil and gas is what has distinguished Alberta and given us a superior track record on revenues. It's not affordable to imagine that people are going to get away with paying less for those commodities in the future. Fossil fuels are here to stay. I expect our deep V will change very soon, and as we come out of this recession, Albertans will see once again a very buoyant economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister, my last question: is there any indication how long this downturn or this recession might last?

Ms Evans: Frankly, no, Mr. Speaker. We'd all like to think that it would be a shorter period. Many of the financial agencies predict that Alberta will be better off. The International Monetary Fund predicts that it'll be a recovery period through 2010 for Alberta.

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

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday there was a meeting of seniors who are members of CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and they expressed their outrage that the minister of health is proposing changes to their pharmaceutical coverage. Today they'll be even more outraged to learn that Health and Wellness is paying their senior management \$1.8 million in bonuses. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. This plan creates have and have-not seniors. Canada's health care is based on the principle of universality. Can the minister explain how this plan upholds that very cherished and envied principle?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that kind of question just exactly shows you how uninformed that particular group is. They know full well that drug prescriptions have nothing to do with the Canada Health Act, have nothing to do with universality. It just absolutely amazes me here in this House that we have this group over here: one day they're attacking paramedics and their ability to perform their role, the next day they're attacking our civil servants, the next day they're attacking our prosecutors, and then they wonder why nobody elects them in four years when they've attacked every group in the province.

Ms Pastoor: The theatrics are getting better.

Will the minister admit that any change to seniors' pharmaceutical costs that creates a deductible based on income is just another form of taxation on the people that have the greatest need for those medications?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've said on many occasions that what we are attempting to do in health care is to make this system sustainable into the future so that when all of us are in the age category where we have to rely on a government benefit supplemental program, it's going to be there for us. We have introduced a new

model that we propose to move forward with in 2010. Now, I have said that the world has changed since we brought that forward, and we are taking a second look at whether all of the numbers in the model are still correct. We've heard seniors. When we finish that assessment, we will bring back to this Assembly what we believe is the appropriate program in this environment.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. I do realize you have said that you would look at it, which is sort of going into my third question. If you would commit to a full review of the whole program, when could we expect a timeline where this would be reported back to the House?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike members of the opposition, who just sort of fly off and say things and do things and don't seem to have a co-ordinated effort, when the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who chairs Public Accounts, doesn't inform his leader as to what he knows and what he doesn't know and back and forth, we do things in a way that we work it through the process. That's exactly what we're doing, and we will have something for this particular House to consider this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Nuclear Power

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bruce Power has launched an advertising campaign in support of their bid to bring nuclear reactors and radioactive waste with a shelf life of thousands of years to Alberta. The Minister of Energy commissioned a report from a nuclear panel almost a year ago, and our documents show that that panel was dissolved in December. To the minister: why are you sitting on the public release of this report if not because nuclear power in Alberta is a ridiculous waste of taxpayers' dollars?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, all Albertans are entitled to their opinion. However, relative to the report I think that it's an extremely valuable document for Albertans. We are going through it and assessing the information therein, and in due course we will deal with it publicly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a year late at this point.

A nuclear plant creates 2,000 tonnes of radioactive waste per year that nobody can clean up. We've already got an environmental disaster on our hands in the form of tailings ponds that nobody can clean up. Now this government wants to repeat that mistake, this time with an undisposible pool of radioactive waste that nobody can clean up. To the minister: why are you sitting on your panel's report if not because you know it's a recipe for yet another environmental disaster?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, it really is unfortunate that individuals cannot get beyond 1950s and '40s and '30s technology. The nuclear industry that works globally today, as a matter of fact one of the sources of electrical energy that is the most benign relative to greenhouse gas emissions, is a much, much different group of facilities than were in place at the times when we've had rather major accidents, nothing similar to what's happening.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, 1950, 2050, there is no answer for disposing of nuclear waste. Hate to break it to you, but there's nothing.

Now, the experts also agree on one other thing, that nuclear power leaves taxpayers on the hook for billions and billions of dollars. Meanwhile the 30,000 Albertans losing their jobs so far this year believe that that money can be spent on sustainable job creation, not a boondoggle. When will you stop hiding your nuclear report and acknowledge the truth, that nuclear power is expensive, too dangerous, and too short sighted to play a role in our economic future?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that in the province of Alberta now – and in the province of Alberta as we see it going forward – the taxpayers of Alberta are not on the hook for any of the generation that we consume in the province now. We don't see that the taxpayers of Alberta will be in any different position whatever type of alternate and new energy sources are brought to play in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Country of Origin Labelling

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For some time our agricultural industry has been concerned about the potential impact of mandatory country of origin labelling being introduced in the United States. Monday, March 16, was the day that COOL, as it is called, came into effect, and as I understand it, we have yet to resolve this important trade issue. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: could the minister provide some detail on the status of this regulation, which essentially segregates Canadian product and imposes extra costs?

Mr. Groeneveld: Yes, I can, Mr. Speaker. In January the USDA introduced some flexibility into COOL, addressing some of our concerns on the labelling requirements for Canadian beef products, but the USDA is now requesting that the industry voluntarily implement stricter labelling, effectively reducing flexibility. The Canadian industry will be faced with extra costs in order to adhere to these labelling requirements. In addition, as the U.S. looks to buy more domestic products, COOL certainly has the ability to push our products out of their market.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. To the same minister. My ag constituents meet with me often, and they want to know what action is being taken to address this ongoing issue because, in their words, they don't think it's cool.

Mr. Groeneveld: Although the Canadian government has jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker, over these trading matters, Alberta continues to raise the issue with our U.S. trade partners and our federal counterparts in Ottawa. ALMA, or the Livestock and Meat Agency, is also addressing the issue through incremental market access. ALMA played a key role in bringing many organizations who had similar concerns and views to the table to ensure a single industry voice on the issue. This resulted in a unified position within Alberta and Canada on incremental market access and stronger advocating on the national level. We've already seen the results of some of that with the incremental market access into Hong Kong.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: what else can this government or Alberta's beef industry do to remain competitive when faced with such a trade barrier as COOL?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have two options, as I see it, for addressing this issue. We can hope that COOL does not proceed in its current form, and then we return to the status quo, and any cattleman will tell you that the status quo has not been very profitable. Or we can take charge of our own future and focus on accessing markets that will be profitable for our producers. The Alberta livestock and meat strategy does just this. It is positioning our industry as a desirable trade partner in Canadian international markets such as Korea, China, and Japan as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Achievement Bonuses (continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year Service Alberta handed out \$3.9 million in achievement bonuses to its senior staff. That is the second-highest amount paid out by all ministries, beaten only by the Department of Justice. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how does the minister justify \$3.9 million in bonuses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's really important to bring some clarity to this issue. Just to make it very clear, Service Alberta's bonuses were \$2.7 million. The other portions were when Service Alberta was with the former ministry, under the ministry of the Treasury Board, where air transportation, regulatory review, and corporate human resources were.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What are the criteria used to give out these bonuses?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, with respect to these bonuses this policy is handled through corporate human resources and is based on achievement, as was mentioned previously, and based on the hard work of the civil service. I think it's really important to validate the hard work that these civil servants do to support all of us in the work that we're doing for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Who gives the final sign-off on these achievement bonuses for senior staff members?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the Premier answered that question very well. I will add that with respect to this whole area, again, it's validating the hard work that civil servants do for Albertans and making sure that their interests are protected and that they are accountable as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:30

Gang-related Crime

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Gangs and gang violence seem to be taking root in communities right across Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. How is the minister addressing these very serious concerns about crime and safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the work that we've done through crime and safe communities, the Solicitor General and I have worked in partnership with police commissions across this province to talk about the issues that they are facing. Apart from the work that we've already done in introducing Bill 50, which has gone a long way to help police officers do their job better and to disrupt crime, I had the opportunity to speak last night to the Calgary Police Commission, where it was very clear that there is a very strong synergy between the work that the provincial government is doing around education, prevention, awareness as well as enforcement and prosecution and the work that police services across this province are doing.

Mr. Speaker, we will also be hosting in June a summit on gang activity, that the Premier will be chairing, and at that summit we are going to be able to look at what we have all been doing up until now with respect to gangs and what the long-term strategy should be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The next question to the same minister. The lure of the gang lifestyle can be very attractive for some young people. What is being done to reduce recruitment into gangs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important part of what we have to talk about for safe communities. It's very clear that all of the work that is done through Health and Wellness, Children and Youth Services, Education, Culture and Community Spirit, and the work that policing agencies are doing across this province has to speak to young people about the risks of criminal activity and a gang lifestyle.

It's very clear, Mr. Speaker, that we also have to make sure that we're addressing the root causes of crime, that we're dealing with vulnerable people who may very well end up in situations where they develop addictions that could lead to lives of crime. We're going to stop that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what is being done long term to curb the rise of organized crime in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have said in this House before and as we as a government have said in the past year, we believe that the entire long-term gang prevention strategy and crime prevention strategy in this province must deal with a number of pillars. We have to deal with awareness, education. We have to help vulnerable people, and we have to effectively enforce the laws

and prosecute people that are committing crimes. This summit will allow us to develop that full long-term strategy in partnership with people in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Rural School Bus Travel Time

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural schools close because school boards face the impossible job of funding schools with insufficient resources. Increased busing costs coupled with decreased funding, a backlog of aging infrastructure, and a loss of teachers have made many schools unsustainable. Rural schools need better funding to sustainably meet these challenges. To the Minister of Education: does the minister acknowledge that requiring some children to spend upwards of three to four hours a day on school buses is unacceptable?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that it was a difficult thing to do when I did it, and it's not the most attractive way to ensure that our children get a good education. In fact, I think most school boards try to keep bus rides to less than an hour one way. But we do have challenges with respect to the provision of education services in rural areas where people choose to live. The wonders of technology, however, and the SuperNet, that the province of Alberta has put in place, are making it a lot easier to make sure that children in all parts of this province have access to a very high-quality public education. That's why people come from all around the world to look at what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to setting limits to the amount of time a child can spend on a school bus each day and work with school boards to help solve their transportation issues, actions that could help stave off the epidemic of rural school closures?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member would be one of the first to yell and scream if we dissolved all the school boards in the province and made one superboard so that we could run it from here. That's not what we're doing. We have elected school boards across the province. They determine what their local issues are and how best to provide the services in their areas, and I would not substitute my judgment for their judgment of their local communities.

Mr. Chase: They say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The only way school boards can collect the money is through what the province provides. Considering that the closure of the Manyberries school as well as numerous grades within the Golden Hills school division will result in students spending an additional hour on the bus each day, will the minister review the rules surrounding rural school closures?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'll have to take his word for the issue about the road to hell because I've never been on it.

I would have to say, again, that issues of schools in local communities is a very, very important one, a very close issue for people. I grew up in a rural area. I know how important a school is to the

community as a centre of the community. Those aren't decisions that anybody takes lightly when you close schools. Obviously, transportation of children is a very, very important aspect. It requires someone in the local area who has knowledge of the local circumstances to be able to sit down with parents in their communities and make those very tough decisions, and that's what school boards do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

TILMA Effects on Municipalities

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July 2008 officials from Alberta and British Columbia reached an agreement that outlines the municipal obligations under the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, the acronym TILMA. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How will Alberta's municipalities benefit from the amendments once they come into place on April 1?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

The Speaker: You know, I'm concerned about this question because my understanding is that this bill is in committee and up for review this afternoon. In committee we deal with amendments, so the time to really debate this is at that time, not in the question period.

Does the hon. member have a policy question?

Mr. Jacobs: The question also relates to TILMA, Mr. Speaker, so I would withdraw the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Homelessness Initiatives

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, and they are about the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness, which, the minister well knows, I am delighted to finally see. It's been a long time in development. It's been a long time in negotiation. It's been a long time coming. I think it is a good plan. Of course, as I have said, the devil is in the details and the funding, and we don't know if any funding is there for it yet. So although I'm happy to see that the plan is finally released, I'm wondering why the minister released the plan three weeks before the budget, three weeks before any funding could be committed.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did make a commitment to release the plan when the processes had been completed. The plan, hon. member, had gone through the process of cabinet policy committees, of caucus, various processes: meetings with municipalities, you know, discussions with the local agencies and community boards. I did make that commitment, and that's why it was released at this time. That process was completed. I am pleased, hon. member, that you support the plan. Thank you for that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that 40 per cent of homeless people suffer from mental illness, what supports have been committed to by the minister of health that

you're aware of that will specifically address this root cause of homelessness?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, those supports for people that do have issues that relate to mental health are through good programs like Pathways to Housing, which, as you know, is a program for people that have gone from emergency shelters to emergency for assistance. A very special mental health support team meets them at emergency and places them into Housing First. We've found that that is working. That's just one of the many good programs offered by the communities as a whole.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: considering that the plan doesn't mention First Nations people even though they comprise something in excess of 30 per cent of the homeless population in this province, how much of the funding – and it seems certainly limited until April 7 and maybe after that; we'll find out on April 7 – will go to programs geared to the aboriginal community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question. I can tell you that we did not take any group of people based on their culture and identify that particular group in the plan. That does relate to the aboriginal people. That's because every program in this plan is going to assist all Albertans that are homeless, and that does include our aboriginal peoples.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

2:40 **Cataract Surgery Wait Times**

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Contracting out medical services such as cataract surgery to private clinics has been a very efficient and successful innovation of our health system. However, since December my constituency office has been contacted on six separate occasions by constituents expressing frustration with long wait times for cataract surgery. Some of my constituents fear that they will lose their independence as a result of these extended wait times of in some cases up to 18 months. I've been informed that much of the delay is a result of a lack of funding. All of my questions are for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the government doing to ensure that the wait times for cataract surgery are reduced?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have to be clear what the terminology is for lack of funding. What does take place is that, previously through the regions and now through Alberta Health Services Board, there is an allocation of funding for procedures, whether it's cataracts, whether it's hips and knees. What has occurred in this particular budget year is that the allocation of funding has been exhausted. In the past several health regions have actually gone beyond the level of funding, and that won't be happening this year.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise how the new Alberta Health Services Board is going to help to resolve this waiting-list problem?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I guess one way is that they will stick to budget, and that is exactly what they have done. But I think it's important

to point out, Mr. Speaker, that in 2004 some 15,000 cataract surgeries were performed in Alberta. Only 1,500 or so of those were through private facilities. In 2007 that number increased to 21,000 cataract surgeries, with only just under 3,000 in private facilities. We have been attempting to keep up the funding with the increase in demand, but again, like many things in health care, demand is exceeding what we're able to fund.

Dr. Brown: Will the minister ensure that cataract surgeries are adequately funded and prioritized for those people who are in danger of losing their independence such as their driver's licence because of the fact that they have cataracts?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. First of all, it is not the minister who determines whether a patient requires cataract surgery. It's the ophthalmologist. If an ophthalmologist determines that it's an emergency or urgent, that goes beyond that envelope of funding, and they will be treated on an emergent or urgent basis. Unfortunately, there are others that will be looked after as the funding becomes available in the new budget.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 104 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now we'll continue the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2009 Bantam B Female Hockey Provincials

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, March 13, I attended the opening ceremony of the 2009 bantam B female hockey provincials at the Bonnyville Centennial Centre. This weekend marked the end of a 17-year wait to host the provincial hockey tournament in my hometown of Bonnyville. Hosting this tournament was such a great opportunity to bring together and to cheer on the 150 girls who participated.

Female hockey has been developing in Bonnyville for the past three years and is still very new. The tournament was able to give exposure to this growing sport and also to the local team from my constituency, the Lakeland Jaguars, girls from both Bonnyville and Cold Lake. It is my hope that this exposure will encourage more girls to get involved in hockey at a competitive level.

Hon. members, girls from many of your constituencies competed in this tournament. The 10 teams who participated came from High Prairie, Lloydminster, Spruce Grove, Innisfail, Lethbridge, Cochrane, Viking, Edmonton, Calgary, and, of course, the Lakeland. I would like to congratulate all of the teams, coaches, volunteers, and parents who made this tournament a complete success, especially the Innisfail Flyers, who beat Lethbridge 6 to 4 in the final to take first place in the tournament.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most foster parents do an admirable job of raising the children they selflessly bring into their homes. With the noblest intentions they make sure that some of our most troubled and vulnerable children enjoy a loving, nourishing environment in which to learn and grow.

Unfortunately, as hard as it is to come to grips with this reality,

there are some foster homes in which children have suffered neglect and abuse. Mr. Speaker, consider the case of a disabled child placed in foster care because the natural parents could not afford to meet its needs. The medical care the child needed would have had to be paid out of pocket because at that time the level of care wasn't provided by the government.

Foster care seemed the only solution, which raises an important set of questions. Is this government doing enough to keep families together? Are children put into foster care too soon without giving due respect to the needs of the biological family? What efforts are made to support birth parents within their home prior to making the drastic decision to apprehend their children? Furthermore, the case in question turned into a horror story for this family. How do parents forced to give up their children know with any certainty that the special needs of their child will be met?

Mr. Speaker, when the children are given up or removed from the care of their natural parents, it happens because people are concerned about the welfare and safety of the child. Yet it seems as though once custody changes, the government's duty of supervisory care of the child's safety and welfare is diminished or taken for granted.

The tragic facts reveal that we should not, must not take the child's safety in foster care for granted. As much as we may admire foster parents, some do a better job than others. The government cannot simply hand off children in need to foster parents and consider its job done. These children in care deserve and demand more than that. Regular monitoring of foster care and enforcement of standards is needed to ensure that the safety and well-being of Alberta's most vulnerable children is protected.

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

65th Anniversary of 418 City of Edmonton Squadron

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again it is my privilege to rise and highlight another group of people from Edmonton-Calder. Under the command of Edmontonian Russ Bannock 418 Squadron aircraft and crews flew their Mosquito aircraft over the heart of occupied Europe in order to achieve their mission of damaging the Nazi war machine.

To give you some background, the Mosquito was a light bomber, twin-engine 4,000 horsepower wooden airplane. It was equipped with eight 30-calibre machine guns. It was fast and deadly. The 418 was responsible for the interception of the Nazi V-1 flying bombers that rained down over Europe. The V-1 was the first cruise missile, and its job was to kill and terrify civilians. The 418 was key in the defence against this weapon, and the tactic was search and destroy in flight. The squadron was extremely successful in this defence.

After World War II 418 became a resident in the hangar of what is now the Alberta Aviation Museum, and it has continued its service to the country as a reserve squadron, defending both Edmonton and the north during the Cold War. The 418 defended the Arctic Circle north in search and rescue liaison roles, and in 1992 it officially stood down.

The squadron will remain in the Aviation Museum until such time as the country needs the services of this group once more. The 418 City of Edmonton Squadron is truly a proud part of Edmonton's history and future, and I would like to congratulate this historic group and the veterans celebrating here today on their 65th anniversary.

Thank you.

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

Eco Village of Hope

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a unique Alberta-initiated international development project, the Eco Village of Hope. The Eco Village of Hope is one of the very few international development initiatives between Alberta and China.

The project founder, Renay Eng-Fisher, a second-generation born-and-raised Albertan, inherited a house in her father's ancestral village when he passed away a few years ago. During her very first trip to China she connected the idea of making constructive use of her ancestral house with the need of the local orphaned children like her father was.

2:50

In the process a group of Albertans of diverse ethnic and professional backgrounds created a comprehensive humanitarian initiative that includes caring for the abandoned children and children with disabilities and building the capacity of their caregivers by providing them with training and sharing ecological development expertise with those who live and work in those communities. Hence, the Eco Village of Hope was born.

Mr. Speaker, in the two years since the formation of the Eco Village of Hope Society over 30 Albertan volunteers have travelled to this region to provide training and support to the project. The society has received requests from officials from a nearby region to assist them with training local volunteers and staff associated with their 600-children orphanage as well as setting up programs for those children, and the Eco Village of Hope Society is in the process of establishing their third orphanage.

Mr. Speaker, the Eco Village of Hope project is a wonderful example of that famous belief in the power of a small group of determined, dedicated people to make transformative changes to people's lives. It's also a great example of the power of human connections, connection between generations, the bond between parent and child, the drive derived from an emotional connection to a totally strange land, and the subsequent treasured connections and goodwill created between those who are so willing to give and those who benefit from their generosity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 27

Alberta Research and Innovation Act

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, 2009. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The intent of this bill is to enable a more integrated and aligned approach to research and innovation to support continued economic prosperity and a high quality of life in Alberta. Through the development of a new roles and mandates framework for Alberta's provincially funded research and innovation systems it will further strengthen and align the research and innovation system to help researchers and entrepreneurs in realizing their potential as creators of world-class discoveries and products. It will also enhance the focus on the government of Alberta's strategic research and innovation priorities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Bill 28

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 28, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

This is an omnibus bill that will provide tools to help the province achieve goals set out in the provincial energy strategy while eliminating inefficiencies found in the current energy legislation. In all, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act will amend 10 and repeal two acts previously passed by the Alberta Legislature. The passage of this act will promote sustainable energy development and increase regulatory efficiencies, including amendments to existing legislation that will facilitate taking bitumen as royalty in kind to optimize benefits of oil sands production for Albertans and expanding the industry-funded orphan well fund, Mr. Speaker, to include large facilities, including large in situ oil sands processing facilities, sulphur recovery gas plants, and stand-alone straddle plants.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 28 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 32

Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request leave to move first reading of Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act.

This bill provides the legislative framework that will help improve transparency and accountability and promote excellence in governance of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions. About 50 per cent of the government's annual operating expenditures are administered by these provincial agencies, of which there are almost 250.

Mr. Speaker, this bill builds upon the work done by a provincial task force struck by our Premier in 2007. In all, the task force made 15 recommendations to ensure that the right policies and best practices are in place for our agencies, boards, and commissions to deliver on their mandates. The task force's first recommendation was the introduction of legislation to provide to agency governance frameworks and standards reflecting the importance of Alberta's agencies.

In February 2008 this government released its public agencies governance framework, elaborating on the recommendations of the task force. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that implementation of the public agencies governance framework is under way in all government departments. With that, I would ask that all members join me in support of this important bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 32 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during question period the Member for Calgary-Varsity asked questions regarding the UN convention on the rights of the child. The member suggested that our province did not sign or support the convention. In fact, our province formally supported the convention in a letter from former Premier Ralph Klein to former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien dated January 13, 1999. Neither our province nor any other province signed the convention since signing international agreements is the constitutional responsibility of the federal government. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the letter of support as well as the convention itself.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a document from two constituents, Claude and Eugenie Dube. These are constituents that are very upset over the government's plan to triple the Blue Cross nongroup premiums. They're very frustrated that the government is increasing the money it gives to the oil and gas sector but increasing the burden on Albertans, and they note especially older Albertans. They feel the government had no mandate to make these changes and should not make changes without extensive public consultation. I have the required five copies.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the five copies of a Ducks Unlimited brochure: A Single Purpose; A Profound Effect. Ducks Unlimited works in consultation and collaboration with a number of Alberta fish and game associations for protecting and restoring habitat. It may seem paradoxical to the uninformed, but hunters and fishermen are among Alberta's most dedicated conservationists.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings with the appropriate number of copies of each. The first is a document from the Manitoba Department of Justice, and it's regarding the appointment of independent counsel. It's a policy document.

Secondly, there's a document from the B.C. government, the Crown counsel policy manual. It, again, outlines the appointment a special prosecutor in cases where there is significant potential for real or perceived improper influence in prosecutorial decision-making.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition "to establish a Special Needs taskforce to address the failure of current policies, procedures and practices to adequately serve the exceptional and individual educational needs of all students in the District." This petition was originally presented to the Edmonton public school board.

The Speaker: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 7(7) I must now notify you that it's 3 o'clock. The Routine terminates. We're into Orders of the Day.

3:00 Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was remiss earlier in introducing my guests earlier than they should have been, and they weren't there. Now they're here, and I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House my guests, Madeline Rainey and her 16-year-old son, Connor, who are seated in the public gallery. Madeline and Connor presented a petition to the Edmonton public school board on January 13 seeking more immediate benefits for the district's special-needs students. Madeline participates in the board's consultation, Setting the Direction for Special Education. I would now ask both Madeline and Connor to rise in their places and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce third reading of Bill 21, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise and enter into third reading debate on Bill 21, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009. This is a supplementary supply act that seeks to get \$127 million and change in extra spending primarily for the ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Employment and Immigration, and Transportation as well as some \$750,000 for the office of the Auditor General. This is extra money – we've made the point before – in and of itself not a dramatic amount of money above and beyond the budget. But this is the second time that this government has been before the House in this fiscal year seeking supplementary funds. We think the government should do a better job of budgeting. We have made this point on a number of occasions before this, and we suspect that we will be continuing to make that point on into the next fiscal year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This issue has been bandied about a lot. It's a similar discussion that's been raised over a number of years. I think, however, we need to also raise a different concern in light of news over the last day or two.

This is supplementary supply; in other words, this is money that in many cases is there to look after budget overruns. One of my concerns is that we have a government that overruns its budget year after year after year. We also have a budget that pays multi multimillion-dollar bonuses to its senior management, apparently for achievement. I suppose that if the achievement is to blow your budget, then the bonuses may be in order. I think it's important for this government to establish an achievement factor for its senior management to stay on budget. I can't imagine – and I'm saying this very genuinely – except in the most extraordinary circumstances why a senior official who allows a budget to go past its mark, allows a government department to spend more than is budgeted by this Assembly would then be justified in getting a bonus. The two just don't add up.

Mr. Speaker, you know, with this fine history in this Assembly we'll remember the days 20 years ago or more, when budgets were taken extremely seriously and it was, as I've said before, a career move for a public servant to blow through a budget. Now it seems that we're in a situation where senior public servants get a bonus even if the budget is blown.

I think we are entering an era of a new attitude towards public responsibility for sticking to budgets, and I hope this is the beginning of that. I would hope that to help create an atmosphere where we don't need to come back for repeated supplementary supply bills every year, this government establishes as an achievement criteria for senior managers staying on budget. Frankly, they should be well aware that if they go through the budget, unless there are extraordinary circumstances, there is no bonus. It should be pretty much as simple as that.

Those are the constraints that many, many people in Alberta have to live by in their own domestic households. Those are the constraints that many, many businesses in Alberta have to live by. Frankly, those are the constraints that the caucus has to live by. We have a budget, and we have absolutely no opportunity nor any desire to go through the budget. We have the budget, and we live within that budget.

I think it's very important to get the message through to the members of this Assembly that paying bonuses to senior managers who allow their budgets to be broken should be unacceptable. There should be no bonuses in those circumstances. I think, maybe, the fact that this government has been paying bonuses regardless of whether budgets were met or not has contributed to this kind of bill that we have right now coming forward, which is at least a second supplementary supply bill.

I want to get that on the record, Mr. Speaker. I'm not particularly pleased that we have this bill here. I wasn't very pleased that we had a supplementary supply bill just a few months ago. I think that now we are beginning to uncover some of the organizational dynamics that lead to this occurring repeatedly, which is that, apparently, senior management bonuses are not tied to living within budgets. My view, my message today is that from here on in they should be.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for the question-and-response portion. The hon. Government House Leader on this point.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the hon. member had an opportunity to look at the third-quarter results and, if he did so, whether he is aware of or whether he just wilfully ignored the fact that the operating budget of the government is pretty much on track for what it was budgeted at. The difference that might be anticipated in terms of if there was a deficit at the end of this year was clearly generated by a loss of revenue in the investment portfolio of the heritage trust fund and not a problem created by any of our dedicated civil service, who work long hours on behalf of the people of Alberta, going into deficit.

Now, he may be referring as well, and I think he did refer as well, to the fact that, of course, coming back for supplementary supply means that you're asking for more revenue. He indicated that businesses and households set budgets and then live within them and that government should be expected to. I'm not sure where he's been living, but in the world that I live in, people take a look at their resources on an ongoing basis and determine whether or not, given the nature of the resources that they have on an ongoing basis, those resources can be applied to the needs that arise on an ongoing basis or not. I know of no business nor of any household which sets a rigid parameter once a year and then tries to live in it. Is he living in the same world that I'm in?

Dr. Taft: Well, that's a unique sort of question. I'm not sure what planet the minister is living on. I know I live right here in Edmonton, and I live right here in Alberta, and I don't have the benefits of the tremendous resources that this minister has. I also know that people like the large number of seniors in my constituency who are on fixed incomes are stuck. They can't vote themselves a higher income in December and then vote themselves another higher income in February or March.

There's no question that the great majority of Alberta's public servants are dedicated and they're hard working, but there's also no question that this government has consistently, year after year for any number of years now, turned out to have spent considerably more at the end of the year than it said it was going to at the beginning of the year. That's a problem, and it's a problem that we need to address. I look to the President of the Treasury Board from here on in to help address it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood first, then the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much. I wanted to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview whether or not he thinks bonuses, in fact, make any sense at all even in, perhaps, better times and what uses they might accomplish.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that's a great question and probably an issue that needs a lot more debate here. I think we need to question the whole issue of bonuses for performance. Public officials are paid to do a job, and they're expected to do that job well. If they do the job well, then maybe there's an incremental raise or something, but to import the whole notion of bonuses into the public service needs some very serious thinking. I think it opens up all kinds of questions about what motivations are and what bonuses are given for. If one particular assistant deputy minister gets a bonus, do they all get the bonus? How is that managed?

This was an innovation, if you want to call it that, that was brought in, you know, several years ago. I think it's time that we as

an Assembly and, I hope, the government caucus as a caucus asked itself the whole question: do we want a bonus system within the public service? Is it a good idea even in principle? Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I was not terribly pleased when I saw this brought forward for the public service. I think – and I say this in part as a former public servant – public servants are paid to be professionals, to do a good job. If they do that job, they get paid. They don't need a bonus, in my view. This was, I think, a dubious policy to begin with, and I think that it's one that should be debated fully in this Assembly.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm wondering if the hon. member is going to remain firm and rigid in his stance on overruns with the office of the Auditor General.

Dr. Taft: Well, I don't have the figures in front of me. There is – what? – something like \$700,000 in the budget overrun.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, we're dealing with Bill 21.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to deal with the question of the supplementary estimates and, in particular, some of the revelations that we've seen when it comes to bonuses. You know, we addressed this question in our caucus. The Premier has been talking about the great financial resources that our caucus receives, encouraging us to give some of our money to the Auditor General to help him out and so on. I think, frankly, it's just a little bit silly.

One of the things that we did was to really ask ourselves hard questions about: what are you actually trying to accomplish with the use of bonuses? We have a very hard-working, dedicated, and capable staff, and they are very committed to the goals of our caucus. We want to make sure to the extent of our capacity that they're compensated for that.

If you take it in the question of the government, if you want to look at the government, you need to ask what it is you're going to get from a bonus. If you want the public employees, the senior management in given departments to save money, I think that's the kind of instruction you want to give them, but if you give them financial incentives to do that, I think that you run a risk.

If, in fact, saving money is the objective that's set for the deputy minister or the ADMs, then what kind of behaviour are they going to enter into when their job is to deliver the services in the best possible way, make sure the public gets value for money, and make sure that their programs are run as efficiently and as effectively as possible. You distort that when you try to incent a particular behaviour in the government service. You might find, for example, that programs were cut or spending was cut when it wasn't what was intended, when the service that the public might receive might be impacted, or people weren't hired and, as a result, there were longer waiting lists. I can see all kinds of reasons why bonuses based on savings in the department could create distortions in the carrying out of the government's policy and the programs that people depend on, but more to the point is that I don't think the people of this province get it.

When the government is starting to talk to them about tightening their belts, and the hon. President of the Treasury Board, you know, who has made a number of comments off message, from what I can tell, with what the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer have been saying, about how we're going to be into cutting as we go forward into this period, my fear is that his faction in the Tory caucus is

going to find a way to force the government to return to the bad old days of Premier Ralph Klein, when these enormous cuts took place from which we still haven't recovered. And this is an inappropriate response to the current situation.

If we're in fact going to be cutting, then I presume that some people might actually lose their jobs. I don't know if that's the government's intent or if the provincial finance minister's budget will call for that, but clearly the government is sending among its various mixed messages a message that we all have to tighten our belts and that there'll be reductions in spending and, presumably, reductions in programs. It's too early to tell whether there are going to be actual layoffs in the public service, but I think those employees who are just next to the door as we enter into this recession are going to be looking at their bosses and wondering why in Justice, for example, there are bonuses worth \$5.8 million being paid; in Service Alberta \$3.9 million; in Finance \$3.6 million. It goes on and on, millions and millions of dollars, \$40 million in bonuses for which the government has given no clear objectives on which they expect to be paid.

I think that when you look at what's going on in the United States, you see a real difference. You see a difference between how the politicians of both the Republican and Democratic parties respond to the public outrage there about bonuses and how this government deals with it. You know, in the United States there's genuine anger, and the politicians are holding people accountable for taking money and spending it on bonuses. Here it's business as usual. This government doesn't seem to get that the rules have changed and public expectations have changed. The economy has changed. There has been a real change in almost everything to do with business, jobs, government, public programs. It has all been affected, and there's a profoundly different way of looking at things and doing things. This government is living in the past and has not adjusted.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that I think that other employees, the unions, and ordinary Albertans are looking at what this government is doing. By insisting on going ahead with these bonuses, in fact, I think the government is sending a different message. It's trying to reduce expectations, but it is in fact raising expectations, and I think that there are going to be political consequences from that.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that I think we should change the way we look at things. I want to, you know, just indicate that there were some relevant comments that were made just today in the *Globe and Mail*. Mr. David Dodge, a former governor of the Bank of Canada, said that those that expect that we're going to have a recovery in this year are dreaming in technicolour. So I hope that the members opposite are enjoying their dream, but I think that it's pretty clear to me that they are off base on where they see this economy going. I think that the supplementary estimates, I think the upcoming budget are all going to send us off the track unless the government gets a little bit more realistic about where the economy is and what public expectations are today.

I think the public expects that there will be a stimulus approach but that governments have a responsibility to make sure that public money is spent where it can help the ordinary folks of this province or wherever the jurisdiction is and not spent on people who are already very well off. Again, I think the government is out of touch with the public on this and, frankly, I think that there is going to be some public anger about the government's failure to listen.

Mr. Speaker, I think that with that, I will take my seat. Another person might want to contribute.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to maybe clarify for me and for the 6,100 civil servants eligible for some type of bonuses in what way he's able to equate a civil service that by any stretch of the imagination has achieved virtually all the goals they've set out to do in difficult times, working under existing contract conditions that they were hired under for the year that they've just completed, how the hon. member is able to make the leap that somehow this equates to bonuses some corporate executive from a financial-sector company in the States that has mismanaged hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars, truly a part of a global meltdown that was perpetrated on grounds that have nothing to do with the civil servants that perform every day for the people of Alberta on our behalf. How could he possibly in the same statement put these Albertans, these people that live here and work for the people of Alberta, in the same category as executives of a private company going to the taxpayers of the United States for compensation and a bailout?

I mean, Mr. Speaker, in your opening words this morning, in your prayer, you asked for integrity and honesty. I guess some of us missed that part of your opening prayer. I would sure like the hon. member to make it perfectly clear to these people how he made that connection.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's this government that entered into those agreements. It's this government that decided that well-paid civil servants, highly paid at a high senior level, deserved very, very wealthy bonuses. It's this government that is continuing to go in that direction. Now, I want to say that this government has a responsibility to adjust itself to the changing times, and paying out bonuses when there also are people losing their jobs just doesn't fit with what ordinary Albertans think. That's what I think.

I don't know what he's holding up there, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to say that ordinary Albertans in this day who are losing their jobs are looking at this government paying \$40 million in bonuses, and they're wondering why the government is so out of touch with their lives, with their priorities. Those are the kinds of things that I think this government needs to take into account.

I believe that the people who are losing their jobs – and there are thousands of them; there are 30,000 in just two months – are wanting to know what the government is doing, whether the government gets it. I don't think the government does get it, Mr. Speaker. I think the government is out of touch with those people.

Their agreement to enter into these agreements for these bonuses at the same time as they're not bringing forward long-term care beds, for example, which is causing backups in our health care system, their failure to deal with the whole question of overcrowding in foster homes and the very poor compensation that foster parents get in this province, their failure to deal with environmental questions – the terrible conditions that continue to exist in our long-term care facilities are really a tragedy. People like that, people like senior citizens who are being asked to pay more for their drugs, are looking at the money that is being spent on these bonuses because the government entered into what I consider to be an ill-advised agreement.

If we take a look at the question of the Auditor General and his budget, there are some very important audits that the Auditor General is going to have to defer or cancel, things like water safety, things like food safety, things like children in care. He needs a couple of million dollars to do that.

The Speaker: Alas, hon. member, the time has expired.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed my pleasure to rise and introduce third reading of Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, so that we can probably spend, oh, I'd guess another hour on subjects completely unrelated to the content and intent of the bill. However, if that's the wish of the opposition, we're more than happy to oblige.

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

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join debate at third reading on Bill 22, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009. I think I would be remiss if I didn't start out by saying that, of course, if the government wishes to shorten the time involved in debate on this bill or the previous bill or any other, all they have to do is not avail themselves of 29(2)(a). You don't have to ask the question. You won't stretch it out by another five minutes per speech per speaker.

Mr. Snelgrove: It just gets better.

Mr. Taylor: It does, doesn't it?
The Minister of Transportation is having a whale of a time.

Mr. Ouellette: That's because I like asking you questions.

Mr. Taylor: But on to the matter at hand, which is worth considerably more money than the last bill that we debated. This one's worth about \$10 billion, and as the Premier himself pointed out in question period a few times I think this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, we're just a couple of weeks away from the end of the 2008-2009 fiscal year. The government clearly needs the money, or at least some of the money, a good chunk of the money, that it is asking for in Bill 22 to keep the lights on, the furnace humming until such time as it's time to turn on the air conditioning, and the bonuses rolling while we debate the budget and pass it so that it can come into effect.

3:30

I will point out once again, Mr. Speaker – and I've mentioned this a couple of times – that there really is no excuse for the fact that we have not yet even heard the budget, begun debate on the budget, that we won't hear the budget until April 7. We came back into this House on Tuesday, February 10. If I'm wrong about this, I'd be interested to hear the minister of finance's defence about this. We could have and should have had that budget in front of us by Tuesday, February 24, two weeks later. There was a time when we had a set of temporary standing orders – of course, they have, as you know, since lapsed – that actually specified the start date for the spring session and the fact that a budget would be brought in by the government a set period of time after that. I believe the period of time was 10 days or two weeks.

Had we followed those rules, which are not the rules currently, I'll grant you that, we would have had the budget in front of us on February 24. Here it is March 18, and we would be well into, in fact

we would be very, very nearly finished Committee of Supply debate of the budget. We'd be ready to move the budget through its final stages. We'd be ready to pass and proclaim the budget, all of that in time for the beginning of the new fiscal year. We wouldn't need to be doing Bill 22.

But they chose to operate a different way, an inefficient way, a sort of: "Oh, you know, let's just go along here, see how things go. We'll get around to this eventually. We don't really know what the price of oil is going to be. We don't really know what the price of natural gas is going to be, don't really have a good handle on the exchange rate for the fiscal year going forward." I don't know why we think we'll have a better handle on all that on April 7 than we would've on February 24. Nevertheless, it gives us an excuse not to get down to business quite so quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that later on this afternoon – and I believe that if the government had its way, it would be earlier on this afternoon – we will resume Committee of the Whole debate of Bill 18, which they are in an all-fired rush to get through this House in time for April 1, when TILMA comes into effect, so that they don't caught with their knickers down, if that's not unparliamentary. I didn't intend it in that way.

The Speaker: Carry on. It's not unparliamentary.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

I'm reminded again that, you know, they've had plenty of time to get to work on this thing. I don't know what they do in the off-season. Maybe they work on their golf game down in Arizona. I don't know what it is because they sure as heck don't get any more efficient.

Mr. Hancock: Who's living in the past now?

Mr. Taylor: I hear the Minister of Education over there chirping away like a songbird, but I'm not in the mood for birdwatching this afternoon, so I'll just ignore him.

That brings us back to Bill 22. Bill 22 asks for \$10 billion in approved spending to get us through the next few weeks. Yes, I understand, Mr. Speaker, that some of that has to be front-loaded because it's more expensive to run a government at the beginning of the fiscal year than it is towards the end of the fiscal year. At least, that's what they tell us at the beginning of the fiscal year. Then they come back once or twice partway through the fiscal year and ask for more money in sup supply because I guess they underestimated their ability to spend. But I digress.

This is \$10 billion that we're being asked to approve, \$10 billion with no explanation other than: "Well, you know what? This is the way we always do it. We can't explain it to you now because you're going to have to wait for the budget." It gives me the willies.

Mr. Hehr: The willies?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, the willies. The willies.

It gives me the willies to consider approving this request when I look at the history of inefficiency and dawdling and goofing around involved with this government. They can't seem to bring anything to the table in a timely fashion. It's always at the last minute, and, gosh, we've got to ram this through. They either can't organize a two-car funeral, or they're perfectly capable of organizing a two-car funeral. They just want to make sure that that two-car funeral is able to run a bunch of red lights without anybody having the authority or the time to work out a way to stop them.

So \$10 billion up for grabs, ladies and gentlemen. Have at 'er. I'm done for now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional participants? Actually, we have 29(2)(a) first. Anybody want to participate? Oh, no. That's right. We just started this one. Sorry about that. I was so befuddled there by his expressive language: knickers, willies, dawdling, and two-car funerals. There was a speech around all of that, too.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, please.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and enter debate on interim supply briefing. As my colleague from Calgary-Currie surmised, this is coming at a time when we should already have a full budget prepared and have things going along in some fashion, where we'd have, then, school boards, cities, all of us here on the opposition benches, and everyone on the government side aware of what our plans are in this province. Then everyone could go forward and build their year accordingly and go off and do the best they can in what are, no doubt, some harder economic times. We've seen many governments around Canada, including the federal government, seemingly be able to get there a little bit quicker than we have here in Alberta.

You know, it even begs the question. Not really to get to whether this is going to be a stimulus budget or whether it's going to be a status quo budget or whether it's going to be a cutting budget: regardless of that, you know, you seem to be limiting the effect of whatever your budget is going to be, bringing it in so late. For instance, if you were going to stimulate, well, the longer you waited, the worse off it apparently is going to get. If you were going to cut, well, I guess that time is still available, so I guess you won't be in as much of a quandary.

Nevertheless, all I'm saying is that it does limit the effectiveness of what, in fact, it's going to be doing and what, in fact, our many boards, organizations, charities, cities are going to do that depends on budgets being brought in in a reasonable amount of time to be able to develop their plans accordingly. In this province it's generally the provincial government that has the gold, and a lot of times our other people are reliant on at least getting some information to them on what they can anticipate to run services to help support Albertans.

I guess another point of it is the fact that this is a rather large number, \$10 billion. Again, if we look at the spending that this government has done – I don't think I'm speaking out of turn; the numbers could be higher, could be a little lower – it spends approximately 24 or 23 per cent more than Ontario, some 30 points higher than British Columbia and others. There's no doubt there is a lot of spending going on here in Alberta. There are arguments for that. I concede some of that. Yet there seems to be a lot of stuff that when you look around and compare Alberta's situation, the state of some of our infrastructure, the state of some of our schools, the state of our hospital wait times, for instance – you know, given the fact that we've had more money, spent more money, and all of this stuff, the results on what comes back should be better.

In fact, I think there's an argument to say that it's not better. Any of the results we get back on national standards on wait times, for instance, say that we're in the middle of the pack. You see that whether we're getting the value for dollar out of our spending. That is, I guess, an argument to be made.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to put my oar in the water, at least give some tentative comments on Bill 22, and I thank you for allowing me that time.

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available should there be questions.

There being none – two members have risen at the same time. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair will now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: We will continue on amendment A2. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do want to get a few more remarks on the record from my conversation of yesterday. My amendment, I believe, is very important. I think it is an amendment that will protect democracy and the way this House operates. I'm asking that the entire section 5 be amended by striking out that whole section in Bill 18. My reasons for that are that I think that in the end this bill is ripe for a constitutional challenge.

We need to withdraw the whole section 5. It's on page 6 of the hard copy of the bill, and it's section 7(1). The heading is Regulations. It says that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is cabinet, "may make regulations in respect of matters relating to the implementation of the Agreement that the Minister considers are not provided for or are insufficiently provided for in this Schedule or any enactment." It goes on in the next section, which is the one that I feel gives the most problem, that a regulation made under subsection (1) "may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision."

It's the act that is the problem. How can something that has taken place in this House, which is a legislated act, be changed in the backrooms by cabinet? It boggles my mind to think of what else could be changed under the same rules if this one goes forward. It delegates the power, as I've said, of the House to the cabinet. Parliamentary tradition is that what's created by the Legislature must come back to the Legislature to be changed. We create and we can change. One of the ways that is done is through the legislated act. Yes, regulations are done by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which then, of course, is cabinet. Actually, I'm seeing more and more things being given over to the power of regulations which, I believe, really should have been in legislation.

In amending this, we're talking about the retroactivity of regulations. I'm not sure that I know of any organization or, to use a sport analogy, any sport where you actually change the rules in the middle of the game. You can't try to stop that forward halfway over the blue line and say: "Oh, whoops. We've just changed. Go back and start over again." It doesn't work like that. We cannot, in my mind, in all good conscience go back. How do you change the rules? How do you go back to someone and say, "Everything you've been doing is wrong, and whether you like it or not, this is the way it's going to be"?

I can hear some of the responses being that part of this is collateral damage. Collateral damage is a pretty powerful statement. It's, to me, a statement of disrespect. It's a statement of: too bad. So when I hear those kinds of things or when I suspect that that might be part

of the thinking, I question, perhaps, the ethics that are behind that kind of a consequence. The consequences should really only go forward, and in this bill, in my mind, they should go forward from proclamation even, not from the date of the passing of the bill.

There is a rush in the House, as we know, to get this bill through by April 1 because that's the deadline for TILMA. It has to be signed, sealed, and delivered by that date. There have been two years to get this work done. Why is there never, it would appear, any time for outside eyes to look at these deals? That's why in the end often amendments are necessary and, I believe, especially this amendment of mine is necessary. Had these types of things been discussed over the last two years or even within the last six months, it would have given a much greater opportunity for other eyes to look at it. By other eyes, I guess, at this point I mean mine because I'm bringing the amendment forward.

I hope that I'm wrong, but I think that there are people in the House that haven't really looked at this carefully enough to realize the actual ramifications of being able to change an act in this House in the backrooms and not have it come back to the table, where it belongs. As I've mentioned, the ethics behind this, I think, are questionable.

One of the last things I'd like to comment on is that I really believe this leaves itself open to a court challenge. I think that there will be one further down the road. What a waste of time that would be. If we had done it right in the first place, if perhaps we had started this process earlier in the two-year window that was given the government when they signed this with B.C. two years ago, perhaps this conversation would never have had to take place. Should there be a court challenge further on, what a waste of time it would have been, all because we have to get this signed within the next two weeks. Of course, we all know that the House will be in constituency weeks for the next two, so it has to be signed before we return.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

3:50

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise in support of the amendment that has been brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East. It's almost exactly the amendment that I was hoping to see. I think I might have been a little less firm than her and might have left in the ability for the cabinet to change the regulations. I had spoken in second and earlier in committee of my great fear and objection to the clause in the bill under the government organization section that would allow for the cabinet to make changes to existing pieces of legislation.

I've taken the opportunity from yesterday to today to do a bit more work in looking at this. I really take issue with this bill proposing that the Legislature would abdicate to cabinet the power to change an act and, further, to change an act retroactively by two years. I have always objected to the preponderance, the choices this government makes to put shell bills in place and to depend upon the power to make regulations for the government to carry on business. Frankly, to me it's increasingly signalling that the government is not as good a manager as it likes to think itself in that it has to give itself so many outs and so much flexibility to get around when it makes mistakes.

That's what this is about. They're trying to cover their posterior extensions to make sure that . . . [interjections] Think about it; it'll come to you. If and when TILMA comes into play, if they've forgotten something or if Alberta gets called on one of the clauses in TILMA, they have the ability to go back and change our legislation so that we don't get called on it again. Of course, what this

government has signed on to with the TILMA agreement is a number of very vague clauses, so we really don't know how this is going to play out.

They've also signed on to something that says that if they're found lacking or in default by one of the tribunals, the offending party, which in this case may well be the government, can be fined for each and every instance that it has been found in default. If we're talking about something that's happened under an act, they could possibly be fined multiple times for, essentially, the same egregious error. If it's happened more than once, for example, they would pay the fine for every single time it's happened under the auspices of an act.

One, what does that raise for us? The need to have cover-your-butt legislation because they're anticipating that there are going to be problems with it. I guess I should congratulate them on having a plan and anticipating that things might go wrong, seeing as I've held them to account and found fault with them for not doing that in the past on things like the budget. But, truly, did we need to cast such a wide net here?

I think this is a very dangerous precedent. This government likes to try stuff, and then they just settle right into it like an old armchair. They just pull that afghan around their shoulders. They just settle right in and put their feet up on the settee, pour themselves a drink, and get the clicker. They just settle in and love that new way of doing things, and they're very hard to move out of that armchair of comfort that they have created for themselves with legislation.

As has been mentioned, I believe this is unconstitutional. I'm just going to talk a little bit about that. One of the ways that you can sort of get a sense of if this is wrong is by looking at different levels, and you do expect a consistency. I sort of briefly referred to one of the areas yesterday although I think I might have given a reference in error. But let's look at a similar situation, which would be the Committee of the Whole taking on responsibility that is a power that is reserved for the Legislature. Here I'll quote *Bourinot*, page 527. It says that the committee "have no power to extinguish a bill, that power [being] retained by the house itself." So even when we're talking about a situation like we're in today where we're in Committee of the Whole, this committee has limited powers. Those are in fact outlined and set out. It's noted how this is different in our standing orders and then further on in all of our other parliamentary books. We don't have the power in this committee to do everything that the full Legislature can, nor should we. There is a place for it.

What's being attempted here is a move by government to try and get the Legislature to abdicate its power back to the cabinet to be able to change this legislation. That's essentially what's happening here. I am certain that there will be a constitutional challenge on this. I already quoted you yesterday the examples of where that abdication has been upheld. Really, that has only been upheld by the courts in a situation of extremity. That extremity was war, and we are nowhere close to war here. There is no civil strife. There is no War Measures Act in place here. There has been no mobilizing of military force on behalf of the government. There's been no legislation brought into place to give it other extraordinary powers to act in a time of civil unrest and strife.

So to make a claim that somehow we are in a situation of dire straits and that the cabinet would need to have that power for some reason is unsupportable. I have heard no compelling arguments from the government that would persuade me that we are in such dire straits in this province, that things are in such extremes that we would need to be acting as though we were under an extraordinary measure like the War Measures Act.

What we're talking about is a trade agreement. Let's get some common sense here. We are talking about a trade agreement. We're not talking about war. We're not talking about civil insurrection.

We're talking about the implementation of a trade agreement that's supposed to be a good thing. It's supposed to enhance the ability of people to work in different provinces, the ability of businesses to make money and reduce red tape. That is the hopeful view of that.

Now, in fact, there have been a number of things go very wrong with TILMA. For starters, we were not able to debate it in this House, unlike in B.C. When we do get a chance to look at it, it's so vague in some cases that you actually cannot anticipate what might flow from some of those sections. I know that some of my colleagues are better versed on that and will likely speak to it in more detail, but here we already are seeing acts that are projecting the government's unease with its position and that it has done everything that it should be doing in order to progress to a smooth transition to TILMA on the 1st of April.

Yesterday I had said that there was no time limit and that the minister had stated that there was, and I had looked in the legislation and I disagreed with him. It's a wonder of this House having the live audiostreaming because, of course, by the time I got back to my office, there was an e-mail saying: you were wrong. Okay. Fair enough. What has been said to me – and this may well be true – is in section 7(4) of the Government Organization Act, appearing midway down page 7 of the hard copy of the act, a regulation made under subsection (1), which is that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations in respect of matters that the minister considers are not provided for. Then it goes on in subsection (2) to talk about regulations that are made under the previous section may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an act.

4:00

I think it could be argued and I'll entertain the argument that, in fact, an act is covered under this provision, subsection (4). Really, it's saying that that's the time limit, that "a regulation made under subsection (1) is repealed on the earliest of the following." Then it lists some three conditions:

- (a) the coming into force of an amendment to a statute that provides for the matter [that's being] dealt with in the regulation;
- (b) the coming into force of a regulation that repeals the regulation made under subsection (1);
- (c) the expiration of 3 years from the day that the regulation
 - (i) comes into force, if the regulation is not retroactive, or
 - (ii) is filed with the Registrar of Regulations.

Now, I'll tell you why I'm still uneasy. We're still talking about regulations. We have not admitted that we're actually talking about changing an act, and that's where part of my unease is, but it may well be that that wording does indeed cover subsection 2(a), which is talking about modifying an act.

But we are still talking about giving cabinet the power to modify any act for a period of up to three years and retroactively two years, back to April 1, 2007, so we're actually talking about a five-year window for which cabinet gets to play around with changing legislation, and, one, I don't think cabinet should be allowed to change legislation. It perverts the whole sense of what this Chamber is about and the fact that there are a variety of representatives here, that there are people here that are not from the governing party, that it does bring an alternative voice, an alternative eye, and, I hope, a critical eye to the proceedings. That's the point of this Chamber. That's why it is supposed to come back here. To leave it in the hands of a group who have a shared interest in something that is not necessarily the shared interest of the whole Chamber is what is so offensive to this scheme.

I will put that argument on one side, that it does allow for a three-year time limit. But as I say, I still don't accept that. I don't think it's acceptable under any conditions to be able to do this. We're

talking about a trade agreement. Why does the government need to be able to subvert this Assembly, subvert the number of people that voted for those of us in here in order to facilitate a trade agreement that is primarily to the advantage of the private sector? That's the trail that really starts to cause me concern. We're here as a democratically elected institution, and what we're seeing is legislation to make us all bend over backwards to facilitate a bunch of people doing business. I don't find that an acceptable reason to diminish the importance of this Assembly. It's not a good enough reason, nor have I heard a compelling argument from anybody on the government side as to why this should be acceptable.

I was reminded as I was musing aloud about this – well, no, I'll have to be honest; I was probably raging aloud about it – of the former Premier Peter Lougheed speaking at the 100th anniversary banquet for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and reminding us all very clearly that the penultimate body was the Legislature, not the government, and that the government is responsible to the Legislature. I am reminded of that very much today and yesterday as we look at what is contemplated in this act.

I know I don't have much hope of swaying the votes of this government caucus. Clearly, this has been decided as usual behind your closed doors. You are determined to proceed with this. But I think it shows such disdain for this House, and it's another example of how low the government's regard is for this very Chamber that it would, you know, organize its caucus to stand behind something that diminished the very Assembly that gives that government any kind of authority at all.

The other part of that argument is that – and the government's very proud of itself that it has 72 members elected here out of the 83. But you know what? Happily, we have an Electoral Boundaries Commission coming up because we had an awful lot of people in Alberta who did not vote for the government, and their votes are not reflected in the distribution of seats in this House. I think some people argue that it's 30 per cent or 40 per cent of the people in total that voted that did not vote for this government, and their votes are not being reflected in the seat distribution here and certainly not in the actions the government is bent on taking.

I think that this action, if followed through with, signals to me that there are much more insidious things to come. If the government can do this to this Assembly based on upholding a trade agreement, then I suspect that there is much more to come. How badly did the government negotiate this trade agreement if it's in that position of being fearful of what the consequences of the agreement are? From my reading, such as it is, around what's in this agreement, I can't say that I think the government did a real bang-up job negotiating on our behalf. I hope that this will be to the benefit of Albertans, all Albertans, but I'm not convinced of that. I continue to be concerned with how vague that agreement is and how much authority has been shifted away from the people that are in fact elected to wield that authority and to debate those kinds of bills.

I realize that my time is almost up, Mr. Chairman. I certainly appreciate the opportunity that my colleagues have given me to get in on this particular debate. I would urge my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to support this amendment A2, as brought forward by my colleague from Lethbridge-East, and not allow this Legislature to essentially abdicate its responsibility by delegating the authority that this bill contemplates to an inferior body. That's not to say that I see cabinet as being inferior in any way, but it is an inferior body when we look at the ranking of the legislative authorities. I think that this has serious and far-reaching implications for all of us and for this institution, and I urge my colleague to vote for this amendment, which would remove the clause from the bill that I find so offensive.

Thank you for that opportunity, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. Before I recognize the next member, may we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour and a privilege to introduce two guests here from West Fraser Timber. They're here meeting some folks in the Legislature. It's great to talk about this industry, and I'm very proud of the facilities that they own throughout the province. The West Fraser folks own facilities in Hinton, Sundre, Rocky Mountain House, Slave Lake, Edmonton, and of course in Whitecourt. They employ hundreds of people in those mills and hundreds of contractors throughout this province. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Mr. Hank Ketchum and Wayne Clogg. I'd ask them both to stand up and receive the warm greeting of this Assembly. I think they're also here to get their citizenship papers from Alberta.

Thank you.

4:10

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (*continued*)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is an honour and privilege to get up and speak in support of this amendment. The difficult thing is that I'm going after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, who always does such a good job describing and saying many of the things that want to come out of my mouth but rarely do. Nevertheless, I will try and follow her.

What I'd like to point out and continue on with is the fact that what we find, I guess, so odious about the bill is that we are in fact diminishing what we are supposed to do in this Legislature, which is to give us an opportunity to debate, to hear or flesh out the ideas of the day, to contact our constituents, to have our constituents contact us. For better or for worse or even if the opposition is totally out to lunch or even on the rare occasion, maybe, that the government is out to lunch, we at least have that opportunity to come here and discuss this in a fair and reasonable fashion in the light of day, so to speak, so that members of the press gallery can then report on this, and it's an honest and open government. Transparency would be paramount.

When we have a bill like this, that reverts decisions so that decisions can be made in regulations and that regulations can then be changed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council or cabinet, and then they can make any change to whatever bill or legislation, in this case TILMA, that is going forward and make that change up to two years back and three years forward – five years: that's a pretty large window of opportunity for the Alberta public, people who voted for us to come here, not to hear about what is actually happening to the bill.

On that front, simply put, I think that's unacceptable. We see this happening time and time again on more and more bills, and it essentially diminishes the role of what we, in fact, do here. Maybe that has some sort of tie-off. By no means am I going to blame this government entirely for the lack of voter turnout that happened last time. You know, let's face it. It's happening all around Canada, in

Alberta more so than other parts. We can quibble around the edges as to why this is in fact happening.

If we ever want to take democracy to that next level, to be seen to be engaging our population, to be really respecting what they say and really see what we do up here in the Legislature, I don't think we're serving that goal by moving decisions to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. It just simply is counterintuitive to my thinking, that this will foster a spirit of democracy throughout Alberta, that it will really engage grade 3 students around the province into saying: jeepers, the Legislature is something I want to pay attention to. Guess what? Why pay attention to the Legislature when all the big decisions are made behind closed doors, behind the veil of secrecy that is beginning to cloak this government?

If that is maybe, you know, one of the reasons why we want to support this amendment, I think it's a good reason to support it. Let's take a look. I hear in Members' Statements from both members on this side of the House and members on that side that, you know, we're worried about democracy; we want to re-engage the public; we want to get people out to vote. That's all fine and dandy. But when we do actions like this, that actually diminish our role as legislators, I don't think that's backing up what, in fact, we're doing here. It's disingenuous to sort of do one thing and say another. We might as well start acting in a way that's in accordance with what we're saying, that we want democracy to be revitalized and the spirit of debate to continue.

On that note, those are my comments as to why I support this amendment, why I believe it is an important amendment that will help strengthen Alberta's democracy and one that I hope all members of this House will support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chase: No one knows what goes on behind closed doors. That should be our Alberta theme song. Last week we spent a great deal of time talking about the mushroom as an emblem for Alberta, and that's how the government is treating its people: putting them behind closed doors under a layer of we all know what: fertilizer, for the sake of the ears that may be tuned into the program today.

This government doesn't live up to its title of Progressive Conservative. The government doesn't seem to know whether it's progressive or regressive. We talked about three steps forward, two steps back, five steps in total. If the government had any kind of confidence in its own legislation, it wouldn't have to hop into its H.G. Wells updated version of the time machine and go back in time with a giant bottle of whiteout to erase its trace. It's a great concern.

This government over the last number of years, under which I've had the pleasure to serve, has moved more and more legislation into regulation. What's particularly offensive about this piece of legislation, such as totalitarian regimes are prone to do, is the Orwellian concept that in controlling the past, you could therefore control the future. If the thing is done right, then it should be transparent, it should be accountable, and it should be open to discussion and debate, not hidden behind cabinet doors under the auspices of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

It worries me when I see a continuing trend with this government, a type of nostalgic desire to go back in time: the human rights act, that we discussed on Monday and Tuesday, going back in time, recognizing the authority of parents, which has never actually been lost, this desire to go back to potentially a time when women and children were considered a chattel. How far back do we go?

This is supposed to be a progressive piece of legislation which is going to bring economic harmony and labour mobility between the two provinces, yet there seems to be sufficient fear, uncharacteristic fear from this government that they need to have a delete clause. This government that is so keen, you know: don't apply the brakes

when it comes to oil sands development; full speed; ride that roller coaster right to the end. To use the western analogy, ride the horse into the ground.

4:20

This desire to go forward, on one hand, and then with a bungee cord be pulled back into reality and need to go back behind closed doors to correct the original mistakes, this whiplashing effect that I've talked about before in this House, is very disconcerting for Albertans who are trying to figure out whether this government has a road map, whether it has a direction, whether there's a plan. And, of course, when the plan, if there is one, is locked in a cabinet door somewhere in regulation which at the whim of the cabinet can be changed, then it's pretty hard, as the Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, to know what the rules are when they're made up as the player goes along.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

As we've debated, the TILMA bill has potential. But not being able to have the opportunity as a House, as elected representatives of the people to make whatever adjustments or corrections but to leave it solely to the wisdom of the cabinet, that sometimes seems like an oxymoron. We have some very capable cabinet ministers, ones that, you know, in good times might deserve bonuses or merit pay. But the idea of Albertans surrendering their democratic rights to the collective, selective wisdom of 23 cabinet ministers is a little bit frightening. The idea of, you know, in cabinet we trust – maybe we should establish our own Alberta currency to reflect these concerns.

Retroactivity is a concern. The idea that this government can basically go back in the snow and sweep the traces of where it was intending to go, wake up the next morning and there's no footprints and there's no path and Albertans haven't, as I say, a clue as to the direction the government is taking, is extremely disconcerting.

Individuals like I believe it's Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch must lose sleep over every successive attempt this government makes to take things out of legislation and hide them in regulation. That's a type of arrogance that, again, is only found in, you know, the divine right of kings or the divine rule of kings, this notion that we know best. I mean, I used to enjoy the show *Father Knows Best* back in the '50s, but I don't want to go back to the '50s. I want to be part of a progressive province that looks ahead rather than just driving along in the rearview mirror.

This government has to get with the program. It has to decide where it's going. It has to develop a map that other Albertans can follow. It has to have a set of tenets that are written down whereby we know where we're going. This business of "Trust us," given the recessionary times we find ourselves in, just doesn't cut it. For this bill to go forward, we must at least take out section 5, as the amendment recommends, or we as a democracy surrender all of our authority to the government. I'm not prepared to do that, nor are my constituents.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise in support of this amendment to delete section 5. I believe that this bill and particularly section 5 is an actual all-out assault on the powers of this Legislature and it is an attempt to usurp the powers vested in a democratically elected body. It is an assault on hundreds of years of constitutional tradition, and it ought to be defeated. By

passing this amendment, which is identical to one that the NDP opposition had prepared, we can take out this particularly irksome assault on our democratic traditions. I just want to say with respect to this amendment and this particular section of Bill 18 that section 5 gives legislative powers to the cabinet of Alberta. It is a very dangerous precedent, and it's not one that this Legislature ought to permit.

There have been attempts to do this and examples of this in Canadian parliamentary history in the past. I would like to read some quotes from the Ontario Supreme Court in a case entitled *Ontario Public School Boards' Association versus Attorney General of Ontario* in 1997. It is interesting. The court characterizes such a provision as we were discussing today as reversing the usual rule that "legislative power is vested in the democratically elected Legislative Assembly to make laws after full public debate," not in the executive of a particular political administration. It went on to characterize such a power in the following way:

This breathtaking power, to amend by regulation the very statute which authorizes the regulation, is known to legal historians as a "King Henry VIII" clause because that monarch gave himself power to legislate by proclamation, a power associated since the 16th century with executive autocracy

It describes such powers as

constitutionally suspect because it confers upon the government the unprotected authority to pull itself up by its own legal bootstraps and override arbitrarily, with no further advice from the Legislative Assembly, and no right to be heard by those who may be adversely affected by the change, the very legislative instrument from which the government derives its original authority.

Mr. Chairman, this goes on to say:

It is one thing to confer this extraordinary power if it is actually needed for some urgent and immediate action to protect an explicitly identified public interest. It is quite another thing to hand it out with the daily rations of government power, unlimited as to any explicit legal purpose for which it may be exercised.

I want to be very, very clear that there is no outstanding reason, urgency which compels the government to act without the Legislature to amend pieces of legislation which may come into conflict with the terms of TILMA. In fact, to put an agreement, a negotiated contract as it were, between provinces above the Legislature and above legislation itself is something that I think flies in the face of our democratic traditions.

Mr. Chairman, I want to read some quotes from a book, and I want to start by saying that I am in no way attempting to associate this government and what it's doing with the regime in Hitler's Germany in 1930. This I want to emphasize and underline. I don't want members opposite to be coming to the conclusion that I'm attempting to equate what the government is doing or this government in general with that. But this is a cautionary tale. This is the tale of how Hitler came to power in Germany. He came to power legally. He came to power through a mechanism which is somewhat similar – well, I would go further; I would say it is similar to the proposal that we have before us.

4:30

This is obviously an extreme example. I'm not suggesting that this is where this government wants to take us. But the principle, I think, needs to be illustrated, so I'm going to read some sections from William Shirer's book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, which I just got from the library downstairs. It says:

The plan was deceptively simple and had the advantage of cloaking the seizure of absolute power in legality. The Reichstag which was the German parliament,

would be asked to pass an "enabling act" conferring on Hitler's cabinet exclusive legislative powers for four years. Put even more simply, the German Parliament would be requested to turn over its constitutional functions to Hitler and take a long vacation.

The question was:

"How could they fail . . .

This is the Reichstag.

. . . to dismiss the apprehension with which they had begun to view the excesses and abuses of his party? Could they now hesitate to grant him their entire confidence, to meet all his requests, to concede the full powers he claimed?"

The answer was given two days later, on March 23, in the Kroll Opera House in Berlin, where the Reichstag convened. Before the house was the so-called Enabling Act – the "Law for Removing the Distress of People and Reich . . ." as it was officially called. Its five brief paragraphs took the power of legislation, including control of the Reich budget, approval of treaties with foreign states and the initiating of constitutional amendments, away from Parliament and handed it over to the Reich cabinet for a period of four years. Moreover, the act stipulated that the laws enacted by the cabinet were to be drafted by the Chancellor and "might deviate from the constitution." No laws were to "affect the position of the Reichstag" – surely the cruelest joke of all – and the powers of the President remained "undisturbed."

Hitler reiterated these last two points in a speech of unexpected restraint to the deputies assembled in the ornate opera house, which had long specialized in the lighter operatic works and whose aisles were now lined with brown-shirted storm troopers, whose scarred bully faces indicated that no nonsense would be tolerated from the representatives of the people.

The government [Hitler promised] will make use of these powers only in so far as they are essential for carrying out vitally necessary measures. Neither the existence of the Reichstag nor that of the Reichsrat is menaced. The position and rights of the President remain unaltered . . . The separate existence of the federal states will not be done away with. The rights of the churches will not be diminished and their relationship to the State will not be modified. The number of cases in which an internal necessity exists for having recourse to such a law is in itself a limited one.

The fiery Nazi leader sounded quite moderate and almost modest; it was too early in the life of the Third Reich for even the opposition members to know full well the value of Hitler's promises. Yet one of them, Otto Wells, leader of the Social Democrats, a dozen of whose deputies had been "detained" by the police, rose – amid the roar of the storm troopers outside yelling, "Full powers, or else!" – to defy the would-be dictator. Speaking quietly and with great dignity, Wells declared that the government might strip the Socialists of their power but it could never strip them of their honour.

We German Social Democrats pledge ourselves solemnly in this historic hour to the principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and socialism. No enabling act can give you the power to destroy ideas which are eternal and indestructible.

Furious, Hitler jumped to his feet, and now the assembly received a real taste of the man.

You come late, but yet you come! [he shouted] . . . You are no longer needed . . . The star of Germany will rise and yours will sink. Your death knell has sounded . . . I do not want your votes. Germany will be free, but not through you! [Stormy applause.]

The Social Democrats, who bore a heavy responsibility for the weakening of the Republic, would at least stick to their principles and go down – this one time – defiantly. But not the Center Party, which once had successfully defied the Iron Chancellor in the Kulturkampf. Monsignor Kaas, the party leader, had demanded a written promise from Hitler that he would respect the President's power of veto. But though promised before the voting, it was never given. Nevertheless the Center leader rose to announce that his party would vote for the bill. Bruening remained silent. The vote was soon taken: 441 for, and 84 (all Social Democrats) against. The

Nazi deputies sprang to their feet shouting and stamping deliriously and then, joined by the storm troopers, burst into the Horst Wessel song, which soon would take its place alongside "Deutschland ueber Alles" as one of the two national anthems:

Raise high the flags! Stand on rank together.

Storm troopers march with steady, quiet tread . . .

Thus was parliamentary democracy finally interred in Germany.

Mr. Chairman, again, I don't think that that's what's happening here, but it is the mechanism that was used to take away parliamentary power. Democratically elected people lost their authority, lost their ability to make laws by delegating that power themselves to the cabinet in that case. The results, I think, I don't have to talk about here. I don't think, quite apart from TILMA or any other policy of the government, that this Legislature should be engaged in the process of delegating its legislative authority to the cabinet. I don't care what the issue is; it is wrong. It is wrong for the government to ask us to do that, and we need to send a very clear message to them that we will not permit this abrogation of democratic principles that the people of Alberta have supported for over 100 years.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all members from all parties to look at this issue not as a question of TILMA or of any policy of the government but a question of the rights of the Assembly versus the rights of the government and urge you to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. On the amendment, Mr. Chairman, I've been listening to the debate. I've thought that a number of good points have been made. I think it's important just for me for the record to repeat the intent of the amendment, which is to strike out section 5 of this bill.

The biggest reason there's so much concern around section 5 is that it gives cabinet, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, two extraordinary powers at least. One is to go back in time and change things retroactively. Section 7(3) says:

A regulation made under subsection (1) may be made retroactive to a date not earlier than April 1, 2007, and if made retroactive

- (a) is deemed to have come into force on the date specified in the regulation, and
- (b) is retroactive to the extent necessary to give it force and effect on the date specified in the regulation.

So the first concern I have is that somehow this is allowing cabinet to go back in time and change the rules from up to two years ago. That's wrong. It's illogical. It's devious. It's dishonest. It's constitutionally dubious as well.

The other main concern I have with this bill and the reason I'm supporting this amendment is that this continues the process that is so well under way here of the cabinet quietly overthrowing this Legislature. I think the reaction to the debate here confirms that that overthrow has largely happened, because while we are here debating a significant piece of legislation which could very well end up in the Supreme Court of Canada, barely a single government member of this Assembly is paying any attention.

The reason for that is that this Legislature is no more than a rubber stamp. The members of this Assembly, presumably, are coached to ignore the debate or are urged not to participate even though they are going to stand here and vote on a bill that is very possibly going to be challenged in the Supreme Court and overthrown. I think that we have developed a culture of casual disregard for the activities of this Legislature, and there are no greater offenders of that than the members sitting on the government side. Certainly, I can see that right now.

4:40

Those are the two key things, Mr. Chairman: a cabinet giving itself the ability to go back and rewrite history and to go in and change the law as passed by this Assembly. That's why I think this amendment is needed so badly.

I think we have to approach this from a couple of angles at least. One is precedent, and a number of colleagues in the opposition caucuses have spoken to this. This is a dangerous precedent, and it's a precedent that's completely unjustified, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre has said repeatedly. This is a trade bill. This is a largely administrative bill. Why do we have to give such draconian authority, such remarkable and potentially arbitrary power, to the cabinet for some bill like this? How is this justified?

Clearly, we're not going to get an answer to that from any of the government members because they've allowed themselves to be reduced to a rubber stamp. But not one of them seems concerned, Mr. Chairman, that this bill is going to get pushed through. I would like to hear somebody from the government benches give some justification for why we need these extraordinary powers for TILMA. Sad to say, I don't expect to get one.

We need to ask ourselves: where could this lead as a precedent? What are the dangers of this precedent? What happens if this gets accepted and in the future it's cited as an example for another bill that allows a different cabinet under different circumstances to go back in time and change the rules or to elevate itself above the Assembly? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – I don't always get that in the right order – you know, drew an example from history. It's a dramatic example, but we need to remember those kinds of lessons. What seemed like an innocent or an acceptable compromise at the time, some 79 years ago in Berlin, turned out to be an important stepping stone towards a global catastrophe.

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood indicated, nobody's forecasting a global catastrophe here, but these precedents are important, and I don't think it takes any great imagination to imagine a cabinet in the future wanting to go back in time and amend health legislation as if the rules had been different two years before their meeting or a cabinet in the future wanting to simply rewrite a piece of legislation that's inconvenient for some reason and citing this particular bill as a precedent. "Well, they did it under TILMA, so we can do it now to rewrite something else," or "We can do it now to go back and try to change history." I think those are very, very dangerous precedents. There are any number of possibilities for that.

I just wish I could hear some explanation from the government of why this is necessary. We have seen this government from time to time proceed with legislation that was unconstitutional. We've seen that with the insurance industry. Ultimately the Supreme Court ruled against the government, and the government has so far tended to ignore the Supreme Court. We've also seen that in the issue of farm worker safety, where the Alberta government, this government, explicitly forbids paid farm workers from organizing into labour unions. They explicitly single out one particular segment of society and impair their right of association. That issue has gone to the Supreme Court of Canada, and it has been ruled unconstitutional, yet this government continues to ignore that. Those things will come back to haunt them.

This government damages its own credibility, it damages the rule of law, it damages the authority of the courts by routinely doing this sort of thing, and I think they're going to do it again here, Mr. Chairman. This is a bill, as has been said, that is constitutionally suspect.

Mr. Chairman, I would ask maybe the President of the Treasury Board or one of the sponsors of the bill, one of the cabinet ministers

here today: can you give us some justification for this? Will you engage in this debate, or are every single one of you silenced by some pressure from somewhere? Are every one of you going to stay silent while we pass a piece of legislation that goes back in time and gives your cabinet the authority to rewrite history? I'm looking for a gesture from one of you. Justify the bill, engage in the debate, stand up. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, stand up and justify why this bill is necessary.

Mr. Marz: You wouldn't want my gesture.

Dr. Taft: He says that I wouldn't want his gesture. I'd like some gesture here. Anybody.

Okay. Well, let it be noted for the record that of the many government members here not a single one attempted to justify this provision. I think that's shameful, but I think it exactly confirms the reason that we're opposed to this. We are steadily watching this Assembly be overthrown by cabinet, and the behaviour of the members opposite confirms that that process is already well under way.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat. Perhaps one of the members over in the corner, the Member for Rocky Mountain House or the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, wants to engage in this discussion. Justify it.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think the silence speaks volumes.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I didn't exactly intend to get up now and follow my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview although I didn't want things to grind to a complete halt here. When I saw no members from the government side of the House jumping up to engage the member in debate, I thought I would get up and keep the debate going.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, they are not on the government side getting up to talk to you to justify their stand on this bill, to justify section 5, to justify why they undoubtedly are going to vote against the amendment put forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East because they don't feel that they have to justify themselves to you. A government that would feel that it had to justify itself to you on a point such as this would not be bringing forward a point such as this. A government that felt that it was accountable to the people, a government that felt that it was a responsible government in the definition of the words "responsible government" would be on its feet, but it would be on its feet to argue something entirely different than this because the legislation that we see in front of us right now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and all other hon. members assembled in this House right now, would not contain a section like section 5.

4:50

Now, this sort of thing, this sort of section, this sort of attempt to get the trains to run on time if we had any trains in this province, this attempt to bring in administrative convenience – I can hardly use the word "efficiency" given my comments about the lack of efficiency of this government in its budgeting process a little earlier this afternoon – this attempt to bring in this administrative convenience, to put that ahead of the public interest or the rule of law can only be done and is only ever done by a government so full of itself, so consumed by its own arrogance that it's not a matter of caring about what the public thinks or what's in the public interest or ceasing to care about what's in the public interest; it's not even on their radar.

You know, I've been sitting here this afternoon, as I was, I guess, yesterday, when we first started committee debate on Bill 18, listening to the exchange back and forth between members of the

second party and members of the third party, largely, and in preparation for this debate reviewing this afternoon the *Hansard* from yesterday as we were debating Bill 18, and I can't help but think back to my school days, my fairly young school days in Ontario.

Mr. Mason: You remember that far back?

Mr. Taylor: I do remember that far back because it helps to remember history to keep from repeating the mistakes of history.

I remember I would think it would be in around grade 5 or grade 6, if I remember the Ontario school curriculum back then, that we learned about the government and governance of Upper Canada and the Family Compact and the brave, initially failed rebellions of William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis-Joseph Papineau in Lower Canada at the same time, a couple of backwater, bush-league, Canadian-style rebellions, hardly on the scale and scope of the way the Americans would have done it up, you know, the way they did do it up in 1776. It was a kinder, gentler, more polite and, as it seemed at the time, less effective rebellion, in fact, without which we wouldn't even have this country that we call Canada today, nor would we be sitting here, pointlessly it seems sometimes, nor would we be sitting here in this Legislature today, nor would our counterparts in the Ontario Legislature or the Quebec Assembly or the Parliament of Canada because that rebellion gave rise to a royal commission of inquiry, the Durham report, which began the process that ultimately, 30 years later, culminated in Confederation and in the process brought the people of Canada – the people of Canada then and the people yet to come, all of us – responsible government, representation by population, one person, one vote. It hasn't always worked as effectively in practice as it does on paper. It hasn't always been perfect, but it's been better than any alternative.

The reason why that rebellion happened, Mr. Chair, in the first place was because there was not responsible government in Upper Canada at the time, and there was not any interest by the ruling classes in responsible government in Upper Canada. In fact, there was interest only in a whole bunch of mutual back-scratching and featherbedding. The aristocracy, the British colonial governor, and the executive made sure that they looked after themselves and that they looked after one another, and the people of Upper Canada and the people of Lower Canada could go hang, for all they cared.

We can go farther back than that. I mean, the whole history, Mr. Chairman, of parliamentary democracy is a history ripe with examples of the people struggling for equality, struggling to have their say, struggling against royals and monarchical despots and corrupt nobles and evil robber barons who wanted to keep the peasants down because you can't be rich if there aren't poor people; you can't be upper-class if there aren't lower-class people; you can't lord it over your equals. Those in the underclasses spent – what's it been now? – almost 900 years fighting back and wresting, piece by piece, little bits of power away from the ruling classes so that the people could rule themselves.

Our shining example of that in Canada was William Lyon Mackenzie and the rebellion of 1837. It didn't go anywhere. Mackenzie got his sorry butt jammed in jail for a while. Somebody got hanged if I remember correctly. But, you know, it started what was then an unstoppable force here in Canada, and it gave us our country, it gave us our rule of law, it gave us our government, it gave us our freedom, and it gave us our rights as individuals to rule. Maybe we as people have gotten a little soft, a little complacent, a little used to having it so good. I don't know. Or maybe there are just evil people who seek to take our rights and our powers from us.

This is an evil piece of legislation. This is an evil, evil section. This is an absolutely unnecessary, unrequired, unjustifiable section in this bill. There is no justification even if you are prepared to

accept that this or any other government was so grossly incompetent that they could not enter into a free trade and labour mobility agreement with the next-door province and keep themselves from being fined repeatedly for the same offence. You know, there's just no justification for this kind of naked power grab. I don't condone it. I personally don't understand it.

I don't know that there are any individuals in the government or any individuals propping them up in the backbenches, doing their trained seal approach and putting their hands up and saying "aye" when the government whip tells them to – I don't know that there are any people over there who are inherently evil or inherently corrupt or inherently bad people. But, you know, persons can be pretty spectacular, and people together can sometimes be pretty dastardly. It seems to me that when you get this bunch of persons together in a group, they lose sight of what they're supposed to be there for, which is not for the people of Alberta to serve them. It's the other way around. The job of every elected representative in this House – Liberal, New Democrat, Conservative; yes, even Conservative – is to serve the people of Alberta.

This legislation cannot, does not, will not serve the people of Alberta so long as section 5 remains in there, and that's why I will be supporting amendment A2.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Acting Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you wish to speak on this amendment?

Mr. Chase: I've spoken. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5:00

The Acting Chair: Are there any further speakers on the amendment?

Call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:01 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	Mason	Taft
Hehr	Pastoor	Taylor

Against the motion:

Allred	Hayden	Redford
Amery	Horne	Renner
Bhullar	Horner	Sandhu
Brown	Jacobs	Snelgrove
Calahasen	Klimchuk	Stevens
Campbell	Lindsay	VanderBurg
Denis	Lund	Weadick
Doerksen	Marz	Woo-Paw
Evans	McFarland	Xiao
Goudreau	Ouellette	Zwozdesky
Hancock		

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are now back on Bill 18. The hon. leader of the third party on Bill 18.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Chairman, on Bill 18. I just want to indicate to the House that I have an amendment, which I will distribute to the table and to the other hon. members of the Assembly. If you'll just let me know when you're ready, I will read it into the record.

The Chair: This amendment is now known as A3. The hon. leader of the third party on A3.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move an amendment to Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I will move that Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 2 by striking out subsection (7) and substituting the following: "(7) Section 293.4 is repealed."

The Chair: Hon. member, please go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment removes a section of the respective act that was added by the government's 2008 TILMA implementation bill. These clauses apply to the portions of the bill that deal with extraprovincial bodies. I just want to indicate that this amendment is, in my view, a necessary one.

We've talked for some time about Bill 18 and its general clauses. We've had the debate on section 5. But I just want to indicate that the current bill states under (7) that section 293.4 is repealed and the following is substituted:

Regulation prevails

293.4 Where there is a conflict or inconsistency between a provision of a regulation made under section 293.3 and a provision of this Act or a provision of a regulation made under another section of this Act, the provision of the regulation made under section 293.3 prevails to the extent of the conflict or inconsistency.

Mr. Chairman, here we have again the same sort of question that we just debated under section 5, and it says – and I just want to go over this again – that where there is a conflict or inconsistency between a provision made under section 293.3, then the provision of the regulation “prevails to the extent of the conflict or inconsistency.” I just want to indicate that in lots of ways we're on dangerous ground. I think that we ought to keep in mind that these very broad powers of what applies and what doesn't apply can lead to unintended consequences and something that I think we ought to be very careful about.

5:20

Mr. Chairman, the concern that we have is that TILMA as it stands and with these various parts overriding other bills is dangerous. I know that the whole question of TILMA has been a contentious one from the beginning. I think the assumption on the part of the government is that there are very many aspects of restrictions and constraints on interprovincial trade that are holding back our economy, holding back the economy of British Columbia as well, and perhaps holding back Saskatchewan because the new right-wing government of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Party, formed by some right-wing elements of the former Saskatchewan Liberal Party and the Conservatives in Saskatchewan that managed to stay out of jail, has now taken the government there.

I just wanted to indicate that I don't think that there is a huge

problem with limitations and constraints on interprovincial trade. I hate to say it, but the government through its use of power of regulation overriding legislation and giving primacy to this bill over other bills is using a sledgehammer to swat a fly. You know, it's one of the things that I have kind of puzzled about. Why would they go to the extent of eroding the legislative power of this Assembly, giving legislative authority to the cabinet, which can meet behind closed doors and make political decisions without any public discussion, in order to make TILMA work? I don't think that TILMA accomplishes anything like what the government thinks it does.

As I was saying in the House the other day, I think that the government looks at Ronald Reagan with stars in their eyes. I see some hon. members, you know, nodding and grinning; Ronald Reagan is their hero. He and Brian Mulroney – oh, I don't see as many people nodding and smiling. Nevertheless, they created the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States, an appalling loss of sovereignty for our country. The Conservatives here look on that as a great accomplishment, sweeping away trade barriers and all of those great things that they believe in. Of course, then it was extended to Mexico and became the North American free trade agreement.

I think that there's a bunch of wannabes here, Conservatives that look up to Ronald Reagan. Maybe they're a little embarrassed about Brian Mulroney. Even so . . .

An Hon. Member: George W. Bush.

Mr. Mason: George W. Bush? Maybe. I don't know.

They want to emulate them. They want to have their own free trade agreement. Even though it doesn't make very much difference, they as good Conservatives want to do that because that's the kind of thing that good Conservatives do. They pass these laws that are extraterritorial, that supercede the powers of Legislatures and Congresses, and they open up the world for their idea of economic progress.

I just think that, on balance, Mr. Chairman, we ought to pass this amendment. If we're going to pass this bill and we're going to continue down the road of TILMA, then I think this amendment makes a great deal of sense. I know that TILMA is very important to the government, and they like to point to it as an accomplishment, but TILMA is going to go up and down. We're going to add Saskatchewan because a conservative party was elected in Saskatchewan, so now they want to join in. But at the next election coming up very soon in British Columbia, there's a very good chance that the NDP may be elected at the expense of the Liberal government, which is really a conservative government. If that's the case, then TILMA's going to shrink again. It'll just be pushed a little bit to the east. It'll be Alberta and Saskatchewan. [interjection]

You know there's always the possibility that the Conservatives could come to power in Manitoba, although I don't think that's too likely given that Premier Doer is the most popular Premier in all of Canada and runs a very balanced and effective government. So that's not likely to happen. I can tell you one thing, Mr. Chairman. It's inevitable that the NDP will get back into power at some point in Saskatchewan, and then TILMA is going to shrink again.

You know, is it really worth it, you guys on the other side? Is it really worth it to push so hard and be so excited about this trade bill? It's just going to go up and down like a yo-yo. One province will be in for a while, and then they're going to be out again. In lots of ways I just think that it's a bit futile. Ultimately, the main effect that this has is to prohibit local purchasing requirements by local authorities: school boards or hospital boards or municipalities. I

don't think that's in the best interests of the people because it means that small business gets run out of business by big business. That's why Conservatives like things like TILMA, and that's why New Democrats don't. It's as simple as that.

All I can say is that this agreement has no real future in Canada because it's just simply going to be opposed by New Democratic governments. One would hope that from time to time, if there was a progressive Liberal government, they would oppose it as well. So it's going to go swinging back and forth like a pendulum and not make much difference.

I would just urge my colleagues to support the amendment because I think it takes out some of the more irritating portions of the bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I'd move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report progress on Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

5:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading
 Bill 21
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009
 (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 18: Mr. Hancock]

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other members who wish to speak on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

Bill 22
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009
 (continued)

[Adjourned debate March 18: Mr. Hancock]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I've learned by the speed at which Bill 21 went through into third that I need to be jumping up a whole lot faster.

Comparing Bill 22 to 21 is somewhat difficult in that 21 is absolutely offensive. For years this government has gone over budget between \$1 billion and \$2 billion, but I wasn't fast enough on my feet, so I'll talk about the interim bill, Bill 22.

Bill 22 doesn't have nearly the negatives associated with it although, as numerous members have pointed out, had the government released its yearly budget in a timely manner, Bill 22 basically would have been unnecessary. But seeing as the government dragged its feet hoping for some type of global recessionary miracle that would shine its light on Alberta and magically the price of oil and gas would return to \$147 a barrel and a gigajoule of gas would be back in the area of \$14 – that didn't happen.

I have a degree of sympathy, actually, with regard to Bill 22 in that we have to have some kind of obvious carry-over while we anxiously anticipate the passing or at least the discussion of the budget. It's certainly far from a cakewalk passing.

I do appreciate the fact that as the government, forces external have had an effect on Alberta's economy, and I am aware that a small portion of the \$10 billion is going to keep democracy working. In fact, it's paying our Legislative Assembly Office bills; it's paying our constituency office bills.

I'm sure a number of members in this House, particularly urban members, have gotten caught in a circumstance where even though the economy is going down and eventually real estate prices and lease agreements will probably follow suit, we basically, a large number of us, had to sign documents for lease agreements. I doubt very much that anyone in an urban setting found themselves in a situation where the landlord was saying: please stay, and I'll reduce your monthly lease. Likewise, the cost of supplies has to carry over from month to month. I understand the need for, as individuals have said before, keeping the lights on and the fans running, the photocopyers operating.

But I would like to think that given what control we do have within the province, we would get to the point where the interim financing would be less and less necessary, and part of the solution for reducing our dependency on temporary measures such as interim financing is having a more stable economic base.

We've been for far too many years dependent on oil and gas, whether we've moved from conventional to new types of opportunities within the oil sands or another form that is, well, in my mind, equally controversial, coal-bed methane. The reality is that we're still resource dependent. We haven't got past the point where finished products bring in more money than the raw product. Within the interim budget in that short period of time how many million dollars' worth of bitumen are being shipped elsewhere? When we come to our next interim budget, how many more barrels of bitumen will have been processed when new pipelines have been operated?

In order to get our interim budget correct or to eliminate our interim budgets, we need to be diversifying our economy. Within that \$10 million I would have been very pleased to see, for example, residences, infrastructure for postsecondary campuses taking place. The minister of advanced education rightly pointed out that the University of Calgary is the recent lottery winner in terms of 600 new spaces, but as I pointed out, that only accounts for accommodating 7.4 per cent of University of Calgary students.

One of the circumstances that I would have liked to have seen flagged in the interim budget was the government's indication, at least, that they were going to work together with their federal counterparts and that maybe they had in the funding of the interim financing struck a committee, at least, that was going to work with

the federal counterpart to either eliminate the parental portion of the tuition fee, that compromises students, or potentially increase the amount students could borrow without that amount being affected by their parents' combined incomes, which a number of students have no access to anyway as they've left the house. In the interim financing I would have liked to have seen, even if it was only a temporary commitment, some type of direction indicating that school infrastructure was going to be acknowledged as in bad need of repair.

I realize that the interim budget is just a carry-over, but whether it's the supplementary supply budget or whether it's the interim budget, I would have really appreciated having some kind of a hint as to the direction we'll be going on April 7. Words like, you know, "wait and see" or "we're monitoring the situation," unfortunately, do not give myself or a number of Albertans comfort. Within the interim budget there is no possible way that we could have eliminated the recessionary trends. We couldn't have magically by some stimulus package within this interim budget restored the opportunities for the 30,000 Albertans that have lost their jobs over the last two months, but within the interim budget we could have struck committees. We could have financed committees to look at how it is that we're going to get those jobs back for the 30,000 Albertans; how we're through diversifying our economy going to create greater stability; how potentially, while these 30,000 people are out of work, we could have set up retraining courses at our numerous colleges and institutes to redirect people in areas where they would have sustainable jobs.

5:40

A number of people, the first ones to lose their jobs, that aren't accounted for in the interim budget are the drillers. Some people have been fortunate enough to find some drilling possibilities in B.C. Others have found some possibilities in Saskatchewan. But in speaking with a driller this past weekend in Calgary, they're very concerned about the lack of ongoing direction and the whole fact that we can't approach it just within this interim budget.

We've got to realize that our conventional oil and gas supplies are limited. With luck, when we get into carbon sequestration, we may be able to pump out those last few barrels of conventional oil and gas, but we don't see within this interim budget, again, any kind of direction from this government as to how they're going to turn the possibility of sequestration into an economic driver. Within the interim budget – and, again, I realize it's limited – some type of flagging would have been nice with regard to reclamation. You know, we get frustrated, and we get after the government for monitoring and for: let's establish a committee. But at least when a committee is designated, there is some hope that that committee is going to provide recommendations.

I had an opportunity this past Friday in Calgary to talk to the new head of ISEEE, the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, and he made some very interesting comments about new technology that the U of C is currently working on that could potentially store energy: solar energy, heat energy. He talked about the possibility with wind turbines, some type of turning that power into a compressed air circumstance and then using that compressed air, as they further develop the technology, to drive the turbines to produce the energy, the thought that we're potentially on the edge of being able to store renewable energy in the form of solar or wind or different types of cogeneration. For example, at that same meeting of the University of Calgary senate there was talk about the new heating plant and the cogeneration possibilities and the fact that there would be less emissions both in terms of CO₂ and in terms of noise and how that was going to save millions and millions of

dollars. Even though it's an interim, I'm looking for any kind of glimmer of potential indication from this government that they're going to get behind innovation and technology funding as a way of diversifying our economy.

Also, in terms of university, we need to be looking at a well-rounded population. Yes, we need engineers. Yes, we need geologists. Yes, we need more doctors. Yes, we need more scientists. But it would be nice to see more emphasis, more stimulation provided to the arts and to the humanities and to social sciences.

You know, we're talking \$10 million in a budget that will be reduced, I'm sure, on April 7. This flagging of dealing with approaching a different type of economic driver in this province would have provided a tremendous amount of, well, hope, for lack of a better word. People are getting more and more glum as we get further into this recession, and they're looking to this government to demonstrate some initiative.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(5) at this time the chair is required to put the question to the House on every appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 18 Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (continued)

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. You can fool me once but not twice. I'm standing and ready to debate and support this particular amendment. As we have noted before, this amendment is trying to remove the notion that somehow regulation trumps legislation. It's trying to remove the tyranny of the majority. It's trying to deal with the philosophy that might is right.

It was an interesting historical glimpse back in time that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood provided with his references to the power takeover in Germany. He made it very clear that he was not suggesting, nor am I, that this government is using tactics of a storm trooper nature. But this is one more bill in a long list of bills where democratic rights are eroded.

All members of the opposition supported Lorne Gibson, the Alberta Chief Electoral Officer, who was eventually fired for pointing out this government's failure to enshrine democratic rights. Lorne Gibson first made I think it was 186 recommendations. Unfortunately, this government decided that not one of them was sufficiently worth pursuing. I think that by the time Lorne was finally tossed out, he had come up with about 250 recommendations. Now, of the key recommendations a very minimal recommendation was the notion of a fixed election – a fixed election date, that is. It's very important that I have my terminology correct.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer has brought up numerous times in this House his concern about the government's failure to allow prosecution of 19 irregularities that occurred during the last

election. For a government that talks about transparency and accountability, this is extremely disconcerting.

5:50

Now, I don't expect that any time soon under the Conservative government I'm going to have somebody kick in my front door. I don't expect that within the realm of this Conservative government we're going to have an equivalent of a Kristallnacht. I don't expect that because I have voted Liberal, I am going to have to wear a red L on my jacket. Those were the extremes that people were subjected to during the Second World War. It's fairly safe to say that I don't expect that first they'll eliminate the intellectuals, as other governments have done. I would be sort of in the middle of the list of that. I would not have been one of the first to go, and I freely admit that. But during the Second World War there was a theme that came out.

Mr. Denis: That wasn't 1929.

Mr. Chase: No. It was actually 1939, you know. Yes, we've moved from Tennessee, and we're now finding ourselves in 1939 in Germany. We've hopped on the TILMA, trade, investment, and labour mobility, time machine.

I don't know to what extent this Legislature has the ability in terms of translation. I know that there is a preference to provide the translation. But a theme that was very significant, a theme song, a rallying cry, which I will spare you the singing of, during the rise of totalitarianism in Germany was this. [Remarks in German] I apologize for not being able to provide you an instant translation. It talked about freedom. It talked about standing up for democratic rights. It talked about not allowing, even in your darkest hour, your rights to be violated.

Maybe it seems that TILMA, you know, is not the Alberta trade measures act, but we are taking away democratic principles. This amendment from my colleague for Lethbridge-East is pointing this out, that when we rely on regulation by an individual or a small group of individuals at the expense of the democratic right of discussion and debate in the Legislature, then we have taken away the rights of individuals to be heard.

I have talked before about omnipotence, omniscience, but my firm belief – and I do consider myself a religious individual – is that that type of power is very much extraterrestrial, and giving that kind of power to either an individual in the form of a cabinet minister or to the cabinet themselves is a surrender of the right of freedom of speech, the right to put forward an idea that may be contrary.

I'm hoping that in debating this amendment, we will receive some type of response from the government in terms of the justification

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you again. It's 5:55, so the committee will rise and report progress on Bill 18.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Assembly concur?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

May I have a moment? We have very special guests of another hon. member here. I would like to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay for the introduction.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, and thank you for the indulgence. This is a surprise visit. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this House two constituents from Calgary-Mackay who are related to me by blood. We have Miss Jadine Paw, who was born and raised in Calgary-Mackay and who is now attending the University of Calgary medical school, and Mr. Jason Paw, my son, who is currently living in Edmonton, working at the University hospital. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As is customary on Wednesdays, a lot of good progress made. That having been said and looking at the hour, I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Issue 18

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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Parliamentary Assistant, Solicitor General and Public Security
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education
and Technology
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC),
Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (L),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Official Opposition House Leader
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L),
Official Opposition Whip
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC),
Minister of Municipal Affairs
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),
Minister of Employment and Immigration
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
Minister of Education, Government House Leader
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),
Minister of Infrastructure
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (L)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),
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Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Energy

Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Leader of the NDP Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
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NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
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Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
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Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L),
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Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
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Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (L),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (L)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 19, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

20th Anniversary of Members of the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Hon. members, someone once said that a week in political life might be like a lifetime. On March 20, 1989, two Members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly were elected for the first time and were subsequently re-elected in 1993, 1997, 2001, 2004, and 2008. They have survived six elections and have successfully completed 20 years of lifetimes in this Assembly working on behalf of their constituents and the people of Alberta.

Seven hundred and ninety-one men and women have been elected to serve in Alberta. Twenty were elected to serve six terms, three of whom are currently in this Assembly today. The hon. Member for Little Bow has been elected six times and will reach 20 years of service but not until 2012.

Today we recognize 20 years of service for the MLA for Lesser Slave Lake and the MLA for Rocky Mountain House. I would ask that both please approach the podium, and I would ask that the Premier approach as well.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has averaged, believe it or not, a phenomenal 61.15 per cent popular support in her six elections, an incredible number. The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House has averaged 59.9 per cent electoral support over six elections and is one of several MLAs in the history of Alberta to have received an increasing number of votes in four successive elections. Both have also served very, very well on Executive Council, and both represent incredibly large and diverse constituencies.

The area of Prince Edward Island is 5,640 square kilometres. The riding of Lesser Slave Lake is 70,790 square kilometres, 12.5 times as large. The riding of Rocky Mountain House is 23,188 square kilometres, four times the size of Prince Edward Island. Prince Edward Island has 27 MLAs. Hon. members, just one other interesting point about this: both of these members have averaged 80,000-plus kilometres per year in travel for the last 20 years. If the circumference of the earth is just above 41,000 kilometres, that means that each year for the last 20 years both of them have gone around the world twice. That's 40 times around the world. If you'd been able to average 100 kilometres per hour in your car, which is impossible, that meant that they've spent at least 800 hours per year in their vehicles coming back and forth to Edmonton and then finding their constituents because both represent extremely diverse, sparsely settled constituencies, and then when they find them, they have to work. That's a minimum of 800-plus hours. If they've each worked 50 hours per week, that's 16 weeks. That's four months per year just to and fro, Edmonton to their constituencies and within their constituencies. That is an enormous amount of time that's been devoted in that period.

We have designed a very special 20-year Mace pin to commemorate their 20th anniversary, and I would ask the leader of the government caucus, their leader, the Premier, to present the special pin to these two long-serving caucus members. Premier, you have a choice: you may pin it or present it. It's entirely up to you.

Please join me in thanking these two outstanding Members of the Legislative Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 25 grades 5/6 students from the Covenant Canadian Reformed school, which is located in Neerlandia, in your constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by their teachers and parent helpers. They are seated in the public and members' galleries this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 12 visitors from Glenwood, Alberta, eight of whom are students of the grade 9 class in that school. They are accompanied by two teachers and two leaders. These students have travelled on a bus that took six hours plus to get here. They've worked really hard since grade 6 to raise money to make this trip, and they're here to have a good time and learn about the Legislature. They're accompanied today by their principal, Mr. Kelly Thomas, and a teacher, Mrs. Crystal Hegedus, and their spouses, Mrs. Kathy Thomas and Mr. Michael Hegedus. I would invite them to rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 87 students that are visiting today from the Strathcona Christian Academy in my constituency. They're here to learn more about our political system and earlier participated in a mock Legislature. They are accompanied by their teachers Alan Foster, Jaime Peters, and Allison Amos, and parent helpers Mr. Neufeld, Mrs. Haas, Mrs. Gill, Mr. Ilkiw, Mr. Koop, Mrs. Williams, Mr. Whiston, Mrs. Kirchner, and Mrs. Stein. They're seated in both galleries, I assume, because there are so many of them, and I would ask if they would all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

1:40

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me enormous pleasure to rise and introduce six very special guests who are seated in your gallery. They are current and/or former members of the now world-famous Ukrainian Shumka Dancers. Tonight they formally begin their 50th anniversary celebration. I see that they have generously provided a copy of their souvenir program on your desks there, so you're getting a sneak peek at what's going to be handed out tonight.

I'll ask each guest to please rise and remain standing as I call out their names: the current president and an active dancing member, Marco Eugenio; another executive committee member and an active

dancing member, Katrina Baziuk; two former dancers who were members of the original Ukrainian Shumka Dancers group in 1959 – and I had the pleasure of dancing with them, Mr. Speaker, in 1963 – Leo and Mary Zalucky; another member of the original group, who was Shumka's first president and my first Ukrainian dance teacher, Orest Yusypchuk; and, finally, a man who actually used to work in this building, but now he is the man who is acknowledged as the founder, the founding artistic director, the man who brought it all together, co-ordinated it, and got it all started in 1959 and was also another of my Ukrainian dance teachers, and we're very proud of him, Mr. Chester Kuc.

Please welcome these wonderful individuals from Shumka. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure and my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some honoured guests who participated in our great announcement earlier today of more funding for affordable supportive living spaces in Alberta. I'd like to ask that my guests rise as I introduce them. Mr. John Pray is the president of Shepherd's Care Foundation in Edmonton, a facility providing Christian care for low-to moderate-income seniors within an aging-in-place environment; Mr. Bill Bartel, vice-chair of Shepherd's Care Foundation; Ms Sharon Read, the president and CEO of Excel Society of Edmonton, a not-for-profit organization that provides both support and advocacy for people with mental, physical, and developmental disabilities in Edmonton and Calgary; and Mrs. Jeannette Vatter, the chair of the Brazeau Seniors Foundation in Drayton Valley, providing supportive housing options that maintain the well-being of seniors in the community. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend each of my guests today and all those they represent in their tireless commitment to affordable supportive living options for Albertans.

As well, from my department I would like to introduce Mr. Dave Arseneault, assistant deputy minister of community support programs and strategic planning division, and Ms Marjory Sutherland, executive director of the supportive living and long-term care branch. Mr. Speaker, as you can see, they're in the members' gallery.

I'd ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today for me to rise and introduce two friends and constituents from the Linden community, Rod and Judy Wiebe. I first met Rod many, many years ago when I was a municipal councillor and Rod was a volunteer with the Kneehill Ambulance Service, where he spent over 20 years volunteering as an ambulance operator for his community. It's a pleasure for me to have them here today. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Merci, M. le Président. Aujourd'hui, en cette occasion des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, j'ai le plaisir et le privilège de présenter en votre nom, à vous et à l'Assemblée, quelques jeunes leaders de la communauté francophone de l'Alberta. Ils sont assis dans la galerie des députés. Les jeunes francophones se mobilisent

d'adresser des enjeux clés comme le leadership et la participation citoyenne. Je demande à nos invités de se lever pendant que je les présente: Mme Sophie Nolette, présidente de la Francophonie jeunesse de l'Alberta; M. Rhéal Poirier, directeur général; M. Stéphane Doucette-Préville, participant des dialogues jeunesse albertaine avec le Ministre de l'Emploi et de l'Immigration; et Mme Cindy Garneau, directrice générale de la Fédération du sport francophone de l'Alberta. Je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour leur souhaiter une bienvenue chaleureuse.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very special guest. Ms Nancy Beasley Hosker is manager of communications, humanitarian issues, and volunteer resources for the Canadian Red Cross in central and northern Alberta. A former Legislature reporter with the *Edmonton Sun*, Nancy started at the Canadian Red Cross as a volunteer just after the tsunami in southeast Asia in 2004. Like so many people who are drawn to the Red Cross because of its work internationally, she discovered that the organization was very busy right here in Alberta communities doing humanitarian work of great importance. Nancy is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two members of my constituency, Céleste and John Zurbrigg. They will be retiring soon after a combined total of 68 years of public service to the government of Alberta and to the people of Alberta in the area of information technology support. Their careers have spanned from the era of mainframe computers that filled a room to the latest technological advances in digital communication.

The Zurbriggs feel fortunate to have worked with so many skilled Albertans. They are grateful for the lasting friendships they have forged, especially because it was through their employment with this province that they met and eventually married. They along with the government of Alberta strongly encourage young Albertans to pursue careers in technology-based fields. Céleste and John are seated in the members' gallery above, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of my friends in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today a family from the Picture Butte area, the Oudshoorn family. John and Deborah are here today with their children. It's the first time that they've been in the building. I don't think they could have picked a nicer day to come here to Edmonton to see some of the neat things that do happen. I would ask that the Oudshoorn family, Kelsey, Danielle, Megan, and Caleb, along with their mom and dad, John and Deborah, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 13 constituents of mine who are here today to discuss seniors' issues

and particularly the pharmaceutical plan for seniors. I can't see up there, but I hope they're in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise when I call their names: Dena Greanya, lodge manager; Deanna Teskey, Lynda and Ron Jonson, Brent Simmonds, Bill Carby, Rose Dutkiwich, Roger and Betty Schneider, Vernon and Elaine Koch, and Eunice Semeniuk from Hinton; and from Jasper Janet Barker. I'd ask everybody to rise and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two members of my constituency although I'm not sure they're here. If they are, I'd like to read into the record Grant and Patti Geldart from Devon. Grant is a councillor for the town of Devon. If they're here, I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've invited some guests to join us here today to mark World Water Day. My guests are sitting in the public gallery. Would you rise as I call your name. Joining us from the Council of Canadians we have Kevin Force and Keely Kidner. Lanna Perrin is the communications director of the Sierra Club Canada. Dietlind Bork is a fieldworker for Amnesty International. Mike Mercredi and Peter Cyprien are residents of Fort Chipewyan. Joel French is here from Friends of the Lubicon, and from the University of Alberta Greenpeace chapter Logan McIntosh and Mark Mielke. Would you please join me in welcoming my guests to the Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Achievement Bonuses

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty three thousand public civil servants, or 80 per cent of the entire civil service, are not eligible for the \$40 million pool of achievement bonus money. It's simply unfair and insulting to Albertans in a time of recession and thousands of job losses that this government gives tens of thousands of dollars to top senior management, who already get a quarter of a million dollar salary or more, a generous pension, and a free car. To the Premier: why won't the Premier cancel this \$40 million in bonuses scheduled for this fiscal year now?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, the \$40 million bonus amount is shared amongst 6,100 people. I can tell you that they do not all have cars provided by the government. The median is about \$5,300. I believe what the member is referring to is the deputy ministers. We have 23 deputy ministers in government that receive part of the bonus structure. This is to bonus those that are outside of the union agreement. Union agreement is one separate entity, and these are people that are out of scope.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are both reporting surpluses this year despite the recession, yet here in Alberta this government has spent Alberta right back into another deficit. Why did the Premier and cabinet give bonuses of tens of

thousands of dollars to senior government officials to "reward achievement"? What was the achievement, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would hope that Manitoba does balance its budget. It receives about \$2 billion annually from the contribution of Alberta to Ottawa, the net contribution. Secondly, all of the tax regimes of both provinces that were quoted by the leader have sales taxes. They also have a much higher tax load, considerably higher, than the province of Alberta. They've got a huge amount of accumulated debt. By the way, they also have Crown corporations that have a lot of debt that doesn't appear on their balance sheet either.

Dr. Swann: If these bonuses were actually based on achievement instead of being standardized rewards for loyal senior officials, why is the Premier so quick to cancel them?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I said a few weeks ago that there will be belt-tightening. As for our employees that work for the government that are presently covered by a union contract, we said that we're not going to go and arbitrarily reduce whatever is in the contract in terms of their salary settlements. We will sit down and negotiate if this recession continues this year into next year. On the other hand, we have a group of people that are out of scope that have said: look, things are going to tighten up next year; we will not receive the achievement bonuses. I think that's very laudable of the 6,100 employees.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Deputy Minister of Executive Council received a total pay package of \$460,000, including a generous bonus. The Deputy Minister of Executive Council determines the size of the bonus pool for the government, and yesterday the Premier said that the pool will be \$40 million, to be paid out in June, before summer vacations. To the Premier: how much of an achievement bonus did cabinet allocate the Deputy Minister of Executive Council last year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all of the bonuses are a matter of record. What had happened back in 1999: there was quite a disparity between senior officials in government and management and some of the other provinces. The previous president of the Executive Council had asked a committee, a small committee – I believe it was chaired by Mr. Eric Newell, and it had Mr. Charlie Fischer on it, and I can't remember the third party member – to review public-sector management salaries, compare them to the private sector, and try to find some balance, and that's what we did.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: did the cabinet grade his performance as a quality performance, a superior performance, or an outstanding performance, the last of which would qualify the deputy minister for \$86,000?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, given what this government has accomplished over the last couple of years – we have moved more off the back burner; we've dealt with the teacher pension issue; we've dealt with a lot of the issues in Fort McMurray; we've involved cabinet and caucus in so many new policy directions – I think it was a tremendous achievement on behalf of government, and it's also reflected in the deputy ministers and other managers that help deliver the decisions that we make in this Assembly.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: does the Premier consider it a conflict of interest for the deputy minister who is setting the \$40 million bonus pool on behalf of the cabinet to also be eligible for the bonus?

Mr. Stelmach: No.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The independence and impartiality of senior government officials and the quasi-judicial boards in Alberta is paramount in an open and democratic society, yet senior government officials and members of these quasi-judicial boards are eligible for significant bonuses which, according to the Premier's statements yesterday, are all signed off by cabinet. To the Premier: how can senior members of the civil service be independent and impartial if they are eligible for significant bonuses that are signed off by the cabinet?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what they're talking about on independence. There's a pool that was established through debate.

Mr. MacDonald: You obviously don't know.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, if you know, then why are you interrupting my answer? Sorry, but that's the kind of behaviour we have in the House.

During budget deliberations a pool is set aside. There is a process for deciding how bonuses are awarded, again, achievement meaning that we've got to balance the budget. You also have to deliver on the mandates that the Premier, the President of Executive Council, dictates to every ministry. At the end of the day there are also issues that may come up in terms of the performance of the deputies and other managers. That's how the bonuses are decided.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how can the Labour Relations Board be independent and impartial if they are eligible for bonuses of up to 15 per cent on a top salary of over \$200,000 per year if the cabinet is calling the shots on how much of a bonus they get on an annual basis?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the pool is set by the Assembly through budget deliberations, not by cabinet. They'll have an opportunity to debate the issue as the budget is delivered April 7.

Mr. MacDonald: That pool has never been debated in this Legislative Assembly, and the Premier knows it.

Again, how can the Appeals Commission for the Workers' Compensation Board be independent and impartial if they, too, are eligible for bonuses of up to 15 per cent of their annual salary when that bonus is being set by your cabinet? How is that independent from the government, and how is that impartial?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the pool is established by the Assembly, and there's a process that we establish in terms of how the bonuses are awarded. It's a system that has worked very well. As I said before, all management, those that were eligible for bonuses, voluntarily said: look, I know we're heading into a very difficult economic year. They've collectively come and said: we

will not be accepting any bonuses; we'll suspend that and try to find as many dollars as we can to balance the needs of Albertans in the next budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This weekend the Energy minister fabulously declared that the nuclear renaissance is here. Well, the minister has shown himself to be quite the Renaissance man, indeed. He appears to be very enlightened, such that he knows something that no one else does. The question is to the minister. Will the minister please tell the House how we can safely dispose of radioactive nuclear waste when even Nobel Prize winners can't figure it out?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I certainly did indicate that there is a nuclear renaissance, and it is global. I didn't talk about a renaissance in Alberta, but I did say that there is a nuclear renaissance, and it's global. It's here; whether we like it or whether we don't is not the issue. There are a number of jurisdictions around the world that are currently increasing their capacity for nuclear energy. Relative to the treatment of spent fuel, recycling of spent fuel is a technology that's well applied in certain places in the world and certainly is way beyond, obviously, what the member opposite understands.

2:00

The Speaker: I need to know how this applies to Alberta.
The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My next question will illustrate that.

Stockpiling nuclear waste in the hope that future generations will clean up the mess is not the action of a Renaissance man; indeed, it's right out of the Dark Ages. It is irresponsible and short-sighted. This minister is refusing to release a report that will open up the public debate on this issue. My question is to the minister. Will the minister act like a real Renaissance man and enlighten Albertans with his nuclear report today, before his spin doctors nuke it out of all proportion?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the preamble, of course, is completely irrelevant to the situation in Alberta. There is no nuclear waste in Alberta, not that I'm aware of, in any event. Relative to what we're doing, I have said on a number of occasions and certainly publicly that we have a task force that has delivered us factual information relative to the proposed application of nuclear generation as it may or may not apply to Alberta. We're continuing with that work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's obvious that this Renaissance man is living in the Dark Ages. Nuclear power is an idea whose half-life has long since expired. Two months ago the Pembina Institute released a report that shows that Alberta can meet its energy needs without nuclear power, but this minister shows no signs of having read it. To the minister: when will you step out of the Dark Ages and admit that nuclear power is too expensive, too dangerous, and too short-sighted to meet Alberta's energy needs?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, a lot of kind of innuendo there that would indicate that somehow or another I have

said that nuclear energy is absolutely necessary for the province of Alberta. I've never made any such statement at any point in time. The fact of the matter – it's true – is that we could burn coal in Alberta for the next 200 years and produce all the electrical generation we require. Is that what the member opposite would have us do?

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

Natural Gas Rebates

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's close to the end of the March and, we sincerely hope, near the end of a very cold winter. Traditionally the end of March also means the end of natural gas rebates. Of course, this year that is notable because the program is scheduled to expire this year. I know many of my constituents are wondering if the program is going to be renewed. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Can he tell the Assembly if the natural gas rebate program will be renewed?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, as the member is certainly aware, there hasn't been a rebate in two months running because natural gas prices have been so low. That's good for consumers; however, it's tough on the province's bottom line. Given our commitment to encouraging energy efficiency and conservation, we have decided that the natural gas rebate program won't be renewed for the upcoming fiscal year. In the future we will take a look at the program or an alternate form of the program if natural gas prices significantly recover.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can the minister advise what programs are available to assist those seniors and people with disabilities who may have difficulties paying their heating bills next winter?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that seniors and persons with disabilities, especially those with low incomes, may be affected by high energy prices. While our programs don't specifically address utility costs, they provide financial assistance for low-income seniors and persons with disabilities who are in need. These programs are among the best in the country. For seniors this includes a monthly cash benefit through the Alberta seniors' benefit program, and for persons with disability it includes financial and health-related assistance through the AISH program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question goes back to the Minister of Energy. Has the minister considered the impact that not renewing the natural gas rebate program will have on Alberta's agricultural consumers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province certainly does recognize the impact the change will have on agricultural consumers such as greenhouses, irrigation, and grain drying. These consumers account for something less than 10 per cent of the total

rebates that were provided since 2003. We want to ensure that agricultural consumers are aware that the program will not be renewed so that they have time to make appropriate decisions based on their consumption. Agricultural consumers who can select their six-month rebate outside of the winter heating season will have until June 30 to make application for their '08-09 filings.

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

Achievement Bonuses

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Black's Law Dictionary* explains that quasi-judicial actions are valid if there's no abuse of discretion and that they often determine the fundamental rights of citizens. Alberta's quasi-judicial boards work for Albertans, but this independence from government influence is compromised by our bonus schemes. Can the Minister of SRD tell us whether or not the appointees of the Surface Rights Board, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, or the Land Compensation Board are beneficiaries of bonus packages?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the answer to that question, so I'll have to check and get back.

Mr. Hehr: Well, they are eligible for bonuses.

Given that the chair of the NRCB received \$28,000 in other cash benefits in 2008, which is a bonus, can the minister explain how the chair can be impartial in his decisions when his bonus is tied directly to the minister's approval?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think we've heard and seen this movie before, where they impugn the integrity of people working on these arm's-length commissions with absolutely no evidence whatsoever to suggest it. It's, frankly, very irresponsible for a party that said they want to act more responsibly and have a higher tone of debate in this House to make allegations based on purely circumstantial evidence.

Mr. Hehr: There are no allegations. We're questioning a bonus structure. Similar bonus structures are in place for other boards under the minister's department. Can the minister explain how the Surface Rights Board can be objective and fair to landowners when they are eligible for achievement bonuses?

Dr. Morton: Can the hon. member opposite give one single example of a decision where they weren't objective and fair? The answer is no. He can't.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Affordable Supportive Living Initiative

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has an aging population, one that is going to require varied and specialized services and accommodations to meet the changing needs of seniors. I know that today's announcement of capital funding is related to Alberta's aging demographic. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can you please advise the House how this funding will address the need for more affordable supportive living units in Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, improving quality, supply, and choice in the continuing care system is a top priority for this government. Proof of this is the over \$119 million in grant funding announced today through the affordable supportive living initiative and the lodge modernization and improvement program. In total this funding will help to build and update more than 3,000 supportive living and lodge units, with 1,153 units through ASLI and 1,992 units through the lodge modernization program.

Mr. Doerksen: My second question is for the same minister. That's significant funding, but how does this funding, as large as it is, even make a dent in the demand for this type of housing in Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, just talk to any person who will move into one of these new, modernized units and ask if their unit will make a difference in their life. The numbers speak for themselves. With this year's funding Alberta has invested \$365 million to develop and update almost 8,000 supportive living and lodge units.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. This is significant funding. Clearly, my constituents and Albertans across the province realize that the need is immediate with regard to this capacity. In reality how soon can they begin construction, and what are some anticipated completion dates for Albertans to move into this new capacity?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we've got a plan of action that is already under way. With the funding announced today, construction of the projects is expected to begin within nine months. Grant recipients are also expected to complete their projects within two years of receiving the initial payment.

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

Water Transfers

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. March 22 is World Water Day, and this year's theme is transboundary freshwater management, focusing on water that crosses over the border to our neighbours in other provinces and territories. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Since the Water Act does not make it clear that human needs must be the priority in all water allocations, will the government look at amending the act to make it explicit that the needs of people and communities should always come first?

2:10

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order in the gallery! You're not part of these proceedings.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member brings forward is very much part of the discussion that we are about to engage Albertans in with respect to water allocation. I would suggest that if it were so simple to simply say that human needs come first, it could have been done by now. But the fact is: how do you define what are human needs? How do you determine whether human needs include the water that's used for agricultural purposes to feed humans or whether human needs include the water that's used for industrial purposes to employ humans and pay the bills so that humans can exist? I would suggest to the member that that's a very simplistic way of looking at it.

Ms Blakeman: I disagree.

To the same minister. The system of – wait for it – first in time, first in right is an archaic throwback and bad management practice. When is this government going to bring their 19th century system into the 21st century and base water allocations on a system of priority needs, not just who got there first?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question last week when the member asked me about our water allocation process. I indicated to her that we are in the midst, as we speak, of exploring a number of different alternatives, that everything is on the table, and that we will be bringing forward a draft policy for Albertans to comment on later this summer or early in the fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. This year's World Water Day is highlighting transboundary water management, but in the oil sands we've had two years of untreated human waste dumped into the river, tailings ponds leaking into groundwater, and oil and grease spills. Given all of this what is the minister doing to ensure that we live up to our transboundary commitments to preserve water quality as it moves across the border?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, standards that are established nationally and in some cases internationally are something that we are involved in developing and ensuring that we adhere to those standards. I can assure the hon. member that Alberta lives up to its commitments that we have both interprovincially and internationally.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Affordable Supporting Living Initiative (continued)

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Helping seniors, including those that live in rural areas, to stay in their communities is part of the government's continuing care strategy. I appreciate that the government has announced the projects that will be receiving more than \$119 million in total to ensure that Albertans have increased quality, supply, and choice in the continuing care system. My questions are all to the minister of seniors. You've addressed a lot of the need for affordable living units in urban areas, but what about us rurals?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, our plans include seniors and Albertans with disabilities who live in rural areas. In today's announcement there is significant funding for rural facilities. Under the affordable supportive living initiative, known as ASLI, over \$35 million is going to rural areas. More than \$35 million is also going to rural areas from the lodge modernization and improvement program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, this is great news. There's a real need in rural Alberta for affordable supportive living. Will this funding actually translate into a meaningful amount of spaces in rural Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Yes. Mr. Speaker, this funding will make a real difference in areas outside of our big cities and towns. In rural

communities 489 new and upgraded spaces are being funded through ASLI, and there is funding for 1,284 spaces under the lodge modernization program. For example, in the member's own constituency the Lac Ste. Anne Foundation will receive more than \$4.5 million in lodge modernization and improvement funding for 60 units at the Pleasant View Lodge in Mayerthorpe.

Mr. VanderBurg: Wow. All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is wow. That's a great announcement. You know, I guess I'll ask the minister one final question. What was the criteria used by her department when deciding which projects would be funded? Was it just the MLA?

Mrs. Jablonski: No, Mr. Speaker, the MLA was not part of the criteria that we chose to select projects with. The funding was approved on a project-specific basis. Projects were selected based on an assessment of how the proposal complied with the program criteria. This way we ensured that funding went to the project proposals that addressed the greatest needs, and by so doing, we're getting a big bang for our buck in assisting thousands of Alberta seniors and persons with disabilities.

Centralized Cytology Lab Service

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, there is a concern in Lethbridge today. In fact, almost as we speak, there is a rally being held. People are concerned about the possibility of the community losing the cytology lab at the Lethbridge regional hospital, one more result of the minister's rushed restructuring of Alberta's health care system. To the minister of health my question is: in this time of high job losses how many staff who currently work in the Lethbridge lab or, in fact, all of those around the province are at risk for loss of employment?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, you know, this member hears a rumour somewhere, and then I'm supposed to confirm the rumour, and then I'm supposed to say how many employees are potentially affected by this rumour if it ever became true. Well, I don't know about any such rumour. I don't know about any such closing of any labs. So I would suggest the answer is zero.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Well, hypothetically – and I know that's not allowed, but we do know that this conversation is on the table – can the minister ensure that these centralized cytology lab services will not further privatize our health care system, and are they looking outside of Canada for these services under the RFPs that are going out?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I can answer similarly to how I just did, Mr. Speaker. She started off by saying that it was hypothetical, so I would suggest that we don't answer hypothetical questions in this Assembly.

Ms Pastoor: However, I said I couldn't do that, but we know that the discussion is on the table. That was the part you missed.

We know those RFPs are out there, so clearly something is happening. How can this minister ensure that there will not be an increased risk of errors in the testing because of the high volumes that will be going into centralized labs?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member either is continuing to ask hypothetical questions or she knows something that I don't

know, because I have no knowledge of centralized labs, so I can't answer the question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Emergency Wait Times

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November sick people had to wait an average of 8.1 hours at the U of A emergency room before they got treatment. Those who needed to be admitted had to wait another 14.5 hours. The story is even worse at the Royal Alex, Grey Nuns, and the Misericordia, where the waits were almost 30 hours. To the minister of health: when will you admit that a day is far too long for a patient to spend in a waiting room or on a stretcher?

Mr. Liepert: This member hasn't been paying attention because I've been saying ever since I took this portfolio, Mr. Speaker, that we have an outstanding health care system once you get into it. We have an access problem, and we're working at that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago Dr. Matthew Cooke, credited with solving the ER crisis in the U.K., told Alberta's ER docs that the wait times have been reduced to four hours in the U.K. He also said that there was only one road to that result: building long-term care beds. He described political commitment that involved weekly meetings with the Prime Minister that oversaw the creation of 5,000 new long-term care beds. To the minister: why do you refuse to acknowledge the problem and dedicate a similar level of political skill and commitment to solving the crisis?

Mr. Liepert: Well, in her preambles to questions this member rarely gets the facts correct, so I'm not going to assume that what she says is correct in her preamble. What I have said on many occasions, Mr. Speaker, is that there are a number of ways that we need to correct our access problem. One of them is more long-term care facilities. Another way is to provide health care to our seniors in a number of areas. Finally, the third one is to move our EMS, which we're doing in a couple of weeks, to the health care system so we don't have people in emergency waiting so long.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have 16 people that are here with us today to say that replacing long-term care with assisted living doesn't work. To the same minister: what explanation do you have for these people, who are telling us that your decision to replace long-term care beds with assisted living in Hinton has created nothing but severe hardship for their parents and their families?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is incorrect. There are so many facilities around this province that I could send her on a little mission in the break that we've got coming up for the next two weeks. We could identify for her a whole number of facilities, everywhere from Pincher Creek in the south to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster's constituency in the east. So I'll sit down after question period with the member. We'll draw out a map where she can spend the next two weeks travelling the province to see that it does work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week on the radio a popular talk-show host proclaimed that this government keeps changing the royalty framework; four times, he said. Many of my constituents work in the oil and gas industry and are looking for some clarification. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Is this government continually changing the royalty framework, and was the framework changed with the most recent announcements?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've made it very clear that the announcement that we made earlier this month is Alberta's response to global economic conditions that are outside of our control. What we've tried to do is use the tools that we have available and introduce measures to encourage new investment by the oil and gas sector that will create jobs for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the same radio show the host echoed a criticism by some industry players. They blame the royalty regime for investment leaving the province. My question is to the same minister. Is the new royalty framework responsible for the current slowdown in Alberta's oil patch?

Mr. Knight: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. This downturn in drilling activity is not isolated to Alberta. The Petroleum Services Association of Canada has forecast a 21 per cent decrease in drilling across Canada in 2009. There are many reasons for this, chief among them a very depressed price for oil and natural gas and a very tight credit market. Alberta is responding to these very unusual circumstances with timely, targeted, and temporary stimulus.

Mr. Johnson: On that point, Mr. Speaker, I have concerned constituents who point out that in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, where those provinces have to contend with the same price of oil and gas that we do, they claim there's no shortage of investment or drilling there. My last question is to the same minister. Can he clarify for my constituents: is it fair to say that these other provinces are active and we are not because of our royalty framework?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, no. You have to remember that there was increased drilling activity in Saskatchewan and B.C. long before there were any changes to Alberta's royalty regime. Both of these have some nice resource plays that are emerging there, and people are lining up to get in the game. Cumulatively speaking, these provinces still don't have the same level of drilling activity or energy activity that we have in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Achievement Bonuses

(continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The generous bonuses that cabinet gives to deputy ministers are not their only perks. Cabinet also gives their senior officials a car at taxpayers' expense. The government has failed to require these cars to be environmentally friendly. To the Minister of Transportation: does the minister think it's good Transportation policy to be subsidizing wasteful, polluting vehicles at taxpayers' expense?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to first say that in the Department of Transportation we have a number of professionals that all have degrees to do with engineering. I also have to say that we've just gone through some of the toughest times to draw professional people in because there are all kinds of bonuses out there in private enterprise. We make sure that we have staff that can look after the jobs for Albertans; therefore, sometimes you have to have bonuses for that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What's that got to do with the cars, by the way?

To the Minister of Service Alberta: given that the government scrapped senior officials' bonuses for next year, will the minister be scrapping the car allowances as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the car allowance for ministers, that's something that is certainly up for discussion. Many individuals do not take advantage of that. Many of them use their own vehicles. It's always a balance and what meets the individual member's requirements as a minister.

Mr. Kang: To the minister again: is this going to be a permanent change or just for the next year?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, whether on purpose or not, dodging around the fact that corporate human resources is responsible for the bonus and its application – I'm just surprised that they wouldn't know that.

The other thing that they seem to want to infer is that somehow this bonus program is a new thing. Well, I've got news for them and Albertans. It's been on the website for years. It describes all of the categories, all of the percentages, and even the criteria we use to reward bonuses to our civil servants that are working on our behalf. It's really sad that they have taken a bad management bonus scheme in the States and tried somehow to connect that with a good management tool we use as a government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Bargaining Unit for Paramedics

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are all well aware that Alberta's nine regional health authorities will be consolidated to become Alberta Health Services on April 1. Yesterday the province confirmed it will maintain the existing four health care bargaining units. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given the number of e-mails I have received from my paramedics and at least one union calling for the creation of a fifth bargaining unit, how was it determined that four is the magic number?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year we initiated some consultation, and we requested some written submissions and met with a number of groups in person. After a lot of discussion and careful review a decision was made to integrate EMS services into one of the four existing health care bargaining units.

I know this is not the decision that some were advocating for, but ultimately we made this decision because it better aligns with government direction to bring EMS services into the health care system and because we've seen it work successfully in two other health regions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: how do you respond to claims from some that say their views were not considered?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, all positions both for and against were well thought out and conveyed. I really appreciated the professionalism as unions advocated for their members and for keeping the discussion around the key issues in this decision. To be clear, some unions like the direction we're heading and some don't. Regardless, I thank all of them for their work that helped us reach this particular decision. Rest assured, Alberta paramedics are world class, and I know all of my colleagues and all Albertans hold them in very high regard.

Mrs. McQueen: Finally, to the same minister: how will these changes affect Albertans who might require the assistance of paramedics?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bottom line is that Albertans won't notice any differences at all. What we're talking about today is bargaining, union representation, and a lot of behind-the-scenes kind of work. When it comes to front-line services and how Albertans can expect to be treated, I'm very confident that ambulance workers will remain the skilled, professional people that they are. If Albertans call 911, an ambulance will come, and a paramedic will help them, just as they always have in the past.

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

Bitumen Exports

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the Premier told the Assembly that having 70 per cent of bitumen upgraded in Alberta was still the government's goal, but with upgrader construction stalled in Alberta but booming in the U.S., this goal just doesn't seem very realistic. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister explain how this government hopes to have 70 per cent of upgrading done in Alberta by the year 2015?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the timeline, of course, is something that, you know, may require some adjustment, and I don't know that it's ever been stated that this would be done by 2015. But what I will say is that certainly as we look forward here – and it's not going to take all that long, I don't believe – we're going to see some changes in the philosophy of some of the major players relative to things like upgrading in the province of Alberta. I think that recently in some of the news media there's been indication that some of the major players that are here now are beginning to take another look at their investments in Alberta.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Premier on Monday did indicate 2015, and speed is crucial with this issue, or we're going to lose this opportunity to the U.S. forever. The whole upgrading industry is being built to shift its centre of gravity away from Alberta towards the United States. To the Minister of Energy. To reach the government's target, a further 800,000 barrels a day of upgrading capacity needs to be built in Alberta in the next six years. It's a breakneck pace of construction. How is it going to happen?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, I think that the capacity for upgrading in the province of Alberta and the numbers that the hon. member is using may very well be on a course that is going to take longer to achieve, perhaps, than some of the estimates that we've given earlier. However, I do maintain that there is the opportunity here for Albertans to maximize the value, and upgrading is going to certainly be one of the options as we move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentions a change in philosophy. Well, credible senior people in the upgrading industry have quietly told me that the government should use its regulatory muscle to require companies that extract bitumen from Alberta to upgrade it in Alberta. This could be made a condition of approval. To the Minister of Energy: given the surging unemployment in Alberta, will the government consider requiring local upgrading?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you know, on the situation that we do have here, relative to what we're doing on the regulatory side of this issue, of course, part of the answer to that is in the bitumen royalty in kind that this government has established, and it will move into play in the next couple of years. We're working now with industry players to make sure that the BRIK volumes, the bitumen royalty in kind volumes, that accrue to the province of Alberta will be dealt with and handled here in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Banff Gate Wildlife Corridor

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Leased public land has recently been sold for a resort in the Canmore area at Banff Gate. Some of my constituents have concerns about the impact on wildlife of this sale. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What policies is his department using to allow the sale of such land and change the land use in an important wildlife area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular resort, Banff Gate, is a collection of about 18 small cabins and a central dining area. It's been on this lease in the Wind Valley since the 1960s. We now have an offer; they've made an offer to purchase it. We have a comprehensive review process for the sale of public lands of this sort. The review was done, and it was determined that the 24 acres that the buildings are already sitting on had no important, significant environmental benefit. The remaining 60 acres, the rest of the lease, is not being sold and will remain part of public lands and managed for purposes of the wildlife corridor.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question to the same minister: is the sale expected to have any impact upon the Bow Valley wildlife corridor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We actually think it will enhance the purpose of the wildlife corridor because, as I've just explained, the footprint of the existing recreational lease there is being reduced by almost two-thirds. The 24 acres that the buildings are already on will be still managed for recreational purposes. The other 60 acres now revert and are part of the wildlife corridor.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final question to the same minister: what protection of grizzly bear populations is being made around this site?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important area for grizzly bear habitat. It's right adjacent to Banff national park. An important part of the province's grizzly bear recovery program is the BearSmart program. The town of Canmore is one of the most active participants, as it should be, in the BearSmart program. Also, the community of Banff Gate has had a long history of teaching all the visitors and residents there to introduce them to the BearSmart information. People who are there have gone through the course. As I repeat, the 60 acres that are adjacent to the cabin area will continue to be managed for a wildlife corridor, including, of course, grizzlies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Achievement Bonuses (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In tough economic times governments must make prudent fiscal decisions. However, in the Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation the minister appears to have not received the memo. It was business as usual, with lucrative bonuses going to top park-survey-ignoring officials. To the minister: given that in the past year you have already handed out \$225,000 in bonuses to top officials, can the minister explain the reasoning behind these perks rather than hiring much-needed conservation officers to properly patrol our parks?

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This line of questioning has been going on all day. I've heard the answer given several times. If the hon. member is asking me if I think that my department is doing a good job, yes, they are.
Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thanks. That's not the question nor the answer.

Does the minister not think that instead of spending all this money on bonuses, it could have been better spent on repairing aging park infrastructure?

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. members had roughly 70 hours last spring to debate the budget. Now, I'm not trying to suggest that they spent very much of it constructively, but not once do I recall them asking about the bonus structure that has been in place last year, the year before, and for about 10 years. If they have issues on last year's budget, maybe they ought to have thought about that while they were debating the budget, or maybe they ought to think about it going into this year's budget as opposed to waiting because they are still showing the uncanny ability to predict the past.

Mr. Chase: Well, the minister opposite is an expert on the past because that's where he's been living for some time. Questions were asked in *Hansard*; answers were not given. Read your *Hansard*, Mr. Minister.

Given that the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation recently spent thousands of additional taxpayer dollars on a survey of Albertans' park priorities, many of which your most highly remunerated officials appear to have ignored, will the minister explain to Albertans why their money was spent on this PR survey in the first place?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right: we do consult with Albertans all the time. We are looking at a new park plan as the Premier has given me that responsibility. I would say: stay tuned to when the park plan comes out, and he can see the result of those surveys.

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

SuperNet

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans are still patiently waiting for access to the SuperNet. I understand that this is now possible using the existing copper lines that are already in place. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. If the existing telephone lines can deliver this service, what is the holdup? Why are Albertans still waiting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, SuperNet was built to connect schools, hospitals, colleges, libraries, and other public institutions to high-speed Internet access, video conferencing, and other services. Now that it has been built, we're looking at ways to expand the service to all Albertans across Alberta. It's important to remember that the SuperNet is like a highway, and the Internet service providers are the roads that connect the individuals. Some Internet service providers are using existent telephone lines to provide dial-up Internet services. As well, copper lines can have limitations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is there anything the government can do to accelerate this process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The SuperNet has made high-speed Internet access available to more communities than ever, and our goal is to go beyond these communities, most definitely. We are working with our private-sector partners, Bell and Axia, as well as municipalities, the SuperNet service provider council, gas

co-ops, community leaders, and other partners to develop a detailed plan that will achieve our goal. We are exploring ideas every day that will expand the SuperNet in a way that it needs to get out to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how does the level of service through copper lines compare to that of fibre optics?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that copper, fibre, and wireless technology can all be used to connect rural Albertans to high-speed Internet. We are continuing to work with all of our partners. It's about leveraging the SuperNet and using it with all the technologies that are out there. In the meantime the SuperNet is doing amazing things for public institutions in the province, and we're committed to making sure it moves ahead, so please stay tuned.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period for today. That was 108 questions and responses.

We are going to revert now to the Routine. Please remember that we were in the section of the Routine called Introduction of Guests, and our Standing Order 7(1.1) says that "at 1:50 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period with the balance of the daily routine to follow." So that's where we're at. In about 19 minutes from now, though, I'm going to have to rise and ask for unanimous consent to get back to this agenda because we're going to come up against Standing Order 7(7), which says, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." There's no way we are going to get through this Routine by 3 o'clock.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly a good friend of mine and an important constituent, Mr. Max Gibb. He's a partner in my constituency's important CrossIron mall development in Balzac, and he's here today with regard to the Balzac mall. Max is a real entrepreneur as well as a water conservation pioneer. The fact is that the new agreement with Rocky View on the water . . .

Ms Blakeman: Is this an introduction or a private member's statement?

The Speaker: We're having his introduction.

Mr. Anderson: Oh, yeah. I just want to say that he has crafted a bill where this new water agreement will actually see a net gain in the water in . . .

The Speaker: Yes, but that's not what we do here. Max, stand up. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. I had

forgotten about the time of question period, and my guests have departed. I will introduce them the next time they're here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. members, in a few seconds from now we'll proceed with a ministerial statement.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's always a pleasure to be able to stand in this Legislature even though it's to commemorate an event I'd rather not have to discuss. On Saturday, March 21, we commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, something I've had to deal with personally before. Growing up in another province, I had a high school teacher tell me that I'd never make it to university, had a university professor telling me that I couldn't have possibly got the mark that I had because of the colour of my skin, that that just wasn't possible.

As a province in a country with a culturally diverse population, inclusiveness and acceptance are pillars of a healthy and vibrant society. The reality is that even in this day and age racial discrimination, unfortunately, exists. While we may not be able to completely rid the world of racism and discrimination, we can recognize this special day and every other day of the year as a celebration of diversity over supremacy, acceptance over rejection.

Communities across our province will be holding different forums, events, and activities to commemorate this auspicious day. One of those meetings, being held in Calgary today, is the Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination. The coalition's initiatives call on municipalities from across Canada to be part of a larger international organization, UNESCO, in a coalition of cities to combat racism. I'm proud to say that I was at an event last night with our chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission. There are 30 municipalities involved in the coalition. Alberta is one of the two provinces with the most municipal members. Those eight Alberta municipalities are Brooks, Calgary, Drayton Valley, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and St. Albert.

Our government's Human Rights and Citizenship Commission is in place to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in all aspects of our society. I'm especially excited with the appointment of our new chief commissioner, the hon. Blair Mason, as he leads the important work as the chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission as a whole. I'm certain that all my government colleagues echo the sentiment as well.

Through the Alberta human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund and other partnership programs we're helping to support community organizations and public institutions for education initiatives that foster equality and combat racism and discrimination. Our world has no place for discrimination. What our world does have room for are inclusive open-mindedness, acceptance, and friendship. Mother Teresa summed it up best by saying, "If you judge people, you have no time to love them."

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in response to the minister's statement and to join him in

celebrating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The minister is right to note that Alberta's communities are already hard at work preparing to celebrate the day and our multicultural heritage. I've already been to a few events in Edmonton on this very theme, including the Harmony Brunch, which is organized by the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation, and the celebrations organized by Changing Together, my very favourite, which is the centre for helping immigrant women participate fully in Canadian society.

Other Edmonton events celebrating this day include Speaking Truth to Power, a series of workshops, films, and art exhibits presented by the Edmonton Immigrant Services Association, and cultural crossroads workplace training and antiracism workshops for adults, both organized by the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations.

In Calgary public libraries will host the Living Library for citizens to engage in conversations with each other, learning about each other's experiences in dealing with racial discrimination, and the bilingual Maple Sugar Festival will promote a multicultural family atmosphere where Albertans will be able to enjoy traditional food and meet people from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds.

That just scratches the surface, Mr. Speaker. Suffice it to say that Albertans understand the importance of eliminating racism. We are, however slowly, learning how to love and respect one another. We are learning that our external differences are meaningless. We are learning, to paraphrase Dr. King, that the colour of our skin is far less important than the content of our character.

This Saturday, March 21, I hope that all Albertans will take some time to reflect on our own prejudices – we all have them – and to rededicate ourselves to the cause of racial harmony. As wonderful a place as Alberta is, I don't think we'll achieve the full measure of our greatness until men, women, and children of all races and sexual orientations enjoy total acceptance from their fellow citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I suspect that you are requesting unanimous consent to allow your colleague to participate?

Mr. Mason: I am indeed, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, then, we need unanimous consent. Is anyone in the Assembly opposed to allowing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate in this ministerial statement discussion? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues in the Assembly. It's a pleasure to rise to speak about the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21. It's important that we pause on this day in particular to remember what circumstances surrounded this declaration. On March 21, 1960, in what is now referred to as the Sharpeville massacre, more than 200 African anti-apartheid protestors were shot during a peaceful protest. Sixty-seven of those protestors, who did not carry arms and did not threaten public safety, died because of their injuries. They died because the state saw their peaceful act of civil disobedience as a threat to their control and unparalleled power. We must learn from this tragedy.

The fight for equality is, unfortunately, an ongoing one, as it must

be. Political decisions are made every day, sometimes intentionally, very often inadvertently, that give advantages to certain racial groups over others, giving privilege and power to some while taking it away from others. This is a failure in our society, and we must continue to work to fix it.

We urge this government to make the legislative and administrative changes that are necessary to eradicate racism and ensure human rights for all. The authority, the remedial options, and the resources of our Human Rights Commission must be significantly increased. I call on all members of this House to join me in renewing our collective commitment to work with groups such as the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations and Alberta Civil Liberties in working to eliminate racial discrimination in our province.

Thank you.

2:50

Members' Statements

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

50th Anniversary of Ukrainian Shumka Dancers

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. It's truly a rare privilege to rise and speak to this Assembly in tribute to Edmonton's world-renowned Ukrainian Shumka Dancers. I am very proud that Shumka is a fixture in my constituency and that I've had the opportunity and privilege to watch both their rehearsals and performances. I was so pleased when some of their current and former dancers were in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, along with their founder and founding artistic director, Mr. Chester Kuc, and that they were introduced earlier. I should add that the hon. Member from Edmonton-Mill Creek is a former Shumka dancer and for 25 years was their composer, conductor, and music director.

Mr. Speaker, Shumka's legacy of accomplishments spans four continents, three generations, and 50 years of dedication and commitment to preserving Ukrainian culture in Canada. Shumka is a household name synonymous with energy, excitement, and artistic excellence. Tonight and tomorrow night Shumka presents their golden jubilee concert at the Jubilee Auditorium, and I will be there along with our Premier, our Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, and several other MLAs to help them celebrate in style.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members join me in recognizing the 50th anniversary of the world-renowned Shumka Dancers of Edmonton, Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I suspect that if we were to ask for unanimous consent to receive a demonstration of dancing by the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, it would be granted. But I'm not going to do that because of the time today, okay?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Water Management

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. March 22 is World Water Day. Alberta is blessed with an abundance of fresh water, and that very abundance has perhaps allowed us to take it for granted. The rapid growth of our population and industries has placed serious strains on the supply and cleanliness of Alberta's most precious resource. If we don't figure out how to properly manage our water supply and quickly, Alberta's prosperity and quality of life could be put at risk.

In the recent past we've seen how water from communities such as Red Deer was very nearly diverted to feed the proposed megamall and horse-racing track at Balzac. We've seen how the government's

policy of allowing industry to self-report and self-monitor its emissions has led to contamination of the Athabasca River basin. We've seen toxic tailings ponds and dead birds blackening Alberta's image. There's a moratorium on new allocations from the South Saskatchewan River basin, one of the largest in the province, because of past mismanagement. We've seen the failure of the water for life strategy, which is a good strategy but useless without the funding to make it work. We all need to remember that someone lives downstream. Watch what you dump because water moves, and it carries contaminants right along with it right into the mouths of Albertans.

We have a lot of work to do. We need to map our surface and groundwater resources. We can't make good decisions until we know where all of our water is located and how much of it there is. If we want to protect our water for our future generations, if we want to ensure that our children and grandchildren have access to clean water, then we had better start getting serious about how we manage it. We cannot survive without water. Communities cannot thrive without it. Crops cannot be grown without it. Industry cannot prosper without it.

This administration, this steward of our water supply, must start to make better management decisions, ones that preserve and protect our water supply for all citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Earth Hour

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next Saturday – not this Saturday but next Saturday – marks the second global celebration of Earth Hour. For those not familiar with this annual event, Earth Hour was started by the World Wildlife Fund and began in Sydney, Australia, in 2007. Last year it was observed in 30 countries, including Canada, with over 10 million Canadians in 150 cities participating. Taking part is simple. People are encouraged to turn off their lights for one hour in support of action against climate change.

This year over 1,500 cities and towns in 80 countries have already committed to show their support for this initiative by turning off the lights between 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. on March 28. Although the energy savings from this action will be significant, the real value of Earth Hour is the awareness it raises. By turning off the lights, people take a moment to consider how they can lessen their impact on the environment both in their homes and their businesses.

I intend to take part, and so does the government of Alberta. All nonessential lights in the Legislature Building and the McDougall Centre will be shut off during the Earth Hour as a symbol of the government of Alberta's commitment to action on climate change and doing our part. Beyond symbolism the government of Alberta has been taking action to green its daily business practices for several years. Since 2005 over 90 per cent of the electricity used by Alberta government buildings has come from green power sources, such as wind and biomass. This has resulted in a reduction of over 200,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually and is the equivalent of taking 42,550 vehicles off the road for one year or replacing 118,000 vehicles with hybrids.

The Alberta government's actions aren't limited to electricity. We continue to see progress as we implement Alberta's 2008 climate change strategy, which includes the largest identified and published greenhouse gas reduction commitment in Canada. We have pledged to reduce emissions by 200 megatonnes by 2050.

Thank you.

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

Canadian Red Cross Society Centennial

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1864 Henry Dunant, a Swiss citizen, asked the following question: "Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?" This idea led to the founding of the National Red Cross, and I rise today to honour Red Cross Month and the Canadian Red Cross Society, now celebrating its centennial year.

In 1909 Parliament passed the Canadian Red Cross Society Act, which legally established the Red Cross as the corporate body responsible for providing volunteer aid in accordance with the Geneva conventions. The Red Cross was established as a not-for-profit, humanitarian organization dedicated to improving the circumstances of the most vulnerable in Canada and throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker, a disaster can happen to anyone at any time. Here in Alberta a team of 113 volunteers are ready day and night to attend to families and individuals to provide their basic needs after a disaster. These services, including food, clothing, and shelter, are provided for 72 hours after the disaster at no cost. Many Edmontonians, Mr. Speaker, will remember how these same exceptional Albertans responded to 145 disaster calls last year, helping over 500 people, including dozens of families affected by residential fires in the communities of MacEwan in southwest Edmonton and Britannia Gardens in the northwest part of our city.

Every year in western Canada the Red Cross provides short-term loans of clean, safe medical equipment to more than 46,000 people who are recovering from injury, illness, or surgery, and 24 years ago, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Red Cross implemented RespectED, a world-renowned violence and abuse-prevention program.

On behalf of this House, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate and thank the Canadian Red Cross and especially its Alberta volunteers and staff for over 100 years of dedicated service to this province and our country.

Thank you.

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

Lethbridge Accomplishments

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise and talk about some of the good things happening in Lethbridge, where it's 17 degrees today. Earlier this month the city of Lethbridge teamed up with Lethbridge College to help build a new student residence at the college. The goal is to provide much-needed on-campus housing for students while, at the same time, freeing up housing in Lethbridge for lower income renters. The partnership will help ease the affordable housing crunch in southern Alberta, and I applaud their efforts.

Speaking of Lethbridge College, I'd also like to congratulate the members of the Kodiak women's basketball team, who, as we speak, are competing at the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association national championships in Ste-Foy, Quebec. The Kodiaks led the province during the season with a record of 17 to 1 and were the top-ranked CCAA team in the country. They took the ACAC provincial title on March 7 with a hard-fought match with the Grant MacEwan Griffins. I have every confidence that these young women will do themselves proud and represent our province as true champions. They've shown that hard work, determination, and the right attitude can take you as far as you want to go.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very happy to report that the first competitive cheerleading team ever to come out of Lethbridge has racked up an impressive first season of their own. The G.S. Lakie middle school cheer squad was formed just this past September, and these girls have already moved to the top of their class in a few short months. After winning two divisional invitational tournaments in February, the girls went on to win the Alberta Cheerleading Association ProCheer Championships in Edmonton this past weekend. The ACA tournament is considered the country's largest cheerleading competition, featuring teams from all over western Canada and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate both these wonderful Lethbridge teams on their remarkable accomplishments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) says: "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." In order to continue to the conclusion of the Routine, we will need the unanimous consent of the Assembly. If an individual is opposed to providing unanimous consent, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Then we'll continue. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

3:00

Water Management

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 1993 the United Nations declared March 22 World Water Day to draw attention to the global crisis in water use. Millions of people die needlessly from water-borne diseases. Millions of children do not receive proper education because they must carry water for their families. Droughts and floods, storms and tsunamis take countless lives every year while over a billion people live without proper access to safe water. An additional 1.5 billion people do not have basic sanitation. Even here in Canada many communities, particularly aboriginal ones, have had to boil their water for months at a time. The numbers are staggering.

While so many are in desperate need of clean water, every year Alberta's tar sands projects contaminate billions of litres of fresh water so badly that they cannot be returned to the water cycle. This polluted water is instead held in massive toxic tailings ponds, some of which are perilously close to the Athabasca River. Even worse, studies have shown that an incredible 11 million litres of toxic water leak out of these ponds every day into Alberta's groundwater.

Our water supply is shrinking, our population is growing, and climate change threatens to forever end our luxury of taking water for granted. We can do things differently. We can build dry tailings technology and protect Alberta's wetlands. We can develop a comprehensive and effective strategy to help farms, businesses, and families alike conserve water. We can commit to keeping water in public hands and not selling off our lakes, rivers, and aquifers to the highest bidder.

Albertans are speaking out more and more against irresponsible uses of this precious resource, and if we act now, we can ensure that safe drinking water remains the right of every Albertan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) earlier today I provided written notice to your office of my intention to raise a matter of privilege, which I hope I will have the opportunity to present later today.

The Speaker: Yes.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader with respect to written questions and motions for returns.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) to advise the House that on Monday, April 6, 2009, we will be accepting written questions 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 17, and we will also be dealing with written questions 2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, and 20. There being no additional written questions appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

I also wish to give notice that on Monday, April 6, 2009, motions for returns 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 20 will be accepted and that 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19 will be dealt with on that day. Other motions for returns shall stand and retain their places on the Order Paper.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 204

Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act.

This is a bill which I am proposing because municipalities require a stable and predictable level of funding from the government to effectively plan and deliver programs and services, and they have been experiencing, with property tax revenues, fluctuations in municipal funding, which causes uncertainty in the establishment and operation of those same programs and services. The bill is calling for the creation of an account to be established to receive 2.5 per cent of provincial income tax revenue, which would then be distributed to municipalities to make up that funding gap for operating expenses.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a number of draft amendments with explanatory notes I am considering bringing forward for Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. In addition, with your concurrence I am providing copies of the same document for distribution to all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: That will be concurred with, so the pages will circulate those this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two recent articles from the *Edmonton Journal* which talk about the dangerously long wait

times in Edmonton hospital emergency rooms and also mentioning that people waiting for long-term care beds are filling acute-care hospital beds that are needed for patients in the emergency room.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific instances of shifts that were short-staffed. These provide examples of residents being left in bed for entire day shifts, missing baths, and receiving meals late.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, response to Written Question 15, asked for by Ms Notley on March 16, 2009.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to please rise and share with us the projected government business for the week commencing April 6.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the week commencing April 6, of course on Tuesday, April 7, in the afternoon we would, as has been indicated to this House previously, understand that there would be a presentation of a budget by the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Thus, we would anticipate the normal routine of adjournment after Orders of the Day are called so that the Assembly could be appropriately prepared for the presentation of the budget later that afternoon.

On Wednesday, April 8, we would anticipate response to the Budget Address under the motions that would be on the Order Paper relative to the budget. Normally, that would of course mean the Leader of the Official Opposition and the leader of the third party would have an opportunity to respond to the Budget Address. Time permitting, then, we would look to Committee of the Whole on bills 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 15, and 18 or such of them as remain in Committee of the Whole at that time or second reading for bills 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 9, 2009, for third reading bills 1, 2, 3, 5, and 18 and Committee of the Whole on bills 4, 6, 7, 8, and 15 and as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had delivered to my office this morning prior to 11:30 notification of her desire to rise on a point of privilege. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Privilege Rights of the Assembly

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise because, as you note, pursuant to Standing Order 15(2) this morning I provided written notice to your office of my intention to raise a matter of the privilege of this Assembly today. In so doing, I refer primarily to 15(1) of Standing Orders, which says simply that a breach of the rights of the Assembly may constitute a question of privilege. It is on the rights of the Assembly that I will be focusing my comments today.

It is my view that the government is attempting to prevent members of this Assembly from fulfilling their responsibility to review legislation or proposed legislation. Through Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, the government seeks to provide to itself the power to rewrite existing or future legislation, a duty which belongs under our constitution to this Assembly. As the bill aims to prevent members of the Assembly from fulfilling their duties as legislators, it is, in my view, thereby a matter of privilege.

I also believe that this is the earliest opportunity for me to make a motion of privilege on this matter. Yesterday the Committee of the Whole defeated amendments to the bill which would have removed that section of the bill, section 5, that provides the executive branch of government with powers which rightly belong to this Assembly.

This is a matter of privilege involving the collective rights and powers of the House. To quote from *Marleau and Montpetit* at page 51, "the House has the authority to invoke privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions." *Maingot* on page 12 defines privilege as "the right, power, and authority of each House of Parliament and of each legislative assembly to perform their constitutional functions."

3:10

Bill 18 shows that it is a matter of government policy that the power to amend legislation, which ought to be the exclusive power of the Assembly, will now also be exercised by the executive without reference to the Assembly. I further believe that this breach of the Assembly's privilege is a matter of contempt. *Erskine May* on page 75 defines contempt as "actions which, while not breaches of any specific privilege, obstruct or impede it," meaning the House, "in the performance of its functions, or are offences against its authority or dignity." *Marleau and Montpetit* concur on page 67: "The House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions."

For further information on the subject of regulation-making power and subordinate regulations I consulted the *Principles of Administrative Law*, the 4th edition, by David Jones and Anne de Villars, which states on pages 94 and 95 that while provincial legislatures may delegate certain of their lawmaking powers, quote, the legislative branch cannot delegate such broad powers that effectively it effaces itself.

By providing the government with the power to rewrite any piece of legislation, I believe the scope of regulation-making power in Bill 18 oversteps the boundaries of legality and interferes with the ability of members to fulfill their duties. Indeed, all the hours that we have spent this year debating bills or even since the last election could be for naught were this bill to come into effect. It would essentially allow the executive to render ineffective or moot the legislation which, indeed, we propose to debate even this afternoon, once this particular matter is completed. It calls into question, I would suggest, what or why we are here in the Assembly this afternoon and all other afternoons.

I understand that it is without question a matter of past practice that the executive retains to itself the authority to make regulations, which often define the legislation under which the regulations arise. But section 5 of the proposed Bill 18 would allow that regulatory power to reach back to legislation which we in this House have addressed ourselves and passed. It would also allow the executive branch to reach forward and to undo legislation which we might be discussing today, tomorrow, or in future assemblies of this House.

I think our fundamental ability to do our job as representatives elected by our constituents in the province of Alberta, to come into

this House and to debate and review legislation, is fundamentally and deeply, deeply threatened by this act because of the uncertainty and the scope of the authority that the executive branch attempts to bring upon itself through this piece of legislation. It is for that reason that I rise and ask that you find that this is a breach of privilege of not only my rights as a member of the Assembly but of all members in the Assembly. All their rights are being significantly impinged by this proposed legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm certainly prepared to hear arguments today and will reserve judgment as to whether or not there's even an opportunity later to hear further arguments, but there will be no judgment provided by the chair today.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would submit that there is absolutely no question of privilege being brought by the hon. member, and she has not made any *prima facie* case for a question of privilege and, in fact, is premature in even addressing the issue.

First of all, Bill 18, which is the act which she alleges to offend her privileges as a member, is still before the House. It's not an enactment of the House. It hasn't been passed. Although one might assume that, being a government bill and having the support of government members, it might pass the House, it certainly hasn't passed the House. So it's not an enactment, and therefore at this stage if there was any question of whether it did breach privilege, it certainly doesn't.

Dealing with the merits of the argument, the hon. member refers to section 5 of the act, which purports to add regulations, section 7. It allows

- (1) the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations in respect of matters relating to the implementation of the Agreement,

that being the TILMA agreement,

that the Minister considers are not provided for or are insufficiently provided for in this Schedule or any enactment.

- (2) A regulation made under subsection (1)
 - (a) may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision.

A regulation made under the act is repealed on the earliest of either being brought into force by a statute or the expiration of three years. In subsection (4) a regulation made under subsection (1) is repealed on the earliest of the coming into force of an amendment to a statute that provides for the matter, the coming into force of a regulation that repeals the regulation, or the expiration of three years from the day that the regulation comes into force or is filed. I've précised, obviously, a little bit of the writing there.

What we're talking about is a proposed amendment which would bring into effect an ability under order in council, as we would normally call them, a regulation by the Lieutenant Governor in Council which has been the subject of a previous act of the Legislature, to be able to make that provision for the purposes of implementing the agreement if there are matters which are not provided for or insufficiently provided for in a schedule or an enactment and, in doing so, to make that provision modify a provision of an act or regulation. That's the crux of this whole question.

The question is: does the Legislature have the authority to delegate its legislative authority in certain circumstances? Mr. Speaker, clearly, it does. First of all, I would say that it has that ability because it has done that in the past. Under the Municipal Government Act, for example, which is chapter M-26 of our *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*, you'll find in section 603 of that act a

provision that is not identical but very, very close in wording to this particular section. That section, in my experience, has been in that act since the early '90s at least and may even go back further than that. The provision in the Municipal Government Act allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations "for any matter that the Minister considers is not provided for or is insufficiently provided for in this Act."

Actually, we can go to *Erskine May*, chapter 23 on page 574, in the first paragraph, the last sentence, where it says, "Consequently, legislative power is often conferred upon the executive by statute, and various arrangements are made for parliamentary scrutiny of its exercise." I'll speak to the parliamentary scrutiny in a moment.

Further down the page, in the last half of the second paragraph:

The justification and advantages of delegated legislation arise from its speed, flexibility and adaptability. Once Parliament has by statute laid down (often in some detail) the principles of a new law, the executive may by means of delegated legislation work out the application of the law in greater detail within these principles, adapting it to fit changing circumstances. Power may even be conferred, by what is known as a "Henry VIII Clause", to amend the statute itself by delegated legislation or to amend other statutes. A principle enacted in a statute may be extended by delegated legislation in a cognate direction.

So *Erskine May* clearly delineates that in certain circumstances for certain purposes – and, obviously, it's not something that one does routinely. But there are certain circumstances even in our own Alberta legislation where this is the case, where the legislative authority has been delegated to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make a law or change a law for certain purposes limited in scope. That's, in fact, what Bill 18 and the section that the hon. member feels is offensive refers to.

3:20

There is an agreement called the TILMA agreement, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, and there was a trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement implementation statute that was passed by this House. I think this is the second amending act, if I'm not incorrect, where basically, as they go through and find the places where there is an inconsistency between what we've agreed to do in the agreement and what the House has now approved, we need to bring our laws into concert, where amendments need to be made. This Bill 18, in fact, is one of those bills which purports to amend the statute to bring our acts into concert with British Columbia, as we've agreed to under the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, as has been approved by the House.

For the limited purpose of making sure our statutes are in alignment, as we've agreed to do and as this House has conferred intention to do in a previous statute, we provide under the proposed section 7 a limited authority for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make changes, to add to the law, or to change a law for the limited purpose of bringing it into line with the agreement, which is approved in principle by another law of the House. In other words, we may have two conflicting laws of the House, and we have a method for resolving that conflict on an interim basis by allowing the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make an amendment, to make a regulation, which would have the effect of amending the law.

The next piece that's very important to that question then is: for a limited period of time. That's not absolutely necessary. Nothing in *Erskine May* or other places suggests that it has to be for a limited purpose and time. But I think we would all agree that for any regulation which purports to change a law, the law itself ought to be changed in due course if for no other reason than for clarity so that it's clear on the face of it what the law of Alberta is for anybody who's reading it. Thus, Bill 18 in its wording provides, as I think I

read, that a regulation made under subsection (1) is repealed on the earliest of the coming into force of the amendment, the coming into force of a regulation that repeals the regulation, or the expiration of three years. It goes on. Again, I've précised that. So it's a time delimited amendment.

Clearly, the Legislature often delegates its legislative authority. Any regulation that's made under an act pursuant to a section of the act which allows the Lieutenant Governor or even sometimes a minister to make a regulation is delegating a legislative authority. Those regulations become law just as if they'd been passed by this House. I would suggest also, because we've done it in the past in this Legislature and because it's acknowledged in *Erskine May* and, in fact, it even has a title which was used in this House previously, a Henry VIII clause, that we're entitled to as a Legislature delegate the authority of the Legislature even to overwrite earlier laws of the Legislature. As a parliamentarian I would say that should be done carefully, that it should be done prudently, that it should be done only in certain circumstances, and there should be a process for limiting that. But it's clearly allowed.

This section in Bill 18 is careful. It's about delegation of the law-making authority within an area of principle already approved by the Legislature; i.e., an agreement to the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement implementation statute. That's an agreement which we've approved in principle in this House. We've debated it in the past, and we've amended many laws already to create that consistency. This regulation is simply a regulation which will allow a cleanup, if you will, or a correction of something that has been overlooked to date so that we can comply with the April 1 implementation of the agreement, as we agreed to with British Columbia. It does have a review provision in that it has to come back to this House within three years or it expires unless the regulation is otherwise removed.

Clearly, the delegation authority is there. Clearly, in a circumstance where you're delegating an authority to change an act of the House, the authority to do that is there. The limitation on that is there in terms of it having to come back to the House for approval within a period of time. We've had a number of circumstances – a two-year time in the Municipal Government Act, a three-year time in the Animal Health Act, other lengths of time in other acts but a limited period of time – in which that kind of a regulation can exist. Mr. Speaker, I would say then that the other piece that one would want to have – oh, section 610 of the Insurance Act also has a similar provision, if anyone wants to look, and there are a number of other references I could give.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would refer you and members of the House to Standing Order 52.03. Standing Order 52.03 reads that a policy field committee, a committee of this Legislature, “may on its own initiative, or at the request of a Minister, review any regulation, amendment to a regulation or prospective regulation within its mandate.” So if any regulation was made under the proposed amendment to Bill 18 that any member of this House wished to have reviewed by a committee of this Legislature and reported back to this Legislature and if they felt that the process of that review was not happening on a timely basis, it would be within their purview to bring it to the appropriate policy field committee to ask for a review of that regulation.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, first of all, there has been no delegation of the authority yet under Bill 18 because Bill 18 hasn't been passed. Secondly, it's entirely within the purview of the Legislature to delegate its authority. Thirdly, there's a limitation proposed in this section, as is consistent with other sections of its sort in other acts of the Alberta Legislature, to provide a timed elimination before such a regulation that's made under that section needs to either be enacted

by the House or it dies. Fourthly, there's a process for review provided for in our standing orders of any regulation that any member of the House wishes to have reviewed by the House. So I would say that there's no breach of any member's privilege. In fact, the House is doing what the House does, which is enact laws and make provision for those things which cannot be foreseen or which have not yet been discovered to be enacted on a timely basis and then reviewed appropriately by the House at an appropriate time.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you for the opportunity to bring comment to the motion of privilege brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. A few observations and arguments I'd like to put forward, starting with the argument that this is a bill that is before us and the Chamber can change its mind. I think I agree with the timing in bringing forward the privilege motion now in that an attempt to remove the offending section yesterday clearly was not supported by members of the government caucus, and that was shown in a standing vote. So any attempt to correct that legislation has been blocked by members of the government caucus, and there has been an indication shown by that blocking that government would support it. In fact, it's a government bill, so it's expected the government caucus would support it and pass it, at which point, I would argue, it's too late for us.

I'd like to address a few of the other arguments that have been made. I think that on the Government House Leader's response regarding the Municipal Government Act, the regulatory authority to amend that act is different than what we are speaking about here. There's also a required principle of law that is fleshed out, and there is no principle that is set out in this bill that explains why this would be needed, and the principle clearly is needed. Bill 18 refers to a need to adjust legislation to account for panel decisions under TILMA, but, Mr. Speaker, there is already a wide body of discussion available on various interpretations of TILMA. That to me signals that the government may have a very wide latitude, wider than it should, in being able to amend a very wide section of legislation to fall into conformation with TILMA. That whole agreement is so vague right now that I think it opens the door far too wide.

3:30

I continue to be concerned about the time. There's no reason given for why the government needs to give itself this extraordinary power at this time. I think that it is an extraordinary power. It's done in a very limited fashion. In the other examples that we were able to find where government gave itself such a wide latitude to change legislation, it was very clear to any citizen why it needed to have the Legislature or the Parliament abdicate that responsibility to cabinet; for example, the War Measures Act. We have no explanation beyond a commercial agreement that is what is particularly driving this need for government to be able to change. I would argue that that is not a clear enough reason to be allowing the government to change potentially so many pieces of legislation.

My second great concern is the very wide amount of time that the government is considering here. It is wanting to give itself the authority to go two years back and three years forward – that's a five-year time span, Mr. Speaker – to change every single piece of legislation that exists, because this motion is brought forward under the Government Organization Act, under which all pieces of legislation are organized by the government.

In other places where there has been some sort of time limit given, it has been very specific to the pieces of legislation that may be altered. It gave itself a two-year time limit – that reference is from

British Columbia – but here we have no references to specific pieces of legislation. It is wide open. They can change any piece of legislation that exists, and I would argue that that is too wide a latitude. We have no compelling reason given, we have a very wide time period, and it's unspecific on which acts this would be limited to.

It has already been noted that the House does have the authority to abdicate its responsibility to create laws – we're not talking about regulations; we're talking about laws, acts, statutes – but, I would argue, under very extraordinary circumstances. A commercial agreement would not meet that test, nor would I think that a reasonable person on the street would take it to meet that test.

Finally, the Government House Leader brings up the argument of the policy field committee and that if a member was unhappy with a regulation or wanted additional review for a regulation, they could take that to a policy field committee. But, Mr. Speaker, as I argued many times in negotiations with that very same member, that actually is not an operable suggestion in that every reference to a policy field committee requires a majority vote to either accept by the policy field committee that it would undertake certain work or that the Legislature itself would delegate to the policy field committee to do certain work on its behalf.

All of those require a majority vote. Therefore, it is in the hands of the government given the particular number of seats that are held here; that is, effectively, no member in this House currently that is not a member of government could get a regulation reviewed by a policy field committee without the agreement of government. To say that any member could go and bring this forward and get it reviewed by a policy field committee is simply a specious argument. It is impractical and could not be implemented, which I felt was ultimately the fatal flaw in that whole set-up. But that's an ongoing and different argument.

I am quite disturbed by what has been proposed by the government here, and I believe that it is obstructing both the ability of individual members, particularly those members who are sitting in the opposition, to be able to execute its functions. For a period of possibly five years this member will not be able to be engaged in representing the people that put me here and debating those acts that the government would choose to change. That impinges upon my personal privileges in this House and what I was sent here to do in representing those people. I would also argue that it does that collectively in that the House should not delegate this under these circumstances.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise those comments. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional members? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on this point of privilege.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has very eloquently outlined most of the points which I would wish to make, but I wish to make a couple of additional points with respect to the nature of this measure which is being complained of in section 5 of the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act.

Clearly, the purpose of section 5 is very limited. It's limited to the purpose of facilitating the implementation of a piece of legislation which is in and of itself a very complex piece of legislation. There is no attempt to usurp the general powers of the Assembly. The power, if it were abused and it went beyond what it states in the piece of legislation, may well be cause for complaint. However, the regulation-making power that's being asked for in this particular amendment speaks of: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may

make regulations in respect of matters relating to the implementation of the Agreement." This agreement is an attempt to bring about free trade between two provinces. It requires certain obligations on the part of each of those sister provinces to comply in order to allow that free trade to happen. As such, it involves literally hundreds of regulations and statutes.

I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that it is clearly impractical to expect that the minister could anticipate all of the particular problems that might arise from time to time in respect of ensuring that there is compliance and free trade with all of those hundreds of statutes and regulations that are present in both of those two provinces. Clearly, it's a temporary measure. It's a measure which will be determined either by bringing forth a remedial measure in the form of a regulation or a statute, which will come before this House again, or it will be taken care of by the passage of the limitation which is provided for in the proposed amendment.

I would therefore argue that there is no usurpation of the powers of this Assembly and that there is no point of privilege.

The Speaker: Additional? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity here. I've been listening carefully, and I was listening carefully as a participant in the debate yesterday afternoon. I'm speaking here not as a lawyer but as a parliamentarian. There is a handful of points I would like you to consider in making your judgment and ruling on this privilege.

There are the obvious ones that were made yesterday, which have been addressed and I won't repeat at any great length today: the concern about granting cabinet an authority to overrule legislation, which as a legislator I have great concern with; also the point that it grants cabinet the authority to do that retroactively. So we have two issues there, one going back in time, which really, really is a concerning precedent or a concerning issue for me, and one giving cabinet the authority to overrule legislation.

I have listened to the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and to the Government House Leader. They were referring to something that I noticed yesterday, which is that this bill spells out that it's proposing to limit – it gives an impression of a limited scope because the changes that can be made have to be limited to the implementation of TILMA, but when you read the TILMA agreement, the scope is absolutely immense, Mr. Speaker. It could touch on all kinds of legislation that we may never have contemplated in here. Just as an example, reading from TILMA, it addresses sustainable development – well, what about water issues, for example? – consumer and environmental protection, and health, safety, and labour standards. And it goes on and on. If you read the agreement, it's actually very, very wide ranging, so I would disagree with the points made by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and the Government House Leader that this is somehow limited.

3:40

TILMA could affect everything from laws on transportation to laws on the environment to labour standards to – who knows? There's no meaningful limit provided here. I think that's very, very important to consider. In fact, the points made by the Government House Leader and the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill are specious, I would say. They just don't stand up to examination.

The other concern I would like you to consider, Mr. Speaker, is one of sovereignty. I stand here and we all stand here as citizens of Alberta in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta responsible to the people of Alberta. This is an agreement with another province. I

believe that if we enact it the way it is now, there is a significant risk that we will actually have our sovereignty as a Legislative Assembly subsumed to decisions that may be made in another province. I think that's a very serious precedent.

It would work like this. The government of B.C. through their Legislature comes forward with a bill, a legislation, or a decision that ripples through TILMA to Alberta. Then the government of Alberta through the Lieutenant Governor in Council and without consultation in this Assembly changes a law in Alberta. Who is, then, in charge? Have we not at that point, Mr. Speaker, transferred the sovereignty of this Assembly into the hands of a government of another jurisdiction? I believe that's a significant consideration and, again, a dangerous precedent. It seems entirely plausible to me that that could happen. It could happen on energy. It could happen on transportation. It could happen on all kinds of issues here.

I am concerned with the fact that this reaches back and tries to rewrite history. I'm concerned that this gives cabinet the authority to overwrite the laws of this Assembly. This Assembly routinely delegates to cabinet, but it doesn't give cabinet the right to rewrite laws that, when they were passed, were never considered subject to that risk. It transfers our sovereignty to a Legislature in another jurisdiction. It is for practical purposes with almost unlimited scope because there's hardly an issue that couldn't come under TILMA unless it's explicitly excluded in the appendix.

This is an inclusive agreement – this is not a limiting one – broadly encompassing free trade, so, Mr. Speaker, I think we are dealing with something that's considerably more serious than the House leader or the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has indicated. I have heard no justification – yesterday there was complete silence from the government on this issue – for this Legislature to take such a drastic step on what is, after all, simply a commercial piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional members?

Well, hon. members, the point of privilege that has been raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has to do with the privilege of members of this Assembly. This is a very serious matter. We'll be taking it very seriously as well. Today is Thursday, March 19. The House will be going on a little break for a few days. If members would like to add something further to their arguments, provide them to my office by noon of Thursday, March 26 – that's one week from now – in written form. Evaluation will be done and take into care all of this. The chair will be consulting with his Parliamentary Counsel and table officers and will return to this Assembly on Monday, April 6, with a decision.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A good proportion of our reservists are students, and I was a reservist myself at one time, so

I wanted to get some comments on the record for Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, which was formally and eloquently introduced in this House by the Premier.

As a proud member of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment Association and the Royal Canadian Legion I and many fellow Albertans recognize the value and the important sacrifices that members of the military and their families make on a daily basis. These heroes protect and defend our freedom while spreading the strong Canadian ideals of honour, duty, service, and democracy throughout the world. In addition to Canada's full-time personnel all branches of the service are enhanced by the work and dedication of reserves. Of the more than 100 military personnel that have made the ultimate sacrifice during the Afghanistan conflict, more than 10 per cent were Canada's reservists.

When reservists answer the call of duty to serve our great country on active duty, not only do they leave their loving families; they must put careers, postsecondary education, and apprenticeships on hold. I, like many of my fellow members of this Assembly, sincerely hope that this legislation is another key facet in a growing culture of support for reservists and their selfless acts and dedication that is being developed coast-to-coast and in our province.

Mr. Chairman, I met our very own Sergeant-at-Arms some 20 years ago when I started my very short reserve career. His is much longer. He has served more than 35 years as both a reservist and a regular forces member, and he outranked me at that time.

An Hon. Member: Still does.

Mr. Horner: Still does.

According to statistics, Mr. Chairman, from Alberta Employment and Immigration, approximately 40 per cent of Canadian reservists are also students in our postsecondary system. This act is an impetus. It will create a greater awareness and will encourage more flexibility among our institutions and our employers. While some may not have practices in place now, I expect we will see more institutions and businesses in Alberta taking the lead and looking at ways that they can accommodate and support these transitions.

In the area of postsecondary studies this act provides an opportunity for us to get the discussions with our institutions going on whether they want to look forward to a standard policy or, certainly, consistent practices among the institutions. Under Campus Alberta most postsecondary institutions do have policies that enable all students, not just reservists, to re-enter their studies. However, we may have to have an open door to establishing some synergies throughout the system.

While we look at working with our institutions, we already have in place some strong supports in Alberta for Alberta reservists who are also working to realize their dreams of a postsecondary education. In terms of the financial commitments of reservist students last June significant changes were made to student finance programs to protect reservists who interrupt their full-time studies to serve. Student finance will defer student loans and the interest on those payments to ensure that while their student careers are on hold, they are removed from making those payments. Reservists may also have their interest-free deferral and payment deferral extended. We encourage reservists to discuss these options with counsellors at their respective institutions to learn more about their policies and if any special circumstances are required.

3:50

For apprentices many of the same policies are now in place. The department will not cancel the registration of the apprentice during the normal cancellation process, 18 months of inactivity. The

department will keep the file active and note the situation on the apprentice's file. We encourage apprentices to contact Alberta Advanced Education and Technology if they're being called into active duty so that their placement is waiting for them when they return. If for some reason the department has not been advised in advance, the department will reinstate the registration when the apprentice returns to work.

As demonstrated in Campus Alberta, our province already places strong value on the work and sacrifices of these brave men and women. As they protect our freedom, they should be protected here at home. Those reservists pursuing degrees and diplomas can take comfort in knowing that Campus Alberta will also be there for them with options to choose from a range of programs and learning opportunities. I know from experience as a reservist with the Loyal Edmonton Regiment that it is a great part-time job while you're going to postsecondary. It's also a huge amount of pride in wearing the Canadian uniform while you attend postsecondary.

When you talk to the presidents of the institutions, I've noted from my discussions with those institutions, they note that reservists make great students. Employers, Mr. Chairman, are finding that they make great employees as well. Major Chris Chodan was introduced in this House by the minister not too long ago. I met Major Chodan as well when I was in the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. He was also above me in rank, I might add.

It was mentioned by the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and, I believe, Edmonton-Strathcona that some employers may be hesitant to hire a reservist. I recall many years ago that I spoke with some of my friends in the regiment about bringing in a bill similar to this. At the time there was a fairly strong concern that a bill such as this might limit a reservist's ability to go out and get employment. I think that the time is now, Mr. Chairman, that the employers have realized that the training in leadership, the training in discipline that one receives as a reservist make them a very valued employee and one that every employer would want to have.

Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009, further strengthens Alberta's commitment to Canada's reservists and certainly recognizes their invaluable contribution to the way of life that we hold so dear and so close. Today, Mr. Chairman, I stand very much in support of this bill as it proceeds to third reading, and I encourage all of my colleagues to do the same.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm also very pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill, if passed, will provide unpaid job-protected leave for military reservists under the Employment Standards Code. At last count there were about 2,500 Albertans enrolled in the reserves. Some are deployed in active missions overseas and can be away for a number of months. Most of them serve on a part-time basis. In fact, about 45 per cent of Canadian reservists maintain either a full-time or part-time civilian job, and another 40 per cent are students, as the hon. member just indicated.

These proposed amendments entitle a reservist to an unpaid job-protected leave while they're deployed to an operation outside of Canada like our current missions in Afghanistan and in Sudan. It would also apply to emergencies within the country such as an ice storm in Quebec or an earthquake in B.C. The proposed legislation also provides the reservist with additional leave to take part in annual training. While this is limited to 20 days each calendar year, leave for overseas operations or domestic emergencies may last as long as necessary.

Currently Alberta is the only province that does not have reservist leave in its legislation. Mr. Chair, this provided us with an opportunity to study the other provinces, determine what works and what doesn't in their jurisdictions, and develop a policy that takes into account the rights and responsibilities of both the employer and the employee.

During second reading a member opposite, while speaking in support of the bill, thought it would be a good idea for government to publicly thank employers, particularly small business owners, for dealing with any disruptions that might come from the proposed reservist's leave, and I think, Mr. Chair, this is a great suggestion. I for one encourage all Members of this Legislative Assembly to make a point of doing just that when they head home to their individual constituencies.

We've done our homework, Mr. Chair. We've taken a close look at similar legislation and worked with the Canadian military. These proposed amendments strike a balance that we believe is fair for both the employer and the reservist. Members of our military, whether they're with the regular forces or the reserves, have long been willing to make tremendous sacrifices. These sacrifices over many decades provide us with the freedom of democracy, the very freedom that we exercise in this House each and every day. These proposed amendments are a small way of extending our gratitude along with the gratitude of all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand once again to reiterate our support on this side of the House for this piece of legislation. As we've heard, it is long overdue. It's an important gesture. I myself can think of a handful of friends and neighbours I know who have served in the reserves and have gone to places like Bosnia and Afghanistan at very great risk to their lives, and they've done it for the public good. This is a way for the public to recognize their sacrifice and to make sure that that sacrifice is rewarded and not penalized.

So I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this legislation. I think it's a good idea, and let's get on with it. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on this?
Seeing none, the chair shall call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 15

Dunvegan Hydro Development Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a piece of legislation that will facilitate the development of a run-of-river hydro generation facility on the Peace River near Dunvegan. I myself have never seen such a facility in person. You know, I've seen hydro dams, and

I've seen coal-fired plants and nuclear plants and all kinds of ways of generating electricity, but I've never seen this particular run-of-the-river hydro facility. I have read about it somewhat over the years, and I think it's a project that is worth pursuing. We need to look at alternative ways in this province of generating our electricity, ways that have minimal environmental impact. I certainly much prefer this over nuclear power. I think it's interesting that both of these come from the Peace River area. I think there's probably much more to support the wisdom of this kind of technology than of a large nuclear power plant being constructed somewhere in the Peace River area.

I think it's a good idea. I would like to make the point here though, Mr. Chairman, that before we proceed with all kinds of new electrical generating projects like this one, we take a much more systematic, disciplined, and strategic view of energy conservation and, in this case, particularly electricity energy conservation. There are huge gains to be made here. Other jurisdictions have led the way before us on this, and while this project is far enough along that it probably will go ahead regardless of how much electrical energy is conserved, down the road a much more aggressive electrical energy conservation program could pre-empt the need for things like nuclear power up in the Peace Country.

4:00

I would very much like to see a bill like this be linked to a broader strategy from this government that addressed electrical generation and consumption as an entirety and addressed issues not only of supply, which this bill is doing, but also of demand. We've seen very, very little of that from this government. I want to register that that's a real shortcoming of the broader electrical strategy of this government that I would like to see addressed and is not difficult to address.

Actually, it's interesting. The Peace River originates in British Columbia, and we just finished debating a trade agreement with British Columbia. I've often compared British Columbia's farm safety standards to Alberta's. British Columbia also leads the way on demand-side management; in other words, on programs to reduce the demand side of the equation for electrical energy. Maybe we should be looking to B.C. for that as well.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, this bill, I think, needs to go ahead. I'm not going to propose any amendments. I will note one thing if I can find it in my background notes. Yes, I can. This bill is prepared under the auspices of the Hydro and Electric Energy Act, which requires Executive Council to cause a bill, this particular one, "to be prepared for the authorization of an order of the Alberta Utilities Commission for construction of the hydro development." Under that set of legislation and regulations a panel needs to be struck.

I did note in the background to this that the panel members in this case were Vern Hartwell, Doug Larder, and George Kupfer, and they were appointed jointly by the federal government, by Canada's Environment minister, and by the government of Alberta. I did have questions about the technical knowledge of these panelists on run-of-the-river hydro projects. I would have thought that that was crucial. I know that Vern Hartwell and George Kupfer are both known for their knowledge of municipal government and of organization and that sort of thing, but I wasn't aware that they had any particular knowledge of run-of-the-river hydro projects or of the detailed environmental or other issues that might arise from this project. Now, maybe the third panelist, Mr. Doug Larder, does have that particular expertise. I think it's worth noting for the record that I had some questions around the background and qualifications of these panelists specific to this particular project. If in the course of

later debate the detailed qualifications of those members of the panel were tabled, that would be of interest to me.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I fully expect this bill to sail through the Assembly, and I genuinely hope that this is a project that generates vast amounts of clean, low-cost, minimally environmentally invasive electricity for this province on a renewable basis so that it will be in place for lifetimes to come.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's also my pleasure to speak to Bill 15, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act. This project is to be located in my constituency a few kilometres west of the historic Dunvegan site and the Dunvegan bridge, that a lot of people are very familiar with.

Mr. Chair, electricity is a facilitator of prosperity. It plays a very essential role in the living standards of Albertans and is an essential input for all of our industry to function and prosper in our province. Our provincial energy strategy is a plan that includes real actions to ensure we achieve clean energy production, positioning Alberta as a leader in energy for decades to come.

Mr. Chair, renewable energy sources are increasingly important pieces of Alberta's energy portfolio and our goal of clean energy production. We support renewable energy development and promote a market for its consumption. Enhancing the capacity of Alberta's electricity system is a key action as we work towards cleaner energy production. Expanding the use of hydroelectric resources creates these opportunities for clean energy production and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the past many years we've shown leadership in renewable energy development through the provincial energy strategy, and I will continue to support projects like hydro facilities. More than 7 per cent of Alberta's electricity generating capacity is hydro. Now, Mr. Chair, Glacier Power's proposed Dunvegan hydroelectric project would add a hundred megawatts to our hydro generating capacity. A hundred megawatts, I'm led to believe, is about the amount of power that's required to supply the city of Grande Prairie, as an example.

This project, as I understand it – and I've seen the plans – is a run-of-the-river facility designed to minimize environmental impacts. Low-impact hydro technology like run of the river gets energy from water flowing naturally downstream without changing or disturbing the downstream water supply, and I think that's an important point to emphasize. Bill 15 will provide the Alberta Utilities Commission the authority to issue a construction and operation order for Glacier Power's proposed hydro facility. A joint provincial-federal regulatory panel did determine that the proposed project is in the public interest, and the passage of Bill 15 would complete the next step in the provincial approval process.

Prior to its December decision the joint panel reviewed extensive evidence submitted by the applicant and intervenors. They called on expert witnesses to testify. The studies that Glacier Power Ltd. conducted were considered by all intervenors and the expert witnesses to be thorough and to have employed the best available modelling and science. Mitigation plans committed to by the applicant along with recommendations from the panel will address the identified impacts. Mr. Chair, I know that the proponents have spent a considerable amount of years studying this particular project, and they did spend a lot of time to make sure that they were using the best models and the best of science that was available to them to make sure that any issues were addressed.

Mr. Chair, aside from my particular support for this Dunvegan

hydro project, this project is also supported by all of our local governments, and Glacier Power Ltd. has basically satisfied the immediately adjacent landowners who originally had concerns about the project. There are still a few downstream concerns from landowners that need to be fully resolved, and those are from residents north of the Tangent area who use the Shaftesbury crossing. They are concerned about the ice formations in the winter, but I'm very confident that the ongoing discussions that are happening as we speak will resolve all of these particular issues.

To wrap up, Mr. Chair, the proposed project will be an economic benefit to the region. By providing local power generation, it will provide employment and revenue and, in my opinion, has certainly no significant adverse effect. I'm confident that this proposal will produce clean, environmentally friendly power for well over a hundred years into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:10

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this bill. I did speak to it briefly in second reading and at that point had said that I was unsure about where our support would be, but I have made some effort now to consult with as many people as I can up in that area. It does seem as though it is a proposal which warrants the support of our caucus, and I just want to review that briefly.

It is an area, of course, that's very dear to my heart. I grew up about two miles away from where the proposed dam will be. I went boating on the river, had my first tailgate party on the shores of the river right about there, worked at Dunvegan, the whole thing. You know, I want to make sure that it's all done just so. However, I wish I'd had the chance to go up there to consult with people. I didn't, but I did ask research in our office to call as many people as I could give them names of to inquire about it, and as I say, it does appear as though it enjoys a great deal of consensus in terms of moving forward with it.

Obviously, separate and apart from the community issues, I do want to join with my colleagues in speaking to the very important benefits that come from pursuing environmentally responsible hydroelectric production. We know that those provinces that have a developed hydroelectric system of electricity production are very well placed to address issues with respect to greenhouse gas emissions, and run-of-the-river projects do appear to provide some potential to negate the negative environmental consequences often associated with hydroelectric. There's no question that it's a clean, renewable, ongoing source of energy, so to the degree that we can safely pursue that source, we can't do anything but support it. I do understand that this is based on the notion that the downstream flow will remain unchanged and that to the extent there are ongoing concerns around fish in the river, those would be not impacted.

I understand that the people of Fairview are quite excited about the prospect of new jobs in the area as a result of the construction. I had just basically wanted to raise the one issue that the Member for Dunvegan did mention, which is the issue of the concerns expressed by citizens living close to the Shaftesbury crossing. My understanding is that they are concerned that with the dam going in there, the ability of an ice bridge to be formed during the winter will be compromised. My understanding is that there has been discussion with Glacier Power on funding for an enhanced-capacity ferry that will be able to function effectively during the winter to address ice blocks, as it were, that form on the river so that as a result they are able to cross the river at the Shaftesbury crossing throughout the

year. It is certainly my hope, then – and our support, of course, is premised on the notion – that that commitment will be met and that the concerns of those citizens will be fully addressed. I understand as well that the Duncan's First Nation is also in support of the project in that they see it, again, as an environmentally friendly run-of-the-river renewable energy project.

With that being the case and having assured ourselves that there really appears to be no downside to this – and I certainly hope that I'm correct in that assumption – we will be giving our support to this bill and to the development of this project.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009. The proposed amendments are a result of a review of existing legislation and extensive industry consultation that included 20 agricultural boards and commissions, a survey of producers who are not actively engaged in industry organizations, and extensive meetings with other agricultural organizations across Alberta and Canada. The review also included an examination of what changes other jurisdictions, including Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and the Netherlands, have made to their agricultural industry governance.

The support received at second reading of this bill by the opposition is greatly appreciated, Mr. Chairman. There were some questions that I would like to address, particularly, that were raised by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under the subject of moving reviews and appeals into regulation. The intent of condensing and moving part 5, the reviews and appeals section, of MAP into regulation is twofold. First, the intent is to make the review and appeal process more responsive to the needs of the parties involved. Moving the review and appeal processes into regulation will allow future improvements such as including alternate dispute resolution mechanisms to be made in a timely manner.

Secondly, currently part 5 of the existing act is somewhat confusing as reviews and appeals are included in the same section, and these are two distinct processes. This can cause some difficulties for those people who administer the reviews and appeals process, so the new regulation will separate it into two processes. Agricultural boards and commissions will be consulted on the drafting of the reviews and appeals regulation. Other than clarification, Mr. Chairman, it's anticipated that there will be very little, if any, change from the reviews and appeals process as it stands now.

Regarding the subject of changing the composition of the appeal tribunal, the intent is to move the current process for appointment of the appeal tribunal members from the act to the new regulation. Care is always taken, Mr. Chairman, by the minister and the marketing council alike to respect the independence of the appeal tribunal. There is no plan to have marketing council members serve as appeal tribunal members, and that will be made clear in the regulation. There has actually never ever been any interest from anyone in involving marketing council members in serving two roles.

In regard to the question about involving the Canadian Wheat Board in consultations, many Alberta producer organizations were directly consulted as part of the industry governance review examining this legislation. This legislation is similar to other federal and provincial legislation. There are some early discussions that went on with governments and national producer organizations. Alberta producers representing all commodity groups, including wheat and barley, which are under the Canadian Wheat Board, participated in the industry governance review. For example, the Alberta Soft Wheat Producers Commission were consulted. The Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission and the Alberta Barley Commission and their members were just some of the organizations which participated, Mr. Chairman. They all interact with the Canadian Wheat Board, but they're more closely representative of the producers themselves on the ground. All producers that participated in the industry governance review were encouraged to bring forward improvement ideas from all sources.

4:20

Lastly, Bill 5 continues to be legislation for establishing and operating producer commodity organizations. You have to be a producer, whether it's big or small, to vote in the elections of boards and commissions, you have to be a producer in order to get elected, and you have to be a producer to contribute service charges to that organization. During the industry governance review consultation participants asked about the ability to include nonproducers in their organizations. They saw the value in improving collaboration across the value chain and working together to achieve common goals. They saw the value of pulling outside expertise into their organizations. The subject of having nonproducers involved in producer commodity organizations will continue to be a topic of discussion; however, it is not currently in Bill 5. It doesn't include any changes in this area.

There were a couple of points, if I have some time, that I wanted to raise. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood had pointed out how five out of the six members of the Wheat Board supported single-desk selling and actually said in *Hansard* that that meant that this government had no understanding whatsoever of what producers in this province wanted. I'd like to point out, Mr. Chairman, that the opposition party, the member over there, doesn't have a single representative from rural Alberta representing any farmers, so perhaps they are the ones that don't have any understanding of agriculture and what can best represent them.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009, ensures that Alberta producers, regardless of where they're from or what size their farm is, continue to have the ability to govern, to lead, and to support their own industry. Proposed amendments reflect the input of over 1,000 individual

farmers and their respective commodity organizations. These amendments ensure that Alberta producers continue to have the ability to promote and market their products. It supports research in their industry and leads in the development of on-farm safety and animal care practices. These amendments will allow the current act to better serve the needs of our agricultural marketing boards and commissions, which in turn will help farms big or small.

I encourage all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 5. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Are there any other hon. members who wish to speak on the bill?

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to move that we now rise and report Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 5, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 15, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 1, Bill 15, and Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On that note, I would like to wish everybody a well-deserved break, working back in the constituencies even more than we have been over the past three weeks, perhaps, just to get caught up.

I would move that in view of the hour we call it 4:30 and, in fact, adjourn until Monday, April 6, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday, April 6, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to March 19, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 506-7 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)

First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)

- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-6 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft.), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)

- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft., adjourned)
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, April 6, 2009

Issue 19

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 6, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of the Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I'd invite all of you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you again, Mr. Lorieau. I sincerely hope that as the week closes, you will not be unemployed in your evening job. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, seated in your gallery, two outstanding Canadians, the Rt. Hon. Don Mazankowski and Mr. Paul Desmarais.

Of course, Mr. Don Mazankowski, officer of the Order of Canada, Alberta Order of Excellence, first elected MP for Vegreville in 1968, served in so many different capacities in the House of Commons but last and most importantly as the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, also as Minister of Finance at some very crucial times for the country of Canada, and a patriot of the Alberta Heart Institute. He's accompanied today by Mr. Paul Desmarais, a chairman of Power Corp of Canada, of course, executive of numerous corporations around the world, member of Privy Council, companion of the Order of Canada. Mr. Paul Desmarais is here today to visit the Mazankowski Heart Institute.

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

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly His Excellency Yerlan Abildayev, the ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Accompanying His Excellency is Adilzhan Ruziev, the second secretary at the embassy in Ottawa. I was honoured to host a special luncheon today in honour of His Excellency's first visit to Alberta. Alberta and Kazakhstan share many similarities. We are both geographically and ethnically diverse areas with vast natural resources. Our common interests have created a solid trading

relationship, which we look forward to increasing in the future. We value our relationship with our friends in Kazakhstan and the opportunities our partnership creates.

I would ask that His Excellency and the second secretary rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the secretary of planning for the Mexican state of Jalisco, Dr. Victor Manuel González Romero, and his wife, Dr. Maria Morfin Otero.

This year we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the twinning relationship between Jalisco and Alberta. This twinning relationship has allowed us to explore common areas of interest in agriculture, education, forestry, science, technology, and the environment. I might add, although it may be in self-interest, that they also produce copious quantities of tequila. By pursuing our common areas of interest, Mexico has become one of Alberta's fastest growing export markets, ranked fourth as our largest trading partner.

Dr. González is in Alberta to speak at a conference hosted by Athabasca University, and I understand that he will be touring the Legislature Building later and meeting with our Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Mr. Speaker, Dr. González and Dr. Morfin are seated in your gallery. I would ask that they rise and please accept the warm applause of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Jalisco is also the home of the rodeo and the mariachi in addition to tequila.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure through you to members of the Assembly to introduce Anzac school in the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. There are 26 visitors today, including teachers and parent helpers. I'd ask this energetic group from Anzac school to stand and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of the Assembly a visiting group from Suzuki charter school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. There are 17 students with us today. I understand that earlier they had a model parliament before their lunch break. They are led today by their teacher, Miss Eva Bauernhuber. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I along with my colleagues from Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Meadowlark, and Edmonton-Ellerslie had the distinct honour today of hosting some folks from India. These folks all belong to the Indian film and music industry and are, indeed, international superstars in their own right.

I'd first like to introduce Mr. Jazzy Bains, who is a singer. If you could rise. Mr. Bains has sold albums in the millions and is actually a native of Vancouver.

Next, comedian Gurpreet Ghuggi, who is, indeed, an advocate for the rule of law and has a very interesting way of communicating that to the Indian public.

Next, Miss Kulraj Randhawa, who was host of a popular Indian TV show, *Kareena Kareena*, and is currently in Canada to launch her second movie, *Tera Mera Ki Rishta*. Mr. Speaker, I won't try to translate that as I'm not known as being one for love movies, but needless to say, I encourage all members to watch this movie on April 10.

Last, Mr. Sukhwinder Chohla, who is a journalist from the *Ajit* newspaper in Jalandhar, and locally Mr. Gurbhalinder Sandhu, who is the editor of the *Des Pardes Times* newspaper and the co-ordinator for the event.

I ask all members to show our western hospitality to these individuals.

1:40

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'm honoured as a former hockey player and coach myself to introduce to you and through you a sports legend in India, Mr. Pargat Singh, seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Singh is the king of field hockey, the captain of India's field hockey team in two consecutive Olympics along with numerous international competitions. In fact, he was awarded Padma Shri and Arjuna awards for his achievements, the highest awards you can receive in India. Mr. Singh has done much for the sport in India and around the world. I would ask Pargat Singh to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction. It is also my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a good friend and a prominent member of the community, Mr. Joe Sunner, seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Sunner is the proud owner of Durabuilt Windows & Doors, with his head office in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Calder. Mr. Sunner has proven himself to be a good, generous man. Among his many contributions to the province one that stands out is his donation of \$100,000 to the Guru Nanak Dev Healing Garden at the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute. At this time I would ask Mr. Sunner to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives and staff from the Capital Region Board. Last Thursday the board presented the Minister of Municipal Affairs with its long-term growth plan. The members have shown excellent collaboration and co-operation so far, and I applaud them for their efforts.

Board members with us today are Mayor Kirk Popik, town of Calmar; Mayor Stephen Mandel, city of Edmonton; Reeve Wayne Woldanski, Lamont county; Mayor Greg Krischke, city of Leduc; Mayor Lloyd Bertschi, town of Morinville; Mayor Mel Smith, town of Redwater; Mayor Nolan Crouse, city of St. Albert; Mayor Stuart Houston, city of Spruce Grove; Mayor Cathy Olesen, Strathcona county; Mayor Camille Berube, town of Beaumont; Mayor Don Rigney, Sturgeon county; Mayor Allan Gee, village of Thorsby. Board alternates with us today also include Councillor Ed Gibbons, city of Edmonton; Councillor Ben Van De Walle, town of Morinville; Councillor Art Erickson, village of Wabamun. Capital Region Board staff joining us today are Chief Officer Kathleen LeClair,

Andy Haden, Brandy Moorhead, Lisa Sederski, Sharon Shuya, and Peter Tarnawsky. Also, from Strathcona county are Yolande Shaw and David Turner. Our guests are seated in the members' gallery today, and I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Evans: It's a thrill today to introduce some women who have made huge contributions to community service throughout the capital region, most specifically to young ladies. Members of the 3rd Trefoil Guild, representing the Guides: Mary Gerritsen, Margaret Campbell, Edna Dach, Carmel Fenniak, Kathy Morris, Ruth Strandberg, and Mae Hadley. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise as we show appreciation for their attendance here today.

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

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly government employees from Employment and Immigration. These dedicated professionals work in the following areas of our department: immigration policy and programs, international qualifications assessment, Alberta immigrant nominee program, strategic marketing, and labour attraction. Their collective work ensures that newcomers are always welcome to our province, that they have the means to settle and make a successful life in Alberta. It is also their efforts that keep Alberta on the national and international radar as a destination of choice for immigrants. I'm honoured to welcome them here today and ask that all members of the Assembly give our guests a very warm welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Chief Ron Morin, Mr. John Park, and Mr. Paul Bercier. Chief Ron Morin has lived on the Enoch reserve his entire life and was the youngest chief elected to the Enoch Cree Nation, in 1993. The chief, as a man of great vision, has been instrumental in developing a number of innovative community-based projects. To name only a few, he was a key player in the successful development of the River Cree Resort and Casino, representing a \$180 million investment. He oversaw the Millennium Housing Project and is currently pursuing the development of environmentally friendly refining right here in Alberta. I wish him luck in this ambitious project and admire his interest in investing in the future of our province through alternative, environmentally friendly energy resources.

Also with us this afternoon is Mr. John Park, the founding and current president of RCI bank of Canada. Out of Vancouver Mr. Park oversees the operations of Renaissance Capital Inc. and RCIC. He has been involved with Canada's immigrant program for the last 11 years, and prior to leading RCI, he successfully managed the Alberta-based royal Canadian immigrant fund.

Mr. Bercier is also with us today, a constituent of mine and exemplary Albertan and Canadian. He has served in our Canadian armed forces for over 16 years and, as such, has been awarded the Canadian Forces decoration/medal and United Nations service medal in commemoration of his first-rate service to our country. Now a consultant with Willow Industries Mr. Bercier brings to that company many years of environmental-related experience through his service on a number of national and provincial committees. A few of those include clean water/life and the national Métis committee on economic development, natural resources, and the environment.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that our accomplished guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We have with us today Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop of the farm workers union of Alberta. The Farmworkers Union of Alberta was recognized as a legitimate voice of Alberta farm workers by none less than Judge Peter Barley when he granted the union legal standing at the inquiry into Kevan Chandler's fatality. They're here to remind the Premier and the ministers that the Farmworkers Union of Alberta stands ready for immediate consultations on implementing Judge Barley's recommendations to include paid farm workers under occupational health and safety legislation. They'll even meet you today if you wish, folks. Please give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House some constituents from the constituency of Mackay. I would like to ask these gentlemen to stand as I call their name: Mr. Appy Bhullar, brother of the Member for Calgary-Montrose, Mr. Balraj Randhawa, and Mr. Sam Sidhu. I would like the members to give them the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are now going to be up against a standing order, and I think it's prudent that we now proceed to Oral Question Period.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Government Hosting Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has many wasteful and lavish spending habits. Hosting expenses on amounts over \$600, as publicly issued in the *Alberta Gazette*, have soared in the last five years, yet the government admitted last week that there is no official hospitality budget. You can't control costs without a budget. To the Premier: given that over \$1.3 million was spent on hosting expenses last year, why is there no official budget for hospitality expenses in the government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member that asked the question is chair of the Public Accounts Committee and is fully aware of the budgeting process we use in this House, fully transparent in terms of all of the expenses that are put forward tied to any hosting done by a minister, by any MLA, or any member of the staff of any of the executive offices or any of the MLA offices.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. The budget process as we know it is certainly flawed.

Again to the Premier. Of all the government departments the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations spent the most on hosting expenses, over \$155,000, in 2008. [interjections]

It's not a laughing matter. Where did the department find the money for all the dinners and drinks when there is no official hospitality budget?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the records will show that the minister responsible for International and Intergovernmental Relations has lived within the budget that was set by this Assembly last year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Environment beat out the ministry of advanced education for second place in the hospitality sweepstakes, spending \$131,000 in 2008. Again to the Premier: where did the department find the money for all the dinners and drinks when there is no official hospitality budget?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the ministers are assigned budgets, and their responsibility is to live within those budgets. I'm proud to say as we have ended this fiscal year, March 31, 2009, that all of our ministry budgets ended up being balanced.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Achievement Bonuses

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In only five years bonuses given to the child and family services authorities have increased by 92 per cent, from \$548,000 in 2003 to over \$1 million last year. In that same five-year period we have children being put into hotels, inadequate compensation and support for foster parents, and a Child and Youth Advocate that can't produce reports on time. It is inexcusable that your minister of children's services is allowing this situation to continue. To the Premier: how can you justify a 92 per cent increase in bonuses to senior officials given the recent track record of the children's services ministry?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that our minister of children's services has done. At a time where the economy is either increasing very rapidly and we have more children at risk, that are now in the hands of this government in terms of care, or the economy is slowing down and we're heading into a recession, we may have more families that require help. With respect to the bonuses this is a decision that I had made, that bonuses will be paid as of the end of this fiscal year, March 31, 2009, and no bonuses for next year. That's in keeping with the agreement we had with all our staff, both unionized and non-unionized.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm assuming the buck stops with the Premier, and \$40 million worth of bucks will be flowing out in June. They should have stopped sooner.

Why was the Premier allowing some of the child and family services authorities to submit budgets up to eight months behind schedule last year yet still rewarding them with achievement bonuses? What exactly did they achieve if they can't even submit their budgets on time?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is coming from in terms of budgets. Budgets were delivered here to the House. The budget for the ministry was debated, and the motion

was passed to approve the budget. From what I gather, it was done in a timely fashion and gave the minister the power to expend the dollars that were given to her by the power of the vote of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To clarify, the money that was approved in April 2008 by this House was not approved locally by Calgary until late November.

Why did compensation for foster parents and other supports for children in care only increase by a tiny fraction of the amount that bonuses did? An extra million dollars would certainly go a long way to help the children in the care of our province.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is an agreement we had with about 6,100 management people across the province of Alberta. We lived up to that agreement. I would say that all of the management personnel, through their responsible deputy ministers, came forward and said that for next year, given the fact that our revenue stream is diminished considerably and we'll have more to do with less, let's work together. We won't go through the management bonuses. We'll save money going into next year so that we can look after the most vulnerable in the province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta trails the entire country when it comes to safety and rights for paid farm workers. This government clings to outdated policies while dozens of farm workers unnecessarily die and hundreds are unnecessarily injured. My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why under this government's policy the truck driver with the hauling company that carries the cattle has the right to join a union, but the worker who loads the cattle at the feedlot does not? Why the discrepancy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think now the hon. member is talking about whether a farm worker has the right to join a union. I'm not up on all of the labour laws, but I suspect that in any operation if the people that work want to gather and vote on the right to join a union, they have that option. If I'm wrong, then the minister responsible for labour can correct me on that point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'll correct the Premier. Despite a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, farm workers in Alberta are explicitly forbidden from organizing unions. My question is to the Premier. Since he delivered that answer in a spirit of goodwill, will he and his government live up to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada and grant paid farm workers in Alberta the right they deserve, which is the right to unionize?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we do have to determine first is what size of operation the hon. member is talking about. Are they talking about a feedlot operation with three people working? Are they talking about one that's 30, 40, 50? Are they talking about seasonal workers that may operate on a vegetable farm or those that work seasonally during the time of harvest? These are all the kind of questions that we're asking agriculture, those that are in the business, to give us suggestions so that we can develop a good policy position.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're actually talking about all paid farm workers, whether it's three paid workers at a small feedlot or 50 at a big feedlot. They're all paid. They all, under the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, ought to have the right to organize unions. Again in the spirit of openness that the Premier is providing here: is the Premier prepared to move this issue forward and help Alberta's paid farm workers get the right they deserve, which would be the right to unionize? Can we move this issue forward, please?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we're now in the middle of consultations. The minister of labour and also the minister of agriculture are holding consultations. We'll bring forward the evidence, what we hear from the agricultural community, bring it forward to the House, and the policy will be debated. This is where it's appropriately debated, I would think.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Carbon Capture and Storage

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's carbon capture scheme is a \$2 billion boondoggle in the making. Big oil players have yanked their applications because the only thing CCS has proven to be so far is a big waste of money, yet this government seems committed to rolling the dice in tomorrow's budget so long as the public purse pays the debts when they come due. To the Premier: why won't you scrap the CCS program from tomorrow's budget and use that money instead to create real, long-term jobs in the renewable energy sector?

Mr. Stelmach: I guess she already knows what's in the budget.

In all honesty, I know that the hon. member is following up on a bit of a stunt that Greenpeace did today. To those that are watching, somebody said that they hid \$600 someplace on the Leg. Grounds. I don't know. Mr. Speaker, it's your grounds. Maybe we can ask people to find the 600 bucks.

2:00

You know, in all honesty, Mr. Speaker, the largest carbon footprint in the province is generated by coal-fired electricity plants. Those are the ones that had actually applied to the CCS fund. That is where we should start first. If we don't, the cost of electricity is going to skyrocket. It will further diminish our global competitiveness, and we will see more job loss.

They will not tell you that their goal is to significantly increase – increase – the cost of electricity. They feel that if they increase the cost of electricity, then they'll be able to bring down the carbon footprint because you and I would not be able to afford to turn our lights on in our house. That's what they want.

Ms Notley: The largest greenhouse gas emission will be the oil sands if you carry on the way you want to, and electricity will come down when you start creating renewable energy.

Your own figures show that dollars invested in infrastructure create nearly four times the jobs of a dollar in oil and gas, and meanwhile the Construction Owners Association of Alberta expects the sharpest rise in job losses to occur late this year or early next year. To the Premier: why won't you landfill your carbon capture idea, admit that it's just a PR tool, and prevent further job losses by investing this money where it creates the most jobs, in infrastructure?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, the \$2 billion that we set aside in carbon capture has been recognized as a very important policy. It has been recognized internationally: London, The Hague, throughout Europe. Even the President of the United States himself recognized that carbon capture is the way to go. Out of a 50-year span it's the first 30 years, more than likely, before there's new technology. Let's use carbon capture to bring down the level of carbon on our continent. This is a very, very good way of doing it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, tar sands executives don't seem to agree. They say that it's too expensive, too uncertain, and it's not likely to work. Now, meanwhile Alberta has lost more than 30,000 jobs this year, and more people are being put out of work every day. Thousands of qualified construction workers are looking to this government for help, and the answer in tomorrow's budget will be to bury their 2 billion tax dollars down a hole for PR and nothing else. Why won't you admit that using public policy to subsidize carbon capture is a fool's pursuit in tough times and invest this money in stimulus green jobs instead?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's a bit of irony, I guess. *National Geographic* did this article on Alberta. The actual text by *National Geographic* was fair and balanced, but the pictures that they used – unfortunately, they put in the picture of the open pit but not the picture of the reclaimed area of the oil sands. But, you know, so be it. Those are the issues that we have to face. At the same time the irony is that *National Geographic* is part of the Aspen Institute, which last week recognized Alberta – Alberta – of all the countries and the jurisdictions in the world, as taking a leadership role in carbon capture and storage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that Alberta's municipalities receive significant support from this government through the municipal sustainability initiative. This unprecedented program assists municipalities to manage growth-related challenges and enhance their long-term planning. I know that the municipalities in my constituency have accessed this funding for their communities. My question, therefore, is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How is MSI helping Alberta's communities today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. MSI is having a real impact. Municipalities decide what their local priorities should be. Municipalities and communities are seeing new roads. We're seeing recreation centres. We're seeing fire halls. We're seeing libraries. MSI is making a difference today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the same minister. I would ask him: how is the government ensuring that MSI is used effectively in today's challenging economic times?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, municipalities are committed to building strong communities, and so is this government. This

support is unmatched throughout this country. This government has also added extra flexibility. Interest can now be used by municipalities to offset projects that they are bringing forward. So they can use the interest from MSI. This is moving forward with infrastructure programs. This is allowing municipalities to do what they feel is best.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How will this change benefit Albertans today?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that there's a very simple answer: it will keep Albertans working. It will accelerate projects by having lower construction costs, and it will continue to build vital infrastructure. It's important. This government will continue to partner with municipalities such as you see here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond

Ms. Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In July last year Syncrude officials reported to Sustainable Resource Development the final count of the ducks drowned in the tailings ponds. These officials were then instructed to withhold releasing the numbers to the public. Eight months later the Minister of Environment didn't know the final count. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Was it department staff or the minister who ordered that the information be kept from the public and from his colleague?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing for the member opposite that she's not in a court of law. That would be called a leading question. There were no orders given to anybody. We got the same numbers that she got, that everybody got last fall. Over the course of the fall and winter I heard that the numbers were higher, but this was in the course of an investigation. I didn't hear any specific numbers till they were made public last week.

Ms. Blakeman: Well, the Syncrude officials were very clear on who they reported to, and it was your department.

An additional question to the same minister: is it policy for departmental staff to decide that a member of cabinet would not receive vital information?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way has her facts wrong. Syncrude worked with government staff in dealing with the ducks. If she has read the report, as I'm sure she has, subsequent to the initial count ducks were floating to the surface. This took time. As I said, there was no attempt made to suppress any information. It was confined in the context of the potential litigation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms. Blakeman: Thank you. This question is to the Minister of Environment. While the final number of dead ducks may not matter for the purposes of a judicial investigation and the laying of charges, does the minister not require final numbers for the purposes of assigning monitoring staff and other department-related actions?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess herein lies the difference between being the opposition critic and being the government minister. The minister is responsible for getting the job done. The critic is responsible for a degree of political grandstanding, and I think that's what we have on our hands here.

The actual number of ducks is part of the investigation that led to charges being laid. I think it's appropriate that we let the courts deal with that number in an appropriate manner. As for her question as to whether the number of duck mortality should affect the degree to which we have compliance with our legislation, of course not, Mr. Speaker. We enforce our legislation rigidly every day.

2:10 Postsecondary Application System

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, I've heard from a few students and parents in my constituency that applying to postsecondary institutions can be both a frustrating and time-consuming process. My first question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. With your new focus on a province-wide planning system will the application process get any better?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, I have heard those same comments, that it can be a frustrating process. In fact, being a parent of postsecondary students, I've found that out myself.

Alberta has been developing a new system. It's called ApplyAlberta. It's an important step forward for students to be able to apply to any one of our institutions in the province from one portal. We're testing the system out currently. Students will be able to create one profile on the system. All of their transcripts and all of their information will be uploaded into that one profile. They can apply with that one profile to a number of institutions across Campus Alberta.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also for the same minister. That sounds great, but when will ApplyAlberta be up and running so that students can actually use it?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's important that we get the system up and running as quickly as possible because another benefit to it will be for us to be able to track student demand and the demand in certain areas. By the fall of this year, 2009, all 21 of the public postsecondary institutions are expected to be using ApplyAlberta. The funding is already in place. In fact, we've already been doing some trials at the University of Lethbridge. We've conducted a test of the system with students and with parents, and by all indications it's a big hit.

Mr. Dallas: My final question to the same minister: will students have to pay more to use this multi-application system?

Mr. Horner: There's not going to be any additional cost, Mr. Speaker. Students will not have to pay for the transcripts either. Most of Alberta's public postsecondary institutions do charge an application fee, and the students will be required to pay those application fees to those institutions that they choose to apply to. But in terms of the new system there'll be no new additional charges.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While externally fixed bars are considered an illegal fire hazard for secondary suites, they are currently legally acceptable for owner-occupied homes. For the past 20 years fixed external bars together with junior jailer-controlled locked bedroom doors have been key components of the nonaccredited Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, which poses as a government-regulated residential treatment program. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: if externally fixed bars are considered a danger for rental tenants, why aren't they considered a threat for home-owning family members or for the vulnerable youth prisoners of forced AARC confinement?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Alberta has very strong building and fire codes to help individuals keep safe in secondary suites. Municipalities choose whether to permit secondary suites. Standards for new suites have been in force since December of 2006. We are working with municipalities to ensure that the right standards are in place.

Mr. Chase: You completely missed the question. Secondary suites are enforced. Homeowners can bar their homes without any kind of result from your department. The rules need to be changed.

To the Minister of Justice: given the broad range of legal exemptions under the assumption that a person's home is not only their castle but can serve as a jail, what type of mandatory correctional training should homeowner wardens or their junior jailers have to ensure the safety of our prisoners?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not even quite sure of the point of that question or what the answer to that might be, but I don't think it's within the purview of my department.

Mr. Chase: The point is that no one in this government is looking out for the well-being of children imprisoned in homes.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how can your ministry account for the physical safety or psychological well-being of either vulnerable adolescent prisoners or the families of at-risk youths who are required as participants in the AARC program to become jailers in your government's unregulated home prisons?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what this government is concerned about is that if we have a youth that is in need of help, we help these youth. Sometimes in this Legislature you do something that you have a fair bit of pride in. During the break I happened to receive this from the families of AARC, from the students who've gone through the program. I'm going to table this so that that member can stand up and talk to these hundreds of students who've gone through this program, and he can read whether or not the program is working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A year ago the Minister of Municipal Affairs established the Capital Region Board, and I'm pleased that there are a fair number of them in the audience today. He gave them the mandate to come up with a land-use plan and transportation plan by the end of March 2009. These plans have now been developed into one comprehensive plan, the capital region

growth plan, which was unveiled last week. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please tell this House how this growth plan will affect municipalities in the capital region?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier created the Capital Region Board because he saw a tremendous opportunity for the region. Regional co-operation is a priority for this government for the success of the region and also for this province. It is absolutely critical that what has taken place with the regional board be accented: communication, collaboration, co-operation. This approach will support strong and viable communities in this region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree that this has been a very significant accomplishment for this region's municipalities. In reference to these plans, will these plans control development within all municipalities in the capital region?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. This is not about controlling development. This is a regional look at planning, and this is an integrated and strategic approach to regional planning. It is imperative that we look in the long term in regard to development and infrastructure and conservation. This process ultimately supports, as I said before, a very strong capital region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. I understand that a similar plan is being prepared for the Calgary region. When will that plan be completed?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Regional Partnership is up on a website for comments not only from adjoining municipalities but from individuals. They have said that they hope to have their plan in place by June. As with the capital region plan, I'm very much looking forward to the Calgary plan as well as other co-operative efforts that are taking place in this province to help develop communities.

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

Centralized Cytology Lab Service

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is now clear that there was a request for proposals sent to lab service providers and that there are plans to only have two provincial labs providing cytology services. On March 19 in question period the Minister of Health and Wellness suggested that my questions were based on rumours and appeared not to know anything about the proposed changes. My questions to the Minister of Health and Wellness would be: whose decision was it to centralize the cytology lab service? Was it the minister's or the Health Services Board's?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct relative to the earlier question, and I make no apologies for saying that I was not familiar with the question but subsequent to that did ask for an answer. The answer I have is that these lab services are being centralized to Calgary and Edmonton, and there are a number of good reasons for it. The decision, by the way, was made by Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'm wondering: what is the time frame for the decision and the timeline for implementation? I'm sure the minister must know.

2:20

Mr. Liepert: I don't have the exact timeline, but the decision has been made, and I presume that it will be implemented soon.

Ms Pastoor: The decision has been made. Thank you for that. I guess we'll all just sit and wait and see what that decision was.

You've indicated that there was a good reason for it. Would you table evidence and results that could show that a cost-benefit analysis of centralizing cytology lab services was performed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't indicate that the reason it was being centralized was because of cost. What I did say was that there are good reasons for it, and I'd be happy to supply the member with a written answer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Waterfowl Deaths in Oil Sands Tailings Pond (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government covered up the truth that over 1,600 ducks were killed in a Syncrude tar pond. On February 9 this year the Environment minister – and I'll use his word – grandstanded, boasting about the charges against Syncrude in a press conference, but conveniently forgot to mention that the death toll of the ducks was more than three times that which people had been previously led to believe. To the minister: how long will your campaign of cover-ups continue before Albertans get the transparency that they deserve?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I've indicated publicly that I became aware that the initial estimate of 500 ducks was going to be exceeded fairly early on in the process, but by that point we had an investigation under way. That investigation subsequently led to charges being laid. Those charges are now before the courts. The number of ducks that were involved in this is very much material evidence in that case. I think that it would be inappropriate and perhaps even an affront to the courts if I was to disclose publicly information that will be part of an ongoing court case.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister previously said that the number of ducks would have no impact on the penalty sought, so I don't see what the relevance actually could possibly be. Now, the minister was reported as saying that he never knew how many ducks died on the pond until Syncrude went public. Then when we found out that his underlings in the ministry knew well before that, the minister said that the truth was irrelevant. Then he said what we've heard again, that it would hurt the case against Syncrude, which is ridiculous because Syncrude is who made it public. To the minister. You're either embroiled in another cover-up, or members of your ministry aren't doing their jobs. Which is it?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there was an investigation. In the course of that investigation there was a determination on the mortality of ducks in this circumstance. The numbers that have been brought forward by Syncrude are a requirement under their operating to report bird mortality. The investigation will present the evidence in

court, and that evidence is part of the court proceeding. I can't comment on whether or not Syncrude's numbers are the same as the investigators' numbers.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this cover-up has swollen Alberta's international black eye even more. It has been reported in *National Geographic*, in *Forbes* magazine, in the *Washington Times*, in the *Denver Post*, on CBS, and it's all over the Internet. This cover-up was over dead ducks. Last month we learned that charges of pollution in the Athabasca River were kept quiet on the eve of an election. To the minister: how many cover-ups need to be exposed before you learn that honesty is the best policy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, every member in this House – well, with the exception perhaps of that one – knows that I have a reputation of being a straight shooter. The point of the matter is that there sometimes is a balance that must be maintained between transparency and being successful in prosecution. I would suggest that this hon. member would be far more critical of this minister if as a result of disclosure of inappropriate information, this company was able to get off on a technicality. That's the reason why we're very careful.

Health Services Board Remuneration

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, during our break a small southern city daily newspaper made a report about a 25 per cent increase in rates of remuneration to the new Alberta health board. The subsequent calls to my constituency office came up with the consensus that per diems are quite fine but that these \$50,000 honoraria are obscene. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: can you explain just what component of this salary remuneration package has a 25 per cent increase and how it came about?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was no increase. What the situation is is that when we created the one health board last spring, we appointed an interim board and put in place a temporary honorarium. As we moved towards appointing a full-time board last December, I did two things. First of all, I asked the chair to give me an indication of the amount of work that they had taken on, but secondly, I also did a comparative factor of boards of similar size and responsibility. The ministerial order was signed – I think it was last November – designating the honorarium for the permanent board of Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the minister please explain to me what the governance savings are for this government when you compare the honoraria, the per diem, and the travel expenses of these 15 board members with the 15 other regional so-called voluntary board members that were in place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I can't do that because we need to allow the board to have at least one year of operation under the permanent structure before we have some actual data. I do need to ensure that I correct something that the member said in his question, and that is that the previous regional health authority boards also received honoraria. It was in varying degrees, but they were not strictly volunteer board members.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: would the minister please outline if possible the salary range – this is

coming from constituents who want to know what the salary range is – of the new senior executive, the CAO, CEO, COO, or whatever they're referred to as?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the new CEO of Alberta Health Services was hired, there was a news release issued. It's on the website. My recollection is that the salary of the new CEO is some \$575,000 annually, which is certainly commensurate with other salaries for running an organization of that size. I don't have in front of me the other executives' salaries, but I can tell you that they're less than that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Grizzly Bear Protection

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has shown a continued neglect for the protection of the grizzly bear in Alberta. Current numbers show that the population is more at risk than ever. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has said that the anecdotal stories from hunters will be compared to detailed DNA data when determining whether to allow the hunting of Alberta grizzlies. Why does the minister place as much weight on anecdotes as on scientific evidence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, I don't say that the two are equal at all. What I'm saying is that the very people that have done the scientific evidence are interested in looking at the anecdotal evidence as another way of looking at the same phenomena. This sort of triangulation of data is a healthy way to go about it and will produce better results. The two different groups are collaborating, and the result will be better data for us to make our decision on.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister's own Endangered Species Conservation Committee report from 2002 states that "the biological status of species should be determined by independent scientists using the best science available in an open and transparent process." Why, then, is the minister giving hunting groups an equal say in determining the status of the grizzly bear?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we are using the best available scientific evidence. We're using exactly the same methodology that was used in the Yellowstone park area to do a successful grizzly bear status assessment down there. It's nonsense to say that we're giving different groups a say. This isn't a question about giving different groups a say. It's a question of taking different types of data gathered in different ways and actually, in cross-referencing them, getting a better result.

Mr. Hehr: Well, then explain to me this, Mr. Minister: how is it that a biological status by an independent group of scientists couldn't be done by them alone? Why are we relying on two separate groups to do this?

2:30

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, every sampling strategy has its strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses of the DNA are that you're baiting specific sites and expecting or predicting that bears pass through and leave some DNA. It is considered one of the best sampling techniques available, as I said, used in the Yellowstone park study, but

it has its weakness: you put the sampling sites in areas where bears are available. The complementarity of the two data sets, I repeat, is the combination of the two studies, not a weakness.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

First Nations Development Fund Grants

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I attended a meeting with representatives of Treaty 6 along with several MLA colleagues and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. The First Nations development fund was discussed, and some First Nations said that there are delays in processing the requests. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What can be done to speed up the application process for this grant program?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think the application process is already very streamlined. In fact, last year we reviewed 200-plus applications, and that bodes well for the staff involved. But as part of our due diligence sometimes we do require additional information or additional budget items to be addressed, and in every case we require a band resolution to accompany the grant request. Those kinds of things can sometimes precipitate understandable delays, but we are working with First Nations more closely than ever right now to help with the process and help ensure that the applications that do come in are completed properly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the grant payout timelines be amended so that First Nations might receive their grants sooner than once every three months?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that issue actually goes back to the original agreement that was negotiated by the First Nations and the government of Alberta in 2001. I'm happy to say, though, that under that particular policy we've never had any late payments, at least none that were precipitated by us. If we were to contemplate a change in the due process of that particular issue, we would have to consult with all 47 First Nations again and, of course, with the gaming and liquor control people, and that would precipitate delays. Finally, if we were to look at additional payments, that would require additional administration and additional costs as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: given that the FNDF program is achieving good success in First Nation communities, will you consider expanding the program's criteria and project eligibility so that more projects can be funded?

Mr. Zwozdesky: In fact, Mr. Speaker, all projects that are eligible right now include infrastructure projects, economic development projects, social development projects, and community development projects, but we are wanting to be clear that projects that are not eligible would include such things as gaming activities or per capita distributions or payments against loans or payments against debts. Those are clearly outside the purview and not eligible. I'm happy to tell the hon. member that we have not had to decline any applications under the First Nations development fund program using the current criteria, which, in my view, are therefore working quite effectively.

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

Oil and Gas Industry Fracturing Chemicals

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Pennsylvania natural gas companies are allowed to keep their fracking formulas proprietary, but the ingredients are public record. In Alberta companies can keep the chemical compounds in their fracturing fluid secret, and therefore scientists do not know what to test for. This puts Alberta's groundwater at risk. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What reason does the government have for allowing companies to keep secret the chemicals used in their fracking formulas?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that question would more appropriately be addressed to the Minister of Energy, responsible for ERCB.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, that is the case in Alberta and British Columbia. I don't know about Saskatchewan and other provinces. In fact, the majority of the frac fluid used in the province of Alberta currently, particularly in unconventional gas – and I believe it's the area that the member opposite would be suggesting is taking place in the eastern United States – is water. Secondly, the areas that are fracked in the province of Alberta are not anywhere near potable or surface water contaminant possibilities.

Ms Blakeman: Well, then, to the same minister: how does the government expect to get a true result from the testing of Albertans' well water that is close to well sites if the scientists do not know what to test for?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest is that if there is any indication of the types of surfactants or release agents that actually provide lubricant to push frac fluids and frac solids into fractures in production facilities underground, if there was any contamination, cross-contamination, it would not be difficult for the ERCB to be able to determine what those contaminants and chemicals were.

Ms Blakeman: Secrets, secrets.

Back to the same minister: given that diesel is commonly used in other centres as a fracking agent, how can Albertans be sure that diesel is not being used here and is not contaminating our groundwater?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that again is an entirely different process that the member is talking about. Most certainly, we do have areas in certain circumstances in the province where the geology is sensitive to water and water contamination of the geology causes decrease in production capability, but it's a completely different issue and used for different processes in the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The assured income for the severely handicapped program, known as AISH, is a very good and unique program in Alberta. The rising cost of living has put great pressure on Alberta AISH recipients, who are already counting on

every dollar they receive. To the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what is the government doing to support AISH recipients through this difficult economic downturn time?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the AISH program will continue to provide financial assistance and a wide range of health and supplemental benefits to eligible Albertans with disabilities. Front-line staff work closely with AISH clients to advise them of the benefits available to them. Staff with the AISH program are also working with other ministries to ensure that when an AISH client is referred, they are referred to a program that will meet their unique needs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you. To the same minister. My constituent, who is an AISH recipient, met with me a few weeks ago. She has a dependent child, so she receives an additional \$100 a month on top of her AISH income. My question to the minister is: what happens to this additional amount when she turns 18 and is still dependent on her parent?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the AISH program will continue to provide the \$100 child benefit to clients for a dependent child who is between the ages of 18 and 20 and who is also attending high school. The dependent child is also eligible for health and supplemental health benefits during this time. When dependent children become adults, it's our hope that with the education that they are receiving, they will be able to pursue the opportunities available to them in our province. They could also apply for government programs such as student loans or income support specific to their own personal situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. To the same minister. The AISH recipient who has dependent children can earn up to \$975 before the benefits are reduced. When the child turns 18, this limit amount is reduced to \$400. Can the minister look into this to make it fair when the child is still dependent on the AISH recipient?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the AISH client would not have their employment income exemption rate reduced if the dependent adult continues to attend high school and is between the ages of 18 and 20 years. As I mentioned in my previous answer, the AISH client would also continue to receive the \$100 child benefit. AISH also provides a children's education benefit to assist clients with the costs of dependent children attending preschool through high school.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the question period. There were 96 questions and responses today.

We'll now return to the Routine. The Routine was at the subject matter of ministerial statements. I will introduce the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and will ask him to convey to his delightful wife, Lorraine, our grateful thank you's for putting up with the hon. minister for 35 years in happy marital bliss. She certainly made him a better man.

2:40

Ministerial Statements

Capital Region Municipal Planning

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are 25 municipalities in the capital region, large and small, rural and urban. Each has a distinct history and a distinct identity, but they also have a shared interest as we look to the future, an interest in co-

ordinated growth, efficient services, and a high quality of life for all residents in the area. Our government has the same interest. That is why one year ago our Premier brought these municipalities together to plan for future development of the region.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform this House that the Capital Region Board has met the key element of its mandate. Last week the board officially presented me with the capital region growth plan. This is an outstanding accomplishment. It is a testament to the leadership of our Premier and to the leadership of the elected officials from all the capital region municipalities, many of whom, as you see, are with us in the Assembly today.

These municipal leaders are able to work together, plan together, and focus on the best interests of the region as a whole. I know it wasn't easy. They worked hard and made the difficult decisions, and I commend them for their tremendous dedication. In the course of over 80 meetings they compromised when they had to, and most importantly they communicated, they collaborated, and they co-operated. As a result, they were able to develop a blueprint that will help shape the future of this region. The capital region growth plan provides an integrated and strategic approach to that future. It identifies overall development patterns and future infrastructure needs. It will be the mechanism to ensure that decisions are co-ordinated, that duplication is avoided, and that economic growth is promoted.

The plan includes four major elements. First, there is the land-use plan, that is based on the following six principles: protect the environment and the resources, minimize the regional footprint, strengthen communities, increase transportation choice, ensure efficient provision of services, and support regional economic development. Second, Mr. Speaker, there is a plan for a regional intermunicipal transit network. It includes a governance model, service policy, and potential route plans. Third, there is a plan for a region-wide integrated geographic information system. This system will provide the detailed mapping and the electronic data that will be the foundation of more co-ordinated decision-making in years to come. Finally, the capital region growth plan includes a regional strategy for affordable housing. It will enable the region to better accommodate changing demographics and prepare for expected growth.

The government will now review the plan to ensure that it meets the criteria and objectives set out in the Capital Region Board regulation. We will make sure that it aligns with the provincial policy and protects the interests of all residents. We will also continue to support the co-operative efforts of the board as it moves on to the next phase of its work – that work is vital to the future of this region and our province and the government of Alberta – and it will continue to fulfill its role in promoting prosperity and building strong communities in the capital region.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the members of the Capital Region Board for their accomplishments so far. Their successful collaboration is attracting notice from across the country and is a prime example of what can be achieved when we work together. I applaud the board members for their hard work, and I wish them all the best as they continue to work hard and work together for the future of our communities.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The capital region has needed a plan for growth and sustainable development for a long time. I am pleased that the long-awaited capital region growth plan is based on sound principles and new intermunicipal relationships.

I join the hon. minister in congratulating the Premier and the hard-working municipal leaders who hammered out a plan for the long-term benefit of so many citizens. There's no doubt that this would not have happened without the involvement of the Premier, and I think that as time progresses, the entire region will recognize that this is a step in the right direction.

We are glad to see that the plan focuses on sustainable land-use development, affordable housing, and an intermunicipal transit system. These are undoubtedly necessary goals for the continued economic success of Edmonton and the region. We in the Alberta Liberal caucus want to see communities that are environmentally sustainable, well connected, and provide all citizens with a very high quality of life. This plan has the potential to meet those goals.

As with any plan its success will depend on the full support of this government, not just verbal support but ongoing financial and planning support. All too often we've seen this government bring forward excellent plans only to have those plans collect dust on a shelf somewhere, unfunded and unimplemented. The stakes here are too high to allow this to happen again. The capital region has the opportunity for a bright future, but realizing that opportunity will require leadership and action.

A growth plan is a good first step. We are glad that it has been taken and that the region's municipalities have come together, and they have come together, again, through the leadership of the Premier and his hon. minister. But this is only the beginning of a very long journey, one that will require good faith, effort, and hard work from local and provincial leaders alike. I hope that this government follows through with the promise on this plan because it's certainly needed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has caught my eye. I anticipate that the hon. member will want to request unanimous consent to address the Assembly on this matter. I will do it on her behalf and ask one question: if any hon. member is opposed, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to all members of this House for allowing me the opportunity to respond on behalf of the NDP opposition.

Firstly, I do want to commend both the minister and the Capital Region Board for the hard work that they've put into preparing their report. They have made many positive recommendations, and we hope that the government will follow through on many of them.

However, it is important that we reflect on the past and current situations in order to understand the purpose and importance of the capital plan. The Klein cuts of the '90s included axing the regional planning commissions. This government changed legislation to disband the 10 commissions and repealed their plans, leaving community planning the functions of individual municipalities. Since that action the capital region has faced a number of serious issues, including the impacts of urban sprawl, the transit deficit, duplication of services, problems with economic regional planning, and the need for community-based schools in both new and established neighbourhoods. Municipal planners from outside of Alberta have repeatedly identified a number of deficits in Edmonton with respect to its planning. In short, many of the challenges that we are now very genuinely congratulating the Capital Region Board for starting to address were caused in large part by decisions of this government over 10 years ago.

Now, the Capital Region Board has been asked to look at a number of issues relating to urban and suburban living in our capital region. Among these issues members have been asked to consider a land-use plan, a housing plan, and an intermunicipal transit network. Unfortunately, the government has changed the rules in the time between asking municipal officials to undertake this large task and today. They released a land-use framework that requires substantial legislative changes before any real accomplishments can be reached, and this government, unfortunately, has not yet followed through. They announced a plan to eliminate homelessness without, unfortunately, any monetary commitments, so it has not yet been followed through on. They yanked nearly \$2 billion from the promised Green TRIP, a public transit fund announced a year ago, that this government has not followed through on.

2:50

I commend the Capital Region Board for meeting their mandate and living up to their promises. However, until this government is committed to implementing its recommendations, I am concerned that this report, as identified by others, may just collect dust on the bookshelf. It's obvious that a lot of work has gone into this group and its plan. They've lived up to their side of the bargain, and now it is up to the government to follow through on theirs.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of a number of members to participate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Excellence in Teaching Award Semifinalists

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every school day teachers across this province encourage students to embrace and enjoy learning and make valuable and meaningful contributions to students' lives. Our students consistently rank amongst the best in the world, and this is a direct reflection on the tremendous amount of work being done by teachers in Alberta classrooms.

Through the excellence in teaching awards program teachers and principals are recognized for their individual and invaluable commitment to our students and to the future of this province. The nominees for the excellence in teaching awards are teachers and principals who use creativity and innovation to motivate students to succeed. They show leadership and work with their teaching colleagues to create a positive school climate. They are champions for their schools and for their students.

This year, Mr. Speaker, out of 365 eligible nominations 134 teachers and principals were selected as semifinalists. They will be honoured at two special celebration dinners later this month and will have access to \$1,500 for professional development. From this group of semifinalists 23 final award recipients will be selected and formally honoured at a dinner and awards ceremony with the Education minister in Edmonton on May 30. Of the 23 award recipients 20 will receive the provincial excellence in teaching award and will have access to \$4,000 for professional development to further develop their teaching skills. Three out of the 23 award recipients will receive a Smarter Kids Foundation innovative use of technology award, which includes a comprehensive technology package.

Mr. Speaker, the excellence in teaching awards have been celebrated since 1989, with more than 8,200 teachers nominated and more than 400 who have received awards. I am pleased to rise today to recognize all of the outstanding teachers and principals across this

province and give special congratulations to the 2009 excellence in teaching awards semifinalists.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Prescription Drug Coverage

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition made many good suggestions recently to extend prescription drug coverage in Alberta to all citizens. We need a more extensive public pharmacare program based on models in other Canadian provinces to help reduce rapidly rising pharmaceutical costs and to ensure proper access to medications. The government has failed to listen to the Official Opposition. The government has failed to listen to Alberta seniors. These seniors are outraged at the latest government proposal, which downloads even more costs onto their already stretched household budgets.

I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to please read a research paper written recently by Aidan Hollis, an associate professor in the department of economics at the University of Calgary. It is titled *Generic Drug Pricing and Procurement: A Policy for Alberta*, by, again, Professor Hollis. Professor Hollis proposes a new approach for Alberta designed to obtain low prices for consumers and fair treatment for pharmacies and manufacturers. Some of the proposals include a descending maximum price with inflation indexing, a cap on rebates or other considerations granted directly or indirectly to pharmacies by manufacturers, an open formulary, a royalty paid to the first generic entrant that successfully challenges a patent. There are ways other than gouging seniors to control prescription costs. Seniors in this province should not have to endure a means test at their local pharmacy before they receive their medication.

Now, in conclusion, I would remind hon. members of what Professor Hollis has stated and noted: "In 2007, the Government of Alberta spent approximately \$887 million on prescription drugs through community pharmacies, while private expenditures . . . totalled \$980 million." About one-quarter of the spending was for drugs that were not patented. There was a \$15 million savings here if we had followed a different model.

Thank you.

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

South Fish Creek Recreation Complex

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two good-news announcements to share from the southwest quadrant of Calgary. The first involves the South Fish Creek recreation centre, which was originally designed to include four ice surfaces, but to this point only two could be built. Although the centre is not in my constituency, many of my constituents use it and helped to build it. Arenas provide an invaluable opportunity for Albertans of all ages to be active and develop valuable life skills. The members of the SFCRA are to be commended for their time and commitment in acquiring the necessary funds to construct the final two arenas.

The MLA for Calgary-Shaw, our Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and I were on hand as our Minister of Culture and Community Spirit delivered a \$3.2 million cheque in matching funds, I might say, from our government's major community facilities program to aid in the completion of this fine project. The expansion will serve more than 400,000 annual users from Calgary, Okotoks, High River, and many other rural areas.

Our Minister of Culture and Community Spirit was also on hand

to deliver 750,000 MCFP dollars to Hull Child and Family Services, and these funds were matched by Hull. They'll be invaluable in the development of a new mental health treatment facility to assist at-risk youth who live with addictions, abuse, and behavioural issues.

Since 1962 Hull has served troubled young people and struggling families and developmentally challenged adults, over 3,000 people every day. They are to be commended for working miracles on a daily basis. Mr. Speaker, there is great news all over Alberta, and with this government's partnerships we don't have to look very far to find them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Pete Eager Fire Hall Wind Energy Project

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate the city of Grande Prairie and Golden Sheep Power Inc. on a partnership that has led to the development of the Pete Eager Fire Hall wind generation project. This exciting initiative has the potential to take the wind and turn it into clean power and profits for residential, agricultural, and commercial use. By utilizing compact wind turbines to harness wind, property owners could potentially produce their own electricity and sell any extra electricity generated back into the grid at market value. At the same time, if you're tied into the electrical grid and should you use more energy than you produce, you can draw from the grid. The Pete Eager Fire Hall project will not only study the noise-to-wind ratio but would also determine if local residents support wind energy production in their community.

I am pleased that this project may help determine how a bylaw can be developed to best accommodate small wind turbines for residential purposes. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Albertans live in one of the most beautiful and healthy natural environments in the world, which is why we are committed to sustaining it. This project is impressive because it's one step closer to reducing our environmental footprint and is another example of this province's entrepreneurial spirit. In this way the project supports this government's commitment to ensuring clean energy production. I always encourage the development of renewable energy, and I look forward to the success of this project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, momentarily I'm going to have to rise – and I have done it now – on Standing Order 7(7), which states, "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly." We still have a portion of our Routine to go through. I will anticipate that perhaps members might want to continue the Routine. We need unanimous consent to continue, so I ask the question: is any member here opposed to continuing the Routine? Any member who is, say no. Okay. We're going forward.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Members' Statements (continued)

Building Leadership for Action in Schools Today

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month I was honoured to have the BLAST team in my hometown of Drayton Valley make an excellent presentation in my constituency office. BLAST, or building leadership for action in schools today, was

formed out of a partnership between the Lung Association and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission in 2002. The BLAST program educates youth throughout the province about the dangers of smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco. Of course, I am very supportive of their efforts.

3:00

The Drayton Valley team is coached by Chris Schoepp and consists of four grade 7 and one grade 8 student: Nick Jodouin, Jessica Gustafson, Tristan Seely, Elyas Patey-Taylor, and Alicia Potter. At BLAST conferences the students learn about current issues about tobacco and work on team-building and leadership skills in order to develop a youth action plan for their community. Following these conferences, the students are responsible for implementing these plans. This BLAST team is presenting to their elected officials and their peers and have also run ads in the local papers.

It is wonderful to see the students involved with the BLAST program getting involved in their community and promoting healthy lifestyle choices throughout the province. Great job to all of them. I look forward to seeing the results of their work and leadership. Our future is certainly in great hands with this young group of team leaders and the youth. Congratulations to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

783 Air Force Wing

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the 783 Air Force Wing, of which I am proud to have been named an honorary member. I was recently invited by a couple of my constituents, Al and Bev Spielman, to attend the 783 Air Force Wing anniversary banquet on March 21, 2009. Based out of Calgary, the 783 branch has positioned itself as an important part of the broader Air Force Association of Canada.

Established in 1948, the Air Force Association of Canada is identifiable through its support, sponsorship, and encouragement of all aspects of aviation, aerospace, and aeronautics. This directive means that the group has been very active within Calgary, Alberta, and Canada through a variety of projects, including honouring the past traditions of the Canadian Air Force and providing a common bond for all aviation personnel; encouraging improved aviation legislation; actively promoting the future of Canadian military and civil aviation by lobbying for the procurement of improved military aviation equipment; participating in community programs designed towards development of Canadian youth, particularly the air cadet activities; undertaking local community charitable projects; honouring the achievements and efforts of deserving groups, organizations, or individuals associated with Canadian military and civil aviation; fostering and encouraging a spirit of fellowship among those involved in aviation endeavours; and, of course, working for Canadian unity and encouraging responsible citizenship among all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, the 783 Air Force Wing is a prime example of an organization in our province that is working hard to make a difference in our country. I would like to take the time to thank the 783 Wing for their contributions to this province and wish them all the best in the future.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is a program from the East Coulee Spring Festival, that occurred this past Saturday in East Coulee, just east of Drumheller. It was a very successful event, designed to raise funds for the local museum. A number of local merchants participated. A number of hotels and bed and breakfast individuals gave away free lodging for the artists, who dedicated their time free of charge for this wonderful fundraising event. Among the various performers was a young, upcoming Alberta musician, Tim Hus, who represented Alberta in our centennial year at the Smithsonian Institute.

My second tabling recognizes the wonderful, talented efforts of the Alberta Ballet company, that has been operating for 40 years in this province. It was an opportunity and a tremendous treat for myself and my grandson to attend the performance this past Thursday in Calgary. The ballet performed *Alice in Wonderland* in Calgary from April 2 to 4 and in Edmonton from March 27 to 28, a wonderful experience for all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is an outline of hosting expenses over \$600 by ministry for the government of Alberta as publicly disclosed in the *Alberta Gazette* 2004 through to 2008, which I referred to in question period earlier today.

The second tabling I have is a letter that was written by our constituency office on May 27, 2008, to the Chief Electoral Officer over on Kingsway Avenue. It's regarding the conduct of poll 75 in Edmonton-Gold Bar on the March 3, 2008, provincial election date.

My third tabling is an initial response that I received from Elections Alberta, from the Chief Electoral Officer, dated June 2, 2008, in response to my original letter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair wishes to table copies of the written submissions provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in support of her purported question of privilege raised on March 19, 2009, and written submissions by the hon. Government House Leader on the same purported question of privilege. As members will recall, on March 19 I indicated to both and any other members that should they wish to provide written submissions to me, they should be received in my office by March 26, 2009. They were, so I am now prepared to deal with the subject matter that was raised at that time. But, first of all, we're going to deal with the Clerk.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Advanced Education and Technology public postsecondary institutions audited financial statements, universities and Banff Centre for continuing education for the year ended March 31, 2008, and public colleges and technical institutes for the year ended June 30, 2008.

Privilege

Rights of the Assembly

The Speaker: Hon. members, those of you who have ever watched the television series *The Tudors* may find this ruling of interest. On the last day before the spring break the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona raised a purported question of privilege concerning the regulation-making authority found in Bill 18, the Trade, Investment

and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. This bill is currently at committee stage. The member's purported question of privilege is based on section 5 of the bill, which would amend schedule 6.1 of the Government Organization Act by making a subsection 7(2), which would allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations that "may suspend the application of or modify a provision of an Act or regulation or may substitute another provision in place of a provision."

Both the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Government House Leader submitted written materials on March 26, 2009, that restate and supplement their arguments made in the Assembly on March 19. The chair has tabled these submissions. The full exchange on this purported question of privilege is found at pages 499 to 503 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

With respect to the technical aspects of Standing Order 15, the Speaker's office received written notice from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on March 19, 2009, at 11:19 a.m. of her intention to raise the purported question of privilege and a brief description of the issue. Accordingly, the two-hour notice requirement of Standing Order 15(2) was met. For the reasons that will follow, the chair will not comment further on whether this matter was raised at the earliest opportunity.

Essentially the member's argument is that the provision in the bill would allow the government to amend legislation that is passed by the Legislature without returning to the Assembly. The member argues that this provision constitutes a breach of the Assembly's privileges, or, alternatively, a contempt of the Assembly.

The type of provision found in Bill 18 that is the subject of this purported question of privilege is often referred to as a Henry VIII clause and, as the chair has discovered, has been the subject of much discussion not only in Canada but across the Commonwealth. The United Kingdom Parliament website indicates that

the House of Lords Select Committee on the Scrutiny of Delegated Powers in its first report of 1992-93 defined a Henry VIII clause as: a provision in a Bill which enables primary legislation to be amended or repealed by subordinate legislation, with or without further Parliamentary scrutiny. . . . The clauses were so named from the Statute of Proclamations 1539, which gave King Henry VIII power to legislate by proclamation.

Erskine May, 23rd edition, at page 664 states: "power may . . . be conferred, by what is known as a 'Henry VIII clause,' to amend the statute itself by delegated legislation or to amend other statutes."

3:10

In conducting research – and we were busy – we discovered that a written question in the British House of Commons asked, "How many Henry VIII clauses were contained in primary legislation enacted in Session 2007-08?" The answer contained in the British House of Commons *Hansard* for March 2, 2009, was that "the Government do not routinely collect or hold information about the number of Henry VIII provisions."

In the arguments raised by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, there is no reference to any instances where such clauses have been ruled a prima facie breach of privilege. Clearly, the references from the United Kingdom and the court decisions in Canada do not indicate that there is any breach of privilege involved when these clauses have been enacted although they may be perceived as objectionable.

Members should be aware that apart from decisions on money bills it is not the role of the chair to rule on the legality or constitutionality of bills. That is the role given to the courts. As noted in the Government House Leader's brief, this principle is cited in *Beauchesne's* sixth edition at paragraph 31(9), where it is stated that "the

failure of the Government to comply with the law is not a matter for the Speaker, but should be decided by the courts." This is also clearly stated at page 21 of *Parliamentary Practice in B.C.*, fourth edition. There have also been rulings in this Assembly on this issue, the most recent being from the chair on March 3, 2005, as noted at page 26 of *Hansard*.

The ability of Parliament or a Legislature to delegate authority to amend statutory provisions was set out as long ago as 1917 in a decision by the British House of Lords.

Accordingly, the chair rules that there is no prima facie question of privilege, and this matter is now concluded with the following addendum. The chair should not be seen as endorsing the use of these types of clauses. There is no doubt that they detract from the role of the Assembly; however, the question as to whether a Henry VIII clause ought to be used is different from the question as to whether it may be used.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Long-term Care Costs

- Q1. Mr. Mason:
For the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 what was the average cost per resident per month at a designated long-term care facility?

Contracted Psychiatric Services

- Q3. Mr. Mason:
For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by regional health authorities, RHA, broken down by RHA, and what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

Physicians in Alberta Towns

- Q5. Mr. Mason:
What was the number of physicians working in Alberta towns for each of the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2007-2008?

Placements for Children in Government Care

- Q8. Ms Notley:
For each of the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2007-2008 what was the average amount of time taken by Children and Youth Services to find permanent placements for children in permanent government care?

Long-term Care Facility Costs

- Q10. Mr. Mason:
What were the total government subsidies provided to long-term care facilities and the total operating expenditures for those same facilities for the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008?

Long-term Care Facilities

- Q12. Mr. Mason:
How many long-term care facilities, with their respective bed complement, were operating in Alberta on March 31 for the years 2007 and 2008, broken down by regional health

authority and whether the facility and service providers are/were owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a voluntary basis?

Alberta's Brand Campaign Costs

- Q14. Mr. Mason:
How much money has been spent on Alberta's brand campaign in the United States in the fiscal year 2007-2008 and from April 1, 2008, to February 10, 2009?

Legal Aid Services

- Q16. Ms Notley:
For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 on how many occasions were approved legal aid services not provided due to unavailability of counsel?

Legal Aid Services

- Q17. Ms Notley:
For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 what was the average income of people accessing legal aid?

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) written questions are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 2, Mr. Mason.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Designated Assisted Living Costs

- Q2. Ms Notley asked on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.
For the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 what was the average cost per resident per month at a designated assisted living facility?

Ms Notley: I'd like to note that the former MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview asked this question of the government in the spring of 2006, and at that time the minister of health rejected the question on the grounds that the ministry doesn't keep track of that information. However, the minister said at the time that she would be doing

some follow-up work on this to see whether or not we can do what is most important; that is, to be accountable to Albertans for the dollars that are spent in these situations and to see whether there is a value in attaching a valuation to those kinds of care facilities for that particular cost.

It's been three years since the then minister of health agreed to do that work, and the question now is just as pertinent as ever. I would suggest it's a great deal more pertinent given the government's announcement with respect to their continuing care strategy made in December of 2008, a strategy which would see no increase in the number of net long-term care beds in Alberta and, rather, a move to increase supportive living beds, or designated assisted living beds, with the supposed rationale that those beds are the most effective way to care for seniors as they age.

This government, it would appear, is attempting to shift people who would have previously been in long-term facilities to designated assisted living. We would suggest that above and beyond the issues that we do raise quite regularly about the level of care that we would suggest is not provided in those alternative facilities, there's also an issue with respect to cost, we suspect, and the public deserves to know what the costs of these assisted living facilities are on a per-resident basis per month. We know absolutely that the residents themselves will see higher costs with every additional little service,

that they have to pay extra for bathing, that they might have to even pay extra for medication preparation, depending on the circumstances, and certain other personal care efforts that are made on their behalf.

Given that this was something that the previous health minister had suggested might be worthy of providing information to Albertans on and given the increased reliance on this type of care being provided to seniors in lieu of long-term care being the policy of this government, we think that sort of having this information provided to us is even more pertinent than it was when the question was first asked three years ago. We would like to see where the minister has gotten, with that reference back again to the comments made by the previous minister of health in the spring of 2006. I believe it was on April 3, 2006, that the minister of health responded for future reference. So it's on that basis that we are seeking that information.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, do you have a position on this?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would recommend that the Legislative Assembly reject this question. The rationale for rejecting this question is that Alberta Health and Wellness does not directly fund designated assisted living. Block funding is provided to Alberta Health Services to finance publicly funded health services provided in designated assisted living sites. Therefore, the information requested is not available.

If the member would like to find further details, she's welcome to go to the RHA audited financial statements. In addition to that is the opportunity to ask questions regarding these expenditures both in the budget estimates that are coming up and if our department appears before Public Accounts.

Again, I would just conclude by saying that the information is not available in the form that is being asked for; therefore, I would ask that the House simply reject this question.

Thank you.

3:20

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you want to participate?

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, in supporting this written question I would like to note for the members of this Assembly and pass along our condolences to the hon. member of the third party, who recently lost his father and is very much involved in the grieving process at this moment.

With regard to the information I am hoping that the minister of health, as he has suggested, will be able to provide the information, the intent, which this question has raised. From 2003 through 2008 the government has moved more individuals towards assisted living, which is considerably more expensive than long-term care because the individual is expected to pick up a large portion of the costs in these facilities. Therefore, getting the cost to the individuals, residents, whether it's a private facility or a publicly owned facility, is extremely important. The costs both of long-term care and of assisted living care have risen dramatically.

The Auditor General in the 2004-2005 year reported on the deficiencies he found within a sampling of long-term care programs, and it would be interesting if the Auditor General were given the opportunity to pursue an equal investigation into designated assisted living facilities.

Any information the hon. minister of health can provide in providing a cost average for residents on a monthly basis in

designated assisted living would be much appreciated. If this question lacks the focus the minister is looking for, then I hope he will find it in his heart and in his ability to research the information. This information is important for all Albertans. We're all going to eventually end up in either assisted living or long-term care, and those prices, short of dying on the spot, are going to be extremely important to us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I'd just like to add that I think that this information would be very important when we balance it against the fact that presently in the province people are not aging in the right place, and they are not receiving the care that they really need. Designated assisted living is not the answer. Some of them really should be in long-term care. This information would be interesting to balance the cost against the fact that they are simply not receiving the care that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude the debate.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a couple of points. The minister suggested that this was not information that was collected or that they had available, but I do note that the ministry has agreed to respond to our Written Question 1, which is the same kind of question except that in that case it's dealing with long-term care facilities.

I have to say that I'm a bit surprised to discover that that kind of information can be researched and collated and compared for long-term care facilities but not for designated assisted living facilities. That seems to me to be rather odd, particularly given that there was a primary decision made by the government to shift their policy towards choosing designated assisted living over long-term care because of the so-called institutional element of long-term care. It would seem to me that there would have to have been some type of cost-benefit analysis and, thus, a comparison of costs between the two. It's clear that that information is there with respect to long-term care facilities. As well, the minister suggested that we could get that through the estimates process, but again, if we could get it through the estimate process, presumably it's available.

You know, a lot of times these questions come to the Legislative Assembly because we ask the Legislature itself to put its full authority behind our request for that information, so it's on that basis that we ask all members to consider approving our request for this information as it is of great interest to all Albertans and to two seniors in particular.

Thank you.

[Written Question 2 lost]

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

Student Loan Debt

Q7. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 for Alberta students with student loans what was the average size of their student loan debt at the time they left their respective postsecondary institution?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason we are seeking this information is because we know that Alberta's average tuition is the fourth highest in Canada, that 50 per cent of university

students will graduate with an average of \$20,000 in debt across the country. We know that postsecondary tuition rates have tripled, and we have been made aware of some research stating that postsecondary students who acquire annual debt of \$10,000 or more have only a 20 per cent chance of graduating. We also know, of course, that Alberta has Canada's lowest postsecondary participation rate and that high costs are a significant barrier to young people accessing our postsecondary institutions.

We think that for a number of different reasons the public should know how much debt students in Alberta are graduating with. Parents and children need information like this to plan for the future. We also think that making this information public would make this debate clearer and end speculation based on loan amounts. We also believe that this is public money that is being spent and that the public should know how much is being loaned on average. And we'd like to know ultimately how to assess what the government is providing for university costs and how much we're putting on the shoulders of students.

So it is with those questions in mind that I am seeking support. I believe I'm aware of a suggestion that might be coming from the minister on this to change the wording slightly, and as far as I can tell, that does appear to be a reasonable proposal.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move an amendment to Written Question 7. I do believe that all members have been provided with copies, and the amendment has been provided to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The amendment seeks to clarify terminology used by the Alberta student financial assistance program as well as policies for student loan repayment. The amendment also reflects data that is readily available from the Alberta student financial assistance program. The amendment strikes out "student loan debt at the time they left their respective postsecondary institution" and substitutes "net student loan debt at the time of consolidation, which is six months after they cease being enrolled as full-time students."

The question as originally worded requests information on student loan debts when students leave their postsecondary institution. However, leaving a postsecondary institution is not the key criteria upon which repayment policies are based. Some students leave one postsecondary institution and then enter another either because they're changing their program of study or because they're pursuing another credential. As long as these students continue full-time in a program designated for student financial assistance, they are not required to begin repaying their government student loans. Student aid recipients must begin repaying their government student loan six months after they cease being enrolled as a full-time student.

In addition, my amendment seeks to clarify that the provincial student loan debt to be repaid is net of any loan remission that may be applied. Alberta has in place the loan relief program, that reduces provincial student loans for eligible students. After any loan remission the amount to repay is considered net student debt.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, the motion will read:

For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 for Alberta students with student loans what was the average size of their net student loan debt at the time of consolidation, which is six months after they cease being enrolled as full-time students?

I believe that with the acceptance of these amendments we'll be able to provide clear and accurate information to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, because it is your motion that is being amended, I'll recognize you first. We're talking about the amendment now.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I did allude to in my initial comments, I think that the amendments being proposed make sense in terms of being able to track the information. Ultimately we're being provided the information we are seeking, so I'm quite prepared to support that motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the minister of advanced education reframing the request. My only concern – and I would put this to the minister for his advisement – is the cost for part-time students. I know that at the University of Calgary a number of students cannot afford to attend on a full-time basis because they have to have so many jobs to pay for their tuition. So if part-time students' debt could be included as well as full-time – a debt is a debt – that information would be appreciated.

The Speaker: Others to participate?
Then I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Written Question 7 as amended carried]

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

Protection of Sexually Exploited Children

Q9. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted.
How many people have been charged under the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act since its implementation?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been provided with a proposed amendment to Written Question 9. Unfortunately, it didn't get to our offices. I'm only seeing it now, so I won't speak to that. I'll just speak in general to the question that I'm seeking to have answered here.

The Speaker: That would be good because we have not had an amendment moved yet.

Ms Notley: Sorry. That's good.

The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was initially introduced in '98, and in 2007, as we know, it was amended and renamed the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act. Among other amendments the age of the child was raised from 18 to 22, and the children's advocate was named as the primary contact for children. As you may know, the NDP opposition caucus spoke in support of both the 1998 and the 2007 legislation. So what we are now seeking is to get some information with respect to how effectively this legislation has been working. For instance, has it significantly increased the work required of police officers?

When the act was amended in 2007, one MLA in support of it noted that since the implementation of the act in 1998 over 770 children had been helped to leave the street behind. We would also like to know what that number is now. Essentially, the public has a right to know how effective a legislation is at stopping the perpetra-

tors of that exploitation. If the act is not meeting the goals that it was supposed to – i.e., protecting the children – then the public needs to re-engage in the debate about how to best protect sexually exploited children and whether there are other strategies that should perhaps be prioritized.

It's with that background that I'm seeking that information today. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move an amendment to the motion on the floor today with respect to Written Question 9 and then move that that be accepted with amendments. The amendments will seek to delete the phrase "people have been charged" and substitute it with "charges have been commenced" and adding "and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, PSECA." The question will now read: "How many charges have been commenced under the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act and the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, PSECA, since its implementation?"

The Justice online information network, with the acronym JOIN, does not collect statistics on the number of people that have been charged but on the number of charges that have been commenced. Though the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was implemented in 1999, JOIN statistics only date back to February 1, 2001. In November of 2007 the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act was replaced with the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, so I would suggest that this rephrasing of the question will achieve the hon. member's objective and give clear information to the House with respect to the intent of the question as opposed to the original form of the question.

I trust that the hon. member will appreciate the context of the proposed amendments. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, would you like to comment?

Ms Notley: As I mentioned before, I've not had a chance to consider these amendments because they were not provided to my office in time for me to consider them before coming to the House today. It does appear on the surface, with respect to the points made by the hon. Attorney General, that these amendments ought to still provide us with the kind of information that we are seeking.

I guess I'm a touch concerned that if we can't track the number of people who have been charged, if there's not a consistency between the number of charges that are laid each time someone is subjected to the authority of this act, then we wouldn't necessarily get a sense of the scope of its coverage vis-à-vis the number of people that it's actually stopping or attempting to stop or whatever. That is a bit of a concern, that we're unable to track the number of people who are subject to the authority of the act. There's no question that the number of charges generally would also provide some measure of the effectiveness.

As a starting point we'll certainly consider this information. If we have further questions, we'll send them on over. So I will support, then, this proposed amendment to my motion.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to thank the hon. Attorney General for providing the information in the form of the amendments that she has provided. Children are obviously extremely vulnerable to abuse. The government recognized and has recognized the need to protect

children. Just today, for example, the Minister of Children and Youth Services indicated that the government will now be working with hotel and motel managers to attempt to provide them with greater information to protect children who might be abused in those private facilities. It is extremely important, and the amendment recognizes the need for the protection of sexually exploited children.

What is not necessarily clear within this amendment but will hopefully become clearer as we discuss the bill on lengthening the time of stay in protective custody for children involved in acts of prostitution is the rights of the child. The government is wishing to move towards enshrining parental rights in the human rights amendment, and I would ask that the Attorney General work with the member responsible for Children and Youth Services to enshrine at least on an equal basis the rights of children.

I will look forward to receiving, as well, a copy of the information that has been requested by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who would like to participate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to thank the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for bringing this forward. When they talk just about prostitution, we think about it as a physical act perhaps on a street or in a hotel room. Children are being sexually exploited, yes, in those places, but it's huge on the Internet. I think that this will be able to protect the children that are being exploited through the Internet and on YouTube and all of those other places that aren't obvious to the average person on the street that could then, perhaps, report it. The ones that find it on the Internet are often the ones that are the perverted users.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona like to close the debate on the question as amended, or should I call the question?

Ms Notley: Call the question.

[Written Question 9 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

3:40 Assisted Living Facility Costs

Q11. Ms Notley asked on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

What were the total government subsidies provided to assisted living facilities and the total operating expenditures for those same facilities for the fiscal years 2003-2004 to 2007-2008?

Ms Notley: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for seeking this information is not completely disconnected from the rationale which I articulated with respect to our seeking information under Written Question 2. The province's new continuing care model talks about additional supportive living spaces, and assisted living falls into that category.

Given that the government is relying so heavily on assisted living as a big part of its new continuing care strategy, it is important to know how much the government is spending to support these

facilities. Assisted living already costs more for seniors, as I've noted before, than being in long-term care and offers a lower level of support. The government seems interested in putting people into assisted living who have previously gone into long-term care. We know that seniors pay more for less, and now we need to know what the government is paying for that same service.

I would also like to point out that Written Question 10 was accepted, and that was the same question but in relation to long-term care facilities. So, again, my hope is that given that these are all part of a continuum of care that is to be provided to our seniors, the government would have at its disposal the same information that it has for long-term care facilities – subsidies, costs, all that kind of thing – as it also has for the broad range of facilities that provide services to seniors under the supportive living space model.

That is the basic rationale for our request. Again, it is information that we require in order to critically analyze the costs and the benefits to Alberta taxpayers as the government moves forward on its continuing care strategy, and it allows us to engage in a more informed debate of the rationale and the motivation, the merits and the demerits, if you will, of this process.

I think that there are, without question – and I suspect that members on the opposite side of the House would agree with me – a number of seniors in the province who are very, very concerned about this issue and about the strategy. I'm sure that many members from all sides of the House have heard a great deal from seniors over the past few months. The more information that we can put out there to these seniors, the better for all of us, I believe.

It's with that spirit in mind that I'm requesting that this information be provided. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to address Written Question 11, received from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I move that Written Question 11 be amended to read: "What were the total government operating grants provided to provincial lodges, and what were the total operating expenditures for those same facilities for the years 2003 to 2007?" These amendments allow us to respond by focusing on seniors' lodges as these are the only type of supportive living facilities that receive operating grants directly from government. Lodges report accommodation and related operating expenses for room and board to government through annual audits.

I'm also recommending amendments to the time frame requested to align with the most recent audit, received in 2007.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We have an amendment. I'll again recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona because she moved the motion.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I do appreciate the time taken to respond to my motion by the minister. However, I can't support these particular amendments for a couple of different reasons. First of all, assisted living and provincial lodges are two different things, and we're not wanting to limit the request for information to simply provincial lodges. As well, we're not simply seeking information about operating grants. On the contrary, we are looking for information with respect to any nature of government funding.

The continuing care strategy lists the different kinds of continuing care available in the province. Lodge living is listed as level 2 on the supportive living spectrum. Assisted living is listed as level 3 on

the spectrum. Enhanced living, which includes designated assisted living, is listed as level 4. There are obviously very different kinds of care.

As well, the amendment to change “subsidies” to “operating grants” is not something that we can accept because it would then not include capital grants, which we are also interested in receiving information on as that, of course, impacts quite significantly on costs to the taxpayer as well as the overall efficacy of this particular strategy. For that reason we are looking for the broader amount of information that we were first requesting in our Written Question 11.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons I am having trouble with the amended motion begins with the word “subsidies.” For example, a member of the Health Resource Group, who owns three seniors’ homes down in Red Deer that are privatized, is receiving not only operating grants, but he’s receiving subsidies not only as the owner but as the consultant to the government on the running of these facilities. By taking out “subsidies” and saying “operating grants,” his consulting fees I don’t believe would be captured under the term “operating grants.” It’s important to note that the Health Resource Group got a very good deal on what was formerly the Grace hospital in Calgary.

Now, with regard to the second portion of the amendment, striking out “assisted living facilities” and substituting “provincial lodges,” I don’t believe that “provincial lodges” completely captures the designation that is being looked for in terms of funding assisted living facilities. As was previously noted, those operating costs are borne to a large extent by the seniors and their families because every single piece of toilet paper, any toothpaste, and any toiletry items are accounted for and billed to the residents or to their families, and therefore there are considerable costs involved. I’m not sure that by limiting it to just provincial lodges, that will be covered.

I do appreciate the hon. Seniors and Community Supports minister for talking about her inability to provide 2008 statistics at this time. Obviously, that’s not something that is available, but I would hope, even if the amendments are for some reason voted down, that the minister will follow through and provide the information requested for the 2008 year and table that as soon as it becomes available. I’m assuming that that will happen.

As it stands now, more information has been requested, and I believe more information is required to satisfy the original intent of Written Question 11. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will not be supporting this amendment because I don’t believe that it’s getting at what the question really is. I think it’s sidetracking it a little bit.

The other thing is that the original question was asking for assisted living facilities, and this one is asking for lodges, and these are totally different. According to what I’m hoping we all understand as definitions throughout this province, which I’ve been asking for for a long time so that we all are speaking the same language and that our definitions are province-wide, these are two different entities.

I think that by having these amendments, it’s not getting at the actual question. We all have to remember that regardless of how the money is put in, whether it’s grants or however it gets put in, a

public dollar is a public dollar. Even if it’s one public cent, it should be accountable, and we should be able to have that information whenever we ask for it.

The Speaker: Are there additional participants, or should I call the question?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Is there additional debate, then, on the motion as amended, or shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Written Question 11 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Contracted Psychiatric Clinical Services

Q13. Ms Notley asked on behalf of Mr. Mason that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 what was the total number of psychiatrists contracted to provide clinical services for regional health authorities, RHA, broken down by RHA, and what was the total number contracted to provide clinical services by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

Ms Notley: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for this request is as follows. In his 2005-2006 annual report the Auditor General stated that “the basis for allocating the mental health funding to the [regional health authorities] is inconsistent with the population-based methodology.” We need to make sure that mental health treatment is accessible in all parts of Alberta, and a big part of that is having enough psychiatrists in all regions of the province.

Now, in the Auditor General’s October 2008 report he recommended that

Alberta Health Services should eliminate the gaps in mental health service across the province. By gaps in service, we mean a program that either does not exist or has a long wait time. Poorly coordinated care also signifies a gap in services, resulting in clients not getting the care they need or even “falling through the cracks.”

By receiving this information we have something with which to compare the current and future numbers of psychiatrists providing mental health services across the province. This way we can see if the switch from regional health boards to the superboard has had a positive or, conversely, a detrimental effect on staffing of mental health care.

We’ve had the Auditor General identify at least twice that there is a concern with respect to the accessibility of mental health care on a regional basis within the province. We have also had a number of people express more recently that there is actually a concern about the provision of mental health services all across the province, not just on a regional basis but on an absolute basis. I personally am of the view that it’s basically the next crisis in our health care system or one that is in play right now that we are not even fully apprised of yet.

It’s for this reason that we think this information needs to be provided so that, again, as members of the Assembly we can keep the government accountable and track the way in which this matter progresses forward and also because, of course, there are a number of people within our population who would be interested in finding

out this information because they are themselves fully engaged in advocating for improvements to the system under which we provide mental health services to Albertans in need of them. So it is for this reason that we are seeking to have this information provided to us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness I would like to propose an amendment to this motion. The members, I believe, have a copy of the amendment in front of them. The amendment reads that Written Question 13 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out “number of psychiatrists contracted to provide clinical services for regional health authorities . . . broken down by [regional health authority]” and substituting “number of in-province physicians submitting claims under the specialty of psychiatry, broken down by regional health authority”; and (b) by striking out “, and what was the total number contracted to provide clinical services by the Alberta Mental Health Board.”

The amended question would read then:

For each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 what was the total number of in-province physicians submitting claims under the specialty of psychiatry, broken down by regional health authority?

Mr. Speaker, the data that Alberta Health and Wellness collects does not include psychiatrists contracted directly by the regional health authority or by the Alberta Mental Health Board. That information would have to be collected directly from those respective organizations. By amending the question, we're able to provide the data that Alberta Health and Wellness has regarding psychiatry. The Health and Wellness data that we provide is based on fee-for-service claims and services provided under the alternative relationship program.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about this amendment to this request for a variety of reasons. Again, it is always concerning when we hear that the government does not have access to this information and that, instead, some not really so arm's-length organization would have that information. Particularly, given that we've just gone through this whole process of consolidating these not so arm's-length organizations into one body that, presumably, has a much more accountable relationship to members of the executive across the way, I am a little concerned that that so-called distinction in the relationship is being used as a means of ensuring that we don't get the full information that we require.

There's no question that the amended motion would still provide us with some important information in terms of giving us the number of in-province physicians submitting claims under the specialty of psychiatry. However, I am not clear on whether that would allow for general practitioners who provide certain medical services to actually be covered under that so that you've got your GP, for instance, prescribing some type of psychiatric medication. If that's the case, then we don't get to the heart of the issue that this question is trying to address, which is the equitable distribution of mental health services across the province on a regional basis.

I suspect that there are more than a few physicians out there, particularly in rural areas, who in great frustration and in attempting to do the best they can for their patients will prescribe to them and treat them for psychiatric ailments while, at the same time, being very frustrated at the inability to access the psychiatric specialty. I would actually be quite interested to hear whether this amendment would cover that situation or whether the amendment still would provide simply for an amount that is paid out to a psychiatrist even

if we're not breaking it down by the number of psychiatrists but, rather, are breaking it down by the number of dollars. If I could know that what we're talking about are psychiatrists, then I would be okay with the amendment, but if what we are talking about are GPs doing psychiatric work, then that is a problem for us.

4:00

The second issue relates to the Alberta Mental Health Board. The reason we included the Alberta Mental Health Board in our original question is because, frankly, the history of the Alberta Mental Health Board and the degree to which it has successfully integrated with different regional health boards across the province is varied and inconsistent. So there is no question that there are some regions within which the Alberta Mental Health Board actually was providing the majority of services and where the integration between the services of the Alberta Mental Health Board and the services provided by the regional health authority was done differently from region to region. We are concerned, then, about withdrawing that amendment from this question because, again, we cannot be getting the full story without including the Alberta Mental Health Board.

We understand, of course, that now the Alberta Mental Health Board is part of Alberta Health Services, so it would seem to me that it would be quite possible for Alberta Health Services to get that information from the Alberta Mental Health Board. That's what I meant, that the Alberta Mental Health Board is part of the large board and that all of that information could be made available to Alberta Health Services.

So with those concerns identified, because the regional distribution of mental health services within our health care system is a critical piece of information that we need to have before us because it impacts directly on how well the government is doing in providing one of the most important types of care that it provides and because the amendment may well negate our ability to distinguish between the psychiatric provision of mental health services and general practitioner provision of mental health services, we cannot accept that amendment.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a variety of concerns with regard to the amendment as well. Mental illness strikes 1 in 5 Albertans. Of those who are struck by mental illness, it occurs to over 50 per cent of the individuals prior to age 14. As a person who is responsible for both Education and Children and Youth Services I am concerned about the accurate reporting not only of the information but, obviously, the treatment that is being reported on.

There was a degree of authority and autonomy given to local regional health authorities. They delivered, obviously, the services locally and were accountable for those services. What is now happening is that regional health authorities are being replaced by a superboard, and the superboard has not only taken over the responsibilities for cancer and AADAC, but the Mental Health Board falls under the auspices now of the superboard. I'm not sure that the new superboard will be able to do a better job in ensuring the equivalency of treatment that local authorities were able to provide, whether through the Mental Health Board or through their regional health authority.

An example – and I don't know if it fits into the category of mental illness, but it is certainly an illness of the mind – is autism. I have been working with a mother who was formerly in Medicine Hat who had been requesting service dog support for her severely

afflicted child. Unfortunately, she was not able to get those services. However, the hours of respite care and specific treatment that were provided in Medicine Hat were longer than those in Red Deer. So the need to know the specifics of where we've been in order to evaluate where we're going is extremely important.

Also, in terms of the second part, the striking out portion of the amendment, the Auditor General pointed out concerns in his 2007-2008 report with regard to the superboard assuming these services but not having clearly defined goals, so he wasn't able to judge as to whether the superboard taking over control of mental health would be able to arrive at goals that weren't clearly defined. Therefore, I'm not convinced that amendments (a) and (b) to Written Question 13 are going to provide the necessary information.

I believe that the number of children alone that were seen under the auspices of care for mental illness was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 58,000, so just for children alone their treatment and the supervision of their treatment is extremely important. If I have calls to my office with regard to mental treatment to the extent I've received on a whole variety of other health issues unable to be answered anymore at the local level – if we add mental illness to this lack of accountability, then I fear for the future of treatment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my concerns about this has been brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, where in fact GPs are acting as quasi-psychiatrists. Certainly, some of the smaller mental treatments can be handled, but I think that it's very important that we know the number of psychiatrists. I want to know not only the number of psychiatrists but also what their specialties are.

I don't believe that we have enough child psychiatrists in this province, nor do I believe that we have enough geriatric psychiatrists. A psychiatrist is a psychiatrist, but in fact that's not true. Each one of these has their own specialty. Often seniors particularly could well end up going to a GP and being told, "Well, it's just getting old," when in fact it really is a psychosis that, if properly diagnosed by a geriatric psychiatrist, could be treated, and we could save a great deal of despair and particularly depression in our seniors. So I think it's very important that we get the number of the psychiatrists and also what their specialties are.

The Speaker: Others to participate, or should I call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Now, is there further discussion with respect to this matter, or does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wish to close the debate?

Ms Notley: Yes, I will close debate.

The Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Ms Notley: Okay. I just wanted to close debate with one brief excerpt from the 2008 Auditor General's report. After spending several pages identifying gaps in the provision of mental health care across the province and shortages with respect to the quality and the scope of mental health care in different areas, he makes a number of

recommendations to improve the system and ends finally with this one:

Last, there should be greater accountability for the mental health service delivery system. We view accountability in terms of a cycle, beginning with planning an activity, delivering it, monitoring operations, and regularly assessing the success of operations with a view to enhancing the service.

It is with that in mind that I believe this information is a critical piece in ensuring that this type of process can start to occur and we can start to improve the services which have been previously identified as needing some intervention.

Thank you.

[Written Question 13 as amended carried]

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

4:10 Student Loan Repayment

Q18. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 how long did the average person with Alberta student loans take to pay the loans off, and how much interest did they pay on the loans?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stated before, we have the fourth-highest tuition rate in Canada. Fifty per cent of university students graduate with an average of \$20,000 in debt. Approximately 28 per cent of university graduates and 34 per cent of college graduates who borrowed reported difficulties in repaying their student debt. Since 1990 postsecondary tuition rates have tripled. Again, with the growing level of debt, the completion rate of postsecondary students is declining.

The public needs to know what a burden student loan debt is to those coming out of postsecondary as it does also ultimately limit their ability to do such things as buy a house, travel, or start a family. It's with this issue and background in mind that we are requesting to have this information provided to us.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move an amendment to Written Question 18. I believe that all members have been provided with copies of the amendment, and they have been provided to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

The amendment to Written Question 18 reflects available data by striking out "and how much interest did they pay on the loans." Alberta's student financial assistance program has data readily available to answer the first part of the question. Information can be provided for the fiscal years requested on students who finished repaying their student loans and how long it took them to repay. However, the interest portion of repaid loans is not included in the data set. Other data is available on the aggregated interest paid by students annually, but it is not linked to individual student loans and the repayment period. Alberta's student financial assistance program would only be able to provide estimates of interest paid on individual loans based on assumptions about amortization periods and interest rates, which, of course, fluctuate over time.

It's also an important consideration that students are not required to pay any interest while they are in full-time studies. Government covers all interest costs during this period, providing significant cost savings to students. As the opposition members are probably aware,

Alberta lowered interest rates on student loans in 2007. Along with Newfoundland Alberta now has the lowest student loan interest rate in Canada, down to the prime lending rate on floating loans, which I'm sure everyone is quite aware is quite low at this time.

Thus the motion will read, if amended: "For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 how long did the average person with Alberta student loans take to pay the loans off?" By accepting these amendments, accurate information can be provided in a timely fashion to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, if you wish to respond.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate the minister's response and, you know, commitment to providing some of that information as reflected in the amendment, so that is good. I'm taking him at his word that it's not possible to provide the information that we requested as it was worded. I would however have been interested in getting the information on the aggregate amount of interest paid if that was possible. He did mention in his comments that that was possible, so that would provide us more information than we were previously seeking. Perhaps if there was some other source where that information is already available, that would be great. If there is not, then I would prefer to see that reflected in the amendment as written.

Those are my comments.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I, too, appreciate what the minister of advanced education is willing to provide to this House in terms of answering Written Question 18. The amendment knocks off one-half of what is being asked for. The amendment deals only with time, and it doesn't deal with the money aspects. It's the money aspects that are most relevant, particularly to students who are taking a long time to pay off a considerable amount of money. The minister did mention some of the difficulties associated with it, but even if he amortizes the expenses and provides a ballpark figure, it will provide recognition to both opposition parties and, more importantly, to students that the costs associated with getting a postsecondary education in Alberta are on the rise.

I also appreciated the fact that Alberta, as the minister noted, as recently as 2007 has the lowest lending rate for the government. But the advantage of that reduced loan rate has been impacted, if not lost, by increased tuition costs. If we go back to 2004, Premier Klein boasted that Alberta would have the lowest tuition rate, and if there were any additional costs, the students were to bring them to the Premier and he would cover the difference. Well, unfortunately, that notion went out the window when the Premier left office.

Therefore, in the amendments only half of the question is being answered, and that's: how long does it take an average person with Alberta student loans to pay those loans off? What is as important is how much money was finally required, including amortized interest over the time periods of 2004-2005 through 2007-2008, so we can get a comparison and validate postsecondary students' concerns that getting an education in this province is becoming exceedingly more difficult based on tuitions that rose this year, for example, at the University of Calgary by 4 per cent and similarly at other colleges and universities.

Both the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and members from the loyal opposition met with representatives of CAUS and the college version, ACTISEC, to talk about the problems and, of course, the

cost of tuition, the availability of loans, and the fact, for example – and this was brought up in question period – that parents are considered part of the formula. What a parent makes is taken into account before a student is eligible for a loan.

Time and money are both equally important. I would appreciate the minister doing his best, as he somewhat suggested, to provide at least a ballpark amortized figure to assist with the answering of this very important question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Further debate, then, on the question as amended or shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate or shall I just go to the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Written Question 18 as amended carried]

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

Contracted Legal Services

Q19. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted.
For each of the fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2007-2008 what was the average hourly rate paid by the government when it contracted out to the legal community for government legal services, excluding legal aid services?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue that we are pursuing information about here relates to the question of the cost of legal services, not only to the government but to all Albertans. In essence, we are looking for a comparison between what the government pays through its legal aid program and what is paid when it's the government's issues that are being represented. I don't know exactly what that number is, but I do suspect that it is a great deal more than the \$84 an hour that is currently being paid out as a legal aid rate. In my view, we need to look at there being some equity there.

4:20

People who require legal aid most often require legal aid because they are within a court setting coming up against an arm of government. It is most likely the case that people who have low income are in fact having conflict with government in its role as an administrator. It is, in my view, quite ironic that we might have cases where people are seeking legal support at the rate of \$84 an hour while at the same time having to confront agents of government who may well be paid two or sometimes three times that. I don't know what the going rate is that the government pays to its lawyers when it contracts out for anything other than legal aid services, but I suspect it's probably in and around the \$200 per hour range, probably more. I suspect it's safe to say that it's probably three times the rate of legal aid.

Of course, what that says is that legal aid for all intents and purposes is in a failed state. It does not work, and it does not for any true purposes exist effectively in this province. What has happened is that when we pay legal aid out at one-third of what the going rate is, then the only people that accept legal aid cases are those who are doing it for one reason and one reason only, and that is charity. As far as I'm concerned, access to our justice system is a fundamental right which we should all work very, very hard to maintain. When

the only way one can get access to their justice system is through the charity of – wait for it, everybody – a lawyer, then, you know, I think we have some problems.

While I have tremendous respect for those lawyers who do do legal aid work, whether because they've made a choice to significantly sacrifice their own income or whether because they allocate a certain number of hours per month to do legal aid work at that significantly reduced rate – in both cases I have tremendous respect and appreciation for those lawyers – the reality is that there are not enough of them. There are simply not enough of them. You need only go to the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada to know that, in fact, we have a tremendous crisis in this country and that we no longer have equal access to justice in any part of the country and certainly not in Alberta.

In order to generate more debate around this issue – although it seems really arcane and all legalistic, those of us who went to law school actually think that the justice system has a fundamentally important role to play in our society. As a result, you can't really hang your hat on that particular hanger if what you're going to then do is admit that those people with a low income effectively have no access to that system.

All of this, then, turns to the question of: what does the government perceive as a reasonable amount of money to pay to lawyers when the government itself hires lawyers for its own work? As much as we have fabulous staff within the ministry of the Attorney General who do a great deal of legal work for the government and who work on staff at rates which probably make it much more affordable for the government, the reality is that they do still on occasion contract out to private lawyers. I believe it is in our best interest to have an understanding of the rate at which those other lawyers are paid.

We often have cases, for instance, in the child protection scenario where the government may well contract out to a lawyer who may earn \$200, \$250 – [interjection] or more, I'm told; okay, it's been a long time since I've been working in the private sector – \$300, \$350 an hour; who knows? The family who is trying to secure for themselves a fair hearing about whether or not their child should stay with them or move into foster care is required to secure that fair hearing through a lawyer who will only be paid \$84 an hour. What that says to me is that we have set up an inherently imbalanced and unfair system, as much as we all say that justice should be equal.

There's a big picture that I am getting at by asking this question, but I think it's a fundamentally important question that needs to be addressed. It's through that background that I think one way to start the discussion is by finding out not the specific amounts paid to specific firms – we already know through the blue book what firms get paid by this government – but the question is: on average what is the hourly rate being paid? Not what the policy is but just what on average is paid: I think that's a reasonable piece of information for us to receive in this Assembly so that we can proceed, hopefully, to have discussions about how we might make a meaningful change to our system of legal aid in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General I think should have a position on this.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the discussion the hon. member has raised with respect to legal aid. I would respectfully suggest that that is a different discussion. I'd be very happy to have that discussion, and perhaps we can continue that once the budget is introduced tomorrow and as we carry on with those discussions.

I would say at this point that I would ask the members of this House to consider rejecting this question. While there are instances where legal counsel is required, Alberta Justice does not track the average hourly rate paid by the government of Alberta for legal services. There are different lawyers that are hired for different purposes, for different levels of expertise and different training. In seeking the services of outside counsel, Alberta Justice's goal is primarily to ensure that quality advice is received at a reasonable cost.

I certainly take the hon. member's point with respect to legal aid. There are a number of discussions that are taking place right now between the government and the Law Society with respect to making that a more constructive system, and some of the issues that you've raised are certainly issues that both the government and the profession have identified and will be addressing. But I would respectfully say that I don't think this gets to the heart of the matter.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I was flipping through my papers, Mr. Speaker, trying to find an amended approach, but clearly from the hon. Attorney General this is an all-or-nothing circumstance.

It's extremely important that I not be portrayed as seeking further employment for my extremely intelligent, hard-working son-in-law Vivek Warriar, who has recently become a partner of Bennett Jones in Calgary. Nor am I seeking further legal employment for my brother, who is a member of the firm of Miles Davison, also operating in Calgary. But I am concerned about accountability in terms of tracking the funding. I believe the government should be responsible for tracking the funding. If the discussion is going to occur on another day and the information will be provided as to why people on legal aid services receive – and the lawyers working in legal aid are so underpaid that it requires only the most altruistic of individuals to take on these cases. As it was indicated, justice should be blind, and it should be available to all individuals on an equal basis.

In November of 2007 I put forward Motion 511, calling for a unified family court. The motion was brought forward to make it a unified family court process, and the intention was to not only increase the efficiency and speed with which custody cases were heard but also to decrease the expenses in the convoluted system that is currently in place, where the Court of Queen's Bench has the responsibility for divorce and our provincial court basically deals with every other aspect of children and youths' legal well-being.

4:30

I have grave concerns about not only the expense that is paid out in the name of the taxpayer for the prosecution of a case which removes a child and places them into the permanent custody of the state, into a foster home potentially to be adopted. I have seen and experienced in court the 43rd time when a set of grandparents entered the court, having paid over \$265,000 of what should be their grandchildren's inheritance in order to have custody of those children. It's an emotional injustice as well as a fiscal injustice that we do not have sufficient judges and sufficient lawyers who are paid at a fee that recognizes their talents, so that individuals who are forced because they lack the resources to rely on the services of legal aid should be shortchanged not by the intent of the lawyer but by the caseload of the lawyer who is willing to undertake a portion of their practice in serving the needs of legal aid.

I would ask the Attorney General that if she is not prepared to track the amount of money that is going from taxpayers and flowing

through the legal system, she could at least at some point later account for the total costs of legal aid provisions as separated from the costs of paying for the prosecution and of judges. It's an extremely large amount, and I'm hoping that at some point the unified family court motion, Motion 511, will actually be legislated as opposed to just simply recognizing its intent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then, to close the debate? Proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I just would like to rise and say that I am a little disappointed that the hon. Attorney General is not prepared to provide us with this information. I am terribly, deeply disappointed. I do believe that it is actually quite relevant to the issue at hand. I think that if the government is going to try and suggest that the legal aid system is anywhere close to being effective, then a reasonable measurement would be what the government itself has found through its own experience that it must pay in order to secure, as the minister herself acknowledged, the most specialized or skilled services in a particular area. I'm sure that people who are compelled to access legal aid would also like to be able to seek out the most specialized and skilled lawyer in the particular area in which they need legal services.

I know that, in fact, in the blue books there is a complete listing of the private firm expenditures of this government, so I'm quite surprised, frankly, that it would be anything other than a simple amount of a few hours to find out the average hourly rate, even a range for the average hourly rate, paid to lawyers who work on behalf of government. No one is suggesting that the government doesn't in certain cases or at certain times need to pay what the market demands and doesn't at certain times need to pay, you know, amounts that the average person might think are a bit ridiculous, but I do think that you cannot have a discussion about provision of legal aid without acknowledging what the current going rate is that the government has to pay for its own services.

I am disappointed that that information has not been provided. I suspect it wouldn't take a great deal for it to be made available, and I certainly hope that the minister will give some thought to how that might be made available between now and the time at which her ministry comes up for discussion in estimates so that we can perhaps review the ability to have that information provided to the public at that time.

Thank you.

[Written Question 19 lost]

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

Supportive Living Facilities

Q20. Ms Notley asked that the following question be accepted. How many supportive living facilities, including assisted living facilities, lodges, enhanced lodges, seniors' complexes, and group homes, and related number of beds were operating in Alberta for each of the fiscal years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, broken down by regional health authority and by whether the facility is/was owned/operated publicly, privately, or on a nonprofit basis?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for seeking this information, again, is not entirely dissimilar from other questions that were focusing on trying to get more global information about the state of supportive living costs and resources across the province.

The province's new continuing care model talks about additional supportive living spaces, and assisted living falls into that category. Meanwhile the government plans to create no new long-term care beds in the province but, rather, to simply maintain and upgrade the 14,500 that currently exist, and of course this is in the face of there being roughly 1,500 people on wait-lists now and having every demographic expert in the province clearly stating that without question that number will go up over the course of the next few years. Indeed, I believe we have heard recently from Alberta Health Services that that number went up quite dramatically just in Calgary, so we know that there is a very significant problem. The Premier had, of course, during the last election campaigned on the notion of opening 600 new long-term care beds. Unfortunately, that particular plan has gone nowhere.

Meanwhile private operators have a lot to gain from the expansion of supportive living facilities, and we as taxpayers want that information so that we can see what share of the supportive living market they have had compared to the nonprofit and publicly operated shares and whether the number of privately operated facilities is increasing, again a legitimate question for Albertans to want answers to.

That is the basic rationale behind why it is we are seeking information in response to Written Question 20.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. The government is proposing an amendment to this question. The amendment has been circulated. I won't waste the House's time by reading it in detail, but the effect of the amendment is that Written Question 20 would now read:

How many licensed supportive living facilities and seniors' lodges were operating in Alberta for the fiscal year 2007-2008, and what was their respective capacity (number of residents), broken down by regional health authority and by whether the facility received public funding or not?

Mr. Speaker, in April 2007 we began licensing supportive living facilities for compliance with accommodation standards. Licences are based on the number of residents in a supportive living facility, not on the number of units or beds in the facility. The recommended amendment allows us to respond accordingly.

Prior to April 1, 2007, information on supportive living facilities was collected on a voluntary basis, and there was not legislative authority to collect such information. As the data from April 2007 onwards is more accurate, we are requesting amendments to the dates contained in the original question. The government does not collect information about whether an operator is private or nonprofit. The recommended amendments allow us to answer the question by focusing on whether a facility receives public funding or not. I therefore move the amendment as presented.

4:40

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I'll give you first opportunity.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I do appreciate the efforts made by the minister, and I do believe that certainly amendments (a) through (c) simply improve it and are better written, so that's great. I'm a little concerned that we wouldn't be getting as much information as we had been seeking through what I guess is, well, (d) – in my amendment it appears as (c) twice, but what I think is (d) – the striking out of fiscal year 2006-2007. But I will take you at your word. If that information is simply not available, then I guess it's not available.

I am concerned about striking out the distinction between whether the facility is publicly or privately operated or functioning as a nonprofit. I think that we know that the private facilities will receive public funding. We know that the nonprofits will receive public funding, and of course we know that the publicly owned will receive public funding. So the question of public funding will not specifically identify the breakdown within our province between the nonprofit, private-sector, and public-sector facilities.

I think these are completely legitimate questions to be asking, and I am a bit shocked that the government wouldn't actually know what the breakdown is between private-sector facilities, public-sector facilities, and nonprofit facilities. Certainly, I know that when I worked in that industry as a staff member for a union, I could tell you which facilities were private sector, which were nonprofit, and which were public sector, so I find it really a little bit of a stretch to believe that the staff within the minister's area are unable to also identify the difference between a public, private, and nonprofit facility. I am concerned about that. I suppose that if we get the list, we can probably do it ourselves, but the idea was that I was pretty sure the government already had that information.

For that reason I am not in support of the amendment, primarily because of the last amendment which is being made, that does not give us that breakdown between public, private, and nonprofit. I do, however, appreciate that the remainder of the motion will be presumably accepted by the minister.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the hon. member's request for information she included group homes, and I know that there are a variety of different types of group homes, some for individuals with physical or mental disabilities, some for seniors. Where I get directly involved is with group homes for children and youth who have run into difficulties and have been basically put into a custodial circumstance by the province.

But the area that I want to refer specifically to in the amendment has to do with the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports' section (a), where she would like to add "licensed" before "supportive living facilities." The fact that some facilities are allowed to operate without being licensed is of major concern to me, and although I have received less than collegial support in my concerns over the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, that isn't the crux of the matter. The AARC facility has a business licence as opposed to having a professionally accredited licence that would recognize it as a legitimate treatment facility for children suffering addictions or extended to those suffering behavioural problems. Not all children at the AARC facility are there because of addictions.

Now, because this organization receives \$300,000 in yearly grants from the government, I would think that there would be greater concern about the types of treatment that were offered, the fact that it is not a residential treatment centre, the fact that it is not subject to external inspection because of the overnight monitoring of children in externally locked, barred bedrooms, where their door monitor is another junior in a vulnerable position. It's the fact that the facility isn't licensed. I have never claimed in debate that the intentions of the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre weren't good intentions. The fact that the minister is planning on tabling, if not already having done so, testimonials from grateful students who have graduated from the program or the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm really sorry to interrupt, but

you've got to find the relevancy here in what you're talking about and what this motion is about. Okay? You've simply got to find it.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Okay. I will. The relevancy, Mr. Speaker, which you're searching for is under the term "licensed." I'll briefly summarize my original argument that all facilities that deal with the treatment of youth or seniors or individuals with disabilities should be licensed, supervised, and overseen by this government.

If taxpayer money goes into the facilities and Albertans are being treated within them, there has to be a much greater level of accountability, and that is part of what Written Question 20 is about. I don't believe that the various amendments that have been provided, whether they be (a), (b), (c), or (d), address the concerns. Albertans deserve transparency and accountability, particularly those who are placed into the care of facilities. Their well-being and their care should be of utmost importance to all Albertans and especially to this government, that is responsible for the individuals' well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a few comments on the record on amendment (b). They want to take out the words "assisted living facilities, lodges, enhanced lodges," et cetera, and substitute "seniors' lodges." Again, it's an argument that I have spoken to before. I think this is far too narrow. Even if they'd used the words "continuing care," what we understand to be under continuing care would include all of the assisted living, et cetera. But to just say seniors' lodges is far too narrow a scope, and I don't think that it will get at the answers which the question was meant to address.

The Speaker: Additional people who would like to participate, or should I call the question with respect to the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, would you like to conclude the debate, or should I call the question?

Ms Notley: Question.

[Written Question 20 as amended lost]

Motions for Returns

[The Clerk read the following motions for returns, which had been accepted]

Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute

- M1. Mr. Mason:
A return showing a copy of all 2007-2009 utilization plans for the Mazankowski Heart Institute and any records of how many wards and beds are currently vacant in the institute.

4:50 Ministerial Foreign Travel Plans

- M5. Mr. Mason:
A return showing copies of all current protocols surrounding the proposal and selection process for approving ministers' foreign travel plans.

Assisted Living Facilities

- M7. Mr. Mason:
A return showing a list of facilities in Alberta whose designation changed from long-term care facility to assisted living facility between April 1, 2001, and December 31, 2008.

Coalbed Methane/Natural Gas in Coal Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee

- M8. Mr. Mason:
A return showing a copy of the final report and recommendation of the Coalbed Methane/Natural Gas in Coal Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

Agreement on Internal Trade

- M9. Mr. Mason:
A return showing a copy of the agreement signed by the Premier on January 16, 2009, at the first ministers' meeting regarding amendments to the agreement on internal trade.

Midwifery Services

- M20. Mr. Mason:
A return showing copies of all government plans to increase the number of midwives practising in Alberta between February 1, 2008, and February 10, 2009.

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 34(3.1) motions for returns are deemed to stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 19.

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

Assisted Living Facilities

- M2. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports or plans prepared between January 1, 2007, and February 10, 2009, regarding the future creation or expansion of assisted living facilities.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for that has been somewhat canvassed already in my previous remarks with respect to our concerns around the government's continuing care strategy and their purported plans to rely on assisted living facilities as an alternative to providing the number of new long-term care beds that were either promised in the election or, more importantly, are required by the roughly 1,500 people who are in hospital beds at this point, waiting for those beds.

As a result, we are now interested in assessing what the extent and breadth is of plans to create new assisted living facilities as well as to determine whether those plans would involve an expansion into and by the public sector, whether they would involve an expansion into or by the nonprofit sector, or whether or not the intention is that this all be done through particular members of the private sector.

There has been a great deal of talk about the expansion of these services and the expansion of the assisted living facilities, but we have not yet been given a global picture of what the plans are and where those facilities would be and the state of the government's current plans with respect to this issue.

As I've already stated, it's a matter that is of very high public concern not only within our seniors' communities but, frankly, within the homes and families of many, many Albertans, all of whom are concerned about the health and the future of their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, not only of just themselves but of those who they care deeply for.

This continuing care strategy represents a very significant shift in gears by the government with respect to plans for caring for our seniors, and it is for this reason that we are pursuing as much information as we can possibly get on how far along the plans are and what they look like at this point and whether or not there is good reason to believe that they will actually have the capacity to solve the problems which we have discussed and identified repeatedly within this House to the government on behalf of those people.

It's for those reasons that we are seeking this information, and I urge my colleagues to support our motion in this regard.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. The minister recommends that the House reject this motion. I think the member actually answered a great deal of the rationale in her discussion of the motion itself when she indicated that much of the assisted living capacity is the purview of the private sector. So the plans and reports that the member is seeking would simply not exist, and that kind of information would not be available to provide to the member.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate the hon. Deputy Government House Leader providing a response, but it amazes me that private facilities don't have to file their plans with the government, especially if they're receiving either operational grants or some form of subsidy or consultation fees, that this information would not be forthcoming.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, our seniors' advocate, has frequently raised the issue of aging in place and recognizing the dignity of seniors and respecting family wishes of their mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandfathers, and so on, having the opportunity to continue to be well cared for in a facility within their locale. Having the details that have been requested in Motion for a Return 2 would provide a degree of planning potential for families whose senior loved ones are at the point of requiring some extra support either in the more expensive version of assisted living or in long-term care.

The government seems very willing to report on a whole variety of information, including individual schools' standard achievement test scores. I would suggest that reporting this valuable information to the public for future decisions with regard to aging in place and dignity would be able to be provided, so I'm disappointed that this motion for a return has been rejected.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you want to conclude the debate?

Ms Notley: Yeah, I do.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Yes. Very briefly, I guess, my final point is that I, too, am a little concerned by the rationale provided by the Deputy Government House Leader with respect to why this motion for a return could not be followed through on. It may well be that assisted living ultimately is the primary purview of the private sector, but the service it provides is in the primary purview of the public interest. It also forms the foundation of a much ballyhooed continuing care strategy which was announced last December as this

government's answer to the crisis in aged care and the crisis with respect to caring for our seniors. So I am quite concerned that we would now say: "Well, we can't provide you information on what we planned because even though it's the foundation of our whole way to deal with this crisis, it's going to be done by the private sector. So how could you ever expect us to have any insight into what's been planned?"

Now, this, of course, is the typical NDP argument for why it ought not to be done.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I must now draw the attention of all hon. members to Standing Order 8(1). We're now dealing with motions other than government motions.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Underground Transmission Lines

504. Mr. Quest moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately investigate the feasibility of constructing underground transmission lines to determine if they are a safe and viable option for transmitting high-voltage power.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and privilege to stand and open debate on Motion 504. The objective of this study is to provide information on the pros and cons of constructing and operating underground transmission lines. The study would also investigate the feasibility of constructing short-distance underground lines in residential and school zone areas.

5:00

Requiring portions of transmission lines to be placed underground is not without precedent, Mr. Speaker. In 2008 Maine passed An Act to Require Transmission Lines To Be Placed Underground near Certain Facilities. This act states that any portion of a transmission line capable of operating at 115 kV or more that is constructed, rebuilt, or relocated on or after October 1, 2009, must be placed underground if it's located adjacent to a residential area, a public playground, a private or public school, a child care facility, or a recreational camp.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Five hundred kV lines are a new technology to Alberta, and as with any new and large technical undertaking there needs to be consultation with Albertans. In order to consult effectively, all of the options and information need to be on the table. Doing a study on underground transmission is a necessary step to informing and consulting with Albertans. Some issues that need to be investigated are the technical characteristics of underground cable, including reliability; operation and maintenance factors; environmental impact; possible health issues; impact on communities; and cost.

I'd like to talk about cost as one of the most important reasons to do a feasibility study. Costs associated with construction of underground transmission lines are reportedly four to 20 times that of overhead lines. Mr. Speaker, there must be a better estimate of the cost of constructing underground transmission lines. I understand that many factors exist in determining the cost of any major project, and these factors fluctuate with markets in the economy, factors such as the current prices of material, construction, labour, and the development of better and more efficient technology. Determining the real costs in our current market would help verify if, indeed, underground transmission lines are feasible in specific

circumstances. These circumstances include close proximity to residential areas and schools.

The estimation of four to 20 times the cost of an above ground line is just not realistic for determining whether underground lines are an option in any circumstance. Let me also clarify that conducting a feasibility study on underground transmission lines does not mean looking at burying a line from border to border. It's to better understand the possibilities of underground transmission lines through variable distances and finding a cost comparison for short distances.

The Alberta Electric System Operator, AESO, published a report, Alberta's Industrial Heartland: Bulk Transmission Development, on May 30, 2008. It states that underground lines have the lowest agricultural, environmental, and visual impacts. Mr. Speaker, we need to know the details around these impacts as well as the costs to determine the viability of using underground transmission lines in the future. The Ministry of Energy released Launching Alberta's Energy Future: Provincial Energy Strategy at the end of 2008. It states: "Improvements will be sized to accommodate long-term growth and will use, where possible, technology such as high-voltage direct current to maximize efficiency of rights of way and minimize impacts."

A feasibility study will provide clarity on the advantages and disadvantages of using AC or HVDC transmission. For instance, we know that an advantage of HVDC transmission lines is that these lines are more efficient for transmitting energy over long distances, but very little is known about underground HVDC. A disadvantage of HVDC is the limited flexibility of the HVDC system. An HVDC transmission line cannot be segmented or tapped without construction of additional converter stations. Again, how is the cost impacted if more converter stations are required for certain distances of an underground line? The environmental impact of underground line transmission also needs to be determined. This would include the effects of additional converter stations.

Currently only two 500 kV lines are in operation in Alberta. One is in the south, connecting Calgary to British Columbia. The other is part of the south kV loop west of Edmonton. The need for more transmission capability has been established, and I think Albertans know that in order to continue to have the luxury of operating our homes and businesses with uninterrupted and reliable power, this province must move forward on plans to provide the means to supply much-needed power. But before we move ahead, exploring the options and possible opportunities of underground transmission is necessary, especially if underground transmission lines could be a viable alternative where the line affects residences or schools.

Therefore, I ask all hon. members here today to vote in favour of 504, and I look forward to listening to more of the debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been watching this motion, Motion 504, with interest. I've been watching it on the Order Paper. I've certainly been following the issue of transmission lines, whether they're overhead or whether they're underground, and adjacent to the hon. Member for Strathcona's constituency is a significant local debate on how to proceed, where to proceed, and when to proceed with additional transmission lines. At some point in the near future these matters will be resolved, and we will have that route developed for the need, which will be the bitumen upgraders which hopefully will be located in the neighbourhood of the hon. Member for Strathcona.

I think this is a very important issue. How this will work is to be determined. It's certainly an issue that we should study. Other

jurisdictions have attempted underground transmission lines. It obviously already happens in neighbourhoods on a limited basis, but on volume and voltage I'm not sure how this would work. Certainly, underground transmission lines have several advantages. Obviously, there is the beautification of the neighbourhood, to bury the transmission lines rather than have them strung out on poles. A buried line certainly has less vulnerability to elements like ice and wind. In some areas like downtown it's much more practical than overhead lines, but underground lines, I'm told, cost more to install and maintain and result in increased electricity rates.

Now, I can be confident that the Minister of Energy doesn't want electricity rates in this province to go any higher. I know he's concerned about the folly that was electricity deregulation. Whether it's the price of power or the lack of generating capacity or the bottlenecks in the transmission system, we can go right back to electricity deregulation as the cause for these prices and shortages and a transmission system that is certainly not as reliable as it used to be.

We can also contemplate the bill that's eventually going to have to be paid by the consumers for the enhanced transmission system, or the improved transmission system. What that bill is is hard to say. I'm sure the minister knows, and I'm sure the minister knows how much that will be for a residential consumer on their monthly power bill, how much more they will have to pay. I'm sure he has all those answers.

I know that whenever transmission costs, Mr. Speaker, were shifted conveniently by a former Minister of Energy, with the approval of this cabinet, of course, to the bills of consumers, it was thought at that time that, well, maybe it'll be a \$2 billion additional bill for consumers to pay for the transmission debottlenecking that was needed. That bill went up to 3 and a half billion dollars. It went up to \$4 billion. It went up to \$5 billion. I would love to know what it is now, in April of 2009. If we were to upgrade our transmission system, bring it totally up to snuff, what would it cost, and how long would it take the consumers on a monthly basis to pay off those costs?

5:10

Certainly, we look at this idea of examining putting some of this transmission underground. I think it's noteworthy and it's worth while. We should at least check it out. I'm told that studies have shown that installing lines underground is expensive for consumers and taxpayers. I could be wrong, but I'm told it could cost as much as 10 times more than overhead distribution of transmission lines. I would certainly like clarification on this in the course of discussion on this Motion 504.

Underground lines are also much more difficult and expensive to work on when problems arise. Of course, we've got to dig them up, so there's earthmoving equipment and specialized technicians. We know that installing underground transmission lines is best done in an area as it's being developed. This is less expensive, of course, than converting later from overhead to underground. Overhead systems are easier, thus less expensive, to upgrade whenever a community grows or the industrial load for electricity grows and we require additional electricity capacity. So there are a number of issues that would certainly drive up the cost.

I thought at one point that the transportation and utility corridor adjacent to highway 216 would have been an appropriate place to install transmission lines as they're needed to power our industry. I don't know what will happen with that, but we'll see. I don't know if there's a stretch of property or an area where the hon. member has an idea where there could be a test facility set up to see how long it would take to install an underground transmission line, how much it would cost, how it would work.

Typically, I'm told, underground lines experience fewer outages,

but again whenever an outage happens, I would think it would last longer because the repairpersons will have a lot more difficult time locating the problem and then repairing it.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I certainly would urge the House to consider this motion. We need to have a look at this to see how underground transmission lines can work and if they will work and at what cost. We know that many communities, not only Sherwood Park but certainly through central Alberta, have reservations. They're very cautious about overhead transmission lines. I think this is an issue that the government has brought on itself by tolerating the use of spies on innocent citizens when they were exercising their democratic rights at a regulatory hearing regarding transmission lines and transmission systems.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly urge all hon. members of this Assembly to give this motion some thought and some consideration. There's no problem in investigating the feasibility of constructing underground transmission lines. I think it's a matter of cost. It's not a matter of safety. It's not a matter of whether it will or will not work but of exactly what this would cost us. Certainly, regardless of where we live in this province and what we do to provide an income to ourselves and our families, we rely on electricity, and we have to recognize that we need a sound transmission system.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thought for a moment there that it must be a different phase of the moon or something because for a split second I thought that the hon. member opposite and myself were going to completely agree on something. But I'm happy to report that, in fact, we're close.

I want to thank the MLA for Strathcona, Mr. Speaker, for bringing forward Motion 504 in the first place. I've said a number of times publicly around the province in the last couple of years that, you know, in my opinion, from the point of view of the Energy department, transmission is job one. We really feel that the transmission system requires upgrades. We know, in fact, that it requires upgrades.

There's a situation in the province where constraint is leading to inefficiency. Most certainly, a lot of line loss and heat losses in the system are costing Alberta consumers every day, so we know that we are going to move forward some additions and fortification to this system and, again, new power generation that's coming on in the province as we speak in a number of different areas across the province. Certainly, new generation, even some of our older, more conventional opportunities here with coal-fired generation, that sort of thing, have to have the highway opened up for them to get into the system and allow for Albertans to have the economical electrical utility that they require.

Just a couple of points, Mr. Speaker, with respect to what we're doing on the generating side before I touch on the thing about underground transmission. In southern Alberta there's a fairly major expansion of wind generation. I think, actually, that that will probably take place all up the eastern slopes in Alberta all the way into the northwestern corner of the province. In fact, there are opportunities all the way along that particular region.

The biomass industry: again, good opportunities for generating alternate electricity and green power.

Again, opportunities in the northwestern part of the province in the wood fibre business to diversify their industries a bit, good opportunities, we think, requiring some upgrades with respect to the transmission system.

Cogeneration in the Fort McMurray area: well understood.

Again, as I said, coal in central Alberta.

Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, major opportunities for hydro development across the province and run of the river. Different opportunities, I think, for some pumped hydro with storage.

Certainly, again, a major development in northern Alberta at Slave River relative to the issue of alternate and green power.

There are concerns around transmission, and we all understand that. We have had some opportunity to experience first-hand these concerns. We have as a government, I think, been responsive to landowners. We feel that landowners are the ones that are primarily impacted by grid development anyplace where you find this kind of development that's necessary in the white area or in areas where agriculture and landowners are in fact affected. They ask a lot of good questions, Mr. Speaker, relative to the ways that the government, industry, and themselves can lessen the impact of this particular fortification that we're going to require.

5:20

Most certainly, I would suggest that one of the things that comes to mind when you talk to landowners is the idea of underground lines: why can we not use more underground transmission? You know, you hear a number of stories about areas where they're using it where it does work. And it works. There isn't any doubt about it. I mean, we have one here from, I believe, kind of the west side of Edmonton into the core area of the city that was constructed last year, an AC underground system. HVDC light handles a lot more power, and it is in fact doable. I believe there are a couple of fairly major operations in Europe and one that we were made aware of and followed a bit that goes into Manhattan, in fact, underground and underwater and is working very well.

There are some issues. I actually agree with the member that I think, Mr. Speaker, generally, it's time that we investigate the issues of underground transmission. Of course, it has been mentioned already, but certainly cost is one. The access to an area to do it is another one, the safety relative to underground transmission. We need to understand that when you start into doing things like this, it needs to fit into the overall grid system that we have in the province. Not to suggest for a minute that it can't fit, but I think what we would find from this is how we make it fit.

You know, the idea of doing something like this is not to go out and see if we can't find people to tell us how we can't do it. I think the idea would be to go out again and do some research, do some work, and find out how we can do it. I think it's timely. I think that the debate is timely. I would have to tell you that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to encourage all members of the Legislature here to support this particular motion that the member has brought forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled today that our colleague from Strathcona has brought forward this motion. It's not only timely, but it's appropriate, as the Minister of Energy has noted, relative to getting the right kind of information. I think what prompted the MLA, the representative for Strathcona, was a significant amount of reaction from people that would be in proximity to that utility corridor.

For a number of years people have seen it as rather pristine landscape, but I want to remind this Assembly of something that occurred when the tornado came through, during a period when because of its very nature as a wide, green space it attracted one of the most traumatic events. During that period power lines were down, and an entire tank from the tank farm at the refineries was

relocated overtop of a rail line. There was significant disruption along with that and, most tragically, 30 deaths of people in a trailer park.

Now, the peculiarity of this type of weather system moving through that area in itself was not something that you wouldn't expect to find where you have a wide open space, but what makes this area particularly unique is that there are literally millions of barrels of product that flow underground through that utility corridor to places as far away as Texas and New Jersey. This utility corridor, I would suggest, has a higher and better use as a continued area for utility right-of-way for the pipes underground, so it would be contiguous in the costing of this to look at whether or not an overground power line would in any way disrupt the capacity of that utility corridor to serve the underground pipelines that it currently serves. It proudly hosts the beginning of the longest pipeline in the world, so when we look at this, it's not only for the reasonableness of locating power underground. It's not just any corridor; it is the most important and significant corridor for Alberta in the conveyance of what is underground with the pipelines, several pipelines, several millions of barrels a day.

I think that there are a couple of ways to look at this. I'm not suggesting that here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly we write the terms of reference of such a costing but that we take a look at whether or not the placement of a power line overtop or adjacent to this pipeline could in any way serve or render less useful the corridor for future pipeline expansion because of the kinds of things that ultimately might happen because of the development of the Industrial Heartland and some of the other options in the future.

Very recently people have come into my office to ask about the capacity for making cuts into our roads, into highway 14 for example, to go in following the pigging of one of the pipelines, do a direct cut to look at whether or not there's any corrosive action in the pipeline.

All of these things are issues that happen in this particular corridor, made wider around the city of Edmonton because of the utility right-of-way that it naturally has. So, as I say, I'm thrilled with the motion coming forward, the support of the Energy minister, because I can see a number of complexities here. If we located underground the power in the right-of-way, we would be less likely in the future to expose or leave vulnerable any of the kinds of things that could be left vulnerable if we continue to just assume that an overground power line is the most convenient and best way.

One final point, Mr. Speaker. At the time of that tornado Sherwood Park, a hamlet at the time, and the entire Strathcona county were rendered completely separated from the emergency facilities within the city of Edmonton, the health care facilities, the acute-care facilities, and it took some period of time to replace the power lines, roughly an hour in some parts of it. Although it was expedient, there was a period of time where life and limb might have been severely compromised because of the reduction of access because of the very nature of the transportation routings through that corridor.

It's an incredibly important corridor, and I think this costing must be done. I applaud the intent of the motion, and I urge all members to support it.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would like to very briefly echo the support for Motion 504 as introduced by the hon. Member of the Legislative Assembly for Strathcona. Because I can't believe that anyone in this House would be opposed to exploring options and considering cumulative costs of putting power underground, I will

not take up a tremendous amount of time. I am extremely pleased that the government understands the importance.

A number of us here sat through the debate over Bill 46, and anyone who represents a rural area is well aware of the spy scandal that was brought up earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. In the debate over Bill 46 and the whole question of surface rights the government introduced 24 amendments to finally get the legislation to the point where a spoonful of sugar wasn't required to put the bad medicine down. Eventually, while it was universally rejected by members of the opposition, it did go forward. I would think that the hon. mover of Bill 19, who is himself a rural resident and has been a very active member of the AAMD and C, has personally experienced recently the type of anger and angst with regard to Bill 19, and he's seen the need to attempt to get it right and to produce amendments that deal with surface rights.

When we sort of do a cost analysis, what we have to take into account are court costs, costs of litigation, costs associated with land expropriation. We have to take into account the public good. I would like to think that part of the analysis of putting lines underground would be the consideration of public good in the form of reregulating electricity. Maybe that would be considered dreaming in technicolour in this House, but I think it would be a good time to re-examine the whole deregulation process and repair the damage that's been done.

5:30

In terms of the physics of converting AC to DC and back to AC again, it's done in Europe. There are precedents. In talking with representatives of ISEEE, the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, sometimes substituted for experiential learning, they have pointed out that in terms of the costs it is, in fact, more expensive than your traditional overhead lines. But as the hon. Minister of Energy pointed out, you have less line loss, so the conduction is of a more efficient nature, and as the hon. minister of finance pointed out, when power is lost, not only are lives potentially lost, but the quality of life is certainly compromised during emergency circumstances.

We have a beautiful province. We have very few parts of this province that don't have some type of human footprint crossing them. The idea of burying the transmission lines using the most current technology available, working with landowners as opposed to against them, to me would be a very successful strategy.

Other individuals have talked about the importance of green energy. Probably one of the largest unelected but vociferous supporters of green energy is Mr. Joe Anglin, who is the chair of the Green Party. [interjections] Yes. Now, it's interesting that there is such opposition to even the mentioning of that name, but it is interesting that the Green Party shares in terms of popular support about the same number as the Wildrose Alliance Party, which is, I would assume, in greater favour with representatives of this government.

Regardless, the idea of exploration of not only the cost but the efficiency of putting lines underground is worthy of all our support. I thank again the MLA for Strathcona for bringing it to our attention. It is progressive, and that is what theoretically the Progressive Conservative government is all about.

Thank you.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. I want to thank the MLA for Strathcona for presenting this at this time. I think it's a very timely motion. You know, one of the issues that we deal with right now, especially in higher populated areas, is of course: not in my backyard. But maybe we can answer the issues of underground safety, aesthetics, maybe health issues, the EMF issue, electromagnetic

fields – that is always raised when lines are being put in – reliability, security, environmental, public opposition, et cetera. I mean, it's probably timely to have that debate.

I presently sit on a think tank of the Canadian Energy Research Institute that does a lot of independent work sometimes for government, sometimes for the oil patch. A group like this could probably easily do this type of work. At one time I chaired the transmission commission for the province, and I know that in some areas there are underground lines in North America. When I chaired the committee, it was probably back in 2003, 2004, and the ratio at that time was said to be about 9 to 1 underground versus overhead. Well, here we are in 2009, and they're talking about 4 to 1. Let's not kid ourselves. You know, no matter what we spend on transmission, we all pay as consumers. The consumers pay. But in some cases it may be more favourable to put in underground lines. I would say: not a chance that you could start putting high-voltage underground lines from one end of the province to the other, but there's no doubt for maybe some river crossings, some lake crossings. I know that from Vancouver to Vancouver Island there's not a power pole all the way across there, and on the surface of the ocean bottom floor there are power lines.

There's no doubt that it's time to have this discussion. With technology and maybe as a pilot project, maybe in an area where the MLA for Strathcona lives, that might be a good way to tell how this works. There are groups, like I talked about with the Canadian Energy Research Institute, that could take on this work. There's a lot of discussion out there within the power companies and the transmission companies themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be worthy of pursuing, and I would wholeheartedly support this motion. Thank you.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to rise today and join debate on Motion 504. This motion, brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, proposes to urge the government to conduct a study on the feasibility of underground transmission lines.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has and will continue to experience large periods of growth, and as this province expands, our need for energy generation and distribution will grow accordingly. Transmission lines are the arteries of our power system, connecting power plants to the communities they serve. Therefore, I believe it is pertinent for any government to conduct studies exploring all possible avenues for power transmission, including underground transmission lines and AC/DC comparisons.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the bulk of power transmissions in this province are delivered by large overhead transmission lines that utilize AC transmission. Traditionally AC has been the preferred method for power transmission as it leaks less energy than DC, specifically over long distances. This technology has proven to be safe and reliable, but there are drawbacks. Most notably, overhead transmission lines are large and perceived to be unattractive by some. In turn, it is said that these unappealing structures could lower property values and pose a negative impact to our environment.

Mr. Speaker, because of these issues being raised, I feel that it is important to explore all power transmission systems, specifically short-distance underground lines, so as to answer the questions being raised by Albertans. Underground transmission lines would alleviate several of the concerns presented by overhead transmission.

There may be, however, other issues to consider. For example, the cost associated with installing underground lines may be

excessive, and we need to know what the costs may be. To date, to my knowledge, there has been no comprehensive study on the cost of underground line installation and maintenance, and I feel that a cost-benefit analysis is warranted. That is why I am very supportive of Motion 504. It seeks information on a topic that warrants further investigation. The future of power transmission in this province will require the utilization of several transmission technologies, and the first step towards implementing any technology is to study the benefits and drawbacks associated with it.

I would like once again to thank the hon. Member for Strathcona for bringing this forward, a very timely idea and a very timely issue. I, too, ask everyone to support Motion 504.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to congratulate and compliment the minister for – sorry. The Member for Strathcona. You never know. One day maybe.

There have been a couple of references, both from the Minister of Energy and, I think, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, talking about under water. Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that actually there have been underwater cables to Europe probably long before some of the members in this House were born, and they've been very successful, with great abilities to be able to maintain them. So there's nothing wrong with assuming that with the proper technical development this sort of thing could happen.

5:40

We have legislation coming forward for utility corridors, and I think it's very important that we spend some time. Up to this point I recall that the two and a half year if not longer process to get the Lethbridge-Montana tie-line through has cost that company a great deal of money in time and effort and certainly bad will amongst the people who were involved with this. If it had gone underground, I'm sure that it would have gone through quicker. The corridors are for that very reason, to have all of these trunks of either pipelines or electricity, gas, telephone, whatever, all in one place. They are easily accessible.

Back to the Montana tie-line. The company always said that it was too expensive, but I don't recall them ever actually having done these studies to say or to prove that, in fact, it was too expensive. Perhaps they should have been encouraged to stretch out their profit timeline because somewhere in there we also have to put in the cost of the public good.

I believe that this is one motion that also incorporates the chance to have perhaps that profit laid out but also the chance to really address the public good so that we all will benefit. There's no reason that companies that might be forced to use underground would be able to be unhappy when they really, really cost it out in terms of what it's going to cost them in bad will in the community.

Again, like everyone else who has spoken, I would encourage members in the House to support that. I really believe that we look today at what our grid systems look like and what we need in terms of electricity, but I don't think that we can even envision 10 years from now what it's really going to look like. Technology is moving at such a rapid rate, and attitudes are changing in terms of: we need the corridors, we need the electricity, so how can we all work together?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 504. This motion, brought forward

by the hon. Member for Strathcona, urges the government to conduct a feasibility study on the construction of underground power lines, specifically within short distances. I'd like to also comment that Motion 504 fits in very well with my forthcoming Motion 505 for the licensing of low-speed electric vehicles in urban areas.

The information gained through this study would help the government evaluate future electrical transmission projects across the province. Currently the majority of Alberta's high-voltage power lines are above ground, and this electrical transportation method has been used pretty much since the beginning of electricity in the province of Alberta. However, throughout the world underground power transmission lines are increasingly being used as the method of electrical transmission.

Indeed, on the family farm in Abbey, Saskatchewan, we've enjoyed underground electrical service for some 35 years now. [interjection] Yes, that would be in the province immediately to the east, hon. member. If you're moving a big auger around the yard or you're unloading a truck with a 20-foot grain box, you certainly appreciate the underground power line.

I think the concept of the underwater cables can best be highlighted by those of you who are movie buffs and the importance that they played in, of course, the movie *Jaws 2*. Alberta is unique in that we do not have any great white sharks; however, with our diverse landscape, what works in one part of the world may not in fact work here. This is why a study would be valuable. It would help to give us a better understanding of the possibilities of short-distance underground transmission lines in Alberta.

As we look at the past advancements in electrical transmission, we can see how important information has been in developing proper electrical transmission systems. The transformation from the DC, or the Edison current, to the alternating, or Tesla, current in power distribution in the late 19th century provides an example of how important it is to have studied the available power options. Indeed, this is a bit of a tribute that we owe to the unknown inventor and brilliant mind Nikola Tesla.

In technical terms the difference between DC and AC is in relation to the flow and the activity of the electrons as they flow through a current. In DC the electrons flow steadily in a single direction, where it's a continuous movement of electrons from an area of a negative charge to an area of a positive charge. DC is the power that is created and stored within batteries and in DC generators, with currents that go from a positive end to a negative end.

In the 19th century DC was the primary source of electrical distribution; however, the greatest challenge with the direct current method of electrical distribution in those days – and I'd emphasize “in those days” – was that the power plants could only send DC electrical currents about a mile before line losses became very significant. As a result Nikola Tesla created the alternating electrical current, which could carry electrical currents for hundreds of miles with very little loss of power. AC eventually became the dominant form of electrical distribution that we know today.

In an alternating current electrons repeatedly switch directions, which are called cycles, which makes it more suitable for long-distance transmission. In addition, the strength of the alternating electrical current can be increased or decreased quite simply through a mechanism called a transformer, converting it into what we refer to and what is affectionately known as 60 cycle, AC 220 volt electrical service, which you have coming into your house. This allows for high transmission voltages yet lower voltages to be sent into a house to adequately provide your power requirements. Another advantage of AC is that it can be converted to DC through a very simple adapter similar to the ones, for example, that are powering our laptop computers today.

The evolution of electrical distribution has led to more efficient

and effective distribution of power across North America and much of the world. Constructing underground short-distance power lines may continue this evolutionary process and improve the distribution of power within this province. To this end, studying the feasibility of underground power transmission would help identify the benefits and drawbacks of underground electrical transmission lines. Along with an increasing population and industrial base and as an increasing energy provider, it is essential that Albertans understand the best decision that they can make to address their energy needs.

I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this motion, and I encourage all hon. members on both sides of this House to vote in favour of Motion 504. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure as well to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 504. This motion was brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, and it is to urge the government to conduct a feasibility study on the construction of underground power transmission lines. I strongly support this motion because of the potential benefits that underground transmission has for local communities.

Overhead transmission lines are large, sometimes unsightly, and have the potential to reduce property values. In addition to potentially reducing property values, overhead transmission lines may generate concerns about safety, especially if they come down in populated areas. For example, I'll just mention a couple here. In 1998 Quebec suffered from severe ice storms that damaged or destroyed over 1,300 overhead transmission lines and caused over 1 million households to lose power, some for longer than a month. Mr. Speaker, the negative economic impact of that storm was estimated at over a billion dollars, and in order to deal with this state of emergency, over 16,000 members of the Canadian Forces were called in to assist the people.

Even in Alberta severe weather or natural disasters may damage overhead lines and pose a risk to local residents, especially in high-density residential areas. Community members have recognized these concerns and have brought them forward during the consultation processes for this motion. Through consultation with residents we feel as though underground transmission might be a way to effectively address the needs of some communities while continuing to provide the power transfer infrastructure that Alberta needs to continue to prosper. After all, underground transmission has proven to be an effective technology in other areas of the world; however, little is known specifically about short-distance underground transmission in Alberta.

5:50

One example of the successful use of underground transmission can be found in Australia, specifically near the city of Perth. In 1994 Perth was hit with severe windstorms that damaged or destroyed many of their transmission facilities. Since that time over 32 major underground power transmission projects have been undertaken, and several more are slated for completion between now and next year.

Another example highlighting the viability of underground transmission would be the Tokyo long-distance line. The Shin-Toyosu line is the longest underground transmission line in the world and connects central Tokyo with its outlying transmission grid. In addition, this line operates at 500 kilovolts, is 39.8 kilometres long, and has been in operation since 2000.

Mr. Speaker, these two examples demonstrate that underground transmission is a viable technology. Furthermore, through co-operation with these jurisdictions Alberta could gain significant information and technical knowledge on how best to utilize underground transmission in this province.

Mr. Speaker, on my own farm I have installed a lot of underground power lines, although they're low voltage, 220 volts. I put in all underground throughout the yards for various reasons. The costs have been increased, but I'm willing to pay these increased costs because I believe that the advantages outweigh the costs. It's for safety and reliability.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, what Motion 504 aims to determine is whether or not underground transmission is a viable technology for Alberta. Alberta has a unique environment and climate conditions that need to be understood in the context of underground transmission. Furthermore, a study needs to be conducted on the environmental impact of underground lines as well as the costs associated with installing and maintaining underground infrastructure.

I feel as though underground technology could address the concerns voiced to us by our local communities and that it is our responsibility as members of this House to explore the feasibility of this emerging technology. I would like to thank the hon. member for his well-thought-out and timely idea, and I would encourage all members to join with me in support of Motion 504.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to participate in the discussion on Motion 504 brought forward by the hon. Member for Strathcona, which urges the Alberta government to closely examine the feasibility of constructing underground transmission lines. We do need to take a good look at the costs, benefits, and technical feasibility of underground transmission lines. While there may be hurdles to overcome, we know for a fact that underground transmission lines are operating in other parts of the world: Tokyo, Australia, and the U.S., for example. It's clear, then, that there's a potential for underground transmission. In order to assess the overall feasibility of underground transmission, we need an accurate assessment of the fully burdened costs, not just the capital costs but any differences in operating and maintenance costs as well.

Currently Alberta faces several challenges with respect to transmission, and underground transmission lines could be a viable solution to some of these issues. Mr. Speaker, it's clear that we need to expand our province's transmission system; however, it's been a lengthy, costly, drawn-out process in great part because of NIMBY, not in my backyard, Albertans not wanting the overhead lines in their neighbourhoods. Fair enough. Additionally, there are concerns regarding overhead transmission lines and their impact on the health of people living nearby, effect on property values, and aesthetics. Underground transmission lines have the potential to eliminate most of these concerns.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, for 30 years we've set aside lands for transportation utility corridors, yet now we find ourselves disagreeing on if that dedicated land will actually be used for the purpose it was dedicated for. We hear about cost concerns, how it may be four times, seven and a half times, 10 times more expensive to build transmission lines underground than above ground. I wonder if this considers the fact that, one, we've already paid for our transmission utility corridor, some of which is not being used. What is the cost of just sitting on that land or forcing Albertans to pay for additional land to site lines? The delays, missed opportunities, and cost escalations that current opposition to line siting causes Albertans: what does that cost? The cost to regular Albertans: how do overhead lines affect property values and aesthetics?

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. Standing Order 8(3) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of

the motion to close the debate. I would like to call on the hon. Member for Strathcona to close the debate.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I won't need the whole five minutes. I'd just like to thank all of the hon. members for their comments and their support. I'd ask that all members present here today support Motion 504.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I'd move that we say it's 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Second Session

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Tuesday, April 7, 2009

Issue 20

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education
and Technology
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC),
Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Official Opposition House Leader
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL),
Official Opposition Whip
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC),
Minister of Municipal Affairs
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),
Minister of Employment and Immigration
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
Minister of Education, Government House Leader
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC),
Minister of Infrastructure
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Energy

Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Leader of the NDP Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,
NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
Government Whip
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Deputy Official Opposition Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 7, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome. I would ask that members remain standing after the prayer so that we may pay tribute to two former colleagues who have recently passed away.

Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Mr. Duco Van Binsbergen December 17, 1936, to April 4, 2009

The Speaker: It is with sadness today that I advise the House that on Saturday, April 4, 2009, Mr. Duco Van Binsbergen, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away in Nova Scotia at the age of 72. Mr. Van Binsbergen was first elected in the election held June 15, 1993, and served until March 11, 1997. During his years of service he represented the constituency of West Yellowhead for the Liberal Party. He was MLA 671. During his term of office Duco Van Binsbergen served on several committees: the Standing Committee on Public Affairs; Private Bills; Members' Services; and Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing. Mr. Duco Van Binsbergen experienced the liberation in Holland, Victory in Europe, VE Day, May 8, 1945.

Mrs. Catherine Chichak October 7, 1934, to April 6, 2009

The Speaker: On Monday, April 6, 2009, Mrs. Catherine Chichak, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, passed away at the age of 74. Mrs. Chichak was first elected in the election held August 30, 1971, and served until November 1, 1982. During her years of service she represented the constituency of Edmonton-Norwood for the Progressive Conservative Party. She was MLA 447. Mrs. Chichak was the first female Ukrainian Member of the Legislative Assembly. During her term of office Catherine Chichak served on several committees: Standing Committee on Public Affairs; Public Affairs, Agriculture and Education; Public Accounts; Law, Law Amendments and Regulations; Law and Regulations; Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; Private Bills; and Legislative Offices. She also served on the Special Committee on the Chief Electoral Officer and chaired Professions and Occupations.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them. In a moment of silent and private prayer I ask you to remember hon. members Mr. Duco Van Binsbergen and Mrs. Catherine Chichak as you may have known them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a number of very special kids and their families. They are here as part of the Kids with Cancer dream experience. Their dream is to become one of Alberta's top politicians, and they are here to

experience what it might be like. Their journey today included lunch with the Speaker, a special tour of the Legislature, and participation in a mock Legislature debate. It was my honour this morning to visit with the group in my office. I was very impressed by our very special guests. These remarkable kids are bright, they're compassionate, and would serve Alberta well as one of our top politicians.

Our guests, seated in your gallery, are Britni Allen, who is accompanied by her father, Rob Allen; Landon Haigh, who is accompanied by his father, Dale; Justin Bickford, who is accompanied by his uncle Jason Smith; and Nathan Spasiuk, who is accompanied by his mother, Connie Spasiuk. They are joined by the generous sponsors of this dream package, George and Theresa Cantalini and their children Matthew and Serena. Also accompanying the group today are Kids with Cancer representatives Joan Forge and Val Figliuzzi; also someone that's well known to the Speaker, his spouse, Kristina Kowalski; and my wife, Marie. I would ask that all of these very, very special Albertans stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to welcome an outstanding group of students from Evergreen school in Drayton Valley. This is the first group of students that I have had the pleasure to introduce in the Legislature, so they are indeed very special to me. These 45 bright grade 6 students along with parent helpers, bus driver, and teachers Mrs. Cloke, Mrs. Haskell, and Mrs. Bullock have toured our Legislature and learned a great deal about our building and provincial government. It gives me great pleasure to ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 62 students from Mary Hanley elementary school of the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The group is led by their teachers, Mr. Steve Bain, Miss Rebecca Lamac, Ms. Philomena Bruch, and parent helpers Mrs. Shannon Buchart and Mrs. Michelle Hingley. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very special young men from my constituency. The first gentleman that I would like to introduce is Shawn Pickett. Shawn is a young father of two teenage boys. He is on my Red Deer-North PC board, and he was by my side for the entire campaign trail, so I'm very grateful for Shawn. This is his first visit to the Assembly. With Shawn is my constituency assistant, also by my side most of the time, Darin Doel. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly eight members of Les Chapeaux Rouges, the Red Hat ladies: Mrs. Carol Firmaniuk, Mrs. Elaine Hewens, Mrs. Lavina Sarnecki, Ms Catherine Garvey, Ms Claudette Binette, Mrs Madeleine Leipnitz, Mrs. Angele Boucher, Mrs. Therese Yakiwchuk. The Red Hat Society welcomes women from all walks of life to discover that real fun begins after 50. They prove that laughter, camaraderie, and active lifestyles are the best prescription for happiness and well-being. My guests are seated in the members' gallery above, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly four very distinguished gentlemen that have played a very important role in my political life, and they were also very instrumental in getting me elected. They are sitting in the visitors' gallery. I would like them to stand as I introduce them: His Worship Johnnie Doonanco, mayor of Glendon, perogy capital of the world; His Worship Craig Copeland, mayor of Cold Lake; Mr. Ed Rondeau, reeve of the MD of Bonnyville; and last but not least His Worship Ernie Isley, mayor of Bonnyville and former MLA for Bonnyville. Please give these four gentlemen the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: Is the hon. member saying that it took four good men to get her here?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce two supporters and friends of mine, Ms Ann Logue as well as Ms Eleanor Art. Both have been long-time residents of the great constituency of Calgary-Egmont. I'm proud to call them friends and very great campaign workers. They're sitting in the gallery right behind me.

Thank you kindly.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Stephen Snyder, seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Snyder is at the helm of the successful Snyder & Associates LLP here in our province's capital city of Edmonton. Stephen Snyder made a contribution to the public sector, having served during the time of the former Premier the hon. Harry Strom. He was instrumental in developing what is known today as the International and Intergovernmental Relations department. Stephen was a strong supporter of me and is regarded by me as a true friend. I'd ask Stephen to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two of my constituents up from Calgary visiting us, also very good friends, Mr. Gary Vegelis

and Mr. Reg Nepinak. Would you please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the House one of my part-time constituent staff members, who's up here from Lethbridge to see exactly what's going to be proposed in the budget. I am exceedingly fortunate to have someone of her experience and knowledge. Adele Downs has served the people of this province for many, many years. She has worked with two government ministers, the late Dick Johnston and the hon. Clint Dunford, in addition to hundreds of volunteer hours, in particular as the results co-ordinator for the annual Kiwanis festival and competitive Scottish dancing. It only took one good woman, not four good men: Adele got me elected twice. I'm sure you'll all agree that that wasn't a small feat. I would like to ask her to rise now and join with me as we welcome her to this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three of my guests: first of all, Father Mircea, who's in charge of the Northern Lights library system; Ken Kwiatkowski, who is a councillor in the town of St. Paul; and the mayor of the county of Lac La Biche, Peter Kirylchuk. If I could ask them to stand up and receive the applause of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Provincial High School Basketball Championships

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the excellence of our high school athletic programs as demonstrated in the 2009 Alberta provincial basketball championships. For the town of Raymond, population 3,363, located just 34 kilometres south of Lethbridge, whose origins can be traced back to its first industry, its sugar beet factory, the results of the provincials were particularly sweet.

The Raymond Comets boys brought home the 4A 2009 Alberta provincial basketball championship. A source of pride in southern Alberta, the Raymond Comets now have the distinction of having won eight provincial championships, the most boys' championships ever won in our province. Raymond had even more reason to celebrate this year because the Raymond Comets girls won their provincial championship also. This is only the third time in the entire history of the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association that both 4A titles have gone to the same school, a tremendous feat. I would be remiss to not mention that last year the Raymond Comets boys football team won the 2008 provincial football championship, making it five times they have won that since 1996.

The celebrations continued, like their typical warm chinooks, to the town of Cardston, population 3,578, nestled about 77 kilometres southwest of Lethbridge, as the Cardston Cougars became the 2009 4A boys silver medalists in basketball.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of this House to join me in congratulating these terrific teams from Raymond high school and Cardston high school on their tremendous achievements.

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

Budget Soliloquy

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Is this a deficit which I see before me,
 Its resolution a sleight of hand?
 Come, let me confront thee.
 I wish thee not, and yet I see thee still.
 Art thou not, fiscal revision, sensible
 To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
 A deficit of the mind, a false creation,
 Proceeding from the economic-recessed brain?
 I see thee yet, in form as palpable
 As this deficit which now I draw.
 Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
 And such a blunt instrument I was to use.
 Albertans made fools of the lost dollars and cents,
 Having wasted all the rest; I long for thee still,
 And on thy blank cheque and budget gout of blood,
 Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
 It is the bloody business which informs
 Thus to mine irises. Now o'er the one halfworld
 Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
 The curtain'd sleep; Tory witchcraft celebrates
 Pale Hector's offerings, and wither'd murder,
 Alarum'd by his sentinel, the Danyluk,
 Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
 With Tarchuk's ravishing strides, towards his design
 Moves like a ghost. Thou unsure and shifting earth,
 Hear not my missteps, which way they stumble, for fear
 Thy very stones prate of my roundabout,
 And take the present horror from the time,
 Which now suits with it. Whiles I regret, the deficit lives:
 Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

Ring

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
 Hear it not, Albertan; for it is a knell
 That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

Albertans, this tragedy could and should have been averted. To have your say, visit our website at www.budget2009.ca or contact the Alberta Liberal caucus by calling our toll free line: 1.888.886.BUDG.

The Speaker: The hon. member will receive an absolute failing grade for that statement. He violated a basic standing order rule of this Assembly. He violated it twice during his speech, and that is a no-no. He should know better if he stands in this Assembly and claims to be a former educator of some repute.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 33

Fiscal Responsibility Act

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a first time]

Oral Question Period

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

Fiscal Responsibility

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A former Provincial Treasurer was quoted today as saying that Alberta is missing a culture of saving. Unfortunately, this province is also missing a culture of fiscal discipline and responsibility. As the finance minister prepares to announce the first deficit budget in 15 years, we can only hope for the sake of all Albertans that the government has finally learned the meaning of fiscal discipline. To the Premier: will the Premier develop a culture of saving in Alberta and commit to a long-term saving plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're the only jurisdiction in Canada to have net savings. Just for some, perhaps, comparisons: some provinces have as much as \$18,000 per capita debt; some have \$11,000 per capita debt; in Alberta we have net savings of \$11,000 per capita.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, how can this Premier claim to be fiscally responsible on the same day this government is forced to change the fiscal accountability act because of its own failure to be prudent?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a choice – we have a choice – to deal with a situation that has been totally unprecedented in terms of the world economic recession. No one knows how long it's going to last. The choice is simple: we either dip into our emergency savings or, on the other hand, lay off thousands of public servants, whether it be nurses, teachers, doctors, anybody that provides services to Albertans and at the same time also looks after the most vulnerable. We're not going to do that. We're going to dip into our emergency savings and make sure that we keep the momentum of this economy going.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, we spend 23 per cent more per person in this province than any other jurisdiction in Canada, and this government talks about responsibility. Last Thursday the Premier indicated that there was a comparison to be made with a family budget. Will the Premier admit that responsible parents don't pay down the mortgage without saving for future generations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, actually, this government did both. Since 2005 we've set aside over \$20 billion in the heritage savings trust fund and other endowments. At the same time – I think this is important for all Canadians to know – in the last decade Albertans contributed a net contribution to Ottawa of over \$113 billion. That's how significant the economic growth in this province was to the whole country of Canada.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Alberta Office in Washington

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent recruitment of two high-priced lobbyists for Alberta's trade office in Washington, DC, raises a question of the value of that office, which costs Albertans \$1.4 million a year. That office failed last year to ensure that the government of Alberta received timely information on the U.S. energy policy when the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 was passed in Congress. This question is to the Premier. Does the Premier not think that this indicates that the Washington office is not providing effective service to Alberta taxpayers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, our representative in the Washington office is extremely busy. I'm glad that the hon. member asked the question. To give Albertans an idea of how huge the lobbying effort is in Washington, there are approximately 8,000 to 10,000 bills introduced every year in Washington. That compares to about 40 bills introduced in the Alberta Legislature. On top of that the one person is responsible for 50 state Legislatures. That's to ensure that it follows every bill, the hundreds of bills that are introduced each year across the United States. That is a phenomenal task for one individual in our embassy office.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is what I would consider to be his job. However, I think that there is something falling through the cracks.

If two lobbyists are needed to be paid a further \$40,000 a month to get this province's opinions made to U.S. lawmakers, which is different than getting their bills, why are Albertans paying over \$300,000 a year to the representative in Washington?

Mr. Stelmach: Just to note a correction to the hon. member, the \$40,000 for the two firms: that's with all the research staff, all of the expenses included for the two lobbyist firms. Again, a former governor, James Blanchard, former ambassador to Canada, good connections with the Obama administration, and Mr. Paul Fraser, who was also minister of public affairs and was also in our Washington embassy for a period of time: these people are going to assist our representative in Washington to meet with all of the organizations. Again, it's not going to the person; it's going to the two firms, \$40,000 a month.

Ms Pastoor: Albertans are losing their jobs, and this administration is asking them to do more with less. Why, then, isn't the administration shutting down the taxpayer-funded office and really using these lobbyists that have the experience that you just spoke about?

Mr. Stelmach: It would be a very foolish idea. We have a revenue stream of approximately \$40 billion at stake, and we're going to have to put a full-court press on the United States, including all the governors, all of the public administration that we're dealing with, to make sure that we get the timely information.

Just to give you an example in terms of what our representative has accomplished: with respect to the state of Maryland, he worked very diligently with the Legislature there to remove its anti oil sands bill. Also, in the state of Minnesota he testified on the state's low carbon fuel standard and was able to garner support for the oil sands. That's just those two states.

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

Payday Loans

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall this House voted in support of a motion to cap interest rates on payday loans. The need to ensure that young families who turn to these loans are protected is more important now than ever. With mounting job losses and economic uncertainty, action must be taken before more people are forced into unmanageable debt. To the Minister of Service Alberta: when will there be legislation capping the interest rates charged by payday loan companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is very timely. Currently Service Alberta is finishing up a consultation with a number of the stakeholders with respect to the issue of payday loans. A number of issues are on the table – the rollover rates, the interest rates that are charged – and it is indeed a huge issue of concern. As minister I've been very concerned about the proliferation of these businesses, and we are at the point where we'll be bringing something forward very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: what supports are in place now to help these individuals who have already been trapped into the outrageous interest rates charged by the payday loan companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's incumbent upon the consumer, when they do choose to go to those businesses, to do their research. The unfortunate part is that some of those individuals may have a bad credit rating, and that's perhaps why they go. Perhaps going to a credit union or a bank that's under Alberta's jurisdiction would be a good idea. I think that it's incumbent upon the consumer to be careful where they go when they choose to use those services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister's been concerned for a long time. Last fall the minister used the industry line that a wide range of people use these payday loans, yet federal agencies report that young, low-income families are those most likely to get one of these loans. To the Minister of Service Alberta again: why does the minister continue to take the side of industry in this debate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was mentioned previously in this House, a lot of consumers, individuals with incomes over \$70,000, are using payday loan companies to support them. Moving forward, in the consultation that we have done, we've actually been able to interact with people who are using these services so we can determine why they need these services and what kinds of challenges they're facing. We want to make sure that this is done the right way so that we do what's best for Albertans.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the next questioner, I'd like to extend to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on behalf of all members of the House our deepest condolences on the passing of his father.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Alberta Job Losses

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that very much.

Mr. Speaker, 4,000 new Albertans were forced to go on welfare in December alone. Albertans want a jobs budget, not a welfare budget. The fact is that this government has had its head in the sand, and it's costing Albertans jobs. My question is to the Premier.

Given that the Premier's failure to deal with economic reality has already cost over 30,000 Alberta jobs, will the Premier do the right thing and bring forward a jobs budget instead of a welfare budget?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, on behalf of our caucus we extend to the hon. member our prayers and thoughts as he deals with the death of his family member.

I'm sure that at 3 o'clock, when our minister delivers the budget, the hon. member will be very pleased because it will be one that's going to grow jobs in the province of Alberta and also support the most vulnerable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier.

This government does not understand that jobs stimulate the economy better than welfare. They've let welfare cases skyrocket, they've let oil patch welfare run rampant, they've refused stimulus spending, and they've drafted a budget which I can only assume is based on the wrong predictions they've been using so far. My question is to the Premier. How many more Albertans will you put on welfare before you do the right thing and start protecting Albertans' jobs?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget is going to do a number of things. One, of course, be prudent in the overall spending. We're also going to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable, protect the programs that are so important to Albertans: education, health, and, of course, children's services. The other is that we will have to dip into the emergency savings to keep the momentum going and, at the same time, aggressively pursue other markets around the world so that we can keep our economy going.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last December's increase in welfare caseloads saw numbers skyrocket by 15 per cent, up to 30,000, yet the government refuses to do anything about it. Albertans want a jobs budget and you're going to give them, I'm sure, a welfare budget. My question is to the Premier. Why won't you admit that your government is on the wrong track, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of welfare cases and unemployed in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member has certainly the best intentions of keeping all Albertans working. We've been very fortunate in the province because in the last number of years our unemployment rate was around 3.8 to 3.9 per cent, the lowest in the country, and really that rate is almost zero per cent unemployment. It is projected to go up to about 5, 5 and a half per cent. It could even reach 6 – who knows? – looking in the crystal ball for the year ahead of us. We're going to do whatever we can to invest in those programs to keep Albertans working. You know, in about an hour or so I'm sure that he will be very pleased when he hears the minister deliver the budget.

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

Carbon Capture and Storage

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the Legislature break I was pleased to see the Minister of Energy accept an award on

behalf of the province from the Aspen Institute for our carbon capture and storage initiative. Despite some international recognition I know that there are still some who have concerns about this technology and our financial support of it. My questions today are for the Minister of Energy. How does the minister respond to criticism suggesting that this technology is unproven?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, the technology itself is proven and internationally recognized as a very usable and practical technology. CCS is safe; it's been tested. It's fully supported by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the International Energy Agency, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The U.S. administration has also expressed support for CCS. We want to be the jurisdiction where CCS is perfected. We have the geology, the industrial activity, and we're committed with the funding to make this happen.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. A number of oil sands players chose not to submit a project proposal to potentially access some of the province's funding. Does this concern the minister or put the success of this program in doubt?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, not at all. What I'd like to point out is that there are actually three oil sands-related proposals on the table. Let's remember a couple of things. First of all, the oil sands are not the largest source of CO₂ in the province of Alberta; coal-fired electricity generation is. The \$2 billion CCS plan will support three to five projects in total. We're very pleased that we have 11 proposals that we've received that we're now evaluating. The challenge will be in assessing those proposals and beginning our work. It's only the beginning of CCS for the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister explain to my constituents why government support for these initiatives is necessary? Isn't this something that industry should be funding on its own?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, if Alberta wants to be the leader in environmental protection and clean energy development, then we need to step forward. That's exactly what we did with this funding. We believe that CCS holds a very important key for us to significantly contribute to the climate change solution while also protecting our economy and thousands of jobs for Albertans. While others are more concerned about rhetoric and stunts, we're moving with our investment to the science of solutions, technological solutions that we can share with the rest of the world.

Homeless and Eviction Prevention Fund

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, instead of implementing rent controls as recommended by the Affordable Housing Task Force, this government introduced the brainwave known as the homeless and eviction prevention fund, that has cost taxpayers approximately \$110 million. As of April 1 people who are facing eviction must either apply to the rent supplement program or for support from EI. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. The HEP fund was sold to Albertans as a way to keep people off the streets and in their homes. As this has

come to an end, what will help people in my community from finding themselves in the Calgary drop-in centre?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify, the HEP fund is not coming to an end. There have been some administrative changes that we discussed in the Assembly in the last session. Those, of course, followed a review of the program. As you indicated, hon. member, Employment and Immigration and this department are working together to administer the fund in the best way possible so that people are successful in staying in their homes through the rent supplement program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister guarantee that people who need emergency funding will receive the funding they need and not be placed on a waiting list?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, we did announce this a week ago. I'm going to ask the Minister of Employment and Immigration to comment on the emergent funding available for the first month's rent and for a damage deposit.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, basically, Albertans who need help to pay their rent shortfall must contact our local housing authority, but in between we do provide some emergency assistance to them so that they're prevented from being placed outside.

Mr. Hehr: Well, to be honest, that really didn't sound overly reassuring to me.

Anyway, that fund was billed as an essential part of the province's solution of the housing crisis. Will the minister acknowledge that implementing even a temporary rent cap would have saved taxpayers approximately \$77 million last year alone and thousands of struggling Albertans their dignity?

Mrs. Fritz: The answer is no, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't agree with that. In fact, the HEP fund has been very successful in assisting Albertans with staying housed when they're most in need. It's an emergent fund. It remains in place through our rent supplement program. That's where the rent shortfall program is; it's just simply changed administratively. But the fund is in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last couple of weeks in travels through my constituency a number of my constituents raised questions regarding the government's policy on large-scale land assembly and its relationship to the establishment of routes for transmission lines. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. Is the ministry considering any policy changes that would result in government acquiring land on behalf of power companies for the siting of transmission lines?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. This province already has a process in place through the Alberta Utilities Commission for the siting of new power line routes, and the process includes public consultation. My ministry's interest in acquisition of properties is

for transportation utility corridors, like the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: is the minister considering any policy changes that would result in government acquiring land on behalf of private pipeline companies that would impact the applicability of the Surface Rights Act?

Mr. Hayden: Again, Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. Our province has a process in place for the routing of private company pipelines also, and that's done through the Energy Resources Conservation Board. They establish the routes for provincial pipelines. The National Energy Board establishes routes for interprovincial lines. The Surface Rights Act applies to all privately held land.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final supplemental to the same minister: is the minister considering any policy change that would enable government to acquire land on behalf of a power company, for example, for a nuclear facility?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. As stated earlier, my ministry acquires land for large-scale public projects, such as transportation utility corridors, not on behalf of any private companies.

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

2:10

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 1 in New Brunswick rules will come into force restricting children's ATV use for safety purposes. These restrictions include limiting the engine size that those younger than 16 may use and a restriction to closed courses for those younger than 14. To the Minister of Transportation: will the minister be considering similar restrictions in Alberta?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always reviewing safety features of all types of things in Alberta, especially when we're using any type of motor vehicle. Off-highway vehicles are used for a number of things, and we have laws in place right now that if they're under 14 years old, they have to be supervised by an adult. At this point in time they haven't come forward, but we're looking at some helmet legislation and a few other things. I don't know exactly what we're going to be doing towards what another province has done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister should stop looking at helmets. He should bring in a law.

A recent report to the government of Manitoba stated that ATVs should be banned from some public lands. This government, however, is exploring increasing the amount of access ATV users get. To the Minister of Transportation again: at a time when other jurisdictions are considering restrictions on ATV use, why is this government moving completely in the opposite direction?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely disagree with what he says about moving in a completely different direction. Right now on our public lands most of those areas are set up for proper trail use. They're also set up where we change areas. That actually falls under the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. But I've been involved with some of the constituency associations that have approached us, and they're working under very good stewardship and land management.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another concern highlighted in the Manitoba report was the role of ATVs' exhaust systems in causing forest fires. To the Minister of Transportation: given the threat of forest fires to human and animal life as well as property and the high cost of fighting those fires, why is the government considering increasing the amount of land these vehicles can use?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation doesn't look after that side of it. But I will tell you that there are certain restrictions that people have to use. They use spark arresters on a lot of these vehicles. We always have to live with common sense, that I sometimes realize the other side has a problem with, but common sense is the answer here, and if it's dry, we should live by that and manage ourselves properly.

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

Energy Conservation

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday I attended and spoke at the very interesting Go Green Eco Expo at the University of Alberta Butterdome. Many of the displays dealt with conservation, recycling, and, in particular, innovation. To the Minister of Environment: what programs or initiatives has the government implemented to encourage Albertans to conserve more and reduce waste?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a timely question because as all members are aware, we have initiated a program of Too Good to Waste, and this program is really leading the nation when it comes to some of the success that we've had with respect to beverage containers and tires, in particular. As everyone knows, as of July 1 we'll be the first jurisdiction in Canada to include milk containers in our recycling. We've also had very successful programs for electronics, paint, and used oil, and we'll be moving into packaging and waste paper in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Green builders focus on waste reduction at the source. What is being done to encourage all builders to conserve and recycle?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, construction and demolition waste is about a third of all of the waste that ends up in our landfills in Alberta. Clearly, this is unacceptable. There are ways that we can work to dramatically reduce that. At present approximately 20 per cent of construction and demolition waste is recycled, and 80 per cent goes into landfills. We'd like to reverse those numbers. We've got an MOU in place with the construction industry to begin that process immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Smaller municipalities are having a tough time developing the critical mass necessary to make conservation programs sustainable. What is the government doing to help these municipalities?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, to some degree I think we're the victims of our own success. We've done such a good job of encouraging people to bring their recyclables back to depots that now, particularly with the economic reality that we find ourselves in, the cost of dealing with that recycled material, the value of that material has diminished to the point where it is getting difficult for some of the smaller programs to be successful. I've been working with the Recycling Council and encouraging them. I know they're working extremely hard to find new and alternative ways of using some of this material that comes in through recycling depots.

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

Achievement Tests for Students

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 503, which calls for replacing provincial achievement tests with diagnostic tests, passed with a resounding majority three weeks ago. According to the Education minister's comments during the debate, it seems that the main hurdle to getting rid of these tests is to figure out what we should replace them with. Let me save the minister some time. We need to replace them with diagnostic tests. Considering that it seems to be merely a lack of knowledge that is delaying getting rid of these achievements tests, has the minister begun to look at diagnostic testing methods, and if so when can we expect a report?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member should know that the department has been looking at and working on diagnostic testing for some time. There are projects in place to look at diagnostic testing, particularly, I believe, starting with math at the grade 3 level. This is not a replacement for PAT 3s. Diagnostic testing is a testing process which will assist with the learning process for grade 3 students and for all students that those resources are applied to, a very useful tool but not an accountability tool. That's one of the learning tools.

The PAT 3 tests serve a different function. They also should be used as part of the learning process. They are also an accountability process, which is very necessary to be able to report to Albertans that the significant investment that they make in education is worth while.

Mr. Chase: Most importantly, Albertans that need to be reported to are the parents of those children who are suffering through the grade 3 SAT tests.

Although the minister has stated that the primary goal of these tests should be to benefit students, the minister also acknowledges that these tests do not help students succeed long term. Why has the minister not already taken action to replace these tests with tests that would benefit students, such as early diagnostic testing?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. member confuses the purpose of the two tests. Diagnostic testing is a very appropriate tool to be used to

assist teachers in determining what areas of concern they have with respect to student learning. The achievement tests that are administered at grades 3, 6, and 9 and the departmental test at grade 12 are to help determine whether the system is working and to be able to report to the public that we have a strong educational system. People come from all over the world, 25 countries in the last two to three years, to look at our system in Alberta. One of the pillars, one of the strengths of the system is the accountability testing that we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Diagnostic tests allow improvement from the students whereas end of the line SAT tests do not improve education. They're simply a tool for the government to justify its purposes.

When can members of this Assembly and all Albertans expect the minister to get rid of the costly and ineffective grade 3 provincial achievement tests?

Mr. Hancock: As I indicated to the House and at all times in the whole discussion around provincial achievement tests, we are looking at our assessment processes. We are always prepared to review what we're doing. We've been talking with education stakeholders about the assessment processes. I was just in London in January and met with a group that's looking at assessment of 21st century skills. It's always prudent to update the way you assess both learning and the system, and we'll continue to do that. I see no immediate change in our process, but we're looking at what we're doing, and we're always willing to improve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:20 Long-term Care Funding

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is bent on bringing more private U.S.-style health care to Alberta. That's why they've refused to create the 600 new long-term care beds that they promised last election, and that's why we have dangerous and growing hospital backlogs. In Strathmore they broke a promise to create 100 new beds and are leaving seniors there without proper care. To the minister of health: why won't you admit that new long-term care beds are the solution to hospital backlogs and make sure they're funded in this budget?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, clearly, as I've said in this House on many occasions, new long-term care facilities are part of the answer, not the answer. We currently have in this province a number of facilities that are either well under construction or nearing completion of construction. Some of them are fully funded by Alberta Health. Some are joint projects with the nonprofit or private sector. That's the model that we will continue to follow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the health minister's neglect has caused a 50 per cent increase in Calgarians waiting for long-term care beds in the last year. His failure to create new beds has caused 23 per cent more people to sleep in hallways, surgery wait-lists to grow 18 per cent, and ER wait times to grow to nearly 17 hours. Why won't you make sure that this budget solves this crisis and properly fund the 600 long-term care beds that were promised in the last election?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the two members of the NDP opposition – I don't know if they were in the budget lock-up or what – seem to have some advance knowledge; at least, they seem to think they do. I'd be quite prepared to wait and see what the finance minister actually does deliver this afternoon before I go running off making a whole bunch of wild and crazy comments like I just heard.

Ms Notley: Well, all I can do is wait and see.

We were promised 600 new beds a year ago, and we still don't have them. All we need to do to whittle down these wait times in the ER is to keep that promise for the new beds. Alberta seniors desperately need these new beds, but instead the minister is intent on privatizing them. Why won't you tell us now whether you're going to fund each of those 600 new long-term care beds you promised?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as in my earlier answer I think we've got some 600 long-term care beds currently under construction. I know this particular party has some difficulty understanding that it doesn't happen overnight. If you make a decision to construct long-term care beds, there's a period of time that you have to hammer nails and put together bricks before it actually becomes a long-term care facility. I think that if the hon. member will just hold her fire, she'll see, I hope, that we've got some initiatives in the budget that are going to address some of the issues she raised.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Old-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Access to Alberta TrailNet Land

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a recent meeting of the Cosway Adjacent Landowners group it was alleged that the Alberta government was responsible for the loss of certain rights and privileges that adjacent landowners had prior to abandoned rail lines being turned over to Trans Canada Trail and then subsequently to Alberta TrailNet. This was stated because the Alberta government allegedly did not uphold caveats that were in place prior to this land transfer. Could the minister of tourism please tell me who is actually responsible for the loss of these landowner rights such as access and fencing prior to this land transfer?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member's question is actually quite rooted in history. The railway owned this land from somewhere around the early 1800s. When they abandoned the railway rights, they gave these lands to the Trans Canada Trail Foundation, who, in turn, gave those lands to different provincial and territorial groups, in this case Alberta TrailNet. The government of Alberta had no role or involvement in this land transfer. That being said, I understand that Alberta TrailNet has offered to sign an agreement with the landowners so that they can continue to move livestock and equipment across the trail.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for that answer. Regardless of who is responsible, to the same minister: is the Alberta government doing anything to help restore those rights and privileges that were lost?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the transfer of the railway lands to the Trans Canada Trail group was under federal jurisdiction. The Alberta government did not have a role in the land transaction which the hon. member refers to. As I mentioned earlier, I understand that

there is an access agreement with Alberta TrailNet that they sign with landowners, and it allows landowners to get to their land on either side of the trail whenever they want.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thanks. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the Alberta government has gifted Alberta TrailNet \$1.2 million as well as provided an annual grant of \$61,104, will the government also set up a similar parallel fund with equal annual payments to compensate landowners for their losses and their legal expenses?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government does support the development of recreation trails throughout the province because we want Albertans to be more active. The number one activity in this province today is walking. These are walking trails, and some regions with these trails often find them to be interesting and to enhance their tourism. The issue that the member has raised has to be worked out between two private landowners and Alberta TrailNet. I am prepared to ask my department officials to arrange mediation between the landowners and Alberta TrailNet if the member and those groups think that this could be helpful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Fiscal Responsibility Legislation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's wasteful spending habits have now forced it to plan to repeal the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Included in that plan is a proposal to discontinue the \$7.4 billion capital account. My first question is to the minister of finance. What will happen to the \$7.4 billion that's in that fund now?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have tabled the new Fiscal Responsibility Act. We will be discussing it more fully this afternoon, when I come forward with the budget, and getting into a more detailed discussion in this House, no doubt. Essentially, the purpose of providing that piece of legislation is to accommodate today's realities. We've been dealing with surplus budgets under the previous Fiscal Responsibility Act. Now we're dealing with a new situation with a deficit.

You know, I'm glad that the hon. member asked me a question because today I've heard criticism about what this government is doing with the budget. Not once in this House has anybody ever suggested a program we should cut for Albertans, not once.

Mr. MacDonald: Your food and drink for one. That's a program that could be cut and should be cut.

Now, again, to the minister of finance: why are there seven exclusions in the calculation of the government's accumulated debt in this proposed plan?

Mr. Horner: He's debating the bill in question period.

Ms Evans: Well, yes. Mr. Speaker, this is not a place for debate of the bill. I would suggest we can do that through the questions that would properly come when we're debating the bill. In this particular period of time I think it would be very useful to have the preamble, the speech first. Out of courtesy today to the hon. members opposite I gave a very succinct introduction of the bill, and I'd be pleased to amplify on it later.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can understand why the minister of finance is reluctant to have this bill discussed in public because it certainly is a poor reflection on the budget of this government. You've spent far too much money wastefully.

Again, what is the government's accumulated debt projection going to be under this plan?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would like to defer my comments to a later time. Then I would provide a more full amplification.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Agricultural Support Overpayments

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that Alberta livestock producers today are facing difficult times. Recently this government distributed \$300 million to eligible producers through the AFRP 2 program. Most producers received their second instalment this spring. While the majority of producers appreciate the support provided by this government – it's more than any other jurisdiction in Canada – some producers subsequently received a notice of overpayment advising them that they had to repay some of these funds. Many of these producers are my constituents and are concerned. So my question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: why did these overpayments occur, and what is being done to help these producers with repayment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly understand that this is a frustrating situation for a small number of producers. AFSC prioritized the processing of the 2007 AgriStability payments for hog producers. Due to an administrative error, unfortunately, some of the first claims did not count for AFRP 2 as eligible income. In addition, in some cases inaccurate information was provided to AFSC by the producers themselves, which resulted in payments certainly being higher than they should have been.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister is: what is being done to help these producers to deal with these repayment issues?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, AFSC staff have been working with the individual producers involved and the producer groups to identify the best way to deal with the overpayments. In fact, just last week AFSC representatives met with Alberta Pork, and the repayment options that we offered them certainly exceeded their expectations. This includes an interest-free period until December 31, 2010. Producers also have the option of transferring any remaining overpayment amount to a low-interest loan and using future AgriStability payments to offset the overpayment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: how many of the affected producers have been contacted, and are they being contacted individually?

Mr. Groeneveld: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, all of the producers at this time who had overpayments received a letter from AFSC earlier this month explaining the situation. In addition, AFSC staff have spoken personally to the majority of the producers and walked them through the individual cases and options that they have. AFSC is committed to working with individual producers and producer groups to sort out the issue. I would certainly encourage any affected producers with questions to contact AFSC to work through their individual cases.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dunmore versus Ontario, a Supreme Court of Canada decision in 2001, explicitly stated that a law blocking farm workers' rights to unionize violates section 2(d) of the Charter. The Supreme Court specifically also noted that the only province other than Ontario to have such a provision is Alberta. Ontario has now, I believe, changed that. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Is it this government's policy to follow Supreme Court rulings or not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although there are some rulings there, it's my understanding that some of the provinces are appealing that particular ruling and are moving through that particular process. In Alberta currently farm and ranch employers and employees are excluded from all coverage under the Labour Relations Code.

Dr. Taft: I didn't get much confidence from that. It's probably news to the minister, but you can't appeal a ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada.

My next question will be to the Minister of Justice. Does the Minister of Justice consider it appropriate that the government of Alberta is ignoring the clear ruling of the highest court in Canada on the right of farm workers to unionize?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not in this House speak to that question and whether or not something may or may not be appropriate. What I will say is that this government takes the responsibility that we have with respect to labour rights very seriously. We have heard in this House on a daily basis exactly what the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Employment and Immigration have said with respect to farm workers' rights, and we'll continue to follow that strategy.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier yesterday said that he suspected that "in any operation if the people that work want to gather and vote on the right to join a union, they have that option." But as the Minister of Employment and Immigration knows or, at least, ought to know, Alberta's Labour Relations Code explicitly blocks paid farm workers from that right. So back to that minister. The Premier stated yesterday the intuitive position that paid farm workers should be able to unionize. Will the minister therefore amend the law to bring it into line with the Supreme Court ruling and with what the Premier himself thought was already the case? Just do the right thing.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I know that some groups support extending legislative protection to farms and ranches or their employees. There are no current plans to amend the code at this particular time. As I have indicated in the past, any changes to the legislation would require a lot of significant consultation with the farm and ranch community itself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the past few weeks a number of seniors have been approaching me regarding the proposed changes to the seniors' drug plan. I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness has said that elements of the plan are under review. Can the minister indicate what the timeline is for proposing modifications to the plan?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct, as are a number of other members, that we have had representations by a number of seniors in Alberta relative to the program. We are looking at a number of modifications that I hope within a very short period of time we can take to caucus. We then would want to ensure that we have a discussion with Albertans around those modifications. I can't put an exact time frame on when we would look at publicly announcing anything but certainly before this session is concluded.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Many of my constituents have expressed concern that due to economic changes world-wide their savings have been impacted, and therefore they find it difficult to pay the proposed deductibles. How does the current global economic situation impact the proposal for the seniors' drug plan?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think that one of the really critical issues that has evolved over the past six months is that the world has changed. However, there have been a number of other suggestions relative to taxable income versus total income. There have also been suggestions that we should look at a July implementation date so that we can use more current year tax returns. Those are the kinds of things that we're going to be looking at, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that those in need that can't afford the drug programs are looked after but that there is an ability to pay as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. Finally, to the same minister: would moving towards a universal pharmaceutical program for all Albertans, not just seniors, be something that the minister would consider?

Mr. Liepert: Well, we have a form of universal through a Blue Cross plan that we offer through government. However, I did notice that yesterday in the House the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was asking about a universal pharmacare program for Albertans. You know, as has become kind of typical, one day it's that we should be saving and not spending; the next day it's that we should be spending. I should note, Mr. Speaker, that the universal pharmacare program as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would cost about a billion dollars annually.

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order? Okay.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Elk Antler Velvet

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Chronic wasting disease is a fatal, contagious illness of deer and elk. What is known is that it is spread from gamed, ranched deer and elk into wild populations. It has also been shown recently that chronic wasting disease can be found in elk antler velvet, which is used as a nutritional supplement in Alberta and around the world. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister agree with the World Health Organization recommendation that all products, including velvet, from animals known to be infected with any prion disease should be excluded from the human food chain?

Mr. Liepert: It isn't something that has come to the top of my pile of the to-do list, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: if the current mode of transmission for chronic wasting disease from animal to animal is not known, does the minister not agree that every precaution should be taken to avoid human contact with potentially infected elk and deer?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that this is something that I have heard discussed at caucus through the minister of sustainable resources. I think the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is an elk rancher, and there are a number of rural members here, but I have to confess that it isn't something that I can actually make a reasonable answer to in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My last question, then, is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Is the department prepared to compensate game ranchers to help them phase out of this industry?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly not. I would like to inform the member that Alberta has mandatory testing and import protocols in place to address CWD concerns for farmed elk and deer. It's interesting to note that Alberta's only case of CWD in farmed elk was in March of 2002, and we've tested over 50,000 captive cervids for CWD since 1996.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today.

2:40 Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a return that I referred to yesterday, which is some dozens of comments from parents and students through the AARC program, that I would encourage the Member for Calgary-Varsity to read.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated June 10, 2008. It's a letter that I received from Elections Alberta regarding the conduct of the March 8 election in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The second letter is a letter that is dated June 25, 2008. It's from myself, from Edmonton-Gold Bar, to Lorne R. Gibson, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Alberta. Again, it is more questions regarding the general election in Edmonton-Gold Bar in March 2008.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do we have a point of order?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, we do.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under our standing orders 23(h) and (i). I would like to bring attention to the House and particularly the minister of health – hopefully, he's had an opportunity to read the prescription drug coverage private member's statement that I gave yesterday. It's on page 520 of *Alberta Hansard*, for those who are interested. It's clear that what he originally said here in question period is untrue. It is not reflected in the comments from the private member's statement. Nowhere did I say any of the things that the hon. minister has suggested in question period. This what I did say:

The Official Opposition [has] made many good suggestions recently to extend prescription drug coverage in Alberta to all citizens. We need a more extensive public pharmacare program based on models in other Canadian provinces to help reduce rapidly rising pharmaceutical costs and to ensure proper access to medications.

I could go on further, but I will not in light of the time.

I did suggest that all hon. members of the Assembly read a report, again, by an associate professor of economics from the University of Calgary, Professor Hollis. This report is titled *Generic Drug Pricing and Procurement: A Policy for Alberta*. In that policy there is noted that "the Government of Alberta spent approximately \$887 million on prescription drugs through community pharmacies while private expenditures . . . totalled \$980 million."

The figures that the minister quoted were not from this hon. member or from any of my colleagues, and I would ask that the hon. minister please retract those statements that he made earlier in question period.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no point of order here. I'd have to check the Blues, but what I did say is that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was proposing an extensive public pharmacare program based on other models in Canadian provinces. I said that we ran the numbers, and it's going to cost about a billion dollars, so I would suggest that there's no point of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I draw your attention to *Beauchesne's* 494, where I read under Acceptance of the Word of a Member.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

Such appears to be the case.

The House will now go into recess until 2:59 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:44 p.m. to 3 p.m.]

3:00

Orders of the Day**Transmittal of Estimates**

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Administrator, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Please rise in the gallery.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

As well, the Administrator transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Government Motions

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 12, I wish to table the 2009-10 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2009-10 government estimates. Also being tabled for the information of the Legislative Assembly are business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the Government Accountability Act. In addition, the Government Accountability Act requires that the government at the same time table the government's business plan and consolidated fiscal and capital plans. The hon. Premier will table the government's strategic business plan, and the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise will table the consolidated fiscal and capital plans.

12. Mr. Snelgrove moved:

Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Administrator, the 2009-10 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply and that the message from Her Honour the Administrator, the 2009-10 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply following consideration by the policy field committees.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the government of Alberta strategic business plan as required under section 7 of the Government Accountability Act. The strategic business plan sets out the government's vision and long-term strategic plan. It also includes the government's three-year business plan, which outlines the government's goals, strategies, and measures necessary to track results over the next three years.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 13, I wish to table the government's consolidated fiscal and capital plans for Budget 2009. The consolidated fiscal plan is required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act, and the consolidated capital plan is required under section 7.1 of the same act.

Budget Address

13. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Ms Evans: Alberta has long been a land of promise, a land of opportunity. To achieve that promise and to realize those opportunities, our ancestors had to overcome obstacles that are unthinkable to most of us today. They met challenges head-on and survived and emerged stronger than before. Today Albertans are facing new challenges, complex problems, many imposed from beyond our borders.

We have watched with trepidation as markets, credit, and commodity prices have fallen, and the world's economy has plunged into a recession. We have seen major international financial institutions fail. Moreover, we have learned of the impact on far too many people: their mortgages, their homes, and their livelihoods lost. Here in Alberta we have been affected – it's true – but far less than the others. We are facing the current global recession well positioned to come out of this economic storm stronger and with greater potential for both our people and for our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is strong because our government has invested in the core services which maintain our quality of life. Alberta is strong because we introduced measures to ensure the orderly development of our province, with plans for climate change, energy development, and homelessness to name just a few. Alberta is strong because our government has been investing in infrastructure, some 26 billion dollars over the past five years to build schools, hospitals, seniors' housing, and roads. Alberta is strong because we have been saving money. We have paid off an accumulated debt of some 23 billion dollars, and we have added about \$25 billion to our savings, including nearly \$17 billion set aside to help us cope with unexpected drops in government revenue. Alberta is strong because Alberta's fiscal plan has helped us maintain the lowest taxes in the country. Alberta is strong, and the job of this government and the people of Alberta is to build on our strengths.

This budget, our road map, is about creating a province where people are confident about the future for their children, for their businesses, and for themselves. We believe it balances the necessary social investments and fiscal responsibility to ensure that Alberta remains a place with a vibrant and competitive economy. Our plan reflects the holistic view of the principled leadership and entrepreneurship of the people of Alberta.

Allow me to explain. Our government faces the same issues that many Albertans and their families are facing. Our income is lower and our long-term savings have lost value due to falling markets. To improve our opportunities, we look at how a family manages when a steady stream of income is not there. Like most families we plan our budgets based on what we earn, what we need to save, and how much we need to spend. As you know, our families face many challenges and changes as they grow, and they accommodate those challenges and changes. We set short-term goals for saving, putting aside cash in a savings account for emergencies, and we set it aside for home renovations. We set long-term goals, and we save for our retirement. When money is short, we watch our dollars closely and focus our spending on the highest priority areas. When there are difficult times, just as a family would, we access our short-term savings to make ends meet. We will not spend our long-term savings to get us through these tough times.

Mr. Speaker, our government is realistic about the current financial and fiscal situation. Alberta's economy is forecast to contract by 2 per cent in 2009. We know that commodity prices will be much lower than they were a year ago, resulting in lower energy

and tax revenues to meet government obligations. In 2009-10 our revenues will decline by almost \$4 billion.

We also know that Alberta grew by 91,000 people in 2008. This growth resulted in increased demands: demands for more teachers, more health care professionals, more police officers, more social workers, more schools, more hospitals, and more roads. We know that all of this impacts Alberta's bottom line. In Budget 2009 operating spending will be limited to a 3.7 per cent increase, roughly the equivalent of population growth plus inflation.

3:10

We also know that government must maintain its support for the economy. Albertans could experience even more turmoil if we fail to do so. To that end, we will be investing \$23.2 billion on infrastructure over the next three years, \$7.2 billion for 2009-10 alone. That is about \$2,200 per person and more than double the per capita average anywhere else in Canada.

After balancing the need for more programs and services with the reality of our fiscal situation, we must supplement our revenues with \$4.7 billion from our sustainability fund. Fortunately, several years ago our government created short-term savings accounts and set aside funds to protect programs and services for Albertans in the event of severe economic hardship. Now, Mr. Speaker, that time is here. Now our government must be able to act and respond to these changing times. We will and we are.

The current fiscal framework met our needs when we had surplus budgets, but it lacks the flexibility we need today, so we've introduced a new framework that increases our ability to meet current budget pressures with rules to ensure that there is responsible spending. For example, deficits will be permitted only if there are sufficient savings in the sustainability fund to offset them. Borrowing will be allowed for capital purposes but not for operating purposes. Operating expense increases during the year are limited to 1 per cent of the total ministry operating budgets.

Mr. Speaker, it's important for Albertans to know that these changes in the fiscal framework do not affect our heritage savings trust fund. We will not compromise the hard work and investment of Albertans, nor will we sacrifice the dollars we have saved for the future of our children. We will, however, curb our costs.

Our fiscal austerity starts at the very top. Pay hikes have been suspended for MLAs and political staff this year, and the Alberta government will suspend bonuses for senior government staff in 2009-10. A further \$215 million will be found this year through a value review of government operations. Unless our fiscal situation improves beyond our forecast, we will take further corrective action of \$2 billion by 2010. When the economy turns around and our revenues improve, we will put surplus dollars back into the sustainability fund with a goal of restoring it to the approximation of 25 to 30 per cent of our operating budget.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans work hard, they pay their taxes, and they volunteer in their communities. Many Albertans are facing the dual task of raising children and looking after elderly parents. These economic times increase the pressure on families. Budget 2009 will not add to that burden. We will maintain and enhance the services Albertans need. We will keep taxes low, and we will make investments to keep Albertans working. We will also ensure that we continue to provide for the needs of our most vulnerable. Our operating increase this year is focused on the highest priorities for families, with more than three-quarters of it directed to children, to education, to health care for seniors and for persons with disabilities.

Budget 2009 provides a 4.2 per cent increase for Children and Youth Services, including funding to increase the number of foster

homes and to support programs for children with disabilities. We will follow through on our commitment to create 14,000 child care spaces by 2011.

Our budget provides a 5.8 per cent increase for persons with developmental disabilities and a 10.2 per cent increase for the AISH program. That includes a hundred dollars in the maximum monthly benefit to AISH recipients to assist them in meeting their expenses. With an 11.9 per cent increase for seniors' programs we will raise the maximum monthly Alberta seniors' benefit by \$40 for singles and \$60 for couples.

Claire Michaud from St. Paul is with us today, one of 138,000 seniors in the province who rely on the Alberta seniors' benefit. She receives monthly payments that complement what she receives from the federal government, and she has access to optical and dental programs. The 17 per cent increase that she will see in her monthly benefits will help her to relieve her mind from worrying about expenses, and then she'll have time to focus on the things that really matter, her grandchildren and the many activities that she enjoys. Thank you for coming from St. Paul, Claire.

Mr. Speaker, housing costs remain a significant burden for many Albertans, and Budget 2009 will help. We will build additional affordable supportive living units, 1,200 of them, for our seniors across the province over the next three years. We will provide \$468 million over three years as part of our commitment to complete 11,000 affordable housing units – well done – and we will provide \$400 million over three years to develop 2,700 housing units for the homeless and a further \$41 million to create 3,600 spaces for emergency shelters, a very good-news story.

Our government recognizes that education is the cornerstone of individual and community success. For 2009 operating support for K to 12 education will be \$5.4 billion, an increase of 3.2 per cent. Most of these funds will go directly to school boards to address growth, reduce class sizes, and operate and maintain our schools. We'll provide \$3.1 billion to our postsecondary education system this year. This includes a promised 6 per cent increase in base operating funds to support colleges, universities, and technical schools.

The Alberta government is committed to maintaining a strong public health care system, one that is accessible, sustainable, and offers high-quality care. In Budget 2009 the government will spend \$12.6 billion to operate the health care system, an increase of \$558 million. That alone represents more than 40 per cent of this government's total operating increase that we are spending this year, and we will be doing this even as we receive fewer dollars on a per capita basis from the federal government than any other place in Canada. The demands of our health system are placing increasing pressure on other essential programs. We will engage Albertans in building a more sustainable system to ensure that health care will be there when we need it in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the impact of the global recession on our economy has extracted a very human toll. Our unemployment rate is forecast to average 5.8 per cent this year and could average 6.5 per cent in 2010. We will spend \$164 million to enhance career and employment training. These programs help Albertans who lose their jobs to upgrade their skills and get them working again.

Budget 2009 also strengthens our commitment to protect our communities. Our safe communities strategy will be bolstered by 200 more law enforcement officers over the next two years and, along with that, more Crown prosecutors. Mr. Speaker, we will enhance addiction prevention and treatment as well.

Albertans lead the country when it comes to looking out for others through their charitable giving. That has never been more important

than it is right now. To encourage Albertans to continue, we are giving them an opportunity through \$20 million in the community spirit program. That successful program is continuing. This program provides grants to charities and nonprofit organizations based on the amount of dollars donated by Albertans. This complements the \$80 million that government provides in the form of the charitable donation tax credit, which allows Albertans a tax credit of 50 cents on every dollar that they donate over \$200.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the issues of energy security, environmental protection, and economic recovery are interrelated. Our Premier has provided leadership so that we have addressed these vital issues in a collaborative manner.

Alberta is a resource province, and our sustained economic prosperity, indeed our country's sustained economic prosperity relies on our ability to achieve clean energy production and wise energy use. Our clean energy commitment is demonstrated through the \$2 billion we have committed to support research and development of carbon capture and storage. We will provide the first \$100 million this year for that particular issue and \$700 million over the two subsequent years to keep our commitment to CCS storage.

We will reduce greenhouse gases from vehicles by spending \$520 million through to 2011-12, increasing use of public transit through Green TRIP initiatives. A further \$40 million over the next two years will help us complete other conservation and energy initiatives. This includes funding for a consumer rebate program that will encourage Albertans to spend on greener and more energy efficient products and services. Our land-use framework will receive \$15 million to support the first two of seven regional plans, engaging people with common interests in responsible management of our land and natural resources.

Our government recognizes that building schools, hospitals, roads, and other public infrastructure is not only necessary to meet the needs of Albertans; it is also an effective way to support the economy and create jobs. Indeed, every \$1 billion spent on public infrastructure supports 11,600 jobs which directly benefit Albertans and Alberta communities.

Mr. Speaker, our \$7.2 billion infrastructure investment this year will support more than 80,000 jobs. These jobs run right across the economy, from construction to manufacturing, finance to retail, accommodation to food services. This investment in infrastructure is a win-win for Albertans both as workers and as owners of our fiscal resource. We can take advantage of lower concrete and steel prices as well as increased availability of labour to keep Albertans working and producing more results.

I mentioned already that we will be spending \$23.2 billion in capital over the next three years, and here is how: \$2.9 billion of our capital is devoted to building, expanding, and maintaining health care facilities in communities across Alberta; \$1.7 billion for 54 new and replacement schools to accommodate and benefit 31,000 students; \$1.2 billion for postsecondary facilities to provide spaces for more than 16,000 adult learners.

We will provide municipalities with \$5.6 billion for their own capital expenses. This includes \$3.2 billion provided through the municipal sustainability initiative and the Alberta municipal infrastructure program. Another \$715 million has been identified for waste-water infrastructure, water infrastructure, and irrigation rehabilitation.

Safe and efficient highways are needed to support our crucial industries of agriculture, energy, and forestry as they produce the goods and services that Alberta sells to the world. Mr. Speaker, \$5.8 billion will be spent over the next three years, including these

highways: construction of Calgary and Edmonton ring roads, further twinning of highway 63 to Fort McMurray, replacing the highway 22 bridge across the North Saskatchewan River [some applause] and 1,200 kilometres of paving and rehabilitation across Alberta. There's strong enthusiasm for that.

Budget 2009 also includes stimulus initiatives to encourage the oil and gas industry to invest in drilling new wells. We believe this is a wise investment because in Alberta each new oil or gas well drilled supports 120 jobs. These are not just statistics, Mr. Speaker. These are people, real people like Darcy McCoy. Darcy is a rig manager for Stoneham Drilling. He works for a small drilling contractor out of Calgary, and currently that contractor has 11 out of 19 rigs drilling in Alberta. That's good news.

Despite the economic slowdown and low energy prices energy companies continue to invest in exploration in Alberta, and they're hiring companies like Stoneham to do the drilling. For Darcy and his co-workers that means continued employment and, in his words, "food on the table" for their families. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Stoneham's activity in this province alone will result in food on the table for hundreds of Alberta families.

Alberta's economy also relies heavily on agriculture, which must compete globally. This year livestock producers will benefit from a \$55 million investment in the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, which will develop markets, initiate and increase innovation, and improve management of the supply chain.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of people come to Alberta to celebrate our arts, to enjoy our natural environment, our festivals, our multiculturalism, and our hospitality. We will support our tourism industry with the creation of the Travel Alberta corporation, which will market Alberta to the world with a budget of \$57 million.

So what will Albertans pay? There will be increases in liquor markups and tobacco tax. However, Mr. Speaker, our government understands the need to keep the dollars in the pockets of Alberta families. Albertans can rest assured they will continue to pay the lowest taxes in Canada by far. We aim to keep it that way.

Indexing personal, spousal, and other tax credits will save Albertans \$115 million this year. Recipients of the Alberta family employment tax credit will receive an increase to offset inflation. In 2009-10 Albertans and Alberta businesses will no longer pay and will have the benefit of no health premiums, saving at least a billion dollars each year. We will raise the small-business threshold to \$500,000 for small-business owners in order that they may be motivated to grow their business still further.

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, I noted our overall revenue would decline nearly \$4 billion in 2009-10. We believe, as most private-sector forecasters do, that we're in a period of short-term decline. As energy prices and global demand for natural resources increase, we expect our revenues to grow and to begin again early next year, but it will take time for them to fully recover, so we're forecasting deficits over the following two years as well. We do expect a return to surplus budgets in 2012-13.

Our government has had a strong understanding of business principles and a passion for maintaining and improving our position on the world stage. We believe that now is the time to promote Alberta. We're proud of what we have, and we want global partners to come here and research, develop, and refine new technologies, new industries, new opportunities, and new economies.

3:30

Budget 2009 reflects our belief in all Albertans, our belief in our province, and our belief in the future. With our Premier's leadership we will seize the opportunity to manage the issues of today. We can, and we will. This budget describes our mission to manage our

spending, use our savings wisely, build on our capacity, and market Alberta to the world. It keeps Albertans working and provides prudent tax measures.

Alberta will continue to be a place for people of courage and determination to dream big, to embrace diversity, and to be strong. We will keep moving forward with wisdom from the past and confidence for our future. We have hope. We are building on a solid foundation, and we plan to build on strength for Alberta and make an even stronger Alberta tomorrow for your families and for mine.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for this very optimistic budget. We look forward to vigorous debate in this House. At this point I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with tradition I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:32 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

Issue 21

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Deputy Official Opposition Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 8, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us in all of our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some great guests joining us today from Sainte Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic school in Innisfail. We have 22 grade 6 students, and accompanying them are two teachers, Miss Jessica Major and Miss Kelsi da Costa, and two parent-teacher helpers, Mrs. Sue Haddow and Mrs. Phyllis Towle. I'm pleased that they could make their way up to Edmonton today and view the proceedings. I had a picture taken with them a little earlier. They were very, very good at answering questions, and I'm sure they'll be great leaders some day. I would like them to rise – I don't see them in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. Edmonton-Manning first, please.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to welcome students from the York academic elementary school from my riding of Edmonton-Manning. These 55 bright and young grade 6 students along with parent helpers and their teachers, Miss Stradin and Mrs. Schenk, have toured our Legislature and learned a lot about our building and the provincial government. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Sorry about that, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. I was momentarily mesmerized by the comment from the Minister of Transportation about the ability to answer questions.

The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Members of this Legislative Assembly government employees from the Employment and Immigration division. This dedicated team works to make sound immigration policies and programs to attract people with the right skills at the right time. Their work also helps to assess educational qualifications so that newcomers have the best options to make a successful start to their careers. Well-settled and well-integrated newcomers form a solid foundation to a strong and enriched Alberta. It is my privilege to welcome this brilliant team of professionals, who work to make our province the best place to live and raise a family. I would ask my guests to rise so that we can give them a very warm welcome to our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a couple of gentlemen that I had lunch with today. Mr. Randy Kerr and – I can't see him – Mr. Ken Lueers, senior vice-president of western Conoco-Phillips, had a chance to meet the Minister of Advanced Education and our President of the Treasury Board today. They were there to explain some of the goings-on in our riding and across the province of their operations in southern Alberta and other points. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present to you and through you to all members of this Assembly directors of the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta. They should all be in the members' gallery. Directors, again, of the Parkinson Society, please stand: Myles Rusak, Ernie Yaskowich, Doug Darling, Bruce Strachan, and Bob Head. We are also joined by clients and supporters of the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta: Dave and Diane Scott, David Morris, Laurine Fillo, Beverly Head, Sarah Rusak. Dr. Wayne Martin and Marguerite Wieler are here from the movement disorders clinic in Calgary. We are also joined by Ray Williams, the CEO of The Parkinson's Society of Alberta, who is accompanied by director Sandy Brodie and client Ken Rows. I would like you to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very good, long-time friend and business acquaintance of mine, Mr. Salim Shajani. Salim and I have had an acquaintance and friendship getting on for three decades, just a very productive family for the province of Alberta and, certainly, Canada as well. Salim is in the members' gallery. I would ask him to rise, please, and ask my colleagues here to give him the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to members of this Assembly four people from CAANA, the Commuter Air Access Network of Alberta. I'd like to introduce Mr. Paul Gervais, Mr. John Szumlas, Ms Mary Anne Stanway, and Mr. Ralph Henderson. It may be of interest to you to note that Mr. Henderson was one of the key people in my decision to run for the Conservatives in the Edmonton-Calder constituency.

CAANA believes in an open-skies policy for Alberta and seeks to link all aspects of air travel in Alberta together. I will be discussing more about this organization in my member's statement later on this afternoon. I would ask all four members to rise to please receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Edmonton City Centre Airport

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. CAANA, the Commuter Air Access Network, the group that I introduced earlier, is an association of communities, businesses, and people committed to improving air access among all regions of Alberta. By way of the Edmonton City Centre Airport CAANA seeks to improve air access to our capital city and create an open-skies policy for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Edmonton-Calder is a major hub for infrastructure in Alberta, and the City Centre Airport is a major part of this. It is not just a major factor for Edmonton but for the province as a whole. By focusing on the needs of the users and providers of air service, CAANA seeks to promote the development and operation of scheduled commuter air passenger service. This could help to strengthen the connections between businesses, agencies, government, and Albertans.

CAANA is one of the many organizations in my constituency that have a vested interest in the airport debate. Airco is one of these organizations affected as well as they operate out of the City Centre Airport. Over the next few weeks I will be introducing many groups, like CAANA, Airco, and the Kingsway Business Association, from Edmonton-Calder who raise issues regarding the status of the airport in particular and air travel in general.

I have seen a lot of noise generated over this debate over the last year, Mr. Speaker, and Albertans have been debating this particular issue for the last 52 years. While I cannot propose a solution to this lengthy debate, we need to keep ourselves informed about issues like this because they affect all Albertans.

Thank you.

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

1:40

Parkinson's Awareness Month

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to thank the Parkinson Society of Southern Alberta for giving tulips to the hon. members of this Assembly. As Parkinson's official flower, the tulip reminds us of the importance of research. Much has been accomplished in this field, but a cure has yet to be found.

Mr. Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, and I urge all Albertans to do what they can to help raise awareness about this disease and to make much-needed donations. Parkinson's is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease. The loss of dopamine in the brain affects both motor and nonmotor functioning. While Parkinson's has tremendous effects on the body, it leaves the mind perfectly untouched. Approximately 100,000 Canadians live with this debilitating disease. They are affected by tremors, slowness, balance issues, and muscle rigidity. The average age of diagnosis with Parkinson's is 60 years, but it can affect people as young as 30 or 40.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Parkinson's societies of southern and northern Alberta and what they do for individuals and families who live with Parkinson's. Supported by volunteers, donations, and dedicated staff, they provide counselling, support groups for people with Parkinson's and their caregivers, learning resources, referrals, peer programs, in-service community awareness programs, and speech therapy. Parkinson's is not easy to live with, but nonprofit organizations make a world of difference for many affected Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Families Learning Together

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to inform the House of the good work being done by Families Learning Together, a project designed by the Taber and District Community Adult Learning Association. The 17-week, full-time program is funded through Employment and Immigration, Advanced Education, and an anonymous donor, and has provided English as a second language, literacy, and workplace preparation skills to low-income, non-English speaking families since 1999. Whenever possible, the program is held in schools within the Horizon school division.

Although the program is open to all immigrants, the learners are predominantly low German-speaking Mennonites from Mexico with Canadian citizenship. As a rule, they have no formal education past the age of 12 and no literacy skills in their first language. Mr. Speaker, FLT is unique because it involves both parents and their preschool children to strengthen and build basic skills of the parents while supporting parental involvement in their children's learning.

Being that the participants work in agriculture and are seasonally employed, the program was designed to accommodate this and is offered from November to March each year. On March 26, 2009, I attended a celebration of learning event with the parliamentary assistant of Advanced Education and Technology in Taber, where we had the privilege of listening to eight adult learners talk about the value of the program for them and their families. One student has been accepted into an upgrading program at Lethbridge College and plans to be an accountant. Another student, a mother of six, is now getting her class 1 driver's licence to assist during harvest. Another spoke of how his improved English now enables him to do his own banking, attend medical appointments, read to his child, and be a better employee. One might well say that Families Learning Together embodies Alberta's new slogan: Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join with me in congratulating these people in Taber for the good work they do.

Calgary Peace Prize

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, on March 30 I attended the third annual Calgary peace prize gala dinner in Calgary. The Calgary peace prize is an award established by the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary to highlight Calgary's contribution to world peace. The prize recognizes outstanding individuals from the global community for their work toward peace, social justice, and human security.

Some of the past recipients include His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Mayor Tadatashi Akiba of Hiroshima, who was the founder of Mayors for Peace.

I was delighted that the 2009 peace prize recipient was Ms Louise Arbour, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights between 2004 and 2008. Her past work includes being appointed to the Supreme Court and Ontario Court of Appeal, the Supreme Court of Canada, as well as by the Security Council of the United Nations as chief prosecutor for the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. It is wonderful to see the Consortium for Peace Studies recognize individuals whose work has made the world a safer and less violent place.

Also taking part in this great event was Dr. Bill Phipps, a former moderator of the United Church of Canada; Mr. Blair Mason, chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; the Leader of the Official Opposition of Alberta; and Janet Keeping, president of the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank Mr. George Melnyk and Maureen Wilson, the co-chairs for the Consortium for Peace Studies, and their amazing group for putting on a great event for a good cause.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

World Health Day

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise to acknowledge World Health Day, which was yesterday, April 7. This year the World Health Organization's World Health Day focused on hospital safety and patient care during times of crisis.

As you know, no region in the world is immune to the threat of disaster, and Alberta is no exception, whether through tornado, flood, or pandemic influenza. I am proud to say that our exceptional health facilities and centres and our professional staff and workers are the cornerstones of a health care system that is one of the strongest in the country.

But it takes more than a strong building to ensure the safety of care during a catastrophe. Investments in health care infrastructure and fortifying the effectiveness of existing facilities are vital in positioning health care services where and when they are urgently needed. But keep in mind that capital investment has to be done wisely. Take Vision 2020 and the continuing care strategy, for example, which highlight this government's commitment to initiatives such as providing more health care in community settings and freeing up hospital beds for those in dire need. It also aims to further increase Alberta's health workforce to meet the growing demand for services.

I encourage all Albertans to thank those who are dedicated to patient care when disaster strikes. They are like angels among us when we need them the most.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Wildlife Week

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Canada's National Wildlife Week. This week is celebrated every year beginning on April 10 in honour of the late Jack Miner and his pioneer work in wildlife conservation. This year's campaign, Our Home and Native Plants, encourages Canadians to conserve and protect our natural habitats.

The National Wildlife Week celebrations across the country are showcasing native vegetation and the value of native plants. Mr. Speaker, from the fescue grass in southern Alberta to the lodgepole pine in our boreal forest, plants are an essential component of our biodiversity. Native plants and trees provide homes for many species of Alberta wildlife, keeping them safe as they nest, sleep, and feed.

The western blue flag iris has been adopted by the Alberta Native Plant Council as a symbol of Alberta's rare and native plants. This flower can only reproduce in the most favourable conditions, and it needs the help of pollinators such as bees to do so.

Recently this Assembly debated the adoption of the red cap mushroom as the official fungi emblem of Alberta. Mushrooms serve an important role in our ecosystems by decomposing organic matter. They also provide many benefits to plants that grow around them that, in turn, provide sustenance for all wildlife. During National Wildlife Week we should also remember Alberta's fungi.

Mr. Speaker, with the snow disappearing and our province turning green, many Albertans will be enjoying the outdoors this long

weekend. I'd like to remind all Albertans to take the time to learn more about the trees, shrubs, and other plants native to our province and the essential role they play in maintaining Alberta's wildlife and biodiversity. Plenty of information is available on the websites of Sustainable Resource Development and Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of 2002 By-election

The Speaker: Hon. members, on April 8, 2002, there was a by-election held in the province of Alberta, and a new member arrived in this Assembly. Congratulations to the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. When he arrived here seven years ago, he had peach fuzz on his face. Now he is a mid-range, grizzled veteran on his seventh anniversary.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Fiscal Responsibility

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This budget gives all the proof needed of years of fiscal mismanagement and that this administration fundamentally must change, yet nothing, absolutely nothing in this budget shows Albertans that this administration has learned what it needs to and will stick to a budget, a plan, and discipline itself in its spending. Instead this budget anticipates prompt return to the bounty of the past 12 years and a plan on a wish and a prayer to get back to business as usual. To the Premier: with consistent large budget increases year over year and overspending will your government take action now to put Alberta on a course for fiscal discipline?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the money that we invested in people programs over the past number of years reflected the growing population. It also reflected the tremendous need to keep up with our infrastructure because as people moved to Alberta, they didn't bring their schools or hospitals nor did they bring the nurses and the doctors with them. So we had to encourage more people and spend more money on those services. When we held consultations across this province across a very wide group of sectors, people said: try to build your budget based on the rate of inflation plus population growth. That's what we did. It's around 3.7 per cent.

Dr. Swann: A glaring example of this government's inability to change is its continued support for the faltering racehorse industry as well as millions of dollars to the highest paid deputy ministers and senior officials in this province. In a time of record-breaking deficits, Mr. Premier: why?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the one item that the hon. leader said, in terms of highest paid deputies: that simply is not true. We're in the middle range of other provinces, but we do not have the highest paid deputies.

Yes, we've got a lot of work to do. There's another confusion by the members across that we have to find \$2 billion this year. The \$2 billion that we're talking about is the next year out. Again, the most comprehensive three-year business plan of any jurisdiction in Canada: we actually roll out the three-year business plan with our budget. We're going to work with all Albertans this year to find the savings for next year's budget.

Dr. Swann: On behalf of all Albertans will the Premier establish an independent value-for-money audit and restore the trust of Albertans in their wealth management and that they're getting the best value for their tax dollars?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of organizations that see that as the government we give them value for their dollar. One of them is the Auditor General. The other is the business sector out there. Various business schools give us advice quite regularly, in fact. I believe we have the trust. In fact, I would say that given the kind of responses we've received over the last number of hours after the budget was delivered yesterday, we are on the right track. Albertans support the balance between supporting those most vulnerable yet not having to bring about any drastic tax increases or at the same time not looking at any drastic cuts to programs.

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

Health Budget

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While transparency in public finance is fundamental to public trust, instead of being transparent about the true deficit our province is facing, this government has chosen not to report on the true state of our staggering deficit. To the Premier: given the massive deficit predicted in the health transition, why were the health regions' deficits not reported in this budget?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, the minister can answer as to when the services board will be delivering their report to him. But here's another thing. You know, I was watching some of the coverage, and some of the reporters kept referring to the deficit, that the deficit we're going to be incurring, the \$4.7 billion, is like the deficit in 1986. Well, quite frankly, the budget in 1986 was \$13.6 billion with a deficit of over \$4 billion. That was close to 30 per cent of the total expenses. If we were going to go year to year in terms of inflation, with a \$4 billion deficit in 1986 the kind of deficit budget we delivered would actually be \$2.1 billion in 1986.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. To the health minister, then: what is the total deficit for the health regions?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to supply that information when we receive the audited financial statements of the Alberta Health Services Board by the 30th of June.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the deficits are there, how does the government plan to address the deficits? Where will the money come from?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is incorrect. For the last actual deficit that was incurred in the health regions, we passed a special order of Treasury Board to clear those deficits off. I think it was last summer. As is required by law, the Alberta Health Services Board will file an audited financial statement for the year ending March 31, 2009.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Employment Supports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this year's budget we unfortunately do not see any significant additional support going to laid-off workers. With tens of thousands of Albertans losing their jobs in recent months, this should be a key priority for the government, but it isn't. While the government claims it's spending millions of dollars on employment and training programs, the reality is that there is only a 2.2 per cent increase from last year. To the Premier: at a time when Alberta's unemployment rate is spiking, how can this government claim to be supporting Albertans who have lost their jobs when it is basically running the same programs as it did last year with no significant increase in funding to support laid-off workers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our budget is based on growing jobs, not taking jobs away. That's the big difference in the philosophy, I guess, of those sitting across the way. For every billion dollars invested in public infrastructure, it's 11,600 jobs. So for the \$7.2 billion that we're investing in infrastructure, that's over 80,000 jobs created just on infrastructure alone.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, this government's bitumen upgrading policy has cost thousands of good jobs in this province, and the Premier knows that. In the budget we see \$7 million budgeted for labour attraction, the same as last year. How can the Premier justify a policy that spends taxpayers' dollars to recruit additional temporary foreign workers when tens of thousands of Albertans here in this province have been laid off in the first two months of the year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you also find out from employers that we are short in a number of skill sets. There are employers that still have signs saying, you know: we need people in these various skill sets. We're open to bringing people in from other jurisdictions to fill those job vacancies. To those Albertans that are currently unemployed, we also have money in the budget to retrain them for those jobs that are vacant there and to give them those skills so that they can fill those vacancies.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Thirty thousand Albertans lost their jobs in January and February alone, with March's numbers still to come, and the government is now projecting 6.5 per cent unemployment for the coming year, yet the government is cutting support for career development services and basic skills and academic upgrading. How can the Premier explain this policy to Albertans who are trying to get back to work? You're not supporting them. You don't care.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, other than just the rhetoric coming from the opposition and looking at little bits and pieces, the overall Budget 2009 clearly addresses the priorities of Albertans. We're hearing that from Albertans very clearly. As I said, we're looking after the most vulnerable. Seniors: an 11 per cent increase. We've seen an increase in AISH, a substantial increase. We're seeing an increase to child care. We're seeing an increase in Health at a time when it's difficult to find all the dollars. At the same time all those in need are going to be taken care of in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the finance minister tabled a budget that was not only late; it was

incomplete. The unspecified cuts of a quarter billion dollars this year and \$2 billion next year in this half-baked budget will create fear and uncertainty among Albertans. The government has left the sword of unemployment hanging over the heads of thousands and left Albertans to fear the reduction or elimination of programs they and their families depend on. My question is to the Premier. Why didn't you finish your budget so that Albertans would at least know where they stand?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Albertans know where they stand. This government cares about every Albertan: those that are working, those that might have lost their job, those that are sick, those that are seeking help. You know, even the families that are caught in difficult situations: we have programs even in these difficult economic times to look after them. With respect to the \$2 billion at least the hon. member knows that, yes, we're going to have a very serious discussion about next year, not this coming year '09-10 but '10-11, in terms of finding a further \$2 billion. But I know where we can start. We can start by asking the federal government to treat us equally, equal to every other person in this country, and reimburse us at least \$700 million for the cuts to health transfer to Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this budget is so lame that if it was a horse, they'd have to take it out and shoot it. Not only are there no new jobs; there are cuts to municipal infrastructure and to the environment, and another 2 and a quarter billion dollars worth of cuts to come. Will the Premier stand in this House and tell Albertans exactly what cuts he has in mind, and if he can't do that, will he explain to the people who elected him the reason why not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, watching the mayor from the city of Edmonton yesterday, he made a very wise observation. He says that, yes, we do have about \$20 million less coming to the city overall. But on the other hand, he also said that given these times we will save more than the \$20 million in the infrastructure we have to do; these are tough economic times. That to me shows that the mayor is a good businessperson. We're good business people. We're going to work through this together.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there is no excuse for an incomplete budget. None. When my son, a university student, struggles to meet a deadline for a term paper, he knows what he has to do.

The question is to the Premier. When you realized that the budget wasn't finished, why didn't you and your finance minister down a couple of Red Bulls, pull an all-nighter, and get 'er done?

Mr. Stelmach: Did he say "pull a red bull" or "down a Red Bull"? Okay. Sorry. He has got me baffled as to what he's talking about. [interjection] It's a good thing the microphone never picked that up.

The issue here is – and it is a serious issue – that we're going to work with all Albertans over the next number of months. As I said before, \$700 million on the table. I'm sure there'll be other questions coming forward during this question period. Our President of the Treasury Board also has other ideas that he's going to share with Albertans because we're going to reach out to Albertans. As Albertans, as a government we're working together. That's the strength that got us into this good financial position, and we're going to continue to work with those same Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Seniors' Benefits

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I've heard from many of my seniors who are worried about making ends meet. In these tough economic times how is the government helping those who are most in need and, in particular, those seniors on fixed incomes who really need a helping hand?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that this government is committed to assisting low-income seniors who are most in need, and yesterday's budget was proof of that. I hope the leader of the third party is listening because Alberta's low-income seniors who are most in need will now receive even more assistance. I'm very happy to tell you that the maximum monthly benefits for low-income seniors is increasing by \$40 per month to \$280 per month, and for senior couples it's increasing by \$60 a month to \$420 per month.

Mr. McQueen: Thank you for that. That's wonderful news that the benefits are increasing, but that is just one half of the equation. The other half is eligibility for the benefits, especially the income thresholds that decide if a senior will qualify for assistance. Has the government made any progress on income eligibility?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to add that those benefits that have increased will start as of April 1 of this year, so seniors will see that on their April cheque.

Mr. Speaker, we've also increased the maximum benefit and the qualifying thresholds for low-income seniors most in need. Beginning in July, which is the beginning of our benefit year, we'll have increased thresholds. For single seniors the threshold will increase by \$1,300 to \$24,000. For senior couples it increases by \$2,100 to \$39,000. As a result of these threshold increases we'll have another 6,000 seniors who will qualify for Alberta's seniors' benefit, for a total of 144,000 seniors that receive these benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. My final question also to the same minister. Many seniors also need access to affordable, supportive housing. Will this need be addressed, especially as Alberta's population continues to age, and will it be addressed in both the urban and the rural areas of Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago I announced \$119 million for the affordable supportive living initiative that was both for rural and urban areas and lodge modernization, and this budget gives us another \$50 million for more supportive living initiatives. This will help the supply of affordable housing for our seniors, with 450 new units coming on with that \$50 million. With this funding the province has now invested \$415 million in capital funding grants since 1999 to support the development and modernization of 8,000 affordable supportive living units for seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Environmental Monitoring and Evaluation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite failing to catch oil and grease leaking into the Athabasca River and for almost five years failing to catch a major oil sands company's negligence in installing air pollution scrubbers, among other examples, the

Department of Environment has now cut its monitoring budget by 23 per cent. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Giving the growing evidence that this department has failed in the past to enforce its own regulations, why did this government slash its monitoring and evaluation budget by 23 per cent?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's deal with the preamble first. The fact of the matter is that the government did not miss dealing with these issues. The only reason this member can refer to them is because we laid charges and the guilty parties pled in court.

Mr. Speaker, we'll go into great detail in committee when we get into the budget. The short answer for this member is that there was no cut in the budget as it relates to compliance. There was some one-time funding that was in last year's budget that was invested in research. That was known as being a one-time investment. The core funding remains entirely intact, and I look forward to discussing it in committee.

Ms Blakeman: No. Vote 2.0.1 has been reduced.

Again to the same minister: considering that the largest percentage increase, 70 per cent, in this department was to the communications budget, can the minister explain why the government keeps opting for a communications strategy over action on environmental protection?

Mr. Renner: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of detailed questions that are very difficult to deal with in question period. With respect to the line item in the communications budget, again, it is a realignment of staff within the department that have been brought from a number of different areas. For example, we've brought our internal communications people that were separated throughout the department together in one office. Again, there is no increase in this budget. It's a realignment and a consolidation of existing resources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: given the amount of lip service that this minister pays to fighting global warming, it's curious that the Department of Environment only spent a tiny fraction of the money that it set aside last year for climate change, so can the minister please explain which programs were not implemented in '08-09?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the main program is the one that we'll be having much discussion on tomorrow, and that is the consumer rebate program that was mentioned in the budget speech yesterday. We've issued a media advisory that we'll be discussing it in much more detail tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:10

Wild Rose Foundation

Mr. Allred: Thank you Mr. Speaker. In the budget yesterday it was revealed that funding for grants through the Wild Rose Foundation was not part of this year's budget. My questions are for the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why did you make these changes to this very important program?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, over the last year we've reviewed many different aspects in our department, and one of those was our

community investment programs. What we want to ensure is that we're giving the best possible level of service to our 19,000 not-for-profit sector members throughout the province. We decided that we would streamline the community initiatives program and the Wild Rose program because they have similar criteria, similar groups, and we want to be more efficient. We are going to maintain the excellent parts of the Wild Rose such as the board development program. We're going to maintain Vitalize. We're going to keep those employees in our department. We are going to use some of those people on our Wild Rose board to help us with the Alberta not-for-profits voluntary sector initiative, which is housed in our department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is again to the same minister. What consultations did you have before making this decision?

Mr. Blackett: Well, other than the 35 years of experience I've had in various capacities in not-for-profit sectors, I've been in over 50 communities in the province. I've talked to CCVO, Volunteer Alberta, and ECVO. Even though I didn't specifically talk about Wild Rose funding, they did come back and say that there's too much duplication; there's too much red tape, too much paperwork. We're going to streamline that process. We want to do as the Leader of the Opposition said: get disciplined in our spending and provide better value for our taxpayers' dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly rewarding to hear that we're cutting red tape.

My last question is again to the same minister. Why would you make these funding cuts to the nonprofit sector in these troubling economic times when people rely on these services?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we're realigning our budget, making our programs effective, efficient, and transparent. We have \$164.2 million out of my department alone that goes to the not-for-profit sector. That's not including the \$80 million that comes out of the community spirit tax credit. As I said earlier, we need to make investment programs more effective; we need to make them more efficient. This sector is of a tremendous value to all Albertans, and I would encourage everyone to give to them, to encourage them, and to tell the story about the great things they do on behalf of three and a half million Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. One of the mysteries of this budget is found on the bottom of page 102 of the ministry business plans. For the past several years the government has had a target of obtaining 20 to 25 per cent of the value of Alberta's petroleum production through royalties. It was a modest target that the government seldom met, but it was a target. This year the target has been dropped. There is no target for royalty collection. My question is to the Minister of Energy: why this enormous step backwards in accountability and management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is, I believe, that for a number of years members across the way have criticized the government and criticized our department relative to the projections that we make on resource revenue. There aren't any people in this Assembly that I know of, none that I know of in the investment community, and very, very, few, if you could find any, in the industry that would have properly predicted oil to be at \$147 and \$38 in the same nine-month period.

Dr. Taft: Missed the point completely. I draw the minister's attention to page 102 of his ministry business plan, the bottom lines. The bottom line is that this government used to have a target of collecting 20 to 25 per cent of petroleum production through the royalty system. They had that target for years. The target is gone. There simply isn't one. In this first year of the new royalty framework it's vital that Albertans know if that royalty framework is working. So again to the minister: how will the government, industry, this Legislature, or the people of Alberta know if the new royalty framework is working when there is neither a goal nor a measure by which to judge it?

Mr. Knight: Again, Mr. Speaker, there certainly are goals, and there are targets. I can tell you that it's a fool's errand for us to go out and try to predict what may or may not happen in the next fiscal framework that we're dealing with here. We realize that we're going to be in a situation where the low commodity prices that we're seeing today very obviously will change. It's, again, interesting that over the last three or four months the price of natural gas was anywhere in kind of the \$6 range; today I think it's trading for about \$3.30. What kind of a target would people like us to set relative to that?

Dr. Taft: Okay. We're not communicating here. We've got a problem in our communication. Page 102 of the business plans: check it out. The target we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is collecting a percentage, whether oil prices are a hundred dollars or \$40. What per cent are we hoping to collect as a target through the royalty system? Has the minister given up on any measure, any target at all on a percentage for the royalty framework to collect? If so, how will we ever know if it works?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again, I would suggest that if you wanted to look at the numbers and how the new royalty framework might compare with a royalty framework that was, you know, in the province previously, maybe in 1938 or '42 or '60 or '90, whatever period you want to choose, you could say, "If we look back, we collected 20 per cent at this point and 40 per cent at this point, then some other percentage," but it's redundant information. What we will do is manage these resources in the best interests of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Education Property Tax

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping that my question isn't as catastrophic as my member's statement. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As announced in

yesterday's budget, the province's education property tax requisition is increasing. I would like the Minister of Municipal Affairs to explain what those increases are.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, education is an investment in our future. The province provides the majority of funding for education. In fact, we invest over \$6.3 billion into education, and we collect \$1.7 billion through the education tax. This year the increase is \$85 million, which represents 5.2 per cent. I need to emphasize that that is real growth in the province. We are committed to providing a quality, accessible – and I need to stress accessible – education system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former school board trustee more funding for education is certainly very welcome.

My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister explain how these taxes will impact the citizens of Calgary?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, all of the taxes that are collected are invested back into the education system to help educate our students to become doctors and policemen and teachers. When we talk about Calgary, \$580 million will be collected through taxation, but we invest \$1.24 billion back into Calgary. The increase will represent approximately \$3.50 per household per month. We are going to continue to support a world-class system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental is to the same minister. Is the government planning to phase out the education portion of the property taxes?

2:20

Mr. Danyluk: No. No, Mr. Speaker, we are not. We believe that the current system finds a balance. It provides a stable source of revenue and ensures equitable funding for students no matter where they live. This government provides the majority, as I said before, of our basic education funding. It is a good system. We need to be proud that it is one of the best in the world.

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

Long-term Care Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What Alberta's seniors need are long-term care beds now, not replacement beds by 2015. It's well known that it costs taxpayers far more money to keep seniors in acute-care beds, where, I must admit, the care isn't quite as good because the staff are not trained in the same way, while they wait for placement in long-term care when compared to the cost of the long-term care bed. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are additional long-term care beds not the priority in this year's budget?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the opposition can try as hard as they want to find what's not in the budget, but I want to talk about what is in the Health budget. What we have in the Health budget is some 7.7 per cent increase to Alberta Health Services to deliver services across the province. We have an additional \$42 million in this budget to deliver home care for those most vulnerable in our society, especially seniors. We've also increased, as an example,

our cancer drugs by some 20 per cent. We've put in extra money for safe communities. We've got to talk about this budget being a good news Health budget in tough economic times.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there were some very good things in the budget, and I would thank the seniors minister for a lot of that.

Has the minister done a value-for-money audit on how much it costs to keep seniors waiting in acute care for long-term care placements as opposed to building or expanding our long-term care facilities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's sort of an implication here that we are not building any long-term care facilities. That's absolutely incorrect. I can take the member, if she would like, on a little trip around the province. We've got facilities that are under way that I know of in the Minister of Justice's community, some 200 long-term care beds at Garrison Green in Calgary. I know that there's a facility in I think it's Stony Plain. There are several facilities that are under way in Edmonton that are joint ventures with a nonprofit society. There's lots of long-term care facility construction under way in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Gosh, you know, I haven't had a chance to go on that kind of a little sojourn for a long time. I may take you up on it.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness. If long-term care beds were included in existing or new supportive living facilities which are getting the additional 400 units this year, that would certainly help to reduce the backlog in the hospitals and create the continuum of care within the facilities themselves. Has there been any consideration within the ministry to take action in that direction? In other words, within one building it would go from one end of the continuum to the other and also include long-term care beds, which probably should include palliative care.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is exactly right on the point that I've been trying to stress. I think I'll use the Strathmore example. We have invested significant dollars in Strathmore into assisted living through our seniors' housing program. Now what we have to do, working with the MLA for Strathmore-Brooks and the community, is ensure that the money that is committed to that facility is done in a way that we meet the needs of the community. But those needs are not just long-term care. That's why we're so happy with the extra dollars that were in yesterday's budget to deliver home care as a total package.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Homelessness Initiatives

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's half-baked budget proved this government has no intention of following through on their plan to end homelessness. It only put a hundred million dollars toward the \$3.2 billion that was promised, and even there it robbed that money from the affordable housing program. Only the most cynical of governments would cut from one homeless initiative to pay for another and then publicly congratulate itself in the process.

Why does the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs think that she can end the homeless epidemic by simply shuffling money around?

Mrs. Fritz: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I'm so glad this question has been asked today. As you know, our 10-year plan to end homelessness for Alberta was released about two weeks ago. In that plan we said that we would increase housing options for the homeless. This budget for the very first time has money for homeless initiatives, for housing for the homeless. I am so pleased. In this budget the base funding has remained the same, but I can tell you that \$400 million over three years for housing units for the homeless is very welcome news to the community and the people that we serve.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that money was already there in the last budget. It was just called something else. All you did was change the name.

Now, at her March 16 photo shoot the minister made a big hullabaloo about her commitment to end homelessness, but this budget has exposed that there is not one new cent this year or any year to take Albertans out of the cold. That money was there before. How can the minister claim to endorse a plan to end homelessness when she's actually cut a hundred million from her affordable housing program this year?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I would love to meet with this member to explain the difference between housing for the homeless and affordable housing. There is \$400 million over three years for our homeless housing units. As well, there is \$468 million for affordable housing. That's \$868 million over three years to assist our most vulnerable people.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, they have simply changed the name. The money hasn't changed a bit. Meanwhile, the minister has cut half the funding from her affordable housing plan, as I've said. You've cut the homeless and eviction prevention fund by 50 per cent, and you've axed \$15 million from rent supplements. To the minister: when will you offer Alberta's homeless real help instead of just PR stunts and more smoke and mirrors?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, along with the capital housing dollars that I've explained to you are available for our homeless, which is \$400 million over three years, we also have funding of \$32 million for operating funding for the homeless. Along with that \$32 million we have the homeless and eviction prevention fund of \$34 million, which, as you know, was \$7 million two years ago. We also have the rent supplement funding, which is \$56 million dollars. You can see that there's over \$100 million in operating for our homeless initiatives as well as capital. It's good news.

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

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. It's very important to ensure that vulnerable Albertans are supported during these challenging times. What are the implications of the budget on vulnerable Albertans, like persons with disabilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this budget is proof of this government's commitment to assisting Albertans with disabilities who are most in need. Here's the proof: the maximum AISH benefit has

increased by \$100 per month effective April 1 of this year. This raises the maximum monthly benefit for AISH clients to \$1,188 per month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is real help for those that need it.

My second question to the same minister: can AISH clients look forward to receiving more increases in the future?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt about our commitment to the AISH program. This is the fifth increase in five years, and this is the third increase under this Premier. My ministry is committed to reviewing the AISH financial assistance program every two years to ensure that we are providing the right supports. In total about 38,000 AISH clients have a better quality of life because of the AISH benefits that they receive.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. There are, however, AISH clients who need more support than the \$1,188. What about them?

2:30

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this is another example of our support for vulnerable Albertans. On top of the monthly income benefit, the AISH program offers supplementary assistance for medical needs, needs such as travel to medical appointments and special diets. An emergency benefit is also available to provide assistance in situations that present a serious health or safety risk.

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

Major Community Facilities Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After two years, coincidentally surrounding an election, of gigantic photo-op cheques being strategically handed out by Tories, the major community facilities program has come to an end. This program worked well for government members, including the members for Banff-Cochrane and Foothills-Rocky View and Airdrie-Chestermere, so it seems as though the government got its money's worth. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. What happens to those organizations who had grants in the pipeline for this program awaiting confirmation but not finalized as of year-end?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, those groups will be notified by my department that the program has been discontinued. For those that qualify under the community facility enhancement program, we'd ask to have their application transferred to that. The program was a two-year program. There was \$240 million that we put in there, \$480 million of ask, and \$2 billion worth of projects. I think we did a great job for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, aside from the excellent photo ops and the helpful timing this grant program gave government members, did the program complete the inventory of needed repairs of major facilities in this province?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question is absolutely ridiculous. We've had 350,000 new people to this province in the last four and a half years, and we will always have new needs for major construction and major facilities all across the province, whether in rural or urban Alberta. That's the way it is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. I note that a number of major facilities are still in dire need of maintenance and upgrading – not new facilities, just maintenance and upgrading – like, for example, the Varscona Theatre in Edmonton or Catalyst Theatre. Is this the end of government assistance with a higher level of funding for community facilities, or is another fund available to groups like the Varscona? The CFEP and CIP are lower amounts of money. There's a cap on them. Is the higher funding gone completely?

Mr. Blackett: Your Leader of the Opposition asked for us to have discipline in spending. You wanted better value for the taxpayers' dollars, and now you want us to spend more. We had a two-year program. We've done it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Education Property Tax

(continued)

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Some cities are saying that they need to keep education property taxes, that they collect on behalf of the province, for their budgetary needs. Can the minister explain why the province does not allow municipalities to keep these taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we all benefit from the education taxes collected. I need to be clear that the education taxes are not municipal revenue. Education taxes are very clearly collected on behalf of the province to support the education system. Those taxes are pooled in the Alberta school foundation fund, and they are distributed equally on a per-student basis to school boards throughout this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Does this 5.2 per cent, or \$85 million, increase in the funds collected pay for things like new schools or renovations?

Mr. Danyluk: No, Mr. Speaker. The funds that are collected by taxation are to help cover the costs of teacher salaries, textbooks, and other classroom resources. These funds are not used for capital expenditures. At the outset I'd also like to say that it does not go towards the teachers' pension fund. This fund is used for the education of students.

Mr. Sandhu: My final question is also to the same minister. Can the minister explain how Edmonton is benefiting from the collection of these taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I look at the city of Edmonton, the city of Edmonton contributes in the neighbourhood of \$315

million. The increase will impact Edmonton in the neighbourhood of \$3.75 a month per average household. But the important part for the city of Edmonton: they will realize \$968 million that we reinvest back into the Edmonton public school system. This investment is an investment in our future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Support for Public Transit

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Investing in public transit is a good thing for the economy and a good thing for the environment. Such investment is consistently ranked at the top of possible green stimulus investment. It is one of the best ways of improving economies, setting the stage for decades of green growth. To the Minister of Transportation: how did the minister fail so badly to advocate for transit spending that Albertans will end up with only \$10 million of guaranteed money going towards public transit?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it just always amazes me how they can always pick up some unbelievable, negative point when they don't even understand what the program is to begin with. There's \$10 million in this budget this year. We're just out on the second round of consultations right now. This is a pay-as-you-go situation, and no matter what would get approved, it doesn't need all the money in the first year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was \$2 billion, and \$2 billion could have gone a long way to improve our public transit system.

When the budgets are tight, value for money is key. What studies does the minister have to show that the value that public transit offers with its stimulus role and its emissions reduction is worth such a low commitment of \$10 million?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Green TRIP was never ever put out there to be part of a stimulus package of any kind. It was there to reduce greenhouse gases by getting rid of tailpipe emissions, and we're still going to be waiting for the proper innovation to come in and what type of public transit will work in putting bums in the seats of public transit and getting cars off the road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are so many projects that are shovel ready. I think that with funding they could be started right away, and that will stimulate the economy, create very badly needed jobs. To the minister again: why is the minister so happy to sign long-term, multibillion-dollar P3 debt contracts building roads but completely fails to provide adequate funding for public transit?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to explain to the hon. member across there that public transit has always – always – been the responsibility of municipalities. As our great leader, our hon. Premier, announced, he has brought out \$2 billion that was going to be for public transit, to help all municipalities with their transit to get rid of tailpipe emissions. We're still saying that public transit is a great thing, and we're going to help municipalities with that.

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

Support for Immigrant Seniors

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirteen per cent of the Canadian population is 65 years of age and over, and between 20 and 25 per cent of the population are immigrants. Many of them have made contributions in the labour market as caregivers, educators, or community volunteers. However, many face challenges such as language barriers, ethnic and cultural differences. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. As Alberta is now the third-largest immigrant-receiving province in Canada, after Ontario and British Columbia, what programs and services does the ministry have in place to respond to the needs of immigrant seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has one of the most comprehensive packages of benefits for seniors in this country. This assistance is focused on assisting those low-income seniors who are most in need regardless of where they come from. The assistance ranges from monthly payments to supplement federal benefits to help with dental work, prescription eyeglasses, and one-time or extraordinary expenses such as things like furnace and roof repairs.

2:40

Ms Woo-Paw: What is your ministry doing to help build the capacity of the seniors care sector so that the needs of the diverse ethnic and cultural communities in this province are met?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, one of my priorities as minister responsible for seniors is helping to build the supply of continuing care spaces. A few weeks ago I announced \$119 million in capital funding to help build and modernize 3,000 supportive living and lodge units in communities across Alberta. These projects were approved for funding, including Oi Kwan Place in Calgary, which was approved for \$3 million to help build new supportive living units and to add to and renovate an existing facility. Partnerships like Oi Kwan and Wing Kei in Calgary help us cater to the specific cultural needs of seniors.

Ms Woo-Paw: Immigrant seniors and relevant stakeholders want to ensure that their voices are heard in the development of seniors' policies in this province. Can the minister tell the Assembly what avenue is available to Alberta seniors to share their views with government?

Mrs. Jablonski: The first thing I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that I certainly enjoy being invited to any facility to discuss these needs with all of our seniors. I have been to Wing Kei and certainly enjoyed being shown how they cater to the cultural needs for Chinese seniors. I think it's a wonderful program.

Any senior can also speak to their local MLA and to the Seniors Advisory Council as well. We have a seniors' information line, where they can make known their concerns, and that seniors' line is 1-800-642-3853.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate any invitation any time to visit these facilities and our seniors.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to table today with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies, five copies, of Travel Alberta's first business plan as a legislated corporation. Travel Alberta is the tourism marketing agency of the government of Alberta, and this business plan outlines the activities that the corporation will undertake over the next three years to position Alberta on the world stage as a premier tourism destination.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter dated July 10, 2008. It's a letter that I received from the Chief Electoral Officer, and it's regarding polling station No. 074 in Edmonton-Gold Bar during the March 3, 2008, election.

The second letter to be tabled is dated July 11, 2008. It's a letter that I have written to the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the conduct of the election on March 3, 2008, in Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The next tabling I have is a letter dated July 16, 2008. It is a response from the Chief Electoral Officer to some of the questions that I had raised earlier.

My final tabling is from the Government Accountability Office of the United States. It's a release that was delivered on Tuesday, March 17, 2009. It's titled Oil and Gas Leasing: Federal Oil and Gas Resource Management and Revenue Collection in Need of Comprehensive Reassessment.

Thank you.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. I'd first like to table the appropriate number of copies of a CBC news story dated March 6, 2009, which backs up information I provided in my questions on March 19. The story describes how the U.K. established a four-hour maximum for emergency room waits. A key part of the solution was opening thousands of new long-term care beds in nursing homes to free up acute-care beds for emergency room patients.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Strathcona, Samara Jones. She says that Alberta is well placed to become part of the global trend towards renewal energy, if they only would, and that we should try to put people to work by building the green economy.

Finally, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. They indicate where residents were left in bed, received their meals late, and were unable to receive baths.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation 2008 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board annual report January 1 to December 31, 2007, and pursuant to the Health Professions Act Alberta College of

Medical Diagnostic & Therapeutic Technologists 2008 annual report and the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2008.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are in the month of April. It's the eighth day. Each month of the year has special commemorations and special days, and it's my custom, basically, when we're sitting, to alert members to this. It also assists us in advising individuals who call our offices and want to know if recognition has been given. So this is recognition for these events in the month of April.

April is Earth Month. It features Daffodil Days. It's also National Cancer Awareness Month. It's also Irritable Bowel Syndrome Awareness Month. It's also Parkinson's Awareness Month. It's International Autism Awareness Month. It's National Oral Health Month. It's National Poetry Month.

It featured, of course, April Fool's Day. April 2 was World Autism Awareness Day. April 2 was International Children's Book Day. April 3 featured the Alberta Easter Seals campaign event in Calgary. April 3 and 4 featured the National 30-hour Famine event sponsored by World Vision Canada. April 4 was International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

April 5 was Palm Sunday. April 5 to 11 is National Wildlife Week that we've heard today. April 6 to 12 is Young Poets' week. April 7 was World Health Day. April 7 was also Unpaid Work Day. Today, April 8, at sunset begins Passover for all of our neighbours and our friends and Albertans of Jewish heritage, which will continue through to April 16 nightfall. April 9, tomorrow, is National Day of Remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. April 10, of course, is Good Friday. April 10 to 16 is World Homeopathy Awareness Week. April 11 is World Parkinson Day.

April 12, of course, is Easter Sunday. April 13 is Easter Monday. April 16 will be World Voice Day as it will be National Law Day. April 17 will be Equality Day in Canada and World Hemophilia Day. April 18 will be World Heritage Day.

April 19 is Orthodox Easter Sunday. April 19 to 25 is National Volunteer Week as it is National Dental Hygienists Week as it is Administrative Professionals Week, including Administrative Professionals Day on April 22. It also is National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week, and it also is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week. April 19 to May 3 is March of the Living in remembrance of the Holocaust. April 20 to 25 is National Soil Conservation Week. April 20 to 26 is Global Action Week. April 21 we will commemorate Yom-ha-Shoah, the Holocaust Memorial Day. April 21 is also the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. April 22 is Earth Day. April 23 is Canada Book Day as it is World Book and Copyright Day. April 23 to 29 is United Nations Global Road Safety Week. April 24 to 26 is Global Youth Service Day. April 25 is World T'ai Chi and Qigong Day. April 25 is also World Malaria Day.

April 25 to May 2 is National Immunization Awareness Week. April 26 is World Intellectual Property Day. April 26 to May 2 is Education Week in the province of Alberta and it also is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and it also is International Astronomy Week. April 28 is International Workers' Memorial Day. April 29 is International Noise Awareness Day, and April 29 is International Dance Day.

At that point we ran out of time to do further research, but we'll find some more in the next number of days.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Debate adjourned April 7: Dr. Swann]

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my responsibility and privilege to rise and respond to the budget. I'm pleased to do so this afternoon on behalf of the people of Alberta and as Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget the opposition cannot support. When last year the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, our former leader, responded to Budget 2008, his comments were that future historians may look back on the budget and say: "This is when Alberta finally lost its chance to build a sustainable future. This is when [they] failed to take advantage of their last opportunity [perhaps] to adapt to a changing world." Unfortunately for all of us, the hon. member's comments were prescient.

After years of record surpluses granted by oil and gas revenues, this administration has at last proven their utter inability beyond all doubt to transform the largest surpluses in our history within a few short months. We now have one of the largest deficits in provincial history, and in fact this administration can't tell us the true size of the deficit. A number of areas, including health budget deficits from last year, are not included in the budget this year.

No one can blame the Premier's administration for the global economic decline, but when we examine the root causes of this global decline, we find the same lack of discipline, regulation, transparency, and accountability displayed by this Conservative administration over the last 15 years. This administration has shown no long-term vision. Plans shift with the times. They've allowed the heritage fund to stagnate, and they've refused to discipline themselves and implement a savings plan. This administration has created chaos in the health system and gone into deficit to do so. They've left us more vulnerable than ever to volatile energy prices, and the only reassurance offered is the hope that things will be better next year. Rather than lead us out of this mess, the administration is counting on chance to do the job for them.

My background as a professional prepared me to do a number of things in dealing with challenges and issues that relate to the well-being of people and their communities. Surely, learning to live within one's means is a responsible goal for all of us: individuals, families, and businesses. It requires a clear vision, a plan, and the discipline to carry out the plan amidst the din of demands and needs and wants.

Yet there are times when borrowing, going into deficit or longer term debt, is appropriate for lasting values that benefit the long term, in this case the long-term public interest. I don't have an issue with deficits when they're needed, but for Alberta to be in a deficit situation is now truly a travesty of leadership and governance. This Premier's administration has mismanaged so badly that we went from the biggest boom in history to one of the largest deficits in our history within a span of less than a year. That is overwhelming evidence of leadership failure and the squandering of such opportunity. If Alberta had true leadership rather than simply a caretaker administration, there is no way we'd be talking about deficits and debt today.

As a physician my goal was healthier individuals and healthier communities. A common approach relates to budget setting. We define the problem; we gather information, the best information available; we seek the opinions of experts, consider the options, propose a diagnosis, and set a plan of action in place, a plan that is

not rigid but responds to ongoing information gathered from a monitoring process, dealing with unintended consequences, side effects, of a plan that isn't quite yet there. That sort of systematic, comprehensive approach to public policy is missing in this government and, certainly, the disciplined approach to serving the public interest for the long term.

A responsible government controls its spending, saves a percentage of its nonrenewable resource wealth so that we can live off the interest rather than the principal, and plans for future generations. One could look at Alaska and Norway as examples of resource-dependent cultures who found fiscal discipline to save for the future. Both these places had a plan. They stuck to it, and this cushioned them from the ups and downs that we're experiencing today. Alberta, on the other hand, remains after decades completely at the mercy of oil and gas fluctuations.

This administration has claimed many times that Alberta is in better shape than other provinces facing this economic downturn. Simply not true. Our neighbours all across the prairies are doing better than we are. In fact, we're far more vulnerable – far more vulnerable – than the government is letting on. Our dependence on the oil and gas sector makes us inherently more vulnerable. When that one sector takes a hit, everyone suffers.

Our government's stubborn refusal to diversify or plan for the future has had predictable results. They've failed to adequately consult conventional oil and natural gas producers on royalty changes, creating anger in our oil patch, especially conventional oil and gas, including service companies and their staff. Recently this government has flip-flopped on that very regime, pleasing some players in the industry but now creating long-term uncertainty for the entire sector.

Recently the Official Opposition brought a small fraction of this administration's extravagant spending to light: millions of dollars in bonuses paid out to senior officials, even in departments that have clearly failed to deliver value for money such as health care and children's services. Only when we exposed the affair did the government do anything. A responsible government would have understood the hypocrisy of asking Albertans to tighten their belts, especially those most disadvantaged, while handing out huge bonuses to well-connected senior officials. A real leader would have halted the bonus program not because his administration was embarrassed but because it's the right thing to do.

A responsible government, for that matter, would stick to the budget, something this government has consistently failed to do since I entered the Legislature and for years before, making budgets meaningless as planning tools and helping explain why this government has been so bad at planning. How much stock can Albertans put in this budget? I'll not be surprised if the government's plans change completely by the time the first-quarter update rolls around. Albertans deserve and want a government that follows through. They need a government that is accountable and professional about managing one of the largest budgets in Canadian history.

There is another deficit here, a character deficit: the lack of fiscal discipline. They've had the greatest opportunity in history to save for Alberta's future, for our children's children's children, and they've blown it. We have spent virtually all the nonrenewable resource wealth taken from the ground in the last 16 years, and instead of saving it, we have spent it away, leaving us as well as our children profoundly vulnerable.

An Alberta Liberal government would not have failed the public. Alberta Liberals still believe that a savings plan, as we have said over and over, is essential to Alberta's future, especially during times like this. You don't stop contributing to your RRSP because of an economic slowdown. Families are more prudent than that.

This administration could use some of that prudence. Instead, we have watched the heritage fund stagnate and decline and likely will do so for a few more years.

Albertans have a right to know where their money is being spent and what the resource result is for each dollar. This administration must perform an independent value-for-money audit if it values the public fiduciary responsibility, an independent audit, not an embedded audit that purports to save \$250 million by slashing benefits that were intended to help the homeless while keeping the horse-racing industry subsidies alive and well. Does this administration truly believe that Albertans place a higher value on horse racing than on helping the homeless?

3:00

For every dollar that British Columbia spends, we spend \$1.28. What are we getting for that extra money? Where is the evidence of our money being spent wisely and leaving a legacy that we can be proud of for future generations? Clearly, there is waste and imprudent spending, far more than just this \$250 million admitted in this budget. An independent, transparent audit, open to the people, will provide assurances and rebuild some of the lost trust that is needed in this province. We don't expect the administration to establish this independent audit. It would be too incriminating and uncomfortable. This is a government that has truly lost its way and confuses self-interest and partisan gain with the public interest.

Do we support going into debt during these extraordinary times? We need to stimulate our economy. We owe it to our working families and to others to ensure that we leave no one behind. We support limited debt financing of infrastructure when necessary, but it has to be prudent, and it has to be followed by a clear, planned timeline for repayment, with a value-for-dollar audit, after we've examined areas to improve in this province. We do not support public-private partnerships.

When I responded to the Speech from the Throne earlier this year, I said that the primary purpose of government must be to serve the long-term public interest. This administration is not serving that purpose. They've instead served up a budget that is full of unjustified optimism, short-term interests, and short on details so that Albertans can plan for their future, a more sustainable future. All we know is that the Conservative government will take "corrective action" if revenues don't rise soon, meaning either tax hikes or deep cuts to public services or both. Creative action: the new euphemism for the pain this administration is preparing to pass on to Albertans, Albertans who played no part in the bad management.

I've noted before the case of Easter Island, whose inhabitants had no vision and depended on one resource for their prosperity and harvested that resource till it was gone, whose civilization crumbled. Alberta is no island, yet this administration seems determined to act as if it were, making us a virtual island, isolated from neighbours, dependent on a single, volatile resource, finding no common ground on issues as important as climate change. Now we see where this administration's approach has led us.

A few weeks ago the finance minister said that Alberta would lose 50 jobs a day. Well, we've lost an average of 500 jobs a day: 30,000 jobs lost in two months. Government predicted that we would lose just 15,000 this entire year, and we've doubled that. Economists now forecast that Alberta's economy will decline by 2.3 per cent this year, the largest decline of all the provinces. This one statistic reveals how vulnerable Alberta really is and how rosy the picture painted by this administration: a see-saw from having the highest rate of growth to the highest rate of decline within the short span of a few months.

Where is our long-term sustainability? Where is the stability that Albertans deserve? What will happen to Albertans when the next

budget comes? Already the government is cutting back on health care spending, and we haven't even seen the health deficit yet. Forget about the extra hospital capacity that our cities so desperately need. We are in serious trouble here, and our most vulnerable citizens will pay the price for this administration's failures.

Alberta's prosperity is almost completely dependent again on our fossil fuel revenues, yet no one in government seems to see this as a problem to move us into the 21st century with renewable energy efficiency as a priority, an investment stimulus package that sees this as our responsibility not only to Albertans but to the planet. This will remain a long-term valuable commodity. It cannot and must not continue to drive everything that we do in this province.

This administration created a highly inflationary economy by failing to provide leadership in our oil sands development. As we continue to pay inflated costs of development today, we are still somewhat reduced in our capacity to respond to the global recession. Now the government is scrambling for answers. They have spent on trivial interests – including bonuses, horse racing, and golf subsidies – while leaving infrastructure to corrode and collapse, that Albertans are paying through the nose to catch up on, and failed to set aside enough savings to get us through this.

Mr. Speaker, this is a time of accountability. As I mentioned earlier, the global economic downturn is not the government's fault, but this administration is responsible for the lack of preparation for a day that everyone knew was coming. Most Albertans know from past experience, and this government should too, that booms are short-lived. Unfortunately, "most Albertans" does not include members of this administration. Albertans want a government that is committed to hard work, transparency, and accountability; that measures short- and long-term risks and benefits; that invests in people, business, and the environment with a view to the future; that guides the market, does not become a slave to the market; that's balanced and responsible in its development of resources; and especially now in this economic downturn, invests in new technology, research, and opportunities for the future, including responsible bitumen upgrading here in the province, buses, light rail transit, and energy efficiency. This will serve us and our children into the future.

Where is the leadership? We are moving into a knowledge economy in the 21st century, and we are still lagging behind most of the world because of our fixation on one resource. This isn't going to be easy, but forward-thinking, imaginative leadership isn't about making easy choices. It's about making the right choices. This takes courage, entrepreneurial spirit, and a bold vision of healthy communities, which most Albertans have come to understand and participate in. They need policy and government leadership to back it up and support it for future generations.

My vision, Mr. Speaker, includes a province that has, indeed, healthy people working together, sharing the responsibilities of protecting present and future generations and including in their vision opportunities for economic, social, and environmental protection for the future. Our public institutions and programs and services all contribute to our high quality of life and our competitiveness as social beings.

Education is critical. It is the investment that we can make in future generations. Innovation and technology are part of that. Our children expect us to invest in those, not to leave them to crippling debt, especially at times when they are having difficulty getting jobs and raising the kind of income that will help them to find security.

As a physician I know from experience that good health is the result of many, many factors. As a politician I want to lead a government that recognizes and addresses these factors in creating a healthy Alberta. Healthy communities are the source of our

security, our social well-being, and our future. Our mutual interdependence and our honouring of diversity will allow us to build a truly healthy Alberta. We look to government to demonstrate those kinds of collaborative, consultative, courageous aspects of leadership.

Business has played and will continue to play a huge role in our quality of life, and the freedom for business to thrive is vital. My father worked in the oil patch for decades, and I know the contributions that he and his company made to Alberta. We're deeply grateful to the many industrial and commercial sectors that have created the kinds of jobs and sustainable, safe, clean environment that we have depended upon. We call on government to stimulate and protect that legacy for future generations. Business taxes fuel our hospitals and schools, provide jobs and training, research and development. Business will be our most important partner in the crucial work of diversifying Alberta's economy, especially with regard to green technology.

3:10

Secondly, I believe in fairness to future generations. For too long governments in Alberta have embraced short-term goals, cutting programs in bad times and spending exorbitantly in the good times without a thoughtful, prudent, and courageous approach to the long term. This short-sightedness is an abdication of this generation's first duty to the next: to provide a lasting legacy and an uncompromised future for our children and our grandchildren. They have the same desire for prosperity; the same need for clean air, water, and land; and the same fundamental right to a vibrant, living democracy as well as the same need to live and grow and learn to meet their potential. Those aspirations cannot be met if we squander today's opportunities and demonstrate a lack of leadership, vision, and discipline.

So much has been lost. We think about the nonrenewable resource wealth that we have failed to invest appropriately. Our duty must be to leave a social, environmental, educational, and economic legacy that our children can grow with. The gift of fossil fuels is finite, but the legacy need not be if only we start saving now.

Alberta's interests are not served by a tired caretaker administration lacking in new ideas and lacking the courage to change the direction we've been taking. We see now what happens when career politicians, ideologically driven, are stuck in the past. What Alberta needs is courageous leadership, bold leadership that will bring a smart, hard-working, honest government to Alberta, leadership that will make the tough, ethical choices considering present and future generations and will stick to budgets that they commit to and plans they make.

Albertans are entrepreneurial, and they stand by their word. They will hold us accountable for standing by our word. We need to build a new future: leadership that believes in honesty, transparency, fair dealing, and every opportunity for democracy to thrive for every voice, Albertans with different views, and every gathering to be honoured and considered. Good leadership involves identifying the important things and helping the community to come along to share their views on what is important and where we need to move forward. Good leadership includes thoughtful, comprehensive analysis of the facts and a viewing and a balancing of public values to create the public policy that should serve us in present and future generations. We've been missing that thoughtful, comprehensive analysis in this province, and it's reflected in this budget. Leadership must truly understand that decisions we make today have very profound impacts on future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta could be so much greater. With real leadership we could build a sustainable future not only for this

province, not only for this country, but leadership in the world. We have the resources. We have the people. We have the infrastructure. What we need is the vision and the courage and the discipline to carry it out, a bold vision that calls on Albertans to work toward something greater than ourselves and greater than a resource-based economy of boom and bust, a vision that demands higher aspirations, a vision that transforms Alberta from stewards of oil and gas into a sustainable energy superpower and, even more, a diversified sustainable economy free of the turmoil of boom and bust, with an enviable environment, healthy and caring communities, and the best health care system, education system, and transportation system that links us, including a thriving arts and culture sector.

That leadership is on the way, Mr. Speaker. For now Albertans can only be astonished by the incredible shortcomings of this administration. Their colossal failure to anticipate and prepare for tough times shows that they are not true and faithful stewards of the public good. It shows that they do not have the wisdom, the foresight, and the character to manage this province's resources.

We will not be supporting this budget. I believe that most Albertans will also not support it. Thank you for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you wish to participate?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. But I wonder if we could briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

The Speaker: With the unanimous consent of the Assembly we can do that. Will all members allow us to revert to Introduction of Guests? Anybody opposed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and members of the House. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Bashir Ahmed, executive director and CEO of the Somali Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization, or SCERDO. SCERDO works to promote and improve the quality of life for all Somalis and Canadians through education and community development. In 2007 SCERDO implemented a needs assessment survey of the Somali community in Edmonton. This assessment helped to determine the social, education, and health needs of Somali people who have recently moved to Alberta. I recently met with Mr. Ahmed, and I'm impressed with his commitment to a healthy and vibrant Somali community and to multiculturalism in our province. I would now ask that Mr. Ahmed rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Government Motions

Provincial Fiscal Policies

(continued)

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two months ago the NDP caucus warned this House that the throne speech would fail

ordinary Albertans because it had no economic focus, no plan for real job creation, and no long-term solution to end Alberta's unsustainable dependency on fossil fuels. It fundamentally failed to acknowledge the tough economic realities that many Albertan families are facing increasingly every day.

Unfortunately, yesterday's budget continued down the same misguided path. This government's economic plan is ill-conceived and fails to recognize the depth of the recession in Alberta now and in the next several years. It ignores the needs of ordinary Albertans who are worried about their jobs and how they're going to pay for their mortgages at the end of each month in the upcoming year and the years to follow.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this is an incomplete budget. We would have thought that by delaying its introduction, the government would have had plenty of time to figure out all the numbers, but perhaps the finance minister's office needed one more all-nighter to get the job done. This budget calls for nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in further cuts in this year, and the government has no idea where to find them. Nothing causes more fear and uncertainty in the hearts and minds of working Albertans than the axe of potential job cuts looming over their necks. By not specifying where it will find this money, the government is forcing Alberta's families to prepare for the worst. This is certainly no way to encourage public confidence.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I do want to take a moment to give credit where credit is due. I was listening when the minister talked about the AISH budget. We are pleased to see the increase of \$100 per month in AISH funding that we have been calling for included in this year's budget. Certainly, this additional funding is necessary, and those who are eligible to receive it will be very appreciative.

I only wish the same could be said for Albertans in general. What ordinary Albertans wanted was a jobs budget; what we got was a welfare budget. Over 30,000 people in Alberta are turning to welfare every month, and that number is steadily growing. In December alone 4,000 new names were added to the list. Given what is in this budget, those numbers are very likely to increase.

Yesterday's budget once again begged Albertans to have confidence in this government but offered them nowhere to find it. Mr. Speaker, this government just doesn't get it. If they did, we'd have seen a far different budget, not this business-as-usual plan and cuts to the services that regular Albertans depend on. This government is almost alone in its failure to create a plan for economic stimulus. It is irresponsible of the government to deny the severity of this recession. If this government ever would just take off their rose-coloured glasses, they'd realize that beyond the shelter of this dome the situation is getting pretty desperate for many Albertan families.

Virtually every financial forecaster is telling us that we need to prepare for an ongoing and difficult recession, but the Premier and his cabinet continually spin the idea that everything is going to be just fine. The reality is that regular people who just one year ago thought they were managing all right are now beginning to fall behind. At the supermarket where they once bought meat and vegetables, they're buying more Kraft Dinner. At the bank where they once had their savings, their rainy-day funds are drying up, and they can't get a loan. In the home where families once found comfort, they are now struggling to make ends meet.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, already this year more than 30,000 Albertans have lost their jobs, and this government doesn't care. In just two months

that figure doubled what this government had predicted for job losses in the entire year. These are average, hard-working people who did everything right. They showed up to their jobs on time day after day, and they worked hard to provide for themselves and their loved ones, but it wasn't enough. When they look to this government for help, they're given directions to the unemployment office and shown a budget that puts corporate interests first.

There's good reason for them to be worried. The government still needs to find nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in cuts in this year's budget and over \$2 billion in next year's budget. This half-baked budget flies in the face of the Premier's commitment to openness and transparency. If this government was serious about being accountable, they would have increased funding for the Auditor General. They would have realized that given the tools, the AG can find savings like no one else. He may embarrass the government from time to time, but the outcome is better-run programs that don't waste the public's money. By eliminating the Wild Rose Foundation, the government has politicized funding of charitable organizations. It is now another tool to reward the government's friends and punish those who aren't.

Our party is the only one in this House that did any meaningful consultation with real people. The NDP invited a wide cross-section of Albertans, including small business owners, farmers, teachers, parents, health care and seniors' advocates, workers, labour organizations, energy and environmental groups to come together for a round-table on the budget to discuss their needs. We did this because our party is committed to protecting the services that people depend on.

People told us that this government must quickly catch up to the realities of the 21st century and begin by making the fundamental shift towards an economy that is based on renewable energy. This new paradigm is the transition upon which the successful long-term future of Alberta's economy is based. We know that Alberta cannot abandon our use of fossil fuels overnight. The tar sands are key to Alberta's economy in the near and medium term, but they come with many challenges. Because of this government's insistence on the lowest royalties in the world, hundreds of billions of dollars that rightfully belong to the people of Alberta are slipping through its fingers. By refusing to demand that bitumen be processed here at home, the Conservatives are ensuring that jobs will be created south of the border rather than here in Alberta. By refusing to clean up the black eye that is the toxic tailings ponds and greenhouse gases being emitted by the tar sands, this government is jeopardizing the international markets for Alberta energy that it is depending on to pull us out of recession. We need also to come up with a plan for the long run, one for a day when fossil fuels are no longer the driving force of world economies.

When we asked about the big picture, about the issues that extend beyond the dinner table, round-table participants routinely identified three areas of concern: jobs and the state of our economy, the environment and green energy, and the future of health care and seniors' care. Regular Albertans want real solutions with measurable results. They do not want \$2 billion wasted on a carbon capture program that even the big oil producers in the tar sands have rejected as an ineffective expenditure. They don't want government to fund corporate tax cuts and pet projects like horse racing by axing the programs that families depend on like the natural gas rebate program for others that have jeopardized the integrity of our health care system and our education and our seniors' programs.

They demand that this government follow through on creating actual new long-term care beds that they promised and not simply replacing ones that have been eliminated from older facilities. Common sense tells them that when you move people out of general

care into the long-term beds that they need, this in turn frees up space for those sleeping on stretchers in emergency room hallways or waiting up to 24 hours before they can receive treatment, which they need, in an emergency room.

Ordinary Albertans who are worried about their jobs are also concerned that this budget further shows how this government has absolutely no commitment to a serious strategy for our homeless. We know times are going to be tough, that job losses are going to mount. What we don't know is how those who are only a paycheck away from living on the street are going to cope. This budget's answers to these fears is to strip money from affordable housing programs in order to fund merely a fraction of their previous public commitments to solving the homelessness crisis in our province. Mr. Speaker, they're robbing Peter to pay Paul. Simply moving around between accounts does nothing to create the affordable housing that is going to be needed to address the growing number of Albertans without jobs. Financial experts the world over tell us that the best way to stimulate the economy and create long-term jobs is through infrastructure spending. According to CIBC World Markets every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure spending has the potential to create up to 11,000 jobs.

Leading up to this budget the NDP made a number of proposals to stimulate growth through infrastructure investment. They included redirecting the funds earmarked for carbon capture and storage into energy retrofits for public buildings and homes across Alberta. Another \$500 million of that money would be set aside to create a renewable energy research council based in Calgary. Finally, \$6.6 billion would have been leveraged for municipal infrastructure projects that would create over 70,000 jobs.

We propose that the province pay the municipal portion of a federal proposal to match funding for infrastructure programs. By doing so, municipalities across the province will be able to get moving on countless projects they have waiting in the wings, ranging from public transportation initiatives to bridges, roadways, new public buildings, and the retrofitting of old ones. Instead, this government went 180 degrees in the wrong direction and cut a hundred million dollars to capital infrastructure grants to municipalities. At a time when the cost of building is the least expensive, this government fails to take advantage. Mr. Speaker, what a missed opportunity.

There are other examples of how smart spending can stimulate Alberta's economy, opportunities this government has overlooked. The developments of green energy, retrofitting of homes and public buildings as well as investment in universal public health care are proven methods of rebuilding our economy. The protection of Alberta's environment is inextricably linked to the revitalization of our economy. Both initiatives are long-term plans that will benefit future generations, but they need to be initiated now.

The NDP has proposed various initiatives to attain the long-term goal of making Alberta the green energy hub for North America, all of which are aimed at weaning the province off fossil fuels and beginning the transition to renewable energy. The right initiatives begun today would greatly reduce our dependency on fossil fuel sources, so much so that the Pembina Institute conservatively estimates that Alberta could transition from a 70 per cent coal-based energy economy to a 70 per cent renewable energy economy by the year 2028. Such a transition would not only reduce Alberta's carbon footprint but create a new employment incubator that would maintain Alberta's advantage for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, ordinary Albertans have also expressed concern over the future of our public health care system. This government's plan to restructure health care through the delisting of services that people need results in excluding those who are less fortunate and on fixed

incomes. It also often represents false economies when incomplete treatment plans result in readmission of patients to hospitals. Universal public health care has always been highly valued by all Albertans. A system that provides services for some and suffering for others is simply not acceptable. Our health system must be protected, not dismantled and sold off in pieces to the highest bidder. Little by little services like chiropractic care are being delisted, which means that costs are skyrocketing for ordinary Albertans, leaving them unable to access the health care they need.

This government is forging ahead with an agenda that dissolves rural health services, closes long-term care beds, increases hospital wait times, and leaves multimillion-dollar facilities like the Mazankowski Heart Institute sitting empty.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's NDP will not be voting in favour of this budget. We've spoken to regular Albertans, and in good conscience we cannot support the failed direction that this government is taking us. This budget should have been all about investments to protect the future of our great province. There was an opportunity in this budget to create thousands of new jobs, and this government squandered it. There was a chance to create a real shift in our energy sector to spur on research and development in renewables, and this government missed it. There was a chance to ease the financial burden facing postsecondary students and seniors on fixed incomes, and this government missed the boat.

Alberta's NDP remains committed to standing up for these things, to representing the values and needs of ordinary Albertans, not the well-connected friends and insiders of this government. The NDP is listening to regular Albertans, Mr. Speaker, even when this government turns a deaf ear.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anybody who wishes to comment.

Hearing none, the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:30 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: We are debating amendment A3. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I have several amendments to Bill 18 in front of me. It would be very helpful if you could clarify which of the various amendments is actually A3.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had moved that Bill 18 be amended in section 2 by striking out subsection (7) and substituting the following: (7) Section 293.4 is repealed. That is amendment A3.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much for pointing that out.

There have been several concerns raised with regard to Bill 18, and I appreciate the hon. leader of the third party trying to do what needs to be done in terms of repairing a flawed piece of legislation.

What is asked for is adding the following clause: "Providing that a provision of this Act or a provision of a regulation made under another section of this Act does not apply in respect of extra-provincial corporations." There is a major concern that the lowest common denominator, the least worker friendly, the least municipality-responsible types of trade will occur on a cross-border basis. In other words, if the wage for a certain practice is lower in B.C., then likewise Alberta might consider adopting it.

Unfortunately, the reverse is not true. For example, B.C. has a lower driver's insurance rate because it's a public insurance, and therefore it provides a better service at a lower rate. Also, B.C. has a much stronger pharmacare program. Again, if it were an even trade-off in terms of what's the best value for Albertans and British Columbians not just in terms of trade mobility but in recognition of the rights of local municipalities, then I could be more supportive of the TILMA than I currently am.

The amendments go on to strike out clause (a) and substitute the following: (a) in clause (c) by striking out "requirements referred to in section 382 . . . from cooperatives" and substituting "matters referred to in section 382." Obviously, a tremendous amount of thought has gone into putting forward this amendment and, again, attempting to ensure that our trade mobility is beyond just strictly a labour agreement and recognizes the values and the strengths of both provinces, British Columbia and Alberta.

This bill, while debated thoroughly in the British Columbia Legislature, will not have received the debate, and where we're at in this stage is basically one step before passing a piece of legislation which does not protect local municipalities. It will not, for example, guarantee Calgary's fair wage policies, which city workers on a permanent basis receive. Again, the city of Calgary could be challenged by labour groups in British Columbia wishing to provide a similar contracted-out service to the city but at a lower rate, and therefore that undermines the credibility, the integrity, and the accountability of areas like the city of Calgary.

I'm sure the city of Edmonton and other municipalities are considering fair labour agreements, too. The fact that amongst so many other parts of the bill the government can reach back into history and erase up to three years' previous recommendations and then, again, leave it to the minister to make the final adjustments or changes to regulations without any debate in this Assembly continues to be a concern.

I support what the hon. member of the third party is attempting to do in terms of creating greater responsibility and accountability within amendment A3 to Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to participate and for your clarification of the amendment. As I say, I had several before me and was not sure which one was being debated.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak on the amendment?

Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We will now speak to the bill. Does anyone wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I won't prolong this because it's obviously a majority decision, as democracy should be, and beyond a doubt this piece of legislation is going to go forward. However, I hope the minister of labour and the minister of government services have some form of escape clause if B.C., for example, or organizations within B.C. challenge municipalities in court over the contracting out of services over the wages paid, over the delivery of insurances. For example, someone from B.C. could very well say: "We're offering a public insurance. We have so many millions of subscribers in British Columbia. We would like to move that form of public insurance into the province of Alberta." That is actually something that I would welcome. But it would be my hope that this government has some way other than a firewall, which is not productive, of protecting Alberta businesses, Alberta municipalities, and the rights of Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 18 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have an amendment and the appropriate number of copies if I could pass those out, or do I read that in first and then pass them out?

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause while they're passed out.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The amendment I am proposing is to allow the government to meet its stated goal of enhancing the current act's functionality and enforceability. To do this, problematic concessions that exempt communication initiated by a minister towards a lobbyist must be addressed. Although this was raised in the committee, I'd like to note that when the federal government eliminated a similar exemption, the reporting of bona fide lobbying increased tenfold. The amendment attempts to do just that by striking out clause (c) of the bill. That's what was passed out to my colleagues.

The Deputy Chair: Do you wish to speak to it?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I do. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As everyone has a copy of the amendment now, it's pretty clear what this is trying to do. It's trying to eliminate the apparent loophole that exists that allows a lobbyist who is contacted by a member of cabinet and who is then called into his office or maybe to a meeting at some other place to get advice. This is now not necessarily needed to be recorded anywhere in the record books. This is such a clear, I guess, way to get around the bill that we present this amendment. We believe that it will allow for a more easily effective bill that will allow democracy to go forward in a much more simple way. It would allow for people to still do business but allow for the government as well as the lobbyist to be accountable. People would have an idea of who is meeting with government ministers, who is giving advice, who is spending time on various projects.

We have no trouble with government trying to access and get the best information possible. In fact, it would be silly to try and stand in the way. What we are trying to balance here is the fact that sometimes in democracy some people have too much influence over government members. That's why the Premier has often stated that his goal is openness and transparency, and that's a laudable goal. To do that, this act, the Lobbyists Act, I hope will be passed and I hope will be put into place. I hope that this is just the start of more things to come toward openness and transparency in this province. One step would be to accept this amendment right now and cut off that apparent loophole.

If we look at the balance that we're trying to strike, it's a difficult one in that we want openness and transparency in our government. As well, we want equal access and opportunity for individuals to go see our government members, and that includes our cabinet. At the same time we need to ensure that no one cabinet minister or no one member of the public has too much influence. That is what this amendment is trying to do. I believe it was cut off by the federal government when they closed this loophole. I think the statistics were that lobbying incidents were reported at a 10 times greater rate. So you can see that there is a need for this. The federal government found it wise to do so. It seems that the results were more proactive, more forthcoming, that people had an ability, then, to see who was coming into cabinet ministers' offices.

That's why I put forward the amendment. I'd encourage all members to add it to what is the start of a good bill and a good era, hopefully, of openness and accountability in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would encourage members not to support this amendment. This amendment would purport to remove a subsection of section 3. Section 3 of this amendment act essentially provides for some modest amendments to the section of the Lobbyists Act which outlines whom the act does not apply to, and the piece that the hon. member's amendment would remove is a piece which exempts from being lobbyists those people that a member of the House or a member of government might go out and ask for a viewpoint or an opinion on a topic.

Consultation is an essential part of what this government does. Talking to the public and asking the public to engage in consultations and seeking out views of the public is an absolutely essential part of the work that we do. That should not be confused with lobbying. The clarity that's provided in this act creates that understanding that when we go out as members of this Legislature

on the government or opposition side or when we go out as members of the government to seek the viewpoint of the public and specifically do that on either a general basis or a targeted basis, that should not be considered lobbying, and it should remain exempt. It's an essential part of the public process.

To suggest that the federal government not including it in their act has made their act more effective because they've had a more massive number of registrations is actually counting the wrong things. It's not the number of registrations that makes the Lobbyists Act effective; it's a question of what disclosure of lobbying is available to the public. With all due respect, seeking views on a targeted basis or a general basis from members of the public is not lobbying, and the section that's in the act is there to clarify that purpose.

This hon. member's amendment would take out a very essential section of the act, and I'd ask members not to support it.

Mr. Chase: When I began my concerns in discussion on Bill 2, the phrase I used was that when the government comes courting, there's no reporting. That's exactly what this amendment attempts to address. It wants to take away the backdoor approach where the government initiates a particular process.

I must say that initiating is not simply going out to the public or holding a forum. This is completely different. It's a form of reverse lobbying, particularly if dollars are involved. In the interest of transparency and accountability I am surprised that the Minister of Education, the Government House Leader, would not be in favour of transparency and accountability. When we do go out into the public, when either the government or members of the opposition hold forums or have discussions, it's a very public circumstance.

3:50

I'm not suggesting that meeting with a community association or going out and discussing with a constituent is a type of lobbying, but where the line of transparency and accountability is crossed is when there are dollars involved. If the activity is initiated by a Member of the Legislative Assembly with the notion of hiring a particular individual to provide a service, then that type of expenditure directed from an MLA should be recorded. What happens now is that while we're having greater transparency on the lobbyist side of things in terms of having them report – and we've gone through the process of exempting nonprofits, exempting community associations, exempting a whole variety of public service providers from having to be caught up in the so-called professional lobbyist act. The fact that the government can do all this behind closed doors with no accounting is a great concern.

Part of the reason the original bill came forward is that we've had a series of sort of lobbying/consulting type of circumstances. Kelley Charlebois, who is a former consultant for a previous minister of health who is now our representative in Washington, received contracts totalling very close to \$800,000 for advice. Sometimes it was a speech written for an individual for which \$700 was paid. We had other examples of individuals very closely connected to the government, like Rod Love, riding on private planes, promoting private lobbyist interests while, at the same time, having contracts with the government, but that wasn't considered a conflict of interest.

The power of the inner circle to influence outcomes and to control budgets is something that should be transparent and accountable to all taxpayers. Whether it's the lobbyist that's being registered, which is captured in the bill, or the government that is approaching an individual with whom they have a relationship and that individual is going to benefit financially from that connection, that information

has to be recorded. Otherwise, any kind of transparency, accountability – what we have, basically, is reverse influence peddling. The number of individuals who have been connected to the government and have been subsequently appointed to boards or commissions or found themselves connected with being electoral officers in certain areas – we have to account for what is described in the worst cases as patronage. We all know how strongly this government feels about appointments to the Senate as opposed to elections to the Senate, yet our Prime Minister has done just that.

If conservatism and accountability are going to stand on an equal plane, then it is extremely important that this amendment be accepted and that MLAs, whether they're on the opposition end of things or on the government side, account for the individuals with whom they are meeting who would directly benefit from a financial point or from a point of influence by meetings that are held in secret.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Chairman, just briefly. First of all, I resent the implication that I'm not in favour of openness or accountability, and I think the hon. member should retract that comment. It's absolutely unjustified. I've been a very strong proponent of open and accountable government and government consulting with the public and seeking viewpoints.

What the hon. member missed in my comments in his desire to get up and say what he was going to say anyway was that there are a number of different ways in which you consult with people with respect to public business. Some of that is, indeed, going out to community associations and public meetings, and some of it is what I would call targeted viewfinding. Going to an expert in an area to ask for a perspective should not put the person that you're going to ask for a perspective or a viewpoint in the position of being considered a lobbyist. A lobbyist by most people's definition is somebody who is coming to try and convince you of something, not somebody that you're going to seek expert advice, viewpoint, or perspective from.

A section of the act which excludes those people makes it clear that you're not a lobbyist just because I as a member of government or I as an MLA come and ask you for your view on a subject. That kind of viewpoint seeking is something that we as MLAs and we as ministers of government ought to be encouraged to do to get a wider viewpoint. In fact, I would suggest that the effect of this amendment that's being proposed would make it necessary for the Liberal opposition as I suspect that when we table a bill in the House, they do take the bill out to the people that they trust in the community for a viewpoint. I know they don't do all the work themselves. I know that they go and ask people for viewpoints on bills. The effect of this amendment would be to require them to have each and every one of the people they go and ask for a viewpoint on a bill to be registered as a lobbyist.

That's not what the lobbyist registry is about. The lobbyist registry is about making sure that the public knows, when a decision is being made in the public interest, if people are trying to affect how that decision is made in their own interest as a lobbyist or in the interest of somebody that they're paid to put a viewpoint forward for, that that is open and transparent. That's a very necessary piece of the Lobbyists Act, and that's provided for. But when we as legislators try to inform ourselves, when we as members of government, as ministers of the Crown try and get a broader perspective on issues that are before us as we craft legislation or policy, that should not be considered lobbying.

Therefore, when I go out to talk or any one of the members of government goes out to talk or any Member of the Legislative Assembly goes out to talk to somebody to seek an informed viewpoint, that should not be considered lobbying, and that's the effect of this section. The amendment that's being put forward would take that out and make all of those people lobbyists and force them to register or put them in a position where some of them would choose, quite appropriately, not to bother talking to us.

Mr. Mason: I'd like to ask the hon. Minister of Education and Government House Leader how you prevent the abuse, then, wherein by a simple device of saying that the MLA contacted the lobbyist, suddenly it's not a lobbyist anymore.

Mr. Hancock: There is no way to codify every aspect of behaviour and cover all contexts. In the context of what we do on behalf of the public, there's a certain element of trust involved that people do their jobs honourably. I know that the hon. member opposite tries often to besmirch the government's reputation, but the reality is that all of us do our jobs in an ethical and honourable manner, and that assumption has to be first and foremost.

Having said that, I think that if there was any question to be raised in any circumstance where there was a suggestion that lobbying had occurred and was inappropriate, the facts would speak for themselves as to who made the first contact and whether, in fact, it was a contact that was initiated by a member of government or by an MLA in order to seek out advice or whether it was an attempt to get around the law.

4:00

Any interpretation of the law starts from the premise that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. If the Lobbyists Act says that you must register as a lobbyist if you're going to lobby government, if you're going to lobby an MLA, you cannot in my view get around that just by saying: well, the MLA called me first, so I wasn't actually lobbying. If you're putting forward a private viewpoint, if you're putting forward a viewpoint in your best interest, I don't think that you can get around that by saying: well, the MLA called me first.

If, in fact, what is happening is that you wanted to create a position where you were lobbying for your interest, that is quite distinct and, I think, separable from the situation where, truly, we as MLAs want to reach out. I would be very surprised, hon. member, if you did not on a daily basis go out and ask people for their viewpoint on a bill or on a policy that's coming forward or on a potential budget issue. I would be very, very surprised if you wanted to register each and every one of those people that you talked to and put on them the onus to register themselves as a lobbyist.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The debate that's going on is very interesting. I would like to add my two bits as we go along. I hear the comments of the hon. House leader, yet it seems to me that the old argument of the slippery slope comes up. I understand the need for government members to get as much information as they can, to get appropriate people who have expertise on highways, on agriculture, on pesticides, on whatever it is that the government legislation or the government is going to be doing. That is fair enough.

Oftentimes the people with the knowledge, who have had 30 years of experience and 40 years of expertise in highways, have made it their private interest to know a lot about the building of highways,

a lot about, you know, putting on the cement and making them run smoothly, for example. Oftentimes the reason why they've made it their 30-year career or whatever is because they've had a business connection to that, or they've worked for some company or, in fact, own some company and have done lots of work on it. You can see why they would have that expertise. In those certain cases when the government member contacts that individual for information, yes, I think that it's a tremendously slippery slope for the government member to really say: "Well, this guy has the expertise, but I'm not really contacting him about his private interest. I'm merely getting information, and he's not really a lobbyist." I think it would be naive of us to consider that that situation does not exist. In fact, I would suggest that it exists frequently for government and cabinet members.

If we look at the reverse situation of the opposition parties, we do seek expertise from time to time in looking at government bills and legislation. Sure, I think we'd have an easy time considering maybe some of these people lobbyists, but at the same point in time they know that in coming to us and getting information, we're not going to be able to reward them with a government contract or something to promote their private interest. I believe it's more so that we're merely going to advocate for an opinion that has no financial reward. At the end of it, it is merely more in the public interest.

That said, we'd feel like we would be covered by the legislation. We would register people as well. I think this is sort of one of those situations where the Caesar's wife rule applies, that for democracies to be credible, for things to run smoothly, it doesn't only have to be without evil, that it has to be – whatever that whole saying is. I've just lost my train of thought, and that often happens. I think everyone knows what I'm trying to get to.

The fact is that this system is fraught with difficulty, is fraught with situations which can come out. Let's face it. You spend \$40 billion of our money a year and you're consulting with many people who come in and give you advice and there are oftentimes situations where private interests could be very easily, I guess, pursued. Nonetheless, this would be a safeguard to that process albeit a minor implication on the ability to discuss with as many people maybe as we would like.

Thank you very much for the opportunity, again, to speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to make it very clear that I respect the hon. Minister of Education. I respect him in his position as the minister. I also respect his reputation as a lawyer. It is the high respect that I hold for my young colleague who drafted this amendment and my respect for lawyers in general that I appreciate . . .

An Hon. Member: Well, most lawyers.

Mr. Chase: Well, very specifically my son-in-law and my brother, but it extends beyond that to, you know, lawyers in general. If they don't follow through with their very high expectations, they're disbarred. So there is a process.

Where I get concerned: I know that the intent of Bill 2 was to cut through red tape. It was not to come down hard on community associations or individuals seeking to have a rink built in their area or a ball diamond upgraded or some type of community project. I think the line of demarcation or the line of separation is that influence peddling goes both ways, and when consultation turns into contracting, that is where the line is crossed.

I think that for MLAs to be able to report to the Ethics Commissioner in good faith, they need to signal from the very outset a meeting where the individual who is being consulted – it goes beyond information, and it goes into the possibility of having a government contract. If that is the case or if at some point later on that is a possibility, then I would think that from an ethics protection point of view an MLA would be well served to make note of those first contacts.

You know, I represent the University of Calgary, one of the powerhouses of information in this province, and I regularly approach a number of professors, most frequently, I would say, in the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy slash experiential learning because that is one of the areas where I am most in need of knowledge. But when I do go and ask someone about, for example, storing nonrenewable energy such as wind power and turning it into a form of compressed energy which can then later be drawn on for power, I'm not in a position, obviously, to award a contract.

Even if I were a government minister or an MLA on the government side, if I thought that my initial consultation and the advice I was given might lead me to offering a contract, then I would record that information because I'm operating on a public expectation. I've sworn an oath, and I've received my symbolic Mace, which indicates that I must be absolutely beholden to the laws of the land and representing my constituents in the most honest form, demonstrating the utmost of integrity.

Therefore, I cannot imagine, for my own protection as well as for the transparency and accountability of the process, not recording those types of meetings. The Minister of Education suggested that somehow this would add red tape. Well, I think we can very clearly define – and if it takes another amendment – where, as I said before, consultation turns into contract. Then the historical development of such a consultation or reverse lobbying needs to be recorded for the sake of transparency and accountability.

Thank you.

4:10

The Deputy Chair: Do other members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Now we're back to the bill. Are you ready for the question on the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Sorry. I'll stand up faster if necessary. I apologize, Mr. Chair, if you didn't see me.

The lobbyist registry has gone through a terrific amount of processing. It has gone through the standing policy committee procedures. We're approximately two years, I believe, from where we were when this was first introduced, and I very much appreciate the processing of this piece of legislation. The fact remains that there are large loopholes where the government has the potential of undue influence by not recording.

The government also has somewhat limited the powers of the Ethics Commissioner to regulate who it is that has been given either a salary or tremendous power. We've previously brought up the individual in charge of Stantec who is now serving on the super-board. Never were the individual's credentials questioned, but the fact that he is allowed, as just one of many examples, to maintain

shares in a company that does business with the government is a flaw that has yet to be addressed in this piece of legislation.

I would love to see the authority of the Ethics Commissioner tremendously increased, as I've stated numerous times, as well as that of the Ombudsman as well as that of the Auditor General. But this Lobbyists Act, while tremendously improved, still has about 25 per cent of the way to go before it can be considered transparent and accountable, and I appreciate having the opportunity in the Committee of the Whole to point that out.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce an amendment to the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Do you have the amendment there with you?

Mr. Mason: I do.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause for a moment while it's distributed.

Okay, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move that we amend Bill 2, the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009. I will move on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 2 by striking out clause (b).

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll refer to this as amendment A2.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, I won't be long on this. I spoke originally – I believe it was at second reading – about the error that we felt was made when the government accepted a Liberal amendment which excluded spouses from the definition of associated persons. In our view, that was not the right approach to take because we think that it's very clear that a spousal relationship is a very close economic relationship, and it is impossible to separate the economic interests of two spouses. So if there is, in fact, a conflict for one, there is almost inevitably a conflict for the other.

I think that this will change that. What it will do is that if you go to section 2(b) on page 1 of the bill, currently 2(b) repeals subsection 5(a), and 5(a) reads that

for the purposes of this Act, a person is associated with a person or entity if that person or entity, as applicable, is

(a) the person's spouse or adult interdependent partner.

It's very clear to us, Mr. Chairman, that by accepting the Liberal amendment on this and passing it in the bill, the government created an enormous loophole that I think will haunt this bill for its entire legislative life or legal life. Our amendment will simply strike that clause out, and as such, a spouse or an interdependent partner will remain an associated person. I think it is almost self-evident that they are.

The arguments that were put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre at the time, as I recall, weighed very heavily on the equality in relationships, in modern relationships, and so on. I would submit that that is, in fact, a red herring, and that the real issue here is to make sure that there are no loopholes that would allow the circumvention of the intention of the lobbyist registry and very clear definitions of what people's interests are. With it as it

stands, that will not occur. I believe that the amendment is, in fact, critical to the success of the lobbyist registry moving forward and would urge members of the House to reconsider their position and vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: We're speaking to amendment A2. Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think what the Member for Edmonton-Centre was intending is that we're all unique individuals, whether we're married or not, but the intention was not to take away the responsibility of individuals to be accountable. With our current expectations as MLAs we put before the Ethics Commissioner not only our holdings or our joint holdings, but we also put forward the holdings and the investments, et cetera, of our spouses. I think what needs to be recognized is that while we have independently defined lives and the right to have our own bank accounts, to have our own investments, each individual requires an accounting.

4:20

Whether that individual is an MLA or the spouse of an MLA or the spouse of a lobbyist, individuals have to be recognized as such. If there's a relationship associated by marriage or by common law or by somehow a business or familial connection, then the investments of the individual's connections also need to be recognized. I don't think that it's an either/or circumstance. I believe what we're trying to accomplish here is that every individual elected or family member or lobbyist or someone connected within their business or family needs to be accounted for in this lobbyist legislation.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hearing none, I'll call the question on amendment A2.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the bill. Are you ready for the question on Bill 2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Chase: Very quickly. We see this as an attempt to remove red tape to speed up the process to provide greater transparency and accountability and also to improve the business climate in which credit unions operate. For that reason we're supportive of it, just for the sake of having that recorded in *Hansard*.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Anyone else wish to comment on the bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There were three questions from before. I would like to clarify them for the members opposite.

The Member for Calgary-Currie's question was: what would determine quorum? Quorum is set out in section 59 of the Credit Union Act as the lesser of 50 members or 10 per cent of the members entitled to vote at a meeting. That would entail the quorum. There was a question from the same member: does this open the door for problems with elections being seen as fair or unfair? That is not expected to. The members will determine whether or not advance polls can be used and how they are designed.

I'm not sure which member opposite asked on the reporting of committees: how will the reporting back to the credit union board be monitored to ensure that it happens? I think that was Calgary-Varsity's question. This will be monitored by the board, who will need the information to meet their responsibilities and for which some board members will sit on these committees. So there will be direct communication. The credit union's internal audit function and the external review by the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation will also be overseeing that.

One further question from the Member for Calgary-Varsity on his concern whether the forthwith comment needed to be replaced by a specific time. Credit unions are private companies, and their members vote for the board that represents them. Any mention of a time frame beyond that is normally regulated in financial institutions or any other entity. The use of the term "forthwith" gives the credit union the flexibility to set their own board governance but allows the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation to intervene if it could have the ability to impair the credit union operating properly.

I hope that clarifies the questions that were brought up by the members opposite, and I appreciate the opportunity to address those today. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I just wish to thank the hon. member for providing those clarifications. My questions were based on the fact that the majority of my working life, 34 years, has been in public service as opposed to private operations, and therefore I appreciate those clarifications. Thank you for providing them.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 8

Feeder Associations Guarantee Act

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I have a series of questions. If these questions have been answered, you can just simply inform me, and I'll look for it in the previous *Hansard*, but these are the questions that we have been asked. With specific details about what guaranteed loans may be used for being moved into regulations with this proposed legislation, there are questions such as: does the government anticipate that loans will be guaranteed exclusively for the processing and marketing of livestock products? Previously it was only for purchasing, so those are two new elements that we'd appreciate answers for if it's possible.

Another question that has arisen is: what specific cases can the minister provide where it would be necessary to extend the loan guaranteeing to processing and marketing of livestock? As I say, initially these loans were just strictly for purchasing. Can the minister provide further clarification as to how members of feeder associations will benefit from these changes?

To the minister: would you prefer that I ask these questions individually so that you have a chance to respond? My intent is not to load you up. Sorry; I'm looking in the wrong direction. Shall I stop and let you answer those three questions now? Continue? Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to give you a fair opportunity.

Can the minister, then, provide further clarification as to how members of feeder associations will benefit from these changes? In earlier discussions we talked about the difference between cow-calf operations and feeder operations. What members of feeder associations will benefit most from these changes? Will it mostly benefit the larger scale operations? We're always concerned, as I'm sure government members are, about the family farm and the survival of smaller operations that have been in families for generations.

The last of these immediate sets of questions: has the minister or department done any studies to anticipate how these changes may increase the number of defaulted loans and the cost to government as a result of guaranteeing these loans? Earlier, when we were talking about Bill 8 in second reading, I brought up the example of Rancher's Beef and the fact that we were trying to support a made-in-Alberta processing solution. Unfortunately, the organization never received the amount of slaughter capacity that it was capable of, and it went out of business. The government had provided subsidies.

I will sit down and look forward to the answers to these questions. Thank you.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today to address some of the questions, particularly the ones that were raised during second reading of this bill. A few members of the House expressed some concerns and questions, and I appreciate having this opportunity now to provide some clarification and further details. With members' indulgence I'll review the questions they have now and get back with answers later on. As some of the comments and questions that were raised in second reading by different members were similar, I will attempt to address those in a more collective answer rather than point-by-point responses to members on particular issues. I'm confident that with further information and understanding there will be support for this legislation, which serves to strengthen our agricultural industry and by extension Alberta's rural communities and beyond.

The livestock and meat industry is a significant sector of our agricultural industry, and it makes an important contribution to our province's economy. Preliminary estimates show that livestock and livestock products in 2008 accounted for just over 42 per cent of

Alberta's farm cash receipts. Specifically, Mr. Chairman, cattle and calves were 30 per cent of farm cash receipts and estimated to have a value of just over \$3 billion; that's with a B. We're, in fact, the largest cattle-producing province in Canada, and nearly two-thirds of all Canadian beef processing occurs right here in the province of Alberta. Legislation and programs that support the growth of this commerce are, of course, of great value to all Albertans.

As shared in previous readings, Mr. Chairman, Bill 8 provides a rewriting of the existing act, and there has been debate over the merits and reasoning for that. To provide some context, the current act has been amended numerous times over the years, and the language used in that text is currently outdated. As the agricultural industry has changed and grown, many of the definitions and terminology used are now limited in their capacity to accurately describe or fully capture the scope of that business activity. Updated text will bring clarity. Since these wording improvements were needed throughout the act and its amendments, legal counsel advised that we create an entirely new document rather than adding further amendments. Simply put, it is more user or, honestly, reader friendly. Let me make it clear. The new act does not introduce wholesale changes, Mr. Chairman. The fundamental principles of the act remain the same.

Another question raised concerns about what is covered by legislation versus what is covered through legislation and if more jurisdiction is being given to regulation as opposed to legislation. That's not the intent here, Mr. Chairman. In fact, the only thing being moved from the existing act to regulations is the activity for which the loan may be given. Originally the act specifically limited the program to the acquisition of livestock for growing or finishing or both by the members of a feeder association. However, as the scope of activity of feeder association members extends further into the value chain, we require legislation and regulations that reflect that extended role.

Given the rapid pace of change in the industry, Mr. Chairman, we have anticipated that we may need to update the description again in the near future. Moving the description of that activity from legislation to regulation will allow this change in a more flexible and timely manner without having to reopen the act. With the new definition of feeder association, which includes the words "otherwise deal with," the proposed act will allow regulation to specify that activity, ensuring a more current and accurate reflection of it.

On the same subject of legislation versus regulation we did in fact move one item from regulation directly into the new act itself. The requirement for a security deposit would be entrenched in the legislation, ensuring that that element of risk mitigation protection is always part of the program.

I also want to stress that as in all legislation, regulation does have an important role to play and is not something deliberately subversive. Defining and detailing all things in legislation is just not feasible or realistic or effective or allowing flexibility. The process of developing regulation is absolutely nothing new in any government.

There was also some discussion in the last reading about whether this new act is transparent and accountable. We have added section 9, which clearly articulates the powers of the minister versus the rights of individuals or businesses. This demonstrates transparency and accountability, Mr. Chairman.

Also, let me state that the new act does not change the way these loan guarantees are granted by the government in any way, shape, or form. The criteria for guaranteeing a loan to a feeder association were never written in the act before. The process for this activity remains at the regulation and policy level, with the ministers responsible – both finance and agriculture are responsible – continuing to be involved in the order in council process.

To answer the question of why we have removed the requirement to renew the act every five years, which was brought up in second reading, commonly referred to, Mr. Chairman, as the sunset clause, and the inference that this somehow means less accountability, it changes nothing about a very solid accountability of the program. Government remains responsible for ensuring that the established policies and procedures are followed. What is accomplished by removing the renewal requirement is that it strengthens the program and the security that the program will exist.

The need to renew the act has the effect of creating a degree of uncertainty among lenders and the associations themselves. Indeed, every five years when this issue came up, I got a record number of calls to my constituency office asking if we were going to get rid of the feeder association program. That's undesirable for an industry that we are trying to grow and advance. If we have learned anything from the current global economic situation, it should be that stability is critical to the financial world. Certainty is critical to the business world and those who depend on it.

In terms of who this program benefits, Mr. Chairman, there was some question of how it relates to cow-calf producers. I want to point out that the program has been serving these members in the industry for years. It has allowed these producers to effectively retain control of their calf crop for an additional 12 months. This allows them to get needed cash flow in the fall and still add value to the weaned calf by feeding home-ground feeds. The program will continue to serve cow-calf producers in this way. Nothing is changing about that. The program also supports these producers by providing a market for their calves and a link in the supply chain to the larger finishing lots.

As for who qualifies as members of a feeder association, the new regulation will establish criteria for associations to use when considering membership; however, it will be the feeder associations themselves, not government, who makes those specific decisions, and rightly so.

In response to the question of whether the proposed act focuses on processing and marketing of livestock products and not just purchasing: not at all. The program will continue to play a role in providing capital to purchase cattle. However, it will now extend to processing and marketing, allowing producers to further participate in the supply chain, giving them more power over their finished product, and adding more value to the product they grow themselves. Those who want to retain ownership of the product through to the meat retail stage will have that ability under the expanded program.

Let me provide an example of why this is desirable. Producers who are differentiating their product with special attributes such as organic production practices and so on need to create a continuous link to their customers in order to capture the higher value. Having to pay off a feeder association loan before they have sold their inventory would be an undue financial hardship and, indeed, keep them from entering themselves farther up the value chain.

Let's be really clear. Businesses that only process and market meat products would not – not – be eligible for this program, nor would the loan guarantee be transferred from one business to the next as the livestock moves through the process from cattle to meat product.

One member of this House raised the concern that the new act would allow corporations to be members of feeder associations, extending support to large operations, which would give them an advantage over smaller ones. Certainly, as with many businesses there are benefits to economies of scale; however, if the concern is for what we like to call the family farm, let me point out that a significant number of family farms are now incorporated and have grown substantially in size.

An Hon. Member: So they're not family.

4:40

Mr. Griffiths: But they're still owned by family members, and the majority of family farms now are incorporated.

It's really an emotional argument that has nothing to do with reality. Members who made these arguments should perhaps leave the city once in a while. The program simply reflects the current business model that a large number of producers have chosen, and in fact my own family and our farm chose it in 1972. [interjection] Pardon?

The Deputy Chair: Just looking at your tie. That's okay.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah, I know I have pigs on my tie. Thank you for pointing that out, Mr. Chairman. It's an agriculture tie.

Another area of concern raised in the previous debate was whether this program and the proposed legislative or regulatory changes present a high or a higher risk to the viability of these feeder associations. Let me state for the record that this has been a highly successful program. Over the life of the program the payouts under the guarantee have amounted to only 0.06 per cent – that's 0.06 per cent – of the amount of financing provided to the industry. That is less than one-tenth of 1 per cent, an incredible success story. None of the changes proposed have any effect on that. In addition, it should be understood that there are very effective risk mitigation practices in place with this program that the feeder associations utilize.

We have done our due diligence in recognizing that we will need to adapt the mitigation procedures to be appropriately applied to any program changes, such as how they apply to corporations. As another example, feeder association members choosing to participate in the equity draw options to be defined in the regulations will be expected to use some sort of price protection mechanism to ensure that the value of the livestock is ultimately realized at the time of sale.

The cattle price insurance program, or CPIP for short, being developed by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation would be one such mechanism. As far as the liability of the program as a whole, the current maximum is set at \$55 million, and there is no desire or need to increase this amount of the guarantee at this time.

Overall I would say that Alberta's tax dollars are well applied and protected under this program, and it does wonders for the beef industry.

As you know, Alberta's agricultural industry is export oriented, so we highly value our trade relationships and work to ensure that those remain on a good footing. There was a question of whether this program puts our trade relationships at risk of retaliatory action. First, there is no subsidy of interest rates under this program. Feeder associations get their financing from commercial financial institutions at negotiated rates. Also, it's worth noting that this program was included as part of a very thorough review of our beef cattle programs by the U.S. department of industry, trade, and commerce in 1998 and 1999. They deemed that it was not significant enough to be of any concern to them at this time.

To sum up, as I stated earlier, the agricultural industry makes an important contribution to our economy and our rural communities. This particular legislation and program is an appropriate support to the economic development of the province. The program has been in effect in one form or another since 1936 and has been an effective catalyst for growth. The legislation and program simply lays the foundation, Mr. Chairman, and creates a stable environment for feeder associations and financial institutions to develop a solid business relationship. They are the business units involved, not the

government. Government's role is limited to providing the loan guarantees and responsible and effective oversights such as audits and inspection services to make sure that everything is working effectively.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, I would stress that they have a very strong foundation for this program. The new act will add clarity to the legislation, enable improved and new regulations that support program enhancements. Therefore, I encourage all member of the House to support Bill 8 through Committee of the Whole and at third reading, where I would be happy to answer any further questions that come out of Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the clarifying answers provided from the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Let's get it officially. [interjections] Battle River-Wainwright. Sorry, I was bringing you a little closer to the Legislature. Thank you for that clarification. Among the clarifications I'm very appreciative that you addressed my concern about perceived subsidies and specifically the concerns that R-CALF or sort of territorial types down in the States might put forward.

I had an opportunity the week previous to talk with a rancher from Montana. I jokingly asked him if he was a member of the R-CALF group. While he didn't mention that, we talked to the degree that I was capable about some of the problems associated with animals crossing the border. He was saying that he ships quite a few animals north and has to go through lengthy processing experiences in trying to ship his cattle. So I'm quite sure that there is equal frustration with ours going south.

I also appreciate the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright pointing out about the need for city folks to get out into the country. Just very briefly I want to say that I did just that this past weekend. My wife and I went out to East Coulee for a music festival, that we thoroughly enjoyed. While we were there, we ran into a former Liberal candidate in the Drumheller-Stettler area, Tom Dooley, and his wife, who are both cattle producers. I'm sure they're members of the feeder group. What was interesting to me was that again my knowledge of agriculture increased tremendously.

Tom and his wife had just purchased a number of calves that had recently been weaned. The reason he did not buy them from the surrounding neighbourhood and bought them instead from a small district around Dorothy was the fact that both the mothers and the calves would be trying to get back together, and the disruption on the animals themselves, both the cows and the calves, would be such as to cause stress to the livestock. So he's having his shipped in from a greater distance so as to avoid that breakup of the family, so to speak, which is obviously part of the agricultural operation.

I thank you very much. With each sortie into the country I'm getting a better understanding. I also appreciate in your clarifications that the loans are secured, that they're guaranteed, because that was a concern we had.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any further comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for a bit of clarification from the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. You know, I know I've been here only a short time. I'm going to try at some point in time to get a handle on all the agricultural acts and symposiums and whatever and different

programs and all that stuff that exists in this Legislature. At this time I must confess I'm having difficulties with it because I had no idea of the breadth and width and involvement of our government activities into the lives of, I guess, our farmers and our ranchers and the like.

Nonetheless, I'm glad to see that this program is one of those ones that looks like it's necessary. Maybe some of the other ones aren't. Maybe some of the other ones have to be curtailed at some time; I don't know. Nonetheless, at some point in time I hope to have a comment to be a little more ingrained and knowledgeable. I may actually even undertake to do that this summer, maybe even with the help of the hon. agriculture minister's campaign manager. I ran into him at The Metropolitan Grill last Friday night, and he offered to explain it to me sometime. Maybe I will take him up on that. I look forward to that opportunity at some time.

Thank you very much for the opportunity and the explanation.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 8?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

4:50

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 18, Bill 2, Bill 3, and Bill 8.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 2, Bill 3, and Bill 8. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Hon. members, before we proceed with Bill 1, may I have unanimous consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of Employment and Immigration's policy team who worked tirelessly on the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 1 is close to completing its way through the legislative process. There have been many outstanding comments from both sides of the Assembly. I think it's only appropriate that Tim Thompson, Sandra Wagenseil, and Myles Morris are here to witness their hard work become law that will in turn benefit the thousands of Alberta reservists who serve our country. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly and our thank you for the work that you have done on Bill 1.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1

Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration on behalf of the hon. the Premier.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 1, the Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009.

This amendment provides Canadian Forces reservists in Alberta with unpaid, job-protected leave while they're away from their civilian jobs serving our country. The amendment also provides the reservist with an additional 20 days' leave to take part in annual training.

Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the support of members on both sides of this Assembly, and I thank all members for their thoughtful comments and discussion.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak very briefly in third on this legislation, which is very important to me. Very quickly, the fact that I'm here at all is subject to very much good fortune. My grandfather was a British cavalry officer in the First World War and was gassed at Ypres, and the fact that he made it through was a testimony to not only his abilities but those of the unit that he was assigned to. Also, my father was a pilot during the Second World War, and in part of his instruction circumstance his plane crashed, and he was pulled out seconds before the fuel tanks ignited. Again, with very good fortune and the quick act of the ground crew he was pulled to safety and he recuperated. He re-enlisted after the Second World War, so I grew up either on or very near bases for a large part of my life.

While reservists don't have the opportunity to live on base – obviously, they do some of their training on bases – the job that they do, the sacrifices they make are as equally important as those of the regular services. Recognizing them through the protection of their employment and recognizing their need to receive the training that will not only provide them with the tools that they need but allow them to be effective members of overseas action, whether it's peacekeeping or in a war circumstance, is absolutely essential.

One of the areas that I hope this bill also covers is a type of compensation for the employer who is required by this law to hold the position. Hopefully within the bill there is some accommodation

for the employer's recognizing the importance and worth of their employee.

The 20-day allowance for training is extremely important. I know, as I say, being the son of a military officer, how wearing the experience was for my mother when my dad would be away on coursework, and that is nothing in comparison to the angst associated with a person being on the front lines. So it would be my hope that future bills will extend further to make sure that the spouse of a reservist and the families of reservists are supported.

When we lived on the base, that support was easier because, for example, when we were stationed at Namao, there was shopping, there was entertainment, there were a variety of circumstances on the base to support the spouses. But in the case of reservists they're obviously not living on the base, and sometimes a reservist's family can be somewhat isolated. Living off the base, their neighbours may not realize the magnitude of the sacrifice they are making. I would hope, as I say, that in future legislation as well as honouring the job that reservists do, we take into account the effect it has on their families when they're away and provide support for them, whether it be in respite care for the spouses or membership in community associations or access, as a number of regular forces personnel have, to special discounts for recreational activities. I would like to think that the privileges that the community and the government provide for members of the regular forces be extended to the greatest extent possible to reservists.

Reservists, as I say, while they've taken a great amount of personal time off to do the training, where that training sort of meets the mat or is undertaken is when the bullets are flying on a mission outside of Kandahar or, formerly, in Cyprus and a number of areas where brave Canadian men and women have represented this country.

Beyond a doubt, I and my Liberal colleagues support this legislation. I appreciate the government members for bringing it forward. As the son of a long line of militarily involved family members I say: well done.

Thank you.

5:00

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Although this bill now is in third reading, I have not had an opportunity to speak to it, but I, too, will be brief. Although not to the extent of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity my family, too, has a bit of a military history. My grandfather was 37 years old when World War II broke out, not exactly a young man; however, he did enlist in the army. He served as a cobbler in, of all places, Halifax. He made shoes for four years. When he came back from war, he brought a nice little bag home, and that was my first hockey bag that I took to hockey when I was seven years old. It said C. Hehr on it with a little army number and all that stuff. It was a neat little memento I got from World War II. As my grandfather's experience was as a cobbler, I'm sure that possibly the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's father wore some of the shoes that my grandfather was busy making in Halifax.

But to the merits of the bill. This is essentially something that is well received by both our side of the House and the government side. It's clearly something that's long past due as many other jurisdictions, in fact maybe all other jurisdictions, have already passed this type of job protection for reservists. We all know, as has probably been belaboured in this House, that Alberta's 2,500 reservists are doing us proud both as Alberta citizens and Canadian citizens at the same time. It's the least we can do as a community to

recognize their sacrifice and allow for them to have their employment opportunities back when they return from duty.

On that note, I will leave it for others if they wish to partake in the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to comment or question.

Seeing none, does anyone else wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 15

Dunvegan Hydro Development Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to move third reading of Bill 15, the Dunvegan Hydro Development Act.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the act arises out of requirements in sections 9 and 10 of our own Hydro and Electric Energy Act. The passage of this bill would allow the Alberta Utilities Commission to issue authorization to construct the facility on the Peace River. It would also allow the AUC to authorize operation of the facility at the appropriate time. The bill does not in any way infringe upon the normal regulatory authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be very quick because the Liberal caucus is very supportive of renewable energy which does not leave a dramatic footprint, and run of the river is one such form of energy. Dams aren't required. The movement of fish and, basically, animal crossings are accounted for in the way the run of the river is set up. It fits very much into our philosophy that we need to diversify not only our economy but our various sources of power, and bringing on safe renewables such as run of the river is one of those ways.

I also want to commend the government on removing the cap within the last two years on wind generation and also encouraging a variety of organizations, both industrial in terms of large senses, like in the oil sands, but also on farms, in providing cogeneration and creative ways of using animal waste to create methane, with the potential of not only using the power provided by the methane on the farm but also the potential of exporting this power to the grid.

In terms of having received a greater understanding of the information, I think most Albertans when they hear the name Brian Keating will associate it with his outreach on behalf of the Calgary Zoo. I had a chance to teach two of the family members of his brother John Keating. John Keating has been involved in numerous renewable power projects. It was basically at a parent-teacher interview where I cornered John and asked him about types of renewable power. He was a big supporter of the idea of renewable power and the river run being a part of it.

I very much appreciate the hon. Member for Peace River bringing forward this legislation. It indicates a desire by this government to diversify its energy sources along with the expenditure on the CO₂ sequestration, to have a much greener approach and more renewable, practical approach to providing energy for this province. Therefore, I want to again thank the government member for bringing this forward. It is progressive. It is maybe one more step towards our greening of our energy requirements.

As the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, has pointed out, we will continue to rely on and be grateful for the power generated from nonrenewable resources, whether it's conventional oil and gas or the more unconventional types such as the operation, bitumen collection, in the oil sands and also the other forms of power that are being generated.

We would advise a very careful, measured, well-informed approach as the government considers other forms of energy, and of those other forms we would hope that the greatest of consultation, the greatest of information gathering, and scientific reviews would be considered before going down the line toward nuclear energy. This is one of the most controversial types of energy and, unlike the river run, has both strengths and weaknesses that have to be considered in thorough debate.

I again thank the minister from Athabasca-Peace for bringing forward this piece of legislation. [interjection] Sorry. I expanded your territory. Sorry about that.

Mr. Oberle: And raised my title while you're at it.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you. I'm sorry that we can't provide you a bonus for extending that area, but you've done a good job so far. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?
Do you wish to close, hon. member?

Mr. Oberle: Just call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

5:10

Bill 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and move third reading of Bill 5, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009.

This act will amend the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. The proposed amendments are a result of a review of the existing legislation and industry consultations. In 2006 the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council began an industry governance review, including a review of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act. Consultations included the 20 agricultural boards and commissions, a survey of producers who are not actively engaged in industry organizations, and meeting with other agricultural organizations in Alberta and, indeed, across Canada. Over 400 individuals participated in the consultation process, Mr. Speaker.

No substantial changes have been made to the act since 1987, so the proposed legislation will update the act, simplify the wording, eliminate duplication, and make minor amendments to clarify regulatory powers, including moving the review and appeal process into regulations. I think we had a good discussion on this in the Committee of Supply.

In conclusion, these amendments will allow the current act to better serve the needs of our agriculture marketing boards and commissions.

I appreciate the support of the hon. members from both sides of the House and anticipate their continued support with third reading of this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Today is very much a sort of a home, home on the range type of corralling of bills.

I very much appreciate the hon. minister of agriculture's consultation, having reached out to Albertans who are most affected, having brought the clarification into this bill, basically cutting through a whole lot of bureaucracy and red tape, bringing it up to its current expedient attempt.

The reality is that agriculture was the first strong pillar upon which this province was founded, and it continues to be a very strong pillar, particularly in these times of global recession, when outside forces determine the value of our nonrenewable resources, our oil and gas. Agriculture to a large extent is determined by global markets, but there is less of a fluctuation; there is greater stability within agriculture. There is an adaptability that is part of both farming and ranching where if necessary you change the type of animal or, in the farming case, you change your approach, whether it be to go more organic and use less fertilizer, all the different types of tilling. So the marketing of agricultural products is one of the ways this province is going to climb out of the recessionary hole that we're currently faced with.

I appreciate the minister of agriculture bringing forth this bill, which will strengthen not only agriculture in this province but our economy. Thank you for doing so.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?
The hon. minister to close debate?

Mr. Groeneveld: Closed.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Ms Notley]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to get up and speak to this bill, given that it allows for many of our postsecondary institutions, such as Mount Royal College in Calgary and some other institutions up here in Edmonton, the opportunity of moving into the university stream. I think that in the future allowing this stream to exist will enable more Albertans to become graduates of universities and of university level programs to obtain the knowledge that's going to be necessary to propel Alberta and its citizens into the 21st century to be able to truly compete in the knowledge-based economy. This process will allow us to continue to do that.

I would also encourage us to look at not only making some of this existing college and university space available for this stuff. We should be really looking down the future at opportunities where we can add more university space, more college and postsecondary education space throughout the province.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I've just noticed that you've already spoken in second reading.

Mr. Hehr: My goodness. My most humble apologies. We can move on.

The Acting Speaker: You have as well, Calgary-Varsity.
Does any member wish to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 6
Protection of Children Abusing Drugs
Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Hancock]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to stand and speak to Bill 6, which is the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, which is a good act that I plan, I believe, on supporting. I just have a few questions and concerns with the existing parameters.

If we look at the bill in total, it's really providing parents with children who are thought to have a difficulty with drugs an opportunity where they can confine those children for up to 10 days. The amendment actually proposes increasing the length of confinement, that was previously five days, to 10 days. Primarily, this is in regard to the more difficult nature of drug abuse, a recognition that many of the drugs out there now that are available to people who are under the age of 18 are much more potent and can cause significant physical addiction to this drug that lasts longer than five days. The 10-day window I believe is fair and reasonable for parents with children who are suffering from these addictions to put them in a confined setting to try and battle their demons and get a handle on at least the physical addiction so that when they leave the facility in 10 days, they have an opportunity to go out into the world and face it with a clear mind and decide whether following that lifestyle is, indeed, in their best interests or if they maybe want a clean break and to pursue longer range solutions.

5:20

There's also the possibility of adding another five days. At that point what this amendment I believe is seeking is that it would allow for a continued confinement of up to 10 days, but it would go before a judge, and it would give the judge the ability to extend the period for a further five days if the original time for a minor wasn't long enough to detox. In general I am in favour of this change. Of course, I would wait to hear how the Child and Youth Advocate will be involved and maybe some opportunities for individuals to seek some legal counselling to see if it is in their ability to get themselves out of this situation should it be necessary and give them an opportunity to be heard in a court of law. Those things I would be interested in hearing more about at the committee stage and at third before I render my final decision.

Nevertheless, I believe this bill recognizes that our best opportunity to deal with the addiction problems that are beginning to emerge not only in Alberta but in other areas of North America and, indeed, the world happen when they're young. The best time to fight these things is when individuals are young and when they are in the custody and care of their parents and when their parents are actively involved in their lives and really wish to help their children rid themselves of the addictive process.

I believe that this bill, at least at first glance, has some tremendous attributes that will enable some children and some parents some opportunities to get off drugs, to maybe rectify their lives and go forward. When those questions are answered and when I hear further debate on this, I imagine myself being supportive of these amendments.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 6 here today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes for anyone wishing to comment or question.

Seeing none, do any other members wish to join debate?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate what has been said as I've listened intently to the debate on Bill 6 and will be prepared to answer some of the questions when we get into committee.

At this point I'd like to move second reading of Bill 6.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 7
Public Health Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 17: Dr. Swann]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. A large part of Bill 7 has to do with clarifying where we are with regard to the delivery of services. The point of the bill will be to strengthen the role of the chief medical officer of health, support student public health programs, expand the reporting of public health matters, and transfer some of the regulations that were formerly under the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the minister. That is where we have a degree of concern, and that concern will be discussed in much greater detail when we come to Bill 52.

What has happened is that while we support whatever we can do to increase the efficiency of our delivery of universal public health services, the accountability portion is always of concern. We've gone from consolidation of regional health authorities to a smaller group. We went from 17, I believe, to 9, and now we've arrived at a superboard with a health board chairperson, who comes highly recommended – I have heard this – from Australia. That gives me hope because in Australia he has seen a number of private P3-type operations fail and actually be recovered within the public system. So I think the individual from Australia was a wise choice, and I commend the minister and the members of the superboard for coming up with that individual. I know it was a very extensive interviewing process, and I'm remaining optimistic that this is one of the individuals who has the background that can bring and strengthen our universal public health system.

One of the concerns that I have brought up before and that occurs, if not on a daily basis, certainly on a weekly basis within my constituency is who you're going to report to. When a constituent comes to me with regard to a health-related problem and access to the health system or support from the government for a malady, be it gastroparesis, which I have brought up prior, or whether it be receiving a particular type of cancer treatment which involves chemical combinations which have been approved for other types of cancer fighting within the province but not necessarily in the chemical combination, I used to be able to address my concerns to a lady whose name, I believe, was Lynn Redford.

Mr. Liepert: You still can.

Mr. Chase: I'm pleased to hear from the minister that that local autonomy still exists because this was one of my concerns. Possibly

the minister can pass on the name of the most recent contact so that I can inform my constituents. I'm pleased to hear that local authority and local autonomy. . .

Mr. Liepert: Same one. Same one.

Mr. Chase: Oh. Okay. I'd heard that Lynn's position had changed, so I'm glad to hear that in this particular, limited experience I am wrong. I appreciate the hon. minister recognizing the talents of this lady. She is an absolutely wonderful front-line individual. We could call and within two hours we would get directed.

Mr. Liepert: Good blood lines from the Attorney General.

Mr. Chase: Oh, is that right? I hadn't realized. That goes to testify to the great quality of the blood lines that are there.

The concern, as I say – and I appreciate the minister for correcting my concern here or redirecting it. There are a number of groups like, for example, Rick Lundy, who is working on advocating for patients who have suffered difficulties in the medical system. It's on record the difficulties his wife had and the embarrassment associated with a miscarriage and not being able to be admitted to a room. The notion of the control – who do you go to, and how quickly will you get a response? – the local autonomy versus the overriding powers of the health board: hopefully, in debate over Bill 7 the minister will provide greater clarification, and in so doing, will alleviate some of the fears of individuals who have experienced ever-increasing waits in waiting rooms and at emergency.

5:30

Also, hopefully, as the minister provides greater information on Bill 7 and the way the health board will be administering, individuals involved in the various levels, paramedics and health professionals, will receive a greater sense of security. Right now there is such a flux that people are concerned not only for their own jobs within the health care system, which is a major employer in Alberta and, obviously, our most costly ministry, but we have not seen overall perceivable improvements within the system. For example, while 60 per cent of seniors have benefited from reduced costs in pharmaceuticals, it appears that the 40 per cent of seniors who haven't benefited have basically had their Blue Cross rates doubled so that any advantage that they receive from health premiums being removed has now been experienced as an increase in their pharmaceuticals.

I'll not get into the concerns over the transfer of the health records. That will come up in Bill 52. But suffice it to say that there is great concern both in the medical community and from a patient-client perception that the records might be subject to external scrutiny.

However, I look forward to the minister attempting to explain to me, as he did in the case of Lynn Redford, any other efficiencies and autonomies local authorities have kept. We may not have health regions, but according to the minister, we still have regional responsiveness. So I would look forward to the minister providing more information, and if not in this second reading stage, then providing those assurances during the Committee of the Whole stage. I do appreciate the information he provided so quickly, which did offer me a degree of reassurance.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for five minutes if anyone wishes to comment or question.

Hearing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to close debate?

Mr. Liepert: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 9

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Hancock]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm sorry. I was just collaborating with my hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. If I could please be updated, I apologize for not being totally attentive to where we're at.

An Hon. Member: Bill 9.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you. I do have comments that I would like to make with regard to Bill 9 if I may be permitted to do so. Thank you for that opportunity.

I've been quite collaborative this afternoon, and I have agreed with a number of bills. In general I agree with what is being intended within this bill, but I must take a small shot at the fact that it's called the Government Organization Amendment Act. By putting the words "government" and "organization" together, it comes across to me as a bit of a paradoxical oxymoron.

An Hon. Member: Yeah, like Liberal appeal.

Mr. Chase: Well, another example of an oxymoron if we're going to exchange is Progressive Conservative – okay? – if we're going to get into wordsmithing.

Mr. Hancock: It's totally unparliamentary to call me an oxymoron.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor and will address the chair.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Who is definitely neither an ox nor a moron although we have spent a lot of time talking about beef today – okay? – related to the ox family. I just want to draw that connection.

In terms of Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, in this year 2009 one of the biggest improvements this government made in terms of its organization or reorganization is getting rid of the ministry whose acronym was RAGE, which was restructuring and government efficiency. I give the government full credit for getting rid of that ministry and returning to the various ministries the ability to conduct their own business without having a sort of overseer ministry.

This act basically brings greater efficiency into the organization of government. The intention is to get rid of red tape to improve the delivery of service to Albertans. Given these recessionary times improved organization and accountability should be praised at all levels. At this point, without belabouring it, I am supportive. So we don't miss my colleague through further discussions, I would indicate to the chair his desire to participate.

Thank you.

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

Seeing no one, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak on Bill 9, Government Organization Amend-

ment Act, 2009. I, too, would like to say that this looks like a good bill that will increase the accountability of our registering agencies. I think that's a good thing. For one, in their privatization in 1993 these agencies took over a great many things: the licensing of vehicles, the handing out of drivers' licences. Not only do these agencies give this stuff out, but they also hold a great deal of private, sensitive information in their databases and have access to all sorts of things. Of course, when you have the ability to issue a legal document such as a driver's licence, there's often some temptation for individuals to try and produce those documents or for people to try and get them. I think having this type of increased government oversight over our registry agents is an important step. It increases the accountability in the process and can sort of keep an eye on some of the things that maybe were creeping up in the system.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to that bill. On that, we can go forward.

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

Seeing none, the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

5:40 Bill 10
Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

[Adjourned debate March 11: Ms Pastoor]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Just to provide a bit of a preview as part of the tracking of the process and to assure the hon. House leader, I will be speaking to this very briefly, as will my colleagues from Calgary-Buffalo and Calgary-McCall, and the last speaker will be calling for adjournment. Thank you.

What Bill 10 purports to accomplish is the licensing and monitoring grounds for the government over supportive living facilities. The bill outlines what this legislation applies to as regards facilities. A framework is given for inspections, investigations, complaints, and offences, which is very much appreciated. What creates a degree of burden and hopefully will be addressed through amendments is the leeway left to regulation regarding what is exempt from the application of this act. There are issues concerning how a

complaints officer may dismiss a complaint. However, I believe that the intention behind the bill is good, and I think with just a little bit of collaborative effort we can accomplish what the bill intends to do.

As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has pointed out, we have a variety of different types of accommodations. We have long-term care, we have assisted living, and we have supportive living, and when working well together, they all provide homes where accredited support is provided to individuals whether they be by age placed into these institutions, whether by some addiction or behavioural difficulty in the case of group homes for youth. Also, individuals with physical or developmental disabilities find themselves in a supportive living circumstance.

It is somewhat unfortunate within this province that we have so few accessible home environments so that individuals would not have to necessarily be moved into supportive living accommodations, but time and necessity require it. As a result, it's important that these facilities be regulated. This is what, again, Bill 10 intends to accomplish.

I very much appreciate the work that was done by the member from Ponoka and also the Member for Calgary-Foothills, I believe it was – I may be wrong – who worked in conjunction with the Member for Lethbridge-East on long-term care. They toured the province after the Auditor General had pointed out some of the deficiencies of long-term care, and they made numerous recommendations, some of which have been implemented.

So I see Bill 10 doing for supportive living what previous legislation and Auditor General assessments have done for long-term care. Rather than cause confusion for the House leader, if it is all right with the House leader, I would move to adjourn debate at this time. I did not want to pre-empt speakers on his side.

Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:46 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 9, 2009

Issue 22

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 9, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

As we pray, let us also commemorate the 92nd anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917. We give thanks for the lives of the faithful men and women in our military who have defended and continue to defend the freedoms and values we cherish. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. On this day I would ask that all Members of Alberta's Legislative Assembly, all others present here, and those observing these proceedings in their homes join together as we reflect upon the lives of Canadian military personnel lost in service to their countrymen. May their souls rest in eternal peace, and may a nation be eternally grateful. God bless. Amen.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure and honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a rather large group of grade 6 students from the Woodhaven middle school, 103 visitors, who have had the opportunity to do your mock Legislature. When I was downstairs talking to them in the rotunda, they passed a bill that would allow school uniforms and as well cellphone usage in the classroom, which I know is very close to the Speaker's heart as well. These wonderful, intuitive students are accompanied by a great group of education professionals: Ms Jayna Butler, Mrs. Ashley Lyster, Ms Emily Pearce, Mrs. Deb Schellenberger, Miss Joanne Fuminger, Mrs. Dara Coles as well as parents and helpers Mrs. Shelley Gibson, Mrs. Jennifer McIntosh, Mrs. Courtney Haberjam, and Mr. Paul Snell. A large group like this I believe is in both of our galleries, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: For clarification that was to disallow cellphone use in the classroom.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of seniors and juniors from the Leduc Family Worship Centre, located in the city of Leduc, my hometown. I actually watched the largest cross-shaped church in Canada being built across from our family home over 30 years ago. Our guests are Mrs. Pam Bakker, Mr. Josh Bakker, Mr. Harvey Bakker, Mr. Lawrence Glesman, Mrs. Linda Glesman, Mr. Jack Cathie, Mrs. Mary Cathie, Mr. Rex Stringer, Ms Clara Kuny, Ms Elsie Jabs, Ms Heidi Zerbin, Ms Violet Wilson, Mrs. Doris Rumak, and Mr. Lawrence Rumak. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly eight

individuals from the 211 support network and distress centre. I'd like to introduce Nancy McCalder, the executive director of support direct; Nancy Douglas, the helpline director; Lynn Odynski, a board member; Andy Feher, a board member; Lenka Stuchlik, a board member; Mr. Paul Bartel, a program director with the distress centre in Calgary; and Mr. Tim Osborne of the United Way of the Alberta capital region. 211 is a free, nonemergency referral and information line that is available 24 hours a day to serve Edmonton and Calgary and their surrounding regions. I will be discussing 211 more later this afternoon. I would invite the group to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House and to all Albertans three people that made a presentation to rural caucus this afternoon. First of all, a constituent from Ponoka, Else Pedersen, who has been the president since 2002 of the Freehold Owners Association, a group that represents about 4,200 members and possibly up to 22,000 owners around Alberta. She's a retired businessperson from Ponoka. David Speirs, director and chairman of the Freehold Owners technical committee, is a geologist and geophysicist from Calgary. Ross Watson is a director of the Freehold Owners Association. He's a farmer and a business owner from Sylvan Lake. They have made a very compelling presentation to rural caucus this afternoon about issues and challenges facing owners of freehold minerals. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate introductions to make to the Assembly today. The first introduction I'd like to make is Joseph Ryan Saunders. Mr. Saunders is joining us in the public gallery. He's a constituent of the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and he is a particular advocate on behalf of grizzly bears in Alberta and is hoping that there will be strong leadership taken in the Assembly to protect grizzly bears. I would ask Mr. Saunders to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second introduction is a really interesting program that has been launched by the Terra Centre for pregnant and parenting teens, and that is their ambassadors program. The intent of the ambassadors program is to give young mothers the opportunity to develop leadership and public speaking skills by being active members of the community and participating in special events and also developing a supportive network with each other. We have one of the Terra Centre ambassadors with us today; that's Kayla Lamouch. She's joined by Laura Slomp Booy, who is the youth leadership facilitator. I would ask them both to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you very much for coming.

Members' Statements

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

211 Community Information

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first priority as an MLA is to serve my constituents. Often we are called upon and asked to direct our constituents to one of the 19,000 charities, government, and nongovernment organizations that exist in Alberta to serve the needs of people. Edmonton, Calgary, and their surrounding regions

have easy access to all 19,000 organizations via the phone number 211. 211 is a free, nonemergency referral and information line that is available 24 hours a day to help serve our constituents. When you dial 211, a person answers the phone, and the callers are able to describe the situation in their own words. 211's information and referral specialists then ask the right questions, assess the situation, and refer the caller to the programs or services best suited to meet their needs.

Currently 211 is available to 78 per cent of the American population. In Canada 211 is currently only available to about 28 per cent of our citizens. We want to join British Columbia and Ontario in expanding our 211 service to become a province-wide resource for all Albertans. 211 can help to reduce inappropriate calls to 911, avoid the fragmentation and duplication of support services, and increase our ability to serve our constituents without having to remember all 19,000 organizations that are available to them. We can do our part to help 211 be brought to all Albertans. Let's make 211 Alberta a reality.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health System Restructuring

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier rolled out his big budget deficit on Tuesday, he very carefully omitted the provincial health care deficit, which would have added over a billion dollars to an already staggering \$4.7 billion shortfall. The health minister has already tried to pin this deficit on Albertans, claiming that our aging population is forcing costs in health care to rise. But Edmonton and Calgary have among the youngest populations in Canada, with median ages of under 36 years old. In fact, demographically Alberta is the youngest province in the country. Seniors are not responsible for the health care deficits; this government's mismanagement is.

1:40

The fault, again, lies with a government that fired the regional health authorities to replace them with one hand-picked superboard. No reasonable government would implement such a massive radical change without a cost-benefit analysis, but this is not a reasonable government. The former deputy minister of health admitted that no research reviews, either external or internal, recommended that the government take this course.

Now we see how well this radical gamble has worked out. The Capital health region was regarded as one of the best health administrations in the nation: highly praised for innovation, efficiency, and patient care; ranked number one in a national survey of 50 Canadian health centres. Not only have we lost a crown jewel in Alberta's public health care system; the restructuring has sown chaos and confusion among health care professionals and patients alike, with the health minister and this government unable to determine when exactly we'll start to see improvements in patient care. Perhaps worst of all is that this gamble has already caused ballooning deficits that have cost Alberta taxpayers over a billion dollars in just a few short months.

Who knows what experiments this Premier and this health minister will perform next on our public health care system? I hope privatization is not one of them.

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

Energy Efficiency Incentives

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that Alberta's climate change strategy includes a commitment to help Albertans be more energy efficient in their day-to-day lives. Earlier today the province, through the hon. Minister of Environment, announced that it is investing \$36 million on energy efficiency rebates for consumers. The rebates encourage Albertans to reduce their daily energy use and allow them to save money at the same time. This pledge by the province encourages consumer spending on greener products and services, helping to shift the market towards greater energy efficiency. These initiatives will create an economic ripple effect that will benefit everyone across the province and help the environment at the same time.

The rebates themselves are significant, particularly to Albertans who are looking to retrofit their homes. They range from \$100 to \$10,000 and are available to existing homeowners who take steps to improve their energy efficiency, to new homebuyers who purchase energy efficient homes, and to taxi operators who are transitioning their fleet to hybrid vehicles. For those of us who are homeowners and are looking to make our homes greener, this program will help us to get a home energy evaluation to know what we need to do to become more energy efficient. The program will also help Albertans purchase more energy efficient washing machines, furnaces, hot water heaters, and insulation.

It's absolutely critical that all Albertans reduce their use of energy if we are to meet our greenhouse emission goals. The province's overall reduction target by 2050 is 200 megatonnes; 24 megatonnes of that will come through energy efficiency and conservation. This move towards energy efficiency demonstrates the government's commitment to building a culture of conservation in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Home-care Workers

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently spoke with a resident from Airdrie-Chestermere named Ms Grace Forsberg. Ms Forsberg has served patients as a home-care worker for 25 years. She'll be retiring soon, and she asked that I bring some awareness to the valuable role that home care plays in our health care system.

As such, I rise today to acknowledge the excellent work that is being done by Alberta's home-care workers and the critical role that they play in our health care system. Without the services provided by home-care personnel, many clients would have to live in long-term care facilities. While we have some wonderful facilities across the province, there is something to be said for being at home, sleeping in your own bed, and having your family with you to provide support.

Recognizing the desire of Albertans to age at home, the government announced additional funding for continuing care initiatives in Budget 2009. This financial support to home care and community programs is essential to keeping people healthier and safer in their homes and frees up needed space in our health care facilities. Home-care workers provide our province's patients with flexibility and support while recovering from illness. As such, home-care personnel are front-line workers in our health care system.

I would ask the Assembly to join me in recognizing the importance of home-care workers to the health of Albertans.

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

Alberta Job Losses

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's working people are rightfully concerned about the security of their jobs, and this government's budget did absolutely nothing to calm their fears. This morning we received word that last month a net total of 15,000 more Albertans are out of work, bringing the total for the first three months of the year to more than 45,000. That number is actually skewed because it includes all the entry-level part-time jobs that replaced good-paying full-time ones. What it means, of course, is that the people who are paying for this government's gross mismanagement of our economy are the ordinary people of our province, who struggle each and every month to make ends meet, while the well-connected friends of the Conservative government are receiving fat bonuses and big raises.

Of course, the fact that the finance minister left nearly a quarter-billion dollars of cuts on the table without explaining where they're going to come from does nothing to ease workers' fears. The Premier mused about cutting a thousand nursing jobs while increasing funding for doctors. By suggesting that public-sector jobs may be cut and/or their wages slashed, this government is attempting to intimidate workers.

Mr. Speaker, workers are the backbone of Alberta's economy. It should go without saying that no sector – not oil and gas, not agriculture, not retail – can flourish in our province without a well-paid, trained workforce. That's why it's inexplicable to us why this week's budget did so little to create the real jobs that would get Alberta back on track. Instead, this government's answer was to hope that things will return to what they once were. The only ones helped by this budget, Mr. Speaker, were the government's well-connected friends and insiders while working Albertans and those who want to were ignored.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Grande Prairie Storm Junior Hockey Team

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I rise today to congratulate the outstanding athletes on the Grande Prairie Storm junior hockey team. Last Sunday in Grande Prairie a crowd of over 3,000 fans cheered on the Storm as they defeated the Spruce Grove Saints in double overtime to win the Enerflex Cup Alberta Junior Hockey League Championship. The Storm was not intimidated by the challenge of competing against the number one team in the league and beat Spruce Grove during the final in four straight games.

Storm coach and general manager Mike Vandekamp led the Storm in a spectacular season, with the most wins and points in team history. They had many close games throughout the season, but these athletes and their fans refused to give up, and their perseverance paid off with an outstanding victory on home ice.

The team draws players and fans from throughout the entire Grande Prairie region and is representative of Alberta's growing reputation for athletic and volunteerism excellence here at home and around the world. I congratulate all the athletes, the head coach, coaches, assistants, parents, and volunteers of the team on a job well done. They are a fine example of Albertans' courage, determination, dreams, and the spirit to achieve.

We all look forward to celebrating the Grande Prairie Storm's success as they take on the winner of the B.C. Hockey League for the Doyle Cup and their chance to advance to the Royal Bank Cup national championship. Good job and good luck.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 35

Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 35, the Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009.

This is an administrative bill that will amend existing legislation and give force to a ruling of the National Energy Board. Specifically, this ruling concerned the NOVA Gas Transmission segment of the TransCanada pipeline system. Mr. Speaker, extraprovincial pipeline reliance on the NOVA Gas Transmission system resulted in TransCanada applying for and the National Energy Board recently accepting that the NOVA system is subject to federal regulation. The amendments in this act will reflect a quasi-judicial ruling.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 35 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Deficit

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier makes claims to being open, accountable, and transparent, yet he has tabled a budget which makes no reference to a looming estimated \$1.3 billion in deficits, thirteen hundred million of overspending in one year by his minister. To the Premier: will the Premier at least admit, if he cannot give exact numbers, that there will be a very sizable deficit incurred in Health and Wellness this past year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the health minister answered the question very clearly yesterday. The Health Services Board are having their March 31 year-end statements audited. Once the audit is complete, then the audited statements will be provided to the minister, and the minister will then share the information with the House.

Dr. Swann: How can the Premier claim to be open and accountable when he will only release the deficit on Health Services by June 30, when the Legislature is closed, hidden from debate and public scrutiny?

Mr. Stelmach: I don't know if we're going to be debating whatever the auditors deliver to Albertans, but this will be public information. Whatever the auditors decide, whatever figure they bring forward is not what will be debated. What we could debate when we come back next fall is: how do we further find efficiencies and savings in delivery of health in the province of Alberta?

Dr. Swann: Well, if the Premier is going to be accountable to Albertans, will he withhold the bonuses this year of the deputy minister and senior officials in Health, recognizing that they have failed their duty to the public? If not, why not?

Mr. Stelmach: We have.

Dr. Swann: For this year?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, for this year. We clearly said that there will be no bonuses, and we're sticking with that decision. The bonuses are suspended.

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

Funding for Cancer Care

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Albertans and health professionals find it unacceptable that after six years of raising concerns about shortages in cancer services at the Tom Baker in Calgary, there are still delays in treatment, risking both patients and professional reputations. People want to know how we have drifted so far from the basics of health care, the most basic of medical needs, in this province. To the Premier: will the Premier tell Albertans whether there are any plans in the next three years to grant the \$22 million funding request from the Tom Baker?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter that the hon. leader raises in the House. Cancer affects every family in Alberta. We're fully aware of that. We have increased the budget for cancer drugs. In fact, the taxpayer pays for all of the drugs for cancer treatment. We're also going to be taking pressure off the Tom Baker Centre by opening radiation clinics in Red Deer and in Lethbridge as well so that people don't have to travel to Calgary. They can get some of the therapy in their own communities. We are aware of the pressures across Alberta, and we will be working with the Alberta health board to ensure that we find an appropriate way of dealing with the ever-increasing numbers of cancer patients.

Dr. Swann: This government is spending millions of dollars on administrative reshuffling in health care. Will the Premier get his act together and immediately shift back to basics now to make the number one priority the care of sick people?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it is the number one priority. We want to improve access, improve quality. We want to get better value for the dollars that are being spent in health. The health budget takes about 40 per cent of the overall budget of the province of Alberta, and we want to ensure that we can increase the number of people that are treated in the province but at the same time work with all health care providers so that we can build those efficiencies.

Dr. Swann: Adding to people's outrage is the awareness that this government sold the cancer clinic along with the Holy Cross hospital a decade ago for a song. It is now buying back space for cancer care from a private company at a premium. Where have the priorities gone? Why has cancer care taken second place to private interests?

Mr. Stelmach: It hasn't taken second place to any delivery. As I said, I'm sure every family in this province is affected by cancer. We have family members, relatives that are being treated for various cancers in various parts of the province. It is an important goal of the minister and of the Alberta Health Services Board, and we'll continue to work towards improving access for those people that are in the system.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this week through your good graces we had four young people that were in your gallery that have

received considerable cancer treatment. I spent time with the families. You know, they're from different parts of the province, and it is difficult because families have to travel to a larger centre. It is a difficult time for them all. We want to put policies in place and offer a wider range of services to extend out of the two major cities so that we reduce the impact on families.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Employment Supports

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March, unfortunately, another 15,000 Alberta workers were laid off. We now have 45,000 job losses in the first three months of this year. That's three times the government's projection for the whole, entire year. The current budget shows very little leadership and does not take significant action to address these job losses through retraining programs. My first question is to the Premier. With unemployment numbers again rising today, unfortunately, showing very large job losses across the province, does the Premier finally recognize that his government's projections are completely unrealistic, inaccurate, and need to change now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to all those Albertans that have lost their jobs over the last number of months. There's been such a rapid change in the economy, totally unprecedented around the globe. You know, losing a job is never easy. Everybody wants to contribute to society. The budget that our minister introduced this week is going to help those families. We're going to help through retraining programs, keep investing in infrastructure, ensure that we're not laying off public-sector staff to add to the increasing roll, and we'll make sure, as we work through this year, that we put as many people as we can back to work. The 15,000 that was first estimated is an annual figure. They're using that as the figure for the whole year. There will be fluctuations from winter to summer to spring, but we hold firm on those figures.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Interesting.

Thank you. Again to the hon. Premier. Among 15- to 24-year-olds across this province the unemployment rate is 11 per cent, twice the provincial average. This government is neglecting a generation. Now, why is the government failing to train these young people to enable them to find long-term, stable, quality jobs where they can get pension benefits and afford to settle down and raise a family?

Mr. Stelmach: I wasn't quite sure if he said 11-year-olds or 11 per cent. I'd hope that at 11 years old they'd be in school and that even at 15 years of age they'd still be in school and completing their education program.

Now, of course, for those that have finished high school or finished university, we know that the oil and gas sector and forestry are two sectors that rely on sales outside the province into global markets, and those markets have been depressed. We're going to be working especially with those two sectors to see how we can help through not only provincial but federal policy to get those people back to work.

Mr. MacDonald: That response proves to me that the Premier is not listening.

Now, again to the Premier: given that funding for job creation and

training and income supports is only 2 per cent higher this year compared to the forecast for last year, is it the government policy not to take additional action to support the tens of thousands of Albertans that, unfortunately, through no fault of their own have lost their jobs recently?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred and sixty-four million dollars for retraining and career counselling: that is a significant amount. We'll continue to support those families in need, but most importantly the dollars that we are reinvesting in infrastructure and keeping the public-sector jobs going are going to minimize those job losses in the province. I'm happy to say that as we're entering summer, more construction jobs are starting up, especially on roads. We'll see those numbers come down.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We've called this budget a welfare budget. We've called it half baked. It's both of those, but the simple reality is that it's a dishonest budget. This Tory government has deliberately left a health board deficit of \$1.4 billion off the books. To the Premier: why are you hiding the truth from Albertans that the real deficit in this budget is actually more than \$6 billion?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader, I guess, was preoccupied when I answered the very same question just a while ago. The Alberta Health Services annual statement, which ends March 31, just ended here a few days ago. It is being audited. Once the audit is complete, the results of that audit will be made public. All Albertans will know about the operations of the board, and when the information comes here, then we'll work on how we can best deliver the services.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this government knows that there's a projected \$1.4 billion deficit in the health system because its own health board has told them so, but they are trying to hide it from Albertans. This government is cooking the books. To the Premier: if you can't table an honest budget, why should the taxpayers trust you with their money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, I guess different words will be used in the Assembly, but there's a lot of input that went into the budget after considerable consultation with various sectors, charitable organizations as well, and hard-working, taxpaying Albertans. We were told to build a budget that in terms of spending was the rate of inflation plus population. We did that. They asked us to focus on education and health and support for the most vulnerable, and this is what this budget delivered.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, can you imagine what would happen to a Wall Street banker who misstated a projected deficit by a third? This government couldn't handle money in the good times, and it obviously can't in the bad. Will the

Premier direct his finance minister to withdraw this phony budget and resubmit one that is transparent and exposes the fact that there's really a deficit of \$6 billion in this budget?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I lauded the hon. leader for being one of the few across the way to read the budget and understand it. Maybe that was premature. The \$2 billion that we're talking about is in fiscal period 2010-11, and for this year it will be \$4.7 billion. We're looking at savings of \$2 billion in the second year out. But we're the only jurisdiction – the only jurisdiction – that has a comprehensive three-year fiscal plan with all of the supporting documents tabled in the Legislature with the three-year budget, the only jurisdiction to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's municipalities will receive \$400 million this year for capital and operating expenses through the province's municipal sustainability initiative. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. With \$100 million less in funding from last year, will this not result in a reduction in infrastructure spending by the municipalities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our municipalities receive a level of support that is unmatched in this country, providing municipalities with \$5.6 billion over three years, and I do want to say \$400 million of MSI this year. In addition to that, I would like to say that this does not include the many projects that will be eligible under the federal program. MSI has made a very positive impact on Alberta municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the same minister. The AUMA issued a news release that says that the MSI funding reduction is a disincentive to its members applying for federal funding under the building Canada fund. Can the minister tell us if he feels that this, in fact, is the case?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. In fact, the programs complement each other. There are programs that qualify under the municipal sustainability initiative that could also qualify under the federal programs. Municipalities could end up seeing more money than they did last year. MSI criteria have also changed so that it enables municipalities to use interest as an eligible expense. So this is an opportunity for municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I understand that interest costs are now an eligible expense under MSI. How will this change benefit Albertans?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it will give municipalities the opportunity to move forward on vital infrastructure programs. Municipalities can take advantage of the 30 per cent less cost on construction costs. That is a substantial amount of money. Muni-

palities are on the front line of these projects. They will create jobs, and it will keep Alberta working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This PC government's approach to budgeting for bad times reminds me of the smoker who says, "I'll quit when cigarettes hit 20 bucks a pack," or maybe Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, whose response to crisis was: I'll think about that tomorrow. So it is that we have this line in the budget about the \$2 billion fiscal correction in case the recession keeps getting deeper. We'd rather deal with that tomorrow than exercise the discipline to set things right today and hope and pray, hope to heck tomorrow never comes. To the finance minister. Perhaps I'm reading this wrong. Is the minister, in fact, already aware that her budget numbers are overly optimistic, and is she softening us all up for a \$2 billion tax hike?

Ms Evans: No, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly not softening anybody up for a \$2 billion tax hike. I have to compliment the hon. member. He took the time yesterday to share an experience with the Calgary chamber. There I said what I say here. There certainly are opportunities on two sides of the equation, to either figure out how we raise revenues – and that might happen for us with commodity prices – or reduce our expenditures. One thing that the Calgary papers have reported resoundingly is identify that one quick way to get \$700 million is if those dollars would come home to roost that the federal government owes us for health transfers, \$200 for every man, woman, and child. That would solve at least a third of our problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the finance minister: is this minister committed to not increasing income taxes?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, we indicated yesterday, both the President of Treasury Board and myself, that we couldn't leave any stone unturned. Our Premier very clearly identified, in response to a suggestion raised by the member opposite, that there would be no PST here, absolutely not, and that we would look instead at management of our budget on both sides of the equation in a way that would best help Albertans to keep on working and to keep our savings as whole as possible.

Mr. Taylor: Again to the minister: is she committed to not introducing any new taxes?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I think everybody here would like to make that claim, but I want to be very honest and open with Albertans. When you have a situation where we don't know exactly how long this recession will last, we have to look at all the options. We believe it's to be a short-term decline. We believe that we'll be back into surplus budgets by 2012-13. During this period of time, however, we're going to have to look at the various options, and we want to make sure that we balance, do exactly what we did this year, make wise choices in spending, saving, and building capacity.

2:10

Travel Alberta

Mr. Webber: Mr. Speaker, Tuesday's budget highlighted \$57 million for tourism marketing through Travel Alberta. My first

question is to this colourful hon. member sitting beside me here, the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Now that Travel Alberta is at arm's length, how will the government know, how will we know that this money is being used effectively?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the compliment. It is spring.

Mr. Speaker, accountability is always important. I just want you to know that one week ago the lights of the Travel Alberta corporation turned on in this province, and I want to assure all members that we put in place a board with really good business expertise, so we're going to really look to this board. But under this new governance structure I will still continue to review and approve the business plan which was tabled in this Assembly yesterday. That business plan sets out how the funding will be spent. The plan is based on a research-based, market-driven model.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Webber: My second question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the regions other than the Rockies or Calgary and Edmonton see any of this funding?

Mrs. Ady: Well, as I was saying before, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General will also be looking to see that Albertans' money is well spent.

While the Rockies are iconic and people know about them all over the world and they're important to tourism, so are the other areas of this province that have wonderful things to see. I'm happy to say that \$7 million has been targeted towards ensuring that the story of all Alberta gets told and that people know what there is to be offered in this province. This week alone we had a Growing Rural Tourism Conference, that was held in Camrose, that helped those partners better understand how to move people around this province.

Mr. Webber: My final question to the same minister. Tourism is vulnerable to changes in world markets, so what is being done to minimize the risks and strengthen our position as a tourism destination here in Alberta?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, Travel Alberta and the board are paying very close attention to world conditions right now. We know that it is tougher out there, so they're doing all to make sure that we are being cautious. But we think it is the wrong thing to pull out of those markets. We've spent millions of dollars promoting this province all over the world. We think the wrong thing to do is to pull back. We're going to continue to press forward, stick with the plan. We think we have a good-news story to tell.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Grizzly Bear Protection

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like Blondie in her 1980s classic the Alberta Liberals are asking Albertans to call us, call us any time regarding Budget 2009. Carl from Calgary did just that by dialing 1.888.886.2834. Carl noted that the grizzly bear is a threatened species in Alberta and is an indicator of health in our ecosystem. Accordingly, a dollar spent to save the grizzly bear is also money spent to protect other plants and animals. To the minister of SRD: why is there no line item for species . . .

The Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. You spent too much time advertising.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, what was that telephone number again?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you. That was a long advertisement, but I'll get to the heart of the matter here. Why is there no line item for species at risk and conservation in the provincial budget for grizzly bears?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that there is significant funding for species at risk and specifically for grizzly bears. I'll be happy to send those numbers over to the hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: You wouldn't happen to have those numbers handy right now?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I believe he received a rather tall pile of data yesterday, but I'll do his work for him and sort it out and send it over.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are expressing concern about mountain pine beetle infestations in southwest Alberta, particularly as one-quarter of the area's land base is parks and protected areas, important to tourism and recreation. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is his department doing to safeguard this forested landscape?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is correct. The pine beetle does not respect map boundaries between parks and working forest or between provincial boundaries. The pine beetle represents a threat to the entire Rocky Mountain ecosystem as a whole, and that's the problem we're addressing. I'm happy to report to you and the House that we're working closely with the colourful Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, with our counterparts in British Columbia, and also with Parks Canada to co-ordinate our approach and make the selective use, the proper use of the different tools we have to fight pine beetles.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is again to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Since the public lands and provincial parks of southwest Alberta are adjacent to Banff national park, what success has his department had with getting Parks Canada to collaborate with provincial mountain pine beetle control efforts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the hon. member is correct. Waterton, Banff, and Jasper are three major national parks on our western boundary, saddling strategic passes which potentially

represent the inroads for the pine beetle from British Columbia. I'm happy to report that I visited with Parks Canada in both Jasper and Banff last summer and had a very good, close working relationship. Also, my department co-chairs a strategic directions council that sits with our counterparts in British Columbia. I can tell you and can assure you that when it comes to the pine beetle, Parks Canada and Alberta are on the same page.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the colourful Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Can she explain what measures are being taken in provincial parks to control the mountain pine beetle?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, we are working closely with Sustainable Resource Development on this issue. I mean, these are provincial parks which we all very much value. We are using controlled burns in the parks. We're also taking all infected trees out in a tree selection. We've seen what's happened in British Columbia, and we don't want to see it in the parks in this province.

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

Continuing Care Review

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of health pointed out that there are still long-term care beds in the capital plan for this year's budget. However, by project breakdown of the three-year capital plan only five of the total 11 continuing care projects are going ahead entirely as planned. The rest are deferred or the project scope is under review. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. For the seniors who are in the communities where continuing care facilities are under review by Alberta Health Services, when will the minister release these findings to the public?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that there's much more that I can add that I haven't already said in the last couple of days. In each particular case where there is a project that funds have been committed to, we want to sit down with the community and make sure that what is going forward best meets the needs of that community. We would be doing that over the next short period of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. For the facilities where the scope of the project is under review, how long will construction be delayed while at least 566 Alberta seniors wait in acute care at a huge, huge cost to the taxpayers?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'd like to emphasize again, Mr. Speaker, that one of the things that we did do in this budget was commit an extra \$42 million to our continuing care programs so that we can get more home care out into the community so that many of those patients could actually be discharged from acute care if physicians are satisfied that care will be provided when they're discharged. This isn't just a matter of taking people from acute care and sticking them into long-term care.

Ms Pastoor: No, and I certainly agree with that, but most of these will have to go into some sort of care.

Will the minister tell Albertans who is doing this review? Is it Alberta Health Services or another privately contracted group? Have you any idea of what the price tag might be?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this will be done internally between Alberta Health Services and the Department of Health and Wellness. There would be no additional price tag as suggested by the member.

We also have to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of long-term care facilities in this province that are currently under construction and will be coming on stream later this year and early next year. So it's hardly like there is nothing being constructed in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alberta Job Losses

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, for three months 500 people a day have lost their jobs in Alberta, and the worst is yet to come. Real projections show the pace of job loss actually skyrocketing later this year and into next spring. Your dishonest budget said you'd support 80,000 jobs. The reality is that you haven't created one. To the minister of finance: how far out of touch can you possibly be to continue insisting to Albertans that they will only lose 15,000 jobs this year when we're on track to lose at least 12 times that many?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad that the hon. member posed the question so that I can reintroduce to this House something we've been talking about. We took an average over the 12-month period last year. There were a lot of fluctuations in where we were at, and we calculated what the number was. Then we took an average of what's projected over this year, for the full 12 months of this year. We are still projecting significant job increases for the last portion of the year. We are still projecting 15,000 jobs fewer this year than last year. I could answer the rest.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this finance minister is the only person still hanging on to that projection. Meanwhile, there's nothing new or stimulating in this budget. All of your announcements are reannouncements. If reannouncing old press releases created jobs, we'd have zero unemployment. Unfortunately, your job requires a little bit more effort than that. Now, to the minister: rather than decreasing support for infrastructure construction for municipalities, why aren't you investing to create new jobs – new jobs – and keep Albertans working?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, let's go back to our figures. Infrastructure spending in Alberta is double the Canadian average: \$2,200 for every man, woman, and child. We're spending \$23.2 billion over the next three years, \$7.2 billion this year. For every billion dollars of work on public infrastructure 11,600 jobs are created. That doesn't even speak to the dollars that the health minister has talked about where projects were not able to be completed, which will ultimately add to the overall spending for public-sector infrastructure. We meet and beat anywhere else in the country by double.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this month Alberta almost led the country in that we posted the second-highest number of job losses across the country. While every other province is adopting new stimulus spending, this government is actually cutting back and threatening

to eliminate public-sector jobs. You're making Albertans feel even more desperate, more afraid, and it's going to make things worse. To the minister: why won't you finish your budget and offer some real new spending initiatives to create new jobs?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, the only ones that are talking about this in negative terms are the members across the House. Everybody else is seeing some very positive things about the dollars that we've spent. They can't have it both ways. They can't tell us not to increase operating spending, which we did, but also expect that we're going to be able to both increase operating spending, which we have, and not add some extra supports for people. The Premier has spoken about our sorrow when we do lose jobs. We don't like to have fewer jobs. But on average we expect that to even out, and many of the major players in Alberta give us their assurance that they're still prepared to make those jobs happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Apprentices are important to build Alberta's skilled workforce for today and for tomorrow. Even in these tough economic times there is still demand for skilled tradespeople throughout this province. In fact, earlier today the Prime Minister announced \$2,000 apprenticeship completion grants. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What are the criteria for apprentices to qualify for this grant?

The Speaker: This comes under the federal jurisdiction or provincial jurisdiction?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I could maybe enlighten the House a little bit. Apprenticeship programming comes under the provincial jurisdiction of my department. In fact, student finance is a shared responsibility of the provincial government and the federal government. However, it was an honour today to participate with the Prime Minister at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, where we had a number of fine apprentices who were there for the \$2,000 completion grant, which is part of the red seal program that we have nation-wide, managed in Alberta by the provincial government and our apprenticeship board. The program starts July 1 of this year. Approximately 5,200 Alberta apprentices will complete their red seal, we believe, this year. That means that all of those applicants will be eligible for the grant.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there's already a grant available for first- and second-year apprentices in red seal programs here in Alberta. How many apprentices have benefited from the program since it was introduced in 2006?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the confidence that is being shown by the companies in Alberta is absolutely tremendous. They continue to hire apprentices in our province. The apprenticeship incentive grant became effective in January of 2007, and from that point to February of 2009 approximately 80,000 – 80,000 – grants have been issued to all of the apprentices. That represents close to 33 per cent of all of the apprenticeship grants in Canada. It tells you the number of

apprentices that we're training in this province. We are the engine of Canada's growth, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: what are we doing in Alberta to help apprentices go to school and complete their training?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, over the past few years we have been, actually, ahead of the curve, if you will, in terms of what other jurisdictions are doing now in the sense that we have added a tremendous number of spaces to our postsecondary institutions because of the tremendous demand that the economy has had. We anticipate that there'll be tremendous demand on our postsecondary institutions because of some of the slowdown. Some of these students will want to come back to postsecondary. In fact, the Prime Minister today in his comments encouraged Alberta's young people or those who are looking at a second career to look to a first-class, world-class postsecondary system and come back to it. In our budget this year close to \$200 million is actually going to be attributed to postsecondary apprenticeship training in the province of Alberta.

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

Special-needs Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After conducting a year of consultations, the Minister of Education's review of special-needs programming apparently has not revealed much about the needs of the most vulnerable of these children. The minister should know by now that children at risk are not getting the educational support from this administration that they deserve. Although the first two phases of the special education review have concluded, the only result to date has been to freeze funding for severe special-needs programming. To the minister: has the minister concluded that special-needs programming is adequately funded, that there is no more need for special needs?

Mr. Hancock: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chase: That's reassuring.

Considering that consultations are only meaningful if the views of Albertans are actually reflected in policy, what is the point of raising the hopes of parents whose children attend Calgary schools such as Emily Follensbee or Christine Meikle when the result is to freeze funding to these vulnerable populations?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've been very open and transparent about the process that we're engaged in. In the fall of 2007 there was a review of special-needs student profiles across the province, and that review, as we've discussed in this House before, indicated a very high discrepancy between those files which qualified for funding and those files which were actually getting funding. There were more files being funded than qualified.

What it also, though, really set out was that there was a problem with the policy framework, and throwing more money into the formula wasn't going to fix the problem. So we engaged in the very thorough review, which I believe at the moment over 5,000 Albertans have participated in. That review is ongoing. There's a conference in June. I'll be getting advice from the steering commit-

tee shortly after that with respect to the policy framework, and we're going to get this right.

Mr. Chase: Part of getting it right is planning and budgeting. That money is desperately needed for special-needs children.

Since ESL programming will only see a 1 per cent increase yet over 91,000 individuals moved to Alberta last year, many of whom have English as a second language, is it the minister's policy to assume that these children should already be able to speak English? Is this minister taking a Jason Kenney approach?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would read the budget documents or, if he doesn't wish to, if he would call me, I would be able to alert him to the fact that the funding for ESL, like the funding for other students, is per capita, per student. As each of those students moves in, they get counted, and as they get counted, they get funded. The funding for the per-student grant went up 4.8 per cent, which covers the cost of teachers and the increase of the cost of teachers. As every new student is added to the student count, the funding is there.

Drinking Water Quality

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, last week I met with a large group of community leaders from my constituency. They brought to my attention several important issues related to the provision of drinking water in their communities. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. The town of Redcliff, a community of 5,000 people, is struggling to meet constantly rising standards for drinking water with their existing plant. I agree that maintaining strict standards is absolutely critical to ensure that the health of Albertans is protected. To the minister: how can the town of Redcliff, like many other small communities around the province, meet the continually rising standards without some sort of adequate funding support?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. The fact is that our drinking water standards are increasing over time, and I make no apologies for that. I don't think anyone does. Even the municipalities recognize the need to constantly be vigilant when it comes to drinking water standards. The fact does remain, though, that for small, isolated drinking water facilities, that does get more and more difficult, so we're encouraging the development of regional facilities. We're encouraging shared responsibility and partnerships among the operators of these facilities. I also want to point out that in the budget that was introduced yesterday, there is about \$100 million that is available to help and assist in the development of some of these regional partnerships.

Mr. Mitzel: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. The minister indicated that regionalization of drinking water systems is a possible solution, but my understanding is that the price that would be charged to the town of Redcliff by the regional system operator is too high, higher than perhaps putting in a new plant. What is the minister doing to ensure that regional systems are affordable and cost-effective for these communities?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did mention that we do have funding, but I also want to be very clear that while \$100 million a year is a substantial amount of money, it pales in comparison to the demand that's out there. Let's not be under any false illusions that somehow the problems are going to go away. It takes two to develop a partnership, and I do encourage not only the small

operators, but more importantly I encourage the larger operators, that are pivotal in getting these partnerships going, to be reasonable and not take advantage of a situation.

Mr. Mitzel: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Cypress county, like many other municipalities in Alberta, is growing and as a result would like to acquire additional water licences. In the South Saskatchewan River basin no new licences are being issued by Alberta Environment. Cypress county contains many communities that are either too small or too far from a regional hub to make a regional system feasible. Could the minister tell us what he's doing to ensure that communities like Cypress county are able to acquire existing licences or portions of existing licences that are deemed not presently being used by existing leaseholders?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, therein lies the problem. If the licences are not currently being used, then transferring the licence doesn't really solve the problem of oversubscription to the water, does it? However, that being said, I should point out that there have been about 30 transfers that have taken place since the moratorium has been put in place. We're getting better at evaluating and determining whether or not these are, in fact, paper transfers or real water transfers. I'm confident that over the next months as we have the discussion on water allocation policy, these transfers will become more and more routine.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Royalty Revenues

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The new royalty framework is immensely important to this government and to the economy of the whole province. It needs to strike the right balance between industry's share and the share that goes to Alberta. There was a clear target for the old royalty framework: 20 to 25 per cent of oil and gas wealth was to be collected by the Alberta government. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What's the target percentage for the new royalty framework?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would certainly agree wholeheartedly with the member opposite that the structure of royalties in the province of Alberta is extremely important for Albertans. I would say that implementing a proper royalty regime is about much more than energy revenues. The regime must ensure that the province remains an attractive place for investment. It must also create an economic spinoff opportunity and wealth generation in communities throughout the province.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, for two days now the minister has avoided committing to any performance measure on this issue. Without a performance measure Albertans are never going to know whose interests the royalty system is serving. To the same minister. Industry feels that they're getting ripped off by the new royalty framework. Has this government refused to publish the percentage take because industry is right?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's probably time that I should let Albertans and the rest of the House know – and I can't probably quote right now from my head verbatim what is stated in the business plan, but it very clearly says that that target is under review relative to the new royalty framework. It is under review, and it will be a target set out when the review is completed, as has

been suggested to us by the Auditor General and by the Valentine report. That's the fact of the matter.

Dr. Taft: Well, good. Some progress. Thank you.

If there was one thing, even just one, that everybody seemed to agree on after the royalty review in 2007 – Peter Valentine, the Auditor General, the Hunter panel, the industry, the public – it was that there did need to be more accountability. This minister has said that he is conducting a review, and he has indicated that this performance measure will be made public. My question to him is: when? When will that review be made public?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, it will be made available to all the members of this House, to the public of the province of Alberta, and to the industry globally as soon as we're done with it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Business Closure Protection

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think everyone is aware of the recent world economic turmoil over the last few months. There have been quite a few stories that I've heard around my constituency, a lot of discussion about retailers all across North America going out of business. There are stories about some businesses closing their doors here in Alberta. In some cases it seems that those stores have closed suddenly, which leaves some customers who have paid for goods empty-handed, who don't have the products or services they paid for. My question is for the Minister of Service Alberta. What protections are in place, legislative or otherwise, for consumers who paid for merchandise only to find that the store has gone out of business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are indeed a number of protections in place for consumers in this situation. For example, if someone did pay for their purchase with a credit card and did not receive any goods or services, they should contact their credit card company. In many cases the charges will be reversed. If the business has entered into bankruptcy, the consumer can contact the federal bankruptcy trustee. As well, if the business is licensed by Service Alberta and has provided monetary security, consumers may be able to file a claim through our ministry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, there are sometimes a lot of stories in the coffee shop. One person does lose money and doesn't receive their product or good, and by the time the story gets passed around, it's hundreds of people that have lost it. I'm wondering if the minister can explain how many people have called with actual concerns about losing money or how many actually have lost money so that we can gauge the reality of this situation.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this past year we've had 32 calls from Albertans all about store closures. Currently we are in the middle of two investigations involving business closures. Now, this may not seem like a significant number, but this is serious,

and it's something we monitor very carefully, which is why we encourage consumers to contact us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the same minister can lay out some of the exact situations where her department can and will help consumers who have found that they've paid for goods and haven't received the products or services.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Fair Trading Act there are protections in place. A retailer who is taking deposits for merchandise even though it knew or should have known it was closing or entering bankruptcy would be in violation of the Fair Trading Act. In this situation we do investigate. Charges may be laid against the company, and depending on the court proceedings, consumers can get their money back. In practice it can be very difficult to prove that a company deliberately misled a customer, but the protections are in place. Any consumer caught in this kind of situation, again, should contact Service Alberta so we can investigate under the Fair Trading Act.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's indeed my pleasure to introduce a councillor from my area. Mr. Dave Gamracy is a councillor from the county of Vermilion River. Actually, I'm very glad that they do occasionally show up and watch what goes on in here because hardly anybody would believe what we're subject to, and now I have a witness. I would ask Dave to stand and please accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we will return to the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table five copies of the 2007 Alberta vital statistics annual review. The report is a summary of all vital events during the 2007 calendar year and contains information involving the births, stillbirths, marriages, deaths, adoptions, and changes of name that occurred in Alberta. This report is produced primarily to provide the public and health care related professionals with a resource document of provincial statistical data. Service Alberta will send the report to medical examiners, cancer boards, hospitals, health authorities, research clinics, medical associations, universities, colleges, funeral homes, and libraries.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: On behalf.

The Speaker: Yes. Please proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I have two tablings. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the labour force survey published by Statistics Canada today. The survey shows that 15,000 jobs were lost in Alberta in March and that the unemployment rate in our province is now 5.8 per cent.

The second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate some residents had long waits before bells were answered, staff sometimes missed their breaks to try to keep up, and hazards were created when there was only one staff person available to lift patients where two staff were required.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter dated July 21, 2008, from our constituency office to the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the poll book for mobile polling station No. 075 in Edmonton-Gold Bar on March 3, 2008.

The second letter that I have to table today is dated July 29, 2008. It is a letter that I received at our constituency office from the Chief Electoral Officer regarding polling station No. 075 in Edmonton-Gold Bar on the March 3, 2008, election.

I also have a tabling today again from the United States Government Accountability Office, a report to congressional requesters dated September 2008. It is Oil and Gas Royalties: The Federal System for Collecting Oil and Gas Revenues Needs Comprehensive Reassessment. It's from the Government Accountability Office in the United States.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Minister Zwozdesky, Minister of Aboriginal Relations, First Nations development fund grant agreement, undated, unsigned, with attached blank project application, tabled during a policy field committee consideration of the estimates of the Department of Aboriginal Relations on April 8, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, responses to Written Question 1 and Written Question 3 asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for the opportunity to ask the Government House Leader under Standing Order 7(6) to share with us the projected government business for the week commencing April 14.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday being Easter Monday, the 13th, our session resumes on the 14th of April. Under

Government Bills and Orders, depending on progress today and depending on progress made through the week, we anticipate dealing with bills 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 19 in second reading; bills 4, 6, 7, and 9 in Committee of the Whole; bills 2, 3, 8, and 18 in third reading; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, the 15th, depending on progress on Tuesday, we would anticipate dealing with bills 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 19 in second reading; Bill 10 in Committee of the Whole; bills 4, 6, 7, and 9 in third reading; and as per the Order Paper.

Ms Blakeman: Executive Council is in Committee of Supply next Wednesday.

Mr. Hancock: I am reminded that we are not doing that on Wednesday, the 15th. Actually, on Wednesday, the 15th, we're in Committee of Supply for Executive Council. Thank you for that.

So on Thursday we will be doing what I just read for Wednesday, the 15th.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to advise as well that I will be away next week.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

11. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that a Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Mitzel, chair; Mr. Lund, deputy chair; Mr. Bhullar; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Campbell; Mr. Horne; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; Ms Notley; and Mr. Webber, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Chief Electoral Officer and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

- (1) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (2) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (3) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (4) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (5) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion is brought forward after recommendation by the Standing Committee on

Legislative Offices. Having been advised that the office of the Chief Electoral Officer is vacant, it's necessary to proceed to select a new Chief Electoral Officer. The committee that's being proposed is the same membership of that standing committee. It still leaves me to wonder that we need a special select committee when we have a Legislative Offices Committee that we should actually task to do the job, but I'm told that we need a special select committee to do the job. I would ask the Assembly to approve the motion and the membership of the committee.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, whenever we are discussing Government Motion 5.

Ms Blakeman: Eleven.

Mr. MacDonald: Eleven. Pardon me. Yes, my Costco glasses need cleaning, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, Government Motion 11 certainly is interesting. I am of the view that it is unnecessary. I would rather have the former Chief Electoral Officer. I don't think he should have been let go. I think his contract should have been renewed, and he could carry on with the tasks that he started in his first term.

2:50

I was part of the previous committee, and I will serve again if this motion passes – and I can only assume that it will – on this special select committee to find a new Chief Electoral Officer. I would like to say that the former Chief Electoral Officer did a lot of good work. When we look at the recommendations, regardless of which report we refer to, the former Chief Electoral Officer had a lot of very good ideas about how to improve the election processes in this province.

Now, if we look, Mr. Speaker, at the current budget in the offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates for 2009-10, we will certainly see where there's money set aside for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Corporate services is \$4.1 million, and for elections – I don't know whether we're having a by-election or not; I think this is routine – this time we have \$465,000 set aside if there is to be a by-election in this fiscal year. So there is money set aside to operate the office.

Specifically to this motion and why it is unnecessary, I think the Chief Electoral Officer was blamed. He was fingered for many of the issues that are still surrounding the conduct of the last provincial election, which, of course, was held on March 3, 2008. There's a long list of issues, and I think those issues could have been addressed and many of them resolved if we had renewed the contract, as I said earlier, of Mr. Gibson and allowed him, along with the Legislative Offices Committee and members of this House, to implement the recommendations. There were good, solid recommendations on how to improve the voter turnout rates, the training of the various election officials, the timing, and who appoints the returning officers.

Everyone knows that it shouldn't be controlled by cabinet or by one respective minister of that cabinet. They should not be controlling the appointment of returning officers, and the enumeration process that follows the appointment of the returning officers has to be done well in advance – well in advance — of the date of the election.

The idea of having fixed election dates: now, our neighbour to the west, British Columbia, of course, is going to have an election in May, and it is a fixed election date there. [interjections] No, the B.C. elections are not fixed. I'm not so sure, hon. member, about

other provinces and constituencies in other provinces. We'll probably get to that later.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please let's just stick to the motion that we have here, which has to do with appointing a Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee. That's the purpose of this. Either you're in favour of the committee or not in favour of the committee. That pretty much seems to me what the range of the debate is.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance. I must say that members across the way were provoking me.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, to this motion and the need for striking this committee, there is really no need to strike this committee. As I said before, the gentleman, Mr. Gibson: his contract should have been renewed. I will clearly admit I was one of the ones after the election that had many questions about this Chief Electoral Officer and how things unfolded. But, again, if we had given this gentleman a chance to do what he had suggested needed to be done, this motion, Government Motion 11, would not be necessary.

Certainly, as all members of this Assembly know, the schedule of the committee work that is coming forward this spring is quite heavy. There's a lot of work to do.

Ms Blakeman: Is it inhumane?

Mr. MacDonald: I wouldn't call it inhumane, but it's a heavy workload, hon. member.

We are debating at this time striking a select special committee from Legislative Offices to hire another individual to operate this very, very important office. Who are we going to get? It is going to be interesting to see. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, when we do select an individual, their workload is going to be very heavy because, of course, we're looking next year at another boundaries commission and how the electoral map for this Assembly is going to be redrawn or if it's going to be changed at all. But that is another matter. That's one job that this individual is going to be tasked with almost immediately upon his or her selection.

If we had given Mr. Gibson another term to implement the recommendations not only for the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act but for the Election Act itself, who knows? Perhaps, hon. members, we would have a fixed election date in this province. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is probably going to have something to say about that.

There are many things that we sometimes overlook. When we look at the outcome of the provincial election and the long list of issues that unfolded, those issues were articulated by hon. members from both sides of the House at the public meetings that were held with the Legislative Offices Committee regarding the renewing or the extension, whatever word you want to use, of the contract of Mr. Gibson. Now, it's all there in the public record, Mr. Speaker, what was said and by whom.

In conclusion, I will remind the House that if I have an opportunity, I will work hard on this committee. If this Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee is struck and I'm a member of it, I will be watching the process, and I will be thinking of how this is going to work and what that individual, he or she, will do to improve our system.

Our system needs to be improved. We only have to look at the work that the former Chief Electoral Officer put into the issue of finances and contributions and what should or should not be done in the enforcement, Mr. Speaker, of some of our rules and our regula-

tions, our laws surrounding contributions. There is a long list. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has brought that up in question period. The Chief Electoral Officer had one direction he wanted to pursue. Of course, that didn't happen. For some reason many of those matters were delayed or stopped by Alberta Justice. Now, hopefully that's not going to continue under the leadership of the successful applicant to become the Chief Electoral Officer.

3:00

There is a lot of work that needs to be done by this individual when they are selected. I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly and citizens from across the province to follow this process very, very closely. This is a very important office, and we have to show support not only to the office of Elections Alberta but to the Chief Electoral Officer, whoever is eventually selected.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Other members to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against this motion. I think we, first of all, need to realize that this is a very, very unusual circumstance. I'm not sure that it's unprecedented in Canadian history, but it is very close, from my consultations on this. When I say that, what I mean is that we are in this position because we, the Leg. Offices Committee, refused to renew the contract of the Chief Electoral Officer. That is a very unusual circumstance. Typically if the Chief Electoral Officer wants to continue, the person is given a second job. In fact, there are jurisdictions in Canada where a second term is virtually guaranteed.

There was one interesting case in British Columbia a number of years ago where an extension of a term was not renewed, and it ended up in the courts, Mr. Speaker. There was a particular legal ruling made which was, I believe, a bit of a precedent. Instead of it being called constructive dismissal, it was called constructive nonrenewal.

I wouldn't have been surprised if Mr. Gibson had in fact taken this issue to court. I don't know and I will never know how this departure was managed. I want to make the point that we are in this position because of very regrettable circumstances. It's a very, very unusual situation. I think we have a choice. We have at least two choices here other than this motion.

I think it's important for us to understand how we got into this situation. Mr. Gibson was hired with considerable enthusiasm by the committee, was recommended after a proper search, and was given a mandate. He looked to all to be off to a great start. He took on a challenge and delivered on an initial challenge, which was to review the electoral system in Alberta and to make recommendations for its improvement. And he made those. He made a large number of recommendations. I forget the exact figure, but it was a significant number. It covered all kinds of things like setting fixed election dates, which I think is a good idea. It included a new procedure for appointing local returning officers and on and on and on. It was basically a whole cleaning up of what has become a pretty decayed electoral mechanism in Alberta. He put forward those recommendations in his report in ample time before the last general election, in fact well over a year in advance.

Every single one of them, Mr. Speaker, was ignored, every single one of them. I think that that speaks volumes to this government's disinterest in cleaning up the electoral process. We had an independent officer of this Legislature give us very serious written advice on cleaning up the elections system, and this government completely ignored it.

So the predictable sorts of things began to happen. That creaky, old election system began to fall apart because it wasn't repaired. Very obvious issues arose; for example – and this is one that got some attention – delays in appointing the local returning officers. The Chief Electoral Officer made repeated requests to the government to get the local returning officers appointed, to get the lists of names so that he could go ahead and approach these people who are, as we all know, those people who run the local elections, and there were delays and delays and all kinds of problems. Ultimately, in what is, in my view, frankly, a kind of Third World standard, he ended up dealing with a political party, with the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, to get a list of candidates to be local returning officers. That's simply wrong, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter of public record, but it's simply wrong. We should not have any political party handing over lists of candidates to fill the positions of returning officers.

At that point, of course, he was desperate because it was only months before the rumoured election. He began approaching these people, and he found that there were all kinds of problems with them, so there were further delays. In many cases, when all was said and done, Mr. Speaker, the local returning officers were not appointed until weeks and in some cases days before the writ was dropped. As a result of that and many other issues, there were serious problems with the elections process. I certainly experienced those in my constituency; I imagine we all did. Enormous lineups at polling stations; shortages of staff to work the polls; serious, serious problems with the electors list. On and on and on it went.

Then there was an immense outpouring of frustration. We received a very large number of complaints verbal and written. We compiled a large three-ring binder of those complaints, some of which were extremely serious, things like ballot boxes being opened in the middle of election day by returning officers, written complaints of witnesses saying this kind of thing – that's clearly wrong, Mr. Speaker – all kinds of other issues like that.

Whether this issue of what happened in the last election is dead or not, time will tell. But I can tell you that we're in this situation debating this motion today because rather than addressing the problems the Chief Electoral Officer raised, this government chose to shoot the messenger, Mr. Speaker, and I think that was a serious and regrettable mistake. Problems in the electoral system were exposed, solutions were proposed, the solutions were overruled, and the person who identified those problems and proposed the solutions basically had the term of their job not renewed. As I said, there is a legal term called constructive nonrenewal which may well have applied here.

To this motion, Mr. Speaker. I don't need to repeat the motion; it's a long one. I think there are two better options, myself, and that's why I'm opposing this motion. The first would be to return to Mr. Gibson and offer him the position back and give him the mandate and the leeway and the resources to actually implement the solutions that he proposed to fix up the creaky, old election machinery in Alberta. Now, that's not going to happen. I'm not sure he would take the job, and I wouldn't blame him if he didn't. But I think it would be worth a try.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, if I had thought that it would work and pass, I would have otherwise proposed an amendment to this motion, which would be to add to this motion a clause giving the new Chief Electoral Officer the mandate and the resources to enact the recommendations proposed by Mr. Gibson, the previous Chief Electoral Officer, so that we at least make a gesture at cleaning up such a failing, rotten, old system. That's not in here.

My fear, if this passes as it is, is that, first of all, the well has been poisoned. I don't know what qualified person, what top-notch

electoral officer, is going to apply for a job which has been so badly damaged. As I said, I know this is a national issue in this community because I've spoken to members of this community across the country, and they were shocked and appalled at what happened to Mr. Gibson. They were dismayed at the culture around the election in Alberta, and they don't have confidence that it's going to be fixed. So the well may well be poisoned. We'll find somebody, but will that person have the abilities we need to clean up this system? I'm not at all confident of that, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

The second concern I have is that even if we get a really good person, there's no sign of any will whatsoever on the part of this government to fix the fundamental problems that led us into needing this motion in the first place. We've had a few brief comments from the Premier about allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers, but when he has been pressed on it, he has backed off immediately. We've had a couple of brief comments from the Premier on the next election date, but when he is pressed on it, he has backed off immediately.

The funding to at least bring this office up to the sort of resource standards that are normal in other provinces was held back. Every sign is that there's no interest whatsoever on the part of this government to clean up the system. So we've damaged our reputation, we've poisoned the well with the pool of potential applicants, and we've shown no inclination whatsoever to bring this voting system into the 21st century.

I think this is the wrong approach. I think we need to illustrate to the new candidate that we're serious about cleaning this up. This motion doesn't do it. I'm opposed to it. I think it's a bad way to proceed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others to participate? This is a debatable motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this motion. As already discussed, this seems like a procedural motion, but of course it's attached to something which is the fundamental foundation of all that we do here. It is attached to a process which gives our being here every day the legitimacy and the mandate to do what we do not only in this Assembly but also in terms of what we do for the people of the province with our legislative authority.

The very, very fundamental, foundational piece of that is the electoral process through which we get here. Of course, this motion is attached to how we establish a mechanism of oversight and administration of that electoral process. It must be a process of oversight and administration which is completely objective and without undue influence in the eyes of Albertans. For it to be anything other than that is, unfortunately, to, as I say, undermine everything that comes after that, everything that we do here. That's why I am concerned about this.

I mean, we talked about and there has been a lot of discussion about why the Chief Electoral Officer's contract or term of his position as an officer of this Legislature was not renewed. Of course, we talked about the problems of the last election, which of course have been fully canvassed. We had, you know, an embarrassing – embarrassing – turnout in our last election. There are countries which are just coming out of dictatorship mode who are having their first elections who have higher electoral turnouts than what we had in that last election, and there were a lot of reasons for it.

There is no question that one of the reasons for it was the failure

of the government to fix the process through which those key players were able to be put in place to administer and oversee the election, that being the returning officers. That process was fundamentally broken. It was broken in that the names for that had historically come through the government, and it was broken in that that process was not ever properly fixed, so it was broken so that the wrong people were being appointed way, way, way too late.

Then, as a result, we had a debacle of an election process that I think all members of this House can agree created many, many problems. Of course, that problem was something that was identified by the former Chief Electoral Officer, an officer of this Legislature responsible not to the government but to each individual member of this Assembly. Unfortunately, when that problem was identified, it was identified in a very sensitive pre-election period, and it was unfortunately a requirement of the Chief Electoral Officer to identify the primary source of that problem, that being the Premier, who was at the time running for re-election. Now, that shouldn't be a problem because he was an officer of this Assembly, and regardless of the political considerations, he should have been completely free to raise those issues in a way that would fix the system upon which we all rely in a way that is objective and neutral and protected from interference and influence. So that's what he tried to do. It didn't work, unfortunately, so we had the problems we had.

In addition to that, of course, other problems were also identified by this Chief Electoral Officer. He, of course, as I mentioned, had identified the process of appointing deputy returning officers. He had also identified a number of matters that should have been prosecuted and were not followed up. I believe there were 19 of them. He also made recommendations with respect to penalty provisions within the act to more appropriately hold responsible candidates who received money from illegal sources. He made recommendations for overall financial reform. Again, the electoral financing process in the province of Alberta is very, very, you know, wild, wild-westesque, I would say, in comparison to most other jurisdictions, which have much more comprehensive rules for accountability in terms of electoral financing.

So he made those proposals, and lo and behold he did that just a few months before his contract was up for renewal. I suppose, you know, he thought he was doing the job that, in his view, was the job that all Assembly members needed to have done. But then we came to the committee, and the vote is a matter of record. All members that happen to be members of the government party voted against his reappointment, and all opposition members voted for it. The result of that has been a significant undermining of the faith that Albertans and other parliamentarians across the country have in the system that we have.

Now we are here with this motion. The motion, once again, sets up the standard search committee. The standard search committee happens to, coincidentally, consist of a majority of members who are members of the government caucus. Frankly, I would think that if I were in government, I would want to try to clean up my reputation on this, I would want to try to heal the black eye that this province has sustained through this event, and I would want, as a result, to appoint a committee that was equally represented by both opposition and government members. Say what you will, we know that in the past there has been a voting pattern. So justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done. It must be expected to be done. If the past is any predictor, Albertans have a real need to be concerned about what the outcome will be from a committee that is, again, dominated by government members.

It's for that reason that I can't support this motion, because I don't

believe that the committee is constructed in a way to best assure the faith of Albertans in the objectivity and neutrality with which it will do its job. I believe that given what has happened in the last year with respect to the Chief Electoral Officer and the role of that officer of the Legislature, we need to assure Albertans that we are going to do better.

3:20

I'm very concerned – and I've made this statement before – that this event that occurred in the last year or, I guess, over the course of 16, 18 months with respect to the Chief Electoral Officer has had a chilling effect on the sense of independence and security experienced by other officers who are accountable to all members of this Legislature. I can't blame them for that based on what has happened on the public record.

I suspect that it's too late to undo what has happened with the previous Chief Electoral Officer. But I would like to see members of this Assembly move forward in a way that is designed to change the practices of the past and to assure Albertans that a new book is being opened, a new page is being turned, and a new commitment to assuring true objectivity is demonstrated. Unfortunately, I don't see that that is demonstrated in the motion that we have before us. For that reason, I can't vote in favour of it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Shall I call on the hon. Government House Leader to close the debate?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, interesting. The province is without a Chief Electoral Officer at the moment. It's not in my hands to revisit the discussion that the standing committee had before they determined not to renew the Chief Electoral Officer's term. The fact of the matter is that that term was not renewed, and we don't have a Chief Electoral Officer. Therefore, I would presume that every member of the House would want to pass a motion to set up a committee to hire a new Chief Electoral Officer and to make a recommendation of same to the Legislative Assembly. I'm entirely surprised that opposition members, who purport to believe in democracy, would not want an independent Chief Electoral Officer.

However, there are just a couple of things that I'd like to comment on in this process. There have been suggestions or allegations that for some reason the committee perhaps didn't renew the Chief Electoral Officer's term because of his report. I think there's no connection between the two that I can discern. I find that that kind of statement should not go unchallenged on the public record. What is on the public record – and these are not my words, but rather the words of the former Leader of the Official Opposition in *Hansard* from the Standing Committee on Leg. Offices, July 29, 2008:

Yes. I just wanted to inform the committee formally in the minutes that I have asked the Auditor General to investigate the operations of the Chief Electoral Officer in relation to the conduct of the last election. As this committee is the committee to whom both the Auditor General and the Chief Electoral Officer report, I thought I should just put that on the record. It's been in the media and elsewhere, so people probably know about it. That's a step I've taken, and it's based on very widespread concerns about the operation of the election in this preceding March.

Those are the words of the former Leader of the Official Opposition, Edmonton-Riverview, a person who today talked about being so disappointed that this motion was going forward and that we're appointing a new Chief Electoral Officer.

In fact, what was he affirming that was in the media? Well, what

he was affirming were comments that are quoted on the editorial page of the *Calgary Herald* on Wednesday, July 9, 2008.

Yet, such was the chaos on March 3, that Liberal leader Kevin Taft has called for the provincial auditor general to look into it. He called it “the worst-run election ever.” The *Herald* having recently made it’s own assessment, has no reason to disagree.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I’m not going to get into commenting on whether the Chief Electoral Officer did his job or not. That is the role of the standing committee of the House. They did their job. They determined that the contract should not be renewed. There’s a provision in the act which calls for the term of the Chief Electoral Officer to expire one year post an election unless it’s renewed. That happened. We have a vacancy in the office. I’m not sure why it happened. I’m not a member of the committee. But I can clearly understand what the Leader of the Official Opposition was saying publicly a year ago and during the course of the last year about the last election, so far be it from me to contradict the former Leader of the Official Opposition in terms of his viewpoint.

But, really, that’s not germane to the motion at hand. The motion at hand is about: should we have a committee?

Ms Blakeman: Then why did you bring it up?

Mr. Hancock: The Member for Edmonton-Centre says, “Why did you bring it up?” I bring it up because every speaker on the opposition side to this motion today dealt with everything but the motion and put on the record of this House things which were not germane to the motion but needed to be put into a proper context, so I’m putting it into that context.

I would ask members of the House to approve this motion because we do need a Chief Electoral Officer in this province, we do need an independent process – democracy depends on it – and you should join us in voting for it.

The Speaker: I will put the question to the House, but prior to that I’ll ask the Government House Leader to slap himself on the wrist for violating the rules of the House.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s certainly my pleasure to stand and request third reading of Bill 18, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

In this particular case, Mr. Speaker, there’s no doubt we’ve had a good, healthy debate, and I’d like to thank the hon. members for their interest and participation. I hope that as a result of the debate, there has been some further insight and answers provided to questions that have been raised.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TILMA, has been around for some time now, and this particular bill really is pretty much a cleanup to a process that started formally a couple of years ago. There was Bill 1 of last year, and Bill 18 is this year’s bill, which is essentially nuts and bolts

legislation that amends some 11 acts. Many of those amendments deal with jurisdictional provisions like residency requirements. Alberta and B.C. agreed under TILMA that residents of both provinces would be treated equally. Just because someone happened to reside in one province, they would not be barred from accessing opportunities in the other.

It is actually very clear today to those from outside of our province and most of those within our province that TILMA is groundbreaking because it is going to help Albertans and Alberta companies during this current global economic slowdown. Teachers, nurses, welders, accountants, to name only a few, are now going to be able to work in either province without having to comply with additional unnecessary requirements. In fact, as of April 1 of this year more than 100 regulated occupations and professions gained full labour mobility between Alberta and British Columbia. As well, Mr. Speaker, under TILMA businesses will have improved processes for registration and reporting, and regulations between the two provinces will be streamlined so that we are even more effective and productive.

TILMA has already served as a model for improving the pan-Canadian agreement on internal trade, labour mobility, and dispute resolution chapters. That occurred formally last December at a meeting of ministers in Ottawa and is currently being rolled out across the country by individual provinces. It was also a catalyst for an arrangement between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, which recently signed an agreement to remove provincial trade barriers.

I can tell you that it was also a catalyst for Quebec and Ontario to commence discussions that sounded TILMA-like. When I last chatted with the ministers responsible, I was led to believe that some time this year we would hear more about that. I indicated to them that I was looking forward to the opportunity to see what they had done because it was always possible that Alberta would like to join in their good work.

It was just last month, Mr. Speaker, at an unprecedented tripartite – Saskatchewan, B.C., Alberta – joint cabinet meeting that there was a commitment by our respective Premiers to pursuing a western economic partnership to continue to reduce barriers and improve trade among the three most western provinces.

3:30

The essence of all of this work, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans are going to receive a dramatic benefit at exactly the right time. I would ask all members of this Assembly to support Bill 18 in third reading.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a privilege once again to rise on this particular bill. I listened to the minister’s remarks, and clearly we understand that no matter what we say here, this bill is going to pass. There has been a vigorous debate, as the minister said, and at times an unusually interesting debate. A point of privilege, I believe, was brought on this and other things. It’s been healthy. I believe debate is good for bringing out new angles and new concerns, and there have been concerns expressed around this piece of legislation.

I also think that it’s worth noting that in principle co-operation between the provinces is something that I support and that in principle there are some good ideas about breaking down trade barriers and improving standards across the country. This is, in fact, something that’s going on globally. I mean, the news today is filled with information that Alberta’s standards on carbon emissions are probably going to be in effect set from Washington. My point in

raising that is simply that there is a global process of integration going on.

We can look at TILMA as part of that process. Inherently it's not a bad process. The devil's always in the details, and the reason that we've debated vigorously on this is that we've been concerned with some of the details.

Frankly, we've been concerned with some of the process as well. Before this round of debate there hadn't been, in our view, adequate debates around TILMA. The initial negotiations and signing were done before there was any legislative debate in this province, which was different from what I understand occurred in British Columbia.

If we are moving in this direction and since this bill is going to pass, I'd like to reflect on some other things that we may want to address in the spirit of co-ordinating and standardizing and getting in sync with the rest of the world. I actually spent last weekend in Vancouver, and I was immediately struck by some things that I thought: gee, I wish we could line those up with Alberta. One of the first was just stepping out of the airport, hailing a taxi, and realizing that virtually every taxi in Vancouver is a hybrid. Immediately you get the impression from that that this is a society, out in B.C., that's wanting to adapt to change, not resist it. It's very different, of course, hailing a taxi in Alberta. I thought right away: gee, there's something that Alberta could learn.

I was reminded, actually – I think it's something we should all remember in these days of rapid change – of Darwin's observation in *On the Origin of Species*. I can't quote it verbatim, but it was to the effect that it is not to the strongest or the fastest or the fittest that survival occurs; it is to the species that adapts most readily. I have to say that I think that in some ways we need to incorporate an attitude of adapting to change a little more quickly in Alberta than we have. That might be something we could import from B.C.

In Vancouver, again, I was looking at building standards as I walked about. I spent a lot of time walking in Vancouver on the weekend. They're opening a massive new convention centre, and the building standards there were such that it has the largest turf roof in the country, if not on the continent. They're doing that as part of an environmental standard. There's a building being opened very shortly on the UBC campus which will probably be the most energy efficient large building on the planet, certainly in the country.

I find myself, then, wondering, well, if we are embracing interprovincial standards and if we are trying to bring ourselves into line with other jurisdictions, why don't we look at some of those things? Why don't we look at environmental standards? B.C. has vehicle emission standards. Why don't we adopt those? If B.C. has better building standards, why don't we adopt those? If they have better standards in other areas, why don't we adopt those? That, of course, brings me to the issue of farm safety, where B.C. has significantly better standards than Alberta. In fact, Alberta doesn't just trail B.C.; it trails the whole country.

If we're embracing interprovincial co-ordination and standardization, which I think is a great idea in principle, then let's not just do it in a cherry-picking fashion. Let's set ourselves some challenges. Let's try to meet some standards that make us uncomfortable, make us stretch a bit. That would include things like vehicle emissions, energy efficiency, building codes, farm safety, worker safety, in fact labour rights generally. Maybe we'll get, you know, TILMA the sequel, that will address some of those issues, Mr. Speaker. That would be something to get really excited about.

The last point I will make as we compare between Alberta and B.C. is that if you look at provincial expenditures per capita, B.C. delivers all of their services, which include wonderful highways, ferry service, great provincial parks – Vancouver General hospital, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is outstanding – a pharmacare program,

environmental standards, for a dollar. The Alberta government spends \$1.28 to deliver in many cases standards that are barely equal to and too often weaker than B.C.'s. I think there are some lessons to be learned from B.C. in terms of just government efficiency.

I would urge this government, if it's pursuing TILMA, to genuinely look at the whole spectrum of opportunities to learn from and co-ordinate with British Columbia. Certainly, they have things they could learn from us; we have a lot we could learn from them.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I think I've participated in every stage of debate on this bill, and I have, clearly, some pretty strong feelings about it. I've listened carefully to the rest of my colleagues, and I appreciate the points made by the previous speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He's putting a positive spin on this, that we could look at this as an opportunity to try to put some things in place across both provinces that would be seen as an improvement in many ways.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think this bill is fundamentally wrong, and I think it's wrong of this Legislative Assembly to support this bill. I think it's wrong because it is inappropriate for a Legislative Assembly to knowingly, willingly abdicate its responsibility to a lesser level. In this case, what is contemplated in this act is that by the passage of Bill 18 the Legislative Assembly would abdicate its ability to be the sole area where changes could be made – so what is made by the Assembly has to be unmade or changed by the Assembly – and that's what would be passed here. That's what the effect of this bill will be, that the bill abdicates the power to cabinet, to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, to be able to change legislation.

The government is very quick to say: "Oh, come on, now. Come on, now. Just trust us. Trust us. We're not going to abuse this power, but we need it in order to make all of our laws comply with the deadlines in order to not fall afoul of the regulations and standards that are in TILMA." My understanding was that there was an April 1 deadline date when all of this was to happen.

3:40

I guess I have a couple of responses to that. One, this is arguably the most powerful governing body in the country. It has 72 members. This is a one-party state. This Assembly can do anything it wants. It always gets the vote. We even have examples of where, you know, cabinet ministers are directing all-party committees on how they're supposed to behave. We had that happen at Leg. Offices, where the Treasury Board president directed the chair of that committee that the raises that were requested by various legislative officers were to be curtailed to a certain amount as dictated by the President of the Treasury Board. That's all a matter of public record.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We have an enormously powerful one-party state, which I think is very problematic because it takes those checks and balances off of things. I am seeing this as a slippery slope. These Henry VIII clauses, as they're called, have been used in the past, and they have been challenged in court, and they have been upheld. But they have been used in the past at times of extreme crisis, let me call it that. Civil insurrection, you know, world wars: I mean big stuff, not a business contract, which is essentially what we're looking at with TILMA.

But this is the problem. Everybody was able to come back to me

and others that protested this and say: "You know what? This has been done before. There's precedent. Don't worry about it. It's fine." Well, there is precedent. It was used previously for circumstances where because of enormous upheaval or unrest that abdication was allowed to happen. We've taken a big step down, and now we're saying: "Well, it's okay. We'll abdicate our responsibility here to scrutinize on behalf of citizens. We'll abdicate that to cabinet in the case of an agreement on trade." We've gone from world wars to an agreement on trade as an acceptable reason by the government members in this House to abdicate their responsibility. I can't support that because I think what's at the base of this for me is that it's clearing democracy out of the way for a profit motive. It's saying: we're going to abdicate our responsibility as democratic workers here for a profit motive. To me that's just not good enough.

I find fault too many times with a government that chooses to uphold and facilitate and reward and enable the business sector as though it were the only one worthy. Frankly, half of our population is employed in the public sector, but you don't see them getting the same respect or the same support as what is given to the corporate sector. I don't feel I need to speak on behalf of the corporate sector because they do pretty darn well. That's part of my point. I think that they are given . . . [interjection] Well, there's somebody muttering over there, so I'm sure they'll be glad to get in on the debate as soon as I'm finished. If you feel that strongly, get up and put it on the record; don't heckle me from behind your hand.

What I see the effect of this bill being is that a B.C. businessperson is going to have more rights and protection in certain cases than an Albertan, and this Assembly, people that represent Alberta citizens, has said: that's okay. That's not okay with me. I think that's wrong. I think we're paid – and not too badly paid; it's not too shabby – to be here to represent the best interests of our constituents, and I don't think that compromising democracy is in the best interests of our citizens. Does that mean that I'm antibusiness? No, it doesn't. I'm very grateful for the very clever businesspeople and entrepreneurs that exist in my riding and work throughout Alberta and through the rest of Canada. They bring us products that we wish to purchase. They employ people. They're an economic driver, but they're not the only economic driver, and I think we need to work harder to balance that.

This government has taken a lot of criticism, and I think appropriately so, for the choices it has made around how it facilitates the oil sands, for example, and the kinds of tax regimes that are put in place so that that sector can flourish. Yes, the oil sands do employ a number of people in this province, and the money does trickle out somewhat, not as much as they'd like me to believe, to citizens. But were they given a number of advantages? Indeed.

On the other side of that, we have the not-for-profit sector in this province, which provides a lot of programs and services that people need and want that make this a better province to live in, that help us attract professional, knowledge-based workers to come from other places and settle here. I was told the other day by somebody in the department of health that the single-biggest problem they have in convincing professional experts to come from other places is that they don't think there's any culture here in Alberta and that they've got to be encouraged to have a look at the Winspear and the Citadel and the Epcor Centre and the Calgary Philharmonic and the Edmonton Opera and understand that we offer all of those things here and that we have a lot of them and that we're very good at it. But isn't that interesting? That's a sector that doesn't get the same kind of support as we are willing to give the corporate sector, yet it's the selling point. It's the final thing that gets the signature on that contract to bring the very people to us that are going to help make us all rich and famous.

I think this is a diminishment of this House, and it's a diminishment of the equality of all of the members of this House. So often I'm told by this government: "Just trust us. You know, really, we know what we're doing. You're raising all of these objections, and really it doesn't amount to a hill of beans. Just trust us. We'll take care of all of this." But you know what? When I look around, I don't see the reason to give that trust.

I think that the members that are appointed to cabinet have extra jobs. They may and should be the best and brightest from the government caucus, but frankly that does not make them gods. That is part of the equality of the members of this House. They are not omnipotent.

Mr. MacDonald: One or two of them must fit into that category.

Ms Blakeman: No. None of them. Sorry.

There are certain times where the Greeks can give us some very good lessons, and the lesson of hubris is one that this government consistently fails to learn. But that is, again, what's being contemplated in this because that power is being given to those members. Why the backbenchers here would knowingly give that power over there, I don't know. They must be hoping they're going to move to the other side. But you know what, guys? Most of you won't. And you will have abdicated your ability as a member of this House over to the other side, where you are never going to be.

I look again for examples of how I could trust them that this is all going to work out so well. Well, I can't. You know, I talked about the not-for-profit sector, and I should complete that analogy. Here we have the Wild Rose Foundation, which was, I'll admit, not completely nonpartisan, but it had operated fairly well with an appointed board for some 25 years. It had the respect of the community, and without one bit of consultation it was wiped out and rolled inside of the department to become even more of a partisan-driven, lottery-grant handout. I was joking, but I was serious yesterday in question period when I talked about the advantageous timing for government members to have these big cartoon cheques, that are the size of a door, for their photo op, to hand them out. But that's a perversion of a process, and I'm seeing the same thing involved in what's being contemplated here.

3:50

Mr. MacDonald: Have you been at one of those cheque presentations?

Ms Blakeman: No, I have never been at one of those cheque presentations. I've never been asked. The government loves to point out that the constituency of Edmonton-Centre is home to grand institutions like the Winspear Centre or the Citadel or the Art Gallery of Alberta. True enough, but they certainly didn't invite me to the cheque presentation. They didn't let me know about that one. I wasn't in the photo op. I didn't have the big cartoon cheque. No surprise there.

What I'm seeing in this agreement is the outcome of a one-party state. I think there's too much power that this cabinet is taking upon itself. I don't see a balance in it. I don't see a way to curtail that power. I think this is a slippery slope. We have slid to this point. What's next? That's the last piece, all of this: "Trust us. That will be okay. We will manage this on your behalf. This will all be great." But I say: "What's next? Where does the slippery slope take us next?" Where members of this Assembly will be asked to abdicate their responsibility and their democratic power to the cabinet to be able to make decisions on, what next?

The very principles of this bill I spoke against in second reading.

I spoke in support of some amendments and against some others. I actually wrote one of the amendments. They were defeated while we were in Committee of the Whole. As I speak to the anticipated effect of the bill in third reading, I cannot support it, and I have not heard arguments from the government side that have made me change my mind, clearly.

Now, I think there will be some people who will be advantaged by this, no question, and I hope that we will see an advantage from some things like a green economy. We'd get some of the good things from B.C., where they are better than us on things like a greener economy, on some of their labour laws and protections, but overall I cannot support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comment. Any members?

Seeing none, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests before I recognize another member.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all the members of the Assembly for allowing me to introduce to you and through you my very special family members: my wife, Kamal Sandhu, along with my beautiful daughter Neetu – she's pursuing second-year nursing at the University of Alberta – and my younger son, Deep Sandhu, also my sister-in-law Manpreet Sandhu.

While we're debating about TILMA, Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome my nephew Rocky Sandhu – he's working at nursing in B.C. – and his wife, Gurpreet Sandhu, who are visiting from Maple Ridge, B.C. They came here to spend time with us to know about beautiful Alberta.

I'm very proud they were able to come to visit our Assembly. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Bills and Orders **Third Reading**

Bill 18

Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (*continued*)

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again and speak to this bill, which I believe I've spoken to a couple of times now. It's really unfortunate, as I've stated before, that it's not a bill that I support in any way, shape, or form. This is a bill, of course, that's designed to facilitate and act as a vehicle for the implementation of the TILMA agreement. I'm going to try and focus my remarks on two general areas: one, the TILMA agreement, and two, that part of this particular bill which, of course, has received some attention in the House already and which I believe represents a gross delegation of authority on the part of this Assembly should we choose to go ahead and pass this piece of legislation.

On the issue of TILMA itself, you know, one might say: well, this bill just enables TILMA, and you should simply limit your debate to

the mechanisms of enabling it. But, of course, the problem is that we don't get to debate the substance of TILMA because the substance of TILMA has never come before this House for debate. We've never been given the opportunity to look at the agreement to determine what parts of the agreement are in the best interests of Alberta and what parts are not. We're told: "Take it or leave it. Either you support trade or you're antibusiness. It's one or the other." Heaven forbid that you actually look at elements of the agreement and determine whether there are parts of it that go too far or don't go far enough. I mean, that's something that is clearly beyond the capacity of the silly little heads inside this Assembly.

Nonetheless, I think that is an error on the part of the government and that, in fact, for TILMA to get support, the process through which it was reached needs to be completely revisited.

Basically, what's TILMA for? We're told by the government that they had to undertake the agreement with B.C. because the agreement on internal trade, to which all provinces are parties, has proven ineffectual at removing trade barriers. As far as I was able to tell last year, the provinces were actually able to reach an agreement to an amendment to the AIT in order to improve labour mobility in Canada, yet somehow that happened without necessarily having to go to TILMA.

So what barriers actually exist between Alberta and B.C.? The website for the agreement on internal trade shows that since the AIT came into force in 1995, three complaints have been filed concerning trade or labour mobility between Alberta and B.C. One of those complaints was resolved by a simple exchange of information between the parties, another complaint was dropped, and the third became inactive. Clearly, you know, business is burning up the phone lines with the way in which they're oppressed by the outrageous, insoluble barriers between Alberta and B.C.

Now, I would suggest, of course, that it's a myth that trade between provinces is restricted by any array of trade barriers and that there's really no evidence of that. Research conducted for the 1985 Macdonald commission concluded that interprovincial barriers cost no more than .05 per cent of the gross domestic product at the time, and relative to distance and market size Canadian provinces are far more likely to trade with each other than with American states. Since 2000 interprovincial trade has actually been growing much faster than Canada's international trade.

There was a Conference Board of Canada study that was commissioned by the B.C. government to support their claim that TILMA was very, very necessary and to suggest that TILMA would add \$4.8 billion to the province's economy. Unfortunately, almost as soon as that study was released, it was very quickly challenged and shown to be very faulty. For instance, the study made no attempt to list or estimate the cost of the particular barriers between the provinces. They didn't use standard economic measurement techniques. The Conference Board, instead, relied on a very tiny survey of a couple of business organizations.

Then through a simple arithmetic error the Conference Board study doubled the estimates of the TILMA benefits. Even after correcting the error, most of the so-called projected gains in that study were from industries exempt from the final agreement or from industries that barely engage in interprovincial trade. All in all, that particular study was not very convincing, and it demonstrated, to me anyway, that TILMA is really a solution in search of a problem. What TILMA does do, however, is provide a vehicle for private corporations to assert their jurisdiction and their authority over the public interest, which is otherwise reflected through acts passed in this Assembly or the Assembly in B.C., and it does that through the dispute resolution process. Failure to comply with orders of the dispute resolution panel would result in the province paying a

monetary penalty of up to \$5 million, potentially over and over and over again. That's not even clear.

4:00

Do we really need a quasi-judicial panel which can be triggered by a whole slew of other organizations to impose penalties on us for legislation that we have passed? Isn't that a bit like using a sledgehammer to swat flies? Basically, by giving trade issues precedence over other issues of public interest and by giving complainants the power to sue ourselves, we are giving other people the power to sue us for more stuff. When did anybody think that was a good idea? You know, this government always talks about how they are such brilliant businesspeople. What business owner would voluntarily give to other people more grounds on which they could be sued? I don't get it.

Nonetheless, by doing that, what we do is create a bill of rights, essentially, for corporations, similar to chapter 11 of the North America free trade agreement. You know, I just don't obviously see the point of that. It's interesting. With respect to that dispute resolution panel a former international and intergovernmental affairs minister was quoted at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Richmond saying to those people: yes, this agreement gives Canadian business everything it's ever asked for. That's great, but, you know, there are a few more stakeholders, I would suggest, to which this Assembly needs to be responsible.

Now, of course, there have also been some legal opinions that have been floating around with respect to TILMA, which we've outlined in the past, and I won't get into them again. Suffice it to say that the agreement itself is open to a number of different legal challenges.

The primary problem with this specific bill that I want to talk about in the remaining time that I have is, of course, that part which gives to the minister of international and intergovernmental affairs the ability to write regulations that would overrule anything that we have done or things that we might do in the future in this Assembly.

As you know, I raised a point of privilege on this matter, and the Speaker ruled against that point of privilege. However, it's worth noting that at the time he suggested: well, I can only rule on what they may do in the House, what the Assembly may do, not what they should do. I would suggest that as members of this Assembly we should not give this kind of unprecedented level of authority to the executive of this government in order to implement an agreement which was not substantially the subject of debate in this House.

An agreement negotiated in secret that was never put to this House for vote or debate will now be allowed to take precedence over legislation that we pass in this House, and it's not emergent. As I've just outlined, there are no businesses screaming for government intervention, asking to bring down those barriers so we can keep our people employed. That is not a refrain I am seeing out there. There is no public emergency. There's no public health crisis. There's no war. There are no major disasters that would warrant this kind of authority being granted to the executive of this government. The only times when you've seen this kind of legislation used in the Commonwealth, frankly, is in those kinds of cases, and here what this government wants to do is take that kind of authority in order to implement an agreement which isn't even required on the evidence but that does give business everything it ever wanted.

That's the vision of this government, to further undermine the authority of this Assembly, which still, at least theoretically, is here to represent the public interest and the best interests of all Albertans. Yet, apparently, this minister thinks, and the government in proposing this bill thinks, that the interests . . . [A timer sounded] Oh, that's mine, so I'll keep going, I guess.

The Deputy Speaker: It's your timer. You still have time.

Ms Notley: Okay, great.

. . . of specific members of the business community in B.C. ought to override the interests of Alberta citizens and that those decisions ought to be made by a dispute resolution panel which we have no control over, which has only the most limited oversight by the judiciary. I mean, we've really set up a lovely, complicated system to ensure the enhanced rights of private-sector bodies to contest and challenge the public interest at every level. The fact that the dispute resolution committee itself can only be challenged on the most limited of judicial grounds is yet another part of this notion that we need to keep it all away from the public sector, keep it all away from debate, keep it all away from accountability, keep it all underground so we don't need to see what is or isn't happening and why our legislation is or isn't being applied or no longer is in effect.

I just think that this in an incredible step backwards. Certainly, this is a much heavier hammer than even the B.C. government used in bringing in its enabling legislation. I suspect it's probably one of the heaviest hammers used on any piece of legislation across the country. Of course, in Alberta we do like to, you know, show ourselves off by doing things that nobody else does. In the same way that we were just talking about our elections process and our 40 per cent turnout at the polls, we now are going to also be proud to demonstrate to the rest of Canada that we are also able to apparently pass one of the most undemocratic pieces of legislation in the history of the country. I certainly think this Assembly should rethink whether that is an award that they want to earn, if that's something that really is in our best interests as legislators.

For that reason, the NDP caucus will not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who wish to join the debate on third reading of Bill 18?

Seeing none, I'll call on the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. There are a few comments I'd like to make in reply. The thing that I find interesting about this general debate is that, once again, people not only in Canada but internationally appreciate that this is an important move that Alberta and B.C. have taken.

Just recently Canada and the EU have commenced trade liberalization discussions. The fact is that in the EU most of the barriers, certainly as they relate to trade, investment, and mobility between the 27 member states, have been essentially eliminated. In recognizing the importance of provinces within our confederation, the EU said that as a starting point they wanted to have an agreement among the provinces and territories, and we were interested in the concept of trade liberalization with the EU, and such an agreement was entered into.

There are lots of discussions with respect to the lost productivity as a result of the barriers regarding labour mobility; they're legion. The unproductive nature of Canada in so many areas is pointed to as a systemic problem. The TILMA in a small measure addresses that, and as I've indicated in previous remarks, the TILMA was the spur to the provinces, writ large, and the territories entering into a change to the agreement on internal trade with respect to labour mobility that is TILMA-like and also to dispute resolution. These are important things.

4:10

When I listen to the criticism with respect to this bill, I don't hear anything about the people who are the most obvious beneficiaries.

I noticed that Edmonton-Centre asked the question: I hope that some people are advantaged. Well, I don't know how many times I've stood and said that there are over 100 regulated occupations and professions that are impacted by this. People can move between the two jurisdictions and gain employment in the other without the barriers that previously existed. Those people would be teachers, nurses, doctors, foresters and so on. People who are advantaged. Thousands of people who are advantaged.

So they stand; they criticize; they say that they represent the people, and they miss the most obvious fact of what the TILMA is about. I must say, it's always good to see the Member for Edmonton-Centre – it's her 13th year in the Legislature, as it is mine – still arguing vigorously, in the 13th year as she did in the first, that democracy is on the verge of collapsing in the province of Alberta as a result of the heavy-handed nature of this government. Hon. member, I've got to tell you that I'm always inspired by the enthusiasm that you can bring to that retreaded argument.

Thank you so much. I will call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 2

Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General it's my pleasure to rise on her behalf and move for third reading the Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009.

This amending legislation will help enhance and strengthen the Lobbyists Act, legislation that establishes a registry for lobbyists. This will allow Albertans to see that lobbying is taking place in an open and transparent way. Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 includes amendments that strengthen and clarify the application of the prohibition against a dual role, limit the concept of associated persons so that spouses are not included, add to the list of individuals who are considered to be public office holders, allow an existing body to hear appeals from administrative penalties, give the Ethics Commissioner authority to disclose information when necessary to enforce administrative penalties, give the registrar the ability to prepare reports and investigations, and address a number of housekeeping matters. Essentially, Bill 2 will help the Lobbyists Act work more effectively for lobbyists and for government. At this time I would move third reading of this legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak?

Seeing none, then the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Bill 3

Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of the Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009.

The main purpose of this amendment is to give credit unions the ability to allow their members to vote for directors in advance of their annual general meeting. The Credit Union Act was amended in the spring of 2008, which, among other things, allowed for credit union member participation at meetings through electronic means. We feel that the ability to use advance polls could further credit union member participation at credit union meetings.

We are also proposing that this amendment retroactively validate those formal processes used by credit unions in the past that have counted voting done at advance polls. In doing so, we will preserve the past choices of credit union members for their board members and preserve the decisions made by boards voted for in this manner. This will also reduce the possibility that these credit unions could be exposed to legal challenges based on the premise that as their board was not appointed in accordance with the Credit Union Act, the decisions made by that board are not valid. As these challenges would have the benefit of hindsight, the uncertainty surrounding a legal challenge could paralyze a credit union. We have not received any complaints regarding any tampering or any other concerns from members of credit unions that held advance polls.

As a matter of expediency we are also proposing a minor administrative change that would give credit unions more flexibility in reporting requirements of credit union committees to their board. Credit unions have sufficient corporate governance policies in place that this can be managed by the board.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Certainly, I've listened to the debate so far on Bill 3 this afternoon. I think we forget just how large the credit union movement has grown here in the province. As of December 31, 2008, credit unions in Alberta held deposits, including accrued interest, totalling over \$15 billion. That's almost \$2 billion more than they held in 2007.

I know that the credit union corporation under the act does a lot of very, very good work. Their business practices are sound. But I'm a little concerned, and I would like to have this concern recorded on the record. I don't understand why it's necessary to change the rules to allow these sorts of procedures, these voting procedures, these election procedures, to occur in the electronic format. I've had constituents question recently the direction of the credit unions, certainly with the bonuses, and there was a rather large salary of over \$3 million to one individual. That salary included many other disbursements, I believe. Citizens don't realize, taxpayers don't realize that through the authority of the Credit Union Act the citizens of this province, the taxpayers are responsible for each and every dollar deposited.

4:20

Citizens lately have had a very keen interest in the policies and procedures of the credit unions. I would caution the House and hon. members, please, to be very, very careful about how we develop a policy or a procedure that, in my view, is leading to less accountability. I'm in that category. I think that if an individual wants to vote or wants to participate, then they should be certainly encouraged to do so, whether it's oral or written notice. But this whole idea of allowing major decisions to be made through the electronic format: I have some concern about that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, then, does any other member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Bill 8

Feeder Associations Guarantee Act

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 8, the Feeder Associations Guarantee Act. This is a money bill.

I'm pleased to move it, but I quickly defer to my parliamentary assistant for a couple of comments on it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to speak on third reading. I think that during Committee of the Whole I addressed most of the concerns and questions that were raised.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sort of confused a bit here in my procedure. The minister moved the bill. We need the opposition to participate before I can call on you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: If the Member for Battle River-Wainwright gives me his notes, I'll happily read them. He can close debate.

I look to the Speaker: how many minutes do I have here, realistically? Do we go right till . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Six minutes.

Dr. Taft: Okay. We'll try to get the vote through before then. I won't talk it out, although I easily could.

I want to begin by thanking the Member for Battle River-Wainwright for the briefing he gave when this bill was first introduced. It was useful, and I would encourage all ministers to brief us on legislation when they can because it makes all our lives a little bit easier.

This bill is, I think, part of an ongoing restructuring of the livestock sector, the red meat sector. [interjections] My own colleagues here are talking right over me. I'm used to heckling from the other guys.

Anyways, just on a very brief but serious point, this is part of an ongoing restructuring of the red meat sector. I think it will allow some leveraging of greater resources. But there are some questions we've raised in debate about it. There are, of course, two sides to these sorts of issues or, perhaps, a number of sides.

I'm just going to make one brief point before I sit down, and that is to register with the Assembly my growing unease with the amount of money that we're putting into the livestock sector in Alberta. You know, in the last fiscal year we poured a number of hundreds of millions of dollars into the cattle industry and the red meat industry, and that's on top of hundreds and hundreds of millions over the last number of years. I've got to say that I'm starting to get uneasy about this. I can understand that in a short-term crisis like BSE or something that needs to be done, but it's beginning to feel like a bad habit.

At some point if the industry is constantly needing to be propped up, then I think we need to look at restructuring the industry. It may well be the case that there are simply too many cattle in Alberta. If we permanently lost the American market, for example, or if we're permanently struggling to get into other markets, whatever the reason, whether it's fair or not, I'm going to begin looking a little bit tougher at some of our supports for this industry because it's a lot of money. If we don't see a winding down soon, then I think we've got to revisit the very nature of some of the red meat sectors in Alberta.

With that said, I think this bill will help the sector. I don't think it's a bill that's likely to actually cost the taxpayer very much, so with some reservations I expect that we can support this, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again. I just wanted to make a couple of comments. I understand the member expressing concern about the amount of money put into agriculture given our global challenges on trade issues quite often of recent years. But I'd like to point out that the way the feeder associations work in Alberta is not a subsidy or a program. This really just supports the banking industry to get behind local feeder associations to enhance the industry.

I appreciate the opposition's support of this legislation. I would remind everybody that this program has been running for many, many years and has been incredibly successful. This legislation isn't essentially changing anything about the way the program runs. It's mostly administrative so that it operates better on a functional basis.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill, and I'd like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to April 09, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft., adjourned)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft.), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
- 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft., adjourned)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]

- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- (Apr. 9 aft.)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft., adjourned)
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Issue 23

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Today is the first session day of the week, so I would like to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to celebrate Canada with us.

Hon. Members:

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

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you 101 students from the Cardinal Leger school, which is part of the Edmonton Catholic school district. They are here with their teacher Mrs. Carmelina Stagliano, teacher Mrs. Patricia Esposito-Neri, teacher Mr. Michele Garcea, and SNTA Mrs. Leanne Junck. I'd like to ask all members of the House to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 25 students from the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods, specifically the school of Tipaskan elementary school. The group is led by their teachers, Ms Joanna Fitzgerald and Mr. Garry Ingram, and parent helpers Mrs. Vanessa Mora and Mr. Dean Bourque. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a constituent who I first became acquainted with back in the 1970s as a Boy Scout. Apparently at that time I as a Scout leader advised Jamie to stand up when a wrong is done no matter what the cost. Today Jamie is here to stand up for a wrong that she feels has been done to her. Jamie-Lynn Garvin suffers from a gender identity disorder and was waiting for confirmation of a date for gender reassignment surgery when the budget was brought down on April 7. Jamie-Lynn has spent three years preparing for the surgery through hormone replacement therapy and was on the provincial waiting list for surgery. Now she

is faced with an uncertain medical and psychological dilemma as she cannot afford to pay for the surgery on her own. I would ask Ms Garvin, who is seated in the members' gallery, to rise, and I would ask members of the Assembly to give this courageous woman the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'd like to introduce to you and through you two guests; firstly, Krista Weir. Krista is a partner at Meyers Norris Penny. She is head of human resources consulting for them across Alberta. She was originally from Whitecourt, a U of L grad, and she resides in Calgary currently. Secondly, I'd like to introduce Lanny Westersund. Now, many of us know Lanny from working here previously. Lanny is responsible for government relations at Meyers Norris Penny. I'd ask them to rise and receive a warm greeting from the Legislature.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions to do today: one now, and I'll ask for us to be able to revert following question period. I have six people who are joining us in the gallery today who have come to protest the government's decision to delist gender reassignment surgery. Some of these individuals are directly affected by this decision, and others are family, friends, and supporters. I would ask the following people to please rise: Rob Wells, Cynthia Paish, Dominic Scaia, Edda Loomes, and Leslea Huber. Also joining them today is Julie Lloyd, who is a very well-known local human rights lawyer and a former member of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I would ask those people I've named to please rise and would the Assembly please give them the warm traditional welcome.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members a very special guest, Ms Joanne Beaton, chair of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. Joanne recently succeeded Mr. Patrick LaForge as chair and was sworn in at this year's Chamber of Commerce ball. Joanne is vice-president of customer solutions delivery with Telus. She joined the company in 1995 and is an acknowledged leader in areas such as customer service, credit operations, call centre marketing and sales, information systems, and project management. We're very proud of the work that Joanne and all of her colleagues do on the chamber board. I'd ask her to please stand and receive our very warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Immigrant Access Fund

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the Immigrant Access Fund luncheon earlier today to take in a speech on the contribution of new immigrants to Alberta and Canada by former Premier of Alberta, the hon. Peter Lougheed. The event was also honoured by the presence of our current Premier and the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

IAF is an organization that provides low-interest microloans to new immigrants to help them pay for accreditation and training. Since 2005 IAF has provided 305 loans under \$5,000, which have

helped support 42 physicians, 32 nurses, 43 engineers, 47 accountants, 12 veterinarians, and 15 pharmacists in Alberta. IAF loan capital consists of about \$600,000 from individual and corporate donors as well as \$50,000 of pledges. Based on the beliefs that actions must be taken now to ensure that Canada takes full advantage of the people who have already entered our country as skilled workers and that immigrants who are fully employed in their field make a substantially greater contribution to Canada's economy, IAF has offered loans to recipients who, after a short training period, have gone from earning minimum wage to over \$120,000 in their profession.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, full employment of immigrants is good for our economy. Because of IAF fewer immigrants are working in survivor jobs well below their education and experience, and fewer physicians are driving taxis because they cannot afford to write their qualifying exams. The social benefits of people being able to work in their field is immeasurable.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to note that the Ministry of Employment and Immigration has identified support of the IAF as an action item in the foreign qualification recognition plan for Alberta and together with Western Economic Diversification Canada, the United Way of Calgary and area, and various corporations is a key partner in supporting the operation and loan delivery of the fund. The Immigrant Access Fund is a unique initiative that offers solutions to our province's need to fill our future labour needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gender Reassignment Surgery

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, given the magnitude of this administration's financial mismanagement, it comes as no surprise that Albertans are once again facing cuts to public services. Nor does it come as a surprise that this administration is picking on some of the province's most disenfranchised and vulnerable citizens to make the first sacrifice. About 20 Albertans per year find themselves in need of sexual reassignment surgery. It's an emotionally devastating choice to have to make, but at least Albertans who had to undergo this transformation knew that the cost would be covered by Alberta health care.

That all changed with Tuesday's budget. Acting with a complete lack of compassion, this administration made a cold, calculated choice to withdraw funding for a needed procedure from citizens who they hoped would not have enough public support to fight it. Albertans don't like it when their government acts in an arbitrary and unthoughtful manner. Accordingly, concerned Albertans are preparing to challenge this decision in court, and given the precedent set in Ontario, I fully expect that the administration will be forced to reverse this poorly conceived idea. I also speculate that the legal costs incurred by the government during this battle will exceed any savings made by delisting this procedure.

Mr. Speaker, given the financial situation, of course this administration needs to start spending smarter, but this is a classic case of penny wise, pound foolish. Even worse, it places an unfair amount of financial burden on one specific group of citizens. For a word, in the legal world we call it discriminatory.

Thank you.

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

Vaisakhi Day

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Remarks in Punjabi] I am standing today to honour the 310th anniversary of Khalsa, Vaisakhi

Day. Vaisakhi marks the birth of the Sikh nation and is celebrated by the Sikhs in every part of the world as the Sikhs' national day. It is an opportunity to honour the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh and to renew commitment to the path that he charted.

I am proud to be part of the Sikh community, and it is truly a great honour. It is my hope that Sikhism will continue to enjoy a strong community of members dedicated to truth and social well-being for all Canadians. The Sikh community of Canada has made a major impact in over a century in the areas of government, business, education, health care, social services, and other aspects of our society.

This historic event in the Sikh religion draws family and friends together in a spirit of goodwill, preserving our community's legacy and the cultural diversity upon which Canada is founded. May this day bring great joy and peace, and may we continue to strive for purity in everything we do.

Lastly, I would like to wish everyone a happy Vaisakhi. Myself and two other members of this Legislature, the hon. members for Calgary-Montrose and Calgary-McCall, are members of the Sikh community, and we are honoured to be here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Video Link to International Space Station

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, on a clear night many of us have looked into the night skies and observed a satellite streaking across the heavens, wondering just how it's possible that you could travel through space. I'm thrilled today to speak to a government announcement just recently made that County Central high school in Vulcan, Alberta, will host a video link with the International Space Station this September. Students in the Palliser school district will have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to speak live with the astronauts aboard the space station.

Astronaut Dr. Robert Thirsk, an engineer and physician, the first Canadian to spend six months in space, will answer science- and technology-related questions from participating students. This event is significant since it's Canada's first space mission this year. More importantly, it will also mark the first time a Canadian takes part in a long-duration mission.

Alberta was the first jurisdiction in Canada approached by the Canadian Space Agency to participate in this historic event. The school was selected based on the capacity of the community to integrate technology both in and outside the classroom and to create learning opportunities for students. This speaks to the quality of our Alberta educational system to be forward thinking and innovative.

The choice of County Central high school also shines a spotlight on the special relationship and dedication of the students, the parents, and the community in and throughout the county of Vulcan.

I became aware of this special project on February 26 at Vulcan when I met Marilyn Steinberg from the Canadian Space Agency and representatives from Alberta Education Kim Budd, Angie Tarasoff, Karen Andrews, and Lynda Burgess. I want to thank them for their individual efforts in making this project a reality and also to acknowledge the efforts and vision of Kevin Gietz, superintendent of Palliser Regional Schools and the Palliser school board.

Thank you, and congratulations to our communities.

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

Workplace Health and Safety Awards

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I had the pleasure of attending the workplace health and safety awards, and I would like to congratulate the two Alberta businesses that were recognized this year for helping to make Alberta work sites safer and healthier.

The leader award was presented to Shell Chemicals Scotford for their industry leadership in creating a safe workplace through their superior health and safety management system, and the 2009 innovation award was given to PikSafe International. I'm particularly proud of this company, Mr. Speaker, because PikSafe International is from Chestermere, which is located in the constituency I represent. PikSafe developed a simple and effective plastic guard that slips over the handle of a pickaxe to protect the user from flying debris. I'm also pleased to see that these entrepreneurs have patented this innovation and are planning to take it to the market soon.

Once again, it was an honour to attend these awards and recognize the innovation and leadership of these two companies in the health and safety of Alberta workers. I would ask all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing these two companies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ATCO Electric Hybrid Bucket Truck

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure to attend a ceremony in Nisku with my hon. colleague from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to unveil ATCO Electric's new hybrid bucket truck. This truck is the first of its kind in Alberta and only the third one in Canada. This vehicle will service ATCO electrical lines at its permanent home in Grande Prairie. It has many eco-friendly advantages, including reduced emissions, low fuel consumption, and a much quieter engine.

Beyond the specific benefits of the hybrid truck, I was pleased to congratulate ATCO Electric on making such an environmentally responsible purchase. By choosing a hybrid vehicle, ATCO Electric has shown the kind of corporate leadership values that are becoming even more important in the 21st century. This one simple act will have a positive impact in the long term on the air Albertans breathe.

I was also happy to join ATCO Electric's president for a bird's-eye view at about 40 feet in the hybrid bucket to experience firsthand the features of this truck. ATCO explained that the diesel-electric hybrid has the potential to cut fuel consumption by 60 per cent, with a corresponding reduction of 11.2 metric tonnes of CO₂ per year.

The government of Alberta is committed to protecting our province's environment so that we can all enjoy the best possible quality of life. We support Albertans, and we support Alberta businesses as they make environmentally responsible and sustainable choices like ATCO Electric with their hybrid bucket truck, and we look forward to more of its kind across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Children's Emergency Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Speech from the Throne the Premier indicated that Albertans have had to learn to stand together as a community that looks after its most vulnerable members. Despite this promise the much-needed funding for the Stollery children's hospital emergency room expansion has been pulled. To the Premier: how can the Premier say that he is protecting Alberta's most vulnerable children when they're building temporary structures outside the hospital instead of a permanent institution?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health has rolled out a very comprehensive capital plan for all health facilities in the province. There is a good working relationship between the Stollery and the Mazankowski Heart Institute in terms of further building on both sites to accommodate more beds and more services, and the plans for both are under way. I visited both facilities earlier this year, a bit aware of the long-term plan, and unless something has changed very recently, plans are under way and continuing.

Dr. Swann: In the capital city of Alberta, one of the richest jurisdictions in the country, we have a situation where tents have been set up for emergency treatment of Alberta's children, and now the expansion is cancelled. Mr. Premier, what are your priorities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the preamble is wrong. There was no cancellation.

I did visit the emergency tent a few months ago. In fact, from the staff that were there, it was both an experiment in terms of preparing for perhaps an epidemic in the future – and the trial run was excellent – and at the same time managing to treat a number of children and others in this new way of delivering those services. So I would say that everything went very well, and the people, our health care providers, that delivered the service were very satisfied.

Dr. Swann: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the physicians are very frustrated.

Can the Premier tell Albertans when the expansion of the Stollery emergency room will show up in the provincial budget and these children can be cared for in the proper environment?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget is before the House, and the minister of health will be delivering his budget estimates with a complete list of the health care projects, in the billions, I might add. We're going to continue with the program. It's going to be well thought out in terms of the need for services and access and also take this opportunity, I believe, to get better value for taxpayer dollars on much of the construction.

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

Blue Cross Premiums

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Tory administration's health care policies are angering Albertans, and we've been hearing from them. Joyce from Calgary e-mailed with concern for herself and others about the tripling – the tripling – of Blue Cross premiums in the next year. As Joyce points out, many persons who subscribe to this plan do so because of high prescription costs, they have lower income, and they have no employer plans. To the Premier: how is this change going to do anything but squeeze Albertans who can least afford it while forcing others from coverage, which will become unaffordable?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to our ever-growing senior population in the province, we're very cognizant of the fact that we have to ensure that we deliver a program long term that is sustainable yet meets the needs of Albertans. These are, of course, very difficult but tough decisions. Once again, the minister will bring forward a pharmaceutical plan, working with Blue Cross, because we know that as we go well into the future, the baby-boomer generation, this large population that will be turning 65 within a few short years, will put additional stress on all our budgets. That's why we're working together with Albertans to find a balance.

Dr. Swann: Well, can the Premier stand here and justify a 300 per cent increase in premiums to Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. leader is referring to, what specific area, but we do know that there are a number of new drugs that are coming on stream. The minister of health just approved one for cancer treatment. I know that last year, if I recall correctly, an increase in-year of well over a hundred million in terms of new drugs. These are the kind of challenges that we're facing as Albertans and, again, working together to make sure that we sustain this very good health system for future generations.

Dr. Swann: Well, this concerned Albertan heard a representative from Blue Cross indicate in the news that, quote, if people don't like it, they can go elsewhere. End of quote. As this woman points out, how can Albertans who are already taking prescriptions for pre-existing conditions just go elsewhere and obtain equivalent coverage, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health is more familiar with the program. He might be able to answer the question.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would answer it this way. The Leader of the Opposition is well aware that when we brought forward our pharmaceutical strategy, we had not increased the premiums for Alberta nongroup coverage for some 15 years. What has happened is that we've simply fallen behind with the equivalency to employer plans. Our schedule of increases over the next two years will bring us up to more equivalency with the employer plans.

The Deputy Speaker: Third question from the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Gender Reassignment Surgery

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health has cut funding for gender reassignment surgeries purportedly to save \$700,000. An identical attempt in Ontario was challenged and resulted in the decision being overturned and the funding being reinstated. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the minister subjecting taxpayers to a significant court challenge with significant costs just to discriminate against a particular group?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member is well aware that this provincial budget was a challenge relative to the fact that we needed to ensure that our expenditures more reflected the revenue stream. Each minister was required to go through their budget line by line and in the case of health care meet a budget increase of some 4.9 per cent. There's a list of some 30 or 40 different programs and grants and coverages that will not be proceeding going forward. Those are some tough decisions that have to be made.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can the minister explain the medical reasons why gender reassignment surgery was delisted and why there was a complete lack of consultation with any medical professionals with expertise in this field?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that I just answered that question. This was not based on medical decisions. This was based on a number of programs. We had to make . . . [interjections] You

know, if the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood wants to ask a question, I'll be happy to listen to him, but until then I would suggest that if I have the floor, he keep quiet.

As I said earlier, there were some very tough decisions that had to be made, everything from cancelling some programs around youth suicide prevention to programs around certain surgeries. I can only say that tough decisions had to be made.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister. Wiping out a program that disproportionately affects a very specific group of people is discriminatory. This administration is discriminatory and is discriminating based on age with the new drug plan for seniors and on gender identity with these cuts to reassignment surgery. Which group is next for this government's discriminatory health care cuts?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear here. It's my understanding that there are some 26 individuals who are currently in the program. The government will fully ensure that those surgeries are followed through and funded to completion. It's also my understanding that there's a list of some 20 individuals that have been prescribed certain drugs by the medical profession but not approved for funding by government. However, it is the intention that those 20 will also be covered under the program going forward.

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

2:00

Delisting of Medical Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This health minister has been playing hide-and-seek with his plans to change Alberta's health care system. This weekend for a change he finally admitted the truth: he wants to move Alberta towards U.S.-style private health care. The minister was quoted as saying, and I quote: you want to go to physiotherapy, maybe you should go on your own. My question is to the Premier. The minister is following your directions, Mr. Premier. You've put him up to this. Why didn't you even mention the delisting of needed medical services during the last election campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the last election campaign we made a commitment to support the Canada Health Act and also to publicly funded health care delivery in the province of Alberta. We did also make a commitment during that campaign that we want to ensure that this very good system that we enjoy in the country of Canada and the province of Alberta is sustainable for the next generation. As I said before, we're going to work hard with Albertans to make sure that it stays so.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't believe the Premier, and I don't think that most Albertans do either.

His health minister didn't mince words this weekend when he said, and I quote: you're going to see more and more Blue Cross-type plans people are going to be subscribing to. He admitted he's changing our health care system to more closely reflect the U.S.-style private system. My question is to the Premier. You're giving this guy his marching orders. Why did you keep your plans to delist services and privatize health care secret from voters during the last election? Is it because you knew Albertans wouldn't vote for you if they knew the truth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we were very clear in the position we took as a party going into the election, and that was our commitment to the Canada Health Act and our commitment to publicly funded health care delivery and also to its sustainability. I think we have a duty as a government to the next generation to ensure that not only the next generation but the generation after that enjoys a very good publicly funded health care system.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have said time and again that they want to retain public health care, but this minister is telling them to start shopping for insurance. He said, and I quote: down the road you should be going to Blue Cross and saying, "Here are the kinds of things I want in a plan. What does it look like?" Delisting chiropractic and gender reassignment surgery is just the thin edge of the wedge. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier accept responsibility for hiding his plans from Albertans during the election and then afterwards directing his minister to delist services and promote private health insurance?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we were very clear in our policy going into the campaign. You know, I don't want to challenge the leader of the third party, but I think Albertans were very clear in terms of who they trusted by the size of the return of the government, and we're not going to disappoint them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Gender Reassignment Surgery (continued)

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I think that to some extent they've already been answered, but just for clarification I'm going to ask them again. We currently have 26 Albertans waiting for gender reassignment surgery in Alberta. These citizens of Alberta have been undergoing medical and psychological treatment for several years, including hormone replacement and electrolysis for hair removal, most of the cost of which has been borne by the recipient. Will these 26 persons be subject to the discontinuation of gender reassignment surgery, which has been removed from the 2009-10 budget?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that there are two separate groups of individuals that the member may be referring to. My information is that there are some 26 individuals that are in some form of the surgical process. There is another list of some 20 individuals who are only on hormonal drugs as prescribed by the medical community. In both cases we will ensure that their conditions are followed through on.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that clarification, Mr. Minister. My first supplemental: what is the total amount of savings in the 2009-10 budget from the discontinuation of this surgery?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this member was part of the overall discussion when we talked about what this province could realistically sell to the public relative to spending increases in this particular year. As pointed out in the budget, our budget increase this year

is restricted to inflation plus growth, so there is some 3.7 per cent increase across the board. Health care was a larger portion than that, but it was still only 4.6 per cent, so some tough decisions had to be made.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister: is the minister aware if this type of surgery is funded in other provinces?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we could get into a long debate about what is funded in other provinces and what is funded in Alberta. There are a number of procedures that this particular province funds or another number of programs that this particular province funds that other provinces do not. I think that, as an example, this caucus and this Legislature just recently approved a policy around drugs for rare diseases. That is a policy that no other province funds. I'm proud of that.

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

Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to go out on a bit of a limb here and predict that all this talk about messing with health care isn't really about that. This is about getting Albertans so up in arms that they're going to gut health care that when the people push back, this government can back off and say: "Okay. You don't want us to cut health care? We're going to have raise your taxes." Obviously, the minister of finance favours implementing a provincial sales tax because it continues to make the rounds. To the minister of finance: if this government is not considering a PST, then how come so many in the financial community are talking as though it is?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, that actually may have started as an April Fool's Day joke by a local columnist that suggested we were going to bring in a 10 per cent PST. The switchboard in my office lit up like Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, there's been no credibility to any remarks that we, myself or any other member of this Tory caucus, have considered a provincial sales tax. In fact, I have suggested that if we were to do such a thing, we would have to take it to Albertans in the form of a referendum. I did say that we may have to increase taxes down the road. We don't know how long the recession will last.

Mr. Taylor: All righty, Mr. Speaker. On that note, is it that she won't bring in a PST, or is it that she won't bring in a PST this year?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I listen very closely to my Premier, and our Premier has said: there will be no PST.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, why should we believe this minister's denials or the Premier's denials when the minister used to say that we were in the black, and her government used to say that deficits were illegal?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, and his point is what? His point is what? We've had such a difference in our economy that, quite frankly, people contact us and applaud us on balancing a reduction in spending, wise use of our savings, still building to capacity, and marketing ourselves to the globe. That's what we're doing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Strathcona County Health Centre

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the budget was announced, my constituents eagerly watched for a signal as to what was to happen with the Strathcona County Health Centre in Sherwood Park. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What does the budget announcement mean for Strathcona constituents?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that's a pretty broad question. I would suggest that what this budget means for residents of the Strathcona constituency is continued provision of health care services as we have been fortunate enough to do in the past, to the extent that we've talked about in this House today. We have, as I think the member may be alluding to, a proposal for that particular region for a new health facility. The funds that were originally committed remain in the capital plan. I'll look forward to the next supplemental.

2:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, then, to the same minister. This talk of the scope of capital projects around the province being reviewed by Alberta Health Services has people concerned about when we'll see the results. I'm just wondering when we can expect these reviews to be complete.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what has happened over the past couple of years is that we have allocated a certain amount of money based on the best information available, and then as we proceed down the path to construction, tenders tend to come in significantly higher than what we have allocated. We have been fortunate in the past to have budget surpluses that we would move around to try to meet some of those requirements. That's not, obviously, in the plan for the next couple of years. What we need to do is sit down with the communities impacted and ensure that, working with the MLAs and the community involved, we build going forward the facilities that meet the needs of the community.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member? All right.
The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Natural Gas Contracts

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are stuck paying vastly inflated natural gas bills because of this government's failure to protect consumers. Between this government's deregulated system and the long-term deals the government pushes consumers to sign, Albertans pay far too much for natural gas. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why hasn't this minister prevented this abuse of Alberta consumers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the natural gas issue it's great to talk about the role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate. That board is in place to hear from Albertans, to hear from consumers on any number of issues to make sure that consumers are not being taken advantage of and to make sure that we can solve their problems and assist them with questions they might have.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the government is allowing this practice to continue on, and consumers are getting gouged.

The government blocked consumers from advocating on their behalf by cutting funding to consumer groups. The government can claim that the Utilities Consumer Advocate would provide those advocacy services instead, but it is clear from the outrageous natural gas bills that the UCA has failed to do so. To the minister again: what kind of advocate for consumers would fail to take protective action in the face of this kind of gouging?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there has been some conversation out there about the role of the commission and with respect to some budgetary issues. I would like to assure the House today that the Utilities Consumer Advocate is continuing to advocate on behalf of Albertans at every moment. There are ongoing interventions and meetings as we speak. Most certainly, there's a very good reason for the UCA, and we need to encourage that the board does the good work it is doing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in this caucus have long advocated that government introduce measures to allow consumers to renegotiate contracts on an annual basis. Will this government finally start acting to protect consumers from deregulation and give them the choice to walk away from expensive long-term contracts on the anniversary of signing?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to long-term contracts that have been signed these last few years and moving forward, we are very much aware of situations where consumers have signed a contract and, for whatever reasons, want out of that contract. These are ongoing situations that we monitor. Again, it's the power of the consumer, the power they have to say no. With the 10-day clause in there they can back out of the contract. Most certainly, we are monitoring all of those very carefully and working with all the individuals out there who are advocating those contracts.

Access to the Future Fund

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the access to the future fund established by this government was a forward-looking program to provide postsecondary education with certain development and funds. It provided for two funds: the innovation fund, which was designed to increase access and participation and promote innovation in postsecondary; and secondly, the renaissance fund, which provides matching grants to institutions to enhance access, quality, and affordability. Demand for matching funds, however, has far outstripped supply, and many donations are waiting in the wings. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Could the minister advise the House on the status of the renaissance fund in view of this year's budget?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, let me begin by saying that we are very committed to continuing with the access to the

future fund as the students and the institutions have shared in its unique benefits. I might add that I don't believe there's any provincial jurisdiction that has that kind of funding program in place for the postsecondaries, which directly benefits the students. It is about access. It's about quality. It's about affordability. In the coming months it's going to be my pleasure to share with Albertans some of the successes that we've seen out of that program as well as the successes we'll see in the coming months.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the House what plans he has to maintain funding for that program in order to leverage taxpayer dollars?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the fund utilizes unbudgeted surplus dollars by legislation and is guaranteed 4 and a half per cent of the funds that have been deposited. In Budget 2009 we're providing \$48.6 million to the access to the future fund, and that is 4 and a half per cent of the original billion-dollar endowment. When resources are available and other issues of priority around the government of Alberta have been taken care of, I'm sure that we'll be looking forward to adding to that commitment.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister give the House any specific examples of where the renaissance fund has improved postsecondary education in the province?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, over the past three years well over \$130 million worth of grants to postsecondaries have leveraged donations that have been received by our institutions: some 45 million plus dollars in grants for facilities and for research, 30 million plus dollars for scholarships and bursaries – and these are scholarships and bursaries that help students in Alberta achieve their dreams for postsecondary because they reduce the costs that they have, part of the affordability framework – \$20 million worth of endowed chairs so that we have the best and the brightest from around the world teaching our students.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Education Property Tax

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taxes are increasing for property owners in Alberta because of the education shortfall. The property tax is the only source of revenue for municipalities, and for half of those monies collected, municipalities are really only a tax collector for the province. Because of this failure property owners are now going to have to pick up the tab. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: instead of listening to municipalities, who have for years said that they don't want to be the property tax collectors, why has the minister opted to increase the education portion of the property tax?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure exactly what the question was, but I just want to make some corrections, first of all. Yes, the municipalities do collect the taxes on behalf of the province; they do collect the education portion. The second clarification that I'd like to make is that the first comment, that the only avenue of revenue that municipalities have is through taxation, is absolutely false. The municipal sustainability initiative, infrastructure funding, the sponsorship funding – municipalities are eligible for up to 80 grants from 12 different ministries.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister. Higher taxes and MSI cuts are not good policies during an economic downturn. Will the minister explain how tax increases and broken promises are to support the sustainability of municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the mill rate for education taxes has gone down. Let me say to you that when you look at education taxes, the only amount that it has gone up is for the real value or the real growth. The amount of taxation increase in education is 5.2 per cent, and that is the real growth in the province, so that is all the additional properties that have been built.

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister on that theme. The 2004 resolution that the AUMA came out with was to phase out the education portion in its entirety. Will the minister finally listen to municipalities and remove the education tax portion from property taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I can say two comments, the first one being that education is an investment in Alberta's future. This funding provides stable funding for our world-class system. The current system provides a balance.

The second comment I need to make is that when you look at the MSI funding and look at it through the longevity of 10 years, it is in the amount that education taxes were, so in essence municipalities are receiving that funding.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair misread the list here. I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and then the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Delisting of Medical Services

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The health minister wants to cut gender reassignment surgery and chiropractic care from public health care. He seems to think that he can create a political precedent for delisting by going after people and services that are most vulnerable; for instance, where there is a high level of public misunderstanding, as with gender reassignment surgery. To the minister of health. You've already admitted it in the media. Why won't you admit here today that these cuts are just one more step towards dismantling the public health system and bringing more U.S. private health care to Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I remember that before the Easter break the leader of the third party talked about – I believe his quote was “a dishonest budget.” We've heard two questions today from these two sitting in the corner, and both of them have been dishonest questions.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what he's talking about, but maybe he could raise it sometime.

A 2004 government study concluded that doctors should recommend spinal manipulation to their low-back patients as part of their medical care; in short, a medically necessary treatment. The AMA says that gender reassignment surgery is an effective treatment for people who suffer from gender identity disorder; in short, a medi-

cally necessary treatment. To the minister: why won't you protect our public health system instead of coming up with more and more ways to sell it off to your friends in the insurance industry?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, if our publicly funded health care system isn't sustainable in the future, we won't have one. We'll have exactly what these two keep talking about, and that is private-sector health care. This government is the one that is preserving our publicly funded health care system, not the status quo.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government gives more than \$700,000 to their high-paid staff in one year than they give to these people that need this treatment. The fundamental health of many transgendered Albertans hinges on gender reassignment surgery, and by denying that, this government could be complicit in raising their risk of depression and suicide. Delisting the surgery trims a tiny fraction from the health budget but slashes at the very foundation of human rights. To the minister: isn't it enough that you're already ripping apart our public health system? Why are you trampling on people's human rights while you're at it?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, again, a dishonest preamble to the question because there is nobody dismantling public health care. This government is preserving the publicly funded health care system. Unless we get a handle on expenditures, we won't have a publicly funded health care system. But I know these two. They're the status quo; they never want to change anything. They want to do the health care of the '50s. We want to do health care for the 21st century.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

TILMA Benefits for Municipalities

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In July 2008 officials from Alberta and British Columbia reached an agreement that outlines the municipal obligations under the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, TILMA. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: how will Alberta's municipalities benefit from TILMA?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, TILMA will help municipalities meet their local priorities as well as remaining competitive. Municipalities can benefit in a number of ways. Municipalities can benefit by having the best prices and services; they can benefit in the value of local projects, also a larger pool of certified workers. As I've said many times before, strong communities are the building blocks of a strong province. We continue to work with the municipalities to help them comply with TILMA.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. We know that it is essential for local governments to make decisions about local priorities. Will TILMA restrict municipal governments from making decisions that are in the best interest of their citizens?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. TILMA allows local governments to continue to make local decisions and priorities. Local governments can make the land-use decisions. They can make the decisions that are in the best interests of their citizens. TILMA

gives Alberta municipalities an opportunity to pursue careers, business, and investment opportunities without barriers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Final question to the same minister: were municipalities consulted in this process?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, they were. In fact, we consulted with the AUMA and with the AAMD and C, the associations that represent this province's municipalities. We consulted with individual municipalities. Those municipalities and those associations support the agreement which applied to municipalities. This is an opportunity for municipalities, and it is a good process.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mental Health Services

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his October 2008 report the Auditor General notes on page 163 that there are no mental health standards in place in Alberta. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Why is the government rejecting the recommendation of the Auditor General to create provincial standards for mental health services?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we're not rejecting the Auditor General's recommendation. We are saying: thank you; however, the implementation of mental health standards is clearly in the purview of policy, and that will be determined by this government.

Mr. MacDonald: You are not adhering to the Auditor General Act, and the hon. minister knows it, clearly.

Now, the Auditor General's report in 2008 on page 164 also states that "hospitals are an expensive place to house [mental health] clients; . . . inpatient beds . . . cost between \$500 and \$1,500 per day. It can be economically beneficial to find patients appropriate housing in the community." Again, why is the government dismissing and brushing off the Auditor General's recommendations to provide supportive living programs so mental health clients can recover in their community?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think that maybe the hon. member ought to take some time out and read the Auditor General's responsibilities.

The Auditor General has given us some very good information as part of his ongoing look into the overall government operations. He comes up with some very good suggestions. What this government is saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the development of policy – where people should be looked after and what's best for that community or for that person are matters of public policy. This government hangs on very strongly to what we are truly responsible for, and that's the development of sound public policy.

2:30

Mr. MacDonald: The Auditor General under section 19 has clear authority not only to make recommendations but to comment on the programs and the delivery of such programs by this government.

Now, again to the minister: on page 197 of the Auditor General's October 2008 report it notes that 72 per cent of physicians disagree that access to mental health specialists in Alberta is timely, and only 17 per cent agree that mental health service delivery in Alberta has improved in the last three years. To the Treasury Board president:

why are you brushing off the sound, reasonable recommendations by our independent and impartial Auditor General?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the last thing we would do is brush off sound suggestions as we would brush off, easily, stupid questions.

The point that needs to be made is that there are a lot of organizations out there who give us help to develop public policy, including the physicians, including the nurses, including the people who work in the field of mental health. They all contribute to us, to the departments involved, to develop sound public policy. We don't reject the Auditor General's claims or suggestions. We simply say that as part of the ongoing development we will use them where it's appropriate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mobile Meat Processing Facilities

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proposed regulations to the Meat Inspection Amendment Act will transfer the authority to regulate mobile butcher meat processing facilities from Alberta Health and Wellness to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. Now, some of my constituents are concerned that the proposals will cause a bottleneck in the system and may increase costs. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. How will these regulations affect producers, processors, and mobile butchers in this province?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, under the proposed changes Agriculture and Rural Development would now be responsible for inspecting the meat processing facility that a mobile butcher uses. We will work with these mobile butchers to ensure that there is a smooth transition from Health and Wellness so there are little or no disruptions, if we can help it, to their operations. These amendments will not affect the ability of mobile butchers to slaughter animals on private property for personal use and for personal consumption.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: the Auditor General identified gaps in the delivery of food safety programs for mobile butchers, so what effect will these regulations have on food safety?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government, certainly, is committed to continued excellency in food safety. This transfer program is an integrated approach to inspections that'll help ensure food safety as we know it. ARD works with all provincial abattoirs to ensure safe meat processing practices are in place, and we will work with the mobile butchers to ensure that the meat facility standards and food safety practices are being followed very consistently.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister: will the new regulations and equipment required by mobile butchers increase their costs of doing business?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, we don't anticipate that the changes will create any financial burdens to the mobile butchers. ARD completed an assessment of mobile butcher facilities and improve-

ments needed to further enhance the food safety practices. There, of course, is a very small percentage of facilities that will require an improvement in construction standards, and we're certainly prepared to work with these operators to meet these requirements.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Gender Reassignment Surgery

(continued)

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health just acknowledged that his decision to eliminate gender reassignment treatment was not made on a medical basis. The truth is that his decision was made on the basis of political discrimination. Will the minister consult with medical authorities before implementing this decision?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think the member raised a good point because one of the things that we are in the early discussion stages of is whether or not going forward we need some sort of an expert panel to start to determine what is medically necessary, what is essential, what needs to be covered, what doesn't need to be covered. Part of the problem you have today is that you have something called the Canada Health Act, which isn't very clear on what should be covered or shouldn't be covered, and you have people like the NDP, who think everything has to be covered under the Canada Health Act.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with what the minister said. However, of all the hundreds and hundreds of services that could've been eliminated, why did the minister choose this one except that this government feels compelled to discriminate on the basis of gender orientation?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question earlier. This particular member is somehow suggesting this is the only program that has been covered in the past that is not going to be covered going forward, and that's clearly not the case. There are some, I believe, 130 million dollars' worth of programming that we've had to reassign, much of it to Alberta Health Services. Alberta Health Services will be making a determination going forward about what it is within their budgetary dollars that they can continue to fund and what they can't continue to fund.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just try to appeal to the minister's sense of money well spent. With that, I'll ask the minister: does he understand that an expensive court challenge is a virtual certainty in this matter?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would not comment on something that's hypothetical.

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

Access to Alberta TrailNet Land

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta TrailNet has drafted a crossing agreement for adjacent landowners which requires the

adjacent landowner to purchase \$1 million in liability insurance payable to Alberta TrailNet. My question is to the minister of tourism. Was there any consultation done by Alberta TrailNet involving adjacent landowners prior to the drafting of this agreement?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do understand that the agreement was prepared by a stakeholder group established by Alberta TrailNet. That was called the Alberta Trail Advisory Council. That council included representatives from the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta, Western Stock Growers' Association, and the Alberta Surface Rights Federation. As well, in 2001 all known landowners that were affected were given copies of the agreement and invited to comment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This agreement can be terminated by Alberta TrailNet within 90 days, giving no assurance to the adjacent landowners. Is there anything the minister can do to protect the rights of adjacent landowners to access their lands on a more permanent basis?

Mrs. Ady: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government has not had any role in the transaction between the railway and the landowners and between Alberta TrailNet and the landowners. Under federal legislation the railways guaranteed that the farmers could get across the railway line to get to the parcels of land on either side. Alberta TrailNet is offering to continue this practice if landowners sign the agreement. I believe these issues can only be handled by the two groups, the landowners and the Alberta TrailNet, but I have offered my department to go down and mediate if it's necessary.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Cosway Adjacent Landowners group has advised me that Alberta land titles will not transfer title unless the Alberta TrailNet agreement has been signed, could the Minister of Service Alberta confirm if this is true?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A TrailNet agreement is not part of the required documentation for title transfer in Alberta, and I'm not aware of any situation where the land titles office has rejected a title transfer because a TrailNet agreement has not been signed.

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

Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre

Mr. Chase: Thank you. From 1998-1999 to 2008-2009 the Alberta adolescent recovery program, AARC, has received just over \$2.8 million from the Alberta lottery fund. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: how can the minister justify giving that much money to an unlicensed, unregulated, nonmedically accredited, nonresidential addictions treatment program?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, if the applicant group meets the criteria that are set out by our department and is approved, then they are set for it. If you want to ask about the specifics of their medical qualification or the necessity, then ask the minister of health that question.

2:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The minister of health, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the minister of municipal affairs and housing have all ignored my question. I appreciate your taking it on.

Now, what oversight, what grant evaluation standards did the minister apply for the allocation of these funds? What are your criteria that recognize this institution?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. The minister does not provide the criteria. The minister does not overview or review these applications. There are staff that are hired in our department that go over that, and there's a series of criteria that is available on our website. If you want it, go and find it there.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. This government does not appear to be concerned about governance, especially of addicted, vulnerable youth. Has the minister ever visited AARC before the funds were disbursed to this program?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is no. We have in some of our programs 1,550 recipients; another one, a thousand recipients. Do you honestly think that in 365 days I'd be able to go and visit every one of those applicants? Let's be serious.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, today we had 98 questions.

Before we continue on, may I have your consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature some special guests from the Calgary Immigrant Access Fund, which I spoke about earlier this afternoon. I would like to ask the following guests to stand as I call your names: Ms Kerry Longpré, board member of the Immigrant Access Fund; Ms Dianne Fehr, executive director, IAF; Ms Cici Yu, assistant to the IAF; Mr. Emil Sofroniev and Mr. Sergio Manrique from the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers; and last and certainly not least, the president and founding member of the Immigrant Access Fund, a long-time, very able, and inspirational leader in the immigrant-serving sector, my dear friend and my mentor, Ms Amal Umar. I'd like to ask members of the House to give them the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, your guest introduction.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for the opportunity to introduce the remainder of the guests that have joined us here to express their concerns about the elimination of funding for gender reassignment. Those that I have not introduced before, please rise as I say your names: Nathan Linfoot, Nicole Linfoot, Lois Gorzalka, Cynthia Paish, Cole Caljouw, Dominic Scaia, April Friesen, Edda

Loomes, Roxana Rastegar, Leslea Huber, and Tam Gorzalka. Of course, I had introduced Julie Lloyd earlier, and in fact she was not in the gallery. Julie, would you also please rise and be welcomed and recognized in the Alberta Legislature?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you have guests to introduce?

Ms Notley: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a group of visitors who are also here because they oppose this government's decision to stop funding gender reassignment surgery for Albertans who are transgendered. My guests include allied persons: those who have been clinically diagnosed as transgendered, those who are undergoing hormone treatment and are preoperation, and those who have benefited from this government's policy in the past and successfully completed their operation. This is a long process that no one enters into lightly, and by cancelling this procedure, one that was considered medically necessary just a week ago, Albertans are becoming aware of this government's plan to delist and privatize essential services.

Mr. Speaker, my guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise as I call their names to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly: Christina Hermary, Michelle Drinkell, Josephine Cross, Axcella Zelensky, and Heather Raine Edwards. Please welcome these guests.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize you to introduce your guests, hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a rare day indeed when I get to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two people from my constituency, very special people. They are my nieces Andrea Calahasen and Sheridan Sokoloski. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that Bill Pr. 1, Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act, proceed in the Assembly; that Bill Pr. 2, the Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, proceed with amendments; and that Bill Pr. 3, Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act, proceed with amendment.

As part of this report, Mr. Speaker, I will be tabling five copies of the recommended amendments to bills Pr. 2 and Pr. 3. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? Carried.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling 19 signatures which come from primarily the Vegreville area of Alberta and Mundare. The petition states, "We, the undersigned residents of

Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace." Bullying isn't limited to urban playgrounds.

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Bill 206

School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009.

Bill 206 will make all schools safer and give our education system the tools it needs to stop bullying, including that which is disseminated by electronic media on and off the school grounds. Mr. Speaker, this will be a first in Canada. Additionally, it would prohibit the possession of weapons and/or drug paraphernalia.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of six letters expressing concern about the cancellation of public funding for gender reassignment surgery. They state that such procedures are medically necessary and that cancelling public funding is a form of discrimination. They disclose the real suffering that precedes the surgery and the greater suffering that will arise from this government's decision. They are from Kim Smith, Dr. Karen Hofmann, Chris Van Alstine, Mercedes Allen, Sarah King, and Michelle Shaw.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings. The first is a tabling from the Alberta lottery fund entitled Who Benefits Report. It shows 16 grants from 1998 through to 2009, totalling \$2,824,228, given to the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre.

My second tabling recognizes the third Calgary peace prize, which was awarded to the hon. Louise Arbour, CC, LLL, LLD. Louise Arbour has had a very distinguished career, including as a Supreme Court justice and a justice for the World Court in some very terrible trials resulting from Bosnia, Croatia, and Rwanda. When asked what her most important achievement was, the hon. Louise Arbour indicated her grandchildren.

My last tabling is recognizing the 30 years that the Calgary Learning Centre has operated. Changing Lives through Learning is their motto. Given the fact that 40 per cent of Albertans are functionally illiterate, they have a large job ahead of them.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:50

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it's a letter dated October 2008. It's addressed to myself, and it's from Elections Alberta. It is signed by Lorne R. Gibson, Chief Electoral Officer. It is a series of answers to many questions surrounding the March 3, 2008, election in Edmonton-

Gold Bar, specifically at poll 075. In this case it acknowledges that “movement of mobile poll within the Chinese Free Masons building (to residents’ rooms) interfered with the routine to be followed after voting was finished.”

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first concerns the cost of postsecondary education. They’re letters from Brett Lambert, Michael Bucholtz, Nieva Burns, Matthew Cadrin, Melissa Moncur, and Catherine Cunningham. All of these people express their concern with the future of Alberta and the negative effects of the high cost of postsecondary education on Alberta’s ability to face the challenges of transforming our economy.

The second tabling is a letter tabled with permission. It’s written by Wilma Korthuis to me. She expresses her concerns that chiropractic care may be delisted from our health care services. In fact, unfortunately, that’s proven to be the case.

The third tabling is letters from a number of people: Anne-Marie and David Kemp, Harry and Tina Schuld, and Fred Reckhard. They’ve each written to express their opposition to the new pharmaceutical plan for seniors and to changes in Blue Cross coverage. They make two really good points among many. One is that the proposal “unfairly penalizes and taxes the sick of Alberta.” Then they go on to say, “Surely income disparities should be addressed through taxation and not through the health care system.” I thought those were very good points.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the appropriate number of copies from 35 people from my constituency who are against the passing of Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, “until such time that public information sessions are held on the bill and public input has been done.”

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk Assistant: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mrs. Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act the Alberta Economic Development Authority activity report 2008.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17

Securities Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Fawcett]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, whenever one looks at Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009, at first blush one would think that this is very good, that it’s necessary, and that it’s long overdue. We look at the proposed sections here that are to be repealed and the substitutions that are to follow. Whenever we read the background around this bill, we think of just how important it is to have sound and secure, independent and impartial regulation of any type of security.

Now, the highlights of this bill, certainly as I understand it, are to harmonize the passport system that originated from the 2004 memorandum of understanding that was signed between the federal government and the provincial governments, but it’s worth noting, at least from the research that I have on this bill, that this excluded Ontario. I know the hon. member opposite who proposed this bill had some comment previously on that. But the amendments as suggested under Bill 17 will further modernize—at least, I think they will—and they will harmonize the securities law to allow for full implementation of the passport system by this summer.

The idea that we’re creating the mutual recognition of rules and registrants across the country is certainly interesting. With Bill 17 we are creating a single set of documents or fund facts, as I believe they’re called, for mutual funds and segregated funds to be given at the point of sale. Now, we’re also going to deal here with the powers of the executive director, and we are going to allow for any market participant to be reprimanded for a securities violation. Previous legislation, again as our research indicates, only called for registrants, but I think that in light of what has happened, particularly south of the border in New York City, this is welcome legislation at the appropriate time.

Now, there has been much discussion on this, but here in Alberta securities are regulated through legislation which is administered by our Alberta Securities Commission. The Alberta Securities Commission regulates individuals and entities in Alberta that advise on securities, trade in securities, or raise money through the issuing of such securities. The basic element of securities regulation always is to protect investors.

The Alberta Securities Commission’s power is with the registrants, the individuals or firms who deal with the securities. The Securities Commission will look at the policies of the dealers, their training, will put firms on notice if they need to self-police. If the Alberta Securities Commission finds any infringements, it will call the firms to stand in front of the Securities Commission if they continue to infringe on policies or established best practices and will periodically audit dealers, spot checks that are unannounced to the dealer. I have not seen any of these spot checks or periodic audits. I never thought, Mr. Speaker, that one should perhaps have a look at—I know it’s not in the Treasury Board annual report, but if it’s anywhere, it would be in the Alberta ministry of finance’s annual report. One could have a look there. I know there have been some controversial issues around the Alberta Securities Commission in the past, but it would be interesting to see what results of those audits have been made public.

Now, that being said, Mr. Speaker, I do know that whenever we look at the Auditor General’s report, all the Auditor’s work or audit projects are made public, unlike the Treasury Board across the way. Last year, hon. members would be interested to note, we spent 4 and a half million dollars on internal audits. In the interests of openness and transparency certainly the President of the Treasury Board should table all those internal audits, that taxpayers paid for with their own money, 4 and a half million dollars of their own money, here in the Assembly.

3:00

The Auditor General of Alberta makes his audits public not only through the Legislative Assembly but through the taxpayers. I don’t know about these background spot-check audits that are being conducted by the Alberta Securities Commission to protect investors, but I do know that to date—I don’t know if delinquent is a parliamentary word or not, but I’m going to try it, Mr. Speaker—the Treasury Board president is delinquent by not providing to this House the audited financial reports that are done by the Internal Audit Committee that he is in charge of.

Now, Mr. Speaker, further on in Bill 17 it should be noted that each province and territory has a similar commission, each with their own securities regulator, and these regulators work together through the Canadian securities administration. The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill has certainly looked into this and has given a very good explanation as to how all this works, but we need to know what's on Canada's Department of Finance website.

The two main products traded in the securities industry in this country are fixed-income securities and equities. Fixed-income products, which include bonds, asset-backed securities, and money market instruments, are traded in dealer markets. Equity products, which include common and preferred shares, are mostly traded on stock exchanges. I think in the next year or possibly sooner there are going to be a lot more regulations, or rules, placed on these fixed-income products. I'm not so much talking about bonds here but, certainly, some of these asset-backed securities and money market instruments.

I was only looking through the advanced education budget estimates in the annual report from the previous year and many of the institutions of higher learning that report through those documents to the public through the minister of advanced education to know that one has to be very, very careful because there are some astute investment advisors working on behalf of those institutions who, unfortunately, as a result of their investment strategies or practices have cost those institutions a significant amount of money in unrealized investment income. Now, I'm certainly not blaming them in any way for what has occurred south of the border, but there were warning signs. In some cases the fact that those warning signs were not observed has cost significant loss of investment income.

Now, with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say on the record to the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill that this is certainly, I think, appropriate legislation. It's welcome legislation at a time when it is necessary that investors, wherever they're from, whatever amount of money they do have to invest, can feel confident in the system that is there to protect their investment. At least make sure that the rules and regulations are fair for everyone and that if there is a violation of any of the rules that there's going to be a watchdog or a regulator that is going to ensure that those who broke the rules are pursued through our court system.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to another colleague. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I appreciate, as my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar noted, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill bringing forth Bill 17, Securities Amendment Act, 2009. I don't believe when it comes to financial matters that we can underestimate the importance of security and governance. We've had incidents within this province, dating back three years, when the Auditor General was trying to take the Alberta Securities Commission, which is under the auspices of the government, to task. He requested a series of documents be provided, and it was of rather unfortunate circumstance that he had to push to such extent for one ministry of the government to provide information under the auspices of another ministry. Therefore, this whole idea of regulation, governance, and oversight is extremely important.

Today in the House I tabled another of thousands of petition signatures on bullying and the need for whistle-blower legislation. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is going to be proposing private member's Bill 206 that will look at protecting teachers and students from bullying within the school system, yet what we have seen is that individuals within the Alberta Securities Commission

who came forward with very grave concerns about how securities were being handled and the management of the Alberta Securities Commission were fired. This, unfortunately, is the case for individuals in Alberta who are trying to bring accountability to their various departments or businesses. Alberta hasn't reached the point where that protection is there. We very badly need watchdogs.

When it comes to investments, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about asset-backed commercial paper. One of the organizations that Albertans, especially rural Albertans, are extremely dependent on is the Alberta Treasury Branches. It lost in the area of between \$250 million and \$300 million dollars because of very foolish investments in asset-backed commercial paper. Now, take those losses and compare them with the losses that the heritage trust fund lost, almost 2 and a half billion dollars, in its investment. Do we need a strong securities regulator in Alberta? Beyond a doubt.

We also need that connection that a passport system provides. Within Bill 17, unfortunately, there is very little discussion or debate about the notion of a national securities regulator. This idea has been brought forward, for example, by a former minister of finance or of the Treasury, Dr. Lyle Oberg, and he talked about the importance, at least, of the discussion about a national securities regulator. I don't believe there can be a limit to the number of regulators. The more people watching over our best interests . . .

Mr. Liepert: That sounds like a good Liberal.

Mr. Chase: Well, yes. It was noted by the minister of health that that's a good Liberal suggestion. Yes, Liberals believe in governance and good governance. They also believe in accountability and transparency, which is lacking within this House.

What this bill, unfortunately, does not address is the idea of a national securities regulator. There are currently, to explain the system that Alberta is a part of, 13 provincial and territorial securities regulators across Canada rather than a single national regulator. I'm not suggesting that I or the Liberals as policy are in favour of a single regulator, but that discussion needs to take place. Jim Flaherty, the federal Finance minister, has been quoted as saying that Canada is the only industrialized country without a single securities regulator. The *Globe and Mail* reported that Canada is one of only two countries in the 103-member International Organization of Securities Commissions without a national overseer.

3:10

Over the last few years all of the provinces excluding Ontario have begun implementing a passport system which mutually recognizes the rules within each provincial regulator in order to facilitate transactions across borders, such as what we're doing with the proposed TILMA regulation, a passport type of system. The federal government has been advocating for a national regulator with resistance from B.C., Alberta, and Quebec. B.C. has recently softened to the idea, but Alberta and Quebec continue to oppose the implementation of a national regulator.

As recently as January 12 of this year a federal report lead by former Tory minister Tom Hockin was released that recommended a national regulator, including provisions meant to accommodate the concerns raised in western Canada and Quebec such as regional offices being established in Vancouver, Calgary, and Montreal and a provision to allow provinces to opt in to the single regulator.

There was also a recommendation for a market participant opt-in for registrants and issuers, who could elect to be regulated by the federal regulator. Our finance minister immediately responded by threatening legal action if a national regulator is implemented,

claiming that it would be an infringement on provincial jurisdictions and that a regulator centralized in Ontario would not understand the unique market circumstances within Alberta.

In the 2009 federal budget Jim Flaherty stated that he would be tabling a federal securities act for Canada later in the year. When asked about the impacts of a national securities regulator on the passport system, Finance department officials stated that the draft legislation proposed in the Hockin report was based on Alberta's current securities legislation. Also, they estimated that it would take several years to implement Flaherty's plan.

There is no doubt that we need surveillance regulation governance, and it is interesting that the Alberta model is recognized by other provinces. We need to guarantee the security of Albertans' investments, and I don't think, as I say, we can shortchange the degree to which Alberta's investments require surveillance, require regulation. We don't want to see the types of fiascos that have occurred south of the border, so the debate over a single securities regulator or the strengthening of the governance of Alberta's securities through Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009, is of utmost importance, Mr. Speaker.

I thank you for allowing me to participate in the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity a question, please.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions. Go ahead.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. To the hon. member. I saw over the weekend a cartoon in a national newspaper where two pirates were on the deck of their ship and one noted to the other one: bankers are giving us a bad name. Now, I heard, when you were giving your remarks, the members opposite were very concerned about overregulation of the financial sector.

I would like to note to the hon. member that in the budget that was just tabled here last week it indicates that there is \$2.4 billion in losses to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. That's at least a half a billion dollars more than was anticipated earlier. There is \$145 million in losses in the Alberta heritage scholarship fund, \$141 million in losses to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research endowment fund, and \$258 million in losses to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research endowment fund. Now, many of these losses are as a result of investments that were located in the lower 48 states and in the European financial markets, where we know there was a regulatory system that was set up that was nothing more than a casino, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity: are you surprised that the government members across the way have such a cavalier attitude toward financial regulation when we see substantial losses in this year's budget?

Mr. Chase: I would be afraid to say, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that nothing this government does surprises me, especially when it comes to the promise of transparency and accountability that the Premier ran on. Any type of surveillance, oversight, governance is viewed by this government as an intrusion in an individual's personal business.

I would suggest that given the fact that the United States has tried to recover with trillions of dollars of reinvestment, this is not an area that Alberta wants to venture into. We've had significant losses, in

the billions. The government has incurred a deficit this year alone of \$4.7 billion, and that doesn't take into account the numerous references that you made to a whole series of other debts, including the debts associated with the reorganization of the health ministry. It does not take into account the billions of dollars in P3 expenses that have yet to be paid out. It doesn't take into account the \$7 billion plus money that this government owes eventually to teachers to cover the unfunded portion of their assumed liability. So I'm sorry to report to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that when it comes to oversight, this government doesn't have it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member under the five minutes of comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona?

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm sorry; is this on the bill directly or on the questions?

The Deputy Speaker: We still have time for questions.

Ms Notley: I don't actually have any further questions for the previous member. Sorry. I will wait until the next opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other member wish to join in the debate in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona again.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak very briefly to this bill. This bill is obviously designed to amend the Securities Act and to sort of carry on supporting the work with respect to the passport system that was initially negotiated, I believe, back in 2004. The work started then. Much of the work was done to amend the Securities Act through Bill 38 in the last session. My understanding is that of the two primary amendments that we'll be talking about here today, one is not quite consequential but house-keeping, and the other is a little bit less so in terms of its relation to the ability of the Securities Commission to respond to inconsistencies in securities regulations across the country as they might arise.

Speaking from a more global point of view, our caucus has already been on the record talking about our view of the passport system as a mechanism to streamline securities regulation across the country. We have made in the past, you know, two or three major, global points. First of all, we think, obviously, that if we are going to have an effective securities regulation system, there needs to be consistency throughout the country and that by having a patchwork of systems in each province, we create a lot of duplication and also run the risk of limiting trade, to some degree, and also of creating confusion and uncertainty in the business world. For that reason we continue to advocate for one national securities regulation system across the country of which, of course, Alberta would be a part.

3:20

Now, we know, as has been stated in the past in previous debates, that there are proposals out there that such a system would be nationally created and run somewhere out of Ontario. We've been on the record saying that's not the kind of approach that we think needs to be put in place but, rather, that there needs to be more work done on the part of the provinces to create one regulatory system with one system of rules, one system of applying those rules, and one mechanism for enforcing the rules across the board but that that one mechanism and that one system would ultimately be run by the provinces collectively, thereby ensuring that it doesn't become a

mechanism for provinces to lose, say, over critical economic interests, where those might arise. That's the overall view of the way we think this should unfold. It's for that reason, then, that the passport system and efforts to put the passport system in place, if it's believed that that's where the efforts stop, are things that we have some difficulty supporting.

It has already been stated by pretty much every speaker – but it is always worth stating again – that with the incredible volatility of the financial markets over the last six months I don't think that most people would suggest that less regulation is the way to go or that there isn't an opportunity for us to do a better job of regulating our financial markets. I think there is. I think the majority of Albertans would agree that that would be a good thing to promote healthy, sustainable business practices across the country and, of course, here in Alberta. That's sort of our global approach to this.

That, of course, then links back to, you know, sort of the more substantive part of this bill, which is putting in place the opportunity for the Securities Commission director, I believe it is, to revoke or vary decisions that were previously made. I appreciate that that authority is being put in there in order to allow for dealing with the challenges that arise from a pan-Canadian system with a variety of different rules and regulations from province to province and that, in fact, that authority was something that came from the efforts that were put in place to negotiate the passport system. Again, it's fine. It makes sense for what it is that it's trying to achieve. I just don't think that what it's trying to achieve is good enough. In short, I don't think that we've set the bar high enough for ourselves and for Albertans and for Canadians in terms of providing a safe and secure investment climate for all of us.

The final piece of this act, of course, relates to the issue of, I understand, simply returning the power or the ability of a purchaser of securities or mutual funds to rescind their purchase within 48 hours of the purchase. My understanding is that this is in there because the federal government was unable to act as quickly as they should to ensure that that was there and that this is a right that was already there before. I haven't had a chance yet to look at whether or not we should be in fact enhancing that right somewhat but will look into that and offer additional comment at further points of the debate.

At this point this is our overall position on this bill. Nothing that's in here seems to fly in the face of a previous bill that we've already passed. Rather, it just simply stands to support a system which we don't believe is going far enough in ensuring an open, transparent, well-regulated investment climate not only in Alberta but across the country.

Those are all of my comments at this point. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We still have five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not too often I stand up and try to help the opposition in this Assembly, but I would like some comment from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. She made some comments earlier on in her speech about, you know, not needing duplication of regulations and all of that sort of stuff. But if I recall, just last week when we were discussing – I don't remember what bill number it was – I believe it was the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement amendment act, she perpetuated the exact opposite. I'm sorry, but I don't understand the inconsistencies in your opinions. Maybe you could shed some light on that.

Ms Notley: I'd be happy to. I think that comprehensive, public-interest-focused regulation is something that is an absolute necessity

in certain areas of public discourse and in our society. There's no need to duplicate it, but there is a need to ensure that the regulations that are put in place go through a transparent, open, and democratic mechanism of debate and oversight and that once they are put in place, they can be administered in a way that is clear and understandable and that they are enforced in a way that is consistent.

My concern around TILMA wasn't that somehow I was seeking the duplication of regulations. What I am seeking in my opposition to TILMA is that we maintain our fundamental right here in this Assembly to make the kinds of decisions that from time to time will appear to us as being necessary in the public interest. My concern with TILMA was that we were giving that away.

That's very different from what we're dealing with here with the securities regulator because all we're suggesting is that when regulations are in place, there is no reason why you can't have a consistent form of applying them. What I was maintaining was that the province of Alberta would still have a key role to play in putting those rules in place. That's why I said that we don't support one national regulator because the province and the people of Alberta, through the province and through the government and through this Assembly, need to have input into what that regulatory framework looks like.

I'm quite happy with the idea of ensuring consistency across the board in certain areas, but you have to maintain the ability for the people of Alberta to have input on that level where possible. What the bill we discussed last week did was that it removed that ability. It gave that ability to private corporations, and it gave that ability to other provinces and then, ultimately, to an appeal panel over which this Assembly has no authority and then, finally, to the executive over which this Assembly is unable to exercise any authority vis-à-vis the way those decisions might ultimately be applied. So that's the difference.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This member has talked in her speech today about the need for openness and transparency, the need for Albertans to have an impact, to have the ability to consult with the Securities Commission. I find this somewhat ambiguous with her support for a national regulator. I want to specifically ask this member what she thinks about our oil and gas sector in this province. Does she feel that a national regulator would give adequate input for this sector in securities regulation, or is it her goal to simply shut this sector of our province down?

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Actually, I suspect what might ultimately happen is that this government's inability to come up with any kind of comprehensive, believable environmental system of regulation will ultimately have a much bigger impact on the oil and gas industry.

But just to clarify, I didn't ask for a national regulator. What I said was a consistent set of rules across the nation. I was suggesting that we would reject the idea of a national regulator in favour of a single set of rules that the province played a role in setting. So I think that may be where the member was confused.

3:30

I think that kind of answers the question. I don't believe there was anything I was saying that in any way suggests that we would be looking forward to having the oil and gas industry shut down by the securities commission or whatever it was that was being implied. It wasn't very clear.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand up, figuratively speaking, of course, and speak in favour of Bill 17, the passport system. I believe it brings us further along towards a systematic set of rules and agreements where people can evaluate the various securities that are coming to market and bring them out in a reasonably fair fashion throughout this nation. What I would say is that, you know, we should be continuing along the lines of simply going to a national securities regulator. Simply put, it eliminates a fair bit of duplication, a fair bit of what I would call, basically, redundancy.

Let's face it. I think the people who are actually practising in this area, lawyers as well as people who go from various jurisdiction to jurisdiction, would appreciate a common set of rules and dealing with one regulator instead of 13. At least, that's my perspective on the issue. I believe most people who practise in the area, who actually invest in the area, believe that it would be a more common-sense approach to doing things to bring about a more fair and even and actually understood securities system than the one that currently exists. I believe that a national securities regulator could provide the oversight needed, could provide the investment climate needed, and would be able to adapt, in fact, in a quicker fashion to various issues that occur throughout the securities industry.

Those are my comments. Again, I applaud us on the direction we're going, but if we can get a national securities regulator, I believe it would be one of those ideas whose time has come.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. As the Liberal caucus whip I just want to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo if he appreciates the opportunity to speak from his heart, from his soul, from his mind freely in this Legislature on issues of great controversy.

Mr. Hehr: Well, of course I do. It's an honour and a privilege to get to do what I do here, and I'm certain that most members of this House feel exactly the same way. You know, the neat thing about it is that you get to express a whole bunch of variances of opinion and add to the debate, and sometimes – sometimes – I even think that the other side listens. That's sort of the neat thing about it.

Mr. Denis: Sorry. What was that?

Mr. Hehr: Sometimes. I didn't say all the time. Sometimes. Hey, the same thing: I think sometimes we listen.

It is truly an honour and a privilege to do what we do here in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 17 read a second time]

Bill 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act

[Adjourned debate March 17: Mr. Hayden]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have been curious about Bill 19 from the start. It's a

classic piece of enabling legislation. It enables the government, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the cabinet to do what they want when they want regarding land assembly in this province.

We look back at the history of government land assembly for large tracts of land. We look at the government's track record with the acquisition of the land for the Edmonton ring road and the Calgary ring road going back 30 years ago. They're very good roads. They're needed. They're necessary. But if you add up the total bill from acquisition through to the P3 construction, they've got to be the most expensive highways in, if not in Alberta, the entire country. Certainly, if you add up the bill from when the land was purchased to the construction phase, well, it's a lot of money.

There were statutes changed to have restricted development areas going back to the mid-70s to facilitate the acquisition of this land. Some of those statutes, if one looks closely, are still in existence. For instance, the Government Organization Act, schedule 5, certainly gives the government the authority and the power that they need, in my view, to assemble land for large-scale infrastructure projects. There is also the Expropriation Act.

There are a number of needs, certainly, for infrastructure projects from time to time, but this legislation is curious, to say the least. It has caused Albertans across the province to ask a lot of questions about why, Mr. Speaker, it is necessary. If you look at the series of public meetings that have occurred in central Alberta and northern Alberta, it's perhaps one of the most interesting and controversial pieces of legislation that the government has put forward to date in this session.

Now, we heard from the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake earlier, before Orders of the Day were called, Mr. Speaker, and the hon. member presented a petition on behalf, I would assume, of constituents who were concerned about Bill 19. They wanted a series of public hearings. I think that is a very good idea, and we need to have a look at that in this Assembly.

What sort of controversy has the hon. Minister of Infrastructure created with this bill? Well, I'm just looking at an invitation that I received, and I would have been delighted to attend this meeting last week. It was in Innisfail at the Legion auditorium, and it was on April 8, starting at 7 o'clock in the evening. I understand the hon. minister was going to be there to present the government's position on Bill 19. I had to remain in the city and, of course, be part of the budget debates on aboriginal affairs, so I could not attend this meeting. The opposition, as the government members know, is going to be tied up in what we're calling budget estimates debates for the next month or so. But it would have been very interesting to have an opportunity to hear the minister explain to the concerned citizens how Bill 19 was not going to be controversial.

3:40

The format of this meeting was interesting. The organizer of this meeting, Mr. Glenn Norman, thought emotions might run high over the power and control that were to be implemented by this bill. There also seemed to be a concern that affected landowners needed answers, not political spin that goes on and on, wasting time.

I don't know what happened at this meeting. Maybe the minister could enlighten the House and enlighten the public on just what exactly happened there. I'm assuming that the hon. minister did attend in the end. Again, I was disappointed that I could not, but there is only so much time in a day. This letter that I received from the government committee chair, Mr. Glenn Norman of the Pine Lake surface rights action committee, is certainly reflective of the many calls and e-mails and letters that we have received regarding this bill.

Now, it started out as what I would describe as innocent legislation, but it has turned into, again, one of the most controversial bills

that has come forward in this session. The devil is in the details. The devil is in the regulations. Much of this has been cut and pasted from other acts or other schedules of various acts, from what I can see. The amendments that have been brought forward by the minister certainly are interesting. We're not even in committee stage yet. We're probably going to get there quite soon. But even before the bill was debated at second reading, there was a series of amendments floated, shall I say, by the hon. minister to see if we could sort of come to an agreement on why this legislation is necessary.

Now, I do know that the government has plans for another series of ring roads around Edmonton and Calgary, further out. I do know that the government has plans for highway 2, or the QE II. There is talk of adding an additional lane going north and an additional lane going south and possibly making those lanes dedicated to heavy truck traffic. There is the need for a utility corridor north and south. There is a need for land that possibly could be used for a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary with a stop at the Donut Mill in Red Deer. It has to stop at the Donut Mill in Red Deer.

Now, there are also ring roads being contemplated for Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie. I believe Fort McMurray is on the list. Certainly, Red Deer.

Mr. Chase: St. Albert.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. Member from Calgary-Varsity is absolutely correct. St. Albert. There is an interesting number of projects in the 20-year strategic capital plan that are not only on the Treasury Board website, they're also on the Minister of Infrastructure's website. I hope they're not having some sort of political wrangle over who's going to control that 20-year strategic plan, but I do notice that it's on both websites. I would urge all hon. members to have a look at that 20-year strategic plan because that strategic plan is the blueprint that Bill 19 is to implement.

Why do we need this bill? We have the strategic capital plan. We have existing legislation. I don't understand why this bill is necessary at this time other than that we can quickly go about our business without the embarrassment of an incident like we had the other summer in Rimbey, when licensed private detectives were caught spying on innocent citizens who were at a regulatory hearing regarding the expansion of a transmission line.

Now, we know that the transmission lines for electricity in this province have not been upgraded in a long period of time. We know the confusion and chaos that has been created because of electricity deregulation, and no one would invest in the transmission lines. We have significant bottlenecks, and if they're not fixed, there are going to be more brownouts and more blackouts than there already have been. We're not going to have energy emergency alerts. We're just going to have to phone folks and say, "Sorry; we don't have enough power for you" unless we get this fixed. There's an urgent need for utility corridors, for roads, for rights-of-way, for high-speed rail links.

But Bill 19 so that we can acquire all of these properties very quietly without risking the fire that turned out to be the Rimbey regulatory hearings, where a private detective was spying on innocent citizens participating in what should have been a democratic process, a regulatory hearing? After the embarrassment of that, I think, we have this bill. Now, there were no public hearings. There was no discussion that I'm aware of, Mr. Speaker, regarding Bill 19. It was just dropped quietly through the usual routine here in the Legislative Assembly. I think it's time that we had public hearings on this matter.

At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment to Bill 19. I have the amendment here. It was signed by

Parliamentary Counsel on March 19, 2009. I will just take my seat while it's circulated to the hon. members.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have on the table the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. So now on the amendment, please, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Economy in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Mason: It'll never pass.

3:50

Mr. MacDonald: It might pass. I think we're offering the government a good political lifeline here, hon. member.

He distracted me. Now, this amendment, Mr. Speaker, would move Bill 19 to the Standing Committee on the Economy. This would allow the general public and MLAs to review further the legislation. We could have a debate. We could consult on the bill at this committee. We realize that it's an extremely controversial bill. Over the summer this committee could travel, maybe even go to the legion in Innisfail. We could go to any number of places in central Alberta. We could go to a community around Lesser Slave Lake, the Peace River district. We could go to Medicine Hat. We could have hearings, perhaps, in Edmonton or Calgary. That was the purpose of the policy field committees to start with.

The hon. Premier has already talked, as I said earlier, about amending Bill 19. Clearly, the government recognizes that in its current form the bill is problematic. Our reason for this amendment is that the widespread public concerns require the detailed study of this committee, and we need as Legislative Assembly members to hear directly from those who have issues with this legislation as it's currently drafted and presented to us in the Assembly. The standing committees, again, were set up for this very reason. Our amendment would certainly take advantage of that after the budget estimates are out of the way, and we get through the long lists of bills that need to be debated, discussed here. This could be a summer project for the Standing Committee on the Economy.

Landowners are seriously concerned about this bill. Everyone is concerned about this bill, and they're not satisfied to date with the answers that they have received. The bill, again, shows that there was a lack of consultation between the government and landowners before this bill was drafted. The lack of any time limits or limits to the areas controlled and the size of the punishments or penalties all concern many people across the province.

Now, the government has already talked, as I said earlier, about amending this bill. There were amendments; there was a press release, as I understand it. This shows even before we get to committee, hon. members, how poorly this legislation was drafted in the first place, and simple amendments aren't enough. We think it needs more public discussion, and that's why we want, Mr. Speaker, to refer this bill to hearings of an all-party committee, so that all Albertans, regardless of whether they're urban or rural, which area of the province they live in, and landowners from throughout the province can bring their issues forward, and we can deal with them fairly.

This amendment is necessary. We need to have a public, transparent, accountable process regarding this bill. I don't under-

stand why the government, certainly, wouldn't support this amendment and have a good second look at this legislation before it proceeds any further in this House. Hopefully, we can hear the concerns of the landowners, and also, Mr. Speaker, we could start to restore public confidence in the legislative process, which has been, in my view, damaged by this attempt at legislation.

In conclusion, this is a very important bill. If the government was to stand this afternoon and table the regulations that are associated with this bill, then maybe this process wouldn't be necessary. But, again, Mr. Speaker, the details are in the regulations. Everything is to be done by regulation. This is only enabling legislation, which enables the government to do what it wants when it wants regardless of any of the consequences.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to give consideration to this amendment and send this bill off to the Standing Committee on the Economy so that they can hear directly from landowners and citizens who are concerned about this throughout the summer and report back, hopefully next fall, to the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Neither myself nor the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar are in the usual habit of saving this government's bacon or keeping them from hoisting themselves with their own petard, but this is exactly what we're trying to do with this amendment today. We're setting aside partisan politics to stand up for rural landowners, who have traditionally voted Conservative over the last 40 years. The fact that this government is ignoring such basic rights as landowner familial rights seems to me to be unbelievable.

The term "Hi, Jack" is no longer a greeting for the Minister of Infrastructure. It's an expression of how rural Albertans see the intent of this legislation. They see it as robbery. The minister can be very glad that to date he has escaped the pole, the tar, and the feathers that would have been brought out in earlier Alberta history, upon which he would be ridden out of town. The minister's attempts at this point to appease the concerns of rural landowners have fallen on deaf ears. They're not convinced by these amendments.

Now, let's look at some recent history. I would call it a government-forced sleepover. We spent over 30 hours, as I recall, debating Bill 46, which also dealt with landowner rights and this government's trampling upon them. During the forced sleepover this government put forward 24 amendments, trying to turn a flawed piece of legislation into something that we could sort of hold our noses and vote for. Of course, to a man, to a woman members of both opposition parties voted against Bill 46, and I recall during our sleepover the sleepwalking standing votes over how poorly the amendments were brought forward.

It was interesting, given all the government time on the debate of Bill 46, that no time was given for either Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the Liberal caucus, or the third party to put forward amendments on Bill 46. What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has done is, as he put it, throw a lifeline. He's given this government an opportunity to say: "Guess what? Consultation is important to us. Transparency and accountability, listening to our constituents' concerns are of importance to us."

The fact that we've had a few meetings in Innisfail and some other rural areas throughout the province has not convinced any of the individuals in attendance that the amendments proposed but yet to be discussed by the government members are going to solve the problems. They still see it as something left over from the Old West,

where the minister of expropriation comes riding in on his black horse with his bandana drawn over his nose and says: it's time to move, family; git. This is exactly what is being brought forward and proposed. If the government believes in consultation, if it believes in the importance of maintaining its rural power base, if the rights of landowners are of any consequence to this government, if they want to move forward in any kind of smooth transition, whether it be for the bullet train, whether it be for the development of highways, whether it be for the development of power lines, let's look at what you've exhausted. Spies don't work. ERCB hearings have limited potential. Thank heavens the citizens of Tomahawk got a reprieve from having sour gas wells drilled in close proximity to their school and their community.

4:00

But what this government doesn't seem to get is the idea of negotiation versus a steamrolling attitude. For 40 years this government has had it good, but part of that goodness has been connected with the support and the listening, somewhat limited listening, I would suggest, to the will of the electorate. Now, keep in mind that on March 3, 2008, only 21 per cent of Alberta's eligible voters put this government into power, and the majority of those Albertans, of that 21 per cent, came from the rural base. So if the government is set on alienating rural voters, if there is some new policy of "we know best; we're omnipotent; we're omniscient; we'll tell you landowners how you should behave and how quickly you should pack your bag," if this is the new version of the Alberta civil war and the government is taking on the role of the carpetbaggers, then you'll reject this amendment, and you'll proceed at your peril.

It is given to you as a gift. It lets you off the hook. It allows you to do what is absolutely necessary, and that is to conduct hearings and not only conduct them but actually listen because to date you haven't been listening. It's a gift. You can reject it, but you reject it at your own peril.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to oppose what's being proposed here. We've had excellent input from Albertans over the past few months. We have tabled proposed amendments, that have been available to all members of this House, and I hope they took the opportunity to look at them. They, of course, are amendments that are aimed at looking after the concerns with respect to clarity, that people had spoken to us about, to provide greater certainty for landowners, and we're certain that they will address their main concerns.

I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, to state that Bill 19 does not create additional land acquisition powers for government. It improves the process that was used to assemble land for the ring roads in the past. The important features, of course, are that compensation can be triggered by the landowners with options for them that are much fairer. The main change in this legislation is to make public consultation mandatory, and to consult about making consultation with landowners mandatory is not a good use of this House's time.

I ask members to defeat this motion.

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

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be very brief. I believe that we ought to reject this amendment proposed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity. The minister and many members of

caucus, in fact, have bent over backwards to consult with Albertans, particularly rural Albertans, and constituents with respect to this matter. They've attended many, many meetings throughout the province. I believe the minister has listened to the criticisms, and I think that if the hon. members who are opposed to the bill or are critical of the bill and who support the amendment would be patient and wait till the matter goes to Committee of the Whole, some positive developments may be forthcoming, and perhaps the criticisms could be dealt with.

I do want also, Mr. Speaker, to refresh the memory of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity with respect to what he termed the forced sleepover. That was not due to the members of the government caucus. In fact, it was the former Member for Calgary-Elbow and the Member for Calgary-Currie who stood in this House repeatedly and refused unanimous consent to abbreviate and truncate the ringing of the bells in this House, as a consequence of which we spent at least four to five hours listening to bells ring and waiting to have votes on numerous amendments. It certainly wasn't the members of government caucus that were to blame for an all-night session over Bill 46.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a great opportunity to rise and speak to this amendment, and I speak in favour of this amendment.

I just do have to respond to that last comment because, of course, the reason we were here overnight was because this government, effectively, brought in closure and time limited that debate. That's why we were here overnight: because there was a decision to limit debate by the government.

Anyway, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm here to talk about this proposal to send Bill 19 to committee for consideration. I think that it's quite a reasonable proposal. The Minister of Infrastructure has outlined some of the objectives which he seeks to achieve through this bill in terms of the public interest, which is ultimately served through the acquisition of certain land rights with respect to certain projects. Of course, there is a public interest to the acquisition of certain land rights with respect to certain projects, whether we're talking about transportation or municipal growth or whatever the case may be, but that always has to be balanced against the individual rights of people whose rights would be negated or diminished through the pursuit of the public rights.

I find it ironic that I'm in this position, advocating this, because the government has decided to adopt a position of being big government and just sort of wholeheartedly sweeping in and taking what they need with limited consultation or negotiation with those from whom they take it.

This bill is an interesting bill in that it really has very effectively united people of all ends and places, even in the middle, on the political spectrum. It's really quite remarkable how many Albertans this minister has managed to anger through this particular piece of legislation. One of the reasons I think that this happened – and I suspect or I'm almost sure, in fact, that the government was more than a little surprised by the outcry which this legislation created. I would suggest that the reason for that is directly linked to the motion that we are dealing with right now, which is that there was really nowhere near the kind of consultation that should have been undertaken with respect to this piece of legislation.

You know, we have claims that there was consultation with municipalities and that there was consultation with the cities in particular as well as with the overall municipal boards. I understand that as far as the AUMA goes, not everybody there felt that it was

sufficiently consulted, and that may have something to do with the internal process of the AUMA. I don't know. Certainly, we've heard that members of the AUMA don't believe that they were fully consulted.

Then, of course, landowner groups themselves were shocked to discover that this piece of legislation was going through, and it didn't appear as though there was any consultation with them as well.

4:10

As well, environmental groups are expressing a great deal of concern about this legislation and the way in which it would effectively allow this government, which, let's face it, has historically been likely to make decisions that favour very large projects in lieu of local people that are working to try and protect the sanctity and the sustainability of their community, of their land, of their place of residence – in that way there's also concern that this is yet another tool in the tool belt of the government to override environmental concerns that can sometimes come into play with respect to proposed development.

Going back to the question of whether or not it would be valuable for this particular piece of legislation to be referred to a committee and subject to the kind of consultation and consideration that would occur in that setting, you know, government speakers have talked about the fact that several amendments were presented by the minister. Maybe they've been tabled; I can't remember now. Certainly, amendments to the legislation have been put out publicly by the minister as things that he would support. But I think that when you consider that the bill was introduced and that then there was this completely surprising outcry from Albertans and that then suddenly we have – I'm not exactly sure how many – I believe four amendments appear from the minister, it's sort of like governance on the back of a napkin. It's sort of like: "We put this piece of legislation out there. We were overwhelmed by how many different people we managed to anger, so we will quickly, very quickly craft four more amendments, and hopefully that will settle the waters enough to get this thing through."

I have to say that I'm very concerned that those amendments may well have been crafted with the same thought and the same planning and the same level of consultation and the same analysis that the original bill was crafted with. I can't imagine that there wouldn't be, actually, people within the ministry itself who would agree that further consultation and further analysis are actually required in order to do the best job possible for all Albertans.

I'll also say, of course, that the proposed amendments that have been put forward don't really address the majority of the concerns that we've heard in our NDP caucus from Albertans about this piece of legislation. Landowners whose lands are a part of a project area still wouldn't get any form of compensation for the development restrictions being placed on their land. There is still no limit on how long the land can be placed under a project area order, and the government can cancel the project area order at any time without penalty. It's ironic that this is supposed to be a piece of legislation that will facilitate consultation, yet there is a real resistance to consulting at this point. There have been only half measures with respect to consulting prior to its introduction, and now the government is talking about trying to avoid consultation through the committee process, yet ironically we're told that this legislation is about enabling consultation. So, yeah, somewhere something is missing.

I would suggest that even though it may theoretically be to enable consultation, we know that with the act as it now sits, notwithstanding any amendments that might come forward from what we've

heard from the minister, the details of the consultation process are still left to regulation, so we have no idea what level of transparency we will or will not end up with at the end of this. The minister still has the power to choose which appeal body will hear an appeal of an enforcement order on a case-by-case basis. We still have the ability of the government to seek an injunction for someone who appears to be "about" to commit an offence, which is one of the most entertaining penalties or sections I've ever come across. I'm not exactly sure how one would analyze that from a legal perspective. I imagine some rather entertaining and humorous representations being made in those hearings.

As we've suggested, ultimately those amendments that have been put forward really don't address the primary concerns that have been articulated by landowners to our caucus and as well, I know, to the government. I don't think they go far enough. I think there's an opportunity for us to do a better job on this bill or, alternatively, to realize that it's not fixable and start over. In any event, we can't know until there's an opportunity for us to meet with people who are directly impacted and get much more comprehensive advice about the rationale behind it and how to address the concerns that have been rightly raised by landowners across the province.

You know, in the House the leader of the third party has talked about the wide-ranging penalty options that this bill would give the government with respect to someone who may well appear to be about to breach the legislation. I'm not sure – I haven't had a chance to read it that closely – if the person who appears to be about to be in contravention of the legislation is subject to or eligible for up to two years of imprisonment. That just sounds quite outrageous to me, frankly. In any event, even if the person who appears to be about to be in contravention of the act isn't necessarily the one that is eligible for imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of \$100,000, then certainly other people who haven't been consulted with respect to the use of their land and the significant impact on the value of their land that this legislation would put into place are still subject to penalties that, frankly, it doesn't appear to me that large companies repeatedly exploiting our environment are subject to.

The penalties here would be greater than they would be if you were, for instance, to repeatedly lie to the ministry or dump toxic waste into a river, all those kinds of things. I believe that it may well be the case, the two-year imprisonment. I'm not sure if there is the capacity for us to imprison people for repeatedly dumping toxic chemicals into our water system and not reporting, but it does appear that we could imprison somebody who appears to be about to act in some way that might possibly be in breach of this legislation.

This is why we think that proceeding to have this piece of legislation referred to a committee for more thorough and comprehensive consideration of the many very significant implications that it brings to bear on property rights in the province is a good thing, and it is for that reason that I would support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on the amendment.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise in support of the amendment to Bill 19. Enough has been said about Bill 19. There are government amendments coming. If it was such a good bill, you know, we wouldn't need to have any amendments come forward. I think it was just hastily done and put forward.

Sure, you know, there is a lot of development that has to go. We need the ring roads. We need the utility corridors. We need the rights-of-way. We cannot stop the progress, but we have to do

everything in such a way that it is kind of a win-win situation for all of the stakeholders. There's no doubt that we need better utility transportation corridors in Alberta, and we have to have better planning for growth and development. All these utility corridors, ring roads, highways, even the bullet train, if we get it some day, between Calgary and Edmonton, are going to play a key role in the progress of our province and, in turn, in Canada.

4:20

This bill is going to have a lot of impact on landowners, on the rights-of-way. If land is currently being used for agricultural purposes and we want to put a highway through it, it's going to have a big impact on the farmer. If a transmission tower is going up, to build a transmission tower, it may not have that big of an impact. There are so many ways that landowners are, you know, being affected by this bill.

This has become an extremely controversial bill, like Bill 46, where the rights of the landowners were being trampled on. You know, it was just like taking control of their land. This will provide limitless government restriction on privately held land for the purpose of future development. I think, you know, there was no time limit when it was going to be done. Let's say that if a person was living in a house and the government was acquiring their land four years down the road and they put the control order in, then their life is put on hold. They may not be able to do anything to the property. They may not get any offers. Then four or five years down the road the government says: "No. We don't need your land." There's a big stigma attached to the property.

The same goes for a business. If somebody owns a business on the land and then four, five years down the road the government says, "No, we don't need it," those poor people's lives have been on hold, and they could have probably, you know, done better things had they got out in time, sold their property on time.

There are so many issues with Bill 19. I think that had it been very well thought out to begin with, the minister wouldn't need to bring any amendments to the bill. This amendment, I think, is going further to let cooler heads prevail. Over the summer let's do the consultation with the stakeholders. And all those amendments coming up: you know, we can have discussions on those amendments, too. Government can put forward their position with the landowners, saying: "Okay. This is what we are doing to improve that bill further." That will pacify their concerns, too, on the bill. It is very important that this bill should be taken to Albertans for a full consultation. That will help a long way to correct what has been hastily put together.

For those reasons I support the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think we should all support the amendment and send this bill to the Standing Committee on the Economy in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to this amendment to Bill 19. As I understand it, the amendment will also have the effect of closing debate on second reading of the bill itself, so I'm going to take the opportunity to address myself to the bill generally as well.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 19, in my view, is one of the most ill-advised pieces of legislation that this government has brought forward in the time that I've been here. The bill broadly gives the government, in my view, too much control over land at the expense of the rights of landowners in this province. I find it ironic in a way that it's the

New Democrat opposition that is standing up and has stood up from the beginning for the rights of property owners in this province against a Conservative government whose alleged ideology is strongly in defence of property rights. But you wouldn't know that from this bill.

I want to indicate that I think it's interesting that previous governments, Conservative governments and Social Credit governments, have been able to manage periods of rapid economic growth in this province without this type of legislation. They've been able to make it work, and this government has not. Their answer is to give themselves more power, and I don't think that that's warranted in this particular case. I want to deal with the amendments that the government has brought forward as well because the government has made the claim that these amendments have essentially drawn the teeth of the bill and made it into a very docile and somewhat warm and fuzzy piece of legislation that people don't have to be worried about.

I'd like to deal a little bit with the government amendments. They have placed an emphasis on consultation provisions, and I think that this particular change is laughable. All the government is proposing to do is take the same provisions about consultation – and the wording even is identical except for the addition of the second amendment, which is a bit different – and put them in their own section with their own title. This is just a matter of optics, and it involves no legislative change. The main problem with this section remains, which is that though it requires landowner consultation, there are no details given about how that consultation will take place, and that issue is not addressed by this change.

Secondly, there is a time limit for the government to approve a project area, and that would place a two-year limit on the government to complete consultations and make a decision on whether to approve the project area. That amendment requires the government to diligently pursue a project and limits the period of uncertainty for affected landowners while the government decides whether to approve a proposed project area. It may be an improvement because it keeps the consultation process from dragging on too long, although two years is a very long time, and keeps people whose land is being considered for a project from being up in the air for more than two years. However, it's not the time limit that landowners have been asking for.

People want a time limit on how long an area of land can be designated as a project area before the government actually goes ahead with their project. The limit on the consultation period, Mr. Speaker, is fine, but it allows the government to continue to freeze the land indefinitely with no guarantee of when the development will happen or if it will happen at all. The government can cancel the project at any time without consequence. The government may try to say that this amendment addresses people's concerns about the lack of timelines in the bill, but it does not.

The third point in terms of government amendments that I'd like to address is the purchase of land provisions. That would require the government to enter into negotiation to purchase a landowner's land in an approved project at the request of the landowner, and the compensation will be based on market value. Now, this proposed amendment does address a problem in the original bill, so this amendment would be a positive change. The ministry has insisted that it would be prepared to buy any land that was part of a project from day one, but this was never enshrined in the legislation. This amendment will change that, and it will guarantee that landowners are always able to sell their land at any point in the process, so that's a positive thing.

The fourth is the removal of section 13. The government has said that section 13 has been misinterpreted to mean that Bill 19 over-

rides the Expropriation Act. To eliminate the confusion, the government has suggested that they would remove that. This is really just a question of clarification. The removal of section 13, however, is a matter of optics and doesn't change anything in the legislation.

4:30

There are a number of things that the government amendments have not addressed. Landowners whose land is part of a project area still do not get any form of compensation for the development restrictions placed on their land. There is no limit on how long land can be under a project order, and the government can cancel a project order at any time without penalty. The details of the consultation processes are still left to regulation, belying the government's claim that this increases transparency. The minister still has the power to choose which appeal body will hear an appeal of an enforcement order, giving him inappropriate influence over the hearing and ruling on the appeal. An injunction can still be sought for someone who "appears" to be "about" to commit an offence. Finally, these proposed changes do not remedy the fact that no landowners were consulted in drafting the bill. These amendments do not address the concerns of Alberta landowners or of the NDP caucus.

Mr. Speaker, if I can turn to the amendment, I suggest that the amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is appropriate and timely. We have established these standing committees so that we can consult with the public on pieces of legislation, particularly where there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. This particular piece of legislation, I think, fits that intention to a T. There's a great deal of concern about this bill and the provisions in it, and I do not believe that these have been assuaged entirely by the government's amendments or by their propaganda campaign among landowners in the province.

I think that an all-party committee which could hold public hearings on the act and identify concerns and identify ways that these concerns can be addressed is a very appropriate thing, so I will be supporting the amendment that has been proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think it's a good suggestion and that we could all benefit by some consultation with the people of this province on this issue. I would further suggest that very serious concerns among a great many Alberta landowners and others remain. I think that the committee could do some good work with respect to that, and I encourage members to support it.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I just want to say that I'm surprised that the government requires this power and requires this authority in order to make this province work. I do not see the difficulties in the face of any competent government in making sure that there's timely development of this province economically, agriculturally, and in any other way. If the government had enough foresight and ability to plan and was as transparent as it would like Albertans to believe, I think we could make this province work for all of us without resorting to draconian legislation that tramples on the rights of property owners in this province.

I'm proud to say that Alberta's NDP will stand up for people's legitimate property rights against the excesses of a government that wants to develop the province often in ways that the people of the province don't wish. We can look at the terrible black eye in the tar sands. We could look at the development potential of nuclear power or attempts to foist power lines on people without appropriate consultation and, in fact, the government's agencies using spying to undermine the legitimate activities of people who dissent from the government's direction. These are not things that I think the government should be proud of. They're not democratic, and they

are certainly not transparent or open. They, in fact, smack of a government that, in my view, is becoming increasingly not only secretive but authoritarian as well and less tolerant of dissent and unwilling to brook any disagreement with its plans in order to advance the interests of its friends, whether they be a power company, a nuclear power company, an oil company, or whatever. That's the crowd the government runs with, Mr. Speaker, and people have to be very careful about getting in their way.

I think we would learn a great deal by passing this motion, by having public hearings with respect to this bill, and I suspect that we would end up with a much better, stronger, open, and democratic bill than what is before us today, Mr. Speaker, so I'd urge all members to support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:36 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	MacDonald	Pastoor
Hehr	Mason	Swann
Kang	Notley	Taylor

Against the motion:

Allred	Horne	Prins
Anderson	Jacobs	Quest
Blackett	Klimchuk	Redford
Brown	Leskiw	Renner
Calahasen	Liepert	Rogers
Campbell	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Dallas	Marz	Tarchuk
Denis	McFarland	VanderBurg
Drysdale	McQueen	Vandermeer
Fawcett	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Forsyth	Olson	Xiao
Hayden	Ouellette	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 9	Against – 36
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[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 19 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We shall now go back to the debate on second reading of Bill 19. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I believe that everyone has spoken.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, we have some procedure. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you wish to speak?

Mr. Chase: I wish to speak to Bill 19, yes, if I may be permitted to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

4:50

Mr. Chase: I'll be brief and look forward to answers or responses from the Minister of Infrastructure.

We did our best in terms of putting forward an amendment, which was very much shot down by all government members present, which clearly indicates to landowners where this government stands, the speed that they believe this bill necessitates, the rush to expropriate. Basically, the race is on.

I do not understand why it's more important to get something done fast rather than get something done well. I do recall with regard to Bill 46 attending public hearings, one out in Ponoka and another in Camrose. There was a mood of unrest, particularly in Ponoka, where I accompanied the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Landowners were extremely concerned about the government's ignoring of surface rights and perceiving what they saw was in the interests of power companies, or you could substitute any other industrial private enterprise.

I remember the number of people who asked the representative for Ponoka to justify the reasoning behind the bill. I also remember driving down the highway and seeing the very large signs that had been erected along the way: kill Bill 46. So I don't understand why the government is wishing to rush ahead with such limited consultation on a bill that is going to impact, as the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall explained, the progress of this province. We want a mechanism that does things right, a mechanism that sort of balances consultation with collaboration. Right now we have neither.

The consultation, what little there has been, has been very unsatisfactory. From the reports of the few meetings that have been held, there was tremendous anger demonstrated towards the government. In Camrose similar concerns were expressed over Bill 46: that the government wasn't listening, that the government had their own agenda. There have been so many circumstances where the government has taken more land than they required and then basically flipped the land. Having purchased the land at a large cost in terms of taxpayer dollars, they then flipped it, and instead of traditional real estate practices and getting an increase on their initial investment, they sold it considerably below market value frequently around ring roads to individuals who then subdivided the land and made tremendous profit at the expense of taxpayers.

Now, Bill 19 seeks to move forward and create a balance between individual rights and collective rights. You know, we don't live in a world where everything is always wonderful, where everybody comes to agreement, but what Bill 19 proposes to do as a resolutionary process does not protect individuals. It puts the government in a position of basically being a bully, dictating how the rules are going to be applied. It doesn't matter whether the family has lived on the land for generations. That's not taken into consideration. If the government has their eyes on a piece of land, according to Bill 19 they're going to get it one way or another. The various ways the government has allowed, whether it be the spying or the refusal to hold hearings, is not only a concern to members of the opposition, but it's a concern to all Albertans that they won't have a fair hearing process.

I referenced, when talking about the amendment, what happened in the little village of Tomahawk and the fact that the evacuation in case of a sour gas well blowout would have compromised any of the safety services because the evacuation area included within it the fire department. Now, eventually, much to the relief of the citizens of Tomahawk, especially those whose children were attending the school, the company itself backed away. It wasn't an ERCB ruling,

as I recall, but it was the company's choice. I appreciate the fact that the company was being a good citizen and basically cutting their losses.

We experienced in Calgary a lengthy hearing with Compton, and the CEO of Compton said that the chances of a sour gas well blowout were the square root of zero. The government is showing similar arrogance by believing that they know best. This government, on one hand, will get after us for talking about governance, about oversight, about stewardship, yet, on the other hand, they will be very overpowering in their desire to dictate to Albertans, to landowners how limited their actual rights are.

The business of holding the land for two years as opposed to four years before some resolution is required is only a slight improvement. As the hon. leader of the third party and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, the idea of putting people's lives on hold for an indeterminate time or a determinate time in the case of two years is not acceptable. If the government inconveniences the landowner and then chooses an alternate route, within Bill 19 I don't see any clauses offering a significant amount of the equivalent of damages or compensation for the inconvenience and the sleepless nights the landowners have faced as the government's shadow approached nearer and nearer to their land.

Bill 19 is flawed. It's unfortunate for the 36 members of the government who are on record today as supporting what would be looked at as speed as opposed to a thoughtful procedure; it must be very disheartening. If the government in its wisdom or lack thereof decides to hold another rural consultation or public forum, I'm sure that similar types of anger will be shown as what bubbled up over Bill 46. I think there was an accusation of a senior taking a swat at one of the ERCB officials, and the hearings in that particular case were cancelled because there was a perceived danger for the government regulators, the participants.

I would like to think that there would be a peaceful, collaborative, collegial conclusion to Bill 19. I for one have stood up in this Legislature and praised the notion of the rapid rail and reducing the carnage on highway 2. Of course, anyone who's representing a southern locale also has vested interests in making this highway more secure, and that's what the rapid rail project would accomplish.

The government has a couple of choices in terms of using the CP right-of-way or making deals with landowners along the way. Regardless of the route they eventually choose – and the residents of Red Deer would hope that they would choose the route that goes by the airport as they've already acquired land for the building of the railroad station there; obviously, that is their preference – hopefully they do choose sooner rather than later to build this rapid rail system as maybe an extension of the Green TRIP, which, unfortunately, has got stalled if not completely cancelled.

5:00

We're here as representatives of a democratic system of government where no matter who you are, if you have landed immigrant status, if you're over 18 years of age, you have the right to express an opinion, but Bill 19, like its predecessor Bill 46, very much diminishes your right as a landowning individual to have your say. The government holds all the cards. The government directs the hearing process, the government sets the rules in regulation as opposed to legislation, and the government dictates as opposed to collaborates, and this, unfortunately, is the way more and more legislation is going in this House. We see things moving from discussion, from legislation, into regulation. What's the point of us being here as 83 elected members if there's a predetermined result? What's happened to democracy in Alberta? Bill 19 denies it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, would you like to close debate before I call the vote, hon. minister?

Mr. Hayden: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, in closing debate. Thank you very much. I want to thank the hon. members for their interest and their comments. There has been a lot of discussion in the Legislature and throughout Alberta. My colleagues and I have been listening to Albertans and speaking with them all across the province.

I was very pleased that just a couple of weeks ago the association that represents all of the rural municipalities in the province invited me to speak to their membership because of the inaccuracies and the misrepresentations that have been made around the province with respect to this bill that indeed, Mr. Speaker, have frightened landowners. They had before them a resolution to delay this bill, but after they had the opportunity to ask questions – and they asked questions until all the questions were asked – and the presentation was made, they overwhelmingly rejected the idea that we should delay moving forward with a bill that mandates consultation with landowners, writes out very plainly that there are a number of options with respect to compensation, and puts clarity and plain language in the need for this province to plan ahead and do these processes properly.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is about protecting Alberta property owners. It's about involving them in the system and consulting them, and I'm very proud to have been a part of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to provide the committee with information on Bill 6, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009. The amendments to the PCHAD legislation build on the program's positive performance over the past two and a half years and are based on input from stakeholders. These stakeholders range from children who have been through the program to their parents and guardians, AADAC staff, protective safe house staff, police forces, court services staff, and children's services.

The amendments address six key areas: lengthening the maximum confinement period from five to 10 days with authority for the court to further extend the confinement period for an additional five days when warranted; addressing discharge issues, including discharge for the purpose of transferring a child from PCHAD into a voluntary program where appropriate; clarifying the role of parents and guardians in better supporting families; easing police transportation pressures; broadening the process for reviewing PCHAD court orders; and providing for the expiry of PCHAD orders.

The PCHAD legislation came into effect on July 1, 2006. Since its introduction more than 1,500 children have been through the program. The amendments seek to better support children and their families, which is why an information process is being introduced. Over the course of this program's operation it has become apparent that some parents and guardians are accessing PCHAD court orders as a first step in addressing a child's drug use problems. These parents and guardians are not always aware of the other programs and supports available to assist their child and their family.

In response, the amendments require that before an application can be made for a PCHAD order, the applicant must attend an information session that will explain what PCHAD does and what it does not do, help parents and guardians determine whether this is the right program for their child, and provide parents and guardians with information on other programs and services that may be better suited to their needs or that may provide additional support.

The proposed amendments are also designed to make the court process more accessible. For example, a child, the parent or guardian of the child, or the PCHAD co-ordinator will be able to apply to the court for a review of the order. The review may be about the appropriateness of the order or the need to further extend the program for up to five additional days. The court will be authorized to permit evidence to be heard by telephone, audio-visually, or by means satisfactory to the court. Greater flexibility in hearing evidence will enable the participation of all interested persons. It improves access to the court and enables the court to hear from all sides before reaching a decision. It is a practical step in improving access and guarding the rights of the child.

Another practical measure is the amendment addressing police assistance with transportation of a child. In some cases undue pressure was being placed on some police services to apprehend and convey a child to a protective safe house. While police involvement may be required in some cases, it is not always necessary. To alleviate pressure on police forces and still properly support families, provision is made for police to assist the family, which will not always require full apprehension and conveyance. This is important on a number of fronts. It is necessary to ensure police services are available when required, but it also tailors police assistance to what is actually required. Providing for police support when necessary and tailoring the support to specific circumstances maintains important and appropriate support for families. The moderate use of police services is also important in providing a measured response to children who enter PCHAD.

During second reading there was a concern raised regarding the confinement period only being extended to 10 days or possibly 15 days. There was a suggestion that the confinement period should be much longer. In response, I can advise that the 10- to 15-day time period aligns the PCHAD program with other youth treatment programs offered by AADAC. The amendments propose a five- to 10-day extension to the confinement period so that children in the program can be provided with more stabilized services. Experiences with other addiction programs for youth indicate that the proposed time period is appropriate. Furthermore, PCHAD is a specialized program, and it is important to balance program objectives with the rights and interests of the children involved. The confinement period must be kept to a reasonable period.

5:10

There was also concern about whether children in the PCHAD program are or will be referred to treatment programs that are not accredited or that are operated by untrained staff. The bill does not contemplate that approach, nor has that approach been part of the program. Under PCHAD assessment, detoxification, and stabiliza-

tion services are provided by trained AADAC staff. Residential services are specifically contracted through AADAC to youth facilities that are accredited to provide custodial care and supervision. The program is regulated under the PCHAD legislation, which specifically obliges the PCHAD co-ordinator to provide these services.

With regard to comments claiming that there are insufficient programs for PCHAD youth to access, PCHAD youth and their family members are accessing AADAC treatment services post-PCHAD at a higher rate than children and families who attend voluntary youth programs. Youth can continue with voluntary detoxification and residential treatment programs that best suit their needs. These programs may include therapeutic wilderness programs, residential addiction and mental health care programs, intensive day treatment programs, or outpatient services.

Some suggestions were made in second reading that the number of youth services beds has been reduced. However, there were 68 beds for youth in July 2006, and there are 69 today. Further, the integration of AADAC into Alberta Health Services will provide stronger addiction and mental health programming. The move will make more facilities and a larger pool of qualified health professionals available to support youth addiction and overall mental health programming.

I am confident that these amendments coupled with Alberta Health Services' province-wide health services mandate and this government's commitment to addiction and mental health programming as outlined in the children's mental health plan will result in improved youth addiction services. As I noted during second reading, this is a specialized initiative that is designed to improve the safety, security, and well-being of children and families in Alberta. It speaks to the responsibility of families, communities, and this Assembly to help children in need overcome significant alcohol and drug abuse. These amendments reinforce this initiative and will better support children and their families in the program, ease undue pressure on police forces, and better facilitate the court process.

I ask all members to support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate, as I stated in second reading, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek bringing forward Bill 6, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009, PCADAA. I want this thing to work every bit as much as the minister wants it to work. Because I believe there have to be facilities available and that there has to be a reporting as to the success of the program, I am putting forward an amendment, which I would ask the pages to deliver to your desk, Mr. Chair, and to then distribute to all members. I'll wait for that distribution to take place before speaking to the amendment.

The Acting Chair: We'll just give the pages a moment to circulate that amendment. We'll refer to this amendment as A1.

You may proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What I am proposing under amendment A1 to Bill 6, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009, is as follows. I am moving that Bill 6, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 11, in the proposed section 10, by adding the following after subsection (2):

- (3) On or before April 1 each year, the Co-ordinator shall prepare and submit an annual report to the Minister respecting;
 - (a) the exercise of the duties and functions of the Co-ordinator, and

- (b) the availability of treatment programs and services, and the level of staffing to support such programs and services, for children who are subject to protection orders under this Act.
- (4) Within 14 days of receiving a report under subsection (3), the Minister shall table it in the Assembly if it is then sitting, or if it is not then sitting, within 14 days of the next sitting, at which time the report automatically stands referred to the appropriate Policy Field Committee established by the Legislative Assembly.
- (5) When a report is referred under subsection (4), the Policy Field Committee shall promptly consider it and report back to the Assembly within 3 months.

What I am hoping to achieve by what I hope is interpreted as a friendly amendment is to put some operating dates and some co-ordinating details to this bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and myself and anyone who has any kind of connection to children, particularly those suffering the vulnerability to addictions, want whatever the intervention is to be successful. My concern is that extending a five- to a 10-day program is the equivalent of almost a catch-and-release circumstance. We recognize the addiction problems, we bring the addicted individual and their family into a resolution, but at the end of that 10-day period, if there is no program to which we then would refer the individual for further treatment, then I don't believe the intervention has any chance of being successful.

The main part of this amendment in section (3)(b) talks about "the availability of treatment programs and services, and the level of staffing to support such programs and services, for children who are subject to protection orders under this Act." Unless we have a professionally accredited institution or service to which we refer these children, then our best laid intentions are not going to account for much. If we simply catch them but we don't treat them, this five- to 10-day period, I'm assuming, is an entry into treatment.

What I'm requiring or suggesting is that there are reporting periods, there is a report card for the program, there are conditions to make the program successful. I've suggested April 1 because under normal circumstances the Legislature is on at that time. I've recognized the importance of the minister, who will receive the report first and, you know, will have two weeks to look over the report before tabling it.

I've also asked that besides the minister having reviewed the report, to recognize that there are treatment facilities to whom the children can be referred, and I'm talking about accredited, clinically staffed, educated individuals looking after the treatment beds.

If all of those conditions can be fulfilled, I'm asking for another layer of oversight, and that's the Legislative Assembly. I'm also asking that a judgment be made not only by the minister but that members of the Legislature have a chance to look at the document. If they see concerns, if they think things are going well or if they have concerns, then within the standing policy field committees that have been established, all-party representation, within a three-month period there is an actual review.

5:20

I believe that this is a very soft, nonintrusive amendment which is asking for structure. It's attempting to guarantee that the reasons for apprehending the children, intervening in their lives in the first place, will meet with success. Just simply having a bill but not having the programs of referral is not going to achieve the outcomes that either the mover of the bill or other members had in mind, whether they have similar concerns as I do, having been a teacher previously or in my role in Children and Youth Services. I believe that we all want the best for children, and through this amendment I'm attempting to structure that referral process.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to introduce the amendment. I look forward to discussion with regard to it.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I've listened very intently to the mover of the amendment, and I can honestly say without any question whatsoever that we as a government are not prepared to accept this amendment. What the member is recommending is redundant and very elusive to the fact, which I find very fascinating, over the last several weeks about this uncredited treatment centre. I know that he is referring to AARC, the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre.

You know, I promised the minister that I wasn't going to get into a great deal of debate about this particular issue, but I think it's important to realize the fact that the information that this particular member has gotten has been on a documentary that CBC put forward on a Friday night. I had actually decided to watch that particular documentary on CBC, and I've never ever in my life seen anything so blatantly one sided and cruel and vicious and mean as that particular documentary was on AARC.

Now, you know, Mr. Chairman, I can tell you that I and many members in this Assembly have been supporters of AARC over the last I don't know how long. I can't even count how many graduations I've been to at AARC. I always say when I go to another graduation at AARC that I'm not going to cry, and I end up crying anyhow because of listening to not only the child that's been through the program but the parents, the siblings, and the whole family involved in the process of healing.

I will share with the Assembly an incident that happened to my best friend's son. In coming over to talk to my husband and me and trying to explain to us why they haven't kept in touch with us and dealing with a very addicted son at that time, we spoke for hours. I said, "Well, what can we do for you?" And she said, "How about giving us a hug?" Their son went through AARC. That was probably a 10-month period, and I can only tell you what that particular place did for their son and their family.

So, Mr. Chair, I wish the hon. member. . .

The Acting Chair: If I could remind the member that we are speaking on amendment A1.

Mrs. Forsyth: I am speaking on the amendment, only I'm speaking to the amendment honestly instead of elusively like this particular member. The answer is, Mr. Chairman, that the government is not prepared to accept this amendment.

The Acting Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I listened to that refusal, if I could call it that, with interest, to say the least.

Certainly, dealing directly with amendment A1, this amendment to Bill 6, one has to look at these changes to the drug abuse program that had been described earlier by previous speakers. These potential amendments will force young adults with addictions into safe houses for up to two weeks and a day. I think that in light of what we've heard initially with this discussion and initially with the bill, this seems to be a work-in-progress. It's a positive step. I know there are issues around rights, but I think that in light of what has gone on in communities across this province, this legislation was needed.

Specifically to this amendment. Now, why would we have on or before April 1 of each year the co-ordinator preparing and submit-

ting an annual report to the minister respecting “the exercise of the duties and functions of the Co-ordinator” and looking at “the availability of treatment programs and services, and the level of staffing to support such programs and services, for children who are subject to protection orders under this Act”? Well, I think we should support this amendment if for no other reason than the past behaviours of some children’s authorities and the minister of children’s services.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona can perhaps correct me if my memory is deficient, but up in the northwest corner of the province I think there were issues around timely reporting of information that was almost a statutory obligation that that information be provided. It wasn’t done in a timely fashion. In my recollection certainly it was not done in a timely fashion. There had been some issues that had been overlooked.

Now, for the hon. Member for Fish Creek to suggest that there’s some sort of conspiracy by the Member for Calgary-Varsity in proposing this amendment is, I think, to put it politely, Mr. Chairman, ridiculous. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has – in light of what happened in other departments, with other children’s authorities, this is another rung in the ladder of accountability. I think it is a very good and sound and reasoned amendment, and it should be supported by all hon. members of this House.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all hon. members of the various annual reports from the department of children’s services and the fact that some of the authorities pass their budgets, their allocation from our government estimates, in a timely fashion. Sometimes they do it in advance of the tabling of the government estimates here, sometimes two to three weeks later, but in some cases, Mr. Chairman, it’s not done for months. In two cases in the last five years it wasn’t done at all. So there’s not a strong track record here of one authority and one department following what should be routine budget practices.

This amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity would certainly help Bill 6, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009, in the process so that the minister could follow through on what the intent is of this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there others that wish to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It’s a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to amendment A1. This is an interesting amendment, one that I only just had the opportunity to look at when it was distributed a few minutes ago. I think it’s an amendment that’s worth considering because, when I look at the amendment, there is certainly one portion, or piece, to the amendment which I think gets to the heart of some of the criticisms around Bill 6.

To be clear, that doesn’t negate the fact that there is value to Bill 6 and value to the scheme that it purports to amend, but of course just because there is value to something doesn’t mean that it can’t also be improved. I think this amendment gets to the heart of where improvement is required.

5:30

I’d like to start just for a moment to comment on some of the suggestions made by the member from I believe it was Calgary-Fish Creek. In looking through this, I am not clear on how this amendment, actually, is being somehow directed towards the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre. Frankly, I do think that that facility and the approach that this government has taken to that facility warrants an open and less emotive debate in this House than it has

gotten to this point. I certainly have spoken to people who’ve been involved in that program, well beyond those who were featured on the program that the member mentions, who suggest that there are some concerns there. I’ve also spoken to parents who are deeply appreciative of what that facility has offered to their family.

I would suggest, however, that even if one accepts only those testimonies, the measure of the quality is in the exception to the rule, and the somewhat, I would suggest, emotive and defensive unwillingness on the part of the government to discuss whether or not there are mechanisms in place to protect against the exception to the rule, frankly, surprises me. I remain very confused by the reaction that we get when this particular program is raised.

Notwithstanding that, I don’t think that’s what this amendment is actually about. I think it’s about what the member who proposed it suggested it was about and to get back to the point that I thought really gets to the heart of the matter, which is section (3)(b): “The availability of treatment programs and services, and the level of staffing to support such programs and services, for children who are subject to protection orders under this Act.” I think that we like to be able to fix problems with a statutory wave of the wand, with the granting of authority here or the granting of a right there. Certainly, there’s no question that that’s one of the least expensive ways to resolve the problem, but often it’s not really the most effective nor the way at all to solve a problem.

Now, in this case this act is a tool, I think, in the tool chest for communities, families, caregivers to address the problem associated with child addiction to drugs and alcohol, but I would suggest that it’s only one tool. Of course, the other tool is the financial and resource commitment to that effort. I think that section (3)(b), in particular, gets to that issue and whether or not that issue is really being properly addressed through this bill or through the actions of this government.

I’m happy to be corrected on this by any member opposite, but I have in my head from having read any one of copious, copious piles and piles of paper in the last month or so – and I can’t remember the source of it – that it was just announced that the High Prairie centre was closing. I have nods here that, in fact, it is closing. I’m not sure if this centre would be a place where children covered under this act would go. I may be incorrect. But if it is a place where they would go, I think what we’re actually seeing is a reduction in the number of beds that are available to receive these children and to provide the kind of comprehensive services that are contemplated, I think, by everybody, at least with respect to their best intentions. So that’s a problem.

I think that, you know, the Auditor General has commented on it. External experts have commented on it. People who work within the system have commented on the deficits in our system in terms of providing for children’s mental health and addiction services across the province. Whether they’re children’s mental health or addiction services that are provided through court order, through involuntary means, or, frankly, whether they’re even provided through voluntary means, there is an incredible – incredible – deficit of services across this province that simply is not going to be fixed through this particular mechanism because the problem is not in many cases the fact that people won’t stay there. The problem is finding a place that’s appropriate for them to stay.

Now, I’m not saying that that’s the only problem. There are times when this kind of authority is required. You know, I’ve also talked to parents who’ve been in that situation. I feel for their situation. I know they appreciate the authority in some part that comes through this amendment. But, really, I think we could be doing a lot more in terms of finding a more comprehensive voluntary program and, ultimately, involuntary program.

I'm concerned that the number of beds that are available is not enough. I'm also concerned that this is one of these things where children whose guardians or parents have the wherewithal to go to court to do this, you know, will then get the beds, and children whose guardians or parents do not have the wherewithal to do this don't get that benefit. Again, it speaks to the fact that this is only dealing with a small piece of the pie.

Going back to this amendment, what I like about this amendment is that it talks about giving us a very clear and regular assessment on the availability of treatment programs and services, where those spaces are, and what the programs look like. I think that's something we need more information about. I don't believe we have enough information about that right now. I think that this would help both, you know, the minister as well as this Assembly.

Whether it ultimately needs to come directly here – you know, as I said, I've barely had a chance to look at this amendment. Ultimately, what it's getting at in terms of identifying the shortage of service is something that I think is valuable in this amendment. It's for that reason that I support the principle that's being reflected here, which is the idea that we need to look less at granting rights – and that's fine – but to do it without an associative or corresponding dedication of resources is really to get a lot of good public attention but to not ultimately make a serious impact on the problem that has been identified.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there others?

Are you ready for the question on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: May I close the debate or discussion on this amendment before a vote is taken?

The Acting Chair: You can go ahead and speak.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll be very quick. I offered this, I guess, rather naively, in good faith. In the process the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has basically sullied my reputation, has accused me of being elusive and having ulterior motives. She has somehow connected this amendment to the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, and the only thing I can potentially see that has any connection to that is that I'm asking for a level of staffing; I'm talking about programs and services. I didn't even mention residential treatment centres. I didn't even mention regulation or accreditation. These are things that I believe every program that deals with human beings, addicted adolescents in this case, should have.

5:40

Now, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek went off on a tangent with regard to the AARC program. I was initially concerned about the program by CBC's *The Fifth Estate*. I do agree that there were sensationalistic tactics used, including a discussion in the parking lot, where Dr. Vause was filmed without his knowledge. However, my concerns with regard to AARC go way beyond anything that is intended or included in this amendment. To set the record straight, I've met with Dr. Vause. I've attended the program and spent about three and a half hours there. A very good friend of mine, who is the principal of the alternative high school that a number of students who are about to graduate from the program attend, is supportive of the intent of the program, as I am supportive of the intent of the program.

If the hon. member has some concern about redundancy, I would like her to demonstrate in future discussions where the referral and the length of the referral and the fact that a place with treatment beds and accredited workers is built into this bill is because I have not seen that. I want children who are apprehended to meet with success. I want the addictions situation to be broken, and without providing specific dates and details, without having services to refer children to, without some type of transparent, accountable reporting program, the intent to have an impact on children's lives will not be met.

I am sorry that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek does not believe that I am sincere in wanting to see children being well treated, their addictions broken. I can't change her opinion of me, but that's the least of my concerns. I am standing up for children. I want them to have successful intervention treatment.

Mr. Liepert: Standing up for the CBC.

Mr. Chase: This goes way beyond CBC, minister of health. CBC touched on a program which you have chosen to ignore.

The Acting Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. Chase: Sorry. Through the chair.

I have spoken to Inspector Slater of the sexual crimes unit of the police. He is continuing his investigation, an investigation that was undertaken two years ago and was welcomed, I might add, by Dr. Vause and the AARC and the individuals associated with it. I have also talked to the deputy fire chief, who has expressed concerns about fixed, barred windows, none of which comes into this amendment. Okay? You made the connection, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. [interjection] Through the chair. You made this ulterior motive, this "elusive" connection. I needed to deal with it.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, I believe, tried to bring in a 90-day treatment program for kids suffering from crystal meth. That was reduced to five days. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is taking the five days to 10 days, and there it stops. Without a referral program, without a reporting, this becomes window dressing as opposed to actual intervention.

Thank you for the opportunity. I hope some members will see beyond the prejudice and recognize the needs of children. That's the intent of this amendment. I hope you'll support the amendment regardless of the individual who is proposing it.

The Acting Chair: Are there others who wish to speak on amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:46 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase
Hehr

Kang
Notley

Pastoor

Against the motion:

Allred	Horne	Ouellette
Anderson	Jacobs	Quest
Brown	Klimchuk	Redford
Calahasen	Leskiw	Renner
Campbell	Liepert	Rogers
DeLong	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Denis	McFarland	Tarchuk
Fawcett	McQueen	VanderBurg
Forsyth	Oberle	Vandermeer
Hayden	Olson	Woo-Paw
Totals:	For – 5	Against – 30

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Chair: Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now rise and report progress.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, do you concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Those opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:59 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

Issue 24

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Prayers

The Acting Speaker: Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and the peace we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of children from Clive public school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Christine Howe, and teaching assistants Mrs. Carrie Knight and Mrs. Jackie Healing and parent helpers Adam Schedlosky, Mrs. Hanne Giles, and Mrs. Jamie Hodgkinson. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it gives me great pleasure and is my honour to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House visitors from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. There are 44 students in the members' gallery from Northmount elementary school, who are joined by teachers Miss Jill Sharun and Miss Krystal Mah, teacher assistant Mrs. Deana Gates, parent helpers Mrs. Monique Pomeranz and Mrs. April Monkman. I would now ask that the students of Northmount elementary school, their teachers, teacher assistant, and parent helpers rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly some crackerjack students from Edmonton-Riverview, Our Lady of Victories school. I spoke with them before we entered the Assembly, and I can tell you that not only are they very bright and well educated; I think a handful of them might well end up being members of this Assembly some day. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Mike Marr, Mrs. Laura Blythe, and Mrs. Therese Savard and parent helper Doreen Sasseville. They're in both galleries. I'd ask them to rise, and let's give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce a very special guest this afternoon. His name is Andrew Halliday. He is my new constituency assistant, who has recently

arrived in Alberta from Prince Edward Island. I met Andrew some time ago. We share a common passion for politics. Despite his youth he has a deep understanding of this country and the important role of the Legislature and governments. He worked extensively in the Leader of the Opposition's office in Prince Edward Island. I am very pleased that he has been able to join us today. I'd ask him to rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Francis Damberger, a U of A graduate and a producer and associate director of the Canadian war epic *Passchendaele*. Also joining us today, seated in the members' gallery, are location sound recordist Garrell Clark and costume designer Wendy Partridge.

Alongside his work on *Passchendaele* Mr. Damberger is a respected award-winning filmmaker whose credits include *On the Edge*, *Due South*, *Solitaire*, and *North of 60*, just to name a few. He is a true Renaissance man of the screen, with multiple writing, directing, and acting credits to his name. It is truly an honour to have such a talented and unique man with us today. I want to applaud his efforts and the efforts of the entire crew of *Passchendaele* for helping to create an opportunity to tell an Alberta-based story at home and abroad, not to mention the six awards that they won at the recent Genies, that I was lucky to be able to be part of, in Ottawa a couple of weeks ago. *Passchendaele* is no ordinary project, Mr. Speaker. It was a centennial-funded project that tells an important part of Alberta's history and is a memorial to our country's veterans and the sacrifices they made in the First World War. The entire film was shot in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that the three individuals rise and receive the warm reception of this House.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly four people from Angel Flight Alberta. Organized in 2006, Angel Flight Alberta is a charitable organization that provides free and accessible air transportation for people who must travel for medical purposes. There are many individuals who need to travel to centralized medical facilities in Edmonton and Calgary who do not always have the financial means to pay. Angel Flight Alberta exists to serve Albertans in need. I'll be discussing this organization further in a member's statement, but for now I would like to introduce Dr. Kerry Pawluski, the founder; Mr. Ernest Pawluski, founder; Mrs. Mary Ellen Pawluski, who we affectionately now refer to as the mom of Angel Flights; and Mr. Peter Moloney, the director of Angel Flights. I would ask all four of them, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 25 truck operators in the gravel hauling business. They are all sitting in the members' gallery. Many of these visitors live in my beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Manning. They are hard-working people, like all other Albertans. I would like to thank each and every one of

them for taking time out of their busy schedules to be here today. It was a great honour that the hon. Minister of Transportation was able to come and meet these truck operators as well. They are here today to thank our government for working with them to allow for common-sense change to hauling for loose loads of gravel. I would ask these fine gentlemen to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

Members' Statements

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

Vehicular Axle Weight Restrictions

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced some truck operators from the Edmonton area who are sitting in the members' gallery today. I now rise today to speak about an issue that is important to my constituents and many other Albertans in the gravel trucking business.

When I was door-knocking last year, I met lots of truck operators who raised the issue of axle weight restrictions. That's why I had proposed Motion 610 urging the government to amend the Traffic Safety Act to allow for the shifting of loose loads during transportation. These truck drivers must follow the laws about the weights that they can haul, both for gross vehicle weight and also for limitations placed on each vehicle's axle. Truck drivers were being fined if their load shifted, making the load too heavy on one axle, even if the load was balanced at first but moved while driving.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that Department of Transportation officers are working with the truck drivers by generously providing for a 10 per cent weight allowance on an axle. I am very proud that this government has acted on this issue that was the subject of my first motion, being as it was very important to me and to my constituents. Overall, Mr. Speaker, these allowances are a demonstration of how the province is co-operating with Albertans on a common-sense issue.

I would also like to thank the hon. Minister of Transportation, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, from Edmonton-Mill Creek, who started working on this issue one year ago, and the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne for their work on this file.

Mr. Speaker, this was my first victory as MLA for Edmonton-Manning. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we have another person celebrating a special day today, and that is the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. Please join me in wishing him the very best.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

1:40

Budget Criticism

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government's depression-recession recovery plan A is awful and there's no plan B backup, what can Albertans do to break their budgetary blunder blues? The traumatic duo of Red I and Pink Lloyd have made it too expensive to drown your sorrows, and you're too broke to smoke. If their boom-bust budget gives you a pain in the neck or lower extremities, you're out of luck because chiropractic services are no longer covered.

If you can't see your name on a cataract surgery list, it could be (a) your growing glaucoma, (b) the lack of publicly funded/staffed operating rooms, or (c) the exceeded budget for privately contracted services.

Forty per cent of single-coverage seniors have been double Blue Crossed by this government into covering the costs of the other 60

per cent. With the critical shortage of long-term care beds lucky senior lottery winners get first dibs on acute-care beds while the losers get hospital hallways.

Depending on how you spell it, superboard or superbored either refers to the centralized oversight of health services delivery or the perpetual state of mind of 80,000 and rising jobless Albertans unable to find work.

The once popular catchphrase Alberta advantage has now become a historical reference reserved only for Conservative cabinet ministers, who awarded themselves a 35 per cent raise last year and bonused their deputies and top-ranking officials to the tune of 40 million taxpayer dollars this year. The government ministers responsible for these excesses shouldn't be in charge of selecting new mottos for Alberta licence plates. They should be behind bars manufacturing them.

Whether you're one of the 21 per cent of eligible Albertans who mistakenly voted for these tired Tories or you're one of the 79 per cent that didn't, your opinion counts. Visit our Alberta Liberal caucus website at www.budget2009.ca or call us at 1.888.886.budg.

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

Angel Flight Alberta

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Kerry Pawluski, founder of Angel Flight, has been flying for 21 years. In those 21 years he has used the Edmonton City Centre Airport extensively. It has afforded him the opportunity to commute between Grande Prairie and Two Hills, where he has provided medical locum tenens services in the past. It has also enabled him to bring patients into Edmonton for admission to the Stollery or Royal Alexandra hospital for timely care. Dr. Pawluski is able to take in-patients from the Royal Alex hospital back to High Level or Stony Rapids, Saskatchewan, thus freeing up critical bed space in a timely fashion.

One of the major issues that Angel Flight sees on a daily basis deals with health care accessibility for rural Albertans. Angel Flight believes that without the Edmonton City Centre Airport, this issue of accessibility could worsen. This organization strives to ease the burden that individuals in need of health care face by utilizing a network of volunteer pilots, aircraft owners, and ground support.

Angel Flight Alberta is modelled after Angel Flight Vancouver Island, which serves a population one-quarter the size of Alberta's, with a geographic area one-tenth the size of this province. Angel Flight Vancouver has been in operation for the last seven years and consistently provides about 150 flights per year. This is the number which Angel Flight Alberta anticipates reaching in the near future.

Angel Flight's objective is to transport ambulatory patients whose medical and/or financial situations make it difficult or impossible for them to travel by conventional means. The service that Angel Flight Alberta provides to Albertans in need is truly commendable. They are one of the many organizations that rely on the Edmonton City Centre Airport. While Angel Flight Alberta operates from my constituency of Edmonton-Calder, it affects each and every one of your constituencies, both rural and urban. It is important to keep organizations like this one alive and well for all Albertans in need.

Thank you.

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

Education Awards

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary board of education's Barbara Bannon, principal of Olympic Heights elemen-

tary school, was recognized as a woman of vision by Global TV for her efforts in actively engaging and inspiring good deeds and hard work in her students, staff, and greater community.

Under Ms Bannon's leadership Olympic Heights has dedicated itself to creating an environment of peace in the school and surrounding community as a member of Peaceful Schools International. Barbara's vision has motivated students, parents, and staff at Olympic Heights to take on many humanitarian endeavours such as Children Changing the World. With the co-operation of her students and community they have contributed to the construction of 15 water wells in rural India and raised funds to help build schools for children in Africa.

Barbara has also championed environmental stewardship at her school. Through a partnership with Enmax and the Calgary board of education Olympic Heights became the pilot school for the Gen E program. The program gives students and teachers the opportunity to explore the environmental benefits of reducing greenhouse gases. Through this stewardship Barbara continuously promotes environmental responsibility and encourages staff and students to reduce their own environmental footprints.

Continuing on the environmental stewardship front, the Calgary board of education is being recognized as the first school board in western Canada to receive the EcoLogo environmental stewardship award. The CBE received the award for choosing environmentally preferable cleaning chemicals that help protect the environment as well as the health of staff and students. The CBE was nominated by Avmor Ltd. to receive this award, an award that recognizes organizations for their commitment to environmental protection through green purchasing. CBE received this recognition as it has successfully rolled out a comprehensive Clean for Health program.

I congratulate the Calgary board of education and Ms Bannon for receiving these awards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Royal Tyrrell Museum Education Award

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to inform this Assembly that Alberta's Royal Tyrrell Museum recently won a national award from the Canadian Museums Association. Each year the association presents awards to celebrate and encourage excellence within the Canadian museum sector. In January the Royal Tyrrell Museum's distant learning program was selected for an award for outstanding achievement in the education category. This is the second straight year that the Tyrrell has won an award for its efforts in educational programming. The museum received its award at the Canadian Museums Association annual conference in the month of March. Using video conferencing equipment in conjunction with the Alberta SuperNet, the Tyrrell has delivered 475 programs to over 12,800 students in Alberta, Canada, the United States, and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, this award is a testament to the high quality of educational programming at our province's museums and historic sites. The Tyrrell has also helped to meet one of the four key points of our province's cultural policy by ensuring that Albertans have greater access to our culture, in this case to education programs at our museums and historical sites.

Special heartfelt congratulations to all of the staff of the Royal Tyrrell Museum for their continued pursuit of educational excellence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Restructuring

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This administration continues to shoot itself in the hip as it dismantles Alberta's most cherished public health care system. What Albertans want is a careful, honest analysis of evidence, respect for public values, and a planned approach to change in the health care system itself. Instead, what we get resembles a car careening along the road and lurching into the right ditch. To the minister of health: what evidence did the minister use to create the Alberta Health Services Board?

1:50

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it seems like there's a little competition over there between the two opposition parties as to who can be the most outrageous in their preambles to the questions. I know that there's . . .

An Hon. Member: Who's winning?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think they're both losing if you want to know the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I've answered that question on several occasions in this House. There were a number of reasons for the creation of the Alberta Health Services Board, and those reasons are going to continually become more obvious as we move forward. I would say that the most recent one is the fact that without one health services board it would have been very difficult to integrate emergency medical services into the health care system. I think that's the most recent one.

Dr. Swann: Again to the minister: what benefits can Albertans see right now from the creation of this Alberta Health Services Board?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I just answered that question. Over the next year we will lay out in conjunction with Alberta Health Services Board some performance measurements that we will hold the board and the management team of Alberta Health Services accountable for. I would suggest and I have said publicly that I think that anyone — only the Liberals and the *Calgary Herald* would have expected that we would have seen efficiencies during the administrative changeover. This is the test year.

Dr. Swann: Again to the minister: what is the health budget based on if a major decision like delisting 40 services isn't included?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I know that the Leader of the Opposition hasn't had much experience in drafting budgets, Mr. Speaker, but there is an incredible amount of input that goes into the drafting of a budget. I could go through all of those details, but it would seem to me that that would be an appropriate question to ask during estimates, when I can take all the time, up to three hours, to explain that to the hon. leader.

The Acting Speaker: Second question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has given this health minister an axe to perform complex surgery to our health care system. Yesterday in this House the minister admitted that the decision to cut gender reassignment surgery was not based on

medical advice. To the minister: is the minister of health going to create an expert panel to advise on which health services to delist? Yes or no?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Member for Calgary-Buffalo asked me a similar question, and I can repeat what I believe is in *Hansard*. One of the things that we have discussed is the need to create – for lack of a better term let's call it an expert panel. This expert panel would operate in a similar way that the one on drugs does. It operates very well and gives good, independent advice to government on what should be covered under publicly funded health care and what shouldn't be.

Dr. Swann: Well, yesterday the minister said that "there's a list of some 30 or 40 different programs and grants and coverages that will not be proceeding." If the minister already has a list of 40 programs he's going to cut, will this expert panel simply be a rubber stamp for his decisions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the expert panel, Mr. Speaker, would be one that would be more designed to look forward as new technologies and new procedures come into the marketplace and determine whether or not they should be publicly funded. I would hope that this panel, once up and running, would also have the ability to have the independency to take a look at what currently is covered under publicly funded health care and make recommendations to government.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister table the list of 30 or 40 services that he's planning to delist? If not, why not in the interests of transparency?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what we have found is that through our department we funded a number of programs and grants for a number of things and that there were some duplications in the previous health regions and sometimes in other departments. Now that we have one delivery arm of health care in this province, what we have decided to do is go through our budget and, appropriately so, send those delivery programs to Alberta Health Services. It will be up to Alberta Health Services to decide which programs are duplicative in nature and which ones should continue. What we need to ensure is that we're not, as I say, duplicating services but, most importantly, having the right arm delivering the services.

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

Nurses' Contract

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness stated recently that he feels that the nurses contract in Alberta is a horrible deal, and in order to address the inefficiencies that deal caused, he doesn't mind pushing for contract changes even if it "creates some angst among the union leadership." To the minister: why is the minister punishing nurses when it was he and his government who created the inefficiencies in the first place? You guys signed the deal that you say is so bad.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody's punishing anybody. We have a contract with United Nurses in this province which the government – I must correct the member – did not sign. The

contract with the United Nurses of Alberta is with the former regional association. Any new contract will be negotiated with Alberta Health Services. We are in a different environment than we were when the last contract was signed.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dodged that bullet.

The nurses union has said that the solution is to hire more nurses because right now you don't have enough part-time nurses in the system to cover the workload without running up a huge overtime bill. Why wasn't this recognized back when the deal was signed?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we can debate whether hiring more nurses or having more nurses that work part-time work full-time is going to help solve the issue around the delivery of health care, but what this government is committed to do is ensure that we have a more efficient, more accessible health care system than we currently have today.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That, of course, involves having enough bodies to deliver the services that the front-line patients need.

Given that this minister feels that front-line nurses should be taking the fall for the government's failures, will the minister also be decreasing his own salary to reflect his own failures in the management of the public health care system in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as is so typical of this particular member, he's saying things that have never been said. Nobody is saying that anybody should be taking a pay cut, and I think that's what he's alluding to. Again, this is one of the issues we have in dealing with this particular opposition continuing to fearmonger out there and, quite frankly, not tell the truth in most cases.

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

Delisting of Medical Services

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the smiling mask of our Premier has finally slipped, and Albertans are seeing the grim privatization visage of Ralph Klein. The Premier hid his plans to privatize health care during the election, but last week he revealed his plans to delist services. It doesn't matter if you call it a two-tier system, the third way, or private health care, it all means the same thing: Albertans won't get the health care that they need. My question is to the Premier. Why won't you admit that you're taking advantage of this recession to do what you've always wanted: bring in U.S. two-tier health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been perhaps two parties that talked about privatized two-tier American health care system; that has been the NDP and the Liberals.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there's one party that doesn't talk about it but keeps trying to do it.

Alberta's delisted health services now include chiropractic care, gender reassignment surgery, eye care, seniors' drug coverage. Lab services are next, and physiotherapy is in the government's sights. This government is systematically dismantling public health care in

Alberta, leaving Albertans of modest means out in the cold. To the Premier: why didn't you tell Albertans during the last election about your plans to resurrect the third way and to dismantle our public health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the leader of the third party is wrong. We were very clear in the commitment we made to Albertans during the last election, and that is that we support a publicly funded health care system. We're also going to ensure that the system that we enjoy today will be sustained well into the future not only for our children but for our grandchildren.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier would like Albertans to believe that, but in actual fact they don't want to end up sitting broke in wheelchairs, wracked with pain because they can't get the necessary services that they want because they can't afford them. The delisting of essential medical services will send more people to hospitals, increase wait times, and make health care more expensive. My question is to the Premier. When will you realize that the only way to maintain a healthy population is through a publicly funded and publicly delivered system, not the third way, not the fourth way, and certainly not the American way?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I agree with him. We're all together in supporting a publicly funded health system, and we're going to ensure that health care is delivered in a timely and accessible fashion, that the system is effective, that it's accessible to all Albertans. We're going to work with all of the health care providers in this province to build in the efficiencies and the effectiveness and, most importantly, the sustainability for the next generation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Provincial Deficit

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that my constituents, like most Albertans, understand that the province is facing some economic challenges related to the global financial situation. They understand that we are in a deficit position for the first time in well over a decade, and they do want to understand this government's plan to deal with that. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Can the minister assure Albertans with regard to the government's plan to deal with the current deficit situation?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually very pleased to answer this and to give an accolade to the hon. member asking the question for his work with grade 6 students in his constituency to make sure they understand what we're doing. With that in mind, I'm going to just say that the sustainability fund is our government's plan to deal with the deficit. It's part of our savings for emergencies, part of the way we protect ourselves when revenue drops. So when we don't have enough money to meet our expenses, it's like taking money from our savings account and putting it into our chequing account so that we can cover those expenses. This year we will spend \$4.7 billion to cover that deficit.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: will that drawdown affect the Alberta heritage savings trust fund in any way?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with those children in the town of Strathmore in mind that we're saving for the future. The heritage savings trust fund does just that. We have no intent to touch any portion of that fund. We will use the funds from the sustainability fund next year. Anticipating that this period of recession will continue, we'll use some \$2.8 billion to help, again, top up our chequing account. In the third and final year of what we expect to be a deficit situation, we'll use \$1.8 billion, expecting to return to a surplus situation in 2012.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you. The third question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. In the report on the budget there has been some combining of the capital and sustainability funds. Can the minister provide some clarity with regard to the future of those funds and what role they'll play into the future?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand that over the longer term there will be always some volatility in a very energy-rich province like we are, so we have protected for the shorter term savings in the sustainability fund, funds to make sure that we follow through with the capital commitments, with our carbon capture and storage commitments, with our commitments for the public transit through Green TRIP. In one entire account of \$17 billion we will be able to accommodate these expenditures during this period of a deficit. In short, when we get surplus funds, we will replenish this account so that we build it back up to roughly \$10 billion, at least to that level, before we put any other savings elsewhere.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Delisting of Medical Services

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1992 there have been 11 deputy ministers of health. We have gone from 17 health regions to nine health regions to now one supermess. While this government spends lavishly on bureaucratic reorganization, salaries, and multimillion dollar severances for senior executives and hand-picked advisers, it cuts core public health care services. My first question is to the minister of health. Why won't the minister of health just admit that it is this government's mismanagement, total mismanagement, of the public health care system that is the disease?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what I will admit is what I said yesterday in this House. It's these two parties who want to stay with the status quo. The status quo is not sustainable. If we stay with the status quo, we will have exactly what they say this government is trying to do, and that is more private health care because we won't be able to continue to afford to provide what we are today. So today we are making some very tough decisions to ensure that the publicly funded health care is here for generations to come.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that this minister and this government are willingly dismantling our public health care system.

Now, an access to information request shows that an \$1,800-a-day consultant to the Alberta Health Services Board was allowed to

charge thousands of dollars more to the taxpayers than his contract stated. In six months this consulting contract realized over \$240,000. Again to the minister of health: how can the minister of health fail in basic contract accounting and then cut public health care services to try to make up for his own mistakes?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what he's talking about. If he wants to supply me with the information, I'd be happy to answer the question, and if he wants to show up at estimates in a couple of weeks, that would be an appropriate question to ask.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister knows exactly what I'm talking about.

Again to the hon. minister. When the Alberta Health Services Board, that this minister controls and hand-picks, fired its executive operating officer after just eight months, Albertans were left on the hook for potentially over a million dollar severance package for one executive. How can the minister of health now turn to vulnerable Albertans such as sick Albertans and senior citizens and take away their services in order to pay for your own mismanagement?

Mr. Liepert: Let's make sure we have it on the record. In this particular budget that we've just brought forward, Alberta Health Services has an additional \$550 million to deliver services to Albertans. This particular government, Mr. Speaker, is ensuring that out of all of the departments health care received the largest increase in expenditures. We are committed to a publicly funded health care system.

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

First Nations Consultation Capacity

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. First Nations receive numerous consultation requests, very often from industry, regarding everything from clearing of trees, building of roads, bridging creeks, oil and gas wells, and so on, and I think that a lot of the times they don't have the capacity to respond as quickly or as thoroughly as everyone would hope. I have some concerns about this capacity issue, and I'm wondering if the minister can advise what he's doing to make sure that the First Nations can respond to these requests.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Thank you, hon. member, for the question. It's a very serious issue. Consultation is something we take very seriously, and I know industry does, too. Obviously, First Nations are critical partners. We do a lot to help them through a program called the consultation capacity investment program. In fact, this year, hon. member, we'll be providing another \$6.6 million to help facilitate that consultation capacity. In central Alberta, around the area where the hon. member serves, we provided over a quarter of a million dollars just recently to help facilitate consultations in that area. We also have the important traditional use studies program.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Yes. Regarding the traditional use studies, I know they yield critical information that's needed, and I under-

stand that they're living documents, that they don't necessarily get done once and come to an end. I'm wondering what the minister's intention is in terms of continuing the support for this program so that that information is readily available.

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that was a three-year program that was scheduled to end March 31 of this year, but I'm happy to inform the House and this hon. member in particular that we were successful in getting that program continued. We'll be adding 1.7 million new dollars into that traditional use studies program because it does yield that critical information. That'll bring our total investment over the past six years up to over \$12 million for traditional use studies, a very important consultation piece.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question relates to the other side of the coin, which is the need for industry to have certainty and predictability. I'm wondering, from an industry perspective, what specific steps are being taken to ensure that within the existing consultation process they are receiving that kind of timely information and help.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are several initiatives that the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations provides and has under way at the moment. For example, we are going to be reviewing the 2005 First Nations consultation policy and guidelines. We'll also be looking at the aboriginal policy framework. We also are developing a trilateral process involving First Nations, industry, the government of Alberta. At the same time we also have the new protocol agreement signed by our Premier, the grand chiefs, and myself, and that ensures and guarantees annual meetings, at least three per year, that will help with the particular issue at hand.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The cardiovascular intensive care unit at the Mazankowski heart centre, according to the Alberta Health Services website, is "a 20-bed dynamic, fast-paced unit providing care to patients pre and post open-heart surgery." The website also lists its hours of operation: zero. In fact, the hours of operation for the cardiac rehab program, the cardiology in-patient unit, and almost every other program at the Mazankowski are listed as zero. Things are better for the lost and found, which has been open for one hour. Maybe the minister of health should go there to look for his lost credibility. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: a year after the official opening why does the Mazankowski stand empty?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that there have been some issues around commissioning this particular facility. It is a highly technical facility. I will say that it's important for this member to recognize that it was not the government of Alberta that had the official opening. It was the former Capital health region that had the official opening. What we want to ensure is that when patients are in that facility, there are no safety issues. If the member wants to stand here and say, "Open the building before you're satisfied that it's safe," then have him do so.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. The fact that the Mazankowski institute stands empty a year after it was officially opened is a testament to this government's inability to manage a public health care system. Staff and patients are furious, Mr. Speaker. They rightly believe that this government and this minister are not competent to run the health care system. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness admit that the construction of the Mazankowski institute has been brutally bungled by this government?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reality of it is that this government is not managing the construction of the Mazankowski Heart Institute. It started out under the Capital health region and is currently being managed by Alberta Health Services. Now, I have recently been in contact with the new CEO of Alberta Health Services. He assures me that . . . [interjections] I don't know if the yipper over here wants the floor or not, but if he wants it, he can have it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Cardiac intensive care unit hours of operation, zero; echocardiography lab, zero; ECG-Holter monitoring lab, zero; cardiovascular surgery in-patient unit, zero; and on and on the list goes. Given that the Minister of Health and Wellness has misled his Premier, who thought that facility was fully operating, and has misled this Assembly about the functioning of the Mazankowski, will he at least give this Assembly a list of the commissioning and engineering problems that have led to this delay?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, cardiac patients in this province today receive some of the best care in the world. For this particular member to stand here and say what he's saying is an insult to the medical community of this province.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Dirt Fill for Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The contract for the north-west leg of the Anthony Henday ring road was let in August of last year, and I continue to be amazed at the progress that they're making adjacent to St. Albert. The amount of earth that has been moved and the progress on several of the overpass structures has been beyond expectations. In the open houses held last year, residents were advised that several tree stands within the transportation and utility corridor would be preserved. Now it appears that these tree stands have been removed in order to accommodate excess excavation. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why did trees have to be removed to stockpile excess dirt?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the trees were recently cleared so that we could permanently store excess dirt removed from the interchange at St. Albert Trail. The reason we have all this surplus material is due to the fact that we've excavated Anthony Henday Drive below St. Albert Trail. It's been dug down to reduce the noise and visual impact of the interchange, and the surplus material has been placed along the outside edge of the roadway.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: is it not customary in road design to balance the cuts

and fills in order to optimize haulage distances and avoid having to either borrow or waste dirt from offsite?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we typically balance all the cuts and fills. In fact, to a large degree that's what's being done there. The excess dirt from St. Albert Trail is being hauled to other interchanges where the dirt is needed. For example, it's being hauled to the bridges at Yellowhead Trail and 137th Avenue, but unfortunately there's so much extra dirt that we've needed to store it near that interchange.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: in view of the fact that there is excess material, can this material be used to construct and landscape berms in order to reduce traffic noise from the completed freeway? Also, can some of the trees that have been removed be replaced?

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we can and we will be landscaping the excess dirt. We'll be shaping the mounds and seeding them with grass. The mounds of excess dirt will be wide and flat and about two and a half metres high. For nearby residents that will help to provide some visual screening from the road. Although the excess dirt was not designed for noise attenuation, it will help reduce noise, I'm sure, from the roadway.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Blue Cross Premiums

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of Health has said that his justification for tripling the cost of premiums for nongroup participants was to bring Blue Cross more in line with employer and private insurance plans. Is it not a contradiction for a minister of a public health system to feel that his top priority is to make our public health care compete with private insurance plans? To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister clarify if he was referring to the cost of the coverage or the services being covered when he said yesterday in this House that it was necessary to bring Blue Cross up to the equivalency with the employer plans?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta offers through Blue Cross a government program for some hundred thousand Albertans for supplemental insurance. The premiums for that particular plan have not increased since 1993. The government of Alberta was subsidizing a hundred thousand Albertans to a significant degree with their supplemental insurance, to the point where we were having employees of corporations or employer plans drop off those particular plans and subscribe to the government-run plan. If the Liberal opposition wants us to subsidize an insurance plan for some hundred thousand Albertans, then say so.

2:20

Ms Pastoor: That was a bit of a reach.

The most recent financial statements from Blue Cross show that it has positive net assets and even ran a surplus. Why was it necessary to increase the premiums, or is this the first step to privatizing Blue Cross for profit?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the question shows how naive this particular opposition is about how this particular program runs, so

let me explain it to them. Blue Cross is a not-for-profit corporation. They do, however, on behalf of the government of Alberta administer our government plan. The government plan has absolutely nothing to do with the profits or lack of profits that Blue Cross makes on its private insurance plans. I hope it's clear to the member.

Mr. MacDonald: It's like crop insurance.

Ms Pastoor: Yeah. Exactly.

One of the questions we've received for Budget 2009 is from Victor in Edmonton. "My wife and I, both seniors, live on pensions. Both being cardiac patients, we spend almost \$600 a month on prescription drugs. The proposed government drug plan starting in 2010 will mean our paying several thousand dollars before benefits kick in. My question: barring selling our home or going back to work, where do we get the money to pay for this?"

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let me assure Victor, as I have assured the Member for Lethbridge-East, that we have heard from seniors that in light of a changed economic environment there are some issues around the seniors drug plan that we announced last December. I have been very clear in this House on probably more occasions than I'd like to remember that we are reviewing this particular program, and I hope that within the near future we can be in a position to bring something forward that would more reflect the economic times we're in.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Delisting of Medical Services (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, physiotherapy is a preventative service that reduces the overall health costs of ailments like breast cancer, cerebral palsy, spinal cord and brain injuries, and arthritis. Albertans who use physio are trying to do what this minister keeps telling them to do: take the time to take personal responsibility for their health. To the minister of health: why won't you admit that delisting services like physiotherapy means that we'll pay more and we'll pay later for the more expensive acute care that physio could have prevented?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in response to the question I said that it was a dishonest question, and I'll explain why I said that. Nobody has delisted physiotherapy, so the preamble to the question is dishonest.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is going to get up and commit right now to not delisting physio, I'm quite happy to hear it, but until then, delisting physio doesn't make the costs go away. It just transfers them directly to the sick. The wealthy will line the pockets of insurance companies in a bid to get care, the price of services will increase, and regular Albertans will do without. To the minister of health: why won't you stop this political drive to hand over our health care system to insurance companies and, instead, right now commit to not delisting and admit that prevention services like physio keep people healthy, out of the hospitals, and on the job?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what this government will commit to is what Albertans want us to commit to, and that is to a publicly funded health care system that is sustainable into the future for our children

and our grandchildren. I know that the particular member of the opposition doesn't like that because that goes against what she believes in, and that is that we should tax everybody to death, that the Crown should own everything, that we should pay for everything, and it goes on and on and on.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this plan, this policy has nothing to do with sustainability and has nothing to do with the bottom line because his plan is going to hurt Albertans' bottom line, and he knows it. These people are struggling just to hang onto their jobs, and you want to dismantle health care, and you want to burden them with higher health care costs. How will you explain to Albertans who need physiotherapy, chiropractic therapy, that this government is no longer interested in helping them get healthy and back on the job?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of anyone who needs physiotherapy today that isn't going to get physiotherapy the same way they did yesterday, so the question is irrelevant.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Victims Restitution and Compensation

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to hitting organized crime and gangs where it hurts the most, the wallet. The Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act is a good example of this. Can the Minister of Justice provide this Assembly with an update on the effectiveness of this legislation?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question, hon. member. I'm pleased to say that we've now had almost four months of success with this legislation. The key message that we have been trying to communicate – and I think the public are helping us to do that – is that we need to ensure that if people are committing criminal activity, we are hitting them where it counts, that we are able to take property that has been either purchased as a result of criminal activity or is property that will be used in the commission of a crime. We think it's very important, as we proceed through this, that we highlight the successes that we've had. I think members of the public who watch the news will have seen in the last two months tremendous seizures of property, applications with respect to forfeiture that deal with vehicles, houses, and property used to steal fuel.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Recently the federal government announced some legislative changes to the Criminal Code aimed at gangsters. While due justice is an important value, my constituents believe that we must tackle the issue of gang activity and violence through a multipronged approach which seriously diminishes the lucrative lifestyle of organized crime. Will the minister inform this Assembly of any additional work her department is doing to accomplish this objective?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Premier announced the safe communities initiative, he was very clear that we need to deal with the immediate issues facing this community. We have to deal with enforcement. We had to deal with prosecution. The safe communities plan is a three-year plan. We need to accomplish a lot in those three years. But what we have to do, most importantly, now that we've dealt with enhanced policing and enhanced prosecutions, is look to the root causes of crime. We have to get involved in education and awareness. We're hosting a gang summit in June. The Premier will be speaking at that. What he will be doing at that is announcing a long-term gang prevention strategy that will include education and awareness and making sure that people don't end up in lives of crime.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister. At this time of year many Albertans are feeling a sense of frustration as they're preparing and submitting their 2008 tax forms to Revenue Canada. Can the Minister of Justice inform this Assembly on any work or initiatives she is undertaking with our federal government to link law enforcement and Justice officials with Revenue Canada to ensure that appropriate resources are directed at investigating the assets and proceeds of criminal gangsters, not law-abiding taxpayers?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important piece of the work that we're now able to do under this legislation. We have to work closely with the federal government, but one of the reasons we introduced this legislation is that we need to target the property that's involved in crime. We have civil forfeiture officers in our police services that are new this year that are working with our prosecutors. One of the things that they do is work with the RCMP's integrated proceeds of crime unit to identify opportunities where we may see property that has been purchased as a result of criminal activity that we may be able to make applications to seize.

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

Public Education Exemptions

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has been musing aloud recently about a proposal to entrench parents with a legal right to prevent their children from receiving education on any subject or issue that these parents regard as unacceptable from a religious perspective. There are a number of unanswered questions and long-ranging consequences from such a legislative change. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Will any parameters be placed on this parental opt-out? For example, can parents remove children from a classroom if a non-Christian-based religion is being taught?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, when I was asked by a member of the media about parental rights, it was in response to the hon. Minister of Education, who in this House answered that particular question, and I said that the United Nations has it entrenched in its particular charter. It was a comment at the time. We haven't made any decisions as a caucus on human rights legislation on the whole. When we have something to report, we'll bring that to this House.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much. One of the questions that keeps coming up is around sexual orientation. Back to the same minister: can the minister explain where in the curriculum sexual orientation is taught? Is there a module for gay 101 or some sort of course that they take that a parent could remove a child from? Could you explain that, please?

2:30

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand where the member is going here. I'm not the Minister of Education. As far as I know, sexual orientation, as far as I can see with my own kids in the educational system, isn't there, so I don't see what the point of the question is.

Ms Blakeman: Excellent response.

Back to the same minister: why is the minister contemplating changing the human rights act when the ultimate goal of this administration is to give direction to the school board and to the curriculum, which is exactly what the minister has noted? So why the human rights act?

Mr. Blackett: Well, funnily enough, Mr. Speaker, I was in here from the first day, I think, some time over 12 months ago and had nothing from the opposition – on the human rights act, if you look at *Hansard*, they have asked no question but about having sexual orientation included and having it done immediately.

Ms Blakeman: What? Are you crazy?

Mr. Blackett: Am I crazy? Look at *Hansard*. You're a one-trick pony. Are you kidding: am I crazy?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

East Calgary Health Centre

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over a year ago the then Minister of Health and Wellness together with myself and the hon. Member for Calgary-East broke ground for the construction of the east Calgary health centre. Recently I heard that the building construction has been completed but that the inside was put on hold. This is unacceptable to my colleagues in the area. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is going on with this project, Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, actually, that's maybe the toughest question I've had all day, Mr. Speaker. I guess one of the anomalies that was discovered as we move from various regions to one health region was that in the case of the facility in east Calgary the building was built, but no money was set aside to do leasehold improvements. So we've had a building sitting there for quite some time that has not been usable. I'm pleased to say that in the capital plan that we released with this budget, we have included some \$13 million for leasehold improvements for that particular facility.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good news.

Now, given that the construction will be going on, my question is: what kind of service will be delivered through that health centre?

Mr. Liepert: Well, it will be a full-service facility, including healthy living promotion, chronic disease management, mental health services, a whole host of services. It'll be a nice complement, Mr. Speaker, when the quarter-billion-dollar expansion of the Peter Lougheed comes on at the end of August, which between the two facilities will significantly enhance the service to the residents of east Calgary.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: when can the constituents of Calgary-Fort and Calgary-Montrose and Calgary-East expect the opening of the centre?

Mr. Liepert: I'm told by Alberta Health Services that they are in the accelerated stage of getting a contract finalized and that they're hopeful that construction can begin almost immediately. It's probably going to take somewhere between five, six, eight months to get completed. Hopefully, it would be nice if that facility was up and running by Christmastime, hon. member.

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

Sand and Gravel Royalties

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his October 2008 report the Auditor General noted that sand and gravel royalties have not changed since 1991. Further, the Auditor was unable to find any evidence of a royalty review since that time. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why did the government not review the royalty framework for over 17 years?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, our ministry does have responsibility for sand and gravel under the lands department. The question of gravel rates is reviewed from time to time internally, and it's been determined that as it stands, it's appropriate.

Mr. Hehr: The Auditor General also reported that the ministry lacks the control to ensure that all revenues from sand and gravel are recorded and that due to the Limitations Act the ministry may never be able to fully collect these royalties. To the same minister: how does the minister justify this mismanagement to Albertans?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that those recommendations from the Auditor General have been acted upon, and that'll be reflected in future reports.

Mr. Hehr: The Auditor further notes that usage amounts for sand and gravel are self-assessed by companies and that the ministry is at least one year behind on many of the reviews of these assessments. The largest gravel mine needs to be reviewed back to 1990. To the same minister: if we've acted on all of these assessments, has this assessment back to 1990 on the largest gravel producer now been completed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the exact answer to that question, but I can say that, particularly in these times of economic hardship, our view in regulation is not to hire lots of civil servants to run around and monitor everything but to put in place outcome-based regulation, where we get the results at a reasonable price.

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

Research and Innovation Funding

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The development of a knowledge-based economy is critical to Alberta's future success. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. My constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods are wondering: how is this government fostering the growth of businesses that conduct research and development in this province?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good question. Over the years this government has maintained a policy of very, very low tax rates for our businesses, which has obviously been a huge benefit to the people of Alberta given the amount of people who are employed in our province today. In addition to that, last year we announced a platform of programs for the knowledge-based economy of the future which included a science and research experimental development tax credit, which makes us even more competitive amongst other jurisdictions. That credit is a 10 per cent research and development credit on up to \$4 million in research, so up to a \$400,000 credit. It is certainly having the desired effect in that companies are looking to Alberta to come and do research and development here.

Mr. Benito: My first supplemental to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: what is the anticipated net economic effect of the Alberta scientific research and experimental development tax credit?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Yes. While we're still in the early stages, we see this refundable tax credit as a fairly significant incentive. I know that both the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and our own department receive a number of questions. Because it is a refundable credit, companies will benefit even if they don't yet pay income tax. It is a refundable credit available to them. It's important for early-stage companies as well as for those emerging technology companies that might be more advanced in their thinking but have new opportunities because of the tax credit.

Mr. Benito: My second supplementary to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: how will this tax credit help new technology companies who might not earn enough income to pay tax?

Ms Evans: That credit remains, so it's still there when they at some point in time will have to pay tax, and then they will be able to draw on that credit. We expect that the annual benefit of the credit to Alberta companies will be in the neighbourhood of \$60 million. Mr. Speaker, I've always felt that the best news story would be that we had paid out tax credits of a hundred million, maybe \$200 million. It would speak clearly and eloquently to the number of companies that are emerging to do good business and to expand their businesses here in Alberta. That's exactly what we want: the creation of jobs and the creation of opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Parks and Wildlife Preservation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Recreation business plan notes that the ministry will be going forward with creating "more campgrounds that accommodate larger trailers." The government's 2008 Survey of Albertans'

Priorities for Provincial Parks notes that 61.3 per cent of Albertans want to protect more natural land and leave it undisturbed. Why is the minister continuing a policy, as Joni Mitchell would say, of paving paradise and putting up a parking lot?

2:40

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's correct at all. I think that our ministry will be reflecting in the park plan, which will be announced sometime next week, a balance between conservation and recreation. This is a very big province with lots of opportunities, and this government is actually very proud of its record of creation of new parks.

Mr. Chase: Yes, it is a delicate balance between concrete and conservation, but you're losing the fight.

The business plan also highlights policy to build more trails for all-terrain vehicles, yet the government's own survey of Albertans' priorities again shows that 71 per cent of Albertans are opposed to increased off-road vehicle infrastructure. Why is the minister going forward with a policy that will further disturb and destroy what's left of our natural protected areas?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to disagree with the hon. member. I've said before in this House that we want a well-managed trail system in this province. We can either let the problem manage us, or we can manage it. We've got the hon. member across the way heading up a committee to bring back to us recommendations that help us manage this issue.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You didn't manage it at Indian Graves two years ago. You didn't manage it at McLean Creek last year. I can hardly wait till this year.

Why doesn't the minister and this government support a policy which sees funding going towards park and wildlife preservation as opposed to ripping up and paving over vast tracts of provincial parklands?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this government has a really good track record when it comes to increasing parks, and I can of course go over that with you. The OH Ranch, that we brought in this year, brought us some 20,000 acres of grassland ecology. We had the Eagle Point provincial park and recreation area, another great example. We've got the Lois Hole centennial park, the river valley park. Oh, I could go on and on. I would say to the hon. member that he's not correct. This government has done a good job.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Supportive Living Units in Bonnyville-Cold Lake

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure this afternoon to speak to an aspect of Budget 2009 that will greatly affect the people in my constituency and all Albertans. Seniors make up a large part of my constituency, and currently there is no assisted-living facility in Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the MD of Bonnyville. Through Budget 2009 Seniors and Community Supports will be providing capital funding in the form of \$150 million over the next three years for affordable supportive living initiatives, or ASLI. This is in addition to the \$84.4 million in ASLI funding for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

Some of the recent funding given through this program to Cold Lake will help build an assisted-living complex called Points West Living. This facility plans to meet the needs of seniors in the Cold Lake community by developing 24 DAL suites, 21 supportive living apartments, and 21 life lease apartments. Mr. Speaker, this is a total of 84 suites for the residents in need. This housing is affordable and intended to give seniors choice, support while maintaining their dignity and quality of life. I am so excited to see this funding being utilized in a way that benefits the people in my constituency.

I would like to thank the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports for this increased support, support that many Albertans need. This reflects the Alberta government's long-term commitment to supportive living. Since 1999 the government has provided \$365 million in funding to support the development or modernization of close to 8,000 supportive living units. Our province is committed to seniors aging in the right place, and through actions in my constituency and across Alberta it is becoming a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Before we move on, may we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to introduce to you and through you to the rest of this particular Assembly three individuals from my constituency. They've travelled quite a few miles to be with us today. These three individuals are Ryan Gauthier and his brother Brett, accompanied by their mother, Rhonda Clarke-Gauthier. These individuals have been extremely involved in the parliamentary process and have been to the Legislature a few times and have been able to debate legislation through some of the programs that are offered through the province of Alberta. As well, this family is very, very keen on 4-H and are active members of 4-H clubs, and the mom is actually a leader of the 4-H club in the Donnelly community. I would like the Assembly to officially welcome them by offering them the traditional warm welcome. Please rise if you can.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly – and I'm sure she's not new to anyone here – my assistant, Hana Marinkovic, and her friend, who are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they both stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 205

Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009.

Bill 205 would clarify the parameters of third-party election advertising during provincial elections.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. As requested by the minister of health, I have a number of tablings today regarding questions on the agenda. The first tabling I have is an invoice from J.L. Saunders & Associates Inc. It is for work done from November 1 through to the 27th of 2008, plus a contract cancellation fee. It's a total invoice for \$47,000.

I have another invoice here from J.L. Saunders & Associates Inc. from October 1 through to the 31st, 2008, and it's for 43,800 and some-odd dollars.

The third invoice I have is also from J.L. Saunders & Associates Inc., and it's for a period of time from September 1 to the 30th. It's for consulting fees, and it's for \$42,360.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, is it your intent to read all of those sheets?

Mr. MacDonald: That was the end of it, Mr. Speaker. I have other tablings as well. The minister of health challenged me to provide this information, and I think for the House I should.

This is an agreement, copies of the agreement for consulting between J.L. Saunders & Associates Inc. and East Central health.

The last tabling I have is from July 22, 2008. It's a letter to the hon. minister of health from Charlotte Robb, interim chief executive officer, regarding the employment letter of Paddy Meade.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of information from the Canadian Physiotherapy Association. These benefits were referred to today in question period by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Also, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of two letters expressing concern about the cancellation of public funding for gender reassignment surgery. They state that such procedures are medically necessary and that cancelling public funding will cost the government more in the long run. The letters are from Marcus Peterson and Nicole Hankel.

Thank you very much.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, response to Written Question 5, asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, you rose on a point of order. You caught my eye. Do you wish to speak?

Point of Order

Members' Statements

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do have a rule in this House that there are no points of order allowed during a

member's statement, but that rule is based on a certain self-control being exhibited by the members. I did not hear that in the member's statement, so I did believe that I needed to draw that to the attention of the House. I apologize for taking up the time of the House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The hon. member is correct. There are no points of order during members' statements. Since 1993, when Members' Statements was first introduced, the agreement was that all of the statements would be on something that is happening within your constituency, to bring something to light that is a positive to the benefit of your constituency. On that point, it sort of has deviated a little bit from that once in a while. I think that taking into account, certainly, perhaps the notoriety that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has gained with some of his waxing eloquent, there was no malicious intent involved in this. The ruling is that there is no point of order on this.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wonder if we could have unanimous consent to just recess for about three or four minutes.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The committee adjourned from 2:54 p.m. to 2:58 p.m.]

The Chair: Let's call it 3 o'clock now. I would like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Main Estimates 2009-10

Executive Council

The Chair: I would like to call on our Premier to move the estimates.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and hon. members. I'm pleased to appear before this committee to move and discuss the 2009-10 Executive Council budget estimates and also the '09-12 business plan. Executive Council is a vital part of government operations, with staff serving Albertans in a number of ways, from promoting good governance of government agencies to facilitating two-way communication with Albertans.

I'd like to first introduce the staff of my office who are with me today. On the floor we have my chief of staff, Ron Glen; Brian Manning, Deputy Minister of Executive Council; Grant Robertson, deputy secretary to cabinet; Steve MacDonald, deputy chief of policy co-ordination; Roxanna Benoit, managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau; and Elaine Dougan, who is the executive director of corporate services. Some of staff are also up in the gallery, including Elan MacDonald, deputy chief of staff; Jordon Copping, my executive assistant; George Samoil, executive director of House procedures and legislative affairs; Bob Fessenden, deputy minister of the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy; Peggy Hartman, assistant deputy minister of the Agency Governance Secretariat; Paul Stanway, my director of communications; and Tom Olsen, director of media relations.

3:00

Mr. Chairman, my remarks today will include a brief fiscal overview for 2009-10, followed by some details on upcoming initiatives from the business plan. Executive Council spending for '09-10 is forecast at \$35.8 million, an increase of \$5.8 million over last year. The increase is attributed to the following initiatives: \$1 million is budgeted to cover the costs of convening the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, bringing the council's total budget to \$2 million, and \$5 million will be dedicated to implement the Alberta brand campaign, bringing the campaign's '09-10 budget to \$10 million. Budget changes also reflect the standard increases for salary settlements and the removal of funding for achievement bonuses this fiscal year.

I'd like to offer a quick review of Executive Council's program areas and priorities as outlined in the business plan. Executive Council includes my offices here in the Legislative Assembly, including communications and correspondence, and in McDougall Centre in Calgary; and the deputy minister's office, which provides advice and support to me on policy and organizational issues and leadership to the Alberta public service. We also have cabinet co-ordination and support, the policy co-ordination office, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, the Agency Governance Secretariat, the protocol office, administrative support for the office of the Lieutenant Governor, the Alberta Order of Excellence Council, and the Public Affairs Bureau.

Executive Council has outlined a number of strategic priorities in the '09-12 business plan, including strengthening agency governance, enhancing policy capacity, continuing the establishment of the Council for Economic Strategy, implementing the Alberta branding initiative, continuing implementation of a strategic communications plan across government, and utilizing social media technology to enhance communications. These priorities reflect my government's commitment to be financially responsible, open, and accountable as well as to ensure that Alberta maintains a strong position nationally and internationally.

One strategy to achieve this goal is to convene the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. Council members will represent a broad range of senior-level experience with the major economic sectors of importance to Alberta and will be tasked with providing advice and strategies to ensure a high quality of life for Albertans. Last year the council was in the developmental stage. This year it'll begin its work. The additional \$1 million will cover remuneration for council members, travel and other costs associated with meetings, and fees for consultation, advice, and support from experts in the field.

I'd now like to briefly mention some of the other work that Executive Council will be undertaking. The policy co-ordination office will continue to support policy development across government and to improve the transparency, accountability, and governance of government agencies. The Agency Governance Secretariat will continue to support the implementation of policies outlined in the Public Agencies Governance Framework.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just talk a bit about Alberta's brand campaign. In this time of economic uncertainty it is vital that we promote our province, that we protect our markets and our ability to attract investment and tourism. We want to ensure that Alberta remains a place of opportunity, a place of prosperity and quality of life. We have a very good story to tell, and we're going to tell it. The budget for the brand initiative is \$25 million over three years, with \$10 million allocated for '09-10, this fiscal period. This is an increase of \$5 million from last year.

This year's budget will primarily be dedicated to implementing the brand campaign in local, national, and international markets and to directly advocate Alberta's interests in those markets. As the

brand is open and available, funds will also support the development of high-quality promotional materials for both government and others who are promoting the province to use. Those others could be from universities to school boards to whoever wants to use the Alberta branding initiative. The funds will be used prudently. In fact, \$1 million of last year's budget, \$5 million, 20 per cent of the total budget, was returned to Treasury. Brand implementation is being led by the Public Affairs Bureau, which facilitates two-way communication between Albertans and their government.

The bureau is also working to strengthen communication with Albertans, Canadians, and the world through emerging web technologies such as webcasts, blogs, and two-way conferencing.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, this concludes my introductory comments. I welcome members to ask any questions that they might have. Thank you.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Premier and his staff on issues relating to Executive Council, the estimates briefing summary in particular. I approach issues of budget, as I think the Premier has articulated, as comparable to managing a household budget, in which one wants to look carefully at what the plan is, where we're going, where we're saving appropriately for the future, where we're spending, and how we're getting value for those dollars. I'm sure that's not a surprise to anyone here.

Some of the questions that I'll be asking will relate fundamentally to: if there is an increase, why is there an increase? If we're spending more in one area, what are the measurement tools that we would use to assess whether we're getting value for money? If we've chosen not to increase, what were the decisions around that? It's not simply around increases, but it's about where we are going. I think an important question to be asking the Premier and his particular Executive Council is how he models within the Executive Council the direction and the vision of this government and how this expenditure of public dollars is reflected in that conscientious approach to establishing a vision, establishing a plan, clarifying how we're going to spend those dollars, and then the discipline with which we actually follow the plan.

In summary, then, the total budget for Executive Council is \$36 million, for the record, for 2009-10, an increase of \$6 million from \$30 million, amounting to roughly a 20 per cent increase. The reasons given for the increase are the provincial branding initiative and the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy.

I'm wondering if the Premier would agree to going through one phase of this for the hour and, over the several phases of this budget, asking for the Premier's response as we deal with them. In that context, then, we've talked about the branding initiative to improve the image of Alberta and the rest of Canada internationally and the Council for Economic Strategy to provide advice to the Premier on economic strategies that would ensure a high quality of life for Albertans and make Alberta a good place to live, work, visit, and invest.

Well, first to the Public Affairs Bureau, Mr. Premier. Here we don't see substantial increases but a significant expenditure of public dollars that I think most Albertans would assume would be operating in the public interest and communicating to the public on behalf of the government of Alberta, so questions continue to be raised in my jurisdiction about how that money is being spent, why it's so much different from other provinces, why that bureau is reporting to the Premier instead of to the government, and some of the concerns around partisan reporting and influencing of the kinds of messaging that Albertans are hearing about the activities of the government.

The need for independence, I guess, is what I'm alluding to. I know the Premier has alluded to some of that in the past, that he would be examining that whole question of independence of reporting. I would like to hear the Premier comment on the role of the Public Affairs Bureau and the extent to which Albertans can have confidence that it's reflecting the objective results that the government is getting for spending its dollars and how it's serving all parties, I guess I would say, all perspectives on the development of this province. It supports government ministries. It helps to inform Albertans about programs and policies, and it co-ordinates communications across the government initiatives.

3:10

Today we spoke in the press about the substantial increase in communications spending across all government departments and the surprise, frankly, that there was a 55 per cent increase in communications from this government, taking all of the departments into consideration. One has to wonder how that is being co-ordinated by the Public Affairs Bureau, why the substantial increase in these departments, to what extent there may be duplication, and especially when we see the very high number of public dollars going into the Public Affairs Bureau, how it could be justified that this government needs so much to communicate to Albertans that it's doing a good job. Those are fundamental questions that I'm being asked and that I have also.

The Premier needs also to address the question of how it is that in his department 40 per cent of the entire budget is allocated to the Public Affairs Bureau. Including the branding campaign, of course, that comes up to \$25 million. With respect to the total amount going through other government ministries on communications, we identified \$15.5 million, which does not include the Executive Council, does not include housing, Municipal Affairs, and Service Alberta. So the total, then, for communications, including Executive Council, is \$38,600,000, clearly a staggering fee for communicating to Albertans about the day-to-day activities of their government.

In the two years 2007-08 to 2009-10 the communications throughout government increased 55 per cent, as I indicated, and throughout the rest of government ministries a total of at least \$15 million is spent on communications, according to the line items in 2009-2010 government estimates. How does the Premier explain the need to be spending a total, then, of \$39 million on communications which in many cases must be duplicating some of what's happening in his Public Affairs Bureau? On the other hand, addressing the office of the Premier, only \$11 million assisting in policy planning and development. There seems to be an imbalance there. One has to raise the question about whether image becomes more important than substance when so much is dedicated to public communications. Has the Premier considered or done a value-for-money audit in the Public Affairs Bureau?

We could maybe leave those questions and ask for your responses before we move on to the other changes.

The Chair: Hon. member, do you wish to combine the 10 minutes of yours with 10 minutes of our Premier's, 20 minutes together between the two?

Dr. Swann: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you. There's no doubt that the role of this Legislature is to carefully examine the budgets of all the ministries. These are public dollars, and I can assure the taxpaying

public that we will apply discipline to spending all the money that comes to a vote before this House very prudently and carefully.

With respect to the comparison, I think, made by the hon. leader to other provinces, the province of British Columbia has \$28.8 million in their Public Affairs Bureau – I believe that was last year's figure – and the FTE count is 223.

The increase that was mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition – I think he talked about a 50 per cent increase. I have a copy of the government of Alberta communications budget that was put out by the director of communications for the Alberta Liberal caucus. Well, if you look at the PAB communications budget – now, this is excluding the branding initiative; just take the branding initiative out – the '07-08 actuals were \$12,528,000. The '08-09 forecast was \$13,083,000. That was an increase of \$555,000, which is a 4.4 per cent increase. The '08-09 forecast was \$13,083,000, and the '09-10 estimate is \$13,051,000, which is actually a decrease of 0.2 per cent. So we're relatively holding our own. Again, that's excluding the branding initiative.

With the government communications budget, excluding the branding initiative, '07-08 actuals were \$24,867,000. The '08-09 forecast was \$27,747,000, which is an increase of \$2.8 million, an 11.6 per cent increase. Now, for this coming budget the estimate is \$28,622,000. The '08-09 forecast was \$27,747,000, which is an increase of \$875,000, which is actually a 3.2 per cent increase. This is keeping in line with what was established as the increase in budget through consultation with various business, community, not-for-profit agencies, Albertans that said, "Keep your increases to the rate of inflation plus growth in population," which is about that 3.7 per cent.

The majority of the increase is in the branding initiative. That's an additional \$5 million for this year. We are going to pursue getting Alberta's story out, as I said before, not only within Alberta but within Canada and the North American continent, and we will do it internationally. We depend on exports of our products to other countries, and we've got to get the correct information, talk about what Alberta has in advantage and the fact that we want to do business with as many countries as we can.

Of all of that Albertans produce, 60 per cent of it is exported outside of Alberta. Ninety per cent of that goes to one country. We do a lot of business with the United States. Given the fact that the Americans are really reeling from this economic downturn, we have to do whatever we can to find new markets. I don't want to tie the future of this province to one country in terms of trade, even though we have a very, very good trade agreement with the United States. As a matter of fact, the state of California is our largest trading partner within the United States, and of course that state is going through some exceptional economic issues given just a huge budget deficit. I think it's something like \$85 billion. So some of our markets are at stake, and we've got to get the correct information out.

Is there a lot to communicate? Yes, there is. We have been very active as a government since December '06. This Legislature has worked very hard. We've made a lot of policy changes. A lot of bills went through the House. New programs were introduced. Whenever there's a new program introduced, whether it be for seniors, whether it be for a school board, for any Albertan, the onus is on government to get the information out through media, whether it be regular media, mail-outs to those parties that benefit from a program change. It's important to have that two-way communication.

3:20

This year we will expand our communication to new technologies. I firmly believe, this government believes, that we have to communi-

cate through a lot of the social media because a lot of Albertans are getting their information from, you know, maybe blogging, Twitter, Flickr, and whatever else is out there. That's an important demographic of Albertans, and this is one way of communicating with them.

That, I think, will capture the increase in this budget. Once again, I will not apologize nor will I back down from the need to further extend our branding initiative internationally. The world is changing. Most economists are saying that the GDP of the United States will decrease compared to the world GDP. If that's the general trend, then let's not just sit back here and hope that things will recover. We've got to be aggressive and seek those international markets, really, for all sectors – energy, agriculture, forestry – and invite people to visit our province in tourism and also invite people from around the world to invest in this great province of Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Council for Economic Strategy stated that one of the main reasons for the \$6 million increase for the fiscal plan included \$5 million for the branding initiative. I'd be very interested to hear what the minister is receiving in terms of economic planning, counsel, and support. Who's being hired to do what? What kind of deliverables? Why, in fact, are they needed beyond the existing ministries that support our planning in this government, at a very hefty price tag; that is, including those related to the ministries of Finance, Treasury Board, and Executive Council itself? How does value for money get translated there?

Especially when we're in a time of real economic constraint, I think Albertans want to know that we're using every means possible within the resources we've already been given to provide the leadership, the planning, and the initiatives that we have begun and have committed to. So if the Premier could enlighten us a bit about who's on the council, something about what the fees are that are being provided, and what kind of deliverables we can expect from that, that would be helpful.

Just jumping back briefly to the branding initiative, it would be interesting to know whether we're using provincial resources, provincial staff, provincial companies to do the branding initiatives, if you could enhance our understanding of that, and what kinds of communication we're going to be seeing from that branding initiative, where the money is actually going in terms of communicating through the Internet, television, what modalities that money is going to, and how, ultimately, we'll measure the impact of that branding initiative.

People who are losing their jobs, people who are finding their medical services delisted, people who are struggling are really raising important questions about whether we're managing their resources in the public interest or whether there are some other agendas that are influencing our spending decisions and that, in fact, it will be very difficult to measure the impacts of this branding within this administration's time frame and, therefore, hold them accountable. Some indicators of success would be welcome.

I'll take my seat and allow the Premier to speak.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. With respect to trying to find a balance in government on the expenditure side, health, education, research, technology, innovation are very important as we move to a knowledge-based economy. Will it happen over 10 years? No. Will we get there in 20? We'll be closer to achieving our goals in 20

years. Certainly, in 30 years, together with the city of Edmonton, the city of Calgary, other municipalities, our universities, that is the goal: to be leading edge in technology and research not only in Canada or in the United States or on the North American continent but in the world. That's the overall goal.

Many have said, you know, that there'll be a transition from fossil fuel to a knowledge-based economy. We know that. Will fossil fuel be around for the next 30 years? Yes. Will it be around for the next 50? Yes. There will be technologies introduced in terms of reducing carbon and dealing with some of the other issues tied to the environment. At the same time, while we move to a knowledge-based economy, we have to constantly create wealth. You don't pay for health or education just by reaching deeper in a pocket or running larger deficits or huge debt that at some time the country of Canada and various provinces have to pay for. That's not the way to go. So we are being affirmative, we're being proactive, and we are putting together, as I said before, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy in conjunction with the branding initiative.

Now, the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. As I said in my opening remarks, the first year was just working towards putting together the council. What we did was we had three committees. These were committees convened of city of Edmonton and area based people, Calgary and area based people, and then a committee of Albertans living in Grande Prairie to Lethbridge to other communities. They came from all walks of life – business, education, academic – obviously those that have a lot of experience internationally, that have rubbed shoulders with some of the world's brightest, not only in research and technology but in business, and have put a list together.

We're now working off of that list and inviting people to join the committee. There are over, well, 60 Albertans that . . .

The Chair: We've just completed the first 20-minute segment. Should we continue on with the second 20 minutes?

Mr. Stelmach: Okay.

These are, you know, 60 Albertans that got together and talked about: what areas of expertise should we concentrate on? This is all focused on the future, which is very important for our province. We are now in the recruiting phase. I'm pleasantly surprised that as of today we will have some of the world's leading experts in many areas that, when asked to join the committee, just jumped on the opportunity to work with and give Alberta advice. Once all of the candidates are called, then we will make the announcement, but at this time we're just working through it. There are a few more candidates to call. Sometimes it's difficult to reach them because they are in different corners of the world. They're very, very busy people. But I can tell you that they're going to bring tremendous expertise, counsel, and experience to the province of Alberta, again, setting the direction.

It will require some research dollars, some support. We're looking, probably, at two meetings a year, and then the information will come forward to the Premier. Then we'll work through our ministries with Albertans in terms of implementing the long-term plan.

I'm still pleasantly surprised that so many leading international experts know of Alberta. They want to help us and are fully aware of the growth in Alberta, our technology, and the investment that we've made. The candidates will dedicate a considerable amount of time because we're going to be asking some very tough questions leading to seeing how we can position Alberta in a relatively short period of time and transition it to a knowledge-based economy.

3:30

The council will consist of 12 members. We have Bob Fessenden, who is the deputy minister, and two staff members, and that's just the three people dedicated. We are looking at a balance between some Alberta born and raised and presently working in Alberta, looking across Canada, the North American continent, and also around the world. We're trying for, you know, maybe four, four, and four, whatever works out. We'd like to have a good contingent, a sample of people that have done very well in different countries, different businesses, especially in high tech, those that have even brought major companies from near bankruptcy to doing very well in the world using technology, investing in research and innovation.

The additional funding requested for remuneration for council members: we haven't decided what it will be; you know, so much per meeting. Most of the costs would be, I assume, in travel because many will be travelling some great distance to do work here in Alberta. It is fees for consultation, advice, and support. The remuneration for council members will follow the guidelines that we laid out in the public agencies governance framework, which is a framework that was supported here in the House.

With respect to the brand campaign there were questions raised on the purpose of the brand campaign and the timing. You know, if you're in business and if your revenue stream is diminished, then some people pull back. Of course, good business leaders look at how they can grow their revenue stream and grow their business at a time when many would look at it as a disincentive. In this particular case we're looking at it as a tremendous opportunity.

The opening comments that I delivered covered the intent, but with respect to the website the brand belongs to Albertans, and it's albertabrand.com. The site provides tools to Albertans so that they, too, can help tell Alberta's story around the world. Now, in the first two weeks following the launch of the brand, there were nearly 40,000 visits. Actually, updated as of March 26, there have been 47,000 visits to albertabrand.com, 11,000 viewings of the video, which is quite outstanding. In fact, this morning the Edmonton Real Estate Forum ran the video twice, and we had guests here from different parts of Canada. There were five Alberta stories selected to be posted on the site, 55 Alberta photos posted, and 37 requests to sign up as ambassadors. Seventy per cent of visitors to albertabrand.com were within Canada, 20 per cent from the United States, and 10 per cent were from outside of North America. The site has had visits from 111 countries.

The government of Alberta website stats. The websites are increasingly used by Albertans, Canadians, and international audiences to find information. In '08-09 the main website had 7.6 million visits, up from 6.3 million in '07-08. That's almost 21,000 visits per day. Satisfaction with the main website is at about 65 per cent, and usefulness of the information is at 85.4 per cent, and those are '07-08 figures.

Now, I made some comments with respect to social media and some of the stats. Use of social media continues to grow in Alberta but also amongst Canadians. We know that men and women use the Internet equally. Alberta at 85 per cent has the third-highest Internet penetration in Canada, just behind B.C. at 90 per cent and Ontario at 89 per cent, and the source for this, of course, is Ipsos-Reid. Two-thirds of online Canadians now have high-speed Internet access, and an additional 1 in 5 have high-speed light service. Dial-up users continue to decline, now accounting for only about 12 per cent of online Canadians.

Since 2006 there has been an upward trend of the older generation of Canadians, 55-plus years old, getting online, with the average age being 51 years old. Sixty-five per cent of online Canadians have visited Facebook, 47 per cent have visited Wikipedia, more than

have visited the Yellow Pages. I didn't even know that myself. Maybe the book is too heavy to hold. Thirty-five per cent have visited Canoe, 32 per cent have visited CTV, 24 per cent have visited CBC, and 20 per cent have visited the Canwest news site. Again, the sources are not the government but comScore Media Metrix and others that follow these sorts of things.

I think that gives us a bit of an idea of the value of the social media and how it is growing in popularity, and it's incumbent that we do use the social media.

Now, with respect to the branding initiative and using the advertising, in the last week of March we ran a TV, radio, print, and online advertising campaign across Alberta to show Albertans the brand and how it will be used to promote the province. The cost of that campaign was about \$460,000. It's all part of the overall budget for Public Affairs. As I said before, we'll continue to do whatever we can to get Alberta's story out internationally.

The Chair: Hon. member, before I recognize you to speak further, may I just take a moment here to refresh our memory about the new process here. All members should be reminded that the vote on the estimates will be deferred until we are in Committee of Supply on May 7. Any amendment moved during the committee consideration of the estimates will also be deferred until we are in Committee of Supply on that date.

Also, the process today is that any member who wishes to speak has 10 minutes, but if you want to combine the 10 minutes with the Premier, you have 20 minutes in total. There's a minimum two hours of debate on the estimates of Executive Council.

With that, I would say that we can proceed. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Well, clearly, the devil is in the details. It's very hard to get details on some of the spending decisions, and it's certainly difficult to get evaluative frameworks reported. I'm wondering if the Premier will be giving details about this economic council: who is on it and the kinds of salaries they're getting and some of the specifics of the deliverables that are being expected. Albertans want to know that we're getting value for money. That's an increasingly pressing concern in these times.

I'll move on to bonuses and ask the Premier a number of questions around this through Executive Council. For the 2008-09 fiscal year the government will pay out \$40 million in bonuses to senior-level ministry officials. We do know that the \$40 million pool for bonuses is allocated to 6,100 civil servants. We want to make sure that our emphasis is not on all of those civil servants but on the high-level ministry officials – deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers – those who are receiving substantial bonuses.

3:40

Will the Premier tell Albertans what role the Deputy Minister of Executive Council plays in determining the bonuses given out in the 2008-09 fiscal year? Will he tell us what role the Premier's office played in evaluating the deputy ministers and the bonuses they received? Will the Premier provide and table the criteria used for determining bonuses for deputy ministers and other senior officials?

Page 10 of the fiscal plan states that there were \$215 million found through a value review. Will the Premier give details of what that entailed? Will he acknowledge that by cutting executive bonuses, that would have made a significant impact, roughly 20 per cent of that amount?

Mr. Stelmach: On the achievement bonuses the budget that was allocated was \$40 million. This is a process that was started a

number of years ago. It was a three-member committee that brought recommendations to the Premier of the day, my predecessor, and we have followed that process to this last fiscal year, that ended March 31 of '09. From April 1 of '09 on the bonuses have been suspended, and it's, again, in keeping with the fact that our revenue has diminished dramatically and that we're starting a new fiscal year and that it's, you know, roughly \$40 million that can go to other needs within the budget.

For the previous year we're being fair with all, whether it be out of scope, which is those that are not in a union, in management positions, or those in a union. We've pretty well served notice that next year we're going to work together and see how we can ensure that within our three-year business plan, the deficit budget that we rolled out this year and into next year, the money that we have set aside in a savings account, the \$17 billion, we can stretch it out and meet the needs of Albertans yet ensure that on the operational side, not on the capital side but on the operational side, we don't go to the bank to borrow.

I'm proud. We're the only jurisdiction in North America that has set this much money aside for times such as these. You know, we learned from the past. The last time that we had a serious recession, Alberta was really the whipping province during that time. We had high interest rates. Oil and gas prices diminished dramatically. We had a federal government policy that was hostile to Alberta, to western Canada. Times are different. We have historically low interest rates. We have international trade agreements that are allowing us more trade with other countries. We have, you know, our free trade agreement with the United States, which has really served us well over the period of time. We also have two emerging economies, China and India, that were not there in the early '80s, that even with depressed economic growth are still estimating their growth at about 5 per cent. So that's good news for the province of Alberta.

The other is that Alberta is recognized internationally now more than ever, especially with respect to our expertise in energy technology. We've attracted some of the world's best to our universities, and that in itself has created a good ambassador program for us. Of course, as I said, the program has been suspended. We will work through, you know, the difficult decisions over the next year, but we will look to constantly finding additional dollars in the budget without significantly disrupting any of the programs.

Now, with respect to the bonus, just for the record, the '08-09 budget, the previous budget, was around \$40 million. These bonuses are taxable income. They're not pensionable earnings. There are nearly 27,000 employees in the Alberta public service. The management group – that means all levels – is around 4,000, and then the opted out and excluded employees number about 2,100, so, as the hon. leader said, about 6,100 individuals.

Key numbers from the corporate demographics report: average age of the Alberta public service employee is 46; average age of the entire management group is 50. Now, ministers' executive assistants were also eligible for the achievement bonus, and that as well has been terminated. The median achievement bonus provided last year, for '07-08, was around \$5,300 individually. There was a formula that was used.

How was the bonus established? A minister sits down with the deputy of the Executive Council. The minister has, you know, looked at whatever the mandate for the deputy and for the management is. How did they perform? Was the departmental budget in line? Was it balanced? How did the deputy minister and his staff – you know, the ADMs and executive directors – move public policy, the decisions that were made in this House? All that goes into deciding what the bonus was.

Where are we compared to others? My chief deputy has completed all performance appraisals of all deputy ministers for fiscal '08-09, reviewing the targets that they achieved in their individual performance bonuses. The achievement bonus: of the 10 provinces in Canada eight other provinces offer an achievement bonus program, four are awarding the full allocation, one reduced allocation, and three provinces have not yet made the determination.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the Premier. I wonder if it would be possible for the Premier to table some of the evaluative comments about these individuals. Clearly, one would be surprised if the deputy minister of health received a bonus, given the chaos that our health system is in. One would have to wonder if Albertans would support that kind of decision. What is the evidence that we're actually following these guidelines? I think Albertans have a right to know where \$40 million is going and that these were objective evaluations.

The Chair: We are now on the last 20-minute period for the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A couple of other questions come through the '07-08 annual report of Executive Council and relate to page 10 of the annual report, showing that there were 68 trade missions made. I guess the question around that is: how much money was spent on these 68 trade missions, and how would Albertans evaluate that this was money well spent? Do we have measures of evaluation of these trade missions? Can we look at details of where the money was spent? That's obviously a big issue for Albertans, to know on individual trips where the money went. We've heard lots of rumours about high-flying spending and side trips. I think Albertans need to know more about the details of that kind of activity.

Page 29 of the report shows that accommodation costs of the Public Affairs Bureau were \$488,000 for the year ended March 31, '08, an increase of almost \$170,000 from 2007, a 53 per cent, in fact, increase. Perhaps the Premier could comment on that further, those two issues.

3:50

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. In keeping with openness and transparency, every time a minister or an MLA on the government side that may be asked to represent a minister travels, the purpose of the trip, the expenses are posted online. There's also a report at the end of every mission in terms of the accomplishments, whom the minister talked to, what meetings were held. We will continue to be in the face of many decision-makers not only on this continent but around the world as often as we can.

I'll give you an example. You know, we talk about transparency. On the one little, quick jaunt to Houston, Texas, I was there with two other Premiers: Premier Gary Doer, Premier Brad Wall, and myself. Very clearly in the news release we said that we were going to cohost – cohost – a luncheon at NAPE, which is a large North American petroleum congress, where Premier Wall and I spoke. Premier Wall spoke just before me. I believe they signed their declaration a few minutes before we did, incorporating the province of Alberta in 1905, although I believe they held their parade three days later. But he spoke first; I followed. There were about 1,200 people in the audience.

Coming back to Alberta, I find that the cost of the cohosting of that luncheon was attached to my plane flight. Talk about stories.

Sure. One TV station in the middle of this province said, “Whoa, man, he must have flown executive class,” you know, just supposition. Just ask for the information if you couldn’t understand, which was clearly stated, that we actually cohosted a luncheon.

Is it necessary? You bet it’s necessary. The state of Texas, the province of Alberta, and the province of Saskatchewan are very similar: Alberta and Texas, major energy producers. By the way, a number of other similarities: Texas is the number one producer of wind energy in the United States; we are the number one wind energy producer in Canada, unsubsidized – okay? – which is also very important. We’re not going to hide the true cost of wind energy in the next generation’s bill. We pay for it today.

So is there transparency? Yes. Every trip is posted with all the expenses. How do you measure it? Well, I can tell you how I measure it. We went to the Western Governors’ conference. The Western Governors’ conference is held in perhaps an auditorium about as big as this, at least, in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The media and the lobbyists, 250 people, sitting in the audience. In public, well, yeah, we’re all going to be joining the western climate change initiatives; we’re all partners. We pat each other on the back. Yeah, we’re all friends. Behind closed doors all of a sudden, oh, hmm, a little different story. Carbon footprint? Yeah, well, we do have real issues with carbon from coal-fired electricity generation. Oh, by the way, we’ll be partners. We’ll sign on the western climate change initiative, but just exclude our domestic coal-fired, and we’re partners. We’ll join this big, you know, initiative across the North American continent.

That’s the kind of information you don’t get from the media. You’ve got to be there in the room at the table. Unless we continue to build those relationships, we’re going to lose out in the clean energy dialogue. That’s why it’s imperative that we’re there – we will be on two committees – especially when it comes to a smart grid and also on carbon capture and storage. We’ve got to get there to make sure that the correct information goes to the decision-makers in the United States.

Whatever you may hear from those who want to detract from Alberta, the big issue for us in Alberta is that coal-fired electro-generation is the major – major – producer of carbon. If we don’t get a fair agreement with the Americans, you know what’s going to happen? You and I are going to be paying more for electricity. It’s going to diminish global competitiveness, which leads to less manufacturing and less jobs. That’s the story we’ve got to get out. That’s why we’ve got to be there, and we will continue to be there no matter how we issue in terms of performance. I tell you, performance is how we’re going to get our place at the table to ensure that we protect Alberta’s interests not only today but well into the future. And that’s a role of the Premier.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. That was quite a speech from a government that first denied climate change, then ridiculed it, and now pretends to be acting seriously on climate change. If this government was serious about climate change, of course, the next coal-fired power plant would have carbon capture required for it, the Keephills 3. Instead, they’ve permitted it without any carbon capture and storage. That’s clearly a government that’s waiting to be dragged into the 21st century on energy and environmental initiatives.

Shifting gears, then, to Executive Council’s responsibility through strategies 1.2 and 1.3, to assist policy development. Can the Premier explain what’s happened in the health care system and how his ministry has influenced some of the policy changes in the health care

system, including the kinds of quality and access and cost-effectiveness questions that have been raised for over a decade now? In a ministry that continues to restructure as opposed to actually addressing the fundamental imbalance in the health system, focusing on high-tech, specialized medicine and neglecting primary care, family physicians, nursing care in the home, prevention, is it any wonder that our system is in such chaos when we have neglected the very foundations of the health system and primary care? I’d be very interested in hearing the Premier’s comments on how his Executive Council has guided or influenced the health ministry throughout this chaotic restructuring.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Chairman, I do have to push back a bit on the opening comments made in this last exchange by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I think it is absolutely ridiculous for a fellow Albertan to get up in this most public Assembly and accuse the government of denying climate change, dragging its feet, and not doing anything about it to protect the future health of the next generation. That is absolutely ridiculous. In fact, Alberta was the first jurisdiction to put legislation in, not just the year before but in the very early ’90s, to prepare for what was coming – the only jurisdiction to do it. Secondly, first jurisdiction in North America and I believe the only one today to actually put legislation in place that limits carbon production out of major industrial emitters. We actually were the first to put a fee, a levy, on carbon; the one and only in North America and in the world to make such a sizable investment in carbon capture and storage, \$2 billion for three and a half million people. That is an investment in the future, and it’s happening here in Alberta.

When people say, “Well, why are you spending that much money on branding?” well, what are we working against? We’re working the very same good news that Alberta has to share with other people around the world right here in this Assembly – right here. So we will do whatever we can. I can tell you that we will represent Albertans extremely well, not hiding behind, saying: oh, you know, maybe next year we’ll do something or the year after. We’re going to be very aggressive and get on top of this policy initiative and work with the federal government and with the Americans to get it right. Just to say that, you know, you could pollute the same amount – just pollute the same amount – but by the way, send a little money to the next country; send it overseas; we’ll be okay: what nonsense. Albertans realize that. By the way, they also realize the nonsense of giving these credits, money, to the very same group of bandits that got us into this international economic situation. A lack of transparency. They want to go down that same path. Yes, we do have to spend a lot of money to get the correct information out, and we will work very hard to do it, Mr. Chairman.

4:00

Now, with respect to health, as we said in the last campaign, just completed in March of last year, we are going to be working with all health care providers to find the efficiencies and the effectiveness in the system. I agree. Many times the hon. leader has said: “We have enough money in health. We don’t need any more. We’re spending a lot. How can we use that money more effectively?” He’s correct. We want to work with health care providers. How can we make every dollar count?

Secondly, how can we sustain the system for the next generation? It is a good system. You know, this afternoon one of the MLAs, the leader of the third party, asked me a question about the value of publicly funded health care. Well, I think we all, depending on our age, have stories of how families were affected prior to the Canada Health Act, prior to when the public, the taxpayer, paid for a lot of

the services. How many people suffering from cancer had to leave the province? Actually, some even went to the Mayo Clinic to receive help. In our community some even put their land up for sale to pay for their loved one to be treated. We're not going back there, but neither do we want to put the next generation in that same predicament. That's why we have to work together. We have something we can cherish. We value it. Rather than pointing fingers at each other and accusing each other, let's work together.

This is the time to do it. Our medical profession realizes that there's new technology coming, new drugs. There's such pressure. Yes, we need more family docs. You know, we have to show a kind of respect for the nurses, for all health care providers, everybody in the system because they are working hard. There's no doubt about it. As technology increases, costs are going to go up. How do you look someone in the eye, perhaps someone with a rare disease, and say: well, yeah, technology is here, but you won't get that drug because we're not going to pay for it. I don't think anybody wants to deliver that kind of a life sentence. That's why we have to work collectively. It's clearly identified in the position we took as a party going into the last election. We hold true to what we said there, and we'll continue to work together.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Page 180 of the budget documents indicates that under communications for Alberta Environment there was a 100 per cent increase this year. I guess one has to wonder what this was related to and how it connects to the Public Affairs Bureau's communications budget. How does the public make sense of all these individual expenditures on communications? How do we understand the value of this, and how can we be reassured that we're not getting tremendous redundancy in all these communications budgets? Can the Premier give us some reassurance about that?

Mr. Stelmach: Communication is important. With respect to Environment we have done a lot over the last couple of years. A lot has happened in the province of Alberta. There's a lot of communication to be made with respect to the issue of climate change, the issue of studies that we're doing in Alberta, cumulative environmental impacts. In fact, that's another first. We still continue to be the only jurisdiction in Canada to do that, both in Fort McMurray and in the Fort Saskatchewan area, the Industrial Heartland. All of these require a considerable amount of communication. Again, it's with respect to environment. In terms of redundancy I need clarification because this is all environment-related, anything to do with environment. We won't be spending, you know, dollars in communication in Education to communicate an environmental issue.

I'd say that we've also made some structural changes, and Public Affairs has taken on a lot of the additional work, the correspondence in many of the ministries, especially Environment. There was just a lot of action over the last couple of years, and we've got a lot more to do in that department. Just to step back, even the land-use framework: again, the only jurisdiction to put that in place. The bill will be going before this House. Albertans said: "We want a plan. We want to protect our rich black soil. We want to ensure that we grow up instead of, you know, urban sprawl." All of those issues of transit corridors for transportation, especially light rail or high-speed rail. We are working on that plan. We are listening to Albertans very clearly, and we're developing.

I know there's a lot to communicate, and every time you communicate, you have to buy space. You either buy it in a paper or on TV. All of that has gotten to be pretty expensive, but it's the only

way of getting the information out to those that value it the most or benefit from it.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Just in summing up then, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of Albertans, I guess there are unanswered questions about why at a critical economic time in our history this government is spending 55 per cent more on communications than it was last year. When real people are losing jobs, when real people are raising basic questions about what's happening to their public dollars, when basic services are being cut, how are Albertans to interpret a government that invests 55 per cent more across the board in communications instead of providing basic services? I'd like to hear the Premier's comments on that.

Mr. Stelmach: Again, I don't want to read into the record the actual increases because I gave the increase for PAB and government of Alberta communications, excluding the branding. For this coming year it'll be a decrease of 0.2 per cent, excluding the branding initiative. The government of Alberta communications budgets, excluding the branding initiative, will be 3.2 per cent on, let's say, a \$27.7 million budget. It's an increase of \$875,000, which is roughly a 3.2 per cent increase.

As I said, our goal was to keep the overall government expenditures below 3.7 per cent. Some ministries got a zero per cent increase, some a modest increase of 2 to 3 per cent, and Health got the largest increase, at 4.6 per cent.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess Albertans would like to know that the Premier is committed to doing an audit of our communications in Alberta since we're spending so many public dollars on communicating this government's message to the people. Will the Premier commit to doing a value-for-money audit of communications across the different ministries, including the Public Affairs Bureau?

The Chair: We have concluded the first hour for the Official Opposition.

Now I would like to recognize the leader of the third party. You have a choice of 10 minutes or 20 minutes combined with our Premier.

Mr. Mason: I would hope we can just go back and forth.

The Chair: So we'll take 20 minutes in combination?

Mr. Mason: Yes. If the Premier can answer the questions in a relatively concise form, I think that would work very well.

The Chair: Mr. Premier, would you agree with the 20 minutes?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, to the Premier: I'd like to get back to just exchanging a little bit of information and so on. I promise at the end I'll make a bit of a rousing speech so he can make a bit of a rousing speech back, but right now I'd really just like to pick his brain a little bit about some matters.

The first question I have is about the new brand. I don't know if I actually got fond of the Alberta Advantage as a slogan for the

province. It used to drive me a little crazy, but I sort of got used to it. I'm just wondering why the government decided that this was the right time. What was it about the old brand, or the Alberta advantage, that was no longer meeting the needs of the province? What kind of thinking went into the decision to move towards a new brand? What objectives does the Premier feel we will be able to meet through the new brand?

4:10

Mr. Stelmach: I believe I gave a fairly detailed answer earlier. Now more than ever, as I said before in my opening comments, it's important that we promote Alberta. Yes, for a period of time the Alberta advantage was a nice little slogan to use, but this is more than a slogan. This is about promoting Alberta, the many advantages that we have in Alberta: quality of life, technology, health, education, the entrepreneurial attitude, the diversity of Alberta.

In the last five years we've seen Alberta grow by 350,000. We have people coming here from many corners of the world. We have, I believe, the most diverse caucus in government of any province in Canada, and that speaks well for the people of Alberta. It also speaks well for those that have come to the province of Alberta and have worked through, established businesses, done well in education and so many other fields and become important members of their community and have won the respect of their constituents and have the distinct honour of sitting in this House. That's a good-news story. That's what we'd like to tell.

You know, sometimes in the past we've heard that, well, Alberta has no culture. In fact, we have a very good culture policy. If you compare, as I do, with other Premiers, they are surprised to hear what we have to offer.

I'm just very passionate about the province of Alberta. The government is passionate, Albertans are passionate, and we have a good story to tell. We have a responsibility to tell it and not allow others, perhaps, to tell something about Alberta that is wrong, misleading. That's why we're going to be very, very aggressive.

Is this the time to do it? Absolutely. The opportunity is here. Many people around the world are looking for investment opportunities. They want to know more about Alberta. In fact, the few missions that I've taken to Europe clearly identified that we have a lot of work to do.

You know, it's interesting. We were in London, met with a number of decision-makers, and then were in The Hague. We had a half-hour meeting with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, which was quite outstanding simply because usually Prime Ministers meet with Prime Ministers. But Prime Minister Jan Balkenende was here in Alberta and learned a lot about our province. We reciprocated the visit, and we had a good discussion.

When we were in Munich, we had a meeting with five very high-profile ministers in the Bavarian government. It is interesting that most of the questions – it was quite a long meeting; it was about two hours – centred on Alberta's quality of education and our very outstanding achievement levels in secondary and postsecondary, but especially in secondary, and the fact that we're competing with the world's best. What is it that we do in Alberta that we stand either at or above many of the other jurisdictions? That tells us that there is a real hunger, a thirst for more information, and that's the kind of information we have to get out there. As we move to a knowledge-based economy, we do want to attract the world's best. We want to partner with the world's best universities and their research and technology and attract the people here.

Another visit was to the Richard E. Smalley institute in Houston, a nanotechnology institute, and I can tell you that I shared a lot of pride with our contingent when the professor at Richard E. Smalley

institute at Rice University spoke so highly of Alberta, recognizing Alberta for leading-edge technology in nanotechnology. The world's most powerful microscope is here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, he said. That tells us, again, that we have this opportunity to work together and slowly start to remove these barriers to information, to just work together. It's really towards one common goal, and that's improving the quality of life not only for this generation but generations to come. That's why the branding initiative.

I know that for a while there, you know, the opposition said: it's all got to do with the oil sands. Well, there's more to Alberta than the oil sands although the oil sands, we found out now, are very important, integral to the overall engine of Canada's prosperity.

There is more good news, especially in health, education, and R and D. That's why we're going to again continue with the branding initiative to get the word out. I know that our school boards are excited, that our universities are excited. We have so many people inquiring as to how they can use the new brand in their letterheads, in their communication with their staff, with their business partners and other countries, so that speaks well for the pride that we all share as Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, if the Premier is going to provide responses of that length to all my questions, I'm certainly not going to get through them. So I'm just going to list my questions, and the Premier can respond in the remaining time or provide me later with the answers in written form.

I'd like to know a little bit more about the Public Affairs Bureau, which is identified in the budget documents as having 118 full-time equivalents. I'd like to know what other communications personnel in the government are attached to individual departments in addition to that and what that has been over the last year as well as this budget year. I'd like to know about the polling activities of the Public Affairs Bureau. I would like to know what polls the Public Affairs Bureau has undertaken in the last year, what the firms were. I would like that to include information with respect to other forms of public opinion research – for example, focus groups, that sort of thing – as well as other forms of public consultation, what the subjects of these polls were, and the amounts that were paid to the firms that did them.

I would like to know about the budget for the Lieutenant Governor. The budget documents indicate that the Lieutenant Governor's administration and communications are handled by Executive Council, so I would like to know in more detail what that is, how much the amounts are, and what the changes are from last year. I would also like to know the status of the Lieutenant Governor's residence and what the government intends to do with respect to that.

If the Premier can respond to those questions, I would appreciate it. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4:20

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. Okay. Where did we leave off? A hundred and eighteen FTEs: they're remaining the same. We're not growing the FTEs in Executive Council. We'll get a breakdown for every one; we'll put that in a letter for you. It's 118 FTEs, 72 professional communications staff to communications branches in the departments. Some departments choose to augment the number of professional staff to meet additional communications needs, but 72 of the 118 are assigned.

Now, the Lieutenant Governor's budget for '08-09 was \$517,000, for '09-10 is \$511,000, so it's a \$6,000 reduction. Four FTEs are

assigned to the Lieutenant Governor, three support and one communications.

Okay. We'll break down the Public Affairs Bureau. Of the 118 FTEs, 87 FTEs are corporate communications staff. That's to plan and implement communications initiatives, provide a range of communications services in ministries, co-ordinate government communications for major initiatives and during public emergencies, support internal government communications, and provide advertising and corporate identity co-ordination. Fifteen are communications support services, who provide website management, media monitoring, news release distribution, news conference technical support, and IT co-ordination services. Thirteen of the 118 are corporate services staff managing human resources, finance, administrative, business planning, annual reports, records management, and FOIP, including the managing director's office. Three FTEs are assigned to the branding initiative.

Public opinion research is important. It's part of a two-way dialogue with the government and Albertans. It's important to listen to Albertans, understand their views. It helps plan the programs and set the priorities of the province's people. It also provides feedback. It helps us to gauge awareness, to see how well we're communicating, if the message is getting through to our citizens to ensure that they know what programs are available, how they can get in contact with service providers for various needs, again, as I say, whether they're in the seniors' department or children's services. It's really with respect to any department that's offering services.

We also post our research findings on the government of Alberta website. It's important that Albertans see what others are saying about specific issues, and that really improves the two-way dialogue with Albertans. That's one way of gauging how the programs are responding to needs and whether we're communicating enough so that all people are aware of what programs are important to them.

We are setting up a quarterly trending study, which will help avoid duplication or overlap in research. This study is estimated to cost about \$250,000 in '09-10. We've also asked various individuals about the budget. There was an expenditure there of \$64,000 just to gauge how people are responding, if it's meeting some of the many priorities of Albertans in different walks of life. Now, the research firms that are selected are selected through a very open, fair, transparent process. Again, it has to comply with the government's purchasing guidelines, and we will always continue to do that.

I think there was a question there on focus groups. Focus groups are really part of the opinion. You know, you just select Albertans at random, put them into a setting, a room really, and ask them certain questions. That really gives us kind of a general trend to see if we are communicating the right way, if the message is getting through, and if we are responding to Albertans' priorities.

That's as short and concise an answer as I can give since he was criticizing me that I was too long in my answers.

Mr. Mason: No offence, Mr. Chairman, but the first answer was pretty long.

The next question I have is: to what degree have functions of the Public Affairs Bureau that have previously been done in-house been contracted out, and what are the number and extent of the contracts that have been let? I'd like to know as well which firms have received contracts for that. I hope the Premier would correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm assuming that the line item for the Public Affairs Bureau does include those contracts. If not, then I'd like to know where we could find it.

I'll just end with the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy. Now, in last year's estimates debate we heard that there would be two new full-time equivalent positions established related to the

Council for Economic Strategy, but it doesn't have a line item in the budget. There will probably be some repetition with the questions of the Leader of the Official Opposition, but my questions are: what's the specific budget for the council, and who sits on the council? I'd like to know whether or not people from the Legislature, MLAs, will sit on the council.

If the Premier can answer those questions and I have a little bit of time left over, I'll try and get things heated up a little bit, and we can have a little debate.

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to anybody that has a contract, people or a firm hired by Public Affairs, we'll get that to the hon. member. We don't have it itemized in the briefing notes here, but we will definitely get that. All hiring is done according to the government process. It has to be fair and transparent. I believe also that the Auditor has reviewed the purchasing process. The standing contract for media buy: these are legal tender ads. They're also recruitment ads for people. That goes through a tendering process, and we try to get the best value.

If it's any contract over \$10,000, it's in the blue book, and of course we've now put that blue book online. You don't have to wait till year-end. I don't know whether the blue book is blue, but I do remember that before I was elected into this Legislature, it was something that a lot of people brought with themselves to the local coffee shop to see if their neighbour was in the blue book and maybe got a fuel tax rebate – at that time I think we had the Crow offset program – you know, different things.

The budget for the Premier's Council for Economic Strategy, of course, in '08-09 was \$1 million. This year, because we're actually working with the council on implementation, the budget is \$2 million for '09-10, and it's two full-time equivalents.

The Lieutenant Governor's residence: those costs are in Infrastructure's budget.

4:30

The Chair: Well, that finishes the period for the opposition. Now we go back and forth with other members. I would like to first recognize the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Premier in one of his responses to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition alluded to the increased role that the social media are playing and are likely to play even more in the future. The Premier also referred to the fact that much of the wealth and many of the jobs in the province of Alberta are a direct result of the fact that we export so much of what we produce. I think those two observations are spot-on.

We do see communications changing, particularly with respect to younger people, who are now increasingly turning away from the old, traditional media, the newspapers. Even what we used to consider as the modern and most effective way of communicating, the television, is changing and becoming less and less important in the delivery of news and content. We see that old, established, and famous newspapers like *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and whatnot are bordering on the edge of failure. Our *National Post* is losing money. I think that we can see, Premier, as you alluded to, the fact that the media are changing. Here in Canada we have Canwest Global media also in some financial trouble.

At the same time, we see exponential growth in the social media and the use of the Internet as ways of communicating and disseminating information. I wonder whether the Premier could elaborate on how the government might use some of these new communication technologies to get Alberta's message out there to Albertans and

also to those that are beyond the borders who might influence exports that we need so critically to maintain our lifestyle and our economy here in Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Excellent question. We've realized over the last year or two that we weren't communicating clearly about some of the challenges that Alberta has faced, especially – and I'll just pick a topic – on the environment. When you go to the schools, when you went on a few speaking engagements in Toronto and Montreal, the misinformation that is out there is astounding. Surprised to hear that it's younger people, those that don't take a lot of time to read a paper or, you know, watch the news at 6 o'clock or at 11 o'clock. They've got a gadget that they carry with themselves, and they just within seconds get the news whenever they have a few spare moments, hopefully not while they're driving on an Alberta highway. It is the social media, especially Twitter and Flickr.

I will confess that on some of the issues with respect to environment that happened, those people that were giving the incorrect message managed to get that message right around the world. There wasn't a lot of it in the papers, you know, the national papers or international papers; it was done through the social media. If we're going to get the correct message out there and correct the misinformation, we're going to have to use the same media. We're going to put a huge effort into that.

I know that last year I believe it was Sustainable Resource Development that set up a page of their own. They've actually managed to get information out to Albertans that were really interested in the changes in land use, with respect to watersheds, all of those things that the minister has undertaken to do.

Culture is another area. You know, perhaps we're not getting enough of the message out in terms of how culturally diverse we are: the various shows, the festivals in Alberta in every community. So many weren't aware of that because many of those that are interested, again, weren't picking it up in the news or in advertising in the paper.

Tourism. A lot of people go online. They'll spend days researching, listening to others that maybe have blogged about a really good experience, let's say, in the Fairmont hotel in Jasper or, you know, something that they found, some unique place in Alberta. That seems to really get across. We found out that a lot of the travel plans, especially from people from Britain, are based on either watching Alberta-based movies, the scenery, or through the social media. So we are going to pursue – again, I mentioned Flickr and Twitter, but there's YouTube and the government blog. I'm interested to see how it proceeds, being careful, of course, how we use it, but I think it's one excellent medium of getting the correct information out and dealing with some of the misinformation.

To give you an example, in working with various business communities but especially when we were in Toronto and in Montreal, when you are sitting down with the public there and you listen to them, the information that they got was misleading. It was totally wrong. We found out that they'd picked something up in a blog or perhaps the other social media, and we were absent from that. We weren't participating. Face to face, well, of course, you can correct some of the misinformation, but you can't meet face to face with everybody, nor does anybody have the time to do that, yet I know that through the proper use of blogging and more involvement in the social media, we will be able to communicate with a much broader, wider, range of Albertans.

The other reason, I firmly believe, is that we can encourage more participation in democracy by hearing more, generally, about what

younger Albertans have to say about what we're doing in the province of Alberta. Is the government on the right track; what are our policies? Did our policies align with their priorities, their values? You get, perhaps, the most honest answer through the social media, in many ways other than just letters to the editor. So we'll continue to do that.

Now, the government of Alberta blog is Your Alberta Blog, and I think that Environment is – what? – One Simple Act on Facebook and on YouTube. So we've started the process, and I encourage all Albertans to get involved.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just one follow-up question, if I could, to the Premier through the chair. With respect to the social media you mentioned counteracting some of the misinformation out there. I know that we are constantly encountering misinformation regarding the environmental impact of our oil sands, in particular. I wonder whether there is any way that we can tap into some of those groups that are specifically dealing with environmental issues and put our message out there and whether it could be co-ordinated with our rebranding effort in terms of showing that we are responsible environmentally with respect to our development of the oil sands and so on.

Mr. Stelmach: There is a tremendous opportunity to do that. In fact, I'll give you an example. When we were in London and met with a number of investment groups, I also met with *The Economist*. I think we had five or six editors in the room, and they were working off one set of information. Where they got it I don't know. It certainly wasn't from the Alberta government but, probably, from various groups, perhaps NGOs, that are very adept at getting their information out to not only their followers but out to people that may be just interested in what they have to say. The oil sands, for instance: 140,000 square kilometres of oil sands in the province of Alberta. Only 500 square kilometres are accessible through open pit mining. The rest will be all in situ. But they thought that all of this landscape will be disturbed and mined. You know, these are well-educated people. That's just one small sample of the misinformation.

4:40

The other was with respect to monitoring air quality. We monitor air quality in Fort McMurray 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Well, I can tell you that some of the groups had completely wrong information. When I told them that 98 per cent of the time the air quality in Fort McMurray was better than or equal to any major Canadian city, you know, there was a little bit of a surprise: "Well, we didn't know that you did that."

They didn't know that we've been monitoring water quality in the Athabasca River since 1971. Again, it's the information shared.

I have to share this with everyone. There's no doubt that in this economic downturn all Canadians – all Canadians – no matter where they live, now know the value of the economic contribution of Alberta's oil sands. But when we were in Montreal, there was an article in one of the papers that said that the Alberta oil sands threaten to pollute the Great Lakes. If you speak to Quebecers today, most of them think that maybe there's Alberta oil coming to Quebec. Well, not a drop of oil comes from Alberta. In fact, only about a third of Ontario's needs are met through Alberta production. Where do some of the refineries buy their oil from? Well, from Venezuela, Algeria, Nigeria. People that write editorials – okay? –

stating opinions, didn't know this. That's how important it is, again, whether it be the branding initiative, through visits face to face, but especially working through the social media.

It's not only Alberta's economy but Canada's economy that's focused on how well we can find that balance between energy production and the environment and the economy. Again, this economy that we've built in Alberta is supporting the rest of the Canadian economy. In fact, it was so nice to hear a visitor to Edmonton, that spoke at the Edmonton Real Estate Forum, thank Alberta for our contribution to equalization. Ontario now just became a have-not province and will be getting about \$358 million from equalization. That just gives you an idea of how quickly things have changed across the face of the country.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Premier for his detailed responses. I know that there are quite a number of other members that wish to take the floor, and I will yield my place to other members at this time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the Premier's participation here.

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like to share the 20 minutes?

Dr. Taft: Yes. I hope so. I'm assuming that we can be a bit conversational here. I'm also intending to keep my questions really brief so that we can cover quite a lot of material, and I hope that the Premier works with us all on that.

I have questions initially about the Public Affairs Bureau and their role in writing questions for question period for government members to ask and ministers to respond to. I'm wondering if the Public Affairs Bureau actually has a role in that process. I'm also wondering if the Public Affairs Bureau has a role in preparing all of the speaking notes that the government members bring to the committee meetings we have, like the standing policy committees, the Public Accounts Committee, and so on. I know that under the former Premier this came up, and I'm sure it's still the practice. I'm wondering: what's the role of the Public Affairs Bureau? How extensive are the resources they commit to that process? How is it handled?

Thank you.

Mr. Stelmach: Within the government caucus it's no different than in the Liberal caucus. We have research dollars assigned to each caucus based on the number of members in our caucus, and we use the capability of government caucus research, the department, to write speeches for individual members, provide research information, statistics that individual members can use.

Do Public Affairs Bureau members, especially directors of communication, spend time with ministers? Yes, they do because it's their role to communicate public policy, programs to Albertans. We've got to get that information out: changes in, let's say, benefits for a seniors' program or changes in health, whatever delivery program. We've made some changes in transportation. All those things have to be communicated to the individual citizen that requires that information. It is a difficult job, but we will continue to follow a process where we have research capabilities within individual caucuses.

Now, if there are major announcements, it would be like today. We did a major announcement on the community spirit program. It

was done at the YMCA. There the Public Affairs Bureau person, a staff member or the director, would be working with the minister providing information, maybe ideas in terms of the kind of questions that may be asked of the minister specific to their program. That's the involvement of the Public Affairs Bureau and also the involvement of a complete and separate department, which is our research branch within the government caucus.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the Premier's comments on that. I must express my concern with a process in which the Public Affairs Bureau and the Premier's office are so tightly and extensively integrated into, for example, the question-and-answer process even among government's own members, but it's a different approach.

Earlier the Premier referred to the line in the budget about 118 FTEs in the Public Affairs Bureau. I just sent over the staff lists to the Premier and his staff, and this is the government's own list dated January 30, 2009. It's titled communications branch staff and ministries, includes both PAB and ministry staff, and I'd think that there are about 220 names on this list. Well, frankly, I'm concerned when it comes to budgeting that the Public Affairs Bureau budget grossly understates the reach and resources of the Public Affairs Bureau because if I understand the situation correctly, Public Affairs Bureau staff are assigned out to each department; the department then pays for the staff, who report to that Public Affairs Bureau officer. So the expenditure on those staff is concealed in each department's budget, but in effect they are resources for the Public Affairs Bureau.

My concern as somebody debating a budget is that this budget may – maybe it doesn't, but my concern is that it may – disguise or, in fact, deliberately understate the size of the Public Affairs Bureau.

So would the Premier speak to the question, since he's in charge of the Public Affairs Bureau, of about how many Public Affairs Bureau staff are assigned to each department? Is it one or two per department? Is it most of these 221? How many people from the Public Affairs Bureau are assigned out to the departments?

4:50

Mr. Stelmach: In my previous answers I gave a full accounting of the 118 full-time equivalents. I also said that every department, any ministry, can supplement communications staff, some for, you know, just maintaining the website, some for publications from various ministries, because there is a lot of communication coming out of some departments, much more in Seniors, Health, Education, than, let's say, the Department of Transportation. Transportation will do something with respect to safe driving; maybe a weekend coming up and we want to do some advertising with respect to promoting safety on Alberta highways. But the staff that is assigned, as I said, to departments out of the 118 FTEs is 72, and that's a matter of record. The list that the member has sent over here said that most departments supplement their communications staff with people that are paid directly from the ministry, and those ministries' budgets are debated, brought forward to the House during the estimates, and also give a full listing of the full-time equivalents.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to bring forward a couple of amendments on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition. I'll read them into the record, and then I guess they can get passed

along. As I understand, there's no particular debate on this; these come forward. The first one says: Dr. Swann to move that the estimates for public affairs, strategic communications, under reference 2.0.2 at page 196 of the 2009-2010 main estimates of the Department of Executive Council be reduced by \$7,400,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 193 is \$28,480,000.

The intent of this is to cut the Public Affairs Bureau budget in half. Thank you.

The second motion reads as follows: Dr. Swann to move that the estimates for office of the Premier, Executive Council under reference 1.0.1 at page 196 of the 2009-2010 main estimates be reduced by \$16,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 193 is \$35,864,000.

Mr. Chairman, the intent of this is to reduce hosting expenses as a demonstration of leaner times in this province. Those are now for the record and, I expect, will come forward shortly.

A tremendous number of issues I need to raise. I'm going to just focus on two. First of all is the role of the Public Affairs Bureau in preparing the annual reports of departments. I'm deeply, deeply concerned that the annual report of the Department of Energy from last year was grossly misleading about royalties and the government's own take and review of royalties and had indicated in writing repeatedly that there had been reviews of the royalty system and all was well and so on. If that sort of document had been filed in the private sector as a corporate annual report, there would have been, probably, criminal charges laid because, in fact, as we discovered, there was internal information that said the opposite. So I'm very concerned and interested in the role of the Public Affairs Bureau in the departments preparing their annual reports. My question, I guess, to the Premier or his staff is: what is the role of the Public Affairs Bureau in the departments preparing their annual reports, and does the Public Affairs Bureau, in fact, have the last word in what goes into annual reports? It's a very, very important question.

My second issue I'd like to raise concerns a former very senior and important contractor for the Public Affairs Bureau, and that's Highwood Communications. Now, probably people are aware that Highwood Communications ended up stiffing most of the rural media in this province and in many of the urban ones for some millions of dollars – I think it was \$5.3 million in bad debts – and the creditors ultimately were able to obtain about 36 cents on the dollar. This happened. Highwood was the agency of record for the Public Affairs Bureau, so Highwood was the buyer. Then it turned out that Highwood on behalf of the government bought millions of dollars worth of advertising, but when the media went to collect, the money was gone. Millions of dollars were gone.

This went through a bankruptcy process. I've got the bankruptcy report here, the report of the trustee. My initial question to the Premier on Highwood. There is some curious phrasing in the trustee's report which suggests that there may be, despite this problem, a continuing relationship between Highwood or Barry Styles or some variation of those and the Public Affairs Bureau. So my question would be: is there still any relationship whatsoever between Highwood or Barry Styles or some variation on those people with the Public Affairs Bureau?

I hope the Premier and his staff are able to follow my questions. If they can't answer verbally, I'd take a written answer.

Thanks.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Yeah. Very easily answered because this is, of course, an annual question from the very same member. I'm happy to hear that he's still interested in the Public Affairs Bureau.

The Public Affairs Bureau is, of course, involved in the annual report format in terms of what the booklet will look like, but each department prepares its own content. Whatever is in the report, each department prepares it on its own. I think the question was: is there any other work that the PAB does? The answer is clearly no.

With respect to Highwood Communications, Highwood Communications was at one time the government's agency of record for media buying. It has gone out of business. Some media outlets that ran government ads had not been paid by Highwood. The Auditor General will audit the system used by the Public Affairs Bureau to monitor advertising contracts starting in mid-April.

Contrary to media reports – again, contrary to media reports – he is not auditing the entire Public Affairs Bureau, nor is the Highwood audit on hold due to Auditor General budget constraints. Again I'm going to read that into the record: contrary to the media reports, he's not auditing the entire Public Affairs Bureau, nor is anything on hold with respect to Highwood because of Auditor General budget constraints.

We welcome any recommendations from the Auditor General. These recommendations that he may make, we'll certainly undertake to improve new contracts. But we've already taken steps under the new contract to further improve internal processes. While it is always unfortunate when a business has financial difficulties, there is a process in place to deal with those matters. Government records show that we fulfilled our payment obligations to Highwood. Taxpayers can't be expected to pay twice.

The government hires an agency of record through an open, competitive process. Highwood held the media buying contract for 12 years. In June 2008 a new agency, DDB Canada, was awarded the contract. That's about all I can say. We'll await the report from the Auditor when it is complete. He's going to audit the process and any other issues tied to Highwood.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. I just want to review quickly with the Premier, and then somebody else can take a question. First of all, if I understand the Premier correctly, he said that the Public Affairs Bureau has nothing whatsoever to do with the preparation of the government departments' annual reports. Maybe I misunderstood, but I'd just like to be very clear on that.

The second thing is that, again, he didn't really answer my question on Highwood. My question was: is there any lingering relationship at all with Barry Styles, who was a very, very prominent Conservative, or Highwood or any variation? The reason I ask this is because there's a curious clause on page 4 of the trustee's agreement which states: "For those affected creditors" – in other words, those who are losing money – "which are media suppliers, the company," i.e. Highwood, "will continue to have media buys directed to these suppliers through a third party media buyer." Now, one way of interpreting that is that Highwood is still influencing how contracts are channelled and directed, and I'd like to know if there is any role, any relationship at all remaining with Highwood or with Barry Styles.

Those are my two questions: annual reports and Highwood. Thank you.

5:00

Mr. Stelmach: To my knowledge – and again, the hon. member can ask the receiver what those words mean – there is no relationship between the government and Highwood Communications. I haven't seen the text of the receiver's comments, but certainly I'm sure that we'd be able to ask exactly what those words mean or why he put it into the report.

Again, for clarity, because sometimes, you know, you've got to repeat it a few times, in terms of preparing the annual reports, it's the format. The content – the content – of individual minister's annual reports is produced by the individual ministries. Public Affairs collates it, bundles it up in a format – I don't have one of the reports here with me – that is compiled and then goes out to the public.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Does the collating and bundling up involve, for example, editing or any changes to text?

Mr. Stelmach: If it's text, if it's spelling, grammar. But I talked about content, content in terms of statistics. The information that's presented, that's the responsibility of the individual ministers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: That's fine. I'll let somebody else ask some questions, and we'll come back later. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real privilege today to participate in the discussion on the estimates. In particular, I guess, I would say that the discussion that we've had around the importance of our government communicating and also the hon. Premier's very extensive working knowledge of the logistics of how we communicate and the changes that are happening in communication in Alberta have been very interesting this afternoon.

There's another area that I think is of considerable interest to Albertans, and it is in the area of governance. Back in February of 2008, Mr. Chairman, the agency governance framework was announced. My question is this: what is the role that the Agency Governance Secretariat is playing in terms of how we're implementing that framework?

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member raises a very important issue that we dealt with over the last number of years. A very large amount, in fact, a major amount of taxpayer dollars that go through the public for various services go through a lot of different agencies. These could be social agencies. They could be boards. They could be a few Crown corporations as well. They ensured that there was full transparency and accountability. After putting together a committee of all private-sector individuals that were very knowledgeable in governance and transparency who brought forward a report, we implemented the recommendations of that report.

As a result, we have an act before the House, and it's the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. I believe it's Bill 32. This act is going through discussion in the House. It is continuing to demonstrate the principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability through a number of actions. We will ensure that agencies have the right people for the job. Again, that's by requiring competence-based recruitment and appointments. We will also encourage agencies to improve their effectiveness by providing orientation, evaluation, and training of new board members. That's very important, and it's one of the key co-ordinating roles for the Agency Governance Secretariat. The secretariat will work with ministries to ensure that agencies have a written statement of their mandate, their roles, their responsibilities, codes of conduct, clearly stating the responsibility of agencies and ministries.

The relationships and accountabilities between government and agencies, including policy-making and information, will be clarified between the boards, agencies, and the government. We will require periodic reviews of all agencies to ensure that they are operating as effectively as possible. There is a role in ensuring that the public knows what steps are being taken to promote agency effectiveness both through legislating these principles and, of course, having someone to monitor, especially through information about agencies. The public needs that information. It's also another area of accountability, information that we can share with the public.

We are making progress on implementation. It will require a lot of work, but I think that this is really what Albertans wanted to see, that transparency. We will improve the effectiveness of all of our agencies, boards, and corporations.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's very helpful.

Back to the hon. Premier if I could. The legislation is both progressive but also very extensive. I wonder if the Premier could share with us the status of the implementation of that framework, where exactly we're at in terms of what work is left to do to fully implement and complete the directive of that legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Overall, we are making progress on implementation. It took a while for the committee to meet with all of the ABCs – agencies, boards, and commissions – to get feedback from the agencies, get a better idea of what we need to work on to improve the effectiveness, and how we incorporate what we heard into legislation.

I covered the fact that the legislation is now here, being debated. I'm not quite sure what stage it's at, but it's working through the process in the House. Once the bill is passed, it will be proclaimed, and we will work on implementing the legislation. For example, 90 per cent of agencies will be required to have a mandate and roles document; at the moment 90 per cent are in that stage. It's clearly identifying the roles and the purpose of the agency.

Competency-based appointments. These processes are in place for a large majority of agencies. In fact, we're asking the various boards: "What are the kind of skill components that you require? You know, do you need a chartered accountant, do you need someone that knows governance very well, or do you need some legal skills on the board?" That is the competency-based advertising that we're going to do for board positions. That is important, to have a good mix of skill sets.

As the bill is working through, the secretariat has also engaged in discussions with the Ethics Commissioner because the Ethics Commissioner office will be involved. Again, it's going to support the secretariat in terms of the kind of codes of conduct that we require.

5:10

Some of the agencies play very, very important roles. You know, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, for instance, is a big corporation. We have corporations down to some that provide social services, like AADAC, for instance. So there's a variant degree of different skill sets that are required.

We're working with the Ethics Commissioner. That process is in place, and it's moving forward.

We are going to lead through the secretariat a very comprehensive review of director remuneration practices to develop a more

consistent approach to ensure that people are compensated for the kind of skills that they bring to a board or an agency. It is important to be clear on that. We'll involve the Auditor General's system of audit of agency and CEO selection, making sure that a person that's in a chief executive officer position is qualified for that particular role. Again, competence-based evaluations and compensation practices will also be discussed with the Auditor.

We've been asked to collaborate with corporate human resources and the Treasury Board to review current practices and, really, develop a more consistent government-wide approach.

Mr. Chairman, these are just a few of the highlights of a huge amount of work that we've undertaken in this particular area. I know that at the end of the day through training and orientation of public-sector governance, enhancing a database to inventory basic information in all public agencies, sharing ideas, good practices and good evaluation processes, and preparing checklists, templates for departments to use in developing standard approaches to agency creation, this will all help, again, with openness and transparency. The public will have much more information with respect to the large number of public agencies that actually handle a huge amount of the taxpayer funds that go to various causes.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That was a very thorough explanation and much appreciated.

At this time, then, I know that there are other members who have been patiently waiting for the opportunity to raise questions, and I'll yield to them.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Do you wish to take 20 minutes?

Mr. Taylor: Twenty minutes combined?

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Taylor: I think it's a pleasure to be able to engage the Premier in some back and forth, some question and answer about the estimates for Executive Council this year. I look forward to the next 20 minutes. I beg the Premier's indulgence. I hope I don't go over any ground that has already been gone over, but I do have a couple of areas of particular interest that I would like to cover off, and it may be necessary to reference issues that have come up before in order to do that.

I'm looking here at the breakdown of the estimates for the office of the Premier and Executive Council, and I'm seeing roughly \$11 million going into the Premier's office and roughly \$25 million being spent in one form or another on communications and advertising, whether that's the branding initiative, whether that's the activities of the Public Affairs Bureau. But more than twice as much is being spent on flogging the message than there is on developing, I think, the substance behind that message. It says to me that we're looking here at a government more concerned with image than substance.

Now, I'm always prepared to admit that I could be seeing some of this wrong.

An Hon. Member: It's highly unlikely.

Mr. Taylor: It's highly unlikely, I agree. I agree with the hon. member, but it does happen from time to time.

I'm proceeding on the basis that the Premier's office and Executive Council have a very specific role to play in strategic planning and policy development that essentially is supposed to give, I think, coherence, consistency, an overarching vision to everything that the government of Alberta does.

It would seem to me that even though we live in an era of communications and marketing and spin and messaging and everybody trying to make their voices heard over the clamour of the consumer-driven society that we live in, where all kinds of people have messages and all kinds of people are trying very hard to sell those messages – I'm not advocating here that the government of Alberta not do any advertising – the real job of government is to get the policy right, not to get the message right. You want to try to do both, obviously, but if you've got to make a choice as to where to spend your money, especially in tough times, I think it's more important to be engaged in strategic planning and policy development than it is in making sure that you get a new logo to replace the old logo and that the colour scheme on the website all goes together.

I mean, I was on the government website today, and it kind of looks like I'm standing in a Benjamin Moore paint store in front of all of the colour palettes. It goes very well together in a kind of pastel version of the old Canadian Alliance party colours – you know, it's kind of like Alliance Lite – but I hope you didn't spend too many millions on that, really. You could have got a colour co-ordinator from, I think, the aforementioned paint store, if not from that one then from another, for a couple of hundred dollars to kind of do the same job for you.

Really, what I'm coming down to – and full disclosure. The Premier knows very well what I used to do for a living before I got elected into this House. He knows very well that commercials paid my mortgage, that commercials put my two kids through university, and that I have a soft spot in my heart for the private sector and the broadcasting business. Lord knows, government advertising is always a very important part of the revenue stream of any private radio or television station or newspaper – no question about that – so I would be a little hypocritical to stand here and just grind incessantly on the Public Affairs Bureau given that the Public Affairs Bureau has helped me pay my mortgage, I'm sure, to make a couple of mortgage payments from time to time.

That said, you are spending \$25 million this year on communications and advertising, you are spending \$11 million on the office of the Premier, from whence should come strategic planning and policy development, and I would like to focus on that to a certain extent. I refer you to page 132 of the Executive Council business plan for 2009-2012. Core business 1 for Executive Council is to "support strategic planning, policy development and decision-making for the Government of Alberta," and under that I see that it means that the decision-makers, the deciders,

need comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning advice and analysis in order to make strategic decisions. Ministries need analytical and coordination support to ensure that initiatives align with government priorities. Achieving this goal ensures that decision-makers and ministries are provided with the appropriate context and support to meet overall government vision and goals.

That says to me – and, again, I might be getting this wrong, and I'm sure that if I am, the Premier will set me straight – that the vision emanates from the big office, from the Premier's office, that the co-ordination of government policy and planning, the support for strategic planning, policy development, and decision-making, comes out of the Premier's office, out of Executive Council, for all government departments, all government ministries so that we make

sure that the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development and the ministry of food and agriculture and the Ministry of Energy and the ministry of finance and so on and so forth are all singing from the same song sheet and, hopefully, singing in, as it says here, a co-ordinated and effective way. So that must mean that Executive Council and the Premier have had some role to play, some part in the development of policy for health care over these last 12 months and over the next 12 months going forward.

5:20

Strategy 1.2 says, "Provide advice and analysis to support policy development and ensure decision makers have the best possible information on which to make decisions." Strategy 1.3 says, "Strengthen policy support to government and facilitate enhanced policy development capacity in the public service." So if it is Executive Council's responsibility through strategies 1.2 and 1.3 to assist policy development across ministries, how can the Premier explain the mess, the turmoil, the horrible situation that Alberta's health care is in right now?

If I may, Mr. Chairman, if I need to reference something else that's very current and germane to what we're talking about, I would refer the Premier to *Calgary Herald* columnist Don Braid's blog on the *Calgary Herald* website right now in which he's writing in real time about . . .

Mr. Denis: Table it.

Mr. Taylor: I would if I had my computer here, but I checked this just before I came over from my office a few minutes ago.

He's writing, blogging in real time about the experience that his wife is going through. I believe she is now in her fifth or sixth hour of waiting in emergency today in hospital in Calgary, this being the third day and the third attempt to get some help for a very serious medical problem. He describes it as hell. He describes the situation in our emergency waiting rooms in Calgary, in Alberta, under the health minister's reorganization, restructuring of health care, as hell. So I would like the Premier to take a whack at explaining some of this if he would, please.

Mr. Stelmach: Sure. The first time we got together, the hon. member was sitting behind a microphone asking me questions about the Canadian Wheat Board when I was minister of agriculture. That was a few years ago. Since then, a lot of water has travelled under a lot of bridges – let's put it that way – and most of it is in Saskatchewan today.

However, you know, the hon. member makes a good point. It's important to communicate. It's important to communicate policy direction, communicate what services are available, changes in services, changes in funding, support for Albertans no matter what program they may benefit from. So \$25 million out of a \$38 million budget is, I think, really pennies spent on communication. Remember that there are a number of roles played out of that budget that are involved around communication. It is policy co-ordination and, again, working with ministries to ensure that policy is going through the process and being developed, you know, listening to Albertans, taking that input.

I think the member did acknowledge that \$10 million of that is in the branding. I continue and will continue to stand committed to the branding initiative. We will fulfill our commitment that we made to ensure that we get the correct information to investors, to other people living in different corners of the world, and I covered a lot of that earlier.

The Public Affairs Bureau dollars cross government departments, and it's not just Executive Council. The other is that in the budget \$11 million is the Premier's office and Executive Council, \$14.8 million is the Public Affairs budget, and \$10 million of the overall budget is in the branding.

With respect to co-ordinating policy and getting the correct information out, it is difficult because, as the hon. member said, we're competing. We're competing for time because people are busy. We're competing for space, either in the paper or on a talk show that some Albertans listen to, trying to get a message out in the regular media. You know, he does accuse the government of – he used the word "spin." Well, a program is a program. It's clearly articulated in terms of what dollars are going into it, what income threshold or whatever it is that goes into the policy. But in a regular article it's very difficult to get all of that information out without buying the advertising.

I know that all media certainly are going through very difficult times, but it goes to show how important the economy is even to the media. We've seen tremendous layoffs in the media. Maybe the hon. member is happy to be here because I'm sure everybody is fighting for ratings. To fight for ratings, what do you say to get the attention of the public? You pull at those heartstrings that will get people excited: emotion, fear. Correct information? You know, you can always word it a little bit to get the attention, and maybe at the end of the program you never do get the correct information out, but the more callers the more advertising. It's a game. I'm sure the member will agree, if he's honest with me and this House, that every person in that media is competing with somebody else, especially when you see the value of shares. You know that Canwest, all of the papers are suffering. They're fighting for ads. Again, a picture of the economy.

That's why I could never figure out why people would be so negative about the economy and keep driving this fear and reducing the size of the economy. The economy really is 65 per cent consumer spending. If you put fear in the public, they don't spend the money. They don't buy a sofa. They may not buy a suit. They might not buy a car. They might not change the windows in their house. The business that offers that service or that product does not advertise because nobody comes through their door anymore. That's the cycle. We're going to be going through the cycle, and I've got to think that because of the lack of private-sector advertising, some of the media has actually increased public advertising, which is good. It's part of corporate citizenry. We did get some public service ads out there reasonably priced and also in some cases gratis, which is good. It's a good relationship. I hope it continues.

Now, with respect to policy, first of all the policy co-ordination office. I'll just go through some of the statistics, and then I'll tackle the issue that the member has raised about health. The policy co-ordination office is a very small, service-oriented unit that works across government, staffed in large measure through secondment in order to build policy capacity throughout government. The office exists to promote a corporate cross-ministry approach to policy development that is aligned with government priorities, supports the identification and implementation of government priorities, supports decision-makers by ensuring that they have the best possible information to make decisions, co-ordinates the government strategic planning process, supports the development of the government strategic plan, and strengthens policy development capacity, which really is important in the public service.

I will say that in this area the Alberta public service is very, very strong. They are recognized by other provincial jurisdictions for the capacity that we have in Alberta. There were new ideas, new policy introduced over the many years. I remember from when I served on

municipal council or ran a business in this province. I know that starting in the early '70s with former Premier Peter Lougheed, an investment that we made in the public service is outstanding, and it has paid off huge benefits for Alberta.

5:30

With respect to health and policy development in government I'm proud to say that we have the most participation in policy development from our caucus. We have various policy committees. All ministerial recommendations come forward for thorough discussion. We seek advice as caucus members and as ministers from various organizations, hear from them, set the priorities, and respond.

Health is a complex issue. It's complicated by the fact that we do see new technologies emerging, new drugs. In fact, a substantial increase in year in our drug budget is because there were just new drugs both for cancer and Alzheimer's. The other is that we are doing more. We are doing more open-heart surgeries. We are doing more knee and hip replacements. All of these are happening because people are spending less time in a hospital. They're recuperating much quicker because of the other allied health care providers from not only nursing to therapists. Home care has seen a huge increase.

During a period of time when our revenue is diminishing not only in Alberta but across the country, Alberta's substantial contribution to Canada will be diminished. Those provinces that rely on contributions from equalization will not see the same amount of net contribution from Albertans. So we're going to have this huge issue in Canada, and all I ask is that we work together as health care providers, as government, as opposition, work collectively, not tear at each others' throats and just slow down the policy development but actually have good, positive input.

Earlier I talked about our commitment to publicly funded health care. It remains there. We're adamant that we have such a good system. In fact, just coming back from Texas, the questions that were asked in terms of the public health system that we enjoy were: "How does it work? How do you govern it? Who pays for what?" All these questions because, as you know, the Americans have undertaken a move towards public health. What we have today, let's cherish. Let's work together and not use it for political purposes.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've actually been looking forward to asking the Premier a number of questions, so if it's okay with you and if it is okay with the Premier, we'll just go back and forth for the 20 minutes that we do have. Is that permissible?

The Chair: Twenty minutes, yes. You choose.

Mr. Rodney: Yes, indeed. Thank you, sir.

I do have to make a comment that might be just a little surprising. I have to say that I find one thing unfortunate about today's proceedings, and that's simply this: that not all Albertans are aware of what's happening today and/or are not able to tune in, because so many people are so interested in what this Premier is doing and what his department is doing. This is just a fabulous opportunity to learn exactly who is in control, who has the leadership, and what exactly is happening. Hopefully, the word does get out through *Hansard* and perhaps through media, but that's beyond our control.

My first question, Mr. Chair, has to do with our experiences in Washington. I was quite interested to hear the number: 90 per cent of our trade is with our American friends. I've been fortunate to go down to the States many, many times. One of the times was to visit

our minister councillor. That, indeed, is the title, if I have it correctly. That was the first title given to a former hon. member and minister here, Murray Smith. I was able to witness his activities one day as I tagged along and learned all sorts of invaluable lessons. It was certainly proof to me that we really, really need that representation. Curiously enough, of course, we're the only province in the country that has representation as we do down there, first with Murray Smith and now with former minister the hon. Gary Mar.

My question to the Premier is: with the ever-capable Murray Smith handing the reins over to the equally capable Gary Mar – some constituents have asked this question – why is it that we would need additional advisers or consultants, be they Canadian or American? Perhaps the Premier can comment on the additional assistance that is, you know, being utilized from this point forward.

The Chair: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you. It is a good question and one that I know is important for Alberta, especially at a time when the countries Canada, the United States, and Mexico are entering into clean energy dialogue and some of the possible implications it may have for Alberta.

Energy is a massive contributor to our economy, and we'll need to make every effort to ensure that we get the correct information to decision-makers in the United States, that we're informed very well of the day-to-day developments. It's not only in Washington, the state capital, but it's in state Legislatures, working with governors. I believe, just off the top of my head, there are about 6,000 pieces of legislation that are passed every year in the United States. We have of course monitored where Congress is going on some of the issues.

The reason I say that is simply this. There was so much attention paid by various groups as soon as the new President was elected that: "The President will move very quickly. He's going to impose these penalties on the oil sands. You know, you've got to move. If you don't move, you're going to get left in the dust. You'll pay a penalty. Nobody will buy your oil. Oh, and by the way, carbon capture is a big waste; you shouldn't be doing that." All kinds of advice, and most, frankly, coming from some of the columnists that the previous member talked about. Quite frankly, if I listened to their advice, I wouldn't be here.

Let's put it this way. The major contributor to our carbon footprint is electrical coal-fired generation. It's the same in much of the United States. In fact, to reach the goals that the President has established will require a 50 per cent reduction in energy demand – 50 per cent. Can you imagine the cost of electricity if we reduce generation by 50 per cent on this continent? It would further diminish our global competitiveness, would further increase the number of jobless on the North American continent, and it would also put us in the position where we would lose even more of the global competitiveness in countries like India and China.

Now that the President has visited with our Prime Minister, they have decided to enter into a dialogue and see how we can work together on the North American continent so that we don't lose this advantage that we have. We may lose it forever to Asia if we're not careful. How do we grow jobs, find the balance between producing energy and also the economy and the environment?

With respect to the two firms that have been hired, it's \$40,000 a month. The value of the firms there is to monitor policy, to give this government advice on where some of the state Legislatures are going with respect to policy and legislation, to work with their contacts in the Obama administration, to make sure that we're not only getting the correct information from the state Legislatures and Congress but that we also have a better idea of which states are

supporting what legislation, what states may be opposing the proposed legislation in Washington, and who we do work with to build alliances.

5:40

A lot of this has to be face to face, and the two companies that we've hired have extensive experience. The first, of course, is a former ambassador to Canada with very good contacts with the Obama administration. He is a Democrat, so the politics align very well. The second is a former minister of public works that worked in Washington and the Canadian embassy for many years. Again, very extensive contacts.

This work that the two lobbyist organizations will do, the two firms, will complement what Gary Mar is doing in Washington. He cannot be in every state every day, nor can he monitor, as I said, a little more than 6,000 pieces of legislation that are going forward. To give you an example of what he has accomplished in a very short period of time, as you know, a lot of work was being done in anticipation of quick decision-making by President Obama and his administration. I think that now that they're in government, they're probably realizing that this is an overwhelming task and that he really does have to work with state governors and find the balance without really increasing the cost of energy even more and putting more pressure on the economy.

Gary has worked in two states, one in Maryland, where he worked diligently to ensure that the state of Maryland removed its anti-oil sands bill. They've done that. He testified in Minnesota on the state's low carbon fuel standard and was able to garner support for the oil sands. He is working very closely with the state of California. You know, the state of California is quite ironical. Everybody talks about Alberta's heavy oil, yet the – what? – 450,000 to 500,000 barrels a day of production in California nobody pays attention to. It's just another example of how much work we have to do, but we are working very closely through both the Washington office and the two lobbyist firms.

I do have good news to share with respect to Alberta and the relationship with the federal government and some of the state governors. With respect to the federal government we've been asked to participate on two committees, one on carbon capture and storage, which we made a very substantial investment in, and the other on the electrical smart grid. This is more on a technical side so that we can get, again, facts, good engineering, good comprehensive information so that we can build the policy on this.

I know that in Alberta many people focus on the oil sands and think that that's the major contributor to the carbon footprint. It's not. It's coal-fired electrical generation. The fact that many of the plants are close to some of the existing oil fields and gas fields gives us an opportunity to capture the carbon, inject it in the oil fields. Not only will it reduce the level of carbon, but we will also enhance oil recovery. It may be quite sizable in terms of the volume of enhanced oil recovery, which, again, will pay back quite a sizable return on the royalties that we'll collect extracting oil from established fields. The other important point is that we will not have to disturb more land. The established fields are there. We'll use the same roads – we don't have to drill new wells; again, less disturbance on our land – and use the same infrastructure that has been in place for a number of years. So it is a good-news story.

I know, having just recently visited Texas, that the state of Texas and Alberta will be working on a couple of projects as well and also tying our research on the environment together, especially in nanotechnology and a carbon fibre being able to carry electrical current further without any line loss. This is a state-of-the-art technology.

Yes, a tremendous value in the Washington office. It's co-located in the Canadian embassy. We're the only jurisdiction to have an office co-located in Washington. It is reaping benefits, especially now when there is a bit of a risk of having a policy implemented that may put quite a larger onus on a very small population, 3 and a half million people in Alberta, in terms of energy cost and production.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Those are extremely valuable clarifications.

I do have a question for the Premier about the branding campaign. It does relate to my previous question having to do with our friends – and I mean our friends – in Washington, DC. We've had all sorts of feedback on the branding, and I suppose that's quite natural in that it's very near and dear to the hearts of Albertans and how we communicate with people well beyond our borders. That's the lead-up to my question. What can our hon. Premier tell us about the role that our representatives in Washington have when it comes to supporting this new brand campaign? Again, what role do our representatives in Washington have in supporting our brand campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: The branding campaign will be in partnership with our office in Washington because the logo, the video, all of the information will be able to tell Alberta's whole story to not only people in Washington, decision-makers in Washington, but also to state governors, especially the Western Governors' Association, where we'll be taking that this spring. We're also going to, again, the state of Texas. We're going to be doing some work in California. These are all important areas for getting the correct information out.

Really, the branding speaks to our values. These are values that govern our decisions about energy. They honour our decisions with respect to environment and also the economy. It is the time to do it. Alberta has such a positive story.

It's amazing that when I was in Texas and met with the governor and some of the private-sector individuals – in fact, the economists at Rice University were not aware that in the province of Alberta we have a flat tax, a 10 per cent flat tax. It doesn't matter how much you earn. They thought that only in Texas do they have a tax situation like that. That tells us that we have a lot of work to do.

We also have to clearly – clearly – articulate to U.S. decision-makers that we develop our resources responsibly, be clear on the very tough water regulations we have, pipeline regulations, how we drill wells because they just do not have that information. The only way to do it is to work with them face to face and through the branding initiative.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: I'll thank the Chair and the Premier. I understand that the leader of the third party has some urgent questions to ask, so I'll turn the floor over to him with the time remaining.

Mr. Mason: Thank you to the member. That's most gracious.

Can you tell me how many minutes I actually have? Six minutes. Okay. That's great. Thank you very much.

I wanted to ask the Premier a question about the government's assessment of the threat to Alberta's economy that is posed by the movement in the United States and other parts of the world to reduce or eliminate the purchase and consumption of heavy oil, or so-called dirty oil. I want to take the opportunity to indicate that, you know, our view is not that the tar sands, or the oil sands, should be shut

down but that they should be cleaned up, that they represent a very key element to our economy and that they represent jobs for tens of thousands of workers, many of them unionized, both on the construction side and on the operations side.

It's our view that the failure to deal adequately with environmental concerns, whether it be downstream effects on the water, the tailings ponds, the failure to use dry tailings and to demand dry tailings for new projects as well as to impose hard caps on emissions has in fact represented a very serious threat, which is being exploited by various organizations, particularly in the United States as that's the major source of our oil.

5:50

In our view, the best thing to do for Alberta and for the future of that important engine of our economy is to clean up the tar sands and to present a much better image internationally, particularly in the United States, at the same time recognizing that at some point we're going to have to transition away from carbon-based fuels. Those decisions will not be made in this province but will be made internationally, so we need to prepare for that day.

I would like to ask the Premier, you know, how they assess the risk to the tar sands, to the oil sands, as a result of changes politically in the United States. Certainly, as long as George Bush was the President, Alberta had a certain umbrella, had a certain protection, and it was clear that the United States was not going to impose any legislative or regulatory changes that would harm our operations and our export of oil from Athabasca tar sands. But that has changed, particularly with respect to the new administration in Washington as well as the new Congress as well as state Legislatures as well as the activities of various environmental and other organizations. How does the government assess the threat, and do they agree that we have to clean up our own act as well in the Fort McMurray area in order to safeguard the future economy of our province?

Mr. Stelmach: Clearly, the questions that the hon. member has raised signal that we have a lot of work ahead of us to get the correct information out. Carbon: one-tenth of 1 per cent. Open-pit mining: 500 square kilometres of 140,000 square kilometres. Our participation in SAGD. Our participation in recovering all of the land that is being disturbed. Those are the rules. The money is in place. The companies have to set money aside to do that.

Unfortunately, you know, the *National Geographic* article wasn't that bad, but it's the pictures – okay? – that show disturbed land. Do you think they would put at least a little picture, maybe five inches by five inches, of the land that was already reclaimed? No, because you'd change the opinion. You can't do that.

Let's look at some facts. Well, the global supply of light sweet crude is declining by a rate of 1 per cent every year. There are no new fields. That's it. Compare that to world demand rising by an average of about 2 per cent. So we do need the oil sands.

Now, do the Americans want it? Of course, they want it. Do they want it discounted? Well, of course. Find some way. That's why we're spending the amount of money on the two lobbyist efforts and the Washington office. I can tell you that it will be through some

scheme, some administrative instruments, in a document that's going to be this thick, that a few years from now they might sneak one on us. That's why we have to be so careful. The \$10 million that we're spending on branding, the \$40,000 a month we're spending for this coming year on the two lobbyists is a pittance, a small amount, in terms of the risk to the next generation and the generation after that of Albertans.

For political purposes we can argue this all day long, but the long-term decision by the two, the Prime Minister and the President, has significant implications in the province of Alberta and, indeed, to a degree, in the province of Saskatchewan.

Now, reputation of investment. Yes, they were getting to people in major investment communities, to say: well, Alberta isn't doing a good job. When you go see them, when you talk to the economist, they don't have the information. They listened to some NGO that gave them incorrect information, making billions of dollars of investment on misinformation. That's why we have to put in this effort, and we're going to continue. The \$25 million, I can tell you, is a small, small investment.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the leader of the third party, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee shall now immediately rise and report progress on the estimates of the Department of Executive Council.

I'd like to invite our staff guests to depart from the Chamber.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Executive Council relating to the 2009-10 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What an excellent afternoon of great debating of a great department. I want to congratulate our Premier on hanging in there and answering those questions so well – thank you – and all the members who participated and asked some very good questions.

I would move that we call it 6 p.m. now and adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 16, 2009

Issue 25

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 16, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity, conviction, and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Speaker, the MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, I would like to introduce to you and through you 19 visitors who are registered with the Vista Virtual school, which offers grades 1 to 12 courses to Alberta residents in partnership with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, located in Barrhead. The visiting students reside in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency as well as Edmonton-Rutherford, Bonnyville-Cold Lake, Calgary-North West, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, Drayton Valley-Calmar, and Edmonton-McClung. They are accompanied this afternoon by teachers Mrs. Nadine Ruhl, Mrs. Isabel Rempel, Mr. Gary Simpson and parent helpers Tracy Ekelund, Kurt Stenberg, Audrey Karperien, Kim Van Amsterdam, Lesley Miciak, Willy Brouwer, Valerie Sorensen. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you some gentlemen who during the warm summer season coming up would all be good to know. With us today we have some gentlemen from the brewing industry in Alberta. We have Bryan Cox from Molson's, Jeff Ryan with Labatt's, Peter Kains from Sleeman, and Greg D'Avignon from Canada's National Brewers. I think it would behoove the Assembly to give these gentlemen the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to welcome a wonderful group of 40 visitors from Calmar elementary school in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar. These 36 bright grade 6 students along with parent helpers and their teachers, Mrs. Jeanette Wilson and Mrs. Angie Podgurny, have toured our Legislature and learned a great deal about our building and our provincial government. I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me this afternoon to introduce to you and through you some members of my family. I believe this is also slightly unusual because, firstly, I have in the Assembly today four generations of strong Alberta women: my wife, Diana Knight, my daughter

Shawna Iggulden, my granddaughter Noelani, and my great-granddaughter Evangelina. They are accompanied by my son-in-law Todd Iggulden, my granddaughter Desera, my grandson Hayden, and my granddaughter Falyn. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce the Glenmore Christian Academy grade 9 band, with whom I had a chance to visit before question period. Their leader is Mr. Dan Bartholomew-Poyser, and their volunteers today are Dawn Stinson and Rebekah Robertson. The band is on a four-day tour of Edmonton and area, performing modern and classical pieces at various schools and balls. Their concerts include trumpet solos, percussion features, and Canada's youngest and newest male vocal quartet, Il Quattro. They're very pleased to be at the Legislature today, and I'm very pleased that they're here as well. I'll ask them now to stand and accept the warm wishes of everyone in this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 20 international students and five instructors from Jasper Place high school's English language learner program. The challenges of immigrating to a new country are many, especially if you don't speak the local languages. At Jasper Place high school ELL students are given individual attention and encouragement to become effective communicators by developing competency in their speaking, reading, writing, listening, and viewing skills. I could have used this program when I first came to this country. My guests will be joining us shortly in the members' gallery, and I would ask that we give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise today to introduce the family and close friends of Mr. Andy Bryant, former president of Horse Racing Alberta, a great friend and Albertan who passed away earlier this year. Joining us today and seated in the members' gallery are Terrie Hudon, Andy's wife; their two children, Sean and Tessa Bryant, along with Andy's parents, Vic and Beth Bryant; Terrie's parents, Larry and Shelagh Hudon; also close family friends Sean Bryant, Tom Hudon, Sue Roberge, Dan Hudon, Lana Hudon, Matthew Hudon, Margot Cooke, Doug Cooke, Candi Fonteyne, Mary Ann Houghton, Jason Houghton, Elaine Williams Allin, and David Allin. I had the privilege of knowing Andy for over 23 years, and I know I speak for my colleagues in government when I say he was a passionate man and one dedicated to making our world a better place. I'd like the family and friends to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people from the beautiful riding of Calgary-Hays, Tyler and Shanna Groeneveld. Tyler, of course, is the son of our minister of agriculture. I believe they're up in the Speaker's gallery. I'd like you to give them the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you. I'm honoured as well to introduce to you and through you to all members two members of my family: first of all, my wife, Pauline Prins, and then my son Dr. Mark Prins. Mark received his bachelor of science in environmental studies at the King's University College in 2001. He then studied nursing in Calgary for a year and then moved on to the medical program. He graduated from the U of C medical school in 2006, and I think, Mr. Speaker, you actually spoke at his graduation, so you might remember that. He finished his residency in rural medicine in Chilliwack in 2008. He's now doing locums at various practices around B.C. Later this month he'll be moving to Iqaluit and Kugluktuk for some locums this summer. Mr. Speaker, they're seated in your gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Pam Cholak. Pam is no stranger to this Legislature as she has worked in many different offices, so many, in fact, that if I were to tell them all to you, it would be more like a member's statement, and I would not do that. I would ask Pam to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am just delighted to welcome to the Assembly and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Chamber nine individuals who are joining us in the public gallery from the Adult Transition Learning Centre. Today we have joining us Mark McGinnis, Michelle Weeks, Mike Kemp, Tim Demont, Valary Howard, Martin Wilson, Robbie Auger, and Aimee Anhill. They are accompanied by their teacher and group leader, Rachel Posch. I would ask them all to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you for coming.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Andy Bryant

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in remembrance of Mr. Andy Bryant, a good friend and champion of Alberta's horse-racing industry, who lost a courageous battle with cancer earlier this year. He was 45 years old. Andy was a fervent supporter of horse racing in our province, having served as president and CEO of Horse Racing Alberta since its inception in 2002.

Although he was born in Montreal, Andy Bryant was a proud Albertan. He began his career as a Progressive Conservative Party of Canada youth volunteer and later worked as executive assistant to Deputy Prime Minister Don Mazankowski in the early 1990s. Andy then returned home to Alberta to assist nonprofit and aboriginal groups in obtaining government funding to support their important programs and services. It was soon after that Andy's passion for horse racing began to take shape. Andy served in several management positions within the horse-racing industry, commencing with the Alberta Standardbred Horse Association and then with the

Alberta Racing Corporation, which eventually became Horse Racing Alberta. He was a driving force and key proponent of the massive entertainment complex, supermall, and racetrack being built near Balzac along the QE II, just north of Calgary. I think of him each time I drive by that facility, Mr. Speaker.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Alberta government I want to recognize and pay tribute to a passionate and dedicated Albertan who worked tirelessly to not only support horse racing in our province but to make this world a better place. I know that his legacy will live on through his beautiful family and the many friends that he made along the way. God bless you, Andy.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health System Restructuring

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before becoming Premier, the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville was a member of the so-called Deep Six, a group of right-wing Tories whose job was to slay the Progressive Conservative debt as fast as possible regardless of the human cost. The Deep Six accomplished their goal by blowing up hospitals, driving health care professionals out of Alberta, and letting the province's infrastructure fall into ruin.

History is repeating itself as this government embarks on a campaign to delist public health care services, starting with those that directly affect the most vulnerable or the most afflicted Albertans. The Premier's pharmaceutical strategy places a huge financial burden on seniors, seniors who have already seen their retirement savings decimated by the stock market crash and who are scrambling to pay their monthly bills and put food on the table, never mind paying for expensive prescription drugs. I can tell the Premier what this strategy will achieve: seniors will impoverish themselves paying for these drugs, or they'll do without and wind up in hospital at great taxpayer expense, far more than the pharmaceutical plan will save. This isn't a strategy. It's simple, short-sighted foolishness.

During the election the Premier promised hundreds of new long-term care beds for Alberta. That promise has been broken, and now seniors are being warehoused in acute-care beds, again costing the public purse more money than if the Premier had simply kept his promise.

This administration has made a complete mess of our public health care system. They've spent millions of dollars on restructuring and public relations while sick children are being treated in tents because our emergency rooms are overflowing. This administration doesn't value public health care. They are preparing Albertans for a move toward more and more for-profit health care. Only that can explain this administration's colossal mismanagement of one of our most important public institutions, public health care.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Inner-city Community Challenges

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the plight of our rapidly changing urban inner-city communities, particularly those in Calgary-North Hill. Recently I've been working with several different communities in my constituency on a couple of issues that have been receiving significant attention, the operation of a youth group home in the community of Collingwood and the operation of a methadone clinic impacting the communities of Greenview and Highland Park.

Resolution to both of these issues have been achieved from the perspective of the community. However, members of these communities have some larger questions about the future livability of their neighbourhoods. They have concerns about the impact of urbanization and densification that we've seen over the last decade. These concerns are exacerbated by the new land-use framework being brought forward and by the gradual shift from a resource- to a knowledge-based economy. Many of these communities do not oppose this direction. In fact, they want to embrace it but only in a manner where they can take ownership of change in their own communities.

The two situations that I have mentioned are merely an example of the challenges that we are going to face in the future. This is not a not in my backyard issue. It is bigger than that, Mr. Speaker. If we want greater density of our inner cities, we need to make these communities livable. However, our current attitudes and processes are driving people and families out of these communities, not attracting them.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development speak eloquently many times about the need for a new land-use framework in this province, that our recent economic and population growth has created a situation where the status quo approach is not going to serve us well moving forward. This is true for the future of our inner-city communities.

The complexity of issues from the siting of social services, including treatment facilities, group homes, and affordable housing, to the need to upgrade and enhance the capacity of public infrastructure in these communities is evident by the number of parties, authorities, and decision-making bodies involved. For example, in the two situations that I have mentioned, there were up to 12 entities, organizations, and decision-making bodies involved either directly or indirectly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Westend Seniors Activity Centre

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton Self Starters Organization was established in 1978 under the direction of a small group of citizens led by well-known Edmonton musician Harry Farmer and members of the west end Rotary Club. Thanks to the tireless efforts of many volunteers inspired and led by executive director Janice Monfries in 2005 the organization moved to a new facility and changed their name to the Westend Seniors Activity Centre.

The activity centre is a busy and active place for seniors to come together for laughter, companionship, and learning. Their outreach program extends into the community to bring the invisible senior out of isolation from their homes and into an atmosphere of socializing and education. They have Alzheimer's programs. They have a workshop. They have a sewing club. They have a library club. Mr. Speaker, when I visited this activity centre, it looked like senior high to me.

Along with participation in the programs the centre's members are encouraged to become active volunteers. Because of these healthy lifestyle changes the number of seniors attending local emergency hospitals and clinics is greatly reduced as their active lifestyles allow them to live independently in their own homes and enjoy the golden years of their lives.

The Westend Seniors Activity Centre is now in the process of completing the basement area of the already renovated facility to

offer carpet curling and other programs. In addition, in order to help cover the related costs, they are holding a fundraising event this Saturday, April 18, entitled the Silver Hair Gala event. Tickets are still available. I would encourage all hon. members to show their support by attending or sponsoring a guest. I have my tickets in my hot little hand.

Mr. Speaker, thank you so much.

Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Facilities Capital Projects

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's uncertainty in rural Alberta about both services and the status of health care facilities. These have been promised and are now under review. To the Premier. The Barrhead health care centre, Didsbury long-term care facility, Lacombe continuing care centre, and Fort McMurray long-term care facility have all been deferred pending an Alberta Health Services review and have no funding dedicated to them in the three-year capital plan. When will these communities know what's going to happen to these?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Health Services Board is reviewing the projects, looking at the scope of the projects, how they fit into a longer term plan for not only seniors' care but providing acute care and emergency services in rural Alberta. They're evaluating. They'll bring the plan forward to the minister. In a lot of the facilities the money that was dedicated by the province is in place. They're just looking at the scope of the project. I also know that given some of the more recent tenders coming in, many of the costs are coming down considerably from the estimated cost, so there'll be further savings on the construction side.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier explain why the Fort Saskatchewan health centre in the Premier's riding is going full steam ahead with \$46 million in funding while Barrhead, Didsbury, Lacombe, and Fort McMurray are in a hold pattern?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, because, I guess, the board decided to go with the plan for the Capital region about, I think, three years ago. I believe the foundation is in place, and the building is being constructed. You know, it's part of the overall capital plan, and it was there for the last, I think, five years.

Dr. Swann: In High Prairie, Medicine Hat, Strathmore, Strathcona, and Grande Prairie the scope of their projects is under review. When will these communities know the results?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, they will know soon. I know with respect to the Grande Prairie facility there's \$250 million that's in place, and the Health Services Board is going to be reviewing the project.

Some of these projects – and the Minister of Infrastructure can give more detail – were asked to implement the LEED program, which is, you know, high energy efficiency, saving long-term dollars. It has really increased the initial cost of the facility. But now that the economy has slowed down, I think we're going to get some better tender prices and incorporate a lot of the LEED standards into the construction of our facilities.

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

Accountability for Health Care System Decisions

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last two days Albertans have heard conflicting stories from the administration. First, we hear that accountability for health decisions is with the minister of health, then accountability is with the Tory caucus and the Premier, and now we hear that accountability will be with the Alberta Health Services Board. To the Premier: where does the buck stop with decisions to delist health services? Albertans need to know.

Mr. Stelmach: All policy decisions in the end are made by government. We will receive advice from the Alberta Health Services Board. The minister will be working with health care professionals. This is in keeping with the plan that we rolled out going into the campaign, when we said that we want to bring about efficiencies and effectiveness in the service by working with health care providers coming to the table, working together so that not only can we improve access but we can also sustain the system for this generation and the generation after that.

Dr. Swann: The preamble to Bill 32, Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, states: "Ministers of the Crown are accountable to the public for the activities and performance of public agencies in their ministries." When the minister of health passes the buck, he fails to do his job. Will the Premier make very clear to the minister of health that it is this minister's responsibility for the failure of Alberta's health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, the other day we had four children in the Assembly. They spent a day touring the Legislature. They spent time with the hon. Speaker, had lunch with the Speaker. They spent time with me in the office. The reason I'm bringing that forward is that we constantly hear from the opposition that it is a failing health care system. Well, we have four youth that have seen phenomenal advances in technology, in drug therapy who are overcoming the huge challenges of cancer. I didn't hear once from any one of the four children that were in the gallery saying that our system is failing them.

Dr. Swann: Yesterday the minister did not answer my question regarding the tabling of the 40 services being considered for delisting. To the Premier: will the Premier table this list of 40 services being considered for delisting?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What the minister said and I reiterated to the media was that there were a number of programs and grants that the minister had under the ministry of health, and there was some duplication of services amongst the nine regional health authorities. So what he's done is that he's moved what was a department expenditure, and he's given it to Alberta Health Services Board, and they will have a look at what was given to them in terms of the grants programs. They'll be making that recommendation to the minister, and then the minister will come forward and make those recommendations to cabinet, and we'll be making the decision in the end.

The Deputy Speaker: Third question of the Official Opposition.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government already has plans to slash public health services, to raise taxes apparently, to drain the sustainability fund, and this, according to the budget, is supposed to be the year of economic recovery. The finance minister has claimed that there won't be a provincial sales tax, but one thing we've learned yet again is you can't trust anything this government tells you as these so-called fiscal hawks have quickly become fiscal chickens. To the Premier: can the Premier explain why he's even thinking about making Albertans pay for his government's mismanagement with increased taxes and cuts to the public health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the only group that's talking about changes and maybe delisting of services and some American two-tier health care system and raising taxes are the Liberals and the NDs. You have not heard me at all talk about any kind of a sales tax. [interjections] I know. Listening to the truth is hard for them. But, you know, I have not at all said that we're going to go to any kind of a provincial sales tax. In fact, that will not happen. The other is that the only area that we raised taxes was on cigarettes and on liquor. We are committed, though, to the billion dollar tax reduction in eliminating health care premiums. That's over a billion dollars that's in the pockets of Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm still waiting to hear the truth, actually.

Can the Premier explain how it is that Alberta spends 23 per cent more than the national average, yet Albertans are being told to open their wallets and pay more taxes? This just shows how this government is utterly flawed in its fiscal management.

Mr. Stelmach: As I said before, the only group that's talking about raising taxes is the Liberals. The hon. member was following the minister of finance in Calgary and talking to media. He says: "Oh, yeah. I think they've got this plan. They're going to be raising taxes." We're not talking about raising taxes, but the Liberals are. I guess that if you want to raise taxes, if you want to introduce a sales tax, get up in the House and say that. But I'll tell you one thing that the government did that was very wise because you never know when they'll sneak up on you. Albertans – Albertans – will make the decision whether there is a sales tax because there is a law on the books that says that it will have to go to a provincial referendum. I know what the results will be. They're going to tell the Liberals: no to your sales tax.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I guess the finance minister and the health minister are still sneaking up on the Premier because the finance minister has said that when it comes to raising taxes, everything is on the table, and the health minister has talked about delisting services.

To the Premier my final question: can he reveal to the House today the date of the referendum on a sales tax?

Mr. Stelmach: If the hon. member wants to bring forward a motion in the House, then do so. But I can tell you about one thing that this Conservative government will not do but something that the former Liberal government did under Jean Chrétien. Remember, they had

the red book? They were coming around all over Alberta saying: "We are getting rid of the GST. It's done." Guess what? The day he was elected: "Oh. Did I say I was going to get rid of it? No. I think we're going to stay with the GST." So that kind of stuff, I tell you, you're not going to hear from this government. You will hear from them. They're already talking about it.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't let that little bit of revisionist history slip by. It was the Tory government of Brian Mulroney that brought in the GST, the Tory government.

Health Care Spending

Mr. Mason: In a recent meeting with the editorial board of a Calgary newspaper the health minister warned Albertans that public health care could only be expected to cover, quote, the necessary essentials. The minister suggested that if we had what he calls a clear policy 10 or 15 years ago, we might not be covering hip replacement surgery today. My question is to the Premier. Do you agree with your health minister that hip replacement surgery is not a necessary procedure?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister had an interview earlier today on radio, and he will of course refer to the House in terms of what he has said.

I do want to, though, before he gets too excited – yes, the GST was put in by our former federal Conservative government. But you know what? They did not go to an election and say: we are going to get rid of it. It was the Liberal Party under the leadership of Jean Chrétien that said they were going to get rid of it, and then once they were elected, they did not deliver on their commitment.

Mr. Mason: The Premier would rather talk about ancient history than this crisis in our health care system.

In the last 15 years more than 25,000 Albertans have had hip replacement surgery. The cost of this surgery runs about \$20,000 a hip. Those who can't afford the price face a future of limited mobility and pain. To the Premier: given the attitude of this government towards such procedures, what other procedures are you considering delisting which could prevent our seniors from living out their lives crippled and in pain?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to answer that question, because, you know, it doesn't matter how old one gets; you learn. I learned a lesson this week: don't use examples, because when you use an example, these guys will blow it all out of proportion. All I said at the time was that we don't know what would have been covered under the Canada Health Act if we had this kind of an expert panel. Quite frankly, it is our intention to continue to cover what is under the Canada Health Act. If this hon. member wants to state in this House anything that we have done that's outside the Canada Health Act, then stand up and say so.

Mr. Mason: Wow. The Artful Dodger, Mr. Speaker.

The finance minister has suggested that \$2 billion of cuts need to be found in next year's budget. The health minister, whose budget is half the total of the provincial budget, has said that you won't find \$2 billion in the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. In other words, the lion's share of the cuts will have to come from Alberta health. I want to ask the Premier: is his health minister

suggesting that this government will cut up to a billion dollars in health spending next year?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, playing on words. All I can say is that we have a number of goals in mind. Certainly, one is to protect the principles of the Canada Health Act and make sure that it's publicly funded, and one that's very, very important is to ensure that we sustain the system for the next generation. All provincial governments and the federal government are struggling with this issue. I just reach out to all Canadians, all Albertans, all provincial governments. Let's work on this together. We've started a good process with British Columbia and Saskatchewan in terms of looking at larger drug purchases, perhaps consolidating some treatments, just various ways of trying to improve access, improve efficiency, and also sustain the system for the future dollars.

Before I do sit down, Mr. Speaker, I just want to inform the House, to end this debate, that the current Conservative government has dropped the GST by 2 points.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Library Services

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier made an important announcement about a new vision for public libraries in Alberta. My first question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please explain what the new vision for public libraries is?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a great day to be an Albertan, especially if you love libraries. This new focus will create seamless access to resources for all Albertans. This new vision will remove barriers and increase access to libraries for all Albertans through collaboration, innovation, and advances in technology. The vision will benefit Albertans in communities where they live, where they work, and where they read.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: does the new vision for libraries come with new funding?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is proudly investing \$32 million in public libraries this year. This is a \$9 million increase in funding, 39 per cent: \$7 million going to local libraries and regional systems, \$2 million to invest in technology and to implement the new vision. Very importantly, our commitment is to support libraries for years to come.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Education. One of the recommendations from the library report talks about colocation and student support. How can the education system under your leadership respond to their recommendations?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been very actively encouraging our school boards to work with other commu-

nity organizations to co-locate, to bring services together, and to provide support for students because schools ought to be a hub in the community as libraries are. Schools and libraries also are very important with respect to literacy. There's a great opportunity for co-location. I think we should be considering student ID cards doubling as library cards, for example. There are many different ways that we can operate together to make sure that libraries serve communities 12 months of the year and schools serve communities 12 months of the year.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, whether he likes it or not, the Minister of Health and Wellness is responsible for the \$217 million Mazankowski Heart Institute. Yesterday when asked about the year-long delay in opening the facility, the minister said that everything from the opening ceremonies to problems with construction management is someone else's fault, but the minister is paying the bills, and he's using Albertans' money. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: will the minister admit that there are serious problems at the Mazankowski that are his responsibility?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the Mazankowski Heart Institute is a world-class facility that's going to put this province on the map for many years to come. If this particular member is suggesting that he'd like it to be removed from his constituency, I think there are about 72 others around here who would gladly take the Mazankowski Heart Institute.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Construction of the Mazankowski was announced six years ago this week. It's been plagued with problems ranging from patient room design to problems with the elevators to the helipad. Some reports say it could now be next year before it opens. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness: will he make public a detailed list of the commissioning problems that have led to the delay so that the public will know what it's paying for?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can put this member's worries to rest. I'm told by Alberta Health Services that they expect to have the Mazankowski centre starting to take patients next month.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the lead architect and engineer for the Mazankowski is Stantec. The CEO of Stantec sits on the Alberta Health Services Board, that is building the Maz. In other words, Stantec is intimately involved as both client and contractor in a case with serious performance problems and \$217 million at stake. Anywhere else this would be disallowed as a conflict of interest. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: for the sake of everyone involved, including Stantec, will the minister ask the CEO of Stantec to step down from Alberta Health Services Board?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we go back to what we were dealing with earlier in the session. You know, this group stands here and smears people's reputations, and then they wonder why nobody votes for them. I mean, it's unbelievable.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:10

Library Services (continued)

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I was certainly very happy to hear the announcement today on increased funding for libraries. This certainly is good news. Indeed, every day is a great day to be an Albertan. Can the minister tell us: how will the new vision ensure that seamless access is achieved between libraries?

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that Albertans do have access to information, resources, and services no matter where they live in Alberta. This could include a single library card, video conferencing, access to the Internet throughout Alberta, access to an electronic database, a province-wide technology plan. This vision is a result of hundreds of stakeholders who shared their ideas and their opinions to the MLA committee that went around this province to get the views of Albertans, and we're respecting those views.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. With greater collaboration and integration among Alberta's public libraries will we see information in Alberta's university and college libraries become available to more Albertans?

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, today is a great day to be an Albertan, as is any other day in the year. With resources like eCampus, Athabasca University, the Lois Hole digital library, the Taylor Family Digital Library, we provide resources to over 35 public postsecondary institutions. We look forward to this vision and being able to tie those institutions together with the libraries and, hopefully, one day having access for every Albertan across the province. Alberta is a leader in digital resourcing for our students.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. How many libraries in the province are currently connected to the SuperNet, and what are you doing to connect even more?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are currently more than 270 libraries connected to and using the SuperNet. In fact, there are currently at least 30 of those that are using video conferencing services on a regular basis via the SuperNet. This is great news as well. In the months ahead Service Alberta officials will be working very closely with Municipal Affairs to look for ways to get individuals to have even more access to information at libraries across Alberta.

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

Mental Health Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our goal is to vocalize the concerns of Albertans who are unable to stand in this House and speak for themselves. We've given them the chance to do that by asking questions on their behalf. To the minister of health: Caroline from Calgary points out that the new hospital in south Calgary was initially supposed to have an entire floor dedicated to mental illness, yet it was scrapped. Many patients in crisis are put on a year-long waiting list for treatment, and a large proportion of our homeless population suffers from mental illness. Why isn't the government prepared to dedicate serious resources to dealing with mental illness?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this government takes this issue very seriously. One of the things that was in our budget was additional money for addictions, and it's part of the safe communities initiative. Just to correct the member, because this is what we seem to have to do all the time, the new south Calgary hospital is going to have a significant number of beds to deal with mental illness.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A significantly reduced number of beds. This government's lack of support for mental health services is appalling, as can be seen with the minister of health's statement this past Tuesday that he would be "cancelling some programs around youth suicide prevention." Can the minister explain how he can so flippantly dismiss a funding initiative involving serious mental health problems with Alberta's youth?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, what has happened as a result of our budget – and I can go through this again. There are a number of programs that were either duplicative in nature or that should more appropriately be delivered by Alberta Health Services. It is those programs that we have transferred to Alberta Health Services to assess in the province-wide health delivery system, which ones need to continue to be funded and which shouldn't. Again, another example of the opposition taking this issue and blowing it completely out of proportion.

Mr. Chase: Speaking of blowing, the General hospital comes to mind.

The widespread problem of mental illness and the costs associated with it because of it being marginalized by this government will not go away just because you ignore it. Does this government not understand that by adequately supporting mental health, this government would effectively reduce the overall burden of costs on the health care system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, if the member would have been paying attention for the past year, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that he would have noticed is that we have done something that government has not done in a number of years: we brought forward a children's mental health strategy. Even though this member may believe that mental health just sort of creeps up in later years of life, that's not correct. If we can address mental health issues at early ages, we can get away from some of the issues that we've had to deal with in safe communities.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Library Services (continued)

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods has many newcomers and job seekers in today's economy. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. How can the government support the new vision for libraries, in particular for the newcomers and job seekers in today's economy?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the funding and vision for libraries will help us expand our existing services to Albertans on careers and training so they can get back to work. We already have a number of partnerships with Calgary public libraries and Bow Valley College, where we use the library for career and employment information services. We hope to do more partnerships in the future. In addition, we know that we can make better use of libraries to promote English as a second language classes and provide information on supplement supports for newcomers and their families.

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, the report calls for seamless access to library services for all Albertans, including aboriginals on reserves and on settlements. My first supplemental question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What programs are you doing to improve access to library services for First Nations and Métis people in Alberta?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've said from the outset that libraries and education in general are my number one priority, so I'm really pleased with this huge increase for public library funding because I was quite surprised to see that we only have one such library on reserve or on settlement that I can actually proudly point to. We need more, obviously. If we're going to increase literacy rates and high school completion rates and educational attainment levels in general for aboriginal people, this is a great place and a great way to start. I'm working with our two ministers of education, with the federal minister, and with aboriginal leaders to help implement this recommendation, and we're going to get it done.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Over the last year you've talked about access to arts and culture for all Albertans. Is this just lip service, or are there ways that this new framework for libraries can help move this forward?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's more than just lip service. Libraries along with our postsecondary education facilities and our K to 12 institutions are a vital part of our cultural policy and its development and delivery. I'd like to see more Albertans using libraries to access our cultural institutions regardless of where they live through the broadband links, the SuperNet. Many of our historic sites, like the Royal Tyrrell Museum, have an incredible amount of online programming that libraries can benefit from. My department has been working with the libraries to promote Alberta Arts Days this coming September.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20 Legislature Grounds Redevelopment

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is again considering plans to redo the Legislature Grounds. As the local MLA I've not been kept in the loop, so I'm hoping that the Minister of Infrastructure can answer some of the questions that have been brought to me. To the Minister of Infrastructure: what is the budget and the timeline of this project?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have undertaken a study to see what possibilities exist for the grounds. I'd like to thank the hon. member because the hon. member was involved in the committee work that initially was undertaken to take a look at it. We have an opportunity with this to actually be a very core anchor piece to the Capital Boulevard. There are some amazing opportunities, but we have to study what possibilities are there, and of course we can only do what we can afford.

Ms Blakeman: This is the committee that only met three times and then paid themselves a whole bunch of money? Surely not.

To the same minister. The Royal Lawn Bowling Club, which has been on the Legislature Grounds since 1918, has not been encouraged to stay. My question to the minister is: can his department work with them to find an alternate space from other provincially owned land, and will they help them to relocate?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to look into that. The statement was made that they haven't been encouraged to stay, but I haven't heard that they've been encouraged to leave, either.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given that other community leagues were consulted, I'm wondering why the Downtown Edmonton Community League, in whose boundaries the Legislature Grounds lie, was not consulted on the plans for renewal.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make sure that the member was able to be seated before I stood.

Mr. Speaker, we are undertaking a study right now that's been budgeted for, and the information was released on that. Of course, as soon as we see what possibilities exist and some of the options that are available, we'll consult with the community and with the city. I know they're very excited, and the mayor has spoken very highly of what we're undertaking.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Nuclear Power

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After months of delay the Energy minister finally released a nuclear report that was completely biased. It was a pro-nuke brochure designed as fact, full of ridiculous claims like wind turbines being worse for the environment than the radioactive waste generated at each nuclear plant every year. To the Minister of Energy: when will you stop spinning your propaganda merry-go-round and sit down for some straight talk about nuclear power with Albertans, who are worried about the environment?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, an awful lot of rhetoric here and not a lot of substance. What's happening, of course, is that we had asked for a nonbiased, factual report relative to the application of nuclear energy in the province of Alberta. That's what we have in front of us. Going forward, we have a very open and transparent process to go out and consult with Albertans as the Premier has asked me to do. In due course that's exactly what will happen.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, Bruce Power has committed \$50 million to support its campaign for a nuclear plant in Alberta. Meanwhile, your website is talking about inviting a select group of Albertans to discuss the issue, but you stop short of having an open house, where all concerned Albertans can discuss the truth. To the Minister of Energy: why won't you commit today to letting all Albertans in on this debate by having nuclear consultations across the province open to anyone who wants to attend, including the media?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we're about to do. I don't believe that the Internet, that the website that we're on, that the workbooks will be restricted so that other Albertans cannot get involved. It's exactly what we are going to do. Thank you very much for the suggestion.

Ms Notley: Well, I will hold you to it, then, because right now your press release on this matter says that there will be no open public consultations. It says that select people will be invited. If you're telling me right now that your website is wrong and that you will have open consultations across the province, where anybody can attend, please confirm that now, and then you will have my thanks.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, do I have to explain it again? I am not restricting anybody from attending the website. All Albertans can attend the website. They're welcome to do it. There will be at some point in time an opportunity for people to march in front of the Legislature. If that's what they choose to do, we're not going to restrict them. They do now, on Friday afternoon, in the sunshine, go out and demonstrate in front of my office in Grande Prairie. I'm not restricting them from doing that. They can get involved in any way that they see fit.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Sorry, Calgary-East. Correction.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you think very highly of Calgary-Fort.

Immigrant Nominee Program

Mr. Amery: Mr. Speaker, immigration has been a key source of growth in Alberta's population. Last year the government missed its target to nominate workers under the Alberta immigrant nominee program. The target was not reduced; instead, it was doubled. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. In 2008-2009 did the government nominate as many new Albertans as it planned for?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we did meet our target. Our goal was to increase the provincial nominee certificates

issued to 3,000 last year, and we surpassed that, reaching over 3,400. This breaks down to over 250 families and over 3,100 employee-driven certificates. These certificates reflect over 8,500 new Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. For most of last year the economy was in quite a different situation than it is today. Given the current economy, are you going to reduce the number of nomination certificates targeted for this year?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The answer is no. This year's target is to issue 4,000 provincial nominee certificates. We recognize that while the economy has slowed in the short term, immigration remains very crucial to Alberta's population and economic growth in the long term. To meet our goals, we're recruiting people in the professions where they are needed the most. We are also reviewing our provincial nominee program to ensure alignment with the federal government and changes in the economy.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. With increases in the unemployment rate, what is the government doing about Albertans who are losing their jobs, and how does it work with the immigration targets?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the rising unemployment rate is concerning. Government continues to offer support and training programs to get people working again. Immigration is all about planning for the future so we are ready when the economy does pick up again. We are also working on improving our foreign qualification recognition to ensure that immigrants who are already here can put their skills to work as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Smoking in Vehicles Carrying Children

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 21, 2009, Ontario joined Nova Scotia in passing a ban on smoking in cars carrying children, and several other provinces are moving to pass similar legislation. To the Minister of Transportation: as many other jurisdictions are passing these laws, when will you commit to meeting your responsibilities to protecting children and move on this issue?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone knows that this government thinks children are one of the best resources we have here. They're going to be our new leaders. For this hon. member to actually think that we don't care about children makes me feel horrible. Anyway, I will say that I've said in this House many a time that there should be common sense to this, and we shouldn't need a law to make people look after their children.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I honestly don't know where this member gets it that I think his government does not care about children. I understand that you do. However, I can't for the life of me believe you haven't passed this law. Why won't you pass a law when adults continue to smoke while they're in vehicles with children in the back seat? Why don't you just pass a law saying that we're not going to tolerate this anymore?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have not seen where we could police the issue, for one thing. I really do watch drivers in other cars now because, as you know, we're looking at bringing distracted legislation forward. I try to watch other drivers without being too distracted myself, and I really haven't seen that problem with people smoking with their children in the car.

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have seen the problem happening, and also your own Solicitor General has said that we can police this if the law is passed. Just to ease your concerns on that issue, I'd have a conversation with your Solicitor General on this. As the Solicitor General, I've assured you, can police this, why not just go ahead and ban it? He will be able to look at protecting children in this province from people who are causing children damage from second-hand smoke.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'll definitely have a chat with our Solicitor General and see what kind of resources he has, but I still say that common sense is the answer here. I think the public in general should be educating people on not smoking in their vehicles with children in them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipal sustainability initiative, or MSI, is an unprecedented program that assists municipalities to enhance their long-term planning and sustainability. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What are the timelines for reviewing MSI project applications?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting municipalities, and municipalities decide on the projects based on their local priorities. After we receive the application from the municipalities, it takes about 10 to 12 weeks to process them. Our staff work with municipalities to ensure that the application is correct and is done correctly and reviewed as quickly as possible. MSI helps municipalities plan for the future and their needs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the same minister. I understand that there have been some delays in processing applications, and this can affect municipal planning and budgeting for these projects. To the minister: what is the minister's strategy to deal with any delays?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have increased the number of grant advisers, and just for information for this House we need to

keep in mind that we've received over 2,200 applications, and 1,800 of those have been reviewed and accepted. We're continually trying to improve the efficiencies, but those efficiencies are improvements for municipalities. We need to make sure that those focuses and directions are right.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs as well. What can municipalities do if they are experiencing processing delays with MSI project applications?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question because municipalities can contact our ministry, and they do contact their local representatives or MLA. We look into their project, and we will tell them where that project is as far as the application or the review. We are trying to shorten those guidelines. MSI is a program that is delivered by this Premier and this government, and it's an excellent program to support municipalities.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton-Calgary corridor is one of the wealthiest regions in the world, and we need to set up a transportation system that provides for long-term sustainable growth for this region. What is the Minister of Transportation's position on the role of high-speed rail as a central part of sustainable future development of this region?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see the hon. member is actually concerned about the great corridor that we have, and we want to be able to transport people safely in that corridor. I do believe that at some point in time we will see some sort of high-speed rail or a connection along that corridor. Today we've been analyzing a study that we just had done on ridership. I think we will probably be ready to release that at some time in the future, and I do believe that someday we will see a high-speed rail connection.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we should be planning for the high-speed train now, when the time is right. We should lay the foundation stone for that high-speed rail. To the minister again. We have heard from groups interested in high-speed rail who have pointed out that such a link would significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions as well as accidents and congestion by taking cars off the QE II highway. Does the minister agree with this? If so, what steps has he taken in that direction?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we haven't finished completely analyzing the review yet, but I'm going to give him a little tidbit out of it. There was one part of that review that did say that if we had a high-speed rail network, in the length of time it would take us to acquire the right-of-way and the length of time it would take us to build, we would not reduce the number of cars on the road because of the type of growth we've had in Alberta. We would still have the same types of emissions and congestion because of our growth.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister received a report over a year ago on the high-speed rail. When will the minister finally release this report and let Albertans know what the government is going to do about it?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, sometime in the future for sure we will release that report. We're analyzing right now.

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

AFSC Lending Limits

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It could also be argued today that this is a great day of agriculture and businesses in agriculture because agricultural businesses, just like other businesses, need to have access to capital in order to manage operations. During the economic slowdown and credit crunch necessary capital couldn't be more important to our producers. Yesterday it was announced that AFSC, or Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, is now able to offer larger loans to producers in Alberta. My first question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: what does this mean for Alberta producers and agribusinesses?

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

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This certainly means that producers and agribusinesses will continue to have access to some long-term, stable financing. This is another tool that will certainly help them establish, help them grow or sustain their operations, and ensure the future success of agriculture here in Alberta. AFSC will be able to provide loans to a broader base of clients and increase opportunities to partner with other financial institutions on some of the larger projects.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second question to the same minister: Minister, what are the increased spending limits?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that AFSC's lending limits have increased since 2002. The maximum loan or guarantee that can be provided has increased from \$2 million to a cumulative total of \$5 million. For larger scale projects limits have increased to \$25 million from \$10 million, so businesses and producers who take advantage of these increases will certainly still have access and the same long-term, low-interest, and flexible payment options that they've had before on other AFSC loans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Final question to the same minister: Minister, could you explain to the House why these programs are important to agriculture producers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, it certainly is a good question because even small family farms have large expenses, Mr. Speaker. Purchasing new farm equipment alone is a huge expense today. The increased lending limits will benefit everyone in the industry, regardless of the operation's size, as they are available in all of AFSC's loan programs in existence today. The increased limits will be very useful in making it possible for Alberta's industry members to continue to

be leaders and act on their innovative ideas. In fact, there's already been a lot of interest from the farm industry, and I encourage everyone who is interested to contact AFSC.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we had 96 questions and answers today. We have 30 seconds until we continue with Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Library Services

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great day to be an Albertan, and I had the great pleasure this morning to be present at and part of a very important announcement affecting all Albertans. It involved the Premier announcing the details of a new vision for Alberta's public library system that strengthens library services for all Albertans and includes a 39 per cent funding increase for public libraries.

This fall I had the privilege to be asked by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, a true champion for libraries, to chair the MLA committee on the Future of the Public Library Service in Alberta. Along with two of my colleagues, the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford and the MLA for Calgary-Mackay, we toured the province and listened to stakeholders. We listened to many passionate, committed Albertans and in our report brought forward their vision.

On behalf of my colleagues I want to thank the minister, his staff, and all library stakeholders for their commitment to this important initiative. Today's announcement demonstrates that the government listened to those Albertans. Autonomy has created strong local libraries and library boards. The government's role is to support that autonomy while creating an overarching library policy, supporting a province-wide public library system, promoting collaboration and innovation, and capitalizing on technology.

Today we celebrate what libraries are and, with this government's support, what they can become. With the hard work of library stakeholders and through the fantastic support for libraries that we've received from the Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and all ministries, we will have a solid framework for supporting a world-class public library service that will serve Albertans well into the 21st century.

Thank you.

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

Climate Change

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For almost 40 years Earth Day has been held on April 22 to draw attention to the dangers facing the planet we share. In the midst of our focus on the global recession, it is good to take the time to once again be reminded of the water we waste, the species we risk, the air we pollute, and the future we endanger.

While there are many pressing threats to our environment, the danger of climate change is especially concerning. Fiercer fires and the mountain pine beetle will jeopardize Alberta's forests, and successive droughts will deplete our supply of fresh water. The personal and economic costs of climate change could be staggering, so governments around the world have introduced effective strate-

gies to fight climate change that create real reductions in emissions. However, while scientists, politicians, and citizens alike agree that the time for action on the environment is now, this Conservative government's plan to fight climate change will not see any real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions until 2050. Alberta is now Canada's biggest greenhouse gas polluter, and the Conservatives are doing nothing to change this.

Responsible extraction of our province's main resource and transitioning toward a green economy can go hand in hand. The technology for dry tailings and greenhouse gas reducing measures exists. But while we take the steps we must to reduce our current carbon footprint, we can also begin the transition towards an economy based on green energy and green jobs. All that is needed to make this happen is the political will to do so. However, this Conservative government continues to pay lip service to the environment while subsidizing large oil corporations through untested and dangerous carbon capture technology.

We also need to ensure that we have enough environmental inspectors who are empowered to provide the oversight that is needed to ensure that environmental laws and regulations are upheld. It is ridiculous to expect that corporations can effectively self-monitor and provide the profit margins that investors are expecting at the same time.

On the occasion of Earth Day we have the opportunity once again to refocus our thoughts and efforts on what is arguably the most significant issue of our time. Recessions will not last forever. Economies will recover and undoubtedly boom again. The actions we take for our environment or, more importantly, the ones we don't will have significance for future generations.

The Deputy Speaker: May I have a moment? I have just been notified that our colleague the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright is married today for four years, his anniversary. He's got two children, and his wife's name is Sue. I would like to congratulate him.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to advise the House that on Monday, April 20, 2009, motions for returns 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24 will be dealt with.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two letters opposed to the cancellation of public funding for gender reassignment surgery. They state that the cancellation of funding unfairly targets a vulnerable group. The letters are written by Wayne Madden and Jordenne Prescott.

I'd also like to table the appropriate number of copies of documents related to the questions asked today by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. They are a column from the *Calgary Sun* dated April 14, 2009, a chart from the Health and Wellness website showing the number of hip replacement surgeries performed from September '07 to September '08, and an article with some statistics on the cost of hip replacement surgery in the U.S.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I have several tablings today. The first is a letter written by Joyce Burnett, who's taken the time at a very challenging point in her life to write to me to say among other things: I cannot imagine how difficult it must be for people who need sex change operations. She's obviously opposing the government's position.

The second is a letter from Reverend Brian Kiely. He first of all notes the cut to chiropractic services, but he's in fact more concerned about the cut to gender reassignment surgery, which he describes as petty, both financially and ethically, and he would like it restored.

The third is from Michelle Shaw, quite an extensive letter opposing the government's position on gender reassignment surgery.

The next is from Kelby DeLaet, who also is opposed to the government's position on gender reassignment surgery.

A letter from Nicole Hankel written to me, a very extensive one also on gender reassignment surgery, opposing the government's position.

One from Marcus Peterson opposing the government's position on gender reassignment surgery.

Another one, the second last, is from Alyssa Stryker, also opposing the government's position on gender reassignment surgery. She notes that she's not directly and personally affected by the decision. She sees it as an issue of human rights.

Finally, a letter from Krystin Prescott, who quotes the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, which ordered that "Ontario must fund the sex reassignment surgery" and also ordered that Ontario is to "cease this contravention of the Code." Pretty blunt language.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been a busy week in the constituency office for Edmonton-Centre, so I've just prepared a report, which I'll table today. Essentially, it covers the top issues that we've heard about in the office, particularly the seniors' pharmaceutical plan, with constituents like Garry and Dolores Acres and Keith Ali writing in – and I've given some excerpts from their e-mails there – a great deal of mail on the delisting of gender reassignment surgery, and also telephone calls, e-mails, and mail on the disbanding of the Wild Rose Foundation.

Other issues that were raised: a number of AISH recipients were pleased that the monthly AISH benefit was increased but also noting that it should be a cost-of-living increase that's indexed rather than increasing at the whim of the government, some support for this member's Bill 204, and some additional correspondence on housing and homelessness. I'll highlight Lisa Budney writing in support of the province's plan to end homelessness and hoping that the plan is appropriately funded.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, just table the report.

2:50 Projected Government Business

The Deputy Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Under Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected House business commencing the week of Monday, April 20, government business commencing on the 21st.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week will be a busy week. Commencing on the 21st of April under government business, depending on what's completed this afternoon, in committee we'll be dealing with bills 4, 19, and 17 as well as bills 6, 7, and 9; second reading of bills 23, 24, 26, and 30.

On Wednesday, April 22, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders again bills 4, 6, 7, and 9, depending on progress; third reading of bills 17 and 19 and second reading of bills 20, 25, 27, 28, and 32 and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, April 23, depending on progress, bills 4, 6, 7, and 9 in third reading and second reading of bills 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 29, 31, 33, and 35 and as per the Order Paper.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009, in Committee of the Whole. I wanted to reiterate a number of important points that have been made about this bill. It is to make two amendments to the Post-secondary Learning Act. One amendment ensures further consistency with our roles and mandate policy framework for publicly funded postsecondary institutions. The other proposal is a housekeeping matter related to clarifying delegation of powers for graduate faculty councils and faculty councils.

Mr. Chairman, during second reading a number of issues were identified. A question was raised regarding the concept of the urban campus in Calgary. Several issues related to tuition affordability and student housing were also highlighted. Finally, the issue of deferred maintenance at some of our campuses was mentioned. While these are all very important issues, they do not directly relate to either of the proposed amendments to the Post-secondary Learning Act. In fact, they're not related to them.

As such, I'd like to acknowledge a question that was raised which does relate to the amendments. That's the suggestion that if in the future Mount Royal College or Grant MacEwan College changed their name to include the term "university," their funding levels would need to increase to match those received by the comprehensive academic and research institutions. This amendment, Mr. Chairman, is about the ability of the institutions in the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions sector to be able to apply for a name change, not a change in the institutions' mandates. Therefore, the funding would not need to increase. The institutions in the comprehensive academic research institutions sector have the mandate to conduct pure research and, therefore, have a much higher degree of research intensity, while the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions sectors focus on teaching intensity. With respect to degree programs baccalaureate and applied studies institutions will be limited to undergraduate programming; therefore, research funding would not need to increase.

Currently the act restricts the use of the term “university.” The original intent of this provision was to maintain control over the use of the term, including restricting Alberta’s college system from using it, in an effort to preserve the foundation of the community college system. However, with the implementation of the roles and mandates framework it’s timely now to consider modernizing this provision to give consideration to the broader use of the word “university.” That would recognize the depth and breadth of programs offered by institutions within the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions sector category.

This bill would support those institutions who are currently offering – currently offering, I must emphasize, Mr. Chairman – baccalaureate degree programming by providing public recognition and some credibility through the option of applying for a name change to include the term “university” in their name. Other than this bill there are no mechanisms to allow these institutions to use the word “university” in their name without dissolving them and re-establishing them as a university under the comprehensive academic and research institutions category of the act.

This amendment to the act allows flexibility within the Post-secondary Learning Act as it relates to name only and does not change the mandate or the role of the institution. This amendment would not allow institutions to move from one sector to another but recognizes that baccalaureate and applied studies institutions are distinct as they offer baccalaureate programs as well as a variety of applied degrees, diplomas, certificates, transfer, and open studies programs under Campus Alberta.

The proposed bill has been intentionally restricted to baccalaureate and applied studies institutions because of that sector’s focus in the policy framework. This is not about shifting sectors or creating additional comprehensive academic and research institutions. Expanded undergraduate offerings within the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions will better position Alberta’s comprehensive academic and research institutions to accommodate more graduate students, which is a part of the vision of our tech commercialization as well as expanding the research capacity of our comprehensive universities. It’s a strong focus within the roles and mandates framework and the Alberta access planning framework.

The second amendment, Mr. Chairman – and I’ll speak to this briefly – is a housekeeping matter to ensure consistency and clarity for university processes related to the operation of their academic governance model. Stakeholders, in particular the Alberta Universities Association, have indicated that the authority to delegate is unclear in the current act other than for student discipline. In the preceding Universities Act there was an overarching delegating power that allowed any body constituted or continued by or under this act the power to delegate. With the amalgamation of the legislation into the Post-secondary Learning Act this overarching provision was not retained for the universities. This amendment would return those powers to the current act and is consistent with the request from stakeholders.

After much consultation and much discussion with all of our postsecondary leaders and stakeholders, Mr. Chairman, we bring forward these two amendments in order that our Campus Alberta can be more comprehensive and move forward into the future. I would also add that at some recent meetings of European leaders, who are coming over and talking about transferability within the European system, this type of sectoral model that we’ve put in place in Alberta is actually ahead of where Europe is even trying to go. These amendments just tidy up a couple of things.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. It’s a pleasure to speak this afternoon on the bill as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, Bill 4. Certainly, there has been comment on this bill at second reading. Bill 4, of course, will allow, as the hon. minister has indicated, postsecondary institutions in the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions sector to by order of the minister apply to use the name “university.” Also allowed under this proposed legislation is the delegation of powers by a faculty council. How that will work, as they say, time will tell.

Certainly, as we review this proposed legislation in committee, the remarks made by the hon. minister clarify a lot. It’s again nice to see the government bringing in more policies from the last election that were put forward by the Alberta Liberal Party. This legislation is a fine example of that.

3:00

It’s definitely time that we see provisions in place for baccalaureate institutions to be able to achieve university status. I understand that Mount Royal College in Calgary seeks acceptance into the AUCC, and with the provisions set out in the bill, this will happen. I would go so far as to say that students at Mount Royal with degrees, of course, will have significantly more academic recognition. I think this is what will happen, but certainly with this bill I don’t think the minister or anyone else has any intention of picking winners and losers. We have a sound postsecondary education system in this province. There is always room for improvement, but when we look specifically at Mount Royal, Mount Royal has for some time expressed an interest in being able to offer bachelor degrees and to be called a university.

Institutions will be contacted before discussions go any further, as I understand it. I don’t think any institutions have expressed any concern, that I’m aware of, regarding the delegation of powers by general faculties councils.

Mr. Horner: They asked for it.

Mr. MacDonald: I’m corrected, Mr. Chairman, by the hon. minister, who indicates that they have asked for it, and that’s something that I think is important to be on the official record of the Assembly.

With that, I do not anticipate any outstanding issues with this component of the bill, and I think we should have a further look at this bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview certainly is the representative of a constituency with the largest university in the province and the most distinguished. I’m going to say that with the threat of offending others, but it’s a very distinguished place, and he is very proud to represent the neighbourhood surrounding the University of Alberta. The hon. member has some issues that he would like to get on the record regarding Bill 4, and I will cede the floor, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. member.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This bill has been brewing for some time, of course, and parts of it I’m quite delighted about. This will facilitate something we’ve long supported, which is, for example, Mount Royal College becoming Mount Royal university, and we may see that trend elsewhere. There’s early speculation about Grant MacEwan College maybe following that route. We’ll have to wait and see.

There are some issues, I think, that need to be put on the record. One of the ones I have as a concern is around the overcentralization

of services and the overcentralization of, for example, the post-secondary system. I see this as a trend across the government with health services, with the school system, with other services, and I'm concerned. I just think we need to be alert to this with post-secondary institutions. These institutions have a long history of independence, and whether it's Mount Royal College, which was established virtually a hundred years ago, or Augustana College at Camrose, that was an independent institution one time, or any number of other colleges – the list would be quite long – I think we need to understand that that kind of independence is important.

It's important for a few things. I think, first of all, it's important for ensuring that there's a diversity of voices and a range of opinions and, indeed, a range of programs. For example, you might at one time have gone to what was then Camrose Lutheran College not just for a liberal arts education but for one that had a spiritual flavour to it, a spiritual flavour that would not have been available in a publicly funded university like the University of Alberta. You might well have gone to Grant MacEwan Community College because it offered a very different experience than a standard diploma and degree-granting college. The whole spirit of the community college was to be out in the community and to offer programs so that learning was available to every citizen on a whole range of issues, not just academic issues but a whole range of interests. The idea and understanding then was that better education was part of a better quality of life.

As we centralize things and, frankly, concentrate more and more control in the office of the minister, I think we risk losing as well as gaining. I admit that we could potentially gain – although there's no guarantees of this – some efficiencies. We can gain ease of transferability.

Mr. Horner: I don't know what centralization you're talking about.

Dr. Taft: The minister is asking me questions, and what I'm doing is just expressing issues that I think need to be raised around the whole trend to Campus Alberta and a single approach to post-secondary education in this province. If the minister disagrees, I think that's healthy. You know, that'll be great. That's how these issues come up.

I understand that the move towards Campus Alberta, which this is, I think, part of – I believe even the minister said that in his opening comments – has some benefits. I'm just wanting to get on the record that we don't lose some of the advantages of a decentralized system.

There's no question that the role of the government is to ensure quality standards in universities, and the word "university" has to be protected. I know that the government is concerned about that, so for Mount Royal College, for example, to become Mount Royal university, they're going to need to meet accreditation standards. That's good, and I'm counting on the government to continue doing that. But I do think that we need to remain conscious of where postsecondary education came from, of the various streams, whether they were the faith-sponsored colleges like Camrose Lutheran College or the community colleges like Grant MacEwan College. We don't want to lose that heritage entirely by coming to a singular Campus Alberta that's run kind of like the University of California system or the University of Michigan system.

I think we need to remember that learning is important for its own sake. We need to make sure that this kind of legislation supports and encourages that. We need to remember that learning doesn't just happen within the halls and walls of universities and colleges and buildings. It can happen in communities. It can happen in the outdoors. It can happen in all kinds of ways where extension programs and community colleges support it.

I wanted to make sure that some of those sensitivities were on the record in this debate and going forward as we probably consolidate the Campus Alberta model and, I suspect, look at parallel consolidations like what might be happening with research funds, which I know has stirred up some controversy in academic circles.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat. I do look forward to some response from the minister. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Chairman. First, I'd like to maybe just chat a little bit about some of the comments that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. The first one, I'm going to say, is that it's difficult for me to accept the comment that this was a policy put forward by the Liberals before the last election. The policy that is allowing this to happen is the roles and responsibilities, the mandate framework that was brought forward to this ministry by the stakeholders. The idea that you supporting Mount Royal being a university is somehow why this bill is here, frankly, Mr. Chairman, is absurd.

3:10

I would point the hon. member to the numerous consultations that we had with all members of our postsecondary system over the last two years to develop the roles and responsibilities framework, the six sector model, the fact that we're getting world recognition about the fact that this will allow, indeed, our postsecondary system to flourish in a small market. I just wanted to make sure that there was no misunderstanding. We're not copying anybody here. In fact, our stakeholders are creating something totally new that is being recognized around the world.

So when we talk about university status, that's an old term, Mr. Chairman. It's a very old term. In fact, it's a 12th century term. We're not using that anymore, and we're not using an AUCC acceptance because the fact is that AUCC is a faculty club. It has nothing to do with accreditation, nor does it have anything to do with a student's ability to transfer from one institution to the other. I don't know how many times I have to say that, but that's the truth of the matter. We're not picking winners and losers. I would argue that our system is not just sound, but it's great, and I think that we get students who tell us that.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview brings up some very interesting points. He mentioned that this was a bill that's been brewing for some time. In actual fact, it hasn't been brewing for some time. It's a result of something that we missed doing in our six sector model. The centralization of the system that he refers to, I guess, would be the idea that somehow Campus Alberta is going to be controlling what's going on at a university campus. It's not. In fact, this has not been driven by this minister or this ministry or this government. What this has been driven by is the postsecondary system itself. That is, the presidents, the chairs, the deans of the system have all been involved in writing this model. I think that's the success of the model.

I would suggest to the hon. member that he might want to check with the president of that very venerable institution which is in his constituency about her views as to what we're doing here. I think he'd find that she views it not as centralization, not as an attack on her independence, not as an attack on the system but, in fact, as the ability for the comprehensive academic institution to do what we want it to do, and that's to grow the graduate-to-undergraduate ratio on those campuses where basic, implied, and pure research is going to be done. The academic independence is there.

Governance is also part of Campus Alberta because we are only a market of 3 and a half million people, even less when you talk about postsecondary students. We have to ensure that there is an ability for students to take postsecondary wherever they are in the province. That's what Campus Alberta is all about. Hon. member, this is not about the institutions. We serve three clients. We serve the student, we serve the taxpayer, and we serve society. We do not serve the institutions. That's a cultural shift that has happened that I think you'll find the institutions themselves have really grabbed onto because they see where they can grow within that Campus Alberta model without threat and without thinking about: well, I have to achieve this in order to grow. That's not what this is about.

The postsecondary system has certainly come up to the plate in terms of support of this. I would hazard a guess that you would not find a president in our system that would say that they're opposed to what we're doing here. I think that when you look at some of the other systems that the hon. member mentioned, like the University of California system, this is not the University of California system. I'm very aware of what that system is. This is not the British system. This is not the Ontario system. This is the Campus Alberta system. I'm quite proud of that.

Again, I would ask the hon. member to have a chat with some of the folks in the postsecondary system to find out the kind of accolades, frankly, that they're receiving – and I give them 100 per cent credit for this – for designing a system that other jurisdictions are looking at and asking: how the heck can we get ours to that? Indeed, I think it's going to make it easier for us to collaborate with British Columbia and Saskatchewan. At the end of the day what it's all about is creating opportunities for the students.

I hope that I've kind of answered the concern about what the hon. member might have been thinking about. With that, I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. I appreciate the comments from the minister. I want to repeat for the minister that we're actually supporting this bill. So if he was thinking we were opposed to it, you know, we actually are supporting it. I was simply trying to get on the record some bigger-picture issues and concerns that I have and some things I don't want us to lose. I wasn't going to raise this, but I do need to raise what to me was a genuine low point in the postsecondary system of Alberta, and that originated out of this Legislature about four years ago, when the former Premier was caught very badly plagiarizing. It was extensive, and it was well documented. I thought it would blow over. Where I think things really went badly was when a predecessor of yours – and I would hope you would never do this, Mr. Minister – leaned on the presidents of major universities, wrote letters which were widely published in the media describing the former Premier as a model student, et cetera, et cetera, when in fact well over . . .

Mr. Horner: I sure hope you're not insinuating what I think you're insinuating.

Dr. Taft: I'm not insinuating anything here. I'm just stating facts. I was not going to go there. I just want to get on the record, however, that I am concerned that universities do remain vibrant, arm's-length, independent organizations. I have tremendous respect for the University of Alberta and for other universities in this province. All I am wanting to do is make sure that that broad social and historical context for a vibrant postsecondary system is under-

stood and recognized. It goes through highs, and sometimes it goes through lows. I really want this to move on to being a high.

At some point I'm going to ask the minister, for example, for discussion on the U of A's goal of being top 20 by 2020, which I hope it can achieve. I'd be interested to know how we as an Assembly can support the university in achieving that, but that's for a different time.

I just want to get clear with the minister that we're supporting this bill. I want to make sure that people understand that there is important context in history for Alberta's postsecondary institutions.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak?

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 19

Land Assembly Project Area Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There's been a great deal of discussion about Bill 19, and the government has been listening to Albertans. We are proposing to make amendments to the legislation based on this feedback, and I'd like to move these amendments for the consideration of the Assembly.

These amendments will make an important piece of legislation even more beneficial to Albertans. The amendments' purpose is to clarify the purpose of the bill, to create greater certainty for land-owners, and to address the main concerns that we've heard.

Amendment A is an additional amendment to draft amendments tabled in the House last month. Subsections (2), (3), and (4) in section 2 are replaced, and the amendment clarifies what types of projects Bill 19 can be used for. The legislation will only be used for projects related to the management and conservation of water such as dams and reservoirs and transportation utility corridors. It's important to note that these corridors must include a transportation component such as a road or high-speed rail to move people and goods. Utilities may also be included in these corridors where it's appropriate, as we presently do with roads, Mr. Chair. Establishment of utility routes must be approved through existing processes with organizations such as the Alberta Utilities Commission or the Energy Resources Conservation Board.

The amendment removes a discretion to designate unspecified projects as public projects, so it makes it clear that this legislation cannot be used for things like nuclear power plants or by private companies to establish routes for transmission lines or pipelines. The legislation is for water conservation projects and transportation utility corridors, period.

3:20

Amendment B sets out the mandatory consultation that has always been a centrepiece of Bill 19, but the amendment moves the

consultation provision into a stand-alone clause following section 2 of the legislation. It's done to better emphasize the importance of the consultation provisions in the act. We want to ensure that landowners are well informed and can provide meaningful input into the process. Consultation is required by law. These provisions did not exist under the old legislation.

The amendment also introduces time limits on the government to go forward and make a decision. Government must complete the formal consultation and make decisions about the project area within two years. This provides ample time for government to complete meaningful consultation with landowners, and it reduces the period of uncertainty for landowners while the project is being considered. Landowners will not be left on hold.

Amendment C. The government always intended to implement a land-buying program as soon as a project area was approved, and priority is to be given, of course, to landowners who want to sell their land as soon as possible, but landowners expressed concern that this policy was not laid out explicitly enough in the legislation. The proposed amendment does just that. Section 5 of Bill 19 is replaced. The amendment requires government to enter into negotiations to purchase the land at the request of the landowner. Additional protection is incorporated to add further assurance to landowners that the negotiation process is fair. The landowner has the option to ask for an independent third party to determine the price if a negotiated settlement can't be reached. The landowner can also appeal the decision to the courts if they are still unsatisfied. The amendment provides additional certainty for landowners, and it compels the government to move forward diligently with a project.

Amendment D. The amendment proposes the removal of section 13 in its entirety. The intent of section 13 was to confirm that the government's power under the act to designate a project area did not constitute *de facto* expropriation. This had been recognized by the courts. Some people took it to mean that section 13 meant that Bill 19 trumped the Expropriation Act. That was never the case, but section 13 has now been removed altogether to remove any confusion that may have been caused.

Let me be clear. Expropriation is still available, but it is a last resort. Our experience with land purchases for projects like our two ring roads shows us that the majority of land will be purchased through negotiation. If an expropriation is required, all the rights and protections afforded to landowners under the Expropriation Act will still apply, and landowners will not lose any legal protection.

We also have amendment E, and this is just housekeeping. Section 15 references parts of the bill that have since been amended, so those references have been updated. The amendment brings section 15 into line with the amended legislation.

Mr. Chair, as a fourth-generation farmer and rural Albertan I know land issues can be contentious. Bill 19 strikes the right balance between landowners' rights and the need for government to move ahead on important infrastructure projects. The proposed amendments will make this important piece of legislation even stronger, and the combined effect of these amendments is to clarify the bill's language, to provide additional reassurance to landowners that their interests have been given a fair hearing in the development of this legislation, to also provide certainty to landowners that they'll be dealt with in a timely fashion, and to assure them that they'll be fairly compensated for their land and have a right to appeal.

Those, Mr. Chairman, are my comments with respect to the amendments. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you mentioned a point about severance. Is that what you want to speak to?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please. Under *Beauchesne* 688 and the precedent tradition of this House I would ask that these amendments be severed for the purpose of voting.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, to be clear, you're asking that they be severed for the purpose of voting, but the whole thing can be debated as a whole. Is that what you're saying?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. It means that you can talk about anything you want, but they'd get voted on separately. So there would be five separate votes, given the divisions here, for sections A, B, C, D, and E.

The Deputy Chair: Correct.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a great honour and a privilege to rise today and join Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. This legislation clarifies the relationship between government and Albertans when land must be studied or used for transportation purposes or relating to the conservation or management of water.

Now, before I go on, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just mention my own involvement in this process. I was privileged to be able to travel around the province and accompany many of my colleagues to a number of meetings around the province that dealt with issues surrounding Bill 19. Some of these members were the hon. members for Drayton Valley-Calmar, Livingstone-MacLeod, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and the ministers of both Infrastructure and Transportation. I attended meetings in Warburg, Ponoka, Round Hill, Ryley, and Innisfail that were billed as meetings specifically called to discuss Bill 19. I also attended a number of meetings in my own constituency where I was able to discuss Bill 19.

The meetings that were sponsored or put on by opposition parties, parties that might not be in this House here today, were generally quite different than meetings that were put on by local groups that were mostly surface rights groups. There are people out in the province, Mr. Chairman, that are really interested in misinforming and creating fear among landowners for partisan reasons. There is no doubt about this. They have a small following that showed up at numerous places, the same people travelling around the province. I believe that they are using these types of forums more to peddle their own opinions and their message than to actually inform the public.

But we did listen to the public, and we suggested to the minister how we could add clarity to the intent of the bill and how we could amend the bill. Following consultation with Albertans, the government has introduced several thoughtful amendments for this Assembly's consideration.

Mr. Chairman, I was absolutely amazed that in some of these meetings, probably in most of them, after an MLA or the minister had the opportunity to explain the purpose of the bill or clarify some misinformation, people were actually quite in favour of the intent of the bill.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to one specific amendment, that I find particularly well thought out, following section 2. I'll only comment on the one amendment as I know that there are other hon. members that will speak to other amendments. Section 2.1(1)(a) stipulates that

the Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a Project Area with respect to a public project unless the Minister

- (a) has prepared a plan, in accordance with the regulations, of the proposed project.

Bill 19 clarifies that the government may not appropriate any area of land for a proposed project unless the minister has established and set forth a specific plan for the usage of that land. Thus, Albertans will be well informed of the government's proposals for any affected area of land deemed necessary for a proposed project.

To this end, section 2.1(1)(b) ensures that the government upholds its responsibility to make the plan of any proposed project available to the public in accordance with the regulations. Mr. Chairman, this provision upholds this government's dedication to providing transparent and accountable government to Albertans. Ensuring that plans are made public provides Albertans the ability to overview any proposed project and thus empowers them to offer valuable insight and feedback.

Furthermore, Mr. Chairman, 2.1(1)(c) ensures that government provides the registered owners of land within the proposed project area with notice of the proposed project in accordance with regulations. Not only would the government ensure that the proposed project is provided publicly – that is, for everyone, including neighbouring Albertans – but also that registered owners of land within the proposed project area are provided notice in accordance with the regulation.

Subsection 2.1(1)(d) ensures that the minister consults with registered owners of land in the proposed project area. This provision guarantees the right of landowners to be consulted by the minister in order to have their views and input heard.

3:30

Mr. Chairman, I feel that the insertion of these provisions into Bill 19 will provide clarity to the rights of landowners and responsibilities of government for proposed project areas. It guarantees the right of landowners to be fully notified, informed, and, most importantly, consulted before any project that affects their land is approved by government. This is a new provision that did not exist before in the current legislation. It ensures that the ministry upholds its obligation to carry forth the necessary notifications and consultations. It is important to note that these measures weren't part of Bill 19, but they have been added for further clarification of all parties.

A further proposed amendment is the insertion of section 2.1(2), which states that "the Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a project area if more than 2 years has elapsed since the plan of the proposed project was made available to the public under subsection (1)(b)." Mr. Chairman, as mentioned in subsection (1)(b), it is the responsibility of the minister to inform affected landowners of a proposed project. This amendment is absolutely critical as it prohibits the minister from designating the affected area of land of a project area if more than two years have elapsed since the date of notification. This timeline ensures that the government must proceed in a timely and orderly manner should it wish to proceed with a proposed project.

Another important amendment is section 2.1(3), which reads:

Where a project area order is amended to add land to a Project Area that does not exceed the maximum amount of land determined under the regulations, subsection 1(c) and (d) only apply to the registered owners of the land being added and of any land adjacent to the land being added.

This outlines which landowners must be consulted when land is added to a project area. Now, one may ask for an example of such an addition. Mr. Chairman, it could be that if after some years it is determined that a little more land is needed to build an intersection

around, you know, a planned intersection, much like we've done on the ring road around Edmonton, only the newly affected landowners would be required to be consulted.

Mr. Chairman, I believe the proposed amendments would serve to enrich Bill 19 by providing greater clarity as to the rights and responsibilities of government and landowners. I'm proud to say that these amendments were made following careful and extensive consultation with Albertans. For these reasons, I am proud to offer my full support for the proposed amendments to Bill 19 and urge my colleagues to vote accordingly.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. That was an informative speech from the hon. member from Ponoka-Rimbey. Before I forget, I would remind the hon. member that even before this bill got to second reading, the government was making public commitments to amend it. The first amendments that were circulated publicly to my knowledge were in the middle of March, and the consultation process that the hon. member is referring to with his public meetings in Ryley among other places have occurred after that. So to say that these amendments are the result of the public consultation process is, in my view, certainly a stretch. In the time I have been a representative in this Assembly, I cannot remember – perhaps the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre can refresh my mind – where a bill, any bill, was introduced, and before it went any further in second reading, the government was providing amendments.

Without a doubt, this is an extremely controversial bill that limits landowners' rights and controls their land. The hon. member from Ponoka-Rimbey is right . . .

Mr. Prins: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. MacDonald: Lacombe-Ponoka. I apologize. It's Joe Anglin that's from Rimbey. I forgot.

An Hon. Member: Who?

Mr. MacDonald: Joe Anglin. Joe is an Albertan with an interest in property issues, whether they deal with transmission lines or with acquisition of land for government projects. He is a very knowledgeable resource on a lot of these matters, and I'm sure many members of the Progressive Conservative caucus shared the public stage with Mr. Anglin this winter in regard to this matter. He's only one of three or four or maybe five parties that have had opinions on Bill 19.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the hon. member talked about public consultations, and we in the Alberta Liberal Party thought: well, let's have some real public consultations, where people would have time to make presentations to hon. members of this Assembly and others regarding this bill over the summer. We had anticipated that the government would give this bill in its current form, before these proposed amendments – and they certainly could be part of the discussion. There's no reason why they could not. But we would have a look at this on the policy field committee that would be dealing with matters of infrastructure, which is the Economy one. Over the summer they could have a look and perhaps even go to Ryley and hear first hand.

But the hon. member across is confident now with these proposed amendments. I think we're going to refer to them as A, B, C, D, and E. This is the political fix for this legislation.

Now, I've said this before, Mr. Chairman. If this government had not been embarrassed by the shenanigans that went on in Rimbey at the regulatory hearing – it'll be two summers coming up really quickly since those regulatory hearings occurred. There was a licensed private investigator who was confronted in the washroom of the local centre in Rimbey and asked what his business was at the hearings. To the local people, to their amazement, he said: well, I'm hired here to keep an eye on folks. It's just like the chairman is keeping his eye on me and making sure that I'm speaking to the bill and to the amendments, which I am.

Now, when we think of that private investigator and his admission to those individuals and how embarrassed this government was, they decided once and for all that this was not going to happen again. I can only guess how quickly individuals not only in the Department of Infrastructure but perhaps as well in Alberta Justice began to draft a bill to ensure that this doesn't happen again, and I think this is the bill. This is the way we're going to proceed so that nothing like that can ever happen again.

Now, when we look at the government's need for this bill, Mr. Chairman, they have a lot of ideas, and they have a lot of planned projects on the go. When we look at the first amendment here and dividing up section 2, I have to make a cautionary note here regarding the emphasis on consultation provisions. Perhaps the hon. minister can explain this to me, but it's not clear to me what this amendment actually does. It certainly changes the ordering of the bill, splitting the current section 2 into two parts. I heard the claim made that this emphasizes the consultation provisions, but the problem with this bill isn't the lack of emphasis. It is the fact that the consultation provisions are not good enough. By simply changing the order of the bill, it does nothing, in my opinion, to address this, so I don't know how this is going to work. Perhaps at some point we can get further clarification on this.

3:40

We're moving some things around here, but we still need to see the regulations. There are many different proposed regulations in this, and with all due respect to the hon. members across the way I do not for one minute believe that there are not draft regulations to this proposed bill somewhere in a filing cabinet in the office of the Minister or the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure. There have to be regulations, and because this is enabling legislation, the regulations are so important. That's why if you want to restore public confidence not only in the processes that led up to this bill but in the public confidence in this legislation, then I would suggest that the regulations have to be part of this. It's nice to present these amendments, and it's very respectful of the Minister of Infrastructure to have almost a month ago made these amendments public and allowed them to be circulated. People could give feedback. People could express their concerns. But let's have a look at the regulations.

Now, when we look further at these amendments and the time limit for the government to approve a project area, we are looking here, as I understand it, at placing a two-year time limit on the government so that they only have that period after they propose a project area to be actually put in a project area order. This does make a substantial difference or a substantive change, but it doesn't address, in my view, the major concerns of landowners. In particular, it doesn't change the fact that the project area orders themselves can last for an unlimited period of time; thus, landowners face those controls on their land for all that time. Unless I'm getting this wrong, I don't see that change.

The duration of the planning process isn't as much of a concern to landowners as the duration of the project area itself. When we talk

about these project areas, we have to have a look at some of the government's plans. The government has a 20-year strategic capital plan to address Alberta's infrastructure needs. I know the hon. Deputy Premier has read it. He probably wrote it. He says no, but I suspect he was involved in it.

It's on the website of the President of the Treasury Board. It's also on Alberta Infrastructure's website. It's a recent document. I think it was put out on the 29th of January, 2008, and it goes into a lot of detail here on what the infrastructure needs are now in this province and what they will be in the sort of medium term and, Mr. Chairman, also the long term. It's divided into three different sections, in my view. It is a very, very interesting document, and it's a guide to Bill 19.

Some of the medium-term plans or priorities of this government – this is where Bill 19 is going to come into play, and this is why we have to get it right with these amendments, Mr. Chairman – will include supporting new highways and expanding and upgrading existing highways, adding and upgrading interchanges on major highways to smooth the flow of traffic, completing ring roads around Calgary and Edmonton as well as planning ring roads for other major centres and outer ring roads for Calgary and Edmonton.

Now, I don't know where these outer ring roads for Calgary and Edmonton are going to be sited, but I would assume that has already been done.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. It's been sketched out.

Mr. MacDonald: I would say that it certainly has been sketched out, and I think this should be part of the debate on Bill 19. The government should let us know what they have in mind for these outer ring roads in Calgary and Edmonton and certainly for the ring roads and power lines in other parts of the province.

We know that "while Edmonton and Calgary's primary ring roads will be completed within a few years, it is critical to plan now for outer ring roads surrounding these two metro areas." This is on page 61 of the 20-year strategic plan, Mr. Chairman. In fact, "Alberta's population [is] projected to reach 5 million people by 2028." Four million of them will be Edmonton Oilers fans; 1 million will support the Calgary Flames. That's not in here. But there will be 5 million people living in this province.

Now, it's interesting to note that other

urban centres such as Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Airdrie, Lloydminster, will also require primary ring roads in the foreseeable future. Planning discussions must be accelerated in order for long-term plans to be established and parcels of land acquired to implement those plans [or ideas] at the appropriate time.

It goes on to say here, Mr. Chairman, that

the Government of Alberta must also determine the location of new corridors that will be required for additional roadways, irrigation requirements . . .

And get this.

. . . power lines and pipelines to accommodate future growth, and begin acquiring land parcels and rights-of-way well in advance.

So this 20-year plan is to follow Bill 19 and the amendments that we're discussing here this afternoon in committee, Mr. Chairman, and this is a significant plan. Now, when we look at all of these projects, again not only in Edmonton and Calgary but in the various cities that I mentioned and Sherwood Park as well, the government should make very clear to all landowners in those areas what their plans are and what property they have their eye on as necessary to facilitate these developments.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when we talk about power lines and pipelines to accommodate further growth, that contradicts what we

were told by the hon. members across the way, that Bill 19 had absolutely nothing to do with pipelines or transmission lines. I would like a clarification from the hon. minister or one of his colleagues regarding what is in the 20-year strategic plan and what was said earlier this afternoon in the House so that I can certainly understand that.

The hon. minister has been very respectful, and he has updated me, certainly, over the last month on some of the issues surrounding Bill 19, and I appreciate that. I missed his – I'm not going to call it a bear-pit – session that occurred at the AAMD and C just during the constituency break, where there was quite a discussion about this. In fact, there was an emergency resolution put to the floor by, I believe, some people in Grande Prairie. I'm not sure. They might have been from the county of Grande Prairie. But it was discussed, and they decided that they were going to stick with the minister's side of the story, essentially. We'll see how this develops as these projects develop in Alberta, Mr. Chairman.

There are certainly requests from this side of the House for information regarding this proposed legislation, but I think that it is very important that the government indicate where they are planning to site these infrastructure projects. These are the projects that we're talking about in this bill. Taxpayers are going to be funding the acquisitions, so they have every right to know what is in the details. Certainly, we should provide that.

3:50

Now, there are other projects that the government has in mind, and one of them that I find interesting is the six-lane highway on the QE II. It would be one of the largest infrastructure projects, I think, in the history of this province if we were to add an additional lane north and an additional lane south on highway 2 considered dedicated truck lanes. Bill 19 is part and parcel of that plan, Mr. Chairman.

Also, the government has a plan to purchase lands for the development of a faster and more efficient link between Edmonton and Calgary while corridor rights-of-way and options are still available. Now, I can only assume that this is the high-speed rail link that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview initially suggested in this Assembly two years ago.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, more than that.

Mr. MacDonald: I stand corrected. More than that. Four years ago.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, for sure. Five or six.

Mr. MacDonald: Five or six years ago, Mr. Chairman. They're distracting me again.

When you look at the importance of the high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary – and I've been told this myself, not by engineers from Infrastructure but by other engineers – the largest cost of that rail link would be the acquisition of the rights-of-way. Mr. Chairman, I think the government also should come forward with their ideas on the acquisition of that land because, again, it's going to be the taxpayers who are going to have to fund it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To start with, I'm sure pleased to hear that we're going to get a ring road around St. Albert. I'm not sure where it's going to go, but I guess I'd better have a little chat with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to find out.

Mr. Chairman, it's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. I would like to applaud the minister for his forward-thinking and pragmatic piece of legislation. Specifically, I would like to address the consultation processes outlined by section 2(3), which reads:

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a Project Area with respect to a public project unless the Minister

- (a) has prepared a plan, in accordance with the regulations, of the proposed project,
- (b) has made the plan of the proposed project available to the public in accordance with the regulations,
- (c) has provided the registered owners of land within the proposed Project Area with notice of the proposed project in accordance with the regulations, and
- (d) has consulted, in accordance with the regulations, with the registered owners of land within the proposed Project Area.

In my mind, Mr. Chairman, this legislation and particularly this section is absolutely essential for the efficient and effective planning of major infrastructure projects. Bill 19 will help to improve the process by which government identifies and assembles large sections of land for major public projects.

Our friends to the left complain that through the current system we've got "the most expensive highways in, if not in Alberta, the entire country." Mr. Chairman, members of the Liberal opposition appear to favour the problems that were created with the restrictive development caveats that were placed around Edmonton and Calgary in the mid-1970s.

Mr. Chairman, this government recognizes that the 1970s legislation created some problems, and that is exactly what this legislation is attempting to avoid. By giving the public advance notice of the plans for major projects, landowners and prospective purchasers are advised of what is being planned, and they can act accordingly. They have the opportunity to engage the government in discussions for the sale of their lands, or they may continue to live on the lands until the land is required. That sounds like a process that will create fairness and equity for all.

Large public projects such as transportation utility corridors, as in the case of the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads, are important for the future development of this province. Alberta has seen dramatic growth in not only our population but also in our industrial and infrastructure needs. Mr. Chairman, to the credit of this government we have recognized that the pressures associated with this growth will require long-term infrastructure planning. For example, projects such as major transportation and utility corridors require large amounts of land and capital and extensive planning. In order to ensure that these projects are completed in an economically responsible manner, land needs to be assembled well in advance.

Just as an aside, Mr. Chairman, I was reading a 1954 article the other day written by a well-known consulting engineer of a former era, Lou Grimble, entitled *Highways and the Ring Road in the Metropolitan Area*. Yes, that paper was presented in 1954, 55 years ago, to the Alberta planning conference. As I was saying, these major projects need to be planned well in advance. Bill 19, section 2(1), constructs a framework that directs the government to consult with landowners and other stakeholders with regard to these long-term projects.

Mr. Chairman, land planning and zoning have been part of our history for many years. For example, in 1913 the government of Alberta passed the first planning act and in 1929 created the Town and Rural Planning Advisory Board. Part 17 of the current Municipal Government Act sets out a comprehensive planning scheme that is the envy of many jurisdictions around the world. Planning is in our blood in Alberta. This province is built on sound planning, even

going back to the 1880s, when the dominion land surveyors laid out our township system in an orderly, systematic pattern of sections and townships. Planning legislation is designed to empower communities to consult with stakeholders and plan for future infrastructure needs.

Over the years we have continually strengthened this consultation process. But to truly understand how our land tenure system has changed, we need to step back and look at how the land tenure system in Canada has evolved. Land ownership in Canada descends from English feudal times. Historically, English monarchs were the direct owners of all lands in their nation. Rather than ruling these lands directly, they would assign them to nobles, who would, in turn, pay taxes and/or agree to perform feudal duties, including infantry or ecclesiastical services, for the king as compensation. In turn, these nobles would divide up their lands and let them out to the people, who would work on them, in turn, providing food or services to the noble, thus allowing the noble to fulfill his obligation to the monarch. In this system, Mr. Chairman, the monarch technically retained ownership of the land and had the right to tax, regulate, and even remove any parties from the property. These actions were undertaken without consultation or consideration of the affected landowners.

Mr. Chairman, I am happy to say that we have come a long way from that early feudal system. We have a government that recognizes the value of consultation and the benefits of long-term planning with public input. Nevertheless, we retain remnants of that early feudal system. Land in Canada is still held as a tenancy from the Crown. The Crown retains certain rights to govern and regulate lands for the greater public interest.

4:00

Section 2.1 is further evidence of this recognition and has within it several measures that enhance the consultation process, recognizing the rights of landowners. For example, section 2.1 states that not only is consultation with affected landowners desirable; it is mandatory. The government must consult with both the public and affected landowners before any land is set aside for a project or development. Simply put, landowners will be informed of development projects, and they will have the opportunity to provide input. Furthermore, Mr. Chair, the Crown will not take land without due compensation, which will be determined by market forces.

I applaud the government for introducing Bill 19, not only for its foresight, dedicated future planning but for the commitment to public involvement and consultation. We must re-establish a due planning process that will enable us to plan and complete major infrastructure programs efficiently and effectively, with due consideration to the rights of all private landowners.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I will be standing in support of Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, and these amendments and urge all members to join with me in doing so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to speak to the amendment that's being proposed by the minister. Actually, I'd look to the minister for some back and forth here because I'm trying to understand what we achieve through this amendment. I'm particularly focused on amendment A. [interjection] Okay. Thank you. I'm quite genuinely wanting to engage the minister so I can understand amendment A more clearly because when I read it, frankly, I don't know what it achieves. I know the minister spoke a bit about this in his opening comments, but I need some further explanation. Frankly, I think the public is going to as well because we all know this has been a controversial bill.

Amendment A amends section 2. I don't want to read the whole section; that will take too long, and I like to be efficient, Mr. Chairman. What amendment A does, first of all, is strike subsections (3) and (4) under section 2. So in subsection (3) what's being pulled out is "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a Project Area with respect to a public project" unless the minister has done the following, and there are four sentences there under subsection (3). Is the minister with me?

Mr. Hayden: Yeah.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Subsection (3). It strikes that out. What that subsection seems to do, to me, is actually curtail, put some boundaries around, what the Lieutenant Governor in Council can do. So I'm not sure what we achieve by getting rid of that.

The amendment as well leaves in a couple of things that are, I think, the subject of some real concern, from what I've heard. It says – and I'm quoting here now from the amendment – that Section 2 is amended and subsection (2) will read as follows:

- (2) For the purpose of this Act and the regulations, a project is a public project if the project is
 - (a) a project related to the transportation of people or goods, which may also include as part of that project a corridor of land for pipelines, pipes or other conduits, poles, towers, wires, cables, conductors or other devices, including any ancillary structures, or
 - (b) a project related to the conservation or management of water.

I guess my simple question to the minister is: tell me what the heck this achieves, because I don't see it achieving anything right now.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the hon. member for the question because it offers us an opportunity to clarify. In a way you are correct. When you look at it, the protections were already in place. But what we found in speaking to Albertans all across the province is that there was a concern. Because subsections (2)(a) and (b) were separate, with the reference in (a) to transportation of people and goods and then (b) as a separate heading, talking about pipelines, pipes, conduits, poles, towers, there was a concern and a fear that a project could be set aside for one or the other. In discussions with Albertans we saw that the intent was clear. I think that you understood the intent, but a lot of people, because of the confusion, were more comfortable to have it plainly stated that, first and foremost, this was for transportation of people and goods but that these other things could be part of that. First and foremost, it was transportation of people and goods.

By combining (a) and (b), that satisfied the concerns of people. They see that it means that it's transportation, and then, like other roadways, there could be power lines or high-speed fibre optics, distribution gas lines. Those sorts of things could be in a transportation utility corridor. It just solidified the fact that this cannot be used for pipelines or power lines, which is plain, anyway, when we say that it's for public projects. These are private undertakings when we talk about transmission lines and major pipelines. So that's with respect to (a) and (b).

With respect to (d), the change that's made in the amendment, there were concerns, and people were uncomfortable that "a project designated by the Lieutenant Governor in Council," which, as you know, is cabinet, "as a public project" left open too much discretion. I trust cabinet's decisions, but at the same time, I understand people's concerns with that particular clause. It really didn't add

anything to what we were trying to do. We are trying to acquire land for transportation utility corridors, similar to the Anthony Henday and the Calgary ring road. Having clause (d) in there really didn't enhance the purpose of the bill. So that's the explanation to it. It's just for clarification. I'm glad that the hon. member was comfortable with it the way it was, but I think this makes it more clear for the public.

If I could, for a moment, just respond to the other questions with respect to regulation. Of course, the bill guides the regulation. I feel that we can have regulation ready fairly early in the fall once we have the bill through. The bill guides the regulation, gives the direction, but much of the regulation, of course, will still go back to the land acquisitions practices that we did under the RDA. The main components here, the things that have been added to what has been done in the past are mandatory consultation, mandatory triggering of purchase of the land by the landowner, and a set time period by which a landowner will know with certainty when the project goes ahead.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. I appreciate the minister's comments. That helps me a bit. It still feels a bit broad.

Could he also, then, elaborate on why in this amendment we are striking out subsection (3) of section 2? I think his previous comments, if I've followed them, were just dealing with subsection (2). So just elaborate on subsection (3) again for me, please.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I mentioned at the start of my remarks, the consultation portion of Bill 19 was deemed to be important enough that now under the new numbering system for it section 2 will deal strictly with the consultation portion with the landowner. So there will be renumbering.

4:10

Dr. Taft: Okay. I think I see that now. There we go. All right.

My next comments and questions relate to the regulations. I am concerned that, whether we're talking about the amendments or the rest of the bill, the regulations are so terribly important to this. Really, it's in the regulations, as the minister knows, that the meat and potatoes, the real action, occurs and the real decisions are made. I am of course concerned that the penalties under the act talk about the regulations – and there are some extraordinary powers here relating to the regulations – yet we don't know what the regulations are. That debate will probably occur more extensively once we're through the amendments, but to the extent that the regulations will relate to the amendments, I think we need to be very, very concerned about this.

I think, Mr. Chairman, I'll turn to my other colleagues for a second while I prepare my thoughts on the next amendment.

Thank you. I do appreciate your comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much. This is one of these bills that I wanted to see the principle of succeed because I think the government does need to plan, and they do need to prepare. I'm one of those people that has urged the government all the way along to carefully lay these sorts of things out. As a citizen in this province I look around at too many projects where I think: that should have

happened, and it should have happened a long time ago. But because there was a lack of planning around it and a lack of consultation, projects got derailed and delayed by quite a bit. So I was looking forward to some mechanism that the government could bring forward that would allow it to move some of these larger projects along.

For example, I would really like to see a high-speed rail plan start to come into place. Clearly, we're not going to pay for it now. We're not going to pay for it this year or next year or probably the year after. But I'm also thinking that those are huge projects, and if you don't start planning them and implementing them and getting all your ducks in a row on those kinds of things, we'll be here 10 years from now and we still won't even have started into this. So I wanted to see those processes start to move forward.

I think what we needed and what the public wanted to see was a secure, transparent model that could be used to assemble, acquire land for these kinds of large projects. Expropriation is and should be a last-ditch, a last – what's the word I'm looking for?

An Hon. Member: Last resort.

Ms Blakeman: A last resort – thank you – for dealing with these kinds of projects. Clearly, I don't think anybody enjoys that process. Certainly, the government doesn't, the taxpayers that have to pay for the court bills don't, and the landowners don't. We need a process that works better than that. Expropriation is still there for a reason. If government needs to move ahead with it, and we've got a landowner holding a project hostage, the government needs the tools to be able to move forward, and they certainly have that.

But I think the government got itself in a bit of trouble with this one. What I've seen is a long progression – and I've talked about it lots of time in this Assembly – of the government bringing forward shell bills in which essentially it says: the minister can decide to do whatever they want, and everything else will be decided under regulations. Thank you very much. On it goes. We complained at the time, and we raised the issues at the time. We said, "This is where you're going to get into trouble on this." "No, no, no," said the government. "Just trust us." Well, it got you into trouble this time because people that thought they would have a direct interest in this looked at this bill and said: "I don't think I'm going to be well served by this. The truth is that I can't tell if I'm going to be well served or not because there are no details in this bill." I think it overreached itself and got a lot of people very upset about what the government was capable of doing. With more detail, more transparency, more accountability the government wouldn't have dug the hole they're in quite so deep, but they did, so we ended up with an amendment.

Okay. Well, points to the minister for going: I've got to stop digging here and do something, build a ladder to climb out of this one. I think he's made some wise moves in making the idea of the amendments available, although he couldn't make the specific amendments available some time ago, to try and deal with this. Goodo.

When I look at these amendments, I think: "Okay. Is this going to solve the problems that have been identified?" On the surface, on the face of it, on the first skim reading you go: "Well, yeah." It's addressing a lot of the areas that were brought up over and over again: lack of consultation, lack of a timeline, the definition of acquiring that land and holding it to one side, which I have just lost the exact terminology for. But when you start to get into it and go, "Okay; really, what does this mean?" once again we're looking at – and almost every single phrase has this.

Under section A, for example, subsection (2) is "for the purpose of this Act and the regulations," and then it goes on setting it out;

section B, “the Lieutenant Governor in Council” yada yada “in accordance with the regulations, of the proposed project.” You keep going on to the next section, (b), “has made the plan of the proposed project available to the public in accordance with the regulations,” and to (c), “has provided the registered owners of land within the proposed Project Area with notice of the proposed project in accordance with the regulations.”

Well, guess what? We don’t have the regulations. There’s an ancient saying about buying a pig in a poke, which I think was about buying livestock in a bag. Basically, you couldn’t see what you were purchasing. That’s what’s in these regulations, so the government has made the same mistake again. It is borne largely out of this being a one-party state, out of the government having so many members and being able to get its way so easily in almost everything so that it doesn’t have those built-in checks and balances, and the same mistake is made here. People cannot see the specifics of what’s in here. To say to people, “We’re going to consult with you,” the first thing I do is say: “How? How are you going to consult with me? What are the specifics of that consultation?”

That’s going to lead me into something that I am seeing, themes that I’m seeing repeated several times in important legislation that’s before this Assembly this spring. I’m starting to call it the 3Cs. We’ve got control, compensation, and consultation.

I just want to talk about consultation right now. This government has tried very hard over the years to try and perfect the system of consulting under a very controlled situation. Some years back we had the round-tables when the government was sort of trying to reorganize itself. Interestingly, those round-tables, which were sector specific, actually excluded professionals that worked in the field. So when we had health round-tables, no doctors and nurses were allowed to sit at the table. It was a very interesting choice.

4:20

Then we moved into the summits, so we had the growth summit and the justice summit, and I went to a gambling summit in Medicine Hat at one point. Then we ended up with the Future Summit, which was, I think, supposed to be the be-all and end-all of consultation. But people catch on to all of these different very controlled consultations, and they know when they go to these things what’s pinned up on the board, what everybody has discussed. When they look at what the government actually starts to implement and say: “But this isn’t what we talked about. Where’s the thing that was up on the board that was so important to me?” they say: “Oh, well, yes. That’s number 79 on the list, and we’re picking other things.”

It puts that whole idea of consultation – people question it and say: “Well, then you really didn’t consult with us. You really didn’t listen to what was going on.” I argue that the government has embarked on yet another round – maybe this is the new millennium version – of consultation. What I’m seeing the government do is consult very widely but very generally and very vaguely on a concept, and then once they implement the final version of what the government wants to do, there is no consultation on the specifics because everyone just refers back to that big general consultation and says: “That was it. You had your chance. Why didn’t you tell us what you were worried about then? Now we’ve made our decision. We’ve passed the act. No more consultation.” I think that is what this government is up to and what we will see roll out over the next three to five years.

I know that my colleague is eager to get back up again, so I will cede the floor to him and look for another opportunity to speak at another occasion.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. I wanted to seize the opportunity of the minister being here to now move down through the amendments, and I’m on amendment B now. I’m looking at B, and it proposes to add a number of paragraphs after section 2. One of those, subsection (2), reads, “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a project area if more than 2 years has elapsed since the plan of the proposed project was made available to the public.” I’d be interested to hear the minister’s comments on why that amendment is there. I can see that it gives some reassurance, I guess, to landowners who might be affected and don’t want it to go on forever and ever.

You know, the time frames of many of these things will be measured in decades, I’m sure. The land for the Anthony Henday Drive was assembled 30 years ago, and we’re assembling land now for an outer ring road that could be built in 30 more years. First of all, can you talk to the purpose of that amendment and, secondly, talk to how the minister ended up with two years as the right time frame?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I’m pleased to speak to that for the hon. member. The two-year period does not put a restriction on the land during that first two-year period, and I think that the member understands that. The restriction would not happen until after cabinet goes forward with the project. The concern for landowners was that a decision to actually go forward with the project could draw out and could have implications because of possible restrictions that their land could be facing in the future. Time certainty was what landowners told us they wanted. They wanted time certainty on a period of time so that it was a sufficient amount of time for proper consultation to take place, not only with respect to how the project . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, I hate to interrupt, but it is 4:25, and we will rise and report progress.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 4. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the committee concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, sir. In light of the hour I would move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 20.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to April 16, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft., adjourned)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft., adjourned)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft.), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
- 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]

- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft., adjourned)
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)

206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)

Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, April 20, 2009

Issue 26

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 20, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back. Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Hon. members, I am now going to invite Colleen Vogel of the Legislative Assembly Office of Alberta to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. I would invite all, those who are present in our galleries as well, to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's such a privilege today to be able to stand before you and introduce a school that has made the trek from my constituency to the Legislature every year for the last eight years. It's the Trinity Christian school. They have with them today their teacher, Miss Cheryl Barnard, and 13 parents, who drove these kids up and shepherded them so that they could come and learn what happens in the Legislature. I'd ask if they would all rise and if we could give a warm welcome to this group.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a group of people from the Rimbey elementary school. They're spending a few days learning about the workings of government at School at the Legislature. There are 24 students, two teachers, and seven parent helpers. I'd like to introduce to you the teachers, Mrs. Vanessa Howey and Mrs. Fiona Martel, and parent helpers Mrs. Connie Fonstad, Mrs. Emily Breton, Mrs. Kim Woodliffe, Mrs. Dana Franklin, Mrs. Rae Ann Rallison, Mrs. Tresa Lowe, and Mr. Dallas Mannix. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some hard-working staff members from my department's community spirit program. Program director Pam Boutilier is a familiar

face and friend to many in this Assembly. Joining her today are Erin Collins, Lynn Ziegler, Darlene Christopher, along with Tom Thackeray, the assistant deputy minister responsible for the community and voluntary services division. Missing is Julie MacLean, who couldn't be with us today. These individuals are the heart and soul behind the community spirit program, have worked hard day and night to ensure that over 1,496 organizations were recipients of some \$19 million.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure today to introduce someone to you whom I have often called a hero, a friend, and a dad. My dad, Keith Griffiths, seated in your gallery, is the man that raised me and made me who I am, so he often gets credit for a lot of things I do, but he often gets a lot of blame for when I act like an idiot. On the balance, however, I think he's fairly proud of me. I'd ask him to rise in your gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 15 fine people from Red Deer and surrounding area that are here today. I'll begin with my constituency assistant, Brenda Johnson, and her husband, Ken. If you could rise. They have brought along with them brothers, sisters-in-law, and friends. Also, a very special guest, Rustom Vazifdar, who is our Rotary International youth exchange student from Mumbai, India, is with us today. Joining this group are Don and Norma Bonham, Frank and Carol Bonham, Don and Ruby Johnson, June and Terry Rollinson, Don Côté, Al and Lorraine Coker, and a name you may recognize, Al Delmage, who formerly was the skip numerous times at the Canadian Brier, representing Northwest Territories-Yukon. Please join me in welcoming our guests from Red Deer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you today and through you to all members of the House three dedicated individuals from the town of High Level. There's probably no community in Alberta that's as heavily impacted by the downturn in the forest industry as the town of High Level, yet despite those hardships we've got with us today some big believers in the future of that town. Could I introduce to you and all hon. members the acting mayor, Crystal McAteer, councillor Jerry Chomiak, and the chief administrative officer, Dean Krause. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and to all members today two guests, Reverend Bob Kimmerly and Isabel Golightly, who are here from Kirk United church in Edmonton. They are here to represent many Albertans who have signed a petition, that I will be presenting later, organized by the Reverend Syd Bell regarding seniors' issues. They want to witness me making that presentation. I would ask them to please rise. They're in the public gallery. Please give them a warm reception.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

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

Organ Donation

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize organ donor week, which is April 19 to 26 this year. Organ donation has always been an important issue for me. That is why I introduced Motion 528, urging the government to require Albertans to make an election regarding organ donation on the back of their Alberta health card.

In the April 5 *Edmonton Journal* there was an article about organ and tissue donations. This article said that Canada has more than 4,000 people waiting for transplants; 600 of these people were in Alberta alone. Last year, sadly, 51 people died while on the waiting list for transplants at the University of Alberta. This article said that one donor could help as many as 80 people.

It is not difficult to become an organ donor. All you need to do is carry an organ donor card in your wallet. It is also very important to discuss your wishes with your family. Once we are no longer living, organ donation is one last chance to help people, to give people another chance at life or at living in a normal way. There are so many people who have died while waiting for transplants, and this does not have to be the case. I urge all members of this Assembly and, indeed, all Albertans to discuss organ donation with their family and to sign their health card and let others know of their decision and explain the benefit of this life-changing decision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40

Equality and Human Rights

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on national Equality Day. I was invited by Erin Woods elementary school through the Dominion Institute's passage to Canada initiative to speak to the grades 4 to 6 students on April 17 on the subjects of immigration, discrimination, and racism. It was certainly encouraging to have educators taking proactive steps to introduce topics that many adults find difficult to discuss.

Each April 17 we celebrate Equality Day as a way to recognize the equality provisions, sections 15 and 28, that were signed into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the historic activism of Canadian women. These provisions have been significant in the progress we as Canadians have made towards equality in our society. In our province it is the role of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission to ensure that all persons are treated equally regardless of race, religious belief, gender, physical or mental disabilities, age, or other factors outlined in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, 94 per cent of Albertans feel that an environment free of discrimination is important to their overall quality of life in communities, and 88 per cent believe that human rights are well protected in Alberta. Budget 2009 announced that Alberta's human rights system would be receiving an additional \$1.7 million, an increase of 26 per cent, to protect human rights, promote fairness and access, and support the inclusion of all Albertans. This includes increasing awareness of Alberta's human rights legislation; resolving and adjudicating human rights complaints; and providing education, information, and consultative services that support human rights.

Equality Day recognizes the formal steps the Canadian government has taken to ensure that all of our rights are protected under law, but we also need our institutions and citizens from east to west,

north to south to have the capacity and share the commitment to be ambassadors of equality in our everyday lives.

Thank you.

Calgary Civic Camp

Mr. Hehr: This Saturday along with 165 other Calgarians I attended the first Civic Camp, an event organized by Sustainable Calgary and the Better Calgary campaign. The initiative pulled together artists, small-business owners, urban planners, activists, municipal and provincial decision-makers, and partners in the nonprofit sector to brainstorm around the simple question: how do we build the kind of city we want for ourselves and our children?

Together we explored urban issues like improving and expanding public transportation, creating green and vibrant public spaces, and encouraging good governance in our city. It was an inspiring day, and like all participants I can say that I came away from Civic Camp with a renewed and energized sense of Calgary's huge potential as an urban community. Expect to hear a lot more from this core group of Civic Camp-ers in the days and weeks ahead.

This amazing event was made possible by a number of individuals committed to improving the quality of life of all Calgarians: Cheri Macauley, Bob McInnis, Byron Miller, Chris Turner, Noel Keough, David Winkler, Donna Zwicker, Nahed Nenshi, Peter Rishaug, Richard Parker, Bob Morrison, Natalia Zoldak, Dave Robertson, Annalise Van Ham, Allard Losier, Bridget Warner, Nancy Jacklin, J'Val Shuster, Sarah Kopjar, Randy Kopjar, Colleen Doylend, Sherrie Dutton, Rona Fluney, Don Cockerton, Patricia Merkel, Juliet Burgess, Tegan Forbes, Ashley Bristowe, Chris Johnston, Jennifer Devine, Neil Devine, Rich Rawlyk. I'd like to commend them all for starting this great initiative.

Thank you very much.

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

Dr. Grant Gall

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay tribute to Dr. Grant Gall. He passed away on Saturday, April 18, 2009, in Jamaica with his wife, Lori, at his side. He was 68 years young. Grant Gall not only left his mark in health care in Alberta; he made people's lives better around the world.

Born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Grant grew up on a farm just outside Acme, Alberta. He completed his medical degree from the University of Alberta in 1965, with subsequent internship and residency in Vancouver, Toronto, and Boston. Grant was a research investigator and physician in gastroenterology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and later joined the university in 1979. He was a dedicated physician and an internationally renowned researcher.

In 1997 he was appointed dean of medicine after serving as associate dean of research and head of pediatrics. Dr. Gall's decade as dean was transformational for the medical school and the university. Under his strong leadership the Faculty of Medicine created the O'Brien Centre for the bachelor of health sciences program and established a Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Grant was also instrumental in the development of the new Alberta Children's hospital.

A passionate learner and traveller, Grant fostered international health programs in Laos, Chile, and the Philippines that have provided immeasurable health benefits for the people in those countries as well as life-changing experiences for U of C undergraduates, medical students, and faculty. He was inspirational to all he touched, and he touched so many.

Our hearts and prayers go out to his beloved wife of 49 years, Laurie, and the children and the grandchildren he loved. Alberta has lost a great public servant. He will be missed, and we thank him.

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

Plan for Parks

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to emcee a media conference this morning as our Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation unveiled Alberta's 10-year plan for parks. The event was held at one of the gems of our provincial parks system, Fish Creek provincial park. This urban park is much loved and often frequented by individuals and groups from Calgary-Lougheed as well as constituents from across the city and far beyond.

The plan for parks represents a milestone for the minister. After extensive consultation across Alberta, it delivers on her mandate from the Premier to develop a plan to ensure Alberta's parks and recreation areas remain protected yet accessible to Alberta's growing population. It balances conservation and recreation activities while illustrating the important role that our provincial parks play in meeting the environmental, economic, and social needs of Albertans. The plan for parks is aligned with the land-use framework as it shares the same desired outcomes and geographical regions. The plan also identifies the need to develop a clear process for Albertans to nominate new parks, a process that will ensure local communities and citizens play a key role in decisions about parks in their region.

Alberta's parks inspire people to discover, value, protect, and enjoy the natural world and the benefits it provides for current and future generations. Public input regarding future decisions will help to literally shape our province's landscape. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans to read this plan and to act on these new opportunities to participate in and provide input on our invaluable parks system. For much more information Albertans can call 1.866.427.3582 or contact ParkNews@gov.ab.ca.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

National Oral Health Month

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you may know, April is Oral Health Month. This week in particular celebrates the many men and women across the country that work as dental hygienists. As of January 1, 2009, there were more than 2,400 dental hygienists registered at practice in Alberta. Their contribution to the continued health of Albertans is beyond measure.

Dental hygienists are highly trained professionals with considerable training and knowledge in the areas of clinical practice, decision-making, and critical thinking as well as in the assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation of care provided to clients. Dental hygienists have been providing oral health services to Albertans through dental practices and community health settings since 1951 and have been self-regulated since 1990. Since October 31, 2006, dental hygienists have been regulated under the Health Professions Act.

The College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta, the CRDHA, is the professional body responsible for the registration and annual professional certification of all dental hygienists in Alberta. The CRDHA, through authority delegated by the government of Alberta, grants the registered dental hygienist designation and authorizes a dental hygienist to legally practise in Alberta. The CRDHA is governed by a council of eight elected registered dental

hygienists and three members of the public, appointed by the minister. The CRDHA ensures that dental hygienists have the educational qualifications and competence to perform and ensure that Albertans receive safe, high-quality dental hygiene care.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Precision Drilling Corporation

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it was announced that AIMCo, which manages Alberta's public savings, has taken a 15 per cent stake in Precision Drilling. This deal is worth almost \$300 million. To the minister of finance: will the minister confirm to the Assembly that there was no contact between any cabinet member or government staff and AIMCo or Precision Drilling before close of business on Friday?

Ms Evans: I will confirm that, Mr. Speaker. AIMCo has been created deliberately as an arm's-length Crown corporation, unfettered by attention or influence by the political or the appointed part of our government. There was absolutely no contact with myself or with the deputy minister relative to this decision. The due diligence done by AIMCo and their staff relative to this is exactly a process that's approved by a very sophisticated board that believed that this type of investment was appropriate within the policy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's necessary to manage the stakes so that Albertans get a proper return on their investment. It's also important to ensure that this is an investment and not a bailout of a debt-burdened company. Again to the minister: will AIMCo be taking a position on Precision Drilling's board?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that is not something that has ever been even suggested to me. I would agree with the hon. member: the mission of AIMCo is to get the very best possible return within the boundaries of policy that this government has relative to the kinds of risks and liabilities and the type of reward that is sought. So they have done everything according to policy. They have not involved the politician. They have a very sophisticated form of due diligence and analysis, and there has been absolutely no suggestion by the CEO or the CFO, the financial officer, that they have any intention of being more involved in Precision Drilling than they currently are as an investor.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a difficulty here. The Alberta government manages the oil and gas resource in this province on behalf of Albertans, collecting royalties on development. The government is currently providing incentives for drilling companies by cutting royalties those companies pay. Now the government owns a large stake in one of those companies. To the minister: how will this government manage this conflict?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, again there is some suggestion by the opposition of conflict of interest, and there seems to be a lack of recognition of the arm's-length role and responsibility of AIMCo. AIMCo invests money not only on behalf of this government but on

behalf of the pension fund, some 70 billion dollars that they manage, roughly half of which is the total responsibility of the government, roughly half, in part, for the pension administration. We're proud of the work they do. To suggest that there's any wrongdoing in that would be to suggest also that in the Thames waterworks in the U.K. or Puget Sound in Washington state they were not qualified.

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

Mental Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In the Auditor General's October '08 report there were serious concerns raised about mental health services. The government's response in their 2009 fiscal plan was to recommend: "Over the next three years, the Department of Health and Wellness and AHS will identify and develop standards for mental health services." To the minister. The Auditor General clearly called for standards. Will the minister table any standards or evidence towards standards that have been created since this 2008 report?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is correct when he said that in our response to the Auditor General we indicated that we would be developing those standards over the next three years, and we intend to hold to that commitment.

Dr. Swann: I gather there has been no progress, then.

Again to the minister. By spending money wisely up front on social and health programs, long-term costs are deferred or eliminated. When will we see this minister set up and strengthen the community support services for mental health?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has funded mental health significantly over the last number of years to the tune of some 600 million dollars annually. In addition to that, we've had a strong part in the safe communities initiative. I think the total dollars over a three-year period are in excess of a hundred million dollars for mental health and addictions. I guess I would just remind the hon. leader that one of the key parts of our action plan last year was to release a children's mental health strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister be releasing a new provincial mental health plan considering the changes that have been introduced with Alberta Health Services and the elimination of the Mental Health Board?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's something that we would always be looking at, whether or not the plan, that was released several years ago, would need revision. If so, we'd certainly be open to that.

I think the important thing, however, is that we have put a lot of emphasis during the past year in the development of the children's mental health strategy. We believe very strongly that we need to identify at a young age those who have mental illnesses and put in place treatment programs for them so that they can grow up to be strong contributors to society.

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

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Mr. Chase: Today we had the sad news of another tragic death of a child while using an ATV. For some years now we have been encouraging the government to take action on this issue. To the Minister of Transportation: when will the minister bring in helmet laws for children using ATVs?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have to say that that was a very, very horrible tragedy this weekend, and my heart goes out to the father. I can't imagine. That would be your worst nightmare, to find your own son in that position. That said, we don't have the information to even know if it was a helmet that created that problem or what actually happened there. But I will say that we try all the time to make sure that we have safe laws in Alberta. We've been working on helmet legislation, which I do think will be coming forward within the next year. I still tell people that they have to use common sense and to please supervise their children when they're on ATVs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when will the minister introduce limits on the power of ATVs that children can operate?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, any manual you ever read for any one of those ATVs that you purchase – there are safety standards all along the fenders of most of these that come from the manufacturer. We have to take responsibility ourselves and for our children, and we have to do that within ourselves and train them on the safety features of these vehicles.

Mr. Chase: The government has taken a stance on seat belts. The government has taken a stance on bicycle helmets. To the same minister: when will there be mandatory licensing for all-terrain vehicles and their drivers?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we only have jurisdiction on Crown land and on public lands under the highway Traffic Safety Act. Under the highway Traffic Safety Act we try to look after all of that Crown land. On private land I don't have jurisdiction as the Minister of Transportation. I'm not so sure that all people, whether they vote for our party, which most of them do, or these other two really want us interfering on their private rights on their private land.

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

Mental Health Services

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's mental health system has been in crisis for decades, and a balanced approach, with more medical and housing services at the community level, would go a long way towards improving things. At least that's what a report commissioned by this government concluded over two years ago. Their own steering committee on mental health approved the report before it was turned into a state secret by this government. My question is for the minister of health. Why are you covering up this government's mental health failures, and why did your ministry hide this report from the public?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's probably no department that tables more reports in this Legislative Assembly than the Department of Health and Wellness. As a department you commission reports periodically, from time to time. Some of them you table; some of them you don't. They become advice to the department or the minister. The recommendations from these reports find their way into policy, and that's exactly what has happened here.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there's nothing in this report that the public shouldn't have seen.

In 2002 to 2003 over 2 and a quarter million doctors' visits in Alberta were for mental health issues, which represents nearly 40 per cent of general practitioner billings. Covering up this report and ignoring its findings costs our economy over \$5 billion a year, and this minister's inaction contributes to higher health care costs. To the minister: when will you admit that implementing the report would not only help thousands and thousands of people get better but could actually help control health care costs in our province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll just repeat what I replied earlier in the House to the Leader of the Opposition, that this government has committed some 600 million dollars annually to mental health. We have been a strong participant in the safe communities initiative, where, again, over a three-year period some 100 million dollars is going towards new beds for treatment facilities. So I would suggest that this government has taken this issue very seriously and will continue to take it seriously.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the government might as well be pushing mentally ill people into the cracks of the system. They've known for decades that it's broken. They got a viable road map to fix it two years ago, but they buried it, and in October, when the Auditor General said the system was in trouble, they cut his funding. My question is to the minister of health. When will you stop ignoring this silent epidemic and hiding the truth from Albertans, that you're failing our people with mental illness and that you don't want the good advice that the . . .

The Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the only people who are ignoring is the particular member here, who hasn't been listening to any of the answers that I've been providing.

You know, in the last year through the safe communities program we've opened up some 80 new residential beds, and in this particular budget, that was just introduced in this House a couple of weeks ago, there is some additional 42 million dollars allocated through our department through safe communities. We anticipate an equal number of beds that'll be opened. We treat this matter very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Plan for Parks

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation released Alberta's plan for parks, and I'd like to congratulate her on this achievement. Recently I've been reading articles that suggest specific percentages of land should be set aside for parks. My question to the minister:

does the plan for parks propose a set percentage of land for parks in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right: we were able to announce the plan for parks. We've been in consultation for a long time, and I was very pleased to be able to bring forward a plan that I think balances conservation with the idea of people being able to enjoy or have access to those parks.

As to numbers, some were asking if we were putting formulas or specific percentages. We're not. We're going out to regional planning. We're going to be asking those communities and taking a look at it from that direction. Really, if you were to look at the parks in this province, 4 per cent of the land base is already protected under provincial parks. As well as the federal parks it's 13 per cent of the system, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: can the minister tell me how new parks will be created under this plan?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we're going out into these regional plans. There's an opportunity to nominate parks, and it's going to be done at a community level. The hon. member, of course, has a great example in her community, where we had all the various groups get together and sit down, even those that were opposed to activity. They came forward with a wonderful plan for the Eagle Point provincial park and the Blue Rapids provincial recreation area, a great example and one that we're going to use as a prototype as we go out into the community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. The land-use framework released at the end of last year mentioned the development of a plan for parks as a priority action. How does the plan for parks fit within the land-use framework?

Mrs. Ady: This is very important, Mr. Speaker, because the land-use framework is now divided into seven regions, and they're going out and they're using the watersheds of this province. We will be going out with the land-use framework with the park plan. We will look at those same regions. We are using the same criteria that they are using, and in the end we want to achieve the goal of sustainable, responsible land use in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Federal Health Transfer Payments

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the government's latest PR spin to distract attention away from the crisis in health care and the embarrassing multibillion-dollar deficit is to blame Ottawa and the federal government for all its problems. This blame game always comes up when they know they're in trouble, and it is disingenuous and, quite frankly, a tired tactic. To the President of the Treasury Board: when will this government stop blaming Ottawa for its own fiscal mismanagement and take ownership of the fact that

after collecting multibillion dollars in resource revenue, they're now scrambling to get \$700 million from their federal cousins?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that what this government has done historically and will continue to do into the future is stand up for the rights of Albertans. When it comes to health care, I don't think anyone in Alberta is any less important than anyone who lives anywhere else in Canada. There may be other equations they want to use to equalize the wealth that we share as Canadians, but from strictly a point of health care I think all Canadians should be treated the same.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a historic moment when the President of the Treasury Board argues for the return of a program, the equalization of health transfers, that the Paul Martin Liberals suggested and the Harper Conservatives took away.

Since there has been quite a bit of revisionist history going on, does the President of the Treasury Board understand the fact that by demanding \$700 million of health transfers, this government is asking that their federal cousins follow through with the policy of their Liberal predecessors?

Mr. Snelgrove: Like most Albertans, Mr. Speaker, we try on a daily basis to forget how wonderful our federal Liberal cousins were to us. We try daily. We're not arguing with our federal cousins. We've entered into a very constructive debate about how we're going to fund health care. If the hon. members don't think that's a responsible move, then they can say so. We're debating about funding health care on an equitable basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I can get the President of the Treasury Board to enter into a debate with Ross from Stony Plain, one of the people who has brought his questions to us because Albertans are clearly angry about this budget. Ross would like to know if the President of the Treasury Board understands the fact that if our unprecedented wealth had been properly managed over the last 20 years, we would be facing this economic downturn in much better shape than we are now.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have used the tremendous wealth that has come from our resources and other industries in Alberta to build a province that is virtually the envy of the world. I don't understand what they think is wrong with having world-class universities, world-class health facilities, an education system that leads the world, and people that are healthier, wealthier, and, thank goodness, wiser than most of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Buffalo Housing First Program

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have an excellent program in Red Deer for homeless people. The former Buffalo Hotel was renovated two years ago to rehouse homeless people and provide them with the right services to address their homelessness. Last year Housing and Urban Affairs provided \$465,000 in operating funding. My first question is for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Can the minister tell us if provincial funding will continue in the next fiscal year?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Member for Red Deer-South has advocated for and supports this program, which began as a pilot project two years ago. It is a good program, hon. member. It's a program that's a public-private partnership. It's funded by all three levels of government. It aligns with our Housing First model. I can tell you that given the success of this program the member will be pleased to know that we are committed to providing a further \$584,000 for it to continue to operate this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister explain the difference between the Buffalo Housing First program for the homeless and affordable housing?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, too, having served on the task force for the 10-year plan for Red Deer, housing is quite different for the homeless than affordable housing. Housing for the homeless is smaller in size, about 400 square feet, has single occupancy, and also is based on an individual's ability to pay whereas affordable housing is more modest in size and amenities, is standard in the community that it's located in, and is for individuals as well as seniors and families and people with special needs. Rents are based on 10 per cent below the municipality's market value.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. This program, I believe, has shown great results. My question for the minister: what would she consider the supporting evidence that the Buffalo Housing First program is working?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, as the member said, this program does work extremely well. They've housed successfully 40 people that have been chronically homeless, along with support services. In fact, the administration received a very prestigious award last week, that the hon. member is aware of, for their outstanding work. The Canadian Mental Health Association and Potter's Hands Developments were honoured with the Robert Hale Jr. memorial award from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. That shows you that Housing First does work for our homeless.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

2:10 Government Information Technology Security

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his report from last year the Auditor General highlighted very serious concerns about information technology security. Footprints were found from international hackers on government systems. To the Minister of Service Alberta: given the growing sophistication of international hackers, what specific steps are being taken to combat this threat to Albertans' personal information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Auditor General's report of last year Service Alberta did indeed accept all of his recommendations. We take the security of Albertans' information very seriously. We have made a number of changes in areas. The first one we've done is that we have a chief

security officer that's responsible for all information, all government departments resident in Service Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How has the minister improved the design and administration of government websites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll add some other comments as well on this. We review information security policies with input from all ministries through the CIO Council, that meets on a regular basis with the deputy ministers. We've been tightening security of all government web applications and put in place technical controls to further protect the government network from cyberattacks, and we are working with the Department of Infrastructure to address the physical security of data facilities across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the registries are responsible for health care insurance information as of April 1, 2009, how will that information be protected since the ministry hasn't fully implemented the Auditor General's recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently there are 20 registry offices across Alberta and a pilot project that we're doing jointly with Alberta Health and Wellness, where Albertans can come and register and get their new Alberta health card, whether they're new residents or whether they have to make a change of information. This is viewed as an excellent measure in giving Albertans access to services. Most certainly, under the registry system the security approaches we take are there within the CARS system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Residential Tenancy Disputes

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My office is getting some calls about a program that the government has introduced which allows landlords and tenants to resolve disputes without going to court, not that there's anything wrong with going to court. The residential tenancy dispute resolution service has apparently been quite successful, and I understand that there's funding in this year's budget to take it province-wide. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why isn't this program available yet to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residential tenancy dispute resolution service, or RTDRS, has been very successful. This is a unique program because it's faster and less expensive for tenants to resolve their disputes, and you're not going through the law system. In Edmonton and Calgary it has significantly reduced the amount of time the courts have to spend on landlord and tenant disputes. The service is currently available in Calgary, Edmonton, and northern Alberta. We are planning to have it available province-wide as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if the funding is now available, what is the holdup? Why can't the program be expanded province-wide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are moving as quickly as possible to make this service available to all Albertans because of the good work that it does. In northern Alberta we've made the program available also through teleconferencing, and we're looking at that approach in other parts of the province as well. Funding is a key part of the equation, but we also need to have staff and office space available. We're working hard on all these fronts to get the offices up and running.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister: does this program arbitrate all types of disputes, and is the program final, or is there a right of appeal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The disputes that are dealt with through the RTDRS are disputes over eviction, unpaid rent, unpaid utilities, security deposits, damages, repairs, and other common disagreements. Disputes are heard by an officer who makes a decision that is binding on both parties. Decisions can be appealed to the courts in some cases, but this is rare.

This is an excellent program, an example of the great work that our government is doing. As well, the satisfaction rate is going up on a regular basis, up into the high 80s, and continues to go up.

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

Plan for Parks (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the province's plan for parks has finally been released, Albertans are still left with a number of questions. The plan for parks says that involving Albertans is its number 1 strategy, yet the plan seems to have ignored Albertans' calls in a provincial survey for the creation of new parks, with no new specific commitments for parks in the plan. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: was the minister serious about taking the concerns of Albertans into account, or was the survey merely a publicity stunt to give the illusion of Albertans actually being able to have a say?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, the hon. member makes a good point. The Praxis report did ask for us to develop new parks, but it also asked for us to make them accessible, so we're doing both. We're going in on a regional basis and giving Albertans a voice for the first time in the development of the parks in their region. We haven't always done that, but we're doing it in the future. I'd say to the hon. member that he should read the entire Praxis report. It covered all areas, and I think this park plan captures it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister be establishing Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kôp north of Waterton national park as a protected park, something which Albertans have been advocating for several years?

Mrs. Ady: Mr. Speaker, as to specific parks, again, we have a regional process that's going out there. We're going to be joining the Minister of SRD and the land-use framework. When we get to that region, we'll take a look at that area.

Mr. Chase: Can the minister explain why there is no commitment this year for either the capital region river valley park or the Glenbow Ranch provincial park on Calgary's western doorstep? How can you claim to have a vision for provincial parks when the ones you've already committed to appear to be shelved or getting no additional support?

Mrs. Ady: Well, I don't know where the hon. member is getting his information from, Mr. Speaker. Some 50 million dollars went to the river valley park last year as they prepare to get ready to build that park. That is going to take a few years, but it's going to be fabulous.

As for the Glenbow, we are well in the process of planning that today. It's very complex because it's between Cochrane and Calgary. We want to get it right, we will get it right, and it'll be a good thing when it's ready.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Carbon Pricing

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy produced a report last week that called for a cap and trade system to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets. The CEOs of Suncor, the Royal Bank, and Manulife were quick to endorse the report. They realize that this is the best way to satisfy the main customer of our natural resources, the U.S. To the Environment minister: why won't the minister admit that his stubborn reliance on intensity targets isn't fooling anyone, is isolating Alberta from our best customer, and will ultimately lead to fewer and fewer markets for our natural resources?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I remind the member once again that as of today Alberta is the only jurisdiction in North America that has any regulation. The report of the national round-table is a good report. It talks about the need for a price on carbon. Alberta is comfortable with that. In fact, we've been saying all along that we need a carbon price. There are a number of initiatives that this round-table committee has come out with and discussed that we are in agreement with. The one that we remain concerned with is the emphasis within this report on international carbon trading. We are not going to be paying for someone else to solve their problem while we do not solve ours.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister and his staff from the Public Affairs Bureau are the only ones that believe the spin on intensity targets. Now, last week the U.S. EPA released a report that increases the likelihood that Congress will pass legislation later this year designed to cut CO₂ levels with a hard cap and trade system. However, this government is heading in exactly the opposite direction, refusing to implement regulations that will bring us in line

with the rest of the world. Why won't you admit that your intensity targets are nothing more than a laughable smokescreen that nobody is going to buy except your staff and that does nothing to address climate change?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, intensity targets are the tool that is used to get to hard caps. Without dealing with the individual emitters, we're not going to get to the hard caps. What this member and so many others fail to accept is that you need to start somewhere. You could have all the grandiose promises and aspirational goals in the world, but unless you have a road to get there, you'll never get there. We have a road to get there.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister has never given us a day or a deadline for hard caps in this province. The fact of the matter is that Alberta's energy future is at a crossroads that we can't deny. Our natural resources could very well sustain us through a transition to a green economy, but it will take this government to wake up to today's international political and environmental realities. Now, you can choose whether to ignore the international warnings to clean up our tar sands and risk having our trading partners wedge us out of the market, or you can choose to clean up your act and abandon once and for all your reliance on the myth of intensity targets. Which will it be?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the day that we adopt hard caps will be the same day that our competitors adopt hard caps. They're not there, and we're not there, but we're getting there.

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

Anthony Henday Drive

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the hon. Minister of Transportation announced construction of the overpass at the Anthony Henday in my constituency. That's good news. At the recent annual general meeting of the La Perle Community League Wes Ursulak and other constituents expressed concerns about the Easter weekend tree removal along Stony Plain Road at the Anthony Henday intersection. My first question to the Minister of Transportation: did anyone from the ministry notify my residents and constituents about the removal of these wooded areas, and if so, when and how?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to let the hon. member know that the contractor notified residents that were backing onto Anthony Henday Drive of the planned tree removal. More than 120 construction bulletins were delivered to residents on April 3 in the communities of Aldergrove and La Perle. The bulletins were delivered on the east side of Anthony Henday Drive between Whitemud Drive and 100th Avenue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. My constituents are concerned about what the future of the Henday will look like in their backyards. Can the minister tell us: are there plans for reforestation or construction of a berm?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, when completed, there will be stormwater ponds with wetland features on the northeast and southeast corners of the interchange. The remaining areas will only be seeded to grass. These trees will not be replanted as they would need to be removed for the ultimate configuration of the interchange and the installation of utilities that may be needed at a later date. It's important to remember that this area is part of the transportation and utility corridor that was identified in the late '70s, and it was not ever designated as parkland.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental question is to the same minister. After hearing the minister's response and the concerns of my constituents, I sincerely believe that there was a communication issue with the perception of what the area was going to look like. Will the minister commit to a process whereby department representatives will meet with the La Perle Community League representatives in order to discuss the respective concerns and issues?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, if I heard the question right, he's asking: will we communicate with them? They have; I have already. Actually, the hon. member there called me one night from a community league meeting, and I said that I would look into it and make sure. Since then, I understand that over the weekend some in my department have spoken with the community league leaders. I will try to make sure that the construction people keep them informed on what's happening during that project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Carbon Pricing (continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the government commissioned the Jaccard report, which modelled the effect carbon charges would have on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Although the minister adopted some of the recommendations, they were watered down to such an extent that many questioned whether success was possible. The Auditor General warned that without a plan "Alberta could spend a lot of money but not achieve emissions [intensity] targets." To the Minister of Environment: how much money is the minister willing to risk for a strategy that is more about PR than about climate change?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of climate change and greenhouse gas reductions is very much part of the discussions that are currently under way not only here in Alberta but nationally and internationally. With the advent of the Obama administration south of the Canada-U.S. border, we're now starting to get to a point where I believe we are truly going to be able to see some significant and real progress because Alberta will no longer be acting alone but will be acting in concert with all of the rest of North America.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: why has the minister set emissions intensity targets without a real plan to achieve them?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really take exception to the suggestion that there is no plan to achieve targets. The fact of the matter is that we have legislation in place, and we are achieving

those targets. There are compliance mechanisms that are the law in Alberta. One is to have reductions of intensity, real reductions in CO₂. Two is to have an Alberta-based offset. Three is to invest in the technology that will lead to large, grand-scale reductions, through implementation of technology such as CCS.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the Minister of Environment has admitted that the carbon charge is too low, can the minister tell us if this administration will adjust the charge by a larger amount now or whether it will be following B.C.'s lead in instituting smaller yearly increases?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the price for carbon, the compliance mechanism, the contribution to the technology fund, is set at \$15 a tonne as we speak. There is no reason for us to believe that it will not increase over time. We also believe very firmly that there is that balance that needs to be maintained between economic activity and environmental protection. That balance is based upon ensuring that we don't get so far ahead of our competitors that we cease to do business at all. The fact is that as the rest of North America comes onside – and I have every reason to believe that they will – I fully expect that \$15 price to rise quite considerably.

Grande Prairie Young Offender Centre

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents recently came to me with concerns about the closure of the Grande Prairie Young Offender Centre. They have many concerns about the impact that the closure will have on them and the community of Grande Prairie. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister explain to my constituents why the centre is being closed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by saying that this decision was certainly not taken lightly. We understood the impact on the community and the offenders and their families and staff. However, the centre has been underutilized for a number of years. It has a capacity for 32 young offenders and last year averaged only 11. We need to ensure that we are using our taxpayers' dollars wisely, and that means running the most effective corrections system we can.

Mr. Drysdale: To the same minister: how will the young offenders be reintegrated into the community when they are placed in a young offender centre hundreds of kilometres from their home?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, under the Youth Justice Act all young offenders released from custody must be supervised by a probation officer for a period of time in their communities. We have a strong network of probation officers across the province who provide support and supervision of these young offenders. Probation officers also work very closely with local agencies to refer these young offenders to community programs and services that can further support their efforts to reintegrate back into society. Closing the Grande Prairie Young Offender Centre will not change this.

Mr. Drysdale: Again to the same minister: will the closure of the young offender centre result in a facility sitting unused for months or years?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, when we made the decision to close this facility, I directed my staff to begin exploring options with other government departments to utilize this facility. We are continuing to explore all those options. I want to assure the member that this facility will not remain empty for very long, and I also want to reassure the member that all staff who were employed at that facility will have the opportunity to be redeployed within the ministry.

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

2:30 Municipal Sustainability Initiative

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipal sustainability initiative was an election promise to address the critical need for financial support of infrastructure projects. Two years later and a \$600 million promise made for this year falls \$200 million short. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Contrary to the original news release the 10-year MSI funding has not proven to be the predictable and sustainable revenue source that it was promised to be. Can the minister tell us how many projects across Alberta will be indefinitely deferred because of this \$200 million broken promise?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to say to you and this House that the municipal sustainability initiative was created to help municipalities with sustainability and with predictability of funding. In the guidelines it very specifically talks about that if revenue drops, so would the municipal sustainability initiative. In this particular budget and at this particular time revenue has dropped. We have had continuous meetings with the associations, with municipalities about the impact that it may have on municipalities.

Ms Pastoor: Given that the minister has reneged on this year's promise of MSI funding levels, next year's promise of \$1.4 billion seems like a pipe dream. How are municipalities supposed to plan for the future and cope with downloaded responsibilities without the dollars to pay for it when the administration doesn't follow through on promises?

Mr. Danyluk: This government is committed to municipalities. If the opposition would look at the three-year plan, \$1.2 million dollars plus is allocated. As well, I can say to you, Mr. Speaker, that we have worked with those municipalities to discuss the challenges not only that they have had in the last couple of years but also with this budget. We need to maximize the stimulus program that the federal government talks about. We're working with those municipalities to help maximize that program.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Some of that conversation would assume that the minister intends to fulfill the \$1.4 billion promise in the MSI funding for next year. Where will those funds come from if oil and gas prices don't turn around as quickly or to the degree that is optimistically predicted by our finance minister?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can see that the member from the opposition has never done a budget. What did take place is that we have worked with the municipalities to ensure that we can help support the municipalities to the greatest degree possible. Working with the municipalities, working with the federal government, and working with this government, we can ensure that we will support the municipalities into the future. The MSI program is a good program. It is a program that is going to carry municipalities into the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Edmonton Public Library Mill Woods Branch

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Mill Woods branch of the Edmonton public library, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, is relocating from its current location at Mill Woods Town Centre to a larger space. Can the Minister of Municipal Affairs please explain what funding is available to support the public libraries?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, libraries are the cornerstones of our communities. We support new and existing libraries in many ways. First of all, last week we announced an increase of \$9 million, to \$32 million, to help support the operational libraries. MSI is available for capital. Lottery grants are available from Culture and Community Spirit. This increased support will help strengthen libraries in Alberta, including Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister: how much funding from this \$32 million is specifically for the Mill Woods library, please?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Mill Woods library is moving from a 10,000-square foot facility to a 25,000 square foot facility. The city spends, I believe, approximately \$98 million to \$100 million on library funding, of which \$40 million is MSI funding. The city has applied for \$24 million specifically for the Mill Woods library. The question was: what support does the government give? Well, the government gives \$40 million through MSI towards libraries and \$24 million to the library in Mill Woods.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you.

Sand and Gravel Royalties

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy's annual report notes that audits of industry reporting on oil and gas royalties result in annual adjustments of \$39.8 million in the Crown's favour. This is a lot of money for Albertans. Previously the Auditor General has indicated that Sustainable Resource Development is behind on its audits of gravel royalties. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why is your department failing to effectively audit gravel royalties owing to this province?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we're not failing to audit gravel taken from here. I explained last week that various types of audits are done. The difference is that we measure post the taking of the gravel the quantity of gravel taken versus receipts. That way audits are done, and we believe – and we've spoken with the Auditor General about that – that that gives us an adequate monitoring of the situation.

Mr. Hehr: As evidenced by the Department of Energy's reviews, audits performed by hard-working civil servants result in more money coming to the Alberta taxpayer. When the government fails to provide the necessary resources to audit these companies, Albertans are being shortchanged from collecting the amount due and owing to them. To the same minister: how many people in your department are actually auditing gravel royalties?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is barking up the wrong tree. Our gravel prices are actually higher than several of the neighbouring provinces. Albertans are getting a completely fair return on their gravel resource. Do you want the cost of highways and home construction and everything to go up? Is it your goal to have the highest gravel prices in western Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only reason I'm asking these questions is that I want to know how many people are actually performing audits and if these audits are resulting in upticks and more money coming into the coffers compared to what the companies are reporting. Let's get some auditors working on what the companies actually say they are doing.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is new to this Assembly, but he clearly subscribes to the old Liberal theory that the best way to stimulate employment in the province is to expand the public service. We happen to disagree with that. We think that the private sector creates jobs, not the public sector.

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

Rural Extension and Industry Development

Mr. Prins: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. When the Alberta livestock and meat strategy was announced last year, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development asked for an internal review to ensure that the department was aligned to assist the livestock industry with the transformation and revitalization. As a result of the review, the ministry reinforced its focus on rural communities. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Can you please update us on the progress of the department following the review?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, our department has strategically restructured its program and service delivery to focus on key priorities to better serve our agriculture industry. Since last October hub offices are now up and running in 13 locations across Alberta, which was long overdue. Alberta's agriculture industry is now better able to access the wealth of specialist knowledge that we have out there, the research and the business development expertise that resides in our department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The next question is to the same minister. Since this review was announced last year and the focus on rural communities is ongoing, why is it so critical to adjust the rural extension programs at this time?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, we can all agree, I think, that our province is built on a rich history of rural communities and agriculture, and their success is important to the overall success of Alberta. Rural extension certainly is one of the most effective ways for our industry to access the expert knowledge and research on everything from farm safety to business management that exists within our department. Providing this support through hub offices helps ensure the prosperity and the vitality and the success of the ag industry. It encourages strong communities, one of this government's priorities.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. There must be many other programs out there. What are these programs, and how do they assist rural Albertans?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, our staff certainly is working closely with the provincial executive of the ag service boards that we have out there and the Association of Alberta Ag Fieldmen to develop an extension model that'll work in all 69 municipalities across the province. Ministry key contacts will be identified for each of the 69 ag service boards. Their role will be to provide support to our agriculture partners and will allow us to sustain our industry and encourage the development of rural communities. In addition, the Ag-Info Centre is available toll-free at 310-FARM to answer questions and direct producers and rural Albertans to additional resources.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 106 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now we'll move on.

Presenting Petitions

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm doing this in the presence of some of our guests, Reverend Bob Kimmerly and Isabel Golightly. I rise today to present a petition signed by 167 citizens who are opposed to the proposals of the government which downgrade health care and cause hardships to Albertans. I'll just read the very brief opening into the record.

We the undersigned are strongly opposed to the proposals of the Government which will downgrade Health Care and cause hardship to millions of Albertans.

We urge the Government of Alberta

- (1) to desist from all plans which will lead to further privatization of our Health Care System,
- (2) to refrain from any plans to reduce the number of Long Term [care] Beds, [and]
- (3) to abandon plans which will require additional costs for drugs to Seniors based on a "means test."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the government pays attention.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Bill 37

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the first instance, I'd like to introduce Bill 37, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009. This being a money bill, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has suggested:

Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly:

It is my pleasure to recommend for your consideration the annexed bill, being the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

Dated April 20 and signed by the Administrator. I request leave to introduce this bill.

The Speaker: Actually, there is a correct form, and it's: "This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of the bill, recommends the same to the Assembly."

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a first time]

Bill 38
Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009.

The Speaker: The number for that bill is Bill 38.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a first time]

Bill 39
Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009, Bill 39.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

Bill 40
Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 40, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

The proposed amendments ensure that Alberta's dividend tax credit and tuition credit are administered in accordance with existing Alberta government policy and that they will be consistent with changes to federal legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 40 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the list of 1,496 Alberta not-for-profit and charitable organizations that will share \$90 million in donation grants in the first year of the community spirit program. Broken down alphabetically by community, this 33-page document showcases the breadth and scope of organizations that will benefit from the community spirit program.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table five copies of the statistical breakdown of the donation grant distribution across the province. Launched in 2008 this donor-driven program is made up of two components: the donation grant and the enhanced charitable tax credit. The goal is to help increase charitable donations by individual Albertans to Alberta's not-for-profit and charitable organizations. Whether it's \$25,000 for Camp Health, Hope & Happiness, near Stony Plain, to support summer camp experiences, or \$9,202 to the Lac Ste. Anne Foundation for the purchase of library, audio visual, and exercise equipment for seniors programs, or \$9,423 to the Central Alberta Theatre Society in Red Deer, to help with lobby and theatre renovations, these grants will help nonprofit and charitable organizations continue their important work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That sounds to me, hon. minister, like a ministerial

statement, which might be the venue followed in the future. This is tablings right now.

The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly five copies of the Alberta Plan for Parks. This plan is a blueprint for the development of provincial parks over the next 10 years. Under this plan Albertans are invited to become involved in shaping the future of our parks system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat in his capacity as chair of the Legislative Offices Committee.

Mr. Mitzel: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'd like to table five copies of the report of the Auditor General of Alberta dated April 2009. Copies of the report are being distributed to all members today.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling two documents today. On Thursday, April 16, 2009, I attended Kirkness school's 25th anniversary program. It was a great time, with many great memories shared, and I'm sure everyone who attended really enjoyed it. I'm tabling five copies.

Second, in my member's statement today I referenced an *Edmonton Journal* article from April 5 about organ donations. Five copies. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter that I received today, April 20, 2009, from the office of the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, indicating that they are rejecting my request for information regarding hosting events and expenses under \$600.

My second tabling is the government hosting expenses \$600 and over as obtained from the *Alberta Gazette* for the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and so far for the calendar year 2008 through to the date of April 15, 2009. This indicates that in the last five years hosting expenses by this government have increased from \$483,000 . . .

The Speaker: Okay. But this is tablings right now. I look forward to you doing a member's statement on this matter.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the five documents that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview previously referred to.

2:50

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of six letters and e-mails from Albertans opposed to the termination of the Wild Rose Foundation. They say that the Wild Rose Foundation has played a valuable role in supporting volunteer organizations and should be allowed to continue. The letters are from Margaret Holliston, executive director of Camrose and District Support Services; Heather McPherson, executive director of the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation; Joanne Moffat; Cecily Mills; Laura Kennedy; and Christa Jubinville. Thank you.

Orders of the Day Motions for Returns

Assisted Living Facilities

- M2. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports or plans prepared between January 1, 2007, and February 10, 2009, regarding the future creation or expansion of assisted living facilities.

[Debate adjourned April 6: Ms Notley speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. member, it has already been moved. We're in the adjourned portion of it. There are nine minutes left to participate if one wanted to. You adjourned the debate, hon. member. Do you want to continue?

Ms Notley: No. I think I have already debated it two Mondays ago, so I'm good. Thanks.

The Speaker: So we should call the vote, then?

Ms Notley: Yes.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

- M3. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all letters received by the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports, and the Premier between October 1, 2008, and February 10, 2009, regarding the province's new pharmaceutical plan for seniors.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This pharmaceutical plan has been very controversial, and we've heard a very extensive public outcry from people who oppose the higher amounts that middle-income ill seniors have to bear and who see this as a blow to the universality of our health care system. It appears as though the plan was conceived with little or no consultation with the people who have been affected by the change. We have, certainly, ourselves been receiving a great number of letters from seniors and other citizens who are outraged by the proposed changes to the pharmaceutical plan, and we ourselves are very gravely concerned about the negative impact this will have on our health care system overall from a preventative basis as well as on an overall cost-savings basis. As noted previously, we're also very concerned about the attack this represents on universality.

As a result of that, we are looking to see what it was that the ministry had been hearing from Alberta citizens regarding this change. Had they not been receiving the same kind of letters outlining the sorts of concerns that we have articulated? It's for these reasons that we are asking to have this information provided to members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of

health I wish to advise the House that the government wishes to reject this motion for a return. When individuals write letters to either ministers or to the Premier, they do not expect that information to be broadly shared. If the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood would like this information, there is a proper channel, and that is through a FOIP request, in which case a third-party consultation would be conducted with each individual person who wrote, to obtain their permission to share the letter.

I urge all members to vote against this motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on this point.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Specifically referencing Motion for a Return 3, the concern expressed here has been the numbers of seniors who have been appealing to this government to take into account the contributions they have made throughout their lives. Those in the higher income brackets have paid taxes for all of their years of employment to this government with the hope that in their retirement years their contributions would be recognized. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, the whole notion of universality is being called into question in this motion for a return.

Now, the government thankfully did a little bit of an about-face with regard to transgendered individuals. They realized that not only the initial 26 but the other 21 who had begun the programming should receive funding. Unfortunately, at that point they slammed the door for future transgendered operations. The government has already slammed the door on further contracting out of cataract surgery, which, obviously, affects seniors directly. It has cut funding for chiropractic services. It has cut funding for podiatry services. So it's no wonder that we as Albertans are trying to get a sense of where the government is headed with regard to the pharmaceutical plan. At this point all seniors and Albertans know is that the individual coverage for Blue Cross has been tripled. That cost is considerably more than what seniors were previously paying for health care premiums. It seems as though the government gives with its right hand and takes away with its left.

Albertan seniors are extremely concerned. Approximately 200 of them appeared outside the minister of health's office this past Friday in Calgary to register their concerns. The idea of a means test, as I say, goes directly against the idea of universality. Seniors deserve better, and that's what Motion for a Return 3 is calling for.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to speak in support of this. Certainly, there has been a public outcry. I'm sure that every MLA sitting in this House is more than aware of that. Phones have been ringing. Letters have been written. E-mails, by the hundreds, actually, have been coming in.

Clearly, I live in a riding with lots of seniors. Beside the fact that it will cost them more money, one of the things that they're concerned about is that the means test also, in their mind, will affect their privacy. They're not used to having to share a lot of that kind of information. That was one of the things that they wanted me to speak about.

My usual question, of course, would be: how was this decision arrived at? Was it a ministerial decision? Was it a board decision? Was there any medical input into it? That's why I think this motion is very important, that we get the answers for that. Yes, of course, we could FOIP it, but we all know how expensive FOIP is. It's probably expensive for a reason: so that nobody will FOIP it and actually find out what's going on.

The Speaker: Are there others, or should I call the vote?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate?

Ms Notley: No. You can call the question.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

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

Public Affairs Bureau Job Descriptions

M4. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the current job descriptions for all positions in the Public Affairs Bureau.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The budget for the Public Affairs Bureau for 2008-2009 is \$20 million. We would like to know the variety of duties performed by members of the Public Affairs Bureau. We have questions and concerns about the relationship between the Public Affairs Bureau and the government. We've argued in the past that it appears as though the bureau sometimes operates in a partisan way. For example, in question period we sometimes see on the government side that questions and answers are sometimes scripted, when the purpose of QP is for private members to hold the ministers to account. [interjection] Indeed, it appears that way, surprisingly.

Alberta NDP policy is to replace the Public Affairs Bureau with a smaller group of communications professionals who report directly to the ministers and not through the Premier's office. Nonetheless, we believe that there would be value in understanding in more detail the number of people and the resources that we are getting for that \$20 million.

That is the basic reason behind why we are seeking this information. Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government House Leader I wish to propose an amendment to this motion for a return. I believe that copies of the amendment have already been circulated. The amendment would strike "all positions in the Public Affairs Bureau" and substitute "the following positions in the Public Affairs Bureau: directors, directors of communications, executive directors, and the managing director."

Mr. Speaker, the motion is being amended to include only job descriptions at the director level and above. They cover each of the bureau's areas of responsibility. In addition, I need to point out to all members that only one job description describes the role of all communications directors who are assigned to the various ministries.

Positions below the director are managers and professional communications staff who support directors in positions that are technical or administrative in nature. This would include the ACN co-ordinator, administrative assistant, financial administrator, human resource assistant, human resource manager, information technology supervisor, internal communications manager, Internet systems developer, public affairs officer, records management assistant, senior graphic designer, systems analyst, and technical support specialist. I would advise all members that the job descriptions for these various levels of communications careers within the Public Affairs Bureau are outlined on the website, which can be found though the government link on the home page.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaking very specifically to the amendment, I appreciate the hon. deputy House leader's comments with regard to the job descriptions of individuals below being included on the website. The specific job positions of the individuals who are most likely in receipt of this last year's bonusing will provide part of that information. We also realize that the people who are farther down the chain of command, the actual public servants, are probably less likely to have qualified for the bonusing although in their job description I would hope that that information would be included.

One of the reasons, I'm assuming, for asking for this information has to do with, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona pointed out, the growing budget connected with the Public Affairs Bureau. When Premier Klein decided to bring the Public Affairs Bureau directly under his wing, a tremendous amount of control was then exercised within the Premier's office. Premier Stelmach, obviously . . .

The Speaker: No, no, no. That's about the fourth time.

Mr. Chase: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I should know better.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Chase: The Premier followed through with our former Premier Klein's mandate and has direct control over the Public Affairs Bureau, which, again, is becoming more and more costly to Albertans and delivering a service that is questionable. Therefore, having these positions not only spelled out but the amount of money that goes to these positions, which I would hope would be part of the job description, and the eligibility for bonusing is extremely important.

As our new Premier has indicated, transparency and accountability are foremost in his mind. For that follow-through, then, these positions, the qualifications expected for the positions, the type of job description required, the remuneration, the potentials for bonusing, all these details need to be brought out to Albertans. I'm sure that Albertans, whether through the website that the hon. Minister of Environment pointed out or in combination with Motion for a Return 4, would like to know how many individuals are employed within the Public Affairs Bureau. As has been noted, it is taking several millions of Alberta taxpayers' dollars to deliver this information.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again I apologize for the name transgression.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do note the information provided by the deputy House leader with respect to some of the job descriptions being available on the website. However, it is my understanding that we don't have a clear description of some of the following positions: senior communications manager; manager, communications planning; manager, internal communications; brand initiative manager; advertising consultant or advertising co-ordinator; or corporate identity consultant, which sounds like a very unique little term for a position. It seems to me that there's no reason why these job descriptions should not be publicly available.

As we've already noted, with a budget of \$20 million, Albertans have a right to know the details of this Public Affairs budget and where it is that we're paying for people and where they actually are. Again, although we appreciate that some of the information is forthcoming through this amendment, we don't believe that it gives as much information as we are seeking at this point. For that reason we can't support it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on this amendment? Then I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: On the motion as amended, additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate, or should I just call the question?

Ms Notley: Question.

[Motion for a Return 4 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Health System Restructuring

M6. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the results, data, and analyses of all public opinion polls, focus groups, surveys, and questionnaires undertaken by or on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness between January 1, 2007, and February 10, 2009, regarding the elimination or replacement of regional health boards with the Alberta Health Services Board.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, this replacement, this decision, is another change that the minister of health has made to our health care system that involved no apparent public consultation. The public at least has a right to know what information the ministry took into account before deciding to make this change.

It's particularly important given that the decision was taken mere months after a provincial general election where there was absolutely no discussion of this type of change to our health care system and, certainly, no discussion or consultation in a number of the smaller regions throughout the province, which stand to lose significant services and, indeed, which we've already discovered since the creation of this board will lose significant services and facilities. There was no discussion with voters, Albertans, in these regions during the provincial general election, so we are very interested in finding out what type of public consultation this government chose to undertake before proceeding with this initiative. Certainly, we know that they have copious dollars at their disposal for polling and that their polling happens quite regularly as do focus groups and other surveys. It would seem appropriate that Albertans be given the opportunity to learn what the ultimate consensus was of voters on these issues, were there any kind of public consultation.

Going back to the issue in general, through the transition time, when the Alberta Health Services Board has been replacing the regional health boards, there has without question been evidence that health care problems have been worsening quite significantly. We've only just recently talked about the issue of increasing bed shortages and waiting lists for surgeries in the area of Calgary.

We've heard the recent comments by the president of the Calgary & Area Physicians' Association, who claims that the province has probably lost at least a year of potential progress because of the administrative upheaval.

3:10

The question that we're asking here, of course, refers not only to the information that preceded the decision but also any kind of polling or focus groups or surveying or information that the government has collected on its own behalf since this decision was taken, up to February 10, 2009. Once again, I believe that because this is such an incredibly critical and important issue to Albertans across the province, it only makes sense that they be given access to the information that the government not only made its initial decision on but also is premising its decision to stay the course and carry on, notwithstanding the many, many problems that we have observed over the course of the last nine months.

It is with this background in mind that we are pursuing this information, and I certainly call on my colleagues here in the Legislature on behalf of Albertans who are interested in these issues to support my motion to have this information tabled and made public in the interests of full democratic discussion and transparency.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of health I wish to urge members to reject this motion. The rationale is really quite simple. There were no public opinion polls, focus groups, surveys, or questionnaires undertaken by or on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Wellness between January 1, 2007, and February 10, 2009, regarding the elimination or replacement of regional health boards with the Alberta Health Services Board. Therefore, there is nothing to provide to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on this point.

Ms Pastoor: There really aren't many points left, I think, after what the hon. member has just said previous to this. However, it certainly opens up the question of why weren't any of these things done, and this is probably where the original question came from.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

Ms Notley: Question.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

The Speaker: The motion is defeated, but the question has been answered.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Working Conditions for Temporary Foreign Workers

M10. Ms Notley moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing, for the period January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2008, a copy of all complaints filed on behalf of temporary foreign workers with the Ministry of Employment and Immigration regarding working conditions.

Ms Notley: Thank you. As has been discussed at some length within this Legislature over the last year, certainly since I've been

here, anyway, Alberta has brought in unprecedentedly large numbers of temporary foreign workers. We have had very few controls or protections in place to ensure that their working conditions are of a level and a standard that we would expect for all Albertans. We have no doubt that these individuals are very deeply vulnerable to exploitation.

We want to know how many temporary foreign workers are having problems with working conditions and what type of problems they are having and how they are being solved. We are looking for this information from the government although we will start out by saying that we know, because of the way in which the system works, there are probably a great number of concerns that are never actually forwarded to the government because of concerns about retaliation and a lack of knowledge about the available assistance that may be at their disposal.

Nonetheless, with that in mind, I know that in April of '07 the Alberta Federation of Labour had decided to launch a temporary foreign worker advocate program to offer free services to temporary foreign workers needing assistance with work-related problems, and in six months the advocate had received more than 1,400 calls. So we know that there are problems, and we would like to know how many the government has actually been dealing with and how they've been dealing with them. It's important as well for Albertans to have this information made public.

These temporary foreign workers are coming into our province, and a good deal of the economic prosperity which we have until very recently been enjoying has taken place on their backs. It is our responsibility, I would suggest, that we have a very clear insight not only in terms of the nature and the frequency and the volume of complaints that have been levied by these temporary foreign workers but also for us to have some piece of information on how they are resolved and if they are resolved and whether or not we're doing an adequate job of ensuring that there is some form of protection at their disposal.

I believe that there may be an amendment coming, and I will speak to it at that time. Those are the primary reasons behind our call for this information. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Employment and Immigration I would like to propose an amendment to the motion. I believe that copies of such amendment have been circulated. The intent of the amendment is to change the date from January 1, 2005, to December 1, 2006. The reason for this is that we do not have documents dating back that far, so the change of the date to December 1, 2006, will facilitate the actual release of documents that exist.

Secondly, there is a proposal within the amendment to strike out the word "copy" and substitute "summary report." The reason for this is that workers making complaints do so in confidence, and we must be careful not to compromise their rights under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and, therefore, would propose to provide a summary of complaints rather than copies of the individual complaints.

Mr. Speaker, the motion as amended would now read that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing "for the period December 1, 2006, to December 31, 2008, a summary report of all complaints filed on behalf of temporary foreign workers with the Ministry of Employment and Immigration regarding working conditions."

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

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I appreciate the intentions of the Minister of Employment and Immigration in coming forward to answer at least part of our question with respect to this – I think some of this information will be valuable, or I hope it will – the concern that I have is simply that I'm not sure what a summary of complaints will look like. Will it just say: March, 20 complaints? Will it say: March, 20 complaints, broken down by type? Will it be complaints broken down by region? Will it be complaints broken down by detailed cause of action? Or will it just simply be complaints with identifying information removed? I would suggest that the latter would be the way in which to ensure we get the full picture of the extent and breadth and nature of the complaints received while at the same time ensuring the privacy of the individuals involved. That is the way I would rather see this amendment proceed.

I am quite concerned that this information being simply provided in summary form will result in our not receiving the kind of detailed information that we need to have in order to truly assess whether or not we are at this point doing a good job protecting these people, whether we have done any kind of good job in the past protecting them, and, in particular, whether the problem is of such a breadth that it further supports our need to do a better job to protect these people as they are here now. I've certainly found in my previous life that it's very possible for summaries of complaints to become so generalized that the value of the information they provide is negligible.

3:20

Unfortunately, then, we can't support this amendment unless we're able to see from some other member in support of the amendment some information about it that outlines exactly what the summary would look like. Otherwise, we unfortunately have to see this as something that would not provide the kind of information that we need while still preserving the privacy of those as required under the law. I do believe it is certainly possible to do that, but I don't think it's necessary to reduce the scope of the information received by members of the House to the extent which would occur were this amendment to our motion to go forward.

It is for that reason that I cannot support the amendment. However, I do hope that members of the House will go forward and support our original proposal because we do absolutely need to receive this information in a more comprehensive fashion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In speaking to the amendment, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, the Minister of Environment, said that the government, for whatever reason, did not track – or it appears from his comments – complaints received from temporary foreign workers for the year January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2005, and again it appears that for a second year running, January 1, 2006, until, we'll say, December 1, 2006, noted here on the amendment, it didn't collect information.

I find that hard to believe, that either the information wasn't collected or that there weren't any complaints over a two-year period. My understanding is that in the 2008-2009 year we had between 50,000 and 60,000 temporary foreign workers working in this province. I know that Gil McGowan, the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, along with the two opposition parties championed concerns with regard to temporary foreign workers.

Another statistic that is missing through this amendment is the

whole idea that we as a province want to encourage immigration. We have been trying to accomplish that in sort of a bit-by-bit approach through our provincial nominee program. I recall just recently the Minister of Employment and Immigration talking about having exceeded the 2008-2009 limits. I think there were approximately 3,500 individuals who were nominated, and he upped the target for the 2009-2010 year to in excess of 4,000. I commend the government for upping the process whereby temporary foreign workers with particular skill sets get a fast track through the provincial nominee program towards permanent citizenship.

However, if you look at last year's numbers and the proposal for next year's numbers, we're talking less than 8,000 people, yet we have currently employed and quickly returning to their country of origin, unfortunately, due to this recession approximately 60,000 people. The fact that for whatever reason the government has encouraged them to come to Alberta and take on jobs that not only help them personally but help the overall Alberta economy, that we don't have statistics for them makes me wonder about our immigration processes along with the federal government.

Yes, the temporary foreign worker program is initiated by the federal government, but once they get within the confines of our provincial borders, there is an expectation that there would be tracking associated with it. The amendment that wants to just simply erase two years of temporary foreign worker history is a great concern to me.

Now, my second concern is with the other part of the amendment, where it is striking out "copy" and substituting "summary report." I fully understand the need for the government to maintain the security of individuals. They do that quite frequently through the FOIPing process by crossing out the names but providing the specific details. Unfortunately, the FOIP process is a very lengthy one. It's also a very expensive one, whether it's members of the opposition seeking that information or media or a private Albertan. What the hon. member has asked for in this particular Motion for a Return 10 is to cut through all the red tape associated with it and give us a sense as to the working conditions of temporary foreign workers.

I would think that this would be in not only the government's best interest but in the province of Alberta as a whole's best interest to investigate the number of complaints, the types of complaints, the regions from which the complaints were taken, and specific examples as opposed to précis or generic summaries. I cannot believe that even though we're in a recession, and we don't know how long that recession is going to take place, we wouldn't want to say to the world: Alberta is a number one destination, whether you're coming here on a temporary visa to work or whether you're seeking to immigrate to this wonderful province.

Cutting back the request to a generic summary and eliminating two entire years of Alberta's history sends a message to any individuals who would be considering immigrating to Alberta that everything is not above board, information is scrutinized, information is highly regulated. We'll never get a sense of the small number of temporary foreign workers who felt brave enough to go either to the AFL or report to the hon. NDP caucus or Alberta's Official Opposition, who are, I am sure, just a small, tiny, tip-of-the-iceberg consideration to those who felt that they would lose their jobs and didn't report. Without numbers, without details any notion of transparency and accountability, any attempt on Alberta's part to bring in immigration, whether on a temporary basis or for full-time immigration status through the provincial nominee program, gets lost.

It's for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, in the name of transparency and accountability and a desire to show the world that we are the

destination of choice, that I would ask members to support the motion prior to its amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to this member, I'm a little confused. I'm wondering if this member's intention is to protect our foreign workers. If you were to look through the *Hansard* and not only the *Hansard* but also the mass media, you will find that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on behalf of the Liberal opposition has been harping for the last few months in favour of packing these workers' bags right now and shipping them back wherever they came from. Whether they're in the midst of a contract or not, just get rid of them because the economy has slowed down a little.

As a matter of fact, their position on foreign workers is no different, Mr. Speaker, than you going to a local outlet and renting a tool from Fasco, renting a tool only for when you need it and when you no longer need it, disposing of it as if it had no value and shipping it back home. That is, clearly, a well-elaborated Liberal position on foreign workers. We needed them when we wanted cheap labour. We needed them when we wanted some work done. Now that we no longer need them, when the job at Tim Hortons perhaps looks somewhat desirable to locals, get rid of them, ship them back home, and break any and all contracts that we may have.

For this member to now stand up and tell us that he really, honestly cares for foreign workers and that he wants information and longitudinal studies on how well they're doing in their places of employment is nothing, Mr. Speaker, other than shameful.

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has already spoken on the amendment.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. I'll just be very brief. That was an interesting interpretation of what actually has transpired from this side of the table. I don't recall saying: send them home. I think part of the conversation was: make sure that they have the opportunity to be citizens, but also make sure that the ones that we are bringing over are fulfilling a need.

One of the reasons that I would stand up against this amendment is because I, too, like my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, am amazed that there is no documentation since December 1 of '06. I would have to ask why that would be occurring. I can't believe that these stats aren't being kept on a regular basis.

One of the reasons that I think this information is important is because there have been, certainly, many instances that came through my office of temporary foreign workers who have had to and been lucky enough to hook up with an immigration centre or citizens that actually are willing to help them. Sometimes things are going on, and the only way that they are being told what's going on is through their interpreter. Often they're at the mercy of the interpreter, who is paid for by the employer from whom they are either trying to understand what they're supposed to be doing or whom they actually lodge that complaint against.

I think that having this information is very necessary because I believe that, certainly, in the future we will always have temporary foreign workers. I think the province will pick up over the next number of years, and we will still need some temporary foreign workers because the rest of the country will also start to pick up. We

do know that we've already lost some who wanted to fulfill their heart's desire and returned to the Atlantic provinces.

I think it's very important that we have this information so that we can go forward and have the full protection for our temporary foreign workers.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: We now can have further debate on the motion as amended, or we can call the question on the motion as amended.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity first, on the motion as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just to be brief and have an opportunity to respond to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, the *Hansard* that he so eloquently referenced will also show the number of times that we as the Official Opposition have stood up and urged the government to improve and increase its provincial nomination program so that these people, who were enticed not by the Liberal opposition to fulfill jobs but by the government, which made various promises to these individuals that Alberta was a land of milk and honey and opportunity – those short-term contracts were not signed by members of the Official Opposition. They were signed by the government.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is correct. Throughout the time period we have said – and we're on record, and I don't deny that record – that jobs are for Albertans first, whether they be unemployed farm labourers, whether they be First Nations individuals, whether they be members of unionized organizations or non-unionized organizations. We have submitted petitions along that line, saying: first Alberta, second Canada, third North America. Then if there is a need and when that need is recognized, we go global, and we honour the individuals' contributions with a reward of citizenship for work well done as opposed to the use and abuse that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs attributed to the Liberal Party.

In terms of speaking to the motion for a return, we're in favour of citizenship. We're in favour of a provincial nominee program because there are rights and protections within citizenship that are not awarded or recognized or regulated for temporary foreign workers. If we're going to improve our Alberta fabric, then we have to give these people stability, and a temporary foreign work program does not achieve that.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 10 as amended carried]

Wildlife Population Data

M11. Ms Notley moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, briefing notes, backgrounders, and memoranda regarding grizzly bear, wolf, and woodland caribou populations in Alberta prepared by or for the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development between January 1, 2004, and February 10, 2009.

Ms Notley: The reason we are seeking this information, again, is because it's important for us to know the state of our wildlife and what protections are being put in place to protect Alberta's wild animals or not, as the case may be. The woodland caribou is an endangered species, and in response to this situation the government implemented a wolf cull. It was a controversial plan to kill wolf pups and sterilize their parents in order to strengthen populations near Jasper national park in 2006. A number of conservationists

pointed out that there were other factors contributing to the decline of the woodland caribou, mostly increased industrial development. The wolf cull was implemented again in 2008 near Rocky Mountain House in order to protect the elk populations.

We also believe that grizzly bears should have the classification of endangered because of their dwindling population. Studies have shown that since 2002 grizzly bear populations have dwindled from about 1,000 to less than 500 today. [interjections] One of the biggest threats to the population is the density of access roads that penetrate habitat.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Anyway, I hear from the opposite side that it's not true, but of course the most effective way to resolve the question one way would be to provide members of this House with copies of all reports, briefing notes, backgrounders, and memorandums regarding the populations throughout the province, not just selected memoranda but, indeed, everything that the minister has had given to him between January 1, '04, and February 10, 2009.

I see that it already manages to get a few members opposite engaged ever so briefly, so it clearly is one of those issues that warrants full distribution of information so that we can engage in a well-informed debate. It is for that reason that I am seeking to have that information made available to all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I would like to propose an amendment to Motion for a Return 11, the intent of which would be to result in the motion reading:

Copies of all reports and associated backgrounders containing analysis done on such reports regarding grizzly bear, wolf, and woodland caribou populations in Alberta prepared by or for the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development between January 1, 2004, and February 10, 2009.

This amendment is based on the following reasons, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the request in the originally worded motion is far too broad and consists of a large volume of records that could be quite overwhelming. Secondly, the department wants to provide the member with a reasonable amount of meaningful material respecting the intent of the request.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this amendment.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate the concern that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has about my ability to manage copious amounts of information. Yes. Much appreciated. However, it appears to me, when I read through the amendment, that what it would do is that we would be losing, through the amendment, briefing notes and memorandums within the ministry on this issue. I mean, I've read a lot of memos and a lot of briefing notes, and they actually tend to be shorter than reports and backgrounders. I would suspect that, really, the concern that the minister has with respect to my ability or my caucus's ability to read and digest this information is probably overdone and that we probably are quite capable of reviewing and distilling that information if it were provided to us. Indeed, I'm quite sure that other

members of the House would also be quite capable of reviewing and distilling that information.

Of course, now I can't help but wonder exactly which briefing note or which memorandum includes information that the minister would rather we not have. Had it not been for those two slight changes, I would have thought that reading the reports and the backgrounders would have been more than adequate, but now the absence of the briefing notes and the memorandums leads me to query whether in fact the information is quite as black and white as we've been led to believe.

Notwithstanding the concerns about the copious amounts of paper, I do believe that we are equipped to review not only the reports and the backgrounders but also the briefing notes and the memoranda on this issue, and it would be of value, again, to all members of the Assembly to be able to have the full story put before us so that we could evaluate and make the best decisions on behalf of Albertans and also on behalf of the goal of protecting and preserving our wildlife populations.

Unfortunately, I am unable to completely support the amendment because it would appear to exempt two smaller sources of information from our review. I'm always a sort of more-information-is-good kind of person, so I would prefer to see all the information come forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This is an unusual position where I find myself. I see myself somewhere in between the government's position and the NDP position. [interjections] I find it a very comfortable place to be, actually.

An Hon. Member: On the fence.

Mr. Chase: No, dedicated in the trenches rather than on the fence is where I would find myself.

Anyway, to the Speaker and through the Speaker. I understand the government's sensitivity with regard to briefing notes. Briefing notes are considered, basically, the belonging, the possession of the minister. While I don't necessarily agree with that, I understand the sensitivity associated with it. However, the backgrounders and memoranda are extremely important because this government has participated in initiatives, on one hand, to save wolves and reintroduce them into Yellowstone.

I just want to very briefly indicate my thanks to a great Alberta songwriter and singer, and that's Ian Tyson, who together with his group wrote *Yellowhead to Yellowstone*, which tells the story of the wolves that were taken from Alberta, and it personifies the struggle they had as they encountered local wolves and tried to create a larger pack and survive.

Anyway, that's my tribute to Ian Tyson. That particular song, *Yellowhead to Yellowstone*, was performed by a group that consisted of a number of backup musicians from Ian Tyson's band who performed at the East Coulee music festival the first week in April.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Chase: The relevance is wolves and information on wolves.

As I said, this government's attitude towards wolves changes. Wolves were good enough to re-establish in packs in Montana and to re-establish in packs in Wyoming, but they weren't good enough to have an existence as part of the food chain in Alberta.

The government tried to blame wolves for the disappearance of

woodland caribou. The government completely negated the effect of seismic and resource extraction roads that have turned woodland caribou habitat into a man-made criss-cross. They blamed the wolves. They targeted the wolves through aerial attack from helicopter, they targeted the wolves through poisoning. It was only when public outcry was such that they basically changed their aerial targets from wolves to deer in southeast Alberta in an attempt to get a handle on CWD. Yet this government has been supportive of importing elk and commercializing deer so that CWD, that has been detected in Saskatchewan, is also showing up in Alberta. Instead of testing the deer and the elk, the government would rather shoot the wild ones.

The information, the backgrounds and memoranda, not only on wolves but on their relationship to woodland caribou populations is extremely relevant. If we want to stop short of briefing notes, I would think that between what has been requested, backgrounders and memoranda, we would probably get a better handle.

Now, with specific regard to grizzly bears, the government seems to prize anecdotal evidence of a hunter who during a seasonal hunting experience might have seen the evidence of a grizzly, whether it's steaming or whether it's just lying there or whether it's bits of fur on a bush, but they don't seem nearly as concerned about the reports of the scientists and environmentalists and naturalists and the studies that they've taken. They seem to put a disproportionate weight on information from anecdotal.

Now, I realize that we don't have enough conservationists, that we don't have enough scientists, but taking so much evidence on anecdotal in specific zones when you consider that the whole southeastern part of Alberta is outside the auspices of hunting for grizzlies even before the moratorium, then hunters aren't going to be reporting on grizzly evidence. Yes, they still have opportunities to go after deer and elk and moose, and occasionally they might come across a grizzly during that particular experience, but we have such a vast province that depending on anecdotal evidence of hunters who in some cases do not wish to see a moratorium – they do not wish to see a grizzly bear being declared an endangered species because they have a desire to add a grizzly to their trophy as opposed to their meat collection.

In my background I've been a meat hunter. That's the kind of experience that I learned from my father. The size of the rack was not important; the size of the paw was not important. It was the quality of the meat. This idea of trophy hunting concerns me greatly. We have a natural process which, unfortunately, has been interfered with in this province through unregulated resource roads for extraction and seismic, but to put the blame onto the animal as opposed to recognizing where the blame belongs and not providing support for the animal but just simply eradicating it is unacceptable.

3:50

The information that is being proposed in this amendment is halfway there. That's why I am trying to provide a little bit of leeway to the government and ask to find information somewhere between: keep your briefing notes to yourself if that's going to make you happy, but provide the backgrounders, provide the memoranda so that we can get an accurate indication of what our wildlife population looks like.

In Banff just recently there was an avalanche that wiped out a significant number of a herd of woodland caribou. For the government to put other caribou further in danger by not maximizing the number of resource extraction roads, using the same roads for timber as for oil and gas as for seismic, is doing not only the animals but Albertans in general a disservice.

As I say, whether being a middle-of-the-road position is considered something that this government despises, if being an individual

who believes in inclusion and looking at both sides is something to be greeted in a negative fashion by this government, I make no apologies. We have a wonderful province. If it's going to continue, if my grandson is going to get to see a wolf or a grizzly bear other than in a zoo circumstance or see a woodland caribou, I want to make sure this government is taking action to preserve these species. I want to see this government taking action on wildlife corridors, Y2Y, Yukon to Yellowstone.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not quite as opposed to the amendment perhaps as the previous speakers because I really feel that this is probably better than nothing, and I do believe that we need to get this information out there. Relying on anecdotal information is never the way to go, but in order for people to really understand and be able to write letters and be able to complain and be able to get people interested, they have to know what's going on. That's why I think that the information that they would share, rather than having to dig it all out through FOIP, which would be astronomical because there are many, many, many reports and certainly briefing notes and those sorts of things – some of them, of course, are probably hidden for 15 years as of the legislation of last year anyway.

I would go on record as saying that I think the amendment probably is worthy of support because at least it would be something rather than nothing.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

[Motion for a Return 11 as amended carried]

Private-public Partnership for Building Schools

M12. Ms Notley moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the initial proposal submitted by Babcock & Brown Public Partnerships Limited to the Ministry of Education for the construction of 18 Alberta schools, the findings of the selection process that resulted in Babcock & Brown Public Partnerships Limited winning a contract, the research that concluded that \$118 million would be saved by constructing schools through P3s instead of through traditional methods, and the agreement signed between the government and Babcock & Brown Public Partnerships Limited to design, build, finance, and maintain these schools.

Ms Notley: As we know, the government has an agreement with Babcock & Brown Public Partnerships Limited to design, build, finance, and maintain 18 new schools in Calgary and Edmonton projected to open sometime in 2010. The agreement is set for a 30-year term. Basically, the reason we are seeking out this information is because this deal amounts to roughly a \$650 million obligation on the part of Alberta taxpayers. Yet as a result of it being financed through a public-private partnership, we, of course, have this even thicker than usual cloak of secrecy that falls over the expenditure of that money on behalf of Alberta. Frankly, it shocks me that we can look at making that kind of expenditure and have so little public

accountability for how it proceeds, whether it proceeds well, effectively, whether it meets the needs of the community, whether it meets the needs of Alberta taxpayers, whether it meets the needs of our bottom line, any of those things.

Of course, the government is able to simply not proceed with providing us that information under the cloak of: oh, well, it's a public-private partnership, and we couldn't possibly make that information available because it's private information that belongs to the corporation in question. I would suggest that it is well within the capacity of this government to suggest that where private industry agrees to work with government to construct capital projects, they simply need to be prepared that more information is going to become public. That's part of the quid pro quo for successfully signing what appears to be about a \$650 million contract. I hardly think that's unreasonable.

Instead, what we have are these repeated opportunities for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to just slip through the taxpayers' fingers into these P3 financing arrangements where we lose all oversight and all control over how that money is spent. It strikes me that above and beyond all the other policy perspectives and public policy arguments against the effectiveness and the merits of P3 development, simply as taxpayers that particular one, that one issue, ought to make people stop and say: "No, we can't accept that. We cannot agree that huge, huge portions of our tax dollars must be slipped under the table somewhere to a place where we will never see them again and will never be allowed the opportunity to assess the efficacy with which they were expended."

Our offices, of course, did a FOIP request on this issue, and we were given a very, very short document with a whole bunch of pages blanked out. More importantly, all the math was blacked out because, of course, we had asked how it is that we came up with this notion that we as taxpayers would save \$118 million on a \$750 million project by pursuing a P3 arrangement. You know, quite reasonably we asked for the basis for this math. Again, as people who are in this House with an obligation to represent the best interests of taxpayers, to make sure that the issue is discussed broadly, comprehensively, thoughtfully, in a well-researched, well-informed manner, we simply asked for this information to be provided so that the assumptions underlying those kinds of conclusions could be openly debated and considered, but throughout our repeated requests we have never been given access to that information.

I think that that is an overwhelming rejection of our responsibility to Alberta, to Albertans, to Alberta voters, to Alberta taxpayers. This government perceives that it is the normal course of business that we would hand out really, literally, billions and billions of dollars or what may appear to be billions of dollars, ultimately if you add up all the different P3s, to private corporations and then actively and intentionally tie our hands behind our backs so that we are simply not able to engage in any kind of cost-benefit analysis for these types of investments.

4:00

It was with this objective in mind and this concern about how well a job we are doing here in this House for the people that elected us that we thought we would bring this matter to the Legislative Assembly. As I've said, under the FOIP provisions we have been unable to have that information provided to us because the whole issue of proprietary commercial information has been used to ensure that that information not go forward.

I certainly believe that there is absolutely no reason under that particular heading that the math underlying the \$118 million in

alleged cost savings cannot be widely distributed to Albertans for us to analyze. I, frankly, find that very hard to believe because, presumably, that \$118 million assessment was done before we actually decided who would receive the final contract. In any event, even if that wasn't the case, this Assembly has the ability to provide information and to table information to members of the Assembly if ultimately it's deemed to be in the best interests of taxpayers.

I would suggest that it's very possible to provide far more information than has been provided to date without in any way jeopardizing any sort of proprietary information that could do any sort of genuine damage to the business interests of this particular company and that, on the contrary, that particular heading under which we exclude the distribution of information to the public about the public interests is far overused and far too often relied on and that there is much more room for us to be provided with the kind of information that we as Members of the Legislative Assembly have a right and an obligation to ask for and to know and to evaluate on behalf of Albertans.

It's for that reason that we are making this motion here today, seeking once and for all this information which for two years now has been kept outside of the public sphere for Albertans to view.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure I would like to urge members to reject this motion. This motion basically requests four documents: one is the initial proposal of the successful proponent; next, the findings of the selection process; the research from the public-sector comparator; and a signed agreement between the government and the successful proponent. This is all to do with the Alberta schools alternative procurement project, or ASAP 1. Don't you love the acronyms around this place?

The minister is recommending that we reject this motion for a number of reasons. Firstly, the signed agreement is already on the Ministry of Education website. Secondly, the financial information already released is consistent with what's available for other publicly tendered construction project bids. Also, Mr. Speaker, some of the information can't be released because it does have proprietary commercial information included in it, and releasing it could take away from the competitiveness of the process. It jeopardizes the proponent's ability to do business or to competitively bid on other projects. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it may even negatively influence the bid process which is currently under way for ASAP 2.

There is a rigorous process used to evaluate the bids. We're confident that the public-sector comparator is accurate. It's based on data from our own experiences building and maintaining schools all over the province, and it includes analyses from the independent consultants, Tech-Cost, and the accounting firm of PricewaterhouseCoopers. I need to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the successful proponent and the public-sector comparator numbers are already public. They, too, are on Education's website and the news release from September of 2008.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is initiating an audit of the ASAP 1 process, and the results of that audit are expected in October of this year.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to reject this motion.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. This government views P3s as

the greatest invention since sliced bread but will not provide the details to explain their tremendous enthusiasm. Now, the government has indicated through a series of puffball questions that Babcock & Brown just coincidentally happens to be the same name as the English subsidiary that is providing the financing now that the mother company from Australia has gone bankrupt. They've assured this House and, through this House, all Albertans that there is no problem over the next 30 years of what must have been a wonderfully sweet deal, considering that it was arranged at close to the height of the boom period. Now, the information contained on the website and the so-called public-sector comparator are far from detailed. How those figures were arrived at is not included as part of the website.

With regard to these 18 P3s the publicly elected trustees had no choice whatsoever. It was to either take a P3 or not get a school. So much for the collaborative, collegial, intergovernmental approach.

As to the proprietary nature of the information Babcock & Brown would be basically competing against itself. The sweetheart deal that they got during this boom period in order to successfully rebid for the second set of 32 schools would have to be considerably lower because the cost of steel, the cost of cement, the cost of building materials, and the cost of labour have dramatically reduced during this recessionary period. So if there is some fear on the government's behalf that Babcock & Brown's bid is somehow going to be prejudiced for the next 32 schools unless the government already has predetermined that they're going to be the recipient of the bid, then providing detail that's already out there – the contract is over in the construction sense.

What remains to be seen, of course, is the keeping up of the infrastructure over the 30 years of the contract. That is such a convoluted piece of contracting that the role of the school boards in terms of daily maintenance, cleaning, and so on, versus the role of Babcock & Brown to make sure that the buildings don't fall around the students' ears, certainly isn't clearly spelled out on the website. That's the type of information we need to have.

I was very pleased when the AG indicated that he was going to provide an analysis of the 18 contracts to date. This is something that I was asking for, and when he came ahead with it, I was extremely pleased.

We need to have a sense and Albertans need to believe that this government's idea of borrowing against the future – it's cheaper to borrow money than it is to expend the money that was set aside in either our stability fund or our capital fund. If you're going to back up those mathematical beliefs, then this Babcock & Brown would be a good first place to demonstrate the reasoning behind why it's better to borrow, particularly at a time when we had sufficient money through our royalties and our surpluses to actually build them in a traditional manner, which we have maintained all along would have been cheaper and would not have required Albertans and their children to submit themselves to a 30-year mortgage on schools.

4:10

Now, it's interesting that part of the secrecy behind the contracting is not even being revealed to the school boards as to why the government is opposed to having preschool and after-school programs in these P3 schools. Somehow that's part of the proprietary information where the contractor and the investor, Babcock & Brown, get to dictate to the public school boards, who in theory own the schools but have to submit themselves to the will of the financier, whose information is hidden by the government.

The requests are all part of the transparency and accountability that this government has prided itself on under the watch of our Premier. By not providing this information and using proprietary information as an excuse, Albertans will never know what has

happened until such time as this 40-year-and-running government is forced to vacate its position, and at that point the whirring that we will be hearing will be the shredding of document information.

It's a reasonable request. It has to do with transparency. It has to do with accountability. It has to do with the 30 years that this government has sentenced Alberta's children to in terms of paying for this P3 contract. For a variety of reasons I support the hon. mover of this Motion for a Return 12, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. We, too, would like to peer inside this extremely sweet deal.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you like to close the debate, hon. member?

Ms Notley: No. Question.

[Motion for a Return 12 lost]

Carbon Capture and Storage

M14. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence sent to the government between January 1, 2008, and February 10, 2009, from businesses and nongovernmental organizations regarding the government's funding of carbon capture and storage technology.

Ms Notley: Of course, the reason for that is that, as you can imagine, not dissimilar from some of the previous points that we've made, this government insists on expending \$2 billion of taxpayers' money on this very unproven technology. That's a huge amount of money at a time when all members in this House are aware that funds are getting a little on the tight side. One has to ask why we're going ahead and whether it's really the best use of our money. Part of having that discussion is to know what in heaven's name generated this in the first place. It does seem to be such a little bit of a Hail Mary PR stunt, frankly, that's more than a little expensive.

Since the program was first announced, of course, we've had pretty much every major player in the tar sands back away from proceeding with this technology or taking part or taking advantage of this funding pot.

Of course, we know that while right now the greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions is without question coal-fired electricity generation, we also know that the fastest growth of greenhouse gas emissions is actually occurring within the tar sands. As such, if we're going to move forward and if this government wants us to continue to plan – I believe their future energy plan anticipates us having our economy built entirely in and around the tar sands for the next 50 years, yet this carbon capture storage technology: no one there is really interested in moving forward with it right now. Moreover, most people will say that the technology does not exist at this point to have an appreciable impact on greenhouse gas emission within the tar sands. It potentially – a very slim potential – could have some impact with electricity-generating coal plants but not in this area of the economy, where the government anticipates its primary economic engine to be situated for the next 50 or 60 years.

So the question then becomes: is this really a good use of our money? We know that there have been a variety of cases across the world where in most cases the private sector has backed away from engaging in the introduction of this type of technology because they see it as being far too expensive and, more importantly, simply not the most cost-effective way to address greenhouse gas emissions. They have all determined that there are far more cost-effective ways to deal with greenhouse gas emissions. It's only here, where this government sees its primary economic engine being development of

the tar sands for the next five or six decades, that they don't want to acknowledge that reality. Yet the irony is that the technology is not even there for that particular part of the sector.

All that being said, \$2 billion is a lot – a lot – of money. There is a tremendous lack of clarity or openness on the part of this government in terms of how they're going to administer that money, how they're going to prioritize the expenditure of that money, how that money is going to be partnered with private money, what the measures are, what it is they expect to get for that \$2 billion. I mean, it's just all pie in the sky PR spin, frankly, at this point. We think that Albertans need to know more and that one way for them to know more is to receive information that the government has received in the last 13 months regarding the efficacy of carbon capture and storage technology, both in terms of its scientific efficacy as well as its environmental efficacy, and the degree of interest being articulated within and from within the business community in Alberta.

Now, once again, of course, everyone is going to say, "Oh, well, this was correspondence to the government" and all that kind of stuff, but I think that it is still possible to go through that information and provide much more than currently has been provided while maintaining confidentiality where necessary, or where the person sending that information deems it's necessary, and in some cases they may not deem that it's even necessary that their name not be attached to it. This is something that is very critical for Albertans to have access to, this information. We have heard far too much of the issue around competitive advantage and all that kind of thing, and that's why we can never give out information to Albertans. But it seems to me that if we're going to take a \$2 billion pot of money and throw it on the back of a truck and jump on in with it with a big shovel and start shovelling it out, these private corporations and interests are simply going to have to be prepared to be subjected to a more transparent level of scrutiny than we as taxpayers have had access to thus far.

4:20

It is with this background in mind that we are seeking to have this information made public, to once again create an absolutely unprecedented level of transparency for all Albertans with respect to how it is that this government came up with their \$2 billion plan to throw this money out the door to a bunch of people, most of whom apparently don't seem that interested in receiving it, for reasons that the experts outside of Alberta will simply agree to disagree on with respect to how effective it ultimately will be. As Albertans we have a right to know how and why the government decided to make this project the centrepiece of its so-called efforts to immunize Alberta's abhorrent environmental record from international scrutiny. I don't, of course, think that it's going to be successful, but I am certainly interested in knowing how it was that the government came to the conclusion that they thought it might be.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's quite interesting, in fact, that the member opposite and, most certainly, other members of her party and, I'm presuming, the people that her party represents in the province of Alberta appear to know so much about carbon capture and storage, seem to be so opposed to the opportunity for Albertans to engage themselves in something that the United Nations, the International Energy Agency, the European Union, individual countries like Holland and the U.K. and Norway, certainly our own Canadian federal government, and now the new administration in the United States have been so very supportive of.

Mr. Speaker, I need to say just a word while I'm here, you know, about the situation around the Aspen award that the government of Alberta has just very recently received for our work on carbon capture and storage.

We've given consideration to this motion and the proper notification to the Assembly that we're recommending to our members that this motion be rejected. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we're seeing a trend among these motions, particularly some of the ones we're dealing with now, that could possibly be interpreted as an attempt to bypass our freedom of information route. Certainly, while that might make sense under some circumstances, I would suggest that in this specific case the FOIP process is essential. I say this because the member is not looking for the government's information per se but is requesting all public correspondence received from businesses and nongovernmental organizations related to carbon capture and storage funding. Perhaps the member is seeking information on both expressions of interest and other information that we've collected from the industrial sector or vying for a portion of the money that we have funded for CCS.

Our concern here is that it would be inappropriate for the province to release that information without permission of all third parties who have submitted it. That's why we have the FOIP process, Mr. Speaker, so the member can go through appropriate channels and obtain that permission. I'm not involved in that process whatsoever, and it's administered effectively by my department staff based on the legislation we have in place.

I might suggest one other possibility for the member. As you may or may not be aware, the Alberta Energy website has posted the names of companies who have been asked to submit full project CCS proposals. If there is an interest in more information about these projects, it would be simpler to call these companies directly.

To reiterate, Mr. Speaker, there is a process in place for the member to request the information, and I recommend that all members reject this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there any other member who wishes to speak on the motion?

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

Ms Notley: I would just rise very briefly to make the point that the companies from whom we might be requesting this information are not spending \$2 billion of my money, so their obligation to give that information to me is ever so slightly different than the government's obligation to give that to me, and it appears to me that members of this government have very much lost touch with that fact.

Once again, it's \$2 billion, and we'd like to know just a little bit more about it. We have not received anywhere nearly an adequate amount of information from this government, and it's for this reason that, I believe, members of the Assembly would benefit from having this information provided broadly to us all.

[Motion for a Return 14 lost]

Nuclear Power

M15. Ms Notley on behalf of Mr. Mason moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all correspondence between Bruce Power and the government regarding proposals for nuclear power in Alberta for the time period between January 1, 2006, and February 10, 2009.

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

Ms Notley: Thank you. As members of this House know from a brief exchange last week, we in the NDP caucus remain very, very concerned about the transparency with respect to the issue of nuclear power being considered for introduction into Alberta. We certainly know this.

Last week we, of course, asked for the minister to commit to open, public hearings to which any Albertan could go, that would be open for people to hear what each other has to say; for there to be an open exchange of views; if necessary, if they were interested, for the media to be there. We were told, very ironically, that people who are interested are free to "attend the website." Last time I checked with most Albertans, as much as we're all becoming increasingly tech savvy, open, well-informed, respectful exchanges of ideas and debate do not occur at the website. In fact, they occur with open meetings, where people can hear each other's exchanges and participate and learn from each other and respond to what people have to say and where people proposing a certain idea are held accountable in a public way for what it is they are proposing.

Clearly, that is something which remains elusive to the people of Alberta as it relates to the issue of nuclear power. You know, it's very concerning because meanwhile we have Bruce Power, which seems to have been able to put roughly \$50 million into their whole project to get nuclear power introduced into Alberta. It seems to me they wouldn't have done that without there being just a little bit of conversation with the government beforehand.

We have a government which purports to tell us that they're just putting together a neutral panel to tell us what the facts are. Then they appoint a panel that does not include environmentalists or public health experts with experience in this area but, rather, simply includes people who are advocates for nuclear power. They create that panel. The panel comes out with a report which concludes, among other things, that the waste issues around nuclear power are nowhere near as problematic as some of the environmental hazards associated with wind power. We then move into this process where we all get to attend a website for public consultation.

4:30

Nuclear power, notwithstanding the government's very cavalier approach to it and their very dismissive approach to the concerns experienced by many, many Albertans, is both expensive and dangerous. There's nothing green about nuclear energy plants. They are not renewable sources of energy; they are a nonrenewable source of energy. They create greenhouse gas emissions. They also create, as we've discussed, waste problems, which nobody has figured out how to deal with.

Most importantly – well, not most importantly; they're all very important. But another point is that, of course, they're incredibly, incredibly expensive. So we have again another sort of panacea coming from the government. If it's not \$2 billion on carbon capture and storage, well, then we're going to embark upon a plan with respect to nuclear power that has never done anything other than cost taxpayers hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars.

As I say, it seems as though the deck is stacked, and Albertans, of course, deserve the opportunity to know the degree to which the deck is stacked. It is not very easy to believe that there has been no correspondence or conversation between Bruce Power and government representatives when it comes to the issue of the advisability of investing \$50 million to try and get a nuclear plant in place in Alberta. For that reason, we think there's information that we're not receiving. Once again, as is a common theme with this government, while there is information that we're not receiving, there is much

more effort in ensuring that we don't receive it. It is for that reason that we would like to have the information that has been exchanged between Bruce Power and the government of Alberta made public and provided to all members of this Assembly so that we can more clearly analyze where this project is at and what the various rationales are for proceeding with this and why it is that the government has managed this issue in the way that they have to this point, to date.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I do have to rise with some comments relative to what's being said here. This is kind of a déjà vu thing again with this motion, similar to the last one. But something about this I think requires a bit of rebuttal because the member is talking here about something that happened in the House relative to question period. You know, she talks about public debate. I agree that public debate is a good forum. Public debate is one thing, but I do have to say that in certain circumstances, where public harassment and public intimidation take place, that's quite another thing.

This member has indicated that what we've done here is not give Albertans an opportunity to be involved in this process. That's wrong. She has very interestingly indicated that there would be select people that would be allowed in focus groups. There was nothing of the sort, Mr. Speaker, in any of the things that we said. We said that the people would be selected randomly by an independent third party, no select people. I think that when you imply something like that, it's unfortunate that Albertans, you know, get misled by some of those types of comments that are very seriously flawed. All Albertans will have an opportunity with respect to this particular issue, and it's another, I think, situation that can be interpreted as an attempt to use the rules of the Assembly to bypass the FOIP process. I would suggest that the same principle applies to Motion for a Return 15 as it did for 14.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a point of reiterating that the Premier has committed that we will not be developing a policy position on the topic of nuclear power until we have public input. The report from the panel is now available, and its content is fact based and neutral. I've also announced the process through which we will gather feedback from Albertans. When it comes to this specific request, again, involving third-party information, I would suggest there's a process administered by the department's FOIP office and currently available to the member. For that reason, I encourage members to reject this motion.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Two statements. Before this government leads Alberta down the nuclear road of controversial return, I am hoping that this government will conduct a province-wide plebiscite so that each Albertan of voting age has an opportunity to state through a voting process whether they believe this is the route to go. Obviously, before we get to such a plebiscite, if we should ever arrive at such a plebiscite, it is extremely important that this government provide Albertans with the greatest amount of information so that they can make a judgment based not only on emotion but on science.

This first request is one of many that will come forward asking this government to lay their cards on the table and give Albertans a sense of the direction that they're heading and recommending.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close the debate.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'll just be very brief about this. There have been a couple of times now where the requests for motions for returns or even written questions have been responded to by the government saying that members of this House have access to a FOIP process. Now, I'm certainly not an expert in House procedure, but I'm pretty sure that the process of motions for returns and written questions are ones that long preceded the freedom of information process. They are processes which members of the Legislative Assembly, through our being members of the Assembly, through our having been elected by eligible voters in the province, have access to. It's a process that we have an access to that average Albertans, unfortunately, do not have access to. Those people, unfortunately, are compelled to go through the FOIP process.

Now, as this minister well knows, pretty much every FOIP request these days comes back with a cost estimate which makes it functionally impossible for anyone trying to consistently get information out of this government to do so without a grand budget the size of – oh, I don't know – the carbon capture and storage fund or something like that.

Nonetheless, the introduction of the FOIP legislation was never done to somehow negate our rights as members of this Assembly to use procedures within the Assembly which have been ours for hundreds of years as a result of parliamentary procedure. So I have to say that I'm quite concerned that somehow there seems to be an argument evolving here that we are going to now just arbitrarily eliminate the rights of elected members of this Assembly to exercise the ability to gain information from the government through a parliamentary process. One thing has nothing to do with the other, as far as I'm concerned. It is simply, I would suggest, not a legitimate ground for suggesting that information that we request be turned down.

4:40

Again, this is not just something that impacts on this little opposition over here. All members of this Assembly have this right, and it should be quite important that all members of this Assembly, even those who are not part of the inner circle, want to maintain their ability to gain access to this information as a result of the rights that flow to them by being a member of the Assembly. So I would suggest that it's not just us that needs to be worried about this trend.

Thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

School Construction Financing Audit

M17. Ms Notley moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the independent audit of the financing method being used for the construction of schools in Calgary referred to in the Assembly by the Minister of Education during Oral Question Period on Wednesday, November 7, 2007.

Ms Notley: I appreciate that this is a somewhat old reference. Nonetheless, on November 7, 2007, the Minister of Education and the now Minister for Health and Wellness mentioned an external review that took place in the summer of 2007 which compared the traditional model for building schools to the "design, build, finance, and maintain model." The minister mentioned this external review in the House but did not table the document, and the issue is still

relevant today, so it's very important that we make the audits that the minister referred to public.

Albertans need the proof that they are not being misled about the actual costs of these projects. As we mentioned with respect to debate around Motion 12, we subsequently had a roughly \$650 million to \$700 million announcement to proceed with a public-private financing initiative in Calgary, and I believe that that was premised on this audit, which the Minister of Education referred to in November of 2007.

Once again, for the reasons that were discussed in our debate around Motion for a Return 12, we believe that it would be of value to members of the Assembly as well as to Albertans, who elected us to be here, that we get access to this audit referred to by the Minister of Education in the House in November of 2007.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure to urge members to reject this motion. The November 7, 2007, reference by the Minister of Education during question period relates to a review by an independent project financial evaluation team, consisting of financial advisers, financial market advisers, and transactions advisers. The minister advises me that releasing this information could interfere with the government's contractual or other negotiations.

I also remind all members once again, as I did in comments to an earlier motion, that the Auditor General initiated an audit of this process in March of 2009, and that audit will include a review of the financing method. Once again, I remind members that that report is expected this October.

I would like to advise the member that upon release of the Auditor General's report, the Minister of Infrastructure would be pleased to sit down with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to answer any outstanding questions that she might have. For this reason, Mr. Speaker, I recommend and urge members to reject Motion for a Return 17.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any member wish to speak on the motion for a return?

Seeing none, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close.

Ms Notley: Question.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

Green Transit Incentives Program

M18. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all proposals, project timelines, and government objectives relating to the green transit incentives program, Green TRIP, initiative for the time period of January 1, 2008, to February 10, 2009.

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

Ms Notley: Yes. This request originated as a result of the July 2008 announcement of the government to make a \$2 billion commitment to fund the expansion of local, regional, and intercity public transit across the province. At the time the plan was that the program would focus on initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions and the number of vehicles on Alberta roads. Unfortunately, though, in

the third-quarter fiscal update in February the fund was reduced from \$2 billion to \$195 million. Of course, we've often been told that that was never actually reduced. I'm not sure if it's because the \$2 billion was not something that we should have ever relied on or that when they said \$2 billion, we should have understood that that meant \$2 billion over an undetermined amount of years in the future.

Nonetheless, while this reduction has occurred from \$2 billion to \$195 million, the government has maintained its commitment to subsidizing carbon capture and storage technology. Our interest was in finding out some of the initiatives that had been in the government's sightline when they first announced the Green TRIP program so that we could perhaps engage in a comparison in terms of the value to the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions between the \$2 billion carbon capture and storage experiment versus what was the \$2 billion Green TRIP program. That is the rationale behind this request for information to the government.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Transportation. The member has asked for copies of all proposals, project timelines, and government objectives relating to the green transit incentives program initiative for the time period of January 1, 2008, to February 10, 2009. The minister assures me that he will have no problem providing the hon. member with plenty of information about the Green TRIP program when it is finalized.

As the member knows, this is a program that was announced last July. Since then there has been frequent consultation between both the department and stakeholders from across the province to determine exactly how the criteria should be structured. This includes consultations with municipalities about the timelines for the program and the most appropriate funding criteria. Work is now under way with all of our municipal partners to reach a consensus before any move forward to the next phase of the program.

The Minister of Transportation assures me that he would be happy to provide the hon. member with information about timelines, projects, and program goals once they have been established. But at this point the minister has not received any formal proposals from any of the regional groups that they've been working with, so it's not possible to provide the information to the hon. member.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to reject this motion.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just to make sure it's firmly on the record, the Alberta Liberal caucus supports the notion of carbon sequestration. While it's a large amount of money in the form of \$2 billion, we hope that it will kick-start a process which over the years will be of great benefit to Albertans.

We share the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's concerns about the lack of information with regard to the Green TRIP. The Green TRIP can be put into place considerably faster than the carbon sequestration because much of the infrastructure already exists. For example, the railroad tracks from High River into Calgary or from Cochrane into Calgary already exist. The side lines for rerouting commercial traffic while passenger traffic gets a priority already exist, so it's a matter of co-ordination with the municipalities, of using existing equipment in terms of rail that we currently have and upgrading.

In terms of which project can come most quickly and provide the

most immediate benefit, I would suggest that the Green TRIP will provide the immediate returns, and the carbon sequestration will provide the long-term returns.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to conclude the debate.

Ms Notley: Question.

[Motion for a Return 18 lost]

Carbon Emission Reduction

M19. Ms Notley moved on behalf of Mr. Mason that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all government research on technologies designed to reduce carbon emissions that were conducted between January 1, 2006, and February 10, 2009.

Ms Notley: A good deal of the rationale for this request has already been discussed under other motions. However, as we have mentioned, the government has decided to make a significant \$2 billion investment into carbon capture and storage. What is of interest here is the degree to which the government may have looked at other technologies which are designed to reduce carbon emissions before making this decision or, alternatively, while not designed to reduce carbon emissions, have as their consequences the reduction of carbon emissions.

We'd like to know what evidence the government has that shows that carbon capture technology is, in fact, a completely viable technology worthy of such a large investment. We, of course, know that there is, without question, some investment going on in other jurisdictions, but on a per capita basis Alberta's investment is probably close to unprecedented. It would make sense, then, that we would have a lot more information put out to us with respect to what the government had to consider before making this investment, not only the information suggesting that it's viable but also the information suggesting that it might not be viable, so that we can determine whether it was a balanced assessment, one that ultimately one supports or one that we think may have been made rashly or without thought to the financial responsibility that we have to Albertans.

As well, there is, of course, the issue of comparing it to other initiatives that could reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I would suspect that the government would have had a fair amount of information at its disposal about the most effective way to bring down the greenhouse gas emissions coming from our province, either through industry or through the public, before making this kind of prioritized investment in carbon capture and storage. This is the information that we don't have before us yet. Again, this issue is not going to go away. It's an issue that is going to continue to feature prominently in our public policy debate for years and years and decades to come. It is important, then, that we know where the government is in terms of evaluating the relative merits of different greenhouse gas emission strategies at its disposal.

Really, that is what this request is going for. It's going for: what did the government have at its fingertips in the course of making and reaching these conclusions, making these decisions to spend this money on carbon capture and storage and not, for instance, on Green TRIP or whatever other initiatives but, rather, to spend it there? What information was at the fingertips of the government when it made that decision? You know, this is not a question that's going to go away either. I suspect that because the issue is so top of mind

and the science is developing, there will probably be more information that will come to the government for additional consideration a year from now or throughout the next year, and we would want to know what that information is as well.

Frankly, the position on it and the consensus as to what is the best way to address this issue is going to evolve not only because science evolves and industry evolves but also because developments in other jurisdictions evolve. So as we go through that process, it would make sense, then, that the deliberations of the government, particularly the cabinet, and the documents upon which those deliberations are premised be made available to all Albertans so that we can engage in this.

The protection of the environment is of critical importance to Albertans. The way in which that balances against our economic development is also of critical importance to Albertans. The degree to which we devote \$2 billion, obviously not in one year, but that amount of money is, of course, also of critical importance to Albertans. Again, members of the Assembly, I hate to harp on it, but if we're going to really sort of do our job for the people that elected us, we should be asking for this information so that we have the opportunity to evaluate it and to involve Albertans in that discussion if they would like to be involved. It's for that reason that we are pursuing this information. We will probably continue to pursue it because I expect that to the information that would be available to us right now there would be more added a year from now, and that's fine, but we should be able to see what's there at this point.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The motion asks for copies of all government research on technologies designed to reduce carbon emissions that was conducted between January 1, 2006, and February 10, 2009. It's widely known that Alberta has globally recognized researchers leading the development of carbon reduction technology at the Alberta Research Council, the University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary as well as a number of other research institutions throughout the province.

The government strongly supports the development of such technology through the Alberta Energy Research Institute, or AERI, and new initiatives such as the \$2 billion carbon capture and storage fund, the climate change and emissions management fund, and the innovative energy technologies program. Government-supported projects have a confidentiality period to allow the project sponsors enough time to protect the new intellectual property generated by these projects, many of which are ongoing. After this confidentiality period has expired, the final reports can be obtained through the energy innovation platform of Alberta database. The website, for anyone who wishes to have a look at it, is eipa.alberta.ca.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge members to reject Motion for a Return 19.

Ms Notley: I would simply rise to say that while that information is of assistance, we weren't simply looking at information that was created or generated by the Alberta government itself but rather that which was at its disposal and which entered into its consideration or deliberations with respect to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. So I think that we could use more information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 19 lost]

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Low-speed Vehicles

505. Mr. Elniski moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Traffic Safety Act to permit the use of low-speed vehicles on roads with a posted speed limit of up to 60 kilometres per hour.

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise in this Assembly today and begin debate on Motion 505, which urges this government to permit the use of low-speed vehicles, or LSVs, on Alberta's public roads with a maximum speed limit of up to 60 kilometres an hour. While the debate on this issue is somewhat contentious, I believe it is beneficial for this Assembly to discuss what LSVs are and how they can contribute positively to the lifestyles of Albertans. These vehicles would provide an environmentally friendly transportation alternative for Albertans with short-distance, inner-city travel needs.

Mr. Speaker, low-speed vehicles are relatively new to the North American market, and as such it is probable that they are unfamiliar to some of my colleagues. In short, they are electrically powered vehicles that do not require conventional fuels. Instead, once the vehicle's battery is depleted, it is simply recharged by plugging it into a standard household outlet. A refill typically costs around 40 cents. These vehicles are powered by a rechargeable electric battery and do not produce any emissions. With a limited top speed threshold of up to 60 kilometres an hour LSVs are intended primarily for closed-course activity or lower-speed urban roadways. We cannot take these vehicles and place them on the highways alongside high-speed vehicles, and this is not what Motion 505 urges our government to do.

This technology proposes financial and environmental benefits for all Albertans and for our province. First, low-speed vehicles would provide Albertans with a significant long-term savings as they do not require gasoline or any other form of energy. Furthermore, the cost of the vehicle itself is competitive in comparison to other small vehicles. Essentially the upfront cost of the vehicle is inexpensive, and the maintenance and long-term fuel costs are nearly nonexistent as the vehicle does not utilize an engine or have a significant number of moving parts.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that these vehicles would be an ideal solution for those who commute within our cities. As most members of this Assembly know, I currently own and drive a Smart car. It is a practical, compact, and efficient means for everyday travel. It parks very well, scoots in and out of traffic, and is quite quick. Well, it's just quick enough. Although a Smart car serves a similar purpose, a more environmentally friendly option exists with the electric-powered LSV, and it would also have room for my golf clubs. This option would not only benefit me but thousands of fellow Albertans with modest transportation needs, the most prevalent, of course, being seniors. Many seniors have short-range travel needs and could save money on refueling costs.

Should this Assembly pass Motion 505, it would encourage this government to join numerous other jurisdictions within Canada and North America. In today's *Edmonton Journal*, Mr. Speaker, it was well identified that red tape is really the roadblock, not consumer demand.

There is hope. In June of 2006 the government of British Columbia amended its Motor Vehicle Act to include a definition for a neighbourhood zero emission vehicle, or an NZEV. The legisla-

tion permits the use of these vehicles on a highway with a posted speed limit of up to 40 kilometres an hour or less, or if authorized by the minister of transportation, up to 50 kilometres an hour. In August of 2008 the district of Oak Bay became the first British Columbia municipality to authorize the use of LSVs on its streets. Following this, Vancouver city council enacted legislation to permit the use of NZEVs on roads with speeds of up to 50 kilometres per hour, making Vancouver the first major Canadian city to do so.

Other provinces have also initiated pilot programs to test the feasibility of LSV use. In July of 2008 the Ontario government launched a five-year pilot program to help determine the appropriate safety standards for LSVs so that they may be used on Ontario roads. Due to the safety concerns associated with LSVs, the Ontario government only permits these vehicles in Ontario parks and conservation areas, which nonetheless is still a step in the right direction.

In 2008 the government of Quebec announced the launch of a three-year pilot program to study low-speed vehicles. The purpose of that program is to test the vehicles on certain public roads, develop traffic safety rules for the vehicles, and establish norms with regard to the safety equipment for LSVs. This program permits the vehicles that participate in the program to operate on roads with speed limits of up to 50 kilometres an hour. They must exceed the standards for low-speed vehicles set by Transport Canada, and the cars must include, in addition to other things, windshield wipers, a defrosting and heating system, three-point seatbelts, and a horn.

The United States has also implemented legislation for the use of LSVs in 40 states. For example, the state of Montana has legislation that permits vehicles on the roads at speeds of up to 45 miles per hour. Other states such as Wisconsin have passed legislation that permit its municipalities to govern the use of LSVs within their borders.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Alberta should join these jurisdictions in promoting the use of these vehicles. Doing so would promote Canadian business at a time of economic uncertainty. Canadian corporations are the leaders in the development of low-speed vehicles, such as the ZENN Motor Company headquartered in Toronto or Dynast motors headquartered in Vancouver.

I understand that several members have expressed their concerns with regard to the safety features of these vehicles. I cannot argue the fact nor can we legislate against physics, Mr. Speaker, that says that if an LSV is hit by an SUV, the LSV will certainly come out second best. Risk exists in any vehicle we operate, but with risk comes basic levels of protection. For a cyclist or a motorcyclist the first form of protection is the helmet; for LSVs it is the seatbelt and safety glass; for high-speed vehicles it is cabin integrity, primary and secondary restraint systems, and electronic vehicle stability control. In all cases, the universal goal is to prevent accidents from occurring. In the case that an accident does occur, features must be in place to minimize the damage to the occupants. I believe that we can work with LSV manufacturers to implement the appropriate safety standards for these vehicles in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleagues to support Motion 505 because it would provide an inexpensive form of transportation for Albertans and continue to promote our dedication to a healthy environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I stand in support of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder and his desire to move us towards a greener transportation system. Previously in our motions for returns

we talked about the government initiative of the Green TRIP. This is one way of individuals getting an opportunity to participate in a green trip experience of their own.

This past January I had an opportunity to visit a brother-in-law and sister-in-law who were leasing a wonderful spot at a golf course in Sun City in Palm Desert. It surprised me that local shopping centres in Palm Springs and Palm Desert had designated golf cart parking spots. In fact, I stopped to take pictures of these because I'd never seen anything like it off a golf course.

The technology exists, and incorporating it and, obviously, licensing, both in terms of licensing the vehicle and licensing the driver – whether it's a lower speed vehicle or not, safety has to extend beyond just the proper type of signal lights, the proper type of horn, the proper type of seat belts. We cannot lull ourselves into the thought that less road safety or training is required for these vehicles because if they can obtain speeds of up to 60 kilometres an hour, they can do a significant amount of damage to pedestrians and to property. Obviously, that licensing is going to be an important part of the conversation.

I remember in my broke high school days how the kids who were, basically, one step above the bicycle were those that drove their moped, pedal motorcycles, to school. Of course, they were shunned by the people who had the Yamaha 300s or the Honda dream bikes at that time. The moped has now transformed itself into an electrical bicycle/cycle as one of the LSV prototypes. So getting people off of a nonrenewable resource, gas and oil, and saving the gas and oil for larger concerns – transportation of goods, the heating of homes, conserving as well as preserving our environment – are both wonderful considerations that LSVs would provide.

5:10

Also when I was down in the States, I saw a variety of individuals from police officers to mailmen using this type of two-wheeled vehicle to great effect. The idea that they can be recharged potentially with the use of green power, whether it be from hydro or whether it be from wind power, whether it be from solar in the sense that the energy can be stored and recharged in battery form, is a tremendous innovation for a world that has been so reliant on oil and gas revenue and, as I say, will continue to be reliant in a number of areas. If we can conserve in this particular area, I think it would be of tremendous value.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder pointed out, there are still dangers associated with this type of vehicle. In terms of the pecking order, as he pointed out, his Smart car would win in a jousting competition between an LSV and a Smart car. Mind you, he's very well aware that his Smart car would come out second best with any regular vehicle. We have to make sure that the safety regulations, the licensing, the instruction, the expectations, from eye exams to demonstrating capabilities of operating these vehicles, must be maintained. But I commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for bringing us further into the 21st century, talking about conservation, talking about a combination of electrical vehicular transportation.

One area that I would just like to conclude with is that we would hope as the Alberta Liberal opposition to be moving the government towards the compromise between the LSVs and the gas-operated vehicles, and that is obviously the hybrid, where you rely not only on gasoline but you also have an electric component to your vehicle. I realize that technology hasn't advanced to the point where you could have, for example, a conservation officer out patrolling a forestry road miles and miles from his station, and therefore there still is a place for regular vehicles and three-quarter ton trucks to haul the equipment and so on, but this low-speed vehicle is definitely a jolt, a bolt in the right direction.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that I have to try to set the record straight here a little bit. I believe that the hon. member had some very, very good intentions to urge the government to do this, but we first have to have an understanding on what LSVs are. There is a difference between an LSV [interjections] and a car that actually meets all of the national safety codes or national safety standards.

There are well over 40 regulations and standards to meet on cars to be able to be registered for the streets or the roads in Canada. Most LSVs only have three of those codes. One is a vehicle identification number. Most LSVs are glorified golf carts, Mr. Speaker. Transport Canada has done a crash test with them and found them to be very, very unsafe if you put them into traffic with regular type vehicles. We have absolutely no problem with letting people register vehicles for the road that meet all the safety standards that are required in Alberta today.

This is a motion urging the government to look at this. In fact, we have two pilot projects going on in the province of Alberta right now, one in the Jasper townsite because there are no roads in the Jasper townsite over 40 kilometres an hour. We have a test pilot going, allowing these on the road. I understand that in the winter with some of the different models, because of the type of features they have, they've had problems. As soon as they let off – I can't call it the gas – the electronic throttle, I guess, the accelerator, it locks up the back wheels, and the thing goes into spins.

The hon. member mentioned that he drove a Smart car. It may be as small as some of these LSVs, but it meets all the safety criteria required to be on the roads in Alberta. What we're saying is that you can't turn vehicles that are not designed with the safety features into the same traffic volume as the others. Some of these LSVs will go as high as 70 kilometres an hour, but for most of them the top speed is around 40 to 45, and they're just not safe in speed limits over that. They're not really safe to be mixing in with the other large traffic.

Because we're already doing the pilot project, because we're trying to look at every different situation we can to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – that's why we have Green TRIP coming forward, Mr. Speaker – I would urge this House to say, no, no, no, not till we get safety. There's no reason to have brought this forward to even look at. I would urge all the hon. members in this House to think of safety, safety for all Albertans, and defeat this motion.

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

Ms Pastoor: Okay. All right. I totally can understand the minister coming from the safety point of view, and certainly it's something to consider, but I would like to commend the mover of this motion to even get this discussion going. We have to think big; we have to think forward. Every time I drive in from the airport, I see that mess at 23rd Avenue, whatever it is, where they're trying to put in the interchange that probably should have been put in when they had to go out and build South Common or whatever it was. I mean, it's small, small thinking. We've got to think big.

We have to think that in the future we will have electric cars, we will have electric bicycles, we will have all these kinds of things, so why aren't we thinking ahead and looking at our transportation corridors and putting in an area where these particular vehicles would be safe? All we're doing is building roads for cars that are going to go a hundred clicks in an 80-mile-an-hour zone or you don't get where you want to go. I mean, even highway 2. I know we've got our sheriffs out, but if you still don't go 140, you're not

going anywhere on highway 2. I think this is really good, forward thinking and needs to be discussed.

I don't know how many people have had the opportunity to actually travel in Europe. I have been privileged to do that. You see these little cars. Unfortunately, they do park on the sidewalks in Paris, and you have to walk around them; same in Italy. Rome is atrocious. But at least they move around.

Granted, their city streets, particularly in the older sections – well, Rome is probably about 2,000 years old, their section downtown. The streets are narrow, and they don't move as fast as we move our traffic here in North America, but they do have areas for small cars. They do have areas for bicycles. I mean, obviously, the perfect example is Holland, where at the stop signs and at the traffic lights the bicycles certainly outnumber the cars. They accommodate that sort of forward thinking.

5:20

I want to commend the member again because it is forward thinking. It is going to have to come. We've got to start thinking of our transportation corridors and how they can accommodate, clearly, what will be the environmental way of moving around safely.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a day at the Alberta Legislature: the Minister of Transportation talking about LSD and the Minister of Environment about the Green TRIP and pot-smoking advocates outside, and here we're talking about little cars. But the Member for Edmonton-Calder should be commended for the motion.

Let's face it: for those who are not familiar with the process of the Legislature, of Parliaments, motions are not binding on government. All they are is a means of instigating discussion, a conversation among elected members and the population at large. I think the time has come to look at alternative forms of transportation not only for environmental reasons, which are sound reasons, but also simply for our ability to move people through congested cities.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if a safe electric or any other environmentally friendly vehicle was developed, it would definitely make a great addition as a second vehicle to my family. I live at a very odd location where I cannot walk to a local grocery store. I cannot even walk to pick up a cup of coffee because I'm in suburbia. It's too far to walk, but it's really too close to drive. It's just a few minutes' drive. Individuals would be able to use such vehicles for short shopping trips, dropping off kids at a game, or whatever it is that they do within their immediate neighbourhoods. So I commend the Member for Edmonton-Calder for at least bringing this discussion forward.

There may not be a vehicle at this time on the market that meets our standards. The Minister of Transportation definitely makes some valid points. We cannot legalize vehicles on roads that simply will create carnage and put Albertans at risk and peril. But we should let the world know that Alberta is open to welcome and introduce vehicles on the road as long as they meet our environmental and our safety standards. I think Albertans are ready to at least consider it.

Mr. Speaker, I imagine that 15 years ago, if one was to sit on a Vespa and ride one through the city, there would be some chuckles and laughs. Now they have become a fashion statement, and Vespas are selling like hotcakes throughout urban Alberta. I'm not sure about rural Alberta. My colleague the minister – I guess not. Harleys are still the preference in rural Alberta, but one can be cool and respected riding a Vespa in Edmonton right now. So I think that

pretty soon a safe electric, slow-moving vehicle will be acceptable in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of people who wish to speak here, so I will recognize, following this list, the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of Motion 505 on low-speed vehicles, and I commend my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for bringing this forward.

While there are some concerns over the safety of low-speed vehicles on public roads, there are possibly some restrictions that could go along with their use to alleviate these concerns so that the environmentally friendly method of travel could be a viable option. While the current motion allows for low-speed vehicles on roads with posted speed limits of 60 kilometres per hour, I would encourage the government to explore 50 kilometres an hour as a maximum speed for the vehicle itself to increase safety in addition to, perhaps, a few other limitations.

At least initially, Mr. Speaker, I would propose that the government set up a pilot project, and I'm pleased to hear that the government has set up a pilot project. I wasn't aware of that. But to pose a few further limitations, firstly, I would suggest that they only be allowed in towns with a population of, perhaps, less than 5,000 and that they only be allowed initially during daylight hours. I would also be inclined to make their use subject to municipal approval, control, and regulation. In that way, the people who are closest to the situation and who will be aware of the safety concerns and who will be able to monitor it the best will be fully in charge.

Mr. Speaker, by giving people a choice to use low-speed vehicles in such a manner, we're offering them an alternative that is both inexpensive and low in emissions without compromising safety. As people are becoming increasingly aware of the financial and environmental impact of their daily actions, I think it is important for the government to explore creative ways of offering citizens more options where they can.

Now, we're not the first jurisdiction to explore the use of low-speed vehicles on public roads, as the mover has indicated. We can learn from how it has worked in other jurisdictions to develop our own regulation and implementation system that is good for the province of Alberta and particularly our weather conditions.

I salute the hon. Minister of Transportation for setting up the pilot projects. A pilot project in a small town or a few small towns could be a good way of seeing how low-speed vehicles might work in our communities and if it can be further implemented in the whole province.

Just an aside, Mr. Speaker, speaking of glorified golf carts, around 20 years ago in a small town in southern Alberta of – I don't know – 3,000 to 4,000 my father was given special approval to use his golf cart to drive from his home to the golf course, which was about five to six blocks away. As far as I know, there were never any problems with that. I'm sure it was fairly closely monitored by the RCMP.

Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, I have some cautionary reservations about the wholesale use of low-speed vehicles, but I do support their use in principle. It's somewhat ironic that we have heavy restrictions for four-wheeled low-speed vehicles, yet we don't have any similar restrictions on two-wheeled vehicles.

In this context I urge the government to investigate this matter further. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Motion 505, which urges the government to amend the Traffic Safety Act to permit the use of low-speed vehicles on roads with a posted limit of 60 kilometres or less. Such an amendment would be an inexpensive, zero-emission alternative method of transportation for Albertans. Essentially, low-speed vehicles are electrically powered vehicles that utilize batteries rather than a motor engine, no carbon emissions, capable of reaching speeds up to 40 kilometres an hour.

It could mean a variety of benefits for Albertans, especially for those in urban areas. Primarily these LSVs would offer consumers an affordable option for transportation. For instance, the ZENN Motor Company, mentioned earlier, a Canadian manufacturer of low-speed vehicles, offers the 2009 ZENN LSV starting at just \$15,995. It sounds like I'm in my previous life here, for a second. The figure compares favourably with a number of entry-level vehicles currently listed on the market. In addition, LSVs require no gasoline or any other form of fuel, so this could mean significant savings for Albertans over the life of the vehicle.

An Hon. Member: It's the warranty.

Mr. Quest: It's the warranty.

Mr. Speaker, because LSVs do not produce any carbon emissions, they also offer an environmentally friendly alternative form of transportation.

The ongoing research and development of low-speed vehicles is also quite compelling. Advancements and improvements are being made at a very fast pace. For instance, in late '09 the ZENN Motor Company plans to introduce a city ZENN, which will utilize the revolutionary ultracapacitor battery. The battery would permit a range of 400 kilometres and a recharging time of five minutes. These advances will make the LSVs even more practical for consumers.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 505 has the transportation interests of Albertans at heart by providing an inexpensive and environmentally friendly alternative to drivers with intracity transportation needs. This government has the opportunity now to significantly expand the transportation horizons available for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta is not alone in considering the usage of LSVs on public roads. As we've heard earlier, actually, from several hon. members, several jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S. have already established legislation and pilot projects for the use of low-speed vehicles, including our own, as previously mentioned by the hon. Minister of Transportation. Similarly, in the United States approximately 40 states have established legislation which permits the use of LSVs on public roads. I'm encouraged to hear the progress being made in other jurisdictions but also believe that it's imperative that we choose a path that's right for Alberta.

5:30

Permitting the use of these vehicles deserves due consideration to ensure that appropriate action is taken. While I've highlighted some of the benefits of these vehicles, I strongly believe that it's important to consider the safety concerns expressed by Transport Canada, which does not recommend the use of LSVs on public roads. First, as outlined earlier by the hon. Minister of Transportation, low-speed vehicles are only required to meet three of the nearly 40 safety category requirements demanded of passenger vehicles in order to be eligible for importation and sale in Canada.

While these vehicles would be limited to roads of speed limits up to 60 kilometres per hour, significant damage could occur to the vehicle and the passengers in the event of an accident. The risk

would be even greater in the event that the driver of the other vehicle was speeding. Indeed, Transport Canada crash tests have confirmed that significant damage can occur to these vehicles in the event of an accident. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the government should proceed with caution in considering these vehicles for use on our roads and for the benefit of all Albertans.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for bringing forward this thoughtful motion. I'll look forward to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to spend a few moments to join in on Motion 505, which urges the government to permit the use of low-speed vehicles on roads with a posted speed limit of up to 60 kilometres per hour.

First, I would like to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for bringing this motion forward. Motion 505 has some very strong aspects to it. It would provide Alberta's drivers with the opportunity to make a choice in their mode of transportation and therefore produce positive economic and environmental effects in those individuals' lives. The freedom to make choices that affect your own life is very important to me. This proposed motion would allow people to make positive choices in two very important aspects of their lives, economic well-being and environmental stewardship.

First, it would allow Albertans the opportunity to travel within urban areas in a cost-efficient manner. The cost of fuel can create an incredible strain on many families in Alberta. As we all know, gasoline is expensive and will most likely continue to be expensive for the foreseeable future; \$300 a month to \$500 a month adds up and could be money in the pockets of Albertans and Alberta families. This would create disposable income and allow Albertans the opportunity to spend their hard-earned money on anything they desire in order to improve their quality of life.

Aside from the economic benefits for everyday Albertans, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about the environmental benefit that this motion touches on. One of the goals of this government is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, so a move to reduce those emissions in daily commutes is consistent with the approach that the government is already taking.

If this Assembly would indulge me, I would like to speak about the city of Edmonton for a minute since that is the city I know the best. Mr. Speaker, I have lived in Edmonton all my adult life. I have experienced, as I am sure many of my colleagues have, the full force of rush hour traffic. All that stopping and accelerating, all the idling on red lights and traffic jams will add some amount of greenhouse gas emissions. Low-speed vehicles could be a great option for those who are environmentally conscious and want to be able to drive on urban roadways with zero or next to zero emissions.

I know there are already low-cost and low-pollution options within the city. For example, I see many people who ride their bicycles to work every day. However, that option is simply not practical in the wintertime in Alberta. Another option for commuters is using the Edmonton Transit System. I do recognize and appreciate the recent work of the city of Edmonton in expanding the LRT and incorporating more parts of the city into their bus routes, but obviously even public transit cannot reach everyone all the time. So I do believe that there is a need to examine other options for daily commuters within our communities and municipalities.

However, there are some issues with this particular type of vehicle that cannot be overlooked. I am talking about the safety issues. As we have heard, Mr. Speaker, vehicles that are classified as passenger

cars must meet up to 40 safety categories in order to be eligible for importation and sale in Canada under the Canada Motor Vehicle Safety Act. The low-speed vehicles in question meet just three of those safety standards. Some notable omissions are the lack of the need for mirrors, head restraints, occupant protections, and roof intrusion protection.

Now, these vehicles can travel at a maximum of 40 kilometres per hour, maybe 50 with a stiff wind at their back. At that speed the impact of any collision would be substantially less severe than a highway collision, where vehicles continuously travel in excess of 100 kilometres per hour. It doesn't take a mathematician to figure out that if we have one low-speed vehicle travelling 40 kilometres per hour and one truck travelling 60 kilometres an hour, in a head-on collision you would be colliding at 100 kilometres an hour.

As a journeyman mechanic I have seen enough of these collisions to know that even at 40 kilometres per hour a vehicle needs head restraint and occupant protection. I have seen regular-size vehicles damaged beyond repair when they collided with a large truck or a bus. These low-speed vehicles would obviously fare far worse, and the passengers would go from suffering whiplash or a broken leg to something far more serious.

However, Mr. Speaker, the positive impact regarding personal choice and environmental protection that this motion would bring about is more than strong enough to warrant a further look from this government. Therefore, I support this motion so long as these major safety issues are addressed while the regulations are being implemented.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 505, which proposes to urge the government to amend the Traffic Safety Act to permit the use of low-speed vehicles, or LSVs, on roads with posted speed limits of 60 kilometres per hour or less.

In doing so, the government of Alberta would permit and promote an inexpensive, zero-emission alternative method of transportation for use on our roads. Because they do not have a gasoline or diesel engine, LSVs do not produce any carbon emissions. This would provide Albertans with an environmentally friendly alternative form of transportation and would fall in line with the government's priority to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Low-speed vehicles would be ideal cars for driving to the grocery store or dropping a son or daughter off at friends', movie theatres, or the mall. Mr. Speaker, having three children of my own, I can speak from my own personal experience on this point. Furthermore, the LSVs could present an inexpensive, viable alternative for drivers with inner-city transportation needs. This would alleviate some of the strain that is placed on our public transit system.

In addition, LSVs would provide an inexpensive mode of transportation to low-income families, many of whom live in Edmonton-Mill Woods, who may not be able to afford a regular car and the expensive cost of refueling. It was not too long ago that gas prices were well over \$1.20 a litre. These high prices made it impossible for many low-income families in my constituency to fill up gas tanks and forced many of them to park the family car. By allowing LSVs on the road, these low-income families would be able to drive their cars for mere pennies a day.

5:40

I would like to point out that many jurisdictions in Canada and

around the world have amended their traffic safety laws to allow low-speed vehicles on their roads. In June 2006 the government of British Columbia amended its Motor Vehicle Act regulations to include the definition of neighbourhood zero-emission vehicles. Municipalities are permitted at their discretion to pass bylaws to permit the use of neighbourhood zero-emission vehicles on public roads with speeds of up to 50 kilometres per hour.

Today the district of Oak Bay and the city of Vancouver have passed such bylaws, permitting these vehicles access to the vast majority of their road networks. Other jurisdictions have launched pilot programs in order to test the suitability of these vehicles on their roads and determine appropriate safety standards. In September 2006 the Ontario government announced a five-year pilot project to permit low-speed vehicles in provincial and municipal parks and conservation areas. More recently, on December 5, 2008, the Ontario government announced that new regulations and guidelines would be released over the course of the winter that would allow the use of low-speed vehicles on provincial roads. Furthermore, in 2008 the government of Quebec announced the launch of a three-year pilot project to study the use of low-speed vehicles on certain public roads and develop safe traffic rules for their use. In the United States 40 states have enacted laws that allow low-speed vehicles to be used on their highways.

Mr. Speaker, by allowing LSVs onto our roads, we would be helping the environment by encouraging alternatives to carbon-emitting vehicles and helping the Alberta government meet its own greenhouse gas reduction targets. It would assist low-income families by alleviating the cost of expensive gasoline fuel, providing more money for essentials such as groceries and clothing.

Even though there is a capacity for this initiative, there are also negatives. Transport Canada, as mentioned by our hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, does not encourage the use of LSVs on public roads as these vehicles are required to meet only three of the nearly 40 safety requirements that are met by passenger vehicles. In fact, recent Transport Canada crash tests have demonstrated that LSVs are, in fact, a safety hazard to drivers.

Even though these vehicles are legally limited to a maximum speed of 40 kilometres per hour, significant damage can be incurred to the vehicle and occupants without the necessary safety features. It is also an unfortunate fact that many drivers continue to speed on our roads, which would inflict even greater damage to the vehicle. As mentioned before, this motion would encourage the use of LSVs on roads with a maximum speed limit of 60 kilometres per hour. A vehicle travelling at 80 kilometres per hour could inflict critical damage to an LSV travelling at its maximum permitted speed of 40 kilometres per hour.

Mr. Speaker, I thank our good friend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder for bringing forward this thoughtful motion. Should LSV manufacturers incorporate increased safety standards in the future, these vehicles could prove to be a viable alternative form of transportation for our province and for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not have a wonderful prepared speech for this, but I did want to get in with a couple of points here. First of all, I want to thank the member for bringing this motion forward and also commend the government on having moved forward with two LSV projects here in Alberta already. There are a couple of things that I would like to raise as points, though.

First of all, these vehicles, though they are small, do take an enormous amount of greenhouse gases to manufacture, and they do

leave behind enormously big electrical batteries that will have to be disposed of. Even though people can feel really good about travelling along without being able to see the greenhouse gases that they are producing, there are, actually, greenhouse gases being produced. Where do we get our electricity from? It does not magically come from the world. So, you know, people can feel really good about driving around in these vehicles, even if they are heavy on the environment as most things that we do as people are.

Now, the other thing that I did want to raise was that there are no government regulations or no rules in the world that we can create which will overcome the laws of physics. If you have a big tanker truck coming down the street, and there's another SUV, which you might think is nice and big, and that tanker truck meets up with the SUV, that SUV is going to get wiped out. Similarly, if we have one of these wonderful little LSVs, and it gets hit by an SUV, well, hey, the SUV is bigger and, yeah, it's going to wipe out the LSV. There are no regulations that we can come to that will solve that problem.

At the same time, we also allow bicycles – bicycles – on our streets. We allow bicycles on those streets or motorcycles on those streets – okay? – those same streets that we allow cars and trucks on, and for some reason we seem to think that that's all right. How come all of a sudden we've got an LSV, and it's not all right to have it on that street, that same street that you have a little bicycle on? Hey, you know, we've got to get that figured out a little bit there.

All in all, I believe that this is something that we should be moving forward with. This is something that our constituents want. You know, these cars are another form of transportation, which I do believe we should be moving forward with. So I very much support the Member for Edmonton-Calder with this motion and hope that you will also support it.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members who wish to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to close the debate.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise and close debate and conclude the discussion on Motion 505. First, I would very much like to thank each of you who rose today to speak to this motion, including, of course, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

I was a little nervous about the motion, I have to say. As I'd mentioned before, of course, the order of the motion is to urge the government to permit the use of the LSV, and with that, I certainly understand the need for some controls. The 60 kilometres an hour number is selfish because if I'm going to get one of these and drive it to work, I've got to have the 60 K limit, or I can't really use it.

I want to talk a little bit for a moment about a couple of the points that some of the hon. members have raised. First of all, hon. members, I'd like to assure all of you that we are not talking about modified golf carts. There is no correlation between an LSV and an electric golf cart. These go considerably faster and have . . . [interjection] No, actually, the LSV goes faster. They have considerably more technology in them than we're familiar with when we're on the golf course.

In saying that, I'll give you a couple of little stats because, you know, sometimes I'm kind of good for the technical side. Typically an electric golf cart has a battery pack capacity of somewhere between 36 and 48 volts. The smallest LSV has a battery pack of approximately 72 volts, and when you get into the high-end one,

which is a car called the Tesla, it has a 200-volt battery pack and is capable of doing about 160 kilometres an hour. [interjection] Two hundred volts. Tesla, yes.

Indeed, I fully understand and I fully appreciate the concern and the discussion about the safety standards for the LSV, but I trust that everyone here will realize that the standards are somewhat a function of the number of wheels on the vehicle. If the LSV had three instead of four wheels . . .

5:50

Mr. Lukaszuk: It would be a tricycle.

Mr. Elniski: That's right. It would be a tricycle, and the majority of the CMV safety standards that apply to four-wheeled motor vehicles would not apply. In fact, in their existing form, with three wheels LSVs would be perfectly legal to drive.

Mr. Lukaszuk: It would be called Vespa.

Mr. Elniski: They would be called Vespas with side cars, actually. Yes, very much so.

I believe that LSVs will benefit Albertans with limited travel options in a number of ways. We've talked, certainly, about the savings in fuel and people's ability to use the money on other things. Because LSVs are powered by batteries, they emit no at-source greenhouse gases. We won't get into the whole generating electricity with coal thing. As has also been mentioned, you know, the car would be useful for a trip to the grocery store, to drop your kids off at the arena. For these short-distance trips, Mr. Speaker, the environmental benefits are clear. [interjection] No, I wouldn't, if I were you, hon. member, but you might.

Furthermore, I believe that LSVs would be a better option for many Albertans, certainly, than motorcycles or bicycles, both of which are currently permitted on the streets. The one thing that really motivated me to do this, Mr. Speaker, is that in my constituency I have many people who ride four-wheeled, single-seat scooters, a number of them who drive them on the streets.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Alberta should join its neighbouring provinces of Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec and explore the uses of LSVs on the road. I believe we can deal with the safety issues. If this motion passes, I want the first one.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair just wants to remind all of you here that the chair will call for the voice vote, so make sure your voice is heard.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Before I call on the Deputy Government House Leader, I want to remind all hon. members here that this Chamber will be used tomorrow morning, so please clear the desks. Take your laptop away with you and so on.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Issue 27

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon, and welcome.

Let us pray. On the Holocaust remembrance monument located on the grounds of the Alberta Legislature are found the following words: "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the tormented." These words were written by Elie Wiesel – survivor, poet, Nobel prize recipient. May God provide all innocent victims of racism and genocide eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, today in the Speaker's gallery, in the public gallery, and in the members' gallery are a number of special guests. The Royal Canadian Legion Alberta-NWT Command takes a keen interest in promoting Mr. Speaker's MLA for a Day program. We're very much appreciative both of their financial support and their involvement for this annual event, which began yesterday afternoon and will conclude later this afternoon. In the Speaker's gallery are members of the Alberta-NWT Command executive council. I'll ask them to rise as I call out their names. Mr. Don Orr, the Legion's command president, accompanied by his wife, Beryl Orr; Rod Stewart, command vice-president, and his wife, Joyce Stewart; Dave Horrocks, command vice-president; and Gordon McDonald, chairman, Alberta-NWT Command.

Sixty-four students are also here with us today who are participants in the MLA for a Day program. Yesterday the participants spent time at the Royal Canadian Legion, debated a resolution, and toured the Legislature Building. This morning they were in this Chamber sitting in your chairs as we had a special seminar for them. They also visited with members in their offices, they attended the Holocaust memorial service, and they lunched with many of you prior to Oral Question Period today. These young people are seated in both galleries, and I would now ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly special guests from the government of Abu Dhabi: Mr. Ghulam Wani is adviser to the chairman's office, Department of Economic Development; and Mr. Khalid Al Hosani is acting director of the contractors and consultants classification division, Department of Economic Development. Accompanying the delegation are Mr. Neil Windsor, who is the executive director of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta, and his colleague Mr. Jim Beckett, president-elect.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Abu Dhabi have a friendly relationship and a history of successful interaction. In particular, Alberta has a strong trade relationship with Abu Dhabi as part of our overall trade

with the United Arab Emirates. Over the last three years Alberta's exports to the United Arab Emirates have averaged \$175 million per year. It's important that Alberta continues to build on this relationship, which is why I led a mission to the Emirates last year. During that mission I met with government officials and business representatives in Abu Dhabi. I also had the privilege of speaking at Abu Dhabi's world-renowned International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference.

Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased that our friends are with us today, and we welcome the opportunity to strengthen our connection with Abu Dhabi. I would like our special guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a gentleman from my constituency of Stony Plain. Mr. John Rebus is here today in the House to view democracy in action and view the debate on Bill 19. He's very interested in that bill. John is in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 28 seniors from my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. They are led by their group leaders, Mr. Don De La Fosse and Mrs. Joan De La Fosse. One of them told me during our picture taking in the rotunda that she has been in Edmonton, Alberta, for 50 years and that this is the first time she has visited the beautiful building of our Alberta Legislative Assembly. These good-looking seniors from Edmonton-Mill Woods are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 18 individuals seated in the public gallery who are here today to witness the Committee of the Whole proceedings on Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. I do not have a list of their names, but I would ask that they now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we recognize a very significant day in the Jewish lunar calendar. April 21 is Yom ha-Shoah, also known as Holocaust Memorial Day. The date is recognized world-wide in remembrance of the approximately 6 million Jews who died during the Holocaust as well as others who suffered and fought during the horrific events of the atrocity.

In Alberta communities and families observe this day by remembering and recalling the victims of this catastrophe. Survivors tell

their stories so that their children and future generations will never forget, all in an effort to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again. Earlier today I took part in a Yom ha-Shoah ceremony organized by the Jewish Federation of Edmonton on the Alberta Legislature Grounds. I urge all Albertans to recognize this very important day and, in doing so, to reflect on our individual and collective roles in the fight against religious, racial, and other forms of hatred.

Yom ha-Shoah is a call to all people, not just the Jewish community, to fight for the common goals of societies that value diversity and protect human rights. Yom ha-Shoah was officially proclaimed Holocaust Memorial Day by the Alberta Legislature on November 16, 2000, with the passing of the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. This act proclaims the observance of Yom ha-Shoah and Holocaust Memorial Day, and annually the Alberta Legislature acknowledges the significance of the Holocaust and the importance of Holocaust education.

The proclamation itself reads:

Whereas the Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewish men, women and children by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945, and this horrific event is part of our common history as citizens on this earth;

Whereas the Nazis and their collaborators murdered 6 million Jewish people, including more than a million children, during that time of persecution and death;

Whereas the Nazis and their collaborators also persecuted and murdered millions of other people because of their race, religion, level of physical or mental ability or sexual orientation;

Whereas, during World War II, Albertans bravely served as members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and many Albertans paid the ultimate price, their lives, to protect and preserve freedom and democracy;

Whereas "Shoah" is the Hebrew term for "Holocaust";

Whereas it is fitting and right to observe Yom ha-Shoah, the Day of the Holocaust, as a day to remember the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and to honour those who fought to defeat tyranny and genocide;

Whereas this day provides Albertans with the opportunity:

- to look within themselves, reflect on the enduring lessons of the Holocaust and educate their children, their colleagues and their fellow citizens on the perils of hatred,
- to consider other times and incidents of systematic violence, genocide, persecution, racism and hatred that call out to us from the past or continue today, and
- to reaffirm their commitment to uphold the human rights of all and to value diversity and the multicultural richness of Alberta society;

Whereas on Yom ha-Shoah we will remember, for we must never forget;

Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, enacts as follows:

Holocaust Memorial Day – Yom ha-Shoah.

1 Yom ha-Shoah, the Day of the Holocaust as determined in each year by the Jewish lunar calendar, is proclaimed as Holocaust Memorial Day.

Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker. History has taught us the danger of ignorance and the result of indifference. We must ensure that a catastrophe such as the Holocaust is never seen again.

1:40

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister mentioned, many of us in the Chamber here today partook in the ceremony organized by the Jewish Federation of Edmonton on the Alberta

Legislature Grounds. This ceremony was an echo of the many ceremonies taking place around the world recognizing Yom ha-Shoah. It is only fitting that this ceremony takes place around the world as this was a human tragedy that affected all the people in the world.

It is traditional in this ceremony that a moment of silence is given for remembrance. We here must know that true remembrance does not happen in a moment or on a single day. True remembrance requires that we always carry with us our understanding of the crime that was the Holocaust. True remembrance requires us to pass on that understanding to future generations. It is that true remembrance that will prevent this kind of evil from happening again.

I would like to quote a short passage from the Kaddish.

May there be much peace from Heaven, and satiety, and salvation, and comfort, and saving and healing and redemption and forgiveness and atonement and relief and deliverance for us and for all.

Jamais encore. Never again.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that on this occasion the House would provide unanimous consent for me to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker and members of the Assembly, I appreciate being given the opportunity to rise and speak on this important day. Although it has been over 60 years since the Holocaust, the reminder of this horrific time in our history is very much present for so many in our community. It is vital that we take this time to remember those who fought, those who suffered, and the 6 million that died.

The name Yom ha-Shoah Ve Hagevurah, which literally means devastation and heroism day, is truly just that, a time of true devastation of our faith in humanity yet punctuated with acts of heroism that the world has not yet forgotten. By remembering the Holocaust and its victims, we can renew our collective commitment in the fight against anti-Semitism, discrimination, and racism because as a society our work is not yet done. We need to educate and inform. We need to pay tribute to the victims of these acts of cruelty and inhumanity and continue to build societies where dignity and respect for others are paramount.

As one historian so eloquently stated,

these survivors have fought for life when there was only death, fought for good when there was only evil, and fought for the future when there was only the past. Their struggles have not only become part of our history but have shaped and prepared our future.

Members' Statements

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

Anniversary of Edmonton Protocol

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ten years ago today a group of researchers from the University of Alberta completed work on a leading-edge medical procedure now known around the world as the Edmonton protocol. This procedure has dramatically improved the health and well-being of Albertans with uncontrolled type 1 diabetes and their families, not to mention so many others across Canada and around the world. The names of these six remarkable pioneers are familiar to many of us: Dr. Ray Rajotte, Dr. Garth Warnock, Dr. Norm Kneteman, Dr. Jonathan Lakey, Dr. Greg Korbitt, and Dr. James Shapiro.

The Edmonton protocol is now practised in more than 40 institutions world-wide, and an estimated 700 patients have received islet transplants over the past 10 years. Here at home the University of Alberta program has treated over 110 patients, making it the busiest and most successful pilot transplant program in the world.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 150,000 Albertans currently live with diabetes, and more than 14,000 new cases are diagnosed each year in Alberta. Of these, about 10 per cent have type 1 diabetes.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the vision and talent of the researchers we remember today, the Edmonton protocol and the many similar advances in medicine and health care delivery that took root right here in Alberta are also a testament to Alberta's success in developing one of the largest and most highly respected academic health centres in North America, in this case right here in Edmonton. These achievements are indeed an integral part of the Alberta brand, and they are a bridge to the knowledge-based economy of our future.

I would ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the research team and to help us as we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Edmonton protocol. Thank you.

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

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you may or may not know, March was Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month in Canada. During the month of March the Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada campaigns to raise awareness and warn against the risks associated with colorectal cancer. About 1 in 14 men and 1 in 17 women in Alberta will develop this cancer in their lifetimes. Overall colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Alberta. It also causes immense personal, family, and societal suffering.

The main risks of developing this cancer include being 50 years of age or older, having a poor diet that is high in red meat consumption and low in fibre, fruits, and vegetables, and, most importantly, getting little or no exercise. Early detection is critical in the treatment of colorectal cancer. Through screening, colonoscopy, and effective chemotherapy treatments this cancer can be treated and even prevented if detected early enough.

I would also like to highlight an option for those in the advanced stages of colorectal cancer. The drug Avastin has been successfully used in combination with chemotherapy in the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer. While Avastin is not a cure, research has shown that it can prolong life and improve the quality of life for some patients. However, this is a very expensive option, costing patients \$2,000 every other week for treatment. With that in mind, I'm happy to remind everyone that as of April 1 of this year the government of Alberta has added Avastin to the list of publicly funded cancer therapies.

Earlier today in the rotunda there was an information session on colorectal cancer with the specific purpose of emphasizing the importance of early detection.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind members of this House and all Albertans that provincial guidelines recommend that all people between the ages of 50 and 70 be screened regularly for this cancer by booking an appointment with their family doctor for a complete history and physical exam. The key to a balanced approach in a sustainable health system is prevention through living a healthy lifestyle, early detection through screening, and effective, evidence-based treatment.

Thank you.

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

Travel Alberta Holiday Cards

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many members on the floor of this Assembly, many of our guests in our galleries, and numerous Albertans from across the province I've been fortunate to visit numerous vacation destinations around the world, and I'm very proud to say that, at least in my estimation, there is not a more beautiful place on Earth than Alberta.

That's one of the reasons why I was pleased to learn that Travel Alberta has mailed out 400,000 Travel Alberta Holiday Cards to Albertans. These cards demonstrate that Albertans can have a great holiday in numerous fabulous vacation destinations right here in our very own province. This free card offers super deals to Albertans, who are mindful of current economic realities. With families looking to minimize spending, the savings and holiday ideas are very valuable tools to taking holidays without spending too much money. The card also benefits our tourism industry as well as the more than 111,000 Albertans who make their living in this sector.

The holiday card program is a true asset both for Albertans and for our tourism industry, and I ask the members of the Assembly to join me now in thanking Travel Alberta and the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation for providing such a great opportunity for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

AIMCo Investments

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public concern and confusion about the AIMCo \$280 million investment in Precision Drilling is building. We're getting a number of calls, many of them angry calls, from the energy sector describing the investment as a bailout for a company that was in a financial squeeze. How can the minister of finance assure Albertans that this is not a bailout?

1:50

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful for the question from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It gives me an opportunity to iterate what their executive director, Leo de Bever, said today, and that is that this is a very good investment. This is an investment that the board supported. In order to find out more – and I've indicated this to people who have spoken to me outside this Assembly – about why the board believes it's a good investment, the board should be consulted. The board is giving an opportunity to address why it's a good investment. For us in this House we identify in our heritage trust fund the rails between which this fund should operate. They are operating within those rails on asset mix.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's precisely the question, Mr. Speaker. What are the guidelines for these kinds of investments?

To the minister. She herself was mistaken yesterday when she said that the deputy minister of finance was not involved in the decision. It now appears that he was not only at the meeting; he voted on the decision to invest in this company. This opens the door, clearly, to politically driven decisions with public funds. Can the minister assure Albertans that politics are not entering our investment decisions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly can. I took the

opportunity to call my critic and to call the leader of the third party today to identify that I had been given the wrong information. Under the legislative framework for Alberta Investment Management Corporation approved in this House, the deputy minister by section 4(1)(b) shall be a member, so we have followed the legislative process. The deputy minister is there. He is performing his duties there as any other director.

Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here reviewing all of the framework for approval of this particular act in 2007, Bill 22, and not once did any of Her Majesty's opposition members or the third party raise a question about the placement of a deputy minister in this corporation.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly did raise questions about tens of thousands of dollars of bonuses for those people, which we never got an answer for.

To the minister again. Given that there are other drilling companies standing by that also stand to rebound in these coming months and could use an injection of extra capital, what does the minister have to say to Precision's competitors, who may want the same treatment?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, the very purpose of establishing an arm's-length Crown corporation to deal with Alberta's investments is to keep political interference out of that. As I was starting to identify, investments in the heritage trust fund, for example, are done on a basis of an asset mix that is approved by this Legislative Assembly. We had an advisory committee where I shared those with an all-party committee. We looked at those. But we do not get into the day-to-day operations of the board, either the payment of the board members or the staff members or the bonuses. That is the board's responsibility. The board shall answer to those responsibilities.

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

Auditor General Recommendations

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General yesterday reported on 41 recommendations made since 1997 that have not been acted upon by the government. These are key recommendations that he called important for immediate response. The Auditor General is the main official watchdog of this government, how it spends public dollars. There has been no response to some of these audits. These were identified to save waste and inefficiency, and in this recession it's clearly critical to Albertans that we spend their dollars wisely. To the Premier: why has this government not implemented 41 key recommendations over the last 11 years to address government waste and inefficiency?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we take the recommendations from the Auditor General seriously, and all ministers are responsible to reply to the report. In fact, the Auditor General as per legislation is supposed to make one annual report. He's making two, so that means that there are more recommendations and more oversight of government operations.

Dr. Swann: What these outstanding recommendations mean to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, is billions of dollars of uncollected resource revenue. The revenue could have avoided a deficit and a devastating set of cuts coming for the health care system. Again to the Premier: why has the Premier still failed to implement the recommendations for improving royalty collections?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have. In fact, we hired a former Auditor General to review the process, and the former Auditor General reported in a very public way that the systems we have in place are being followed. Today, of course, there are many opinions expressed on the collection of royalties, especially by the opposition because they're always looking to keep raising them and raising them higher, hopefully that we may collect more royalties. Today I can tell you that it's a matter of not only the low resource prices but the fact that we've instituted a new royalty regime that shares in the rewards and high prices, but it also shares in the risks of lower prices.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, other outstanding recommendations relate to mental health services and inefficiencies in the health care delivery system that could have been improved. Why has the Premier not taken action on the recommendations for mental health services, which could have significantly reduced human suffering as well as saved the health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this is one area that the minister of health is working diligently to improve service in, both in access and support for those that do suffer from mental illness. It is one part of the area of health that Alberta is leading in so many ways in terms of new programs and access to not only mental health programs but some of those tied to addiction. We'll continue to do whatever we can to move mental health illness access to programs across the province.

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

Gaming Conference

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in November 2008 the Solicitor General used tax dollars to take a trip to Las Vegas to study gaming. Unlike Kenny Rogers the minister has no idea when to hold them, when to fold them, when to walk away, or when to run. There is \$1.6 million in annual funding provided to the Alberta Gaming Research Institute at the U of A to study gaming. Instead of taking a trip to Vegas, why didn't the Solicitor General save Alberta taxpayers \$4,671 and take the LRT across the river?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's quite a connection between comparing. I agreed to going to a very worthwhile conference where we can learn about social responsibility from a world-wide perspective and also get updated on the latest technology in the gaming industry. I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General and his EA spent \$425 a day on incidentals and miscellaneous expenses on a three-day getaway. Will the Solicitor General commit to providing this Assembly with an itemized accounting for this \$12,081?

Mr. Lindsay: I think the correct number would be \$1,200 extra, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this government is open and transparent, and we do put our expenses on the website every month. Yes, this particular trip, I think, was \$1,200 over the estimate. That cost is basically a reflection of transportation and hotel costs.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I found two rooms for three nights' accommodation in Vegas online today right on the strip for \$852. But Alberta taxpayers paid \$1,729.27 for the Solicitor General and EA. Why were these rooms so much extra dough?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, when we were down in Las Vegas, we did notice that the recession was taking effect there. We know that the recession is larger there today than it was back in November, so the cost of rooms today is a reflection of that. I'm not going to stand up here and waste this House's time by debating a hundred dollar hotel bill.

AIMCo Investments

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Well, that's a good introduction to a question about gambling, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday we learned that the Alberta government had invested \$280 million of Albertans' money in Precision Drilling. Investment firm Peters & Co. said in today's *Financial Post* that Precision Drilling remains overlevered and may have difficulty meeting its financial commitments. The government is letting AIMCo make a \$280 million gamble with Albertans' pensions. My question is for the Premier. In this time of economic uncertainty, how can you let AIMCo roll the dice with Albertans' pensions?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the minister earlier reiterated, the AIMCo board, Alberta Investment Management Corporation, has the responsibility of making the investments. It is arm's length. At the end of the year they have to report to the minister in terms of the size and the growth of the assets that are held with AIMCo, I believe in that \$70 billion to \$75 billion amount.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's responsibility is greater than that.

The number of oil and gas drilling rigs operating in the U.S. fell to a six-year low just last week, Canada's rig count is the lowest it's been in 10 years, and this government is allowing a board of high rollers to gamble our pensions on an extremely risky venture. My question is to the Premier. Why are you letting AIMCo and its board gamble with Albertans' pensions?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I want to just raise a question here in this House, and that is that the hon. member of the third party knows full well that their member withdrew from sitting on the Alberta investment discussions when we had the heritage fund. I think we'd be very pleased to answer these questions. But we have very specific guidelines. We have a very specific act, Bill 22, that was passed, that gives the outline for the parameters of the director function. There are additional orders given to that board every year through the approval of the business plan, through the articulation of investment management strategies. There are other, further identified issues on investments, what they can do and what they can't do, that come from our investment department of Finance and Enterprise. I'd be very happy to entertain the minutiae of that question by going back and spending some time with the hon. member and going through the detail of how it's actually done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we've been down this road before. Under the Tory government of Don Getty Alberta got heavily into the business of investing in companies, picking winners and losers, and Albertans lost billions. It appears that this government is heading down the same discredited path. To the Premier: why won't you learn from past mistakes and ensure that

Albertans' investments are as secure as they can be instead of undertaking risk more appropriate to the private sector?

Mr. Stelmach: In fact, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans learned, and that is why this government has given the responsibility to an arm's-length board to make the decisions without any political interference.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Cold Lake City Status

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Faced with spiralling costs, uncertainty on future revenue-sharing agreements, a tremendous infrastructure deficit, and the determination not to burden residents with another tax increase in 2010, Cold Lake city council has proposed to dissolve the city status and form a regional government solution. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What assistance is this government going to give the city of Cold Lake to help them handle these recent events? For example, would the government consider forming a new specialized municipality in our region?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. There is a lot of work that needs to be done before this would be considered. We continue to discuss these challenges with the city. We do provide financial assistance through MSI and other supports and programs. We have concerns about a larger municipality potentially dissolving into a smaller one. We strongly encourage the municipalities in the region to find a co-operative solution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: given that the city of Cold Lake does not have the money necessary to offer the services that residents require – in addition to this, Cold Lake has the highest urban tax of any city in the province – is there a way to relieve the financial pressure that is placed on its residents while still managing to generate financial support and stability to the city?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have talked to the mayor of the city of Cold Lake. I do understand that the city is continuing talks with the municipal district of Bonnyville about renewing their current cost-sharing agreement. Municipalities need to work together. They need to communicate together, collaborate, co-operate. We need to let these discussions proceed and unfold. If that doesn't work, our department does provide mediation services that are available to go and have discussions with those municipalities. Again, I encourage all municipalities to try to work together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the President of the Treasury Board. What more can the city of Cold Lake do to ensure that it remains afloat? As it is a major hub of the oil industry in Alberta, Cold Lake officials have worked with the assistant deputy minister of the Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat on proposals and have taken all steps that they feel are necessary to receive additional support from the province.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's true that we expanded the oil sands secretariat to areas like Cold Lake-Bonnyville because of the

tremendous opportunities and the ongoing operational oil development in there. It also stretches up into the Peace Country. There are many communities that are affected positively by the oil development, but there's also a great cost that comes with it. We've seen the cost there from the Esso expansion. All I can tell the hon. member: at least we're at the table. We do not have a magic bullet to solve these problems. They didn't arrive overnight; they can't be solved overnight either. It's important that they continue to work with their surrounding municipal governments to a solution.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

AIMCo Investments (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy suffers from a boom-bust cycle that this government needs to counter. By investing its funds in a drilling company, AIMCo is actually increasing the government's exposure to the energy sector's booms and busts rather than counterbalancing it. We're intensifying our risks rather than diversifying them. To the minister of finance: does the minister of finance have any strategy on this issue?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again this is a question particular to one investment by the Alberta Investment Management Corporation within the context of their policy. They have invested in a number of Alberta companies, and those kinds of information are public and are published every year. There's certainly no attempt here by this government, nor will there be, no temptation entered into to try and influence the type of investments that this particular group is doing when they're staying within the policy context that this Legislative Assembly has approved.

Dr. Taft: The Norwegians have a deliberate strategy to ensure their petroleum fund counterbalances the booms and busts of the energy sector. They also realize their fund could distort domestic investment decisions and imbalance their entire economy, so they require the fund to invest outside of the domestic economy. My question is to the minister of finance. Has the minister taken a serious look at the benefits of a policy requiring AIMCo to invest outside of Alberta?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, that actually is a very interesting perspective. I did spend some time talking to them in Norway, where they were absolutely sick about their investments. They lost \$92 billion on their fund, and they had even further losses in some of their additional funds. They'd started out with roughly \$400 billion, lost about 25 per cent of it, which is considerably more than we had proportionately in Alberta as losses. [interjections] One of the accusations that I continually get from people, if they're interested in listening, is that we should be investing in Alberta like every other place. This is the best place in the world to invest.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm not accusing the minister of anything. I'm trying to engage in a policy debate.

Any institutional investor holding 15 to 19 per cent, which is where this is likely to end up, of a publicly traded company's shares would normally be entitled to a position on the board of directors. Again to the minister of finance: is AIMCo planning to have a representative on the board of directors of Precision? If not, why not?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I believe this question came up from the opposition yesterday, whether there were any plans. There have been no plans that I am aware of. Nobody has provided me any information relative to such a plan. There is absolutely no way that we could anticipate that AIMCo would become a member of the board of all the various companies and corporations that they have investments in. I'm not even sure of the origin of this type of question, but to me that's a question that we could certainly pose to AIMCo themselves, and I'm quite sure they'd give the same answer: they don't see the value.

2:10

Plan for Parks

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation yesterday released a plan for parks. Alberta's population is projected to increase to 4.6 million people by 2035, greatly expanding the development footprint in our province. Now, while the new plan for parks refers to a process for nominating new parks, there appears to be no substantive objective set out in the plan which would preserve our rapidly disappearing landscapes such as the grasslands region. My questions are for the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Given that the expanding environmental footprint in our natural areas is happening, why is there no specific target in the plan to expand the provincial parks in our grasslands region?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good question. Some have said: why aren't there targets? We set out a process, and I think it would be a bit disingenuous ahead of a process, probably one of the biggest changes in land use, that we set out a target before we go out and consult with those regions. There is a way to nominate, there is a way to do this, but we need to be in the process because Albertans will decide this based on science and what they want in their park areas.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, in August 2006 it was announced that the Glenbow Ranch, west of Calgary, would be purchased and developed as an Alberta provincial park, and it was anticipated that public access would be allowed within a year or so after the park's creation. Now we are in 2009; the park is still not open. Why is the minister now advising Albertans that they won't have access to this park until 2012?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're actually hoping to get it open in 2011. But this question has been asked. This park has not been delayed. If you were to talk to the Harvie family, they would tell you how pleased they are with the resources and the planning that we've done. To be more specific, we had to do a bunch of studies in this area. There are very ecologically sensitive grasslands there. We want to ensure that the pathway systems and the way we move people don't destroy the very park – sometimes people can love a park to death – and we want to ensure that it's done right.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, all-terrain vehicle enthusiasts perceive that they are being squeezed, overregulated, and moved into fewer and fewer areas in the province. Will the minister assure ATV users in the province of Alberta that they will have an important place in the new plan for parks?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are really looking at a policy around trails in this province. I've mentioned many times in this House that myself and the minister of sustainable resources are working together with the recreation trail committee. But as to

ATVs actually in the park, of 500 parks they're only in one park designation. That's the wildland provincial parks. Probably, roughly out of those 32 only half have access, and they're on trails, and they're just for staging. We're not looking at expanding them in the parks but at ways that we can create a better trail system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Reforestation Performance Information

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his April 2009 report the Auditor General noted that the Department of Sustainable Resource Development has yet to implement a process to publicly report on the effectiveness of reforestation activities. The Auditor noted that there have been plans to report for almost five years, but it has still not been done. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why has it taken your department so long to implement this recommendation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I'd like to acknowledge the importance of the Auditor General's criticisms and suggestions to our department reflected in the hon. member's question. I can report that the standard that was being developed was changed midstream, in part because of discussions with the Auditor General. I'd like to make it clear to the House that there has never been any question in the Auditor General's reports that reforestation is being done and done well in this province. The issue has been about reporting, public reporting of that, and that's an important difference.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To view just a sampling of SRD reforestation failures, check out aerial photos of Cataract Creek, Wilkinson Creek, McLean Creek, and the Bragg Creek surrounding areas. Then shudder at the clear-cutting devastation in the Crowsnest. Reports are necessary, not only to reassure the public that industry is complying with reforestation standards but also to make sure that the standards themselves are adequate. The Auditor found no evidence of any internal reports which reviewed or assessed forestation. Why is your ministry not reviewing the effectiveness of reforestation practices in any formalized manner?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has gone from solid ground to real thin ice here. It is spring, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and the ice is getting thinner the more you talk. If he wants to cherry-pick around the province at areas that have been harvested recently and are in the process of regeneration, of course you can find some open spots. But I can take the member – in fact, he knows them – to areas that are now being nominated for national or international park status that were harvested 20 years ago, and now the regeneration is so good that they're being nominated for national park status. There's very good reforestation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking of thin ice, SRD progress is glacial. Your department certainly knows how to reap but appears clueless when it comes to sowing. By the time your land-use framework is implemented, irreparable damage will have been done to so-called parks and protected areas. The Auditor noted that

compliance issues are not compiled and reported in a way which would be able to meaningfully analyze compliance trends across the province. How can the minister expect Albertans to be reassured that our forests are being responsibly managed when reforestation compliance is not effectively reported or managed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I think that when the new Leader of the Opposition took over, he replaced critics and put this one on ice, and we see why now. I'd like to direct the hon. member's attention to a report on reforestation that was posted on our website in February of '09, very recent. I'd also like to refer him to page 50 of the Auditor General's report, where he says: "We believe this quality control system will bring the necessary rigour to make monitoring for compliance effective when fully implemented." That is the Auditor General speaking.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Community Spirit Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the recipients of the community spirit grant program were announced to Albertans, including some in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. How can you be satisfied with only 1,600 applications to this program when there are over 19,000 nonprofit organizations in Alberta?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first year of any program is a learning experience for everyone involved. Overall there's a good response from small, medium, and large organizations across the province, but we will work to ensure there are even more applications next year. We realized when we were halfway through the rollout of the program that we had only contacted 7,000 organizations, so I instructed my officials to contract through Service Alberta and make sure that we had the list of all 19,000 registered not-for-profit and voluntary organizations. We had repeated communication with them to make sure that they all knew about the program. Hopefully, next year, the second year of this program, we'll have more applications.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: does the minister really believe that this program will be enough to help organizations through the current economic downturn?

The Speaker: That's an opinion. Tie it into government policy, please.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, this is just one of the community investment programs that are available to the nonprofit sector. Whether an organization receives \$1,000 or \$25,000, these are new dollars. The new program was introduced in May of 2008 to go as part of a \$166 million program to a vital, important sector. It translates to 19 million new dollars to this sector. We've committed another \$20 million in the community spirit donor program for this year along with the \$80 million in enhanced tax credit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Some of my nonprofit organizations didn't qualify for the funding. Could the minister explain what criteria were used for the selection process?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the criteria are pretty simple, and those decisions are made after they have met the criteria through the applications to my staff. The criteria are: do they have matching dollars or do they have matching volunteer hours or do they have matching donations in kind? Based on that, we make the determination if they're eligible or not. Over 1,600 organizations applied; 1,496 received funding. I think that by any measure that's a great program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:20 Natural Gas and Electricity Contracts

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Both in question period and in the budget debates our caucus has questioned this government's lack of support for consumers. Because of deregulation Albertans are locked into multiyear natural gas and electricity contracts at unreasonably high prices. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what action, if any, has the minister taken or is the minister going to take to let Albertans get out of these unfair contracts on an annual basis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to individuals, to consumers getting out of contracts, we encourage consumers to contact Service Alberta. At any one time we are investigating a number of situations where consumers are confronted at the door and asked to sign up for a contract. It's important that they contact us. We have tipsheets on the website as well. We are more than happy to assist individuals and to get the information out right.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is costing my constituents lots of money every month, and they cannot wait forever. To the minister again: when will the minister finally get around to putting this into place? How long do Albertans have to wait for this action?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's important to talk in general terms, but if there is, indeed, a particular situation, that individual needs to contact Service Alberta so that we can check into it. I can't comment if something is going on if I don't know what the particular question is or the history of the situation or how long they've had the contract, those kinds of questions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are not talking about a particular situation here. We are talking about everybody who has signed long-term contracts. To the minister again: why hasn't the Utilities Consumer Advocate been pushing for this kind of protection for consumers? Isn't that its job?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Utilities Consumer Advocate is involved in interventions, but an important part of the UCA is the role of education, educating consumers on any number of issues. We're in the process of finalizing the hiring of a UCA, and we are looking forward to moving forward on a number of initiatives to ensure that consumers know what they're getting into and know where to ask the right questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mental Health Services

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The secret government report we leaked yesterday says that Calgary has less than one-quarter of the psychiatric beds in the province, which, as a whole, has less than half the beds and community supports that Albertans actually need. When proper care is not available, patients end up in ER. In 2002 alone over 34,000 Albertans sought psychiatric treatment in emergency wards. Given that wait times in Calgary's ERs have climbed to a dangerous 16.6 hours, why has the health minister failed to act on the recommendations included in this internal report?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat what I said yesterday. We have made significant commitments towards mental health capacity in this province and are adding beds on an annual basis. We recognize that in the past there have been some gaps, and we are working to address that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when you're 1,500 beds short of the national average, 80 new beds, not all of which are actually dedicated to mental health, will only ensure the shortage continues. As a result, people who need mental health care are going to fill up our acute-care beds and our ERs. This is just like the long-term care fiasco, where we're shorting the system and the result is increased wait times, increased costs, but decreased care. Why, when government has known about this bed shortage for more than two years, is the health minister continuing to fail Alberta's mentally ill?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the real fiasco here is the position of this particular group, that somehow you have to stick people into a bed in an institution. Over the last number of years we have had a very aggressive policy of ensuring that individuals after treatment are integrated into the community, and that's been a successful program in this province. Just because some national statistic – we don't chase national statistics if they don't make sense.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this government has is an aggressive policy of keeping things secret, and it's their own internal document that says that they're not doing well enough. As well, a spokesman from Canadian Mental Health said yesterday that mentally ill people are simply not getting the help they need from this government. Last year you scrapped plans to build a psychiatric wing in the south Calgary hospital and have made nothing but empty promises since. Given that mental illness is such a significant health care issue in Alberta, why did the minister refuse to release the report that points the way to improving the system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday that this particular report along with a whole bunch of others helps formulate policy going forward. I've elaborated on the policy. The member, I think,

or her partner over there actually released the report yesterday, so I'm not sure what the point of the question is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Wild Rose Foundation

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Budget 2009 funding for the citizen-led Wild Rose Foundation was removed, with funding decisions instead now to be made by the community spirit program. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. With the shifting of Wild Rose funding to the community initiative and other government programs, will the criteria now require matching funding on all grants, and will they be restricted to community facilities and functions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to make a point of clarification, funding decisions will not be made by the community spirit program. They will be made by the representatives in our department who are responsible for all the different community investment programs. Our department right now is looking at creative ways to take the community initiative program, the community facility enhancement program, looking at the criteria for those and seeing if we can get an envelope of money and make that available on a nonmatching basis to these worthwhile community organizations and community projects. Budgetary requirements mean that we have to be creative and collaborative. I know that the sector has to do that, and I ask their indulgence and patience so that we can come up with a worthwhile plan that will work for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Now that the granting responsibilities previously made by the foundation will be made within the Department of Culture and Community Spirit, what additional staff requirements will your department require?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that no additional staff are required because the excellent staff that have worked with the Wild Rose Foundation and helped administer that program for numerous years will still continue to be employed in my department. They will still help with the community investment programs. Hopefully, by utilizing their expertise and their knowledge and their outreach capabilities, we can help enrich our programs that exist for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question again to the same minister: what will the net savings be from streamlining the grant process?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't emphasize enough that the merging of operations improved the services that we provide to the not-for-profit sector and the voluntary sector and ultimately to Albertans. The goal is to make the grant process more efficient, effective, and transparent. In total these programs are being reduced by \$7.8 million, but as I mentioned earlier, we're reviewing the

criteria for our other programs to see if by being more efficient, more collaborative we can make money available to those worthwhile programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Postsecondary Institution Endowment Funds

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Auditor General again highlighted concerns about investments at postsecondary institutions. Many public colleges and institutions in Alberta do not have goals and policies in place for the preservation of their endowment funds, which total over \$100 million province-wide. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why has the department not provided any guidance or leadership for these institutions in the management of over \$100 million in investments?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would think that the endowments amount might actually be a bit higher than that, but in truth all our postsecondaries are board governed. They have a certain amount of autonomy that is granted to them so that they have academic autonomy, but they also have some financial autonomy in the sense of money that they can raise in endowments that are given to them, not by this government but by philanthropy from other folks. Certainly, now that we have our new Campus Alberta secretariat and our new Campus Alberta Council of Chairs, these are the types of things that we'll be talking about on a pan-Alberta approach and recommending to those institutions that they bring together a pan-Alberta policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister. The Auditor previously recommended, last fall, that investments be better monitored at Alberta's universities. In the year ended March 31, 2008, the University of Alberta lost \$46 million on its investments held for endowment, and the Auditor's recommendation is still outstanding. Why is this recommendation still outstanding given that so many investment funds in the province are losing millions? Your office must show leadership, sir.

2:30

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I just overheard one of my colleagues say, it's wonderful to be able to predict the past. Certainly, there are a number of endowments and funds, including my own RRSP, that have lost a considerable amount of money over the last little while. If we could go back and change history, I'm sure that we could change the losses that the University of Alberta had on their endowments.

We take the recommendations of the Auditor General very seriously, as do all of our postsecondary institutions in the province. The recommendations were to the postsecondary institutions. My recollection is that the university is going to follow the recommendations and take the advice of the Auditor General.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House and taxpayers that the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology certainly takes the Auditor General's recommendations much more seriously than the President of the Treasury Board. Can the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology tell the House how

much has been lost in investment income while the Auditor's recommendations go unfulfilled?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, no, I cannot. I don't have those numbers at my fingertips because I don't believe that the Auditor General's recommendations are unfulfilled. If you asked the Auditor General, he would tell you that many of these things take some time to be implemented, some time for new processes or new procedures to come to fruition. We're going to see that happen over the months and weeks ahead. Certainly, I expect that all postsecondary institutions in our province will take to heart the recommendations not only of the Auditor General but also of the department.

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

Postsecondary Institution Internal Controls

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's report from the Auditor General outlined a number of serious recommendations for postsecondary institutions, particularly when it comes to managing their finances. One institution, Grant MacEwan College, was identified for being unable to pursue or record campus parking fines over \$700,000. My first question for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: what is his ministry's role in ensuring that postsecondary institutions like Grant MacEwan manage their financial resources wisely and responsibly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As per the previous question, you know, publicly funded postsecondary institutions are governed under several acts approved by this Legislature: the Postsecondary Learning Act, the Financial Administration Act, and the Government Accountability Act. All of these relate to public funds that we provide to the institutions. All of these institutions are also board governed, and as board-governed institutions they receive fees or, in this case, fines from other sources, not public funds given to them by this Legislature but other sources. It is up to them and their policies that they have to develop to manage those. Certainly, the Auditor General is welcome for those recommendations, and Grant MacEwan is going to take them to heart.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Another recommendation deals with alleged fraudulent contracts awarded at Bow Valley College. Can the minister tell us his ministry's role in safeguarding Alberta's postsecondary students and the overall system from potentially illegal activities such as this?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be a bit careful here because, obviously, this is still under some investigation. I think the pertinent points here to the hon. member is that it was Bow Valley that found the irregularities, and it was Bow Valley that called in the Auditor General to do the investigation. The Campus Alberta institutions take the AG's findings very seriously. The Auditor General, actually, in his report commended Bow Valley for timely notification to his office of some suspected irregularities, and I commend the Auditor General for going in and helping us out with this because that's the way the system should work.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports provided \$24 million from the '09-10 budget to contracted agencies for recruitment and retention of PDD staff. This increase is crucial as turnover rates are far, far too high in these agencies and create many problems. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: can the minister tell Albertans how the \$24 million is being divided amongst the six PDD community boards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to the PDD program and to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities are able to live and work and participate in their communities. We recognize how very important it is that there be qualified staff to support these individuals. The \$24 million all by itself won't solve the problem entirely, but it will help. The money is divided amongst the six PDD regions, and there is a funding formula that divides the money up properly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I actually was looking for the answer to how the formula is delivered, but I'll go on to my next question. Thank you for that.

Can the minister tell Albertans how specifically targeted recruitment programs are being used to help these agencies?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, recruiting and retaining staff in our PDD areas are extremely, extremely important. We have a number of programs that are being used throughout our colleges for disability workers, and we have private, not-for-profit and private, for-profit organizations partnering in those training programs.

The PDD formula that we use is an approved formula that supports all PDD clients throughout the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will this increase in funding even begin to bring agency wages to parity with government staff that are working in the same field?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, in the last few years we've contributed millions of dollars towards the PDD program. It was 5 per cent just recently, last spring, and prior to that, in November of 2007, it was another 5 per cent. This \$24 million will amount to close to 5 per cent again for our PDD front-line staff, and it will bring them closer to the government wages that the member refers to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Victims Restitution and Compensation

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents and I want our Alberta to be the number one global petroleum industry but also number one globally in toughness against criminal activities. We are pleased with the recent introduction of the victims restitution and compensation law. Given the general concern for property rights and the recent ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, my question

is to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister explain how this ruling affects Alberta law?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was very good news to hear the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling last Friday. The legislation that we passed was, we believed, constitutionally valid and constitutionally sound. We were pleased to see that the court did what we have always said the court should do, which is reflect the values of the community that we serve. I think that it's important to remember the essence of our act, which is to remove the profits of criminal activity from our communities and to compensate victims. This ruling supports our legislation and the hard work of our civil forfeiture office, and we'll continue to use this act with confidence to dismantle organized crime in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: since its implementation what progress and impact has our new law had on crime reduction and prevention?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important. As I've said in this House before, organized crime is a business. Civil forfeiture allows the courts to seize the illegal profits of crime and to use that revenue to help victims. This is a tool we can use to target those who victimize others. If you're dealing drugs in your car, we can seize your car. If you're running a marijuana grow op from your home, we can seize that home. Something that's very important is that we make it clear that this legislation puts Albertans on notice. If you're knowingly participating in criminal activity or benefiting from criminal activity, you put yourself in jeopardy of losing the tools of your trade or your ill-gotten gains.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. minister: how are the law enforcers in Alberta reacting to this new way of targeting the profits of crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've always said, since launching this initiative, that we need to ensure that the police have the tools to do their job. We've been up and running now for four months, and police agencies across this province are referring files to the civil forfeiture office.

Our legislation expands and extends the scope of powers that are already available under the Criminal Code. With our legislation we can seize property without a criminal conviction, but it's always the case, Mr. Speaker, that at the end of the day the courts will be the ones that will determine the conduct of the police. They will decide whether or not actions taken by the police under legislation are appropriate. We're confident in the work that the police are doing with this legislation. They're taking it seriously, and we know that the courts will apply the law effectively.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements.

Oh, I'm sorry. Hon. members, please return to your places. The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise had advised that she wanted to supplement an answer. My assumption was that in the first question today that was done, but if the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise wants to supplement an answer, permission will be given now, and an additional question will then come from the Official Opposition with respect to this matter.

Does the minister wish to proceed?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that it's been clarified, but I could, in fact, if you wish.

The Speaker: I thought it was, so that's why I didn't call you.

Sorry. You may depart. Boy, once that recess bell goes, it's hard to retract your decision, isn't it?

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to this Assembly's attention that April 19 to 25 is National Soil Conservation Week. Soil and water are two necessary ingredients to sustain human life and produce food. Today it is more important than ever to preserve soil to ensure that future generations will enjoy the same rich benefits of home-grown agricultural products.

Development demands often take prime agricultural land out of production. Fortunately, researchers and inventive farmers are setting the bar higher for soil conservation management practices. Since 1991 conservation tillage practices in Alberta have steadily grown to represent about half of the annually seeded areas. Alberta farmers are effectively using direct seeding, no-till and zero-till practices.

A reduced tillage system contributes to the government of Alberta's climate change strategy as well by removing atmospheric carbon and sequestering that carbon within the soil. Farmers who have adopted these practices have been able to benefit from the Alberta carbon offset market since 2007. Last year, in fact, Mr. Speaker, 10 of the 25 registered carbon offset projects were no-tillage agriculture, which contributed a total of just over a million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalences, or 30 per cent of the total carbon offsets.

I'd like this Assembly to acknowledge the efforts of dedicated soil and crop research scientists, professional agrologists, and forward-thinking prairie farmers who developed and adopted soil conservation techniques over the past seven decades. The Dirty Thirties taught us a valuable lesson, Mr. Speaker. It has been this cumulative effort that has rebuilt, maintained, and improved soil quality across Alberta and western Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Edmonton City Centre Airport

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not far from where I'm standing, the Edmonton City Centre Airport will serve a small number of its 20,000 annual passengers. These passengers will be comprised of oil executives, hobbyists, and members of this Legislature. The small assortment of small craft, mostly jets, have passed through the 217-hectare airport for far too long. While most cities in North America, especially fellow capital cities, would

welcome with open arms and probably do a lot more than that to have a downtown airport, the Edmonton City Centre Airport has been all but closed to doing business in the downtown. Airports within Denver, Las Vegas, and Chicago, just to name a few, have thrived in an efficient, passenger-friendly atmosphere for decades. I seriously doubt that there are movements in those cities to shut down these lifelines of infrastructure. However, here in Edmonton there is such a movement to remove this valuable asset that should be used by all Albertans and the many flights that come from the rest of North America. Rather than abandon the airport, we should focus on long-term value added by open skies over Edmonton that are for all Albertans.

As it stands, the Edmonton City Centre Airport does not receive or send flights from southern Alberta nor reduce the environmental footprint because of the needless going back and forth from Edmonton to Leduc. The Edmonton City Centre Airport was extremely viable, but it is purposely being underfunded and underappreciated. This is short-term thinking for a long-term loss. If Albertans are confident that Edmonton will continue to be an important centre, they must ensure that this airport remains.

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

Primary Care Networks

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the opportunity to attend the grand opening of the Lacombe walk-in medical centre. This centre is part of a primary care network, or PCN, which is a made-in-Alberta success story in providing innovative, flexible, and effective care to meet the needs of the community.

Primary care is the first point of contact that most people have with the health system, the point where people receive care for most of their everyday health needs. This type of care is typically provided by family physicians, nurses, dietitians, mental health professionals, pharmacists, therapists, and others.

The Lacombe PCN includes a group of family doctors and nurses and Alberta Health Services personnel who co-ordinate health services for patients. Services may include prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of various health conditions and especially chronic, complex diseases like diabetes as well as geriatric concerns.

In just three years since the first PCN was launched in the province, there are now 30 PCNs in operation with many others in development. A PCN can be comprised of one clinic with many physicians and support staff or a team of physicians across several clinics. Each network has the flexibility to develop programs and to provide services in a way that works locally to meet the specific needs of patients while working within the provincial PCN framework.

Mr. Speaker, since the Lacombe PCN opened its doors, it has already enhanced the working relationship between doctors in my community. It also serves as an excellent example of how we can better connect people and communities to local health care services by matching the correct resources with people's needs at the right time.

PCNs, or primary care networks, represent a significant step towards achieving the integrated, effective, and responsive health system that Albertans deserve. I know that we will all reap the benefits for years to come.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 42

Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009.

The proposed legislation in part is intended to give police and bar operators a more effective way to address gang violence and problem patrons in and around licensed premises.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader. Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, third time: do you want to move a bill?

Mr. Renner: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was temporarily disconnected.

I would move that Bill 42 be moved to the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you have one?

Mr. Mason: I'm a little disconnected, I guess, too, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be going around, but I do.

The Speaker: It's still April.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your patience today. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate staff were delayed in answering calls from residents, and hazards were created when there was only one staff person available to lift patients where two staff are required.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you have another set of guests that you would like to introduce?

Mr. Mason: Yes, I do. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Well, we have to get the approval of the House, though, first, so maybe I should get that. Is it okay, hon. members, to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to introduce guests? I won't ask if anybody disagrees.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Ellen Parker, who has made Camrose, Alberta, her home since 1985. Ellen has worked as an educator in numerous capacities since

graduating from the University of Alberta. She has also been an avid supporter of Canada World Youth exchanges and was a founding member of the former Camrose Waste Reduction Action Committee. She's here with us today to observe Committee of the Whole proceedings on Bill 19. Ellen is a passionate global activist, participating in campaigns for fair trade, gender equality, aboriginal rights, and the peace movement, and has been the federal NDP candidate for Crowfoot since 2004. I would now ask that Ellen rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 23

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to begin debate on Bill 23, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009. I am proposing legislative changes to improve the assessment complaints and appeals process. The key objective of my ministry is to have a well-managed, fair, and efficient assessment and property tax system in which taxpayers have confidence.

In January 2008 Municipal Affairs staff began a comprehensive review of the current assessment complaints and appeals system. We consulted municipalities, municipal associations, businesses, property owners, and taxpayer associations, and we listened to their concerns. We heard that appeals are taking too long, that there is duplication in the process, there are inconsistent decisions, a lack of access to information, inconsistent qualifications of board members, concerns with a lack of accountability of all parties involved in the complaint, and concerns on costs associated with filing that complaint. As a result of this feedback, Mr. Speaker, I am recommending that we amend the MGA to introduce a new process that will improve the efficiency of appeals, improve the quality of decisions, and ensure that Albertans are treated fairly.

The key change will be to restructure the current board makeup. We will create three separate boards to hear complaints about different types of property. This will ensure that a complaint is heard once by the right board instead of twice by two separate boards. It will also eliminate duplication and preserve the taxpayers' rights to have their complaint heard based on the merits of the case. Under the new system an assessment complaint would go to one of three quasi-judicial boards based on the type or category of the complaint. Each board's role and area of responsibility would be clear and straightforward.

The first is the local assessment review board. Three trained members would be appointed by the municipality to hear complaints about residential property and farmland.

The second is a composite assessment review board. This review board will hear complaints about multifamily residential, nonresidential, and machinery and equipment. Two of three members will be appointed by the municipality while the third member will serve as the chair and will be provincially appointed. The elements of provincial oversight and impartiality are being maintained. I would like to point out that it is only after a complaint is made that the municipality must establish a local or composite assessment review board. For example, in 2007 only 37 municipalities besides Edmonton and Calgary would have needed to establish a composite assessment review board.

Mr. Speaker, the third board is the municipal government board. It will continue to hear complaints about the linear property and equalized assessment. We are also proposing that the complaint timelines be changed so the process is completed and decisions rendered by the end of the tax year for most complaints. We also want to implement realistic time frames for complaints to be heard. Timelines for disclosure will be increased, but we also expect decisions to be issued within the tax year. There will be consequences if disclosure requirements are not met.

Other changes proposed include mandating the training of board members to improve the decision-making ability of a board, ensuring an appropriate level of information is available to taxpayers to help reduce complaints, requiring disclosure of relevant information by all parties to ensure a fair complaint process, placing limits on fees municipalities can charge, and ensuring fees are returned to the successful appellants to ensure the process is affordable and reasonable. It should also be noted that two or more municipalities may continue to establish joint assessment review boards, enabling municipalities to share assessment review boards' resources and improve efficiency.

Based on our review I believe the changes we are recommending are necessary to provide taxpayers with the understandable, objective, and fair complaint and appeal system they deserve. Ideally, we want the changes in place for the 2010 assessment complaint schedule. I expect that any cost increases such as enhanced training will be offset by cost savings in other areas.

I would encourage all members to support this legislation, and I look forward to any discussion that they may wish to have. Mr. Speaker, I would like to close debate on this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: I think that the hon. minister is moving adjournment.

Mr. Danyluk: Yes.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 24

Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and move second reading of Bill 24, the Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009.

The Animal Health Act was proclaimed in part on January 1, 2009, along with three regulations: the reportable and notifiable diseases, the traceability premises identification, and the traceability livestock identification. The provisions of Bill 24 will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of a highly contagious livestock disease and respond to emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health. Time is of the essence when responding to animal disease outbreaks to minimize the extent and financial impact of the outbreak.

The provisions in Bill 24 also ensure that Alberta is better able to minimize the risk to the public caused by those animal diseases that can spread from animals to humans. The proposed amendments to the legislation will revise penalties to ensure that low-risk minor offences are appropriate and not overly punitive, clarify definitions under the act, clarify licence names to reflect the authority to sell certain types of livestock medicines, add a provision authorizing the destruction of animals that have consumed toxic substances, and make minor administrative changes to facilitate more efficient and appropriate drafting of regulations under this act.

The development of the remaining regulations is expected to be completed by late spring of 2009. A consultation process has been undertaken to obtain appropriate input from stakeholders that would have concerns. All of the proposed regulations are completely consistent with Alberta's livestock and meat strategy. The amendments will allow us to facilitate growth of a globally competitive, sustainable agriculture and food industry and at the same time ensure public and consumer confidence in food safety. I look forward to the debate and receiving the support of members for proceeding with this bill.

Mr. Speaker, with that I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:00

Bill 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise before this Assembly and move second reading of Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009.

Wildlife management involves hunters, the courts, fish and wildlife officers, and the public. Wildlife management protects habitat and biodiversity, agriculture, and the health and safety of Albertans. The Wildlife Act governs the management of wildlife as a Crown resource and enables the hunting and trapping of wildlife while providing protections and controls where necessary. The proposed miscellaneous amendments to the Wildlife Act will clarify how we plan to deal with some challenges around enforcement, sentencing, and wildlife control measures.

Mr. Speaker, wildlife control measures are needed where indigenous captive wildlife such as farmed elk, deer, and moose either escape or are unlawfully released from captivity. Wildlife control is also needed for controlled animals, which are nonnative species of animals that require a permit for live possession. Controlled animal permits are allowed for very limited purposes such as zoos and research. Under the Wildlife Act owners and those in charge of captive wildlife or controlled animals must make reasonable efforts to recapture an animal that has escaped. They must also report the escape within 48 hours after the escape unless the animal is recaptured within that 48-hour period.

We also need to ensure that our fish and wildlife officers have the support they need to carry out their other expected duties. At times there have been challenges to the authority of fish and wildlife officers to access land. For example, an officer needs to be given reasonable access to land to respond to a report of dead wildlife in order to determine whether the animal's death resulted from illegal activities. The amendments will authorize fish and wildlife officers with increased access to land to respond to reports of dead, injured, diseased, or dangerous wildlife and to monitor hunting activities while still protecting privacy rights.

The amendments also ensure that hunters follow the regulations for exporting wildlife. Currently an export permit is required to export wildlife or wildlife parts. Export permits are not issued for certain wildlife parts such as bear paws or bear gallbladders. It is recognized that exporting wildlife that is banned from export is a serious offence and warrants a potentially higher penalty. An amendment will therefore provide the courts with a higher penalty range to deal with those who have been convicted of this offence.

In addition to illegal exporting, we also need to ensure that big game and game bird meat is being used appropriately. The Wildlife Act also requires that big game and game bird meat is not wasted,

destroyed, spoiled, or abandoned. Cases involving spoiled meat have been brought before the courts, but there have been problems proving to the courts what evidence was required to show that flesh that was once edible has become spoiled. In some cases fish and wildlife officers have testified to the poor condition of game meat by stating that the meat was no longer suitable for human consumption. Despite these testimonials the court did not accept the evidence that had been entered.

The amendments will clarify the rules regarding wastage of big game and game bird meat in two ways. Number one, Mr. Speaker, the methods to enter evidence that edible meat has been wasted or spoiled will be established and applied in the courts. Number two, the act will require edible meat to be kept fit for human consumption, to clarify what constitutes wastage or spoilage. Requiring game meat to be kept fit for human consumption will eliminate the defence that any meat in question was intended for animal food.

Lastly, there have been instances where people have incurred losses as a direct result of an offence. For example, client hunters have had their deposits stolen by persons posing as legitimate outfitter guides who are not able to or do not intend to provide the services. The amendments will adjust the creative sentencing provisions so that a court may order a convicted person to pay restitution to another person such as those client hunters who have incurred a financial loss as a direct or indirect result of the offence.

Wildlife management is challenging and continually changing, and these amendments will eliminate certain challenges in administering and enforcing the act. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 30, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Traffic Safety Act. The proposed changes include the following. A wording change related to the maintenance enforcement program replaces "cancellation" of an operator's licence regarding maintenance enforcement program payment defaults with "suspension" to address the administrative processes resulting from the different definition of terms. This change eliminates confusion and appropriately identifies those who fail to make payments as suspended drivers.

The next change creates a new class of investigators for the carrier and vehicle safety programs and driver training programs. These investigating officers will be dedicated to carrying out specialized technical functions under the Traffic Safety Act and its regulations.

The third amends the definition of peace officer in the Traffic Safety Act and clarifies the definition of peace officer to include the new classifications as well as certain police officers created under the Police Act, including the First Nations police officers. Mr. Speaker, this gives police officers who were inadvertently not included in the peace officer definition under the Traffic Safety Act the authority to enforce the act.

The fourth clarifies the authority to make regulations about the conduct of driver examiners, driving instructors, and the operation of driver training schools.

The fifth, Mr. Speaker, adds driver examiners, driving instructors, and the operators of driver training schools to the definitions of

regulated person and therefore provides authority for a further compliance tool. The two amendments I just mentioned related to driver training and the operation of driver training schools stem from a 2008 court case and legal advice from Alberta Justice.

The sixth clarifies the definition of intersection safety device, introduced in the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007. It is necessary to specify that these devices are capable of gathering evidence for traffic signal infractions or a speeding infraction or both. Without the amendment Justice believes the definition may be interpreted that an intersection safety device must be able to gather evidence for a traffic signal infraction and a speeding infraction.

The seventh, Mr. Speaker. Finally, this amendment adds vehicle rental companies to the list of businesses whose vicarious liability will be capped upon proclamation of the 2007 Traffic Safety Act.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate today on Bill 30.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:10 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in Committee of the Whole and present Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009. The proposed amendments are a result of a commitment from the Alberta government and all provinces and territories, except Ontario, to ongoing reform of our securities regulatory system under the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation. The support received at second reading of this bill is greatly appreciated. I would like to commend all parties for unanimously approving the second reading of this bill.

There were some points, however, raised by the opposition that I would like to take the opportunity to discuss. I believe it was the Member for Calgary-Varsity that did have a concern that the legislation does not address the idea of a national securities regulator. I want to suggest that provinces have been responsible for regulating securities markets for decades and have successfully created a national regulatory system through the implementation of the provincial-territorial passport system.

This system, Mr. Chairman, allows market participants to deal with the provincial regulator and have that regulator's decision or approval apply automatically in other participating jurisdictions. The move to a national regulator could take years. We are ready to move with the passport system now, and we are doing that. Alberta is strongly opposed to a single federal securities regulator. Securities regulation is a provincial responsibility, and the move to a single federal securities regulator would be an intrusion into an area of provincial jurisdiction. That's just not something that this government wants to see.

I also believe that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said she is seeking "a single set of rules that the province played a role" in

creating. I wasn't quite sure where she was going with that. It almost sounded like she was seeking something that is exactly what we are doing with the passport system, Mr. Chairman. The passport system is a practical model that the provinces and territories, other than Ontario, have implemented to create a national regulatory regime that is flexible and responsive and which respects provincial authority. The passport system is founded on harmonized legislation rules that are consistently interpreted and applied throughout Canada. Alberta has been a leader in harmonizing legislation, and this bill continues that leadership.

In second reading, I believe, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was concerned that government securities policy means lawyers and other people would have to deal with 13 regulators instead of just one. It is a myth that anyone has to deal with 13 sets of rules. The passport system gives a market participant streamlined access to Canada's capital markets by dealing with only its home or principal regulator and by complying with one set of harmonized laws. Despite the rhetoric, there is no empirical evidence to show that a single regulator model could deliver functional improvements to the Canadian securities regulatory system, which is already ranked by independent organizations as one of the best in the world.

Bill 17 builds on the work that Alberta has done since 2004 to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities laws. I encourage all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 17.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will hand it over. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Not at this point, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this? I might add, hon. members, that we are speaking to amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I will focus on the government amendments. I'll just wait for the minister's attention here. Okay. We were beginning to discuss these amendments last week, and we shall continue. So that the minister is aware, I'm going to be asking a few questions on point C of the amendment, which amends section 5. This is a pretty major amendment. What's proposed here is that all of the existing section 5 is struck out. All of existing section 5 is actually quite brief. It's really just two sentences that read:

5(1) Land within a Project Area may be acquired by the Crown by purchase or expropriation.

- (2) Land acquired under this section is under the administration of the Minister unless, before or after the acquisition, the Lieutenant Governor in Council directs that it is under the administration of some other Minister.

That's all of section 5 in the original bill. That's now done and being replaced by a somewhat longer amendment.

One of my first questions around the proposed amendment – and I'll focus on the proposed amendment 5(1), but this also applies to 5(2) – is around the time frames and the fact that there is, as I'm reading this, no reference to a time frame, I don't think. The proposed amendment 5(1) would read that "subject to section 5.1, at any time, at the request of the registered owner of land within a Project Area, the Crown shall enter into an agreement with the registered owner to purchase the land at market value."

Now, first of all, I think the word "shall." It's important to note that this is not a "may" or a "can"; this is a "shall." In other words, this is a legislative directive to the Crown that it must do something, as I understand this. But as I read through this proposed amendment in that section, I am concerned that there is no time frame. It doesn't say: shall enter into an agreement within one year or one decade or, you know, to be ridiculous, one century or something like that. There is no time frame. On the one hand it sounds very forceful while, on the other hand, there is an entirely open end to this if I am reading this correctly.

I'd like the minister to speak to that because I understand you'd need a certain amount of time to sort out market value, but after all there is a process for doing that here without any time limit on this. My concern – and let's be honest – is that the wheels of government can turn slowly, sometimes on purpose. This could stretch out . . . [interjections] Never? Never. Oh, I'm getting corrected by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who has never had his department do anything slowly, I guess.

Let's speak hypothetically. Seriously, if the government were to decide that it shall do something over the course of a decade, there's nothing here to stop it from taking that long. I'd like the minister to speak to that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. The intention with "shall" is exactly as you mentioned. It is: shall at the owner's triggering sit down and negotiate for purchase, and we're talking right away. The clarification . . . [interjection] Well, actually it does. In the bill there's reference to where it's budgeted every year for the purchase of land. Of course, with our past experience we have a general idea of how much land is purchased at different stages on the long-term projects. In some ways, of course, it's advantageous to government to do that purchasing earlier in the process rather than later, just so we're not dealing with the time constraints we have on some projects right close to the time that construction needs to be started.

3:20

The amendment to the bill spells out very clearly the steps that can be followed, and it does state "shall," which it hasn't in the past. Under past legislation – the hon. member is exactly right – the government had the opportunity to pick and choose the time that it wanted to purchase the land according to whatever determinations it made in that particular budget year. But what we've moved forward with, to better suit these types of projects, is a situation where the landowner triggers the compensation portion, and the government "shall" negotiate and sit down with the landowner and move forward with purchase of the land when they trigger it. Of course, the other thing that we see in projects like this is that many

people choose to stay on the land and use it as they always traditionally have, until they get very close to the time of the project, before they sell the property.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. I appreciate that the minister and I are just trying to clear something up here. I didn't get a lot of reassurance from that. Can the minister point me to where there is a time frame here? I mean, quite honestly, and all kidding aside, if a government wants to grind a landowner down, they could take years. They could take a long time for this to occur. Where is the time frame in here? I didn't get a lot of reassurance from the minister telling me that we have a process. I would like to see something a little firmer in here on a time frame. Maybe it's here. If it is, show me.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. When the member first started speaking about this, that is where concern comes in, where government "may" if you change the wording. When it says "shall" negotiate, the landowner does trigger it. It is budgeted for every year, and that is written in the bill. Section 5, that you're referring to, states very clearly that a landowner can sit down to negotiate the purchase of the land by the province. They can bring to the table whatever they feel is material to that negotiation. Should they not be satisfied with that, they can then move to the third party – and it makes reference to the Land Compensation Board or another board as agreed to by both parties, an arm's-length board – to bring the information to that table and have a determination made there. Should the landowner at that point still not feel that they're satisfied with that amount, it can then go to the Court of Appeal. Even after that there is still expropriation at the end of the process.

With respect to the timelines on it, obviously, there's a two-year time period when the consultation and discussion take place on the project before such time as the Lieutenant Governor in Council or cabinet actually have to vote to approve or turn down the project. At that time, once a decision is made that they would decide to go ahead with that project, the landowner can trigger that compensation at any point from there forward.

Dr. Taft: All right. Well, I think you are just going to have to accept that I'm not convinced by that because I don't see a time frame for this "shall." Once the process is triggered, if I'm the landowner, I say: "Okay. I see the project. We've taken the time. We've worked that out. Now I want to sell, so you shall as the Crown enter into an agreement to buy it from me." But I don't get a lot of reassurance from this that you need to do that even in my lifetime, frankly. Again, you know, I'm looking for direction here.

Now, this section in this amendment refers to section 28 of the Expropriation Act. I won't profess any expertise in the Expropriation Act, but I did just have a page bring me that bill, and I've had a quick look at section 28. Section 28 seems to give the Lieutenant Governor in Council and cabinet a pretty blank cheque. Again, I don't see in section 28 a lot of reassurance to the landowner that something is going to be done in an expeditious time frame or that the outcome is necessarily that fair. Section 28, as I read it quickly, gives the minister a blank slate, really. I don't see a lot of reassurance for the landowner in section 28. Do you want to respond, please?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. minister, we're staying with the amendments.

Mr. Hayden: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would suggest to the hon. member that when we say “shall,” I think that’s very direct: shall enter into negotiations.

With respect to the trust related to the timelines I would also suggest to the hon. member that if I put a number down there and said, “shall negotiate the agreement on the purchase price or compensation to the landowner within a 30-day period,” someone would be standing up and accusing me of rushing the negotiation and frightening a landowner. If I was to stand up and say, “shall do it within a one-year time period,” someone would still stand up and criticize me for rushing someone or for taking too long and delaying. I suggest, sir, that when we say “shall,” it means that the government shall sit down and negotiate. These, of course, are the people that we’re responsible to represent, and obviously we will do it in good faith.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What I would find reassuring and I would bet you that landowners would find reassuring would be something like, “shall in an expeditious manner,” so that if it ended up in court, the court has some sense that taking five years to negotiate it is not expeditious. I agree, you know, that putting 30 days or one year or something could be problematic. But having a flexible time frame that nonetheless would indicate to the minister and ultimately, if need be, to a court that this was to move on expeditiously would be a worthwhile amendment to this amendment. I’d urge the minister to consider something like that.

If I may move on to the next paragraph under this same amendment, which is paragraph 5(2). I’ll just leave it – we don’t need to repeat that exchange – but again I don’t see any time frame or time limits on this either. We all know that court cases can drag out for years. Frankly, in any court case, ultimately, an organization like the government is going to have far more power than a landowner just because the government has, for practical purposes, unlimited resources. So I am concerned just about the aspects of that that open things up.

I will repeat what I said a moment ago under this amendment 5(3). I’ll try to abbreviate it a bit here. It reads:

If the registered owner requests that the Land Compensation Board make the determination as to the market value of the land . . .

And it would do that if negotiations broke down, presumably. It goes on that the Land Compensation Board has jurisdiction with respect to the determination of market value under this Act and may exercise the powers given to it pursuant to section 28 of the Expropriation Act.

That’s what took me to the Expropriation Act, and I read section 28 as giving just about all power it ever wants to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, so I am concerned there.

I will move on to section 5.1 of this amendment, in which the subtitle is Requirement of Land by the Crown. This is just a one-sentence section, and it reads as follows: “When the land within a Project Area is required by the Crown for or in connection with the public project, the Crown may acquire the land by purchase or expropriation.”

Now, I have a couple of thoughts on this right away. First of all, I’m wondering why this is needed because there is the Expropriation Act. We’ve outlined a process for purchasing the land. I don’t know why this section is needed, and I’d be curious to know what the legislative drafters told the minister to justify the existence of this. Secondly, my concern is: does this ultimately override the previous sections? In other words, when the chips are down, this would seem to give the Crown everything it needs to just go ahead

and barge in, in any case. So why is this section needed, and does this actually trump everything else, in any case?

3:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the hon. member will see when we move to section D and the section being struck out with respect to the Expropriation Act, in the original version of the bill there was a section there for clarification purposes that the Expropriation Act is still available for use, to give some satisfaction to landowners that that still is an area that’s available to them. It was being misconstrued, I will say, by some people and used to indicate to people that the Expropriation Act, in fact, wasn’t available to them should they need it through this process.

When we talk about 5.1, that the hon. member is referring to, there are, of course, two ways that the land can be acquired. One is through a purchase through the three steps that we spoke about previously, and the other is, at the end of the day, with the use of the Expropriation Act and all of the restrictions and abilities that go with that for the protection of the landowners. That’s still available. Mr. Chair, that’s available to the federal government, to municipal governments, and to the provincial government, and it’s just stating it because we heard from Albertans that they were concerned that their right to use the Expropriation Act would not apply to this bill. Of course, it very much does, and we’ve stated it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole and speak to Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. The minister has tabled four amendments, which affect sections 2, 5, and 13. These amendments are the result of members of this government first and foremost listening to the concerns raised by Albertans and addressing those concerns by making the amendments you see before you to the issues that were raised.

Since the bill was introduced on March 2, 2009, I have participated in many public meetings. The first one was in the village of Warburg in my constituency with two of my MLA colleagues. Soon after I attended one in Ponoka, then another in Ryley, where we were joined by the Minister of Infrastructure and several other MLAs. Then I attended two more, in Pigeon Lake and Innisfail, again with several MLAs and the ministers of Infrastructure and Transportation. On each and every occasion we were keen to hear what the constituents’ concerns were and worked closely with the minister and the department to ensure that they received the feedback we were hearing. It was from the feedback and the conversations we had with Albertans that the following amendments were drafted.

Section 2(2) was amended and now reads:

For the purpose of this Act and the regulations, a project is a public project if the project is

- (a) a project related to the transportation of people or goods, which may also include as part of that project a corridor of land for pipelines, pipes or other conduits, poles, towers, wires, cables, conductors or other devices, including any ancillary structures, or
- (b) a project related to the conservation or management of water.

Mr. Chairman, this amendment makes it clear that Bill 19 is designed to facilitate the construction of either a water project or a highway such as a transportation utility corridor. Furthermore, it is explicit that land assembled under Bill 19 can only be used for

things like pipelines or transmission lines if and only if that land has already been assembled for another purpose such as a transportation utility corridor.

Mr. Chairman, section 2.1 has also been amended. Part (2) of this section now reads that “the Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a project area if more than 2 years has elapsed since the plan of the proposed project was made available to the public.” In our discussions Albertans expressed concerns about the duration of consultations and advocated for a finite consultation period. This amendment gives those constituents peace of mind, assuring them that any consultation would be completed after two years. At that point the government would have to make a decision regarding whether they are going to proceed with the original plan and designate that land a project area or whether they are not going to follow through with assembling that land.

Mr. Chairman, the amendments to section 5 ensure that if the government chooses to designate a particular piece of land a project area, the landowner is fairly compensated. Section 5(1) reads: “At any time, at the request of the registered owner of land within a Project Area, the Crown shall enter into an agreement with the registered owner to purchase the land at market value.” In essence, at any time after the land is designated a project area, the landowner can choose to begin the negotiations to sell their land to the Crown. This means that a landowner can choose to maintain ownership of their property, continuing to use it until the government requires it, or they could choose to sell it immediately. Ultimately it is the landowner’s discretion.

Further to this, Mr. Chairman, if an agreement cannot be reached about the market value of the land, part (2) of this section allows for the owner to apply to the Land Compensation Board to determine the market value of the land. Should the registered owner choose to exercise their rights in part (2), part (3) applies to the Land Compensation Board, allowing them the ability to establish the value of the land just as they would if the request were made under the Expropriation Act. This provides them with several powers in order to draw a conclusion on the value of the land, including allowing them to hold formal hearings and to physically inspect the property.

In the event that a determination by the Land Compensation Board is unsatisfactory to either the landowner or the government, part (4) then applies. This section reads:

The registered owner . . . or the Minister may, within 30 days after receiving notice of the determination of the Land Compensation Board, appeal the determination to the Court of Appeal, and section 37 of the Expropriation Act applies to the appeal.

This part ensures that there is an additional mechanism for a landowner to be certain that they are being fairly compensated when selling their land to the Crown.

The last amendment is section 13. Mr. Chairman, this section was initially written to reinforce that Bill 19 was to work in concert with the Expropriation Act. However, it caused some confusion. Albertans were concerned that Bill 19 would override the Expropriation Act. It doesn’t. Regardless, the amendment is there to remove this section, thereby alleviating this fear and, therefore, providing clarity on the issue to Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, these amendments are in response to the concerns and recommendations we heard from our constituents, Albertans. The feedback from Albertans gave us a clear understanding of the elements of Bill 19 that were misunderstood and enabled the communication of these concerns back to the government. This democratic response has ensured that Bill 19 respects the rights of landowners while balancing the province’s need for future transportation utility corridors.

Indeed, as mentioned in earlier debate last week, this was also

taken to the floor of the AAMD and C. After listening and questioning the minister on questions they had with regards to Bill 19, the assembly voted – and overwhelmingly supported the minister – to defeat an emergent resolution to delay this bill.

For myself and others this has been about listening to our constituents, going to meetings with them, meeting with them in our offices, over the phone, and bringing back their concerns and having those concerns addressed in the amendments we see tabled here today.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the members of government and all Albertans that have shared their ideas and suggestions. That process and the feedback that we have received and the amendments that have been tabled have made Bill 19, in my opinion, a better piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Before we move on, hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has asked for unanimous consent to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do apologize for having to interrupt the debate. I will be brief. We had attempted to introduce a number of people who are in the gallery today to listen to this debate, and at the time we did not have their names at our disposal. With the permission of the members of the Assembly I would now like to introduce the people who are in the gallery, who are very committed to following this debate and are very concerned about the outcome of the debate with respect to Bill 19.

I hope I have most of the names correct. I may miss some of them still, but I would ask that you rise as I call your name in order to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. The members in the gallery are Joe Anglin, Jan Slomp, Benz Rofacht, Jessica Ernst, Mary Binnette, George Binnette, Stewart Shields, Garry Mizera, Midge Lambert, William Munzie, Rod Olstad, Patty Davidson, Terry Smith, Sheila Sharko, Jim Slavin, Susan Junas, Edwin Erickson, Florence Stemo, and Ken Stemo. It does appear as though there may be a few others up there whose names I didn’t get, and I do apologize for that. I do want to say thank you very much for your demonstrated interest in this very important issue to Albertans. I would ask that all Members of the Legislative Assembly welcome these members.

Bill 19

Land Assembly Project Area Act

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: We will now continue with the debate on the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman, on the amendment. Okay. My concern with what I’m seeing from the government amendments is that it’s one step forward and two steps back. I don’t in fact see that there has been much accomplished through these amendments. Just let me give you one really quick example. When we looked at section 2(3) of the original bill, we had, “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may not designate an area of land as a

Project Area with respect to,” blah, blah, blah, and then (a), (b), (c), (d). In (a) it talks about “has prepared a plan, in accordance with the regulations,” and for (b), “has made the plan of the proposed project available to the public in accordance with the regulations.” That “in accordance with the regulations” phrase appears in every single clause.

As always, we don’t get the regulations. We don’t get the regulations in advance of the bill that is tabled before us in the Assembly. Members of the Official Opposition keep bringing up this issue because we’re asked to approve a bill in which, over and over and over again, the salient clauses in the bill are all subject to regulations. All the detail of what is supposed to happen here is by regulations. That’s like saying: would I please admire your child who is yet unborn. I’d love to admire your child, but the child is unborn. I have no child to admire here, and I don’t want to go out on a limb and say, “What a lovely looking boy” when it could turn out to be a girl, and I wouldn’t know because there’s no child.

In many ways what the government keeps trying to do is exactly that. The child that I’m referring to is the regulations. Until we can see the regulations, these bills don’t make sense. They don’t give us any information at all. Legislation should be a plan. It should be a good enough plan that I can follow it, that these people who have joined us in the gallery can follow it, that people that want to download the legislation at home and read it can follow the bill. It should be written in clear and understandable language, and you should be able to actually figure out what the government is trying to do as a result of reading it. That is an impossibility here because everything is subject to, and the detail of which is supposed to come through, the regulations, which we don’t have as we’re trying to debate the bill.

We now have an amendment come forward from the government, and I thought: “Yay. Glory. It’ll be great.” I look at it, and the section that has been replaced, which is appearing here as 2.1(1): “(a) has prepared a plan” – is this sounding familiar? Yes, I think it is, Mr. Chairman – “in accordance with the regulations.” Wait. Let’s go to the next one: “(b) has made the plan of the proposed project available to the public” – yes, again – “in accordance with the regulations.” And on it goes in (c), in (d), and henceforth through the rest of the bill. Can I tell what is supposed to be going on here? Could I explain it to someone else? Could anybody else in this Assembly explain it specifically? No, they can’t because none of us have the regulations to be able to understand the detail of what the government is anticipating here. Even though we’ve got a series of amendments, in many ways we’re no further forward.

This is what this government keeps doing. The previous time this bill was up for debate in committee, I talked about buying a pig in a poke, and it ended up getting picked up in the media. Essentially, we’re being asked to approve something that we can’t see and we can’t test and we can’t examine in any way, shape, or form. We’re just supposed to go, “Oh, I guess the government means well, and I’ll accept that.” But we can’t accept that, no, and I won’t accept that. There are too many examples of where the government actually made a mistake and, gee, in some cases passed legislation that was unconstitutional and then had to redo it, or in some cases we’re still waiting for them to redo it. Sometimes they make a genuine mistake, or they don’t foresee the consequences of something.

We have the government trying to address an issue that it has identified it wishes to modify. Thus we had the original Bill 19. That didn’t go so well. We even have backbenchers that, I’m delighted, have joined in the discussion. We rarely have them join us in discussion of a government bill, but we’ve certainly seen that this afternoon. They feel compelled to get on the record in order to address concerns that have been raised by their constituents. We’ve

got amendments brought forward by the government, but that didn’t really take us that much further forward.

I’ll just pick up on the section that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was querying the minister on, the language that we’re missing from that section that’s appearing as amendment 3 from the government, which is, in fact, amending section 5. It talks about an agreement to purchase the land and that it shall be entered into. My colleague is correct. The language that’s missing here is any language that talks about time: “expeditiously” or other kinds of time language that you get in legal documents, “forthwith,” “immediately,” or a number of other examples of language that has to do with time. There is no language that has to do with time appearing in this amending section.

My further question on this is two things around compensation. Would this section address the time lag that takes place between when this idea to designate this particular area for future use by the government – does it take us from when that’s a twinkle in the government’s eye to the point where the landowner says, “Okay, I’m ready to sell,” and we have section 5(1) kick in? What is done about the devaluation, the lowering of the market value of the land that has happened from that twinkle in the eye to this point? If you start to negotiate from this point forward, you may have already had a devaluation in your land. If the government says, “Well, no, I mean, we do the regular due diligence that happens around the sale of land, and we look at the nearest ones or comparable property, and at this point in time or within the last six months it is X amount of money,” that may not be taking into consideration any devaluation that’s happened over the longer advance period of what’s contemplated in this bill. That’s the first question I have.

3:50

The second question is around the ability of the landowner to continue to negotiate contracts for the use of their land. I’m thinking grazing leases or access for oil and gas companies, in which a landowner can sign a contract for additional compensation. If they are now under the definitions of what is contained in Bill 19, is there compensation available to them if they’re not able to negotiate those kind of contracts?

I’ll see if the minister is willing to answer those two sets of questions for me.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to first speak to the reference to regulations. The hon. member made reference several times that the regulations aren’t there before them to take a look at and that they never are in government. Well, the hon. member is correct. Only an arrogant government would create the regulations before it has the legislation to guide it. That’s the way the democratic process and this process works in the House. The regulations are guided by the legislation, and the legislation with this bill, as with all bills, is the tip of the iceberg. It’s what gives the high-level direction of what we’re trying to accomplish.

The only part I really got, question-wise, out of that second section is where the member talks about the value of land. We talk about the compensation, and we talk about market value. Market value is determined by all levels of government. Everyone uses the same principle with respect to market value. It does not consider any sort of damage that might be done to a value by the project that’s going to impact that piece of property. The market value is a property unencumbered, as this one is at the time that government comes in and has a project that they need to do. All considerations on compensation can be brought to the table. This is the advantage of this legislation compared to what we’ve done in the past. As soon

as a determination has been made that it will go forward, the landowner can trigger the compensation immediately if they want that to take place.

I'm going to talk a little bit about my personal experience, but I can also talk directly with respect to the two projects that we're familiar with now, the Anthony Henday and the Calgary ring road, over the past 30 years while land has been acquired, the value of those properties and the value of properties back in my old days. In fact, when you have a proper transportation corridor – and there are a number of members in the House with past municipal experience – you see the values increase dramatically. That is more the case. So with proper consultation with landowners at the front end of this project I as an Albertan and as a person representing Albertans would like to make certain that that's on the table so that they understand that they can be the speculator on land should they choose to be the speculator on land as it goes forward.

If this creates a situation that they find is not in the way that they want to operate, they can trigger the compensation, or as has been mentioned, they can continue to use the land exactly as they have right up until the government needs it for the project. At that point, should they not wish to use all of those tools that are available to them for compensation, in section 5 expropriation is still available.

Having been involved and even being personally involved where the provincial government needed land from my property for a transportation project, I am very thrilled with this bill and these amendments and its clarification. The hon. member is correct. The intention of the bill before the clarification and the changes were made was to ensure that the landowners were consulted, compensated, and treated fairly in this process. But there have been many fears that have been put out there, people that continue to go out and talk about this being used for the placement of a nuclear plant, for example, or for the transmission of power, for those sorts of things, and these amendments have cleared that up. All of those clarifications have been made.

We have a responsibility, and these amendments show the responsibility. We have a responsibility to the landowner, but there is a greater public good, too, and we have a responsibility to plan towards the future. We need to have good legislation that's responsive to all Albertans and also is responsive to the landowners. I think that we've captured it very well with these amendments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, specific, of course, to the amendments, Mr. Chairman, but a little democratic vignette for the benefit of the member, who, I understand, was elected six or eight months before the last election and, in fact, has served as a member of cabinet for a year. In fact, in most other provinces it would not be uncommon to have draft regulations to consider at the time that you were considering legislation on the floor. Alternatively, most other provinces still have an all-party legislative standing committee called law and regulations, to which the regulations are referred. All parties would be represented and would be able to examine and debate the regulations often at the same time and even previous to when the legislation comes to the floor. I understand that this is a one-party state, I understand that this party has been in place for 40 years, and I understand that you all believe that this is the way it is. But the truth is that this is the way it is only in this one province, and everywhere else in a democracy those regs are available as part of the process.

I know that this government likes to keep control of everything. I know you love those three Cs. You love that control. You love to be able to control the consultation process as well, and you – well, it's centralization as much as control. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has the floor.

Ms Blakeman: You know, Mr. Chairman, I'm always delighted when I can get any member of the government to engage, so I'm perfectly happy to have them heckle me. If they'll actually pay attention to what we're doing on the floor, I'll take it. I don't mind the heckling. It shows they are awake, which is an improvement over the status of things at some times in this place, so I'm happy to take it.

Now, back to where I was with the three Cs. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We are talking about a government that deals very much in centralization. It is centralization and control that it's increasingly interested in, how it hangs on to consultation, which is addressed in these amendments, and also compensation, which is also addressed in these amendments. Those are three themes that I am seeing play out not only in this legislation and these amendments but in a number of other sectors that we are seeing this government involved with.

For example, the Auditor General: control of that compensation so that he can't do the systems audits that he wants to do. It's an example that relates to the amendments, Mr. Chairman. The control and the centralization of that control and who is able to report to whom and a real hard push-back from these government members about having any additional officials report to the Assembly, like the commissioner of human rights or the child advocate. So those and compensation: again, the government really likes to use those three things to bully its way through. You know, if my party had been in power for 40 years, I might well do the same thing. I hope I don't. I hope I'm not there for 40 years because I think that's what happens.

4:00

When you get a government in place for 40 years, you get amendments like we're looking at here, and you get the rhetoric that we're hearing in this House about how we should all be grateful that they have replaced a series of amendments and replaced legislation that talked over and over again about "according to the regulations," which we don't have, with amendments that do exactly the same thing.

Overall I'm not seeing that these amendments accomplished what the government said that it was going to accomplish. In the real world, outside of these doors, would they be up or liable for claims of false advertising? Well, I think there's a good case to be argued there, Mr. Chairman. I don't see enough forward movement in what has been presented in these government amendments to allay the concerns that were raised or, more importantly, to make this a piece of legislation that is useful to the citizens of the province over the long term that protects both the citizens and the government.

The larger picture here is about: how do we move ahead with that long-term, large-project planning? If we're going to grow up as a province and take our place, as everyone keeps saying, in the global marketplace, et cetera, et cetera, it is around transportation. It's around moving goods. It's around moving people. But it's also around our utility corridors, our environment, how we balance – I'd argue that we're imbalanced right now – between the energy sector and environmental protection. We need to be planning long term on that, and we need to be understanding how big the projects are. I want something that does that. As a citizen of this province I want to see those kinds of plans and that kind of process in place, and I am not getting it from this government. Do I see protection for the citizen here in balance with a government's ability to move forward on large projects like that? I don't think it's been accomplished in what I've seen here.

I know that there are other amendments that are going to be brought forward. I know that there are others that want to speak, and I have other colleagues that are interested in continuing to speak on these amendments. Maybe I will be convinced that they are more effective amendments than what I am seeing, but thus far I'm not able to support them in the manner in which they are currently presented.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and talk about the government amendment to this bill.

I'd like to begin by dealing with some of the aspects of the amendment, first of all the government amendment which puts emphasis on the consultation provisions and removes from the cabinet the unlimited ability to designate something as a public project. Mr. Chairman, I think that this supposed change is laughable. All the government is proposing to do is to take the same provisions about consultation – and the wording is identical except for the addition of the second amendment, which is detailed – and put them in their own section with their own title. It's just a matter of optics, and it involves no legislative change whatsoever. The main problem with this section is that although it requires landowner consultation, there are no details given about how that consultation will take place. That is not addressed by this change.

The second one, a time limit on the government for approving a project area under section 2. The government wants to amend it to place a two-year limit on the government to complete consultations and make a decision whether to approve a project area. But the part of the amendment that removes the ability for the Lieutenant Governor In Council, or the cabinet, to name anything they chose as a public project is beneficial. Now it's clear what a public project which can lead to the creation of a project area consists of: something that transports people or goods, something that involves water conservation or management. I think that this is a positive limit on the cabinet powers, but there's still no requirement that a public project under this act will be in the public interest.

The amendment requires the government to take no more than two years to assign an area as a project area from the time they first release the tentative plan to the public. This provision would be included in the new section about consultation requirements. This is probably an improvement as it keeps the consultation process from dragging on too long and keeps people whose land is being considered for a project from being up in the air for more than two years.

Mr. Chairman, here's the point. It's not the time limit that the landowners have been asking for. My understanding is that people want a time limit on how long an area of land can be designated as a project area before the government actually goes ahead with their project. As it stands, a person's land could be under a project area designation indefinitely with no guarantee of when the development will happen or if it will happen at all. The government can cancel the project at any time without consequence. The government may try to say that this amendment addresses people's concerns about the lack of timelines in the bill, but it does not.

Mr. Chairman, there is one here that we do like, and that is the purchase of land provisions under section 5. This proposed amendment does address a problem in the original bill, so this amendment might be a positive change. The ministry has insisted that they would be prepared to buy any land that was part of a project area from day one, but this was not enshrined in the legislation. The

amendment would change that. It would guarantee that landowners were always able to sell their project area land at any point in the process.

The removal of section 13 is just an issue of clarification. Some people believe that section 13 of this bill was nullifying parts of or all of the Expropriation Act. That was not the case. Section 13 only says that actions under Bill 19 would not be considered expropriations. If the government had to expropriate project area land because development was imminent, then that action would be taken under the Expropriation Act, not under this act. To be clear, Bill 19 does not affect expropriations. The removal of section 13 is once again merely a matter of optics. It makes no legislative changes whatsoever.

This government amendment does not address a number of important issues. Landowners whose land is part of a project area still do not get any form of compensation for the development restrictions placed on their land. There is no limit on how long land can be under a project area order, and the government can cancel the project area order at any time without penalty. The details of the consultation process are still left to regulation, belying the government's claim that this bill increases transparency. The minister still has the power to choose which appeal body will hear an appeal of an enforcement order, giving him inappropriate influence over the hearing and ruling on the appeal. An injunction can still be sought for someone who appears to be "about to" commit an offence.

Finally, these proposed changes do not remedy the fact that no landowners were consulted in the drafting of this bill. These amendments do not address the concerns of Alberta landowners or of the NDP caucus. Given that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to propose an amendment to the government's amendment.

The Deputy Chair: If you want to have it distributed, we'll pause until it's distributed.

Mr. Mason: That would be great.

The Deputy Chair: Please send it to the table here.

We will label this subamendment SA1. The hon. member.

4:10

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will move that amendment A1 to Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended in part A, clause (b) in the proposed section 2(2) by adding "the project is in the public interest and if" after "a project is a public project if."

Now, if I can just address that, Mr. Chairman. I want to say first of all that this bill has more fundamental problems than any amendments that we can make here can solve even if the government were to agree to pass these amendments, which is unlikely. I think the government needs to go back to the drawing board and actually consult with landowners and other stakeholders before completely redrafting this legislation. However, these amendments will address a few of the many problems contained in the bill.

One of the most basic concerns about Bill 19 is that its definition of a public project does not include the requirement that it be in the public interest, and that is what this amendment does. Section 2(2) gives some guidelines for what a public project could be – something related to the transportation of people or goods, a road or railway, I guess; a land corridor for pipelines, cables, and other kinds of conduits or ancillary structures; or a water management or conservation project – but the bill does not specify that these must be in the public interest. Given that the project has to be considered a public project in order for land to be set aside for it under this bill,

there should be some requirement that the project be something that is being done for the public good instead of just for the good of big business.

This amendment would require the government to justify any public project as being in the public interest. Most of the projects that government has talked about with regard to Bill 19, such as ring roads and transportation and utility corridors, would probably qualify as being in the public interest. However, I would say that a power line built for the commercial exportation of power to the United States would not. That would be, ultimately, for the courts to decide.

If an individual or group thinks that a government project that has been designated as a public project is not actually in the public interest, this amendment would give them legitimate grounds for complaint and appeal to the courts.

Mr. Chairman, I would urge the government to accept this amendment. As I said, this amendment will not in any way fix the bill. The flawed process and the flawed drafting of this bill will not be corrected. But it will eliminate the possibility, at least, that commercial projects for purely commercial reasons would not qualify, and the government would not be able to use the bill, use the legislation to sterilize landowners' lands in the interests of their friends in business. I think that this would provide a small improvement, and I would urge members of the Assembly to support this amendment to the amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister on subamendment A1.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I stand to speak against this subamendment. In the hon. member's preamble it seems that the member completely disregards the amendments that have been put in place that talk about a public project related to the transportation of people and goods. There is no possible way anyone could miss that that is in the public interest and something for the people of Alberta. I believe it's very clear.

Also, with the comments that were made – and I'm only going to make a small reference to them – in the hon. leader of the third party's time in the other order of government, that member put more restrictions on people's lands through his land-use bylaws in a month than this bill will put on in 35 years without compensation.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, the minister cuts me to the quick as a municipal councillor. He also served in municipal government. He rightly knows that good land use is essential to the functioning of any municipality, whether it's urban or rural, but that does not mean that you should trample on people's rights. You should follow a due process. Of course, if the city needs to take land, they have to use expropriation and provide compensation. They do not have the authority to just freeze somebody's land and say: you can't do anything on that land until we're good and ready to come along and buy it from you. You know, I know that. [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has the floor.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I don't mind a little cheering and so on as I go, Mr. Chairman.

You know, the transportation of nuclear waste might qualify under this. Not everything, as the minister has said, is in the public interest. A pipeline shipping bitumen and our jobs with it down to the United States would certainly qualify in this government's assessment.

If the minister is so convinced that the definition already encompasses the public interest, then why doesn't he support this amendment? Why doesn't he? If the public interest is protected, there can be no reason not to add it in. It might be redundant, but it obviously wouldn't change the intention, as the minister has stated it.

I just want to indicate to the House that I believe this is an essential amendment in order to protect the public interest, Mr. Chairman. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the subamendment.

Dr. Taft: On the subamendment; A1 I believe it is. Who knows how many subamendments there might be.

Mr. Chairman, I'm interested in this subamendment. I'd be curious to know if the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who sponsored this subamendment, has any formal reference to a definition of public interest. Is there a legislative basis for how public interest is defined, or is it something that would be worked out in due course?

Mr. Mason: As far as I know, it would be a matter of case law.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. This subamendment raises an interesting point, and it's the conflict potentially between a development for, as the member said, purely commercial purposes versus a corridor for the public interest. The minister had an interesting response, and he's right to the extent that this amendment refers specifically to a project related to the transportation of people or goods.

Now, if I can just work with the minister here a little bit on getting as clear as possible, that would be great. Thank you. What I have with me – and I tucked this in my file many weeks ago – is actually the map for the Heartland transmission project, which is a proposed electrical transmission route from the Wabamun area up around the northwest of Edmonton, up past St. Albert and so on out to the Industrial Heartland. I guess that's why they call it the Heartland transmission project. Now, one of the questions I had, and I think this subamendment gets right to the point here: is there any possibility that Bill 19, once it becomes law, if it does, would be used to pave the way, as it were – or perhaps that's a poor choice of words – to assemble the land for this Heartland transmission project? Is that the kind of thing that Bill 19 would be used for?

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, that's not possible. There's legislation for the management of pipelines or for transmission of power. There's separate legislation that deals with that. We do not acquire land as a province for private industry.

Dr. Taft: Still on the subamendment, Mr. Chairman, we're into some interesting and, I think, important – I think it's fair to say important – definitional matters here. Since we're on to the one about the public interest and what this piece of legislation would cover, I don't want to get too complicated here, but in part A of the amendment we get into subs and subs and subs. It says, "For the purpose of this Act and the regulations, a project is a public project if the project is," as the minister has said, "(a) a project related to the transportation of people or goods." But then (b) – we haven't spoken about (b) yet that I'm aware of – says: "a project related to

the conservation or management of water.” Is the minister with me on the amendment? Okay.

Then we go to the subamendment, which would narrow this a little bit to the conservation or management of water that was in the public interest. I have been wondering about that section of this amendment for some time. Conservation and management of water is very broad. It strikes me that, well, that could include canals. It could include pipelines. We’ve put a number of bills through this Legislature for interbasin pipelines and the whole water system which, in fact, the hometown of the minister is served by, those pipelines stretching from the Red Deer River up as far north, I think, as Hobbema and as far south as, well, south of Stettler, anyway; I know that. It could include dams, it seems to me, if we’re wanting to manage our water system. It could include something like wetlands, which are gradually being recognized as an important flood abatement resource and an important natural resource.

My question here is that that’s wide open. One of the most contentious issues in this Legislature, which this minister will know about, I’m sure, because it certainly came up in Drumheller in the by-election, is the transportation of water from the Red Deer River through the Drumheller water treatment plant to a big shopping mall at Balzac. Now, that’s a commercial project. That water is being transported from one basin to another for purely commercial purposes. It’s not in the public interest. So if we do not accept this subamendment, in fact, it would seem to me that it’s very possible that this legislation could be used to allow water management such as we saw for the Balzac shopping centre. I’d appreciate the minister’s comments on that.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. No, that isn’t possible either. There’s legislation that deals with regional waterlines, and it’s not the acquisition of large parcels of land for that. I’m sure that the hon. member is aware of how the distribution of utilities works. That’s the legislation that would cover that.

There is also a restricted development area of the legislation that was designed for environmental purposes. When the member speaks about wetlands and areas like that, that legislation was designed for that and can be used for that should those types of areas be protected.

This is for the acquisition of large areas of land that would be involved in reservoirs or dams, where we’re talking about a large area of land being required for that particular project.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Certainly, anyone is welcome to jump in here. First of all, I just want to reiterate for the record that the minister is being very clear that this legislation would not be used for drinking water transportation or for anything of the like. This would be used, as he said, only to assemble land for dams or reservoirs. That’s interesting to know.

I am concerned, as Albertans have been for a very long time, about the assembly of a water transportation system to take water from north to south, from the Athabasca or Peace basin down to the Red Deer or Bow or South Saskatchewan. I’m concerned that this bill, in fact, can facilitate an interbasin water transportation project like that.

I have to say that I’m not convinced by what the minister told me on the water side that the subamendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood isn’t actually very well justified

in common sense. We often hear from the Minister of Transportation how we need more common sense. Well, this is a common-sense amendment brought forward. I don’t see the problem with it. I think it would help reassure that some of these land assembly projects for reservoirs or dams or other such are genuinely in the public interest.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I’ll be brief. Don’t worry.

Mr. Mason: You don’t have to be.

Ms Notley: I’ll try to be. It happens every now and then.

It’s a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this proposed amendment to the government amendment, wherein we would add the concept, the notion, of public interest into the definition of the types of projects which would come under the authority of this legislation.

I want to start by simply repeating the point made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, which is: if it is the case that these items which are listed in the legislation are actually in the public interest, what would be the problem with including that language in the legislation? It’s certainly the case that that language appears in other contexts. It appears in the Expropriation Act. I believe it appears in the Government Organization Act. I believe it was at one point a principle governing the now-defunct energy utility boards, however ironic that is. So it’s not that this government has in the past been uncomfortable with identifying the concept of the public interest as far as describing and in some cases limiting its authority. There’s not really been a good answer to the question posed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to the minister with respect to why it is you would not simply agree to have that provision included.

The other thing that I am a bit confused about is that every time we put certain scenarios to the minister and say, “Well, would this be something that might be covered, or would that be something that might be covered?” the minister responds by saying: “Oh, no. That would be covered under this scenario or that scenario or this legislation or that legislation.” Of course, you know, we do have under section 3, which is not part of the amendment at this point, of the proposed legislation the notion of essentially giving the cabinet, the Executive Council of the government, the ability to override any other act or regulation that might otherwise limit the way in which the government conducts itself on a piece of land once it becomes approved as a project area. So there may be water management rules and regulations, there may be environmental rules and regulations, there may be other standards in place which we assume are in the public interest, yet section 3 of the proposed legislation would say that once this becomes an approved project area, those things need not apply if it’s not something that the minister thinks should apply.

4:30

You know, I’ve made this point in other debates before as well. The minister in response to our concerns says: “Oh, no. This idea or this example wouldn’t be included,” and “Oh, no. We’re just using this for huge reservoirs. That’s all we mean by water management.” Of course, as we all know, once the issue becomes a matter of dispute and once you take the act and go into the courts and say, “What does the act say? What does the act prohibit the government from doing? What does the act allow the government to do? Is it okay for the government to tromp on this set of rights or that set of rights?” then the courts only look to the language in the legislation.

That's all we're left with. They don't look to what the minister said in the House. They don't look to the assurances, where the minister said: oh, no; it's only for big reservoirs, and that's it. They simply look at the language that we have, which is water management.

Well, I don't know why it is that huge investments in, for instance, diverting water out of Peace River to provide the adequate levels of water necessary for a hypothetical nuclear power plant wouldn't be a form of water management. If that's the case, then what do we do? Is that in the public interest? What's the weighing? What's the assessment that has to be done? Certainly, by including this issue of public interest in the legislation, that gives us and the people of the province a greater tool with which to question the government's decision to take land for a project that involves water management with no other criteria than that.

Again, it just goes back to the original question, that there seems to be a tremendous opportunity for the government to exempt itself from a number of regulations and legislation that is already in place once the land becomes a designated project area. It would seem to me that it would be only reasonable to very clearly limit and define the circumstances in which that can be the case. Thus, I don't understand why it is that there would be any resistance to including in this clause the notion of public interest when, as I say, it exists in a number of other pieces of legislation that this government has utilized.

I really would like to hear the minister's response to that particular issue. If you think it's all in the public interest, what's the problem with including the language, when it already exists in other legislation in other contexts anyway?

Those are my comments, and I'd be interested in hearing the response.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It very clearly states a public project for the transportation of people or goods. Public projects, by their very nature, are in the interest of the public or they wouldn't be undertaken.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to support this amendment because I think it does bring some clarity to the overall legislation. As he was speaking, I could see how not having it in the act could be used by the government in its unique way. You know, this government has, shall I say, an Orwellian flair for language, so I could see how trucking toxic waste across the province can be justified by the government as being in the public interest because, in fact, the government has done that.

When we had Swan Hills and the deal the government had with Bovar, they weren't making enough money despite the fact that the government was paying them a guaranteed amount of money, and they wanted more business. The government said, "Righty-ho; no problem; we will allow you to bring toxic waste from other places and truck it across our beautiful province" so that the toxic waste treatment plant had more gunk to process so that they could make more money. This was all justified by the government of the day, which is the same government, by the way, that we're looking at, which is what happens when you have someone in place for 40 years. It's not a good thing. They justified that as being a reasonable thing.

I am seeking – and many people have been trying to assist me in this Assembly over the last 15 minutes – a definition of "in the public interest" that would work with what I am seeing proposed in

the subamendment brought forward, actually, by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. We're finding that the term "public interest" appears in 121 statutes, and none of them really have a definition attached to them.

I know that as I speak the good people in the Legislature Library are trying to find me a dictionary definition or some overriding legal reference, you know, like the reasonable person test we have, for example, in law, to see if they could find me something that we would then understand is a definition of "in the public interest." I'm a little loath to let these guys across the way, my hon. colleagues, have at their definition of "in the public interest" because, as I've noted, they've managed to justify trucking toxic waste around the province as in the public interest in the past.

I was looking for something that I was a bit more comfortable with, so I've gone to the Random House concise version. They're not giving me "public interest" as such, but they're giving me "public." So it's "of or for the people as a whole; open to all persons; owned by a community." That's interesting. "Serving a community . . . ; generally known; familiar to the public, as a person; intending good to the community" as in public spirit. That would be useful if I could go on that one. "The people as a whole; a particular group of people having something in common; in public" as compared to in private.

If I put that together with "interest," it gets difficult. "A group financially involved in a given enterprise, industry; benefit or advantage." Okay. That might work for us if we could put those two together. "A sum charged for borrowed money; the rate for such charge." Unfortunately, it's not definitive enough.

I'm wondering if the member who has proposed the subamendment is able to provide something to me. I know they've referenced that it appears – and, indeed, it does – in 121 statutes but not in a definition, that I think both the sponsoring member and myself would be happy with given the one-party state that we live in. Perhaps the member could address my concern.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just have looked up a definition of public interest for the hon. member, and it may or may not help her. I want to indicate, however, that putting public interest in the legislation means that ultimately that will be decided by courts, not by the government. Neither the hon. member nor I trust the government to define public interest. They will try to do so, of course, but if they do so in a way that's unfair or arbitrary in a situation, then it may ultimately be adjudicated in court. If that's the case, then that is the intention, and that's why my answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was that it would be a definition of case law.

I'll try to provide you with one definition which I have just found. It says:

The public interest refers to the "common well-being" or "general welfare." The public interest is central to policy debates, politics, democracy and the nature of government itself. While nearly everyone claims that aiding the common well-being or general welfare is positive, there is little, if any, consensus on what exactly constitutes the public interest.

That may not clarify things quite as much as I had hoped.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you.

4:40

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a brief comment. Until

that last exchange I was seriously considering the merits of including the words “public interest” although it seems somewhat self-evident to me that when we talk about the transportation of people and goods, that by nature is a public project, and it is by nature in the public interest. But I was seriously contemplating the inclusion of that term. Would it be harmful?

Here we have two opposition parties that are fighting fervently for the inclusion of the words “public interest.” They (a) can’t agree on the definition, and (b) neither one of them knows whether it’s going to help them or not, yet they’ve tabled an amendment with that wording in it. Mr. Chair, I find it very strange.

I think the wording in the bill is self-evident, and I’m back to going with the bill as is.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I’m so sorry that the Member for Peace River has trouble understanding.

Mr. Oberle: I understand perfectly.

Ms Blakeman: No, I don’t think he does because the point is that it needs to be in the legislation so that the government cannot do something to the people that we don’t wish to have done. That’s why it needs to be clarified, and it needs to be in the legislation. [interjection] I am so good at getting people engaged, Mr. Chair. You must be so pleased with me today. I’m just delighted that we’ve had a second person engaged in debate in this House.

It is about underlining the importance of having it in the legislation and to have it clearly defined.

Thank you so much for getting engaged in the discussion. I’m always delighted to see another government member on their feet because it’s such a rare occasion in this House.

Dr. Taft: One of the things that debates do is to bring issues out and flush issues out and get people thinking. Again, this is a serious question to the minister, if I can do that. I was partly stimulated by the comments from the Member for Peace River, who made me think about Peace River, which made me think about nuclear power. I’m not actually being facetious here. Nuclear power stations need big pools of water for cooling. They need reservoirs.

Now, I am wondering if this bill could be used – because, you know, we don’t have to have every project transporting people or goods. What is to prevent this bill being used to assemble land for a dam and a reservoir to facilitate a nuclear power plant? What is there in here to pre-empt that or prevent that from happening?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you’re referencing that to public interest?

Dr. Taft: Yes, I am. Presumably it’s going to be a privately built nuclear power plant if it does go ahead, so it’s a matter of public interest.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hayden: I think it’s clear what a public project is and what a private project is. This is for public projects, and what the hon. member is referring to is a private development and has no connection whatsoever.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the minister said, it is a private project, but the private project will be supporting the public

if they are selling the power. In turn, indirectly it will be for the public, so you can get around it. This is so broad, you know, the definition in here, so it could be used for anything. If you put this amendment in there, that will clarify things. That’s what we are trying to do here with the amendment. This is so open. This is so broad. Anything can be done under this section. Maybe the minister can clarify all that, please.

Dr. Taft: I have to get this on the record. It seems to me that what this amendment is doing and what’s being avoided by not supporting this subamendment is that this is a definitional game here. That’s all that this legislation is about. It’s simply saying, “For the purpose of this Act . . . a project is a public project if the project is,” and it goes on. So all this is just defining into existence one version of a public project, and it doesn’t give any broader reassurance. It doesn’t link it to anything else.

This, to me, is just a definitional game, and it would be a definitional game that would be short-circuited if we were to support this subamendment because then there is a broader reference to public interest, which, frankly, would be sorted out if it came to it by case law in a court.

As much as I’d like to be reassured by the minister, frankly, I’m not.

Mr. Mason: I’d like to close if I could, Mr. Chairman. I want to first deal with the whole question of the minister’s definition of the public interest, which was: if it’s a private project, it’s not a public project. But that’s not the definition contained in this amendment. The definition contained in this amendment says, “For the purpose of this Act and the regulations, a project is a public project if the project is . . . related to the transportation of people.” So it doesn’t matter if it’s a private railway or a public railway. If it’s related to the transportation of people in the definition of the act, it is, in fact, a public project. That is how this act with this amendment will define public projects. If it relates to the transportation of people, if it’s a pipeline, poles, towers, wires, cables, conductors – in other words, power lines – or a project related to the conservation or management of water, those are public projects regardless of whether or not it is a public organization, a government organization building them or a private organization and regardless of whether it is for the public interest or for private gain. So I just wanted to deal with that first.

Mr. Chairman, I was quite proud to be the first person to blow the whistle on this bill. I think the reaction from the public has been very strong and sustained, and I don’t think it has been toned down at all by the amendment that has been put forward. I think it’s interesting that it’s the NDP – and I don’t want to exclude my friends in the Liberal caucus – that have been standing up for the rights of property owners in this province against a government that is too powerful, too centralizing, too interested in the power of the state as opposed to the rights of the individual.

A lot of people might find that a little bit ironic, Mr. Chairman. I know that some members opposite find that ironic, but of course they’re only responding to their own stereotypes of the policies and principles that our party stands for. I just think that it is important that we recognize that we’ve tipped the balance between centralized government control and the rights of individuals and the rights, indeed, of property owners, and I think that they should be protected. I think that they ought to be protected. We need to find the right balance, and this act doesn’t have the right balance. I think that this particular subamendment would improve the situation.

I wouldn’t want to sit with you, hon. minister, because what you’re doing here doesn’t fit with your rhetoric. It doesn’t fit with

the rhetoric of the Conservatives in this province that they're all for the individual, all for property rights. So, no, this government is too centralized, it's too secretive, and it needs a bigger opposition. Better yet, Mr. Chairman, it needs a new government that will actually stand up for the people of this province and live up to the principles which it espouses, which this government doesn't do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Pastoor
Kang	Notley	Taft

Against the motion:

Ady	Fritz	Marz
Benito	Griffiths	McQueen
Berger	Groeneveld	Morton
Bhardwaj	Hayden	Oberle
Blackett	Horne	Prins
Brown	Horner	Renner
Campbell	Johnson	Rodney
Danyluk	Johnston	Sarich
DeLong	Knight	Webber
Doerksen	Liepert	Woo-Paw
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	Zwozdesky
Elniski		

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 34
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[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to amendment A1. Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. We're back on the main amendment, correct?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you. My understanding of what the government was trying to address with this main amendment was a couple of areas specifically around the time limits that the government could hold the private land that they had an interest in, compensation, and – there were three Cs, I thought. My concerns that I had outlined previously were that although the government talks about a two-year time limit after they propose a project area before they actually put it into a project order, because that was open to such interpretation through the regulations, we in fact really didn't have enough specifics to understand exactly what it was that the government intends. I'm presuming that the minister will say, no,

that he knows what he intends, but he can't share it with us using enough specificity of language so that we can all understand what that is meant to be.

As I have stated in the House before and I heard my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona say earlier today, nobody reads *Hansard* years from now to see what the minister said by way of explanation. You know, if it's not in the legislation, if it's not in the regs, nobody goes back and reads *Hansard* to see what was intended by government with this. They go off the actual legislation, so anything that we need in there should be in there.

Now, the government has chosen to vote down the inclusion of language around the public interest, which again I think doesn't help us with the specificity of what's being considered here. I would argue that it has not addressed the timing problem, and I would argue – and I think others have argued actually better than I – that the compensation issue has also not been addressed here. I mean, the government has enough members that they're going to vote this through.

There was a small group of people that travelled from throughout Alberta to be in the gallery today, and that's indicative of a larger number of people that are unhappy with the efforts of the government, and their unhappiness doesn't seem to have been alleviated by the government amendment. But I think that that's an indicator of a wider unhappiness with policies of the government and a distrust. You know, unhappiness with this particular legislation may not bring down a government, but a growing distrust that the government has the best interests of the public in mind does become more problematic for the government, I think. So I would have thought that they would take advantage of the opportunity that was presented with this bill, but that doesn't appear to be the case.

The final piece that I want to talk about around these amendments is consultation. I talked a little bit about this the previous time we were debating, but let me complete the argument here. What I keep seeing the government trying to do is organize different ways of consulting without actually consulting or without being in a position where they're held to what the stakeholders or the invited participants had actually directed the government to do.

I talked about the number of summits that we had seen. In the earlier days I'd gone to a gambling summit when I was the gambling critic, and I'd gone to a justice summit when I was, I think, the justice critic. Then they sort of petered out. Then we had two more attempts with the growth summit and the future summit. I never remember which order they came in. Oh, I'm sorry; those were preceded by the round-tables. That was it. There were the round-tables, the specific summits, and then we had the sort of catch-all summits, the clean-out-the-fridge summits where everything got discussed, which the growth summit and the future summit were supposed to be. In each case the public confirmed growing suspicion because they would go and participate in these, and we had all the people that were trained by community development that came out and put little coloured sticky notes up on the wall, and then they moved the coloured sticky notes around and would end up with a very bland statement at the end. People said: "That's not what I said. That's not what I came here to say, and that's not what I spent three days saying." But that's what went forward, and people became very suspicious that they were being manipulated. They weren't being consulted at all.

Frankly, public consultation is a pain in the posterior extension. You know, it's time consuming. It's expensive. People say stuff you don't want to do, and sometimes the public says stuff that's unimplementable. It sounds like a good idea, but it's unimplementable. But I would still argue that like democracy, yes, it's noisy and time consuming, but you've still got to do it, and you should do it with as much good faith as you can muster.

When I look at the consultation that's happening with this government, I think we've reached a new phase. This new phase seems to be sort of generic in-advance consultation, where a large consultation is held in very broad terms, very vague, that people are notified about. It's on the website, they have town halls, they move around the province, it goes on for an extended period of time, but nobody is very clear about what, in fact, government is talking about. Then the government says: "Okay. That's it. We've done the consultation. We know what we're doing, and now we're going to move forward." From then on any specific legislation that's brought forward where the public says, "Yes, but you didn't consult us," they go, "Yes, we did. We did that general consultation. Remember, a year ago? We've covered it. We're not going to go back and do anything specific anymore. We've done the general consultation."

5:10

I'm watching what the minister is doing around human rights consultation with great interest because I haven't seen that sort of broad generic one happen. We've certainly seen that happen in some other areas like land use or the consultation with the seniors around one of the pieces of legislation that they implemented, the Dependent Adults Act, for example. I think that's now what we're looking at by way of consultation. So the three Cs that I started with, which were around centralization, compensation, that's completed with consultation. Again, I think that few people would be happy with what is outlined as consultation in this act and the ability of people to bring the government to the table in a meaningful way to hear what their concerns are and with an expectation that those concerns will in turn be dealt with rather than be dismissed or cast in a different light.

Those are the concerns with the overarching themes that I'm seeing in this legislation. Speaking to the amendment, I understand that it was an attempt – but I think it was a very poor attempt – at trying to address the concerns. I can't say that I'm unhappy to see the government get raked over the coals by its citizens. I wish there was more of that, and I hope there is more of that because the more engaged the citizens get, the more pressure there is on us to be better legislators. I think that would be a good thing for all involved.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. We're still on this amendment A1, Mr. Chairman?

The Deputy Chair: We're on amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: Thank you very much. I appreciated the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. I have a couple of questions still for the minister on this amendment, and they do relate to issues that have come this afternoon, particularly around the sentence of this amendment that reads, "A project related to the conservation or management of water." While the minister was able to say, "Well, it doesn't apply to certain things," he was able to also confirm, which was very helpful, that it could apply to the land assembly for reservoirs or dams. My general experience is that when something turns up in legislation, it's usually there for a reason. So my question to the minister is: can he tell us what reservoirs or dams may be in the works, maybe being considered, maybe even hypothesized, that would cause this to be written into the legislation?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question, hon. member. There is not a project at this time that is before me. Of course, my ministry is responsible for acquiring lands for the projects that other program ministries bring to me. When we looked at what our past experience has been, using the RDA legislation for the ring roads as an example – of course, there have been other dams and reservoirs that have been established in the province – it's the assembly of large tracts of lands that are required for very large projects. Our ministry saw that it was in the best interest legislation-wise to make a good piece of legislation to ensure that we had that area covered, too. That's another area where we're talking about large amounts of land that would involve multiple landowners. Of course, reservoirs and dams, those types of projects, are the ones that are required.

As the hon. member, I'm sure, is aware, Mr. Chair, there are processes and legislation in place, as I mentioned before, for regional water systems. All of those things are covered. I know that the hon. member is very familiar with that legislation because of past projects where there have been concerns about water moving from one system to another, and I know the hon. member has been very involved in those discussions.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Just to be really clear here because, as I say, my experience is that things turn up in the legislation for more substantial reasons than what the minister just indicated. I believe that in the minister's own constituency there's this special areas project, I think it is, which involves water transportation out into sparsely populated areas of eastern Alberta. I don't know the status of that project now, but does this bill pave the way, for example, for a reservoir to be established for that project so that the water might actually be contained for a longer period than would otherwise be the case? There has got to be something somewhere going on that's leading this particular clause to be being put into what is, after all, a pretty controversial bill. If it wasn't needed, it probably wouldn't be here. So does this relate to special areas, or is there any project anywhere in Alberta under any ministry that this member is aware of that meets this sentence?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Chair, to the hon. member, I wish it did apply to that particular project because I'm a big supporter of it, and I would love to see it go ahead. Unfortunately, on that particular project it is a form of off-stream storage that's being proposed, but there isn't a requirement for a reservoir or a dam or any structure to be built because Mother Nature, actually, put all of the landscape in place to manage that particular project.

To the second part of the question: I have not been approached by any program ministry with respect to a specific project, but we do know – and the hon. member knows – how important water is. There's discussion that carries on with respect to the need for off-stream storage, which, of course, would be the reservoir-type situation, or to consider on-stream storage, which would be the dam situation, that we may in fact need to do just because of the amounts of water that the hon. member is aware goes out of our jurisdiction, over and above what we have agreements in place for.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Now, just on this theme, there are serious concerns for flood risks in the Bow Valley for Calgary. In fact, we've seen significant flooding in Calgary itself and in some of the towns immediately south of Calgary. I can't remember if it's Turner Valley or High River, in the Highwood River and Sheep River and so on. One of the concerns or speculations or theories is that those

floods have been worsened because upstream there has been overforestation or there have been wetlands destroyed. Then that leads to the possible solution being some kind of water storage system upstream of Calgary and upstream generally in that area so that the water coming rushing down the mountains gets held back a little bit. Are those projects the kinds of projects that might be covered under this sentence? I mean, if this government is wanting to assemble land to help with flood abatement in the Bow basin, especially, you know, in the Calgary region, is that what this is for? There has got to be a reason for this sentence.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the hon. member: if the hon. member and all of our other colleagues in this House consider a project somewhere down the road that they feel best serves Albertans' needs with respect to the conservation or management of water, it's my duty as the Minister of Infrastructure to work with government to put in place those things that are necessary in order to accommodate your wishes. So should a project come along, I'll say, upstream of any community in this province where the hon. member and all of our colleagues decide that's necessary, I'm your servant.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

5:20

Mr. Kang: I had a question earlier. For the purpose of this act and the regulations a project is a public project. You know, there's a grey area between a public project and a private project. I will give you an example. We had Rancher's Beef. I think they walked away with \$42 million from this government, you know. They came to Calgary, and the city of Calgary wouldn't give them the water, so then they went outside the city limits. That was a private project, but that was being set up in the interest of the public for the ranchers. How will we differentiate between the private and the public project? There is a grey area here, sir. You know, some private outfit may come here, and then they are going to do this in the public interest. How will we differentiate, you know, that it is a private project or it is a public project?

I'm going to take it to section 5(1). We are talking about the market value under this section. "At the request of the registered owner of the land within a Project Area, the Crown shall enter into an agreement with the registered owner to purchase the land at market value." My concern is: what kind of criteria are we going to use for market value? Will it be the present value of the day, or will it be the value a year ago or the value when you are going to take over the land, or will there be some compensation in between?

If the owner

agrees to sell the land [to the Crown] and the Crown agrees to purchase the land but there is no agreement as to the market value of the land, the registered owner may apply to the Land Compensation Board or the Court of Queen's Bench.

How about the costs incurred, you know, for the poor little landowner? How is he going to stand up to the government? Is there any safety net in place for the landowner, that the government will be compensating him or her for their legal costs, if they incur any? This may drag on for a long time.

Those are my concerns, you know, with these amendments. What will be the criteria to find the market value? Those are the questions that I have for you, sir.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, a public project "related to the transportation of people or goods": it's quite a stretch to turn that into a butcher shop, so I don't think I need to follow that down any further.

With respect to market value, market value is an indicator that is not new to this legislation. As a matter of fact, market value has been used by all orders of government right back to my earliest and several of my colleagues in the House and members opposite even – I'm going back 30 years, pretty close; 25, 30 years. Market value, of course, is the indicator that all orders of government use, and it's based on the value of comparable properties without any encumbrances on them to be taken into consideration.

In the negotiation the other feature that's there – and one of the hon. members from the opposition party brought forward a reference to section 28 in the Expropriation Act as it relates to the negotiations. The powers there are not for government. The powers there are for a determination to be made by a third party like the Land Compensation Board, as an example, or another arm's-length group that's agreed to by both parties so that things can be brought to the table in the determination of the compensation that a landowner gets, Mr. Chair. That could be improvements that the person has on the property, any value that has been added to the property by that owner, plus the market value consideration on the land itself so that the land sales at the time that the person decides to sell are the ones that are used.

Market value is used, as I say, and has been for as long as I'm aware of by all orders of government, and the determination is at the time of the negotiation, the value at that time, so that if a person decided to use the land as they always have right down the line to within a year or two of the project being undertaken and then triggered negotiations with government, the market value at that time is the market value that they deal with. That's the principle that has always been used. It's the principle that all orders use.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've sat for the last two and a half hours, I guess . . .

Mr. Mason: Three.

Ms Pastoor: Three.

. . . and actually have enjoyed because I've listened to some of the debate, and I think it has been very good. That's partly why we're here, to be able to debate back and forth and ask questions and have them answered. I haven't really stood up until now to speak to this, but there was one thing, as I've listened over the last hours: "a project related to the conservation or management of water."

I remember in history, probably, once when I was at the Hoover Dam. In their museum in their interpretive centre there's a very large topographical model of the southeast of the United States. In that it showed what it looked like in the beginning, and then it showed as they added the dams and as they tried to play with nature and as they tried to move water. What they have now are dams and no water. I think when we have a sentence like this, we have to be very careful how we play with the water in this province. I come from southern Alberta. Water is exceptionally – exceptionally – important. But I will always remember – it stuck in my mind very clearly – lots of dams and no water. We certainly know where California and Arizona are today.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Mr. Kang: Mr. Minister, I was giving you an example of Rancher's Beef. Any other private project could be on the horizon or even in the future that will in turn serve the public. That's the clarification I was trying to get here for the grey area, that, you know, that private project could be in the best interests of the public. How will we differentiate between the two? That will be a private project, or that will be a public project. With an open-ended project related to the conservation or management of water or a project related to the transportation of people or goods, it could be CP Rail or it could be any ABC company. They want to do this in the public interest. How will this apply to their project? That's what I was getting at, sir.

The market value. There was this landowner by the airport, and they fought for years and years, and they couldn't agree on the market value. I know there's a definition for market value, but how will this system be made fair? You know, there should be something in there to speed up the process so this doesn't drag on in the courts for years and years. There was still no agreement, and there was some restraining order taken out by the city to kick them off the lands. That's what I was getting at, sir.

Those were my questions, my concerns as well.

Mr. Hayden: Just very briefly, Mr. Chair. The language is very clear. A project is a public project. There is no reference whatsoever in the act to deal with private projects, strictly public projects.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, are you ready for the questions on the amendment?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

5:30

The Deputy Chair: It has been requested that the votes be severed, so there will be five votes.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

[Motion on amendment A1E carried]

The Deputy Chair: Amendment A1 is carried.

This takes us to Bill 19 as amended. Any comments or questions on Bill 19 as amended? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to propose another amendment, and I'll pass that up to the chair.

The Deputy Chair: This will be amendment A2. I'll just ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: you're moving this on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll just take a moment. It's being passed out now.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move that Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended in section 10(1) by striking out "section 7(2)(a) or (b)" and substituting "section 7(2)." I briefly just want to explain that. If you go to section 10(1) in the bill, it says that you may appeal any matter under section 7(2)(a) or (b), but if you turn to section 7 of the act, you'll find that there's a longer list of things that an enforcement order may do. The present bill as it's written allows you to appeal (a) and (b) but not (c), (d), or (e). So the effect of our amendment is simply to allow an appeal of anything under section 7(2).

Right now the bill would allow an appeal of an enforcement order that may

(a) direct a person to cease the contravention specified in the order, [or]

(b) direct a person to stop doing something, or to change the way in which the person is doing it,

but not appeal an enforcement order that may

(c) direct a person to take any action or measures the Minister considers necessary to remedy the contravention, including, without limitation, the following:

(i) the removal or demolition of a structure that has been erected or placed in contravention of the regulation; [or]

(ii) the restoration of the land to the condition it was in before the contravention occurred.

You also under the present bill may not appeal an enforcement order that directs you to

(d) state a time within which the person must comply with the directions.

Nor may you appeal an enforcement order that may

(e) state that if the person does not comply with the directions within a specified time, the Minister will take the directed action or measures at the expense of the person.

We believe that these three subsections ought to be subject to appeal in the same way as the first two. All of those things, I think, require some level of appeal, so I would urge hon. members to support this.

I want to say that I hope the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre doesn't have any definitional questions for me on this particular amendment because I note that our conversation the last time caused the hon. Member for Peace River to change his mind about voting for my last amendment, and I would really like to give him the opportunity to vote for this. I thought it would have been a unique experience to see the government whip actually vote against the minister on a bill that the minister had put forward. I think that's really thinking outside of the box for whips, and it would have been an interesting result to see indeed. So I'm hoping that the hon. Member for Peace River will be with us on this one, Mr. Chairman.

You know, with that, I just think it's a question of natural justice. It's just a question of allowing people the right to appeal any of these orders and providing those same protections with respect to those orders that might be made as have been made by the minister on the first two.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak against this amendment, and I do so because the enforcement actions that are described in this legislation are those that have been used for the assembly of lands in the past. They're actually identical. The record of this enforcement legislation, I think, speaks for itself when we say that in 35 years only one enforcement order was ever issued, and it didn't even get to the point of enforcement, and it wasn't issued to

a landowner. In fact, it was a neighbour that required being served with an enforcement order. When I see enforcement legislation that works that well for 35 years, that's that well understood by landowners and works that well for government, I would suggest that we've got a winner.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I just think the wording of section 7 of the bill should concern everybody and probably does concern most citizens who've read it. What I'm referring to specifically is 7(1), which reads: "Where, in the Minister's opinion, a person has contravened a regulation." That's a very sweeping power to give a minister. [interjection] Sorry. The Minister of SRD said something?

Dr. Morton: Draconian.

Dr. Taft: Draconian. I think it's a draconian power – thank you – to give to a minister. What makes it doubly draconian, dreadfully draconian, drastically draconian, a genuinely dastardly piece of legislation is that most of what then follows cannot be appealed unless the amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is passed. I think we need to question the democratic basis of a draconian provision here.

I'll stop the silly word games because I think this is a serious issue. I think we need to question a law that defines an enforcement order as where, in the minister's opinion, somebody does something wrong and then actually prevents most of that section from being appealed.

5:40

I think that this is a reasonable provision if the minister is correct. I don't know if he is or he isn't. I'll take him at his word that those provisions haven't been needed. Then there's no harm in enacting this amendment. I don't see what the downside would be to enacting this amendment other than maybe forcing a slight revision to the drafting of the bill. Can I ask the minister, who has been very well engaged in this discussion – I want to give the minister kudos for that because a lot of ministers actually don't stay – what would be the drawback of passing this amendment, an amendment which to me just seems to give a basic, natural justice to a bill that otherwise does seem actually draconian? Is there a drawback to passing this amendment?

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak?

Dr. Taft: Well, I guess, Mr. Chairman, then, there isn't a drawback to passing this amendment. If there was, the minister probably would've said so. I think that it stands to reason that we ought to vote in favour of this, and I would urge all government members to just think this through carefully, to actually read what this amendment is addressing. It's very clear here that we are, through this legislation, curtailing people's basic democratic rights, and we are giving an enormous power to a minister that I think is unjustified. I am quite uncomfortable with the bill unless this sort of amendment is brought in.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Let me try this with slightly different wording,

which is commonly used in law, which is to sort of flip it on its head and say: what is the harm? What is the harm that would be caused if this amendment was in fact passed – that, I think, is at the root of what my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was trying to get at – if the following areas were appealable?

Currently section 7, where it's in the minister's opinion that someone has contravened a regulation that's under section 3, which is a very long section that talks about – well, I'll just refer people to it. In the hard-copy bill it's on page 4, but for those reading along at home, it's in section 3 of the bill. It's basically all of the control, restriction, and prohibitions section. So where someone has contravened that regulation, the minister can serve that person with an enforcement order, and the enforcement order includes directing a person to take any action or measures that the minister deems necessary, including the removal or demolition of a structure that's been put in place in contravention or the restoration of land to a condition that it was in before this contravention occurred. It includes stating a time that person has to comply to this and that if they don't comply with these directions within the particular time that is set out, once again, in ever-elusive regulations, the minister can take the directed – there are consequences to it. Let me shorten it by saying that.

What is the harm that is created here for the minister by including the section that says that the last words I just read through would be appealable? So far, the only one that can be appealed is the section that directs a person to cease the contravention and directs them to stop doing something or change the way they're doing it. But it doesn't allow them to appeal around the demolition or removal or the restoration of land and the timelines and complying within those same timelines. So what is the harm that is created, then?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. The enforcement actions in what you refer to are completely and totally consistent with the abilities of municipalities and the federal government in taking these actions to fix what's happened, like a land-use bylaw, as an example, or a zoning restriction with respect to the type of development that can take place. All of these things, all of these powers, are available right now to every municipality in the country to step in and do that.

Now, when we talk about fines and penalties that are referred to in the enforcement order, they are appealable through the courts. It is not at the decision of the minister or at the decision of government. The fines are appealable through the courts. To take action, to remediate a building situation, as an example, to move in: those are abilities that all orders of government have. They're not an abuse in any way, shape, or form. When a restriction is placed, be it by municipalities, by the province, or by the federal government, if they are not followed, all orders of government can move in, correct that, send the bill to the owner or put it against the land on a lien. I'm sure that hon. members with municipal experience in both opposition parties are very aware of that.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're now on Bill 19.

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Renner: Mr. Chairman, given the close proximity to the assigned adjournment hour, I would move that this committee now rise and report Bill 17 and report progress on Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 17. The committee reports progress

on the following bill: Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Assembly call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

Issue 28

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome back.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance with our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I had an opportunity to attend a prayer breakfast. Part of the conversation went to how important it is that we be with our children and include them in our lives and provide some guidance. You know, no town that I know does a better job of including their young and raising them and teaching them values than the town of Viking. It's a real honour for me to be able to introduce a classroom of kids from Viking and their teachers. Their teachers are Mrs. Muriel Hill, Mrs. Marlene Taylor, and their assistant is Mrs. Debbie Snider. There are about 40 of these young people here, and I really would like them to rise and receive the very special warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you 19 grade 5/6 students from Fort Assiniboine school, which is located in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teachers Charlene Assenheimer and Debbie Breitzkreitz, program assistant Fleur Whitley, parents Ellen Carlson, Leah Holmes, and James Aitken, and principal Allan Menduk. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to welcome 13 fabulous students from Lakedell school in my riding of Drayton Valley-Calmar. These 13 bright grade 6 students along with parent helper Tim Belec, principal Clint Neis, and their teachers, Jennifer Chinnery and Arlene Jackson, have toured our Legislature and learned a great deal about our provincial government and our building. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visitor from Lebanon. Mr. Abdul Majid Awad is visiting family and friends in Edmonton. Mr. Awad is one of the most prominent lawyers in Lebanon. Currently Mr. Awad is the head of the Protocol Department in the Prime Minister's office, the Rt. Hon. Fuad Siniora. Mr. Awad is accompanied by his brother Youssef, who is a resident of

Edmonton. They are both seated in your gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have a second introduction. It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 36 students from Father Lacombe high school, located in the beautiful constituency of Calgary-East. The students are accompanied by Dr. Adriana Bejko, Linda Almond, and Mr. Gabriel Arok. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of staff who are joining us here in the Legislature today who work throughout the Ministry of Environment. I understand that there are about 50 people here who have travelled from as far away as Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer as well as a number from the capital region. I know I share the same view as my colleagues here in the House when I say that these government employees are welcome here, and I thank them for joining us today. I appreciate your interest in the legislative side of government.

Mr. Speaker, on Earth Day I think it's most fitting to have so many people here who have built a career working hard to protect Alberta's environment each and every day. They're seated in the public gallery, and I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I introduce three individuals today. The first is Mr. Marvin Romanow, the new president and chief executive officer of Nexen Inc. Of course, Mr. Romanow has replaced legendary oilman Charlie Fischer as president and CEO.

In addition to that, we have Mr. Pierre Alvarez, who's no stranger to members of this House. Mr. Alvarez is the former head of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and is the recently appointed vice-president of corporate relations for Nexen.

Third is a good friend who is the director of government relations for Nexen and, besides being a good friend, helps keep me in this seat in the Legislature. I would ask Mr. Brian Humphreys, Mr. Marvin Romanow, and Pierre Alvarez to stand and receive the welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members of this Assembly two very distinguished guests. Miss Alora Deonie, seated in the members' gallery, is here to assist me in commemorating Cancer Awareness Month. Alora was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma two months before her 17th birthday. She's a remarkable young woman who, among other things, is considering pursuing nursing upon graduation from high school in order to allow her to become a pediatric oncology nurse and return to work in the same unit where she was treated less than a year ago. Miss Deonie is accompanied by Ms Angeline Webb from the Canadian Cancer Society. We're very grateful to have them here. I'd ask them both to rise and receive our warm welcome.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two

introductions. It is with pleasure that I introduce to you and through you a young soccer team, known as Team India, seated today in the public gallery. Team India just won the Mini World Cup soccer tournament against Team England, that was held right here in Edmonton, with 76 teams representing 40 different countries. I had the privilege of having lunch with these fine young Albertans just a few minutes ago. Team India is led by coaches Nirmal Herian, who, unfortunately, was not able to join us today; Miles Hunt, who is here today; and Kanwaljit Sidhu as well the president of EDSA, a committed volunteer, Mr. Kahan Virk. I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

For my second introduction it is also an honour to introduce to you and through you a constituent of Edmonton-Ellerslie and a prominent member of the community, Mr. Manjit Dhaliwal. Mr. Dhaliwal is the owner of many Liquor Mart retail stores in Edmonton and around Alberta and was a proud sponsor of Team India, whom I just introduced a few minutes ago. Mr. Dhaliwal was also a candidate for the Conservative Party in the 2004 provincial election. At this time I'd ask Mr. Dhaliwal to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Volunteerism is embedded in the fabric of all Albertans. It is this quality that has helped this province to lead this nation. I'm pleased to say that Albertans volunteer more than anyone in this country. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly seven staff members of Volunteer Alberta, which works to build the capacity of the volunteer sector by strategically connecting leaders, organizations, and networks. Seated in the members' gallery above are executive director Karen Lynch, Rosanne Tollenaar, Cindy Walter, Lisa Michetti, and in the public gallery are Trang Nguyen, Carol Cheung, and Gillian McDonald, a summer intern. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good friend of mine, Mr. Paul Pharo. Paul flew up to attend the Premier's prayer breakfast this morning. He's an active member of our community, is on the University of Lethbridge Senate, and he's the incoming president of the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask Paul to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce a very distinguished guest to you and through you to members of this Assembly. This person is the president of a construction company in my constituency, and in 2004 he came in second for mayor of Calgary. He needs no introduction. His name is Oscar Fech, and he is sitting in the public gallery. I'd ask him to stand. Oscar is also a resident of Kingsland, a couple of blocks away from where I live. I'd ask that we please give him the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly seven of my favourite hard-working staff members from the Kidney Foundation of Canada: Ms Heidi Erisman, Miss Joane Marot, Barb Foxall, Theresa Jenkins, Sabrina Sperber, Kerstin Kluge, and Sheelah Zapf. They're here today to promote National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week, which takes place from April 19 to 26. I will be discussing more about the Kidney Foundation and why they are here today in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would ask the visitors to please rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce a couple from my constituency who are here in Edmonton for the Premier's prayer breakfast. This couple, Joan and Rod Dyrholm, are salt-of-the-earth Albertans, warm-hearted, hard-working, and tenacious. I'm proud to have them in our Calgary-Bow constituency. I ask Joan and Rod to please stand so that my associates can give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: As this is Earth Day, it's my pleasure to inform all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta that 61 years ago today the hon. Member for Little Bow joined the world population. Happy birthday.

Members' Statements

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

Cancer Awareness Month

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Cancer Awareness Month, held each April, and to salute the important work of the Canadian Cancer Society and its many volunteers throughout Alberta. The society's most recent statistics indicate that 2 in 5 Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. In Alberta alone this means we can expect approximately 15,800 fellow Albertans to be diagnosed with cancer this year and more than 6,000 of us to die as a result of cancer.

For many the word "cancer" evokes fear of the unknown. Diagnosis marks the beginning of a devastating, overwhelming, and harsh reality for patients and for their families and communities. As we observe Cancer Awareness Month this year, there is much to be hopeful about. For instance, an individual diagnosed with cancer in the 1940s had a 25 per cent chance of survival, in the 1960s it was 33 per cent, and today the survival rate stands at 62 per cent, Mr. Speaker. These improvements are due in large part to the great strides made by cancer researchers, many of whom are supported by the Canadian Cancer Society, which last year contributed more than \$49 million to the most promising projects in Canada. This funding supported several Alberta researchers, including Dr. Peter Forsyth, investigating one of the most highly aggressive types of brain cancer, and Dr. Frank Jirik, investigating lung cancer, the leading cause of death among both men and women in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this investment in research together with advances in prevention and the tireless work of hundreds of volunteers that support patients and their families is the reason that, thankfully, we see Albertans like Alora Deonie living to tell their story. They have provided us with concrete hope for a future without cancer. As

legislators may be ever mindful of their courage and determination as we work to improve our public health care system.

Thank you.

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

Flexahopper Plastics Ltd.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about a very successful Lethbridge business, Flexahopper Plastics Ltd. Flexahopper is the largest rotational moulder in the Pacific Northwest. They export all over the world and have 600 products and custom products for other manufacturers, including the aerospace industry.

This company was a spinoff from Duncan Industries, an enterprise my family owned, so I have watched as a father, Jim Spenceley, and then his son Bill built this company to the success it is today. These men had extraordinary vision, way ahead of their time. Jim made the company global, Bill made the company green, and they are leaders in their industry in energy conservation. That's the story for today.

The company implements green innovations from all over the world. They have had energy audits performed, acted on them, and saved major dollars in return. The plant has substantially reduced its environmental footprint and uses renewable energy sources such as wind energy from Bullfrog Power. The plant reuses its waste heat to heat the plant and will soon preheat plastic before the mould process and thereby reduce the heat required by the ovens. The truck fleet is all hybrids. Flexahopper is presently looking at a technology that can reduce their process energy use to 10 per cent of what it is now.

This company is a true example that a green dollar spent can create many more dollars and grow the economy in a responsible, environmental way. They should be commended for their vision and dedication.

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

Volunteerism

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize National Volunteer Week. The last Statistics Canada data show that more than 2 million Albertans over 15 years of age volunteered over 214 million hours, an average of 175 hours per volunteer, in 2004. In addition to the traditional areas of sports and recreation, arts and culture, services for the elderly or disabled, and programs that help integrate new immigrants into communities, voluntary organizations have also evolved with our changing social context to expand the engagement of volunteers into areas of suicide prevention, supporting victims of rape and domestic abuse, and mentoring the increasing number of disadvantaged young people, just to name a few. The impact from Albertans who give their time, talents, and energy to our voluntary sector is enormous. Together with the professionals in the 19,000-plus charities and nonprofit organizations the nonprofit voluntary sector adds support, balance, and value to the public and private sectors in our society.

Mr. Speaker, some preliminary studies suggest that volunteering increases the probability of feeling socially connected, accumulated through social relations among individuals within groups based on trust grown of participation and social engagement with others within the context of shared norms and expectations of reciprocity, or what is defined as social capital. Strong social capital, or strong social relations, are viewed as a potentially important remedy for social cohesion, harmony, and economic prosperity. An increasing

number of countries and states are paying greater attention to the development of social capital in their communities. With the growing economic and social prominence of the nonprofit sector, initiating or supporting more empirical studies in this area would be beneficial for a fast-growing, highly mobile, and increasingly diverse province such as ours.

In closing, I would encourage that we all take time this week to thank those who volunteer and make our communities better places to live, work, and raise a family. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Bank of Canada this week took a bold step towards being transparent by stating that the current interest rate decrease will be held until the second quarter of next year. This was done primarily to combat a major problem in a recession, that of re-establishing confidence in the markets by letting people know what's going on. This is a lesson that the Alberta government needs to pick up. To the Premier: will the Premier begin to re-establish confidence and come clean about what other taxes will be imposed to deal with our deficit?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what I did say yesterday, when the question was raised about tax increases, is that our goal as a government is to ensure that we remain competitive in all of the taxes, that we're the best jurisdiction in Canada and, indeed, North America to do business. We're committed to that, and we'll continue to do that.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Well, will the Premier begin to re-establish confidence also by clarifying to Albertans what health services are going to be on the chopping block?

Mr. Stelmach: I did say in this House last week, when questions were asked by the opposition, that we're going to have to make some very difficult and tough decisions. Our goal here is to improve access to health. It's also to improve quality of care but at the same ensuring that we sustain this health care system that all Canadians and Albertans enjoy for the next generation and the generation after.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: will he improve confidence further in this province by recognizing our unhealthy dependence on oil and gas revenue and show Albertans a long-term savings strategy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a good point talking about a long-term savings strategy. In fact, when I look at other jurisdictions around the world, Alberta is the only jurisdiction here in the country of Canada and, indeed, in North America that has \$17 billion saved to deal with these very difficult economic times. The other thing, just as a comment in terms of I think the hon. leader used the word "transparency" in showing direction: it's one thing to lower the interest rate to .25; it's another thing for the chartered banks to ensure that they give the same consideration to the consumer that wants to borrow money from the bank.

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

Wait-list Registry

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Mazankowski Heart Institute is not open. Albertans are waiting longer and longer in emergency rooms. The one-year deficit from Alberta Health Services is somewhere between \$500 million and \$1.3 billion, and now the Alberta wait-list registry is the most recent casualty of health system restructuring. This Premier and his government have no credibility in health care. To the Premier: why is the information system on the wait-list registry seven months out of date?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll allow the minister of health to answer the technical questions. All I can say is that, once again, we're going to work together with all Albertans to ensure that the decisions that we make are those that are going to improve access, improve quality of care, ensure that no matter where you live in Alberta you do have equitable access to health care, and at the same time, though, ensure that the next generation enjoys the program. It's cherished. We're committed to publicly funded health care in the province of Alberta. We want to do whatever we can to sustain the program, and we will continue to work with all of the health care providers to make those difficult decisions.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, talk is cheap. How long will Albertans have to wait in order to see a real wait-list?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health is working with a number of health care providers. He has initiated discussions. That information, of course, will come back to government because at the end of the day we're the ones that will make the decisions based on the advice we receive. Once we come to that point, then we will of course communicate those decisions and work with Albertans to choose the best method of delivery in different parts of the province and ensure that we do stand above the rest in terms of health care provision in Canada.

Dr. Swann: Well, Alberta Health Services has been functioning for a year now, yet the Alberta wait-list registry is still providing seven-month-old information and still identified by health region, Mr. Premier. How will the Premier report on access to services in specific areas of the province since there is only now one provincial health authority?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know that the health board has been in place for some time, but this is a monumental task. We're now consolidating all of the other health care regions into one in terms of the annual reports, issues tied to pension plans – believe it or not, each area had its own audited pension plan – all of the issues tied to staff sick leave. All of those things are coming under one board. The board has made, I believe, unbelievable progress, but it has a lot of work to do. That's why they're meeting publicly in different parts of the province, being very open and transparent with Albertans in trying to find a way to ensure good delivery of health services in Alberta.

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

Government Benefits Definition of Spouse

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The benefits package of government union employees defines a spouse as "a person of the opposite sex to whom you are legally married." Same-sex partners are covered under the document but are defined separately as a

"benefit partner" instead of a spouse. This prejudice highlights the discrimination felt by the gay and lesbian community from this Tory caucus. To the Premier: why does the Premier's government continue to use outdated and dismissive terms instead of the real term, spouse?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. leader and some of his members were in the news conference when the CBC raised this issue, so you almost could tell that it was going to come up as a question today. Three times – three times – I had to repeat to the news correspondent the fact that it does not matter whether it's a same-sex or opposite-sex marriage; the benefits are the same. They're all treated fairly. That's the most important thing.

Dr. Swann: This is about a correct legal term, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier agree, then, that spouses, regardless of whether they are same-sex or opposite-sex relationships, should be defined equally?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, again, the very same question came up, and I said that the benefits apply fairly, equally to both, whether it's same sex or opposite sex. It's the importance of how the couple is treated, and that means in fairness, in equal benefits. It doesn't matter if it's opposite or same sex. That's what we're doing here in Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the Premier is listening to the people who are most affected by this offensive decision. Will the Premier apologize to government employees, the people that actually work for him, who have been deeply offended by the manner in which the government has handled this issue?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, as minister responsible for human resources there are many relationships that are undefined or, certainly, don't meet either of the criteria of a spouse or same-sex marriage. There are people who live together. There are people who enter into interdependent adult relationships. The responsibility of our benefits program is to ensure that everyone who is entitled to the benefits gets the benefits. It's not the responsibility of our benefits program to drive social change or other aspects. Everyone in Alberta has the opportunity to go to the Human Rights Commission or court if they believe they have been slighted in any way.

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

Long-term Care Accommodation Rates

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government met behind closed doors with executives from private care companies and is conspiring to double long-term care fees for seniors on fixed incomes. The Tory government has already tripled their drug costs, reduced their eye care coverage, failed to create the long-term care spaces they need, and now is planning to allow gouging of the few seniors who can get in. The question is to the health minister. When will this minister stop his relentless attack on Alberta seniors and stop letting private companies set his government's long-term care agenda?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, as is typical with this particular member, he has one of his fronts out there creating fear amongst seniors relative to our long-term care facilities. This ministry is responsible for the provision of care. The Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports is responsible for accommodation rates, and I'll let the minister respond.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Long-term care fees rose over 7 per cent just in November, and now the government wants to double them. Government officials are having closed-door meetings with private health care corporations, the very people who stand to make a profit on the backs of Alberta seniors. The result is that people who need long-term care in Alberta will not be able to afford it when they need it. Will the minister publicly identify the private companies he has met with in secret so that seniors know where to send their pound of flesh?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Looking after seniors in long-term care is a very important issue for this government. We do meet with the industry on a regular basis. They come to us, and they inform us of how well things are going and when they need some help. We have identified in our continuing care strategy that was announced publicly in December that we are looking at ways of changing how fees are administered. At this time we are not contemplating an increase in fees.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that seniors in many private long-term care facilities are not getting the care they need. They're missing meals, not being toileted, and they're being left alone in bed for hours because private health care companies need to turn a profit. Now this government is going to double fees because the private health care lobby has it over a barrel. My question is to the minister. Will you stand in this House today and commit that you will not increase long-term care fees for seniors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I have to strongly disagree with some of the comments that the leader of the third party has made across the way. I don't know where he got the idea that we would be using a hundred per cent increase. He's quite out to lunch on that topic. We are reviewing concerns and issues with long-term care all the time, and we are inspecting them annually. We will bring up a website that will tell you anybody in long-term care that is not in compliance, and we're preparing that website now.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've noticed in the last couple of weeks that there have been a number of reports relating to the environment that have been released. My questions are about those reports, and they're all for the Minister of Environment. Earlier today the minister released the 2008 results for the government's greenhouse gas emission reduction program, and the headline trumpets that the province has realized 6.5 megatonnes of reductions. How does the minister account for the actual emissions reductions within an intensity-based system?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question because I think there's been a lot of torquing going on over this issue of intensity versus real, actual reductions. The fact of the matter is

that we have about a hundred emitters, large industrial emitters, in this province that come under our legislation. They are compelled to come into compliance with our legislation by reducing their emissions. We measure those emissions. They either contribute to a fund or they have real reductions. In this case these are real reductions due to investment in technology and offsets.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. For the same minister. Last week the federal government submitted a national inventory report for greenhouse gases to the United Nations. Now, that was for 2007. It noted that national emissions had risen by 4 per cent from the previous year and 26 per cent from 1990 levels. This is something my constituents are asking me about a lot. Oil sands emissions are no doubt part of the growth in this increase of emissions, but I'm wondering what role the oil sands play in the overall emissions for Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the answer is that oil sands emissions play a role that is in keeping with so many other growth-related industries across the nation. Oil sands do contribute to an increase, yes, but the national growth works out to about 29 megatonnes, and oil sands account for about 3 megatonnes of that 29. In fact, Canadian emissions have grown by 155 megatonnes since 1990, and in 2007 the oil sands as a whole emitted 35. Yes, oil sands emits CO₂, but so does everyone else.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. The National Round Table on Environment and Economy released its recommendations last week on a national emissions reduction program, and they recommended a carbon price of \$100 a tonne by 2020 and \$200 a tonne by 2025. Our current price here in Alberta is \$15. I'm wondering if the minister can explain where we're going with that.

Mr. Renner: Well, the member correctly points out that we have in place now a charge of \$15 a tonne. In fact, in the announcement we made this morning, that generated about \$82 million in 2008. But I remind you, Mr. Speaker, and all members that that \$15 a tonne is the only jurisdiction in North America that is being assessed. Yes, we recognize that over time that number is going to have to increase, but we can't increase the compliance mechanisms in Alberta until the rest of North America catches up with us and puts some of their own in place.

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

Climate Change

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earth Day is a good day to set the record straight on Alberta's climate change strategy. The Minister of Environment has repeatedly claimed that Alberta is first on climate change, but according to the latest Environment Canada report, Alberta is world leader only in the production of greenhouse gases, not in their reduction, and we're dead last in air quality. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister reverse the government's present tepid commitment to wind power and its energy potential by working on the transmission line bottleneck in southern Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of gridlock, so to speak, is the responsibility of the Minister of Energy, but I can tell this member that this government is committed to deal with the issue of access to the electrical grid. In fact, there are hearings taking place as we speak to deal with that exact issue. The wind is in southern Alberta. The demand is in central and northern Alberta. We need to be able to connect the two.

Ms Blakeman: I'm glad he agrees with me.

Back to the same minister: given that most of the 21 states and three provinces that have adopted absolute caps have put those targets into legislation, can the minister verify his statement from Monday that "as of today Alberta is the only jurisdiction in North America" that has any regulations on climate change?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are no other jurisdictions in North America that have in place and in operation legislated reductions on a facility-wide basis with respect to CO₂. I stand by my comments that I made earlier this week. They are true. I defy this member to prove me wrong.

Ms Blakeman: Happy to.

Next question back to the same minister: Harris from Calgary wants to know when Albertans can expect targets for renewable energy productions that are backed up by a long-term plan emphasizing energy efficiency – wind, solar, and geothermal – and reducing our reliance on coal-fired energy projection. That would be environmental protection.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there are so many people that get wrapped up in this cloak of targets and aspirational legislation, but the fact of the matter is that it doesn't matter what your targets are if you don't have a road map to get there. We have a map to get there. We are moving the envelope along. The fact is that there are all kinds of targets all over the world. No one is meeting their targets except Alberta.

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

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Page 47 of the Auditor General's 2009 report contains a follow-up to an earlier 2001-2002 audit on emergency preparedness. The AG felt a strong and urgent need to improve the co-ordination of emergency preparedness plans by government and a reassessment of the government's Emergency Operations Centre, which is located in the Edmonton-Calder constituency. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What have you done to address the Auditor General's recommendations?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do believe in being accountable and appreciate the recommendations that do come forward by the Auditor General. The Auditor did ask us to make a plan, and we did exactly that. We created the Alberta Emergency Management Agency in 2007, and it co-ordinates the government responses. We have updated the emergency plan, a comprehensive plan for the province and for the partners, and we have defined the role. The Auditor General and I are very happy with the progress that is being made.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is doing a good job for a relatively new organization. There are undoubtedly some kinks to work out. What are you doing to ensure that the province is prepared for emergencies?

2:10

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we believe that preparedness is a continual and ongoing process. This year we are increasing training. We're exercising the plans for staff and partners. We're going to continue to improve on the co-ordination between ministries and between industry partners and the partners that we do have in emergency management to ensure that we have a good sense of preparedness for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago at the Horizon oil sands project two workers from China were killed when the structure they were building collapsed. Yesterday 53 charges were laid against their employers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. If those had been two paid farm workers killed when a grain silo they were building collapsed, no charges could have been laid because in Alberta OH and S doesn't apply to paid farm workers. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: where's the justice in that?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, any time there's any workplace injury or any fatality in Alberta, those things are unacceptable in this particular province. We are very, very actively working to reduce injury rates. We're continuously working with the minister of agriculture on the farm issues. We're looking at what could be done and what can be done. If those same things had happened on the farms, the workers' families have access to the courts as any other Albertan has access.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, in responses to the charges being laid, the Premier boasted, and I quote: we've got to be clear to anybody that's doing business in Alberta that the safety of workers is paramount. End quote. He should have added: unless they work for our friends who run corporate farms. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: doesn't this government see that protecting all workers except paid farm workers is morally bankrupt?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, farm employers have access to WCB, and there is a certain amount of protection that's available through them. Farm workers are exempt under our existing legislation. As I indicated, we are looking at reviewing that. We've hired a consultant to work with the farm communities to see what can further be done.

Dr. Taft: Well, the minister knows that WCB is entirely optional on farms. The Premier, whose leadership campaign was bankrolled by corporate farms, yesterday said, and I quote: it doesn't matter whether it's temporary workers or Albertans; we do mean business when it comes to the safety of workers. End quote. This government alone in Canada exempts corporate farms from mandatory WCB, from OH and S, and from most of the labour code. To the same minister: why does this government grant rights to temporary workers from China but not to born and bred Alberta workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think I've explained many times in this House that, you know, we recognize that the farms are places where actual families live and where individuals raise their particular families. We still recognize that farms are not the traditional workplace. They don't necessarily follow routines that occur from nine in the morning until five. We are monitoring the situation, and we're looking at seeing what changes can be made.

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

Special-needs Education Funding

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been continuously recognized world-wide as among the few top educational systems. As leaders we should continue to raise the bar of excellence. Of great interest to my constituents and myself is how we teach those with severe disabilities. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Education. What is the minister doing to ensure that students with severe disabilities are receiving needed resources to enable them to learn and grow to their potential?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member and all members will know because we've talked about it in the House, we are working with the setting the direction for special education in Alberta process to redefine the policy framework by which we deliver education to all students and particularly to those who have special needs or special attributes. That setting the direction framework process will culminate in a conference in June. That conference will help us to define a policy framework and a new funding formula, which will be brought forward to work on implementation over the course of 2009 for implementation in 2010. That agenda has been clearly set out to all school boards in the province, and the process is under way.

Mr. Cao: My only supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. What is being done in the interim to ensure that the learning needs of students with disabilities are being met?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, all school boards have the obligation to make sure that all students in their jurisdictions get the educational opportunities that they need. We've been clear to them throughout this process that we would maintain the funding levels that we had in place until the process was completed and a new funding formula was put in place.

I should say that that funding formula funds every school board in this province at a higher level than the existing policy framework would actually call for. However, we have said to school boards that if they believe they have students that meet the funding requirement formula in its current state that we're not funding, we'd be happy to look at those situations and make sure that they get the funding for those students.

Gaming Conference

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I've had some good times in Vegas, but I'd be hard pressed to spend \$4,500 on a three-day trip there. To the Solicitor General: are you saying that the taxpayers were better served by your attending a conference in Vegas than spending three days at the University of Alberta's Gaming Research Institute?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Speaker, the hon. member yesterday in his

preamble talked about knowing when to hold them and when to fold them. I would suggest that he should consider folding. When you get the opportunity to go to a conference and listen to world leaders on social responsibility regarding gaming – we have experts in our own province, but again it's good to get a world-wide perspective.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General said that he wouldn't waste this House's time by dealing with a \$100 hotel bill, but these are public funds. We could conclude the debate if he would commit to tabling an itemized accounting for travel, hotel, and miscellaneous expenses.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. Airfare was \$1,416.32. Accommodation was \$1,729.27. Meals were \$244.12. Of the \$1,200 he talked about yesterday in incidental expenses, \$1,121.38 was for fees to pay for the conference.

Mr. Hehr: I really thank the hon. minister for doing that. If he would have done that, he would have saved me some time and trouble here in the House. I thank the hon. member for saying that. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, anything further?

Mr. Lindsay: All I can say, Mr. Speaker: it's an honour to set the record straight.

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

Workplace Safety

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government distracts the public from its failures by waiting years before charging private companies that disregard worker safety. Yesterday's half-hearted attempt to appear serious about two fatalities at the CNRL tank farm is another example of this government doing far too little far too late. They can't even serve a third of the charges that they laid because the company is based in China. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why won't you admit that your workplace safety standards are just too weak and contributed to these deaths?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated a little earlier, we sympathize with those who have lost their lives. Any time somebody is injured or loses their life in Alberta, we extend our deepest sympathies and find it totally unacceptable. Having said that, we've got some of the best inspection services anywhere, and the fact that these charges were laid after a lot of research and a lot of work is a testament that we are taking this seriously.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing has become crystal clear in this investigation: CNRL had been chronically negligent in ensuring the safety of their workers. But we can't know how many other job sites exhibit the same negligence or whether the conditions at CNRL are even better today because this minister is relying on industry to self-report. He hasn't got enough on-site inspectors to keep an eye on things before accidents happen. Why is this minister letting oil patch executives set safety standards instead of establishing mandatory committees where workers can have a say in their own safety?

2:20

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the oil sands activities, especially around Fort McMurray, are very, very busy ones. We've got

thousands of people working there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and in the oil sands activities the injury rates and death rates are amongst the lowest across the province of Alberta. They lead in terms of their safety records. Having said that, we do have additional inspectors on-site, and we do work with those individuals and do spot inspections and other inspections on those individuals that have the worst safety records.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this province is the only province in the country that does not have mandatory work-site health and safety committees. This government is more interested in spinning the image of a safe workplace than in actually making it so. These two men died because this government let industry get away with chronic, long-standing breaches in standards, period. No one is checking up on things, and this government doesn't care. To the minister: why won't you stop offering platitudes and sympathies and immediately implement mandatory work-site safety committees just like exist in every other province in the country?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, this government believes in working in partnership with employers, labour or safety associations, and employees to ensure that health and safety remain a priority even with the economic conditions that we're in. Just this morning I joined the Workers' Compensation Board and employees as a representative of government and saluted those companies who were very active partners in injury reduction. They earned \$70 million in rebates for the work that they're doing. So we are creating an environment of safety amongst employees and employers and are actively pursuing those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Innovation Voucher Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have long been looking for assistance in getting across that chasm between successful research and a finally successful commercialization. One of the first actions coming out of the nine-point technology commercialization action plan is the innovation voucher program. I'm aware that it's designed to give entrepreneurs a financial boost, but one of the key questions is: how are the funds being distributed? My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Are we sending cash directly to the companies applying for these vouchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Yesterday was a very important day in the voucher program as we did announce Alberta's first round of innovation vouchers, which totalled more than \$5 million and through 24 different communities within the province, so across this province. They're going to expand the innovation capacity within the province. The dollars, or the vouchers, the cash does not go directly to the companies themselves. Rather, the vouchers are like a coupon to take to an approved service provider within the province to have whatever that application was for performed, and we are paying the provider.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is again for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. With all

of the program cuts in this recent budget how is there more money for a program like this?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we found when we had the initial round of applications was an abundance of great ideas being thought up throughout all areas of the province, and rather than say no to a whole raft of great ideas which will take us a step closer to that knowledge-based economy that we have the Premier's vision of, we reallocated some dollars within our budget to add more dollars to the voucher system, and I think that's a great investment on behalf of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question, again for the same minister: while government is assisting companies, what are the financial responsibilities of the participating companies?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, for generations this government and private stakeholders have written a number of success stories, and the voucher system is going to be another one of those positive stories in the book. But while this assistance enables small businesses to leverage their limited resources by sharing the costs of commercialization, the businesses must be willing and able to cover a minimum of 25 per cent of whatever those costs might be. It is a two-year program as part of kind of a pilot project. We're looking to see how well the program will work before we decide how much we may expand or change the program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Police and Peace Officer Training Centre

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When times were good and his wallet was flush, the Solicitor General got plenty of attention about the Fort Macleod police college. Can the Solicitor General tell me why, after waiting these many years, a P3 partner is still being sought for the construction of this facility?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great opportunity to talk about a very worthwhile project down in Fort Macleod. As the hon. member indicated, initially we were looking for a vendor to come forward who would be prepared to build the facility using their capital, and we were prepared to lease the facility. That didn't work out the way we wanted it to, so we're now looking at a P3 partnership in the traditional manner and at other options. Hopefully, in a very short time we will be able to move the project forward because it's still very much needed in the province of Alberta.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that, Mr. Minister.

A further question. In the meantime I'm sure that we've been writing cheques. To the same minister: how much have Albertans spent on this project so far?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, I don't have those exact numbers here, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've done some work with our staff in regard to going out for requests for information on it. I can't put a number on that, but it's certainly nowhere near the price tag that the facility

will cost at the end of the day. The information we have will help us move that project forward in the best interests of all Albertans.

Ms Pastoor: Well, I would accept anything in writing. Thank you.

On every previous occasion we've asked about this issue, the minister has assured us that everything is going according to plan. Mr. Minister, I think that you probably have spoken to part of this, but what is the plan now? Is the centralized training recommended by the MLA committee still a priority for this minister?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, it's an excellent question. Obviously, this particular facility is certainly a priority for this ministry and is a priority of this government, but in the economic times we have today, we have a number of priorities that we're trying to address. At the end of the day we'll see where it falls on the list of priorities.

School Capital Construction

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, Calgary is in need of new schools for its growing population and to replace or modernize older schools in the city. Last year the Calgary board of education in its capital plan requested 11 new schools and modernization of 14 more. However, according to the board none of these were approved in this year's Department of Education budget. My questions are all for the Minister of Education. How is the government planning to eliminate the backlog of schools required by the Calgary board of education when there's no funding for new schools in Calgary?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, Calgary and Edmonton have really been the two jurisdictions that have been addressed well in capital for education through ASAP 1 and ASAP 2. In fact, there are 19 schools being built or planned for early construction in Calgary as we speak, four of them in the Calgary separate and 15 in the Calgary public jurisdiction. Those schools will create 10,000 new spaces by 2013. The projected enrolment growth is 5,300 students by 2013. So not only are we addressing immediate enrolment growth pressures, but we're also replacing old facilities.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the House how many new schools will be funded in Calgary in the next year?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have my doubt that they'll be able to handle any more than the 15 that are coming online in the next little while. That's a lot of schools to commission and put online. But, as I said, we're creating 10,000 new spaces in the next three years. There's a projected growth of 5,000 students. There's provision in there for modernization, for replacement of old facilities, and putting schools in the right places, which is one of the policies that this government has had. In the Calgary situation, while they are going to need planning for the future, currently they're in one of the best positions in the province.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary board of education says that it needs at least \$40 million to address the infrastructure and maintenance backlog but last year received only \$18 million and even less the year before. Will the minister ensure that the Calgary board of education gets the necessary funds to bring its maintenance standards up to par?

2:30

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to entertain questions on this from the hon. member as we discuss my estimates in committee. I think that's next Wednesday night. He can perhaps

help me with how we take the \$97 million we have in that budget and stretch it across all the projected needs.

However, as I mentioned, 5,000 new spaces over and above growth projections: clearly, this will allow the Calgary board of education to replace the worst facilities that they have with new facilities, which takes that maintenance off the table. The other thing which I would advise them to do in the interim is to take the \$35 million that they have in their operating surplus, take a look at the key areas of priority that aren't being funded, and perhaps, if some of them need immediate funding, put it right into that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Special-needs Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Depriving severe special-needs children by freezing their limited support grants is an exclusionary practice which defies human rights legislation. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has trumpeted enshrining parental rights in legislation, but apparently this government considers children second-class citizens. To the Minister of Education: how do you justify investing less than half of what our B.C. neighbour provides in per-pupil annual support grants for severe special-needs students?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier in the House, we're having a very good look at how we do the provision of special needs in this province. It's not unique to Alberta. That type of look has happened in Ontario and Saskatchewan. We need to go from a medical model to a needs-based model, and we need to make sure that we're providing the right kind of funding so that every student can maximize their potential and every student has the opportunity to learn. That being said, all jurisdictions across the province know that the process is in place. They're participating in the process. Parents are participating in the process, and they're very excited about getting that process right. In the meantime under our current model we are actually overfunding in that area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Does the minister expect Calgary's 1,000 special-needs school-aged children, their loving parents, and their dedicated teachers to put their lives on hold until his special-needs consultation process has concluded? B.C. is doing it now. What's our excuse?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we're funding the students in Calgary that are eligible under the policy framework for special-needs funding. In fact, we're funding almost twice as many students as are eligible under the policy framework for special-needs funding. That is exactly why we need to look at the policy framework, to make sure that it's not a question of the medical diagnosis of students but a question of the real needs in education for the students and how we make sure that every jurisdiction can provide the supports that these students need, whether they're assistive technology, whether they're aides, whether other types of instructional help. We're in the process of making sure that we get that right. In the meantime they're funded for twice as many students as they have.

Mr. Chase: It's your method of counting that's flawed.

Why does the Education ministry through its underfunding force Calgary public and Catholic school boards to rob regular-program

Peter to pay for severe special-needs Paul because this government refuses to recognize 337 severe special-needs children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there has to be a methodology in place for how you determine who has special needs. There is a methodology in place, and as the hon. member quite rightly says, everybody agrees that there needs to be changes to that. We're in the process of developing those changes. However, I should say that there was a \$30 million increase in special-needs funding last September, in mid-year, notwithstanding that under our current formula – I shouldn't say this too loud; the Auditor General might have a look – we're funding twice as many students as actually qualify under the formula. I'd also say, as I said earlier in the House, that the Calgary board of education has an operating surplus, so they shouldn't be taking any money out of other students' programs if they're having an operating surplus year to year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Aboriginal Relations Communications Budget

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some recent reports indicate that the communication budget for the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations has nearly doubled over the past year. With both First Nations and Métis in my constituency can the minister tell us why his communication budget went from \$237,000 up to \$415,000?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed unfortunate when only partial information gets communicated to the public through the media or elsewhere. The fact is that the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations became a stand-alone ministry last year, and the costs related to that part of the budget reflect primarily staffing costs whereas this year those costs are carried forward and are added onto by supplies and services costs, publications costs, and other costs related to our new organizational structure.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you tell us how this increased budget will benefit First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the fact that we have a variety of very important programs that help aboriginal communities become more self-sustaining, more self-supporting, and overall improve the quality of life for those communities is one thing. Communicating them effectively to those partners, to those stakeholders, and to the public in general is absolutely, entirely another matter. In fact, it's more critical. As our Premier has often said, we have a lot to talk about, we have a lot to communicate, and we're very proud to do exactly that.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mrs. McQueen: That's it. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Municipal Affairs Hosting Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the *Alberta Gazette* on November 17, 2003, the Minister of Municipal Affairs spent entertaining at a minister's open house at the Alberta

Association of Municipal Districts and Counties \$2,471. Last November the minister spent at an open house at the same event over \$12,600. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why did the minister's open house budget at this convention go up in six years by over \$10,000, and the taxpayers must foot that bill?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I don't have the exact documentation, but I'm sure that the numbers that are used are being skewed to some sort of an advantage.

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order.

Mr. Danyluk: Let me say to you that in this particular situation, there is no doubt that there are 360 municipalities in Alberta with approximately five or six councillors per municipality. There are also support staff. It is extremely important that MLAs and I have an opportunity to meet and have discussions with those councillors and reeves and mayors.

The Speaker: I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and the hon. minister is just going to rethink the words he used a minute ago.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. The same event held on November 19, 2007, two months plus a couple of weeks before the provincial election in 2008, cost over \$14,000. Why did this open house cost taxpayers 400 per cent, or over \$11,700, more than the same event in 2003? Surely, we can have a party without billing the taxpayers for all this money.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I do apologize for my wording.

The Speaker: That wording would be: "Skewed to some sort of an advantage."

Mr. Danyluk: Yeah. I'll apologize for "skewing."

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, what I will do is get an accountability to the hon. member opposite for the figures that he's asking for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I can appreciate that, but it's the taxpayers that the hon. minister owes an answer to for this lavish hosting expense.

Now, given that the Public Affairs communications expert has suggested that there's no hospitality budget not only in this hon. minister's department but in the entire government, what controls does the minister have on these hosting expenses when they rise so dramatically from one year to the next and one event to the next?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of the responsibility of my ministry is communication and having dialogue with municipalities and councillors, reeves, and associations. The input that I have is that what does take place under my ministry is under my jurisdiction. Do I have responsibility? Yes, I have responsibility.

2:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you rose on a point of order, but the chair did interject. You heard an apology coming from the minister. Did that negate the reason to go forward with the point of order later?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker. For the minister's convenience I will photocopy the *Alberta Gazette's* respective pages going back to 2003 and send him a copy.

The Speaker: Perfect. Then there will be harmony.

We'll proceed to Members' Statements here in just a few seconds from now.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry for the mix-up that occurred at the beginning of today's question period.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure again to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 34 grades 10 to 12 students from Father Lacombe high school. The students are accompanied by their teachers Dr. Adriana Bejko, Ms Linda Almond, and Mr. Gabriel Arok. The hon. Deputy Speaker and I will be meeting with the group at 2:30 for a picture down in the rotunda. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have one more I forgot to mention at the beginning of question period. Mr. Fayssal Jamha is seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Organ Donation

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned earlier, the week of April 19 to 26 is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week in Canada. Organ donations save lives, improve the health of thousands of Canadians, and can even create long-term savings for our health care system.

The Kidney Foundation of Canada supports the development and implementation of government-funded provincial programs focused on living donors. By supporting the reimbursement of living donors for out-of-pocket expenses, the Kidney Foundation hopes to encourage more Canadians to donate. It is their hope that financial barriers will not discourage Canadians from donating an organ. Recipients of kidney transplants from living donors have shorter wait times for surgery and experience superior health care outcomes. In 2007, Mr. Speaker, 4,195 Canadians were waiting for a transplant; 71 per cent were waiting for a kidney. Organ donation is crucial to help save lives, especially kidney donations.

During this week the Kidney Foundation of Canada is encouraging Canadians to donate a kidney to someone in need. If you would like more information on kidney donation, please visit the Kidney Foundation's website at www.kidney.ca. I strongly encourage my

colleagues and everyone in this House to become an organ donor. Saving lives begins with each and every one of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Armenian Genocide

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Adolph Hitler said: who today remembers the annihilation of the Armenians? He then proceeded to methodically exterminate the lives of over 6 million Jewish people. Every year in April we remember the innocent Jewish victims on Holocaust Memorial Day.

On April 24 of each and every year people of goodwill around the world, including Canada and the United States, remember another genocide, the first genocide of the 20th century, the brutal annihilation of over 1 and a half million Armenian men, women, and children.

There is a connection between the Armenian massacre and the Jewish Holocaust. They were both predetermined, carefully planned genocides. Because the world did not hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions, Hitler correctly assumed that he, too, would be able to commit crimes against humanity with impunity.

Ronald Reagan, President of the United States, said:

Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it – and like too many other such persecutions of too many other peoples – the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten.

As we join with other nations around the world in remembrance of family and friends lost in these massacres, we are reminded to reflect on other times of persecution and genocide. We can also remember and pay tribute to the brave Albertans who fought during the world wars and those who still fight today to defeat the tyranny of evil.

As we honour the memory of those who suffered in the many massacres that have darkened the history of the world, we can reaffirm a commitment to fight against racism, violence, hatred, and persecution. We can also remember that hope survives these atrocities. Today many people in Armenia and Turkey work together to support peace and reconciliation through the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission. If anyone in history should ever ask again, "Who remembers the annihilation of the Armenians?" we can say, "We remember."

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

Earth Day

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and recognize Earth Day, which, as you know, is an event coordinated world-wide every year to raise awareness of what each of us can do to lessen our impact on the environment. Today we can recommit ourselves to ensuring that the air, water, and land we all share is protected for this and future generations of Albertans.

It's also a day to remind us that sometimes the simplest effort can be a catalyst for change. In Lethbridge, for example, a group of dedicated volunteers is spending today cleaning up a portion of the coulee hills that surround the city as a part of the second annual Coulee Clean-up, that runs April 20 to May 10. These coulees act as a catch basin for trash and other debris that gets deposited there every winter during our southern Alberta chinook winds. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is just one of the many examples that demonstrate how simple acts can have a significant impact on our environment.

I know each member of this House has made a personal commit-

ment to be greener, and I applaud every Albertan who has done the same. But I believe this year it is especially important to embrace the principles of Earth Day. This year, when the world is mainly focused on economic uncertainty, we must keep our eyes on the environment during these tough times. While it would be easy to drop our guard as we reach for economic recovery, we must resist taking the easy way out.

As legislators Albertans have entrusted us with the job of protecting the environment throughout this great province, a province that is home to some of the most incredible natural beauty to be found anywhere in the world. Mr. Speaker, I think all members can take pride in what we've achieved together. Our environmental laws are sensible and effective. They uphold the delicate balance between the environment, the economy, and responsible energy development, and they keep Alberta focused on doing the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing a day celebrated across the Earth for the Earth, Earth Day.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I would like to present a petition, which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government not to proceed with Bill 19 (Land Assembly Project Area Act) and to consult directly with citizens and concerned landowners and their organizations before proceeding with any further changes to the way public land expropriation is conducted in the province.

The petition has 92 signatures.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling 18 signatures on the theme of petitioning the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

Introduction of Bills

Bill 41

Protection for Persons in Care Act

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

The act supports safeguards provided for seniors and persons with disabilities by enhancing the protection of vulnerable adults and ensuring abuse complaints continue to be addressed effectively.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 41 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a publication entitled *The Potential Impact of Canadian Federal and/or Provincial Tax Credit Incentives for Volunteer Participation*. It was prepared for Volunteer Alberta, Mount Royal College, and the Muttart Foundation.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of the March 2009 survey findings, *Impact of the Economic Downturn on Alberta's Nonprofits & Charities*, prepared for the nonprofit, voluntary sector leaders of the ANVSI by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two copies of a petition to table that I received last week at a public event in Edmonton. These documents are signed by people from Edmonton, from Ponoka, from Calmar, from Devon, from all over the province, actually. They are asking for a cease-and-desist order on the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness regarding the dismantling of our public health care structure. This petition was organized by the Friends of Medicare.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. The first is a copy of the Peacekeepers Day program that took place at the Peacekeepers Park at what was once the air force base of Lincoln Park. In 1966 my father became the commanding officer of the personnel selection unit on that base, and we lived a mere stone's throw away from the monument. It was a moving and remembering occasion.

I would like to table five copies of the Vertigo Mystery Theatre's announced plays for the 2009-2010 season.

I would also like to table the appropriate number of copies of the TransCanada-Alberta Music Series, that took place at the Epcor Centre for the Performing Arts. Among the featured Alberta artists were Joni Delaurier and Troy Kokol, who wrote the wonderful song for Shane Yellowbird, *Pickup Truck*. It came to number one on the country charts.

It was my pleasure to be in the company of the Deputy Premier, who was a graduate of William Aberhart senior high school in 1967. William Aberhart senior high school in Calgary-Varsity celebrated its 50th anniversary this past weekend.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Did I get this straight? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore graduated in 1968 from high school?

Mr. Chase: May I rise?

The Speaker: Absolutely. I'd like to hear this.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Actually, I was graduating from Ernest Manning in 1967 at the time the hon. Deputy Premier was graduating from William Aberhart in 1967. We were centennial graduates.

The Speaker: That was a long time ago, wasn't it?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd have to agree with the length of time that appears to have passed since then.

I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific programs on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate that staff were delayed in answering calls from residents and hazards were created when there was only one staffperson available to lift patients where two staffpeople were required.

The Speaker: Actually, hon. members, I graduated from high school in 1963.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20

Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before I begin, I want to confirm to this House that I was born in 1975 and graduated in 1993.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your indulgence. I'm pleased to rise today to begin debate on Bill 20, the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009.

This government recognizes that retirement income is needed for Albertans to provide for themselves in their senior years, and that's not a reference to anyone in this Chamber. While Albertans participate in federal retirement income plans such as the Canada pension plan, we know that it is important for individuals to save for their retirement and rely on their own resources. Registered retirement savings plans, otherwise known as RRSPs, allow for self-employed individuals as well as individuals who do not have employer-sponsored pension plans to save for their own retirement.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, individuals who purchase RRSPs sold by a bank or credit union, also known as noninsurance RRSPs, have no creditor protection for their retirement savings. This means that creditors are able to recover the debt that they are owed from the money that is actually in the RRSP. The Insurance Act already protects insurance-based RRSPs from creditors, but currently noninsurance-based RRSPs have no such protection.

The amendments proposed in this piece of legislation will change the law so that creditors will not have access to the funds in noninsurance RRSPs, deferred profit savings plans, known as DPSPs, or registered retirement income funds, RRIFs. However, if the owner of the plan withdraws money from the plan, whether it's a one-time amount or monthly withdrawals, then this money is available for the creditor. This legislation does allow debtors to keep a specific amount of the withdrawal to provide for themselves and for their dependants as already prescribed by the act, Mr. Speaker. This is similar to the laws that currently apply to employment earnings. It's important to note that this new legislation will not apply where family maintenance orders are enforced.

Bill 20 brings our province into line with our neighbours, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, who have enacted or are enacting similar legislation, as well as the exemption in the federal bankruptcy legislation.

A provision is also being added to exempt registered disability savings plans, as I mentioned, RDSPs, from creditors, Mr. Speaker. RDSPs are a new plan that became available pursuant to the federal Income Tax Act just this past December 2008. RDSPs are intended to help disabled individuals or their parents or representatives save

for long-term financial security for a disabled individual. An individual must first qualify for the disability tax credit in order to establish an RDSP. This government, through the ministries of Seniors and Community Supports and Employment and Immigration, has exempted RDSPs from the assets and income used in determining eligibility pursuant to the assured income for the severely handicapped, otherwise known as AISH; Alberta seniors' benefit, ASB; and income support, or IS, programs.

Mr. Speaker, complementary with these changes amendments have been made to the Trustee Act regulation to allow trustees to invest in RDSPs on behalf of their clients. Fully exempting RDSPs from creditors encourages families of persons with disabilities to plan for the future needs of their disabled family member. It also provides opportunities to increase their independence, which is consistent with this government's goal of independence for all Albertans.

I encourage all members to support Bill 20. With that, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board on behalf of.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the schooling thing, I'm still sworn under witness and secrecy protection: I never went to school, I don't know anybody that did, and anybody that says they did is lying.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise I would like to move Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009, legally transfers the full pre-1992 unfunded liability to the government effective September 1, 2009. The amendment act will also incorporate changes to the payment and governance arrangements pertaining to the pre-1992 unfunded liability.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:00

Bill 27

Alberta Research and Innovation Act

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll let everybody keep guessing as to when I graduated, although I think you know, so you can tell the House if you'd like. It is my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act.

This bill is an important step in my ministry's work to achieve one of the mandates given to us by the Premier. He asked us to develop and implement a framework that defines roles and mandates for the provincially funded organizations that support world-class research and innovation in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, if we want to be strong players globally, then we need to focus on the areas where we have jurisdictional advantage and align our priorities.

As outlined in the recent throne speech, the new Alberta Research and Innovation Act will strengthen and align the province's entire research and innovation system. It will promote and provide for the

strategic and effective use of funding and other resources to meet the research and innovation priorities of the Alberta government and of all Albertans, which includes the development and growth of new and existing industries. The new model will help Alberta researchers and entrepreneurs better realize their potential as creators of world-class discoveries and products.

The act will enable my department to implement the new roles and mandates framework for the provincially funded research and innovation system. Enabling our government to align and strengthen the research system, we'll be better able to realize greater social and economic benefits for Albertans and others beyond our borders.

The organizations involved in this reorganization are the Alberta Science and Research Authority, Advanced Education and Technology's five research institutes – energy, life sciences, agriculture, forestry, and information and communications technology – the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, operating under the trade name of Alberta Ingenuity, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Research Council, and iCORE. The legislation will allow us to transform these 10 existing entities into one new advisory body on science and innovation and four new board-governed provincial corporations.

Under the act the new advisory body will be called the Alberta research and innovation authority. Mr. Speaker, this board will be comprised of leaders from Alberta's science, technology, and business communities, and we expect it to also have members with national and international expertise. If we want to compete globally, we need to continue to receive high-level strategic advice to the government on key research and innovation matters. This advisory body will be an important element of the strategic planning needed and will build on the viable work that has occurred over the past number of years with the current advisory body, the Alberta Science and Research Authority.

Mr. Speaker, the world is changing. Research and innovation activities are becoming more interdisciplinary, with multiple teams working on particular research areas. The global environment requires Alberta to compete with many other leading jurisdictions. It was time to transform our advisory body on research and innovation, and this new authority will have a renewed mandate given to it by the government of Alberta.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, the legislation also provides authority to establish four new provincial corporations. These corporations, which will be created by regulation, will consolidate the functions currently being undertaken by a number of existing organizations. They will facilitate strategic research and industry development in health, bioindustries, energy and the environment, and technology commercialization. One of the key roles of these provincial corporations will be to take government priorities and turn them into solutions, which is necessary if we want to be successful in diversifying our economy.

The first provincial corporation, the health organization, will work mainly in the context of a health research strategy.

The second corporation, bioindustries, will focus on our renewable resource areas of agriculture, forestry, life sciences, and biotechnology. While there are unique aspects of agriculture and forestry research and innovation that will be maintained, there are increasingly areas of common interest such as biorefining.

The third body, the energy and environment organization, will focus on two critical areas of research and innovation for this province. It will build on our strengths while also focusing on sustainability.

The fourth corporation will focus on technology commercialization and development and support for knowledge-based industries. This organization will be responsible for a number of things. The

first will be to consolidate tech commercialization activities currently done by many different organizations. This would include the actions under our bringing technology to market action plan. The second will be to support the development of emerging knowledge-based industries. It will also work closely with companies and entrepreneurs to facilitate a clear path to access those programs, largely by working with regional organizations throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, the act sets out a governance model by creating two committees to promote co-ordination, integration, and accountability across the research and innovation system. The first is the Alberta research and innovation committee, which will advise the minister on the co-ordination, mandates, roles, activities, and initiatives of the provincial corporations established under the act. Members of this committee will include the chair of the Alberta research and innovation authority, the chairs of the provincial corporations established under this act, and potentially other members appointed by the minister such as the chair of the Alberta Enterprise Corporation.

The second committee to be established is the cross-government portfolio advisory committee. This committee, comprised of cabinet ministers, will further link and align government ministries' research objectives to the work of the new provincial corporations. This advisory committee will advise the minister on funding matters for the provincial corporations based on the strategic research and innovation plans developed by the corporation. This will strengthen our efforts to find real solutions to challenges being faced by Alberta today as well as discover economic and social opportunities from research activities.

Mr. Speaker, this approach builds on what stakeholders told us during our consultations. They said that our government's priorities need to be better aligned and that organizations need to work closer together as many research and innovation initiatives cross a number of disciplines.

Continuing to support basic research here in Alberta is an important foundation of the new framework. While it's not specifically addressed in the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, the ministry will be working closely with postsecondary institutions to identify research capacity requirements to support the long-term outcomes of the provincial corporations and also the research capacity requirements identified by individual postsecondary institutions. This support for basic research and innovation and the development and retention of highly qualified people will be critical for Alberta to be competitive in key areas of research and innovation. We remain committed to the principles of excellence and peer review for Alberta's research funding programs, and we will work closely with the postsecondary institutions and the new corporations on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, although it's not specifically addressed in the legislation, I would like to touch briefly on another important part of the overall framework, and that's a new service within the department that we're calling the connector. The connector will be a mechanism to direct inquiries from companies, researchers, and other interested parties and connect them to organizations and individuals that can address their questions and their ideas related to research and innovation. Many of these inquiries to the connector may also be directed to one of the four provincial corporations under this act, depending on the topic of the inquiry. Not only will our system be more aligned, but it will be easier to navigate. You could think of them as a concierge service for research and innovation.

The work that has taken place over the past year has brought us to this stage of development. We consulted with our stakeholders, who told us that the system is too complicated, too fragmented. We

asked for input on two major consultations, one in July and another in October of 2008, as well as many, many one-on-one meetings over the past several months.

We also talked to other government departments that are linked to the Premier's mandate for our department, and we looked at the feedback from international panels that reviewed the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research in '04, the Alberta Science and Research Authority in '07, and Alberta Ingenuity in '08.

The feedback we received from all of these sources was quite consistent. They told us that we need to make some significant changes. The system is not as effective as it needs to be to achieve the vision. Roles and mandates of stakeholders aren't clear. Individuals and companies who need support have difficulties navigating the system.

The new framework will improve Alberta's research and innovation system by making it less complex, more focused on strategic priorities, more consolidated, with less overlap and stronger links between the players. It'll be more transparent for other government ministries and key stakeholders so that everyone can understand where they fit on the system. It's essential that we're better organized so that we can capture the most value from all innovations developed in Alberta and so we can attract top people from all around the world to come here and share their knowledge.

The pan-Alberta approach that we're taking with this framework is similar to what we did just over a year ago for Alberta's postsecondary education system. That's when we developed the roles and mandates framework that is seeing the concept of Campus Alberta take shape to better meet the needs of students, taxpayers, and society. With Bill 27 we're again looking for collaboration around common goals, especially as they benefit the taxpayer. With the foundation of the new roles and mandates framework for Alberta's provincially funded research system we have the principle of capturing value for both societal and economic benefit.

3:10

Government priorities are informed by and respond to market opportunities and societal needs. This link back is important because it will help us keep our priorities relevant. We know that the province will need to look to research and innovation for solutions to the challenges that we face. We want to build a system that can provide answers to society's questions and deliver on them. The new framework will support the R and D agenda of other ministries as they search for the solutions to issues like pine beetles or water research or developing carbon capture and storage solutions. The new structure will support emerging knowledge-based industries to diversify the economy, specifically around industry development, commercialization, and collaboration.

Mr. Speaker, it's difficult for many of the current organizations being transformed through this legislation to manage funding for long-term research and innovation projects when they operate within the limitations of government's fiscal year requirements. Research projects are typically multiyear in length, and funding can fluctuate on an annual basis due to factors such as the stage of the research. Therefore, the legislation includes a consequential amendment to include the provincial corporations established through section 7 of the Alberta Research and Innovation Act under section 2(5) of the Financial Administration Act. This will allow the new provincial corporations to carry forward funds not spent in one fiscal year into the next.

Mr. Speaker, the act continues the endowment funds currently set out within the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Act and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act. This model will continue as it provides stability

to our research and innovation system by keeping the endowment funds in perpetuity and accessing a certain percentage of the funds each year to support excellent research and innovation. Payments from the endowment funds will be made based on a request from the minister of AET to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. To better manage and to sustain these funds, the legislation establishes a maximum percentage of funding that may be accessed from the endowment funds in any fiscal year. We will address any transitional requirements to move to this new funding model through the regulations to be prepared.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, these changes will give us a system that is focused on priorities but, most importantly, is responsive enough to deliver on those priorities. As a province of our size breaking into this global industry, we need to do it right.

So that's our new framework. It will result in changes in the roles for some players within the system. Those changes will result in new relationships among some of the players, but the players themselves are telling us that we need to make the changes so that we can have a better pan-Alberta research and innovation system. Ultimately, we believe the framework will allow us to be more successful in doing what needs to be done to address societal needs, add value to our resources, diversify into a knowledge-based economy, and be a serious global player in the new knowledge economy.

To make all of this happen, we all need to work together: the government of Alberta ministries, the postsecondary institutions, the scientists, the researchers, the corporations, the politicians, everyone.

With that, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 27.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move second reading of Bill 28, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Sometimes good governance can be likened to a good hockey team. Some bills are all-star forwards, bringing crowds to their feet as they break in on a goal. Sounds good. Others are like stay-at-home defencemen. You know, they're colourful, they're overlooked all the time, but they're hard-working and effective. What's this got to do with Bill 28? Well, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that Bill 28 is the equipment manager. [interjection] Well, if we're talking about birthdays and who left school, I'm going to talk about hockey.

The Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 might be kind of humble and overlooked, but it's nonetheless an important part here. As mentioned when introduced a couple of weeks ago, this is an overarching bill that will provide government with tools to help the province achieve goals set out in the provincial energy strategy while eliminating the inefficiencies found in the current energy legislation.

Now we're getting into the meat of it, Mr. Speaker. In all, Bill 28 will amend 10 and repeal two acts previously passed by the Alberta Legislature. Passage of this act will promote sustainable energy development and increase regulatory efficiencies. This includes amendments to existing legislation that will facilitate taking bitumen as royalty in kind, optimize benefits of oil sands production for Albertans. What's interesting in the amendment is that it doesn't restrict the province to collecting bitumen and only bitumen. The amendment anticipates that at some point the province may wish to consider royalty in kind for products from bitumen to attract a better

price or to achieve a strategic objective relative to value-added processing.

The bill also facilitates expansion of the industry-funded orphan well fund, which a lot of people have had concern about, to include large facilities, including large in situ oil sands processing facilities, sulphur recovery gas plants, and stand-alone straddle plants. The key purpose of the amendment is to prevent the costs of abandonment and reclamation of large upstream oil or natural gas facilities from being borne by taxpayers should the original lessee become defunct. In such event the industry-supported fund would pay the licensee's share of costs.

I think these are the benefits that Albertans would appreciate. It also shows that the province and industry can work together to create economic opportunities for the benefit of Albertans while minimizing the industry's environmental footprint at the same time.

I think there are mutual benefits in even the most administrative aspects of Bill 28. I'll use an example of an electronic transaction, Mr. Speaker. At present industry and the Department of Energy conduct electronic transactions for everything from the sale of mineral rights to payment of royalties owed. Giving the department the authority to require others to conduct their business with the department through approved electronic means is therefore only common sense. Likewise, it makes sense to give the Energy Resources Conservation Board tools to enforce its collection of administrative fees from industry.

In turn, Bill 28 makes amendments to three different acts: the Coal Conservation Act, the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, and the Oil Sands Conservation Act. Those amendments will streamline the regulatory process without affecting the ability of the ERCB to act independently to regulate safe, responsible, and efficient development of the energy resources. I'm speaking of the amendment to not require an order in council for ERCB-approved amendments to project approvals. Mr. Speaker, this doesn't change the application process; it simply eliminates the final sign-off. In other words, the substantial rule remains the same, but the process is streamlined.

Any amendments being sought by a project developer are going to be subject to public hearing if need be and adjudication by the ERCB, which is quasi-judicial. The proposed amendments will not change this, nor does this alter the requirement for developers to notify any potentially affected third party of the application.

There are examples where a clause or descriptive phrase is written one way, and I'll give you an example, Mr. Speaker. The Oil and Gas Conservation Act is written slightly different than the Mines and Minerals Act. If that clause or descriptor is to mean the same thing in both acts, then they should be written the same way in both acts, and this bill will accomplish that. It's also important that our vibrant energy industry and the legislation that guides it continue to evolve to ensure that it operates in the best interests of all Albertans.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, and without making any further comments on who's got the favourite hockey team, who's going to win tonight, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 28.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair now calls the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. I rise to speak in favour of the amendment that was moved, I believe, on my behalf by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood yesterday. That amendment, as has already been discussed, refers to amending section 10, which deals with the appeal and the scope of appeal available to people affected by the new bill. The amendment would expand the scope of the issues or the items that would be available for appeal and would therefore expand the redress which would be made available to those who believe that they've been in some way . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. The amendment has been defeated.

Ms Notley: Pardon me?

The Chair: Amendment A2, that was introduced yesterday, has been debated and defeated. Hon. member, do you wish to continue on the bill as amended, not the amendment?

Ms Notley: Absolutely. Sorry about that. I didn't read the very last pages, and I was misinformed as to the status of that amendment.

I've already spoken generally in terms of the merits of Bill 19, and as most members of this House know, we are deeply concerned about a number of different components to the bill. Ultimately, as we have said before, we are of the view that, really, all these amendments to the bill are not preferable to simply going back to the drawing board and revisiting the bill and engaging in a full, comprehensive consultation with the landowners who would be impacted by it as well as other Albertans who are concerned that their interests will be negatively impacted.

However, given that the government seems unprepared to engage in that kind of comprehensive consultation, I would nonetheless like to make another motion to the House with respect to that bill. I will distribute it now and wait for it to be distributed.

The Chair: While the pages are distributing the amendment, the chair shall designate this amendment as A3.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, continue.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes. I rise to make the following amendment. I move that Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended in section 12(1) by striking out "is doing or is about to do" and substituting "or is doing."

The rationale behind that proposal relates to the type of authority that the government is giving to itself through the current section 12 of the bill. The current section 12 of the bill gives to the minister the ability to go to the courts and apply for an injunction to stop people from doing things which are in breach of the act. There's no question that the concept of injunctive relief is not new. It's quite a reasonable concept, and it often appears in a whole bunch of different pieces of legislation. Injunctions have been around for as long as courts have been around, I assume.

However, this particular clause as it's currently constructed appears to us to provide far more wiggle room and ultimate authority to the government and to the government lawyers when they appear before the judiciary with respect to their ability to obtain an injunction than would normally be the case. In essence, what we

currently see in section 12(1) is that where the minister applies to the court, if it appears to the court that “a person has done,” reasonable enough, “is doing,” very reasonable, “or is about to do,” not so reasonable, “any act or thing,” and then this is very interesting, “constituting or directed toward the commission of an offence under this Act,” the court may then go ahead and issue injunctive relief not only asking someone to refrain from that behaviour but also asking them to do something else altogether.

Now, to me this clause includes a significant amount of discretion and authority for the government that I think is unnecessary. There’s no question that in law there are, I guess, sometimes acts that if they occur, the minute they’re done, the damage is done. But that needs to be very, very limited. In our view this whole issue of “is about to do” something that would constitute an act that is “directed toward the commission of an offence” gives far, far, far too much breadth to the government.

For instance, let’s say the government were about to exercise some of its authority under this act and were about to designate a piece of land as a project area for the purposes of a dam being built. Let’s say a bunch of farmers got together to say that they were not happy with this. They were meeting, and in the course of that meeting there was discussion about doing something illegal. Now, the way this is worded right now the government could actually apply to the courts to get an injunction against the very meeting. They could actually tell the farmers that they can’t meet because – we don’t know – it may well be that the meeting will be directed towards the planning of the commission of an offence.

What this language does is create an offence, and it triggers in the government a right to take very significant action against Albertans too many steps away from the actual commission of an offence. It gives to the government the ability to assess that someone is about to do something, and the something which is prohibited is not even the commission of the offence; it’s something that is directed toward the commission of an offence.

3:30

Well, you know, I suspect that people do a lot of things prior to committing an offence. How do you decide what is or is not directed towards the commission of an offence? I would suggest that something like this could potentially be used to get an injunction against landowners actually meeting to talk about how they’re going to respond to an upcoming initiative on the part of government. I would suggest that this ultimately reflects the absolute worst-case scenario, the nightmare scenario of big government that everybody is constantly, particularly in this Assembly, railing against. Yet this is what this government is giving itself the authority to do or wants to give itself the authority to do.

What our amendment would do is essentially strike out the ability of the government to seek an injunction where someone is about to do something; rather, they would only have that ability where someone is doing something.

Now, at the end of the day one of the problems with – well, there are so many problems with this bill, as we’ve talked about before. But this is another clear example where in addition to giving government tremendous authority over the rights of individual Albertans, tremendous ability to overlook the public interest and the needs of not only landowners but of people who rely on the land being used in a certain way, that is in everyone’s best interest, it also just creates tremendous, tremendous uncertainty.

This particular section, we would argue, is one of those sections which also creates tremendous uncertainty. It is, in particular, the combination of the section that we’re trying to strike out and the phrase “or directed toward the commission of an offence.” As I say, when you put those two together, you are at that point two or three

or four actions away from anything that is illegal. It’s incredibly speculative. It will put a tremendous chilling effect onto Albertans who wish to meet and engage and talk about their response to a particular government initiative, whether it is or is not ultimately in the public interest.

It’s with that in mind, then, that we are putting forward this amendment in an effort to reduce the level of uncertainty and to bring the government’s authority to take very excessive action much closer to the act, which would trigger it and which would rightly trigger it, so the commission of an offence. The commission of an offence should trigger the ability of the government to take very serious action, not the pondering of maybe in the future doing three things, at the end of which one might possibly commit an offence. That is an incredibly presumptuous and extensive level of authority and power that no government needs, certainly not this government.

The other thing that needs to be analyzed as well in that section is that were the government to actually have the court conclude that somebody was thinking that they might do something that, were it to be followed by another thing and another thing, might possibly lead to the commission of an offence, they not only have the authority to ask that person or ask the court to have that person refrain from doing that thing, but they can also ask the court to have that person do any act or thing that it appears to the court may prevent the commission of an offence under this act. Then suddenly there’s a broad range of remedies that the courts can seek against someone who may have thought about taking action in the future, that if followed by another action and yet another action after that, might ultimately amount to a commission of an offence. I think it just makes some sense that this language is far too extensive and that it gives far too much authority to the government, far too much discretion to the government, far too little certainty to Albertans.

Thank you.

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Chair, I rise in opposition to the amendment. By way of explanation, because of restrictions that are on land, this would be only used in an area where, in fact, the municipality has already informed the landowner that they’re in contravention of the development restrictions and has issued a stop order through the municipality before the court.

Another instance that is a possibility – and this is from experience, which is why the wording is in there – is that if someone was stacking the framing materials for a foundation on a right-of-way, that’s not a problem, but if they were bolting them together and digging in the ground, it’s in everyone’s best interest that that activity be stopped before the expenditure is made by the person and actions have to be taken to reverse that.

The wording in this is consistent with wording in other enforcement legislation that we have, and it’s there for that purpose: to save dollars for everyone. It comes from instances that we have actually been through already.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This business of: just trust us; the wording is there in other documents. If it’s there in other documents and it has yet to be challenged, then I’m sure that under Bill 19 it will be challenged.

Every time justice is portrayed, justice is portrayed as a woman with a blindfold holding out a balance. The type of portrayal of justice that government is providing is an individual with crystal balls. They can look into the future and determine that an individual is going to commit a crime. Based on telepathy or ESP or their hocus-pocus looking into the crystal ball, they can predetermine that

this individual whose land is about to be expropriated is likely to commit some type of a criminal offence in order to hold onto their land. That's a bit of a specious argument, to say the least. It's speculative. It's pre-emptive.

The government has already been caught illegally spying. They've been caught wiretapping when it came to electricity rights-of-way. Now they want to arrest people before they've committed a crime because they think that they might commit a crime.

Mr. Hancock: Do you have any idea of the difference between arrest and enjoin?

Mr. Chase: Well, we're enjoining in discussion, and right now you're arresting my conversation.

To continue, the whole notion of the predetermination of a crime, the unfulfilled lack of evidence that on the basis of suspicion alone you could prevent somebody from continuing on, whether they were enjoined or whether they were arrested or whether they were prevented in any manner from carrying out a legal opposition, is very concerning. The whole idea of guilt, you know, that you're innocent until proven guilty . . .

Mr. Hancock: That's what the court case is about.

Mr. Chase: And that's the whole point.

We tried to, as I use the term, save your bacon before by having this referred to committee so that you could do it right. That was rejected, so we're now specifically talking, through the chair, about A3, which is saying: let's deal with the past evidence, let's deal with ongoing evidence, but let's not attribute an action or an intent until such a point as it appears that the commitment is without a doubt.

3:40

Obviously, if somebody has a knife as opposed to having a stapler, and their hand is up here, then there's some type of restrictive action that is required. But in this particular case to presume that this individual is going to interfere in some way with the carrying out of, questionably, whether it's justice or injustice when it comes to expropriation is just too far fetched.

In the regulations associated with the TILMA bill, for example, the minister can reach back in time and change the rules. Now, that was rather ridiculous, but what's even more ridiculous is somehow hopping in the time machine, racing to the future, indicating that the person is going to commit something illegal; therefore, we'd better take them out of the game right at this point without any proof. It doesn't make sense.

Because the House leader does have the legal background which I lack, if he could provide examples of where suspicion of a crime or the committing of a crime is sufficient to enjoin an individual, that would be appreciated. The way I interpret this is that it's: "We believe you're guilty. Therefore, because we believe you're guilty, it's easier for us to deal with you, put you on ice, take you out of the game, remove you from participation, take you from a hearing and just simply isolate you. Then we don't even have to deal with you. Forget a hearing; we just simply disqualify you."

I will sit down and look forward to examples of how wrong I am.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to participate in the discussion this afternoon on Bill 19, specifically amendment A3, as proposed by the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Strathcona. There have been amendments to this legislation, of course, from the members of the third party, members of the government. I, too, have amendments to this legislation that, hopefully, at some point we'll get to.

However, we're specifically with the hon. member's amendment. My look at this in Section 12(1) certainly indicates – first off, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say that I support this amendment. I think the members across the way should thank the hon. member for pointing this out.

If I understand this correctly, this amendment is to pull a section because the hon. member does not think that the minister and/or the court should be able to impose some rather restrictive penalties on landowners based only on suspicion.

Now, the entire section 12 is certainly a section that many, many different Albertans, whether they're urban or rural, whether they have property in urban areas or rural areas, have raised as being of great concern to them. I think that if we were to vote in favour of amendment A3, it would alleviate some of the concerns that have been expressed. We don't have to go too far between our legislative offices and our constituency offices to encounter an individual who will ask: "What's with that Bill 19? Why does the government need it?" Certainly, as time progresses and we get more and more information, you can see why the government is anxious to have a bill of this nature. I for one don't think it's necessary, but when you look at what the plans are in the short-, medium-, and long-term, you can certainly see where they want in some cases to act quite quickly.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is right when the hon. member indicates that, of course, we don't need any more embarrassing spying incidents like the one that occurred in Rimbey over the regulatory hearing on the north-south 500 kV transmission line.

Now, last night in the Infrastructure estimates – and, Mr. Chairman, I'm not wandering here into another issue – I had a very interesting, detailed discussion with the hon. Minister of Infrastructure regarding the plans of that department and the government: what land they may need, when they will need it, and where they will need it for these so-called projects. After the rough start that Bill 19 has encountered, I can understand why the government is so anxious to amend it. I would like to compliment the minister on his interest and his desire to attend many public meetings and explain the government's side of the issue. I think that in this case the minister is to be commended, but he needs to listen to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in regard to – I'm not going to say repairing – amending this section 12.

Again, Mr. Chairman, in conclusion regarding amendment A3, I would strongly urge this House to have a good look at what the hon. member is proposing here and give it consideration because I for one think it would take a bad bill and at least make it better.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A3?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. I think that maybe I'm just rising to close debate on this. I'm not sure. Anyway, I just want to respond to a couple of the points that were made, primarily by the minister, in response to the concerns that I've raised. He mentioned the fact that the type of scenario where this section of the act would be used are situations where, for instance, municipalities had informed the government that someone was in breach of land-use standards or land-use regulations. But my understanding is that were that the scenario in which this section were being used, then the section as it would remain should my amendment pass would still be perfectly satisfactory as a tool for

the government to seek injunctive relief to stop the offence that they were concerned about. In essence, if the person or body in question had actually breached rules or standards in place by the municipality, then it is probably the case that they would fall under the phrase “is doing . . . any act” blah, blah, blah, all of which would be fine in terms of, again, if you believe this act is the way to go and in terms of a reasonable interpretation and administration of this act.

The other example that was given by the minister, again, on its face sounds kind of reasonable, but, you know, there’s an adage in the law for those few of us who periodically are forced to engage in that debate, and that adage is: good facts make bad law. Basically, you don’t just take one example and say: oh, this is about that example. What you do is you analyze the whole scope of implications of what your particular outcome, whether it’s a decision or whether it’s a legislative initiative, could mean.

3:50

So, yes, that piece of legislation would help the government stop the person who’s bolting together foundation pieces on a piece of land that they’re not supposed to be developing at that point, knowing that the bolting process precedes the inappropriate building. But I would suggest that, frankly, if it is the ultimate construction, the completed construction which constitutes the breach that the government is seeking to have stopped, then I think it’s quite reasonable that in that particular case the person proceeding to engage in what would ultimately be the commission of an offence simply has to accept the consequences of making the investment to do that.

This act already gives to the government the ability to ask the courts to not only ask the person to stop doing that thing but to do whatever else the government thinks would be helpful. That may well mean: take your building down. Yes, that is a costly outcome, but presumably if the person has committed an offence, that’s the risk they take. So there is actually still a remedy for the government under this section of the act for the example given by the minister were my amendment to be passed.

Conversely, though, if the amendment were not passed, here is another scenario which would be covered by the legislation as it currently exists. As I said before, say that there are four farmers who are very upset about the government’s designation of a project area. Say that one of those farmers had publicly stated that they were going to go out the next day and pour a concrete foundation. Say that that farmer was going to have a meeting with four others. Under this legislation the government could seek an injunction to stop that meeting from happening. What I’m saying is that that is too much. It is just too much. No government – not in Alberta, not in Ontario, not in the former Eastern bloc countries – needs that kind of authority. You need to be able to prove what’s happening. This would allow the government to basically stop meetings that are two or three or four steps away from any potential commission of an offence, and no government needs that much authority.

I urge you all to pass my amendment.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A3?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A3.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are now back to Bill 19 as amended.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Speaking in committee at this time, Mr.

Chairman, it has been said before regarding Bill 19 just how controversial this bill is and how it limits landowners’ rights and implements control over their land. I can understand why the government was anxious to amend it. You know, this limitless government restriction on privately held land for purposes of future development is, I think, totally unnecessary.

The debate to date has been quite extensive regarding Bill 19. I couldn’t help but read *Hansard*. I listened yesterday to the debate on the intercom, but it was on and off because I was diligently preparing for the Infrastructure estimates, that occurred yesterday evening at 6:30, which I referred to earlier. I’m looking at *Hansard* on page 741 from yesterday, and the minister indicates:

Only an arrogant government would create the regulations before it has the legislation to guide it. That’s the way the democratic process and this process works in the House. The regulations are guided by the legislation, and the legislation with this bill, as with all bills, is the tip of the iceberg. It’s what gives the high-level direction of what we’re trying to accomplish.”

Now, certainly, I for one and many other members have suggested that perhaps the regulations be put forward. So much of this legislation is enabling legislation. The government can do, again, what it wants, when it wants, and where, but it’s routine – and I would remind hon. members across they way that it’s routine – for regulations to be developed.

This is not the first time that legislation such as this has been drafted and that regulations have been drafted at the same time. In fact, the Department of Energy had a cottage industry in this province with the drafting of regulations around electricity deregulation. That went on at the same time as various amendments to statutes were debated in this Assembly. That went on and on and on.

Surely, I don’t think that the Minister of Infrastructure was implying that a former Conservative Premier of this province, Mr. Lougheed, would be arrogant. One only has to look at the proceedings of this Assembly going back 30 years, when the hon. minister was probably in junior high, where regulations were routinely tabled. They were debated.

There’s no problem with a bill being drafted and the regulations that accompany that bill also being drafted and openly discussed. I would take exception to that series of comments from the hon. minister because we could have a look at the regulations and no harm would be done.

I’m, again, surprised – and I will express this on the record – that what the government has in mind with this bill through the regulations is not even part of the plan to date. I can’t accept that. I would think that the regulations, again, are drafted, and they’re somewhere not too far from the minister’s office. I think the minister, certainly, could provide all hon. members of this House and property owners throughout the province with a look, just a little peek, at those regulations, just to see what they have in mind.

Now, when we’re looking at some of the regulations that could be enforced, Mr. Chairman, we’re looking at regulations that include how to give notice of a plan, how to consult about plans, how much total land a project area can cover, regulations that authorize the minister to expropriate any estate or interest in land if the minister considers it necessary for the purposes of the act or regulations, and also regulations to allow an appeal body to be designated and, I would also assume, to be selected or chosen or hand-picked.

There’s a difference between choosing, selecting, and hand-picking. When you have a government that has been in power as long as this one – some of the current cabinet ministers weren’t even in elementary school when the Conservatives came to power – we have to be very, very careful about hand-picking because there are many people in this province with different views than the views that

are expressed by the Progressive Conservative Party. People with different views and other suggestions should be considered for some of these boards or appeals commissions. It'll be interesting to see. I'm not going to surmise as to who would wind up on that appeals commission, but certainly I would rather doubt that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity would be asked if he would wish to appear.

4:00

Now, when we look at other details, Mr. Chairman, in this bill, there's no better time than at committee to review this legislation. In section 1 we have the definition of terms, of course. Then we move on to section 2, which is the land assembly project area. I would urge all members of the Assembly to have a look at the 20-year strategic capital plan of the government, and I would urge all property owners and taxpayers to have a look at this document because it certainly outlines the government's plan or ideas for the next 20 years. You only have to have a quick look at this document to know fully well why this government needs Bill 19.

Now, I have to inform the hon. Minister of Education at this time that when we were discussing Bill 19 and the implications of this 20-year strategic plan, his name came up. It was the Minister of Infrastructure's suggestion to me when I asked yesterday evening regarding this strategic plan – and the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill asked a question in question period today about elementary schools and public schools, new school construction in Calgary. I found it quite interesting because in this plan, in the 20-year strategic plan, which Bill 19 is going to sort of administer, it is indicated that in the five years between 2003 and 2007 \$258 million was spent on new school construction projects in Calgary. There were 30 new schools. If you look at the next page, there were in Edmonton during roughly the same time period – it's a little shorter time period in Edmonton, between 2004 and 2006 – seven new schools constructed, costing \$48 million.

I had asked the minister for an explanation on this, and he suggested that I ask the Minister of Education, so perhaps tomorrow in question period – I'll give you a heads-up – you could explain why Edmonton got so little and Calgary got so much in regard to new school construction. During the same time student populations remained the same in both jurisdictions. I looked into this. In Edmonton, of course, we saw 15 schools closed in about the same time frame. Those numbers were startling to me, and hopefully I can get an answer.

Mr. Chairman, specifically regarding the 20-year strategic capital plan and Bill 19 I would again urge members, before I go any further with a detailed sectional analysis here, to have a look at that 20-year strategic capital plan.

Regardless of where your constituency is in the province, I think it is one of the most interesting documents you can look at on behalf of your constituents.

Now, we looked at section 2 briefly. This section, Mr. Chairman, allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister to of course designate one or more areas of land that, in their opinion, is required for a public project as a land assembly project area. There are a lot of ideas in that 20-year strategic capital plan that could be implemented through this bill if it unfortunately becomes law.

Now, 2(2) sets out the criteria that these public projects must meet. They will be transportation corridors and utility corridors in the main, but the bill also provides for water management as well as any project the Lieutenant Governor in Council may call a public project. I'm not convinced. I was at one point convinced by the Minister of Infrastructure that this had nothing to do with electricity transmission infrastructure, but I can't say that with confidence now. I was buying it at one time, but whenever I look closely at this bill,

I can't accept that because things can change here, and they can change very quietly. They can be changed very quietly by this government.

Of course, this is a considerable . . .

Mr. Ouellette: Consult your colleague behind you and find out.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm sorry, hon. Minister of Transportation. I did not hear that.

Mr. Ouellette: I said: didn't you hear your colleague behind you today in question period about how we need transmission lines in southern Alberta for the bottleneck?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, I certainly did hear that. It has absolutely nothing to do – well, the minister is certainly entitled to his view.

I would point out that things can change, and things can be changed by this bill.

Now, when we're dealing with (d), we've got to remember, Mr. Chairman, that it simply states that a public project is any project the government calls a public project. There's no legislative framework here. It is simply up to the minister; it's a ministerial call.

I would remind the hon. Minister of Transportation of that. Your name did come up more than once, I must say, in Infrastructure estimates last night. It was quite interesting. You know, there was a division of the two portfolios, and I for one think, Mr. Chairman, that we should put them back together and save a few dollars. Now, one of these ministers would no longer be a minister, but that's the reality of these economic times. See how easily I'm distracted by this hon. member, Mr. Chairman?

Certainly, whenever we look at (3), this subsection requires that the Lieutenant Governor in Council undertake a plan for the project. There is also an undertaking that the plan be made public, and of course there's notification and consultation with the landowners in the project areas. But to what extent? This is where my questions earlier came from, the regulations. All these requirements will be determined later by the regulations, which, of course, no one is allowed to see. I cannot believe for a minute that there's been no consideration of these regulations along with the drafting of this bill.

We've got to look at this because this is a key section that is set up for weak regulations later. This will allow the government to offer merely nominal consultation, planning, and notification, in my view. The government can fulfill the bill's requirements but not actually undertake anything meaningful. What kind of protection does this section provide for landowners? Landowners have suspicions. Those suspicions are valid. So far, I don't think we have made any effort to restore public confidence in this proposed section.

If the government, Mr. Chairman, won't state what kind of consultation and planning is required and, instead, later puts it through the regulations, how can it claim to be protecting landowners' rights? One only has to look at the series of articles that have been published recently by individuals and groups regarding Bill 19 to know that there is quite an issue around protecting landowners' rights. Many landowners have been through this before with the ring roads in Calgary and Edmonton. I don't think we're going to have time to get into that. There were some winners and there were some losers in that deal, and the losers were certainly identified in the *Calgary Herald* editorial which was written earlier in March. It sums up that process rather well, in my opinion. I don't think I'll quote that – well, the minister of health is not here, so maybe I could.

4:10

Now, section 2(4) requires the government to notify and consult

with owners of any late additions to the project area but does not require the government to consult all over again with existing landowners, and (5) blocks project areas from including Métis settlements.

Section 3, Control, Restriction and Prohibitions, is the notwithstanding section, allowing the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations relating to the project area that apply regardless of other legal and regulatory provisions. These include (a) and (b), controlling the use, development, and occupation of land in the project area but also giving the minister the ability to exempt land they choose from these regulations. This is considerable authority. This is a serious power. The minister is the arbiter of landowners' activities. How will these decisions be made? I had a look through *Hansard*, and I didn't see an answer to this question. Doesn't this lead, Mr. Chairman, to the impression that landowners have to be nice to the minister because of the power over land use that the minister holds?

I think we've got to do a thorough sectional analysis of this bill, Mr. Chairman, and I intend to do that. Subsection (c) allows for the regulations around the removal of structures and materials and animals from land as well as compensation for that removal; (d) allows for regulations regarding how these powers may be exercised. So this would be a regulation regulating the regulations, if I could use that idea. Shouldn't this be set out in the act? Now, (h) also is of note as it allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make further regulations about anything they want, and that's, of course, a standard clause with this and many other governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to the bill as amended, I have been to a number of, I guess, public information sessions both on the northeast ring road and also on the southwest ring road, and when it comes to consultation, this government has an awful lot to learn. With regard to the northeast ring road, with very little consultation with the businesses and the individuals living in the northeast part of Calgary, including a trailer park, the government changed the design and routing of the ring road. What it did was cut off access for emergency services for a variety of businesses and individuals. From the business point of view, one of the businesses was a trucking firm. It added about 12 kilometres to their daily drive in order to access their own property and, obviously, the additional expense in gas and inconvenience.

Now, the northeast ring road is causing problems for Calgary planners when it comes to how it affects the airport. The proposed airport tunnel to try and make up for the fact that a large section of Barlow Trail, which is a north-south, frequently used roadway leading to the airport and of great convenience for Calgarians travelling to the airport, especially from the east side of the city – the way that the province has dealt with this particular project has not shown any tremendous degree of collaboration with the city. They basically have suggested to the city that you can't build a tunnel underneath a runway, yet my experience in Paris, France, where the runway went over several overpasses, shows that that kind of reasoning is flawed. The whole idea of Bill 19 and assembling land and plants is flawed in a whole series of areas.

When it comes to the southwest ring road, I cannot imagine the province taking on the Tsuu T'ina in terms of talking about expropriation to the same extent that it's willing to take on every other nontreaty individual in this province. Fortunately, the Tsuu T'ina and other First Nations bands have federal rights which supersede provincial rights whereas the everyday non First Nation individual

is subject to the whims of the government in terms of whatever they determine through Bill 19.

The southwest portion of the ring road: it's now, I believe, 42 years and counting since the concept was first suggested. The Premier and the Minister of Transportation every once in a while get up or put out a little media release saying how much closer they are. I gather that at this point, in terms of acquiring that land, they've at least agreed upon an outfit that will set a price for the land, and I'm hoping that that price will be fair, obviously, to the First Nations, who are giving up a significant portion of their land to allow this roadway to go through it.

Again, I know from having talked to individuals on the Tsuu T'ina reserve that there's great conflict among the residents as to where exactly on the reserve this road should go. There's already an existing road with very few houses associated with it which is about six kilometres west of where the proposed ring road is to go. This western route has been favoured by members of the Crowchild family although older brother and younger brother have varying opinions on which route is best. The western route involves less interference. It crosses the Elbow River at a place where it is considerably narrower and would require less of a span and, therefore, less expense in crossing the wildlife area there.

Unfortunately, this alternate consideration was never given much value. The style of the bridge in terms of any of the architectural plans that I've seen are suggesting a low-level bridge, which would potentially block the movement of game and interfere with recreational activities, as compared to the bridge over the Bowness park, the expansion there, which is a wide expanse and high. There's a pedestrian road or bridge underneath, and as I recall, there is only one buttress or pillar that actually is located in the Bow River, so there's very little interference with the natural state of things.

4:20

The way the proposed ring road through the Tsuu T'ina right now and then up into the southwest part of Calgary on the other side of the reservoir is routed is going to interfere with existing wetlands. It's going to come very close to the back doors of a number of properties. The plan, as I understand it, currently is for a six-lane, three and three, as opposed to an eight- or a 10-lane circumstance that takes into account future needs.

Now, my understanding in this particular development is that there will be large rights-of-way where possible. Of course, behind Oakridge, I believe is the district, there isn't much room for the extra expansion, and that's why moving it further west would have been a good idea. To a degree some of the land except for the Tsuu T'ina has already been designated and set aside, and I don't recall any feuding or concerns about how that land was acquired. I believe the government, for example, worked with the Mannix family to acquire land that's currently being used right beside the western reserve of the Tsuu T'ina Nation. These were examples of co-operation and collaboration in terms of trying to get this southwest ring road going, which we don't see in terms of Bill 19.

Another example of co-operation that the province had a degree of input in – in fact, the former Minister of Education, the minister of health, was one of the key individuals involved in that – is the west routing of the LRT. The city worked with the school board because Ernest Manning, the school that I earlier referenced graduating from in '67, would be right in the middle of the tracks. So the city not only did a land swap with the CBE, but they also provided some extra funding, and I'm quite sure that the province supported both the city and the school board in terms of that choice. The choice was made in a collaborative, collegial fashion as opposed to being dictated.

Mr. Hancock: That was the Minister of Infrastructure who actually put that together, so when you give credit, give credit where it's due.

Mr. Chase: Well, I did. I just did. Hon. Minister of Infrastructure, you were part of the organization of that land swap? That's great. I commend you for your forethought in that decision. I was at the breaking of the ground of the new location for the Ernest Manning school. So to commend the Minister of Infrastructure, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, that was a very successful, collaborative effort.

Bill 19, however, makes the assumption that the government knows best. You know, it makes me think of the old camp song, only the government changes it: this land's no longer your land; this land is now our land; this land's not big enough for you and me. Throw in *Git Along Little Dogies*. This is what landowner after landowner after landowner – these aren't people that you can sort of sideline, call tree huggers or environmental pests or, you know, all these sort of demeaning, excluding terms. These are individuals who have farmed the land in the rural cases sometimes for generations. A number of MLAs who represent rural ridings: these are your neighbours, that live along potential future power corridors or high-speed rail or highway developments, potential sewer systems to expand existing municipalities, and they deserve to be heard.

What has happened previously in large-scale ring road projects is land speculation, flipping. It appears that depending not on what you know but who you know, there is an opportunity to gain an advantage by purchasing land that has somehow been discussed behind closed doors for a particular routing of a public system as is mentioned in the land assembly project area that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought out, a project to confine to a corridor of land pipelines, pipes or other conduits, poles, towers, wires, cables, conductors, other devices, and so on. It goes on and defines all the things that are supposedly in the public good.

Going back to the justice image and the balance, a balance has to be struck between public good and private property rights. Bill 19, obviously, even in its amended version – and as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar noted, he appreciates the Minister of Infrastructure trying to soften, take off some of the sharp edges of this draconian piece of legislation, but short of putting it through a tree shredder, you're not going to get rid of those sharp points.

Therefore, it continues to be a concern to landowners, whether they're in urban circumstances or rural circumstances, that they're not going to have a fair hearing. Based on the amendment that was introduced earlier by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, there is a presumption that anyone who interferes with the government's acquisition has the potential of being considered guilty, and an injunction can be nailed to their door or passed through their mailbox indicating that they have to desist from any further action that would interfere with the government's expropriation of their land.

I know that other members have amendments. They're going to try and help the government fix this bill. I wish them well. It is so flawed that I cannot imagine that without the help of the nonpartisan committee to which it was attempted to be referred, this will be able to be worked out by any one or collection of cumulative amendments.

Not wanting to slow the progress of the discussion, I'll take my seat and look forward to further discussion.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Now, certainly, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill asked what we would do. Well,

for one thing, we're going to be persistent and try to amend this legislation even further because it certainly needs it.

When we look at the whole discussion and the assertions that have been made that individual property rights are under attack and how this will work out in the future for landowners, we only have to again, Mr. Chairman, look at the past here. In 1974 we started with the restricted development areas around Edmonton and Calgary for the ring roads. The ring roads have been discussed in this House this afternoon.

4:30

Now, many landowners at that time, whenever we talked about the transportation utility corridors – and they were the land assembly project areas of their time – were very, very dissatisfied. Many had property that was devalued because no one wanted anything to do with property that may or may not be frozen for 10, 15, 20, sometimes 30 years. It was considered to be – and this is according to the *Calgary Herald* – an abuse of property rights then, and so now is Bill 19. The editorial in the *Calgary Herald* goes on to discuss the land assembly project areas, discusses the regulations, points out some very accurate observations about the regulations, but also notes that the proposed Bill 19 renders the provisions of the Surface Rights Act inapplicable and also for the Expropriation Act.

This is interesting. I had a look through *Hansard* while the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was speaking at yesterday's debate and discussion on this bill. I'm not satisfied that we have given a clear explanation as to why these subtle changes have been made to the Surface Rights Act and, likewise, the Expropriation Act, but we need to have another look at this bill, and we need to go through the sectional analysis.

Mr. Chairman, when I find my copy of the bill – ah, here it is. There's a lot of paperwork involved with this bill; that's for certain. Now, we look at section 4. It's to discuss the notice of project area orders and associated regulations, again, and we require the minister to send notice to the chief administrative officer of the affected municipalities, to the provincial registrar, and to the last address of any people with land titles in the project area. We are also requiring similar notice of amendments of project area orders to be sent out – this is very important – and require similar notice of amendments to regulations governing project area orders. We are ensuring that while a notice is required, it isn't in any way necessary for the regulations to have impact. In other words, even if no notice is given, everything can still go ahead. This is another problem.

What is the point of having the notice if it isn't integral to the process? This shows the government's contempt for the landowners, in my view. If they really, really cared about landowners and property rights, then notification would be a necessary part of the deal, and failure to notify would cause the project to fail itself. It's not like the notification process is even particularly difficult. Ultimately, this is a sign that the government doesn't really care about notification and landowners. Now, hon. members across the way, if my interpretation of this section 4 is wrong, please speak up.

Also, if we look at section 5, at the guarantees that were there – and this is gone, as I understand it; I don't know whether it was amendment A1 or amendment A2 – we have to be careful that the guarantees are there that the landowner is going to get a fair value for their property. People were talking here in the past discussion about how landowners are going to be compensated for their land. That is an important issue.

Now, the obligations of persons with interest in project area land: this section ensures that people who acquire an estate or interest in land covered by a project area are still, of course, subject to the acts and the regulations and the direct authority of the government.

The enforcement orders. Now, here we're going to allow the minister under section 7 to serve enforcement orders against those who the minister deems to have contravened the regulations going back into section 3, set out what an enforcement order can do: require an action to cease, provide remedy for an action such as restoring land, set timelines, or inform that the minister may do these things at the expense of the individual or the corporation served.

Section 7(3) requires the reasoning for the order to be clear and for the order to be served on the person. That's pretty straightforward.

Section 7(4) allows the minister to change enforcement orders, amending, adding, or deleting terms or conditions. Now, at some point I think it's worth considering that this be amended. I think we should propose an amendment to this section cutting out the section that states that the minister can amend or add terms or conditions. This allows for additional penalties and powers outside the process set up previously. Mr. Chairman, we think this is unfair to landowners. The rules for enforcing these powers should be very clear. They should be concise. This section allows the minister, in our view on this side of the House, to increase the burden of orders far too easily. We will get to that.

Section 7(5), Mr. Chairman, allows a change to the enforcement order to be served to the person on which it was placed.

Section 7(6) deals with the Court of Queen's Bench, making it enforceable through the court system, of course, through the standard procedure of filing the orders.

Section 7(7) allows the minister to take whatever action the minister considers necessary to carry out the terms of the order and recover costs from the person accordingly.

Section 7(8) is an explanation of what these costs are.

Section 7(9) sets out how the minister may recover costs, including from someone who buys land from a person who has been served an enforcement order. This means that the enforcement order follows the landownership, not the person. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity may have an opinion on that – I suspect that he does – and how that will affect the value of said piece of property, Mr. Chairman, because that all depends, I guess. I don't know whether market forces will apply here or not.

Now section 8, requires that an enforcement order be served by personally serving it, sending it to the last known address, or sending it to the address of the registered land title. Subsection (2) of section 8 allows for the alternative method of serving an order such as electronically if given permission by a judge of the Court of Queen's Bench. I would imagine that would be a fairly costly process to receive that permission.

Mr. Denis: Yes.

4:40

Mr. MacDonald: Did someone say yes? I would really appreciate it if I could have an update from the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont on that. He's a learned member of the Law Society. Perhaps he can enlighten us all on that.

Section 9 imposes joint and several liability in cases where multiple people have been served an enforcement order. This means that the minister can go after each and all of them, as I interpret that. Now, if I'm wrong, if my interpretation is incorrect, I would appreciate the minister on the record indicating that.

Section 10(1) allows for appeal of an enforcement order to a body established under regulations. We talked about that. I talked about my sincere hope that maybe at some point the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity or someone that the hon. member knows and suggests and recommends could be a part of that, or maybe we could

even suggest Joe Anglin from Rimbey. Maybe he knows some people that would be suitable for this appeals body. [interjection] Yes. I'm delighted to hear, Mr. Chairman, that the government is considering taking some suggestions from Joe Anglin and the other folks around Rimbey. I understand they were here yesterday. Maybe they could come up with some names of individuals who would be interested in serving on this appeals body. Now, that's all outlined under section 10.

There are other directions here regarding orders that are filed with the registrar of land titles. Now, we are looking specifically at section 12(1). I forgot to do section 11(1). No, I'm sorry; we looked after that. Section 12(1) allows the minister to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an injunction if it appears that a person has done or is about to do something. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona valiantly tried to correct that but was unsuccessful. Again, I think this is an extremely problematic section, and I commend the hon. member for that amendment. I'm disappointed that it was rejected. We do not think that the minister and the court, again, should be able to impose these kinds of penalties on landowners, as I said before.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one of the amendments that I would like to suggest and I would like to provide to all hon. members of this Assembly is an amendment to change the bill through an amendment that was passed yesterday, and that was amendment A1. I will circulate this and wait for your direction.

The Chair: While the pages are distributing the amendment, the chair shall designate this amendment A4.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Amendment A4 for the record. I move that amendment A1 to Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended in part B, in the proposed section 2.1, by adding the following after subsection (3):

- (4) The designation of an area of land as a project area by the Lieutenant Governor in Council is limited to a period of 5 years.

There has been considerable discussion about this five-year time period so far in debate, but this proposed amendment adds a limit to the duration of a project area order. This, in our view, means that landowners who have a project area order placed on them wouldn't be faced with an indefinite period of time of the government blocking their land use. There would be a strict limit put on this. After five years if the land was still needed – and this is in answer to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's question: what would you do with the land for the Anthony Henday Drive? – the government would have to reapply for the order and update the land. However, if the land was not needed, the project area would die out very easily, and the landowner would be given back full control of the land, knowing that the order no longer had any power over them.

That essentially would be the amendment. I would urge all hon. members to give it consideration.

I note to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that there was a lot of surplus land left over when the land was purchased through the restricted development areas going back to 1974. As I said yesterday, there were some landowners who were losers and, of course, some landowners who – surprise, surprise – were big winners. There were land transactions going on there that, to say the least, were very interesting. The restricted development area, of course, was very large, and over a period of time much of the land that was deemed surplus to either the transportation utility corridor or the twinned freeway, or expressway, was sold back to the same people who sold it to the government in the first place, sold back to them in some cases for a dollar per parcel.

To think that we would have this five-year time limit and then have the government reapply for the order to update the land doesn't seem unreasonable. I would urge all hon. members, Mr. Chairman, to please consider this amendment at this time.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any hon. members wish to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes. Speaking in favour of the amendment, what it does is that it basically takes landowners out of a government-enforced purgatory, where they're sort of between heaven and hell and don't know what their fortunes are going to turn up. This defines it: you're in the circumstance for five years, and at the end of the five years there's an expectation of restoration, reclamation. If restitution is required because your land has been held up and you've been inconvenienced and there's been a monetary penalty because of this tie-up of your land, you had other purposes for it which were not taken into account, then this amendment referred to here as A4 covers that circumstance. It provides certainty for landowners, which does not exist currently within the regulations of Bill 19.

Now, this is one more attempt outside of a standing policy committee to approach getting this thing right. I cannot imagine entering into a deal with someone unless there were regulations that I was aware of, not government fine print that was to be determined later. If it was my particular land, if somebody wanted to set up a project in my backyard – they'd be hard-pressed between the gazebo, the greenhouse, the garage, and the extended balcony – if they for some reason decided to expropriate some of the limited space there because some city function needed to take place, I would like to think that in their wisdom, if they decided that my backyard was too small for them to accomplish this project that they had in mind, there would be some restoration, some restitution, some evidence of goodwill on the part of the individuals that, yes, my life had been interrupted. But, at least, it had only been interrupted for a period of five years, a definable period.

4:50

This government in some ways gets after Liberals for talking about governance and for clearly laying out the rules, but then it goes on in a sort of reverse circumstance and says: "If we need your land, we'll take your land. We'll give you whatever we feel is the acceptable going market price. Then, if we decide not to use your land at some time in the future, we'll talk." But there's no laid-out procedure. Amendment A4 tries to provide landowners with a degree of certainty, a degree of definition that five years from now it's either . . . or get off the pot.

Thank you.

The Chair: On amendment A4, the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Speaking to the proposed amendment, I'd first like to say that I would like to thank the hon. members for the intelligent conversation and discussion and reasonable debate that took place on the bill yesterday. With respect to today I would like to say that this amendment would make it absolutely impossible to serve the needs of Albertans for their transportation needs surrounding the large cities where we've just done the project. So I speak in opposition to an amendment that would basically make it impossible to provide Albertans with what they need.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. This may come as a surprise, but I think I'm going to disagree with the minister on how he has interpreted this amendment. To me, what this amendment is really only asking for is what the Premier has promised. It's asking for accountability, it's asking for open discussion, and it's asking for transparency in the processes that this government is responsible for. In five years a lot of things can happen. I also am a firm believer in reviewing something, and certainly five years is not too long to ask for a review. There's no reason that something couldn't sit there for 30 years or 20 years or however many years it's had to sit there for the Anthony Henday and some of the other ring roads.

Certainly, one of the things that we should be looking at – and I know that it has been looked at – is property that would be for a high-speed rail from Calgary to Edmonton. Then, certainly, it either has to hook up with an LRT or actually be high-speed rail to downtown. These are the kinds of long-range planning that governments are supposed to do. That's their job. Then when they go to get the land that is going to be required for a long-range vision like that, fair enough. But there's nothing wrong with reviewing it every five years because there are two different companies that are very interested in the high-speed rail, and I believe, if I'm not corrected, that both of those companies have a different idea of where it should go. I think one of them is looking at the old CP rail, which would allow some property, and the other company is looking at something else. So these kinds of things should be reviewed every five years. There's nothing wrong with opening it up.

I think that all we have to do is look at how quickly our economic situation has changed. We've gone from a surplus to a deficit. Although it does seem like overnight, I'm sure that there were more than many signs that certainly something was coming our way. So to be able to review is a good thing. Also, a review can put new information into the discussion, new eyes to look at those discussions. Certainly, new perspectives may be brought towards the original plan that was put in. As things go forward – I'll use the high-speed rail again. It was a kernel of an idea, and then it goes to people that might be interested, and then it goes into the land that would be required. If there is a review every five years, there's actually more information put into that particular file, that should be open and available to every citizen of this province. They're the ones that are going to end up paying for it.

For that reason I totally support this amendment. There's nothing wrong with it, nothing to be feared. I think it opens it up. As I said before, I think it fulfills the mandate that the Premier was looking for: open, honest, and transparent.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've been listening to the discussion on the bill and on this amendment. Quite frankly, when you assess this amendment, it is totally impractical. Think about it. There have been two years of consultation and open public meetings, and then a decision is made that in fact this is the right place to designate as a project under this particular bill. If you're going to put something like this in – just think about it.

One of the other statements that's in the bill: as soon as there's a designation, the government has to be prepared to start purchasing from anybody that wants to sell along that route. So if we were to agree to this amendment, you'd have a situation where there could be a number of parcels already purchased. The owner of the properties now becomes the province. The individuals can continue to use the property the way it has been used in the past. As long as the integrity of the property is maintained, they can continue to use it.

Then you're going to have pieces where an individual decides, because they maybe feel that the value of the land is going to go up, they want to wait to sell. It may be 10 years. It might be 15 years. It might be 20 years, as the case with the current ring roads. Really, what you're doing is taking away the ability for the person to wait and, if there's appreciation in the value, that individual having the ability to gain that increased value. So this works against the landowner. I would be very, very upset if something like this was in place and there was a project that was going to go through some of my property. Basically, what this would make you do is make up your mind within five years, and maybe it's 20 years that you'd have the land if this wasn't in place.

This is a real backward step, but it doesn't surprise me because of some of the comments from Edmonton-Gold Bar this afternoon, again back to that nonsense that, in fact, the government sold land back to the landowner for \$1. We've shown you time and time again in this House that that is not the case. What happened was that there would be a whole parcel of land. The government knew exactly how much land they needed in that parcel. They paid the top price for that land, and then when it was surveyed, the parcels that were left over – we knew the acreages would be, but the land physically now is separated, so it's turned back for \$1. That was in the original agreements. There was no such thing as giving land back for nothing. We didn't own it in the first place. So it doesn't surprise me that something like this would come up when the hon. member still doesn't understand the way these transactions work.

One of the big things in all of this is that if the individual landowner is going to go ahead with the subdivision, they've got to go through the whole planning process under the planning act. If the government purchases it, you survey it, and you know where you're at.

So I would really urge people: don't fall for this. It's bad – it's bad – for the landowner.

5:00

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

Ms Pastoor: Well, thank you. Thank you very much to the hon. Member for . . .

Some Hon. Members: Rocky Mountain House.

Ms Pastoor: . . . Rocky Mountain House. Thank you. I understand where he's coming from. Actually, I was very, very involved when I sat on city council in some of the negotiations and, certainly, putting the land aside for the Canamex, so I'm not quite as perhaps out there as he may think I am. The whole point of it is that it's not stopping those agreements, but things do change over time. A farmer has made the agreement, the land is gazetted, everything is ready to go, but maybe they have to change something.

One of the examples I would use is that mess on Calgary Trail at 23rd – I think it's 23rd Avenue or 23rd Street. I mean, surely to heavens, if they'd thought about it ahead of time, they would realize that they would have needed a little turn thing there, a little whatever they're putting in, a cloverleaf or whatever they're trying to put in, because it's clearly a mess.

One of the other things is – and this is where farmers would be most interested – when we talked about the Canamex highway, the whole point of it is that it's going down someone's land. It's also dividing their land. The problem is – and this could well be reviewed if the Canamex changes or for any other reason – what's happening is that their land is divided, and they are going to have to go way around to go from one parcel of land to the other with their

combines and their Rototillers and whatever else it is that they pull behind those big trucks. They are going to insist that we have . . .

Mr. Chase: Overpasses.

Ms Pastoor: . . . overpasses to be able to get their equipment over it because, surely, we are not going to put – my dream for Canamex is that it actually would be like an autobahn, and surely to heavens we will not be having a farmer and his combine going across an autobahn without an overpass.

So things do change. There's nothing wrong with a review. It has got nothing to do with the farmer's ability to have made the agreement. All it's asking for is a review so that when something happens, if the farmer's land is going to be freed up, then so be it. Then at that point they can do what they want. But to tie something up for 20 years on a huge, long-range plan like Canamex, I just don't see the logic in that. I really believe that reviewing every five years is for everyone's good.

The Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert on amendment A4.

Mr. Allred: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to make a few comments. Firstly, in reference to the last speaker, in her previous comments and even in these comments she spoke of a review. I just think it's worthwhile to read the amendment. It says: "The designation of an area of land as a project area by the Lieutenant Governor in Council is limited to a period of 5 years." What this does is it basically kills the bill.

This bill is for long-range projects, and long-range projects, as we've seen from the Anthony Henday, take a long time. It has been 40 years for the Anthony Henday. In fact, as I said the other day, it has taken 50 years since it was initially planned. Mr. Chair, really, we've got to look at the intent of this bill. It is for long-range projects, and there are provisions in the bill. If a landowner wants to sell, he can sell. I believe there are even provisions where he can get a leaseback, so he can stay on the land until it's developed, which might be 30, 40 years, whatever. But these are long-range projects, and they need a long-time horizon.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I'm speaking against this amendment because it absolutely defeats the entire purpose of the bill. In fact, I would suggest that it may even be out of order.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I would certainly start with the comments from the hon. Member for St. Albert and work backwards. After five years if the land was still needed, the government would have to reapply for the order and update the property. Now, if the land was not needed, the project order would just die a natural death, and the landowner would take back full control of the land.

There's a public interest here, and the public interest is not being served by this bill. Property owners' interests are not being served.

Mr. Allred: Why not?

Mr. MacDonald: Because of the freeze that is put on your property, hon. member.

I can see why, you know, a five-year period is a contentious time period with this government. But I would like to remind hon. members that you can change the law regarding the Fiscal Responsibility Act. You don't need a five- or 10- or 15- or 20-year period to do that. The circumstances change. You change your mind. I

would use that as an example of why five years is not an unreasonable amount of time. If it's good enough for some of your legislation which governs your ability to spend or save, if you can do it with that legislation, Bill 33, that is one example. [interjection] Now, the hon. Minister of Transportation is very anxious to participate in the debate, and I'm very anxious to hear what he has to say.

I would like to point out also that five years may be a time period that is of issue with this government, but my records indicate that it's six years since they initially shoved the spade in the ground over for the Mazankowski health centre at the U of A campus, and that's still not finished. I can see why there's a little bit of an issue on the other side with the five-year period, but property owners have told us that it is a reasonable amount of time.

Now, to the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House – I appreciated his historical vignette on this, Mr. Chairman – this land that he was talking about, these parcels that were for a dollar, show me on the record once and for all, show not only myself but the taxpayers who funded that, where it is written that the surplus land is returned to the previous owner for \$1. You show us precisely where that is. If this land had considerable value as the road was constructed, why would the government not have sold that land at a profit itself and given the money back to the taxpayers who originally paid, in some cases, megabucks for that land, and why did not all previous landowners get the same deal that the hon. member is talking about?

Now, specifically regarding amendment A4, Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude, before we call the question on this amendment, by urging all hon. members to please consider this because it is what property owners in discussions with us have indicated would be a reasonable amendment to this legislation.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: I would just like to explain in a very, very brief moment, but I'm just not so sure if you can explain anything nicely to them or if you've got to be nasty. I'm trying to figure out which way I should go on it.

The Chair: Be nice.

5:10

Mr. Ouellette: Okay. I will do that, Mr. Chair.

This is so simple, and I just don't know why you're not understanding that. It took us 30 years, and we still haven't finished the ring roads. Before we even started the ring roads, we'd been acquiring land. We don't want to build another ring road with taxpayers' dollars in five years. If the growth of Alberta would grow that much, not a problem. But, really, we're planning a ring road here for 30, 40, maybe 50 years out. If we don't protect that land now, we will never, ever be able to build that ring road. As you know, if somebody wouldn't have had the vision in this province to protect that land where we're building the ring roads today, we wouldn't be able to build them because the prices would've just been so far out of sight.

The answer to your other question, you were saying about giving land away for a dollar. What we really do when we buy this land – and we're doing it today – the surplus land that we have left after, we sell it at market value. In most cases we've made money for the taxpayer for it. Today there is the odd deal where to be able to acquire the land, guys make you write in the contract that they'll purchase it back at the same price we bought it for. There are some that we do that with. But we are very diligent on how we look after taxpayers' money.

A five-year option. You may as well not even protect land for a ring road because we know that in five years we're not going to

outgrow the ring roads we have, so we're looking at 30 years out. We have to protect the land now, or we won't be able to build the ring road later. That'll be constituents right close to Edmonton and Calgary who are going to need these ring roads and all other Albertans and people that drive through the province that don't want to get tied up with in-city traffic. Therefore, that's why we need to protect the land till whenever we need it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on A4.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I appreciate that from the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Certainly, whenever you look at the 20-year strategic plan, the capital plan, you can see where the hon. member is coming from. But if we look at the ring road around Edmonton and the ring road around Calgary, there was a lot of speculation that went on, and not everyone was allowed to speculate on that land before it was purchased by the government. The majority of that land was purchased within the first five years of the restricted development area being implemented. And the hon. minister agrees with me. So the five-year term is not unusual.

If the hon. Minister of Transportation, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, has other additional information, I would appreciate getting it on the record. Where exactly are these lands that the government is proposing to set aside for these outer ring roads? You certainly mention them frequently, not only in the budget documents but in the strategic plan. Also on the Internet there's talk of this. Where exactly is this land? Is there a map? [interjections] The hon. member laughs, but I'm told there is a map actually. I'm told there is a map, and if what the hon. member has stated is true, then the government is obligated to show us the map.

What exactly is in your plans? What land are you contemplating or what roads are you contemplating expanding at some point in the future where you may or may not need this land to make this outer ring road? What land do you have your eye on in Red Deer and in Medicine Hat and in Lethbridge and in Grande Prairie and in Fort McMurray for these supposed ring roads? It's in your plan. It's in your plan, and if we're going to spend millions of dollars acquiring this land, then make those documents public. Make all the details of what you're planning to do with this bill public. Show us. Tell us what properties you're interested in and who owns them now.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on A4.

Ms. Notley: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just rising very briefly on this issue. There have been very interesting points made on either side of the House with respect to this. I guess, notwithstanding, you know, I'm a big planner. People on my side of the House are all about planning. No question. Absolutely. We're planners. I'm a planner; I wish more people were planners. But it seems to me that even . . . [interjections] Yeah, absolutely more than two.

Even with those best laid plans and those people that do plan, sometimes the plan doesn't quite work out. It's very possible that I'm misinterpreting the intent and the outcome or the implications of this amendment; nonetheless, I'll carry on because what the heck. It would seem to me that sometimes, as I say, plans are made, and then suddenly they change.

For instance, I've been thinking about this and pondering this while I've been listening to this debate that, of course, there's been lots of discussion about ring roads. This is an opportunity for me to go off on my little urban environmentalist rant. Most people outside of this province understand that ring roads are one of the most dysfunctional municipal planning tools out there and that they are

very problematic for healthy urban development and ought to actually be avoided and dismissed.

Yes, I know. The member of over there is looking at me with some chagrin. I suggest that you read up on it.

An Hon. Member: Chagrin?

Ms Notley: Well, it's all I can think of at this point. Yes, chagrin.

In fact, the way to go is to plan for public transportation, for sky trains, LRTs, that kind of thing, high-speed rail and that in the long run this is the way to develop our transportation system. The more we rely on this ring road, which creates increasingly unhealthy urban communities, the more we are doing a disservice to our population.

Now, obviously, that's not the majority opinion in this House right now, but one hopes that even this group will ultimately be just bombarded by the consensus that exists in so many other jurisdictions on this issue and that perhaps five years, 10 years, 15 years from now there may actually be some disagreement within a governing group. I won't say it's this one but a governing group, where they start to debate whether or not it's really the best plan to build yet another ring road around a city that's falling to pieces inside, that can't afford it's own transportation system. Maybe that's not the best way to proceed.

So the debate starts and the plans get put aside and the funding doesn't go forward. Then this land is sitting there in this undetermined, endless state, and the policy directives that initially drove the decision to set it aside are now shifting and changing, yet the people on that land have no capacity to engage or to assess and to ask for accountability about what the plan is. The plan is still the same as it was.

There's something to be said for requiring the government to check in again. Is it still the plan? Is it still the plan?

An Hon. Member: Beijing.

Ms Notley: I don't know why we're talking about Beijing. One member is talking Beijing and ring roads. I don't want to get into a discussion of cities with subways and metros and good public transportation and all of those places and then compare them to what every expert has said about our cities and how they are just models of planning nightmares.

The reality is that this stuff can change. When it does change and when the government essentially comes to a point where it's not planning to do the same thing that it has before, but the debate still continues, is there not some need at that point to check back in with the landowners, and is there not a mechanism through which that can be done? Perhaps this amendment is the mechanism through which that can be done. [interjection] I think it's very possible that it could be as well. It's all possibilities, you know, because I've laid out a whole bunch of different ways the language can be misinterpreted and misused, and I'm told to rely on the possibilities that are put forward by government. So I'm going to have to continue to deal in that.

In this case I think the amendment would require that government rethink and recommunicate its plans periodically rather than putting huge, huge tracts of land into an abyss that nobody can make use of for long, long periods of time while they engage in protracted debates about whether their plans made 20 years ago still make sense.

Anyway, that would be the end of my comments on this. I would certainly suggest that members should support the amendment.

5:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. On amendment A4. I found this discussion and debate interesting. I would remind all hon. members of this House that our view is that ring roads are a necessary part of the planning of any major city. I would remind hon. members of Paris, France, with its *périphérique*, which is essentially an outer ring road. There's a lot of traffic on that. Paris, France, also has a very well-used, well-designed metro. Hopefully, at some point in the future Edmonton will have both a functioning ring road and also a subway system that is used by many of the citizens and that will be affordable.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I would like to call the vote, please, on A4. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: On the bill the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act. I thank the hon. Minister of Infrastructure for his foresight in developing this piece of legislation. Bill 19 will provide an important tool for Alberta, allowing government to acquire land for major public projects for transportation or water management in a manner that is fair to landowners. Mr. Chairman, through the land-use framework consultation meetings as well as throughout the election campaign one of the common themes was the need for planned corridors. Actually, some of the opponents of this bill were actually calling for corridors, and they were constantly calling for a plan. I kept remembering this thing about a plan. Well, to have a plan you have to have legislation in place to create a plan. So here we are, Mr. Chair. We're at that point.

I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to a part that I find particularly important. Sections 2(2)(a) and (b) of this legislation address the types of project to which this legislation would be applicable. It states as follows:

- (2) For the purpose of this Act and the regulations, a project is a public project if the project is
 - (a) a project related to the transportation of people or goods, which may also include as part of that project a corridor of land for pipelines, pipes or other conduits, poles, towers, wires, cables, conductors or other devices, including any ancillary structures, or
 - (b) a project related to the conservation or management of water.

Mr. Chairman, I would first like to discuss (2)(a). This subsection clearly defines the extent of this legislation in relation to transportation corridors. Specifically, this would ensure that all future transportation corridors are organized and planned in an efficient manner and could incorporate utilities within the same area. Organized planning of transportation utilities is important for environmental, economic, and social reasons. For example, it is financially more costly to build infrastructure where it will have to be demolished or relocated.

It is interesting that some would be against this planning, but maybe they have not given it any thought. To have the carbon expenditure that they all talk about as well as the financial expenditure of constructing something major in an area designated as a corridor only to have that equivalent or even greater carbon expenditure and financial expenditure in the future to remove that structure is totally nonsensical. By ensuring that we plan ahead and consult with landowners on where future transportation corridors will be located, landowners will have input in the siting and location of corridors, knowing ahead of time where to build, which in the long run will save both landowners and taxpayers money. This is

planning. Furthermore, by consulting and planning ahead, we can minimize any environmental degradation by choosing routes which avoid ecologically sensitive landscapes.

Mr. Chairman, those on the land know the landscape better than anyone else. It is difficult for me to understand why anyone, whether in this House or outside of this House, would be against consultation. It doesn't make any sense. This legislation is necessary to enact upon the organized planning of corridors.

The wording in section 2(2)(a) makes it clear that the focus of this legislation is for transportation projects. These large-scale transportation corridors could also include utility corridors which would parallel the transportation route. To be clear, it is not for large-scale transmission lines or nuclear power. This legislation recognizes the importance of establishing utility corridors within transportation corridors to ensure the efficient use of land, eliminating the one-offs half a mile apart or two miles apart. Stack as many compatible things in the same corridor as possible.

Organized corridor planning is a benefit to all Albertans. This is being made evident with our ring roads. With south segments of the Anthony Henday complete, people both rural and urban save time and gas when travelling around the city, which is also less carbon output. Upon completion of the Calgary ring road the same advantages will be afforded to the people travelling in the Calgary region. It is important for projects like these that Bill 19 is brought forward so that the large-scale assembly projects can be undertaken in a fair, open, and transparent manner.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, section 2(2)(b) recognizes the importance of planned water conservation or management projects. Water management is extremely important to many regions of Alberta. It is through the development and maintenance of our dams and reservoirs that Alberta is able to meet its economic, social, and environmental objectives. We can look at rural Alberta to see the importance of dams and reservoirs in retaining water and managing water flow into specific areas of the province. Dams and reservoirs provide the necessary water supply for many communities across rural Alberta as well as irrigation of agricultural lands. However, these projects require significant planning and in some cases require the acquisition of land. Subsection (b) clarifies that this act would apply to such projects that are vital to so many communities across this province.

We can look at numerous water management operations in southern Alberta that enhance our quality of life and provide for a healthy and sustainable water supply. Some of these include Pine Coulee reservoir, Twin Valley dam, Oldman River reservoir and dam, Little Bow reservoir and dam, Paine Lake reservoir and dam, Waterton reservoir and dam, Chain Lakes dam, St. Mary reservoir, Chin reservoir, Travers reservoir. There are only two natural-water lakes south of Calgary; one of them is dry most of the time.

Mr. Chairman, I submit that we need the ability to do these plans. There is no choice. In fact, you would think that more of the members across the floor would understand the necessity of this legislation, particularly based on the water needs of southern Alberta. Whether you're from Welling or any community in southern Alberta, reservoir water is essential for a stable and reliable water supply. Mr. Chairman, subsection (b) is essential for the organized planning of our future water management projects, that are crucial for the many sectors and communities across this province.

5:30

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we would be doing landowners a huge disservice by not passing this legislation. This planning, this consultation, is only found offensive by those who find their part of the process in between the government and the landowner. They

would rather not see the government sit down with the landowner, come to an agreement, and settle because they make their living out of the process, not out of the agreement, not out of the settlement. It's in between the two is where they are, commonly referred to as intervenors.

Mr. Anderson: Damn lawyers.

Mr. Berger: Not lawyers. Of course not. I'm staying right away from them.

Anyway, those are the ones who are offended, those who want to be in the middle.

Without organized and planned land assembly we could risk wasting valuable land in the construction of transportation corridors and water management conservation projects. We have to have this ability before something else is done on it.

Again, I thank the hon. Minister of Infrastructure for bringing forward Bill 19, and I urge all members of this Assembly to support it. It is good for landowners. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, you indicated to me that you wanted to join the debate.

Mr. VanderBurg: I have some comments with regard to the discussion that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod had. I know that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod did have the opportunity to attend some open houses regarding Bill 19 and some of the fearmongering that went on in the province. I'm not so sure that the comments from the opposition are what I want to take into my questioning to the member. It's the comments that I've had from good supporters of mine throughout the province and good supporters of this government in wanting to ask the Member for Livingstone-Macleod: where do you think this got off the rails? Was it a group politically motivated that had a chance to speak on this throughout the province, or do you think this was just lack of good communication?

The Chair: This is debate on the bill, not the question-and-answer comment.

Mr. VanderBurg: I've said my piece.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I'd like to perhaps reply to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. The concept of the bill and the fact that we have to amalgamate pieces of land for whatever – dams, as he has mentioned, and how important they are in southern Alberta. Of course, I don't believe that that is in question. As usual, often with this government it's not the what; it's the how. It's part of the how that we are asking to have amended. What would have probably motivated a lot of this conversation is the fact that we are – and I'm sure you are as well – receiving many, many letters and phone calls from concerned citizens about this particular bill.

One of the things that I would like to perhaps address is the love of the land, I think, that the member had spoken about. I've been very, very fortunate in my life to have always had a second home, so I really do understand the blessing that I've had by being able to have that land outside of the city. As a child I was fortunate enough to spend from when I was eight years old until I was probably 13 playing in the Netley Marsh, which is south of Lake Winnipeg. I watched that marsh change over the number of years that we've had our place there. It is still in our family. My brother has it. I can still

go in the summer and take a canoe and go through that Netley Marsh, and trust me, I can see where all those changes have occurred.

I also have a place at Lee Lake, and over the 40 years that we've had it, I have physically watched an aspen forest move. As it died off at the end, it moved towards the lake. I know that we don't have the frogs. I know that we probably are down to four turtles. I've watched nature take its toll on the land.

I'm sure there are many people in the House that have been as blessed as I have been to be able to watch nature and to watch the land. Yes, of course, I do love the land, and I do realize that we have to be able to find a balance, and, yes, there is a need. I just wanted to say that I for one am very aware of the value of the land and the value of nature and how it can change and how it's supposed to change. That's just evolution, how it works.

The concept of this bill is fine. Again, the what is okay. It's the how that we're questioning.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to assure the Member for Livingstone-Macleod that I'm all for sitting down with landowners, but what Bill 19 does is sit on them, and it sits on their land for an interminable amount of time.

I appreciate the Member for Livingstone-Macleod bringing up water as an example. Water for life was the start of an interesting idea, but we still are so far away from having an accurate measurement of our aquifer potential. As the member from southern Alberta pointed out, the Oldman River is at its limit, and the government recognized that and will not allow any more draw from that particular river. As we move up the province from the south, where our greatest populations are, towards the north, preserving watershed becomes extremely critical. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod listed a number of dams and sort of man-made interventions.

I for one am looking forward to the land-use framework, and I'm hoping that the land-use framework is a circumstance that will be so well thought out, because it puts water at the centre of the discussion, that discussions like the controversy over Bill 19 will have a priority land use, and the first priority will be water conservation and preservation. Hopefully, that will dictate how other bits and pieces of land are used.

Now, one of the things that I would like to see under legislation that allows for a give-and-take, a discussion, a collaboration, a collegial sitting down, as the Member for Livingstone-Macleod suggested, is acquiring watersheds. This has been done in New York. It has been done in Canada around Vancouver. Other sort of forward-thinking cities, states, and provinces have realized that you've got to protect your most important resource, and that is the water. I would hope that where we already have Crown land in the form of parks or protected areas or other designated areas, we could work with surrounding ranchers or surrounding farms, work with people with woodlots and create that opportunity.

For example, the Nature Conservancy allows land to be protected. The growing need for protection in the southern area of the province and for native fescue, for example, which is rapidly being put in danger, is extremely important. It's the native fescue, with its deep roots, that is one of the few types of grasses that can survive in that southern area, that has not only the ability to sink its roots deep into the land and hold the land from erosion, but it also serves for domestic grazing purposes. It served the buffalo, and it continues to be a natural source.

5:40

So the idea of the land-use framework: connecting the province

into six or seven priority watershed areas and then moving out from the importance of first protecting the water in all our considerations. In whatever use of the land, we have to ask the question: is this going to add to conservation, or is it going to detract from it? That will give us the type of argument that we need.

Now, in terms of the speed at which land is acquired, I want to give credit to the Harvie family and the fact that they didn't quite donate their land, but they provided the land to the province for park development at considerably below its commercial value for the creation of what I believe is going to be called the Glenbow Ranch park. Again, this is along the Bow River, and it's approximately 1,600 hectares, I believe it is, of land. I had an opportunity this past summer to visit the area. It concerns me that when we have such a wonderful gift, a wonderful opportunity, that the progress on creating this parkland and preserving it and protecting it is such a painfully slow process. This is why the former amendment was suggested in terms of: determine what you want to do, prioritize, have some sort of semblance of where it is that you want to go, and then, once you've made that decision, go for it, and if you can't get it going within a five-year period, then something is wrong with the plan or something is wrong with the initiative.

Examples of failed planning. I would suggest to look at how expensive it was and how long it took to expand Glenmore Trail over the Glenmore Reservoir. The individuals who lived along that trail were led to believe that only the first row of houses were going to be taken, and then it became the second row and the third row because the due diligence – and the province was involved in this interchange – was not there.

Another example of questionable planning is the expansion on 16th Avenue between University Heights and the Foothills hospital. There are still a number of unresolved issues there with regard to the lights, with regard to the way the road was built, whereby the wall is below the grade of the actual roadway, so it doesn't operate either as a visual barrier or as a sound barrier. So mistakes have been made. It's extremely important that planning out from the initial considerations be much more comprehensive and that there be much more consultation.

There are limited opportunities, as the Member for Livingstone-Macleod pointed out, in terms of occupation, in terms of water management in the southern part of our province. I remember the conflicts associated with some of the dams. I'm sure the Member for Livingstone-Macleod is aware of the conflict just about 20 miles down the road from Fort Macleod, where the Peigan reserve is, and the conflict with Milton Born with a Tooth over water rights and land rights and land access. Fortunately, no one was injured in that circumstance, but a rifle was fired, and there was literally a standoff in this particular circumstance because the consultation wasn't there. I'm not speaking in praise of Milton Born with a Tooth. I'm not suggesting that he was either a patriot or a terrorist. I'm saying that that's what can happen when there isn't a consultation process.

We've seen other circumstances in this province where trespassing occurred with very disastrous results. I bring out the example of what happened on the Weibo Ludwig family farm. That was a tragedy. It was a tragedy. I'm not saying that that was acceptable.

Mr. Snelgrove: It's just about the same as your speech on the tragedy scale.

Mr. Chase: Well, the hon. President of the Treasury Board may think that my speech is of a tragical nature.

Mr. Snelgrove: Irrelevant.

Mr. Chase: He's entitled to call my concerns irrelevant.

The point is that there are conflicts in this province. There are historical conflicts, and in the last one that I mentioned, there was a death associated with it. We don't want to drive people to the point where they consider illegal acts, but in the same manner, we don't want, as the hon. House leader sort of defended, to enjoin them before any kind of illegal action is even contemplated, never mind committed. [interjection] I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill indicating that my legal understanding is improving. That's very reassuring.

When we get the land-use framework right, then debates that are taking place, for example, in the Longview area about the concern over the former Petro-Canada connection to the gas plant and the possibility of a pipeline and 80 creek crossings – then, hopefully, we'll have some ground and water rules that will simplify the task of prioritizing land use and also simplify land acquisition. I think that what Bill 19 is doing is literally putting the cart before the horse. Until we have the land-use framework as a guiding principle, any of these bits and pieces of legislation are not going to accomplish that end. So my encouragement would be to speed up the process and the understanding, the collaboration, the consultation with Albertans, and get the land-use framework right the first time so that we have the intent of water for life put into actual policy.

The confrontation, whether it's in a verbal form in this Legislature or fisticuffs at an ERCB hearing or spies infiltrating discussions, we've got to move on. If we're going to progress in this province, we've got to have ground rules that everybody understands, and Bill 19, unfortunately, does not set out those ground rules. There's too much left to regulations to be determined after the legislation in its multi-amended form goes forward.

Thank you for allowing the participation. I would like to invite the hon. Treasurer to add his comments. I believe he is a rural-based person, and he seems to have opinions on this process. He certainly has opinions on my opinions of this process. Unfortunately, at this time he is engaged in discussion with the minister of advanced education and does not appear to be desirous of participating, which is truly unfortunate because he is a man of rural roots and opportunities. It's unfortunate that there has been more critique as opposed to create, but I will sit down at this point and allow either the hon. member to participate or any other member who would like to contribute to this very important discussion on the future of Alberta.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The discussion and the debate on Bill 19 at committee certainly continues. We had an interesting dialogue, if I could use that word, on the debate when we were discussing the merits of amendment A4. When we look at the overall bill and the plans of this government – I've discussed this before – I think we need to have further discussion on this. The implications to the taxpayer, the implications to the property owners and, of course, to the government are significant.

Now, when we're looking at the plans of this government regarding infrastructure and property acquisitions, it is noted that the primary ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary will be completed within a few years. That's correct. It's also stated that negotiations to acquire the necessary land for outer freeways need to commence now.

Mr. Hancock: First of all, you plan where the road should go.

Mr. MacDonald: I can understand why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is sensitive about this government's record on planning. Whether it's on budget or whether it's on construction, there are issues around that ability to plan. I can understand why the hon. member is sensitive to that. He's welcome to participate in the debate at any time. I would note that, yet again, an example of the planning of this government, a fine example of it, would be the Mazankowski heart centre, whether it's surgeons and nurses that are needed to operate the facility or the fact that some of the engineering surrounding the completion of the project may not be adequate.

Mr. Chairman, we look at the outer ring roads and we look at Edmonton and Calgary, and we can only assume that somewhere in the Department of Infrastructure or somewhere in a mysterious planning department there is a group of individuals looking at a map of this entire province. They're looking at areas around Calgary, areas around Edmonton, and other urban centres like Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Airdrie, and Lloydminster. These communities or cities will also require primary ring roads in the foreseeable future. Planning discussions, it must be noted, will be accelerated for the long-term plans to be established and parcels of land to be acquired to implement these plans. So this group has a map of these areas. I would think that it's already been determined which properties are going to be purchased.

Mr. Ouellette: Not a chance.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, the hon. Minister of Transportation says, "Not a chance," but I'm of the opinion that the decision has already been made on which areas are for . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it's five minutes to 6, so the committee will immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 23, 2009

Issue 29

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 23, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly a group of grade 6 students from Camilla school in Rivière Qui Barre in my riding. This year their school gym became non-usable, and the community has come together along with the parents and facilities in the community. I want to commend both the teachers and parents and the students for making a difficult situation workable while we repair the gym. They're here touring the Legislature today and have had a great morning touring around the magic spot and whatnot. I'd like to introduce to you the teachers, Ms Amanda Langford, Mr. Mike Panstian, Mrs. Sandra Hollett, Mrs. Chancy Moores, and bus driver Mr. David Soetaert. They are seated in our public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and introduce a group of enthusiastic, hard-working students from Kneehill Christian school, which is located just outside the village of Linden. They're here today to learn how democracy works, and I'm sure they won't be disappointed. They are accompanied today by teachers Miss Terri Miller and Miss Vicki Reimer as well as by parents and helpers Mr. DaVon Baerg, Mrs. Darla Baerg, Mr. Lorne Reimer, Mrs. Staphene Reimer, Mr. Dale Wiebe, and Mrs. Charmaine Wiebe. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the gracious welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to welcome a group of wonderful students from Winfield school in my riding of Drayton Valley-Calmar. These 25 bright grade 6 students along with their teacher, Mr. Thomas Wilkinson, and parent helpers Mrs. Renee Harris and Mrs. Jeannette Chappell will be touring our Legislature, and I'll have the pleasure to be meeting with them later on today. They will be arriving during question period; however, I still invite you to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today

and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of students here today visiting us from Madonna Catholic school in Sherwood Park. I'm introducing this group on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Sherwood Park. They're accompanied today by their teacher, Mr. Ray Rudanec, and parent helper Mrs. Tracy McCloy. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they all rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 31 grade 6 students from Bassano elementary school. These young people travelled four hours on a school bus yesterday to be in Edmonton, are here this afternoon in the Legislature, and will be travelling back later this afternoon. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Miss Jeneen Armstrong and Mrs. Della Armstrong, and parent chaperones Mrs. Jodi Bjornson, Mr. Bill Kelly, Mr. Marty Holmes, Mrs. Tanya Moss, Mrs. Carrie Lassiter, and Mr. Darrell McCoomb. They are seated up in the public gallery, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of nine teachers from the Rotary group study exchange team from Belize. Rotary group study exchange teams provide young professionals and businesspersons an opportunity to experience their business or profession during a three- to four-week visit to another country. For the past two years this Rotary district in co-operation with Belize Rotary clubs and the Belize Ministry of Education has been sending a team of 24 teachers to Belize each summer to conduct workshops for teachers in that area in the areas of math, science, and language arts. Funding has been provided by the Rotary Foundation, Rotary district 5370 Rotary clubs, and a matching grant from the government of Alberta.

Today we have with us a group from Rotary district 5370's Belize literacy program. The purpose of the program is to assist Belize in raising its primary school completion rate, reduce the dropout rate, and improve teaching excellence. The group study exchange team is lead by two Rotarians from Belize, Dr. Eve Aird and Javier Moreno, and includes seven other team members of teachers, school administrators, and Ministry of Education officials: Erwin Arnold, Nelson Longsworth, Jerris Valentine Jr., Franzine Flores, Althea Spain, Glenford Parham, and Anthony Morris. They're joined by St. Albert teacher Bernie Hryciw and local Rotarian Marilyn Mucha. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask all of our guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four very special people in the members' gallery today. Alyse Reid and Lynne Amyotte are University of Alberta students who have volunteered with the give a kid a lunch program. They are joined by Natalie Chesser and Linda Armstrong of the Unity Centre. I will give a statement describing more about their wonderful work

today. I would ask these four guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce an individual who works very hard for the people in the city of Edmonton. We have with us, joining us in the public gallery, Jon Hall. Jon is the manager of marketing and communications for the Edmonton Real Estate Board. We were hoping to have him joined today by Bill Fowler, who is the director of industry and government relations for the Alberta Real Estate Association, but he, unfortunately, was turned back on the highway from Calgary. We do have Jon with us in the gallery, and I would ask him to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a prominent Albertan. Her family came from Barry, south Wales, to Irma, Alberta, in 1927, where they farmed. Her mother moved to Edmonton and became a teacher. Unfortunately, her father died when she was 10. This Albertan married and had four children, went to Grant MacEwan College and the University of Alberta, worked in information management, and was one of *Alberta Ventures* magazine's 50 most influential people. She wrote a story about an Albertan family. It's called *No Corner Boys Here*. The book won an Independent Publisher's book award, best nonfiction, Canada west category. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright purchased a copy for every library in his constituency, and in Edmonton-Meadowlark we purchased a copy for every school in our constituency. This is a history of our province and the people in this wonderful province. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to ask Jean Crozier to rise so that she may be welcomed by my friends in this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to make a second introduction today to you and through you to all members of the House: two Albertans who are very involved in working with students with learning disabilities, improving the learning experiences and outcomes of these students, and furthering research in the realm of learning disabilities. They're here today as we table a white paper from the world summit on learning disabilities which was held in Alberta. With us today is Kathryn Burke, executive director of the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta, the author of the white paper on behalf of the world summit organizing committee, an active volunteer working with children at risk, and the proud parent of a gifted teenager affected by learning disabilities. Kathryn is well published through her volunteer and professional activities and has presented all over Canada. With her is Michele Pentyluk. Michele is a registered psychologist practising in Edmonton who specializes in the area of learning disabilities. She is the president of the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta and is also a popular speaker and author and has also presented all over Canada. I'd ask my two guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Give a Kid a Lunch Program

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I introduced to the House four special people visiting the Legislature today. The Unity Centre does wonderful work and is located in my riding of Edmonton-Manning. Alyse Reid and Lynne Amyotte, two University of Alberta students, as a part of their degree have been volunteering with this great organization. Through their volunteering these students noticed how many clients of the Unity Centre were children and that most of them were going to school hungry. That's why Alyse and Lynne developed the give a kid a lunch program. This project, which ran from April 7 to 14, was very successful: \$811 was raised in food donations and \$695 in cash and gift certificates. This money will go a long way towards helping our city's most needy people.

I would like to congratulate these girls on their hard work and for helping those who are less fortunate than themselves. Our government will continue to support groups just like the Unity Centre through the funding available from Culture and Community Spirit. This will mean that organizations such as the Unity Centre can focus on helping Albertans and strengthening the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Gordon Hansen

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the contributions of one of my constituents, Gordon Hansen, a long-time resident of Marlborough Park, who is entering his retirement. The Marlborough Park community was registered in 1973. Gordon saw a vision of a new hall and facility to replace the small hall in Marlborough Park, and he and another constituent, Doug Caswell, were instrumental in the planning and design of the new facility. The grand, multifunctional centre opened on May 23, 1987. Gordon spent most of his life serving on the board of directors and as a volunteer. Gordon's volunteer spirit also runs throughout his family. His son and daughter have also been involved with the organization.

The centre began to offer sports for youth and a preschool for the little ones. Mr. Speaker, Gordon was a huge part of the community by fundraising, bartending, helping out at bingos, and initiating Marlborough Park Community Association's participation at casinos for fundraising. Gordon was also the co-ordinator from 1998 until the present date. He has a reputation for knowing every single detail about the building that the association currently owns, including loose tiles and the number of nails. He oversaw the smooth running of all events held such as jelly bean dances, bridge tournaments, wedding parties, as well as dealing with the staff, purchasing, and reporting to the board of directors.

Gordon's hard work has earned him his retirement. The community will surely miss Gordon's involvement and his time spent within the walls of the Marlborough Park Community Centre. My best wishes go out to Gordon and his family. His dedication has made a profound impact on the residents of Marlborough Park.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Achievement Bonuses

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to talk about the achievement bonuses that have been provided by the government of Alberta for the last 10 years to senior managers of this province. The total for these bonuses exceeds \$250 million. In fact, that's what we can glean from the annual reports.

That's the information that the government has quietly made available to the taxpayers, who have footed this big bill.

Now, when we look at the reaction of the senior government ministers, including the President of the Treasury Board, that surprises me because in 2006 Meyers Norris Penny recommended that bonuses of this nature compromise the independence and the impartiality of senior officials, including the officers of the Legislative Assembly.

The officers of the Legislative Assembly did the right thing, Mr. Speaker. They do not take achievement bonuses. But what did this government do so that they could control and manage the top levels of the civil service? They've continued with this practice while at the same time asking others to do with less. The others, I would remind the hon. President of the Treasury Board, include seniors; they include people with very, very little, if any, income at all. Meanwhile, this bonus structure, that has reached a quarter of a billion dollars, goes on without any proper accountability to the taxpayers. The government should be ashamed of themselves.

Thank you.

St. George's Day

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of St. George's Day. Historians tell us that St. George was an officer in the Roman army who died a martyr on April 23, 303 AD, for protesting the persecution of Christians. Over the centuries his fame grew, and by the sixth century the legend of St. George slaying a dragon was recorded, possibly as an allegory of his conflict with the Roman emperor, leading to his death.

In the 11th century he was adopted as the patron saint of soldiers, and in 1415 St. George was officially recognized as the patron saint of England. St. George was adopted as the patron saint of Scouting and of many other countries, including Georgia, Malta, Russia, Lithuania, Greece, and Portugal.

Seventeen centuries after his death the memory of St. George remains associated with the virtues of duty, defence of the poor and helpless, and bravery and heroism. The poet Edmund Spenser conveyed St. George's persona in his epic poem the *Faerie Queene*:

But on his breast a bloody Cross he bore
The dear remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweet sake that glorious badge we wore
And dead (as living) ever he adored.

St. George's standard is the red perpendicular martyr's cross on a white background, which makes up part of the Union flag of the United Kingdom and of the flags of four provinces hanging in this Assembly. St. George has special significance for our province as his standard figures prominently in both our Alberta provincial flag and our provincial crest.

Today I'd like to recognize St. George's Day on behalf of our friends in England, those of English descent, and others around the world who embrace St. George and his heroic spirit and to wish everyone a happy St. George's Day.

Genome Alberta

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, Saturday, April 25 marks the 56th anniversary of James Watson and Francis Crick announcing the discovery of the double helix as the basis for the structure of DNA. In plants DNA controls the genetics and genetic selection which allows plants to thrive in different climates. Livestock farmers track the genetics of their herds to raise quality Alberta beef. In humans DNA is largely what makes us who we are. It determines the colour of our eyes and our hair. Unfortunately, it can also lead to a host of diseases.

DNA- and genome-based technologies and knowledge can provide the world with tools for better diagnostics, open the door to more informed choices in therapeutics, and offer lifestyle choices which promote health and lower the incidence of disease. In our province Genome Alberta is helping to put Alberta on the North American genetics map and ensuring that Albertans may be among the first to benefit from new discoveries. Established in 2006 through funding from the Alberta government and Genome Canada, this group is making good headway in the study of how genes interact with each other and the environment.

Genome Alberta is working with research organizations across Canada in tackling mountain pine beetle problems by looking at the complex interaction between the tree, the beetle, and the deadly blue stain fungus which ultimately is killing sections of our province's forest. Field crews are set to sequence the previously unknown genome of the fungus.

Genome Alberta is now launching a couple of new projects. In one project scientists will sequence the active genes of many important plant species, and in the second project they will look deep beneath Alberta's surface into hydrocarbon deposits, where naturally occurring microbes may be able to play a role in sustainable ways of extracting oil and in managing tailings ponds.

In the 56 years since the double helix was discovered, the world has come a long way in understanding and finding the genetic basis for many human diseases and conditions. With the work that Genome Alberta is doing, Alberta will soon be at the forefront of international metagenomics research and innovation.

April 25 is an important day in the world of science, Mr. Speaker. I encourage all members to recognize the achievements of Alberta's genetic science community.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in an unprecedented closed-door press conference this minister of health released his revised plans for seniors' drug coverage. Obviously, the government wants to control the message, and for this media release little has actually changed. To the minister. Under the old proposed plan, 60 per cent of seniors would pay nothing or less than before. Under the new plan 60 per cent of seniors will pay nothing or less than before. What, Mr. Minister, has changed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Leader of the Opposition endorses our new plan because he's absolutely right that under the plan 60 per cent of seniors today will pay less than they're currently paying for drug costs. We do want to ensure, however, that we have a plan for those who do have to pay, that there's some predictability around it, and that's what today's plan did.

Dr. Swann: Well, under the new plan many single seniors with an income between \$12,000 and \$24,000 a year will actually pay more. How can the minister say this is an improvement? Was he listening to seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two situations here that need to be clarified. Under the plan that we announced in December, we used total income. We have changed that by listening to seniors. The original plan was total income; the plan we rolled out

today is taxable income, so we in fact did listen to seniors. But the key thing is: compare what we announced today to what seniors are paying today, and 60 per cent of seniors July 1, 2010, will pay less for drugs than they do today.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, what many seniors are asking us today is: why is this minister taxing seniors to make up for the mismanagement of this government?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't recall anybody talking about taxes. What we did was we introduced an optional plan – let's be clear; this is an optional plan – for seniors to give them some predictability with their costs. Yes, that is tied to income so that some close to 70 or 80 per cent of Alberta's seniors will be in some way assisted by government. Overall when this plan goes into effect, the government will continue to pick up 80 per cent of the cost of drugs for seniors.

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

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Employment and Immigration said that families of injured and killed farm workers "have access to the courts" just like any other Albertans. The minister knows, however, that there is no prosecution for occupational health and safety as there is for all other occupations in this province. To the minister: does the minister support a policy where the only way employers of paid farm workers can be charged with unsafe workplaces is if the families take this issue to court?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I indicated that I am always very sympathetic to any types of deaths or injuries no matter where they happen in the province of Alberta. I've also indicated to this House that farmers have other options that are available to them, and farm employees have options that are available to them. I also indicated that we did hire a consultant to talk to the farm industry out there to see what else could be done.

Dr. Swann: The minister again tried to dodge this issue by speaking about the unique circumstances of family farms. The minister surely acknowledges that there is a difference between a family farm and a corporate farm and that paid farm workers deserve the same rights and protections as any other employees in the province. What's your response, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, those are the areas that we're looking at at present. We're going to keep on working with the agricultural industry. We're going to see where we might be able to clarify some of those definitions and see if there is anything in addition that needs to be done.

Dr. Swann: Well, the minister and this government have been consulting on changes for many, many years. They've simply not only failed in their duties to these families, but they have failed Albertans and shamed us nationally. How many more years, Mr. Minister, will it take for you to do the right thing?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I indicated that we had hired a consultant to look at this. That particular person is to report to both my ministry and to the minister of agriculture over this particular

summer. We will look closely at the options that will be before us and no doubt examine various ways to make distinctions between family farms as we know them and maybe corporate entities for possible regulatory and legislative purposes.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Condominium Property Management

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Condominium Property Act is heavily slanted toward the start-up of newer conversion condos but contains little for the ongoing problems long after the developer has gone. My constituents, some of whom are in the gallery today, are being left in untenable positions by large management companies who take fees from the condo boards but do not do the work, leaving the boards and the owners on the hook. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why is there no assistance available under the condo act to these condo boards who cannot get the work, including producing financial reports, from the management companies that they contract with?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed a very serious situation, and I appreciate this question. With respect to some of the issues that have been raised through Service Alberta, under the Residential Tenancies Act there are certainly a number of things that we can do to support consumers and help them when they are faced by this situation, whether it's management fees or the work not being done. That's what has been made clear to me in some of the correspondence that I've handled.

Ms Blakeman: That was a nonanswer.

Back to the same minister. Given that the government offers others, like a renter, rights and protections or shareholder-investors rights and protections, why is there no section in the legislation which steps in to protect people who own condos when they are taken advantage of by property management companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, under the Condominium Property Act we are constantly looking and reviewing just to make sure the legislation is up to date and pertinent to the situations and the challenges that Albertans are facing right now with respect to condos not being attended to and some of the things that we need to look at. If there's a particular situation that I need to be aware of, I'd be more than happy to look into it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. What is happening here, Mr. Speaker, is that the little guy, the condo owner, and their board are expected to duke it out in court with large national property management companies with unlimited resources. How is that fair? Why can't the government protect these individual owners and their boards as part of the Condominium Property Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I will reiterate that with respect to changes or things that we need to look

at under that act, we have to make sure that these changes are enforceable and effective. If indeed there are consumers that have situations, I need to be aware of those. I am aware of some situations that are going on, and we are currently looking at the legislation as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Government House News Conference

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today is a black day for democracy in Alberta. For the first time that I can recall, opposition MLAs have been physically prevented from attending an important government announcement. This was done on the order of this government to prevent the opposition from commenting on yet another attack on Alberta seniors and public health care. My question is to the health minister: why did this government order security personnel to physically prevent opposition MLAs from hearing and responding to a major government policy announcement?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I know that this particular member craves media attention, but if he'd take a look at the release that went out yesterday, it said: for news media. There are restricted areas there, and I'm afraid that, you know, it wasn't a town hall meeting. We didn't invite the president of the chamber of commerce or the mayor of Edmonton, and frankly we didn't invite the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it was a public building.

This is the most secretive government in Canada. Today's action at Government House shows that it is also the least democratic. Nothing could underline more clearly this government's contempt for the role of the opposition. To the same minister: why would the government take the unprecedented step of blocking opposition access unless it's afraid of what we have to say about yet another attack on public health care and Alberta seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that is just such a bunch of bunk. This particular government, this particular Legislature provides more funding to that party, which is not an officially recognized party. We do things that are unprecedented in this House. For that member to stand there and say that kind of stuff is baloney.

Dr. Taft: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government in the last election promised a more open and transparent government, but it has delivered the opposite. This is the most secretive and undemocratic government in Canada. To the same minister: why won't you admit that this Tory government misled voters with its promise of openness and transparency and that you tricked them on your plans to privatize health care as well?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, from what I'm hearing from my constituents, I haven't heard one of them say that I misled them at the door. When I was at the doors during the election last year, what

Albertans told me was: we have an outstanding health care system; you've got to get the costs under control; you've got to make it more accessible. And that's exactly what we're doing. I'm not sure who he was talking to, but that's who I was talking to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

(continued)

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today government announced changes to the new drug plan for seniors. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is government reintroducing premiums for seniors just a few months after eliminating health care premiums for all other Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we need to make the distinction. The premiums that had been in effect – in fact, the removal of those premiums have given Albertans something like a billion-dollar tax break – were actually premiums that covered those procedures and those services that are under the Canada Health Act. In essence, this particular program is covering a service or drugs that do not fall under the Canada Health Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question also for the Minister of Health and Wellness: why were the plan's income thresholds lowered rather than increased?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what the member is asking is relative to what we announced last December because there are no income thresholds today. I think the unfair part of the program that exists today is that every senior, regardless of income, has to pay 30 per cent of their prescription costs. What we are finding is that many low-income seniors are not able to access the drugs that they need, so what we have done is we have simplified the income threshold. In fact, there is no income threshold. In essence, there is a premium. Government is assisting almost 80 per cent of Alberta seniors with those premiums.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, my final question is for the same minister. Why is government asking seniors to contribute to their prescription drug costs but not asking all other Albertans to also contribute?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, that's something that we've heard during this discussion that we had with seniors. I can only repeat that under this particular program the Alberta government assists to the tune of 80 per cent of drug costs for seniors. We do not do that for any other Albertan. If you're an Albertan and you're not a senior, you buy a plan, and you pay the premium. So to say that somehow we're putting a premium on seniors or making them pay for something that other Albertans don't pay for is incorrect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Provincial Fiscal Strategy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it became pretty clear at last night's budget estimates on the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise that the only strategy this government has for savings is to hope that the economy recovers next year sufficiently that by 2012 there might be some surplus dollars kicking around to start

topping up the sustainability fund. It's pretty clear that this government has not developed a long-term fiscal vision, and I do not understand why there's a continued reluctance to do so. To the President of the Treasury Board: how much longer do Albertans have to wait before this government actually puts forward a comprehensive fiscal strategy that includes a long-term vision for savings, controlled spending, and a reduction in reliance on nonrenewable resource revenue to fund core government programs?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there are those now today that can tell you exactly what was going to happen. They weren't telling us a year ago, but now they're brilliant in their ability to say what happened.

This government has charted a very clear and direct course to the future with a balance in savings in our heritage savings trust fund and the other endowments. We were prudent in putting into our savings account close to \$17 billion in the unwelcome eventuality that times like this might happen. We have built an infrastructure that is second to none to enable the people of Alberta and industry to thrive. That's pretty good planning.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, why can't this government, why can't this minister wrap his head around the notion that you need to invest for the long term as well as saving short term to have cash on hand for emergencies, both simultaneously, at the same time, like walking and chewing gum?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, I guess he maybe has practised that at home. Good.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear. They have the opportunity to come out and say: "We wouldn't have built the hospital in Calgary; we'd have put that money in the bank. We wouldn't have opened the new wings in the hospitals or universities throughout this province; we'd have put that money in the bank so that we've got a savings account. You can drive over all the potholes you want in Alberta. Not us Liberals; we've got money in the bank."

It's not magic. There is a dollar. It's full of a hundred cents as opposed to no sense somewhere. You can't have it both ways. You can't spend your way out of debt and save your way into prosperity.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, the only thing this government has practised, the only thing this minister has been consistent at is trying to insult the opposition.

He has no plan. He's never had a plan. He never will have a plan. Why is this government so reluctant to implement a long-term savings strategy? What are you afraid of?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, now, Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that was the most intelligent question I've heard from him in this entire session. I want to thank him for asking how my family is. They're wonderful. They belong in a province that is prudent, that is forward-thinking, that is as transparent and open with our forecasts and our budgets as anywhere in Alberta.

Unfortunately, they have so little to hang their future opportunity on that they have to continually tell themselves how bad things are, and if they do it enough, they start to believe it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Carbon Emissions Monitoring

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of great interest and concern to my constituents and myself is the air we breathe, the water we drink,

and the land we live on. The world is now hyped up about the danger of global warming and the debate on its causes. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Environment. The minister has always publicly stated that Alberta leads other jurisdictions in having taken concrete action in reducing harmful gas emissions while others are still talking about it. Can the minister tell us how the greenhouse gas emissions and their reduction are measured?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. There has been a great deal of discussion over the last couple of days on this whole issue of greenhouse gas and CO₂ emissions and measurement. What's so important to note is that we know that there are reductions because we have been measuring since 2003. It's not that we just started measuring last year and then invented somehow what our baseline is. We only established a baseline because we've been measuring since 2003. Without having that base, then I think that the criticism that somehow or other we're dreaming up a reduction could be valid, but the fact is that we have had measurement in place since 2003.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: since the law of climate change and emissions management was approved through this Chamber, what has this unique Alberta law achieved?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that it has achieved is the development of a great deal of Alberta expertise on this whole issue of measurement. I've said in this House before that you can't put CO₂ on a scale and read the total and say: well, that's how much CO₂ was emitted. It's all based on chemical formulas. It's very complex. What we have developed in Alberta is a regime, that is third-party verifiable, that actually can determine with a great deal of accuracy the amount of CO₂ that is emitted from any particular facility.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: looking into the future, what kind of improvements can my constituents expect in the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we live on?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, directly as a result of legislation surrounding climate change and CO₂ management, we can expect that Alberta will be able to join the rest of the world in dramatically reducing the amount of CO₂ emissions. We're going to do that because we started small but learned a whole lot. We'll be able to apply what we learned on a much larger and grander scale, and CCS, which we've discussed in this House, is just one of the many tools. In the longer term protecting the air from greenhouse gas emissions will protect the results of climate change, the inherent water shortages, and others that the member refers to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Achievement Bonuses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 10 years the government paid out over a quarter of a billion dollars in bonuses to hand-picked senior managers. In 2006 Meyers Norris Penny in an independent review of the salaries of officers of this Legislative

Assembly determined that bonus measures would seriously compromise the independence and autonomy of those officers. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Does this recommendation not also apply to deputy ministers and other senior government officials, whom you have so generously rewarded so that you can control them?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the public service in Alberta has been asked to do over the years a very difficult but an incredible job of bringing good, sound public policy to implementation. I find it somewhat surprising that continually in here, day after day, the senior management, who are nonpolitical, have to listen to how poorly they are working or that other payment mechanisms that have been found to be truly successful in the corporate world, such as bonuses for performance being implemented in a corporate structure to try and save money, to try and build efficiencies, has somehow now become a bad word for them. I think they, actually, owe an apology to the senior management team in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why did the government continue to compromise the independence and the impartiality of senior government managers by ignoring the 2006 recommendations from Meyers Norris Penny to cut out the bonus program? You know full well that the base salaries of senior civil servants here are very generous, and they can certainly live on them.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we hardly set a salary here and determine whether you can live on it or not. We have to compete, as every other entity in Alberta has done in the past few years, with a rapidly expanding and very successful private sector. The size of the Alberta government can be debated, but it's around a \$40 billion corporation where all Albertans are shareholders. Most shareholders demand of their corporation that you get the best people possible to implement your policies as a government. We have done that through different strategies. One of them is appropriate bonuses for senior management in our government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that over five years five individual positions on the Alberta Teachers Retirement Fund board received \$1.1 million in bonuses, all of which were individually reported, separately reported, in the Department of Education's annual reports – these bonuses, and I emphasize this, were separate from other benefits – why did the government hide the quarter of a billion dollars in bonuses that have been paid out in the last 10 years by hiding it in the financial fine print? If it's good enough for one annual report, why is it not good enough for all the rest?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition thinks that I know everything that goes on this government, but we don't include all of the pension boards, all of the agencies, everything that has an indirect or direct responsibility to the government. I don't know of the situation that the hon. member has talked about specifically. I do know that our achievement bonuses are covered very clearly on a directive that is published on the Alberta government website. It's not a secret. It's an effective tool we use to attract and retain good talent.

Thank you.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan (continued)

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, seniors have built this province, and we are indebted to them for their tremendous contributions. As part of the pharmaceutical strategy seniors were asked to make further contributions, leaving some seniors frustrated. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness: why are you asking seniors to pay more for their drug coverage than they do today?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is absolutely correct that the program that we announced in December had a fair level of frustration with seniors. I think it needs to be pointed out, however, that a senior's drug cost today at 30 per cent of the prescription is presenting some real difficulties for low-income seniors, so we set out to fix that. Maybe we didn't get everything right in our announcement in December, so we aren't afraid to say: if it's not all right, we're going to make it right. I'll leave it at that for the next question.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also for the Minister of Health and Wellness. The minister has frequently mentioned that helping those seniors in need is a priority. Is changing the seniors' drug plan contrary to that philosophy?

Mr. Liepert: No because what I was just talking about, Mr. Speaker, is exactly that, helping those in need.

But I need to make another point. This particular plan we announced today is not about the senior for today; it's about the senior of tomorrow. As we move forward, the number of seniors is growing, but along with that the income of seniors is growing. This business about one size fits all has to change in health care. This is one of the things that we're saying: if you can afford to pay and enrol in a plan, that's the way of the future.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my final question is for the same minister. Why are you basing this plan on income, especially with all the controversy over that aspect of the plan?

Mr. Liepert: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the only part that's based on income is in reverse. It's: at what level of income does government no longer assist you in ensuring that you can pay into what is a very good plan? I would like to repeat again that under this particular plan not only does government pay 80 per cent of seniors' drug costs, but some 80 per cent of seniors in one way or another will be assisted by this plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Oversight of Police Conduct

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General has stated that the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team and the Law Enforcement Review Board provide adequate civilian oversight of police conduct. However, the head of the Edmonton Police Association believes that independent civil oversight is necessary to strengthen public confidence and adequately protect police officers. Last year there were 21 disciplinary hearings involving members of the Edmonton police. There was only one in Calgary. What is the Solicitor General doing to rectify this imbalance?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'm not sure there is an imbalance, and I'm not sure how each agency reports their internal

disciplinary action. I'm completely satisfied that both chiefs of police, whether it be in Edmonton or Calgary, are doing a great job in regards to internal disciplinary actions within their agencies.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, during last year's estimates the minister indicated that the department was developing a new model for police complaints and disciplinary processes to encourage police professionalism and enhance public confidence. How about including independent oversight for the Edmonton Police Service in this new model?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we already have a great model for public oversight in regard to policing agencies across this province. First of all, we have police commissions and police committees across the province who are appointed by elected representatives. They, in turn, appoint a chief of police who is responsible to them, so that is where the public oversight comes in.

2:20

Mr. Hehr: Well, we know we already have them, but people are calling for better ways. For instance, the Edmonton Police Association president, Sergeant Tony Simioni, wants independent oversight for simple reasons, to provide better service and to increase public confidence in the force. Will the minister tell me why he is so opposed to an independent oversight for Alberta policing agencies?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I've already indicated, we already have a public oversight process in this province that works very well. In regard to the concerns of a union representative for Edmonton Police Service I'm not going to get into management-union issues. The chief of police is assigned his duties, and we'll leave it at that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in the health minister's closed-door announcement this government broke yet another election promise. They said that they were going to eliminate health care premiums, but they just reintroduced them except this time it's just for seniors. If a senior makes more than \$24,000 a year, she or he will be forced to pay under this plan between \$400 and \$800 a year in premiums. To the minister: why is this minister so committed to making seniors pay for this government's mismanagement?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me deal at the outset with this secret meeting. Any time you talk to the media, it's hardly a secret, and that's exactly what we did. So I'm not so sure what the two are all, you know, getting their hair on fire about. If they really want all the information, we'll be happy to send it over to them.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, any time you use public resources to keep the opposition out, it's a secret.

Now, a senior who takes in \$2,000 a month before taxes has to pay at least \$31 a month in premiums plus up to \$15 for each prescription. The minister hasn't fixed their problem; he's just rebranded it. Because they're still going to have to choose between paying these out-of-pocket expenses and paying their rent, more seniors are going to go without, get sick, and end up in the hospital. At a time when we have nothing but a shortage of beds in hospitals,

why is this minister committed to going after the very thing that helps keep seniors healthy and at home?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, about once every four years we ask Albertans: do you want elected officials who want to tax people? We ask them: do you want to give everything to people for free and increase taxes, or do you want to have people accept some personal responsibility? Every four years Albertans say no to them and yes to us.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, one year ago seniors were not asked by this government about this plan, so they got no say on it at all.

Now, the minister's announcement on insisting on including income testing. He's pushing some seniors to seek private health insurance, and he's keeping others from getting the drugs that they need. Why can't the minister understand that income testing undermines the universal public health care that Albertans demand and need and that seniors themselves worked so hard to build?

Mr. Liepert: First of all, Mr. Speaker, nowhere does it say that drug coverage has to be universal and paid for by the taxpayer. What we are doing is ensuring that those seniors who have the inability to pay, lower income, are in fact getting universal free drug coverage, which is an improvement upon today. I can only repeat that government continues to pick up 80 per cent of the cost for seniors' drugs, and I would suggest that's probably a program most seniors are quite appreciative of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Conquest Vacations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The holiday is over for Conquest Vacations, and thousands of people are out of luck with their travel plans. Some are even stranded in other countries. Many questions are being asked with respect to what protections are in place for Albertans in situations such as this. My first question is for the Minister of Service Alberta. What strategies are organized within your ministry to assist Albertans who have been impacted in this particular instance?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, this is a very unusual situation, and Service Alberta is encouraging individuals to contact our consumer contact centre so we can speak with them and give them some advice and hear about their experiences. Of course, depending on how they purchased their vacation, there are provisions under Alberta law to help travellers get their money back either from the company or from their credit card company. People can call us, and we'll review their situation and determine how we can best help them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Other provinces such as Ontario have a travel insurance fund. Why is that not the case here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Travel insurance funds

only cover vacations booked through travel agencies, and we well know that many individuals book their trips online. That certainly has evolved over the years, and it's only growing. Alberta does have a regulation called the Internet sales contract regulation, which does include cancellation rights for consumers doing business with a company on the Internet. Under this regulation if the consumer has booked their vacation with Conquest and they didn't get what they paid for, there are provisions for getting their money back.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following that, my final question to the same minister: how is it, then, that someone from this province who has booked their vacation online with Conquest Vacations actually gets their money back?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first step is that these individuals should contact Conquest Vacations first to request their money. If they're not reimbursed within 15 days, under our regulations a credit card company is required to reimburse them. For those who already started their travel plans and are being billed by their hotel, it is more complicated. We encourage them to come home, and then we can look at their situation. For someone else caught in this situation, there are very many variables. This is a new situation, and, again, please call our consumer contact line at 1.877.427.4088.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

All-terrain Vehicles in Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, her staff, and my Community Service Committee colleagues for a brief but collaborative budget discussion Tuesday night.

If the first responsibility of this ministry is to protect, preserve, maintain, and hopefully expand our provincial parks and protected areas, which currently account for barely 4 per cent of Alberta's designated land use, then surely the second task is to celebrate and promote our multifaceted natural wonders to the world. Can the minister explain how the portrayal of two blond children romping on a British beach benefits Alberta tourism?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member makes the point that there are some 500 parks in this province, all of them beautiful – love them all – but when it comes to the promotion of this province, I can tell him that we do have a digital library in Alberta, some 25,000 images of all of Alberta. We encourage people to use those when they promote this province at all times, and we will continue to do that. I would say that we've done a good job with our digital library.

Mr. Chase: I don't understand, then, why British photos got into that mix. Let's celebrate Alberta.

Given the damage done in Ghost-Waiparous, Indian Graves, and most recently around McLean Creek, can the minister commit to restricting access to parks and protected areas to off-road vehicles other than those parks and trails designated for that specific use?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've shared with this hon. member many times that we are looking at the trail situation in this province right now, not just for ATVs but for horses and hikers and bicyclists. That's why we had the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater meeting with both sustainable resources and the parks systems to take a look at this issue to see where we can safely and appropriately use these trails in all manners, and we'll get back to him as soon as we have that policy ready.

Mr. Chase: I look forward to that policy and the land-use framework policy especially.

In keeping with our Alberta Liberal caucus commitment to give Albertans a voice, Kelly from Leduc wrote in and would like to know, and I quote: why is this government spending money on expanding trails for ATVs in wilderness areas when the government's own survey shows that Albertans, at least those surveyed, do not want this?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had, actually, lots of surveys done in this province. We continue to consult a wide range of Albertans, and the land-use framework as well as the new parks plan is going to do further consultations in a region. So to say from one report that you should or shouldn't have: I don't know that that's as balanced as we want to be. We're listening to all stakeholders, and when we put together these plans, you'll see a multistakeholder vision with these regions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Taser Testing

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security released the results of tests conducted on tasers being used by police agencies in this province. Of the more than 400 tasers tested, about 12 per cent did not meet manufacturer specifications. My questions are all for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. While the results indicate that most of these tasers are operating as they should, can the minister explain to the Assembly what will happen to the 12 per cent of the tasers, or 50 devices, that did not meet manufacturer specifications?

2:30

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we just completed what we believe is the most comprehensive and largest independent testing of tasers in the world today. As the hon. member has mentioned, about 12 per cent of those instruments did not meet the manufacturer's specifications. I want to say that most of those devices that did not meet specifications were operating below those particular standards. I will say that all devices that were tested that did not meet the manufacturer's specifications have been pulled from service. Those that have been pulled will be independently retested before going back into service or destroyed. Those tasers that were operating properly have been returned to service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: did the results of this testing get us any closer to determining once and for all if tasers are safe for usage by police in this province?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, when we started this testing, we said that we were conducting these tests to determine if these devices

were operating within the manufacturer's specifications, and the vast majority of them are. While this will not quell the debate around safety of these tasers, it does provide us with more scientific information to share with law enforcement agencies and researchers to help in developing policy and training. We believe that these tasers are an effective tool to help police deal with violent and dangerous situations. Having said that, my department will continue to look at new information that will strengthen the strict taser guidelines that are already in place in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister: what about the remaining 550 tasers in Alberta that have not been tested? What does this minister's department plan on doing with them? Does he want to take them to Vegas?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, if I was going to go to Vegas and stay in some of the cheaper hotels, I may need that for protection.

Mr. Speaker, we will be conducting independent testing of the remaining tasers that are in use.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Health and Wellness told this Assembly, "I'm told by Alberta Health Services that they expect to have the Mazankowski centre starting to take patients next month." Today Alberta Health Services said publicly that they never advised the minister of this and that the Mazankowski will not begin taking patients until at least late summer or into the fall. Mr. Speaker, misleading this Assembly on an issue like that, I'm sure you'd agree, is very serious.

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

Dr. Taft: To the Minister of Health and Wellness: where did he get his information that the Mazankowski was opening next month?

Mr. Liepert: The CEO.*

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. There seems to be, Mr. Speaker, a lot of political covering up when it comes to the Mazankowski. Last week Alberta Health Services' website showed that the hours of operation for virtually all their services were zero – I'll table the print-offs of that – but after I raised the question in the Legislature, the website was changed to make it look like everything in the Maz is up and running and taking patients even though it's not. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why can't the public get an honest answer on what's really going on at the Mazankowski?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the public will get an honest answer if they listen to the government, not the opposition. What I said was that there have been some real issues around commissioning the facility. You know, I'm not sure what this particular member wants us to do. If the technology is not one hundred per cent certain, does he want us to put a heart patient on a bed and say, "Well, it might work. It might not"? Is that what he wants? Say so.

Dr. Taft: I'm just looking for a straight answer on behalf of the public, the patients, and the staff, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard from this minister a whole range of different stories. He's distanced himself from the official opening, he distanced himself from construction management, and now he seems to be having all kinds of difficulties in working with Alberta Health Services. My question to him is: why is his working relationship with Alberta Health Services so strained?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the answer to the first question I suggested that the CEO had given me information that they expect to start taking patients in May. Now, I would suggest that if I'm talking to the CEO and he's giving me information, that is hardly what I'd call a strained relationship. What we have here, obviously, is a particular member of the Legislature who can't seem to give up his former job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Northeast Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the northeast leg of the Calgary ring road is nearing completion, many of my constituents in the communities of Applewood, Abbeydale, and Monterey Park are concerned about the proximity of the road to their homes. Specifically, they are concerned that children playing behind their homes can wander onto the new road. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Will there be any barrier between the homes and the road?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, we always fence off the road components in a transportation and utility corridor. The children would have to go through a barbed wire fence before they could get to that road. We encourage people, especially children, to stay away from transportation and utility corridors, and I sincerely hope that parents would educate their children properly, supervise their children, and really explain to them the dangers of playing by a high-speed roadway.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister perhaps may have meant to say "chain-link fence."

The residents are also concerned about the increased noise caused by traffic when the road is under construction. My second question is to the same minister. What can the minister do to ensure that there is not excessive road noise?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, engineering studies indicate that noise levels should not exceed the sound limits on that roadway. However, once the road is built, we will go out there, do the proper testing, and make sure that it's within our allowable limits. If we find that the noise exceeds the limits, then we'll engineer and fix the problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During construction they have also been forced to deal with issues like excessive garbage in their yards, dirt on their windows and their homes. My final question to the same minister: what is your department doing to ensure that the concerns of the residents are being addressed?

*See page 817, right column, paragraph 7

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I do understand that there have been some complaints over time of some dust and some debris blowing around. You always have a bit of that problem when you're under construction. It's one of the hazards of construction that needs to be done. Our contractors have been instructed – and I understand that they're living up to that – to water down the site whenever they can or whenever they notice that it's getting too windy. My staff have been instructed to make sure that if there's wind and some of the papers or the debris from the construction site blows around, you send guys out there and pick the stuff up. From what I understand, our contractors have been largely complying with these instructions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Government House News Conference (continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to, I think, put these questions aside and only have one if I might, and it would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why was I as an elected member of this House and a dedicated defender of seniors' rights thrown out of Government House this morning when all I wanted was to be part of a public announcement?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier and in this particular case, I would check to see whether anybody was thrown out of anywhere. That's a pretty serious accusation.

But what was clear in the invite was that it was a news media news conference. The last time I checked, that particular member was not a member of the news media. This was not a public meeting. No other elected officials or other business leaders were invited. I can say no more than that, other than the fact that if this hon. member, in fact, was thrown out of Government House, then I'd like her to stand up and acknowledge that. If she was told at the door that this was a news conference only, then I'd also like her to say that in this particular House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have an additional question?

Ms Pastoor: No. I'm going to let it go.

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

Ms Pastoor: No, I won't. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: Sorry. I've already recognized the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency along with Agriculture and Rural Development have announced \$30 million worth of grant programs which will be delivered by ALMA. This is very welcome news to many of my constituents as well as agricultural producers around the province. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: why are these programs necessary at this time?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These programs certainly are critical to help the industry do things differently. We

know that the status quo isn't working, and the idea behind the strategy is to better respond to what the markets are asking for. These grant programs will provide industry with a means to undertake projects that will improve our competitiveness by better responding to what customers and potential customers are asking for. Industry is now doing things differently, and it was imperative that as a government we shifted out of funding short-term to long-term solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What makes this type of funding different from what we've done in the past?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, all of these programs focus on tactics identified in the Alberta livestock and meat strategy to help improve the long-term profitability, including differentiating products, diversifying markets, enhancing marketing effectiveness, fostering effective business models, and promoting a strengthened supply chain. When I announced the strategy last June, I also said that there would be no more ad hoc payments. Instead, we would focus on making the right investments that would move industry forward and into a profitable future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: who is eligible for these programs?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, that's a good question, Mr. Speaker. These programs are certainly open to all industry associations, individual producers, and agribusinesses in Alberta. Anyone who falls into one of these categories and has a new, innovative idea that fits the objectives of a grant program is eligible. I would certainly encourage all industry members to put forward ideas and work with ALMA people to get the projects off the ground.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 104 questions and responses. In a few seconds from now I'll call on the last member to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Trade Unions

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Trade unions ensure that workers, who are the backbone of our economy, are treated fairly by their employers and by the government. They ensure that workers' rights are not forgotten in the rush to allow corporations to turn a profit. Jobs are being lost at an alarming rate in Alberta. Where a year ago there were far more jobs than workers, things have quickly changed. Now, more and more, workers need to access employment insurance, and good jobs are being replaced with low-paying part-time work. In times like this they need the protection of a union more than ever.

Safety standards are not in place for farm workers at all, and for the rest government provides only vague regulations, almost no enforcement, and refuses to legislate worker safety committees. As a result, Albertans need unions to help them keep safe in their

workplace. We all benefit from the work of trade unions, be it in the livable wages that we enjoy, the pensions that will see us through retirement, equality in the workforce, recognition of human rights for underrepresented groups of people, and, of course, the weekend.

But, Mr. Speaker, in its ongoing efforts to place corporate profit above the interests of working Albertans, this government hangs onto a regressive set of laws, intent on doing everything they can to stand between workers and unions. It is time for this to change. Over the last few years labour groups have consistently asked that Alberta's labour legislation be made fair for all. They have called for a return to the right to strike for all workers, a ban on scab labour, first contract arbitration, automatic certification when the majority of workers sign up with the union, and the elimination of the Public Service Employee Relations Act. It is time for this government to treat all Albertans fairly and change the law to right the imbalance that exists only in this province.

Today we salute workers, we salute trade unions, and we ask this government to join us in finally doing the same.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to advise the House that on Monday, April 27, 2009, we will deal with motions for returns 21, 22, 23, and 24.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate that some residents received their meals late, did not receive their bath, and were left in bed all day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is copies of a petition organized by the Friends of Medicare. It's a petition indicating a cease-and-desist order against the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness regarding the dismantling of our public health care structure.

My second tabling is in reference to my questions earlier in question period. It is a spreadsheet indicating the government's \$250 million plus senior management achievement bonuses scheme over the last 10 years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two different sets of tablings. One is documents I referred to in question period. They're printouts of the website from Alberta Health Services from before my questions last week on the hours of operation of the Mazankowski. These indicate hours of operation at zero. On the current website that's all been wiped out.

My second set of tablings is a range of correspondence on the government's policy on gender surgery. It's letters from Matthew Cadrin, Karen Hofmann, and a number of other people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 13, 2008, 189 people from around the world gathered in Lake Louise for the first-ever world summit on learning disabilities. International experts from diverse disciplines and backgrounds together with parents and individuals with learning disabilities attended the summit. The findings of the summit, as articulated in this white paper, fit well with the discussions and work that are taking place through setting the direction for special education in Alberta. I know from conversations with the steering committee and staff working on the initiative that the work done at the world summit will inform the setting the direction process. I'd like to table five copies of the report *A Call to Action: World Summit on Learning Disabilities*, that was held in Lake Louise April 13 to 16, 2008.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Acting Official Opposition House Leader.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Government House Leader please inform the Assembly of the expected government business next week for the Assembly?

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tuesday, April 28, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we would intend to introduce to the Assembly bills 29, 31, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42. Those would be moved so that the Assembly would have the benefit of the initial speech indicating the purpose of those bills. That's the Family Law Amendment Act, 2009; Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act; Fiscal Responsibility Act; Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009; Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009; Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009; Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009; Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009; Protection for Persons in Care Act; and Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009. We would anticipate being in Committee of the Whole on Bill 19, subject to progress today, and on bills 6, 7, and 9, and, time permitting, third reading of bills 4 and 17.

Wednesday, April 29, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 10, Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act; Bill 11, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 12, Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 13, Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 14, Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act; for third reading bills 6, 7, 9, and 19; and as per the Order Paper.

April 30 in the afternoon under Government Bills and Order for second reading Bill 14, Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act; Bill 16, Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 20, Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 23, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 24, Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009; and in Committee of the Whole Bill 10, Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act; Bill 11, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 12, Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 13, Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009; and as per the Order Paper.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, earlier today during part of the Routine there were some interventions with respect to purported points of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: No. I'll withdraw mine.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, you rose on a purported point of order?

**Point of Order
Parliamentary Language**

Mr. Liepert: I did, Mr. Speaker, and it's a very simple one. This clearly refers to *Beauchesne* under Alberta's standing orders. In the line of questioning the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said something to the effect that I had misled this House. I would ask him to withdraw those comments, please.

The Speaker: So you're making a point of order?

Mr. Liepert: Yes. I did.

Some Hon. Members: What's your citation?

The Speaker: Well, it was a citation under Standing Order 23, I'm sure.

Go ahead, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to explain, briefly, the exchange. We were informed earlier today from Alberta Health Services that the conversation with the minister had not occurred. It appears that we were misinformed. The minister is saying that the CEO of Alberta Health Services told him the Mazankowski Heart Institute will be accepting patients next month. At this point we'll take the CEO at his word, so I do withdraw my comments. We'll see how it plays out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That's all very good. Well, actually, the chair was going to say something. I'm just going to say it anyway because it's Thursday afternoons that we always have these kinds of activities. What the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview actually said: "Mr. Speaker, misleading this Assembly on an issue like that, I'm sure you agree, is very serious." It's absolutely correct that there's an innuendo associated within there, and there's a direct relationship.

Then we heard the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond. But the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness probably was offside, too, because he did say something to the effect that if the public wanted the truth, they should actually "listen to the government, not the opposition." You know, there's a bit of cut and thrust in all of this.

I was going to call this a draw, but seeing as you have both clarified the situation, I really appreciate that as the chair because it provides for the ultimate harmony, and there's the suggestion that we can get along very well. So that's very good.

Mr. Snelgrove: Let's call it 4:30.

The Speaker: You want to call it 4:30? There's a motion put forward by the hon. President of the Treasury Board to call it 4:30. If all members agree, it will be done.

[Motion lost]

**Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 19

Land Assembly Project Area Act

The Deputy Chair: We're debating comments or questions on the bill as amended. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We will certainly continue the discussion and the debate on Bill 19. I'm not satisfied, and debate at Committee of the Whole is the ideal time to try to improve this legislation as it exists. It has been amended, as you have correctly stated. There have been valiant attempts by various members to try to fix this legislation. Certainly, there are many, many people throughout the province who still have concerns and issues with this.

I know that there was a time recently – I guess I'll have to say that I was more idealistic – when I thought maybe the government would move this bill from any further discussion here in the Assembly out into the public, where the public could have a good look at this. If they wished, they could make suggestions. They could express their concerns through public hearings through the Standing Committee on the Economy. But that wasn't done, so here we are. We have this benevolent idea in the government benches that they certainly know what's best, and this bill is an example of that.

Now, when we look at what we're deciding here with the Land Assembly Project Area Act and refer back to what was said yesterday afternoon, Mr. Chairman, there was a bit of discussion on the original restricted development areas as they were implemented through, I think, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. When you look at the RDAs, as they were called, the result of those RDAs is, of course, the land that was assembled for the ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary. There was a restricted development area in Sherwood Park. There was one in Devon. What happened to the land in Devon around that RDA is a mystery in itself. Anyway, when we look at the plans of this government and we look at this legislation and we look at the maps of the ring road around Edmonton and the maps of the ring road around Calgary, what land does the government plan to acquire through this bill, if it does become law, for the outer ring roads?

Now, I was told yesterday that that's not in the planning stages.

Mr. Snelgrove: Relevance.

Mr. MacDonald: It's typical of that hon. member across the way to say "relevance." This hon. member, who's in charge of so much money – in fact, Mr. Chairman, I think I'm going to report that hon. member to the former Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, Steve West. I realize that he's . . .

The Deputy Chair: Talk to the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Hold on here, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] I still can't see it. Okay. I thought it was the map to Steve West's house. I suggest that you pay him a visit.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll speak to the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. When we look at the Land Assembly Project Area Act and we look at the long-term plans of this government, the medium-term plans, and the short-term plans, this is legislation that they need to acquire the land for these outer ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary. You'll be pleased to know there are also plans afoot for a ring road around Medicine Hat.

There's one around Lethbridge. There's one around St. Albert, Red Deer, Lloydminster. Now, that'll be a delicate negotiation with the province of Saskatchewan. We're not going to go there.

Anyway, somewhere in the Department of Infrastructure – or maybe it's in Treasury Board because there's a lot of planning going on there, and we do know that the 20-year strategic Infrastructure plan is on the President of the Treasury Board's website. I'm not going to talk about this, but there was some suggestion before, during debate at committee, as to who exactly was in control of the 20-year strategic infrastructure plan, which this bill is very, very crucial to, whether it's the President of the Treasury Board or whether it's the Minister of Infrastructure.

Regardless, what land and where is it and how much is needed to fulfill the requirements of these projects? Has any of that land already been purchased? If these maps are drawn up, who has them? Who has knowledge of them? Is it the minister? Is it senior officials in the department? Is it the entire cabinet? I mean, we know the control that the cabinet is going to have around decisions relating to this bill. Who would make the suggestions that we need a ring road?

3:00

Let's look at Legal. Let's take Legal as an example. Does the outer ring road, Mr. Chairman, go as far north from Edmonton as Legal? Now, maybe the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology can enlighten the House. Does it go past Spruce Grove, or does it go on the other side of St. Albert? Where does it go? How big is it going to be? How much land is going to be set aside? Is there going to be a transportation utility corridor with those roads?

There is a lot of land to be purchased. There is a lot of information here. If we look at the past and we see what happened in Calgary and in Edmonton with the acquisition of the land for the ring roads, I think it would be in the best interests of public confidence and, certainly, interests of the taxpayer, to protect the taxpayer, if these proposed plans, these complete plans were made public because they're part of this bill.

Mr. Chairman, I would strongly urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a close look at the 20-year strategic infrastructure capital plan that I referred to earlier. It's a document from January 2008. It wasn't part of the election process, but it was a document that was developed by this government. It's on at least two ministry websites, and it is the details that would follow this proposed Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act. It would be the fine print if this was to be the initial direction that we are going in.

Now, if these maps do exist – and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology certainly implied that they exist, particularly in his area – I think they should be tabled. I think they should be tabled in the Assembly. I know we went into the argument about the regulations and why or why not we can see those before we pass this enabling legislation, but typical: the regulations are to follow, and we have this sort of trust-us attitude with the government members. But when you think, Mr. Chairman, that this information should be made available so the taxpayers can have a look, we could put these maps, these potential or possible or future ring road maps, on the Infrastructure website.

We used to have really detailed maps of the ring road around Edmonton and the one around Calgary. Those maps were front and centre on the Infrastructure website, but I was asking questions about some of the land deals surrounding those ring roads, and poof, Mr. Chairman, those maps disappeared from that website. But I suspected that, and I downloaded them in colour. I suspected that would happen.

I'm going to have to be more and more aware of that, Mr. Chairman, particularly after the events of today, which I can't

believe. Government House would be in the Infrastructure department, and for members of the opposition, all parties to be banned . . .

The Deputy Chair: Talk about this.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. You're absolutely right. It's Thursday afternoon, and the minister of health has provoked me.

Now, Mr. Chairman, yesterday afternoon we went through this bill line by line, detail by detail. We certainly had a fairly good look at it, but there are some amendments that I think we need to discuss. Certainly, when I talked to particularly rural landowners, they had an issue around section 14, the offences. "A person who contravenes an enforcement order under section 7 is guilty." There has been a lot of discussion about that. Not only are they guilty of an offence but liable

- (a) in the case of an individual, to a fine of not more than \$100 000 or to imprisonment for a period of not more than 2 years, or to both a fine and imprisonment, or
- (b) in the case of a corporation, to a fine of not more than \$1 000 000.

I have had a few discussions with individuals regarding this. First off, Mr. Chairman, I said: if you had my job and you wanted to try to improve this bill and convince the government of any one thing, what would it be? I was surprised that many people wanted amendments to this section to reduce the \$100,000 amount to \$25,000, so I would like at this time, please, to introduce an amendment. I believe it would be A5.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause while that is brought to the table and then distributed.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I have a signed copy here. I would be glad to do that.

The Deputy Chair: Okay, hon. member, please continue. This is amendment A5. We'll be speaking to this now.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Officially for the record, Mr. Chairman, I would move that Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended in section 14(1)(a) by striking out "\$100 000" and substituting "\$25 000."

If the government is insisting that this proposed legislation go through the usual process here and we get through to third reading and it's imposed on the citizens whether they agree or disagree with it, I think it would be better if we were to reduce the penalty. There are certainly going to be individuals that are going to be affected by this. It is individual Albertans who have spoken out the loudest about this. There certainly have been, as we talked about yesterday, many editorials from various newspapers across the province that have had a lot to say about this bill and the direction that the government is going in. But it's the individual property owners that we've got to be thinking about here this afternoon.

3:10

I think \$25,000 would be a reasonable amount if a person was found guilty of an offence under this act. I would like an explanation as to why the government thought \$100,000 was their amount. It certainly seems to me to be excessive. I've been told by many different people that they feel that the government is high-handed here.

Before I take my seat, I would just remind all hon. members of the comments of Mr. Erickson from Drayton Valley-Calmar – I think he's the leader of the Green Party – who stated that he has met so many individuals, he's had so many discussions regarding this

proposed legislation, and I suspect that he has not met the minister of health because he has not met anyone, Mr. Chairman, who is in favour of this bill.

The Deputy Chair: We're talking to amendment A5.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, we certainly are.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I would like to urge all hon. members of this Assembly to please consider reducing the fine amount for an individual from \$100,000 to \$25,000. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Does the minister wish to respond?

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment speaks to a maximum, and of course that would be determined in a court of law. The fact that no fine has been issued over the past 35 years under this enforcement indicates to me that we don't have a problem, so I oppose this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Yeah. Just to add to that, Mr. Chair, \$100,000 is a maximum for very extreme cases. As was pointed out by the minister, this probably would only be used in extreme circumstances, where it may require a huge fine to prevent some corporation with deep pockets that would be intent on preventing some type of thing like the building of a dam or that sort of thing. I think it would not apply to the average farmer or landowner of little means such as myself. I'm a landowner, and I'm not concerned about this level of a fine in there because I know how these things work. You know, it seems to me that the opposition is looking at going through this bill one word at a time and wanting to strike out a word or add a word here and there.

I've been to some of these meetings as well. On the amendment, a lot of these people at these meetings have been intimidated into silence, actually. Some of them have approached the minister and told him that they support what the minister is trying to do here in the bill and that these amendment-type things don't concern them at all, but they're afraid to stand up at a public meeting because of the mood and the intimidation at the meetings. Quite frankly, one guy said: I'm afraid to get out of here with my skin. I talked to numerous ones one-on-one, and they told me the same thing. I got very few calls in my constituency – I got some opposed to this, but I got a lot that were in favour of it as it is. So I oppose the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much. I listened with great interest to the previous speaker and his comments. With respect, we are in Committee of the Whole, which does allow us to examine a bill line by line, clause by clause, word by word. So it's a perfectly legitimate way to examine legislation.

The second interesting thing he said was that, you know, the hundred thousand was really there for corporations, but in fact the way section 14(1) is set out, it says:

(a) in the case of an individual . . .

It's listed in the legislation.

. . . to a fine of not more than \$100 000 or to imprisonment for a period of not more than 2 years, or to both . . . or

(b) in the case of a corporation, to a fine of not more than \$1 000 000.

It is considering it in two different ways, and this amendment is amending section (a), which is talking about the individual.

I'm taking a step back, and I'm thinking: what is the point of putting punishment in legislation? It's meant to act as a deterrent from the get-go so that if people are aware of the legislation, they say: "Oh, boy, that's a stiff penalty. I wouldn't want to put myself in a position where that might come into play." Fair enough. That's what deterrents are for. Also, if it's actually enforced, it acts as a deterrent to others: "Well, you know, this actually did play out. Mr. So-and-so down the road a bit was convicted of this and, in fact, did pay a fine of X amount of money." Again, that falls under the deterrent section.

I think to myself: what's enough to be a deterrent to an average Albertan like me? A hundred thousand is like winning the lottery. I mean, a hundred thousand dollars is a lot, a lot of money, and to have to contemplate paying that out of my own resources, especially in a dispute with government, to which I've probably already committed a fair amount of funds to fighting the government or supporting others that are trying to bring forward their concerns around these land assembly projects, that's so far beyond a deterrent that it's into the realm of the magical or the horror film. A hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money for Albertans. So I think that in this case it has gone too far.

Mr. MacDonald: These guys spend that in hosting expenses, you know.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I understand that the government can blow that off in a hosting expense, no problem, but for most Albertans \$100,000 is more money than they will have in their bank account at any time except for right when they retire, and hopefully they've got that much and more in their account when they do retire. For the rest of us that's just not happening or, at least, not in my world. That just doesn't happen.

I heard the reaction back from the government members: "Well, you know, it's a maximum, so don't sweat it. That'll never be issued." The truth is that you don't know that. You shouldn't be passing legislation and at the same time saying: well, yeah, I know that's the way it's written, but I don't think it'll ever happen that way. That's what's in the legislation. It says \$100,000. It says that it can go up to a fine of not more than \$100,000 or to imprisonment or both. That's what could happen. You can't be supporting legislation thinking: "Well, yeah, that's the max, but it'll never be laid out that way. It'll be less than that. Trust me. It'll be less than that. It'll be – I don't know – say, \$5,000 or \$10,000." Really? Does the member have that much control over the courts and what kind of fine a judge would levy in the end. I don't think that's a good way to go about making legislation.

The second point I want to raise is about the government's rebuttal of this: "Well, you know, in X period of time, in a long period of time" – 35 years I think I heard the minister say – "this kind of a fine has never been levied." Well, once again, not a great way to write legislation, guys, to say, "Well, this is what it is in the legislation, but honestly in a similar circumstance it has never actually come in to play, so don't worry about the amount." No, that's not how you write legislation.

You need to take it seriously, and you need to understand – I hope the government members do – that this is how you're writing it. This is the direction that you have given the courts in the interpretation of it, and you have to expect that this is the way it will play out. Yes, it says not more than a hundred thousand, but it is well within the courts' ability to levy a fine of a hundred thousand and levy it every time it comes before it. You can't be saying: "Don't worry about this. It's not over the top. It's not too much because (a) it'll never be implemented, or (b) it won't go to that amount of money."

3:20

Therefore, I support my colleague's amendment, amendment A5, which is reducing the \$100,000 maximum amount to \$25,000. I think that even \$25,000 is a lot of money. I am looking at who is likely to be affected in most cases. We may well be talking about landowners that have owned a considerable amount of land, but that doesn't mean that they have a considerable amount of money in the bank correspondingly. I think \$25,000 is still a scary amount of money for anyone to have to contemplate pulling out of their pocket and laying down in a cashier's cheque to the court should they be found in contravention of the legislation. I think that \$25,000 as a maximum is high enough to scare people. Let's face it, if it's going to be levied under \$25,000 – and it could be \$5,000 – that's true as well for the other legislation. So it might as well be \$25,000 as a maximum rather than the hundred thousand.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak in favour of amendment A5. I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to also support amendment A5. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Speaking to A5, I'm inclined to support this amendment, but I'd like to explain why. I hope that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills will participate for a few minutes in this discussion because I know he's eager and anxious. I'll get to the point I was going to ask him right away. Given that, as section 14 points out, this is only the section that applies to individuals and not corporations, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills said: well, this hundred thousand dollars would be used only in extreme circumstances. I think that was the phrase he used. So help me understand: what would be an extreme case where a hundred thousand dollar fine might be applied? Can the member give me an example of when that might be needed?

Mr. Marz: Specifically, no. Not right now.

Dr. Taft: I appreciate that. Just for the record, the member couldn't pull one out of thin air, but maybe with a bit of thought. I know he wasn't prepared for that, but it would help me balance this out, \$25,000 versus \$100,000, if I could sort of picture in my mind what it was meant to do. Anyway, I appreciate that, hon. member.

There's a point in principle that concerns me, and I'm very glad that the Minister of Justice is here. Here's what I feel I'm being asked to consider here as an MLA with this bill. Section 14, which we are debating an amendment to, proposes penalties in the case of an individual, \$100,000; in the case of a corporation, up to a maximum of a million. Those are the maximums. Those are for offences, and it says here in section 14(1): "A person who contravenes an enforcement order under section 7 is guilty of an offence." So I then go to section 7 to see what would exactly be involved in the offence, and it says in section 7: "Where, in the Minister's opinion, a person has contravened a regulation made under section 3." Then it outlines what the minister may do. So now we're bumped, if I'm reading this correctly, to section 3.

Section 3 is a fairly long section; it's a bit over a page. It addresses several areas, and I'll briefly enumerate these, Mr. Chairman. What's crucial here is that it says that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations, and then there's a long list here:

- (a) respecting the control, restriction, prohibition or approval of any kind of use, development or occupation of land . . .

- (b) authorizing the Minister to consent to or approve any particular kind of use, development or occupation . . .

I'm abbreviating here.

- (c) respecting the removal of any buildings, improvements, materials or animals . . .
- (d) respecting the control, restriction or prohibition of the exercise of any power referred to in the regulations . . .
- (e) respecting the control, restriction, prohibition or approval of the dumping, deposit or emission . . .
- (f) making any or all of the provisions of the Surface Rights Act inapplicable.

I don't need to go through (g) and (h). My point is this: section 3 really empowers the minister to make all kinds of regulations in very important areas; section 7 then says that if those regulations are violated, they can be enforced by the minister; and then section 14, which, in fact, we are debating here – there is a clear logic, Mr. Chairman – provides the offence.

My concern as a citizen is that I'm being asked to approve a scale of offence – when I trace it back, I don't know what the regulations might be that the offence could be against. So I feel like exercising the principle of caution. If I knew what the regulations were, I would be more comfortable saying a hundred thousand dollars or a million dollars. But when I look at what's in the act and how broad those regulations could be and how they could affect everything from an order to remove a building or an order for land use or all kinds of things, I'm very reluctant as a legislator to go to the point of a maximum penalty of \$100,000 under regulations I've never seen. It's really asking us to make an enormous leap of faith as an Assembly.

It's frankly compounded because – and this isn't anything personal – when I asked the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for an example, I couldn't even get an example. I'm very concerned that as an Assembly we're giving a penalty here for an offence we don't really have any knowledge of, we don't even have an example of, we don't have any regulations about, and that concerns me. So in the principle of being prudent and conservative, I'm more comfortable with the smaller fine. I am concerned about the intrusion of government into an area that's not spelled out here.

Those are my points, Mr. Chairman, and I quite genuinely ask members to consider that. If we had the regulations in front of us and could see what the offences would be, then maybe \$100,000 is fine. Maybe it's not enough. But without those regs we actually don't know what the offence could be. So I think that we're prudent to support this amendment and be cautious rather than incautious.

I also do want to repeat the point made by the Member for Edmonton-Centre that for most individuals \$100,000 is an awful lot of money. Most farmers I know, most Albertans I know are going to go a long way to avoid the risk of a \$25,000 fine. Imagine if there was a \$25,000 fine for speeding. I bet you not many people would be speeding anymore. So I just want to make those points for the record. Any debate on it: I'd love it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Yeah. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was asking for some examples, and of course any example anyone could give in this House, including myself, would be strictly hypothetical. For example, if we wanted to build a dam in this province at some point in time, there would be an RDA applied to all that property that would be flooded. If someone within the flood plain decided to start building houses down there or a recreational area along the river, would \$25,000 be enough to deter him? He may feel: well,

I've already got three built, I may as well keep building a dozen. Would \$25,000 be enough for that? I don't know. The bottom line is that the amount, whether it's \$25,000 or \$100,000, would be determined by the courts. Up to \$100,000 would be determined by the court, not by us, and that is a maximum for an individual that may or may not want to do that. That's an example that that could be applied to.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3:30

The Deputy Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to join in the discussion of this amendment. I listened with interest to what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview had to say with respect to this, and I've just been quickly rereading some of the sections that exist. Actually, what concerns me about the penalties, as we work backwards from assigning a penalty to how the offence is defined and then to who actually defines the offence – and I'd just like to point out that quite apart from the financial penalty contained in section 14, there is also a provision for imprisonment up to two years, which I believe is the maximum under provincial legislation, the maximum penalty of imprisonment that can be imposed under provincial jurisdiction; otherwise, it becomes a federal and criminal act. So we can put someone in jail and fine them up to \$100,000 or both under this act, and that is done for someone who is found guilty of contravening an enforcement order under section 7.

As we work backwards through the legislation from section 14 to section 7, we see that, in fact, when someone "has contravened a regulation made under section 3, the Minister may serve that person with an enforcement order." So we move back from section 7, working backwards to section 3, and we find that the regulations, of course, are made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and those can authorize the minister "to consent to or approve any particular kind of [land] use, development or occupation of land in the Project Area" and so on.

What we have, then, is that the government, the cabinet, you know, as they meet privately, can make regulations, and if you don't follow the regulations, you get served with an enforcement order by the minister, and if you don't follow the enforcement order, then you can go to jail for two years. So I'm concerned. I share the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's concern with respect to this because I know that sometimes government gets it a bit wrong. To have the cabinet make a regulation and, ultimately, if you violate the regulation which they set – and there are very few constraints on what can be in those regulations – if you don't follow it and you get an enforcement order and you violate that enforcement order, you can be sent to jail or fined up to \$100,000 or both.

I think that that is excessive. I think that if you're going to actually have fines on that scale, if you're going to have penalties of imprisonment of up to two years, we need to have a little bit more certainty about what kind of regulations we're going to see. I think it would be certainly preferable from my perspective if we could set out offences requiring imprisonment in legislation so that it can be debated in public rather than have the government make rules without public debate, the violation of which can result in people being faced with enormous fines or, in fact, imprisonment.

Mr. Chairman, I want to indicate that I am convinced by the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview that would reduce the penalty here. I certainly would hope that we could also be

looking at an amendment to reduce the imprisonment portion of the penalty or eliminate it altogether. I think that that would be something as well. It's great to reduce the fine from \$100,000 to \$25,000, but if you can still go to jail for two years, then we haven't really dealt with the problem completely. So perhaps we'll be able to deal with that.

As I say, Mr. Chairman, and have said with respect to this piece of legislation, I find it to be not only draconian but unnecessary. The imposition of penalties for basically refusing to go along with what the government tells you to do, if that's not putting too fine a point on it, is not something that I think we ought to be agreeing to. I certainly won't.

Based on that reasoning and the concern that I have about the bill in general, I am prepared to support this amendment, and I hope that other members will as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak to amendment A5? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. To certainly conclude discussion on amendment A5, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have spoken regarding this legislative amendment, not only thank you to those who are for it but to those, too, who are opposed to it.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has some more comments regarding this, and I would be delighted to take my seat and hear from the hon. member.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Ever so briefly I want to just reinforce my concern with the nature of this when not only are we being asked to enact a penalty of up to \$100,000 and up to two years in jail for an individual who may be contravening regulations we've never seen, but it is also the case in this legislation – I've been uneasy about this from the beginning – that there are parts of this for which there is no appeal. In other words, the way this will be set up, for section 7(2)(a) and (b), I believe, there's no appeal. So we are being asked not only to rubber-stamp regulations we've never seen, but we are actually then passing a bill sections of which the enforcement relates to cannot be appealed.*

We as a Legislature, if we pass this as it is, would be creating a situation in which a landowner, who owns the land through full due process, fully paid for – you know, the buildings may have been in her or his family for generations – can be subject to an order made under regulations that we don't know, and it says here under section 7 that the minister may serve that person with an enforcement order directing a person "to cease the contravention specified in the order," and the landowner cannot appeal that, or directing a person "to stop doing something, or to change the way in which the person is doing it," and the landowner cannot appeal that. Then we are saying that not only can you not appeal, not only are you subject to regulations that we don't know anything about in this Assembly, but you could be fined \$100,000 and be sent to jail for two years. It feels heavy-handed to me, Mr. Chairman. It feels like as an Assembly we're being asked, as I said, to take a leap of faith.

3:40

I'm doubly concerned when I realize that part of that relates to things for which the legislation prevents any appeal. Is this due process? It would be interesting, if there ever is a court challenge to this, if this legislation would stand all the way up. I don't know if

*See page 804, left column, paragraph 8

there's due process in here or not when you prevent an appeal. I think everybody has the right to due process and appeal.

Anyway, I won't take more time of this Assembly. I just wanted to say that the more I think about this, the more concerned I am to be quite so heavy-handed.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. That was certainly an interesting observation by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Certainly, I don't see members opposite rising quickly to respond.

In conclusion on A5, I certainly would like to say that this amendment is a good amendment. It reduces the individual penalties to \$25,000 or less for a person or persons. We on this side of the House think that the current penalties are far too draconian. We think this bill in itself is too draconian. This amendment, if it was to be passed, would go some way to reduce the impact of this legislation on landowners.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has summed it up very, very well, Mr. Chairman. Please, let's think of the landowners here and the valid issues that they have had regarding these proposals.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill as amended.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. You bet. Mr. Chairman, that was another attempt at taking bad legislation and trying to make it better. When we look at this, when we look again at the government's plans, we have to try again to improve this.

Now, I'm sure that there are landowners across this province who are questioning how this debate is transpiring. Certainly, there have been amendments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. There have been amendments from the Official Opposition. There were amendments, of course, before we went to second reading on this bill, which is unusual. When you think of the political firestorm that has occurred, particularly in rural areas, over Bill 19, Mr. Chairman, it is worth while to again attempt to improve this legislation at committee.

Now, I don't know what's going to happen at third reading with this bill. I have no idea.

Mr. Liepert: It'll pass.

Mr. MacDonald: It'll pass. Do you think it's going to pass?

Mr. Liepert: When we get third reading.

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah. That's the confidence of the minister of health. Mr. Chairman, the minister of health is reading a newspaper over there, something he probably should have read when he was Minister of Education. I would like to call a point of order.

The Deputy Chair: There is no point of order.

Mr. MacDonald: There's no point of order. Okay.

It's quite odd. There seems to be a difference between the *ATA News* and the *Globe and Mail*.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, let's get back to the bill as amended.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Absolutely. I am, for the record, speaking of the bill, and we have wide latitude at committee, Mr. Chairman, to discuss this bill.

Since you weren't in the chair yesterday, I think maybe what I should do now is refresh all the members of the Assembly on the bill line by line, word for word.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, there's no need to refresh us. Everyone has had an opportunity to either read *Hansard* or see it online, so we'll continue on.

Mr. Mason: I didn't catch it.

Mr. MacDonald: There. Okay. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. When we look at the section analysis of this bill, Mr. Chairman, we have to realize – and this is for the benefit of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who has been very busy doing his other duties and hasn't had a chance to review *Hansard* or look at the bill from yesterday. [interjection] Well, if he had known, hon. member, that he was going to be physically blocked from that event, he could have taken *Hansard* from yesterday with him and read it.

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Anyway, Mr. Chairman, when we look at this bill and, specifically for the benefit of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, we go through and we look at the definitions, we look at the definition of registered owner, we look at the definition of project area, project area order, public project, two words we don't see in there are "public interest" because, of course, the public interest has been neglected. This bill fails the public interest. It fails the property owners of this province.

Now, when we look at section 2, again, and we look at the land assembly project area – and we discussed this before, but for the benefit of the hon. member I would strongly urge you or your researchers to have a look at the 20-year strategic plan, the capital plan, that is the work of the Department of Infrastructure and the President of the Treasury Board. They're both sharing this on their websites. This is what the whole idea behind the land assembly project area is. When we see this 20-year strategic plan, we see why the government so quietly, so desperately wants this bill to become law so that they can go about their business acquiring specific, targeted properties in various locations in the province for their needs.

Now, I don't think anyone is going to be interested in speculating on the possible location of a nuclear power plant. But maybe there will be speculation occurring on some of the proposed ring roads or on other projects or on the rights-of-way, and this is what we've got to prevent once and for all for the sake of the taxpayers, speculation that drives up the price of land beyond any sort of market measure. That's what we have to do. I think, Mr. Chairman, that the government has failed to listen to our concerns on that. In fact, I don't

think; I know they have. Now, that is why we have to look at this section 2, the land assembly project area, closely.

3:50

I agree with what the Minister of Infrastructure said earlier about the transmission corridors. That's a separate issue. That certainly is a separate issue. There's a significant bottleneck created because of electricity deregulation. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is certainly aware of that. He gets his power bill just like the rest of us. His power bill would be significantly higher than what it used to be, and it's going to be higher even still when the transmission lines have to eventually be paid for through the consumers' bills. Those transmission lines will be on a separate corridor I'm told. I would accept that, but anything can change with this legislation. What is now considered a utility corridor, well, we can change the rules, and we just might do that. With this government rules change all the time, and the rule changes that are made sort of discreetly, quietly are the ones they like the best, Mr. Chairman.

Now, we didn't talk earlier about subsection (2)(c), a project related to the conservation or management of water. That could include a canal. It could include an above the surface pipeline. It could be a pipeline below the surface. There are a lot of different issues around water conservation and management in this Assembly. I think this is the first session in a while – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview could refresh our minds – where we haven't had a stand-alone bill to transfer water from one river basin in the province to the next. A project that would be related to legislation of that nature would of course, I think, be captured under subsection (2)(c).

I don't want to open up this whole debate in committee on a discussion on water exports or transfer of water from the northern half of the province to the southern half of the province, where we could use more water. The allocations have been utilized. There are examples – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is very concerned – of water transfers or parts of licences or portions of licences being sold. Under subsection (2) there is a possibility – and we have to be cautious of that – that that could occur under this land assembly project area. It could be a canal. It could be a pipeline. It's interesting.

Now, section 3 is, again, the powers of the cabinet. We had a discussion on that yesterday. The hon. member knows fully well the extreme powers of the cabinet. I would say that before the hon. member was, unfortunately, physically barred from attending a news conference today, it would have been discussed by that cabinet. That's another example, Mr. Chairman, of the extreme powers of this cabinet. In this bill the cabinet is going to have more power than they've ever had. [interjection] Too much power. Draconian power. The hon. member is absolutely right.

Now, section 3 was discussed during the previous amendment. [interjection] The hon. member is absolutely right, but there is one thing. In my view, this is why in committee we go over these bills word for word, line by line, paragraph by paragraph. Every hon. member is entitled to do that. Every member is entitled. Whether they want to participate or not, that's their business.

The government agency that we were referring to here in subsection (2), we're also debating – and I should find my Order Paper – another piece of legislation around the public agencies governance. This bill, Mr. Chairman, was one of the earlier ones: Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. Now, I'm not going to be able to find that. The definition of government agency means

a corporation that is an agent of the Crown in right of Alberta, and any corporation, commission, board or other body empowered to

perform quasi-judicial or governmental functions and whose members are appointed by an Act of the Legislature, the Lieutenant Governor in Council or a Minister of the Crown or any combination of them.

I believe that's the same definition of a government agency as Bill 32.

Now, Bill 32 in itself is interesting because that's legislation that has come from a government recommendation, and that was a recommendation that was used – and this is incredible. Legally, it's quite interesting. [interjection] The hon. Member for Peace River laughs, but his health authority in the Peace River . . .

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair. Hon. member, through the chair.

Please, quickly, tell me how Bill 32 relates to Bill 19, and we'll move on with Bill 19.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. If you will listen carefully, please.

The government agency that's listed here, I want to know if it's the same definition as in Bill 32 because there are implications to this. There was a legislative officer from this Assembly – to be exact and precise that was the Ethics Commissioner – who had a lot of discussion on the definition of a government agency. We need to be perfectly clear before we go any further with this bill what is meant because there are two, if not three, interpretations of what exactly a government agency is. It depends on who you talk to and in what context it's used, so it is quite important. If I could have some clarification on that, I would really appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

Now, when we think of how on the Order Paper we're dealing with Bill 32 and how this government when they reorganized the health authorities and fired the regional health authorities, including the hon. member's one, they pretended it was already a law when it was only a recommendation – Mr. Chairman, you're absolutely right. That may not be part of this bill, but it needs to be a part of the official record of this Assembly.

Now, when we go on to section 4, that has been discussed as well.

We go to 5, the acquisition of land. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, certainly section 5 was reflected in his comments regarding the amendment that was previously discussed.

Section 6 is, of course, the obligations of a person with interest in the project area land.

Enforcement orders under section 7, the control, the restriction, and the prohibitions that are in section 3 are related. That was outlined very well by my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview.

When we look further, Mr. Chairman, maybe we should have a look at section 7, section 7(4)(a) to be precise, and consider what this will do. Perhaps an amendment to this section cutting out the authority that the minister has – the minister can amend or add terms or conditions. The members across the way may not be concerned about that, but landowners are. They've instructed us to at least get this on the public record. This allows for additional penalties and powers outside of the process that has been set up previously, and we think this is unfair to landowners. The rules for enforcing these powers should be very clear. This section allows the minister to increase the burden of orders too easily. So I would like at this time, Mr. Chairman, to propose an amendment to this section.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: We will pause while that is brought to the table and then distributed. Hon. members, we will title this amendment A6.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Amendment A6, for the record, would read that

Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended in section 7(4)(a) by striking out “amend a term or condition of, add a term or condition to or.” That would be deleted. If we were to do that to the bill, that would significantly change not only that section but some of the tone of this bill.

Now, the proposed amendment cuts out the section that states that the minister can amend, as I said before, or add terms or conditions. This allows, of course, for additional penalties, in our view, and powers outside of the process set up previously. Again, this is totally unfair to landowners. The rules for enforcing these draconian powers should be very clear. This section, if we allow it to remain, provides the minister an easy method of imposing cabinet’s will – I suppose I could call it that – on an innocent, unsuspecting landowner, who, certainly, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has pointed out very accurately, doesn’t have the resources that back up this government, legal or financial resources to defend their property rights. It’s not a fair fight.

I would please ask all members to give this amendment A6 consideration. I look forward to the debate and discussion on this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stand to oppose the amendment. In the conversation that took place where the member has been speaking about the concerns that are being brought forward, even though he got the president of the party’s name wrong – that’s another party; there’s a different president for the Green Party – I’m not just sure if this was another one that was brought forward from that information. It would be interesting if the members that are supporting this and bringing these forward on behalf of those people are familiar with all of the land proposals and policies that go with that party, if they’ve tied themselves that closely.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on A6.

Dr. Taft: Yes. On A6. Mr. Chairman, I rise first to briefly make a correction to some statements I made earlier. I believe I was actually mistaken and misreading the bill, and I think it’s important for the record because some people are following this debate. When I was indicating that the way I was reading the bill, section 7(2)(a) and (b) were not appealable, I think I was mistaken in that. I think they are appealable. For anybody following this and for the integrity of this Assembly I need to acknowledge that I think I was mistaken in that.*

As far as amendment A6 goes, I had noticed this myself when I went through the bill, this particular clause, and it did strike me as an area of concern, so I’m pleased that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has brought forward this amendment. I just have to question why we need to give the minister such power. Just to reinforce this for people who are following here, the clause right now reads:

- (4) The Minister may, by order,
 - (a) amend a term or condition of, add a term or condition to or delete a term or condition from an enforcement order.

That’s a very broad power. It’s a very broad power, and this one is in fact not just in the hands of the cabinet; it’s in the hands of a single minister. I think this amendment would curtail an unusual and, perhaps, even extreme power being granted to a minister without any great controls that we can see. Again, I need to refer to the point that we don’t have the regulations in front of us.

As far as I can see – and maybe somebody here can correct me – if we pass this bill without this amendment, the bill doesn’t seem to provide any limitations on the power that it’s giving this minister. It says, “the Minister may, by order.” It doesn’t say the minister in consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council or anything like that. “The Minister may, by order . . . amend a term or condition.” It doesn’t put any limits whatsoever on that. Or he may add a term or condition. Again, there are absolutely no limits on that, unless I’m reading this incorrectly. I’d welcome to be corrected on this, but it seems to be giving an extraordinary power to the minister here. I mean, after all, we are talking about an enforcement order that’s already been prepared under this act.

Let’s use the example that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills used earlier, which was a farm that was in the way of a planned reservoir going up behind a dam. The landowner refuses to comply, so an enforcement order is written under this act. Presumably that enforcement order is going to do everything that’s necessary. It’ll say that the landowner must leave the land or the landowner must desist from building even more buildings or whatever. If we already have that enforcement order, why do we need to give such extraordinary powers to the minister to amend it or to add to it?

Maybe the minister could help me with this, actually. I’m looking at the minister here. He’s been very helpful. I want to give kudos to this minister for sitting through these debates and responding in good faith to our questions. Mr. Minister, I’m referring here to section 7(4)(a), which is on page 8 of the bill. My question to the minister is: why would he or his successor need such extraordinary power? In other words, why would he need the legislative right to amend or add a term or condition to an enforcement order when that enforcement order is already written? It was very helpful to have the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills give an example earlier. Could the minister justify why that particular power, which strikes me as quite extreme, is necessary?

4:10

Mr. Hayden: The enforcement order can be issued, but with respect to any fine or any action taken, that has to go through the courts. Of course, that’s not determined. But the varying of an enforcement order and the changes that may be necessary to be made to it could be to remediate damages done on a right-of-way. Those are the types of things that, once issued, might need to be amended, to ensure that the right-of-way is put back in a condition that’s consistent with the land-use restrictions that are on it.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I appreciate that. But aren’t those the kinds of things that would be in the enforcement order already? Why would an enforcement order be written up and imposed, if that’s the word, if it was incomplete? Wouldn’t that be done already?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Yeah. For the sake of clarity, in the enforcement order there could be extra actions and works that took place between the delivery of the enforcement order and the time that we actually could get to it. There could be extra considerations that would be required to be remediated.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much. This has been an interesting exchange. It strikes me that what we have here is

*See page 801, right column, paragraph 10

essentially a “whoops, uh-oh” clause that allows the minister, or the Crown, the government, to go back on an action where a mistake was made or there was an omission, to be able to fix it. I’m a little reluctant to okay that kind of thing in an act.

Just given the resources that are available to the government and the period of time that’s now being anticipated to reach this point with what’s being set out in this act, even given that we don’t know what is in the regulations, I just would not expect that a mistake or an omission would be made. Essentially, that’s what I’m seeing this section, 7(4)(a) – it is the “whoops, uh-oh” clause.

I can’t tell you which is worse, the whoops or the uh-oh. You know, I used to run a small company, and I just hated it when I could hear the workers say that. You could tell by the tone of their voice that this was going to cost money.

Mr. Denis: You were in business.

Ms Blakeman: Business, yeah.

I honestly couldn’t tell you which was worse, when they went “whoops” or when they went “uh-oh.” I think, actually, probably “uh-oh” was more expensive.

That is what I’m seeing in this particular section. I guess if you’ve reached that point, given the amount of planning and anticipation and front time that this bill is anticipating, I think that if we’re at the point where there’s a whoops or an uh-oh, maybe there’s a much more serious problem than just having a situation where the minister can correct it through this particular section. I guess what I’m saying is that if this section needs to be used, then maybe there’s a much bigger problem and you need to re-examine the whole thing.

I would like to see that happen given the timelines that are anticipated in this bill, but it does strike me that this is what this is, and therefore I’m supportive of my colleague’s attempts to remove it from the act. I think it signals a much larger problem, and/or this is a sort of quick and dirty way of getting out of something or a cheap and cheerful way of getting out of something that maybe needs some more consideration.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Do other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’m pleased to rise to speak to this amendment, which is called A6. I’ve considered very carefully the comments that I’ve heard from some of my colleagues in support of this particular amendment. This particular amendment would amend, or change, section 7(4)(a), that allows the minister to “amend a term or condition of, add a term or condition to or delete a term or condition from an enforcement order.” It doesn’t amend (b), which allows the minister to cancel an enforcement order, and I think that’s wise. However, I do upon careful consideration find that I disagree with my colleagues on this point, so I’m going to speak for a little bit about why that is.

It seems to me that one of the things that I’ve learned since coming into the opposition and becoming part of this legislative process is that the government is not infallible. I know that may come as a shock to many of you. Based on careful observation of this government and of individual ministers, I have discovered that they occasionally make mistakes. Now, they don’t often admit that, but it’s true. So I think it follows from that, Mr. Chairman, that in terms of developing these enforcement orders, in terms of some of the things that the minister can do, it might be good to let them

actually have a way to change their mind in case they do make a mistake.

For example, the orders under this could

- (a) direct a person to cease the contravention specified in the order,
- (b) direct a person to stop doing something, or to change the way in which the person is doing it.

Now, that’s an interesting bit of wording there. If you directed someone to stop doing something and then decided that by doing that thing, he or she wouldn’t really violate the intention of the regulation in the first place – in other words, you’d made, perhaps, a mistake – then you could use this clause to amend your order. I think that in this respect we could do it.

Take, for example, 7(2)(c)(i). That says that the minister could order somebody to take action to remedy a contravention; for example, “the removal or demolition of a structure that has been erected or placed in contravention.” Suppose somebody has built a structure, for example an outhouse, that is seen to be in contravention, and then suddenly the government realizes that it’s just an outhouse and it doesn’t really affect anything. You can knock it down in five years or whenever the government finally decides to move on whatever it is they want to build. So then the minister could change it. He could change, he could vary the term or condition, and I think he would be wise to do that.

You know, it’s with the greatest respect and regret that I find that I don’t agree with this amendment called A6 because I actually believe that the government needs to be allowed to change its mind from time to time. If, in fact, they brought in a very bad order and they came to their senses and realized it was a mistake, if we pass this amendment, the government would have no recourse.

Of course, they could get around it. They could withdraw it because wisely we haven’t eliminated section 7(4)(b), which allows them to cancel. They could cancel it, and then they could issue a new one with the changes. But I think it’s just simpler and more direct to allow them to amend it and change it, so I think this section of the act should remain unamended. I think we should defeat the act for reasons that I’ve stated, but I certainly think that eliminating the ability of the government to change its mind in the very rare cases that it makes a mistake is probably not a good idea.

4:20

While I won’t be able to support the bill, I will support retaining this particular clause and will, with the greatest of regret to my colleagues in the Official Opposition, not be able to support this particular amendment. But I encourage them to continue because most of their amendments have been very supportable, and I look forward to a continuing number of amendments from the Official Opposition as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just briefly address the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with respect to the matter. I really don’t see what problem the opposition has with respect to this. I mean, if the minister has the ability to make these orders, the minister should certainly have the ministerial power to amend the orders. An example: if one of these orders provided for the various things that were specified in the draft bill, the removal or demolition of a structure.

Another thing that’s provided in there is that the minister may state a time within which there could be compliance. There may well be a circumstance in which the minister might want to give additional time to remedy or to rectify the situation or to take down

a structure or to put the land back into a condition amenable to whatever use is being planned for it.

I think those provisions are entirely consistent. They're consistent with what happens in other legislation as well where there is a quasi-judicial body that has the ability to change an order. If you don't have that in there, the body then lacks that flexibility. So I think it's an entirely reasonable proposition, and I would urge members to defeat this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now, I listened to the two previous speakers with interest, and I certainly can appreciate what they're saying. But if we were to pass this amendment, I would remind the House that the new section 7(4)(a) would read: the minister may – may; it's not shall – by order delete a term or condition from the enforcement order or cancel an enforcement order. So the minister can still change their mind. There's the odd time that they might make a mistake. The option is there with this amendment that if there was a mistake to be made, this would give them the avenue to correct it.

Now, in regard to the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, certainly, section 7(2)(c) would still be applicable. I can understand where the member is coming from, but this is not going to put too many restrictions and too many limitations on the minister. The minister, it is our interpretation of this, can still change their mind and delete a term or a condition from an enforcement order or cancel it. They still have those options.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, it is 4:25 p.m. According to Standing Order 4(3) we will now rise and report.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports some progress on the following bill: Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been another excellent week of some excellent progress, as has been identified. On that note, I would move that we now call it 4:30 and adjourn until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to April 23, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

- 1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)**
First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]
- 2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]
- 3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]
- 4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)
- 5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]
- 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft., adjourned)
- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft., adjourned)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft., adjourned)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft., adjourned)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft.), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft.), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft., adjourned)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)

- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft.)
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)

- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft.)
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft.)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft., adjourned)
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, April 27, 2009

Issue 30

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 27, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Today's prayer was authored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. Let us be ever mindful of our responsibilities as elected officials. Give us the wisdom to serve for the common good of all Albertans, and help us to carry out our duties with respect and courtesy for all of our colleagues in this Assembly. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to invite all to participate in the singing of our national anthem. It will be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a unique group of individuals who are visiting the Legislature today. Joining us for their annual visit are some of the executive members from the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. PNWER has a great tradition that the current executive travels to all jurisdictions within PNWER. We're very pleased to have them here with us today and tomorrow meeting with ministers, members, and government departments. They've taken this opportunity to look at best practices that affect everyone in this jurisdiction, including energy, environment, health, and border issues. Mr. Speaker, the individuals are seated in your gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and remain standing when I call their names: Senator Lesil McGuire from the state of Alaska; MLA Mike Chisholm from the Saskatchewan Party, the government of Saskatchewan; Wendy Baldwin, consul and program manager for the consulate general's office in Seattle; Matt Morrison, the executive director of PNWER; and David Kettles, U.S. relations for International and Intergovernmental Relations. I'd like to ask the Assembly to greet them with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through to all members of this Assembly two very important people seated in your gallery this afternoon. With us this afternoon is Stan Woloshyn, a friend and former colleague, who served the constituents of Stony Plain and the people of Alberta for

many years as an MLA and minister. Joining him is his grandson Scott Woloshyn, who attends St. Marguerite school in the constituency of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. With your permission I would ask our special guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a rather large group of grade 6 students from St. Marguerite Catholic school in Spruce Grove. They're accompanied by a long list of teachers and parent helpers, which I'll go through in a moment. We have 110 students in the galleries accompanied by teachers Miss Lori Green, Mr. Joel Boyko, Mrs. Lori-Lee Carriere, Mrs. Judy Monea, Mr. Denis MacNeil and parent helpers Mrs. Brenda Canfield, Mrs. Sheri Ratsoy, Ms Kim Johnston, Mr. Larry Krahn, Mrs. Kerri Sutherland, Mr. Mike Woloshyn, Mr. Trevor Lein, Mrs. Carmen Victoor, Mrs. Jacquie Frend, Mrs. Monica Halvorson, Ms Shelley Bulie, Mrs. Tara Kozdrowski, Mrs. Patti Kocon, Mr. Paul Richard, Mr. Harold Properzi, Mrs. Rena Nielsen, Mr. Mitch Flaman, Mr. Richard Stirrett, Mr. Bryan Fehr, Mrs. Shannon Matsuba, and Mrs. Tammy Walsh. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, they are in both galleries, 137 guests in all. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: I'm sure you bought lunch for them all.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members today a group of students and parents and helpers from Rimbey elementary school. There are 20 grade 6 students, very bright and eager kids, that asked good questions this afternoon; their teacher, Mrs. Cathy Coers; and some parents and helpers, Ms Lennie McFadyen, Mrs. Glenis Shaw, Mrs. Holly Trenson, Mrs. Margaret Tanasiuk, Mrs. Laureen Morton, Ms Pam Elliot, Mr. Glen Clark, and Mrs. Frances Beagle. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you 18 students and six adult chaperones, including their teacher, Heather Hempstock, from Bishop Routhier elementary school. Bishop Routhier elementary school is located in the Peavine Métis settlement, about 350 kilometres north of here. I don't know which gallery they're seated in, but I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to be able to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a great group of kids. On Sundays when I go from MLA, I turn into a Sunday school teacher, so this is my Sunday school class. They're up visiting, and I'd ask them to rise as I name them: Jenae Feddock, Laura Stringham, Taylor Stevens, Jaden Feddock, Becky Cooper, Jon MacDonald, Linden MacMillan, Scott Broadhurst, Chris Pinter, and Myrna MacMillan, who is helping me today.

They're about to go and take part in some tourism in this province at West Edmonton Mall after question period. I'd ask that we all give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today people I consider to be friends and, of course, colleagues. They represent the county of Camrose. They're up here in Edmonton today doing some work, and we had the opportunity, myself and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, to have lunch with them and hear some of the things they're working on. I would like to have them stand as I call their names. They are the reeve, Don Gregorwich; councillors Kathleen Ireland, Harvey Benke, Glen Nelson, Doug Lyseng, and Al Radke; and Steven Gerlitz, administrator. They're behind me up here. I guess they've got us surrounded. I'd ask my colleagues to extend the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three guests joining us in the gallery today, all of whom have come to hear my member's statement and to express their concern about the fate of the Wild Rose Foundation and its funding. The first person I'd like to introduce is Danisha Bhaloo, who is the director of programming for the Edmonton inner-city children's project. This is a 14-year old project that has been providing recreational and educational programming to youth in the McCauley-Boyle Street community. Danisha, would you please stand?

Heather McPherson, please stand. She's the executive director for the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, and with her is Auralia Brooke, who is the research and administrative officer for the same organization. The Alberta Council for Global Cooperation is a coalition of voluntary-sector organizations located in Alberta and working locally and globally to achieve sustainable human development.

Please join me in welcoming my guests to the Alberta Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you my first granddaughter, and first grandchild, Alyssa. She is a beautiful seven-pound, four-ounce little girl. Since she was only born 15 hours ago, she has to join us by television today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

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

Pacific Northwest Economic Region

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. PNWER, or the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, is a formal organization established in 1991 with seven original legislative jurisdictions: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska, British Columbia, and Alberta. The Yukon joined in 1994. In 2008 Saskatchewan became a partner as well.

Our former colleague Jim Horsman is one of the founders of PNWER. The original vision was to establish a region-wide

organization that would address common interests and concerns, including energy, environment, climate change, agriculture, and, last but not least, border issues and trade movement of goods and services across our common borders, to reduce congestion.

PNWER has set itself some lofty goals, including promoting greater regional collaboration, enhancing the competitiveness of the region in both domestic and international markets, leveraging regional influence in Ottawa and Washington, DC, and achieving continued economic growth while maintaining the region's natural beauty and environment. I strongly believe that PNWER is reaching and surpassing these goals, and we should all be very proud.

After so many years PNWER has become so respected that many other areas are trying to use this association as a model to improve their respective relationships. The midwestern United States is looking at PNWER for keys on how to build on their own organizations.

I'm very proud and pleased that PNWER is very well respected in both Ottawa and Washington, DC. Along with my colleagues from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Calgary-Bow, and Calgary-North Hill, thanks for the opportunity to represent Alberta at PNWER.

Mr. Speaker, everyone was working in isolation on the issues that their jurisdictions faced, and only after meeting did everyone begin to realize how many of the PNWER jurisdictions are facing the same issues, thus the obvious need for working together.

Under the great leadership of the CEO, Mr. Matt Morrison, PNWER has indeed become greatly successful. PNWER has a great future.

Thank you.

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

Wild Rose Foundation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Towards the end of March I began receiving phone calls, e-mails, and letters from people concerned that the Wild Rose Foundation would lose its funding in this year's budget, and on April 7 the monies available under the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit to the NGO volunteer sector were cut by \$7 million. This decision continues to be strongly opposed by members of the human services and voluntary sector.

There are two major problems that I have with this cut, and the first is practical. The government has eliminated all funding for the international development program, \$1.3 million, cutting off support to a number of Alberta groups that work to better lives all over the world. The minister has also eliminated the \$4.7 million grant pool that targeted volunteerism in human services in Alberta. Groups that offer counselling to AISH recipients, support for seniors, help to new Canadians to access services, and that support volunteerism have all told me that this cut will put their services in doubt at a time when they're needed more than ever.

The minister has told organizations who received grants from Wild Rose that they can apply under CIP or CFEP. How cruel. There's no extra money in either of those programs. In fact, CIP's budget has been reduced by \$1.1 million. Nonprofit organizations will be competing with community groups, municipalities, arts groups, education, and others vying for CIP money, not just the same pie and more forks but a tartlet and more forks.

That leads me to the second problem, and it relates to this government's approach. It's an approach that they've used in health care, in human rights, and now in the NGO voluntary sector. This government divides and conquers. It cuts the most vulnerable first and then plays each vulnerable group against each other. In the

budget debate the minister repeatedly said, “Well, which sector should I cut, then?” or “Would you rather I cut the arts?” It’s a ridiculous argument, particularly in light of the billions of questionable expenditures this government has wasted in health care reorganization, bonuses to well-paid deputy ministers, and a royalty scheme that nets us less money from our natural resources.

*As one person put it, we are all intricately woven together to create the fabric of our community: arts, culture, film, theatre, sport, museums, health, and human service. The government has failed the nonprofit sector, it has failed to support social development, and it has failed to provide a budget that supports strong, vital communities.**

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

Vision Education Alberta

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One reason that Alberta is known for having one of the best education systems in the world is because it is a priority for our government to ensure that every student has access to high-quality learning opportunities. Students with disabilities may require extra supports to achieve their educational goals. This government, along with education stakeholders and community groups, is committed to ensuring that these students get the services they need to maximize their learning opportunities and outcomes and fully develop their personal potential.

The services for students with vision loss initiative was launched in May 2008 with a \$9 million government commitment to enhance educational supports for students who are blind or visually impaired. Through this initiative, I’m pleased to say, Alberta students with vision loss can now access online resources, training, and support through one window, the new Vision Education Alberta website. The Minister of Education officially launched the website today over the noon hour.

Vision.alberta.ca is a unique place for Alberta students with vision loss, their families, classroom teachers, educational assistants, vision teachers, other vision specialists, and education stakeholders to access important information, including, Mr. Speaker, news and upcoming events; loan catalogues for alternative format materials, including Braille, large print, audio, and e-text; video training clips for specialized equipment; and other educational resources. This site is highly accessible for students who are blind or visually impaired, and it is designed to work co-operatively with assistive technology to ensure students fully benefit from the site’s offerings.

I’m pleased to rise today, Mr. Speaker, to honour this initiative and to encourage you and all members to visit the site to learn more valuable information about supports and services for students with vision loss.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Challenge North 2009

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the city of Cold Lake hosted the Northern Alberta Development Council’s Challenge North 2009 conference. The turnout was truly amazing, with approximately 200 delegates in attendance as well as our hon. Premier, six ministers, and 10 MLAs. It was a busy week filled with brainstorming sessions, workshops, and fun-filled activities.

Challenge North 2009 was an opportunity to share experiences, ideas, and solutions that help to outline and address the issues that northern communities are faced with. Through the discussion we were able to identify the risks, challenges, and opportunities that our

communities will encounter as we move forward together. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has spoken a lot about the importance of strong municipalities as a means to create strong, vibrant communities. The conferences and the workshops like Challenge North 2009 help to build and strengthen the connections between our communities.

I would like to thank everyone who came out to Cold Lake last week to participate in the conference. I had a wonderful time, and I truly enjoyed the dialogue that took place.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Swine Flu Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The swine flu pandemic raises very real concerns for our strained health care system’s capacity to cope. As a former health officer I know the need for clear lines of authority; accurate, timely communications; and a well-supported health workforce. Last June the province’s four senior public health officers resigned en masse in large part because they felt that this government was not taking public health seriously. To the Premier: what capacity does this province have to deal with the flu pandemic?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there have been no confirmed cases of the influenza, but our health officials have been working very closely with the federal health department. We also increased surveillance for acute respiratory illnesses and are monitoring very closely. Once again, this weekend the minister’s staff was working very closely with the federal government.

Dr. Swann: In crowded emergency waiting rooms and clinics a flu virus spreads very quickly, very easily. What is being planned to prevent this?

1:50

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition, with his background and training, will agree that it’s incumbent on all of us as members of this Assembly not to cause undue concern. The situation is such that our chief medical officer of health has put Alberta Health Services on high alert to ensure that anything that has indications of symptoms is brought to the attention immediately. As the Premier has indicated, there are no cases in Alberta at this stage although there are some elsewhere in the country. We continue to work with the federal government on this situation.

Dr. Swann: Well, every day we have people crammed into hospital rooms, gurneys in hallways, waiting in emergency departments. How will the system cope with increased demands of a pandemic?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we want to ensure that – and this is in the statement from the chief medical officer of health yesterday – the first contact if someone has concerns is with the Health Link to ensure that the right advice is given. Ideally we want to ensure that we’re treating these situations seriously but not necessarily in the public institutions, so we’ve done a couple of things. As of tomorrow the provincial lab here in Edmonton will be doing testing. It’ll be a 24-hour turnaround, so we’ll have results much quicker than we are today by having to send it out of province.

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

*The text in italics exceeded the time limit and was not read in the House.

Physician Supply

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Alberta Health Services has quietly implemented an astonishing and unprecedented province-wide freeze on new physician hiring. We will not even be replacing retiring physicians. Instead of fulfilling his election promise, the Premier has supported that decision and is doing the opposite of what was promised. To the Premier: did the Premier approve this recent decision to freeze physician hiring?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to our overall goal of increasing the number of trained physicians here in the province of Alberta. We've increased the number of seats in our training universities. Those physicians, of course, will take time to be trained and implemented into the workforce. But we know that we have some catch-up to do in terms of not only physicians but nurses as well and other health care professionals because we've seen an increase in our population and also an increase in need for the kind of services we provide.

Dr. Swann: Well, clearly the Premier doesn't get it, that the primary health care system is in serious jeopardy, and therefore the people of Alberta are in serious jeopardy. Which other vital health professionals are on the chopping block, Mr. Premier? Nurses, lab technicians? Where are we going from here?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with this issue about reductions the health budget in this province has seen the largest increase compared to other departments. Some departments got zero. Some got a modest increase of 2 per cent. Health got an increase of 4.7 per cent to ensure that we keep the momentum, keeping as many people as possible employed in delivering health services in the province. Was it a cut? No. It was an increase in the budget. So I don't know where they're coming from. They are saying that there are cuts and cuts. There's more money going into health at a very, very difficult time and economic situation.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier: how much money are you planning to save with these freezes on physicians?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's actually an increase in the budget of 4.7 per cent. You know, years before the percentage of increase was 10 to 14 per cent. We know – Albertans have told us – that if we keep increasing one budget at that rate while the projected increase in economic growth is dropping, then we will not be able to sustain this very good system we enjoy for the next generation. That is important. Always look to how you can help the next generation and sustain this very good program that we enjoy.

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

Precision Drilling Corporation

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The oil patch is a small world, where everybody knows everyone else and deals are often made over a handshake. If what ends up as a multimillion dollar merger or acquisition begins as a casual conversation between two insiders who have worked together on deals before, what business is it of ours in this House as long as it's just business? But if the public sector or public money is involved in any way, then it is the business of this House because then it involves the public interest. To the minister of finance: is the minister aware that the vice-chair of AIMCo and the founder of Precision Drilling are long-standing

friends and business partners? I will table the relevant documents at the appropriate time.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, no, I'm not aware of that, and I guess I would have to ask: what business is it of this House? We have deliberately, by legislation, created a Crown corporation that is at arm's length. We neither politically interfere, nor do we get engaged in screening of investments, nor do I see the relevancy of it in this particular situation. I would assume that that connection must be made because right at this point I fail to see the relevancy.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I will table the appropriate documents for the minister to take a look at. Perhaps then she will see the potential conflict of interest here.

Can the minister produce proof to this House that the vice-chair of AIMCo recused himself from absolutely all discussions of this deal going back to mid-March, when it was first offered, or even earlier, when the idea would have first been raised?

Ms Evans: You know, my hon. colleague the President of the Treasury Board is absolutely right. They are not understanding, Mr. Speaker, in the opposition benches that AIMCo as a Crown corporation does not in fact consult with us in any way, give us any of the information. They have their own rules to follow. They are subject to consideration by the board. The board does its due diligence through the staff relative to investments they make. The best reason to have us not interfere politically is that you can't imagine how politically polarized that would be. We are no different than the Canada pension plan, which is totally separate. They go even further than we do to make sure that the audit is separate. Mr. Speaker, we are not involved in the day-to-day operation of AIMCo. I have no knowledge of this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Evans: And, actually, I would suggest . . .

The Speaker: No. The hon. member has been recognized, please.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to ask the minister if she would please review what happened through the course of this deal and come back tomorrow and assure the House that there were no conflicts of interest and that all appropriate procedures and codes of conduct were followed.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not sure it's even appropriate to have this conversation on the floor of the House. This is a question that should be provided in writing to the chair of the AIMCo board. The AIMCo is accountable for it; this House is not. If this House starts taking the time to go through all of the minutiae of the detail there of AIMCo, then we're not doing the business of this House. These kinds of concerns can be tabled in letters to Mr. Charles Baillie, who is the chair of AIMCo and who has been duly appointed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Swine Flu Surveillance Measures

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the swine flu virus has been spreading, this government has caused disarray in the public health system and has shrouded the department of health

in secrecy. The minister forced top health officials out of the system, allowed syphilis infections to spread, and now he's keeping plans to monitor swine flu a secret. When his department spokesman was asked what specific measures were being taken to monitor the outbreak in Alberta, he refused to answer. My question is to the Premier. How can we know if your precautions against swine flu are sufficient when your health minister won't even tell us what he's doing to keep swine flu under control in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the leader of the third party has made some allegations against the minister. The minister can respond.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the chief medical officer of health issued a statement yesterday. The statement is pretty clear. The same individual is holding a media conference as we speak, just to in fact actually say the same thing he said yesterday. I'm not sure why the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is making those accusations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the official for the department refused to say what surveillance methods were in place. How can Albertans have confidence in a government that claims to have surveillance measures in place for swine flu but won't say what they are? Swine flu could be the next pandemic, and this government is refusing to tell Albertans how our province is monitoring infection. Telling people to call Health Link if they've been infected isn't good enough. Albertans deserve to know what the government is doing . . .

The Speaker: Okay. There is a time frame, hon. member. Now I will recognize the hon. minister.

2:00

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I guess I have some difficulty understanding this particular member's motives here. What he is suggesting, if I hear him correctly, is that he doesn't believe the chief medical officer of health. He wants to hear from a spokesman from the Department of Health and Wellness. Well, how absurd can you get? We have the chief medical officer of health, who is clearly in charge of this particular issue, who is in contact with the federal Public Health Agency, other provincial agencies, issuing a statement yesterday, meeting through the media today, and somehow this individual calls it secrecy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, his own official refused to answer a direct question with respect to this matter, so I'll just ask the minister. What are the surveillance methods that your department is using in order to track the growth of the pandemic, or potential pandemic, of swine flu and its entry into this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, I would suggest that all of us in this House, Mr. Speaker, have the responsibility to show some leadership, to show some leadership that doesn't start to try and make accusations that something is happening that isn't. The chief medical officer of health has been very clear. There are no confirmed cases in this province. I spoke to him just before coming into the House. He says that nothing else has changed. We have outstanding individuals in Alberta Health Services whose job it is to

ensure that the health of Albertans is protected. I trust them, not him.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

High-risk Offender Website

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently there are approximately 19,000 registered sex offenders in Canada. Each and every one of them has committed horrific crimes that are devastating to their victims. Cory Bitternose is a repeat sex offender so violent that his sneaker imprints stayed on the face of a woman he viciously attacked. Today Bitternose is facing 46 separate charges in connection with recent attacks plus, ironically, one charge for failing to comply with the national sex offender registry. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. How many registered sex offenders live in Alberta, and how many are featured on Alberta's high-risk offender website?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, according to the statistics from the national registry there are currently more than 1,600 registered sex offenders living in this province. Alberta's high-risk offender website contains a list of approximately 70 offenders who have been released into the community and are considered a high risk to reoffend. Our website is a repository of all high-risk offender public notification news releases that have been issued by police agencies in Alberta. Albertans can access the website if they want to know if a high-risk offender has been released into their community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Was Mr. Bitternose on Alberta's high-risk offender website? If not, why not?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the individual the hon. member is referring was not on our high-risk offender website. For an individual to be put on our website, they have had to have been the subject of a media notification by police alerting the public to their release into a community. Our website has never intended to be an active list of all known registered sex offenders or high-risk offenders in Alberta. As for the national registry it is not a publicly accessible site. It is used as a tool by law enforcement to keep tabs on registered sex offenders.

Mrs. Forsyth: Given that the national sex offender website is broken, with ineffective legislation and faulty technology, would the minister consider adopting Ontario's national sex offender website, which is considered the best in the country?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the question is very timely. Just this week a parliamentary review began on the Sex Offender Information Registration Act. This is the legislation that covers how sex offenders are registered in a national program. We anticipate some consultation by the federal government with the provinces and territories on expected recommendations from the review that will lead to amendments and improvements on a national system. A more effective national system will allow us to look at what all provinces could and should be doing within their own jurisdictions.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Physician Supply (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our emergency room staff are overworked, stressed, and some are reluctantly considering leaving the province's health care system because of the extraordinary pressures today. To the minister: what does the minister have to say to the 200,000 desperate Albertans who even now cannot get a family doctor?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear in this particular Assembly that solving our family doctor issue is not just simply a matter of finding more doctors. We need to ensure that we have a delivery model in place that uses all of our professions to the utmost of their abilities, and we are in the middle of ensuring that that is taking place. We will continue our recruitment of doctors. There is recruitment that takes place by some doctors in this province from outside. It's a number of situations.

Dr. Swann: That sounds like a contradiction to me, Mr. Speaker: continuing recruitment when there's a freeze on new hiring. Maybe the minister could explain that.

Thousands of cancer patients waiting for treatment will now face even longer wait times because this government refuses to hire new doctors. What is your response to Albertans, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm not sure where this particular member is getting his information relative to a hiring freeze, Mr. Speaker. There was a situation with a recruitment process through the former Capital health region of recruiting foreign physicians. There were a dozen or so who had offers of employment extended, and those are being honoured. There were a number of other discussions where no particular offer had been extended, no even verbal commitment had been made. In light of the current economic situation that Alberta Health Services finds itself in, it is reviewing this situation.

Dr. Swann: Well, how can a minister of this government justify spending \$35 million on horse racing, \$25 million on a greenwashing campaign, and we can't afford to hire new physicians in this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just explained in my answer that we are in fact hiring new physicians. Every particular program that Alberta Health Services has inherited from the various health regions is being assessed to ensure that we're getting value for dollars. This particular opposition is continually giving us good advice on how to save money. This is exactly what Alberta Health Services is doing, ensuring that their expenditures are justified before they simply write a blank cheque.

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

Apprenticeship, Trade, and Occupation Management System

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some apprentices in my constituency and other parts of Alberta are waiting much longer than usual to get their exam results, record book updates, and other services they require. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the reason that these apprentices are being forced to wait so long for their results?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, recently we implemented a new computer system to increase the efficiencies in the apprenticeship system now and well into the future. As you well know and this House knows, we have extended the number of apprentices considerably over the last few years. This new system is going to be online. It's online access 24/7. When we launched the new system province-wide this February, the sheer volume of the records that we were transferring over did cause some delays in normal client service cycles. Our first priority – and it remains our first priority – is restoring client services so that the apprentices can get their marks.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: how many apprentices in the system have been affected?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the exam records of approximately 6,000 of the 70,000 apprentices that we have who were originally caught in this transition process is kind of the number where we're at. So far some of the things that we've done to get them back on track is that we've allocated more staff from the department to work on going back through our manual system. The exam records of about 2,000 of those apprentices are left to catch up on, but we expect to be caught up to those in about the next 10 days. There will be some further delays because this is an ongoing process. We continually have new apprentices coming into the system and registering. Front-line staff offices across the province are going to be working directly with the affected Albertans and ensuring that the client services are met.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: why did the department need a new system, and when will it be fully functional?

2:10

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, it's been about 25 years since the system has been updated. That's quite a long time. As you well know, there have been a lot of changes in our province over the last 25 years; in fact, a lot of expansion of the apprenticeship training program, a lot of expansion in what is going on in terms of how those apprentices are marked and the exams are done.

These systems are fundamental to record the accuracy and preserve the integrity of the apprenticeship training certificates. We knew that as we ramped up the number of apprentices that we have up to the 70,000 mark, we were going to need a new system to ensure the type of client service that apprentices in Alberta have come to expect.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Ms. Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A game of semantics about climate change is played in Alberta. Instead of having a system which relates to other countries, we have a made-in-Alberta version that doesn't compare to anyone and which allows Alberta to claim all kinds of things out of context. The 6.5 megatonnes reported by the minister last week does not represent an actual reduction in greenhouse gases; it's a reduction of intensity of emissions. My question is to the Minister of Environment. In 2007

the large emitters reported 114 megatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. Can the minister confirm what that number was in 2008?

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of savings is related to the requirements under our legislation that companies reduce their emissions over the base that was established in 2007. The member can be assured that there was a 6.5 million tonne reduction in emissions over what would have been in place had we done nothing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. In the 2002 climate change strategy the target for 2010 was to reduce emissions, emission intensity, by 20 megatonnes. Given that it has taken so many years to reduce greenhouse gas emission intensity by 6.5 megatonnes, is the minister on track to see this reduction of some 13.5 megatonnes in the next 10 months?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the climate change strategy that this government tabled some time ago and that we are in the process of implementing projects that there will be a bending down of the curve notwithstanding a significant amount of economic growth, notwithstanding a few million more people living in Alberta, with a few hundred thousand new homes and automobiles and everything else associated with that growth by 2020, and we believe that we are on track to achieve that.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister: given the concerns raised by the Auditor General report and others about the ability to measure and compare reductions and the language used when this government reports reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, will the minister commit to using more accurate and comparable terminology when discussing Alberta's emissions? I live in hope.

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what this member would have us believe, Alberta is setting the standards. Alberta is establishing the protocols for measuring. Other jurisdictions look to Alberta for our experience, having been one of the only jurisdictions that has been requiring measurement since 2003 and that has had legislated reductions in place since 2007.

Vehicular Accident Statistics

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, vehicle collisions in Alberta seem to go up every year, and 1 out of 4 collisions in Alberta involve speeding. In 2006 the sheriffs began to patrol and conduct traffic enforcement on Alberta highways as a way to bring down collisions. My first two questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. How can Albertans know whether we're getting value for money by having sheriffs patrol Alberta's highways?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, traffic safety is, obviously, a key element of safe and secure communities, and Alberta's traffic sheriffs are working diligently to ensure safety and reduced collisions on our highways. Through collaboration between sheriffs, local police agencies, and the RCMP aggressive drivers and speeders are routinely targeted and held accountable for driving habits that can lead to serious or deadly collisions on our highways. We continually review and assess how traffic safety is enforced so that collisions can be reduced. We also receive many letters and e-mails from Albertans thanking our sheriffs for the job they're doing on our highways, and many of these individuals comment on the reduced speeds they now see on our highways. So, yes, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Brown: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the question in a different way. What performance measures is his department using to assess the cost-effectiveness on an ongoing basis of the sheriffs in making our highways safer? What performance measures is he using?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier answer, we get e-mails and letters from everyday Albertans expressing appreciation for the work our sheriffs are doing driving up and down our highways. I personally can see that speeds are reduced on our highways. Again, that's in large part due to the great work that our sheriffs are doing in this province.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's almost four months since the last calendar year ended. However, my office has been advised that even preliminary data for 2008 collisions won't be available until late fall this year. My final supplementary question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why are data on vehicle collisions, injuries, and deaths not more readily available so that we can assess the effectiveness of the sheriffs department?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the collision stats are just about always released in the fall. The reason for that is that we need to receive and compile all of the different data, but we need to give time to the RCMP, the sheriffs, all the other enforcement agencies to compile all of their statistics. That said, traffic safety is a priority for this government, and as soon as we get the results, I will compile them and make sure that the hon. member gets those results. I've just been releasing the '07 results, and they've been getting all of those stats. That was from the fall of last year.

Taser Use by Law Enforcement Personnel

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General isn't halfway through testing the taser arsenals of the Alberta police services, and already 50 tasers have been found to be operating outside of the recommended limits. Given these results, will the Solicitor General consider a moratorium on the use of the remaining untested tasers in this province?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, of the 400 and some-odd tasers that we tested, the ones that were pulled out of service were pulled out simply because they did not meet the manufacturer's specifications. When we made that decision, we weighed the possibility of public danger versus officer safety, and we believe that the prudent decision has been made. The remaining tasers will stay in operation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you. Are you not worried? With 50 tasers found in the first round of testing to be operating outside the limits, wouldn't it be more prudent to pull the remaining things before testing is done to give people some measure of assurance?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we weighed that balance between public safety, officer safety versus pulling all the tasers, and I stand behind our decision. In fact, the results that we received were very technical results of testing. There was not one taser that operated from an amperage basis above the manufacturer's specifications. In total energy they were maybe one or two per cent higher. Again, they were pulled because they simply did not meet the manufacturer's specifications.

Mr. Hehr: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that a Califor-

nia study indicated that you are six times more likely to die in police custody after having been tasered, will the Solicitor General commit to a mandatory review by the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team for any incident where a taser is deployed during arrest or detention of an accused?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to speak to the study that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo mentioned, the California study, when he talks about six times the fatality rate over the course of a year. The person who did that study did not even check with the police jurisdictions to find out whether or not a taser had been used in the arrest of that particular individual.

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

Mental Health Services

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government covered up the mental health report because it exposed their long-standing failure to fix Alberta's mental health system. The report said that the number of psychiatric beds in Alberta is well under half the national average, and since the NDP made it public, the health minister has been twisting the truth and holding up a criminal diversion strategy as a mental health fix.

Mr. Liepert: Point of order.

Ms Notley: To the minister: why won't you stop stealing bed numbers from other ministries which are not designed for general mental health patients and create real spaces to help some of the 20 per cent of Albertans who suffer from mental illness?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the member is talking about. This particular province has invested some 600 million dollars into mental health facilities. We've been bringing on new beds. We continue to bring on new beds as part of our SafeCom initiative, and we will continue to do that.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, by chirping about these 80 beds and the safe communities strategy, this minister is playing bait and switch with people who need psychiatric care. He's piling onto the same 80 beds that the Attorney General has already earmarked to accept people involved in the justice system. Again to the minister of health: why are you using a crime-reduction strategy to cover up your failure to provide enough mental health care for the 20 per cent . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, hold on. The first time you used "twisting the truth," and now you're accusing the minister of covering up. I mean, let's get some temperate language in here if you want me to recognize you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this particular government believes that you get a much better success rate if you work together as departments rather than separately. We've got an initiative under safe communities that involves some half a dozen or more departments of government. It is working well. We are continuing to put new beds into the system. Whether they are beds that are for mental illness or addictions, it's all connected to health care.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, last week the Attorney General said in committee that those beds were designed for people in the justice

system. So for the rest of Albertans who have mental health problems, where are we? The number of psychiatric beds in Alberta is less than half the national average, there is little or no access to the most basic of mental health services in regions across this province, and for decades this government has rejected the need for adequate community mental health services. Why is this minister more focused on keeping the report secret instead of taking responsibility for this government's failures so far and adopting the recommendations of the report?

Mr. Liepert: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to refer this question to the Attorney General because the member is so offside in her numbers that it needs to be corrected.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue, I would say, not to clarify this issue. What this government does is treat all Albertans in the place that they need to be treated. When we were discussing last week how we would use mental health beds that were connected to the safe communities initiative, we talked about recognizing the fact that there might be people in the criminal justice system that had some other need. We don't categorize people as having a mental health issue or being a criminal. We will take a comprehensive approach to mental health and safe communities in co-operation with each other.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Minimum Wage Exemptions

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently I met with a constituent who drew to my attention a website operated by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The website includes a forum where people can discuss issues which concern them. A recent topic in the forum concerned Alberta's Employment Standards Code, and the suggestion in the discussion was that the code allows for exemptions to the minimum wage for persons with disabilities. So I'd like to ask the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration how many companies have permission from the government to pay disabled individuals less than the minimum wage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is quite right. This provision allowing exemptions to the minimum wage does exist in the Employment Standards Code. However, there have been no permits issued or renewed since January of 2006, and no permits are currently in effect. As such, employees are entitled to the current minimum wage of \$8.80 per hour.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. To the same minister: given, then, that no permits have been issued in the recent past, why does this provision exist in the Employment Standards Code?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the provisions for minimum wage exemptions in the Employment Standards Code have existed for

decades. When first enacted, they reflected a different philosophy towards disabled individuals than does exist today. It was seen as a way to support the integration of persons with disabilities into the workforce. When we receive a permit request, our employment standards staff work with the employers to determine alternatives to issuing that particular permit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the explanation.

Some of the respondents in this online conversation are maintaining that there are still cases in the city of Edmonton where disabled workers are receiving less than the minimum wage. Finally, then, to the same minister: what does the minister have to say to people who are making these allegations and suggesting that disabled individuals are working in \$4-an-hour positions?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm saying that we need to get the facts. Let's get the information to us. We've posted a comment on the discussion group outlining what the current requirements are, and if any Albertans feel that their entitlement to minimum wages has not been met, that they're not receiving that from their employer, I encourage them to file a formal complaint with our employment standards. There's a lot more information that's available online through employment.alberta.ca in the safe and fair workplaces section.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was recently reported that Chinese temporary foreign workers working in Fort McMurray were paid their wages only until auditors could verify they were paid. Then the money was transferred to bank accounts in Hong Kong. In the end these workers received only 10 per cent of their total wages. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is the government of Alberta still supporting a flawed temporary foreign worker program?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, Employment and Immigration has also determined that 132 Chinese temporary foreign workers employed by SSEC Canada on the Horizon oil sands project were not paid earnings from April to July of 2007. These funds are held in the government trust account now and will be disbursed to the workers who had not been paid for their work prior to their return to China. Those funds are there, and we're trying to identify all of the workers before transferring the funds.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how much money is the government of Alberta holding for the benefit of these workers and their families?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we've begun the process of verifying individuals' identities and establishing that process for the distribution of unpaid earnings. It sounds like there's about \$3.17 million that is owing. As we collect those funds, we'll be returning those to the workers. They'll be reimbursed accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that you spent over 58,000 taxpayers' dollars touring overseas last fall, and included in that trip was one stop in China, did you ask the Chinese officials about this matter and how you could contact these individuals so that they could get the wages, the 3.17-odd million dollars that you claim they are now owed because they were cheated out of their fair wages?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, our occupational health and safety officers interviewed several of the temporary foreign workers regarding those incidents. Basically, that's how we determined that those workers had not been paid. Certainly, we are concerned. We're trying to identify the individuals that have not received their full wages to make sure that we can return those wages to them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the Member for Calgary-Varsity

Direct Energy Retail Marketing

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of my constituents in Whitecourt-St. Anne have contacted my office about the confusion that they have experienced caused by different services offered by Direct Energy Regulated Services and Direct Energy Marketing Limited. My questions are all for the Minister of Service of Alberta. What are you doing, Minister, to protect Alberta's energy consumers from noncontract regulated utility services versus long-term contract unregulated services?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following complaints from consumers and an investigation by Service Alberta, Direct Energy has signed an undertaking to ensure that its salespeople are clear about the company's different retail operations. Direct Energy has submitted a plan explaining how it will accomplish this, including details of its complaint process and sales staff training. Direct Energy must fully comply with that plan by September 30, 2009. Direct Energy has also paid \$5,000 to Service Alberta as a requirement of the undertaking. The \$5,000 will cover the cost of investigative work my department has conducted.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's fine, but it seems like the issues come from door-to-door salespeople that seem to put pressure at times on my constituents. What is the advice that this minister gives to Albertans and my constituents when these door-to-door people arrive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are, indeed, very strict rules in place regarding what door-to-door marketers can and cannot do. Albertans who do have concerns about any practices should contact us, and we will investigate. Again, it is so important that they let us know what's happening out there. Consumers do have the right to ask questions of anyone who tries to sell them something at the door. They are under no obligation to sign any agreement for electricity or natural gas. It's entirely in their hands.

Mr. VanderBurg: My final question is to the same minister again. When the minister's department gets a concern or a complaint from one of my constituents or any Albertan, how long does it take to get back to my constituents, and how are these complaints handled directly by your department?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past seven years the government has investigated 356 complaints against energy marketers, has followed up with 169 enforcement actions ranging from warning letters to criminal prosecutions. Typically the complaints come to the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Then they are investigated by the consumer unit in Service Alberta. With the intervention of the consumer services area nearly \$160,000 has been returned to Alberta consumers as a result of electricity and natural gas settlements. We will continue to monitor the company's progress to ensure that all requirements of the undertaking are fulfilled and can take further enforcement if necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

School Capital Construction

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Education trumpeted the increase of over 10,000 student spaces by 2013, claiming that it will meet Calgary's growth pressure. Since 2003 the Calgary board of education has applied the province's space utilization formula, closing 13 schools, and is projecting the closure of another 15,000 student spaces over the next 10 years, a net loss of 5,000 spaces. To the Minister of Infrastructure: will the ministries of Education and Infrastructure stop pitting urban against rural infrastructure needs and review the approval process for school capital projects province-wide?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The program ministries bring the infrastructure needs to my ministry to help provide these. With respect to Calgary, that the hon. member is referring to, we have 26 major projects under way right now, 20 of which are new schools and replacement schools, and our overall projects are going to put in place 32,630 new seats for students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's important to note that that 32,000 figure is a province-wide figure, and it isn't meeting the requirements.

Given that during the past six years only one modernization project was approved in Calgary by the Infrastructure and Education ministries, will your ministries commit to approving at least some of the 11 high-priority preservation projects identified by the Calgary board of education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the present time there are six major modernizations, additions taking place in Calgary. We are investing in infrastructure in Alberta at two times the closest jurisdiction in the rest of the nation, so if we're being accused of investing heavily, guilty as accused.

Mr. Chase: Since the cuts of 1993 this province has not kept up with infrastructure deficit. Given that the 2003 Commission on Learning report recommends that junior kindergarten to grade 3 classes have no more than 17 students, why is it that of the 122 schools that are in the Calgary board of education's jurisdiction, 77 still have more than the recommended number? That's progress?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak for the Minister of Education on the programming in the schools. I can only speak to the 129 major new schools, renovations, and modernizations that are taking place right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Nuclear Power Consultation

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents have expressed strong views both for and against the option of nuclear power generation as part of Alberta's energy supply mix. Last month the report of the Nuclear Power Expert Panel was released. The panel was asked to create this report to provide a basis for informed discussion in Alberta on this issue. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Could the minister explain how Albertans can share their views on nuclear power? That's 'nuclear,' not nuclear.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly would be able to do that. There's a workbook and a survey that have been created with information from a panel report that we recently received. It's available now, as of today, on an interactive website, and Albertans can provide their input electronically. They can request a hard copy to be sent by mail. We will guarantee Albertans that completing the survey will ensure your views are considered on this topic.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was receiving pronunciation tips from my friend the Minister of Municipal Affairs if you could imagine.

My second question to the same minister: in what other ways will the consultation process engage Albertans to ensure that all views are represented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, we encourage all Albertans to get involved in this process. We think that by completing the workbook and the survey that's attached with it, they will have an understanding of the situation and be able to be involved. But to ensure that the process is comprehensive, there will be discussion groups, selected randomly, held across the province of Alberta, there will be meetings with stakeholders, and there will be a public opinion survey on the matter. An independent research firm is managing the process for us, and we believe that all Albertans will have an opportunity to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A third and final supplement-

tal to the minister. There is no formal proposal placed before the Alberta government at this time to build a nuclear power facility, but there have been discussions in the province since 2007. Could the minister inform this House as to when a decision will be made on this issue?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the decision will be made when we are satisfied that Albertans have had an opportunity to voice their opinion relative to the issue. The first step was to get the facts with the expert panel report. The next step is, certainly, to hear from as many Albertans as are prepared to give their opinion. The survey will remain open until the 1st of June, and the government will consider all of this input. It's a very serious and, we think, good opportunity for all Albertans to be involved, and we think that a provincial policy could be expected before the end of the year.

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

Cost-shared Crop and Livestock Funding

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, for a government that doesn't like to be in the business of being in business, we once again see the minister of agriculture providing subsidies to big corporate farms. The federal-provincial agribusiness programs announced last Friday will give grants ranging from \$100,000 up to \$5 million for cost-shared crop and livestock projects. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: why is this government now offering hundred thousand and multimillion dollar grants to big producers when last June he announced "the end of ad-hoc funding"?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member would like to clarify just a little bit exactly what he's talking about, maybe I could answer his question.

Dr. Taft: Well, I suppose I could send the minister printouts from his own website if he's not familiar with the program.

To the same minister: given that this minister told producers last year that if they can't run a viable business, they "need to consider ways to exit the industry," why is he now giving out big grants to private agricultural businesses? What are we supposed to believe?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly pleased that he brought that little issue up about exiting the industry. What I said and what I'll have to say time and time again in front of people: when we had the program, the monies were coming; if you were considering exiting the industry, now was probably the time to do it. Never once did I say that you had to comply with anything to exit the industry.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I'll send this material to the minister. It's from his own website, his own department.

To the same minister: if corporate farms are being provided with millions of dollars in grants, can the minister at least require that they are bound by occupational health and safety legislation to protect their paid workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I'd

just like to see the list of the corporate farms that are being offered a hundred thousand dollars' worth of grants.

But getting to where he just went, it's very interesting because he is so specific on what we should do with the farm occupational health and safety standards. Do you realize how many family farms are also corporate farms? Just think about some of this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wishes to supplement an answer given last Thursday. That will provide an opportunity for the member to whom the answer was being given to raise an additional question.

Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that I clarify an answer that I provided to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview last week. I will table five copies of a letter from the chair of the Alberta Health Services Board, and it's relative to the Mazankowski Heart Institute. I won't read the entire letter. I'll just read a portion of it.

It is now our expectation that the building will have achieved substantial completion and hospital handover by May 31, 2009. It will take approximately two weeks for the proper authorities to inspect and issue occupancy permits. Alberta Health Services staff will occupy the building on or about June 15, 2009, to be followed shortly thereafter by patient move in to general care and intensive care units, operating theatres, and procedure rooms.*

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the clarification from the minister, and I think we can probably put this issue to rest if there's just one more step taken. The Alberta Health Services website has a link to a detailed description of the Mazankowski Heart Institute, and over and over for at least two dozen programs it describes the institute as if it's fully up and running and taking all kinds of patients when in fact it's not. My final request to the minister on this would be to just have Alberta Health Services take down that link until the hospital actually is functioning and taking patients.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: We'll forward a copy of *Hansard* to the CEO of Alberta Health Services, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll continue the Routine momentarily, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the wheelchair team who won the silver medal at the 2009 Canadian wheelchair curling championships in Halifax. We have them in the two galleries. Up in the public we have Jack Smart, the team skip, and Bridget Wilson. If they could just wave. You see that they have their silver medals around their necks. Over in the members' gallery: Bruno Yizek; Anne Hibberd and her husband, Ken

*See page 794, left column, paragraph 11

Kaufman; Tony Zummack, the coach; and Martin Purvis and his wife, Fran Purvis. I'd also like to introduce Donna Elms, my constituency assistant, and Sydney Crawford, my new STEP student.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I'll see if I can get this one right. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly, as I indicated, 24 visitors, students from the Peavine Métis settlement. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they stand as I introduce them. Miss Heather Hempstock is a teacher. Mr. Bruce Joudry is the principal. It's rare that principals come, but it's great to have him here. The parent helpers are Mr. Al Holmes, Mr. Eric Filion, Mrs. Teasa Gauchier, Mrs. Dorothy Anderson, Mrs. Juliet Gauchier, Mrs. Natalie Cunningham, and a special guest, Mr. Brian Davies, who is a former teacher from Alice Springs, Australia. He also taught in Redwater, Alberta. That's not the kicker; it's the fact that he's 94 years old, and he's now joining the students here. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: In 30 seconds from now we will continue the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Aboriginal History Quiz

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, April 24, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations and I attended the seventh annual Aboriginal History Quiz awards day at Prince Charles elementary school. Prince Charles is a school that is designed to meet the needs of urban aboriginal children and families through the Awasis program. The school uses the Alberta learning curriculum and integrates aboriginal content into all subject areas.

The goal of the Aboriginal History Quiz is for children to develop self-awareness, self-esteem, study habits, and pride in aboriginal culture by having the opportunity to learn about their history and culture. The curriculum areas of the quiz focus on social studies, language arts, the Cree language and culture, and native studies. The hon. minister and I had a chance to hear some of the questions that were asked and were extremely impressed by their difficulty.

I would like to congratulate all of the students that participated in the quiz and awards ceremony on Friday and thank all who attended. It was a tremendous success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Wind Turbine Technician Program

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to this House about a success story in my hometown that highlights not only some very dedicated Lethbridge folks' but also this government's commitment to the development of viable alternative energy resources.

On April 15 officials at Lethbridge College learned that the college's wind turbine technician program had been selected the winner of the 2008-2009 program excellence award from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. The six-month program prepares graduates for immediate work in the wind turbine

industry. Thanks to a partnership with BZEE, which provides similar training in Europe and sets the standard that is recognized by most major turbine manufacturers world-wide, these grads can go to work anywhere. Many choose to stay here in Alberta, but others have gone and will go on to help develop wind power around the world.

Mr. Speaker, this program is unique in Canada and attracts students from across North America and around the world. It's an unprecedented opportunity for people to pursue a career in trades and at the same time be leaders in greening our growth and developing a renewable energy resource. A total of 27 people have graduated from the wind turbine technician program since its inception in 2008. Another group is set to graduate this coming July. Thanks to their education here in Alberta, these folks will become invaluable assets in the wind energy industry in southern Alberta and ambassadors of Alberta's commitment to developing sustainable energy alternatives for the future.

Mr. Speaker, this is just one of the many examples of research into alternative energy sources in southern Alberta. The Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership, which includes Economic Development Lethbridge, is looking into a number of innovative ways to develop both wind and solar power and is doing exciting work in the area of biofuels. The partnership is currently working on establishing an integrated biodiesel refinery in southern Alberta and has done extensive research into waste-to-energy treatment alternatives that will not only reduce the environmental impact but will actually turn waste into usable fuels.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give notice of a point of privilege pursuant to section 15(2) of the standing orders with respect to some interference with my role as an opposition MLA that took place last week.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 36

Alberta Land Stewardship Act

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Administrator, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

With the input of Albertans, municipalities, and business and environmental organizations this government created the land-use framework tabled in December of 2008. This framework introduces a new approach to land-use planning, one that will meet the environmental as well as the economic and social objectives of this province.

To implement the land-use framework, I rise to table Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, for first reading. This act creates seven planning regions in Alberta. It authorizes the creation of regional plans and requires compliance with those plans. It creates new conservation and stewardship tools that will protect Alberta's natural heritage on public and private lands. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act will provide a blueprint for sustainable growth, a

policy balance that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the opportunities of future generations.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the letter I referred to earlier in question period.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to discussion in question period today I'd like to table speaking points from the minister of agriculture, where he talks about changes to agriculture funding as well as programs under that department giving grants up to \$100,000 and up to \$5 million.

I also have three excellent letters from constituents, each one written in detail and at length, expressing concerns about cancelling funding for the Wild Rose program. They are from Alisha Brown, program manager for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association; MacKenzie Gordon, Students International Health Association; and Leslee Greenaway, co-ordinator of the Nyarut village community development project.

My very last tabling is a letter from Alison Dinwoodie expressing her opposition to the use of taxpayer dollars for pictures of foreign beaches to rebrand Alberta, and she also objects to pharmacare costs increasing for seniors.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to table five copies of corporate registration documents that detail a business partnership between the founder of Precision Drilling and the vice-chair of AIMCo.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of correspondence from a constituent, Marjorie Russell, who's very concerned about the elimination of funding for chiropractic services and believes it's limited thinking on the part of the government to shut out one profession and some of the citizens who use that care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On a purported point of order the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll be very brief. It's under Standing Order 23(h), allegations against another member. I believe you have already identified the fact that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona used the term "twisting the truth." She's been here long enough to know that that's unparliamentary. This is occurring far too often in this Assembly to have decent debate, and I would ask the member to withdraw that comment.

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

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start out by saying that I haven't yet had the opportunity to actually look at the language that's been ruled parliamentary and nonparliamentary.

I would like, however, to give just a brief background to what led to my questions and my statement. In particular, as recorded in *Hansard* last week, on April 20, 2009, in response to questions from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood about a mental health report which had been released and which had clearly identified a number of deficits in the provision of mental health care to the general population in need of mental health care, the minister responded, "You know, in the last year through the safe communities program we've opened up some 80 new residential beds, and in this particular budget [we have allocated] some additional 42 million dollars."

Subsequently, on the evening of April 22, while I was participating in estimates debate with the Attorney General, this issue came up. As a result I asked the Attorney General – and it's again found in *Hansard* – about the 80 beds which had been referred to. I said: "Now, I know the health minister spoke about 80 beds, and I believe those were talked about for last year, or are those this year?" She responded: "This year." Subsequently in that debate she said: "Forty new beds to existing programs that are already connected into the justice system and provide services." Subsequently she also said:

One of the things that we need to determine – and it's one of the reasons that we're doing this now in the second year and didn't do it immediately in the first year – is that we want to ensure that when we do that, we're going to be able to connect them to the justice system. So your question about simply passing money over and having it sort of, you know, disappear in the health budget is exactly what we don't want to [have] happen.

My concern was that in responding to the questions from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the minister implied that the 80 new beds were a response to a report prepared for the ministry of health about the deficit in mental health beds for the general noncriminal population across the province. Subsequently it became clear that the 80 beds that the minister referred to in this House as the response of his ministry to that issue were in fact clearly designated for people in the justice system. That was what was in the Attorney General's comments to me in estimates.

So are the 80 new beds the truth? Yes. Was characterizing them in that way perhaps a twisting of the truth? That's what I thought. If, however, the Speaker confirms that that characterization is too close to the line, I'm prepared to apologize, and I wait for your ruling.

The Speaker: Did I hear you correctly, hon. member? You're withdrawing the comments and apologizing? Just say "yes," and we'll move on.

Ms Notley: Yes.

The Speaker: I can go on for 10 minutes on this. I've talked about temperate language. You withdraw the thing, apologize, and we're moving on. Nobody else is participating. The matter is finished. There's nothing more, Calgary-Nose Hill. I would have introduced you, but the matter is now determined with an apology, which is the customary parliamentary tradition.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a question of privilege. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you will speak on behalf of?

Ms Notley: Yes, I will, Mr. Speaker, if I can just find my documents.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, this seems to be pretty much your purview, with respect to you. You might want to wait around.

Mr. Liepert: I don't. I've got other things to do.

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Ms Notley: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. They are right here.

The facts of the issue relate to a matter that occurred on Thursday, April 23, at about 11:15 a.m., where the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood attempted to attend a government news conference; however, he was barred from entering Government House, where the conference was taking place. When he asked why he could not enter, security staff told him that they had received orders from the minister of health not to let him in. It is our intention to argue that barring the leader of the third party's attendance constitutes interference with his role as an MLA and is, therefore, a breach of his privilege. I believe that this is the earliest available opportunity for me to raise this point of privilege. The incident happened too late in the day on Thursday to provide notice that morning. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, therefore, provided notice prior to the deadline today.

3:00

Obstructing members in the discharge of their duties is a breach of privilege. To quote *Erskine May* at page 143, "The House will proceed against those who obstruct Members in the discharge of their responsibilities to the House or in their participation in its proceedings." Attending government news conferences is a necessary part of the Member for Edmonton-Highland-Norwood's job as a member of this Assembly and as the leader of the third party. As an opposition leader his role requires that he be able to obtain a full understanding of government policy to be able to provide proper critique. Following government news conferences, he is usually expected to provide comment to media. In these circumstances it is crucial that he receive the information first-hand from the government rather than have it relayed to him through members of the media who are attending the news conference.

Furthermore, Government House is a public building. When the government invites the media there for an announcement, there is no reason why Members of the Legislative Assembly should be forced to wait outside. The government, therefore, uses public resources to provide information on a significant announcement of its policy to the media while excluding members of the opposition. Members of the Assembly should have at least equal access to such announcements as members of the media.

The Speaker ruled on a similar point of privilege in this Assembly on March 5, 2003. Yes, I know it's not exactly the same point. However, the issue at that time was that the media had been briefed on a piece of legislation which was on notice on the Order Paper but had not been introduced. The Speaker at that time ruled that a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege existed in that instance. The argument supporting that question of privilege was that the rights of a member of the Assembly were interfered with because the member was not provided the same information that had been provided to members of the media on a bill that was about to be introduced. To quote from the Speaker's ruling as it appeared in *Hansard*,

the department briefing provided to the media concerning Bill 19 when the bill was on notice but before it was introduced constitutes a *prima facie* case of privilege as it offends the dignity and the authority of this Assembly. As the chair has noted on many

previous occasions, the principle of ministerial responsibility holds that ministers are responsible for the actions of their officials and, in turn, are responsible to the Assembly for those acts.

Although the question that we are dealing with today does not involve a piece of legislation and, instead, involves a public policy announcement rather than a bill, we would argue that the effect on the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's ability to fulfill his role as a member is similar. That is, the media have information about public policy before he and other members of the Assembly do, yet the media then expects the member to provide comment on that policy.

The government makes numerous announcements on policy, but it should be pointed out that the announcement on Thursday was particularly significant as it dealt with the issue of insurance coverage seniors receive for prescription drugs and had been the subject of extensive debate within this Assembly in the previous two months. Since the government's original announcement on seniors' drug coverage in December there has been considerable public debate on this issue, and the change in policy announced on Thursday was a response to that debate.

On Thursday when the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked the minister of health why he was barred from the news conference, his reply, as recorded in *Hansard*, was as follows:

I know that this particular member craves media attention, but if he'd take a look at the release that went out yesterday, it said: for news media. There are restricted areas there, and I'm afraid that, you know, it wasn't a town hall meeting. We didn't invite the president of the chamber of commerce or the mayor of Edmonton, and frankly we didn't invite the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Now, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that as a member of this Assembly commenting on an issue with respect to public policy coming through this government, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood should not be characterized as a member of the public or the president of the chamber of commerce. Rather, to do so negates his role and his ability to perform his functions as a member of this Assembly.

When the member asked the minister why the government took this step of deciding to bar the opposition from the news conference, the minister replied:

Mr. Speaker, that is just a bunch of bunk. This particular government, this particular Legislature provides more funding to that party, which is not an officially recognized party. We do things that are unprecedented in this House. For that member to stand there and say that kind of stuff is baloney.

Mr. Speaker, according to the record of the House, that is where the matter stands.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I ask that you rule that a *prima facie* breach of privilege has occurred. Should you so rule, pursuant to *Beauchesne's* 114(2) I would move that this matter of a point of privilege be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I will recognize additional participants on this matter.

Normally at 3 o'clock we sort of come to Orders of the Day, and that allows individuals to bring a certain type of refreshment into the Chamber. Today, if you wish to have coffee now, consider it so. It can be brought into the Chamber, but this is really nonprecedential, of course.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to this purported point of privilege. I would like to refer to our own

Standing Order 15(1) where it states: "A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of the parliamentary rights of any Member constitutes a question of privilege."

Then I also refer you, Mr. Speaker, to *Beauchesne* 31(10).

The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether Hon. Members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, in my humble opinion, the reference in *Beauchesne* is almost a complete parallel to the circumstances that were described by the member. That being said, it is generally a practice of the government to include MLAs and opposition members, in particular, in news conferences. In this particular instance there was a technical briefing, that is not infrequently attended solely by members of the media. There was also a news conference that followed.

The issue of the previous ruling by this Speaker refers to briefing of the media of legislation prior to its being introduced in this House. Clearly, we were not dealing in this instance with legislation. We were dealing with an announcement of government policy. I refer you back to my reference in *Beauchesne*. That being said, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has made it clear through public statements that he considers it standard practice that opposition members should be involved and invited to government news conferences. That being the case, clearly there is direction being given to all members of cabinet with respect to the involvement of the opposition in future news conferences.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this instance has perhaps drawn the issue to the attention of all members and to the attention of the Premier and the government in particular. But I must reiterate that this clearly is not a question of privilege. However, I think that there is a reasonable solution that has been proposed and thereby adopted by the government for future reference.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to offer some comments and arguments on this particular point of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The Official Opposition, of course, has a keen interest in the outcome of this as, in fact, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Official Opposition critic on seniors had preceded the leader of the third party to this particular government occasion and had likewise been obstructed from entering the premises and instructed to leave.

Mr. Speaker, I think this question of privilege is about interference. The way I see it, there are two issues to this. One is the obstruction in being able to enter the facilities. The second is whether the members were impeded in their work. In the case of our two members being refused access, their way being barred in attempting to participate in the media conference, was their privilege as members of this House breached? We have some historical background to that. Particularly, in *Beauchesne* 24 it talks about:

The privileges of Parliament are rights which are "absolutely necessary for the due execution of its powers". They are enjoyed by individual Members, because the House cannot perform its functions without unimpeded use of the services of its Members.

In addition to that, I am guided by what appears in *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 55, in which it notes, "Thus, privilege came to be recognized as only that which was absolutely necessary for the

House to function effectively and for the Members to carry out their responsibilities as Members."

3:10

I think that what is at the heart of this matter is the obstruction to Government House. If I may refer the Speaker to *M and M*, page 51, "The House has the authority to invoke privilege where its ability has been obstructed in the execution of its functions or where Members have been obstructed in the performance of their duties." Certainly, I think that to have an Official Opposition leader, a leader of a third party, and an Official Opposition critic attempting to attend a significant announcement of a change in government policy is part of the performance of their duty.

Further, I note that on page 65 of *Marleau and Montpetit*, referencing a report during the 13th Parliament, a special committee stated that "the purpose of privilege was 'to allow Members of the House of Commons to carry out their duties as representatives of the electorate without undue interference'." I argue that the barring of the way to the Government House media conference is undue interference. Their way was obstructed on the instructions of the government.

Finally, I note on page 85 of *Marleau and Montpetit*:

In circumstances where Members claim to be directly obstructed, impeded, interfered with or intimidated in the performance of their parliamentary duties, the Speaker is apt to find that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred. This may be physical obstruction, assault or molestation.

Further, appearing on that same page is the reference that

on October 30, 1989, Speaker Fraser ruled that a prima facie case of privilege existed when [the then Member for Windsor West,] Herb Gray . . . raised a question of privilege claiming that a RCMP roadblock on Parliament Hill, meant to contain demonstrators, constituted a breach of Members' privileges [because it denied] them access to the House of Commons.

We recognize a number of locations where members carry out their duties. This Assembly, this Chamber, is one. Where committees meet is a second. I believe Government House would be included in that as a place where we do business. The Annex to the Legislative Assembly is another place where members carry out their parliamentary duties and carry on their business. So this Chamber is not the only location, not the only precinct in which that business is carried out. I argue that barring a member's entry into any of those other locations I've outlined is an unnecessary obstruction and does impede the member's ability to perform their parliamentary duties. Of course, the roles of the Official Opposition and of other parties are recognized throughout *Marleau and Montpetit*, *Beauchesne's*, *Maingot*, and a number of others. I won't go on with various references that outline the duties of the Official Opposition there.

I think there is an argument that the physical obstruction and denial of access to the location did in this case constitute a breach of several members' privilege. I would argue that the Premier has in fact recognized that. But while I appreciate that this individual is the Premier, I would prefer to see the ruling come through the Speaker, which sets that out in *Hansard* and is able to be referenced henceforth by those of us in the House now and those that follow behind us, that members should not be impeded, physically particularly, in their attempts to carry out their work.

I think what's important here is the members' ability to access that policy announcement. The further communication and dealings with the media I am not as certain, in fact, are part of the members' businesses. It certainly is something we all engage in and that many of us are particularly enthusiastic to seek out. But the work that we do as legislators is a work that is focused on policy; it is focused on

legislative development; it's focused on consultation with the citizens. That is the work that I think was impeded when the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Official Opposition critic for seniors, and the leader of the third party were barred access to the public policy announcement in Government House last week.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my points.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, sometimes there are situations that are different or happen at the same time and that maybe weren't preplanned. Thursday mornings this government holds its caucus meetings in Government House. We have for quite some time, and barring exception, we continue to do so. While it may be unfortunate that we had a media conference at the same time, I would suggest that on any other Thursday we would not allow the opposition members to enter Government House as we're conducting what is a critically important and necessary part of doing our business as legislators, as I'm sure they would probably keep their doors closed if they were holding a caucus meeting and we wanted to listen in. Quite frankly, I can't imagine.

Mr. Speaker, I guess, to get to the gist, I said that one thing is being barred from the facility, being stopped. The other one is about their inability to do their job. We're talking about a policy release that's not going to take effect until July of 2010. If this were an issue that was time sensitive, that would have prevented the opposition from commenting to the news before it was implemented or before it could have taken place – but this is a policy that is being developed. The minister has made absolutely no secret about it – we're going to go back and come forward with another policy paper – and made no secret that it would take effect in July of 2010. There is not an issue here of sensitivity, where the hon. members would not have time to comment. They probably have far too much time to comment without thinking about it.

If the hon. member is going to make the statement that he is unable to do his job because he was unable to get the factual information from the government news release, then he ought to be able to make the connection to us that at some time before in this House he had actually used the factual information from a government news release to help him do his job. Quite candidly, Mr. Speaker, it's simply about being in a place to contradict, to bend, to shape, to reply to whatever they need about the government news release. It has never been about them needing the context of the news release. It's about being in the right place to get in front of a camera and make negative comments about it. That's their job. That's their job, I guess.

3:20

Certainly, to satisfy myself that somehow not being allowed into the front row of the cameras at a government release around a policy paper that's not going to take effect until July of 2010 when the hon. member has shown quite candidly that not only doesn't he believe anything we say or do and is certain to repeat that – I'm not exactly sure how he could make the connection that not having a front row or having to wait half an hour to see on the news something that's not going to take effect for a year in any way, shape, or form impaired his ability to do his job. Lord knows, there are enough other arguments to go on about that.

But, unfortunately, we do hold our caucus meetings in Government House. We'll continue to hold them there on Thursday mornings. I would think the opposition would respect the fact that we don't try and go into buildings where they're holding theirs. If we've learned a lesson to not hold media briefings or if this were in this building, Mr. Speaker, I would agree. No one should be kept from media conferences in this building for this is the people's

building. Caucus meetings are somewhat of a different manner.

I look forward to your good judgment.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you want to participate as well?

Mr. Mason: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, I thought you were going to start them.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you. I prefer to follow and make some comments with respect to this issue. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has given us a quotation that the opposition or MLAs in general do not enjoy the privilege of having prior information from government announcements ahead of the public or ahead of the media. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what happened was that the media was given privileged and prior access to an important government policy announcement, and the government used physical obstruction in order to ensure that the opposition did not get the information until after it had been provided to the media. This is a very different thing than the hon. Deputy Government House Leader talked about.

I'd like to speak briefly about the question of location. The hon. President of the Treasury Board talked about the importance of giving access to the media facilities in this building as opposed to Government House or other potential locations for government announcements. In fact, the media room in this building, Mr. Speaker, is under the control of the government and not under the control of the Speaker, as are the facilities in Government House. This is an important distinction because, I suggest, the government could simply change the policy with respect to opposition access, so they could do what they've done at Government House in the media room in this building very easily. That's why I don't believe that this needs to be or should be left as a matter of government policy, which can change from time to time. If the government giveth, the government can taketh away. That is why I believe that it's important to have a ruling.

I want to be clear that we are not seeking unlimited access to government buildings or public buildings in this province. We have no intention of trying to attend a government caucus meeting. But I do want to point out that the government caucus meeting is not in the foyer of Government House any more than the cabinet table is in the media room in this building. It's on a different floor. In fact, the news conference was scheduled subsequent to the Conservative government caucus meeting. There is no question of us seeking access to Conservative caucus meetings. That is absurd, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to conclude by saying that when the government uses its authority to exclude opposition members from important policy announcements, it is an important question. I would equate it very much with the release of legislation. I think that the nub of it is that the media or the public were given prior access to a news conference dealing with an important public policy issue which we had raised in this House and debated in the House and that physical means were used to ensure that we were not present. I believe that that represents an interference in our ability to do our job.

I think that a reasonable and well-balanced policy that recognizes that the opposition and, indeed, all MLAs should not take the back seat to the media in important policy announcements or, as has previously been ruled, legislation is important for the functioning of our system here. To ensure that a proper balance remains, notwithstanding the very large size of the government, a small opposition needs to be protected from undue use of power by the government. I think that all Albertans will benefit if we have a clear policy with

respect to this, which emanates not from the government but which emanates from yourself, Mr. Speaker, that ensures that the appropriate balance between the legislative and executive branches exists in practice here in our Assembly in Alberta.

That concludes my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for your attention.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I've been listening to the arguments on both sides of the House regarding this purported breach of privilege that occurred last week over at Government House. As a member of this Assembly who was barred at one point from coming into this legislative precinct, I have considerable interest in this point of privilege.

Now, I'll be concise. The hon. President of the Treasury Board suggested that Government House is on Thursdays routinely property of the government caucus.

Ms Blakeman: The room.

Mr. MacDonald: The room. Precisely. It looks like a room out of the *Star Wars* movie. But, certainly, it's the room.

I would remind the President of the Treasury Board that in the Annex the third party certainly shares, I believe, a portion of the floor that they have with members of the government caucus. If not, they're on the floor below. Certainly, the Official Opposition shares the third floor with members of the government caucus. There's no need to ban one group or another whenever there's an activity going on. We even share the washrooms. So this heavy-handed, ham-fisted behaviour last Thursday is inexcusable. When you look at what goes on in the Annex and compare it to the activity that happened at Government House, I certainly would think that there is a violation of the rights and the privileges of the Member for Lethbridge-East, the one for Calgary-Mountain View, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Now, just think about that and also the McDougall Centre in Calgary. While I'm here, I was very pleased to hear the Minister of Environment acknowledge that in the future the McDougall Centre will be open, and it will be open to opposition members as they wish. I was delighted to hear that from the hon. Minister of Environment.

3:30

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would just remind the House of the co-operation and the harmony – the harmony – that happens in the Annex between government members, Official Opposition members, and members of the third party. They do everything but share their own offices. They certainly share elevators, security, bathrooms. There don't seem to be any problems, so I can't understand why the government would be so draconian last Thursday at Government House.

Besides, it'll be interesting. There could be another privilege on this whole issue when Bill 34, the Drug Program Act – it's a money bill – is finally introduced and is before the Assembly. Now, that will be interesting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I take it that's it?

Well, I appreciate the comments from everyone. I just want to make a couple of comments before I give my ruling. We've reviewed this matter over the weekend, and I don't want to prolong it.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please, it's the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly who has to fight the wars of disharmony between the Official Opposition and the third party when it comes to one square inch of space allocation. If one caucus gets one more square inch of space than the other one, I've got to spend days on it. So go whistle your harmony tune someplace else with respect to that because one gets one thing, and somebody else gets something.

Thank you very much, President of the Treasury Board, but the effective date of the statement, in fact, is totally irrelevant to the argument with respect to all of that.

I want to thank all members for their participation. Usually the chair takes a day or two to rule on purported questions of privilege, but this situation has been well known for a few days, and the chair doesn't want to prolong it any longer.

Essentially, the hon. leader of the third party's question of privilege is that his ability as a member was infringed upon in an unacceptable manner when he was denied entry to Government House for an announcement concerning the drug plan for seniors made by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness on the morning of Thursday, April 23, 2009. Technically this alleged violation of the member's ability to perform his duties is characterized as a contempt.

For the benefit of those viewing the proceedings who may not be familiar with the location of various buildings in Edmonton, Government House is located a few kilometres north and west of the Legislature. It is next to the Royal Alberta Museum and is used by the government for various purposes, including caucus meetings and ceremonial events.

With respect to procedural matters the chair notes that the third-party leader provided notice of his purported question of privilege to the Speaker's office at 11:09 a.m. today, April 27, 2009. The events giving rise to the purported question of privilege occurred last Thursday. Standing Order 15(5) provides that a question can be raised "after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question." The member chooses to rely on the two-hour notice provision found in Standing Order 15(2). For the reasons that follow, the chair will consider that the notice has been adequately provided.

A similar issue concerning access to government briefings was the subject of a Speaker's ruling on March 7, 2000, at pages 286-287 in *Alberta Hansard* for that day. In that instance the chair ruled that denial of access to a press briefing in the media room in the Legislature Building was not a question of privilege. As the chair noted then, he does not have control over that room, and it is not booked through the Speaker's office. It is not part of the parliamentary precincts. Clearly, the same can be said of Government House and McDougall Centre in Calgary.

In the 2000 ruling the chair referred to a January 19, 1984, ruling by Speaker Francis in the Canadian House of Commons. The 1984 incident involved some members of the opposition being excluded from a media lockup where it was alleged that a copy of a bill was released prior to first reading. As the chair said in 2000 at 286 and 287 of *Alberta Hansard*,

even in the federal Parliament, where the Speakers of the Commons and the Senate exercise control over the entire building, it has been held that restricting attendance at a media lockup does not constitute a question of privilege.

The chair went on to quote Speaker Francis' 1984 ruling at page 563 of *Commons Debates* for January 19, 1984.

The Chair obviously recognizes that the parties represented in this House may from time to time request rooms. They may or may not choose to invite members of the press. They may choose to invite their own supporters or include or exclude their own supporters.

They may on occasion include members of other Parties or not include them. This is not a matter for the Speaker to decide.

As the chair held then, allowing or not allowing a member to attend a media briefing does not constitute an impediment or obstruction to the member performing his or her parliamentary duties, which presumably is the category of privilege that the leader of the third party relies on. If the facts had been different and the question of privilege involved the denial of access to this Chamber or a proceeding in this parliament and on the precincts of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, this ruling may have been very different.

Accordingly, the chair finds that there is no prima facie question of privilege. The chair is, however, very pleased to hear of the position of the government and the direction provided by the Premier to members of Executive Council with respect to similar matters as this as we go forward.

The chair concludes by saying how ironic this really is. In the mid-1980s the Speaker, under incredible pressure from the opposition parties and the media, asked the government to take over further control of buildings within the precincts. The Speaker of the day approached the government. The government minister of public works, supply, and service at the time, who was myself, argued with the Speaker that that would be the wrong thing to do and that total control over the precincts should rest with the Speaker. The Speaker, however, as a result of the pressure from the opposition and the media parties at the time, convinced the government that it might want to assume some of the responsibility that the Speaker had previously had. Twenty-one years later I say that this is quite ironic.

This matter is concluded.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Clerk read the following written question, which had been accepted]

Hospital Ward Closures

- Q6. Mr. Mason:
Which hospitals had to shut down wards temporarily or indefinitely due to staff shortages between April 1, 2006, and January 31, 2009, which wards were shut down, and for how long?

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Executive Council Hosting Expenses

- M21. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all hosting expenses under \$600 in the ministry of Executive Council, itemized by event and amount, for each for the fiscal years 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we do know from the *Alberta Gazette* the government's hosting expenses for Executive Council over \$600 that are published. Certainly, in those years we can see where it follows a rather erratic spending pattern. It goes from \$44,000 in 2004 to \$145,000 in 2005, which was centennial year, and I can understand that because it was a very, very busy year for Executive Council. The following year it was cut back by about \$50,000 to \$94,000. In 2007 it went back up

again to \$106,000. In 2008 – these are calendar years; I will make that clear – it was \$32,000.

There's quite a range of hosting expenses here. I think that in light of this range and in light of the fact that the government's hosting expenses over \$600 have increased so dramatically in the last five years – in fact, they have gone from \$480,000 to \$1.4 million, so that's roughly a million-dollar increase over a five-year period. What exactly is going on in amounts below \$600?

3:40

That is the reason for my request. I think taxpayers across this province would be very, very interested to know what these amounts are for the years in question, and I would expect that the government is quite able to provide those amounts.

Before I conclude, I would remind all hon. members of the Assembly that I was surprised, as were different taxpayer associations, to learn that there appears to be from the official government spokesperson no official budget for expenses of this nature, whether they're over \$600 or below \$600. This information should be made available, and that is the reason for my request through this Motion for a Return 21.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Premier to recommend that the members reject this motion. This motion would cover a period of time of four fiscal years. There would be an excessive cost and, frankly, an inordinate amount of staff time required to restore digital information, recover, review, itemize the records containing the details of all hosting expenses under \$600.

The member is well aware and has noted that there is an opportunity for itemization for expenses over \$600. There also is on each minister's website, including the Premier's website, a monthly summary of office expenses that can be accessed by not only this member but members of the public. Mr. Speaker, if the member is truly seeking specific information that he can't find on either of those two sources, it's recommended that he submit a FOIP request so that the appropriate costs, which, I can assure you, would be significant, can be allocated so that this member can satisfy his own curiosity in some kind of a fishing expedition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. To think that this hon. member considers me to be a curious fisherman; I am defending the interests of the taxpayers.

Now, I'm very, very disappointed that this motion for a return is being rejected. I can't imagine that there would not be a summary. I know there has been a lot of fiscal mismanagement by the government, but I cannot imagine that there is not somewhere in the deputy minister's office – the deputy minister, I remind the hon. Minister of Environment, must or should be signing off on these expenditures. It shouldn't be a lot of time. It shouldn't take a lot of resources to find this information because if the hon. minister – and we're not looking for his department. The President of Executive Council should be signing off on these expenditures, or the deputy minister should be signing off on these expenditures. If they're not, why not?

This shouldn't be hidden. These amounts should not be hidden like the achievement bonuses were in the global departmental budget. It surprises me that the government would reject this

request. Mr. Speaker, the excuses that have been provided surprise me. I just cannot believe that there is no summary of this and that it cannot be provided in a timely and economical fashion. It just astonishes me.

When I look at how much money we have spent and some of the lavish hosting expenses, I can see why this is so far out of control, but I'm disappointed that the government, by rejecting this motion, indicates that they're not interested in getting it back in control. I'm very, very disappointed.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 21 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Sustainable Resource Development Hosting Expenses

M22. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all hosting expenses under \$600 in the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development, itemized by event and amount, for each of the fiscal years 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you don't succeed, try again. That's what they taught us in 4-H club.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at what's published in the *Alberta Gazette* for amounts over \$600, you have the functions. I want to pick one function that has been, in my opinion, totally out of control. This is the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties', affectionately called the AAMD and C, fall 2008 convention and minister's open house. Purpose. The purpose of this event: "promote the relationship with elected officials in municipalities from across the province." The amount spent was \$12,659. The dates given are the 11th to the 14th of November 2008. The location is Peace River. Yes. People are looking around. I don't know if that's the correct location; neither does the hon. Member for Peace River.

Now, the year before that, the bill was a little bit bigger. This would be the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Alberta Transportation held a similar open house at the same event, but they held theirs in Edmonton. The bill submitted to the taxpayers was \$2,780. I don't know why both departments couldn't have gotten together and saved the taxpayers a few dollars, but that didn't happen. If we're having this sort of out-of-control spending with those specific events, what's going on in amounts of \$600 or less? Why is the government so reluctant to provide that information to the taxpayers? Forget about me; think about the taxpayers.

With that specific event and the \$12,600 tab, we can go back to 2008, and the same function was \$14,184, the minister's open house.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes?

The Speaker: With the greatest degree of respect, it's Monday afternoon; it's private members' day. The question that you have in here deals with a motion for a return for expenditures under \$600 in the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. It's very clear what the motion says: under \$600, the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. It would be really, really helpful to all private members, many of whom even have other business they want to conduct this afternoon, if we were to be totally onboard with the question and to be, in other words, relevant to the discussion. It would be helpful.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I am building a case here with a very valid example of just why we need this information. With this case we can see by going back a few years that the cost of this event was less than \$3,000. When we look at the hosting expenses over \$600 and see how they've increased, we need to know what's going on with the amounts under \$600. You can clearly see there's more than a pattern here. We have no idea, if you look at the hosting directives, if alcohol or other spirits were provided, whether it was just for food. You have no idea. There is a difference in those directives because there are hosting expenses and those that are provided for what are called working lunches. Now, I don't know what the difference is, but apparently there is one.

3:50

With Sustainable Resource Development if we look at what was going on with expenses over \$600 since 2004, through to 2008, well, we can see that there's quite a range. Taxpayers would be interested to note that in 2007, during the calendar year, SRD spent \$100,000 in hosting expenses over 600 bucks. It was down in 2008, to \$64,568. This is according to the *Gazette*, and the *Gazette* gives the details.

Now, I'm asking, with this motion for a return, for the details on what's spent under \$600. I think it's a reasonable, valid request. If we look at this government's budget and where we're spending a lot of money, if we look after the pennies, the dollars will add up themselves.

I would certainly hope that we can get this information and that it won't be rejected like Motion for a Return 21. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising on behalf of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, once again, to urge members to reject this motion. In the interests of saving a few pennies in unnecessary, repetitive words that are already recorded in *Hansard*, the arguments that apply to this instance also are the same as the ones that I have already enunciated with respect to the previous and, in fact, the next two as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to complete the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a dark day for openness and transparency in this province that our Motion for a Return 22 is being rejected, just like Motion for a Return 21.

In conclusion, surely there is a summary of these expenses available in the office of Sustainable Resource Development. Someone somewhere must be signing off on these expenses. My recollection of the Treasury Board directive is that this has to be done. If that's being done, there has to be a record. With our annual reports and the line items that are provided in those annual reports and the breakdown of those line items, this is not an unusual or an unreasonable request. I just am very, very disappointed that the government cannot provide this information.

We look at, again, hosting expenses and where they've gone. It's incredible, and it's disrespectful to the taxpayers to reject this motion. It would also be neglectful of the government's duty to provide this information because it's not the government's money; it's the taxpayers' money. Whether the hon. members across the way like it or not, we have a role in providing accountability by asking these questions and demanding that this information be made

public. I cannot understand why this government is so reluctant to say: yes, we will provide that information. I have no idea what you're hiding.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 22 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Energy Hosting Expenses

M23. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all hosting expenses under \$600 in the Ministry of Energy, itemized by event and amount, for each for the fiscal years 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's quite straightforward. If we look at the Department of Energy, the Department of Energy would be a role model for some of the others that are in amounts over \$600, particularly the ministry of advanced education. In 2008, for instance, in the calendar year, according to the information I got from the *Alberta Gazette*, the Department of Energy spent \$5,077 on hosting expenses over \$600. The year before they spent \$25,000. The year before that, they spent \$18,000. In 2005, while some departments were spending well in excess of \$100,000, the Department of Energy spent \$3,676.

We can get all that information from the *Alberta Gazette*, but we cannot get the hosting expenses that are below \$600. What's to stop two officials from a department with credit cards from splitting the bill so it doesn't show up as an amount over \$600?

Ms Blakeman: Nothing. They've done it before.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. member said: nothing; it has been done before. Well, this is why we should be getting this information from Motion for a Return 23, to just exactly see if this is a practice and how widespread it is. Certainly, if government officials, say, are to go out – let's pick a restaurant. We're not going to pick Denny's or Boston Pizza either. We're going to pick the Hardware Grill. Let's pick the Hardware Grill. A delegation goes out. Let's say that the spirits, the liquor or the wine, are put on one individual credit card and the meals themselves are put on another individual credit card. Those amounts are less than \$600, but if you totalled them, they could be anywhere from \$660 to \$1,170. The taxpayers are none the wiser in any of this, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Employment and Immigration is looking at me, but yes, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre makes a very good point there. Certainly, if this is a practice that's going on, it should be stopped, and if it is a practice that's going on, taxpayers have every right to know.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Again, I'm going to repeat for the record that this information should be readily available because someone somewhere is signing off on this. If the minister looks perplexed, I think the hon. minister should after session today go back to his office and ask his deputy minister or one of the assistant deputy ministers for the list of hosting expenses that have occurred in those respective fiscal years, Mr. Speaker, that I'm requesting. I'm sure they're there, and I'm sure they're readily available. It's not a big deal to get them.

I think that in this case, with Motion for a Return 23, I'm very confident that in the interest of being open and transparent this

government is going to finally understand and provide the information.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Energy to once again urge all members to reject this motion for a return for the same reasons I've already enunciated on the previous two.

[Motion for a Return 23 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:00 Finance and Enterprise Hosting Expenses

M24. Mr. MacDonald moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a list of all hosting expenses under \$600 in the ministry of finance, itemized by event and amount, for each for the fiscal years 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This motion is similar to the other three. If we look at the Department of Finance and Enterprise and we look at what happened in the last five years with amounts over \$600 as recorded in the *Alberta Gazette*, these are, I would say, reasonable expenses: in 2004, \$1,228.

Mr. Campbell: Then why waste our time?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, in 2005, hon. Member for West Yellowhead, the bill jumped from \$1,228 to almost \$40,000. I don't think the taxpayers would consider that a waste of time.

Now, the next year they sort of remained about the same, at \$33,000. The following year, 2007, they were down to \$21,000. Then again in 2008 it more than doubled from the 2007 calendar year, to \$52,867.80. That's in amounts over \$600. The hon. Member for West Yellowhead can trot down to the library and look through the *Gazettes* and see for himself the function, the purpose, the amount, the date, and the location of those events. They're all over the place. It was amazing that last fall when the financial meltdown was in full force, there were many interesting amounts listed in excess of \$600 from that ministry, many with various groups, various advisory groups and whatnot. Unless the government accepts my Motion for a Return 24, we have no idea what kind of hosting went on in amounts of \$600 and less.

Perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, when he was conducting his review on condominiums, had some hosting expenses that were under \$600. Maybe that's a work-in-progress. Maybe all that is being done through the ministry of finance. It could be being done through Municipal Affairs. It's hard to say what's going on with that review.

Again, when you look at the department and you look at the fact that these amounts have to be signed off, it's not unreasonable to request this information. It should be provided unless this is a government that for some reason or other doesn't want the taxpayers to know where they're dining and with whom and why.

Mr. Rodney: What are you trying to say?

Mr. MacDonald: What I'm trying to say, hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, is that if this government is sincere in their commitment to being open and transparent, this information will be provided

through this request to the Assembly and ultimately to the taxpayers, who are footing the bill.

It's not long ago that we had a Treasurer, who has gone on to Ottawa, who used to stand in this Assembly and show us all the sweat-soaked loonie that that hon. member had on his lapel. We've forgotten about that, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: A gold-plated loonie.

Mr. MacDonald: It may have been a gold-plated loonie; I'm not sure.

It was a loonie, and the hon. member, the Provincial Treasurer at that time, was very anxious to remind all members of the House, regardless of which side of the House they were on, about that sweat-soaked loonie and what it meant. I think that if this motion is to be rejected, the spirit or the intent that was shown by that hon. member by wearing that loonie on his lapel will have been forgotten by this government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of finance.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For reasons similar to what the previous House leader has provided on behalf of the ministers of Energy and SRD and on behalf of our Premier, on behalf of our Ministry of Finance and Enterprise I similarly reject the motion and would just identify that, obviously, ministers' expenses for 2007-08 can be reviewed and viewed on the website. Service Alberta has a website available. More specifically detailed information could be accomplished by a FOIP request.

I think one of the things I'd like to identify is that the hon. member keeps referencing this government. Well, since this last election occurred, one year ago, many of the charges he's looking for were with the previous government, certainly many of the same members but with the previous Premier. We have no difficulty having those researched and brought forward provided the hon. member would like to pay the charge. I mean, we're going into a situation where very detailed records are being asked for and over a period of time, a considerable lapse in time, which would be very costly. So also being somewhat mindful of the cost to this government and also mindful of the various areas for transparency in regard to expenses that he could avail himself of today if he chose, I think that we're being quite reasonable in this approach.

I have to go one step further. I really do reject some of the attitude that's coming from the member that would suggest that ministers of the Crown would go to a great extent to camouflage by the use of two different credit cards and all kinds of things. We're all listening to this, and I wish the schoolchildren of Alberta could be in here to hear someone make those kinds of allegations. Fair to do so because under the dome they can say virtually anything, but that truly offends me. If my grandchildren were here, they would wonder, "How can you let him talk like that about you, Grandma?" It's ridiculous.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to raise a couple of issues. I'm a citizen; I'm a taxpayer. I'm also fortunate enough to be a legislator. I know that members of the government feel that this is an easy hit against them, but frankly the members of the government make it an easy hit. They are required by legislation to give us the kind of detail that was laid out by my

colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for expenditures that are over \$600 but not under \$600. That's why these requests have been laid out in the four different departments.

I understand that the minister of finance would be offended by the idea that somehow there were shenanigans going on around hosting expenses, but with respect, Madam Minister, we didn't invent that. We got the examples shown to us by predecessors on that side where procurement cards were used by executive assistants where expenses were split up. We weren't creative enough to dream that one up ourselves. We're building on the solid examples that have been laid before us by members of the government and their staff previously.

I think what's important to the taxpayers is that we understand why expenditures have been made and that they are reasonable and fair. If the government invites people to come and brief them on something or give them an explanation or give them some consultation or speak to them in some way and it happens over mealtime, particularly over lunch, fair enough. You know, they've been put out, and they don't have an opportunity to go and have their own lunch now, so lunch should be provided.

4:10

I think that where citizens draw the line is around alcohol and the provision of alcohol. I'll stop right there and say that in some countries that would be expected, but frankly if we're dealing on that level, those are probably hosting charges that are above the \$600 level. I think that below that \$600 level citizens have a right to say: was alcohol included in that? And perhaps it shouldn't be. Maybe that's an internal government decision that's already on the books. If it is, great. If it's not, could I possibly recommend it? I just don't think taxpayers should be paying for people to consume alcoholic beverages given that this is all supposed to be happening on working time.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has pointed out that there has been a stupendous increase in hosting since 2004. We are witnessing that in the above \$600 category, which we're able to track. We have no idea if the same thing has happened in the under \$600 category because we can't get any information on it. Truly, to say that, well, we should just go ahead and FOIP that, I'm sorry, but I've been around that racetrack before, and it was an absolute waste of my time, conjured up by members of the government, in which we got referred around and around and around about expenditures. Frankly, the freedom of information and protection of privacy was intended to facilitate the government providing information to the citizens, to the opposition, and to the media. What it has become is a giant cover-up, and it ends up costing the taxpayers even more money because the opposition and the media end up using their resources to pay the government in order to get access.

Why are we asking for so many documents? Well, because when we ask for something reasonable, we get nothing. So we end up having to cast a very wide net. There are always consequences to every action, and that's the consequence we've now come to with FOIP. The government has made it darn hard, the net gets cast wider, and then we get these ridiculous charges of tens of thousands of dollars for FOIP. That is not about accessibility to information.

If the government wonders where this is coming from, I just have to say: look back to yourself. There are enough documented examples where hosting was abused. It should be above board. It is the kind of thing that creates curiosity in the public and in the opposition, so fess up. Get it out there. Tell us how many people were there for lunch and why, and tell us what you were eating. Was it salads from Boston Pizza? Fair enough. That's the kind of careful, prudent management that I would expect. But there are too many other examples in front of us that we have managed to dig out

in the past to stop us from continuing to do that kind of digging now.
Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brings up a really good point when she says that there are consequences to everything that we do and that the government often brings some hardship upon itself because it acts in the manner that it acts. Well, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre it should be pointed out that there is a great deal of truth in what she says, that there are consequences for everything that we do, but the consequences don't flow only one way. They flow the other way as well.

For a prime example we don't have to look back more than five minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will rise, and he will use my name, not by my true name but by my constituency, and insinuate that in my review of the building envelope under the building code I may be wining and dining and spending money inappropriately. He won't say it directly, Mr. Speaker, because he's a bright man, and he knows what the rules of the House are, but there are ways of tarnishing another person's reputation and making innuendoes just by squeaking by the rules, getting the message out clearly that you're suggesting that someone is doing something. "I'm not saying, but I'm saying," as kids in junior high school would say. That is just enough to get that information out there and insinuate what somebody is doing over there.

That's exactly what the member does, and I don't know what he would base it on. He has never travelled with me. He has no clue what it is that this review encompasses. He has no clue even whether there were any meals involved or, if there were, where they were, or were they day trips that, you know, perhaps didn't require. Maybe all the individuals who were submitting to this committee were actually coming here to the Legislature. He has no idea, no idea whatsoever, other than the fact that he knows that I am doing some kind of a review. That is enough for him to insinuate that now with this committee I'm wining and dining.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be honest with you. If it came to vote right now to decide whether I should release any information to him, I'd say to him: "Do it the hard way. If you're going to accuse me of things that you have no clue about, why would you expect me to assist you in your work as a member of the opposition? Do it the hard way. Dig it up." There is FOIP. There is process.

Second of all, Mr. Speaker, just open the newspaper. Over the last 24 hours children addicted to ecstasy died, members of my Somali community in Castle Downs are facing problems with law enforcement, there are issues with recession, and there is the swine flu possibly approaching Alberta. There are big issues that Albertans want us to deal with. They expect this Chamber to address some issues that they really, honestly care about, that really, really matter, and they pay big dollars to have us here, sitting in this place. They don't pay your salary, my salary, and for the lights that are on in this Chamber and the hundreds of people that work behind us to support us to discuss frivolous things only for the purpose of, hopefully, getting a one-liner somewhere in the paper, because that kind of stuff sort of attracts media attention, and you may be able to get that one-liner.

Mr. Speaker, the rules are clear. Anything over \$600 has to be listed, and it is listed publicly on web pages. Anything under \$600 – and that includes your \$3 cup of coffee; that's under \$600 as well – that stuff is not listed because the cost of listing it probably

cumulatively would be more expensive than the actual bills. But there is a process that they can utilize. They can use FOIP. Use it if you think that there are any issues. If you want to FOIP my committee, hon. member, and make yourself look really foolish, go for it. Find out what dinners we had, where we had them, and how much the entire process cost.

He won't do it because he knows he won't find anything, but he will say it in the House so that it's on the record so that somebody can think that something wrong may have happened. That's shameful. It's unfortunate that our rules allow for that to happen, but they weren't intended for that.

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, indeed there are consequences for everything that we do, but that goes both ways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. To conclude the debate on Motion for a Return 24, I've listened to the last three speakers with a considerable amount of interest. I'll start with the latter and go back to the initial speaker. With the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, I've already been provided by various people in the condominium industry a summation of the hon. member's activities around the review, and I certainly find that interesting. I would remind the hon. member that FOIP is a very, very expensive process and that whenever we FOIP or ask a question, government members say: well, it should be on the Order Paper under a written question or a motion for a return. In Public Accounts they certainly provide that response. In regard to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has indicated, it is a revolving door for us. This government hides behind expensive FOIP schedules all the time. It's routine.

If we look after the budget for hosting expenses, we will have enough money left over to adequately fund programs and services to reduce and in some cases eliminate criminal activity. What we're saying is that by looking after these amounts – and the hon. member may think they're trivial, but they certainly are not. If you were to add up this entire government and these hosting expenses, they would be well in excess of \$1.4 million, which is the amount 600 bucks and above.

4:20

Surely, in that department, Mr. Speaker, in the ministry of finance, it's frightening to think that the minister is not signing off on these hosting expense requests that come in in amounts of 600 bucks and under. I don't think the Taxpayers Federation would be too impressed with that activity. I would urge all hon. members across the way to have a look at the hosting expenses, the directives that come from the Treasury Board to control these expense amounts. If they were trivial amounts, there wouldn't be any need for this hosting directive from the Treasury Board. But there are two directives. In fact, they are amended routinely as times change.

This is in direct contrast with what the minister of finance has said. When we look at what we do know from the *Alberta Gazette*, regardless of whether it's the Klein era or the new era of the hon. Premier, we've seen hosting expenses skyrocket in amounts over \$600. How do we know that that same trend isn't going on with amounts of \$600 or less unless we get this information?

In conclusion, the hon. minister of finance was talking about schoolchildren. Well, I would remind the hon. minister of finance and the other hon. members across the way that there are many children in this province who through no fault of their own come to school hungry and stay hungry all day long. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs: when we think of our hosting expenses

and we look at the extravagance, the lavish, wasteful spending of this government in the last couple of years, to think that there are children in our school system not only going to school hungry but remaining hungry all day long is shameful.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 24 lost]

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 203

**Local Authorities Election (Finance and
Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009**

[Debate adjourned March 16: Mr. Horne speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Bill 203.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker, on the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I have been reading this bill since the hon. member introduced it. It certainly is an interesting legislative initiative, and it is one that has created considerable interest. I have some questions regarding this bill at this time, and hopefully we can be provided with answers before we vote. Some sections of this bill are very reasonable, and for others there are questions.

However, with this bill I would like to know, in light of what happened with Elections Alberta and the fact that in the last provincial election, in March 2008, there was a great deal of difficulty in administering the two acts and getting that election up and running and getting people enumerated and trying to get some sort of control on it – the House has been through that matter many times, and I think we'll be dealing with that again. If these legislative initiatives to Bill 203 were to become law, who will enforce this, and will they have enough resources to enforce this? I know that with municipal elections you can certainly go to city hall in downtown Edmonton, you can go to Calgary, and you can look up the disclosure statements of many of the candidates. Exactly how this will be enforced, how much it would cost: I would appreciate an answer to that question.

In the definition of trade union that occurs, I'm curious why that definition was chosen. That definition, Mr. Speaker, reads:

“Trade union” means a trade union as defined by the Labour Relations Code, the Public Service Employee Relations Act or the Canada Labour Code (Canada) and that holds bargaining rights for employees in Alberta, and for the purposes of this Part all locals in Alberta of a trade union are deemed to be one trade union.

When this definition was drafted, did the hon. member consult, for instance, the Alberta Federation of Labour or the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, where they have many locals throughout the province, different locals that represent different workers? Were they consulted on this? For instance, the United Nurses of Alberta: were they consulted on this bill, and did they agree with this definition? Also, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta: were they consulted on this? If I'm reading this correctly, the AUPE, for instance, would be restricted and limited by this definition because, of course, they have locals all over the province, representing, as I said before, various locals.

Now, also, the limitations and contributions. It's different than the provincial limitations, which are \$15,000, and then during an election period they're \$30,000. Why was this amount – and this is in section 147 – not to exceed \$5,000 in any campaign period? Why was that amount chosen?

Also, if I could ask regarding a definition, and I'm just looking for it here, Mr. Speaker. I can get to this later. There was a definition in here that I wanted to talk about that had reference to organizations as defined by the Income Tax Act of Canada. I believe I've found that; it's on page 7. It would be section 147.05. Which section of the Income Tax Act of Canada is the hon. member referring to? Is it 258? I think that's the section that I have my eye on, but I'm not sure. If the member could correct that, I would be very, very grateful.

Before I cede the floor to another hon. member, I would also like to know why the definition of the campaign period was written as it is in this legislation.

Those would be my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Briefly I'd like to put my support behind Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. The member sponsoring this bill should be commended on being perceptive in identifying an area of the municipal act that definitely could have used some updating and, shall we say, tweaking.

4:30

I think all Albertans would believe and even pride themselves on the fact that we want our elections to be as transparent as possible. Particularly when it comes to finances, they want to make sure that any and all money donated to political campaigns, be it in municipal or provincial or federal races, is money that was spent in accordance with how it was intended to be spent, meaning on the actual electing of their favourite or preferred candidate, and that also there is a transparency relevant to who is donating to whom and how much in order to be certain that there isn't a possibility of someone unduly influencing a particular candidate.

Lastly, I think Albertans would expect that following an election, if there is any surplus in a campaign, the surplus be declared so that not only those who donated money but pretty well the entire electorate have a clear understanding of how much money a candidate has raised, how he or she has spent the money, how much money they have in their surplus account following the election, and how that money will be disbursed.

Those rules are pretty well entrenched in our provincial statutes relevant to provincial elections. The federal government has done some recent changes, shall we say, tightening up their legislation on electoral financing. I think it is time that perhaps some of those ideas be also now transferred to municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, many important decisions – and some would frankly, maybe even rightfully, argue that some of the most important decisions – are made at the local level. Those are decisions that really impact us as citizens from day to day. Even though the budgets that municipalities operate with may not be in dollar value as big as they are provincially or federally, these decisions are very important. It's very important for Albertans to know how their elected representatives have been elected to their posts and how their campaigns have been financed. Hence, because of the prominence of the municipal governments, we now refer to them as governments. We see them as an order of government, which in the past wasn't the case. I think that if they are to be treated like governments, if they are to have the benefits of being known as orders of government, then they should also abide by some electoral rules that allow them to get to be government.

I'm looking right now in the bill at section 147.03(1): very

common-sense principles that I don't think anybody in this Chamber or outside, in Alberta, would disagree with. Subsection (c) says, "Money in the campaign account shall only be used for the payment of campaign expenses." Well, I would say, Mr. Speaker, that that's natural. If people donate money for a campaign, they expect the money to be used only for campaign expenses.

Subsection (d): "Contributions of real property, personal property and services are valued." So if somebody gives you an office to use for the duration of the campaign, that actually has a market value. You should declare it as a donation. That's what we do in provincial elections.

Receipts should be issued to everyone who contributes to a campaign, and whether they have a taxable credit benefit to it or not is irrelevant. At least then they're receipted and accounted for, so there is a transparency built in.

Disclosure statements should be filed in accordance with the section of the act, of course, at the end. That's something that we do provincially as well.

Records should be kept by the candidate of campaign contributions and campaign expenses for a period of two years following the date of the election. That makes a lot of sense, Mr. Speaker, because if there is any question, there should be records to refer to for a reasonable period of time, obviously. Two years to me would appear to be a reasonable period of time.

"A campaign contribution received in contravention of this Act is returned to the contributor." That happens, Mr. Speaker, provincially. If a provincial candidate was to receive money for a campaign from outside of the province, for example, which is not allowed, if that was to be tracked down, that candidate would have to return the dollars to make sure that only appropriate contributions are kept within the campaign finances.

Mr. Speaker, most importantly, subsection (2) says, "A candidate who contravenes any of the provisions of this section is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$1000." Here I perhaps would argue that a thousand dollars is not significant enough, but that's something that could be debated at a later point as we proceed with this bill. I think that a thousand dollars perhaps may not be sufficient to deter a person from breaching the act; however, you'd imagine that that person also would be disqualified from holding his or her post if significant breaches were found. So I would perhaps consider a higher fine.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I think the bill is very well intended. It addresses a need that exists out there, and it will definitely give Albertans some peace of mind, knowing that when they donate money, the monies are spent just the way they intended the money to be spent and not in any other way. Also, it will give Albertans peace of mind that there is control on contributions and that there could not be – not to suggest that there is – any influence peddling relevant to the size of contribution to a candidate.

Again, I would like to thank the member sponsoring the bill and encourage the entire House to vote in favour of this bill because I think this is one piece of legislation that all of us could agree on.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to participate in the discussion today in second reading of Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, proposed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. As democracy evolves across Canada and abroad, it has become apparent that the finance and contribution components of an election's various candidates and parties are important factors in

determining the overall virtue of the electoral process. By extension, the value of the democratic process and the perception of government amongst everyday citizens hinges on the merit of the electoral process.

Legislation similar to Bill 203 has been introduced at the federal level and thus far in some provinces as well and has been perceived as a good measure. While our government has done so for provincial elections, Mr. Speaker, there's been no such regulation in regard to municipal elections. Bill 203 seeks to implement structure for municipal campaign financing similar to that which is already in place for provincial elections here in Alberta as well as a number of other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, municipal governance is vitally important in a diverse province like Alberta. In many ways Alberta's continued prosperity, as I see it, will rely on strong municipal governance and, by extension, a continually respected election process, as has been referred to by other colleagues. Municipalities manage many of the public goods and services that citizens use every day, and it is the citizens who in many ways are the best promoters of local government policies. As Albertans deserve confidence in the process that elects their mayors, aldermen, reeves, and councillors, Bill 203 seeks to enhance finance and contribution standards for municipal elections. While the province's electoral process at the municipal level has been sufficient to this point, we must make improvements where necessary consistent with government goals.

Bill 203 is forward looking and, as such, is not retroactive. This is an important point to our discussion as current municipal government members should not feel that their election to office is in any way being scrutinized after the fact. To be clear, we do not intend nor wish to convey a message to municipal governments and citizens alike that there is blame to be placed. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, past municipal elections have occurred under the purview of our government as is written in the Local Authorities Election Act. By this very fact we support the present-day state of municipal election results as they were implicitly sanctioned by the province. Bill 203 seeks now to enhance the electoral process at the municipal level consistent with our duty to Albertans to provide transparency of government and consistent with the same goals of the Local Authorities Election Act.

4:40

In considering Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that it is intended to be implemented on a go-forward basis. Past election campaign finances will not be audited nor investigated for any municipal district, county, or city. Elected officials, for example, would not have to disclose financial contributions from past elections as these elections occurred under the Local Authorities Election Act as it stands, without the proposed changes.

One of the changes proposed by Bill 203 is in regard to unused contribution amounts, or surplus funds. I wish to provide some clarification to this point since surplus funds will require disclosure. Surplus funds are the amounts that are unused after a campaign but remain in the possession of the campaign; thus, these funds, if kept, are likely to be used in future elections if the candidate was to seek re-election.

Changes proposed by Bill 203 for the Local Authorities Election Act would require under the new rules that such funds be declared by July of 2009 if they are to be used for future elections. If surplus funds exist and are used for a campaign in the future, they are, for the purposes of disclosure, current funds for that campaign. However, as the bill is not specifically retroactive, limitations on the size of existing surplus funds will not be regulated, while funds raised under the new rules would be regulated. This is simply an

issue of fairness, Mr. Speaker, as existing surplus funds are basically grandfathered. If any of these funds continue to exist and, acceptably, are intended for use in the future, they should not be subject to contribution limits, for example, as such rules were not a part of past decisions on campaigns. Rather, these funds raised according to the Local Authorities Election Act must merely be disclosed, as is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I trust that I've made it clear here that Bill 203 would require that existing surplus funds be disclosed if they're intended for future use but that the bill is not specifically retroactive and will not take anything away, so to speak. The ultimate result of this is fairness for all parties involved and the acknowledgement of the importance of municipal elections and the legislation that they operate under.

In consideration of the practical virtue and fairness of Bill 203 I urge the members of the House to support it, as I do, and I thank the Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing this matter forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll call on the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater to close the debate.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and thank all my colleagues who have spoken to this bill, given their comments, thoughts, suggestions. I think we've had some very good debate over what has probably been the longest two hours of debate I've ever been a part of. But, finally, here we are.

As I mentioned in my opening statements, Bill 203 would define provincial-wide standards regarding financial contributions in municipal elections and the disclosure of those contributions. These amendments that I've proposed would simply align the municipal election finance rules with those that already exist at the provincial and federal levels as well as in other jurisdictions across the country.

Without any further ado I will thank my colleagues for commenting on this and look forward to the vote and encourage everyone to support it.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

Bill 204

Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is sure an interesting day for municipalities here in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We just had financing, and now we're going to talk about financing specific to Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. At this point I would like to move second reading of Bill 204 and offer a few comments in support of it.

Mr. Speaker, I live in a city, like almost 80 per cent of the people who live in Alberta do. For some time I've noticed my city struggling with having enough money to provide the basic services that I as a citizen expect them to provide. At the same time that I'm watching my city struggling, I was until a few short months ago watching the province rolling in double-digit surpluses. To me this was an inequity that should not be. There is only one taxpayer. We should be able to work this out. So I started looking for some possible solutions to how we could have some sort of a revenue-sharing process between the provincial government and the municipalities.

First of all, the question is: well, was there a problem? Yes, definitely in the reading that I did, there's clearly a problem.

Frankly, I could see the problem as I walked down the street. I could see it, you know, as I read the letters to the editor about people unhappy with the litter pickup in their city or the number of times their road got plowed in the wintertime.

I was also able to read it in a number of different articles and commentary. I read through the AUMA resolutions. I read through AAMD and C. Certainly, there was lots of commentary in there about financing. Also in Canada West. The Canada West did a very good report which I would recommend to people, Delivering the Goods: Infrastructure and Alternative Revenue Sources for the City of Edmonton. It was released in June of 2008. Yes, there was a problem. Others had identified it. Okay.

So, two, was there a provincial role in this? Could something the province did or was capable of doing, legally had access to, address this issue? Clearly, the answer to that question is also yes. Essentially, we have a constitutional set-up where we have a federal government and a provincial government, and they divide up in the constitution who is responsible for what. That same Constitution also sets out that provinces create the municipalities under them. Yes, the province is responsible for creating the municipalities and the laws that go around them. Indeed, we just debated second reading of Bill 203, which talked about election financing for municipal elections.

When I looked at alternative revenue options for the province to share some revenue with the municipalities or for the municipalities to be granted by the province additional revenue generation, a number of things were suggested. They fall into a couple of general categories. Again, I will encourage people to read the Canada West document.

There are things like visitor-specific selective taxes. Those essentially are things like lodging and accommodation taxes, restaurant taxes, bar and pub taxes, beverage taxes, gambling taxes, et cetera. There are also vehicle-specific selective sales taxes, where we get into things like a local option fuel tax; a local vehicle registration tax; car rental tax; local tax on parking; vehicle ownership, or a wheel tax; special taxes on vehicle sales; et cetera. There's quite a long list that appears on page 31 of that document.

I was quite interested in a third possibility, which was called a SPLOST, which is a rather unattractive name but an interesting idea. That was essentially called a penny tax, but it was to fund infrastructure. I was really captured by what I was hearing from municipal councillors throughout Alberta but also others that, really, what we were dealing with here was an operating gap, and that's what I chose to try and address. What I've ended up with is what you see before you as proposed in Bill 204, which is about indexing grants to provincial income.

4:50

Now, Mr. Speaker, people that are following along with this particular debate may not be aware that private members get their placement in the bill draw literally by having their name drawn out of a hat. You've got to be having the blessings upon you to have a good bill draw. This is my 13th spring session. I have had exactly one other good bill draw. In those days in my caucus it was traditional that if you had an excellent bill draw, the best one actually, you handed it over to the leader, who got that position. In fact, that's what I did, and I got punted to the back of the bus with some number that was so high that I didn't even get the bill printed.

I was pretty excited when I was going to get an opportunity this year. In fact, I drew Bill 201, and I exchanged places with my colleague because we felt that that was a very timely bill and something that he really wanted to bring up. I am still pleased to have position of Bill 204 and to be able to bring forward and

encourage my colleagues in the Assembly to have a good debate about municipal financing.

We've talked about: is it necessary? Yes. Can the province do this? Yes. What was really needed? Well, what I was told was that municipalities really needed three things. The property tax in municipalities, which is their primary revenue source, is not responsive to growth. So even though we're now in a recession, we are still expecting growth in a number of our urban areas in Alberta. It's not as fast a growth, but we're still expecting growth. They really do tell me that property tax is not responsive enough to growth. They have to build things and provide services on a municipal level. They cannot keep ahead of it and have an increasing operation gap.

They needed something that would respond to growth, that the city would be able to control how the money was spent, and that would be predictable to them. Thus, we have the revenue sharing that is laid out in Bill 204: specifically, take a portion of the provincial income tax, which includes personal income tax and corporate income tax – and it's a small amount, 2.5 per cent – set it aside in a separate account which would be created by cabinet within the next sitting after this bill passes, and then the money from there would flow back out to the municipalities for operational purposes, not capital, not infrastructure.

This legislation is based on the Manitoba model, which has been up and running for some time. I believe that their percentage is currently 4 per cent, and there was some talk about how they wanted to increase it to 6 per cent. We have a larger population base, and I think the 2.5 per cent that I'm asking for here is quite reasonable.

The idea behind this is that it is for operational spending, as I said, and that it's an unconditional grant. There are no strings attached. The province can't tell the municipalities how to spend it. It goes to them, and they decide on a local basis how they would be spending the money. It is for operating money – I'll repeat that again – not for capital. There are other grant programs in place. Also, the entire procedure and process would be examined and reviewed in one year.

So I did quite a bit of talking. I got a lot of correspondence back and a fair amount of support and some questions from municipalities. I didn't get formal responses from AUMA or AAMD and C, but in this province I wouldn't have expected that either.

I'm looking forward to a healthy debate on this. I think a number of members in here come from a municipal background and understand exactly what I'm talking about when I talk about funding gaps. I hope that the members will be supportive of my suggestions here, but I hope that there's a respectful and energetic debate more than anything. We need a wider discussion of the relationship between the province and the municipalities, and given that two-thirds of us live in those urban areas, this is an important part of that discussion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It indeed gives me pleasure to be able to stand up and have an opportunity to speak on the private member's bill today. This bill suggests that a portion of personal and corporate tax revenue be dedicated to ensure the sustainability of Alberta municipalities. Let me start by saying that ensuring the sustainability of Alberta municipalities has been and will continue to be a priority of this government. We know that strong municipalities are the key ingredient to strong communities and that strong communities are the building blocks of a strong province. The Premier has stressed his firm belief in this on numerous occasions.

Mr. Speaker, this government has consistently shown its commitment to fostering strong communities. That is why the Alberta municipalities receive a level of support that is unmatched in the country. In fact, that is exactly the reason that we did introduce the municipal sustainability initiative. Over the past two years we have provided municipalities with \$900 million through the MSI, and this funding is having a real impact in our communities. In all corners of our province Albertans are enjoying the benefits of this program. They are seeing new roads, recreational facilities, emergency and police facilities that keep their communities safe, investments in underground infrastructure like water and sewer lines that provide essential basic services, and, of course, libraries, which play a critical role in the well-being of communities.

Mr. Speaker, the MSI also provides \$50 million for operating. The member opposite talks about the necessity for operating. The two large centres had the opportunity to have some of their funding put into operating. Their decision was that they wanted all funding to come as capital, and that's exactly what we did.

MSI is new money on top of other significant support that the government already provides to municipalities. Under MSI, Mr. Speaker, municipalities have the autonomy to determine local priorities and choose their projects to meet their citizens' needs. Unlike Bill 204 MSI also includes measures to ensure that we are accountable to Alberta taxpayers for funds provided to municipalities. Projects must meet program criteria designed to ensure that they will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Alberta communities. Municipalities must submit a long-term infrastructure plan as well as detailed information about each project to be funded through MSI. We are also developing an accountability framework to ensure that funds provided to municipalities are used to meet agreed-upon objectives. None of these accountability measures would be included in Bill 204, which would provide a fixed proportion of tax revenue unconditionally.

In addition to MSI, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta municipalities receive support from programs such as the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, the municipal transportation grants, the Canada-Alberta municipal rural infrastructure funds, and Alberta municipal support such as the underground petroleum tank site remediation program. In fact, last year municipalities received over \$2.3 billion in direct funding from this government.

The Deputy Speaker: It's 5 o'clock. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business for today has concluded. The minister still has time to go the next time.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Ecological Integrity in Land Reclamation

506. Mr. Berger moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to use site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes to ensure the preservation and integrity of our plant ecosystem.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour and privilege to stand today and open debate on Motion 506. The purpose of reclamation is to return disturbed land to a capability that is equivalent to or greater than what existed before. The use of native species to revegetate disturbed sites is already common for most reclamation projects; however, while the use of native species

is encouraged, it is not mandatory. That is why I feel we need to ensure that any land being reclaimed on native landscapes in Alberta is reclaimed with only native grasses and forb species. This means prohibiting the introduction of foreign and/or invasive species into areas that are undergoing reclamation.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, the reclamation of specified land is carried out in accordance with the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, EPEA, the conservation and reclamation regulation, and also in accordance with the disposition and authorization issued under the Public Lands Act, the Forests Act, and the exploration regulation. These require that companies conducting activities that disturb land must remediate and reclaim the land in a way that will support activities similar to its previous use. However, similar to its previous use does not require the use of a hundred per cent native species.

Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss why it is vitally important for native species to be used in all future reclamation projects on native lands. Introducing nonnative, invasive species to native landscapes can have serious long-term effects both ecologically and economically. Invasive species have the ability to rapidly reproduce and displace natural vegetation, which may lead to many negative ecological challenges. For example, it can result in the crowding out of native plants, including rare and endangered species. Furthermore, the introduction of foreign species can reduce soil stability and water quality.

Mr. Speaker, many of the Alberta initiatives work to re-establish native species, especially along stream banks as well as areas back from streams, such as rough fescue, which provides for water retention and water filtration and is also a great carbon sink in the backcountry. Additionally, many invasive plant species can rapidly spread beyond the reclaimed area, causing considerable ecological damage. For example, highway corridors provide opportunities for invasive species to move rapidly through the landscape by being transported on vehicles or during the mowing of ditches. The seeds from these plants could also be introduced throughout a highway corridor during construction or utility improvements. That is why it is best to maintain native plant species throughout native landscapes. Maintaining naturally adapted grasses and forbs also leads to more efficient water use as well as enhancing the carbon uptake, which is beneficial for not only the plant ecosystem but our overall environment.

The introduction of nonnative species can also lead to negative economic impacts. When these invasive species spread onto agricultural fields and pastures, herbicides are needed to bring the weeds under control. Furthermore, weed control is increasingly becoming more expensive. In the agricultural sector invasive species not only require increased application of herbicides but can also result in reduced crop yields.

Mr. Speaker, foreign species can also negatively affect wildlife. Deer, elk, and many other species that feed on native grasses and plants are accustomed to their natural habitat. Invasive plant species that crowd out native plants can not only destroy the natural habitat of many animal species but can potentially poison wildlife. Further to this point, while invasive species may adversely affect wildlife, the same can be said about farm livestock. Part of what makes Alberta beef the best in the world is the natural grasses and plants that our livestock graze on. This is something we want to protect.

The economic impacts of introducing invasive species to native landscapes can be considerable. In fact, in 1999 the science adviser to the United States Secretary of the Interior suggested that invasive plants cause about \$123 billion in damages every year in the U.S. In this province the economic costs of invasive species would also be surprisingly high. Controlling invasive species is one method.

However, it is best to not introduce these species in the first place, particularly on native landscapes.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate in Alberta to have some of the most pristine landscapes in the world, and I want to see it kept this way for many generations to come. I ask all the members of this Assembly to join with me and stand in support of Motion 506.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much for recognizing me. I'm very happy to stand up in the House in support of Motion 506. It's no surprise to me that it was brought forward by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. For anyone that's ever been in that constituency, they surely understand that it's God's country. I'm just a tad biased because my family originally came from that area.

He raises a number of very valid points. As we deal with a province in which there has been a lot of disturbance of the land through mostly oil and gas development but for a number of other reasons – exploration, seismic, you know, forestry roads, that sort of thing – we're learning some lessons. I think we've had to learn some lessons through consequences where we have seen that when you disturb the soil, basically, you open it up, and any seed that falls into it, that's what can take hold and grow, in some cases very invasive species and, in fact, noxious species. It can and does have long-reaching and detrimental effects on our natural environment.

I'm thinking of loosestrife, for example, which was immensely damaging to our wetlands. A really great plant; I had one in my garden. Man, did that thing grow, and it produced hundreds of thousands of seeds. It was so effective, and it was fabulous. My garden was filled with flowers until my neighbour came over and said: please get rid of that, and when you do, burn it and make sure that you pick every single seed out of the soil because it is prolific and invasive. It was. It took me years before I had finally got the garden rid of it because every spring it would come up again. I thought: wow; that's in a garden in a city with somebody that is watching it and trying to deal with the fact that it is such a prolific seed producer.

The problem with loosestrife is that once it took hold in wetlands, it just choked it out exactly in the same way it did in my garden. It just took it over, choked it out, and made just about any other native species very difficult to compete with it. It was not a good food source for the local animals. We were replacing, you know, good, easy-to-access nutrients for the animals and waterfowl that were frequenting the wetlands with this very woody stalk that was nowhere near as nutritious. That's one small example of how it can really get away from us.

I'm very supportive of what has been brought forward in Motion 506 by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I'm the Official Opposition critic for Environment. I've talked to a number of the groups that I deal with on this from the environmental and conservation side, and they are supportive of this as well. I think it makes sense, but sometimes we have to pass laws to remind ourselves to do the right thing, and this may well be one of those times.

5:10

We're expecting that if this motion passes and the government implements it, we could see benefits like, as I've mentioned, retention of the local biodiversity, certainly in the grasslands the appropriate grass. We've already lost significant grass out of the area that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod represents because the long grass we don't really have anymore. It doesn't really exist. It's gone. It has been taken over by the shorter prairie grass.

If you're in some of the museums down that way, I think particularly Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump – is that where it is? – there's an excellent example of the root structure. The root structure of the long grass is long; it's, like, three feet into the soil. With the short grass it's much less; it's about six inches. The long grass just didn't compete, and it's gone. We really, essentially, don't have it anymore.

I think, for some of the reasons that I've mentioned, that it does give our native flora and fauna an opportunity to continue to thrive, that it's going to increase the reseeding potential – we're not usually doing fertilization in those areas, but it would certainly reduce it if you're using an indigenous planting to the region – and trying to get as close to what was there before if you can't actually get what was there before. I'll hearken back to my references there to the short and long grass. The shorter grass is as close as you're going to get to what you had before in the long grass.

This is, I would argue, a common-sense motion. It's something the government should be going forward with. It is supported by the environmental and conservation groups.

I had one question. The member amended his original motion partway through. I'll just read the whole thing so that I can get to it:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to use site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes to ensure the preservation and integrity of our plant ecosystem.

The amended part is "on native landscapes." I'm not sure what was there before, so I'm not sure of the significance of the change there. Maybe he could get one of his colleagues to explain that if he gets a chance.

I remember a number of conversations with my uncle, who was for many years in the seed business, and he used to do a lot of reclamation projects. I remember being shocked at hearing that often there was no requirement of him to seed in a reclamation project anywhere close to what had been there before. Of course, he was a businessman, very successful, and he did what was most cost-effective, which was not always the native planting. Even back then I remember being disheartened by that because it meant that – he was selling seed for reclamation along the sides of highways and things, so covering a lot of land, and to hear that we weren't even trying to get back to anything close to what had been there before was pretty disheartening because we'd essentially changed the landscape. I think one of the lessons that we keep failing to learn is that you can't fool around with Mother Nature because sooner or later she'll get you for that. I think this is falling into line with that, and understanding and coming as close as possible to what is the native biodiversity is a darn good idea.

On behalf of my colleagues – I think all of them support this. I certainly do.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm in favour of listening to the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, okay. We've got some of them that are going to listen to the debate.

I'm going to certainly be encouraging my colleagues in the Official Opposition to support Motion 506. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to enter into debate on this motion. I, too, am intending to speak in favour of the motion. I think that this is in support of a good deal of work that we've been doing in Alberta Environment

and, in fact, reflects to a very large degree the practice that has been ongoing for some time.

I want to address the question that the hon. member just brought forward with respect to the insertion of "on native landscapes" into the motion, and it is an insertion. It came as a result of some discussions between the hon. member and myself. There is a responsibility that we have for reclamation that applies not only to areas where there are native grasses but also in agricultural, cultivated lands. So it doesn't make as much sense to use native grasses to do reclamation in an area that is cultivated in the middle of a grain field. Obviously, it doesn't apply.

Also, there are instances where we do have industrial disturbances that are on the fringe of urban development areas where once the reclamation has been completed, they get incorporated into urban development, residential areas, and those kinds of things. Again, it wouldn't make sense to reclaim to native grasses and then come back a year later and remove all of those and put yards that may or may not have loostrate in their gardens.

Like everything, Mr. Speaker, we learn that sometimes there needs to be some degree of interpretation or some degree of ability for our people to be able to have some discretion when it comes to applying these kinds of rules. They tend to sometimes become hard and fast, and that's maybe not the most appropriate way to deal with it.

There are other ways that we need to deal with and encourage minimizing the disturbance and the effect, particularly on native grasses. While it's true that the use of seed that would be recognized as native is critical and important and we've since 2001 advised against the use of nonnative seeds to revegetate sites, we also endorse best practices for minimizing disturbance on grasslands. One of the most effective ways of doing that is by scheduling activities, drilling activities, for example, during the winter, when the ground is frozen. That has a huge impact on minimizing the impact.

The native plant species are an important component of our end goal within our environmental legislation, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, or EPEA. It's reflected in the upstream oil and gas reclamation criteria for grasslands and our recently revised reclamation criteria issued for forested land by Sustainable Resource Development. The issue of land reclamation is jointly delivered by Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. We're currently reviewing our upstream oil and gas reclamation criteria to strengthen the use of native plants on native landscapes. We're also committed to the use of native species on reclamation in the oil sands, and EPEA approvals support the use of native species in those areas as well. In fact, Sustainable Resource Development currently approves the reclamation seed mixes, including for those areas managed under EPEA approvals such as oil sands facilities.

For a moment I just want to talk a little bit about trees and shrubs. Although they're not necessarily part of what the member has before us, trees and shrubs for reclamation are also required to be native and from a local seed source, particularly when we're talking about the reclamation in oil sands. Any use of nonnative species of trees and shrubs needs to go through a very thorough evaluation process. The use of nonnative trees and shrubs is currently restricted to reclamation research trials and occurs only after a very formal review. Oil sands operators are developing a seed co-operative to ensure that a stable supply of native seeds is available. That's important because, particularly if you have large areas of disturbance, acquisition of seeds can be problematic. So the seed bank is an important vehicle for ensuring that we have reseeding available. The province is providing guidance in the development of this

overall plan, and we plan to expand in the future to ensure that we include herbs and grasses.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I commend the member on his initiative to bring this issue forward. I support the initiative with one cautionary note: we have to ensure that there is a degree of discretion that's involved in the application of a policy such as this to deal with some rare instances where it might make sense to have nonnative species in particular circumstances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to speak in favour of Motion 506. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod is a man of the earth, someone who understands that nature never rests and that bare ground never stays that way. Indeed, he has already mentioned rough fescue in his opening comments. Rough fescue is a wonderful grass. It's a grass that has often been equated with snow and used as cattle feed.

It is logical that we should approximate as close as possible the same species of grasses and forbs as were in a place prior to a disturbance. Nature enjoys generalities and adapts quickly to conditions, which is why so many plant and animal species can be found over a wide range of areas. Alberta folksinger Ian Tyson eloquently describes the coyote's range as extending from the tundra to the shores of Malibu. I'm sorry, I don't remember the name of the song.

Mr. Rodney: It's the shores of Malibu.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. And so it is with grasses and forbs. Prairie species are reasonably common and highly adaptable. The reason that native species are not often used in reclamation is mostly a matter of supply as opposed to suitability.

The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, a federally funded organization, has developed a nondestructive means of harvesting native grass seeds, a system that they perfected at the old Lethbridge research station in the mid-1980s. Imagine, if you will, walking with a pair of long pants through the prairie and your pants are polyester. Now, I know that disco is out of style and leisure suits are hard to find, hon. members, but my point is still served. As you return to the car, you will see the various seeds stuck to your pants and your socks. This is nature's way of propagating seeds over a wide area.

The PFRA, instead of being annoyed by the seeds sticking to their leisure suits and socks, saw opportunity. Using prairie ingenuity and an old Massey-Ferguson model 510 Western Special combine, the PFRA developed a combine harvester that does not disturb the prairie grasses. It is quite effective in stripping the seeds from the stalks. Because different prairie grasses go through seeding at different times, the converted harvester had to be light enough to travel over the prairie many times with minimal disturbances. In place of a straight-cut header, a large brush, not unlike that used on a street sweeper, is mounted above the combine table and rotates slowly, brushing seeds onto the table. This particular vintage of combine harvester, which predates the high-tech equipment used today, had fairly significant losses which resulted in volunteer reseeding as the machine progressed. Progress was very slow as nature does not yield her abundance in any particular hurry. Oftentimes it took them all day to brush and thresh a bushel of native seed. This particular bushel of seed, however, may have been

enough to seed a hundred acres in combination with other plant species.

The real beauty of the PFRA machinery is the ability to travel across the same piece of native prairie harvesting different seeds at different times of maturity. Grassland is undisturbed, and indeed protected areas such as Grasslands national park in southern Saskatchewan are the perfect locations to harvest. All we need to make this an effective business model is a market. We have native seed. We have harvesting technology that we can license to independent operators. We have a ready market.

It makes sense to promote the idea of using native species for regeneration and reclamation. I applaud the hon. member for offering us the opportunity to develop and enhance not only the rural environment but also the rural economy.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak in favour of Motion 506. Motion 506 urges the Alberta government to use site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes to ensure the preservation and future integrity of our plant ecosystem.

Currently companies that conduct activities that disturb land must remediate and reclaim the land to make it productive again in a way that will support activities similar to its previous use. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act sets out the regulations for conservation and reclamation of lands. It states: "The objective of conservation and reclamation of specified land is to return the specified land to an equivalent land capability." However, there is no requirement to use 100 per cent native species when reclaiming lands.

Invasive nonnative species can rapidly spread throughout the native grasslands as they have minimal controls to limit their spread. However, the severity of nonnative species varies. Timothy, for example, is commonly found in Alberta and throughout North America and is planted as a forage crop. Timothy is a perennial grass that is native to Europe. It was introduced to North America in the 18th century. Although timothy is not native to Alberta, it is much less invasive and harmful to the ecosystem. Timothy is commonly grown for horse and cattle feed, particularly because of its relatively high fibre content. While timothy is an example of a nonnative plant species that is less invasive and harmful, other nonnative plants can be much more invasive and displace beneficial native grasses.

It is important that reclamation projects control what they seed, particularly ensuring that they use clean seeds, without weeds, and foreign and unusual grasses. Motion 506 would encourage the use of clean seeds that are native to Alberta in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes. This would help prevent nonnative and harmful species from spreading in Alberta.

Naturally adapted grasses and forbs lead to more efficient water use and carbon uptake, which is beneficial not only for the plant ecosystem but our overall environment. Native plants have grown within communities of various grasses, where they have evolved together and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

While some nonnative species are less harmful than others, it is important that we prevent the spread of the most harmful invasive species. Motion 506 would prevent the spread of harmful species by requiring the use of only site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that maybe later on the member would clarify the wording of "site-specific." I take it as the

site in the area where the reclamation work is being done, not to the seed that was there before on the exact piece of ground but to the species that are growing around the site, so it's specific to that area and site. For example, up in my area a lot of the green zone has timothy growing in it, so if there's timothy growing all around this site, it wouldn't be harmful if timothy came back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 506, which urges the Alberta government to use site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes. This would ensure the preservation and future integrity of our plant ecosystem.

Currently companies that conduct activities that disturb land must remediate and reclaim the land to make it productive again in a way that will support activities similar to its previous use. The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act sets out the regulations for conservation and reclamation of lands. It states that "the objective of the conservation and reclamation of specified land is to return the specified land to an equivalent land capability." However, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act does not require the use of 100 per cent native grasses and forbs to be used when reclaiming native landscapes. Motion 506 would encourage the government to ensure that future reclamation would include the specific native grasses and forbs.

5:30

The use of native plant species would be beneficial in a number of ways. By using native grasses, reclamation projects would be using plant species that have already adapted to our region's specific geography, hydrology, and climate. Native plants have grown within communities of various grasses, where they have evolved together and provided a habitat for a variety of wildlife species. By introducing nonnative grasses, many of these native ecosystems are replaced and lost to us forever. Another advantage of native plants is that they develop a deep root system, which helps prevent flooding, controls erosion, and enhances biodiversity.

An example of a beneficial native grass in Alberta is rough fescue. Rough fescue was adopted as the official grass of Alberta on April 30, 2003, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the Prairie Conservation Forum. Though not as noticeable as the wild rose, it is, nevertheless, a symbol of Alberta. Alberta has the largest area of rough fescue grassland in the world and is the only place in North America that has plains, foothills, and northern kinds of rough fescue.

Rough fescue is a wonderful grass. It is among the most productive grasslands in North America in terms of providing valuable forage. This forage is very beneficial to both wildlife and livestock. Rough fescue is very important as prime winter forage because of its ability to retain high nutrient levels during the winter season. Rough fescue is invaluable to ranchers and wildlife throughout Alberta.

However, fescue grassland is one of the most threatened native grass communities in Alberta. According to Environment Canada fescue prairie once extended over 255,000 square kilometres in the prairie provinces. Less than 5 per cent of the original fescue prairie remains today. At 315 square kilometres the Little Fish Lake-Hand Hills block in Alberta is the largest piece of northern fescue grassland left. Invasive nonnative species can and have been rapidly spreading throughout native grasslands and displacing native grasses like rough fescue.

Motion 506 would help prevent the introduction of invasive foreign plant species in reclamation projects and would help maintain the integrity of site-specific native grasses and forbs in Alberta. It is important to protect the few things that are slowly being lost to us, and as a proud Albertan I feel that it is necessary to take all actions possible to protect and enhance through proper reclamation our native landscapes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Motion 506, which urges the government to use site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes. Essentially, Motion 506 aims to ensure the preservation and future integrity of our plant ecosystem by requiring that companies that disturb land must use specific grasses upon reclamation of land.

Alberta currently has stringent legislation regarding land reclamation across our province. Motion 506 would strengthen this legislation by requiring 100 per cent native species to be used when reclaiming native landscapes. This would continue Alberta's trend of being a leader in land reclamation throughout Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta was the first province to legislate land reclamation, through the Surface Reclamation Act in 1963. This act provided a standard of reclamation for private land throughout the province. Over the last 46 years the act has been amended to require more stringent conservation methods, including a requirement for companies to strip the topsoil from the land and store it for future reclamation upon completion of the project.

In 1993 the Land Surface Conservation and Reclamation Act was replaced by the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Currently the reclamation of land is carried out in accordance with the EPEA and other conservation and reclamation regulations.

Mr. Speaker, last summer I had the opportunity to visit a coal mine in central Alberta with rural caucus and to observe the reclamation process first-hand. I was encouraged by the results I was able to see. There was a noticeable commitment from the company to leave the land in a condition equal to or better than how it was prior to the mining operation.

The passing of Motion 506 will serve to enhance the current regulations and, therefore, significantly improve the conditions of future land reclamation projects. Ensuring the use of site-specific native grasses and forbs could mean a variety of benefits for Albertans, in particular for those living in areas where land will be reclaimed. For instance, native grasses have adapted to a particular region's geography and climate over centuries.

In addition, native plants have also grown within communities of various grasses, evolving together and providing a vibrant habitat for a variety of wildlife species. If these same native plants and grasses are not returned following the reclamation process, this can directly impact the return of wildlife species to the area following reclamation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the use of naturally adapted grasses and forbs leads to more efficient water use and carbon uptake, which is beneficial not only for the plant ecosystem but our environment overall.

This compelling information illustrates that Motion 506 has the environmental interests of Albertans at heart. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod for bringing forward this important motion. I strongly believe that the benefits to our ecosystem promoted by this motion are significant. Therefore, I'll be offering my support to Motion 506.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to make a few comments. I certainly recognize that the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod probably has the best preservation of some of the native grasses in the province. My roots are also in God's country down there, and I certainly miss that country.

I'm not particularly conversant with native grasses per se, but I certainly do support the restoration of native species of all types. I'm not sure if this motion is intended to apply to native flowers, but I certainly hope and anticipate that it does. Particularly at this time of the year I certainly miss the wild crocuses and the shooting stars and the buttercups and the tiger lilies and some of those flowers that are very specific to the south country and in the native areas. I would hope that the intent of the motion is to broaden it to preserve all native species of that type because they certainly add to the beautiful landscape, particularly in southern Alberta, at this time of the year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are any other hon. members wishing to join the debate on Motion 506?

Seeing none, I'd like to recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod to close the debate.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to comment on some of the questions that were left out there. I'd made a comment earlier about the availability of seeds and the process of growing some of them. Rough fescue, for example, has been reproduced, and it's now put out there in plugs and replanted into areas. It's started out in a greenhouse, then replanted as plugs into disturbed areas.

A comment on the flowers. Yes, for any of the flowers that are native to that area, if the seeds are available, they, too, would be welcome to be put back.

Site specific would mean specific to the site. If you're in an area of timothy, put it back to that. If that was not the native plant there and it had taken over already, then basically we would be looking at it differently than we would if we were in pristine native areas. Let's try and keep those exactly the way they are as much as possible, using common sense.

5:40

It was an interesting comment from the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti as we were in Australia last winter and toured one

farm that had reseeded all of the farmland back to native trees and was now harvesting native tree seeds. That was his income now because they're replanting as much as possible to have an uptake of the water that is creating big salinity areas and blowing their soil out. The native trees are replanted on ridgelines. It takes the water up, and their lower areas are now producing better again. So there are opportunities, if we have this in place, for seed producers to come forward, and we already do have some in the province. There are concerns over the price of native seeds. The price of native seeds will become competitive if there are more people producing and capturing them.

I would like to thank all of my hon. colleagues who have spoken to the motion this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, I would like to again emphasize how fortunate we are in Alberta to have some of the most pristine landscapes in the world. To keep it this way, I believe this motion needs to be passed, to ensure that our native landscapes are preserved. That's why I have proposed this motion urging the Alberta government to use site-specific native grasses and forbs in all future land reclamation projects on native landscapes.

This past hour we have discussed the importance of our native landscapes, the effects of invasive species, and also the geographical diversity of this province. Overall, Mr. Speaker, I believe that by exclusively using site-specific native grasses and forbs in the future, reclamation projects on native landscapes are one way to ensure that our native grass species and forbs remain on our landscape for generations to come.

Just one more comment on our fescue grass. It's one of the few grasses in the world that can cure on the stump with the exact same protein level as it had when it was actively growing and green. It does provide a very important source of nutrition for all of our furry animals, as do sweetgrasses as well.

Therefore, I thank my hon. colleagues for their consideration of this motion and ask all hon. members to support Motion 506. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried unanimously]

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:44 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

Issue 31

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. On this day let each of us pray in our own way for all who have been killed or injured in the workplace. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. In a moment of silent contemplation may we now allow our thoughts to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered through tragedies, and reach out to the families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the honour of three introductions of grade 6 classes. The first that I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly is a group of grade 6 students from Sturgeon Heights school in St. Albert. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Matt Ohm and Mrs. Lorna MacKay and teacher's assistant Mrs. Collette Hartmetz as well as parent helper Mrs. Dillis Brown. I believe they are in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is also a grade 6 class from my constituency. They are students from l'école Broxton Park school in Spruce Grove. I might add, too, that I chatted with them on the steps leading up to this Chamber. Both classes that I'm introducing have already participated in the mock Legislature. Among other things they passed school uniforms and separate schools for boys and girls.

L'école Broxton Park school is accompanied by teachers Mme Bérénice MacKenzie and Mrs. Fran Korpela and parent helpers Mrs. Teresa Yamada, Mr. Gary Lundman, and Mrs. Alana Regier. I believe that they are in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My third introduction is on behalf of the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very special students from St. Matthew Lutheran school in Stony Plain. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask our special guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two good friends of mine, Laila and Alice Goodridge, who are sitting in the public gallery. Alice is a native of Hagen, Saskatchewan, but lived most of her life in Alberta and now is visiting us from New Westminster, B.C. Her granddaughter Laila is a native of Fort McMurray but, most importantly, is the president of the University of Alberta Conservative club. I'd ask that they please stand. Give them the traditional warm welcome. Thank you.

Ms Notley: Today I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly members of the board of directors of the Alberta Workers' Health Centre. They are Russell Eccles, Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta; Wally Land, Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Local 855 from Hinton; Liz Thompson, Health Sciences Association of Alberta; Nancy Furlong from the Alberta Federation of Labour; and Kevin Flaherty, executive director of the Alberta Workers' Health Centre.

Today is the International Day of Mourning for workers who were killed and injured on the job. Last year 166 workplace fatalities were recognized by the WCB in Alberta. This number highly underrepresents the true totals since most deaths resulting from occupationally related illnesses go unreported as such. The centre believes that every worker is entitled to a safe and healthy workplace. It supports all workers, both unionized and non-unionized.

I would now ask that my guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: It's my pleasure today to introduce you to a person who arrived in the world a few years ago, a number of years ago, and that's the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who is experiencing an anniversary today.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

International Day of Mourning

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you. Every year on April 28 we take a moment to remember those who are seriously injured or killed on the job. Every one of these workers has family, friends, and co-workers. Their lives can be shattered in a split second. On this International Day of Mourning we renew our commitment to making sure Alberta workers come home healthy and safe at the end of their workday.

Mr. Speaker, 60,692 Alberta workers suffered disabling injuries in 2008. This was about 2,000 less than in 2007. However, there were also 166 workplace fatalities in 2008. I know we all agree that even one fatality is one too many, but 166 serves as a wake-up call since that is 12 more than in 2007.

We have strong workplace health and safety legislation in place in Alberta. We have a prime contractor clause that ensures there is one employer who has overall responsibility for health and safety at each work site. We perform five times the number of inspections we did 10 years ago, and we write almost 10 times the number of orders for safety infractions. Mr. Speaker, 2008 was a record year for Occupational Health and Safety Act prosecutions, with 22 convictions and over \$5 million in court-ordered penalties against employers; 88 per cent of that money went to alternative sentencing to fund programs for the health or safety of workers.

Taxpayers expect us to do our job protecting workers by enforcing safety standards, and we do. We can still redouble our efforts to work with our partners and improve health and safety in Alberta workplaces because at the end of the day workplace health and safety is a responsibility governments share with employers, unions, safety associations, and workers. We expect our partners to do their part. The government will be reviewing the Work Safe Alberta strategy with these partners to see where we have been effective and where we need to improve. The budget for occupational health and safety has been increased by more than \$5 million for the 2009-10 fiscal year so that we can implement any changes found to be necessary.

Fittingly, Mr. Speaker, North American Occupational Safety and Health Week takes place right after our day of mourning so that we

can make people aware of the need for improved health and safety at work. A complete list of activities taking place across Alberta is available online at employment.alberta.ca/naosh. I encourage all MLAs to go to local events and show your support.

I know, Mr. Speaker, I speak for all my legislative colleagues when I say that our hearts go out to those whose lives have been forever changed by workplace injuries and fatalities.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On behalf of the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this International Day of Mourning those of us in the Official Opposition offer our condolences to the many friends, family members, and loved ones who have lost someone due to a workplace fatality. Workplace fatalities are avoidable tragedies, making the loss all the more heart wrenching and senseless.

The Alberta government must do more to safeguard the lives of all workers. In 2008 we lost an average of three workers per week as a result of workplace incidents or occupational disease. Workplace fatalities have risen 34 per cent in the last three years.

1:40

Albertans go to work to support their families and contribute to the Alberta prosperity and economic growth. Their hard work benefits us all, yet when it comes to protecting these people from avoidable workplace accidents, Alberta unfortunately lags behind other jurisdictions. Farm workers, for example, work without the protection of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Workplaces are currently not required to develop or post health and safety rules at the job site. These outdated policies must be changed if we're going to be sincere in our efforts to finally reduce workplace deaths and accidents.

In addition, the Alberta government should implement mandatory health and safety committees for workplaces with 20 workers or more, and they should make accident investigation reports admissible as evidence at trials and public inquiries. Taking these actions now could save many lives and reduce the number of needless, costly workplace injuries.

I'm grateful to Alberta workers. Every day they roll up their sleeves to keep Alberta's economy going. The least we can do is to pass legislation that will make their workplaces safer so that they can return home each and every day after their jobs to their families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: This would be with respect to a request to allow the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to participate. I'll have to ask. If any member is opposed to granting unanimous request, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and also to members of the Assembly for giving me the opportunity to rise and speak on a day that has taken on greater and greater significance and is marked around the world.

Every year too many workers lose their lives as a result of work-related injury, illness, and disease. The numbers are discouraging. Workers shouldn't have to risk their lives or their health when they go to work. Mr. Speaker, it's not enough for this government to use

vague language about renewing age-old commitments to making sure Alberta workers are healthy and safe at the end of their workday. It's not enough to say that we have strong workplace health and safety legislation in Alberta because, frankly, we don't. And it's not enough to say that we perform five times the number of inspections we did 10 years ago because it still isn't enough.

We owe it to the families left behind when a worker dies to do much better. It's time for this province to appoint special prosecutors to lay charges against employers when their actions cause death or serious injury. It's time for us to hire more inspectors to ensure employers comply with the law. It is time to ensure that all Alberta workplaces have mandatory health and safety committees. It's also time for this government to enact new regulations that deal with known dangers in today's workplaces, including workplace violence, exposure to toxins and carcinogens, repetitive stress injuries, and injuries caused by poor ergonomics, workplace harassment, and stress.

Finally, we need to remove that employer escape clause that says "as far as . . . practicable" from the health and safety act, where it does not belong. Every workplace death or injury is preventable. In the last 10 years 1,283 Albertans, some as young as 15 years old, have needlessly died in the workplace. How many more will be killed before this government finally takes the action we need?

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Student Engagement Initiative Media Award

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 26 to May 2 is Education Week in Alberta. Alberta students benefit from an education system that is progressive and engaging. One example of this is Speak Out, Alberta's student engagement initiative, that was launched in November of 2008 to encourage our youth in our province to engage with government in strengthening their education experience. To encourage students to speak out, a public service announcement was recently produced for Alberta Education. This excellent piece of work was recently awarded a bronze Telly award in New York for outstanding achievement in the educational category.

The Alberta Education Speak Out team worked in collaboration with Dynacor Media Group and student volunteers from across the province to create and produce an engaging, creative, and informative public service piece. Several students volunteered to be filmed and provided their perspectives on education, Mr. Speaker. Three students were from Edmonton, two were from Camrose, and the final pair were from the Fort McMurray area.

The Telly awards were founded in 1978 to honour excellence in local, regional, and cable TV advertising. Today the Telly is one of the most sought-after awards by industry leaders. The 29th annual Telly awards received over 14,000 entries, from all 50 U.S. states and five continents. This award for the Speak Out team is significant because it was selected from amongst submissions by industry giants like Disney, Harpo Studios, TSN, and Warner Bros.

I would like to direct members of this House to the Speak Out website, www.speakout.alberta.ca, where they can see for themselves the thoughts and ideas of the thousands of people across the province who have been engaging in this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all those involved with the Speak Out public service announcement for their outstanding and creative work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Funding for Small Nonprofit Organizations

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations' 2009 report entitled *No Small Thing: Calgary's Small Nonprofits, Charities and Grassroots Groups*, an exploratory study of 20 groups that had a budget of under \$100,000 and under four paid staff.

According to Statistics Canada's national survey of nonprofit and voluntary organizations two-thirds of Alberta-based nonprofits and charities operated with less than \$100,000 in annual revenue in 2006.

The study provided the following recommendations. Increased recognition and valuing of the contributions of small organizations to the development of healthy and vibrant communities, particularly by government, the corporate sector, and other large organizations, would help these groups to be included for research and future investments. More funding stability and improved funding practices are needed as small groups are particularly vulnerable to funding fluctuations. This would help support their core operating costs. Small nonprofits need increased access to affordable operating space that provides the opportunity to share office, reception services, file storage, and meeting space.

Participants identified the need for more collaboration between organizations in the face of competitive pressures, and providing support to interested groups would help to address difficulties in finding potential partners. Greater co-operative arrangement of business services such as audit and accounting services, insurance and benefits, human resource management, and web support would be helpful in increasing operating efficiencies and reducing costs. These small nonprofits also have a strong desire to build better connections with the business community. Lastly, in-kind donations of items like computers, software, and vehicles would help build the technology capacity of these groups and enable them to focus funds to service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, our small organizations are led by people driven by the cause of their organization, and the role they play in weaving the fabric of Calgary's volunteer landscape is indeed . . . [Ms Woo-Paw's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, you're going to give a statement today? Proceed.

Swine Flu Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Because of the developing swine flu threat, the World Health Organization has raised their pandemic alert level to 4 out of 5: a global epidemic, a new virus for which there is no current vaccine. This is the most serious alert level since the Hong Kong flu outbreak of 1968-69, during which a million people died world-wide.

Albertans can have confidence in the dedicated and competent professionals and ready availability of treatment, including antiviral drugs, but clearly this administration has no reserve in our underbuilt system, and Alberta is seriously compromised in providing timely, quality care for new cases and contacts.

While there are encouraging signs that this flu won't be as serious as the Hong Kong flu, it raises disturbing questions about Alberta's preparedness for any large-scale emergency, including industrial and vehicular disasters. Right now serious overcrowding and lack of hospital capacity is a fact of everyday life in Alberta's health care system. We simply do not have health care sufficient in professionals and space in our facilities to meet existing demand.

Emergency departments are so full that doctors are examining patients in their waiting rooms, and people with flu-like systems who

come to these clinics or emergency departments expose others waiting for care. These must be isolated. Where are we going to find the isolation rooms in emergency and in clinics?

Some patients will need admission to hospital for treatment. Again, where are the isolation beds to deal with this? Already hallways are jammed with patients. Rooms intended for single or double occupancy have additional patients. In a worst-case scenario, with staff sick and off work from influenza, these challenges will be compounded yet again.

The unfortunate reality is this: Alberta, even after the SARS outbreak, reduced its investment in public health as well as beefing up spaces for professionals and patients. It seems that prevention is not a priority for the Stelmach administration. The solution is that we need to get back to the foundation of primary care: public health services, family doctors, nurses, and home care. Not sexy, just . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you've gone past the time frame allocated. Secondly, you violated one of the rules of the House by naming a member.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Paid farm workers in Alberta are exempt from occupational health and safety, mandatory Workers' Compensation Board coverage, and the labour code. The government has been consulting on this matter for over a decade while 182 farm deaths and thousands of reported farm injuries have occurred. To the Premier: as a farmer why has your government in 2009 still not taken action to protect paid farm workers with the same rights as all other workers in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned a couple of times in the House over the last few weeks, the minister of agriculture and the Minister of Employment and Immigration are holding consultations with the agriculture community and other interested parties. Once the consultations are complete, then that information will come forward to government. We'll accept whatever we hear from the people and then look at how we can change legislation if necessary.

Dr. Swann: When, Mr. Premier? When?

Given that a provincial court judge has recommended that all paid employees on farms should be covered by occupational health and safety, an act which would prevent some fatalities, when will the Premier make the necessary changes to include paid farm workers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the two ministers can inform the House of how the consultations are proceeding.

Dr. Swann: What does the Premier have to say to those injured farm workers and the families of those farm workers killed on the job, whose only option is to turn to costly lawsuits because this administration has failed to protect them and give them equal rights?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, whenever there's an accident – it doesn't matter if it's in a farmplace or a small business or large business – we take the issues very seriously. That is why we're holding the consultations. We'll bring forward the information to the House. We'll have an opportunity to discuss it and hear from all

sides on the issue and come up with a policy that's going to serve Albertans well.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year there were 166 workplace fatalities in Alberta. That's three deaths per week. Joint work-site health and safety committees, a very effective tool to help reduce workplace accidents and deaths, are not mandatory in Alberta as they are in the rest of the country. They are only issued by ministerial order. To the Premier: why does Alberta continue to lag behind the rest of the country as far as providing efficient, safe occupational health and safety rules on our job sites?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the number of fatalities was up slightly. The number of injuries has actually decreased in the province of Alberta. That's given the fact that there was a large increase in the workforce in Alberta. We've got to find a balance and, certainly, prevent those fatalities. Many of them were traffic fatalities. There were some right on the job site.

I know that companies are working in partnership with the Alberta government. We're doing whatever we can to ensure that we protect the workers, that do a good job for all Albertans.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, a 34 per cent increase in workplace fatalities over a three-year period is not a statistic that's up slightly, as the Premier maintains.

Of the 24 workplaces which have a ministerial order to operate a joint health and safety committee, none are at an oil sands operation. However, there are ministerial-mandated committees at Lucerne Foods, Keyano College, and Sealy Canada. To the Premier: why are oil sands operations not deemed dangerous enough to have a mandatory health and safety committee ordered by your government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible has all of the information.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're very, very concerned any time the number of injuries goes up. The hon. member talks about the oil sands. The oil sands lost-time claim rate is substantially lower than the average of all industries in Alberta. We continue to work with oil industries to make sure that they're as safe as possible. Again, the oil sands subsector is the second safest, right behind exploration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That's interesting. To the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration: one of the reasons why the oil sands operations are safer is because they're union sites.

Now, again to the Premier: today on this International Day of Mourning will the Premier commit to making joint health and safety committees mandatory at all Alberta work sites where there are 20 or more employees?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we'll work with industry to make sure that we find efficient ways of ensuring the health and safety of workers. The oil sands do have a good record. There are other small businesses; sometimes there are some issues there. We're going to work with all industry, both large and small, and work out

a plan to make sure that we do protect the safety of workers in the province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In questions yesterday into AIMCo's decision to invest in Precision Drilling, it was established that AIMCo's vice-chair and the founder of Precision are business partners. That the founder of Precision Drilling stepped down from that company 16 months ago is not relevant. There are two things at issue here: first, that it is not good practice for an active investment banker to be on the board of AIMCo because of the inevitable potential conflict-of-interest problems and, second, that public agencies are accountable to their ministers even when set up to operate at arm's length. To the Premier: since it's pretty key if AIMCo is going to invest public funds here at home in Alberta business to follow best practices so that everything passes the smell test, what policies or codes of conduct are in place at AIMCo governing conflict of interest?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, AIMCo follows a code of conduct. We recently did a complete review of our agencies, boards, and commissions. That was additional work that the government did to ensure that we have a very clear delineation of responsibility. I'm sure that the AIMCo chair would provide any information very specific to whatever the member is asking.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given what the Premier just said in answer to that question and since this government has released the agencies governance framework and just recently Bill 32 as well, will the Premier point out to the finance minister that according to those documents she is accountable for AIMCo's activities and the codes of conduct they have in place? Yesterday in question period she didn't really seem to want to have anything to do with AIMCo.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, of course, that's a matter of opinion of the member. The province of Alberta has about \$75 billion worth of assets that AIMCo is managing. They are doing a good job, especially in light of many of the issues that other fund managers are experiencing across the country and around the world. They made a decision based on the evidence that was presented to the board. In a democratic state, which we are here in the province of Alberta, yes, at the end of the day the responsibility lies with the highest office, which is the government of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if everything does pass the smell test, I wonder if the Premier can explain to me why one of the corporate registration documents I tabled yesterday regarding the business partnership, a document we accessed last Thursday off the Alberta corporation nonprofit search, was altered to remove all references to directors or shareholders of the company and, further, that it was altered on Sunday. I'll table those documents at the appropriate time.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the smell test.

Yesterday that hon. member got up in here and indicated there was a relationship of something untoward between Mr. Gosbee and Mr. Swartout. Swartout retired in 2007 and has no shares in Precision Drilling. Mr. Gosbee has no shares in the company and no personal interest in it. They have a business sideline that has precious little or nothing to do with it. It's a helicopter business to do skiing.

So it's all right for them to stand up and impugn two very successful, respected Alberta businessmen and then say: it's true because I've got a document. That's the smell, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

2:00 Nuclear Power Consultation

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to nuclear power, this government has put the horse before the cart. It is increasingly evident that the Tories have already decided to support the development of nuclear power in our province and are now making a big show of pretending to care what Albertans think. Under the guise of public consultation the government has a website full of so much pro-nuclear propaganda that it might as well have been paid for by Bruce Power. I want to ask the Energy minister: why won't he admit that this government has already decided in favour of nuclear power and is now merely attempting to convince Albertans to go along?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will admit is that the government of the province of Alberta has a very solid program to go forward and ask Albertans for their opinion with respect to this very serious issue. It's very obvious that there are some members – there may be a number of them over there; I'm not sure – who have already made up their minds. Thank you very much for that. We will mark them down. However, I now want to hear from the rest of Albertans.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, he doesn't want to hear from Albertans. The evidence is clear. This government supports nuclear power, and they're providing one-sided and misleading information to Albertans to try and get them onside. Their nuclear panel was made up of hand-picked nuclear supporters and its findings predetermined. The government is misleading Albertans with pro-nuclear propaganda, and they're shutting ordinary Albertans out of consultation meetings. To the Minister of Energy: why are you denying Albertans the opportunity to speak up at public meetings if not because you want to shut them out of a decision that's already been made?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's worth the time to stand here and repeat again for – I don't know – the second or third time what it is we are doing with respect to the consultation with Albertans. What we're doing, the consultation that we're doing, the information that came out of the workbook that we produced in the last month or so: that was all based on research, not rhetoric.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, they're researching the ways that they can try and convince Albertans to support nuclear power. The proof is in the propaganda pudding. This Tory government's claim to open consultations is a sham. It's clear that their mind is already made up. Their nuclear power was biased. Their website is full of pro-nuclear propaganda. Its so-called consultations with ordinary Albertans are a joke. They're not

even invited to your meetings. Again to the Minister of Energy: why are you pretending to care what Albertans think about nuclear power when the decision has already been made?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is one-sided and biased about selecting a group of individuals that would have the opportunity to be unfettered in their discussions relative to this issue. I don't know what's one-sided about the ability for every Albertan, if they so choose, to receive a workbook and some background information relative to this. That's not the only information they can receive. There is information that abounds on this topic. The members opposite are absolutely within their rights to give that information to anybody they would choose.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Alberta-Canada Growing Forward Program

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we heard in this House from a member opposite that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development made an announcement around more ad hoc funding for agriculture communities. Our producers and processors in and around Lethbridge are very interested in funding support for agriculture. In an attempt to get accurate information that is based on fact rather than speculation and attempts to grab headlines, my questions are for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Will you please clarify what type of funding was announced last Friday?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I believe the member opposite was referring to yesterday was the announcement of our Growing Forward programs, which are a collaboration between the federal and all provincial governments, but you'd never know it by the way the question was asked; I'll tell you that. It replaces the old agriculture policy framework and is not ad hoc funding. Quite frankly, it's the complete opposite of ad hoc funding. It's strategic grant funding that is designed to help industry be competitive, innovative, and proactive in managing risks. All programs are also cost shared, and industry must make their own financial investments in the projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. My agricultural producers and processing industries are facing incredible challenges from intense global competition. Can you describe some of the programs and what they will mean to the agriculture industry?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, Growing Forward programs in Alberta were specifically designed to achieve results that will lead to long-term industry success. A hog producer could apply for a grant to upgrade his facility to be highly efficient, which helps environment and the bottom line. A commodities association could opt to implement enhanced biosecurity measures programs for their membership. A food processor could enhance food safety protocols to adopt new, state-of-the-art technologies, quality-added and value-added opportunities. All of these programs enable Alberta producers in agribusiness to become competitive, profitable, and industry leaders.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. How has the agriculture industry responded to this announcement?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the member from across the way, who always seems to look for the worst in anything that happens in this province, the reaction from producers, processors, and commodity associations has only been positive. Yesterday I met two family-owned and family-run processors based right here in Edmonton who would be eligible for the program the member opposite tabled, and they were very appreciative of the program. These family-run companies employ quite a number of Edmontonians, but I suspect the members across the way really don't care about that. They only care about headlines and not about jobs and growth of Alberta business.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Physician Supply

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A decision to freeze hiring for doctors is a scary prospect, especially at these times. What's more concerning is that neither the minister nor the Premier seemed to be aware of the situation. The minister of health gave a response that was later refuted as incorrect by the spokesperson of the Health Services Board. The lack of communication or even understanding of what is happening by the members who are ultimately responsible for it casts doubt on their credibility in managing this health care transition. To the minister: will he clarify what is actually happening with the Health Services Board, and will there or will there not be a freeze?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason the Premier and the minister of health refused to confirm the allegation made by the Leader of the Opposition is because it was not correct. Let me state for the record: there is no hiring freeze. I'll repeat that: there is no hiring freeze. We need general practitioners, family doctors, in all parts of this province, and efforts are going to continue to ensure that we, wherever we can, fill those vacancies. What has happened is that a number of positions that are more specialist in research are being reviewed to ensure that they fit within our focus on research in this province, going forward.

Dr. Swann: Well, the truth is, Mr. Speaker, that the Health Services Board is now backing away from the hiring freeze due to complaints from the medical and academic communities. Can the minister explain who was consulted before the decision was made to release the memo advising of the freeze?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only restate what I said in the first place: there is no hiring freeze. I can repeat it 10 times if it helps. There is no hiring freeze. There never has been a hiring freeze. What there is is a number of positions; a number of individuals internationally had been contacted for potential recruitment. In light of a new focus on medical research in this province we want to ensure that the right people, that fit within that medical research focus, are the ones that we actually recruit.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday a spokesperson for the Health Services Board dismissed this memo on a freeze, sent last

Wednesday, as no longer valid and, quote, old news. End of quote. It's very concerning that changes are implemented in such a haphazard way, that memos are sent one day and then considered invalid the next. Why the flip-flop, Mr. Minister?

2:10

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this particular Leader of the Opposition has stood here on several occasions during this session and talked about smarter spending in health care. Well, I would suggest that as we develop a research policy within Health, working with the Department of Advanced Education and Technology, smart spending would mean that we should be recruiting people that fit within that research strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mineral Exploration Tax Credit

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have had several conversations about mineral exploration tax credits with many constituents. They believe that they're a valuable tool to encourage investment in our province in these uncertain times. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Why does Alberta not have a mineral exploration tax credit?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta doesn't have a mineral exploration tax credit per se. Instead, we have other programs in the province of Alberta that were introduced to encourage development. Some recent ones that we've done are programs to encourage drilling and production of wells. On the mining side studies indicate that Alberta does have a favourable regime from the perspective of regulation, land-use rules, overall taxes, and business attractiveness. We remain open to suggestions to become competitive in areas where we're not competitive and remain competitive in areas where we are. I believe we'll continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. It was announced that the province is developing these incentive programs to provide short-term, targeted assistance to junior and mid-cap companies. Can flow-through shares be one of these incentives?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again that's a very good question. The information that I have would certainly indicate that flow-through shares are currently allowed under the federal income tax system, in section 66 of the Income Tax Act, for qualifying resource expenditures.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, also to the same minister: what sort of incentives currently exist for mineral investment in Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, our strengths would include a great tenure system in the province of Alberta, an extensive mapping database that's provided through the knowledge and expertise of the

Alberta Geological Survey. That is available to all explorers. We believe that the political stability in the province of Alberta is also a great incentive.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Air Quality Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's asthma rates are among the worst in the country, and Alberta is the only province that refuses to participate in the national air quality health index. This index emphasizes the link between air quality and health and is as simple to understand as the UV index. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why has the minister refused to adopt the national air quality index, when it would allow parents to turn on their televisions and find out whether it was safe to let their asthmatic children go and play outside?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has no opposition to a national standard. However, we have a disagreement with the federal government on how this particular standard was established. We have already in place in Alberta a detailed network of air quality monitoring systems. We're more than pleased to participate in any kind of a national reporting standard, but we don't want to take what we have in Alberta, which is a very detailed, quality system, and water it down so that it fits into some kind of a national system, where other jurisdictions don't have the capacity that we do to monitor it.

Ms Blakeman: Well, actually, the standards are weaker.

Can the minister explain why Alberta's measurement of five pollutants in isolation from one another and a 20-year-old method would be considered better than the new national standard, which measures the interactive effects of the three pollutants that are not safe at any concentration?

Mr. Renner: The answer to the question is that in Alberta we believe that it's necessary to monitor a much longer list of air pollutants because of the amount of emission sources that we have within this province. We feel that we have a unique circumstance here in Alberta. That unique circumstance needs to be dealt with in a unique way. I emphasize that we have a system in Alberta that we believe to be superior to the one that is being proposed through the federal government.

Ms Blakeman: Now, you shouldn't be going this one alone.

Back to the same minister: given the government's past support and use of population-based health studies for the UV index and for the campaign against smoking, does the minister support the use of these population-based health studies for air quality monitoring?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, air quality monitoring is something that is critical if we're going to be able to implement what we feel to be our priority, and that is the cumulative effects regulatory regime. We need to understand what the desired outcomes are, and we need to be able to understand what the monitoring techniques are that will be required so that we can determine whether or not we have achieved those outcomes. How they fit in or not with all of the ancillary kinds of information sources is very much part of that discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Second-language Education Programming

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the future economic and social success of our province so inevitably linked to international immigration and international trade, instilling an understanding of global issues and culture in our youth is critical. Perhaps the most salient expression of culture is language. My questions are relative to international language instruction in Alberta, and they're directed to the Minister of Education. How many schools or what percentage of schools in Alberta offer second-language programming for students in grades 4 to 9?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. All school jurisdictions across the province offer programming in second languages, and about 71 per cent of our grades 4 to 9 schools are offering those second languages, so a very significant proportion of our students have second-language programming available to them in grades 4 to 9.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. How does Alberta compare with other jurisdictions in Canada in terms of second-language programs?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have in Alberta the widest range of language programming available in the country, including the choice of French language programming plus 10 provincial programs in Blackfoot, Cree, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Punjabi, Spanish, and Ukrainian. As well as that, many of our school jurisdictions have locally developed programs in additional language areas such as Arabic, American Sign Language, Dene, Filipino, Greek, Hebrew, Korean, Nakota, Polish, Russian, Saulteaux, Swedish, Tsuu T'ina, and Vietnamese. International languages as well as our native languages here at home are very important to students and very important for the learning experience.

Ms Woo-Paw: I'd like to know if there's a difference in the offering of second-language programs between rural and urban jurisdictions in Alberta.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as one might expect, there's a wider range of offerings available in urban schools, but it's important to note that our rural school jurisdictions also have a wide access to programming available. The Peace River jurisdiction, for example, offers German and Cree in addition to French-language programming. In Red Deer public schools you can take Chinese, German, Japanese, and Spanish. I might say that with distance learning opportunities students anywhere in the province can participate in virtually any language of their choice online.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton's aging schools desperately need upgrading. Edmonton public is facing a \$63 million asbestos liability, and 16 school preservation requests remain a high priority since none of the projects were approved last year. This isn't about asking for more money; it's about using limited resources more wisely. To the minister: given that the projected cost to preserve Edmonton's schools is \$12.7 million more this year than

it was last year, when nothing was done, will the minister commit to approving the projects with the highest priority this year so that costs do not continue to escalate?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'd invite the hon. member to attend at committee on the estimates tomorrow night, and he can perhaps show how he can accomplish what he's talking about without spending more money or where, in fact, there could be a change in priority, from his perspective, as to where the \$790 million that we're spending this year on new projects and maintenance projects across the province might be rejigged. We're spending more money than any jurisdiction on schools. We do have lots of work to do in the area, no question about that. We're looking for innovative ways to both stretch the dollars we have and to bring new dollars into the process. But it's a very important area: to make sure that we have schools where children need them.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Edmonton public board is facing a \$700,000 deficit from previous relocations of portables and needs another eight portables moved, will the minister review the approval process to ensure that cost-effective practices which increase much-needed classroom space will be adequately funded?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been reviewing both the approval process and the capital planning process. We're working with school boards across the province and with the Ministry of Infrastructure to make sure that our capital planning and the capital improvement process are both effective and efficient and that we make sure that we can prioritize the most important areas based on health and based on capacity needs, based on where the highest priority is. Yes, so very much we're engaged in that process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the minister: given that six years ago it was recommended by the Commission on Learning that classes from junior kindergarten to grade 3 should have no more than 17 students, why is it that out of Edmonton's 153 schools, 120 of those schools still have more than the recommended number?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a fairly complex issue, believe it or not. There has been a significant amount of resources invested in school boards right across the province to help those school boards achieve the class size initiative, and they have across the province at every level except the grades 1 to 3 level. I've had those discussions with the board chairs and superintendents across the province about the need for us to deal with that, but as the hon. member will know, it's about where the schools are located. It's about the class sizes in those schools and the capacity of those schools. There are a number of factors which go into making sure that we meet those class sizes where and when possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Workplace Health and Safety (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last 10 years 1,283 Albertans have died on the job, and each one of these deaths was

preventable. However, ministerial regret and sympathy will prevent nothing if not followed by real action. More inspectors, mandatory committees with authority, clear safety standards, and special prosecutors: these are the things that would keep Albertans safe at work. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why won't the minister replace condolences with the real action needed to protect Alberta workers?

Mr. Goudreau: I think, Mr. Speaker, I did indicate in my statement earlier today that we are doing a lot. We're adding a lot more resources in safety inspections – we're working with those employers who show to be the most in violation – and we continue to invest additional funds and resources to improve the amount of inspections that we do. We are adding to the levels of prosecution.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't seem to be working. In 2006 124 people died, in '07 154 people died, and last year 166 people died. Every year the minister says that one death is one death too many, every year we have over 100 of those deaths, and every year the numbers go up. It's time for a demonstration of real ministerial responsibility, so here's a performance target for the minister. Will the minister put his job on the line for Alberta workers and commit to handing his job over to someone else next year should he fail to reduce the number of work-related deaths in this province?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to say again that workplace injuries or fatalities are totally unacceptable in the province of Alberta. We are recognizing that numbers change from year to year, but given our population growth and the amount of employment that we've seen, the numbers of new businesses in the province of Alberta, our workplace fatality rates have basically stayed constant. While we continue to remain very concerned about the increases in fatalities due to traumatic workplace injuries, the long-term trend for workplace injuries is again downward. We have a tremendous amount of actions and strategies aimed at reducing those traumatic injuries.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, the injuries in the province have not gone down; WCB has just renamed them. Meanwhile the number of work-related deaths is worse than the stats because countless victims are rejected by the WCB. For example, the Alberta Cancer Board says that far more people are dying from work-related ailments than this government admits. Why won't the minister stop repeating these platitudes and reduce workplace deaths by providing real legislative and inspection protection for Alberta workers and their families?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about these increases that the member talks about, so new government initiatives are proposed for a lot of areas. The Work Safe Alberta initiative is going into a new planning phase and will be recommending some targeted activities related to things like motor vehicle incidents, workplace traumatic injuries, cancer and other occupational diseases.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

FNMI Education Funding

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the 2009-2012 business plan, released previously by the Ministry of Education, a new

business plan goal was revealed that focuses on success for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – FNMI – students. My question for the Minister of Education is: why has it taken so long for the minister to take an interest in First Nations education, and why now?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, First Nations and Métis education has been part of the education business plan for a number of years. We've decided this year that it was necessary to be more focused and to concentrate greater efforts on the education needs of FNMI students. A number of reasons for that. First of all, the achievement gap between FNMI students and the general student population is significant and shows no signs of narrowing. We have the third-largest FNMI population in the country, and it's growing at a great rate. Children and youth are the fastest growing segment of the aboriginal population, and by 2017 they'll have grown by 39 per cent. It's always been important but never more important than now to focus on that particular area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. This may be an admirable goal, but it comes in a period of fiscal restraint. Is the minister going to provide additional funding to help school boards implement this new business plan goal?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have for a number of years been providing supplementary funding for self-identified FNMI students, and this year that will be \$1,155 per student registered. We have about 35,770 self-identified students, resulting in about \$40 million. There's money already being invested in that area in this year's budget, but we need to make sure that that money is being invested effectively and that we're getting the results, so focusing in on what we're doing, sharing best practices, and making sure we have accountability factors in place so that we know that we're getting the results that we need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister is about tracking results. Up till now school boards have not had to report on FNMI students' data publicly. Will they now do so under this new goal?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker, they will, but it'll take a little bit of time to get that in place appropriately. The reporting will be part of jurisdictional three-year education plans and annual education results reports, and that will start in 2010. We need to capture the information so that we can assess whether or not we're being effective, so the accountability piece is very, very important. But it's also important that we do it in a sensitive way, in a way that makes sense for the purposes not of demeaning or diminishing any particular category of students but making sure that we have the information so that we can be effective in the use of our resources to achieve the results needed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Reciprocal Drivers' Licences

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation has talked a lot about moves to improve driver licensing for many immigrants coming to the province. The government has full

reciprocal licensing with only nine countries. Could the minister tell us how long it takes on average for an immigrant from India or the Philippines to get their driver's licence converted into an Alberta licence?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, when they follow the rules that are there, I can't tell him the exact timing because everything is different, but I can tell you that it's a heck of a lot faster than it used to be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not a heck of a lot faster than what we anticipated.

To the minister again. Things may be better, but they aren't yet good enough. What is the minister doing to speed up this process?

Mr. Ouellette: I'm glad that he admitted that things are better, and they are happening faster. Mr. Speaker, we are always working with other jurisdictions. As you know, we have to verify the paperwork that comes in with the immigration people, and as fast as they can get that verified for us, we go ahead and issue them a licence.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not afraid to speak the truth. Things are getting better, but they are not good enough. We should be ready for the next boom.

To the minister again: will the government start a program to give temporary licences to drivers from countries without reciprocal licensing after they have passed their test and while the government is waiting on confirming the validity of their original licences?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we have looked into that. I think we are working on trying to proceed with some of that. The biggest thing you have to remember, that I say in this House all the time: the first thing we have to worry about is the safety of Albertans on our roads, and we have to make sure that they have the proper paperwork in place to get a reciprocal licence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:30 Municipal Transportation Funding for Calgary

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Transportation issues are in the forefront of the daily lives of Albertans, particularly in the communities that have experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, such as Calgary. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. What types of funding are available to municipalities to assist them in their local needs for transportation?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department alone administers roughly \$1.3 billion to municipalities in this province for their infrastructure work, which I think is close to double any other jurisdiction in the whole country. Depending upon the particular program, the grants may be used for transportation-related projects, for water and waste-water projects. Municipalities may also access capital grants under the municipal sustainability initiative, which is under the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He may wish to supplement on how MSI works in the province or for Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: how much money is collected through the provincial gas tax, and how much of it flows back to Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Calgary receives 5 cents per litre on all road fuel sold within the city limits. The provincial fuel tax is 9 cents per litre, so Calgary would receive over half of the money from our road fuel taxes within city limits. That works out to roughly \$100 million for the city of Calgary. In addition to that, the federal government rebates \$58 million in federal fuel tax to the city of Calgary, which flows through our department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: can the hon. minister tell us the amount of transportation grants that the city of Calgary has received annually and the number of transportation-related dollars that the province spends directly in and around the city of Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, Calgary received roughly \$350 million this year through my department's grants alone, just my department. We're also investing \$425 million in the Stoney Trail northwest ring road and another \$650 million in the northeast leg. We're hoping to start on the southeast leg next spring. That'll be another huge-ticket item. Finally, we're investing about \$18 million in the Deerfoot Trail this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Nuclear Power Consultation (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's workbook on nuclear power is very obviously one sided. For example, the workbook describes the capital cost of both coal-fired and nuclear plants as if they were exactly the same when nuclear plants can be far costlier to build. Does the Minister of Energy think his workbook on nuclear power is fair and accurate?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I would suggest that it's not one sided because an individual believes that it's one sided. Because a member has a certain view, that doesn't make it one sided. The research that's done there is credible and scientific, done from credible sources. There's a full bibliography in the panel's report. The workbook is based on the information in the report. It is not my research. It's done from credible sources.

Dr. Taft: Well, the workbook is one sided because it only presents one side of the case, and that's pretty obvious to anyone who looks at it. For example, the first nuclear power plant to be built in Europe in the last 30 years was to have opened next week in Finland, but it won't because it is as of today 37 months behind schedule and 50 per cent over budget. To the Minister of Energy: wouldn't the minister agree that this kind of information should have been included in this workbook?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't pretend that everything about every nuclear installation around the world is or is not included in the workbook. What I did say was that the research that was done there, done by credible people, backed up by credible scientific sources is all available for any member or any Albertan to

look up for themselves if they would prefer to do that. The upshot of this whole thing is that this government has not made any predetermined decision about this issue. We are willing and open, and we are listening to the rest of Albertans before we make any decision.

Dr. Taft: Electrical users in Finland were promised that a new nuclear power plant would provide competitively priced electricity, but industrial users in Finland are now calculating that nuclear power will add billions to their electrical costs. This is the only example of a new power plant in the last 30 years in Europe, so it is relevant to what's going on here. If the minister is open on this issue, will the minister issue a second workbook that provides both sides of the nuclear debate instead of the one-sided view that the current workbook provides?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell you, the House, and all Albertans is that the workbook is a tool that we're going to use to engage Albertans. It was tested with average Albertans, who found that it was balanced and did not lead them to any conclusion.

Relative to the cost of nuclear energy the cost of that energy from a nuclear plant was from the panel's work. The panel considered information from the Canadian Energy Research Institute, the U.S. Department of Energy and national laboratory, the Public Services International Research Unit, the University of Greenwich, and the International Energy Agency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Temporary Foreign Worker Advisory Offices

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency I recently attended an information session for temporary foreign workers, and I was impressed by the presentation and the opportunity for workers to speak to an adviser from the temporary foreign worker advisory office in person, right in their local community, two hours from Edmonton. My questions are for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why were the advisory offices created, and are they able to engage workers who may be leery of bringing their concerns forward?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the offices were set up to help people who may be vulnerable. These were set up to help them understand their rights and responsibilities. Alberta has set an example in Canada by opening these offices both in Edmonton and Calgary. We've got a very proactive approach to delivering local presentations to workers, employers, and other public groups. Last year office staff participated in over 100 presentations and meetings. Those are just one of the many things that we do as part of our advisory offices.

Mr. Johnson: To the same minister: if a worker or a concerned constituent feels there is an issue warranting investigation by this government, what do they need to do in order to have your department look into it, and how do we protect them from reprisals, which they're often fearful of?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Basically, we need someone to report a complaint or problem, and it is very, very hard to help if we don't have specific complaints to follow up on. There

is a lot of hearsay, but unless somebody comes in with something very specific, it's very difficult. I know this can be difficult, but temporary foreign workers' information and concerns are also handled in a very confidential manner. They can get assistance from the advisory office through our helpline, by e-mail, or in person.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some would have us believe that this is a rampant issue in Alberta and that a majority of employers here are taking advantage of their temporary foreign workers. Does this minister's office have statistics on how widespread this issue actually is, and are we seeing continuous improvement in this regard?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are 2 million working Albertans in this province, and temporary foreign workers make up about 2 and a half per cent of those 2 million workers. Temporary foreign workers have the same workplace rights as any worker, and most employers treat them well. In fact, in Alberta 98 per cent of our employers don't have any complaints against temporary foreign workers. Any allegations of mistreatment are taken very seriously, and all complaints from temporary foreign workers and other workers are investigated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:40 Grizzly Bear Management

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has been waiting on DNA data to take action on the declining grizzly bear population, yet we are now told the information will not be ready until later this year. For five years we've been waiting for this, and during that time the population continued to decline. To the Minister of SRD: why has the minister not taken any action aside from suspending the grizzly bear hunt to stop the decline?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong on almost every count. We've taken half a dozen different strategies to deal with grizzly bear issues since then in addition to suspending the hunt, in addition to doing the DNA study, in addition to doing the BearSmart communities, and also integrated resource management and reducing impact. Let's start with a new question that gets closer to the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister commit to listing the grizzly bear as threatened now to minimize the population decline until all the DNA data can be analyzed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that I won't commit to anything until the results of the study are in. The people over there always want science-based policy. That's all we hear. Well, we want the results of the study in before we make a decision. You guys are always in a hurry. Be patient.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I don't think we have to wait for science. There are only about 230 bears left. Why don't you just list them as threatened now and save us the time in waiting for it?

Dr. Morton: Once again, the hon. member is just picking numbers out of thin air. There's absolutely no evidence to support either the number that he just gave or the fact that there are fewer bears today than there were when the study began. There is no reliable baseline count. As I said, be patient. You guys are always in a hurry. When the numbers are in, we'll make the right decision.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today. In a few seconds from now I'll call upon the remaining members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Alberta-Canada Growing Forward Program

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight an important partnership that was announced last week. The five-year Alberta-Canada Growing Forward agreement provides for a cost-shared investment and commitment to moving our agricultural industry forward. It is part of a strategic national framework that's focused on concrete actions to help position our producers for long-term success.

Alberta's agricultural industry is export oriented, and in today's highly competitive global economy our producers, processors, and other agribusinesses need to make changes in order to compete. That is what Alberta's Growing Forward programs are designed to help support.

Just as important, Mr. Speaker, Growing Forward recognizes that industry needs to be a leader in creating our own success. Grants are dependent on industry members also investing in projects. Simply put, Growing Forward is designed to help industry help itself. This partnership is very responsive to Alberta's needs. It gives us the flexibility to focus on the specific areas that industry in this province needs to further develop in order to advance. The program includes ones that will help industry differentiate its products for priority markets and integrate best practices to further protect our land and water. The bottom line is that Growing Forward programs will help industry become more competitive and innovative, manage risk, and contribute to the priorities of Albertans.

Alberta's agricultural industry helped build this province. With the strategic support provided through Growing Forward, this industry will continue to make an important contribution to Alberta's economy, its rural communities, and its future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

National Immunization Awareness Week

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Keeping up to date with immunizations is important. The World Health Organization reports that each year immunizations save over 3 million lives worldwide. However, just as many lives are lost each year due to diseases that are preventable with existing vaccines. Immunization is one of the best health measures that Albertans can take to protect themselves and their families from disease and illness.

Children, teenagers, and adults all have varying needs for immunization. Keeping immunizations up to date is a lifelong process, that begins at birth and continues throughout a lifetime. The need for immunizations includes occupational requirements, foreign travel, underlying illness, and age. The number of vaccine-

preventable diseases is growing, and immunization vaccines provide one of the most effective, long-lasting methods of preventing infectious disease in all age groups. Immunizations can help Albertans to protect themselves against diseases such as measles, influenza, the meningococcal virus, and hepatitis A and B. Immunizations also help reduce the burden on Alberta's health care system, which can result in fewer hospital admissions and reduced medical care.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize this week as National Immunization Awareness Week, and I encourage all Albertans to talk to a doctor, a pharmacist, a nurse, or a public health official for more information on immunizations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Alberta Land Surveyors' Association

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association kicked off their centennial celebrations at their 100th annual general meeting in Banff last weekend. The theme of their annual conference was Honouring the Past, Celebrating the Present, Looking to the Future.

The association was created by the Alberta Land Surveyors Act, which was introduced in this Assembly in 1910 by the hon. Jean Leon Côté, a Dominion land surveyor and MLA for the riding of Athabasca. His Honour Jean Leon Côté of the Alberta Court of Appeal is the grandson of J.L., as he was affectionately known.

Subsequent to the passing of the Land Surveyors Act the association was formed, with William Pearce, another dominion land surveyor, as president. Pearce was known as the czar of the prairies for his intimate involvement in irrigation, resource development, and general land management in this new province. Lionel Charlesworth, another DLS and provincial director of surveys, was the first secretary-treasurer. Initially there were 45 members, all of which were dominion land surveyors practising in the province. The Alberta Surveys Act was passed the following year.

The Alberta Land Surveyors' Association is still a relatively small professional association after 100 years, with only 388 members today. Despite their small size they are very active and are recognized as one of the leading professional associations in North America.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues, please join me in congratulating the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association on 100 years of maintaining an orderly system of stable, well-defined land boundaries in the province of Alberta.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to continue to cover under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan all health services which promote health and wellness, including chiropractic services.

The petition today has 370 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 43

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

Mr. Griffiths: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

These amendments support freedom of choice, Mr. Speaker. They support giving individual producers the right to decide how their hard-earned money is spent. Under the amended act producers in four commodity groups – beef, pork, sheep and lamb, and potato growers – will be able to request refunds on the service fees they pay to agricultural commissions that represent them. These proposed changes are about the viability of the agricultural industry. They're about ensuring that commissions are responsive to the needs and wishes of their members. This act will bring uniformity of regulation to all 13 boards and commissions that do not set prices or function as marketing boards.

I look forward to the debate and discussion on this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a first time]

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 43 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Bill 44

Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request leave to move first reading of Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009.

The proposed changes will update and make the legislation and the commission more effective and efficient and in line with current and future realities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 211 of the Metis Settlements Act I'm tabling five copies of the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 2008 annual report. The Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal, referred to as MSAT, was established in 1990. Along with the Métis Settlements General Council and local settlements' councils it acts as a courtlike body, ruling on land, membership, and other matters. Finally, in 2008 the MSAT office co-ordinated 1,038 inquiries and projects, more than double the number from the previous year. This is a true measure of the valuable service that MSAT provides to Métis settlement members in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of information regarding the 2009 excellence in teaching awards semifinalist regional celebration, the itinerary and program, which honoured all the recipients. That'll be for the Edmonton celebration.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the 2009 excellence in teaching awards semifinalist regional celebration that took place in Calgary, the appropriate itinerary and a listing of the celebrants for that particular evening.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is information I got from the Employment and Immigration office last October. It is a ministerial order, and it lists the work sites requiring a joint work-site health and safety committee here in Alberta.

My second tabling is a copy of a petition which is essentially a cease-and-desist order for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness requesting the hon. minister to stop dismantling our public health care structure. It's put out by the Friends of Medicare.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, five copies of documents I referred to in question period from the Alberta corporate registration system regarding R.K. Heli-ski Panorama Incorporated, documents which were altered or changed on Sunday from the documents which I tabled yesterday, that we accessed on Thursday.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, do you have tablings?

Mr. Hehr: No.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta nuclear consultation online workbook, which can be accessed through the Alberta Energy home page. I referred to this document in my questions today.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from a constituent, Mr. Guy Pallister, who indicates that he wants me to voice his concerns at the Alberta Legislature and that he is appalled that a picture of a U.K. beach was used in the promo of an Alberta tourism advertisement. He believes that someone's head should roll on this blunder.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise

today to begin debate on Bill 29, the Family Law Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that in the fall 2008 session this Legislature passed Bill 15 to establish the child support recalculation program. This is a new and much-needed service for separated and divorced parents and the children of their relationships. The program will annually recalculate child support orders based on changes to parents' incomes. This process will be an administrative one so that parents do not have to go to court. The child support recalculation program will improve access to justice by offering a simple and low-cost way for parents to keep their child support orders current. It will help ensure that children receive the best support their parents can offer as their financial circumstances change from year to year. It will help child support payers whose incomes have gone down by reducing the amount of child support that they're obliged to pay, and it will also help children and support recipients by increasing the child support they receive if the payer's income has in fact gone up. In either case it will help parents meet the obligations they have in law to ensure that their child support orders are adjusted in order to match their incomes. This new program is expected to open by the end of this year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, although the child support recalculation program will share some resources with the maintenance enforcement program, parents can be clients with either program or both programs depending on their specific needs or circumstances.

For the child support recalculation program to adjust support annually based on the parents' incomes, the program needs income information from both parents. Bill 15 requires that parties registered with the recalculation program provide the program with documentation each year to show their current income. Mr. Speaker, that documentation is expected to be copies of the parent's income tax return and notice of assessment for the last taxation year as well as a short questionnaire. This information will allow the program to determine the party's income and set child support accordingly. It will make sure that the support to be paid reflects both good earning years and bad earning years over time.

Mr. Speaker, it's an unfortunate fact, however, that not all parents live up to their own obligations when it comes to child support. Even though parents registered with the child support recalculation program will have a legal obligation to provide their income disclosure, we know, unfortunately, that some will not. One parent's failure to disclose their income as legally required should not mean that the other parent is denied services from the new program. If it did, the whole purpose of the program, to keep parents out of court and to allow an easy, low-cost way to have child support amounts adjusted, would be defeated.

Bill 15 attempted to address this issue. Bill 15 stated that if a party failed to provide the required income disclosure, recalculation could still proceed based on a deemed 10 per cent increase in that parent's income. In other words, if the payer of child support did not give the recalculation program their tax return information, that program would recalculate the child support as if the payer's income had gone up by 10 per cent. The 10 per cent figure was chosen based on other recalculation programs throughout Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice staff have spent a lot of time over the past few months consulting with the public, with judges, with lawyers, and with others on the new child support recalculation program. Those consultations and information received from other jurisdictions suggested that in some cases the deemed increase of 10 per cent would be insufficient to provide income disclosure incentive. Consultations also suggested some unfairness in applying a flat 10 per cent deemed increase to all orders regardless of how much

time had passed since the parent's income was last determined. It was felt that older orders needed a deemed increase of an amount higher than 10 per cent to promote income disclosure. Other provinces reporting low compliance by parties in providing their tax returns to facilitate recalculation also felt the same way. This is, of course, a real concern as compliance in Alberta could be even lower than other programs because we'll be recalculating orders that are much older than those that are being recalculated by other jurisdictions in the country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the five existing recalculation programs in Canada are in British Columbia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Nunavut. They only recalculate orders granted after their recalculation programs were created. Alberta will not make people go back for a new order so that they can participate in this program. Rather, our program will help parties with child support orders dating back to May 1997, when child support guidelines were first introduced. If the order used in the child support guidelines has set the child support and other means to meet the recalculation program's criteria, it will not matter when it was granted.

3:00

By the way, Mr. Speaker, the child support recalculation program will be widely accessible and will have even more success in assisting parents who do not wish to use the court process. However, the older the child support order that is being recalculated, the more likely that the 10 per cent deemed increase will fall short of that parent's actual income increase since the order was granted. This could actually encourage payers not to disclose their actual income as 10 per cent could be less than the increase that they actually realize.

Mr. Speaker, when we considered the Statistics Canada figures on average income increases and the consultation feedback, it became clear to us that Bill 15 needed to be amended. A more effective way needed to be found to encourage parties to comply with their obligation to provide income disclosure. We want this program to recalculate as many cases as possible based on the parents' actual income, not deemed income.

Bill 29 provides the additional encouragement to promote income disclosure and produces a fair result for parties and children if disclosure is not provided. The amendment would remove the blanket deemed increase in income of 10 per cent. With the proposed amendment the more time that has passed since the court recalculation program last set the parents' income, the higher the deemed increase will be. The minimal deemed increase of 10 per cent will be applied when no income information has been provided and the latest court order recalculation was completed less than one year before. For older orders another 3 per cent will be added for each additional year since the order was granted or recalculated. The deemed income increase will be escalated up to a maximum of 25 per cent, which would be applied to the order where five years or more have passed since the income was last determined.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the proposed amendment, one, will encourage parents to provide income disclosure to the program; two, is fair if income disclosure is not made; and finally, better protects Alberta's children, ensuring that they receive the financial support that they deserve even if their parents choose to withhold information regarding their income. I would encourage all members to support Bill 29.

With that, I would move to adjourn debate of this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 31

Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again today but this time to begin debate on Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

The *Rules of Court*, which govern practice and procedure in the Court of Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench, are going through major revisions. The last time this happened was in 1968, when I wasn't even on this planet, Mr. Speaker. It is a special privilege for me to be able to argue this bill. I must remember that when I began articling the first time, I learned my first principle. The first rule I learned was rule 13, dealing with service of documents. [interjections] I think I may need to serve some of the members here with some notices today as well.

Over the next several years I became familiar with many of these rules, but more importantly I realized how much these rules affect not only the court but also the business outside of the court. Mr. Speaker, the rules affect how people, lawyers and nonlawyers, view the justice system as a whole. A common criticism I have heard is that the current rules are complex, they are cumbersome, and they do not effect timely resolutions. This is why I'm pleased to bring in the new rules on behalf of this government. The purpose of these rules is to maximize the rules' clarity, their usability, their effectiveness, as well as to contribute to a fair, timely, and cost-effective civil justice system. The new rules will improve the public's confidence in our justice system.

Implementing these new rules requires consensual amendments to be made to many statutes in order to reflect the different procedures and terminology used in the new rules. For example, under the new rules it will not be necessary to specify in an act the kind of application that is to be made in the court. As a result, phrases in an act such as "application by notice of motion" or "application by originating notice" are being changed to simply "application." An example of an amendment reflecting the updated terminology used in the new rules is as follows: if an act states that a person may be examined on their affidavit, the word "examined" will be replaced by "questioned."

One of the main things this bill will do is consolidate the authority of the *Rules of Court* in the Judicature Act. This will ensure that there is no confusion about which statute has the ultimate authority for introduction or amendment of a rule and will make the legislation more user friendly by locating any and all related provisions in one place.

Mr. Speaker, this bill also limits the number of years that a nonjudicial member can serve on the Rules of Court Committee and limits the number of times that they can be reappointed. This is to encourage a balance between renewal and experience on the committee, which makes recommendations to the minister on the amendments to the *Rules of Court*.

This bill will also relocate provisions regarding the enforcement of money judgments from the *Rules of Court* into the Civil Enforcement Act. The end result will be that all substantive provisions relating to the enforcement of money judgments will again be located in the Civil Enforcement Act and the civil enforcement regulation, making the legislation in this area more coherent, more integrated, and user friendly, again to both lawyers and nonlawyers.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is the result of literally years and hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of consultation with stakeholders and their volunteered time. I'm very proud to present it today. I would also like to add that I've always believed that one of the greatest gifts to the modern world has been the rule of law, being that the law must

be prospective, well known, and have the characteristics of generality, equality, and certainty. Bill 31 is consistent with this and will be a credit to our legal system. I'd encourage all members to support Bill 31.

With that, I move to adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 32

Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise for second reading of Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act.

This bill focuses on Alberta's nearly 250 agencies, boards, and commissions. These organizations are situated across the province and play a key role in the lives of Albertans. They also administer a sizable portion, about 50 per cent, of this province's operating budget.

Mr. Speaker, the focus of Bill 32 is to improve the effectiveness of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions by ensuring that we have the right people for the job, by requiring competence-based recruitment and appointments, and by encouraging agencies to improve their effectiveness through orientation, evaluation, and training of their members. The bill will also ensure that agencies and the responsible ministers understand their mandates and respective roles and responsibilities. It will do this by requiring agencies to have a written statement of their mandate, their roles and responsibilities, and their codes of conduct and will clearly articulate the respective responsibilities of agencies and ministers.

Bill 32 will clarify the relationships and accountabilities between government and agencies, including policy-making and information sharing. It will also require periodic reviews of all agencies to ensure that they are operating as effectively as possible. The Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act will enhance public awareness by requiring information about agencies to be made publicly available.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act builds on the work done by the Board Governance Review Task Force, which was struck by our Premier in 2007. This was one of the key actions under Premier Stelmach's commitment to govern Alberta with integrity and transparency. This task force was charged with providing recommendations to improve the transparency, accountability, and governance of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. In October 2007 the task force released its final report, which included 15 recommendations.

The first of these recommendations was for an Alberta public agencies governance act that would institutionalize a governance framework for agencies, that provides clear agency mandates and a competence-based appointment process. As a result, the public agencies governance framework was developed and then released in February 2008, and that brings us to today and the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, which provides the legislation to implement the policies set out in the framework.

I'd like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that implementation of the public agencies governance framework is already under way for many agencies. For many agencies Bill 32 simply formalizes what has already been in place. It cements the solid relationship between government and agencies. The bill builds on those efforts and will ensure further transparency with respect to agency governance, agency mandates, and their activities.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk for a few moments about the principles underlying Bill 32. First, the bill is based on the principle that

having the right governance structure in place is critical for any organization to achieve its goals and objectives effectively and efficiently. Public agencies are no exception to that rule. The next key principle is that of accountability; that is to say, who is responsible to whom and for what.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, agencies operate as an extension of government, carrying out tasks delegated to them through legislation and by the executive branch of government. Once government has delegated authority to an agency, the agency then becomes responsible to government. Given this, the bill reflects the principle that agencies are responsible to the minister of the portfolio under which they fall, and as elected officials ministers are accountable to the public.

Ministers and agencies have the same fundamental objective, to promote the best interests of Albertans, but advancing this common goal is only possible when the parties work co-operatively. Therefore, another key principle underlying Bill 32 is that there should be free and open communication and a co-operative and collaborative working relationship between an agency and its responsible minister.

Mr. Speaker, another principle of Bill 32 is the need for flexibility in governance structures. This reflects that Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions come in many shapes and sizes. They range from large organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets to small advisory groups that do not administer a budget. They may deliver services, provide advice to government, manage Crown assets, or perform regulatory or adjudicative functions. Given these differences it would obviously be counterproductive to impose a one-size-fits-all governance standard.

Another key principle underlying this bill is the need for openness and transparency with respect to agency governance, mandates, and activities. This reflects the large number of agencies that currently exist and the importance of the roles they play in the lives of Albertans each day.

With that background, Mr. Speaker, I will leave details of specific features of the bill to other speakers in second reading.

I'd like to make a few final comments regarding application of this proposed legislation. The bill applies to all public agencies. This includes any agency for which the government appoints the majority of its members. However, this bill does not apply to the following: the provincial court of Alberta; a body all of whose members are elected officials; a purely advisory agency that does not administer a budget and whose members are unpaid; a body established under federal law; a body whose establishing enactment or instrument provides that it will be dissolved within one year; or a body chaired by a minister or government employee, a majority of whose members are ministers or government employees, as long as it does not perform any adjudicative functions. Further, the bill does not apply to officers of the Legislative Assembly such as the Auditor General, the Ethics Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Ombudsman, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Legislative Assembly Office.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to close by saying that I look forward to the balance of debate on this bill.

At this time I would move that the House adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 33

Fiscal Responsibility Act

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

We're in the midst of some challenging times, and Bill 33 provides a simpler framework that enhances the flexibility needed to address today's economic climate while still retaining elements of fiscal discipline.

Our previous fiscal framework legislation has been the solid foundation of this government's commitment to fiscal responsibility, but it needs to be updated to reflect today's economic realities. I'd like to point out that since implementation of the fiscal responsibility framework, in 1993, the Alberta government has made major changes to it every four to five years, generally to reflect changes to the province's fiscal situation.

In addition, our current framework has become quite complex, requiring transfers between funds, which are often confusing to Albertans. The result was a lack of the transparency that we've promised those same Albertans. The changes within Bill 33 simplify the framework, make it clearer and more transparent. It also provides the enhanced flexibility necessary to fulfill the commitments we've made to Albertans in Budget 2009.

Bill 33 contains a number of basic elements from our past fiscal frameworks, which have helped us to position Alberta to build on our strengths as we move forward. In terms of deficits, they will only be allowed if offset by a transfer from the sustainability fund. When it comes to debt, government will only be able to borrow for certain things, including capital investment, support for capital projects owned by school boards, postsecondary institutions, and health authorities, as required by self-supporting corporations such as the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, and to fulfill our commitment to pay back funds owed by the pre-1992 teachers' pension plan to the post-1992 plan. Government will not be permitted to borrow for operating expense.

One of the main pillars of the act will see the sustainability fund expand to include the capital account and the amounts set aside from 2008-09 year-end results for carbon capture and public transit. This new single fund is allowed to offset approved deficits, and the confusing transfers between funds that currently take place are all eliminated.

Although it may be necessary to draw from this fund for the immediate future, it will be replenished as our fiscal circumstances allow, much as the original sustainability fund has been built up over the years. The act also demonstrates fiscal responsibility by putting limits on in-year increases in operating expense, which has been a successful element of past frameworks. This spending would be limited to 1 per cent of total ministry operating expense with an exception for things like disasters or emergencies or if there's a revenue associated with the expense. When it comes to nonrenewable resource revenue, the act will remove the limit on the amount of this revenue that can be used for budget purposes.

Overall, Bill 33 will continue our history of fiscal responsibility. It will help us to build on the work we've done in the past and help us deal with the current economic situation by increasing our fiscal flexibility.

I urge all members of this Assembly to give their support to Bill 33. Thank you.

I would like to adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 33.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 35

Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move

second reading of Bill 35, the Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009.

As mentioned at introduction, this is an administrative act to give legislative authority to a ruling of the National Energy Board. It's a small and minor amendment, as most members would see if they perused the legislation that was introduced last week. In fact, had the decision from the NEB come down a little bit sooner, Mr. Speaker, we'd likely be discussing this matter under Bill 28, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, that I introduced last week as well.

This quasi-judicial ruling concerned the NOVA Gas Transmission pipeline owned by TransCanada PipeLines. Specifically, the ruling was to accept an application by TransCanada to make this pipeline be subject to federal regulation.

Mr. Speaker, many Albertans who've followed the history of oil and gas development will recall the establishment and subsequent growth of the Alberta Gas Trunk Line. Created over 50 years ago, this trunk line system was the underground highway that facilitated exploration and development of natural gas fields across Alberta. Over those decades the people involved – the company, the farmers under whose land much of the pipe was laid, and the provincial regulator – have become very familiar with each other. Quite rightly, people ask what this move to federal regulation will mean to them.

Both TransCanada and the federal regulator are engaging the agricultural community in consultation on where there may be differences in wording of various regulations. In fact, though, where the wording may be different, the practical result is that there will be negligible difference to individual Albertans. Under its new name of NOVA Gas Transmission this system is about to take on an additional and very important role to the province as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, people should know that Alberta is Canada's leading producer of petrochemicals. In fact, in 2007 the petrochemical and chemical industry produced over \$15 billion in products, almost half of which were exported. This is what we and others mean when we talk about adding value. We're talking about taking bitumen or natural gas and stripping ethylene from it to create a host of value-added petrochemical products. In order to grow that value-added industry, Alberta needs new, additional sources of feedstock. The NOVA gas system will accomplish that by feeding the Alberta gas hub with product from British Columbia and potentially beyond. The history of this gas transmission system is a success story of Alberta exploration and development. Now it's poised to provide the future success of our value-added industry.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 35. Thank you very much.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:20

Bill 37

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

I would ask my colleague the proponent of this bill, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, to please speak to this bill.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Corporate Tax Act is generally amended every year to ensure that Alberta maintains

a fair, equitable, and competitive tax regime. The legislation will introduce a relieving provision into the Alberta royalty tax credit program this year. The provision ensures that participants in certain financing arrangements are not denied benefits in situations where wells were disposed of on rig release dates rather than finish drilling dates.

Also, in 2008 the federal government implemented new rules allowing corporations to report in the functional currencies in which they conduct their day-to-day affairs as long as they were in U.S., Australian dollars, the euro, or the British pound. For ease of administration Alberta will also adopt functional currency reporting. Amendments in this bill will require functional currency reporters to calculate their Alberta taxes payable in Canadian dollars using the average exchange rate for the year rather than the spot rate on the payment due dates as provided under federal legislation. This approach does not add any administrative burden and has the added benefit of retaining a relationship between Alberta's tax rate of 10 per cent and taxes payable in Canadian dollars.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, some issues remained outstanding from last year's introduction of the scientific research and experimental development credit. These amendments will address and provide additional certainty for taxpayers and company and government officials administering the credit.

Lastly, the other proposals largely correct technical deficiencies in parallel federal measures.

Thank you. With that, I would move that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 37.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 38

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009.

I would ask my colleague the proponent of this bill, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, to speak to this bill, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to refresh everyone's memory, Alberta imposes a 4 per cent levy on short-term accommodations like hotel rooms. As MLAs we've all travelled through our constituencies enough to see this charge on our bills, and there are a few issues about what is subject to the levy. This amendment act is meant to clarify the situation.

It used to be that when you pay for your room, you pay cash or you pay by credit card. Nowadays you can use reward points like air miles to pay for your room. This practice has brought with it some complications. How do you apply the 4 per cent levy on accommodations paid through reward points, Mr. Speaker? Currently it isn't clear, and the practices aren't consistent. That's why the industry has taken a look at the issue and asked us to come up with a fair and consistent approach, and we've done that.

When a person uses their reward points to book a room, the company operating the reward point program may pay the accommodation provider a certain amount of money. In other cases the operator doesn't receive money for a room booked with reward points. So this legislation aims to clarify what is subject to the tourism levy and make sure that the practices are consistent throughout the province.

In a nutshell, if the operator is paid for the accommodations, then the province of Alberta expects to be paid the 4 per cent levy. If the operator is providing the accommodations out of their pocket and is not being paid and the room is complimentary, we don't expect to get paid either.

As well, deposits and cancellations: the same approach, Mr. Speaker. You know, if the operator gets a deposit or a cancellation, you cancel the room, and you get a refund. We don't expect to have the 4 per cent tourism levy. But if they withhold your deposit or have a cancellation fee, we expect our pound of flesh as well. So that just kind of clarifies that situation.

Joint bank accounts is another issue that this legislation will deal with. If at any time the lodging provider fails to submit the tourism levy, then it's within the government's power to seize an operator's bank account. That's the existing process. The Tourism Levy Act, however, doesn't allow for seizing the bank accounts of the service provider when they are a joint owner. This amendment act does. It specifically proposes the ability to make proportionate amounts from a joint bank account of someone who has defaulted on paying the levy, not a big problem throughout the province, but we want to make sure that our acts are consistent, and this is something that is going to be done throughout the department.

Finally, there are a few other minor changes that are administrative in nature. The most efficient and effective way for Albertans' laws to work is to make sure that they are harmonious. These housekeeping changes do that by ensuring this legislation is consistent with all other acts in the province.

Thank you. I'd move that we adjourn debate on second reading.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 39

Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

I would ask with your permission to invite my colleague the proponent of this bill, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, to speak to the bill, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill implements the tobacco tax rate increase that was announced in Budget 2009. Proposed amendments will also strengthen the tobacco tax framework and support the province's safe communities initiative.

By way of background, the act imposes a tax on tobacco purchased in Alberta. It also prohibits various activities and requires industry participants to register in order to import or sell tobacco in Alberta. Amendments are needed as the current Tobacco Tax Act does not effectively prohibit unwanted activity, and prosecutions are becoming difficult. To help ensure that tax is properly paid and only legitimate participants are involved in the industry, amendments strengthen prohibitions and clarify their application.

The bill also broadens seizure powers and adds the ability to seize joint bank accounts in proportion to ownership for those in default. To be comparable to other jurisdictions, fines are doubled and civil penalties tripled for unlawful possession for sale of tax-free tobacco or tobacco on which tax has not been paid. A late filing penalty for tax collectors will be imposed. Changes also enhance requirements for tax collectors and make reporting obligations more transparent.

In summary, these proposed amendments raise the tobacco tax rates, clarify prohibitions, and make enforcement more effective and efficient. In addition, providing more serious penalties will act as a greater deterrent to prohibit activities. I urge all members in this Assembly to give their support to Bill 39.

Thank you. With that, I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 39.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 40

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 40, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise for the opportunity of sponsoring this bill. I'm pleased to review for the benefit of the hon. members the proposed changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. It's not a terribly complicated bill, and I'm pleased to say that it's one tax measure which I believe I actually understand, if not the arithmetic calculations then at least the principles underlying the changes.

The proposed amendments will accomplish two objectives. First, they will ensure that Alberta's dividend tax credit is administered in accordance with existing Alberta government policy. Secondly, they will align the eligibility for tuition credit for students to reflect the way that our tuition credits for foreign students are currently administered in Alberta.

3:30

First, dealing with the dividend tax credit, the legislation is being changed to ensure that Alberta's dividend tax credit will be consistent with the changes in the federal legislation. The proposed amendment will set Alberta's dividend tax credit rate for eligible dividends to be taxed at the corporate rate of 10 per cent for 2009 and for subsequent years. As an example, if a person has \$1,000 worth of income from dividends, the policy is that no personal tax is payable on that same \$1,000 of income. The rationale is that the income has already been taxed in the hands of the corporation, and therefore to avoid double taxation, the individual receiving such dividend income receives a dividend tax credit. As hon. members are aware, Alberta's corporate tax rate is 10 per cent, and our personal tax rate is 10 per cent. Therefore, the dividend tax credit should be 10 per cent to reflect the corporate tax already assessed on those funds.

In calculating the amount of the provincial tax credit, there's reference to a section in the federal Income Tax Act. Mr. Speaker, under the federal Conservative government the gross-up factor applicable to federal dividend income is going down to reflect reductions to the federal corporate tax rate. So adjustment of the formula in our act is required to ensure that Alberta's dividend tax credit, which is calculated based on the federal gross-up, does not also go down. The numerical ratios which are set out in section 2 of the bill reflect the adjustments necessary to maintain the status quo as to calculating Alberta's dividend tax credit. If we did not adjust the formulae in our tax act, we would in effect be double-taxing Albertans on a portion of their dividend income. In other words, the ratio set forth will ensure that for the 2009 through 2012 tax years Alberta's personal and corporate tax systems are integrated with the federal tax act, preventing dividends from being double-taxed.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment entailed in this bill relates to the tuition credit. The proposed amendments will ensure that

eligibility for the Alberta tuition credit parallels eligibility for the federal tuition credit. This is required under the Alberta-Canada tax collection agreement. Section 41(1) of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act is being amended to delete reference to section 15. To bring the legislation into conformity with present policy and with the way that the Canada Revenue Agency is administering tuition credits presently, we need to make this change. The objective of the change is to ensure that one does not have to obtain 90 per cent plus of their income – and the tax act actually says “all or substantially all” of one's income – from sources in Canada in order to claim tuition credit. As I stated, this amendment to policy is required under the tax collection agreement between Canada and Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members to support the passage of Bill 40 and at this juncture would move adjournment of debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 41

Protection for Persons in Care Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to move second reading of Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

I'd like to thank the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports for allowing me to bring this bill before the Legislature on her behalf. I want to acknowledge her strong support of the legislation and her interest in protecting those in our care facilities.

The Protection for Persons in Care Act, Mr. Speaker, is an important piece of legislation. It's meant to enhance safeguards and improve the prevention of abuse of adults who receive government-funded care or support services. The act was first proclaimed in 1998, and after more than 10 years of experience with this act, which I would note was first introduced as a private member's bill, we know that more can be done to promote the prevention of abuse and to strengthen our response to the abuse complaints.

There has been extensive public consultation regarding these amendments, which first came under legislative review in 2002. At that time Albertans told us to give the act more teeth, to make people more accountable for their actions, and to do more to deter abuse from happening in the first place. I also conducted a further review in 2006, including consultations with stakeholders most affected by the act. Based on these reviews, the act has been rewritten as Bill 41.

Overall, the protection of clients from abuse will be enhanced by improving prevention, monitoring, and follow-up when abuse has been reported. Some of the key changes to the act include expanding the scope of the act to apply to broader groups of clients receiving care and support services, such as individuals receiving home care services and those in mental health facilities; changing the definition of abuse so that it is not defined by intent but focuses on the act or omission by a service provider which causes harm to the client; and ensuring that there is a fair and unbiased process to address complaints by enhancing administrative fairness practices, including written notification, capacity to respond to allegations, and establishing an appeal mechanism.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all hon. members to support the passing of Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act, and at this juncture I move adjournment of debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 42
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Making Alberta communities safer is one of this government's key priorities. Albertans want and deserve the freedom to enjoy a night at a bar or nightclub without fear of violence breaking out and innocent bystanders being hurt. Two key amendments in Bill 42 will help prevent liquor-related and gang violence in bars and nightclubs.

Under these new amendments police would have the ability to identify and remove suspected gang members and their associates before an offence is committed. Mr. Speaker, the presence of these kinds of individuals is a danger to the safety of others. We understand there could be some concern that those powers could violate an individual's right to freedom of movement. However, this proposed amendment was given a thorough legal review, including a review by the Privacy Commissioner, and the powers being proposed are limited and specific to provide the police with the ability to address known problem patrons. Ultimately, we believe that the safety of law-abiding Albertans should be the priority, and if it makes it a little more inconvenient for gang members and their associates to conduct their shady rendezvous, so be it. I and this government will take the side of keeping Albertans safe.

Another proposed amendment would give bar operators a tool to deal with problem patrons. They would have the authority to collect, use, and share limited personal information with other licensees and the police. This limited information would be names, birthdates, and depending on the system used, photographs of the patron may be taken. Licensees would not have access to addresses, phone numbers, or driver's licence numbers. Because the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information will be contained in the Gaming and Liquor Act, the provisions of FOIP and PIPA will not apply. The idea behind these proposed amendments will allow police and licensees to work together to keep individuals who don't respect the law as well as gang members and those with ties to criminal organizations out of bars and lounges. For example, the police and licensees could agree that if a licensee identifies a person who poses a danger to patrons or the order of the operation of the business, the licensee may call the police. When the police arrive, they'll confirm the identity of the individual and remove that person from the premises.

There are several other proposed amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act that are housekeeping in nature. These changes are designed to enhance the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's governance practices and ensure that the act remains relevant given changes in technology in the business environment.

Mr. Speaker, liquor related violence is a community problem that needs a community solution, and these amendments have received the support of Alberta's police chiefs and bar operators. The presence of people who don't respect the law and those who are involved in organized crime in bars has grown in recent years, and violent incidents in these establishments is on the rise. Staff and bar owners say that when they go to work, they hear threats or sometimes have to break up fights in and outside their establishments. Dealing with these kinds of situations day in and day out has drastically increased the risk for anyone who wants to work in the hospitality industry.

These proposed amendments will bring police and businesses together in an effort to alleviate criminal activities and undesirable behaviour. This will be beneficial for the promotion of public safety and the orderly operation of licensed premises across the province.

I look forward to the debate and receiving the support of the members for proceeding with this bill.

Mr. Speaker, with that I move to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**3:40 Government Bills and Orders
 Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

**Bill 19
Land Assembly Project Area Act**

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to briefly summarize where we're at with Bill 19. Very early on in the process the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar tried to provide both the government and Albertans in general an opportunity to have the discussions, participate in public forums, do the consultation, work collaboratively with Alberta landowners, whether they be rural or urban. Unfortunately, the notion of sending the bill to committee, which was among the first amendments provided, was not accepted by this government, so we see Bill 19 now in its Committee of the Whole stage.

Both the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the hon. members of the third party, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, attempted to bring out concerns with regard to the legality of the bill. We participated in a discussion on the difference between, for example, enjoining and arresting. It was pointed out that enjoining basically prevented individuals from following through on concerns they had with regard to their land being expropriated. They were basically rendered silent because they were not having an opportunity to participate further in hearings to argue their case. It was simply a circumstance where the decision had been made and they were out of luck. Their land was going to be taken.

We discussed a series of possibilities which would try and make a flawed piece of legislation at least to a degree more palatable and less subject to court challenges, as has been the case to date, but unfortunately that hasn't occurred. The last time I had an opportunity to talk in Committee of the Whole on Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, I used the suggestion that this Bill 19 was putting the cart before the horse. I referred specifically to how badly Alberta needs a land-use framework act. We're still at least two years away from that act even being drawn up or presented to this House for further discussion, yet while we wait, numerous activities are occurring throughout the province, many of which are going to be very hard to reclaim or restore.

Despite former Environment minister Lorne Taylor's best intentions with water for life and the idea of scientific knowledge and the need to locate and get a sense of the size of our water resources so that we could then move ahead in protecting them, very little has taken place. Approximately a year and a half ago the government did provide I believe the figure was \$21 million toward water protection and water mapping. There has been a degree of progress on the mapping of aquifers, but we are still not at the point where we can protect underground resources when we're not sure where they exist.

In terms of expropriation or determining what activities go ahead,

for example, members of the Pekisko Group – and, you know, that included Ian Tyson, a landowner west of Longview – a number of individuals in that Longview area moving down to the Chain Lakes, moving along to the Livingstone Range, are very concerned about how the land under Bill 19 will potentially be used. Therefore, we need to put Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, in sort of a cumulative perspective as part of the land-use framework.

Now, hopefully, somewhere in connection with Bill 19 there is a type of map that indicates where projected growth, projected development is likely to occur, say, five, 10, 15, 20 years out. I have had a chance to be at a number of presentations on where the effects of current progress if unaltered might lead. The map kind of indicated where historical development had occurred, and it indicated that if development were to continue at the current pace, this was what the map would look like. It was based on progress to date and, obviously, made certain assumptions. It did not draw conclusions, but it was extremely interesting.

I would hope, as I say, that in connection with Bill 19 the government would sort of lay out this map on a table and say to Albertans, “Here, for example, are two proposed routes for the rapid-speed rail,” that hopefully will come sooner rather than later. “Here are proposed routes for utility corridors. Here is the west route from Lake Wabamun. Here’s the east route. Here are the advantages and disadvantages of the two routes.” They would clearly lay out, for example, where the expansions on the Canamex highway would occur that have had a very determinant factor on southern Alberta, especially, obviously, between Lethbridge and the American border, Coutts crossing and so on.

If we had this tentative plan as part of the land-use framework in connection with Bill 19, I think it would take away a lot of the worries that landowners have. If it had any degree of accuracy, if the projections had validity, if there was scientific background to them, then Albertans could say: “Well, this land appears to be stable. There don’t appear to be any particular land-use changes that the government is considering. Therefore, I can go ahead with whatever it is on my land that I wish to do that, obviously, falls within provincial regulations.” But in failing to have that projection map, it leaves Albertans in a concerned state.

3:50

Now, with regard to Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, as I say, I cannot separate the two from the land-use framework because they both deal with how land is going to be used and what degree of protection it will receive. The whole idea of watershed protection as a priority I believe has to be taken into account, whether we’re through Bill 19 proposing a highway, whether we’re proposing a utility corridor. For whatever it is that is going to leave a large footprint, whether it’s the direction a pipeline takes, there has to be a collaborative process beginning with the government saying that the number one priority is the protection of our water. From that, obviously, the protection of our air and the way we acquire the land and what we do with that land and how long we freeze that land in Bill 19 will then play out in kind of a natural order.

We have to start with, as I say, priority uses, watershed protection, river crossings, mapping the aquifers. We don’t want to develop a system, when we’re creating what will hopefully be a public good, from some kind of lack of scientific knowledge. As we proceed with Bill 19, it’s extremely important that the greatest amount of input from Albertans is provided. We haven’t reached that point, but I know, hon. chair, that there are other people who have concerns or who maybe can provide assurances. Therefore, I will sit down at this point and offer them the opportunity to provide those assurances or express their concerns.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Ed. and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to just get on record a couple of things. The first thing I wanted to get on record was a clarification of something that I noticed in *Hansard* from last Thursday, I believe it was, when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had been waxing, well, on and on for awhile there and talking about a map that supposedly I might have in my possession as it related to Bill 19. It had no relationship to Bill 19, but somehow he suggested that I might have a map as it related to where this new corridor might go. It’s absolutely false, and I just wanted to make sure that constituents who read *Hansard*, as I’m sure some do, would not get that impression.

I also wanted to say, Mr. Chairman, that with the amendments in this bill as it’s now been amended, the concerns of the people in my constituency have been eased, and I support this bill a hundred per cent.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I’d just like to add my comments at the committee stage on this bill. I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity, who went before and who really laid out sort of a very good synopsis of where we need to go in this province and a real devotion to understanding our landscape and our priorities as a province and our water and our wind and our more ecological resources as we go forward.

Really, what I appreciated most was that it does appear that we have a bit of a cart-before-the-horse scenario here in that Bill 19, what we’re going forward on, appears to be going before, really, a land-use framework albeit we are seeming to go down that path right now with at least the legal framework to allowing the land-use framework to come into play again some two years down the road. I guess that if all things work out the way we hope they do on a land-use framework, in two years this will come into play and give some guidance and some direction as to how the regional corridors are developed, on their interworkings with both the city and the surrounding towns and all the other jurisdictions, and, I guess, how we’re going to utilize the water in all these areas comes into play.

Bill 19 sort of supercedes that, and it really, I guess, stresses the fact that we should have been on this land-use framework about 10 years ago, like many of the other jurisdictions out there. Jurisdictions in both Canada and the United States have moved at a much more rapid speed on getting a land-use framework out there. Now, it would be of great assistance to have a land-use framework to enable something like Bill 19 to travel more smoothly and to allow people to have some direction as to where the province is going instead of having this come up without the mechanisms in place for people to understand the direction that this government is going.

Moving on from that, I do note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did provide numerous amendments that would have given people a chance for more input. There was a feeling amongst many communities, mostly in rural jurisdictions of this province, that their voice wasn’t being heard. By having the amendment go to committee, it would have been an opportunity for us to field some more voices for democracy to do its thing and maybe some more time to get the information out to people or maybe to bring the bill together in a little more concise fashion. That would have alleviated many more concerns from people. That’s why we set up the committees: to hopefully allow for

democracy to proceed more smoothly, to allow for some contentious bills to be decided, debated, discussed, to hear from public groups, and to go forward.

For instance, last summer we discussed in committee a bill regarding weeds. You know, we heard from the community and many of the rural towns and the rural farmers and many of the other people who were more directly affected by weeds, and they gave us their input as to how these weeds should be dealt with both in terms of a fining mechanism and in terms of how many days to wait before people would receive notification of their fines. It was really quite detailed, and really I learned a lot about weeds. I'm sure that I would have learned a lot about Bill 19 and the reasons for it and all that stuff if we would have gone to committee stage with Bill 19. More importantly, not only would I have learned a lot, but the fact is that the people teaching me would have been the citizens of Alberta: what their experience is and what they wanted and what they would have liked to have seen out of Bill 19.

I could go on and comment about other amendments, but I won't. You know, we will need electricity corridors. There is no doubt about it. But the simple fact is that we are seen to do things, again, backwards here – and that's starting with the land-use framework and moving more fluidly to Bill 19 – going in this direction.

Nevertheless, those are my comments. I look forward to the province getting a land-use framework in place, sooner rather than later, that can hopefully implement the direction our province takes. Actually, a document I read that I think was released in January of 2008 or somewhere around there recognized that Alberta was at a tipping point, that we're going to have to really evaluate what goes forward on our land in terms of business opportunities as well as the development of citizens, how they participate with the land, how our agricultural community is going to go forward, how wildlife reserve areas are going to be able to be, and all that sort of stuff.

Anyway, those are my comments, and I thank you for allowing me to comment today at the committee stage.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

4:00

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have had the opportunity to speak to this before, but I will take this opportunity again. I think the fact that, if I'm correct, this is the third week that we're talking about this bill should probably tell us something: that it probably should have gone back to committee. Certainly, I still am hearing from farmers and, actually, other landowners, those types of small acreage landowners, who still are very much afraid of this bill and feel that it really did require more public input and, perhaps, having gone to committee. That wasn't what they suggested, but what I'm saying is that had it gone to committee, we would have eliminated, perhaps, some of the people that have been contacted on this. It shouldn't have just been focus groups or sort of hand-picked groups but real people that are really involved.

Had it gone to committee, of course, we would have known that it would have all been Hansarded, it would have all been recorded, and it would have been open for anyone to actually understand some of the dialogue and discussion that had gone on.

Bill 19, of course, is really a follow-up and in many ways is tied to Bill 46, which in itself was a very controversial bill. Despite the fact that it was passed, there are still many people that understand and are opposed to it, opposed to what they were trying to do.

As has been said many times, the fact that we have to get utility corridors, transportation corridors, and all of those is certainly a given. I don't think that that's the question here today. What I've

said many times in this House I'll say again, that quite often what happens with bills from this government is that it's not necessarily what they're trying to do; it's how they try to do it. It more often is very – what's the word? – draconian I think was used by the minister of sustainable resources, and that will probably do for now. It really can be overbearing.

It might have been the goal of Bill 19 that the actual document is more restrictive than would appear to be required, and I think that still holds true. The sections related to enforcement orders and the injunction regarding the commission of offences are far stricter than really are necessary. Indeed, some sections such as 12(1) – and that is not one that was changed by the government amendments, which, of course, have passed – allow an injunction on the basis of suspicion of protest or action forbidden by one of the many regulatory powers in the bill, suggestive of a government that is afraid of almost any form of opposition. It seems to not be welcomed, and when it is, it is often put down, is degraded and a degradation of the people that actually want to honestly come forward and make a complaint or ask to have something changed.

The significant failings of the bill are that the committee – I'm sorry; I'm back to the committee – really should be able to study the bill and involve the public. What I had said before is that the public, to me, are those that could well be directly affected. Often big organizations are known to not have listened to their actual membership, and what comes through the presidency sometimes of large boards isn't really necessarily what the members of a particular group want.

Many of the discussions about this bill I don't think were put to a ballot in terms of what some of the people in these groups actually thought. I've certainly had people phone me and say that these are their concerns, but they don't want me to use their name because of perhaps a fear that something later on would be held against them, which I think is a pretty sad state of affairs when we have to say things like that.

There's no doubt that we need, as I've said, the transportation corridors, and we have to plan for growth and development. Certainly, I believe I heard yesterday in a budget discussion that in this province we are looking at 2 per cent growth for the next two years, which is fairly significant in a province that is already struggling to keep up with the growth that we've had over the last 10 years. We really have to be looking at the future, but I think what we should be looking at – and I'm going off on a little bit of a tangent here – is public transport. We're looking at, certainly, high-speed rail. I for one certainly support that, but I think we have to start those discussions quicker and get on with it.

One of the things we keep looking at is road transportation. I drive highway 2 all the time, and I can be very clear when I say that it's absolutely obsolete. We need four lanes on each side of the divide on that highway. There's a tremendous amount of traffic. Some of the traffic is trucks. I'm not trying to knock off the trucking industry, but a lot of those could be sent on high-speed rail. High-speed rail does do freight, certainly, in Europe as well as just moving people.

There are things that we should be looking at, and this bill is necessary so that we can look at those things and put that land aside. We had proposed amendments to introduce time limits and limits on the scope of the project area orders and to weaken some of the sections on offences and enforcement under the bill, and as we all know, those weren't successful. Actually, a number of those amendments were very good amendments, and I'm sorry that it's so confrontational that they probably weren't given the consideration that they actually deserved.

One of the other problems. Again, it was tried to bring this up in

an amendment. It sets out the criteria that public projects must meet. They will be transportation corridors, utility corridors in the main, but the bill also provides for water management as well as any project that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may call a public project. Now, this is, in my mind, a problem and one that should be raised. What's the point of the immediately preceding criteria when the fourth, which is (d), simply states that a public project is any project the government calls a public project. There's no legislative framework. It's simply a ministerial fiat.

Again, we're back to the fact – and this was discussed – that I think there is a flaw in the way this House operates, actually, in that before we even vote on a bill, we are not allowed to see the regulations. The regulations can be changed, so to speak, in the backroom. When we say Lieutenant Governor in Council, of course, we know that we mean the cabinet, but there are many people out there that don't realize that's what it is.

There's also a key section. It requires the Lieutenant Governor in Council to undertake a plan for the project, to make that plan public, and to notify and consult with the landowners in the project area. Quite an extent is necessary in each of these requirements but would be later determined by regulations. If a landowner is going to be notified about something going across his property and he wants to get the support of the people around him, it's a lot of work that he has to do to be able to notify his neighbours of what's going on, instead of having a very, very public notice that should be put in all the newspapers. In fact, it probably could be put on other websites, Facebook, whatever else is being used out there.

I think we know that sometimes newspaper readership actually can be limited, which is a shame because some of the good information that really should be getting out is not getting out, or people aren't reading it, and by the time it's twittered and tweeted and whatever those other things are, it really has been watered down to often not having very good information in it. It often comes down to opinions of people who really haven't the proper information to make those opinions.

4:10

There is a key section that is set up for later weak regulations, allowing the government to offer merely nominal consultation, planning, and notification. As I've said, it should be a very, very broad notification. It shouldn't just be a small group of people involved. Every time our land in Alberta is adjusted or changed in some way, it really does affect all Albertans. It directly affects the farmers that own the land, but it truly affects all Albertans in the long run. When we look at the future, it definitely affects all Albertans.

The government can fulfill the bill's requirements but not actually undertake anything meaningful. What kind of protection does this section provide the landowners? If the government won't state what kind of consultation and planning is required and, instead, later again puts it through regulations, how can it claim to be protecting the landowners' rights?

The notwithstanding clause allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations relating to the project area that apply regardless of other legal and regulatory provisions. I think that this should be very carefully used because if they can override legal and regulatory provisions just by an order in council, which we know is in the backroom and not often brought out for public view or public discussion – this is something that is causing the people who are calling me to say: "What's going on here? What rights are we losing here in this province? Is this just a slippery slope to other uses and what could well be misuse by a government that has power through regulations?"

In section 3(1)(a) and (b), relating to the project area, they include controlling the use, development, and occupation of the land in the project area, but it also gives the minister the ability to exempt land that they choose from these restrictions. That is a very serious power. The minister is the arbitrator of landowners' activities. How will these decisions be made? Again, we're assuming they are being made by regulation. Doesn't this lead to an impression that landowners have to be nice to the minister because of the power over land use that the minister holds? These words that I've just said are being reiterated to me on the telephone. They're saying that, yes, they are afraid to speak out and would have preferred to be able to speak out in a committee as opposed to having a third party, someone like me, repeat what they've said. They wanted it out in the open, which would have been a committee.

They are talking about it requiring the minister to send notice to the chief administrative officer of affected municipalities and to the provincial registrar and to the last address of any person with land titles in the project area. It requires that similar notice of amendments to project area orders be sent out, and it requires similar notice of amendments to regulations governing the project area orders. It ensures that while the notice is required, it isn't in any way necessary for the regulations to have impact. In other words, even if no notice is given, everything can still go ahead. This is a problem and certainly, I know, has been discussed before, but I think it is worthy of being talked about again.

What is the point of having the notice if it isn't integral to the process? It shows that the government isn't really respecting the landowners. If they cared, then notification would be an entirely necessary part of the deal, and failure to notify would cause the project itself to fail or to at least go back to the drawing board until everyone who is involved is aware and has the ability to sit at the table to voice their concerns. The notification process isn't necessarily particularly difficult. Ultimately, it's a sign that the government doesn't really respect that landowners should be given notification in a very, very public way.

We were proposing an amendment. Right now it allows the minister to change enforcement orders by amending, adding, and deleting terms or conditions. We did propose an amendment to this section to cut out the section that the minister can amend or add conditions. It is an awful lot of power in one minister's hands. It allows additional penalties and powers outside of the process that has been set up previously. We think that it's unfair to landowners. Certainly, there are many landowners that also feel it's unfair; in fact, fear for this kind of power that should they step out of line, the enforcement police, so to speak, could move in on their property. People who have always lived on the land and have respected and honoured their ancestors, many people who've been three generations on this land, respect their privacy, respect their independence. This is the main thing that they feel that they're losing with this bill.

The other thing that would go along with that is that it allows the minister to apply to the Court of Queen's Bench for an injunction if it appears "that a person has done, is doing or is about to do any act or thing constituting or directed toward the commission of an offence under this Act." We think that the marked section is extremely problematic. Again, we did put in an amendment to pull that part. It is an awful lot of power in any minister's hands to be able to impose a penalty based on a suspicion. I believe that this is a flawed part of this bill. I think it's very heavy-handed. I think that if things are handled properly, it should never come to this sort of an action that would be required by a government on its own citizens.

The government does have a job to get these sorts of utility corridors. That is their job. However, they also should be of the people and for the people. I think that many of the people are

feeling that the heavy-handedness is taking away the fact that the government is for them. We should be protecting the people. We should be protecting all of the people. But in protecting the people and coming forward with the utility corridors that we need for the good of all, we still have to respect the people who will be directly impacted for the good of all.

We've certainly seen roads. This province is just over a hundred years old. We've gone from native pony tracks to wagon wheel tracks to sort of superhighways, if highway 2 could count as a superhighway, over just a period of a hundred years. We can see how quickly our society is evolving. As I've said before, 2 per cent growth in two years is fairly substantial to be putting on our roads.

Certainly, we have to do these things. Certainly, we have to think in the future. However, I think we also do have to have the deep respect for the people that truly are this province who we the government, sitting in this House, were elected to protect. We were elected to bring their thoughts to this House. We were elected to make sure that what we do is good for all but that it really is also good for the person that is directly involved and will be directly affected by any moves that are for the public good.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

4:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Not to prolong this much further, but what's missing with Bill 19, as was referred to with the prior bill, Bill 46, by the Member for Lethbridge-East, is consultation. That is what is absolutely necessary if we're going to go forward. The government has not only the right but the responsibility of moving forward on projects that are of benefit to the entire province, but in that moving forward, the province has to strike a balance. The way that balance can be achieved in Bill 19 or bills that follow with regard to land use is through the consultation process. We need to take this directly to Albertans and involve their input.

All members of our caucus and members of the NDP caucus have provided examples of concerns that people have raised. The newspapers, the media have been full of concerns. Unless these concerns are addressed and the value of these concerns is addressed in Bill 19, then this stigma of government power and influence and regulatory ability to change and turn a potentially innocent concern into a condemnation – unless we take those into account, we cannot expect Albertans to be onside with this piece of legislation or any other land-use designation legislation. So it's extremely important that we get this right, and at this point, unfortunately, that hasn't occurred.

I am hoping that the government may in the third reading, which we will be approaching shortly, have further amendments that will make this, as I say, flawed piece of legislation fly. If it proceeds as it currently is amended, then I'm afraid that we can expect the Alberta taxpayer to be on the hook for thousands if not millions of dollars in court costs because simply saying, "We want it; we need it" and then creating a series of laws to make expropriation easier rather than fair is going to be subject to dispute.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for providing the opportunities to debate and express concerns in Committee of the Whole over Bill 19. I firmly believe that we need to do better if this province is going to progress.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 19 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 6

Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The concern that I still have that I tried to address through an amendment is that after the 10-day period what treatment possibilities are there for these children that either voluntarily or through the court procedures have been taken into custody because of their addictions? I don't think there's a single member within this House who doesn't want what's best for children trying to break their addictions, but if we simply have a bill that is a holding bill that manages to keep kids off the street for a period of 10 days and if we have no place then to direct the children after that, then what's the point? If anything, it's injurious to the children and to their parents to give them a false sense of hope. Having recognized their addiction problem and having begun the preliminary process of dealing with their addiction, the program comes to an abrupt end.

I'm pleased, Mr. Chair, that we're in committee because I am looking forward to the opportunity to hear from the hon. mover of the bill what we can expect after the 10-day period. Do we, in fact, within the province have sufficient treatment beds in accredited facilities with individuals whose education provides them with the understanding and the background to deal with the addictions that the children are facing? Now, I realize that to provide counselling you don't have to have a doctorate, you don't necessarily have to have a master's, but you do have to have some type of relevant education beyond just simple field experience. We know that these children are going to need to be kept in custody – we call it protective custody – for some period of time.

I had a very interesting discussion this past Friday with a psychologist who explained that addiction, whether it be alcohol or drugs, is in some cases a predisposed genetic circumstance where some people might try a particular drug or they might consume a number of glasses of alcohol but not be adversely affected or almost instantly addicted, but the biological makeup of other peoples' brains predisposes them to addiction. For these people the 10-day period would not be sufficient for them to, you know, as we see portrayed in movies, break the habit or sweat it out or go through the bends or whatever other terminology you want to use in terms of trying to overcome their addiction.

I am hoping, as I say, that any member in this House who is more familiar with addictions treatment than I am can lay out, for example, how the PCHAD will direct us to a longer term addictions treatment. I know that we have nurses, or in their former lives nurses, and individuals with that type of background. I am hoping that somebody can provide assurances that once we have taken these

children into our temporary custody as Bill 6, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009, from a five-day period to a 10-day period – I'm really looking for someone to give me hope that we have sufficient facilities within this province, with beds at the ready, to break this addiction cycle that is so detrimental.

When we look at what happened at West Edmonton Mall and the tragic death of a young, basically junior high school student or possibly just grade 10, age 14, this wasn't a case of addictions as Bill 6 is referring to, but it was drug related, and Bill 6 is trying to break that relationship between addiction and youth.

I will take my seat, Mr. Chair, knowing that this is committee. I'm hoping that questions I've raised will be answered so that I can have faith that Bill 6 is just the beginning of a longer term process of addiction treatment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand up and try once again to answer the questions from the hon. member in regard to some of the things that he's brought up. I want to remind the hon. member that Bill 6, first of all, is a first in Canada. It's been a very, very successful bill. It was brought forward originally by the Member for Red Deer-South. All of the amendments that have been brought forward in this legislation are amendments that were based on the staff that are working with these children, on the children themselves, which I think is absolutely fascinating, and the families that are dealing with these addicted children.

The 10 days that we're talking about in this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Chairman, are for detoxification and stabilization of these children. What happens from there, after that, is based on the wonderful people that work with these children, AADAC counsellors that are dealing with children and who know how to deal with children with addictions. It could be a voluntary component that they put these kids in. They could go back to the courts and have another five days to detoxify or stabilize these children.

I think that what we're looking at here, Mr. Chairman, is a unique piece of legislation. Amendments on the floor at this particular moment are all based on the professionals that work with these children.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Well, I appreciate the chair giving me the opportunity to speak, and I also appreciate the comments of the hon. member from the government side who gave some of those answers. I do really want to actually commend the government on having brought this forward and, again, extending the timeline from five to 10 days, with the opportunity of going back for an extra five days. I believe that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity would agree that this is a good first step.

Nevertheless, despite the assurances of the hon. member, what I think we're more getting at here is that we're hoping there is an AADAC counsellor available for these people and that there is some aftercare provided for both the family and the teenager. If there is going to be that, if that is what is available, I'm very happy to hear that.

I guess another thing we've been told or led to believe – not led to believe; I believe it's true. We have a crisis when it comes to spaces for addictions counselling. Are there going to be guaranteed

spaces for these people coming out of a 15-day treatment sentence when they have become addicted to, say, harder type drugs that need longer treatment times?

I know that I for one have watched on Monday nights this show called *Intervention* on I think it's channel 25. I can't remember. I'm not a regular viewer. That's Monday night *RAW*, so I switch back and forth between wrestling and the *Intervention* program. [interjections] I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I'm amusing myself a little bit here.

Anyway, back to that addiction thing. They do have the program on, and they're in addiction recovery for 30, 60, and 90 days. Right here we have an addiction counselling session that is going to go on for 10 days and then possibly another five. Clearly, although this is a great first step, hopefully for some of the people, because they're young and maybe they haven't been addicted that long, they are able then with their parents' help, with AADAC counsellors and all that, to move on with their lives and proceed from there.

What I think we're looking for is more of an assurance that when people get out of this program and they need an additional bed, those beds are going to be earmarked, whether it's through the safe communities program, whether it's through the ministry of health or some other cross-ministry movement where addictions are going to be dealt with, that is going to guarantee that: "Hey, this person is getting out of here in a couple of days, and we need to have a bed ready for them. Will that be available?" That's the type of assurance we're looking for, that whole wraparound care provision that will hopefully be there. In case the parents are not, the youth and maybe their counsellors can arrange to get a longer term stay with a bed available if that is necessary should they be addicted to harder drugs. I believe that's all we're getting at.

Other than that, this is, again, a very good bill. I wasn't here when this bill was first announced, but I'm glad to see that Alberta was the first to introduce legislation like that. Let's keep building on that.

We know from the example brought out that drugs continue to be a difficult thing faced by many of the youth in our society. Again, just to reiterate, the strength and the potency of the drugs is much more than it was when I was in high school. They are no longer gateway drugs, more or less. Really, people just become addicted almost immediately upon their use. That being the case, we have to do even a more diligent job of having methods available for people to try and give themselves opportunity to set things right in their lives and find themselves a way off the drugs and the destructive path they've been on.

Those are my comments. I know it's very difficult for the government to be able to assure me that a bed will be available if necessary, but that's what we're looking for, that there's a wrap-around care provision. I think some of the answer was provided, but that's what we're looking for.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I do appreciate the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek providing some clarification. We've gone to almost a bidding process: "Do I hear five? Do I hear 10? Now we're up to 15." We're talking 15 days. I freely admit that I don't have a medical background, but I don't believe the stabilization and detoxification process can necessarily be accomplished, whether it's within a 10-day or a 15-day period. Take the testing of Olympic athletes, for example. The residual effects show up months after the fact. The reality is that the drugs are still within the system, and the withdrawal process, even in some strict cases when you have

different, less horrific drugs that you use as part of – methadone is the word I'm looking for, for example, for heroin treatment. Even when we have more medically appropriate drugs, it takes a long, long time to break that cycle of addiction.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek also brought forward the terrific intent of the Member for Red Deer-North. We all or at least a number of us in this House remember how quickly we pushed through that piece of legislation. It's extremely important that the Member for Red Deer-North through her consultation process came up with the figure of 90 days. She felt that it would take 90 days of treatment to break the addiction cycle with crystal meth.

Again, I'm not a pharmacologist, and I don't have a medical background, but given the different types of drug cocktails that are out there and that have various degrees of addiction, crystal meth apparently is probably number one in terms of how quickly it develops a dependency and how quickly it can destroy a person's mental capacities. If we're simply using what I referred to earlier as a kind of catch-and-release and hope-for-the-best kind of approach, which Bill 6 is unfortunately limited to advocating, then, you know, we cannot as Albertans be overly proud of our innovative strategy when it stops so short of the extended treatment and care that's provided. To be truly innovative, we've got to see the end results.

4:40

I think Bill 6 is a wonderful beginning, but it doesn't go far enough. It does not guarantee that after 10 or 15 days the type of treatment that addicted adolescents require will be provided either in terms of the individuals providing the counselling or the infrastructure in which the counselling will occur. Again, I'm hoping that someone can clarify the fact that we have X number of facilities with X number of beds that are ready and waiting and Y number of programs for these addicted children to move to after their 10- or 15-day introduction to the program.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to participate. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for offering some words of clarification. As I say, specific examples and a kind of an accounting of what facilities we have prepared to take the next step would be much appreciated.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to say that I believe that this is a good bill. It is a good first step. Certainly, the intent is – I guess I could use the word – noble because, really, it is working in the best interests of our children, who, of course, are addicted and cannot help themselves. Cognitive abilities are definitely strained when one is addicted.

The one thing that I would like to see is a time frame on an evaluation, a review of how this is working. I'd like it to go fairly in depth. I'd like real numbers, with different kinds of follow-ups after those 10 days. Did they get the bed? Did they get the support? I think we all know that 10 days is, really, absolutely nothing in terms of the fight against any kind of addiction. I'd like to see those real numbers and to actually follow up on how successful the different steps have been in being able to get the young kids off it. [interjection] I'm hearing from my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek that some of these numbers are available, and I would be most interested in looking at them.

One of the things that I think is really important is the fact that the parents are involved. The parents that are dealing with these situations often feel like they're talking to brick walls, and there are

many, many tears. Parents, of course, have such an emotional attachment not only to the child but to the process. Often the emotions can get the best of both the children and the parents, and it's very difficult for the parents to be able to handle it. The help that they will get I think is very important. They have to be involved. It's saying that the parents will have to attend a mandatory information centre regarding PCHAD so that they're better informed of the programs before they can complete an application for a protection order.

Addictions hit all socioeconomic levels. It doesn't matter how educated the parents are, how they understand the process, how they understand what they're up against. It really doesn't matter when their emotions are involved. Often depending on the drugs these kids have used, of course, it can go almost overnight. Here's a kid that they never worried about. Here's a kid that was actually doing well in school, could well have been an athlete, and, boom, it hits them. Parents are totally at a loss on what to do.

Also, undereducated parents often are at a loss on what to do as well. Sometimes, particularly with the undereducated parents or even with the educated parents, the mom and dad are both working, and the kids sometimes get away from them because of the hours that they have to work. Again, it doesn't matter: educated or undereducated parents.

Sometimes the parents are actually users themselves. Certainly, they clearly aren't addicted. Often parents can be very functional users of drugs. Pot is one that would come to mind. So I think this is really forward-thinking that we're actually involving the parents and giving them the help that they need as well.

There was a news article on July 9, '07. A statistic was given, stating that almost 400 children had been sent to treatment and that at least 112 of them appealed, and 58 of the protection orders were overturned and that this translates to about 14.5 per cent of the protection orders being issued without enough basis to actually force the child into treatment. That's not how I would interpret that. I would have to see where the statistics came from and what the mandate was, you know, what they were really looking for because I think it's very, very sad that someone who has been given that opportunity to help turn their life around would appeal it.

Who's doing this appealing? Is it these kids who are on drugs? And if they're on drugs, they're either going up or going down. They're never really at that steady, in-between stage that could even remotely be considered a cognitive decision that would have any basis of a normal – perhaps that's not quite the right word – way of thinking. If you're going up or down on drugs, there is no way that your cognitive ability is at its best or how it should be.

The other question that has already been asked – and it's something that I'm very strong on – is on that 10 days. Okay. Fine. It's a good step, but it isn't even close to being enough. We really have to ensure that we have that backup support for these kids. We have to get them away from their friends, who will of course be more than delighted. We have to get them away from the teenage dealer, that is probably their classmate. We have to be able to identify how these kids got into the problem in the first place, which is a long psychological treatment.

We have to know who is giving them the drugs, what the atmosphere is that we do not want to send them back into so that they actually have a chance to be able to help themselves to understand that in the end, no matter what we do, no matter how much we support them, it's they that have to want to do it. Otherwise, it'll never happen. We can keep them in treatment. We can do all kinds of wonderful things. Until we can get through to their minds that they are the ones that have to want to do it and they are the ones that

have to want to change, then it's very difficult to consider that the treatment has been a success.

I think all we have to do is think about if even as adults we are taken off a medication, we're not just taken off that medication right now. We are teetered off of that, and sometimes it can take as much as 30 days to be teetered off a medication that you have been on for a great deal of time. If you're on it every day, then you may take it only every second day, every third day, and so on until the end of the month. So it's quite clear. How many people have tried to come off coffee? Yes, you can come off that, but the effects are still there, certainly, after 10 days. How about coming off cigarettes? Just coming off booze certainly takes longer than the 10 days.

4:50

Another research statistic that is interesting is that it actually takes three months to really change a habit. Even the habit of doodling can take three months to change. A physical behaviour such as pointing takes three months to really ingrain as a change of physical habit that you would want to make. For instance, changing bed-times, sleep times, or awake times takes three months, actually, to get through, to make that exact change. Certainly, I'm supportive of this bill, but again I would like to of course see it go further.

The transportation of the child to the treatment facility, that sometimes the police could assist the guardians in the transportation: I'm not altogether sure, but I think that's a good thing. I think some kids who aren't really, really hard-core drug addicts and who have had brushes with the police before will get, hopefully, a police officer – certainly, many of the police officers I know of in Lethbridge and in some other areas are very cognizant. I think that many of our police officers today, particularly where they're dealing with these kids, know the difference between the hard-core addict and the kid that has a hope of actually getting through. They can actually create that good feeling between someone who is there to protect them and someone who is also an authority figure.

I do believe that good police officers – and I know we have many of them – who have children of their own really can relate to these kids. I know that I've certainly had conversations with some. The last thing they want to do is take some kid and throw him in the back of their car, that, of course, has the bars between them and the front seat. They want to be able to talk to these kids in the back seat of their car. They want to be able to connect with them. I know that police officers are in some ways no different than the nurses that I'm aware of.

Time is of the essence, and it's so important that somewhere along the line we give police officers and nurses somewhere on that bottom line that – you know what? – to treat people with dignity does take time. Yes, it's money. It's got to show up somewhere on a bottom line. We can't just have people saying: "You're going to go pick somebody up. It's going to take 10 minutes. You'd better get on with it." It's just not how it works when we have to give people respect.

Mr. Chair, I think I will take my seat at this point. Again, just to say that I really believe that 10 days is a good start, that I don't think it's enough, and how important that follow-up support is. The follow-up evaluations must be kept up. I'm glad to hear that there are some, but we must keep them up on a very timely basis and be able to follow these kids. I think I'd love to see a kid followed for at least a year – let's see how it really works – not just within a month after they've left the treatment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. One thing I've learned through 34 years of teaching is that you can't create parent profiles. You can't suggest – and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East alluded to this – that drug addiction is upper class; it's white collar. Bill 6 recognizes, I believe, the fact that anybody's children can be addicted. It isn't necessarily that the parents are so busy with their double salaries or professions. It doesn't matter whether the parent is a stay-at-home mother. Despite the best intentions we have as parents or grandparents, kids can get sidetracked. With the best intentions that we have, sometimes we miss this.

Bill 6 is kind of like the safety net. It's the catch. It's the first attempt as a child is falling farther and farther, almost like an *Alice-in-Wonderland* scenario down the rabbit hole. In this case it's a hole of addiction. This is the first time that safety net reaches out and catches them. It holds them for, unfortunately, a limited amount of time. Bill 6 allows the safety net to last for 10 days, potentially 15 days, but at the end of that time the net starts to untangle. Unless we can guarantee that we have another net or somehow that we can strengthen this net that has temporarily caught the child and taken them out of the circumstance which led to their addiction, unless we can provide that assurance, then Bill 6 stops short of the intention of helping children to break their addictions.

The intention is great. We need the facilities, and we need the government funding commitments to follow through with these children. As the Member for Lethbridge-East indicated, we need to try and come up with whatever commonalities we can in terms of how effective the treatment program worked. We obviously want to repeat successes.

Therefore Bill 6 starts the process. It captures the child momentarily, but what do we do after Bill 6? Unfortunately, I don't see where we're headed after this piece of legislation. If three years down we extend the period to 20 days, I don't think it's going to capture the intent. We have to have a long-term commitment. Bill 6 begins it, but unfortunately it brings it to an abrupt end.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Why, thanks, Mr. Chair, for giving me an opportunity to speak on this again. I don't mean to belabour the point that's been made by both my hon. colleagues and me in this debate, but the more I listen, the more this becomes clear. If we look at what it really costs the health care system and society in terms of what, I guess, drugs play and crime plays and health plays in the future of people who have become addicted in their teens or earlier to drugs, it's substantial on all three fronts: on crime, on health, on those individuals' ability to take care of their own families later on in life.

I would like to reiterate that this bill is a great start, but with those things in focus I think we do need some sort of follow-up or to have some necessary things put into place to ensure that these children, hopefully, if their parents are around, are given opportunities to whatever it is that is going to make their transition from drug use easier, more accessible, more, I guess, tangible in terms of actually achieving that. Yarding them off the street and then putting them back into the exact same situation they were in or hoping that their parents then can manage the situation, I think may be naïve thinking at best.

I'm sure that this bill in the past can point to success stories – I have no doubt about that – where a person who has been looked after for these five to 10 days and now 15 days will go back to their old lives and will be able to successfully break away from drug addiction; however, I don't know if anyone has done studies or numbers on it following what this bill has done. I'd hazard a guess that we're

not having as high a success rate as we could have if we had the follow-up care, the follow-up beds, the follow-up intervention by AADAC, or whatever it's going to be called under the new superboard, if those services are, hopefully, still there under the new superboard. That's all we're getting at.

I thank you again, to the Chair, for the opportunity to speak on this. With that, I'll take my seat.

5:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. One of the concerns that this recession has brought out is the potential of cuts to the health care programs. First Nations children and First Nations individuals show up in disproportionate numbers in terms of addiction, and Bill 6 doesn't discriminate on the basis of a person's heritage. We have seen, for example, suicide prevention, the potential of that being cut. There is a very direct connection in Bill 6 between addiction and suicide. A number of kids either become so disoriented or so delusional that they cannot tell the difference between reality and a drug-induced circumstance. Their failure, the bouncing back and forth between the real world and the detox world, for example a 10-day treatment program, and with all of the loving care surrounding them and the intentions, children who are addicted are among the most likely to require suicide intervention.

The intention of Bill 6 is wonderful, but we've got to take this further. We've got to take into account where addiction leads. We have to include suicide prevention, not just simply temporarily break the hold it has on youth. We have to include education, with the hope that more and more children get the message early on about the problems of addiction, but for those that are affected, we have to break the cycle, and 10 or 15 days, unfortunately, is not going to provide that break.

I'm pleased that the government has taken into account the very preliminary need, as I used the image before, of catching children, but we then have to envelop them, protect them in a caring circumstance. We need to monitor that the programs in Bill 6 will achieve the success that's intended.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 6, Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 7

Public Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The major rationale

behind Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, is the control of health-related information, and there seems to be a tremendous amount of controversy with regard to who has the proprietary rights to that information.

In a series of outreach that the Liberal caucus participated in, I had an opportunity while down in Lethbridge to talk to a company that provides secure website compilation of records and so on. One of the concerns that was pointed out to me was the number of different health regions, the number of different computer systems that are unable to talk to each other in terms of sharing that information. A large concern has to do with how we protect the information that has been received and who should have access to that information.

Obviously, the chief medical officer of health is the health traffic control officer, but before that individual receives the information, there are so many different levels. Of course, consent by the individual is absolutely essential to direct where this information is going to be sent and with whom it's going to be shared. So consent is a large part of it.

The Auditor General talked about, basically, electronic hacking – I think he referred to it as prints; I'm not sure what the correct electronic term would be – evidence of individuals trying to break in and acquire information which they had no right to receive. Ideally, we can create a system which protects the information and shares it with those who need to have it. I've spoken before debate on Bill 7 about the need to have an electronic health card which carries the information, and in the advent of an injury we would have that information available on the spot. I know from my most recent visit to the Calgary Foothills hospital that they no longer have the plastic cards, so obviously their electronic information has been updated beyond that point.

One example of the tracking of information that Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, takes into account is immunizations at the local school level. We've had examples where because their computers didn't have a scrambling code, information was taken from stolen laptops. I mean, prior to that time we might have had break-ins and files being interfered with or whatever, but the further we get in terms of electronic security, the greater the challenge to individuals to hack into those security situations. When you consider the hundreds of thousands of school-age children and the importance of the privacy of their information and then take it to the adult level where it's whether a person receives insurance, as Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, suggests, then it's extremely important that we protect that information.

For example, there have been concerns raised over the chief medical officer's ability to access this information, as I mentioned, without consent. How much information is exposed in the public realm and for what purpose? Whether we get concerned about information leaving the country or leaving the province or leaving the confines of the chief medical officer, I think we need to be concerned about how that information is tracked.

5:10

We also have concerns about information that will then be prescribed in regulations. Without going into detail, unless we have a sense as to how in Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, the regulations are going to achieve the protective intent of the information and the degree to which it is shared only with those who have the right to have that information, then concerns will continue to be raised about privacy. This is my first real opportunity in committee to express these concerns.

Overall, I believe that Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, is headed in the right direction. How we control the information is absolutely essential, not only to our privacy but, most importantly,

to our health and the services that we receive. So much of our discussion during this time period is on maintaining our public health standards and expanding the universality of the services. There has been a lot of talk lately about cuts as opposed to improvements. This is always a very concerning discussion when our universal health is at stake.

I thank the hon. chair for allowing this first participation in Committee of the Whole on Bill 7, Public Health Amendment Act. I think the intention is good. If individuals who have a greater understanding of computer security can provide assurances as to how well the information is protected, I'm sure that will help in my decision whether to support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the opportunity to speak to Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act. At this time I note that the bill is headed in the correct direction. I believe this will lead to more reporting of public health care matters, that will give Albertans a greater sense of trust in the health care system than in the past was generally given. I believe that this will expand on the program, where you can access the inspection records of various things like restaurants and other businesses that are involved in the public realm.

We do have some questions on this. Again, like the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity suggested, it is primarily due to the collection and dissemination of information that is going to be in the hands of the chief medical officer of health. I guess the question is: how much right to private information does the chief medical officer of health have in the name of public health surveillance? That is always one of those slopes. How much is necessary to ensure, I guess, society's health, to answer that question? Do they need to know everything? Do they need to know a little? That's one of those questions I have regarding this bill.

Also, this act changes the lines of reporting for the chief medical officer of health from an assistant deputy minister directly to the minister. I guess that change is in the right direction. However, why aren't we having the chief medical officer, who's in charge of Albertans' health, report directly to the Legislature? It seems like this would be an excellent opportunity for people to get a look at our health care system in the full light of day and to understand, then, what is happening. Let's face it. I firmly believe that the health system in Alberta is probably what our citizens are most interested in us doing correctly.

For instance, many times people don't pay attention until they get into a hospital or when they're suffering their last breath or they have a spinal cord injury or whatever you have. That's when they understand that their government is needed. That's when they understand that: "Oh, my goodness. I've been paying taxes, and thank goodness I've been paying taxes because – guess what? – I've got this nice public health care system that I can now go into and rely on." Why don't we have that person, who's in charge of what we have built here in Alberta in the name of public stewardship and of us coming together and collectively deciding how we're going to run our health care system, report directly to the Legislature? I think that would be a step in the right direction.

I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity also went over numerous other things that were pertinent. The fact that the collection of information from students at school could then be possibly given to, I guess, other governments or other foreign officials, also gives us more concern. It's more along the lines of:

how much protection is going to be given towards people's privacy? I know this concern has seemingly come to grips with almost everyone in this modern world. Simply put, I guess, the advent of computers, with the advent of being able to transport people's information a great deal of distance in a short period of time, has alerted the public to the fact that we should be vigilant, even borderline hypervigilant, about the dissemination of this type of information.

I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity did an adequate job of highlighting those concerns, actually, more than adequate – more than adequate – and as I'm fumbling over my words here, I will rely on his statements in that regard and thank the chair for allowing me to speak on this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to say a few words about the bill and indicate that the section of the bill that allows the chief medical officer to share information with foreign governments seems quite broad. According to the Information and Privacy Commissioner he's satisfied that it does strike a reasonable balance between protection of privacy and public safety. The reasons he might disclose the information – for the purpose of addressing public health matters, patient safety, quality of care, or the general public interest – put enough of a limit on the powers there.

I think that he's also a custodian of information under the Health Information Act, section 58(1), which requires him or her to "collect, use or disclose only the amount of health information that is essential to enable the custodian or the recipient of the information, as the case may be, to carry out the intended purpose." So there's another limit on the chief medical officer's power in the Health Information Act that pertains to this type of disclosure. However, the broadness of the provision still does cause us some concern. We need to make sure that private health information is not being released unnecessarily.

5:20

Privacy of health information is a hot issue right now, Mr. Chairman, with the Standing Committee on Health reviewing Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2009. In that committee on January 21 the Information and Privacy Commissioner said that the monitoring of access to health information is conducted through a complaints-driven process. There is not a proactive system in place to make sure that health information is only being viewed by those people who should be viewing it. That, Mr. Chairman, is worrying.

Orphaned medical records are another example of how medical information has been mishandled in this province. Just recently there were newspaper articles about a woman in Didsbury whose father's medical records were lost. These issues alert us to the importance of making sure that there is a proactive way of monitoring what information is being shared by our public health system, especially when it's being shared with other governments and other countries.

The powers given to the minister and the health board to publish results of public health inspections and nuisance orders should be given instead to the chief medical officer because he is less political. This is, once again, an area where the decision has to go through the minister or board before information can be made available to the public. The chief medical officer should have more freedom to provide information to Albertans directly.

We need a strong public health system in Alberta, Mr. Chairman. Families here need to feel secure that the ministry of health is looking after their well-being by using preventative and educational approaches and not just by providing services once something bad happens. Giving the chief medical officer the ability to gather contact information from all schools in order to contact children and their parents about public health programs is a positive step to keep families feeling supported and informed. We can try to improve our public health system by giving the chief medical officer more power, but it won't do any good if the chief medical officer is not free to do his or her job.

Last August our province's chief medical officer along with three other top public health doctors did not have their contracts renewed for reasons that this government still refuses to divulge. Meanwhile, despite warnings from the outgoing chief medical officer that there was a serious syphilis outbreak in Alberta that required a broad-based information campaign, the minister of health refused to acknowledge the extent of the outbreak and cancelled plans for a widespread campaign. Because of the government's secretiveness, we still don't know why those public health officials left.

This kind of hush-hush political intervention does not belong in our public health system. If this is the way the chief medical officer will be treated by the government, then this change in legislation will be ineffective. The province's new public health model announced in September gives the chief medical officer a direct reporting line to the minister. If the minister is going to interfere in a politically motivated manner as he did in the syphilis case, then a reporting line to the minister is useless for creating accountability and better public health.

That concern, Mr. Chairman, gives rise to our amendment to the bill, which I will now send up to the table.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the amendment is brought to the table and then distributed. This amendment will be amendment A1.

Hon. member.

Mr. Mason: We're ready to go? Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

I will therefore move that Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 2 by adding the following after the proposed subsection (4):

- (5) If the Chief Medical Officer considers that the interests of the people of Alberta are best served by making a report public on health issues in Alberta or on the need for legislation or a change of policy or practice respecting health in Alberta, the Chief Medical Officer may make that report public in the manner the Chief Medical Officer considers most appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, just a few minutes on this amendment. This amendment would give the chief medical officer the option to report directly to the public on matters of public health. This would allow the chief medical officer to communicate with the public without ministry interference. This provision is very similar to one contained in British Columbia's Health Act which governs B.C.'s provincial health officer, which is their equivalent to our chief medical officer. Given some of the interference that we've seen in recent events, we believe that the chief medical officer needs a way to ensure his independence and his ability to act, when he believes the public interest requires it, without political interference.

Now, we know the government has claimed that they wish to increase the powers of the chief medical officer. The bill only increases those powers in a minimal way. The amendment would actually give the chief medical officer a substantive increase in reporting powers. The public has a right to be able to hear the concerns and opinions of the chief medical officer even when they

don't match up with the wishes of the government of the day and their political considerations, that may be involved.

The amendment, just to summarize, Mr. Chairman, gives the chief medical officer the legislative ability to report directly to the public with or without agreement from the health minister or officials in the department of health and gives him a responsibility thereby for communicating directly to the public on important matters affecting the public health. We think that this would strengthen the bill considerably and ensure that the chief medical officer has the independence necessary to pursue the public health and the public interest. So I would urge all of my colleagues to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: On amendment A1 the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. What the hon. leader of the third party has pointed out is the need to have a balance between governance and health delivery. We've run into this circumstance of: who's in charge, and to what extent are they allowed to communicate their advice?

When we had the first news of syringes being used repeatedly for a variety of procedures at the Vegreville hospital, and then it turned out that this procedure had been abandoned in other hospitals, it's here where having a person directly in charge such as the chief medical officer, given their medical training and background and the fact that we have faith in their ability, is extremely important and that the chief medical officer be able to report directly to the people.

Now, whether or not the Legislature is in session, the appropriate sort of next circumstance I would like to think would be that the Legislature would receive a fairly immediate briefing. In the event that we're not in session, the chief medical officer should not have any restraints or layers or filters that he needs to go through in order to indicate a concern to the public.

The speed at which infections – MRSA, I believe, is the infection that travels so quickly through an open wound and can be acquired through just casual contact, brushing up against somebody in a gym circumstance. If it turns out that there seems to be a potential outbreak in a particular area of the province, whether it's due to the lack of simple activities such as are being recommended for the influenza, which is handwashing, or whether it's the need to wear masks or take precautions by wearing gloves or absenting yourself from particular types of activities, isolation, it's extremely important that the chief medical officer be able to issue these bulletins as quickly as possible, not to alarm but to create a sense that the health management of the province is in good hands given the number of circumstances, as I say, in the last two years where we weren't sure who was in charge and the bouncing of blame back and forth between various political layers and medical individuals, whether they be front-line nurses who had received a particular type of training which was now considered out of date but where the information was never passed on.

5:30

We now have the individual who's the go-to person, and that's the chief medical officer. What amendment A1 is saying is: recognize the individual's professionalism. He was basically hired and/or appointed by members of a government ministry, the ministry of health, I'm assuming with cabinet approval because of the importance of such a position as the chief medical officer. Allow him the professional judgment to make the necessary pronouncements. It's always a balance between the governance role that a government

needs to provide and the picking of individuals in whom Albertans can have faith to carry out their job, and I can't think of a job more important than that of the chief medical officer. Let's not have this individual encumbered by red tape, forced to filter information before a decision is made. Let's allow, as amendment A1 suggests, the opportunity for the chief medical officer to do what he has been chosen to do, and that's to protect the health of Albertans.

I support the intent of A1. Medical decisions need to be made by medical individuals. Governance requires the government to evaluate those decisions but not interfere with them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me an opportunity to speak on this notice of amendment to Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009. I'd really like to thank the hon. leader of the third party for bringing forward this amendment. It's similar to what I was discussing, actually, in Committee of the Whole before this amendment was brought forward, but it has given me some time to clarify my thoughts on the matter.

If you look at this, the chief medical officer is appointed by our government to look after, essentially, our province's health care system. Like I said in Committee of the Whole, I believe that what is most important to Albertans and most important to what we do under the dome and what we do here in governing in the public interest is to see that our citizens are healthy and taken care of in a publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system. The chief medical officer, as this government's representative on the front lines, shall we say, should have the ability to make a report on public health to the people of Alberta. I would suggest that the most logical place for that would be in this Legislature. They should have the ability to bring forward matters that he or she believes to be of fundamental importance to the way our publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system is run, how it can best be run, and to offer suggestions to the Legislature as to what is needed to be done, whether that's in terms of a change in policy or practice respecting health in Alberta.

I think that having the ability of the chief medical officer to make that report to the Legislature, to the public, would greatly add to our ability to provide excellent health care in this province. It would actually relieve the chief medical officer of some of the political apparatus that is currently in place that may actually work against what's in the best interests of the health of all Albertans. This amendment goes a long way to highlighting that ability, giving the chief medical officer the same sort of ability that other officers currently have to provide information to this Legislature. For instance, the Auditor General does so in a twice yearly time period. Obviously, the chief medical officer should have a greater ability than even the Auditor General to do so.

On that note, I am supportive of this amendment and thank the leader of the third party for bringing it forward. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, am standing to support this amendment. I just think that it is almost a no-brainer that medical decisions, especially at the level that this medical officer would be making decisions, should be made on a medical level and also that he should be consulting with other medical consultants, certainly not a politician. I don't think that medical emergencies should be politicized. Just the thought of it is very, very scary.

Last night in the estimates for Municipal Affairs I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs actually proved to me that, in my mind, he really got it. He was saying that emergencies should not be partisan, that his department would do the very best to make sure that all emergencies were looked after, period, and that it had nothing to do with partisanship. So kudos on that one.

One of the things that I've dealt with within the last month or so is the fact that the health minister actually said that it was his decision to not go forward with the public information program about the increase in syphilis in this province, and one of the considerations for that was cost. I mean, it should scare anybody to think that this kind of information is being withheld because of cost and the decision actually made by someone with no medical background.

We have a good chief medical officer. I think that some of the things that he's done in the last three days in regard to the swine flu have become, certainly, a topic of conversation everywhere. He's done a good job. He's brought it out in the open. He was right on top of it. He said that our labs are ready to go, to do the testing that we actually need. I think that at any given point in time there are thousands of people in this province that have what we would call the flu. People who feel that they've got the flu are being encouraged to go to our labs and actually be tested so that we here in Alberta and certainly in Canada will be able to get a jump-start on this, and nothing else would be spread.

I think that the SARS example in Toronto is another good example where the information wasn't forthcoming right at the very beginning. They had to scramble. They did handle it. Certainly, there were many, many unfortunate deaths with SARS, but it wasn't right out in the open to begin with. I think that's one good example of why medical emergencies should never, never, never be politicized, and we would politicize it by not allowing the chief medical officer to be responsible to this House. He absolutely has to have no constraints on him by having to report to anyone other than the House or have restraints put on him that may have any kind of a political overtone.

This is why I would support this in its entirety, and I think that if people in this House have actually listened and really thought about this, they would support it as well.

5:40

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to comment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: On the amendment, then, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much. I think this is an important amendment. You know, I regret that nobody from the government side has risen to comment on it. I'm only assuming that that means it's a routine voting down of an opposition amendment, but this is an important amendment. It is, in fact, based on legislation that does exist in other provinces, specifically British Columbia, which gives a higher responsibility to the chief medical officer of health to report directly to the public on matters of serious concern to the public health. For example, with the current outbreak of swine flu, if actions were not being taken by the government for whatever reason that the chief medical officer felt were necessary, he could communicate directly to them without having to get his comments vetted by the minister or by the government. I think that's self-evidently important.

I want to just clear up a little confusion. This is not setting up the chief medical officer as an officer of the Legislature to report to the Legislature about these issues but to allow him or her to make public comments, through the media or through other means, directly to the public to inform them of threats to their health or steps that are being

taken to protect their health, things that they should do and things that they should not do in order to reduce the risk of the spread of disease. As we begin to see this development of what could potentially be a pandemic, I think it underlines the importance of the role of public health in our society and the role of responsible and objective people who are responsible for the public health.

It's by no means a new or a radical notion. In fact, it has been adopted, as I've mentioned, in other places. Clearly, we've seen, for example in the SARS epidemic and the situation that developed in Toronto, where the top people in public health in Toronto, in Ontario, were on the front lines in terms of communicating to the public, taking measures to protect the public, making sure the public was informed, and they became in many respects very well-known and very well-respected figures that the public looked to for guidance in a very frightening time. We simply want to make sure that this role is not constrained for any reason and that these responsible officials have the capacity to communicate directly to the public, should that be necessary, on matters affecting the public health.

That's the intent of the amendment, and I would encourage all members on both sides of the House to support this.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back to the bill. Any other comments or questions on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I know that there are members of my caucus who would like to potentially participate in the Committee of the Whole process on Bill 7. In particular, I'm thinking of the hon. leader, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. If you would consider the possibility, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 7 so that other members of my caucus may have the opportunity to discuss it further.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Well, thank you. I had hoped that reason would prevail, but in that it hasn't, then I stand up in support of reason.

My background in education indicates to me that education is an important topic, but health care is absolutely essential to our very being. Had it not been for health care, we wouldn't be here to be discussing Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009. I don't quite understand whether all members opposite think that this is just a wonderful piece of legislation that requires no amendment, no discussion, or that the authors of Bill 7 just by sheer intelligence or force of effort have come to the conclusion that this is the be-all and end-all in terms of legislation.

We have raised concerns with regard to how secure the information is. We have raised concerns about the extent to which the population is subject to surveillance. We have raised concerns with regard to the tracking and securing of information. With no privacy impact statement to be submitted, there is little assurance that this information will be used properly. There is no provision, for example, in section (4.1) that the information transferred will be stripped of any identifying features. This was what I was referring

to in our earlier discussion on Bill 7: encrypting. I wasn't able to remember that particular term, but that's the term, encrypting the information such that only those that have access to the code – of course, we're assuming that these are the people within the medical profession – would be able to access that information.

In one sense we support the idea of taking some of the power that had sort of been behind closed doors in the cabinet, otherwise known as the Lieutenant Governor in Council, and bringing it a little more forward to the public domain, but Bill 7, Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, doesn't deliver the information and the accountability far enough towards the public. Also, it doesn't give sufficient accountability to the chief medical officer.

If I were to go through the bill clause by clause, I could point out some of the concerns. For example, 66(4) allows the minister to make "a code, standard, guideline or body of rules" instead of regulation. Now, that's not such a bad idea providing that the regulations are published and available to the public, but as is so frequently the case, the regulations seem to be the sole domain of the cabinet, or the Lieutenant Governor in Council, as it is sometimes referred to. Because of this, neither members of the opposition nor the public in general have a sense of the type of regulations that are controlling the access to and transmittal of their information.

5:50

Now, with Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, we have sort of sent out to various stakeholders and asked them to give us an account of their concerns. For example, the Canadian Association of Professional Access and Privacy Administrators have come out against some of the amendments proposed in this bill. The first issue they have is that school boards can be compelled to disclose students' and parents' names, addresses, dates of birth, and school. There is also a section that states that the chief medical officer of health can request any other information the regulations allow. While we believe that the medical officer should have all of the pertinent medical information available, there has to be some type of protection of privacy for the individuals involved.

A second issue that stakeholders brought forward with regard to Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009, is that the chief medical officer has the potential of disclosing information outside of the limits of this province. Parents and guardians need to be able to own their own information, and the way this legislation is currently worded, that privacy protection is not guaranteed.

Members from the Consumers' Association of Alberta echo the concerns brought forward by the Canadian Association of Professional Access and Privacy Administrators. They've pointed out that there needs to be strong evidence provided for the means that will be taken in the name of surveillance and interference in Albertans' lives. We have become a surveillance society, and some of that surveillance, as Bill 7 is proposing, in terms of watching at airports, particularly given the swine flu influenza, watching for people who are coming off at our international airports who have recently come from Mexico – that type of surveillance for the sake of the public good is extremely important. Other people would argue that the collection of information that we currently have from street cams and their locations and who reviews the information from which the surveillance is reported is also a concern.

Okay. Mr. Chair, we do have time, and I know it's the wish of the hon. Assembly to move Bill 7 forward to third reading. Therefore, I will not oppose our progress. We may bring forward amendments during third.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 7?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Hon. members, according to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the

Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 19 as amended, Bill 6, and Bill 7. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Having heard the report of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, does the Assembly agree with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see it's just about 6 o'clock. On that note, I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Issue 32

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our citizens. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visiting group from the Lakeview Christian school in the constituency of Drumheller-Stettler. These are some wonderful grade 7 to grade 9 students, with their teachers, Miss Grace Yoder and Mr. Wayne Toews, and accompanied by parents Mrs. Sharon Toews, Mr. Keith Klassen, and Mrs. Kathy Klassen. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members 53 students from Rideau Park elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. There are 27 students seated in the members' gallery, and I believe 24 students – and they'll be wondering if I can add – seated in the public gallery. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Tara Jones-Whitford and Mrs. Tanja Burns. I'd like to ask all of them to please rise and receive our very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this afternoon a group of 20 grade 7 students from Rosemary school, including one that's particularly close to me, my niece Lindsey Doerksen. They're accompanied today by their school principal, Mr. David Blumell, and parent helpers Mrs. Pam Norton, Mr. Arnold Retzlaff, Mr. Russ Pickett, Mrs. Yvonne Doerksen, Mrs. Jan Lepp, Mr. Cliff Walde, Mrs. Loretta Berg, and Mrs. Kristie Hall. I'd like to ask them all to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First of all, I have 34 fabulous students visiting our Legislature today from St. Lucy Catholic elementary school. They're accompanied by two teachers, Ms Dawn Miskew and Mrs. Karen Robinson. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly nine young high school

students who formed a group called Erin and friends because they wanted to make a difference in our community. These students from Jasper Place high school arrange time away from class so that they can volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit organization that works with volunteers and builders to build affordable housing. With us today are Erin Austen, Mariève Langevin, Kyla Stoodley, Jocelyn McCaw, Megan Mah, Monique Mah, Emily Dyck, Jennie Austen, and Monica Winstone. Accompanying them is Mr. Alfred Nikolai, president and CEO of Habitat for Humanity since 2005. Mr. Alfred Nikolai is a charismatic individual. He started building six homes per year; now they're building over 30 homes per year. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Mr. Cao: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the community sponsors of the School at the Legislature. Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, from Priority Printing Limited Mr. Tim Downey, president; Mr. Lloyd Lewis, vice-president and general manager, CTV; Mr. Eric Rice, production and interactive, Access TV; Mr. David Fisher, production and interactive, Access TV; from the Rotary Club of Edmonton Mr. Jack Clements and Mr. Bill Hamilton, youth services committee; from CKUA Radio Network Mr. Ken Regan, general manager, and Ms Sharon Marcus, director of development; and finally, Mr. Ron LaFranchise, a volunteer.

The School at the Legislature program gives grade 6 teachers from all over the province an opportunity to relocate their classroom to the Alberta Legislature for a week.

I would ask our guests to rise and receive a warm welcome from our Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three individuals seated in the members' gallery. With us this afternoon are Mr. J.F. Turcotte, president of the National Smokeless Tobacco Company; Mr. Jeremy Adams, director of government relations for the NST; and Jim Dau, no stranger to this Assembly, from Prismatic Group. The National Smokeless Tobacco Company is based in the province of Quebec but does substantial business here in our province. They're here today visiting MLAs to talk about issues important to their industry. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to welcome back to Alberta Richard Engelhardt. Richard is sitting in the public gallery. He worked for me for a number of years as my constituency assistant and manager. I keep losing constituency assistants because I convince them to go back and finish their degrees, which is what he did. He went off to UBC to complete his degree, so he's back for the summer. Richard, would you rise and allow us to welcome you to the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a number of staff from Alberta Employment and Immigration who are visiting the Legislature today. They play a very important role in keeping Alberta workplaces safe and fair.

I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: Kelechi Madu, Muneer Naseer, Teresa McKinnon, Roy Clough, Fazal Hussain, Gita Sud, Angela Curtis, Jane Kieser, Bernice Doyle, and Gayle Joyes-Bond. I would ask my guests to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 11 workers from Alberta Care Resources. Alberta Care Resources is a private child, youth, and family support agency within the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. They've provided 15 years of service to the Edmonton community and have provided quality programs, serving diverse client and community needs for every one of those 15 years. I'd like to introduce the individuals here: Ms Sunny Thaleshvar, Mrs. Aly Fergus, Mr. Brian LaBelle, Mrs. Becky Kiryluk, Mr. Shane Whippier, Miss Katie Grant, Mr. Jack Johnson, Ms Sylvia Reynolds, Miss Michelle Crawford, Mrs. Donna Smith, and Miss Vanessa Wyard-Scott. I'd like to welcome all of these individuals to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly four guests seated in the members' gallery. Growing up in rural Alberta, I knew of the UFA as the co-op, or the co-operative. They're a hundred years old this year. I knew of them in the fuel business and the farm business, but they're also in the construction business.

I'm introducing to the Assembly today the four people attending on behalf of the UFA Construction company, who bid on a luncheon with me at the St. Albert Housing Society fundraising breakfast in March. I would ask that each of them stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as I call their name. They are Bill Hutchings, Gregg Shoemaker, Darryl Hartigh, and Reid Lillico. We had a great discussion around P3 concepts, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the Assembly give them a warm welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine, Cheryl Davis. Cheryl is the owner-manager of two of Alberta's finest registries, the One Stop Licence Shop in Red Deer-North and in Red Deer-South. She has also been the very successful manager of my last four election campaigns. She's a very successful businesswoman, a very thoughtful and loyal friend, and a very hard-working member of the PC Party. Cheryl is in the members' gallery, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Education Week

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we are celebrat-

ing Education Week across Alberta. This year's theme, Learning Connections: Celebrating Student Engagement, speaks to the past, present, and future needs and successes of our students. The theme also reflects a natural and very powerful urge within the education community to effect positive change. It recognizes that we are strongest when we stand and work together.

Today Alberta is renowned for a high quality of educational programming available to all our citizens. That is today, but what about tomorrow? Education is the basis of a successful, open, and progressive society. We thrive if Albertans of the future are truly an educated people; we fail if they are not.

As a parent and as an elected official I am acutely aware of the challenges in preparing our children for a future that may be very different from today. We seriously need to rethink how we design our education system so that it continues to meet the needs of learners 20 years from now.

I'm very pleased to be co-chair of the steering committee for Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans, which kicked off the first of 10 community conversations this morning. We are asking a fundamental question to Albertans about our future: what qualities and abilities will future Albertans need to be successful and contributing citizens?

When you ask Albertans this question, they will have many ideas. From oil rig workers to farmers, from businesspeople to community leaders, from First Nations peoples to newly arrived Albertans, we all have the right, the obligation to bring our ideas, our dreams, and our hopes forward for this discussion. We need to hear all voices and all points of view. Education belongs to the entire community and to all Albertans. The future prosperity and success of Alberta, the Alberta of our children and our grandchildren, is dependent on our efforts and our commitment to education today.

Mr. Speaker, during Education Week 2009 let us take some time to consider the value and importance of education to our lives now and in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Partners in Injury Reduction

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 23 I was privileged to attend the annual WCB partners in injury reduction luncheon. I would like to congratulate the safety and industry associations who serve as certifying partners and the employers who participate in this program. Their hard work and their dedication in this joint program between the Workers' Compensation Board and Alberta Employment and Immigration is paying off.

The latest projections from the WCB are that the number of lost-time injuries on Alberta work sites went down again significantly, from 35,900 in 2007 to 32,800 in 2008. This is a huge achievement on its own, Mr. Speaker, and even a bigger one because the number of workers covered by WCB grew by over 86,000. Nearly 5 per cent more workers were covered last year, and the number of compensation claims fell by more than 8 per cent. More than 7,000 companies which participate in this program are proving the old saying: safety is good for business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Habitat for Humanity Funding

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Members of this Assembly know that homelessness and a lack of affordable housing

are challenges for all Canadian cities, and ours in Alberta are no exception. Individuals, many with families, who are hard-working but have low-income or entry-level jobs are having a difficult time finding a place to live. On April 24 I was pleased to join our Premier and our Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs to announce the largest partnership in Canada between a province and Habitat for Humanity, an organization which has made home ownership possible for many hard-working Albertans.

Through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs Habitat for Humanity Alberta will receive \$6 million to help build 67 homes in several communities across the province, including Brooks, Camrose, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Olds, and Red Deer. All of the homes are built by volunteers, donors, and the actual recipients themselves. The 67 new homes will be sold to low-income families at 80 per cent of market value.

Habitat for Humanity holds the mortgage, charges no interest, and amortizes the mortgage for as many years as necessary to ensure the families pay only 30 per cent of their income. The program also requires a contribution of 500 hours of work by the homeowner recipient and his family.

Mr. Speaker, this unique partnership reminds us all that we need to continue to work together as one community to ensure Albertans have a safe and sustainable place to call home. In just two years this government has increased access to safe and affordable housing by developing more than 5,600 new units, and we are on our way to achieving our goal of 11,000 units by 2012. In doing so, we will build a stronger Alberta, a place where our communities are modern, diverse, and dynamic.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Welcoming and Inclusive Communities

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on welcoming communities. Canada as a country of immigrants is well aware that the character of a city or community can be considerably shaped by migration. Migration not only alters the size of the city but also the cultural expression of the collective over time. Recent Alberta-based consultations and reports are telling us that many of our communities know they need to do something to respond to the changes, but they don't know what to do. Then we have research informing us that a community tends to enjoy a smoother transition if its institutions and citizens understand how diversity influences and benefits communities, if communities are prepared for the diversity they face, and that integration is a two-way street, that it is both for newcomers as well as established communities.

Mr. Speaker, our government's goal on developing strong and inclusive communities sets a context for continued development in creating welcoming communities in Alberta. In 2005-06 with a grant from the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association produced the welcoming and inclusive communities toolkit, an online resource for municipalities interested in becoming more welcoming and inclusive and in combating racism and discrimination.

In Alberta the municipalities of Wood Buffalo, Drayton Valley, Calgary, Edmonton, Brooks, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, and St. Albert joined the UNESCO Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination. Their request for support in building welcoming communities led to a three-year welcoming and inclusive communities (WIC) partnership between the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, the human rights and citizenship

branch, and AUMA. This partnership will increase the capacity of municipalities to build welcoming communities and provide greater networking opportunities to the CMARD members.

Sensitive and proactive management on the effects of immigration and diversity would help cities prosper through the process of change.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Hospital Capacity

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard complaints from both patients and doctors that Alberta's health care facilities are seriously over capacity and can barely deal with the daily pressures, let alone any extra demand that may occur such as that with the influenza outbreak. Lack of capacity is revealed by beds in hallways and overcrowded rooms, that have become the new normal on a hospital visit today. To the Premier: how far over capacity are Edmonton and Calgary's major hospitals?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the budget for health increased 4.7 per cent. Physicians received, over the next three years, a billion-dollar increase in their remuneration. We're doing whatever we can to attract more nurses and other health care providers to the province of Alberta. We're doing a lot to offset, of course, the challenges to the system: more people moving to the province of Alberta, an aging population, more technology, and just more of what we're doing in terms of hip and joint replacement, heart surgery, anything and everything that we can provide in Alberta. There's more demand, and we're meeting those demands.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Apparently the Premier doesn't want to talk about overcapacity.

Overcrowding ultimately increases the cost of health care because it creates a higher risk of infection, staff fatigue and burnout, medical mistakes, and patients staying longer. Why is the Premier cutting health care when the real problem is in space and professionals? We're bursting at the seams, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: I have to reiterate: I don't know where the opposition sees it as a cut to health when it's the only department to receive an increase of 4.7 per cent. I was reminded yesterday that other departments actually saw a reduction in their individual ministry budgets to make sure that we had enough money for the 4.7 per cent increase in health. We're continuing to recruit nurses. We're continuing to train more nurses and more physicians here in the province of Alberta, Alberta born and bred students that have an opportunity now to get their medical degrees and nursing degrees right here in the province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, under current conditions of overcrowding in our system we cannot — we cannot — manage a major disaster. This is not a responsible or acceptable state of affairs in Alberta. Even opening new beds tomorrow, Mr. Premier, means weeks or months before we have staff to fill those. Will the Premier act immediately to open new beds in Edmonton and Calgary?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're putting billions of dollars into infrastructure in health. It's not only in acute-care research facilities

but also in long-term care. You combine that with all of the additional training, the number of spaces that we increased in universities and colleges. Again, let's not just focus on doctors and nurses. There are other allied health care providers. We've increased those numbers to provide and support the nurses and doctors that are delivering health care in this province. So we have done a lot for the future. Just as a reminder to everyone, here in the province of Alberta, in the city of Calgary, the new Children's hospital has one bed per child, also room for the parent, again, you know, for breaking the chain for disease prevention within the facility. There's a very good example of the additional investment in infrastructure.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the most vulnerable times of their lives this government is denying basic human dignity to patients by putting them in hallways or overcrowded coed rooms. If my loved one were lying in a hallway somewhere or embarrassed by being in a coed room, I would be livid with this government, just as many Albertans who are writing to me are. To the Premier. This government is mismanaging health care so badly that even in a province this wealthy we are cramming three or more patients into a two-bed room. When will you resolve this chaos, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, back in 1958 – I don't want to give away my age because people will really know how old I am – I was in a six-man ward. I spent a month and a half in that facility recovering from a broken bone. Today the same facility is coed. There are men and there are women in the very same facility being treated just as well as I was many, many years ago as a young lad.

The point I'm making is that the system is continually changing. It's increasing the scope of service that we deliver to Albertans. The new technology is amazing. For the month and a half that I spent in the hospital, today I would have been in perhaps a couple of days, and I'd have been home convalescing and more than likely, perhaps, healed up better; I'm not quite sure. But that's how health has changed, and that's what we have to keep in mind. We also have a very aging population. This is the glut generation, the baby boomer generation. They'll be retiring in 10 years, putting on additional strain, and that's why billions of dollars are being spent on health care facilities in Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Well, I wonder how the Premier's parents would feel about being in a coed room.

This government is failing Alberta's health care professionals as well, working in unacceptable, crowded rooms crammed with more patients than they were designed for, increasing the risk of mistakes and litigation. How will we keep professionals in this province, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once the leader starts talking about my parents – my parents were not any different than many parents in this room. When they were helping to build this province, there was no publicly funded health care. They were lucky to have a bed. When they did go to the hospital, many had to sell a farm, or neighbours had to get together, put money together to keep someone in the hospital. Those were the true pioneer days of this province. This thing about a coed room: that's the least of our issues. Our issue today is to make sure that this health care system is sustained for the next generation. That's how we've got to start working together.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is failing all Albertans by putting them in hallways and cramming them into overcrowded rooms. What will the Premier do in the next 90 days to fix this problem?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, someone that has come from the health care profession – and that's the leader – unfortunately has very little knowledge of actually what's happening in the province in terms of the number of beds that have been opened, the physicians that have been attracted to the province of Alberta. Just since April 1, 2004, and, again, rolling this out in an intensive, aggressive, capital plan, \$2.6 billion dollars has been spent on health care facilities just in Calgary alone, just in one city. That is more, I dare say, than some provinces have spent in the entire, whole province, and this is in one city.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

AIMCo Governance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is no question that the minister of finance should not be telling AIMCo, as an arm's-length investment corporation, what specific investment decisions to make. But the minister absolutely should be telling AIMCo the rules under which it makes those decisions and making sure those rules, the codes of conduct, are enforced. This is \$75 billion worth of public money, and the public, in the person of the finance minister, should always know that decisions were made appropriately. To the minister: does the minister understand that the conduct and activities of AIMCo are her responsibility as the minister of finance?

Ms Evans: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We have also legislation that clearly articulates not only the role and relationship with the government of Alberta but the responsibility for the directors that serve on AIMCo.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we made a tiny, tiny little bit of progress there.

If this government has acted appropriately and taken all the necessary steps to avoid a potential or perceived conflict of interest in AIMCo's investment in Precision Drilling, why won't the minister just table AIMCo's code of conduct documents and all other relevant documents and show us the proof?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I know that the CEO, president and chief executive officer, Leo de Bever, contacted the hon. member opposite to make a comment relative to the challenges to, really, the code of ethics that exists between the board members and the kinds of decision-making they have. It is proper and right, I believe, for those kinds of questions to go initially to the chairman of the board, Mr. Charles Baillie, who will be pleased to answer them. We will arrange for that comment and response back. But the inference in this House about that lack of conduct, as implied by the member opposite, is totally inappropriate.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I am still waiting for that phone call that she referred to. I have not received that phone call or that contact yet.

Ms Evans: E-mail.

Mr. Taylor: E-mail? Haven't received it. Go back and check your sources, Minister.

Since ATB, another arm's-length Crown corporation, publicly displays its code of conduct, corporate statement of governance practices, and directors' independent standards on its website, if ATB can do this, why isn't the same expected of AIMCo, the manager of over \$70 billion worth of public funds? And if it is expected, where is it?

2:00

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, as of January 1, 2008, AIMCo was established with a board of directors that only very recently, last August, after a global search, was able to appoint president and CEO Leo de Bever. Over the last period of time his focus and energy has been committed to looking after the images, looking after the IT system and all those things the Auditor General identified. I will acknowledge that there may be more need for public communication, but the primary focus of AIMCo should be to raise the maximum amount of dollars for Albertans with Albertans' money. We will get on to making our communication refined in a way that, hopefully, will meet the needs of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier stated that the teaching of evolution will become optional in Alberta public schools if parents object on religious grounds. Eighty-three years after the Scopes monkey trial in Tennessee teaching evolution in public schools will again be prohibited for some children. Why will the Premier allow some children to be denied a balanced, scientific, and objective education?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that statement is totally wrong. He was at the news conference yesterday. That statement is totally wrong, and I ask him to withdraw it. If he wants to ask questions about the act that was put here before the Legislature, that's fine, but don't come here with the wrong information.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I heard the Premier confirm it, and so did reporters because it has been also contained in the coverage of his news conference yesterday. I want to know how far this Premier is prepared to go in allowing parental choice based on religious views to affect what children are taught in public schools. Will Holocaust deniers be able to claim religious grounds to prevent their children from learning about the Holocaust? Will those who believe in the subordination of women be able to prevent their children from learning about the human . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this government supports a very, very fundamental right, and that is parental rights with respect to education. The proposed amendments are very clear. These are amendments to the legislation that was introduced in this House yesterday, and this is how – and I mentioned to the media that when you start talking about human rights, it's very easy to crank up headlines because sometimes the media will try just to crank up the emotion either through fear or some other means. But emotion gets past the hard evidence of what's before this House. Simply said, the amendments to the human rights legislation simply confirm rights

that parents or guardians have already concerning the education of their children. Parents or guardians would have the right to exempt their children from courses of study, programs, or materials that include subject matter dealing explicitly with religious instruction, sexuality, or sexual orientation. This is already in the manual that the Department of Education has. This is simply putting it into the act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope to get the same consideration as the Premier.

This government just spent \$25 million of taxpayers' money to give Alberta a new image. All they've done is to make Alberta look like Northumberland and sound like Arkansas. Albertans are embarrassed by this government's ineptitude. When will the Premier start projecting an image of Albertans that is as modern, progressive, and culturally sophisticated as Albertans actually are?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad he asked that question. Just look at this caucus. You find me another caucus in the country of Canada that is more diverse than right here in the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. [interjections] The chair has recognized the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. He is interested in the concerns of the member.

Nursing Education

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, our health care budget takes about 40 per cent of our overall budget. As funding demands on government, so do the demands of the strong health care system. To support this system, we need to ensure that we are well prepared to meet these demands. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the cost share for educating our nurses between the student and the Alberta taxpayer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We in the government of Alberta look at the investment in Albertans' futures as a sharing in that investment. This vocation, nursing, is almost a hundred per cent employable, so it's a great investment for students to make. The cost to the government and taxpayers for a nursing education if you just looked at the operating costs alone is approximately \$13,000 to \$14,000 per year. The average, dependent upon the institution that you're in, for students in the nursing field is roughly just under 40 per cent of what the total cost would be. So taxpayers are investing about 60-plus, and the students are investing about 40.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the same minister. I have students from Whitecourt-St. Anne attending the Grant MacEwan College, and they started a four-year nursing program. How will the number of nurses going through this program impact the targets that have been set for the growing Alberta workforce to meet the demands of our future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, in this House we've

made the commitment on several occasions to the Premier's vision of where we're going with graduating nurses, 2,000 nurses by 2012. That's graduating nurses by 2012. The Grant MacEwan program is a critical and key component of that. We expect that they would be graduating upwards of 300 students per year – graduating those students per year – to reach that target, so they're a very key component of that. We look forward to some ladder opportunities as well within the system.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us what nurse retraining initiatives the Health and Wellness ministry has undertaken to get more nurses working in this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question because we have committed through the Alberta health workforce action plan some \$45 million. Over the past two years we've had almost 400 former registered nurses participating in the refresher education program to become reregistered. We've also made a number of investments to ensure that we have funding for internationally trained nurses, and we're working with our postsecondary institutions to do refresher courses for licensed practical nurses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Condominium Property Act Consultation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government held a meeting last summer to discuss residential construction practices and condominium legislative changes, which did not include stakeholders from the condominium community. These stakeholders need to be part of these discussions as they are the ones ultimately on the hook for the poor construction of their condos. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why did the government hold a meeting to discuss condominium changes without including the condo owners, board members, and property managers, who would be most impacted by these changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the meeting the hon. member is referring to, I'd like to assure the hon. member that any time that Service Alberta is looking at a particular act, especially the Condominium Property Act, we are very inclusive and we consult with a number of different people. As I indicated in the House last week, we have been looking at that property act for some time, and we are going to be moving forward on a further consultation on this very complex piece of legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far we don't know who the minister has been consulting. To the minister again: who has the minister been consulting regarding legislative changes for the condominium community or the study involving residential construction practices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, with respect to any piece of legislation the approach of Service Alberta is to be inclusive and respectful and to bring everyone to the table. Again,

there are a number of issues that have been on the table with Service Alberta, whether it's payday loan regulation or whether it's this act. I am looking forward to further consultation on this and bringing forward more individuals. If there's a particular group that we should engage with, I'd be more than happy to meet with that group.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: what specific policy changes to protect condominium stakeholders are being considered by the minister?

2:10

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that the Condominium Property Act has been around for some time. We know the economy has changed. We know that there are situations with mediation. There are situations with property management companies, situations with the amount of fees that are in the condo associations. There are a whole number of issues on the table, so we should be looking at the whole breadth and depth of all of those issues to make sure that the legislation is updated and inclusive of what's happening in today's world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Crime Reduction and Prevention Strategy

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that much work has been done for the benefit of Albertans of helping build safe and secure communities. As hon. members know, in response to recommendation 31 from the keeping communities safe strategy the Safe Communities Secretariat was established to oversee the implementation of the task force recommendations on crime prevention. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us what action is being taken to establish a comprehensive, long-term crime reduction and prevention strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very good news that we have a Safe Communities Secretariat. That was started a year ago. It's housed within my ministry. The important piece of that secretariat is that it's beginning to build that long-term plan. I think there are two components that are very important to that plan. The first is that communities need to be engaged. There's a lot of work that communities are doing right now with respect to building safe and strong communities that we need to listen to and we need to support. The second piece that is very important is bringing together the eight government departments that we think have a particular role in safe communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I recently, along with my hon. colleague from Wetaskiwin-Camrose, attended a community consultation at the Ermineskin Elders Centre in my constituency with respect to the government's gang suppression initiative in Hobbema. Can the minister tell me how this particular initiative fits into the province's long-term crime prevention and reduction strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an important part of the work that the government is doing at the moment. Out of the 31 recommendations that the task force made last year, eight of them have something to do with education, awareness, prevention, or enforcement around gangs. So we're using this opportunity of the antigang summit that's coming forward in June, that the Premier will be chairing, where we will build a comprehensive gang prevention strategy to demonstrate how to work with communities and work with government departments on an integrated approach to an overall strategy. A part of that is the consultations that have been taking place across the province in eight different communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister: how will we use what we have learned in these consultations in developing both a gang suppression initiative and a longer term strategy?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we know about the work that we're doing around safe communities and building strong communities is that there are a number of pieces of work that are already happening. But what we need to do is to bring that work together in a way where we're able to benefit from one experience in one part of the province and learn from that to build on another program in another part of the province. The other piece is that it gives us the opportunity to develop new policy approaches and deliver new programs that will support the community in the work that they think needs to be done to build safer communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Homelessness

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans continue to be concerned about homelessness as now some are afraid of being homeless because of having lost their job. They're turning up in our offices and on our website www.budget2009.ca. These ordinary people are worried about the recent transfer of homeless and eviction prevention funding to the programs that are beyond capacity and have waiting lists of 3,000 people. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: Jason from Calgary would like the minister to explain why he has not been able to access any employment training through income support for over two years.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, at any one time and in any society and in any economy we find that there are people who struggle to make ends meet. In Alberta we do have some very good programs to help individuals. Those programs are important both in good times and in tougher times. We deal with individuals on a priority basis. We do have emergency assistance that's available on a very, very short-term notice. But in the long run we work with all individuals that are affected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. David from Calgary has two questions for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. Does the minister have a distinct off-reserve aboriginal housing plan that is consistent with the province's 10-year plan to end homelessness, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member doesn't mind, I'd just like to go back to the first question. I want to assure you that Jason is being well looked after, hon. member, because he is a constituent of mine. We've met with him often. I know exactly the situation. We are working very closely with Jason.

An off-reserve housing plan that's specifically for aboriginal people. The plan that we have for permanent housing for the homeless is for all people that are homeless, and that would include aboriginal people.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Jason will be delighted that we are discussing this in the House.

To the same minister: will the funding allocation for off-reserve aboriginal housing be proportional to the high percentage of urban homeless aboriginal people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The housing program for people that are homeless will be based on, as I said, what is available for all people. The criteria are exactly the same for off-reserve aboriginal people as it is for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

First Nations Consultation

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 the government adopted a First Nations consultation policy, and the intent was that there would be consultation with First Nations people with regard to projects that might adversely affect their treaty rights. Part of that policy was also that it would be reviewed every four years. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. I now have constituents asking me: since the four years are up, is the review going ahead, and what are the particulars of the review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right. We did bring in that policy. We were the first province, in fact, to have a First Nations policy and consultation guidelines, developed back in 2005. We will be doing that review this year as part of our larger consultation initiative. We will be doing that review with the greatest of respect for so-called treaty rights and with as much involvement as possible with First Nations right from the beginning.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Again for the minister. Just relating to his last comment there, sometimes there can be a little bit of angst when somebody says that they're going to be consulted with. I'm just wondering if the minister can provide some particulars as to how they will be meaningfully consulted with.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're very committed to honouring our relationships with First Nations on a government-to-government basis. That's exactly the way it's reflected in our historic protocol agreement which our Premier signed with the grand chiefs and deputy grand chiefs and myself last year. We already

have regularly scheduled meetings – that's another very important thing – with consultations with ministers, MLAs, and others. We are also very involved with them in other capacities, through which I ask them how they want to be consulted. I'm asking them to be part of the design process this time, and that will give us the most meaningful consultation, I think, that they have ever had.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Again for the minister. No doubt the process will require some resources, and I'm told that the capacity to do that kind of a review could be an issue for some First Nations. I'm wondering if there is any funding available, then, for just the process.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very critical part of what we're trying to do as a recently established self-standing ministry: develop the specific relationships that will help move that particular issue forward. For example, we provide about \$6.6 million annually to First Nations. Some of that is obviously centred right around the consultation process. With respect to this particular review, as we go down the path together with First Nations, as they provide feedback as to how they want to be involved and have input in the design, that might require us to take a look at other sources to augment the funding that they are already receiving.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Campsite Reservations

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the \$10 online registration fee will provide piece of mind for those who can afford to secure a spot in any of the 25 campgrounds where two-thirds of the sites are restricted to reservation only, for others it will be viewed as an exclusionary practice whose aim is to generate revenue rather than promote a natural recreation experience. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: what mechanisms are in place to prevent an individual with an extra hundred dollars burning a hole in his wallet from turning a publicly subsidized campsite into a season-long exclusive weekend retreat?

2:20

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for talking about the new reservation system that's going to light up on Friday. It's something that Albertans have been asking for for a long time. I'm happy and pleased to say that we're ready with 25 campgrounds. I went online just a little while ago to demonstrate that site, and for the May long weekend it would cost me \$88, including the \$10 fee, to be able to go and use a very nice campsite in this province. These campsites have to be serviced – garbage has to be hauled out; they have to be cleaned and kept – so I don't think that that's too large an amount of money. I do think that Albertans see our campsites as a good value.

Mr. Chase: As a former campground operator in K Country I had a number of individuals question the rates, and now we've increased the rates by another \$10, so it is a concern to campers, particularly during this recessionary period. Are there any public safeguards to prevent an individual from monopolizing or booking more than one site each weekend, thereby further eliminating the availability of spaces?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, in all honesty, if the hon. member was to have called a campground in the past to book a site, it would have cost him \$10 to book that site, so it's not any different. That being said, I think that we will be looking at the reservation system. The beauty of an online system is that you can actually see where people are booking and how they're booking so that you can determine how to prevent those kinds of issues in the future. You can book four sites at a time. Then you've got to go off the system and go back on. We think it's a very rational way to go about it and that it will serve the majority of Albertans very well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much want it to serve Albertans very well. It's these unintended consequences that I am concerned about.

Has the minister taken into consideration that by making at least a somewhat supervised park camping experience more expensive, more families may be driven to random camping, where safety and security cannot be guaranteed?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say to the hon. member that we have not really made it more expensive. We are really offering much the same service as before. It is just now online, with better opportunity, I think, for fairness. We're always concerned about the random camping, and we are looking at opportunities that will create maybe a bit more of a rougher type of camping that's more affordable in the future for those that do like the random, but those are decisions we'll make in the future. This is about a state-of-the-art system that helps Albertans that are trying to book their campsites this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Career Development and Academic Upgrading

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently we learned that the number of Albertans on EI increased by more than 6,500 people in February, the highest increase in the country. Meanwhile, this government's plan for career development service and academic upgrading includes a 7 per cent cut in support for out-of-work Albertans trying to find the jobs they need. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: how can he possibly expect to provide the growing number of out-of-work Albertans the upgrading and career development support they need when he's actually cutting back on those services?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, our priority has been and always will be to connect people with jobs and help them get the training and upgrade the skills that they require so they can succeed in the workforce. Our whole role is to assess those particular individuals, and if we sense that there's a need and if there's a desire for them to receive the upgrading, we do have the budgets to have that happen.

Ms. Notley: Well, that's great in theory, Mr. Speaker, but there's been nearly an 80 per cent increase in the number of Albertans on EI. Those benefits will last till February at the very latest, and only 1 in 3 unemployed Albertans even qualifies for EI benefits. Albertans needed a jobs budget, and the government gave them a welfare budget. To the minister: why is the minister abandoning the newly unemployed Albertans who need retraining help to support their families through this recession?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we need to put things in perspective. When our unemployment levels are low, any type of increase will trigger a high percentage. We still have a lot of people, over 2 million, in Alberta that are presently working. There's no doubt that there are people that have lost their jobs. We're very, very sympathetic to them, and we will continue to work with them to see if we can find them additional jobs or the training that they require to meet their job requirements or additional job requirements.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's true that people have lost their jobs. Indeed, over 40,000 Albertans have lost their jobs so far this year, and no one thinks it will stop there. The number of Albertans on income support grows every month, and we know from the EI numbers that this trend will continue, yet this government is planning to provide less re-employment help to each Albertan who needs it. To the minister: just how out of touch can the minister be if he plans to give unemployed Albertans less help at exactly the time they need more help?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we went through our budget estimates about 10 days ago, and I think I indicated to the hon. member at that particular time that our budgets have in fact increased. They have not decreased from previous years. We are putting more emphasis on training and supports. We're also finalizing agreements with our federal government to provide additional funding to those individuals that are impacted by the economic downturn. We will continue to work with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Film Development Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The film and television industry brings big dollars into this province. It grows our cultural identity and brings more tourists to Alberta. But a recent cancellation of a television series shot in Calgary is the latest indication of a decline in film and television production in Alberta. My questions are for the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. As the minister responsible for this industry, what are you doing to address this decline?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true that CBC has cancelled *Wild Roses* production, as much as we would have loved to have it. They cancelled due to a ratings decline. As most people know, there's an economic downturn not just in Canada but across North America, and that has resulted in a downturn or a decline in the number of productions in film and television in the province and in the country. Last year the Alberta film development program guidelines were adjusted to try to help encourage more productions. We raised our cap from \$1.5 million to \$3 million so we could attract major motion pictures and full-feature series. We also increased the amount they were able to use in terms of their financing for the package with their broadcast partner.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. Last year this minister committed to a new funding model for the film and television industry. What progress has been made? Or has this whole funding model been shelved?

Mr. Blackett: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, we were looking at a

funding model and we were looking at a tax credit system similar to everybody else in North America. But something has happened with this economic downturn. If you look at the situation that television, especially, finds itself in, right now the tax credit model is based on the fact that a province or state would give money to a producer who had a broadcast licence with a broadcaster. Well, the broadcasters are disappearing. The broadcasters are less able to fund their own productions. They're spending less money on Canadian productions and more on U.S. productions. So we're looking at a system that we think will be better for Alberta, not me too with everybody else. Right now the investors get their film development money two months after production instead of waiting up to 18 months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last question to the same minister: all that being said, in these tough economic times can Alberta really afford a film development program, or can it afford not to have a film development program?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can't afford not to. We need a strong film and television production business to ensure that we have somebody telling our stories, somebody employing our crews, somebody filming in our great vistas. We need to have the \$102 million that the sector provides to our economy, especially in these tough economic times. Our film and television industry is knowledge based, it's green, and it supports rural economic development, promotes tourism, and helps bring diversity to our economy, as I mentioned.

Lead Times for Trials

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice has added Crown prosecutors to streamline the operation of the courts. However, increased resources may not have resulted in decreased trial times. During main estimates the minister indicated that trial times have increased slightly since 2007. This seems to indicate that the median time has increased from the previous total of 109 days. To the minister: can she confirm how long the median time is now in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

2:30

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appointed new Crown prosecutors for a number of reasons. One of them was to streamline the system. Another was to deal with the fact that we had an increasing number of people coming into the court system. There's no doubt that one of the reasons we did that is in order to deal with lead times and mean times. I believe that in estimates, if I recall my conversation, and it was part of an answer I gave previously in this House – whereas we have seen an increase in some lead times, we have not seen an increase in all lead times. There are specific charges where there have been slightly increased times, perhaps two or three days, but we've also seen reductions in cities and, in particular, courts.

Mr. Hehr: To understand the nature of my questions, if you could try and confirm in writing, that would be great.

Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: if the median time has surpassed the 109-day mark listed on page 208 of the 2009 ministry plan, what is the average number of days a litigant can expect between the first appearance in court and the conclusion of their matter now in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if we look at average mean times, we have to look at the applications that are coming forward. It depends on what court you're in, it depends what the matter is, and it depends whether you're in family court, youth court, or criminal court.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I understand that. Nevertheless, a study came out last year that said that we weren't doing very well in those measures. I assume you're familiar with that study. What I'm wondering is: are we past the 122-day national average as proposed in that study? If we are, what are we doing to combat that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, that study that came out just about this time last year said that we had made progress in some courts and not in others, that we were in the middle of the road with respect to the country. That was before we took some steps. We're still finding those experiences. We are seeing some progress. We are seeing cases that aren't even going into the court system. I can't give you a number with respect to an average mean time because I think the way that we're approaching the situation is different than the way it's being tested.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Oil Sands Emissions

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a lot of discussion on both sides of the border about oil sands and, specifically, carbon emissions from oil sands development. Last week there was some discussion in the Golden State as California debated and passed a low-carbon fuel standard. I understand Alberta officials were in attendance at the hearing. To the Minister of Energy: can he explain to the members of this Assembly why Alberta was at this hearing?

Mr. Knight: Well, most certainly I can, Mr. Speaker. The situation is that when it comes to oil sands and the development of oil sands and production of bitumen feedstock into the American market, what we want, quite simply, is not special treatment; we just want equal treatment. That's why we're at these meetings. We think it's a bit unfortunate, the result in California, given that the carbon intensity of oil sands production is equal to oil that is actually produced in places like California, Venezuela, or, for that matter, in Mexico. California's heavy oil is very carbon intensive, and it's actually produced in a similar way that in situ oil sands are produced in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: could the minister explain to the Assembly what the implications of the California low-carbon fuel standard might be for Alberta's energy exports?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't expect that there'd be any immediate impact because we don't actually ship directly into the California market. However, we are looking at expanding

markets for our products out of Alberta, and all we're asking for, again, as I said, is a level playing field for Alberta oil. California's situation shows that there is a need to continue our work with U.S. officials, number one, to protect Albertans' jobs and our economy and, secondly, to highlight our commitment to responsible energy development in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are some suggestions by environmental groups that the Alberta and Canadian governments are seeking special treatment for oil sands emissions. To the Minister of Environment: can he please advise how Alberta's oil sands are treated under the Alberta climate change plans and what we're seeking when it comes to federal or North American climate change plans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can unequivocally confirm that Alberta and Canada are not looking for special treatment. In fact, as you know, there is no free pass for oil sands in Alberta's legislation. Oil sands emitters are treated exactly the same as any other large industrial emitter. We're asking for that same equal treatment in any kind of North American climate change strategy that's put in place. Our primary concern is that at the end of the day any kind of North American strategy results in a reduction in emissions where they are produced.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last May the Minister of Employment and Immigration said that he was unaware of any incidents of unpaid workers going back further than six months. However, on Monday the hon. minister admitted that over \$3 million was owed to 132 Chinese temporary foreign workers working in Fort McMurray from April through to July of 2007. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given that wages were unpaid two years ago, why did the minister not do anything about it until now?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we weren't aware until just very, very recently that these wages had not been paid. These discoveries occurred after the investigations following the deaths of the two Chinese workers. It was during that particular investigation when we found out that the wages had not been fully paid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the minister said also on Monday that the funds are being held in a government trust account, how did the minister get the 3 million dollars plus that was cheated from those workers in Fort McMurray back from the labour broker in Hong Kong?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I believe there are two different situations. One is that there are some wages that were owing prior to them departing, and then as part of their contract there were some wages that were transferred over. We're dealing with the 3 million

dollars plus that are held in a government trust account. Those will be disbursed directly to the workers who had not been paid for their work prior to their return to China.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: where did the Minister of Employment and Immigration collect the \$3 million that was cheated from the temporary foreign workers in Fort McMurray? Where did he collect that money from?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I believe those were collected from the various contractors that were involved on the job site.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Municipal Capital Financing

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Capital Finance Authority Act allows certain nonprofit groups such as municipalities to access capital at reasonable rates through the Alberta Capital Finance Authority. Other groups such as foundations which build and run seniors' lodges cannot. My first question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. My constituents would like to know why municipalities have access to this low-cost capital while other nonprofit groups such as the Greater North Foundation, which runs seniors' lodges across northern Alberta, do not.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our practice has been to confine the access to these funds to those people that have either been elected or appointed to do jobs that the government needs and deems to be important and have been given a legislative mandate. If you look at a municipality, they have received funds through the ACFA, and that's their prerogative. The attitude of our government has been to channel people who want to have access to those kinds of funds for particular projects to go and seek approval at the municipal table first before moving further.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since municipalities have a debt-load cap, some feel that they should not have to borrow on behalf of these nonprofit groups. In addition, a foundation may have to get sign-off from a dozen municipalities, especially when you include summer villages, just to apply for a grant for access to capital. To the same minister: will the minister allow these nonprofit groups to go directly to the authority for capital?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, when we reviewed this practice last year, we determined that it was not wise to do so. Those were times of a different nature than we have today. Subsequent to that and in more recent weeks because of the concerns that have been raised by the hon. members and others in this Legislative Assembly, we will review this practice to see if it would be prudent to change our policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: can the Minister of Municipal Affairs

tell us whether there are opportunities for nonprofit groups like seniors' lodges to access funding through the municipal sustainability initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is committed to building strong communities. Recent updates to the MSI guidelines have made it easier for municipalities to invest in nonprofit organizations. Capital and operating support is available and eligible under MSI if it's operated by a municipality or if it's operated by a nonprofit organization. Municipalities have the autonomy and the ability to make decisions on what they believe is important in their own communities. MSI has made a positive impact in our communities and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Support for Public Education

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's public education deficit. The Alberta government's support for public education is inadequate from kindergarten through to postgraduate studies. StatsCan figures confirm that 40 per cent of Albertans are functionally illiterate. Alberta has the highest dropout rate in Canada. Depending on how you define dropout or failure to complete high school within a consecutive five-year period, the number of students who fail to graduate ranges from one-third to one-quarter. An even more dramatic dropout reality occurs in English as a second language, where 75 per cent of students fail to complete high school within five years. Considering that every dollar invested in education yields a \$3 return, academic failure undermines our economic viability.

Another lost opportunity Alberta statistic is the fact that year after year one-quarter of eligible high school graduates who achieved the grades necessary and can afford our inflated postsecondary tuition rates are turned away due to lack of postsecondary seats in Alberta. A key component of a successful education system is building upon a strong foundation. Because the government has failed to implement the recommendations of the Learning Commission, local school boards have been left scrambling to find the resources to fund full-day kindergarten for the most socioeconomically vulnerable or language-deficient children, never mind considering trying to find the money necessary to fund half-day junior kindergarten. The province still has a long way to go before achieving the 1 to 17 K to 3 pupil-teacher ratio six years after the reduction recommendation was accepted.

A strongly supported education system will be a key factor in eliminating the poverty under which 78,000 Alberta children were living prior to the recession's full force being felt. Our most important resource, the key to Alberta's survival, never mind success, is our youth. Education must be viewed as an investment rather than as an expense.

The Speaker: Is there an additional government speaker in Members' Statements today? Okay.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 34 Drug Program Act

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 34, the Drug Program Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This legislation puts in place a framework to guide pharmaceutical policies for the future.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, April 24, at Dr. E.W. Coffin elementary school in Calgary-Varsity I had the honour and pleasure of participating in the celebration of the SEEDS water conservation challenge. The students, staff, and supportive parents of this amazing school together with the corporate sponsorship of Devon Canada and Canada Safeway have dedicated themselves to preserving our environment. Previously they transformed a portion of their schoolyard into a creatively designed and illustratively signed nature preserve.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair is pleased to table five copies of the School at the Legislature report card for 2007-2008. This is a Legislative Assembly educational program for grade 6 students cosponsored with community partners Priority Printing, Access Media Group, CKUA Radio Network along with Via Rail Canada and the downtown Edmonton Rotary Club.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Insurance Act the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board 2008 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, let us all congratulate the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, who has arrived at another momentous occasion in his time frame. It was a number of years ago that he entered the world.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 36 Alberta Land Stewardship Act

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to bring Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, before the Assembly for second reading today.

Alberta's new land-use framework was adopted this past December. This framework had three goals: a robust economy, healthy ecosystems, and people-friendly communities. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act creates the legal authority to turn these goals into realities.

Over the past generation Albertans have experienced unprecedented growth. Our population has more than doubled, and economic activity has increased at an even faster rate. We all know that Albertans have benefited greatly from this growth, but this same growth has crowded many of our landscapes and in some areas tested the health of our air, land, water, and wildlife. In some areas of the eastern slopes, for example, on the same parcel of land it's not uncommon to find a cattle grazing lease, an active forestry disposition, a gas well, recreational hikers and anglers, bears and deer, and, of course, the critical headwaters for the streams and rivers that water southern Alberta.

When it gets this crowded, we all lose. What worked when we were only 1 million Albertans is working less well at 3 and a half million and will not work at 5 million or 10 million. So it comes down to this, Mr. Speaker. If we want to keep what we have here in Alberta – and we have a lot – we have to change how we do it, and that's what the Alberta Land Stewardship Act does.

Regional planning is the cornerstone of the Land Stewardship Act. The act establishes seven planning regions, identifies the contents of the regional plans, outlines the planning process, and sets out the roles of the regional advisory councils and the secretariat. The seven regions are congruent with Alberta's major watersheds, a policy breakthrough that will facilitate the co-ordination of our land and water policies, and the act makes these regional plans binding on the provincial government, local governments, and all boards and commissions.

The act also creates four new stewardship policy tools. Voluntary conservation easements, already a growing presence on our landscapes, are further encouraged and expanded to include agricultural lands. Conservation offsets will help to protect land for conservation purposes and to compensate for industrial development. The transfer of development credits will rein in urban sprawl and prevent the fracturing of agricultural land and protect landscapes and habitat. Conservation directives will help protect valued landscapes and views on private and public lands. Where a directive is applied to private land, if there is a resulting loss of value, it provides for landowner compensation, a Canadian first in respecting property rights.

The Alberta Land Stewardship Act includes consequential amendments to more than 25 other acts. Most of these amendments are simply to ensure compliance with regional plans. Two of the amended acts are under my ministry. Amendments under the Public Lands Act will allow us to better manage access to public land and support conservation and recreation on those lands. Both the Public Lands Act and the Forests Act will have updated offence provisions, with higher fines and creative sentencing and the authority to establish a dispute resolution and appeal process. Also, the Forests Act will reference regional plans and clarify decisions and activities related to timber dispositions. Finally, the ability to create forest land-use zones, or FLUZ, is moved from the Forests Act to the Public Lands Act to facilitate the better management of crowded landscapes.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, work has already started on planning for the lower Athabasca region. Its regional advisory council is in place, and the advisory council for the South Saskatchewan will be announced in May. Timelines call for the regional plans for both of these regions to be completed in 2010. We need the legislative authority to ensure this work gets done in a timely manner. Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, provides that authority.

I would ask that second reading be adjourned. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 43
Marketing of Agricultural Products
Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

The proposed amendments to the legislation will give producers of four commodity groups the same choice as other producers, a choice which they do not currently have. It will make our legislation consistent. It will help ensure accountability, it will help ensure leadership, and it will help ensure responsiveness of the commissions. Under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, or MAPA for short, agricultural producers are able to form boards and commissions. Twenty producer boards and commissions currently operate under MAPA, including seven supply-managed marketing boards, which Bill 43 does not impact or change in any way.

The remaining are commissions that collect mandatory per-head, per-acre, or per-pound levies, commonly called check-offs, for producers. Producers belonging to nine commodity groups have the option of requesting a refund. However, producers in the remaining four commodity groups are legally obliged to pay the check-off but have no means to ask for a refund. Bill 43 would change that and give beef, pork, sheep, and potato producers that fundamental right of choice. These producers would now have the ability to request a refund from their respective organizations, particularly if they are not satisfied with their association. Very simply, Mr. Speaker, what is being proposed is to give these producers the right and the ability to choose, to have a voice if they do not feel the organization has delivered value or met their needs.

It is important to note that the nine commissions with refundable check-offs all operate successfully and are thriving organizations that still have the financial means to support their members' needs. Yes, Mr. Speaker, some producers will request refunds when this change is made, but not every producer will. On average in the other nine commissions only about 7 to 10 per cent of the producers request refunds. Making the check-offs refundable for the remaining four commissions will encourage the commissions to remain relevant by being responsive to their members' needs and help ensure accountability. Producers who feel that their needs have been represented will see value in those commissions and likely won't request a refund. Perhaps for some of the commissions it will help them regain an active and engaged membership.

Beef, pork, sheep, and potato producers, like the rest of the producers paying check-offs in Alberta, should be able to decide if a commission is representing their needs, if they're getting value for their hard-earned dollars that laws are requiring them to pay for their respective commissions. If the answer is no to either of those two questions, those producers should not be forced under law to continue to provide financial support to a commission that they don't feel represents them.

I know we'll hear from some vocal individuals that will say that making these four check-offs refundable will destroy the associations, Mr. Speaker, but this is not about the industry associations. This is about the future viability of the industry itself and the future success of all of Alberta's producers, whether they're big or small and regardless of the commodity that they produce. Keeping the status quo and allowing commissions to be complacent will not allow for a profitable future for our producers and will not drive the industry ahead. This is about allowing new leadership and realistic market-based strategies to re-energize the industry.

It's also about fairness. It's about choice. It's about a successful future. As a Conservative government our law should not dictate what Albertans do with their money, what group they have to pay dues to, and whom they have to support with their own funds.

It's also important that our legislation is consistent, and Bill 43 is just the way to accomplish this. If passed, this change would not go into effect until each commission's 2010-2011 fiscal year. This time frame gives the commissions adequate time to make the necessary adjustments internally and to secure their members' willing support rather than legislated support for their organization. The Agricultural Products Marketing Council will continue to work closely with each commission and support them through the transition.

I look forward to the debate and receiving the support of members for this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I would like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 44
Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism
Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, is the first update to our human rights legislation in almost 13 years. It is a key component of my department's review of Alberta's human rights system, with the goal of reducing discrimination in Alberta. We'll do this by focusing on three key areas of improvement: efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency. We also want to make sure that the commission has the capacity it needs to effectively serve all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring all Albertans have equal opportunity to participate in the life of Alberta and to maximize their individual potential. Alberta's population is growing in size and diversity. We need to ensure that the act and the commission continue to meet the priorities and needs of a changing population in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The bill strives to meet this challenge with a number of administrative changes to the commission to reduce the time it takes to process and review a complaint. For example, the commission receives more than 30,000 inquiries per year. In 2008-09 they received 1,245 potential complaints in writing. All of these written complaints need to be carefully reviewed by commission staff.

In addition, the amendments will clarify the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission's role by removing "citizenship" from both its name and guiding legislation. The process for handling appeals as they arise will also be improved by ensuring that they are directed to members of a tribunal. This improved process will also increase transparency and will also make amendments that are consistent with current legislation and judicial decisions such as writing in sexual orientation. The rights of parents on the education of their child would also be confirmed. That is why it's important to support Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta already has strong human rights legislation, and these changes are simply designed to fine-tune, update, and make it more effective and efficient. The legislation has not been revised, as I mentioned before, for over 13 years now. Although we've made some important changes to the commission already, including hiring a new chief commissioner, more needs to be done. I'm working closely with our new chief commissioner, the hon. Blair

Mason, to implement some practices that will help speed up the process and improve the transparency.

As part of Budget 2009 I've increased the commission's budget by \$1.7 million, a 26 per cent increase, to make sure that the commission is able to implement the changes starting this year. We'll use these dollars to hire more staff, ensure that more legal resources are in place, and move the commission staff to new facilities away from those in my department. We can also use these dollars to help the commission build the capacity it needs to more effectively serve those who are newly immigrated to Alberta from other parts of the world. Our focus is to reduce discrimination, Mr. Speaker, and to enhance the system's ability to investigate and mediate complaints in a timely manner while maintaining fairness to all parties in the process.

Over the past year I have received input from several interested groups, including the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, faith leaders, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and others. The opinions of Albertans will continue to help ensure that the legislation reflects the core values and the principles of the province and its citizens. In our world today it is important to do everything we can to prevent discrimination and provide the means necessary to address it when it occurs. I think these changes will help us do that. However, many of the changes we would like to make to improve the complaint resolution process can only happen if these legislative amendments proceed.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here to ask for support in improving the human rights system so that it can benefit all Albertans. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:00

Bill 14

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

[Adjourned debate March 3: Dr. Taft]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join debate in second reading on Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act, and to add my own two cents' worth to \$2 billion worth of proposed legislation. [interjections] Do I hear some groans from the other side? I promise that's the last bad joke of the afternoon, from me at any rate.

I think that by and large this is a good bill, and we will be supporting it as far as it goes. The problem that we have with this – and this is to speak to the broader issue of what we're going to do about global warming and greenhouse gases in the province of Alberta in concert with the government of Canada and the government of the United States because it's going to be a continent-wide approach. President Obama has made that pretty clear. Prime Minister Harper has made it pretty clear that he is going to work with President Obama on a joint Canadian-U.S. project that will involve cap and trade systems most likely, effectively put a price on greenhouse gases, so this province is going to have to look at ways to reduce its emissions. Otherwise, it will suffer a significant loss of competitiveness.

Carbon capture and storage is unquestionably one way of doing that, one way that is in many respects ideally suited to the geology of this province. The very same reservoirs that produce the oil and gas that made this province what it is today are now a natural storage point for carbon dioxide. There's the potential added benefit that the injection of the carbon dioxide down into these reservoirs can help us engage in some enhanced oil recovery or enhanced coal-bed

methane recovery, so that could in effect create some revenue that will go some way to defray the costs of the carbon capture and sequestration system.

So, you know, it's good as far as it goes. It has some very real applications, I think, for this province. It has some very real applications for large point emitters, as they are called, the institutions that put out a lot of carbon dioxide in one place. That means in this province fossil fuel electrical generating stations, and that really is the single major source of our greenhouse gas emissions. Coal-fired generating stations are responsible for producing almost half of the power that we generate in the province of Alberta. Good solution for that. No question about it. Good solution in terms of upgraders for bitumen, should we get some significant number of them off the ground, because capturing and transporting the carbon requires infrastructure spending, so the desire is to get as much carbon as possible out of one place, and we have some good candidates for that.

We have some candidates, too, that are not so good. I mean, there has been much talk from the government side about how this will be applied in the oil sands. In that upgraders are part of the oil sands process, it certainly applies there. But there are some real doubts at this point, as I understand it, about whether carbon capture and sequestration is really a solution that you can apply to the many small power plants that are burning natural gas to provide steam for steam-assisted gravity drainage for that kind of oil sands extraction, so that may be a problem.

Nevertheless, this is a big step in the right direction. So what's our concern, really, with it? Well, the concern is that it's the only step in the direction of reducing greenhouse gasses whether we're talking about intensity-based targets or actual emissions. I know that there are others in this House that will have and probably have in many different opportunities, many different venues, many different formats debated that question of intensity-based targets versus actual emissions. I'm not going to go there right now. For the purposes of my argument this doesn't make any difference.

For the purposes of my argument what I'm saying is that carbon capture and sequestration is the only tool we have in the box, the only magic trick we can pull out of our bag of magic tricks, and I think that's part of the problem here. So let's go ahead and do carbon capture and storage. Let's go ahead and pass the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act, but let's also be far more aggressive on some of the other options, the other methods of addressing greenhouse gas emissions.

That's where I find that the government's strategy around greenhouse gas emissions is lacking at this point. Perhaps it wouldn't have been lacking so much if the government was going to be a little more aggressive about Green TRIP. Green TRIP was announced with much fanfare at the same time as carbon capture and sequestration, and each project, each strategy had \$2 billion set aside for it. That aggregate total of \$4 billion does still exist although under Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, and the provisions of Budget 2009 the proposal is to move those monies along with the capital account into the new sustainability fund to give a total of about \$17 billion in emergency savings that'll get us through the tough times ahead.

I understand the rationale behind that and agree with some of it and maybe have some problems around the edges of some of it, but agreeing with the rationale doesn't change the fact that all the real money dedicated to Green TRIP in this coming fiscal year has been reduced from a potential \$2 billion. It's not that I think that there was ever a plan to try and spend \$2 billion on buses and LRT cars and innovative public transit systems in one year, but that \$2 billion promise has been whittled down in real terms to \$10 million this

year, which is the price, depending on the model that you buy, of maybe 20 buses or 10 LRT cars, which doesn't make a huge difference there.

The reason why I bring this up is because we know that public transit could make a significant difference. We know that getting cars off the road makes a difference, and we know if from nothing else than the Calgary experience – and, by the way, I suspect that very shortly we're going to see that experience replicated here in Edmonton now that the south leg of the Edmonton LRT is open. We know what the experience in Calgary has been over the last five, seven, 10 years, which is this: every time the city of Calgary can get its hands on another set of C-Train cars to put on those tracks, it's a matter, it seems, of moments, Mr. Speaker, a matter of days before that additional rolling stock is full to capacity.

If you build it and it can get you from point A to point B, they will come, and they will ride it, even in Alberta, which had, certainly when I moved here 23 years ago, a reputation as the last province in the world where anybody ever wanted to get on a bus or public transit. Well, times have changed, and urban Albertans are certainly very willing and very eager to ride public transit when it gets them in a quick and efficient manner from where they are to where they need to be. Certainly, LRT systems do that. I know that we talked, the Transportation minister and I, in Transportation department estimates debates about the desire for some innovative developments in rapid transit, regional transit programs, that sort of thing.

3:10

The thinking is going on on the government side of the House and the thinking is going on at a lot of other different levels around making public transit work well in Alberta: regional transit systems, for instance, regional transit models that complement one another. It's just that it's not very possible to do much about it with only \$10 million in the budget. We do a little bit of early stage planning, but you're not going to get too deep into that. That's one example, Mr. Speaker, of alternative methods of addressing greenhouse emissions and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The point here, really – and I could go on. It doesn't appear that anybody in the House thinks I'm going on and on and on too long yet, so I'll wrap it up here pretty quick.

The point is that there are a number of alternatives – sorry; alternatives is the wrong word to use, Mr. Speaker – a number of options in addition to carbon capture and storage that we, I believe, should be pursuing as aggressively as possible given that this is a different fiscal and economic climate than a year ago. As the President of the Treasury Board and I discussed at some length in estimates last night, that requires different approaches, but it also requires some re-engineering of the way we've always done things. Here's a classic example of something that allows for precisely that. It's not even so much re-engineering as engineering something entirely new because we really haven't responded to the greenhouse gas threat in a meaningful way yet.

This Bill 14 is a good start. There's no question about that in my mind. I will be voting for it along, I think, with my colleagues when the time comes at the various stages, but I would urge the government to produce some follow-up legislation really quick that addresses some of the other options so that we're not putting all our carbon reduction eggs in one basket.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and see if there are others who wish to join the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, the hon. member now can participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a) in a five-minute question-and-comment period if there are questions to the hon. member.

There being no questions, the chair is ready to recognize another speaker. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act, is of course, as we all know, a very important one in terms of how we address the emissions that we create in this province. I, for one, would certainly never dream of standing up here – I certainly have some opinions on things that I have read – to say that I really fully understand exactly how all of this works and the ins and outs of the good and the bad. I guess a question from someone who doesn't come from within the industry would be: 20 years from now how do we know this stuff isn't going to bubble up out of the ground?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Having said that, this is a good bill and clearly one that has to be done. The object is really to establish a fund that would provide for projects that capture and store carbon dioxide emissions. The bill would set up a \$2 billion fund that would provide for a number of carbon capture and storage projects in Alberta. Currently the government is planning five projects. The government plans for the systems set up under this fund to store around 5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually by 2015.

I would like to repeat at this point, too, what my colleague from Calgary-Currie has said, that I think we really have to look at alternative methods as well as the carbon capture. Of course, the thing that I would like to see the most is huge conservation of our energy so that we don't have to produce as much. The government needs to be able to try to create other tools so that the public interest in the investment is protected and emphasized.

The carbon dioxide emissions are a serious problem for the global climate, as we all know. Man-made carbon dioxide levels are far above the natural base level. The excess gas prevents natural venting of the planetary heat, so the world is steadily warming. The exact impacts of this warming are not known, but the general probabilities are, and they imply a world with much more severe weather conditions, rising sea levels, increased massive disruption to human, animal, and plant life all over the planet.

At this point I would just like to sort of make a bit of a personal observation. Yes, I am worried about climate change, but what I'm more worried about is right next to home, right down at my level. I'm worried about the fact that we should conserve. The other thing that I'm even more worried about is the pollution that we are creating on our planet that has really nothing to do with climate change. I think that is a whole other issue, but climate change often seems to be the umbrella that they use over everything. I'm worried about the fact that our rivers are polluted. I'm worried about the fact that our air is polluted. I'm not sure what kind of food I'm eating. It's these sorts of things, that are actually right on my doorstep and affect me every day, that I'm probably more worried about than the actual climate change as a subject.

The climate change in Alberta will probably be felt primarily in the increase in drought conditions as rainfall lessens and the glaciers that feed our rivers shrink. Again, the glaciers may be shrinking, but when we look at them, there's a tremendous amount of pollution caught in the ice of those glaciers.

In 2006 the British government commissioned a report by Sir Nicholas Stern on the economic impacts of climate change. The report suggested that by the middle of the century unabated climate change could cost the global economy between 5 and 20 per cent of the global GDP, equivalent to trillions of dollars.

The naturally occurring greenhouse gases help regulate the earth's

climate by trapping heat in the atmosphere and reflecting it back to the surface. Over the past 200 years increased atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases resulting from human activity such as the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation have amplified this process. The deforestation, I believe, can be very easily fixed. Probably it's an easier fix than the greenhouse emissions and the trillions of dollars that it will cost us for carbon capture.

This is just a very small example. My constituency office is right next to a tire place that actually regrinds the tires and retreads them, and there is a smell coming out of there, and just not too far down the road are Canbra and Maple Leaf foods, that fry potatoes. That odour isn't all the best in the world either, and we get those odours in my office. What I decided I would do is get plants. I now have five large plants and four small plants. Everyone knows that I'm not good with plants, so I've hired a plant lady who keeps them alive for me. I cannot prove it, and I don't have any scientific evidence, but I know that the air quality in my office as a result of those plants is better. We notice it every day. We even noticed it in the winter when the heat was on. Again, there's a different odour that goes through. So deforestation, I think, is a huge area that we could be looking at because the trees do suck up the carbon that's in the air.

Alberta is one of the worst jurisdictions in the world in terms of per capita carbon dioxide emissions. In the data from various sources, including the government of Canada, the United Nations, and the World Resources Institute, Alberta has a worse per capita emission of greenhouse gases than Qatar, which is the worst country in the world. In other words, if Alberta were a country, it would be at the top of the list of greenhouse gas producers. The emissions in Alberta for 2005, according to the government of Canada, were 71 tonnes per person, with only Saskatchewan slightly ahead at 71.6 tonnes.

3:20

I think that those kinds of statistics are not new to us. I don't think that anyone is surprised at those statistics. I think that the government does recognize that there are some pretty strong reasons out there why we should be doing this carbon capture, and kudos to them for going ahead and looking at what we can do. I think there's still a lot of work to be done on what's going to happen. As I've mentioned before, what will be the long-term effects of this?

One of the main reasons, of course, for Alberta's oversized emissions is our reliance on fossil fuels. Again, we would go back to wind power with our windmills and, certainly, the wind that we have. I can certainly vouch for southern Alberta in the massive winds that we have, of course the argument being that they aren't steady at all times. Then my next thing would be that the sun in southern Alberta usually is quite steady. Between the sun and the wind I think that we could have a very steady source for creating our energy.

Most of the other provinces in Canada have access to cleaner solutions such as hydro power. That means that they don't produce greenhouse gases. Ontario produces much of its electricity through nuclear power, which, while it has all sorts of other environmental concerns that do not make it a good option for addressing climate change, does mean that there are fewer greenhouse gases emitted.

One of the things that I think about Ontario being able to produce hydro power is that we have to have a way – and this is one thing that is a starting point. I know I've spoken against TILMA, not so much the concept, again, not the what but the how, but I think it's a starting point. So my question after that starting point would be: why is a lot of Ontario's hydro power going to the States? Why are we not doing east-west? Why are we not working tighter as a country and opening up barriers? The answer, probably, to part of that is that we need transmission lines. Well, I think that possibly

we should be sitting down and talking about transmission lines east-west because hydro power, of course, is so renewable. In southern Alberta it may not be so renewable. Certainly, water is a problem in Alberta. But in Ontario at this point in time it isn't.

The main way in which emissions could be reduced in coming years will be through the imposition of market forces through cap-and-trade systems or carbon taxes. These will put a price on greenhouse gases either directly or indirectly, causing people to move towards other sources of energy. I'm not sure that that's a bad thing. In fact, I think it's a good thing. I think that we will be looking at solar panels on our garages. We will be looking at small windmills on the tops of our houses. We will be looking at better forms of conservation within our homes, within our businesses.

I spoke last week about a business that we have in Lethbridge that has done that very thing. They have not only cut down on their use of energy, but they have ways of conserving their heat so that they can even recycle their own heat internally. These are the kinds of things we really have to be looking at.

In terms of the cap and trade President Obama has stated that he'll bring in the cap and trade. The response of the Prime Minister suggested that this will be a joint Canada-U.S. project. As Alberta is covered by the system, the province will have to look at ways of reducing emissions; otherwise, it will suffer a significant loss of competitiveness. I think that from some of the things that we have been hearing just lately even out of California, I'm not sure that cap and trade is up for discussion anymore. I think it's something that will be going ahead. Cap and trade is often touted as the solution to the oil sands' reputation as a greenhouse gas pollution problem, one of the things that comes partly along with our oil sands.

Again I'm back to this: why aren't we going east-west? Why aren't we keeping some of our stuff in Canada? We have so few upgraders in this province, and we are shipping our bitumen south, which is not a surprise to anyone. We need more upgraders. If we can't put them here, then let's put them in Saskatchewan; let's put them in B.C.; let's put them in Manitoba. Let's put them where we can start doing our trade going east-west. There's nothing wrong with sending some of our product to the States to be manufactured and then sold back to us, but I think that we can do it ourselves. I think we owe it to ourselves because these are, after all, our natural resources. I think that we should get the very last dollar out of our own natural resources. We are more than capable of doing it. I think that incentives for upgraders should be on the table in terms of discussions.

One of the things that, as usual, comes to my mind is that as with almost every single bill that I've dealt with, certainly more lately than before, there are so many regulations that allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make these regulations relating to all and any aspect of the bill and the bill's intent. Again, many of these things should be very clearly defined and put in legislation. It's a tremendous amount of power within very few people's hands, which, of course, we know is cabinet. These are the things that should be really clear in the legislation so that surprises don't come. This kind of behaviour can also lead to . . . [Ms Pastoor's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes available for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. I was listening intently to our colleague. There's one thing I always want to ask, and I wonder what her position on it is. I've been here long enough to remember this

discussion being a little bit around where there were proposals to build upgraders and refinery capacity around Edmonton, particularly in the heartland. It was not uncommon for members of her own caucus and the ND caucus to rise in here and say: "Stop that. There are environmental concerns. This needs to be studied and studied over again. Delay it. Make it last." Often those who invest big dollars in building upgraders and refineries clearly told us: you know, it's much easier to do it south of the 49th parallel because we don't have to put up with the opposition and the barriers that are being put before us in Alberta. I wouldn't say a lot but the majority of this opposition was coming from your caucus and some from the ND caucus. Now you're on the other side arguing that if only we'd built more upgraders and refineries, we wouldn't be shipping bitumen down south. How do you reconcile that?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Thank you very much for that, hon. colleague. If I recall, prior to the last election one of the things that we spoke about was our policy called Western Tiger. That was to share upgrading with Saskatchewan and B.C. I'm not quite sure where that's coming from. The fact that things are cheaper south of the border because of less environmental oversight I don't think holds true anymore under the Obama administration. I think it's very clear that they are very aware of the need for strong environmental studies. In fact, I might be wrong and stand to be corrected, but I do believe that the Obama government has also backed off on some of the drilling they were going to allow offshore and in some of their protected areas in terms of a massive park, I believe, in Alaska. I think that they've backed off on allowing that. Times have certainly changed by elections both here in the province and in the United States.

But clearly, our policy was called the western tiger, and we really did want upgraders to be shared across western Canada.

3:30

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, unless I'm missing something, you're arguing that all this upgrading capacity should have been built in Alberta since the inauguration of President Obama because the rules have changed so drastically in the United States since that time, and you're also arguing that we should have built refining and upgrading capacity in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and not have been building it in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nice stretch. Nice stretch. Good try. No, not at all. I'm not saying anything about what has happened since the Obama administration, which is – what? – a hundred days old. I don't think anyone has had a chance to even have some good beers in the meantime in a hundred days. It's not that long.

No. What we were saying with the western tiger was that we need to keep our upgraders in Canada. Saskatchewan was certainly going toward that, and they were getting some money. The point is: let's keep our upgraders here; let's keep our own natural resources here. We don't necessarily always have to be Alberta first. There's nothing wrong with sending our bitumen to Saskatchewan, where they, too, could have upgraders. It isn't always about us, us, us. It's supposed to be about us as Canadians.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member to take the five minutes?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to participate in the debate on Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act. This is my first opportunity to speak to this bill since it's been introduced. I'd like to start right at the outset by saying that unlike other members in this House, I and the rest of my caucus will be voting against this bill. We do not support it. So that's sort of the introductory comment to this. Having said that, I'd like to give a few reasons for why that would be the case.

I think that, you know, the idea of carbon capture and storage is an untested but theoretically possible effective means to control greenhouse gas emissions. I think the idea of pursuing something which has a great risk to it but which has the potential, maybe, to play a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in some contexts can be a worthwhile venture. I appreciate that the objective here, in theory anyway, is to find some way for Alberta to commence some activity, any activity, geared towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and that this might ultimately be a solution.

The difficulty is that, first of all, most experts on the issue don't believe that it will actually function as any kind of meaningful solution within the next 25 years and potentially much longer than that. In addition, we are, as this government has said to us repeatedly in the last few weeks and months, in a new world in Alberta. We are in a world where we have to look very, very critically at every dollar we spend, and we have to know that we're doing it wisely on behalf of Albertans. Frankly, as members opposite have said repeatedly, sometimes when you are in that environment, you need to pick winners and losers. You know, not everything can be funded. Not every program can be funded, not every service can be provided, and now we're in a process of picking winners and losers.

In that context I think you have to bring a very, very critical eye to this process, this carbon capture storage experiment, and the \$2 billion price tag which is attached to this carbon capture and storage experiment. It is, as I've said, very, very costly, and it has, of course, yet to be proven. There is some good theoretical science out there – absolutely – but there is no example.

Mr. Liepert: Go to Weyburn.

Ms Notley: I know all about Weyburn, but it's not far enough along to justify a \$2 billion investment. It's not. It's absolutely not.

I will get to why it is still only a theoretical success, but I want to talk first about what we're losing. What we're doing is that we're losing \$2 billion out of our budget. We are losing \$2 billion, that is not going to health care, which is not going to bring more nurses in, which is not opening long-term care beds, which is not expanding hospitals, which is not doing – and this is the key point – a whole bunch of other far more effective stuff that would help bring our greenhouse gas emissions down.

That is the place where I want to just start with this. The fact of the matter is that there are far more efficacious ways to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions than the theoretical, very expensive science behind carbon capture and storage; that is, simply reducing the energy that we use through retrofitting, through reducing the energy that people use in their homes and in their businesses and in their cars.

Anybody who knows anything about greenhouse gas emissions knows that the biggest bang for our buck for greenhouse gas emissions – you need money to do that. You need money to retrofit. You need money to bring down our energy use rates. You know what else that does? It creates jobs. You invest that money into

broad-based retrofitting and energy reduction strategies. You put Albertans back to work. You know what? The second that retrofit is done to a building, that building stops producing as much greenhouse gas. So it works, and it works better.

The stats out there show, as this government in the past used to be very happy to tell us, that industry is not the primary producer of greenhouse gas emissions, that, in fact, it's generally Albertans. That's not going to be the case over the course of years. The tar sands will ultimately be the primary producer, but right now it's not. So the place to get the biggest bang for your buck is in retrofitting. You create jobs and you reduce greenhouse gas emissions and you do it right away. But these guys want to spend \$2 billion on an experiment.

Now, the next question, then, is: how effective can carbon capture and storage be? Well, we've talked already about: what are the projections for where our greenhouse gas emissions are going to come from over the next 20 years? Who are the biggest culprits in terms of the production of greenhouse gas emissions? Right now we know it's primarily coal-based electricity generation. We also know that 15, 20 years down the road from now, even less, it will actually be the tar sands that are generating the most greenhouse gas emissions, yet it's pretty clear that the carbon capture and storage strategy is not designed to address that particular industrial polluter. It may work with the coal-based electricity generation. It may be able to have a notable impact there – it may – but the technology is not developed for it to have a significant impact in the tar sands.

The first thing, then, is that the area of our economy that is most likely to contribute to the growth of our greenhouse gas emissions is immune to any reductions that might be brought about through this particular strategy. Hmm. An effective way to use our money? I would say not so much.

The other question is, of course, that there is still a fair amount of uncertainty out there around the safety and environmental implications of greenhouse gas storage, or whatever, in our lands. I know everyone says that it's all great because we've got all this porous land. Maybe it is, but there is, frankly, a lot that we don't know about that yet. There is a lot that we don't know.

3:40

The next question then, the other concern that we have, is whether or not this is something that's going to be able to be effective quickly enough. Everybody has been quite clear that the carbon capture and storage mechanism is not going to be able to bring down our greenhouse gas emissions for somewhere between 25 and 40 years. Yet the intergovernmental panel on climate change tells us that we need to start a curve of reduction by 2015 if we're going to have any impact. So here we are investing money that is not going to a whole bunch of other important programs to not even achieve the things that we know we need to achieve. Even if the folks over there want to pretend that we don't have to achieve that and they're just going to ignore it, the fact of the matter is that the rest of the world is getting closer and closer to accepting that obligation.

The other concern that we have, of course, about carbon capture and storage – and I want to go back to my initial comments – is that it's experimental but it's hopeful. There is potential for it. For that reason there have been some groups that have given it very qualified and cautionary support. As I said before, I appreciate the hopefulness of it and the value that it has in terms of its potential, but even those groups that have given it cautionary or qualified support qualify and caution their support with the understanding that this is not something that should be paid for by taxpayers. This is something that should be paid for by polluters. They are the ones that should be paying the as yet unknown costs of putting in this very,

very complex system which may or may not ever have any serious impact on greenhouse gases emitted from the tar sands. So why is it that we are putting in so much money?

Now, this government, of course, made a great fanfare because President Obama at one point had spoken quite positively about carbon capture and storage. But here's the thing. They are planning at this point to fund it, if it makes it all the way through their Congress, to the tune of about \$10 or \$11 per person. We are planning on funding it to the tune of just under \$600 per Albertan. So Albertans are going to be paying for the cost of producing the oil which at this point is still being shipped south faster than these guys can build a pipeline to get it there, along with the jobs that might otherwise upgrade it up here. So we are paying . . . [interjection] Absolutely, but there are other ways to deal with that, as I've said before. We are paying, our taxpayers are paying, \$600 each for however long to clean up the greenhouse gas emissions created by a resource which is then shipped to the States at fire-sale prices, with the absolute minimum of upgrading and economic diversification in the interests of Albertans.

The problem with this model is that there's no plan for it. So my concern should the government go ahead with it is: why is there no provision for industry to be stepping up? Why is there no provision for industry to be stepping up? Why is it all about the taxpayer having to subsidize industry to the tune of \$2 billion for an experiment?

One of the other things that we have a concern about with respect to this bill in particular, again, going back to the first comment, is the theory. In its very theoretical form there are some elements to this which might possibly be worthwhile down the road, but it all comes down to how it's administered, how it's put into place, what the rules are. The devils are in the details, as it were. Well, of course, this is a bill that provides no details. This is a bill that provides for no accountability. This is a bill that provides for no performance standards. This is a bill where, in fact, the money, this \$2 billion, will just sort of be handed out with little oversight, very little priorities identified or direction from Albertans about how it is that we're spending this \$2 billion. And there's going to be an advisory committee consisting primarily of the folks that would be receiving the money. Of course, only in Alberta would they see this as a reasonable way to set the system up.

I would suggest that that is not the way to proceed, that if this legislation were actually to have any sort of merit, there would need to be a very clear set of rules in terms of how this money was being distributed, what the objectives were, what the measurements were, what was to be expected for it, and what we as Albertans get back for it. That's the other thing. We're just shovelling this money out the door. What are we getting back for it? Are we getting any ownership in the technology that we're funding for industry? Are we getting any of that? No, we're not getting that. We're just shovelling it out the door and crossing our fingers and closing our eyes and hoping it all works out just fine.

In this time of economic restraint it seems to me that this is an incredibly irresponsible way to shovel \$2 billion off the back of the truck. I know that the shovelling of money off the back of a truck is a hard habit to break, but in this particular case, in this particular context I would suggest that it might be time to slow it up a bit and think about whether this is really the best bang for our dollar and think about whether the job creation benefits and the greenhouse gas emission reduction benefits that would come from the same amount of money being spent on retrofitting programs isn't a better way to go in the long term.

There are things that we can be doing in the interim which will be beneficial to our environment. As I've said before, we should be

implementing a cap and trade system. As I've said, if we started using renewable energy sources and investing in the growth of the renewable energy industry, we wouldn't be as desperate to find a way to spend this \$2 billion.

At the end of the day I would suggest that there are just better ways to do it, and I do not believe that what these folks have planned under this piece of legislation is the right way to go in the interests of Albertans. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Now is the time for the hon. member who wanted to interject when the hon. member had the floor to use the five minutes for comment and question.

Seeing none, do any hon. members wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

Bill 10

Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

[Adjourned debate April 8: Mr. Chase]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll join second reading debate on Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. I don't have a lot to say about this.

Mr. Rodney: Hear, hear.

Mr. Taylor: Does the Member for Calgary-Lougheed wish to join debate? I'm sure that if he does, when I'm finished, he could get to his feet and the chair would recognize him. Otherwise, perhaps he should just sit back there and drink his coffee while I talk. Thank you.

In large part we're for this legislation, at least at second reading, but we think there are a couple of problems with it. Those are, in essence, this. There's too much leeway, we believe, left to regulation regarding what's exempt from the application of this act. There are issues around how a complaints officer may dismiss a complaint. We think this bill could do with a couple of amendments to that effect. Of course, that's something that needs to be done at committee stage.

3:50

Certainly, in broad principle the intent of this bill, I think, is good. It may not be perfect, but it does address some concerns that our caucus has raised in the past. We've often called on the government to table an act like this because the old Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which dates back to 1978, is just kind of out of date and obsolete. It doesn't include many of the current seniors in the supportive living accommodations that are running in Alberta. They're not suitably covered under that legislation. An important aspect of this bill is that it will incorporate many of the smaller supportive living accommodations into its definitions, and that's important because 70 per cent of licensed facilities are either 10 beds or less. So it certainly is an improvement on what exists currently, but it's an improvement that we believe can be improved upon.

With those comments, I'll take my seat now and allow others to join debate at second. I'm sure we'll be back to this with more specifics in committee stage.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. I rise to join in the debate on this bill in second reading. It's the first opportunity I've had to speak to it. This is an interesting bill. It's one that, on one hand, appears in some areas to improve the current standard, which is that found in the oversight of the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act. I understand that, in fact, the accommodation standards which are part of this new act have actually already been in place as a form of regulation under the old act. Nonetheless, this is sort of the attempt to bring in the governing legislation. In that sense, of course, there are some small improvements included in this act as it relates to the standards that have been in place for the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act.

The difficulty with this legislation, though, is found in the statements of government in its continuing care strategy, and it's within those statements that we find the future of care for seniors in this province. We see that this government is contemplating a significantly new and different role for the facilities which are expected to be covered by this act. While this act might represent an improvement to the standards for those facilities that previously were covered by it, because the expectation for those facilities has grown so significantly, it now, actually, right out of the starting gate is inadequate.

In effect, as we've heard, the government is planning to effectively halt further construction on long-term care beds. The Premier is not going to follow through on his election promise to construct the new beds in long-term care that he promised during the election. Instead, he will be funding the increased construction of supportive living beds, and those beds will be governed in large part by these standards. The problem, of course, is that we know there are a number of seniors who require long-term care, and as much as the government wants to say that it's so, those seniors are not going to have their needs met. Many of them are not going to have their needs met within the supportive living regime which is being contemplated by the government as announced through their continuing care strategy.

I appreciate that this particular bill deals only with accommodation standards, but this bill deals with accommodation standards for a population which ultimately is going to be a great deal more acute than is currently the case or has previously been the case. This is going to deal with a population which needs a great deal more care and a great deal more protection and which has a great deal more vulnerability than the population that currently lives in these places or has lived in these places in the past. It's not enough to simply look at this act and say, "Well, it's better than what we've had for the last 20 years" because we're not asking these accommodations and these facilities to do what they've done over the last 20 years. We're asking them to now effectively become the new long-term care beds that the government is not building. For that reason, we have a lot of concerns about this bill. It's calling itself one thing, but unfortunately it's going to turn into another.

Now, there are some specific concerns as well that we have with the bill. We understand that there are some concerns with the degree of consultation that occurred with people in the community that works particularly with people with developmental disabilities. I'm sure the minister will have an opportunity to speak to that in perhaps Committee of the Whole, but that's one issue that has been brought to our attention.

Accommodation standards in long-term care contain provisions for trust account management and safeguarding personal possessions, but that, of course, is not included in this bill notwithstanding that these facilities will receive people who, were it not for a lack of beds, would otherwise be in long-term care. As I said, improving the standards for assisted living is not addressing the overall problem, that seniors who need a higher level of care can't get into

the long-term care facilities. So we have outlined a few of the concerns that we have.

On October 22 of last year the minister claimed in the House that the Extencare long-term care facility in Lethbridge that's being closed is being replaced by a designated assisted living centre, which I assume would be covered by this act. If I'm incorrect, I'd be happy to be told that, but that's my understanding. So this is not a replacement; it's a downgrade in the quality of care for those seniors.

On October 30, 2008, the patients in an auxiliary hospital in Jasper, including some who were palliative, had their care changed to a designated assisted living situation. I'm not sure the degree to which that would be covered by this new piece of legislation. Assisted living, ultimately, is just not appropriate for people who no longer have the cognitive ability to negotiate their own care needs or who are palliative.

As higher needs seniors are being diverted to assisted living and supportive living instead of long-term care, their rights and their safety are being put at risk. There's no bill of rights or ombudsman for seniors in supportive living situations, and that's not included in the act.

People in supportive living also do not have tenancy protection. The bill contains a consequential amendment that exempts them from the Residential Tenancies Act.

Seniors and people with developmental disabilities and their families need to know that they and their loved ones are getting the accommodation and the care that they need. This bill may support the implementation of slightly better standards for supportive living, but it does not address the problems with those standards or the larger issue of providing seniors with a lower level of care. Of course, the other piece that happens in these cases is more costs. There is, unfortunately, a significant problem with the absence of rules around the costs associated with this kind of living.

Generally speaking, you know, when you're looking at providing a more global and closer to home mechanism, to use the government's own language, for the care of our seniors and people with developmental disabilities, even in those places that are not nursing homes technically under the act but in those other places that treat people who are on the spectrum of need from barely any to, frankly, should be in a long-term care bed but can't because there's no space there, for those people on that spectrum of need, you need to provide them with some measurable and enforceable standards of care. These need to include best practices for staff ratios and support ratios and also resident complaint mechanisms. The whole issue of resident complaint mechanisms is a key issue.

Legislating standard qualifications for health care aides is another thing, for those people that provide day-to-day care and day-to-day support in some of these facilities.

The other thing, of course, is the whole issue of establishing community-based teams of mental health professionals to offer support to people living in these settings because often that kind of support wouldn't be available in the supportive living environment. We know that the government is in a very, very grave position with respect to the provision of community mental health services; i.e., it's a bit of a dog's breakfast, and they're not meeting anybody's needs. Now our plan for seniors is to take them out of the level of care that they used to be in, put them in supportive living, and plan for them to access more community resources.

4:00

Just like 25 years ago, when we all sang the deinstitutionalization mantra, we didn't actually follow that up with community support, so we have thousands of people falling through the cracks in terms

of mental health issues in Alberta. Now we're going to do the same thing to seniors. We know from studies that geriatric mental health is a very significant issue. Again, we have no plan there. It's very clear from the health budget that we have absolutely no plan there. Many seniors who should have access to a nurse in a long-term care setting who might have some experience in that regard won't be there, obviously, in these supportive living environments regardless of where they appear in the spectrum of care offered. There'll be nobody in the community because they're not there now, and there's certainly no money for them to be there now.

All of that is to say that this bill, unfortunately, to the extent that it reflects any kind of facilitation of the continuing care strategy that the government announced in December of 2008, is not something that we can support. Any vehicle for that strategy we cannot support because that strategy is inherently faulty. It's not going to help seniors; it's going to hurt seniors. It may save money; no doubt it will save money. You know, I think we have a greater responsibility to the seniors in our province, and I'm afraid that we are not going to meet it by adopting the continuing care strategy. I'm afraid that, as I say, while we see the improvements that exist in this legislation to the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, the improvements are not what is needed to actually provide for a functional vehicle for implementing the continuing care strategy and one that will protect and maintain the safety and health of our seniors in Alberta.

For that reason we have some very grave concerns with this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comments and questions to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Any hon. member?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This isn't for a question, right?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. As the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I rise today to speak about Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, which will replace existing legislation for the licensing of supportive living accommodations in the province. I also want to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for sponsoring this legislation. This legislation has the support of operators and associations who believe it reflects on the commitment and good work provided through Alberta's supportive living facilities. As well, industry groups have expressed that this legislation will encourage confidence in the province's supportive living system.

The act will assist in fulfilling the ministry's mandate to improve quality, improve supply, and improve client choice in supportive living accommodation. It will enhance the safety and security of residents, whether or not the facility is funded by the government. It will establish a licensing regime to ensure quality accommodation and services. It will improve the ministry's ability to keep the standards current and introduce new standards or features that will meet the needs of an evolving supportive living sector. It will establish a mechanism for addressing complaints and concerns about accommodations and services, and this legislation will allow the ministry to take the necessary steps, which may include closure, if a facility operator continually fails to meet standards or residents are in imminent danger.

This new act provides modern legislation that recognizes the

changing needs and complexities of an aging population and a growing supportive living industry. It meets the ministry's mandate from our Premier of improving quality, supply, and choice, and it addresses the need for safeguards for some of Alberta's most vulnerable residents.

I urge all the members to support Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We also have five minutes available for questions or comments to the hon. minister.

Seeing none, does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

Bill 11

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 11: Mr. Hehr]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill would appear to propose more punitive penalties for fisheries violations. The purpose is to equip the courts to include penalties that would bind offenders to return fisheries back to their healthy state. The impact would have much harsher penalties on those convicted of a penalty under the act. These punitive actions would have the effect of decreasing actions that have a profound effect on the fisheries' health such as overfishing beyond the limits of a licence, improper handling of fish, and probably one of the worst things that happens is poaching.

I know that I can speak for the lake that I'm fortunate enough to have a cabin on. That lake is stocked, and certainly it is a very, very popular spot in southern Alberta. It's very close to the mountains, and many people come there. A lot of the fishermen are catch-and-release, which is great, but every now and again you'll see someone walking away with more than their fair share of the fish that they're taking out of that lake that has been stocked. So just from my own personal observations I would certainly like to see more conservation officers looking after those sorts of things because that lake is not the only lake that is stocked in Alberta.

We need to keep our lakes in a healthy state. Certainly, we have some lakes that are called trophy lakes, and those are the ones that for sure we want to make sure that the fish are protected because my understanding is that they are all catch-and-release.

The fish stocks have been declining steadily since 2000, and the main reason seems to be overfishing, as I've just spoken to, and the loss of fish habitat due to rapid development. I think that the fish along with the grizzly bears and the cougars are many of the wildlife that we have lost and we are losing because of the encroachment of developments into what is their habitat.

Bill 11 hopes to address the issue of overfishing by introducing punitive measures to discourage overfishing. In the event that an angler would be charged under the Fisheries (Alberta) Act, strict penalties are introduced. I think that this is all fine and dandy and that the intent is noble; however, certainly with this government in Alberta we do have the regulations in place, but they're just not enforced. Part of it is because they don't have enough staff to actually enforce them. I, for one, would like to see an increase in our conservation officers. I am not convinced that sheriffs are the way to go with that. I don't think that they have the proper training. Conservation officers more often than not have degrees in the

environment and can understand what they are protecting. I certainly would like to see the regulations actually being enforced.

4:10

Alberta has only about 1,500 fish-bearing streams and 1,100 lakes. Careful management is really needed to balance it against approximately 1,500 domestic and 200 commercial and 300,000 anglers competing for these same fish. One of the things that I find always interesting is that as we go north in Alberta, I'm starting to recognize what they actually call lakes. I was, again, fortunate to have a cottage on Lake Winnipeg, so I know what a lake looks like. In southern Alberta I think most of them could probably be called large sloughs. As we go north, we can talk about lakes. Regardless of the size of these lakes, certainly the depth is very important to fish habitat, particularly if we're going to want them to survive over the winter. That's a good strategy to try to help our fish population.

Fish management is divided into three zones: the eastern slopes, parkland-prairie, and the northern boreal. Each zone really does have a unique assemblage of water bodies, species of game fish, and management techniques. I think I sort of made a comment about water bodies and how they are certainly different through this province.

The species of game fish. Some are natural and replenish themselves. Certainly, in the lake that I'm speaking of, that I go to, it's mainly rainbow trout that they put in there. It's basically a closed lake. There's no water coming in and out; it's fed through springs. So there is no ability for the fish, actually, to replenish themselves if they're being fished out.

One of the other factors that is contributing to the declining fish stocks is the runoff from septic tanks and overfertilization, which is referred to as summer kill. I think I did speak a little bit on another bill this afternoon where I was saying that we can talk about climate change, but what I wanted to talk about is the pollution in my backyard. My backyard is not unique. My backyard is many, many, many backyards of people who can see that the wildlife and even the life that's in and around our lakes is certainly decreasing. There has to be a reason for that. I know that it is coming slowly but surely that people on acreages and in summer homes are going to actually have to have septic tanks, that will be emptied, as opposed to having septic fields, particularly septic fields that are too close to any body of water.

Also, another thing can happen in lakes that don't have a lot of natural movement of water as it's coming in one end and going out the other. They get algae blooms on the lake, and those algae blooms can rise to the top and then form a scum on the top of the water. That oxygen then doesn't get down to the fish, and they die. Micro-organisms break down the algae, and again part of that breaking down requires oxygen. That oxygen then, of course, is not available for the fish, and it causes a suffocating kind of atmosphere.

Damming land-use practices can also cause destruction of critical fish habitat such as altering shorelines and creating sand beaches. I don't think there are that many sand beaches in Alberta. I certainly know that there are some up north, that they could have easily photographed. I think all we have to do is talk to the member for — and I've forgotten exactly where she is from.

An Hon. Member: Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Pastoor: Lesser Slave Lake. Thank you. Yes. The member certainly made it very clear that they have wonderful shorelines and was more than prepared to have her people on the shore having their pictures taken.

Altering shorelines and creating sand beaches. Often the altering

of the shorelines is because of developments that have gone in. I think we really have to protect the shorelines for the public. Yes, we'll always have developments. They're getting uglier. They're getting more heavily dense in terms of the people that they try to cram in, and it goes up, down, and all around. But we really should not be allowing people to build right up to the shoreline. We really do need to be able to protect that for the public, and then part of that would eliminate the problem of altering shorelines.

By altering a shoreline, you actually can – and I'll use an example of that. Forty years ago, before a lot of the knowledge that we have, we didn't change our shoreline on purpose, but what we did was we had a small boat launch. When we first went to our lake, we could sit and watch the fish actually spawn on a shallow shoreline. Now, of course, since we had put that dock there, the fish didn't come anymore. Just even a small thing like putting out a small dock can really change what's happening.

The provincial government has taken steps to address overfertilization by banning the sale of weed and feed in Alberta, lawn care products that contain a combination of fertilizers and herbicides, which is certainly to their credit. It will go into effect in 2010. The intent, of course, is always to protect our water quality downstream of towns and cities. It will affect the fish habitats through runoff. The fact that the government has taken these steps is, I think, not just good for the fish, but they're good for us because we do use that water and not only to drink. In the summer – certainly, I can speak for my neck of the woods – the Oldman River has all kinds of aquatic activities on it, a lot of diving and a lot of kayaking. These are the kinds of things. The other thing that we do see in our rivers is a lot of swimming, so we want to have clean water.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down and perhaps have further words in committee.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Seeing no other member wishing to speak, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

4:20

Bill 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Hehr]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the honour to speak on Bill 12, brought in by Mr. Berger. As now the Surface Rights Board encourages parties to mediate their disputes, that that's how to resolve them, there are a few steps there, you know, to be followed. There are negotiations prior to the application to the board where operators and landowners are encouraged to attempt to negotiate a settlement. There's the application to the board, and then there's a prehearing dispute, the mediation, the hearing before the panel of the board, and then the SRB deals with all of the surface rights compensation.

Compensation orders or surface leases can be reviewed by the board. The board deals with that. It provides for payment of compensation on an annual basis or other periodic basis. If the order of agreement doesn't provide for annual or periodic payments, it cannot be reviewed unless it relates to a major power transmission line, 69 kV or larger.

There always have been tensions involved, you know, in the negotiation of surface rights for compensation between the resource

companies and the landowners. Generally speaking, it is the objective of the resource company to obtain consent for access to the land. For compensation they want the payment to be low, while it is in the landowner's interest to obtain as much compensation as possible on the grounds that they cannot use that land for extraction purposes, for the nuisance on their property, or for the loss of income from that part of the land.

Areas of compensation can be for drilling wells, construction of pipelines, power lines, telephone lines, and other such points of entry. The rights of entry may be granted by the board on both private and Crown land for activities such as mineral extraction and drilling, whether the activity occurs on the tract of land under which the rights exist or from other lands through the use of horizontal wells; even for roads to connect mining or drilling operations on adjacent lands; for construction, operation, and removal of pipelines, power lines, or telephone lines; construction of tanks and other structures related to the above; drilling or operation of a well or installation of pipelines to and from a well that is used for various conservation purposes such as repressuring, storage, or obtaining water for such purposes; exploration; enabling reclamation in limited circumstances.

There are many areas that require compensation to landowners or occupants from resource companies. Most of the negotiations between the landowners and the resource companies are handled by land agents. There are about 1,200 of them, and they're all employed by the oil and gas industry.

That brings in another issue here, that there are serious issues involving the entire area of surface rights. Going on further, this process can be time consuming and expensive for the landowners. According to the SRB 2008 annual report there have been 898 scheduled hearings. Only 403 were heard, 293 settled, 193 rescheduled, six withdrawn, and three adjourned. It can be seen from the stats above and from hearings between 2006 and 2008 that there were 568 files scheduled to be heard in 2006, and only 209 files were actually heard. In 2007 665 files were scheduled to be heard, with 274 files actually heard. In 2008 898 files were scheduled to be heard; only 403 files were actually heard.

From the statistics the caseload for the SRB is increasing every year, and only around half the cases are actually heard. You know, this is a very, very drawn out process for landowners, and it can be expensive and emotionally draining. In other words, the process can be time consuming and expensive for landowners. As such, having a new mechanism in place to expedite the matters would be beneficial to landowners as long as any changes do not adversely affect the fairness of the process.

When we do the sectional analysis of the amendments, section 2 repeals section 3(3) to (7). This section deals with the composition of members of the board. The major change here is in the substance of the new subsections (5) and (6). This allows the chair of the SRB to select members or a panel of members to deal with any matter or class or group of matters. It also gives the members of the panel all the powers and jurisdiction of the board in any matter. The potential area of concern here is the delegation of the authority to only one member, who may be presiding over the hearing. It seems like too much authority in deciding these contentious matters to delegate to only one member.

Then it further goes on to section 5, which repeals sections 8(1), (2), and (3) of the act and substitutes new sections.

The amendment in this section basically takes the previous sections 4, 5, and 7 and incorporates these functions into a new section 8. The new section prescribes that the board keep records of its proceedings but doesn't specify how. This is left to the board to decide.

Then the new section 2 allows the board to make rules and essentially to conduct proceedings, incorporating the previous elements of section 5 into a new section 8. A new section (3.1) and (3.2) are added. Section (3.1) allows the board to make decisions based upon written submissions instead of oral hearings “subject to the principles of natural justice.” The principles of natural justice prescribe that an accused or interested individuals have an opportunity to be heard by an impartial tribunal in order to present arguments. Quite literally, this means hearing the other side before judgment is rendered. The new section (3.1) allows this process to take place without oral hearings; in other words, based solely upon written submissions.

You know, this option can be problematic. Evidence presented in person usually can carry much more weight than the same argument presented as a written document. Allowing this option will inevitably lead to a decrease in oral hearings, and this may affect rendered decisions for either party. There is a possibility that the SRB, in order to expedite procedures, may use this to avoid oral hearings in too many cases.

4:30

Section 6 repeals section 9 of the act, powers of members. This previous section spelled out conditions prescribing that any three members of the board may perform duties of the entire board. This change is being made, it appears, due to new provisions of sections 5 and 6 allowing any one member to perform the duties of the entire board. This could also be problematic, as stated earlier. One member shouldn't have the authority to render binding decisions.

Then going on to section 12, it amends certain parts of section 28, termination of right-of-entry order. This section allows an owner to apply for a termination of right of entry if the operator has not commenced operations within two months. The main amendment is repealing section (2), which sets out the process for fixed dates to appoint a date of inquiry.

The intent of these amendments is to take away the requirement for the board to hold a hearing into the matter. The intent is to allow the board to make a termination order without having to hold a proceeding. The only problem that could come from this amendment is if the board decided not to grant the termination order and there's no mandatory hearing for the owner of the land to present the argument. This could potentially be seen as depriving landowners of their right to a hearing; in other words, their right to the principle of natural justice. So there's a concern. You know, why in this bill is the right to a hearing being removed in the termination of right-of-entry orders?

This is a very important bill as it relates to the compensation for landowners who have resources activity on their land, and any changes to it must be carefully considered and must achieve an optimal balance between the rights of the owner and the rights of the operator. Given the increased workload of the Surface Rights Board, streamlining the process to expedite decisions is an admirable goal; however, this should not impede the elements of fairness to both parties and should not impair the principles of natural justice that guide any quasi-judicial boards.

Having those concerns, I'd like to have those addressed. Although the intent of the bill is simplify the process the board uses to resolve disputes, it is a step in the right direction. It is to implement a more informal, flexible form of dispute resolution. I agree with that.

With those comments, I will thank the chair.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions. Does any member want to take that?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this bill. I particularly also appreciated the enthusiasm the Member for Calgary-Lougheed had earlier, and I hope that he also has a similar enthusiasm to hear from me. I would also like to thank the Member for Livingstone-Macleod for introducing this bill and the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development for his tireless work on this file. It's a pleasure to work with both of them on the Land-use Framework MLA Committee, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I've spoken to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, and when this all started, it was simply an idea. Some folks decided more needed to be done to address the concerns of landowners and applicants when dealing with the Surface Rights Board. This process was too slow, there was a backlog, and decisions took months to be issued. After hearing these explanations about what was happening, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod put the ideas into words, and here we have an exceptional bill, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009. It is being proposed to solve some of the problems indicated by stakeholders such as the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. Mr. Speaker, they wanted a comprehensive review and look at board processes, and this bill is the outcome of the first part of this review.

I've heard concerns raised about allowing one member to be vested with the powers of the board. I consider this no different than having a judge preside over a court case whereas before we had a three-member panel for every single process. Now, you can imagine if every aspect of our court system required three judges to sit on and hear every case. This proposal before us allows the chair to determine whether a one-member panel or more is needed to hear a case or deal with the other members of the board. Of course, Mr. Speaker, during the process of writing a decision, board members will consult with legal counsel, other board members, and administrative staff. As hon. members do ourselves, we always consult with our colleagues before making important decisions.

Accountability here rests with the chair and by association the vice-chairs to ensure that the board is running smoothly and things keep moving along. The board is a quasi-judicial board, and an air of collegiality is certainly maintained amongst the members, ensuring that they consult with each other when making rules or decisions.

I do not believe there is a problem with added flexibility because, as I mentioned, matters will not be left to the sole discretion of one person. All good board members consult, discuss, and debate amongst each other matters before them so they can make the best ruling in every case, and they have been doing a good job, even with their current constraints. To give you an example, Mr. Speaker, in 2008 alone the board held 403 hearings, an increase of 93 per cent since 2006, when they held only 209.

With these proposed amendments, although still just a bill here in the Legislature, this will improve the way the board does its business, and one day it may become law. I'm asking members to support this bill.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to call for a vote on this matter.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to be recognized? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. I'm just looking to speak to this bill, okay?

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill.

Ms Notley: On the bill. Exactly. Notwithstanding the desire to vote

on these things in lightning speed, I do appreciate the opportunity to be able to join in the debate on Bill 12, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009. There are a number of concerns that we have with respect to this act, Bill 12, many of which have already been outlined by my colleague in the Official Opposition caucus.

I think that it is important to go over them again because as much as, you know, there's always the objective to have matters dealt with quickly and you can just assume that everybody is going to do the right thing and they're going to chat with each other and it's all going to be done really nicely and quickly, this is actually a quasi-judicial body that deals with significant rights of people. So it is absolutely incumbent that it maintain the capacity to operate in a fair way so that it can adjudicate in a fair and transparent way the competing interests. We know, and I'm sure all members in this House know, that the types of matters that the Surface Rights Board deals with can sometimes be very contentious and very significant to the parties before it.

This bill, from what I can tell, appears to do several things. The bill repeals sections that talk about a board secretary and assistant and allows the board more latitude in keeping records. The bill gives the board the power to design and implement alternative dispute resolution methods for settling cases before them, and the board is of course authorized to adopt any settlements reached through these processes. The board is able to choose to make their decisions about a dispute on the basis of written submissions, thereby denying the right to an oral hearing.

In a number of cases details about various processes and powers are removed from the act by the bill, leaving more of the specifics up to the regulations and, even more problematically, to the board itself. For example, as already mentioned, details around right-of-entry orders and the board's power to rehear applications and rescind decisions and the costs of proceedings would be largely removed from the act by this bill.

4:40

Finally, the bill fails to make any changes with respect to compensation. Now, as I say, I understand that the bill is designed to help deal with the backlog of cases and to deal with the delay in the hearings. One way, of course, to deal with the delay is to make the hearings shorter and quicker and faster and simpler and probably result in people not being able to say their piece, though. But, hey, you know, it's shorter and faster and quicker and simpler, so as long as we're doing that, that's great. Who cares what happens to the rights of the applicants and the parties before the board?

Well, I would suggest that that's not the way to approach problems in the area of judicial or quasi-judicial bodies. For one thing, we're talking about adding yet another mechanism for alternative dispute resolution. Now, it's my understanding that there are already in the act three separate opportunities for parties to resolve their disputes: during the negotiation process itself before any application is made before the board, if the issue goes to mediation after the application to the board is made, and during the prehearing dispute resolution before it goes to hearing. There are already three opportunities for there to be a negotiated settlement, so presumably if it's not being negotiated at that point, what's probably happening is that the parties have two very crystallized positions. You know what? In our world people are allowed to have crystallized positions. It is in that case that there needs to be an objective, clear, transparent process through which those disagreements can be adjudicated, and I mean adjudicated, not mediated.

Now, part of the problem, of course, with creating yet another alternative dispute resolution mechanism is that, as is often the case in these cases, if there is a power imbalance going into mediation, it

is often maintained or enhanced through mediation. For many people who are involved in the legal system, particularly dealing with clients who tend to be less able to represent their interests, less powerful, having less resources, the more you move towards mediation, if it's not done right, the mediation can simply enhance any inequity that already exists.

The other thing, of course, is that the bill doesn't give a lot of detail about what the dispute resolution processes would look like. Again, we're just expected to trust the board and trust the cabinet and everything will be fine, but we're not going to be given any detail in the bill. For reasons that we've outlined repeatedly in the past, this is not a form of legislating that is fair to members of the Assembly or, more importantly, to the people in the province to whom we're accountable.

Now, it's interesting that, apparently, in the briefing people from our office were told that the alternate dispute resolution process was something that both parties had to choose and that a party could depart or back out of that dispute resolution process if it started to go off the rails. Unfortunately, that right is not included in the legislation. If it's not there, it's not there, so that guarantee is not there. Without that guarantee being there, there is a very significant problem.

The issue of taking away the right to an oral hearing is fundamental. Decisions made by the Surface Rights Board can only be appealed by going directly to the Court of Appeal. I found fascinating that it was not even possible to have any other level of appeal. Perhaps I'm incorrect, but this is the information that I'm provided with.

In any event, it should be the highest level of opportunity for a fair trial, and instead what we're talking about doing is effectively changing the process. We're turning the person that's making the decision into a desk-bound adjudicator who may never meet the applicants and who will never hear the full scope of the matter. You know, you don't have to be too, too involved in the legal system to understand that the whole right to an oral hearing is a fundamental component of natural justice. The idea that we would be taking that away is very disturbing. It really does look to me like, you know, sort of an exercise of power gone wild, especially given how many people do have concerns around how these decisions are made.

The final thing, I guess, is that throughout this process we have heard from various parties that the whole issue of the compensation schedule itself needs to be revised and also the process through which the issue of surface loss and/or reclamation is assessed needs to be reconsidered, that the tools that are defined in the act are not up to date enough and that there are more accurate ways to engage in this assessment.

That issue along with the compensation scale are other things that, certainly, landowners have articulated as being significant things that they would like to see this government move forward on. So it's disappointing to see that these issues, which landowners had been wanting to see movement on, remain unaddressed in this legislation while issues designed to effectively limit their access to a truly fair, transparent, and fully comprehensive hearing process are moving forward with great haste. Again, it seems as though there has been a decision made, a value judgment made, a choice made, winners and losers selected, and unfortunately the interests of all parties are not necessarily being reflected in this bill.

We're perfectly happy to have the government come to us with some proposals for how to help the Surface Rights Board function in more effective ways. The idea of going to a single-person panel as opposed to a tripartite panel: not an unreasonable proposal, has been done often in the past. Quite a reasonable way to deal with resource issues. So it's not as though we simply live to say no.

There are ways in which this can be done while maintaining the fundamental natural justice rights of the parties and, in particular, those who most often find themselves without representation in these situations, but where this is going right now is not to that destination. We think that it needs some very significant reworking and some amendments in order to meet the objectives that the government is seeking while at the same time protecting the interests of all parties to a fair and properly resourced hearing process.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

Bill 13

Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Hehr]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The object of the bill is that under the current act justices of the peace are appointed for a term of 10 years but cannot sit past the age of 70 even if their appointment has not expired. The proposed amendment will allow justices of the peace to sit past the age of 70 up to a maximum age of 75 or until his or her appointment expires, whichever happens first. So the proposed amendment will be consistent with the provisions of the provincial act applicable to judges and to the provisions in the Court of Queen's Bench Act applicable to masters in chambers.

4:50

This bill will have an entirely positive effect on the administration of courts and similar amendments, as mentioned above, to overhaul the rules of appointment terms of the masters in chambers in the last sitting. In addition to conducting bail hearings and presiding over traffic court, justices of the peace provide front-line judicial services. These JPs, you know, work around the clock to grant search warrants, approve the apprehension of children in danger, authorize emergency protection orders that keep abusive family members out of the home.

As of January the number of experienced justices working in the Edmonton area fell from 17 to three because 10-year appointments expired January 31. Other jurisdictions across the province are facing a similar exodus of experienced justices. For some time now the department has assured Albertans that plans are in place to ensure that the court system continues to run smoothly during this transition. However, recently there was a court challenge about the delay in appointing replacements. Sources within the justice system are concerned, you know, about the big backup in bail hearings because the accused has the right to have a bail hearing done within 24 hours of arrest. Delays may allow criminal defence lawyers to launch Charter applications to have their clients' charges stayed due to the delay in the bail hearing.

This bill, I think, will go a long way to fix the problem in the court system, and it will speed up the process for bail hearings. This proposed amendment will allow justices of the peace to sit past age 70 up to a maximum age of 75. I think this is a good bill. We support this effort to ensure the smooth operation of the courts and security for Alberta's justices of the peace. Even though the problem has been known for some time, my only concern was that

the government took a little bit of time to move on this issue, but I still support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I would like to just stand up and maybe point out a couple of things. Actually, today's 70 is the old 50. I am delighted that they have actually looked at extending the age to 75. I think all we have to do is walk into Wal-Mart. As much as I can't believe I actually let that word cross my lips, but never mind, if we go into Wal-Mart, we see many people who are over 70 that are actually functioning as very effective greeters. There are many people out there working past 70.

One of the other reasons that I'm pleased with having a longer ability for our judges to serve – first, I'd like to make the comment that it was sort of very poor succession planning on the part of the government not to have younger people coming in behind them and being able to not only fill the positions of those that would be leaving but actually to increase them because of the number of increases that we've had in the population.

One other thing, just an incident that I've had lately, is that they are very short of judges to do citizenship courts. I do believe that some of the more mature judges, perhaps when they're getting to be around 75, might well be able to and be interested in presiding at those citizenship courts. I know that in Lethbridge – and I haven't been to any others – it's a big deal. It's a very big deal. We have the Senator, we have an MP, we have two MLAs, and our mayor. We all show up at citizenship courts. The people that are becoming our new citizens are most appreciative of having that level of government all represented and also that we can mingle with them afterwards. We've always had a really interesting judge, and I'm sorry that I've forgotten his name. He was entertaining, and after everyone was sworn through, he would run through the different countries. It was absolutely incredible, even in a group of 60, to see the number of countries that were represented that have now become Canadians.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. I think this is a very good bill for those two reasons, neither of which was in my notes.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Seeing none, does any other member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill 9

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the intent of the bill

is that it will improve the security and will improve and increase the accountability and the service delivery at the registries. As the registries hold lots of sensitive, private data, it is a necessity for the government to have strong, strong controls over registries. I have been asking questions, too, on the security of the personal information because the AG raised questions about the security of the information that the registries hold as well. With Alberta health care coming under the registries, they will be holding a lot more sensitive data about Albertans, and this bill will provide the government with strong controls over registries so that all of the information the registries hold won't fall into the wrong hands.

5:00

My concern has been that the registries have been private since 1993. It took a long time for us to come out to have a look at the registries. They have been holding sensitive data for a long time. My concern is, you know, so far I wonder how much information has ended up in the wrong hands. I hope for the best, that there's no private information that has ended up in the wrong hands.

With health care coming under the registries, they're going to do, I believe, 18 million transactions a year. I think it is a good idea to make the registries accountable, to make them secure. Some of my concerns have been addressed by the minister before. I think it will be a good bill which will increase the powers of accountability and the monitoring powers that the government is going to have over the registries and registry owners and who can be a registry owner. It will increase the regulatory powers of government over the registries as well.

I have some other issues, too, with the government. There will be an impact, you know. What will be the impact of these additional regulatory administrative burdens on the public service that registries provide? Will there be a time impact for registry agents? Will there be a financial impact for registry agents? Will the users of Service Alberta see an impact such as slower service or reduced options? Those are my concerns.

Overall I think it will be a good bill, and I'll support it. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure today to rise and start Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009, schedule 12. As discussed in second reading, the registry agent network has been successfully providing registry agent services since 1993. In that time period there have been substantial changes to technology and a growing awareness surrounding the protection of personal information. These changing times dictate that amendments must be made to the governing legislation to ensure that Albertans' satisfaction with and confidence in the quality of registry services continues to remain high.

In second reading, Mr. Chairman, the Member for Calgary-McCall raised a number of questions about these proposed amendments, and I will take this opportunity to address his concerns. His first question was with respect to the current functioning of the registry agent network, specifically whether there's a serious problem with the existing security of the registry agent system that these changes are meant to address. Registry agents in Alberta provide excellent service to Albertans and consistently receive high marks from their customers. The proposed changes to the act are intended to ensure that there are clear and up-to-date accountabilities and protections in place for the future. In recent years there have been rapid technological developments and increasing need for

information protection. The changes in the legislation will ensure that the registry network is well positioned to meet all these realities in the years ahead.

His second question dealt with the impact of these additional regulatory administrative burdens on the public service that registries provide and how much time it would take to make all those changes. The changes in legislation aren't expected to add any additional administrative burdens or significant changes in the way that registry agents conduct their business. In fact, the legislation will benefit registry agents by making expectations, accountabilities, reporting processes, and incentives clearer and easy to follow.

His remaining inquiries addressed the financial impact on the registry agents, specifically how much it will cost them to buy new equipment to get the new technology, along with the financial impact on the government, the ministry, taxpayers, and Albertans accessing registry services. At this time, Mr. Chairman, it's not expected that there will be any major financial impact on any registry agents, government, the ministry, taxpayers, or those who access registry services as a result of these legislative changes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise in support of this bill. Who knows? It happens every now and then. I suppose just in my current grumpy mood that I apparently have to sort of qualify my support with: the better thing to do, of course, would be to reverse the process or the decision to privatize these registries in the first place because, of course, we never agreed with that plan, and it has probably created a lot of problems which we're trying to fix now.

Having said that, I do appreciate that this proposed change in legislation is coming forward in an effort to deal with some of the problems that we've had in the past and is an effort to tighten up some of the rules and the regulations around some of the problems that we've had with the private registries.

Alberta First Registries in Edmonton was shut down in July '07 for improper storage and handling of government documents. A government spokesman at that time said that no information was inappropriately used; however, quote, the threat existed. End quote.

Elizabeth Avenue Registries was shut down in June 2006 after gang members in B.C. were found in possession of fake licences issued by that registry. The Edmonton police actually first raised concerns about that particular registry in 2000, and gang members were arrested in B.C. in September of 2005. It took from October '05 to June '06. The government apparently was trying to force the registry owner to sell the business. At the same time, members of the public filed numerous complaints about poor service and errors in documentation at the registry.

Then there was apparently another registry in Calgary where the owner was forced to sell his business after some employees had taken bribes in return for fake licences.

Clearly, there is an issue of enforcement with this line of work. Of course, registries have tremendous access to a great deal of personal information, which, were it to fall into the wrong hands, would be very damaging to the people whose information it was. That being the case, though, it is my understanding that these regulations will go some distance, anyway, to give more tools to the government to monitor private registry agents, to tighten up their rules, and to increase penalties for registries that break the terms of their licence.

Of course, all of that will have to go hand in hand with comprehensive enforcement and inspection and follow-up and all that kind

of stuff. No question that this does appear to be a moderate improvement of what is now a long-past, bad policy decision. But we're here now, so hopefully this will move us forward somewhat in order to at least protect the interests of Albertans in this particular area.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

5:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 9.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 19 Land Assembly Project Area Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. members for their comments during the debate of Bill 19. I believe this is very important legislation.

Now, while Bill 19 does not grant additional land acquisition powers to government, it will improve the process that was used to assemble land for the transportation corridors such as the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads.

Bill 19 introduces three important changes to the process that will ensure that Albertans are well informed and that the rights of landowners are respected. Government will be required to consult in advance with the public and landowners before any final decisions are made. Government will be required to begin negotiations to buy land as soon as the affected property owners are prepared to sell. Government must decide if a project area is approved within two years of initiating the formal consultations in order to create greater certainty for landowners. Mr. Speaker, this legislation is good news for Albertans.

I move third reading of Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to third reading of the Land Assembly Project Area Act, Bill 19. It clearly raised some important issues for landowners, for all Albertans and attempts, no doubt, to address some of our need in the province for better utilities and transportation corridors, a better framework for dealing with the public interests in the context of private land. If we are to have better planning for growth and development, these corridors will play a key role.

As we have said on this side for a number of hours on this very important bill, we find it difficult to support as a result of some of what we feel are far more restrictive conditions: a section on enforcement orders that seems to be far stricter than necessary, far more draconian in terms of individual landowners' rights and freedoms, and discouraging of individuals expressing and standing for what is a reasonable balance for them, and some sections, like 12(1), allowing an injunction by the government on the basis of suspicion of protest or action forbidden by one of the many regulatory powers in the bill. These are of real concern to us as they are to many Albertans and bring shades of Bill 46, as we've raised in the House previously, and some of the concerns that that raised.

It's understandable that from the government's point of view they want to move things quickly both in terms of land expropriation and this bill in particular. We are trying to speak on behalf of quite a sizable number of Albertans who are concerned that the bill, although a certain number of amendments have been made already, does not conform to the values and interests of most Albertans and how they define the public interest. The first thing that we see as important in terms of the public interest is that we be much more clear in defining what a public project constitutes, which seems to be a catch-all for almost anything the government wants to do.

I will at this time, then, after raising questions in this House around the need for further public discussion and debate and a referral to the committee, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, move that the motion for third reading of Bill 19, Land Assembly Project Area Act, be amended as follows: by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting "Bill 19, the Land Assembly Project Area Act, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence." I have the required copies here and will circulate them.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment to third reading of Bill 19 as proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, please proceed, hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, that we've raised considerable concern on behalf of Albertans here over the different sections of the debate. It's been clear that Albertans want to see a much more flexible, respectful, transparent, and public process before we move to enact this bill. There's significant anxiety and concern about inappropriate power, inappropriate abuse of power, and I think this could be significantly assuaged through referral to committee with public involvement and a real openness to making the kinds of concessions that we have been raising in this House repeatedly over the last few weeks.

I think it's not necessary to reiterate the many concerns that Albertans have raised and that we have raised on their behalf. I'll

take my seat and listen to some of the further discussions around this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak against the amendment proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. This bill has had a very thorough airing in this Chamber. In fact, in the last four years, since I have been elected to the House, I cannot remember too many bills that have been discussed at further length than this Bill 19. The minister and many of the MLAs in this Chamber have listened to the concerns of the Official Opposition and of the other members in the House. They've listened to the concerns of many of the rural landowners with respect to this bill. As a result of listening to those concerns, some changes and some accommodations have been made, which have improved the bill.

I would urge all hon. members to support me in defeating this amendment and having this bill go forward in third reading. It has received a lot of debate. It is a better bill now than when it came into the Chamber. I think it's time to move on and pass this bill on third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I certainly agree with the hon. colleague that spoke just ahead of me. We certainly have spent many, many, many hours, and yes, there were some amendments that came from the government side, surprisingly, that went through. Not surprisingly, again, there were many, many amendments that came from both the third party and the Official Opposition. Regardless of how many hours we've spent in here, we're still not hearing from the constituents that call us that say: oh, dandy, Andy; you've spent your time, and everything is wonderful. No, it's not.

5:20

One of the biggest concerns I hear, that actually is a huge concern to me, is that people don't trust the government. I think that that's a terrible thing to hear. To be able to disagree, to think that they're wrong, to say that they just think the government is wrong and to be able to come at it from that angle – but to say that they don't trust them I think is pretty scary when we hear this from citizens. So I really believe that this amendment is necessary.

I think this bill has to have further public input, further public discussion, and a chance for the government to really be able to make sure. This is huge, and it will affect many, many people, and it will affect them many, many years into the future. So let's make sure we get it right. Everyone out there may not be totally happy with it, but let's make sure that at least they're a lot happier because they felt they've been listened to, and in fact maybe there are further changes that should come. I for one certainly think there are. I think some of the amendments that were voted down were good amendments with good discussion around them. Of course, we know the numbers in the House dictate how those sorts of things go.

I really believe that this is a good thing. Let's get some more public input into it, and let's go back to citizens saying, "You know what? Okay. Fine. It's not too bad. I'll trust the government to do this," rather than saying, "I don't trust the government." That's pretty scary.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you. I rise to support the amendment; no great surprise. As has been mentioned several times, there has been a great, great deal of debate in the House with respect to this legislation. You know, it's interesting. That debate was generated through, in large part, the reaction of Albertans. As one member said, they've rarely seen a bill debated at that much length. Well, I can say that I've rarely seen a bill generate as much response and as much contact, certainly, with our offices and I'm sure with many others from people across the province. We know that that is the case. We know there are a lot of people who are deeply, deeply concerned about what this bill represents.

It's another one of those bills that, you know, when you talk about it sort of in the most high-level terms, in a very theoretical way, could potentially be somewhat compelling, the idea of essentially giving the government the ability to plan and to assemble land in a way that allows them to develop matters for, I guess the phrase is, the public good – I know it's not the public interest – in the future. In theory that's a great objective to pursue. The problem is: how do we do that? What is the process through which we will go? What are the details? Is the devil in the details? That, of course, is what we heard from Albertans to be the case, in many, many opinions.

I do appreciate that the minister did make some amendments to this legislation although I would suggest that the only amendment that was made that had any kind of notable effect was the decision to at least put a limit on the consultation period to two years. That particular amendment addressed a small problem, so that was notable and of some value. My recollection is that the remainder of those amendments were ultimately window dressing and window-dressingsque and really didn't address most of the concerns that had been raised by Albertans.

We continue to have significant concerns. We are concerned about the fact that only portions of enforcement orders can be appealed, and other portions of enforcement orders can't be appealed. We are concerned that once the land is designated as a project area, if the landowner chooses to stay on his land or her land, there is no compensation, no rent, no nothing for the restriction on the use of the land over that period of time. They're given a sell or stay option, and it may well be that the land in question may not ultimately be used for 15 years down the road even though it's designated as a project area. It may well be that the family wants to stay on that land for a whole variety of very important reasons, so they choose to stay there, but their use of the land is limited through it being a project area, and there's no mechanism for compensating them for that even if 15, 20 years down the road the government changes its mind and decides not to use that land. So that continues to be a very significant problem.

We talked as well about the really quite ham-fisted enforcement mechanisms that are given to government within this piece of legislation. We talked about, frankly, the way the legislation is written. As I said, people attending meetings that happen to include other people who have previously threatened to do something in breach of the act could well be subject to prosecution or subject to some type of enforcement action under this act. They could well be told that they're not allowed to attend the meeting. No one has ever really answered me to suggest why it is that that's an incorrect interpretation of the way the act currently reads. So it's truly problematic.

There are so many elements to the act that require more consultation. Although I give the minister credit for going out and meeting with a lot of people once the bill was introduced, I'm not sure if he intended to do that or if it sort of suddenly appeared on his agenda after the fact, sort of engaging in a damage control exercise. But I appreciate that he did travel to quite a lot of places to talk to people

about the bill. Unfortunately, at that point it really was more of an issue management exercise than a consultation exercise.

Unfortunately, the landowners themselves were not consulted prior to the bill coming into effect. Some groups were but not the landowner association, so that's a concern. That's why having this bill put over for six months, you know, would be a good thing. It allows for some genuine sober second thought. Rather than sort of a reactive damage control assessment of what is in the act, it allows for some reasoned, less pressured consultation and sober second thought, and I think that landowners throughout the province would appreciate efforts on the part of the government to engage in that kind of initiative.

There are, as I say, a number of concerns that we continue to have about this bill and that landowners continue to have about this bill. We, of course, asked the government to consider amending the bill to include the phrase "the public interest." Some people argued: well, what does that mean? Conversely, if it's in other pieces of legislation, why would it not be included in this one? What's the resistance to including it in this one? Again, ultimately there is just no limit on how long land can be under a project area order. It could be 50 years. We don't know. There's no mechanism for a person to seek compensation when the government cancels the order. The details of the consultation process are still left to regulation, and as we've talked about, the consultation process in this particular bill left a great deal to be desired. In leaving further consultation to regulation, you can be not at all surprised, I'm sure, that we are concerned with what that will look like, and again we would suggest that it would be beneficial to include the particulars of that consultation within the legislation itself.

5:30

The minister still has the power to select a one-time, one-off appeal panel, which is always concerning. As I said, an injunction can still be sought for someone who appears to be about to commit an offence. These proposed changes, basically, do not remedy the fact that landowners remain very, very concerned about this. There have simply not been enough safeguards put in place to either assure them or assure members certainly in this caucus that the legislation will be implemented and administered in a way that fairly balances the right of landowners against the right of the government to pursue a particular development in a way that ultimately most effectively represents the best interests of the public as a whole.

I strongly urge members in this Assembly to vote in favour of this amendment. As I said, we certainly will be. I have great hopes that, in fact, there will be a surprising little minirevolution across the way and that just a few people will think about doing that, but perhaps I'm being naive. I'm sure I am. Anyway, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:33 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Kang	Pastoor	Taylor
Notley	Swann	

Against the motion:

Anderson	Horne	Quest
Bhullar	Jablonski	Redford
Brown	Johnston	Rodney
Campbell	Klimchuk	Rogers
Cao	Leskiw	Sarich
Dallas	Liepert	Sherman
Denis	McQueen	VanderBurg
Fawcett	Mitzel	Vandermeer
Hancock	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Hayden	Olson	Zwozdesky

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 30
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[Motion on amendment lost]

The Speaker: Under the provisions of the precedents of our Assembly the next order of business, then, is a vote with respect to Bill 19.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

Bill 6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek it's my pleasure to move third reading of the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009.

I think the points in favour of this bill have been enunciated very loudly and clearly in this House during previous stages of the bill. I just want to add my personal support to that. On behalf of all members who are concerned about protecting children who are in these unfortunate circumstances, I would ask for your support as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would concur with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek that the points in favour have been amply articulated as far as this bill is concerned. I really rise just as much at the request of my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity but also on my own behalf to get on the record one more time the one point against this bill that we have a serious concern about. In all other respects I think we favour Bill 6.

The notion that you can confine someone who has an addiction and put them through detox, which you can put them through for 10 or 15 days, and then have them come out the other side, in quotes, cured, if you will, of their addiction: the evidence is pretty clear that that's a false notion. The member whose bill this is, the sponsor, in *Hansard* yesterday made it clear that the period of time that is being talked about in this bill is for detoxification and stabilization of these children, which is all well and good.

Certainly, I suppose, it is better than the alternative of doing nothing, but it's not yet good enough. The notion of, you know, the

child care workers, the people who are working with these addicted children magically finding AADAC counsellors or somebody else who knows how to deal with children with addictions and making sure every time that after the detox and stabilization period the kid is passed off to some counsellor who will finish the job I think needs a little more clarity and codification, if you will, than that, a little more certainty because we know that it just doesn't always go that smoothly. It takes a lot longer than 10 days or 15 days. It maybe doesn't take any more time than that to detox and to stabilize, but it takes a lot longer than 10 days or 15 days to rehab and come out the other end of rehab with a relatively good chance of not sliding back into your addiction.

In so many other ways this is a good bill, but that is still what's missing here in the process. It's a good enough bill that I'm going to vote in favour of it on third reading – there's no question about that – but with those concerns on the record. We need a piece of legislation here, whether it turns out to be the protection of children abusing drugs amendment act, fall 2009 or spring 2010 – I don't know – I believe, that deals with part two, which is rehab, and deals with it in a clear way so that we know that at the end of the 10- to 15-day period there is a place for that child who has kicked the most acute and critical aspects of their addiction to finish the healing process so that when they come out the other side, out of rehab, they're ready to rejoin society clean and sober and stay that way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

Bill 7

Public Health Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to move third reading of Bill 7, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2009.

I think it is very timely that we are passing this particular legislation at a time when public health relative to what is going on in the world today is at the forefront of ensuring that Albertans have a public health system that they can trust and rely on. I think this

legislation will set that in place for the future, so it's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 7.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like just a reiteration of a couple of things that I've already spoken to in this House and that I'd like on the record. One of the things that I think is very important is that the medical officer have complete freedom to be able to report to the public. I don't think that we should have any kind of political interference with what should always be medical decisions. I'm not sure that he should be consulting with the minister of health even if the minister of health was a doctor. I believe that he should consult with other medical consultants, come up with what he thinks is right, and be able to go directly to the people.

Having said that, I think that with the example of the swine flu, that we're going through right now, that is what the medical officer did do. He has been quite clear with the people in Alberta. He has said that our labs are ready, and in fact they have been doing testing right here in Alberta rather than having to wait to have it sent to Manitoba. So perhaps my words don't have quite the same weight that they may have had even a week ago; however, I still want it on the record that the medical officer truly must be able to be independent, make independent decisions that have not been politicized.

The Speaker: Others?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very good afternoon of outstanding progress on behalf of Albertans. On that note, since it's almost 6 o'clock, I would move that we, in fact, call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, April 30, 2009

Issue 33

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 30, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise to introduce to you and through you to members 34 visitors in the gallery from Killam public school. There are 28 students, and they are accompanied by their teachers – please forgive me if I mess up your names – Ms Karin Brussé-Paterson, Mrs. Janet Yarham and parents Mrs. Mavis Knodel, Mrs. Marilyn O'Brien, Dr. Tim Hanton, and Mr. Roger Rachid. It's a pleasure to have them here. I know that they're enjoying their time here in Edmonton, and I look forward to getting the opportunity to come and visit them in Killam, like I do with as many schools as possible, to talk to them about what we do here in the Legislature. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous pleasure for me today to rise to introduce a very good friend of mine, a very good friend of many people on this side of the House, Mr. Bill Smith. Mr. Bill Smith is a long-standing Calgarian. He used to be a firefighter. He made the wise decision later in his life to go back to school and become a lawyer. He is now a very respected member of the legal community in Calgary, and he is also vice-president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta. Bill and his wife, Mary, have four children, very tall children: Connor, Logan, Liam, and Alison. I'd like to ask all members to join me in offering him a very warm welcome this afternoon.

Mr. Cao: Mr. Speaker, I have an introduction today. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two individuals from the Cantos Music Foundation in Calgary. They are executive director Andrew Mosker and fund developer Jeni Piegrass. Cantos Music Foundation owns a world-class collection of keyboards and electronic instruments, and it offers musical tours and programs for Alberta children and seniors. I would like to ask Andrew and Jeni to rise and receive a traditional welcome from our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly another gentleman who has made some wise choices in his life, Mr. Tyler Shandro, who is sitting in the public gallery. Tyler is a lawyer with Walsh Wilkins Creighton in Calgary. He is a resident of Calgary-Buffalo although he grew up in Calgary-Fish

Creek. I'm particularly proud that he could join us today as he and his wife have been very occupied with their eight-month-old boy, Phineas. I'd ask that Tyler please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a group of 10 individuals who are visiting the Legislature today from Longmont, Colorado, which is about 45 minutes north of Denver. They're part of a home-school group led by Debbie Lukasiewicz and are in Alberta touring around, performing as the Luke Ham Sandwich Family Band. They have already toured the building today and are now looking forward to seeing government in action. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they all rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you two people. They're not lawyers. I'd ask them to rise as I mention their name. The first one is my new STEP student. She'll be working in the office. Her name is Bethany Long. She'll be taking care of my constituents this summer. The other one is my daughter Charlene, who is back home for the summer from Olds College, where she took design and marketing. You'll notice that she's wearing something that she designed, her jacket. I'd like you to give them both a warm welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Paving Health Pathways Strategy

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about an exciting new initiative by the government of Alberta that I believe is one of the first of its kind in Canada. It'll provide high school students in several communities the opportunity to sample health courses contained in Alberta Education's revised career and technology studies program.

This opportunity will be available in 10 communities, which will serve as pilot sites for Paving Health Pathways: A Health Services Strategy, which aligns with the government's mandate to build Alberta's skilled workforce and initiatives in the Minister of Education's mandate letter. This strategy is backed by a three-year, \$12 million funding commitment by the government. Under the revised program of studies the previous CTS strands have been replaced by a more deliberate and structured set of five clusters, including a health, recreation, and human resources cluster. Under the strategy students in these 10 pilot jurisdictions will have greater opportunity to explore the world of work, gain insight into possible health services careers, and work toward postsecondary education, all while still in high school.

Each pilot jurisdiction has determined its own course options and site location. Options include child care worker, health care aide, sports medicine, emergency responder, and licensed practical nurse. The revised CTS program of studies will be phased in starting this fall, with the health, recreation, and human resources cluster set for implementation in the fall of 2010. This initiative is a win-win for everyone. It opens doors for students to new career possibilities and may potentially increase the pool of qualified workers in Alberta's

health services field. It also fosters collaboration between K to 12, postsecondary, industry, and other community partners and helps ease the transition into postsecondary education.

I applaud the school jurisdictions that applied for these pilot projects, and I'd also like to congratulate the 10, including those in my constituency, for being selected to pilot this initiative. The Premier, the Minister of Education, and his department staff deserve our thanks for moving this important pilot project forward.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to seeing the results of this pilot project, and I hope that some day it will be available province-wide.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Oscar J. Lacombe

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Oscar Lacombe has made history in this province and has left a legacy that many aboriginal people are proud of. He has done this in so many ways, but more notable is his appointment as the first Métis Sergeant-at-Arms in this Assembly, from 1980 to 1993. He took this position seriously and showed this with the pride that he exhibited as he did his job. In fact, Mr. Lacombe was so respected in this position that on the day after his retirement, in January of 1993, government and opposition stood in unison to pass the motion that Oscar J. Lacombe receive the title of honorary Sergeant-at-Arms for life.

Oscar has had a distinguished career, spanning over 40 years; first, with the Canadian Armed Forces in 1949, serving in Korea, Japan, and Europe; with tours in Egypt, Cyprus, and the Middle East as a peacekeeper with the UN. Following his retirement from the military, for 12 years he worked as a bodyguard for then Premier of Alberta Hon. Peter Lougheed, something Oscar speaks about with pride.

Never one to back down from his heritage nor from his accomplishments, I believe the then Speaker of the House, David Carter, said it well: Mr. Lacombe has served his country, his province, the former Premier, and this Legislative Assembly with distinction. In his own right and as a representative of the Métis people Oscar has contributed to our province and country. Loyalty, dedication, and perseverance are some of the fine personal attributes that he possesses. But I believe that one of the greatest attributes that Oscar has is his Métis humour, which many of us who knew him could attest to. In fact, media types often dubbed him as having a salty humour and the strategic sense of a good soldier.

We will be celebrating Mr. Lacombe's 80 years of a remarkable life on Saturday. Still active, I am sure he will do the Métis jig with fervor and show up many of us younger people in the crowd.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of all of us here: Oscar Lacombe, our honorary Sergeant-at-Arms, happy birthday, and may you celebrate many more.

1:40 National Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mr. Hehr: This week is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, a time for all of us to consider real, life-affecting crimes on our neighbours and fellow citizens. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking of crime as something that happens to other people, but once you're the victim, everything changes. Whether you've been robbed, assaulted, or defrauded, crime leaves you feeling hurt, violated, and frightened. Often there is an erosion of trust, a loss of faith in humanity. Violent crimes are seen as more devastating, with long-term emotional and physical consequences. No one wants to be a victim of crime, and indeed we all feel sympathy and regret when we hear that an Albertan has been murdered or robbed or otherwise victimized.

Fortunately, many Albertans go further than sympathy. I'm grateful to those citizens who decide to serve as Block Parents, for those who sign up for Rural Crime Watch or who volunteer to help out with Crime Stoppers videos. Above all, I'm grateful to the social workers and police officers, who put everything on the line every day to help victims of crime and to prevent crime. These dedicated men and women are real heroes. They do more to ease the pain of victims of crime than we can ever know.

As elected representatives of the people of Alberta the members of this House should always keep their eyes and ears open for new ways to alleviate the pain and suffering caused by crime, just as we should be open to new strategies to stop crime cold.

On behalf of my colleagues on both sides of the House I want to express our condolences and best wishes to all Albertans who have been victimized by criminals.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Work Safe Alberta Student Video Contest

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the first annual Work Safe Alberta Student Video Contest winners gathered at a ceremony in Edmonton to receive their awards from the Minister of Employment and Immigration. I would like to congratulate the winning students on their creativity and hard work in producing videos to bring the attention of their peers to the importance of working in a healthy and safe manner.

First place was Brad Fleischer from Bert Church high school in Airdrie with his entry called *Mistakes and Regrets*. Second place went to Mr. Curtis Huisman and Mr. Jeff Oudman from W.R. Myers in Taber for their entry called *Promote Safe Work*. Third place went to Mr. Evyn Boudreau and Ms Jessie Seberg from The Third Academy in Lethbridge for their entry called *Work Smart Be Safe*.

By putting this kind of effort into keeping other young Albertans safe, they have shown that they are truly winners. I encourage Albertans to see these award-winning calls for safety online at www.employment.alberta.ca.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Government Accountability

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Openness and accountability in government are the foundations of a true democracy, yet we're seeing, at an alarming rate, bill after bill take power out of the hands of the Legislature and give it to the cabinet or minister, where decisions can be made behind closed doors. So-called consultations are not public, and there is no onus placed on the government to follow the advice it is given. Hand-picked friends of the government are placed on boards and make important decisions that have significant impact on all Albertans.

Increasingly, government ministers are refusing to answer questions from the public and the opposition, demanding instead that we use the FOIP process. When this is done, they often refuse to release the information asked for or render what they do provide worthless by striking out key passages. The FOIP legislation itself is designed to allow the government to hide information from the public. There are built-in loopholes, such as the so-called advice to the minister, that allow almost anything to be withheld. Such a clause is not the norm in other freedom of information legislation in other jurisdictions. Most recently the government withheld an

important report on mental health, based on the dubious assertion that it was advice to the minister.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are concerned about what this government is hiding. They wonder whether a government that is afraid of public debate can be trusted. They worry that this government is more concerned with the interests of its friends and the oil industry than it is with the things that ordinary Albertans need to care for their families.

The Alberta government has become the most secretive in Canada. That is not what Albertans want. That is not what Albertans voted for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to talk about gangs and the safe communities task force and the impact of both on a community in my constituency. As you know, in recent weeks the safe communities task force has been conducting meetings around the province, talking about gang suppression. Last week the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar and myself had the opportunity to sit in on one of those meetings. Now, even though we were at a meeting in Hobbema, I want to stress that this is not an issue that's unique to aboriginal communities. This is something that all Albertans in every community deal with. It touches all of us either in terms of property or in terms of a more personal, individual impact, impacts like fear, intimidation, injury, and even death.

I want to focus a little bit on victims in a personal way but gang members as victims of gangs. While gangs are in many ways thought of as kind of large, monolithic, faceless organizations, they're made up of individuals and for the most part young individuals, kids. We were, I think, somewhat shocked to hear how kids are being used by gangs as couriers, enforcers, prostitutes, and so on. One of the most shocking things is how kids have lost hope. They don't see themselves as living even into their 20s, and that makes for a very dangerous formula both for themselves and for their communities.

However, it was interesting to hear a policeman say that the person that one of these young people wants to speak to when they get arrested is their mum. So I think we have to keep that in mind, that we're dealing in large part with kids. It's time to take firm action on crime, but it has to be coupled with good parenting, respect, good role models, education, and jobs. We need hope. That's what I like about the safe communities task force and what they're doing, and led by the people in Hobbema, I think they're going to make a difference to the people in that community.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would request that the Government House Leader please provide the Assembly with the projected government business for the week commencing, Monday, May 4, a new month, with government business commencing Tuesday, the 5th of May.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, May 5, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we would anticipate dealing with Bill 20, Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009;

Bill 23, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 24, Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 26, Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act. In Committee of the Whole Bill 10, Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act; Bill 11, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 12, Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 13, Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 14, Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act; and Bill 16, Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009.

On Wednesday, May 6, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 27, Alberta Research and Innovation Act; Bill 28, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 29, Family Law Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 30, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 31, Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 34, Drug Program Act; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); and Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009; and in Committee of the Whole Bill 33, Fiscal Responsibility Act.

On Thursday, May 7, of course, we have scheduled Committee of Supply and the votes on the main estimates and, time permitting, second reading of Bill 34, Drug Program Act; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); and Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009; and as per the Order Paper.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Clerk will stop the clock. Before we proceed with Oral Question Period, there is a matter that arose yesterday in the House and which must be dealt with now. I'm going to invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to make comment.

Member's Apology

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, thank you for granting me this time to stand before the Assembly and say that I am sorry. I heckled yesterday during question period thoughtlessly, without any thought whatsoever that the words I used would be offensive. I just figured I was doing a little trash-talking with my heckling. Indeed, I was so insensitive to how my remark would be taken that I continued blithely along for the rest of the afternoon in here, thinking everything was fine, and it was only after we adjourned at 6 o'clock last night that I discovered how I had hurt and offended my colleagues on the benches opposite. That was never my intention. That never even entered my mind, and I am truly sorry for the offence and the pain that I have caused. It will not happen again.

1:50

The Speaker: The comment arose out of an exchange with the Premier. Mr. Premier, is that satisfactory to you?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to table four copies of a letter that I sent to the Leader of the Official Opposition. Please permit me to quote just the one paragraph.

As members of the Assembly we are afforded special privilege under the law in an effort to promote free speech and honest debate. That privilege cannot be taken for granted and requires a high standard of integrity. That is why party leaders need to demonstrate through actions and words their commitment to, and respect for, democratic ideals. Simply put, with leadership comes the burden of discipline.

I believe that our caucus as a whole will accept the apology from the hon. member.

The Speaker: We will now proceed with the Oral Question Period. The clock will now be set in motion. First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Enshrining parental rights in human rights legislation as Bill 44 proposes is either a deliberate attempt to undermine Alberta's public education system or a thoughtless, unintended consequence of social conservatism. Not only does this legislation guarantee a get out of class free card, but there's an expectation that the teachers stop, drop, and roll over the lesson to provide an immediate alternative learning experience for the objector. To the Premier: why has the majority of the Conservative caucus decreed that a minority tail wag its dogma at the expense of Alberta's public education system? Does a religious right make an Alberta education wrong?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education responded to the allegations yesterday, and I'll ask him to respond in the House.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what is being proposed in the human rights act merely puts into the human rights act something which is already in practice not only in Alberta but, I believe, in many places. Under the School Act a parent can exempt their children from religious study. Under the policies mandated by the Department of Education of the human sexuality education policy, schools are required to inform parents through letters or meetings when sensitive or human sexuality topics will be discussed in their child's class. Parents must be given the opportunity to request . . .

The Speaker: I appreciate that. This is the question period, not a time for debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are existing exemptions available to parents, including private schools, charter schools, home-schooling, and opt-out provisions currently within the School Act. What is the justification for allowing our universal public education system to be held hostage by the social conservatives in this Tory caucus?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, nothing of the sort is happening. Parents are always expected to have a strong role in the education of their children; in fact, parents are responsible for their children. At the beginning of every year schools have meet the teacher nights and open houses so that parents can be invited in and understand the curriculum that their children are being taught. There are specific areas where parents are required to be informed. One is with respect to teaching about human sexuality. Sex ed has always been the case; it's been a very sensitive subject. When it's taught, it's required that parents be informed, and they have the right to exempt their child. That happens now. Nothing will change.

Mr. Chase: Again to the Premier, or he can pass it off to the Education minister at his will. Don't students and teachers have the right to follow the publicly approved curriculum without the looming spectre of accusations of intolerance? Isn't that what a public school system is meant to be?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, sex education has always been something that is a family value, and we expect those family values to be maintained. Schools have a role in making sure students have appropriate information in accordance with the curriculum, and the curriculum is a public health curriculum when it comes to CALM, when it comes it comes to, I think, the junior high health program. In those cases, because sexual education is a sensitive issue and a family issue, parents are informed. They've always had the right to request that their child be exempted from sex education in school.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Income Support for Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs claimed a few weeks ago that the cancellation of the homeless and eviction prevention fund was merely an administrative change. However, on page 2 of the Alberta works directive circulated on March 24, it states:

Even though clients may receive less than their full shortfall or be put on a waiting list by the Housing Authority, the Income Support program cannot exceed its required shelter maximums.

To the minister: given that the government has been fully aware of the funding gaps since the inception of this administrative change, what has the minister done to address the gap?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I did indicate, hon. member, the change to the homeless eviction and prevention fund is administrative. What will be happening for people is that they will more clearly see that their rent support program will be with Housing and Urban Affairs, much as it is with all other Albertans that require subsidy with rent support.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue, though, is whether there is enough support there. Given that housing management bodies have wait-lists that can be up to two years, and in some cases, depending on the circumstances, even longer than that, will the minister explain how people will be able to pay the rent shortfall in this two-year-long interim?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The program will be under the direct-to-tenant rent supplement program. Rather than first-month rent and damage deposit only, it will be delivered on a 12-month basis, which is completely new for people that were previously under the HEP fund. That allows for, I think, greater financial peace of mind for people as they can undertake job retraining, employment counselling, or they can relocate to housing that's even more affordable for them in that time period. The rent shortfall benefit program and the other comments, you may speak to the minister of EI.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing from constituents all the time that it's not working out that way for them. So considering that as a result of these administration changes some

people will have to lose their homes before they can access programs and supports, will the minister explain how this new program is in line with the housing first model? It sounds more like a homelessness first strategy.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that people will not be losing their homes through our rent supplement program. In fact, as I indicated, we're supporting people for a 12-month period rather than what had previously been a very short time for them. Previously people were going through about 22 application processes. Every month they were doing that. This ensures stability for people. The HEP fund program, the rent supplement people were receiving, will continue for a 12-month period for those individuals. They don't need to requalify. It's actually a very good change.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, with the cancellation of the rent shortfall portion of the homeless and eviction prevention fund many people who were receiving income support are no longer able to pay for housing. Under income support a single adult only receives a core shelter benefit of \$323 per month. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: given that even the Salvation Army charges rent of \$525 per month, where exactly are income support recipients supposed to find housing for \$323 a month?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we do our best to help individuals find the proper accommodations, and those that need emergency help that are facing, say, emergency evictions or help for damage deposits, for instance, can apply directly to our ministry for that type of support. You'll recall that last fall we increased our budgets quite dramatically, and those increases are still in place. Our estimate for this year of \$473 million towards income support programs represents an increase of just about \$70 million from what we had last year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. People don't receive funding from your ministry until they are actually off the waiting list and at the front of the line. Can you tell us what they're supposed to do in the interim to receive funding to find a place to live?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm assuming that the member is still discussing the HEP fund for people that are receiving a rent shortfall benefit. Those individuals that are moving into our direct to tenant supplement program will not need to qualify. They are moving directly over administratively to this department. They are, hon. member. I don't know why you're shaking your head no. I know exactly what's happening with this program. I can tell you that people are moving over to our program. They will be assisted not for a one-month period but for a 12-month period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie indicated, this sounds more like a homelessness first plan than a plan to end homelessness. Why are we continuing to not support the people who need support the most?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can stand before this House with great confidence that there is not one jurisdiction in Canada that's doing as much to end homelessness as this province. Absolutely no one comes close to the millions of dollars invested. In fact, raised just yesterday in Members' Statements, a new idea: \$6 million for Habitat for Humanity, that will add another 67 homes across Alberta in various communities. That's over and above the hundreds of millions of dollars that are going into affordable housing. Again, no jurisdiction is coming close to the plan that we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was at the news conference yesterday when the Premier was asked if his new Bill 44 could be used to prevent children from learning about evolution in schools. The Premier told the media, and I quote: parents would have the opportunity to make that choice. Yesterday the Premier denied making that statement and accused me of using wrong information. He said it, and I can play the tape if members wish. My question is to the Premier: you said it to the media, so why not say it to the House? You've drafted a bill that means that children can be prohibited from learning about evolution. Admit it.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the bill is very explicit in what it says. The Minister of Education, again, referred to sections of the policy that's in place. This is nothing new in the province of Alberta. It's simply confirming the rights. Those rights will now be in our human rights legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's very different, and in this respect: not only does the government think it's okay for children to be opted out of studying evolution in the classroom; it puts the onus on teachers to enforce it. If they don't, they can be hauled in front of the Human Rights Commission. That is new. Why is this Premier planning to expose Alberta teachers to persecution for teaching evolution in schools?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from reality. Under the School Act, section 50(2): "Where a teacher or other person providing religious or patriotic instruction receives a written request signed by a parent of a student that the student be excluded from religious or patriotic instruction." That's in the School Act now. What Bill 44 basically says in section 11.1 is that when there's a course, educational program, or instructional materials that deal explicitly with religion, a student can be exempted from study. The School Act provides it now. It's now in the human rights act.

It's apparent that that's a parental right, to guide the course of education of their child, as we all know is a responsibility of parents. We have a public responsibility for public education. We have a strong curriculum in this province. What the hon. member is talking about is absolutely ludicrous.

Mr. Mason: Sure sounded like two completely different things to me, Mr. Speaker.

This government's so-called parents' rights policy exposes teachers to prosecution before the Human Rights Commission if they teach something a parent doesn't like. That's new. Teachers will be

looking over their shoulders and afraid of open discussions with their class. This Education minister knows it. I know he's been put up to protect the Premier today, but I don't think he believes it himself. Why won't you admit that this policy will stifle education and end up hurting Alberta children?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, nothing in this policy or this act is going to stifle education in this province. We have a very strong curriculum in this province. We have a very strong curriculum in sexual education. We have a very strong curriculum in health. We're constantly improving the education. What we're saying is that under the act that exists and under the policies that exist, parents have a right to exclude their students from sexual education and from religious education. Under the human rights act they'll have the same privilege.

The Speaker: To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. A lot of energy today; save it for the full debate on Bill 44, okay?

The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the World Health Organization raised the level of the influenza pandemic alert from phase 4 to phase 5. This phase means a pandemic is likely imminent. Confirmed cases are now being reported world-wide, including six cases in Alberta. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness: what measures are in place to protect Albertans from a pandemic?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that as of this morning we now have officially six cases of the influenza in Alberta. It should be pointed out, however, that all of the cases are mild in nature and are all either recovered or well on their way to recovery. We have a very extensive plan in place. It is being administered by our emergency operations centre. As of tomorrow Alberta Health Services will be part of that emergency operations centre, and in the event that the World Health Organization declares a pandemic, we also have a 100-page pandemic plan, which is available to all members on the website.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question, also to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what steps should individual Albertans be taking to help stop the spread of this infection?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think, first of all, Mr. Speaker, individual Albertans should go about their normal business doing what they do on a day-to-day basis. If someone travelled to Mexico and returned and feels as though they may have, in fact, some contact with this particular influenza, we have the Health Link line, the professionals monitoring the Health Link line, who will give the advice that the average Albertan would be seeking, but overall we should be doing what we normally do on a day-to-day basis in this province.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Education. We're hearing of school boards in this province that are cancelling trips for students. Is it necessary for parents and/or school boards to cancel planned trips at this time?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, from a public health perspective there's no reason to cancel field trips within the province or within the country. Obviously, if school trips are planned to an area or a gathering where there are confirmed laboratory cases, that should be a consideration. The deputy minister advised school boards on Tuesday to consider rescheduling student trips to Mexico and the affected areas of the United States until additional information is issued in the days ahead. I believe that's still good advice. There's no need for people to do wholesale cancellation of trips, but that decision is in the school boards' hands with respect to what's most appropriate for trips that their schools and their students are planning. What we've advised is that they should look very closely at cancelling trips to Mexico and clearly affected areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Secondary Ticket Sales

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Ontario Attorney General introduced amending legislation prohibiting secondary reselling of tickets between related sellers like Ticketmaster and TicketsNow and instituting a penalty of up to \$50,000. While other jurisdictions are acting to protect their citizens, this government seems content to sit back, monitor the situation, and let Albertans be gouged on tickets for AC/DC, Leonard Cohen, and Britney Spears. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why does the minister continue to allow our citizens to be ripped off?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm indeed aware of what the government in Ontario is doing. I think it's really important to note here that there are a number of cases across Canada. Of course, the federal commissioner has asked for an investigation as well. We need to look at all the answers and questions and make sure that what we do is right for Albertans and that it's enforceable and effective. So the fact that we are looking at what they are doing in Ontario is a step in the right direction.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. If this government is so aware of changing economic times for its own budget, why can't this administration understand that citizens get angry when a \$90 ticket turns into a \$300 ticket because there is no consumer protection for ticket reselling in this province?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what's at stake here is the power of the consumer. The consumer has the power to make choices that I can't comment on. On the other hand, it's important to note that the consumer is protected under the Fair Trading Act. To make sure that consumers know and that they have the information to make the best decisions, we are looking at this very closely. We are not going to propose something that's a solution overnight. This is a complex situation that we are looking at from all angles.

Ms Blakeman: Well, back to the same minister. Does the minister not understand that Ticketmaster is the sole ticket supplier? She makes a remark like: oh, the consumers can decide to purchase tickets somewhere else. No, they can't. When will the minister stop

monitoring the situation and introduce legislation like Ontario has prohibiting secondary ticket sales and instituting significant fines to deter this practice?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know in Service Alberta when I did my estimates, I made it very clear that any regulations or legislation that we introduce has to be the right legislation for Albertans. This is what this conversation is about. If we legislate something that's not effective and enforceable and has false expectations, that's not going to protect consumers either. That's why we are looking at what's happening across Canada and doing what's right for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2015 World University Games

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As all of my colleagues in the Legislature representing Edmonton constituencies will know, the coming weekend is a very important weekend for our city. An international sport delegation will be visiting Edmonton to view sport facilities and infrastructure for Edmonton's bid to host the 2015 Universiade summer games. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. What is the specific role of the delegation visiting Edmonton, and what will be happening with this weekend's site visit?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right: this is a very exciting weekend for the city of Edmonton. We've got five members from the International University Sports Federation that are arriving today. They're going to be looking over the city of Edmonton and their sports facilities. They're going to meet with the bid committee, with government officials. They're going to be looking at Edmonton to see whether they have a chance to win the university bid in 2015. I'm here to tell you that I think this city is going to do a great job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for her optimism on behalf of our city.

To the same minister: what is the expected economic impact of hosting the games both for the city of Edmonton and Alberta?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, Economic Development Edmonton is projecting that the economic impact for the province is about \$465 million, and for the city of Edmonton it's about \$301 million. It's important to remember that there are legacies that get left from games in improved infrastructure but also in the attention that will be paid to sport and high-performance sport and fitness in this province. Those are legacies you can't put a price tag on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Final supplementary question to the same minister. When does the minister expect the final decision will be made on Edmonton's bid? Specifically, what date can we expect to hear the good news?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, Edmonton is the final stop of these delegates. They've already been to Korea, and they've been to

Taiwan. We get the last kick at the can to show what a great job Edmonton can do. I have to say that the city of Edmonton has such a great track record when it comes to hosting international sporting events that I think they're going to be in a very, very strong position. The decision will be made in Brussels on May 22 and 23. Good luck to Edmonton. Let's show them what we can do.

Unified Family Court

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Justice has taken the initiative to improve maintenance enforcement collection by removing adversarial aspects surrounding recalculation. I applaud them for it. However, this government remains unwilling to commit to improvements flagged by the Graham report in 2003 to accomplish similar goals. Why is this Justice minister unwilling to commit to the creation of an integrated, single-forum court for Albertans facing a family breakdown?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what the hon. member is referring to is a unified family court. Those are magic words. In theory they should allow certain objectives to be achieved, the most important objective being to find alternatives to litigation to resolve family matters. In Alberta Justice we have a number of programs that have been championed by court administrators, by judges, and by people who are involved within the entire court system with respect to ADR mediation, ensuring that we have full disclosure of financial information and that we look to what is in the best interests of the children with respect to custody. We believe that we meet those objectives already.

Mr. Hehr: Well, that does sound great, but it's not quite a unified family court. Unified family courts have been endorsed by academics, legal practitioners, and litigants as ways to increase access to justice. Why do we continue to deny litigants a more appropriate forum and streamlined access to the courts for family disputes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I made it very clear that it's not a unified family court. We've made a decision, this government has made a decision that we're going to meet the objectives that we need to make. One of the things that we know is that there are always lots of academics and lots of lawyers that have opinions and endorse this or that. What we know is that we're going to serve Albertans, and we're doing it.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, are you, then, saying that your own expert task force back in 2003 was wrong and that a unified family court is no longer needed?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, that report included a number of pieces about what we needed to achieve for family law and family courts in this province. I think we're achieving those, and that's what we'll continue to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Public Transit Funding

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The announcement by the Premier of the extension of the northeast light rail transit line,

including the portion from Clareview to the Gorman Town Centre in my riding of Edmonton-Manning, was great news. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. What are the priority projects funded with regard to the announcement today?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, this was indeed a great news story for Edmonton today. The funding today will support three projects. One is extending the LRT line from Clareview to the Gorman Town Centre in the northwest, as the hon. member mentioned, the second involves lengthening station platforms to handle longer trains and increase system capacity, and the third involves building three park-and-ride locations and upgrading signals on the LRT to improve systems efficiency.

Mr. Sandhu: My first supplemental to the same minister. The federal government promoted this project as a stimulus project. What does the announcement mean for the Edmonton construction workers?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, great news also for the Edmonton construction workers. The \$300 million announced today will keep roughly 3,500 Alberta construction workers working. One of the priorities of this government is to keep people working in Alberta, so let's keep Albertans working.

Mr. Sandhu: My second supplemental: when can my constituents and other Edmontonians expect to see work begin on these projects, and when will the work be concluded so they can make use of an expanded public transit system?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, on the planning and design, I understand the city of Edmonton has that under way or is getting it under way soon. If all goes well, the city of Edmonton could see construction start early this summer. I don't have exact completion dates, but I encourage the member to contact the city of Edmonton on that because the city is in charge of these construction projects.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Community Initiatives Program

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday it was made known that after a meeting with the international development organizations the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit reinstated the international funding component into the community initiatives program. The right decision, but it does call into question the quality of the research or the reasoning that led to the cut in the first place. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why did the minister torment the international development community and make it jump through hoops by withdrawing the funding in the first place?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I certainly didn't torment anyone. We had a budget decision, and we said in response to the budget estimates that we had to look at taking a reduction of \$9 million in our budget, and what was the most effective way to be able to do that and to deliver the services to those organizations that we support? We thought that the Wild Rose Foundation could roll into the community initiatives program. We would find a way. We haven't made that commitment yet because I had committed that in 30 days we would deliver that. I said that it's our intention to

honour the funding for \$1.3 million to the international development fund. That's what I said, and we'll stick with that.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: well, given the change of mind that the minister has had, how can the Assembly, the voluntary sector, and indeed citizens in Alberta have faith that this is the minister's final answer?

Mr. Blackett: Well, because this minister, Mr. Speaker, has been pretty consistent. I said on budget day, I said in the budget estimates, I said in every interview from there forward that my intention is to be able to provide funding on the same criteria to those organizations, whether it's with respect to international development, whether it's with respect to the organizations that need funding on a nonmatching basis. Albertans believe strongly in helping one another and the less fortunate. Our not-for-profit sector does a fantastic job, and our government will stand behind them.

Ms Blakeman: Teeter-totter Tories.

Back to the same minister. Given that a month ago there was 37 and a half million dollars in Wild Rose and CIP and now a reduction of both the original cut and this set aside for the international funding, how are all of the original Wild Rose grant recipients plus the groups that usually compete for CIP money supposed to cope with a loss of almost a third in the total funding available to them?

Mr. Blackett: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite doesn't tell the truth. Our government through our department alone commits . . .

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blackett: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The statement is that in budget estimates I said that we have \$166 million that comes through our department to the sector – it is not just CIP; it was not just Wild Rose funding – \$20 million dollars from the community spirit donor program, new money introduced in 2008, \$80 million in enhanced tax credit, and also the community facility enhancement program at \$39 million.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, there was a comment made. I heard an apology, but I think it's very important to withdraw that comment as well.

Mr. Blackett: I withdraw that comment, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has proposed a human rights policy that prevents teachers from discussing issues a parent might deem distasteful on religious grounds without first giving notice to the parent and censoring the discussion in the meantime. The minister's defence was that the law isn't meant to be taken literally. He said, and I quote: if you took the thing literally and ran it on its ear, we'd have anarchy. Well, I do agree with that. To the minister: if you never

meant for this to be taken seriously, why are you trying to make it law and denying kids a balanced education?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has one of the best educations in the world for our children, and no child is being denied a balanced education. What we have in this province is an opportunity for parents and the public to have a joint interest in making sure that every Albertan child is educated. Parents have a very strong responsibility for the education of their children.

There are two areas in this province and in every other place that I know of that are particularly important to parents. Those have to do with their religious values and sexual education. It's long been the practice in this province and, I believe, in most other places that parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction and from sexual education. They're entitled to be advised when it's in the curriculum, and they're entitled to ask that their child be excluded.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm going to recognize you. You are also the House leader of your caucus. Would you put some mufflers on the person sitting to your right? Now, proceed, please.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I could have sworn that the Human Rights Commission was part of the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit's area.

As part of a class discussion on current events a young girl asked her teacher about the oppression of women in many parts of the world. This minister's new policy means that the teacher would have to uncomfortably change the subject and refuse to answer the question until notice had been given to certain parents. In effect, this policy prohibits educators from using teachable moments to explain to students the values we hold dear. Why has the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit proposed policy that allows a parent who believes in the subordination of women on religious grounds to interfere with a young girl learning about her democratic rights?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we engage in flights of fancy. What is there is an entrenchment of what's already in the School Act, the provisions that foster our curriculum. We are not telling teachers to do anything different than they've already done before. As the Minister of Education has eloquently stated, we are just putting into the human rights act something that is already there in the School Act. Teachers can respond to their students. They can have discussions. We are not creating the thought police. Please stop the misrepresentation of what we are actually doing. People are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] It's okay. I've already recognized – boy, we're going to have an exciting debate if this bill ever gets to the House.

The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The act is different from the policy.

Now, a bunch of kids surround another in the schoolyard, calling him something derogatory based on his sexual orientation. The teacher intervenes, telling the kids why people are completely equal regardless of sexual orientation. Under your policy he's just breached the human rights code. Why does your government want to prohibit this teacher from teaching human rights at the very time it's most needed?

Mr. Blackett: You know, again, we expect that Albertans will be reasonable. Parents are reasonable, and they have the ability to determine how their children are taught. We have protection. The Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act is to prevent discrimination. What you're talking about: discussions, conversations . . . [interjection] We're not turning anything back. I'll have the Minister of Education respond.

The Speaker: Okay. Okay. First of all, you're going to debate this through the chair. Okay? Number one. Number two, we're going to move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Southwest Anthony Henday Drive

Mr. Xiao: Yes. Mr. Speaker, many constituents continue to call our office inquiring about the completion of the Edmonton ring road, specifically the southwest section, where there are still traffic lights plugging up traffic at certain points of the day. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. With the construction of the Stony Plain Road interchange under way, when will your department begin work on the remaining three interchanges at Cameron Heights, Lessard Road, and Callingwood Road?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that we are very, very close to moving forward on all three of the remaining intersections. In fact, we've completed the design work on both the Lessard Road and Callingwood Road interchanges, and we've just held an open house this past week for the Cameron Heights interchange. We're not quite ready to announce the start of construction on these projects, but we're moving forward quickly, very quickly. I would tell the hon. member to stay tuned. It could come any time.

Mr. Xiao: I'm very happy to hear that.

Again to the Minister of Transportation: will the minister ensure that by the time the northwest section of the ring road is completed, there will not be any lights remaining to slow traffic down at any point on the southwest ring road?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, our Premier has stated many times that the goal of this government is to complete the Edmonton ring road by 2015. That includes the removal of all traffic lights so that the entire ring road will be free flowing. My department is working very, very hard to remove those traffic signals as quickly as we can, and if possible we will have them removed by 2011.

Mr. Xiao: My second supplemental to the same minister: can the minister tell me what is the total estimated cost of the Edmonton ring road once completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that to date my department has committed almost \$2.4 billion towards the construction of the ring road. That includes the cost of the southwest, the southeast, the northwest sections as well as the Stony Plain Road interchange. Next we'll have to complete the three interchanges in the southwest, a bridge across the North Saskatchewan River, about 10 kilometres of new roadway, and improvements along the northeast leg of the Henday. By the time it's done, it'll be a multibillion-dollar project.

Mr. Xiao: My last supplemental . . .

The Speaker: You've already had three.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:30 Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One hundred and thirty two Chinese temporary foreign workers in Fort McMurray were cheated out of 3 million plus dollars of their wages from April through July of 2007. A weakness in the Alberta Employment Standards Code prevents code violations going back further than six months from being investigated. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. How can the minister guarantee that the unpaid Chinese temporary foreign workers will receive their wages which they were cheated out of when we can only go back six months in violations of the Employment Standards Code?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated this past week, we have begun the process of verifying those individuals' identity and establishing the process for the distribution of unpaid earnings. The member is right in indicating that there is \$3.17 million for distribution that's available to these particular workers, and we'll continue to make every reasonable effort to make sure that they get their money back.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: of the 132 workers cheated out of their wages, how many hours per week did they work and at what rates?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I really cannot answer that particular question. I don't have those particular details. We know that they weren't paid their full amounts and that there is some money owing. Our staff have that particular file, and they have those particular details. I would be prepared, if the hon. member wishes, to get more details for him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I and Alberta workers and members of this House would appreciate it if that information could be tabled forthwith.

Along with that, to the hon. minister: were the Chinese temporary foreign workers in Fort McMurray who were cheated out of their wages in 2007 paid for their overtime? If so, how much of the \$3 million did they acquire through overtime rates?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, again, I cannot answer that particular question, those particular details. I'm sure that that information was made available as part of the investigation process to determine the earnings that were not paid. When we do look at earnings, it's the full complement of all of the earnings, including the overtime. Again, I don't have those details at my fingertips.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Federal Building Renovations

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been almost a year since the Minister of Infrastructure announced the redevelopment of

the federal building, which has been vacant since 1989. It doesn't appear that much progress has been made. My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Can the minister update Albertans on the progress of the federal building redevelopment project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to report that we are on schedule with the federal building, and it will be ready for occupancy at the end of 2011. Our construction manager and our design consultants are in place, and the design work has gone very well. The construction fencing – I'm sure all members have seen – is going up, and the excavation of the parking lot will begin very shortly. The interior demolition has gone very well, and we will be working on the restoration of the exterior of the building. In very early summer we'll get started with that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister assure Albertans that the historical significance of the federal building as an architectural landmark will remain once the redevelopment is complete?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it also would interest the members that the design team, in fact, includes historical resources professionals who are going to ensure that the heritage features of the building are preserved. There are a number of things we pay particular attention to: the restoration of the building exterior, the main lobby, the historic elements throughout. The stairwells, doors, and many other items have all been documented in their warehouse to be put back exactly in the right place to keep the historical significance of this building exactly what we want.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to hear that. My final question is to the same minister. It can be a challenge to make older buildings environmentally friendly and energy efficient. What is the minister doing to make sure that the federal building will be a green building while keeping its history intact?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, this is an area I take great joy in, the record of this government with respect to the environmentally friendly approach we take to our buildings and energy efficiency. We are targeting LEED gold on the federal building when completed with a green roof, high-performance mechanical systems, and landscaping that minimizes the irrigation needs that are required. We are recycling and reusing as much as we possibly can in the restoration of the building.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Marketing of Agricultural Products

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Time and again this government's agriculture policies benefit the small number of big players and discourage the large number of smaller players. The most recent

example is Bill 43, which has many of the province's cattle, pork, lamb, and potato producers angry. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Why is the minister ignoring the concerns presented by the producer commissions concerning Bill 43?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, Bill 43 is in front of the House as we speak today. I'm not ignoring anyone. I'm just moving forward to what we believe very much on this side of the House is freedom of choice.

Dr. Taft: Boy, I can tell you that producer commissions don't see it that way.

Again to the same minister: why is this minister, who says he's in favour of freedom of choice, imposing this new provision on producer marketing commissions instead of allowing them to exercise their democratic right under existing legislation and conduct a plebiscite allowing all producers to decide whether or not they wish to make check-offs refundable?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the member across the way doesn't understand how when you give people choice, that gives them the ultimate vote out there. They vote with their money. If their needs are not being met, they have the choice of pulling their hard-earned monies back.

Dr. Taft: How they vote with their money. That's a telling comment, Mr. Speaker.

This bill is about taking power from the hands of the many and concentrating it in the hands of the few. Bill 43 abandons the principle of one producer, one vote, and as the minister, I guess, is admitting, replaces it with a golden rule: he who has the gold makes the rules. Once again the big players who back the Premier's leadership campaign with secret donations rule the day. To the minister: will the minister admit that his intent with these changes is to take much power away from the small producers and their associations and concentrate it in the hands of giant feedlots and huge corporate producers?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the question is full of innuendo and misrepresentations. I don't know where the hon. member gets his facts. We on this side of the House have a mind of our own. We know where we want to go. If you think I'm being unduly influenced by one or two people, you're very mistaken, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Postsecondary Education Research Funding

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The doom and gloom associated with the global economic downturn is overshadowing some very strategic and significant investments that will strengthen Alberta's future economic position. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Mr. Minister, will recent investments position the Edmonton capital region as a first-rate centre for research and higher learning?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question because given the current economic times many have probably been wondering whether or not we're pulling in our horns, so to speak, on investments in our postsecondaries, but Edmonton is definitely a success

story as it relates to Campus Alberta. The postsecondary institutions are going to be receiving over a billion dollars in support in research funding and capital and operating expenses this year alone. We are certainly positioning ourselves in Campus Alberta with the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan and NAIT and even the Universiade games that were mentioned earlier today in question period. We're positioning Edmonton to be a leader not only in the province but also on the globe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. There's been a lot of discussion in this House and, certainly, throughout our province about our health care system. To the minister: how are research and technology advancements through our universities enhancing the quality of life for all Albertans?

2:40

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of endowments over the years. We've had a considerable amount of capital expenditure in health research. Obviously, we're currently working with the ministry of health on the strategic health research initiative, where we're going to be working with not only Bill 27, that's before this House, in terms of the framework to align and focus our research efforts but also to strategically build on the strengths that we have in the province. The Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research just announced \$25 million in funding for three new Alberta-based research teams that will be developing devices for brain and spinal cord regeneration and replacement for devices. Our biomedical services institution at the U of A . . .

The Speaker: You'll be able to get all this in the third question.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: how will these technological advancements enhance our next gen economy?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we've heard our Premier say on a number of occasions that the vision for this economy is the next generation economy, or the knowledge-based economy. We know that the commodity of the future, if you will, is going to be knowledge. To that end, our investments and the legislation that's before this House and all of the capital expenditure that we've put on the table, the \$1.2 billion across Campus Alberta over the next three years, including the \$400 million that is in our budget this year, is all zoned in to build on the strengths that we have not only in health research but in life sciences, in biomedical, as I mentioned, regenerative medicine, working with the new Health Services Board and in a number of other areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Energy Conservation

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our budget website, budget2009.ca, has received some very interesting questions for this government. Albertans want to know more about the spending priorities of the government. My questions are for the Minister of Energy. Jordan from Edmonton wants to know why this government isn't investing more in renewable energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, to be quite honest, Mr. Speaker, the situation is that the province of Alberta, in fact, has a very robust support system

for biofuels and alternate energy, one of the strongest support systems across Canada. We've got about \$239 million in a program to do exactly that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Fraser, also from Edmonton, wrote along the same lines. When are we going to use the money from oil and gas to prepare the next generation, the 21st century, for energy utilization?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the preparation of individuals in the next generation for energy consumption, I suppose, could be a long, long debate because in the next generation, if she's talking in the kind of time frame I hear her talking about, there's an entire range of, I think, new energy discoveries and new technology that will be employed by that point in time. Who knows? We might have fusion energy by that time. So we're not able to kind of condition people for that kind of energy at this point in time, but we certainly are able to condition them to the use of alternate energies that we know about today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Fraser follows up with a clear example. Why aren't we making the best solar panels in the world and selling those?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, wonderful question, and I'm glad to answer it by saying that at our nanotechnology institute we have the top researcher in solar panels on the globe. We were able to attract him. It's a wonderful success story, and I'd be more than happy to share that with the hon. member.

Mr. Knight: And manufactured in Edmonton.

Mr. Horner: And manufactured here.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today.

Today is the last day of April. We begin May tomorrow. As there are almost four pages covering the various days and the weeks that May is, I'll deal with that Monday and Tuesday. I just want to advise all members, however, that because of all the interest and the enthusiasm in the room today, the chair really wondered why there was so much energy in this room today. The chair actually looked over to see what days are coming up, and the chair runs across May 2, Saturday, World Naked Gardening Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move third reading of Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009.

The first proposed amendment to the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act will allow baccalaureate and applied studies

institutions the option of applying for the use of the term "university" in their name. The second amendment will clarify delegation powers for general faculties councils and faculty councils. These proposed amendments have been the subject of some very productive discussions in the House on what they will mean to further enhance the roles and mandates policy framework and the government's vision of Campus Alberta.

Campus Alberta and the six-sector model have enhanced and strengthened one of the best postsecondary systems in the world. We may not be the largest, Mr. Speaker, but we are recognized as one of the best by ensuring that diversity, independence, learner mobility, and teaching and research excellence are maintained within the system. These elements build upon the already strong foundation that has made Alberta's postsecondary system a shining example for other jurisdictions to follow and are critical to ensuring that Alberta realizes the goal of a knowledge economy for future generations.

The amendments will enable further sound decision-making to strategically and effectively invest public resources to address critical skilled labour shortages while at the same time creating a more educated society to respond to the growing need for knowledge workers.

Mr. Speaker, I am indeed very proud to be the mover of this legislation, and I encourage all members to support the passing of this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: On third reading of Bill 4, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on this particular issue. Postsecondary education is important to me on a number of accounts. First of all, the University of Alberta main campus and its south campus are in my constituency, as is the Jasper Place campus of MacEwan College. As well, I was a student at the university for a number of years, my wife taught in the school of nursing there for many years, and I must say that a number of members of my family – my mother, my stepfather, and two of my three sisters – are graduates of the University of Alberta as well. I will just simply finish off by saying that my father was very involved in the development of Canada's postsecondary education system in the period after World War II, in the 1950s and '60s in particular and into the '70s, and had quite a distinguished career in the postsecondary system. So this is an issue and a field that I feel very close to.

I also want to make the point that it's long been my view that the future of this province won't depend on oil and gas or forestry or tourism or high tech. None of us really know what it's going to depend on, but there's one thing we can be certain of, that whatever it is, it's going to require terrific education, and it's going to require terrific education right from preschool to the postgraduate level. That's why we have long argued in the Alberta Liberal caucus that the resources devoted to education need to be generous. They need to be thought of as an investment.

2:50

We long have argued that a portion of the nonrenewable resource revenues that fuel so much of this government's budget should be dedicated to establishing an uncapped endowment fund for postsecondary education so that the day comes, you know, the dream perhaps of all of us – I think I heard that in the voice of the Member for Calgary-Montrose, for example – when Alberta's postsecondary system really can take its place among the best in the world. One of the key ways to achieve that isn't just through this sort of legislation, but it's also through guaranteeing a stable and generous supply of

revenues to the universities and to the colleges and to the technical schools. This Bill 4, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009, feeds into what for me and what for our caucus is a larger view of the position of postsecondary education in Alberta's economic, social, and cultural future.

When I debated this bill during committee, I commended the general steps taken by this bill that will allow the expansion of the university system in Alberta. The obvious candidate to become a university first is Mount Royal College. There may well be other campuses that follow suit. There's certainly talk about Grant MacEwan College, now more commonly known as MacEwan College, becoming MacEwan university. I even saw an article in the *Edmonton Journal* proposing that its name be changed to the university of Edmonton. [Ms Calahasen sneezed] I hope the member from Slave Lake hasn't been to Mexico recently because she's sneezing and coughing vigorously. Anyway, this bill will facilitate the expansion and development of the university system in this province. [Ms Calahasen sneezed] [interjections] We're all having a hard time with the member from Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Lesser Slave Lake.

Dr. Taft: Lesser Slave Lake. Sorry.

I also want to make a couple of other points, Mr. Speaker, for the broader context of Bill 4. Hopefully by expanding the university system, we also expand and encourage more people to actually attend postsecondary education. Alberta has long had a relatively low high school completion rate, and there are many explanations for that, one of which has been the strong economy, another of which, in my view at least and in the view of some, is that in the downsizing of the 1990s, when we eliminated so many of the vocational high school programs, we actually cut out programs that drew many people into high school. Whatever the reason, we all agree that we need to increase the high school completion rate. I think we also need to expand the participation rate in postsecondary education, and I mean in everything from the technical schools to the diploma programs right through to, you know, the research in nanotechnology, that the minister of advanced education mentioned earlier today.

If this bill, by expanding the profile and extending the reach of the university system, actually draws more people of all ages and all backgrounds into Alberta's university system, I think that's a good step. It won't happen just by changing names. It won't happen just by changing designations. It's going to take a long-term strategy. It's going to take financial resources. It's going to take a social will. But a gesture like this bill will, I think, help to create the atmosphere for more people to think, "You know, it's not such a big deal to go to university. I could do that. I could go to Mount Royal university. I could go jump on the bus and attend MacEwan university" and to find that, lo and behold, three or four years later they come out with a degree, and they go on and contribute so much more not only to their lives and their families' lives but to society as a whole.

So I'm glad that this policy has been brought forward. The concepts in here are ones that we've long supported on this side of the House. It's definitely time that we see provisions in place for baccalaureate institutions to be able to achieve university status. It'll be interesting over the years to see how this plays out for other institutions like King's University College or Concordia College or those other institutions that are out there and perhaps will be drawn more clearly into the entire provincial university system as this develops.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that I think this is a step forward.

I hope it's part of a longer term, bigger vision to really help Alberta take its place as a champion of postsecondary education.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to stand to celebrate the progress we've made on this legislation. I've had the opportunity as an Albertan to attend a number of different postsecondary institutions in this province – the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, Mount Royal College – and also a number of institutions outside of the province. What I've found so important in all of those experiences is that the institutions in Alberta have not only provided a wonderful quality of education but also a unique experience in terms of the relationship that we as students are able to build with those institutions. I want to congratulate the minister who brought forward this legislation and the Member for Calgary-Montrose for understanding that regardless of the nature of an institution, the most important thing for those institutions is to serve their students.

In the work that I do and that our government does with respect to justice, when we talk about safe communities and the future of what the justice system would look like, one of the things that we celebrate is the fact that as we move forward to shift the kind of work that government does and communities do, we are now talking about different kinds of careers that people might have in the justice system. When I think back to when I went to law school, you pretty much became a lawyer, practised law however you might choose to do that, and participated in the system. Now when we talk to people about safe communities and what it means to be involved in helping people that need to make their way through the justice system, we talk about trained mediators, people who are trained in ADR, we talk about lawyers doing different kinds of work, we talk about paralegals that are involved in the system, and we talk about trying to understand that it's important for education in Alberta to meet the needs of the people that will require services in the future.

I look at programs across this province that are creating new ways to approach justice reform. There are programs such as the program at Mount Royal College. I know there are also programs in other parts of the province. Athabasca University has some. I just want to thank those institutions for looking forward in the way that the ministry has to try to find new ways to provide education to people that serves the needs of students now and will serve the needs of Albertans in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for question and comment.

Then we'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, as a graduate of the University of Calgary I recognize the value of an undergraduate education and the benefits that it provides and the opportunities that it provides to people throughout their careers and their lives in pursuing their goals and dreams.

Also, I do want to recognize the importance of our baccalaureate-granting and applied study colleges. They're doing a very superb job of teaching and educating our students, which cannot be overlooked, specifically when it comes to the economic benefit that our province derives from these institutions in providing the people with the skills and knowledge to be very competitive in the global market. One of the forces that we're very much subject to these days is globalization, and part of being competitive on that level is

ensuring that we have the skills and attitudes that are appropriate to get the work done that needs to be done in a manner that allows us to be competitive.

When I talk to both students as well as administrators at Mount Royal College, they're very happy to hear about this legislation not because it provides anything substantive to their organization, but it recognizes what they already do, and what they do is provide those opportunities for people to become very important members of our skilled workforce.

3:00

The second part is that it also recognizes what is happening at that university and provides future opportunities for those individuals that are attending that institution and getting their education there. Whether they want to move on to further graduate work or work in the workforce, it provides them with the recognition that they believe is equivalent to some of the other institutions that are delivering education, not just in this province but right across this country and across the world.

For those reasons I believe this legislation is important. I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology for bringing this forward and taking that one last step to ensure that recognition for this institution and the students that attend it is there so that they can further their endeavours in providing a workforce for us as well as allowing individuals to pursue their passions and their life's dreams through their education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, then.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to participate in third reading on the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009, as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. Certainly, our comments in third reading are similar or reflective of what has been stated earlier in previous stages of debate.

When we see this amendment to the Post-secondary Learning Act, we see that it is to allow institutions in the baccalaureate and applied studies institutions to – and, of course, this is all subject to the minister – be given the name “university.” The bill will also set out provisions which would allow the delegation of powers by a faculty council as the council sees fit.

Now, certainly Mount Royal College has had a consistent and sustained effort for some time to be named Mount Royal university, and this was part of the Alberta Liberal Party's platform in the last election. It's nice to see another policy from the Alberta Liberal Party being brought forward by this government and becoming eventually the law of the land.

Now, the President of the Treasury Board is sitting over there with a very satisfied smile on his face. Certainly, he must be very pleased, indeed, after this government, that he was a member of, was so reluctant to initiate or start a sustainability fund or a cookie jar for a rainy day. That was done. After a lot of discussion it was done, and certainly it's needed at the moment during this economic downturn. Hopefully, that cookie jar won't be emptied by the time the economic recovery resumes. I certainly hope not. This is another example of a good policy being adopted by this government.

Dr. Taft: Along with eliminating health premiums.

Mr. MacDonald: Eliminating health care premiums was another

one. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I'd forgotten about that. I appreciate that. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, I've been distracted again by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Speaker: If we'd stick to the debate on Bill 4, you probably wouldn't have been.

Mr. MacDonald: You're absolutely right. Yes.

Now, with Bill 4, as Mount Royal seeks acceptance into the AUCC and with the provisions set out in this bill to allow university status to institutions such as Mount Royal, students with degrees from these institutions will have greater recognition. I think it was the previous speaker, from Calgary-North Hill, who talked about this.

Certainly, when you look at the information that's provided by CAUS, you can see the economic contributions being made not only by each respective institution but by the graduates from those institutions. The more education you have, the easier it is to make a good living, and I don't think there is a member of this Assembly who doesn't realize these days that it's very difficult for some people, unfortunately, to make a living.

This bill, I'm convinced, will not only improve the education that Mount Royal College or university will provide, but also I think there are applications for this, which was mentioned by previous members, for a lot of other institutions across this fine province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The speakers list that I have has now been exhausted. Should I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to close?

Mr. Mason: I'll stand and say a few words, Mr. Speaker, on this. I rise to support this bill. I agree with some of the comments that have been made about the importance of education and encouraging people to engage in lifelong learning.

The community college system that was established in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s in this province I think has played a very important role in extending higher education much more broadly than had previously been the case. It has in a sense democratized education and made it available to many people who in earlier years would have been unable to obtain entrance to one of the universities for a variety of reasons: the number of spaces, costs, academic requirements, and so on.

That system has evolved over the years. Community colleges were given the ability to grant degrees, and that has been extended and extended. Now it's very much the policy that most students who embark on a bachelor's level education will do at least a couple of years at one of the colleges. There's been a real evolution in the development of colleges in this province.

Traditionally the distinction between a college and a university is that a university does research and a college does not. Both teach. But I think that that distinction is increasingly becoming obsolete. I know that both Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College here in Edmonton have their own reasons for seeking university status, and I agree that it can only help to enhance their stature, enhance the stature of the degrees which they grant. In general, I think it will benefit education and will benefit those who have received their education at those institutions. It will benefit those institutions and make them stronger.

Hopefully, they will be, like the existing universities and the rest of the postsecondary institutions, adequately funded so that they can accomplish the goal of ensuring that every Albertan who has the ability and the desire can have the education which they desire.

Meeting that goal is a very, very high priority for me and for our party, and I'm pleased to offer my support for this piece of legislation.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to close the debate?

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank all hon. members for their support of this legislation and call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

3:10

Bill 9

Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta on behalf of the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. Proceed.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first like to give a quick recap of Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009, that was introduced this session. Alberta is the only province in Canada that uses a registry agent model for delivery of registry services. This model allows Alberta to deliver the best registry services in the country. A full review was recently completed to ensure that the registry agent model continued to evolve and meet the changing needs of Albertans.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

In response to the full review, the changes included in this bill focus on strengthening the requirements of registry agent agreements, clarifying the Minister of Service Alberta's right to inspect registry agent businesses, enhancing the offence and penalty sections of the act, and granting the Minister of Service Alberta additional regulation-making powers that will further protect Albertans and support registry agent operations. These changes will ensure that Albertans continue to receive unparalleled service and that Albertans' confidence in the registry agent delivery model remains high.

I move third reading of Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is one of those small but important bills that will work its way through this Assembly. I think it's telling that the bill is here to address some concerns with the registry system. The Minister of Service Alberta said in her comments – and she said it unequivocally – that Alberta has the best registry system in the country. I don't know that that's true; I don't know that it's false. If the minister has some interprovincial or some national comparisons or something to support that statement, I'd love to see it.

I think it's important, as the minister said, to take steps to protect the integrity of the registry system and to protect public confidence in it. Otherwise, people lose confidence in the system, we'll begin to have problems, and more drastic steps will have to be taken.

The presentation of this bill raises the question: why is it necessary? What were the issues and problems that prompted this legislation to be drafted and brought forward as this particular bill? Were there serious problems already occurring in registries that this

is meant to address, or is this entirely in anticipation of problems that theoretically could arise in the future? You know, we don't want to overlegislate. We don't want to overcontrol. On the other hand, if there are real problems, we do need to address them.

One of the issues that immediately comes to mind when we begin talking about the security of private registries was a pretty dramatic series of incidents a few years ago in Edmonton where there were what I think were called crash and dash incidents at a handful of Edmonton registries, where people in off hours would crash vehicles through the front windows of the registry and steal special papers and documents and printers and other things that were required for producing secure documents. There was, of course, a lot of concern there. I haven't heard of that occurring recently, and I'm relieved by that, but I'm wondering if, you know, those kinds of problems maybe were partly what stimulated this bill coming forward. It is the case that registries, frankly, can hold a fair bit of quite sensitive personal data, so it is necessary for the government to have strong controls. I was going to say: in case the data gets into the wrong hands. But by then it's too late, I think, really, to prevent information from getting into the wrong hands.

I know this government is very keen on having a privately owned registry system. I'm always of the view that there are two sides to everything. I think there are benefits. There's no doubt that there are a lot of registry offices in all kinds of locations, and I know that when I go to them for my driver's licence or car registration or that sort of thing, other documents, usually, not always but usually, the service is good.

One of the concerns that has been brought up – and I hope the effect of this bill will be to address that – is the role of organized crime in registries. It's not that difficult to imagine that through a very clever organization of criminal activities, in fact, the ownership of a private registry falls into the hands of sophisticated organized criminals. I mean, we are talking in the world today about organized crime of remarkable sophistication. The Auditor General himself in his report last fall spoke about his staff being able to see, in his terms, the footprint of organized crime on the data of information in Alberta government computers.

I think we have to assume that organized criminals are out there and that they are working very hard. One of the ways that I've been concerned they could get access to all kinds of things we don't want them to have is by quietly taking ownership of what appears to be a perfectly legitimate registry business. Then – wow – think of the access to information and numbers. Insurance information, birth information, all that kind of thing could ever so quietly but ever so effectively be mined and stolen and repackaged in the hands of organized crime. So I think that's one of the risks of having privately owned registry agencies.

The people of Alberta and the people of Canada are rightly very alert to privacy issues. It's because people's private information is so valuable that we do need to be alert to that. To the extent that Bill 9 gives this minister more control over that information, frankly, I think it's a good idea.

When we look at the evolution of registries, I hope that this bill and this minister are trying to stay ahead of the game because registries are constantly evolving. They're sometimes taking on new services. If I'm right – and the minister might be able to nod her head yes or no – the day is perhaps now upon us or soon will be when Alberta health cards are issued through private registries. I believe that's the case. I'm getting a nod from the minister. Who would have thought that a few years ago?

We may even see private registries involved more and more in the marketing of auto insurance or home insurance so that you can go in and get your driver's licence and your pink card and all that stuff and

also buy your auto insurance. Well, there is a merging of functions there, with access to personal data, that has to be thought through and managed very carefully. I hope that the minister and her department are anticipating where registries may be in five or 10 years from now because if we make mistakes, it's almost impossible to reverse them. It's virtually impossible to turn back the clock on this kind of thing and repair losses or damage that has occurred.

We on this side of the Assembly have supported this bill. I repeat my request to the minister that if there is actually interprovincial research comparing different registry systems that puts Alberta at the top, I'd be very interested to see that.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

3:20

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009. When you look at what this bill is proposing to achieve by increasing the powers of accountability and monitoring that the government has over registries and registry owners and also increasing the government's regulatory powers over the registries, as I interpret this, I certainly think it's necessary.

I, too, would take exception to the comment from the hon. minister that this is the best registry system in the country. There have been issues in both Edmonton and in Calgary. There was an issue recently in the town of Athabasca, that I'm aware of, around the registries. You know, each and every one of us is entitled to our opinion, but in my view, after what happened in Calgary on Centre Street and what has happened here in Edmonton, I don't agree with that statement.

One would only have to look at the Auditor General's recommendations from previous years and from last year to see that there is a need for this bill. At the same time I think we should commend the minister and the hon. minister's department for bringing this forward and trying to tighten up some of the processes here. Certainly, issues of security, for instance, Mr. Speaker, were even brought up at Public Accounts earlier this week with Service Alberta and also during budget estimate debates, which I had the privilege of participating in, even if it was for a short time.

When we look at the intent of this bill, before we pass it on, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at some of the audit findings and recommendations of the Auditor General. Service Alberta provides many services to ministries, but specific to the registry system we can look at some of the recommendations that have been made. Now, the Auditor has flagged that Service Alberta should securely store void or cancelled documents with confidential information obtained through its vital statistics services. There was an issue around the secure storage of this, and I think Bill 9 will make a difference. Certainly, that recommendation will come into force much sooner.

We look, Mr. Speaker, at the system conversion process for the registry system and the Ministry of Service Alberta, and I'm going to quote directly from the Auditor's October 2008 report: "We recommend that the Ministry of Service Alberta document its review of actual system-conversion activities to ensure that they comply with the approved test plan for system conversion and data migration." Now, I'm not going to go into great detail here, but if members are interested, they can check this out on page 349. Those two examples are reason enough for all of us to consider passing Bill 9.

We look at other recommendations that the Auditor has made

around the registry system. I'm not talking here about performance measures, Mr. Speaker, but IT project management for registry renewal initiatives, security, the issues around security and who has access and who doesn't, security administration for shared services. All of this relates to Bill 9.

I think the minister's and the department's intentions are very good. We have to ensure that the Auditor's recommendations – and I'm so disappointed that some of the Auditor's recommendations have been just rejected by this government, certainly not by the Minister of Service Alberta. If the hon. minister, you know, could maybe grab the President of the Treasury Board by the elbow and suggest to the President of the Treasury Board that he abide by all of the recommendations from the Auditor General, just like the hon. Minister of Service Alberta has done with this legislative initiative, I think we'd have a much better province and a better government.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and speak to Bill 9, the Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009. I think it's quite clear that the government is taking steps in this bill to tighten up control over the private registries that exist in our province. A number of these steps, I think, are necessary and overdue. There are a number of aspects of the bill that are worthy of comment.

The agreement between the minister and the registry agent must specify the services the agent must provide and the location of the agent and that the agent shall not provide services other than those specified by the government and the agency cannot change ownership without the prior approval of the minister. That's particularly important, Mr. Speaker, an important control to prevent these registries from falling into hands of either criminals or people who do not have the best interests of the public and public information at heart.

It says that the minister may act to collect a debt that rises from a default by the agency. That's a necessary protection of the public. It also expands the regulation-making power of the minister in regard to the requirements people have to meet to be an agent, the use of information in a registry, and restrictions of access to the information following a contravention of regulations, the conduct of inspections and audits, and it deals with offences and deals with appeals by registry agents against contravention.

The bill goes on to establish the power to enter without warrant the business premises of a registry agent to inspect and audit the business, require the production of records, make copies of those, access the computer systems, and so on. It states that each registry and all information in the registry are the property of the government, which begs the question, Mr. Speaker, of why this is all necessary.

We could go back to the establishment of the new driver's licence for Alberta. Very, very expensive security features, two parts, were imposed, and this was after some incidents when driver's licences that were obtained through a registry were found in the possession of gang members. The costs of additional security features, the necessity for stronger regulation all really begs the question as to why this service is being provided through private enterprise as opposed to the government.

If you look at the history, Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of very serious problems that have been created by these private registries. Alberta First Registries of Edmonton was shut down in July 2007 for improper storage and handling of government

documents. A government spokesman at the time said that no information was inappropriately used; however, the threat existed, he said. Elizabeth Avenue Registries in Edmonton was shut down in June 2006 after gang members in B.C. were found in possession of fake licences issued by the registry. Edmonton police first raised concerns about that registry in 2000. The gang members were arrested in B.C. in September 2005, five years later. From October 2005 to June 2006 the government tried to force the registry owner to sell the business. Members of the public have filed numerous complaints about poor service and errors in documentation at the registry. Mr. Speaker, a Calgary registry owner was forced to sell his business after some employees had taken bribes in return for fake licences.

3:30

It seems to me that these tighter regulations are in part a response to a problem it has created by privatizing the registries and the handling of very important aspects of public information in our province. The bill gives the government more tools to handle problems that it has created through the ideological approach to the delivery of public services.

Our policy is to reverse the privatization of the registries as the best way to ensure the protection of public information and the public interest, Mr. Speaker. I think that back in 2006 we indicated that raids at that time on a registry in Edmonton provided evidence that the decision to privatize registries was a disaster. It was the second time that very serious breaches of privacy and confidentiality of extremely sensitive information of Albertans that was entrusted to privatized registries took place.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a world where identity theft and threats to national security go hand in hand. Breaches that we have repeatedly seen in these registries are unacceptable. I believe that Albertans also deserve assurance that their personal information is secure. Identity theft leading to fraud is a very serious and still growing problem. We're not dealing here with how long people stand in line or whether correspondence is answered – those are the kind of performance standards that the government likes to talk about – but the very serious questions of the fundamental security and privacy of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just indicate that we believe that registries demand close public scrutiny and government transparency, and that is best delivered when they are a part of government, not freewheeling privatization and ministerial complacency. We believe that ultimately what is needed is a decision to reverse the privatization of registries. We don't believe that anything short of that will actually fix the problem. Nevertheless, given that the government has shown no indication that it realizes the error of its ways but is moving to try and put a few more fingers into the dike here, we will support the bill.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this is not the fix that we need. We need a more fundamental fix, and that is to have Albertans' information carefully protected by government. That cannot ultimately be done through its dissemination through multiple small businesses located around the province. There is something just inherently difficult about protecting Albertans' information with that type of system that the government has established.

I just want to indicate that we will support the bill while at the same time recognizing that the real problem has not been addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. minister to close.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the excellent comments on Bill 9. I believe that many of the comments about security and technology and wanting to be ahead of the parade I agree with. The critical point and the integrity of these registry agents and the information they have is paramount to me as Minister of Service Alberta. This unique partnership with the registry agents across Alberta means that this new agreement is going to give them more information and better assistance to do their job and to help them.

One of the things that we have been working very hard on is smart cards, cards that when you go onto the system you can track the service that you're doing and move forward on that. I think that ultimately what we're doing here relates to the work that's gone on with Service Alberta with the whole approach to IT, information management and security. This bill is going to assist agents to be accountable and to be alerted to situations when they need to be looking at a matter. I believe that this agreement is going to set out a number of important changes in the areas of accountability, requirements to become a registry agent, processes for audits and investigations, and other areas of legislation.

I'd like to move this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

Bill 17

Securities Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009.

I've been pleased to hear a number of the comments from colleagues in this Assembly about this particular piece of legislation. Bill 17 continues the commitment made by Alberta and all other provinces and territories except Ontario to reform this country's securities regulatory system. Alberta has been leading this work since we signed the 2004 provincial-territorial memorandum of understanding regarding securities regulation.

I understand that the federal government prefers a single federal securities regulator. However, I would suggest that that is more a policy looking for a problem than it is anything else. I would counter by pointing out that the provinces have been responsible for regulating securities markets for decades and have done a very good job. The work we've done and will continue to do under the 2004 MOU has led to the successful creation and implementation of a passport system, which is national in scope. The passport system is ready now, Mr. Speaker, and eases the regulatory burden by allowing market participants to deal with one provincial regulator, comply with one set of harmonized laws, and have the regulator's decision or approval apply automatically in other participating jurisdictions.

To move to a national regulator could take years. The passport system is a practical model that provinces and territories other than Ontario have implemented to create a national regulatory regime that is flexible and responsive and which respects provincial authority, all without the need for structural change. Canada's securities regulatory system is already ranked by independent organizations as one of the best in the world.

Bill 17 builds on the work that Alberta has done since 2004 to further modernize, harmonize, and streamline Alberta's securities law. The majority of the debate on this bill focused around whether we want to see a federal securities regulator and what the federal government is doing. I just want to remind members of the House

that this bill is more to do with further harmonizing enforcement sanctions to improve disclosure to consumers and restore rescission rights to mutual fund investors until harmonized rules are adopted.

I would encourage all member to give their full support to third reading of Bill 17. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. 3:40

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed a phrase recurring in the comments we just heard from the Member for Calgary-North Hill. It was similar to a phrase from the comments from the Minister of Service Alberta, which was “best in the world”. So we have best in the world registries, and we have best in the world security systems. Again, I’m going to ask the member simply to show me. You know, you mentioned studies. Send them over at some point. Let me see who has ranked Alberta’s security system so well. I’d be interested in it. We are supporting this bill, so I’m not saying that out of any devious motive. I’d just like to see the basis.

Mr. Denis: Nothing devious, eh?

Dr. Taft: I would never be devious.

However, I think it’s worth noting, Mr. Speaker, that while most members in this Assembly will support this bill – I can’t speak for the third party – there are, in fact, serious, credible voices speaking for the other side. Over the years I’ve talked with any number of top business leaders, for example in Calgary, the hometown of the member who’s sponsoring this bill, who actually would prefer Canada to go with a single regulator. It seems to be the case that the larger the company and the more capacity they have to play on the national and international stage, the more likely they are to prefer a single national regulator.

I’ve heard people, big businesspeople and, I think, even New Democrats, propose what would be an interesting compromise. We know how close big business and the New Democrats can be at times. Another option would be to pursue a single national regulator but insist that its headquarters be in Alberta. That’s something that’s worth considering. Since I don’t think that’s going to happen, I think we need to look at this particular bill.

We have supported for any number of years, perhaps forever, the idea of an Alberta Securities Commission as opposed to a national one. There was a period when I was beginning to lose confidence in our support of that, and that was the session before the current Member for Calgary-North Hill was a member. That was about four years ago when there was some prolonged and extremely serious controversies in the Alberta Securities Commission that led to a real erosion of the credibility of the commission. It led to a number of firings, a major RCMP investigation, and although no charges were laid, there was no question that there were serious breaches of best practice.

We seem to have moved on from that as far as I can tell. The Alberta Securities Commission is more on track than it was four or five years ago, so that helped restore my faith in the model that Bill 17 represents, which is a passport system with many different provincial securities commissions.

One of the effects of Bill 17, I hope, is to increase interprovincial co-operation and integration. What we have here is a very interesting model of Confederation where provincial governments from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from Victoria to St. John’s, have come together and addressed some common concerns and discovered that we could work together as Canadians to make for a better security system and not sacrifice the regional interests either.

I think this is an interesting model. I do genuinely hope that one of the effects of a more effective passport system will be to increase the east-west integration of Canada. I think that we’re going to find – and we can see this already in the newspapers – more and more barriers coming up to easy north-south economic activity. The Americans now for almost the entire decade seem to be putting up one barrier after another, whether it’s cross-border movement of tourists or business, whether it’s all kinds of security issues, the no-fly list, and any number of trade issues: beef, wheat, softwood lumber, on and on. Now we may see the Americans erect other barriers concerning environmental issues.

We are at a moment where we need to be doing the kind of thing that Bill 17, I think, can facilitate, which is to strengthen our east-west ties and to make it easier for us to do business on a trans-Canadian basis because it may be becoming more and more difficult to do it on a north-south basis. I look forward to this bill being implemented, and like I’ve said, I think it’s a step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to just very briefly speak to Bill 17, the Securities Amendment Act, 2009. One of the problems that we have with a Constitution in our country – and this is not just confined to Canada; other countries have similar problems – is that it’s fairly difficult to amend. Constitutions usually are difficult to amend, and there’s very good reason why that’s so. Our system is based on division of powers. The provinces have some authority in certain areas; the federal government has authority in other areas. The problem when you establish a Constitution well over 100 years previous is that the world changes very quickly.

What has been changing the most quickly in the last decade or two is the degree to which the world is becoming unified in many respects, particularly in commerce, through the process of globalization. The type of regulatory system for securities that was appropriate in the late 1800s or through most of the 20th century has become rather obsolete, and we now have a situation where it’s not appropriate and does not adapt well to the modern realities of electronic transfer of information, money, and ownership.

We believe that the idea of provincial governments regulating securities is obsolete. It’s clearly an anachronism and is not appropriate for today’s world. We do see the need for a national regulator, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that it has to be the federal government. We need one, not 10, with a system of passports and a system of co-operation although it is a step perhaps in the right direction. Ultimately, we should be establishing a single regulator for Canada. What we propose is not to hand it over to the federal government but to organize one through mutual agreement between the provinces, and then create a national securities regulator in that way.

Calgary rivals Toronto as a financial centre in our country. It is a growing and very powerful city in respect to business and finance in our country and really is, in many respects, the financial capital of the new west, so it makes sense that the national regulator should be located in Calgary. I think we might have trouble with Ontario on that, but we’ll have trouble with Ontario even on the passport system and the agreement that has led to it.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that while the passport system is a move towards greater co-operation between the provinces, it does not go far enough, and our federal system needs to be more

responsive and quicker to change than it is. Having said that, I think that we have seen more movement in this regard in the last few years than we have for a long time, so that is not a bad thing.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we don't really have any difficulty with this legislation. But I just want to put on record that we need to move past this and towards a national regulator that is consistent with the realities of the 21st century, and we're not there yet.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, do you wish to close?

Mr. Fawcett: Just the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate March 12: Mr. Hehr]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping that there was going to be a response to some of the questions that my colleague the Official Opposition critic for the Solicitor General and Member for Calgary-Buffalo had put on the record.

This appears to be a very straightforward thing, but I've learned not to believe that things are as straightforward as they appear. What we have is one fairly narrow section being amended that basically is talking about insignia and markings and the use of the term "constable" or "special constable" in conjunction with permission from the minister. What's being added in is "without the prior approval of the Minister," and then it goes on to say that you can't use the term "constable" or "special constable" or use the insignia on symbols and uniforms and things like that.

According to the explanation that was given the last time this was debated, which was on March 12, a while ago, this was simply to save smaller centres from having to fall into line with requirements about presenting identically and having to change their insignia and things on their cars and the little tabs that are on their uniforms and what colour their stripes are and things like that.

But because the clause that's being amended also talks about the term "constable" or "special constable," it brought into play that whole discussion of terminology, which reminds me of another decision that government made that then government was looking at reversing some period of time later – that always causes me to say: well, why did you do it in the first place? – and that was the whole thing about front plates and not front plates. We used to have two plates on our vehicles in Alberta, front and back, and then the government changed that to only being on the back. There was then a bill that came forward – it must have been a private member's bill – that was going to replace the licence plates on the front of the vehicles again, and a debate ensued.

Really, the conundrum that is raised by this that I was hoping to get an answer about is the terminology again. We just aligned everybody not that long ago into calling all of our constables and special constables peace officers and tried to have everything line up

that way. Now, given the opening of this particular clause, it makes me question whether we aren't going backwards and trying to reinstate all of this terminology that we just took away. The levels of authority that we have now are Alberta peace officers levels 1 and 2 and community peace officers levels 1 and 2.

Now, I think that the concern around the insignia and the markings has probably more to do with that community level of policing. I have to say that as a citizen it's getting a bit bewildering. I move through a lot of public spaces, and there are so many different uniforms and colours of stripes on the sides of pants and different hats and different titles, and also with that, of course, comes different powers of what they're enforcing.

I know that having different levels of law enforcement where they're differently empowered has worked very well in some situations. I'm thinking specifically of what were going to be community peace officers, I think, that the city of Edmonton deployed onto Winston Churchill Square because of the vandalism and kind of petty crime that they were having there. They were very pleased with the result. These were uniformed officers that were basically making their presence known in an unobtrusive way in that particular public space, and it worked really well for them. But I have to admit that as a citizen I'm starting to get bewildered by all of these different levels.

If this act is merely to make sure that smaller centres do not have to change all of their insignia and yet another version of coloured stripe on their trousers and yet a different hat, I would be grateful, but if it's going further than that and starting to work around, again, how we are going to title these law enforcement personnel, then I have more questions around this because I liked the move to peace officer. I think that was important. The specificity of language is important in the work that we do here. "Peace officer" says something very different than "law enforcement officer," and that was the question I was hoping was going to get answered.

You know, frankly, this can be dealt with in Committee of the Whole, so I'm happy to allow others to speak. I will wait to get an answer in Committee of the Whole, and I can address my concerns again there.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security to close debate.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak in support of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009. Under the Peace Officer Act auxiliary police service uniforms, titles, and insignias must be changed from constable to peace officer effective May 1, 2009. Bill 16 proposes to amend this provision to permit the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security to exempt certain police services from this requirement.

Mr. Speaker, this would relieve the exempted constable employers of the cost to make the necessary name change on items such as uniforms and insignia. It's important to note that this amendment in no way impacts the duties and responsibilities of the affected constables and peace officers. In this regard the legislation could be considered a matter of technicality.

One of the unintended circumstances of the Peace Officer Act, Mr. Speaker, is that the legislation as it is would force police agencies who employ auxiliary police officers, such as the RCMP, to unnecessarily change up the uniforms for, in regard to the RCMP, 300 auxiliary members in the province of Alberta, and that's really what this amendment is intended to correct. The RCMP's auxiliary

program is a national program, and we don't want to set precedents here in Alberta.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, there are also a number of smaller communities, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed to, that we could look at if they're experiencing financial difficulties in regard to this particular legislation. For example, the Lacombe Police Service has, I believe, five members who they refer to as auxiliary members. Taber has two; Medicine Hat, approximately 19, I believe; the Blood tribe, maybe one or two; and Louis Bull, although it's now closed, did have one. So we could extend that to them, but primarily at this point in time I'm looking at the RCMP because it does create a bit of a problem for them.

4:00

I guess in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I ask for support for this legislation as it will provide flexibility and relief to law enforcement agencies who do not change their titles and insignias from constable to police officer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon. I'm pleased to rise in Committee of the Whole to discuss Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. This bill, of course, recognizes the changing needs of seniors and persons with disabilities and the growth and complexities of the supportive living sector in Alberta. Thoughtful discussion and dialogue has resulted in the drafting of a very good act. Where possible, this act is aligned with the complaint process in Bill 24, the Adult Guardianship and Trustee Act, which received royal assent last December. During second reading of Bill 10 some comments and concerns were raised, and I would like to now speak to these matters and describe how they are addressed in the bill.

One comment was that there appeared to be too much leeway in the regulation regarding what is exempt from the application of the act. Having the ability to exempt classes, types, or categories of supportive living accommodations will help keep the legislation current and enable quick responses to changes in types of supportive living accommodations. This also allows for the opportunity to test pilot projects and new ways of delivering supportive living accommodation that is not presently captured under this legislation without reopening the act. This type of exemption would allow and encourage innovation that could have a positive impact on the needs of residents and would cover areas in the rapidly changing supportive living sector that are not currently addressed in the legislation. An example would be a group home operator who has come up with new or better ways or has adapted their practices to meet or exceed existing accreditation requirements for accommodations that are better suited to meeting the needs of their residents.

Another concern that was raised is about the power a complaints

officer has in dealing with a complaint. The proposed act says in part that the complaints officer can accept the complaint but may not refer it to an investigator if the complaint is considered to be frivolous or vexatious such as a third-party complaint that cannot be verified or if the complaints officer has been able to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the person who made the complaint. While on the surface this seems to give the complaints officer a lot of flexibility, there is a safeguard also built in, which is that when the complaints officer decides not to refer a complaint, it is subject to appeal to the director.

The final question raised during second reading relates to the use of the words peace officer instead of police officer. The reason peace officer was used is because it is a more inclusive term than police officer and is commonly used throughout legislation. As outlined in section 2 of the Criminal Code, the term peace officer is defined as "a police officer, police constable, bailiff, constable, or other person employed for the preservation and maintenance of the public peace or for the service or execution of civil process."

Overall, this legislation is needed to help ensure compliance with provincial standards of accommodation and accommodation services in supportive living facilities and to place additional emphasis on areas that impact residents' security and safety. The new act gives the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports the authority to carry out a full range of activities associated with supportive living facilities, to monitor compliance to accommodation standards, and to investigate complaints of noncompliance with the legislation.

Bill 10 replaces existing legislation that needs to be updated to reflect the changing needs of Albertans. It addresses the licensing needs of today, it provides the flexibility to address the evolving nature of the supportive living sector, it reflects the changing needs of residents, and it will help ensure the safety and security of residents in supportive living facilities. This also allows them to stay close to family and friends, their support systems.

Bill 10 also supports the province's continuing care strategy, aging in the right place, which provides more options for seniors and persons with disabilities to remain in their communities when they can no longer live independently due to increased personal care needs. The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act is an important part of this province's commitment to assist those in need today while we prepare to support those in need in the future. It's about having legislation that reflects this government's priorities to promote strong and vibrant communities and to be there for our most vulnerable citizens.

I strongly urge you to support the passing of this important piece of legislation, Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I have to say that I am overall at this point glad to see the introduction of this legislation, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act.

Mr. MacDonald: Are you going to support it?

Ms Blakeman: Well, mostly I'm going to support it. I know my colleague is going to bring forward some amendments, and I will look forward to speaking to them.

We have a continuum of living facilities and care facilities for older and frail Albertans, but we have not necessarily, in my opinion, covered them adequately through legislation, and that includes legislation that would have monitoring and enforcement built in. When I was the seniors critic for the Official Opposition, I raised a number of those situations in the House.

One of the major concerns that we have continued to raise over the years is that not all kinds of accommodation were in fact covered by legislation, and with the legislation come standards and, one would hope, monitoring and enforcement. So I'm pleased to see that we are going to get more coverage, if I can put it that way. For example, the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, around which this act is clearly intended to fill in some of the gaps, did not deal with seniors' lodges. I think my memory is that it also didn't cover things like group homes and sometimes what are called day homes for seniors. So we have come to the point where there are a number of possibilities, options, and even choices for older seniors and medically frail individuals for their accommodations.

4:10

Now, the dividing point here is always the difference between a housing or an accommodation set-up and care. I think that line has been quite blurred in the past. As I say, there were a number of gaps where certain kinds of accommodation just simply weren't licensed or, in the case of group homes, for example, licensed like crazy by the municipalities but not covered under the legislation that was offered by the province.

This particular act, Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, is picking up quite a bit of what I think was missing before. I have some very good privately operated and owned supportive living opportunities in my constituency. I also have some group homes, and I think there are a variety of other ways for, you know, seniors that are living independently in their own rental apartments or condominiums but also those that are in care.

I know that the government has really had a push, a direction, to move away from automatically assuming that anyone that can't live in their own home anymore or doesn't want to is going to end up in long-term care. I think for some people that's true, but I have to admit that the Minister of Health and Wellness has scared the bejesus out of me on a couple of occasions when he has talked about this attitude of: well, almost no one needs to go into long-term care; almost everybody can be looked after through some sort of supportive living accommodation. As the adult child of someone who is in long-term care and is quite frail, the thought that there could be a new regime in place in which that individual in my family is – what's the phrase they use? – recoded or redesignated to be in a facility that offered any less care than what they are receiving today really is quite scary to me as an individual who is responsible, ultimately, legally for a family member's care because I don't know where I would find the time. I just honestly do not know how I could possibly offer any kind of reasonable additional care to my family member. Not possible.

I think what we're witnessing here is a struggle in this province over: how do we offer some choices that are reasonably priced to aging individuals and medically frail people? Also, I think it's important to reassure that care facilities will still be available. Of course, for the government the care facilities have a health care component in them. Therefore, we talk about copayments. We talk about residents who are copayers in their care, and they are assessed a fee for accommodation, room and board, essentially. Then the government is also putting money into the facility that is covering their medical care, so the nurses that dispense medication, et cetera.

You say: okay; well, if we looked at supportive living, then, how is that health care component covered? Does the individual now have to pay for this? Dispensing of medication: do they pay a fee of \$2 a day to have the nurse dispense the medication to them at the appropriate times in the appropriate dosages? I don't know, but it's the kind of thing that I would like to know both as an adult child of aging parents in this province but also as a legislator. I want to be able to reassure the number of seniors that live in my constituency,

one, that there will be options for them that are affordable but, two, that if they need care, they will be able to get it, and it won't be at a cost to their dignity.

What do I mean when I say that? Well, I think one of the hardest things to deal with when you have somebody that goes into a long-term care situation is that the first thing that happens is that it's made pretty clear to you that your family member or friend is going to end up being diapered because there simply is not time for staff, especially for people that are frail, to move them onto the toilet, stay there with them so they don't get hurt, move them back off the toilet. So it's made pretty clear as soon as you get into a care facility that they are going to end up wearing diapers, which is, as you can imagine for any of us in here, not a very pleasant experience to look forward to. None of us can imagine ourselves being in that situation.

It's a pretty fast comeuppance when you see people in care facilities who were important civil servants, who were school principals, who were professionals that are well respected and award recipients coming to terms with the fact that they're going to end up being diapered, not because they're incontinent but because there isn't enough staff time to, as they put it, toilet them appropriately. In fact, that's exactly what happens. That, I would argue, is not a medical component but because they're in a long-term care facility. That's what happens. I wish it didn't, but it certainly does.

I have not had as much time as I'd like to spend reviewing the back and forth of legislation and reviewing what groups in the stakeholder community have had to say about legislation. We are in Committee of the Whole. When I have finished my comments today, I'm going to recommend that we adjourn the debate so that we can return to it and spend some more time on it.

I think there's great possibility in this, but I also think that there are a number of concerns that need to be aired and discussed around what's being considered in this. Essentially, it's meant to cover the environmental aspects of what's in these supportive living accommodations, so food standards and building codes and requirements. It's more with the environmental part of it and not with the care standards so much, so it's really about the building and the services therein.

The one thing I have noticed is some concern from those that work in this sector that they be included in any future development of like legislation or, in fact, in the development of regulations and the implementation of this act. The one that I've dealt with in the past was the Alberta Senior Citizens' Housing Association. There's expertise there about, you know, how things work well and what things don't work so well.

I have concerns about the way this government is going around consultation. What I'm seeing is a very, very, very general, broad consultation before legislation, when people don't really understand the specifics. In fact, they don't have a bill to look at, so they really don't have the specifics of what they're discussing. It's being discussed on a much more broad, general basis. Then the legislation comes in, it's passed, and that's it. There's no more consultation on the specifics because, well, they were consulted broadly before, and that's it. That's all the consultation that's going to take place.

Having made those comments, I will move adjournment of Bill 10 and look forward to continued debate on this bill at another time. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amend

ments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and speak briefly with respect to Bill 14. Certainly, there have been a number of comments that are duly recorded in *Hansard* relative to this piece of legislation. Of course, I think the object is that CCS will at the end of the day transform our environment in Alberta and, certainly, have the added benefit of also transforming our economy to a degree.

The real question, I think, given the importance of energy to Alberta's future, is: what's next? I think what's next is addressed in carbon capture and storage. I think that we need to consider here a very delicate balance that we'll need to work with on a go-forward basis to continue developing our resources in the province of Alberta, and that is the balance between energy, environment, and the economy. It is quite a delicate balance.

4:20

The \$2 billion commitment that we've set out in Bill 14 would allow, we believe, for three to five fairly large projects that have a potential to sequester about 5 million tonnes of CO₂, and we would want to see that commencing by 2015. Just out of interest, that would be equivalent to removing something in the neighbourhood of a million cars off Alberta roads. I think that the Minister of Transportation, of course, would be quite pleased. We'd probably nearly put him out of work. [interjection] I see I have some attention there now.

Mr. Chairman, the coal-fired electricity potential with respect to CCS is probably a major win for the province of Alberta and an opportunity for us to market some of this technology globally. Certainly, we think that this has an opportunity to make a tremendous and significant impact on global emissions. I think it's fair to say that globally coal-fired generation is most certainly not just being stabilized, but it's on the increase in many developing countries, and an opportunity to find ways to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in those regions would certainly be welcome.

To look at what we're doing here at home and the opportunity that we see, the geography of Alberta is very, very well suited for carbon capture and storage. I think that from both the point of view of getting involved with enhanced oil recovery and the possibilities of enhanced gas recovery, we're very ideally situated with respect to carbon capture.

The other thing that I think is important is that the legislation, Bill 14, is a very good indicator that we are very motivated in the

province of Alberta to make this happen. There have been a lot of suggestions that carbon capture and storage is unproven and so on, but I have to tell you that we know from experience both in Canada, some in Alberta, and other places around the world that carbon capture and storage is a technology that is being used, that has been to quite a degree, I think, developed. What we're looking at here, of course, Mr. Chairman, is an opportunity to take that technology and move it up a level to major opportunities for CO₂ sequestration and make sure, again, that we can prove that on a larger scale, on a go-forward these types of projects are beneficial.

CO₂ emissions, of course, come from a variety of sources. There's been a lot of talk in coffee shops and some indication in the media that this whole thing is, you know, not going to come to anything because there's such a focus on oil sands relative to CCS. Again, I think that focus has been a bit misleading, Mr. Chairman. We think that there are other opportunities, and we know that at the end of the day what we have to recognize is that the consumption of hydrocarbons is where the largest emissions are.

So we'll work with this front-end piece, with CO₂, with the carbon capture and storage. We think that there's a great opportunity here for Alberta to move forward with respect to this particular piece of legislation.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, according to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 10 and Bill 14.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to April 30, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft., adjourned)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]

- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)

- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 36 Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft.)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft., adjourned)
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft.)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft., adjourned)
- 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft., adjourned)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)

- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft., adjourned)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, May 4, 2009

Issue 34

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 4, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask for renewed strength in the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of the Legislature. We ask for the protection of this Assembly and also the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great today to introduce to you and through you a group of energetic students from the Darwell school in Whitecourt-St. Anne. They're joined today by Michael Warner and Darla Topping. At this time I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to be able to introduce through you to members of this Assembly representatives of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. I know I'm probably going to get in trouble with you by saying this, but I'm going to say it anyway: these are the future Dr. Shermans of Alberta. I would ask that they stand as I introduce them. First, we have Dr. Matt McIsaac, Dr. Jillian Schwartz, and Dr. Diana Hong, who are representing the field of family medicine. From internal medicine are Dr. Seema Patel and Dr. Angeli Chopra. Representing plastic surgery are Dr. Peter Kwan and Dr. Adil Ladak. I would welcome as well Dr. Brock Debenham from radiation oncology, Dr. Riley Boyle from anaesthesia, Dr. Elsa Fiedrich from pediatrics, and Dr. Kenman Gan from ophthalmology. I would ask all of our guests to please stand and would ask members to give them the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is in trouble with me, but I take consolation in knowing that I'm not the only one.

The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly an exceptional group of Albertans, the Red Deer 18th Morrisroe Scout troop. They spent

some time with the Minister of Municipal Affairs this morning, and he said that they're very articulate, intelligent, and committed. They're from Red Deer, Mr. Speaker.

This week, as you might know, is Emergency Preparedness Week, and this Scout troop is one of the first troops in Alberta to earn their emergency preparedness badge. In order to earn this badge, one must be trained in CPR, know how to use a defibrillator, and know how to prepare a 72-hour emergency kit. They've also been asked to provide first aid service during the upcoming Olympic torch relay. Congratulations. I'm very proud of them. Joining us in the members' gallery are Derrick Richards, the group commissioner and troop counsellor; Susan Scott, vice-chair and troop counsellor; Bruce Schollie, the Akela, which is the pack leader; Cody Richards, Scout patrol leader; Monica Scott, Scout patrol leader; John Scott, a Scout; and Evan Schollie, also a Cub Scout. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, Scouting is a family affair. They're now standing in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest, Mr. Bradley Bostock. He is executive director of Child Find Alberta. Mr. Bostock is seated in the members' gallery and joins us today to kick off the Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign. The campaign runs through the month of May to build awareness regarding the issue of missing children and to educate about ways to safeguard children from predators. I'd like to ask our guest to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you eight members of the Youth Advisory Panel and their chaperone. These eight youths are from all across the province, as far north as Gift Lake and as far south as Claresholm. The Youth Advisory Panel plays a critical role in providing the Youth Secretariat, of which I'm proud to be the chair, with a youth perspective in helping identify important issues for youth in Alberta. They're all in Edmonton volunteering for the Speak Out conference, which is an opportunity for Alberta's youth to share their experiences and ideas about education. The individuals are Brittany Ashley, Zaheed Damani, Cassie Flett, John Hampson, Fardoussa Omar, Brandon Stewart, Amy Yaremcio, Jesse Peever, and Jena Bober. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce four guests from Red Deer regional hospital. They are Dr. Danga Sileikiene, Jennifer Hovila, Janice Kuefler, and Derek Harwood. They're concerned about the proposed centralization and privatization of gynecological cytology laboratory services, that directly affects the laboratories in Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and University of Alberta hospitals. Today they are here to witness the presentation of a petition which was signed by many engaged citizens in their community and from regions around the province. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to the members of this Assembly my constituent and friend Mr. Jan Buterman and his partner, who really wishes she was a constituent but who for the moment will have to be happy living in Germany, Ms Nicole Koegel. Jan truly lives on the front lines of my constituency and is a champion for the Spruce Avenue community. Indeed, from Mr. Buterman's house you can see three other constituencies, which makes me all that much prouder that he chose to live in Edmonton-Calder. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly. Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

H1N1 Virus in Central Alberta Pig Herd

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to underscore the importance of relying on fact, not fear, in the midst of the H1N1 influenza outbreak. Over the weekend it was announced that a pig herd in central Alberta had contracted the illness from a farm worker who had recently returned from Mexico. As a result some countries are now unnecessarily restricting imports of pig and pork products. In fact, both the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations agree that flu viruses do not affect the safety of pork and warned against imposing trade restrictions. The pigs, the family that lives on the farm, and the farm worker have recovered or are recovering.

1:40

I'd like to stress that there is no threat to our food supply. Pork and pork products are still safe to eat when handled properly and prepared properly, as always. You cannot catch the virus by consuming pork products.

I'd also like to commend the farmer who owns the pig herd. Due to the diligence of the farmer, his veterinarian, and the government's immediate response, precautionary measures were put in place to minimize the risk of the influenza spreading to other swine and people. The farm was quarantined, and no other farms are reporting herds with flu symptoms.

Agriculture and Rural Development has been working closely with industry and the federal government since the outbreak in people was reported, urging producers to be vigilant in their biosecurity measures, to restrict people from visiting their barns, especially if they've been to areas affected by the virus, and to report any suspected cases. Agriculture and Rural Development will continue to work with its counterparts to ensure that producers are vigilant in maintaining their biosecurity practices and support the efforts of the federal government to get borders reopened to Alberta pork.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

National Emergency Preparedness Week

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May 3 to 9 is National Emergency Preparedness Week, as noted earlier by the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Emergency Preparedness Week is a collaborative, province-wide effort that educates Albertans about their role in preparing for emergencies and disasters

as well as encourages communities to work together during a crisis. Safety is everybody's responsibility. Planning and preparing for emergencies can significantly reduce the impact of an emergency or disaster and help Albertans recover more quickly.

We should all be prepared to address our basic needs for at least the first 72 hours of an emergency. Mr. Speaker, there are three simple steps that will better prepare Albertans to face a range of emergencies. The first is to know and assess the risks in your community or region. The second is to make a plan that will help you and your family know what to do. The third is to prepare an emergency kit that includes water, nonperishable food, a flashlight, extra batteries, candles, matches, and a first aid kit.

Partnerships are essential to providing the foundation that builds safe and strong communities in Alberta. The government of Alberta through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency is committed to helping individuals and families become better prepared to face a wide range of emergencies any time, anywhere. By working together with municipalities, First Nations, emergency services, volunteer organizations, the media, and individuals, we can help ensure the safety of Albertans when disasters threaten our communities.

I encourage all Albertans to take a few moments to learn how they can keep themselves and their families safe. Being prepared is not reserved to one week out of the year but is a year-round activity. Are you prepared? You can check out our website at www.aema.alberta.ca or my Twitter site at JonoMLA.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Public Education Parable

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The class of '44, a public education parable. Welcome back, grade 6ers, to day two of your graduating class of '44. We had a very eventful first day back at school yesterday. As you recall, we had just begun the genesis of our discussion of ancient civilizations when the fire bell rang, causing our mass exodus from the school. Once outside, Caretaker Leviticus called out the names and numbers until Principal Deuteronomy and Vice-principal Joshua judged that it was safe for us to return. Ruth led the way back into the school while twins First and Second Samuel held the outside doors, and the First and Second members of the Kings family monitored the inside doors.

Once back in the classroom we reviewed the drill carefully, chronicling what had gone right and wrong. Ezra and Nehemiah remarked how calmly, regally Esther had led the way while Job patiently followed behind. David, the proverbial optimist, noted that he wasn't afraid because he knew the drill. His ecclesiastical enthusiasm prompted Solomon to wisely remark that, in his opinion, our first fire drill was a real success. Isaiah and Jeremiah lamented that they thought it was their turn to hold the doors. Ezekiel and Daniel praised Hosea for his quick response in alerting the fire department. Amos and Obadiah had very little to add to the discussion. Jonah wailed that Micah, Nahum, and Zechariah had been talking instead of exiting the school quickly and quietly. However, none of his classmates swallowed his story. In conclusion, Malachi prophesied that tomorrow would be a new day and that if we didn't do better in the future, we might suffer the consequences.

Students, please now open your history books to chapter 1, ancient Greek gods and goddesses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

National Hospice Palliative Care Week

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is National Hospice Palliative Care Week in Canada. This one-week campaign not only focuses on raising awareness of hospice palliative care but is also a week to celebrate, recognize, and share the achievements of hospice palliative care and its care providers.

Hospice palliative care is a type of health care that aids in relieving suffering and improving the quality for those living and dying. Hospice palliative care provides care to patients and their families living with or at risk of developing a life-threatening illness, regardless of diagnosis, prognosis, or age. Palliative health care providers help patients prepare for and manage the dying process by addressing the needs, hopes, and fears of patients and their families, Mr. Speaker, as well as helping Albertans cope with loss and grief during illness and after death during the bereavement period. These services could not be provided without the support of the Canadian Hospice Palliative Support Association and their belief that all Albertans should have access to quality end-of-life care.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in National Hospice Palliative Care Week and to help celebrate, recognize, and share in the achievements of the hospice palliative care and all its health professionals.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many members of this House are wearing green ribbons, like this one, to commemorate Child Find Alberta's Green Ribbon of Hope campaign. This campaign was started 18 years ago in response to the abduction and murder of Ontario student Kirsten French. It raises awareness about the issue of missing and abducted children. The ribbon symbolizes the hope for the safe return of these children to their families.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that affects people across our country. In 2007 over 60,000 children were reported missing. Thanks to Child Find Alberta people in our province faced with this horrifying ordeal have somewhere to turn for help. These dedicated volunteers spend countless hours educating adults and children on how to prevent abductions and work hand in hand with law enforcement and other agencies to locate missing children. I commend their dedication to keeping children and youth from being victims of abduction, abuse, exploitation, and trafficking and providing strength and support to parents during a most trying time in their life.

This green ribbon is a symbol of hope to the families of missing and abducted children across our nation. Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the Legislative Assembly to wear this green ribbon and draw awareness to this very important issue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Online Campground Reservations

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation in partnership with the Minister of Service Alberta launched Alberta's new online campground reservation service. The sheer volume online and over the phone shows that Albertans want this service. There were more than 145,000 hits to the website in the first few hours, and the call centre has handled thousands of phone calls.

Mr. Speaker, more than 10,000 campsites have been reserved online or through the Service Alberta call centre so far. It is

interesting also that on our opening day 23 per cent of the website hits were international, from the United States, France, and Switzerland. Despite the high volumes I'm told there are some spots available for this long weekend at Cypress Hills provincial park and other locations.

The new online service makes it easier for Albertans and visitors to make reservations in 25 popular provincial campgrounds. I know my constituents are pleased that two Bonnyville area campgrounds are included in the service this year: Moose Lake provincial park and Franchere Bay provincial recreation area, both great places to camp.

I understand there were some glitches, as you would expect with any new service. This is being monitored closely, and adjustments are being made where necessary.

Mr. Speaker, the government's investment in the SuperNet made it possible to take the Internet out to remote campground locations. I encourage all Albertans to use this service and to explore Alberta's beautiful campgrounds this summer.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The proposed changes to the human rights act are an embarrassment. They show this government to be out of touch with Albertans and the modern world. The Alberta Teachers' Association has clearly stated that they do not support the move. The Sheldon Chumir foundation similarly has stated that it's against this bill. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why did the minister not listen to these groups in drafting the legislation?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes you have to make tough choices. There were lots of recommendations that were made to our department on this proposed legislation: some that we agreed with, some that we didn't agree with, some that I brought to our caucus and we supported, and some that we decided we would not.

I remember the day the Sheldon Chumir foundation released their report, and I spoke in response to it. The Leader of the Opposition at that time said that he would work with us to make this bill a successful one. There were things that we all agreed on that we should have. The inclusion of sexual orientation into this particular legislation was one that we agreed on and others.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the minister let the right wing of his caucus prevail over his own knowledge and experience and the understanding of experts in this area?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's funny enough: the right wing of this caucus. Our caucus has had full, vigorous debate on this particular issue. The Sheldon Chumir foundation wanted us to take out publications and statements, and that, you know, from an organization I wouldn't deem to be right wing. But our caucus thought we wanted to make sure that we protected the rights and responsibilities of those visible minorities and those people that are new immigrants to this province. We can't agree with everything, and we shouldn't expect that the opposition would understand that.

Dr. Swann: Well, does this minister understand that the lack of consultation and thought on this policy has resulted in a bad bill that

will lead to children being excluded from public schools on important issues like evolution, women's rights as well as trivial issues like what the Flat Earth Society might be promoting, compromising our public education system?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I love to read fiction. I like to engage in it. But I would expect the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition would be able to read the bill, which clearly states: "subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation." Evolution is not explicitly religious. We're talking about the actual religion if you're talking about Catholicism, for instance, or Muslim. We're not talking about religious beliefs. We are not talking about religious content. In our school system in our curriculum as it stands today, there is very little in the way of a religious nature with respect to the subject matter.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the Sheldon Chumir foundation the parental opt-out clause in the proposed human rights legislation is a "slippery slope to administrative and legal chaos." Teachers must have the freedom to teach our children how to think critically and with an open mind without fear of the consequences of archaic laws being forced upon them by the government. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: will the minister confirm that section 11.1 of the proposed human rights legislation can be used to launch a human rights complaint against a teacher, principal, or school board?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that if a teacher follows the curriculum, which has very little that is of a contentious nature, and if the school board, as they have to do now under the School Act, notifies a parent of those contentious issues with respect to religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation, they have nothing to worry about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what consequences has the minister identified regarding a chill effect for teachers who will now avoid spontaneous discussion or teaching opportunities for fear they might run afoul of various student opt-out instructions?

Mr. Blackett: Well, thankfully, most of our teachers, Mr. Speaker, in this province are reasonable people. Parents are reasonable people. We do not determine what the discussion in a classroom is. The Minister of Education and the school board determine what the curriculum is. We cannot control nor is our intent to control any discussion that arises in a classroom. That is for the teacher to lead, and there is nothing here in this legislation that deters them from doing their job.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: how do those outside of Alberta determine a standard of education to assess Alberta students when a student can opt out of any class or teaching module in math, biology, history, social studies, or whatever when their parents object on religious grounds? [interjections] It's factual.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, hopefully those people outside of the province won't be listening to the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

I'll tell you this: if they read the legislation, "subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation," I don't know where math fits into that. I don't know where English fits into that. I don't know where social studies fits into most of that. I don't know what school you went to, but the one I went to never had to deal with that subject matter.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Bill 44 fails to differentiate between faith-based objections of conscience and opportunistic avoidance convenience, it expects classroom teachers to be able to do so. Parental rights devoid of parental responsibility are not simply unsound but unjust. If a parent considers a portion of Alberta's approved public curriculum objectionable, then the onus should be placed on the parent to seek out the publicly subsidized alternatives currently available, whether through home-, charter, or private schooling. To the minister: given that hours of instruction and preparation are contractually predetermined, where and how are objecting students going to be accommodated?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the same way that they're accommodated now. Under our current School Act and our mandated policies if parents object to religious instruction or instruction with respect to human sexuality, they are entitled to ask that their child be opted out of the class, either within the class or in another setting in the school, to take an alternate program at that time. It's the policy now. It's the policy that will continue.

Mr. Chase: How many additional teachers are you planning to hire to educate faith-based objectors within the universally accessible public system? How will their deployment be determined and their nonoffending curriculum developed?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is taking things to a ludicrous extreme. We currently have in this province an opportunity for parents who object to their child being included in instruction with respect to human sexuality to have those children opt out of that. We also have in the School Act, under section 50, an opportunity for parents to ask that their child be excluded from religious instruction. That's exactly the same process that will be continued. Parents will continue to be notified when those topics are up for discussion, and if they wish, they can exclude their children. It's not a problem now. It won't be a problem in the future.

Mr. Chase: Given that the mandate of public schools is to provide a first-rate education rather than a publicly subsidized sitting service, under what circumstances would a teacher or principal be empowered to call an objectionable parent to come pick up their child? In other words, how far backward are public schools under Bill 44 expected to bend over at the expense of all other children, their parents, and teachers to accommodate the wishes of faith-based objectors, whose rights to legitimate dissent are already covered under our existing School Act?

Mr. Hancock: The only thing objectionable that I found was in the way that question was formulated.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, in Alberta we have a very strong curriculum. We expect teachers to teach that curriculum. In that curriculum from time to time – for example, in the junior high health program or in the CALM program in high school – there are topics of human sexuality, which have always been issues of concern to

parents about how their children are instructed in those areas. Many parents want to know when that instruction happens, and they want to be able to know either that their child could be excluded from that or included. They're also allowed to talk to their child about values, about caring and loving relationships, and about the things around that. We would encourage parents to be involved in their children's education, to understand what's in the curriculum, and to have the opportunity, where they object, to have their child opt out.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit admitted that evolution was science, and he said that his government isn't arguing science. But, you know, despite all of the protestations from the other side about what they're not doing, we need to remember that it was the Premier himself who said that evolution would be optional if parents objected on religious grounds. This isn't a fantasy of the opposition; this comes from the Premier. So I want to ask the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: have you and the Premier figured out why you're contradicting each other and why the message . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:00

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know one thing: I don't pretend to speak for the Premier.

What we have here is the legislation. It's clearly stated, and I refer to that. In the legislation that I brought forward: "subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation." If you have a question about what the Premier said, I suggest that you ask the Premier that question.

Mr. Mason: Well, I keep trying, Mr. Speaker.

The minister knows that those things are subject to interpretation. It is the interpretation of what is religion that is at stake here. Will he stand up here and settle this matter once and for all and say that evolution is not considered religious grounds and will not be enforced by this government and make sure that the act is amended to say that?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know my English is pretty good, and I did say: "subject-matter that deals . . . with religion." Evolution is not religion. Neither is math. Neither is English. I can't be more clear than that. Ask a court, ask anyone to determine where evolution becomes religion.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's interpretation and his minister's interpretation are clearly very different things. The question is: will you change this act, will you amend it to ensure that there can be no misinterpretation such as we've seen from your Premier, your leader?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as he alluded to last week, we haven't even had debate in second reading on this particular motion. We'll have a lot of chances to discuss it, and we'll see what comes out of that. I tell you what. Speaking of misinformation, I'd love for the opposition members to actually stick to the facts, to what's actually written here, not their flights of fancy and their ideas of fiction.

The Speaker: Of course, the question period is not the place to debate bills – we have ample opportunity for that – nor is it a place to seek legal interpretations, but we all know that, too.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

H1N1 Virus in Central Alberta Pig Herd

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend it was announced that the H1N1 flu virus had been discovered in a herd of pigs in Alberta. Unfortunately, a small number of countries are now either banning or restricting the import of pigs and pork products. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Can you provide us with an update on this situation?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the worker and the family who live on the farm have recovered from the flu, but there have been unwarranted trade restrictions imposed. China has banned importing live pigs and pork from Alberta. Both the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations agree that flu viruses do not affect the safety of pork and warned against imposing trade restrictions. To date there have not been any reports of illness in other pigs. The virus was contained in this one instance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a livestock farmer myself – and I've raised pigs for many years, many thousands of them – I know that farmers have very strict biosecurity protocols to protect the health of their animals. My second question is for the same minister. Can you explain the biosecurity measures in the livestock industry and explain what they have in place?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the pork industry in particular in Alberta has very proactive biosecurity measures in place that are standard procedure. This includes limiting visitors to the barn, using visitor logs, showering before and after entry into the barn, wearing special clothing inside the barn, using closed herds, and sourcing stock from reputable sources. In addition, flu in pigs is a notifiable disease under the Animal Health Act here in Alberta. Any suspected cases must be reported to the chief provincial veterinarian within 24 hours.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That sounds good to me. I'm going to be sure to put some pork chops or ham steaks on my barbecue this weekend, and I'd encourage all Albertans to do the same.

My final question to the same minister: what traceability measures does Alberta have in place to ensure that this one isolated incident does not spread further?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, in January we introduced new traceability measures, which included premises identification. It's become significant that we've done this now. Livestock producers were required to register their premises, which includes providing their legal land description, species that are raised there, and the maximum capacity of the operation. In cases like this, information is critical. As soon as we are notified of a possible animal disease like H1N1 in a herd, we are able to check our system and find out immediately what other livestock operations are in the area, what

species of livestock are being raised, and the proximity of livestock to other farms' herds.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Wait-list Registry

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lack of answers on wait-list issues in the health system prompt further questions on how this government continues to fail Albertans in establishing the true status of wait-lists in the health care system. Albertans are being denied access to information that would tell them how quickly they can expect to be seen. This government has neglected to update the Alberta wait-list registry since September 2008. To the minister: why is the Alberta wait-list registry more than seven months out of date?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest: let's talk about something that is up to date. I would advise the Leader of the Opposition and all members of the House to go to the Alberta . . .

Mr. Mason: Just answer the question.

Mr. Liepert: I would advise the Leader of the Opposition and maybe the other fellow over there to go to the website of Alberta Health Services because on that website is their strategic plan for the next three years. It talks specifically about wait-lists and asks for public input.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's very good, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure public input is important, but when will the wait-lists, with an accurate picture of people's ability to access the system, be available?

Mr. Liepert: Well, if he'd check the website, Mr. Speaker, there are some specific numbers on there that I'm sure he'd find very interesting.

Dr. Swann: Will the minister comment on how we're going to be reporting the regional differences in access when the regions are gone?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we're all Albertans, and our objective through Alberta Health Services is to ensure that we provide equitable health care to all Albertans. Now, this particular member and this particular party may want to favour one particular region over the other in this province. We don't do that, and that's the way we're going to proceed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Spring Flooding

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year's late heavy snowfall in southwest Alberta has many of my constituents thinking about spring floods. Every year spring storms flood Alberta's many rivers, which are already high due to snowmelt. Every year that rain and runoff flows through Alberta and into Saskatchewan, sending much more water across the border than the 50 per cent we are obligated to send. My first question to the Minister of Environment: what is this government doing to help harness the excess rain and runoff in the spring for productive use in the late summer and fall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, mankind has been trying to harness Mother Nature for thousands of years. I think that we find time and time again that our feeble attempts are sometimes acknowledged as such by Mother Nature and by the environment. That being said, we do have a series of dams, reservoirs throughout the province that we maintain and try to have the level in those dams reflect the risk of flooding that is based upon the snowpack in the mountains, and we're managing them in the same way this spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Oldman dam, just north of Pincher Creek, not only captures spring runoff and rain but helps regulate the flow of water during high stream flow, protecting downstream communities from the devastating effects of flooding. The first supplemental to the same minister. The benefits of dams are obvious. When will this government commit to building more?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give a very simple and direct answer to that question – it would certainly make my life a lot easier – but unfortunately I can't. The cost related to dams is enormous, and there are consequences. It's undeniable that there are consequences, particularly downstream and to some degree the flooding that results behind the dam. We're constantly looking at opportunities to expand our dam infrastructure in the province, and we're also looking at some very promising opportunities for off-stream storage as well as traditional dams.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister. While dams help control spring flow, it still brings the risk of floods. What is the government doing to ensure that Albertans are aware of potential flood situations during the annual flood season?

2:10

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can speak from personal experience that the damage that can be caused by floods is enormous. However, Albertans can rest assured that we continue to do 24/7 monitoring of not only the level of water that's in the rivers but also the snowpack, the rate of melt, and related weather systems that move through. We issue advisories, warnings, and they are not only posted online, but when they're severe enough, we'll intercede and make sure that as many people as possible have advance warning of dangers that may result.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Beef Marketing

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The check-off for the sale of beef in Alberta is \$3 a head, and currently it's nonrefundable. However, this government is planning to make this check-off refundable without allowing producers to exercise their democratic right to hold a plebiscite on the matter. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Why is the minister not allowing producers to conduct a plebiscite and decide for themselves instead of imposing a decision on them?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, if just one producer wants to redirect his own money to support an association of his choice, he should have that freedom. It's not up to government to tell business owners what business association they must support with their own money. That gives these business owners the ability to choose for themselves. It certainly does. No matter the outcome, everyone loses in a plebiscite because it will only further divide a group that's already faced with the difficulty of trying to work together.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. I congratulate the minister on reading his notes so well.

My question to him now is: if allowing choice on this matter is so important, why was the minister so heavy handed in making ID mandatory for every beef producer in this province? Why the double standard, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, they're two very separate issues. The age verification is mandatory. We're trying to move beef, particularly, into offshore markets. I've heard out there loud and clear that if you don't do that, you're not going to be here. So we moved ahead, and there was compliance, I believe, of 83 per cent, and I think that probably now we've got the stock in position where we can move ahead with this. Will it give us a market advantage? Stay tuned. We'll see how that goes in the next little bit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. A pretty convenient double standard, Mr. Speaker.

As this minister knows, from Pollockville to Peace River Alberta's beef producers are angry, and they feel betrayed by this minister and this Premier. Will the minister tell the House which big feedlot operators are calling for this change, or is he afraid of revealing the names of the people who bankrolled this Premier's leadership campaign?

Mr. Groeneveld: Here we go with the innuendo again, Mr. Speaker. Why doesn't he come right out and say what he's thinking? I can guarantee this hon. member that there are a whole lot of people out there that want to have choice. It's not just feeders. There's a whole slug of them, so don't think that a 50-50 plebiscite is going to solve anything.

Domestic Worker Recruitment Fees

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, a number of my constituents have expressed concerns about domestic workers, specifically nannies, being charged fees by recruiting companies. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Are employment recruiting companies allowed to charge fees to domestic workers hoping to seek employment in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta wants to ensure that all workers in our province are treated with fairness and respect. Currently there is an exemption in Alberta's regulations that allows for nannies and domestic workers to be charged a fee by recruiting companies. As the Minister of Service Alberta I have the ability to change that exemption. I assure

you all today that I will be removing that exemption as soon as possible.

Mr. Benito: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's certainly good news.

My first supplemental is to the same minister. Is the fee that these agencies are charging domestic workers something new?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Actually, Mr. Speaker, this exemption for domestic workers has been in place for decades, but there is no good reason for it to exist. It is already illegal for an employment agency to charge a fee for helping a person find work in all other Alberta sectors. We will be communicating this change with the employment agencies, and we'll work closely with our counterparts in Employment and Immigration and the federal government to ensure that employees, workers, and the employment agencies are well aware of their rights and obligations.

Mr. Benito: My last supplemental is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. When will this exemption be removed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am taking the steps to ensure that the regulation will be amended by June 1, and the change will take effect three months after. I believe this is a change that's necessary in creating further equality in Alberta's labour market. As Minister of Service Alberta I became aware of the situation when I first was appointed last year, and it's time to make sure it gets done.

Caribou Management

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, a recent federal report has noted that half of Canada's boreal caribou herds are in decline and could die off unless their habitat is better protected. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: despite the caribou recovery plan having been in existence for approximately four years, why does the caribou population continue to be in critical danger?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Woodland caribou have been in decline across all of Canada, the provinces and the territories, including Alberta, for the last century. In the recent federal report referenced by the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo, the data on Alberta, in fact, stood out precisely because we do the best job of all the provinces in actually tracking our caribou, having previous numbers and current numbers because we have a caribou recovery plan.

Mr. Hehr: Well, congratulations on the tracking of the numbers. Given that the province admitted last year that the land northwest of Edmonton and set aside for caribou protection was still subject to significant industrial development, why has greater action not been taken to protect these critical habitats?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we are taking extensive and innovative actions to protect the habitat and to look after our sustainable caribou population. Again, the opposition likes to make it sound like you do one thing at a time in this province. The fact is that in most of northern Alberta, in addition to wildlife issues, you have forestry issues, oil and gas issues, native issues, and so forth. You have to strike a balance, and that's exactly what we're doing. The success

of our integrated land management plan, which reduces the footprint of industry, and co-operation between forestry and oil and gas exploration has made a significant improvement in protecting caribou habitat.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I like to hear of all these wonderful things. Last week I was asking about the grizzlies, which appear to be in decline. This week I ask about the caribou, that continue to be in decline. Why, with all these efforts, are things continuing to decline? What are we going to do specifically in the interim between now and the land-use framework to protect these populations of animals that remain here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council, which deals with the northeastern part of northern Alberta, will be moving forward on its advice. Part of their agenda, part of their guidance document is to look at new protected areas. I've seen the guidance documents, and I can predict with some confidence that there will be significant new protection for wildlife and forest in the northeast.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Parental Choice in Education (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's attempt to water down human rights under the guise of curriculum control has created a firestorm of controversy. Once again a lack of foresight has embarrassed our province. It's ridiculous to think that the teaching of evolution would ever be considered a violation of human rights, yet that's exactly what your plan will likely be interpreted to say. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why won't you clarify the issue right now and commit to removing any threat to teachers from your proposed changes to our human rights scheme?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to agree with the hon. member that it's ridiculous to believe that evolution as part of our curriculum would be something that would be challenged.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the School Act does not say that people can remove children from instruction on the equality of people from different races or genders. The minister is finally adding sexual orientation to the code, but, at the same time, he's allowing people to remove children from instruction on the equality of people with different sexual orientation. Does the minister think that parents should have the right to remove children from instruction about the equality of people from different races or genders? If not, why is he treating the GBLT community differently and creating a second tier of human rights in our province?

2:20

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the opposition is all over the map, like, you know, the subject matter that deals explicitly with religion. I don't know what half of what she says has to do with this particular piece. We as a caucus, as a government strongly believe in human rights. We believe in family. We believe in a lot of things. We believe that Bill 44, when we get to actually debate it, will show exactly how we have looked at the best interests of Albertans and

each and every group and will represent them to the best of our ability.

Ms Notley: Well, I suspect that the minister had trouble understanding the question because he doesn't understand the issue. Your proposed policy will clearly allow children to be removed from classes which discuss sexual orientation. Presumably, that includes where a teacher instructs that sexual orientation is a protected equality right under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Why is the minister supporting a plan to limit the ability of teachers to talk about our human rights code to our Alberta children?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is saying that, you know, the provisions are already given to our parents in the School Act. We will continue to do that. With respect to sexual orientation, they have that provision to opt out now. They will have that provision going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Legislation

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are fears among seniors that the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act will allow for their rights to be taken away arbitrarily without their consideration or without the assistance of legal representation. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Could you please inform this House about the real facts?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I too have heard these misconceptions. I stand before you and all members of this Assembly to assure you that these claims are wrong. In fact, quite the opposite is true. I am more than willing to go on record and say that the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act is good legislation. It provides more choices and more safeguards for Albertans who need help making decisions. The act is designed to respect an Albertan's right to make decisions for as long as possible and maintain their dignity in the process. It's a big improvement over the 30-year-old Dependent Adults Act legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have told me that under the new act capacity assessors can enter seniors' homes to make determinations about their mental capacity without their consent. Again to the same minister: can you please explain the safeguards provided to individuals under the AGTA?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, first let me clarify that under the new AGTA adults are presumed capable unless determined otherwise by proper assessments. Any adult can refuse a capacity assessment, in which case the assessor will leave. Also, under the new act if anyone applies to the court to be a private guardian, the adult will be notified and given copies of all the documentation. The adult also has the right to legal representation. Seniors and vulnerable adults are more protected than ever under the new AGTA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement to the same minister: since this is new legislation, what are you doing to help our constituents understand it better?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, my ministry staff are currently conducting information sessions on the new AGTA in communities across the province. We've been running local ads to announce these meetings, and a list of all the sessions is posted on my ministry's website. I encourage anyone who has questions about the AGTA to attend one of these sessions or to contact the office of the public guardian.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge East, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Emergency Preparedness

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Emergency Preparedness Week. Grass and brush fires outside of Edmonton, flood season around the corner, and the threat of H1N1 pandemic have all heightened Albertans' awareness of emergency preparedness. One of the initiatives that appears to have fallen off the public radar is the interdisciplinary institute for emergency preparedness that was part of last year's business plan. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In 2008 the minister was committed to establishing the safety, security, and environmental institute. Given that the institute's funding was supposedly in place last year . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the institute is being worked on. We are having discussions, and the progress is coming forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll be just a tad more specific. How much money has been spent, what is the timeline for completion, and has this been budgeted for next year?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, it is in our budget with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. We hope that our progress this year will bring forward the good work that the agency could do. I would say that it's in our budget year.

Ms Pastoor: Given that the proposed fiscal sustainability act will take away the \$2.5 billion security blanket for disaster recovery, what is the minister's plan B if there are no funds left to deal with forest fires, floods, and other disasters, a very real possibility with this proposed legislation?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we do not budget for disasters. Disasters are not things that are predicted. Every year we have different disasters, whether they be floods or storms. In 2005 the disasters cost approximately \$165 million; last year it was approximately \$40 million. This government has always supported Albertans in disasters and in emergencies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Emergency Public Warning System

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced that the province is investing in upgrading the emergency public warning system, and I'm pleased that he was able to meet with the Red Deer Morrisroe Scout group and advise them on it. That will certainly assist them in responding to an emergency. Can the minister elaborate and tell Albertans specifically why this is being done?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an outstanding public warning system. It is the first province-wide system of its kind. The system has served Albertans very well, but it is time to look at new technologies so we continue to lead the way. In specifics, we will increase the access to information by expanding our use of technology of satellite television, satellite radio, website alerts, reverse 911, cellphones, social media.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that response. My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us when he thinks this new system with all its new technology will be up and running?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, today is the first day of a process of building for the future. Today we issued a request for proposal, and the plan is to have the system in operation in approximately a year.

Mr. Speaker, during the upgrade of the process I want to assure Albertans that there is not going to be any disruption of the system we have in place. The system that we are bringing forward is going to provide additional access for all Albertans. The emergency public warning system will be there for Albertans for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Your ministry is responsible for the Amber Alert. How will changes to the emergency public warning system affect the Amber Alert?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the key to an effective Amber Alert program, obviously, is getting accurate information out to the public as soon as possible so that the public can be on the lookout for the child. These improvements that the hon. minister spoke about to the emergency public warning system will enhance the Amber Alert program used by police services in this province in high-risk cases of child abduction. The partnership with police has proven highly successful. Each of the seven Amber Alerts that has been initiated since the start-up in 2002 has concluded with the safe return of the child.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

2:30 Condominium Property Act Consultation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The endless monitoring of condo problems by the Minister of Service Alberta is completely ineffective. Condo owners have to choose between difficult legal battles or leaving their homes because this government refuses to protect them. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how does the minister's monitoring do anything to help Albertans who have to leave their homes because they can no longer afford the condo repair bills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this situation, as I've indicated before, the Condominium Property Act is one of those acts that is under review and is going to be going through a very thorough review. It's a very complex piece of legislation; therefore, we need to make sure we do it right. I'm very

aware of some of the tragic and unfortunate situations that are happening across Alberta, and that's why being informed of these situations is so important to me.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that review is taking longer and longer while the crisis is hitting more and more Albertans every day. Since the minister refuses to change the legislation to help condo owners, how else will the minister assist condo owners who are forced to pay tens of thousands of dollars to repair the poor construction of their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to note that I will be meeting with the Alberta Real Estate Association. I know that particular group has some excellent suggestions looking at solutions to some of these issues, whether it's condo fees or the reserve fee or the maintenance issue. We know that condos are aging in Alberta. We also know that with the boom in building there were situations where perhaps places were built that we need to look at and to change to enforce the rules better.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation is not improving as the number of legal cases involving condos, repairs, and management companies continue to rise, Minister. How can the minister justify her continued inaction on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, with respect to the Condominium Property Act, the review that will be going on in this next short while is really, really important. I am very aware of the many legal cases that are before the courts on this matter with respect to individual situations. This affects families. This is families having to move out for whatever reasons. This is why we need to look at this and make sure that those families are protected and to make sure that things like this don't happen again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Knowledge Infrastructure Program Funding

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's postsecondary students are the future of our knowledge-based economy. Earlier today we got some good news when our government announced the shared funding agreement with the federal government to enhance the infrastructure of Alberta's postsecondary institutions. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. It is nice to receive infrastructure funding, but how does this funding align with the provincial goals and priorities?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, today we did have the pleasure of having two of our federal ministers, Ms Ambrose and Mr. Goodyear, in Edmonton to announce a partnered funding of \$350 million for postsecondaries here in the province of Alberta, of which \$187 million is the provincial contribution to this project, the KIP, or knowledge infrastructure project. The federal contributions are going to enable us to enhance and advance the high-priority capital projects within the science and innovation system across the

province. It's also important to note that these projects are going to support nearly 2,500 new jobs for Albertans in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: how were Alberta's universities and colleges selected for this program? What criteria was it based on?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, Campus Alberta, introduced in this House last year, developed a system of prioritization for Campus Alberta and all through the province based on the need identified through a provincial, pan-Alberta approach. I'm very, very pleased that all of our postsecondaries were online and on stream with what we were doing. The universities and the colleges and the technical institutes all have submitted to us their priority projects and their deferred maintenance and their science and innovation agenda, so we went through that list in consultation with the postsecondaries and came up with those high-priority projects.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. The federal government called this one-time funding. Is this the only announcement we can expect related to this program?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would love to see more announcements from the federal government on dollars coming to Alberta and certainly hope that there are a number of areas where they're going to be making do on some commitments. I think the balance of funding under the knowledge infrastructure program is going to be further announced this fall. The ministers gave us every indication that there is another phase to this project. It's a short-term, two-year program. We have to have shovel-ready projects, but they also have to be projects that in our mind align with the goals and the objectives of Campus Alberta and the science and innovation agenda of Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

H1N1 Virus in Central Alberta Pig Herd

(continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. China, Ukraine, and South Korea have all banned Alberta pork as a result of the spreading H1N1 influenza. Alberta pigs, as I think we all know in this Assembly, have tested positive, but we also all know it has to be stressed that the influenza cannot be transferred to humans from the consumption of pork and that Alberta pork is safe to eat. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. How is this minister working with Alberta pork producers to co-ordinate efforts and ensure that Alberta's pork exports are not further hurt by misconceptions about the H1N1 influenza?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a good question because it sure is an issue for our pork producers out there today. I can guarantee the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview that from the very moment that swine flu was announced, we worked with the pork people on contacting all the producers, making sure their biosecurity was up to speed. I don't think we had

to do that. I think they were there ahead of us. But it certainly is an issue, and we continue to work with them as we move through this.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Again to the same minister: does this minister recognize that in situations such as these industry councils such as Alberta Pork play an important role in protecting export markets?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, of course they do, but we have to work together. Let's not lose sight of the fact that we have to work with the federal government. We have to work with CFIA. We have to have all our ducks in a row. We work with these people every day to make sure that those are the protocols that we have in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all realize that Alberta Beef Producers played a huge role in the BSE crisis. We probably expect the same from Alberta Pork. To the same minister: since making check-offs on pork refundable, which Bill 43 would do, weakens the pork industry at a time when it needs strength and unity to face a crisis, will the minister delay Bill 43 until all its effects can be thought through?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, why was I not surprised with that question after the set-up from the last question? Maybe give me a little time to think about this.

Of course, what this will do for the pork industry, as the beef industry, as the other associations: they will have to become more accountable. They'll have to think out of the box. They'll probably have to come up with some new ideas to make sure that it works for all their producers, every one of them in there, and they will not lose any money in the check-off procedure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Education Public Satisfaction Survey

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For Alberta to remain on the leading edge, we need to be constantly evaluating how our education system is performing. I understand that Alberta Education conducts surveys with random samples of students, parents, teachers, and school board members as well as the public to measure our overall satisfaction with the quality of the education system. This is important data as it complements the hard data we have such as test results, dropout and completion rates, and postsecondary transition rates. My questions are all for the Minister of Education. The surveys have shown that public satisfaction with Alberta's education system has been consistently lower than that of students, parents, teachers, and school board members. Can the minister explain why that is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. The public's satisfaction is lower than that of those who are directly involved in the school system, and I think that, in fact, is the answer, that people who are directly involved with the school system get their information through the school system, either from school newsletters or from the schools directly, so they have a higher degree of association with the system, and it's encouraging to know that they have a higher degree of faith in the system. The public – and our surveys show this because we ask the questions – tends to

get their information from the media; therefore, they have less satisfaction with the system.

2:40

Ms Woo-Paw: Does the ministry make adjustments or modifications to survey methodologies, questions, and respondent groups to address ongoing changes to the content of K to 12?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we do review the questions annually and make changes as appropriate. We want to make sure that the measures fit the goals of our business plan, that we're addressing the relevant needs of our stakeholder groups. For example, self-identified aboriginal high school students and their parents were added as respondent groups. Parents of students with severe special needs are surveyed as well. We break down the results for respondent groups by geographic region, for example, and in other areas. In addition, jurisdiction surveys are now available in 10 different languages to make sure that we can get a full response from all parents in the system.

Ms Woo-Paw: Does the ministry work with stakeholders in developing and updating the methodologies, contents, and scope of the provincial jurisdiction surveys?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in fact, we do. We worked with stakeholders in developing the surveys in the first place back in 1995, and now we have an advisory group made up of school boards that work with us on the design implementation of the accountability pillar surveys to assess school jurisdiction performance. We receive advice and feedback on the choice and composition of groups to be surveyed, the general survey content such as the linkage between measures and survey questions, processes for survey administration, timelines, and feature enhancements. Yes, we have an advisory committee. We do take advice on what should be in the surveys and how they should support the accountability pillars.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 108 questions in responses today. In 30 seconds from now we'll move on with the Routine.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to be able to present a petition today regarding the issue of centralized cytology labs. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation to put a moratorium on the centralization of gynecological cytology laboratory services in the Province of Alberta.

The petition has 668 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Bill 45

Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce a bill on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. I request

leave to introduce Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009.

Under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act a commission must be appointed to review existing electoral boundaries and make proposals for change where appropriate. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act also requires the commission to submit a report that divides Alberta into 83 proposed electoral divisions. The amendments in Bill 45 will require an electoral boundaries commission to be established no later than July 31, 2009, and prepare a report dividing Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions. Bill 45 will help ensure the political representation reflects the changing population of the province and that these changes are in place in a timely fashion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today which are directly related to the Calgary-Varsity constituency, which I have the honour of representing. The first is the 2nd Chapter of Light up the World, an event in memory of Captain Nichola Goddard, who would have celebrated her 29th birthday with her family on May 2 had she not been killed in action leading her troops into battle in Afghanistan. The money raised will benefit the people of Papua New Guinea.

My second tabling, from last Friday, is the opening of the smart new building for Smart Technologies in Varsity's research park. In addition to the fact that it is built to the LEED gold standard, viewed from above, it symbolically represents the capital letter E of education, which is key to Alberta's future.

My third tabling is the program celebrating the 75th anniversary of John Paul II Polish school in Calgary. Our Lady Queen of Peace church is located at 2111 Uxbridge Drive N.W. in Calgary-Varsity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters opposing the delisting of gender reassignment surgery. The letters argue that the procedure is medically necessary, that the savings to the government are extremely small, and that delisting will likely lead to a costly legal challenge. The letters are written by Brendan Van Alstine, James Swanson, Michael Lepard, and Jamie-Lynn Garvin.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act

[Debate adjourned April 27: Mr. Danyluk speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs to continue.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to continue on with my presentation on Bill 204.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, strong communities are a priority for this government, and we are supporting them. However, the

challenges facing Alberta's municipalities are complex. They are as wide ranging as the unique nature of municipalities themselves. What we are doing and what we will continue to do is talk to municipalities about the importance of sustainability, their challenge, and the possible solutions.

The Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability played an important role to help develop long-term solutions to address these challenges. The council presented a report, we listened, and we took action on a number of the council's recommendations, including the creation of the municipal sustainability initiative, the creation of the Capital Region Board.

The board has now presented their long-range regional plan, which has been developed to benefit not only the citizens of the region but all of Alberta. We will continue to look at ways to promote greater communication, collaboration, and co-operation amongst municipalities.

While progress has been made, what is clear to me is that the issues facing municipalities are complex. They go beyond funding. That is why I see this bill as overly simplistic and inflexible, and I cannot support it.

Municipalities are diverse. Their challenges are diverse. The solutions need to and will be diverse. That is also why I will continue to discuss the issue of long-term sustainability with municipalities. Alberta and Albertans need strong municipalities. Albertans deserve strong and safe communities, and this government will continue to support them.

My top priority as the Minister of Municipal Affairs is to ensure that our province has those sustainable communities for Albertans to thrive in. This is a priority for our Premier, my ministry, and the government of Alberta today and into the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to join debate on Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, brought forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. I think it is a very timely bill. I think it addresses not only a timely and current but ongoing issue of real concern to municipalities big and small in the province of Alberta.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between simple, as in straightforward, and simplistic, as in: tries to apply an easy answer to a complex problem. I do not believe that this bill is simplistic.

2:50

Indeed, I believe that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in listening to his remarks just a moment ago and reviewing *Hansard* from a week ago, when he began to speak in debate on Bill 204, has gone to some length to come up with anything he could throw against the wall to object to this bill. On the one hand, he says that the municipal sustainability initiative provides operating money and that "the two large centres" – I guess he means Edmonton and Calgary – "had the opportunity to have some of their funding put into operating. Their decision was that they wanted all funding to come as capital, and that's exactly what we did."

On the other hand, he goes on to argue that there's this incredible autonomy that municipalities have under MSI to determine their local priorities, choose their projects to meet their citizens' needs. But then he says that MSI, unlike Bill 204, "includes measures to ensure that we are accountable to Alberta taxpayers for funds provided to municipalities." Then he goes on to say:

Projects [have to] meet program criteria designed to ensure that they will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Alberta communi-

ties. Municipalities must submit a long-term infrastructure plan as well as detailed information about each project to be funded through MSI.

He says further, "We are also developing an accountability framework to ensure that funds provided to municipalities are used to meet agreed-upon objectives." Then he slaps Bill 204 for not including any of these accountability measures. All Bill 204 would do is "provide a fixed proportion of tax revenue unconditionally." Well, it's a fixed proportion of tax revenue that would be reviewed on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker.

But I will agree with the minister that, yes, it is unconditional. That is the point. MSI is anything but enabling of municipal autonomy to make their own determinations. It is full of conditions and requirements and quid pro quos and strings. It has more strings attached to it than, you know, even a lot of the legislation that has come forward from this government. It is overwhelmingly, quite apart from what the municipalities choose, about the provision of funding for capital and for infrastructure. What we are saying with Bill 204, Mr. Speaker, simply and in a straightforward manner, is this. The cities and towns of Alberta need sustainable, predictable operating funding that generates enough funding to be able to meet their operational requirements year in and year out.

Over primarily the last 15 or 16 years, but it's been a trend that's been going on for, you know, probably several decades now, federal and provincial governments have been downloading responsibilities onto lower levels of government, whether that is the municipal government, whether that's school boards – this isn't really a form of government – even the volunteer sector. The responsibilities have been downloaded to people and organizations and corporations and governments below this level of government at the provincial level, yet we haven't been correspondingly downloading the revenue that we scoop up to these lower organizations – that sounds terribly pejorative the way I put it, but you get my point: the organizations beneath us on the governmental and community org chart, if you will – so that they can actually afford to pay for the responsibilities that we have asked them to undertake on our behalf or in place of what we used to do at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, if this hasn't been said before in debate on Bill 204, it surely will be said again, I would imagine. It needs to be said and reiterated and contemplated and thought about, and we need to wrap our heads around this. There is only one taxpayer. There are a number of levels of government clamouring to get their hands into that taxpayer's pocket, but municipalities are like the runt of the litter at lunchtime when it comes to being able to do that. Of all the taxes that are paid by a household in this province, 92 to 95 per cent go to the federal government and the government of Alberta. That leaves, depending on who's doing the calculation, just between 5 and 8 per cent of the taxes to go to the municipality.

But the municipalities increasingly are providing more services to increasingly larger populations, and the cost of providing those services continues to go up, whether it's collecting the garbage and the recycling, whether it is providing through family, community, and social services, you know, social programs, whether it is operating the inventory of social housing that exists, whether it's providing or having a hand in providing the support that we envision will come to the homeless under the Housing First models being advocated by the Calgary 10-year plan to end homelessness, the Edmonton plan to end homelessness, other municipalities' plans to end homelessness, and the overarching province of Alberta 10-year plan to end homelessness. You know, those services need to be provided at the local level, and they take local dollars to do it.

More than 80 per cent of us live in urban areas, Mr. Speaker, and we need the level of government. In fact, it is simply done this way

on a daily basis that the level of government closest to us, the citizens, provides a very large part of the services that we use every day, and they need to be able to pay for that. Municipal sustainability initiative funding is going to capital projects and is not being used for operating expenses. Even if the minister had directed that the \$50 million that MSI provides for operating be required to be spent that way by the cities, it wouldn't be enough.

Some quick calculations here, and I'll just give you the rationale for how we figured these numbers out. The operating shortfall for any municipality is difficult to determine because, of course, municipalities aren't allowed to have operating shortfalls, but they do in reality. We looked at the amounts that Edmonton and Calgary proposed to increase their property taxes for 2009. We then added the amount that the two cities took from their reserve funds, because you have to dip into your reserve funds to pay the bills that you can't otherwise afford to pay, and then we added in the amount that each city received in grants and subsidies. We understand the total of those numbers to be approximately the funding shortfall for each city's operating expenses.

For Edmonton we came up with a shortfall of \$104 million. For Calgary we came up with a shortfall of \$131 million. As you can see, \$50 million divided two ways won't come close to addressing those operating shortfalls, let alone all the other cities and towns in the rest of Alberta where the other one-third, roughly, of the population lives. On the other hand, 2.5 per cent of the income tax that the province collected in 2008-2009, last year's provincial income taxes, recognizing, as we've discussed in estimates debates and so on, that that would be a lesser number in the year going forward to some extent, would be close to \$310 million. We assume the similar ratios to those used to allocate MSI funding. That's 34 per cent, or \$105 million, to Calgary; 25 per cent, or about \$77 million, to Edmonton; 41 per cent, or \$126 million, to the other municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak in favour of Bill 204, Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. The purpose of Bill 204 is to ensure a predictable revenue stream for municipalities. The funding would go towards municipalities' operating expenses, which would lessen funding shortfalls for those operating expenses. The bill would allocate 2.5 per cent, roughly \$300 million, of income taxes collected by the province to go back to the municipalities. This bill would allow for the percentage of income taxes that would be allocated to municipalities to be changed after one year. That indicates the flexibility built into Bill 204. It's extremely important that we're clear that we're not asking for a tax increase but relocating current tax revenues. That's extremely important. We're not saying: let's top up the taxes. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie previously mentioned, there is only one taxpayer, and given this global recession that we currently find ourselves within, that pocket is unfortunately shrinking.

3:00

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie talked about the limitations of the municipal sustainability initiative, and that problem has to do with the whim of the provincial government. It takes sort of a patriarchal view that we will provide the municipalities with whatever we deem fit as opposed to consulting them and freeing them up to use money as needed. Now, to the province's credit they do provide money through the local gas tax. The municipalities do

receive a portion of that, much of which, I'm sure, goes into the municipal sustainability initiative.

However, what we have seen in this province since 1994 and what has continued on up until last year is centralization of power controlled by the province. In 1994, under the guise of equivalency and efficiency, the government reduced the number of locally elected school boards. It removed the autonomy that school boards had through the collection of the educational portion of their property tax, which back in 1994 accounted for half of their revenue. We have seen this last year health boards reduced to one. Previously we had 17 regional health authorities taken down to nine and most recently to one. So what we see in this province is an eroding of the powers and potentials of municipally elected officials to govern as they were elected to do.

The municipalities regard the tax collection by the province as a type of cash cow. The province takes a considerably large portion of the income that a municipality generates and then returns a fraction of it in the form of grants, grants which frequently have fairly closely tied strings attached to them. What Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, does is that it guarantees autonomy to municipalities. It guarantees that a portion of the income tax the residents pay to the province is returned to them, where services are most urgently needed.

Now, an argument this provincial government uses frequently is with regard to immigration to Alberta. We hear over and over again in this House that immigrants to Alberta do not bring with them their schools. They do not carry their hospitals or their recreational facilities or their fire halls on their backs. Therefore, it's through the largesse of the province that these services are provided. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that's a lot of baloney, for lack of a better word, because the people that immigrate to Alberta bring with them their revenue in the form of income tax. They bring with them their revenue in the form of the property taxes which they're charged. This isn't just largesse on the part of the province providing these services to the people freely, but what happens is that the province filters the services, and the municipalities and those living in the cities are expected to be extremely grateful for the generosity shown by the province. What Bill 204 says is that these people are entitled to their money, that where their services are provided is where their money should be spent.

Yes, in a democracy there is an expectation that we all share in the betterment of the province, in the betterment of the country; thus, we pay federal taxes and we pay municipal taxes and, of course, provincial taxes. But by the time the two upper levels of government have drawn their share, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out was in the area of 92 per cent, there's very little left for the front line, and the front line, of course, is the municipality. What Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, does is that it guarantees the security to local municipalities. They know that whatever the tax rate is that is set by the province and by the federal government – you can do the math – 2.5 per cent will be returned to the municipalities if Bill 204 is adopted. That provides stability. It provides sustainability. It provides a degree of predictability to municipalities as opposed to the offerings by the province.

Now, the province did make a 10-year commitment through MSI, but what it hasn't taken into account is the global recessionary effects, so those percentages may be reduced again at the whim of the province, who is in the driver's seat on MSI funding. Also, as I've indicated before and as the other members from Calgary-Currie and from Edmonton-Centre have indicated, this sort of poor cousin placement of municipalities dependent on the largesse of the federal government and the provincial government takes them out of the direct ability to provide the services to their constituents.

I find it interesting that municipalities, for example, from an electoral governance basis, are able to look after a million individuals through their ward system, which is less than half of what provincial representation is required. So if we're looking potentially at reducing electoral expenses and looking at, for example, what aldermen have to do in terms of governance, then maybe we should be looking at reducing the number of constituencies within the cities. If federal MPs can have this larger representation and aldermen can have a larger representation, maybe in the interests of a smaller and more efficient government we should be viewing a reduction in electoral constituencies and truly reflecting the fact that two-thirds of Albertans live in the cities.

It is those two-thirds that would benefit most directly, of course, from Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. That would not leave their rural friends and family out of the picture because the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act not only offers support to Calgary and Edmonton but to Medicine Hat, to Red Deer and Lethbridge, all the smaller municipalities. Let's not forget the terrific contribution of Fort McMurray that would be strengthened by the application of Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, then Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy I was first on that list because I think I lost track throughout that as to who was next.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act in 2009. This was of interest to me as I have an alderman in Calgary who is a member of my board of directors, and I had a chance to discuss this with him amongst a few other people as well.

3:10

As the previous speakers have mentioned, this bill seeks to allocate two and a half per cent of personal and corporate income tax to Alberta's municipalities. It has received a bit of media attention. The first time I heard about it in the media was on April 2 from the *Edmonton Sun*, and interestingly enough there is a Facebook group that's been established. I see the Member for Calgary-Currie here and the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I see an alderman in my area, and I also see a cousin of mine, actually, who's a member here, so I'll have to chat with him about that. He wears my colours. Don't worry. He very much wears my colours.

The Speaker: Having some relevancy with respect to the question at hand would be in order.

Mr. Denis: Oh. Yes, sir.

In essence, the finances would be collected to a provincial account known as the provincial-municipal tax sharing account. The relevancy earlier, Mr. Speaker, was that this was referenced, again, in Facebook. I think social media is a good thing.

I assume, Mr. Speaker, because it's not clear in the legislation, that these funds would be divvied up amongst our local governments. The rationale behind this legislation is that the dedicated funds would provide Alberta's local governments with additional sources of revenue that would be reliable, stable, and unconditional. The fact is that this government has continually demonstrated its commitment to the sustainability and development of Alberta's municipalities through many grant programs. Indeed, there are up

to 80 different grants available to municipalities through 13 different ministries, all designed to support Alberta's communities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Perhaps the sponsoring member felt as though there is a need to dedicate a specific amount of provincial revenue to support the growth municipalities have experienced in the past decade. However, Mr. Speaker, the municipal sustainability initiative, which I'll refer to as the MSI, was developed to address this growth. If municipalities need to undertake projects to meet demands related to this growth, they can apply and receive funds pursuant to the MSI. Projects can include building or improving roads, bridges, public transit, and water supply, treatment, and distribution systems.

Since 2007 a total of \$900 million has been distributed through MSI, and this year's budget allocates an additional \$400 million to MSI, which will again rise next year, to \$1.2 billion. What's the total? That's \$11 billion over 10 years, unprecedented throughout this nation. These increases are designed to support municipalities by providing equivalent funding when compared to the amount of money collected through the education property taxes. Suffice it to say, Mr. Speaker, that this government has supported and continues to support municipalities through these times of substantial growth, which leads me to the conclusion that Bill 204, however well intended, is both needless and redundant.

I think it is important to remind the sponsoring member of the other grants that this government offers to support municipalities. For example, Alberta Transportation offers the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, which specifically is designed to provide financial assistance to municipalities for infrastructure projects that maintain or enhance the economic, social, and cultural opportunity of a municipality. This includes capital projects such as roadways, waste water collection and treatment systems, cultural and recreational facilities, and solid waste management systems.

The government also offers the regional partnerships initiative, which focuses on promoting and fostering regional co-operation and cost savings by facilitating projects that involve three or four municipalities. There are two components to the regional partnership initiative, exploration and implementation. The exploration grant allows municipalities to evaluate the feasibility of a project such as amalgamating water services or developing a regional governance structure or business plan. If the exploration process suggests that the project will be beneficial, the implementation component of the regional partnerships initiative can assist municipalities with its implementation.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on to discuss many other programs that government offers to municipalities, but the reality is that there is substantial support for Alberta's municipalities to manage both growth-related and non growth-related capital and operational pressures. Furthermore, these municipal supports ensure openness and accountability and are a demonstration of this government's prudent financial management. It was not so long ago that members of the opposition were criticizing the government's spending patterns, suggesting we needed to reprioritize spending and reallocate finances.

In summary, I find myself somewhat confused as to how Bill 204 would save this government money or demonstrate a, quote, reprioritization. This government has already made our municipalities a priority, which is demonstrated by the many municipal grants and initiatives that I have outlined.

Furthermore, the funds that Bill 204 suggests that the government allocate to municipalities must come at the expense of other programs, and I look forward to hearing from the sponsoring

member in her closing speech as to what provincial services she believes we should cut. Would she cut health care? Would she cut education? Would she cut any specific services? I'm looking forward to hearing that, Mr. Speaker.

Regardless, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 is a redundant bill and therefore unnecessary. For these reasons, I'm unable to support it. I will table my references to the page.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to rise to join in on this debate on this interesting piece of legislation proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. In general, I believe it is the intention of our caucus to be supporting this bill. It's a bill that, as has been stated already, would allocate 2.5 per cent of income tax revenue into an account for municipalities, which would provide roughly \$300 million more a year to municipalities.

As has been discussed already, this is not the only source of funding for municipalities. Indeed, there are a number of other sources of funding from the government for municipalities. But the key element to this bill and the proposal here, of course, is that this funding would be unconditional and would allow for long-term planning and would allow for support for operational funding and operational funding deficits. As all members of this House know, there do appear to be a number of municipalities who are reporting significant financial difficulty at this time. My understanding is that the number is roughly around 60 municipalities across the province who report these kinds of difficulties.

As we know, the biggest source of revenue for most municipalities is the property tax, but there is a limit with respect to how much revenue can be brought in through that mechanism. At the same time while that limit is in place, the municipalities themselves have a growing demand for services placed upon them not only from the federal government through its 15 years of downloading services onto municipalities but also through the provincial government and also through their own population, which, quite importantly, are becoming increasingly engaged in their municipal politics as that is, of course, the government which is closest to home, as it were.

A number of people think first to go to their municipality to demand a number of services, and that's not unreasonable in many cases. Of course, because the municipalities are, as it were, on the ground, they are often in the best position to provide leadership on the resolution of certain issues. You know, a perfect example of that is the housing issue. We've seen both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary lead the way in large part on the issue of dealing with housing and homelessness. I'm not sure that I necessarily agree that the processes that they've adopted are utterly the best, but there's no question that they are trying to make a commitment to address the issue, and we have the provincial government appearing to follow behind in that regard.

We have, for instance, talk about the need for homelessness strategies. I believe the city of Edmonton suggested we'd be looking at about \$3 billion, and I believe the city of Calgary talked about \$4.5 billion. Then, unfortunately, the provincial government has committed much less than that amount and even in claiming to fund that this year has taken every single dollar from other housing funds in order to support their so-called investment in this particular housing fund. In fact, we have sort of a follow the bouncing ball kind of process, where we ultimately find that the net investment in housing on the part of the provincial government hasn't gone up a single red cent. Ultimately, it will fall to the municipalities to shoulder that burden as they have been for some time.

3:20

That's just an example. I mean, that's certainly not the only example. Most of that funding doesn't come out of operational funds, but it's an example of how municipalities are taking on greater and greater roles in terms of the services that they provide to the cities. It's just an example of the circumstances which are leading to the situation where we have municipalities suffering operational deficits.

To go back a little bit to the municipal sustainability initiative, the NDP does support, in general, that fund. There are good things that come from that fund. We would like to see its allocation criteria amended somewhat so that it's not based on kilometres of local roads because we'd rather not see municipalities be encouraged to build yet more sprawling subdivisions with windy lanes that absolutely nobody without three GPS systems and two different maps and two navigators can get through. Rather, we'd like to see a denser type of development premised on the notion of enhanced public transportation. That's why we think the municipal sustainability initiative can be tweaked to make some improvements. Notwithstanding that, it is still conditional, and it still is premised on a 10-year duration. That doesn't provide the ability for unconditional operational funding which allows for planning that goes beyond that 10-year period.

That, of course, is the kind of thing that we would see provided to municipalities through the bill that we're looking at at this time. It's for this reason that we think that members of this House should consider supporting this bill. We need to look at the changing relationship between municipalities, the provincial government, and the federal government, we need to look at the changing demands that we place upon our municipalities, and we need to look at the very constrained set of financial resources at the disposal of municipalities, a system that was put in place when, I think, the expectations vis-à-vis municipalities were very different. We must then look at the whole issue of how that can be changed.

We know that municipalities, like other parts of government across the province, are suffering from a very, very significant infrastructure debt, one created by this province and the federal government but more by this province over the course of many years as they tried to hide their debt in things as opposed to off the books. That debt has not been addressed, notwithstanding the funding which had certainly started to kick in over the last couple of years or maybe even more than that. Nonetheless, because of the inflationary pressures at the time we know that municipalities are still struggling with tremendous infrastructure debt, and we think that this is a time for this kind of investment in particular to be considered and not dismissed. These are job-creating investments. We know that in the long term that is another objective which this government should be focusing itself towards, given the current economic situation that we're all experiencing.

As I said before, it's with these general reasons in mind that our caucus will be supporting this particular bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak in favour of Bill 204, which will go a long ways to solving maybe not all of the operating needs of municipalities, but I think it will pretty well solve most of the problems. This bill is a step in the right direction to ensure predictable funding for municipalities. This will provide funding for the municipalities just for operating expenses only, not for infrastructure. It will lessen the shortfalls in operating expenses that municipalities have from time to time.

This bill will allow the government to allocate 2.5 per cent, roughly \$300 million, a year from the income tax the province collects to go toward municipalities. We're talking about all of the municipalities here. We want to be clear that, you know, this is not a tax increase. This bill will be reallocating the current revenues that the province collects in personal income taxes, and the money collected from the personal income taxes will go toward municipalities. That will be 2.5 per cent.

While the province has downloaded a number of responsibilities to the municipalities, municipalities lack the ability to generate enough revenue to meet the current operating costs. This bill will provide a stable revenue stream so that municipalities can better meet their current operating needs without having to increase property taxes or raid their reserve funds if they have any.

During the boom times there was lots of migration. It put lots of pressure on the municipalities to hire more police officers, more firefighters. They had to build more fire stations, and that put lots of pressure on the municipalities. They are limited in raising their taxes. Edmonton is an example of a municipality facing a shortfall of operating expenses. Expenditures rose by 7.2 per cent in 2009, but the revenues, excluding property taxes, increased only by 0.9 per cent. If a municipality is having difficulty in funding existing programs or funding the creation of new programs, they only have a couple of options. They can either raise the property taxes, or they can cut existing programs and defer future projects, or municipalities can tap into reserve funds they may have saved.

Although municipalities are not allowed to run deficits on their operating budgets, they have to adopt extreme measures to meet their funding shortfalls. Calgary raised property taxes 5.3 per cent. I think next year they're going to rise by 4.6 per cent. There was a big hue and cry. People were almost up in arms because the property taxes were going up and because that's hitting people hard, you know, in their pockets. In Edmonton they raised property taxes 3.6 per cent for 2009. Both Edmonton and Calgary couldn't raise enough taxes to meet their operating needs. They had to cut back on their existing programs and future projects. They had to even tap into their reserve funds.

Of all the taxes raised by the governments, 95 per cent goes to the provincial and federal governments. Only 5 per cent goes to the municipalities. I think the municipalities should get a larger share of household taxes, and this bill will achieve that by giving municipalities some share of the personal income taxes collected by the province. This 2.5 per cent figure was arrived at by taking into consideration the operating shortfall for all of the municipalities. It is difficult to put an exact number, but this figure will almost correct the shortfall the municipalities face.

3:30

We determined that 2.5 per cent of the income tax the province collected in 2008-2009 would be a good amount because in some sense approximately we added all those figures up. The municipalities, you know, the shortfall they took out of the reserve fund and all the other shortfalls they had, we added them all up, and that's the number we arrived at. It would be a reasonable number, 2.5 per cent, to reallocate income taxes to the municipalities.

This funding will help support upgrading needs of municipalities, but it would not solve all their financial difficulties. For example, we have not included the unfunded capital plan for either city nor the gap in infrastructure funding that has been identified. Considering that \$1.3 billion is needed to fill Edmonton's infrastructure funding gap, the amount that would be allocated by this bill is not really extravagant. That's not really a big amount. This will only help the municipalities for their operating expenses.

There is also a mechanism within this bill that will allow for the 2.5 per cent to be changed one year after the fund is created. We decided on 2.5 per cent of income taxes to create the fund, which is a minimum amount because of the current tough economic times. Moreover, the fact that there's a mechanism that would alter the percentage allocated to the municipalities is a good response to the argument that 2.5 per cent would be too much or too onerous for an already cash-strapped province. As the economy slows down, maybe the municipality's operating expenses will come down, so this 2.5 per cent number can be changed.

Although there is a provincial and a municipal revenue sharing formula there, those unconditional grants account for less than 25 per cent of all provincial municipal grants, and some of the money has strings tied to it, that it cannot be used for operating expenses. The Alberta Municipal Government Act sees municipalities as little more than the provider of a few local services and gives municipalities few tools to raise their taxes, so that relationship doesn't work any more. It is time to see the municipalities in Alberta as an important level of government in their own right.

Strong municipalities are essential to Alberta's future. More than 80 per cent of Albertans live in urban areas. Our cities, towns, villages, and hamlets are the levels of government closest to us and provide service that we use every day. Local governments are in the best position to lead Alberta into the future, by developing a sustainable transportation system, improving our land use, and becoming our environment leaders. Lots of services have been downloaded, offloaded to the municipalities by the provincial government, and I think they need this funding to cover their operating expenses.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise today and join in the debate on Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, which, of course, has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Bill 204 proposes to apportion 2.5 per cent of income tax revenue to a provincial-municipal tax-sharing account.

The preamble of this bill states that municipalities in Alberta require both stable and predictable funding. However, Mr. Speaker, this government provides significant long-term funding for municipalities through programs such as the municipal sustainability initiative, better known as the MSI. MSI is a program that in 2009 will provide municipalities with \$400 million in funding. Not only that, but this 10-year commitment to funding will see an unprecedented amount allocated to municipalities. The MSI is one of many programs that are available to municipalities, such as the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, the gas tax fund, and the building Canada fund. This government supports all municipalities while recognizing their autonomy. Bill 204 is redundant as this government already has in place significant and long-term funding.

I would like to raise some concerns that I have with Bill 204, particularly how this new account will be funded and the impact that funding will have on all Albertans. Alberta prides itself on having one of the lowest tax structures in Canada, with a 10 per cent flat tax rate and no provincial sales tax. Mr. Speaker, income tax is one of the largest sources of revenue for both federal and provincial governments, accounting for over 30 per cent of all tax revenues. This past year personal income taxes accounted for approximately 22.3 per cent of provincial revenues, and corporate income tax accounted for 9.8 per cent.

The preamble states that "municipalities in Alberta require a stable and predictable level of funding from the Government to effectively plan and deliver services and programs." However, I do not see how this account could be considered predictable and stable, particularly since revenue from taxes fluctuates year to year. This fact seems to contradict the intent of this bill. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how the member for Edmonton-Centre can see this proposed account as being stable and predictable.

Revenue from income taxes is deposited into the province's general revenue fund. From there these funds are used by the government to pay for public programs such as health care, education, and infrastructure. Money is allocated from the general revenue fund to ministries based on need. For example, in 2008 Health and Wellness required 34 per cent of the year's budget. By allocating 2.5 per cent to the proposed provincial-municipal tax sharing account, 2.5 per cent will have to be cut from ministries. Not only that, but it will take away from programs that help every single Albertan. Ministries such as Health and Wellness and Education help each and every Albertan and have a direct impact on the lives of all Albertans, as do many other government programs.

Mr. Speaker, another point that I'd like to raise about Bill 204 is that it would require additional bureaucracy to manage the fund. Once again, this bill requires this government to spend more. I question why the Member for Edmonton-Centre is asking this government to spend money in a time when it may not be fiscally prudent to do so.

In addition to creating more bureaucracy, this bill also calls for the creation of a Legislature committee to convene every year and draft new legislation. The members opposite claim that this government would be more fiscally responsible; however, this bill would seem to contradict this statement.

The Member for Calgary-Currie stated recently in this House that "this government needs to get a handle on its spending." This statement stands in complete contradiction to this bill, as this bill is proposing additional government spending. It seems that these members cannot get all of these priorities straight. One minute they want us to stop spending, yet they introduce legislation requiring more spending.

A final and important note that I would like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that Bill 204 has all the appearances of a money bill, which a private member cannot bring forward. Certain sections try and get around this by creating further legislation; however, in all appearances this would be a money bill. Even with this provision of creating further legislation, this bill has requirements on the financial initiative of the government, thus making it a money bill. If passed, Bill 204 would clearly impact the government's ability to raise and spend money. Automatically dedicating revenue to municipalities is problematic as it reduces the government's ability to direct spending to its highest priorities and does not allow fiscal flexibility.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this bill, and I encourage other members to do the same. Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in support of Bill 204, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

I as one of the 80 per cent of Albertans who reside in our cities would appreciate this act as a form of creating for cities a consistent, stable flow of money that would go towards operating expenses. I think that's where some of the confusion is had by some of the government members who have already spoken. They continue to

refer to the MSI funding, which is for capital costs and capital initiatives, that this Bill 204 is not dealing with; it's dealing with the operating funds.

Before I get into the intent of the bill, I don't really see that this is looking for an increase to what is already spent. What this is more looking for a consistent flow of money that is already created through the provincial coffers that is earmarked for our cities to provide the essential services that the cities provide. I think anyone who has been in Alberta for any number of years would reference that cities have become the front line of providing services to the people.

Also, anyone who has been here for any period of time has heard the impact of cuts to cities and that cities have been sort of left behind in being provided with funds. They've had services continually downloaded upon them by other levels of government, both federal and provincial. There's a strong argument that's presented by the AUMA and other organizations like that that references the fact that cities have had these responsibilities downloaded to them by other levels of government without having any provision of finances attached to them. I guess this bill would address some of that disparity and recognize that cities are major players in the Alberta landscape. They provide a significant service to the Alberta populace, and it is much needed.

On another note, although I will not concede that this is, in fact, an additional spending mechanism to be put forward, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont asked where we'd begin cutting. I guess I'll list some of those that I see that could be cut that we've brought up from time to time. I will go through the exercise now because we were asked. I would note that my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre has many other things to comment on as I see her busy taking notes to answer on this bill, so I'll try to save her some time here.

One would be that we've put in an amendment this year to eliminate \$33 million, I think, from Horse Racing Alberta that we would like to see gotten rid of. We've seen numerous hosting expenses that have been what we would consider above and beyond what would be necessary in these times of strain. Also, let's talk about some of the bonuses to senior-level civil servants who are already getting substantially rewarded.

Let's also think of future spending. Increasing the number of MLAs: I would suggest that, at least, the last thing Albertans need is four more MLAs. That's just my honest-to-goodness opinion. We can do with what we have in this House and, you know, find enough work for everyone. That's just my honest-to-goodness opinion.

So if you're looking at savings, there are some I listed for you. We can start from there. If the books ever get opened up more around here, I'm sure I could find a little more to go down and take the trimmings to. That's a start. I was asked for it; otherwise, I would've never brought it up. Since I was asked, I do try to respond from time to time.

If we look at other things, the municipalities, like I said, are an important part of our increasingly urban structure, where people are living, where people are stimulating our economy, and where it seems to be that much of the growth is occurring. I again would say that this is a necessary bill that would go a long way to ensuring that essential operating dollars are reaching the areas that need it the most. It would also allow cities to I guess decide for themselves what is important for them to do and important to their citizens and not be beholden to a senior level of government that may be doing things to appease a different agenda that they may be following that may not be the same agenda that the cities are wishing to follow.

Those are my comments, and I thank you for the time you've given me to speak in strong support of this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member who wishes to join the debate?

Seeing none, now I shall recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to welcome the participation of those that did participate, including the minister and the members for Calgary-Egmont and Red Deer-South. It was a very interesting exercise to shine the light on how well government members understand municipal funding and the current situation that many of the municipalities believe that they find themselves in. It was an excellent opportunity for me to start and in some cases continue a dialogue with the many fine municipalities in Alberta. That was a real opportunity for me, and I enjoyed it very much. I did correspond with several dozen municipalities, and I'm very grateful for that.

Just let me talk very briefly about the MSI funding, which I think every single member referenced. I set out to create a funding stream for municipalities that would be stable, predictable, and would not come with any strings attached, and this government is very fond of putting strings on any money that they give out, including the MSI funding.

The MSI funding is time limited. It's a 10-year program, which we're several years into, and it is focused on capital and infrastructure funding. The history of it came out of the tremendous infrastructure debt that the province created on behalf of the municipalities and left the municipalities to deal with. Those from Calgary will appreciate that history because it was their mayor who was most instrumental and very aggressive in pursuing the provincial government to come up with some funding money to be able to address that infrastructure debt. I think at one point the infrastructure debt in the province was estimated to be somewhere in the \$8 billion mark – I'm sorry; there might be a zero on the end of that – so there was a lot to catch up on, and that's what that fund was meant to do, and it is doing it.

There was a very small component in that, I think about \$50 million, that was available for operating money. In fact, by the time you divided that up amongst the municipalities, it was such a small amount of money that it was not going to make a significant difference in any one operating allocation for a given year, and it may have prevented their being able to complete some capital programs, so as the minister indicated, it all went to capital. Bill 204 was anticipating a fund of money that was directed only to operating money, no capital money, so MSI and what I was proposing in Bill 204 did not intersect. Bill 204 was – one more time I'll say it – intended for operating funding.

3:50

The minister worried about accountability, and I find that interesting. I take his point, but I think there are a number of accountability and auditing functions already in place there, as you would expect. Certainly, the government funds are audited as they go out. The municipalities are also audited, so the money as it comes into the municipalities is audited. We also have a legislative review that was built into the act. So there's quite a bit of accountability that is available there, more, in fact, than you sometimes see with other government programs.

It was meant to be a piece of legislation that dealt with the most pressing matter before the municipalities, and that was the operating gap that they were experiencing. So, no, I didn't get into a lot of other things, and I didn't make it really complicated. [interjection] I was trying to address one thing, and I just did address it. The Minister of Health appears to have missed his opportunity to speak, but I'm happy to talk with him afterwards. [interjection] Well, he's

very exercised about it, whatever it is, but I'm sure he'll let me know afterwards.

It was my intention that the monies be distributed on a per capita basis, but I did not write that into the legislation at the time because if the legislation passed, I wanted there to be an additional debate on the best way – and that discussion should take place primarily with the municipalities – for that money to be distributed.

The Member for Calgary-Egmont talked about how the government provides 80 grants, but he includes in that things like lottery grant funding and, in fact, the federal government grants.

I encourage people to support Bill 204. It's a great move for our municipalities.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair now shall call the question on the bill.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Notley
Chase	MacDonald	Taylor
Hehr		

Against the motion:

Anderson	Forsyth	Morton
Berger	Groeneveld	Oberle
Calahasen	Horne	Olson
Campbell	Jablonski	Ouellette
Cao	Jacobs	Renner
Dallas	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Denis	Liepert	Tarchuk
Drysdale	Marz	Weadick
Elniski	McQueen	Webber
Fawcett		

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 31
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 204 lost]

Bill 205

Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to rise today and lead off second reading debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009.

The goal of this bill is to place clear parameters around third-party political advertising during provincial elections. Mr. Speaker, democracy is an institution that all Albertans cherish. There are several fundamental principles that are essential to an open and democratic society. These include freedom of political expression and freedom of speech, where people are free to convey their views without undue censorship by government. There's also freedom of

the press, where the news media is free to report on political happenings without political interference. It was with these democratic principles top of mind that Bill 205 was developed.

In addition to respecting fundamental democratic principles, Bill 205 recognizes the need to ensure that we have a fair and level playing field for all participants in the election marketplace of ideas. A level playing field alludes to the idea that there should be a consistent standard that all democratic participants must abide by. A level playing field means that the success and failure of the ideas put forward during an election should depend not on the size of a proponent's bank account but on the substance and merit of that idea.

I would like to go through some of the provisions of this bill to clearly illustrate how Bill 205 strikes a balance between respecting the rights of free speech, political expression, and free press with the need to keep our democratic playing field fair and level. First, this bill establishes a mechanism called the third-party election advertising account. All third parties would be required to establish such an account in order to run political advertisements during a provincial election. Contributions by donors to this account would be set at a fair limit of \$30,000 during an election year and \$15,000 in a nonelection year. These contribution limits correlate with the contribution limits the political parties are subjected to. The money raised from donors and placed in these accounts could then be spent by that third party during a provincial election.

This account mechanism provides for the advancement of interests and ideas based not on the wealth of a few but upon that idea's ability to attract popular support. In other words, if a third party can raise millions of dollars from thousands of Albertans to advance an idea, it can spend every last cent of that money raised on promoting that idea during an election. But if only a few wealthy organizations or individuals are proponents of an idea, although they are free to advocate that idea, their ability to use their large wealth to dominate the airwaves or newspapers during an election will be reasonably limited under this legislation.

All opinions and ideas from Albertans are part of our political process, even ideas that seem unpopular at first glance. I recall the words of John Stuart Mill, who stated, "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion . . . mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind." Of course, we do limit speech that incites violence against identifiable minority groups. However, the generally accepted view of free speech in the free world is that no individual or group should be silenced except in the most extreme cases. Mr. Speaker, I want to be absolutely clear that I support this principle wholeheartedly, and in no way do the measures of this bill silence the people of Alberta. In fact, freedom of speech will be enhanced by this bill by giving all ideas and viewpoints a more equal opportunity to flourish within our open and democratic society.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would also require third parties to identify themselves on advertising and promotional materials. Identification is important in ensuring accurate communication between the third party and its targeted audience. When the electorate is adequately informed as to who is attempting to convey a message to them, they will be able to make a more educated judgment on the message itself. Thomas Jefferson understood the important connection between information and democracy when he once stated, "Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government." Today accurate information is just as vital to our democratic system as it was in the past.

4:10

Another important aspect of this bill is the requirement that all third parties register with the Chief Electoral Officer if they have

incurred or plan to incur political advertising expenses in excess of \$1,000 during an election period. Bill 205 will also require a third party whose political advertising expenditures exceed \$1,000 in an election year to submit a financial report to the Chief Electoral Officer. This financial report would disclose all advertising spending and the identities of the donors who contributed more than \$375 to a party's election advertising account. This would be similar to the rules governing political parties, who also must disclose all election advertising spending and identified donors who contributed more than \$375. Ultimately, this will achieve greater accountability surrounding third-party advertising and, again, provide the electorate with more information about who is financially pushing an idea.

While I will not go through every aspect of this proposed legislation, I want to emphasize that I believe this bill strikes the balance between enhancing democratic fundamentals while also achieving a more equitable and level playing field for third-party political advertising during election periods. It will, I believe, strengthen transparency and democracy for all Albertans, so I encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Bill 205 isn't about freedom of speech; it's about controlling speech, stifling who is and who isn't able to speak. The government currently exercises undue promotional opportunities at the expense of the public taxpayer through its Public Affairs Bureau, which employs more staff than all other provincial and federal governments combined. The Premier ran on a campaign platform of transparency and accountability, yet the Premier refused to reveal where \$163,000 of his campaign donations came from, and in this Bill 205 there is a proposition designed to prevent people from collecting that funding to express their own views.

This Bill 205 is aimed at unions, who last March 8 tried to influence the outcome of the way this government treats unionized employees in this province. Alberta is the least unionized province in Canada, yet there is a desire on the government's part to limit union membership even further and to basically limit their opportunities to vocalize their concerns, particularly during an election period. This has got nothing to do with increasing individual influence; it has to do with stifling union or collective influence. The government only wants those people they wish to hear from to have the opportunity to speak.

Now, I talked about the leadership campaign. We had a number of very creative ways in which Conservative leaders collected money. We had one individual who sold shares in himself for \$10,000 a pop, but at least he provided and indicated in his returns each of the individuals who had sort of bought a share of his piece of the pie. The hon. minister for sustainable resources refused to provide any of the donors' names or backings that funded his campaign. Likewise, depending on who it was that ran in the last provincial campaign, we had dribs and drabs of revelation.

This particular bill wants to punish individuals who would dare collectively to oppose the direction the government is taking on any of a number of concerns. Now, you might think: well, this is sour grapes; why didn't the members of the trades put more money into the individual campaigns of the opposition? That is not the point. For example, if you take a look at my campaign finances, you are not going to find any significant donations from any collective group. What you will find is a hundred dollars here, \$200 there, \$50, \$10 from individuals who felt that it was important to have a

social conscience in this province. Obviously, there was a collective desire on the parts of the constituents who contributed to change the government.

Bill 205 is all about control. The government almost successfully received empathy in the last election because the Premier was portrayed in ads that were of a mocking nature. If anything the \$2 million worth of ads at that time backfired. However, the fact that they didn't succeed was not enough. This Bill 205 is there to hit them with another hammer to further eliminate their opportunity to have a collective voice at a key time in Alberta's political undertakings.

We have seen in this province the lowest voter turnout in Canadian history in our last election, whereby only 41 per cent of eligible voters chose to participate. Of those 41 per cent a total of 21 per cent of eligible voters chose the current government. Voters are never wrong. They, through their freedom of choice, elected 72 members to this House; thus, the government is formed. What the individuals are worried about that they need to exercise even further power I don't understand. This government has had a rather easy ride when you look at the last 40 years.

The Speaker: I have to remind the hon. member that this is private members' day. This is a private member's bill. It's private members' day and a private member's bill.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I very much appreciate that qualification, Mr. Speaker. The private member in this case comes as one of the 72 members that was elected on March 3, 2008. What the member in proposing Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, is putting forward is the idea of limiting the opportunities of collective organizations to speak with a collective voice. It is more example of the divide and conquer attitude which we have seen in recent times.

Peter Lougheed was a builder. He built schools. He built hospitals. He had a vision. Unfortunately, when he left, that vision left with him. Bill 205 is not about democracy. It is not about providing the public with a voice. It is not about allowing a collective cry to be raised. It's about stifling the opportunity to speak.

I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity to debate Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. As I say, I see it as a regressive bill. As opposed to promoting free speech, I see it attempting to limit it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. I particularly appreciated the comments from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere relating to freedom of speech. In that vein, this bill was composed and brought forward by him, and I'd like to commend him for presenting a timely and effective piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the goals of Bill 205 are rather straightforward. First off, Bill 205 would define clearly in the legislation the concept of third parties and third-party election advertising. Essentially, third parties would be defined as any person, trade union, corporation, or organization that seeks to influence an election other than a political

party or a candidate. Likewise, third-party election advertising would be defined as political advertising that appears during an election and is placed by a third party. In addition, advertising would be any message conveyed to the general public through the use of newspapers, billboards, or through electronic media such as through television or the Internet. The definition for advertising would be standardized across the board as it would apply to political parties, to candidates, and to third-party interest groups.

4:20

Secondly, this bill proposes to establish donation limits on contributors supporting third-party election advertising accounts. Specifically, donors to third-party election advertising accounts would be limited to donations of no more than \$15,000 in a nonelection calendar year and \$30,000 in an election year. Currently the advantage of regulating political contributions at the provincial and federal levels are evident, and I feel it would benefit Albertans to extend this regulation to third-party advertising accounts. Furthermore, this Bill 205 would provide a framework of disclosure which would allow the transparency of third-party financial donation records.

The measures proposed in this bill are not only effective because of what they seek to accomplish but timely because they may help enhance the accountability by strengthening the role of the provincial Chief Electoral Officer. Now, Mr. Speaker, the provincial Chief Electoral Officer is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and is responsible for ensuring the continued successful operation of provincial elections. In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer is also responsible for ensuring accountability and transparency for both political party campaigning and for advertising.

Mr. Speaker, under Bill 205 the provincial electoral officer would be given the mandate to ensure accountability of third-party advertising in the overall electoral process. An additional stipulation proposed by Bill 205, perhaps more specific towards third parties, is that all parties incurring election expenses would be required to register with the electoral officer. The advantages of this regulation are numerous. Perhaps the most advantageous aspect is the increased transparency of third parties, as I've mentioned. With this in place voters will know exactly who represents a third party and, thus, will be better educated to assess the third-party's message.

Accountability and voter information also tie directly into a clause requiring third parties to identify their election advertising account contributors, just like every one of us would in our election. Just as is the case with political parties, contributors to third-party election advertising accounts would also need to declare who is donating to their cause. Knowing who supports a third party can dramatically influence voters' perceptions, which, in turn, can help clarify their choices when casting a ballot.

Bill 205 would require that all campaign advertising bears the name of the third party that is behind the advertisement. This is already legislated for political parties, and it is intended to inform voters of the source of the advertisement. It puts everyone, Mr. Speaker, on an even keel. The reasoning behind this policy is that requiring advertisements to bear the name of the sponsor also extends a level of protection to candidates. These regulations can mitigate crude and confounding ads as they ensure that the ads cannot be distributed in anonymity. Voters would also know exactly who sponsored every advertisement, which, based on their perceptions of the sponsor group, might shape their opinions of the ad.

Another change that would enhance the accountability advocated by Bill 205 centres around the full disclosure of third-party election account spending. Currently political parties are already required to

document and report the full value of their campaign expenditure, but the same is not true for third-party groups. Full financial disclosure has the same benefit as many of the other proposed measures. As I mentioned, it promotes transparency, which, in turn, gives voters the information they need to hold governments accountable.

The last speaker, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, has made some comments, and I have to respond to a couple, Mr. Speaker. This act, Bill 205, is not aimed at unions. It applies equally to corporations and to individuals. Furthermore, unions can raise money also from their own members, which is not prohibited by this piece of legislation. Requiring third parties to disclose campaign expenditures is in essence holding all of these groups accountable, be it a union, an individual, or a corporation. Everybody is treated the same. In turn, this accountability promotes good governance and good decision-making. Informed voters are the foundation of our province. To this end, providing voters with clear information is an essential component of any strong democracy.

It is an advantage for third parties to foster accountability within their organizations, and that is why, Mr. Speaker, I am strongly in support of Bill 205 and the role it plays in strengthening the accountability in our provincial elections. I must again give credit to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere because Bill 205 actively reflects the growing importance of third parties and enhances their role in the electoral process. Accordingly, I will be voting in favour of Bill 205, and I strongly encourage all hon. members to join me in supporting this initiative.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to engage in this interesting debate, where I think people have different positions for the same reasons and the same positions for different reasons. It's all very kind of confusing to me in many ways. At the outset, I guess, I will probably surprise members opposite by saying that we will be voting in favour of this bill.

Mr. Liepert: That's because the dollars didn't go to you.

Ms Notley: Well, that may be true. They don't typically come to us, but that's part of the bigger issue. The issue here is that if there is any concern around this bill, it is that it does not go far enough.

I guess I will start with the statements made by the very last speaker, the Member for Calgary-Egmont, in that I would rather not see us enshrine and crystallize and promote the role of wealthy third parties in our electoral system regardless of which side of the spectrum they occupy. I think that historically the role of those third parties in most political systems, certainly outside of Alberta and also in the U.S., has resulted in some gross distortions of what has happened in the legislative process afterwards. In fact, what we do here is we represent individual voters and we represent the collective interests of individual voters, and the best way to do that is for us to communicate with and participate with individual voters in as open and transparent a way as possible.

This bill goes a certain measure in this regard because at least it opens the door to look inside these third-party organizations and to maintain some level of accountability for their financing as they engage in the electoral debate and participation and, ultimately, extensive advertising. So we're at least able to see who's funding these groups, how much money is going to these groups, and where that money comes from, and we're able to a very small amount limit it although not to a large amount.

These third parties, however, don't act like political parties, so you can't necessarily join one of these third parties. As a citizen you can't join the party and engage in an open, transparent process to influence how that third party might ultimately choose to spend its money, and that's different from how political parties function. That's why I separate out political parties and suggest that they should be the primary vehicle for people's participation. These rules tend to as well exclude charitable organizations. I understand the reason for that. Because of tax reasons they can't engage in this kind of thing. I don't agree with that, but that is, unfortunately, the way it is. Again, there's a certain profile of people that become active in those groups, and those folks don't get to participate in that more transparent debate either.

What we end up with then is we have third-party organizations that may or may not have a great deal of money – mostly ones that engage in this do – and now we have a little bit of insight into what it is they're doing. Most other jurisdictions have chosen to go in a completely different direction. The federal government, B.C., Manitoba, Quebec have chosen to go in the direction of banning third-party advertisement, and that doesn't matter whether you're talking about union groups or whether you're talking about the National Citizens' Coalition.

Speaking as somebody on the left of the spectrum, somebody who typically supports the objectives of the labour movement probably as much or more than anyone else in the House, I can tell you that historically across the country what has happened is that it has been significant lobby organizations that oppose those very objectives who spend great deals of money to impact the political debate through advertising. So it does tend to be, actually, those on the right side of the spectrum who have in the past been able to utilize the third-party mechanism as a way of influencing political debate during an election.

In my view, that is not helpful to the democratic process. In my view, people should be able to engage in politics, and it should not become a question of being able to buy votes, buy opinion, buy advertising space. Frankly, in Alberta we should have a much more comprehensive set of rules around our own election financing as candidates, as members of political parties, we should have much more substantial limits on how much we can spend as political parties, and we should have much more substantial rules on the maximum donation that we can receive, all of that designed to ensure it is the individual voter whose activity and whose engagement ultimately makes the day one way or the other at the end of the process and that it's not one person or a group of 20 people with \$15,000 each who can decide a particular campaign in a particular riding.

4:30

Again, in most other jurisdictions we have much more significant limitations on election funding than we do in Alberta. That's where I, obviously, part ways with my colleagues because although this starts to apply the ever so lightly touched rules that we ourselves have to operate under to these third parties, it doesn't go anywhere near far enough. It should, frankly, ban third-party engagement altogether. It should then go hand in hand with the next step of very significantly limiting the way in which people who have the capacity to engage in the electoral process through the expenditure of money can impact that electoral process in a way that is different from those who would engage in it through the use of their time and their commitment and their ability to talk to other voters one-on-one.

That is how our elections should be decided. They shouldn't be bought. They shouldn't be bought by the governing party, they shouldn't be bought by opposition parties, and they shouldn't be

bought by third parties. They should be won and lost by, heaven forbid that I suggest it, the merits of your ideas and each party's ability on a level playing field to engage voters. That's what it should look like. I know I sound very naive, but it's been done in other provinces, and there's no reason why it shouldn't be done here.

We all know that one particular political party in this province outspends the other parties about 4 to 1, in some cases more than that, and I don't think that makes for a healthy democratic system. Certainly, we know that we have the most unhealthy democratic system in the country when it comes to the level of voter participation, so we need to think about what changes we can make, and part of that process, I think, is leveling the playing field and giving the right back to individual citizens to make a difference in how elections turn out rather than people with the biggest chequebooks.

That's our position on this. This bill, needless to say, doesn't go anywhere close to where I would like it to go but at least opens the door somewhat so that people can have the ever so slightest idea what other third parties are out there engaging in the effort to influence where voters end up on election day. That is a very, very tentative and small first step towards a much larger journey that I think we need to take if we are going to bring, really, quality once again into our electoral system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, and I want to thank him for this effort.

This bill is designed to clarify rules around third-party spending on political advertising during election campaigns. Some of this comes from the way in which this bill clearly defines what constitutes political advertising as well as who would be considered third-party sponsors and eligible donors. When coupled with the rules that would regulate contributions, we can see how Bill 205 would create a consistent, transparent, and fair mechanism that enhances free speech in Alberta. To a large extent this is because it reduces the ability of wealthy third parties or political parties to dominate the media and, therefore, the political discussion. In this way it not only leaves the door open for more ideas but also enables Albertans to participate in more direct ways by allowing them to support third parties that closely reflect their particular views and sensibilities.

Mr. Speaker, part of this bill's strength lies in the way it has been designed. It is crafted in such a way that it is comprehensive but at the same time targeted. In other words, it does not overreach but simply identifies a need and addresses it through directed and measured action.

More and more we are seeing other jurisdictions deal with the issues around money, influence, and political advertising and its effects on the greater political dialogue. One of the most recent and possibly most well known of these can be found in our neighbour to the south, the United States. On March 27, 2002, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, perhaps better known as the McCain-Feingold act, was signed into law, bringing with it a number of substantial and technical changes to American campaign finance legislation. Ultimately, it was directed at restoring the credibility and effectiveness of what some suggested was an American federal electoral system unduly influenced by contributions from wealthy third parties.

In order to achieve this objective, the act is based on two related key elements. The first includes provisions which restrict and in

some cases ban the receipt, solicitation, and use of nonfederal funds, referred to as soft money. This ban has met with considerable success due to the way in which it has managed to steer parties and elected officials away from soliciting large and in some cases unlimited donations from corporation, unions, and individuals. As well, parties themselves have increasingly taken up a more active role in the financing of presidential and congressional elections.

The other important element in McCain-Feingold, Mr. Speaker, was directed at restricting the influence of certain third parties by prohibiting labour organizations and corporations from financing electioneering communications, often referred to as issue ads. From a more technical standpoint the legislation defines this electioneering communication as any broadcast, cable, or satellite communication that fulfills each of the following conditions: first, the communication refers to a clearly identified candidate for federal office; second, it is publicly distributed shortly before an election for the office that that candidate is seeking; and finally, the communication is targeted to the relevant electorate.

There are some exceptions, however. This definition would not include communication that may appear within news stories and editorials or as part of a candidate debate or forum.

In addition, McCain-Feingold specifies who can make electioneering communications. It includes individuals, political committees, certain unincorporated organizations, and membership organizations, all of which require that they do not use corporate or labour funds to do so. There are additional rules and regulations that require those who do finance such communications to file disclosure reports. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, there is general agreement in the United States that these measures have gone a long way to bring greater transparency and clarity to political communications.

However, McCain-Feingold has not been without its critics. Indeed, there are those who question perhaps not its intent but its reach. Some suggest that it actually works to suppress free speech while others claim that McCain-Feingold acts as a tool of censorship. However, this argument is largely theoretical and with little convincing qualitative or quantitative evidence to support it. When we look at relevant indicators such as the amount of dollars spent and the range of diversity of views within advertising, by all accounts McCain-Feingold has done nothing to limit or damage the operation of free speech. In fact, the way in which it has focused on providing better transparency and clarity around the rules of electioneering communications of third parties has allowed for greater access by some of those previously excluded. This is a celebration of free speech, not a silencer.

4:40

In the end it is fair to say that Bill 205 addresses the same kinds of challenges as McCain-Feingold. Certainly, our respective jurisdictions are different, and perhaps the scope of these challenges is deeper in the United States if for no other reason than its relative size, but the goal is the same. Ensuring the ability of voters and citizens to participate in their democratic system is always at the forefront of what governments do directly or indirectly, and the important values of free speech and equality are something this government has always been committed to upholding. I believe that Bill 205 would enhance these efforts and allow all Albertans to continue to be a part of the political dialogue. I therefore support its passage and encourage all other members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak against Bill 205. This bill, I strongly believe, arose from the ad which was run in the last election, the Albertans for Change ad campaign, for which some unions claim they spent \$2 million. That was on the no plan. This is where it came from, I believe. This bill does nothing but suppress freedom of speech during elections. I think that was a great ad. It brought lots of issues to the forefront. It was only strengthening the democratic process by bringing all the issues to the forefront. That is the best way, I think, to keep the electoral process strong in a way so that during an election, you know, Albertans can decide what is best for the province and what is best for all the electors. This bill does nothing more than suppress that freedom of speech.

Also, the B.C. government brought in a similar kind of bill, which was challenged in the courts. The government even conceded, you know, that freedom of speech was infringed on by that bill. Under the Charter of Rights I think that this bill is like opening a can of worms. It will be coming up for challenge if we pass this bill. This is nothing but, I think, problems later on, even after the bill is passed. I don't think that we should be restricting third-party advertising during elections. Everybody should have the right of free speech, and this is free speech during elections to bring all of the issues to the forefront. That's what was done during the Albertans for Change ad campaign. That brought lots of issues to the forefront. It was not an attack on anybody personally but an attack on the record of the government. Although all Albertans were made aware of the ad campaign, we know what kind of effect it had on Albertans. It brought the issues to the forefront.

Even the B.C. government lost that in the courts. The law was challenged, and the judge did not go with the government's vision on that. I strongly believe that we don't need this new law through Bill 205 because this is going to suppress the freedom of lots of Albertans. For those reasons I'm not supporting this bill. It's suppressing freedom of speech.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Other participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief. I just want to get a couple of points on the record about this particular bill, Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. There's been some talk about how this will bring transparency and clarity to the issue of third-party advertising by requiring those advertisers to register with the Chief Electoral Officer in advance of any advertising campaign and mandate that they reveal where their money comes from and the way that it is spent and put some restrictions on the amount of money that any one person or organization can donate in a nonelection year or in an election year and so on and so forth and like that, which is all well and good except that there seems to be a fair amount of transparency and clarity, even if it is after the fact, around who the Albertans for Change were in the ad campaign that certainly seems to have sparked the need for this bill.

I mean, it is a private member's bill, Mr. Speaker, although the Premier mused not long after the last election that maybe we have to bring in some election reform to speak to this issue because the governing party was clearly upset with the no-plan sound bite and the no-plan campaign, although it clearly didn't do them any harm. It may in fact have done them some good. There may have been some blowback that got a few more of them elected than otherwise would have been the case. There's no secret, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, as to who this Albertans for Change third-party association was or whom it included. It included the AFL, the building trades,

the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Health Sciences Association, and the United Nurses of Alberta. I think that's well known.

So I'm not really sure that there's a particularly crying, pressing need for this transparency and clarity that the government seems to be situationally concerned about. When they see a benefit to themselves, they're all for transparency and clarity, and when they see that transparency and clarity might reveal a little bit more about their operations than they would like to, well, then they're not nearly as eager to do that sort of thing. I question the need for this. It's not exactly a huge problem, either an acute or chronic problem, third-party advertising in Alberta elections. I suppose it might become so, but it hasn't become so yet, in my view.

I think my colleague from Calgary-McCall referenced the court challenge in British Columbia. You know, I would always urge that before we bring forward legislation in this House and approve it, we be sensitive to whether we are needlessly courting the possibility of a court challenge.

The last point that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is basically this, and it goes to the participation in debate by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who raised the McCain-Feingold bill in the United States. Now, that's a very interesting concept and one that might very well apply to legislation like this if the government is not bringing it forward as government business but if it's to go forward in this House as private business. I've often talked about how we should rearrange things legislatively and procedurally so that there is more time for private business and more opportunity for those of us of any party who are not actually part of the government, that being the Premier and cabinet, to bring forward legislation, hopefully good, onto the floor of this House, work with members from all parties, negotiate our way through it, and make good law on the floor of the House much like they often do in state Legislatures, in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the U.S. Senate as well.

4:50

This brings us back to McCain-Feingold. McCain is a Republican, Feingold is a Democrat, and they worked together in a bipartisan way on the legislation that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod references. You know, I think I would have an easier time with this because, for one thing, I would have a sense that there are fewer axes, perhaps, being ground on the part of any individuals or any parties if we worked together collaboratively on a piece of legislation like this. Rather than one private member representing one party bringing it forward, I'd be a whole lot more inclined to support legislation like this or to give it some serious consideration if it was brought forward collaboratively by a Conservative and a Liberal and a New Democrat.

That's an approach we don't see in this House. In fact, we might even have to change the standing orders – I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker – in order to allow that to happen. But in legislation like this, where we are seeking to put limits and restrictions on the ability of third parties to enter the campaign, perhaps for the right reasons, perhaps for the wrong reasons, I'd be a whole lot more comfortable to see that kind of bill come forward with a Conservative and a Liberal and a New Democrat sponsor because, if for no other reason, then that allows the third parties who might be impacted by such legislation to hold all parties to account for having had private members who brought that legislation forward.

I think that would be fairer. I think that would get to better legislation. I think I might be able to support that. But, Mr. Speaker, I can't support this particular bill, and I will be voting against it at the appropriate time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers, or should I call on the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to close the debate?

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all the members who have participated in the debate on this bill. In closing, I would just like to highlight and remind the members that this legislation applies to everybody. It applies to individuals, it applies to corporations, unions, organizations, everybody equally. That is important.

It also treats them the same as political parties. We want to try to put third parties and political parties, with regard to election advertising, on the same playing field, and that's what this does. It increases transparency and accountability, levels the playing field, and it respects the fundamental principles of democracy that have been talked about today.

With that, I close the debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:54 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Anderson	Fawcett	Morton
Berger	Forsyth	Notley
Calahasen	Groeneveld	Oberle
Campbell	Horne	Olson
Cao	Jablonski	Renner
Dallas	Knight	Rogers
DeLong	Leskiw	Tarchuk
Denis	Liepert	Weadick
Drysdale	Marz	Webber
Elniski	McQueen	Woo-Paw

Against the motion:

Chase	Pastoor	Taylor
Kang		

Totals:	For – 30	Against – 4
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[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a second time]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: Clerk, just hold the clock for a second, please. We've now gone six minutes past the hour of 5 o'clock. Our standing orders indicate that at 5 o'clock sharp motions must be called. However, they're not to be called if, in fact, we have the procedure we've just gone through, a division. So we will start the time allocation for this motion now at six and a half minutes past the hour of 5 o'clock.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Aboriginal History and Culture Month

507. Ms Calahasen moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the month of June as aboriginal history and culture month in Alberta.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour to sponsor Motion 507. Culture is an essential ingredient in a well-

lived life. Culture is that which connects individuals to their communities, to their provinces, to their nations, and nations to the world. Culture describes who people are, what they value, what their customs are, how they spend their time, how they think about and treat each other, and, of course, where they come from. History determines our future and can be a lesson for future generations. The *Oxford* dictionary identifies it as a whole series of past events connected with someone or something or, as my elders described it to me in Cree, a forum of our ancestors talking to us of past activities, trials, and tribulations. It can provide a way to remember your good deeds and, yes, sacrifices our people have made during difficult times.

As an example, over 200 years ago many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures existed in this country with many aboriginal nations with their own rules, mores, laws, customs, and traditions. History shows that much of the original aboriginal lifestyles has disappeared, and many aboriginal nations and cultures were decimated, indigenous languages lost, kinship relationships confused, and, yes, illnesses new to the original peoples were rampant.

Rare has it been for the aboriginal community to tell its story and its history, rarer yet to openly practise its faith. That is why this motion is being put forward to help promote and acknowledge First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples' culture and historical contributions in this province, because, Mr. Speaker, it is this province which has done many positive things for and with aboriginal Albertans.

As an example, Alberta was first to settle the land claims quickly and fairly. Alberta was first to have the native education policy recognizing the history of the people by using elders and aboriginal historians, and their work was then taught in the schools. The recognition of the language development of the many aboriginal nations in this province was also done. The establishment of the aboriginal health strategy; the developing of the aboriginal policy framework and the aboriginal policy initiative; establishing traditional land-use studies, mapping where the aboriginal peoples lived and where they practised their culture; the economic development partnerships that have been developed; completing more land claims; signing between our present Premier and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations with the grand chiefs for an MOU; the Métis settlements agreement signed and finally to be completed; the Métis nation framework to be implemented: I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but this government has a history of doing the right thing because we've had and continue to have great leaders.

The creation of an aboriginal history and culture month would be an opportunity for Albertans to learn about the experiences of aboriginal Canadians and the vital role this community has played throughout our shared history. The numerous generations of aboriginal peoples who have made the prairie provinces their home for thousands of years have a multifaceted and rich history. As an example, I'm of Cree descent. We have a lot of Métis who are also Métis-Cree. We also have Bloods. We also have Blackfoot people, and we have Inuit people. We also have people of the Chipewyan Nation. We have many, many different nations in this province. Approximately 188,000 people in Alberta identified themselves as aboriginal during the 2006 Canadian census. There are 46 First Nations and eight Métis settlements in Alberta with many different cultures and languages.

5:10

To recognize June as a commemorative month would help these 188,000 people and other Albertans in so many ways. First, the acknowledgement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples' historical contribution to this province and this country will be elevated. As well, their own histories could be written and preserved

so that others could experience what they have. Second, acknowledgement of aboriginal peoples' culture would give the aboriginal community the ability to further showcase their cultural practices. Third, it would allow the numerous languages that we do have, as I described, to flourish.

Today I ask all members of this Assembly to support June as aboriginal history and culture month as my elders had so wished. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I rise in support of Motion 507, the idea of making June the aboriginal history and culture month in Alberta. As has previously been noted, June 21 is already National Aboriginal Day in Canada, so we would be in sort of a lockstep circumstance with celebrating First Nations achievements and culture.

I think that if there is such a thing as a second life, then at some point in a previous life I was connected with a First Nations background. Since a child I have been absolutely fascinated with First Nations culture, First Nations history. As a young child I was an avid reader and read anything I could get my hands on with regard to First Nations. Being a child of the late '40s and early '50s, the portrayal of First Nations was not very positive in the movies. Despite that portrayal, when we as young children played cowboys and Indians, I was always on the Indian side, and my side always won. Maybe it was somewhat revisionist history. I thought that the First Nations showed considerably more creativity and wisdom, both environmentally and in the way they preserved their culture, than the chaps with the white hats and the bandanas, who rode around on their horses, basically, with one single shot able to knock five First Nations people off their horses.

I also noted that in the '50s there were an awful lot of Mediterranean Apaches employed in Hollywood. It's only been recently that we have seen a true portrayal of First Nations and their actual stories in history.

It's very important that we recognize when we move from sort of history and that time period to the modern day that First Nations are the fastest growing segment of the population. The First Nations offer a tremendous contribution, not only to our western provinces and across Canada, but First Nations aboriginals offer a terrific lesson on life and the need to preserve Mother Earth, as the term is so often used. It's a lesson that we need to learn.

There are also tremendous lessons with regard to coexistence and also tremendous lessons with regard to how elders are treated and respected. First Nations had a terrific respect for individuals who were viewed as suffering. Potentially, we would view them as suffering from mental illness. These people in First Nations were regarded as having been specially touched, and as such they were treated. It was thought that some of these individuals had vision beyond that of the ordinary person.

Part of First Nations background is the idea of a spirit animal or a spirit bird, and fasting was an important part of First Nations celebrations regardless of the tribe. This was called a vision quest, and the idea was that by depriving yourself of sleep and sustenance, if you waited long enough, your spirit animal or spirit bird would come to you with a message, and that message would have important ramifications not only for your own personal survival but for that of the tribe of which you were a member. There was also a thought that as you progressed in life, it was appropriate that your name changed based on the accomplishments you made. So while you

might have started out with a particular name, as you matured and as your accomplishments were noted, your name would change numerous times within the process.

One of the most significant First Nations encounters that I personally had was as a teacher when Douglas Cardinal, Alberta's very famous architect, spoke at a teachers' convention in Calgary. As I say, I already had a strong sense and appreciation of First Nations history, particularly in what we would refer to as the Victorian time period, but my enjoyment was prior to 1850, while there was still buffalo and sufficient game and the majority of western First Nations were nomads and followed the game.

At the teachers' convention I asked Douglas Cardinal what sort of First Nations wisdom, what philosophies inspired him in his architectural creations. He related the story of a church he designed in New Mexico. He had built the walls of the church without predetermining what the roof would look like, and as he was contemplating his work, he went out into the wilderness. He saw in a bush a spider's web, and that gave him the idea of the cross-cabing from which the roof was suspended.

I asked him: who would you suggest in terms of philosophers or elders that I could potentially research or draw inspiration from? He talked about a Sioux elder by the name of Black Elk. Black Elk was revered by the Sioux Nation as a man of great wisdom. Following having read *The Sacred Pipe*, Black Elk's first book, I was drawn to other pieces of literature by First Nations authors such as Lame Deer. One of the books, the historical references that I particularly enjoyed that talked about shamanism and spiritualism was entitled *Mitakuye Oyasmin*, which translated from Sioux simply means "we are all related."

It's that relationship that we share that makes Motion 507 particularly important. We have benefited from our contact with the First Nations. I wouldn't say that it was necessarily a reciprocal agreement because what we offered back, such as blankets covered with small pox, were some of the examples of genocide that occurred in early Canadian history. Canadian history may not appear to have been nearly as violent as what we saw below the Medicine Line in the United States, but we have our share of history which is hardly positive.

5:20

Recently Stephen Harper, our Prime Minister and our Calgary-based representative, made an apology to First Nations about the effects of residential schools, which were not simply limited to the first generation that was taken from their families but affected subsequent generations. At some point people will say, "Well, we've got to get on with it. We've got to stop apologizing and work with First Nations." But for us to progress further, we need to recognize beyond just a simple apology that what we did was a form of cultural genocide. First Nations individuals were not allowed to speak their language. They were not allowed to wear their hair in the traditional manner. They were not allowed to wear traditional clothing . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a long list of speakers this afternoon, and we have a very, very short amount of time. I'd encourage brevity, and I'll try and move everyone in.

Just to bring you up to date on some developing news, mid-afternoon today the government of Nova Scotia presented its budget. Shortly thereafter the government was defeated on a bill that would have allowed it to miss a debt payment. So the Premier of Nova Scotia must now meet with the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, and by all likelihood that province will be in election mode.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in support of Motion 507, Alberta's Aboriginal History and Culture Month, as sponsored by my colleague from Lesser Slave Lake. The purpose of Motion 507 is to urge the government to recognize June as the month during which aboriginal history and culture would be officially recognized and celebrated. The commemorative month would also signify our province's acknowledgement of aboriginal peoples' present and historical contributions. This motion would also be an opportunity to demonstrate the Alberta government's respect for aboriginal history and culture and to further its commitment to encouraging aboriginal people to make a positive difference in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to read a few passages from the book *People & Peaks of Willmore Wilderness Park: 1800s to mid-1900s*. It's a book that was written in my riding.

The mountain men and women of the Mt. Robson, Jasper, Willmore and Kakwa areas had, and still have, exceptional abilities and knowledge. If one were to liken their aptitude in today's education system standards, they would be recognized with a PhD in bush knowledge. These trail people exercised refined skills in survival, tracking, hunting, horsemanship, trapping and fishing. An example of this is when one aboriginal elder showed me how to make a candle out of lard and a tea towel, when the candle supply was depleted. This simple technique afforded our camp two nights of light, which was superior to the candles we had previously been using. Survival in remote places took ingenuity and common sense . . .

In the early 1800s, the white man wanted to find natural corridors through the Canadian Rockies – so the search began. The Indians had been travelling through these natural passageways for generations. One of the first attempts to find a practical route to the Pacific Ocean was through what is now called Howse Pass. Although David Thompson has been credited with the first crossing of this Pass in 1807, his employer, the North West Company, had sent an advance party over the pass in 1806. This trail-blazing trip was made by Jacques (Jacco) Findlay, a man named MacMaster, and two others. They drew a sketch of their route, and upon their return to Rocky Mountain House, presented it to Thompson. This helped to guide Thompson on his first passage in 1807, during which he officially mapped the area. However, the pass was named after Joseph Howse, even though it was not until 1809 that he crossed for his employer, the Hudson's Bay Company . . .

The first reports of Iroquois in the Athabasca Valley were recorded in 1814, resulting in their bloodlines running deep in the veins of the area's indigenous people. The Wanyandies were some of the first Iroquois to come west. In fact, Vincent (Basa) Wanyandie landed a job with Henry John Moberly, a Hudson's Bay Factor at Jasper House. He was born in 1858 and was the son of Jean Baptiste Wanyandie . . . and the grandson of fur trader, Ignace Wanyandie, one of the first Iroquois who guided the first explorers west . . .

Some of the indigenous families, like the present-day Wanyandies, have striking features of the Iroquois. "Many of them stand over six feet, broad-shouldered and erect, big men with aquiline noses and strong features; while the Cree are short in stature, with round faces and snub noses. The Iroquois who came west were select men." The Rocky Mountain People, called the Aseniwuche Winewak, have long acknowledged their family ties with the Iroquois, Cree, Beaver, and Stoney.

Today such names as the Wanyandies, Joachims, Moberlys, Vinsons, Findlays, and Groats are still familiar names up and down the eastern slopes and continue to work and live off the land. Of note, the Findlay name, that is synonymous with the fur trade in and around Jasper and now Grande Cache, traces its Caucasian roots back to the royalty in Scotland.

Mr. Speaker, the Métis and the AWN people play an important role in the workings of West Yellowhead as they continue to teach

the traditional ways to the people and to the youth as they try to keep their languages and cultures alive. The local Métis hold summer camps each year where they bring as many as 50 youth out into the bush on horseback, getting them away from Xboxes, TVs, and cellphones, to continue the traditional ways such as cooking gopher, which is a delicacy among the Cree.

On July 25, 2009, the Métis of Grande Cache will embark on a 14-day horse trip with 25 of their youth from Grande Cache to Jasper, following the routes taken by their forefathers, to celebrate a hundred years since this forced migration from Jasper to the valleys and peaks of the Grande Cache area.

We're all proud of our heritage, and it would be wrong for us to not acknowledge, identify, and celebrate the culture and accomplishments of aboriginal people to the opening up of this great country, this province, and, in particular, my riding of West Yellowhead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise in support of this motion to declare June aboriginal history month. It's my understanding that Saskatchewan has officially recognized aboriginal history month in June in both 2007 and 2008, yet it is not recognized every year quite as yet. In 2007 Jean Crowder, the NDP MP for Nanaimo-Cowichan, put forward a private member's motion to have June recognized as aboriginal history month, but the motion was unfortunately never debated.

Nonetheless, the objective which is sought here is one which I think all members of the House can agree on. Promotion of aboriginal history and culture is vital to a full understanding of what it means to be Albertan and Canadian. Aboriginal people knew this land and not only survived but often thrived here for thousands of years before the arrival of any Europeans. Those early European visitors required the help of aboriginals to survive. The early fur trade succeeded because of the skills of the aboriginal people and the trade networks that aboriginal people helped to develop.

Many years ago I had the pleasure of working at the historic site at historic Fort Dunvegan and often ran numbers of tours of people through that Alberta site and would have the opportunity to speak in part about the significant role played by our aboriginal people, including the Beaver Indians, when the fur traders were just beginning to make their way up through the Peace River.

Some of the most exciting places to visit in Alberta are already places associated with aboriginal history and culture. Writing-On-Stone national historic site, a provincial park since 1957, protects the largest concentration of North American Plains rock art. The preserve is accessed by guided tours only which allow park visitors to view over 50 rock art sites and enjoy many interpretive programs. Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, of course, is the UNESCO world heritage site, and it's one of the world's oldest, largest, and best preserved buffalo jumps, bearing witness to the custom practised by North American Plains natives for nearly 6,000 years. The Ewan Moberly Homestead, I believe already mentioned, is in Jasper national park.

All Albertans are enriched by the role that aboriginal societies have played in the development of our province. It is really important that as we all, I suspect, vote to support this motion, we not let our celebration and desire to promote and appreciate aboriginal culture gloss over our ongoing need to respond to the needs of our aboriginal people with more justice than perhaps we have thus far. We have the ongoing inability to complete the

negotiation of a fair Métis harvesting agreement. We have the ongoing concerns raised by aboriginal communities living downstream from the Fort McMurray area. We have what is probably one of the most tragic and embarrassing international situations with respect to the status of the Lubicon and our government's inability to resolve those issues.

5:30

None of these issues should be forgotten by us. But ultimately as our First Nations people move forward, while they may need our support in certain areas with respect to the kinds of decisions I've just discussed, it is they who will lead their own journey forward, and it is through this kind of process, where we acknowledge and celebrate aboriginal culture and aboriginal history, that we will be able to help provide the vehicle through which our aboriginal brothers and sisters will be able to move forward to provide and create many, many more centuries of history for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I have eight speakers on my list. If you spoke two to three minutes, we'd get you all in.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also want to say a sincere thank you to the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, who championed this motion thus far and, hopefully, will champion it through to conclusion with support from all members of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief in my comments. I simply want to indicate that I'm very supportive of this particular motion. We've already heard that the single fastest growing population by cultural identity, by group, is in fact the aboriginal population. We're very proud of the 225,000 aboriginal people in Alberta who self-identify as either First Nation, Métis, or Inuit. There are probably more that we could add to that number. Certainly, we'll be adding a lot more in the coming years.

This provides us with some great opportunities in so many areas. One of the greatest opportunities is in the area of economic development and in job training and skills training. I know that that is being pursued very aggressively. A motion such as this one, that officially serves to have the Assembly recognize the month of June as aboriginal history and culture month, merits our serious attention. Anything, in my view, that helps to promote the positive sides of aboriginals and the aboriginal way of life, that particular focus, is something that I am very much in favour of.

We're doing some of this promotion ourselves to help out on the education front, to help out on the economic development front, certainly to help out on the resource management and land management front. In fact, all of those issues, Mr. Speaker, will be part of the focus we're putting on aboriginal things, coincidentally, in the month of June with our international symposium, Gathering for Success. It'll be hosted in the lovely constituency of Banff-Cochrane on June 28, 29, and 30. A number of our colleagues will be there as well.

The other point I want to mention quickly, Mr. Speaker, is some of the new and exciting things that have been alluded to by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake such as the protocol agreement with First Nations in Alberta, such as our three-year interim agreement with the Métis settlements, such as our seven-year agreement that's just recently been signed with the Métis Nation of Alberta, and, of

course, the first-ever aboriginal education summit that occurred between ministers of education, ministers of advanced education, and all ministers of aboriginal relations or aboriginal affairs from right across Canada, which was hosted in Saskatoon at the end of February.

There are many things that we can learn from aboriginal people, from their way of life, from their rich and diverse culture. Having a month dedicated to that will go a long way to helping it be fulfilled. I think it also bears mention, Mr. Speaker, that my ministry is proud to provide about \$30,000 in annual funding for the support of National Aboriginal Day, which is traditionally held on the weekend of June 21. We're going to be hosting some events in that regard ourselves. We're looking forward to that.

My final couple of points are these. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Education ministry a few years ago brought in aboriginal studies 10, aboriginal studies 20, aboriginal studies 30. I was very privileged to be the Minister of Education at that time. I'm happy to tell you that in just a few years of it being there, children in our schools today are learning more about aboriginal business here in the province of Alberta than ever before.

When I grew up, we knew a lot more about the Treaty of Versailles, which came about at the end of World War I in 1919, about the Treaties of Rome, which came about in 1958, all about the European Economic Community, and so on than did we learn, or did I ever know, about Treaty 6 or Treaty 7 or Treaty 8, which are less than an hour or two, three, four hours' drive from the city in which I live. So anything that helps focus on that is definitely worth supporting.

I'll just close by saying that I hope other members of the Assembly will also support this motion, and I thank the aboriginal community for supporting this and for supporting some of the many initiatives that we're bringing forward to indeed build more positive, more productive relationships with and for Métis, First Nation, and Inuit cultures that thrive here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, then Edmonton-Meadowlark, then Calgary-Mackay.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to support Motion 507 on aboriginal culture and history month. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing this motion forward because it's such an important topic for many Albertans. Motion 507 urges the government of Alberta to recognize June as the aboriginal history and culture month. I believe this is important to recognize the aboriginal community for its influential role it has played in our provincial history. This motion would be very meaningful for the people of my constituency. In Bonnyville-Cold Lake we have a large aboriginal population spread over five areas: Frog Lake, Cold Lake, Kehewin, Elizabeth settlement, and Fishing Lake settlement.

By proclaiming June as an aboriginal history and cultural month, it would help to improve the connection between our communities through the sharing of culture and traditions. This recognition would help to instill pride in aboriginal culture and ensure that traditions are passed on from generation to generation. Not only would Motion 507 improve the connection between communities, but it would help to strengthen the relationship between the aboriginal community and the government of Alberta.

June 21 has already been established as National Aboriginal Day, and Motion 507 would work to complement this. Mr. Speaker, establishing the aboriginal history and cultural month would be so

meaningful to many Albertans, especially to many in my constituency. I would ask all members to please vote in favour of Motion 507 and recognize the important role that aboriginal culture plays in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, then Calgary-Mackay, then Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in support of Motion 507, which is to declare June to be aboriginal history and culture month in Alberta. I will just start with saying that I think that for us people coming from India, there's a bond there between the natives, aboriginal people, and us, and we respectfully call them tae-ke. Tae-ke is the Indian word for uncle. The uncle, you know, the older brother of dad, is called tia. So, I mean, I think the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark will agree with me that when he was driving a cab and when I was driving a cab and we had a fare from the Tsuu T'ina reserve and when he asked me, "Where did you go for a fare?" I said, "I went to pick up a tae-ke." That means, you know, I went to pick up my uncle's sons and nephews, nieces. That's the word we use respectfully, tae-ke. So that correlates to us personally.

I'm glad that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake brought in this motion to recognize all the contributions made by the aboriginal and native people in Canada since June 21 is National Aboriginal Day, which the federal government recognized in 1996. National Aboriginal Day is to give Canadians the opportunity to show their appreciation and respect to aboriginal people and to recognize the unique achievements of aboriginal people through celebration although there are lots of issues still maybe to be resolved, like Lubicon issues and other land claim issues and limitations on hunting and fishing rights.

5:40

It's an ongoing primary concern for Alberta's aboriginal people. Aboriginal people see that these issues are infringing on their ability to participate in their own culture, and I think we should be working towards solving all those issues. All too often the focus is placed on the aboriginal community surrounding their socioeconomic problems instead of their positive contributions. We should be recognizing all the positive contributions made by our native brothers and sisters. I think it is long overdue, and I urge all the members of the Assembly to support this motion. I'm in favour of it, and we're all going to support it.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

Five speakers left. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 507, aboriginal history and culture month, proposed by the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Speaker, on several occasions I've mentioned that the majority of Albertans and Canadians, me included, have immigrated from other provinces and distant countries; if not us, then our ancestors. I'd just like to tell you a couple of stories. On my first day in Canada I arrived as a six and a half year old, and I didn't speak English. I met this young fellow whose name was Shawn Baker. He looked like me. I assumed he was from India, and I started speaking the only tongue that I knew. He looked at me in a

very peculiar fashion, and he took me to the other fellow who had the same skin complexion as I did who spoke my mother tongue. That's when I first came to learn of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

The other story I'd like to share with you. The hon. member sitting next to me, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake: as fate would have it, my father-in-law actually taught the hon. member next to me 40 some-odd years ago as a social teacher in Peace River. His name is Mr. Singh. And this hon. member, my understanding is, is the first aboriginal woman elected in Canada, first aboriginal woman cabinet minister.

Many Canadians, Mr. Speaker, are recent immigrants encountering the beautiful seasonal prairie climate for the first time. Others have been enjoying life in Alberta for decades while more still are descendants of immigrant families who've been arriving for various reasons throughout the centuries, some in search of adventure and a new life, others escaping what are very difficult and hostile environments. No matter the category or duration of stay, the government of Alberta supports and encourages the presence of immigrants from across the world here in this country and this province.

The value of our positive contributions to Alberta's society is recognized and appreciated, but as we all should know, numerous organized communities were established here long before our arrival, before the formation of the province, and, yes, even before the influx of the European explorers, adventurers, and pioneers. In fact, the aboriginal peoples were living here and thriving here for thousands of years prior to the discovery of the so-called New World.

Alberta's First Nations have a rich and vibrant history and culture, and while relationships have been strained in the past, currently the government of Alberta and the province's First Nations enjoy a strong collaborative friendship based on mutual respect and honour. Aboriginal political culture is on display here in this building. Perhaps you've noticed that the first statue adorning the rotunda of this Legislature is that of Chief Crowfoot, leader of the Blackfoot confederation, who showed his bravery, prudence, and desire for peace by refusing to join the Northwest Rebellion in 1885.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta recognizes June 21 as National Aboriginal Day. On this day all Albertans can celebrate the unique heritage and culture of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples throughout the province of Alberta. However, the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has put forth a motion which I support wholeheartedly to designate the entire month of June for aboriginal history and culture.

This commemorative month would symbolize the province's acknowledgement of aboriginal peoples' historical, present, and future involvement in shaping Alberta's spirit. It would be a gesture of friendship between our government and our aboriginal peoples. By remembering aboriginal culture for an extended period, we can start changing misconceptions. We can develop a positive rapport and inspire our aboriginal youth, who can give whole communities new hope.

On behalf of my family, that has had the honour and privilege of landing on Canadian shores 103 years ago, I would like to thank our aboriginal peoples of Canada for the opportunity to live in the best province in the best country in the world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, it's unfortunate, hon. member, that you cannot correct *Hansard*. There is no way in the world that your father-in-law taught the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake 46 years ago. If she was studying social then, that would make her a minimum of 68. I know for a fact that she's no more than a day over 37, so I'll correct it for you for the record.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, then Edmonton-Calder, then Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to be fast. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on Motion 507, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Aboriginal Canadians hold a distinctive place within the social, political, and cultural fabric of Canada as well as a vital role in the historic, current, and future development of our communities and nation. Aboriginal Canadians have contributed in all aspects of development in the province of Alberta, and it's anticipated they will play an even greater role in the future social and economic growth of our province.

The aboriginal communities' path of development within the broader context of the Canadian fabric hasn't been a smooth one. It has in fact been one fraught with marginalization and exclusion and overcoming trial and tribulation with individual and collective perseverance and tenacity. The impact from centuries of systemic exclusion resulted in adverse outcomes for aboriginal people in health, education, justice, employment, social participation, and economic opportunities on this continent.

We know from research of the continual omission of a people from the vast facets of society such as our books and texts, various forms of communications media, positions of leadership in institutions of power. Without acknowledgement of the existence and impact of institutionalized or systemic barriers on people, it is almost inevitable for many of the marginalized to ascribe their place and circumstances as faults of their own doing, which then leads to the acceptance and internalization of the negative attributes into their lives and their communities.

I am pleased to note that our government's response to the needs and issues of aboriginal people is taking on a more systemic approach, which is absolutely critical as the problems impacting the people are structural. We have ministries responsible for education, health, advanced education, employment, and sustainable development not only to develop specific strategies and programs to address the specific needs and issues experienced by aboriginal people but also working across ministries to better co-ordinate efforts. Our government also has a stand-alone ministry to focus efforts and development in aboriginal relations.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed motion to urge the government to recognize the month of June as Alberta's aboriginal history and culture month would expand and enhance our government's current efforts to strengthen the capacity of the aboriginal people for greater engagement and participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political life in Alberta. I believe a dedicated aboriginal history and culture month would serve to enhance pride and belonging, especially for the younger population among aboriginal Canadians, resulting from the public's increased awareness and understanding and appreciation of the participation and contribution of aboriginal people.

A greater sense of belonging and safety will lead to higher participation by aboriginal people. Their engagement with society would be more meaningful and equitable due to improved overall social relations. Society will benefit from a heightened level of social cohesion in the long run. I envision tremendous opportunities for learning, celebration, and creative developments from this month. Aboriginal history and culture month could offer opportunities for business and literary as well as arts and cultural institutions to profile the participation, integration, and contribution of aboriginal Canadians.

There's opportunity to incorporate the recognition and celebration of aboriginal entrepreneurs, literary accomplishments, visual artists,

groundbreakers, and outstanding achievement in areas of law, education, entertainment, research into the program during and around the month. These will enhance the diverse representation of the events and programs, and these events will also contribute to dispelling the misconceptions and stereotypes of our aboriginal Canadians.

The proposed aboriginal history and culture month can also serve as a platform for sharing community experiences and untold stories that would build better understanding. As an example, I have learned that when Chinese labourers were brought in to help build the Canadian railroad, they were left to die along the developing railroad when they became gravely ill or injured, and many times it was the aboriginal people who took them in and brought them back to health. I think human stories like this and historical relationships such as this are worth capturing and sharing.

Drummers from aboriginal communities and the Indian community, the Asian community, and African communities, and many others would be creating new beats and connections. I've tried this, and it's beautiful. I can see people from the aboriginal and nonaboriginal communities sharing and creating new forms of art, drama, and theatre and in the process contributing to creating a more vibrant cultural scene in Alberta and, hence, the support and participation of the arts in Alberta.

5:50

In closing, I believe the recognition of June as aboriginal history and culture month will enhance the social relations and cultural vibrancy of our province, which would benefit all Albertans of all backgrounds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm speaking today in support of Motion 507, and I'll try and do it quickly to allow for other speakers. Our government is so proud of the cultural diversity amongst our caucus, which, I believe, truly reflects the cultural mosaic of our province.

The aboriginal peoples have a rich history in cultural traditions that are an important part of the diversity of our province. As the MLA for Drayton-Valley-Calmar I have been fortunate enough to work in close contact with many of the aboriginal people in my constituency in Hobbema and, in particular, the two bands of Ermineskin and Louis Bull. I have participated in several events and meetings in my capacity as MLA, and I must say I have learned a great deal about their way of life and their culture, and I certainly look forward to many more opportunities.

Motion 507 will give all Albertans an excellent opportunity to learn about the history and achievements of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. It would serve to educate future generations of Albertans about the history, culture, and positive contributions made to our great province by aboriginal peoples and leaders. The recognition and celebration of the contributions aboriginal people have made to our province and nation would be an important tool in showing our support for aboriginal youth and enabling them by giving them the confidence necessary to become actively engaged in their community. This could encourage more aboriginal peoples to break forth and to consider other areas that they may not have felt they would break into for careers. In fact, in my area we have been fortunate enough to have an aboriginal leader who was also elected to the House of Commons in the 1980s, Chief Wilton Littlechild.

I believe we need to not only embrace the unique history of the aboriginal people in our province but celebrate with aboriginal people around the province and, indeed, the country and educate

future generations to overcome the challenges or obstacles aboriginal people have experienced and continue to face in our society largely as a result of ignorance.

I am in full support of this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 507. Edmonton-Calder is the home to many aboriginal people, organizations, and schools, something which we're very proud of. In fact, the hon. Member for Drayton-Valley-Calmar once said, "It's all in Calder," and that seems particularly appropriate. We have the Métis Urban Housing Corporation, Métis Settlements General Council, the Métis Nation of Alberta, the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, the native elders community centre, Amiskwaciy Academy, and Prince Charles elementary school, which is in the Awasis program.

Declaring June as the aboriginal history and culture month will help us further not only the educational efforts in our constituencies but also our whole communities to teach all Albertans about the prominent role that aboriginal Albertans play in our province's rich history.

I would ask all members to please vote in favour of Motion 507 and to help promote awareness of the importance of aboriginal history and culture in Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for your co-operation.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 507, Aboriginal History and Culture Month, as sponsored by my colleague the Member for Lesser Slave Lake. Motion 507 encourages the government of Alberta to recognize June as the month during which aboriginal history and culture would be officially recognized and celebrated. I would like to congratulate the hon. member for bringing this motion forward and bringing it to the attention of government.

Culture diversity is extremely important to Albertans. There are at least 188,000 aboriginal people and 46 First Nations groups in Alberta. Each of these groups boasts a different culture, language, and traditions. Mr. Speaker, aboriginal culture and values have played an important role in the development of Alberta, and aboriginals are proud people who have lived on the landscape of our province for thousands of years.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that an aboriginal history and culture month would have a number of benefits. It would help educate Albertans on the valuable role that aboriginal people have played in Canada. It would recognize that we the representatives of Albertans respect the value and contribution that aboriginal history and culture has had on Alberta, and it would demonstrate the Alberta government's commitment to encourage aboriginal people to make a positive difference.

It is for these reasons that I applaud the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for Motion 507, and I encourage all members of this House to do the same. Thank you.

The Speaker: Would additional members like to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to congratulate the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake for bringing this great motion to the Assembly, and I just want to tell of my own experience. A

few years ago I had the privilege of chairing the committee to review the Northland school district in the north. I went up there and I toured around and I visited many, many, many places there. At one particular place we were talking to a senior there, and she said to me that her priority is to protect the native, the aboriginal culture. She looked at me and said: you, young man, if you lose your Chinese culture here, you still have billions of people in China whereas if we lose it here, who else in the world do we have? I want to relate that message to all members here. It was a learning experience for me, and I support the hon. member's motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others, or should I call on the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake to close the debate?

Ms Calahasen: Just a short minute, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Aboriginal Relations for coming in to speak to this

motion and for all the great work that he's been doing on the Aboriginal Relations side. I'd like to thank all my colleagues from all sides of the House for their support on this motion. I really appreciate the knowledge that they have brought to the table. Thank you very, very much. I look forward to the vote.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the hour I would move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Issue 35

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my pleasure today on behalf of our Premier and yourself to introduce through you to all the members of the Assembly students participating in the Forum for Young Albertans program. We are joined today by 27 students from various high schools across Alberta.

The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning opportunity for senior high school students from all over the province. The program provides a wide variety of experiences for participants, including insight into the judicial system, the role of the bureaucracy, the function of interest groups, and the legislative process. While interacting with decision-makers, our leaders of tomorrow gain valuable insight into the political system in Alberta.

These students have already met with some of the members of the Assembly and will be meeting with many more throughout the week. I would ask the students and chaperones, seated in the public gallery, to rise and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to welcome students from Caernarvon elementary school in Edmonton-Castle Downs as their MLA is unable to be here today. These 60 bright young grade 6 students along with parent helpers and teachers Susanne Venaas and Bobbi-Jo Hollingsworth and teacher helper Melissa Carlson have toured our Legislature to learn a lot about our building and the provincial government. I believe they are sitting in both galleries. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we are fortunate to have a group of students from Horizon school in Olds. I met with them earlier, and they were very excited to go on a tour of this grand building and learn about its history. They're here this afternoon to learn how the Legislature works. We've got 10 students, and they're accompanied by six teachers/group leaders by the names of Lianne Manning, Doreen Mozak, Sarah Thompson, Marje Cheecho, Jackie Klein, and Anne Tuggle. I would ask all of them, students and leaders, to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two groups to introduce today. The first group is a group of new employees from Finance and Enterprise who, as part of their orientation, are taking a tour of the Legislature: Jennifer Keats, Parminder Lytviak, Karen Chan, Mike Hartfield, Laurie Balfour, Carole Marson, Margaret-Anne Huynh, Gavin Hoekstra, Ronald Brochu, Tomas Nilsson, Diana L'Heureux, and Artem Barsukov. Would they please rise, and would the Assembly please give them a warm round of applause.

Mr. Speaker, we also had a real privilege today at the rural caucus at lunch to be graced with the presence of four mayors and councillors, who provided us their experience on the regional economic development authorities. With us this afternoon are Dale Barr, who is the mayor of Rimbey, who is part of Central Alberta Economic Partnership; Pamela Marriott, who is the mayor of Swan Hills, with the Grizzly Regional Economic Alliance; Jack O'Toole, councillor from Grande Prairie, Peace Region Economic Development Alliance; and Don Whittaker, councillor for the county of Vermilion River, with the Northeast Alberta Information Hub. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise and that you please acknowledge them here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of this Assembly some folks that have travelled down here from La Crête. They're a group of people that have spent countless hours working for the betterment of their community, focusing on the issue of health care delivery in that extreme remote region of northwestern Alberta. With us today are George and Eva Friesen and George and Mary Janzen. Accompanying them is Jerry Archibald, who is a consultant that they've engaged.

Mr. Speaker, they've done so much work on this project and they're so committed to their community and they're so concerned about the issue of health care that in my meeting with them today they didn't even mention highway 88 even though some of them drove down on highway 88 to get here. An oversight I'm sure, and I'll hear about it later.

I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Doug Drozd. Doug is a director of the Central Alberta Rural Electrification Association, and he was kind enough to buy several of us breakfast this morning. Doug, as you might guess, is not from my constituency; rather, he is expertly represented in this Assembly by yourself. I'd ask Doug to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce guests from the Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton region, who are here to promote mental health awareness week and this year's theme: invest in yourself. For 55 years the Canadian Mental Health Association has been supporting the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. The CMHA is engaged with the community in education, advocacy, housing, community rehab, and supporting recovery for people

living with mental illness. I would like to invite my colleagues in the Assembly to join me at the sunny side up breakfast at CMHA offices tomorrow at 7:30 a.m.

I would now ask that my guests rise as I call their names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Brenda Wentzell, board member and chair of the social action committee; Dick Southworth, board member and chair of the fund development committee; Ione Challborn, executive director; and staff members Natasha Nicholson and Connie Benjamin. Also accompanying them are nine individuals involved in various CMHA programs. I would ask that the Assembly now join me in providing them with the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Pochaiv Maple Leaf Safe House

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an Albertan of Ukrainian descent and as chair of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations I would like to speak briefly about the Pochaiv maple leaf safe house project, or World for Children, an organization that is very near and dear to my heart. The Pochaiv project has been operating in the village of Malechkovitchi, Ukraine, since February 2000. This project was created to address the issue of human trafficking and, more specifically, the growing trafficking of women in both Ukraine and in Alberta.

The Pochaiv safe house project is comprised of volunteers throughout Alberta who are dedicated to improving the lives of women affected by human trafficking. A safe house has been created where teens will be protected from human trafficking and sex slavery. A school is to be created nearby so that these teens can receive the education that they so dearly deserve. Other local service agencies like Youth Emergency Shelter and Crossroads Outreach also help to provide a brief transition for trafficked children, teens, and women from eastern Europe. The government of Alberta has given financial support to this project through the Wild Rose Foundation, but private donations from both Albertans and Canadians remain the largest source of funding for these activities.

The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations and I have personally visited the Pochaiv project in Ukraine. When I returned to Canada, I helped to raise \$5,000 to help an orphanage buy a washer and dryer and, along with some of my former students from H.E. Bourgoin school in Bonnyville, have also sponsored a child in need.

I will be tabling two documents from this organization later this afternoon to help raise awareness about trafficking of women both in Ukraine and in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

1:40 Lethbridge High Level Bridge Centennial

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to this House about a subject near and dear to everyone in my hometown of Lethbridge. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Lethbridge viaduct, better known as the High Level Bridge. Over the past century the bridge has become synonymous with Lethbridge and is the city's most remarkable landmark. The bridge is the longest and highest bridge of its kind in the world and was a true marvel of engineering when it was built at the turn of the century.

Mr. Speaker, the official centennial celebrations for the High Level Bridge began months ago, and they are definitely picking up steam as we head into spring. Member groups of the Allied Arts Council in Lethbridge have planned several commemorating events for the spring and summer to help local residents get in the spirit.

The Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra, for example, will finish up a series of concerts called Building Bridges. Another musical celebration, featuring the University of Lethbridge Global Drums and the Irish Dance Academy, will be hosted on May 9. In recognition of the bridge's significant contribution to the south, the Galt Museum will open an exhibit May 9 dedicated to the history of the bridge and the economic benefits. Later this summer the Allied Arts Council will host a number of exhibitions in honour of the bridge, including a temporary display in the river valley and a one-day festival is planned for September. The city of Lethbridge has even commissioned a piece of public art to be displayed north of the Galt Museum.

Mr. Speaker, the goal of these centennial events is to reflect the crucial role that the High Level Bridge has played and continues to play in defining Lethbridge's unique character.

As a special note, the grandfather of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, Mr. Gus Malchow, was a riveter during the construction of this bridge.

I'd like to take the opportunity to invite all my colleagues and their constituents to come to Lethbridge this spring and summer and take in some of the celebrations to mark this milestone in the city's history.

I would also like to ask that my fellow members join me in congratulating the Allied Arts Council, CP Rail, and the great citizens of Lethbridge for their hard work in making the bridge's centennial year a memorable one. As my friend Suzanne Lint says: when you see the bridge, you know you're home.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Bitumen Upgrading

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal caucus strongly believes that as much bitumen as possible should be upgraded right here in Alberta. Upgrading bitumen here ensures that we ship a more valuable product. It provides many profitable spinoff industries. It creates long-term, well-paid, full-time employment for thousands of Albertans. We cannot have our province become a strip mine for raw bitumen export.

We are impatient to see government action on this issue. Such action might involve bitumen royalties in kind used to boost the local upgrading market. It might involve other measures, too, if necessary. We're impatient because we're concerned by the increasing rate of bitumen exports to the United States. Pipeline companies are getting long-term contracts. New upgrading facilities are being built in Texas, Illinois, and Oklahoma. We here in Alberta are getting left behind.

What we need to do is clearly assess what proportion of bitumen can be upgraded here in Alberta. We need to look at the labour resources and limits, the environmental resources and limits, and the infrastructure resources and limits. When we know what we can upgrade here, we can get on with it. If there's too much production for Alberta's capacity, which at the top end of predictions would probably be the case, we would look first to our neighbours in Canada to pick up the surplus, thus building a broader coalition of national support for our oil sands industry.

We can do this. We can make it work. It will take determination and vision. But if we do it, we can look forward to an upgrading

industry in Alberta that drives this province and this country to a prosperous future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Smart Technologies Corporation

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak about an event last Friday attended by the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow. Smart Technologies Corporation officially opened their new headquarters and research centre in Calgary. The building is a model of environmental initiatives and energy conservation. It produces 50 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions relative to a typical office building and has numerous leading environmental aspects. At over 211,000 square feet the building cost over \$60 million to construct and is expected to become one of only nine office buildings in Canada to meet the leadership in energy and environmental design, or LEED, gold certification.

Mr. Speaker, the company is best known for the Smart interactive whiteboard, which it brought to market in 1991. From humble beginnings to the world's leading provider of interactive whiteboards and other technology products Smart is a great example of Alberta's ingenuity, innovation, and business development.

The company employs 750 people in Calgary and over 1,300 world-wide. It is the largest technology company in the province and a model for many others. Despite the current global economic climate Smart continues to hire to meet the needs of an expanding world-wide customer base and expects to add over a hundred full-time employees to its Calgary operations this year. In its fiscal year ended March 31, 2009, Smart grew revenue by approximately 35 per cent, and for the 2010 fiscal year the company expects to grow at or above the same rate.

I would like to recognize the leadership and the staff of Smart Technologies for their caring approach to the environment and their creation of an internationally significant technology business.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Food Allergy Awareness Week

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Food allergy week is being held May 10 to 16 across Canada and in Alberta. During this time the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network is stepping up its efforts to educate Canadians and Albertans about allergens and how to reduce behaviour that puts a person at risk of a reaction. An allergic reaction occurs when the immune system responds to a substance like food, dust, moulds, or pollens that the body mistakenly identifies as harmful. Symptoms can vary from mild symptoms of an itchy rash to shortness of breath, wheezing, and swelling of the throat to severe symptoms, which are devastating, and severe anaphylactic reactions, which can and have resulted in death.

Mr. Speaker, the foods that account for the majority of food allergic reactions include various dairy, seafood, soy, wheat, and nut products. Other common causes of allergies include antibiotics, especially penicillin, and bee stings. It is estimated that approximately 6 per cent of young children and 3 to 4 per cent of adult Canadians suffer from food allergies. I'd like to remind Albertans to be careful when preparing food for any group event, and I strongly encourage my colleagues and everyone in this House to take action and prevent reactions throughout the coming year. Albertans need to know what they're eating, so please pay attention to food labels.

Treatment for allergies is simple. Number one, don't expose yourself to potential allergens that you know you're allergic to. Secondly, seek treatment for allergic reactions. That usually involves antihistamines. Lastly, if Albertans have had anaphylactic or severe reactions, they should have injectable adrenalin with them at all times.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to recognize the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network for its dedication to saving and improving the lives of Canadians through their awareness and education programs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Julie Mulligan

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to deliver one of the most significant member's statements I am sure I will ever make, and that is to say: welcome home, Julie Mulligan. I am sure that most Albertans joined with the community of Drayton Valley and Julie's husband and children and shared in their anxiety and fears for the nearly two weeks she was held by her kidnappers in Nigeria. The community of Drayton Valley, as its motto states, pulled together for Julie's husband, John, and their family but also came together to pray for her safety and to guide her return. Prayers and letters of support were received from around the world, and indeed prayers were offered at the recent Premier's prayer breakfast.

Julie is a personal friend of mine, and those two weeks were a tough time for all of us who knew her. Our prayers were answered with Julie's release on April 29. Amazingly, she was not physically hurt. I am so proud of my community, my province, and my country as all played a role in her safe return. I want to thank the local RCMP and the Solicitor General's office and all those involved in negotiating Julie's safe return.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes you get a second chance in life. In Drayton Valley we are very blessed to have Julie back home safe. To Julie, John, and family, you are an example of how quickly life can change and how fortunate you are and we all are to have a second chance to have Julie back in our lives and our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Virus

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The first severe Canadian case of H1N1 flu lies in an Edmonton hospital today. My information is that this is an elementary student, and this raises questions about what is being done, what is being communicated, and why parents, teachers, and the public are being kept in the dark about this. Minimizing panic is important at a time like this. Hiding information, as some administrations have found around the world, increases people's anxiety unnecessarily. To the minister: can the minister tell us why parents at the school and the public are being kept in the dark about this case?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've said on several occasions in this House that it is important that we all show leadership and don't make comments that could be seen as an overreaction. We have an outstanding chief medical officer of health, who is working with the federal Public Health Agency and other

provincial governments. There is a strategy in place across Canada. The advice of the chief medical officer of health is that the information that has been made public is appropriate, and as I am sure the Leader of the Opposition would appreciate, in a situation like this we should be taking the best possible professional advice that we can get.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, several schools in B.C. and the United States have closed in the last week around cases of H1N1. Can the minister explain the guidelines for school closure in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I won't say any more from a health standpoint. That was not the advice we were given by the chief medical officer of health. But I would ask the Minister of Education if he would choose to supplement.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've been in contact with the school board involved and also, of course, taking advice from the chief medical officer of health. Following that advice appropriately, the information that we were given is that this is not a circumstance where it is necessary to inform others in the school. At this point there is not an indication of risk.

Dr. Swann: Well, recently senior public health officers resigned from this government in protest of government policy that does not support their work in this province. Does the minister now see the downside of a weakened public health system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said on several occasions that you can spend all your life looking in a rear-view mirror, or you can look out the windshield. We prefer to look ahead. We have made an outstanding choice in our new chief medical officer of health. He has shown through this particular set of circumstances very strong leadership. We have brought through in this particular session some significant amendments to the Public Health Act which strengthen that act, and I think we have an outstanding public health system moving forward.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Temporary Medical Tent

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Sick children being treated in a tent is something you'd expect in an impoverished country, but it's become the new normal at Edmonton's flagship University hospital, where in the last year over 2,500 sick and injured children have been treated in a tent because facilities are so crowded. The hurt yurt, as the staff have dubbed it, was to be replaced with a permanent structure starting this month. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why was the construction project to replace this tent with a real building cancelled?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member is well aware, we have some significant financial challenges facing the government. We have made some decisions around capital. That being said, as we move forward in this particular budget year, we want to ensure that we are getting full value for the capital that we have allocated. I am confident and optimistic that we are going to have the opportunity to see some projects proceed that may be proceeding at a rate

that is less than what we had originally estimated, and at that time, if that does occur, we will review all of our capital initiatives that for financial reasons weren't able to go ahead in this particular year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, sick children and their parents and families and an outraged staff are tired of the broken promises. How can this minister justify putting sick children in a tent while this government spends lavishly on expensive trips to Europe and drops millions on dinner parties and horse racing? Where are your priorities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be sure that appropriate information is communicated because there is so much incorrect information in the lead-up to that question. In this particular year this government is committing some 7 billion dollars to capital projects across this province. I think that on a per capita basis that is higher than anywhere else in Canada. Included in that is about a billion and a half for health facilities. In the last three to four years capital construction in health care has exceeded some 5 billion to 6 billion dollars, and I think that's a record this government is very proud of.

Dr. Taft: Well, the tent where sick and injured children have been treated now for over a year sits in the shadow of the Mazankowski Heart Institute. The Mazankowski, which is a year late in opening, got \$36 million at the end of last year to finish office spaces while children will be shunted to a tent for years to come. To the same minister: since when did it become acceptable in Alberta to treat sick and injured children in a tent? How did we get to this?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have outstanding facilities in this province – I can name them all, but I think the member is well aware – several of them in his own constituency, too, and some of the leading-edge pediatric services in the world in this province. To suggest somehow that our children, our future, are not receiving the kind of health care that they need and desire is absolutely incorrect.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Provincial Electoral Divisions

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs four more MLAs about as much as a dog needs fleas. I already hear rumblings from the other side about how many seats will be added to this Legislature and their distribution. Can the Justice minister tell me why we're wasting taxpayers' dollars by adding four more seats?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the hon. member is referring to legislation that was tabled yesterday. There will be discussion in this House on that. What I would say is that what this government cares about for this province is effective representation across this province, and that's why we made the decision that we did.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this government goes to great lengths to stress their frugal, small-government approach. It's a front. To the Minister of Justice: why is it that Ontario and Quebec members of provincial Legislatures can handle more constituents per capita than Alberta MLAs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think it's important to explain to the member that we all have different jobs in this world. There will be a commission that will be established. That commission will determine how best to make sure that Albertans are effectively represented. I think that if we look across this country, one of the things that we will find is that there are very different distributions of people in different parts of this country. We believe that for the people of Alberta this decision is the right decision.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the Justice minister again: as any increase to the Alberta population has happened in urban centres, why is it that this government will not just redraw the electoral map to reflect this change instead of adding four more seats primarily to rural ridings?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This again gives me the opportunity to have a little discussion about what everyone's job is. It is not the job of this government to redraw the boundaries; it is the job of the commission. The commission will decide how Albertans should be best and most effectively represented, and we will wait to hear their recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The government proposes adding new human rights for Alberta children, including the right to not learn about sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion, which according to the Premier includes evolution. It's an interesting list, considering that it could have included the creation of rights for disabled students or protection against bullying. Obviously, someone has been urging this government to create this specific list of rights. Can the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit tell the House what groups have been urging the government to protect so-called parental rights?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it'd be my pleasure. One such group was a group of Alberta faith leaders that I met with a little over a year ago. They include Bishop Fred Henry; Reverend Tim Seim, the president of the Alberta Church Executive Fellowship; Syed Soharwardy, the president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada; Reverend Glen Johnson, chair of Synod Council, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Kulwant Dhillon, adviser to president, Dashmesh Culture Centre, the Sikh temple; Majeed Ahmad, national vice-president, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community; Reverend Jonathan Gibson, chairman, Calgary and southern Alberta chapter, Anglican Essentials Canada . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Will the minister confirm that each one of those individuals and groups that he has named urged the government to create these categories of rights in the human rights act?

2:00

Mr. Blackett: Actually, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the *Calgary Herald* today, Bishop Fred Henry, the spokesman for the group, has

said that they had met with us and that they were disappointed that we didn't go with further recommendations, not only parental rights, not as far as they wanted to go. They wanted us to amend many other such things, and our caucus, when we looked at it, decided that in the best interests of Albertans we would go forward with the parental rights portion of the human rights bill because we believe in parental rights, we believe in family values, and we believe in the best interests of Albertans.

Mr. Mason: That remains to be seen. However, the minister did not answer the question. He quoted from a newspaper article quoting one person, being Bishop Henry. The question I asked and that I would like an answer for is whether or not the minister is claiming that every one of those groups and individuals he named supports the changes that he is proposing.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I said that they don't support that because they believe that we didn't go far enough. Now, Bishop Henry has been on the record. I'd be glad to give those names. The hon. member can contact them and ask them himself if they believe in that or not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

U.S. Tax Credit for Pulp Producers

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is home to the Alberta-Pacific pulp mill, and my constituents and other Albertans are concerned about the impact of an unfair tax credit for U.S. pulp producers to burn black liquor in their recovery boilers. One industry analyst indicated the potential tax credit for just one mill at one company could reach \$240 million just this year alone. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can he tell us why this U.S. tax policy is a threat to Alberta pulp mills?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a very serious threat to Alberta and British Columbia pulp mills and the communities they support, and we're doing all we can to bring it to an end as soon as possible. Black liquor is a byproduct of making pulp, and in both Canada and the United States it's burned as an alternative and renewable fuel to generate power in these pulp mills. So far so good. But starting last fall U.S. tax policies began to provide subsidies to American producers if they put diesel fuel in with the black liquor. As the hon. member pointed out, these subsidies run \$200 million to \$300 million per mill up to \$3 billion to \$6 billion for the American industry over the next year. This incentive is encouraging U.S. companies to overproduce pulp, drive down prices, and Canadian mills and European mills can't compete against this type of unfair and perverse subsidy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This certainly is a serious issue for Alberta pulp mills. I'd ask the minister: is this biofuel tax subsidy actually incenting a reduction in the use of fossil fuels?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, that's the absurdity of the whole policy. It's a policy fiasco. It's actually going into the

U.S. mills who are already burning a renewable fuel, the black liquor, and paying them to add kerosene or diesel to it to qualify for this subsidy. It's an incredible waste of scarce environmental dollars. It's bad for the environment. It's bad for pulp markets. We're doing all we can to call public attention to this policy fiasco.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us what he's doing to restore a level playing field for our Alberta pulp industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is working with British Columbia to communicate the complete unacceptability of this subsidy. We're going through both official and unofficial channels. Officially the Alberta and British Columbia governments have communicated our concern to the Canadian government and through Ottawa to the U.S. government. We are also using Alberta's official representative in Washington, our former colleague Mr. Gary Mar. He's doing a very good job on this file. Informally we're working with organizations and industries in Canada, in the United States, and in Europe who are all opposed to this, and we're making progress. Senator John Kerry, usually not my favourite U.S. Senator, denounced this policy. He called it a licence to cheat, and many Senators are bringing motions to terminate this as soon as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Alberta Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CEO of Alberta Health Services wrote last week that there isn't enough money to balance the books this year, so more belt-tightening is needed, and the brakes have been put on staff recruitment. To the minister: is the Minister of Health and Wellness aware that the chief of Alberta Health Services is speaking of belt-tightening and putting the brakes on staff recruitment?

Mr. Liepert: I'm not aware of the particular document that the member refers to, but it would seem to me that if this particular CEO did what I believe he needs to do – that is, ensure that in our health care system we are spending our money wisely, as the Leader of the Opposition has referred to so many times – it would not surprise me that he would be seeking some efficiencies in the system, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has mismanaged our health care system so badly for so long that we now have children being treated in tents, we have a wait-list registry out of date for seven months, and it's now standard practice to wedge patients into a two-bed room with three beds. This is not a crisis; this is the new normal in Alberta's urban hospitals. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what further belt-tightening the CEO has in mind for Health Services?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess you could use the term "belt-tightening," or you could use the term "creating efficiencies within the system." Clearly, we have a situation where we had 12 different entities that have been merged into one. There's obviously

going to be duplication of services. I'm sure that if the Leader of the Opposition is responsible, he would not expect that we would continue to duplicate services, and those are the kinds of reviews and decisions that will be forthcoming over the course of the next year.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, last week the minister said in this Assembly that there never was a hiring freeze at Alberta Health Services, but the memo, dated April 22, written by the vice-president of medical affairs said, and I quote: all recruitment efforts must cease until further notice. End quote. To the minister: since the minister had no idea that something as important as a written policy to freeze hiring had been issued, will the minister admit he has no understanding of what's going on in his department?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that if there's a lack of understanding, it's by the Leader of the Opposition. Frankly, I would have expected more from someone who has a background in the medical community. Let's be clear. The memo, which I haven't seen but that he continues to refer to, I believe was about a specific hiring around academic staff. First of all, I challenged the hon. leader last night in estimates. He alleged that we have recruited doctors, signed contracts with them, and then, if my memory serves me correctly, sent them home. I've challenged him to prove to me that that has happened. If he can't prove it to me, then I'm going to ask him to stand up in this House and apologize to Alberta Health Services for making a wide-ranging accusation that he cannot substantiate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Wildfire Assistance

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. There were wildfires burning on the weekend in my constituency in Ma-Me-O Beach, Ermineskin and Louis Bull First Nations as well as currently in Strathcona county, Lamont county, and Bruderheim. Can the minister tell us how he is supporting and how his department is supporting these firefighting efforts and municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the safety of the public is our priority and focus. Also, the Premier passes on his praise and gratitude to all of the voluntary firefighters doing such an excellent job in fighting these fires. The government of Alberta has activated its emergency operations centre. We are on-site and in direct contact with local officials that are affected, municipalities or First Nations. Alberta emergency management staff is helping co-ordinate resources to fight fires, and we will continue to provide resources and expertise to these communities.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Minister.

My next question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the department's role in fighting wildfires in the province, and what is the department doing to assist communities in that role?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate of Sustainable Resource Development is to fight wildfires in the province's forest

protection zone, the green zone which covers two-thirds of the province. So far already this season we have fought 216 fires covering 900 hectares in the green zone.

When capacity allows, when we have the equipment and fire-fighters available, we do help MDs and Indian reserves and Métis settlements to fight fires on their territories. In the case of the Lamont and Strathcona fires, SRD is providing support-team firefighters and bulldozers. They help us also put out fires on unoccupied Crown land, so it's a partnership that works well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfires don't respect municipal boundaries, and we've seen fires rage across rural municipalities onto First Nation reserves and vice versa. My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Can he tell us what measures are in place to ensure that aboriginal communities are protected from the devastating effects of these fires?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the most important measures in place today is the so-called mutual assistance agreement. Many First Nations, in fact most, do have a partnering agreement with their neighbouring municipalities and/or also in some cases with local industry to respond immediately to the kind of potential tragedies that the member has alluded to. In fact, that's exactly what happened this last weekend. The four bands at Hobbema collaborated with local fire departments, and they stopped the potential spread of a very tragic fire there.

Otherwise, educational safety about fires is also very prevalent right now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The human rights act amendments are causing more problems than they're fixing. If parents have a concern now, it is dealt with by the school or the school board. If parents have a concern in the future, it will likely become an issue for the Human Rights Commission, with all the costs attendant on that since both the plaintiff and the defendant have to pay their own fees and hire lawyers, et cetera. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. The minister avoided a direct answer yesterday, so I would try again for an answer today. Can section 11.1 of the proposed legislation be used to launch a human rights complaint against a teacher, a school, or a school board?

The Speaker: All hon. members should know that the question period is not the time for legal interpretation. Proceed.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd say that if there is a part in the human rights act that pertains to an area that's covered under that legislation, then they would have an opportunity to present a case before them. Also, understand that the school board and the school system have provisions to deal with a lot of those issues. Just because a parent has a grievance with a school board does not mean that they have grounds for a case to the Human Rights Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. If a parent believes that there's been subject matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation, does section 11.1 empower that parent or guardian to bring a complaint before the Human Rights Commission?

Mr. Blackett: Well, it's a legal issue. It's cause for speculation. There is provision right now to have that remedied. The school board's responsibility will be to notify that parent, and the parent has that right to opt out. If there is a situation – and I fail to see where one would arise – they would not do that in a course because very few instances have ever happened with respect to that nature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. If the minister is so sure about the lack of problems, will the minister commit to covering all of the legal fees that will be incurred by teachers, school boards, and schools that emerge as a result of section 11.1?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, reasonable people ask reasonable questions. The opposition member opposite obviously isn't one of those.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Blackett: Of course I would not subject my government to any such expense.

The Speaker: Okay. We have a point of order here as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Safe Communities Innovation Fund

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Crime and personal safety continue to be major concerns in Edmonton. Last month *Maclean's* magazine ranked our city as one of the most dangerous cities to live in in Canada. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: what are you doing to reduce crime in the capital city?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Edmonton is a great city for me to be able to spend time in, and I know that people that live here are very proud of it. Edmonton has a wonderful mayor and a wonderful chief of police, who are partners with us in our safe communities initiative. Our initiative has been able to respond to a number of the concerns that people in the community have had. We've been able to put more Crown prosecutors and more police on the streets. We have more support staff and more probation officers in place. We're now funding particular community initiatives. We believe that the community and the leaders in local communities want to and need to be part of our partnership, and we're happy to support them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. With the announcement of the safe communities innovation fund Albertans can look forward to some grassroots approaches to crime prevention developed by individual communities. Can Edmonton expect to see any of these projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safe communities innovation fund will fund 30 projects across the province in the next year that will each be three years in duration. We were very fortunate, the Solicitor General and I, on March 19 to be able to announce the first of those projects, which is two new crime councils that are being set up in Edmonton to address issues from graffiti to gang violence. The councils empower neighbourhoods that have been identified as having chronic crime issues to take back their community. Crime councils allow them to take an active role, to participate, to have discussion, and to do positive activities such as street fairs, which have been a great success. This joint project between the city of Edmonton and the Edmonton Police Service will be expanded into Castle Downs, Mill Woods, Clareview, and Avenue of Nations.

Mr. Elniski: My final supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister explain how these projects funded by the safe communities initiative will remain sustainable? Short-term project funding is often the kiss of death for meaningful improvement.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a very important piece of the conversations that we had with community groups as they put forward proposals for this project. As I said, these are three-year initiatives. We have a commitment as a government to ensuring that what we do with our safe communities piece is not only short-term pieces that might address immediate challenges but also talk about how we change the way government and partnerships work together to deal with safe communities. So as we were funding and deciding what to fund, one of the things that we asked communities was: how do you expect to be able to make this project sustainable? We know that there are commitments from municipalities with respect to this. It's an ongoing commitment for our government as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Alberta Health Services (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Stephen Duckett, the CEO of Alberta Health Services, has posted on his blog a new document entitled *Alberta Health Services: Strategic Direction 2009-2012*. There's a quote here for the benefit of the health minister. "These priorities address goals established by the Government of Alberta and are aligned with Vision 2020." My first question is to the minister of health. Given that eliminating waste, duplication, and inappropriate care is one of the means of the strategic plan, can the minister please provide examples of waste, duplication, and inappropriate care currently within Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get specific, but I'll repeat what I said earlier. When you merge and amalgamate some 12 entities, you tend to have a number of people who have done the same job in each one of those entities. We want to ensure that our management and administration is streamlined and that the dollars that Alberta Health Services has to work with are almost exclusively directed to the front-line delivery.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of health: given that on that blog Dr. Stephen Duckett has indicated there will be this week up to 100 managers from across the province laid off in the health care system, which managers has the minister of health instructed Dr. Duckett to lay off?

Mr. Liepert: None, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. That certainly is interesting. That's not what I heard.

Mr. Liepert: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: Now, to the same minister: given that the strategic plan also indicates that there's going to be an increase in the ratio of licensed practical nurses to registered nurses, can the minister please tell us what the new ratio of licensed practical nurses to RNs will be after his plan is implemented by Dr. Stephen Duckett?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly that's a decision of the management of Alberta Health Services. They have a job to do, and they will do it. I don't give them any direction on what staff ratios should be, and the member knows that. He's having trouble finding things to criticize in Alberta Health and Wellness these days, and he's not doing a very good job at what he's found.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Child and Youth Advocate

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For years the NDP has been calling on this government to make the Child and Youth Advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. Alberta, as I've mentioned, is the only jurisdiction refusing to do this. This government's refusal to give the advocate position its own voice shows they are more concerned with censoring information than doing what's best for our children. To the minister of children and families: why won't you stop delaying and just make the advocate an independent officer of the Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this member knows, we have over the last couple of months undertaken a review of the advocacy for children in the province and, in particular, how the advocate reports to Albertans and what other provinces are doing across the country. That work has been completed. I do have a copy, and we're just working on a government response to it. I hope to be releasing that information fairly soon.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, by January this government was reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate report to government. By March 15 the minister had that review, and she promised to make it available "in the next several weeks." Well, it's closing in on two months now, and we've heard nothing. When will the minister stop delaying, make this report public, and tell Albertans if she plans to let the Child and Youth Advocate off her leash?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I would just reiterate that I'm not delaying the report. We are working on a government response, and I do hope to share that information soon. What I can assure both this member and Albertans is that we will make sure at the end of the day that we have a strong voice for children, that we have a very accountable advocacy system, and as well that we'll have reporting to Albertans that will be timely and make a lot of sense.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister had the report in early March, and she said that she'd act on the report "quite quickly," and she said that she'd make it public. Well, we're still waiting, and if this is her version of quite quickly, I worry about those children who need her to act quite quickly when their safety is at stake. To the same minister: why have you failed to make this report public if not because you're reluctant to give up control of the advocate position and risk exposing further failures in your ministry?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I would say the same thing and, as well, that the children are still being taken care of. Once again, the review was just called at the end of November. You're right: it has been in my hands for the last couple of weeks. I can tell you that it's very good information that they have come forward with, and we will have a government response shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Environmental Assessment Database

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former home builder I know how important it is to understand the history of the land you are building on. The last thing my constituents and Albertans across the province want to find out is that the land they have just purchased has previously been contaminated. Many people don't know how to find this type of information, and for those that do, it is tedious, time-consuming work. My question is to the Minister of Environment. I understand your department launched an online database last week. Will this help my constituents and Albertans like them find out the environmental history of this piece of land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, the member is absolutely correct. When I became Environment minister, I was quite frankly surprised to learn that Environment leads all departments in FOIP requests. The reason is that the vast majority of those FOIP requests are asking for information regarding environmental assessments on various pieces of land. It really is quite exciting that what previously has required as much as five weeks or more will now take five minutes to access online. It's a huge improvement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. My understanding is that the database houses documents relating to thousands of sites. Does this mean that all of these sites are contaminated?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. We have to emphasize that. What this database contains is all of the environmental assessments. Oftentimes environmental assessments are done that indicate that there is no contamination. Just because there is an environmental assessment on a particular piece of property should not be taken to mean that there was contamination. What it does mean is that the individual who is purchasing that property or interested in going onto the website can find out what the contents of that environmental assessment are.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in these tough economic times can you justify the cost of this new system to the taxpayers? How much are my constituents going to have to pay for the use of this system?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no charge to access the system. It's done through the Internet. There were, obviously, some costs that were borne by my department in developing the system, but even there we used existing software that was already used in Service Alberta. So I think that this is truly an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how you can apply technology from affiliated fields, different fields, and actually work to the benefit of both government and the consumer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Funding for Contingencies

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is about to pass a \$37 billion budget with no plan for savings to speak of and a budget which has eliminated the required contingency for public emergencies. Crossing your fingers and hoping there aren't any natural disasters is no way to run a province. But since this government still can't wrap its head around the need to save in the heritage fund, I guess asking them to save for natural disasters might be too much to hope for. To the minister of finance: how will the government pay for the forest fires that are forcing people from their homes just east of Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. We removed the contingency amount from within the budget, and we will use the sustainability fund. There is \$17 billion in the sustainability fund this year. We plan to use \$4.7 billion to achieve our operational targets. If we need more and it's not available within the operating budgets, it certainly is within the purview of the minister to bring those forward with recommendations to Treasury Board, where we can examine them. Natural disasters, emergencies, pine beetles: all of these kinds of things will qualify for disaster funding, so we haven't reduced the opportunity. We've reduced the place where we allocate the funds to deliver that.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, what money specifically has been set aside to pay for unforeseen circumstances such as fires and floods and pine beetles and flu pandemics and whatever else could happen during the summer? What specific money is set aside, or is the money in the sustainability fund that would pay for those sorts of things just kind of in a big competition with everything else?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that sustainability fund is still available. As I indicated, we certainly don't intend to spend all of it, all \$17 billion, but \$4.7 billion this year. If we have to, we will spend \$100 million, \$200 million, or whatever it takes to achieve the results of reducing the impact of emergencies for Albertans. There isn't a cap on that amount. Hopefully, we'll have to spend none of it. Hopefully, the dollars that are within existing operating budgets will cover it, but we are prepared for disasters. The theory behind the sustainability fund hasn't evaporated with this new Fiscal Responsibility Act.

Mr. Taylor: Hopefully, the sustainability fund won't evaporate over the next three or four years of deficit operating as well.

Will this government commit to a detailed savings plan, including a contingency for public emergencies, before it passes this budget?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we will not commit to a detailed plan. We have outlined in broad terms the plan to save, first of all, to rebuild the sustainability fund. On this we are following the theory and the practical advice from several economists, who indicate that while you are spending your emergency savings is not the time to try to rebuild the savings account. We will leave the heritage fund intact. We will endeavour to hold the line on ministers' expenses within 1 per cent of their operating budgets.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:30 Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hear from permanent and temporary constituents who are concerned about layoffs. In particular, there is confusion over the rules for employers when temporary foreign workers and Albertans are employed. People have heard that there are rules about who can be laid off and who can't. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Can you explain what the rules are for employers who have to lay off workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program is a federal program. It is employer driven, and the employer must show that no Albertans or Canadians are willing or are available to take on the jobs. The federal government does not have specific rules for who should be laid off. All workers in Canada have the same rights, and to lay off a worker based on national origin could be discriminating. If a business is struggling and layoffs are required, the decision as to who is laid off is up to the employer. It's strictly a business decision.

Mr. Benito: My second and final question is also to the same minister. In the case of layoffs what are the employers' obligations to the workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Employers have obligations to all workers under the employment standards, workplace health and safety, and workers' compensation legislation. Layoffs are usually very, very difficult. We do have resources available to Albertans, including temporary foreign workers that are affected by job losses. Our first priority is the needs of Albertans, and we

provide employment connections, information, training, and financial assistance. Temporary foreign workers can contact our advisory office through the helpline or in person in both Edmonton and Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Protection of Children in Care

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proposed changes to service delivery for child and family services in Edmonton will fund service providers to reach an outcome within a benchmark time frame, providing no extra funding if a case takes longer than the prescribed time to complete. Additional funding will only be provided if the case has been closed for six months and then reopened or if a new issue emerges. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: what happens when the funding stops and a child is still in need of care?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, we would always provide services to a child in care or a family at risk. I'm not quite sure what the member is talking about, but I would suggest that he forward that information to me.

Mr. Chase: Internal documents from your ministry have raised this concern.

Does this change not risk acting as a disincentive with the potential result of a lesser quality for those cases which will take longer than the specified timeline?

Ms Tarchuk: Again, Mr. Speaker, we would never walk away from quality, so I would suggest that the member share with me whatever it is that he is talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Why is funding not being provided to regions to adequately fund the successful completion of cases they have as opposed to being provided based on rigid timelines? What comes first, the dollar or the child?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the child will always come first. We will always do what's in the best interest of the child. Once again I would just suggest that the member share that information with me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

First Nations Development Fund

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First Nations in Alberta have experienced a tremendous windfall as a result of funds generated by on-reserve casinos. These funds have become a very important facilitator for numerous infrastructure, cultural, and community development projects on reserve. However, some First Nations in and around Calgary have expressed concerns which I would like to express to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Why was this fund moved to the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations from the AGLC ministry?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, the First Nations development fund does a tremendous amount of good work through the dollars we

provide, about \$100 million annually to the 47 First Nations in the province. The short answer to the question is that the aims and objectives of the First Nations development fund are very closely aligned with the aims and objectives of the newly created, stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Relations. For that reason it was felt better to administer it through this particular ministry, and so far it's working very well.

Ms Woo-Paw: FNDF is a flow-through program from First Nations casinos to First Nations projects. Why is your ministry asking for detailed information on FNDF applications?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, as with all programs administered by the government of Alberta, there's a need for a good balance between program effectiveness and program accountability and meeting and matching the needs of local community development projects or local economic development projects such as this particular fund is set up to administer. In short, we ask for a project description, we ask for a budget to see how it'll be accomplished, we require a band council resolution and the signing of an FNDF agreement. All of this was determined in consultation with the 47 First Nations, and we're adhering to what was determined years ago.

Ms Woo-Paw: How many times can one First Nation access the FNDF in any one year?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, access to the fund is actually governed in accordance with a fairly sophisticated formula which the government of Alberta negotiated with the First Nations host casinos and other First Nations in the province. That particular formula is available publicly. We have approximately 40 per cent of 70 per cent of the total revenues from government slots to distribute. We don't make it complicated at all. In fact, we've never refused an application. We have held up a few or requested that they be delayed to get more information in. But that's how the fund is administered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Direct Energy Retail Marketing

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans need a government of action, not a government of monitoring. We are getting gouged on utility bills, but the Minister of Service Alberta and the Utilities Consumer Advocate do nothing to help us. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Why isn't the minister and the UCA taking real action to fix these problems?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Direct Energy issue, as indicated before, we have sent a number of warning letters in the past year, and the company has been very co-operative. However, the consumer has spoken. The consumer has indicated that we need to do more, and that's, indeed, what we're doing. That's what this undertaking is about, to make sure that we find out what's happening and that consumers are protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hotline to the Utilities Consumer Advocate is not fixing the problem of a system that lets

Albertans get charged too much. Why won't the minister simply change the contracting system to let Albertans get out of these unfair contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to indicate that the Utilities Consumer Advocate, the team that works out of that office, do excellent work, and they certainly take calls to the call centre every day. Certainly, they should be commended for their work and the good work they are doing for Albertans.

With respect to the issue with Direct Energy, as we move forward to September 30, when we get to that point, if we're not happy with what has gone on, there are issues like director's orders, and there are a number of other initiatives we can take to solve these problems if we can't collaborate and fix it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think September 30 is too long. We need action right now. When can we expect the monitoring to end and real action to happen?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated before, September 30 is the end date for this undertaking. I want to make it very clear that Direct Energy must always comply with the Fair Trading Act and the energy marketing regulations. This deadline is for implementing their action plan. There are very strict rules for door-to-door marketers on what they can and cannot do. The most simplistic answer with respect to contracts is that it's something that we have to look at, and that is what this undertaking is all about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year Albertans are affected by carbon monoxide poisoning, some tragically, and others are alerted to the threat by their home carbon monoxide alarm. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What are the requirements for carbon monoxide alarms in Alberta homes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, carbon monoxide alarms are very much a valuable safety tool. The current building codes require these alarms to be in all new homes. That came into effect in September of 2007. The carbon monoxide alarms must be acceptable to the national quality standards of the Canadian safety code.

2:40

Mr. Sandhu: My second question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us if the alarms are also required in existing homes or rental properties? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, they are a very important safety tool. We recommend that owners of existing homes get carbon monoxide alarms as well. Buildings are subject to the codes in force when they are built. As such, safety codes are generally not retroactive. As to the other part of the question, rental properties are subject to the same codes as other homes.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will conclude question period, then. That was 104 question and responses. We have two points of order arising out of it, that we'll deal with at the conclusion of the Routine.

In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the Routine.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 46, the Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act.

This act will make it mandatory for health care facilities and emergency medical technicians who treat gunshot or stab wounds to disclose to police the injured person's name, type of injury, and location of treatment. Bill 46 strikes a careful balance between patient privacy and public safety. Providing police with this important information helps them keep the public safe by preventing further violence, injuries, or death. It also gives health care professionals clarity regarding when disclosure is needed and when it is not.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 46 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Pochaiv maple leaf safe house project that I referred to earlier in my member's statement about human trafficking.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from the same organization. This document is an account of the human trafficking in Alberta panel that was aired on Alberta Primetime, Access TV, on April 27, 2009, at 7 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just two quick tablings from my address with respect to Bill 204 yesterday, one dealing with the *Edmonton Sun* as referenced in my speech, another being a Facebook page dealing with that bill. I have five copies of each that I'll table with the page.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters to table today. These letters are from Kenneth Ross, a senior who has received effective pain relief from chiropractic treatment over his lifetime, as well as from David Gurnett and Marilyn Bulat, both of whom attest to the benefits they have received from chiropractic care. They've written to express their opposition to delisting chiropractic services.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I am on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Leader of the Opposition, tabling correspondence he has received from Marianne Hart, who is also extolling the wonderful effects that she has experienced through chiropractic care and asking the government to stop the madness and step up and be a voice for everyone. She does not want to see this service delisted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of in this case 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating several specific problems on different shifts that were short-staffed. They indicate that some residents were left in bed far too long, received cold food because their meals were late, or were toileted too late.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, tabled during policy field committee consideration of the estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness on May 4, 2009, the Alberta Health Services strategic direction 2009-2012 consultation document and the health action plan annual report April 2009.

Also on behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, response to Written Question 10, asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009, and response to Written Question 13, asked for by Ms Notley on behalf of Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I get to the two points of order, it's now the 5th day of May. Normally, in the first opening days of any particular month I draw to the attention of all members what certain special weeks and special days occur in that particular month. May is the busiest month of the year.

May is Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety Awareness Month, Museum Month, Red Shield Appeal Month, Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month, Huntington Disease Awareness Month, Medic Alert Month, National Physiotherapy Month, Asian Heritage Month, Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month, Hemochromatosis Awareness Month. It's Leave a Legacy Month, Neurofibromatosis Awareness Month. It is also the time that the Green Ribbon of Hope campaign initiates itself.

April 25 to May 2 was National Immunization Awareness Week. April 26 to May 2 was Education Week in Alberta as it also was National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. April 27 to May 3 was International Astronomy Week. May 1 was Space Day. May 1 to May 7 is National Summer Safety Week. It's also Spinal Health Week. As all members will know, Saturday last, May 2, was World Naked Gardening Day. It was also International Astronomy Day.

Sunday, May 3, was World Laughter Day and World Press Freedom Day. May 3 was also the Annual Hike for Hospice Palliative Care.

May 3 to 9 is Emergency Preparedness Week. May 3 to 9 is also National Hospice Palliative Care Week. It's also International Composting Awareness Week, and it's also North American Occupational Health and Safety Week. May 4 was International Firefighters Day. The week of May 4 to 10 is National Mental Health Week. May 5 is World Asthma Day. May 5 is International Day of the Midwife. May 5 is Cinco de mayo. May 8 is World Red Cross Day as it is the Red Shield Annual Luncheon as it is International Thalassemia Day. May 8 and 9 is the Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for Those Who Lost Their Lives during the Second World War. May 8 to 10 is the MS Carnation Campaign. May 9 is Kinsmen's Raise the Flag Day. It's also the Alberta Neurofibromatosis Association Tea. It is also World Fair Trade Day. May 10 is World Lupus Day as it is World Health Organization Move for Health Day as it is Mother's Day.

May 10 to 16 is National Police Week as it is Alberta Crime Prevention Week. May 11 to 17 is National Nursing Week. May 12 to 18 is National Road Safety Week. May 12 is International Nursing Day as it is Canada Health Day. May 12 is also National Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Syndrome Awareness Day. May 13 to 14 is the Provincial Skills Competition. May 15 is International Day of Families. May 17 is World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. It's also World Hypertension Day. It's also International Day against Homophobia.

May 17 to 23 is National Public Works Week as it also is Emergency Medical Services Awareness Week. May 18 is International Museum Day as it is Victoria Day. May 19 to 22 is Aboriginal Awareness Week. May 20 to 23 is the Canadian Skills Competition. May 21 is World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. May 22 is International Day for Biological Diversity.

2:50

May 22 to June 19 is the Canadian Cancer Society Relay for Life. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day. May 25 to 31 is Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Non-Self-Governing Territories. May 26 is National Day of Healing and Reconciliation. May 28 is National Multiple Births Awareness Day. May 28 from sunset to the nightfall of May 29 is Shavuot in the Jewish faith. May 29 is International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. May 31 is World No Tobacco Day as it is the World Partnership Walk as it is the Great Strides Walk for Cystic Fibrosis. May 31 to June 6 is Canadian Environment Week.

That's just a brief list.

On a point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The citations I'm using today are 23(h), (i), and (j), *Beauchesne* 409, 410, 417, and *Marleau and Montpetit* 431. The point of order is referring to an exchange between myself and the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit during question period in which – and I'll have to paraphrase this because, as usual, we don't have the benefit of the Blues – the minister said that a reasonable person would ask a reasonable question. He specifically named me as the Member for Edmonton-Centre as obviously not a reasonable person, so it was a direct comment on me. It was not a sort of general opinion expressed of all members or just a statement that he'd made. It specifically mentioned me, and it was a direct assertion that I was out of order or unreasonable.

The question that had been asked for which he gave the response was on the minister's willingness to cover costs that would be incurred as a result of proposed legislation. The minister insinuated – again, I'll refer to 23(h), (i), and (j) – that I as an individual was unreasonable. When I check for what that definition might be, it's saying: expressing some belief, action, fact, or event – so to be unreasonable would be the opposite of that – mental powers concerned with forming conclusions or inferences, sound judgment, clear or logical, judicious, rational, sensible.

This, I argue, was deliberate, and I believe that it contravenes 23(h), (i), and (j) as well as *Beauchesne* 417. *Beauchesne* 417 is around the answering of questions and notes that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate." Of course, when you start making statements that are casting aspersions and insinuating that someone has problems with mental capacity, that's likely to provoke debate, Mr. Speaker.

You know, with careful choice of words, if the minister chose to take issue with the question, fair enough. But just because he doesn't like the question, there should not be an open ability for him to bully the questioner or to cast aspersions upon my character or mental capacity. The question itself was in order and met the test of *Beauchesne* 409, 410. As I've mentioned, it did offend 417. Finally, under *M and M* on page 431, Replies to Oral Questions: "replies are to be as brief as possible, to deal with the subject matter raised and to be phrased in language that does not provoke disorder."

I would argue that the minister was certainly welcome to take issue with the question and to decide not to answer it if he so chose, but I think it was unreasonable to take it a step further and to use the kind of language that he used in connection with the person that was asking the question, that being this individual.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that he has offended me and the House with that point of order.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I used the word "unreasonable" in response to the question. I thought it was unreasonable that the member would think that the government would pay for the things that she was suggesting. Under *Beauchesne's* 488 when I look at it, it does not list the word "unreasonable" as unparliamentary language. Based on that and 417, talking about brevity, in this House I have seen many, many instances where brevity was not something that was coming from this hon. member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any additional on the point of order? We're going to have a citation, and we're going to be very specific. I'm not interested in opinions. I'm interested in dealing with the issue. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of quick points. *Beauchesne's* 486(2) states that "an expression which is deemed to be unparliamentary today does not necessarily have to be deemed unparliamentary next week." That, to me, deals with intent. With respect to the minister's intent I would submit to this House that it was not malicious. He also did look at portions of unparliamentary language. As he mentioned, nowhere does it say that what he had mentioned is listed as unparliamentary language. I would also submit to this House that he did not mention a statement of fact but rather a statement of his own opinion. I did not pick up any malice there at all.

Those are my submissions, sir.

The Speaker: Are there others to participate? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, let's deal with a citation.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I would like to point out to the Speaker and to this House that the minister did not appear to have learned the lesson from *Beauchesne's* 28(g), (h), (i). He continued to pummel verbally the Member for Edmonton-Centre by again casting aspersions on her character, suggesting that, for example, she was long-winded or that she carried on overly important debate, in his opinion.

We are trying to create an atmosphere of decorum in this House. When it appears that the government is offended, they jump up very quickly to advocate on their behalf and say that they've been offended. It's a two-way street, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad that you're the judge directing traffic. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Such statements of overfamiliarity, hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do not put one in a better position. First of all, there is no such thing as the *Beauchesne* that you referred to. It could have been Standing Order 28. That's okay. We won't deal with that in a major way.

Look. Part of this is the result of an interpretation that I've given and an interpretation that we use in this House. We do some unique things in here. On Thursday of each week the Opposition House Leader rises and asks the government what might be on the Order Paper on a particular day. Somebody from the government, the Government House Leader, the Deputy Government House Leader, responds. We then print what is on the Order Paper for the business of the day.

It's customary that there not be debate in question period about legislation before the House. But the way it has been interpreted is that if the Order Paper says that a particular bill is to come up, then I presume all members in the Assembly would look at that. In this case on Wednesday, May 6, it says that Bill 44, I believe, which is the intended bill that was being discussed today, will come up tomorrow. It's pretty much fair game between the time at which the bill is introduced and the time it actually enters second reading to allow questions in question period with respect to this, which I have done consistently. Some members find this quite offensive. They think that as soon as you introduce the bill, that eliminates any opportunity in the question period to do that. That is not the case. So the subject matter is in fact fair game. But tomorrow, because the Order Paper basically says that on Wednesday, May 6, Bill 44 will be up, you'd be hard pressed to find myself to allow questions with respect to it in the question period because it's now identified to come up.

3:00

So we have questions. Okay. It's very, very clear that a series of questions came up today with respect to this particular bill, and on one occasion the chair intervened and basically said that if the question has to do with a legal opinion, it should not be raised. Now, from the chair's position – and the chair very attentively looked at the questions and heard the questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre – he's quite hard pressed not to believe that they were seeking legal interpretation of one sort or the other.

Just to refer for all members' attention, 408(1)(c) says a question should "not require an answer involving a legal opinion." It's repeated again in *Beauchesne* 409(1) and (3), and at *Beauchesne* 411(1) pretty much the same thing, that we should not be dealing with legal interpretations.

I suspect the hon. minister by the third question in was getting, well, frustrated is the word that I will use – it may not be at all; it may be the demeanor of the minister or what have you in attempting to find a response – at which point in time a question that could have

been ruled out by another chair but not by this one was permitted today even though it went on to the question of interpretation. The hon. minister said, and this is what the Blues say: "Reasonable people ask reasonable questions. The opposition member opposite obviously isn't one of those." There's pretty clear intention in there to suggest that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is not reasonable.

Well, while it may not be an appropriate response, it doesn't make it unparliamentary. However, while it may not necessarily constitute a point of order, I want to provide a reminder that I think that we can avoid a lot of these interpretation difficulties if we don't ask for legal interpretations at any time. Secondly, we try to avoid getting involved in debate. That's a submission made to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and others and to the minister. Even though this may not necessarily be unparliamentary, I would ask the minister to exercise some care in how he addresses colleagues in this House. That's a statement to all members.

That matter is dealt with. We will now go on to the second one. The second one comes from the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h) and (i), which says:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member;

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member.

Mr. Speaker, in question period today the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked me a question. I do not have the Blues in front of me, but it went something like this: what instructions did I as minister give to Alberta Health Services relative to individual layoffs? My answer was: none. The member then went on to preface his next supplementary with a comment something like: that's not what I heard.

Those comments by the member clearly allege that the information I provided to this House was somehow incorrect or that somehow I was misleading this Assembly. Now, there was a great fanfare made before this legislative session started by the Leader of the Opposition on how we needed to treat others within this House with respect. I would suggest that this member should be called to order, acknowledge that the information that I provided to this House in answer to his question was in fact the truth. Unless he has information he can table otherwise, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you rule that he withdraw those comments and apologize to this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, did you wish to participate?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I would stand and indicate that there is absolutely no point of order here. I am certainly entitled to my opinion. I'm entitled to do my research, as is the hon. minister of health. Now, the minister of health may be sensitive, but I would remind the minister and all members of this House that in question period I talked about the strategic direction that Alberta Health Services is going in. I talked specifically about a document that I suppose I could say was tabled on Dr. Duckett's Alberta Health Services blog. It's a public document, and it indicates clearly that the priorities of this strategic plan are priorities that address goals established by the government of Alberta, established by the ministry of health, and aligned with Vision 2020, which is a document that I have before me that came out in December of 2008.

So there is nothing untoward here. As a member of the opposition it is my job, it is my duty, it is my obligation to stand up and ask questions. These are very important matters, and if the minister is not interested in answering them, then he does not have to. But certainly I am entitled – in fact, I, again, have an obligation – to ask questions, and that's precisely what I was doing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others to participate?

Shall we deal with this matter, then? Okay. This matter has been raised. The text, essentially, is the following. A question was raised about purported layoffs. The response from the hon. minister was, "None, Mr. Speaker." Then the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said: "Thank you. That certainly is interesting. That's not what I heard." At which point in time the minister said, "Point of order, Mr. Speaker." That's the full gist of the text that we have in *Hansard*.

There is a citation in *Beauchesne* which has been used time and time again. It has been referred to time and time again by the chair in the past. It's under Acceptance of the Word of a Member, and it's *Beauchesne* 494.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements [made] by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

We've heard explanation here with respect to this. It strikes me that if I look at these words, maybe some sensitivity, but I do not believe that in here I can find imputation of character assassination. So we're moving on.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 24

Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Griffiths]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, Bill 24.

Mr. Griffiths: I was done.

The Speaker: Okay. Anybody else to participate? We're on Bill 24. The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright had 18 minutes left in his speaking time, but we'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Bill 24.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an interesting bill to come up at this moment in history, when there's so much concern and interest about the H1N1 influenza, which everybody knows can be carried by humans, can be carried by swine, and there's at least a little bit of evidence of cross-infection not from the meat itself but from the live animals and, interestingly, from humans to animals, it appears. This bill, Bill 24, I imagine, if it were in place right now, would be probably being actively used or, certainly, actively examined to help manage the situation that we're facing in Alberta concerning the H1N1 virus and the isolation of a swine production facility as well as the isolation of a number of human beings.

3:10

One of the points I want to make with this bill – and I'm actually going to register a little bit of concern about process here; it may be that as things go along, I can be corrected on this – is that my reading of the bill is that it actually amends a piece of legislation that was enacted just a few months ago. Under the original version of the Animal Health Act, which Bill 24 will now amend, there presumably must have been a number of shortcomings because we have now in Bill 24, a mere five months after the original Animal Health Act was proclaimed and enacted, quite a hefty bunch of amendments.

I wouldn't have been surprised if there were a couple of minor corrections or adjustments, but Bill 24 presents us with some 25 pages or so of amendments to an act that has only been in place five months. It makes me wonder why that original act had so many problems in it. Was it drafted in a terrific hurry? Were there shortcomings in how it was drafted in that perhaps adequate thought wasn't given to it? Perhaps the proper stakeholders weren't consulted, or perhaps the government just wasn't up to the job of drafting a good piece of legislation. That's something I had looked for.

The other explanation is that the world has changed so quickly that this legislation had to come forward, but I'm hard pressed to think that that's the case. It would be something to hear explained in second or in committee why this has happened. The reason I would look for that explanation is so that we don't do it again, so that we figure out next time that a bill can actually last more than five months without getting so many amendments.

With that having been said on the process, I think that this is a bill that, from our understanding of it, is going to make sense. The effect of this will be to give the animal health system and in many ways the public health system a broader range of tools to act more quickly in times of crisis. It broadens things like the definition of animals and livestock, and it should make our system of protecting animal and human health that much more fleet footed and adaptable and comprehensive and responsive. The need for that is being demonstrated hour by hour as we're sitting through this session of the Legislature.

I'm sure all our thoughts are with the child who has been hospitalized with the H1N1 virus, and our thoughts would also be with his or her family. We all hope and pray that it doesn't go beyond this and that this doesn't turn into something much more serious. If it does, we may be using this legislation more quickly than we ever expected.

A handful of other comments on this bill, Mr. Speaker. As well as expanding the definition of animals and livestock, it addresses the definition of diseases. It amends and clarifies issues regarding food-producing animals that are being illegally fed nonrendered animal carcasses. It gives various powers to inspectors and clarifies those so that their role and responsibilities and authority are clarified. It addresses a few questions concerning the chief provincial veterinarian, who, I should note, took the time to meet with me and some of our staff to discuss this bill, and that was much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill, while it raises some questions about the drafting of its predecessor, is a good bill, it's timely, and I expect it'll get the full support of the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Other members to participate?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to conclude the debate?

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will address most of the questions that have been raised here in second reading in Committee

of the Whole. I'd just like to remind members that given the current situation with animal health and the regulations that have been adopted, we have continued to consult with the industry in the adoption of the remaining regulations. Because of the regulations being written, some changes needed to be made to the bill. We've also had to in a couple of circumstances synchronize the wording to better comply with federal legislation, which continues to evolve as well.

I look forward to debate in Committee of the Whole. With that, I would call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. Snelgrove]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and join second reading debate on Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009. I think there are a few people on this side of the House who would like to speak to this act, so I won't take a great long period of time. I'm going to speak very favourably to the act by and large. This bill will fully implement the teachers' unfunded pension liability agreement that was proposed by the government in November of 2007 and ratified by all 62 school boards on February 1, 2008. This bill will legally transfer the entire unfunded liability from pre-1992 to the government effective September 1 of this year and will incorporate changes to the payment and governance arrangements pertaining to the pre-1992 unfunded liability. We've dealt with a couple of previous bills put forward in the implementation of the pension agreement to deal with payment schedules and transferring the authority of payment to the management of the finance minister. This is going to complete the process, and it's the right thing to do.

The pre-1992 unfunded pension liability is up to about \$7 billion. The teachers' portion of that was just a little over \$2 billion. The very unfortunate and, I think, frankly, dangerous effect of allowing the teachers to continue being responsible for one-third of the unfunded liability was that teachers were paying ever-larger percentages of their pay back into their pension fund, about 12 per cent as opposed to around 7 or 8 per cent for teachers in most other provinces, and it was getting difficult to recruit and retain good teachers in the province of Alberta. Essentially, what we were asking our teachers to do in recent years was to fund the pension liability of previous teachers so that they were funding pensions for teachers already retired and would never see the benefit of the money that they were putting into this pension fund themselves.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I think it was the right thing to do, a sensible thing to do, and it could be a brilliant thing to do, now that the government through this legislation wants and, if passed, will take over the pre-1992 unfunded liability in its entirety, if the government develops a good strategy for making that unfunded liability shrink in a timely fashion.

3:20

We're looking at \$7 billion here. You know, there have been quite a few numbers kicked around going back to before the government announced plans to take over the unfunded pension liability. Some of those were announced by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Their projections were that the funding scheme in place under the 1992 pension agreement would have seen the

unfunded liability increase each year until it topped out at about \$14 billion, about double what it is today, in 2045, after which it will rapidly diminish until it is eliminated by 2060.

Of course, there are debt servicing costs involved with a debt like that as well. Again, according to the Teachers' Association, if you let it go to 2060 and pay it out according to the model in the 1992 agreement, the cost of that thing was going to be about \$46 billion. So if we paid off the \$7 billion in unfunded liability in one fell swoop today, we would save the taxpayers approximately \$40 billion over the next 55 years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the finance minister – this is not something that we really talked about in finance estimates. If you look at the budget figures, I think you will find an unfunded teachers' pension plan liability line item in there. I'm sorry; I don't have the estimates right in front of me, but there is a line item in there that I think amounts to about \$355 million, \$356 million for this year. I see the finance minister is nodding her head in agreement, so I'm pretty close on the numbers anyway. My reading of that number, by the way, is that what's in the budget estimates for fiscal '09-10 is about one-third larger than the forecast and the estimate for fiscal '08-09, which suggests that what we're seeing in that figure is simply the effect of the government taking over the one-third of the unfunded liability that had been the teachers' responsibility.

Now, this is a bit of a stretch because I'm projecting, and perhaps the finance minister could give some clarification to this, if not now, then at committee as well. If I'm projecting here correctly, it would seem to indicate from a cursory glance at those numbers that although the government is prepared to take over the unfunded liability in total, it hasn't come up with a repayment strategy that's going to pay this thing down any faster.

Now, the finance minister and I and the President of the Treasury Board and I have had some fairly lengthy discussions and debate around the estimates thus far. We know what times are going to be like to some extent. We think we know, and we hope they're not going to be any worse than what they've forecasted for the coming fiscal year and the two planning years beyond that. We know what's being proposed to be done with the sustainability fund to turn that into a much bigger fund so that there's enough money to cover off the deficits that are anticipated over the next few fiscal years. Everybody is keeping their fingers crossed that this thing doesn't get any worse than it is and that we have a rather quick and rather sharp recovery. The minister and I have had some discussions about whether that's realistic or not. We shall see in the fullness of time. So I doubt very much that there's, you know, any place, any nook, any cranny where \$7 billion happens to be hiding this year that the minister can take and simply dump into the plan.

But, again, the trick to making this work to the advantage of not only the teachers of Alberta and by extension the children of Alberta but to the taxpayers of Alberta is to get after this debt, this unfunded liability, which as of September 1 will be, if this legislation passes, part of the public debt. Get after it, and pay it down as quickly as possible. Really, in terms of details I suppose that at committee is the appropriate time to hear details of what the repayment plan will be. Although I leave it to the finance minister to decide when she wants to reveal that, I hope that she will. I hope that she will contribute to the discussion that way because I think that really is a key part of this legislation.

On paper it's a great bill. On paper it does the right thing. On paper it is going to create a situation which should make it far more attractive to recent graduates of education programs both in our own universities here in Alberta and universities all across the country, down into the United States, and around the world, for that matter,

to want to come and be great teachers here because they know that they can focus on being great teachers and not have to worry about how much of their paycheque is going into these long-standing obligations. But there is that little matter of how fast we're going to pay back the debt. Other than that, though, I'm fully in support of it myself.

I know some of my colleagues want to speak to this. I suspect others from other parties do as well. So I'll take my seat now and look forward to further discussion at committee stage and response from the minister at some point.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Members Absenting Themselves

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize an additional member, it's not often that I will intervene with respect to this kind of a debate, but I do want to draw to all members' attention Standing Order 33, which deals with pecuniary interest. This is a bill that deals with pensions of a select group of people in the province of Alberta. There is benefit to be derived to those individuals as a result of this particular piece of legislation.

Pecuniary interest says the following:

33(1) No member is entitled to vote on any question in which the Member has a direct pecuniary interest, and the vote of any Member so interested will be disallowed.

(2) If a Member has a direct pecuniary interest in a matter to be voted on, the Member shall declare the interest to the Assembly and leave the Chamber before the vote is taken.

Now, one can extrapolate in here the whole question of debate with respect to this matter. It's whether or not it's self-serving for an hon. member who might benefit very directly from this either now or in the future to then participate in the debate as well as going the next step to voting.

This is a very serious matter. It's not often that I make this kind of comment. I make it here because of the very specific nature of the bill before the Assembly at this time and the dollar implication of it. I have to believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has no pecuniary interest in this – neither he nor his direct spouse is an educator – but I do make this now. So I say this: I will not rule any member out. The members will be guided by their consciences as to how they choose to participate in this debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate the cautions provided by the Speaker. As a retired teacher, although I no longer contribute to the pension, I am a recipient of it, and that pension is adjusted on an annual basis. Therefore, when it comes to the vote, I'll make sure that I absent myself so as not to cause any confusion. However, the fact that I was a teacher in a former life I don't believe prevents me from speaking on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: Please, I want to make it very clear what I said. If there is a direct benefit to a member, the member goes forward with his own responsibility and caution. That's all I'm saying.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm pleased that you requalified it and left it to my conscience to decide. I don't believe that I have the personal persuasive powers to change the outcome one way or the other.

My comments are that this is sort of the implementation state of what was a very positive piece of legislation. I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that it was as positive for the government as it was for

teachers, for students, and for parents across this province. I would like to think that the reasons for bringing forward this legislation were purely altruistic, but the reality is that by living up to the obligations that the province had basically dragged its heels on for a 30-year period, the government averted the potential of a province-wide strike. The government did the right thing by taking over the unfunded pension liability. It created labour peace for five years. It tied any increases in salary to the weekly average. It also made a connection not only for teachers through the agreement but for staff, including caretakers, so that anyone dealing with a support function within the education system would be considered under that same weekly average. That was a very positive undertaking.

3:30

As the Member for Calgary-Currie previously mentioned, the longer we deal with paying down this debt, the greater it becomes. In order to service the debt, the province is basically required to pay in the neighbourhood of about \$83 million just to keep the debt from growing substantially larger. The interest continues to grow on that \$7 billion figure.

Now, it's important to note that this government has decided to undertake a deficit of approximately \$4.7 billion. When you add another 7 billion plus dollars of the unfunded liability, and then you add another \$10 billion of public infrastructure deficit, at least \$1.5 billion of which the Education minister agreed was the amount on defrayed infrastructure for schools, what you are seeing there alone, is \$21 billion of debt. To that we need to add another \$1.5 billion, at least, for other unfunded pension liabilities that the government has the responsibility for undertaking.

While this is very successful, it is important that the government come up with some type of savings plan which will allow it to keep up with its debt payments and also prevent our deficit/debt from growing. At this point, Mr. Speaker, we're almost back at the point of \$23 billion in debt, which was reduced to a large extent on the backs of public employees.

I look forward to this bill being discussed further, Mr. Speaker, and I will take you up on your suggestion, and I will absent myself until after the vote has occurred. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the hon. member for wanting to absent himself from the vote, thereby acknowledging that he has a conflict of interest in the situation. Doesn't he find it somewhat untoward and self-serving to then participate in the debate? I'm shocked, hon. member, and perhaps you could answer that.

Mr. Chase: I'd be glad to answer that question. It doesn't affect my benefits whatsoever. This will affect the current employees, especially the young teachers who have been servicing this debt for years and years and years. It does not affect me monetarily. I do not benefit from this. Whether the government decided to pay off this pension or not, my pension is secure because of the good management of the Alberta Teachers' Association in terms of the pension fund. It may not be as successful as the Ontario teachers' fund, but it is managed, and I won't benefit from this. Also, it's important to point out that I was a teacher. I am now the elected representative of Calgary-Varsity constituency, approximately 35,000 to 40,000 members of which will be paying for this unfunded liability. If I were not to speak on behalf of my constituents, I would be abdicating my responsibility.

I hope that has clarified the concerns, but if any other individuals within the 29(2)(a) process would like further clarification, I'll be glad to do so. I'll stay around for that time.

Ms Evans: Well, it's a very good point in debate, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you very much for illuminating it so that we can all have a full understanding of it. There's conflict of interest in direct or indirect pecuniary interest, and there's always a wide-held perception by people that if you are still held as a member of the group that received, for whatever reason, a pension from the Alberta Teachers' Association, including my mother as a widow of a teacher who died many years ago, in some way you are still connected with the policy-making body that can affect or can benefit from the kinds of activity we're engaged in.

I, like the Member for Peace River, would have been interested in the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's impression of that because while you continue to hold that right to receive monies from that group, there's certainly an inference, a perception that the benefit that accrues to the group as a whole – their opportunity to give X amount of dollars for COLA clauses in the future – is impacted somewhat by the decisions we're making today. It's that COLA and the establishment of that that I think would serve you well to remember and to be absent.

I am surprised that you hadn't chosen to before you spoke, but I'm glad to hear your intention to leave now, and I'm glad to note further that other members have absented themselves. I don't think anyone in this Legislative Assembly wants to do something that places into conflict or into question by the electorate en masse out there in Alberta that we try to do things in a very above board fashion.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I want to make some comments and then perhaps make a suggestion to members of the House.

The Speaker: Well, we are on Standing Order 29(2)(a), the question-and-comment period.

Mr. Renner: I want to make a motion, but I'll wait, perhaps, until other members who wish to participate at this stage have done so. Then I would like to make a motion with respect to the debate under way.

The Speaker: Well, we've just lost 15 seconds of the hon. member's time.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Based on the fact that your mother was a teacher and you stand to potentially inherit, does that not put you in a similar conflict of interest? It's a question of how far the conflict goes? If we had a brother or a sister or a mother . . .

Ms Evans: She's the widow of a teacher.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Well, I'm just saying that if there is a teacher connection in your family, then possibly – do you see what I'm saying? How extreme do you take the connection before you absent yourself?

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have now exhausted the time associated with that.

Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, I'm sorry. You have to help me. What do you mean "a motion"?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that there appears to be some concern among a number of members as to whether individuals are

or are not in conflict, I would just like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill pending some clarification from the Ethics Commissioner so that we can all participate in good conscience or not as the case may be. There are a number of members who may find themselves in a similar position.

The Speaker: So the hon. member who basically has joined the debate is now adjourning the debate. He has now given his shot in the debate. Do I take it that if the Assembly agrees, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader will be contacting the Ethics Commissioner for a ruling in this regard, or is the expectation that the chair should?

Mr. Renner: I don't care who does it, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps it might be appropriate for the chair to do so.

The Speaker: The chair would be happy to do it anyway.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

3:40

Bill 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act

[Adjourned debate April 28: Ms Evans]

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise, do you choose to continue?

Ms Evans: No.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, then.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is, again, an honour to get up and be able to join debate on Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, in second reading. This is the bill that changes the rules around the legislated fiscal framework for the government in the province of Alberta. This is the bill that allows the government to run deficits. This is the bill that permits deficits if offset by transfers from the sustainability fund. This is the bill that reworks the sustainability fund sufficiently to allow it to have enough money in it to pay off those deficits for the next three or four fiscal years. This is the bill that anticipates that most of that money, in fact, will be needed to cover those operating deficits because it anticipates that we will be running operating deficits for the next three fiscal years, maybe four.

In fact, the budget anticipates that things might be worse than actually projected in that the budget refers to a \$2 billion fiscal correction that could happen sometime during this fiscal year in time for next fiscal year if things don't start to recover in time. That, Mr. Speaker, would be necessary most likely because even with the way Bill 33 proposes to rework the sustainability fund, there wouldn't be enough money in that particular piggy bank to cover the deficits that we would run if a worst-case scenario than what the budget projects actually comes to pass.

How things have changed in the space of a year. Boy. Less than a year ago the finance minister was talking about the possibility that we would run an 8 and a half billion dollar surplus for fiscal '08-09. It didn't work out that way. By the way, I'm not blaming the finance minister for the fact that it didn't work out that way. I don't know what her math marks were like in school, but I'm not blaming her for getting the math wrong. This undoubtedly is a global economic meltdown, a global credit crisis, a global rhubarb patch that we've all driven the fiscal automobile into.

As Ann Landers used to say when she wrote that advice column that used to appear in the newspapers back in the day when people

actually used to read newspapers by getting them delivered to their houses rather than just going online to get them: when the good Lord hands you lemons, make lemonade. We've been handed a lemon. Maybe we've been handed two lemons here, actually. We've been handed a whole bushel of lemons in terms of where the economy is going and has gone, and we've been handed another lemon in terms of Bill 33, I think.

Bill 33 permits deficits if offset by transfers from the sustainability fund. It continues to disallow borrowing for operating purposes while allowing borrowing for capital purposes and borrowing by self-supporting corporations. That was allowed and will continue to be allowed. In-year operating expense increases are limited to 1 per cent of budgeted total ministry operating expenses. Here's where we start getting into trouble, Mr. Speaker. The limitation on the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be directly used for budget purposes: bye, bye. That one is gone. The sustainability fund is being expanded to include the assets of the capital account, the amounts set aside for carbon capture and storage, the amounts set aside for Green TRIP. Add it all together, and it comes up to about \$17 billion.

You know what? The only control in here on what you can do with the money, other than you have to use it to offset operating deficits because borrowing to cover operating deficits would still be against the law, is that the balance in the sustainability fund cannot be an amount less than zero. So the sustainability fund can't run a deficit. Wow. Knock me over with a feather.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. That is just not good enough. The \$2.5 billion that was required to remain in the sustainability fund as a contingency for natural disasters, unforeseen emergencies: that's been eliminated. The notion of how we sustain the sustainability fund is just kind of vague and airy: well, you know, when the fiscal situation improves – we think that's going to happen in 2012-2013 – well, then when we're running surpluses, cash available from the surpluses will be saved in the sustainability fund until the fund's balance reaches \$10 billion again.

This is essentially the first plank in the province's savings strategy, the province says. The province does not say what the second or third or fourth planks are. My goodness, Mr. Speaker. I have questioned the minister of finance, the minister responsible for Treasury Board, the Premier, anybody else over there whom I can question, repeatedly since budget day, as to what the other planks are. There are no other planks. This plank is sort of sticking out perpendicular to the side of the ship like, you know, it's a pirate ship, just inviting us to all walk off the plank and go splashing into the ocean of red ink.

There's no control anymore, and goodness knows, Mr. Speaker, there wasn't much control to begin with. Back in 2003 the government introduced Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, which included amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act as it existed then. Those amendments created the sustainability fund, which, by the way, was originally a Liberal idea. Those amendments also created the capital account.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

That bill also introduced a cap of \$3.5 billion for how much nonrenewable resource revenue could be spent before having to be transferred into the sustainability fund. You know, when you get to 3.5 billion and 1 dollars, the \$1 gets transferred into the sustainability fund and on like that. There was some understanding even then, in 2003, that we shouldn't spend all our capital, that that might be a good idea since once we get the money from the oil and gas that

comes out of the ground – that oil and gas is gone, and if we spend the money that we made from that oil and gas, it's gone for all time, too.

So \$3.5 billion initially. In 2004 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$4 billion. In 2005 the government amended the fiscal responsibility act yet again to increase the cap to \$4.75 billion. In 2006 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$5.3 billion. And now it's gone altogether. Now it's just gone.

The government is removing the only legislative limit they had on spending all the resource revenue that they collect. In my view, in my opinion, they're taking a gamble by removing the \$2.5 billion natural disaster contingency amount, too. There's nothing set aside for anything except it's all set aside to offset operating deficits that will be rung up this year and may continue to be rung up next year and the year after and – who knows? – the year after that. Because we've all seen it happen in this country often enough at the federal level, at the provincial level in this province, and at the provincial level in just about every other province, Mr. Speaker, we all know that once you start down the road of running operating deficits, it's a tough road to get off of. So we don't really know where we're going with all this.

3:50

In essence, Mr. Speaker, what we are saying with Bill 33 is that we're going to get our hands on every bit of money that we can in short-term savings, or short-term set-asides, in this province, we're going to lump it all together into one big emergency fund, and then we're going to start spending that emergency fund until, God willing and the creek don't rise, the economy starts to turn around or we run out of money in the emergency fund.

There is no plan to embark on a multilevel savings and investment strategy that involves replenishing some of these savings in the short term, that involves continuing to save short term to continue to have an emergency fund that involves investing for the long term, that involves the notion that if we were a family we'd be saying: "Okay. Dad's lost his job, and Mom is working part-time, but we've still got to save for the kids' college education someday, you know, 18, 19, 20 years down the road, and we'd better be trying to put a little something away for our retirement. Oh, yes, we also have to pay the mortgage. We can't afford a new roof, but we've got to patch the leaky spots in it, and stuff like that."

I mean, when you're a family and especially when you're a family of limited means, what we sometimes refer to as a SITCOM family – single income, two children, outrageous mortgage – the world doesn't care that you don't have all that much money or that this year is a little rougher than last year. You've still got to meet your current obligations, your monthly and daily expenses; you've got to pay down your debt.

We were just talking in Bill 25 about adding \$7 billion to public debt, and rightly we should, in the unfunded teachers' pension liability, and you've got to save for the future. All this does is say: "Okay. Let's get our hands on every penny and dime and quarter and nickel that fell through the cushions of the couch, and let's look behind the fridge to see if the cat knocked any loonies back there. We're going to put it into a piggy bank. Then we're going to get a hammer, and we're going to smash the piggy bank, and we're going to start spending that money to meet our shortfall." That's not good enough. That's not nearly good enough.

There is no strategy here. There is just pure naked fear, as far as I'm concerned, pure naked terror coupled with hope that bears a

passing resemblance to, you know, Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, a hope for one of those "Aha" religious moments where we can suddenly go: "There, I've seen the sign. The economy is getting better. The recession is over. We're not as deep in the glue as we feared we might be." I wouldn't run my family's finances on a foundation that shaky. I know the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the Member for Calgary-McCall wouldn't run their family's finances on a foundation that shaky. I suspect there are even a few members in the government that wouldn't run their family's finances on a foundation that shaky.

This great province of Alberta is a family of 3 and a half million people who rely on us not to mess it up, not to put it in the rhubarb, not to drive it off a cliff, to be prudent, to be visionary [interjection] and to ignore the hackles and the heckles and the chirping from the little sparrow from Calgary-West across the way there, and to do some responsible, prudent fiscal planning. [interjection] That was a good sparrow imitation, not as good as the Member for Calgary-West but not bad.

We're failing them in this. We're absolutely failing them in this. What the government seeks to do in Bill 33, Mr. Speaker, is give itself kind of an all-encompassing get out of jail free card that allows them to continue spending irresponsibly, to continue spending without having gone through any more of an exercise in value-for-money audit or seeking of efficiencies than the stated — they're looking for \$215 million in savings over the next 12 months out of a \$37 billion budget. I think they can do better than that, but that's all they're looking for.

This is not a government that is taking seriously the need to prioritize its planning and its spending and reallocate spending and investment so that the spending goes to the projects and programs that will benefit the people in the province of Alberta and the investment goes to long-term investments that will enrich the people in the province of Alberta and get us off this roller-coaster ride of volatile oil and gas resource revenue prices and amounts so that we can ride out the storm better in the future. This is a short-term, myopic solution to a problem that calls for some long-term vision. It just in no way, as far as I'm concerned, passes the test of good, prudent fiscal management.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that that's part of the reason why the voters of Calgary-Currie put me here, why the voters of the 82 other constituencies in this province put the rest of you here: to be prudent fiscal managers and good stewards of this province's wealth. We all, all of us who didn't come here post-1993, all of us sacrificed and suffered and went through pain, some more than others, when it became necessary to slay the deficit, balance the budget, and try and get this province out of debt. We owe it to the people of Alberta who were here then and to the people of Alberta who have come here since not to set them up for having to go through that again.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this piece of legislation, Bill 33, as enabling legislation for this year's budget does exactly that. It sets us up to go down the road that we went down all through the '80s, really, and it sets us up to again have to come to grips in a way that we came to grips in the early '90s with the financial mess we had gotten ourselves into. We have time to do it differently. I hope that we have the collective will to do it differently. There's no way, in my mind, that this piece of legislation can go forward without significant amendments, and at the appropriate time we will be bringing forward amendments on this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think my time is just about up. I will take my seat and allow others to join the debate, perhaps even the sparrow from Calgary-West.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated that. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Calgary-Currie. They were a good opening analysis. I wonder about the name of this act, frankly: the Fiscal Responsibility Act. I think that by the time we're done, it could have all kinds of names. It could be the fiscal non-responsibility act or the fiscal irresponsibility act or the fiscal cross your fingers act or who knows what? I'm sure it'll get more and more creative.

I cannot think of a bigger symbol of the hollow agenda of this government in the last 15 years than this particular piece of legislation. The simple fact of the matter is that through the 1990s, as natural gas prices were surging and natural resource revenues were climbing, it was actually pretty easy after the first couple of years of the so-called Klein revolution to run surpluses, and it was easy to stick with the original Fiscal Responsibility Act. It's only now, six months after the price of oil and gas drops, that suddenly the commitment to balanced budgets is out the window. Frankly, it makes we really wonder what that whole campaign to pay off the debt was really about. What was that really for? I think Albertans are increasingly aware that a mere two or three years after the mortgage was burned, we're going back into debt. What the heck is this about? If we're so readily prepared on such short notice to toss out that kind of discipline, then why did we put so much effort into the last 15 years?

4:00

In many ways I think, Mr. Speaker, a lot of what happened in the last 15 years, through the 1990s, was deeply misguided and deeply damaging. I think that every time I drive a road in Alberta that's in dismal disrepair because we deferred maintenance, and now we're having to spend substantially more to repair those roads. I think that every time I get a call from a constituent who has experienced 12- or 24-hour or even multiday waits in emergency rooms because they're short of staff and short of facilities. I think back to the moves in the 1990s to lay off over 10,000 health care workers and to reduce our training capacity for nurses and doctors and to sell two hospitals in Calgary, to blow up what was then the largest hospital in Calgary.

All of those things and so much more were undertaken in the name of balancing the budget and paying off the debt. Now this government has the nerve, six months after the price of oil and gas drops, to bring in legislation and say: "Forget all of that. That was all just then, and this is now. Just get over it. Forget your history. Forget all the blunders we've made, and stay with the program." Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that offensive. I find that demeaning. I find it insulting. Worst of all, I think it's a sign of extremely bad management on the part of this government.

What were all those cutbacks really about? What was the boom all about, folks? Think this through. Fifteen years of multibillion dollar surpluses and six months after natural resource prices drop, we're into this. Is this the best you people can do? Is this what you consider managing Alberta's wealth effectively? Because it sure isn't what I consider it. How could we be so exposed, after so much wealth has flowed through this treasury, to the forces of debt and cutback? How could we even be considering internal memos coming through from top medical people in the system putting freezes on recruitments? How could we be considering standing here today while children across the river, sick and injured children, are being treated in a tent? What the heck has gone on with you people in the last 15 years? Where have you taken Alberta, and how did you get us so exposed to a drop in oil and natural gas prices, Mr. Speaker?

This is, I think, a shocking betrayal of the hollow agenda of a government that is inept in managing public finances. Time and

time again over the years we and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Canada West Foundation, Jack Mintz at the commission of this own government, and many others have said: get a savings plan in place. As the Member for Calgary-Currie has quite rightly pointed out, we're still waiting for any meaningful plan.

How is it that after all of that money the heritage fund is worth significantly less today than it was 20 years ago? If we were to adjust for the larger population and inflation, we'd find that it was worth far less today than 20 years ago. In those 20 years that have passed, we've pumped out literally hundreds of billions of dollars of nonrenewable resource wealth. It's gone. We have less savings in place than we did 20 years ago, and we're heading back into debt.

I think this is shameful. I think that there needs to be some serious soul-searching taking place among the members of this government about the long-term future of Alberta. There is no savings plan, and when we have the government's own report, written by Jack Mintz and a blue-ribbon panel with clearly a right-wing leaning – this is not some, you know, left-wing or even Liberal group of people; Jack Mintz and the others were hand-picked by the former finance minister. When they come up and they say, "What this government is doing is unsustainable," and this government and current minister of finance try to bury that report, release it on a day when it's going to get lost to the media, brush it aside, I think the long term of this province is actually in some serious jeopardy, and I think events in the world are going to overtake the carbon-based economy that's given Alberta its prosperity.

History, as I've said many times, is filled with examples of economies and societies that are based on commodities going boom and then going bust and never recovering. I'm afraid that we're beginning to see that play out. There will be some recovery, no doubt, but each recovery from here on in is going to be weaker and shallower and shorter than the previous one, and each downturn is going to be deeper and longer and harder to get out. As that downward wave continues, we're going to dig ourselves further and further into debt, and we do this led by a government that has no strategy. Debt is not on its own necessarily bad, Mr. Speaker, but it needs to be managed in the context of a bigger strategy. This government doesn't have a strategy, and it's shocking and dismal.

Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment to make to this piece of legislation. It's got the appropriate approval from Parliamentary Counsel. I'll take a moment to allow the pages to distribute it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member proceeds on the amendment, we shall call it amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: I shall read it for the record. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 33, Fiscal Responsibility Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill does not adequately protect current and future generations from the possibility of catastrophic natural or environmental disaster.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this motion is intended to point out and take at least a small step to addressing some of the shortcomings of this bill and to try to put it in the context of some kind of larger strategy. We are, in fact, day by day right now living through the makings of something that could be a natural disaster in the form of H1N1 flu. We don't know whether this is going to become a great pandemic or not. There are looming environmental crises with mountain pine beetle, with forest fires. There are fires burning in this province right now, and those could easily loom. We need to be responsible

and set aside in effect a contingency fund so that there's some specific amount, some specific account that we can draw on in the case of a catastrophic natural or environmental disaster.

4:10

We need to do that for the long term. That's the very least that we could do in terms of a fiscal strategy. At the very least, we could take a little bit of all that incredible wealth that has flowed through the treasury and set it aside for all generations to come to say: well, this is at least a small bit we've done for you. This is in effect an insurance policy for this generation and all future generations in Alberta against unforeseen natural or environmental disasters.

Let's consider what those could be. Tornado. We all remember – well, maybe we don't. But many of us will remember the tornado in 1987 that caused hundreds of millions of dollars' damage in the Edmonton area and cost, I think, 27 people their lives. We know that there's flooding looming this spring. This also mentions very specifically environmental disaster because none of us really are that clear on what the environmental liabilities in places like the oil sands may end up being or in many, many, many other sites in this province where there has been oil and gas development, where there have been petrochemical plants, where there's been other activity that could create the equivalent to the Sydney tar ponds or Love Canal in New York, Mr. Speaker.

I would ask all members of the Assembly to give this some thought, to consider an amendment that at least puts a little bit of specific strategy and thought to how we're managing the incredible wealth here. As the Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, as this bill is structured right now, there's a risk of an endless downward slope. If there isn't a recovery in the price of natural gas, for example, and if this turns out to be more like 1982 than 1992 where there's the better part of a decade of an economic slowdown, then we'll be here in three or four years having drained all the coffers and set virtually nothing aside.

I should remind members here about a little bit of history. In I believe it was 1982 there was the initial downturn, and there was for the first time in many years a significant deficit for the provincial government. Then there was a brief recovery for a couple of years, and then the real pain bit. I find myself wondering increasingly, Mr. Speaker, if we aren't in that first phase of what will become perhaps a decade-long or even longer slowdown.

I think that the real long-term risk for Alberta's economy is the development of new technologies on solar power and renewables that simply take away the market for Alberta's treasure and just eliminate global demand in the long term for our carbon. If that happens, we'll have nothing left. This amendment would create at least a small pool of money that would be there like an insurance fund forever and forever and forever. I would ask all members of this Assembly to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, before I recognize a member to speak, this is in fact a hoist amendment?

Dr. Taft: No, it's not. It's a reasoned amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: It's a reasoned amendment. Okay.

Then I would recognize the minister of finance to debate on the amendment.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. Speaking to the amendment, when I view the words of the amendment, the amendment suggests that, in fact, Bill 33 not be read because it fails to "adequately

protect current and future generations from the possibility of catastrophic natural or environmental disaster.” Well, there are several things we do to protect current and future generations.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs could argue that his planning for emergencies and disasters is part of the ways that this government by policy and practice and strategy prepare and safeguard future generations. The attitude that has been presented, however, is that perhaps we haven’t adequately put some money aside to prepare for these disasters. Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest there’s nowhere else in Canada where there is so much money in an emergency savings account to prepare for or to safeguard against any type of disaster. Nowhere else in North America do they have a \$17 billion sustainability fund of which over the next three years the draw is less than \$9 billion.

When we have identified a plan that shows the reduction in expenditure both from a value review of operations and a planned reduction of another \$2 billion worth of expenditure, in my view Bill 33, this particular act, responsibly addresses not only how we cannot borrow for operating purposes and talks about many of the principles that were in the previous act, but it does more. It disentangles what had actually been happening between accounts management in government, that really engaged us in some very intricate, complex transactions. The act, in my view, is much more transparent than we’ve had in the past. It, in fact, identifies exactly how we’re spending money on three separate tracks: obviously on the operating budget, on the capital budget, and on those things we’re doing that are safeguarding our environment and our sustainability circumstances with Green TRIP and carbon capture and storage.

I urge defeat of this so that we can proceed with this Fiscal Responsibility Act as currently written because I believe that nowhere else in Canada, as I’ve said, are we as well prepared if we need financial resources to support ourselves against any kind of disaster.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to the amendment, which I’m assuming is A1 unless I’m told otherwise, what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is saying is that we need to have a definite fund set aside. The hon. minister of finance indicated that somehow we could avert this disaster or we could soften the effects of it, mitigate the effects by proper planning and relying on our existing savings fund. My answer would be that if we’d had proper planning, we’d have real savings, and we wouldn’t be drawing on a \$4.7 billion deficit. If we’re going on past practice, the planning isn’t there, and I don’t see anything to indicate by legislation that we’ve seen to date this year that there’s a change in attitude.

What we have here is basically the grasshopper saying: “Well, you know, I’m going to dance all day while the sun shines, and I’m not going to worry about the winter. It’ll be taken care of.” Of course, whether we’re talking about the allegory, the lesson learned from that story, or we’re talking about Alberta’s reality, \$17 billion, whatever we want to call that amount, is a tangible, finite resource. If we’re putting all our eggs into one basket and saying that this amount of money is going to tide us over and basically praying that the global recession is going to reverse and that the value of our oil and gas will instantly rise so that we can waste another boom circumstance and head into another bust, then, you know, what do they say with regard to insanity? It’s repeatedly carrying out the same action and expecting a different outcome.

4:20

We are fortunate that the government didn’t squander even more of what was left. We are fortunate that the government recognized

the need for a sustainability fund. This was a Liberal idea. It was a stability fund that we proposed. We proposed putting a significantly larger amount of money into this to ward off concerns. Going back prior to March 3, 2008, we were saying that as much as all the surplus money that we were getting from oil and gas should be set aside. For example, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who has a doctorate in financial management, recognized the fact that we could not continue to spend 23 per cent above what every other province spent, that we could not continue to rely on our one-trick pony of nonrenewable gas and oil, that we had to prepare for that future.

Now, Alaska is prepared for its future. Norway is the example of an absolutely fantastic preparation, where they no longer rely on their oil and gas. They can live off the proceeds that were gained on that oil and gas revenue. It will be depleted, but their savings fund won’t be. Compare what is in the area of \$400 billion even after the financial losses to what we have left in our now combined stability fund and our rapidly depleted heritage trust fund, and you can see that we’re not prepared. We’re not prepared for everyday occurrences, never mind the emergencies that this amendment A1 is addressing.

If we do not get our financial house in order, we will not be prepared to deal with global warming. The Bow Glacier is rapidly reducing, so it’s not just a matter of dealing with the after-effects of floods or the prevention of floods. It’s dealing potentially with water shortages into the future, and we’re still waiting for that land-use framework to come into place to look after water management. Now, I believe it was three years ago when once-in-a-lifetime flooding occurred on the Highwood River twice in a two-week period, yet the government still allows builders to build below the flood plain and then after the fact bails them out with insurance, well, with taxpayers’ funding. What we’re asking for is to set aside a fund which is dedicated to emergencies.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview relayed concerns such as pine beetles and the devastating economic effect it could have and the need, therefore, to manage and mitigate, but also if our best-intended efforts for whatever reason are overcome by the infestation of beetles, then we’ve got to have something to fall back on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about reclamation. He referred to the tailings ponds in Fort McMurray and to the thousands, to which I’ll add, of orphaned wells which need to be reclaimed and are being sort of addressed at 10 cents on the dollar in terms of funding set aside by industry to cover that.

Take us into the future. The government seems in its communications to be heading towards the possibility of nuclear power. Well, look around the world at some of the circumstances that have happened in minor meltdowns in Ontario, then go to the States and Three Mile Island, and then go to Europe and talk about Chernobyl. If you are going to take people down that route and you’re not going to have an emergency fund to deal with the potentials – to deal with the radioactive material that has to be dealt with, to counteract the amount of water that would be used in the cooling requirements of that facility – if you don’t have a contingency fund or an insurance policy, you’re going blindly into the future without armour, without any kind of support.

This amendment says: get your fiscal house in order; set aside an insurance plan so that we can go forward with some sense of control. Right now spending by this government is out of control. They have no idea what to save, where to cut. The cuts that we’ve seen so far are to chiropractic services, to aboriginal suicide prevention services. We see a tripling of seniors’ single Blue Cross coverage. The hits are happening at the wrong spots, yet this government will be putting out \$40 million worth of bonuses in June. It will be, as part

of their budget, putting forward \$35 million to horse racing. Why could some of that money not be the start of an insurance fund? That's what we're asking. We're asking for you to protect Albertans not only now but as a legacy in the future. Don't leave my grandchildren to clean up the mess that you are dealing with today by not having an insurance fund.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When last I checked, we were debating the Alberta government's response to the current economic crisis, and somehow during the course of this amendment we're now talking about tornados and forest fires, environmental or natural disasters. I find that a very curious twist.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that I am absolutely astounded by the hypocrisy of that party to stand in this House day after day after day and call for more spending and more spending and more spending. Even today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is complaining about our spending levels on health care. Then he stands up and launches this missile. I am absolutely astounded by the approach.

No government in North America is better prepared for the situation that we find ourselves in than the government of Alberta. If you look across this country now, where some of our fellow provinces are facing debts of \$11,000 or more for every man, woman, and child in their constituency, today we have a surplus of that amount in Alberta, the only jurisdiction in North America, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity doesn't seem to understand that paying off debt is in fact protecting his children and their future. They don't seem to understand that the heritage savings fund is, in fact, savings, that the sustainability account is savings, that the capital account is savings, and that other reserves – Mr. Speaker, the debate is juvenile.

For the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to stand there and forecast his brilliant economic forecast that the recoveries in the future will be weaker and shorter, well, thank you for that. Mr. Speaker, his hindsight is always one hundred per cent. He has an uncanny ability to predict the past, but he didn't see this one coming. Where was he to save Albertans when this economic crisis descended upon us? We should be debating how a government responsibly reacts to the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, and this is what we get? Thanks very much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, stand in frustration in listening to the diatribe coming from the opposition benches today. I do not support this amendment. The member for Edmonton-Riverview has suggested that we need to protect current and future generations from the possibility of catastrophic natural or environmental disaster. I know that he and the member for Calgary-Currie have made quite a push in trying to increase our savings here in this province, yet they're not quite sure what we're saving for.

They talk about this 4 and a half billion dollar operating deficit. Quite frankly, if they looked at the government budget, this government is bringing in just as much revenue as it is spending on the operating side, and the deficit side of it is particularly on the amount of money that we're spending on infrastructure. That is a direct

response in particular – and we're seeing this right across not just this country but the world – to the economic situation that we're in. We know that for every million dollars we invest in infrastructure, it directly supports approximately 140 jobs.

This particular member wants to talk about savings for a natural or environmental disaster that might happen sometime in the future, but I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that right now we have an economic situation that Albertans want us to deal with today. We have people that have lost their jobs, people that will potentially lose their jobs in the near future. It's this type of investment particularly in infrastructure that will result in us creating some of those jobs back and getting us through this current economic situation. To suggest that the only reason we save money is for catastrophic natural and environmental disasters is, I believe, irresponsible and actually quite narrow minded. I don't think Albertans support that, and that was very obvious about a year ago.

The other part that I did want to mention is that in debate on this bill and in particular on this amendment the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has really shown his narrow grasp of the current situation that we're in. He kept referring to the current situation as a drop in oil and gas prices. Mr. Speaker, that is not the current situation. Yes, we've seen a drop in oil and gas prices, but I don't believe that that is responsible for the current global economic situation. In fact, the current situation is much more complex than that, and we're not immune from that. That's why I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Enough has been said against the amendment, but I'm standing here to support this amendment. We are talking about savings here. We are concerned about a major disaster maybe happening in the province.

I will take it back to 1981-82. I know the interest rates, you know, went sky high, through the roof, and we had the money to support Albertans with their mortgage payments. There were subsidies that were there for Albertans to save their homes. I've been through that time, Mr. Speaker, and we are talking about saving for a rainy day. We are not talking about spending all the money, whatever we have here. Had the government been prudent and frugal with the money, I think we could have handled this situation better than we are doing today.

I know that every time we stand up here and we talk about savings, we are blamed to be the spenders, spenders, spenders. For the last five years, year over year, spending has gone up 10 per cent. We didn't tie it to inflation and population growth, and \$60 billion was gone just like that. I think the government has squandered an opportunity to save more for a rainy day.

In 1976, when the heritage trust fund was set up, you know, the government of the day had the vision to look into the future. Alaska and Norway set up their trust funds after we did, and look where they are today because they had this plan. They were saving for the rainy day, and they won't have to depend on nonrenewable resource income in the future. I think we are way, far, far behind those jurisdictions.

Alberta was the envy of everybody. The way we're going at it, I don't think we'll be the envy of the other provinces or other jurisdictions anymore. Within maybe a year or two we will be down where I cannot imagine being. This is not fearmongering, Mr. Speaker. We have been down that road before, and I thought we learned our lesson, but it seems like history is repeating itself again.

I think everybody should be supporting this amendment. We should start, you know, saving for the future, for the rainy day, for the disaster, whatever may come our way. For those reasons I will be supporting this amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 33 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: On the bill now, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With this Fiscal Responsibility Act I think we are turning the clock back here. The Fiscal Responsibility Act was first presented in 1999 by the government of the day as a mechanism to reduce the provincial debt. The idea of the sustainability fund was originally put forward by the Leader of the Opposition as Bill 208, the Fiscal Stability Fund Calculation Act, in the fall of 2002, and that was hoisted by the government of the day. The object of the bill was to encourage the government to create a fiscal stability fund by calculating the positive effect that a fiscal stability fund would have on Alberta's financial affairs. The purpose of calculating the effect of the stability fund on the financial affairs of Alberta was to determine how the stability fund would assist in stabilizing the cyclical nature of Alberta's economy, which we are facing today again.

The stability fund would protect the sustainability of social programs and would improve the long-term fiscal planning framework of the government. That was the intent of the sustainability fund. The creation of the sustainability fund at the time would ensure that funding for health care, education, and children's services is not based on oil and gas revenues, an important first step in ensuring that funding for the priority programs and services is not based on oil and gas revenues but to have the savings in place so we can get the money coming from the savings to spend on those programs.

4:40

In 2003 the government introduced Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, which included amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act. These amendments included the creation of the sustainability fund and the capital account. This bill also introduced a cap of \$3.5 billion for how much nonrenewable resource revenue could be spent before having to be transferred into the sustainability fund. The bill also introduced a clause stating that \$2.5 billion had to remain in the sustainability fund for emergencies and natural disasters, but with this new Fiscal Responsibility Act, Bill 33, I think we are just abolishing that section.

In 2004 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$4 billion. In 2005 they changed it again to \$4.75 billion. In 2006 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenue to \$5.3 billion.

These annual increases in the limit on how much nonrenewable resource revenue could be spent highlight the lack of fiscal discipline this government has shown. Every year as spending requirements went up, so did the amount of money that could be spent. There was absolutely no attempt to keep spending of the nonrenewable resource revenues in check. In 2008 the act was amended again to allow for P3 borrowing for schools and postsecondary institutions and health care facilities. Mr. Speaker, every time there were

changes made to the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the spending went up and up and up.

Now we are at a juncture again where we are going to change another bill, Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Under the original Fiscal Responsibility Act deficits were not permitted. The main goal behind the change to the Fiscal Responsibility Act is to allow the government to run a deficit of our capital spending and, I hear, operating spending, too, here and there, so I'm not really clear on this, you know. Maybe we will change this act again to go for operating spending again.

This change is required because there is a drop in oil and gas prices, and the recession has greatly impacted Alberta's revenue stream and its ability to maintain its \$23 billion three-year capital spending plan. The deficit will only be permitted if offset by transfers from the expanded sustainability fund, and borrowing for operating purposes continues to be disallowed while borrowing for capital purposes and by self-supporting corporations continues to be allowed. In-year operating expense increases are limited to 1 per cent of the budget total of ministry operating expenses. The way I see it, with this Fiscal Responsibility Act I think we will have no money left in the sustainability fund.

We tried to deal with that with the amendment before brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I would like to move another amendment here on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

I'll take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I heard you say "on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview." The member already spoke, so the process would not allow it.

Mr. Kang: This is another amendment, A2. That's another amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it your amendment or on behalf of?

Mr. Kang: Okay. On behalf of myself I'll move another amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I have to see the amendment. This is the amendment signed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, so procedure-wise this is not permissible because your hon. member already introduced an amendment.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Seeking clarification. This is a totally different amendment, and it's being moved on behalf of the hon. member by a different member. It's not a repeat of the first amendment. Is it being suggested that a person can sign their name to only one amendment within the process? That's the clarification I'm looking for.

The Deputy Speaker: According to our parliamentary rules, in second reading the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview already spoke once and introduced an amendment, so that is done for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Anything you do on second reading – this is the second time, and it's not permissible. This amendment should have been signed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to be valid.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Thank you for that clarification. Speaking to Bill 33 in general, obviously we will get our amendments in order and bring them forward again in discussion of Bill 33.

The point that we've tried to raise throughout our discussion on Bill 33 is the need to have a buffer, to have a backstop, to have a way of protecting ourselves when times are tough such as we're currently experiencing. But when those tough external economic times are compounded by emergent circumstances within our own province such as water shortages – the term that is frequently used is acts of God. Frequently, the acts result from the failure of man to prevent the potential of natural disasters occurring.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act, as other members before have indicated – the Member for Calgary-Currie and most recently the Member for Calgary-McCall – seems to be the equivalent of a government windshield washing blade during a rainstorm. Out of convenience it flips to the right and adds more money. Then it flips to the left and takes it away. There's no planning. It's all ad hoc, on the spot as opposed to long-term.

Now, we've talked about: why have a stability fund? Why have a sustainability fund? The government recognized that we had to have that padding, that circumstance that would tide us over. But what the government has and is basically gambling on is the idea that the global recession will magically end by the actions of other governments, that once the current stores of gas and oil run down, the price will return. It's all operating on kind of a wing and a prayer circumstance as opposed to sound economic policy.

4:50

The whole notion that, you know, six months ago it was illegal – throw in immoral, unreasonable – to consider going into debt, and then as sort of a parachute move you pull the rip cord and say, "I'm going down fast; I've got to do something," and that something turns into a \$4.7 billion deficit and further borrowing against the stability and sustainability fund through P3 projects that continue to build up our debt for another 32 years in the case of schools and in the case of pre-established ring roads 30 years, should lead Albertans to wonder how their money is not only being managed now but into the future. This government has committed Albertans 30 years into the future into continuing to pay for a debt that they continue to build up at this time. If we don't get past our reliance on nonrenewable resources, if we don't invest in education, where we know a \$1 investment produces a \$3 return, then we're basically dooming not only our present but our future, too.

On this Fiscal Responsibility Act we've had members talking about what wonderful hindsight the Liberals have. Well, I remember a former minister of aboriginal affairs making the comment: trust the Liberals to think about the future. Unfortunately, that's where this government is at. It will make announcements that sound like large expenditures at one time when that money is spread over a three-year period, but when it comes to declaring the debt, we might hear about it on June 30 just before heading into a long weekend.

The government fails to recognize that you've got to have long-term planning. There's nothing magical or overly intellectual about that. If you don't plan, if you don't have a backup plan, then you're going to fail. I mean, I spent 34 years of my life teaching students that if there wasn't a consequence for the direction you took and you didn't appreciate that consequence, you were never going to arrive at the destination you had intended to go.

This government, as I say, makes its moves, its legislation on the fly, and it buries the actual rules of the game in its regulatory framework. It shares within its own cabinet and has these wonderful discussions while the rest of Albertans, including the opposition, are left completely in the dark. When members of the opposition suggest something that would be proactive, potentially preventative, we're ridiculed and accused of wanting to spend more.

What Bill 33 calls for is going further and further into debt. What we've been saying all along is that even in your darkest hours, you

still have to save because there's no predicting where we're going to be next year, the following year, and the following year. The government is gambling that they're going to be able to just dip in to the tune of \$4.7 billion this year, a little bit less, potentially, next year and the following year. They basically put all their chips onto the table with one tour of the roulette wheel, and if it lands on black 3, then everything is solved. If it doesn't, then you know the old expression about going to hell in a handbasket.

We've got to get past this ad hoc, we've got to think long term, and it's going to take a collegial, collaborative team approach to do so. So I would encourage members opposite that if you don't like the direction of the amendment that we proposed in terms of having an insurance plan in case of emergencies, then come up with a replacement of your own that you think is more productive. Don't simply reject out of hand. Instead of condemning, I would like to see some creating. That is what we have attempted to do today and will continue to do: provide Albertans with alternatives, provide them with thoughtful possibilities, look after their futures, and continually look forward, keeping in mind what has historically occurred so that we don't repeat the mistakes of history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments.

Seeing none, back on the bill.

Seeing that no other member wishes to debate, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Benito	Forsyth	Oberle
Berger	Griffiths	Olson
Bhullar	Groeneveld	Ouellette
Boutilier	Hancock	Quest
Campbell	Horne	Renner
Cao	Jablonski	Sherman
DeLong	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Drysdale	Liepert	VanderBurg
Elniski	Marz	Vandermeer
Evans	McQueen	Webber
Fawcett	Morton	Xiao

Against the motion:

Chase	Mason	Taft
Kang	Pastoor	Taylor

Totals:	For – 33	Against – 6
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[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a second time]

Bill 34 Drug Program Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 34, the Drug Program Act.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, creates the overall legislative structure necessary to implement the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy. It represents an important change in how government drug programs operate and will enhance access, improve patient outcomes, optimize resources, and achieve better value from drugs within Alberta's health system. I'm confident that all Albertans will benefit from the improvements to government drug programs that this bill makes possible.

The bill formally establishes a government drug program in legislation under which the minister may establish plans to meet the needs of the people of this province. I'd like to note that many other provincial jurisdictions already have such legislation that governs the operation of their government drug programs. These plans will provide coverage for seniors, for palliative care patients, for low-income Albertans, and for those who need specialized drugs like patients with rare diseases or cancer.

5:10

A plan will continue to be available for any Albertan under the age of 65 who wishes to join regardless of their medical history or drug therapy needs. Under this legislative authority government will unify the drug programs offered by several different ministries into one consolidated program. This measure will streamline and bring greater consistency to government drug coverage.

Under the bill specific program operation and administrative activities will be outlined by regulation. By including program operations in regulation, this government will be able to efficiently respond to health system changes, incorporate innovative new technologies, and address emerging drug therapy needs.

To help explain the provisions included in the strategy and in this proposed legislation, I'd like to provide you with some background on the strategy's creation. To support the development of the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy, consultations with stakeholders were undertaken in 2008. They included the professional colleges and associations, the pharmaceutical industry, seniors groups, patient representatives, business associations, and insurance companies. A report was issued that summarized key findings. Many of these findings are reflected in both the strategy and in this legislation. For example, we heard that the program should facilitate cost sharing among individuals, employers, and government. As such, the bill enables the minister to establish premiums, copayments, deductibles, and subsidy rates for members.

We also heard about the need for a way to assist patients who do not tolerate or benefit from standard drug therapy. I'm excited that this bill includes a provision for an independent consideration process for nonstandard drug therapy. I strongly believe that this new independent consideration process will facilitate access to appropriate care and provide better service to Albertans in need.

As well, Bill 34 provides for a drug approval process that will further strengthen accountability to taxpayers by focusing government spending on drugs that are shown to have value. The Expert Committee on Drug Evaluation and Therapeutics, which provides essential advice on drug therapies to the minister, will continue, and other expert panels will be established. These committees will provide the expertise necessary to address the complex issues involved with operating a government drug program. Moreover, as outlined in the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy, a public members committee will be introduced to provide a societal and ethical perspective in the drug approval process.

To support these and other key initiatives, Bill 34 includes a number of additional provisions. The bill allows the minister to

have providers, who participate in the administration of the drug program, undertake certain activities such as providing important information to patients about the cost of their drugs or communicating information about the drug program's processes and rules.

This bill also includes inspection authority, which strengthens the government's capacity to audit and verify the accuracy and eligibility of paid benefits. These provisions enhance the government's ability to ensure accountability and financial responsibility for public funding under the drug program. In addition, the bill incorporates liability protection for the minister, his committees, and advisers so that drug listing and benefit decisions can be made in an open manner based on public interest without fear of challenges from pharmaceutical manufacturers or others with commercial interests.

Mr. Speaker, this bill demonstrates our recognition of the important role of drug therapies in our health system and signifies this government's continued commitment to invest in and make drug coverage available to all Albertans in need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Taft: Did the minister move adjournment? No. Okay. I want to begin by noting that to our knowledge we weren't expecting this bill to be debated this afternoon, from our arrangement with the House leaders. However, we'll do the best that we can. Perhaps with the agreement of the Government House Leader I'll move adjournment.

Mr. Renner: We were to debate and adjourn, so you can adjourn debate.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's just a simple misunderstanding, so I'll move adjournment of this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. This bill addresses what will be and has been an area of real concern probably for all of us, certainly for many of us as MLAs. Undoubtedly we've received comments and complaints from constituents who have had concerns about supportive living and are feeling like things aren't quite the way they ought to be, so I hope that this bill addresses some of those concerns. I know that I've had concerns as an MLA, and I'm guessing that any number of other people have.

Given that we're in committee, I'd like to spend just a few minutes on some of the specifics of this bill and go through a section-by-section analysis. I'm going to start, Mr. Chairman, with the definitions. I've been trying to think through exactly how you capture what is a supportive living accommodation and what isn't and how you make it appropriate to capture under this act what you intend to capture and don't capture other things.

The definition right here under section 1(g) of supportive living accommodation says:

“Supportive living accommodation” means buildings or units in buildings that are intended for permanent residential living where an operator also provides or arranges for services in order to assist residents to live as independently as possible.

Now, that strikes me as very, very broad, and I guess that’s the basis that the bill is going to build on. What we’re talking about here is a building or units in a building intended for permanent residential living. Well, that could be an apartment, condominium, house, boarding house. It could be all kinds of things.

It says that there has to be an operator who provides or arranges for services – so the operator doesn’t actually have to provide anything – to assist residents to live as independently as possible. Again I have to wonder: what in the world does that really mean?

Then it goes on gradually to narrow that, Mr. Chairman, in section 2. It says it has to be “provided to 4 or more adults who are not related to the operator.” So right away if you have three people in a facility, then that’s not going to be covered under this bill, and I think that needs to be considered. We’re not trying to capture really small operations; for better or for worse, I’m not sure. I mean, I don’t see why it couldn’t be the case that three unrelated people living in a permanent facility and getting these services would also be protected, so perhaps the minister at some point will be able to address that.

5:20

Then it says that the operator has to provide or arrange for services “related to safety and security for the persons.” It doesn’t say what kind of services, so that could be something as simple as an alarm service in a building or, you know, a monitoring service at the front door. Is that all we’re limited to? Do we want to capture something as broad as that?

Then it says under 2(1)(c):

The operator provides, offers or arranges for

- (i) at least one meal per day, or not “and” but “or”
- (ii) housekeeping services.

It seems to me that we need to think this through here. Meals may not be provided. It may just be housekeeping services. Does that mean that we might end up capturing, you know, a rooming house where a weekly housekeeping service is provided? There may not be any meals, but there could be a security system at the front door and weekly housekeeping or weekly laundry, and that’s it. Are we meaning to capture those sorts of facilities under here? I think we want to think all that through. Some comments from the minister on that at some point would be helpful in debate.

Then the licensing requirements are laid out. I should point out that there are some exclusions under the application here. I’m under section 2.

This Act does not apply to

- (a) a nursing home under the Nursing Homes Act
- (b) an approved hospital . . .
- (c) a facility referred to in . . . the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, or
- (d) a class, type or category of supportive living accommodation designated as exempt in accordance with the regulations,

which is absolutely wide open and completely undefined.

So right away, Mr. Chairman, I’m going to be looking for some clarity from the government members. What are we capturing under this bill? Why have we set the minimum size? Why have we set some of the standards the way we’ve set them?

There are then the licensing provisions of the bill. Clearly, it says that a licence is required, which is reassuring. Then it goes on to

explain the application for a licence or a person who is ineligible or how a licence may be refused or cancelled and that kind of thing, so I’m going to assume that that’s pretty straightforward.

Then we begin to get to some of the issues of how this legislation might be actually acted upon in section 5, which is titled Designation of Director. It says under 5(1) that “the Minister may designate a director for the purposes of this Act,” and then in 5(2), the director under this “may delegate to any person any of the duties imposed or powers conferred on the director under this Act.” So we’re setting up a standard sort of bureaucratic arrangement here to implement the act. We end up with a director under the act and then inspectors, which are addressed under section 6.

Then the role and responsibilities of the inspector to conduct inspections are under section 7. This is where I begin to have a few other questions, Mr. Chairman. Under Inspections it says here: “At the request of the director, for the purposes of ensuring compliance with this Act, the regulations, [or] an order,” inspections may be undertaken at any reasonable hour. It says: “An inspector may, with the permission of the operator . . . at any reasonable hour enter the supportive living accommodation.” I think we need to consider fully in this Assembly the issue of “with the permission of the operator.” Perhaps this is done after the fact or later in this legislation. How would the bill allow an inspector to enter a facility if there are serious concerns and the operator doesn’t want them to do that? What if the operator wants to enter at any hour? Maybe they want to enter at 3 in the morning for a particular reason. How is this legislation going to deal with that?

Frankly, one of my concerns with inspections under this bill and with the attitude towards inspections in some of the other fields is that the government typically gives notice that an inspection will be conducted unless there has been an explicit complaint. I think we need to consider that. I understand the pros and the cons, and I don’t think we should always be in a default position of giving notice of a routine inspection. Frankly, I don’t know why we wouldn’t once in a while just do a routine inspection without notice, just have the inspector walk in and see what it’s like when nobody is prepared for an inspection, see how clean the facility is, see how people are being treated, see if the security systems are actually enacted, see if the staff who are supposed to be there are actually there, and all those other things that should be in place every day but may not be unless an inspector is scheduled to come.

I have no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that from time to time – and I regret to say this – in some places there will be operators who inevitably are going to spruce up the facility because they know that tomorrow or next week the inspector is coming. So I would like to see provisions and an attitude from this government in this legislation and elsewhere that routine inspections can and do occur unannounced. I think that would improve the system at no extra cost, it would keep the system honest, and I think we would look after the residents of these facilities better. That’s one of my concerns here under section 7. The way section 7 is set up, at least initially, it looks like notice is going to be given of that inspection.

It says also in 7(2), “An inspector may enter the supportive living accommodation of a particular resident only with the permission of that resident or that resident’s legal representative.” Why are we doing that? Well, I suppose we’re doing that to respect privacy, but it also sets up a situation where for reasons of fear or for reasons of intimidation or for other untoward reasons people may not allow or invite an inspector into their facility when, in fact, they’d be served well by having that inspector come in.

It also says under 7(3) that an inspector may interview employees and residents of the accommodation, relatives, legal representatives, or “any other person who may have information relevant to the

inspection.” Well, that’s a good provision. There should not be any particular limit on who the inspector may want to interview.

I would make the point at this moment, Mr. Chairman, that these inspectors, I hope, will be properly trained. It’s not clear in here, so far as I have yet seen, that the inspectors will be required to have a particular set of qualifications. Mr. Chairman, will the inspector be required to have any background in, let’s say, public health inspection or in health care or in police investigation or in anything else? What about interviewing skills? We clearly see here in section 7(3) that they’re allowed to interview virtually anybody who may have useful information. Well, that’s great, but I want to make sure that they also have the skills to conduct proper interviews.

5:30

If an inspector removes books, records, or other documents, they have to keep a record, and so on. That’s good. Under 7(5) when an inspector takes samples of any material, food, or equipment, the inspector shall give a receipt, and so on, and keep a record of that. That’s fine.

It goes on, then, under section 7(7):

If permission is refused or cannot be reasonably obtained under subsection (1) or if anyone prevents an inspector from exercising powers under subsection (1) or obstructs or hinders the inspector . . . a judge of the Court of Queen’s Bench may on the application of the inspector make any order.

In other words, it sounds here like if an inspection is blocked, the inspector has to go to court and get a judge to allow the inspection to occur. Well, I think there are some serious issues that need to be discussed there.

Maybe I’m misunderstanding, and maybe the minister or a government member will correct me in debate, but it seems to me here that if there’s a concern at a facility, if an inspector turns up and access is blocked – maybe the inspector even has turned up unannounced, but access is blocked – then the inspector has to go to court to get permission to conduct an inspection. Well, by the time they’ve gone to court and gone through all of that, the problems could be concealed, the place could be cleaned up, the mouldy old food that’s being served could be thrown out and replaced with new food, et cetera, et cetera.

So I am concerned here, Mr. Chairman, that the inspection process doesn’t have enough teeth. It doesn’t have enough muscle to really bite where it needs to bite. I think we need to discuss that and quite possibly consider an amendment as this bill proceeds.

Mr. Chairman, I know there are others here who wish to speak to this bill. I don’t want to monopolize all of the time. Being that we’re in committee, I know I can get up again, so I would like to give an opportunity to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood or anywhere else to speak. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I’m pleased to rise to debate the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. This legislation reflects the priorities of our government to increase the quality of life of seniors and persons with disabilities.

I feel very strongly that Bill 10 is needed legislation that reflects the growth and sophistication of the supportive living sector in Alberta. It’s legislation that recognizes the changing needs and complexities of seniors and persons with disabilities who want to live as independently as possible while having access to the accommodations and services that they need. This legislation will replace existing legislation for the licensing of supportive living accommodations in the province, and it will clearly define supportive living in legislation for the first time.

The Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act will also assist the Seniors and Community Supports ministry to achieve the mandate to improve the choice and availability of continuing care accommodations in the province. It will establish a licensing regime to assure quality accommodation and services relating to accommodation. It will enhance the safety and security of residents whether or not the facility is funded by the government. It will provide the ministry with the ability to respond quickly to change and improve the ministry’s ability to keep the standards up to date by meeting the changing needs of an evolving supportive living sector. It will establish a mechanism for addressing complaints and concerns about accommodations and services, and it will minimize licensing steps for operators with good track records and assist other operators to make changes where required so they are compliant to the legislation.

Mr. Chairman, we now do an inspection every single year. As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned, we give notice. That’s true; we give notice of the annual inspection. However, we also do random inspections when we feel it’s necessary. I want people to know that. Our inspectors are already well trained. We have done this inspection for over a year. You’ll see on our website. If you go to our website, you can look up every single facility in Alberta, and you can see whether it has been compliant or not. If it hasn’t been compliant and there’s been a complaint, you will also see that on the website if it hasn’t been resolved. I want you to know that that website is a very good tool for people to use to determine whether or not a facility is where they want to put a loved one, a friend, or themselves.

Under Bill 10 the province will also have the ability to take the required steps, including closing a facility, if an operator continues to not meet standards or when the residents’ safety is at risk.

As you can see, this is good legislation that will help seniors and persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible and to age in the right place. I urge all members to support Bill 10.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to make a few comments with respect to this bill, Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. This is a bill which will legislate supportive living instead of having it fall under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, and it clarifies licensing requirements and strengthens investigation procedures.

Mr. Chairman, there are some positive things here. I want to agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview when he says that the inspections need to be random, regular, and unannounced. I think that that’s critical. In fact, when we had the long-term care report from the Auditor General, he indicated that people who do inspections of those facilities – and I think the same applies here – needed to be properly trained professional people and that they needed to make unannounced inspections, that the committee of volunteers led by a Conservative backbench member was just not up to the job, and it was a much more serious business and needed to be dealt with. I agree with respect to that point.

Now, Mr. Chairman, it’s probably a good thing that we have more regulation of supportive living, and in that sense I don’t have any difficulty supporting this bill. But I want to just indicate my very serious concern with the broader question which I think this fits into. Now, the minister has just spoken about the importance of making sure that people get the right care, and I agree with that. But what’s happening today is that hundreds of individuals require more care than they are getting and more care than they will get here.

The long-term care bed issue is a major issue, and it affects and impacts people in a variety of ways. One of the things that I want to

see is some action on the part of government to limit or control or restrain or halt the conversion of long-term care beds into supportive living, and there's nothing in this act that really deals with that.

Here's what happens, Mr. Chairman, and it's happened in a number of places in our province, including at Hinton and several other places. You have long-term care facilities. Long-term care beds are expensive: people receive nursing care, they get their drugs for free, and there's a variety of services that are included in long-term care. You have patients in long-term care receiving these services and paying a fixed amount, and all of a sudden the operator decides for economic reasons to convert their facility or some of the beds from long-term care into assisted living or some other form. So you actually have people who are displaced who no longer get the care that they need and can no longer afford the additional services.

Part of the problem with this approach is its cost-plus basis. You pay a certain amount for beds, but if you need nursing care, you pay. If you need drugs, you pay. If you need additional services, you pay. There's a financial aspect and there's a care aspect that need to be dealt with. I think both of them deserve attention.

5:40

It's great to have additional licensing for supportive living, but we need to address the question of making sure that people who need long-term care beds can get them. Now, the minister of health has repeatedly said that the opposition wants to institutionalize people and put them in long-term care beds when they don't really need it, and I don't think that that's a fair statement, Mr. Chairman. I think the reality is that there are many people who actually need and need badly the services that they receive in long-term care beds but can't get them. They are in assisted living facilities. They are in supportive living facilities. They are in apartments. They are in their children's homes. They are in acute-care beds, in particular. Last night in the estimates I asked a question of the minister of health about that. In his own report it gives the number of people who are occupying acute-care beds that really need to be in long-term care beds. I think it's 500 or 600 people. Those people are occupying acute-care beds.

Of course, acute-care beds are much more expensive than long-term care beds, so there's a burden on the taxpayer, but it also means that there are not enough acute-care beds for throughput from emergency rooms. It's one of the key reasons, one of the fundamental reasons why we've seen a sharp rise in waiting room times in our hospitals. It's not that they can't intake the patients and treat them in the emergency rooms appropriately, but they have nowhere to put them when they've dealt with them. The acute-care beds are occupied by long-term care bed patients. So it affects a number of areas of our health care system and our seniors' support and housing network.

With respect to this bill it's fine that there is going to be greater regulation and higher fines and so on. I think that that is a very positive thing. But I do believe that if the government believes that this is the solution to the long-term care problem we have, they are sadly mistaken. I want to make sure that people who don't need long-term care beds or don't need to even be in an institution are not institutionalized. That's not the objective. The objective is to make sure that those who do need it have it available, and so far we haven't been able to do that.

The Conservative Party in the election promised about 600 new beds, but that was rescinded by the government's December 2008 continuing care strategy, which states that there won't be an increase in the number of long-term care beds over the next several years. Well, this contradicts some answers I got from the minister of health last night about construction of new long-term care beds. We're still trying to sort out exactly what the situation is.

We do know that the patients of an auxiliary hospital in Jasper, including some who were palliative, had their care changed to a designated assisted living situation. That meant, really, that they were only having housing provided when what they really need is continuing health care. In Hinton citizens are still fighting to reverse the decision of 2005 to convert their long-term care facilities into assisted living.

Mr. Chairman, I think that we need to have something – for example, a bill of rights or an ombudsman – for seniors in supportive living situations so that there are mechanisms to ensure that they're well cared for. Also, people in supportive living do not have tenancy protection. This bill contains a consequential amendment that exempts people in supportive living from the Residential Tenancies Act.

I have a few more things to say about the Alberta NDP action plan on long-term care, but I'm getting the "be quiet" signal from the Government House Leader. I don't really have to do what he says, but I did agree that I would move to adjourn debate even though I haven't quite gotten to the NDP action plan on long-term care. We may get back to that.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, in fulfillment of my agreement I will move that we adjourn debate on Bill 10.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered on this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I'll swim upstream very fast. Bill 11, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009, proposes more punitive penalties for fishery violations. The purpose is to equip the courts to include penalties that bind offenders to return fisheries back to a healthy state. The reason for this bill is tremendously sound because there are severe pressures in Alberta that affect fish populations. Alberta has only about 1,500 fish-bearing streams and 1,100 lakes, so careful management is needed to balance use by approximately 1,500 domestic, 200 commercial, and 300,000 anglers competing for these fish. That information comes from the Sustainable Resource Development fish conservation strategy for Alberta 2006 to 2010.

This is a great piece of legislation, and I suggest we call the vote on the legislation, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Seeing no other members who wish to debate on this bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 11 and progress on Bill 10.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 11. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 10.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all members for their co-operation in getting us through business this afternoon, and I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, May 6, 2009

Issue 36

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 6, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. In our mind's eye let us see the awesome grandeur of the Rockies, the denseness of our forests, the fertility of our farmland, the splendour of our rivers, the richness of our resources, the energy of our people. Then let us rededicate ourselves as wise stewards of such bounty on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Sine Chadi, a former member of the 1993 to '97 Legislative Assembly, the Member for Edmonton-Roper; Mr. Henry Mah, a wise elder from the Edmonton Chinese community as well as a member of the Order of Canada; as well, Dr. S.P. Singh, who is a retired professor from the University of Alberta and the president of the Indian societies of Edmonton as well as a humanitarian. I would ask my friends to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some guests that are seated in your gallery: Consul Hou Danna from the Chinese Consulate General office in Calgary as well as Mr. Felix Guerrero, honorary consul general of the Philippines for southern Alberta. These guests are here today to join in the kickoff of Asian Heritage Month. They both play a key role in making the From Asian Shores to Alberta Prairies initiative a success. The Chinese consulate is donating 1,000 books to the regional library system.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great honour to introduce to you and to members of the Legislature a group of Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation fellows who are sitting in your gallery. They are participants in a nine-month international fellowship program based in Ontario, in Ottawa, and are visiting us today as part of the tour of western Canada.

Sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, the fellowship program is a collaboration between the office of the Auditor General of Alberta, the office of the Auditor General of Canada, and the Comprehensive Auditing Foundation. Our guests are from Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, St. Lucia, and Thailand, and two are from Vietnam. They are accompanied today by their hosts from the offices of the Auditor General of Canada and the Auditor General of Alberta. I would now ask all of our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled to stand here today and introduce a very special class to you and through you to the Assembly. The grade 6 class from St. Anthony school in Drayton Valley along with their teacher Dawn McConnell and parent helpers Charlene Wojcicki and Sharon Davidson are in the members' gallery today. I would like to point out one student in particular who is very special to me, my youngest daughter, Courtney Siobhan, a politician in her own right. It is wonderful to have Courtney and her classmates and teacher and parent helpers here today. I am sure they thoroughly enjoyed their tour and a special stop at the Premier's office. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce through you to members of the Assembly three grade 6 classes from Timberlea school in the oil sands capital of the world – you might have heard of it – Fort McMurray, Alberta. It's my pleasure to greet them, their bus driver, and their teachers. There are 82 of them here today. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly. They're entering as we speak.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the government's first group of policy interns. They're co-ordinated by corporate human resources. The new policy internship program provides postsecondary graduate students interested in the field of public policy a unique opportunity to work side by side with seasoned policy professionals in government. This talented group will contribute to important policy initiatives that will impact Alberta.

The policy internship program is part of the government's workforce plan to attract and retain employees to ensure a bright and prosperous future for all Albertans. I can assure you that after meeting with this group, the future of our public service looks extremely positive. I would ask these interns in the members' gallery to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of four people who donated some funds to a charity in St. Albert at the St. Albert Housing Society fundraising breakfast. We invited them to come here and have lunch and tour the Legislature. They did that, and we had a great chat at lunch today, talking about developments in St. Albert and the world economy and a number of technology innovations that we're doing. They're seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask that they stand as I call their names. They are Bob and Lori Holm and Paul and Adrina Falkowski. I'd ask all members to give them the warmest greetings of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you an old friend of mine, Bill Hunter.

He's seated in the public gallery. Bill is presently from Calgary. He's formerly from the Gulch. People might recognize that as Dinosaur park, Drumheller. Bill and I go back a long way, 50 years actually, to when we were survey partners at SAIT though it wasn't SAIT then. It was actually the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art in those days. Bill and a group of us went to school together, worked together, lived together, and partied together for many years. Bill is up here today meeting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'd ask my colleagues in the Assembly to give Bill the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly six very special people from the constituency of Athabasca-Redwater who are also good friends and very involved community workers. They've come in today to have lunch with me and talk about a whole raft of subjects that are important to our constituency: Jack Dennett from Redwater, Noel Major from Athabasca, Bob and Mabel Dick from Athabasca, Deb Crosswell from Thorhild, and Carol Lund from Athabasca. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some visitors from Calgary. They're here to join in the kickoff of Asian Heritage Month event earlier today. Some of them are seated in your gallery. We have Dr. Mayi Arcellana-Panlilio, a professor at the U of C and cochair of the Asian Heritage Foundation. She played a leadership role in raising \$10,000 for the book donation this afternoon. Next to her we have Mr. Vladimir Panlilio, an engineer who volunteers with the foundation. He played a key role in preparing the big cheque for the donation today. Then we have Ms Tuyet Lam, a board member of the AHF and one of the most active members of Calgary's Vietnamese community. She was instrumental in raising \$10,000 for the book project. Then seated in the gallery we have Ms Nancy Li, a student at the University of Calgary, who performed the beautiful *Carmen* piece for us this afternoon in the rotunda. Mr. Yang Li, professor at the University of Calgary, today played the special role of driver for Ms Nancy Li. We also have Mr. Ron Sheppard, chairman of the Parkland Regional library system, who was here earlier this afternoon to accept a donation from the Heritage Foundation for the purpose of purchasing multilingual books.

1:40

If you would allow me to finish another set of introductions. The Edmonton Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative helped us to organize the lunch for this afternoon's event. This group together with the Edmonton public library is developing a formal partnership to engage immigrant and refugee communities in designing relevant programs and innovative collaborations. Seated in the members' gallery we have Ms Linda Williams, from the Edmonton public library, who co-chairs the committee. From the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative we have Ms Nasreen Omar, president of the board of directors; Ms Nhan Lu, vice-president of the board; Ms Tigist Dafla, board member; and Mrs Dormitorio, who is a Filipino member who has been working with the Mill Woods community library. I would like to ask members of the House to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the newest member of the constituency office team in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Joining me under the STEP program this summer is a young man named Jordan. I'll ask Jordan to stand. Jordan is a student at the University of Alberta. He is in the final year of his political science degree, which is why it's always a good idea to come and work in a constituency office. After many years of being on the outside looking in, he is interested in being on the other side. Please join me in welcoming Jordan Taft to the Alberta Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you sitting in the members' gallery Mr. Amarjeet Sohi. He's one of our local leaders from the city of Edmonton, city councillor from ward 6. He's also on safe communities and, I believe, one of the first Indo-Canadians elected to city council in Edmonton.

Also sitting in the gallery behind me is Mr. Ned Lee, president of the Lee association of Edmonton, as well as Mrs. Lai Chu Li Kong, vice-chair of the Edmonton Chinatown Multi-cultural Centre as well as chairman of the Edmonton Chinese library foundation. I would ask them all to rise so they can receive the traditional warm welcome of my friends in this Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2002 May was officially designated as Asian Heritage Month in recognition of the important contributions of Asian Canadians to the settlement, growth, social, and cultural development of Canada. In addition, various groups have been organizing events to celebrate Asian Heritage Month in Alberta since 2001.

Asian Heritage Month engages people of all backgrounds through pan-Asian cultural events that foster awareness of the broad spectrum of Asian Canadians' social participation and cultural heritage. With your background, Mr. Speaker, in East Asian history, I'm sure that you can attest that Asian Heritage Month is all about culture and history. The presence of Asian Canadians in Alberta dates back many, many years, and currently Asian Canadians make up 15 per cent of the population in Alberta's two major cities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to represent a province that is as culturally strong and diverse as Alberta. As you can see, we have one of the most if not the most diverse representative bodies in all of North America, and that is something to be proud of. I want to thank all those who immigrated here over the years for their contribution to the culture of Alberta, and I hope this culture continues to flourish.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Wildfire Update

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfires are burning in many communities across the province, and some of these fires are

threatening homes and businesses. As I understand it, three homes were lost in my constituency alone yesterday. As we can all imagine, residents watching the flames can be filled with fear and anxiety.

On behalf of the Premier and every one of our caucus I want to recognize the tremendous efforts of the volunteer firefighters, who are working 24 hours a day to ensure the safety and security of the families who call these communities home. The services and support provided to the local residents is truly remarkable. Most of the firefighters battling these blazes are volunteers, making tremendous sacrifices and taking time away from their work and their families. Their selfless dedication is a true reflection of Albertans' willingness to support and protect their neighbours. I know of a Canadian soldier who just returned from Afghanistan, came home Thursday, changed his boots, and has been on the front line in Lamont fighting the fires since Sunday. Another volunteer has been on the scene full-time. He told his boss that the fires are where he had to be, and he didn't know when he would be back to work.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of all these volunteers, who selflessly go beyond the call of duty, working long hours and fighting exhaustion. Their efforts are nothing short of heroic. These brave individuals are supported by a range of agencies, including RCMP, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Service Alberta, volunteer organizations, and by their municipalities, neighbours, and communities. The efforts of everyone are truly invaluable in this time of crisis.

On behalf of the Premier, all of my colleagues, and the residents of these communities I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to everyone who was there and to those who are still there to ensure our communities and families are safe.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mental Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I attended the Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton region, meet and greet breakfast. Since I'm already quite familiar with the decline in mental health services under this administration, the concerns of the people in attendance came as no surprise. But this administration needs to hear these concerns, pressingly so, and I'm passing them on today.

Since the indiscriminate closure of mental health beds in the province years ago, Albertans needing treatment for mental health problems have had few places to go. As a result, many Albertans with mental illness have wound up on the streets, plugging our emergency wards and hospital beds and simply struggling along as best they can, with a vastly reduced quality of life, at risk to themselves and to others.

While I acknowledge the renewed commitment to child mental health in this administration, we are simply providing inadequate services in this province. As citizens we have a solemn duty to take care of each other, especially our most vulnerable. Instead, this administration has abdicated its responsibility, with costly and tragic results. Again, Mr. Speaker, penny-wise, pound-foolish. In addition to the moral imperative, we see that homelessness, emergency care cost increases, family impacts, policing, lack of productivity far outweigh the costs of treatment in a properly funded system.

One message this morning rang out clearest of all: it's time to stop treating mental illness as a stigma and a poor second cousin within the health care system. The stigma of mental health is unacceptable

and unjust to Albertans suffering from real medical problems. Education is needed, both in the public at large and for this administration. The Auditor General himself has said repeatedly that we are not meeting the mark, with incomplete standards and gaps in services.

I urge the administration to invest in mental health and assign it the priority it deserves. A healthy Alberta is possible when we make the appropriate commitments to mental health services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health System Restructuring

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has finally admitted that their goal is to privatize health care. I was disappointed this week in estimates to hear the minister of health say: "It's about time we started running health care like a \$7 billion business and not having it run by health care professionals. I'm not going to sit here and have a board of health... professionals running a \$7 billion business." Thank you for making the Premier's intentions quite clear. To the minister: when did this government decide that health care was a business?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this Leader of the Opposition can't figure out that when we are spending some 13 billion dollars of taxpayers' money, we should be running it like a business is run. What the hon. leader failed to mention in his preamble was the question that he asked, and the question was around something to the effect: why wasn't our new board made up of health care professionals? My response was: we have health care professionals who are involved in the delivery of the system, but when it comes to the governance model, we need to ensure that we have the best and brightest minds in the world.

1:50

Dr. Swann: So is this minister saying that there are no qualified health professionals in Alberta to sit on this board?

Mr. Liepert: I never said that at all, Mr. Speaker. What I said is that we have outstanding qualified health professionals who are doing outstanding work in delivering health care. It never hurts to have some outside views as to what works and what doesn't work. In many cases our board members have experience in other regions – in fact, in one case another country – to bring a different view to health care. If we want to stay with the same narrow, myopic view that the opposition parties have, we will always have a system that, quite frankly, at this stage is no longer sustainable if we don't make changes. It is not as accessible as it needs to be to meet the needs of Albertans and it is not effective and it is not efficient.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the minister is launching out on a new experiment for the health care system. I would just like to ask the minister what evidence he has to shift now to a business model for health care delivery in Alberta.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. This is not an experiment. This is the model that will be going forward to deliver

health care in this province. Already there are successes out there. We had a three-hour debate in estimates the other night. I pointed out a number of success stories. He chooses to ignore those, and that's fine. But as I talk to Albertans in this province, they tell me consistently: you as government are on the right path, keep moving forward, and don't blink.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Virus Exposure

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, once again we're seeing evidence across the province that communications around influenza are somewhat smattered and inconsistent. One Calgary school, for example, has sent messages to their parents that influenza is affecting the school while schools in Edmonton are being kept out of information when there's a case of influenza. Could the minister clarify why there is already inconsistency and uncertainty and a sense of hiding information in Alberta around this new H1N1 influenza?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll answer that question on behalf of the Minister of Education. The process that we have taken right from day one is that if it is a school-aged child that has been identified as one that has tested positive for the influenza, the school board is notified. School boards are locally elected bodies. They have the right to make a decision in conjunction with the principal as to whether or not it is significant enough to inform the parents. Some have chosen, as I understand it, to communicate to parents; others may not have. But, surely, that's a decision that a locally elected school board can make.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the restructuring of the health system is creating unwarranted anxiety and breakdowns in communication. I'm hearing from a number of regions that they're looking to their health unit, some are looking to their medical officer, some are looking to the province, some are looking to their school board for direction. Are these medical decisions going to be made at the school board level, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the time that I've been in this Assembly, I'm not quite sure that I've heard a remark coming from someone with medical training that could be such an absurd comment. The Leader of the Opposition knows full well, he's been told consistently all week that the chief medical officer of health is the one that is leading this communications effort. It has been going exceedingly well, to plan. I guess what is irritating the Leader of the Opposition is that he has nothing controversial to grab onto, so he starts to invent things that he thinks he's heard out there from people in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. leader?

Dr. Swann: No further questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Stucco Exterior Wallcovering

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus fought this government on the pine shakes scandal, standing up for homeowners'

rights, but this government doesn't learn. Now homeowners are facing more costs as a result of bad building practices. What is a condo buyer to do? They trust this government to have effective standards, and this government has let them down again. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why hasn't the government improved the building codes to stop this bad construction?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has indeed improved the building codes. It has improved the building codes in regard to the high-intensity residential fires. We also did receive a handful of calls with complaints about building practices. From that we got the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to do an investigation and consultation with key stakeholders, and that member has provided me with his recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the government going to do to support homeowners who are now out thousands and thousands of dollars because of the bad standard this government has allowed for years?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure exactly what bad standard he's talking about. We have the Safety Codes Council, that monitors the building codes and the safety codes of buildings in this province on a regular basis. They do an incredibly professional job. We as a government make sure that if there are situations or there are concerns or there are problems, we address them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are thousands of homes which could rot because of the stucco covering linked to leaky walls. To the minister again. The minister has had months to get this done. Monitoring, reviewing, waiting: these are all specialities of this government. Unfortunately, action isn't. When can Albertans finally expect action on this issue?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is very interesting. We have one individual that brought forward a concern. The member opposite read it in the paper, and all of a sudden it's a concern for months. That particular concern that he's talking about was brought to my attention yesterday, and we are looking into it. I've asked my Safety Codes Council as well as the assistant deputy minister who is in charge to look into that concern. The question is not so much, as I know it right now, a question of product but a question of workmanship. We're looking into it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has dismissed NDP assertions that allowing teachers to be hauled before the Human Rights Commission for teaching something that a parent doesn't like will hurt education in this province. "Absolutely ludicrous," said the Education minister. "Flights of fancy," said the culture minister. Well, parents, teachers, school superintendents, and school boards have all said that the NDP was right and the government was wrong. In light of this, is the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit willing to drop his attempt to enshrine so-called parental rights in the human rights system?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. members, yesterday I advised hon. members that we do have an Order Paper. This bill is up for debate this afternoon. I indicated that prior to the date in which the bill was up for debate, we'd allow questions in the question period, but we'll not use the time of the question period if that bill is up this afternoon. If you've got a short response, fine, but we're not going to spend three questions on something that's going to be debated this afternoon in this House.

Parental Choice in Education (continued)

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we'll save the debate for this afternoon, but I've got a copy of the press release, and I don't see anywhere that they say that the New Democratic Party was right.

Mr. Mason: That's perhaps because the minister of culture can't read between the lines.

Groups representing Alberta's school councils, teachers, school superintendents, and elected school boards agree with Alberta's NDP that this government's policy will have a negative impact on the education of children. Given this view, coming from all sectors of the public education system, will the minister of culture admit that he is wrong and withdraw this ill-conceived policy before he does some real damage to Albertans' education system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister if you wish.

Mr. Blackett: We'll save the debate, Mr. Speaker, for this afternoon.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was a question about policy.

Enshrining the rights of children not to learn about certain things in human rights is about as backward a step as there could be. It will not only make it harder for teachers to teach; it will make it harder for children to learn. Given that teachers, parents, superintendents, and public school boards have not been consulted, will the minister agree to withdraw these changes until the concerns of these groups have been addressed? Please answer the question.

The Speaker: No. That's not the way it works. We have rules that we follow. We're moving on.

The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Wildfire Update

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildfires have been burning out of control in many Alberta communities. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister please provide an update on the wildfire situation in Strathcona and Lamont counties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Lamont county and Strathcona county both have fires that still aren't completely under control. Our agency has deployed its mobile command unit to assist the fighting of these fires. These counties have declared local states of disaster. The concern with these two counties is the two fires joining together because of the extensive-

ness of the fire. There are residences that have been evacuated. We will continue to provide the resources and expertise to help these communities and their residents.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what's the status of the fire in Sturgeon?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, last night the fire in Sturgeon was very active, and it's now partially under control. They did declare a state of emergency yesterday, and several homes have been damaged and destroyed. The local emergency operations centre activated in your constituency in Morinville. The Alberta Emergency Management mobile unit has also been deployed for this fire. We have a reception centre for evacuees set up in Gibbons, and we're trying to co-ordinate the efforts and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also for the same minister. There have also been several recent fires in many other areas of the province. Could the minister give us an update on the status of those fires?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we did have approximately 20 fires that have been raging through Alberta. The fires in these areas have been reported to be contained or extinguished, and that is very much thanks to the continuing support and the assistance of volunteers and professionals. We continue to provide support and assistance also to the four First Nation communities in Hobbema as well as the Saddle Lake First Nation. We very much want to thank all of the agencies and the firefighters for the work that they are doing in battling these fires.

Provincial Electoral Divisions

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, at a time when government should be cautious about adding to the bottom line, this government is adding four more MLAs to this Legislature. A rough and ready calculation indicates this would cost taxpayers an additional \$10 million over a four-year term. To the Justice minister. Albertans need four more MLAs like a dog needs fleas. Why are we saddling the taxpayers with these additional costs?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my humble opinion, MLAs play a pretty important part in effectively representing Albertans. What we know about this province is that in the past five or six years we've experienced tremendous growth. We've had to make very difficult decisions. We've wanted to make sure that Albertans get great service, we want to make sure that Albertans are effectively represented, and we believe that an increase in the number of seats will allow that to happen.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of this administration's big-government approach to governing Alberta. To the Justice minister: considering the economics and our current technological capabilities, can't we make do with 83 MLAs in this Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a complicated business. This is something that's going to get to, I think, the fundamentals as to how we want to govern ourselves in this province. We think it's very important that as this province grows, we don't look in a parochial way or a backward way at how we've done things before. We think this province is growing and changing, it's diverse, and it needs to have effective representation. An increase in the number of seats will allow that to happen.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, without moving too far outside my own job description, I did notice that B.C. has a larger population and less MLAs. Why don't we follow their lead instead of following this big government approach to doing things?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We sit in this Assembly every day. We debate matters of important public policy. We think that it's important for Albertans to have a voice in this House. We think it's important as a government for people to be elected to this House and to be able to talk about public policy. We know from the opposition that they seem to have some difficulty with that and have some 1-800 number where they think people should be able to call in and ask questions. We think that that's an important piece of dialogue but that people should be elected to effectively represent Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Wildfire Assistance

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this year my constituency is once again affected by wildfires. We know the volunteer firefighters are out there on the front lines working 24 hours a day doing a tremendous job to protect their neighbours and their communities and their municipalities. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell us how we as a government are supporting these firefighting efforts?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I visited the fires last night, and I really want to pass on the appreciation of the government for the efforts of the volunteers. I talked to the Premier, and he's very concerned and will be heading to the sites when he does return. We have activated the Government Emergency Operations Centre to co-ordinate the response. We are on-scene with equipment and getting additional resources. We're partnering with municipalities, SRD, Service Alberta. Just as a point of interest, last night I talked to an individual who has not gone home since Sunday, and I asked him how he does it. He says: "You know, there's only one thing that motivates me. I know that they would support me the same if I was in the same situation."

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. He indicates that he was actually at the fires last night. While I can commend the minister and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and the municipalities who are co-ordinating the efforts, we know that many of these firefighters are volunteers. Can he elaborate about the role that they are playing in these efforts?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would say, I guess, in short, that it's nothing short of heroic. We have individuals that are putting their lives on the line for communities and for their neighbourhoods. They are well trained and committed to serving, and we're doing everything we can to support them. Their neighbours are supporting the firefighters by providing food, by providing support. This is a community effort in time of disaster and emergency. This is when communities pull together to support each other.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. I know that his department gets engaged and is engaged in these firefighting efforts. Can the minister tell us what resources his department has committed to fighting these wildfires?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by thanking the Minister of Municipal Affairs for being on the front lines last night and being there with the volunteer fighters and the communities there that are fighting them and congratulate those people for their bravery. Our priority responsibility is in the green zone. We've had 217 fires in those areas already. Fortunately, at the moment we have spare capacity. With the fires at Strathcona and Lamont we've been able to send in 90 SRD firefighters to join the 100 volunteer fighters that are there. Plus, components of the Alberta air force are there, the air tanker and two helicopters plus several bulldozers. We've provided similar support in other areas of the province. So long as we have spare capacity, SRD is ready and willing to be there to help our communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

2:10

Nursing Shortage

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of the implementation of Vision 2020, the government's latest scheme to increase the role of private operators in public health care – my first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What are the recruitment targets this year to address the critical shortage of all nurses here in Alberta?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. Our ministry is well aware of the shortages of health professionals in the province of Alberta. We are maintaining our efforts in recruiting and attracting individuals in that particular field from around the world. We will continue to hold various fairs across individual countries to bring additional support here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what is the ratio of registered nurses to licensed practical nurses recruitment by the department this year?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we have needs on both sides. I really don't have those numbers at my fingertips. I don't have those ratios there. Certainly, those numbers could mostly likely be made available if the hon. member wants them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'll take the hon. minister up on that. Certainly, Dr. Duckett is quite curious about what this ratio will be, according to his blog.

Now to the Minister of Health and Wellness. In 2008 there were 6 RNs per 1 LPN in the old Capital health region, according to their annual report. According to the annual report of the Calgary health region, there were 9 RNs to 1 LPN, and it was a 2 to 1 ratio in the old East Central region. What ratio is the province now going to implement for registered nurses and licensed practical nurses in your Vision 2020 scheme?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, you know, if life were as simple as what this hon. member tries to make it out to be, that everything could have ratios – what the Alberta Health Services management team is going to be doing is ensuring that all efforts are made to have the right care provider in the right place at the right time. That may be an LPN. It may be a registered nurse. In some cases it might be a combination with an aide. There is a whole variety of ways to ensure that we provide the health care that Albertans need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent public update on activities of the province-funded Alberta law enforcement response team shows that ALERT enforcement units are making good headway in preventing serious and violent crime. Two hundred and nineteen police officers and support personnel arrested 133 individuals over a period of three months. My constituents and all Albertans are encouraged by the results and hope that even more could be done. My question today is to the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What I'm curious . . .

The Speaker: Well, you've now got the question. Time finished. It's the response time now.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will talk about is how effective the ALERT model has been in tackling serious and violent crime in our province. With an approach that emphasizes integration and co-ordination, the ALERT units target organized crime and gangs as well as online child exploitation in a very effective manner. These investigations do require substantial time and resources to gather intelligence information, identify targets, and gather enough evidence to make arrests. I'm confident that through the efforts of ALERT we'll continue to reduce the negative impacts of crime in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister. You indicated that ALERT units are doing an effective job. Does that mean that we can expect the same results every quarter or more effectiveness using the same resources, more arrests, more drugs and guns seized, and more gang members taken off our streets?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the great work of ALERT will continue. Again, our top priority in this province is to reduce crime so that Albertans are safe, and that means targeting and arresting those who have no respect for laws

and use violence and intimidation. We will continue to do everything we can to bring those people to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister. My constituents are very glad that government continues to take strong action in combatting gangs and violent crimes. Will the changed ALERT model that you are considering put more police on our streets?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, ALERT has been up and running now for a couple of years, and, yes, we are looking at refining the model to make sure it operates more effectively. We are doing that, and we're sure that these changes will improve the efficiency of our police across the province.

Having said that, in regard to the comments about additional police, our Premier spoke about that numerous times. We will be adding four integrated gang units in April, made up of 67 members, to address ongoing gang and organized crime activities in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Lobbyists

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent news out of Saskatchewan illustrates that they performed their due diligence when attempting to maintain a presence in Washington, DC. My questions would be to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. The Alberta taxpayers are paying \$40,000 a month for two high-priced lobbyists in Washington, DC, while the government of Saskatchewan just hired a former U.S. ambassador for less money. Why didn't this government hire David Wilkins for less money?

Mr. Stevens: Well, I was just meeting with Ambassador Wilkins yesterday, as a matter of fact. I think that Saskatchewan did an excellent job in selecting Ambassador Wilkins to represent their interests. I can tell you that Ambassador Wilkins is a good friend of Canada, a good friend of the west, and we're looking forward to working with Saskatchewan and Ambassador Wilkins in addressing the oil sands issues in the United States.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Now, the Premier of Saskatchewan justified this \$400,000 annual expense to the taxpayers of Saskatchewan by saying that it was a better deal than any other province was getting for similar service. In light of this development does the minister still feel that Albertans are getting the best value for their tax dollars?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, I must say that the Premier of Saskatchewan said what I, too, would say if I were in his situation. There is no doubt that Ambassador Wilkins will do a very good job for them. I must say this to the hon. member: I'm absolutely satisfied that we have outstanding assistance in terms of Ambassador Blanchard and Mr. Fraser and the firms that they represent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Albertans have been told to do more with less. Can the minister tell me why the Alberta government isn't operating in the same business mode? Would those contracts be reviewed?

Mr. Stevens: Well, Mr. Speaker, the contracts that we're talking about are one-year contracts. They started, as I recall, towards the end of March 2009. I'm sure that we will be reviewing those contracts as they expire sometime in terms of perhaps March 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

H1N1 Influenza Virus Exposure

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anxious parents across Edmonton have been asking their children all week if any of their classmates have suddenly been absent. This is because they're worried about the H1N1 flu infection and want to protect their children. I'm a parent of young children, as are many members of this House, and when there's a chance that my kids have been exposed to a dangerous virus, I want to know the facts. To the minister of health: why are you denying parents the right to know whether their kids have been exposed to H1N1 in their school?

Mr. Liepert: I'd suggest that if the member wants to find out about issues at her school, she should call her school trustee.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, school boards are actually looking to the chief medical officer of health for direction on this one. As a parent I know parents are regularly warned by schools of less serious public health concerns such as school-specific outbreaks of lice and chicken pox. To the same minister: if parents can be told about an outbreak of lice in their school, why can't they be told about a serious incident like a severe H1N1 infection?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the chief medical officer of health has been very clear. He said that we shouldn't overreact, that we shouldn't be closing schools. In the case of when there is a situation with a student, it's my understanding that the Department of Education does contact the school board. It's the school board's decision what information they want to hand out.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, so far all we have is chaos. School boards are cancelling trips to unrelated destinations all over the world. Meanwhile, parents can't be told if there's an H1N1 case in their own school. We need a clear policy that tells parents right away if a child in their school has H1N1. Why won't the minister of health commit to a policy that publicly identifies schools where this flu virus occurs so that parents can decide how best to protect their children?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I would suggest that the best way to protect your children is to tell them the truth and not overreact, Mr. Speaker. If there's a situation that the school board deems serious enough that it would require a school closure, they will make that decision. Clearly, to this stage that hasn't been the case, so I think the member is worrying needlessly.

2:20

Seniors' Benefit Program

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening I hosted a forum in my constituency on health care and seniors' supports. I want to thank

the hon. ministers of Health and Wellness and Seniors and Community Supports as well as my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark for their participation. My questions today are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. A number of seniors at the forum expressed great concern about lack of government support for vulnerable seniors. Can the minister describe what she's doing to support seniors in need?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to supporting low-income seniors who are most in need. The proof is in the 2009 budget, which included a \$48.6 million increase to seniors' programs. One of these programs is the Alberta seniors' benefit, or ASB program, which provides a monthly income supplement to approximately 138,000 seniors. The maximum monthly benefits have increased, and we expect another 6,000 seniors or so to be eligible when the qualifying income thresholds are increased in July. Our assistance to low- and moderate-income seniors also includes help with dental work.

Mr. Allred: My first supplemental is to the same minister. Some of the people at the forum expressed doubts about the government's commitment to providing care and housing options for aging Albertans. What is the minister doing to ensure that Albertans have the supports to spend their retirement years in their own homes and communities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, seniors have told us that they want to live as independently as possible for as long as possible in their own homes in their own communities. To help seniors do this, Alberta Health and Wellness and my ministry have developed a continuing care program to help seniors age in the right place. This includes looking at home-care services and how to provide supports to help seniors remain in their homes longer. It also includes increasing the number of supportive care facilities, and my budget this year has another \$50 million to help increase those numbers, and that's added onto the \$119 million that I just announced a month ago for over 3,000 new supportive living units.

Mr. Allred: My final question is to the same minister. One of the issues I spoke about last night is the need for individuals to prepare for their own retirements. Since there's going to be a surge of baby boomers about to retire, what is the minister's department doing to prepare for the major demographic shifts that are about to occur?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's population, like the rest of Canada's and, indeed, like the rest of the world's, is aging. Although nobody has found the fountain of youth yet, we are preparing for this demographic shift. This preparation includes the Demographic Planning Commission, which received over 10,000 survey responses on the Internet, and we spoke to over 100 stakeholder organizations. We are now combining the work of the commission with research and cross-ministry input to develop an aging population policy framework. This framework is intended to help government make decisions for Alberta's seniors population.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Protection of Persons in Care

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been far too many cases of mistreatment and abuse of seniors in Alberta. Files on cases of abuse and mistreatment go back years, and many people

trying to help these seniors are running into dead end after dead end. Their concerns seem to go unheard. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. How is the minister working with other groups to resolve these problems of mistreatment and abuse? When can seniors expect better protection from this government?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this government has very good legislation called Protection for Persons in Care Act. Under this legislation we investigate every single complaint that comes forward about abuse in any kind of supportive living facility. If the abuse is in a criminal form, those complaints will go to the police. We have inspections of facilities, and we have investigators going out and speaking to the people who are involved in the complaints of abuse.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Who is it that makes the decisions on whether a public inquiry goes forward on a case of abuse or mistreatment?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have a branch within our ministry that does investigate every complaint that comes forward. We have a director that decides in which direction an abuse complaint should head. We get lots of complaints about the food, which is one of the most common complaints that we hear from our supportive living facilities. Those cases are not investigated, but we do work with the facility operators to encourage better preparation of food. More serious complaints are investigated thoroughly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister. One particular case where decisions were made against a senior's wishes goes back over three years now with no action. Why are cases like this one sitting for years without any public inquiry when it's clear that there's a problem that needs to be addressed to better protect our vulnerable seniors? This is only one case.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the situation that the member is speaking of; however, I would like to be aware of the situation, and if there is a problem, I would like to attend to it immediately. I would ask the member opposite to inform me of this situation so I can further investigate myself on why there is a holdup in taking action.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Physician Supply

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Reports of a hiring freeze affecting specialists who have received offers of employment here in Alberta have been circulating and continue to gain momentum. In Edmonton, home to one of the largest academic health centres in North America, this is cause for serious concern. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Minister, for clarity and for the record, are these reports true or are they not?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, there's been some attempt by certain people to distort the facts, let's say, because what we're talking about here, first of all, are academic specialists. They are not family doctors that are going to be locating elsewhere in the

province. Just to clear up the record, I did speak with the CEO of Alberta Health Services, Dr. Duckett, and he confirms the following: not only has Alberta Health Services honoured the contracts of 16 physicians that were already in place, but it is also honouring verbal agreements with 25 other physicians; five physician positions are being advertised, and another 42 offers are proceeding within the existing budgets.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only one supplementary question for the minister. Rumours have also been circulating, and reports in the media tell us that the incoming dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Alberta would not have privileges with Alberta Health Services. Is this true or not, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, I don't know who's spreading these rumours, but I have some suspicions, Mr. Speaker. I would just confirm for the record that we welcome to our city the new dean of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Alberta, Dr. Philip Baker, and he will certainly have all the privileges required at the Royal Alexandra hospital.

While I'm on my feet, I wish dean Dr. Tom Marrie the best of success in his endeavours in Maritime Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Nuclear Power

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The public is increasingly skeptical about the government's consultation on building a nuclear power plant in Alberta. Among other things the consultation workbook completely avoids mentioning the very real problems that are plaguing the construction of new power plants. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister name a single nuclear power plant anywhere in North America or Europe under construction today or any time in the last 30 years that's on time or on budget?

The Speaker: If that's within government policy, go ahead.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I will tell the House and the people of the province of Alberta is that the government of Alberta is not constructing any type of nuclear facility anywhere.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's pursue that line because I think that's a promising line. The nuclear lobby is aggressively pursuing \$50 billion in government loan guarantees in the U.S. because without them nuclear power is not viable. To the Minister of Energy: will this minister rule out this government giving loan guarantees for developing nuclear power in Alberta? Can we just rule that out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The question, really, absolutely has no relevance to what's happening in the province of Alberta. We have not – not – given any loan guarantee to anybody to build any electrical generating facilities in the province of Alberta since I don't know when. I can tell you that

right now under the structure that we have in the province of Alberta, electrical generation is a stand-alone market facility. We have no nickel in it, and we do not intend to have any.

2:30

Dr. Taft: Okay. I'm glad there won't be so much as a nickel of public money in there.

To the same minister. Another way that nuclear power companies want to put their financial risk on the public back is to begin charging customers when construction begins on the plant rather than when power generation comes online. That means customers pay for nuclear power for years before it's even generated. Again to the Minister of Energy: will the minister rule out any option from this government that would require customers in Alberta to pay for nuclear power before it actually comes online?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, it's very obvious that the member opposite hasn't spent one iota of time to actually take a look at the structure of generating in the province of Alberta. He wouldn't ask a question like that if he had a little idea about what it is that we actually are doing in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Seniors' Community Centres

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency, Calgary-Mackay, is a relatively new, younger constituency. That said, the seniors population in my constituency is growing, and they are looking for ways to stay active in their community. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Seniors' centres are an important venue for seniors in our communities. What options are available to support seniors' centres in Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of seniors' community centres throughout Alberta, and they exist because of community volunteers that have come together to ensure the establishment of these facilities. There are currently a number of sources of funding for seniors' centres. I'm very proud that the province is able to support seniors' programs through family and community support services, which is 80 per cent provincially funded. There are also lottery-funded grant programs such as the community spirit program, the community facilities enhancement program, and the community initiatives program, and the federal government has the New Horizons for Seniors program, which provides grants of up to \$25,000 . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. I'm sure we'll get chapter 2 in the next question.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. Can the hon. minister inform the Assembly if her department works with community organizations to provide services and information to seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I do have to put in chapter 2, and that's because this is a \$25,000 grant that they're currently taking proposals for until June 12. I want our seniors' centres to know that.

To go back to the supplemental question, we have eight regional seniors' information services offices across Alberta helping seniors

and their families access information on provincial programs and services. Staff from each of these offices are available to visit seniors' centres in their area to provide information sessions on various topics.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Are there avenues through her department for seniors to become aware of the services and programs available in their communities?

Mrs. Jablonski: There are. Mr. Speaker, I just want you to know that seniors' centres are very important to everyone in Alberta. They provide lots of opportunities for our seniors. I could further discuss this with our representative from Calgary-Mackay.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

High-speed Rail Link

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Transportation received a publicly funded report on high-speed rail in Alberta over a year ago. To date the public has seen or heard nothing from the government about that report. To the Minister of Transportation: why is the government refusing to release the report on high-speed rail? What have you got to hide, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, absolutely, I have nothing to hide. I will say that I agree: we've had the report for a long time. My department has been analyzing the report. I ask them every once in a while: what makes you guys so slow in there anyway? They're not coming back, but we are analyzing the report. As soon as we have real, real, true analysis in the proper form, we'll be letting the hon. member know.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister should put the entire department on the report so we could speed things up.

To the minister again: what is so controversial about this report that the government won't release a single page of it even under a freedom of information request?

Mr. Ouellette: I don't know anything about the freedom of information request, Mr. Speaker. That's handled, as you know, by officials in the department. I don't think there's absolutely anything that could be hidden in there. It's a report where we're trying to find out what the actual ridership would be and if it would pay back investment if we built high-speed rail. There could be nothing to hide there. We're just waiting to be able to make sure that we analyze it properly to release the proper information to the paying public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister has been sitting on it for a year. It's about time you should release it, Mr. Minister.

To the minister again. The minister has been sitting on this report for over a year: I repeat it again. Maybe he hasn't even read it, maybe only once, twice, thrice. Give us a date. When will Albertans get the opportunity to see that report, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I agree. I'm not the guy that's analyzing the report. We have professionals in the department to do that work. I've never sat on the report either. I will say, though, that this is going to be a fairly complex report. This is really about: what will it do with the expanded population that we have in Alberta? Will it take pressure off the busiest highway at times in Canada, let alone just western Canada? Will this help with lowering greenhouse gases? What expense will it be to do all that? All of that is very complex, and it's being analyzed. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Student Loans

Mr. Elniski: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel a little bit like I drew the short straw on that one.

Lately I've been receiving a lot of feedback from students regarding student loan eligibility for postsecondary education. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. It's my understanding that an unmarried student is allowed to earn up to \$800 per month before it affects the size of their student loan. However, for a married student their spouse's income is included in the eligibility calculation, and they're only allowed to earn a \$200 exemption. Why are these program eligibility calculations not the same?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, it's this government's intent to ensure that all students have an affordable and accessible framework. The part-time earning exemption of \$800 per month applies to all students, both single and married. Reducing spousal contributions is one of the initiatives that was identified in the affordability framework for consideration for budgets in the future. Certainly, in the big picture married students really only make up about 10 per cent of the total student numbers that are applying for student assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. What is the government doing to ensure that married students, who often have greater obligations such as mortgage debt, receive equitable treatment in the calculation of student loan eligibility?

Mr. Horner: We certainly recognize, Mr. Speaker, the obligations of married students and take into consideration that they have higher day-to-day costs, including mortgages in some cases. The standard monthly living allowance for married students with no children is \$1,873 compared to the single student, who is eligible for up to \$941. For married students with children an additional living allowance of \$449 per month is provided for each child. As I mentioned in my previous response, support to married students is part of the ongoing analysis that we have within the affordability framework. Hopefully, depending upon budget considerations, in the future we'll be able to add to that wonderful package of items in student finance that does make this one of the most affordable places to take postsecondary education.

The Speaker: That was 102 questions and responses today, hon. members.

2:40

Statement by the Speaker

Members Absenting Themselves

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday in the House in the afternoon at the start of second reading debate on Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009, it was the decision of the House that advice should be sought from the Ethics Commissioner with respect to potential conflicts of interest among members in their participation on this particular bill, and the conclusion was that the chair should contact the Ethics Commissioner and seek advice from the Ethics Commissioner. A few minutes ago I received such advice of the Ethics Commissioner, and I believe it's of prudent nature and benefit that all members of the House hear this advice. I intend now to read the advice into the record.

For the benefit of all members, it's a letter dated May 6, 2009, addressed to me as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. It arrived in my office at 1:47 this afternoon. It says:

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Re: General Advice pursuant to section 44 of the Conflicts of Interest Act Re Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

Thank you for bringing to my attention the debate which occurred in the Legislative Assembly on May 5 at Second Reading on Bill 25. I took note of your comments to all Members and the subsequent debate on the Bill.

Although Standing Order 33(2) requires a Member to declare a pecuniary interest and withdraw before voting on a matter, section 2(2) of the Conflicts of Interest Act goes further. It says:

(2) Where a matter for decision in which a Member has reasonable grounds to believe that the Member, the Member's minor or adult child or a person directly associated with the Member has a private interest is before a meeting of the Executive Council or a committee of the Executive Council or the Legislative Assembly or a committee appointed by resolution of the Legislative Assembly, the Member must, if present at the meeting, declare that interest and must withdraw from the meeting without voting on or participating in the consideration of the matter.

The letter goes on:

It is my understanding that this Bill relates to the Memorandum of Agreement of November 2007 under which the Government of Alberta agreed to pay the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded pension liability. As a result of this agreement, persons currently in the teaching profession will directly benefit as a result of reduced pension deductions from their individual paycheques. It is my further understanding that Teachers' Retirement Fund recipients will not be affected by this legislation in terms of an increase or decrease to their pension cheque.

Under the Conflicts of Interest Act, a "private interest" is not defined. The Act states what a "private interest" is not. It is not an interest in a matter that is of general application or one that affects a person as one of a broad class of the public.

Based on my preliminary review of the Bill, the *Alberta Hansard* excerpt from May 5 with respect to the Second Reading debate on the Bill, and the Conflicts of Interest Act, it is my advice that in certain circumstances, Members of the Legislative Assembly may have a private interest in Bill 25 and those Members would have to declare that interest and withdraw from the proceedings without taking part in or voting on the matter.

I have considered the matter under three basic scenarios: a Member who has retired from the teaching profession; a Member who is on a leave of absence from a teaching position or who may or may not return to the teaching profession; and a Member who has a spouse, adult interdependent partner, or minor or adult child who is a teacher.

1. Members who have retired from teaching

It is my advice that Members who have retired from the teaching profession – whether or not they are currently receiving

a pension cheque – will not benefit from this legislation. It is my view that the general application exception applies since the pension plan itself affects all persons who have rights in that plan. The fact that the pension plan may be adjusted on an annual basis is also, in my opinion, a matter of general application. Members in this category may participate and vote on this matter.

2. Members who hold a teaching licence and who have not retired. There are subsections in here.

- (a) If a Member holds a teaching licence but has resigned from their position with their school or school board, it is my advice that this is a matter of general application and those Members may participate in the debate. Since they are not currently contributing to the pension plan – whether or not they intend to return to teaching – there is no immediate direct financial benefit and it is my opinion that it is a matter of general application. Members in this category may participate and vote on this matter.
- (b) If a Member is on a leave of absence but has not yet resigned from a teaching position, it is my opinion that there is a private interest since the Member is technically still an employee of that school or school board. Until such time as the Member is removed from the payroll, it is my opinion that the Member may benefit from this legislation. That Member would have a private interest and must declare that interest and withdraw from the proceedings without participating in the debate or voting on the matter.
- (c) If a Member has a teaching licence and is still teaching in any capacity (since the Conflicts of Interest Act does not restrict Private Members from having outside employment provided it does not conflict with their public responsibilities), that Member would have a private interest and must declare that interest and withdraw from the proceedings without participating in the debate or voting on the matter.

The third category of identification.

3. Direct associates or children who are teachers

If a Member's spouse, adult interdependent partner, minor or adult child is a teacher, then it is my opinion that there is a private interest. While the benefits that will result from this legislation will apply to all persons making pension contributions, it is a subset of the larger population of those persons who have rights in the pension plan. Since there is an immediate financial benefit to these persons, it is my view that a private interest exists. Members who have direct associates or children currently in the teaching profession must declare that interest and withdraw from participating in the debate or voting on the matter.

The Ethics Commissioner goes on.

I have advised that a private interest exists, in part, because I am mindful of the preamble to the Conflicts of Interest Act that sets a high standard of conduct for Members to ensure that the public can be confident that Members are acting in the public interest and not to further their private interests.

This advice has been prepared on short notice and it may be that arguments could have been made that in all cases described above, the matter is not one of private interest but one of general application. I would recommend that in future, my Office be consulted prior to such legislation being introduced so that we can get a thorough briefing on the intent and effects of such legislation.

Yours very truly,

Neil R. Wilkinson

Ethics Commissioner

It's now in the *Hansard*, and in a few moments from now I'll also table copies of this that the members will be able to obtain within minutes of the closing of the Routine.

We're now going to continue but in 30 seconds only.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The face of mental illness is different for everyone. As a boy growing up in a small Ontario town home to a provincial psychiatric hospital, mental illness took the form of strange people wandering our downtown streets, carrying on conversations with invisible companions, and whom we were warned to avoid at all costs.

These were, in fact, patients suffering from chronic mental illness, and for many the hospital had been their home for over 20 years. Early in my career I participated in the development of strategies to deinstitutionalize this same patient population. Hundreds of psychiatric beds were closed, and psychosocial and vocational programs were established in central locations. We waited for the patients to magically show up, ready to be integrated into mainstream society.

That was 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker, and fortunately things have changed. We have seen an extraordinary rise in patient and family support movements. Research has provided us with incredible advances in knowledge about the brain and new medications, and while there is still much more to be done, our mental health services, especially those provided in the community, have improved significantly. Many of us take great pride in the fact that Alberta is now home to the Canadian Mental Health Commission. As former Senator Michael Kirby describes so well in his 2006 landmark report, mental health has come "out of the shadows at last."

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there is still one thing that hasn't changed enough, and that is the enduring stigma which surrounds mental illness. Too few of us know its burden on our society, how to spot signs of mental illness among our family, friends, and colleagues, and how to appropriately intervene. More to the point, we are afraid or somehow feel it inappropriate to talk about these issues. As a result, many, including our youth, do not seek help when they need it most.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing I observed during debates in this Assembly, it is that there is a deep and abiding concern on all sides of this House for the issue of mental health in our society. As we observe Mental Health Week 2009, it is my hope that members of the 27th Legislature will accept the challenge of defeating the stigma that plagues us.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Shandy Wogan

Ms. Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The little school that could has produced one of many of my constituency's great minds. I'm talking about a grade 9 student who attends the Red Earth Creek school, approximately 450 kilometres north of Edmonton. As little as 10 years ago this school did not exist. However, the parents and people of Red Earth moved mountains to get a school for their children, and from the looks of it it's paying off in Shandy Wogan.

This grade 9 student is a brilliant, determined, and passionate young woman, which is evident in her recent accomplishments. Shandy won the best-in-fair trophy, the award of excellence in health and science trophy, and a gold medal for the life sciences at the

Peace Country Regional Science Fair on March 19, the first for a student of Red Earth Creek. These awards were for the study that Shandy undertook studying the effects of energy drinks on teenagers. As a result of these honours, she has won the right to attend the Canada-wide Science Fair, held in Winnipeg May 9 to 17.

Science is a passion for Shandy. This passion has been cultivated by her mother, who gives her every opportunity to expand her learning not only through school but through attending conferences and visiting museums. In fact, last year Shandy participated in her first science fair, where she studied human memory by using a pig's brain, dissecting it to identify the regions of the brain. Amazingly, she did not win that one, but that didn't and won't stop her.

Shandy aspires to be a doctor, and I have no doubt that with the perseverance and hard work she has shown, she will achieve this dream. Shandy is one of the young, brilliant minds who are the future of our province, and I have no doubt that we will be hearing more about Shandy in the future.

All the best to you, Shandy, at the Canada-wide Science Fair in Winnipeg from May 9 to 17.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Alberta Forest Week

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our theme for Alberta Forest Week is Something to Celebrate. To celebrate this special week, we need to acknowledge the value we receive from our forests. They provide us with clean air and water, homes for fish and wildlife, abundant recreational opportunities, and community sustainability. Forests cover 60 per cent of the Alberta land mass that drapes across our province like a giant green shawl. Forestry is the principal livelihood of approximately 50 communities in Alberta, employing 44,000 people and generating \$10 billion in annual revenue. Healthy forests are the foundation of all the values we receive from our forests, whether it's wildlife habitat or recreation or jobs.

Alberta is home to some of the world's best sustainable forest management practices. The Alberta government is committed to carefully managing Alberta's forests for the widest possible range of values and for the greatest benefits to Albertans today and in the future. Our forests are sustainable. The cut we allow does not exceed what the forest can grow each year. Alberta also invests in science and research to find better ways to manage our forests for maximum benefit.

Mr. Speaker, our forests are renewable and will be an enduring symbol of our sustainable land legacy. Our forests will be a safe home for wildlife. Our practices will safeguard our water supplies, support our communities, offer many recreational opportunities, and will continue to be loved and enjoyed by our children and grandchildren. Our sustainable forest management is a success story that provides economic, social, and ecological benefits to Albertans, Canadians, and the world. Alberta is determined to see our forests thrive on our landscapes through wise stewardship now and in the future.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Television Camera on the Chamber Floor

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we go on, I've received several notes from hon. members inquiring as to why there is a television camera on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. We have a policy, that we've had in place for a great number of years now, that from time to time members of the media by way of electronic devices,

television cameras, seek permission to be planted on the floors of the Legislative Assembly. We have a code of rules that applies to it, including a dress code, including what they can shoot and what they cannot shoot.

Such a request was made today, to have a camera on the floor in anticipation of the debate with respect to Bill 44. The camera will only be operative when the debate on Bill 44 goes forward if it goes forward today. There are very strict rules that the only person that the camera will look to is the person who is speaking. There is no general panning of the Assembly or anything else and no visual taken of anyone else.

Should there be a violation of the rule that we have, I'll tell you what happened a number of years ago when there was a violation of such a rule. Permission was sought by representatives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Permission was granted. The rules were violated. I banned the CBC from this building for a year. They went to court; they lost. They went to court; they lost. They decided it wasn't worth it.

Decisions of this Assembly are made by the members of this Assembly through the Speaker's chair, so there'll be no violation today, I'm sure. Everything will be done quite accordingly, and there'll be no intimidation, harassment, or anything else associated with this. If members object to this, kindly convey your thoughts to me with respect to this matter, and we'll review the policy that we have for the future, but I believe that everything will be quite fine. The camera will only be focused on the individual speaking.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to table a copy of correspondence that I've received in my office, which is a commentary from Leslie Carlyle on Bill 44 that notes that she felt very strongly that had she not been taught about human sexuality through the Edmonton public school board, she would not have known that she could escape a sexual abuser, and she feels very strongly that the government should consider that allowing section 11.1 may prevent other children from finding out about the same thing and being able to protect themselves.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I indicated earlier today that I'd received a letter from the office of the Ethics Commissioner with regard to general advice pursuant to section 44 of the Conflicts of Interest Act regarding Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009. I'm tabling with the Assembly now the appropriate copies. If members wish to get a copy of the actual letter, they can do so; otherwise, it will be printed in *Hansard* for the benefit of all.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, responses to questions raised by Dr. Taft, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; Mr. Mason, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; and Ms Blakeman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, on April 29, 2009, Department of Energy main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, responses to Written Question 12 and return to order of the Assembly MR1, both asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The Committee of the Whole shall now come to order.

Bill 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Bill 33 is a bill that I have been waiting for some time to get a few comments on the record about. This was initially, I recall, introduced to the Assembly the same day we dealt with the budget, and it may have been overlooked. It certainly is a bill that is going to change how this government operates. They have indicated, to my knowledge, that it is a bill that reflects the times, and we are not to worry about this in any way.

3:00

Now, when we look at Alberta's fiscal framework and we look at what has gone on in the past, of course, we've had some rather different laws going back to 1993 about debt and deficits and the fiscal framework and the rules and the limitations the government places on itself for budgeting purposes. These restrictions and limitations are very similar to what one would compare to a teenager with an allowance. Sometimes this government doesn't know what to do with a lot of the extra money that they acquire.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead is grinning over there, but it's not a grinning matter. It was only, Mr. Chairman, six months ago that the provincial finance minister was beaming that we were going to have this \$8 billion to \$12 billion surplus. The world changed rather quickly last fall, and the budget in this province does not reflect that change. But Bill 33 is certainly an interesting initiative.

Now, Bill 33 has seen many, many different forms, Mr. Chairman. Going back to 1993, it was the Deficit Elimination Act, then the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act. It was revised again in 1999, and it became the Fiscal Responsibility Act. This act, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, was substantially amended in 2003 based on recommendations of the financial management commission. There were a series of frameworks there.

- Balanced budget requirements.
- Prohibitions on debt, especially for operating purposes.
- Mechanisms to deal with revenue volatility. Examples include: budgeting based on 90% of forecast resource and corporate income tax revenue; using only \$5.3 billion in resource revenue for budget purposes; establishing the Sustainability Fund.

Another good idea from this side of the House.

- Requiring an economic cushion or contingency allowance to be set aside.
- Limiting use of in-year increases to budgeted revenue.
- In-year limitations on spending increases.

As I said earlier, the fiscal and economic situation during this budget year, according to the government, necessitates changes to the framework. Now, it goes on to say in the fiscal plan, Mr. Chairman, that

the framework in place in 2008-09 was mainly intended to provide limitations during times of revenue growth. It provided relief from

the limitations when events occurred during the year, such as emergencies and disasters, or when revenue declined from the budget.

The whole issue of emergencies and disasters is certainly an interesting one, and one would only have to look at the *Alberta Gazette* to see how frequently that line was used.

Now, according to the government, the framework has become complex, requiring intricate transfers between funds, and has become less transparent. I couldn't agree with that statement any more than I already have. I'm pleased to see that this government recognizes that it has transparency issues. It's not sincere, in my view, in its effort to address them, but at least it recognizes it's got a problem.

This new bill, Bill 33, or the latest version of this bill, provides for a much simpler fiscal framework, and according to the government, it contains limitations but enhances flexibility, the economic Slinky that it is.

Dr. Taft: Economic Slinky?

Mr. MacDonald: It is an economic Slinky, this legislation, because of the flexibility that's needed by this government at this time. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is very interested about the economic Slinky that is this bill.

It is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview who was one of many who alerted, Mr. Chairman, taxpayers in this province to the fact that this was a crazy-spending government. They weren't prudent financially. They didn't balance the spending with savings like they should have. Now the only fortunate thing we have, of course, is the stability fund, which was an idea that the government adopted just in time, that cookie jar that is available to the hon. President of the Treasury Board during this very difficult economic period.

When we look at this flexibility, we have to consider the past fiscal framework and what it did. Now, deficits are only permitted under the new Fiscal Responsibility Act if funds are available in the sustainability fund to offset them. Under debt, according to the fiscal plan, the new Fiscal Responsibility Act maintains the requirement that the debt retirement account has to be equal or be greater than any accumulated debt. There are two words in here that are very important, Mr. Chairman: as defined. We're talking about accumulated debt as defined. This is where we get into the Slinky going down the spiral staircase. It never falls away or moves off the centre of that staircase as it goes around the corner because of the ability to draft legislation that only the President of the Treasury Board has.

This in combination with the requirement that deficits are only permitted if they can be funded from the sustainability fund means the government is not permitted to borrow money for operating purposes. According to the fiscal plan, the government can borrow only

- for capital investment in government-owned assets;
- to support capital projects that are owned by school boards, post-secondary institutions and health authorities.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but that would certainly include the 3P projects.

The government can only borrow

- as required by self-supporting corporations such as Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, Alberta Treasury Branches and Alberta Capital Finance Authority.

I think to say that these corporations are self-supporting is a bit of a stretch.

Of course, it was interesting that we dealt a little bit with this earlier, after question period, with the letter from the Ethics Commissioner.

- to pay back funds owed by the pre-1992 Teachers' Pension Plan to the post-1992 Teachers' Pension Plan.

Now, we talk about the sustainability fund here and controls on in-year operating expenses and nonrenewable resource revenue and financial reporting standards. These proposals, as I understand it, concern budget limitations. As I understand it, the year-end annual report will continue to report in accordance with the Canadian generally accepted accounting principles for the public sector. The main differences in this are going to be pension liabilities and the SUCH sector.

With pension liabilities, according to what I'm reading in the budget documents, this bill will continue to exclude the change in unfunded pension liabilities of the government of Alberta from expense. The annual report will report any increases in pension liabilities as an expense. I find that quite interesting.

3:10

Now, the SUCH sector. That includes schools, universities, colleges, hospitals. Similarly, this bill's rules, as I understand it, do not account for the inclusion of Crown-controlled SUCH sector entities – school boards, universities, colleges, and health authorities – into the government reporting entity. The annual report currently reports the change in equity of the SUCH sector as a single revenue item, modified equity. Public sector accounting standards will require reporting, and it goes on.

Whenever we're discussing this, we need to have a look not only at the balance sheet of the province, the fiscal summary. When we look at pension liabilities, if they are to be excluded under this bill, we have to look at what pension obligations were in 2008. They're listed, Mr. Chairman, as a liability on the balance sheet. Pension obligations were \$7.8 billion. This estimate, this budget year, 2010, they have climbed by over \$3 billion to \$10.9 billion, and in the next two years they are estimated to be over \$12 billion. These are the pension obligations.

Now, why would we be excluding them in this bill, Mr. Chairman? I know there is a new provision in this bill, and that would be, if we go to the definitions section, under 1(a)(i)(E): "any amounts raised for the purpose of paying to the post-1992 fund all or any portion of the amounts determined by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise to be owing in accordance with the Teachers' Pension Plan Act." This, according to my research, is a new tweak to the act, and that would, in the post-1992 fund, increase by \$184 million.

Now, other definitions are similar to what was used under the old act because we've got to remember that this act, if it becomes law, is deemed to have come into force on April 1, 2009.

That's only one portion of the unfunded pension liability, but these liabilities are significant, and they're adding up. I know that when I went through the annual report of the minister of finance, there were some significant changes in some of the numbers in the various pensions that report to the public through the hon. minister's annual report. I don't know if that's the reason why there is this \$3 billion increase or not. Perhaps at some point in the debate we can have an answer provided by the ministers opposite.

When we look also at debt servicing costs and we look at the fiscal plan tables, this is why we've got to be so careful with this bill. I'm not going to go into the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's debt servicing costs, but I am going to have a look at the ones under Education, and they're listed here as financing costs for the Alberta schools alternative procurement, the P3s. It's interesting to note that the Minister of Education, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the entire government seem to be cooling off in their admiration for 3Ps. They never were a good deal. Never were a good deal.

When you look at the business plan of, let's choose for example Edmonton school district 7, the Edmonton public board, on their wish list they claim they can construct a school for \$11 million. If you average out what's going on with the 3Ps that were moved ahead last year, it's over \$33 million. I know it's a longer period of time, but, wow, that's quite a difference in unit cost.

I don't think taxpayers in this case have been served by this fascination with 3Ps. Once again, it's an issue of ideology over economic common sense. The financing costs for the Alberta schools alternative procurement 2010-11, the debt servicing costs, are \$17 million. The following year, the target – and these are targets, Mr. Chairman – is \$22 million, or \$5 million more. In two years it's \$39 million in debt servicing costs.

We look at debt servicing costs for Finance and Enterprise and general government. That's a real broad category. That's going up as well from \$112 million to \$170 million two years later. This is according to the hon. minister's own documents. Transportation: financing costs for government-owned capital plans. I thought at one time the government, with these 3P projects, was not to be involved in financing whatsoever, but here we find in the budget documents that there are financing costs. In the years that we know, for Education they're increasing and also for Transportation. Now, in 2009-10 it is estimated that the financing costs for the 3Ps are \$21 million. Two years later they're going to double. The financing costs are going to be \$40 million. With this bill I believe definition (C) under 1(a) provides the government the scope to handle this.

Mr. Snelgrove: You've lost your audience.

Mr. MacDonald: Never had them to start with, hon. member. Never had them to start with. Perhaps if the hon. members across the way were paying attention, we could save a few million dollars of the taxpayers' money.

This government, I'm telling you, hon. member, some of their spending habits . . .

An Hon. Member: Are they a Slinky, too?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, they're not like an economic Slinky. I would compare them to the gentleman who was on cable television advertising those ShamWows. I don't know if ShamWows is the plural. I'm sure the Minister of Transportation, if he was interested, could moonlight at a home and garden show and make himself a very good living. I'm confident of that. He could sell ShamWow by the square metre. I bet he could sell 10 square metres per presentation. People would be cutting them up and using them in their RVs and in their tents and to dry off their pets, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Brown: Do they work? Have you got one?

Mr. MacDonald: No, I don't have a ShamWow, but maybe he could sell me one. He's very anxious to sell me on these 3P projects, and I'm not buying that. No way.

Also, with Bill 33 – and I was distracted there; I apologize, Mr. Chairman – one of the consequential amendments in here, where the Auditor General Act is amended by repealing section . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess we're not supposed to sleep in here unless we're standing up and talking. You know, it's interesting that the hon. member says, "the bill as I understand it" and then clearly goes on to show that he doesn't understand it. He's completely discon-

nected with what this bill is actually trying to do and going to do and his revisionist theory of history and his gloom and doom into the future.

Mr. Chairman, it's really simple. The situation that countries or provinces, not just ours, find themselves in changes. It has and will probably continue to change. I think we could all be pretty sure that this won't be the last time that the province has to rethink and reassess its position on how it handles its money.

3:20

I think most people, certainly the people in this government, understand that sometime, maybe in a year, maybe in two years, maybe in three years – it may be longer – when the economic situation turns around, we will continue to lead and be one of the most stable and prosperous entities in the world. We will continue to use the tools that evolve in the communities of finance to invest and to make better use of our money.

This government took very bold steps a few decades ago. It, like many other provinces, had bought into the theory that deficit financing was somehow okay and that you could continue to spend your way into prosperity. By some extremely solid leadership at the time, Premier Klein and his government said: "Enough. Let's take Alberta and put it on a footing where it is completely steering its own boat. We don't want to put ourselves in the same position that many provinces and countries have gotten themselves where they've loaned out all of the opportunities they've got for very little gain."

The chairman would remember that when we entered into debt reduction in this province, we had roughly the same debt as the province of British Columbia. This province took steps to quit spending more than it was taking in, to pay off the debt, to be very open about it. And you know what? Albertans bought into it completely and said: you're right; for this time in Alberta, for the future we need to make sure that Albertans control their finances. No other province took those steps, and now British Columbia is looking at a 40-plus billion dollar debt. Are the people in British Columbia better off than we are? Is their standard of living improved because they've accumulated and continued to grow this much more debt? Are they better off because they're paying \$4 billion a year in interest? Our good friends in Quebec: are they better off because they're paying – well, we're paying for them – just under \$8 billion a year in interest payments?

It's okay, I guess, if you have no conscience and you want to continue to live off other people and you don't intend to tackle your debt and your obligations and the country will continue to take from those who work hard and earn it and have the good fortune to be sitting on top of oil. But the attitude of Albertans has been far more important in how we've become prosperous than oil. We could have taken the same step that many other parties or provinces would do – don't worry about your debt – and spent our way into this glorious, wonderful position they found themselves in: hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars in debt. Not just the direct government debt. Many other provinces have burdened their Crown corporations with debt of untold, unaccountable billions of dollars.

When the consolidated financial accounting comes into place, Mr. Chairman, it's not this province that's going to adopt or reject that thing. We have been doing it for a year, and we are ready to go to consolidated accounting. Most other provinces are terrified of having to open their books, where it's in the cupboard and where the cupboard is bare. When we bring our consolidated assets together, it's going to show Albertans that we have accumulated even more with our other interests – more – probably assets to the tune in excess of \$12 billion to \$14 billion and a cash difference of probably

\$4 billion. Some other provinces, Mr. Chairman, are going to show enormous liabilities and very little assets.

The hon. member would like to suggest somehow that this is a Slinky or whatever his goofy term was around doing this. This is about saying, actually, for the situation we're in today: "We have been prudent enough to put some money into a savings account. We have been wise enough to begin investing in infrastructure, which is as good an investment as you can get, the investment in our universities, our colleges, our roads, hospitals, and schools, to a rate that far exceeds any other state or province's wildest dreams per capita." We've been building diligently. We've been taking the wealth that's being generated from not only our oil and gas sector but from the other industries in Alberta that pay taxes, too, and we've been building an environment where business wants to come from around the world and locate, one, for stability and certainty because they know the business climate is fair; two, because they know that we're not going to have the same issues as the other provinces, that one of these days they're going to have to start paying their bills.

It is no different, Mr. Speaker, the overall debt, than is the completely irresponsible position that they would like to take, that there is no problem with health care spending. I think in our estimates the hon. leader of the third party said: "What's the big deal? Just borrow some money this year. You don't have to make tough choices."

Ms Evans: He didn't say that.

Mr. Snelgrove: Yes, he did. "Just borrow." I said: "Well, that's great. We're borrowing for capital." He's borrowing for operational, so you borrow this year to run your health system for another six months, seven months. Well, then you would just borrow some more, and sooner or later, even if you have a most limited education and no calculator, you would figure out – maybe 20 years, maybe 30 years, maybe after I'm gone – that you have to quit spending more than you're making. You can't have one department in government spending at three or four times the rate of growth and not start to severely hamper all the other departments in the government in doing the very important work they do.

I had, I would look back and say, the unfortunate opportunity to ask the Saskatchewan Health minister of a few years ago when he thought Saskatchewan might think there was a problem in health care spending. When it became 60 per cent of their budget? When it became 70 per cent? When it gobbled 80 per cent of their budget? Or when, in fact, it was eating 110 per cent of their income and they were just borrowing? His answer was very NDP-like. He said, "You so-and-so Albertans are all about money." I said, "Thank goodness you're not in finance." But that's the attitude of those who don't want to see the truth or the reality that there is an accounting day sooner or later.

So you can sit in here and you can make all the excuses why we don't need to tackle these tough problems, why we should continue to indulge in whatever flight of fancy they would like to do, but sooner or later you're either paying interest until you can no longer take that much out of your ongoing operational dollars to pay interest, or you quit building your infrastructure. We would have an operating surplus if we didn't build anything. Maybe that's the approach they would like: quit building schools, quit building roads, quit building hospitals, balance your books, put everybody at home and create a social program for them so they don't have to work. Federal governments did that for years in the Maritimes. What did that do? Quite honestly, sitting on the dock and waiting for the fish to come back wouldn't work in Alberta. I can assure you, Mr.

Chairman, that in 200 or 300 or 400 years when the oil runs out in the north, Albertans won't sit up there on the end of the oil rig waiting for the oil to come back. By then we will have gone on to far more current things.

One thing about this government is that we're already planning for the future because we think we're living in the future here in Alberta. Reinvesting in the nanotechnology sector, the genomics, realigning our research and our development departments, building one of the foremost health care systems probably in North America – in Canada, for sure – not only for the everyday patient but for research, sustainable research. One of the things we're going to be able to sustain our health care on, Mr. Chairman, is that if you get a cure for cancer, you save a lot of money. When you start to find out what's causing MS, what's causing all these horrible afflictions that take the people that we love, when we figure out how to fix that, we're going to go a long ways to fixing health care.

3:30

Yes, it does take money sometimes to save money. I know that. Sometimes you have to change the way you allocate your dollars to get where you're trying to go. What the Fiscal Responsibility Act worked for in the '90s was a spending problem. It got put back in. With the opportunity, then, to create the heritage savings account, we would say: "Okay. That's for the future." Very clearly we've said that that is the future and that that will stay there, and when we're back in a position to continue to invest in not only that but the other incredibly important endowments that we've got, when we're ready to say that our infrastructure spending is at an appropriate amount and we've caught up on the backlog of some of the maintenance, then we'll be better situated than any other country you can possibly think of that has the standard of compassion and the standard of living that we have here in Alberta.

You know, Mr. Chairman, the group of interns I introduced in here before question period very much resemble this caucus. They are from all over the world – one from Germany, from all over Canada – very, very ethnically diverse, very bright ambitious children, young men and women, wanting to come to Alberta because they see it as still the land of opportunity.

It's a little frustrating. When the sky finally falls for those over there and they'll have their happy dance in the rotunda, the sky will land on one of the most prosperous, well-planned-out, well-thought-out governments in the country. It will land on a health care system that's second to none. The sky is going to fall on an education system that is teaching students far ahead of most everywhere else. It's going to land on a diversified and prosperous agricultural sector and an energy sector that's not only meeting or exceeding all the environmental challenges that are thrown at us but leading in it. We will be the province that gets to sustainable energy. It won't be the ones that are down there clamouring for closing the oil sands. It will be the wealth the oil sands generates that allows us to reinvest in more experiments. It will be the clean coal industry that reinvests.

You can shut them all. You can pretend it's over. "Alberta was here once. We don't know what happened to it, but when the sky fell on us, it was so cloudy that we wandered aimlessly over to Saskatchewan, then maybe into Manitoba to find the despair that we so love." That's okay, and I'll give them a ride to the border. I'm happy to. You know, they won't know what they've left, but they'll know when they get where they're going what the people of Alberta have long known, that they've been governed by a party that has adapted and evolved over time and continues to meet and exceed what the people of Alberta believe their province is able to do.

This is a change, yes. It's a change that says that we are in the middle of an economic situation that we do not control, but we can

control our spending. We can start to put forward a very real understanding for the people of Alberta so that they, too, can see where this government is going to be in two, three, and four years and on. No other province publishes a second-year budget. Ours is a three-year budget, Mr. Chairman, and it shows people exactly where we are going.

One of the CEOs of Marathon Oil that I met before Christmas said that in their business sometimes you've got to budget for the worst and hope for the best. Mr. Chairman, that's what we have to do. We have to know it can stay worse for quite some time. It can get worse than it is now, and it can get better quicker than we know. The one thing that I know is that the people who really, really are able to tell us why it didn't happen aren't really able to tell us right now when it's going to happen.

The opposition put it up and say: well, if oil is here, this is what we'd do. Magically, they never have to worry about that. In the same day, Mr. Chairman, sometimes in the same question, they're going to save more or they're going to spend more. I don't know. There's only one dollar. It's divided up very clearly in our budget where the priorities that we see are. Our priorities have been put on health, education, and our seniors and on continuing to build the infrastructure that enables industry to prosper and want to locate here.

They can take this bill, Mr. Chairman, and they can make it out to be whatever bogeyman, whatever Slinky toy they want it to be. The fact of the matter is that we were prudent enough to establish a capital fund, a sustainability fund, a fund to go forward with carbon capture and sequestration, and several other saving things that are enormously important to Albertans. Now we're saying: "We told you when we put this in that it was for a rainy day. We hoped it would never come." I admit that a year ago at this time I did not expect to be back here a year later saying that things changed. They did.

Thank goodness our Premier and the finance minister had the foresight to say: we'd better put a little in the cookie jar because we don't want to touch the heritage fund. This bill just simply says that we put it there for a reason. Our bookkeeping, our accounting systems are different. If we have to acknowledge it differently, we will. We have never tried to stay away from the consolidated financial accounting. The Auditor General has consistently and for quite some time given this province a very unqualified financial statement and, as a matter of fact, often uses the Alberta government's accounting practices as an example to the rest of Canada.

We have nothing to hide. We are proud Albertans. We are proud of what has happened in the past. We know that with what we've done, we have a solid future. They can make whatever analogies or allegations they want to about what this bill means, but what it means for my kids and for me is a smarter, stronger future far before anyone else will come out of this downturn, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, the President of the Treasury Board. It's good to have some passionate debate in here. He made a very strong case against debt in the first several minutes of his comments, laying the groundwork, in his mind, but in some ways also laying the case against the very piece of legislation we've got in here.

Debt is not always evil. We understand that. In fact, the aggressive, over-the-top campaign to pay off the debt in the last 15 years I think has had a lot of negative consequences, as I said yesterday. Now we're listening to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster

change the government's policy and as President of the Treasury Board even steer the government's policy on this. It makes me wonder what his predecessor the former Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, Dr. Steve West, would say and how he might weigh in on this particular bill. [interjections] Not surprisingly, I'm getting comments that he said: don't listen to the opposition. I guess that was taken to heart, wasn't it?

I want to address a couple of things that were said in debate on this bill yesterday. One was a comment from the Member for Peace River talking about hypocrisy on our side. He couldn't believe the hypocrisy on our side in sometimes arguing for spending, sometimes arguing for savings, cuts, and that sort of thing. I think the President of the Treasury Board holds the same position. I think it's important to put some context around that.

What we have in Alberta are easily the most dramatic swings in public expenditures of any provincial government in the country. In 1986, '87, '88, in fact all through the 1980s Alberta was the highest spending province per person in the country. We were spending 20, 25 per cent higher than the average, and it was not sustainable. What we had, then, by the middle '90s after this bloodbath of government cuts was the lowest spending government per capita in the country, and that wasn't sustainable either. We went from the highest spenders in the mid-80s to the lowest spenders in the mid-90s. On the way down all kinds of people kept saying: "Stop the cuts. Stop the cuts. You've got to spend something on training your nurses and your doctors, and you've got to keep your schools open and maintain your roads." But, oh no. The drop kept going until we were absolutely at the bottom. By the middle '90s we had gone in one decade from the highest spending to the lowest spending. We're now back up to the highest spending again, and this isn't sustainable either.

3:40

What we're arguing for and why we're questioning this piece of legislation, Mr. Chairman, is for some long-term stability. Sure, when we're at the lowest in the country, we urge the government to spend more, and when we're at the highest in the country, we're urging the government to be more prudent, to have a long-term strategy. I think that explains to some extent, whether the members across the way accept it or not, why sometimes we're arguing for spending and sometimes we're arguing for savings. We are on a wild roller-coaster ride on the fiscal side of this government, and we want to get off the roller coaster and onto some nice, steady cruising.

Also, I want to reflect for a moment on a comment made yesterday in debate on this bill by the Member for Calgary-North Hill. I'm looking at *Hansard* from yesterday, page 977. He accused us. He said, "They're not quite sure what we're saving for." Well, actually, we have a very clear reason to save, Mr. Chairman, and I wish this government would listen to us on this. I wish they would listen to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Canada West Foundation, and especially Jack Mintz, who was commissioned by this very government to give them advice on saving. The reason to save is because we have an enormous gap between what we're spending as a province and what we're bringing in. We're covering that gap through oil and gas royalties, but as those royalties decline, we need another source of income. So the reason to save in the long term is to create an enormous pool of capital that will offset the declining income from royalties.

Mr. Mintz's report is absolutely clear, and I would ask every MLA in this Assembly to take a few minutes to read that report. Their analysis, which was based on the government's own figures, suggests that if we don't start saving aggressively now, we will end

up either having to cut spending by 40 per cent or increasing taxes by 40 per cent or some combination of the two. What we're doing right now is not sustainable. That's why we need to save. That's what we've been arguing for a long time. Most Albertans get it. I wish the President of the Treasury Board and the finance minister would get with that program as well because then we could all look forward to a more certain future for this province.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to propose an amendment to this bill, so I'll take a minute to have it distributed, and then we can discuss the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: This amendment is now known as A1.

Hon. member, please continue on A1.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment, made on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Varsity, reads as follows: that Bill 33, Fiscal Responsibility Act, be amended in section 3 by adding the following after subsection (6).

- (7) Subject to section 2, if the net assets of the Alberta Sustainability Fund exceed \$2,500,000,000, the excess or any portion of it may be allocated by the Treasury Board from the Alberta Sustainability Fund.

Now, the Alberta sustainability fund, Mr. Chairman, has a history that's notable. It's notable because it was sort of the little brother of the idea of a big, big sustainability fund, and it was brought forward by the previous Member for Lethbridge-East, Dr. Ken Nicol, who is an agricultural economist, when he was Leader of the Official Opposition. Then the idea was actually voted down as a private member's bill but readopted by government and brought into place.

The effect of this amendment, Mr. Chairman, is to guarantee a certain minimum balance in the Alberta sustainability fund. What this would do is it would add a clause after subsection (6) of section 3 that says that if the net assets of the Alberta sustainability fund exceed 2 and a half billion dollars, the excess may be allocated from that fund.

All we're saying here is nothing too radical. We're kind of taking the sustainability fund back to its original form, which is to just keep a minimum amount in the sustainability fund. We think that's a good idea. We think it's prudent. We think it avoids draining things down to zero. It's just a kind of prudent fiscal management that helps this government stay on the straight and narrow and maybe even get us off this roller coaster boom-and-bust economic ride.

I hope people have had a chance to look at the amendment, and I'll encourage and listen for debate. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on amendment A1.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Chairman, amendment A1. I will mark that on my sheet. Certainly, I would like to thank the hon. member for proposing this to the House. I think it's a sound idea during these times. To have a 2 and a half billion dollar amount, as the hon. member described it, as a minimum is certainly prudent. We know where the majority of our government revenue comes from, and we know the volatility that surrounds that revenue stream. Whether we're looking at personal income tax, whether we're looking at corporate income tax, whether we're looking at royalties from conventional crude oil, royalties from synthetic crude, or our natural gas royalties, there is significant volatility.

I would like to point out, Mr. Chairman, and I will use this as an example, that the anticipated revenue the government plans on getting this year from the sale of Crown leases, bonuses and sale of Crown leases – I don't want to use that word "bonus" – is estimated

to be \$631 million, which is significantly less than last year for obvious reasons. But in the three sales that I'm aware of that have occurred so far in this fiscal year, we have realized in bonuses and sales \$6.6 million. That is a far cry and that's so much less than what the government has targeted. Now, that is just an example of the volatility and the assumptions and the sensitivities that this budget relies on.

3:50

For us with Bill 33 to have this \$2.5 billion set aside for emergencies of any type is significant. I'm not convinced; taxpayers are certainly not convinced. In fact, I met with a group yesterday who are very, very concerned about the direction this government is going in. Now, members across the way may not take issue with that. But the individuals I talked to, one ran a small business, one was an MBA working for a major accounting firm, the other ran a medium-sized business whose activity had been significantly reduced since the new year. When that individual tells me that their activity has been reduced, one can only assume that the amount they pay in taxes, whether they're individual taxes or the taxes of their corporation, is going to be less.

The one benefit to those changes in taxes, as I understand it, is that there will be a significant increase in the transfer from the federal government. Earlier, members across the way were making a lot of noise and suggestions that the federal government could come up with an additional \$700 million. I noticed that in the robust times we have just gone through, our Canada transfer was reduced from what they had anticipated by \$700 million. So if there's a silver lining to a storm cloud, it's the fact that with our changes in economic activity there will be a significant increase in the transfer from the federal government. If there is, hopefully, it will be spent wisely, very wisely, by the President of the Treasury Board and those that sit on the board with him.

When we look at this amendment, it's a very sound amendment. As I said before, we know the volatility of our resource revenue stream. We know how the economy is affecting our tax revenues, whether they be personal or corporate income tax. So to have this minimum bank balance, I guess you could call it, I would really encourage hon. members to consider amendment A1.

At this time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 33. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chair, if it's appropriate, I would move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 33. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 27

Alberta Research and Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. Horner]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, with Bill 27 I would like to, first off, express my gratitude to the minister. Earlier in April the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology was kind enough to sit down with myself. He had a few of his staff, very capable individuals, with him, and we had quite a pleasant discussion around this bill. I must say that I appreciated that. I thought about what the hon. minister had said regarding this bill. It's going to enable the government to implement a framework which restructures provincially funded research and innovation organizations by merging 10 existing entities into five new entities: one advisory body and four board-governed provincial corporations.

It sounds fine when you think of the idea that if Bill 27 was to become law, we would sort of have an increased incentive for research and development to occur in this province. The hon. minister, I think – and he'll correct me if I'm wrong, I'm sure – his hope, Mr. Speaker, was to have the Alberta region become a northern version of the Silicon Valley in California, with a lot of research and development and businesses being attracted by the ideas that are being developed and the application of those to the free market. It seemed like a very sound idea, and it may be.

Now, when we talk about the money that would sort of be pooled if this restructuring was to occur, it's a significant amount of money. My research indicates that this would be well in excess of \$2.5 million, including endowment funds. Certainly, when we look at the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute – and I got this information from the 2007-08 annual reports, Mr. Speaker – it's \$4.9 million. Alberta Energy Research Institute is a \$10 million amount. Alberta Forestry Research Institute is a \$3.9 million amount. The Alberta Information and Communications Technology Institute is a \$2.8 million amount. Alberta Life Sciences Institute is \$27.5 million. As I understand it, these five entities operate under the Alberta Science and Research Authority. The amounts are total dollars invested in projects by each institution. Now, with the Alberta Research Council, there's a revenue stream here, a total of \$85.1 million, and iCORE, which is a transfer from Advanced Education and Technology, is 11 and a half million dollars. That's a total of \$145 million. Of course, we've got the big endowment funds. The Alberta heritage foundation for medical research is over \$1.5 billion, the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering research at \$838 million. So it's a significant amount of money.

4:00

You know, there's a certain responsibility with that kind of money. I had thought: well, this is a very good bill. But after I read the Auditor General's report, which also came out in April 2009, the Auditor General had a lot of things to say about some of the organizations, some of the institutions that are under the care and management of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology.

Now, we had a discussion about this at Public Accounts this morning, and I was anticipating quite a detailed discussion among the members and the Auditor General regarding these specific recommendations, but the members had other issues which they

wanted to discuss with the Auditor. When we look at this latest report and we look at this bill and we look at the intentions of the department, I believe we should exercise some caution here. At this time I don't have confidence – maybe in the future I will – that the department will manage these significant amounts. I know I'm going to be told it's an outside board and that it's at arm's length, but the minister and the cabinet, as far as I'm concerned, still call the shots because of their ability to provide the appointments through order in council.

Now, when we look at what the Auditor is flagging, the Auditor is talking about increased fraud risk at some institutions, and he talks specifically about Bow Valley College, an investigation of an alleged fraud. He talks about significant internal control weaknesses at Grant MacEwan College.

Mr. Horner: It's not relevant.

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, yes. I'm sorry, hon. minister. You may not feel it's relevant, but these are all entities that are under, as far as I'm concerned, your direct control. They are an example of how some institutions, not all but some institutions, under your control have been operating. With this bill, if this bill were to become law, there would be a significant increase in the pooled funds, and there will be less control of this by the Legislative Assembly. This arm's-length authority at this time – I'm sorry – I can't go for when I look at what the Auditor General has flagged, not only for us in this Assembly but for taxpayers.

Now, the Auditor indicates that management and the audit committee need good information. Management needs timely, relevant, and accurate financial information to run an institution. Management provides summarized financial information to an institution's audit committee to allow it to effectively oversee and objectively assess the institution's overall performance. Meanwhile with Bill 27 here we're having this arm's-length operation. Now may not be the time for such an initiative. With Bow Valley College we already talked about that. The Auditor also mentions Medicine Hat College and suggests we could "improve its financial reporting to its Board by including – at least quarterly – complete statements of operations, financial position, and changes in net assets."

Grant MacEwan:

To improve the accuracy of financial reports to management and its Audit Committee, Grant MacEwan College should improve its capital asset processes by:

- documenting its assessment of the appropriate accounting treatment for costs for construction and renovation projects.
- improving its processes to code and record transactions accurately the first time.

Grande Prairie Regional College, also under the hon. minister's watch, implemented a similar recommendation to improve its financial reporting. It's good to see that they've listened to the Auditor, and hopefully the minister has been very firm in giving direction that the Auditor certainly be listened to and that his recommendations be implemented. The Alberta College of Art and Design, it is noted here, has not yet implemented a similar recommendation from the Auditor's report from last year.

Mr. Speaker, you can see why I am reluctant to give a ringing endorsement to this proposal. If one was to look at the Auditor's findings and recommendations like a report card, one of your children coming home with a report card, and there were a couple of Cs on it and there was a B and there was only one A, well, I don't think you would give the child a bigger or an expanded allowance.

That's sort of what the direction is here with Bill 27. I've outlined, you know, the consolidation of these funds and the total amount of money, and I'm not satisfied at this time that Advanced

Education and Technology will be able to, whether it's close at hand or at arm's length, ensure that the interests of the taxpayer will be first and foremost.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to join in the debate on Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act. In listening very attentively to the hon. member that just spoke, I can see where he has been quoting things that have happened in the past and may be close to being accurate. However, this is looking into the future.

I'm very excited about the potential of Bill 27 and what it will do as far as research in the province. The bill seeks to encourage a more integrated and aligned approach to research and innovation in order to ensure the province's continued economic prosperity. Furthermore, Bill 27 would support the Premier's vision of a diversified economy by encouraging the growth of new industries through technology commercialization.

I would like to thank the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology as well as his department for the forward-looking thinking this piece of legislation demonstrates. In light of the current global economic uncertainty, making our publicly funded research and innovation activities effective as well as efficient is of paramount concern. When you look at the structure and the openness and the outcome type of setting that this bill creates, I believe that it will attract many more dollars to research, private dollars and not just government dollars.

4:10

Recognizing this, the government has developed the roles and mandates framework for Alberta's provincially funded research and innovation system. The framework seeks to reconfigure the province's research and innovation structure to reduce its complexity as well as to provide improved access and transparency for all participants. It is important to note that this framework was developed with extensive stakeholder consultation in order to make certain it would benefit this valuable part of our economy.

Bill 27 would provide a legislative model for the implementation of this important framework and would allow Alberta to further develop a highly qualified and skilled workforce and to build on our world-class postsecondary institutions. Further to this, it would allow Alberta to attract highly qualified individuals from abroad to advance and develop our research and innovation activities. This would be achieved in part by having a focused, integrated, and aligned research and innovation environment and would help to ensure Alberta's continuing competitive advantage.

The government has shown tremendous leadership in developing a research and innovation structure that reduced redundancies and promotes continued growth in the research and innovation industry. Furthermore, the roles and mandates framework would encourage improved access and transparency for all participants in the industry – Mr. Speaker, if one looks at the business model for the department, we see that this fits right in with goal 3 and goal 4 of the business plan from the department – and it is designed with a governance structure that helps to ensure the responsibilities are made very clear.

Further to this, Bill 27 would allow for the creation of research and innovation entities. These entities would focus on research and innovation in very specific areas, which could include bioindustries, energy and environment, health, and commercial development. The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology would be responsi-

ble for any provincial research and innovation entity created through the regulations. Further to this, the funding model would provide the minister the authority to approve each entity's plan and budgets. This would allow the minister to provide direction and to direct funds that meet the government of Alberta's research and innovation priorities.

The success of the proposed framework would be achieved in part by ensuring the collaboration and co-ordination between the new provincial entities and the government of Alberta ministries. The proposed structure for Alberta's government-funded research and innovation sector would include the establishment of an Alberta research and innovation authority. This body would provide advice to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology pertaining to the strategy and to policy as well as long-term planning. In addition, the bill would create two advisory committees, the Alberta research and innovation committee and the cross-government portfolio advisory committee. The Alberta research and innovation committee would advise the minister with respect to items pertaining to the co-ordination, mandates, and activities of the research and innovation entities whereas the cross-government portfolio advisory committee would provide advice and recommendations pertaining to the funding of the new created provincial entities.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation provides the necessary legislative model to implement the roles and responsibilities framework of Alberta's provincially funded research and innovation system. To this end Bill 27 would ensure the continued effectiveness and efficiency of Alberta's research and innovation activities, and it would further encourage the development and growth of this valuable industry.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have found with the current situation is that we are lacking the openness, the ability to make sure that research is actually being done in areas that really do mean a difference to our economy. Of course, when you're looking for outside money to go along with the government's money, when that money comes in, you're pretty much assured that it's going to be for a project that is going to fit into the improvement of our economy.

One of the issues as well that has been a problem all along: there may be a major development that occurs, but commercializing it hasn't happened in Alberta. It moves outside. Bill 27 will create another entity that will help very much in the commercialization, which is extremely important. Really, we're missing out as a province on some of these things that have been discovered. The research has been done for them only to have it move outside of the province and outside of the country in a lot of cases in order to get the money and the ability to commercialize it.

I would really urge all the people in the Legislature to support this bill. If you have difficulty understanding it, then get a briefing on it and get to understand it. In my opinion, this is a major, major step forward. It'll do nothing but good for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I actually have quite a bit to say on this bill, but I'm just going to try and keep my comments fairly brief in my opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act. I was aware that this act was coming some time ago because I started to have people approach me at public events saying: "We're really concerned. This bill is coming that is going to roll all of the research foundations together. We have real concerns about the effect that that's going to have." As I started to look over the possibilities, I've come to the conclusion that really this is about the politicization of

government-funded research. I think that is a monumental step backwards.

The reason why, Mr. Speaker, is that every now and then this province does something right, something really right. What they did really right here was to create the Alberta heritage fund for medical research and a number of other similarly configured and funded research foundations in Alberta. The uniqueness and the success of what we've seen through the Alberta heritage fund for medical research really inspired me because a couple of years ago – I guess it was the 2004 election – the Alberta Liberals had developed a whole policy about endowment funds as a way of saving and as a way of taking our nonrenewable resource revenue and driving it, directing it into something that would be of benefit to Albertans for many years to come, that that nonrenewable resource revenue would pay off for us for a long, long time.

The model that I looked at as I gave my input to the development of that policy was the Alberta heritage fund for medical research because what they did right here was that they had an independent and peer-respected board that made decisions. They put a good chunk of money into it. That was back in Peter Lougheed's day. Then the previous Premier put another chunk of money towards it. They have managed their finances very well, but they were definitely seen by the scientific and medical research community as arm's length.

4:20

What started to happen is that we created an economic cluster with that medical research foundation, so we started to get other pockets of activity that came to Alberta and came to the Edmonton area because of the work that was being funded through the Alberta heritage fund for medical research. It's odd to think of that as an economic cluster or an economic driver. I don't know. I'm not satisfied, exactly, with that wording of things, but it's the best wording I can come up with at this point to describe what I was seeing.

We were attracting researchers and scientists from across the world because we were giving out serious money. I mean, there's a level of grants that's considered pretty small potatoes, and then there's the kind of middling stuff, and then there's the serious money. If you're a top scientist, researcher in the world, you go where there's big money. We had not a lot of big-money grants to give out, but we had enough to give out some big-money grants.

They attracted some really impressive people here. As they came here, well, of course, they brought their families with them. If I may make a broad, generalized statement, their family members were no academic slouches. We ended up with a whole new group of people moving into Alberta just because we gained the benefit of the researchers and the scientists coming. Then we also ended up with these sort of ancillary businesses that started to spring up to support the research that was being done. So it was a really good model.

Now, what I'm seeing is that this government, as I often note with this government, has not looked far enough into what could be the unintended consequences. I hope these would be unintended consequences because I'd be very unhappy to learn that the government intended to do what I'm about to describe.

What I'm seeing is that this is the politicization, the control of these research foundations. I thought: "Who would come up with such a wacky idea? Why would any group of people decide to do this to something that worked so well?" Guess what? You know, we learn a lot from our families. What I discovered as I started to look around was that these members had looked to their federal cousins and, in fact, are following what we've already seen that their federal Conservative cousins have set up in controlling and politicizing the government-funded research grants on the federal level.

What would be the consequences of this? I started to think: "Okay. Well, if we end up with a politicized and a controlled fund to support scientists and researchers, is it going to reverse what we had? Are we going to stop getting the really, really A-level, gold-plated, prizewinning, blue-ribbon scientists and researchers that we've been able to attract to Alberta? Does that start to reverse itself?" The answer, I think, is yes. From my inquiries to people that are around in this sector, I'm being told that there is no indication that there will even be a competition this fall for new positions and that recruitment and replacement is essentially sliding to a halt.

You can understand why that would happen. If there's uncertainty, everybody tends to stop. We see that around election cycles. You know, we get six months out from an election cycle, and everything starts to sort of slow down in the departments because nobody knows who's going to be their political master, and they don't want to make big moves that they're going to get criticized for. Everybody just slows down until they know what's going to happen. We are definitely seeing that here.

I'm hearing that, indeed, there's a real question about the independence of the board to make the tough decisions that they have been able to make, that has been a critical piece of the success of that particular foundation that I'm highlighting. I mean, there's a very definitive time-sensitive consequence to all of this because they have an independent review every five years by international experts. [interjection] I don't know. I don't think the minister is going to be so happy about what could be coming out of that one. You can jig that. You know, you can have the right people in place and put them in place for the five years, you get your passing check mark, and then you pull the whole thing apart. That's certainly quite possible, and I've seen that happen in other situations. But it's darn hard to rebuild the next time you're coming around to that five-year review.

That's what I see has happened, and I've taken quite a bit of time already to describe it. I'll be very interested in reviewing a sort of sectional analysis and reviewing some more of the information I've been able to dig up about this when I'm able to speak in Committee of the Whole.

At this point I know there's some interest in moving on, so, Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of Bill 27 at this point.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. McFarland]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, I think has some things to commend it. I look forward to an extensive discussion in committee. The bitumen royalty in kind mechanism that it proposes I think is worth a serious look. We've discussed that with the minister, and we've done some thinking through on that ourselves. There will be, undoubtedly, some questions around the orphan well funding, the extra \$30 million, I believe, this allocates for orphan wells and larger sites than that. But our general sense of this is that this is a bill that probably needs to make its way through.

So I call the question on Bill 28. [interjection] No. Sorry. I misspoke. Some day I would like to call the question on Bill 28 – that's what I meant to say – but not right now. I'll take my seat, and I think others may want to speak.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for introducing my opportunity to speak very briefly to this bill in second reading. I've not had a chance to look through it in a great deal of detail, so I, too, look forward to the opportunity to discuss it further in third reading.

However, in first review of it, we do have some concerns with respect to the objectives being sought through this bill and the many amendments that it makes. It does appear to include a number of provisions for removing the need for an order in council and the subsequent report to the Legislature of same where permits and licences are being amended either in the coal sector or in the oil and gas sector by, in some cases, the ERCB or otherwise.

This is a concern because it's part of an ongoing pattern with this government to move more stuff from legislation to regulation and then more stuff from regulation to policy, and the more that's done, the less we're able to keep track of how things are and the less opportunity we have to debate it. Of course, that's particularly interesting as the nature of the changes are no longer considered regulatory. It will of course have some implications in relation to the upcoming Bill 36 and the legal nature of certain provisions that will be created through the operation of that act. So I think that there are some pretty significant consequences to this.

4:30

Generally speaking, this is an act that is designed to support the government's energy strategy that was released in December. Without getting into a great deal of detail, our caucus has a significant number of concerns with respect to that strategy as it was introduced, the first of which is that, like many other things that we've talked about over the last several months, it lacks detail. Also, in terms of the detail that we do have, it is a strategy that is premised on the notion that the primary focus of our economic development, our innovation efforts, our postsecondary education system, and our approach to renewable energy – it assumes that the fossil fuel industry is the primary vehicle for all good fortune in the province for at least 30 years. It very clearly trivializes the role that government needs to play with respect to the development of a renewable sector much, much sooner than 30 years from now. So, frankly, any piece of legislation that supports that very vague but concerning provincial energy strategy is one about which we also have concerns.

This bill will also of course allow for the notion of bitumen being received as an in-kind royalty. Although our caucus has talked at great length for some time now about the need for the province to take more clear action to compel bitumen to be upgraded in the province to create more jobs here, it's not our view that this is the mechanism that is most fair to Albertans, who are the owners of the resource. In fact, we need to be increasing the amount of money we get from these companies, and we need to be limiting the amount of bitumen that ultimately can be sent down the ever-growing number of pipelines which are being built as we speak. Of course, as we know, while the economy is slowing down, one thing that's not slowing down is the efforts being made to expand the capacity of our southern neighbours to receive our bitumen and process it there.

I think there's a lot more debate that needs to be had on this bill and the overall strategy that the government tends to adopt to the extent that there is any strategy inherent, ultimately, in how our energy resources are developed and managed for the benefit of Albertans. I'm not sure that there is, but if there is any, we certainly need to have a greater discussion on that, so I look forward to the opportunity to hear more from the government about how this bill supports their strategy and what the details are around that strategy.

I look forward at that time to having further discussion about our response to all of that.

I thank the Assembly for giving me the opportunity to speak to this bill in second reading. I assume we will now call the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member wish to speak?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

Bill 44

Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 29: Mr. Blackett]

The Deputy Speaker: Like the Speaker said earlier, we have a cameraman here to film those who speak today.

I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad for the opportunity to rise in second reading and speak as the Official Opposition critic for the Liberal caucus to Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. This is certainly expected to be a controversial bill, mostly because the government started into this, I think, for a good reason, to correct some administrative process and procedural problems with the way the Human Rights Commission was actually operating. As they should and, in fact, should have, in 1998 they were going to have the act opened to add in the definition of sexual orientation under the prohibited grounds of discrimination under our Human Rights Act. Then I don't know what happened, but they started to clean out the fridge and added a whole bunch of other things in here that are certainly going to make for an interesting debate.

So let me say right from the get-go that I and a number of the people that I represent and many others that are not my constituents are very glad to see the inclusion of sexual orientation under prohibited grounds of discrimination. This has been a long-running embarrassment and sore thorn in our side in the way we look at ourselves and in the way others look at us in Alberta. As a result of a case that started here in Alberta with the Delwin Vriend case, the Supreme Court ruled that we must include, we must extend protection to those who have been discriminated against on the grounds of sexual orientation, particularly as it applies in employment, housing, and access to government programs and services.

The Supreme Court at the time was actually pretty prescient and kind of thought they might have some trouble with this government, and they insisted that not only would they tell the government that they needed to do this, but they would actually insist that the legislation be read as though the grounds were actually written in, and in fact that has happened in the last period of time. Those who approached the Human Rights Commission with a complaint around discrimination based on sexual orientation have in fact had their cases taken up by our commission here in Alberta. But for those that didn't know and went and got the act out and read it, there was nothing in there to tell them that they, in fact, had protection under those prohibited grounds – nothing – because it had not actually been written into our act.

So thank you for finally putting that into the act. It was long past time, but I'm still glad that you did it. It should be there. I think it's a real indicator of our Canadian society and Albertan society that we do understand and value that there is a diversity of people and that it's important to us as citizens that we offer protection to people

from discrimination and, further than that, we take a step further in that we offer the services of the Human Rights Commission on their behalf for that.

There are also a number of administrative matters that are being dealt with in this act, and that's things like the name. When the act got changed a while back, they added citizenship and multiculturalism, so what had been the Alberta Human Rights Act now became the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, which also sort of made it a bit confusing about what was actually going on and who was supposed to be served by this legislation. So this is proposing that there be some clarity and removes the references to citizenship and multiculturalism.

As we led up to this bill being tabled in the House, the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit was very active in the media, and so were many others in trying to figure out what was going to be in the legislation. Part of the questions at the time were: who did you consult? Who did you actually talk to about what was going to go into this act? At various times we got various answers from the minister, a whole long list of people that were consulted, although others have come back to me since then and said: boy, if that was a consultation, never seen it done that way before. I think that there is some question there about whether groups actually were asked what they wanted to see in the act and what they didn't and whether in fact there was a two-way communication there.

4:40

One of the groups that the minister repeatedly referred to was the Sheldon Chumir foundation for ethics. Of course, we're very proud in the Liberal caucus that Sheldon Chumir was an elected member in our caucus for many years in this Assembly, has been a great citizen for Alberta, and has given us a great example and, in fact, a great legacy with the ethics foundation that carries his name. The foundation did a very thorough consultation, and the minister seemed very happy to take that consultation as his own.

It was interesting reviewing what the Sheldon Chumir foundation actually recommended happen with the review, opening up, and amending of the human rights act and what the minister took and what he didn't take. They did in fact recommend some things like changing the name. They made a number of recommendations about how the commission actually worked, and there have been some suggestions on streamlining that administrative process, clarifying the functions, renaming the commissioners as tribunal-less, severing the position of the executive director on the government side, who's actually the same person as the director of the commission – those were actually the same individual, so you could argue that there was a conflict of interest there – enabling a paper review, enabling the chief of the commission and the tribunals to delegate reviews and appoint panels, restrictions limiting the director's authority. The government has done a number of those things. So let me give credit to the government for what it has done right.

Here's the rub. You know, in 12 years in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that there have been very many bills that I could just jump behind and say: yahoo; let's go lock, stock, and barrel. This government always seems to like to present a difficulty. Usually where I start to have trouble is in examining both the intended and the unintended consequences of the legislation that they propose. Here we have a number of things that I am very eager to support in the legislation, and that is complicated by the other things that the government has included in this legislation. Of course, number one under that is section 11.1. That appears in the bill as the bill's section 9, but it's amending section 11.1 of the actual act. It's essentially allowing a parental opt-out.

Now, let me be clear here – and most people would have already heard this – that we already have a system in Alberta through the

School Act where parents can ask to be notified when certain subjects or issues come up in a teaching classroom situation, and they can give written notification to request that their child is given an alternate instruction module and is not engaged in the classroom instruction for those particular subjects. So we already had a process in place. But what this act does, Bill 44, is it actually takes something that, as we know, is operational now and falls under the School Act and drops it into the middle of the human rights act. So, one, that's an inappropriate place to have it. I'm just going to read this so everyone knows what I'm talking about. Section 11.1(1) says:

A board as defined in the School Act shall provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act include subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.

A school is now under some requirement, if this act passes, to identify again to parents what might be considered – and I listed all those things – essentially, subject matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation. Then you start to get into a description of how you consider the word “religion.” How is that going to be defined? Who does the defining of that? I don't understand why the government waded into this one, but I've been told repeatedly, and I guess we'll hear from other speakers, that this was a compromise, that it was a political compromise. In order to get the sexual orientation written into the act, this was the political compromise. This section would be inserted to satisfy what some other members of the caucus wish to have. Okay? That's what I'm told. We have lots of opportunity for others to talk about this.

It goes on, and in section (2) it talks about:

Where a teacher or other person providing instruction, teaching a course of study or educational program or using the instructional materials referred to in [the previous section] receives a written request signed by a parent or guardian of a student that the student be excluded from the instruction, course of study, educational program or use of instructional materials, the teacher or other person shall in accordance with the request . . . and without academic penalty permit the student . . .

And it goes on to say, basically, to either leave the classroom or be given something else to do while they sit in the class.

The problem that arises out of this is: what do you do about teaching and instructional opportunities – what they call teachable moments – that arise in the normal give-and-take of a classroom day? What is a teacher supposed to do? Do they stop teaching completely, not take advantage of the opportunity to explore something, a particular issue, because it might be interpreted by some parent or guardian as being subject matter that is dealing explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation? How do you make that call in the middle of your teaching day?

Alternatively, the teachers under the School Act are actually given instructions about how to engage students and to take that opportunity, to seize upon those opportunities to find a way to help students come to – and I'm going to quote here. This is from the Sheldon Chumir document. Article 26(2)

stipulates that education is to “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.”

They say:

It is difficult to see how withdrawing children from material which one religious group finds objectionable gives those students the tools to come to understand, tolerate or find friendship with people who differ from them on religious or other grounds.

Excellent point.

There's a situation being created with this legislation that, one, puts a tremendous burden on the teacher in the classroom, avoids opportunities that are amazing opportunities to teach students how to move forward in our increasingly diverse world. Further to that,

following up on my questions to the minister, a number of questions in question period in this House, it's clear that that section can be used by parents and guardians to bring a human rights case against a teacher, a school, a principal, a school board based on the situation that's described there. So now we have a situation. How about that for putting a chill on instruction and on a teacher?

Mr. MacDonald: Who would pay for the legal fees?

Ms Blakeman: Well, it's a good question. Human rights is not a simple process anymore. It's quite complex. You do end up with both sides often incurring a number of fees, including legal fees. So what kind of a chill do we put on our teachers to say: “Whoa. Be careful. Any time anything comes up that could be construed as being explicitly religious, sexual, or around sexual orientation, don't go there, or you could have a human rights case brought against you, which will cost you time and money.”

When I tried to press the minister responsible and say: “Okay. Well, if you're so sure this isn't going to happen, are you going to pick up the legal fees for any teacher that this happens to?” “Oh, well, it's not going to happen,” he said. This is part of, I hope, the unintended consequences but, I suspect, intended consequences of what's in section 11.1

4:50

Certainly, the school boards have reacted fairly vehemently around that and there have been joint media releases from the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association – I'm sorry; I don't even know all these initials here – the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and the Alberta School Councils' Association. They are talking about the chilling effect that legislation will have in the classrooms, the onus on the school to now send out even more notification to parents of how and when a controversial issue might be caught up. But isn't that exactly what we need? When there's a controversial issue, don't we need all of those students to be talking and thinking about this so they come to some kind of understanding about the society that we have and that we can move forward in?

The government has spent – I don't know how much – \$25 million rebranding this province's image. I'm constantly being told: it's all about Alberta's diversity. Really? Well, I guess it's about Alberta's diversity but minus anything that might have to do with a subject matter that's explicitly religious, sexual, or around sexual orientation. How is that more diverse? How is that moving forward, you know, in this new millennium of ours? It's not. It's taking us backwards. For some reason this caucus has decided on a political compromise that is literally one step forward and at least one step back and, I think many will argue, more than one step back. Obviously, I don't approve of that section.

There is a lot of information that is out there now, and I really encourage people that are listening to this on the video streaming or reading *Hansard* to follow up with this.

A couple of other points I want to make before my time is over here on a couple of things that were not included in this that I think should have been. One of the issues is that there is no mention of gender identity. The definition of that and the understanding of where gender identity sits in our culture is a complex one and is hard for some people to deal with, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't deal with it. We should. The funding for gender reassignment surgery has now been cut by the minister of health, so there's even less support and understanding. Maybe these two things are linked and are consequential or sequential and are deliberate actions by the government. I don't know. But we have no recognition of gender

identity in this act. I think this was an opportunity to add it in, and it should be added in. We don't get these human rights acts opened up very often, and we should do the right work when we have the opportunity.

The Sheldon Chumir foundation had recommended as well – and I'll just read recommendation 12 – that aboriginal heritage “be added as an expressly illegal ground of discrimination in the Alberta human rights legislation.” They develop a very solid argument about that, appearing on pages 29 and 30 of the document that they released, *Toward Equal Opportunity for all Albertans: Recommendations for Improvement of the Alberta Human Rights Commission*.

The other issue that was not included and I think should have been is the concept of workplace bullying. The government seemed to have had a fairly firm grasp of childhood bullying, schoolyard bullying. The concepts are the same; they're just happening between older groups of people. They have programs that they run in their children's services section. They had a whole summit or one of those things they have – a round-table, a summit, a forum, a consultation, stakeholder something or other – that was chaired by the now minister of finance, the then minister of children's services, which was an excellent and very far-ranging exploration of the issues that are affecting children, especially around violence. Bullying is considered an issue of violence, especially for children.

So here we have an opportunity to add that into the human rights act. I get a lot of complaints in my office around that issue. There is no mechanism for people to take an issue like a workplace bullying issue to the Human Rights Commission because it's not protected grounds.

Also, very curious, suggested by the Sheldon Chumir again and not in this act – and I'm looking forward to the debate from government members as to why that choice was made – is the recommendation that we revert to the 1996 wording around hate propaganda and dissemination of material that encourages or may incite hatred towards an identifiable group. It was not put into this legislation, and I'm very interested to hear why the choice was made to not do that. I'll tell you that the media and a number of others strongly encouraged it.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to a vigorous debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The chair has received indication from the hon. members for Airdrie-Chestermere, Edmonton-Strathcona, Calgary-Nose Hill, and Calgary-Egmont to speak.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand in this House today and speak to Bill 44, the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. It's quite a mouthful. I wish to address what I believe is one of the most positive and meaningful advances for human rights that this province and this country has seen in many years. I refer to section 11.1 of this proposed legislation, or, as it is better known, the parental rights clause. This section, in accordance with article 26(3) of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights enshrines as a human right a parent's right to choose whether or not their child shall be taught controversial subject matter that may offend their family's most personal and closely held beliefs. Specifically, this refers to curriculum that explicitly teaches religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud the minister and the Premier for making the inclusion of this parental rights provision possible, but I also want to express the pride that I feel in being a member of this government caucus. Although the members of this government

caucus are as diverse in opinion as the communities and people that they represent, I can say without reservation that we all understand that there is no institution, program, or initiative, government-led or otherwise, that is more essential to the future prosperity of this province than our committed parents and strong families.

Too often, Mr. Speaker, we allow the fluid and fuzzy boundaries of political correctness to cloud our political discourse surrounding what is truly critical to bettering our society. We have no shortage of government programs and solutions for every conceivable criminal activity, every health challenge, every mental health issue, every instance of poverty and hardship, and, indeed, many of these government programs and initiatives are important and must be continued. However, facts are stubborn things, and the facts are that the most effective antidotes against crime, poverty, and virtually any other social ill are caring parents working together to build loving, safe, and financially stable homes where their children are able to learn and grow into contributing members of society.

Mr. Speaker, the day that we lose sight of this truth, the day that we undermine the central and critical role of parents and family in the fabric of our society is the first day of the decline of this province and of this country. Committed and thoughtful parenting is the key to positively shaping the lives of our next generation for the better, and there is no more effective parental arrangement than a committed mother and father working side by side for the benefit of their child. There is an absolutely overwhelming body of social science evidence demonstrating beyond any reasonable doubt that children living in traditional intact families – a mom, a dad, and a child – when compared to any other family arrangement are on average less likely to be suspended from school, less likely to use illegal drugs and other harmful substances, less likely to commit minor property crime, less likely to engage in violent behaviour and violent crime, and are less likely to be the victims of various kinds of abuse. They are, on the other hand, more likely to graduate high school and go on to university and more likely to earn more income.

As we all know, not all families remain intact. Tragedy and misfortune are part of the human experience, and marriage breakups are not uncommon. Such circumstances are not easy for anyone involved, especially children, but when these instances do occur, how can anyone overlook the need for the heroic efforts of single parents, grandparents, step-parents, adoptive parents, and foster parents in picking up the pieces and guiding the involved children through what is for them a time of much confusion, heartache, and oftentimes financial difficulty? In these difficult circumstances it is the sacrifice and devotion of these parents that is all that stands between a child having a fighting chance at success in life and an almost complete guarantee of failure.

5:00

I personally think of the orphanage in China that my adopted baby sister came to our family from. My heart breaks when I think that had my parents not stepped forward to fill that parental gap, the happy little girl with the bright future that I know and love today would never have known safety and security and would never have known parental love. The fact is that she would likely have been consigned to a life of poverty, loneliness, and unspeakable choices.

Parenting matters. There is no position, there's no career, there's no job that matters more to the life of a child. By extension, there is no job that is more important to our society. Government programs no matter how effectively implemented, teachers no matter how well qualified, social workers no matter how well intended are simply unable to replace the role of parents in the life of a child. Why is this so? Well, simply put, it is due to the unique and special bond that exists between a parent and child that allows a parent to know their child better than anyone else possibly could.

My wife, Anita, and I have four boys. There's no one in this world that cares for those boys more than we do. There's no one that understands those boys better than we do. We know how each one learns and what motivates them. We know what values they live by because we taught them those values. In fact, we can already see some of the challenges that they will inevitably have to face, and we are preparing them to meet those challenges. There is no educational course of study that could possibly teach any individual what Anita and I know about our sons. Because we know them so well and because their welfare is the only agenda our feelings for them will permit, does it not follow that we as parents are in by far the best position to determine what is and is not in their best interest?

Now, we have laws that ensure that there is a basic standard of care that any parent or guardian must adhere to, and these laws are very important to maintain, of course. However, these laws merely attempt to guarantee that each child will be given a blank canvas upon which to paint his life's work. The first small brush strokes of that painting are best guided by the steady hand of a caring and experienced parent in the hopes that that child one day can be taught to paint a masterpiece. Hopefully, these first few critical brush strokes include a parent instilling in their child the first understandings of a value-based system of morality and ethics to promote and reinforce healthy and positive decision-making.

Oftentimes this system of time-honoured virtues is based on a specific religion. Other times it's based on traditional societal values or natural law or just good, old-fashioned common sense. Whatever the source of that value system, it is often very sensitive and personal to both the parent and the child, and so it should be. What use is a system of values that cannot or is unable to positively mould behaviour in any meaningful way? I would ask: if we expect, as we should, parents to teach their children positive values on which each child can build a successful future, should we not as a society respect the right of a parent to teach those values in the home without having them explicitly countered in our schools without parental consent? I say that we do owe parents that respect. I say that we owe children that respect.

Now, of course, lines must be drawn. Logistically it is impossible to burden our education system with the necessity to cater to every possible parental educational preference. However, is it not reasonable to commit to the parents of this province that with regard to their and their child's most personal and sensitive core beliefs, it is they, the parents, that will have the final say as to whether and how such subjects are taught to their children? I would submit that it is not only reasonable for parents to expect this; I would submit that it is their human right to expect this.

Mr. Speaker, that is what this proposed parental rights provision is all about. It is about recognizing the unmatched bond of commitment that exists between a parent and child, it is about affirming that it is within this relationship that a moral code of conduct is most appropriately taught, and it is about guaranteeing for each parent that it is they and no one else who will be ultimately responsible for what values are taught to their child.

It has been well said that the people we influence in a positive way constitute the real and lasting monuments of our lives. For most of us the people we are best positioned and best equipped to influence in a positive way are our children. Mr. Speaker, the day this bill becomes law will mark a special day for this province and for this country. It is a victory for human rights, it is a victory for parents and children, it is a victory for this province, and it is something that we can all be very proud of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. The hon. member quoted the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. I would like to know why with this particular piece of legislation the hon. member feels that it applies, yet it does not apply whenever we're dealing with issues around children's services or issues around migratory workers who come to work in Alberta's farms and factories.

Mr. Anderson: I fail to see how we got from parental rights in child education to children's services. I don't know what the member is speaking about, what specific policy he may be speaking about. I would be happy to discuss that with him, but he'll have to be a little bit more specific on what in the world he is talking about.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that in this Assembly we have heard many outstanding comments from members. Every now and then you take a set of those comments home from *Hansard* and publish them for your community. I will be proud to do that with the comments made by Airdrie-Chestermere today, well acquitted and clearly identifying why his community is so proud of his representation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. I could feel the passion and the eloquence in the comments from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere though it doesn't mean I necessarily agree with him. My question to the point is: why does the member feel that the ability of a parent to take their child out of a classroom needs to be put into the human rights legislation when it's already in the School Act? Why this extra step?

Mr. Anderson: Well, it's partly symbolic. There's no doubt about that. It's about recognizing the special relationship that exists between a parent and child. But it is also practical. If I look to our neighbours in British Columbia, there is no doubt that right now there is a movement under way to take that very right that parents have in British Columbia away from them so that they cannot opt their children out of these specific courses. So I think that it's important to enshrine that in this legislation.

It's important that we as Albertans don't look at this as a step backward. It certainly is not. I mean, I respect the Member for Edmonton-Centre's comments about us being a diverse province, and I agree with her. It is just absolutely important that we show that principle to all Albertans and to all Canadians. But are we not diverse enough, are we not tolerant enough that we can allow for a parent that has a different viewpoint on the way their religion might be taught in school or with regard to an issue that is very sensitive around sexuality and such? Are we not diverse enough, are we not comfortable enough in our own skin that there's room in our society for those types of people, or are we so worried about hurting people's feelings and being politically correct that we would effectively stamp on that person's closely held personal beliefs? I think that we are big enough and we are diverse enough and we are tolerant enough to accept the rights of all members of society, whether we agree with them or not. So that's why I think that it's important to have this in the legislation.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member: what extra resources will be needed in public schools to enforce the amendment to the School Act?

Mr. Anderson: Well, I would say that that's a better question, of course, for the Minister of Education, but my guess would be: not very much if at all. As is stated, it is right now government policy, School Act policy, Department of Education policy that parents can opt can their kids out. The only difference is now parents will have to be notified in advance of those few tiny subjects, say a course in religious curriculum and such. They will be notified and have a chance to opt out of that. That's the only difference.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, now we are back to the bill, and I have a list of people who indicated to me that they wish to speak on the bill: the members for Edmonton-Strathcona, Calgary-Nose Hill, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Calgary-Egmont, Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to finally have an opportunity to speak at more length about this issue. I won't go so far as to say that I'm pleased at the opportunity because I think that the fact that this bill is coming into this House today is, in my view, very disturbing to me as a member of this Assembly, and in some ways, you know, I'm quite sad today, actually, that I need to be in the House outlining the significant concerns that exist around elements of this piece of legislation.

What should be a time for a significant portion of Albertans to celebrate a long-awaited symbolic recognition of their equality has instead turned into this debate, which, in my view, undermines the impression of Albertans to the rest of the world, undermines our own collective commitment to education and to diversity and to a full, thoughtful discussion of things, and ultimately undermines the very new right which we are in the process of being about to recognize.

Let me just talk a little bit about that. Obviously, the key issue with respect to this bill is section 11, and that's, of course, the part of the bill that would allow parents to have their children opt out of instruction that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation. It is this particular section which, in my view, represents a very dark day in the history of this province.

Let me talk first about the issue with respect to religion. Now, I respect the right of parents to choose what religious instruction their children will or will not receive. Personally, I would prefer to see a system where all children were given a very neutral survey course on what different types of religion look like. That's my personal belief of what would represent the most enlightened approach to educating my children. But I understand that my belief is not everyone's belief, and I appreciate that some people feel very strongly that they don't want their children's religious instruction that they receive at home and their beliefs – it goes beyond just instruction – to be challenged in the school setting, and that's fine.

Section 50 of the School Act deals with that issue. It deals with that already. The School Act talks about education. The School Act talks about parents' rights in relation to their children's education. The School Act talks about that whole milieu. It is not necessary to put that provision into the human rights code. The human rights code is not a document designed to undermine the very rights which are included in the human rights code. It is not a document designed to, as the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talked about, bow to every different person's version of what is politically correct today or tomorrow or the next day. It is a set of rights that we presumably all agree all people have. So I'm very concerned about muddying the waters with a statement that we are prepared to undermine some of those rights in certain circumstances.

Now, I'll talk a little bit about how it is I believe we're doing that, but I want to just stay for a moment on the issue of religious instruction. One of the problems with putting this into the human

rights code and taking it out of the School Act is that you make it a human right, and with that comes a whole slew of legal consequences and implications. It allows for a broad range of interpretive efforts to be applied to it. What we're putting in it right now could be amended through a great deal of litigation in the future, and because it's an active right which is found in the code, it will be treated differently than what's in the School Act, which is essentially an administrative provision.

Right now in our schools what theoretically happens is if religious instruction – and, of course, the School Act only talks about religious instruction. The School Act does not allow parents to pull their kids because somebody talks about the dreaded sexual orientation. Let's just say for a moment we're talking about the issue of religion. If religion is brought up, the family needs to get notice. Well, that's fine. What does the notice ultimately look like? At the beginning of the year, can the school board say: from time to time in grade 12 the social studies curriculum will call on the teacher to engage in discussions that will cover issues that may cover religion, that may cover theories of evolution, that may cover philosophical discussions that have implications for certain religions, which may cover the concept of, for instance, gender equity and gender equality? If they give that notice, is that enough? Can the parent then simply provide the notice to the teacher, and then every time those issues come up in the teaching moments that we've talked so much about, the teacher just says to the child: you have the option now to leave the room because we're talking about these issues. Is that the way it would work?

Well, now that it's in the human rights code, it is entirely possible that the parents would be able to go and say: "Well, this right that you're giving me is meaningless if it's administered this way, so in fact what you need to do is give me notice every time it's going to happen. You've got to give me dates. You've got to give me content. You've got to give me written curriculum because otherwise this right that you've now given me in the human rights code of my province is meaningless." That's what happens when you put it in the code. So then suddenly we create chaos.

Alternatively they can turn around and say: "You've given me this right, but in my exercising this right, my child has to now sit in the hall playing with his DS or something like that. In effect my child is being discriminated against now because I cannot crystalize or act upon my right that is in the code without otherwise adversely impacting my child by making him or her sit in the hall. Therefore, you've breached my right, so you need to actually come up with a whole new way to teach my child during the time that that education's going on."

With all of these things, this is not trying to create a panic. This is not trying to blow it up beyond what it is. It's not. This is the kind of thing that happens when you put a new right into the human rights code, and let's just be clear: this is a new right that we are putting into the human rights code. There is no other human rights code in the country that has this right embedded in the code. It is embedded elsewhere, not in the human rights code. This is the kind of chaos that we will create.

Then, of course, the other thing is that under the School Act it is not necessarily the case that the teacher would become the subject, a respondent in a human rights commission hearing. The teacher would not necessarily become compelled to defend their course of study, defend the way in which the particular issue came up in the class. They wouldn't under the School Act. They will now, another consequence of putting it into the human rights code.

5:20

Again, for the member opposite, this is not a symbolic change. This is a substantive change. It is a change that is going to signifi-

cantly limit the way teachers approach their job in the classroom. I have numerous friends who are high school teachers, who are high school social studies teachers, who are high school English teachers, who are high school science teachers. The teaching moment is a critical way in which they engage their students in critical debate in order to bring about a truly meaningful education. That process will be limited by this substantive provision which is now, for the first time in the history of this country, proposed as a human rights provision.

In short, what we are going to do is we are going to not just protect the rights of that one child to have certain things kept away from them in the school setting, but also while we do it, we are setting up a system that for every other child whose parent does want them to get a balanced education, to hear both sides of every story, to engage in a thoughtful debate, those children's rights will ultimately be impeded because of the natural chilling effect that will arise from this being an element of the human rights code.

I don't have a lot of time left yet, so I want to go on to the issue of where I think we are in effect creating a second tier, a second-class set of human rights in our human rights code. Once again, I believe we are leading the way in the country in our efforts to create a set of second-class human rights. Without this act being in place, thanks to the Supreme Court of Canada, gay and lesbian Albertans enjoy the same protection under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as gay and lesbian people across the rest of the country. That's because, as we all know, the Supreme Court of Canada insists that the right to protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is in effect read into our code.

Of course, we were hoping to actually have it written into the code to create a symbolic victory. Unfortunately, now what we're doing is that we are saying: we're going to write it in there, but then we're going to treat it just a little bit differently. In our human rights code we say that people cannot be discriminated against on the basis of their race, on the basis of their colour, on the basis of their gender. This is a long list of prohibited grounds. We are now about to add sexual orientation in writing to that list of prohibited grounds. Of course, as we know, it has already been read in there by the courts, but we're going to actually put it in writing. Yay for us.

Then, through section 11, we're going to treat that prohibited ground differently from all the other prohibited grounds because some people think that parents need to have the right to recognize the personal and sensitive core beliefs that they need to massage and parent their kids with. Apparently, we as parents need to be able to shelter our children from one of the prohibited grounds in the human rights code of this province. We're not giving parents the opportunity to exclude their children from instruction on other races. We're not giving parents the legal opportunity to exclude their children from instruction on other cultures. We are not giving parents the legal opportunity to exclude their children from instruction on other genders. But we are going to give parents the legal opportunity to exclude their children from discussion about sexual orientation. What that says to me is that we are treating it differently.

While the Supreme Court of Canada had told us we couldn't treat it differently, now we are going to say: we are treating it differently. That is why I am so offended by this piece of legislation. After 11 years of ignoring the Supreme Court of Canada's direction that we write in that sexual orientation is a prohibited ground for discrimination, we're going to write it in, and then we're going to qualify it, and we're going to treat them differently from other minorities within the province. To me that is deeply, deeply disturbing, and I think we should be very, very embarrassed.

Now, at the end of the day, you know, there has been lots of talk about: oh, well, the School Act already allows them to do that.

Well, as I say, the School Act talks about religious and patriotic instruction, and the school policy talks about sexuality. But this is not about sexuality. This is about some people are disabled, some people are brown, some people are women, some people are gay. That's all it is. Our children should learn that they should all be treated equally, and our schools should not under any circumstances refrain from telling all kids that because if it's in our human rights code, presumably we believe it too.

That is where we are left with all of this. As I have said, it is very, very concerning to me that we are embarking upon a path to, first of all, limit the breadth of discussion and intellectual curiosity within our schools through a mechanism that will put a chilling effect on our teachers and at the same time create a second tier of human rights in the province.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Seeing none, now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on the subject of Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. This bill would ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, as dictated by our Supreme Court of Canada in the Vriend decision, it would also streamline the procedures under which the act is administered, and it also includes a provision on parental rights. Section 9 of Bill 44 states that

a board as defined in the School Act shall provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act include subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.

Parents would have the option, if they so chose, to have their children moved from the classroom or not participate while those topics were being discussed or covered. This section is intended to protect parents' choice to not expose their children to religious or moral beliefs that are contradictory to their own belief system. It is a right that is presently found in more or less the same manner in our School Act.

Mr. Speaker, the meaning of section 9 of the bill and its possible ramifications for teaching various classroom subjects has been the topic of much conjecture, surmise, speculation, and so on in the public, in the press, and by members of the opposition during question period in this House. The conjecture has centred around the fact that some could interpret the so-called parental rights clause in such a manner that a student might be excused from the teaching of various aspects of history or biology or evolution.

The rhetoric has been inflammatory in the extreme. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked: "Will Holocaust deniers be able to claim religious grounds to prevent their children from learning about the Holocaust?" The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity asked: "What is the justification for allowing our universal public education system to be held hostage by the social conservatives?" The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona asked: "Why has the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit proposed policy that allows a parent who believes in the subordination of women on religious grounds to interfere with a young girl learning about her democratic rights?" A comparison has also been made to the so-called Scopes monkey trial of the teacher, John Scopes, who defied a Tennessee law banning the teaching of evolution.

Mr. Speaker, in my respectful submission, all of this is hyperbolic conjecture and nonsense. There is nothing in this bill that prohibits

the teaching of evolution or which puts it within the ambit of dealing explicitly with religion. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, the sponsor of the bill, stood in this House during question period and refuted the narrow view of that clause. Mr. Speaker, if the hypothetical ramifications of this provision as posited by members of the opposition and certain members of the press were justified, I can say without hesitation, without equivocation that I would not be supporting it. If it allowed parents or students to opt out of a curriculum dealing with evolution or biological sciences, I could not vote for this. If it denied all students the opportunity of learning about the Holocaust or any part of world history, I would not vote for it either.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, as a former professor of biology I'd like to make a few remarks and some comments about evolution. The theory of evolution is quite simply an integral part of biology, the science of life. Life sciences are of great value to our society. They should be taught as part of the curriculum in all Alberta schools to all students.

The theory of evolution was elaborated by Charles Darwin in his publication *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in the year 1859, 150 years ago. He and his contemporary Alfred Russel Wallace identified the driving force behind evolution, natural selection. Darwin observed that within a population of living organisms of the same species, individual variability of traits occurs. Darwin believed that the offspring derived characteristics from each of their parents and that this variability of traits could give the possessor either an advantage or a disadvantage in survival and in reproduction in a particular environment. Of course, the exact mechanisms of genetics and the structure of DNA would not be known for a hundred years after Darwin.

Mr. Speaker, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the theory of evolution is central to the understanding of all biological sciences, and biological sciences touch our lives and our society in a myriad of ways, including, to name just a few, animal and plant genetics, livestock breeding, crop improvements, pest control, human health, food safety, medicine, antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals, vaccination, and disease control.

Evolution is often referred to as a theory, Mr. Speaker, but it is not simply an unproven, hypothetical theory as we might use that term in everyday parlance. When somebody dies violently, we might have a theory or a supposition as to the cause of death or a theory as to who caused the death, but when we speak of a theory in science, we mean something more substantive, that is testable.

The theory of evolution is based on scientific principles. It has been observed and tested repeatedly in both natural and laboratory settings and has been found to be sound, reliable, and repeatable. The process of evolution has been demonstrated and revealed by research in diverse fields, including paleontology, geology, taxonomy, biogeography, animal behaviour, and especially by genetics and the ability to read the genome of man and other living creatures.

With advances in technology and our ability to read the genetic code of viruses, we are now able for the first time to see evolution occurring virtually in real time as genetic sequences in influenza viruses change slightly from one population to the next. Flu viruses, with their rapid replication, quickly mutate their form into another strain. This happens frequently and makes tracking of specific strains of viruses extremely important. This is the reason why, when we get our flu vaccine every year, there are usually three new strains of flu covered in our vaccine. Scientists have observed the prevalence and the spread of new flu strains in the spring and are able to prepare vaccinations based on their genetic makeup for the following fall flu season. The H1N1 flu outbreak is now currently being

examined in laboratories around the world on a case-by-case basis to see how the virus is mutating and evolving. This information is invaluable to public health authorities, vaccine manufacturers, and health care providers. Mr. Speaker, it is for reasons such as these that biological sciences need to be taught to all students in all Alberta schools.

Mr. Speaker, I want to expand on why I believe the discussion of biological sciences in general and evolution in particular does not properly infringe on anyone's religion. I agree with His Holiness Pope Pius XII, who stated many years ago that there is no opposition between evolution and the doctrine of faith about man and his vocation.

There is no doubt that historically there was conflict between science and religion. The case of Galileo Galilei was a famous case where religious leaders were responsible for the persecution which occurred against a man who sought the truth, in that case the truth of the universe as proposed by Copernicus, that the Earth revolved around the sun. Happily, however, with very few exceptions the great religions have reconciled themselves to the fact that matters of science and the pursuit of truth do not in any way hinder the fundamental teachings of faith and religion.

Mr. Speaker, there is a distinct difference between faith and reason. Faith is the province of religion. Reason is the province of science. His Holiness Pope John Paul II agreed with this distinction himself and explored this in his encyclical of September 1998, *Fides et Ratio*. Reason is bound by laws and observations. The divorce of reason and faith is summed up by Immanuel Kant in his work *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he stated that reason is used for understanding of the world, that we are entirely dependent on our senses and our observations. Faith is very different. There is no need for any laws or any observations to justify what has happened. Knowledge of things that are unobservable and transcend our world cannot be proved by reason and science, only by philosophy or faith.

Mr. Speaker, the Earth and all the creatures in it were not created in six days, and the world is not 6,000 years old. We know these facts through science, that the myriad of living things on this planet evolved over a period of over 3 billion years. We know through science that the Earth is approximately 4.54 billion years old. These facts are based on reason, on the search for knowledge and truth. But nothing in these facts derogates from the wisdom of the teachings of the Old Testament, which deal with matters of faith. As Bishop Fred Henry of Calgary recently stated in an article, teachings in the opening chapters of Genesis cannot be read as literal statements of scientific fact. He states that "the sacred stories are not 'history' as we normally use the term." The purpose of them is to teach religious truths, not science.

As the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has stated, this bill will serve to reinforce a right that was already available to Alberta families and already in practice in our classrooms. If a parent does not wish their child to take part in a specific piece of the curriculum or in a class, they have the option to opt out and not participate in the discussion where it explicitly deals with religion or sexuality. I emphasize the word "explicitly." It does not say tangentially, peripherally, or consequentially. Mr. Speaker, let us not descend, as some have, into wild speculation, hypotheses, or conjectures as to how the words "deals explicitly with religion" might be interpreted.

I am confident in supporting Bill 44 that this new section 11.1 as proposed in section 9 of the bill will not affect the teaching of biological sciences in Alberta classrooms. We should be confident that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and individual commissioners will do their job, that they will exercise sound judgment and proper legal interpretation when complaints are

brought to it regarding this legislation. I am confident that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission will exercise a sound interpretation of the section and will not interpret the section to the broad manner posited by some critics of this bill. I urge hon. members to read Bill 44 carefully with a view to confirming our understanding that this legislation will not in any way affect the education or teaching of biological sciences or of evolution to Alberta students.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of the debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:40

Bill 34 Drug Program Act

[Adjourned debate May 5: Dr. Taft]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 34, the Drug Program Act, which provides a legislative mandate to establish and operate a provincial drug program and sets out the regulations for the minister to regulate and administer that program, a very interesting piece of legislation that has some real opportunities and real positive features to it that I think will benefit many Albertans. There are also some real concerns about it and how it will be implemented.

It does establish a provincial drug program and consolidates a number of different drug programs, and we see that as very positive and efficient in the interests of Albertans. It's absolutely essential that we get a clear plan with administrative clarification, qualifications for membership, and what benefits accrue to what parties. It's clear the plan is optional, and this also is a good feature but has some ramifications for those seniors who have been receiving the benefits of the present Blue Cross program and are now no longer in that position to receive it as a free service to their seniors' position.

As indicated in previous press releases, 60 per cent of seniors will receive either free prescription drugs or pay less, and this is a positive, progressive initiative for many in our society, I believe, and we applaud that. The recent changes that the minister has announced relate to the move to base the premium on income, taxable income instead of gross income. That, too, is a positive measure that I think reflects a lot of the public wishes and the seniors' groups, who have responded to this in a very vigorous way, many of whom we've heard from.

As I indicated, it's consolidating the drug benefit programs of Health and Wellness, Children and Youth Services, Employment and Immigration, Seniors and Community Supports, Solicitor General and Public Security, and these changes will most likely bring all of these under one set of administrative rules and eligibility criteria that are obviously in the public good and in the interest of more efficiency.

It also opens the door to what we have been suggesting for years, which is bulk purchasing and, in fact, an interprovincial co-operation to benefit all Albertans with reduced costs. We think this also is a very positive dimension to this bill.

We do have some concerns about it, of course, not the least of which is that we are reintroducing a bureaucracy now and a means test in which not only are we going to have to ask for personal data, financial data on seniors, but we are going to be judging on that basis who can pay and who cannot regardless of their illness status or their wellness status, I'd guess you'd say. Indeed, some so-called middle-income individuals are the most seriously ill in our society and will of course have to pay much more significantly than some

others. That's a serious concern for some people; I'm not saying for all. But it does raise the question about whether a means-based system purely and simply is appropriate if we're really trying to be, as I would say, equitable and fair about the system.

To us, Mr. Speaker, there are some key principles that should be involved in any kind of public program. That has to do with fairness, it has to do with consistency, and that has to do with universality as much as possible in our health care system, particularly for people who are chronically ill and who already have out-of-pocket expenses relating to those chronic illnesses or disabilities.

Several of the concerns that we have I can itemize here, and they have to do with, as I mentioned, those with chronic and expensive illnesses being penalized most and carrying the heaviest burden of both sickness and now costs.

The second is that it's discriminatory. It focuses on seniors as a select group, indeed a group that has the most sickness, as opposed to being a universal principle to apply to all citizens in terms of their ability to pay. I guess one might ask MLAs whether they'd be willing to be part of a program that would take up to 5 per cent of their taxable income before the program would kick in to pay for drugs. I wonder how many MLAs would be willing to fit into that program.

A third concern is that the income disparity is already adjusted for by taxation. We, of course, feel that to be really progressive, a policy should be tied to income. This is a partial attachment to income, but again it doesn't address the fact that the burden of illness is in the last few decades of life and that the burden of expense, then, will fall to seniors, albeit some who are well-off seniors. We think that can be tweaked a little bit, and I'll be introducing an amendment in the next phase of this debate.

A fourth issue has to do with the invasion of privacy and the concerns that many seniors have that they now will be scrutinized, perhaps having to defend and debate and discuss and appeal decisions around their bills. This raises some concerns, especially for seniors who are struggling with understanding some of these terms.

It has also blindsided seniors in a way that they were not prepared for, especially during this time. Planning for their retirement, they are hit with both this new pharmacy plan and a Blue Cross program that's suddenly changing, doubling and tripling in the next two years . . .

Mr. MacDonald: What about power bills?

Dr. Swann: . . . in addition to, as my hon. colleague is saying, power bills that may well be increasing as a result of changes in our rebate program and the deregulation that we've coped with for the last few years as well as a 40 per cent loss in their investment income, in the main. This is a time when we should be looking at seniors in a special way. I believe and our party believes that the seniors who built this province should not be inordinately burdened not only with increasing illness but increasing payments that they were not planning for.

Finally, it does seem unfair that we are rationalizing a system based fundamentally on age. Why should we focus this particular approach to drug coverage and drug payments primarily on the age of the citizen? So for these concerns and others we'll hopefully get support for a couple of amendments to come in the next phase.

In terms of the changes to Alberta Blue Cross coverage, we also have some serious doubt that this has been managed in the public interest. We look at the proposal to double and then triple the monthly premium for families over the next two years and have to ask the question: why is it suddenly important to make such huge

jumps in premiums? If this has been mismanaged in the past few years such that the program has not kept up with the cost of living and other issues, costs of drugs, then why has it been neglected for so many years? Now we're being faced with such a dramatic increase in Blue Cross coverage.

Another question has to do with why, as a government service providing for the public, we would be trying to integrate or harmonize a publicly funded program with the private sector. Clearly, this is designed to make drug accessibility and availability easier for those Albertans that need it. We're now setting up a system where essentially we're saying that it's a free and open game where private drug companies are in direct competition with what was supposed to be a public benefit program. Clearly, with the extra administrative costs of this income-based system, we're again going to be dealing with a big bureaucracy, and we're going to be spending on a bigger government when we're all wanting to trim government, wanting to make it more efficient and actually delivering more for less.

5:50

So those are some serious concerns raised by seniors and small-business owners who have said that this will not serve their interests as they share the costs of Blue Cross premiums with their employees. Seniors, as I've indicated, used to receive Blue Cross for free and only had to copay a maximum of \$35 per prescription. This is going to be a challenge for a number of them.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the drug benefits program for rare diseases is clearly a positive direction. We support that. The drug approval process currently through an expert committee on drug

evaluation and therapeutics advising the health minister: excellent progress and very much supportable. The bulk purchasing, as I mentioned, is a very positive decision that's going to assist all Albertans in receiving better access to drugs, especially if it's an interprovincial purchase program. We could be leaders in that area. I look forward to that.

I also support the stimulus for pharmacists to take a greater role in prescribing, reducing the demand on physicians where it's appropriate and where it's supervised by a physician. I think that's very appropriate to be refilling prescriptions and making simple diagnoses and providing basic drugs to people. That will decrease costs in the system and improve access for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, those conclude my remarks, and I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 34.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very exciting afternoon of illustrious debate. We want to thank all members for their participation today. Since it is almost 6 o'clock, I would move that we, in fact, call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:52 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, May 7, 2009

Issue 37

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 7, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you a group of students all the way from Medicine Hat. The students are from Crestwood school in Medicine Hat. This is about the 20th or more time consecutively that the grade 6 students at Crestwood school from Medicine Hat have come up and joined us here at the Legislature. I'm very, very pleased with the commitment of the teachers and the parents to give the students that opportunity. Joining the students – and they're seated in both the public and the members' galleries – are Principal David George; Vice-principal Al Tisnic; teachers Maria Thompson, Wade Lawson, Darcy Nielson, Wendy Smid, and Kathy Western; along with parent helpers Paula Tessier, Nelda Davis, and Diane Foster. This is an outstanding group of young students, and I'm proud to introduce them to this Legislature. I'd ask that they all rise and receive a warm welcome from all members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly a special school from Vulcan, Alberta. They've been up a number of times before, not this same group, but I want all the members to pay special attention. The teacher asked, out of respect for the Legislature, that the boys wear ties – I thought they were with a little hockey team – and the girls are all dressed up very nicely. These kids are from Prairieview elementary school along with teachers Ms Vanda Ruffli, who grew up around Westbank, B.C., and Ms Heather McBride, who's from around Rumsey, she tells me; education assistants Mrs. Terry Lanktree from Vulcan and Mrs. Kay Ellis from Vulcan; along with parent drivers Mr. Brian Connors and Mr. Clarke Williams. I would ask that they rise and be extended the warm welcome of our Assembly, please. Thanks for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the members of the Education Advisory Committee. This is a group of dedicated educators who volunteer their time to provide pedagogical and curricular expertise in support of all school programming offered by the Legislative Assembly Office: Glenda Bistrow from St. Paul, David Bryce from Edmonton, Catherine Cole from Edmonton, Linda Couillard-L'Abbé from Peace River, Wally Diefenthaler from Edmonton, Rick Homan from Lethbridge, Carol Anne Konkin from Edmonton, Susan MacKay from Calgary, and Corvin Uhrbach from

Lacombe. They are seated in your gallery. I would like to ask that all our guests rise and receive the most warm welcome from our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Student Executive Council, or ASEC. This organization represents postsecondary students in our province and has done so for over 27 years under the name of ACTISEC. Much like Alberta's postsecondary system, the organization is evolving to better meet the needs of the students in our great province. They're holding their first annual leadership conference under the new name of ASEC and will be electing the new leaders of their organizations this week in Edmonton. Representing over 120,000 postsecondary education students in Alberta from four of the six sectors in our six-sector model, they are an excellent stakeholder group, ensuring that front-line student issues are clearly communicated to government.

Mr. Speaker, we have over 40 guests in both galleries, but I would only like to name the outgoing executive committee, who I've had the pleasure of working with this past year: Matt Koczur, Lisi Monro, Marie Barnes, Stephen Griffith, Brent Constantin, Adam Boechler. Also, the new executive director is Carol Neuman. The current executive director, Adam Boechler, is leaving after two years of very great work, and I would commend him on that. These student leaders are in both galleries. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Walking Away Hunger Campaign

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great privilege today to rise and speak about an initiative that I was involved in starting some four years ago. This is the Walking Away Hunger campaign. My reasoning to start this initiative was (a) to help the Calgary Inter-faith Food Bank and (b) to get young people to serve. When you get people to serve, they bring out their best, and they experience their best. When someone experiences their best, they're less likely to do anything negative.

It's with great pride that I announce today that this past weekend was the conclusion of our campaign for this year. The young folks raised \$25,829.63 in cash and over \$12,200 worth of actual food. That brings our collective total for four years to \$130,029.63.

Mr. Speaker, this is an initiative that involves young people and schools from all different backgrounds, that is organized and co-ordinated by Sikh Youth Calgary. I applaud them, and, most importantly, I thank them for stepping up and keeping this initiative going since my time is now devoted elsewhere.

I'd ask all members to show their appreciation of these members, who are watching and listening on TV right now. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MS Walk

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week you mentioned that May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. It is an honour for me to rise this afternoon to recognize the MS Society of Canada and their annual MS Walk campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I'm wearing a red lanyard. These have been distributed to all members of this Assembly. I'd ask them to wear this today, if they're so inclined, in observance of this month.

Multiple sclerosis is the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada, with between 55,000 and 75,000 Canadians having been diagnosed with MS, 11,000 of those in Alberta. That number is growing by an estimated three people today.

Mr. Speaker, my family is no exception. My aunt Mora Hauk was diagnosed with MS in her early 20s. She has a very severe case, and we just had some very bad news about her health this week. No one needs to face MS alone, and I'm thankful that my aunt has had her husband, Jamie Beckstead, and my mother, Marguerite Denis, to care for her every day.

There is some good news about MS, Mr. Speaker. Researchers are developing new and better treatments with the ultimate goal of finding a cure for MS. Every year the MS Society of Canada helps organize the MS Walk in order to raise money for this research. The MS Walk involves over 60,000 volunteers in 160 communities across Canada. Last year the MS Walk campaign helped raise \$12 million towards research.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank every volunteer that has worked tirelessly in support of the MS walks that have already been held but particularly Crystal Phillips and Jamie Ivey, who brought this walk to my attention this year. I remind everyone that there are still many opportunities to get involved by walking or sponsoring a participant in the Edmonton MS Walk on May 31, the Calgary one on June 7, and others that can be easily found at www.mssociety.ca.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues and fellow Albertans to support the MS Walk and help cure a disease that afflicts my family along with tens of thousands of other Canadian families.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:40

Provincial Budget

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and his ministers have mishandled one of their most important responsibilities, to craft a budget that both prepares Alberta to meet today's challenges and lays the foundation for a prosperous tomorrow. This budget and the changes to the so-called Fiscal Responsibility Act that will enable this budget remove any legislative means of saving. The cap on oil and gas revenues that can be used for budget purposes: gone. The \$2.5 billion held in reserve to deal with natural disasters: gone. In essence, once the act passes, the government will be able to spend every penny they have, and once this budget passes, they will start doing exactly that.

One of the guiding principles of responsible government should be that we govern not only for ourselves but for the benefit of future generations. A consistent and enduring refusal to commit to any kind of legislated savings strategy is not the position of a responsible government. For years opposition parties, media, think tanks, and citizens have been calling on this government to save more of its nonrenewable resource revenues, but this government has failed Albertans: no fiscal responsibility, no plan for the future, just a wish and a prayer that another oil boom will dig them out of the hole just one more time.

On top of all this, Mr. Speaker, the government expects the Official Opposition to debate this budget on behalf of Albertans without the benefit of critical information about that budget. Out of all the requests we made for written responses to questions we raised

during the ministry-by-ministry estimates debates, only one ministry has bothered to deliver on the promise they all made that they would provide those answers before today's vote.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Parental Choice in Education

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a dark day for Alberta's public educators and for our children. This government, through Bill 44, has said that it needs to use the Human Rights Commission to keep teachers in line. This has a chilling effect on teachers who are attempting to address issues that may arise in the classroom that might be deemed publicly sensitive and that might promote critical inquiry on the part of the students. Quite frankly, it undermines the very fabric of our public education system, which strives to stimulate dialogue, inspire, and educate our children so that they might become engaged participants in a healthy and vibrant society.

Never should a public school teacher be at risk of persecution, prosecution, or penalty for engaging students in critical debate in our public schools. If such a thing were to happen, Alberta would stand to be embarrassed among developed jurisdictions for stifling education, scientific methodology, and the very creativity of the youth we hold so dear. Yet this government proposes amendments to the Human Rights Commission legislation that threaten to do just this.

In this country and in this province parents have already got the right to raise their children as they see fit and to instill in them the spiritual and cultural values they hold dear. No government can prevent that, nor should they even try. By the same token, no government should threaten our educators with violating human rights legislation for teaching controversial issues and for allowing students to draw their own conclusions.

Mr. Speaker, this government's priorities are dangerously off course. A child's right to an objective, open education in the public school system and a teacher's right to provide that education without fear of retribution is a goal that all of us, and especially our provincial government, should consistently pursue.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Paving Health Pathways Strategy

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and speak about paving health pathways, the health services strategy that was announced by Alberta Education on April 30, 2009. This pilot project will develop a number of high school courses designed to help Alberta students to explore careers in health services. This project is backed by a three-year, \$12 million funding commitment by the government of Alberta. Students in these 10 pilot jurisdictions will have a greater opportunity to explore the world of work, gain insight into possible health services careers, and work toward postsecondary certification while still in high school.

The Edmonton Catholic separate school district, with a school in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie, offers health care aide, sports medicine, medical sciences, and prehospital care programs. Other available programs include emergency responder and licensed practical nurse programs. The program will be phased in starting this fall.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this program will provide great benefit to high school students by providing them with real-life education.

At this time I would like to recognize Alberta Education, Alberta school boards, teachers, and parents for providing pathways to jobs in health for Alberta's high school students.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to recognize the creation of the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation. It is an important step on the road we are travelling in Alberta when it comes to fighting climate change. As we know, technology is the foundation for our government's climate change strategy. It will provide the keys to unlocking the door to a more carbon-friendly future by allowing significant and meaningful greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and it will reaffirm Alberta's commitment to being a responsible global energy producer.

The Climate Change and Emissions Management Act created the continent's only emissions reduction program that is operating and achieving real results. We are taking another leap forward with the creation of the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation, which will be led by, I'm happy to say, Mr. Eric Newell. His experience with industry and serving the interests of Albertans will give the corporation the guidance it needs to take the money collected from industry as part of complying with our climate change regulations and leverage it into significant emission reductions here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 30 I would like to now give oral notice that at the appropriate time I'll be raising the following issues under Standing Order 30, which is, of course, the emergency debate provision.

That the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure to provide written responses to questions posed during debate on the 2009-10 main estimates obstructs opposition members of the Legislative Assembly in their review and evaluation of the budget, preventing them from making a fully informed decision on the vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) to advise the House that on Monday, May 11, 2009, Motion for a Return 25 will be dealt with.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate that staff did not have sufficient time to provide effective care to residents with dementia.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there others under tablings?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table these five copies of my responses to the questions raised during Alberta Transportation's estimates in Committee of Supply on April 20, 2009.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of answers to questions raised in Committee of Supply for the benefit of the House.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Hayden, Minister of Infrastructure, responses to questions raised by Mr. Mason, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and Mr. MacDonald, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on April 21, 2009, in the Department of Infrastructure main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, response to written questions 9, 16, and 17, all asked for by Ms Notley on April 6, 2009.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Budget Debate Process

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year we've experienced a budget process that is fundamentally flawed and violates basic requirements of openness, timeliness, and accountability to us as the opposition and to Albertans. After the delay in even seeing the budget, we are debating as the Official Opposition separate ministries at up to \$160 million a minute. This government failed to provide written responses, as promised in debate, to allow the opposition to represent the public interest. To the President of the Treasury Board: why have most of the ministries except Energy failed to provide written responses?

1:50

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I would allow the hon. leader to ask the ministers, but, as I think he's heard, most of them are tabling the responses.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that should be pointed out: anyone in Alberta can go to *Hansard*, and they can go and review the questions that were asked while we were undergoing budget deliberations. If the hon. leader thinks it's appropriate with two or three or five minutes left in a committee meeting to put on the record 30 or 40 or 50 asinine questions and expect written answers in a few days, then they have a little different opinion of the budget.

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can this government sit there and claim that this is a fair, accountable budgeting process when it withholds required information by the opposition and all Albertans in doing our job?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we spent approximately 60 hours on the budget. We've created an opportunity now where we can deal

with two departments a night, where the opposition has the opportunity to focus on the areas they feel important, too. The departments are critically aware of how important it is to get accurate information back when it's asked for. Sometimes the information asked for is very complicated. Sometimes the numbers are very detailed and need to be extrapolated from the bigger budget numbers. The departments work diligently to try and respond to questions as soon as they can.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this government commit to delaying this budget vote until the opposition does receive the written responses so that we can do our job on behalf of Albertans and give sufficient time to review the information so that we can represent these interests appropriately?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the process has gone on since the introduction of the budget here about a month ago. It has taken the same time or track that we have had for years, where the budget gets a very full vetting both by members of the government and members of the opposition. The general public can certainly go to some of the Liberal caucus rooms – why they can't be debated. I've just underlined the ones that say that we don't spend enough and the ones that say that we spend too much, and it's coming out out of balance.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mental Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, mental illness is a prevalent problem within our health system, but unfortunately it's put on the back burner by this government. Many people who are homeless suffer from mental illness, yet this government continues to fail the very efficient voluntary agencies that are working with the mentally ill and now struggling to cope with reduced resources at a time of actual increased demand. To the minister of health: how will the minister support the underfunded nonprofit sector in their work with the homeless and the hard-to-house as they struggle with increased demand from mental illness?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was at a very enjoyable breakfast yesterday put on by the Mental Health Association; so were a number of colleagues in this Assembly. In speaking with my colleagues who were meeting with various people involved both at the volunteer and the professional levels within mental health at yesterday's breakfast, it was very clear that the people that are actually delivering the service and are volunteering for the service are incredibly happy and pleased with the initiatives that this government has taken in the area of mental health. The only one I heard that wasn't was the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, they are very committed and dedicated people, and they're very frustrated people also. As the Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton region, stated to me, they are struggling with nearly a hundred individuals whom they cannot house, and they lack resources to help. Mr. Minister, what support and reallocation will your ministry provide to the Edmonton region of the Canadian Mental Health Association?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition had been taking some time in looking through our budget documents, it would be very clear as to what we are committing to in this particular year for mental health. In addition to that, we have through our safe communities work made a number of announcements. There is an announcement tomorrow in Calgary, and I extend an invitation to the hon. leader to show up. In addition to that, one of the initiatives in our health action plan was the introduction of a children's mental health plan. So we've got a number of initiatives that we've taken around mental health that have been very progressive.

Dr. Swann: Well, as the Auditor General has said, Mr. Speaker, properly addressing mental health would reduce suffering and keep many people out of hospital and out of the justice system, saving money. Why is the minister not showing leadership in mental health service delivery which would offer significant cost reductions to the health care system?

Mr. Liepert: In fact, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we're doing. Our announcement tomorrow is a joint announcement by the Justice minister and myself relative to a number of beds in the Calgary region. It's through our safe communities task force, where we've got a number of departments working together because we recognize that mental health just isn't health. It involves the Justice department, the Solicitor General's department, a number of departments of government. It's an initiative that's working very well.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Definition of Religion

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The current human rights legislation forbids discrimination on the basis of religion, yet what constitutes religion or religious belief has been the topic of debate for thousands of years. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. For the purposes of the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act what is the definition of religion the government is using?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, in terms of a definition, we don't have a definition that we're using. We're referring to the curriculum that the Department of Education is using and what they determine religious instruction is with respect to the curriculum.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Again to the same minister. A dictionary definition of religion is "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power" or "a particular system of faith and worship." So for the purposes of the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act are all religions equal? For example, if Christianity and Islam count as religions, does Wicca or Falun Gong?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, religious beliefs are already in the human rights legislation as a protective ground, but for the purpose of the parental rights piece, section 11.1, we are talking about religion as an area of study. We do not care which religion is more important than another. We treat them all equally because in this province, as far as I can remember, we treat people equally.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister: for the purposes of government policy what is the difference between a religion and a cult, and by what criteria does the government determine this?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a spurious comment. It has no relevance to what we're talking about with respect to Bill 44 and the parental rights amendment. What we're talking about is religious content as it appears in the boundaries of the curriculum of the school boards, nothing more, nothing less.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Taser Deaths

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, this morning we learned that the RCMP have deployed a taser, resulting in another person's death, this time an Albertan. Last night the Mounties were called to investigate a complaint of an injured man causing a disturbance in Brooks and ended up using a taser on him. Grant William Prentice is the fifth Albertan to die after being tasered by police. Enough is enough. Why won't the Solicitor General ban taser use in Alberta when it's clear that tasers kill?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the incident the hon. member is speaking about is a tragic incident that occurred last night in Brooks. That being said, the taser has been utilized in this province probably at least 2,500 times in the last four or five years. There's been no evidence at all to indicate that any of those incidents have resulted in the death of anybody. In fact, we have evidence to indicate that they've saved probably hundreds of lives over that period of time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2004 Ronald Perry was tasered by Edmonton police and died. In 2005 Alesandro Fiocco was tasered by Edmonton police and died. In 2006 Jason Doan was tasered by Red Deer RCMP and later died. Last year Trevor Grimolfson was tasered by Edmonton police and died. Why won't the Solicitor General ban these lethal weapons in Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has any evidence at all that taser use contributed to those deaths, bring it forward, because the medical reports that we have do not indicate that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 when the RCMP tasered Robert Dziekanski to death in the Vancouver airport, I called on this government to review taser use in Alberta. No such review was done, and I think we're past that now anyway. The families of these victims are outraged that their loved ones continued to be killed by police using tasers. Why won't the Solicitor General follow Newfoundland's lead and ban tasers in Alberta?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know why this hon. member doesn't do something responsible and reasonable and provide evidence that these particular instruments are causing death instead of spreading innuendo and misinformation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Building Construction Review

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been recent reports in the media and some calls in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie about homes that are experiencing leaks and mould due to problems with the building structure. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell us if he's aware of these concerns and what he is doing about them?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, we are. Because of some of the concerns that we did receive, a handful of concerns, I asked my parliamentary assistant to do a review, and this last summer he met with homeowners, consulted with stakeholders, municipalities, also builders, and examined ways to ensure that the quality of construction in new homes is examined. The builders and designers and homeowners are responsible to ensure that homes comply with these building codes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: can the minister tell us when we can expect a response to these reviews?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did and do realize that this is very important, and that's why we did the consultation. We wanted to be proactive. Alberta's building codes are strong. We are looking at the issue in its entirety, and we feel that it's very important to do a very good, thorough review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been recent media reports about a specific exterior system causing this mould. Could the minister indicate if this was addressed in his review?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear that these are two separate issues. I was recently made aware of the concerns regarding this specific product. I understand that the Safety Codes Council has been approached. We'll hear a presentation from an individual, and that is our first indication. We don't know what the presentation will be about. Our review looked broadly, going back, at how to maintain the quality of construction practices in Alberta.

I need to say that we are confident that the homes in Alberta are built to code, and we want to ensure that Albertans continue to have confidence in the construction industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Religious Content in Education

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the millennia innumerable wars have been fought over the separation of church and state, but now this government has blurred that separation and threatens to turn Alberta classrooms into the next battleground. To the Minister of Education: how can you expect teachers to know which lessons would be objectionable on religious grounds when your colleagues cannot even agree on what would be considered religious subject matter?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I don't expect teachers at all to take a look at each and every part of the curriculum through any form of religious lens whatsoever. The curriculum they're teaching is mandated. They're required to teach the curriculum that we provide to them. What the hon. member is obviously referring to is a bill that is coming up for debate later on today, possibly, and certainly has been before the House that is talking about a potential for opting out of instruction about religion. I think the House can be very clear and teachers can be very clear what we mean about instruction about religion. About religion is about the faiths that we know and the faiths that people practise. That's not about using religion to correct the curriculum. It's about instruction about religion.

Mr. Chase: Why is the minister imposing an unreasonable burden on Alberta teachers by requiring them to send out consent forms in advance of the countless situations that could be considered objectionable?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased that the hon. member is helping to clear this up because we are not requiring teachers to send out notices to parents about things that people might consider objectionable in the curriculum. What we're asking is what they're required to do now: to send out notice when they're teaching about human sexuality so that parents can participate in the education of their children on something that is very important to them and their families. With respect to religion the School Act currently provides for an exemption where there's religious instruction. The new provision will provide for instruction about religion – not about anything else; instruction about religion – and notifying parents in the same way that they do now with respect to human sexuality. It's not a burden, and it certainly shouldn't freeze up discussion in the class on any other topic.

Mr. Chase: How do you justify turning secular public schools into opt-out Sunday schools when taxpayer-subsidized home-schooling, charter, and private school options exist?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the only time that religion would come up that I'm aware of in a public school curriculum is if a teacher decided to teach a module, for example, on comparative religions. Science is not about religion. Social studies is not about religion. Math is not about religion. Certainly, literature is not about religion. They all may have some issues that cover religious topics in them. This act is about teaching about religion, and there's nothing in the curriculum now that I'm aware of which requires teaching about religion. But if a module came up where a teacher wanted to bring, for example, comparative religions into the social studies curriculum, then, and only then, would they be required to provide notice to parents and let them know what is included in that curriculum.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Bullying Prevention

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bullying behaviour is unacceptable any time, anywhere, and at any age. Preventing bullying starts with each one of us. Unfortunately, bullying happens all too often and even sometimes here in the Legislature. Yesterday a student from my constituency was featured on *Oprah*, telling his

story about being bullied. I'm sure there are many other students across the province who are being targeted each and every day as well. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Can the minister tell us what government is doing to ensure that bullying prevention is being taken seriously?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is, in fact, a very, very important topic across Alberta. I think in surveys it's shown that about 49 per cent of Alberta youth indicate that they feel that they have been bullied, and 58 per cent of Alberta youth say that they've seen bullying taking place, so this is a very important topic. We do, in fact, with my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services have a joint ministry approach to bullying. There are websites called bullyfreealberta.ca and b-free.ca that Albertans can go on, and those websites are visited a significant amount of times. We have a task force. We have employees who are specifically tasked with dealing with bullying in schools and providing materials to schools. Of course, school boards also have a responsibility to make sure that schools are safe and caring places.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Oprah has offered up a student program to the school to help stop bullying behaviours, and I'm happy to say that the school and the division have accepted that offer. Can the minister tell me how this program will effectively address bullying in conjunction with the provincial initiatives?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd say that I always appreciate when people bring the topic of bullying into the public domain for discussion because I think it's very important that we have that discussion, that we have that discussion in public, that we raise the awareness that this isn't about the old days and what we had to brace in the schoolyards. This is a real issue for real students driving some students even to the point of committing suicide. So it's an extremely important issue. The reality is that there's no one single answer. The program that Oprah is promoting may be one part of the solution, but there are many, many ways that we can help bring awareness and deal with the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. Finally, the last question to the same minister. If we're going to stop bullying, we need to get to the heart of where our students live, learn, and play. Is the government's bullying prevention strategy doing enough to reach all Albertans and make sure they are getting the message?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we do have the websites, and there is good indication that we are reaching people. There have been 4.3 million hits on that website since May 2006. To date about 1,100 people have called the 24/7 toll-free bullying helpline for assistance. We've reprinted and updated our information materials, which have been sought after in high demand by schools, community groups, and associations. We have an Alberta Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee, whose advice has been sought. In fact, employees of our department travel to schools around the province to promote bullying prevention and to provide materials and advice to schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Building Construction Review (continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A home is the biggest investment one makes, and some condo owners may have to walk away from their investment because of unmanageable repair bills. Condo owners cannot afford to wait for this administration to conduct a lengthy review with no guarantee of action. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what is the minister doing today to help condo owners who have repair bills, big ones, due to shoddy workmanship?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, there has been a concern raised by a handful of individuals, mostly single-home dwellers. We did bring forward a consultation process with the parliamentary assistant. That process has come to me. I have brought it to my department, that is looking at the recommendations or the comments that came forward, and we are looking at solutions if there need to be.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not the first time this issue has been raised. The Calgary Region Home Builders Association was advising about stucco application problems almost three years ago. Why is the minister only now looking into these standards?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we have very good codes in Alberta. The Safety Codes Council reviews the codes on a regular basis. When the concerns came forward to our ministry, we initiated the consultation with the condo associations, with individual home builders, with municipalities. We do have recommendations that have come forward, and we are dealing with it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been three years. No action so far. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why is the minister denying protection to condo owners by her continued inaction on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, just following up the minister's comments, with respect to the Condominium Property Act, as I've indicated before, this piece of legislation is going to be under review. The review process has begun. The complexity of this particular act is evident today with the issues that Albertans are facing, and that's why looking at this particular angle and working with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, we have to look at this and do the right thing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Highway Traffic Enforcement

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall a pilot project between the RCMP and the sheriffs was brought to my constituency in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. You know, the police presence out on provincial highways has just been outstanding. My questions are all

to the Solicitor General. Can the minister tell this Assembly how this program is working and if the pilot project will become a permanent project in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member speaks about a program that's working very well in Alberta. We've always had great co-operation between the RCMP and the sheriffs. We put in place four pilots this spring: one in Olds, one in Wetaskiwin, one in Airdrie, and one in this member's constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. They work very well together. In the Whitecourt area the joint forces issued 2,500 violations. Over 1,600 of them have been for speeding and 880 of them for other violations.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the same minister. I understand as well that there have been some charges laid for speed limits that have been exceeded, like over 200 kilometres an hour. I wonder if you could advise us: do these people just get a 24-hour suspension, or are their licences taken away for a longer period of time?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as the legislation is today, when there's evidence that somebody has been drinking and driving and there may not be enough evidence here for an impaired-driving conviction, the officer, including our sheriffs, have the ability for a 24-hour suspension. However, Mr. Speaker, I'm getting feedback that sometimes they're pulling over the same people more than once, so I will be speaking to the Minister of Transportation to review that, as other provinces are doing. They're putting more stringent penalties in place for subsequent actions when the same number is picked up.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee you that it's not an old blue Dodge going over 200 kilometres down that highway. I am very upset that we continually give a 24-hour suspension to these same people going over 200 time after time after time. We have to get tougher on this issue, and I want to know from the minister if he can act on this very quickly.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, just so we're not confused, Mr. Speaker, when somebody is travelling over 40 kilometres over the speed limit, they do have to make a court appearance. However, when that same person has also been consuming alcohol, that's another matter, and that's where the 24-hour suspensions come in. I will be talking to the Transportation minister to look at making some more stringent penalties in that regard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Worker Recruitment Hosting Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall during the worst financial meltdown in generations the Minister of Employment and Immigration spent over \$25,000 in New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC, on hosting expenses to recruit workers to Alberta. These events were all by invitation only, another example of elitist Conservatives. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: how can the government justify spending over \$25,000 in hosting expenses to recruit workers when so many Albertans here in Alberta at the very same time were losing their jobs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member indicates or seems to leave the impression that I was there on those particular trips, and

I want to make it clear to the Assembly that I did not participate in those particular trips. However, we do have staff that do some of the fairs and will go into very strategic markets to identify individuals that we are very short of here. Specifically, we are targeting individuals in the health professions, and we will spend the money necessary to attract individuals that we are short of in the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's interesting now that there's a freeze or the brakes are on hiring. The department took their travelling road show across the Atlantic to Britain last fall, spending an additional \$15,000 on hosting expenses while thousands of Albertans were lining up for EI, if they could get it at all. Where is the value in this expenditure for Alberta taxpayers? To the same minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're monitoring the labour market very, very closely. While I admit that we are in a much more balanced labour situation, it's always important to develop our workforce. We are targeting, first and foremost – and I've always said that in this House – Albertans and Canadians. Having said that, there are still areas of shortages, and those are the areas that we're putting emphasis on.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. The government seems more interested in supporting overseas catering companies and doing very little for unemployed Albertans. Why is it necessary to spend all this money abroad when so many Albertans here at home are losing their jobs?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, as I have indicated, Albertans and Canadians have every opportunity to participate in the Alberta labour force, and we do encourage that. We work with them. Those that lose their jobs have all of the resources available through our ministry to try to match them with other jobs, and we'll continue to do that. If there are some holes that need to be filled, we'll also work in those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Building Construction Review (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's new home warranty program is deficient, and this government knows it. Instead of demanding better from builders, they're passing the buck onto unsuspecting homeowners. A top engineer with CMHC has already written two reports about shoddy workmanship leading to mouldy buildings, and we know that a lot of homes were built in a hurry during the boom. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is he letting fly-by-night contractors get away with building faulty homes, that are costing people tens of thousands of dollars to repair just a few years after they were built?

2:20

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that our ministry has not received any complaints about the product that the hon. member is talking about. The Safety Codes Council has not received any complaints. The individual that the member is talking about I do believe has asked for a meeting. There is no indication on that proposal for a meeting with the Safety Codes Council of what it could be about. If there are issues and there are concerns, our ministry and the Safety Codes Council look at them immediately.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian condominium association has been telling this government for some time to make new home warranties mandatory and to extend them beyond the first year of ownership, but this minister has ignored them. Given the crisis that we had with pine shakes and the billion dollar condo crisis that affected tens of thousands of B.C. homeowners, how can this government go on ignoring this problem?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, this government is not ignoring those concerns or those requests. That is why I asked my parliamentary assistant to meet and have consultations with the condominium association, with homeowners, with municipalities, with the Safety Codes Council, to look at those issues and try to find a solution if one is necessary. As I said before, those recommendations have come to me. I have sent them to my department, and they are looking at them. I'm sure I will have recommendations very shortly.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, while there are years of studies and examinations and consultations and hand holding, buildings are rotting. Now, single-year warranties for new homes are ridiculous. We all know that major construction problems in new detached homes and condos take years to crop up, and what's more ridiculous is that for condo owners the new home warranty timeline applies to the entire building, not just their unit. So the warranty has already expired before some people even move in. When will the minister stop consulting, stop examining, stop hand holding, and instead take a lesson from B.C. and Ontario and insist that home builders provide better, longer home warranties for new owners?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will say one thing. Maybe a little bit different from the member of the third party, we don't operate on a whim of a newspaper article. We have some of the strongest safety codes in this country, and the comparison with British Columbia is completely different because their safety codes that were in place were not of the same calibre as ours.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Stock Market Rally

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Stock markets have begun to rally of late, with the TSX rising by nearly 375 points on Monday. This could be taken as a sign the economy is beginning to recover. Now, on this side of the House we all knew it was eventually coming but are pleasantly surprised that it seems to have started so soon. My first question to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise: what impact will this market rise have on the province's economy?

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I think that people have been watching the markets much more closely of late. We've heard the head of the U.S. Federal Reserve say that the U.S. could be out of their recession in the latter part of this year. We've heard the same prediction from the Bank of Canada. The surge on Monday, interestingly enough, was quite buoyant for many seeing those stocks increase, but we take it as nothing more than a few days of good news. Today, you'll notice, they're down 262 points, so we have to watch that we don't get too excited when we get these increases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is also to this minister. Will this improve the province's fiscal situation in the near future?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly hope so, and we hope to see more on the increase side. I'd like to take this opportunity to remind everybody in the Assembly that we have \$17 billion in an emergency fund that will help us bridge the storm. We're using it wisely. This year when we spend roughly \$4.7 billion out of that fund, we'll be able to sustain many of the programs that Albertans want. I think that's a good-news story in itself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the minister again. What effect will the stock market rally have on the heritage trust fund, and when will the next report be coming out?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, again, the heritage fund is our long-term savings account. We're very prudent in our management of that account. That account is not intended to be used as emergency savings. We hope to see increases. Many people will know, if they've taken a look at their most recent RSPs, that some of the stocks have gone up and had some rally since last year. We expect that when we get a first-quarter report on the heritage fund, we'll see some of that reflected in that report as well.

Fundraising Dinner Sales Committee

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, some of the names on the list of the sales committee for the Premier's dinner here in Edmonton, a partisan political fundraiser, make for interesting reading. Two of those names, Dave Broda and John Logan, are vice-chairs of the Surface Rights Board. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: how is the Surface Rights Board independently governed when its vice-chairs are fundraisers for the governing political party?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, this is a standard practice of the opposition to try to tarnish the reputation of good Albertans, one of whom actually served in this Assembly. There are a variety of backgrounds of members on that board, and they're doing a good job.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'm not trying to tarnish anyone's reputation here. What I'd just like to inquire about is: what kind of code and conflicts-of-interest provisions are there that would say that people on the Surface Rights Board should be fundraisers for a political party at Premier events?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the opposition obviously doesn't understand a lot about a variety of human rights, one of them called freedom of association. If somebody wants to be a member of a political party, they can be a member of a political party.

Mr. Hehr: I understand being a member of a political party full well. I just don't understand what kind of conflict-of-interest rules or regulations exist with your Surface Rights Board when they can be chief fundraisers for political events.

Dr. Morton: Now we're back to plan 1, which is innuendo, tarnishing the reputation of individuals. I'm tired of these kinds of questions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Integrated Ambulance Services

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in St. Albert are hearing rumours that due to ambulance service moving under the purview of Alberta Health Services, city council has had to hire more fire and ambulance workers and that this, in turn, will result in higher taxes for the city of St. Albert. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness please explain this situation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to comment on rumours, but let me state the fact. The fact is that prior to April 1 of this year the provincial government paid 60 per cent of ambulance costs, and municipalities paid 40 per cent. As of April 1 the provincial government through Alberta Health Services is paying 100 per cent of the cost of ambulance services. I fail to see how our picking up 40 per cent of the municipalities' cost somehow would increase their property taxes.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my next question is also for the same minister. Since the minister has said that the province is providing all of the funding for ambulance service, how is it possible that St. Albert's costs could rise? Were fire costs previously buried in the EMS budget?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don't know that I'd want to go that far, Mr. Speaker. I'd let the member and others make their own presumptions. All I know is that the changeover to EMS and the signing on of municipalities, if they chose to remain in an integrated service, has gone very well. In fact, in flipping through the clippings in the weekly newspapers, I happened to see where many of the mayors and councillors have been very pleased with it. I know that the mayor of Airdrie, as an example, has been a strong proponent of an integrated service. Her comments couldn't have been more complimentary about how this has worked well in their favour.

2:30

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, my final question. Again to the minister: can the Minister of Health and Wellness provide a couple of tangible examples of how this transition of ambulance services from municipalities to Alberta Health Services will benefit Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, we have several instances already identified that show that having a centralized dispatch service and one province-wide ambulance service has created efficiencies. I know, as an example, it was told to me that a patient was transferred from Olds to Red Deer, and the dispatch happened to pick up at the same time that another patient had to go from Red Deer to Olds, so that ambulance was used both ways. In the past you'd have had one ambulance passing the other on the highway.

We've got a number of other instances that have been related to me, and I'd be happy at some point in time, maybe by written answer, to let all members know of some of these examples.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Medically Necessary Abortions

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just an hour or two ago there was a large, well-organized pro-life, antiabortion protest on the steps of the Legislature. The Minister of Sustainable Resource

Development spoke to the cheering crowds and urged them on. Now, given that the Minister of Health and Wellness has indicated that there could be 50 or so services delisted, my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is there any consideration being given by this government to delist public funding for medically necessary abortions?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, given the very recent delisting of gender correction surgery by this government, I'm going to repeat this question for the minister. Will the Minister of Health and Wellness guarantee that this government plans to respect the law of the land, including the Supreme Court ruling, and continue to fund medically necessary abortions?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we've been very clear in this House that we plan to follow the principles of the Canada Health Act. I'm not sure if the member is familiar with those particular principles. I'd ask him to read up on it, and then we'll ensure that we follow those.

Dr. Taft: Yeah, I am pretty familiar with those, actually, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the same minister: will any delisting of any medically necessary services being considered by this government be taken to a policy field committee before implementation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can use whatever terminology we want, but clearly there are a number of programs and services that were offered in the past through the regional health authorities that the Alberta Health Services Board has to take a look at and ensure that there's not duplication of services, that they're services, within the budget constraints that they have, that they can continue to meet. That's the job of Alberta Health Services. I've got the utmost confidence that they'll do their job.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

High School Graduation

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One avenue in helping create a culture of innovation amongst our youth is to promote early high school graduation. When students reach the high school level and have flexibility in their course load, they have the potential to graduate early. To the Minister of Education: has the minister considered any incentives for early high school graduation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although we think of high school in traditional three-year terms, we are not actually organized on a time basis. It's organized on a credit basis. As soon as a student gets 100 credits, they can graduate. We have many students who take summer school courses. We have many students who try and accelerate their programs. As I say, there's no specific reason why a student has to be in high school for three years.

With respect to incentives to complete early, no, I don't believe we have any on a provincial-wide basis, nor are we contemplating such.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first and only supplemental: on the flip side, can the Minister of Education tell us what flexibility the education system has in allowing students to stay an extra year if they cannot finish high school in three years?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, in our business plan the members will see that we have targets which report on graduation within three and five years, I believe. That's to recognize the fact that while, as I just mentioned, some students want to accelerate their programs, in other cases students need a longer period of time to graduate. We want to emphasize that the outcome that we're looking for is graduation, is completion of high school. Therefore, whether a student wants to do it quickly and can do it quickly or whether it take a little bit more time – and some of the jurisdictions, for example, offer particular schools to encourage that – we have online learning; we have all sorts of processes for students to graduate in the manner which they find most appropriate for them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Workplace Health and Safety

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Employment and Immigration has recently updated the occupational health and safety code for 2009. Changes were made to confined spaces, cranes, hoists, and lifting devices, powered mobile equipment, and other devices. However, what is most notable is what hasn't changed with OH and S laws here in the province. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why were these updates done to provide more protection around the areas mentioned above but not to make joint work-site health and safety committees mandatory on each and every job site in Alberta where 20 or more people are employed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. The occupational health and safety code 2009 was enacted on April 2, 2009, and the version of the occupational health and safety code needs to be complied with on or before July 1 of 2009. We go through a very regular extensive public consultation in order to keep our codes up to standards, and the mandatory safety committees have never been part of the discussion as to the changes to the occupational health and safety code.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That public consultation is on a one-way street.

Again to the same minister: why are investigation reports of accidents not admissible as evidence in a trial, a public inquiry, or fatality inquiry?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has asked that question a number of times. The reports are exactly that. They are reports, and the individuals that make up those reports are usually the ones that will testify in person and indicate the background and the information that they had used towards the report, so generally in court those reports are not admissible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will the minister please consider making changes to allow these reports to be admissible as evidence in trials and inquiries, reports which are key in investigating not only work-site accidents but also, unfortunately, fatalities?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I'm the proper minister to be asking. I would suspect that this is a question for Justice to respond to and to determine the definition of reports or when they can be used and when they cannot be used.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

High School Curriculum

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I've been talking to a number of young people in my constituency and throughout the province in my role as chair of the Youth Secretariat. They've expressed concerns to me about the relevance of high school curriculum, specifically math and career and life management. All my questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister share with this Assembly how his department evaluates the relevancy and effectiveness of the CALM curriculum?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the CALM curriculum was designed to help students with questions and concerns that come up as part of life and planning for the future. It includes topics relevant to students' lives with outcomes organized around personal choices, resources, finances, and career and life choices. We regularly update curriculum, and as part of that process we're currently updating the CALM curriculum. Recent research about learning and teaching and the needs of students in society, continuity among programs, et cetera, are included when we do update the curriculum. We'll be consulting with stakeholders on that. One of the things the hon. member might be interested to note: there's a recent push, for example, to include things like financial literacy.

Mr. Fawcett: Actually, Mr. Speaker, that's very good to hear.

Grade 12 math, particularly math 30 pure and applied, provides a significant amount of pressure and stress on a large portion of students, and a majority of them have a difficult time seeing the relevance between this curriculum and their future career or educational pursuits. Quite frankly, calculus math has very little applicability to most careers and postsecondary courses. To the minister: how is the current math high school curriculum determined?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, a timely question because the math curriculum has been under revision, and a new math curriculum will be in place beginning September 2010. The new curriculum will have three streams. The first course sequence will replace pure mathematics and will provide students with the mathematics they need for those postsecondary programs that require intensive math skills, an in-depth study of math. The second sequence will replace applied math and will provide students with the knowledge, skills, and entry to those postsecondaries that require some math but not the high-intensity math. Then a third stream for those students who also will need math but at a lesser level. So we've revised the program. It will be implemented September 2010.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister must have seen my last question because he just answered it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 108 questions less one response, so that would be 107 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue the Routine.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) could I ask the Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing the 11th of May, which would make it the 12th of May for the first day of government business.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'd be happy to do so. Pending passage this afternoon of Government Motion 15, it may be anticipated that if necessary we would sit evenings as well as afternoons.

In projected government business I would propose for Tuesday, May 12, in the afternoon for second reading Bill 27, Alberta Research and Innovation Act; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 45, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 47, Appropriation Act; and as per the Order Paper. In the evening for second reading Bill 25, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 37, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 38, Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 39, Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 40, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009; and in Committee of the Whole bills 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, and 33 and as per the Order Paper.

For Wednesday, May 13, in the afternoon for second reading Bill 20, Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 23, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009. In committee bills 24, 25, 27, 28, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, and 47, the Appropriation Act, and as per the Order Paper. In the evening at 7:30 under Committee of the Whole Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009; and as per the Order Paper.

For Thursday, May 14, in the afternoon for second reading Bill 35; third reading on bills 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 24, 25, 27, 28, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 47.

Statement by the Speaker

Television Cameras on the Chamber Floor

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday in the House I provided erroneous information with respect to the CBC in an incident which occurred in 2000. At page 997 of *Hansard* I said, "I banned the CBC from this building for a year. They went to court; they lost. They went to court; they lost." The correct statement should have been: "I can confirm that CBC video cameras will not be permitted on the floor of the Legislature Chamber for the balance of the calendar year."

Further, the matter did not proceed to court; hence, the case could not have been lost if it did not go to court. I want to clarify this matter in the public record so that there'll be no misunderstanding either now or in the future, and I further wish to apologize to the House and the CBC for providing this incorrect information on May 6, 2009, in the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Corrective disciplinary action will be taken upon myself.

I also received a number of notes from members yesterday, but I indicated that we do have a protocol that allows for cameras to come onto the floor of the Legislative Assembly. It's a very detailed protocol. There are certain rules and conditions. The request made yesterday was by one carrier of the CBC to attend at one point in the activities. The CBC will decide who they choose to film and who they choose not to film. It will not be upon the direction of the chair or the Speaker. There is one location for these cameras. It just happens to be to the left of me in that one corner, so there's no interference whatsoever from the chair with respect to anyone coming or going. They have a protocol simply to film the person who's speaking at the time and not to pan.

Now we have, first of all, a point of order. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If you would allow me to argue this point of order on behalf of my leader, I would appreciate it. Thank you very much. This is referring to an exchange between the President of the Treasury Board and the Leader of the Official Opposition in the early part of question period. I would like to use as a citation 23(j), which is specific to using abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder, which in fact it did. I can compliment the President of the Treasury Board on his effectiveness.

The issue that is on point, Mr. Speaker, was – and I'm going to have to paraphrase because, as always, we don't have the benefit of the Blues. I'm sure the Speaker does, but I don't. The President of the Treasury Board was making an assertion that opposition members were asking asinine questions and also loading 30, 50, or 70 questions in the last few minutes of debate. I don't think even the Member for Calgary-Varsity could speak fast enough to load 70 questions into the last 10 minutes, so I'm not going to deal with that one.

But the use of the word "asinine" in reflection upon members of the Official Opposition and the questions they were asking, some of which I might add, Mr. Speaker, were on behalf of Albertans who had contacted us through our website, so in fact the President of the Treasury Board was casting the net very wide by in fact calling some members of the Alberta citizenry asinine for asking questions – just because questions are difficult for the President of the Treasury Board or embarrassing for the government or even put the government in a different light and catch them in a compromising position, I think for the member to say that opposition members are asking asinine questions is abusive.

The President of the Treasury Board is a smart man. He has a very wide vocabulary. He has a choice of many words that he could be using. So he may not like the questions that have been asked, but he definitely offends the intent behind Standing Order 23(j) and, I might add, *M and M* page 431 under Replies to Oral Questions. If I may quote part of it: "Replies are to be as brief as possible, to deal with the subject matter raised and to be phrased in language that does not provoke disorder." Again, my congratulations to the President of the Treasury Board for having provoked disorder.

You know, I understand that the President of the Treasury Board is a passionate individual. I can certainly understand that, but I

would argue that he went a tad too far in describing members of the Official Opposition and the questions that they ask as being asinine, and I would ask him at this point to withdraw the comment. We would certainly be happy to accept an apology from him.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit I was caught a little bit by surprise today. In fact, I thought the opposition had forgotten all about me over here, so I was so pleased that they asked me a question that I came out of my slumber in too much of a rapid ascent.

I truly do not ever wish to bring any disrespect to this Chamber. As to the terminology around "asinine," I guess appropriately I should have used the proper dictionary description of having or showing little sense. But I think that may too stretch what may upset the hon. member. In the fact that we do have a lot of business to do here today – and a lot of it is serious business – I would like to apologize to not only the hon. leader but to all hon. members. I appreciate the latitude that we have in here, and I don't want to abuse that. I do appreciate the opportunity to debate them in a meaningful way. Sometimes we need to stretch it.

Mr. Speaker, I also apologize to you for taking up the time of your Assembly.

2:50

The Speaker: Well, I think that's very honourable, but we're going to go one step further. I'm going to go out and buy a thesaurus and deliver it to the hon. President of the Treasury Board so that he can find alternate words to use in the future.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Are you asking if I'll accept the apology?

The Speaker: No. I assume that everybody did. We're on to your point of order now.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry; I don't have an additional point of order. I have a Standing Order 30.

The Speaker: Sorry. Standing Order 30.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've got a lot on my plate, and I just didn't need more.

Request for Emergency Debate

Budget Debate Process

Ms Blakeman: Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I would like to move a motion.

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the failure to provide written responses to questions posed during debate on the 2009-10 main estimates obstructs opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly in their review and evaluation of the budget, preventing them from making a fully informed decision on the vote.

I am aware that the motion has already been distributed in hard copy.

What brings us to this point today, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that during the estimates process 24 departments were involved in scrutiny by the opposition members and others. A number of questions were not able to be answered at the time. We have documented at least 10 instances where ministers agreed to provide written responses to the questions that we had asked. In fact, as of yesterday, the day before the votes are to take place, we had received

responses from the Minister of Energy. Just today I've had some correspondence from the minister of finance, who I think did attempt to supply answers. I don't think it actually got to the individual she was trying to get it to, that being our finance critic, but she did try. A total of 3 out of the 10 that we identified in *Hansard* as promising responses were in fact tabled either yesterday or today. We're still far short.

Our ability to make a decision and vote on behalf of all Albertans, filling our role as the Official Opposition, has been severely compromised. That's the crux of the debate today. It's our belief that the government's failure to provide adequate written responses for the information we requested during the estimates process places severe limitations on informed debate and jeopardizes our ability to accurately assess the budget.

Let me talk about urgency because that's what we're here to argue. This is the first year, Mr. Speaker, that we have not received a significant number of responses for answers that were not able to be given during the regular debate. In fact, I often commented on the promptness of the former minister from the constituency of Drumheller with her alacrity in providing written responses to the questions that had not been answered during her debates. We even at one point had a standing order, which was then numbered 59.05(1), that the vote not be held until answers had been tabled. Now, that standing order was in fact removed by the committee examining the standing orders, a committee that has a government majority, I might note.

We have a situation where there is no requirement on the government to provide those written responses, but there's certainly an expectation that we would receive it. As I said, in *Hansard* is recorded the ministers' agreement to that in a number of cases.

Mr. Speaker, today is the last day of the estimates process. These amounts are to be voted on in the Committee of Supply. I'm going to work my way through some of the tests that are generally used in assessing Standing Order 30. *Marleau and Montpetit* in 584 ask that it be specific, and I think I have been very specific. Our concern and the request for an emergency debate is because we have not been able to receive answers to questions that were outstanding from the estimates debates. It is urgent and important and, I would argue, requires urgent consideration.

M and M 585 asks that it be immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the province. Well, certainly, the budget and the vote on the budget is of concern to the province, a particular concern to a number of projects to be able to move forward or not. This is not a chronic issue, which is one of the tests under *M and M*. As I say, prior to this year we even had it in standing orders, but it had not been an issue. One or two departments might have been remiss, particularly the ones that were immediately prior to the vote, but not most of them. I mean, at best we got four responses out of 24 ministries, Mr. Speaker, so this was more of a wholesale abdication from providing us with the answers we were looking for.

Referring to the parameters set out in *Beauchesne* 387 to 398 on emergency debates, 387 and 389 are indicating that the primary issue is the urgency of the debate and whether there has been opportunity for debate under the rules and provisions of the House. Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. But this is about the information being provided in time for us to analyze and go forward on a vote, and that time has not been given to us.

What are the other opportunities? What else would we have to do to try and get that information? Do we have time to do it before the vote, which is scheduled for this afternoon? We have no time to go through a FOIP process at this point. As the Speaker well knows, once a written question or a motion for a return is on the Order Paper, there is a three-week delay, so that is not a possibility for us

to try and get this information through some other source since it wasn't supplied prior to today. We have very limited caucus research support. You know, again, the government has been careful to deny our request for that, certainly, through their membership on the committees that would have been able to grant us additional funds for that support. So our ability to go out and try and somehow find these answers between when we realized yesterday we weren't going to get the answers and our ability to vote on the budget today is severely compromised. So it's urgent, and we have no other opportunity to recoup and reassemble ourselves to do this.

The Speaker has set a test on the 28th of February of '06 in which he talks about other opportunities for a member of the Assembly to discuss this matter, and in fact I've just set out that it's not so much about the discussion; it's about the receipt of the information for us to be able to go forward and make a decision on a vote. But, further to that, the appropriation bill next week limits us in a way that we can't have a further discussion on it. There is nothing that compels the ministers to respond to any questions we might have if we were able to dig up the information and go back and say: "Well, here's the answer. Can you respond to me now?" There's nothing that compels the minister to respond. Our opportunity to seek that information has passed.

This is a genuine emergency. The budget debate is this afternoon. I would argue that when we look at that test set out by the Speaker, this is both the earliest opportunity for caucus to raise this issue and ask for an emergency debate but also the final opportunity for us to do that. The vote has been scheduled for this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I believe I have met the tests that are required here. We are talking about budget debates, so the usual test that would apply to an opportunity to debate a bill doesn't come into consideration here, and I've already talked about that the opportunity for debate in appropriation does not compel ministers to respond to us at all. Most times they don't, as a matter of fact. I think we have been put in a position by the government – I don't know if it was deliberate, but it was certainly effective – where the members of the opposition are here today without the information that they need to be able to proceed, and I would ask that we suspend the ordinary business of the day and allow for that emergency debate. Perhaps we'll be able to get some of the answers that we're lacking before a vote is finally called.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present that.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 30(2) states the following:

The Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

There are several words in here that are quite subjective: "may briefly state" and "may allow."

Are there additional members who would like to participate?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, very briefly, there is no valid argument to be made that the ordinary course of business, which this afternoon happens to be voting on the estimates, for the most part, be suspended in order to debate the failure, as the Opposition House Leader puts it, to answer questions. First of all, there is no parliamentary requirement that all of the opposition's questions be answered before a vote is taken on any bill or any subject matter. That would be a very strange practice indeed.

There was in this Assembly for one year under a trial set of procedures that we had for estimates a standing order that said that

answers should be filed if a commitment was made in estimates in Committee of Supply and that answers should be responded to within two weeks of that department's estimates having come up. That was a temporary standing order. That standing order no longer exists.

There is no standing order, there is no rule or procedure which requires, in fact, that written answers to questions be tabled. Certainly, in the past in Committee of Supply we have and I as House leader have encouraged the answering of questions just as a matter of practice. In fact, that exists with our new procedure this year with the estimates being heard before the policy field committees. But there is nothing in parliamentary procedure, law, or requirement that says that all the information that the opposition might want to have or asked for at any given time on any bill or subject matter before the House must be provided before they're required to go to a vote on that, and it would be most unusual if that was required in this circumstance today.

So if there's not a requirement for that, then the fact that the vote's coming up and there's some urgency to deal with this issue before the vote, the urgency matter, doesn't override the fact that there's no precedent, no requirement for what they're actually asking for to be done. Therefore, there's no urgency to debate it at this time. Just because we're having a vote, why would we usurp the normal procedure of the House in order to debate something that's never been the practice of the House other than for a very short period of time under some temporary rules?

The Speaker: Are there additional speakers that want to participate? Okay. The Leader of the Official Opposition, then the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, and then perhaps we can move on.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this as a point of confidence, really, as opposition leader, as representing the accountability of a government that's spending \$37 billion. I find it very difficult in good conscience to say to Albertans that we can support a budget where a large number of questions remain unanswered. In my particular department we were debating \$160 million a minute. It's very difficult to get the kinds of detail and understanding of where money is going, what kind of impacts it's having, why changes were made from one year to the next. Those are the kinds of questions that Albertans are asking me, especially professionals who have had many suggestions for improving the health care system over the last decade.

It's a very difficult position that we find ourselves in, the major responsibility of the opposition, and being fundamentally unable to say with confidence that we have reviewed the budget, that we have seen the decisions and the priorities of this government and could in some way endorse the past 12 months of spending or the plans for the future.

I think it's unfair to expect an opposition of nine members, indeed, to stand up and support a budget where we have had a very substantial number of reasonable questions, not asinine questions, actually, and have had no answers on a number of these, leaving us very vulnerable to criticism both within our caucus and by the public. I hope other members will support a few days at least of delay and further discussion and opportunity to raise some of these important issues that have to be clarified in the interest of the public.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne on this Standing Order 30, please.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past five weeks I had the opportunity to chair the estimates in Public Safety

and Services. You know, the ministers having from 230 to 270 exchanges during the three-hour period I found was very productive. Many times I could have raised the point that questions that were brought up weren't on the budget. They were on policy. They were on other issues and even referred to question period.

I don't really feel that the comments raised by the members opposite are valid. I think there was plenty of time. There were very good answers, and there were very good questions, like the opposition leader stated. There was ample time and good exchanges. What I experienced over the five weeks was that there were valid exchanges of questions and answers, and I don't believe that we need to deliberate longer on our estimates.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Standing Order 30 I would like to remind the previous speaker and all members of the Assembly that the opposition, when they go before a field policy committee, regardless of which department it is and which policy field committee, they're restricted and limited by the clock in the questions that they can ask. Regardless of how many questions they have, regardless of the size of the budget, whether it's in hundreds of thousands of dollars or hundreds of millions of dollars, the Official Opposition – and this is the whole point of this Standing Order 30 – does not have enough time to scrutinize the budget on behalf of the taxpayers of this province. We have 60 minutes at the start of the committee, and then we wait like everyone else to have our questions answered. We have detailed questions on the budget. Many of the government members, the hon. member is correct, have policy questions, but the Official Opposition tried to deal with each line item.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I just want to use a little bit of an example. I think there were four questions unanswered in mine, two from the third party and two from the Official Opposition, and I tabled them today. I think the Official Opposition ones, if I remember correctly, I gave them the answers, but they said: could you supply that to me in writing so I have a copy of it? They got the answers verbally there and wanted them supplied in writing. That's what I've done.

In the eight years that I've been in this House, I can't remember once through the eight budgets that our budget was supported by the Official Opposition. Their job is to criticize us. Let's move on with things.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:10

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to set the record straight, in previous years we have pulled out certain budgets for further discussion, but in the end the budgets were passed, and we were part of that passing. Let's not rewrite history.

Secondly, anyone who has been in the committee of services debate with me knows how hard and how fast I try to get issues on the table. I use the format of the full 10 minutes so that I can ask and put on the record as many questions as I possibly can. Last night I think I achieved the highest speed humanly possible, and I was pleased to have an hon. member who is a former emergency doc in his background sitting beside me in case I passed out from lack of oxygen.

The point I'm making, Mr. Speaker, is that I was able to ask about 15 pages' worth of very important questions on Children and Youth

Services. I still had at least five pages to go. These questions were very directed. They were specific. I cited page and reference number from the pages of the ministries that I talked to. I do appreciate that there were opportunities to have some of those questions answered, and it would probably be unrealistic of me to think that the hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services could have provided written responses for me today. But as a former teacher, the fact that I received the responses for the Education debate from weeks previously on my desk today, where I have no opportunity to go over the information and make an accurate judgment on the budget, I would give this paper a failing grade, as I'm sure you would in my circumstance.

If we are going to do Albertans justice in debating a multibillion-dollar budget, then the time allotted for the opposition, which is in total 40 minutes out of that three-hour period when you break it down into 10 minute slots, isn't doing Albertans any type of justice. It's not holding the government accountable, and contrary to what the Minister of Transportation suggested, the job of the opposition is not simply to oppose. It's to provide viable alternatives, to require accountability. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, in the time allotted that was impossible to do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, the chair has listened attentively to the arguments put forward on this Standing Order 30 application, and I would like to thank the members – there were quite a number today – who actually participated in this debate.

I've already written into the record what Standing Order 30 says about the brief statements and the role of the chair then to rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order. If the chair were to find this request in order, then the question would be put to the Assembly as to whether the debate on the urgent matter should proceed, and if 15 or more members were to rise in support of this motion, then the emergency debate would proceed. Again, first the chair must rule on whether the request is in order, and it is in order. The application was received at 10:14 this morning. We know what the motion basically says.

To be in order, Standing Order 30(7) requires that the matter proposed for discussion "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." Several members have referred to *Marleau and Montpetit*, but I would like to refer members to pages 586 to 588 of *Marleau and Montpetit's House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and *Beauchesne's* paragraph 390.

One of the criteria that the Speaker must consider is whether the matter could be brought before the House by some other means. *Marleau and Montpetit* at page 587 outlines that. It's also important to note that Standing Order 30 applications cannot be used as a mechanism to debate the interpretation of a standing order. Once again *Marleau and Montpetit* at page 588 will provide further reference.

Both the Government House Leader and the Official Opposition House Leader did refer to some recent history surrounding our standing orders. In 2007 there was in place a temporary standing order, 59.05, as has been identified, which required members of Executive Council to table answers to questions raised in Committee of Supply within two weeks, and such answers were to be tabled prior to the vote on the main estimates. That requirement was in place for one session of this Legislature.

Hearing the debate today and looking at the motion today and looking at the circumstances today, the chair is hard pressed to find that this issue relates to a genuine emergency for several reasons. A Standing Order 30 application is not the appropriate means to debate

matters concerning the administration of this House, and there are other opportunities for this issue to be brought before the Assembly or to be considered by the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing.

As all members of this Assembly are aware, the current standing orders were a product of the work of an all-party committee of this Assembly and were the subject of debate in this Assembly last fall. One can look at *Alberta Hansard*, November 27, 2008, pages 2112 to 2121. It would appear that during the committee's deliberations last year and during the debate on the amendments to the standing orders would have been the appropriate times to discuss a requirement to table responses to questions raised during estimates consideration. Any member could have initiated such a discussion by moving an amendment on point.

Accordingly, the chair does not find the request for leave in order under the Assembly's rules, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Committee Membership Change

14. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that Mr. MacDonald be appointed to the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund to fill a vacancy.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The House will recall that sometime earlier this spring session a certain member resigned from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee. Under the provisions of the act, I believe it is, that provides for the membership of that committee, it provides that a certain number of members from the government caucus be appointed and a certain number of members from the opposition caucus. Accordingly, it's appropriate to propose a member from the opposition caucus to fill the vacancy that was created by the resignation of an opposition member. As there is not a member from the third party available to fill that vacancy, we have requested the Official Opposition to provide a nominee. They have, and it is the member I referenced. I would ask the House to support the motion.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Government Motion 14 I consider it a privilege to sit on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee. I have served on this committee before. It is an issue of great interest in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, not only the history of the heritage savings trust fund but also the amount of money that's there now. I have many interesting discussions not only in the constituency office but at the Capilano Mall with constituents regarding the heritage savings trust fund and the direction we're going. I would be very pleased to sit on this committee again.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the privilege of serving with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar now for this is the third term. When this vacancy became available, we considered it in caucus, and the member, despite his heavy workload, including

chairing Public Accounts and serving on any number of other committees, volunteered with enthusiasm for the position. I think he will fill the position extremely well. He's got a remarkable mind in many ways, we'd all agree . . . [interjection] I was going to finish that by saying that he's got a remarkable mind for numbers and details, and I think he'll do an admirable job. I would urge all members to support this motion. I can see that the President of Treasury Board is enthusiastic. I'm glad to support this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's nomination to this committee. I won't speak to his remarkable mind, but I will say that I have served with the hon. member, and I remember that he served with great ability. I'm pleased that he's willing to serve. I'm willing to support his nomination.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and speak in support of the motion to appoint the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I know he's got a remarkable mind. People have remarked on his mind from time to time. I think he's a person of exceptional ability and integrity. I regret that we don't have the staff support to continue on all of the committees that are in the House. I think that the hon. member would be a fine member of the committee.

The Speaker: Should the hon. Government House Leader close the debate, or shall I just call the question on the motion?

Mr. Hancock: Question, please.

[Government Motion 14 carried unanimously]

3:20 Evening Sitings

15. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the remainder of the 2009 spring sitting, unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

The Speaker: Under Standing Order 4(1) this motion is not debatable, so I call the question.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of Supply to order.

Hon. members, as most of you are aware, this is the first time in the history of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta where consideration of proposed main estimates of the general revenue fund and lottery fund and business plans of various ministries was done

almost entirely by policy field committees. The exception, of course, is the estimates and business plan for Executive Council, which were considered by the Committee of Supply on April 15, 2009.

We are now on the last leg of this historical journey, where these estimates must now be voted on. Prior to beginning, I thought it would be useful to outline how the process will unfold this afternoon. The Committee of Supply will first call on the chairs or deputy chairs of the policy field committees to report on their meetings with the various departments under their mandate: standing orders 59.01(7) and 59.03(4). Members are reminded that no vote is required when these reports are presented.

The committee will then proceed to vote on the amendments introduced during the policy field committee meetings, and please note that these votes shall be taken without debate or amendment: Standing Order 59.03(1)(a).

The vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services and the estimates of the officers of the Legislature shall then take place, also to be decided without debate or amendment: Standing Order 59.03(5).

Following that, pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(1) the committee will then proceed with a single vote on the main estimates. Please note that if the vote has not concluded prior to the normal adjournment hour, the process will continue until all matters have been voted upon. At that time the committee will immediately rise and report.

Committee Reports

The Chair: I would now invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services to present his committee's report.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services and pursuant to standing orders 59.01(7) and 59.03(4) I am pleased to report that your committee has reviewed the 2009-2010 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Department of Culture and Community Spirit, Department of Education, Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, Department of Municipal Affairs, and the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

I would also like to table amendments to the estimates of the following departments that were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: one in the Department of Culture and Community Spirit, one amendment in the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, one in the Department of Municipal Affairs, and two in the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now call on the chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy to present his committee's report.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Economy and pursuant to standing orders 59.01(7) and 59.03(4) I am pleased to report that your committee has reviewed the 2009-2010 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Advanced Education and Technology, Employment and Immigration, Finance and Enterprise, Infrastructure, Transportation.

I would also like to table amendments to the estimates of the following departments that were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: for the Department of Advanced Education and Technology, three; for the Department of

Employment and Immigration, one; for the Department of Finance and Enterprise, three; for the Department of Infrastructure, one; and for the Department of Transportation, two.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Health.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the deputy chair and on behalf of the chair of the Standing Committee on Health and pursuant to standing orders 59.01(7) and 59.03(4) I'm pleased to report that your committee has reviewed the 2009-2010 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Children and Youth Services, Health and Wellness, Seniors and Community Supports.

I would also like to table amendments to the estimates of the following departments that were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: Department of Health and Wellness, one; Department of Seniors and Community Supports, one.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services and pursuant to standing orders 59.01(7) and 59.03(4) I'm pleased to report that your committee has reviewed the 2009-2010 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Aboriginal Relations, Justice, Service Alberta, Solicitor General and Public Security, Treasury Board.

I would also like to table amendments to the estimates of the following departments that were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: Department of Justice, one; Department of Solicitor General and Public Security, one; Department of Treasury Board, one.

Further, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank all members that participated in our committee both from the opposition and from government and, as well, the staff from *Hansard*, the security officials, and our able committee clerk, Jody Rempel, for the excellent service given during those estimates.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you.

Then for the last one here I would like to call on the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As the deputy chair and acting on behalf of the chair for the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment and pursuant to standing orders 59.01(7) and 59.03(4) I'm pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2009-10 proposed estimates and business plans for the following departments: Agriculture and Rural Development, Energy, Environment, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Sustainable Resource Development.

I would also like to table amendments to the estimates of the following departments that were introduced during the meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: one for the Department of Environment, one for the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, and one for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, chairs.

3:30 Vote on Main Estimates 2009-10

The Chair: The next item in our business is to vote on the amendments introduced during the policy field committee meetings. There are a total of 25 amendments, and they are numbered A1 to A25. All members have received copies of the amendments on their desks. Now we start voting on each amendment.

A1. Dr. Taft moved that the estimates for communications under reference 1.0.3 at page 36 of the 2009-10 main estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Technology be reduced by \$63,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 33 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$2,977,069,000.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

A2. Dr. Taft moved that the estimates for strategic corporate services under reference 1.0.4 at page 36 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Technology be reduced by \$3 million so that the amount to be voted at page 33 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$2,974,132,000.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

A3. Dr. Taft moved that the estimates for corporate costs under reference 1.0.5 at page 36 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Technology be reduced by \$1 million so that the amount to be voted at page 33 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$2,976,132,000.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

A4. Mr. Chase moved that the estimates for horse racing and breeding renewal program under reference 4.0.6 at page 108 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Culture and Community Spirit be reduced by \$33 million so that the amount to be voted at page 105 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$259,762,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:32 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: Before calling the vote, the chair would like to remind hon. members that should there be any subsequent divisions, the interval between division bells shall be reduced to one minute.

For the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Swann
Chase	MacDonald	Taft
Hehr	Mason	Taylor

Against the motion:

Allred	Horner	Rogers
Benito	Jacobs	Sandhu
Bhullar	Klimchuk	Sherman
Blackett	Lindsay	Snelgrove

Brown	Lund	Stevens
Calahasen	McFarland	Tarchuk
Campbell	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Dallas	Oberle	Weadick
Evans	Olson	Woo-Paw
Hancock	Ouellette	Xiao
Hayden	Quest	Zwozdesky
Totals:	For – 9	Against – 33

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

- A5. Mr. Taylor moved that the estimates for strategic corporate services under reference 1.0.3 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Employment and Immigration be reduced by \$42,000 so that the amount to be voted for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$1,015,314,000.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

- A6. Ms Blakeman moved that the estimates for people services under reference 1.0.5 at page 180 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Environment be reduced by \$66,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 177 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$251,681,000.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

- A7. Dr. Swann moved that the estimates for office of the Premier/Executive Council under reference 1.0.1 at page 196 of the 2009-10 main estimates of Executive Council be reduced by \$16,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 193 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$35,864,000.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

- A8. Dr. Swann moved that the estimates for public affairs – strategic communications under reference 2.0.2 at page 196 of the 2009-10 main estimates of Executive Council be reduced by \$7,400,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 193 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$28,480,000.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

- A9. Mr. Taylor moved that the estimates for strategic and business services under reference 1.0.3 at page 204 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Finance and Enterprise be reduced by \$26,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 201 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$479,263,000.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

- A10. Mr. Taylor moved that the estimates for communications under reference 1.0.4 at page 204 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Finance and Enterprise be reduced by \$60,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 201 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$479,229,000.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

- A11. Mr. Taylor moved that the estimates for treasury management under reference 4.0.4 at page 204 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Finance and Enterprise be reduced by \$5 million so that the amount to be voted at page

201 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$474,289,000.

[Motion on amendment A11 lost]

- A12. Ms Pastoor moved that the estimates for corporate support services under reference 1.0.7 at page 242 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness be reduced by \$51,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 239 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$12,962,420,000.

[Motion on amendment A12 lost]

- A13. Mr. Hehr moved that the estimates for support services under reference 1.0.3 at page 258 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs be reduced by \$1,500,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 255 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$530,527,000.

[Motion on amendment A13 lost]

- A14. Dr. Taft moved that the estimates for strategic services under reference 1.0.4 at page 272 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Infrastructure be reduced by \$1 million so that the amount to be voted at page 269 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$584,195,000.

[Motion on amendment A14 lost]

- A15. Mr. Hehr moved that the estimates for corporate services under reference 1.0.4 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations be reduced by \$75,000 so that the amount to be voted for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$26,272,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A15 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:47 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Swann
Chase	MacDonald	Taft
Hehr	Mason	Taylor

3:50

Against the motion:

Allred	Horner	Rogers
Benito	Jacobs	Sandhu
Bhullar	Klimchuk	Sherman
Blackett	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Brown	McFarland	Tarchuk
Calahasen	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Campbell	Oberle	Weadick
Dallas	Olson	Woo-Paw
Evans	Ouellette	Xiao
Hancock	Quest	Zwozdesky
Hayden		

Totals: For – 9

Against – 31

[Motion on amendment A15 lost]

A16. Mr. Kang moved that the estimates for corporate services under reference 1.0.4 at page 294 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Justice be reduced by \$15,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 291 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$461,638,000.

[Motion on amendment A16 lost]

A17. Mr. Chase moved that the estimates for support services under reference 1.0.3 at page 306 of the 2009-10 main estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs be reduced by \$1,247,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 303 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$592,723,000.

[Motion on amendment A17 lost]

A18. Ms Pastoor moved that the estimates for strategic corporate services under reference 1.0.4 at page 322 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Seniors and Community Supports be reduced by \$12,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 319 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$1,971,773,000.

[Motion on amendment A18 lost]

A19. Mr. Kang moved that the estimates for corporate services under reference 1.0.4 at page 354 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Solicitor General and Public Security be reduced by \$15,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 351 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$601,301,000.

[Motion on amendment A19 lost]

A20. Mr. Hehr moved that the estimates for communications under reference 1.0.3 at page 378 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development be reduced by \$325,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 375 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$335,568,000.

[Motion on amendment A20 lost]

A21. Mr. Chase moved that the estimates for strategic corporate services under reference 1.0.3 at page 394 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation be reduced by \$53,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 391 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$190,708,000.

[Motion on amendment A21 lost]

A22. Mr. Chase moved that the estimates for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games under reference 4.0.6 at page 395 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation be reduced by \$2 million so that the amount to be voted at page 391 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$188,761,000.

[Motion on amendment A22 lost]

A23. Dr. Taft moved that the estimates for communications under reference 1.0.3 at page 414 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Transportation be reduced by \$337,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 411 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$2,282,369,000.

[Motion on amendment A23 lost]

A24. Dr. Taft moved that the estimates for strategic services under reference 1.0.4 at page 414 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Department of Transportation be reduced by \$29,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 411 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$2,282,677,000.

[Motion on amendment A24 lost]

A25. Mr. Kang moved that the estimates for spending management and planning under reference 5.0.1 at page 430 of the 2009-10 main estimates of the Treasury Board be reduced by \$750,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 427 for expense and equipment/inventory purchases is \$241,731,000.

[Motion on amendment A25 lost]

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Standing Committee on Members' Services. Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the question on all matters relating to the 2009-10 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$96,265,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The chair shall look at the government estimates now and ask those members in favour of each of the resolutions for the 2009-10 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, to please say aye.

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Horner	Rogers
Benito	Jacobs	Sandhu
Bhullar	Klimchuk	Sherman
Blackett	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Brown	Lund	Tarchuk
Calahasen	McFarland	VanderBurg
Campbell	Mitzel	Weadick
Dallas	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Evans	Ouellette	Xiao
Hancock	Quest	Zwozdesky
Hayden		

4:00

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Swann
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Chase	Mason	Taft
Hehr	Pastoor	Taylor
Kang		
Totals	For – 31	Against – 10

[The estimates of the general revenue fund and lottery fund were carried]

The Chair: I would now like to invite the hon. Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2009-10 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2009-10 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So moved.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2009-10 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2009-10 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$58,450,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$23,221,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,911,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,951,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$991,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$5,741,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$149,966,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,977,132,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$139,300,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$622,857,000.

Children and Youth Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,136,277,000.

Culture and Community Spirit: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$292,762,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$2,685,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$4,298,126,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,015,356,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$252,614,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$251,747,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,100,000.

Executive Council: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$35,880,000.

Finance and Enterprise: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$479,289,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$43,660,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$12,962,471,000; capital investment, \$19,200,000.

Housing and Urban Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$532,027,000.

Infrastructure: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$585,195,000; capital investment, \$588,929,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$26,347,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$461,653,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$593,970,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,971,785,000.

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$366,018,000; capital investment, \$92,500,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$601,316,000; capital investment, \$35,061,000; lottery fund payments, \$1,497,927,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$335,893,000; capital investment, \$20,450,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$190,761,000; capital investment, \$17,284,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$375,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,282,706,000; capital investment, \$1,482,278,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$6,545,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$242,481,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

4:10 Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate May 6: Dr. Brown]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. I sat with interest, and I listened to the speeches from various members yesterday afternoon. It certainly was an interesting discussion and debate.

I listened to all sides in this discussion, and from what I have learned, Mr. Speaker, Bill 44 is a political compromise between the progressives and the conservatives in the government caucus. I would be very interested in hearing more on the public record of the internal debate that went on on Bill 44 in the government caucus. Certainly, it must have been an interesting discussion because we see the progressives and then we see the conservatives and we see this bill which, in my view, is a political compromise between both of those groups. I don't think the citizens of this province are further ahead in any way with this compromise.

Now, this bill writes sexual orientation into legislation and once and for all indicates and points out that it is no longer tolerable that we can discriminate in any way, shape, or form based on sexual

orientation. It makes other administrative changes to separate the role of the executive director of human rights within the department from the director position with the Human Rights Commission as both were the same person. Certainly, the section 11 that is added includes a parental opt-out that will allow parents to remove their children from any teaching course or lesson or instruction that deals with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation. Teachers are required to provide notice of these topics in writing to parents so that the parents can decide to remove their children from the discussion.

With this legislation we've also got to remember what's not in it and should be in it. It ignores the recommendation from the Sheldon Chumir foundation to remove the hate crime freedom of speech in section 3 of the legislation as it currently stands. When we look at this and we review *Hansard* on the record again, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the UN convention was quoted and discussed yesterday. Certainly, hon. members are correct in quoting the United Nations universal declaration of human rights, but it's interesting that the government seems to be shopping or picking and choosing which issues they want the declaration of human rights from the United Nations to apply to and which issues they do not want it to apply to or issues that they ignore.

I'm dealing specifically with the issue around migratory workers or workers that may be coming here as temporary workers. The United Nations has some issues not only in this country but throughout the world as to how those workers are treated, and the government conveniently ignores those standards whenever we're dealing with workers, whether they're on farms or whether they're in factories. Certainly, also in children's services – and this has been brought up many times by many different members as to how the UN declaration on human rights could perhaps be considered when we're drafting rules and regulations regarding the treatment of children under the care of the government. I found that quite interesting, not unusual because, again, this is a government that picks and chooses and selects when they want to provide certain information to voters.

Now, the Alberta Liberals have been calling on the government to write sexual orientation into the human rights act as an illegal ground of discrimination. We've been asking for that in the House for years. Hon. members have brought up the fact that it was the courts; it was the judicial system that finally forced this reluctant government to come forward with that.

Ms Blakeman: They went around them and just wrote it in.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, that's right. The courts did write it in to become law. That is the part of this legislation that I think is long overdue.

But I cannot understand the parental opt-out section. Certainly, this is going to create a legal and an administrative mess for teachers and the Human Rights Commission. It's going to threaten, in my view, the quality of public education in Alberta if teachers are forced to censor themselves. I believe that this section has to be removed in its entirety from this legislation. There is no need for this, to start with. When we look at the current School Act, there's no need. There's absolutely no need to have this section in here.

When we look at section 11, I'm not going to discuss in any further detail because hon. members before me have, but I'm going to note that in subsection (1) under the act we must "include subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation." That was discussed yesterday. When we talk about sub (2) "the teacher or other person shall in accordance with the request of the parent or guardian and without academic penalty permit the student" to do a number of things, either leave the classroom on a temporary basis or remain in the classroom without taking part in the

instruction. How is this going to work? I asked yesterday for the resources that will be provided to school boards and to schools and to the classroom to enforce this. What extra resources will be needed?

We look at Edmonton public, and we look at the site-based budgeting that goes on, that principals and teachers and other staff may set that budget with the co-ordination of the central office. How are they to know, if this bill becomes law, that these options will be exercised by a parent or guardian? How is this all going to work? Who is going to provide the resources to ensure that it will work? Certainly if this amendment becomes law, there is going to be quite a long list of parents or guardians that are going to take exception to some of what may be studied in these classrooms. How are teachers going to deal with this?

Science. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill gave quite an interesting presentation yesterday afternoon while we were discussing Bill 44, which, in my view, rejects the importance of science. The hour before that we discussed Bill 27, which is a legislative initiative to enhance, as the hon. minister has indicated, our position in research and development within the scientific community in the world. When we talk about Bill 27, I certainly have my issues around it, but I recognize the diligence and the interest the minister has in promoting research and technology in this province and what it would mean to all of us.

4:20

Then I find it quite ironic, Mr. Speaker, that an hour later we're into this bill that essentially could allow people to argue that dinosaurs did not exist or, if they did exist, they were wandering around Drumheller at the same time the pyramids were being built in Egypt. This bill will certainly add to a lot of confusion. It is totally unnecessary. Parents already, as I said, have the option. They can opt their children out of sex education if they so wish. Biology and the science of evolution are likely to attract religious objections. The government knows this. Evolution is not the only area that could trigger such objections. As I said, what about the discussions of dinosaurs and other things that occur in nature?

Mr. Mason: Where did the oil come from?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asks the question: where did oil come from? A lot of the guys I know in the oil patch call it dinosaur juice. That's what they call crude oil. It's quite interesting that some reject the whole idea of the creationist view of natural history. It can be strict. It can be rigid. Charles Darwin and his ideas can be certainly called into question. The teaching of other sciences such as astronomy could also be impacted if this amendment were to become law.

Now, here's what others have said about this parental opt-out section. This is from the Sheldon Chumir foundation. They point out that if the parental opt-out clause is legislated or becomes law, they have this question: would the Human Rights Commission be obliged to respond to concerns – phone calls, letters, and the like – from parents? How are we going to do all this? Again, what resources are going to be available? What's the formal process here?

Teachers. It was described yesterday as a chill, and it certainly will be that for teachers.

With this legislation, Mr. Speaker, if it's to become law, we're going to enshrine a right under the human rights act in one section and, in my view, take it away in another. I think that is unacceptable.

Again, in conclusion, I would remind members of this Assembly to please think about what we're doing here with this bill. It's not

right. It never was right. There's no need for this legislation. I can understand where the government caucus is coming from. There must have been a political row over there, and this is a political compromise, again, between the progressives and the conservatives in the government caucus. It is not acceptable. I think it's going to lead to chaos and confusion and further erosion of our public school system. There are other avenues that already exist in the School Act for parents to take. Please vote this down.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, if no one wants to use the five-minute question period, I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark on the bill.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate on Bill 44, the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:26 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to May 07, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft., adjourned), 980-83 (May 5 aft.)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft.)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft., adjourned)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]

- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft., adjourned)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft., adjourned)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)

- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft., adjourned, amendment introduced)
- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft., adjourned)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 36 Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft.)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft., adjourned)
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft.)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft., adjourned)
- 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft., adjourned)
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft.)
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft.)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)

- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft, defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, May 11, 2009

Issue 38

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 11, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please feel free to join in in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Pedro Moitinho de Almeida, ambassador of the Portuguese Republic. Accompanying His Excellency is Mr. Carlos de Sousa Amaro, consul general from Vancouver, and Mr. Aurélio Carmo Fernandes, honorary consul from here in Edmonton. I was honoured to host a special luncheon today in honour of His Excellency's first visit to Alberta.

Alberta and Portugal have a solid trading relationship, and the Portuguese community plays a prominent role in our province. We value the hard work and dedication of the Portuguese community in enriching our province. Their work helps increase the quality of life in our province and helps build stronger communities and a stronger Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the delegation rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature very special guests, students from Mundare school. I just took a picture with them. They're excited, well behaved, and spending an interesting afternoon here in the Legislature. They are accompanied by teacher Robin Derow and parent helpers Lisa McNeely and Michele Zurborg. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The young people from Mundare should also know that today is the birthday of their Member of the Legislative Assembly.

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this House 65 constituents, visitors from Gibbons school. We have three grade 6 classes here, and they are led by their two teachers, Ms Colleen Lowe and Miss Amy Jensen, and are accompanied by parent helpers Mrs. Niki Smyth, who's actually a councillor at the town of Gibbons, as well as Cory Smyth, Sherida Allison, Becky Sturm, Sandra Welsh, Stephanie Thimer, and Shiela Fediow. I had the pleasure to meet them and take a picture on the steps, and they took part in the mock Legislature this morning. I just want to welcome them and ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I indeed have a great privilege to introduce two people to you and through you to members of the Assembly. One of them is my sister, who is here from Eugene, Oregon. She was the oldest in our family – so if I become out of control or unruly, she probably didn't do the task she was left to do that my mother left her – my sister Peggy. With her is my mother, Margaret. It's just maybe a little more special because of yesterday being Mother's Day. For those of us that had the opportunity to spend some time with our mothers, those of us that are lucky enough to still have them, on behalf of all of the Assembly to all the mothers of Alberta: let's give them a genuine welcome through my mother to them. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly members of my staff from the workforce supports division. These are the people who work behind the scenes, supporting Albertans to upgrade their skills, make informed career choices, and get jobs. They create the policies around the skills investment, career services, and partnerships that help Albertans succeed in the workforce. I appreciate their commitment, dedication, and the high standard of work they consistently produce in support of all Albertans. I would ask that our guests stand as I introduce them: D'Arcy Claypool, Beryl Keller, Donna Bruce, Jaclyn Denman, Linda Willis, Shirley Meakin, Melissa Sliter, Denise Gazloff, Caroline Maran, Cindy Kleinmeyer, Synora Thomas, Azmina Walji, Annya Masse, Emma Abdelmaseh. I would ask all of the members of the Assembly to give these guests a very warm welcome to our Legislature.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a special introduction today. Every year I am so impressed with the calibre of applicants for summer STEP positions. Edmonton-Riverview has been most fortunate again this year. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Rebecca Kos, who is seated in the public gallery. Do you want to stand up, please, Rebecca? She's entering her third year at the University of Alberta this coming September in the Faculty of Business, with a major in accounting and a minor in business law. I might need her services in the future.

Who knows? In her free time her interests include a variety of sports, including swimming and tennis, as well as singing and theatre. We're very fortunate to have her talent and enthusiasm in our office, and I'd like all members to please give her a warm welcome. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to the members of the Assembly seven members of the Kingsway Business Association. These members represent approximately 300 organizations in my constituency and are here today to show their support for the Edmonton City Centre Airport. I'll be discussing more about the KBA in a member's statement this afternoon. For now I would like to introduce board chair Mary Anne Stanway, Paul Gervais, Bob McEwen, Kathy Hall, George Marine, Don Koziak, and Karon Kosof. I'd ask them all to rise and please receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When destruction hits our homes, our roads, our communities, when a disaster strikes and leaves us immobilized, when we are filled with fear and unable to help ourselves, or when an accident occurs and we are in need of help, the brave and selfless firefighter is there to come to our aid. The late author Kurt Vonnegut said: "I can think of no more stirring symbol of man's humanity to man than a fire engine." That resembles the members of the Lesser Slave regional fire service, who are heroes to many in our community because they embody skill, training, compassion, and commitment, and they help many, many people in need.

1:40

There is one individual, however, who has received recognition for his outstanding efforts. This past December, just five days before Christmas, a woman from Slave Lake drove into town to pick up her daughter. On the way home their truck hit a patch of ice and flipped upside down. As you know, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency it's a long way to the hospital. Jamie Coutts, volunteer firefighter and acting fire chief of Lesser Slave regional fire service, who lived nearby, was able to reach the accident scene within minutes, before other firefighters arrived, and saved two lives that day. He received commendation from the Minister of Municipal Affairs for his actions on behalf of his team.

When I asked him if I could use the names of the other firefighters who came to help he said: "Oh, no. Don't even mention my name. Names aren't necessary. Firefighting is the ultimate team effort." However, today on behalf of the family I do want to thank Jamie Coutts, who we call the man of the hour, who worked hard to save the two people. I'd also like to thank the Lesser Slave regional fire service for their service and commitment to their community. Keep up the great work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Anniversary of Canada-Israel Diplomatic Relations

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of myself, my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Creek, and all Members of the Legislative Assembly I rise to recognize the 60th anniversary of

diplomatic relations between Canada and Israel. Canada recognized the state of Israel upon its founding in 1948 and established formal diplomatic relations on May 11, 1949.

Over the last 60 years Canada and Israel have deepened this relationship through strong political, economic, cultural, and social ties. Alberta's Jewish community of 14,000 has been important to the development of these relationships, acting as a bridge between our two countries. In a world that faces many challenges, let us celebrate this 60th anniversary of relations and our commitment to continuing positive ties between Canada and Israel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Calgary Airport Runway

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents and I are very concerned about the Calgary Airport Authority's plan to construct a fourth runway. We understand that the new runway is needed to serve Calgary's growing airport traffic, but we are opposed to how the authority's plan will not only segregate northeast Calgary from the airport but will affect 200,000 residents living on the east side. To construct a new runway, the city must close down Barlow Trail north of McKnight Boulevard. This will sever the northeast from the only link it has to the Calgary International Airport. Worse yet, there are no plans to build a new link between the northeast and the airport despite the fact that the northeast is the city's fastest growing quadrant.

Through the airport, the northeast is Calgary's gateway to the entire world. To maintain this position, the city needs adequate transportation infrastructure. To address this issue, my constituents have proposed that a tunnel be built under the new runway. The tunnel has been endorsed not only by the communities in my riding but by the city of Calgary and by the communities in the ridings of Calgary-Cross, Calgary-East, Calgary-North Hill, and Calgary-Montrose, whose members are seated on the government benches. I'm sure that communities in the other ridings of members opposite will also agree.

Mr. Speaker, this transportation artery is necessary to maintain the economic vitality of the whole city of Calgary. The price we would pay now is far smaller than the costs that would come later if we do nothing now. Without this link to the airport, Calgarians will see more pink slips, more business closures, a worsening quality of life for their families, and continuous transportation delays. This administration should accept the recommendations of Calgarians and ensure that the tunnel is built. It is the right thing to do for not only Calgary's future prosperity but also Alberta's.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Kingsway Business Association

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton Kingsway revitalization zone, or BRZ, was established by the city of Edmonton by bylaw in November of 1987. The Kingsway Business Association is an organization comprised of board members that represent both the large and small businesses in the region. The KBA has continually worked towards making Edmonton Kingsway the preferred place to shop, play, fly, and stay.

The major goals of this nonprofit organization are to continue to enhance the projects for Edmonton Kingsway and to support efforts to promote the long-term viability of the Edmonton City Centre Airport. Again, the debate about the City Centre Airport is one that

affects many people in Alberta. The status of this airport is integral to organizations like the KBA because they are trying to make Edmonton Kingsway into a destination, and without an active airport this would be very difficult. The KBA is also concerned about the future of the airport, and frankly so am I. The ongoing debate needs to address the issues with the city and key stakeholders to ensure that the best interests of the capital region are met.

It is important to keep the dialogue going and to pay close attention to the wisdom and concerns voiced by organizations like the Kingsway Business Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

National Mining Week

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize National Mining Week, which was first celebrated in 1996, acknowledging the importance of the Canadian mining industry to the economic development of Canada and Alberta. I've spent over 35 years in the mining sector, 30 of them in coal. The coal mining community has played a significant role in the early and current development of the province.

Over 1,800 mines are known to have operated in Alberta and were first mined to supply domestic heating needs. Lethbridge had its first coal mine in 1882, while the first mine in Edmonton was 1883. Some of the earliest mining in Alberta was within the now Banff national park. The Crowsnest Pass in southern Alberta was also developed as a coal mining centre to supply coal to the CPR. A similar role was established in west-central Alberta for an area known as the Coal Branch in my constituency, an area just south of Hinton. A number of mines and towns developed to supply coal to the Grand Trunk and the Canadian National railways. The towns of Nordegg and Grande Cache both were developed for the purpose of coal mining.

Early coal mining established the first major trade corridors between Alberta and British Columbia, the historic Coal Branch segment of the Canadian National Railway. The trade and transport of goods between these two provinces has grown in size and diversity today from the beginnings of the Coal Branch railway. In 1964, Mr. Speaker, Great Canadian Oil Sands, now Suncor, started mining oil sands to produce crude bitumen when Fort McMurray was a small trading post. Commodities mined in Alberta include oil sands, coal, limestone, salt, shale, dimension stone, ammonite shell, sandstone, sand, and gravel.

Today mining is a high-tech industry, and many aspects of modern mining are controlled by computers. There are 15 major mines and quarries in Alberta: 11 coal and oil sands mines and four major quarries. Coal and oil sands mining contributes approximately 3.1 per cent, or \$3.3 billion, to the provincial economy. The minerals industry, excluding oil and gas, is estimated to directly employ about 10,000 people in Alberta. Communities that have a significant dependence for their livelihoods on mining include Fort McMurray, Hinton, Edson, Grande Cache, Forestburg, Hanna, and Wabamun to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of this House join me in recognizing National Mining Week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Foreign Workers

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently I was fortunate enough to attend a symposium on immigration laws and

employment called Meet the Filipino Foreign Workers. It was sponsored by Iglesia ni Cristo, also known as Church of Christ, south side local, with approval and blessings from their head office in Manila, Philippines. The Asian Christian Cultural Association of Alberta Centre was filled to its capacity with noted guests, representatives, stakeholders, and interested members of the public.

This invaluable and informative session brought together those with backgrounds in immigration law, legal rights, and employment standards to share information on foreign workers. I would like to thank the Philippine labour attaché, based in Vancouver, representatives from the employment standards, and the Alberta immigrant nominee program along with immigration law experts for attending the symposium.

One topic that was brought forward to both employers and employees attending was the fact that the employer retains the discretion for layoffs, not the government. Their decision should not be based on country of origin. Rather, the decision should be based on what is best for the business, its customers, and its employees. Laying off people must be a difficult decision for any employer. I would like to acknowledge those companies who choose to retain individuals based on the skills they bring, the contributions they make to the workforce, not on their country of origin.

I would like also to acknowledge the hard-working Albertans, Canadians, and individuals who have left other countries to contribute to the success of this province. Whether you are a short-term or a long-term resident, your hard work is appreciated by this government and will continue to play a positive role in Alberta's bright future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The parental opt-out clause being proposed by the Alberta human rights legislation has become an international embarrassment. Under the influence of minority right-wing groups this government has threatened our public education system and not considered the implications of Bill 44 on the teachers. This government had a chance to rid itself of the image of being backward and out of touch with the rest of the world, but it failed. To the Premier: why did the Premier allow such a controversial section to be included in what could have been a very progressive piece of legislation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I really do take exception to another elected member of this House calling this province backward, especially this Assembly, when we look at the number of people who have been elected to this Assembly from so many different religious backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, coming from so many different countries, looking to this province for opportunity, and who have really found it.

I want to be very clear on this matter, very clear. Bill 44 confirms the existing situation – existing situation – that exists in policy, to opt out of religious instruction and sex education. It does not give parents the right to opt out of other instruction on religious grounds. All I ask is: please read the bill.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has stated – and I was present at the time – that students could be pulled from class

on issues around evolution while the culture minister has said explicitly that they could not. Will the Premier clarify: which is the correct answer?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it's very clear in the bill, and again I'm asking all Albertans to read the bill. You know, every time these issues are raised in the House, that's fine. It's good for debate. But at least debate on correct information.

The other fact is that recently in a poll done by *Maclean's* magazine, which I think probably is a little, you know, left of centre – I'm being very gracious to them – has said that Alberta, this great province of Alberta, is even more tolerant or accepting of people than our neighbouring province of British Columbia. I think that is a very positive statement for all Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Premier, will you answer the question? Can students be removed from class on discussions of evolution? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let me read into the record again that Bill 44 confirms the existing situation to opt out of religious instruction and sex education. It does not give parents the right to opt out of other instruction on religious grounds.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Alberta Health Services Capital Reserve

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the news release accompanying the budget, there was a statement regarding the three-year capital plan for health, mentioning a \$1.5 billion cash reserve for Alberta Health Services; however, there's no mention of how or when this \$1.5 billion cash reserve will be spent. To the Premier: can the Premier explain how Alberta Health Services is expected to run a deficit this last fiscal year yet have \$1.5 billion listed as capital reserve on hand?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta in our accounting practices has to separate capital dollars away from operational dollars. That is the law. That's the way we do our accounting based on generally accepted accounting principles. We split it in terms of capital, you know, long-term investment, and operational, which would be the daily expenses of health. Whether it be heart surgery, cancer treatment, those are operational. Capital will be the new hospitals, the equipment in the hospitals, anything that is a long-term expenditure on infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, why are there so many health facilities on hold, including Stollery children's, Medicine Hat, and Grande Prairie hospitals, when Alberta is sitting on a \$1.5 billion reserve?

Mr. Stelmach: I'll have the minister responsible reply to that specific question.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] We made it quite clear when we identified the financial plan for this year's budget – and last time I looked, I was still finance minister – that the amount of money that was already provided to the various health authorities, \$1.5 billion, that wasn't spent over a number of years

would be in fact lapsed to Alberta Health Services for expenditure and follow-up on over and above the amount of money that's in this year's budget for new capital expenditure, so it's the reserve from years past.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. To the health minister: can the health minister detail how much of and where the \$1.5 billion capital reserve will be spent?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition has to recognize that the \$1.5 billion in reserve is already committed dollars. What we had over the past couple of years – and I'm sure he'd recognize this – was a heated economy, and it was an issue of construction projects not proceeding as quickly as they had been budgeted for, and thereby there were cash reserves. So this isn't new money; this is money that has already been allocated for projects that could not be put out to the construction provider because they hadn't yet got to a process where they could take that money.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Marketing of Agricultural Products

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Bill 43 is dissolving this Premier's credibility in the red meat sector. It's widely perceived as a favour from the Premier to the secret donors who backed his leadership campaign. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that Bill 43 will hurt the smaller players in the beef industry and, in fact, is a serious blow to the pork, lamb, and potato producers while it's a huge benefit to the giant feedlots that backed his leadership campaign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this line of questioning occurred before. It's funny; he calls it secret, yet everybody seems to know – he knows at least – who contributed to everybody's campaign. I suppose the next time there's a question that comes up on royalties, it will be significant to mention that that party received considerably more from one major oil company than the whole Progressive Conservative Party. So, you know, if you want to play games, we can play games.

In terms of the red meat industry, we've come to a crucial point, and that is: how do we gain access to markets around the world excluding the United States? I just came back from Switzerland. For the first time we had Alberta beef served in Switzerland. Switzerland is not part of the European Union, but through Switzerland hopefully we can reach out and access markets in the major centres because we cannot depend on one market, and that is the United States. They've shut us out a number of times, and we can't do that anymore for the sake of all our producers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the people watching know the Premier didn't answer my question at all. The same people and companies who were widely reported to have backed the Premier's leadership bid with important but undisclosed resources also turn up on the board of ATB, on various PC donor lists, and in the last couple of years have received millions of dollars in government grants. Some of these are also expected to benefit handsomely from Bill 43. Will the Premier follow best practice – that's all we're

asking here – clear the air on Bill 43, and finally disclose the list of secret donors to his leadership campaign? Here's the opportunity.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I can go back and pull the files in terms of who contributed to the campaign and who didn't. This has got nothing to do with who contributed either to my campaign or to individual campaigns of any member of this House. I am sure that there are some people on the other side of the House that received donations from other beef producers.

However, set that aside and concentrate on how we are going to gain access in other markets around the world. That is the critical issue. This bill is referring to the check-off that producers pay, whether it be pork, potatoes, also beef. We're meeting with the industry. We're giving them a year to adjust. The bill is fair, it's going through the House, and this is looking to the future of this industry.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the Premier that all the members on this side of the Assembly have fully disclosed all donations. I wish the Premier would do the same.

My question to him is: out of respect to the large majority of beef, pork, lamb, and potato producers in this province, who I'm sure his office is hearing from, will the Premier put Bill 43 on hold?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier of the province and also as one that is responsible for the welfare, the general direction that the meat industry has to take in this province of Alberta, I stand committed to the bill. We've got to move forward, take the politics out of it, and start positioning this province as open to markets around the world.

This is something I learnt coming back from Switzerland. We have the best traceability in Canada and, indeed, in North America, in fact to rival many other countries, yet we cannot gain access to the European Union because other countries are beating us that don't even have anywhere near the traceability. Now we have ensure that we do whatever we can to position ourselves through our world trade ambassadors to make sure that our needs are heard, that we work with all the industry, the red-meat industry, to build those markets. We can't depend on the Americans because they already showed us how they're dealing with us under COOL.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Those are some pretty long answers.

New Home Warranty

Mr. Mason: My question is to the Premier. An increasing number of homes in Alberta are mouldy wrecks just a few years after being built. Many new-home owners have to dole out thousands of dollars to fix problems from the exterior insulation and finish system within just a year or two of taking possession. Will the Premier commit today to ensuring that builders take responsibility for their shoddy workmanship by extending the homeowner warranty on building envelopes to five years?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the whole situation came up just about a week ago, and the government, through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, is working with other ministers, looking at this issue of

building code and will be able to report back to Albertans at a later date.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Currently builders are only required to take responsibility for the work for the first year of home ownership. In the case of condos the clock begins the moment the first owner takes possession, meaning the last owner to move in may have no warranty whatsoever. Engineers and other experts are calling on the government to require builders to back up their work for five years. Will the Premier commit today to protecting new-home owners by giving them a reasonable sense of security and introduce a five-year warranty on new-home exteriors?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said, I'll take the whole question under advisement because this is a matter that we do take seriously as a government. We'll thoroughly investigate and bring the information forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we've seen how much the pine shake fiasco cost Albertans just a few years ago, and we know that leaky condos in B.C. cost homeowners billions of dollars. Here we go again, Mr. Speaker. Again home and condo owners are left holding the bag because this government doesn't protect them. Will the Premier commit today to ensuring that Alberta homeowners will not be stuck with costly repairs in one or two years' time, or will he once again leave them soaking wet?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're reviewing all of the information, looking at the evidence that's coming forward, and we will be making the appropriate decision based on the best evidence brought forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Anthony Henday Drive Interchanges

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I feel like it's Christmas. I was very pleased to attend the Edmonton ring road announcement this morning for the start of the Lessard Road and the Callingwood Road interchanges. These ring road interchanges have moved forward thanks to the commitment of the Premier, the minister, and all my caucus colleagues for investing in Alberta's highway network. This is exciting news for my constituents, who have been concerned about the growing amount of traffic congestion in Edmonton's southwest. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. How quickly can these interchanges be completed and open to traffic?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that my department is going to tender the Lessard Road and Callingwood Road intersections in the next week or two. That means that construction will begin this summer on these interchanges and that they will be complete by the fall of 2011. In fact, in 2011 that whole west side will be better because that's when we will also be opening the Stony Plain Road and Anthony Henday northwest, the 21 kilometres of it. It'll be great for northwest Edmonton.

Mr. Xiao: Again to the same minister. Thanks to the announcement today there is only one traffic signal left on the ring road. When will the minister commit to building the final interchange at Cameron Heights Drive and remove all the traffic signals on Anthony Henday Drive?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, our Premier has set a goal of having all the ring roads done in Edmonton by 2015. When the Premier has a goal, I'm going to work my little buns off to make sure that that goal is achieved and that whole, entire side will be free flow by that time. I will say that we're going ahead right now with the design work on that interchange.

Mr. Xiao: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate that statement. To the same minister again: can the minister describe how the April 28 open house was advertised for the Anthony Henday Drive interchanges at Cameron Heights Drive and Rabbit Hill Road?

Thanks.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the open house was advertised in a number of ways. We had roadway signs at six different locations to advertise to motorists about the open house. We also sent out notices to the residents in the communities and advertised with the local community leagues. In addition, we advertised for the open house in the *Edmonton Examiner* and the *Edmonton Sun*.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Funding for Teachers' Collective Agreements

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government can change legislation at the drop of a hat to run a deficit when it can't balance its budget, school boards are prevented by law from running deficits. School boards are entirely dependent on the government's commitment to fund the salary increases promised as part of the five-year collective agreement. Without this financial commitment boards will be forced to significantly cut people and programs. To the Minister of Education: are school boards expected to spend whatever amounts they have managed to set aside for future projects in their surplus accounts before the government will provide the increased funding for collective agreements?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we've made the commitment to fully fund the teacher agreement that was entered into, that's provided this great period of stability in the education system, and we will adhere to that commitment. We provided funding in the budget to make sure that school boards had the funding that they needed to finance their remaining collective agreements. It's a little bit tighter for them because of the change that Statistics Canada made to their average weekly earnings index calculation, but those agreements the school boards made, they need to deal with. As I said before, we've made an agreement to talk with the ATA and the Alberta School Boards Association about how we deal with the change in the way the average weekly earnings are calculated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The minister stated in the budget debate that teachers' salaries are "not the school board's problem." Why, therefore, are Edmonton public schools expressing concerns about significant layoffs if the funding, \$21 million worth, is in place? Where in the budget is this money guaranteed or accounted for?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no indication at all at the moment that there's any additional money required, so of course it's not in the budget or guaranteed or accounted for. What we did say is that we would meet the funding requirement to implement the teachers' agreement, and we committed to that. At the time the budget went to bed, the number that was known was 4.8 per cent, and we've budgeted for that. We have in place an understanding with the Alberta Teachers' Association and with the Alberta School Boards Association that we need to discuss whether there needs to be a change to the way the average weekly earnings index is calculated. Stats Canada has changed the way they've calculated it, but that's a subject of discussion for us as we go forward.

Mr. Chase: Unfortunately, while these calculations are being made, thousands of teachers are facing potential layoffs, and a lot of those teachers are the young ones in temporary and first-year contracts. Having failed to reach the K to 3 class size targets, are these targets now going to be abandoned to make up for the funding shortfall in teachers' wages?

2:10

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, there is no funding shortfall for teachers' wages. I don't know how many times I have to say this to the hon. member or to people out there. The commitment that this government made to school boards is that we would fund the teachers' agreement, and we will fund the teachers' agreement. The question is: what's the amount? We've said to school boards: budget on the basis that whatever the amount is, we've undertaken to fund it. We have to determine what that amount is, but there should be no school board across this province that is either laying off or terminating contracts for teachers on the basis that they're not funded for their salaries because they are funded for their salaries, and they will be funded for their salaries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Federal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January the federal government announced over \$12 billion in economic infrastructure stimulus. My constituents were particularly interested to know that \$4 billion of that over two years was going to restore aging infrastructure. My first question is to the hon. President of the Treasury Board. Could he give us an update on whether Alberta has received its share of the federal stimulus package this year?

Mr. Snelgrove: No, Mr. Speaker, we haven't received our share of the budget. We have been working very, very diligently with the people from both Minister Merrifield's and Minister Baird's offices to try and get the agreement in place. We have been working on the specific projects that have been identified by the different departments in the Alberta government and some of the projects that our federal cousins have put forward. I would say that it's a work in progress, but I would expect the agreement in principle is very close.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the hon. President of the Treasury Board. I noticed that when this budget was delivered, there were a number of strings and conditions as far as sharing of funding and what projects might or might not get funded. Could you please indicate whether this is impacting the amount of money that Alberta will be receiving, particularly since

Alberta has spent significant amounts of money in infrastructure and to municipalities in the MSI funding?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is problematic in the way that Alberta has built over the past few years and continues to build infrastructure at a very rapid pace. The departments, quite honestly, have gotten very efficient and very good at understanding, organizing, and putting forward these projects. While it's a train moving very quickly, where the federal government is trying to feed some of the hopper cars with some money and help us out, we haven't been waiting. We have been trying to live up to the intent of their stimulus package, which is to get Albertans and, indeed, all Canadians working. That's what we're trying to do, but it's a work in progress.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the announcement of this economic stimulus money, is this changing any of the infrastructure priorities in Alberta to be able to receive this money from the federal government?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, yes, it does in a way in that it moves some of the projects that we were going to be unable to do up in line in the queue. It also allows the federal government to partner up in some of the projects that may be staged and otherwise would have taken years to complete. So it's kind of a method of putting together where they're comfortable with their participation in some of the staging, where they're comfortable in participating in some of the ongoing maintenance, like they announced last week with our universities and colleges. We found, Mr. Speaker, that by sitting down with the different departments, identifying where we are in the go-forward with the projects, we're able to determine how it suits our capital budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Automobile Insurance

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk car insurance today. Using data from the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Canadian Bar Association has found that the surge in auto insurance claims in New Brunswick had little to do with the increase in premiums and that there is no correlation between claims and the actual average premium. These findings completely contradict the reasoning that this government has been using for fighting its own legal battles to keep the minor injury cap in place. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: how much money has the government spent in legal fees appealing the provincial court's ruling against the minor injury cap in Alberta?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, I think that the government of Alberta's position is that this is an important piece of public policy. I know that there are governments across this country who are looking to what the government of Alberta is doing with respect to this. We are looking forward to the result, and we expect the Court of Appeal to make a decision shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I will continue to look forward to an answer someday to my question.

To the minister of finance: will the minister be using the information found in the New Brunswick study to reform the government's auto insurance policy on minor injury caps?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Justice has identified, this issue is before the courts. We have not had any comment, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Mr. Taylor: Quite a few answers in a few weeks' time, by the sound of things, Mr. Speaker.

Rather than continuing to spend taxpayers' dollars fighting legal battles on the side of insurance companies, will the minister of finance fight on the side of Albertans and introduce public auto insurance?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we've had conversations about that issue in this House before. We've identified, for example, the billions of dollars that other governments have spent in ways that are abusing taxpayers' dollars to cover auto insurance. I believe that all Albertans are well served by the existing plan that we have in place. We hope it continues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

WorldSkills Calgary 2009

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial skills competition starts tomorrow in Edmonton, and the WorldSkills competition is about four months away. With over 1,000 competitors from 51 countries and an expected 150,000 spectators this is a huge event. However, WorldSkills is expected to cost taxpayers \$21 million. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the economic benefit of this competition to the city of Calgary and this province?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question because it is taxpayers' dollars that we're putting out. We expect, based on some economic analysis that was done pre-event sponsored by the WorldSkills competition, that we'll more than double our investment in returns to both the economy and to the city as well as to the province. Really, this is about much more than just the money. This is about training our young Albertans for careers in the trades and in skills competition. It's about providing learning opportunities. It's about highlighting the employers who share in the training of these young people. This is a great event for Alberta. It will help showcase Alberta around the world.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. There are so many talented tradespeople in this province. What criteria are used to select these individuals who represent their provinces and country, for that matter, for the world competition?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, we have several competitions throughout the province that are ongoing. It's similar to any other competition: you work your way through the playoffs, if you will. Those students are going to be the ones that will be showcased in the competition.

Really, what we're trying to do is inspire all of our youth who would look to or maybe not look to consider a career in the trades by way of this competition. In fact, my colleague the hon. Minister of Education is also supporting this WorldSkills competition, making it possible for an estimated 54,000 students to attend.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Canada lags behind when it comes to world trade competitions. What are we doing to help our tradespeople to perform better on the world stage?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a tremendous commitment to skills training. In fact, although we may have 10 per cent of Canada's population, we train close to 20 per cent of Canada's tradespeople. That alone suggests to Canadians that we take this very, very seriously. We're going to show a very strong support for WorldSkills. It's one of the reasons why it's here. We agree that we want to raise the bar as far as our skills training goes and, again, highlight these careers that are available for young Albertans.

Protection of Freedom of Expression

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the lack of any thought into Bill 44, not only with the inclusion of the parental opt-out clause but with the exclusion of extending protection for freedom of speech in this province, and the fact that section 3 of the act, which deals with freedom of speech, is not being amended back to the pre-1996 wording are just other examples of how this government has failed in its attempt to revitalize human rights in Alberta. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why has this minister chosen not to protect freedom of speech in Alberta?

2:20

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think free speech actually needs to be defended in Alberta. We have free speech every day. We have it in this Legislature. We have it in our schools. We have it in our homes. We have it in our communities. We're doing nothing different. We have some concerns with respect to the recommendations for section 3 because we feel, our Progressive Conservative government, that we have to make sure that those individuals who are discriminated against, that the Human Rights Commission is supposed to protect, are protected against hate crimes. We're not convinced that the provisions in the Canadian Criminal Code actually protect those. That's the opposition's response. That's who they forget they should be representing. We represent all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the parental opt-out clause has led to unintended consequences that the government didn't even think about, how will this government deal with the unintended consequences of denying freedom of speech to Albertans such as complaints being filed with the commission about honestly held beliefs or cartoons about religion?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I look at excerpts from *Hansard*. The hon. member asked this question on April 16: "What is [your] position on amending the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to write in sexual orientation?" Again on May 21: "Can the minister tell me why race and disability are currently enumerated grounds but not sexual orientation?"

Ms Blakeman: What's your point?

Mr. Blackett: The point is that in the last 13 months the hon. member's opposition party never ever mentioned the words "freedom of speech." Their cause célèbre was the inclusion of sexual orientation. That's all they ever talked about. We in this caucus, sir, have delivered a bill that encompasses all the beliefs of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's kind of nice that the hon. minister did accept our recommendations for including sexual orientation.

What the big print giveth, the small print taketh away sometimes, I've been warned. Will the minister commit to amending Bill 44 by returning to the pre-1996 wording of section 3, as recommended by the Sheldon Chumir foundation?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, when our caucus is assured that visible minorities or people in our aboriginal communities can walk around freely without the fear of being exposed unduly to discrimination with respect to hate crimes and that the Criminal Code will not have a test that's so exorbitant that we cannot get a charge laid or a conviction made because of it, then we'll look at that. It's our responsibility as a government to make sure that we take care of the less fortunate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Groundwater Monitoring

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to a national scientific report released today by the Council of Canadian Academies, our groundwater is being increasingly threatened by contamination and misuse. We don't know how much we have, where it is, or how it's being used. What is this government's answer? Cut the budget for groundwater monitoring by 50 per cent. To the Minister of Environment: how can the minister justify cutting the budget at the very time scientists are telling us that we aren't doing enough and that we need to do much better to protect our groundwater?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right: this Council of Canadian Academies came out with a report today. But this is a report that applies to all of Canada, and it's a generalization, that generally speaking, there is insufficient background information available with respect to groundwater. What this member has not acknowledged is that Alberta is far ahead of most other jurisdictions, and we've already begun and have a huge wealth of information and are committed to continuing to develop the information.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, according to the report, the oil sands region is in jeopardy. The experts there say that our environmental impact assessments are inadequate, that we can't measure the factors that impact tailings ponds leakage, and the government's regulators do not have the expertise or the resources they need to evaluate industry's groundwater studies. That's what the report says about Alberta, yet this government is planning to cut the budget for monitoring in half. To the minister: why won't he admit that the problems identified in this report are only going to get worse in the face of his current budget cuts?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this member was at committee the night that we discussed our budget. She knows perfectly well that the reductions in monitoring of groundwater have nothing to do with the industrial areas. The commitment was made, and I think I made it abundantly clear – she can check the record – that there are no reductions scheduled with respect to groundwater monitoring in the industrial areas. The area where we slowed up our groundwater monitoring is in the development of new information, where we have moved from annual reporting to in some cases biennial reporting. So the question is not accurate.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, overall the budget is being cut in half. Now this report suggests that the single most important factor in managing our water resources is knowledge. We need accurate and timely reporting, follow-up on water quality compliance, and insurance that contaminated sites are cleaned up. This ain't gonna happen with a budget that's being cut in half. Will the Minister of Environment explain to ordinary Albertans why he feels comfortable gambling with the resources we all count on by cutting the funds necessary to monitor them?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, one of the key objectives of this government is to implement cumulative effects environmental management tools. Cumulative effects environmental management tools deal with outcomes. This member is mired in the past. This member is mired in recording history and not looking at the reality that we are concentrating and are putting all of our focus on: the future. We have determined that it is in the best interests of the environment and in the best interests of Albertans for us to focus on the future to ensure that we have the necessary legislation and policies in place, to have the cumulative effects legislative regime in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Forest Industry Sustainability

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday the government released its response to the recommendations contained in the Forest Industry Sustainability Committee's final report. The government was unable to offer direct financial support to the industry, so the response focuses on government policies and practices. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How will addressing government policies and practices help the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the debt that we all owe to the hon. Member for Peace River, who was the chair of the committee that wrote the report. An excellent report it was.

I'm also happy to report that we accepted 90 per cent, 43 of the 49 recommendations made in that report. These recommendations will provide new government policies and initiatives that will create a more competitive and more efficient forestry industry. We think that, for example, changes in the tenure system that allow flexibility and divisibility will help forestry companies decide how and when to develop fibre in a way that works for them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the risk of sounding like Chip 'n Dale, I'll thank the minister for appointing me to the committee.

To the same minister: could he inform this House as to what is being done now to help the industry in the short term?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd remind the hon. member that his committee was asked to make recommendations for the long-term sustainability of the industry and not for the short term. In fact, we are doing a number of things that do address short-term concerns. The nine-point bioenergy plan, which forestry companies participate in, has provided \$238 million in grants over five years. We're providing money to FPInnovations, which does research and product innovation and market research for forestry companies, and this year the community development trust fund is providing \$10 million for worker retraining and retention in resource communities, again including forestry communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister: how long will it take for the industry to feel the benefit of government changes today?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, there are certain factors that influence the industry: the macro factors that we cannot control, and then there are things that we can control inside. The macro factors – the collapse of the U.S. housing market, the rise in the exchange rate on the loonie, the global recession credit crunch – are the big things that are hurting the industry. We can't control those, but we are taking some of the initiatives and policies I alluded to earlier that will make a difference this year. If the macro factors don't get worse, I believe that our initiatives will begin to show improvements this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

2:30

Air Quality

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government's air quality measurement doesn't just suck; it wheezes. Last week downtown Edmonton was covered by a smoky haze from the brush fires near Fort Saskatchewan, yet the government's air quality instruments continued to measure "good" for that period, which is a testament to Alberta's poor air quality standards. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. How can the ministry have instruments which measure air quality as good when the smoke is so bad that we can all smell it, see it, and breathe it?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the gauge that is used to determine the air quality index is a combination of a number of different measurements, most of which have to do with identified pollutants. What the member is referring to was the result, as we all know, of fires that were in the region and relates to particulate matter. Particulate matter, yes, is part of the air quality index, but the instruments that we use are checking for a number of other contaminants like ozone and SO₂.

Ms Blakeman: Well, particulates have the most serious effect on asthmatics.

Back to the same minister. The minister says that the government is outcome focused. What outcome, aside from smoky air, is the government implementing that's an improvement on the national air quality index?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I guess the member suggests that I should have been out there putting out the fires. By the way, we were. My colleague from SRD had a number of people that were out working and helping with fighting those fires. The fact of the matter is that we are focused on ensuring that we have a system in place that measures the kinds of pollutants that will be a true determination of the strength of our regulatory system in ensuring that our industrial emissions in this province remain within acceptable limits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Maybe I can help you out a bit. In the past the minister has said that the reason that Alberta doesn't participate in the national air quality index is that Alberta's circumstances are unique. I'm wondering what unique circumstance Alberta could possibly have that means we measure smoky air as good quality.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member refers to is that we have in place an air quality index that is a component of a number of measurements, most of which relate to industrial emissions of one kind or another. We're focused on ensuring that we can adequately measure the amount of volatile organic compounds that are in the air, the amount of NOx, nitrogen dioxide, that is in the air, which then results in smog. At the end of the day, we feel that given the circumstances in Alberta, given the fact that we've got a high concentration of industrial emissions, it makes more sense for us to concentrate on those areas.

Workforce Employment Services

Ms Woo-Paw: Mr. Speaker, my first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Over the past few months we have seen many Albertans lose their jobs. My constituents would like to know: what is the government doing to assist Albertans affected by the current economic slowdown?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our staff responds to layoffs they hear about through the media and through my particular office. Our staff reach out to those that are affected and offer free career services, including career planning, employment retraining programs, and connections to local employers who are hiring. I would emphasize that there are still employers who are hiring. Whether it is by posting jobs over our free website or holding recruitment events in our offices, we are helping employers find the people they need.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. These employment services seem well intentioned, but how are they actually helping anyone?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, our staff are helping hundreds of

Albertans get back to work every day. I want to show one example, and that was the closure of the General Electric Money call centre in Edmonton. Our Employment and Immigration staff delivered presentations to the affected staff about our services. They organized job fairs for 120 GE Money employees, with 19 employers talking to them. To date 97 former GE Money staff have had interviews, and more than 50 have new jobs.

The Speaker: Hon. member, is that okay?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Ministerial and Senior Official Vehicle Fleet

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ministerial and senior vehicle allowance is a very generous perk. Despite repeated requests, the Minister of Service Alberta has failed to bring in guidelines that would make the use of that perk more responsible to the environment. In budget debates the minister said that some vehicles in the total government fleet were hybrids but did not talk specifically about the \$40,000 perk that ministers and deputy ministers get. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why hasn't the minister acted to put environmental responsibility as a requirement on these ministerial and senior official vehicles?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the fleet that Service Alberta runs and with respect to the fleet of executive and ministerial vehicles, they are two very separate items. Most certainly, it is up to the individual choice of the ministers to decide if they choose to take a vehicle.

With respect to the fleet, with respect to the whole issue of hybrid vehicles, I am pleased to say that we are up to 50 hybrid vehicles in the fleet, and we are moving forward on a number of those.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a perk of the job, and the minister could very easily put a requirement on it for environmental responsibility. This is not a hard change. We aren't talking about many vehicles here, but the minister seems to need years of consultation. We are talking about the ministerial and senior vehicle staff only. When will the consultation end and responsible decision-making begin, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it will certainly not be years of consultation. In this whole area, again, in looking at whether it's a hybrid vehicle and the uses for it in different parts of Alberta, that's a number one concern. Again, I've said it before: we are not going to just merely do something just because it looks good. It has to actually work, and it has to be a good use of taxpayers' dollars with respect to the service fleet.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister has been taking so long to think about these changes, there must be a draft proposal for fuel efficiency standards. What are they?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another approach that we do take within the fleet is vehicles that are more efficient with respect to gas mileage, linking that with the hybrid vehicles. There are a whole number of areas that we have been working on with the Department of Environment, and we are hopeful that we're going to be moving ahead on some very innovative directions, so you can certainly look forward to that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Energy Efficiency Rebates

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did some door-knocking on the weekend and had some pretty good chats with some constituents of mine. In talking to them, a number of them are interested in making some energy efficiency improvements to their homes. I learned that some of these types of purchases are slightly more expensive than standard purchases. It's not cheap to replace a furnace or a hot water tank. I know that we have a rebate program in place here in Alberta, but I wonder if it's enough of an incentive in these difficult economic times. My question is to the Minister of Environment: are Albertans taking you up on this offer, or are these purchases still out of reach?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, about a month ago we announced about \$36 million in energy efficiency rebates to consumers. I'm very pleased to report that to date over 3,000 Albertans have filed applications for these programs. I think that's an indication that Albertans recognize that it's a wise investment despite the tough economic times that we find ourselves in. Rebates are engaging Albertans. It's giving them an opportunity to appreciate that everyone has a role to play and that there are opportunities to save money. More importantly, I think it creates some economic stimulus as well.

Mr. Webber: My first supplemental to the same minister. With over 3,000 applicants in one month, Mr. Minister, that's really quite excellent. The program seems very popular. But just what type of environmental difference is this making?

2:40

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, a key plank in our climate change strategy is energy efficiency. We've often talked in this House about carbon capture and storage and all of the other technologies that are associated, but this is an opportunity for individual Albertans to play a role. Overall, we have forecast a 24 million tonne reduction in CO₂ as a result of energy efficiency. This particular program, when it's fully subscribed, should be responsible for about a million tonnes, or 200,000 cars off the road. Overall, that's 200 megatonnes by 2050, and 24 megatonnes of that will come through energy conservation and efficiency.

Mr. Webber: My final question to the same minister: with the \$36 million government investment in this initiative, is that enough? Is the minister considering expanding the program any time soon?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think this is one of those programs where you could truly say that there will never be enough. We could always expand this program. In my humble opinion, it's not enough, and I think that we should be expanding the program. Will we expand the program? I guess that question really has to be

addressed to the President of Treasury Board. But the fact of the matter is that as we're able to accommodate within a reasonable fiscal agenda, it certainly is my intention to continue to argue that programs like this are doing what they need to do and should be expanded over time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today. In 30 seconds from now we'll continue the Routine.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Bill 47 Appropriation Act, 2009

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 47, the Appropriation Act, 2009. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, from the delivery of the budget back on April 7, 2009, by the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, five all-party standing committees of the Legislative Assembly have spent some 72 hours reviewing and debating the budget. Very clearly, this budget represents the values and priorities of Albertans and during these uncertain economic times presents a clear and positive way forward for all the citizens of Alberta.

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce first reading of Bill 48, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act.

Currently the province's authority to recover health care costs resulting from wrongful acts or omissions is contained within the Hospitals Act. This bill is proposing that separate legislation be created specifically for this authority because it covers more than simply hospital costs. Developing distinct legislation will enable the government to enhance the effectiveness of the cost-recovery process, provide authority to recover health care treatment costs from convicted criminals when that person suffered an injury while committing an offence, and enable the province to seek to recover health care costs caused by the wrongful acts of tobacco manufacturers. This is important legislation because, Mr. Speaker, Alberta taxpayers should not be responsible for health care costs resulting from wrongful acts or omissions.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly five copies of our written responses to questions raised by the opposition during the debate on Tourism, Parks and Recreation estimates on April 21.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence to the Liberal caucus from Steve Schembri, who is writing to express his dismay, shock, and disbelief with the direction the government has taken the Alberta drilling industry.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it's the Qualitative Research Findings: Branding Alberta Message Testing Groups, January 2009. This is the focus group organized by Harris/Decima in various locations throughout Alberta and throughout the country and, I believe, across North America. It is noteworthy on page 10, hon. members, the photograph of the young couple in Northumberland in England. This is certainly not Sylvan Lake. It's not Slave Lake. It's a foreign photograph. It's interesting, to say the least, how the government once again tried to pull the wool over the eyes of Alberta taxpayers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of tablings today. First off, I have letters from University of Alberta students Wayne Stelte, Ashlie Pratt, and Danielle Edge, all expressing their concern with the monopoly on ticket sales in Alberta and the lack of consumer protection.

Second, I want to present a letter from Alberta senior Tine Steen-Dekker and a second letter signed by 59 Albertans. They are all participants in the Edmonton General hospital's get fit program, which is designed to help seniors stay active and independent. They're writing because they're opposed to the cancellation of the program scheduled for the end of this month.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a summary of a report from the Council of Canadian Academies titled Sustainable Management of Groundwater in Canada, which I referred to in my questions today.

Secondly, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate that some residents were left in bed until late in the day, did not receive any care until after lunch, and also that some lifting that required two staff members was done by only one.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, responses to questions raised by Mr. Taylor, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie; Dr. Taft, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; and Mr. Weadick, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, on April 22, 2009, Department of Finance and Enterprise main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, return to order of the Assembly MR 7 and MR 20, both asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to questions raised by Mr. MacDonald, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and Dr. Taft, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, on April 28, 2009, department of advanced education main estimates debate.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Motions for Returns

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Lottery Fund Grant Announcements

M25. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all invitations sent to opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly for lottery fund grant announcements in the constituencies they represent and any photographs of these members taken at the events in question.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The history behind this particular motion for a return is that there have been lottery grant programs in Alberta, which, I will add and underline, are much valued by the NGO and voluntary sector. These have been in place for a significant period of time, not always in the exact configuration that they are today, but there have been grant programs that are disbursing lottery funds out to the NGO and voluntary sector based on criteria established by the government for some time.

For the same period of time, Mr. Speaker, the government has used the distribution of the cheques that go along with these various grants as a photo opportunity. Often we see those sort of door-sized cartoon cheques or photo op cheques that are handed out with everybody gathered around them, and the photo appears in the newspaper. We actually even got to a point in the last term where backbenchers' names were appearing on these big photo op cheques as though the individual backbencher had written the cheque out of their own account to give to a particular not-for-profit. When the Liberal opposition brought that to the attention of the government, eventually the Premier ordered that that practice was to stop, but a few months went by, and we're back to having the big cartoon cheques given away at the photo op again.

Recently we've had other examples of government MLAs that are writing in public documents that they have certain pots of money or money that is assigned to them or available to them. I've heard of two sets of money, one was \$750,000 and the other one was more than that, several million dollars, I think, depending on what the status is that they hold in the particular caucus.

But the truth is, Mr. Speaker, that we don't know. We get little glimpses of this, little pieces of this, but what we know in the Official Opposition is that we're never asked to hand out the cheque to groups that are in our constituency that receive the money, and we're not in the photo that goes out to the media. It's pretty carefully done by government to enhance government although this is supposed to be lottery money that often the local MLA, including the members of the Official Opposition and the third-party opposition, has supported and lobbied for and even written letters in support of.

We have examples of government MLAs saying that they have pots of money that they are responsible for giving out. We've even brought forward examples of government MLAs showing control over the grant amounts and over the timing of the grant amounts. That example was Foothills-Rocky View and their neighbouring constituency, Banff-Cochrane. That was \$1.5 million and \$1.5

million, for a combined \$3 million. So I guess that answers my colleague's question.

The government, when we've raised these issues, likes to refute this by saying: well, look at all the money that goes to the constituency in Edmonton-Centre; that disproves everything you've been saying. It actually doesn't, Mr. Speaker, because we've been saying that government MLAs have access to a pot of money that we don't, and saying that Edmonton-Centre agencies are getting money doesn't mean that I have any access to it. I'm certainly not invited to the photo op, and I don't get to put my name on the cheque. So I thought: well, you know, let's find out about this.

Just let me point out that Edmonton-Centre is home to the major arts facilities in the city that we all share in and enjoy, and frankly they should have that support. They are a reflection of our city and of our province. There also are major NGOs, our larger NGOs: Catholic Social Services, United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters. Any number of large helping agencies also tend to be centred in the downtown core because that's where people are clustered, looking for those services.

As I said, we haven't been invited to these cheque handouts and the photo ops although the government says that somehow all things are equal, so I thought I'd ask, Mr. Speaker. I took advantage of the parliamentary process that's available with motions for a return and put it on the Order Paper some three weeks ago.

Now, timing is everything, Mr. Speaker, because on Thursday, just a mere two business days before this particular issue was going to come up in the Assembly today, the Liberal caucus got an invitation from staff in the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit's office 45 minutes before an event, inviting the Liberal MLAs to go to a cheque handout. I thought: well, that's really interesting except that the minister knew or should have known that, in fact, all of the Liberal opposition MLAs were going to be at a media conference 15 minutes before this started.

I say "should have known" because with the number of resources that are available to these government MLAs and particularly the minister through the Public Affairs Bureau, surely somebody checked to see if there was going to be any conflict with the minister's 11:45 media conference, anything around that time like, say, oh, an 11:30 a.m. media conference that was being hosted by the Liberal caucus. That media notice had gone out at 8:38 that morning, so a fair amount of notice had been given. It was certainly available for the minister and his staff, and being the excellent staff that I know them to be, I'm sure they checked, and they knew that we would all be standing in a little row in the basement of the Legislative Assembly doing our own media conference and that the likelihood that we would make it to fulfill the minister's obligation was slim to none aside from the fact that we'd actually been issued this invitation 45 minutes before the event was to take place. So even at that, that was pretty tight timing to have a number of MLAs reschedule things and be able to make it to this.

I suppose, strictly speaking – and I'll be really interested to see. I bet you money that that is going to end up being used as proof that the ministry is open and had always been willing to extend an invitation. But the timing of it certainly is very interesting. In my head I'm sort of classifying that as an attempt to race through the yellow light of the timing that is set by the motion for a return coming up. Unfortunately, because we had already scheduled something and there was public knowledge about our media conference, the minister got caught by the equivalent of a red-light camera.

I have moved that motion for a return. It is on the Order Paper. It is asking for copies of invitations and any photographs of our

members that were taken at the events in question. I look forward to the minister's response to Motion for a Return 25.

Thank you.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member loves to come up with these conspiracy theories, but the fact remains that all these lottery-funded programs, community investment programs, are government of Alberta programs. Last I checked, it was a Progressive Conservative government in Alberta, not the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, that administers these programs. We believe strongly that we should have an opportunity to have those individuals, those volunteer groups, those organizations who raised a lot of money, and those sponsors have recognition for that. So we have events, we invite the media to them, those volunteers get some recognition, and they're all very, very thankful.

In response and without a lot of preamble, the government is prepared to accept Motion for a Return 25 with amendments. I wish to propose an amendment to Motion for a Return 25 that would add a time frame to the request. Without a specific time frame this request is simply too broad. In addition, the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit is only just over a year old. With that in mind, I propose that the motion be amended to read:

Copies of all invitations sent to opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly for lottery fund grant announcements in the constituencies they represent from the date of inception of the ministry on March 12, 2008, to March 31, 2009, and any photographs of these members taken at the events in question.

Prior to 11 a.m. today, Mr. Speaker, I did share the proposed amendment to the motion for a return with the Member for Edmonton-Centre as per parliamentary procedures. I now request that the proposed amendment to Motion for a Return 25 be circulated to all members. I see that it appears on their desks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Indeed. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to respond to this amendment because I think there's a concept here. I recognize that we are dealing with a minister who has not been in place for a very long period of time. Nonetheless, there is quite a bit of paid staff and a great deal of experience from his colleagues in the House here that could have assisted him with this.

As I mentioned, these grant programs have been in existence for some time. They have been in other ministries at various times, but there certainly is a long history of these particular grant programs. I'll specify the community facility enhancement program and the community initiatives program, which was formerly the community lottery boards' money. Then when the lottery boards were disbanded, that money was rolled over into the community initiatives program, and the media at the time was quite clear in connecting those two, so I will connect them as well.

3:00

So here we have a minister who is saying: well, I'm only going to talk about this stuff from when my ministry was created and I was the minister for it. I would argue that that's inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. We have the parliamentary precedent ahead of us that's pretty clear, and I'll point you towards section 428(11) of *Beauchesne* – let me just dig that out for you – which acknowledges under the section on written questions that, you know, there's a long list of things which should and should not be done. It does acknowledge

under the (II) section: “seek from an ex-Minister information with regard to transactions during that person’s term of office.” That is always the standing rule in this Assembly.

For example, I cannot ask the current Minister of Environment what he did in his previous ministry of Municipal Affairs. That would be inappropriate. But, certainly, it would be expected that I could ask this minister something about policy that had been developed in the Ministry of Environment four and five years ago, when he was not minister. There is an expectation of institutional memory and institutional responsibility. As a matter of fact, it’s called ministerial responsibility. Ministers are expected to know this. They are supported by the staff, that give unbiased information to them. So to somehow say, “Well, no; I can only talk to you about what has happened in this ministry when I was minister” flies in the face of some fairly weighty tomes on parliamentary process here, that clearly say that the minister is responsible for the department they’re in and for all of the department they’re in back in history, not starting the day they took over.

If the Speaker would like, I also have references from *M and M* that I can dig out.

The Speaker: That’s not required.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

The Speaker: It is a point of ministerial responsibility that you go back in the department, as the hon. member has said. This is the debate now on a motion, please remember.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much. You are always so kind to me, Mr. Speaker.

So would I accept this motion? No. What I see in this amendment is an attempt – and I don’t know if this is true or not – to get out from answering the question that is a long-running issue in this Assembly. That is that the government members are given access to money that the rest of the members in this Assembly are not and that they are able to take advantage of that, some of them with very generous timing very close to election campaigns in ways that will advance their election likelihood, and that’s just wrong, plain old wrong.

Will I accept this amendment from the minister, attempting to amend my motion for a return, which was asking for information? Now, if he’d said, “This is too wide open; you can only go back five years” or one term or something, but to tie it specifically to when he took over that ministry I don’t think is appropriate. I think it does fly in the face of the parliamentary precedent that we have under the concept of ministerial responsibility.

So I would urge my colleagues in the Assembly to not support the amendment to curtail the time period in which the information should be handed over to me, the person requesting it. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I’m pleased to participate in the debate on Motion for a Return 25, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, in particular the amendment as proposed by the hon. Minister of Cultural and Community Spirit. I don’t understand how this amendment could be presented to the Legislative Assembly, restricting and limiting this request to the period of time through March 12, 2008, until March 31, 2009. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is quite right.

I would remind the hon. member that the lottery funds are disbursed from the Department of the Solicitor General and Public Security. They have been for some time, to my knowledge. When you look at some of the programs that were available in the past, particularly in the run-up to the election, there was a lot of money spent, in excess, I would say, comfortably of \$400 million, in the Culture and Community Spirit program, specifically to programs which, if we were to accept this amended program, we would have no idea if any of us ever got an invitation or, if we did, if there was a photograph taken. I have no recollection of ever being invited. Now, I’m busy, I may have missed some of this, but I can’t think of ever being invited, Mr. Speaker.

If we look at the major community facilities program of \$140 million, which this year has been eliminated or omitted from the budget for obvious reasons, and if we go back to 2007-08 and take this amendment to Motion for a Return 25 as it’s worded, we would have no information on that major program. That’s \$140 million. After the big 72-seat majority is acquired, that’s conveniently eliminated.

Now, there are major fairs and exhibitions. Going back two years, they have a \$53 million allocation. It’s dropped to \$23 million in this budget year. We would have no record – we would be excluded – of the information regarding the lists and the invites and whatnot that the hon. member is seeking.

In conclusion, in the run-up to the provincial election there was significant money, millions and millions of dollars, spent through the lottery program, through various constituencies. I’m not saying that it’s good or that it’s bad. The fact is that you only have to look at the annual reports, and the AGLC is in the Solicitor General’s department, not in the hon. minister’s department.

Ms Blakeman: CFEP is in his department.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. That is correct.

But the money flows from the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security through to various organizations. For the hon. member’s request we need all of the information, not just part of it. So much money was spent in the immediate past from the dates that the hon. minister is talking about here that I think we need to go back and get all of the invitations, not just the ones from the 12th . . .

Ms Blakeman: There aren’t any.

Mr. MacDonald: There are none?

Ms Blakeman: You didn’t get any. I didn’t get any. I don’t think there are any.

Mr. MacDonald: I didn’t get any, no. No, I did not. But I might have missed them. I don’t know. Certainly, I would like to point that out.

Thank you.

The Speaker: If you can direct your thoughts through the chair, he’s kind of interested.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit credit for being so direct in his approach. While he’s only been the minister and elected since March 3, 2008, he’s quickly felt the sense of entitlement that this government has had for the last 40 years. He doesn’t have to get up to speed. He was running, and he’s there already.

Now, regardless of whether we receive the motion as amended or the original motion for a return, we know what the result is, Mr. Speaker: a big fat zero. The government has the feeling that it is their money that they are passing out to the constituencies regardless of whether they were elected to represent those constituencies. It's not taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker. It's something that they have stroked the golden goose, got the golden egg, exchanged it at the money market, and now out of their goodness – note the Premier's signature on the bottom of the cheque – it's theirs to do as they wish because they're the government. Well, guess what? It's the taxpayers' money. It's lottery money that has been earned from constituents throughout the province.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with the minister leaving money behind and maybe a silver bullet like the Lone Ranger in Calgary-Varsity, for example, as he did in January, when he provided \$10,000 for a community rink, which I'm very much in support of, but until I saw the minister's smiling face in the Calgary-Varsity newsletter, Varsity Acres – *Varsity Voice* is the name of the document – I had no understanding that this wonderful generosity of the lottery grants had been awarded to the constituents of Calgary-Varsity. Now, I'm very pleased that they received it. I would have even been more pleased if the minister had indicated that something that I had lobbied for and supported my constituents for some time in the receipt of finally arrived.

This business of the government believing that it is their money and therefore they can do with it what they like – and then we have this amended motion, which basically does the Orwellian thing of trying to erase history, the whole business of he who controls the past controls the future. Well, here's another example. Get out the large daub of whiteout. However, in this case it doesn't really matter because we weren't invited, we've never been invited, and if this government continues in power, we probably never will be.

Ms Blakeman: Well, let's find out. Maybe they've got something.

Mr. Chase: As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre says: well, let's find out. Maybe the invitation that was through Canada Post is in the mail, and somehow the Pony Express never made it to our constituency offices.

It's ridiculous that the government thinks that lottery money is their own sole possession to dole out as they wish to try and undermine the constituencies of those members who are not government members. We're all elected to do our jobs, to represent our constituents to the best of our abilities, and when the government throws arguments: well, do you want us to take back the grant? Of course not. We just want to be considered as the elected members of being worthy, whether we're elected as opposition or not, to be a part of that celebration, which to date has not occurred.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: We're back now to the debate on the motion as amended. Anyone want to discuss further?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, do you wish to conclude debate, or should I just call the question?

Ms Blakeman: Well, I am interested to see what we're going to get here, Mr. Speaker, because I think we've been pretty clear, and we've tried over a number of years to raise this issue. This just does

not pass the test. I don't think it passed the ethical test, that the government is helping itself to a funding source which it then uses to advance its own cause. I don't think that passes an ethical test. I don't think it passes a moral test. Certainly, the responses I've had from people that have read my comments in this House around this issue go: "We had no idea that was going on. This is not right." They feel that the government is using this as a slush fund, and it's inappropriate.

Let me be really clear here, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anybody in this House would say that the groups don't deserve this money. I think they do. I think it's the manner in which the government chooses to control the amounts that the groups are getting, the timing that they're getting it, and the way that it's being handed out. It's meant to aggrandize the government members, and it's inappropriate.

I think the final test is the mom test, and I don't think it's passing the mom test either. I think that what is contemplated here is sneaky and underhanded. It's meant to deceive. It's meant to make the constituents that live in constituencies that have a nongovernment member believe that their member isn't working hard for them. I know that's wrong. I think it is wrong. It doesn't pass any of those tests. The bottom line is that what the government is doing here is inappropriate.

I'm going to continue to raise this issue. Why I put this motion for a return there was to get them to step up and show us these invitations. At one point it was heckled back to me in response to one of my questions: oh, we've invited you guys before. Really? Let's see it. If it's on the level of what we got out of this minister's office on Thursday, I think that's going to tell us a whole bunch. If we end up with other invitations that got lost in the mail or that never got there or were delivered after the event happened, that's going to tell us a whole bunch more about how the government is handling the distribution of these lottery-based funds through the grant programs.

Just as a final point, I think it's disrespectful. It disrespects the number of people who chose to vote in someone who wasn't a government member. I think that's where it's disrespectful, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to receiving the information about the invitations that were given to us. I will see where it goes from there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 25 as amended lost]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 203

Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and open Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the local authorities election amendment act. I would like to thank my colleagues from both sides of this House for sharing their thoughts and concerns during second reading. I would also like to quickly review the primary components of Bill 203.

This bill was designed to be a unifying piece of legislation that would provide clear and fair local election regulations for campaign finances that would be consistent province-wide. It would mirror rules that already apply in provincial elections and would be similar to legislation already enacted in Ontario, B.C., and Quebec. It has four main elements. First, it would apply a \$5,000 limit on contributions from any one individual, corporation, trade union, or employee organization. This limit was designed to ensure that all Albertans regardless of personal wealth were able to play a meaningful role in the electoral process.

Second, Bill 203 would require all candidates to file disclosure statements with the municipality following the conclusion of an election. These statements would be made publicly available and must include the names and addresses of those contributors who donate more than \$100 to a candidate as well as record the total dollar value of all contributions \$100 or less. Mr. Chairman, disclosure statements ensure public confidence and can also protect candidates from insinuations or outright accusations of undue influence.

Third, Bill 203 would provide clear guidelines for the handling of surplus campaign funds following an election. Candidates who record surplus campaign funds exceeding \$500 would be required to pay the amount of that surplus to the municipality to be held in trust for the candidate for their use in the following election. Should the candidate choose not to run in the subsequent election, the surplus funds held in trust may be directed to a registered charity by that candidate. These measures protect the contributor and ensure that contributions are used for their intended purpose, the municipal election campaign of the candidate.

3:20

Fourth, finally, Bill 203 clearly identifies who is eligible and ineligible to donate to a municipal campaign. The list of prohibited organizations is mirrored from the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act with a few minor relevant alterations, including prohibiting donations from municipally owned corporations and nonprofits who have received recent municipal grants.

These provisions are designed to build upon the commendable efforts of municipalities across Alberta and ensure that all Albertans can expect the same level of transparency, fairness, and accountability in their municipal and provincial elections regardless of where they live.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take this opportunity to address some of the specific questions brought forward by my hon. colleagues during second reading. I thank the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs for his question regarding whether I had thought to extend Bill 203 to include school division trustees or trustee elections. I would like to state that no provision in Bill 203 precludes such a regulation from being explored or implemented in the future, but because Bill 203 is a private member's bill, I believe it's important for it to have a narrow scope of focus. This is to ensure proper consultation as well as thorough debate and, possibly most important, to maximize its chance of success. Since this is the case, I did not include them within the scope of this bill at this time. I believe that extending its measures to school trustee elections could be a worthy item for discussion at a future date.

Another important question raised by the hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Gold Bar relates to a key provision of Bill 203, the proposed contribution limit of \$5,000. As members of this Assembly we are aware that Alberta's Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act establishes contribution limits to political parties, constituency associations, and registered candidates during and between election campaign periods. Section

17(1) limits contributions to local constituency associations to \$1,000 in a year that is not an election year. Furthermore, it limits contributions to a registered candidate during an election year to \$2,000. Mr. Chairman, this means that over a three- to four-year term the maximum any donor can contribute to any one provincial candidate's campaign is approximately \$5,000. The \$5,000 limit was set, again, to mirror the opportunities that currently exist for a provincial candidate. It was selected after consultation with the AUMA and the AAMD and C as well as widespread discussion with some of my many members of caucus who have valuable municipal experience.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona questioned why contributions are higher for provincial candidates. They are not. As I have described, they are consistent with each other and were set through careful consultation but certainly could be adjusted, if warranted, in the future.

Another question brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall and others relates to the matter of making contributions tax deductible. Mr. Chairman, I believe this is a notable suggestion. No provision of Bill 203 precludes such a measure from being explored or implemented in the future. Once again, this relates to keeping the scope of this private member's bill focused on aspects that are achievable in the short term. We also would need serious consultation on who would fund such a tax credit. This potential tax credit is an idea that would need more in-depth consideration and wider consultation with stakeholders and affected ministries. I prefer to propose that the four essential elements of the bill proceed first.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East addressed the matter of surplus funds and whether those funds would be available should a candidate or councillor choose to run for election at another level of government. Section 147.05(4) of Bill 203 requires candidates who choose not to run in a future municipal election to direct surplus funds left over from the prior election to a registered charitable organization as defined by section 149.1(1) of the Canada Income Tax Act, or it will become revenue for the local municipality. A candidate may only use prior held surplus funds under the condition that he or she chooses to run in the subsequent municipal election. Therefore, a candidate who chooses to run for office in another level of government may not use surplus funds held from a prior municipal election campaign.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to address questions that a number of hon. members raised in regard to trade unions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity suggested that Bill 203 disenfranchises members of particular unions. Furthermore, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East questioned whether members of a union in addition to their organization could contribute to a municipal candidate. I'd like to state that Bill 203 was designed to ensure that all contributors – be they individuals, trade unions, corporations, employee organizations – are treated fairly and equally. To this end, it mirrors existing legislation governing provincial elections.

In conclusion, I'd like to address a particular concern raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The member suggested that trade unions and corporations were being treated differently under Bill 203 due to their respective definitions. She noted that whereas section 147.01 deems all locals of a trade union to be one trade union, no such restriction exists for corporations and those corporations associated with it. I would like to assure the hon. member that it was the intention of Bill 203 to mirror the provincial legislation in this regard.

As such, I'm pleased to move an amendment to Bill 203 that will address this potential discrepancy. Its language is identical to existing provisions within Alberta's Election Finances and Contribu-

tions Disclosure Act with respect to corporate donors. This amendment essentially says that for the purpose of the contribution limit of \$5,000 all corporations associated with each other are treated as one corporation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to debate on Bill 203 and the proposed amendment and thank all the hon. members for their careful consideration.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A1. We'll just pause for a moment to make sure that it's passed out.

Hon. members, we'll be debating amendment A1. Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for the opportunity. As I indicated when Bill 203 first came up, I am in support of this piece of legislation, and I thank the hon. mover of the bill, the Member for Athabasca-Redwater. I also support the clarification provided in his amendment. I believe that in previous debate I pointed out that the idea of limiting the influence, whether it be of corporations or unions or individuals, is something that came out of the Liberal government under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

The purpose of the amendment and its clarification spells out just exactly that. For example, take CUPE. It has various locals, but the entire organization would only be allowed a certain amount. Likewise, there are several subcompanies within a larger company that previously could potentially have given donations within their subcompany status, whereas this particular amendment, A1, clarifies that. Therefore, I'm very much in support of it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. On the amendment. This amendment is in section 3 of the proposed Bill 203. Certainly, if I'm to understand this correctly, it is changing the definition of a corporation in the federal Income Tax Act. I still have questions, and I can understand where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is coming from because of the existing definition for trade unions.

The hon. member submitting this amendment suggested that this would level the playing field. Now, one has to look at the definition of corporations associated with section 256 of the Income Tax Act. That is certainly interesting. Section 256(1) of the Income Tax Act of Canada shall read as though the words "at any time in the year" were struck out.

3:30

Now, are we capturing associated corporations with this definition as I understand it? When we compare this to a trade union, Mr. Chairman, we would be looking at – let's pick the AUPE as an example – where for the purposes of this Bill 203 all locals of a trade union in Alberta are deemed to be in one trade union. So there would be lots of locals of the AUPE scattered throughout the province, but they're to be deemed by this legislation to be captured in the same definition, as I understand that.

Now, if I understand correctly, the definition of associated corporations here in the Income Tax Act is that

For the purposes of this Act, one corporation is associated with another in a taxation year if, at any time in the year,

- (a) one of the corporations controlled, directly or indirectly in any manner whatever, the other;
- (b) both of the corporations were controlled, directly or indirectly in any manner whatever, by the same person or group of persons;

and it goes on and on.

There's also section 256(1.1), the definition of a specified class, and 256(1.2). Under this amendment, as I understand this, they would all be applicable, would they not? Perhaps I can get an answer to that from the hon. member before we proceed any further, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Chairman, I had directed a question to the hon. member, and I was hoping to get a response before we go any further.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. member for his question. The amendment and the Income Tax Act of Canada are fairly clear. As I stated in the introduction to the amendment, the amendment is brought forward to mirror exactly what we have in our Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. It has always been the intent of this bill that it would not create a greater burden on municipal elections than we have on ourselves at the provincial elections. So what we've done is take the exact language right out of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act and plopped that into this bill. The member is correct in that the intent of this is that every corporation that's associated with each other would be considered one corporation for the purpose of contributions, just like every union local associated with each other would be considered one entity for the purpose of a donation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I appreciate that response from the hon. member. Now, I don't know how this legislation or even this amendment, Mr. Chairman, can be policed. There is a shortage of resources as it is at Elections Alberta. The former Elections Alberta CEO, or Chief Electoral Officer, certainly indicated on the public record and suggested that there is a Wild West of accounting here with contributions. There are very few rules.

I would like to know how the hon. member plans to enforce this amendment if it is to become law. How is this going to work in light of the very disappointing statements from an individual who was in charge of not only this act but Elections Alberta for a period of three-plus years? That individual had very little confidence that the system worked. Now that we are providing this amendment to this legislation – we will see where it goes in the House – how, precisely, is this going to work?

Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Chair, the question on who is going to police this amendment and the bill itself, for that matter, is a good question, but there aren't a lot of resources required to police this. This is going to be policed essentially by the public. This is just a disclosure for the public. Once these things are made public and accessible by the public, then, of course, if we see some serious violations, it would be up to the prosecutor's office to decide whether they would move forward on those. The intent is not to create a whole mechanism to police this. This is just about proper disclosure to the public.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has raised an important concern. This is a terrific amend-

ment, A1. I'm very supportive of it. I'm supportive of the bill, as I've previously indicated. But there were 18 infractions that were pointed out as a result of the last provincial election, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo continuously approached the hon. Minister of Justice about looking into the 18 infractions. Therefore, with potential infractions that occur in the future, even though we're trying to tighten up the regulations and bring them into line with provincial legislation, what assurances can be provided that the intent of this terrific amendment will actually be able to be governed and followed up not only by Elections Alberta, which, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated, brought up over 150 concerns that needed to be dealt with, never mind the 18 infractions?

I would look forward to an explanation of how, going beyond this terrific amendment, we can actually make sure that it gets legislated and enforced. How will the rules be changed to make sure that the rules that previously weren't followed are now more closely followed as a result of this improved legislation?

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the amendment?

If not, I will call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill as amended, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Whenever we debate any, you know, private member's bill in this Assembly, we have to be mindful of two rather significant pieces of legislation that have passed the Assembly here in the last number of years, and both of them – I don't know who in the government has been reluctant to proclaim them. I'm not going to suggest for a minute it's the President of the Treasury Board because I know he likes tax cuts as well as the next person.

The first bill that I would bring to the Assembly's attention is a private member's bill that was passed. The former Member for Strathcona had a bill, and it was a good bill, to give tradespersons a break when they were first buying their tools or upgrading their tools. It was a tax credit. Many people, including this hon. member and even many government members, thought that this bill had become law and started to talk about it and encourage taxpayers to access this. Some auto or heavy-duty mechanics spend thousands of dollars annually. Some of them have \$35,000, \$45,000 worth of tools that they take with them daily in their work. They thought that this was going to be a tax credit. But the government has refused to do anything about it.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, of course, last year had proposed a tax credit for individuals who were active, or exercising.

3:40

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we're talking about the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm certainly talking about that. You bet I am. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Now, when we look at what the Member for Calgary-Lougheed had suggested, it has not been passed into law. It's even mentioned in this year's fiscal plan, that for whatever reason we can't afford that tax credit.

So there are two examples, two recent examples, of private members' business getting the nod from the Legislative Assembly, from all members regardless of which party affiliation, and the bill not becoming a law of the province.

This legislation I have many questions about. I'm not so sure about this legislation. Certainly, I would like to see restrictions and limitations put on campaign donations. In my view, Mr. Chairman, if your name is not on the voters list, you can't donate. If it is on the voters list, you cannot donate, in my view, any more than \$500. That certainly would eliminate trade unions. That would eliminate all corporations from making contributions. One only has to look at the disclosure statements of any political party to see that at certain times there is significant interest by respective or interested parties in donating money.

One group that I notice lately is very, very anxious to donate money, not to this party and certainly not to the New Democrats but to the government party, is outfits that are promoting the atomic reactors. All of a sudden in the last two to three years I see where they've become very generous to the Progressive Conservative Party. Never heard from them in the past that I could recall, but lately they seem to be very generous, and they seem to be very anxious to go to Premier's dinners and hear what the Premier has to say and pay a significant amount of money for that privilege.

Good records and good disclosure records are very important. I don't think we have the resources nor the political will to enforce this, for starters. I can appreciate where the hon. member is certainly coming from. When we look at the prosecutions that have been ignored by officials from Justice, I can see why the former Chief Electoral Officer was so frustrated. He investigated, made suggestions, thought that prosecutions would proceed through the system and that innocence or guilt would be determined. That didn't happen. That didn't happen for whatever reason, whether it's with the Ministry of Justice or with the RCMP up by Kingsway Avenue. No charges were ever laid. I had an issue in our constituency of people toting around a ballot box in the election from room to room in a series of seniors' apartments.

So there are issues, and I can see why members would be skeptical of this bill. It's a good idea, but do we have the ability to enforce this, Mr. Chairman? That is the question that we must determine before we vote on this. Why the different tiers – this still puzzles me – regarding donations and campaign amounts? We know there's a different donation level at the provincial level, whether it's \$15,000 or \$30,000 during a campaign period, and that can be divided up between a party and the party's respective candidates. Why would there be two sets of rules, as I understand it, one for us whenever we ask for money as either an individual candidate or a political party and people who are running in supposedly a local authorities election? Like, why the two standards here?

Now, I would be interested at this point, Mr. Chairman, to also get an explanation of the campaign period. My understanding of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act is that in this act there are different rules for the campaign period. Is that because the act that governs local elections is different than the Election Act for the province? I suspect that has something to do with it, but I'm not sure. If I could have that clarified, I would be really grateful. I'm also interested in – and it's something that I support – the campaign surpluses and the distribution of those surpluses if an individual candidate does not run at a future time.

Other than that and the questions I had, I had a few discussions with various labour groups regarding this legislation. Some, such as the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, are not allowed to make donations to political parties. Others that do make donations thought that the fact that they would be lumped together as one union regardless of how many local unions they had throughout the province was an act to restrict and limit their ability. They may want to support some of their members who seek office at the municipal level, and they thought this would restrict and limit their ability to support their members.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for his initiative here and his diligence in responding to our questions and concerns. I really appreciate that. Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise today to discuss Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. Again, I'd like to congratulate my good friend and colleague the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing forward such a timely and well-written, well-drafted piece of legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that this bill has advanced to this stage of the legislative process as it allows me the opportunity to specifically address an important section of Bill 203, section 147.03, which relates to the management of campaign financing. This section defines guidelines to improve upon our fair and open municipal electoral system, especially with provisions (a), (b), and (c) regarding campaign accounts. Indeed, these provisions aim to strengthen the documentation of financial activities throughout a municipal election campaign. As elected officials the members of this Assembly are well aware of the necessary guidelines and regulations for provincial elections. We understand their purpose in ensuring a fair and reasonable democratic process.

3:50

The provisions under section 147.03 encourage an open process and allow for those who have contributed resources, financial or otherwise, to know that there are checks and balances in place. To elaborate further, section 147.03, provision (a), establishes that "a campaign account is opened at a financial institution for the purposes of the election campaign and in the name of the candidate's election campaign." The opening of a campaign account at an accredited financial institution ensures that a responsible mechanism for recording the deposits and withdrawals of a campaign fund is established. Additionally, opening an account in the name of the candidate works to ensure that candidates and their campaign organizers are directing electoral contributions to the person for whom they are intended.

Those involved with political campaigns will acknowledge how important it is to have a legitimate method for documenting and recording financial activities. This method of responsible documentation is supported in section 147.03(1)(b) as it states that a candidate shall ensure "all contributions of money are deposited into the campaign account." All these provisions work to support more accountable election campaigns and the responsible use of political contributions.

There have been recent examples in other jurisdictions in which a lack of such guidelines has allowed individuals to use political contributions in a way that we would find inappropriate. I would like to note one story of an elected U.S. official who took advantage of the absence of clear campaign disclosure laws. After losing an election campaign, this individual was able to keep a campaign account active. This, then, enabled the former Senator to use funds that had been contributed in good faith for his previous election bids at his own discretion. In this particular case the individual, who was no longer an elected official, used his campaign funds to lobby with an influential government relations firm. His leftover campaign funds were used to campaign to members of Congress and presidential candidates and to pay family members excessively high wages for accounting services.

While these practices are not common, nor have they been deemed

illegal, amazingly enough, in this particular circumstance they exemplify the potential for questionable conduct if guidelines are not established for the use of campaign accounts. Mr. Chairman, it is reasonable to assume that those individuals who donated to this Senator's campaign had intended for their money to be used for election purposes only and not be retained and allotted for alternative purposes later on.

This brings me to the next important provision of section 147.03, provision (1)(c), which reads as follows: "money in the campaign account shall only be used for the payment of campaign expenses." With this clause we are setting a standard for appropriate financial operations of campaigns. If stipulations are absent, it can again potentially lead to practices in which campaign contributions are misused. Campaign account guidelines support adequate documentation of the amount of campaign money received and spent. This will only enhance the accuracy of financial statements and ensure that Alberta's municipal election laws align more closely with other jurisdictions.

For example, in the United States the Federal Election Commission rules prohibit campaign funds from being used for personal uses. We have also legislated similar guidelines for provincial elections, requiring the chief financial officer of a registered party, constituency association, or candidate to ensure contributions are placed in a depository on record with the Chief Electoral Officer.

I believe these are appropriate and necessary practices, and I am encouraged that we are proposing these steps for all of Alberta's municipalities in order to improve the operations and accounting of municipal election campaigns. These improvements will support and complement election rules and guidelines already implemented in many of Alberta's cities, counties, towns, and villages. This legislation is, again, another example of this government's commitment to assessing areas where we can work to strengthen elections in Alberta and improve the health of our democracy. Under the direction of the hon. Premier our government remains committed to governing with integrity and transparency, so we will continue to assess areas where we as a government can implement democratic reforms that will work to support an open and transparent regulated election system.

Bill 203 proposes changes to the current Local Authorities Election Act that I believe are essential to improving municipal election campaigns. As such, I am proud and honoured to give my full and enthusiastic support for Bill 203 and wholeheartedly encourage my colleagues to join me in doing so.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again, I appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater has worked so hard to bring a degree of consistency into electoral reform in Alberta. I appreciate the fact that in the A1 amendment, for example, the hon. creator of the bill, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, referenced federal regulation as a precedent. I think federal electoral regulations, actually, are one step up in terms of the tightness of the regulations from our provincial, but I think that provincial regulations are several steps above the current circumstance with regard to municipal financing. I guess we've got to start somewhere, and this is kind of the middle ground. As such, I support it.

I share some of the concerns that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Goldwater – Gold Bar; the American references earlier were distracting me. Barry Goldwater from Edmonton-Gold Bar. Okay. It is important that transparency and accountability, especially

during the electoral process, be first in mind, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to come up with the transparent regulations behind the enforcement of this Bill 203, Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009.

In my own personal circumstance I've been very fortunate in the last two elections, 2004 and again in 2008, to have my daughter's mother-in-law be my chief financial officer. She, with her background in finance, does everything with such a fine-tooth comb that it would be impossible to find any omissions, never mind violations. It's that type of accuracy and transparency that will improve the municipal electoral system.

I am hopeful that this bill will not only go forward but will be enforced at whichever time the next municipal election will occur. I guess that's about two years from this October. There have been discussions in terms of bringing municipal elections in line with provincial elections in the sense that instead of the three-year period, you know, also having municipal elections be along the same four-year approximate cycle. But this legislation at least provides that groundwork.

I very much like the provisions with regard to the money after the campaign either going to a charitable institution of choice or directly to the city's finances. I think that way we have a sense that this money is going to benefit a wider array of individuals or the city itself rather than the individual who is elected.

I also am in support of Bill 203. I would like to mention the fact that the people who supported me in the last two elections were very aware of the machine that I was facing. In both cases while the amount I was able to raise was dwarfed by that of my Conservative competitors, a spending of 3 to 1 by comparison in both 2004 and 2008, people saw beyond the dollars and looked at the product. What this is doing is making it less dependent on how well you can fund raise and more dependent on the services you provide. As a result, it makes it a much more level playing field for all involved, and I appreciate, again, the Member for Athabasca-Redwater with Bill 203 levelling the playing field so that anyone who has a good idea or foresight, strength of character is not disabled by an individual's corporate or union or influential considerations.

Again, thank you, hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, for bringing forward this particular bill and allowing the best individual, whether they be man or woman, to proceed without undue influence in their pursuit of democratic representation. Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my sincere pleasure to rise today and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. I congratulate the member on this bill. Bill 203 is an important piece of legislation that will have a resounding benefit for the municipal elections process in Alberta, and I thank the member for sponsoring it.

For the purpose of this Committee of the Whole debate I would like to draw attention to section 147.04(1). This section is instrumental in achieving the transparency that Bill 203 seeks to promote for municipal elections in Alberta. First, section 147.04(1) specifies that a candidate must file their disclosure statements in a prescribed form by March 1 following the election, and in the case of a by-election disclosure statements must be filed no more than 120 days following the by-election date. These reporting deadlines are a vital component to Bill 203. It ensures that all candidates operate under

the same timeline requirements, thereby promoting fairness in the process. In addition, these deadlines ensure that campaign disclosure statements are all readily available at an expected time for review by anyone who wishes to access them.

While it is important that campaign disclosure statements are timely and accessible, it is also important that they contain the proper information about election campaign finances. I know that that matters to the members of this House. Thus section 147.04(1) also specifies what is to be included in those statements. First, as per item (a) the aggregate amount of all individual contributions not exceeding \$100 must be reported. For these contributions, Mr. Chairman, the identities of contributors do not need to be reported. While a number of contributions of a hundred dollars or less can add up, these smaller amounts are generally not of overbearing concern, and since there is typically no concentrated source for these amounts of money, they will be forgone. Rather, it is likely a number of individuals and separate entities; this is a distinction from a large contribution from one person or corporate entity.

As per item (1)(b) of the same section, Mr. Chairman, both the amount contributed and the contributor's name and address are to be reported if their contribution or the aggregate amount of multiple contributions exceeds \$100 during the campaign period. In many ways this requirement is the pillar of Bill 203. The transparency that Bill 203 promotes is largely dependent on the disclosure of large contribution amounts and the identity of the contributors. With this information being clear and accessible within a predefined time frame, voters will ultimately have a broader range of information, which they can use to make an informed decision when they go to the polls, about the candidates that are running for office. Moreover, this increased transparency will also help candidates, insulating them from misinformed accusations of misconduct, which we are wont to hear at some point, and allowing their campaign to demonstrate and document practices of accountability and openness, which matters to this government.

Mr. Chairman, with the reporting requirements set out in section 147.04(1), I am confident that Bill 203 will be of great value to the democratic process in Alberta's municipalities. The transparency that would accommodate the reporting requirement could go a long way in the minds of voters, ultimately increasing confidence amongst the electorate.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the last item in section 147.04(1), item (c), specifies that the prescribed forms for disclosure statements must also specify a list of campaign expenses. This is intended to promote accountability by demonstrating that the contributions collected are being used for the intended purpose and for the reason that they were raised in the first place. This strengthens not only the electorate's confidence but also the confidence of contributors. I would expect that if contributors can be reassured that their dollars are being used for the purposes that they intended – that is, to directly fund their preferred candidate's campaign – then they can continue to contribute in the future, and that's an important part of democracy. Moreover, this sort of environment, one of accountability and transparency, should promote others to contribute, those perhaps who would not otherwise be inclined to support a municipal election campaign.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203's intent is to promote accountability and transparency in the municipal election process across Alberta. Section 147.04(1) is instrumental in achieving this as it specifies the requirements for campaign finance disclosure statements, including deadlines and reporting requirements. Indeed, some municipalities have already led the way in implementing various campaign finance disclosure requirements. Bill 203 and section 147.04(1) in particular will help standardize such requirements for all municipalities. It

provides a clear framework within which municipal election campaigns can file disclosure statements so as to make this information more open and accessible. These provisions will benefit both candidates in municipal elections and municipalities overall.

To conclude, I fully support this bill and believe that its measures, specifically the ones I've emphasized, are instrumental to the long-term success of Alberta's municipal election process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 203. I brought some concerns before. One of them was addressed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. That was to make these donations tax deductible.

I agree with the Member for Calgary-Elbow. I think donations under a hundred dollars should all be reported. I would like to take it a step further. I think all contributions should be payable by cheque only so there's a track record of who contributes to these campaign funds. This bill will make municipal elections more transparent and candidates more accountable.

This way, you know, everybody can contribute \$99, and we won't know who contributed to the campaign fund. We will only know how much money was collected. I think it's leaving a little bit of room for abuse the way the bill stands right now. I think we should go all the way and look at the bill thoroughly and correct everything once and for all so that we won't have to go back to do another sweep at the bill to fix it.

Overall, you know, it's a good bill. I support it, but I think we should get into the nitty-gritty of things. Then we should fix all those little loopholes which may be left by passing this bill.

With those comments, I still support the bill, but I think we should, you know, comb it a little more thoroughly and fix it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to participate in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill is designed to ensure accountability and transparency for Alberta's municipal elections by regulating the size of campaign contributions, by creating a clear directive for surplus funds, and by ensuring full public disclosure of campaign finances.

Mr. Chairman, an integral part of Bill 203 is section 147.02 as it establishes limitations on contributions to municipal campaigns. The last two parts of this section, part (4) and part (5), are of particular importance as they define the consequences of a contravention of these rules. Mr. Chairman, section 147.02(4) reads, "A corporation, trade union or employee organization that contravenes this section is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of not more than \$10 000." Additionally, part (5) reads, "A person who contravenes this section is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of up to \$5000."

The contribution limitation rules to which these two parts refer are parts (1), (2), and (3) of section 147.02. These three parts specifically ensure that donors do not contribute more than \$5,000 in any campaign period, that the candidate who contributes to his own campaign is considered a donor and is subject to the same \$5,000 limitation, and ensures that those who donate are, in fact, eligible to do so under the act.

4:10

Parts (4) and (5) ensure that these provisions can be enforced and therefore are imperative to Bill 203's effectiveness. In essence, they ensure that individuals or groups of individuals will not have undue influence over candidates. Part (4) establishes a \$10,000 penalty for any corporation, trade union, or employee organization that contravenes the contribution limitation. Bill 203's definition of a trade union is aligned with Alberta's Labour Relations Code, the Public Service Employee Relations Act, and the Canada Labour Code. It therefore includes any organization of employees that has a written constitution, rules, or bylaws and has as one of its objectives the regulation of relations between employers and employees and holds bargaining rights for employees in Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, some employee organizations are not actually designated as trade unions. However, Bill 203 includes these groups as well, referring to them as employee organizations and defines one of them as an organization that is not designated as a trade union but that bargains collectively for employees in Alberta. Together these definitions ensure that all employee groups are accounted for under Bill 203.

Furthermore, because part (4) is inclusive of corporations, it ensures that all organizations representing employees as well as incorporated businesses and not-for-profit organizations are accounted for in legislation. Ultimately, section 147.02 enables these entities to continue to support the municipal electoral process through contribution, while part (4) makes certain that these donations do not exceed a certain amount. If any of these entities do in fact exceed the \$5,000 donation limit, the legislation is clear that they are guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of up to \$10,000.

Part (5) of section 147.02, Mr. Chairman, is similar to part (4), except it pertains to persons or individuals as opposed to corporations or groups that represent employees. Part (5), therefore, ensures that persons, as they are defined in the act, are limited to contributions of \$5,000. Because the legislative definition of a person under Bill 203 includes a candidate or any other individual, this part makes certain that no one single person can make an excessive donation to a municipal campaign. Furthermore, the definition of a person under Bill 203 also includes "an organization other than a corporation, employee organization or trade union." Therefore, part (5) ensures enforceability of contribution limitations for unincorporated organizations and other groups who may choose to donate to a campaign. It is clear under Bill 203 that if any of these persons or organizations do contribute to a municipal campaign in excess of the \$5,000 contribution limit, they are guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of up to \$5,000.

Altogether, Mr. Chairman, the wording of section 147.02 strikes a balance that secures the ability of these entities to remain engaged in municipal politics while making certain that donations are a reasonable size and do not exceed \$5,000. This is true specifically for parts (4) and (5), which establish penalties for entities that contravene this section and ultimately ensure compliance with this act.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 is a positive step in maintaining fairness, transparency, and accountability in the election process for Alberta municipalities. I therefore stand before the Assembly to support Bill 203 and commend the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for his hard work and diligence in bringing forward this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you wish to speak?

Ms Notley: No.

The Deputy Chair: Then I'll call the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise today and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. We've heard some good speakers today, and this legislation, I submit to you, would ensure province-wide transparency and accountability measures for municipal elections. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing forward this thoughtful and constructive piece of legislation. I think he has done a very excellent job on this.

As legislators we must ensure that elections at all levels of government are conducted with the highest degree of transparency and accountability. Specifically, I would like to discuss section 147.05 of this bill. This section provides clear guidelines for municipal governments and candidates as to the usage of surplus campaign funds following an election. Some people have asked me: why do we need to do this municipally? Well, the difference is that federally or with our Assembly you have party structures that can hold the money and can take it then to the next election. Obviously, we don't have that municipally. I don't think, actually, that there's anything that prohibits parties, but they're not formally associated in this province.

Section 147.05(1) requires candidates who disclose statements to show a surplus exceeding \$500 to pay the excess amount to the municipality. This subsection is essential in ensuring the effectiveness of Bill 203 as it provides a clear directive for the handling of surplus funds totalling more than \$500.

Section 147.05(2), conversely, outlines the responsibilities of the municipality following the receipt of surplus funds from the candidate. Bill 203 directs municipalities to hold the money in trust for the candidate at a financial institution. In this way, Mr. Chair, Bill 203 protects the candidate by ensuring that his or her surplus funds will be held in a responsible manner. Thus candidates may have full confidence in this legislation and the municipal government for which they choose to run for office. In addition, it protects municipalities by providing them with strict guidelines on where to direct the funds. Municipalities may have full confidence that the surplus funds will be held and safeguarded at a major financial institution as protected by the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 also provides clear direction as to when candidates may collect funds that have been held in trust. I would draw the attention of this Assembly to section 147.05(3), which reads:

If the person in respect of whom the money is held under subsection (2) files nomination papers to be a candidate in the next general election or in a by-election called before that time, the municipality shall pay the money and interest calculated at the rate prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council to the candidate for use in that election.

With interest rates these days it's probably only a few cents, but they could rise in the future.

Mr. Chairman, this provision is important for several reasons. First, it provides municipalities and municipal candidates specific guidelines as to when surplus monies from a prior election may be used in the future. It is clearly indicated that surplus funds may only be returned to a candidate should they choose to file nomination papers and run in the subsequent municipal election. Indeed, if this provision was not clearly stated, it would be unclear as to when the candidates would be eligible to get surplus funds from a prior election.

Second, subsection (3) clearly states that the money shall be returned to the candidate with interest at a rate determined by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, as I mentioned. Essentially, Mr. Chair, subsection (3) provides clear direction to the municipality on when to return surplus funds collected from the last election. These funds may only be returned to the candidate should they, again, file nomination papers for the next subsequent election. Should they fail to do so, section 147.05(4) ensures that the candidate can direct the municipality to donate surplus funds to a registered charitable organization.

Mr. Chairman, public confidence in municipal elections is essential to ensuring strong communities, and I'm proud to say that numerous municipalities have spearheaded strong campaign finance legislation. Bill 203 proposes to build upon their efforts and to provide a single uniform set of regulations for all municipalities in Alberta. I believe that the regulation of surplus funds is essential to ensuring accountability on behalf of municipal candidates and those who contribute to their campaigns.

4:20

As I mentioned earlier, in a different level of government, if you are running for MLA or MP, you'd run into a situation where your constituency or riding association could hold any surplus funds for use in the mid term or leading up to the next election. Again, though, unlike in provinces like British Columbia and Quebec, which have party structures through municipal candidates, fortunately or unfortunately, we don't have that in Alberta. It isn't prohibited by the Local Authorities Election Act, but it isn't a common practice as well.

Many of my constituents have mentioned to me in the past that they're worried about certain candidates having these surplus funds with no accountability, with no transparency as to where these monies go. They don't even know how much these people have in these accounts. This bill would actually change that, Mr. Speaker.

It's also critical that any proposed legislation should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities for both candidates and municipal governments, specifically in the handling of funds following an election, and section 147.05 does just that. The subsection clarifies circumstances in which municipalities may return the funds to the candidate. In this way, Bill 203 ensures that contributions are used for their intended purpose, thus ensuring accountability on behalf of the contributor.

Mr. Chair, the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater is to be congratulated on bringing forward this unifying piece of legislation. It's not the first in this country, and I hope it's not the last.

I do want to add a couple of other items as time may allow. I did post on my Twitter earlier what people are saying about this. A gentleman in my constituency named Mike Kuipers talks about democracy belonging to the people, not to the highest bidder. I couldn't agree more. Another individual, Michael Cust, says: campaign finance law is a way to protect incumbents and limit free speech; the only laws surrounding campaign finance should be slim to none. I would submit to Mr. Cust on my Twitter that this isn't a way of protecting incumbents. Rather, it encourages new candidates and encourages more accountability for the funds that the incumbents actually have. A gentleman named Brock also says that reasonable limits to seek and make sure that the average voter remains a factor in elections are worth debate. I agree.

In that respect, I ask all members to support Bill 203. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, as proposed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. I would like to thank and congratulate the member for this timely and well-thought-out piece of legislation.

While this bill includes a number of notable sections, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to section 147.02(1). This section states that "campaign contributions by any person, corporation, trade union or employee organization to a candidate shall not exceed \$5000 in any campaign period." This campaign contribution limit proposed by section 147.02(1) would offer a number of positive benefits to Alberta's municipal electoral system.

I believe the benefits of this section can be highlighted in three specific areas. First, section 147.02(1) would limit an individual's or group's ability to exercise undue influence through significant financial contributions as their donations would be limited to a regulated maximum of \$5,000. Indeed, given this maximum, Albertans would have greater confidence in the fairness of the electoral process in this province's municipal elections. Moreover, it would help to prevent unwarranted accusations of excessive or undue influence by those who have made significant financial contributions to a municipal campaign. With this in mind, section 147.02(1) would help protect members of the community who would traditionally donate sums greater than the proposed regulated amount. In addition, it would protect candidates and elected officials from being accused of forwarding an initiative because of individuals or groups who had donated significant funds to the campaign.

Second, Mr. Chairman, section 147.02(1) would help to create a more equal electoral playing field for both the electorate and those seeking office. This level playing field would be created in part by reducing the financial influence individuals or groups can have on municipal campaigns and, by extension, the election. Given this, those who may not have the means to donate significant financial sums to a campaign may find the value of their contributions having a greater influence on the direction of the election. This greater influence would be the result of the increased value of their small donations relative to those limited by the regulated campaign contribution maximum.

Further to this, individuals may be more willing to participate in a municipal election if they believe their contributions, financial or otherwise, would have an enhanced impact on the outcome. Ultimately, Mr. Chairman, Albertans would be more likely to volunteer their time or resources if at the end of the day it could have a significant impact on the results of an election. Regardless of their financial means, section 147.02(1) would give Albertans confidence in the fact that their actions and financial contributions would play an important role in who is elected to municipal office.

Third, section 147.02(1) could help to improve voter turnout in Alberta's municipal elections and encourage more Albertans to run for office. Individuals who have traditionally relied on a small number of significant donations to fund their election campaigns would now have to solicit funds from a broader segment of the electorate. Given this, candidates would have to broaden their appeal by forwarding policies that have a greater impact on a municipality's residents. Ultimately, this broader solicitation would result in more members of the local community becoming engaged in municipal elections. In turn, this further engagement would lead to more Albertans casting their votes in municipal elections.

Mr. Chairman, the level playing field that section 147.02(1) would create would also increase the number of candidates in municipal

elections. Individuals might be more inclined to run in a municipal election if they believed they had a more equal opportunity to win. Section 147.02 would reduce the influence the larger financial contributions could have on the outcome of a municipal election. Potential candidates who do not have an established fundraising base would find themselves on a more equal fundraising plan with those who do.

Mr. Chairman, section 147.02(1) offers a profound measure to further Alberta's municipal democratic process. This section would encourage greater participation from the electorate and would protect individuals and groups from allegations of undue influence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to speak on this section and to encourage my colleagues to vote in favour of this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing forward these valuable amendments.

As a newly elected official I was impressed by the thorough and open process with respect to election fundraising and campaign expenditures. My understanding is that we would lose this honourable position in this House if we didn't file our statements.

Mr. Chairman, while I believe the hon. member proposes a number of important amendments, I would like to focus my comments this afternoon on the merits of section 147.09, which is titled Disqualification in Relation to Disclosure Statements. This section relates to elected councillors and reads as follows:

In addition to any other penalty under this Act, if a person who is declared elected as a councillor

- (a) fails to file a disclosure statement required under section 147.04 before the end of the late filing period provided under section 147.07, and
- (b) has not been relieved from this obligation by a court order under section 147.08,

then the person ceases to hold office as a councillor, and the seat is deemed to be vacant.

Mr. Chairman, I believe this language clearly details what is expected of an elected councillor regarding the disclosure of their election finances and contributions and what the penalties are for noncompliance. Section 147.09 details the consequences that someone elected as a councillor would face if he or she failed to file required disclosure statements. It clearly states that as a penalty for failing to file a disclosure statement, an elected councillor will lose his or her position, and the seat will be considered vacant. Mr. Chairman, I believe it is important to emphasize that section 147.09 applies to people who are elected as councillors, not simply all candidates seeking office.

4:30

As I'm sure my colleagues in this Assembly would agree, it is a tremendous honour to be an elected official. However, it is a privilege that is not without conditions. One of those conditions is that elected officials are held accountable to the people for their actions. Therefore, by revealing their campaign period financing, newly elected or re-elected officials are engaging in an act of transparency that justifies the faith that voters have placed in them. As I've previously mentioned, elected officials at the provincial level are subject to legislation that mandates the disclosure of their

election finances and contributions, and for the sake of transparency and accountability I see no reason why municipally elected councilors should not be subject to similar legislation.

Disclosure statements are important documents, Mr. Chairman. They promote voter confidence by assuring them that their elected representatives' campaigns are straightforward, open, and transparent. They also help protect the elected candidates. When an elected candidate's campaign finances and contributions record is accessible to the general public, the possibility of unwarranted allegations is greatly decreased. Disclosure statements are also important documents in the pursuit of transparency and accountability because they publicly document an elected candidate's campaign expenses and contributions. Firstly, disclosure statements must set out the total amount of campaign contributions received during the campaign period not exceeding \$100 per contributor; secondly, if an individual's total contributions during the campaign period exceed \$100, they must detail the total amount contributed together with the contributor's name and address; and thirdly, they must detail campaign expenses.

Holding any office in this beautiful province is a privilege, Mr. Chairman. Without section 147.09 if a municipally elected councilor failed to file the required disclosure statements or was not relieved of this obligation, as per section 147.08 he or she would not be held accountable by the voting public until the next election, nearly three years away. Section 147.09 ensures that election finances and contributions are revealed at the beginning of a municipally elected candidate's term, similar to what is required of the provincially elected officials. Simply put, this bill demands the same accountability of municipally elected officials as this government does of provincially elected officials.

This province understands the importance of ensuring that Albertans seeking political office are transparent in their actions and held accountable for their election finances and contributions. That is why provincial candidates fall under Alberta's Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, which details the requirements for the disclosure of election finances and contributions and prescribes penalties for failure to comply with those requirements. I believe it is reasonable for Albertans to expect accountability and transparency from their provincially elected officials, and I also believe it is reasonable for Albertans to expect the same from their elected representatives at the municipal level.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 was designed to build on the good work that many municipalities have already undertaken to ensure accountability in campaign finances. In its spirit Bill 203 seeks to mirror legislation that currently provides provincial election campaign finance contribution and expense disclosure at the municipal level to ensure consistency throughout Alberta, and I believe that this is a worthwhile endeavour.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to declare my support for Bill 203 and urge all members of the Assembly do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise today and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I thank the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. Bill 203 seeks to provide campaign finance standards for municipal election campaigns which would be comparable to those already in place at the provincial level.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to a section of the proposed legislation that I find particularly important, section 147.03(1). Subsections (i) and (j) of this legislation address measures to deal with contributions that contravene this act. I would like to discuss section 147.03(1)(i), that states that "a campaign contribution received in contravention of this Act is returned to the contributor as soon as possible after the candidate becomes aware of the contravention." This measure is important to ensure that all contributions received are legal. It will require a process of validation for contributions which previously was not necessary for many local election campaigns.

Furthermore, requiring that all contributions received are validated would build confidence in municipal elections. For example, Bill 203 sets out a contribution limit of \$5,000 for any campaign period. This limit is specifically included in this bill to reduce the ability of individuals or groups from influencing political campaigns or, by extension, the outcome of an election through large financial contributions. This measure provides individuals and groups a greater ability to equally contribute to the electoral process.

Furthermore, this limit prevents municipal campaigns from receiving excessive donations from a select few individuals or entities. Section 147.03(1)(i) is essential to enforcing the contribution limit by requiring excessive donations to be returned to the donor. It sets a clear directive that is to be followed by all municipal campaigns in Alberta.

However, a situation could occur where a contribution that contravenes this act is anonymous. This is why Bill 203 also prohibits any anonymous contributions to candidates. Section 147.03(1)(j) clearly states that "an anonymous campaign contribution or a campaign contribution not returned to the contributor under clause (i) is paid to the secretary for the municipality in which the election is held." Mr. Chairman, it is possible that an anonymous donation originated from outside of Alberta, which is prohibited under this act. By requiring that all anonymous contributions are to be paid to the municipality, any contribution that contravenes this act would not benefit the candidate.

Furthermore, having all anonymous contributions directed to a single entity would ensure that all candidates know exactly how to deal with contributions that are invalid. Moreover, since it's municipalities that fund municipal elections, it is appropriate that these anonymous contributions are returned to the municipality so that they may be used to help pay for the municipality's municipal election expenses. Overall this measure is important to help ensure fairness in municipal election campaigns by providing all candidates a directive to follow regarding anonymous contributions.

Mr. Chairman, the measures in sections 147.03(1)(i) and (j) benefit both the candidate and the contributor. These measures will ensure that all undue influence either from excessive contributions or from contributions by prohibited donors will not interfere in a campaign. Contributors to municipal elections will benefit as these rules would apply to all donors, enhancing the ability for them to equally participate in a municipal campaign by donating to the candidate of their choice. This standard may in the end encourage more people to contribute to a municipal election. Candidates seeking municipal office will also benefit from these measures as all candidates would be required to abide by the same standards.

Mr. Chairman, the measures set out in this bill ensure that all municipal candidates play by the same rules, ensuring that any undue influence, whether from anonymous contributions or that are in excess of \$5,000, are eliminated from municipal campaigns. By establishing these standards, both the candidate and the contributor mutually benefit from both clarity and a level playing field that

would evolve from limited contributions and clarifying eligible donors. Sections 147.03(1)(i) and (j) are very important measures that will strengthen municipal elections by establishing a proper process for dealing with contributions that contravene this act.

I would again like to thank the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for this important piece of legislation. I encourage all hon. members on both sides of the House to vote in favour of Bill 203.

Thanks for the opportunity to discuss this.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to rise today and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. This act, as you know, was brought forward by my hon. colleague from Athabasca-Redwater, and I'd like to thank him for bringing forward this timely piece of legislation for our consideration.

Hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, from the bottom of my heart I thank you sincerely.

4:40

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to draw the Assembly's attention to a section of the proposed legislation that I find particularly enlightening. Section 147.02(3) was created to clarify who can and who cannot make a financial contribution to a municipal election campaign. Specifically, this section reads:

No prohibited organization, person normally resident outside Alberta or trade union or employee organization other than a trade union or employee organization as defined in this Part shall make any campaign contributions to a candidate.

Section 147.02(3) clearly lists the three groups or bodies not eligible to donate to municipal campaigns.

The first of these are prohibited organizations, which are defined by the act in section 147.01(g) and include municipalities, corporations controlled by a municipality, a nonprofit organization that has received municipal grants, a provincial corporation, a Métis settlement, a school board, a postsecondary organization, or a corporation that does not carry out business in Alberta. Institutions such as publicly supported nonprofit groups and provincial corporations operate using funds derived from the taxpayer. Essentially section 147.02(3) restricts organizations from using public funds to support political campaigns. It just makes sense, Mr. Chairman. It's a no-brainer. Organizations using public funds should not be supporting political campaigns.

In addition, organizations such as school boards and municipally controlled corporations are intricately tied to the administration of a municipality. It might be in the interests of these organizations to support a candidate who addresses their positions or goals. Furthermore, while voting according to self-interest is one of the guiding principles of democracy, there could be a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest in cases where public institutions support political campaigns.

Now, the second group restricted from contributing to municipal political campaigns is trade unions or employee organizations which are not defined by the act. To this end, a trade union is defined by section 147.01(h) which states that:

"trade union" means a trade union as defined by the Labour Relations Code, the Public Service Employee Relations Act or the Canada Labour Code (Canada) and that holds bargaining rights for employees in Alberta.

Furthermore, section 147.01(e) defines an employee organization as "any organization other than a trade union that bargains collec-

tively for any employees in Alberta." The trade unions and employee organizations defined by the act are only those that carry out their operations within Alberta on behalf of Alberta workers.

Mr. Chair, section 147.01(1) clarifies the definition of corporations and those corporations associated with them. To this end it reads:

(2) Corporations that are associated with one another under section 256 of the Income Tax Act (Canada) shall be considered as a single corporation for the purposes of this Part . . . subsection 256(1) of the Income Tax Act (Canada) shall be read as though the words "at any time in the year" were struck out.

(3) Nothing done or omitted to be done by a corporation is a contravention of this Part solely because that corporation subsequently becomes associated with any other corporation.

These provisions ensure that corporations associated with one another may only make a single contribution, similar to how locals of a union are considered one donor.

To be clear, Mr. Chairman, section 147.02(3) limits municipal election contributions from trade unions or employee organizations to those unions and organizations that conduct business within Alberta. Prohibiting contributions from organizations outside of the province helps to ensure that municipal elections are only supported by groups directly tied to the municipality. As well, this restriction could build confidence in voters as it would create a framework that ensures that their elections are not unduly influenced by outside groups.

Preventing undue influence from outside groups is also the reasoning behind the third restricted group proposed by section 147.02(3). As defined by this section, people normally residing outside Alberta are not permitted to contribute to a municipal election campaign. Essentially, this means that people residing outside the province would not be able to donate to candidates in Alberta's municipal elections. These restrictions are advantageous in circumstances where an outside group might benefit by having an issue debated at a local level. The issue might not be at the forefront of local debate or important to local residents, but outside groups might use financial support to sway candidates' platforms, thus prioritizing the issue. Therefore, an issue that may not be in the interest of the local population could infringe on an election campaign and take away from more pressing local concerns.

Mr. Chairman, this section recognizes that Alberta's elections should be conducted to meet the interests of Albertans. Realistically, however, outside influence can never be completely removed from an election campaign, nor should it. Outside ideas and proposals may actually add to the debate of local municipal campaigns, and I feel as though any proposal aimed at eliminating this exchange would have negative consequences.

From this, perhaps the most enlightening aspect about section 147.02(3) is not that it tries to control outside influence but that it attempts to restrict undue outside influence. With the restrictions defined by this section in place, non-Alberta residents would not be able to donate to municipal campaigns. They would, however, be able to influence an election through ideas. Mr. Chairman, this would create a scenario where residents could be confident knowing that they were getting the best of two worlds. On the one hand, they would be confident knowing that their candidates were protected from undue outside financial influence while, on the other hand, they would know that they were still able to benefit from outside ideas and opinions.

The benefits of section 147.02(3) are clear, Mr. Chairman. First, this section limits contributions from publicly funded or supported organizations and, secondly, restricts donations from persons or groups residing outside of Alberta.

In closing, I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for this well-thought-out piece of legislation, and I commend him for the foresight evident in section 147.02(3).

Thank you for allowing me to rise here today and speak on this important section. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to join the debate and add a few comments within the amount of time we have left on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I, too, want to add my commendations to the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for his efforts in bringing this forward.

Mr. Chairman, today I'd like to discuss section 147.04 and, specifically, subsections (4) and (5). Section 147.04 is a portion of the bill that addresses campaign disclosure statements. Now, prior to subsection (4), section 147.04 outlines directions for both candidates and the municipality such as when candidates must file their disclosure statements, what those statements should contain, when to file a supplementary statement, if necessary, and what the municipality should do with the disclosure statements.

Mr. Chairman, section 147.04, specifically subsection (3), states that the municipality must make the documents available to the public during regular business hours. It's essential for transparency and public accountability. This bill expects the same of the candidates. Likewise, subsections (4) and (5) promote transparency and public accountability.

4:50

Let me start with subsection (4), which reads:

If a candidate's total amount of campaign contributions or campaign expenses exceeds \$10,000 for a campaign period, the candidate's disclosure statements required under this section must be audited in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards.

Mr. Chairman, it's already been established that every candidate must detail his or her campaign contributions and campaign expenses in the disclosure statement, including the identity of all donors contributing more than a hundred dollars within the campaign period, so it should not be an onerous task to have that statement audited. There is no unreasonable burden being placed on the candidate through this requirement. In meeting the requirements for the disclosure statement, a candidate's finances should be ready and organized for an auditor. Likely no additional efforts would be required.

The subsection further outlines that statements must be audited in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. Now, these standards, Mr. Chairman, ensure that the statement is consistent and accurate and that information is adequately disclosed. In complying with those standards, an auditor must have adequate technical training and proficiency, maintain independence, and take due professional care. It is implied, Mr. Chairman, that as in provincial campaign finance disclosures, any costs incurred through the auditing process are covered by the candidate in question.

Subsection (4) also sets out clear guidelines for when these audits are required. They are required when either contributions or expenses exceed \$10,000. This is a reasonable monetary limit, Mr. Chairman, and mirrors similar legislation already in place in Ontario. Presumably, some campaigns are very small, and therefore professional services aren't required to evaluate the accompanying disclosure statements. With larger campaigns, however, the use of a professional auditor guarantees public accountability. This provision protects both candidates and the public. Candidates are

protected from unwarranted allegations of misconduct and possible resulting litigation while public confidence in the candidates is assured through the transparency and the openness of the process. In this way, by demanding disclosure statements, making those statements public, and ensuring that large statements are subject to an independent audit, voter confidence in the honesty, accuracy, and integrity of the election financing is preserved and enhanced.

I'm just cognizant of the time, Mr. Chairman. Just maybe to conclude, subsection (5) ensures that municipalities can determine whether they like candidates to have their disclosure statements audited when the amount of the contribution and expenses is less than \$10,000. There could be any number of reasons why municipalities might decide to make use of section 147.04(5), but that is at their discretion. What concerns us today are the amendments proposed in this bill to allow municipalities to have that choice while still giving voters the comfort and assurance of a transparent election process at the municipal level.

For these reasons, Mr. Chairman, I am fully in support of Bill 203, and I would encourage all my colleagues in the Assembly to give their support as well.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, are you ready for the question on Bill 203, Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 203 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report this bill.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 203. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the close proximity to 5 o'clock, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the

Assembly that we now move to private members' motions to allow the next bill to have an opportunity to have the full time allocation when it comes forward for second reading.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

Innovation in Education

508. Mr. Bhullar moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a policy framework to ensure our kindergarten to grade 12 education system is innovative and competency based by exploring incentives to encourage early graduation and by promoting real-world learning opportunities and programs that help engage elementary students facing difficulties.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and open debate on Motion 508. This is really about fostering a culture of innovation in our province. A culture of innovation is one that must start from the very foundation of our society, and the very foundation of our society is our young people, our young people who today are the learners, who tomorrow are the workers and contributors, and who the day after shall be the leaders of our province. It's with that hope of inspiring a culture of innovation where our young people are driven, are inspired to be the problem solvers in our world that I put forward this motion.

Further, Mr. Speaker, at this time there is a dialogue series taking place in our province called Inspiring Education, where the Minister of Education is seeking dialogue and input from Albertans on where our system should be in 20 years, what the educated Albertan looks like 20 years from now. My motion also has an aim to promote this dialogue so that Albertans engage and really look far out to see what the educated Albertan 20 years from now needs to look like.

Mr. Speaker, I specifically want to see discussion on shifting from a model that focuses on completion to a model that focuses on competency. To have a culture of innovation, you must have a system based on competency. Our students, as I said, need to be proactive, and that deals with the first aspect of the motion, creating a system that will allow for and promote early graduation from high school. Now, this is not about getting students through high school sooner so they can merely enter the workforce. This specific part of the motion aims to get young people driven, driven to be responsible and accountable for their own progress in life.

So a grade 9 student, Mr. Speaker, can look and say, "You know, I want to complete high school, and I want to do well so I can go on to law school" or "I want to go on to study nanotechnology." This promotes their being able to complete high school sooner and gives them some incentives to do so.

5:00

The purpose, as I said, behind this is to get young people to be accountable and to be driven because to have an innovative culture, you have to have young people that are accountable for their own lives and driven to achieve and driven to contribute. This can be done, Mr. Speaker, by taking summer courses or passing up on some electives. The end result would have students graduating early, earlier than their peers, and going on to postsecondary earlier or, should they choose, the workforce earlier. The bottom line is that they have an opportunity to do so already in our system, and providing some incentives to do so, I think, would be very positive.

Mr. Speaker, the next part of my motion deals with creating real-

world learning opportunities. This, the real-world learning opportunities, focuses not just on work opportunities but also postsecondary opportunities. What I'm proposing here is that a student in high school should have the ability to work towards, perhaps, some sort of postsecondary certification while in high school, have some of their electives count towards postsecondary education, allow students to be engaged in the workforce. This is a way of connecting our high school system with the real world and, in turn, having a group of students that leave our high school system already connected and integrated with the world as opposed to walking out of high school and then being hit flat on with the so-called real world.

Mr. Speaker, this particular part of the motion also has potential to really engage high school students that may not be engaged with traditional teaching methods. If there's a student who, you know, doesn't quite connect with just sitting in class and learning and maybe wants some sort of opportunities where they feel that they're learning something real and practical, this would provide them with that opportunity. It's a matter and a way of engaging students that may not be engaged today.

We have such programs today, Mr. Speaker, like the RAP program, that allow students to earn their high school diploma while obtaining on-the-job training. We can further these programs. We can apply the same concept to many other areas outside of just the apprenticeships and the trades. We should apply this concept to the finance world, to the justice world. Give students an opportunity to connect with the real world while they're in high school. This motion recognizes the importance of these projects and merely seeks to expand on them.

One very exciting program, Mr. Speaker, that I've recently learned of is a program at SAIT, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the career pathways pharmacy technician retail program. Now this is very, very exciting; 30 students will receive their high school diploma along with a SAIT certificate. So while these students work on their high school diploma, they're also getting recognition and certification as a retail pharmacy technician. This empowers them to work in this particular field right after high school. There is massive demand, I'm told, on the part of students to enrol in this program.

Students get this. Students want this. The student of today wants this. They want to be able to engage in the real world sooner and quicker. The student of today is more engaged in the issues of the day, Mr. Speaker. Some of the most challenging dialogues I have in my constituency are with high school students because they long for more involvement in the real world.

I'm told that this specific program at SAIT has more schools joining it. Three more schools are joining up with this program. There are, as I said, far more applicants than positions available. This particular program, Mr. Speaker, is the first of its kind, and I think that this particular model can be applied to many other careers that we perhaps have shortages in or wherever feasible. This, I propose, will also help with our high school completion rates. I think that providing these real-world opportunities will keep more students engaged in their high school system, that it will make them want to complete it.

Finally, Mr. Speaker – I'm told I've got a minute left – the third component encourages the government to further support elementary students facing challenges. Now, challenges are plentiful. As study after study will show, it's in those early years that a child's love for education is either built or not. I am a strong proponent of finding ways and mechanisms to help young students in elementary school really engage with education. If they come from a household that

perhaps is not as engaged in education or doesn't value it as much, or maybe they come from a household where they are not encouraged to be educated or they get no support per se with respect to education, well, maybe in our school system there are some ways for us to engage those young people at an early age to build in them a love for learning, an understanding that education is empowerment, so they can achieve and do great things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. While I appreciate the mover's intent with Motion 508 and while I support components of it, I'm not convinced that this is the vehicle to achieve the end result desired. Looking at Alberta high school completion rates, in 2002-2003 the number of students who finished within a three-year period, which is the expectation – grades 10, 11, 12 done once; this resource is from the Ministry of Education – was 67.8 per cent. In the most recent statistics that has only moved up to 71 per cent. So we have approximately 30 per cent of our students still failing to complete senior high school within a three-year period.

It improves somewhat when we get to those who hang around for a fourth year. In 2002-2003 the number of individuals who finally finished high school after sticking around for the extra year was 72 per cent, and currently it's 76 per cent taking four years. Now, if a student was to spend a fifth year, or an extra two years, in high school, things improve somewhat. In 2002-2003 the rate of completion after five years of high school was 75 per cent, and in 2006-2007, 79.5 per cent.

I understand why the hon. member is wanting to improve the system. But there are other factors that have to be taken into account. I agree with the hon. member that making education more relevant is one of those ways, but relevancy doesn't necessarily happen or go hand in hand with speed of completion.

5:10

Now, the hon. member mentioned some very good programs; for example, CTS programs that give you sort of a hands-on experience early on. Those CTS credits earned in junior high can be applied to senior high, so after a fashion there is a speeding circumstance built up within the program. I agree with the idea that if you have sufficient space on your timetable, it would be nice to see CTS high school level courses apply to postsecondary possibilities. That part I support.

I also support the idea of the RAP program, where students get first-hand experience working with builders or architects or plumbers or electricians. They get that hands-on, supervised equivalent of an early apprenticeship program. That program already exists within the high schools. I know that a number of high schools have businesses that support them and encourage their students to build the home and even go so far in terms of fundraising as to provide the school with a portion of the sale of the home to indicate how well the students involved in the project did in terms of completing and working side by side with experienced carpenters or experienced electricians. So we already have some wonderful circumstances within the program.

I've always had concerns about parts of the British system, the 11 plus program, where, basically, at a very tender age students were streamed as to their end product, where they would eventually graduate. I believe that high school should be more than just a training ground for future potentials. I also agree, for example, that engineers should have at least a 201 English equivalent or a

humanities equivalent. What I don't want to see happening is the equivalent of an Aldous Huxley brave new world, where you put in a certain incubated series of sperm and egg and, depending on how fast you twirl your test tube, you create a khaki worker or a red extreme worker or a yellow professor or a blue Smurf.

What I'm getting at is that I believe there has to be a well-rounded education. I agree that there's a need to improve our current system. In terms of dealing with our current situation, challenging an exam already exists, for example, in language proficiency. If a student has had an opportunity to, you know, live in Quebec for some time or they've travelled to Europe, they can challenge the exam and get the credit for it already. That frees them up for other pursuits. We've talked about the work experience programs and so on.

In order for Motion 508 to be successful at all three levels, the government would have to support – and I'm saying financially support – early intervention programs. When a child is identified as early as age three with having a learning disability, then an opportunity for the parent to seek extra support in the form of learning and special programs would be extremely important. But this government for the last six years has refused – for example, in terms of creating a strong foundation – to fund optional full-day kindergarten for those parents who would like to give their child that not necessarily a head start but a keep-up circumstance. The government has not even considered the recommendation of half-day junior kindergarten.

If we're talking about creating a greater strength and understanding and literacy and numeracy early on in the system, then there's going to have to be an expenditure. The government is going to have to at some point live up to its K to 3 teacher-pupil ratios of 1 to 17, which they are so far from achieving that, unfortunately, this idea that's being put forward under Motion 508, K to 12 education, is still in our current circumstance a bit of a pipe dream.

In terms of making education relevant, education is more than academics. It's more than trades. It also involves options and extracurricular such as leadership programs. It might involve students in business experiments. It might involve them in giving them an opportunity to participate in sports beyond the grade 10 level at high school. I'm not saying to make it compulsory, but I'm saying: offer students the widest variety of a menu to choose from as opposed to trying to rush them through the current system. We need to support children to a much greater extent early on than we currently do.

I know from junior high teaching experience that students are looking for more than just, as I say, academics. They are looking for opportunities. One of the programs that I thoroughly enjoyed was along the lines of a CTS program, but what it did was that it encouraged leadership, and students had an opportunity to select where they wanted to contribute. For some students it was a matter of going across the parking lot from F.E. Osborne junior high over to Marion Carson elementary, where they would mentor and work with younger children. Some other students chose to be part of the school's recycling program. I didn't judge as to where they should go. The only limitations were the number of spaces available.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to spend a few moments and add to the debate on Motion 508, which urges the government to develop a policy framework to ensure that our K to 12 education system is innovative and competency based by exploring incentives to encourage early graduation, promoting real-world learning opportunities and programs that help engage elementary students facing difficulties.

First, I would like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose for bringing this ambitious motion forward. I support this motion because I believe it is good for all students to have more options in their education. This motion proposes several options for high school students, from early graduation to workforce training and postsecondary learning opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I see a high school diploma as a starting point for individuals, not a finishing point. For an increasing number of students this means going to postsecondary institutions, but for a significant portion of Alberta's high school students this means learning a trade. Because of this, I would like to focus on the part of Motion 508 that deals with promoting real-world learning opportunities. This portion addresses one of this government's goals, which is to enhance value-added activities, increase innovation, and build a skilled workforce to improve the long-term sustainability of Alberta's economy.

The registered apprenticeship program does just that. It allows students the opportunity to begin apprenticing while still in high school, which can go a long way to building a skilled workforce. When I went to school, the focus was always on mathematics, social studies, language arts, and science. Although these core subjects are very important, Mr. Speaker, everybody has different interests and different skill sets.

5:20

Before being elected last March, I served as a RAP co-ordinator for Edmonton public schools at J. Percy Page high school. There I had the pleasure of seeing first-hand the impacts that real-world learning can have on young people's lives. I have seen students who had never cared much for school enrolled in mechanics or carpentry courses, for example, and have seen their whole lives and attitudes turn around. Mr. Speaker, these students found themselves something that they were passionate about. School was no longer a daily chore for these students but a chance to create a vision for their future, a future that includes education.

The other major benefit for the students who participate in the registered apprenticeship program is the ability for these students to earn while they learn. Many students can be lured away from high school with the prospects of earning some money, but with programs such as RAP students can work and earn money while gaining credits towards high school graduation. This can be a major motivator in keeping Alberta's youth in school.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 508 encourages the continuation and growth of programs that offer real-world learning opportunities, such as RAP. Students, schools, and teachers can continue to benefit greatly from this program and other skills like it. In addition, if these programs continue to grow, it will help raise high school completion rates, foster a more skilled workforce, introduce students to something they feel passionately about, and motivate them towards lifelong learning.

Therefore, I wholeheartedly support this motion and look forward to listening to the rest of the debate. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Motion 508, which urges the government to encourage real-world learning options for Alberta students. Specifically, this motion proposes to encourage early graduation programs, to develop and support real-world training, and to extend additional supports to

elementary students facing difficulties. While all three of these proposals are valuable and worthy of debate in their own right, today I'd like to focus my comments on early graduation programs.

Now, Mr. Speaker, current graduation requirements dictate that in order for a student to earn a high school diploma, they need to meet certain criteria, obviously. For example, they must have 100 course credits, and they must complete several core course requirements such as social studies, math, English, and science. There are no stipulations, however, on how quickly a student can achieve these requirements. Therefore, it is possible for a student to graduate in two or two and a half years if they take summer courses and schedule their time effectively.

I feel that it is important to clarify that Motion 508 will not change graduation requirements. Motion 508 proposes to urge the government to develop programs to encourage students to consider the benefits of early graduation. Mr. Speaker, these benefits are numerous. For example, a student who graduates in two years rather than three will be able to enter a postsecondary institution or the workforce at an earlier date than their classmates. Essentially, as a reward for their hard work and planning while in high school, these industrious students will have one extra year to get ahead both financially and academically. Another potential benefit that could be associated with an early graduation program is that it empowers students to take a more proactive role in their learning.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I went to a very unique high school way back when, way back in 1975 – I think that was the year – before some of my colleagues here were even born. I went to Bishop Carroll high school in Calgary. It was a very unique program, a self-study program. There were no classes. There were no lectures at the school. We all worked independently. We would collect a unit or two, and we would work on these units, and when we completed the required work and the required reading from these units, then we would write the test.

Ms Redford: Then you'd get a green slip.

Mr. Webber: And we'd get a green slip, yes. My colleague obviously experienced Bishop Carroll high school as well. Is that correct?

Ms Redford: Yes.

Mr. Webber: I did not know that. Well, a fellow alumni.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. Anyway, I guess what I have to say with regard to Bishop Carroll was that it empowered me to take a proactive role in my learning. I wanted to finish high school early. I wanted to get out into the workforce and make some money. I had a lot of extracurricular activities that were quite expensive. I had a girlfriend at the time. She was very high maintenance, so I had to make some additional dollars there. Plus, you know, I played sports, and I had a car I had to pay for, so I had to get out of high school early. This is what drove me to want to finish high school early.

Now, early graduation requires long-term planning, goal setting, and dedication, and by encouraging students to graduate early, these important life skills could be further developed. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I did not have the dedication or the drive to finish early, but I did finish. I want to make it clear that I did finish. It took me three and a half years to finish high school. You know, I have to admit, though, that I had a lot of extracurricular activities. I did get my matriculation also, so I was quite proud of that.

Mr. Speaker, I feel as though the potential benefits of early graduation programs warrant further investigation and study, so I

will be standing in support of Motion 508. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose for bringing this motion forward, and I encourage all members to join with me.

With that, I look forward to the remainder of the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand up today to speak to Motion 508, and I want to commend the Member for Calgary-Montrose for bringing this forward. I believe it's at an opportune time with the dialogue that the Minister of Education is having with Albertans regarding the future of our education system. The passion that the hon. member has about this particular issue was very obvious, and that passion goes back years. I know that even before being in this Assembly, the hon. member and myself had many discussions about areas where we could improve our education system, both for the individual as well as for our society at large.

I wanted to start off my portion of speaking today with a quote from an excerpt – I was just doing some research on this topic – from the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. It comes from Contribution to Memos to the Prime Minister: What Canada Could Be in the 21st Century, 2001. He says:

Government needs to put a premium on education at all levels, from pre-school to post-graduate. But more of the same and increased spending alone won't cut it. We need a profound values shift and a radical reinvention if we are to lead the world in the creation of the most valued commodity in the coming century: knowledge assets . . .

Creating the best education system in the world won't be easy. Globalization, the rise of technology, and a greater emphasis on the autonomy of the individual mean we need to think about education in new ways. In the new millennium, the world will be an increasingly interconnected place. We need to look at education holistically – as a total system with continuity through all levels. Right now, we are doing the opposite . . .

The fundamental educational experience of our students now is that they learn in silos, right from kindergarten, a stale curriculum that does not connect to the society in which students actually live and function.

I think that the issue that this gentleman has laid out – his name is Roger L. Martin. Again, he's the dean at the Rotman School of Management. I believe that this motion specifically addresses this issue.

I also want to indicate that one of my favourite quotes that I've heard is from a Canadian journalist, publisher, and producer, Gwynne Dyer, and he says:

Our intelligence tends to produce technological and social change at a rate faster than our institutions and emotions can cope with . . . Innovation is cumulative and the rate of change accelerates. We therefore find ourselves continually trying to accommodate new realities within inappropriate existing institutions, and trying to think about those new realities in traditional but sometimes dangerously irrelevant terms.

5:30

Now, I heard the Member for Calgary-Varsity get up and speak to this motion, and clearly he was not in favour. For someone who claims to belong to a progressive party, I believe that he's speaking in very dangerous and irrelevant terms when it comes to education in our society today. Quite frankly, he represents a position that does not serve our economy, our society, in the empowerment of individual people. I believe this motion gets to that.

In doing some further research to this issue, I came across another website. I can't remember what exactly it was called. It referred to an individual that started doing some consulting work in this particular area. He was somebody whose high school years were a disaster, walked away from high school at the age of 18. What he learned was "the ability to educate myself made it possible to break through society imposed barriers and be the person I dreamed of being." What this motion does, I believe, is allow individuals to take control of their own destiny, of their own talents, of their own dreams and plan for that and be rewarded for that. I commend the hon. member for bringing this up.

I talked about sometimes dangerous or irrelevant institutions. We talk about lifelong learning. Everybody from academics to teachers to politicians to bureaucrats to industry talk about lifelong learning, yet we continue to be siloed in these K to 12 and postsecondary institutions. Mr. Speaker, if lifelong learning is truly the mantra and truly the concept that we need to go towards, I would suggest that what we need to do is start to break down those silo barriers. In fact, those barriers were created, I believe, to serve a post Industrial Revolution society, not the society and economy that we're in today. I believe that this motion certainly attempts to break down those barriers by allowing high school students to set their own direction and graduate based on the competencies that they learn and to move on, whether it's to further education or work, based on those competencies, not based on some uniform formula that some bureaucrat or some educator dreams up.

The other point that I think this really stresses is the importance of other opportunities for learning, particularly work-related opportunities. I've got these examples that I'd like to bring forward. We talk about, you know, speed of graduation or whatever. First of all, my girlfriend graduated from the University of Lethbridge with a bachelor of commerce degree. It's normally a four-year degree, Mr. Speaker. She graduated in three and a half years. Not only did she graduate in three and a half years, she did three co-op work terms: one as an internship down in Chicago, one where she actually worked with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology right here in Edmonton, and one with the Lethbridge Hurricanes hockey team. Just talking with her about our general education system, she explained to me that those were the real learning opportunities. In fact, the coursework that she took at the University of Lethbridge probably had less applicability to her current roles and jobs than the work experience that she had.

Mr. Speaker, I faced very similar experiences. I graduated from the University of Calgary with a degree in political science. One of my former professors is here. As good as the classes were that he taught, I really didn't start to learn about the political process and being involved in the community until I got a job as a summer student in the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs' constituency office, which happened to be in the community that I grew up in. It's these opportunities that we need to provide, a more formal mechanism to allow high school and university students to become involved. If there's one thing that this motion could really do, it's promote those types of opportunities.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members to adopt this motion and encourage the ministers of Education and Advanced Education to use this motion and the debate on this motion as part of the policy framework that will result from the Inspiring Education dialogue with Albertans.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Motion 508, encourage real-world learning opportunities, sponsored by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Montrose. Motion 508 urges the government to explore incentives which allow for early graduation, promote real-world learning opportunities, and focus on disengaged elementary students.

Elementary education is a critical part of a child's growth and development because they learn fundamental academic and social skills which will serve as a foundation for future learning. Motion 508 proposes that we need to support more flexible and responsive programs in order to achieve equal outcomes for elementary students who face multiple challenges. To this end, it is important that we identify children who are facing difficulties at an early age. This may require greater co-operation and co-ordination between education, social services, and health organizations. Population or demographic analysis should be used along with school performance and student test results to determine the level of teacher and resource allocation as well as overall program design, including critical hours and extracurricular programming.

Some of the remedial and enrichment programs that have been proposed from various researchers include programs geared towards specific types of intelligence, preschool programs for the financially disadvantaged, weekend schools for ESL students or other students in need of remedial support, and incorporation of mother tongues in educational instruction, just to name a few.

Our school systems may also need to assess whether existing innovative and special programs such as arts-focused programs, sports schools, and other similar programs are accessible to all students, including those whose parents do not have the capacity and resources to provide additional support to their children. We know that even having just one significant person in a child's life can make a whole world of difference in the development of the child, so mentoring programs and friendship support are equally important to the learning outcomes of children who face additional challenges in life.

Mr. Speaker, some of the school systems have explored the development of an equity policy, but the process seldom, if ever, comes to fruition. Public discourse on an examination of the challenges to establish clear direction and commitment to address equal learning outcomes for disadvantaged students through policy would yield additional insights on taking a more systemic approach to address the comprehensive learning needs of children.

Alberta has an exceptional education system, and our challenge is to ensure that this excellent system will work for all students that possess the potential to learn and become productive citizens despite having additional challenges. As our society continues to become more knowledge-based, it is critical that we continue to improve programs for students with unique needs and additional challenges and grant each student the specific assistance that they may need.

Motion 508 will enhance the culture of knowledge and the culture of innovation in Alberta and continue to promote lifelong learning. It is for these reasons that I applaud the Member for Calgary-Montrose for Motion 508, and I encourage all members of this House to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion would have high school programs geared towards encouraging students to finish high school as quickly as possible to join the workforce. The perception is that, you know, we are just creating this production line here. We

put the students through the schools very, very quickly, without the understanding of their education, and just send them into the workforce.

Talking about early graduation, this motion would see innovation in school systems that would encourage students to graduate early, but what is the motivation for getting the high school students to graduate early? The real issue is that not enough Alberta students are graduating at all. British Columbia, for instance, and Saskatchewan report higher high school completion rates than Alberta. In British Columbia the dropout rate has declined 44 per cent, from 13.3 per cent to 7 and a half per cent. Saskatchewan's declined 34 per cent, from 16.3 per cent to 10.7 per cent, whereas in Alberta the decline is 24 per cent, from 15.8 per cent to 12 per cent. So still the dropout rate is higher. I think we should be looking at that to encourage students not to drop out of school early. In B.C. the overall high school completion rate for aboriginal students was 80.4 per cent in 2006-07. In Alberta the completion rate is 48.4 per cent. Instead of putting them faster through school, I think we should be looking into the reasons why this current rate of completion is so low.

5:40

For instance, in Calgary northeast for English as a second language, you know, I don't think we can speed up the process for those students to go through high school faster. If English is not their first language, then I think we should be putting more resources into those schools for teaching English.

Then we were talking about early elementary school programs. There's currently an early childhood development mapping project, which is province-wide, which provides a program for children as young as two and a half years old. Children who have disabilities and delays can be eligible for up to three years of funding. The problems with ECS include that many students are not identified as delayed, so they do not access ECS programming. We need better access to early diagnostic testing. Some students are not protected by all of the provisions of the School Act.

Another great way to help engage students with difficulties is to feed them. School lunch programs have been shown to help students not only show up at school but also to perform better on their achievement tests. One out of every 10 live in poverty in Alberta, so we should be looking after those children so that they can better access the education system.

Those are the concerns I have. I think we should be addressing those concerns before we speed them through the high school system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to give some further commentary on Motion 508, dealing with real-world learning, as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. In particular, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about education, coming from a long line of teachers in my family.

As proposed, Motion 508 would further highlight the government's support for developing innovative educational opportunities in several areas. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose mentioned, this motion has three major components. First, it proposes the government explore incentives to encourage early graduation; second, the motion encourages the promotion of real-world learning opportunities; and finally, it promotes programs that help engage elementary students who are facing difficulties.

Mr. Speaker, all of these ideas are important enough to foster a culture of innovation, and although I support all facets of this

motion, I want to discuss and focus on the exploration of incentives to encourage early graduation. The reason I find this particularly interesting is that it provides students with more options reflecting the modern reality of education, and more options, of course, mean greater ability to control your own future.

I know that accelerated education is already available for Alberta students so long as the requisite number of credits and the core courses are completed, but this motion goes further than simply allowing early graduation and suggests that these incentives should be used in order to further encourage early graduation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, being a Conservative, I'm a firm believer in individualism. People work and learn at different rates, and the option should be there for students who are ambitious and bright to graduate early and to move on to the next part of their lives, again the modern reality of education. This motion introduces a way that early graduation could become more widespread and sought after by students. Scholarship-style incentives would also reward students who work hard and have the talent necessary for early graduation. I know that at least a few advanced students coasted through high school because there was little extra incentive for them to apply themselves to the fullest. We don't want to inadvertently encourage underachievement in that respect either. If an incentive is created to encourage these students to work towards their full potential, there's a good chance that a culture of innovation would be further developed in our province and in our high schools.

Who knows what our brightest young minds might be able to accomplish in such an environment, Mr. Speaker? I would submit to this House that the possibilities are indeed limitless. In addition to the benefits for the students who qualify for early graduation, there are also benefits for the schools and for other students. The students who would most likely apply for early graduation are students that need less attention and instruction. However, the majority of students would still be going through high school in the conventional manner. Early graduation of the advanced students would free up class space, would allow teachers to spend more time with the individuals that need more instruction. This concentration of resources could lead to a better educational experience for all of Alberta's students.

One opportunity that I did also want to share is, again, on the modern reality of education. Usually in the past you'd finish high school at 17 or 18. You'd go on to either university, technical school, or to whatever vocation you wanted to pursue. I remember that when I started law school, I was 21 years old, and I remember that there were many people who had actually in fact finished masters degrees, had different careers. One even had a PhD. Many even had families as well. The modern reality of education is that there are many different people at many different stages of their life that will seek higher education, but on the other end as well there are

also many different types of students who would benefit from this motion in an accelerated program. For this reason I do support Motion 508.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity made some comment earlier about parents knowing best. I don't remember exactly what it was, but I definitely do think, too, that I was very happy to hear that he does believe that parents do have an important value in their children's education.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I do support Motion 508, and I look forward to listening to the rest of the debate if there is any at this hour. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to close debate.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank all members for their participation in this debate. Really quickly, members opposite brought up a series of concerns that they have with the education system. However, they show a reluctance to look at something new and something innovative. My friends, the world has complex problems, and to solve them, we must think outside the box and try something new, whether that be in education or whatever else. This motion merely says: let's think outside the box.

It's not meant for every student to be plugged along in high school quicker; it's meant for the innovators. Mr. Speaker, if I may, just one quick example of an innovator, the sort of student I'm speaking of here. Harsimar is, I believe, 14 years old. At the age of 14 he has established a business whereby he has contractors overseas that develop very sophisticated websites. So a 14-year-old kid here has the potential to start an international business. Now, that is the sort of student that should have incentives on the part of government to say: "Go out there and be innovative. Go out there and achieve everything you can, and we as a system will support you. We will not hinder you with rules that don't add to your progression." That's an example of the sort of individual here that will lead our province and our nation to great things.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we close debate and vote on the motion.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour I move that we do now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:50 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 12, 2009

Issue 39

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a delegation from the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor Alliance, who are seated in your gallery. Ports-to-Plains is an umbrella organization for a nine-state trade corridor that stretches from Texas to the Canadian border. It was instrumental in hosting the first Texas-Alberta summit last December, in which our Premier had the pleasure of participating.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to inform all members that the purpose of the delegation's visit is because Alberta will be the first Canadian jurisdiction to join the alliance. With us today – and I would ask them to rise as I mention their names – are the hon. Tom Martin, the Ports-to-Plains board vice-chair and the mayor of Lubbock, Texas; Mr. Michael Reeves, the president of Ports-to-Plains; Mr. Joe Kiely, vice-president of Ports-to-Plains and assistant town manager for Limon, Colorado; Ms. Duffy Hinkle, vice-president of Ports-to-Plains; and also Mr. Scott Flukinger, who is policy adviser to Ports-to-Plains. I've heard this comment from both sides, whether I've been in Texas or been in Alberta: they're just like us. I'd ask members to provide the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great today to rise and introduce some special guests. We have 25 visitors from the Rich Valley school. They are led by teachers June Crowther and Cheryl Ruthenburg and parent helpers Janet Veltman and Harvey Hove. You'll see them stand in their red shirts. That has nothing to do with their political affiliation. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly today a grade 6 class from l'école Plamondon. We have 25 students visiting today along with two teachers, Twila Moore and Christina Frasier, and two parent chaperones, Marianne Ludington and Linda McDougall. They are very excited to be here today. They took part in a tour of the Legislature, participated in a mock sitting of the Legislature, and now are here to sit in the galleries of this Assembly. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today with two introductions. My first introduction on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is 28 visitors from Katherine Therrien school in the Edmonton-Castle Downs constituency. With them today are teachers Mrs. Joanne Friedt and Mrs. Jena-Lea Bang and parent helper Ms. Alicia Saunders. I would ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to members of this Assembly is five people from the Go Green Eco Expo, an event that took place this year on April 4. The expo, which is sponsored by Newcap Radio, focuses on ways that Albertans can reduce the impact on their environment and start to promote green living in vibrant and healthy communities. I'll be discussing more about the eco expo in a member's statement later this afternoon. For now I would like to introduce – and I don't see them in the members' gallery, so I presume they're in the public gallery – Miss Colleen Yukes, Ms. Elissa Scott, Mrs. Maureen Tash, Mr. Randy Lemay, and Mr. Ross Hawse. I would ask all of these individuals to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 11 enthusiastic and bright young Albertans from the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. Visiting the Legislature today to learn about how government works are students from the Living Springs Christian school in Hythe. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Tony Isaac, and parent helpers Mr. Duane Isaac, Mrs. Geraldine Isaac, Mrs. Mary Jo Isaac, Mr. Kelly Isaac, Mrs. Christa Isaac, Mr. Lowell Wohlgemuth, and Mrs. Laureen Wohlgemuth. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of Calgary-Nose Hill, John and Jeanne Barclay. They're also joined by Jeanne's sister, Brenda Etherington, and by John and Jeanne's daughter, Jennifer Redondo, who's also a resident of Calgary-Nose Hill, and their son Rob Barclay from Calgary. Today they were here in the Legislature to present a set of books, *The War Illustrated*, to our Legislature Library in memory of Mrs. Hilda Buckett and Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Audrey Etherington. All of my guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms. Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Bill Ryans, a constituent of Calgary-Mackay and veteran of the Canadian air force. He enlisted in 1943 as a radio operator. Mr. Ryans played a key role in the donation of *The War Illustrated* 10-volume collection to the Legislature Library earlier today. Mr. Ryans is seated in your gallery. I would ask Mr. Ryans to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct pleasure today to introduce two separate groups. One, from Calgary, is wives and

life partners of members of the World Presidents' Organization. This group is called the Bella Forum Group. They are here today with their co-ordinator, Sandy Kellam. Dr. Ruth Taylor, Beverly Berkhold, Carole Brawn, Shirley Glen, Dolores Killick, Elizabeth Yuill, Ann Sparks, and Midge Travis are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second group live both in my constituency and in the constituency of my hon. friend from Strathcona. They are library board members, and among them are Muriel Abdurahman, chair of the Strathcona County Library Board and former MLA in this Assembly; Ernie Jurkat, vice-chair of the Strathcona County Library Board; Roxy Shulha-McKay, Strathcona library board member along with library board members and directors Colin Vann; Judy Schultz, famous for her writing; and Sharon Siga. Jason Gariepy, from Strathcona county council, is also a member of the board along with Joan MacDonald, a board member for the past four years and trustee for area 7. They would like to thank the MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul and the MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service for the work they've done for libraries.

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

1:40

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Crime Prevention Week. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three Albertans seated in the public gallery who are making their neighbourhoods and communities safer by taking ownership and responsibility for crime prevention. They are among six recipients of this year's Solicitor General and Public Security crime prevention awards. With us today is Lori Andrew, who is a chairperson of the McMahon Business Association of Calgary, which works with the Calgary Police Service and the community to deal with crime in Calgary's Motel Village area. Also with us is Chris Hayduk, an Edmonton police officer who started a program that helps prevent crime by encouraging people to meet their neighbours and participate in community activities. Also, we have Maria Orydzuk, a producer with CTV who has raised awareness about crime prevention and other social issues. I would also like to recognize three other award recipients who are not able to be here today: Clarence Nelson of the Beaumont citizens on patrol and constables Allan Devolin and Garret Swihart, both Calgary police members who work with youth involved with gang activity or at risk of becoming involved in gang activity. Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would ask Lori, Chris, and Maria to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very important people from my constituency office in Stony Plain: Lorna Wolodko, my constituency manager; and Mychele Freund, our STEP student this year. They both do outstanding work appreciated by the constituents as well as myself. With your permission I would ask Lorna and Mychele to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you two very special individuals from Alberta's Association of Agricultural Societies: Tim Carson, the president for Alberta; and Lisa Hardy, the executive director. They're in town today talking to many individuals about some great

strategies they have for strengthening economies in rural Alberta. I just want to thank them and commend them for their efforts and all the efforts of the ag societies across the province. I'd ask Tim and Lisa to please rise so that we can give the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly our Quebec-Alberta student employment exchange student, Julie Chartrand. Julie is part of a program with 37 students who are sponsored by Alberta Employment and Immigration. Thank you for that. We're looking forward to her working as a research analyst with the Alberta Liberal caucus through until August. Julie lives in Montreal, and she has her bachelor of international economy from the University of Montreal and her master's degree in international business from HEC Montréal. Julie is standing, so please join me in giving her a warm welcome to the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly four special guests this afternoon. Today, of course, is International Nursing Day, and I'm honoured to have these individuals with us from the United Nurses of Alberta. As front-line workers the nurses here today are concerned about the changes they see being made to our health care system and fear a return to the brutal and punishing cuts made in the early 1990s. Our guests are in the public gallery, and I would now ask each of our guests to rise as I introduce them. The first is Marg Hayne, president of the UNA local 33 for nine years. She has worked at the Royal Alexandra hospital for over 31 years. Our second guest is Deb Adams-Druar, president of the UNA local 196, and she has been a registered nurse for over 12 years. A third guest is Cari Noelck, treasurer of United Nurses Association local 33, and she has been an RN for 13 years and an operating room nurse for 10 of those 13 years. Also with them is Collette Mattson, vice-president of the UNA local 33. Collette has been a nurse for 28 years at the Royal Alexandra hospital, 26 of those years in labour and delivery. I see that they've already risen. Please give them a warm and traditional welcome to our Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. National Nursing Week is a time to recognize the incredible commitment and caring of our nearly 25,000 registered nurses in Alberta's health care system. Today I'm very pleased to rise and introduce three guests from the United Nurses of Alberta. They are Heather Smith, president of the United Nurses of Alberta; Bev Dick, first vice-president; and Jane Sustrik, second vice-president. Nurses are the single largest group of health care professionals and are responsible for much of the direct care of people who really need it in our health care system. Nurses are also some of the strongest advocates for our public health care system, which is universal and serves all Albertans. We're very pleased today to introduce these leaders in our nursing community. I would now ask that my guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce Ray White as my guest in the Assembly. Ray represents approximately 600 health care aides and support workers through the United Steelworkers and six long-term care facilities in Alberta. Ray and the workers that he represents are concerned that the government is denying those who are in long-term care their dignity. Over the last number of months employees have been documenting care issues arising from short-staffing. I applaud my guest's efforts to bring to the attention of all Albertans the need to have a staff-to-resident ratio in order to care for Alberta's seniors. I would now ask that my guest, Ray White, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Well, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who's celebrating an anniversary today, the anniversary of her arrival into this world just a few years ago.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada became a nation in 1867. At that time the majority of goods were traded across Canada from east and west. This was also the case in the United States. Trade in Canada and North America is no longer east and west; it's north and south. The United States is our largest market and customer. The partners of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region recognize this and are an example of how we can work together on both sides of the border. We must develop trade corridors that transcend boundaries and work with other member jurisdictions to find our common interests and increase trade.

Alberta's trade is not limited to the western states but, rather, to the central and southern states as well as Mexico. The cargo traffic also uses United States highway systems other than the Canamex. Mr. Speaker, the Ports-to-Plains trade corridor connects the states of North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, and even Mexico. Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico are some of Alberta's top customer states. That's why I'm so pleased to know that Alberta has recognized the importance of this partnership and has joined the Ports-to-Plains coalition. Regional economic development alliances along the east side of Alberta may look to partner with this coalition as well and could be Ports-to-Plains north.

There will be economic growth potential for all of Alberta, including Port Alberta, which will have the Edmonton area acting as a hub for trade through the western seaport of Prince Rupert and on to the United States. The most pivotal in all of this is an additional 24-hour commercial port of entry for Alberta at Wild Horse, in the southeast corner of our province.

Mr. Speaker, a trade corridor which has a defined customer and seller base in three countries in North America is truly a continental trade corridor. I look forward to all the possibilities as we embark on this initiative, things like eliminating or amending trade barriers in agriculture, forestry, and our oil industry. The understanding of these member jurisdictions has been very positive as we together approach Ottawa and Washington for recognition and consideration of our positions regarding the aforementioned industries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Oil Sands Royalties

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The only public source of detailed information on royalties comes from corporate filings. I want to read a quote to the Premier from the latest filing from Canadian Oil Sands Trust, just out in the last few days. That's the largest shareholder in Syncrude. "In the first quarter of 2009, Crown royalties decreased to \$4 million, or \$0.48 per barrel, from \$131 million, or \$14.57 per barrel, in the comparable 2008 quarter." Won't the Premier admit that a royalty of 48 cents a barrel is a giveaway?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the section or what he's quoting from, but we'll have a look at it and respond to that particular quote later.

I can tell you that the new royalty regime that's in place shares risk and also reward. As prices go up, the Alberta citizens, that own the resource, will get a higher royalty rate. As prices decrease, which they have significantly, below the \$45 a barrel mark, producers have seen a break in the size of their royalty.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Well, we all know the prices of oil and bitumen have dropped. The same report shows that in the first quarter of this year Syncrude's selling price was down 45 per cent from the same quarter last year, but their royalty dropped 95 per cent. These days the government is virtually giving away the oil sands. How does the Premier justify giving Syncrude a 95 per cent royalty cut?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the new royalty rate, as I said earlier, reflects the change in policy: the higher the price the greater the return; the lower the price the less royalty paid to Albertans by all conventional oil and gas and also oil sands producers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta should think about this: a citizen of Alberta earns more from returning two empty pop bottles than this government gets from an entire barrel of bitumen in royalties. Can the Premier tell us of anywhere in the world where oil companies pay a lower royalty than Alberta?

Mr. Snelgrove: There's something that needs to be made very clear. One of the commitments the Premier made and we made as a government was to keep as many Albertans working as we could. It is just unbelievable that the people over there can stand up and talk about how we have to spend money, we have to get people working, and when we keep people working, with a royalty that reflects the risk and reward, now they don't understand that. They want to shut the oil companies down, too, until oil prices go up and we can get a bigger share. So send everybody home and return their empty bottles. That's what he's worried about?

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, for years under the former Premier the government set a target percentage for royalty collection. Under this Premier those targets were eliminated. More than a year ago the Minister of Energy said they'd be setting targets in a few weeks. Well, we're still waiting. To the Premier: is this why his government failed so badly to set royalty targets, because they don't want people to know we're getting less than 50 cents a barrel?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I recall the day we announced the new royalty framework in Calgary. The hon. member, who was, I believe, the leader of the party at that time, now relegated to the third role, scampered out the back end and down the street with the media chasing him because he would not take a position. Why not take a position then? If you thought the royalty rate was too low . . .

Dr. Taft: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stelmach: . . . stand in front of the people and state your position. But sitting on the fence: you know what it does.

Dr. Taft: Clearly, the Premier is getting pretty uncomfortable here, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the whole government is getting twitchy. They don't like to hear about this, do they? This government keeps its own backbenchers in the dark. Time and again we have to turn to corporate filings to get basic information on government royalties. To the Premier: why won't this government disclose royalty information to citizens in the same way corporations disclose to shareholders?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's clarify an issue here that's in front of us and is absolutely being misrepresented to the people of the province of Alberta. First of all, this member is speaking about a Crown agreement, a Crown agreement, by the way, that we all agreed we would not break. They weren't in favour of breaking any Crown agreements. We renegotiated the Crown agreements. The essence of the royalty paid now under Crown agreements with respect to integrated players is revenue minus costs. Revenues are very low; costs still remain very high. There is a narrow margin, and that's what we're collecting royalty on. It's a snapshot that will correct itself in the short term.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's remember that Syncrude was built with enormous assistance from the people of Alberta, ranging from huge direct investment and hundreds of millions of dollars in research funds to massive tax and royalty writeoffs. Most of Syncrude's capital was invested years ago and decades ago and long since deducted from taxes in royalties. To the Premier: is this what the Premier meant, 48 cents a barrel, when he spoke of getting a fair share for Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister explained, the current situation, the world oil prices, very, very high costs of operation – you know, again, I know he's going to stand up on another point of order, but that is the group that wanted to shut down the oil sands completely, shut her down.

Dr. Taft: Point of order.

Mr. Stelmach: See? I don't even have a crystal ball. It must be very uncomfortable on that side.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Definition of Human Sexuality

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The *Oxford* dictionary has several definitions of sexuality, one of which being the quality of being sexual or possessing sex and another being the appearance distinctive of sex. Any living organism can fit into these definitions, making the teaching of biology without referring to sexuality quite a difficult prospect. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: what definition of sexuality is the government using to guide its policy development?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that's the best that they've got, then we'll go with that. The definition that we rely on is one that everybody would rely on, and the teachers who have common sense and those school boards that have common sense and have done such a great job in teaching our children know what the difference is. They know when they've broached that line. We don't have to define it. Human sexuality is what we've referred to. If we had to make that more explicit to them, we could do that, but that's what we're talking about. We're talking about sexual education.

Ms Blakeman: Gee, if it was so easy, why couldn't they do it?

Back to the same minister: what information has been chosen by the government to guide their decision on using the term "sexuality"?

Mr. Blackett: Common sense. Parents ask you to have common sense and respect their right to have an influence on their children's education. That's what it is. So we took three simple areas: sexuality, sexual orientation, and I forget the other one right now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Then we'll move on.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll try the Minister of Education, then. As the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has stated, what is considered religious – that would be the part you couldn't remember – is determined through the curriculum. Can the minister explain how the curriculum will determine what is considered sexuality?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit very clearly explained – and I think anybody who deals with this understands – in the mandated policy that we have now, it clearly talks about letting parents know when you're teaching sexuality. What that refers to, of course, is sex education. Now, we're not really worried about the sex education of frogs or of buffalo. What we're really talking about is human sexuality, and anybody who's involved in the process of education knows that and understands that. Notices are sent home to parents when children are taught in the grades 7, 8, and 9 health curriculum or in the CALM curriculum in high school about human sexuality.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

H1N1 Influenza Virus in Pig Herd

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Arnold Van Ginkel, the hog farmer whose herd was infected with the H1N1 virus, has done everything right. When his pigs began showing symptoms of illness, he contacted his veterinarian. His vet called the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the herd was quarantined. Now nobody will

return his call. Mr. Van Ginkel and his family are facing imminent financial ruin because the government cannot decide what to do. My question is to the Premier. Why won't the Premier commit to providing compensation for the Van Ginkels, who face losing their farm because they did the right thing?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the member is totally wrong in his statement, saying that nobody returned his calls. That's another example of misinformation, just outright misinformation. In fact, as we speak, there are federal government officials and provincial officials on the farm working with the farmer and also looking at the whole layout of the farming operation. We don't know if this is farrow to finish or if it's just the finishing barn. We've dealt with the overcrowding. In a farrow to finish operation or finishing operation you have so many hogs fed to market, you know, roughly 240 pounds. They've got to go to market. They couldn't go to market, so we of course bought those culled hogs. We destroyed them, made sure they weren't part of the food chain.

To say that calls were not returned is totally wrong.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's misinformation like when I said that the Premier said that evolution might be optional under Bill 44. Maybe that's the kind of misinformation it is.

The Van Ginkels are only the first of many farmers that are about to face financial ruin because this government has failed to manage the crisis. Why won't the Premier stand up for Alberta's hog farmers and put a plan in place to ensure that they can get through the current crisis without losing their farms?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I took part in a conference call with all of the provinces and territories represented. We took the initiative as the province of Alberta to get our colleagues together and discuss a plan, working with the federal government, working with our WTO ambassadors, and working with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to make sure that we get the correct information out. It makes it much more difficult when a member in this House gets up and gives misinformation about a very, very important issue. This is the livelihood of hundreds of Alberta pork producers.

Mr. Mason: That's exactly my point, Mr. Speaker. What pork producers really need is a policy in place to deal with urgent issues as they arise. Officials from Alberta Pork told us that this government had no clear plan of action when emergencies that threaten an entire industry arise. To the Premier: why has this government allowed H1N1 to escalate into a crisis that threatens hundreds of Alberta's farm families?

Mr. Stelmach: I hope all Albertans heard that very clearly. That's just an example of misinformation, fearmongering. That's the kind of issue we're working against right in this Assembly. Just to gain a few votes. Well, he's going to lose a heck of a lot of votes because nobody out there in rural Alberta is going to support this kind of misinformation, again putting more pressure on a marketplace that's already rejecting pork sales based on lack of scientific evidence.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

H1N1 Influenza Virus in Humans

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now most people know that the northern Alberta woman who died recently and tested positive for the H1N1 influenza virus was from my constituency.

Her family and friends have been concerned about this information. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: could he please illuminate to my constituents if his department has determined the cause of death of this very important lady?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, last week there was extensive coverage of the unfortunate situation involving the member's constituent. At that time the chief medical officer of health did indicate that the deceased had tested positive for the H1N1 virus. However, there's no further information I can add at this time. Further tests are continuing.

Ms Calahasen: Then if there is no further information, can the minister please tell this Assembly of the go-forward plans of any pandemic operations that are going to occur?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're fortunate in this province and, I think, world-wide that this particular influenza . . . [interjection] You know, when I went to school, we moved those from the back of the classroom up to the front, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Liepert: We are gearing down because, clearly, on a daily basis the numbers of those who are testing positive have continued to decline. The operations centre will start to wind down this week. Fortunately, this has been a very mild case of the influenza.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I know my constituents are really concerned. As you know, anything that happens in our community is very important. There's been criticism in the media about the lack of information provided to the public by the chief medical officer of health. To the Minister of Health and Wellness again: what is the chief medical officer of health doing to properly inform the public about H1N1 and limit the spread of this virus?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think it was unfortunate last week – I know a couple of members of this Assembly were publicly stating that somehow the chief medical officer of health was suppressing information. That is just so much falsehood. In fact, I went today to the opposition's favourite research body, the *Edmonton Journal*, and they have a poll on the *Journal* website where the question was: "What do you think of the media's coverage of the swine-flu outbreak?" Their words, not mine. Mr. Speaker, 2.87 per cent of those polled said it was insufficient; 6.17 per cent said it was responsible; 9.18 per cent said it was adequate; 10.19 per cent said, "Ask me when it's over"; and 71.5 per cent said it was panic inducing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Advocate for Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many seniors are continuing to contact me to say that they still feel that they do not have an appropriate avenue to register their very real concerns. One solution for Alberta seniors would be to establish an independent seniors' advocate. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Can the minister tell me whether there are any plans to create an independent seniors' advocate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish that I could stand here today and say that seniors in Alberta do not suffer from abuse, but I would just be dreaming. They do. We have four avenues of services that are available to seniors to help them with any complaints that they might have. First of all, if it was criminal in nature, the police should be notified right away. We have a division of Seniors and Community Supports that is an investigative unit called the Protection of Persons in Care Act. We have a bill on the floor right now concerning that. We also have the ministry and our seniors' information line. We have the Seniors Advisory Council as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. I agree that there are many things out there, but the seniors still really sincerely believe that they need a go-to person that really has specific understanding and knowledge of the issues that they face. Is the minister planning at this time or are there any conversations about creating this office?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I strongly feel that seniors are well represented through my ministry. We have a seniors' information line. We have the Protection of Persons in Care Act. We also have an independent Alberta Ombudsman, who will investigate immediately. At this time of fiscal constraint I think it would be irresponsible to duplicate these services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Unfortunately, that's not how the seniors feel. They feel that if Alberta has a Child and Youth Advocate, seniors want the same rights to advocacy as the children have. How can we justify not having one for them?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I do know that our seniors have a concern in this area because there is abuse that happens. We all have a responsibility to report abuse. The reporting of abuse can be done directly to my ministry. We have a separate arm that will investigate these complaints. We also have the Alberta Ombudsman, who will investigate these complaints. I feel that we have a sufficient number of services to help seniors who may be suffering from abuse.

Deerfoot Trail Traffic Congestion

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, every day Calgary motorists are fighting increased traffic congestion on the Deerfoot Trail, which is not only highway 2 but the main north-south artery for traffic within the city of Calgary. Deerfoot Trail is presently carrying traffic far beyond its designed capacity, and some days, even outside rush hour, traffic is reduced to a crawl. My questions are for the Minister of Transportation. Will the minister take some action to reduce the congestion on Deerfoot Trail?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in that the Deerfoot operates way beyond the designed capacity in a number of locations. We recognize that some portions of Deerfoot have far more vehicles than the road was designed to handle. Deerfoot was designed to handle about a hundred thousand cars a day, and in a lot of areas it's handling 160,000 cars a day. The fact that the road still operates that far above design capacity is a testament to how well that road actually was built and designed. The Alberta government has invested \$200 million and . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Is that right?

The hon. member.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, it's often difficult for residents of Beddington Heights in my constituency to merge onto Beddington Trail and also to access the Beddington Heights community from northbound and southbound Deerfoot Trail. What can be done to improve that situation and give greater access for residents of Beddington Heights?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to tell this hon. member that something is being done to improve the access in that area. We are looking at adding a lane later this year to southbound Deerfoot Trail between Beddington Trail and 64th Avenue. With the help of my hon. colleague from the Treasury Board we could possibly even use some building Canada funds, and that would get the project started later this year and completed sometime in 2010.

Dr. Brown: Well, that's very good news for the residents of Calgary-Nose Hill. I wonder, in view of the high rate of accidents in that particular location and along the north end of Deerfoot Trail, what measures his department is taking to decrease the rate of accidents and to increase traffic safety in that area.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we recently completed a traffic safety review on Deerfoot Trail. We're putting the final touches on that report right now, and I assure the member that we will look very closely at the report's recommendations and put whatever measures are practical into place that make some sense. But reducing collisions is a shared responsibility. My department has a responsibility to provide a high-standard roadway, but drivers have a responsibility to drive safely and be courteous to one another. You can't have one without the other.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Health Services Budget for Nurses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In April the Alberta government ordered the chief executive officer of Alberta Health Services to cut his budget by over \$500 million. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will these budget cuts reduce the role of registered nurses in the public health care system here in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member is getting his information, but in the budget for this fiscal year the budget for Alberta Health Services actually increased by \$500 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: what will the new reduced budget do for the ratio between licensed practical nurses and registered nurses?

Mr. Liepert: Well, there's one budget, and it has increased by a half a billion dollars from what Alberta Health Services had for operating funds last year. I'm not sure what terminology the member is using, and I don't understand the question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: The question is clear. This government has told

the chief executive officer of Alberta Health to cut the budget by half a billion dollars, or \$500 million. Now, again, how will the planning work when you're trying to expand the scope of practice for some health care professionals and reduce the scope of practice for other ones? How exactly is this going to work?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, there's a vote on the Appropriation Act, I think, later today or this week. Maybe the member should read it before he votes on it because he will see clearly that the funding for Alberta Health Services is increasing by \$550 million for operating over last year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Carbon Emissions from Coal

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal Minister of the Environment has recently been in the media talking about the possibility of decommissioning traditional coal-fired electrical generating plants as part of the federal climate change plan. As we all know, Alberta relies heavily on these plants to produce our electricity. To the Minister of Environment: with, first, the Obama administration and now, it appears, the federal government moving in new directions related to climate change policy, what effect will this have on Alberta's policy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, I'm sure, Alberta already has a mandatory emission reduction program that's backed by law. Now, that being said, I think it's important that we understand, and whatever these discussions lead to, recognize that in Alberta it's the application of technology that is the key to success for us to be able to reduce our emissions. The other thing that's very key to us is that we don't want to leave stranded assets in place. We don't want to arbitrarily cut off the life of a plant before its economic life has expired.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Energy. Obviously, the federal policy being discussed could have an impact on our communities where the coal industry is operating, including those in my constituency, but it could also impact electricity consumers in Alberta. Can he advise what impact such a policy would have on Alberta's electricity market?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, a very important issue for Albertans. Sixty per cent of Alberta's electricity, of course, currently comes from coal-fired generators. We're working in concert with the federal government to try to understand the details of the program that they will come forward with. We want to be sure that any policy that does come forward from the federal government doesn't penalize this province and cause an issue where there are undue costs passed on to consumers. Alberta's newest coal-fired plants use some of the best technology in the world and, in fact, have substantially lower emissions than the older coal plants that they're speaking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy again. The federal Minister of the Environment referred to the potential application of carbon capture and storage in addressing emissions from coal-fired electricity plants. Is this something being considered under the province's carbon capture and storage program?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a word, yes. We do have enormous coal reserves in the province of Alberta, and they're relatively economic. We have other sources as well that we're working with: wind, solar, biomass. But we have not given up on coal just yet. We think that by exploring carbon capture and storage, both in postcombustion and by gasifying coal, we can capture emissions that would normally be attributable to coal plants and meet or expand our economic and environmental goals by doing so.

Fundraising Dinner Sales Committee

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the sales committee list for the Premier's dinner in Edmonton includes a number of Tory glitterati, many of whom are on government agencies, boards, and commissions, earning hefty salaries over \$100,000. Last week the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development dodged some very simple questions, which I'd like to pose again today because Albertans deserve accountability. What conflict-of-interest provisions are in place for members of agencies, boards, and commissions such as the Surface Rights Board regarding political fundraising for a governing political party?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, if that falls in your area of competency, go ahead.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recycling questions from last week. Things must be getting bad over there.

As I said last week, all of these appointments are screened for competency first, but there is an ethics check. Any possible conflicts of interest must be identified prior to appointment, and as in the public service, if anything comes before one of these boards and there is a conflict of interest, the member has to excuse himself.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my follow-up question is: do the conflict-of-interest guidelines as currently drafted allow for members who sit on the Surface Rights Board to then fund raise for the governing political party?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the party opposite obviously isn't very successful at fundraising or winning elections. There is quite a difference between buying a ticket to attend a fundraising event and going out and doing active fundraising. I'll remind the hon. member that there's this thing called freedom of association. Just because you're active in the government, you don't have to resign from political life.

Mr. Hehr: I absolutely love the freedom of association and, I think, so do most Canadians. But people on the sales committee for the Edmonton Premier's dinner also sit on a board, the Surface Rights Board. If they're involved in sitting on the board and selling tickets for the Premier's dinner, do you guys see a conflict of interest here at all?

2:20

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat myself again. If a specific conflict of interest comes up between a matter that's before the board and a member of the board, the member is obliged to identify that and excuse himself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Staffing of Long-term Care Centres

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January the United Steelworkers and the NDP caucus highlighted nearly 300 worker reports showing that seniors are receiving substandard treatment in long-term care because of chronic understaffing. Seniors, who've worked hard their whole lives for the privileges that we enjoy today, deserve better than to be treated like this. Since the session began, our caucus has been tabling these reports, and there are more coming in. To the minister of health: will the health minister commit today to legislating an appropriate staff-to-patient ratio to ensure that Alberta's seniors are treated with the dignity they deserve?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are working with the operators of long-term care facilities in this province to ensure that the care that our long-term residents receive is of a standard that would be expected in this province. There have been some issues raised over the years. They've been dealt with and continue to be dealt with if they're raised. We need to ensure that the residents of our long-term care facilities receive, as I say, the care that they expect to have.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reports in question have been provided to the minister, and they document numerous degrading circumstances to which seniors have been exposed. They're not fed on time, they're not bathed regularly, dressing changes are delayed, and they've been left untoileted for hours on end. This is happening because facilities aren't putting enough workers on shift to deal with the workload. Back to the minister: why does the minister refuse to take action to ensure that long-term care centres can and must ensure adequate staffing to treat seniors with the care, respect, and dignity they deserve?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is making some allegations that I'm not going to concur with. There are instances where staffing shortages have been a challenge, I guess is the best way I can put it, with our long-term care operators. As this member would recognize, workforce challenges in health care have been quite evident for some time. We have a workforce strategy to try to meet some of these issues, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was an important announcement made today that really affects the constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sorry. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona still has one additional question.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It seems I have to work a little harder for this one today.

Instead of coming up with new and creative ways to allow private operators to charge more fees for fewer services, why not focus on

your obligation to treat seniors with the dignity they deserve in the settings they require? When it comes to long-term care, the solution is easy: more beds and legislate an adequate staff-to-patient ratio in care centres. To the minister of health again: chronic understaffing is hurting seniors, so why won't he do what needs to be done and regulate effective minimum staffing levels?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member, I think, has just showed her lack of knowledge about this particular issue. There are no fees for services when it comes to health care. In long-term care Alberta Health and Wellness provides the care. There are no fees for health care. If the member wants to ask the minister of seniors about accommodation rates, there are fees for accommodation rates. Ask about accommodation rates. But there are no fees for health care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Timber Harvesting and Reforestation Certification

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta announced today that the province's timber harvesting and reforestation monitoring program has been certified as meeting world-class quality management standards, which is very important to my constituency. My questions are all for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. This accomplishment is huge. We should be shooting off the fireworks. Where are the reports on this from the Auditor General? Where are the reports from your ministry? Why aren't we shooting off the fireworks?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by reminding the hon. member that setting off fireworks in the forest during the fire season requires a permit.

This was a very significant announcement today, recognition from the international standards organization that our forest monitoring system meets international standards. It wasn't in the Auditor General's report because while the Auditor General was checking this, our application was under consideration. The Auditor General, however, did reference it and noted, "We believe this quality control system will bring the necessary rigour to make monitoring for compliance effective when fully implemented." That quality control system is now in place.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, that's fine, Mr. Speaker, but when I go home this weekend, I guess our companies are going to ask me what the ISO certification will do to make better timber harvesting and reforestation monitoring in this province. To the minister: what can I say to them?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne can report that the ISO certification means that our program does meet international standards. It will assure Albertans that their forest resources remain healthy and sustainable, that they are monitored, mandatory replanting at two years, checked again at eight and again at 14 years to make sure that they're growing, 3,500 inspections a year. We've said for a long time that our monitoring of harvesting and replanting is among the best in the world. With this certification we can now prove it.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, that's fine, and I understand that the ISO certification will do that. What other steps possibly could be taken within your ministry to strengthen the reforestation monitoring and help communities like Whitecourt, that are forest-dependent, remain sustainable?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ISO standard includes a commitment to continuous improvement. In fact, our program framework does include both internal and external audit processes. This system of self-checks, accountability, and continual improvement ensures that the program will get better with time. No other province in Canada has this ISO certification. Once again Alberta leads the way in Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Access to Medical Services

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a few minutes I will table a letter from a constituent of mine to the minister of health providing a first-person account of the kind of hell that the sick all too routinely experience these days when they have to go to the hospital in Calgary. John Witwicki's medical emergency was a rapid heartbeat, supraventricular tachycardia. For that, he spent seven and a half hours in a hallway under the care of three EMS staff, 12 hours in emergency waiting to be admitted, and four days in a ward waiting for tests. To the minister. John is aware of your long-term plans. He and I both want to know what you're going to do right now to solve the problems you have right now.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we're going to do is exactly what we've been doing for the last year, and that is to put in place a governance model that is going to run this system more efficiently and more effectively. We've brought in one of the leading CEOs in the world to run the system. If this hon. member has a suggestion on how we can turn it around overnight, I'd like to hear it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I quote from John's letter. "Sitting rooms provided for patient comfort and rehabilitation are off limits because they are occupied with patients and beds. All rooms are in a co-ed mode with eight of us sharing the same toilet facility." I ask the minister: does he find this situation tolerable? Would he subject his wife to that?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've said from day one that we want to work to improve access to the health care system because it is not adequate. I've also suggested to the hon. member here that if he has a suggestion on how we can turn this around overnight, I'd like to hear from him. All I hear from him is criticism. Let's hear some suggestions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I will ask on John's behalf: "How much longer do the citizens of Calgary have to tolerate these conditions?"

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, ask him if this is a spending day or a savings day. One of the things that we could do is commit here today to spend a whole bunch more money, as I've tried to point out to the member to his right, who still can't figure out \$500 million more versus \$500 million less. We have increased the operating budget this year for Alberta Health Services by some 7.7 per cent. I've met with the CEO, and that particular gentleman has said: we

are going to work within that target, and we are going to improve this system. I would suggest that's doing a whole lot more than this individual is, sitting here crying about a situation that we're fixing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Wind Power Generation

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of locations in my constituency have been identified as possible sites for the siting of wind turbines for electricity generation. This has raised a number of concerns among local residents. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Who is responsible for the siting and setback provisions of these turbines? Is it the province, or is it the local municipalities?

2:30

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, it's both. The siting relative to wind turbines is under the purview of the Alberta Utilities Commission, and they do follow some quite strict guidelines related to noise control around the sitings. The AUC's rules on noise control include some requirements related to turbine sitings. A facility may not produce more than 50 decibels of noise during the day at any nearby residence which is one and one-half kilometres or closer and no more than 40 decibels at night. The setbacks from these eloquent structures . . .

The Speaker: We'll probably get it the next time.

Mr. Marz: To the same minister: could the minister explain what regulations are governing the setback distance from neighbouring residences and from neighbouring property lines?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, the situation is that they will vary according to municipalities. There's a convention in the wind powered generation industry that suggests that any residences should be at a distance away from a turbine of at least four times the height of the structure. As an example, an 80 metre turbine structure would be required to be sited 320 metres away from the nearest residence. Some municipal bylaws support this convention, and Alberta Transportation, interestingly enough, also has a role to play. They require that turbines be at least 300 metres from the nearest road.

Mr. Marz: To the same minister again, Mr. Speaker: has the minister's department conducted any studies as to any potential health risks? If not, have they accessed any studies done in other jurisdictions, and what are the results of those studies?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we have limited information relative to wind turbines and their effect or possible effect on health. All types of generation, including those that are categorized as clean and renewable, have both pros and cons, and we do work in the system to be sure that none of these things are detrimental to health. The AUC takes social, environmental, and economic factors into consideration when these facilities are in fact applied for and sited.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Condominium Property Act Consultation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government claims that they are serious about protecting the rights of condo owners, but all

they do is claim ignorance and monitor a problem that was known and written about by the Calgary Home Builders' Association three years ago. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what notification has the minister been giving to condo owners since first learning of this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated last week, I had an excellent meeting with the Alberta Real Estate Association to begin the dialogue about the Condominium Property Act. This is really important moving forward and hearing from owners. We hear on a regular basis on our consumer line about situations that Albertans are experiencing. Working with the Department of Municipal Affairs and some of the other departments, we know that we can look at that and solve some problems.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think those are excellent meetings. They won't cut it. This government should be protecting consumers, but it is failing to do that. To the minister again: why is there no consumer alert on Service Alberta's website that would help protect condo buyers?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Condominium Property Act the major thing is that there are rules within the act about solving disputes. There's also mediation included in this legislation to make it easier and less costly for owners to get these kinds of disputes resolved. Most certainly, there is information for owners to start the process. When owners take the step and decide to pursue the other course of action, legal action, well, that's something that becomes their choice as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the past weeks of monitoring leaky condos, who has the minister consulted during this time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has spoken on that matter as well with respect to leaky condos. With the Condominium Property Act, again, this particular legislation deals with condominiums, how they run their boards and all those matters. That does not preclude information, working with the minister to make sure that we look at all angles to protect consumers and help them make the best choices.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Knowledge Infrastructure Program Funding

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Albertans learned through this House about a shared postsecondary infrastructure project funding agreement between the federal government and our provincial government. Albertans continue to tell me that every single one of our postsecondary institutions is important and that they would be upset if this funding went to only select and certain institutions. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the Minister tell us exactly how the

money will be distributed amongst Alberta's universities and colleges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The shared funding agreement of almost \$350 million that was announced last week, \$187 million of which was provincial funding, supports high-priority capital maintenance and renewal projects throughout the province. We have a very eloquent structure of a knowledge-based economy and a framework that we're going to be putting forward in front of this House right now. In order to make that happen, we have to ensure that the deferred maintenance across the system is taken care of. Under the federal-provincial program approximately 70 per cent went to universities, 30 per cent went to the colleges. They were selected based on talking to the individual institutions and Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. I often hear from constituents about the need for more student spaces at new facilities, so I hope the minister can please explain why the funding is focused on deferred maintenance rather than on the construction of new institutions.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years we've taken a very strategic approach to the construction of new facilities and new spaces in the province. Colleagues may recall discussions last year in this Legislature around the Campus Alberta framework, where we talked about individual access plans from each institution and a projection of the number of spaces that we're going to need and those that we're going to build. But as important to that is ensuring that the facilities that we have today can fill the needs for tomorrow and that the students of today can have an adequate facility to work in and learn in.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister. I've heard the claim that the funding is to reach across Alberta, so to speak. Can the minister please explain how the funding will be distributed throughout the different regions across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I guess one of the things that we could look at is how we develop our strategic priorities around the capital that we put into the postsecondary system in the province. That starts with, as I said, the individual access plans for each of the institutions, coupled with a projection working with other departments within the government, so Health and Wellness, Employment and Immigration. We got together and decided the workforce strategies of those departments, then projected out the number of jobs in those various categories that we might need, the vocations that we might be looking at, the apprenticeship training that we might be looking at. We made a determination then in the various locations or campuses around the province, all 28 of them, and said: "Where do we need those spaces? Where do we need deferred maintenance projects to be undertaken? Where do we need value-added into those institutions?" That's how we made those determinations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

School Construction and Renovation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta's aging schools desperately need upgrading, and there's very limited funding for modernization projects. Some rural school boards have simply resubmitted last year's three-year capital plan because none of their requests were approved. Requests this year for modernization projects total \$1.5 billion, yet there's no new funding. To the Minister of Education: given that construction costs have decreased due to the economic slowdown, why is the minister not taking this opportunity to invest in rural schools?

Mr. Hancock: Well, primarily, Mr. Speaker, because I didn't get any extra money in my budget.

Mr. Chase: Considering that the Wild Rose school board only requested one capital project last year because their request did not align with the province's building plan, how many capital projects are deflected even before the approval process begins, due to, and I quote, differing principles?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I wouldn't have any idea of what the reference to differing principles is, but I can tell the hon. member that we have in excess of 60 school boards in the province, not to mention the charter school boards. I can tell you that each of those school boards files on an annual basis a capital plan which identifies their top priority with respect to new construction and their top priority with respect to modernization, and deferred maintenance comes after that. So new, primary maintenance, and deferred maintenance issues. Some of them have, it will surprise the hon. member to know, more than one new project or renewal project and certainly many deferred maintenance projects. It would not surprise him to know that there are not 66 new projects every year, nor are there 66 renewal projects every year, so obviously some of those projects are going to go on to the next year's. It's not surprising, then, that they would come back in next year's plan.

2:40

Mr. Chase: Well, the devil is in the details, and I guess that rather than 66 maybe the answer is with 666.

Given that a 1949 written-off section of Iron Ridge elementary was brought back into service to meet the province's class size initiative, what is the minister doing to ensure that the province's principles – they're your principles – align with the capital pressures school boards face?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we work very diligently with school boards across the province to make sure that those areas that have the most essential needs have those needs dealt with. That's why we're spending approximately \$760 million this year; I think it's closer to \$1.4 billion over the next three years in new and renewed schools across the province. Does that deal with every single issue? No. Does it deal with the critical issues? I believe it does. We work with school boards all the time to make sure they have the places where they need them for their students and that schools are safe places for students to go.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today. In 30 seconds from now we will continue the routine.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, May 8, 2009, I had the pleasure of attending the Life without Limits Gala hosted each year by the Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta. The event featured Josh Blue, the renowned winner of NBC's *Last Comic Standing*. It was a lot of fun and included lots of laughs.

The CPAA is a great organization that collaborates with community agencies and organizations to advocate on behalf of individuals with cerebral palsy and other disabilities. They are a leader in delivering programs and services, educating the public, and providing information on treatments and resources relating to cerebral palsy in Alberta. They have a dedicated staff under the leadership of their executive director, Ms Janice Bushfield, and passionate volunteers and supporters.

Given the strength of the organization, it's easy to see how the May 8 event was so much fun. The success behind the event included the entire CPAA staff, that went above and beyond their normal workload. Also, I'd like to recognize the help of Allergan Botox and Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation for their support of the event. On top of CPAA staff volunteers Brant Hurlburt, Kelly Jennings, and Steve Burak also donated their time and services to make this event truly successful.

I know that in my home city of Calgary the Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta is hosting an open house on May 21 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. This will be another excellent opportunity for Albertans to familiarize themselves with the important work the CPAA does, to get a tour of their facilities, meet the staff, and check out their multisensory and music therapy rooms. I've heard there is something for everyone.

The Cerebral Palsy Association in Alberta is an organization that does very worthwhile work in our province. I was thrilled to support them by attending their Life without Limits Gala and by rising in the House today to recognize their commitment to Albertans with cerebral palsy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

National Nursing Week

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recognition of many of our guests today and some of my dearest friends and the thousands of nurses across this province it gives me great pleasure to rise today to salute nurses during National Nursing Week, which runs May 11 to 17. Special events are being held throughout our province to honour nurses this week, and May 12 is International Nursing Day. It is celebrated around the world every May 12, the birthdate of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

Mr. Speaker, this year's theme for National Nursing Week is Nursing: You Can't Live without It. Let me say definitively that, no, we can't live without nurses. Nurses play a vital role in our health care system and the life of every Albertan. These dedicated health care professionals provide care where and when it is needed. Nurses deliver quality health care each and every day and make the well-being and safety of their patients a top priority. They are a key part of the strong health care delivery system we have in the province of Alberta.

National Nursing Week is an opportunity for us to show our appreciation for the contribution nurses make to health care and our communities. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that I speak for all Albertans when I say thank you to all Alberta's nurses. I encourage everyone to salute the nurses in their communities as we give special recognition to the importance of the nursing profession during National Nursing Week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

**Lyn Radford
Madiha Mueen**

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've often heard it said: volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless but because they're priceless. Last Wednesday Red Deer's four Rotary clubs, the city of Red Deer, and friends of the community acknowledged two exceptional citizens and priceless volunteers at their annual spring gala. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the Red Deer citizen of the year, Lyn Radford, and the young citizen of the year, Madiha Mueen.

Ms Radford has been the driving force with a number of projects in Red Deer and is well known for her work on opening the Red Deer gymnastics centre and chairing the Alberta Summer Games in 2006. She also chairs Red Deer's Olympic torch committee, the Red Deer Curling Club capital campaign, and serves on the Red Deer College Board of Governors, to name only a few, and all that while raising four children.

Eighteen-year-old Madiha received the young citizen of the year award for her outstanding volunteer work with the leadership program at Hunting Hills high school, pennies for paws, the Red Deer regional hospital centre, and the list goes on.

Their names will be added to a list of past recipients on the base of the clock tower at the old courthouse in Red Deer. I'm proud to say that Red Deer is known for its spirit of volunteerism, helping others in our community and around the world. Mr. Speaker, these individuals have made their community proud and are inspirational role models for all of us. I would like all the members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the accomplishments of these two outstanding citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Go Green Eco Expo

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in my introduction today, Newcap Radio sponsored the first Go Green Eco Expo in Edmonton on April 4. The event was held in the Butterdome, which surprisingly is not in Edmonton-Calder. The main purpose of the expo was to spread awareness about environmental sustainability in Alberta and to promote those businesses that supply sustainable products and services such as organic health and body care products.

Newcap and the organizers of the event also wanted to educate Albertans on minor lifestyle adjustments that they can make to become more environmentally responsible in their everyday lives. Now more than ever our province needs to make the environment and conservation a top priority. Expos like this help bring awareness to the general public in fun and creative ways, like recycled leather flooring. I have to admit that I thought all leather was recycled once it had come off the cow, but I learned that there are other purposes. They had open discussion, presentations, and a number of very interesting points of view. It was \$10 very well spent, Mr. Speaker.

The 43 exhibitors at this expo drew nearly a thousand people, a number that they hope to improve on in next year's expo. The organizers of this exhibition that are here today have received tremendous feedback and support for their cause, and this is only the beginning. If you would like some more information on the Go Green Eco Expo, please visit their website at www.gogreenecoexpo.com.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The visitors, hon. member?

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They had actually been introduced before and had moved over to this side of the galleries, but I'll introduce them again. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly . . .

Ms Calahasen: Three beautiful women.

Mr. Elniski: . . . three beautiful women. Thank you. I'd like to introduce . . .

Dr. Sherman: Three smart women.

Mr. Elniski: . . . three smart women. Thank you, sir. I'd like to introduce Colleen Yukes, Ms Elissa Scott, and Mrs. Maureen Tash of the Go Green Eco Expo.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

2:50

Rosie Templeton

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a special young Albertan. Last weekend the 52nd annual 4-H selections program was held in Olds. I'm pleased to also acknowledge that my friend and colleague the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills presented to Rosie Templeton of Coaldale, who among 90 of the province's top 4-H members received the province's highest honour, the 2009 Premier's award.

Rosie is a seven-year 4-H veteran and a member of the Ready-made 4-H Beef Club and the South Country Judging Club. Most recently Rosie was named 2009 provincial public-speaking champion and regional judging champion. As the Premier's award winner Rosie's passion for the 4-H program will serve her well as she represents 4-H on a provincial level.

In addition to the Premier's award announcement, 41 senior-aged members were chosen to represent 4-H at major educational programs throughout Canada and the United States during the 2009-2010 year. Fourteen 4-H ambassadors were also selected to promote 4-H and youth involvement in Alberta over the next two years.

The longest running youth organization in our province is 4-H. By following the 4-H motto, Learn to Do by Doing, members take part in activities that meet their interests, increase their knowledge, and develop their life skills. Our government is proud to support this important program for our province's youth.

It might be of note to Rosie and the other recipients that our Premier was also leader of the Andrew 4-H Beef Club, Mr. Speaker, and he was also district president of the 4-H Council.

I wish to acknowledge the youth and adult leaders who support the work of 4-H across Alberta and congratulate each and every one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the responses from Service Alberta on the consideration of the main estimates with respect to the budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will now table five copies

of the letter from constituent John Witwicki that I referred to in question period.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short-staffed. These indicate that the meals were served late, rooms were not properly cleaned, and residents were woken early so that staff could finish their work.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a letter dated April 10, 2009, from a constituent, Lorian Kennedy. Lorian Kennedy is writing to express anger and disgust at the Conservative government's decision to delist gender reassignment surgery.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk Assistant: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, response to a question raised by Mr. Mason, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on April 14, 2009, in Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations main estimates debate.

The Speaker: On a purported point of order, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in reference to 23(h), which refers to making allegations against another member. There were, in fact, two points of order.

The Speaker: Deal with the first one first.

Dr. Taft: Okay. One of them, Mr. Speaker: in the exchange with the Premier, the Premier made an allegation which he's repeated a number of times. We've gone through this a couple of times. It's an allegation to the effect that the Official Opposition wanted to shut down the oil sands.

The Speaker: I think that's point number two.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Sorry. Then the other one, Mr. Speaker, was a description from the Premier of a news conference in Calgary in which he described me as scurrying away, or he used some colourful language like that. The fact of the matter is that we were blocked from access to that news conference. This I remember very vividly. It was at the McDougall Centre. We got in the door, and the security blocked our access. They refused to allow us in even though we identified ourselves. All through that period the news conference was conducted, and it was only at the very end, after it was over, that we were allowed access. Of course, at that point I didn't have the information to respond, so that's why I walked out.

I found the Premier's statements to be false and abusive, and he made allegations and descriptions of me that I think were not only untrue but insulting, and the facts clearly were otherwise. As I say, I was there with staff. We were barred from McDougall Centre for that news conference until the news conference was effectively over.

I would ask just for the honourable thing, which would be for somebody on that side to recognize those facts and withdraw the Premier's statements.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member obviously has a version of events; the Premier has a version of events: two differing versions. But the reality is this. There was a news conference. I think people agree with that. The Official Opposition leader left without making comment. Whether he left without making comment because he didn't have any comment to make, whether he left without making comment because he didn't have any knowledge of the subject, whether he left without making comment because he didn't know what to say is not really the Premier's concern or my concern. The fact of the matter, as he has indicated, is that he left without comment. That actually indicates exactly what the Premier said, and that is that at the time when he could have made comment, he left without making comment. It's a different version of events but no point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on this point of order.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The access to the McDougall Centre is part of the concern that has been brought up in this point of order. I have written to the Premier expressing concern about similar situations when I also have been denied access to the McDougall Centre, which is the equivalent of the Legislative Assembly and its grounds in Calgary. For a person to be expected to comment on something as important as the royalty issues, you have to be there and present and welcome to be a part of the whole discussion. Expecting someone to make an off-the-cuff comment based on no previous information is not acceptable.

The other part of the unacceptable nature of, basically, the insult that was suggested is that somehow like a shadow in the night the hon. former leader of the Alberta Liberal caucus scurried away like some deer in the headlights. That was not the case. We believe in research; we believe in being informed before we enter into a discussion. We didn't have that opportunity because the Premier through, unfortunately, his minion in the McDougall Centre prevented access, just as has happened with the health discussions at Government House. Until we have an opportunity to fully participate, how can we possibly answer questions?

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board on this purported point of order.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, yes. On the point that somehow in here we have to be careful about allegations, many on that side have a right to stand up and be indignant. That hon. member does not. Yesterday he twice talked about the Premier as someone who is passing a bill as a favour to secret donors around his leadership, undisclosed resources, who have shown up on various boards – I'm paraphrasing; the quote is in *Hansard* – and have received millions of dollars in grants, that some have also expected to benefit hand-somely. Those are not only past the point of what honourable should

get to; those make very serious allegations, that I think the Premier showed tremendous calm in ignoring. Then based on whether it's scurry or slurry or sneak or "My reputation has been hurt by an allegation" – you shouldn't throw rocks if you live in a very, very glassy house. Should there be rules about making allegations? I agree. But it should start right there first.

3:00

The Speaker: Are there others, or should I bring this matter to a head?

Dr. Taft: Well, I just . . .

The Speaker: No. We've already had one participation. This is not a debate.

The chair would like to point out *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* at 494, acceptance of the word of a member.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

I would further refer all hon. members to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 433.

The Speaker ensures that replies adhere to the dictates of order, decorum and parliamentary language. The Speaker, however, is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

This is not a point of order.

Second application. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the second issue I also cite 23(h), (i), and in this case as well (j), but particularly (h) and (i). This has to do with statements from the Premier alleging that the opposition wanted to shut down the oil sands or shut down the oil industry totally. Despite the comments of the President of the Treasury Board I actually try to stick to the facts in my questions. As an example, I will gladly back up every statement I made yesterday in my questions with facts. I can table the documents, and I can show the *Gazettes*. I can indicate, you know, where all that information came from.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that we've never said that we should shut down the oil sands or shut down the oil industry. I think that's an allegation and a twisting of the facts that's unjustified and unworthy of this Assembly. The Premier persists in repeating it, and I think that's most regrettable.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is obviously a difference of viewpoint but also not a point of order under the citations given because those citations refer to allegations against a member. As you've said repeatedly, an allegation against a whole caucus does not constitute an allegation against a member. Suggesting that the Alberta Liberal Party didn't have a policy on oil

royalties or suggesting that the effect of whatever position the Alberta Liberal Party took would be to shut down the oil sands is a validly held position given any logical research of the positions that they've held, but it's not an allegation against a member.

You know, over the course of the discussions of royalty review the Liberal opposition has taken many positions, but they've never really had a position that I can discern on royalties. One of the things that they had suggested – for example, when we did come up with the royalty regime, they accused us of trying to tear up the agreements with Suncor and Syncrude. Then shortly after that, a few months after that, the hon. member comes forward and says that we should have known better than to allow Suncor and Syncrude to invoke the bitumen royalty option, which was in the earlier agreement, that somehow we should have torn up the agreement at that stage. I mean, it's not hard to discern when you read some of the material that comes out in question period, some of the material that's shown on their website – did I just admit that I sometimes read their website? I should not have done that. It's not hard to discern that they either don't have a position or they have an inconsistent position or have positions which would have the effect of shutting down the oil sands, all of which, I agree, is a matter of interpretation, none of which is an allegation against a member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The hon. Government House Leader is entitled to be concerned about newly developed information with regard to royalties, but for him to suggest that the hon. Premier simply had a difference of opinion – how many times, Mr. Speaker, would you have allowed a student in your class to repeat misinformation before some type of disciplinary action was taken? What we have here is that circumstance. We have an individual across the way continuing to pass out information suggesting that the Liberal caucus wants to shut down the oil sands. We're on the record as asking for sustainable development. We're on the record as expressing environmental concerns. We're on the record announcing concerns that Albertans aren't getting a fair share for the resource they own.

But never – and I feel like this is a déjà entendu circumstance because I've said this before, and the Premier hasn't seemed to have got the lesson yet. We have never suggested shutting down the oil sands. To draw out any kind of conclusion that would suggest that somehow we're opposed to a major development in this province – it has some difficulties, obviously, with emissions and with tailings ponds, granted, but this is a major source of income now and into the future, and it has to be sustainably managed. To suggest that the Liberal caucus is opposed to development in the oil sands, Mr. Speaker, that's pure bunk, and if I had the Premier in my class, after school he would be writing out: I will not say that the Alberta Liberals are opposed to sustainable development in the oil sands. He would have to write it out a hundred times.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on this purported point of order.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to sort of preface my comments by saying that like the Minister of Education I, too, have noted some inconsistencies from time to time with respect to Liberal positions on certain issues. However, the Premier has clearly alleged – and he has not only alleged it with respect to the Liberals but also with us – that they want to shut down the oil sands. Nothing could be further from the truth. Quite frankly, I consider that to be real fearmongering because many, many

thousands of Albertans' jobs depend on that. So for the Premier to repeatedly make those assertions, which I believe he knows are not correct, in my view constitutes the breach that has been identified by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The Speaker: Well, that's all very nice, but unfortunately points of order and points of privilege have to deal with accusations against individual members of the House, not groups or other parties. If the hon. members would like to read the rules once again, *Beauchesne* 494 and *Marleau and Montpetit* at page 433, all of these matters deal with allegations against individual members. The Blues basically say: "You know, again, I know he's going to stand up with another point of order, but that is the group that wanted to shut down the oil sands completely." Those are the words of the Premier of the province of Alberta.

We've had this matter raised in the House before. We've dealt with it before, and we're dealing with it today in the same way we dealt with it before.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 47

Appropriation Act, 2009

The Speaker: Hon. members, before I call on the hon. President of the Treasury Board, this bill must be dealt with by 10:15 this evening.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 47, Appropriation Act, 2009.

I can just anticipate, after question period, that we'll have a very lively debate on many of the bills for the rest of the day, and I look forward to it.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. I would hate to disappoint the hon. President of the Treasury Board, so here goes. Mr. Speaker, as you know and as the House knows, last Thursday when we voted the estimates on Budget 2009, the Alberta Liberal caucus voted against those estimates. We voted against those estimates because we do not feel that the budget that has been brought in this year for fiscal '09-10, for the fiscal year coming, given the financial, fiscal, and economic circumstances in which we find ourselves in this province and, indeed, across the world, is a responsible budget for the people and the province of Alberta. We could not very well vote against the estimates on Thursday and then turn around and support the Appropriation Act, Bill 47, this time around, and certainly we will not be doing that.

I want to go on record, before we go any further, as being very, very clear that the Alberta Liberal caucus supports and endorses the tireless efforts of the employees of the government of Alberta to carry out the jobs and the tasks that are assigned to them by their political masters, to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, to uphold their oaths as public servants, and to carry on the business of the public sector in the province of Alberta for the benefit of the people of this great province of ours.

However, their political masters have seriously lost their way. We are being asked to support a bill – and I'm sure that at some point, whether it's the President of the Treasury Board or whoever,

someone on the government benches opposite will say: "Well, you know, if you vote against the bill, you're voting against the employees of the government of Alberta; you're voting not to pay these people. What have you got against these hard-working civil servants?" Well, we have nothing against these hard-working civil servants, but they need a better budget to work with than this one. This one does not cut it.

Dr. Brown: Too much or not enough?

Mr. Taylor: The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, Mr. Speaker, just said, "Too much or not enough?" I find this line of reasoning, this either/or line of reasoning that the Conservatives, the government and its backbenchers, who are here primarily to prop up the Lieutenant Governor in Council, continuously parrot very interesting. They can't seem to wrap their collective heads – and I know it's a struggle for them – around the notion of whether this is a spending day or a savings day. You know, it's both, or it should be both. It's got to be both. It's both a spending day and a savings day and a paying your bills day and a paying your debts day and an investing for the future day. It has to be all of those things, virtually, if not every day of the week then certainly every week of the year and every month of the fiscal year. You've got to do all those things together.

As I pointed out before to the President of the Treasury Board one day in question period – I don't remember which day it was – it's kind of like walking and chewing gum at the same time. You know, you've got to do more than one thing. It's very simple, Mr. Speaker, and we'll take it back down to the level of the average, ordinary family in the province of Alberta. The average, ordinary family in the province of Alberta has to do all those things because it has bills to pay. It has a mortgage payment to meet. It has a Visa bill or a MasterCard bill to make a payment on or, hopefully, pay in full every month. It has kids who are going to go to university or college some day and has to save for them. It has two adults, both of whom are probably working, who have to save for their own retirement because pension plans ain't what they used to be. It has all those things, all those responsibilities, and it has to meet all those responsibilities pretty much simultaneously.

This budget on so many levels – on so many levels – fails to do that. It fails to do that. The best it does is pledge to not keep increasing spending this fiscal year as much as it has in past fiscal years and to put a little bit here and a little bit there back into the sustainability fund once we stop running deficits in the province of Alberta. This budget projects deficits not only this year but next year and the year after that as well. And who knows beyond that?

I mean, those of us who have been in this province longer than since the last boom that just ended started can remember back to a time when the Conservative government of Alberta started running deficits. Yes, the circumstances are somewhat different, Mr. Speaker, today. I realize this. They're still prevented by law from borrowing money to go into deficit unless they're borrowing money from their own sustainability fund. You know, that's an improvement over the old days, but we remember when deficit spending started not only in the province of Alberta but in every province in the nation, in the nation itself. We went on this orgy of year after year after year spending more as governments than we took in until pretty soon we individually and collectively had debts, provincial and national debts, in the billions upon billions of dollars.

In this province we had a provincial debt and an ongoing deficit that to get under control, to end, to balance the budget, to eliminate the deficit and start to pay down the debt put us in a very difficult position that hurt a lot of Albertans, hurt us all in some ways. All of us had to sacrifice. I think my colleagues on the benches opposite

would agree that we'd all prefer if we didn't have to go through that again. But, Mr. Speaker, this budget so utterly fails to address the consequences of running consecutive deficits that it threatens to put us right back into that position.

Now, true enough, when and if Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, passes this House – and I'm sure "if" is merely a theoretical construct – you know, we'll have a new, allegedly improved sustainability fund of about \$17 billion combining all the loonies and toonies between the cushions in the couches and the money we got from taking the pop bottles back to the bottle depot and all the rest of that, and we'll be able to use that money to cover off these deficits for a while. But ultimately, if we don't have a plan going forward other than for hope and prayer that the price of oil and the price of gas go back up and somehow the world comes out of this recession, that \$17 billion is going to be gone, and there is no plan B. There's only this sort of quasi-commitment that, you know, when we do and if we do get to the point where we're running surpluses again, we'll start putting an undetermined amount of money back into the sustainability fund at an undetermined schedule of making deposits until someday in that grand and glorious future when my grandchildren have grey hair, we'll have \$10 billion in the fund again.

That's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. There's no long-term savings and investment strategy in this budget, no desire to commit to one. There's no real plan to replenish our short-term savings. There's no prioritization of programs that work for Alberta. There are no plans to reallocate funding or spending to programs that work for Albertans. They're just isn't anything in here that gives me confidence that this budget protects the fortunes and futures of the people of Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment at this point to Bill 47, the Appropriation Act, 2009. I'll give a moment to the pages to distribute this.

The Speaker: Yes. We'll wait for this. It's not that normal at second reading, but we'll have it circulated quickly, please, pages. Distribute them so everybody can work.

Hon. member, please proceed with your amendment.

3:20

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will read the amendment into the record. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 47, the Appropriation Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 47, the Appropriation Act, 2009, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill does not provide a long-term savings and investment strategy, set adequate priorities, or reallocate spending to sufficiently protect the futures and fortunes of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I think I set up the reasoning behind this reasoned amendment in debate before I moved the amendment, so there's really not a whole lot else that I feel I need to say about this. I realize that I've now changed the debate on Bill 47 at second reading to a debate on the amendment, but having gotten my point across, I hope, I think, I will take my seat now and let others join the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are now on the amendment. The amendment is before everybody. That is the gist and the purpose for the debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the amendment.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Specific to, well, what is a reasoned amendment, always, of course, the budget is one of the

most important debates in a spring sitting. I think this year it's particularly important because we have an unprecedented, or at least unprecedented in 14 years, deficit. I also think that there's an extremely important discussion to be had. I only wish the government were leading this discussion in the way that the discussion about balancing the budget was lead by the government in the early 1990s. The government has the tools at its hands to address directly what is proposed in this amendment. I think it's very important to notice in the amendment the specific referral to the fact that there is not currently in this budget a long-term savings and investment strategy. That's what I want to focus my comments on for a couple of minutes.

This very government – well, I should say, I guess, the preceding government, when the minister of finance was the member then for Strathmore-Brooks, Dr. Lyle Oberg. At that time he commissioned a special report, which I only wish every member of this Assembly had studied. It's come to be known informally as the Mintz report. The title is Preserving Prosperity: Challenging Alberta to Save. It was written by a committee of several people, chaired by Jack Mintz, which was given the name of the Alberta Financial Investment and Planning Advisory Commission. They came out with startlingly important conclusions. For those of us who want to spend the rest of our lives in Alberta, who want to see Alberta prosper for lifetimes to come, I don't think there's a more important document than this one. I think it's very important, for understanding why this amendment is so vital, to read a handful of excerpts from this report.

This is from the executive summary of a report commissioned by this government, chaired by a fellow who is known as a very, at least, small "c" conservative, a right-wing, market-driven economist, Jack Mintz. The other people on it were Harry Buddle, Daniel Halyk, Judith Romanchuk, and David Weyant. Here are a handful of points from the executive summary on why we need an Alberta long-term savings and investment strategy. I quote from page 3 of the report.

Alberta is at a critical point in its history. The province's economy has consistently outpaced the rest of Canada. We enjoy the tremendous benefits of the lowest income taxes in the country, no sales tax, the highest per capita spending on health care in the country and an education system that outranks some of the best in the world . . . These advantages make Alberta a very prosperous place today.

[some applause] I'll be interested if there's still applause because I quote from the next paragraph of the report.

At the same time, warning signs should be heeded.

Mr. Speaker, this amendment is a warning sign. If nothing else, at least this debate should serve as a warning sign because the report found, and I quote again from page 3:

To a very great extent, the level of spending and the low taxes we enjoy today are the direct result of our abundance of resource wealth. Alberta's aging population and the expected lack of growth in resource revenues suggest that it will be difficult for Alberta to preserve our current prosperity for present and future generations. In fact,

And I emphasize this. In fact, wrote the Mintz commission, if action is not taken now, Albertans could face a substantial tax hike by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment moved by the hon. MLA for Calgary-Currie proposes action now. That's exactly what this is about. This amendment is exactly about the need to respect and take seriously what the Mintz commission wrote and advised and what this government has chosen so determinedly not to act on.

I'll skip a few paragraphs here, but I think it's important to drive home some key points. I quote again from the report.

To put it in clear terms, Alberta's non-renewable resources should provide significant benefits not just to Albertans today, but also for our children and grandchildren. When Alberta sells its resources . . .

And, parenthetically, Mr. Speaker, given question period today, I must say that I believe we're selling the resources much too cheaply. I return to the report.

... it has given up wealth that can either be spent today or saved for the future. When our stock of non-renewable resources dwindles, Alberta's economy will need to rely only on its people – not its natural resources – to create wealth.

It goes on. Then it says, Mr. Speaker, what I think is a remarkable statement, a dramatic statement for a government report written by a committee of economists. I quote again a government-commissioned report.

Alberta should not look like a ghost town in the next century when the resources are depleted.

Mr. Speaker, that's a very, very significant warning. We stand here debating a budget that puts Alberta back into, effectively, a deficit for the first time in 15 years a mere eight months after the price of oil and natural gas began to collapse. We had 14 or 15 years of consecutive multibillion dollar surpluses, and a mere eight months after natural resource revenues drop, we're back into deficit. We're having to squeeze public services, and we're having to consider raising taxes. Those are the kinds of warning signs that should be heeded, that Jack Mintz warns about.

In fact, if you go to the trouble of interviewing Mr. Mintz, which I would urge all government MLAs to do – please sit down with this guy; please listen to what he says – he warns that in the foreseeable future, the next two decades, Alberta is either going to have to raise taxes 40 per cent or lower spending 40 per cent or do some combination of the two. Using the government's own forecasts on revenues, there's no way other than going into massive debt, which will drive us into destruction.

3:30

I'm again quoting from the Mintz report. "To achieve those objectives, this report recommends," and there are several recommendations. I won't read them all, but this could not be more important, Mr. Speaker, number one: "setting a bold target of achieving \$100 billion in net financial assets in a reinvigorated Alberta Heritage Fund by 2030." Now, that would be apart from pension assets.

I can already hear some of the cabinet ministers saying: well, we already have \$70 billion in AIMCo. In fact, most of that is tied up in pension liabilities. We want to see that target. We want to see some strategy. We understand that times are tight right now, but where is the strategy when times get better? Where is the symbolic gesture that we could use now, even if it's a small symbol, to say: okay; no matter how tight, we've got to commit to the future. Mr. Speaker, there's no sign of that in this budget as presented. What's so frustrating is that when we raise the issue with government members, it just gets laughed off or shrugged off. I hope – I hope – that this caucus of Tory MLAs gets the message through to this government that a savings strategy is crucial.

The report goes on to recommend, and I'm quoting from page 4 here: "saving a fixed percentage of Alberta's total revenues each year as part of the budget." Then the third item: "establishing a clear and specific purpose – to preserve and enhance Alberta's prosperity for the benefit of current and future generations – and changing the name of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund to the Alberta Heritage Fund."

Let's stop using this term "rainy-day fund" for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. I've argued for quite some time, Jack Mintz has argued, many others have argued that we should look at that effectively like a RIF, effectively like an income fund. While governments don't retire, Legislatures don't retire, there is an equivalent sort of moment looming for Alberta as an economy. That

moment is when our nonrenewable resource revenues deplete to an insignificant level.

The warning signs could not be more clear. Alberta was once a significant player in conventional oil production. That "once" was in the early 1970s. Peak conventional oil production was 35 years ago. Today Alberta's conventional oil production is minor. Alberta's natural gas production, which has been immense in the last 15 years, is dropping 4 per cent a year now, peaked some years ago and is inevitably declining. The oil sands, for all their enormous size, bring forward immense complications of their own, and they will not generate the royalty income that our conventional resources have generated so well.

Let's get past this rainy-day idea. Let's imagine the day coming when royalty revenues are not significant anymore and we need to turn somewhere else. That's the day we need to plan for by establishing the kind of heritage fund that the Mintz report recommends, Mr. Speaker. That's the kind of strategy that's envisioned in this amendment and that is completely lacking from this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I don't need to drive – well, I will need to drive this message home more. I can't drive it home any more right now. But I think it's vital. I can see that some of the government MLAs are actually listening. They don't need to listen to me. They can listen to their own advisers. They can listen to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce. They can listen to the Institute of Chartered Accountants. They can listen to the Canada West Foundation. Please, people, please put in place a long-term, disciplined savings strategy for this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available, that provides five minutes for questions and comments.

On the amendment.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, on the amendment. The problem they seem to have is that they're stuck somewhere between yesterday and fantasyland. I think it's nice that they decided to switch their previous position on many of our civil servants, who they soundly thrashed in here about their bonuses. Over 6,000 of them had to sit here and listen to how unworthy they were that they would be on a bonus system. I'm glad to see they finally may have realized that these are hard-working people and that bonuses were part of their salary. But I don't expect that they will recover a lot of their other arguments.

Let's just talk about what this amendment is trying to say. By referring to a paper that was produced in a very different time – and I wish they would have come out and said: what we would like you to do is save by taking money from these areas, take money out of ongoing areas of the budget that we're dealing with. That's what our debate is in here now, the budget of this year, for the coming year, and the two out-years. Tell us how much they would like us to take out of the programs we deliver. Given that around 76 per cent of the money we spend is in the areas of health, education, advanced education, and seniors, to have a significant change so that you could take money out of these hospitals right now, take money out of these schools right now, take money out of these seniors' facilities right now and put it in the bank so that a couple of hundred years from now, when our oil is gone, we'll have a lot of money in the bank.

Earlier today you listen to the question that comes: you should have more people in these facilities; we've got to spend more money on health care, a \$500 million increase. That wasn't quite enough; that's a cutback. But we've got to save ourselves into prosperity. You know, maybe in the dictionary there is confusion between a magician and a politician, but we can't magically just wave our little

wand and wave a report and say: if you just wish hard enough, if you hope and click your heels, you can spend more on everything, and you can still have money that we can put in the bank.

And this will be our platform: don't deal with anything specific. Oh, they can pull some communications budgets out of here, and they could pull some hosting budgets out of there, and they can add it all up to about a day and a half of health care and say: "See? See what we mean? You've got to get tough on these departments. You university people, you need not sit around and talk with the minister and have lunch. That's a waste of money. And you don't need to communicate what's going on in Alberta around the world because those communication dollars are wasted anyhow."

It's easier to get bad news if you stand up here and misrepresent what's really going on. That's like free communications. They'll pick up the stuff they really like – some very unfortunate birds in a tar pond, in an oil pond, or whatever the heck you want to call it pond – and we can spread that all around the world for free just about if we stand on the steps here and repeat it enough. We can focus on every negative thing we can find in Alberta. That's free. We don't know why, we don't understand why your government would think it's important to spend money on communications to actually show the world the level of environmental commitment we've made here and the progress that has come directly from Alberta companies and Alberta attitude. Somehow, by selling our resources, whether it's coal or oil or natural gas, selling those resources and investing them in some of the most world-class facilities – medical, educational, experimental, and research – somehow that would be better: just put the money in the bank.

They talk about building an economy. We couldn't agree more except we actually know how to do it far better than just pretend, heels click, the money is in the bank, we're all rich. You have to build the universities, you have to build the hospitals, and you have to run them. You have to pay the people that run them for you a decent salary, and you have to compete not only with our neighbours but around the world. We went through a very interesting economic time, where prices rose significantly around the world, yet because of the resource wealth we've got, we were able to maintain and actually grow. We continued to invest in infrastructure, including what we said.

3:40

We've provided more benefits. My mother was sitting here a few days ago. She gets angry when she's told continually how hard things are for her. Eighty-two years old, and she's still coming here to shop and will tell you unequivocally that they could never have imagined what their parents went through to help build this province, and now it seems like they have to be given everything, glasses and teeth and a little help here and a little help there, as if somehow the 60 or 70 years of hard work were just good luck, and now the government needs to make sure we're looked after. They're slightly insulted that they're treated like that. That's a little bit different.

For the hon. members to suggest that the Mintz report would somehow be our salvation – Mr. Speaker, can you imagine? You would know now how lopsided transfer payments are from Alberta to Ottawa to fund a lot of programs that other provinces have in place to try to look after the people that they're representing and that they have the responsibility to care for. Without getting caught up in exact details, we all know that it's into the hundreds of billions of dollars that Alberta has allowed, encouraged, participated in for the wealth creation of this country.

So let's take that, what we've got left, and let's put it in the bank. Alberta could. We're going to shut down schools and hospitals and all the stuff that they won't say, but if they get it, they'll have to do

it. We'll put this money in the bank. Who do you suppose is going to pay when the other provinces – Mr. Speaker, Quebec has some \$140 billion in acknowledged debt, \$7.5 billion to \$8 billion a year interest payments. Ontario is even worse than that and has billions of dollars in Crown corporations. When the consolidated financial statements are finally adopted by the other provinces, probably next year, it's even going to portray the wealth that Alberta has far greater in comparison to what you would imagine now.

Just think politically, Mr. Speaker, regardless of what party might do it, to become the only province in the country with wealth, with a great big fund. You let your roads deteriorate, you've quit building hospitals, but you've got this big cash. Cash is king. We've got money. Do you think the rest of the country, the rest of the provinces, given the system we live in, are going to sit back and say, "Oh, good for you"? I don't think so.

Mr. Speaker, there is a balance between living in yesterday and hoping for the future. Then there is recognizing what we're in today. There's no question that it's far harder to approach the coming years given the uncertainty and having to deal with the incredibly difficult choices that we're going to have to make as a province. But we have always done it. We have talked with Albertans, and whether they'd like to admit it or not, this province recognizes that times change and political reality changes with it or it disappears. You can sing the songs of the past, and you can harp on solutions that may have worked then.

There may be a future where Alberta has billions of dollars in the bank. I quite honestly believe that it will happen. Our days are going to return quicker than any other province, probably quicker than anywhere else in North America, possibly in the world. As our resources are developed, we're going to be ready, more prepared to have the infrastructure, more prepared to understand what it means to reinvest in research, in the medical sciences. The knowledge-based economy and the value-added economy that we're working for is out there, but it's coming here because of the political stability and the common sense that have gone into both our taxation and our spending priorities.

You know what? I hope we adjourn this session soon. I hope, personally, that the hon. members spend the entire summer and all of next year – as a matter of fact, I hope they spend the next two and a half years – out around Alberta telling them exactly what they want to do because then I won't have to campaign one day, not one day, when you tell them, "We believe that we're going to have to cut all of the programs for Albertans because some guy that used to lead us got this brilliant idea that we'd be far better off with a bunch of money in the bank." That's what I hope they do. I hope they spend two and a half years spreading the word. I might even be able to find their website – I'm not good at this, but I'm trying – and I'm going to send them some money, and I hope they put it to good use, get out there and tell Albertans: we're going to save our way into prosperity. That's the Liberal way.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must congratulate the President of the Treasury Board for his impassioned speech. You know what? We disagree. I respect that disagreement, and I frankly enjoyed the vigour of his presentation.

I just want to put three quick points to the President of the Treasury Board. The first one is about British Columbia. I know we'll hear all about the debt and all this kind of thing. Just on pure spending, if you compare per capita spending in Alberta with per capita spending in B.C., Alberta spends, the most recent figures, 28 per cent higher. Alberta spends 23 per cent higher than the national

average, 28 per cent higher per person than B.C. does. Yet when I go to B.C., the roads are good, they run a ferry system, they're building the Olympics, they've got a pharmacare program, and UBC consistently outranks U of A. So our point on this side is that surely – surely – there is some value for money that can be squeezed out of the provincial spending. That would be the first point. And the people with access to that information are the government.

My second point. As the Member for Calgary-Currie has often said, this is not either/or. Most or all of us have families, and we manage at the same time to do a number of things financially if we're going to have long-term prosperity. First of all, we need to pay the bills. We do have to pay the rent. We have to buy the groceries and so on. Secondly, we need to pay our debts, a mortgage, whatever that may be. Third, any one of us here, if we're doing a good job of planning for the future, is saving. We put something aside even in the lean years in the RRSP. We put something aside for our kids' college education. This is not an either/or proposition. This is a both/and. It's exactly the same kind of balance that successful families achieve in their own lives. We're looking for that same kind of balance from this government.

So the first two key points: let's try to get the kind of value for money that the B.C. government delivers. Let's try to get that from our dollars here in Alberta. Secondly, don't look at this as either/or. This is just like good, long-term domestic financial planning. Third, I agree with the President of the Treasury Board that there has to be some strategy around the politics of Confederation, and we don't necessarily want to have a giant, juicy target of, you know, half a trillion dollars or something, but there are ways around that: endowing the postsecondary institutions so that maybe the day comes when we don't actually need to provide any provincial tax revenue to them because the endowments are so large, like the world's great universities already enjoy. And there are other ways around that.

I enjoyed the comments from the President of the Treasury Board, but I've got to tell you that they deeply worry me because there is such an entrenched resistance to the very thing that this Mintz report and this amendment are about. I guess I fear, from my own perspective, for the future of Alberta in the same kind of way, apparently, that the President of the Treasury Board does but on completely different perspectives.

The Speaker: President of the Treasury Board, did you want to comment?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think that was a comment.

The Speaker: That was a comment, but it could have been a question too.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

3:50

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking very specifically to the amendment . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. We're still on the Q and C section. If you have a question, you proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, no. I hadn't realized we were still on that section.

The Speaker: Does anybody else have a question or comment?

There being none, then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to participate in the debate on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking very specifically to the amendment, the idea of having a savings plan is hardly new. Joseph recommended a savings plan to King David a millennium ago. He predicted that there would be seven good years, followed by seven years of famine. As a result, during those seven good years he built up the granaries; he created the food supplies. The idea of providing savings and setting aside during the good years is nothing new. That needed to be established.

Now, the either/or part of the discussion. The hon. President of the Treasury Board with regard to savings said: well, how can you save and still fulfill the needs of Albertans at the same time? Where does this problem occur? I'll take this problem back to 1994. Stupid moves. Stupid moves followed by inaction. We closed down, blew up hospitals in Calgary. We drove away the professionals who staffed them. Now 15 later we're trying to entice them back. How can you do both? Well, if you had done both, we wouldn't be in this position we are right now because we would have had a savings plan. We wouldn't have had to be going overseas to recruit temporary foreign workers, especially in areas of medicine, because they would still be here had we not driven them away. So inaction, stupid action, and then failure to look into the future sufficiently beyond the next paycheque.

This government and the Premier in terms of savings and investment declared full speed ahead in the development of the oil sands. What was the result? Inflation. What was the result? A lack of workforce in the rest of the province because this one area was so overheated that the costs and the lost jobs and the drain were felt throughout the province. How can we save? By doing things at a sustainable pace, by thinking of that next step as opposed to just strictly living for the moment.

With regard to the comment about the 6,000 individuals and our lack of support or our wavering support for civil servants, the reality is that very few of that number of convenience, 6,000, saw the \$40 million. It was the deputy ministers and the higher individuals within the chain of command that received the majority of that \$40 million, so don't be telling me that it somehow found its way, dribbled down to the civil servants who do the actual front-line work.

With regard to savings, how can we accomplish savings? Well, how is it that Alaska is able to accomplish it? How is it that Norway, who started so long after Premier Peter Lougheed initiated the idea of a heritage trust fund, was able to run with it and set aside savings that we can't seem to do here in this province or that the government seems unwilling to do?

Again with regard to savings and monetary procedures, all we hear is the old, worn-out phrase: tax-and-spend Liberals. Well, we're talking about saving Liberals, a savings account, and we've proposed this for some time. When the Alberta Liberals are more fiscally conservative than the so-called Progressive Conservatives, then there is something to be worried about in this province as to who should be running the government.

With regard to individuals who have indicated a savings plan, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview indicated Jack Mintz. I'd like to add on such luminaries as the Canada West Foundation. I'd like to talk about the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. How about the Canadian Federation of Independent Business? Let's throw in Preston Manning. Let's throw in Peter Lougheed. These are all individuals that are hardly noted for Liberal tendencies who have recommended the need for establishing a savings fund, and they didn't say: well, we'll wait till oil goes up to \$160 a barrel. They recommended those savings when oil was back at the \$10 a barrel level. So the idea of a savings plan isn't new.

With regard to savings plans in the 2004 lead-up to the election we said that while we still had a surplus, we needed to set aside 30

per cent of any surplus dollars and with that create a university endowment fund: 35 per cent of that 30 would go to it. We said 25 per cent for infrastructure. We wanted to set aside 5 per cent for culture and arts development. We were looking at the various aspects that an endowment fund, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out, would be necessary to offset our dependency on nonrenewable resources.

In 2008 leading up to the election, based on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's economic background, a doctorate from England, he said: we've got to set aside 30 per cent not just of surplus revenue but 30 per cent of every nonrenewable dollar that we get because the clouds are coming, and if we don't set up a savings plan now, we're in for deep trouble. Unfortunately, this government chose to take us deeper into trouble with a \$4.7 billion deficit, no savings plan. We owe \$8.6 billion on the unfunded liability, which should have been addressed years ago. Had it been addressed years ago, we wouldn't be at this point. Savings and wise investments are absolutely essential.

In the last five years this government has lost over \$5 billion from the heritage trust fund due to questionable investments. We have experienced poor investments in asset-backed commercial paper. I do believe that AIMCo, however long the arm's length is, will be the agency to make the wise investments, knowing how well the Ontario teachers' fund did with the individual at the head. I know that this government doesn't feel very strongly about the recommendations that its Auditor General makes and suggests that the Auditor General drifts from money management into policy, but he's argued the savings point.

What we're saying through this amendment is that savings and investment have to happen at the same time as wise expenditures. Control inflation; you don't have the problem.

I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo would like to share his wisdom on this matter. He's a young man, and he's got longer to save for than I do, so I will sit down and save the House some time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

No participants? Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill to participate.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a wonderful thing to be in the opposition and have the opportunity to criticize without coming up with any concrete propositions as to what they might do with the budget. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was up a few minutes ago talking about his amendment, and he inferred that one might trim and spend and save all in the same day. Therein lies the rub. We hear all the time that we're not spending enough in certain areas. We hear that we're spending too much in certain areas. We hear that we should be saving at the same time. We're talking about an amendment which talks about the fact that this Appropriation Act in 2009 does not provide a long-term savings and investment strategy. This is an appropriation bill. It talks about what we're going to spend in the fiscal year 2009-2010.

4:00

I would like to know from the opposition – I hope someone will get up and address the issue – how much they would save this year given the fact that we have the budget and the economy where it is right now. I'd like to know how much they'd save this year. I would also like to know where they would cut in order to save that particular amount of money.

They also talk about setting adequate priorities and reallocating spending to "sufficiently protect the futures and fortunes of Albertans." If there was ever a nebulous statement, there it is. What are

those adequate priorities? How would they reallocate? Where would they spend more, and where would they cut? Let's see some specifics regarding this. Let's see them go on the record and not just say that we need to spend smarter. I hear that term all the time, that we have to spend smarter. That means, presumably, that you have to cut somewhere and that you have to spend more in other ways.

So let's see where the rubber hits the road. I'd like to hear some specifics from the opposition. When they're putting forth an amendment here that talks in very general terms, let's see where it's going.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Are there questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar first.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. The previous speaker was talking about concrete solutions. I believe those were the precise words. When this party, the Official Opposition, suggested originally to the government that we initiate a stability fund or a stabilization fund to provide a cookie jar whenever it was necessary to have a substantial amount set aside because of the volatility of oil and gas prices, does the hon. member, number one, not consider that to be a concrete solution when the Provincial Treasurer and the President of the Treasury Board and the Premier and the bloated cabinet were so anxious to use that money and so grateful to have it set aside? Is that not an example of a concrete solution from this side of the House?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill if you wish.

Dr. Brown: I think there was a stability fund, and the reason that the government has some flexibility is because there was that saving, so it is there. I think that you've just answered the question on what the government ought to have done, and we did it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill: if he's looking for places to cut, would he not consider the suggestion, which has come from our party and, I think, has also come from the Official Opposition, that the elimination of the subsidy for horse racing in our province might be a good place to start?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, if you wish.

Dr. Brown: Well, I think that this has been discussed. I'm here to support the budget as it is written right now.

With respect to the horse racing I think that it's been adequately explained in this House many, many times that there is no subsidy on horse racing. What the horse-racing industry gets back is a portion of what's taken in on their own facilities with respect to the slot machines and the VLTs that are located on those premises. Without the horse-racing industry there wouldn't be any revenue, so there is a net gain, in fact, to the province of Alberta from those facilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, to clarify for the hon. member, the Official Opposition brought the stability fund forward twice. Both times it was rejected, and fortunately it was finally accepted by the government.

Now, if we're looking for a cost saving, the previous Premier reduced the size of cabinet at one point. Does the hon. member consider the size of the cabinet now, in light of these difficult economic times, to be suitable, or should we reduce the size of cabinet perhaps by 20 per cent to save a few dollars?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, do you wish to, or should we see additional questions first?

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

The Speaker: We can't adjourn debate during the Q and C period.

Mr. Mason: I'd just like to remind the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill – he wasn't here at the time – that what happened was that facilities like Northlands and the Stampede board were taking far more than the cut that they were allowed on their gambling sheets, and the Auditor General caught them and found it out. What happened is that they had to reduce their take to the same take that any casino might charge on the gambling machines, and they got an agreement from the government to provide a subsidy to make up the difference. That's how it came about.

The Speaker: Additional comments or questions with respect to this matter? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member: does the hon. member consider in these economic times, which are quite difficult – and we do have a shortage of money – the cabinet too big, too small, or just right, like Goldilocks?

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you. I'd like to contribute to that last point: is it too big or too small, or is it just right, like Goldilocks? I think it's way too big. I agree with the hon. member. It's much too large.

The Speaker: Additional comments or questions with respect to this matter?

Hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, you cannot adjourn the debate because you finished the debate without adjourning it.

The next member up is the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have really enjoyed, actually, listening to many of the people who have spoken today, especially the former Leader of the Opposition, Edmonton-Riverview. I enjoyed listening to the hon. President of the Treasury Board speak with passion, too, on the direction of Alberta and what he sees as a future for our province. I believe they were both speaking towards, hopefully, a bright future for our citizens, one that looks responsibly towards future generations.

I think that if I could sum up sort of the two positions without having the clarity, one position would say that we've got to keep some of that and keep looking out for the future, and one position might be: let's invest it all now and put it to work now or not put it to work now, maybe just spend it all now on a variety of different things. If I look at those positions, I would say that it is much wiser of us, which is the nature of this amendment, to develop a long-term savings plan that we can really get behind here. Although I agree that it is a very difficult financial time here in Alberta, nevertheless it's time we get on with this thing.

For the last 40 years, in fact for the time this government has been in power and, in fact, for my entire life Alberta has taken in significantly more money than any other province and, I would go so far as to say, any other jurisdiction in the world per capita. Now, I could be corrected on that, but that is what I have been led to believe, and since I am not corrected, I'll stand by that.

One of the comments continually made by the hon. President of the Treasury Board is that we have world-class facilities, world-class this, world-class that, yada yada yada. That's fair enough. You look around, I guess, the western world. People would say: "Yeah, Alberta has got similar stuff to what we have here. They have similar health care facilities. They have similar universities. They have similar police forces. They have similar justice departments." But by no means are we number one. One would think that if someone had brought in the most money per capita for a governing body with the people involved, we would have the best, and that simply doesn't happen.

If you look at relative reports coming out in this country alone, we look at health care reports that say that we're roughly in the middle of the pack. You look at policing numbers. You know, we're short on policing numbers. You look at wait times for our accused to get to trial. They're longer than average. You look at our roads, all of that stuff. [interjection] Well, then I'll be corrected later on.

4:10

Nevertheless, these things are all average when we look across Canada. How can we sit here and say that we are providing value for the dollar for what our current citizens are getting when we're spending more than other areas and all these reports come back and say that we're doing an average job? I find it difficult to reconcile those two points, and if someone can do that for me, well, then maybe I'll be better served and wiser the next time I rise to speak in this honourable House.

Now, if we go to a long-term savings plan, there's no doubt we can continue to, I guess, snow through our abundance of natural resource revenue in the next 40 years like we've done in the last 40 years, during the life of this government, which is essentially what we've done. We've snowed through that revenue, and yes, we do have average stuff when we compare to the rest of the western world. Kudos. Great. We've got average stuff for having the most revenue.

Hopefully, over the future, having this savings fund, maybe it will force us to get some financial discipline. We will say that we're going to put some of this resource money away, and I'd say that the 30 per cent figure that we ran on in the last election is a reasonable amount. I don't know the exact amount suggested by the Mintz report. But it should be in and around that figure. It should be a responsible figure for us to go forward, or else, as the Mintz report says, we are going to be in a dangerous situation come 40 or 50 years from now.

Dr. Brown: Would you do that this year?

Mr. Hehr: Why not start this year? If not this year, hon. member, when? Next year? Fair enough. We've got to at least start with some nominal figure and say: we're going to start. Okay? We came up with, I think, the number of \$50 million, and by no means is that: "You can sound the bugles from the mountaintop. Oh, my goodness. They are really going forward on this." Nonetheless, it would be a start. I think that if we came up with some number, that this year we're going to do X, that we're going to devote X amount to doing this in the future, it's some recognition that we have a problem of snowing through petroleum revenues whenever they come in. To be

honest, as Albertans we don't pay for anything we use anymore. We just simply snow through it all in one generation like we've done.

I think this savings plan will recognize the fact that we owe something to future generations that will want to live here. Alberta will not become a ghost town, but I believe it will if we keep spending at the rate we are and not recognizing that this is sort of a one-time, I guess, opportunity to really set us up for the future. Well, you know, maybe lightning strikes twice, but I don't necessarily see that happening. Our advantage here is that oil. What we can do to sustain that advantage long term is to have a long-term savings plan.

Those are my points, and I thank you for the opportunity to allow me to speak on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Question? Comment?

Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address the amendment as well as the bill.

The Speaker: Well, we're on the amendment now.

Mr. Mason: I know, Mr. Speaker, but I think that for various reasons I will not have the opportunity.

The Speaker: Sorry.

Mr. Mason: That doesn't count?

The Speaker: No, that doesn't count. Okay? We're on the amendment now, and the bill will be debated in its true form after the amendment is dealt with. The hon. member is a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. We'll go on this afternoon to 6 o'clock. The House will reconvene tonight at 7:30. The hon. member may have ample opportunity between now and 10:15, when the vote is called.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that your job is to enforce the rules.

The Speaker: Pretty much.

Mr. Mason: Yeah, pretty much. Sometimes we may not, you know, like the rules all that well, but I get it.

On the amendment, which is that it

be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the bill does not provide a long-term savings and investment strategy, set adequate priorities, or reallocate spending to sufficiently protect the futures and fortunes of Albertans.

My response to this, Mr. Speaker, is that I'm not entirely onside with all three of those reasons. I want to address particularly the one where I have some difficulties. Maybe I disagree or maybe it's just a more nuanced approach, but certainly I don't think the bill sets priorities adequately. I think there, indeed, could be some reallocation of spending, which just goes hand in hand with setting priorities differently.

It's the question of long-term savings and investment that I have a bit of an issue with. I know that that's the Liberal Party's position. They think we should be building up a giant fund and that this, in fact, should get us through difficult times and ensure a steady flow of revenue. Now, I think it's fair to say that we should have more

savings through the heritage savings trust fund. In particular, the idea of spending the interest each time keeps the fund from growing. I would support that. I would ask hon. members what happens in an economic recession, as we've seen, and particularly when there's a major downturn in investment markets and in the stock market. We see, in fact, that those countries that depend on these funds have taken massive, massive losses. I think that the implications have not been carefully enough considered.

What we proposed, I think, is a little different. This also addresses the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill's comment: where would the opposition cut? The real question that has to be dealt with with respect to this, Mr. Speaker, is on the revenue side. We heard today that Alberta is getting less than 50 cents a barrel in royalties on oil. This has been an issue that we have raised in the past, particularly when oil prices were extremely high. If a barrel of oil is trading at \$38 a barrel and we're getting 50 cents, then that really amounts to a minimal, minimal amount of revenue. The royalty system has to come into the discussion around savings and priorities because we are letting billions of dollars slip through our fingers that rightly belong to the people of Alberta.

The question of a tax on bitumen that was put forward by the government's own task force was rejected. The Premier called it a wellhead tax and said that it smacked of the NEP. The result was that as the two large operations in the tar sands, Syncrude and Suncor, switched to a bitumen basis for calculating their royalties, they managed to reduce the amount of royalties that they were paying to the province very, very dramatically because the government had an ideological aversion to what the Premier called a wellhead tax on bitumen.

We've seen a huge drop just in the last year in revenue that we obtain from the tar sands from two operations that were identified by Pedro van Meurs, an internationally respected consultant on oil and gas royalties, as two of the most profitable enterprises on the face of the planet. They managed to cut in half their contribution to the province that has nurtured them and helped create them. So the government has not addressed that through its attempts to renegotiate the agreements.

4:20

The other aspect that I'd like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the whole question of corporate income tax. When I was first elected, I attended a luncheon of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, and the guest speaker was the then Provincial Treasurer, Dr. Steve West. Dr. West, in his speech to the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, announced that they would be reducing the corporate income tax rate in this province from 15 per cent to 8 per cent over a period of time. He claimed that there was lots of competition from places like Ontario and other provinces that were reducing their corporate income tax. We felt that that was completely unnecessary because this is paid on profits of corporations. It's not paid by companies that are like General Motors and losing lots of money. They don't pay any of this tax. It's based on the profits of the corporations, so there's no real reason to reduce the tax in that fashion.

Now, the government has proceeded along that line with our opposition fairly continuously opposing it. They're now at about a 10 per cent effective rate on corporate taxes, so they've cut corporate taxes by a third. At the time when they made the last cut, of course, the corporations in Alberta were setting record profits, multibillion dollar profits for EnCana and Nexen and all sorts of corporations that were making enough profits in one year to run a small country, but we were reducing our take.

So the revenue side, the proportion of the economy, the GDP that is available to government to meet the priorities of the people of the

province, has been steadily shrinking as a result of this government's policies. The result is that we have a crisis in health care. According to the health minister, it's unsustainable. Well, the fact of the matter is that the economy has grown, the population has grown, and health care spending needs to keep pace with it, but in fact the government doesn't have the resources to do that because of policy decisions that they've made.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this budget doesn't reflect that. I think there are a number of problems with the budget that would lead me, on balance, to favour the amendment even though I disagree with the Liberal policy of having massive savings in cash and investments. Our preference is to create a \$20 billion green energy fund to transform the economy, make investments in research and development, and basically restructure our province's energy economy based on renewable energy before we get to the point where we can no longer sell our oil internationally because of climate change issues.

But I want to indicate that we felt this budget should have had a greater stimulus to keep people working. We think the government's projections in this budget are not sufficient. They're assuming that the economic recession will be shallow and of short duration, and the number of people who have been laid off has already well exceeded the figure used by the finance minister when she tabled her budget.

There's \$215 million in unallocated cuts. If the government's projections are not met, and I don't think they will be, they will have to find another \$2 billion of cuts. Eliminating the Wild Rose Foundation has been a really tough blow for the volunteer sector.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm really serious. We have to abide by the amendment we're playing with.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was trying to give other reasons why I would support the amendment, but I'll try to be a little bit more on task. Thank you for that.

So in terms of this amendment, the real question, I think, why I'm prepared to support this, is the failure to set adequate priorities, which is clearly part of this amendment. I don't think that the government has shown any signs that it's prepared to make up the shortfall in mental health services. I don't think the government has shown that it is setting adequate priorities with respect to long-term care beds, which play a key role not only in protecting seniors and making sure that they're well taken care of in their final years but which play a key role in solving the problem with the crisis in emergency room waiting times. If you can't move people out of emergency rooms into acute-care beds because they're occupied by long-term care patients, then you've got a real serious problem.

Mr. Speaker, there are lots of reasons why I believe that this government has not set appropriate priorities for our province in this budget. Although I'm not entirely in agreement with the Liberal opposition with respect to the need for massive savings, I do think, on balance, I am prepared to support this amendment that we not now read the budget a second time.

There's one last point I want to make in terms of setting adequate priorities and reallocating spending, and that is the over a billion dollars in deficit from the health authorities, which the government knows about but is not included in this budget, which means that the deficit is much larger than the government is prepared to admit to the people of Alberta. There's something fundamentally wrong with a budget that doesn't include all of the liabilities of the government in the coming year. That's another reason why I believe that we should support this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my comments. I'm sorry for having

strayed from the true path, but I will attempt to adhere to that in the future. Thank you very much for your patience.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Well, I'll be very brief, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said that he didn't entirely agree with the Liberal savings plan. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo said that even in the face of this recession that we're dealing with right now, he would proceed with the plan, which I take it is that 30 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenues would be put into savings. By my calculation a third of \$10.7 billion, roughly, is \$3.2 billion, which would have to come from somewhere. It would probably be roughly 30 per cent of the health care budget or 60 per cent of the education budget. Does he agree with the Liberal proposal to keep socking away money when we need to spend it in this recession?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the hon. member for that point, but I cannot be held accountable for a Liberal economic policy. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Q and C.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to the hon. member's remarks. The hon. member talked about a \$20 billion green energy fund. My question would be this: if this \$20 billion green fund was to become a reality, would there be any money from that fund allocated for carbon capture and storage projects?

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you for that question, hon. member. No. The fund would be divided in three parts. A billion dollar revolving fund to help homeowners, small businesses, and farmers as well as various government buildings to do complete retrofits in order to reduce their energy costs – and the savings could then replenish the fund; that's why we'd call it a revolving fund – would be one component.

4:30

Another component would be major investments in research and development. We would create a second Alberta Research Council but one focused entirely on renewable energy in order to make Alberta the centre and the leader in the country in terms of research and development and commercialization of renewable energy technology.

Thirdly, we would get involved in actually building and operating renewable energy projects, doing joint ventures with other provinces, the federal government, or possibly even with the private sector, and that would be how we would deal with it.

In terms of carbon capture and storage, hon. member, we think that if there's merit and value in carbon capture and storage, it is the people who are producing the massive amounts of CO₂ that needs to be captured that really ought to be the ones who are making that investment rather than the people of Alberta. We wouldn't completely reject that direction, even though it's a temporary solution, simply of land-filling, essentially, the carbon instead of reducing it, but if there is some temporary merit in doing that, then, by all

means, those who are producing the CO₂ should proceed and should pay.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, you wanted to be in on the Q and C?

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A quick question. I was listening to the hon. member's comments. What I gathered, generally, was that the hon. member would like to spend more on some very specific projects, which he spoke very eloquently about. He also referred to continuing to increase health care spending. As I understand the gist of his comments, he will be supporting the amendment because the government does not have a long-term savings plan. So I would like him to reconcile the two. If you're supporting the amendment, how do you reconcile that with spending more?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister misheard me. That's the part of the motion that I have some difficulty with, this idea that we should have these massive investments in the creation of some massive savings plan. I think it's much better to invest in transforming our economy into a renewable, energy-based economy rather than putting a whole bunch of money in the stock market, where periodically we would take a bath.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member in his presentation this afternoon on the amendment made reference to the term "tar sands," I observed, in my constituency of Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, of which I'm very proud. I wanted to share with the hon. member: did he know that the 100,000 people in my community refer to the tar sands as oil sands sweet blend? Now, it has been referred . . .

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Unfortunately, the time is expired for this moment.

Now, we're still on the amendment. Are there additional speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

The Speaker: We're back to the discussion on the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'd like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a second time]

Bill 27

Alberta Research and Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate May 6: Ms Blakeman]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, with some very genuine concerns, and the more I study this bill, the more deeply concerned

I become. I think we all understand the importance of research and innovation and the importance in every society of public support for that function. The simple fact of the matter is that private, for-profit interests do not in any great amounts support fundamental research, basic research, into issues simply because the timelines are so long and the risks are so high.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If you're doing basic research, you don't really know where it's going to take you, whether it will lead to anything that can be commercialized, whether it will lead to any clear results at all. That doesn't mean it isn't important. It's the foundation for applied research, commercialization and so on. Certainly, there are companies in the world that do support basic research, but I think everybody paying attention in Canada, the United States, the western world, India, China, wherever you go, understands that there's a very significant role of the public sector in supporting research.

Alberta has a pretty good track record in this. The Alberta Research Council was established many, many decades ago, and the University of Alberta was established now over a hundred years ago. They have both had long legacies in research. In fact, the Alberta Research Council was kind of a spinoff, as I recall, of the University of Alberta, and it was in part to help in the very early days, some 70 years ago or so, in research into the oil sands, or the tar sands, whichever you want to call them.

Alberta has a long history in supporting research, and that history was advanced significantly in the late 1970s by some decisions of the government of the day to establish, in particular, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, which has created, I think it's fair to say, an international, even a global reputation for backing good research. Since that time, more recently using roughly the same model as the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, we've seen parallel research funds set up on sciences, on engineering, precious little on anything relating to the liberal arts, but hope springs eternal, and maybe that'll come some day.

That's all background, Mr. Speaker, for this bill. I lay out that background because I think research is important, I think that public support for research is vital, and frankly I think that the future of this province depends on our success in areas like this. I have said this many, many times, that 50 years from now I don't believe that Alberta is going to have an oil and gas economy. I think if we're flourishing, it will be because of advances that none of us can foresee. So I'm a big supporter of public funding for research, and in the last two general elections, at least for us in the Alberta Liberals, increasing public support for research has been a core part of our platform.

All of that is background, and with that, you might think that I would be delighted with Bill 27. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the more I consider this bill and the more I look at the background documents to it, the deeper are my concerns. What we foresee in this bill is a terrific centralization of control, a centralization of control over Alberta's research sector. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. I'm not a lifelong Liberal actually, but maybe my principles are lifelong that way because the liberal in me, the small "l" liberal and the big "L" Liberal, is pretty unnerved by the tendency of this government in many, many sectors to centralize.

4:40

In the last year we've seen nothing less than a breathtaking centralization of control over the health system. All the regional health authorities were dissolved; the Alberta Cancer Board, which was a wonderfully respected organization, dissolved; AADAC,

dissolved. All brought into one central system. We've certainly seen a centralization of the school boards over the last 15 years. We see a centralization in all kinds of areas, and it's now to the point where the Premier issues mandate letters to his ministers and is expected to follow all the way down the line. Of course, there's a logic to that, Mr. Speaker, but I think when it's carried too far, it becomes a misguided logic. I actually am a small "I" liberal in the sense of believing in the liberties of people, believing in the importance of freedom and freethinking and believing in the long term that society's interests are best served when people are able to think freely and to act freely.

Certainly, there are clear economic foundations and philosophical foundations recognizing that there are limits to freedom and that there are areas in economics where as a society and even as individuals we're better off to have a fairly centralized system or to have a non market-based system. But when it comes to ideas, Mr. Speaker, I think freedom is absolutely vital, and my concern with this bill is that this leads to a curtailment of freedom; this leads to a centralization of control that is actually quite alarming.

I would urge all members, as they look at this piece of legislation, to read some of the background documents that are connected to it. I draw their attention, for example, to a document dated November 4, 2008, just six months ago: Alberta Education and Technology, Roles and Mandates Framework for Alberta's Provincially Funded Research and Innovation System. The subtitle is Focusing and Accelerating Innovation.

Mr. Speaker, I think there's a genuine risk that this bill will actually do the exact opposite of what it's intended to achieve. As you read through the document, you can see that what this does is ultimately centralize control over ideas and research and innovation in the hands of a very few people, and that span of control is immense. It will span research into medical issues. It'll span research into engineering issues. It'll span research into biological and life sciences issues and a whole host of other areas.

If you actually turn to page 6 of this roles and mandates framework, put out by the government six months ago, you come to a paragraph subtitled Clear, Long Term Vision. I want to read this into the record, Mr. Speaker, so I'm going to quote this entire paragraph. It's only one long sentence.

Clear, long term vision: Alberta's provincially funded research and innovation system has a long term vision (as set by the Premier) . . .

I want to emphasize that: as set by the Premier.

. . . which focuses and aligns the work of each component of the system and ensures all stakeholders are working towards the same goal.

I don't want to be overdramatic here, Mr. Speaker, but that's a frightening sentence. What this erects is a system of control focused in the hands explicitly of the Premier. It's a kind of totalitarianism of ideas, and I'm not prone to that sort of language unnecessarily. But what the heck is going on here when we are bringing in a piece of legislation that overtly is built on a sentence that says that Alberta's provincially funded research and innovation system has a long-term vision as set by the Premier? I don't care if the Premier is the current one, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, or the next one, maybe the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, or it might be the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Who knows? I think it's wrong and dangerous to have the hands of one person controlling such a span of research funding. Now, there will be those who would say that I'm being alarmist. There will be those who'd say: "Well, it's only the Premier in name, and everybody knows the Premier takes advice. It'll really be the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or it'll be stakeholders." Whatever. It's down here, Mr. Speaker, in black and white.

The paragraph before that isn't really much more reassuring. Again I'm on page 6 of the November document put out by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. I'm going to read it into the record as well.

Government Leadership: The Government of Alberta develop value added and knowledge based industries that support the diversification of the Alberta economy, utilizing research and innovation as key building blocks in turning this commitment into action. The Government of Alberta shows leadership by ensuring the stakeholders are clear about their roles, mandates and linkages within the research and innovation system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, any thinking person, any person with genuine experience in how innovation and research work should be deeply concerned about that.

Let's just take apart that sentence for a brief moment. It starts off by saying, "The Government of Alberta develop value added and knowledge based industries." Well, let's ask ourselves: is that what we want a government to be doing? Do we want the government to develop industries? Isn't that taking us right back to where we were 20 years ago when we had a government developing industries, investing in MagCan, magnesium refinement, south of Calgary and in Gainers and in NovAtel? And it seems to me there was a laser research company, GSR, General Systems Research, something to that effect. Are we turning the clock back to that point? Are we actually saying here – and we are – that the government of Alberta develop? It doesn't say invest in research that will stimulate the development, or it doesn't say will partner in development. There's no equivocation here at all: "The Government of Alberta develop value added and knowledge based industries." That's the path to ruin.

You know what I find happening? The feeling that's developing for me, Mr. Speaker, is that we're back to the very same mindset of the mid-80s when we had a government beginning to get us into debt and deficit, a government beginning to get us into the business of being in business, a government playing all kinds of games, that ultimately led us into a crisis and wasted staggering billions of dollars.

That's just the first phrase of that sentence. Then we have the classic Alberta clause all of us have used: "support the diversification of the Alberta economy." Well, of course, we all want to support the diversification of the Alberta economy, but my personal view is that this isn't the way to do it. But then the sentence continues: "utilizing research and innovation as key building blocks in turning this commitment into action." If we look at this seriously, "The Government of Alberta develop value added and knowledge based industries . . . utilizing research and innovation as key building blocks in turning this commitment into action."

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was listening with great interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I realize that the time expired. I'm so interested. Could you please proceed?

4:50

Dr. Taft: I would be thrilled to proceed. I just want to continue on this one paragraph, Mr. Speaker.

We have the government of Alberta developing value-added and knowledge-based industries utilizing research and innovation as key building blocks in turning this commitment into action. I cannot imagine a more interventionist statement from this government or

any other government this side, maybe, of Beijing. I don't know where. We have here a mandate and a government document about to be supported in legislation that just sweeps away all the lessons that so much of the world has learned in the last 20 years, that innovation comes up from the bottom, that innovation is something that percolates, that innovation happens in unexpected ways, and that government should not be in the business of business. Here we have government lock, stock, and barrel getting right back into the business of business.

Now, I know time is short at this point, but I just want to go through the last sentence of that paragraph I read into the record: "The Government of Alberta shows leadership by ensuring the stakeholders are clear about their roles, mandates and linkages within the research and innovation system." Listen to this. The government of Alberta ensures the stakeholders – in other words, those doing the research – are clear about their roles. What are we doing here? Do we have somebody at the beck and call of the Premier or somebody in some senior civil servant's office saying: your role is to research X and lead to innovation, and your role is to research Y, and somebody else's role is to research Z. Mr. Speaker, it's not how innovation works. It doesn't come from the top down.

I cannot imagine a more heavy-handed, interventionist, anticreative approach to research and innovation than what's being proposed in this framework. And I can hear all the arguments that'll come back: "Well, do you want chaos?" You know what? Chaos is a lot more creative than what's being proposed here. "Do you want people confused about their roles and their mandates?" Well, if we're talking about innovation, sometimes that's exactly what it takes. We need fermentation. We need the kinds of things that the hard lessons of other places should have taught us and our own history should have taught us. We need a creative class, and we don't get a creative class by the Premier giving mandate letters out to match his vision and then giving the orders down with clear roles and mandates to all these researchers. That ain't gonna work. That ain't gonna work, Mr. Speaker.

We've turned the clock back here. We're putting way too much control in the hands of far too few people. It's politically and culturally frightening, and it's economically backwards. It's intellectually misguided, at least. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if we're out there trying to attract the best and the brightest to this province, if we want the best and the brightest youth to stay here, and they have to deal with a system that tells them, "Well, the senior bureaucrat says your role is this," they're going to go somewhere else. They're going to go to a place where they're given the creative mandate and the resources to say, "Think, experiment, innovate, and come back to us and see what you've got."

You know, the lessons of history are so clear. Nobody told Albert Einstein: go out, Mr. Einstein, and innovate something on physics, and report back. That's not how it works. Nobody told Steve Jobs: go out, Steve, and invent the personal computer. You know how he did that? He did that in his garage as a 19-year-old. On and on it goes.

This is nuts. This is misguided craziness, Mr. Speaker, so you can bet we're not going to support this. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act. Research and innovation are integral to the growth of many sectors across the province, and it is important that this government leads the way in research excellence. The purpose of this act is to

promote and support the strategic and effective use of provincial resources to help meet the government's research and innovation priorities.

Mr. Speaker, the roles and mandates of all provincially funded research bodies have undergone extensive evaluation over the past year. As a result, a roles and mandates framework for Alberta's provincially funded research and innovation system has been created. This new framework reconfigures the current research and innovation system. It is designed to reduce complexity, facilitate access and transparency, and ensure that resources are used effectively.

I would like to highlight the structure of the new research and innovation framework in Alberta, including the new research authority committees and research entities. First, the Alberta research and innovation authority will provide advice and recommendations on research and innovation matters to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology in areas such as strategy, policy and long-term planning, identification of strategic opportunities in research and innovation, and monitoring of overall performance.

The act will clarify the duties of the Alberta research and innovation authority and help support the roles and mandates framework. It will also reflect recommendations made by an international review panel of the Alberta Science and Research Authority in 2007. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the minister will be able to make regulations relating to the Alberta Science and Research Authority, allowing for adjustments as the research and innovation system evolves.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act will create two advisory committees similar to the Campus Alberta Strategic Directions Committee, established within the Post-secondary Learning Act. The first of these, the Alberta research and innovation committee, will provide advice to the minister relating to the coordination of mandates and roles and activities and initiatives of the provincial research entities that will be established under the act. This committee will link the provincial entities and assist the minister in aligning the framework's priorities.

The second committee created, Mr. Speaker, will be the cross-government portfolio advisory committee. This committee will provide advice and recommendations on funding matters related to the new provincial entities created under the act. This advisory committee will provide an opportunity for ministries interested in research and innovation to review research plans and provide advice to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Speaker, the Research and Innovation Act will provide a legislative structure for the implementation of the roles and mandates framework and will establish a number of new provincial research and innovation entities. These entities will have clear roles and mandates and will be consolidated from existing organizations funded by the government of Alberta. Ultimately, these new provincial entities will build on the success of the current research and innovation groups.

Four research entities are currently being contemplated and will focus on research and innovation matters in the areas of bioindustries, focused on strategic agriculture, forestry, and other life sciences; energy and the environment, focused on strategic energy and the environment; health, focused on strategic health; and commercial development, focused on assisting companies and entrepreneurs through technical support and enhancement through technology commercialization. Existing entities and their functions will be merged and/or reorganized to support a more aligned and integrated research and innovation framework.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, existing entities that will merge or reorganize include the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Life Sciences Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the Alberta Research Council, and iCORE. These entities and the others that fall under the current research structure had significant impacts on the province. However, by merging and reorganizing them, it will increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

The Alberta Research and Innovation Act simplifies the process for both creating new provincial entities and dissolving them as the need may arise, which as a result builds responsiveness into the system. Additionally, it allows for flexibility in both broad structure and corporate objectives, which will allow them to better meet the needs of the system and its participants. These new provincial entities will provide opportunities for government ministries to achieve their research and innovation objectives with defined outcomes. This act will provide the model for the implementation of the roles and mandates framework that will in turn help foster a diversified economy. Additionally, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act will support the development of a research and innovation environment that is focused, integrated, and aligned.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like at this point to just mention that there have been some members in the House that have spoken about rumours in the Assembly such that there will be no fall competition for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research funding and comments questioning our commitment to our scientific foundation. There has been absolutely no announcement toward that end. Alberta is building upon an excellent science base, and we continue to be a jurisdiction where researchers want to come because of the excellent people and infrastructure already in place. It is a detriment to all of the excellent scientists and researchers we have in Alberta to imply otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 27 is about making our world-class research and innovation system stronger and even more attractive to researchers both here and internationally. I strongly support Bill 27, and I urge all members to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. To the Member for Calgary-Montrose: does he genuinely believe that a highly centralized research-financing organization like this, with ultimately very explicit, clear political control in the hands of the Premier and cabinet, is the best way to stimulate innovation? Does he think that that's how innovation erupted in California or in, you know, the Boston area or anywhere else? Is that really what he believes? If it is, could he give me some evidence to support it?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Well, you know, it makes it a bit difficult to hear when you have hecklers on the other side who constantly speak about the need for government to be a mechanism of effectiveness. On any given day in question period or whatever other mechanism they have in this Assembly, members opposite speak about spending, and members opposite speak about saving. We realize that there is great potential for us to be international leaders in research and innovation. We are international leaders on many fronts already. Now the time is upon us

when we can better align our system so that we are more effective, so that instead of having a wide range of organizations each doing their own little pieces, we can be more effective and co-ordinated with provincial resources. Provincial resources are, obviously, not infinite. I mean, the province, just like any family or any business, has a defined amount of resources that we can put into any given area.

What we're trying to do is make sure that we get the best possible return by being strategic and by being more aligned, to make sure that we've identified areas where we feel that we will be international leaders, Mr. Speaker, in research, whether that be in the bioindustries, energy and the environment, or health. I mean, Alberta today is recognized as being a foremost producer of research in these areas and commercializing these technologies here in our province. One only needs to look at our nanotechnology research. It is an international leader. There are so many exciting things coming out of Alberta in our research and innovation system.

Mr. Speaker, aligning our system so that the overall priorities of society, of government can be more aligned ensures that we really are strategic and that we're best using our resources to produce results that will perhaps help us in health care and help us in solving the problems of modern disease and help to ensure that we bring those solutions to market in Alberta as well.

I think that for far too long we've had a system that has done very well in the respective areas. There's absolutely no doubt that we have organizations and institutes that have done tremendous, tremendous, tremendous work and provided Alberta with a wonderful reputation internationally for the research they've done. Now, Mr. Speaker, it's time to rise up and go to a new level. That's what we're speaking about here. It's time to step up and go from A to B and show everybody internationally that Alberta is the place where the brightest minds come together with the support of such a progressive government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to very quickly go from the nanny state, as recommended by Calgary-Montrose, a total, centralized control, to nanotechnology. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out the wonderful contributions and the origins of research through the University of Alberta, that's celebrating its hundredth year. I want to very quickly wave a flag in the direction of the University of Calgary, that was formerly under the auspices of the University of Alberta. We have been doing wonderful work for 42 years as an independent institution.

With regard to the nanotechnology reference that I made, the surgical arm, the robotic arm that is so precise and can be controlled from thousands of miles away in terms of doing surgery, is just one of the phenomenal inventions that has come out of the University of Calgary, no doubt collaborating with the University of Alberta.

One of the fantastic research organizations associated with the University of Calgary is the institute for sustainable environment and economy. Experiential learning gets thrown in there once in a while as well. This institute is responsible for terrific developments. It is working in terms of projects on sequestration. It's working on converting electrical-generated wind power into a compressed form of energy which can then be brought on demand and added to the grid.

5:10

I want to point out that right across from the university we have a wonderful research park with facilities such as Alastair Ross. Most recently we celebrated the opening of the new Smart Technologies.

I believe that the majority of the government's investment should be directed towards our own postsecondary institutions. There's no doubt that innovation and technology are going to lead us into the future and take us from our current dependency on nonrenewable resources, so while we have the nonrenewable resources, let's use the money as investments in our postsecondary systems.

With that, I would like to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

**Bill 45
Electoral Boundaries Commission
Amendment Act, 2009**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to move second reading of Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009.

This legislation will help government keep pace with Alberta's growing and changing population. Under the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act an Electoral Boundaries Commission must be appointed to review existing electoral boundaries and make proposals for change where appropriate. Right now the act requires an Electoral Boundaries Commission to be appointed no earlier than March 25, 2010. Amendments in Bill 45 will move up the date to establish a commission to no later than July 31, 2009.

The commission has a year to conduct public hearings and do its research, and then it must provide a report to the Speaker with recommendations as to where electoral boundaries should be located. Mr. Speaker, this time frame will not change. Regardless of changes to the legislation, the commission has one year to report. Appointing the commission earlier will, however, allow the commission's recommendations to be reviewed, debated, and adjusted by this Legislative Assembly well in advance of the next provincial election.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act also requires the commission to submit a report that divides Alberta currently into 83 proposed electoral divisions. Bill 45 will direct the commission to divide Alberta into 87 proposed electoral divisions. This increase of four divisions recognizes that Alberta's population has increased by more than 1 million people since the last time the number of electoral divisions was changed. Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I was quite surprised to see that that was almost 20 years ago. Alberta has changed an awful lot since then. The amendment will help ensure that Albertans from all areas of the province are being represented in this House fairly, equitably, and effectively.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments in Bill 45 will also expand the information that the commission can use in its population calculations. The commission will be able to consider more recent population information along with Statistics Canada census information in its population calculations if the commission feels the information is reliable and helpful.

The final amendment, Mr. Speaker, relates to what have been referred to as special electoral districts. Generally speaking, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act says that the population of a proposed electoral division must not vary from the provincial average by more than 25 per cent. However, to recognize that some parts of our province are particularly remote or may be sparsely populated, something our caucus is quite familiar with, the act allows for there to be a maximum of four electoral districts with a

population of as much as 50 per cent below the average. To be eligible as a special electoral district, the proposed electoral district must meet certain criteria that are listed in the act, 3 out of a list of 5 criteria, Mr. Speaker. One factor that the commission may consider in determining whether to propose the creation of one of these special electoral districts relates to the size of towns in that area. For that factor Bill 45 increases the maximum size of a town in a special electoral district from 4,000 to 8,000 people. This also recognizes that the size of some of Alberta's small towns, even in remote and sparsely populated areas, may have increased over the last few years. Changes to the Electoral Boundaries Commission will help to ensure that political representation reflects the changing population of the province and that these changes are put in place in a timely and responsible fashion.

I'd also like to add, Mr. Speaker, that one point that is part of the current act and will continue to be part of the act after these amendments is that the commission will be supported by the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, so there is dialogue between the Chief Electoral Officer and the commission with respect to the planning of the boundaries.

I encourage all of my hon. colleagues to support Bill 45, and I look forward to hearing and participating in the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009. If you look through that, much of the object of the act, as explained by the hon. Minister of Justice, was that we are essentially changing the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act to reflect that they are adding four more seats to this province's democratic Legislature. I guess that, on its face, is the most obvious move. There are also some other things which I will speak to later on the act.

If we look at that first move, which is to increase the number of MLAs currently sitting in this Legislature, I guess one can say that, well, yes, Alberta has increased by, I believe the hon. minister said, a million people since the last time this act was drawn up some time ago. But I guess if you look at it more, what's happened in that time since the electoral act was redrawn, what has happened sort of outside the framework of the adding of those million people, what has really happened in society has been the advent of our ability to communicate, to be able to talk to one another with computer technology. Whether it's cellular phone technology or other types of technology, it allows us to communicate in a much more effective fashion than we at one time did.

For instance, you know, I just stepped out of here about 15 minutes ago, called my constituency office. They told me that a gentleman had called into the office and wanted to talk to me about X. I actually called that guy back, and lo and behold, no one missed me in that time I was gone.

Mr. MacDonald: I did.

Mr. Hehr: Well, yes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar may have missed me.

But what I think that story points out is that, yes, we haven't only added a significant amount of population, but we've added such a different component to our technology that there is simply no need for an addition of four more MLAs to this House for that primary reason, that we simply can do the work ourselves.

For instance, it's not only because it's my constituency of

Calgary-Buffalo, but I would suggest that I have a fairly busy constituency office. In Calgary-Buffalo I have a large percentage of people who are not only renters but people who would be considered far below the average, I guess, wage earning here in Alberta. I think if you also look in Calgary-Buffalo, we also have a significant number of recent immigrants who have come into the province. They live right downtown in Calgary.

5:20

Often, if you look at these two groups, although they're not the only ones who've used services of their MLA – other groups do, too – they use their MLAs probably disproportionately more than other groups. If I can handle the number of, I guess, people who come into my office and, I believe, effectively serve them – I believe that if you talk to them, they are effectively served by me and the hiring of two staff members – well, then I think it's fair enough that, you know, we can all do it. In fact, if we got added a few more constituents to my riding, I would feel safe in saying that we could handle their needs, too, at my office. I don't know. Maybe some other members would like to speak about their constituency offices. Maybe they're coming unglued at the hinges, but I would doubt that that is the case.

Anyways, my point is that if we look back to what debates were just happening, I guess the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill was asking: what would you guys cut from the budget? Well, here's one thing I wouldn't add to the budget, okay? Here's one thing I wouldn't add to the budget: another four MLAs to come here and, I guess – although we do do important jobs. I'm not minimizing what we do here. It is important and all of that stuff. Nevertheless, if you want to know what I would cut, that's a little more difficult because you don't open up the books. But I wouldn't add this.

You know why? Just some simple math tells me. I looked at the Legislative Assembly Offices, and it costs, I believe – and someone can correct me – \$53 million or \$51 million a year for us 83 members to sit in here. If you divide that number by, I believe, all 83 of us, times it by four years, you'll get roughly \$10 million for four MLAs to sit here for an average of a four-year term. If you look at that, I don't think that's an expense that the state or the Legislature, the people of Alberta need to undertake at this time. It's simply unnecessary.

I'd like us to all roll up our sleeves and do a little more work here and handle a few more calls, maybe, instead of buying a pin for someone to go on a trip to, say, some foreign jurisdiction and hand out Alberta pins that maybe some members are paying for out of their offices – I don't know – or some other things like that, maybe one less silent auction item. Don't get me wrong; I've provided a silent auction item as well from time to time. But all I'm saying is that it's just that we can all do a little more work in our constituency associations, possibly hire another person, and handle everyone's concerns. I don't think we need another four MLAs.

In fact, the hon. leader of our party, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, has been so bold as to suggest that we need another four MLAs like we need a hole in the head. That's not really language you would use, but he did use it.

An Hon. Member: Shocking.

Mr. Hehr: Shocking, yes. If you talk about shocking, that was actually shocking when that was said. I believe I said we need another four MLAs like a dog needs more fleas. Actually, when I went home to discuss this with my father, he said: well, the Legislature needs another four MLAs like the hon. Member for Calgary-

Buffalo needs a doughnut. I thought that was a little bit mean of my father, but he can be like that sometimes. Nonetheless, I think the point is being made. There are lots of these things – we can keep on going – that are kind of funny and euphemisms for, I guess, things people don't need or what Alberta citizens don't need at this time. What they don't need is a greater expense for maybe what we can all do here more efficiently by the use of technology and that sort of stuff.

Moving on to, I guess, some other portions of the bill, I was encouraged to hear that the commission when it's established can use even more updated information from the 2006 census. I don't know if that information will be available or out there, but I think that's another recognition that maybe there is technology out there that will allow us to find out what the true population of Alberta is and where people are located in this province and allow us to do even a more up-to-date finding out how many people need to be here.

I think there is one question, and I might as well ask it now. It'll probably go back to my office, or possibly the hon. Minister of Justice is here right now, and she could probably answer this later on or possibly even later today or something like that. I know we're allowed to have now four, I believe, ridings outside of 50 per cent of the population. I believe that's what that is.

Mr. MacDonald: It's 25 per cent.

Mr. Hehr: No. I believe this amendment has changed it now to be 50 per cent of the people. If we just take a couple of seconds, I'll grab that. I believe it says four ridings outside of 50 per cent of what the average is. I believe this is a change from what it used to be, from being 25 per cent outside of the riding. If that has been a change – and I'm not sure if it is – if the hon. Minister of Justice could explain how it differs from what was there before. I do have some possible concerns about that. If that could be addressed, maybe those concerns could be relieved.

Nonetheless, I think this is one of those bills that will probably address some of the things that have changed in Alberta society. Primarily, we are no longer a rural society. Most of our people have gone to the cities or outlying areas of cities, bedroom communities, that sort of thing. We're no longer an agricultural or rural-based society. I think this Electoral Boundaries Commission will have a lot of work to do in recognizing that the vast majority of our citizens are living in cities. I believe probably 70 per cent, possibly 71 per cent at this time. The electoral map has to reflect that. I think this Assembly should reflect that. I think some of the decisions we make in here will be significantly impacted by a more realistic drawing of an electoral map that actually reflects where our population resides.

I look forward to this commission being drawn, hopefully, recognizing some of those things. Going back to my first point, let's recognize that we are in a time of constraint. I will most likely be putting forward an amendment later on, just to give the hon. members of the government a heads-up, so they can maybe think about this, that maybe this commission can do their job with redrawing the electoral map if there are only 83 members in it. I think that's something to think about. Let's show them that we can roll up our own sleeves here in difficult times and take some more calls. Let's get the Alberta SuperNet up and working in different places and all that stuff.

5:30

Nevertheless, I think those are my comments, and of course I'll have more at different time periods. I appreciate being given the opportunity to speak. I may go have a doughnut right now.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright on the bill.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments. I hadn't really planned on speaking to this, but I do have to point out a few observations. I know that the hon. member talked about the cities being where the population resides, but there has to be some consideration given sometimes at some point to where our food resides and where our oil and gas reside and where all the people who produce those things that get funneled into the city reside. I know that the majority of the population continues to urbanize – the whole globe continues to urbanize – but somewhere we have got to establish a balance.

I know that technology will provide some of those solutions. I mean, for some reason some of the newspapers in this province keep commenting on how well I utilize technology to talk to constituents. I don't know that I'm the best one, but I do the best I can. But you have to understand that in rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker, people don't just want to see you on a video screen or over the phone. Every one of my constituents, all 34,000 that live there, don't call me Mr. Griffiths; they call me Doug. They ask me how my wife and kids are doing. They ask me, you know, how my garden is growing and how the lawn is growing. They talk to me as though I'm a member of each and every one of the communities.

You have to understand that in my constituency of Battle River-Wainwright, Mr. Speaker, there are 32 different communities, there are five different county and MD councils, and then there are all the elected school boards that I have to represent. All of these people are only represented by me. It's not an urban centre, where there are two school boards or one city council that is represented by 20 urban MLAs. This is 43 different elected bodies combined that are only represented by me, and every single one of them expects to see me every couple of months to sit down and talk about the issues, not over the phone but right there, face to face. On top of that, in each of those 32 communities there are parades, there are fairs, there are rodeos, there are all the graduations, there are all the fundraising events plus every other event that goes on that for some reason everybody always expects me to be there for.

There are typically only two opinions, Mr. Speaker, in my constituency. Either people come up and say, "I can't believe you can actually maintain a presence regularly in each of your 32 communities and get around to see the councils and attend all of those events," or people don't understand that I have all of the constituency issues to deal with. We're up here, two hours from my constituency, with all of the committee work, the parliamentary assistant duties that I have, and the time that we spend in this Legislature, and they wonder how I can even make it. Or, as I said, because they don't understand how many committee meetings we have, how much work goes into the budget, how much time we actually spend up here, they ask me: why aren't you attending every single thing?

I actually had one of my constituents come up to me at a fundraising event in one of the larger communities in my constituency, walked up to me and said: you weren't at the graduation ceremony; why weren't you? She was very upset. I said: well, between my parliamentary assistant duties, the committee duties that I have, the time we spend in the Legislature, the fact that we've been working on the budget, the fact that I have 32 communities to represent, and I try to sometimes squeeze in some time with my wife and sons, I may not have had an event that Saturday night, but I might have chosen, actually, to put my two boys to bed after I gave them a bath and kissed them goodnight. She looked aghast. She suddenly

realized that she had no idea about the amount of work that goes on up here, how much time we spend up here.

Mr. Speaker, I've talked to a lot of people in my constituency. We spend time historically in this province and across western Canada talking about how in the eastern provinces we sometimes think that Ontario and Quebec or Ottawa and Toronto are the centre of the universe. They have so much of the population, and we don't get a voice out here, where we produce so much of the natural resources. I've suggested that perhaps we should take the 83 MLAs and divide them in half and have half of them always based on population and half of them on sort of a grid cut out of the province. It doesn't matter whether four people live there and all the oil is there or a hundred thousand people are there and there's no oil there, it never changes. So we'd have balance in this House between the regions where our resources are and people work hard to produce them and where the population lives. We've complained a lot in this province, across western Canada, about how we face the same situation and we need a triple-E Senate in Canada, but we don't model it here in the province.

I know that people talk about equal representation, one person, one vote or one person, one representative, so that we all should represent about 40,000 people. But, Mr. Speaker, somewhere within the consideration of the courts and within this Assembly there has got to be consideration given for fair representation, where 21 MLAs in the city who represent one city council, two school boards, and one health authority, who may have a lot of work – I'm not saying that they don't have a lot of work – have to be balanced with an MLA that lives in rural Alberta, where it takes two hours to go from one corner of the constituency to the other, and has 32 communities to represent, 43 different elected bodies. There has to be some consideration, some balance given to that.

Although I would still like to see deeper democratic discussions had about whether or not we could split the House between 42 MLAs based on population and 41 based on regions or maybe split into two Houses – I don't know – some really deep, back to the very beginning philosophical discussions about democracy, there is no way that I would not support something that will add more MLAs to make sure that rural MLAs aren't taxed more with more communities, more disparity, and less voice in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank the hon. member for his questions. I'll make some brief comments, and then maybe he can answer sort of from my comments and generalize where I'm going.

I heard his comments on the fact that something has to represent where our oil comes from and where our wheat comes from and all that sort of stuff. But the simple fact of the matter is: that stuff doesn't vote. That stuff is not what we represent. We don't represent oil that comes out of the ground. We don't represent wheat. We represent people, okay? Those are the people who cast their ballots and who actually go to the polls and actually talk to an MLA. It's called representation by population, and that is the primary goal along with effective representation. I do know that that is a portion of it, but I think that you can do effective representation. And that's what we owe our citizens: effective representation.

I don't know if you have to be at every graduation. I'm not at every graduation in my community although I think people know I get around to a fairly significant number of events in my community and don't say that I'm not able to be seen on the streets. There are

certain things that have to, I guess, come first, and I believe effective representation can be given to the technology devices that are available, that people have an ability to get a hold of you and that you can be accountable through these things. Just simply put, that's sort of where my feelings are.

I guess we all have our own feelings on this. People are in my office all the time who can't speak the language. We go our extra mile to try and help this, that, and the other thing, so I know the challenges.

Anyways, I'm starting to ramble. I'll pass it on as just sort of a general comment, plus I'll give you a chance to comment back.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't meaning – and I'm sure the member understands – that his job is easier than mine because I have different groups to represent or so many different communities. But there tend to be different mindsets that occur in the city as opposed to rural Alberta.

5:40

One of the great principles of democracy that we always discuss is that you have to prevent a tyranny of the majority. Democracy is great. Democracy is fundamental. But somewhere when you have a vote of 51 per cent or 80 per cent for something and 49 per cent or 20 per cent opposed – democracy has to be a fundamental principle, but you cannot allow 80 per cent of the population to dominate 20 per cent of the population because you could undermine the very fabric of the democracy if you don't prevent a tyranny of the majority.

I meet people in the city who sometimes talk about the environment. It's very important to them. It's very important to rural Albertans, too. But there are fundamentally different ideas about what protecting the environment means to rural Albertans and urban Albertans. I have a cousin in the city of Calgary who talks a lot about the environment and the need to shut down the oil sands, not realizing that this isn't just providing oil and gas; it's providing plastics and diapers and so many other fundamental things in our lives. Rural Albertans have a different understanding. They're not destroying the environment by growing wheat. So if you suddenly give too much influence and power to urban Alberta to the detriment of rural Alberta, where it doesn't have a fair and balanced voice, you could wind up undermining all that very success that you're trying to achieve.

I appreciate the member's one person, one vote and that those resources don't vote, but somewhere, Mr. Speaker, you have to make sure that those voices are significant enough and balanced enough against the majority so that you prevent a tyranny. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Just within the five minute period I want to put it on the record that over here we know all about tyranny of the majority. Beyond a doubt. In terms of responsibility, try being an opposition member and having a number of portfolios. I realize that we're not in the position of the NDs, but there's a struggle involved. I just wondered if part of the solution that you might envisage would be a form of proportional representation.

Mr. Griffiths: I know that time is short. Very briefly, it really depends on how it's formulated because right now the 34,000 people in my constituency come to me knowing that I represent them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: On the bill, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take advantage of the Minister of Justice being here. I regret to say I missed some of her introductory comments because I was just in a commitment outside. I will keep my comments fairly brief.

I listened with sympathy to the comments from the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, and I know that's a huge, spread out, sparsely populated constituency. It is a complicated issue. I do think there is a case to be made, actually, for fewer seats. I sometimes wonder why there needs to be 83 of us here and if a lot of things government gets into perhaps unnecessarily or just because there are make-work projects for MLAs, but I won't prolong that.

I know it's limited debate, but if I were to take my seat and open the opportunity under 29(2)(a) for the Minister of Justice to just go through again – I think she might have done this once before – the variations from the mean that are proposed here, plus or minus 25 per cent, minus 50 per cent, that sort of thing. I know that will probably come up in committee, but can the minister take a moment to elucidate the approach of this bill on that particular issue? No? I don't read sign language, but I take it that was a no. At the next stage. Okay. All right. I just thought we could be innovative under 29(2)(a).

Well, I acknowledge this is an important bill. It affects every one of us. There's a good chance that any number of us won't have constituencies to represent after this commission is done its work. I must say it's a concern of mine. I'm concerned that Edmonton-Riverview will actually get dismantled through this process because of political reasons. However, I'll wait and see. It could happen. It was attempted last time. I should get it on the record that all the submissions last time around concerning my constituency from the Progressive Conservative constituency associations in southwest Edmonton advocated dismantling Edmonton-Riverview, and I think there'll be an even stronger move to that next time.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, I won't prolong the debate in terms of fewer seats, but I actually think it would be a really refreshing idea to consider. I think we all get carried away with the importance of our jobs. We're all busy. We could all go 24 hours a day because we all know that people expect us at their graduations, or there are homeless people, there are receptions, there are 100th birthday parties, all of that stuff. But at some point we just have to say: enough. City councillors do it with far larger populations. Members of Parliament do it with far larger populations. I think that would be an interesting debate. I wouldn't win it, so I won't prolong it. I do, however, hope that we can keep the number of MLAs to 83 because I actually don't think we need to be adding more politicians to the social-political fabric of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions and comment. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the comments from the opposition and from the government side of the House with interest. I wanted to first say that I think that the nature of what we do in this House, even though we all probably as members have a different take on it, inherently comes from an understanding and an abiding faith that what our constituents have elected us to do is to represent them.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that from the work I have done and I think other people have done in this House, not only in their current

careers in life but in terms of work around the world, I truly do believe that there is no replacement for standing face to face with someone and listening to what their concerns might be. I know that there is much celebration of technology and much celebration of finding other ways to do things, but it has always been to me in my life experience and the case in my life that it is very difficult to substitute that direct conversation because people will share things with you in person that they will not share with you by e-mail or by phone.

I believe that it is a fundamental piece of what we have to do in this House, all kidding aside as to how many people represent us or whether we may or may not think that people effectively represent in some joking manner. But when you're standing face to face with someone and you're seeing where they live and how they live and what their day was like and what it's going to be like tomorrow, there is nothing that can replace that. So I would ask the member under 29(2)(a) to perhaps comment on that.

With respect to the 25 per cent question which has come up – and there have been some queries about that – there was reference in my opening comments to 25 per cent and 50 per cent. The 25 per cent reference was with respect to no constituency in the province having either more or less than 25 per cent of the mean average of people in a constituency so that you don't see tremendous deviations in that, with the exception of the special electoral districts, which do have a set of criteria attached to the legislation that would allow for exceptions beyond 25 per cent. So I hope that that may clarify to some extent, because two 25s add up to 50, so people sometimes confuse the issues. They are actually separate issues, and it's about ensuring consistency across the province with that one exception, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. On the bill, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: In the time available, for questions and comment.

Mr. MacDonald: No. I just wish to participate in the debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Does anybody wish to join the questions and comments? We still have one or two minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

5:50

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Bill 45 is interesting. We could wait before we proceed with this commission, but for reasons known to themselves, the government has decided that now is the time. With this bill, of course, we are proposing another boundaries commission to be established no later than the middle of the summer. We're going to have the five-member commission prepare recommendations to divide our province into 87 proposed provincial electoral divisions, an increase of four divisions, or four constituencies.

Well, certainly, I have listened to the discussion to date. Since we increased the size of the Legislative Assembly to 83 seats, there has been a significant change in how information is exchanged whether it's between individuals or between an elected representative and their constituency. There has been significant improvement. Some days when I look at my e-mail and there are dozens and dozens of e-

mails, I doubt that, but overall the electronic age has certainly made it much easier for each and every representative to have a dialogue with their constituents. For that reason and that reason alone I don't think it's necessary that we increase the size of the Legislative Assembly by four seats.

I certainly think that there should be a fair redistribution. The hon. member across the way talked about urban, rural areas, and there are sparsely populated areas. We all know that Alberta was one of the areas of Canada that was slow to urbanize, or change from rural to urban. Now we see the dramatic growth in Edmonton and Calgary, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat . . .

Dr. Taft: Red Deer.

Mr. MacDonald: . . . Red Deer, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, and it's only logical that we would see a redistribution of the electoral map. I don't think it is necessary to add four additional seats.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, as it was correctly pointed out by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, was looking for some efficiencies and looking for ways that we could perhaps save a few dollars. Well, that's one of them. We may have to look at this. Certainly, a way we could save money is by maintaining the present number of MLAs in the Assembly.

We all know that Edmonton was a loser in the last boundaries commission. It was astonishing to think that a central part of Edmonton would lose its representation. No one is saying that Calgary should not have gotten additional seats. The dramatic population growth was there, and it was evident. Calgary had to get an increase in representation.

This gets to my point where one of the basic principles of democracy is representation by population, Mr. Speaker. Where the population is is where the representatives are. Rural areas, sure, they have unique circumstances, but so does the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview, so does the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Both of them have large postsecondary institutions. Actually, Calgary-Varsity has less than Edmonton-Riverview, but they are unique. Calgary-Buffalo is a downtown, urban constituency with a lot of issues around new Canadians. There are issues around homelessness. There are issues around the care centres that are to provide for people who are, unfortunately, in circumstances that do not allow them to participate in the job market. Edmonton-Gold Bar. A complete section of our constituency deals with file after file after file on social services and access to affordable housing, access to adequate medical care, access to homeless shelters. Each and every area and each and every neighbourhood has interests that should be looked after by their respective representative.

When you look at the basic principle of representation by population, a commission is going to have to make some tough decisions. I think we are going to have to look at Fort McMurray and the whole Wood Buffalo region. I'm not saying that the hon. member that's elected there is too busy, but there's been a dramatic increase in the population there, and I'm confident there will be in the next few years, so that has to be reflected in the new map.

I know, again, that Alberta's population has increased by more than 1 million since the last time the constituencies were changed or increased. We're looking at 23 years, I believe, since that was done, Mr. Speaker. In that 23-year period we have gone from a computer the size of a truck, even larger, to one that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill can just pack up in 30 seconds and away he goes. So that's how much the information age has changed. I think the information age allows us with larger constituencies to represent them effectively.

Now, I don't know whether we're looking at increasing the number of seats to 87 to see if we can avoid a court challenge. I was surprised after the last boundary redistribution that there was not a court challenge because we are not in balance. There is not a balance by the principle of representation by population. If this proposal becomes law and the boundary commission is struck and it makes its recommendations, then by this time next year we'll have a good idea as to what they are. If there is still what I think is an imbalance between rural representation and urban representation, then I think there will be well-meaning, concerned citizens who will consider taking this matter through the courts.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed bill contains the legislative means to allow the commission process to start so that they can meet the deadlines that have been outlined. This is in section 2. Section 3 of the proposed act, which would amend the current section 12, allows the commission to rely on several forms of census that they would be unable to use, as I understand it, under the current act. The new statistical data relied upon would incorporate municipal statistical information, which is gathered with greater frequency, and would

allow the commission to have a more up-to-date perspective of conditions on the ground in each constituency in the province. I think that's a fine idea.

In fact, I was driving just before dark last night out in Edmonton-Sherwood Park. I shouldn't say Edmonton-Sherwood Park – not until we get that Bill 36 passed; then it will be Edmonton-Sherwood Park – but the Sherwood Park neighbourhood. I saw the sign that alerted citizens to the census. They had two ways that they could participate in the census. They could wait until someone came to their door, or they could do it on the Internet, another example of how the Internet has changed our lives. Having this census information is really important . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The chair hesitates to interrupt the hon. member, but it's 6 o'clock, so the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated, hon. members.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate May 5: Mr. Renner]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in second reading on Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009. I just wanted to make a couple of comments on this bill. I do have a number of younger teachers that live in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre because I tend to have a number of young professionals who are living in all of the many wonderful apartments and condominiums in my constituency, and they're actually really good about keeping in touch with me.

This question of the unfunded liability has been around for a long time. Actually, Mr. Speaker, because I am the daughter of two teachers, I've been listening to the discussion of this unfunded liability for most of my life. My parents, my father in particular, were very concerned about the fact that it was unfunded from way back when. Now, both of my parents are long retired. Actually, they retired prior to 1992, so they're really not captured in this.

What the younger teachers in my constituency have approached me to say is: "How is this fair? I could go to B.C. or Saskatchewan or Manitoba, and I would be paying a considerably smaller percentage of my salary towards a secure pension for when I retire as a teacher." But here in Alberta, as young teachers, they feel that they are having to pay for the sins of their fathers, if I may be allowed to paraphrase a little bit. They were pretty unhappy about that, but they're still going to do it because they need and want that pension. I think they work hard for it. It was certainly an issue that needed to be addressed.

I don't want to say that it was considered okay at the time because I think certain financial people and economists and people like my father would have argued even, you know, back in the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s that having an unfunded liability was a bad idea, but it was certainly allowed, and lots of pension plans were unfunded. As people retired, the money would get shifted over to the account to pay their pension. But as we grow into maturity as a province, we have a larger workforce, and we have to compete nationally and internationally for good teachers. One of the things that we have the ability and the opportunity to achieve here is an excellent education system. It's important that we have excellent teachers to help us and support us in that. That competition factor started to come into play plus the economic issue of having an unfunded liability.

This has come about through a series of smart moves and stumbles and bumbles, but we got here, which is good. We did arrive at an agreement. Essentially, what the government got was an assurance of labour stability from the teachers for a period of five years. The teachers got both the government paying in for their unfunded liability portion and the government picking up the teachers' pre-1992 unfunded portion. Both sides were at fault here, Mr. Speaker, and I should point this out although I think it's argued that the

government was at fault for longer, so their unfunded liability went on for longer than the teachers' did.

We clearly have had a downturn in our economy, and I'm wondering if I can get someone on the government side to talk now or maybe at the beginning of Committee of the Whole about how this additional funding commitment is going to be managed given the pressures on the budget during these times. We have less revenue coming in. In most cases our costs, our expenses continue. They haven't necessarily increased unless we're talking about infrastructure costs. How long is this repayment expected to take, and what will be the total cost to the taxpayers in the end run of funding this?

Attached to that – and I'm not doing a sectional analysis here, of course, Mr. Speaker; that would be left for Committee of the Whole – as I peruse the bill, I notice that there are sections that are talking about taking money from the general revenue fund and advancing it to enable the school boards to make the payments on these pre '92 benefits. I'd like it clarified what the schedule is for those transfers, for that advance of money, and how much money is going to be advanced to allow those payments to be made.

Just a couple of fairly small questions about this. There's a long timeline of how we got to be here. Well, I don't need to go into all the unhappiness that happened around this. I think all sides seem fairly happy with the arrangements now. I don't think I would have made the same deal because I'm a little worried about that, about what the government will do in four and a half years' time or four years' time that could make the teachers pretty unhappy, and they'll just have to suck it up because they agreed to a five-year period of stability in those labour negotiations. So just a couple of questions about the payments and the payment schedule and what the total amounts would be.

Overall, this seems to have made my teachers happier, and it makes me happier as a legislator and as an Albertan. I think that more than any other resource that we have, education is going to keep us prosperous and healthy long into the future, long past any oil reserves, long past any gas reserves, long past coal or any of the renewable resources. That knowledge-based economy is us, and as long as we keep our people healthy and we have an excellent education system that people have access to, we should excel and be able to compete across the world. That's what this bill should allow us to do. It's going to allow us to compete for teachers. It should keep the teachers that we have here happier. We are looking at a period of labour peace, so this should be a happy, good-news bill. I hope it is, and I just look forward to answers to my questions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is exactly right on. I don't think anybody can guarantee her right now how long it will take to actually contribute to the pension fund so that it becomes self-sustaining. Till then, we will take money out of general revenue to meet the commitments of the pension fund.

It really does depend on how quickly our economy turns around. I know she knows that a lot of pension funds are scrambling right now to try and get themselves back into a funded position. I think that nearly everyone in North America will probably find themselves in some kind of position. For this particular bill, though – as she said, you know, the devil is in the details – it just simply acknowledges that we will be responsible as a government for that portion, and we will contribute to the ongoing costs on a yearly basis until we're able to fund the pension and kind of let it go.

So the hon. member is right in her concerns. They are the concerns we share. I don't know how quickly we'll be able to accommodate it. I don't know how soon we'll have the money to

contribute or what form it could take to fund the pension. I know she's saying: now, what does he mean? I'll talk to her about it because there are some ideas that I think the teachers and Albertans would really support, but that's not really in this bill. It's just simply acknowledging our commitment to that debt.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

7:40

Bill 37

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Johnson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join second reading debate on Bill 37, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009. This is an act that normally gets amended pretty much every year, a little tweak here, a little minor adjustment there. I think that's pretty much what we're looking at there, so I'm not going to dwell on this for any time at all.

I must admit that I raised a bit of an eyebrow on one particular change in here, that having to do with the Alberta royalty tax credit program, in that we're amending that section in the act to legitimize a bunch of claims that have been made in the oil and gas industry based on a wrong approach or a wrong interpretation by the industry as to what the laws were so that we had all kinds of oil and gas companies inadvertently breaking our own tax laws. We've said: well, rather than go after them to get the tax credit money back, even though the royalty tax credit doesn't exist anymore, we're going to make this amendment to absolve everybody of those past sins. It's a little bit like, you know, two wrongs making a right or that two wrongs don't make a right but three lefts do. I don't know. In any event, I raised an eyebrow, but it's not a deal breaker.

Other than that, we are basically looking at just some housekeeping changes that parallel changes in federal law and a couple of amendments made in Quebec. Some Alberta scientific research and experimental development tax credit issues that were introduced in Budget 2008 are to be resolved in this bill. That may bear a little more discussion in committee. I don't know. We'll see when we get to committee.

Certainly, in principle I don't think we have any problem whatsoever with Bill 37. I don't know if others want to get in on the debate or not, but I'm pretty sure that in pretty short order, Mr. Speaker, we can call the question on this one.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've just got a couple of comments. I think this bill is very timely the way things are going. Just a quick comment. Is there any money owing by the corporations? Do we need to make this amendment now to seize the bank accounts of the corporations? That's the only comment that I want to make.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a second time]

Bill 38

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. VanderBurg]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join second reading debate on Bill 38, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009. This really seeks to do two things: figure out when we do and when we don't get our share of the 4 per cent tourism levy in hotels where reward points are involved. The other issue is: do we get our 4 per cent when a reservation has been made, a deposit put down, and then the reservation is cancelled?

I think what this does is attempt to standardize everything across the industry so that if rewards points are deemed to have a certain dollar value, in fact, if money changes hands so that the rewards points company actually pays the hotel operator a portion of the room rate in that case, then the tourism levy applies. If it's comped, complimentary, then there is no tourism levy. The same thing goes on the deposits and the cancellations. If the reservation fee is refunded, we don't get anything; if there's a cancellation fee, we do. It's just, basically, that the province getting its 4 per cent of whatever money changes hands. Seems pretty straightforward.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, again, I have nothing at second reading stage to complain about. We may get into a little more examination of some of the specific details in committee, but again maybe not. We'll have to see. Certainly, at this point I'm pleased to let this bill proceed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on the bill.

Ms. Notley: I also rise in order to join the debate on Bill 38, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act. As has already been pointed out by the Member for Calgary-Currie, this appears to be a primarily administrative piece of legislation that would focus on clarifying the circumstances under which the 4 per cent levy is paid, where accommodation, as mentioned, is paid for using reward points. Of course, this clarification appears to be a valuable one and one that would be to everyone's benefit.

As well, it does appear also to make changes that are not dissimilar from those which have been made in other acts with respect to the ability to collect against an account which is jointly held. Again, this appears to be a case where in the past these types of accounts couldn't be accessed where they were jointly held. This is not a matter that we would have significant difficulty with.

With that in mind, at this point, anyway, we have tentative support of the bill, and we'll look into additional implications in third reading to determine whether there are any concerns that arise upon that level of scrutiny.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the understanding and the co-operation given by the members opposite. I just wanted to stand and give my appreciation to both of them.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a second time]

Bill 39
Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Weadick]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you. Bill 39, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009, is, I guess, a little more involved than the previous two bills we've just dealt with in second reading. It's a little more than administrative. I mean, we do have a problem here, or so the government contends, with the issue of tobacco smuggling and the illicit sale of tobacco and illicit importation of tobacco becoming a growing problem in the province of Alberta. In part the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act seeks to deal with that.

Of course, it enables the higher tax on smokes announced in the budget. It also brings in some amendments that should more effectively prohibit unwanted activity by strengthening prohibitions and clarifying their application. Again, it brings in the ability to seize joint bank accounts where that applies, which pretty much just makes this uniform with other taxation acts on our books in Alberta. It broadens some seizure powers, and it doubles fines and triples civil penalties for unlawful possession for sale of tax-free tobacco or tobacco on which tax has not been paid.

There are a couple of other things as well. A late filing penalty will be imposed, and it enhances requirements for tax collectors to make their reporting obligations more transparent. It will provide greater access to books and records. I was going to say a better and easier paper trail although, actually, it does that by encouraging the migration over to electronic record keeping and making sure that once somebody has made the move to electronic record keeping, they can't go back to the old paper voucher system, which I think is a good idea as well.

7:50

I don't think that second reading is necessarily the appropriate place to ask this, but I do think that when we get to committee study on this bill, I would like to hear some detailed description from the minister of finance or the sponsor of the bill as to the extent and nature of the problem of tobacco smuggling and the illicit sale and importation and possession of tobacco in the province of Alberta. We have long been, of course, under the impression that cross-border tobacco smuggling and various other illegal activities having to do with cigarettes and other tobacco products were a huge problem back east where the borders of Quebec and Ontario and New York state all converge.

Maybe I just haven't been paying attention, being a reformed smoker of many, many years now who has gotten to the point where I don't even get cravings anymore. I really don't pay too much attention to what's going on in the world of big tobacco or the world of tobacco generally, but I must say it caught me a bit by surprise when during briefing, we were told that there is a significantly, from the impression that I was left with, increased amount of law-breaking going on around tobacco.

There is, of course, a lot of money to be made off tobacco, and the province, of course, wants to make as much money off tobacco as it can while tobacco is a legal product. I note that an additional \$70 million in revenue should be collected each year now that we've bumped up the tax on smokes. Unless all smokers actually make a New Year's resolution to quit and stick to it next year, you can't help but say that that's a fairly stable and predictable source of revenue. In these economic times you have to concede that that's not necessarily a negative as far as the provincial treasury is concerned. Increased taxes on tobacco are also an effective deterrent

on smoking but may possibly be contributing to the increase in illegal activities around tobacco as well.

I'm looking forward to a discussion about that at committee stage. For now, in principal, no problem with this bill. I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and allow others to join the debate if they wish.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join in the second reading debate of Bill 39, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009. I'll start out by saying that I am so glad I'm not a smoker anymore. Holy mackerel, it's expensive to be a smoker now. There's that sin tax that should, I hope, be working as a deterrent, as a disincentive to people.

Mr. Taylor: What did they cost when you quit?

Ms Blakeman: I think it was, like, \$40 a carton or maybe \$44 a carton, which makes that seem like a very long time ago, Mr. Speaker.

We are now generating almost a billion dollars – \$915 million is the projected revenue from tobacco tax in this budget year of '09-10, 6.2 per cent of total government revenue. So this is not an insignificant amount of money that it's raising. I mean, I know that our gambling revenues are sort of \$1.3 billion or \$1.5 billion, and that, I think, is a significant amount of money. So this is a fair chunk of change we're getting from this. One can only hope that eventually the amount of tax that we make off of this goes down because there are fewer people smoking. I will admit that it hasn't been long enough for me. I slow down as I leave buildings, walk very slowly, inhale deeply as I move through the crowds, but that's about the extent of my participation in smoking these days.

I'm a little curious about the decision to put right into this act the ability to seize property. Now, clearly, homes, domiciles are exempted from this because the language that's being used is "other than a dwelling house," which is very odd language, but I'm assuming that that's meaning a personal residence. It is allowing it if officers believe that there's a contravention or that the vehicle or the premises have been used for activities that contravene this act. They can enter and search, people have to help them with information, and an officer who believes there has been a contravention can seize that thing, which would be a vehicle or premises, I'm assuming. They have to immediately take it to a provincial court judge with an affidavit, and if they don't, they have to return that thing to the person. I'm thinking: wow.

Is this legislation in line with similar legislation across the country? That's the first question. The second question is: how many times has that sort of seizure power been used in other provinces? If I could get some idea on a per capita basis, you know, because Ontario is significantly larger than we are, so if they've seized somebody's car 10 times, then I would expect a rate for us would be significantly less than that.

I guess where I'm a bit curious here is that my first memory of legislation that started to talk about seizure around something that wasn't sort of big-time Criminal Code activity was around seizing johns' cars. That, to my eye at the time, was a unique solution by a community trying to deal with an invasion of their neighbourhood and them trying to get a handle on that activity that was really disrupting their community. The seizure of the cars and also the john school was a way of those communities actually dealing with something.

Since then it just strikes me that almost every time I turn around, there is a seizure power that is being considered in an act, and here I see it again. I'm curious as to whether this is now another made-

in-Alberta solution or whether this is following a trend that we see across North America. If it is, how common is that trend? How many times a year do we see a successful seizure of a vehicle or premises in connection with a contravention of a provincial tobacco tax law?

My colleagues are clearly supportive of this bill, and there don't seem to be a lot of people who want to get up and speak about it, but it is starting to strike me as strange that we so often default to the idea of property seizure now. I don't think it really serves much as a disincentive, but my colleagues opposite are welcome to get up and argue that with me. It seems to be sort of a back door or quick route to police being able to get their hands on evidence that they wouldn't be able to get if they had to go sort of a longer route. So I'm just interested in how common this is becoming and what kind of comparisons the government can supply to me about this kind of activity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on the bill.

8:00

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 39. I think I agree with everything in the bill here, but I don't see any money being spent on smokers who kick the habit. I don't see it in here. So I'm just looking for the answer for that only, if there is any money put aside for the smokers who kick the habit, through Alberta health or whatever department.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

Oh, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Please stand up.

Ms Notley: I am truly having one of those days where apparently no one in the Speaker's chair can see this far down the Assembly. [interjections] Maybe that's it. I need higher heels, right?

Anyway, it's a pleasure to be able to rise to join in the debate on this bill. My remarks are not entirely dissimilar from those that have already been put forward. Generally speaking, those parts of the bill that talk about taxation and increasing taxes on cigarettes and cigars are something that our caucus supports completely. Frankly, separate and apart from the degree to which this is a revenue generator for government, we know that increasing the cost of smoking does, in fact, bring down the number of people that smoke, that there is no question that you can see a direct linkage between taxes going up and the number of people smoking dropping a little bit or the amount that they smoke dropping a little bit. That's important because there is no question that this is probably one of the most problematic public health issues that we have in our province and in our country, and anything we can do to reduce the frequency of people smoking is a good thing.

Like other speakers I have to say that I, too, was once a smoker, and I have to say that it was the combination of cost and the increasing inconvenience of smoking that ultimately drove me to making everybody around me miserable for several months while I got to the point of being able to go without smoking. So that's all good.

I do, however, have a couple of concerns that I will be seeking to hear more information from the government on as it relates to points that have already been identified with respect to, again, the authority of the police around people that they suspect may have breached the act. Again, there does seem to be a theme of where we are really moving pretty fast and furious on every element of being able to

push to the maximum and perhaps beyond the maximum the degree to which we are violating fundamental rights and freedoms in the country.

I'm a little concerned about that portion of the act that removes or changes the standard under which the officer can engage in search and seizure without a warrant. Previously it used to be reasonable and probable grounds; now it appears to be just reasonable grounds. I'm not sure if that is a change that arises from legal developments such that the "and probable" is no longer given meaning anyway or whether we are in fact lowering the standard of knowledge that the officer needs to have prior to searching and seizing without a warrant, a warrant, of course, being one of those things that typically has been seen as a safeguard against extensive abuse of state authority. So that's the first thing.

Of course, the other thing, again, talks about where there is a warrant, the whole ability to seize property, you know, regardless of where the ultimate adjudication is with respect to guilt or innocence of a party. Again, this is part of a growing trend that we see. So I basically want to hear more information about these issues, the degree to which they're replicated in other jurisdictions, what types of enforcement changes they would bring about, and what promises they're trying to remedy. Those are sort of the three key things I would want to hear more about in terms of why it is that we need to embark upon what is otherwise a steady walk towards diluting some fundamental rights. Those are my concerns on that.

Certainly, with respect to the issue of the taxes I just have to say that that is not really something that we can object to because to the extent that we can reduce or discourage people from purchasing cigarettes, you know, more power to you.

So that's our preliminary view of this piece of legislation in second reading, and I look forward to the opportunity to engage in a more detailed discussion as the bill makes its way through the Assembly. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a second time]

Bill 40

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Dr. Brown]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm weighing in on this one largely because as the finance critic I'm supposed to, but I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill pretty much summed up what this bill will do when he moved second reading of it. It will align the eligibility for the Alberta tuition credit with the eligibility for the federal tuition credit. That is necessary.

It also does some fancy math that the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill claimed the other day, when he was moving second reading, that he understood. I'm going to need to go and have a coffee with him afterwards because I don't. But, then, math was never my strong suit. It makes some minor calculation changes to the dividend tax credit to ensure that Alberta's dividend tax credit rate for dividends taxed at the general corporate rate remains at 10 per cent in 2010 and beyond regardless of whether the federal percentage changes a little bit or not. In principle, yeah, I support that.

Frankly, I've got nothing to complain about. I want the President of the Treasury Board to note that, that the Member for Calgary-Currie right now, at this very moment has nothing to complain about. But in a few minutes I will. I'll take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a second time]

**8:10 Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 33
Fiscal Responsibility Act**

The Chair: We have amendment A1, which was moved on May 6. Does any hon. member have questions or comments on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We're speaking to amendment A1, which was moved by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, that Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, be amended in section 3 by adding the following after subsection (6):

- (7) Subject to section 2, if the net assets of the Alberta Sustainability Fund exceed \$2 500 000 000, the excess or any portion of it may be allocated by the Treasury Board from the Alberta Sustainability Fund.

Mr. Chair, this is, I think, a fairly straightforward amendment to put back into the sustainability fund a requirement that it had before this particular bill came along seeking to change it, and that's the requirement to hold back in the fund an amount of money, a minimum balance that is there for emergencies, for natural disasters, you know, for unforeseen circumstances of that nature.

The old section required that a minimum balance of \$2.5 billion be retained in the fund before any allocations from it could be made for balance sheet improvements. I know that the Member for Calgary-Varsity felt that that was a very good idea. I concur. It is an absolutely essential idea, in my opinion, that we require that the sustainability fund have that minimum balance in there at all times. We've been fortunate so far this year. No, we've been damn lucky so far this year.

Much of the province has been absolutely dry as a bone, yet we haven't had a major fire, not taking away from the impact that the fires in Sturgeon county and that area had on the people living in the immediate vicinity. But we have not had a fire go wildly out of control on us yet and burn over great swaths of territory, nor have we had any significant flooding that left damage totals in the hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, nor have we been in a position – and I'm keeping my fingers crossed that we're not going to get into this position – where the H1N1 flu went fully pandemic on us. It's been a heck of a blow to the pork-producing industry – there's no question about that – and that could get worse. I hope it doesn't, but it could. It has not had nearly as significant an impact on human health as we have all feared the next pandemic might. We've been very fortunate there as well.

With what has happened in terms of the H1N1 virus's impact on our pork producers, on the basis of what H1N1 did to wake up the world or reacquaint the world with the possibility of a very serious flu pandemic, with the fires that we had northeast of Edmonton last week, those examples specifically, I think we've dodged some bullets. They should be timely reminders to all of us in here that we do have a responsibility to be able to step up to the plate when a state of emergency occurs, when there is a disaster or a catastrophe that we didn't foresee, that we didn't see coming.

That's why the \$2.5 billion was held in there as a minimum holdback in the sustainability fund, that through this bill, Bill 33, we are about to change. You never know. You never know when something bad is going to strike, when the lightning bolt is going to come down from on high and leave behind enough damage that you

need ready access to a big pot of money to help out a lot of people who have been left in very dire straits.

Now, I would expect that the counterargument on the other side is going to be: "But, Mr. Chair, when we get through with Bill 33, when we get through with the new Fiscal Responsibility Act, we will have taken the existing sustainability fund and rolled the capital account into it and rolled the money set aside for Green TRIP and the money set aside for carbon capture and storage into that as well. You put it all together, and you come up with \$17 billion. We know we're only going to run, at least we hope we're only going to run, a deficit of \$4.7 billion this year. We're projecting deficits next year and the year after, and we're not so sure about the year after that, but we really don't think, or we really hope and pray, that we're not going to take this big, new, improved sustainability fund down to zero. So the Member for Calgary-Currie is, if not exactly fearmongering at this point, overstating the case, exaggerating the threat." Yada yada yada. Well, maybe I am and maybe I'm not.

The point to setting aside \$2.5 billion that cannot be touched, that cannot be spent, that cannot be moved by the President of the Treasury Board or by Treasury Board out of the sustainability fund into general revenues or anywhere else, for that matter, is to make sure that if and when the unforeseen happens, we're reasonably, prudently ready for it. I mean, nobody can say whether the state of emergency is going to cost us \$2.5 million or \$2.5 billion or \$25 billion. You can use the laws of probability and suggest that the odds that it will cost us much more than \$2.5 billion in any given fiscal year are pretty slim. So it's a good, prudent figure, I think, to start with and to set aside.

We could be caught, quite figuratively, quite metaphorically, with our collective pants down on this one if we don't amend Bill 33 to set aside the first \$2.5 billion as an emergency fund, if you will. That's why I would urge that this House pass amendment A1. I think that it's key to our being able as a province to handle the unforeseen and unplanned-for disasters and emergencies that do from time to time befall any jurisdiction.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Any other hon. member with to speak on amendment A1? The hon. President of the Treasury Board on A1.

Mr. Snelgrove: If we were to accept this, Mr. Chairman, it would virtually sterilize 2 and a half billion dollars. If you're going to maintain a minimum amount in a fund, then you might as well take that fund and invest it in a bank. So it's redundant.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A1.

8:20

Ms Blakeman: Well, I always appreciate the President of the Treasury Board because he just cuts right to the chase. I appreciate that. I appreciate the fact that he cuts right to the chase. I'll try to do the same thing although I'm not as good at it as the President of the Treasury Board.

I think our issue with this is that the money that has now been deemed to be the stability fund does not consider those expenses that we see come up every single year and then actually are accounted for in this government's budgeting process through supplementary supply, and that is those expenses that tend to come up as so-called public emergencies. It tends to be stuff like fighting forest fires, for which there's a small amount put into the budget. Then there's always an understanding – and I'll place quotation marks around that – that the final amount, the total bill, would be organized through supplementary supply and monies put into that account or into that

vote line to cover the final amount. We just think that that money should not be reliant on a supplementary supply process, that you should be able to pull from the sustainability fund.

Second to that, we are getting close enough now – happily, it doesn't seem like it's going to overwhelm us – with the H1N1 flu that our brains are starting to comprehend that we could have a day come in Alberta where we're facing a genuine public emergency for which we would need to have funds available. I think that's another reason for earmarking these funds.

Finally, of course, we have ongoing First Nations negotiations and also legal suits that eventually do get settled, and money would have to be available there. So we're anticipating a couple of things.

The President of the Treasury Board says: well, this money is sterilized. Well, yeah, it is because it would have to be held there in anticipation of need according to some of the scenarios I've outlined. But, frankly, if you don't set that money aside, then you are in big trouble when you actually need it because – guess what? – it's not sterilized. It's not there. It took me a bit longer to get around to that point, but I hope I made it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We shall go back to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre would like to speak to the bill. Can I take my seat and allow her to go ahead of me? I am about to propose another amendment.

The Chair: Yeah. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did not get an opportunity to speak to Bill 33 in second, and I would like to put some comments on the record at this point. I think that next to the Municipal Government Act this piece of legislation is the most amended piece of legislation that I have seen in my years in this Assembly. At the time that the version I was familiar with was introduced, it didn't pass a credibility test with me. Then, sure enough, almost every single year it has come back and been amended in some way, shape, or form, so it lost all credibility with me. When you stand up and say, "We're going to pass a piece of legislation that says that we can't run a deficit," it was great showboating. It was great branding. That's what it was, a branding exercise for the government to prove that they're government.

Some of the people that were in cabinet at the time they did this had been in cabinet at the time they racked up enormous deficits and finally a huge debt. Well, they were going to get on top of this. They were going to prove to the world – what was the phrase they used all the time? – that that was then and this is now, that they were a totally different group of people. No, they weren't, but it was a way of rebranding themselves and saying: "Okay. We're in charge. We're on top of this."

Boy, it's interesting looking back on this now. They were essentially saying: "We're on top of this. We're going to pass a law that we cannot run a deficit." Oh, yeah, great. Well, that sure lasted.

Every time they gave themselves an amount of money that could be set aside in whatever kind of a fund, the next year they just brought in an amending piece of legislation and changed the amount. So where's the restraint in that? Where was the holdback in that? Where was the amazing fiscal responsibility in that? You just had a majority. The next year you brought in another amending act, changed the numbers, and away you went. It didn't have meaning, and it didn't have credibility.

I actually had the library pull some of the information for me on all the different sorts of variations on this. In fact, in the beginning we had the Deficit Elimination Act. That was May of 1993. It repealed the Spending Control Act. In 1993 the government repealed the Spending Control Act, brought in the Deficit Elimination Act. They amended that a series of times. In '99 they repealed the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act and the Deficit Elimination Act so that they could have the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which was brought in in March of 1999, which is the one that I'm clearly remembering.

Then there have been a series of amendments and changes of total amounts in this act, and here we are again looking at it. If you go to the back page, oh, look at that: the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2000 is repealed in its entirety, and you're just going to call it Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That's an even more interesting sleight of hand because you no longer even admit that it's replacing a previous act. You just repeal the previous act by the same name and bring in a new act by the same name, and everybody thinks you're brilliant except me because I have a long memory about these things, which must just be a real curse to you guys. I can remember sitting in here watching the then Treasurer of the day waxing eloquent about how this showed what amazing fiscal managers the government was. I thought: "Well, what a bunch of hooley. There's nothing in here that actually makes the government restrain itself." And, in fact, it didn't.

When I started in '97, the budget that came in that very first year I was elected was \$17 billion, and there were 18 or 19 ministries. Then it was just more money, more money, bigger ministries. Nobody ever got thrown out of cabinet. They just created more cabinet positions and more ministries until at the height of it there were, I think, 27 ministries, and I think there might have also been a minister without portfolio at that time. It got as high as – what was it? – \$38 billion, and that's before we ended up with supplementary supply budgets added onto that.

So fiscal responsibility is just not happening here. There's a lot of talk about it, there's a lot of branding about it, and I've got to admit that you guys are really good at the PR. You are really good. I mean, \$25 million in rebranding yourself. You've spent that many, many, many times over in the years I've been here. I think it's been one of your most successful ones ever in that people actually believe that you are fiscally responsible, and you're not. You just keep changing the numbers in the acts. That's one of my observations on this bill.

I'm sorry. Just let me give credit where credit is due here on the whole sustainability act. I sat here in 2002 when the previous Member for Lethbridge-East introduced a private member's bill. This gentleman is an economist. He knew his stuff. He introduced the Fiscal Stability Fund Calculation Act – my goodness, what a cumbersome name – but we always called it the stability fund. The government pooh-poohed this, oh, hooted with derision absolutely, what a stupid idea, and turned around very quickly and brought in their own version of the sustainability act.

8:30

You know, being a Liberal in Alberta, I'm pretty used to the government hooting with derision at our ideas and six months later bringing it forward as a government bill. Fair enough. But I think

it's important to give credit where credit is due to Mr. Nicol, who was then the Member for Lethbridge-East. He really was the first person, at least that I'm aware of, that talked about a fiscal stability fund that would set money aside to act as a cushion for when there was a downturn in the economy.

It wasn't the heritage fund. It wasn't to be confused with that, but it was to stabilize a pitch and heave in our economy. It was set up with some pretty specific criteria around how it would work. It was meant to ensure that we still had funding available for health care and children's services and education. Actually, it was intended at that time that it had nothing to do with oil and gas reserves. I think it really was an innovative act for its time, and it still is.

In 2003 we had the government introducing their version of it, which was the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, and that did create the sustainability fund that we know now and that capital account. Here it is: cap of \$3.5 billion. Then in 2004 they amended it to increase the cap to \$4 billion. In 2005 they amended it again to increase the cap to \$4.75 billion. In 2006 – you start to get a feel for why I'm a little cynical here, Mr. Chairman? Anyway, in 2006 amended it again to increase it to \$5.3 billion. So, I mean, there was no fiscal discipline here. They just changed the numbers every single year: 2003, '04, '05, and '06. Then in 2008 it was amended again to allow borrowing for P3 schools – what an insult – postsecondary institutions, and health facilities.

I just really have a hard time taking any of this seriously. You know, as legislators we have to take the finances of the province seriously, but this was a joke. It's just not any kind of fiscal responsibility at all. We continue to take a nonrenewable resource revenue right out of the ground and use it immediately for operational expenses. We are spending what should be our future savings but certainly future revenue, and we're spending it right now. It's not even going into a bank. It's getting spent instantly in the same year. So I think that there really are some fiscal restraint problems that this province has. We're into our first year now where the government is actually pulling down and using that sustainability fund. We'll see what happens and how much fiscal restraint we can get if this recession continues and we end up having to develop a second restraint budget in the '10-11 year.

What's the last piece I wanted to mention? Oh yeah. You know, what I've seen since I've been actively involved in Alberta politics – and I'll say that's from 1993 although I was working for the advisory council prior to that – was that the government cut stupid in the mid-90s, then they spent stupid, now I think we're going into another period where we're going to cut stupid, and maybe we already have cut stupid. I find it really frustrating when there's lots of evidence, you know, that prevention measures and allocation and prioritization of expenditures save us money in the short and the long term. I admit to getting very frustrated with, literally, the pitch and heave of this government's finances. I can't support this. I have real trouble even taking it seriously.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ms Notley: It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, or the so-called Fiscal Responsibility Act. This is an interesting piece of legislation because, of course, it's one that really is part of sort of a long history of political posturing and positioning vis-à-vis the critical campaign components that this government has run on in the past, not so much anymore but in the past. It really is one of those political tools and communication tools, the whole notion of fiscal responsibility. The fact that, you know, we have an act that claims we run our finances in a certain way but then, as needed, we go back to the act and we change the act really puts the question mark, shall I say, to the seriousness with which the act is meant to be taken in the first place.

Now, it would probably come as no surprise that I've never actually been a big fan of legislated bans on deficits come hell or high water because I think, frankly, that that's reflective often of thoughtless governance. It is sometimes the case that deficits are required. It really becomes a question of intelligently weighing your longer term obligations and your longer term priorities and your longer term revenue streams and your shorter term priorities and your shorter term revenue streams. It's a complicated assessment, and the act itself was one of those politically cheap sort of right-wing things that happened in the '90s that, you know, were very popular in the day. This is sort of a continuation of that, when, of course, the need to come in today and change it and probably next year change it again, the year after change it again, just starts to show how much of a political tool and communications piece it really is as opposed to being any sort of serious guide for financial management.

Having said that, there are certain circumstances within which, certainly, our caucus would actually support and perhaps even advocate a deficit, although those are rare. I will go so far as to say that I think the fact that we're at the position now that we have to change this act has, really, quite a lot to do with how this government has managed our finances over the last few years in particular.

I speak in particular to the fact that we are not and have not in the past adequately promoted or enhanced the government's revenue stream. We have collected and continue to collect a pittance in royalties. There has been study after study after study showing that we could have collected anywhere from 60 per cent more than what we collected over the last few years to 10 times more, depending on how you structured it. In any event, there's no question that the history of this province with respect to the very irresponsible way we've approached the collection of royalties on what is, ultimately, a public resource is an unfortunate one, and it is one that's indicative of thoughtless governance. Unfortunately, it leaves us in the position where we are now, not having enough revenue in order to avoid going into deficit. Frankly, I also think that there have in the past been lost opportunities because of our flat income tax structure. Again, there are ways in which revenue can be addressed which are fair and would keep Alberta very competitive. These kinds of things have not been considered by this government in the past, so now we're at the point where we're looking at an operating deficit.

8:40

I think it's important to understand that if you go back to the '90s, when the government played its very political card and ran on their deficit elimination platform, it was at that time more than just a communications strategy and a political ploy because, of course, at that time Albertans paid. They paid with their jobs. They paid with their homes. They paid with their families. They paid with their services. They paid with the infrastructure debt that we now have. They paid in order to eliminate the deficit. Now here we are casually playing around with this legislation without, I think, real regard to the kind of impact that this government's mismanagement had in the past.

One of our concerns about where the government is going with respect to the budget and the need to go into the sustainability fund and where they're going in the future and the fact that they're currently planning to ultimately try to find about \$1.3 billion in savings is that we are still in some ways playing the same kind of game. We are imposing a very artificially low level on the borrowing limits for infrastructure in order to use annual revenue to build capital infrastructure. Most people will argue and accept that borrowing for infrastructure and spreading the cost of that over many years is a very economically sound and reasonable approach to managing your finances. Of course, the benefit of that capital infrastructure is provided to Albertans over the years that you are

paying for it, yet what we have right now is a budget that is premised on the idea of paying for an unnecessarily high level of infrastructure out of this year's revenue. From that, we're then going to be told that we need to find potentially up to \$1.3 billion in cuts.

Again, the government is playing some games here in terms of whether or not they really are trying to create jobs, whether or not they really are trying to stay the course. You know, we talked, certainly, a couple of days ago about the significant cuts, for instance, to the Environment ministry and key parts of that. Once again, that is dealing with, to use business terms, an asset which has long-term consequences and implications to Albertans. So we're making cuts on one hand. We're getting rid of the prohibition on deficit funding theoretically because we want to build a jobs budget, but in fact we're insisting on paying for capital infrastructure out of this year's annual revenue when we don't need to, which, of course, means that we're not really going for a jobs budget because we could do a lot better in that regard.

It really seems to me like there are a lot of mixed messages in all of this. It really doesn't reflect either sound financial management, a focus on planning for the future, nor a focus on job creation. That's our overall concern. This bill, of course, plays a role in those many misplaced priorities and, again, as we say, continues to be a little bit almost of an irrelevance because the government is clearly prepared, you know, to pass this bill, say it has a rule, rely on this rule when people suggest that they could be doing different things, and then change the rule when they need to change the rule. It's really just a tool in the communications tool box. I would suggest that in the long run it's not anywhere nearly as relevant as they will undoubtedly try to tell us it is in the future or have in the past.

With those few comments, I will look forward to further debate on any further amendments as they come forward. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on Bill 33.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, I would like to propose another amendment to Bill 33. I will pass the motion to the page and give the pages a couple of minutes to circulate the amendment.

The Chair: This amendment shall be known as amendment A2. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie moved on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity. Is that correct?

Mr. Taylor: Yes. I will move this on his behalf, Mr. Chairman. Are you ready for me to . . .

The Chair: Yes. Please continue.

Mr. Taylor: We have time?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Taylor: We're ready to go? Okay. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Varsity I move that Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, be amended as follows: A. Section 1 is amended by adding the following after clause (g):

- (g.1) "non-renewable resource revenue for fiscal policy purposes" in respect of a fiscal year means the lesser of
 - (i) \$3 000 000 000, and
 - (ii) the average of the following:
 - (A) the forecast non-renewable resource revenue for the previous fiscal year, and
 - (B) the actual non-renewable resource revenue for each of the 2 fiscal years preceding the fiscal year referred to in paragraph (A).

B. Section 3(3) is amended by striking out "and" at the end of clause (a) and adding the following after clause (a):

- (a.1) if for a fiscal year actual non-renewable resource revenue exceeds non-renewable resource revenue for fiscal policy purposes, the difference must be allocated to the Alberta Sustainability Fund, and.

At that point, Mr. Chairman, we return to the wording of the bill as we have it in front of us in Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

Now, the reasoning for this is perhaps more straightforward than the legalistic language appears as I read it into the record. It is simply this: Bill 33 puts only one meaningful restriction on the government's ability to spend the entire sustainability fund, and that is that the balance of the sustainability fund can't be less than zero. Wow. That's discipline. You can't actually take your rainy day fund and put it into the red while you're using it to pay off the government deficit because the government is already in the red.

Look. It's not the deficit per se that gets my knickers in a twist, Mr. Chairman. I understand. The economy went into the rhubarb with very little warning whatsoever. It happened to us. It happened to every other province in the nation. It happened to the nation. It happened to our big number one trading partner to the south of us. In fact, it happened so hard there, although not all that fast; I mean, we saw it coming down there. A lot of us up here in Canada thought it wasn't going to affect us until suddenly we woke up one day, and it did. It hit the Americans so hard that it took everybody in the world if not down, then at least back several steps with it.

8:50

This is a global recession. This has been a global economic crisis. The level to which it's been a crisis does vary from country to country, from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, from province to province. We're lucky we are where we are, but that's hardly the point. Government fiscal policy should be driven by more than luck. That's part of the argument that we're making here, that without these amendments, really, this new Fiscal Responsibility Act, Bill 33, doesn't seek to drive fiscal policy by much more than luck.

The deficit per se for fiscal '09-10, I've got to tell you, doesn't bother me any more than it would bother me, as long as I was going about it prudently, to have to dip into the Taylor family line of credit to borrow some money for whatever legitimate purpose. Certainly, you know, there is a legitimacy over the short term to having to dip into something to cover your shortfall. We have something to dip into to cover our shortfall called the sustainability fund. In that sense, as they say in *Romeo and Juliet*, "There art thou happy." But the key here is prudence and sustainability and planning and that sort of thing.

While I have no problem with our going into deficit for fiscal '09-10, I start to get a little bit twitchy when we start planning to continue to be in deficit in '10-11, '11-12, maybe '12-13, maybe not. We kind of hope everything will have turned around by '12-13. That again is fiscal policy based on luck, fiscal planning based on luck.

I get a little twitchy when we want to set up this big, new, improved megasustainability fund, all \$17 billion worth. Look, it doesn't make any difference to me, really, whether we roll in the capital account and the money is set aside for Green TRIP and carbon capture and storage and, oh, whatever else we're putting in there. We're putting a couple of other little things in there as well. Whether we roll it all into one big megasustainability fund or whether we've got the sustainability fund and the other thing is still hived off doing other things doesn't really matter. What matters is not whether we have \$17 billion worth of cushion. What matters is: what are we doing to try and make sure that we don't have to spend it all? Okay? What are we doing to make sure that we're spending

as little of the sustainability fund as we possibly can so there's money in the rainy-day fund for the next rainy day because, sure as shootin', there will be another rainy day once this one is over and done with.

What this amendment does, Mr. Chairman, is that it seeks to impose some discipline on the government – it's guaranteed that they'll vote against it, but one can try; one can hope – by saying: "You know what? You can't spend every 48 cents that you get on every barrel of oil sands bitumen." We talked about that earlier in question period today, a royalty of less than 50 cents a barrel. Now, there are other situations where the royalties are higher, I'm sure. But the point here is that we want to impose some discipline and say to the government: "You cannot spend everything you've got. You cannot spend all of our nonrenewable resource revenue. You have to save some of it. You have to get into the savings habit."

Earlier this afternoon the Treasury Board president went on about, you know – and I hear this frequently from that side of the House – this notion that if you're going to save any money, then you can't spend any money. That's essentially what he said. You can either save it or you can spend it; you can't do both. That is just wrong, Mr. Chairman. That is just patently wrong. Individuals, families, corporations, other governments in other jurisdictions, anybody who has to run a budget for a calendar year or a fiscal year is regularly faced with the need to do both those things at the same time: spend and save.

In a tight time like this nobody is expecting you to save as much as we were expecting you to save when you had more money coming in than you knew what to do with. Still you managed to bleep it all away or bleep a lot of it away. But a savings strategy, getting into the savings habit, says that even when times are tight, you have to develop the self-discipline to set aside a little bit of it. Every pay, put that away. Don't touch that. Don't spend that. Find a way to live within your means. That comes back to what we were talking about earlier this afternoon when we were debating Bill 47, the estimates bill. What's the term I'm looking for?

Ms Blakeman: Appropriation.

Mr. Taylor: The Appropriation Act. Thank you.

If you've got to live within your means, and you've got to set some aside for savings, some modest amount that you're contributing on a regular basis so that you're in the habit for when times get better and you can save more, then in that part that talks about living within your means, you have to make some choices. You have to set some priorities, and then you have to reallocate the money that you do have to spend. Mr. Chairman, this government still has a lot of money to spend. That includes money it can access in the sustainability fund. Within that envelope, within that context you've got to reallocate to the things that you determined were your priorities.

Back to the amendment. The amendment basically says that you have to set aside some money, any nonrenewable resource revenue collected over the amount defined as nonrenewable resource revenue for fiscal policy purposes. Okay? So the nonrenewable resource revenue for fiscal policy purposes is the stuff you can spend however you want, for whatever purpose you want. You can draw down against that to cover off your deficit. You can blow it on something fun. I don't know what governments do that is fun, but they do manage to blow it anyway. You can do whatever you want with that. Okay?

Any nonrenewable resource revenue collected over that amount – and remember, you can only collect that nonrenewable resource revenue once. That barrel of oil only comes your way once. You

only get the royalty on that barrel of oil one time, and then you have to wait for the next barrel of oil to get your next piece of royalty, and so on and so forth. Once that barrel of oil has left your hands, left your jurisdiction, been turned into however many litres of gasoline you can get out of a barrel of oil and pumped into the tank of a cabinet minister's sport utility vehicle, you can't make any more money off that. You get your one shot at it, and you had better be somewhat responsible and somewhat fiscally prudent about that.

Any amount collected over the amount defined as a nonrenewable resource revenue for fiscal policy purposes is to be transferred into the sustainability fund. My hon. colleague from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre's skepticism about the Fiscal Responsibility Act down through the history of its life and its various incarnations notwithstanding, right from the get-go, at least in theory this government has recognized that you need to have a cap on how much nonrenewable resource revenue you can spend before having to transfer the rest of it into the sustainability fund. That cap started out at 3 and a half billion dollars way back in 2003. It inched up to \$4 billion the next year, \$4.75 billion the year after that, \$5.3 billion in 2006.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm saying that we need to roll it back to \$3 billion. That's the cap. That's the lesser of \$3 billion and the average of the following as it's spelled out in the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That says that any amount of nonrenewable resource revenue collected over that amount has to go into the sustainability fund.

9:00

The government has said that once it's done drawing down the money it needs from the sustainability fund to cover off successive years of deficits, then it's going to start putting money back into the fund, and it will put money back into the fund until it's got it back up to \$10 billion, which as a grand statement of principle is pretty good. But, of course, what's utterly missing from that is any kind of detailed plan or strategy or timetable to get to that target of \$10 billion. It's kind of like, well, you know, we think, God willing and the creek don't rise, that we'll be back in the black in 2012-13.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

At that point we'll start looking at the possibility of maybe, you know, if we've got a little bit of extra money and we can't think what else to do with it, we'll put it into the sustainability fund. Then – I don't know – five, six years later we'll put another quarter billion dollars in there and so on and so forth. So I might still be alive by the time they get it up to \$10 billion, but I wouldn't count on it – I wouldn't count on it – not with their lack of commitment to a timeline for that target, not with their history of fiscal irresponsibility, not when past behaviour is the best predictor of future performance.

That's why I moved this on behalf of my colleague from Calgary-Varsity. That is why I have moved this amendment A2. I think that otherwise it is fairly self-explanatory.

I'll take my seat now and let others have a crack at debate on amendment A2.

Mr. Snelgrove: I would just suggest, Mr. Chairman, that the length of an argument doesn't contribute anything to the strength of an argument. I read through the amendment many times, and I was very puzzled because the hon. member that spoke is normally very clear and to the point. Then I got down to the original sponsor of the amendment, and it made a little more sense to me why it was written in kind of a mumbo-jumbo, let's get there somehow. It doesn't

rhyme, and they haven't used Biblical characters in it; however, it's a long list.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think for a minute that the hon. member and most people aren't on the same page when it says that we need to be responsible for the finances of this province of Alberta. When we have the opportunity to make wise investments, be they cash in savings or things like the heritage fund or, I believe, even into investments that can contribute to our positive building of our province, we will. Rewriting, whatever they're trying to do here, isn't the way to do it. It's about a willpower that says: we'll get there. We were getting there. We were doing quite well.

This amendment is really not a positive step to the future for clear and transparent finances for the province of Alberta, so I would encourage our hon. members to give a pass on this also.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back to Bill 33. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Chairman, thanks for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 33. Under the original Fiscal Responsibility Act deficits were not permitted, and the main goal behind the changes to the Fiscal Responsibility Act is to allow the government to run a deficit for capital spending. This change is required because there's a drop in oil and gas prices and the recession has greatly impacted Alberta's revenue stream and its ability to maintain its \$23 billion three-year capital spending projects.

The new FRA maintains the requirement that the debt retirement account has to be equal to or greater than any accumulated debt as defined. This in combination with the requirement that deficits are only permitted if they can be funded from the sustainability fund means that the government is not permitted to borrow for operating purposes. The government can only borrow now for capital investment in government-owned assets; to support capital projects that are owned by the school boards, postsecondary institutions, and health authorities; as required by self-supporting corporations such as Agriculture Financial Services, Alberta Treasury Branches, and Alberta Capital Finance Authority; to pay back the funds owed by the pre-1992 teachers' pension plan to the post-1992 teachers' pension plan. That deficit, that liability for the teachers' pension fund, has even increased by \$2 billion, from \$6.6 billion to \$8.6 billion.

The sustainability fund is being expanded to include assets of the former capital account and the amounts set aside from year-end 2008-09 results for carbon capture and storage and Green TRIP. The limitation on the amount of nonrenewable resource revenue that can be directed for budget purposes is eliminated. The 2 and a half billion dollars that was required to remain in the sustainability fund as a contingency for natural disasters has been eliminated. So the limit on nonrenewable resource revenue that can be spent is gone. There's no legislation on annual spending increases and no commitment to savings other than vague statements to top up the sustainability fund to \$10 billion if surplus dollars become available. This bill just lets the government spend every penny they have, and this move makes them less fiscally responsible than they were before.

This government had been talking about fiscal responsibility all along. I think we are just going in circles. We were fiscally

responsible for a few years. Then all of a sudden things go the other way, and then, you know, we spend the little bit of money we've saved. Then we go for cutbacks. Then we pay the deficit again, pay the debt, and that cycle never seems to end.

The only limit now on deficits and drawing from the sustainability fund is that the fund can't be drawn below what's in the account, meaning that government can spend every penny in the sustainability fund and can spend every penny of nonrenewable resource revenue without any of it having to be put into the sustainability fund. While the Treasury Board had the authority to transfer funds out of the sustainability fund, there was at least in principle a limitation on how much that could be done.

The justification used for this is to improve flexibility as the previous legislation was too complex. The Fiscal Responsibility Act is actually quite short and specific, so calling it complex seems like a bit of a reach. This Fiscal Responsibility Act has been changed almost every year – every year – and in 2006 the government amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act to increase the cap on spending nonrenewable resource revenues to \$5.3 billion. Then they amended it to allow P3 borrowing for schools and postsecondary institutions and health care facilities. Now, I think, that cap is gone, so there are big concerns.

9:10

There was also a clause that stated that 2 and a half billion dollars had to remain in the sustainability fund as a contingency fund for natural disasters, and I think we are facing a few of them. Luckily, I hope, we won't get to that point, but what are we to do if this swine flu virus catches on and our pork industry is devastated by this? What if we have floods? What if we have fires? What if we have other natural disasters? What are we to do if we go and spend all the money we have in the sustainability fund and there's nothing put aside for a rainy day?

For those reasons, Mr. Chairman, I cannot support Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 33 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 14

Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I spoke to this bill fairly extensively in second reading, and the concept and the intent of this bill is really one of necessity. It's one of the ways that we can be responsible for our share of the greenhouse gases, particularly the energy that is generated by our coal industry. It's a concept

responsible to the rest of the province, but still the first responsibility is to the citizens of this province, because they own the resources, on whose behalf these greenhouse gases are produced.

I believe the amendment, that I am going to ask the pages to pass out at this time, will actually help address that problem in terms of the responsibility that I think is owed to the citizens of this province.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment until the amendment has been distributed. Hon. members, this is amendment A1, that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is moving on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I am presenting this on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview. I would move on his behalf that Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act, be amended by renumbering section 4 as section 4(1) and adding the following after subsection (1):

- (2) In addition to the report required under subsection (1), the Minister of Energy shall, within 15 months of the date this Act comes into force and annually after that, prepare a report that evaluates the carbon capture storage projects funded under this Act in comparison to other carbon reduction strategies to determine the economic and environmental viability of the projects undertaken.
- (3) When complete, the report prepared by the Minister of Energy under subsection (2) shall be presented in the Legislative Assembly if it is then sitting or if it is not sitting within 15 days of the next sitting of the Assembly.
- (4) Within 15 days of the report being presented in the Assembly pursuant to subsection (3), a member of the Executive Council must introduce a motion in the Assembly to refer the report to a committee of the Assembly for review and recommendations.

I think that if my hon. colleagues have read this, it is very clear what the object of these amendments is. Really, as I've said, the bill itself is good and necessary; however, I do miss the part where, in fact, it's responsible to the people of this province. We have to be accountable. I think they have the right to know, when we're spending money on any kind of a project, if it is worthwhile. The only way you know that is if going in, when you create the project, you create the time frame for the evaluation and then have a report, and of course that report has to be public.

I think that these amendments would meet that obligation, and I believe that the citizens of this province would be appreciative of it. Although there are many words, it really isn't asking for that much. All we're asking for is that a report is evaluated, there's a time frame put on it, and then when that report comes back, it goes to a committee that could review it and perhaps come up with recommendations based on the evaluation that comes forward out of that report.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat and look forward to any other comments that may be made on these amendments.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, if this were five or six years from now and the projects that were applying for this money were running, the hon. member would know that a lot of the money that was set aside was to monitor and to work in a very scientific way so that we do know the opportunities there are for carbon capture and storage. Within 15 months from now any kind of a reporting structure will have nothing to report. These facilities aren't going to be built.

Down the road we're not going to keep what is produced from this carbon capture work a secret. We actually believe that we may be able to sell this technology from it all over the world, so keeping it a secret will be the last thing we want to do.

It is not just about carbon capture and storage. It's also about enhanced oil recovery. Once again, Mr. Chairman, we will be more than happy to be able to come back and report to Albertans and the world how we're able to enhance or increase our oil reserves possibly by as much as half a billion barrels of conventional oil. There's no intention here to keep the results of this secret.

Given the timelines of this amendment it really is five or six years or possibly more premature. I would hope that hon. members would all agree to that.

Ms Blakeman: Well, Mr. Chairman, surprisingly, shockingly, I don't agree with the President of the Treasury Board. I know. I can tell that I've ruined his evening. [interjection] Yeah. Are any of our physician MLAs on duty here? I think I've caused some sort of tachycardia.

9:20

Really, what we've got with this amendment is a requirement for a report evaluating where we have got to with the various projects. That report would come to the Legislative Assembly and would then be referred to a committee of the Assembly for review and recommendations. I disagree with the president. There's no expectation here that it's reporting on any kind of final project. It's saying: where are we 15 months from now?

Frankly, where we were 15 months ago on carbon capture and storage was a very different place than where we are today. For example, there was a lot of talk from the government about how this was really going to make a big difference for greenhouse gas emissions in the oil sands. Well, now we know that not one of the oil sands players is even going to submit a proposal. They've had media conferences. They've announced that they're not even going to submit a proposal to be considered for carbon capture and storage projects. Well, that's a big difference from where we were 15 months ago.

The fact is that carbon capture and storage is really targeted and is expected to be most effective around coal-generated stations for electricity. But 15 months down the road that information could be quite different. What we're dealing with 15 months from now could be quite different from where we are today. I think we can see that these timelines do become important.

The second issue I have is that I understand that the government says: "You know, we're not going to hide this. If we have a success with carbon capture and storage, we want the world to know, so it won't be a problem requiring us to report." But you know what, Mr. Chairman? There is a difference about requiring this government to report and when the government decides to say something on its own or to spend \$25 million on a branding campaign or to release some other glossy brochure. There's a difference between a legislative requirement that a report is tabled in this Assembly and the government deciding when it wants to talk about something on its own, with or without \$25 million and a campaign slogan that no one can remember that goes along with it and pictures of children running around on a beach in England. You know, there is a big difference in those things.

Mr. Anderson: Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Chairman, there is someone in this Assembly that can remember it, so this is a golden moment. Someone in this Assembly can remember the \$25 million slogan, and, fingers on your buzzers, the prize is going to go to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. There we go. It's a wonderful moment. Now I'm going to go back to talking about the amendment. Thank you for

that nice little break, Airdrie-Chestermere. Good for you for remembering that slogan, the only person in the House that could.

I think this is reasonable, and I think it's important that we do require that there actually is a legislative timeline for when a report comes before this Assembly because God bless this government, but they don't always follow through on things that they say. I know that there are lots of reasons as to why they don't follow through on things they've said they're going to do: times change, you know, things work or they don't work. But running on a legislative requirement and running on the government's own timeline are two different things.

While I appreciate that the President of the Treasury Board said that if they had something to talk about, they'd be delighted to talk about it, I would still like to see the report in front of the House. Frankly, if it's bad news, they're not going to talk about it, and we do need to know in this House.

The first report is required 15 months from now. That's not to say that there aren't subsequent reports, perhaps on an annual, biannual basis, that there is an expectation of a report between the House. Although with the first report we are not likely to have anything out of the ground – well, that's not fair. There could be, but it's not likely we're going to have, you know, bricks and mortar that we could be talking about for these projects. But for the next round of reporting, yes, I think there would be an expectation that there's something out of the ground that we could be talking about.

Star Trek is in all the news. What is the *Star Trek* saying about new frontiers?

Mr. Taylor: To boldly go where no one has gone before.

Ms Blakeman: To boldly go where no one has gone before. There you go. Thank you. Oh, we're very good with the quotes today.

Mr. Taylor: You're sitting next to a nerd.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Ten points to the Member for Calgary-Currie on that one.

Truly, we are moving into the unknown, and I have some caution around the government putting all their eggs in the one basket because I just keep getting a vision of a great big huge ostrich egg in a basket, and if it cracks or breaks, we're in big trouble here, or one tool in a tool box, you know, because if you open that tool box and there's one tool in the bottom, and if it's not working, you're hooped. You need more than one tool in that tool box. You need more than one egg and even one kind of egg in your egg basket. So I think we need to keep tabs on this. We need to check on it on a regular basis, and we need to revise our plans if it's not working. We've already had changes, at least according to what the government press releases were saying, that we didn't anticipate like the complete withdrawal of the oil sands companies from participating in any of these projects. Who could have foreseen that 15 months ago?

Once again, I know it's heartbreaking, and I'm so sorry to disappoint the President of the Treasury Board again this evening, but I disagree with him on this amendment. I think it is worthy of support, and I would urge everyone in the Assembly to do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I'd just like to make a couple more comments, Mr. Chair. I don't think that this is nearly as complicated as the President of the Treasury would make out. I'll try to break it

down to a very simple kind of analogy. Every year at income tax time I'm sure we all sit down and re-evaluate: where was I, and where am I now? That doesn't mean that I'm lost somewhere. It means that I'm looking at what my goal was a year ago. Am I actually progressing, or do I have to re-evaluate and perhaps make adjustments to it? All it is is a quick picture of what's happening. I don't think that that is a very onerous task or a very onerous thing to ask of the government for almost any project but especially this one that we're talking about right now. Really, until things get going, but right from the very get-go, all it is is a picture of whether progress is being made and if it's going in the right direction and doesn't need an adjustment. Quite simple.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to speak in favour of the amendment. Two billion dollars is a lot of money, and this amendment is merely asking for a progress report on the CCS. This is just to evaluate, you know, where we are 15 months from when the act comes into force, and then 15 months thereafter. Do we have to make any changes to what we are doing? Are we achieving the desired result we need from the CCS? This is just merely a progress report on the carbon capture and storage program.

This will make everything more transparent and more accountable, so I think all the members should support this amendment. It's merely asking for a progress report. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Surprisingly and shockingly, I do not agree with the amendments to this bill. I'm looking at the bill here right now, and I look at the reporting, and I see that, you know, "The Minister of Energy shall report in the Ministry's annual report on the progress of carbon capture and storage projects funded under this Act." Now, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East wants to amend this by, you know, having a report done and having another committee put in place for review and recommendations. I'm sick and tired, Mr. Chair, of all the studying and all the committees we have to put together in order to pursue this project.

9:30

The Carbon Capture and Storage Development Council was put in place, Mr. Chair, back on April 24 of 2008, and I was a proud member of this council, working along with a number of industry experts, amazing individuals. We had people such as our chair, Mr. Jim Carter, who is a former president of Syncrude Canada, a very respected man in the industry. We had Don Lowry from EPCOR. We had representatives from Nexen and Suncor; Bill Andrew from Penn West, a hell of a nice guy and also a heck of a nice guy – I apologize, Mr. Chair – and also very knowledgeable about the industry; Dave Collyer with Shell Canada, now with CAPP, a very impressive individual. [interjections] Excuse me, hon. member. Mr. Chair, I'm trying to speak here. You're a little bit distracting. Thank you.

I guess my point is, Mr. Chair, that this development council put together a plan, a plan for Alberta to move ahead with this carbon capture and storage, and they did a wonderful job. We have an excellent plan. We've got \$2 billion now committed to carbon capture and storage, so let's just get on with it.

I'm tired of these amendments to these bills. We've got a perfectly good bill here with the reporting, which to me is sufficient. We shall report annually on the progress of these projects. I can't

imagine seeing any sequestration in that time period, 15 months from now. It's going to take time to build these projects. Our goal is to sequester five megatonnes of CO₂ per year in the ground by 2015. Fifteen months from now we're still going to be in the construction phase, in my opinion.

So let's just get on with this. We've dragged this on too long. Let's end the games here with these amendments. Let's pass this bill. I don't support the amendment, and I ask my colleagues to just vote against this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this bill in Committee of the Whole. Well, I have to say that one element of this bill that was identified by the previous amendment certainly is its brevity and the complete lack of direction in the bill, the complete lack of criteria, the complete lack of oversight. This bill basically says that the Minister of Energy may spend \$2 billion as he may or may not see fit to possibly achieve something that may or may not ultimately work out for us. I mean, if you had to sort of summarize this bill, that's how you'd summarize it. To the extent that the member was trying to add a little bit of clarity and a little bit more direction to the bill, I applaud her. Unfortunately, in my view, there is just so much more that is wrong with this bill that, frankly, cannot be corrected by an additional report.

Where to start? Carbon capture and storage is one possible tool in the tool box that we all need to embrace in order to address the very, very significant environmental risks that face Albertans and Canadians and, frankly, the world. But it is simply one tool in the tool box. The question of whether or not you open the tool box and you spend \$2 billion on that particular tool is one that is a little bit more complicated to answer than simply saying: hey, this could work; let's try it. That, I would suggest, is an incredibly irresponsible way to embark upon a process of spending \$2 billion.

Even people who agree that carbon capture and storage might be a tool also agree that it is a tool that must be polluter paid, or there must be a certain amount of commitment on the part of industry to at least cofund these initiatives. We have in Bill 14 the authority about to be given to the Minister of Energy to spend however much money he may choose on whichever recipient he may choose, who may or may not match one dollar of taxpayer funds, to initiate some carbon capture and storage research, investigation, implementation, whichever it may be. That's the first point.

We know that across the world there have been a number of different projects initiated with respect to carbon capture and storage. Quite frankly, the majority of them have either been greatly delayed or abandoned because of the incredible cost to the public and the unwillingness of industry to step up and pay their portion. We know that that is the experience in Europe, in the States, across the world. We know that there's a tremendous uncertainty with respect to this and that there is a tremendous cost, yet this government, that claims to be great financial managers, is putting no protection in this bill for Alberta taxpayers on how much it is that industry needs to commit in order to become eligible for funding through this mechanism. None. So that's one thing that we have some very serious concerns about.

Another concern is the criteria under which this money will be shovelled off the back of a truck – I mean, given to various and sundry industries. Again, the government itself has talked about criteria that they would develop and that they would try to adhere to. At one point, I remember, in some release somewhere there was talk about: oh, well, you know, we're going to try and identify the industrial player whose adoption of this strategy would bring about the biggest impact, the biggest reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and of course we want to prioritize those who will be able to have it up and running by 2015. By 2015? Are you serious? I mean, every expert on carbon capture and storage will tell you that the earliest that you're going to see this have any sort of serious impact is 2030. So the government's own documents are premised on a wing and a prayer.

You know, again, \$2 billion: let's close our eyes, cross our fingers, just throw it up in the air, and see where the wind blows it.

Mr. Snelgrove: Now, I'd vote for that.

Ms Notley: Well, indeed, I believe that's kind of how you functioned up to this point, so more of the same.

I would suggest that this very, very slim two-page bill, if we were really serious about making this work and if we were really serious about owing anything to taxpayers in terms of financial responsibility, ought to set out in the act the criteria under which we would give this money to industry. Again, two pages: the Minister of Energy will as he sees fit give money to whoever might possibly ask for it. So that's another concern we have.

9:40

A third concern we have is that, you know, the crossing of the fingers and the closing of the eyes and the humming when anyone hears anything that might suggest that this won't work: should those strategies work and we do ultimately find some success in this, this, to me, should be an investment on behalf of Alberta taxpayers, not a subsidization by Alberta taxpayers of industry. Once again, this bill should be talking about ensuring that for that money handed out, there should be some investment interest that taxpayers receive back for that. But the bill is completely oblivious to that issue, no plans to ensure any sort of investment or ownership or equity interest in any positive outcome that might possibly come from the strategy. Again, big if, very big if, major wing and a prayer here, but should something come from this strategy, we will get no ownership interests in it. We'll just pay for it and then give it away. So that's another concern.

Yet another concern about this, of course, that should be considered which is not, which was actually touched on by the Member for Lethbridge-East's amendment, is this idea of relative efficacy, relative value of the strategies that are being employed to address the environmental challenges that we face. That's where this whole idea of assessing how the outcomes to date of the carbon capture and storage investment would be measured against the other strategies that might be available. I mentioned this briefly here. I touched on this briefly in second reading.

The fact of the matter is that we don't have to choose to focus our hopes on the results of 1 out of 19 studies to suggest that this could work with respect to many other strategies geared towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Quite the opposite. I could find you 150 peer-reviewed studies that will tell you that the quickest way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to spend \$2 billion on retrofitting. You'll create jobs, and you will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions significantly, far more than this could ever hope to. But are we talking about spending the money on that? No.

The Minister of Environment recently announced a very small retrofitting plan. I can't remember exactly what it was. Perhaps he could tell me. It may have been in the \$10 million, \$50 million, \$100 million range. I can't remember which it was. But the point is that it is a small, small portion of what we really need to be investing if we're really serious about using retrofitting as a mechanism to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We should be serious about this because that is one of the areas where we know — the research shows — it works. But we're not doing that. We're not creating jobs. We're not doing that. We're shovelling money off the back of a truck to give to whoever manages to put together a good proposal.

The problem is that, clearly, because we're not putting a billion dollars into green retrofitting, this bill represents lost opportunity. It's not just: "Oh, what the heck. We've got all the money in the world. Let's throw \$2 billion at carbon capture and storage. If it works, it works; if it doesn't, it doesn't." No, no, no. For every dollar that we put in this, we're clearly not putting it into much more effective strategies. Again, this represents tremendous lost opportunity both in terms of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and creating jobs.

Another reason why this is a concern is because there's nothing in this talking about criteria that would relate to the obligation to ensure that any initiatives with respect to carbon capture and storage must ensure that we have an answer for safe disposal of the carbon which is theoretically captured and stored. The key is that we cannot just store it. We have to dispose of it, and we have to find a way to dispose of it that is sustainable and secure for the future.

The problem with this, even the name of the bill, carbon capture and storage, is that this is all premised on the notion of just creating a great big storehouse of CO₂, and we actually don't have complete research yet on what the implications of that are to our environment. It's not black and white. It's not there yet. It's yet one of a number of question marks that remain with this strategy.

Another thing with respect to this, of course, is that as this rolls out, if it rolls out in any kind of remotely effective way, which is, again, a big question mark, it has to be accompanied by substantive, very clear monitoring obligations. Once again, the bill is completely devoid of any discussion about monitoring. What we do know is that while we talk about creating a \$2 billion fund to put forward carbon capture and storage, we are at the same time cutting monitoring in the Ministry of Environment in other areas. I would think that if you're talking about putting this kind of taxpayer investment in here, we should be stipulating within the bill the kind of monitoring that would be associated with the receipt of that kind of taxpayers' dollars, but again silence, complete silence on this issue within this bill.

Another thing, again, is a problem with, frankly, this whole strategy. The members opposite go on at much length about the many possibilities that exist through enhanced oil recovery. Again a question mark. It is possibly an effective strategy. We don't know for sure. What we do know is that in order to use enhanced oil recovery, we ultimately use more energy, so we are actually embarking on a process that is going to increase our energy use by 30 per cent. Enhanced oil recovery as a mechanism of disposing of carbon will actually increase quite dramatically our energy use. Is this a wise way to move towards reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and, ultimately, reducing our energy use when we know that reduction is the absolute most effective way to deal with these environmental concerns? No. We're going in exactly the wrong direction.

Ultimately, this is what we're talking about doing, and there are, you know, just a whole bunch of reasons why this is a poorly

constructed bill. The idea in principle has some merit, but this bill is a permission to government to roll the dice with a huge amount of taxpayer dollars on a strategy which we know is not by any means the best way to address the problem. It is irresponsible from a financial point of view, it is irresponsible from an environmental protection point of view, it is irresponsible from a job creation point of view, it is irresponsible from a governance point of view because there are simply no rules in this bill.

Frankly, there is no amendment to this bill because it would have to be rewritten from scratch, and it would have to be substantially reconsidered. As it exists now, frankly, it is a very, very expensive PR stunt that government doesn't know will work or not work, and certainly taxpayers have no way of knowing if it will work or not work. It is a very unfortunate and unwise initiative on the part of this government. There is simply no way to save it. We cannot support this bill.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

9:50

Bill 10

Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to stand up and support this bill. I also commend the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I've had the opportunity to work fairly closely with her on this. I also believe that this bill is a result of some of the work that was done on the MLA task force about four years ago. I had what I called an adjunct report to go with that because I didn't feel that it was a minority report. All I wanted was timelines and to augment and help the report from the MLA task force move quicker.

It is a good bill. Many of the things that we found on that task force, many of the things that we brought forward are in this bill: the provincial standards that we wanted and had been asking for for so long so that they were the same across the province. Also, it didn't matter who was delivering the service; the standards had to be the same.

There will be a very strong monitoring program put in place with this. It will be on an annual basis, and the facilities will know that this review is coming up. Although I personally don't think that's probably the best way to do it, there is the ability to do random checks if there are complaints, so that's a very positive thing. Having been in the industry, I know that sometimes, also for inspections of schools, if you're ready, everything is up and shiny perfect, so it doesn't always give the true picture.

One of the things I sort of had a problem with was the fact that they used the words "peace officer" and not "police officer." I really believe that if something is suspected to be a criminal offence, it must go to the police and not to the peace officers.

Generally, this is a good document. The standards are in place, there's a way to monitor those standards, and there's also a way to

be able to respond to complaints, and I think that that will go a long way to helping people when they have complaints. At least they feel that now there is an avenue for them to be listened to. Sometimes it's just complaints about the food, which is probably 90 per cent, I think, of the complaints on the housing side of it, but food is probably one of the most important things in these homes where people live. We have any number of diabetics, and certainly those numbers are improving, and they do require a special diet. We also have many, many, many seniors who do not have good oral health. In fact, many don't have teeth or teeth that fit, and it's too late to go back and try and perhaps do implants or things that would help seniors be able to eat properly.

All in all, Mr. Chair, I am pleased to support this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. I'm going to support this because this is something that the Liberal opposition has raised and asked for a lot in the past. The previous version of the act didn't include seniors' lodges and some other kinds of seniors' housing under the monitoring and licensing sections. This does recognize different kinds of housing, brings more of it under an act which can be monitored and licensed. This bill really deals more with sort of the environmental aspects of supportive living licensing and has less to do with the actual accommodations and sort of direct assistance to individuals, which, I think, is where I've been concentrating my efforts.

You know, it's an interesting time because I think some of the government's innovations around this are right. We should be offering more choice. We should be offering different levels of support to people according to what they need. I think what really frightens people – it certainly frightened me – was what seems to be a fairly rigid approach that the government is taking to reclassify seniors who are currently in care and from the outside appears to be classifying them to a less care-driven form of accommodation. Somebody that's been in long-term care is redesignated to be into a designated assisted living complex.

While there are people that are very happy in that and should be in that level of care, I think it really frightens people who have relatives or who may be themselves in long-term care that they'd somehow sort of get punted out of that and that there would be an expectation that there's an increased level of family support for that. Oh, I did talk about this before because the same phrase came to mind: it scares the bejesus out of me. I don't know how I would find more time in my week to give more direct care to the relatives that I have that are in long-term care. If they weren't getting the level and intensity of support they were getting and I was somehow expected to pick up the loose ends on this because they've been reclassified to a different kind of living, I would be really personally very stressed by that, both in time but also in financial resources because I'd have to end up paying somebody to offer this additional assistance. I mean, my God, it's 10 o'clock, and I'm standing in the Assembly. I just wouldn't have the personal resources to put that additional time into caring for my relative.

The graduated level of care that the government is anticipating here probably is appropriate as we look at an aging population. But the government is pretty single-minded – perhaps I could even say bloody-minded – in moving people and redesignating or reclassifying or recoding. I can't remember the exact language the government uses. I know that in southern Alberta in some cases they've

had entire facilities that have been reclassified. I find it a little hard to believe that every single person in a long-term care facility was, presto chango, reclassified into someone capable of doing all right in a designated assisted living facility. I really find that very hard to believe.

I've strayed a little bit, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize for that. This bill is really dealing with the bricks-and-mortar side of those facilities and allowing better monitoring and enforcement, which, you know, I've been very keen on. I'm on the record a lot saying that, one, you've got to have the standards, two, you've got to have the monitoring to make sure that those standards are being met, and three, you've got to have the enforcement so that if they're not being met, the boom comes down and there are consequences for that. Particularly, owners and operators of facilities need to understand the consequences because these are frail people that in many cases do not have the wherewithal to demand support for themselves or adequate care for themselves. They really can be quite dependent on others.

Given that we are getting increased levels of monitoring and licensing under this, I am happy to support this bill in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

10:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. This bill, as I think I said before, is one of those bills that, you know, is sort of dressed up like a good-news thing, but because it is being used as a vehicle for a different objective, it actually is more problematic than one might first see on the surface. It does expand the application of regulations to certain types of facilities and in that respect is good. It ultimately takes matters that were previously regulations and puts them into legislation, and that is good.

There are certain specific elements of it that are a little concerning. For instance, right now licences for supportive living accommodations are only issued for one year, and this bill would actually allow that term to be extended to up to three years. The ministry says that they plan to have a policy where you're only eligible for a licence with a three-year term if you've already shown two years of compliant behaviour. Then they said that periodic spot checks would still be done throughout the three-year term. My concern about that, though, is that, frankly, I'm not convinced that the spot checks or the monitoring is as comprehensive as it should be, so I have some concerns about that.

In fact, in the House today but also in estimates debate with the minister for seniors we had some discussion around how short-staffing concerns had been addressed by the ministry. Those short-staffing concerns had impacts for both the health care side of the job being done – in this case it was long-term care – and the accommodation side of, in this case, long-term care. Notwithstanding that 300 reports of significant compromises in care, which might actually overflow in some cases to accommodation, had been made – and they had certainly been made to the minister of health, not to the minister of seniors. In fact, the minister herself indicated that that ministry worked quite closely with the ministry of health in terms of these kinds of issues because often there was an overlap in terms of the kind of complaints that they received. Yet seven months after these 300 complaints were provided to the ministry of health, there had been no follow-up inspections as a result of those 300 complaints. That indicates to me that there are some shortcomings in inspections and the frequency of inspections. For that reason, I would have some concern about moving licensing from one year to

three years. It seems to me that there are greater opportunities for places to fall through the cracks and for people to go a longer period of time without seniors having the basic standards met that should be.

I'm also concerned about the notion of inspectors not being able to do spot checks without first being announced because, of course, anyone in the industry will let you know that when that happens, many issues are often addressed between the time that notice is given and the inspection is completed. Again, this raises some concerns about the effectiveness of our inspection process. Those are a part of the concern.

There is also a concern just in terms of specifics. In the new bill the director may cancel a licence if the operator is breaking a specific rule in some way. In the old act there was also a greater discretion, where a director could suspend or cancel a licence where a licence holder was "not providing proper care to a person accommodated or cared for in the licence holder's social care facility." Another way they could do it would be if "the premises described in the licence have become unfit or unsuitable for the purpose authorized by the licence." So a much broader range under which a licence might be suspended than currently exists in this bill. That is another concern that we have.

Ultimately, though – and this has been touched on already – the real sort of dark side of this bill, if you will, is that it will be used as a mechanism for suggesting the government's plan to replace long-term care beds with beds in other, less comprehensive settings. This bill will facilitate that and facilitate their ability to say that that's a reasonable approach. There's no question that there are definitely cases where seniors would rather not be in a long-term care facility, nor should they be. Where the problem arises is where we know that we have at least 1,500 seniors in the province of Alberta who have been assessed as needing long-term care under the Nursing Homes Act, not some other version of supportive living with less support, yet we have the government making the decision to not build any more long-term care beds to address those needs. So we have a deficit, and we have the government instead making the decision that somehow that assistance and support to seniors can be provided in assisted living or designated assisted living or some lower care facility.

The fact of the matter is that for some of those people that's simply not true. That population is going to grow. The number of seniors needing some other supportive living will also grow. Absolutely. So, by all means, you know, expand supportive living. But to expand it at the expense of expanding long-term care is just such poor planning. It's going to have very clear and direct implications for our health care system, and it's going to hurt seniors.

On October 22 of last year the minister claimed in the House that the extended care, long-term care facility in Lethbridge that was going to be closed was being, quote, replaced by a designated assisted living centre. That's not replacement; that's a downgrade in quality.

On October 30, 2008, the patients in an auxiliary hospital in Jasper, including some who were palliative, had their care changed to a designated assisted living situation. This means that they're only having their housing provided when what they really need is much more comprehensive, ongoing health care. Likewise, citizens in Hinton are still fighting to reverse a February 2005 conversion of their long-term care facility into assisted living.

Assisted living simply is not appropriate for people who no longer have the cognitive ability to negotiate their own care needs or for those that are palliative, yet that appears to be what the plan is for

many of these people under the government's continuing care strategy.

Under the Nursing Homes Act the minister of health, in theory, should he use it, has the authority to make regulations stipulating staffing ratios. Now, frankly, that hasn't happened in any kind of effective way, but the authority is there. The same authority is not provided under this piece of legislation, and there's no other place where it might be provided because the health care side is under nursing homes, and these aren't nursing homes. Again, less government oversight, more opportunity for money to be taken from seniors and, ultimately, greater compromises in health care of both seniors as well as all Albertans.

I think that the other concerns that we have about this bill were already raised in second reading. It just needs to be clearly outlined that this strategy is one that is doomed to failure, and there will be a number of unfortunate situations that arise before the government is compelled to admit that this is a failing strategy that is letting down Alberta's seniors. Ultimately, it will be. While in theory this bill upgrades a few things, really, it doesn't do anywhere near what it should do for the type of people that this government intends to have use these facilities. That is why we have some very serious concerns about this bill and the direction that it facilitates.

Thank you.

10:10

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 12

Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a great pleasure to speak on Bill 12, brought by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. The intent of the bill is to simplify the process the board uses to resolve disputes and to implement more informal, flexible forms of dispute resolution mechanisms. Amendments are included to allow the board more efficient processes to manage its workload, but there are no amendments to deal with the actual competency of the decisions made. It's just procedural in nature.

The design of the bill is intended to deal with administrative procedures, in effect to streamline them in order to more expeditiously resolve surface rights disputes. The amendments to the act are on the procedure side and are aimed at making the process aspects of the Surface Rights Board more efficient. The previous Surface Rights Act contained many procedural, prescriptive inclusions that made the process of dispute resolution onerous and led to delays in compensation judgments. The new amendments will allow more flexibility for the board to expedite the proceedings.

This is in the best interests of landowners as long as the amendments are fair. It is not in their interests to be involved in these disputes for an extended period of time because it costs them lots of money and lots of anxiety and the procedure takes a lot longer. As the statistics over the past few years have shown, the SRB is hearing more and more cases. This makes it a necessity to find a process to deal with more hearings and resolve them fairly for landowners and resource companies.

I raised some concerns last time I spoke on the bill. As long as those concerns are addressed, I think we can support this bill. This is a very important bill as it relates to the compensation for landowners who have resource activity on their land, and any changes to it must be carefully considered. Like I said, I had concerns that I raised before, like giving too much power to just one board member and the appeal process and those kinds of issues. Any changes must be carefully considered and must achieve an optimal balance between the rights of owners and the rights of the operators.

With that, I think I'll conclude. Those concerns should be addressed. I think that's about it for me, Mr. Chairman. As long as the bill is balanced, I think we have no problems supporting it.

Thank you.

Ms Notley: I'll be brief. Probably to nobody's great surprise, we do actually have some concerns with this bill. I did review them in second reading, but the bottom line is this: in the most general of ways this bill is going to dilute the administrative processes, the rules around an administrative tribunal. That never is a good thing. There are already opportunities for negotiation, and what this does is allow for a tremendous amount of discretion on the part of the tribunal to move parties into negotiating processes, often when the parties are greatly imbalanced in terms of their power. While negotiation can be an excellent mechanism and a tremendously positive strategy for resolving issues, there must always be a way to come out of it if it's not working.

If you look at other administrative tribunals – and I'll take, for example, the Labour Relations Board – there are a number of different avenues through which parties can mediate settlements of issues, and that's totally reasonable. That's totally reasonable. But you can't set something up where, in fact, you are removing from someone the right to have an in-person hearing. That's essentially what this legislation does. It is removing from the parties the right to have in-person hearings. It is a significant dilution of their natural justice rights, and it is an informalization of an administrative tribunal, which, some might argue, has already struggled to fairly balance the needs between two parties who have very, very different levels of power when they come to the table.

For that reason, the stated objective of finding a way to deal with the backlog and coming up with better ways to negotiate: that's all fine, but you cannot do that by removing people's rights to a fair, open, in-person hearing, and that's what this bill is doing. So we can't support it for that reason.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to briefly address this amendment. The bill as proposed will enhance the Surface Rights Board's service delivery and streamline the processes for users and give better and more timely service. It removes a number of statute-imposed procedural impediments and implements procedural changes only. It does not in any way affect either the compensation payable to the landowner or occupant for surface entry or any other substantive right of the parties. By providing for

flexible procedures, the board can better and more easily respond to the needs of the parties appearing before it, and this will enhance service delivery to those who require the services of the Surface Rights Board. For example, the existing provisions requiring a certain number of board members to perform certain tasks will be eliminated, and provisions mandating certain processes such as hearings or inquiries will be repealed to enable and encourage dispute resolution conferences and permit those processes to occur quickly.

The amendment also repeals provisions that are not necessary either because they are implicitly within the board's jurisdiction – for example, setting staff duties – or more reasonably would fit within the rules of practice. So this will again streamline the board's processes.

10:20

I would like to specifically address the provisions of section 12 of the bill, which amends section 28 of the existing act. Section 12 would improve the way the board functions by obviating the necessity of holding what would be unnecessary inquiries or hearings. The landowner would still have a right to seek a termination order under section 28(1) of the Surface Rights Act. We are not denying this right of landowners to terminate access for unused portions of the right of entry orders. All that is being sought here is to streamline the process and to provide a speedier service by getting rid of the legislative requirement for an inquiry. Termination orders are used when operators have ceased using the right of entry or part of it or where an operator has failed to avail themselves of a right to enter within a period of two months. This is really an administrative function, and that should not require a hearing to proceed. This is one of the outdated provisions of the Surface Rights Act that prevents the board from operating as responsively as it could.

In 2008 the Surface Rights Board issued 40 full termination orders and decisions and 16 partial terminations. One could only imagine the time and expense and the inconvenience of having all of those go to a hearing when all that is being asked is a right of entry termination by the landowner himself. Getting rid of these unnecessary inquiries through the amended section is a way to promote efficiency. It's a way to cut red tape and to simplify the procedures and cut costs.

I would urge all hon. members to support the bill in its present form. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 12, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 13

Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Bill 16

Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yeah. I mean, I don't what we'd do if we weren't here to drag this out. We do have a concern about Bill 16. The amendment that was initially brought in was designed to ensure that peace officers were not in a position where they would be using the term "constable" or "special constable." Now, you know, we've heard just very recently about some unfortunate but still highly public and very problematic uses of force by the police. Whether they are or are not justified, the fact of the matter is that there is an agreement on the part of citizens that they will allow themselves to be policed by people who have met the requirements and conditions to be a police officer. Sometimes that means that those people actually give up certain rights that they wouldn't allow just an average person on the street to take from them. But that's sort of the consensus. That's the deal that we make when we, you know, agree to be policed.

There is a reason why police don't just sort of walk in off the street and become police officers the next day. There are criteria that they have to meet. There are standards of behaviour that they have to meet. So our concern is that although this appears to be a very, you know, administrative little thing – oh, people are having to spend a little bit too much money on uniforms – the concern is that in the long term you'll have peace officers who are appearing to be constables, and that is something that ought not to be happening. That's the concern that we have about this.

The fact of the matter is that when the bill first came in, I believe there was a three-year grace period between when the legislation was passed and when these parts of the act are proclaimed. I just don't know how hard it is to take a little label off a uniform. It seems to me to be a bit much that we're coming back to the Legislature to say that it's okay for peace officers to be called constables because we can't change the uniforms in three years.

I am concerned about this, so just because that's what we do, we'll probably not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report bills 33, 14, 10, 12, 13, and 16.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 33, Bill 14, Bill 10, Bill 12, Bill 13, and Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now do stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:28 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 40a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Leader of the NDP Opposition
McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,
NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
Government Whip
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Deputy Official Opposition Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Stevens, Hon. Ron, QC, Calgary-Glenmore (PC),
Deputy Premier, Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 13, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of grade 7 students from l'école Broxton Park school in Spruce Grove. They missed last year as grade 6 students, so they came this year as grade 7 students and were able to participate in your mock Legislature. I might add that, talking to them on the steps before the picture, they told me that their bill was school uniforms, and it passed, so it's interesting that a number of the schools are doing that. They are accompanied by teacher Mrs. Fran Korpela and parent helpers Mrs. Lauri MacKinnon and Mrs. Shauna Specht. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that these bright, young students from Spruce Grove rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members here two very special guests, who are seated in the members' gallery. The first is my STEP student for the summer, Mr. Alykhan Rajan, who is in his second year at the University of Alberta. He'll be graduating with expertise in science and in commerce. We want to welcome him and thank him for the work he's going to do.

Second is my trusted and faithful constituency manager, without whom I'd be totally lost, Judi Kendall, who, by the way, is also the president of the Fort Edmonton historical board.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly staff from the Workers' Compensation Board, government relations office. WCB Alberta is an independent, employer-funded organization that provides cost-effective disability and liability insurance. Workers' Compensation compensates injured workers for lost income, health care, and other costs related to a work-related injury. The staff in this office respond to inquiries from ministers responsible for WCB and the MLAs' inquiries on behalf of workers. They provide a very important service in responding to the inquiries and concerns of all Albertans. I would ask our guests to stand as I introduce them: Ron Helmholt, Ashley Croden, Keri Grainger, Kathleen Ruelling, and Sarah McEwen. I'm honoured to welcome them here today, and I would ask all of the

members of this Assembly to give them the warm, traditional welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today that I rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two good friends of mine, both strong Conservatives, who are sitting in the public gallery. Firstly, Kyle Franz, who is a PhD student at Queen's University in Kingston, where he expects to finish his PhD in 2011. He's a native of Brooks and a former president of the PC Youth of Alberta. I once served on his executive. He plans to come to Alberta once he has completed.

Secondly, I'm pleased to introduce my STEP student, Matt Gelinas, who is originally from Calgary. He is a fourth-year political science student at the University of Calgary. He is a former staffer of the Prime Minister's office. Despite him having poor judgment in being a fan of the Saskatchewan Roughriders, he is one of the best campaign workers that I've ever seen.

I'd ask that they both please stand up and get the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Barb and Don Oatway from Airdrie. Barb is currently battling a serious form of cancer, and her courage in doing so has been inspirational. I'm happy to report that she is currently in remission. They are up here to witness the tabling of a petition that Mrs. Oatway has organized, which we will get to later on this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly six special guests sitting in the public gallery. Mr. Balvir Boparai is a well-known pop singer in the Punjab state of India. Mr. Boparai is in Canada to promote the Punjabi culture in our beautiful nation, Canada. Balvir escaped from the Indian summer. You can see the colour of his skin. Along with him are other members of the Sikh community: Mr. Malkit Singh Panesar, Mr. Kirpal Singh Padam, Mr. Kuldip Singh Chana, Mr. Balbir Singh Chana, Mr. Avtar Singh Deol. I would like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special group of people. We have four of the 10 buffalo gals joining us in the public gallery today.

First of all, I'd like to introduce to you Conni Massing. Conni, would you rise. Conni is a playwright, a television and film screenwriter, and currently the writer-in-residence at the Edmonton Stanley Milner library.

Next, Stephen Heatley, who many of you would recognize as the artistic director for Theatre Network in the '80s and '90s. We've lost him to British Columbia. He is now a professor of acting and directing at the University of British Columbia.

Richard Stuart is one of the very few but very precious full-time

staff members at the Edmonton Folk Festival. He is their administrator.

Finally, Brian Deedrick, who many of you will recognize as the amazing, beloved, and, well, yes, artistic director of the Edmonton Opera.

Please rise again and accept the warm welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, do you have an introduction?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today we have with us a very special guest in the public gallery. Mr. Al Kiffiak wrote a letter to me in February expressing his outrage at the unjust policy changes proposed for seniors' health care. Mr. Kiffiak is appalled by the government's plan to put the quality of life of seniors in jeopardy by making it more expensive to acquire prescriptions. Mr. Kiffiak is here today to show this government that seniors deserve better and to witness the tabling of his letter. I'll ask Mr. Kiffiak to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Canadian Home Builders' Association SAM Awards

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the Canadian Home Builders' Association, Calgary region, and the recent successes of their 22nd annual sales and marketing, SAM, awards ceremonies. The SAM awards recognize the highest levels of innovation and achievement in single- and multifamily home designs, development, renovation, new products, marketing, and sales, to name a few. Sixty-one awards were presented to members who exemplify the industry's best of 2008. For the first time points were awarded to new homes which were rated and qualified as bronze, silver, gold, or platinum under the Built Green program criteria.

Mr. Speaker, Built Green is an industry-driven, voluntary program that promotes green building practices to reduce the impact that building has on the environment. It benefits the homebuyer, the community, and the environment and is an opportunity for everyone to choose a green future. This program was the vision of the CHBA Calgary region member builders and has grown quickly to become a national program, which continually raises the bar of environmental responsibility.

Both the Built Green and the SAM award programs are prime examples of how one of Alberta's major industries strives to better itself and self-directs for positive advancements to the benefit of all Albertans.

I would like to ask all our members here to join me in congratulating the SAM award finalists and recipients and in thanking the house builders in Alberta for providing Albertans with housing of high quality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

1:40

**Lori Irvine
William Smolak**

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to congratulate two Alberta teachers who received an award for their dedication to high school students. The Hilton Mierau award of

excellence in off-campus learning is a new award offered by Careers: the Next Generation. It honours educators who go above and beyond their duties to give students the opportunity to connect learning to work. The recipients are Lori Irvine and William Smolak.

Lori has taught at Lindsay Thurber comprehensive high school in Red Deer for 18 years and has been off-campus co-ordinator for the past four years. Her innovative approach to off-campus learning includes using video conferencing to connect students with specialists in different occupations.

William left retirement five years ago to provide a new focus for the off-campus education program at the Vegreville composite high school. He has partnered Vegreville composite with over 40 businesses in the community that accept students for work placements.

Mr. Speaker, these teachers truly understand the value of off-campus education programs, which reinforce and extend and motivate students' learning.

I also want to recognize the work of Careers: the Next Generation, an industry-driven partnership dedicated to developing the careers of Alberta youth. I applaud the efforts of individuals like Lori and William, who make off-campus learning an engaging and successful experience for Alberta students.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Buffalo Gals

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I welcome to the Legislative Assembly a group of western Canadians known collectively and affectionately as the buffalo gals: Conni Massing, Richard Stuart, Brian Deedrick, and Stephen Heatley. Missing from the group here are Bob White, Kevin McGugan, Patti Pon, Bob Erkamp, Tyler Irvine, and Norma Lock.

Now, I've asked them to join me today to celebrate the announcement by Brindle and Glass books that next year they will be publishing Conni's book about the buffalo gals and their Alberta adventures, tentatively entitled *Buffalo Jerky*.

Who and what are the buffalo gals? Well, you get a sense of them by reading about them in this month's *Legacy* magazine, where Conni has an article entitled the *Torrington Eight*, which I highly recommend. Essentially, this is a group of 10 western Canadians who explore Alberta: Alberta off the beaten tracks, Alberta by theme, Alberta by region. I think the genesis of this was the annual adventure that Conni and some friends took years ago doing the stamp around Alberta project, where you could travel to different locations in Alberta and get a stamp in your passport book. Now, for 10 years this group of friends, all employed more or less in the theatre, have done what few of us do: they choose the theme or the location, they do the research, they jump in the van and explore Alberta for a weekend every June. I've always been insanely jealous of the fun and adventures that they have and of the stories that they tell. Now, as of next year we can all enjoy these stories.

Thank you for coming to the Legislature, buffalo gals, and allowing me to show you off to all of my legislative colleagues and for showing us a way to have a fun time and celebrate our wonderful province. Enjoy this year's tour.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to commemorate a special day for Albertans of every culture and background, World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. In November 2001 the United Nations adopted the universal declaration on cultural diversity, which designated May 21 as a day to deepen our understanding of the values of cultural diversity and to learn to live together better. World day recognizes the pivotal relationship between culture and development and the role that communication technologies play in that relationship. Through dialogue and mutual respect Albertans of all cultures and faiths can help contribute to the great task of building a stronger, better world for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of such a diverse and dynamic group in this Assembly. Together, Albertans of all cultures have contributed to making our great province a beacon of hope and achievement on the world stage. I am also very, very proud to serve as the Member for Edmonton-McClung, a culturally diverse constituency that continually inspires me every day.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

International Day of Families

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The United Nations has designated this Friday, May 15, as the International Day of Families. My wife, Jennifer, my son, Dawson, and even our puppy, Mac-Gyver, will definitely celebrate the day, and I encourage all Albertans to do the same.

Healthy, supportive families are key to building a strong province, and that's why it's so important for individuals, communities, and government to work together to ensure that families enjoy the support they need to reach their full potential and build a successful future for all. Our government provides numerous programs and services that contribute to building strong families, including family and community support services; parent link centres; services for foster and adoptive parents; support for quality child care; an education system that is second to none; high-quality, accessible health services; supports for seniors and people with disabilities; and so much more.

Mr. Speaker, successful families continue to be our priority, and we're proud of Alberta's diverse and thriving families, who provide children and youth with the foundation they need to become successful adults.

I'd like to thank my family for making me feel on top of the world every day. I'd like to encourage all Albertans to commemorate the International Day of Families on Friday and perhaps every day, and I'd like to congratulate everyone associated with each of our related ministries for their invaluable contributions to our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is also a very special anniversary for the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. Ten years ago today he became one of the very small number of human beings who had the opportunity to view the world from 29,035 feet above sea level, the summit of Mount Everest.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Crime Prevention Awards

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Crime Prevention Week, a time for all Albertans to make crime prevention

a priority and work together towards a common goal of safe and secure communities.

When a neighbourhood experiences a problem with crime and residents become frustrated, it's important to remember that sometimes all it takes to fix a problem is one person with an idea and drive. That person gets others involved. Everyone is looking out for one another, and great things happen. We saw some excellent examples of this last week at the annual Solicitor General and Public Security crime prevention awards. Six Albertans who are stepping up to make a difference were honoured for their involvement with preventing crime in their communities. Earlier this week we had the honour of meeting three of these award recipients when they were introduced in this Assembly. It's inspiring to see the good that happens when ordinary people take ownership and responsibility for crime reduction in their backyards and neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, individuals and community organizations are key partners with police and government in the fight against crime. Every day there are new examples of the excellent job police in Alberta do in preventing and investigating crime across the province. Government is doing its part by implementing key recommendations of the safe communities task force such as adding 300 new police positions, hiring 110 new probation officers, new Crown prosecutors, as well as launching a new program that targets the 15 per cent of offenders who commit 60 per cent of the crimes. We are also developing a gang crime suppression strategy that focuses on intervention, prevention, and enforcement, and a gang summit will be held in June.

Mr. Speaker, this week and throughout the entire year I encourage every Albertan to visit the government website at www.crimeprevention.gov.ab.ca for crime prevention information and suggestions they can use today to help keep their communities safe.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Royal Alexandra Hospital Surgery Reductions

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Alexandra hospital, one of the largest and busiest in the province, is having to cut elective surgery by 15 per cent, thus cutting needed operating rooms that were finally running at full capacity. To the minister: how much has the minister told the Alberta Health Services Board to cut in the health system? How many dollars are we looking at this year?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, like on so many occasions with this particular member – most recently I recall him talking about a physician hiring freeze. There was no physician hiring freeze. In this particular case I recognize that the leader is back to his favourite research arm, and that particular research arm is reporting a situation that, quite frankly, is not correct. I asked the CEO, in fact, earlier this week because I expected the question to come earlier, but because it hadn't been made public in the *Edmonton Journal*, I guess that's why – I'll answer the second question.

Dr. Swann: Well, perhaps the minister would enlighten us, then. What is the plan for the Royal Alexandra hospital's surgical services?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, what has occurred at the Royal

Alexandra hospital is that in the first quarter of this year they did increase their workload, and they incurred a significant amount of overtime costs. The CEO of Alberta Health Services has a budget that he is attempting to work within, so what he has done by way of a letter – and I would like to at the appropriate time today table five copies of the letter. The letter states very clearly that he has instructed this particular facility to maintain the level of operating surgeries at the same level as at the end of 2008, so there is no reduction.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's clearly a playing with words here. My understanding is that the surgical suites finally got up to full function in the last couple of months. They've been short of staff, short of space. They've finally gotten up to optimal functioning, and now this minister is saying that they're being asked to return to last year's rates. Well, those rates were surely not optimal. How does the minister explain this disparity?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I've heard from this particular leader talking about smart spending in health care, about one day saving, the next day spending. What we've done is we've brought in a budget that is before this Legislature. Our particular budget has increased by about 4.9 per cent. The Alberta Health Services budget has increased 7.7 per cent within that operating budget, which, by the way, is \$500 million more than last year. The CEO is attempting to prioritize where those dollars go, and that is a decision that that board and that CEO will make.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The National Center for Science Education in the United States stated that opt-out policies are a mistake because of the burdens imposed on teachers, the disruption caused to the educational process, and the damage opt-out clauses cause to the reputation of public institutions. While reputable groups continue to protest against opt-outs, this administration's mind has already been made up by fringe religious groups. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: which organizations were consulted during the policy development on the parental opt-out? We already know that Alberta's teachers were ignored, so who is influencing this government?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the people that influence this government are Albertans. There are 3 and a half million of those, and we proudly stand up for them. I met just recently, yesterday, with the Minister of Education, and we had a discussion with representatives of various school boards. We all agree on one thing: the system that works now works perfectly well. If you have a problem with the curriculum, you go to your teachers; you go to your principal; you go to your school boards. There's nothing that we have here in Bill 44 that will change that, sir.

Dr. Swann: Well, if it was fine before, why are we changing it, Mr. Minister?

The parental opt-out will drive away the best and brightest teachers in Alberta, who will not tolerate the conditions this government is creating. Why has the government threatened our public education by imposing such a burden on teachers that many will actually leave for more progressive jurisdictions?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank the Lord that our teachers are much more sensible than that. They know that they are in one of the best education systems in the world and one of the best provinces, the best countries in the world, full stop. We're not assailing anyone. We are not undermining anyone. The only people who are undermining the integrity of the educators in the teaching profession are the ones that continuously fearmonger, and they happen to be on the other side of the House.

Dr. Swann: Why has the government ignored the rights of parents who do not want their children's education disrupted or compromised by the religious views of others?

Mr. Blackett: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more. We're not compromising anybody because of the religious views of others. Religious views have no purview in what we're discussing. With respect to parent rights we're talking about notification and an opt-out clause on the grounds of religion, sexual orientation, and human sexuality. No more, no less.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Oil Sands Royalties

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we revealed that a major oil sands company is paying 48 cents a barrel in royalties, at least for the first three months of the year. That's a 95 per cent drop in their royalty payments. The government justifies this by saying that royalties are much higher when prices go up, and they are. But the government capped its royalty rate increases at \$120 a barrel. To the Minister of Energy: since the government is sharing in the risks at the bottom of the price cycle, will it lift the \$120 cap at the top of the cycle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most certainly, with all of the discussion around royalty and the collection of royalty that we've had in the last while, I think it would be interesting to establish just where it is that certain members actually find themselves seated because there is a suggestion now by an hon. member that we should do something about raising royalties at this particular point in time. This same individual not that long ago – I believe he was the leader of a party at that time – said something like: you don't want to kill the golden goose; Albertans depend on this industry.

Dr. Taft: And so they do, so it needs to be well managed, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta's small and mid-sized conventional oil and gas companies are struggling like never before. Since the government has given a 95 per cent royalty break to a very profitable giant oil sands company, to the Minister of Energy: what does he say to the conventional industry, which is under such stress?

Mr. Knight: You know, Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question. Quite simply, it's obvious again that the member opposite has not been paying any attention at all to what we're doing. Transitional rates are in place to help exactly the type of people that he's talking about. Besides that, we now have a drilling incentive in place, \$200 a metre, 5 per cent royalty on the first 100,000 barrels of production from a new well. We're doing all of that and more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the conventional producers are quite delighted.

My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. This government plans to take in 50 per cent more from gambling than from all oil sands royalties combined. Fifty per cent more from gambling than from the second-largest oil reserve on the planet. To the President of the Treasury Board: why is this government depending more on gambling revenue than on all oil sands revenues combined? What kind of priority is that?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, I guess it would be akin to having something change in the world, and all of a sudden all of the cards and slot machines are gone, and we don't have casinos anymore. Then I would be getting twice as much money from parking tickets as I am from casinos, and that would be something we've orchestrated. The world oil industry collapsed. There was a framework in place to manage that. So where the oil royalties are coming from now – yes, we'd like to have more. But the structure in the AGLC around casinos and gaming has stayed very consistent, and that is Albertans doing what they enjoy doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Health System Restructuring

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Wait times in Edmonton and Calgary emergency rooms are approaching 24 hours. Now the government is cancelling 15 per cent of elective surgeries at Edmonton's Royal Alexandra hospital. Wait times for hip and knee replacements and cataract surgery will go through the roof. My question is to the health minister. Why have you again failed Albertans, leaving them waiting in pain and darkness because you've cancelled their surgeries?

2:00

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, nobody has cancelled anybody's surgeries. It's been very clear that urgent care and urgent surgeries will be proceeding as they always have. There is a budget – and I know this particular member knows nothing about budgeting. He wouldn't know how to live within a budget if it were placed in front of him. What we are trying to do with Alberta Health Services is ensure that for the first time in many years we are going to live within our budget, and that is what the Alberta Health Services Board is planning to do.

Mr. Mason: Cutting costs at the expense of surgeries that allow people to see and walk without pain is heartless and cruel. To the health minister: with a \$13 billion budget why on earth can't you and your government provide basic health care for Albertans who need it?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that they only want to provide basic health care, we are providing excellent health care in Alberta. Ask anyone who's been in the health care system. There are situations, however, where we have to ensure that we live within our means. We have a budget before this House, which I believe the Legislature will most likely approve, and we're going to live within that budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you tell that to somebody who's been waiting in an emergency room for 24 hours.

It's clear that the Progressive Conservatives cannot be trusted with our health care system. They are so beholden to private interests that they keep trying to wreck public health care. To the health minister: given that the current demolition derby was completely absent from the PC platform in the last election, will you call off your dogs and fully restore our public health care system until you actually get a public mandate to change it?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we had a mandate about a year and a half ago, I believe. Also, I think there was a party that ran in a neighbouring province of ours last night that campaigned on a similar kind of theme, and I think we all know the results.

Gangs and Organized Crime

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, police agencies throughout the province have made it clear that gangs and organized crime have become a prevalent threat to the safety and security of Albertans. This government has responded with initiatives that are helping police and communities gain an upper hand on criminals. These initiatives include the western Canada gang and organized crime conference, which was hosted in Calgary two weeks ago by Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, a part of the Alberta law enforcement response team. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. What is being done to make sure that police services in Alberta can co-ordinate their fight against organized crime and gang crime?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to ensuring an integrated and co-ordinated response by policing agencies as they keep Albertans safe from gangs and organized crime. One such initiative is the Alberta law enforcement response team, which recently hosted the western Canada gang and organized crime conference. The conference brought together more than 450 experts in criminal intelligence to share best practices in gang crime suppression. This conference also gave us the opportunity to share details of Alberta's gang crime suppression initiative and solicit feedback from experts in the field.

Mr. Dallas: To the same minister: it's interesting to learn a bit about the conference, but how exactly would this type of conference support Alberta's fight against gangs and organized crime?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, crime knows no boundaries. Integration and collaboration amongst police and communities is the key to success in our fight against gangs. Conferences such as this are critical to ensuring that our response to gangs and crimes is co-ordinated effectively across provincial boundaries. They provide valuable information regarding emerging trends about gang culture and related criminal activity in both Canada and the United States. They also give intelligence officers, police, and probation officers another opportunity to network, share information on techniques to combat gang violence.

Mr. Dallas: To the same minister: well, sharing is great, but did we come up with some solutions to gang crime as a result of this conference?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, this conference confirmed that Alberta is very much on the right track when it comes to fighting gangs and organized crime. We're moving to better integrate and align police

responses to gang crime by building on the current ALERT model, which is proving very successful in fighting organized crime and Internet crime. Premier Stelmach's commitment to add 300 new police officers over three years is also significantly increasing police resources in the province.

The Speaker: You know, you made a faux pas.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Seniors' Pharmaceutical Plan

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The government's new plan for seniors' pharmaceutical coverage has missed the point. Selectively targeting sick seniors for drug costs is discriminatory and un-Albertan. To the minister of health: will the minister commit to further review this legislation to address the concerns seniors have brought forward? You have not completed your work, sir.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have listened to seniors in Alberta, and we have announced a revised seniors' drug plan that will take effect on July 1, 2010, whereby some 60 per cent of Alberta's seniors will be better off than they are today. Under that plan 80 per cent of seniors' drug costs will continue to be picked up by government.

Dr. Swann: Will the minister also admit that single seniors who earn between \$12,000 and \$21,000, considered relatively low income in this province, are actually worse off under the revised plan as opposed to the first draft of his plan?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's something wrong with the member's math because that particular senior today is paying 30 per cent of a prescription up to a maximum of \$25. Under the new plan that same individual will be paying 20 per cent of the cost of a prescription up to a maximum of \$15. So I'd ask him how he sees that as being worse off.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What plans does the minister have for the seniors who need life-saving medications and find the costs beyond their reach?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have heard the answer to my question. Obviously, he didn't review the question before he read it because he knows it's wrong.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Income Support Training

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received many concerns about the duration policy for funded learners under the Alberta Works income support policy of 1995. One of the concerns is that the training period changed from 40 to 30 months. If students require further training after the 30-month period, they then have to wait for four years to receive more training and more dollars. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What purpose does this serve for those people who need to get more education?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, prior to 2006 a learner under Alberta

Works or income support could take funded training up to a lifetime – and I emphasize lifetime – maximum of 40 months. After that, they were no longer eligible for any funding. But in 2006 we changed that policy to allow students to take funded training for a period of 30 months. The significant change is that they can come back after a period of four years and receive more funds for additional training. This policy strikes a balance between being accountable to our taxpayers and getting people the adequate training to succeed in the workforce.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, if students fail or don't complete a program, they have to wait another four years before they can return to training. I know that when I went to school, I was not perfect. I did not receive the perfect marks. If I failed at least one course, I wasn't kicked out of school, nor was I told that I couldn't access funding. To the same minister. This is really a harsh policy and a harsh penalty. Why would we continue to support this outdated policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our department is committed to the success of students. Our staff and students work together on a service plan that sets the direction and goals that they have on their coursework. Students must also be accountable and responsible for their studies in the program that they've registered in. Our staff can intervene on behalf of a student if that student is experiencing difficulties. We can change courses, and it is possible to have that organized. Students who fail a course may take the course on a part-time basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's really great to hear, but when a student doesn't follow through and complete their courses on time, they are not provided with further funding for at least another four years, as I indicated. My question is to the same minister. How is this helping the students, especially in depressed areas, and the Alberta taxpayer, as he indicated, if they are forced to go back to SFI, if that's all they've got? What course of action can they take?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, students who don't complete their course in the required time are considered to have left that particular course. They have left their service plan. I agree that they have to wait the four years to be eligible for funded training again, but under really extremely extraordinary circumstances individuals may be funded for training again before the four-year period has elapsed. We want to confirm to those individuals that in both the school situation or in the workforce they have individual responsibilities that they should adhere to.

2:10 Mandatory Disclosure of Gunshot and Stab Wounds

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the province's vision of reducing crime is contained in the safe communities task force, and having recently reviewed the document, I could not find anywhere therein the enlisting of health care professionals to act as surrogate detectives for our police forces. To the Minister of Justice: can you tell me how having health care professionals provide information about individuals' gunshot or stab wounds, most of which are self-inflicted, helps our communities get to the root cause of crime?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The great thing about the province's safe communities plan is that we had a great task force, that put together 31 recommendations under the leadership of an hon. member in this House. We are not restricted, in our view, to those 31 recommendations. We believe that this policy is a way forward for all people in Alberta to feel better in their communities and for us to partner with them in the context of building safe communities.

I will answer the second part of the question once I get asked the second part.

Mr. Hehr: In addictions court an accused must plead guilty as a precondition to entry into the program. To the Justice minister: with the proposed approach why would an accused plead guilty to a substantive offence if they might be then liable for associated medical costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In terms of the partnership that we have with Albertans, we believe it's important for everyone to understand that they have an obligation to be part of building a safer community. We believe that it's very important for everyone who's involved in the medical system, who already has an obligation with respect to the reporting of child abuse, to also be involved in helping police and helping the community to find out what's going on in the community to get to the root causes of crime.

With respect to our approach to addiction treatment it's very important that we understand that people who are coming to court can with the help of social workers, Crown prosecutors, and their own defence counsel acknowledge that they need help, and we're there to provide programs that will help them.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you for that answer. Mr. Speaker, I guess a lot of times the people in our criminal justice system are both victims of crime and criminals themselves, and they often need treatment for addictions and mental health issues. Turning to medical professionals and health care facilities and agents of the state: well, these are diverging goals. Can the health minister tell me who from the Alberta medical community was consulted in these policy developments?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you who was consulted. It was Albertans, and they're fed up with crime. Despite the fact that this member tries to portray himself as some kind of a crime fighter, I'd like to see him support this bill for once and actually show that he is a crime fighter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

No-zero Grading Policy

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Many schools have adopted a no-zero grading policy, and some members of the public view this practice as unreasonable and potentially damaging to students who find that the real world isn't quite so forgiving of below-standard performance. If we're to assure the postsecondary schools and employers of the calibre of our students, will the Minister of Education establish a province-wide grading policy?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously assessment is a very important part of the education process, and teachers are the professionals in the classroom that have to work with students to make sure that they can help those students find their passions, help those students succeed. The question of a no-zero policy is one that's adopted from school to school. There's been discussion about it across the country. But, in effect, it doesn't really matter whether a student gets zero or five or 10 or 15. The issue is: how does a teacher engage with a student in the classroom to encourage them to do their best and to maximize their potential?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Public debate is valued by Albertans, but on matters of grades or on reporting to students and their parents, the ministry will have to take a leadership role. Will the Ministry of Education be doing that?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, really, when it comes to classroom performance and assessment of learning, assessment for learning, those processes, where the province is interested in assessment of the system to see whether the system is serving Albertans well and serving our students well. When it comes to the assessment of students with respect to progress, that is the role of the professional teacher in the classroom and the policies that are adopted by a school and a school board to ensure that students are encouraged to learn and succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Parents have expressed concern that a no-zero grading policy gives them too little to go on. With this type of grading system, can the minister advise how parents are supposed to know how well their child is performing in school?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the no-zero policy, as I understand it, as it's implemented in various jurisdictions and schools, essentially would deal with specific assignment processes and with a mark on a report card. What's really important is that parents engage on an ongoing basis. With the wonders of technology now we see more and more schools going on a school zone reporting process so that parents can actually log on and find out whether their students have completed assignments, what progress their students are making, and how they're participating. Again, we would encourage parents to engage at parent-teacher interviews with teachers with respect to the progress of their children. It's not simply a mark on a report card that matters. It's the ongoing process of learning, encouraging success, and making sure that parents are involved in that process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Municipal Government Board Appeals

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last few years the number of appeals before the Municipal Government Board has absolutely skyrocketed. This administration's solution to reducing the board's workload is to take away a private owner's right of appeal. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Presently local boards are made up of local officials. How will the minister guarantee property owners a fair and independent hearing when they cannot appeal the decision to the provincial board itself?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that particular bill is in front of the House, but I can suggest to you that we are not taking away any appeal opportunities for individuals. In fact, if you would read the bill, it enhances opportunities for individuals to acquire information that individuals need from municipalities. The appeal process is no different than a planning process. The first process is at the local level. I can explain more on the second go-around.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I can't believe that. The minister probably read my mind.

Given that with the proposed changes a property owner can only appeal a point of law to the Court of Queen's Bench and those costs can be very prohibitive, how will these concerns of independence and fairness be addressed under that prohibitive action?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, presently and in the new bill the contents are exactly the same: the only way that you can appeal a point of law is through the courts. It's no different now. It's not going to be any different in the future.

Ms Pastoor: But there was that one step in between where they could go to the province. If the changes are made, Alberta will be the only province with a one-level appeal system whose boards are locally appointed. Why has the minister taken the drastic measures? Instead of improving the current system, it's been rejigged, and there's one less step.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, presently an individual can go to the local appeal process. They also have the opportunity to go on to the Municipal Government Board. What does take place in a lot of situations is that the individuals hijack the first appeal process and go directly to the Municipal Government Board. These are local decisions. The only decisions that are going to be made at the local level are residential and farmland.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Groundwater Monitoring

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Council of Canadian Academies' report on water said that 92 per cent of private wells in Alberta don't meet Canadian guidelines for water quality. Now, on Monday the Minister of Environment said that industrial water monitoring won't be reduced, which means that he's got to cut groundwater monitoring, that affects water wells for rural Albertans. When 92 per cent of these wells are pumping poor-quality water, how can the minister possibly think it's okay to cut water monitoring anywhere in Alberta?

2:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that what the member is not acknowledging is that groundwater monitoring is an evolutionary process. It's something that goes on over time. You only really get the information that is required to interpret from making comparisons over time. What we're doing is not eliminating groundwater monitoring, but perhaps instead of monitoring every well every year, we may monitor some of the wells every other year. The end result at the end of the day will be relatively unaffected.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that sounds to me like we're reducing our water monitoring.

Now, First Nations are taking government to court for ignoring them and failing to protect their water resources. Meanwhile, this government is giving industry free access to nearly 90 billion barrels of fresh water a year. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: will the minister explain how he can pretend to advocate for aboriginal Albertans when his government ignores their rights but lets industry go on using and contaminating their water?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's nobody in this government that I'm aware of that's ignoring any aboriginal rights whatsoever. In fact, I was just with the chiefs at their annual meeting yesterday, and we talked about some of these issues. I think the Minister of Environment has clarified what the province's role is. At the same time, perhaps I'd encourage the member to take a look at what the federal role is. We have a joint partnership with respect to the work that we're doing to help improve that circumstance. I've been up and have spoken with these groups at least half a dozen or more times to ensure that that gets done and those treaty rights referred to are respected, and they are.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it seems that mostly there's a joint partnership in passing the buck.

Now, the recent water report also notes an Alberta Research Council report stating that toxins from tailings ponds are leaking into our water table and aquifers. This government denies the effects this pollution is having on downstream First Nations despite the rising incidence of cancer. To the Minister of Environment: will the minister explain why aboriginal communities should trust that their watersheds are being protected when he continues to insist that development in the oil sands is harmless to the watershed, to groundwater, and to the environment?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we've been through this many times before in the past. The fact of the matter is that there are some acknowledged issues with some of the very early tailings ponds, the very first ones using very old technology. In those instances there are collector wells that are in place that will return the vast majority of any seepage back into the tailings pond itself. With the newer technology tailings ponds, the ones that are currently being developed – and, frankly, the old ones are almost entirely retired – the technology is entirely different.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Aboriginal Training and Employment

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the main concerns of aboriginal people, like most Albertans, is employment. We all realize that the current economic downturn has negatively impacted job opportunities around the world, so it's not surprising that aboriginal communities in Alberta are concerned about these downward trends. My questions are to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What is your ministry doing to help stimulate more job opportunities for Alberta's aboriginal people?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of excellent programs housed within the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, one of which is the First Nations economic partnerships initiative. That program alone has supported 109 successful economic partnerships with and amongst the First Nations, involving about 31 First Nations. We also have the First Nations economic development fund, which has provided additional opportunities through dozens of

partnering programs that the First Nations have undertaken from casino dollars. Those two programs alone have helped add hundreds of jobs for aboriginals in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, how do you know whether your ministry's programs and efforts are helping to increase aboriginal employment opportunities?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we keep a keen eye on the statistics and on information gathered through other means. I can tell you, for example, that in the oil sands area there are over 1,500 jobs, not including construction-related jobs, that aboriginal people are involved in. That is an increase of 60 per cent over the last few years. Similarly, there's another statistic with respect to the trades and apprenticeship area, where we've seen an increase of over 400 per cent of aboriginal people involved in the trades. Finally, we're working very aggressively with the Ministry of Employment and Immigration to help increase our aboriginal workforce plan, and that's succeeding now as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, with the significant growth in this population, what about job skills training for aboriginals and for youth in particular? What is your ministry doing to help engage that sector?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, a number of aboriginal youth already receive employment opportunities through some of the programs I've just mentioned, but I just want to highlight one that we're very proud of that's coming up at the end of June in Banff. This will be our first-ever international symposium focused on economic development success strategies for aboriginal people. This is in partnership, by the way, with Treaty 7 First Nations. We're going to feature a special aboriginal young entrepreneurs forum within that particular milieu. The registrations are starting to come in, and I'm very encouraged by that because there's a large number of young aboriginal people who are coming out to learn how to ply the trade and do business in this wonderful province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's paid farm workers have no occupational health and safety protection. When asked about what paid farm workers should do when injured, the Minister of Employment and Immigration told this Assembly that they could turn to the courts. Well, in the public gallery today is Philippa Thomas, an injured farm worker who has paid 15 and a half thousand dollars in legal costs and faces many times that cost before she even could get her case considered. What does the Minister of Employment and Immigration say to Philippa today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the question. As I've indicated to this House, we've hired a consultant to deal with this particular issue, to delve into it. The consultant will be talking

with farm workers, will be talking with farm owners, will be talking with various businesses that deal with farmers, and will be preparing a report for us to review over the summer and into the fall. We'll make some recommendations from there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given the tens of thousands of dollars that injured farm workers are forced to pay in legal costs because of this government's policies, does the minister recognize that saying, as he did in here a few weeks ago, that farm workers "have access to the courts as any other Albertan has access" is irresponsible, is unacceptable, and needs to be changed?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think I've indicated to this House quite often as well that, you know, it's not the rules and regulations that will make the difference on individual farms; it's the atmosphere of developing a farm safety attitude on farms. That works from both the employee's side as well as the employer's side. Both have to co-operate, and both have to work towards farm safety for each other.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, that was a shocking comment. The implication there is that a woman like Philippa Thomas is equal to any other worker and is responsible for the damage that she suffered at the hands of an employer.

My question is again to the same minister. He has talked about this consultant many times. Will the minister direct this consultant to personally meet with Philippa Thomas and any other injured farm worker or their family who wants to meet with him?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and we are developing the list of individuals that will be met. At this stage we're expanding on that particular list. This afternoon I'm personally meeting with the Farmworkers Union to discuss this very subject, and we'll keep on doing that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Rural Family Physician Recruitment

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got several rural communities that are experiencing a dangerous shortage of family physicians. This affects my constituents' access to primary care and in some cases is decreasing services in local hospitals and emergency rooms. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I have some great communities that are working on doctor recruitment committees and investing great dollars in trying to get family physicians to the rural areas. What is this ministry doing to help these groups recruit family physicians to rural areas?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. It is a challenge today. However, there are a couple of programs that the department runs. One is the rural physician action plan, which works with rural communities. In addition to that, there's the rural, remote, and northern program, which is part of the recent agreement with the Alberta Medical Association to actually provide incentives.

2:30

I think, however, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at a couple of other options to fill in some of these roles, such things as the

physician assistance plan that we need to start to examine and hopefully put in place. We need to adopt a model where nurse practitioners have the ability to assist in some of those communities as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for that answer. I'd like to add that some of my communities are frustrated that qualified and experienced physicians from out of the country must jump through so many hoops and regulations in order to be able to work in their profession here. Again to the same minister: why is it so difficult to get foreign doctors approved to provide services here in Alberta and improve our rural communities' access to these physicians, and what is his ministry doing about that?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the reality is that we have a number of foreign-trained doctors who are working in Alberta. In fact, every time I travel into rural communities, it seems like at least 50 per cent of the physicians are from somewhere else in the world, many of them from South Africa. We need to recognize that it's the College of Physicians and Surgeons that actually registers international graduates. I know that we've been working hard with them to impress upon them the fact that we need to ensure that there are no barriers to approval of these foreign-trained doctors. We also have to recognize that the college has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the training these doctors have in foreign countries meets the high standards that we have. That's always a delicate balance that has to take place.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, we know we have added more spots to educate Albertans at our universities in medicine, but it doesn't do much good if they leave the province once they're educated. My final question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What is the province doing to help ensure that doctors who are trained here in Alberta stay and practise here in Alberta once they've completed their medical training?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's my pleasure to be working with the Minister of Health and Wellness on the health workforce action plan. We're doing things such as the member mentioned, adding a number of spaces for Alberta students in our two medical schools. That in and of itself will help increase the number of doctors that will practise in the province.

In addition to that, we recognize where the hon. member's constituency is. It's very important that we attract rural physicians, so the integrated community clerkship program is funded through my department. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that we've had a recent report from the two medical schools on that clerkship program, which includes a doctor in your constituency. It has been tremendously successful.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Support for Children with Disabilities

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nature of care that not only protects but nurtures children with disabilities in Alberta is of the utmost importance in ensuring that they experience the best quality of life possible. It is therefore essential that there are

appropriate placements and ongoing evaluation of the care that is provided for vulnerable disabled children. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: given the highly specific individual needs of disabled children, can the minister briefly introduce and follow up on in writing what quality and quantity of training specific to physical or mental disabilities is required for Children and Youth Services staff above and beyond the limited staff members in the family support for children with disabilities program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will endeavour to get that information for this member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll look forward to receiving that information.

Is the minister absolutely certain that all Children and Youth Services staff are adequately trained and have the necessary understanding and experience to provide the proper placements and supports to Alberta's vulnerable disabled children?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we have some of the most dedicated staff in the province that are dealing with issues related to families with disabled children, and I just want to also stress for the House – and I think everybody here understands – that we do have one of the best programs in Canada. We're known for that. Our FSCD program is very unique. I don't know that there's any other program in this country that offers the wide variety of supports that we do, and we're very proud of that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You can have a big heart and be extremely dedicated, but unless you have the training and experience, that practicality is not going to be there.

What type of follow-up does the ministry conduct to ensure the well-being of disabled children after they've been placed in either foster care or kinship care? How frequently does the support evaluation occur to ensure that the placement and care continue to be appropriate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This response also relates to your last question. I think it's really important to point out with this program that we do survey families to find out what their experience with the program has been. In our last survey 87 per cent of the families talked about this being a very positive program for their family and having a very good impact on their children.

I think another thing that's very relevant and worth pointing out is that we have close to 9,000 clients that are using that program, and on an annual basis we only see just over 20 appeals.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

May Long Weekend Campsite Preparations

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are getting ready to enjoy the long weekend, and for many of my constituents that means camping. My first question is to the

Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. In light of the new online reservation service does your department have a policy in place to ensure that Albertans can still find campsites at a provincial park without having to spend \$10 to reserve?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new online campground system has been very successful. We've had a few glitches, but we've booked to date over 14,000 campsites this summer, so I would say very successful. We don't have a specific policy, though, on sites available on a first-come, first-served basis. We usually check out each different campground to see what needs to be done, but most of them as a policy or practice try to have some on-site that you can actually drive to that day.

As far as collecting reservation fees, we've been doing that for 20 years, and that always goes back into the campground system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also for the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Parents of teenagers in my constituency are very interested in temporary liquor bans at eight provincial campgrounds for the long weekend. Are you planning to extend bans to all provincial parks?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not planning on having liquor bans for all provincial parks. We have eight campgrounds out there that have proven to be problematic, so we have placed bans on those. As a result, we're seeing families return to those campgrounds where they were not feeling like they could be there and be safe. We want people to be safe and to have an enjoyable weekend, but only eight of our campgrounds will have a ban for the May long weekend.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. It seems like every May long weekend we have a problem with people tearing up Crown land with monster trucks and ATVs. What is your department doing to protect our precious lands?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the monster truck rip-up-the-land crowd had better bring their chequebooks with them this weekend because they're going to meet 280 law enforcement officers out there. Last week we signed a new joint enforcement task force with Tourism and Parks, Solicitor General, Transportation, and the RCMP that's going to put 280 officers out working together to make sure people have a fun weekend, a safe weekend. The people that destroy public resources are going to pay.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Support for Community Sports Organizations

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit has created a domino effect by reallocating money from the community initiatives program to international development agencies, which were cut when the minister disbanded the Wild Rose Foundation. Other groups who received cuts have also been told that they will be looked after, but the one group not looked after now or before is the sports commu-

nity. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Why did the minister choose to allocate the entire \$20 million to the community spirit program instead of using just \$13 million and leaving \$7 million to protect the Wild Rose and CIP programs from cuts?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that I'm not responsible for the sports community. I'm responsible for communities, community investments. I'm responsible for the not-for-profit sector. But I'm not responsible for the sports community, so I don't understand the question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Back to the same minister. This government has made it almost impossible for sports organizations to qualify for funding through the enhanced charitable tax credit, the community spirit program, both of which are under the minister's jurisdiction, or the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. Why does the government resist funding community sports organizations?

2:40

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely do fund community sports organizations. I looked at the combination of community investment programs; it's well over \$10 million that went to community facilities programs, so I don't know what she's talking about.

Ms Blakeman: Well, let me help the minister. Given that only 65 out of the 1,500 organizations who were awarded grants under the community spirit program were sports organizations even though they have a huge portion, almost a third, of the volunteer base in Alberta, will the minister commit to reviewing the criteria of this program so that the sports community can be included?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does identify one problem. There is only so much money to go around, and yes, we have 19,000 organizations. Yes, about 4,000 of those are community-based organizations. We do the best we can within the resources that we have, just as Albertans do in their own homes, and they expect that of our government.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses. In 30 seconds from now we will continue the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of my responses to the questions raised during Employment and Immigration's estimates in committee on April 14, 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently met with Mrs. Barb Oatway, whom you met earlier, about her very brave battle with cancer and a new medication called Revlimid, that was recently approved by Health Canada for the treatment of multiple myeloma. Mrs. Oatway has asked that I table this petition urging the government of Alberta to provide Revlimid as a publicly funded choice to patients with multiple myeloma.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling from Alison Ainsworth, formerly of Medicine Hat, who continues to be concerned that a golf tournament fundraiser held by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat in 2008 was falsely linked to autism support. Alison writes:

I continue to demand the apology that is owed for the conduct of an elected official who, rather than taking responsibility for failed promises and misdirection to a cause, would insult a family that he himself brought into the mix, make the issue about the family's 7 year old child with Autism and the community, and do so in writing to officials who have nothing to do with the family's best interests.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you be prepared for either a point of order or a point of privilege. The hon. member in question is not here today, and I will accept that upon his return.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period I referred to a letter from the CEO of Alberta Health Services relative to the question by the Leader of the Opposition. I would like to table five copies of that letter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of six letters from Albertans concerned about the burden the drug plan places on seniors and who are opposed to the means test involved in that plan. The letters are from Sonia Francis, Shirley Swanson, Jim and Roberta Saltvold, G.M. Hoke, Dave Williams, and Miriam Farrington.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Calgary-Mountain View I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence directed to him by the individual who was introduced in the House today. His name is Al Kiffiak, and he is most concerned over the changes to Alberta health care coverage for middle-income seniors.

Thank you very much.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk Assistant: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, responses to written questions WQ 7 and WQ 18, both asked for by Ms Notley on April 6, 2009.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 36 Alberta Land Stewardship Act

[Adjourned debate April 29: Dr. Morton]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Yes. It's a pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. This is a very substantial piece

of legislation, with a number of components to it, that has tremendous implications for how things in this province unfold over the next several decades, quite frankly. It's premised, of course, on the land-use framework, which is a document that has been prepared over time by the government with some consultation with a number of different stakeholders.

The principles underlying the land-use framework are in many respects laudable principles. So in theory, then, in principle, this piece of legislation is one which we support because it is, in fact, you know, a vehicle for moving forward on some of the elements that were and are included in the land-use framework. Quite honestly, we need to move forward on many of those ideas because we're behind on many of those issues. I think that we really have a crisis in development and environment and resources across the province right now as a result of our failure to co-ordinate in any kind of substantial way. Should the land-use framework be implemented in a thoughtful and effective manner, it could truly be one of the most important government initiatives ever introduced and could put Alberta quite high up in terms of responsible land-use policy with respect to other jurisdictions.

The concern is that there is a tremendous amount of discretion that exists within this piece of legislation, notwithstanding the length of it. Really, what's going to be the measure of success is how that discretion is exercised. I suppose that at the end of the day that's one of our most critical concerns, that there is so much discretion that rests with cabinet in moving forward on the initiatives inherent in the land-use framework and that that discretion can be exercised while at the same time overruling municipal bylaws and plans, impacting First Nations' issues and rights, impacting upon Métis nations' issues and rights, and having tremendous consequences for private landowners and, of course, for people with an interest in promoting community interests and promoting wise and effective environmental development.

It is a bill, then, where again it's really hard to see what's going to come from it because the measure of the bill in large respect would be a regional advisory plan, one of these plans that the bill facilitates the development of through the regional advisory councils. What we need to do is really see what a plan will look like and see how it will unfold and see how the consultation process took place and see how the various stakeholders believe that their interests were reflected and then see how it is implemented and introduced. Until we see that, we can't know if the grand amount of authority and discretion being given to government through this piece of legislation is a good decision or not.

2:50

Again, the high-level principles are good ones, but it really comes down to how this stuff is implemented, when we get right to it. You know, we certainly have other examples. We know that the government had established CEMA in the lower Athabasca region, and we know that in that case what happened was that government really didn't exercise a lot of its authority to deal with what were clearly competing interests within that regional planning process. So what ended up happening was that large components of the CEMA board left because there were no hard decisions being made, the balancing processes with respect to how those decisions were made were not clear, and ultimately there wasn't a belief on the sense of a significant number of members of the community that their interests were really being heard.

Of course, if you then expand it to how other parts of government consultation have been introduced and pursued – and we've had a great deal of debate on, for instance, the whole concept of whether or not we're actually consulting anybody in any kind of open fashion

on the nuclear issue – the question becomes: how will this be done, and will it be done in a way that will actually bring about the kind of changes that we need? Or will it turn into a defence mechanism for the government so that whenever a problem arises, we're told to wait for a process that is endless yet never resolved one way or the other, or alternatively we're told that, well, it went through a process, and this is what they came up with, that this is the best that we can get? We really, really don't know.

I think part of that comes from the fact that there really are not any kind of substantive planning criteria built into this legislation. We don't have details on the kinds of hard targets the government attempts to achieve in terms of air quality management, greenhouse gas emission management, and land use and water use and all these kinds of things. We know that the principle of cumulative effects is mentioned in the bill – that's a good thing – but that's where it stops. We don't have a real sense of what the hard targets are. We just know that people the government chooses will be consulted, but then the government will ultimately do what it wants to do with it, and in so doing, it will have tremendously broad impact on numerous components of the community. So this is, generally, our concern.

The other thing, of course, is that all along, through the whole process with respect to the land-use framework, there has been a long call for interim measures pending the development of regional advisory plans. I appreciate that the government is moving reasonably quickly, well, reasonably quickly relative to since I've been here, with respect to the lower Athabasca region in that they hope to have a plan in place by the fall. But we have been talking about these issues now for years, and there is no plan in place yet, and there are numerous ways in which development is proceeding and decisions are being made that impact on land use and the environment and all these other issues without there being any kind of cumulative effects assessment and without there being a strong assessment of even what the state is of the environment in those areas on so many different levels.

There has been talk, then, that while the idea of the land-use framework was a good one, there should have been interim measures put in place. There's no mechanism for interim measures in this piece of legislation, and there is no record of interim measures absent the legislation.

Another concern that we will probably talk a little bit more about in third reading is the whole way in which the conservation offsets that are referenced in this piece of legislation can be used. The regional plans are based on watersheds, but it appears as though conservation offsets can be traded between regions, from one region to another region, which would obviously contradict the very objectives behind doing cumulative effects assessment on a regional basis. So we're a bit concerned about that one.

There's also quite an extensive power that is being put forward with respect to the government's ability to impose and/or penalize municipalities in terms of the implementation of this act.

We've also heard concerns from a number of different Métis groups about how this piece of legislation will be integrated with their current land-use rights. We know that certain elements of their land-use rights are excluded from coverage under this legislation, but not all elements of their land-use rights are excluded from this legislation. The concern is: how will those competing interests be measured given the record of the government with respect to dealing with aboriginal issues in general over the last few years?

Finally, the concern, of course, is that the regional advisory council process is so much left to the discretion of government to appoint the regional advisory council members. Of course, just today we saw that the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council was established. It appeared to me to be a group that was

very industry heavy and had pretty low representation from the environmental community.

You know, the whole issue of how one gets to be on the regional advisory council, not to mention the regional advisory council's obligations and criteria with respect to consulting with people within the region and the community and receiving information from people about the implications: none of this stuff is laid out in the act. It's just: "There will be a council. Government will appoint it on whatever basis they see fit. They may do whatever they think is necessary to come up with a plan." It may involve extensive consultation; it may involve very little consultation. We don't really know. Then, of course, notwithstanding all that, the government can just say: "Well, thanks. It's been fun having you here, but we're actually going to go in a completely different direction." So there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty.

While I do appreciate the introduction of a legislative vehicle to potentially move forward with the land-use framework, there is so much discretion, as is usually the case with this government, left to cabinet within this bill with so few criteria set out. The difficulty that we have is that the authority being given to cabinet through this bill and the implications of what this bill could cover are so broad, yet the way in which it would move forward is so without detail and so without clarity. We can't help but have some significant concerns about it.

That's sort of how we'll start on this issue. I will just say again, though, that the principle is a good one. We absolutely support the principle behind it. The key is whether Albertans, members of the Assembly, key stakeholders will be able to engage in the process and whether there will be a sufficient level of transparency and accountability ultimately and mechanisms for people to actually have their concerns and their positions seriously considered by government throughout this process. That is our concern.

In broad principle that's our view of this legislation as it stands at this point. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Minister of Municipal affairs, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

3:00

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join second reading debate of Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. Since we are at second reading, we are debating the principle of the bill, so I have to say that in principle I like this bill. I think that in principle this is a good bill. Needs some work. Needs some tweaking around the edges. I don't know that I would go quite so far as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in terms of finding issues in the bill that need to be worked on, but there are some, and I think our side will be bringing forward amendments at the appropriate time, which is in committee.

Again, I reiterate that in principle I like this bill, and I think it goes in the right direction. Of course, you might not be so surprised to hear me say that since a couple of years ago, in 2007, I introduced a private member's bill, Bill 211, Planning for the Future of Communities Act. My colleagues across the way voted that one down. Shock. Horror. Surprise. They voted that one down. The interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that if they had passed Bill 211 two years ago, we would be two years further on in the implementation of a land-use strategy because this Bill 36 is eerily like Bill 211. I want to say clearly that Bill 211 offered at least some inspiration to the members opposite. Well, maybe not the Member for Peace River, who is sitting there shaking his head right now. I would simply point out to the hon. member that denial ain't only a river.

Nevertheless, I myself have to admit that Bill 211 was inspired by a piece of legislation in Ontario, the Places to Grow Act, which I think was a very aptly named piece of legislation. It would have been an apt name for Bill 211. It would be an apt name for this particular Bill 36 because that, essentially, is what this bill is about, places to grow and places to preserve, places to protect. The rough patch that our economy has hit notwithstanding, with the incredible growth pressures in this province over the last several years we've seen now the necessity – some of us saw it earlier than others, clearly – for moving in this direction to come up with a land-use strategy and legislative authority to create regional plans that will implement the land-use framework throughout the province, which is what this bill will do.

You know, as I was preparing to get up and join debate on this today, I was thinking of the number of different ways that I could approach this. There are almost as many ways as there are communities in my constituency, interests of mine, interests of people I know, that sort of thing. You can take it from the approach of a mature inner-city residential community like Cliff Bungalow-Mission in inner-city Calgary, which is a community dating back to about 1910, 1912. It's coming up on its hundredth anniversary. It was originally, at least the Cliff Bungalow side of it, housing for Canadian Pacific Railway workers and managers. The Mission district, of course, is one of the oldest if not the oldest district in Calgary. Folks in Inglewood might dispute that. It's one of the two oldest; let's put it that way.

The residents of Cliff Bungalow-Mission – and I refer to them as one community because they are represented by one community association – are deeply concerned about the ability to preserve the character of their neighbourhood from intense development pressures over the last few years. It's not that they're antidevelopment – far from it – but there are certain characteristics of their neighbourhood, of their community that they want to see preserved. They want to see the opportunity for the development of affordable housing in their neighbourhood.

You know, there are a lot of communities that don't feel that strongly in favour of affordable housing, but the folks in Cliff Bungalow and Mission do. They want to see that when new development takes place, when old housing is knocked down and new housing takes its place – condominium developments, townhouses, more densification of the neighbourhood even though it's pretty densely developed as it is – the new development architecturally respects the heritage character of the neighbourhood, that the mature trees are preserved, things like that.

You can get so far negotiating those things as a community with city hall. You can get so far with an area redevelopment plan. But when you've got something like a land-use strategy and a Land Stewardship Act and a regional plan and within that context a subregional plan and an intermunicipal plan involving, you know, the Calgary region or the capital region or something like that, then you've got something backing you up that helps you preserve and create the kind of character for your community that you want.

Another thing that is a particular interest of mine and has been for a number of years now, which a bill like this can and should and, I think, will address, is the rapid disappearance of our rangeland in southern Alberta. This was an issue first brought to my attention by the Nature Conservancy of Canada I would say about 10 or 11 years ago now, when the Nature Conservancy sounded the warning that the subdivision of our rangeland in southern Alberta was continuing at such a pace that if nothing was done to preserve that rangeland, which is a unique land use and a unique geographical feature, if you will, a unique ecosystem, if I can apply that term here, in Canada, that rangeland would be gone by 2020.

Thankfully, since that alarm was sounded by the Nature Conser-

vancy, work has been done, especially around the area of conservation easements, and this particular bill speaks to that. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act will enable the expanded use of conservation easements, which are voluntary, legal agreements between landowners and a qualified organization like the Nature Conservancy, which is a land trust, or like government to conserve the ecological integrity of a piece of land. The current landowner retains ownership, but the conservation easement is registered on the land title, and then that particular parcel of land is protected under that easement. Those conservation easements have been around in Alberta now for about 10 years. There are about 300 square kilometres of Alberta's private lands under conservation easements right now. That only represents .2 per cent, two-tenths of a per cent, of our private land, but it's a start, and a bill like this allows us to get a good deal farther than that.

There are other conservation initiatives, too: conservation offsets, conservation directives, transfers of development credits, conservation exchanges. I like these tools. These tools will go a long way to preserving not only those ecological portions that are designated or defined as natural or native areas but also those areas which are under some degree of human development, like ranching, and which have a very unique purpose, a unique function, and which in their own way represent a form of conservation and a land use that very much must be protected. As anyone who is even distantly related to or involved with or acquainted with ranching knows, ranchlands these days are much more profitable if you can hive off subdivisions or sections of them, whether that's for acreage development or whatever you're doing, than if you're trying to keep the entire spread going. So there's some good stuff in here, some really good stuff in here.

And, yes, there are some quibbles, some concerns. I think the big one is that there's no mandatory public consultation and, close on the heels of that one, no binding cumulative impacts. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has spoken to that angle, I think, and rather than add to it, I'll just concur with what she had to say about the cumulative impacts. The public consultation part, I think, needs stressing. Right now that's a discretionary item in this bill, and I believe it needs to be made mandatory.

3:10

I'll refer back to Bill 211 again, which would have balanced our respect for municipal autonomy with the clear need for a provincial role in support of integrated regional and intermunicipal planning. I mean, we have at this level a role to play as the coach, the quarterback, the head cheerleader, the encouraging and, to some extent, enabling body. The province has a clear role, I think, in ensuring that planning occurs and that a planning process is in place, but fundamentally I believe that those plans, those actual plans, are best developed by local leaders, local citizens with support and backing from the provincial government rather than top-down direction. So I think that's key, and I think as we go forward into Committee of the Whole, we're going to be wanting to talk a good deal more about that in a good deal of detail. I think that public consultation and cumulative impacts need to be made mandatory, and I think if they are, this law will be stronger, a better law.

There are a few other things as well. There appears to be no appeals process in the legislation around the development of regional plans other than cabinet's ability to amend those plans as they wish. I'd like to know the reasoning behind that, and I'd like to question the reasoning behind that, quite frankly.

There are a number of things that the bill says that regional plans may do as opposed to saying what the plans must do. I think as we get into committee study, I'm going to be wanting to tweak some of those.

But, again, we're at second reading. Second reading speaks to the principle of the bill. The principle of this bill, I think, is excellent. The government is on the right track. I don't get to say that all that often, but the government this time is on the right track, in my opinion, and certainly at second reading I'll be voting in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, do you want to postpone? Did you want to participate today?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I'll make my comments during committee.

The Speaker: Well, you're going. I've recognized you now, so go.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just have one comment. I'll make my comments during Committee of the Whole. I just wanted to let the hon. member opposite know that, you know, Bill 211 had some good ideas in principle, but it was the detail that gave me concern.

The Speaker: Well, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available. The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take advantage of that because he said he was going to make some comments, and all he made was that one very general statement. This member wants to hear more. He wants specifics. Inquiring minds want to know, Minister.

The Speaker: Sorry. We have a Q and C. The hon. minister was recognized. If you don't want to participate in Q and C, that's fine, but we still have time available for questions and responses. Any other members want to raise a question? No further members?

Then we'll recognize the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. I would like to first congratulate the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and all those who worked on bringing this important piece of legislation forward.

The conservation of our natural heritage is part of the legacy our ancestors bequeathed to us. It is not legislated. It is something that every Albertan is a beneficiary of. We are born with the notion that this land is not ours but belongs to generations of Albertans, present and future.

This legislation proposes to create regional advisory councils of pre-eminent Albertans who will advise the government on economic, environmental, and social goals for each region. Planning and land-use restrictions are nothing new in Alberta, of course. Decades ago the province was split into green and white zones, the former primarily for forestry and the latter for settlements. Until they were abolished in 1995, Alberta had regional planning commissions. They failed because they did not respect landowners and tried to run against their rights in some cases.

Land-use planning in the form of municipal zoning has always existed for subdividing land, and this will not be affected either by this legislation. Municipalities will retain their authority for municipal development plans, area structure plans, land-use bylaws, and making decisions on subdivisions and development standards.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, land-use restrictions and planning have been an ongoing Alberta project. The new regional planning does not

mean creating a heavy-handed, centralized bureaucracy in Edmonton. It does mean, however, that the government will provide the kind of policy direction and guidelines and opportunities that local levels of government cannot. That being said, the most local level of government is the Alberta landowning family. There is no one better placed to determine the best use of their land than the owners who reside upon it.

I am thinking of the thousands of Albertans who ranch not merely as a means of earning a living but also as a living legacy of our western heritage, Albertans like the late Jim Hole, who passed away recently. Jim farmed on ranches east and west of Airdrie all of his life. Even after he sold most of his herd in 1982, he kept a keen interest in ranching and farming, especially in the young people of our area and their 4-H projects. This legislation is about preserving the Alberta that Jim helped to create. It is about preserving our landscapes, protecting our streams, and keeping our traditional agricultural values. All of these can be accomplished while respecting the fundamental right of Albertans to own property.

At first glance much of this legislation may be interpreted as a regression on property rights, but it would be a very large mistake to think so as this bill, in my view, does the exact opposite. It strengthens landowner rights. Bill 36 has provisions for four conservation tools: conservation easements, conservation offsets, conservation directives, and transfer of development credits. I would like to briefly explain what these are and why I believe they will work to strengthen property rights protection in our province.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization, like a land trust, to conserve a land's ecological integrity. Easements are registered on the landowner's title. A great example of private, small, family-level, and local government voluntary conservationism is the late Doc Seaman's generosity in placing conservation easements on the historic 125-year-old OH Ranch. This was a gift almost as important to Albertans as when Doc helped to bring the Calgary Flames to Alberta during the 1980s.

Mr. Speaker, conservation efforts driven by landowners is the finest example of who we are as Albertans. We are stewards and conservationists at heart. This bill will not change that. This bill will not disrupt these grassroots efforts. The government will not get in the way of the good work done by groups such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, and Ducks Unlimited. This legislation will not get in the way of generous Albertans who want to responsibly steward their land.

Another tool in this bill is the conservation offset, that can replace, restore, or compensate for the effects of an activity on public or private land. In early 2008 the Suncor Energy Foundation and the Alberta Conservation Association partnered together to protect habitat in the Winagami Lake area. This was a three-year pilot project that led to 1,750 acres of ecologically significant boreal habitat being secured for conservation. You know, it's a fine contribution to our ecological heritage, in my view.

Another tool, the transfer of development credits, helps direct development away from our protected or conserved land. This can protect agricultural, ecological, or heritage landscapes from urban and rural growth pressures.

Lastly, a conservation directive is a new, nonvoluntary tool that through regional plans will protect, conserve, and enhance landscapes, views, environmentally sensitive areas, or agricultural land, that is important to all Albertans. I would like to take a moment to dwell on this last tool for a second. My constituents and other Albertans have raised some concerns about what these conservation directives might mean for property rights.

Read literally, it basically gives the government of Alberta the power through a regional plan to take an interest in any piece of

private land for conservation purposes. However, all this will be accomplished with appropriate compensation. None of this will happen without landowners being properly compensated for a public good they are asked to provide. This is an important and, in fact, a groundbreaking proposal that ensures that landowners are compensated for being asked to provide a public good even in cases where their land is sometimes not directly affected.

The act protects property rights. Landowners will be compensated for any loss in market value based on principles under the Expropriation Act. This is an improvement over the status quo that placed the costs of conservation for public good on what I would define as the private treasury. The private treasury consists of the funds, monies, and savings that families have privately, of course.

3:20

Some critics may argue that providing mandatory compensation will be a disincentive for government to use conservation directives. Well, that is exactly the point. These decisions have to be done responsibly and must respect the private costs borne by Alberta families that are associated with conservation. No other jurisdiction proposes to protect the rights of landowners the way Bill 36 does.

Another major benefit to landowners is the regional plans themselves. They will provide consistency, stability, and predictability. Lands determined to be candidates for conservation directives will be identified in the regional plans. Formal notice will be provided that will outline the land affected, give a description of the directive, notify the landowner of the right to compensation, describe the application process to the Land Compensation Board, and inform the landowner of the right to appeal any decision.

No longer will landowners be surprised by having parks or other conservation areas created at their expense and at the whim of politicians. If the only way to protect the land is to impose a conservation directive, then the value of the land will be appraised, any impact assessed, and landowners will be compensated for any loss in market value. Landowners will retain title to their land. Often in the past they were expropriated outright, losing lands that may have been passed down through several generations.

Mr. Speaker, the process I have just outlined is game changing. It is an unprecedented victory for the rights of landowners in this province. It will ensure that our province's precious views, landscapes, and lands that we all know and love are preserved for generations to come. I am very excited to see this bill proceed. I support it, and I urge all members of this Assembly to support it as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Anyone wish to participate?

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support the nature or the underlying principle of land protection and land designation. I see where Bill 36 leads toward the eventuality of a land-use framework, and I want to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who referenced his previous private member's Bill 211, that, as he noted, would have taken us in this direction two years ago had it been adopted.

As the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out that this would reinforce the rights of landowners and private holdings, my concern is that when you add this bill to previous bills – Bill 19 from this year and Bill 46 from last year – what we are seeing is an attempt by the provincial government to centralize its controls over land, not just the Crown land but the private land. If it were strictly

for stewardship purposes and in the best interests of, say, watershed protection, protection of the air, I would be less concerned. The white and green zones, that again the MLA for Airdrie-Chestermere referenced, while currently those designations are drawn up and appear as colour-codings on a map, the reality is that just because something appears to be in the green zone and, supposedly, comes under a notion of a degree of greater protection, that's far from the case that I have witnessed, particularly in Kananaskis.

The concept of multi-use continues to override the notion of priority use, and my experience was that on any given day, regardless of the fact that there may be a fire ban on at the time, you could simultaneously have clear-cutting, camping; you could have free-ranging cattle roaming through the area. There was no one to direct the various uses or prioritize them. That certainly was not in the best interests of either the flora, the fauna, or the people that were in the area trying to enjoy it because, as I say, there is no referee. Now, if the land-use framework is done properly, that referee will exist, and priorities will be established based on seven watersheds. I very much appreciate that concept.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere pointed out the wonderful donation of Doc Seaman's with the ranch. We've had similar wonderful donations of land that's going to eventually turn into a park, and that's the Glenbow Ranch project, that stretches from Cochrane to Calgary. The need to co-ordinate the donations of land, such as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned, through organizations like the Nature Conservancy, that Larry Simpson and other members have been so passionate about, and the notion of co-ordinating conservation easements and offsets and trying to link them with existing Crown land is a wonderful idea. Also, from the point of view of protecting animals, if done properly, it will help to preserve the Yellowstone to Yukon wildlife corridor, that continues to be fragmented by a variety of different types of land use.

We've had a number of individuals: the Pekisko Group, members of the Cartwright family, Ian Tyson, landowners in the Longview area and then heading further into the Whaleback and then going into the area that Larry Simpson in his Nature Conservancy refers to as the last five miles. That's the area along the American border that is one of the few areas where we still have fescue grasses and original vegetation. So protecting these lands for enjoyment by future generations is absolutely essential.

In terms of restoration and protection I'm extremely proud of my father, Bryce Chase, who has planted single-handedly thousands upon thousands of caragana as part of restoration projects. He has worked on Two Jack Lake in terms of fish habitat preservation, and for this he has received the centennial medal, the Order of the Bighorn from the Alberta Fish and Game organization, and numerous other awards because he very much cares. He has passed on that idea of preservation and conservation to me and, in turn, to my daughter and his great-grandchildren.

This land-use framework is absolutely essential. Dr. Brad Stelfox has done a number of presentations on cumulative effects. The beauty of Brad's presentations is that he allows the viewer to interpret the results. He doesn't push people in a particular direction. He just indicates that if we continue with a certain type of usage at the rate we're going, then here's what it's going to look like in 2020, 2040, 2060 unless there is some type of intervention. The difference between stewardship and central control not necessarily for positive legacy is where my concern for Bill 36 lies.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

If we don't protect our watershed, as the land-use framework

suggests it will do, then forget whatever future activities we might have, whether it be trying to maintain a ranching stile in the Whaleback area, west of Longview, whether it's parks and protected areas. Right now only 4 per cent of this province is set aside under the provincial parks and protected areas, but as I began, even those areas aren't guaranteed to be protected. It's absolutely important that we get this right.

3:30

Lorne Taylor, with his water for life, began this progress years ago. It's taken us years to get to Bill 36, but my concern is that we haven't got it right yet. Hopefully, in terms of amendments, in terms of collaboration and collegial interaction between all parties, we'll get this right. As I say, Bill 46 got it wrong. Bill 19 got it wrong. Bill 36 without amendment has got it wrong. We're still waiting for the land-use framework to get it right.

We've got a lot of homework ahead of us. I think the individuals within this House are capable of achieving a responsible land-use framework which will protect a legacy for generations to come, but we're not there yet.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if anyone wishes to participate.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to speak to Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, in second reading. There are a few things that I would like to point out that have already been talked about, if I could bandy them about and flesh them out a little more. I think that is the opportunity that is before me, so I will take it.

If you look at the Alberta Land Stewardship Act in total, the idea is going forward in the correct direction. What we actually see is an act here that is going to input the land-use framework at some point in time. It will be able to measure some creative boundaries here in Alberta that will be able, then, to govern and grow those areas with much more respect for the watersheds and respect for nature and respect for our birds and animals that live on the Alberta prairie that need to be respected.

I guess there is some point of consternation in that this act should've been in place a long time ago. We can note that two years ago this bill, which was Bill 211 at that time, was brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, and at that time it was rejected. Probably it should have been made law at that time. We could've made some amendments and got things going, and it would've saved us two years on this timeline. Even at that, Alberta would still have been behind the curve if you look at areas like Ontario, areas like Oregon, areas like that that have had these types of acts in place for a long time, that really have managed the growth of various areas and, in fact, stopped cities from growing exponentially and stopped the inordinate urban sprawl and all that sort of stuff. That's where we're at.

We should've been at this point we are at here today, for sure, two years ago, and probably a strong argument exists that we should've been here 10 years ago. However, those are just some of the details, I guess, of living in Alberta, that we don't quite get to things as soon as we should. I think it is a failure of this government that this hasn't been brought in a long time ago. Nevertheless, that's where we are.

There are some things that concern me in this bill as well. They were brought up by members earlier. Primarily it's again with the concentration of power, that this bill seems to put all the decision-

making power into the hands of the cabinet, with no recourse to courts or other appeal mechanisms that can be put in place. Where it stops is, I guess, for all intents and purposes, the cabinet. The government is the single deciding force that can implement. It can change. It can withhold money. It can consult. It doesn't have to consult. It can do whatever the heck it wants in regard to land-use decisions once this bill is in place.

Now, I'm hopeful that this doesn't occur. Nevertheless, when we set it up such that it is being set up at this time, that is what can happen. I would say that no doubt someday in the future it will happen. The concentration of power that we see happening in this province will come back, and citizens will look and say: well, how the heck did this happen? You know, hopefully, we'll say: we kind of warned you of it; we kind of thought this might happen. At this point in time that's not quite happening, but it's happening on every single bill we see coming through here, and we see no difference on this bill.

I guess, just to go back on the history here and sort of why this is a bit of a positive movement, the Alberta government has talked about doing this in the past. For instance, in 1999 the government published Alberta's Commitment to Sustainable Resource and Environmental Management, which was basically a document that looked a lot like the beginning of the land-use framework, that this government said they were going to get busy on doing and implementing in the near future and all that good stuff. Anyway, that document sat on the shelves for a number of years, but it was not signed until 2006. Following that, you go to the draft land-use framework, which was finally presented by the government in early 2008, with the final land-use framework document released in December 2008.

I think that just shows you how sometimes there are plans to make plans to make plans. Sometimes all these announcements are made with much fanfare and much trumpeting and flag-waving, when they're merely almost a delay tactic or a way to take the public's attention off the government, I guess, moving toward actually doing something. The announcement is just a way of distracting things or buying the government time, which I'm sort of seeing happen in many other cases up here in the Legislature in even the short time I have been here. That's sort of the future.

I guess where we're talking about the seven regions and such, although the concentration of power exists, this will hopefully allow for our land development to go forward in a much more reasonable fashion. You know, we have some stuff on the Alberta landscape that is not something to be that proud of. For instance, the city of Calgary is the largest city, I believe, in terms of its land use in the world, possibly, or it's as large as New York City, and New York City houses 10 times the people.

3:40

Nevertheless, this type of thing has happened in our landscape. I believe in the future that because we've delayed so long in getting a land-use framework to the table, it will make our cities and our ability to do business and what have you and our communities' ability to thrive much more difficult because we didn't recognize the fact, you know, that sustainable development was in vogue a lot before this document recognized it. Communities that develop sustainable planning or sustainable development and cumulative effects planning and all of those things are going to be much better served in the future than, I believe, communities that are spread out over wide areas, that use an abundance of natural resources and even fossil fuel resources to survive and even thrive. I believe those areas in the future will not do as well as those who recognized this some time ago and built up and developed land-use frameworks at a much earlier time.

Nevertheless, as indicated by people earlier, this act brings in a wide variety of legislation. It amends 26 pieces of legislation and tries to bring them in line under this act. That is part of the centralization of power that I was referring to earlier and the proposed amendment's attempt to ensure that existing acts align to support the regional plans and ensure compliance with these plans. For some legislation this requires more extensive changes and will have to be done in the future.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

As also indicated by my colleague from Calgary-Currie, this act will have more of a direct hand with the Municipal Government Act. It's going to take a more committed working relationship between the province and the regional communities and surrounding cities to work together, which is a good thing. Hopefully, areas like Calgary, Okotoks, Airdrie, and that can with this plan hopefully develop their own regions with the existing watershed and go forward in a more sustainable way.

It also sort of amends the forest management act and has many conservation and stewardship tools, which was talked about already. Conservation easements are being provided, which is a good thing. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization such as a land trust or a government that conserves the ecological integrity of a piece of land. The easement is registered on land title, but the landowners retain ownership of the land. This is one of those good things.

Another good thing is conservation offsets that are going to counterbalance the effects of both activity on public and private land. They can be used to replace and restore or compensate for affected landscapes. For example, a company can serve an environmentally significant area to offset its industrial activity elsewhere. The act also sets the framework for offsets to be used for restoration, mitigation, or conservation as it provides a legal basis for government to establish an offset program and to set rules for defining and trading these offsets, which is going to take a certain amount of dedication and a certain amount of, I guess, utilization of the secretariat and putting this into play.

Nevertheless, I am hopeful that this sort of sets us on a new stage of recognizing that Alberta is probably at a tipping point when it comes to recognizing both how much, I guess, land and water and air and all that stuff we take for granted can actually be put to use by industry and others in a sustainable way and still have an economy and still have people who are living in a healthy state.

The land-use framework recognizes that in the language. It recognizes that we are at a tipping point here in Alberta. I think to that extent the government has to be commended for at least recognizing that the no-holds-barred approach to developing industry and letting industry, I guess, go willy-nilly wherever it wanted to, which by all means probably in the past was relatively effective – you know, we had lots of land; we had lots of resources. [Mr. Hehr's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. Does any hon. member want to take part?

Seeing none, does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a second time]

Bill 44

Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate May 7: Dr. Sherman]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, do you wish to continue since you still have time from the last adjournment?

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand and speak to Bill 44, the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. Human rights are an important and delicate issue for many Albertans and Canadians because no single issue is more essential to humanity than how we treat ourselves and one another.

A few weeks ago from my vantage point in this House, when it appeared that an hon. member opposite used his liberty with impunity to call some members of the government caucus an inappropriate word that I don't want to mention, I am reminded of past examples of discrimination. It reminded me of when I first came to this country in the '70s as a child. You felt different, you looked different, and you knew you were in a cold climate in a cold country with no family and no social supports. Your parents were adventurers to this land. But there were times when you were made to feel different, and that was the most difficult point about discrimination, Mr. Speaker.

This is a nation that is founded on immigration. We are all descendants of immigrants if we are not direct immigrants. Today before you you see the most diverse caucus in this nation. Mr. Speaker, human rights are defined in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* as the "basic rights held to belong to every living person."

My personal experience from my family. My grandfather came here in 1906 – and he was the first from our family to come – at the age of 16 in his search for freedom for in his home nation they didn't have freedom to speak, nor did they have freedom.

3:50

In speaking to this bill, I would like to speak on freedom of speech – I think this is one of the most valuable things that we as human beings have – and, at the same time, the freedom to walk down the streets and have the feeling that you belong in this society. With that freedom of speech is the right to life, liberty, justice, free thought and expression, and equality before the law.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms sets out guiding principles, and the Criminal Code of Canada defines acceptable conduct. Furthermore, the government of Canada has addressed the discrepancy between law and practice by creating a Human Rights Commission to investigate complaints regarding human rights violations, provide legal channels to hear the complaints, and find solutions to human rights problems. It seeks to educate all Canadians about human rights and to advocate equality of opportunity for groups in society that are frequently the target of discrimination. It does this for the good of society and because discrimination based on age, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation is against the law.

Likewise, Mr. Speaker, each province has supplemental human rights laws that cover other issues not included in federal legislation. Thus every Canadian is legally protected from discrimination by the various levels of human rights legislation. But in order to guarantee that this legislation is effective, provincial human rights commissions oversee the application and everyday function of human rights laws.

Mr. Speaker, over the past year there has been much discussion

about the effect of antidiscrimination legislation on freedom of speech. There are certain individuals who believe that section 3 should not be included in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act. I am standing in support of this bill today on account of what it proposes not to change. It does not silence the voice of the voiceless or remove the advocate of the visible minority, of the new Canadians. Rather, it sends a loud, clear message that all human beings are to be respected and accepted and that willful discrimination will not be abided. Removing section 3 would be inconsistent with our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It could lead to unnecessary legal squabbling.

Just as importantly, it sends the wrong message about us. The vast majority of Albertans, as I've mentioned, are from elsewhere or descendants of folks from elsewhere. We are not narrow minded, and we are not intolerant. In fact, I would say that this is one of the most tolerant societies and provinces in this nation. The elected members are evidence of that.

However, within the context of the overall human rights system the government of Alberta has recognized the need for a few simple yet vitally important administrative changes so that freedom of speech may be maintained, which, by the way, has already begun with the introduction of a new chief commissioner, who brings an extensive judicial background and a new focus to the position. Other necessary changes include finding ways to reduce the average time it takes to process a complaint, working to improve the general functioning of the system for all complainants, and, of course, expanding section 3 to include sexual orientation.

While some may grandstand for the media and make themselves advocates and champions of freedom of speech, they continue to have that right under this legislation. Section 3 is and will continue to be an important piece of Alberta's human rights legislation because it outlines protections for those same freedoms of speech. In fact, this act states that nothing shall be deemed to interfere with our freedom of expression or opinion on any subject. The real challenge is curtailing alarmist rhetoric and promoting common sense, a value I believe most Albertans possess in abundance.

As proof of this, freedom of speech complaints account for less than 3 per cent of Alberta Human Rights Commission investigations. That's a good thing. This very Assembly illustrates equality of rights and opportunity and the protection of the law provided by this great province. This Premier, who did not speak English until the sixth grade, has provided a great example of this. As he pointed out, this caucus is the most diverse in this nation.

Mr. Speaker, let us not divert our focus from the big picture; 97 per cent of cases reviewed by the Alberta Human Rights Commission are with the respective areas of employment and tenancy. This legislation ensures continued protection and equality of the rights of all Albertans where they need it most: in schools, in workplaces, and in homes. I will support it and encourage all hon. members to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from across for explaining his comment in the House, and I accept his apology.

It's truly an honour for me to be a member of this Assembly. It's truly an honour for me also to be an Albertan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. Does any hon. member want to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, now back to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. While I appreciate the intent of Bill 44, it fails to achieve its intent.

Last Wednesday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and I were sitting side by side in the Children and Youth Services discussion. As we were chatting, it turned out that given his age and given my age, I could very well be his father or of his father's age, at least. I'm extremely proud of my son-in-law, as I'm sure the hon. member's father is of him.

[The Speaker in the chair]

My son-in-law's family had a similar experience coming from Kerala in southern India in the 1970s. They recognized the opportunities, although because it's a maternal society, Kerala had the highest education per capita of any of the states in India. However, the family came seeking opportunities that Canada provided, and like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark my son-in-law and friends of his have been the recipients of prejudice.

Bill 44, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark pointed out, deals to a large degree with employment and tenancy. What the bill has done is recognize the rights of individuals regardless of race, religion, or sexual orientation. Now, what Bill 44 does is recognize their rights in the workplace, it recognizes their rights to habitation, but unfortunately – and this is where I have great concerns – it turns public schools into places of potential prejudice.

What it does is say that while you can't discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace or in a tenancy circumstance, prejudice can still be fostered either passively or actively within the school system because individuals who interpret a lesson as somehow connecting with sexual orientation or sexuality can show, basically, their concerns and expect to be accommodated by being previously informed about a discussion that has yet to occur. Under the School Act the protection already exists for classes in sexuality, and human sexuality is what I'm referring to.

4:00

There is also protection based on religious grounds, but where the areas become grey – for example, in the grade 7 social studies curriculum that I taught, there was a section on world religions. I provided the details: a little bit of a historical background of how the religions got started, the number of potential worshippers on a global basis, followers of the particular religion. My concern is: would I now be expected to send out a permission slip to parents saying that I'm going to be talking about world religions tomorrow should there be an objection? Or – and this happened, for example, when I was teaching English in grade 9 – one of the plays that we were studying was referring to pieces of wood, but the comment was: pile the faggots high. In this new circumstance and the misuse of the word "faggot" to be somebody who is of a same-sex nature, then that discussion could be the subject of a human rights accusation. So teachers don't know what grounds are now off limits. In the School Act it was fairly broadly determined, but with this latest aspect of religious opting out, there is no possible way of predetermining what might be considered offensive.

I think it's important that I establish a little bit of my own historical background in terms of relevancy. I was brought up in a Christian religion. In my particular church Sunday school went up to 21 years of age. When I was in one part of Saskatchewan visiting one grandma, who was my sort of preschool Sunday school teacher, it was the Anglican faith. When I was in Saskatoon, it was the Christian Science faith. I have a very strong faith-based upbringing, but nowhere in my religious studies, which continued on at the university level, where I actually prepared sermons on a weekly basis for my organization – nowhere there was I suggesting that I had a stronger sense of right or wrong, of religious principle, than other people did.

When people come to my door and have a particular religious

belief, I don't slam my door in their face. I don't opt out through closing my mind or my door to the individuals who appear on my doorstep. I interact with the individuals, and I thank them for their concerns and for coming to my door in their belief that they had a very strong message to give. On some occasions I've even suggested: would you like to exchange literature? I've always sort of ended the discussion with: thank you very much; I have my own faith, and I'm pleased that you're faithful. My version of faith is very much grounded in the New Testament, where we talk about loving thy neighbour as thyself and doing good to others and setting a table in the presence of one's enemies. It doesn't say anywhere: your views aren't good enough or I don't accept your views; therefore, I'm going to pull myself out of a circumstance.

The strength of our public system is its secular nature. If that is eroded and it becomes a place, potentially, of religious intolerance as opposed to tolerance of all faiths and backgrounds, then the whole fabric of the public school system, that I've been so proud to be a member of for 34 years, is undermined. As long as the religious opt-out clause, which has been extended from religious topics and topics of human sexuality, gets blurred by going into sexual orientation in great detail, which, as I said at the beginning, in Bill 44 is no longer acceptable as a cause of prejudice – if that type of clause is instituted as another layer into the public system, then it changes the whole nature of the public system.

We have private schools. We have charter schools. We have home-schooling. We accommodate in this highly tolerant province a whole variety of opportunities. I believe that one needs to live their faith as opposed to using their faith as a hammer, and that is what I am concerned about, that religious intolerance of an individual based on sexual orientation will now become enshrined within the public education system and replace what was the intent of the education act.

I've heard the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit speak at news conferences and say: "What's the big deal? It already exists under the School Act." Well, sexual orientation doesn't exist under the School Act, and bringing it into legislation excludes as opposed to includes a significant sector of the public. The last thing I want schools to be turned into are bigotry breeding grounds. One's faith is personal, but when one starts to exercise that faith, whether by excluding themselves from a science lesson or a literature lesson or a social studies history lesson, especially at the junior high situation, where children are undergoing changes that people may not want to discuss under the terms of human sexuality, the reality is that physical and mental changes are taking place, and kids are extremely vulnerable at that age. The child who isn't sure what his religious rights or beliefs are would feel potentially uncomfortable in a variety of discussions, and if that child leaves the class, standing up for what he or she believes is their religious right, there is the perception of that child being excluded.

I don't want public schools to have to be forced into a circumstance where an external religious muzzle is placed on any types of open discussion. Trust teachers. Where a teacher's trust isn't warranted or if there is any evidence of crime, of hatred, or exclusion based on race, religion, sexual orientation, then it belongs in the courts. It doesn't belong as a shoehorn into human rights legislation. Parents already can make the choices.

Please, I urge you to remove this particular clause, which undermines the whole foundation of a secular public education system.

Thank you.

4:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, first, that I respect very much the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity and his respectful arguments and the tone of debate that he brought.

I have two questions in particular. Specifically, you mentioned the world religions class, the grade 7 class that you taught. I happened to go through that same course. During that experience my personal faith as well as the faiths of several other students in the class were really, for lack of a better word, slandered. It was very much misrepresented. I don't think it was on purpose. I don't think that the teacher in that case had any sort of vice or anything towards these specific faiths. I think it just came from a lack of a true understanding about what that faith taught. And it was more than just mine; it was others as well. I will say, though, that although it wasn't intentional, the discrimination that I felt at that time was very real, and the feelings of hurt were very real. My first question would be: is that appropriate? Is it intolerant of me as a parent, in order to keep my kids from possibly experiencing that same discomfort and pain, to teach them about world religions in my own home, where I think I can give a very fair and balanced and very tolerant approach to that subject?

The second question. We all know – and it's very much related – that one example where the state thought that they were a better teacher of religion than parents was the tragedy, of course, of the Indian residential schools, where the state took children against their will and forced them to learn a religious-based teaching. I guess what I would ask is: in that context, given that history, do you believe that the state is better positioned than parents to teach religion to students?

Mr. Chase: It is my firm belief as a parent and a grandparent that religion is something that originates in the home. Depending on your type of practice, it may be fortified in a mosque, in a synagogue, in a church. It may be celebrated within a natural setting. It is not the state's purpose to supplement or teach a child a particular religious faith. That's up to the families.

I'm sorry that you felt the type of discomfort in that class on world religions that I was explaining other children might feel. As a teaching professional it's very important that we not provide a particular view as to, you know, yea this religion, nay that one. It's very important that we lay out the factual information. For example, I said a major prophet for the Islamic religion was Mohammed. I talked about Buddha. I talked about Jesus as being a primary representative of the Christian faith. But I did not indicate that one religion or another, other than numbers, has a greater following or should be followed over any other. That's very important. That was part of a global class, and I provided maps on where the various faiths had the greatest intensity of worship and so on.

I would like to separate religion and secular education. Religion, as I say, belongs, I believe, in the home. I believe the demonstration of one's religious beliefs is something that we should live by on a daily basis, but I don't think we should push our beliefs.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, on the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important debate, and it's a very important debate because it's very important that the clear meaning and understanding of the intention of this bill be on the record and be understood. There has been a significant amount of discussion about what, in my view, is not in the bill, but I think it's important to say what is in the bill.

First of all, what is in the bill is some effort at an administrative change to the Human Rights Commission to make the processes of the Human Rights Commission more effective, to recognize that

there are frivolous complaints that come forward and make sure that it's easier to deal with those, and to make sure that the complaints that come forward that are grounded are dealt with appropriately. The important part of the bill, really, is about the reinvigoration of the Human Rights Commission to do its job properly and to arm it to do its job properly.

There had been discussion – and I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark – with respect to section 3. There had been comments that this bill does not address section 3, and I'm not going to go into the section 3 issue other than to say that there are all sorts of concerns about our right of freedom of speech. I'm one of these people who believes that I was born with a bundle of rights and that every time society does something through government, it takes away from my personal rights. Hopefully, it does that on an appropriate basis, to encourage and create a civil society. But there's nothing we can do as government which doesn't detract from my personal rights, so we have to always be on guard that when we detract from personal rights, we do it for rational reasons that are for the good of civil society.

The other thing I would say about section 3 and the freedom of speech and our freedom to express ourselves is that there are restrictions on all of our rights. I have a right to flail my arms around, but I don't have the right to connect them with somebody else when I do it, and I think freedom of speech has the same kind of limitations. That's all I'll say about section 3.

The section that I really want to address is section 9, which provides for putting section 11.1 into the act. It's very important because a lot of the public discussion and most of the discussion in here has been focused on that section 11.1 and what it means. Let me clear up something, first of all, that I think has been mentioned in the House – I know it's been mentioned outside the House – and that's whether section 11.1 deals with all educational institutions because it talks about a board as defined in the School Act. That board is defined in the School Act as not just school districts and school divisions; it also includes charter schools under section 36(1) of the act. So it should be perfectly clear that this includes charter schools. Should it also include private schools? Well, that's a subject that we could raise later on. Certainly, I would see no reason why it shouldn't, but clearly it includes charter schools. I wanted to make that perfectly clear.

Then there are the claims that people are making that this will somehow result in students being deprived of knowledge and understanding necessary to participate in a diverse society. This is not the intention or the import of section 11.1 as proposed. Section 11.1 affirms in law parents' ability to opt their child out of instruction that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation. This will not result in any changes to current practice.

Section 50 of the School Act already states that parents can opt their children out of religious instruction or exercises. The guide to education, the mandated policy that all schools operate under, states that the principal shall exempt a student from school instruction in human sexuality education at the written request of the student's parents. The guide to education is policy, not law. Mr. Speaker, section 11.1 affirms in law parents' ability to exempt their children but functionally changes nothing.

Now, some comments have been made that this has never extended to sexual orientation before. Human sexuality includes sexual orientation. Full stop. It's always been in there; it's always been part of the policy. Now it's part of the law. Some people didn't realize that that was included, so it's expressly mentioned so that people will realize that that's included.

The other effect of section 11.1, of course, is to require parents to be informed of instruction that deals explicitly with religion,

sexuality, or sexual orientation. It only makes sense to do this because parents can't opt their children out of activities that they don't know about. This is a minor change to current practice in that section 50 of the School Act allows for opting out but doesn't require notification.

4:20

The guide to education says that parents shall be advised prior to the start of human sexuality instruction of their right to exempt their child from that course component. There is no similar notification about religious instruction or, for that matter, patriotic exercises in the current School Act, so that's now added. All section 11.1 does is mandate a consistent approach to informing parents and allowing them to opt out of religious or human sexuality instruction. When I say "religious," I mean as it says in the section, explicit religious instruction.

Are we going to cause mass chaos in the schools by requiring boards to inform parents about instruction explicitly addressing religion or human sexuality? Well, no. We already do that. We already require that parents be advised before instruction begins on human sexuality. Adding a requirement that they be advised of explicit instruction about religion imposes no extra unmanageable burden. In much the same way this does not create a logistical problem in schools, as has been mentioned. In the past teachers and principals have not had any problem accommodating students who have opted out of human sexuality instruction. Students who opt out of religious courses are not going to overwhelm the ability of teachers and principals to find suitable alternative activities.

Mr. Speaker, some critics of section 11.1 say that you can read anything into the meaning of religion, so students could opt out of anything that they interpret to be religious. That is not the import of section 11.1, and it's not the intention of section 11.1. Our current practice of allowing students to opt out of sexual education classes has not enabled anybody to opt out of their biology classes. I don't know why anyone would think that including religion here will enable anyone to opt out of discussions of Middle Eastern politics or evolution or geology. What are clearly intended are courses of study, educational programs, instructional materials, or instruction or exercises that are explicitly, specifically, primarily about religion.

Mr. Speaker, there are also claims that Bill 44 will somehow put a chill on what can be discussed in class. This concept that teachers will have to fear any utterings, that discussions in class will freeze, that there can be no utilization of teachable moments when a topic touches on religion or homosexuality is really not on. Social studies classrooms must and will be able to discuss current events, especially when they involve a clash of cultures, values, or even religions. This is not teaching religion. This is acknowledging that in the reality of today's society in developing students who are global citizens, religion will be part of the topic. That is basic to understanding where we are going and how we deal with disease among other things. Science will continue to teach about cell structure and its continuing adaptive evolution.

Other critics are asking why there is any particular sensitivity at all about teaching religion. The implication of these statements is that allowing students to be exempted from explicit religious instructions or teaching about religion somehow prevents students from learning about and appreciating diversity. That's simply not the case, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to values and value systems, there has always been this question of whether schools should teach values or whether that's the purview of the family.

Bill 44 is not about preventing children from learning about diversity. In fact, we can't prevent that, and we don't want to prevent that. In a modern, pluralistic society there is no way to

avoid discussions of values. Just by walking into a modern classroom, with dozens of ethnocultural backgrounds, religious beliefs and, yes, sexual orientations, today's students are going to learn from each other about diversity. Our society increasingly reflects this diversity and celebrates this diversity. That's why students absolutely should be learning about subjects that they do not necessarily agree with, whether a scientific viewpoint or a religious belief. That's why we ask our students to express views based on their personal values and beliefs. Thinking through personal beliefs is an important part of developing judgment and character.

But there is a particular sensitivity for specifically teaching about religion and religious doctrine. While I want my children to understand the spectrum of religions in the world, I may not want you to interpret for my child what the doctrines of my religion are. That's why we respect and honour students' religious beliefs by allowing their parents to opt them out of religion classes.

When it comes to sexuality and sexual education, it's important to me that I know what you are teaching my child. Then I can be involved in ensuring that my child has more than a technical understanding of the mechanics of sex but also a clear and unequivocal view of the importance of sex within a loving and caring relationship. It is for these reasons that notification is provided to parents and the opportunity is there for a parent to say, "I would rather my child not participate."

Some people have argued that by putting these provisions in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, there is a significant change, that we're elevating them to the status of rights. Surprise. Parents have always had the fundamental right to direct the education of their child. That's recognized in the preamble of the School Act, Mr. Speaker, where it says that "parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children." They have the right to review curriculum with teachers and, in fact, are encouraged to do so. I wish more parents would take an active interest in what is happening in their child's school. That's why parental rights, including being informed about and given the chance to opt out of explicit religious instruction and exercises and instruction about human sexuality, are important. But that absolutely does not include allowing a religious interpretation of the broader program of studies as grounds for opting out.

Mr. Speaker, I've always maintained that education exists not just for our children but for our communities and our society as a whole. This legislation is one of those efforts that walks the always uncertain and uneasy line between communal needs and personal preferences. However, it is clear that parents are ultimately responsible for their children, that society has an interest in making sure that children are appropriately educated, and that in some areas there is inevitably going to be a clash of values, which needs rational discussion and resolution.

This is a methodology of ensuring that parents can and will be involved when those sensitive subjects come up. They can opt out if necessary, but hopefully it would only be after a discussion with the teacher as to what was actually going to be included in the instruction and possibly the ability of the parent then to supplement that discussion at home if they had concerns. Ultimately, they have the opportunity, they have the option, they have the right to opt out.

One of the other issues that I want to deal with very quickly is this issue that perhaps teachers will be hauled before the Human Rights Commission. Mr. Speaker, clearly, if this section is in the human rights act, the Human Rights Commission has a role. One of the tenets of the Human Rights Commission is always to require a complainant to first go through other processes that are available to them. In the school process those processes have always been there and always worked. We have all across this province opportunity

for parents to talk to teachers not just about these issues but about any issue in the curriculum that they find offensive or any teaching resource that they find offensive. We've had examples of that across the province where a parent has taken an objection to the resource, and the appropriate route is then to talk to the teacher about it. If they don't get satisfaction, talk to the principal about it. If they don't get satisfaction, talk to the school board about it. I'm not aware of any circumstances where that process has not been successful.

However, in the event that someone did complain to the Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Commission would first ensure that they went through that process. Secondly, the Human Rights Commission would have the opportunity to determine whether this was a frivolous or a valid complaint. This doesn't have to be a huge process. In fact, the other amendments to the human rights act that are being proposed will make it much easier for the Human Rights Commission to do its job and not be burdened with frivolous complaints, to deal with those expeditiously and to deal with the appropriate complaints that come before them, the ones that have merit, in a robust nature.

I do not believe teachers or school boards should be scared of the process at all. I do not believe that there's anything in section 11 which should freeze discussion in the classroom at all. The clear interpretation that should be put on section 11.1 is that when a teacher in a program of studies is going to teach explicitly about religion or, as is in the School Act, religious instruction, when the teacher has a unit in their program of studies which teaches about human sexuality, which includes sexual orientation, notification is required. In fact, that's the process that's undertaken now, and it works.

Changing this, putting it into the human rights act, is not going to change the fact that parents have rights. It's not going to change the fact that parents are required to be notified as they are now under policy – not in the act but under policy – about the teaching of human sexuality.

It will change one thing with respect to religion, and that is not only the right to opt out of religious and patriotic instruction and exercises but the right to opt out of the teaching about religion. But it's explicitly teaching about religion and not using a religious lens on all the other curriculum to determine whether they disagree on religious grounds with anything that's being taught in science or math or social studies or literature.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear about this. The intent of this bill is to make sure that you can opt out where appropriate but not opt out of all the other areas.

4:30

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the hon. Minister of Education reviewing the historical significance of the School Act as it relates to opting out of religious classes and the specificity and definition of religious classes. I also appreciate his reinforcing of the sexuality clauses. But one area that he either treaded around or didn't tread into to the extent that it's causing the greatest deal of difficulty is the area of sexual orientation. That was not previously in the School Act, and now it is being put into this human rights legislation. That is where the difficulty of the interpretation will exist. I don't anticipate a degree of difficulty with the religious aspects. With regard to human sexuality it has always required a consent. I don't see that being a problem.

While we have promoted tolerance in one part of the bill with

regard to sexual orientation, which the government reluctantly put in – it was 1998, with the Vriend case, when this matter first came to a head. Now we protect people, as I say, in the workplace, and we protect them in terms of tenancy, but it's a slippery slope as to whose rights are being protected, whose rights are subject to interpretation when it comes to sexual orientation. So if you could please talk about that part of the bill because that's where the controversy lies.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe there should be any controversy on this. The human rights bill, Bill 44, clearly puts sexual orientation into the act in all the appropriate places with respect to ensuring that there is no discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As the former Premier said when this was discussed in the House a number of years ago: I abhor discrimination. I think every member of the House would say that same thing. People should not be discriminated against on any basis, quite frankly. We all live in this society together, and we have to live together and work together. It's very important that it be in. This is the first time the human rights act has been opened. It's quite appropriate that there were changes to be made to the Human Rights Commission. So to put it in, now is a good time to do it.

With respect to human sexuality sexual orientation is part and parcel of human sexuality. In our mandated policy to school boards right now if they are teaching anything about human sexuality, they have to give notice to parents. The fact that it's specifically set out, because some people didn't realize that, in my view makes no change to the policy that has been mandated for a long time; that is, if you're teaching human sexuality, you need to give notice. I could give the member chapter and verse of the various sections of the curriculum that deal with human sexuality issues, where notice is required, but that's the sum and substance of it.

You can read it broader if you want, but my suggestion is that that's not the appropriate reading of it. The appropriate reading of it is that when you're teaching explicitly about religion, when you're teaching about human sexuality, including sexual orientation, those are areas where parents should be notified so that they can discuss the curriculum. If they have a problem about the way it's presented or the content of it, they can opt to teach their children themselves about values which they hold dear.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. There is no sexual orientation 101(b) of human sexuality. Sexual orientation isn't something that's limited to a health class. It's not a lifestyle. It's something that individuals are potentially born with. It's not a disease. It's not a choice. It's not a preference. But it isn't restricted to a human sexuality class. When issues of sexual orientation appear not as a direct part of a teaching lesson, can a person simply jump up and say, "I'm opposed to this person because they're soft-spoken" or "He's wearing purple and pink clothes again, and that's annoying me"?

Mr. Hancock: Clearly not, Mr. Speaker. Clearly the section says, "deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation." It's a class that deals with it. It's not a comment that comes up in class or a teachable moment that occurs. That's clear from the wording of it. It should be the way all of us focus on this because it's so important.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to be able to speak to this bill although I will say that it is one of those things that I speak to with a little bit of a heavy heart as I don't think it holds Albertans in a good light or holds our classroom teaching to really going forward in a positive direction.

If I look back at this bill and sort of the makings of it, I look back at being in a law school class in about 1997-1998. We were then given the Alberta Court of Appeal's decision to read on Vriend. I remember that being interesting reading and going forward and then saying to myself: you know, this really is kind of bizarre. The fact that we actually appealed it to the Supreme Court of Canada I thought even more bizarre. Then the fact that we didn't immediately take the recommendation to implement sexual orientation into the human rights code like many other jurisdictions did immediately, like the Supreme Court of Canada suggested all jurisdictions do, again, I found very bizarre. I guess that's sort of what it was. That's why my first question that I believe I asked in this House was on when sexual orientation was going to come into our human rights legislation. I felt proud to ask that question. I'm actually overjoyed to see that that is finally part of the legislation in this act.

Nevertheless, you know, what the right hand giveth, the left hand taketh away, or something to that effect, because although we have a piece of I guess what we call symbolic, progressive, what have you, legislation going forward, we have an equally, I'd even suggest, more regressive act going forward the other way, which is the enshrining of parental rights into our human rights code. Essentially, what I see that as is really just holding a flag out to people, like almost a red flag, saying: "Hey. Here it is. In Alberta you are allowed to drag people to a human rights tribunal if this happens in your school system, if you don't like it happening, if you don't want people to talk about sexual education or sexual orientation, if you feel it has happened, whether it has happened legitimately or whether it happened in the playground." You have enshrined a right that was not there before.

I understand what the hon. House leader said before, that this is a not a new right given to parents. Fine. I agree with that. You could've yarded your kids out of class in section 50 if you got your knickers in a knot over them going to teach sexual orientation or if they were going to talk about X, Y, or Z. You know, fair enough. Parents could always do that. You know, I guess that's fair enough. I won't comment any further on that. But what we're doing here by this is that we're putting a red flag not only to parents but to institutions, religious and otherwise, to say: "Hey, guys. In Alberta we're allowed to do this. Let's get organized and possibly do this." It just alerts people to something that really I don't think was necessary. It enshrines a right that I believe sets us back, and I'll say it sets us back numerous years.

4:40

Maybe some of you read the Canadian Press today, where a former member, I believe probably still a member of your party but at least a former member of your party, who was a member of the House, Ron Ghitter, from Calgary-Buffalo – he wrote the document on tolerance and understanding – expressed extreme, I think, distaste towards this.

It was just a few short months ago when I was in a meeting put on by the Sheldon Chumir foundation, and Mr. Ghitter came in with the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. I had such great hopes for this bill at the time. When Mr. Ghitter introduced you at that forum in front of the Sheldon Chumir people, I was saying: well, Ron Ghitter wouldn't be doing this unless he thought this was good stuff. Then lo and behold, this is what happens. I can't help but say I'm nothing but disappointed in the fact that this has come

out. It's safe to say from his comments in the paper today that he's disappointed.

So, you know, don't just point at us on this side of the House and say we're the ones being silly here. Look at people who've built that party, who supposedly were part of that progressive arm of your party, that sort of left the Social Credit Party and said: "Yeah. We're not quite like that anymore. We've moved on as a society." Whereas now those guys are looking and saying: "Are they back? Did the Socreds do a reverse takeover?" I don't know. It really looks to me like this is a regressive set of legislation that goes back to 1967, apparently before the Progressive Conservative Party took over. But hey, what do I know? What does Ron Ghitter know? I guess that's sort of what I read in today's paper. I don't want to speak for Mr. Ghitter, but that's what I took from his comments.

I think that's almost what I'd like to point out, that Alberta has taken a step back in terms of this legislation. I think we've really got to look at ourselves like: "Man, are we going in the right direction? Are we going in the progressive direction, the way people are going?" In my humble opinion I would say not.

Anyway, those are my comments, and I thank you very much for allowing me to make them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available for questions or comments to the hon. member.

There being none that I can ascertain, then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to continue the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and continue the debate I will. We're at second reading, so we're again debating the principles of Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. I have to say that I do not understand this bill. I do not understand the purpose behind this bill at this time. I do not understand why, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1998 that sexual orientation needed to be written into our human rights legislation, it could or would possibly take over 10 years for this government to get around to doing that. I do not understand why there would be any connection made between writing in sexual orientation as a prohibited grounds of discrimination and writing in parental rights.

I do not understand why when a human rights law expert like Linda McKay-Panos says that no other provincial human rights legislation, none anywhere in the country, touches on parental rights in education – and she's the head of the Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre at the University of Calgary – I do not understand why this government would see fit to put it into human rights legislation. She says that the issue, in her opinion, belongs under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, not in human rights legislation.

I don't understand how these two things, Mr. Speaker, are supposed to go together. I do not understand why I should accept the Education minister at his word that enshrining what already, in his view, exists under the School Act in human rights legislation makes no difference whatsoever. The reason why I don't understand why I should accept that line of argument is because if that's the truth, if that's the correct and factual interpretation of this legislation, then there's utterly no reason to put it into Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, because you don't put things into legislation unless those things – those clauses, those sections, those paragraphs – are meant to have an impact.

Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. You can't say that this was a vitally important issue to put into our human rights legislation on the one hand and then on the other hand say: "Oh, but it doesn't change anything. Things just continue on gloriously, calmly,

wonderfully, the way they've always been, with parents having no more right and no less right to opt their kids out of sex ed than they did before."

Now, I remember when my kids were young and in school – and it even started back in elementary school. I guess we sent our kids to a really progressive public school; I don't know. You know, the earliest sex ed classes for our kids were in grade 4, and I know the opt-out provisions existed there, too. There were a couple of parents in our neighbourhood who routinely opted their kids out of sex ed. I know that's existed under the School Act for a long, long time. I understand that.

Mr. Hancock: It's policy.

Mr. Taylor: Policy. Fine. Good enough. The Education minister has just corrected me that it's an issue of policy. Fine.

Nevertheless, the ability, the right, the privilege, whatever you want to call it, of parents to opt their kids out of sex ed in the public school system in the province of Alberta has existed for a long time. My kids are 22 and 20 now, and by the way, their parents did not opt them out. They made them go and take sex ed whether they found it embarrassing or not, which from time to time maybe they did a little bit, but it did them good. They turned out just fine, and I would highly recommend to any and all parents in the province of Alberta that they not opt their kids out of sex ed classes because it will do the kids some good. It really will.

That opt-out ability has existed for a very long time, and it seemingly worked just fine for the parents who wanted to take advantage of it. Now suddenly we feel the need to enshrine it in the human rights code. But at the same time that we're feeling that we need to enshrine it in the human rights code, we're saying, "But it doesn't change anything; things just go on as before," and this from a government, this from a party that actively and with premeditation, I would argue, dragged its heels for a decade on doing what the highest court in the land told it to do, which is to enshrine sexual orientation in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act of the province of Alberta as a prohibited ground for discrimination.

Now, Mr. Speaker, to me none of this passes the smell test. I don't think we're getting the straight goods on this. I don't think a government that dragged its heels for that long on following the directions of the highest court in the land on an issue that they now have suddenly, if you'll pardon the pun, gotten religion around supporting – if it took them 10 years to figure out that the Supreme Court made the right ruling here and that they should actually do what the court told them to do because it's the constitutional and right thing to do, you know, I don't really buy it when they say: "Yeah, just put the parental rights clause in there. Nothing is going to change. Things are going to carry on as before. Everything is going to be just fine. Don't you worry your little head about this." Well, my head, which nobody has ever described as little, is worried about this, greatly worried about this, greatly concerned about this.

4:50

I don't think this bill passes the smell test. I'm going to vote against it at second. I invite and challenge members opposite to convince me in committee, as we debate amendments to this bill, that they're not trying to sell me some swampland in Florida over this one, but I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker: they've got a ways to go to pull that off.

Mr. Speaker, I've been instructed that I'm supposed to adjourn debate on this issue, so I would move adjournment of Bill 44 at second reading now.

The Speaker: Well, we'll deal with that after we deal with Standing Order 29(2)(a), which affords all members an opportunity to provide question or comment.

Mr. Chase: I was just wondering if the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was intending on moving adjournment following 29(2)(a). If he could clarify his position, that would be much appreciated and would serve this honourable House well, I'm sure.

The Speaker: Well, he'll not be in a position to do that. He's already provided the motion. I postponed it for five minutes. That's one of the little quirks we have here on the administrative side. That just dealt with 35 seconds.

Any other members want to participate on the Q and C side?

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned May 12: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise in second reading and speak to Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009. Now, according to the electoral boundaries act that currently exists, we would have had to strike our next Electoral Boundaries Commission by June 30, 2010. Clearly, the government is anxious to get that ball rolling, so this act is replacing that date. Now they would like to roll that back to July 31 of 2009, so pretty much back by a year. My memory was that it does take about a year before you actually get a report, so this would line us up a little earlier.

In the other electoral boundaries that I have been in place to witness, the number of seats was kept the same. What you're trying to do is anticipate growth and also anticipate fair and equitable representation. That usually breaks down into two things. Is a vote in Athabasca-Redwater the same as the vote of an individual who's voting in Edmonton-Centre? Also, is the ability of a given MLA elected in one area to provide representation the same as the ability of an MLA in another jurisdiction?

Lots of things are at play here: urban versus rural, the number of constituents, the stress that we place as what was a predominantly rural province is now a predominantly urban province, how we offer reasonable access and representation to those people who are still living in rural areas, how large the area is that a member is expected to serve and to serve their constituents with a reasonable amount of access to them and, frankly, without killing the MLA, which sometimes we don't put enough consideration toward. We're struggling here. We have 80 per cent of our population who are living in an urban area, but when you look at the number of those 83 seats that are what we would call urban seats, I would argue that we end up with significantly less than 80 per cent of the MLAs in this House representing those people. I think it's much closer to 60 per cent. So there is already an inequity created here.

Now, in Alberta in the electoral boundaries act we have tried to adjust for that in the past, and frankly I think we've stretched those definitions to the point where that elastic is going to snap on some kind of Supreme Court challenge. There was a lot of talk in 2002 about whether what was being proposed would qualify as a Charter challenge. Certainly, there has been some judicial commentary that is available as to when they start to signal that they think that's going

to be a problem, but we do stretch it. I mean, we allow, I think it is, four ridings to have a variance of plus or minus 50 per cent, and a number of other ridings – or maybe it's all the other ridings – are allowed to have a variance of plus or minus 25 per cent.

Now, remember, guys, that this is off the average. You can have one riding, let's say an urban riding, that has 25 per cent more people and a rural riding that has 25 per cent less people off your norm. Let me just pick a number. Let's say 30,000 people. You can have a riding that has 25 per cent more than that 30,000 and 25 per cent less than that 30,000. You can end up with a heck of a spread between those two constituencies, yet supposedly their votes are the same and the ability of the MLA to represent those two areas is the same. I think we've reached the point where what we have in that current legislation is not justifiable any longer.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, it's an interesting thing. Having been elected long enough in this House, you do start to find that everybody thinks they work hard, that everybody thinks they work harder than everybody else. I've never met any MLA who stood up and said: "No. You know what? I don't work as hard as my neighbour." Everybody says that they work harder than everyone else. I think MLAs do work hard. I am not aware of any MLA sitting in this House at this time who's slacking off, who's kicking back eating bonbons. I don't know of anyone sitting in this House right now that's doing that, that is skipping days in the House, that is calling in sick, that isn't doing a share of their caucus load or their committee load or their critic load. You can probably argue that some people work harder and read more stuff and that some people take longer lunches. Yeah, yeah. Go ahead and argue it. I don't see how that's getting us any further forward here.

I think what's important for us to understand is that there are differences in the constituencies we serve. Driving is not a factor for me. I can remember the previous member for I think it was Cypress-Medicine Hat, who eventually when he resigned said: "That's it. I just cannot do those five and a half hour drives from Edmonton back to Medicine Hat anymore. I've had it." Fair enough. I drive, as you know, hardly at all. I walk almost everywhere, and you know what? I can walk across my constituency, if I really get going at a good clip and I'm already out of the river valley, in about 40 minutes. So driving is not a factor. Those are not comparisons for me. But I am not going to . . . [interjection] If you want to dis me, there is a five-minute opportunity for you to get up and slag me at the end of what I have to say here, and I'm sure you'll take advantage of it.

If there's an event in my constituency, everybody knows where I am. They know I'm not very far from them, and they expect me to be there. There's no excuse for me not to turn up because, you know, I'm so close I can just – and I'll put it in quotes – pop by. So there is great expectation that I am going to be at every single event that's happening in this constituency. I can't say to them: "Sorry. I'm in Edmonton, and I just can't get to whatever is the list of events that you have. I won't be back in the constituency until, you know, Thursday night at 8 o'clock, and I'm happy to go to something then." No. Monday morning, Monday lunch, Monday night, Saturday, six, seven events on Sunday: I'm expected to be at all of them. So it's different. That expectation is not held for some people, but there's also no burden upon me to drive around. Constituencies are different.

5:00

My constituents want to know why their votes can be valued so differently, why we end up with such a difference in the spread of

votes that are required, why the vote of an Edmonton-Centre constituent is not of equal value to the vote of someone in Cypress-Medicine Hat or in Little Bow or anywhere else, to make sure that my ability to represent my constituents is essentially the same as another member's ability to represent their constituents. This is not about how hard you're working. This is about whether it's actually possible to do these things.

I remember having a conversation once with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He said: I just don't understand how you do your work in your constituency office. I think we had a STEP student that had worked in my office, and they went to work in the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's office, and the student had been talking. Yeah, I do a lot of casework. I mean, I represent people whose household socioeconomic demographics range from millions of dollars worth of real estate in the penthouse of a condominium high-rise overlooking the river valley to the homeless guys that are sleeping underneath the bridge behind my office and everybody in between. I have the widest range of household incomes in the province. Fair enough. Okay? Good. Move on.

How do I represent them? He said that, you know, when people come to see him, they want to talk policy; they want to see their MLA and talk policy; they want to express their opinion. My constituents don't do it that way. They e-mail me if they want to express an opinion on a current issue, or they phone and leave a message on the voice mail, or they phone and leave a message on my cellphone, or whatever. The people who come into the office need help, and they need casework. They don't actually need me to do it. They need someone to do it, some staff to help them through it.

The way we work is literally different than everyone else. I don't have 32 municipalities that I deal with, but I do have half a dozen community leagues, six to 10 BRZs, a couple of city councillors, three or four school board trustees, half a dozen ARPs, a bunch of multimillion dollar NGOs that serve a number of constituents not only for me but for others, head offices of a number of other agencies and companies. Can I compare it directly across there? No. Do I have my attention pulled in as many different directions as somebody with 32 municipalities? Yeah. I mean, I can match them 32 to 32 if that's what is important to you. But I understand that it's a different way of going at things.

What's important to me in what we're contemplating here is a couple of things. One, I do not believe we need more MLAs. I look to our neighbours, who just had an election. They've just elected 79 members in the province of B.C., which has a significantly larger population than Alberta does. They also have a very wide diversity of urban density versus rural density. I think their average, or their mean, is 75,000 people. I've always thought: "Well, what's the matter? Are we wimps or what?" I think what it is is that we, in fact, could represent that many people, but we would need to approach things differently. We would need to make use of technology. Some things we wouldn't be able to do in the same way as we've been able to do them.

I don't know that it's about having more MLAs in place. I think it's about how well we serve people. That doesn't necessarily mean that every individual is going to get face time with an MLA and that that's the definition of effective representation. I challenge that. I don't think we need to have four more MLAs. I think what that is about is the distribution of boundaries so that we can keep a whole bunch of rural seats and give a few more urban ones, but we'll see how this plays out.

I think the other thing that's important as part of this process is that we look at how that matrix is developed and what's included in the matrix and what's not. I think that matrix is very unfair, and it does not take into consideration this diverse Alberta that we are in

today. I think it's very backward looking. It, for example, takes into consideration not at all a diversity of language in a constituency. Lots of you have many different language groups in your constituencies now. I must provide translations for the work that I do in my community. It's not an option for me. But that matrix doesn't recognize that at all. It does not recognize that I have to provide a level of casework that other people don't even contemplate. It's not even considered in that matrix.

I think that matrix is very old-fashioned looking, very backward looking, and needs to be redone and updated. That's what our funding for our constituency offices is based on. You know, that point system that is worked out there very much advantages certain things and very much disadvantages other ones, and I would argue that there is a bias against the urban ridings on that one.

I know that I'm nearing the end of my time, and I'm looking forward to a robust discussion on this. I know you guys need this by the summer, but for heaven's sake, you've got until June 4. There's lots of time to work this through committee and third. There's no need to run it through in the middle of the night. I'd really be interested in hearing what different people have to say about the challenges they face in representation and what they think would be the best changes.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of questions for the member, and I ask these in absolute good faith. I don't for a second poke any darts in that direction nor suggest that she works more or less or harder or not as hard as I do. The argument is essentially that all Albertans are entitled to equal representation, and we're fundamentally not different people regardless of where we live. Why can you make that argument but then suppose that in a rural constituency the constituents don't expect the MLA to pop in, as you put it? My constituents do expect me to pop in. When I pop in in La Crête or Rainbow Lake, it's a nine-hour return trip from my home in Peace River. Never mind coming back to Edmonton, it's a nine-hour return trip from my home in Peace River. So popping in is certainly an issue. I always found it amusing coming back to Edmonton on Monday morning and sharing office space with the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who would always tell us he went to four functions on Saturday and five on Sunday. I go to one, and that's a day for me, a nine-hour return drive.

I guess I'm wondering, and I would ask the member: is there some line – and I don't argue that my constituency or any other rural constituency at the moment is over the line. Would the member allow that there is some line, some situation where it's harder to reach constituents in one constituency versus another constituency and that in the interests of fair representation it might be advisable to recognize that there is such a line? The courts themselves have recognized that there is, in fact, such a line. I'm wondering what the member would have to say about that, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I think the point of that and the point that I was trying to make – and I'm sorry that the Member for Peace River didn't get it – is that there are a number of lines. That is the point. There are different challenges that each of us face, and what the Electoral Boundaries needs to recognize and what that commission . . . [interjections] Well, if this was just an opportunity to slag me, then I guess you've had your fun. There you go.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

5:10

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a question for the member opposite. She made reference to the province to the west, our neighbour B.C., and the fact that they had 79 seats up for re-election, a population of something over 6 million, and that they didn't need to see an increase in the number of MLAs. Well, I would like to remind her that, in fact, they increased the number of seats. They had six more. They elected 85 seats last night. Just out of curiosity, for a Liberal Party in B.C., they must have felt the need for some sort of extra representation, and apparently that was part of the mandate given to them last night because prior to the election they held 42 seats. Last night they won 49. As I said before, they moved from 79 to 85 seats, so they've added six seats in their Legislature.

If you care to respond to that, that's fine. If you don't, I just wanted to correct the record, that, in fact, they weren't staying the status quo. They have had a substantial increase in their population, as Alberta has. I just checked it on the website, actually, to make sure that 85 was the correct number, and if I'm wrong or if the information I have is wrong, I'd stand corrected.

While I'm up on the floor, though, I, like the Member for Peace River, from Rocky Mountain House – if you recall, a couple of weeks ago two of our members got awards for 20 years of service, Lesser Slave Lake and Rocky Mountain House. I found it rather interesting when the Speaker made a commendation to them that each of the members in those two ridings, although they can't walk across their riding in 40 minutes, had to travel the equivalent of two trips around the earth just to do the normal travel. I'm not unlike that. I max out at 80,000, and I lose track after 80,000, as the Member for Peace River does. It's a five-and-a-half hour drive. Most people don't realize that those of us that are driving that kind of time spend 13 weeks a year driving to and from Edmonton and around our constituencies. That's more than a lot of people get just for holidays each year. I guess I, along with one of my colleague members, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, have the dubious distinction of having one of the two hardest ridings to represent in the province according to the report that came out on the last Electoral Boundaries Commission.

The Deputy Speaker: Now back to the bill. Does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a second time]

Bill 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate April 29: Mr. Griffiths]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to get up and join second reading debate on Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), and register my opposition to this bill.

I am a city boy. I have been a city boy all my life. I have never pretended to know my way around a farm. In fact, back in my past life, from time to time agricultural issues would come up for discussion, as they would do from time to time on a radio station with a signal like CHQR that covers about half this province and a

good chunk of Saskatchewan and down into Montana as well. Whenever they did on my show, I would always hasten to point out that what I don't know about farming or ranching or producing crops or producing livestock would fill the Library of Congress, no doubt. So when we had to discuss those things, I always relied on our listeners who actually made their living that way to guide me through it and help me understand what was going on. It seemed to be a fairly effective way of dealing with the subjects, and I think we built up some good relationships, some of our rural listeners and I, over the years on the radio station. I have found out since this bill hit the fan, I mean hit the floor, that those relationships still exist. I've heard from a lot of people who produce livestock for a living, and they ain't happy, Mr. Speaker. They ain't happy at all.

Now, as I've said in the past and as I say to them, even though I know theoretically the process by which steak arrives on my dinner table, as a city boy I still tend to kind of suspect that it comes from the back room in Safeway or Co-op. You know, that's kind of the default position. So if I say something dumb during debate – remember there are no stupid questions, just stupid politicians and stupid interviewers – I beg the indulgence and the forgiveness of the agricultural community. I'm trying to keep on topic as much as possible and keep this as accurate as possible.

I do think that I now understand check-offs. I understand that check-off is not just the navigator on the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. There was a time, Mr. Speaker, when that's what I thought a check-off was, and we are not looking for nuclear 'wessels.'

Anyway, what I have been made to understand or have come to understand in the last couple of weeks since this bill hit the floor is that there are an awful lot of beef producers, pork producers, lamb producers, and potato growers as well who are not happy with the intention and the direction of this bill, which would require producer commissions to grant their members the option to seek refund of mandatory check-offs, mandatory service charges, in the beef, pork, lamb, and potato business. As the beef producers have pointed out to me, those beef producers who've spoken to me about it, there are about 28,000 of them in this province, and there are about 100 really big guys in the beef-producing business. There are about 28,000 cow-calf operators, smaller folk who maybe run a couple to a few hundred head of cattle in their operation, as opposed to the feeders, who maybe deal with a couple of hundred thousand head of cattle over the space of a year, something like that. It's the 100 really big guys who want this; the 28,000 normal-size guys don't want this.

See, this city boy brain says that the 100 big guys who feed the 100,000 or 200,000 head of cattle a year and fatten them up so that ultimately they end up in the hands of Cargill or Tyson or one of those organizations and then at horrendous markup end up on the shelves at Superstore and hence from there to the Taylor family table wouldn't be anywhere without those 28,000 normal-size guys who are growing the cows 100, 200, 500 at a time. I think the 28,000 ordinary-size guys are more important members and producers and contributors to the food chain than the 100 big boys. I really do. I think that without the 28,000 little producers the 100 big boys are sunk.

5:20

Now, I'm probably missing something here. I'm probably missing some fundamental of agricultural or agribusiness economics that would play out like this. If we can get refundable check-offs so that we don't have to contribute \$3 a head times several hundred thousand over the years to Alberta Beef Producers or the pork producers or the lamb producers associations and we can just hang on to that money given that we already get to, as I understand it – and this is how it's been explained to me by farm folk, who know a helluva lot more about this than this city boy does, you know. They

already get to discount what they're going to pay the normal-size guy when he sells them a cow or sells them a calf or sells them an animal for them to fatten up if their input costs have gone up. They get to discount what they pay the producer by the amount that their input costs have gone up, more or less, so they get to hang on to that, and they get to hang on to the refundable check-off.

Maybe there's something about the economics of agribusiness that says: if we can do that, then we can drive enough of the normal-size guys out of business, and then we can corner that part of the market, too. Or we can just turn the normal-size guys who have this preternatural compulsion, that no city boy could possibly understand, to stay on the land and produce food at sometimes abnormally low prices paid to the producer on behalf of those millions of us who actually live in the city and still suspect somehow that the steak comes fully formed right out of the backroom at the butcher department at Safeway, you know, that these folks can in effect be turned into indentured servants of the big boys of agribusiness. You know what? I just cannot wrap my urban-raised, fast-food-fed city boy brain around the notion that that can possibly be good for the people of Alberta and the people of Canada, for their economic well-being, their health, the environment, or anything else. It doesn't add up to me.

It adds up for me that a normal-size guy who runs a few hundred head of cattle and has this preternatural compulsion to stay on the land, whether it actually pays or not, and to do this farming thing because it's in his blood, because he views it like a craft, like a piece of artisanship almost, you know, has more of a stake, no pun intended, in making sure that his animals are well cared for, that they're well raised, that they're healthy, that they're in good shape when he sells them than somebody who's just running these things through, you know, looking at a few hundred thousand head of cattle and seeing how many quarter pounders with cheese they'll turn into, you know – no slam, no offence against McDonald's – or how many T-bone steaks at Superstore, however you want to measure it.

I think this bill does a disservice to some of the hardest working men and women in the province of Alberta. It does a huge disservice to them. As I did earlier when we were debating Bill 44, I'll offer another challenge to government members opposite in committee to try and convince me, although I feel more like a state representative from Missouri today because of my skepticism than I do a provincial representative from Alberta, that this bill somehow translates into a benefit for anybody but the hundred or so big boys, that this actually will open up world markets in a way that no other strategy or initiative or approach could to our beef and our pork and our lamb and our potatoes, that without this the whole agricultural sector is going to collapse like a house of cards. Mr. Speaker, I don't believe it is.

What I do believe is that the passage of Bill 43 is going to inexorably and negatively alter the production of beef and pork and lamb and potatoes in this province. It's going to negatively impact the agricultural sector in this province. I think we're all going to be the poorer for it, and that would be very unfortunate. These folks – and I'm just talking about beef producers right now – these 28,000 normal-size, ordinary-size folks and their counterparts who produce lamb and produce pork and produce potatoes, some of the finest beef and lamb and pork and potatoes you will find anywhere on the planet, these folks are themselves hard working, the bedrock of our society, and in many cases the product of many generations of the bedrock of our society, families who have been on the land and who have been producing for several generations now. I think we owe them something better than this. I think this does them a real disservice.

Maybe, just maybe, somebody can come up with a compelling

argument in committee to convince me otherwise. But as I said before, Mr. Speaker, I think that'll take some doing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent – her name is Florence Henning – in Whitecourt-St. Anne. She's a well-respected agricultural producer and a member of the Alberta Lamb Producers association. For the record, she asked me to stand up and express her concerns, and maybe the mover of the bill can comment on this in Committee of the Whole.

She has some concerns that under the Alberta government's Bill 43 all of the \$1.50 check-off paid to the Alberta Lamb Producers will be refundable to producers. Alberta Lamb Producers is a voice to governments and the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, and the check-off enables access to industry development funding. So she wants to know: how will producers be represented provincially and nationally should the majority of large producers claim a refund?

As well, she's concerned that choosing the refund will not always mean that producers do not support Alberta Lamb Producers. It just may mean that in these economic times more dollars available to the producers to cover things like the bluetongue insurance premium might be more important. Neither the Alberta Lamb Producers nor the Alberta government have been lobbied by sheep producers for a refundable check-off, so she's asking: why is the government including the Alberta Lamb Producers in Bill 43? That would be denying the sheep producers the fundamental right of choice for a democratic vote on this issue before it's made law.

Those are the points that are raised by Florence. I told her and I made a commitment to her that I would raise this in the Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the comments from the mover of the bill in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, I'll recognize any other member who wishes to speak on the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Following the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie's lead, I may be a city slicker, but I'm not a city sucker. Prior to this bill I thought that check-off was the last name of Anton Chekhov, who wrote the play *The Cherry Orchard*, that I had the pleasure of viewing in Stratford, Ontario, during my high school days in the 1960s.

What this Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, reminds me of is what this government tried to do to the Canadian Wheat Board. They were opposed and spent I think it was in the neighbourhood of \$3 million trying to undermine the authority of wheat producers all across western Canada because they felt that it was individuals' rights to market their grain on their own as they saw fit. When I think nine Alberta individuals were arrested for trucking their grain across the Montana border, this government took great offence to the fact that these poor men, who were entrepreneurial individuals, were so badly treated and hauled off to jail. Well, all I see Bill 43 doing is centralization, monopolizing, concentration of power in the hands of the few at the expense of the many, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie so adeptly pointed out.

5:30

This bill takes away the democratic rights of producers under the

act to conduct a plebiscite to amend their plans to determine whether or not service fees, check-offs, should be refundable. This act by the government appears to be a retaliatory action against the Alberta Beef Producers for criticizing the implementation of the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency and is also being made in the interests of the big corporate feedlots, who will benefit from the refund of hundreds of thousands of dollars in service fees. It's not in the interests of the small producers, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned. He numbered them in the area of 28,000.

The government has said that this is about choice for producers to determine whether or not their producer organization is doing a good job of representing them and, therefore, to request a refund of service fees if they feel the organization is not doing a good job. However, the reality is that producers already have the choice through a plebiscite as set out currently in legislation. This move by the government is aimed at supporting the interests of the big corporate players in the industry.

If democracy is important – earlier we discussed Bill 45 with regard to electoral boundaries, and we talked about representation by population – then the interests of the majority of individuals who are small producers have to be taken into account. During the BSE crisis we saw what happened when foreign-owned outfits slaughtered their own feedlot cattle first. The smaller feeders didn't get a chance to even have a play in the market. Then this government sent out cheques, of course, based on the per-head and the per-slaughter capacities. Again, the American feedlot owners did extremely well at the expense of the small producer and the family farm or ranch. This is what Bill 43 is doing. It's a pure case of bullying.

There are approximately 20 agriculture marketing boards and commissions which engage in various activities to support their industries, lobby government, and promote their products and producers. Some examples are Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Barley Commission, Alberta Beekeepers, and Alberta Milk, just to name a few. Currently the majority of these boards and commissions allow for refundable service fees, sometimes referred to as check-offs, which are charged at the sale of a product or animal.

However, four do not. Those four are the Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Pork, Alberta Lamb Producers, and Potato Growers of Alberta. They represent the greater majority of producers in this province, and they're the ones that are being targeted. There are a number of reasons why these four are not refundable. The government is proposing in Bill 43 to make all of these check-offs refundable.

Currently under the act producers have the ability to conduct a plebiscite on matters relating to the amendment of their agricultural board or commission plan, which sets out how it operates. How democratic: a plebiscite. This would allow producers to hold a plebiscite to determine whether or not the plan should be changed to make the check-offs refundable. Many producers in the beef industry are outraged that the government has not allowed them to make their own decisions.

Now, whenever I raise the issue in terms of government stewardship or the importance of governance, I'm accused of promoting some type of a Liberal nanny state. Well, if this isn't an example of a nanny state and the government treating small producers as their wards or children, then I don't know what is.

There is also a concern that these are actions the government has taken to weaken the Alberta Beef Producers as the ABP last year released a letter to its members which was somewhat critical of the government's recent livestock and meat strategy. Concerns were around increased burden on small producers and lack of consultation with small producers, more evidence of bullying.

Further, this move to make these check-offs refundable is seen as

acting in favour of the big corporate feedlots, who stand to gain quite a lot given that they manage such large amounts of cattle. The check-off is currently at \$3 per head of cattle. Some in the industry may be in favour of this bill, but the majority do not see it as of any advantage to them.

In situations of crisis such as BSE and now the problems facing the pork industry with H1N1 influenza, otherwise known as swine flu, these producer associations play an important role in promoting products and making sure that misconceptions are addressed head on. Weakening these organizations by making check-offs refundable means that there will be less funding to engage in these promotional activities. The big feedlots also benefit from the promotion of Alberta beef, yet their dollars will no longer be going towards these organizations if they choose to request a refund for their check-offs, which they most likely will.

It reminds me of some of the sort of simplistic comments about Texans and, you know, bigger is better or bigger is more beautiful. This province was built on the sweat and labour of men and women and not on agricultural sweatshops, with large producers dictating to the family farm to either get in line or get out. We don't need more corporate farms in Alberta. We have enough. What we need to be supporting are the family producers.

Bill 43 basically ignores a hundred plus years of Alberta history. Therefore, for that reason and many others that I will allow other members the possibility to bring forward, we are opposed to Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions. Does any hon. member wish to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As with my colleague from Whitecourt-St. Anne, I, too, have a number of constituents who've asked how I was going to represent them. I find myself in a very awkward position. For those of you who may not know, our riding has the largest number of confined feeding operations and some, if not the biggest, feedlot operations. We also have a lot of cow-calf operators, backgrounders, grassers. As well as having a unique meat, poultry, swine industry in our riding, we have probably the second-largest number of potatoes grown in the province. Along with my colleague from Cardston-Taber-Warner we have between the two of us the two largest potato processing plants: Lamb Weston, outside of Taber, and McCain, just outside of Coaldale.

I have to say that in 17 years I've never had the Potato Growers approach government, that I'm aware of, for anything until this bill came up. I find it really rather difficult when anyone that has contacted our office from the Potato Growers who are not in favour of being rolled into this marketing amendment act has asked me how I'm going to vote on it. When I've pursued the question here, I've been told: well, if this group is as strong as they say it is, people shouldn't really be requesting a refund, and therefore everything should continue as it is.

I have to ask the question: but what if it doesn't? Like many industries – the cattle industry, potato growers, probably lamb – there are always a few very large operators. The question at the back of my mind that I have to have answered fairly soon: what if those two or three of the very largest request a refund and don't reinject it into the system for advanced research, marketing, and so on? If, in fact, they don't, then I'm more worried about the repercussion afterwards, that in fact without that cash flow of money going back into research and marketing development, the groups that have represented these different industries will then come back to government and say: well, we can't do it without your help.

5:40

That's the quandary I find myself in because we've been told that this is the last bailout, subsidy program of any kind that we're going to have. But if, in fact, a few of the largest producers in any one of these areas were to pocket their refundable check-off—which is their money; they paid it—if they didn't reinvest it in research and market development, there's going to be a shortfall. That's just my impression of it.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, especially from the point of view of the potato growers in our riding, I have a problem supporting the concept of potato growers being included in a meat problem, that seems to be the impetus behind this bill. I know that it won't curry a lot of favour, but as the representative for a constituency that probably has, along with my colleague south of us, in excess of 80 per cent of the potatoes grown in Alberta I find it very difficult to support the bill as it is, without excluding the potato growers from it. I wanted to get that on the record on behalf of my potato grower constituents, especially.

As far as the cattle and beef, I know a lot of these people in the industries, and they're on both sides of the issue, whether it's the Western Stock Growers', Alberta Beef Producers, the Cattle Feeders' Association. Some of these individuals are on both sides of the issues, and it's much like a family fight. I wish there was another way that the family could come together and resolve their differences instead of putting me as an elected representative in the middle of it, making a decision on which side of the vote I want to go to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I found the member's comments about the potato growers being in with the meat people really interesting. Is the member able to give me some understanding as to the size of the potato grower operations? Can you give me a yearly amount that they're under or number of employees or some idea so that in my mind I can understand whether I would be considering these as a sort of small or medium-sized operation versus a larger operation?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I'm not a potato producer, but I can tell the hon. member that, give or take, there are 120 potato producers in Alberta and, considering 59,000, 58,000 farms, 29,000 or thereabouts producers of various types of meat. I just don't think it's of any importance, so to speak, other than having a common thread of refundable. I buy that argument. It's just difficult for me to ascertain when 100 per cent of those that contact me from the potato growers' side—again, I may have 60 of the 120 or 50, and the average would be about three and a half circles of potatoes, which means in layman's language 550 acres. That part is incidental because they also have a dedicated check-off. Actually there are two check-offs in the potato industry; one is for research, and they have another component. They're dedicated; they're designed to be a check-off for certain purposes, and potato growers know how good that is.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other member wish to join the five minutes?

Seeing none, now we go back to the bill. Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm pleased to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 43, which is a bill that we have some difficulty supporting. There have been a number of points that have already been made. Nonetheless, I think it warrants repetition in some cases.

Generally speaking, this bill seems to me to be a bill which is about making a choice between sides in many respects, picking a large producer over a small producer or, alternatively, perhaps even doing one of things that periodically this government does, which is retaliating against individuals or organizations that speak out publicly against it and risk embarrassing it.

We know that last fall the Alberta Beef Producers—I guess it started last summer—were fairly public about their concerns with respect to proposed changes through the ministry of agriculture, the Alberta livestock management plan. There was significant concern expressed by the Alberta Beef Producers. I have no doubt that those concerns were not shared by all members of the Alberta Beef Producers. Nonetheless, it appeared that the majority of beef producers had concerns, and as a result that organization spoke out against that particular initiative of the government.

Now what we see, of course, is an initiative on the part of the government to allow the very large players within the industry to withdraw their funds and, effectively, to stunt and potentially bankrupt the Alberta Beef Producers in terms of its ability to play its role as effectively as possible. Basically, with the Alberta Beef Producers, as we all know, like many other organizations, money goes in by size and decision-making is allocated by vote. Heaven forbid that you have that kind of system in place, but some people refer to it as democracy. Far be it from me to characterize it so politically. So that's the way it works right now within the Alberta beef producers and within the pork producers and within the lamb producers and within the potato growers. Each organization has its own internal ability, its independent ability to change that formula should they determine that that formula requires change to meet the objectives of the organization and to meet fairness.

Obviously, that particular change has not come about in the best interests of those people whom the Tories spend most of their time talking to, so as a result the government is going to step in and make it happen for them. They're going to make this change under this act to allow for big producers to either (a) hold the rest of the organization hostage by threatening to take their money out and thus controlling what happens or (b) just simply taking their money out.

Not too long ago in this House we heard the minister of agriculture talking about how in terms of promoting the livestock industry and promoting the pork industry and promoting the beef industry, the marketing associations had a huge role to play in working with government to get all this kind of work achieved. It is quite true that, for instance, Alberta Beef Producers does spend a lot of its money on research, on trade advocacy, on policy development, on lobbying, and just ensuring that the issues of producers are addressed at the provincial and federal levels.

There's no question that these types of organizations do do the kind of work that the minister of agriculture not too long ago was suggesting should be left to those organizations in answer to our suggestion that maybe government should be stepping in periodically to help them out.

5:50

It's really quite interesting that now we're moving forward with this initiative, which is clearly designed to either fracture that organization or to give power in that organization over to those with the most resources and take it away from those with the most support within the organization because, of course, those positions within, for instance, the Alberta Beef Producers that have the most support

are not ones in many cases that those who pay the most dues themselves support. So the government has kindly chosen to step in and to make sure that Agricore in whatever capacity is well represented and has the ability to have even more control and influence over these organizations so that hopefully in the future the government will never be embarrassed by them putting out any releases or reports critiquing their proposals.

Needless to say, we don't support that initiative. We don't think that that is in the best interests of the industry. We still think that the small producer is someone that the government should support and try to encourage rather than embarking on policy after policy after policy designed to push them out of the industry. Unfortunately, again, the government doesn't agree with that. As has already been mentioned by the previous speaker, the Potato Growers of Alberta have also expressed their concerns about this initiative. It's interesting. The Potato Growers, although a much, much smaller organization – the member opposite did an excellent job of describing the dynamics within that organization, did an excellent job describing the consequences of this bill to that particular organization and how it would happen. As he said, there are big producers, and there are little producers. The big producers do most of the funding, and the little producers have a democratic right to participate in how the associations are run.

Basically, if we pass this bill, the big producers will now have the ability over the objections of the democratic process within their association to pull their funding. The government will by regulation give itself the ability in cabinet to overrule the democratic decisions of these producer associations. Just as the member opposite suggested that he did not want to be in the position of being like in a family fight and picking winners and losers, I agree. It's not up to us to pick winners and losers, yet apparently the government or some members of this government think it is up to us to pick winners and losers. Their plan, not surprisingly, is to pick the bigger players on the field and just make sure that they have even more opportunities at their disposal to carry on their growth at the expense of other members within the industry.

Generally speaking, we do not agree with this bill, and I don't believe that it can be saved by simply exempting the potato growers. Certainly, the lamb producers, the potato growers, and, of course, a number of people within the Alberta Beef Producers have strongly stipulated their very real objection to this bill. This is not about choice. This is about picking winners and losers and a very small number of winners at the expense of a very large number of losers. It is a bad choice.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions, hon. members.

Seeing none, on the bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just coincidentally, I was actually at a wedding recently, and there was a gentleman there by the name of Earl Hale. He is a cattle producer outside of Strathmore. Mr. Hale also taught me and coached hockey when I was younger. His son played for the Lethbridge Hurricanes. Anyway, they're both involved in the beef industry. I said to him: "Mr. Hale, up here in the Legislature we seem to deal with a lot of stuff that deals with livestock, agriculture, feedlots, all this sort of stuff. Maybe you can tell me a little bit about what's going on in the industry. Is the family farmer able to make it? Are the feedlots

making money?" On that comment he said: "Oh, yeah. Someone is making money. It's not the family farm here, but it is the feedlot."

I said, "How does this happen, Mr. Hale?" He said, "Well, let me tell you something here, Kent." And someone can correct me if this is wrong. "These guys get paid when they feed cows. So if they've got 6,000, 7,000 cattle sitting there, they get paid for every cow they feed a day by the Alberta government. Then guess what? They get paid when they kill those cows, too. Okay? So they get paid on the front end, and they get paid on the back end." If Mr. Hale was right, what he was saying with that story is that the big guys are getting paid. Okay? They're getting paid some good money by this government to do this sort of stuff.

My follow-up question then was: "Well, how are the family farms doing, the people who are ranching and who are doing this stuff?" He said, "Well, you know, I guess that if they inherited their farm, maybe they're plugging along, doing okay, but if someone really wants to, say, stake their claim, take \$250,000 and say, 'I'm going to go start a farm, and I'm going to run some beef on it,' well, that's not available anymore here in Alberta."

Maybe, just maybe, this bill has something to do with that story I heard at that wedding just on the weekend. I bring that up now just sort of to give a little background and a little bit of personal feel to, I guess, my comments on the bill.

Again, my understanding, like individuals' who have spoken before me, is that this is a bill designed to support the larger players in the game. It supports the big producers, the big feedlots who are already, I would assume, making a buck or else they wouldn't still be in business because they have shareholders to answer to and all that sort of stuff. But then if you look around, there are all these people who are seemingly upset about this, and they're called the little guys. Whether they're actually little or not, I don't know, but it's a euphemism for, I guess, smaller players in the industry than the big feedlot. Do you know what I'm saying? So I think I'm painting a pretty clear picture of what this bill is seeming – David and Goliath, to use a Biblical reference. Hopefully, no one here is going to take offence at that, being that Bill 44 is about to come into law, but there are no students here.

Nonetheless, I'll get back to the bill. Currently under the act producers have the ability to conduct a plebiscite on matters relating to the amendment on their agricultural board's or commission's plans which set out how it is to operate. This would allow the producers to hold a plebiscite to determine whether or not the plan should be changed to make these check-offs refundable. Many producers in the beef industry are outraged. These are the little guys.

When I say that many producers in the beef industry are outraged, those are the little guys, Mr. Speaker, just to make sure you're following along. Those are the little guys, and they are outraged, extremely outraged that the government has not allowed them to make their own decisions through a plebiscite and that their democratic right is being taken away. It's amazing how things run their course. It's sort of like city folk here don't understand why a rural vote is worth more than a city vote. That representation by population we were talking about earlier, democracy? Democracy seems to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but it's 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 13, 2009

Issue 41e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 13, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

[Debate adjourned May 13: Mr. Hehr speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in second reading of Bill 43, Marketing and Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2). This has been very interesting this afternoon, listening to the debate on what was going on here. It really started to play out for me as a battle of opposites, if you will. It's about the large producers versus the smaller producers. It's about a small group that has chosen to have a check-off and to continue to use it for their own membership to do, for example, work on policy or regulatory issues, production research, promotion campaigns, animal health and welfare concerns and follow-up, communications – ah, yes, the famous communications line – land use and environmental stewardship. I'm sure they had some input there into what's being considered under Bill 36.

I think this also is an issue of an intersectoral dispute, if you will, which is something that politicians usually avoid. I think that's partly what I heard the Member for Little Bow saying. You know, none of us is keen to get pulled into an argument. Let me just give a little explanation of what I mean there, which may not necessarily pertain to the issue in front of us with the group that's being captured under this particular act.

It's not uncommon for us to be approached by a group that's a splinter group off somebody else or slightly different from another group, and they want the MLA to sort of say that they're the right ones. "Pick us as being the official voice for this group. We're the ones that should be legitimate and get the grant or get the support." Certainly, it's the policy in my office that we do not get involved in those. We say: "Look, we're not here to pick winners and losers out of your group. You know it best. You guys figure it out. When you've figured it out, come back and let me know where you want to go from there. I'm happy to work with all of you or the ones that you elect to represent you."

It's a bit of what's going on here. The Member for Little Bow was really good at sort of drawing out that we had four groups that had come together because they are the ones that remain out of all the other agricultural producer associations that still have a service charge, which they call a check-off, which they're then using for a number of the reasons that I listed earlier. It's a bit of an odd matching because you've got – just let me get this straight – the Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Pork, Alberta Lamb Producers, and then the Potato Growers of Alberta.

The potato growers, for obvious reasons, are a bit of the odd group out here. They're also quite a small group compared to the number of producers that are involved in the other three areas. Additionally, they're not as large a producer as you would find with the beef producers or the pork or the lamb. They've been captured in

something that, I think, based on their letters to the government, they're not too happy about being captured in. As the Member for Little Bow put it, the potatoes are caught in the meat problem. Oh, if it was a little later at night, we'd have some good puns going, but it's not quite late enough for that, so I'm just going to keep going.

I also see this as being a dispute or a difference between what I would call a corporate farm or a large organization like an intensive livestock organization – they go by a different name now: confined feed operation – and a family farm or a smaller, locally owned farm. But, essentially, what we've got here for some reason is the government injecting itself into a sector that didn't ask for help. It doesn't look to me like any of those four groups came to the government and said, you know, "Please change the legislation and take away our ability to decide for ourselves," which they've clearly done, and they continue to be able to do. They're self-empowered through their collective organization to be able to hold a plebiscite, amend what they're doing, elect different people, amend their board or their committee, set out a different plan on the way they want to manage themselves. They're allowed to do that. They could even change whether or not they have the check-off system in place that they currently have in place.

It doesn't look to me like they asked for the government to inject itself into this and to change the rules, and I haven't seen a compelling argument from the government as to why they would be doing this. I'm tempted to say in my own colloquial manner: butt out. They didn't ask for you to be coming in and doing this to them. They clearly don't want this to happen to them. So with all possible due respect, maybe the government could just butt out because I don't think this seems to be solving anything.

More than that, the government once again seems to be picking winners and losers and deciding that they're going to favour the larger over the smaller. This always I find really interesting because the government likes to put itself out as the sort of saviour of the farmer and the family farm and the ones that are interested in promoting business interests and that this is the party of the marketplace and the free marketplace, yet every time I turn around, I see them do something like this, which flies in the face of all of those claims and, if anything, certainly is not supporting local over global. It's not supporting the local farmer, the smaller or mid-sized operation here over a multinational corporate farm that's owned by somebody outside of Canada. So the government makes a claim about one thing, and then its actions belie its policy statements.

I wouldn't usually join into a conversation or a debate about this, but I've listened to enough of this and read correspondence and press releases from the potato growers and letters from the beef industry and all kinds of *Hansard* clippings and the old marketing act, version one, and it just strikes me that this is a really unnecessary intrusion for the government to get involved in. So I'm going to come down on the side of these four producer associations that have an agreement on their check-offs and say: more power to them, and, government, back off and butt out.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

7:40

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions and comments.

Seeing none, then I will recognize the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to add my comments to this bill in second reading. Unlike most of the opposition members I do live in a rural riding, and I actually live on a farm. I've farmed most of my life. I have a

lot of people in my riding involved in the business. As a rural riding, as we've talked in a previous bill about the electoral boundaries, I get around my riding. It takes a long time, but I get to know everybody on a personal level. I tell you, these people are not shy about phoning me, and I'm not shy about phoning them. When I call them up, most of them recognize my voice; I don't even have to identify myself. So they're not shy in calling me about issues that are near and dear to them.

So far on this particular issue I've had 10 either letters, calls, or e-mails, representations, and I think I've called all of them back except maybe one so far and was able to talk to them personally on this. They're not all in agreement with each other on this issue, so it does create a bit of a dilemma for me. Of the 10 calls I got, eight were from my constituency, and out of the eight from my constituency seven of them were cattle producers, not all in agreement with each other, and one was representing the lamb industry. I didn't get any calls from the pork industry that I'm aware of at this time unless some got to my constituency office today. Although I've had some potato production in my constituency over the past few years, it's not an area that produces potatoes in this province, and I've got no calls on that.

To say that there's a division amongst producers in the cattle industry I think would be an understatement. That division has been going on for some time. As I looked at this bill, I had a lot of reservations about it. I thought about it a lot as I talked to people. Of course, they all want me to represent their view in the House. As I talked to them, they understood that it's not that easy because they recognize the divisions within the industries themselves.

I looked at the choices and the ideas that were brought forth to me. The choices were to stay with the status quo and just leave it alone, and hopefully things would resolve themselves. But this issue has been going on for a long time, and it hasn't resolved itself. The other option is to do as the minister is proposing in Bill 43, change it to an optional check-off. As recently as over the supper hour I heard of another option, a discretionary check-off, where it would be mandatory to have a check-off, but you could direct your money to the organization you thought would best represent you. I found that one kind of interesting as well. I haven't had a lot of time to think about that particular option or discuss it with any of my colleagues. I will be discussing it with the minister. But I wanted to bring that up tonight so the minister would have the advantage of seeing that on the record. I'm sure we'll have a discussion on that before tomorrow ends.

I just wanted to bring these issues forward. There are some deep divisions not easily resolved. I wish I had all the answers that some members in the House have that would be so easy to say: this is the right way or the wrong way. Yes, there have been some vocalizations by some organizations. It's an issue you could probably argue a number of different ways. Being a farmer myself, I used to have a mandatory check-off on canola. There were times when I felt that I wasn't being represented properly by that organization and that my money would be better spent with an organization of my choosing that I could influence more.

I just wanted to bring this up, Mr. Speaker, to contribute a bit of ideas to the debate that I'm hearing from my constituency. I'd be interested in listening further to comments from my other colleagues. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I'm sure that he's getting

a range of calls on this issue – I know I am – and I thought his comment about the discretionary check-off was an interesting one. There are other ideas here. I guess my question to the member would be: why not just allow plebiscites? Why not allow the producers to have the vote that the current legislation would allow and let them decide democratically as opposed to going this way?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I fully expected to hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview because we have a mutual friend in the Didsbury area. I would be very surprised if he hadn't talked to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview as well because he's related to him but also a good friend of mine.

The issue of the plebiscite has been brought up and debated by the industry, and there's no common consensus within the industry to even have a plebiscite. Certainly, that's supported by some members of the industry. Some feel they could win it; some feel they can't. Of course, those that feel they can't wouldn't want a plebiscite. But I think it's well accepted that the industry is almost split 50-50, which creates a much more difficult situation for all of us in this House to try to resolve this issue.

The Deputy Speaker: On the five minutes, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to ask the hon. member a question because he talked about being torn and, you know, trying to decide which way to vote and so on. But it's my understanding this is a government bill, and the government caucus is supporting it, and that's pretty much how everybody in the government caucus is bound to vote. Is that not correct?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to reply?

Mr. Marz: As the Speaker would point out to you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and has on many occasions in the past when I was in the House to witness it, every member in this House has the right to vote however he or she feels according to their conscience. I don't have the references in *Hansard*, but I'm sure I could find them. As rusty as my memory may be from time to time, I believe that he has pointed that out on many occasions.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, what do we pay whips for?

The Deputy Speaker: Is that a comment or a question? Just a comment, I guess.

Mr. Oberle: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j). I can't comment on what the whip for that party does, whether they do a good job or not, but the member is suggesting that I control the way members vote and that, in fact, I infringe upon the privilege of members in this Assembly. I don't know whether the whip over there does, and I'm not going to comment. If I were, I would have to point out if anybody could remember the last time you got two separate votes coming from that side. But that's not the role of the whip here. I object to the remark. I would ask that he withdraw it.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't mean to imply that anybody was forced to vote any way. I'm quite sure that on every government bill every government member always votes for it, without exception, of their own free will. I accept that and withdraw my remarks.

7:50

The Deputy Speaker: You have 12 seconds.

Mr. Marz: My response was going to be, if I may, Mr. Speaker, that I know the responsibility of our whip, and he just laid it out. I was going to ask the hon. member: what's the responsibility of his whip in his party?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we can't afford a whip.

The Deputy Speaker: We had a point of order, and the withdrawing of the statement has been done. Hon. Member for Peace River, are you happy or okay with that?

Mr. Oberle: Well, no, actually, but I guess I have to let the matter drop, seeing as how the remark was withdrawn. In withdrawing it, he managed another drive-by smear on the role of the whip or the Government House Leader or whoever else he intended by that drive-by smear. Our members are independent, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's important for you to stand on that principle and inform that member that he's out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I would advise the hon. members, all of us here, to just be careful of what we say in the House. We're all honourable members. We respect each other. Go on with the debate.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2). Now, currently producers pay a check-off, or a levy fee, to their commission upon the sale of a commodity, which goes towards various areas of the organization. The changes proposed in this legislation would mean that producers could request that these funds be refunded.

The Alberta Beef Producers benefit the most from the \$3 check-off, which is paid on a per head of cattle basis. There are three other commissions affected by this legislation: Alberta Pork, Alberta Lamb Producers, and Potato Growers of Alberta. Currently the producers of nine commissions have a choice of a refund. That's barley, bison, canola, pulses, soft wheat, winter wheat, elk, bees, and forage seeds.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will be phased in for each commission at the start of their 2010-2011 fiscal year. Section 3, which amends section 23 of the current act, is where the controversy comes from. It basically says that if a commission's mandate says that fee is nonrefundable, the Lieutenant Governor in Council can step in on a request from a producer and change the rules of the commission so that the fee has to be refundable.

The Alberta Beef Producers have always been against refundable check-offs, but there's a new group in Alberta called the Beef Industry Alliance, which has been pushing the government for refundable check-offs. The Beef Industry Alliance, or BIA, is made up of the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, the Beef Initiative Group, the Feeder Associations of Alberta, and the Western Stock Growers' Association.

The Alberta Beef Producers, the Alberta Lamb Producers, and the Potato Growers of Alberta have spoken against these changes. The news release for this amendment quotes the minister, who says that now refundable check-offs can be used. If producers "feel their organization has not met their needs or provided value, they can ask for a refund. It is all about choice." Very, very common language from this government: it's all about choice.

The minister thinks that the producers in the four commodity groups dealt with in the proposed changes lack a fundamental right of choice, but really the ability for producers to make a choice regarding the check-offs already exists. In effect, these changes will actually do the opposite, remove a producer's choice. The government has taken away the producers' ability to make their own decisions on how their commissions will be run. There's already a mechanism in place where producers can democratically change the way their organization deals with check-offs by way of plebiscites and voting on procedures. So producers can ask for a refund in any case, not just when they feel their needs are not being met.

Now, I know that the member proposing this bill mentioned that only between 7 and 10 per cent of producers request refunds from these commissions that use refundable check-offs. It is possible that because the cattle industry is so big in Alberta, the percentage will increase because producers stand to take in more profit if their check-offs become refundable. When the government says that based on what has happened in the past with the other commissions, only a small amount of producers will opt out, what they don't realize or don't understand is that this pattern won't continue because the biggest agricultural industry was not part of the calculation.

Farm cash receipts from cattle sales were \$3 billion in 2008. This industry, which makes up 58 per cent, makes a significant amount of money. This money, however, becomes more and more concentrated within the larger industrial farms, while smaller family farms struggle to keep producing. If these changes are made, smaller producers are concerned that the decision-making will become based on how much money is contributed; for example, if a large agribusiness is at the table with smaller producers and declares that if the commission is not functioning the way it wants, then they will request a refund.

This makes the head of this organization have to decide between the money from big business, which helps the commission run smoothly and protects their members, and the rest of the members. This would make these organizations less democratic. The biggest contributors can threaten to request a refund. Then it makes it easy to manipulate the commission to the benefit of the richest and largest producers. There's some worry that if producers choose to have their check-off refunded, there will not be enough money for things such as legal fees. Who would then defend the industry in a legal situation?

Mr. Speaker, in a letter to all MLAs the Alberta Beef Producers' chair, Rick Burton, lays out his concerns. Alberta Beef Producers continue to tell the minister that it is ultimately cattle producers who are affected by this type of legislation and that it should be run by the producers, making the decisions on how they want their commissions to run.

The chair, Mr. Burton, of the Alberta Beef Producers has asked the minister to conduct a plebiscite of producers regarding this issue. The minister chose not to do this and amended the legislation regardless. In the letter Mr. Burton says:

Cattle producers have a choice under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act about whether check-off should be refundable or non-refundable. We think that refundable check-off does not give producers more choice – it allows money to vote instead of people.

The Alberta Beef Producers have also said that making the check-off refundable would reduce the amount of industry funding that's available for marketing research and promotion activities.

Another letter from the Alberta Beef Producers, this time from the vice-chair, Mr. Boon, echoes some of the chair's positions by saying that the current act already allows direct and individual input through plebiscite from producers. He continues on to say that this bill does not give producers the opportunities "to make the choice of where they direct their check-off dollar . . . What it does do is allow for individuals to remove these dollars." Mr. Boon also raised a point about the advocacy that happens with the check-off funds. He said:

Currently about fifty cents of the check-off goes to [the Cattlemen's Association] for such things as trade advocacy, domestic policy, and insuring our producers wishes are being heard nationally. Reducing this funding would put organizations capabilities in serious jeopardy.

Mr. Speaker, the Potato Growers of Alberta have also issued a release which lays out concerns similar to those of the Alberta Beef Producers, that there is already a democratic process in place where producers can introduce changes to the operation of their commission. They're also concerned that the government expected them to continue to offer services to the producers even after they've had their levies refunded. Finally, he said that contrary to what the government has said, there was no consultation with the Potato Growers association about these changes. The mechanism for deciding whether or not a commission's check-off will be mandatory or not: there was absolutely no reason why the government needs to intervene in the issue. The producers have the means to make democratic changes they as a group want to make, and the government interfering in the process makes the commission less democratic because it removes the right of producers to make decisions for themselves.

We know that the Alberta Beef Producers, the Alberta Lamb Producers, and the Potato Growers of Alberta have been against the refundable check-offs, and we know that the beef industry group has been pushing for refundable fees. We also know that there are only four commissions affected by these changes. It would be good to find out what other commissions were asking for refundable fees.

Mr. Speaker, what's happening here is clear. The large producers, the big boys in the industry, don't want to pay their fees, or they want to be able to use the potential withdrawal of those fees to increase their influence within these organizations. The small producers favour the current situation with mandatory check-offs. I want to say that it is my experience that when it comes to the agriculture industry or any other industry, this government consistently sides with the big players against the small players, and that is what they are doing here. It's the golden rule of this Conservative government: them that's got the gold make the rules. That is what is happening here today.

8:00

I'm not surprised that other hon. members who represent rural constituencies are getting a lot of heat over this move because I think the large majority of producers, who are small producers, will be adversely affected by this. This is a play of the powerful and strong producers in this province, especially in the beef industry, and it will only result in accelerated concentration of ownership within our agricultural industry.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge hon. members to please consider voting against this bill as it is something that will hurt small producers and further do damage to our family farms. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. member, I listened with interest to your questions and your answers regarding Bill 43. However, you talked about big producers and little producers. Do you have any other examples of the big producers calling the shots in the beef industry? There was that \$400 million BSE program. If you do have any more examples, I'd love to hear them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, there's a bit of irony here because it was the Alberta Beef Producers who produced the report which showed that, in fact, when the bailout for BSE was brought forward by the government, the lion's share of the money went to the big packers, to two very large packers, Cargill and Tyson Foods at that time, who pocketed the lion's share of the public bailout money as a result of that. That was millions and millions of dollars. You know, the program was designed to favour, actually, the people who really didn't need it. The small cow-calf operations, which tend to be in some cases mom-and-pop operations, smaller types of farms, actually didn't get the help that they needed.

Most of the money went to feedlots, and the feedlots were of course controlled to a large degree by the big packers because we don't have a rule that bans packer-owned cattle, and that, of course, allows the big packers to manipulate the price. If there's a shortage and the price starts to rise, they can just put more of their cattle on the market, and they depress the price that they have to pay. So the whole deck is stacked in favour of the biggest players in our food industry, and I think that particularly applies to the cattle industry.

Thank you for the question, hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to make it very quick. With respect to the previous speaker and hopefully to set the record straight, the largest recipients of BSE payments were not the packers. They own traditionally 8 to 10 per cent of the herd that's live and ready to be slaughtered at any one time. I don't think it's any secret that I've got the largest feedlot in the province in my riding. I'm not going to say who they are, but it's fairly obvious by the size of the operations that they would be the largest recipient.

The Deputy Speaker: Anybody else for the five minutes?

Seeing none, the chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Bill 43 is proving to be one of the more contentious bills on the Order Paper these days. I think it's worth getting on the record a handful of things at this second reading before we get into a section-by-section analysis in Committee of the Whole.

I've had quite a number of calls and letters and e-mails on this issue, and most of them have been pretty unhappy. This is in some ways the kind of struggle that the Member for Edmonton-Centre said that we typically stay out of. This would be easy to dismiss as an internal power play within the industry, and in some ways it is, but it's a lot more than that because there's so much public funding at stake here. The simple fact of the matter is that the taxpayers of Alberta put an awful lot of money into the beef, pork, lamb, and

potato industries, especially the beef industry, so I think it's important that as representatives of the taxpayer we make some comments on this bill and that we show an interest in how the industry is struggling.

The origins of the bill seem to lie in a basic conflict between a small number of large players and a large number of small players. The small number of large players are the 40 or so biggest feedlots and related companies, who among them have a huge number of cattle. I think it's very important to state right off the bat that this bill seems really to originate with the cattle industry and that the pork and lamb and potato people are collateral damage in it as far as I can see and as far as they can see. We have a small number of companies controlling a large number of animals, and because they control a large number of animals, they have a much higher cost of check-off. It's just because it's per animal. If they've got a lot of animals, they pay a lot in check-offs. On the other hand, you have a large number of cow-calf operators with maybe a few hundred head each. It's a much smaller deal to them individually, but collectively it's a very big deal.

So it's a basic power play, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood indicated, between the big, powerful players and the many small players. It seems that the big, powerful players were able to get the ear of cabinet and the ear of the Premier and presumably of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and basically convince them that despite whatever opposition there might be, this bill was a good idea. I know that there's some support for the bill in caucus, and I suspect there's some concern about the bill, and the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills reflected as much.

I think we need to stop briefly and just reflect on the value of Alberta Beef Producers to the industry. Alberta Beef Producers has played a key role, particularly in the last six or eight years, and they are supported by this check-off. Because of that, they've had the resources to do some very important work. The first thing that comes to mind, of course, is working in the United States and other international markets to get those markets reopened after the BSE crisis, but they do a lot of other work as well: advocating on behalf of the industry, lobbying nationally and internationally, developing new markets, doing all kinds of very valuable stuff that any good industry association should do.

A similar kind of work is done by the pork, lamb, and potato producers. I think it's important at this moment to just mention in particular the pork producers. This could not come at a worse time for the pork industry. The pork industry has taken a terrific blow in the last couple of weeks because of the H1N1 flu. Borders are being closed. We're seeing some culling, maybe widespread culling. We're seeing a drop in consumer confidence, unjustified, but it's there.

This is a time when we need the pork producers to be focused one hundred per cent on addressing those issues head-on. They don't need to worry about refundable check-offs. They shouldn't have to worry about coming to the floor of the Legislature or the Assembly and trying to sort out political issues that were never of their own making. My heart really goes out to the pork industry right now on this issue because at a time when they should be having this government one hundred per cent behind them, no questions asked, they find that they're standing on a foundation of quicksand, and I think it's very regrettable. I know as well that potato producers are very concerned about this.

Mr. Speaker, I do need to keep an eye on time a little bit, and there's an awful lot in this bill. Just to keep things moving, I have an amendment to make, so I'll just give it to the page and wait a moment while it's distributed.

May I proceed, Mr. Speaker?

8:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, before you proceed, I just want to remind all members here that this is a hoist amendment that you introduced. Proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment reads as follows. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Mr. Speaker, we all know the intent of these kinds of amendments. They're meant to basically stop the bill, and I think it comes down fundamentally to one principle, and that's the principle of democracy. We have a democracy that developed over many centuries. I won't go through the whole history of it. I won't claim to know it all. I have a pretty good sense of some of the key moments, but I won't go through all of that.

It's through a very gradual, sometimes bloody and often very difficult process that we've gotten to the point in our society where people don't vote according to how much land they own or don't vote according to their gender or don't vote according to their ethnic background. I think it's worth reminding that the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta's family, when they came to Canada, couldn't vote because they were Chinese. Through all of those struggles it moved the vote to universal suffrage so that whether you're rich or poor, whether you own property or not, whether you're male or female, as long as you're over the age of 18 and a Canadian citizen, you can vote. That's a huge principle: one person, one vote.

The reason I think this amendment should be accepted is because Bill 43 is enormously undemocratic. It takes us back in voting terms to the middle 1800s or the late 1800s, when you had to own property to vote, and it connects voting rights to property. In this case people will vote with their dollars, and their dollars will depend on how many animals they own. The more animals they own, in effect, the more clout they have. It's not democratic. The producers don't like it.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills indicated that there isn't consensus in the industry on this bill. That's why you have a vote. There are lots of times when there isn't consensus in this Assembly, and we have a vote. There are lots of times when there's not consensus, in fact there's very seldom consensus in society at large on any particular issue, but we go to votes. That's what it means to be democratic. Fundamentally, that's what it means to be Albertan and Canadian.

Mr. Speaker, I won't go through any of the other arguments at this point. I will simply drive home the message that we should stop this bill now because it's antidemocratic. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. This amendment to Bill 43 certainly comes at a very good time. I appreciate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview giving the Assembly a choice in this matter. I heard from a beef producer this afternoon. This gentleman was phoning from just east of Bashaw. He phoned our constituency office. He took issue with this bill. He took significant exception to this bill. This amendment certainly would be acceptable to that farmer, the beef producer.

When we look at democracy, flourishing democracy, the right to vote is certainly the number one principle. The hon. member talked

about age and citizenship and various other matters that are of importance when you think that it's not so long ago that certain individuals could not vote. I don't think that we should be advocating that the ownership of property is a criterion for voting. We've been through that, actually, a couple of centuries ago. Hopefully, we would never go that way again.

I can't understand why the producers themselves could not have a plebiscite. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was talking about that earlier. To seek direction from the producers themselves, to me, is the logical way to go with this. We've had divisions over the Wheat Board in the past, and there were, I think, two votes taken to seek direction from the producers themselves on which direction the Wheat Board should take. The government got actively involved in that through the Grain Commission. We all know that the Grain Commission had picked a side on that vote, and we know how active they were. We know through the Internet that there was even at least one employee in the department of agriculture, who was from a government source, making his or her opinion known as to which way they would like the Wheat Board election to go.

Certainly, when we look at this bill and we look at the controversy that it has created by requiring producer commissions to grant members the option to seek refund of mandatory check-offs in the beef, pork, lamb, and potato industries, I see absolutely nothing the matter with allowing the producers themselves: one producer, one vote. In the case of the cattle industry, regardless of whether they have a thousand head or only 50 head, let them decide. I can see no reason why this shouldn't happen.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that if we were to allow this amendment to proceed, it would certainly give time for a vote to be organized. Producers currently have the ability to conduct a plebiscite on matters relating to the amendment of their agricultural board's or commission's plan, which sets out how it is to operate or how it's to conduct its affairs. What would be the matter with allowing producers to hold a plebiscite to determine whether or not the plan should be changed to make the check-offs refundable? Many producers in the beef industry, including the fine gentleman that I talked to earlier this afternoon, are outraged that the government has not allowed them to make their own democratic decisions through a plebiscite, and they're very resentful that their democratic right has been taken away. If we allow this bill to proceed, I think we are showing disrespect and, in a certain way, neglect of the democratic process.

8:20

Now, there's also concern that these are actions the government is taking – I can't believe this, but I've certainly heard this – to try to weaken the Alberta Beef Producers as the Alberta Beef Producers last year released a letter to its members which was somewhat critical of the government's livestock and meat strategy, which was released last year. Of course, there are concerns around the burden on smaller producers and the lack of consultation with smaller producers. That's why I was listening with a great deal of interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who was talking about the contrast between the big producers and the smaller producers in this province. I would agree with him. There is a significant difference. The ear of the government is certainly tuned to the voice of the big producers, in my view.

This amendment certainly would provide ample opportunity for a vote to be organized and taken and counted, and the organization would have to live with the results. If that was to happen, I would certainly like to see the government stay independent and impartial,

not like it was during the Wheat Board elections. As well, I don't know how the Beef Producers would be funded and the consequences of that if the check-off was to be removed or changed or reduced.

Certainly, I know from the public accounts, Mr. Speaker, that there is the odd grant that goes the way of the Alberta Beef Producers. I don't have those statistics with me. I thought for a minute of darting down to the library and just looking them up quickly. But it's a significant amount of money. If we are to eliminate the check-off, is that how the government plans to finance the Alberta Beef Producers?

Ms Blakeman: You don't think it's the plan to not finance them?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, it's a plan of control, hon. member. You know, the strings would be pretty short, and the Beef Producers would get nervous. They certainly would not want to rock the jukebox, so to speak, and have whatever grant they are getting jeopardized.

When we look, Mr. Speaker, at the money and how it's spent . . . [interjection] Hon. member, rural Albertans are known to rock the jukebox on occasion, too. Oh, yes.

An Hon. Member: How do you know?

Mr. MacDonald: How do I know? I travel to rural Alberta. Hon. member, I also know how they feel about this bill.

Now, when we look at the \$3 check-off and how it's spent, it's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that 38 per cent is spent in national and international market development, promotion, and research. I would say that that's money well spent, certainly, as we get our markets back after the issue around BSE not only in America but expanding to new markets in the Far East. Operations and administration is only 9 per cent. Now, if this government had that sort of track record, it would be, like, wow, as the children would say. Environment and animal welfare is 3 per cent of the budget, or that would be 9 cents. Animal health and research would be 15 cents of the \$3 check-off. Producer communications would be 15 cents. That seems to be a lot cheaper than what the Public Affairs Bureau would provide that service for. Policy development is 18 cents. Federal and provincial government affairs is again 18 cents of the \$3. Provincial market development and promotion is 33 cents. The BSE recovery programs are an additional 51 cents. That's how the money is spent. It seems to be spent very wisely, very prudently.

I don't know what it would mean for the Beef Producers if this bill were to become law or if the government is going to provide similar amounts through a grant program. That would be one question I would have. Hopefully, if we were to pass this amendment, it would be very considerate of the government to answer how they plan to fund the Beef Producers. Through the grant programs, I would suspect, through the ministry of agriculture, but it's hard to say. It could be lottery money these days. It could come through the Solicitor General through to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit to the Beef Producers, and of course it would be all authorized by the President of the Treasury Board.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly urge hon. members of this House to give consideration, please, to the hoist amendment presented by my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview. I think it would certainly allow for democracy to exercise itself, a vote to be conducted, and all parties to live by the direction from the producers resulting from that vote.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Other hon. members wishing to speak on the amendment? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 43 lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:28 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Olson
Anderson	Horne	Quest
Benito	Jablonski	Rodney
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Sarich
Blackett	Johnston	Sherman
Dallas	Knight	Tarchuk
Danyluk	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Elniski	Marz	Weadick
Fritz	Oberle	Zwozdesky

8:40

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Taft
MacDonald		

Totals:	For – 27	Against – 4
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[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a second time]

Bill 44 **Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism** **Amendment Act, 2009**

[Adjourned debate May 13: Mr. Taylor]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is going to be one of the more interesting discussions of the session, not just tonight but throughout the duration, on Bill 44. Some members may not feel that's a very high standard to set, but I think we could set a pretty high standard with this one. I must say that I feel like there have already been some passionate and eloquent speeches on this. I hope that we can keep this entire discussion respectful, and I think we probably will.

I want to speak in the few minutes available to me tonight in second reading primarily to the principles, as I see them, surrounding the issues in Bill 44. There are certainly significant administrative questions, and if there's time, I'll explore those a little bit, but I think it's always good to begin in second reading thinking about the principles of the bill and of the spirit behind the bill. I listened to the comments from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere when he spoke, and I think he touched on some of the principles that need to be discussed. The concerns around Bill 44 hinge in some ways on matters of tolerance and understanding and how those are developed and respected in Alberta and in Canadian society.

I wanted to start, actually, by reflecting on an experience I had last Saturday afternoon, which was a very sad funeral for a young man,

a 25-year-old man, the son of some good friends of ours, who died quite unexpectedly. There was a very large funeral. The main hall was overflowing and even the backup hall was overflowing. Several hundred people were there. I was looking at the crowd of people there and the impact that this young man had had and the number of lives he had touched. As I looked around, I couldn't help reflecting both on the nature of Alberta society and on the discussions we'd had around Bill 44 because there was a remarkable range of people there, people from, of course, all walks of life and all ages.

There were also people from many ethnic and religious backgrounds. In fact, the father of the young fellow who died is Jewish; his mother is Christian. There were people, as far as I could tell, from almost all faiths you would imagine at this funeral service: Muslim – in fact, I think there were a couple of Muslims who were pallbearers – Hindu, and undoubtedly atheists and who knows? It was a tremendous mix of people. There were also, I think it's important to mention in the context of Bill 44, lots and lots of straight people, of course, but undoubtedly a significant number of gays. It didn't matter. They were all there to mark a life, and they were all there out of tremendous mutual respect.

One of the things that struck me and my wife and others was how young the crowd was and how, to people of a generation, say, under 35 or so, many of the traditional divisions in our society just are not relevant anymore. They don't care. They don't care what your religion is. They don't care what your ethnic background is. They don't care, particularly, if you're straight or gay. I found myself thinking: boy, there's something special to celebrate here. How did we get here? How can we continue to encourage this not just in Alberta but around the world? I think we need to think hard about that, as I know members have. Members on both sides of this debate undoubtedly have.

It got me to thinking a little bit – and I won't dwell too much at this point – on Canadian society and something I sometimes think about, which is: why Canada? Why does Canada work? What kind of remarkable place is this? Inasmuch as we express frustration over Canada, I think we need to reflect on what a remarkable achievement this country is and, particularly, what a remarkable achievement it was in the middle 1800s to take French Catholics and combine them with English-speaking Protestants and mix them in with all kinds of First Nations people and through open willingness and commitment come together, not split apart but come together and embrace, really, a new approach to a nation.

We have continued to develop that over the last 150 years, leaders like Macdonald and Cartier and shortly after that a very controversial figure in the form of Louis Riel. If you actually study and read the proposed constitution, as it were, for the Métis settlement in Manitoba and if you look at Riel's vision for Canada, it was a remarkably far-sighted vision for plurality, where people of all faiths and ethnicities and languages could live together. He proposed that. In some ways you could probably make the argument that Riel was a very important founder of the multicultural fabric of Canada. There's even history going back to Champlain and his vision, but I won't dwell too much on that.

Bill 44 wrestles with those kinds of ideas, and it struggles with those kinds of ideas, and it challenges us to think about what's the best way to move forward to continue this wonderful experiment that our society is. Because there is the specific term "religion" brought into this bill, it opens up what will be a very wonderful debate.

It got me thinking about a book I read earlier this winter at the recommendation of a friend. It's called *The Search for God at Harvard*. It's actually a pretty interesting book. It was written, boy, I think it'd be close to 20 years ago. It's autobiographical. It's about an Orthodox Jew who's a reporter at the *New York Times* who

takes a year to go to divinity school at Harvard. Harvard was founded, actually, as a Puritan school of divinity. Obviously, it lost the Puritan roots centuries ago, but the school of divinity has always been sort of a heartland of Protestant thought. It has expanded and grown and so on. But the idea of an Orthodox Jew taking a year to go to divinity school at Harvard was very, very unusual.

8:50

Although we only have a few minutes now, just to set up what would be later debates, I wanted to read a couple of passages from this book. When the author, Ari Goldman, decided as an Orthodox Jew to go to Harvard Divinity School to study other religions, he ran into a lot of resistance, and he ran into resistance from his own family. Here is just one brief example. It's from page 5 of the book, if anybody ever reads it. He's referring to his Aunt Minnie, who had largely raised him, and he says:

Aunt Minnie was very much opposed to my going to study religion at Harvard. "You have one of the best schools for religious studies right here in New York – Yeshiva University," she told me. But when she realized that I was going to Cambridge despite her entreaties, she gave me her blessing. "Remember," she whispered in my ear at a family gathering shortly before I left for Cambridge. "You can study all the religions, but Judaism is the best."

That was how his aunt sent him off to Harvard. So he spent the year there. It wasn't always comfortable for him, and it stretched him, but it's very interesting to go through the book and see what happens.

I'm going to just read a couple of other passages, again because I think it sets context for this debate. At page 8 he says:

No, I did not convert. My deeply nurtured Jewish identity never seriously came under siege. But what did happen was an extraordinary dialogue, one between the religious ideas that I encountered and the Jewish ideas within myself. The dialogue continued every day in the classroom, in the words of the New Testament, the Koran, the Upanishads and in fellowship at my own Sabbath table, around which I assembled people of various faiths. As a result of these encounters, I learned how others experience their faith. But more important, I developed a richer and fuller understanding of myself and my own Judaism.

I think there's a very important point to be considered in there as we look at the possibilities of Bill 44, Mr. Speaker, and that is, to put it in a nutshell, that bringing people together and challenging people to understand each other and share experiences and speak to each other and, I think, in the words of Ari Goldman in this book, enter into a dialogue isn't necessarily threatening. It doesn't mean that the people who come will leave with their identities overthrown. In fact, he himself admits – and perhaps later in another debate I'll read from the conclusion – that his Judaism was enriched. But he came out understanding other people well.

I think that's what we want to achieve in our schools, and I think that's one of the great, great values of our public education system. I've had teachers tell me in the last few days, since this bill has got a bit of publicity: "You know, I've got Jewish kids, I've got Muslim kids, and I've got Christian kids all in the same class, and it's wonderful." And it would be wonderful. I think that we as a society need to encourage that, and we need to facilitate that. We don't need to impose it, but we already allow ways out if it makes people that uncomfortable.

The Member for Airdrie-Chestermere – and I wish I had his comments in front of me – spoke about us approaching these issues with confidence, that we shouldn't be threatened by what's proposed in Bill 44. Last fall I had a woman come to me on a completely unrelated issue, of course, but towards the end of my conversation she said, "You know, I grew up in a very conservative family, and one of the things I noticed" – and I don't mean this with a capital C

at all; I don't want anybody to take this personally – "is that conservative people so often come to issues out of fear." They approach an issue as if it's a threat, and they approach it therefore as fear. She was struggling with that because she wanted to approach issues as problems or opportunities or challenges to be solved, and she made this interesting comment about people approaching things from a position of fear.

I suppose we're all guilty of that. You know, I'm a little bit nervous – maybe not fearful – about Bill 44, and there are others who are concerned about Bill 44 not being here. It seems to me that what we've achieved and what we can achieve in our classrooms by expecting people to come together is a wonderful thing, and we can do that by having our own courage and our own confidence, just as Ari Goldman discovered it himself. When he first set off to Harvard, that took courage, but he had confidence in himself, and at the end of the year he was still Jewish, he was still an Orthodox Jew, but he had a far broader understanding, a far richer view of things.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we as a society should have the courage and confidence to urge people to work, to dialogue, to talk, to share, to laugh, and to live together. That's why I have some concerns with Bill 44.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for comments or questions.

Ms Blakeman: I just wondered what the member's concerns were for Bill 44.

Dr. Taft: Well, I'm assuming there will be other opportunities for debate, but I'm concerned that there is a symbolism in this bill that encourages people to separate from those who are different from them and that discourages people from coming together to share life with those who are different. I prefer us as an Assembly and I'd like the government to do everything reasonable to encourage people to come together and share their differences and live their differences.

Now, I did mention in my very opening comments that I also have quite a number of concerns around the administration of this bill. Of course, it needs to be said that I find, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona said several days ago, that this bill giveth and it taketh away, in a sense. It's very important that equal rights are granted for people regardless of sexual orientation. I think that's a step forward, and it's overdue. We even see that becoming very common in the United States. My concern is that just as it does that, it then, in a way, takes a step backwards.

Again, I'm assuming we're going to have lots of really good discussion on this, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to join the five minutes?

Seeing none, the hon. leader of the third party on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure, at last, to rise to speak to these amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, one of which will change the name to the human rights act.

Mr. Speaker, if we can talk for a moment about the positive things that are in this bill. I want to indicate that the government has included sexual orientation as a protected right in sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 of the bill. Now, this comes years after these rights were read into human rights legislation in this country by the Supreme Court of Canada, so this amounts, really, to a formality. This government has been the last government to recognize this, and in

fact it is just a matter of changing the language to conform with the reality that has been created in this country. It's something we've been urging the government to do. Even just a matter of months ago, the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit was saying: we're not going to do that. Now it has been done. But, really, it amounts to nothing more than a formality.

9:00

Similarly, the definition of marriage has been changed in section 30, and the requirement that marriage be defined as a union of two people of the opposite sex has been deleted. This comes after the reality was changed with respect to this about three years ago by the federal Parliament of Canada. Again, what we have is a change in formality, recognizing the reality that others have created. This government has not created that reality; in fact, it has resisted it as long as possible.

Now, the real nub of the debate around this bill has to do with the inclusion in section 9 of the bill, which amends section 11.1 of the act, of sexuality, sexual orientation, and religion as protected grounds, which then gives the right of a parent whose wishes in their view have not been respected with regard to the teaching of their children in these areas to bring a case there to the Human Rights Commission. The government has acknowledged that these rights of parents already exist in the education act, where parents may inform a school or a teacher that their children are to be excused when things explicitly dealing with this are being taught. There is a process of going to the teacher or the principal and appealing, then up to the superintendent and right up through to the Minister of Education, that already exists. So the question then is: why does the government need to now make this a protected right, where the Human Rights Commission gets involved?

One of the problems that we have about this, Mr. Speaker, is that the current system seems to be working quite well in protecting the rights of parents to exempt their children from those areas of education if they choose to do that, so why now are we going to subject teachers and school boards to being brought before the Human Rights Commission and superseding the existing process? Now it will be possible for a parent to simply jump over the existing procedures and make a complaint directly to the Human Rights Commission.

So what's the problem with that? Well, I think a great deal of confusion was created by the Premier's comments at a news conference, which I attended, in which he said that parents would have that choice when asked about whether this act would allow parents to excuse their children when the theory of evolution was being taught. That interpretation of the Premier, because he is the Premier, gave rise to a great deal of concern. Now, his ministers have subsequently gone to great pains to dispute the Premier's interpretation and to assure the House and Albertans that, in fact, that is not the case, but we have not heard that yet from the Premier.

Ultimately, what's going to happen, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to now have the Human Rights Commission making essentially case law, making decisions on these matters. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit says: well, of course, you know, we expect people to behave reasonably. But if you talk to any teacher, they will tell you that there are occasionally parents who are not particularly reasonable, so the assumption that all parents are reasonable is absurd. There will be parents that bring charges before the Human Rights Commission if they don't like what their child has been taught.

Now, a lot has been said about this, but ultimately, Mr. Speaker, even if the Human Rights Commission makes reasonable interpretations of the act when charges are brought, it will have a profound

effect on the education of our children because teachers will never know what it is that they can talk about if issues relating to sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion come up spontaneously in a classroom outside of their lesson plan. So they will adjust their behaviour accordingly. You could call it self-censorship. They will say: "You know, I'm not going to talk about this. I'm not going to do this because Johnny's or Janey's parents might object, and we haven't got time to deal with it." They don't even know sometimes where the discussion is going to go in a class.

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. The handful of parents who might avail themselves of this clause are going to influence the education of all of the children, including the children of parents who want their children to be present for those discussions. It will change how education is delivered in the classroom, however subtle, and that is of great significance. Why, then, do we need to include this under the human rights act when it's already well dealt with under the School Act?

Mr. Speaker, I think we have to talk a little bit about what the politics behind this move are. This reflects a proposal made a couple of years ago in a private member's bill by the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, which basically sought to enshrine parental rights in a very strong way. The question is why those views, which I consider to be not mainstream views in this province – I'm putting that delicately – should come to dominate the government caucus to the point where the two ministers responsible, that being the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and the Minister of Education, who have indicated at various times their preference to approach this in a different way, are now forced into the position of being the staunch defenders of legislation which apparently they don't even agree with? That is a disturbing trend. It seems to me that the government caucus has been hijacked by a group that has very, very socially conservative views. I don't think that those views are widely held by the people of Alberta, and yet here it is as government legislation. And if the government persists, it's going to become the law of the land.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about another very serious deficiency here, and that is that the very stakeholders in the education system who will be affected by this legislation have not been consulted about these changes which will in such a fundamental way change the way education is delivered in our classrooms. We saw the spectacle a week or so ago of the Public School Boards' Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the association of parent councils, and the association of school superintendents all opposing this legislation and indicating that they have not been consulted. Where's the consultation?

That brings me, Mr. Speaker, to my amendment to this bill that I would like to now bring, which deals with the lack of consultation that has taken place. I will send that up to the table and have it distributed, and I'll make it when you indicate.

Thank you.

9:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have an amendment here, a reasoned amendment, introduced by the hon. leader of the third party.

Hon. leader of the third party, continue on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the motion for second reading of Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment

Act, 2009, be not now read a second time because the bill has not been subject to sufficient consultation with teachers and school boards."

Mr. Speaker, if I might speak to this motion. It really strikes me that when you make a change which will affect the education system in a fundamental way, you make sure that there is as broad a consultation as possible with teachers, with elected school boards, with school administrations, and most of all with parents. Now, it's curious that the same government that claims that it's standing up for parents' rights has not consulted with parents on this bill. It's true that they've apparently consulted with some religious leaders, but they have not consulted broadly with parents yet are attempting to suggest that they're actually representing the interests of parents with respect to this bill.

I have been contacted by many parents in my constituency and from other parts of the province as well, and I would say that the very large majority of the parents who have contacted me have deep concerns about this bill. If it's about parents' rights, then I think it's just logical and even fundamental that we ask parents and get a sense from them. Instead, the government has not done that, and now the provincial association of parent councils has taken exception to the sections of the bill that we are concerned about. They represent the parents in schools. They're the active parents. They're the parents who get involved with their children's education and who participate in school councils.

When my son was still in public education, I participated from time to time in the parent council as well, and I know that the parents there are deeply concerned about their children's education. They want the best for them. They want the best opportunity not only for their kids but to strengthen the school, to strengthen the education system, and so on. These parents who participate in public education from one end of the province to the other have not been consulted about this, not been consulted by a government that claims that they want to protect parents' rights.

School boards have not been consulted by this government with respect to this bill. There may have been some quick meetings organized since we've raised this issue and since it's become a fairly contentious public issue, but it's very clear that school boards, the people who are elected by the citizens to run the education in our communities, have not been consulted about this bill and about this change. Now, we give them that responsibility. The government created school boards. They give them limited powers, but they do ensure that they are elected by the citizens in the community. And they haven't been consulted.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge members to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the amendment.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak in favour of the amendment because I think this was true. There may well have been consultations after the fact between the drafters of the bill and representatives of the educational sector, but I would argue pretty strongly that there was not sufficient consultation prior to going into this bill.

I mean, it's hard to get the four organizations together that have come together as a coalition almost in reaction to what this bill has brought forward. But this government managed to do it with this particular legislation. We had the Alberta Teachers' Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Boards Association, and the Alberta School Councils' Association.

I mean, this government does some impressive things sometimes, and getting those four groups to come together as a coalition to speak with one voice in opposition to this bill is really impressive. I have to hand it to the government because that's no mean feat, to get those four groups all motivated to come together. They did a joint press release. They had it all co-ordinated. Wow. This government must have really done something to get them that motivated.

Indeed, they did. They put a section in this bill that has thrown — chaos is a strong word to use in this context.

Dr. Taft: Confusion.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. A colleague suggests that "confusion" would be more appropriate.

Dr. Taft: Disarray.

Ms Blakeman: Disarray is another possible wording. Actually, I like "disarray." I think that's pretty accurate. I mean, we don't actually have this bill in play yet. It hasn't passed, and I hope it doesn't pass in the form that it's in.

You know, the guards are kind of making fun of me every day as I haul all this stuff up the stairs. A significant portion of it, all this stuff in the pink here, is the reaction that we're getting into my office on the proposals in this bill, and 99 per cent of that reaction is about section 9, which is amending section 11.1. It's being casually referred to as the parental opt-out.

I'm coming at it as the daughter of teachers and someone who grew up in a household that was all about education. To me this section is about creating disarray, confusion, and possibly, finally, chaos in our classrooms, in our schools, and in our education system. This comes about because we don't end up with the kind of consultation that should have brought us to this point.

9:20

I'm going to back up a little bit here. I think that the minister got into this for all the right reasons. I think the government got into this for the right reasons. It may have been that the minister came on board when this process was already in the pipeline, and that's quite likely.

First of all was to streamline the actual process of the Human Rights Commission. Yes. Needed to happen. I've now gone back and consulted with some of the people I know who knew that system well. You know, I'm just reading through some of the notes from these people, and they're saying: "Yes, absolutely. Needed that. Good to see this. Glad they chose to call it a tribunal, not a panel." So a lot of administrative changes that really needed to happen.

One of the perennial sets of questions that I inherited as the human rights critic from my predecessor, the previous member by two for Calgary-Buffalo, the venerable Gary Dickson, was a series of questions about how many cases had been opened by the Human Rights Commission, how many cases had been closed by the Human Rights Commission, how many had been carried over the year, how many were more than 300 days old as open cases, et cetera, et cetera. What it really showed us was year from year the commission was falling behind in its ability to deal fairly swiftly with these cases and investigate them and either mediate to a conclusion or move them on. It just really dragged out.

So they got into it for the right reasons. Of course, once the act was open, they'd really look very silly if they didn't include the sexual orientation, which they did. I'm very glad to see that, and so

are many of my constituents and many of those that I claim as constituents.

Then they didn't do what this motion is suggesting they should have done, which was to do sufficient consultation with the teachers and the school boards before they got into this section 9, which is amending section 11.1, suggesting that we start to create this disarray, confusion, chaos in our classrooms. The argument that comes back at us is: well, we always did this. Yeah. Good. So why did you feel the need to write something that properly should be situated in the School Act and write it into a different piece of legislation? Can you imagine writing something that affected the beef producers into an act on education because someone decided that that should now . . .

Dr. Taft: We should all be taught to eat beef.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. We should all be taught to eat beef.

Yet we've talked about this so much now that everybody is going, "Yeah, that sounds very reasonable" when the Minister of Education says: "We already do this. This is why we put it in the act." Huh? No. If this is affecting what is going on in the classroom, it should be under the School Act, not under the human rights act. Well, then I'm told that it's already there. Okay. Then if it's already there and it's working, why are you, one, writing it into a piece of legislation and, two, writing it into a different piece of legislation?

You know there are nights – and it always seems to happen at night; there we are, 25 after 9 at night – when I start thinking: why does this government insist on exposing our taxpayers to yet another constitutional challenge? Every time I stand here in this House and say, "Mark my words; this one's going to come back as a constitutional challenge," a couple of years later there it is on the front pages of the paper, and the taxpayers are on the hook to chase through on why this government decided to do this. Maybe they need to do it to satisfy their own internal politics. I don't know. But if that's the case, can you not just work that out the way other caucuses work it out?

Mr. Mason: Because they have free will.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Right. Voting with the free will and all of that kind of thing.

To expose taxpayers to what is surely going to be a pretty clear-cut constitutional challenge on these grounds is really unfair to the taxpayers, especially when I suspect you know that going in. You've got a lot of smart people working for you. You've got a lot of lawyers working for you. [interjection] I'm sorry; the minister is interested in something. I'm sure he's going to get up and respond to me when he gets his chance. [interjection] Oh, yeah. I've come back to the amendment a number of times. It's talking about: we can't read this a second time because we didn't consult with teachers. You bet you didn't, and you didn't consult with them particularly on section 9, which is amending section 11.1, which is about why the government chose to put something that affects the School Act into human rights legislation and the fact that – are you following along? – that is going to end up being a constitutional challenge and cost taxpayers money. There's the total thread recast for you. Thank you so much.

The other things that have come up repeatedly here are: well, you know, if you just notify parents of what's going to happen, you can adjust the modules, and kids can be opted out of classes or given alternate instruction. Here I'm going to come and stand alongside my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview to say: we really need to

be working forward in a way that is about coming together, not about highlighting differences, not about taking people apart, not about taking children out of the classroom.

I'm just going to pause here and say that part of this is about religious education. There have been other discussions earlier in the day about, you know, parents' rights to educate their children in a particular religious faith. Absolutely. But to me that doesn't mean that that faith is then used to remove a child from the teaching that all other children are getting in that system. To me as the child of educators I want to know that when we say, "This is someone that graduated from 12 years of education in Alberta," we know that this is what they know. We know that this is the instruction that they've had, that they can think, that they have analytical skills, that they've been challenged on some things that maybe make them a little uncomfortable.

I mean, let's face it. If everybody in this room had been allowed to opt out of everything that made them a little uncomfortable, this would be a much harder place to work toward some kind of a solution in. As part of our education in Alberta we were taught how to be able to construct those arguments and bring them forward and to recognize that you disagree with someone and to be able to develop those arguments and put them out on a public platform and debate those ideas out there.

What are we trying to create here when we say, "No, we don't want children involved in these discussions or exposed to these ideas or challenged by this; we want them taken out of this and not exposed to that"? Everything I've been reading about what we really need children to do and all the stuff that's actually in the School Act and in the manual that they use about, you know, creating opportunities for kids to learn, to find controversial issues, to help them work their way through that process – and Sheldon Chumir, you know, has also weighed back in on this a couple of times.

Dr. Taft: You mean the Sheldon Chumir foundation.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. I mean the Sheldon Chumir foundation. For those of us that actually knew Sheldon Chumir, yes. Now there is a foundation in his name, which he funded. Much of the work that they did in the consultation process was freely adopted by the minister in charge of this bill, but not all of the suggestions that the Sheldon Chumir foundation made were in fact adopted and incorporated into this.

I'm aware that my time is running out here, and I'm not going to be able to find the references fast enough to speak to them. But the point that I was trying to make is that the world gets more complex. It's not getting simpler. It's not getting easier the more times we look at a problem, and in many ways we've not solved problems. How many times do you hear people say, "Well, we're coming around on this one again"? Child poverty: you know, here we are; we're still dealing with it. Is it an easier issue to deal with now than 50 years ago? No, it isn't. We've got all kinds of other complications in it, so in many ways the issues are still here, but they're increasingly multilayered. They're much more of a woven tapestry. We need to be able to educate the next generation to be able to understand the complexity of that and to be able to put forward their point of view with confidence, with some factual backup to it, and be able to argue those ideas out in a public context. I really feel strongly that removing kids from controversial issues and from the classroom is a bad idea.

9:30

It also puts enormous pressure on teachers to somehow deal with impromptu ideas coming up, that with questions from students or

current affairs that are brought up in the day, a teacher now has to say: "Oh, okay. Whoa. Stop. Just let me send a note home to the parents to let everybody know that this is controversial, and we'll get back to you in two weeks."

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on the bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 47 Appropriation Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Certainly, I'm looking forward to speaking at committee on Bill 47. I was encouraged earlier in debate this week by the President of Treasury Board that if I had any questions or any concerns, to put them on the record. I received a similar response yesterday from the hon. minister of health regarding the Appropriation Act and what should or should not be in this legislation.

When one thinks of the Appropriation Act and the budget and the whole budget process that we just I would describe it as endured, Mr. Chairman, I certainly don't think the interests of the taxpayers of this province were served with the whole process of examining the budget to date. Whether we go through the respective offices of the Legislative Assembly and the support for the Legislative Assembly or the government departments from A through T, there is a lot of money allocated here, a lot of money allocated during difficult economic times.

When we look at the budget process and how it was developed by the government, we do know that there are a lot of volumes to this. The first volume I would like to mention in my remarks is the ministry business plans, Budget 2009. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill also was anxious for members on this side of the House to provide some examples of budget restraints that could be used to reduce this big, bloated government, its wasteful spending habits. I'm not going to mention horse racing because that gets a lot of attention in this House, and taxpayers seem to pay a lot of attention to the fact that during these rather difficult times we still have a significant subsidy to the horse-racing industry.

We look at the accountability statements that each minister signed off on. Some of them signed off on March 19, others on the 18th, one, I think, signed off on the 20th, and it goes on and on. We'll just check some of the larger departments by budget amount, and Justice is one, certainly. They've got a lot of money in bonuses; that's for sure. They always give a lot of money in bonuses. This account-

ability statement was signed off on March 19, 2009, Mr. Chairman, and the accountability statement in the business plan reads:

The business plan for the three years commencing April 1, 2009 was prepared under my direction in accordance with the Government Accountability Act and the government's accounting policies. All of the government's policy decisions as of . . . And this is very important.

. . . March 12, 2009 with material economic or fiscal implications of which I am aware have been considered in preparing the business plan.

The Ministry's priorities outlined in the business plan were developed in the context of the government's business and fiscal plans. I am committed to achieving the planned results laid out in this business plan.

It's signed by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, dated March 19. That's a week after it was signed off in the accountability statement. My point in all of this is that these sign-offs occurred, and I'm sure these budget documents went to the printers before we had finished our additions on the lavish senior management bonus plans that this government used as a means to exercise complete authority over senior civil servants.

Now, we have done additional math – and I know this is outside this budget year, Mr. Chairman – over the years since this program was first initiated, and the majority of the money, oddly enough, was taken from the social services budget, but \$250 million has gone through this program. What does it have to do with the sign-off on these business plans? Well, the Premier stood up in question period one day and said: we're going to discontinue this practice. It was the right decision but the wrong year. This should have been discontinued, in my view, quite some time ago. It was not.

The Premier indicated that it's about a \$40 million tab now that is to be paid out in these bonuses, and if you look at last year's budget, where the money is coming from for the \$40 million now, it's hidden line by line in the budget in each and every respective department. Nothing has changed from last year's budget to this year's budget. The government certainly would not have time from the day that we started asking questions about this to reduce these budget documents by \$40 million. So there is one more pot of cash that we can either save or set aside for key government programs.

9:40

Now, I know there are members opposite that just want to spend, spend, spend [interjection] – the hon. Minister of Education laughs, and it's not a laughing matter. I can read the *Alberta Gazette* as well as the next person. This hon. minister certainly has taken liberties with the treasury to provide lavish hosting expenses. An example of this, hon. member, is that last year when the budget came out, the Provincial Treasurer's postbudget reception cost \$700, but the one hosted by the Minister of Education was over \$2,000. In fact, I think it was over \$2,300, but I'm going by memory, and my memory is like that of the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills: it gets rusty at times. But you can look that up in the *Alberta Gazette*, and it's not a laughing matter.

I'm going to get to hosting expenses in a minute, but I want to summarize my point that when the accountability statements were signed off, and then later the Premier announced that this was a bad, bad program and it was going to end, this government did not have time to remove that \$40 million from this budget department by department. So there is an additional \$40 million that can be set aside, and if a portion of it is to be spent, it's to be spent in a prudent fashion. That's one example.

When we look at hosting expenses, while I'm on the subject, Mr. Chairman, last year – and this is in the latest issue of the *Gazette* that we've had a chance to have a look at – hosting expenses over \$600

for this government in amounts that have been publicly disclosed in the *Alberta Gazette* are over \$1.4 million. It's a lot of lunches, a lot of dinners, a lot of wine. When we look at places where we can save money, these are good places for the government to start. I would encourage the hon. Minister of Education to set an example with budget discipline because when we look at these hosting expenses, Mr. Chairman, we have to realize that they're all buried in Bill 47 here, in each and every department with the exception of Energy. The Minister of Energy seems to have a very modest and reasonable amount in hosting expenses, as do several other ministries but not all.

What is annoying to the taxpayers is that in these global amounts is money to be used to pay for hosting expenses. There was an ambassador, an envoy from a country visiting the province and our capital city. No one is suggesting that the minister shouldn't take that individual out and have a pleasant meal. No one is suggesting that for a moment. But there has to be some sort of control on this. If there's no control on this kind of spending, what kind of controls do we have on other larger amounts?

I was startled to realize and learn that hosting expenses, well, just exist. There's no budget to speak of. There's no amount. Sure, the deputy minister or the assistant deputy minister sign off on it; in some cases, I would say, the minister. But it doesn't seem like a sound practice. It doesn't seem like a sound practice at all. That's why when we talk about Bill 47, when we talk about the entire budget process, we have to realize that there's a lot of wasteful, lavish spending going on. We see how the budget has increased so dramatically. This is a government that appears to want to continue to practise those habits. It's a government, in my view, that doesn't have the discipline necessary to practise fiscal restraint. Common-sense spending, not wild, lavish spending: that's what the taxpayers are demanding.

When we look at the strategic plan that's provided for health care through the Alberta Health Services budget, there's an acknowledgement in there of wasteful spending. There's an elaborate circle, a 360-degree chart, and in there is the acknowledgement that there has been waste and inefficiency. I wish I had the chart before me, but I do not, Mr. Chairman, but that is yet another example. It's how much budget? Well, there is close to \$13 billion in the total Alberta Health and Wellness budget. There is in the Alberta Health Services Budget over \$7 billion.

I don't know what's going to happen. I was told yesterday, and we had this discussion in question period about the whole issue of the edict or the order or the demand or the command – I don't know how you describe it – from the Minister of Health and Wellness to the Alberta Health Services Board that they were to reduce their expenditures by \$500 million. Now, there was a reference to that in the *Edmonton Journal* today, in the newspaper, that I'm sure all hon. members read. There was a reduction of surgical services to be provided by the Royal Alex hospital. That was an interesting front page of the *Edmonton Journal*.

It was quite a contrast. In fact, I was at a public meeting before session started at 7:30, and there were many questions from individuals who were attending the meeting about the scaling back of surgical activity at the Royal Alex and about the oil sands production, synthetic crude oil, about the fact that one of the partners at Syncrude was paying less than 50 cents a barrel in royalties for the first quarter of this year, from January through the end of March, whenever the new royalty regime had come into force. The citizens were quite puzzled. How could this happen? Who was looking after our interests? Who is defending our interests in all these discussions and these negotiations? Surely, the government cannot be when we're paid less than 50 cents. I think it's 48 cents a barrel, is it, hon. member?

Dr. Taft: Yeah.

Mr. MacDonald: Forty-eight cents a barrel in royalty.

Dr. Taft: What is it in Yemen?

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know, but hopefully I'll find out tomorrow in question period.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we look at that contrast: the events at the Royal Alex hospital with the cancellation of surgeries and the amount of resource revenue, the royalty stream that we are getting. These events are related. Fortunately, we do have the stability fund, or the stabilization fund, and it's going to carry us through at least this year. But where do we go from that point? I don't know.

This budget and this budget process are both flawed. There should be considerable public discussion. I think these business plans should be reviewed publicly. I know the Minister of Education is very fond of the policy field committees. They were born under his watch; I'll put it that way. I know that he's very fond of them, and I know that when they were started, it was hoped that they would be a means by which this government would be more open and more transparent.

9:50

I can't understand why, after these business plans go through the Treasury Board and go through their usual government processes or discussions, they couldn't go before the policy field committees before the minister of finance stands up with great fanfare and with the full effect of the Public Affairs Bureau and delivers the budget. Instead of having an open and transparent process, we have this budget process.

It all started with Aboriginal Relations: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations. I was present at that first budget debate, and I was disappointed. I didn't think the taxpayers were well served by the whole process, and I still think that. Yes, certainly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was very diligent in the time that was allocated to him to get specific, detailed answers from the minister, but the process was, I'm afraid, constricted. It was limited. That department had a budget in excess of \$149 million. There just wasn't enough time, I felt.

So here we are in Committee of the Whole having another look at the budget and the implications of it for the citizens. Advanced Education and Technology, a significant amount, not 10 per cent, but it would be between 8 and 10 per cent of the total budget. We look at Agriculture and Rural Development. We look at Children and Youth Services; that's an interesting department. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] We'll get to that again.

Thank you. I appreciate the chance.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: I believe I have a potential conflict of interest relevant to Bill 25, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act. I will now absent myself from the Chamber during the discussion.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to do the same thing, a conflict-of-interest declaration? The hon. Member for Red Deer South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe I have a potential conflict of interest relative to Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, and would now absent myself from the Chamber.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Yes. Mr. Chair, I also believe that I may have a potential conflict of interest with respect to this Bill 25, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, so I'll also be excusing myself.

The Chair: Any other hon. member who wishes to do so? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It would appear that the Ethics Commissioner believes that I have a conflict of interest in this matter, so I will absent myself.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. If the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose is in conflict, then I certainly would be, too. Enjoy the debate. I'll be in the opposition lounge.

The Chair: Now that all the hon. members who feel that they have a conflict of interest have left the Chamber, we'll go back to the debate on the bill. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to rise this evening in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act. The bill legally transfers the full pre-1992 unfunded liability to government effective September 1, 2009. The act will also incorporate changes to the payment and governance arrangements pertaining to the pre-1992 unfunded liability.

The support received at second reading of this bill is greatly appreciated, Mr. Chairman, but there were some points raised by the opposition that I'd like to address.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but another member wishes to declare his conflict of interest at the last minute here. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is leaving the Chamber on conflict of interest.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, please continue.

Mr. Marz: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I was saying, there were some points raised by the opposition earlier that I would like to address at this time.

Under the November 2007 memorandum of agreement the government agreed to pay the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded liability payments until August 31, 2009, and then assume the total pre-1992 unfunded liability on September 1, 2009. Inquiries were raised as to how much this will cost as well as how this additional commitment will be managed, considering our current economic condition. The opposition also wanted to know the amount that will be transferred from the general revenue fund to get this commitment paid.

Annual payments over the next three years from the general revenue fund will be \$356 million in 2009-2010, \$437 million in 2010-11, and \$450 million in 2011-12. The annual payments are

expected to increase to about \$500 million by about 2021 and then gradually decrease until the liability is eliminated by about 2060. In light of the current economic downturn the amounts for the next three years have already been built into Finance and Enterprise's spending targets that have been provided in the fiscal plan.

A concern was also raised regarding the plan of payment. Alberta Finance and Enterprise and Alberta Education share responsibility for the teachers' pension plan, with Finance and Enterprise responsible for the liability and funding related to the pre-1992 obligation. Education covers the ongoing regular contributions.

The government was already responsible for two-thirds of the pre-1992 obligation before the agreement. Under the agreement the government will pay the entire amount of benefit payments to recipients without borrowing from the post-1992 plan. By paying the pre-1992 benefit payments in full as they come due rather than borrowing to make part of the payment, the government is saving hundreds of millions of dollars it would otherwise have paid towards the unfunded liability over time.

Under the previous payment arrangements the pre-1992 unfunded liability would have increased to \$14 billion by 2041. Under the new payment plan the unfunded liability would be reduced to \$2 billion by the year 2041. Last spring an earlier amendment, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2008, authorized government to pay teachers' unfunded liability payments until August 31, 2009.

10:00

It's important that the 2009 amendment proceed to ensure the implementation of the pension agreement in a timely manner. The 2009 amendment establishes a closed pension fund for the pre-1992 pension benefits under the teachers' pension plan. The amendment provides for the Crown to make payments into the fund as statutory expenditures and guarantees payment of pre-1992 benefits from the Crown. The amendment also provides that any assets remaining in the fund after all pre-1992 benefits have been paid will be returned to the Crown.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would encourage all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 25. I'll now take my seat. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Any other member wish to speak on Bill 25? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. I want to express my appreciation for the comments from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, giving information on some issues that have been raised earlier.

This is, as soon as you scratch the surface, a fairly technical issue, and it's a very large issue. This bill is an initiative that we support. We, in fact, included this sort of concept in our pre-election platform before the last election, and it's good to see the government adopting the idea. I think there's a lesson to be learned from this. This is a very expensive problem. This was a small problem that grew bigger and bigger and bigger, and now it's going to be multiple billions of dollars and, if I understood the member correctly, several more decades before it's fully addressed.

The lesson that Bill 25 ought to teach us is to be very careful and very thoughtful about the actions we take as a Legislature. Sometimes we move very abruptly and without thought and find that we've created problems that are difficult or expensive to resolve. This particular bill is one of the really, really big examples of this. The origins of the issue that is being addressed by Bill 25 go back to, I think, the 1950s and probably some debate that occurred in this very hall the better part of a lifetime ago, when people perhaps

didn't consider all the issues or people were rash or people just weren't paying attention. At some time 50 years ago decisions were made in this Assembly that today are costing us \$8 billion – or who knows how much by the time it's all done? – and won't be played out for another 50 years.

I think there should be a copy of this bill and some of the expenses connected with it framed and hung on the walls, maybe one in each of the two lounges behind the Assembly, to remind people that there are sometimes very expensive, long-term consequences to what initially seem like small decisions. I can't imagine – in fact, I'm certain that when the decisions were made that led to this unfunded liability, nobody really thought it through. Nobody thought: you know, this is going to cost people in 2009 many billions of dollars. I wish they had, and all those teachers who are affected by this wish they had as well, particularly the youngish teachers now, who have been paying a premium on their pensions because of the mistaken decisions of years ago. I think that's the key lesson here.

When I see some of the other legislation that's brought forward, I see that the lesson hasn't been learned because I see legislation brought here and pushed through here that is almost certain to cause all kinds of different problems in the future. Earlier this evening in a different debate the Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking about how this government enacts things or puts us in positions where we end up, predictably, in Supreme Court decisions and lose those. The auto insurance one is an example, the Vriend decision is another, and it may well be that the amendments brought in on Bill 44 this session will be yet another. Why do we do that? Why don't we just pause and collect ourselves and think things through, do the number crunching, do the analysis, exercise real prudence, and save people decades from now very expensive corrective action like the one we're having to take here in Bill 25? That's the most important lesson, I think, from Bill 25.

However, there are other things to be recognized, and I think this bill corrects some of those. The first to be recognized is the importance of teachers and the importance of attracting new, young, energetic recruits to the profession. Those were the people who were going to be paying the most under the current unfunded pension situation. I've talked to any number of them who were considering leaving the province because it was like making a second mortgage payment every month, with very little to show for it in their books. So I think we're demonstrating as an Assembly that we value teachers, that we value education, that we want to renew the profession through bringing in fresh recruits and replacing the retiring teachers, who have by and large done an outstanding job.

I support this bill. I think that as a caucus we support this bill. We just really hope that as an Assembly we're not making decisions today such that people in 2059 are going to be standing in this room, saying: gee, I wish those people had thought a little longer and a little harder before they pushed that through.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to rise in support of Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009. This bill puts in place the legislative framework needed to implement the pension agreement reached with Alberta teachers in November 2007 having to do with the pre-1992 unfunded liability payments.

Now, the unfunded liability with respect to teachers' pensions in Alberta was a very long-standing problem. Certainly, we on our side urged the government repeatedly to deal with it. Finally, after some lengthy negotiations an agreement was reached that the government

would fund the teachers' portion of the unfunded liability in exchange for an agreement with the Alberta Teachers' Association. A term of that agreement gave four years of certainty as far as labour peace was concerned and so on. I thought that it was definitely a win-win, with the Alberta Teachers' Association, I think, getting a very long-standing issue resolved and the Alberta government ensuring that the education system could operate without any prospect of labour difficulties anywhere in the province for four years.

10:10

Mr. Chairman, I think that it's a very reasonable agreement, and I think it will provide not only reliable pensions for teachers who are retiring today and in the future but also is fair to young teachers, who were hit with an extremely heavy burden of trying to pay off a liability that had grown out of control. The pension payments required by young teachers were onerous and difficult for them to meet in some cases and quite unfair. It was those teachers who would have to bear the brunt of this problem, which was created way back when the Social Credit Party was in power and was unfair to teachers who weren't even teaching before 1992 but who still had to make extra contributions to service the liability. This was off-loaded onto those teachers for years and years by this government, and finally an agreement was reached. I think it's unfortunate that it couldn't have been dealt with earlier, but I think that it is to everyone's credit that it has been done.

Mr. Chairman, during an economic downturn such as this people need to know that their pensions are secure, especially when their retirement savings may have lost significant value as a result of the stock market crash that we have seen. I think that this deal ensures that the pre-1992 liability will not have a negative impact on the health of the current pension fund because those are now entirely separated.

Mr. Chairman, I think for now that will suffice for my comments with respect to this bill. It's a good bill and, I think, a credit both to the government and this Legislature and to the teachers and the Alberta Teachers' Association. I urge all members to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to comment on Bill 25?

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 47 **Appropriation Act, 2009** *(continued)*

The Chair: It is 10:15 now. The chair shall now put the question on Bill 47, Appropriation Act, 2009.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 47, Bill 25.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)**

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: Committee of the Whole is now in order.

**Bill 27
Alberta Research and Innovation Act**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm just looking through this for my notes here, but I do know what I want to say about this because I've been doing a bit more research. When I spoke in second on this, I was talking about the politicization of our research and academic scholarship programs. What I was seeing was a movement on behalf of Conservative-based governments towards funnelling, controlling our research and our scholarship and award and granting system towards sort of producing a certain outcome that is business focused. As I started to read on this, I think this is the first time that this government is moving into that area, but I've certainly seen it in a government to which my colleagues across the way have a close affiliation, and that is the current federal Conservative government.

Dr. Taft: They're cousins.

Ms Blakeman: Well, yeah, pretty close cousins.

That is turning up in a number of places. I'm looking at one report of the awarding of the Steacie fellowship, which is a very prestigious pure research-based fellowship. The PM was there and was going on and on about how he wanted to more narrowly target the new research dollars for commercialization of the products of research. It's interesting because there have been a couple of times recently in this House, particularly around carbon capture and storage money, when members of the Official Opposition have said: "Okay, if the government is going to put money into developing this technology, are we going to own a piece of it? Do we get a sort of copyright payment or a royalty payment back because we've invested in this technology and it takes off and it makes everybody a gabillion dollars? We were the seed money for that. We gave them stuff to get started with. Do we get something back for that?"

Mr. Mason: But they're not going to do that.

Ms Blakeman: Well, no, they're not going to do that.

It's one thing to invest in the development of that technology, but I think when you start controlling research and academic institutions

and saying, "You are going to focus your research on doing what we want you to do," we have stepped down a completely different road than what we understand academic research to be.

10:20

How is that relating to what we're contemplating in Bill 27? Here's what we're contemplating. Bill 27 is basically taking our favourite and, I would argue, our most successful heritage fund resourced, funded research foundation, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, and it's rolling it in with a number of other research bodies like the Alberta Research and Innovation Authority, the Alberta Research and Innovation Committee, the Cross-government Portfolio Advisory Committee, and a number of other corporations.

I know in this bill there is an act. There it is. I knew I would find it. Under section 14 in the bill, entitled Transitional Provisions, Consequential Amendments, Repeal and Coming into Force, we're looking at the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research, the Alberta Information and Communications Technology Institute, the Alberta Life Sciences Institute, the Alberta Research Council Inc., the Alberta Science and Research Authority, iCORE Inc., and any subsidiary of any entity that has been referred to in the list that I just went through, which are sections (a) to (j) in the bill. For reference for those of you that have got a paper copy, I'm on page 11 of Bill 27, Alberta Research and Innovation Act.

We're seeing a Conservative thought process that seems to be generated out of the federal government under Prime Minister Harper, where they talk about targeting research dollars for commercialization of products of research. One of the places that I noticed this the most was SSHRC funding. SSHRC is the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Now, that is the only grant source to support humanities and social science based research. It's the only one that exists in the country. It doesn't get a lot of the money. I think it's like in the 20 per cent range. It has been told that all the new research they do has to be business focused.

I'm just quoting from an article out of *Vue Weekly*, but I have seen this. This is the week of February 26, issue 697, an article by Ricardo Acuña from the Parkland Institute, but I've also seen the same statistics quoted elsewhere. Essentially, it's saying: "Budget document that says 'scholarships granted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council will be focused on business-related degrees'." Here are the other quotes. There we go. So of the money that's granted, we've got, yeah: \$17.5 million allocated to Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for Canada graduate scholarships is to be uniquely allocated to business-related degrees, one of the few budget elements that is devoted to the knowledge economy.

This is where we all say we're supposed to be going, right? This is the future. This is it. Invest in the knowledge-based economy. Okay, here it is. That's what these grants represent. But, no, they're now going to focus that not really on a knowledge-based industry but on business-related output, which is what they're looking for, and only 20 per cent of the federal research grants go to SSHRC, but that's now all to be focused on business-related study.

So we have two things happening here. One is a reinvention, a recasting of the social sciences and humanities research grants into a business-related research function. Then we have the provincial government drawing together all of the different research councils that we have operating, I might say very successfully, out there. Like, this has become a growth industry for us. This is an economic

driver. This is a cluster for us. All of those things that excited, you know, economists and Edmonton boosters talk about in having the Alberta Research Council located in Edmonton, in having the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research based out of here, all of the wonderful press releases that have come out: now they're looking at shifting that and rolling it into some strange thing that the government will control.

That's what this is about. You don't change this stuff that has worked very well because you just thought it would be fun. I mean, this costs money; it costs time. Let's face it, we've got a professional reputation that's tied up in this as well.

This is important. I think this is a serious mistake. I think we run the risk of not attracting the top-notch scientists that we want to see. I mean, look at what we've got running here in Edmonton and in Alberta. I'll talk about Edmonton because I know it better. We've got the nanotechnology centre here. We've got the new engineering building that's on the U of A campus. We've got a lot of medical research that comes out of here, the Edmonton protocol. We're developing the Edmonton clinic and that whole way of doing team-based approach. I mean, that's the stuff that flows from this, and it's working for us, and now we've got a government that says: "We're going to change it all. We're going to uproot everything. We're going to tear it all apart. We're going to roll it all together and do something completely different with it." I have yet to hear a clear explanation of why the government thinks this is a good idea. Everything that I look at says: no, no, no, do not do this.

Mr. Chairman, I'm actually surprised that I've heard as much as I have out of the research community because this is not a group of people that, you know, really has their finger on the pulse of current affairs and politics, that's following this with any amount of vigour, that would throw themselves into a political discussion about, you know – what's the word I'm looking for? – the configuration of the context of what they work in, the administrative set-up and format that they work in. They're researchers. They're off doing what they do. They're thinking about and inventing the new things that are to come. So, as I say, I'm surprised that I heard from as many of them as I did. Clearly, they are deeply concerned that this will shake what they know, that this will drive away some of the colleagues that they have who are currently here, that they will fail to attract new colleagues here.

Let's face it. These people are not coming here because they're going to get paid multimillions of dollars. They can go other places and get paid that kind of money. Frankly, they could go and work for, you know, Swiss drug companies. There are lots of places that if they wanted to go and just make money, they could go to and make money and lots of people willing to pay them a lot of money to do that. But this is about the opportunity to work with other amazing minds in a research-based facility with a focus on putting out and working toward an end here. I think this is a serious – a serious – step backwards. I am really concerned about what this does.

10:30

I talked in second reading about how impressed I'd been by that model of the heritage trust fund for medical research and what it had created for us, that it had created an economic cluster, and that I had based some of our policy going into the '04 and subsequent '08 elections with the same policy because it was based on that idea of creating endowment funds that you then used to drive a community of researchers and thinkers towards something else, that whole idea of an endowment fund that supported postsecondary education, an endowment fund that supported a capital fund. And when that capital fund had reached the point where it paid off all the infrastruc-

ture debt that we had accumulated and had built all the capital projects that we needed, that money would then roll over into the heritage trust fund. In the end, the ones you ended up with were the postsecondary education endowment fund and the heritage savings trust fund.

I'm puzzled by why the government would choose to do this. As I look around for what could possibly be the reasoning, that's the reasoning that I found is out there, that it is an approach that the federal Conservative government has taken in trying to control what kinds of things our researchers work on and develop, and that they want it focused into a business model. Now, these are fairly recent announcements, February 26 and March 17. These are recent moves by the federal government to control this, so we don't know what the outcome is going to be. I can't see how this is going to be a positive move. I can't see how this is going to recruit people, that it's going to attract scientists and researchers into Alberta. I can't see how this is going to move us into a more creative economy. I mean, we do need to be more creative. We have finite resources. We have less money available. Everybody wants everything, you know, bigger, faster, funnier, and more wonderful.

I don't think that this is a smart move on behalf of government. I think it is really going to cause us a lot of trouble. I guess all I can say is that for those that are in the research community that are following along with this and keeping attention on it, you need to start communicating with your elected representatives. As I say, I've heard from more people than I expected to on this one. If you want the government to understand the effects that this is going to have, the intended and unintended consequences, you need to start getting in touch with us.

I'm going to leave it at that and see whether I can get any kind of response from the government side as to why they would choose to do this. I've read in *Hansard*, and I'm not picking up anything that's particularly good about it. I'll take my seat and let some others discuss this, and maybe I'll get another opportunity to stand up and rebut a little later on.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, is certainly an interesting bill. It follows a pattern, as I said in second reading, with this government of centralizing and exercising control, in this case of a series of endowment funds that, if this bill becomes law, will total over 2 and a half billion dollars.

When I first had a briefing on this, I thought it was a bill that one could accept, but when I talked to various people, they cautioned me. They warned me. They said: "Hold on. This may not be in the province's best interests. It may be in some people's best interests but not everyone's." If there's something that I think we have to guard in this Assembly and guard diligently, it is the public interest.

So we have a look at the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, and we see what they're up to. We have a look at the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, Alberta Ingenuity, the Alberta Research Council, iCORE, Alberta Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, Alberta ICT Institute, and of course the Alberta Life Sciences Institute. They will all be sort of centralized.

We look at what's going on. Let's take, for example, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. It's an unincorporated board consisting of representatives from industry, academia, and government. It was established under the Alberta Science and Research Authority Act. Its goal is to support the

growth of a dynamic, sustainable Alberta life sciences sector by leading the agribased industry's research, development, and deployment strategies and outcomes. Their final goal, if I can use that word, is to become an Alberta leader responsible for ensuring that agricultural research, development, and deployment delivers innovative solutions to the marketplace. The Alberta Agricultural Research Institute plays a big role in Alberta's agribased industry. I'm told that this role will continue to occur, but I don't know why we can't just leave well enough alone.

Now, the research institute has a priority of sustainable production. It continues to make significant contributions in support of the bovine genomics programs, enhancing the portfolio with investments in support of a national healthy embryo development network and further initiatives in livestock genomics. The investments that are also under this research institute include biomarker development.

I'm not going to get into this at this time, Mr. Chairman, but certainly we know that in August of 2007 the institute supported the eighth International Plant Cold Hardiness Seminar, critical to evolving cropping systems in western Canada amidst climate change. That is only one of a number of conferences and seminars that the organization has been involved in. They're certainly going to be involved in other critical conferences, as I understand. I certainly hope this continues, and whether you support or reject this bill, the institute will continue to work.

10:40

Now, I understand that two years ago there was close to \$5 million invested in the institute's three strategic theme areas: bioproducts, health and nutrition, and, as I said, sustainable production. I think we should just leave each one of these organizations as a stand-alone research facility. I thought about what the minister had said in our bill briefing – and I appreciated his time, as I said before – but I'm not convinced this consolidation or whatever we want to call it is in the public interest.

If we look at the Alberta Energy Research Institute – now, this is another one of the organizations that's going to be consolidated – according to the annual report, as I said in second reading, it's a \$10 million entity. Again, it is an unincorporated board, established under the same act, the Alberta Science and Research Authority Act. The Energy Research Institute works closely with other research institutes in business areas, with Advanced Education and Technology as well as key stakeholder departments of Energy, Environment, and Employment and Immigration. The Alberta energy innovation strategy and the Alberta Energy Research Institute's business plans are designed, I'm told, to position Alberta for the future in energy and environment so as to create value and build a strong Alberta economy.

I don't know where we would be going with all of this, Mr. Chairman, but certainly we look at hydrogen development from sources other than natural gas. We look at the source of that. Perhaps at some point it will be mostly coal, that source of hydrogen. We look at coal gasification in the coal seams. We look at ways of capturing and compressing CO₂ streams from exhaust from electricity-generating stations which are coal fired. There are any number of interesting projects that the Energy Research Institute can do and in some cases can continue to do without this consolidation, this big package idea that seems to be coming from the ministry of advanced education.

I know the ministry makes the comparisons of California and the San Jose area and some of the research clusters that go on there, but research and development will go on. Sometimes smaller may be better. It can be certainly in some cases more innovative.

I don't know whose research projects would get priority if we were to vote Bill 27 into law. Whose ideas would come first?

Which research would be funded, and which wouldn't be? How would those decisions be made? Some members have suggested that this may be politicizing the research and development community, and that would never happen here, hon. members, no, certainly not after one party has been in power for – is it 38 years or 39 years?

Mr. Mason: I don't know. I was in grade 11 when they got elected.

Mr. MacDonald: You were in grade 11 when they got elected. You're not that old. You must have been a very smart student. You must have combined a couple of grades in elementary.

Mr. Chairman, there are many projects that the Alberta Energy Research Institute could do. We know that there's a combination of resources in this province that "allows an integration strategy that maximizes synergies, protects the environment and aids in developing coal, oil sands, heavy oil, refining, petrochemicals and alternate energy resources." This is according to the annual report, the overview, a year in review of the Energy Research Institute. I mean, there's merit in what they want to do.

I look at the old ASRA, or whatever it was called, that initiated the research into the original oil sands extraction technology and the money that the province put into that, the taxpayers did, significant amounts of money, and some of the innovations or some of the processes were sold and adopted commercially. When we look at what return we're getting on those dollars now – I'd have to go back into the library and go back 25 years through Public Accounts to get an accurate figure – it's startling to think that we made all these investments through research and development, some of which were successful, some of which were applied commercially, and now we're getting 48 cents a barrel in royalties from some of those same facilities that got off the ground initially as a result of research and development that occurred here in this province, not sponsored but certainly supported by the government, and it worked.

It wasn't a big megafund. It wasn't a big mega endowment fund. It was a much smaller facility. I believe it was located at the corner of 17th Street and 101 Avenue, just in the east side of Edmonton, nestled between Edmonton and Sherwood Park. A lot of work went on out there. Of course, a lot of work went on in the field up in Fort McMurray. That's an example of a small research and development enterprise that certainly has worked out. Sometimes I think, Mr. Chairman, that we could be getting significantly more return on that investment. We've certainly built some big facilities up there as a result of that research and development that I don't think would have been built by the private sector. When we look at the Energy Research Institute, it's only one of many outfits that are part and parcel of this suggested legislation.

Now, another one is the Alberta Forestry Research Institute. The Alberta Forestry Research Institute certainly has a lot of work to do. Again, it's an unincorporated board. It was established under the Alberta Science and Research Authority Act. I'm not going to bore you, Mr. Chairman, with any of the other details of how it relates to other research institutes, but Alberta is Canada's fourth-largest manufacturer of forest products. Alberta's forest sector, as the government whip fully knows, contributes over \$8 billion to the provincial economy – this was in 2007-08 – ranking third after the energy and agricultural sectors. Forestry is the primary industry in over 45 Alberta communities. Of those, 12 communities are deemed forestry dependent.

10:50

Now, the hon. minister of advanced education has indicated, again, in a briefing I had with the hon. minister and his officials, that there was widespread consultation regarding Bill 27. Perhaps the

hon. Member for Peace River, the government whip, can confirm to the House in committee if any of the 45 Alberta communities where forestry is the primary industry were consulted regarding this consolidation into this one big megafund for R and D. Does Bill 27 suit the needs of the Alberta forestry industry?

Every member of this Assembly, I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairman, hopes that the forestry industry makes a quick recovery and that we get back to business as usual. We all recognize that many communities and many workers rely on this for their livelihood, and investment in research and development in the forestry industry will certainly help that economic recovery. Again, I'm concerned that the Alberta forestry institute will be treated as a little sister. I could be totally wrong, but I certainly hope that it would not be ignored. I'm not implying that little sisters are ignored in family discussions or family matters.

Now, as I understand it, two years ago close to \$4 million was invested in the Alberta Forestry Research Institute strategically in the areas of the resource management centre and fibre conversion technologies. I would like to find out more details on the fibre conversion technologies, but in the time that I am permitted, I doubt if that's going to be possible.

Certainly, when we look at this institute and others, we've got to be confident that the good work that these institutes do is not going to be swallowed up in this megaconsolidation that the minister is proposing here.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, at this stage of the discussion at committee, I would ask that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report progress on Bill 27. I do believe we've actually reported the other two already.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 27.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 44

Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

(continued)

[Adjourned debate May 13: Mr. Hancock]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. For clarification, we're on the amendment?

The Deputy Speaker: On the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. This is the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that, certainly, Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a second time because the bill has not been subject to sufficient consultation with teachers and school boards. I couldn't agree with the hon. member more.

I got up this morning, and I was reading in the newspaper where the chairperson of the Edmonton public school district 7 had suggested that this legislation certainly was not necessary or that the parental opt-out section was not necessary. Then you go around the province and you look at other newspapers and publications, and school officials are also indicating that if they had our jobs here this evening, they would support the hon. member's amendment to Bill 44. [interjection] They perhaps will.

I'm going to quote a gentleman from a recent edition of the *St. Albert Gazette*. I believe it's dated May 6 – it could be May 8 – and I apologize to the House and the members if I have the date wrong. The board chair – and this is why I think we have to support the hon. member's amendment – for the greater St. Albert Catholic schools, Mr. Dave Caron, states regarding Bill 44, "It's almost a sledgehammer approach to what I'm really not aware is a major problem." [interjection] That's very powerful, and if the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere doesn't think that is powerful enough, this is another quote from the same individual: "It's unreasonable to assume that teachers have to get bogged down every time they want to touch on a topic." This is, again, from the board chair for the greater St. Albert Catholic school system.

Now, we do know that the School Act already allows parents to opt out of religion classes and requires educators to respect a diversity of opinion. This is also according to Mr. Caron. He is also concerned about how teachers could be hauled before the Human Rights Commission. He also fears an end to impromptu classroom discussions, and this is the teacher chill that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre had talked about earlier, I believe, the chill in the classroom.

The Catholic chair is not the only individual that has concerns. The same concerns were echoed by Gerry Martins, board chair for the St. Albert protestant schools. Mr. Martins had this to say regarding Bill 44: "We have no reports that it's not working and that parents are dissatisfied." He's referring, Mr. Speaker, to the School Act. He goes on to say, "Why do we need legislation that now puts it into another bill, another arena?" Now, those are two individuals from St. Albert.

The Alberta Teachers' Association president, Frank Bruseker, called the opt-out section utterly unworkable for teachers and argued that it goes against Alberta Education's own guide, which states: "Studying controversial issues is important in preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society."

Now, those are some of the individuals that have expressed a great deal of concern, and this amendment would deal with that matter and would deal effectively with their concerns.

11:00

Ms Blakeman: I thought this was five minutes.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. You're absolutely right.

Now, I have one more point, Mr. Speaker, and this is stated by a St. Albert resident who heads the institute for sexual minority studies at the University of Alberta. That individual indicates that the opt-out clause represents a slip back into the 20th century at a time when

the province should be moving beyond tolerance towards celebrating diversity, and that individual was Kris Wells.

Ms Blakeman: It's a guy.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

Now, those are comments from four individuals. I think those four individuals, if they were present here tonight, if they were members of this Assembly, would give consideration to this amendment because in light of the political firestorm that's surrounding this bill, I think this is the right thing to do. Let's have sufficient consultation with teachers and school boards as to precisely how this is going to work, what sort of resources, if this bill became law, would be needed by school boards across the province to try to implement this.

Mr. Mason: It's a firestorm.

Mr. MacDonald: It is a political firestorm.

Mr. Mason: And I'm just a kid playing with matches.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Well, I'm not going to go there, but I am going to urge all hon. members at this late hour to please consider this amendment. I think it's the right thing to do with a very, very poorly drafted bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments to one specific point in the amendment. The amendment reads that this bill not be read because it "has not been subject to sufficient consultation with teachers and school boards." I just want to focus on one single issue concerning school boards, and it relates to what is in section 9 of the bill, which proposes adding further paragraphs, and there it contemplates notice to parent or guardian.

My concern, which I would like to get on the record – and maybe later on it can be addressed; I don't know – is that there is a genuine complication for schools to give the notice that is proposed here. How I would imagine that notice would need to be given to fulfill this particular paragraph of the act is that – and I'm quoting here largely from the bill – wherever there are "courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act," then notice has to be given to parents.

If you're thinking, say, of a school that goes from K to 9 and has going at any given time and in any given grade classes on world cultures which deal with religions, or perhaps it's a separate school board and there are religion classes, or perhaps there are issues or classes that one way or another deal with sexuality, I foresee a significant administrative complication with giving those notices and

then in getting them back. I can see somebody in the school office, which is already a very busy place, having files and files of paper and trying to keep it all straight or perhaps having to build databases so that we have to notify parent X in grade 2 class B, and we have to notify parent Y in grade 4 class X, whatever. It just feels to me like we're creating a bit of an administrative nightmare here, and I don't believe that that sort of consultation has occurred with the schools or with the school boards.

Of course, if you multiply that by the hundreds and hundreds of schools in the province, this feels like we're building a very complicated bureaucratic system. Frankly, if the schools fail to do that, then there's apparently a genuine risk of being taken to the Human Rights Commission, and of course there are real costs which are going to take resources away from the classroom or else are going to require further spending by the government.

Mr. MacDonald: Schools with site-based budgets.

Dr. Taft: Yeah, some school boards have site-based budgets, so resources are going to have to go to this from somewhere else.

I don't believe – I could be corrected – there's been consultation with school boards on the practicalities of this bill. I'm just zeroing in, because it's late and people want to get going, on that one particular issue, but that alone makes me feel that this is a sensible amendment and that, gee, you know, maybe we should just let this bill even sit for the summer and that we can let some of these issues percolate and come back in the fall and maybe make some amendments that streamline it or adjust it or address some of these issues.

I will be supporting this amendment, Mr. Speaker, because I think it's right on the money. Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 44 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We are back on the bill now. Any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, does the hon. minister wish to close debate?

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to close debate on second reading of Bill 44. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:09 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, May 14, 2009

Issue 41a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 14, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very special person, someone who was a former member of this Assembly for 11 years and as so did a terrific job serving his community and his province. He also did a fantastic job raising four terrific kids with my mother. I would ask my father, LeRoy Johnson, to please rise and receive the familiar warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some 58 enthusiastic grade 5 students from the Webber Academy school in my constituency of Calgary-West. This is a class that makes an annual visit to our Assembly, and I know it's a class that both the Member for Calgary-Foothills and myself are very proud of, a school we're very proud of in our constituency. They're accompanied today by teachers Mr. Ash, Mr. Mondaca, Ms Ferguson, and Mrs. Webber and by parent helper Mrs. McCurdy. I think they're seated in the public gallery. I would ask them all to rise and have members give them an enthusiastic welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a group of 26 people from the Edberg Countryside Christian school. There are 19 students in grades 8 and 9 and one teacher and six adult helpers. The teacher is Steve Penner, and the adults with him are Andy Friesen, Trish Friesen, Menno Siemens, Nelda Siemens, Kerry Baerg, and Rachel Baerg. I believe they're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 17 visitors from the Radway school in my constituency. There are 13 grades 5 and 6 students accompanied by group leaders Darlene Kuzik and Sandra Moschansky and parent helpers Tammy Kuefler, Randy Prockiwi, and Corine Wilchiw. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. One is a group of people who are sitting in your gallery. There were I thought five but I maybe only see four people who, along with the other people I'll introduce, are here to celebrate Norwegian Independence Day, which I'll speak to in a few minutes. They are Mr. Wayne Nordstrom, the president of the Sons of Norway Solglyt Lodge and his wife, Joyce – if they wouldn't mind standing as I call their names and remain standing – Mr. Roger Bruce, treasurer of the Solglyt Lodge; Mr. Ivar Traa, the former honorary Norwegian consul general from Quebec, visiting from Montreal; and his son Olaf Traa of Armena. I was looking for Mr. Lloyd Reed, of the Ronning Lodge in Camrose, but I don't see him there. I'd ask that this Assembly give them the warm traditional welcome.

There are also a host of other people of Norwegian descent in both galleries today who are here to celebrate with us. I won't attempt to name them all, but I'm very pleased to welcome them all here. I should single out my wife, Mardell, though, because tomorrow is our 33rd anniversary. If they would all rise and receive the welcome, please.

The Speaker: Just how big a diamond does one get for the 33rd anniversary?

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very dedicated and inspiring public servant whose innovative work on Speak Out, Alberta's student engagement initiative, was acknowledged on Tuesday at the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, Edmonton region's recognition dinner. Jennifer Keller, director of student engagement at Alberta Education, is the winner of the first annual Institute of Public Administration of Canada, Edmonton region's new public servant award of excellence. This award recognizes Jennifer's tremendous attitude towards work and learning, her commitment to providing consistently excellent service beyond the scope of her usual role and responsibilities, and her drive towards improving the public service. I'd ask Jennifer Keller to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome and thank you from this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is, indeed, a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly today the grade 9 class from l'école Beausejour in Plamondon. We have 16 students visiting together with their teachers, Claude Lamoureux and Étienne Vaillancourt. I had the opportunity to take a photo with them along with the Minister of Employment and Immigration. They are having a great day in Edmonton touring the Legislature Building. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. We welcome you to Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special person in my life who served the last 27 years of her life in the career of law enforcement, protecting both the citizens of Edmonton and later the citizens of greater Victoria on Vancouver Island. Her work as an undercover police officer had her tediously infiltrating

organized crime gangs and crime rings, often putting her in very dangerous situations. This lady would pursue and harass and persecute those who preyed on the sick and the vulnerable. Often the most cherished in society, our children, would be the targets of these ruthless criminals. Most recently, up to her retirement, she supervised a highly specialized and passionate group of undercover police officers within the child abuse and youth section on the island. As a sergeant she was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's medal of valour for outstanding service on the assignment. Best of all is the fact that this lady just happens to be my sister. She is here today, somewhere up here under cover. I'm not too sure where she is, but I think she's with the students of Webber Academy. I'd ask that my sister, Barbara Webber, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk about the commitment the government of Alberta has made to assist low-income seniors and persons with disabilities. I have received phone calls from constituents and people have stopped on the street to say thank you. It is very encouraging to have constituents – is this introductions? I don't have any guests to introduce.

The Speaker: Well, that is very unique. You are not on any other list that I have.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a very, very great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful woman whom I've known for a number of years, Lorna Thomas. Lorna is a documentary filmmaker. She is joined here today by Kern Goretzky, who is a broadcaster for Access television. But, really, the star of today and of tomorrow is Ken Thomas, her brother. Ken is an activist, an athlete, and the subject of the documentary *Catching My Breath*. I'm going to do a private member's statement later describing Lorna's film about Ken and his participation in the Masters Games. But in the meantime, Ken would like me to remind all of you that May is Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month. I would like to congratulate them all on the broadcasting tomorrow, May 15, of Lorna's and Ken's documentary on Access television. I would ask you all to please rise or signal your acceptance of our welcome to the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Norwegian Heritage

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've already indicated, we have many people in the galleries today who are proud of their Norwegian heritage. We have actually the largest number of people of Norwegian descent in Canada living here in Alberta. My informal survey indicates, too, that we have 17 former and nine current MLAs who are of Norwegian descent. We're actually using this occasion today – we're a few days early – to celebrate the 17th of May, or syttende mai, to recognize the country of Norway and its independence from Sweden. Now, a former MLA from my area, Gordon Stromberg, who is actually of Swedish descent but lived at New Norway, was fond of saying that syttende mai was really a celebration by the Swedes for having finally gotten rid of the Norwegians. I would suggest that's a bit of revisionist history.

The real reason we are celebrating, though, is to recognize our ancestors, our people who came here, many of them at or just before the turn of the last century. In that sense the story of our ancestors is the same as many other groups from many other parts of the world. There is a lot of similarity. It may be a generalization, but these people all were probably from underprivileged classes in their own countries, and they came here on a quest for political and religious freedom, economic opportunity, and educational opportunity for their children.

These new Albertans may have had little in terms of worldly possessions, but they had great hopes, they had a strong and abiding faith, and they had a huge work ethic, and that stood them in good stead as they built their communities. They built schools; for example, Camrose Lutheran College, which is now the Augustana faculty of the University of Alberta. They built many communities, communities like Bergen, New Norway, Viking, Valhalla Centre, Camrose, which for a time was known as Oslo, Bardo, Vang, and Armena, which was originally Thordenskjold.

I just want to point out, if you'll indulge me, that the staffs on the outside of this door have the reeds that are bound together, and it's that binding together of all of these groups that makes Alberta strong.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. That's a very hard act to follow, but let me see if I can match that.

Catching My Breath

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow is the first broadcast on Access television of Lorna Thomas's documentary about her brother Ken Thomas, entitled *Catching my Breath*. It's not easy to make a film, never mind to get it screened and then to nail a broadcaster, so I really want to celebrate Lorna's artistry and her tenacity in getting the documentary this far. It has already been nominated for two different cinema awards. Please watch for it at 8 o'clock tomorrow, Friday, the 15th of May, on Access television.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, tenacity runs in the family. Ken has cerebral palsy, and his tenacity has carried him through a lifelong fight for inclusion and independence, for housing, for home care, for education. Not surprising to those who know him, he's also a winning wheelchair athlete and a fierce competitor on behalf of the Alberta and Canadian cerebral palsy sports associations in the '80s and '90s. The film shows his battle to participate in one more race being held in his hometown of Edmonton during the 2005 World Masters Games. *Catching my Breath* witnesses his heated e-mail correspondence to convince race organizers to let him race his way, which is racing backwards in his wheelchair, and his family, friends, and volunteers all get in on this. I'm not going to give away the outcome. You will have to watch and see for yourself.

I do want to extend my congratulations to Ken Thomas on his many victories on the track and in life and a big cheer to Lorna Thomas for her wonderful film. Many thanks to the support of her brother Bryan and family and for the great folks at Access television, including Kern Goretzky.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Okay, hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, go.

Support for Seniors and Disabled Persons

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise today to talk about

the commitment the government of Alberta has made to assist low-income seniors and persons with disabilities. I have received a number of phone calls, and people have even stopped me on the street in my constituency to say thank you. It is very encouraging to have these constituents make these comments.

They are thankful because the government has increased the maximum monthly benefit through the assured income for severely handicapped program and the funding to address the increase in client caseload. This year's AISH budget of \$709 million allows us to increase the maximum monthly living allowance for AISH recipients by \$100 per month to \$1,188 per month.

I'd also like to highlight this government's ongoing commitment to low-income seniors through the Alberta seniors' benefit program, which supplements federal benefits by providing monthly cash benefits to low-income seniors. As a result of this budget presented to the Legislature, approximately 6,000 more seniors will be eligible for the Alberta seniors' benefit. In addition, those that qualify under this new income threshold will receive up to an additional \$40 per month for a single senior and \$60 a month for a couple.

I'm proud to be a part of this government that is making a difference in the lives of those who most need it. We define ourselves by how we treat the most vulnerable in our society, and by this definition I think each and every Albertan can be proud of what this government is accomplishing on their behalf.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Lois Hole Day

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has been very fortunate to have had many fine citizens serving as the Queen's representative in our province. This morning in St. Albert we honoured one of Alberta's and St. Albert's finest, Her Honour the late Lois Hole, 15th Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta.

Lois Hole became well known in the late '50s and early '60s for her generosity to patrons of the family market garden on the edge of St. Albert. She would always add a few extra carrots to everyone's purchase. This was a defining characteristic of Lois. She always went that extra mile, adding those few extra carrots in whatever she did. In fact, she was even known to add a few extra gems when she read the annual Speech from the Throne.

This small market garden evolved into Hole's greenhouses, a business that attracted customers that came from far and wide not just for the produce but for the friendly gardening advice and the hospitality that was part of every visit.

Lois was very interested in education, children, and libraries, which led her to serve on local school boards, the Athabasca University Governing Council, and as chancellor of the University of Alberta. She was named to the Order of Canada in 1999.

We all know her very well as our 15th Lieutenant Governor. Lois was very special to all of St. Albert and all Albertans and, in fact, everyone that she met. As the queen of hugs Lois broke through traditional social barriers. As a woman of the earth Lois was always very down to earth in her approach to issues. Whether they were school board, civic, or political issues, she always took a very practical approach and she always took the high road.

The city of St. Albert has declared May 14 Lois Hole Day in recognition of Her Honour. A sculpture was unveiled this morning in St. Albert, which will initially stand in front of St. Albert Place until a suitable location is available in Lois Hole provincial park. The intention is that when the interpretive centre is constructed on Big Lake, the sculpture will be relocated at a suitable location near

the interpretive centre. This sculpture by Barbara Paterson is a fitting tribute to a great lady who brought honour and grace to our province and to the city of St. Albert. In a few years everything will come together when the interpretative centre is completed in Lois Hole provincial park.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Surgery Reductions

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, no matter how the minister of health spins it, the Royal Alexandra hospital has cut surgery in response to pressure from this administration. Right now the issue, though, is not budgets; it's not dollars. It's about people, people who have a right to an honest, straight answer from the Premier. To the Premier: now that the administration has forced these cuts on the Royal Alex, how much longer will people be expected to wait for elective procedures like hip, knee, cataract, and hernia?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the board has received an additional \$550 million in operating funds – that's about a 7.7 per cent increase to the Alberta Health Services Board – and they're now working with health care providers in the province to try and work within the money that was given to them. At the same time there was a substantial increase to the medical profession, a billion dollars over the next three years. As to the detail of the plan I'll ask the minister to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier explain the rationale that reducing surgery will strengthen public health care and reduce wait times?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the House before, we have quite a challenge before us, and that is to protect a publicly funded health system for the next generation and the generation after that. At the rate of increases that we've seen in health care delivery – and we've been rather fortunate as a province because we did grow our wealth. But in this particular case when we see substantially declining revenues, this year we took money from all other departments and gave health the largest increase to try and maintain services through this province. At the end of the day it's a long-term vision to make sure that our grandchildren enjoy this system that we enjoy today.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's a puzzle to Albertans how we're going to cut efficiency and improve services in the long term. Again to the Premier: how long will Edmontonians expect the Royal Alex's operating rooms to be forced to perform at less than full capacity?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to put on the record in this House that this particular government spends more per capita on health care than any other province in this country. This particular member has said on several occasions that we've got to spend our money smarter. I agree with him. We have to spend our money smarter. We can't continue to do what we've done in the past and expect to get different results. We have a health board. We

have a new CEO, and he is taking the action that will be required to ensure that this system becomes more effective and more efficient and that we no longer are spending 23 per cent more per capita than every other province in this country.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, people and organizations, including the Alberta Medical Association, are saying that these cuts will spread to other hospitals and to other surgery. The fate of many services throughout the province is being called into question. This is unacceptable. To the Premier: will he tell Albertans what percentage reduction in surgery we'll be seeing at other hospitals, including the University of Alberta, the Peter Lougheed, the Foothills hospital in Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: I'd like to answer that question because I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to show me where the Alberta Medical Association has said what he just said they did. He can't prove that, Mr. Speaker. What I would suggest is that, yes, we've got the United Nurses of Alberta saying that, we have the two opposition parties saying that, and we have the odd doctor saying that, but when I meet with the Alberta Medical Association, they are committed to work with us to ensure that we make this system more effective and more efficient for all Albertans.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier, will the Premier tell Calgarians how much reduction in cancer surgery to expect in the coming year?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, again, this particular leader is trying to convey a message that is wrong. We have been very clear yesterday and will be as clear again today: there are no changes to cancer and urgent surgery that are required. We're talking about elective surgery. Until the hon. member will acknowledge the fact that he is — I won't say what he's doing, but until he starts to ensure that what he is saying is consistent with what is fact, then I'm not necessarily going to respond to his questions on that.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the minister, then, despite what he and the Premier are saying, the fact is that Albertans are seeing surgery delayed further and even cancelled. People are leaving the province to get the service they expect. How can he claim to be improving the system when Albertans actually experience cuts?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this particular leader is suggesting that somehow when we've added \$550 million to the system, it's a cut. Now, yes, of course, it's not as much as they would want us to spend because today is a spending day. Tomorrow will be a savings day. We've got to be consistent on this side of the House if we want to have any credibility with Albertans.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Rural Hospitals

Dr. Swann: Well, back to the Premier on the issue of rural hospitals. Mr. Premier, this administration is planning to close specific rural hospitals, it's clear. The plan was approved in the former David Thompson health region. It falls into line with the Premier's Vision 2020. It means cuts for rural hospitals in Alberta. Beyond generali-

ties the fate of specific small-town hospitals, however, is still a mystery to Albertans. To the Premier: why is the Premier so secretive and reluctant to tell Albertans what the plans are for rural hospitals in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the government's decision around the future of health care is very clear. We've released the Vision 2020 document, which lays it out very clearly. We have committed that if there are any changes to what current facilities in rural Alberta are providing, we will discuss that with the communities involved. For this leader to suggest that somehow he and a few of his friends think they've got some kind of secret document here is just ludicrous.

Dr. Swann: Well, there's nothing secret about it, Mr. Speaker. It was approved by the David Thompson health region. Will the minister then tell the people of Rimbey, Ponoka, Lacombe, Innisfail, Coronation, Consort, Sundre, Three Hills, and Hanna if their hospitals will be downgraded to urgent care? They know that's on the block. What is the plan, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Where has this guy been for the last year and a half? There is no David Thompson health region anymore, Mr. Speaker. It's one of the reasons why we went to one health board, so we can deliver equitable health care across the province. It just shows how out of touch he is, using a document that is some year and a half old with a board that doesn't exist anymore.

Dr. Swann: Well, if this administration is already cutting access in the cities and now the plan to cut services in small towns, where are rural people supposed to get their services, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, rural people will get their services where they're getting them today and as long as we're providing that service, Mr. Speaker. This particular member is doing nothing but fearmongering in this particular Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Health System Restructuring

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Senior doctors say that cuts to operating rooms will affect cancer patients, and they say that Alberta Health Services is lying about it to Albertans. My question is to the Premier. Why is your government cutting cancer surgeries at the Royal Alex hospital and then denying it to the public?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're not. Once again, he comes forward with misinformation. The minister yesterday answered the question very clearly, and he'll be able to respond in terms of the level of activity at Royal Alex and all other hospitals in Alberta.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's not enough that this government is cancelling hip and knee and cataract surgeries. Now cancer surgeries will be delayed, and people may die as a result. Again to the Premier: when will you accept responsibility for Albertans' health care and rein in that one-man wrecking crew you call a health minister?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, you know, Albertans have an opportunity here to judge. Do they believe the leaders of Alberta Health Services and this government, or do they believe that member and

the *Edmonton Journal*? That's what we're talking about. There's an issue around credibility here, and I would suggest that Albertans consistently show that they happen to believe this government and not those two over there who do nothing but spread fear throughout this province.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this Premier has unleashed a shock wave of unplanned change that is shaking the very foundations of our public health system, yet he did not seek nor did he receive a mandate from Albertans for these changes. Will the Premier agree to stop wrecking our public health care system until he goes to the people for a mandate? Run an election on cutting cancer surgeries, Mr. Premier. I dare you.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we were very clear during the campaign that our goal was to increase access, also to increase the quality of care, but most importantly to ensure that we preserve this publicly funded health care system for the future. I mean, if that's a challenge that I hear today in terms of the operation of government, I'll take them on any time. First of all, they wanted to shut down the oil sands. Then all of a sudden he reverses his position. He's going to keep it open. Even with a little slowdown and all of a sudden thousands of people out of work, now he's changing his position.

There would be more to come, but I used up my time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

2:00 Capital Power Corporation

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents have questions about a recent move by EPCOR in the city of Edmonton to create a new publicly traded company called Capital Power. They are concerned that this move will affect the price they pay for their electricity and the services they receive. My questions today are for the Minister of Energy. Will this change in ownership affect the prices Edmontonians pay for electricity?

Mr. Knight: In a word, Mr. Speaker, no. EPCOR's retail and distribution services will remain the same. The change actually only affects EPCOR's electricity generation facilities. Electricity prices are determined here in a fair and open, competitive marketplace. The move will not impact electricity services, nor will it have any direct impact on the rates that these Albertans are paying for their power.

Mr. Benito: To the same minister: does the creation of this new publicly traded company change the way the services are regulated?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, no. The province continues to regulate the rates and service levels of EPCOR's distribution customers and the regulated rate retail customers. The creation of another publicly traded company in our competitive electricity market is good news for all Albertans.

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, I've heard a number of concerns about electricity, the regulation, the role of power retailers and so on. Some might think that this latest move by EPCOR is further evidence that the electricity market is more focused on corporate interests than protecting consumers. What assurances can the minister provide that the market is fair and working as it should?

Mr. Knight: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is that all of the work done relative to the generating side and the distribution transmission of power in the province of Alberta is done under the scrutiny of the Market Surveillance Administrator. Private investment is responsible in the province for about 5,000 megawatts of new generation since 1998, an approximate value of over \$5 billion invested in this province, money that was not paid for by the provincial taxpayers. We believe that the system is working.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Provincial Fiscal Policy

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The current recession has shown us that this government's fiscal policy is not sustainable. Whether this recession ends this year or in five years, we must use this experience as an opportunity to take a different path, yet this government has failed to develop either a long-term vision or the fiscal discipline to implement it. To the minister of finance. I'm going to try to get an answer to this question one more time. What specific plans does the minister have to reduce Alberta's reliance on funding core programs with nonrenewable resource revenues?

Ms Evans: I'm sorry; there were at least two points in that question that weren't clear. But if it's relative to the financing of government programs with nonrenewable resource revenues, we have certainly been privileged in Alberta to have such a healthy economy, such a largesse of fortune from nonrenewable resource revenues. We have been operating with the full knowledge and consent of Albertans in the expenditure of those types of revenues not only in the development of infrastructure that supports development but in the support of the families that have lived and worked in the oil and gas industry.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, I said I'd try.

The budget says that the government wants to encourage a culture of savings with Albertans because "it is timely to enhance Albertans' awareness of the importance of individual savings." Can the minister explain the hypocrisy in asking Albertans to be more prudent in their savings when this government is completely unwilling to do it itself?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, our track record on saving is second to none in any other part of the country. Today Albertans have the benefit of over \$10,000 worth of assets on an individual basis if you divided up some 36 billion dollars and ascribed it to every man, woman, and child. Contrast that with Ontario. If they cashed in their chips in Ontario, they would owe \$13,000 for every man, woman, and child. With the heritage fund, the sustainability fund, the assets we've accumulated in the endowment funds, we have shown that, clearly, we are savers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister of health has already floated the idea of upping gasoline taxes by 5 cents a litre to bring in additional revenue, will the minister of finance clarify if this government is going to be increasing the gas tax or not?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have not entertained that type of discussion. We have certainly been looking at the challenges that lie

ahead in this fiscal situation. We've seen some ideas and other things floated that might gain traction, but at this time I have no knowledge of that. What we are looking at, though, is a very serious situation when we have in fact used \$4.7 billion from our sustainability fund. We take that seriously, and our intention at the time that we have recovery is to pay those dollars back.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Financial Literacy Education

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night Junior Achievement of northern Alberta hosted its 29th annual Alberta business hall of fame gala here in Edmonton, a great way to celebrate the accomplishments of two of Alberta's finest entrepreneurs and the work of an outstanding community organization. To the Minister of Education: what are you doing to support the work of organizations like Junior Achievement to ensure that our students learn how to properly manage their money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was, indeed, an honour and a privilege to be at that banquet last night with the President of the Treasury Board to say thank you to Junior Achievement for the great work they do in our community, partnering with our schools to make sure that our children have an opportunity to develop entrepreneurial instincts and to learn financial literacy among other things. JA's economics of staying in school program is an excellent way for grade 9 students, for example, to think about their financial future and make sound financial investments. There were 70 teachers at that banquet last night, representing over 400 teachers across our school jurisdiction who partner with JA to make this possible for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Junior Achievement not only teaches students how best to manage their personal finances but the entrepreneurial skills needed to turn bright ideas into a successful business. What is the minister doing to ensure that Albertans have the skills that will keep our province a hot spot for entrepreneurship?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's important to recognize the role of Junior Achievement and the many members of Junior Achievement who are role models and mentors for students across our system. Every study shows that to encourage students to finish high school, one of the strongest incentives for students who are successful is that they have an adult in their life who has made a difference. That can't always be the teacher. Often it is, but it can't always be the teacher. Sometimes it can be someone from the business community – a role model, a mentor – who comes in to help the students find their passion, learn financial literacy, and improve. We have programs like CTS and others that help with financial literacy instruction, but we really have to thank Junior Achievement and the role models and mentors that go into our schools to help our children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister. The 2009 federal budget includes a plan to establish an independent task force to develop a national strategy on financial literacy. Is Alberta going to participate in this?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. Particularly in this downturn that we are experiencing across the country and around the world, many people have talked about the need for more education on financial literacy. We've got a very good head start on that with the program that Junior Achievement does in our schools and the partnership that it has created with our schools, and again we need to thank them for that. But we do need to do more. We're talking with the Ministry of Finance and Enterprise and some of our colleagues in government about how we can do financial literacy across the spectrum on an even broader scale.

Building Construction Review

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, this government has been reviewing the building codes since last summer. It's now a year later. An increasing number of people are losing their leaky, mouldy condos because the government is sluggish to improve Alberta's building codes. The industry knew three years ago that stucco in Alberta is a problem, and this government is still monitoring, still reviewing, still sitting on their hands. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The minister's review of building codes began last summer. When will the recommendations to improve the building codes be made public?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We did have a consultation last summer. Through the fall and into the winter the report was assembled and was presented to me. At the present time we are reviewing it, and we hope to have recommendations coming forth in the very near future.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is good to hear, but it still doesn't reveal how many condo buildings this government has identified to date in Alberta that potentially have faulty stucco.

2:10

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, what did take place is that we mostly looked at single-family dwellings. We did have consultations with individual families that reported to us that they had concerns. We examined those buildings. We do not have a number of how many buildings were or are affected. We have very good safety codes in Alberta. The discussions, that the hon. member mentioned, that were looking at the consultation very much talked about what needs to happen to ensure that we have good workmanship.

Mr. Hehr: Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, many people in my constituency have had their condominiums built in the last number of years, built in the boom time, and they are really worried about what has happened. When will these new building codes be put into place to better protect homeowners from faulty construction?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. There's not a suggestion from our department that there will be new building codes. We examined the quality of construction to ensure the protection of new homeowners. As I said before, we're reviewing the recommendations. We want to ensure that we do have safe and reliable homes for Albertans to live in. We're confident, as I said before, that the codes are appropriate, and we want to ensure that

Albertans have the confidence in the construction industry that they should have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Postsecondary Application System

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the school year gets closer to an end, caring parents and eager students are looking forward to higher education. Now is the time that tens of thousands of students are looking forward to applying to postsecondary education for the fall program. Alberta's province-wide postsecondary enrolment system should be up and running by now. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why is the new enrolment system taking so long to implement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that everybody is anxious to get ApplyAlberta working across the province. It was a huge undertaking, getting all 21 of our publicly funded postsecondary institutions online, with well over 140,000 students. There has been some pilot testing along with the students to test the usability of the system. The University of Lethbridge conducted those tests, and it did pass with flying colours. By the fall of this year all 21 postsecondary institutions will be expected to be using ApplyAlberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: with the ApplyAlberta system running, will the students from out of the province and out of the country wanting to apply be able to use the system? Will it be the same as it is for Alberta students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Out of province students and international students will be able to use the ApplyAlberta system, and it will be the same as it is for Alberta students. The only difference is that those out of province or international students would have to provide their own transcripts from their high schools or the schools that they're coming from as they would have to do currently. We don't have access to those; therefore, we can't tie them into the system. Alberta students do not have to pay for high school transcripts that are applied for through the ApplyAlberta system. That's one of the benefits of the new system that we're putting forward. Most of the postsecondaries do charge a fee, but there is no fee for ApplyAlberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary question to the same hon. minister. I understand that the ApplyAlberta system is part of a larger initiative called Campus Alberta. Is the framework for Campus Alberta now complete, or is there more work, as ApplyAlberta, to complete it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of years ago we brought forward into this Legislature the roles and responsibilities

framework document, which put the six-sectoral model in place, which is unique to North America, I would say, and we should be very, very proud of that system. It's working very, very well. As we roll out the other pieces of it, one piece being the APAS system and another piece will be the Campus Alberta management of that system, we will bring all of these pieces together, have that support system as a single source of support so that as new projects come along, whether that be space utilization or other things that we can do, we have one place we can go to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Personal Care Aides

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vast majority of the care that is provided in Alberta's continuing care facilities is through personal care assistants. Personal care assistants are not a regulated profession, so there's no requirement for continuing competencies or standard level of training. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: is the minister concerned that the majority of the care provided in Alberta's continuing care facilities is through an unregulated profession?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, my ministry is responsible for overseeing accommodation standards in long-term care and supportive living facilities. Accommodation standards include housekeeping, meal quality, and resident safety. To help ensure that Albertans receive quality continuing care accommodation services, my ministry staff monitor operators for compliance to these standards. If the member would like to talk specifically about qualifications for personal care aides or any other health professionals, she should talk to my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Pastoor: Whoops. That was perhaps a little bit too prepared.

My next question is to the same minister. Do you have any plans or discussions to advocate that PCAs be included in the Health Professions Act and give seniors and their families the peace of mind that they're receiving a standard level of care? I think that would be your discussion with the minister of health.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm familiar with personal care aides. There are courses in our colleges that people take in order to be certified as a personal care aide. I've experienced many good people who are part of this profession, and it's a conversation that I would consider having with the Minister of Health and Wellness later on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm just going to upstage you here, and I'll ask the minister himself. Can the minister answer if there are any plans or discussions that PCAs would come under the Health Professions Act now or in the future? It's very important because in the future we're going to be relying more and more on PCAs to deliver that care.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member actually raises a very good issue. Through the department a couple of years ago we had brought forward some certification standards that we felt would enhance the quality of care that was being provided. As we all know, in the last few years we've had a real challenge relative to finding workforce, especially in facilities like long-term care. So what we've done is

worked with the long-term care providers to relax those guidelines. Now, that doesn't mean to say that the quality isn't the same. Long-term care providers were having difficulty not only attracting people but keeping them and training them. We are working with Alberta Health Services to see how we can make this a certified profession, but we have to work with all of the players in the system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Rural Health Care Facilities

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta Health Services document outlines this government's plans to downgrade 10 hospitals in the former David Thompson health region. Now, this is the heartland of rural Alberta, where people can't risk driving hours to a major medical centre. To the minister of health: what other plans to downgrade and shut down health facilities in other areas of the province are you not telling the public about?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's little doubt this is just fearmongering on behalf of these members and a few of their friends. There is no plan in place to do anything of the sort, what the member has just referred to. What I think she is talking about, I suspect, is the same question that came from the Leader of the Opposition. I don't have the document in front of me, but it sounds to me like it's a couple-of-years-old document by a no longer operating health region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, this plan was repeated in an Alberta Health Services newsletter that was published a month and a half ago, and it outlines the closure of long-term care facilities in Trochu, Bentley, and Breton. Now, this government promised to build up long-term care in the province. Instead, it appears they plan to take long-term care beds out of the communities where they're needed. The minister says that this is an old plan. Will he stand up here today and commit that every facility listed on the DTHR capital plan will be maintained?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, what I will commit to is what I said earlier in the House, that if there are changes planned for any facilities in a community, we would ensure that we have discussions with that community. There are no plans that I'm aware of that follow the path that this particular member is talking about.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, by downgrading 10 hospitals and closing five other facilities, this government would be making health care for over 100,000 rural Albertans less accessible. To review, that's just the one region we know about. Now, there's no doubt this government has similar plans in other rural regions of the province. Rural communities at this point feel as though they're being left out of the process. When exactly will the minister consult rural Albertans about what health care facilities they need in their regions as opposed to dictating what facilities he thinks they can do without?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think I beat the member to the question because that was my exact answer to her last question. I said that we would be consulting with the communities. If she would just quit yipping away there, as she has become accustomed to, Mr. Speaker, she could listen to the answer and she might have heard when I answered her previous question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Rural Physician Recruitment

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm advised by one of my constituency's five local doctor recruitment committees that until recently the province provided incentive funding or a relocation allowance to attract doctors to rural areas of the province. This is a valuable program, and they are concerned that it may have been eliminated. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can he tell my constituents: has this program recently been eliminated for rural doctor recruitment?

Mr. Liepert: Finally, we have a question from a rural member who actually has real concerns about rural health care, not some wannabe rural member from across the way. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what funding the hon. member is referring to, but we continue to provide dollars through our trilateral agreement with the Alberta Medical Association through the rural, remote, and northern program to provide financial incentives to physicians to practise in rural and remote regions.

But I do want to add that physicians do not work for government. Physicians make their own decisions as to where they want to locate. I think it's very important for communities to do whatever they can to ensure that they make it easy for physicians to locate in that community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another community working very hard to keep their emergency room services open, and they are concerned that we will pay a doctor from another town significantly more money to do an ER locum, yet we will not offer that same amount of money to incent a local doctor to cover extra on calls at the local emergency room. Can the minister tell us: is that accurate? If so, why do we do that?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don't believe it is, Mr. Speaker, because my understanding of how the locum service works is that locums are paid equivalent to what a permanent physician in that community would be paid. Now, where the differential may come in is that, obviously, if it's a locum, it's someone from outside the community, so there would be expenses that that individual would incur, and that would obviously have to be paid for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some rural hospitals have empty wings or pods, areas we maintain yet are sitting empty. We are also as communities trying to provide incentives to get doctors to come and practise in our rural areas. My constituents would like to ask the minister: why do we not provide these empty hospital spaces at a reduced rate or no rate to general practitioners to house their clinics in our hospitals that are underutilized?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, finally a constructive suggestion on how we start to fix situations in rural Alberta. I think that has some merit. Each one would have to be looked at on its own by Alberta Health Services, but I would suggest that if it makes sense, we should be looking at that. At the same time, I can guarantee you that when we do that, we'll hear all kinds of screaming over here for closing down rural hospitals because they'll be exaggerating exactly what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

All-terrain Vehicles in Parks and Protected Areas

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow is the official kickoff of the 2009 camping season. To date, due to the lack of proactive government policy and enforcement a small minority of irresponsible off-roaders have caused millions of dollars of damage in the Ghost-Waiparous, Indian Graves, and most recently in the McLean Creek area. Government inaction has simply moved the destruction around. Due to the increased camping registration costs in a growing number of campgrounds, more families will be driven to wilderness random camping, where much of this destruction has taken place. To the Solicitor General: how far ranging will the RCMP and sheriff support be for SRD and conservation officers this weekend?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity asks an excellent question, certainly a question that's a concern of many Albertans. Based on, you know, what the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development said yesterday, he's going to have, I believe, over 280 officers out patrolling those areas. I can assure this member that our sheriffs and the RCMP will also be patrolling the surrounding roads to ensure that proper vehicle registrations are in place and will be monitoring the liquor control act as well. We believe we have a good handle on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. That's reassuring. For the last number of years conservation officers have been stretched very thin. This added support will be very much appreciated. I'm hoping that this increased presence will reach out into the wilderness areas to offer 24-hour security responsiveness.

Again to the Solicitor General: will the vehicles of irresponsible off-roaders be seized if they have caused destruction in undesignated trail areas?

Mr. Lindsay: What I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that we will utilize the legislation that's in place to the best of our ability to ensure that these wilderness areas are not abused.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think a tough-on-crime approach in the rural areas, particularly wilderness, would be welcomed.

Again to the Solicitor General. Yesterday the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation indicated that there would be a temporary liquor ban in only eight of Alberta's hundreds of parks and protected areas. Given that the overconsumption of alcohol is at the heart of most campground confrontations, will you be reviewing the liquor policy and enforcement support in campgrounds?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I believe the minister responsible for parks indicated the steps that we're taking this weekend, quite similar to the steps that we took last year. They have created the results that we were expecting. We're not looking at or considering a total ban of alcoholic beverages in Alberta's parks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Crime Prevention Initiatives

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've all seen and heard media reports suggesting that crime in Alberta is on the rise. Gangs seem to operate without any fear of getting caught, and every day brings new stories of more crime and violence in our cities and towns. This government has introduced a number of initiatives to help prevent and reduce crime so Albertans feel safe, but crime prevention also requires a partnership between Albertans, police, and government. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister tell us what his ministry is doing to help prevent and reduce crime in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This hon. member knows that this government does have a plan and is taking action to ensure that Albertans are safe in their homes and communities. We've added more police officers. We will continue to do that. More probation officers, as well, will monitor those that are out on release. We've launched a new program that targets chronic, repeat offenders. We have four new integrated gang enforcement teams that will be taking to the streets of our cities and province over the next month or so. We also have a province-wide gang reduction strategy that's been developed. A new grant program is providing \$60 million to support programs in our communities. We are moving ahead to ensure that our communities are safe.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what can individual Albertans do to help share the responsibility for preventing crime in their own neighbourhoods?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, crime prevention works best when it's a community effort involving residents, police, and all levels of government. When a neighbourhood experiences a problem, often all it takes to fix it is one person to get involved. Then others come on board, and great things happen. We encourage all citizens in our province to get involved by being vigilant and to take action to reduce crime.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: where can Albertans get the information that they need to help them become effective partners in crime prevention?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of programs and educational materials available for Albertans who want to take an active role in preventing crime in their communities. The ministry's website offers practical information on how to organize community crime prevention activities and tips on how Albertans can protect themselves, their neighbourhoods, and their workplaces. Crime Prevention Week ends this Saturday, but crime is a reality all year long. I encourage all Albertans to continue working with their neighbours and the police to prevent crime in their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

2:30

Bitumen Royalty in Kind Program

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Royalties on oil sands are very price sensitive, and when prices are low, royalties almost disappear. When those royalties are paid to the government in the form of bitumen instead of cash, then when prices are low, the flow of royalty in kind bitumen will slow to a trickle. My question is to the Minister of Energy. How will this government establish local upgrading through the bitumen royalty in kind program when royalties can drop to such a low level?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the questions that the hon. member opposite raises are questions that are all predicated on a snapshot in time that's about three months long. The vision of this government relative to this resource for the people of the province of Alberta spans 40 or 50 years, and the amount of time that we're talking about relative to this resource and the wealth creation that it will provide for Albertans is a much longer time horizon than a three-month snapshot from someone's public document.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am just trying to get at the policy issue here when we have such wild swings in the production. A good bitumen royalty in kind program, I think we agree, could be a useful tool for stimulating Alberta-based upgrading, but it is a very unstable tool. Right now it's very low. Last year it was very high. Who knows, next year? Again to the Minister of Energy: what measures will the government introduce to ensure greater stability in bitumen supply for local royalty in kind upgrading?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, I think that if we go back and take a look at what the provincial government did relative to this business kind of in the mid-90s, took a look at a specific framework, a generic regime to allow for the investment and increase in production of bitumen for the future of the province of Alberta, no one – no one – in those days would have expected the tremendous amount of investment and the tremendous uptake relative to production of bitumen in the province of Alberta. Right now we do about 1.2 million barrels a day, and that will increase over time.

Dr. Taft: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Well, reaching the government's objective of having 70 per cent of bitumen upgraded in Alberta is going to be tough. It's a stretch target. With so much upgrader and pipeline construction surging along in the U.S., it's going to take some kind of dramatic step from this government very soon, or it's going to be too late, and we'll end up, in the Premier's words, shipping topsoil from the farm. Back to the same minister: is this government prepared to consider a regulatory requirement on producers to upgrade a per cent of bitumen here in the province?

Mr. Knight: Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, the situation, of course, with respect to bitumen royalty in kind and the royalty structure that we have in place is that bitumen royalty in kind, as the member opposite very well knows, is the subject of ongoing debate relative to how it will perform for us in the long term. What I will say is that the government of Alberta and this government under the current administration will not overcommit supplies to any project for the province of Alberta or the producers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Marketing of Agricultural Products

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are currently some advertising campaigns, especially in local newspapers, rural newspapers, and some on air. These campaigns are being paid for by producer associations, and they are showing opposition to some government initiatives related to agriculture. My question to the minister of agriculture: what do you plan to do to address this?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the focus is on the organization itself rather than on a successful future for the producers in the industry. It is also unfortunate that producers' money is being spent on this when it should be supporting initiatives that create a better future and growing industry for producers. We are not focusing on the negative. We are focusing on new initiatives, research, new increased market access in order to create a more profitable and competitive future for the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of these organizations are actually saying that making check-offs refundable might be the end of these organizations' existence. My question to the same minister: what are you doing to prevent this from happening?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, nine other commissions operate very successfully in Alberta. They are able to represent their producers very effectively. For these commissions their membership base is engaged, and the commission is responsive, and it's positive. You know, there's a saying that comes to mind: if you think you can or if you think you can't, you're probably right. These commissions will survive and they will prosper if they turn their attention to ensuring the future of the industry and their producers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Minister as well. My final question to the same minister: are there really new markets and opportunities for Alberta's livestock and meat industry around this world?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, there certainly are. We've recently opened new markets offshore, and we're trying to get a foothold into the European market. We're now in Hong Kong and we're in Taiwan, which are great strides into the Asian market. If we can provide these markets with what they want, we will be more competitive in the global marketplace and have more customers, which will put more money, certainly, into the pockets of Alberta producers. For producers ALMA is working. The strategy is working. It will continue to work and it will continue to prosper as long as we work together.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Groundwater Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The point of collecting data is to understand an issue and then make decisions to either benefit or to reduce harm. The province's own report states that the government can't make good decisions on groundwater and aquifers because it doesn't have enough data. In other words, it risks making bad decisions. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. How can the minister know what the acceptable amount of

water that can be diverted from aquifers is if he doesn't have the data?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. That's precisely the reason why we've identified learning more about the connection between groundwater and surface water. How the groundwater aquifers contribute to surface water, and vice versa, is critical as we go forward and deal with what will inevitably become a decision that needs to be made at some point in the future. I can assure the member that that point is not today. We don't have the huge stress that we anticipate is going to come in the future. At this point in time there is plenty of time for us to gather the information, have that information in place so that we can make those appropriate decisions in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: why does the government consider damage to aquifers not relevant in situations where there are no other identified users in the immediate vicinity?

Mr. Renner: I don't think I agree with the premise of the question. I'm not so sure where the member gets the idea that the government considers damage to aquifers not to be relevant. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the reason why we engage in the work that we do. Damage to anything, clearly, is relevant. It's a question of determining what is the impact that we have on anything related to the environment, be it aquifers or be it surface areas, and determining what is an appropriate level of impact and what is the point at which that impact becomes something that we need to address.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'll send the minister the quote. It's from government documents.

Final question to the same minister: is the sparse population in northern Alberta the reason why the government accepts high levels of risk in groundwater contamination when approving water allocations?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, there are various types of groundwater that we deal with. There are water allocations in northern Alberta that are dealing with saline sources of water, deep well sources. There are sources of water where water is in contact with bitumen, where there are some natural contaminants that are located within the water, and then there are groundwater sources that would be more traditionally associated with what you would encounter in southern Alberta. All of those various sources and realities have to be taken into consideration when making decisions with respect to allocation of groundwater.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today. In a few seconds from now we'll continue the Routine.

2:40 **Members' Statements** (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Jennifer Keller

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased and honoured to rise today to recognize a young, passionate, and dedicated member of Alberta's public service. She was introduced to us earlier today by the hon. Minister of Education for her role as

director of the Speak Out Alberta student engagement initiative, to engage Alberta's youth in an ongoing province-wide forum on education, and as the recipient of an IPAC award.

Over the last 50 years, Mr. Speaker, IPAC, or the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, has been advancing excellence in public service through learning, networking, and celebrating the successes of public service. Jennifer Keller received the Edmonton IPAC new public servant award of excellence to recognize and showcase her significant achievement in driving and succeeding in fulfilling a challenging government mandate. The inspiration for the Speak Out initiative came from the February 2008 throne speech, when government announced it would strengthen Alberta's education system by establishing a youth advisory committee to provide a fresh and youthful perspective on learning.

This past year Jennifer has successfully engaged youth from across the province, and on May 4, 2009, the Minister's Student Advisory Council on Education was officially formed. Over the past eight months Jennifer has criss-crossed the province, visiting 37 high schools to engage students and gather their opinions and ideas on education. Asking for students' input and taking action on their ideas will move us toward creating more actively engaged citizens and a stronger education system in our province. One student's mother wrote:

My son returned home last night after having the "best time of his life" at the conference. He is super motivated, and unbelievably positive about what he learned and experienced. Thank you for hosting an excellent conference for the kids.

As a parent of two children, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty amazing to have your teen motivated to get involved and motivated for success. This speaks to the outstanding work that Jennifer Keller and her team have done on behalf of Alberta students. Thank you, Jennifer, for your dedication.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Rural Communities

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans have the largest representation in this government, including the Premier, since the Socred days. They rightfully expect that their issues will be heard. But ever since the election this government has abandoned their needs in so many areas. They've attacked small producers and favoured large corporate farmers. They've abandoned hog farmers, who are in crisis. They've broken many promises about rural health care. The Peace region is just one example of a region that is being ignored by this government, with broken promises about building a new regional hospital in Grande Prairie while in Beaverlodge the hospital may be closed altogether. This region is not alone.

Small family-owned farms are struggling to compete against the large corporate farms that are favoured by this government. Producer associations that support small farmers are being weakened while this government spends public money to lobby against the Canadian Wheat Board. Most recently, the hog producers have been left stranded by this government's lack of a plan for H1N1 flu. It isn't enough for this government to attend photo ops and say that everything is just fine. The farmers need assistance and a plan, and they need it now. What about the people of Rimbey, Lacombe, Ponoka, Coronation, Consort, Sundre, Three Hills, Hanna, Innisfail, Castor, Beaverlodge, Athabasca, and others whose hospitals are now under threat of closure?

The social and human impact of this lack of commitment to the very rural communities who helped elect this government has yet to be determined. So much of our provincial pride stems from our rural identity, and we celebrate it every day. It's time for this government

to stop ignoring the needs of Alberta rural communities and start fulfilling long-awaited promises.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, do you have a tabling?

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two e-mails from Albertans concerned about the amendments to the human rights act in Bill 44. Lyndia Peters is concerned about the bill's effect on teachers and the public education system. Zoya Svitkina is concerned that postsecondary institutions will have to require students who did not learn about evolution at the secondary level to take remedial science classes before entering the regular program.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk Assistant: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Groeneveld, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, responses to questions raised by Dr. Taft, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; Ms Notley, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; and Mr. Webber, hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills on May 4, 2009, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Architects Act Alberta Association of Architects annual report 2008; pursuant to the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta annual report 2008.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, response to Written Question 11, asked for by Ms Notley on behalf of Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government House business for the week of May 25, with government business commencing on May 26.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday evening at 7:30 under Government Bills and Orders we anticipate being in Committee of the Whole on Bill 27, Alberta Research and Innovation Act; Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); and Bill 45, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009.

On Tuesday, May 26, in the afternoon we anticipate dealing with second readings, including some of Bill 20, Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 26, Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 29, Family Law Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 30, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 31, Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 32, Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act; Bill

35, Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 41, Protection for Persons in Care Act; Bill 42, Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009. In the evening at 7:30 under Government Bills and Orders we would anticipate dealing with bills 20, 23, 24, 26, 35; Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 52, Health Information Amendment Act, 2009, presuming it's been reported back by that point.

Wednesday, May 27, in the afternoon we would anticipate being in Committee of the Whole on Bill 28, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 29, family law; Bill 30, traffic safety; Bill 31, *Rules of Court*; and Bill 32, public agencies. At 7:30 in Committee of the Whole we anticipate dealing with Bill 34, Drug Program Act; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 41, Protection for Persons in Care Act; Bill 42, Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 28, in the afternoon we anticipate dealing with third readings. There is a long list of third readings. Obviously, we won't be able to deal with all of them: bills 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 52.

The Speaker: The House will sit on the evening of Monday, May 25, if I heard correctly, for government business. Okay.

Hon. members, before we go further, might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. It indeed gives me pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very renowned builder, an entrepreneur, and a very consistent supporter to the community of Edmonton and Alberta. Greg Christenson and his mother are in the members' gallery. He has been the past president of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. He's with the Home Builders' Association. If I could ask the two to rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, I am also honoured to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very upstanding and exceptionally united, solid Alberta family. If I could please ask the guests to rise when I introduce them. Firstly, I would like to introduce the mayor of Lac La Biche county, His Worship Peter Kyrilchuk, who is visiting the Legislature today with his wife, Alma, and their three daughters and one son; the Shultz family from Lac La Biche – if you could remain standing – the Lane family from Airdrie; and the Vandervalk family from Claresholm. If we could give them the traditional warm welcome for all coming from different parts of Alberta to unite here today to watch this Assembly.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 37**Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 37, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009. The Alberta Corporate Tax Act is generally amended every year, and it's to ensure that Alberta maintains a fair, equitable, and competitive tax regime. The support received at second reading of this bill is greatly appreciated, but there are some points raised by the opposition that I would like to discuss.

A concern was raised that we are amending a section to legitimize claims in the oil and gas industry for companies that were breaking the law because of the industry's misinterpretation of the program legislation. I'd like to point out that the transactions in question were not structured to avoid the Alberta royalty tax program parameters. Exempting these transactions from their restricted resource property rules ensures that companies that met the policy objectives of the program and the spirit and the intent of the program when they drilled a new well will indeed receive the benefits under the program of which they truly are deserving. The industry's general misinterpretation of the existing legislation did not preclude individual companies from receiving program benefits when the policy objectives of the program were met.

With regard to the scientific research and experimental development tax credit, the proposed legislation does not change any parameters of the program introduced last year. Proposed amendments will correct several minor technical errors in the legislation and clarify administrative rules for the program. For example, the assessment of the tax credit or the credit is generally later than the assessment of other taxes payable. Therefore, the proposed legislation provides a separate reassessment period for the credit.

I encourage all members of this House to give their full support to Bill 37. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments we just heard from the Member for Athabasca-Redwater. They are useful to us in addressing this bill, which is a bill that we're inclined to support.

I wanted to comment in particular on one thrust of the bill. As far as we can tell, most of this bill is pretty much housekeeping. The bill does address one issue around the Alberta scientific research and experimental development tax credit, and I just want to comment generally on that and the need to continue to do things that stimulate the development of research and development in this province. That's a full range of initiatives, including things like a tax credit, granting, providing direct support through universities and colleges and the Alberta Research Council and those kinds of organizations. So I am heartened. I think we're all heartened to see that any issues that could be causing friction or confusion around a tax credit for research and development are being addressed.

I, just by coincidence, was reading earlier this afternoon a report indicating that the level of research and development investment in Alberta is actually relatively low by some measures compared to most other provinces. In the long term – if I've said it once, I've said it a hundred times – decades from now Alberta's future is not going to be built on oil and gas or agriculture or the existing pillars

of the economy. It'll be built on something new, and we don't know what that is, but we can be certain that whatever it is, it's going to depend on terrific education and on an ongoing, stable, generous, and far-sighted support for research and development.

This bill is just one little, tiny part of filling in that picture. But, you know, the little bits add up to a large whole, and I am hoping that this little bit in this bill will contribute to stability and prosperity for Alberta's future by supporting further research and development.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat. I think that's probably it from our caucus.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 37? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 37 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 38**Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well thank you, Mr. Chairman. A moment ago when I was commenting on the previous bill, I spoke about the need for a stable, reliable, far-sighted, generous strategy in relation to research and development. Exactly that same approach needs to apply to the development of tourism. This bill and the bill that we just voted on are both components of building the longer term prosperity of this province and securing Alberta's future from the day when our fossil fuel wealth diminishes. I think we need to be moving aggressively on that.

3:00

I want to just reflect briefly, Mr. Chairman, on the history of tourism development in this province. You know, an easy place to begin would be the establishment of Banff national park, when the Canadian Pacific Railway first went through Banff and discovered the hot springs there. I suppose that in many ways Banff remains the keystone of Alberta's tourism development, but shortly after that – and we're talking well over a hundred years ago – you had Banff, then you had Jasper, and you had the rise of things like the Calgary Stampede, which, as everybody knows, is the greatest outdoor show on earth, I think it's called.

Those kinds of initiatives provided a foundation for Alberta to build a remarkable tourism sector. In the 1970s and through the 1980s this provincial government understood that and worked hard to advance the interests of tourism, understanding that it was a diversifying of our economy, that it was a relatively green industry, that it was interesting, that it didn't just provide services to people who visited here but that all of us benefited. So we saw a number of initiatives under tourism in the '70s and '80s because tourism was a priority for this government.

That included the development of attractions like the Tyrrell museum in Drumheller, the Remington Carriage Centre in Cardston, and the Reynolds-Alberta Museum in Wetaskiwin and support for a

whole host of festivals, a lot of which arose in the late '70s and the very early '80s, things like the original Fringe festival in Edmonton, which now has taken its place as one of the largest festivals of its kind in the world, the Folk Festival in Edmonton, Jazz City, and so on. All of those were part of a movement that the government of the day led in enhancing tourism. It was part of a larger strategy to make tourism a central part, and probably it culminated with the Olympics in Calgary in 1988, which, of course, was an enormous international success.

The reason I bring that up is that through the '90s and until just a very, very few years ago this government seemed to almost abandon tourism. There was confusion around the mandate for tourism. The tourism initiative got passed back and forth around industry groups and the government. It wasn't clear who was in charge. There were issues around how it would be financed. In the last couple of years there seems to have been some progress on that issue, and I think this particular bill, Bill 38, will help in consolidating some of that progress and help in addressing some of the confusion.

I want to drive home the point here to all members of this government that tourism, like research and development and like so many other things, needs government to take a far-sighted, predictable, stable leadership role. Government needs to work with partners, needs to be there year after year after year. There's no point in spending vast amounts of money over two or three years and then abandoning it.

I hope this government understands that tourism can grow significantly for Alberta and that it's a good employer, that it's a good cornerstone for this province's economy, that it's something that can be enjoyed by people who live here as well as by visitors, and I really hope – really hope – that this government sticks to it when it comes to a far-sighted tourism strategy. I think this bill is part of that thinking, so we will support this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 38, Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009.

[The clauses of Bill 38 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 39

Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to present Bill 39, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill implements the tobacco tax rate increase announced in Budget 2009. Support received at second reading of the bill is greatly appreciated, Mr. Chairman, but there were some points raised by the Member for Calgary-Currie and other opposition members that I would like to address.

The government believes that the tax increase strikes a balance between encouraging individuals to quit smoking while not increas-

ing illicit activity, black-market tobacco smuggling, and theft. Even with the increases in tobacco tax rates Alberta's tobacco tax is comparable to the other western provinces after factoring in other provincial taxes such as a provincial sales tax.

The opposition asked: how much of the tobacco tax is used for the tobacco reduction program? The collection of tobacco taxes is an important component of the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy as higher tobacco prices continue to be one of the most effective ways of encouraging individuals to quit using tobacco. Tobacco tax revenues are not dedicated. Rather, they flow into the general revenue fund. In general, the government is opposed to dedicating revenues to specific initiatives primarily because it limits the government's ability to direct dollars to its highest priorities.

Proposed amendments to the act will also strengthen the tobacco tax framework and support the province's safe communities initiative. The measures outlined in Bill 39 will help curb illegal tobacco trade by increasing the economic consequences of doing so. By way of background, the act imposes a tax on tobacco purchased in Alberta. It also prohibits various activities and requires industry participants to register in order to import or sell tobacco in Alberta at the wholesale level.

Concerns were also raised regarding the severity of illicit tobacco and the extent of smuggling in Alberta. It is estimated that Alberta could be losing tobacco tax revenue of \$12 million a year to illicit trade. Illicit tobacco trade has a number of negative impacts. Not only does it erode the tax base; it also puts an additional burden on the health care system by dealing with the impacts of tobacco which has not met health standards. In addition, the proceeds of illegal tobacco could help fund gangs and crime.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has reported a steady increase in the presence and seizures of various types of illicit tobacco, especially black-market cigarettes. The equivalent of one carton of cigarettes sells on the street for \$30 to \$40 compared to the retail price of \$75 to \$90 for legitimate cigarettes. These black-market cigarettes do not have the Health Canada warnings.

The opposition also wanted to know how Alberta compares to other jurisdictions. Other jurisdictions in Canada are facing similar and even worse problems with illicit tobacco trade. The RCMP released a report last year on this problem, noting that

linkages between the illicit tobacco market and organized crime have increased exponentially over the last six years. While tobacco is a legal substance that is consumed . . . a growing number [of Canadians] are purchasing contraband tobacco without realizing the negative impact it is having on Canadian communities and Canada's economic integrity

and also on their health since the contraband tobacco may not meet tobacco standards.

Amendments are needed as the current Tobacco Tax Act does not effectively prohibit unwanted activity, and prosecutions are becoming difficult. To help ensure that tax is properly paid and that only legitimate participants are involved in the industry, the amendments strengthen prohibitions and clarify their application. The act also broadens seizure powers and adds the ability to seize joint bank accounts in proportion to ownership for those in default.

The opposition Member for Edmonton-Strathcona also raised concerns around seizure and the ability to search without warrants. Officers in this province have long been able to seize vehicles without warrant where the officer believed that the vehicle was used in contravention of the act. Officers have always been restricted by the test that they must believe on reasonable and probable grounds that a contravention of the act is being or has been committed. The wording was also brought up as a concern. The term "reasonable and probable grounds" is generally considered equivalent to "reasonable grounds," and the Supreme Court of Canada has said that it is essentially the same thing. The change of wording does not

affect the bill, and personal residences are still exempt from search and seizure without warrant.

3:10

This bill also adds a temporary seizure power for items that are used in contravention of the act within the previous 60 days. Temporary seizure provisions can act as an additional tool to fight those conducting illegal tobacco trade. Since these measures are targeting illegal activity, legitimate participants should not be affected by these measures. Since seizure provisions vary among provinces, it is difficult to draw a direct comparison. However, many jurisdictions have some form of seizure power.

For example, Saskatchewan's legislation contains the ability to seize a vehicle if it contains a certain amount of unmarked tobacco. Although the offences are different in each jurisdiction and it is difficult to draw a direct comparison, Alberta is on the low end for the amount of the associated fine. To bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions, fines are doubled and civil penalties tripled for unlawful possession or sale of tobacco on which tax has not been paid.

A late-filing penalty for tax collectors will be imposed. Changes also enhance requirements for tax collectors and make reporting obligations more transparent.

In summary, these proposed amendments raise the tobacco tax rates, clarify prohibitions, and make enforcement more effective and more efficient. In addition, providing more serious penalties will act as a greater deterrent to prohibit these activities.

I encourage all members of the House to give their full support to Bill 39. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I just want to briefly raise an issue of potential hypocrisy or conflict of interest with regard to the raising of the tax on tobacco. While I support raising this tax, a sin tax, which can then be potentially plowed back into general revenue and eventually make its way proactively to support health issues, I would like to know if we still have over a \$600 million investment in tobacco in our heritage trust fund. If we do, I would consider that, particularly at this time, a very unethical investment.

I would also express concerns that given the government cutbacks or failure to fully fund expansion of the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary or sufficiently support the Cross cancer centre in Edmonton, the funds that have been received through this tobacco raise go specifically to fight the diseases which tobacco caused in the first place. Rather than having that money disappear into the black hole of general revenue, I would like to see this money specifically targeted.

If there is a member here who can answer the question as to whether we are still investing in tobacco companies, this is very important because down the line there's talk about us joining other provinces in pursuing tobacco companies for the health effects that they have caused on our citizenry. I would look forward to having that matter cleared up. I know it has been the case in previous years. Is it still the case?

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I notice we have some guests in the gallery, and I'll just take a moment to explain what we're doing here. I have no idea if they're tobacco users or not, but just for your information we are in the final minutes of debating and then voting on a bill that will make tobacco use more expensive. It's

actually quite a far-reaching bill. It isn't just about adding a few cents to the cost of tobacco. It addresses issues around search and seizure, law enforcement. It's quite a significant bill.

I appreciated the comments from the Member for Lethbridge-West, who spoke about the need to balance raising the price without making it so high that we encourage growth in the black market for tobacco. I know that has been a problem, particularly in Ontario and Quebec, where there are easier channels of smuggling across the border to the United States because of the placement of some Indian reserves, but it is an issue we have to watch here as well. We can only put it so high before we create a black market that becomes, actually, a bigger problem than the one we're solving. That's an important point.

I would like to see this government in its initiatives to reduce tobacco use also rely on other strategies. At some point I'd be interested to hear more about what those are. I know there have been restrictions on how tobacco can be marketed. I'd like the government to continue to tighten that up.

I'm particularly concerned that the one segment of society that is seeing a significant growth in tobacco use, particularly smoking tobacco, is young women. It's a bit of a mystery to me, except I think the marketers have got it into the culture of young women that it's cool, it's fashionable to smoke.

Ms Blakeman: Thin.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Maybe it goes with being thin. I'm not sure. That's what the Member for Edmonton-Centre is suggesting, that smoking can be an appetite suppressant. I'm sure it's linked to many things. I think we as a government need to particularly target those people because if they start when they're 16, 17, 18, they're going to be smoking for decades and decades and then becoming very ill.

That leads to my next point, which would be that I'd love to see a more systematic and routine reporting from this government on the costs to the health care system of tobacco use. I'm sure those would be calculated if the minister of health moves forward with taking tobacco companies to court, which I hope he does. It would be terrific in the government's reporting somewhere to try to count year by year how much money the health care system is having to spend because of tobacco use and report that publicly, and we could see whether it's rising or falling.

I also noted in here, of course, the specific mention of cigars. Probably about four years ago, after one significant increase in tobacco taxes, there was a very aggressive lobby – this was when the former Premier was in place – to single out cigars and to reduce the cost of cigars. I found myself wondering: why are we doing this? Is there some kind of cigar industry in Alberta that I don't know about? In fact, it was the result of some very serious lobbying by former senior officials of this government. I don't need to name names, but a couple of them were well paid here. I think that was one of the issues that led to the creation of the lobbyist registry, which we're still waiting to see implemented. It's a kind of interesting history around tobacco and lobbyists in Alberta.

Finally, my last comment is around the strategies of the tobacco industry to shift tobacco use from smoking to smokeless tobacco, which I think is nefarious. I would encourage this government to continue to work very hard to address all forms of tobacco use: chewing tobacco, snuff, all forms of smokeless tobacco as well as cigars and cigarettes. Tobacco is one of those few legal substances that no matter how you use it, even if you use it according to directions, it's bad for your health.

I'm happy to support this bill. I think our caucus will get behind it. The Member for Calgary-Varsity and I have both raised a handful of issues. We understand that this is an ongoing strategy, and for

each move we make as a government, the tobacco industry makes a countermove. But I think we are as an Assembly sending a clear message that, you know, ideally, tobacco use would be eliminated in Alberta. Let's hope that day comes along, and we can look back and think of this particular moment as one of the steps toward that day.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

3:20

The Chair: Do any other hon. members wish to join the debate?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 39, Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

[The clauses of Bill 39 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 40

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered relating to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will speak only briefly to Bill 40 in Committee of the Whole on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. As he stated during debate on second reading, the proposed amendments will accomplish two objectives. First, they will ensure that Alberta's dividend tax credit is administered in accordance with existing Alberta government policy and that the status quo is maintained in light of changes to the gross-up factor applicable under the federal Income Tax Act on dividend income. If we did not adjust the formulae in our tax act, we would in effect be double-taxing Albertans on the portion of their dividend income. Secondly, they will align the eligibility for tuition credits to reflect the way our tuition credits for foreign students are currently administered. This is required under the Alberta-Canada tax collection agreement. The objective of the change is to ensure that one does not have to obtain 90 per cent plus of one's income from sources in Canada in order to claim the tuition credit.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all hon. members to support the movement of Bill 40 on to the third reading stage. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Again, I will keep my comments brief here. As the MLA whose constituency includes the University of Alberta I just want to make particular note that in this bill it does address the eligibility for the Alberta tuition credit. To the extent that that makes it easier and more affordable for students to attend postsecondary education, I think that's a terrific idea.

I noticed that this particular amendment removes the requirement that a student has to obtain 90 per cent or more of their income from sources in Canada in order to claim the tuition credit. That raises a question for me, which perhaps the sponsoring member or somebody on the government side may be able to answer when we get to third reading: will that have any effect on foreign students studying here in Alberta? Will that make it easier for them, or does it have any

impact at all? Or possibly does it have any impact on students from Alberta studying internationally?

I have no idea about the answer to those questions, Mr. Chairman. But because the University of Alberta and I'm sure the University of Calgary and others are wanting to become bigger players on the global stage and attract students from around the world to add to their mix, particularly at the graduate level, I'd be curious to know if this particular amendment will have any impact whatsoever on that. If it does have an impact, I certainly hope it will be a favourable one because I think attracting more students from abroad to Alberta and encouraging more Alberta students to study abroad would be a great thing.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 40, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

[The clauses of Bill 40 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report bills 37, 38, 39, and 40.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 37, Bill 38, Bill 39, and Bill 40.

The Deputy Speaker: Would those hon. members concurring in the report please say aye?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 47 Appropriation Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 47, the Appropriation Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Finance and Enterprise and her department – her deputy Mr. Bhatia; in fact, all of the deputies – Mr. Ramotar in Treasury Board; and certainly Mr. Brian Manning, chief of deputies, and all the CFOs that were very, very diligent in putting together this budget and the thousands of hours that were spent by our staff in compiling the document that allows us to deliver the programs and the services that are important to all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, today around the world governments of all stripes are trying to balance the issues of the situation that we're in right now, and in many ways they take different methods to try and achieve the same result. I think it's quite obvious that there is no absolute right or wrong when it comes to determining what a budget can be. I think the opposition has done a very good job of pointing out some of the priority differences they may have, and certainly internally the government spends a lot of time working on the different policies and struggling to find the balances in the spending. So I would want to also thank the House for the work they've put into it. I think the people of Alberta are being well served by the budget that's being voted on today, and I want to thank all hon. members for their participation in the budget debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Those were very nice opening remarks from the President of the Treasury Board. I have a number of issues that I want to raise. Unfortunately, I was trying to get on the list yesterday for Committee of the Whole, but thank you for the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 47, which is, in essence, the budget bill, the Appropriation Act, 2009.

We had a new structure for debating the main estimates, which is what the budget is, but that's the parliamentary language for it, this year that I really didn't like. I didn't make any secret of that. I think, having gone through it, that some of the concerns that I had and my colleagues had did not manifest themselves. But two of my major concerns going in did, and they've resulted in my having to try and raise questions now.

3:30

One of the two biggest issues for me was the doubling up of the committees. As an opposition member that's a critic for two portfolios and who has a very active and interested and engaged constituency, I couldn't be in two places at one time, yet I needed to be in two places at one time. I really find that the structure of running two full committees each night for the budget debates was an impossibility for me, and it placed an impossible burden on me and my colleagues in the Official Opposition. That actually manifested itself triply because we're assigned to various policy field committees and are expected to be there and were there.

We also often had to be in a different room as the Official Opposition critic for a given portfolio. Then we have our own constituent concerns. They want us to raise questions. So I will raise some of the questions I wasn't able to just because I couldn't get into both committees at the same time, and I think that's a real flaw.

I understand that the government has got 72 members and they're going to get what they want, but it doesn't make them a government for life. I didn't know whether to be amused or horrified when I heard one of the rural members talking the other day in the Electoral Boundaries Commission debate about the tyranny of the majority over a minority. I mean, that's exactly what our lives are every day, and this was a perfect example of it. The government doesn't want to spend time in budget debate, and they made darn sure that I couldn't either. Frankly, I resent that because there was work I wanted to do, and I couldn't do it.

The second issue around that process was the allocation of how much time was spent. Essentially, the opposition most nights could manage to get about 80 minutes of debate on a given portfolio, a given ministry. At times we were debating hundreds of millions of dollars a minute. I mean, it's an impossibility. I don't think it's transparent, I don't think it's accountable, and I don't think it serves the citizens of the province well.

If the government is proud of its budget and they believe that it

will stand up to scrutiny, then let it stand up to scrutiny and do what the other provinces do, which in one case is to allow unlimited debate on a bill until all questions are asked and everybody is ready to move on. In some of the other provinces with a committee structure for examining estimates there's a 20-hour limit of time that can be spent on a given ministry. That's in Quebec. I think in B.C. it's 10 to 15 hours. In Ontario it's 10 hours per ministry. We got one hour and a total of three hours if you include the third-party time and the time for the government members.

I don't understand in a lot of cases what the government members were doing. There were a few that clearly had prepared and were asking reasonable questions and others that were reading from a script. I just don't understand why we were doing that. I just don't understand that. If the government believes that it'll stand up to scrutiny, it should let it stand up to scrutiny, and we should take as much time as we need.

So the areas where I had questions. The Minister of Justice: I understand that there's been a request for a review of all programs under legal aid and that there are some statutory requirements of what Legal Aid must look after; you know, difficult custody battles and children that have been taken as wards of the state and various things that they're required to look after under family legal aid. My concern is: what is the expectation for what will happen to those programs that aren't statutorily covered if the money runs out or all the time has been allocated based on those statutory requirements? What is supposed to happen to the rest of those programs?

As I'm sure the minister is aware, coming from a vigorous law practice in this province, women more than men, I would argue, need that assistance. They have in some ways two barriers that they face when trying to seek a remedy in the court, and one is monetary. Often those that are involved in that system are working on a wage basis, and to appear in court or to be required to appear in court repeatedly to answer and argue, for example, a custody battle is a financial hardship aside from the money that they actually may have to be paying out for a lawyer. So assistance through a legal aid program is particularly essential to them.

I find – it certainly was the truth in the past, and I'm not seeing that much of a difference now – that a way that some male partners can continue to control and abuse female partners is by bringing them back into court over and over and over again. There's a need there for access to justice in more than one way. I was really concerned about what would happen to that program under this review and what the end expectations are for it.

I'm switching departments now to Housing and Urban Affairs. I'd like to get a clear answer of how the money for homelessness really has been reallocated. There was money taken out of programs and then a new hundred million dollar program set up, but that's over 10 years, so that's \$10 million a year, which for what needs to happen there and the expectations of those programs is, frankly, a drop in the bucket. This is not to say – where's the President of the Treasury Board? – that I'm insisting that more money be spent, but I think we need to be really careful on that one.

I'm still trying to figure it out, and I'm not a stupid person. It looks to me like there was a shell game of money coming out of a couple of areas around homelessness and affordable housing and a blurring of lines there. We just managed to get to the point where everybody did understand the difference between that, and now it appears to me that money has come out of both homelessness and housing funds and has been shifted to this 10-year homelessness program. So I would like some real clarification about that.

I've also tried to seek answers through some of the other large agencies that are working with this, and they're not able to help clarify for me. Often the opposition is the last one to get the answers on things, so I've developed various end routes to try and go around

and get information through organizations that are working in the community. They didn't really have a clear enough answer given to them to be able to provide it to me. So I'm just wondering what exactly is going on there. I think it would be better if we actually knew. Even if it's bad news, I'd rather know it because then I'd know what I'm dealing with, and maybe I could go looking for another way of working with this. Right now it looks like it's \$100 million, but I don't think it is. I'd like to know how that's affecting the programs that the money came out of.

Under Children and Youth Services, which I think ran at the same time as Housing and Urban Affairs, I'm wondering what our numbers are on violence against women and their children. The province stopped publishing the turn-away rates from the shelters several years ago because, frankly, the rates just kept doubling and doubling and doubling. I think at the point that we hit the 11,000 turn-away rate, they stopped publishing the numbers. Let me clarify. That doesn't mean that women didn't get some kind of assistance from the shelters. They did, and the shelters try very hard to do that. But it's not the same as actually getting admitted into a shelter and having the immediate on-site and consistent assistance and programming and counselling and support that's available.

If you're a woman that arrives at a shelter without children in this day and age, the chances are pretty good that you're going to be turned away. You'll probably never get a spot. Obviously, the priority is to women and children, and you can understand that, but it does mean that we've left a whole bunch of women out there without support. They can get access to an outreach program, but you know it's not immediate. It's not there 24 hours a day. It's not in the next room. It makes a difference because we end up with a lot of women returning to a violent situation because they don't have the financial resources to just walk away from it and go somewhere else. So I'm interested in what the turn-away numbers are.

3:40

I'm also interested in how the funding is working out for support for the shelters at this time. There was an increase, but I continue to hear out of that sector and other sectors that there continues to be a wage gap between what they're able to offer their employees and equivalent positions in government social services. The vacancy rate, I think, is almost directly correlated to that wage gap.

Further to that, I would like a clear undertaking by the government and by the minister to explain what the government expects or how the government expects to benefit from moving to a request for proposal system in the social services sector. I mean, in a number of areas there is only one provider or possibly one provider large enough to do it and maybe one small provider.

Expecting these, again, in many cases volunteer-based not-for-profits to jump through the hoops of writing up an RFP and then being, according to criteria – and some of the stuff I'm seeing is making my hair stand on end, you know, where if somebody gets a contract to look after troubled youth and the youth don't improve under their care, the organization won't be paid. Well, I don't know how that's an incentive for an organization to continue to take in troubled youth when it looks like they could do a whole bunch of work and not get paid for it. This drive, this unholy belief that business is best and the free marketplace always produces the most amazing results just is not true when we are trying to work with having a large number of the NGO sector provide services that the government doesn't wish to. They're getting a heck of a deal. I have serious reservations about where this is going to take us.

Unfortunately, in my opinion, the social service sector is too good. I think there are times when they should step aside and say: "No, we're not taking that person on our doorstep. No, we're not keeping this program. No, we're not taking one more whatever because the government is not paying adequately for it." But we have people

there who, in their hearts, cannot leave that person on the step and will continue to run a program and take more people in even when they're not getting adequate contractual compensation from the government.

There's something happening behind the scenes there that I think is sort of creeping along at the government's instigation, and I don't like the direction it's going. Let's hear the government's reasoning behind it.

For Employment and Immigration I'm interested in what has been the advancement on the cultural workers strategy that was released under the then Minister of Employment and Immigration, the previous Member for Lethbridge-West. There was an entire study done on cultural workers, and as far as I know, nothing has ever been done with it. I'm interested in where that is in the process. Hopefully, I'm wrong that nothing further has been done with it. Seeing that we now have Conservative cousins provincially and federally, I would have expected that there could have been a better working relationship between the province and the feds on strategies around cultural workers.

It costs considerably less to create a job in the cultural sector than it does in the manufacturing sector or, for example, in the oil and gas sector or nonrenewable resource sector. As we are looking to try and encourage employment of all of our population, you know, the knowledge-based creative sector is where we're supposed to be going, yet I don't see the government investing in that sector at all. So I'm looking for information about how much investment has happened there. What has been the follow-up to that particular policy that was produced by this government specifically around cultural workers?

Just by the by, it would be very helpful if we could actually get the minister of community services to protect our cultural workers that are working in large touring houses from getting the short end of the contractual deal when we have related reselling practices that are going on that end up ripping off our cultural workers – our stagehands, our union members, our artists, backup musicians, and people like that – whose original contract is based on the original ticket price times the number of seats that are in a house.

When we end up with a reselling practice, none of our people in Alberta get a piece of that action. It all goes, you know, in a nanosecond across the Internet waves and ends up landing in the pocket of a shareholder in the States. I would prefer that that kind of practice doesn't go on, because I think the ticket buyers don't appreciate it, but if the government is satisfied to let those reselling practices go on, then, for heaven's sake, could we not get some of that money staying here in Alberta and going to our own cultural workers?

I should mention that in my constituency office I've had a number of concerns raised about delisting of the chiropractic services. It's a significant number of letters that I've had. I haven't brought them all in and tabled them, but suffice it to say that I've certainly had them, and people are very concerned about the delisting of that service.

Of course, I raised the issue of gender reassignment surgery and the cuts there. The specific question I have around that is: when is the cut to the tariff in effect? It doesn't appear in any official document, but the minister did talk about it in media conferences, and then there was a series of questions in question period. The question that I'm now being asked and I can't answer, so I'd appreciate the minister's help, is: when was this in effect? Is this in effect as of the 1st of April? I realize that he said he would cover the people that were already in the pipeline, who had already started on hormone therapy or who were scheduled for surgery and were far enough along. But for those otherwise did this come into effect on the 1st, and where would I find the delisting of the tariff or the

change in the tariff that the physicians would have normally billed for? I just need something on paper, if I can find that somewhere. The minister can send me a note about where I'd locate it. That would be very helpful.

I'm not doing too badly here. I'm going to run out of time again. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, that for the rest of the issues that I was looking to raise here, I don't think I'm going to have time. But I do want to reiterate again my frustration around the lack of time that we spend on the budget debates, particularly opposition getting an opportunity. I didn't have any spare time in any of the debates I was involved in this year.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on Bill 47.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm pleased to be able to rise to join debate at third reading of Bill 47. I believe this is the first time I've actually had a chance to rise on this particular bill. I want to start, of course, by talking a little bit about the process through which we went to discuss the individual ministry budgets. I, too, having had the opportunity in a previous life to work in politics in a different jurisdiction, was, as I've mentioned in the past, quite taken aback at the amount of time that opposition is given to engage in any sort of debate or, more to the point, fact-finding with respect to the budget decisions being made by government. I was intimately involved in estimate debates that went on until the opposition was finished asking questions. That was basically an understanding of how the system was supposed to work, how people, whether they were actually opposition members or government members, were going to keep the government accountable on behalf of taxpayers for these huge amounts of dollars that were being spent.

3:50

It was quite a shocker to discover that, instead, with ministries, many of which were multibillion dollar ministries, we would get in our party between 20 and 40 minutes for each ministry to inquire into the spending decisions, the priorities that went into making these decisions to spend billions and billions of dollars. I mean, it's quite ludicrous, obviously. You know, it really puts the system in question in a lot of different ways.

Nonetheless, that's what we dealt with, so we gamely attempted to embark upon that process and do so in a way that would disclose even the remotest amount of information on behalf of taxpayers. Personally, I had the opportunity to participate in estimate debates for 10 different ministries, typically one night after the next night after the next night, of course with the House sitting during the day between those estimate debates. So, not surprisingly, it was often a challenge to be able to really prepare in a way that would allow taxpayers to get the benefit of any sort of comprehensive oversight of the way in which their dollars are being spent. Nonetheless, we are here today.

We're talking about globally a budget that would allocate spending of \$36.4 billion with expected revenues of \$31.7 billion, such that in this budget we are forecasting a deficit of roughly \$4.7 billion, although I don't think it's actually \$4.7 billion because I do believe that, again, the government brought in an unfinished budget, which is what this budget is, in that they were unable to find a quarter billion dollars of revenue and/or cuts. So it's just sort of this extra deficit floating around unallocated and undescribed to taxpayers, you know, a quarter billion dollars we couldn't quite make work. It seems to me to be a little bit of an unfinished job. That's sort of the overall plan that we're dealing with.

The government, to its credit, does project down the road in terms of what they're expecting. They indicated to us that they were also

expecting a \$2 billion shortfall next year, so somewhere that money had to be found unless, you know, the magical oil revenue fairies started unexpectedly showering the government with happy revenues that they had otherwise had nothing to do with creating.

Anyway, we're in this position where we're looking at this budget. Now, as our party has said in the past, the notion of a deficit periodically where it is needed to carry a province through a period of economic shortfall is not something that we're necessarily going to say is wrong. We've said this in the past, that there is wise, good economic sense to periodically relying on a deficit in the bad times and then figuring out how to increase your revenue and balance things out in the good times. As I've said before, of course, we think the government grossly mismanaged the good times, but that was discussed in a different bill, so I won't get into that.

In this one I just want to talk a little bit about some of the cuts that we observed or some of the priority in spending decisions that, at least, I observed in the course of engaging in estimates debate and some of the decisions for which we have some great concern. I will start with the ministry of health. This is a ministry where we have a tendency to hear that the sky is falling and, for that reason, big changes need to happen. About every three or four years the government rolls out another dramatic set of changes, and they attempt to actually, in a way, scare Albertans into accepting significantly less and into accepting very different models of health care and significantly lower service levels.

There's nibbling around the edges in that respect, and we see that in this budget. We see the start of service delisting – and I have no doubt that it is merely a start – and again delisting, that was not really saving them a whole bunch of money, but it was about starting a process, in our view. So we saw delisting of chiropractic services and gender reassignment surgery. Of course, we delist chiropractic services, a significant preventative benefit, ultimately a long-term savings, I would suspect, to the health care system. And gender reassignment surgery, well, that's just a group that is, you know, easy to pick on. We can do that, and then we can create a precedent of delisting services so that, you know, when we move on more next year, people are kind of used to it. This, of course, all flows from previous directions given to government through previous reports. In particular, I believe, it was the Mazankowski report.

We also have a new drug plan, which, say what you will – we may be doing things more equitably; we may be giving seniors more choice – whatever the language is, at the end of the day the new drug plan this year will save government \$20 million, and it's structured in a way to save it more money every year, so it is about one thing and one thing only, which is transferring services away from seniors and making them pay more for what they currently receive. The numbers don't lie, and that's what it's about. You can dress it up in any other kind of spin, but that's what we're doing. We're saving money on the backs of seniors.

We talked already, of course, at long length about the plans the government has with respect to long-term care. We don't really have the time to get into that much more than we already have except to say that that particular method of saving money is not a good one.

The only other thing in health care that I'd like to talk a little bit more about is the issue of mental health services. I believe that our caucus was able to share with Albertans some pretty reliable information about the state of mental health care services in this province. I believe that we were able to show that it is pretty much a disaster, that we are not providing services at anywhere near the rate that's happening in other provinces, that we have significant regional disparities, not just rural to urban regional disparities but also Calgary to Edmonton regional disparities. Even in places like Edmonton, that, theoretically, has more resources, we still have

nowhere near the support that we should have. This is a huge issue because there are so many cost implications and social and community and health implications from failing to treat mental illness in the way that it should be. We're just not doing a good job in this province.

I was very disappointed to hear, you know, the government suggest that they believe they're doing a good job because of a community anticrime strategy, which is truly just a drop in the bucket. Were this government to actually be taking this issue seriously, there would be a much more significant investment in that area. It's something that is needed because we have a real problem. We have a homelessness plan, which the government claims it's going to spend billions of dollars on – but I'll get to that in a second – and that's just a small example of the cost to the system of untreated mental illness. So I'm quite disappointed to see that, really, there's nothing of any significance in our budget to address that.

4:00

Another area that we have some concerns about I'll just mention quickly. Children and family services essentially maintained its budget in order to stay at a maintenance level after you factor in population increase and inflation. I have said before and I will say again that I don't believe this government is coming anywhere near to doing what it needs to do on the issue of child care. I know there's been a lot of recent talk about: oh, look at all these new spaces we've created. I don't believe that the spaces they're talking about are truly high quality or affordable. The affordability of those spaces remains a very significant problem, and of course many of the spaces the government is counting are not really dealing with the primary crisis area, which is full-time care for preschool children. Of course, the numbers that the ministry has been talking about include a whole bunch of other categories that are not that issue. At the end of the day we're at about half the number of child care spaces for that age group that we should be at, and we are nowhere near providing the number of affordable child care spaces that we should be. So I was disappointed to see that we're not really moving forward on that key priority area.

I also mentioned briefly that I think there's a lot of work to be done with respect to the environment in terms of monitoring, in terms of controlling, inspecting, and ensuring that our environmental resources are protected. Earlier today there was some reference to the fact that we have a long way to go before our groundwater resources become a matter of concern, but I actually don't believe that that's the case. I believe we have studies that show that we could well be at the tipping point in the lower Athabasca region, yet we have nowhere near the resources out there to properly address water quality, groundwater, and surface water usage in that area. I think we are letting Albertans and certainly the people of that area down by not doing a better job there.

Finally, I would like to talk just briefly about the homelessness strategy. Government spent a heck of a lot of time and probably a little bit of money giving itself a lot of credit for adopting a homelessness strategy earlier this spring, but the reality is that there is not one new dollar put into that program. Every dollar going into the homelessness strategy is coming out of other resources which are required to meet the broad spectrum of housing needs in the province. So we take a hundred million dollars out of affordable housing. Affordable housing is designed to assist those people who are at risk, who are housed now but are housed in a tentative way. They need low-income housing, and if they don't have low-income housing, their access to housing becomes vulnerable. We're taking money out of that program to put it into the homelessness program.

Now, you know, I understand that the homelessness program needs money, but at the expense of the next level of the overall

program that we need to put into place to ensure that all Albertans have high-quality housing? That makes no sense. More to the point, what is frustrating to us is to see the government attempt to characterize their action in this regard as something that it's not. If they choose to prioritize homelessness at the expense of other types of housing, that's fine, but be up front and honest about the fact that that's what you're doing.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for question and comment. The hon. member.

Ms Notley: I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 34 Drug Program Act

[Adjourned debate May 6: Dr. Swann]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 34.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved, hon. minister. You spoke to it when you moved it according to our documents.

We continue on the debate. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this bill in second reading. This is a bill with which we have some concerns. There are some parts of the bill which actually make some sense. Let me start out that way for a change.

You know, the bill does move from policy to regulation certain practices with respect to managing our drug programs. Of course, not a big surprise, moving stuff from policy into a legislative framework is always a good thing. As well, it is very possible that this bill, from what I understand, could provide some foundational support for moving towards bulk pharmaceutical buying initiatives. Of course, that too is a good thing and is something that our caucus has been promoting for years and years and maybe even decades at this point.

The concern that we have about the bill, though – and I will try to be relatively brief at this point – is the role that it plays with respect to operating as a vehicle for the recently announced seniors' pharmaceutical plan. As I mentioned ever so briefly in the discussion about Bill 47, this is a pharmaceutical plan with which we have some great concern. We have heard a lot about how this plan ensures equity and availability and choice. As I said, I can't remember the exact communications buzzwords that were used in this particular press release, but as I've said before, I think the key measure on this as a starting point is that this plan saves the government money. It is anticipated that this plan will save the government \$20 million this year, and it is anticipated that with demographic projections being what they are in terms of both the number of seniors and their projected income levels, this plan will ultimately save the government a great deal more than \$20 million a year. It's not really about improving things for seniors; it's about saving money.

How are we going about saving money? Well, no question, one part of the plan and the part of the plan that they'd hoped would receive the most attention and distract people from the other components of it is that low-income seniors are now paying fewer

if not, in fact, in some cases no fees at all with respect to receiving prescriptions. There's no question that that's important. I will say that during the last election, when I was out knocking on doors, seniors would talk to me over and over and over again about how much money they were being asked to spend on their prescriptions. The system that was in place with the \$25 per prescription was very significant and really a problem. Now we've seen that go down to \$15. You know, this is an improvement. The key, though, is: what are we paying for this improvement with? In the long term, the way we put this all together, the one positive thing is that we need to accept all these negative things. Is that a reasonable approach to providing for medical care for seniors?

Let's not be unclear about this: pharmaceuticals and the provision of drugs are medical care. This is more and more how people receive their medicare in our province and in our country. Having fair and equitable and affordable and, I would suggest, universal access to it is critical.

4:10

One of the key points with this plan is that it denies and abandons the principle of universality. We start to make the access to these treatments, because pharmaceuticals are a form of treatment, something that is incumbent upon income and where prices go up and down and you're paying on the basis of income. Well, I'm a New Democrat, and I'm always about, you know, progressive systems, but as far as I'm concerned, the progressive system we should be looking at is a progressive tax system. We should not be loading a bunch of costs onto one particular group in society, in this case seniors, and saying: you guys get to pay for this because you guys have started to be too expensive for the rest of us, so we're going to move that cost over to you. That's essentially what we're doing through this. We're abandoning universality, and we're asking seniors to pay more.

As time goes on, as the demographic projections unfold, seniors will pay more and more and more, and that's what this act effectively brings into play. It is with that in mind that we have some very, very serious concerns about what the act is trying to bring about. Of course, as most members across the way know, we're not the only people to outline those concerns. I suspect that almost all members of this House have received tremendous feedback from seniors in their constituencies and across the province telling them how incredibly angry they are with this plan, and of course it's for that reason that the government had to back down a bit and tweak it. Nonetheless, as far as I'm concerned, it has not been sufficiently well tweaked.

As a starting point we have concerns about this bill and at this point are not prepared to support it. For now I will sit down and allow others to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wish to speak at second reading of the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a second time]

Bill 23

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Danyluk]

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 23?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Very quickly, I want to get onto the record that I am not pleased with this government's accountability in terms of its deficit: \$8.6 billion in unfunded liability; \$10 billion at least, of which \$1.5 billion is Education deferred infrastructure; a \$4.7 billion deficit. Add on another at least \$1.5 billion in unfunded public pension liabilities. That brings the total to \$23.8 billion. We've got \$17 billion as our sort of desperation parachute fund that's supposed to carry us over the next three recessionary years in terms of our combined sustainability-capital fund. We have no accurate accounting.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. It's 4:15. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for third reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:16 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Allred	Fritz	Ouellette
Amery	Goudreau	Prins
Bhardwaj	Groeneveld	Quest
Bhullar	Horne	Redford
Boutilier	Jablonski	Renner
Cao	Johnson	Rogers
Dallas	Klimchuk	Sarich
Danyluk	Knight	Sherman
Denis	Leskiw	Snelgrove
Doerksen	Liepert	Tarchuk
Evans	Oberle	Vandermeer
Fawcett		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Notley	Taft
Chase		

Totals: For – 34 Against – 4

[Motion carried; Bill 47 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until Monday, May 25, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:28 p.m. to Monday, May 25, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to May 14, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]

- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft., adjourned)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)
- 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 27 Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve., adjourned)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft., adjourned)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)

- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 36 Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft.)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft.)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft., adjourned)
- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
- 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft.)

- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft.)
- 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 25, 2009

Issue 42

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 25, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen and all present, we'll now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau. I invite all to join in and participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you some of the best and brightest students in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek who happen to attend Jackson Heights elementary school. They were here last Wednesday, and they had such a good time that they came back again today. I'm delighted to have them here. They had some very interesting questions for me. I'll look forward to seeing them when they get back to their school. I'd ask the students and the parents and teachers who are here with them to now please rise and receive the accolades of the House. Welcome.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I know we are in between the time that they come in, but I thought I'd introduce at this moment a group of grade 6 students from E.G. Wahlstrom school in Slave Lake, which is about 250 kilometres north of here. It's rare that we get visitors, but it's so nice to see teachers take the time to bring their students in. They're accompanied by six adults and their teacher, Jane Zimmer. I'd ask that they stand – I do believe they might be here, but I'm not sure – and that this House give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all of the Assembly students from the Rosedale Christian school in my riding. They are accompanied by teacher Joshua Hunt and parents Mr. Rob Wohlgemuth and Mrs. Monica Wohlgemuth. This very attentive group of youngsters have been here, had a tour of the Legislature. I would ask that they rise and that all of my colleagues give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of special people responsible for the international award winning video *Our Workplace, Our Future*. The video was produced for the 2008 Premier's awards of excellence and was aired at the ceremony last fall. It was a very powerful production that highlighted our employees' contribution to our province and the impact the Alberta public service has on the lives of Albertans. From over 13,000 entries submitted around the world for a Telly award, this Alberta public service video received the highest, the silver Telly. Corporate human resources along with their production partner, Dynacor Media Group, are to be congratulated on this outstanding achievement.

Members of corporate human resources and Dynacor Media Group are in the members' gallery: Mr. John Kelly, Briar McGinnis, Janine Weber, Terri Dorn-Gromada, George Gromada, and Susanne Hunka. In addition to offering our thanks for their participation, we also want to acknowledge how important it is to have the external recognition for our employees within this province. I would ask them to please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Mr. Bradley Moss. Mr. Bradley Moss is the artistic director for Theatre Network. Theatre Network is a society, a nonprofit charitable organization, which operates within the jurisdiction of Canadian Actors' Equity Association. Theatre Network is resident in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. Since its inception in 1975 the nonprofit society has prided itself on presenting plays about Alberta for Albertans and has not shied away from controversial subjects in the process. Mr. Moss just finished directing a very successful play called *Buddy*, which used some visually stunning camerawork and some very different approaches to theatre. It was a very successful play about perceptions of the world as Albertans see it from the centre of a small town. I would like to have Mr. Moss stand up. I'm thrilled that he was able to come spend some time with me. I know that he's looking forward to the excitement of question period. Could you please rise? Help me welcome Mr. Bradley Moss.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that today I do have a guest to introduce. In fact, I have a couple. Sitting in the members' gallery is my constituency assistant, Kathy Holdaway, as well as my STEP student for the summer, Jeff Agnew. Jeff is the former president of the Students' Association of Mount Royal College. He is taking his degree in political science and history and is still a current member of the students' association. Jeff's family has a history of over a hundred years of residence in Alberta. Currently Jeff is also a member of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer. I was hoping that the two of them could please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you 69 students from University elementary school in Calgary-Varsity. The University elementary school is very tightly connected with the University of Calgary and

offers a special observation program for bachelor of education students. We have today 69 student guests, their teachers, and parents. The teachers who are accompanying them are Laura Mills; Chris Blais; Laura Smart, whose children I taught at F.E. Osborne; Patti Acorn; Heather Conellan; and Heather Wolfe. The parents who are helping this large group enjoy the hospitality of the Legislature are Naz Convery, Paul Kim, Rob MacLeod, Jennifer Eiserman, Yongzhang Li, Michelle Rosenberg, Janet Pelzer, and Nancy Bly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw the attention of the members of the House to my 38 very special guests, who departed Beaverlodge at 6 this morning in order to be here today in both the members' and the public galleries. Included in the group is Andony Melathopoulos, president of the Friends of Beaverlodge Hospital. My guests are concerned that this government is failing to respond to the needs of rural Albertans and are here to state their concern over the future of the Beaverlodge hospital. The community wants the hospital to remain an acute-care facility, and they want the building to be upgraded. I would now ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

1:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Four individuals are here with the group from Jackson Heights, and I'd just like to read their names into the record because the list was just given to me: teacher Melissa Bruins and parent helpers Terry Mahoney, Janet Caceres, and Chris Spracklin. If the four of you could quickly rise, we'll rerecognize you. Thank you very much for being here with our students.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Tablings

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our parliamentary system is looked on as one of the best in the world. Engagement that is open and transparent is a facet that's the envy of many jurisdictions.

Last week a tabling was made by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity that was not checked for authenticity but was also defamatory and had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with my job as an elected legislator in this Assembly. I thought long and hard about this and decided to look at this not as a personal affront, even though I believe it was, but with regard to the point of tablings in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, tablings are a function whereby any member of the Legislature can ensure that an item or an event that is germane to the government is on the record. This is also available for anything that is statutory in nature and is relevant to Alberta and Albertans, not to make a defamatory member's statement.

Mr. Speaker, the tabling by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity last Wednesday was neither of the above. This is not the first time that this member has tabled items as a way of making a statement. In fact, you admonished this member many times, including on April 16 and 23 in 2008 and on May 1, 15, and June 6 in 2007 to name a few. If the member was truly interested in helping this individual, how does the process of tabling an e-mail make this happen?

Mr. Speaker, I believe that many tablings are, as I mentioned, neither relevant or of a statutory nature and are about as stupid – I'm sorry; I apologize, and I withdraw that remark. I should have said: as smart as me standing here and asking to table the other half of my cheese sandwich that I forgot to finish last night.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Nagar Kirtan

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On May 17 around 20,000 people attended the Nagar Kirtan in Edmonton. This annual event gets bigger and better every year. The Nagar Kirtan is a Sikh religious parade. The one in Edmonton loops around the Mill Woods area in the month of Vaisakhi, and it takes about four hours to complete. We were joined by Member of Parliament Tim Uppal and my colleagues from Edmonton-Mill Creek, Edmonton-Meadowlark, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Gold Bar, and city councillors. The date of the Nagar Kirtan is one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar, marking the Sikh new year and celebrating the creation of the Khalsa on April 14, 1699.

This parade is celebrated by millions of Sikhs around the world, and most major cities in Canada have a Nagar Kirtan each year as well. This parade is led by RCMP and city police escort cars, an RCMP police band, and Canadian and provincial flags. There were six beautifully decorated floats, and thousands of people participated in this celebration. As this parade continues from one gurdwara to another, some sing Sikh hymns, and others have a good time meeting new friends and sharing the laughter and conversation. There was a lot of youth participation in understanding the culture and the religion, and this parade really united our community.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this parade. Those who organized all the details and floats, the business owners who provided the food and the cleanup all did a great job. [Remarks in Punjabi]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Freedom of Speech

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, freedom of speech is the cornerstone of every liberal democracy in the world. Canadians have fought and died to protect this freedom. In his work on liberty British philosopher and parliamentarian John Stuart Mill wrote, "We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still." Our ability to discuss controversial issues, to offer contrarian opinions, to speak out and defend the rights of even those whom society detests is perhaps the greatest philosophical invention of the human species.

Without freedom of speech there is no progress, no evolution, no ability for society to move forward. Over the course of the last number of years we have seen many cases here in Alberta that have gone before our Human Rights Commission that have stifled free speech, that have stifled the free expression of ideas. I believe this has been an affront to our democracy, an affront to our ability to communicate ideas.

We have seen cases where individuals have published their honestly held beliefs or made comment about religion when exercising their free speech in newspapers or magazines and have found themselves in front of a human rights commission. Accordingly, what I'd ask the government to do is return section 3 of our human rights legislation, the section that deals with free speech, back to its pre-1996 wording to give both individuals and the press gallery alike the ability to express their opinions without the legitimate fear of winding up in front of a human rights commission.

Mr. Speaker, people don't need to be protected from ideas as currently can happen under our human rights legislation. People should be able to express their honestly held beliefs about science, sexuality, religious belief, and other controversial subjects without having a fear of appearing before a human rights commission.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Airdrie Centennial

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 10, 2009, the city of Airdrie will commemorate its 100th year as a community. We started as a small farming and ranching community and have grown into a flourishing city with numerous amenities, opportunities, businesses, and facilities. Although we are approaching a population of 40,000, we still maintain our small-town feel, that draws so many young families, entrepreneurs, and other to our city.

I would like to invite all Albertans to come and visit Airdrie this year, whether it's to see our Pro Rodeo from June 26 to July 1 or our parade on Canada Day, or if you like flying, the Canadian Snowbirds performance is on July 22. Our homecoming weekend and centennial day is on September 10. There are other events posted on our centennial website, at www.airdrie.ca/centennial.

I'm proud of my community and hope you will come and see what a great place my family and I get to live in. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Child Care Professional Awards of Excellence

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, May 22, the government of Alberta recognized nine of the province's best and brightest child care professionals at the 2009 child care professional awards of excellence. These nine professionals contribute to the heart and soul of their child care community, and their talent, dedication, and innovation are essential to the success of child care in Alberta. The recipients of the award this year were Patsyann Sanftl from Athabasca; from Beaumont, Colleen Kwong; Dawn Wiseman from Blackie; from Canmore, Crystal Ryan; from Calgary, Maggie Tew and Helen Cameron; Laurie Knoll and Claudia Murga from Edmonton; and Suzanne Chivers from Namao.

I'm very pleased that our government has demonstrated its strong commitment to the child care sector through the implementation of the creating child care choices plan. Child care professionals are highly skilled individuals who are dedicated to making sure that our children are cared for in safe, stimulating environments. Every day, Mr. Speaker, they provide high-quality care to children and give families peace of mind, knowing that their children are in excellent hands.

I congratulate and thank the people who were mentioned for an award of excellence this year and thank the thousands of professionals working in Alberta who have chosen child care as their career.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By placating certain interest groups at the expense of public education, this administration has made Albertans both angry and embarrassed. Ordinary citizens, parents, teachers, academics, and religious groups have all joined

together to support public education and oppose enshrining parental rights in the human rights code. To the Premier: why is the government unwilling to accept the voice of the majority and protect public education?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill does protect parental rights. We believe that families are really the foundation of our society, and that's what we are committed to.

1:50

Dr. Swann: The Canadian Civil Liberties Association, whose goal is to protect freedoms, states that this legislation will, quote, promote a regime of religious intolerance. End quote. Why is the government protecting special interests at the expense of society?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have listened and will listen as a government. The intention of this bill was never to have undue fear, undue duress put upon any members of the teaching profession, any members of the school board. We have an amendment that we will propose and bring forward tomorrow that will make the wording clear, and to clarify what we intend to do, we will add a section which will state this.

The Speaker: We'll get to that later.

Dr. Swann: Again to the Premier. Our public school system is designed to impart knowledge; it is not designed to reinforce dogma. Why is the government persisting in its attempt to break down this core role of public education?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member didn't listen to the last answer. We have listened to the ASBA. We have listened to the ATA. I've actually had numerous conversations last week with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. They have concerns, and we as a government are listening. We will make some amendments to make sure and clarify the intent of this caucus and this government. We will not put them in any undue circumstances. We will not cause them any undue pain, and tomorrow you will see that.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Surgery Reductions

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier talks about improving quality and reducing wait times yet is cutting the number of elective surgery procedures performed in Edmonton and Calgary and elsewhere. Elective operations are not optional. They are not frivolous procedures. They are medically necessary services, and they relieve Albertans of painful, disabling conditions. To the Premier: does the Premier understand that the consequences of deferring treatment are lost productivity, medical complications, and some elective patients actually becoming urgent patients?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, when this question came up in the House, I did say that we're certainly aware of some of the surgeries that have been delayed, whether it be for hip and joint. We know that people may be living in pain during that period of time, and our goal, of course, is to improve access and the quality of care. The minister may have further detail on what he is planning to do with the situation.

Dr. Swann: Well, does the Premier realize that short-term savings and cutting surgery increase long-term costs?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said numerous times, we are trying to find a balance in terms of ensuring that we have this good quality of health care that all Albertans enjoy, ensure that we sustain it well into the future, and we're working through a very difficult situation. Our revenue stream is down dramatically, but even – even – at the rate of growth that the province saw in its revenue, the costs surrounding delivering health care services far outstripped the revenue increases. We've got to deal with this, and that's why I've been asking all the health care providers to work with the minister and the Health Services Board to find a solution to it.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, right now health reform has meant reductions in services, cutting of surgery, increased wait times that will spread throughout the province. How long will Albertans have to wait to see improvements in this area?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, on the 11th of February of this year this particular member of the Legislature – and I quote from *Hansard* – said it's not “about spending more; it's about spending smarter.” That's exactly what Alberta Health Services is doing within its budget. Alberta Health Services has an increase this year of some 6 to 7 per cent. It has to ensure that those dollars are spent smarter than they have been in the past, and that's the review that's happening right now by Alberta Health Services. But I must emphasize that all emergency and urgent surgeries are not being impacted; we're talking about elective surgeries only.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Federal Financial Aid

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Here we have a government that constantly tells a worried population that we're better positioned to weather this economy than perhaps any other jurisdiction in the known universe. We've got enough to get us through, and those silly opposition politicians are just being alarmist about us not having saved enough. Then we have the finance minister in Meech Lake today asking for close to a billion dollars from Ottawa, including \$200 million in stabilization payments if she gets the chance. You know, it's time for the Conservatives to stop talking out of both sides of their mouth at once. To the Premier: did you do enough during the boom to save for the bust and reduce your dependence on volatile energy revenues, or did you not? Which is it?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, since 1993 this government has not only paid off a \$26 billion debt; we've set aside a \$17 billion sustainability fund. We've put money into endowments in postsecondary education, we've put money into the heritage savings trust fund, we've also spent close to \$40 billion on infrastructure, badly needed infrastructure, and at the same time, the last 10-year period, we made a net contribution of \$117 billion to the capital of Canada, Ottawa. I would think that Albertans did their part over the last 10 years.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, have provinces don't ask Ottawa for stabilization funding. Isn't the Premier embarrassed by this appalling demonstration of fiscal incompetence?

Mr. Stelmach: I think the member has a few things mixed up. He's probably thinking about the equalization fund. The equalization fund is different than the stabilization fund. The way the stabiliza-

tion fund was set up many, many years ago, if your revenue drops, you know, more than 5 to 6 per cent, then you could qualify for the stabilization fund. I would say, Mr. Speaker, that just in the last fiscal period I think the net contribution to Ottawa was something like \$18 billion. Just in the last fiscal period \$18 billion net: that's what stayed in Ottawa. How much is it? I believe the whole national defence budget of the country of Canada is \$17 billion. So we probably could have bought our own army.

Mr. Taylor: Well, that's an interesting concept, and I must go there sometime. But for today, Mr. Speaker, this government is the rich kid that squandered its inheritance, and now it's a provincial welfare bum. Will the Premier commit to using any funding his finance minister does get from the feds, be it health transfers or this embarrassing need to ask for stabilization funding like we couldn't see an inevitable drop in energy prices coming, to fix the cuts his health minister is making to elective surgeries?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the request by the minister is in two key areas. One is the stabilization fund, which is about \$220 million, and the other – and I believe we've been unfairly treated – is about \$200 per capita that should have come to us from the Canada health transfer fund. It didn't come to Alberta, and that's about \$700 million. So between the two that's close to a billion dollars. I think any Albertan that is ill and requires health care is in no way any different than someone in the Maritimes or in Quebec or in Ontario. We're just asking for fair treatment. That's all we're asking for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Bitumen Exports

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When this Premier first took office, Alberta was booming. Now the Premier is going cap in hand to Ottawa for a bailout. Because of this government's misguided policies Alberta is at risk of becoming a have-not province. Instead of the Premier asking for a federal handout, why doesn't he end the export of unprocessed bitumen to the United States and bring the jobs back to Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member is a little behind the times. We're continuing to add value to about 700,000 barrels of bitumen in this province. He's talking about all these jobs that have vanished or have gone to the United States. There are pipelines that are being built. I keep reiterating to him that these pipelines will receive a much higher tariff by moving finished product as opposed to bitumen. So there are things under way to ensure that we keep adding to the amount that we upgrade because we are going to see continued investment in the province. We just had a good announcement today on another project that's been introduced by Exxon, and that will increase the number of barrels that we're producing and also increase the number of barrels that we're going to upgrade.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, right in the Premier's backyard Alberta's Industrial Heartland Association has joined the outcry over this Premier's bitumen blundering. They want upgrading here, not in the United States. This is the Premier who once likened the sale of unprocessed bitumen to scraping the

topsoil off the farm, but under his watch every single upgrading project in Alberta has been cancelled except one. In the U.S. upgrader construction is booming. To the Premier: how long will you keep starving our economy while the Americans get rich upgrading our bitumen?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, for someone that talked about shutting down the oil sands, now all of a sudden he wants to keep everything here and add value to everything. You know, as I've said before, it looks like he didn't read my speeches during the campaign, but after the campaign he's finding them particularly interesting.

We do have a good plan in place to keep adding value to the bitumen that is produced in Alberta. We are endeavouring under the bitumen royalty in kind program, which will have a number of barrels that every Albertan owns that we can add value to. We're looking at other markets as well because I submit to this House that we cannot depend only on one market, the United States; we have to expand and look at other countries as well. So we're doing our part.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows that we never said that we should shut down the tar sands. The Premier is misleading the House.

The Premier's bitumen policy is threatening Alberta's economy. He's not even listening to his own constituents in the heartland who are demanding this government do more to ensure bitumen is upgraded in Alberta. To the Premier: given that Alberta's energy economy has stalled and your finance minister is asking for a federal bailout, why won't you act now to stop the export of unprocessed bitumen to the United States?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're adding value to about 700,000 barrels of about 1.2, 1.3 million production. That's what we've done in the past. We'll continue to do that, but as the production in bitumen increases, we also want to increase the amount upgraded here in the province.

We're working through a number of details. One of them, of course, is doing a cumulative environmental impact assessment because as we load more in the airshed in that particular area, we have to make sure that we're meeting all of our very strict guidelines. We also have to make sure that we have pipeline access and also an ability to ship that product once the value has been added to it. We also have to work with the other industries, the petrochemical industry, that are going to use a lot of the product as a result of bitumen upgrading. There's a lot of work going on, and I feel very confident it will not only increase the amount of bitumen upgraded but that we're going to add thousands of jobs in the petrochemical industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Rural Hospitals

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent reports of several rural hospital closures in central Alberta have set off alarm bells throughout these communities. This would appear to defy all logic. For one thing, there would be no apparent capacity anywhere else for all these patients to go. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness assure Albertans that these rumours are just that, rumours and not public policy?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what the member is referring to is a document that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and a few of his friends had released and

thought they had this revelation relative to rural hospitals. But the author of the working document himself has indicated that if they would have actually contacted him before releasing this document, he could have informed them that this was a working document with the former health region, that has now been deemed not to be appropriate going forward. I know it certainly caused a lot of unnecessary concern in residents of central Alberta, and I would just hope that going forward there would be more responsibility shown in that area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister share at this time: what is the plan for central rural hospitals like Three Hills and Trochu and Didsbury, which has recently been put on pause, which are full to capacity most of the time? The staff are working very hard to meet the needs of their patients.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reasons that many of these hospitals have capacity issues are twofold, I guess. Number one is that we need to ensure that in our acute-care facilities we are treating patients who really should be in acute-care facilities. We need to have a broader view of what our health delivery system should look like. We need to ensure that when these patients are being admitted, they are being admitted into the right facility. But equally as important is that we have the challenge of ensuring that we have the right workforce for those particular communities. That's part of the overall review that Alberta Health Services is currently undergoing.

Mr. Marz: Well, given that the services offered in any health facility are dependent on the level of training and the skills of the individual health professionals such as doctors and nurses, what is the minister doing to attract more of these health professionals to rural Alberta? The need is great.

Mr. Liepert: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the member actually hit on something that I think we have to address: doctors and nurses. What we need to ensure in health care in this province is that all of our professionals are working to full scope of practice. We have highly qualified LPNs who are underutilized. I believe we have many other professions, like pharmacists, who are underutilized. That's the whole initiative that we'll be re-examining through our Vision 2020 document to ensure that the right professional is providing the right level of service no matter where you live in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The parental opt-out clause has not been carefully thought out by this government. The lines that separate discretion and discrimination are not clear cut. Under the proposed changes a child can either be pulled out of a class or stay in the room and not participate. The clause is eerily silent on who gets to decide how a child will be accommodated. To the Minister of Education: if a parent chooses to pull their child from a class, who decides how that child will be accommodated? Will it be the teacher or the parent?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it'll be handled in the same way it's handled throughout schools in this province right now. Under the

mandated policy with respect to human sexuality education parents are notified when what we know as sex ed classes come up, and they have the option, if they wish, to have their child excluded. It doesn't happen very often, but it does happen. When it happens, the school provides another option for the child.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Education: given the shortage of teachers and classroom space, if a child opts out of a class, who will teach them and where will they go?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would have people believe that there are going to be hordes of students leaving classes. That has not been our experience in Alberta, and we don't expect it to be the experience in Alberta.

Mr. Chase: If that is our previous experience, then why introduce Bill 44?

Who will instruct the remaining children when a teacher is busy contacting a parent to pick up their objecting child during a spontaneous class discussion on religion, evolution, or sexual orientation?

Mr. Hancock: It's been very clear in the discussions in the House and the discussions in public – and I think it'll be even more clear in the very near future – that this is not about spontaneous discussions. This is about a mandated curriculum. This is about teaching the curriculum, which includes religious instruction or religion, which includes human sexuality, including sexual orientation. This is not about spontaneous discussion. This is not about what happens in the schoolyard. All of those things are fears that have been raised by people who want to interpret this far more broadly than it's ever intended to be interpreted, and hopefully that'll be clear once this process is done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Immigrant Nominee Program

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta immigrant nominee program launched a family stream in June last year. My question is to the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. We're coming up to the one-year mark. What result has Alberta seen from this family stream compared to others?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are nearing the one-year mark for the family stream, which generated a tremendous amount of interest. Visits to the Alberta immigrant nominee program section on our website have reached over half a million. This interest has translated into action, with another 4,800 applications received under this stream. In fact, on average we receive about 15 family stream applications per day. Processing these applications takes a little longer than other streams, but we have so far processed 279 nomination certifications.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: if the family stream applicants are not required to have employer sponsorship, what measures are taken to ensure that they find a job and they are not on social assistance?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the candidate does not have the job in place, the selection criteria are designed to ensure that that person is ready to join our workforce. They have to be between 21 and 45 years of age, have funds to support themselves after arrival. They need to have a certain level of postsecondary education, some work experience, and English language skills. The applicant must also have an Alberta sponsor who provides support for the newcomer while they are settling into their new job and location.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister. There is a recent rise in Alberta unemployment. Also, the need for foreign workers is in doubt, but recruitment outside Canada is still enticing people in foreign lands with, I could say, a false promise of work. What is our government doing to address this issue, that hurts people financially and the good reputation of Alberta and Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question, but we need to plan for the long term. We know that the economy will pick up, and with our aging population we are sure that we'll be short of labour in the future. There are also still some labour shortages in certain occupations. A skilled worker in one field cannot necessarily switch to a different occupation without meeting certain educational or training or certification requirements. We are addressing this by enhanced training and offering more spaces in schools and attracting the right people at the right time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Imperial Oil Kearl Lake Project

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, as we all know, Imperial Oil today announced it is proceeding with its Kearl Lake bitumen mine. About three years from now the first stage of that will be producing over a hundred thousand barrels of bitumen every day. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will he tell this Assembly where that bitumen is going to be upgraded?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that, of course, will be a matter to be determined by the proponent of the project. Now, there are a number of options, of course, available to them. I'm not exactly sure, but I would think that the member opposite would understand that Imperial Oil, it occurs to me, has a relatively large refining operation in the Edmonton area.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of that. Actually, it might interest the minister to know that back in my university days I had a summer job helping build it.

Then I'll pursue the minister's question. Is the minister aware of information that Imperial Oil is considering altering its Strathcona refinery or some other facility in Alberta to upgrade bitumen?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's quite obvious by the announcement that was made today. It's public information. I think

I've got two or three different articles that indicate that the announcement has been made. The matter of the upgrading of bitumen in the province of Alberta is continually being addressed by this government and, most certainly, industry players. What I will suggest is that phase 1 – phase 1 – of the Kearl Lake project does not include an upgrader at Kearl Lake.

Dr. Taft: Yeah, well, we knew that. That's the point of the questions. Holy smokes, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta gets the largest share of environmental liabilities, including tailings ponds and an open pit mine. We should also get the largest share of the wealth which is overwhelmingly generated by the upgraders. This government approved Kearl Lake in 2007 in an order in council. My question is to the minister. Why did the government approve Kearl Lake mine without requiring some portion of upgrading here in Alberta?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the way I would like to have that understood and answer the question is that Kearl Lake as a project will very likely end up at the end of the day producing somewhere in the neighbourhood of 340,000 or 350,000 barrels a day of product. In the initial mining operation, that's being developed by the proponent now, 100,000 to 110,000 barrels a day, that product will move someplace and very likely into the Alberta heartland. Part of that product may move to upgraders that are outside of Alberta. I would not be able to stand here today and say that every bit of the bitumen relative to Kearl is going to have the molecules adjusted in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Building Construction Review

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The media has recently been reporting about concerns with stucco leaks in homes throughout the province. As a former home builder in the Edmonton area for 18 years I know that poor quality and workmanship can lead to stucco leaks, which can cause serious problems for homes. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is the minister aware of the extent of the problem, and what is he doing to address it?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am aware of some homeowner concerns with residential construction practices in Alberta. That's why my ministry very proactively looked into the matter. I asked my parliamentary assistant to consult with homeowners and stakeholders. We want to ensure that Albertans have confidence in the construction process. It is essential that the homes built in Alberta are built to the quality that Albertans expect and deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The next question is to the same minister. How will the minister ensure that the building codes are being properly enforced to make sure that tradespeople are not cutting corners and putting homes and homeowners at risk?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, our building codes, I think, are some of the best in Canada. My parliamentary assistant, as I said before, carried out a broad review of the residential construction

practices. The review focused on inspection and enforcement, on construction industry accountability. It talked about consumer protection, about certification and skill development. The review examined ways to ensure quality of construction of new homes in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. When will the government respond to that?

Thank you.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is one of my ministry's and my top priorities that we are dealing with at this time. I want to thank all of the individuals that were involved for their valuable input, whether it be homeowners or the Home Builders' Association or the municipalities that were involved.

This does involve Service Alberta, Finance and Enterprise, Alberta Justice, Advanced Education and Technology. We are discussing with these ministries ways that we can make improvements, and we're also looking at other provinces. In the end, Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that we get it right and address the homeowners' needs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The temporary foreign worker program has many flaws. The economic downturn has highlighted yet another. Along with thousands of other Albertans temporary foreign workers are being laid off, and many are not receiving the EI benefits they have paid for on each and every paycheque they earned. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why are temporary foreign workers who are eligible for EI benefits not receiving them?

The Speaker: Hon. member, EI falls under the federal jurisdiction, not the provincial jurisdiction. I don't know what the minister is going to respond, but we're staying within the competency of Alberta here.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, maybe the only comment that I would add is the fact that we are working with the federal government to see if those particular issues can be resolved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that temporary foreign workers are not only promised jobs but also the possibility of permanent residency when being recruited in foreign lands, how can the minister now explain to the workers who've been laid off that the program is working and protecting workers' rights when it has so clearly failed?

The Speaker: Well, once again, residency in this country is under the federal mandate, not the provincial mandate. If the minister has something to offer, go ahead.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, temporary foreign workers have the same rights as any other worker once they are in Alberta. When it

comes to the treatment of temporary foreign workers, we've taken a very proactive approach to it. We've added a couple of offices to help temporary foreign workers. We've established a hotline. As well, we continue to work with our federal government to see if we can make some changes to make things much better.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the minister stated that temporary foreign workers have the same rights and the same benefits as each and every worker in this province, why, when they are laid off and they have worked the number of hours necessary, are they unable to collect EI benefits? You're the minister of immigration.

The Speaker: Well, but that comes under the federal jurisdiction, hon. member, not the provincial jurisdiction. For the third time today, if the minister wants to proceed, proceed.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I would really encourage the member opposite to ask his MP for that type of answer. They need to move forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Support for the Peace Country

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has abandoned the Peace Country, and residents want to know why government is turning its back on rural health care. The minister's plan to downgrade the Beaverlodge hospital will make the closest emergency room over an hour's drive from that area. To the minister of health: why can't the health minister be straight with these people and tell them once and for all what's going to happen to the Beaverlodge hospital?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'll be straight with this member. There is no plan to downgrade the Beaverlodge hospital.

Mr. Snelgrove: There goes supplementary 2.

Ms Notley: Not so much because it hasn't quite worked out this way.

Now, this government continues to abandon the Peace Country. Displaced Beaverlodge patients may well end up arriving in Grande Prairie only to be bottlenecked at a crumbling facility this government has yet to replace. The only thing this government actually knows how to do up in the Peace Country is make empty promises. Again to the minister: why won't this minister come clean and admit that his repeated foot-dragging on the Queen E hospital is hurting the health care of Peace Country residents?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the two members of the opposition there who've gone to Beaverlodge once and may have stopped in Grande Prairie on their way through, we have a planned visit with the three MLAs for Grande Prairie in about a week's time, when we're going to discuss with the community what the plans are in Grande Prairie and how we can meet the needs of northwestern Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, I suspect they'll tell you to start building their hospital.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's not just in health care that this government has abandoned the Peace Country. They've turned their backs on farmers, too. Their latest attempt to kill the family farm strengthens Agricore at the expense of small producers, many of whom are still trying to make a go of it in the Peace Country. My question is for the minister of agriculture. Why is it that the minister is so committed to giving Agricore more power over their producer associations at the expense of the family farmer?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I probably would need a little more information about where the hon. member is coming from. I have no determination to do anything to the small producers out there except put them on a better footing with the rest of the people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a meeting last week with Alberta's southern region watershed planning and advisory councils council members raised some concerns regarding future funding given the reduced government budget. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Is this government going to let its long-term environmental responsibilities fall by the wayside to deal with this short-term economic situation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the member brought this question forward because nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I have been working and speaking with a number of our WPACs, watershed planning councils, throughout the province, indicating to them that they are partners in our implementation of water for life. As a matter of fact, we just recently announced \$2.5 million in funding for both WPACs and the Water Council, so there's a clear commitment on the part of the government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, times are tough and we're all feeling the effects of the global recession, but the important work of these councils must continue. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Last week this government announced funding for Alberta's watershed planning and advisory councils. Can the minister explain the changes in the funding from this year over last year?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is critical is that we maintain the corporate knowledge, that we maintain the core services that are provided by these critical organizations. As a result, we put in place a \$250,000 cap. Well, that will result in a slight decrease for some of the WPACs, the more mature and larger WPACs, but it will actually allow for some growth for some of the new organizations that are just coming on. Overall, the effect will be that we will maintain the capacity, we will maintain the strength that lies within these organizations so that when the economy starts to turn around, they'll be in a position to be able to pick up right where they left off.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Since the implementation of water for life five years ago, watershed

planning and advisory councils have built a knowledge and public understanding of Alberta's watersheds. Since the land-use framework seems to be the way of the future, what does that mean for the future of Alberta's WPACs?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the future of the WPACs is very strong. The work that the WPACs do, the watershed management that they do, is critical to the development of the land-use framework and the regional plans for the land-use framework. It's no coincidence that the boundaries for the land-use framework follow the watershed lines. That is not by coincidence. It's to allow the terrific amount of public and community-based input that's associated with our watershed planning to be incorporated and fed up into the land-use framework process.

Civil Recovery of Health Costs

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the health minister has been front and centre in the media lauding his new approach to medical care in this province. Today I ask the health minister: who in the medical community was contacted before inputting the civil recovery for medical costs associated with Criminal Code violations?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, in our particular caucus we have 72 members. When a department proposes a change in policy, we take it to caucus. Caucus is responsible for ensuring that their constituents are supportive of what we are proposing. That's the process we have always followed and will continue to follow.

Mr. Hehr: Well, nevertheless, as the hon. member knows, many of the people that use his services in the health system have mental health issues and addiction issues. They are also involved in the criminal justice system. Can you tell me how this is going to help our overall society by implementing this bill?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the member raises the issue of mental health in Alberta, and this province will stand on its record any day relative to what we do for mental health patients in this province. Our budget is some 600 million dollars annually for the treatment of mental health. We've announced a number of initiatives in recent weeks through our safe communities initiative to ensure that we have more beds available for mental health and addictions. I think our record speaks for itself.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'm glad to hear the minister talking about his record, yet other people would have opposite views.

Nevertheless, somehow to get a mental health bed sometimes you have to plead guilty to a criminal offence. Now, this happens. In this bill if you plead guilty to a criminal offence, are you going to be able to get this mental health bed if your crime is involved?

Mr. Liepert: The member makes an accusation that I do not agree with, that in order to access mental health, somehow you have to plead guilty to some sort of an offence. I think that is, Mr. Speaker, just an absolute misrepresentation of facts relative to what we do for mental health in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

International Biotech Conference

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The minister has just returned from Atlanta, Georgia, on a mission for Alberta. Can

the minister tell us what has been accomplished on behalf of Albertans during that mission?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, last week the Premiers of several provinces and ministers from a number of provinces – from across Canada, really – all gathered along with industry representatives and federal Minister Clement in Atlanta to all represent their jurisdictions and the industries that they lead. We lead these missions to promote Alberta's knowledge-based industries, which are growing. This mission, in particular, helped profile Alberta's innovation capacity and the emerging life sciences and the technology that is related to that in genomics and a number of areas. The event itself attracts over 20,000 businesses and leaders from across the world.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. As the minister knows, two of my constituents from the town of Drayton Valley, Mayor Moe Hamdon and Manager Manny Deol, also attended. They had the opportunity to meet with the minister and the minister from Germany with regard to a bioenergy project they are working on. Can the minister elaborate on some of those details and how they will benefit both the community of Drayton Valley and Alberta?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. I would congratulate her, too, on her experience in bringing forward these types of collaborative ventures where it's not only American companies but international companies. I did have the opportunity to meet with one of the innovation ministers from Germany, and we witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Drayton Valley and the German group called CLIB, which is an organization network of biorefineries, another example that will show to the world that Alberta is a leader in alternative energies as much as we are a leader in environmental stewardship of the energy that we create. I would note that this is not just about agriculture. It's about forestry. It's about the biotechnology that we're going to be able to sell to the world, and Drayton Valley is going to be a hub for that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the same minister: how do the initiatives that your department is working on reflect on the province's priorities and needs?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. members across the way have read the bill that's in front of this House, bioindustries and biotechnologies are critical key components of the vision of the future for Alberta's economy this Premier has set out. I think attendance at these types of conferences and attendance in other global aspects to get Alberta's vision out there and to also showcase the talent and the expertise and the technology innovations that we're creating is an extremely important step in selling Alberta to the world.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Building Construction Review (continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Protecting homes from high-intensity residential fires is important, but it is also important to

protect homes from leaks and mould. Despite all the so-called consulting this administration does, time and again industry's concerns are not heard and not acted upon. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why did the minister stipulate that nonventilated soffits are to be used when builders already know that they will create mouldy roofs?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite is talking about the high-intensity residential fires. The consultation on high-intensity residential fires was done with fire chiefs, was done with home builders, was done with the Safety Codes Council, with municipalities. These are some of the recommendations that came forward. In fact, this last Friday I did meet with representatives from all different parts of Alberta discussing where these code changes are and how they're working. The hon. member did make mention of one particular example. We had those discussions, and we're going to have some discussions very closely in the near future to make sure that if that recommendation is not working quite to where we see it should be, we will look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: gypsum can develop mould when it is installed in inclement weather. This is Alberta. How does the minister expect builders to install gypsum boards only in dry conditions?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, when we had the consultation process with home builders, that discussion had taken place. This consultation had two aspects to it: one of them, of course, is the building process; the second one, ensuring that the building process provided safety for residents. We don't want to have another situation like the fire that took place in southern Edmonton. With consultation with all of the stakeholders: that is where those recommendations came from.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These complaints are coming from the builders. If these complaints were not coming to us, I wouldn't be standing here asking these questions on the gypsum part.

To the minister again. When new houses become mouldy because of the recent changes to the building codes, who will foot the bill: the homeowners, the builders, or the taxpayers?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to express to the hon. member that safety codes, building codes, and fire codes are directions for building safe homes. If there are changes that are necessary, that is where we get our information. We get it from builders. We get it from the Safety Codes Council. We get it from municipalities. We get it from inspectors. We need to ensure that homes, the biggest investment for individuals in this province, are built to the quality that they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Red Deer Riverbank Erosion at Sundre

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the town of Sundre there was a very large rally sponsored by the committee calling themselves Save Our Sundre. This committee was formed about a month ago to try to get the message through about the danger

of the Red Deer River jumping its banks and causing great damage in the town. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. As well as the number of people that were there, there was a lot of equipment loaded on trucks, and they were wondering why they couldn't go down and unload the equipment and start working in the river yesterday. What do they have to do to get permission?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I actually wish that they could begin the work immediately as well. However, there is an approval process that's in place. It's a necessary approval process. Our staff have been working with not only the town of Sundre but the rural municipality in that area to explain the process to them. The approval, that is under the Water Act, requires a detailed application be developed that would include an environmental assessment. Most importantly, that, then, would result in a public notification and a requirement that public affected by any work on the river would have an opportunity for input.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the minister has toured this particular spot himself, so he's seen the whole situation. Many people were asking me yesterday: why do they have to do these studies and the engineering when, in fact, it's so plain to see what needs to be done in order to stop the river from eroding the bank further?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it does seem quite obvious, and I can assure you that once this application has been filled out and the basic engineering has been completed, we'll work as efficiently and quickly as we possibly can to do that approval. But it's not as simple as it would seem. A river is almost like a living instrument. If you fix something in one area, the chances of having unintended consequences downstream or elsewhere begin to multiply. It's so important to ensure that we don't solve one problem by creating another.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke yesterday to a person that was from High River. Apparently, they've got much the same situation there.

My next question is to the President of the Treasury Board. This project is going to cost probably – it could be up to at least a million dollars. The town of Sundre just simply cannot afford to pay that kind of money. So to the minister responsible for Treasury Board: is there any provincial assistance available?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do allocate a great deal of money over the years to the different departments for various projects like this, but the Treasury Board does not determine nor do we approve individual projects nor funding for them. So without the support of the Minister of Environment or that department it wouldn't be appropriate to even approach Treasury Board for the spending as it would have to fit into our ongoing capital plan.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

Statement by the Speaker

Bill 43 and Potential Conflicts of Interest

The Speaker: I have some information that I have to convey to the House, and it deals with general advice that I have received from the

Ethics Commissioner. On May 21, 2009, late afternoon, I received a letter addressed to me in my capacity as Speaker, subject regarding general advice pursuant to section 44 of the Conflicts of Interest Act regarding Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

2:40

For the information of all members – I think it is timely information – I intend to read the letter into the record. I also intend to provide all members with copies of it.

It has been brought to my attention by more than one Member that some Members of the Legislative Assembly may have concerns regarding participation in Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009. I am therefore taking this opportunity to provide general advice to all Members under section 44 of the Conflicts of Interest Act.

Section 2(2) of the Conflicts of Interest Act requires that Members who have reasonable grounds to believe that they, their minor or adult children, or their direct associates have a private interest in a matter before the Legislative Assembly must declare that interest and withdraw without voting on or participating in the consideration of the matter. The full text of section 2(2) is noted below.

And I quote directly.

(2) Where a matter for decision in which a Member has reasonable grounds to believe that the Member, the Member's minor or adult child or a person directly associated with the Member has a private interest is before a meeting of the Executive Council or a committee of the Executive Council or the Legislative Assembly or a committee appointed by resolution of the Legislative Assembly, the Member must, if present at the meeting, declare that interest and must withdraw from the meeting without voting on or participating in the consideration of the matter.

The Ethics Commissioner goes on:

I was asked to review this issue in late April, prior to the introduction of the Bill. At that time, I advised the Member who raised the issue that Members who were producers affected by the Bill could vote on the matter. It was my opinion at that time that this was a matter of general application.

I have now had an opportunity to review Bill 43. It is my understanding that Bill 43 will allow for producers covered by the Bill to request a refund of service charges from the commission to which the producer is required to submit service charges. A request for a refund is a direct financial benefit and, in my opinion, is a private interest.

Under the Conflicts of Interest Act, a "private interest" is not defined. The Act states what a "private interest" is not. It is not an interest in a matter that is of general application or one that affects a person as one of a broad class of the public.

As noted, I originally considered that this matter was one of general application. However, not all producers may opt to request a refund and, further, as earlier noted, there is a direct financial benefit to those producers who do seek a refund. It is my view that this matter is not a matter of general application but is, in fact, a private interest.

I have advised that a private interest exists, in part, because I am mindful of the preamble to the Conflicts of Interest Act that sets a high standard of conduct for Members to ensure that the public can be confident that Members are acting in the public interest and not to further their private interests.

It is my advice that Members who have a private interest in Bill 43 should declare that interest and withdraw without participating in the debate or voting on the matter. That advice also applies where the Member's minor or adult child has a private interest and where the Member's direct associates have a private interest.

It was signed on behalf of the Ethics Commissioner by Karen South.

On Friday I discussed this matter with the Ethics Commissioner, and I asked him for further clarification. He corresponded with me

late Friday afternoon – that is, May 22, 2009 – and in a letter addressed to me, same subject:

This letter is further to my letter of May 21, with respect to the above-referenced Bill.

For clarification, as indicated in my May 21 letter, I had previously given advice to Members that, in my opinion, Bill 43 was a matter of general application and Members who were producers covered by the Bill could participate in the debate on Bill 43 and vote on it.

Those Members are therefore protected under section 43(5) of the Conflicts of Interest Act. They were acting in accordance with the previous advice given and no proceeding or prosecution can be taken against those Members. The advice contained in my letter of May 21 should be taken to apply from that date forward. It does not apply retroactively. In my opinion, Members who complied with my advice are protected and not in breach of the Act as of this [moment].

It's signed by the Ethics Commissioner.

So, in a nutshell, what this means is that we have before the Legislative Assembly tonight for committee review this particular bill. It has now gone through second reading. Some members who have participated in second reading are clear. That's not an issue in the eyes of the Ethics Commissioner. But members who will participate if it comes to committee tonight will have to declare that interest, and I've asked the Deputy Chair of Committees and the Deputy Speaker, who will be in the chair tonight, to raise that as the first issue when this bill does come up: to ask members that if they believe they're in a private interest, they must declare it. The procedure I outlined to all members in my memo of May 11, 2009, on this particular matter. So there are a number of hours which members have to review this matter in their own personal views. That's fine. They may contact the Ethics Commissioner this afternoon again for further information as well.

In 30 seconds from now we will go back to the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're back to the Routine. We were on Members' Statements. I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Integrated Training Program for Health Care Aides

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the honour of attending the graduation of the integrated training program for health care aides at the Centre for Newcomers in Calgary, where I met program graduates, all newcomers to Canada from a wide range of countries, who have completed four months of full-time instruction, including academic upgrading in English and science, essential workplace skills in communication, and life management skills like making and implementing plans, being accountable, giving and receiving feedback. They will now attend the health care aide program at Bow Valley College and after another four months of full-time instruction will move into jobs in extended care facilities, home care, and other positions requiring the health care aide certificate.

This program is supported by Alberta Employment and Immigration and is offered without charge to the participants. Integrated skills training addresses the needs of the local labour market and is offered in occupations where there is strong labour market demand. The graduation illustrates the value of services offered by Employment and Immigration.

The participants in this training have come from many countries – Africa, China, India, Venezuela, and the Philippines – with length of immigration from several years to a few months before the training began. Each of them has faced the struggle of learning a

new language and culture and finding connections and opportunities in an unfamiliar place. The graduates spoke about the anxiety they felt in making the transition to Canada. However, with the strengths they have developed through the training program, each of them is now able to stand before a group of friends and strangers and speak with confidence of their skills, plans, and dreams. They are proud they have the academic and study skills they need to attend a certificate program in a public institution. They are taking the first steps toward building a career in Canada and thus a role in the ongoing economic and social development of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford in his capacity as chair of the Standing Committee on Health.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour as chair of the Standing Committee on Health to table today the requisite number of copies of the committee's report on Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2009, introduced by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon and referred to the Standing Committee on Health on March 17, 2009.

On behalf of the committee, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge and express our appreciation for the support provided by staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. I'd also like to thank ministry officials from the government of Alberta Department of Health and Wellness for their diligent work with the committee. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the many Albertans who provided the committee with their written submissions and made oral presentations. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank my fellow committee members, representing all parties in this Assembly, who worked so well together over both the First Session of this Legislature and the current session to provide meaningful consultations and discussions in support of the review of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the report recommends that Bill 52 proceed with amendments.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by approximately 4,000 Albertans from the Beaverlodge-Grande Prairie area urging the government to "maintain a full-service hospital in Beaverlodge which includes such services as acute care, palliative care and emergency health services."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 208 Life Leases Act

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 208, the Life Leases Act.

This bill will set out the specific rights and responsibilities of life lease landlords and lessees.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Griffiths: On behalf of my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure and MLA for Drumheller-Stettler I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that reads:

We the undersigned want it to be understood that we do not want the Dialysis Unit in the Hanna Hospital to be closed. It is important to patients who use it, to their families and to the aging rural community that we live in to have these services available to us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table petitions bearing the names of 96 Calgarians and two residents each from the communities of Blackfalds and Airdrie, Alberta. These petitioners are urging the government of Alberta to immediately provide Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health care providers in this province through public funding. I have the required five copies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of tablings today. The first is a copy of the program for the graduating class of 2009 of Sir Winston Churchill high school, located in Calgary-Varsity.

My second tabling is a letter written to me by the Bow Valley Christian Church and copied to the Minister of Health and Wellness calling on the government to include marriage and family therapy under the Health Professions Act.

My third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter written to me by a constituent and neighbour to my constituency office, Dr. Jeffrey Mellor, expressing concerns about Bill 52 and the potential infringement on the privacy of his patients.

My final tabling for today, Mr. Speaker, is a letter written by a constituent, Mark Hambridge, to the Minister of Health and Wellness, calling on the government to give more attention to the prevention of colon cancer through screening and, particularly, to decrease wait times for colonoscopies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A few quick tablings today. First, I have letters from Dr. Reg McCurry and Michael Longul regarding their concerns on health care coverage reform and delisting of chiropractic services.

Next I have a letter from Ivan Fair, voicing his concerns on the reduction in elective surgeries in Alberta hospitals.

Finally, I'm tabling letters from Lennea Oseen and Alison Dinwoodie, who have both written to express opposition to Bill 44 and the problems they feel such reforms would create.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the weekend last I had the opportunity of attending the ARA, the Annual Representative Assembly of the Alberta Teachers' Association, but today I have the privilege of tabling the 2008 annual report of the Alberta Teachers' Association and the requisite five copies.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, a few minutes ago I read into the record two letters that I'd received from the office of the Ethics Commissioner, one dated May 21, one dated May 22, both entitled General Advice Pursuant to Section 44 of the Conflicts of Interest Act, Re Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2). I'm now going to table the appropriate copies for the library. As well, I've asked the pages to circulate to all members copies of both of these letters so that they'll have them for review prior to tonight.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, responses to questions raised by Ms Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and Mr. Hehr, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, on April 22, 2009, in Department of Justice main estimates debate.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 203

Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009.

I'd like to begin by sincerely thanking all hon. members from both sides of the House for productive and thoughtful debate thus far on Bill 203. Through second reading and Committee of the Whole we were able to better examine what this legislation hopes to achieve and the means by which to achieve those goals.

Mr. Speaker, the objective of Bill 203 is to provide all Albertans, regardless of where they live, with minimum campaign finance and contribution disclosure standards in municipal elections, mirroring standards that already exist provincially. The proposal is to do so through several key provisions. First, Bill 203 would limit contributions to municipal candidates to \$5,000. This would ensure that all Albertans, regardless of their personal wealth, would be able to contribute meaningfully in local elections by supporting the candidate of their choice. This limit was designed to fall in line with the maximum contributions a provincial candidate and their constituency association could receive from a single donor over a typical term.

Second, Bill 203 would require all candidates to file complete and accurate disclosure statements with the municipality following the conclusion of an election. These statements would be made public, ensuring transparency for voters and protecting candidates from accusations or insinuations of undue influence from particular donors.

A third key element of Bill 203 provides clear direction for the handling of surplus campaign funds following an election. Should a candidate record more than \$500 in surplus campaign funds following an election, they must be directed to the municipality, who will hold the funds in trust for use in subsequent elections. This will protect the donors and ensure that donations to campaigns are used for their intended purposes, municipal election expenditures. Should

the councillor decide not to run in the subsequent election, the campaign funds held in trust may be directed towards a registered charitable organization. Failing that, they will become the revenue of the municipality.

The fourth key element is the outlining of prohibited corporate organizations for the purposes of donations. These are similar to those prohibited organizations already set out for provincial elections. They will include organizations owned in majority by a municipality or nonprofit organizations who receive municipal grants.

Mr. Speaker, several municipalities across Alberta have paved the way with implementing campaign finance and disclosure rules, and they should be commended for their efforts. Bill 203 was designed to build on these efforts to ensure consistent standards and consistent transparency throughout Alberta.

Members from both sides of the House addressed some very important issues over the course of second reading and Committee of the Whole. Some members suggested Bill 203 should take into consideration the possibility of extending its measures to school trustee elections. As a private member's bill I believe that its scope should be narrow and focused on its intended purpose, to ensure accountability in municipal council elections. I believe such a proposal could be brought forward in future legislation and would be a worthy idea for this Assembly's consideration at the appropriate time.

Furthermore, some members expressed the belief that Bill 203 should make financial contributions to municipal campaigns qualify for a tax credit. I also believe that this proposal could be considered in a future debate in this Assembly, but it does not address the central issue that Bill 203 seeks to address, which is accountability and transparency in municipal elections, and it would impact government revenues, something that is just not practical for a private member's bill to tackle.

I would like to again acknowledge the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for raising the issue of fairness for trade unions and corporations in Bill 203. The member raised the fact that under the act a trade union and its locals are considered one trade union for the purposes of contribution and that that same restriction did not exist for corporations and those corporations associated with it. In Committee of the Whole this House approved an amendment that addressed that oversight as it was always the intention to mirror the provincial guidelines and ensure that fairness for all parties who participate in the local election process, from individual donors to corporations or trade unions.

Mr. Speaker, it's my hope that these measures included in Bill 203 will keep interest and faith in the local democratic process as high as possible. Ultimately, Bill 203 will ensure the same high level of accountability asked for from provincial and federal campaigns. For these reasons, I encourage my hon. colleagues to support this private member's bill, and I thank them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in third reading debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I want to start out by extending my congratulations to the Member for Athabasca-Redwater for bringing forward a good piece of legislation. If we, in fact, pass it today in third, I think this bill

will do what he seeks and sets out to do with it, which is bring additional accountability and transparency to the municipal election process.

3:00

It brings minimum standards across the board, and they are minimum standards. I would like in many cases to see those standards be perhaps a little more stringent than they are, but at least it gives a consistency, a minimum consistency now across the board in local municipal elections, and I think that's a good thing.

One of the things that the bill does or seeks to do, which I think is important, is to determine and regulate what happens to surplus contributions. I remember the very, very first time that I discovered, I'll say – I don't know that I really discovered anything, but I sort of tuned into it and became aware of the fact – that in my city, Calgary, there really were no controls over that. You know, if an alderman decides to step down, retire, and not run again for city council, they can keep – or they could and still can until this bill becomes law, I guess – whatever surplus they have accumulated, that was left over from the last election and, I suppose, in some cases even in terms of donations that had gone on through their last term of office. I remember thinking to myself: well, that's certainly one way of getting yourself a pension plan, but it's not exactly the most open and transparent and accountable way.

I think that the regulations that this bill sets out around what happens to surpluses address an issue that needs to be addressed and address it in a fair and equitable way, I think, to the benefit of all the voters and all the taxpayers and, ultimately, to candidates and office-holders at the municipal level themselves. We do better by our constituents and by ourselves when we have to disclose.

I note with my four years and a bit of experience the huge gap that sometimes exists between what we do disclose, what is routinely disclosed and available to people, to our constituents, or, you know, anyone else across the province if they wish to go look for it and what they actually take the trouble to go look for. In many, many cases they don't know that it's there for them to find out if they want to go looking for it. It makes me think that perhaps we could and should do a better job of publicizing the rules as they exist already and the rules as they will exist for municipal elections and municipal office-holders under Bill 203, should it become law, because there are many people who do not know what our own situations are in this House, what their city councillors' situations are, what the situations of their federal Members of Parliament are, even though much of that information is there for public consumption as it is.

I think that in general this is a good bill. I, too, as the Member for Calgary-McCall brought up in committee debate, would have liked to have seen contributions to municipal election campaigns become tax deductible simply because they are at the provincial level and they are at the federal level. I understand the member's concern, two concerns really, one about keeping a private member's bill specific and clear and focused and straightforward, the other one being the concern around how a private member's bill would address the impact on government finances that would follow any attempt to make the contributions tax deductible. I don't know how we address that problem, then, other than to have the government bring forward legislation that would do that, and I would urge the government to do that should Bill 203 become law.

As well, my congratulations or acknowledgement or both to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing up the issue of fairness and equity relative to trade unions and corporations. My congratulations to the Member for Athabasca-Redwater for addressing that concern with an amendment that passed in the House a week ago. I think that although it may not be perfect, it's a pretty darn

good piece of legislation. I know that I intend to support it when the vote is called, I assume, later on this afternoon.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and let others join the debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I have to first preface my comments by thanking the Member for Athabasca-Redwater for putting forth this good piece of legislation. And I have to say that it is Monday, and I am feeling okay, but I have to agree with a lot of the comments of my colleague from Calgary-Currie. The tripartisanship that we're seeing here shows what an important piece of legislation this is and how the Member for Athabasca-Redwater must be commended.

Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 has three main goals that could ultimately improve our democratic system. These include defining minimum standards for financial contributions during municipal elections, ensuring comprehensive and timely disclosure of campaign financial records, and setting a clear directive for dealing with surplus campaign funds.

Strengthening this province's democratic process requires in part the removal of barriers to accessing candidates' information. Provincial candidates already have to disclose their financial information to the public, so it makes sense to extend this transparency to municipal elections. As a result, Mr. Speaker, one of the positive effects of Bill 203 would be a greater public involvement in municipal campaigns. In fact, the greater accountability achieved through this bill would motivate more people to get involved with the campaigns and volunteer. Once people feel that the efforts are going towards a cause that they believe in personally, they may increasingly want to help and contribute to that cause financially.

Mr. Speaker, public participation in these elections enhances the very quality of our governance in this province. This happens because a greater public participation allows the public to have a stronger relationship with the municipal candidates, which in turn helps candidates to better represent their constituents. When people start a process, they tend to feel as though their involvement in the process matters, which in turn encourages them to volunteer. The election process is the foundation of our political system, and improving involvement in these campaigns is the first step towards enhancing our democratic system. In fact, a more democratic system goes hand in hand with greater accountability and transparency, which Bill 203 intends to accomplish.

Bill 203 is based on the principles of accessibility and integrity, which ultimately support the legitimacy of our electoral process. Elections must be accessible and responsive to the needs of voters, and that is my submission. Bill 203 does this by ensuring that the majority retains a vote in municipal campaigns. You may ask why I am talking about the majority when, of course, citation 1 in *Beauchesne* says that the principles of Canadian parliamentary law are "to protect a minority and to restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority." Similarly, it is my submission to this House, Mr. Speaker, that while we want to get away from tyranny of the majority, we also cannot have tyranny of the minority, where a few people, corporations, or unions, who may be wealthy in their means, can simply affect the whole outcome or governance of a campaign or election.

Now, without Bill 203 we run the risk of individual voices, again, taking precedence over the majority, as I mentioned. Funds can be a powerful, influential tool, Mr. Speaker. They're not a bad thing.

Of course, none of us would be here if it wasn't for contributions. But we also have to ensure that certain funds do not have an undue influence on our elections. Enshrining full public disclosure of any and all financial accounting in campaigns allows the public to have greater confidence in our political system and our candidates. Because the absence of rules involves speculation, imaginations can run wild if the public and contributors are unaware of how candidates actually spend their donations or how they obtain them. Bill 203 takes the unknown out of campaign contributions, reducing the possibility or appearance of mishandling even when none may exist.

Mr. Speaker, more and more we are concerned about public engagement and its apparent decline in this province. We have to get more people engaged in our elections so that they become more interested in who represents their views and opinions. Nowhere is this more important than in municipal elections, where we see the lowest turnout. A great way to do this is by disclosing more information to the public so that they know exactly how the campaign process works and how campaign funds are being spent.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, elected officials are accountable to the people who voted for them. They have to be open and they have to be transparent about their actions. A more accountable and open campaign process raises public confidence, particularly with those who otherwise might think their involvement did not matter or was of little importance. In this way another mechanism in Bill 203 that would help increase public participation in the democratic process is the limit on the size of campaign contributions, be they from individuals, corporations, or trade unions. This would limit and control the power that such funds could have in campaigns.

When candidates have to rely on a greater number of people to sponsor their campaigns, this allows individual contributors to play a greater role. This allows the individual contributor to feel more significant because his or her donation matters just as much as everyone else's. As a result more people will be inspired to donate, knowing that their contribution matters and is valued by the candidate. In this way we see that the increasing number of contributors has another positive effect on enhancing our democratic system.

Another approach to inspire more people to donate money is to set a clear directive for dealing with surplus campaign funds, which Bill 203 intends to do. The public are more likely to donate money once they are guaranteed it will actually be spent on a campaign and not a retirement policy, as the Member for Calgary-Currie indicated, and that surplus funds are donated to a municipal district or to a registered charity.

In addition, Bill 203 would allow contributors to be eligible for a tax credit which would benefit both candidates and contributors – I believe that there have been some changes that I have just been corrected on, and I apologize to this House. Contributors would be motivated to donate, knowing that they would receive part of this donation back in such a situation. I guess that's a matter to be dealt with on another day.

In short, this bill is a win-win situation. I've said to the Member for Athabasca-Redwater that I don't think he appreciates, probably because he's too humble, how important this legislation is to our democracy, realizing on a go-forward basis how this is going to impact our municipal democracy. Mr. Speaker, this is going to be a model for the rest of this country and maybe even internationally.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to again take this

opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater for putting forward Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. I pointed out in great detail why I support the member and the legislation that he has proposed. I also pointed out that while the federal regulations and restrictions on the amount of money that can be contributed to any candidate are of a stricter nature, this by far is the best we have at a provincial level. Therefore, applying it at the municipal level makes absolute sense. I also appreciate the support and enthusiasm of the Member for Calgary-Egmont for Bill 203.

It will be interesting given our by-election circumstances to see to what extent this bill could potentially be preapplied or at least the intent of this bill. It has been stated in the papers that Diane Colley-Urquhart, an alderperson in the city of Calgary, is potentially seeking the nomination for Calgary-Glenmore. If Bill 203 were to be applied voluntarily by her, she would donate the proceeds from her last campaign to a charity of her choice or possibly, as Bill 203 suggests, directly to the city coffers. To do less would be to go against the intent of Bill 203 and would fly in the face of the potential colleagues she attempts, at least, to join through a by-election process.

Again, I support the need to disclose completely, whether it be at a provincial election, as we already do, whether it be at a municipal election, as Bill 203 proposes to do, and I would like those same disclosure rules extended to any type of party leadership at the provincial level.

Wonderful legislation. Again I want to thank the Member for Athabasca-Redwater for putting forward this highly clarifying piece of legislation, which is truly transparent and accountable. I would hope that future members of this Assembly will take Bill 203 and its intent, when passed, into consideration. I guess they'll have no choice because at that point it will become law.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It again is my privilege to rise in support of Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. The reason for my, I guess, zest in speaking to this bill is the fact that there has been so much unregulated raising of money for a municipal election. If you look at even the numbers and totals that were raised in municipal elections to run, for instance – I've heard up to a million dollars – for mayor.

I know that in my riding of Calgary-Buffalo, of the two candidates, John Mar, now alderman, ran a campaign of close to \$280,000, and Madeleine King, an incumbent alderman who ran against him, spent \$250,000. That's an inordinate sum of money, seemingly, to be raised by individuals who are seeking, really, to serve in the community. There are other situations, not just those, that point to the fact that an awful lot of money is given to people to run, seek office in municipal campaigns.

Without the ability, I guess, of there being some sort of limit on the amount given or some contribution guidelines for these people in positions of power, it leads to people being suspicious. I don't know whether there's any need to be suspicious, but I'll tell you what: over the last 100 years of municipal governance here in Alberta, given that there have been these sums of money at play, I would hazard a guess that there may have been one or two instances of maybe some influence being peddled with large contributions to a particular councillor. Now, that just might be my spider sense overacting, but that's sort of what I'd postulate before you.

What these rules and regulations will do is eliminate, hopefully, all of that if there was any or at least the rumour and innuendo around such financing. For instance, it's been long held – the rumour around Calgary was that the developers own city council. That was because, I guess, developers could write big cheques that were for unlimited numbers. Whether that is or is not true, that was some of the suspicion that came from constituents and people in Calgary. They'd look at decisions being made and often say: well, how can that be? Then someone, rightly or wrongly, pipes up: well, the development community pays for our elections here. You know, that was some of the suspicion that was aroused. I believe that this bill will clarify some of that, will allow some people to have more confidence in our civic elections and allow for the disclosure principle to happen by all candidates.

Again, just like the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity said, I believe the disclosure principle should also go to all leadership candidates, those who win or not. It just eliminates that element of suspicion. Although there's probably no reason, it's human nature to sometimes say: well, why was this decision made? It leads us, you know, to make accusations, albeit probably unfounded, on just the simple fact that they are not disclosed. This may have happened a time or two unwittingly by our side in the fact that the current Premier has not submitted his full list of donors to his leadership campaign. We now have suspicions, probably wrongfully, over some of those contributions there. Nonetheless, this type of act by people wanting to go into public service will eliminate the suspicion that unnecessarily surrounds the current situation.

Just briefly, again, I'd like to applaud and commend the member for bringing this bill forward. I believe it is timely and much needed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to this very important bill.

3:20

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to participate.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to support Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. The ultimate goal of Bill 203 is to help improve confidence in the electoral process. Significant elements of public confidence include citizens feeling as though they have had an opportunity to elect an individual who could satisfactorily represent them and that there is transparency in the election process, particularly with regard to finances.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the components of Bill 203 would contribute to this objective. Changes proposed to Bill 203 would not only provide individuals with better access to information, thereby improving transparency, but would encourage new individuals to run for municipal office, which would help provide a wider range of nominees for the public to choose from when they vote.

Let me expand, Mr. Speaker. One of the components of Bill 203 limits the size of campaign contributions, a rule which all provincial and federal candidates running for office currently follow. In ensuring that contributions from a single source do not exceed a certain threshold, candidates would require endorsements from several individuals to raise the necessary finances to run an effective campaign. This is an approach that is fundamentally democratic. Candidates are capable of securing the confidence of more members of the public and would be capable of raising more funds. The candidates who secure the funds of more individuals would be in an optimal position to run a campaign with a higher budget. This could encourage new members of the public to consider running for office

because they would know that their competitors couldn't rely on being backed by just a few individuals. Furthermore, candidates would feel confident that if they chose to run, they would not be unduly influenced by large contributors.

Mr. Speaker, two other key components of Bill 203 are to ensure that all campaign contributions and expenditures are made public and that any surplus funds are either held in trust or donated to a charity. In addition to providing increased transparency, this element of Bill 203 serves to secure accountability. Candidates would benefit as donors would be more likely to contribute, knowing that if their funds weren't spent during the campaign, they would either be used to fuel a future campaign or donated to a charity or a municipality. Further, in knowing how the candidates manage their campaign finances, the public is able to evaluate whether they feel the money was spent diligently, which can be a testament to the efficiency of the candidates and contributes to their accountability.

Moreover, in ensuring public disclosure, Bill 203 would allow for new candidates to learn how much their rivals had spent on a previous election, perhaps an indication of how much a successful campaign could cost, which in turn would help them better evaluate whether they could be a serious competitor, and if they were to run against an incumbent, they would have the knowledge of how much money remained in trust from the previous campaign. All in all, the information that would be disclosed through Bill 203 would help new candidates evaluate whether they wanted to run and facilitate planning for the kind of support they need during their campaign.

Ultimately, I believe that Bill 203 will legislate changes that would encourage new members from the public to run for office. In turn, this would engage the voters as they would be better able to elect an individual who, they believe, accurately represents them. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think several components of Bill 203 would allow for greater public engagement. For instance, limiting the size of contributions would ensure that single, modest donations would not be overshadowed by exceptional ones. Donors would be more likely to contribute as they would feel that their contribution was thoroughly important to the candidate in his or her campaign.

Again, it is fundamentally democratic. It would ensure that a single opinion expressed through a donation would not carry significantly more weight than the next. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, contributors and voters could rest assured that finances used to run a campaign were acquired through sincere and diligent means, with the candidate securing contributions from many different individuals or organizations. In addition, because Bill 203 ensures public disclosure of all campaign finances, contributors would know for certain how funds were spent, which would provide them with confidence in the system.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would make donations tax deductible, similar to provincial and federal politics, so individuals would increasingly be motivated to contribute. In addition to knowing that their donations would have an impact on a campaign, they would receive a portion of their donations back.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 would establish rules for municipal campaign finances that would benefit both the candidate and the voter. Candidates would have a more level playing field, all having to secure donations from many different individuals or organizations. Public disclosure of all campaign finances would benefit potential candidates as they would have the opportunity to research previous campaigns and candidates and assert how much an efficient campaign would cost, perhaps resulting in more individuals running for office.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Voters, too, would benefit, as they would have the knowledge of where the finances fuelling a campaign originated and would be certain that candidates are not being unduly influenced. With contributions becoming tax deductible and limitations being placed on their size, more individuals may feel motivated to make a donation.

In all, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 203 would encourage engagement in local politics. For this reason I support Bill 203 and urge all hon. members to do the same. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, sponsored by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. This bill seeks to regulate the size of financial contributions, to create a standard framework for allocating surplus campaign funds, and to ensure full public disclosure of election revenues and expenses. In essence, the financial requirements in Bill 203 would parallel those found in legislation that currently guides provincial elections within Alberta. Ultimately, these measures would help ensure a high level of transparency and accountability in municipal elections.

This is not to say necessarily that municipal elections are neither transparent nor accountable. However, this bill intends to further strengthen campaign finance rules at the municipal level, benefiting both the electorate and candidates in a municipal election, and would encourage greater public engagement. For example, by creating a maximum for campaign donations, some candidates would no longer simply solicit significant donations from a small group of individuals. In doing so, the influence that individuals may have on candidates through financial contributions, and by extension the election, is significantly reduced. As a result, candidates would be less vulnerable to allegations of impropriety during an election or once elected.

In addition, ensuring full public disclosure of campaign finances allows the electorate to see who is donating to a candidate's campaign. This would allow them to determine what groups or individuals may be trying to forward their interests through campaign contributions. Also, this information would ensure that the voters could identify which candidate most accurately represents the issues that concern them. Mr. Speaker, these are just two examples of many benefits this bill would create in municipal elections.

3:30

I would also like to draw the Assembly's attention to how Bill 203 would be instrumental in engaging greater voter turnout in municipal elections. Mr. Speaker, we're all very aware of decreasing voter turnout experienced not only in municipal elections but in all levels of government. An example of this can be seen in the most recent federal elections, where voter turnout reached an all-time low of 59 per cent. However, this situation in Canada is not unique as other countries also experience lower voter turnouts. On average, voter turnouts in both the United Kingdom and the United States have been falling for the latter half of the 20th century.

There are many theories and explanations as to why voters are not showing up at the polls as often, and there have been many studies conducted on how societies can help encourage greater voter participation. However, given the many theories and research studies on the subject, the reality is that there is no one single

solution. Mr. Speaker, there are numerous contributing factors as to why individuals decide not to exercise their right to vote. When surveyed, those who chose not to vote cited many reasons for their decision such as being too busy, not interested, or simply not aware of the issues. It is this last reason in particular that I believe Bill 203 would help address.

Knowledge of local issues is paramount if the electorate is to become engaged in a municipal election, and by establishing a campaign contribution maximum, this would help pass on this knowledge. By regulating campaign contributions, individuals or groups would be limited in the amount of money they could donate to a campaign. Consequently, candidates would be limited in how much funds they could receive from individual donors. Rather than raising large amounts of money from a small number of contributors, they would be more concerned with increasing the number of campaign donors. This would likely give more influence to those individuals or groups who traditionally may not have the financial means to contribute significant funds to the campaigns. Given the need to expand their fundraising base, candidates would have to actively engage a greater segment of the voting population. In order to do so effectively, candidates may even have to increase the number of volunteers to broaden their fundraising efforts. Ultimately, we would see more Albertans more deeply engaged and knowledgeable about the issues in their municipality.

In short, all of these measures help to engage greater voter participation. This may also encourage more Albertans to seek municipal office. Individuals may be more willing to put their name on a ballot if they believe they have an equal opportunity to win. This equal opportunity would arise because the financial advantage experienced by those who rely on a small number of donors would be greatly reduced. This would result in a more even playing field for candidates in a municipal election. As more candidates enter a municipal election, the more competitive it may become. Again, this would result in more campaign-related activities and greater community engagement on the issues that affect the local level.

Mr. Speaker, there may not be a catch-all solution to address low voter turnout in municipal elections. However, I do believe that Bill 203 will ultimately lead to greater equality in municipal elections for both the electorate and candidates, resulting in improved voter turnout. It is for this reason that I'm fully supporting Bill 203.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. Some of the fundamental aspects of a successful democracy include openness, accountability, transparency, and fairness. Just from my personal experiences as a newly elected member of this Assembly, I was impressed with the level of scrutiny and reporting with respect to reporting election finances and contributions and expenses. I rise in support of this bill because it works to enhance transparency in the election processes within our province. Further, it enhances consistency across municipalities by standardizing rules related to election contributions and finance disclosure. Consistency and transparency are integral to our democratic process.

Currently under the Local Authorities Election Act municipalities may pass bylaws that require candidates to prepare and disclose statements of all their campaign contributions and expenses. As well, the legislation allows for municipalities to define what should happen to unused campaign contributions. Because municipalities

have enacted independent bylaws under this legislation, these and other requirements vary from municipality to municipality. This variation is one of the challenges when it comes to ensuring consistency in accountability and transparency province-wide.

For instance, Edmonton's bylaw requires all candidates to file election statements itemizing contributions that exceed \$300 and identifying the donor. The donor may not be anonymous. In fact, under the bylaw if the candidate receives a donation that exceeds \$300 from an anonymous donor, they are required to attempt to identify the donor and return their contribution. If they are unable to identify the donor, they are required to give the money to the city manager so that it can be deposited in the city's general revenue fund. Edmonton's bylaw also requires that campaign surpluses be held in trust for candidates' future municipal campaigns. If candidates choose not to run again, they are required by law to donate the funds to a registered charity or to the municipality. In addition, the bylaw requires that all contributions and surpluses be disclosed publicly.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary has also passed a bylaw. However, several elements of the Calgary bylaw differ from those of Edmonton, which exemplify the variation that Bill 203 would address. For example, Calgary's bylaw also requires candidates to track campaign contributions and expenses. However, unlike in Edmonton, candidates in Calgary must disclose the names of an individual donor if their contribution exceeds \$101 rather than the \$300 in Edmonton. Furthermore, Calgary's bylaw does not make any specific reference to how to manage anonymous donations, as Edmonton's does. In addition, Calgary's bylaw, unlike Edmonton's, requires candidates with campaigns exceeding \$2,500 in either contributions or expenses to submit reports that have been audited by a recognized professional accountant.

So, Mr. Speaker, despite similarities in bylaws such as full public disclosure, there are many variations. That would be addressed in Bill 203, ensuring that municipalities are held accountable to exactly the same rules. In fact, there is greater variation throughout the province than those between the bylaws in our two largest cities. Red Deer, for example, also passed a bylaw regarding municipal campaign finance disclosure. It requires, like Edmonton's and Calgary's bylaws, that expenses and contributions be tracked and disclosed. However, in contrast to the two bigger cities, itemized lists of contributions need to be submitted for all donations that exceed \$100 versus the \$300 in Edmonton or \$101 in Calgary. Furthermore, following the election, Red Deer's bylaw requires that campaign surpluses be disclosed to the public and held over for a future election or donated to a charitable organization. This is similar to both Edmonton's bylaw and what is proposed in Bill 203 except that in Red Deer they do not have the option of donating it to the municipality.

In addition to these differences, Mr. Speaker, St. Albert's bylaw introduces even more variety among the municipalities. It requires candidates to have their finances audited not once but twice if their total campaign expenses exceeded \$2,500. This is similar to that in Calgary, which also requires large campaigns to be audited, however only once. Currently Edmonton's and Red Deer's bylaws do not require campaign expenses to be audited. Bill 203 would address these variations and can create a standard to ensure a consistent level of transparency in municipal campaign finance for every municipality across the province.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident from these bylaws that municipalities are working towards transparency and accountability, and that is a good thing. All four municipalities I have mentioned require that contributions exceeding a certain threshold are explicitly declared along with the name of the contributor. Bill 203 would simply

standardize this threshold so that there would be no variation. It would also ensure disclosure of campaign finances for all municipalities. Further to this, Bill 203 would establish a maximum contribution size for all donors regardless of whether they are an individual, corporation, trade union, or employee organization. It would also standardize directives regarding surplus campaign funds, ensuring that they were disclosed and held in trust for a future campaign or donated to the municipality or a charity.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, all components of Bill 203 are about ensuring the integrity of our democratic system and making certain that in municipal elections, like provincial elections, the rules are clear and consistent. In essence, Bill 203 would harmonize the rules related to municipal election campaign finances. Altogether, this consistency would ensure openness and transparency within all the campaigns and all the governments in the province.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I stand before the Assembly today in support of the Member for Athabasca-Redwater and Bill 203. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to participate in the discussion today at second reading of Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009, as proposed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater. Bill 203 seeks to implement standardized regulation on election contributions and financial reporting for local elections in municipal districts, counties, and cities across the province. Similar regulations are now common at the federal and provincial levels and have been implemented with the intent of providing information on campaign contributions to the electorate, therefore reinforcing the fairness and accountability in the electoral process.

Currently Alberta's Local Authorities Election Act does not specify mandatory reporting of the identity of campaign contributors, nor does it specify requirements for reporting and disclosing contribution amounts. However, Mr. Speaker, the act does allow municipal governments to enact bylaws for the regulation of campaign finances at the municipal level. The application section of the legislation reads as follows:

An elected authority may, by a bylaw passed prior to April 15 of a year in which a general election is held require that candidates prepare and disclose to the public statements of . . . their campaign contributions and campaign expenses and may prescribe how campaign contributions not used for campaign expenses must be used.

Through this act, then, the Alberta government allows for municipal districts to implement campaign finance regulation and related disclosure requirements as determined by their citizens and enacted by their officials. Thus far Alberta's three major population centres – the cities of Edmonton, including St. Albert and Strathcona county, as well as Red Deer and Calgary – have enacted bylaws that specify reporting requirements for municipal election campaign finance.

However, Mr. Speaker, the collective bylaws of these municipalities exhibit an assortment of regulation and a lack of consistency. For example, one of these municipalities has included in their bylaws all of the five main components that Bill 203 focuses on, being the total amount of campaign funding where the reporting is required, the amount of a contribution of which reporting is required, minimum expenses for reporting, how to deal with anonymous contributions, and, finally and significantly, how to deal with surplus funds.

For example, Calgary and St. Albert specify that campaigns not exceeding \$2,500 in their total budget do not need to report contributions or expenses while Edmonton, Red Deer, and Strathcona county bylaws provide no such detail. Regarding the expense amounts that need to be reported, Edmonton and Strathcona county specify an amount of \$50 or more while Calgary specifies an amount of \$101 or more. Red Deer and St. Albert do not specify any amounts.

In regard to anonymous contributions, Edmonton, Strathcona county, and Red Deer require that they be reported if the contributor's identity can be established. If identities cannot be established, then their bylaws require that the amounts be donated to the city or county for inclusion in their general revenue funds. Calgary and St. Albert have no such provisions for anonymous donations.

In regard to surplus campaign funds, both Edmonton and Red Deer require that such funds be held in trust until the future candidacy of the respective candidate while Calgary, St. Albert, and Strathcona county do not have such requirements pertaining to these funds.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in regard to contribution amounts, each of the aforementioned municipalities – Strathcona county, St. Albert, Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary – specifies threshold contribution amounts where it is required that the size and identity of the contribution be reported. For example, Edmonton and Strathcona county require that all contributions of \$300 or more be reported, St. Albert requires that all donations greater than \$200 be reported, and Red Deer and Calgary require that all donations greater than \$100 be reported.

It is clear then, Mr. Speaker, that the aforementioned municipalities have included provisions in their legislation for some of the categories Bill 203 focuses on, but not all. I must emphasize the importance, though, of these municipalities leading the way in establishing campaign finance standards. It is proper and fitting that they have recognized the importance of such measures to improve the transparency and accountability of the election process. With Bill 203 we as a government can consolidate such efforts by standardizing the campaign financial disclosure requirements, providing clarity and leadership for all municipalities consistent with our duties to ensure a thriving democracy for all Albertans.

Bill 203 will harmonize the direction that municipalities have taken in campaign finance regulations, implementing changes that will be consistent with provincial and federal legislation that regulates election campaign finances and has largely been deemed a success. Such measures truly resonate with the electorate, Mr. Speaker, and I wholly believe that they are crucial to the vitality of the electoral process. In recognizing the merit of the election campaign bylaws that I have mentioned for Strathcona county, St. Albert, Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary, I believe Bill 203 focuses on all the right areas of the election campaign finances to ensure transparency and accountability for all Alberta voters.

I stand today to support Bill 203 and urge my fellow members to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater to close debate.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and conclude debate on Bill 203, the Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009. In recent years both federal and provincial governments in Canada have elevated the discussion of how to make elections even more accountable and transparent to voters, and they have acted. In 2006 the new Conservative government fulfilled an election promise by enacting the Federal Accountability Act, ensuring the most open and

free federal elections in Canadian history. Here in Alberta the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act governs provincial parties, constituency associations, and provincial candidates to ensure openness and fairness, that Albertans demand and deserve in provincial elections.

In recent years provincial governments across Canada have begun to debate how to extend many of these key provisions to the municipal level of government. This is because, as members know, provincial governments are charged with developing the regulations that govern the structure and functions of a municipality. Provinces such as Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec have already enacted legislation to govern municipal elections, finances, and disclosure statements, and the objective of Bill 203 was to bring such legislation to Alberta. Numerous municipalities across the province – such as Edmonton, Strathcona county, even Red Deer – have already taken a lead on campaign finance and disclosure reform.

Mr. Speaker, all municipal councillors should be applauded for their hard work and dedication to honest and open government. Bill 203 builds on their efforts and will extend the same accountability demanded of provincial candidates to all Alberta municipal candidates. This will ensure certainty for municipal candidates across the entire province as to who is permitted to contribute to their campaign, how much contributors are able to donate, how surplus campaign funds may be used, and what reporting of finances is required. Because of these measures Albertans will feel an even increased confidence in the already high integrity of their municipal elections, and for these reasons I encourage all hon. members to vote in favour of Bill 203.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a third time]

3:50 **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to stand and speak to Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. Yes, we definitely do need a shorter name for bills in the future. It's quite a mouthful.

This Bill 205, Mr. Chair, puts clear parameters around third-party advertising during provincial elections. One of the main thoughts in crafting this bill was to find that delicate balance between protecting free speech and the right of people to express their views during an election period. We want that. We want the free expression of views from all over the spectrum. That's healthy for democracy. We wanted to make sure that we balanced that right to free speech and the principles that that upholds with making sure that we had an even and balanced and fair election playing field, to make sure that the size of one's wallet would not unduly influence the outcome of the election, rather that the quality of an idea and its ability to foster public support and grassroots financial support from hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of voters would determine whether or not a third party's idea would be believed in and agreed with. That's the balance that we tried to strike.

There are many jurisdictions across the country and across North America and across the world that have laws governing third-party financing. We took a long look at those and decided on kind of a hybrid of many different ones, a more made-in-Alberta approach. The approach we took is that we would place third parties for the purposes of political advertising during elections on the same level playing field as political parties. The reason we wanted to do that is that if we were to use what other jurisdictions had used and put, say, a cap of a certain amount of money that a third party could spend on election advertising, then basically we'd be giving political parties the monopoly of speech during an election period, and that's not what we wanted to accomplish either. We wanted it to be fair. What we decided to bring forward was a piece of legislation that would place third parties on the same playing field as political parties.

For example, political parties have to go out and raise funds that they can use during elections. They can have \$15,000 in a nonelection year donated to their cause from an individual or a corporation, et cetera, or \$30,000 in an election year. We have now applied that exact same contribution limit to third parties.

Political parties have to set up election accounts for their party. The money goes into those accounts, it's accounted for, and then they can spend and purchase election advertising or campaign brochures. Whatever they want they can purchase out of that account. It's a transparent document that's registered with Elections Alberta. Well, now third parties will have to abide by those same principles and those same rules.

There's disclosure for political parties when someone donates over \$375 worth of contribution. Now third parties will also have to identify their donors who give in excess of \$375. That is another similarity between third parties and political parties that this legislation will create.

The most important thing that we've done, in my view, is that we have not capped election advertising spending. I think that's important. The reason is that let's just say that a third party comes along, third party A, and they come up with just a brilliant idea, but it's not an idea that caters to big interests or people that are wealthy or anything like that. It's an idea that has the support of a large percentage of the population but maybe not popular with the richer and more wealthy, well-to-do segments of society. Well, that group should be able to raise, in my view, the funds necessary to get their viewpoint across to the people of Alberta. That would mean that they would need to spread their idea to a large base of people because they would need little donations of \$10, \$20, \$30, \$40 in order to get their idea across to Albertans and be able to in their case hopefully sway the vote.

If they're able to raise, say, \$2 million or \$3 million or \$4 million or \$5 million from tens of thousands of different donors across the province, I don't think it's fair to say: "No. Sorry. I know that that's a great idea and so many people support it, but we're only going to allow \$150,000 of that \$5 million you raised to be spent on this idea." I think that is too restrictive. The federal government and the B.C. government went that way and capped the amount a third party can spend on election advertising. I don't think that that is the way to go, especially in Alberta, especially in a place where we believe in free speech and we believe that an idea should proceed or not proceed on its merits.

Those are kind of some of the thoughts that went into this bill.

I'd like to thank the Assembly for the debate. It's been a very healthy debate. I just hope that they would support this bill as currently written. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I suppose it's not terribly surprising that I might have a different opinion on an issue than the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I appreciate his putting forward his ideas. The beauty of this House is the opportunity to exchange a variety of ideas.

For me Bill 205 is an act involving suppression as opposed to freedom of speech, of gagging as opposed to communicating. If a group feels sufficiently concerned about an issue, I think they have the right to promote that issue. I personally don't like attack ads. I would prefer to point out what should be done as opposed to, particularly, how badly something has been done.

I'll state for the record that when I first ran as an MLA in Calgary-Foothills in 2001, at the time I was not in support of provincial Liberal attack ads on the government. I believe that was a major factor that contributed to fewer Liberals being elected in 2001, the negative-style attack ads that are more frequently seen in federal campaigns. Whether the attack ad is a puffin flying over a would-be Prime Minister or whether it's the "you've been out of this country for so long" and "you're in it for yourself" types of ads, I don't believe negative ads contribute anything, whether they're from a third party or from a political party. However, I do believe that third parties have a right to establish not only what they believe is in the best interests of their particular membership, as may be the case in a union or an association, but what they believe to be in the best interests of Albertans as a whole.

4:00

I had the dubious honour of being a member of the negotiating subcommittee for local 38 of the Alberta Teachers' Association in 1993 and 1994. With regard to Bill 205, Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, that year, I think, it would have been highly appropriate to have pointed out the effects on education of cutbacks, the effect of teachers being let go, class sizes increasing. Then in 1994 again I was a member of the negotiating subcommittee who brought back to my less-than-enthused membership the notion of a 5 per cent cut in salary and in operating fund support for education. Similarly, unions connected with nurses or doctors were very concerned about the cutbacks that were not just a year in length but lasted over a series of years and drove a number of professionals, both teachers and medical personnel, out of this province.

Now, at that point, if they so desired, they could have put forward arguments in favour of education, in favour of a strong health care system. But I'm not sure with Bill 205 if they would have run into difficulties. If in the future teachers want to point out the importance of having a full-day kindergarten, for example, or if they want to point out during an election that it would be very important to have half-day junior kindergarten – or what if teachers pointed out that the government needed to live up to its commitments during the last education discussion with regard to pupil-teacher ratios? Would Bill 205 prevent those issues from being raised? These are questions that I'm putting out there as well as concerns.

If there are limitations on the freedom of speech as opposed to an attack, does Bill 205 still allow for that same freedom of speech opportunity to be provided if you have a concern? Possibly it's the thought or the perception that rural hospitals may be closed. Say you're a member of the Health Sciences Association. Are you able on behalf of your membership to state, "We as a union are concerned about potential effects of closures of hospitals on not only our membership that serves those hospitals but on Albertans as a whole, whose health care is concerned"? Would that be, under Bill 205, a discontinued or a nonallowable process?

If a group of farmers, beef producers, got together and said, "We

think that there's a better way to market our beef; we think that age verification is important," during an election would Bill 205 prevent beef producers from pointing out something that is in their common interest? I am hoping that further on in our Committee of the Whole discussion somebody can delineate for me what is allowed in terms of promotion versus what is disallowed in terms of the potential view of attack.

The whole notion of Bill 205 limiting free speech concerns me. As I began, I am not concerned about sort of working on the negative aspects. Well, my personal view is that negative attack ads have the reverse, that they create a degree, a potential of sympathy for the individual being attacked as opposed to pointing out the lack of capabilities of those who are under attack.

I look forward to rising again in committee on Bill 205 following these clarifications. I'm hoping that freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, even freedom of assembly, which was denied to teachers at one point prior to the Learning Commission being set up – it was stated that teachers were not allowed to gather in groups of two or more to discuss the potential of a strike. That right of assembly was denied prior to the Learning Commission report coming out. So I'm hoping that that type of suppression is not the intent of Bill 205. I look forward to further debate and clarification, whether it be the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere or any other member of this House. Whether they have come from a legal background or a professional background, it is of no consequence to me; I look forward to their input.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to also join the discussion on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. I hope I got that right.

When I first was discussing this just with some colleagues, somebody suggested that either I or the government had no plan. However, Mr. Chairman, since the administration took office, our government has been steadfast in our efforts to implement measures to improve both openness and accountability. Bill 205 complements these measures.

In particular, I refer members here to section 39.2, which proposes guidelines for applicants who qualify to register third-party advertising accounts. Our government recognizes that new democratic reforms for these applicants as outlined in Bill 205 need to be thorough if they are to be, indeed, effective. Section 39.2 of this bill strikes a balance between setting appropriate registration guidelines for third-party accounts while upholding their rights to express perspectives on various issues.

Mr. Chair, I reaffirm that the intent of this legislation is not to impede third parties from voicing opinions but to establish guidelines to allow Albertans to know who's attempting to influence them throughout a provincial election. To achieve this, I submit that third parties that will incur expenses over the prescribed limit during an election will be required to register an account. However, we have limited some entities from sponsoring an account directly in an effort to restrict those groups that may present a challenge to increased disclosure and fairness.

I refer specifically to section 39.2(5) and its provisions that list those applicants who are restricted from registering. Some of those parties listed pose obvious conflicts of interest, while others are simply restricted in an effort to close potential loopholes. Pursuant to section 39.2(5) the list begins with provision (a), which denotes "numbered corporations." I believe that there are over 1.4 million corporations in this province to date, so this could be just any

corporation where people can't distinguish them. Now, as anyone with a marketing background will acknowledge, one disadvantage to having a corporation named by numbers only is that it provides very limited, if any, information about the identity of the business. Provision (a) exemplifies a key objective of Bill 205 in that it aims to inform voters. Prohibiting numbered corporations from sponsoring accounts sets a precedent that will encourage third parties who attempt to persuade voters to bare their identity.

Provision (b) will restrict any organization "that has not carried on business for one year prior to making its application" pursuant to this act. Additionally, part (c) further restricts "an organization whose primary purpose is to engage in political advertising" from sponsoring a third-party account. The intention of these provisions is to ensure that third-party political advertising is conducted in an open and a democratic manner. Through these provisions we are limiting avenues that could potentially allow third parties to exploit these accounts for political gain as well as to remain de facto anonymous.

4:10

However, some organizations will be restricted from operating in this capacity for other reasonable purposes. The restriction is set in place with provision (d), that "a registered charity within the meaning of section 248(1) of the Income Tax Act (Canada)" is not able to register an account. These organizations, such as nonprofits, collect funding in order to provide ostensibly benevolent services; therefore, realizing expenses for political advertising could potentially undermine their charitable causes. Now, Mr. Chair, we all know that this government offers very generous tax credits under our own tax code, and the purpose, I submit, for these charities, is exactly for that. It's for charities. It's not for a particular political activity. That's what this legislation goes through.

Building on provisions (a) through (d) inclusive within section 39.2(5), there are provisions for restricting political professionals and organizations from operating a third-party account. The provisions restrict the following individuals or entities:

- (e) a candidate for election;
- I think we've all been there.
- (f) a registered political party;
- (g) a registered constituency association;
- (h) a member of Parliament;
- (i) a member of the Senate;
- (j) a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, these individuals or entities, if allowed to sponsor a third-party account, would be in direct conflict of interest. Yes, I am aware of this. This is due to the fact these individuals and entities have other means by which they can advertise political messaging, so it may in fact not be appropriate for them to use third-party advertising mechanisms.

Indeed, I believe that we have before us guidelines for comprehensive registration and reporting requirements for third parties. Whether for the purpose of supporting or opposing registered political parties or a candidate through advertisements appearing in print, broadcast, or online, third parties pursuant to Bill 205 will now have a more accountable system in which to conduct their activities. Having third parties disclose information and adhere to these guidelines will serve to strengthen Alberta's electoral process.

Mr. Chair, Bill 205 will usher in a new level of accountability for political disclosure in provincial elections, and I urge all hon. members in this Assembly to stand in support of this legislation. I must also add my personal thanks to the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for sponsoring such an excellent piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. At least, I believe that's what we're on. It was a bill just introduced by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I've heard some of the debate that has gone on, and this is, in fact, my first time to speak to the amendments.

I appreciate the intent of the bill in that it attempts to sort of look at third-party contributions and maybe rein them in to a certain extent. Yet I think that in this situation it is better for us to err on the side of caution. I think this would be too much fundamentally an attack on freedom of speech.

As I mentioned earlier today in my member's statement, freedom of speech is the cornerstone of every liberal democracy in the world. Canadians have fought and died to protect this freedom, and in no small way should we be interfering with this right of citizens to take part in freedom of speech. We can see that now being, I guess, done in this manner, and I think it really is one of those situations where the government should not be deciding who or what or if anybody would want to comment on the status of the government, the status of whatever they'd like. The government should not be involved in regulating that speech or in any rules intended to be used for limiting that speech by third-party organizations. Now, it's fine to have rules and regulations for the people who are running for office, who are running in elections, or for limiting the amount of advertising, say, of a political party. That, to me, would be a fair and reasonable gesture. It would allow for a level playing field for people taking part in an electoral process so that the battle of ideas could truly be heard by constituents.

I don't believe that limiting freedom of speech in terms of third parties being able to comment on the democratic process is what we are here to do. If we take a look at some of the examples used by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, it would have effectively eliminated many of our trade unions pooling together their money and contributing to advertising for what they full well stand for and believe in. I guess I say this is more of an attack on their individual freedom of speech than it ever would be for any government in power. Let's face it. Those individuals who have been part of a union have contributed to a fund, and I guess that if they disagree with what those funds are contributing to doing, they can full well quit the union and go work somewhere else. Needless to say, by limiting their freedom of speech, we are in fact taking away an avenue that they as individuals who have started to work together and bind together on how to organize their workplace and how they're going to take part in the political process – we are starting to interfere in that. That's something I do not believe should be happening: governments interfering in that process.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity also brings up the fact that the teachers' union, the Alberta Teachers' Association, could have been stifled by this type of legislation should they have wished to advertise on the airwaves about the unfair and unjust cutbacks to education in the early '90s or if they wanted to talk about whatever it is the ATA, the Alberta Teachers' Association, would like to discuss. They should as an organization be allowed to use their resources collected by members in whatever fashion they see fit. This is a fundamental attack on their ability and their free speech rights as entertained under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I also heard the earlier comment by the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere regarding freedom of speech, his suggestion or comment that his government is more in favour of freedom of speech than, say, other relative governments or other jurisdictions. But I'd challenge him on that opinion. If we look at this bill, at its core, it's a limit to free speech. If we look at the bill, what many

people have been calling for in the human rights and multiculturalism act is a return to 1996 protections under the human rights code as advocated by the Sheldon Chumir foundation. That isn't being followed up. Again, we're not moving to extend free speech in this province; we're looking to limit it, it appears, at every turn.

On that note, I have appreciated the opportunity to come up and speak for, I guess, civil rights, for the protection of democracy and individuals' or groups' rights to partake in advertising in elections – I believe it is a fair comment – for those organizations to use their funds to advocate for change or changes, whatever that may be. I thank you for the opportunity, for allowing me to speak at the committee stage. I guess that in the meantime and in-between time that's it for now.

Thank you very much.

4:20

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. I would first like to commend the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for bringing forward a notable amendment to a very important piece of legislation. Bill 205 proposes to clarify the parameters of third-party spending for election advertising during provincial elections.

While this bill has many points worthy of support and discussion, I would like to focus my comments this afternoon on the term that is key to this amendment act, the definition of third-party advertising, found under section 39.1(1)(c) of the legislation. Bill 205 defines third-party advertising as "political advertising that appears during an election period and is placed by a third party." Mr. Chairman, I think everyone in this Assembly would agree that it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of a specific word and term prior to using it, especially when dealing with legislation. Ambiguity could create confusion, which, in turn, could detract from the intent of this bill. Therefore, the definition of third-party advertising in Bill 205 provides clarity as it contains three terms that are also defined under subsection 39.1(1).

Before delving into part (c), each of those terms needs to be explained as they are essential to understanding the meaning of the definition of third-party advertising. The first term I'd like to clarify is "election period." Under Bill 205 an election period commences the day the writ is dropped and concludes at the end of the polling day. Mr. Chairman, according to Alberta's Election Act the 14th day after the writ is dropped is nomination day, and 14 days after that the voting takes place. An exception occurs if the 14th day is a holiday, in which case the voting occurs on the next day that is not a holiday. Therefore, the election period in Alberta is typically 28 days, according to the definition described under section 39.1(1)(a) of Bill 205 and qualified by the Election Act.

The second term I'd like to touch on is "political advertising." We all know that companies advertise and attempt to entice consumers to purchase their products. Similarly, parties engage in political advertising in an attempt to sell a political platform or a candidate or to dissuade you from continuing to support your current candidate or platform of choice. According to Bill 205, political advertising means advertising "with the purpose of promoting or opposing any registered party or the election of a candidate, for which there is or normally would be a charge." Political advertising also includes advertising that takes a position on an issue a political party or candidate may be associated with, bearing some exceptions such as the publication of free news, editorials, and interviews, which are detailed in the legislation.

The final term contained within the definition for third-party advertising is “third party.” As detailed in Bill 205, a third party refers to “a person, including a trade union, employee organization, corporation and any other organization that would qualify for registration under section 39.2” Section 39.2, entitled Registration Requirement for Third Parties, outlines both the requirements for the third-party registration and details that must be included in an application for registration. Simply put, if a party’s advertised expenses are or are anticipated to be \$1,000, they are considered a third party and are required to apply for registration. That, Mr. Chairman, brings us back to the definition of third-party advertising.

Bill 205 defines third-party advertising as “political advertising that appears during an election period and is placed by a third party.” As you can see, the wording of the definition is comprehensive and straightforward, and since the three terms contained within the definition are also covered by the legislation, it leaves little room for confusion or misinterpretation. Accordingly, if you expand that definition and generalize it, third-party advertising essentially means advertising by a party whose advertising expenses to promote or oppose any registered party or candidate in an election are at least \$1,000 during the 28 days after the writ is dropped.

Clarity is key when dealing with legislation, and clear legislation is the foundation of transparent and accountable governments. This government is committed to transparency, Mr. Chairman. To this end, the proposed amendments in Bill 205, especially those contained in section 39.1(1), are vital to ensuring third-party election advertising transparency. I commend the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for bringing forward legislation that aligns with that ideal.

I fully back Bill 205, and I hope the hon. members of this Assembly will add their support to mine to pass this important amendment to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate the opportunity provided for the democratic process under the Committee of the Whole structure. It allows for a flow of ideas not permitted, for example, under second reading, where you have a 20-minute, if you’re leading off the debate, a 15- to 10-minute opportunity. The beauty of Committee of the Whole is that it allows for an exchange, a discussion, a collaboration. It’s interesting, for example, the support that all parties gave towards Bill 203. That’s a great example of collaborative efforts.

With regard to Bill 205, when I last stood up, I put forward a challenge. I put forward a request, and that was: can you show me or demonstrate to me or explain to me that Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, rather than allowing for a third party to have a level platform of opportunity to express views – what I said was: show me that this isn’t actually stifling the opportunity to put forward ideas that may be contrary to those of a particular party, most frequently contrary to the ideas of the ruling party.

Now, what I find interesting is that on the same Order Paper we have bills 203, 205, and 206. Bill 203 talked about tightening up regulations. After a fact Bill 205 does the same. It talks about tightening up the regulations for third-party advertising. On the record, I have no problem with the tightening up of regulations. The expectation that a third party would have to undergo similar divulging, accountability, transparency as the current political party: I have no problem with those ideas. However, as the hon. member who preceded me pointed out, the definition of what falls under

political advertising is not as clear as it might be. If you put forward a view in terms of “I’m looking for support for reducing the size of a classroom,” is that political advertising because it takes place during a campaign period, or is that simply a notion that I am upholding? So again I ask what falls under the idea of political advertising. Anything that happens within the writ period, whether it’s putting forward a positive idea that you would like to embrace: is that considered political advertising, or is it only, in Bill 205, some form of confrontational advertising? Is there a difference between positive and negative advertising, and how do you tell whether they’re political?

4:30

One of the best innovations that this government has brought forward in the last number of years is the idea of the all-party standing policy committees because, like the Committee of the Whole, there is an opportunity to combine efforts, to put our collective minds together and come up with something which is better through our Committee of the Whole or standing policy committee process than any individual, whether they’re the proposer, or proponent, of a bill or not. I would hope that in our continuing discussion over Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, somebody will come up and clearly demark for me, create the lines of demarcation between what is simply putting forward an idea that we would like to have considered and potentially adopted by a party, whether it be government or opposition – during an election period, is that putting forward of an idea considered political advertising?

That lack of clarification makes me a little bit suspicious or, at least at this point, withholding of full support for Bill 205 because I am yet to be convinced that Bill 205 promotes and acknowledges the need for freedom of speech as opposed to suppressing it. But I am pleased to see that the hon. member and mover of Bill 205, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, is here and has heard my concerns and may wish to answer them. Does Bill 205 limit the opportunity to put forward ideas? How do we define political ideas? Are they strictly political because they’re brought up during the writ period? What allowances are there for freedom of speech within that writ period?

We have all experienced as we campaigned prior, of course, to the introduction of Bill 205 the public forums and the opportunity to debate, and we have all beat the bushes, some more successfully than others, in terms of raising campaign donations. Ideally, we wouldn’t need to worry about third-party advertising or limits on it as Bill 205 puts forward. We would be able to be champions for individuals regardless of whether they were members of unions or associations, whether they were mothers or fathers or students that were age 18 and older and had an opportunity to vote. Ideally, they would look at our campaign literature and they would say: this is an individual I can support. But the reality is that individuals and organizations have the right, at least prior to the passing of Bill 205, to put forward an alternative viewpoint, and if Bill 205 limits that opportunity for freedom of speech, then I see it as a regressive move.

I am looking for clarification. I will sit down, and hopefully that clarification can be provided.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do have an amendment which I am going to propose be circulated.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We’ll pause for a moment while the pages distribute the amendment.

Dr. Brown: Mr. Chairman, I move that in Committee of the Whole Bill 205, Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by the addition of the amendment as circulated, which states that the following is added after section 39.4: 39.41(1), that a third party shall not incur election advertising expenses of a total of more than \$3,000 to promote or oppose the election of one or more candidates in a given electoral district, including by naming them, showing their likenesses, identifying them by their respective political affiliates, or taking a position on an issue with which they are particularly associated; and 39.41(2), that the limit set out in 39.41(1) only applies to an amount incurred with respect to a leader of a registered party, or eligible party, to the extent that it is incurred to promote or oppose his or her election in a given electoral district.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, what you just read is the amendment, or were you clarifying the amendment?

Dr. Brown: No. What I read is the amendment. Is there an issue with . . .

The Deputy Chair: Well, that's not what the amendment that we have says.

Dr. Brown: The amendment as circulated. Yes. I'm sorry. It's the amendment as circulated.

The Deputy Chair: Okay.

Dr. Brown: If I could just clarify that, then, for the record, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Dr. Brown: It states:

39.41(1) Subject to subsection (2), a third party shall not incur political advertising expenses of a total amount of more than \$3000 during an election period to promote or oppose the election of one or more candidates in a given electoral division.

That's the extent of it.

Mr. Chairman, I do support the bill, and I commend my colleague and fellow member of the Alberta bar, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, for bringing forth his bill. The thrust of his bill is to put limits on the amounts which any person or entity can contribute to a third party. However, I believe that a small amendment, that I'm proposing, would strengthen the bill and make it a stronger piece of legislation. I think that the amendment would level the playing field by limiting outside interference in local constituency elections. The proposal that I'm making is to add a provision that would limit spending in any one electoral district, for or against any candidate, to \$3,000.

This amendment, Mr. Chairman, tracks the provision already in federal legislation, and in my estimation it would prevent the perversion of a fair election by third parties and special-interest groups which might blanket a riding with ads or single out candidates for an overwhelming campaign. I would note that the limit of \$3,000, which I'm proposing in the amendment, is identical to the limit already in the federal legislation and that federal ridings are over three times larger than our provincial constituencies. So the amount is a generous one, in my estimation.

Mr. Chairman, I want to talk very briefly about what happens in the United States right now with respect to some elections. In the United States spending by third parties and special-interest groups

has been shown to be a real problem, and it is really a situation which is perverting democracy. It hasn't happened here yet, but I think that when we look to the south of us, we can see what might happen, where dirty politics become the norm, where huge sums of money are needed to fight very close elections, where Congressmen and Senators accept huge contributions from special-interest groups which, in turn, expect favourable treatment, where American elections have been influenced by big spending from third parties. These are known as political action committees. We haven't called them that yet in the bill, but political action committees in the U.S. spend millions of dollars to promote the interests of specific industries or business interests. They target specific candidates in specific ridings, often with considerable effect.

4:40

Mr. Chairman, as I've said, we haven't yet seen large-scale involvement of third-party interest groups in Alberta's individual electoral districts. However, the expensive attack ad campaign which was organized by certain labour organizations during the last election might be a harbinger of changes to come. If such resources were allocated against individual candidates in specific electoral districts, they could significantly affect the outcome of an election. Third-party interests with deep pockets and self-centred interests should not be permitted to manipulate the democratic process by buying up media space and attempting to push a certain political agenda against an individual candidate.

In Alberta we have no limits on campaign spending by candidates or by parties, and this amendment would not change that situation. Nothing in the proposed amendment alters the total amount which could be spent by a third party during an election in the province as a whole or in a given city or in a region. Nothing in the amendment restricts the amount which political parties can spend in any given electoral district. That remains unlimited. The amendment doesn't control the use of attack ads. The proposed amendment would not in any way control total spending, nor does it affect spending in specific areas, cities, or districts. Only as long as it does not single out specific candidates would those totals be allowed. The amendment only addresses limits on advertising for or against individual candidates in a given electoral district.

Mr. Chairman, the danger is that without some type of spending limit on third parties, a political campaign could become extremely one sided. Different political views could be prevented from having a fair airing. In my submission the danger lies not just in the influence of the election; I think the greater danger lies in the intimidation of members of the House or candidates for public office in taking strong stands or expressing their honestly held beliefs.

I think that right now in the United States, if we look at what happens with Senate and Congress elections down there, there is a chilling effect that these third-party spending campaigns have with respect to many of those controversial issues, whether they be for or against. [Dr. Brown coughed repeatedly]

Mr. Chairman, in view of my present situation, I think I'll sit down. I would urge members to support the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I wish the hon. member a speedy recovery.

I'm honoured by the fact that the hon. member who's proposing this amendment to Bill 205 – I'm assuming we'll call it A1 – is a Calgary-Varsity constituent. I believe that we have a type of rarified air in Calgary-Varsity that naturally promotes good ideas. The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is also a Calgary-

Varsity member, and we all know some of the wonderful ideas with regard to sustainable development.

Speaking specifically to amendment A1, as I've stated earlier, I don't believe in slime politics or mud throwing. I believe in putting forward an idea that has merit on its own as opposed to tearing down one that doesn't. The reason I am here today is because the ideas I proposed were considered superior to those of the candidates who ran against me. What this amendment A1 is proposing is that no individual or third party has the right to basically slime or toss mud at an individual beyond the amount of \$3,000; in other words, "advertising expenses of a total amount of more than \$3000 during an election." I'm quoting from 39.41(1) of amendment A1, just to qualify the comments. Instead, we have the opportunity of supporting an individual for what they stand for and the ideas they put forward as opposed to spending money on attacks.

Now, during campaigns when I've had signs destroyed, I've said to the individuals who were apprehended: why did you not spend this time and this energy in terms of supporting an opposing candidate whose views you felt were closer in mind to yours? What this does is it eliminates or at least limits negative advertising, and the other side of that coin is, hopefully, promotes positive advertising. Work for the candidate of your choice. Financially support the candidate of your choice. Get positive as opposed to getting negative.

This afternoon as we further discuss A1, given the limited time we have remaining, I think you'll get a chance to see democracy in action because I have presented the pro side of the support for A1. I support the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for bringing forward this amendment as I believe it strengthens the intent of Bill 205, and I look forward to other discussion, pro or con.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere to the amendment.

Mr. Anderson: Yup. On the amendment. I'd like to speak to the amendment from the hon. member. First of all, I'd like to point out the incredible contradiction in the argument of the Member for Calgary-Varsity. It's just mind boggling to me how he can stand and say that he's against Bill 205 because it restricts free speech, and then an amendment is brought forward to effectively restrict certain types of free speech, which he is for. It's like you were for the bill before you voted against it. Or I don't know.

Mr. Liepert: That's kind of typical.

Mr. Anderson: It's pretty typical. Exactly.

Anyway, we'll get down to the actual amendment here. I appreciate the amendment being brought forward, and I understand the spirit behind it, but I will not be supporting this amendment, and I would urge my colleagues not to support it, as well. I do so for several reasons.

The first is that it undercuts what I tried to do when drafting this and what I tried to do as I talked with different colleagues and different interest groups and stakeholders on this issue. There was a feeling that we had to get the right balance between making sure we protected free speech while at the same time making sure that we created an equal playing field for democratic participants, for third parties, for political parties, et cetera.

The way we went about doing that is by saying: okay, we're all going to be in the sandbox together, we're all in the election together here, so let's everyone play by the same rules. Whether you're a political party, whether you're a third party, if you want to advertise an election you've got to raise your funds in the same way that

everyone else raises them. You've got to get a whole bunch of grassroots support together to raise those funds and in relatively small donations. We're not talking about in increments of \$100,000 dollars or in amounts of \$1 million. You have to raise them in amounts of \$15,000 or less from many hundreds or thousands of people around the province, and then during the election we can use those funds to purchase advertising and to conduct campaigns, et cetera.

4:50

If we were to do this, if we were to limit the amount you could spend in any one constituency against a candidate to \$3,000, in effect we would be placing a rule and a restriction on a third party that a political party does not have to abide by. So there's an inconsistency there. What's good for one participant should be good enough for another. If somebody were to target a riding, if someone were to target, say, the riding in Calgary-Varsity, the Liberal Party could then target that riding as well in order to defend it.

Or if someone was targeting Airdrie-Chestermere and I needed some help from the Progressive Conservative Party, well, we would have the right to spend as much money as we wanted on that riding. We could spend whatever – \$100,000, \$150,000, whatever it is – to make sure that we were fairly defended against the attack of a third party who got their funds because they had an idea that resonated with hundreds or thousands of Albertans enough to raise a sizable sum of money. In other words, there might be some merit to that. That's part of the democratic process, and that's part of free speech. So I would say that this amendment undercuts the level playing field that we were talking about.

Secondly, I do think that logistically this will be a very difficult amendment to implement. Let's look at the amendment. It says, "a total amount of more than \$3000 during an election period to promote or oppose the election of one or more candidates in a given electoral division." One or more candidates: well, what does that mean? Let's say that there are three ridings in the city and you have \$15,000 that you want to spend on political advertising, does that mean you divide the \$15,000 by three? Then it's \$5,000, so that's over the limit, so you have to bring down the amount of money that you're using. It's a little bit vague, too. Are we talking about named candidates? Do you have to name these candidates or identify an issue that they're closely associated with? What does this refer to? I would say that logistically this would be a very difficult amendment to implement, and it is quite vague as to how it would work.

Thirdly and finally, we looked very closely at B.C. as well as the federal legislation. What B.C. and the feds did is they put in a cap. They decided they were going to cap at – I believe that B.C. is \$150,000; I can't off the top of my head remember what the federal one is. That's how much a third party is going to be allowed to spend in an election period. They have rules similar to this, where they then limit what can be spent in a local jurisdiction by a third party on election advertising. That's one way to go about it. That's one system.

My belief is, and I believe the majority of this caucus feels, that instead of the capped system, free speech is better served by not capping the amount that can be spent but by capping the contribution from each individual who is trying to contribute to an election advertising campaign to a certain fair amount so that no one person can dominate kind of the marketplace of ideas during an election just because of the size of their wallet. So you can't have somebody swoop in, give somebody \$2 million to do an election campaign, and so be it. If we had a cap system, then I would say that this amendment would work. But we're not going towards a spending cap system; therefore, this amendment doesn't fit into the legislation as it is before us.

I mean, that's basically it. I know our time is short here before we possibly vote on this, but I would say that this amendment is an unnecessary restriction on free speech. It treats parties differently from third parties, and it gives political parties a more dominant voice than they need. We have lots of means to avail us. We don't need to restrict free speech any more than this legislation already does and, I believe, appropriately does.

With this, I would urge my colleagues to vote against the amendment. But I want to say to the hon. member moving the amendment, Calgary-North Hill, that I do respect where he's coming from. I welcome debate on the issue and appreciate his bringing this forward, but I will be voting against the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 8(1), which provides for consideration of motions other than government motions at 5 p.m. on Monday afternoons, I must now put the following question: shall progress on the bill be reported? All in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no. This motion is carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 205. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Monitoring of Home Electricity Usage

509. Mrs. Forsyth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require all electricity providers to notify local authorities of spikes in home utility usage that may indicate the electricity is being used to power the operations of an illegal drug facility.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise before this Assembly and open debate on Motion 509. I've talked to people before in this Assembly about how I've seen drug productions in my own neighbourhood. I can drive around Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, and any other community in Alberta and see houses that I know are being used to produce drugs. They're unmistakable. The place is just a tangle of wires running to lights, timers, and watering equipment. What are these wires carrying?

The answer is that they're carrying the lifeblood of any drug production operation, electricity.

I don't need to tell any of you who were recently driving through a snowstorm in May that Alberta's climate is not hospitable to the production of the plants associated with drug operations. This isn't some warm jungle in South Africa where you plant Mary Jane in the back 40, and she'll grow like a bad weed. No. To create this type of climate in Alberta, you need tons of heat, artificial light, and water, and the delivery of all these elements involves electricity.

Utility consumption rates are a very useful tool to identify houses that are involved in drug production. The average 2,000 square foot home in Canada consumes 1,000 to 1,100 kilowatt hours per month. With hot tub usage, et cetera, it can reach up to 1,500 kilowatt hours per month. The average grow op consumes 10 times this amount, around 10,000 kilowatt hours per month. So we're not talking about shades of grey differences here; we're talking about huge discrepancies that indicate something is up. In B.C. the trigger for reporting unusual utility consumption to police is 3,000 kilowatt hours, or about three times normal consumption.

Making it mandatory for electricity providers to alert authorities when these huge discrepancies occur will allow us to take action to stamp out drug production in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, drugs are like any other product. There is a defined process that they must go through to be produced, distributed, and consumed, and every step of this process endangers Albertans. Drug production in Alberta usually involves a clandestine operation located in a house, and this creates a whole host of dangers. It produces mould, which can lead to respiratory disease, exposes people to harmful chemicals, and, according to a study in B.C., increases the chances of fire by 24 times.

5:00

It would be reassuring to think that these operations were located out in the woods somewhere many miles from any neighbour. Well, actually it would be naive to think that way. These operations are often located smack in the middle of densely populated areas throughout the province. This means that many innocent families, children, and seniors are exposed to the dangers that I've mentioned.

Once these drugs are produced, they've got to be distributed. This involves a complex network of mules, dial-a-dopers, and street corner pushers. It also means heavy involvement from organized crime. Hardly a day goes by that I don't read about violence associated with organized crime in Alberta – a brawl between rival gangs, a body dumped there, a drive-by shooting, a beating because of a drug-related debt – and innocent bystanders like youth out at a club on a Saturday night or motorists on their way to the grocery store are sometimes affected. We need to take action to stop this.

Finally, after drugs are distributed, they are consumed by the buyer, usually someone who is young. Drugs have many awful effects on the body. They're highly addictive. They can cause cancer and respiratory disease, impair motor skills in the short term, and cause long-term congestive damages, and they can be laced with dangerous additives which can lead to sudden death. We were recently reminded of that sad fact when two young girls west of Edmonton died after taking ecstasy.

All of these dangers make it imperative to eliminate the drug trade in Alberta, and it begins with taking out production. It's pretty hard to distribute and consume something that cannot be made. Now, it's true that 90 per cent of drug operations bypass the electricity meter and steal electricity from the provider, and I've heard some argue that forcing utility providers to report spikes will accomplish nothing since they don't know about 90 per cent of cases where drug operations are consuming their product.

Well, a couple of points on this issue, Mr. Speaker. First, what about the 10 per cent the utility companies do know about? Would it benefit our communities if 10 per cent of the grow ops in Alberta were busted and 10 per cent fewer drugs made it to our schools? Secondly, advanced metering technologies are rapidly being developed. These technologies make it possible to use remote sensing to determine how much electricity is being consumed, no conventional meter necessary. So you can bypass all you like, but the provider will still know how much electricity is being consumed. I think that mandatory reporting combined with enhanced technology will really take the bite out of drug production in Alberta. This isn't to suggest that it will entirely stop the drug trade or that we should discontinue our efforts, but it's a practical step that will make it much more difficult to make drugs in Alberta.

I urge my colleagues to support this motion and make it more difficult for those who endanger Albertans by manufacturing drugs.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed, may we have unanimous consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief because I think this is a very important discussion to have here. I just wanted to introduce some guests we have from out in my part of the world, Ken Freimark and Kent Staden. Ken's business is in Lloyd. And Gerald Zagrosh is here to talk about some important discoveries he's making in health care. I'd just like to welcome them.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Monitoring of Home Electricity Usage

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for attempting to get a handle on drugs. The hon. member led the crime and community task force that toured this province and came up with a number of recommendations that have since been implemented.

I, however, would rather see the amount of money that this would entail being put towards increasing feet on the beat, so to speak. Motion 509 is talking about the need to monitor, and I believe that type of monitoring could potentially better be involved with a greater police presence, an active participation in the community, improving local reporting in communities in terms of Neighbourhood Watch and so on.

I'm concerned that in casting a large net, there will be individuals potentially caught within the net who are law-abiding citizens. I know a number of individuals, for example myself at one time, where we didn't get into the hydroponic production, obviously, of an illegal drug, but we did have a number of lights in our basement for promoting the early growth of plants. Then we watered them in a very systematic nature. [interjections] Notice I am not saying illegal plants. I'm talking about flowers, just to clarify for those people who are getting excited across the way.

I am aware of the amount of electricity and the amount of water beyond the normal day-to-day usage that was required to keep those

lights burning in the evenings, the amount of extra water that was necessary to bring the seedlings to a mature point. I'm also aware that to try to make the transition from the basement to the greenhouse, we had to have heaters installed, and of course they were drawing more voltage. I can imagine the look on my wife's face or on my face if all of a sudden we had several well-armed individuals kicking down the front door of our greenhouse with the thought that the flowers we were growing were more of the smoking as opposed to the smelling kind. So I'm concerned about this.

It goes beyond the B.C. legislation. B.C. only required Hydro to pass on records on request. This is saying that electricity companies are to automatically provide this information. The potential, as I say, of the net casting and, rather than catching the big fish, getting some minnows is rather disconcerting to me. Does the member, for example, intend for power companies to pass on the information without there being a request from local authorities? Is this only under specific circumstances? For every house in the province and every local authority, how often would these reports be required? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?

In addition, we should bear in mind that with the new confiscation and civil forfeiture provisions, this kind of a move is a potential revenue maker for the government as seized drug houses can be auctioned off. Now, I have no problem with the profits of crime being seized and turned into a positive circumstance. I would like to put the marijuana growers out of business. I would also like to put the crystal meth manufacturers out of business, cut down on other types of illicit drug manufacturing which don't show up on the monitoring or metering of electricity. But does this take away the focus for police? Does this mean that police and local authorities would be driven to focus primarily on these operations, which, while serious, are not the full sum of drug dealing operations? We'd manage to shut down a greater number of marijuana grow ops – that's a good thing – but I would be much more concerned about, as I say, crystal meth and some of the drugs that have automatic, devastating, brain-damaging, immediate effects.

Now, how expensive would this policy be? The power companies will now have to process all of this information. Are we expecting them to, out of the goodness of their public-spirited hearts, not expect extra compensation for this extra observation? Are they going to then be passing it on? What would the cost of an inspection be? Would that be borne by the homeowner even if no grow op was found? Where are the electric companies going to find the resources and the individuals to do this extra monitoring and at what expense? Is the government prepared to provide this expense as opposed to requiring every electricity consumer in the province to be stuck with a marijuana grow op increase on their utility bill each month? People are having trouble paying the extra \$5 a month for the blue boxes. Can you imagine how they would jump up and down with regard to the marijuana grow op potential electricity spike adjustment to their bills?

5:10

What are the long-term impacts of such a policy? Doesn't this move grow ops into moving off grid or using a generator, for example? There are, from a camping point of view, quiet generators that very efficiently can provide this. We've seen examples, and the hon. member mentioned the Mayerthorpe circumstance. Well, in a situation like that, far from your neighbours, you could have a great big industrial generator cranking out the power you needed, and it would never show up on the electricity grid. There are similarly effective generators, auxiliary generators that organizations like hospitals use and so on, that can create a significant amount of power.

So while I support the idea of getting tough on crime, I believe the correct vehicle to be doing the toughening is our police force in co-operation with local authorities. If the government has funds that it can not only hire extra police to patrol our communities with the support of existing programs such as Neighbourhood Watch – in the rural areas they talk about Report a Poacher. Well, maybe we can talk about report a spiker. But for the hon. member to suggest that these electrical companies would be such good corporate citizens that they wouldn't tack on the extra costs of this monitoring is a concern for me.

I don't believe in the balance that if we only interrupt the lives of three families but we catch five crooks, that's a fair trade-off. We've seen the examples where the wrong door was kicked in or the wrong assumption was made, and we've got to do our due diligence. The best ones to provide that due diligence and monitoring are the police forces themselves. We have a number of sophisticated abilities that have been used by the military and by the police in terms of monitoring the amount of heat that is coming out of a suspected facility. It's not science fiction wherein they show the heat ramifications; they can penetrate into walls. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] Well, that's unfortunate. I ran out of power.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Motion 509, the energy spike provider reporting motion, as sponsored by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Motion 509 urges the government of Alberta "to require all electricity providers to notify local authorities of spikes in home utility usage that may indicate the electricity is being used to power the operations of an illegal drug facility." I would like to congratulate the member for bringing this motion to the attention of government. She's a lady that speaks tough on crime and actually does something to address crime as opposed to the members on the opposition benches.

Safety, as we know, Mr. Speaker, is extremely important to Albertans, especially the safety of our neighbourhoods and our children. We all know that illegal drug facilities are dangerous to have within our communities. The operators and occupants of marijuana grow ops can be dangerous people, and their homes are more susceptible to both extortion and home invasion. These grow operations are often linked to organized crime. Rival gangs may invade a grow op, which can lead to assaults, kidnapping, and the use of weapons not very far from where our children live, play, and go to school. They break into these operations to steal marijuana and put our families at risk just to make a quick buck. Oftentimes the operators will use traps to deter and obstruct intruders, which also can compromise the safety of our neighbourhoods and our children.

One of the Premier's five stated government priorities is to provide safe and secure communities for all Albertans to live in. To do this, our government implemented the safe communities initiative, in which a number of departments are targeting the problems of addiction as well as gang- and drug-related crime. If the government required electricity providers to notify local authorities of spikes in home utility usage, it would be a simple addition to our crime-fighting tool box. It would alert authorities to potentially illegal drug and gang activities within our communities, and it would do so at virtually very little cost to taxpayers.

I would like to draw attention to our neighbour to the west, British Columbia, which has implemented similar legislation and has had quite a bit of success with it. In 2006 the B.C. government enacted Bill 25, called the Safety Standards Amendment Act. This legisla-

tion gave local governments the right to request from electricity distributors information regarding residential electricity consumption within the government's jurisdictional boundaries. While the bill was intended to make communities safer, it also had a positive effect for electricity companies: it helped address the issue of electricity theft and the safety of electrical employees. So the success of the legislation in just that regard is encouraging, but even more encouraging, Mr. Speaker, is that in over a six-month period 88 grow ops were found in Coquitlam, B.C., with the information from electricity providers, and over a 13-month period 125 grow ops were found in Richmond, B.C.

I was going to say something about pot usage being a little bit more prevalent in B.C. than in Alberta, but I would digress. I would just say that there is no doubt that similar legislation in our province would definitely provide us with similar results. We would give our law enforcement officials one more way to track down dangerous and illegal activities while improving the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. I think it is fair to say that no one wants a drug house in their neighbourhood, and we must use every reasonable tool that we can to get these houses out of our communities. Again, this is a cheap way for the taxpayer, for everyone involved, a very simple solution that would have immediate benefit to our communities in making them safer and more secure.

For those reasons I applaud the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for Motion 509, and I encourage all members of this House to support the motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to compliment the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on 509, the electricity usage and grow op sponsor, because it does appear to be well-intentioned legislation. I would like to say that I probably would have supported this legislation should it have been drafted more according to what the B.C. legislation was. The legislation in B.C. . . .

Mr. Liepert: I thought you were a crime fighter.

Mr. Hehr: I am a crime fighter, Ron. I just forgot my cape today.

The legislation in B.C. asked hydro companies to pass along this information if requested. The difference in our jurisdiction is that this requires electric companies to actively just go about looking at people's electricity bills and submitting this information randomly to the powers that be. If we look at this, what we're saying is there is no opportunity for police to do, I guess, criminal investigations anymore, and that's the thing.

5:20

If you go ask the police officers in the city of Calgary, in I'd assume almost any jurisdiction in Calgary, "Do you know where the grow ops are in Calgary? Do you know the people who are dealing marijuana?" they'll say yes. Ask them that. I challenge the hon. member or anyone in this House to simply go ask their local police officer: do you guys know where the grow ops are? They'll tell you yes. Honestly, they will. Then the question is: why don't we then go follow up? Now, that's another question that I can't answer as well. But they seem to know where all the grow ops are. They seem to know where the people are dealing drugs. It's not this type of stuff that is keeping these grow ops going.

What happens is that when we're enabling this type of legislation, we're just not respecting good old honest police work, where they go

in if they know where the houses are. You've got to ask the question, "Why aren't they doing this?" and ask yourself, then, if the laws need to be toughened as to what happens if you find a grow op. I'd suggest, then, that if the laws were toughened and if they were enabled to lock them up longer instead of just a revolving door, this might actually happen, that this might actually have some teeth to it and allow for our police officers to actually go in and bust these grow ops on a more regular basis. They know where the dope dealers are and, in fact, where the people who are running grow ops are.

I think the other thing, too, is that when you're not having the police or the court get this information, you're opening up a severe, I guess, infringement on people's right to privacy. We're having a company that is doing business that is simply firing in, willy-nilly, spikes to electricity and simply just sending them in. There's no real police intervention in the process. It's simply a company who looks at records, doesn't do any investigation, and sends it on down the highway.

Maybe the people doing those things, they go tell their neighbour and say: "Hey, by the way, I just sent up this request. Do you know who had a spike in their electricity? It was the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie." You know, maybe he was, like the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, growing plants and watering flowers and all that stuff in his basement. I would hate to see this person from the company then besmirch the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie's good name. I know he's more of a birdwatcher than a plant grower or a flower grower. I just used that as an example.

Nevertheless, those are the reasons for speaking out on the bill. I believe our police know where these things are. I challenge anyone in this room to go ask them if they know who the people are with the grow ops, and they'll say yes. What they do after that – you'd have to ask them why they don't go bust them down.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to speak to Motion 509, energy spike provider reporting, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I'd like to thank the hon. member for her tenacity and enthusiasm in trying to reduce crime in Alberta. I appreciate that very much. I'm supportive of Motion 509 for several reasons; namely, because it will tackle crime in our province and because I believe it will benefit consumers.

Mr. Speaker, drug-related crime impacts our society in many ways. It affects the drug user who suffers from an addiction and community members whose safety may be compromised while at the same time profiting traffickers and fuelling crime. For these reasons this government has shown incredible innovation and determination in addressing crime. For example, the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act is particularly innovative as it provides a mechanism for the public to report properties that are possibly being used for illegal activities. Essentially the initiative builds on the foundation that the people living in the community know it best.

Motion 509 expands on this kind of innovation. It utilizes the fact that harvesting marijuana requires large amounts of electricity and that high residential electricity consumption can therefore be indicative of an illegal grow op. Based on these facts, Motion 509 works to collaborate with energy providers, engaging them to pass on relevant information to authorities.

One of the criticisms of this methodology surrounds the fact that many grow operators bypass the electricity meter in their home so as to remain inconspicuous as well as to avoid paying excessively

high utility bills. In essence, operators steal electricity. In light of this it can be difficult for utility providers to identify grow homes using consumption data. However, new technologies are being discovered that present alternatives to current measuring mechanisms. Mr. Speaker, these technologies are capable of accurately measuring how much energy is used in the absence of a traditional meter, ultimately making it very difficult to steal electricity. This will facilitate the discovery of properties that are using excessive energy. Therefore, requiring utility providers to report these occurrences to authorities would likely expose many, if not all, grow ops in the province.

That is why I'm primarily supportive of Motion 509. However, I'm additionally supportive because I believe that it will directly benefit consumers. Mr. Speaker, in addition to exposing homes that use electricity excessively, the information that is collected through these new technologies is sent wirelessly in real time to utility distributors. Essentially this means that for billing purposes no one needs to come to your home every couple of months to read the meter. By these means utility companies would no longer have to issue billing estimates to consumers. The bills would contain thorough and accurate consumption data. I consider this aspect of new metering technologies particularly appealing.

I frequently hear from my constituents about overestimated utility bills. This may not seem like a major issue because if a bill is estimated high, when the meter is read and shows less consumption, the subsequent bill will compensate the consumer. However, for individuals who have detailed financial plans or who are on a fixed income, like seniors, this kind of estimation can actually be burdensome. For this reason alone I would support the implementation of new metering technologies. If coupled with Motion 509, this technology can have a major impact on crime reduction in our province. Therefore, I would be happy to support Motion 509.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, thank God that motions only urge the government to take action on this, that, or the other thing. This is one of the most cockamamie, silly, stupid, ridiculous motions I think I've had the dubious honour to come across in the time that I've been in this House. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor, and he will address the chair.

Mr. Taylor: And the health minister, you know, if he's going to make life difficult for me in the next election, Mr. Speaker, might first want to learn what riding I represent and what the name of that constituency is. He doesn't seem to have a pretty good handle on that.

Mr. Liepert: You might not be there next time.

Mr. Taylor: I might not be. You never know. You might not be in Calgary-West next time.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, please address the chair.

Mr. Taylor: And maybe my constituency is going to be called Calgary-Centre. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, let's have a little bit of order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor. Everyone else, please refrain from interjections.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that intervention.

I'm being led to believe here that this draconian interference with people's privacy rights and civil liberties is being done in the name of consumer protection, so that my Enmax bill will go down. Is that the purpose of this? I find that a little bit of a stretch. I find it a little bit of a stretch that we are going to solve a problem – namely, the war on drugs, that we have been fighting now for probably 35, 40 years and losing . . .

5:30

Mrs. Forsyth: Because of people like you. [some applause]

Mr. Taylor: Thank you for the applause. Mr. Speaker, that goes precisely to my point here: there is absolutely no interest in solving the drug problem and every interest in limiting the freedoms of citizens of a democratic state in bringing forward a motion like this.

Look, give your head a shake, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This is not going to solve the war on drugs.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote *Beauchesne*. I'm sitting here very quietly, listening to some of the comments. "Stupid," which I think he mentioned, is in here.

Every person in this Assembly has the right to bring forward a motion or a private member's bill that they believe in. This particular motion that I have brought forward has been a year in the works with a lot of very reputable, good police officers in this province. I think that when we talk about "give your head a shake," I'm sitting here very quietly, listening to the hon. member so that I can figure out in my head where he's going on this particular issue. Mr. Speaker, if we may, would you get the fellow back on track?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, were you calling a point of order?

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: Under what standing order, what citation?

Mrs. Forsyth: Unparliamentary language, Mr. Speaker. It's on page 148 in the offending words in *Beauchesne* 488 to 492. "Stupid" is one of them.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the word "stupid" is unparliamentary. If the member would wish to withdraw that word, we can continue on.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will withdraw the word "stupid." I wouldn't want to use unparliamentary language when there are so many parliamentary words that can describe the pointlessness of this exercise, of this motion.

May I continue?

The Acting Speaker: Yes. Please continue.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Taylor: So let me put it this way. Hon. member, you're right. Any member of this House has the right to bring forward any motion that they believe in, as does any member of this House have the right

to debate that motion when they don't believe in it. That is precisely, Mr. Speaker, what I'm doing.

I don't believe that this is going to solve the war on drugs. If you want to start winning the war on drugs, Mr. Speaker, we have got to wrap our collective heads around the notion that we are going to attack demand, not the suppliers. As long as there's demand, there will be criminal elements in our society who will find ways to meet that demand no matter what it takes. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek knows this. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has undertaken a number of very laudatory efforts, initiatives in the past to try and tackle the war on drugs from the demand side of things, I believe. This, I'm afraid, is not one of them.

Now, I have no problem with the notion that there may be from time to time reason, probable cause for the authorities to contact a power company and say: we want to see the electricity consumption records on 123 XYZ Street S.E. because we have probable cause to suspect that there's a grow op going on in that house. But, Mr. Speaker, we have warrants for a reason. This motion urges the government to simply set up an arrangement by which Enmax and EPCOR and every other power company that may ever come into the mix in this province are somehow required to notify the authorities every time there's a spike in home utility usage.

There can be spikes for many reasons. Certainly, running a grow op in the basement is one of them, and it's the worst possible reason because at the end of the day you have a house that is for all intents and purposes rendered unfit for human habitation which may yet go back on the market and be sold to some unsuspecting homeowner. I do not for a moment believe that our rules and regulations, if we're going to make rules and regulations around grow ops, governing what becomes of houses that were grow ops when they go back on the market are tight enough, as tight as they should be.

I think that if you want to deal with consumer protection, there's an area to deal with in terms of making sure that no grow op goes back on the market so that some young family comes along, buys it, and raises their family at great risk to the children's health and their own. That, to my way of thinking, is a real issue. But this notion that the state can order electricity providers to just go on a regular fishing expedition or to somehow undertake the role of Big Brother and notify the authorities every time there is a spike in electricity usage – look, I might be wrong. Maybe the hon. member who is the sponsor of this bill, maybe one of the hon. members opposite who has spoken in favour of this bill can sit down and enlighten me as to precisely how this would work – and I don't think they can because this is a motion; it's not a bill – precisely how they envision that this would work beyond new metering technology, which I heard the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner reference, so I acknowledge that.

But, you know, at what point does a residence become suspect? Is it a gradual increase over time in the usage of electricity? Is it a sudden increase that then is constant and prolonged? Is it literally a spike on the coldest night of the year, when it's minus 35? You know, what is it? Let's say that on the coldest night of the year the furnace conks out, but the electricity is still on. I recognize that sometimes furnaces conk out because of an electrical problem. But let's say that the furnace conks out, and the homeowners have a number of electrically powered space heaters. Is that reason enough to have the police or health inspectors from the municipality knock on their door in the middle of the night and then present them, as has happened frequently in the B.C. lower mainland, with a bill to cover the cost of the inspection, that can run into the thousands of dollars, regardless of whether there is any concrete evidence found in those inspections that there's an actual grow op taking place in that residence?

This may be well intentioned. I'm not even sure – and if the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek wants to get up again and call another point of order on me, then have at 'er – that this particular motion is all that well intentioned. It doesn't make sense. It ain't going to fly. It ain't going to work no matter how many people in this Legislature vote in favour of it. I suspect very strongly that, you know, if this motion passes, this is the last that we'll probably see of it because I think the government will quickly take a look at it and go: no, we can't go there. At least, I hope they would because to do otherwise, to require unasked this routine notifying of the local authorities whenever there's a spike in electrical usage in a particular residence, a requirement on the part of the provider that they have to provide this without anybody in authority asking for it, without anybody seeking a warrant, that's not drug enforcement. That's enforcement of a police state.

And the funny damn thing about police states – oh, I'm sorry. "Damn" is probably an unparliamentary word, too, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize and withdraw that. The funny darn thing about police states: you know, there are an awful lot of them in the world, including ones that shoot drug users and drug pushers but still have a drug problem. So you may be able to very effectively quash civil rights and civil liberties, but you can't quash the drug problem, not through police-state tactics.

This is badly thought out, and there is no way I can support this, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

5:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 509, energy spike provider reporting, a motion brought forth by my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This motion urges the government of Alberta to require electricity providers to notify local authorities of spikes in home utility usages that may indicate the electricity is being used to power operations of an illegal drug facility.

Mr. Speaker, our province is committed to providing Albertans with safe communities to raise our families in, and one of the factors that greatly endangers this is the presence of illegal drug facilities. We made this promise to Albertans, and we need to follow through on this to the best of our abilities.

Whenever I talk about safety in our communities, I always think about Sherbrooke, a neighbourhood in my constituency, that expressed concern recently about a recovery house operating in their tight-knit community. After debate on the issue, Sherbrooke residents realized that the folks in the rehab facility needed a safe place to live, free from the addictions that threatened their rehabilitation and livelihood.

A lot of people came out to debate this issue, which made me think about the areas that may be of more concern to members of the community, issues like having an illegal drug house next door or across the street. But as important as helping these individuals in their recovery, it is equally imperative that we detect the houses in our community that are contributing to their addiction, the houses that are manufacturing illegal drugs and distributing them into our communities, houses that are hidden throughout many neighbourhoods across the province, and the houses that some people are too afraid to question or to report despite their suspicious activities.

Recently the government enacted the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, which provides a method for citizens who are concerned about tenants or residents who are using the property for illegal activities to voice their concerns to authorities. While this is breakthrough legislation, it may not mean that all drug houses are

found. Some are difficult to detect, which is why novel and innovative tools such as Motion 509 are needed. Ultimately, this is the kind of initiative that is likely to get these criminals out of our community, helping to put a stop to the illegal activities that threaten the safety of our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the issues of safety, illegal drug facilities could threaten the health and lives of nearby residents. Due to the large volumes of electricity and carbon dioxide needed, not to mention the carbon monoxide that is created, these operations could also greatly affect and threaten the safety of our communities. They increase the probabilities of fire, pose risks of infections, skin irritation, exacerbation of asthma, and increase the rates of upper respiratory disease.

Mr. Speaker, ultimately, the issue of grow ops is one that affects all Albertans, and it's one that we cannot stand by and let threaten the safety of our communities. We need to commit to keeping this government's promise of protection of the safety of Albertans every day. Motion 509 is another innovative way we can achieve this, and I would really like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this motion forward. I, too, had some concerns about how one initially measured electrical consumption, and my fears were laid to rest. I think it's a great motion.

Colleagues, I would urge you to support Motion 509 and commit to ensuring the safety of communities within this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has given us to rise this evening and spend a few minutes to add to the debate on Motion 509, regarding energy spike provider reporting. Now, as the motion is proposed, it urges the government to require electricity providers to notify local authorities – authorities – of spikes in home electricity usage that might indicate the electricity is being used to power the operations of an illegal drug facility.

Mr. Speaker, anyone who pays attention here knows my views relating to crime. Some of these people, with due process, simply belong behind bars – and I will state that over and over again – for all of the damage that they cause to our respective communities. This motion would further highlight the Alberta government's commitment to developing innovative ways to fight organized crime and to keep our communities safe.

As most of my colleagues – most – have probably noticed over the past year, again, as I mentioned, crime and organized crime are huge issues to me in my constituency and to all my constituents in Calgary-Egmont. I'm very happy to hear from constituents, including the Member for Calgary-Currie. My constituents and I recognize that the presence of organized crime in a neighbourhood often leads to increases in crime on all levels. I'm talking theft, violence, fires, other neighbourhood disturbances, and, as we saw on January 1 in my constituency, even murder. Mr. Speaker, I think that all Albertans will agree that keeping organized crime out of their neighbourhoods is a priority worth investigating.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, there is a clear link between organized crime and those illegal drug facilities, that this motion indeed intends to help detect. This last Friday I happened to run into someone who was a grade 4 student of my mother's, who now lives in Ottawa. He was in Calgary. He said to me: "I've never been involved in any drug issues whatsoever because I always think, what's behind that? What's behind the marijuana? What all is behind the cocaine?" What is it? It's organized crime. The more

demand there is for it, the more activity you're going to have in our communities. In fact, it's estimated that grow ops are operated and fuelled by organized crime 90 per cent of the time. It's clearly in the public interest that these grow ops cease to operate because of the impacts on criminal activity.

Not only do grow ops increase crime in the neighbourhoods that they occupy, but they also provide unavoidable health risks to the law-abiding neighbours of these drug facility operators. In fact, Mr. Speaker, an article written in the *Calgary Real Estate News* back in 2004 talked about the dangers to unsuspecting home buyers, again these unrecognized consequences of crime. Actually, I wrote the article. Those health risks include high levels of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, contamination from toxic spores and pollen from mature plants, contamination due to vaporized pesticides, fire hazards, and never forget also the black mould that often is part of the homes of unsuspecting buyers of these properties. These health risks obviously affect Albertans who have the misfortune of living in the vicinity of illegal drug facilities, not just the criminals who operate them.

Mr. Speaker, one of the government's key strategic goals is to promote strong and vibrant communities and reduce crime so Albertans feel safe. My vision of this province is one that the people of today and the people of tomorrow can continue to walk the streets safely without fear of organized crime. This motion is consistent with the commitment of this government's crackdown on criminals and criminal activity. For example, just last fall this Assembly passed Bill 50, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008, which established the process through which property and profits gained through unlawful acts are seized through civil courts and returned to the victims or used for programs that benefit the victims of crime. The Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has continued his department's commitment to increasing the police force in Alberta as part of the government's three-year plan to add 300 more front-line officers and to ensure that people in this province are safe from organized crime.

One of the major criticisms of this motion that I hear is that it would invade the privacy of individuals. I posted this on my Facebook and Twitter moments ago. That was the main theme that came up. A few things to consider here, first of all, is that B.C. Hydro has a similar program, and they use a trigger point of 3,000 kilowatt hours, which is approximately three times the average home consumption, okay? On top of that, the Electric Utilities Act code of conduct regulation in this province permits utility providers to disclose information to law enforcement without consent in certain circumstances. This obligation of service providers to ensure public safety in relation to the supply of electricity may provide an additional basis upon which a service provider may disclose consumption and other information where the circumstances warrant.

As I mentioned, there are already provisions in the existing

regulations that allow utility companies to disclose information, and that, to my mind, speaks of due process. We don't want to go and start knocking down doors. Mr. Speaker, this is about public safety and crime reduction and crime control. Furthermore, there are also provisions to allow utility companies to report hazardous situations, which illegal drug facilities would obviously qualify as. This goes one step further and proposes suspicious consumption levels to be automatically reported, again, not to other individuals; this is reported to law enforcement officials. This motion as proposed would give law-abiding citizens one more tool in their fight against organized crime and bring our neighbourhoods and our families one step closer to enjoying the safe, healthy lifestyle they so richly deserve.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Currie talks about reducing demand, and I agree. This can be done through education. It's not a one-pronged approach. It's a two-pronged approach: reducing both demand and supply. My part in reducing demand—I've always wanted to say this—I've never inhaled, and I've never exhaled.

Thank you.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. member to close debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to listen to the debate, and I really want to thank my colleagues from this side of the House, if I may, for their thoughtful, provocative thinking. I say that with all sincerity. I've been listening to the jibe back and forth from the opposition, and I'm thinking: God, they don't even know how to listen because we brought up in the Legislature the triple spikes used by B.C.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, by thanking two people who have worked very hard on this particular motion with me. That's my researcher, Elizabeth Clement, and my Leg. assistant, Brock Mulligan. I have to send a special thanks to some of the police in this province that have helped me with this particular motion, provided me with all of their wisdom and their advice when they're dealing with drug homes, grow ops, and taking drug-endangered children who are in these particular grow ops out of the house.

I ask everybody in the Assembly to support this motion.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the hour I'd move that the Assembly now adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:51 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, May 25, 2009

Issue 43e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 25, 2009

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Bill 27

Alberta Research and Innovation Act

Dr. Taft: [Not recorded] of decision-making over research activities, and I'd like to speak about that for a moment, Mr. Chairman.

The reason this bill is moving forward, I think, and one of the rationales for it is that we want to streamline decision-making. We need to simplify funding and administrative arrangements over supporting research, and we want to streamline the process, speed it up, make sure that funding programs that were complicated for supporting research – because researchers had to go here, and then they had to go there, and they had to go somewhere else, and if everything didn't come together in the same time frame, they might get their operations funding for research in year 1 and not get any equipment to conduct the research until year 2, and on and on. So there were a lot of problems, and I think the idea of this bill is in part to correct those problems.

Where I have concerns around one of the outcomes of the bill, probably an unintended effect, is that it centralizes. In the process of streamlining it brings tremendous control into the hands of a very few, ultimately the minister and the Premier, and I think that the whole effect of centralization on innovation needs to be questioned. I don't dispute the government's right and, indeed, the government's responsibility to set some broad frameworks for research directions. If you're putting a half a billion dollar fund together to fund research, you'd better have some idea of what the research is going to be about, but that's already being achieved when we have things like, you know, a fund for medical research or a fund for engineering research.

As the control from the central figures, the minister and the Premier, becomes more and more specific, the danger here is of micromanaging research, and I think we need to really be alert to that because I think that sort of centralization will actually achieve the opposite of what this bill wants. Instead of encouraging innovation, I think that too much centralization will discourage innovation. As I said in my comments a couple of weeks ago, the great innovations of history – the printing press or, you know, Einstein's $E = mc^2$ or Steven Jobs inventing the personal computer, whatever you want – weren't undertaken because some central figure said: thou shalt innovate and invent a personal computer. Those were very much decentralized innovations that came through a culture of innovation. I think there's a risk that this bill will lead us in the opposite direction.

There's, not surprisingly, a fair amount of literature on the effects of centralization and innovation. There are a number of concerns. I'm not going to go through all of them, but I do want to raise one particular concern with having a research structure that in the background document says that the mandates will be set by the Premier. It refers repeatedly to the Premier's priorities. Then we see the minister named in the act as being quite closely in charge. The minister chairs the cross-governmental committee, and the minister and cabinet appoint the people who sit on the research authority, and so on and on. One of the concerns – sorry, I'm just getting distracted by one of the members. [interjection] Thanks. I know you're not meaning to, but it's just a little bit loud.

One of the concerns when there are just a very few people setting the tone for the whole research structure is that if those few people become captured by a particular interest group, the entire structure can end up getting rearranged. The former Premier here, Ralph Klein, in his last couple of years seemed to suddenly develop a real passion for cancer research. He unveiled a plan for a billion dollar fund on cancer research, and there was the hope of curing cancer. There was a great deal of activity around that, not nearly as much money in the end, and then when he was no longer Premier, that priority faded out. Now we have a Premier with a different set of priorities, and who knows how long those will last? Frankly, I think that having somebody in centralized control of decision-making raises the risk that under a concerted effort of lobbying that minister or that Premier can end up being captured to special interest.

Imagine a very aggressive bioenergy lobby on the Premier today. You know, it would be timely. It would be kind of tempting even though it's not at all clear that it's a viable area. But if the Premier were captured sufficiently by interests committed to bioenergy research, then suddenly we might find a significant shifting towards bioenergy. That might go on for two or three years, and then a new interest group would capture a new minister who would be in place by then, and there could be another shifting there. I'm very concerned that by having things so centralized, the system itself is prone to being captured, if I may say it that way, by special interest groups.

In the same way that that could lead to research getting focused on one or two areas and the system lurching about every time the minister changes or the Premier changes, there's also the possibility that research would never be done on areas that were deemed politically dangerous. I think that's also a concern. That's one of the basic issues with this bill.

There's also, of course, the whole idea – and I think it's kind of ironic that this comes from a government that seems so consistently committed to the marketplace because the marketplace is all about decentralized decisions. You know, there's a sort of famous case study on how it is that people in Edmonton, for example, can go to any number of grocery stores in the middle of January and get fresh tomatoes. How does that happen? Well, when you look at that, it doesn't happen because there's a minister responsible for fresh tomatoes. It doesn't happen because there's some centralized structure. It happens because there's this tremendously decentralized structure, and a whole series of marketplace decisions that seem to occur on their own lead to us having fresh tomatoes in Edmonton. You know, the comparison was the old Soviet system, where there was central planning. I don't know how fresh the tomatoes were in Moscow in January, but I don't suppose they were that great.

7:40

I'm concerned that in the same kind of way the marketplace for ideas under this bill is being centralized in a way that's actually going to be inefficient and stifling. I think it's, as I said, a bit ironic that a government that's apparently on paper committed to free ideas and decentralization and market forces and so on in this case is actually going the opposite direction. So, Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment I'm going to propose for this bill.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the pages distribute the amendment.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this is amendment A1. Please proceed.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the record amendment A1 reads that I move that Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, be amended by striking out section 4(1) and substituting the following:

4(1) The Authority shall consist of not more than 12 members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

- (a) 2 members nominated by the University of Alberta General Faculties Council,
- (b) 2 members nominated by the University of Calgary General Faculties Council,
- (c) 2 members nominated by a public post-secondary institution as defined in the Post-Secondary Learning Act other than the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, and
- (d) 5 persons recommended by the Minister.

That's the end of this proposed amendment.

I just want to draw to members' attention how that compares to what's there right now. What's there in the act right now says:

4(1) The Authority shall consist of not more than 12 members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

It's pretty obvious what the idea here is, and that's to bring in multiple voices, to bring in the wisdom of several perspectives to that council. We're frankly concerned, as we've seen this play out with the Alberta Health Services Board or see it play out with other organizations, that when everybody is appointed at the discretion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, you tend to get people who are politically safe. You don't get the rabble-rousers. You don't get the innovators. You don't get the people who are pushing the limits. You get the people who are politically safe. Sure, they may have academic qualifications, or maybe they won't. But when the chips are down, the number one qualification is that they are politically safe. You can be sure that those people are going to be coming from one slice of life and that they are not going to reflect broadly enough in our view. They're also going to be accountable not to the various institutions or to the researchers or to anybody else but accountable strictly to the minister, in effect, and the Premier.

The effect of this amendment that I'm proposing is to diversify the membership of the board. The Lieutenant Governor in Council would still appoint five persons as recommended by the minister, so the minister still has the largest voting block, as it were, on this authority. But the authority would also be comprised of members nominated by the two largest research organizations in the province, the U of A and the U of C. Their general faculties councils would each nominate two members, and then we would get two members from another postsecondary institution. That might be the University of Lethbridge or Athabasca. It could be NAIT or SAIT or one of the colleges. It could be – who knows? – perhaps in the future some different institution entirely.

The idea of this amendment, Mr. Chairman, is to reflect the need for many voices so that we get a genuinely rich and diverse view, the need, frankly, to dilute the risk of political safety around the board of the authority, and to open space for the real spirit of innovation to be breathed into the authority.

I think it's pretty straightforward. I leave it open now to debate from members of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll rise and support this amendment. It reminds me of an amendment that we attempted to move a few years ago, back when we were dealing with legislation setting up the Access to the Future Act. At that time we attempted

to suggest that the best way to govern such things is to get a diversity of voices onto boards and agencies like this one. Although that didn't go through, I still think that the rationale is sound for this idea.

I do think, especially where we're talking about research and innovation, that the very definition of research and innovation involves creativity, diversity of viewpoints, the dynamic tension that can come sometimes from that diversity of viewpoints, which leads to more creative paths of thinking and more creative undertakings and more creative developments in many cases. That works in the lab. That works when you're doing the actual research. I think that'll also work in terms of setting up the reorganization, if you will, of our research and innovation sector.

I'll be brief. I'd just speak very quickly in favour of this. I think it would be a good idea. It brings people from the University of Alberta, people from the University of Calgary, people from at least one other public postsecondary institution, and then five people of the minister's choosing to the board. You'll notice as well that "the Authority shall consist of not more than 12 members," and we've only tried to define here where 11 of those members should be brought from, so there's potentially a 12th member up for grabs here that could potentially be appointed from, oh, perhaps out of province, something like that.

You might go looking for somebody like someone from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, for instance, to add some outside perspective to the authority and, I think, create the conditions – there are never any guarantees, of course – for more innovation and more leading-edge work as we combine these various corporations and try to make our entire research and innovation sector a whole lot more efficient, effective, and leading edge.

With that, I'll take my seat and let others join the debate on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

7:50

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, first of all, I'd thank the hon. member for the effort that he put into this amendment, but I'm going to have to tell my colleagues that I cannot support this amendment, and I cannot support this amendment because the stakeholders would not agree with this. If the hon. member would look at the act.

- 3(1) The Alberta Research and Innovation Authority is established.
- (2) The purposes of the Authority are
 - (a) to provide strategic advice and recommendations to the Minister on research and innovation matters relating to the purposes of this Act, and
 - (b) to carry out other duties . . .
- (3) The Authority reports to the Minister through the Chair of the Authority and is responsible for submitting to the Minister, at the times and in the form determined . . . reports and plans as requested by the Minister.

It's an advisory body. It is the replacement for the Alberta Science and Research Authority. If the hon. member – and I'm sure he did – read the international review panel, eminent scholars from around the world who did the review of the ASRA report said, "What you need to do is to have it outside of the postsecondaries in your province; you need to have international experts from around the world that have a tie to Alberta that can give us the type of advice on direction and where we're going and how we're going to get there," in fact quite the opposite of the centralized control the hon. member seems to be stuck on. In fact, the opposite is to take

international eminent scholars, create an advisory authority that can tell us where our strengths are, where our alignment needs to be, where we need to move forward in consultation with all of our stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman, the stakeholders, that we had numerous discussions with throughout the last year and a half, would not agree to the University of Alberta General Faculties Council being advisory because they have an interest in their institution. I have every faith that they are doing the right things in their institution, but I would not want to put them in a situation where I'm pitting them against each other in their advisory capacity or in a funding capacity because that's been one of the problems. It creates a problem in terms of getting that creativity and that innovation.

Frankly, Mr. Chairman, I'm somewhat surprised at this amendment because this one is pretty straightforward from the international review panel. They would be very upset with me if we were to accept this amendment to this bill. They kind of wrote part of this act, and I would suggest to all hon. members that we should pretty much defeat this thing fairly quickly and move on.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I'm very interested in the discussion here and certainly in this amendment. I can understand where the hon. minister is coming from, and I certainly can understand where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is coming from. His constituency, of course, is home to one of the finest universities in Canada, and he has knowledge of and interest in this matter.

The hon. minister is talking with the international community and the advisers from that community, but he didn't mention the taxpayers, who are responsible for the majority of the money that will be provided, and I'm puzzled at that. I would think that this amendment would certainly give taxpayers a more balanced representation, with people from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, two members nominated by a public post-secondary institution: six of the maximum of 12 that would be appointed as members of the authority. I really don't understand what the concern is here from the minister. I think it's a very good idea.

It breaks up the authority, if I can use that term, and the minister may not realize it, but this is another example of centralization. I could list off a lot of legislation that is coming before us, Mr. Chairman, through the House in the last six weeks or so. Certainly, if one word was to describe the theme or the trend, it would be centralization. Bill 36 would be another example of the authority and the scope and the power that rests with the minister and with cabinet. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview here, in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, is ensuring that that does not happen, and in the public interest and in the interest of the taxpayers I think the floor of the Assembly should give this amendment due consideration.

Thank you.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, obviously, the hon. member didn't hear my previous response. I'm not going to repeat it. I'll allow him to read it in *Hansard* later. But I would like to point out that this authority will not be a funding authority, so I fail to see the taxpayer connection here in the sense that they're not going to be making decisions about funding. They're going to be making decisions about strategic advice to this government, the government of Alberta, about our research initiatives and agendas and where our postsecondaries are going. In fact, the presidents of our post-

secondaries are very keen about this particular piece of the legislation. I would suggest the hon. members might want to talk to them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I'll go from the conclusion of the minister's comments to his initial comment. But certainly I have discussed this with various officials at the university. Some are for, some are against, and some move from one foot to the other one. There are a lot of opinions regarding this bill.

Mr. Horner: Did you talk to the president?

Mr. MacDonald: I did. I did talk to the president. Yes, I did.

Now, when you have a fund that comes from our revenue stream or from the taxes, whether it's resource royalty revenues or whether it's from our taxes, ultimately it's from the taxpayers. If this authority provides advice to this government and there is an initiative that doesn't work out well, who loses? The taxpayers.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Why, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to speak on this amendment. I've listened to both the minister and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and I still believe this amendment does have some merit in that it does allow for the minister to get advice from credible Albertans that have served their community well and are recommended by our universities. I've heard the argument that they don't want to be picking winners and losers from their own university, but by all means these people would be the leading authorities in Alberta on who has the best scientific chance, I guess, of succeeding. Simply put, you've got to have these types of people, with education and brains and know-how, on Alberta boards.

I also do take the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview quite seriously. There happens to be a tremendous amount of centralization going on right now with this government, and this is plainly evident in this bill as the decision begins and ends with the minister and the Lieutenant Governor in Council. In particular this type of decision-making I do not believe will serve the taxpayers, and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is correct that it is the taxpayers who we're looking out for, the citizens of Alberta who are funding this research and innovation venture that we are ultimately accountable for and to.

I believe having a board more consistent with players both known and not arbitrarily selected by the minister will serve this process very well and would allow for some influences outside of the minister and the Premier's office to set some tone and direction as to where this fund is going and what research gets going. For instance, I would hate to see all of a sudden, you know, a venture down some sort of scheme because it's the thought of the minister at the moment or anything like that. That's just why I think this errs on the side of caution. I think it's a good amendment that recognizes the centralization of power that is occurring.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

8:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the amendment?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think we've probably heard everything we're going to hear on this. I should warn the minister that there are more amendments coming.

Mr. Horner: Then you won't get my speech. I prepared a speech.

Dr. Taft: You have a tremendous speech. Well, you can give that after we vote on this.

I just want to comment to the minister that, in fact, I spent a good deal of my week last week consulting with stakeholders, and I was a bit surprised at how few of them knew much at all about this bill. I think the stakeholders the minister has consulted are at the level of the president and the vice-president of the university. When you get talking to the researchers, including the very, very senior researchers, they have just a passing knowledge of this piece of legislation. You know, there's ambivalence. We're not saying to throw the whole bill out, but there's ambivalence about how this is headed.

When you sit on our side of the House and you watch one piece of major legislation after another centralize control in the hands of fewer and fewer people, there's a pattern here. It's a pattern in health care. It's a pattern in education, K to 12. It's a pattern now in research. It's a pattern in land use. It's a worrisome pattern, and I don't think it's good for Alberta. So this is just a small gesture aimed at providing insurance against one voice and a groupthink taking over at that particular level.

So I'll call the question on that at this point, then, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: On Bill 27, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to rise today and address some of the questions. I know the hon. members have further amendments that they might be wanting to bring forward, but I thought perhaps it might be a good time for me to get on the record some of the responses to some of the questions that were brought up in second reading and some of the other debate that we've had on this bill.

I would like to also, Mr. Chairman, first of all, thank the hon. members for the glowing things that they've said about our Alberta researchers and the innovators because we are truly very proud of the research and the innovation that is created in this province by our government. We're also very proud and we're very pleased about the important role that research and innovation is going to play in Alberta's future, and I think some of the members have even mentioned that. I couldn't agree more with their praise. That's why we're introducing Bill 27. It's to pave the way for the kind of research and innovation that we need to grow a more knowledge-based economy and that culture of innovation the hon. member talked about.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's very big of the members across the way to celebrate our government's decision in the late '70s to establish the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and all of the world-class work that has been achieved by its researchers. It's a stellar organization that has brought international recognition and excellent people to the province, and we're going to build on that stellar history to set the stage for even better things to come.

I've heard many good things all around the world about AHFMR, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, as well as

our other research and innovation organizations. I'm in awe, Mr. Chairman, of the talent that we already have here in Alberta. I can't overstate the personal sense of pride that I get when I speak about Alberta's outstanding talent around the world to the various places that I'm blessed to go.

There is Alberta Ingenuity, supported by another endowment fund, a fund which is going to realize and focus its tremendous potential through this bill. There are the amazing contributions through the current Alberta Research Council, with over 600 people committed to excellence in their fields. They're world class.

I might note that they forgot the Alberta Research Council, and they forgot some of the other funding agencies in the past amendment. There are world-class iCORE chairs, whose work will continue to turn heads around the world. There are leading-edge institutes for agricultural research, for energy research, for forestry research, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar celebrated so articulately during the debate on Bill 27. They're all staffed by great innovators. Bill 27 is going to help them become more effective.

Of course, a few members of the Assembly also expressed some concerns and questions, and I appreciate having the opportunity now to provide clarification and further details. As I mentioned during second reading, this bill is an important step in this very timely work to develop and implement a framework that defines roles and mandates for the provincially funded organizations that support world-class research and innovation in our province.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that a certain member from across the way will be paying attention to the next points that I make because she said during the earlier debate that she has yet to hear a clear explanation of why Bill 27 is a good idea. I hope she is listening carefully.

Mr. Chairman, if Alberta is serious about our place in the global economy, then we need to strengthen our support for Alberta's researchers and entrepreneurs. This is about strengthening the support for those researchers and entrepreneurs. It will better enable them to realize their potential as creators of world-class discoveries and products. The world economy is changing, and we would be remiss if we didn't take action to situate ourselves strategically in that economy. It's a new, knowledge-based economy, and the leaders in that economy will be the ones who are smarter, more aligned, and more focused. We want Alberta to be a place where researchers and scientists can achieve beyond their wildest dreams.

But Bill 27 is also for all Albertans. By enabling our government to align and focus Alberta's research system, we'll be able to realize greater societal and economic benefits for Albertans and others beyond our borders.

Mr. Chairman, I always enjoy a good debate, and I enjoyed many of the diverse questions that have been raised. I must also say that I was somewhat disappointed and actually quite surprised at how some of the debate was focused on rumour and innuendo and an uninformed resistance to change. I didn't really know where to start. We heard everything from false rumours about AHFMR's fall competition to an undisguised effort to confuse the overall vision with individual funding decisions. I note, for example, that AHFMR has confirmed that their fall competition will be taking place despite attempts in this House to make people think otherwise. It's like the game of telephone, that is very popular in grade school. One person whispers to the next one until the real message is garbled. This is really a disservice to the existing researchers and innovators in the province, and it sends an entirely wrong impression to those people who are looking to start their careers in Alberta.

This is clearly a time when we are renewing our commitment to research and innovation, providing greater support than ever before,

not less. You need only look at any one of our announcements over the past couple of years to see how deeply committed we are to moving forward on the next generation economy here in Alberta. That takes foresight. Bill 27 will enable our people and our organizations to better connect with their stakeholders and with each other as well as with other parts of the innovation continuum both here in the province and around the world, Mr. Chairman. It's all about better communication, improved alignment, and clearer direction.

Mr. Chairman, I hope we can put aside some of the rumours. I want people to have the facts. As I said, I appreciate the opportunity. I heard comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar during second reading that government would have less control over the corporations being created as well as their funding, and I heard from the hon. members for Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Centre that government is going to have too much control. Which is it? Perhaps the members, since they're all part of the same party, can compare some notes next time and let me know.

Let's just set that aside for a moment, Mr. Chairman, and look at some of the specific questions that were raised. I'd like to start with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's concern about the ability of board-governed entities to manage money given the Auditor General's recent report specifically regarding postsecondary educational institutions. Our board members take their responsibility for managing public funds very, very seriously. They are proactive, and they take action when issues arise. I can assure you that the boards of the new research and innovation entities will operate with a high level of financial accountability. We will ensure that the right people, the right systems, and the right processes are in place so that the corporations provide the level of financial oversight that Albertans expect.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought up Bow Valley and the Auditor General going in and finding something about that. I might point out that it was the Bow Valley auditors that found the error and called the Auditor General. I just wanted to clarify that.

I'd like now to turn, Mr. Chairman, to the comments shared during second reading by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. We heard some fairy tales in the House that day. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview finds vision and leadership to be politically and culturally frightening, then I think he lives in a very, very scary and sad world. It would seem that if the hon. member were to be telling some of the old classics, Snow White would turn into an ogre, and Bambi would be a fire-breathing dragon.

8:10

It seems he's chosen to willfully select isolated phrases from our roles and mandates framework document to suit a single-minded opposition to the bill. It's unfortunate that he chose to pull a very specific passage regarding the Premier's long-term vision for an aligned research and innovation system out of context for the purposes of creating anxiety in the research community. If he had read the very next paragraph, Mr. Chairman, the very next paragraph, he would have told the Assembly that the document says:

Greater transparency and accountability for the processes used by all provincially funded organizations. Governance structures should have the financial capacity to make long-term commitments as many research and innovation activities have multi-year dimensions.

The reason, I think, that he didn't go on to read that sentence is because it doesn't support the conspiracy theory of a centralized government, and it recognizes the long-term nature of research and innovation efforts in a way that we haven't been able to address before. In fact, it does disprove that conspiracy theory that seems to

be bubbling up there. It also speaks to support for the basic research that he says is absent in the document.

So does this sentence, which appears just a few lines later, regarding building and supporting a strong research and innovation base. It says that "basic and applied research is seen as a cornerstone" – a cornerstone, Mr. Chairman – "of any research and innovation system." I think it's important that we repeated that. Not only have there been some single sentences very selectively pulled out of context from the roles and mandates framework document, but it seems that there has been a blind eye to our clearly stated and dearly held tradition of peer review and excellence when it comes to basic research. That will not change.

If he had looked at the website that we have, if he had explored the documents on it, he would have seen the importance we place on the role of basic research and the importance we place on the role of emerging technologies. We fully recognize that the next Alberta frontier, like our frontier in nanotechnology, for example, will come out of that kind of innovation, and we don't want to miss it.

The bottom line is that we'll be able to afford a much stronger basic research system. We'll have a much stronger infrastructure for it. We'll have even stronger universities and applied research institutions so that we can build both basic and targeted research, and then we'll be able to build that tax base that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is talking about, to build that jurisdictional advantage and turn the eyes of the world toward Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview also seems to have missed this sentence, which is on the very page he said he was quoting from.

Over the last two years, stakeholders have told the Government of Alberta that the Province needs to better align and co-ordinate its provincially funded research and innovation resources to become more competitive and to better achieve desired outcomes.

Stakeholders – stakeholders, Mr. Chairman – have told us, and stakeholders have asked us to take leadership. We're doing what the stakeholders told us and are asking us to do. Yes, they want government leadership. They want government to have a vision that targets overall funding directions, not individual funding decisions, like the member liberally implies. Stakeholders agree that boards would make decisions, exercise judgment, and ensure excellence, all within a more collaboratively and integrated environment.

That's one of the many passages which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview chose not to quote that demonstrates the stakeholder support for Bill 27. Instead, if you look at *Hansard*, he would have me put forward a strategic recommendation that chaos be a creative approach to build a research and innovation system in Alberta. In the full day of workshop discussions we had with over 90 of Alberta's key researchers and innovation stakeholders and in all of the subsequent discussions that we've had with stakeholders one on one, not one of them, not one, recommended that we employ chaos as a strategy to develop research and innovation in the province.

I would note that as the MLA representing one of our largest research campuses, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar pointed out, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, from my understanding, hasn't even asked the president of the University of Alberta what she thought of Bill 27 before he spoke about it. I can tell you what she thinks. She knows and has told her staff that the province remains strongly committed to the principles of excellence and rigorous peer review that have characterized research in all areas. The Alberta government and the university have invested heavily in research and infrastructure and will not contemplate compromising Alberta's successes in these areas. [The Alberta] government further underscored that basic research is our foundation, and it is one of the reasons that Alberta is a destination for top researchers.

Mr. Chairman, we understand the full value of the whole research system. I also note that the hon. member fails to acknowledge that research enterprise extends far beyond the faculties of medicine and even the postsecondary institutions.

Before I move on, Mr. Chairman, to address the question raised by another hon. member and reviewing the *Hansard* from that day, I found it interesting, too – and this is just of personal interest – that when the member was casting a vote for names of potential future Premiers, it didn't occur to him that his own leader should or could perhaps be Premier one day.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to turn now to the question that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked during second reading of Bill 27. I found startling the hon. member's question regarding who would come up with such a wacky idea to change the system. I'll tell you who: the more than 90 stakeholders intimately involved in the system, from postsecondary institutions to industry to the chairs of our existing research and innovation organizations. I'll tell you who else: the CEOs of the current organizations – of AHFMR, of the Alberta ingenuity fund, of the Alberta Research Council, of iCORE – who jointly signed a letter on March 18, 2009, available publicly on our website, which states: "Such a system is integral to a diversified and robust knowledge-based economy – the Next Generation Economy – that will position our province advantageously on the global stage."

These individuals, Mr. Chairman, are forward looking. They don't want to go backward. They want to do what's best for Alberta. They understand that aligning and supporting Alberta's research and innovation is even more important now in light of the global economic situation. This is about staying committed to building long-term prosperity for Alberta, a sustainable future where we are fully participating in the global knowledge-based economy. It's unfortunate that the member doesn't value the input of some of the top minds in the province.

Mr. Chairman, I'll tell you who else told us that the system needs to change: the outstanding and eminently qualified individuals on our international panels, which I mentioned earlier, people like Dr. Joseph Martin, former dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, who chaired the international review of AHFMR; Dr. Jacquelyn Thayer Scott, professor of organizational management at Cape Breton University, who chaired the international review of ASRA; Dr. Alan Bernstein, executive director of the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, who chaired the international review of Alberta Ingenuity in 2008. Sir John Bell from London, who is in charge of revamping the entire British medical system, said to me personally: this is music to my ears. Those are the wacky people which I refer to as the stakeholders who helped us with this.

The comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre would indicate, somewhat like the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, that perhaps they haven't gone through those international panel reports. I give them credit that there's a lot of work, there's a lot of reading that has to come into a lot of the stuff that they have to do. But I would encourage them: don't listen to me; listen to the individuals that I've just read into *Hansard*. Phone the people who are the CEOs of these institutions who have the touch. Did we go to every researcher in the province and ask them to design the new system? No because that's not their job, Mr. Chairman. Their job is to do their research. Our job is to make that research turn into something valuable here in this province. That's what this framework is all about. That's what Bill 27 is all about.

Mr. Chairman, the international reports have been available on my department's website for months. I would encourage them to take the time to read them. I'd also refer the hon. members to the debate that took place in this very House on November 9, 1979. I think it's

very important that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre look at that debate because it was she who referred to former Premier Lougheed and the creation of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, so I think it's important she be aware of former Premier Lougheed's own words when it comes to the original intent of AHFMR. He said:

I've made it absolutely clear to the university presidents and to the deans of medical schools in discussions with them – and the records would say, on a number of occasions – that this foundation and the government's priority decision, and hopefully the legislative priority decision, in medical research is not to be used as a lever in terms of university funding. I think that should be clear and on the record. It's a decision we have made.

Those were Premier Lougheed's exact words, and they are guiding us in our ongoing consultation with the universities to ensure a sustainable long-term approach to research and innovation.

While we're on the subject of health research, Mr. Chairman, I really do need to address head-on the hon. member's concerns about the future of health research in Alberta. I think it's important to find out that the health corporation will continue to lead health research activities in the province with the continued financing from the endowment fund. For the new health corporation there will be clearly defined provincial health research priorities to support its mandate, something that Albertans have not had before but that the stakeholders have asked for.

8:20

What's new is the affirmation that investments in health research are a key driver of the new knowledge-based economy. We want this health institute to work with many key stakeholders to capture as much value as possible at every stage of the health research continuum. In fact, it's the model for all of the institutes to work with key stakeholders in an aligned and strengthened research fashion in an innovation system that takes the entire value chain of innovation from the bench top or the garage, Mr. Chairman, right through to the societal benefit or the marketplace or the benefit of the taxpayer.

In terms of the comments made by the hon. member during debate on Bill 27 that it will increase levels of government control or centralization, I'd like to present the facts. Mr. Chairman, the intent is to establish boards for these institutes comprised of individuals with the knowledge and the experience to deliver on the mandate and roles of those corps. We want to strengthen the relationships between the Ministry of AET and our new institutes. Among the organizations themselves we want some work between themselves in order to move in a more collaborative fashion towards common outcomes. The boards are going to have the ability to manage and make investment decisions based on their approved strategic business plans. The institutes will continue to seek external advice as may be required, and they will develop and deliver programs that will support many people working in our research and innovation system.

It's worth repeating, Mr. Chairman, because it's such an important foundation of our system, that Alberta's research decisions will continue to be based on peer-reviewed standards of excellence. We have so many very talented individuals employed within our current system who will continue to work within the new organizations and across the entire research and innovation system towards clearly defined objectives. The difference is that the government will also show greater leadership in bringing these institutes together to discuss and deliver on collaborative research initiatives. We need to continue to work together towards a strong future for Alberta. It's a global environment that we're working within, so we have to harness the collective strengths of our province.

There's a final point in the second reading that I'd like to address regarding the boards of the new corporations and specifically regarding their ability to make tough decisions. I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that I completely agree that the boards will need to be able to make some tough decisions. That's why they will have boards appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, I may have an opportunity to finish that thought.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Well, I listened carefully to the minister's comments. He made some good points, some unnecessarily personal attacks, and walked very close to points of order, but I chose not to challenge him on that. I'll go through a handful of points.

First of all, he spoke of rumours on AHFMR's fall competition. I don't know if the minister is aware, but it's just today that AHFMR put out notice that they were actually going to proceed with a fall competition on funding. It's late. There was reason for those rumours. There are reasons for fear. For the minister to somehow suggest that this was all made up without any grounds, in fact, is, I think, unfortunate for him to conclude. The truth of the matter is that it was only today that notice was given out on that.

As for greater transparency and the statements in government documents about greater transparency, that's just, in our view, standard boilerplate, and we don't take it seriously. I don't think the public does either. We'll begin to take the government's commitment to transparency more seriously when they're actually transparent, when they meet things like the standards of full, plain, and true disclosure required of publicly traded corporations to their shareholders. This government falls shockingly short of anything like that, and there's no shortage of examples. We can't even get the cost of building schools from the Minister of Infrastructure. If they're under P3s, it's some kind of state secret. We can't get the cost of road construction under P3s. What kind of disclosure is that? What kind of transparency is that? It's very disappointing.

Of course, I won't even go into the frustrations in obtaining information on royalties. Where do we have to go? Where do the citizens of Alberta have to go? They have to go to corporate filings to find out that oil sands companies are paying 48 cents a barrel in royalties. So don't talk to us about transparency. There's a reason your government lacks credibility on that.

The stakeholders: I just return to our point. Sure, the minister probably had many lengthy conversations with the president of the university and of the Alberta Research Council and so on. I can tell you again that last week I e-mailed and spoke to multiple deans, multiple researchers, other very senior officials. The level of knowledge on Bill 27 was shallow, and the people I spoke to did not feel consulted with one or two exceptions. So the stakeholder consultation has been only, as far as I can tell, at the very highest level.

I will tell the minister this. He'll be pleased to know that in my e-mails to probably two dozen different researchers I ended up attaching links to the government's website and links to the bill and links to the background framework paper so that the researchers whose careers depend on this can read and be informed because so far they have not been.

There is a concern – and I speak personally about this – about the politicization of the research sector of Alberta. I speak personally because I've gone through that experience. I've also witnessed too often that politically unpopular topics, when they're researched and published, are subject to efforts to squelch them, and I think there's

a serious concern there that needs to be reflected. We do not want this bill to lead to a suffocating blanket of conformity which will have exactly the opposite effect of stimulating innovation. So I will take issue with the government on that.

I will, however, look to the minister here for the possibility of support on my next amendment. I do have another amendment.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment and have the pages distribute it.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this is amendment A2. Please proceed.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment reads as follows: Dr. Taft to move that Bill 27, Alberta Research and Innovation Act, be amended in section 2 by adding "and supporting a balanced long-term program of research and innovation directed to the discovery of new knowledge and the application of that knowledge to improve the quality of life of Albertans" after the word "industries." This addresses the idea that the minister spoke to, that I spoke to earlier, which is basic research, the importance of exploring subjects just to see what happens, the importance of undertaking research that may or may not have commercial benefit or may or may not lead to some conclusion.

One of the concerns that I have with this bill is that starting right from the beginning, Mr. Chairman, the purpose is not what I think this bill deserves. The purpose reads right now as follows:

The purpose of this Act is to promote and provide for the strategic and effective use of funding and other resources to meet the research and innovation priorities of the Government, including fostering the development and growth of new and existing industries.

Period. That's the purpose. There's nothing in this bill that speaks to the importance of pursuing information for its own sake and understanding. You know, taking an example I used earlier tonight, when Albert Einstein sitting in a patent office as a young man in Vienna or Salzburg in the very early years of the 1900s was doodling away on physics, there was no realization that 30 or 40 years later his work would transform the world. It was just exploring for the sake of exploring. We want that spirit in this province.

8:30

This amendment would recognize and champion that spirit in the purpose of this bill by talking about a balanced, long-term program of research and innovation directed to the discovery of new knowledge. It broadens things out. It understands that this isn't just about serving the commercial interests. As important as those are, it's about something much bigger than that, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the effort that he's putting into the debate here tonight in the amendments that he's bringing forward. I would like to point out that in my comments what we talked about was strengthening the framework for basic research. That basic research really is the domain of the postsecondaries. It really is the domain of the deans. It really is the domain of the graduate students of those researchers that are going to be pursuing those questions to solutions that we want. But it's also the solutions to questions that they have curiosity about.

I think what the hon. member is really talking about is this idea of curiosity and that curiosity can lead to some very interesting things, and I agree with the hon. member. I also agree that the framework and the way we've developed the framework and the structure, again, of Bill 27 – and I'm glad he agrees with this – allows us to support a balanced, long-term program of research, and it allows us to support innovation directed to the discovery of new knowledge, and it allows us to support the application of that knowledge to improve the quality of life, I would suggest, hon. member, of not just Albertans but of the globe because we do want to sell this.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest to all hon. members that I have absolutely no problem accepting this amendment from the hon. member, and I would support it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: I'm left speechless, so I would call the question before anybody changes their mind.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Back to the bill as amended.

Mr. Horner: Well, I thought, Mr. Chairman, that in the interests of continuing this and perhaps bringing closure, I would want to just continue on the independence of the boards to make decisions within the bill because I didn't get an opportunity to actually clarify that. I think the hon. member deserves that. He's talking a lot about centralization, which is not in the bill because it isn't about the centralization of decision-making. What we're talking about is alignment. We're talking about getting focus from science researchers to give us advice. That's not the government making the decision. That's researchers from within Alberta and from without similar to – and the hon. member is probably familiar with this – the old ASRA, the original ASRA. That's where we're headed with the authority.

In terms of the comments, Mr. Chairman, the boards of these corporations will be individuals of knowledge and experience to deliver the mandate. So if it's within the biosphere, they'll be experts in bioindustries or with their health researchers. The boards will have the ability to manage and make investment decisions. They're going to have true strategic business plans. That's the accountability part that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar asked for. The institutes will continue to seek external advice as may be required to manage those activities. The Alberta research decisions, as I said before, will be peer-reviewed standards of excellence.

There's a final point that I'd like to address from second reading, and it's regarding their ability to make tough decisions. We really do want them to make tough decisions, Mr. Chairman, and that's why the corporations will have boards appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. There's a current process already for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and for Alberta Ingenuity, two organizations being transformed through this bill. The research institutes being transformed by the legislation currently have their boards appointed by government through ministerial orders. ARC, or the Alberta Research Council, and iCORE are owned by the government of Alberta, and their boards are approved by their shareholder, the Crown.

In these respects board appointment by government is continued. What has changed is that with the introduction of Bill 32, the Alberta

Public Agencies Governance Act, all agencies, boards, and commissions, including these four as well as the Alberta Research and Innovation Authority, the one the member was talking about, will have defined roles and mandates documents completed as per Bill 32, and it is between the minister and the organization to clearly outline the roles and responsibilities. Mr. Chairman, I think that gets to the hub of what the hon. member has been talking about. We're not going to make the decisions. We're just setting the parameters and the framework that they can work that decision through.

If the hon. members have reviewed Bill 32 – and I'm sure they have – they would note that there are other requirements around board orientation and training, all critical elements to support strong governance of the research and innovation system. There is currently and will continue to be accountability in these systems for these publicly funded corporations through mechanisms such as reviews by the Auditor General and by the development and release of annual reports, again a current practice which we will continue. The new structure simply enhances the accountability through good governance practices, and that's an important objective when we're dealing with funds that have been provided to us through the taxpayers.

Mr. Chairman, these changes will give us a system that's focused on priorities, that will be responsive to society, to the economy, to students, to graduate students, to researchers. For a province of our size breaking into this global industry, we need to do it right. We can't be all things to all people. The framework does result in changes and new relationships among the players, and yes, there's always angst when that's going to happen. But ultimately I believe, as do all of the stakeholders who built this framework – I didn't write it – that the framework will allow us to be more successful using research and innovation to do what needs to be done to address the social needs, to add value to our resources, to diversify our knowledge-based economy, to be a serious global player.

It truly is an exciting time to be part of Alberta's research and innovation system, Mr. Chairman. Through the renewed system we're going to be able to become an even more attractive place for researchers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and innovators of all kinds. I have taken this structure to places like the Silicon Valley. I've taken this structure to places like Oxford, to places like Ireland, to places like Mexico. I've showed them what we're doing, and they are in awe of how we've been able to align our system. The only way we can do that is because of our size, because of the fact that we can do it, and because we are pulling as one. Is that centralized control? No. That's a good team effort.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the spirit behind the minister's comments. As I said, we're not standing here trying to sabotage Bill 27. We're not going to do anything to block its passage. We understand that streamlining and consolidating can be a good thing. We're just offering some sober second thoughts on the process. Just to repeat a message I've said many, many times – and I know the minister would agree with me here – getting this right is one of the most important things this government can do to ensure the medium and long-term success of this province, so that's why we're taking some time on it.

I would now like to move with the minister to section 9 of Bill 27 because there are some real concerns around this section, and I'm hoping to hear some real reassurance and explanation from the minister. Section 9, for those of you who haven't seen the bill, is titled Records and Accounts. Under this bill the minister has the

right to get access to very extensive and detailed information. I have to wonder why it's necessary. Just for the purposes of this debate I'm going to read two or three portions of section 9 out loud here.

8:40

Section 9(2) reads:

The Minister may request from a research and innovation corporation any information, including personal information, the Minister considers necessary, and the corporation shall disclose the information in the form and manner determined by the Minister.

It's very clear here that the corporation shall disclose.

Then it goes on under 9(3):

A research and innovation corporation shall allow the Minister or the Minister's representative to inspect and make copies of all records, accounts, reports and other documents of the corporation and, in the case of an electronic document, print the electronic document, and otherwise review the operations of the corporation.

Then under section 9(4)(d) – I read it initially thinking there was some reassurance – it basically gives the minister, as I'm reading this, the capacity to seek this information “for any other purpose authorized by regulation.”

I want to draw attention to one other point here. Maybe there's a good explanation here. Maybe I'm misreading this. But I am concerned. Under the definitions of the act the term “personal information” is defined as meaning “personal information as defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.” Now, that definition – I'm not sure that I have it with me here – is remarkably inclusive. It includes all kinds of personal information, medical information, opinions, biometrics, virtually anything you'd ever want to know about anybody. So I'm asking the minister why. Why would we give the minister that level of detail?

Here is the concern I have. Let's say that we have a researcher conducting research into AIDS and HIV patients or, goodness knows, any number of medical conditions. The way I'm reading this bill, the minister if he so chooses – and I'm presuming that that would be a rare occurrence. Nonetheless, if he chose – and, you know, it could be this minister, it could be any minister in the future – he could request very, very detailed information collected under research. Maybe I'm misreading this. I don't know if the minister can help me now or if we need to defer here. I do have an amendment. But before putting everybody through the process of the amendment, maybe the minister can explain.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Chairman, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as well as some federal regulations as well as some other legislation that has been passed by this House protects individuals from the type of thing that the member was talking about. Yes, this gives the minister some fairly intensive powers in terms of being able to review what's going on in those institutes, but we fund and will be the major funder of these institutes. We need to have some way of ensuring accountability both on the financial side and on the strategic business plans that they'll be presenting to us.

I think it's important that when you set out a framework like this – and I'm not saying that we're going to do this on a regular basis, and the hon. member knows that. But I don't think you pass legislation that precludes you from doing the things that you're going to potentially need to do down the road, and that's essentially what this section is all about.

Dr. Taft: Well, I was so thrilled with the minister's response to the last amendment, but he won't be surprised that I am less thrilled. I really want MLAs to listen to this because this is how personal information will be defined under Bill 27. This is how it's defined. People, please think about this.

“personal information” means recorded information about an identifiable individual, including

- (i) the individual's name, home or business address or home or business telephone number,
- (ii) the individual's race, national or ethnic origin, colour or religious or political beliefs or associations,
- (iii) the individual's age, sex, marital status or family status,
- (iv) an identifying number, symbol or other particular assigned to the individual,
- (v) the individual's fingerprints, other biometric information, blood type, genetic information or inheritable characteristics,
- (vi) information about the individual's health and health care history, including information about a physical or mental disability,
- (vii) information about the individual's educational, financial, employment or criminal history, including criminal records where a pardon has been given,
- (viii) anyone else's opinions about the individual, and
- (ix) the individual's personal views or opinions, except if they are about someone else.

It's a remarkable scope, an unnerving one. I'm not just doing this for political grandstanding. It's unnerving for me to think that information collected under research, covering everything from genetic makeup to political beliefs to criminal records, is subject to this kind of request.

It says here – and I'm quoting from the bill – that the Minister may request from a research and innovation corporation any information, including personal information . . . and the corporation shall disclose the information.

Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment, and it is specific to this particular issue. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. We'll pause for a moment while the pages distribute this. This amendment will be A3.

Okay. Proceed, hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment would proceed as follows: that Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, be amended in section 9(2) by striking out “including” and substituting “excluding.” What the section currently reads is, “The Minister may request from a research and innovation corporation any information, including personal information.” This would amend that to say, “The Minister may request . . . any information, excluding personal information.” So it's pretty straightforward. I don't know that I need to belabour the point.

For the life of me, unless we're somehow misunderstanding the legislative drafting here, I'm concerned not only about the principle of intrusion into personal information but about the fact that this could create all kinds of problems when we get into ethics reviews. For example, any research done involving personal information is going to have to go through an ethics review committee, which is pretty strict, and if this is hanging over the decisions of an ethics review committee, I just don't know how it's going to work out. I think there's a concern that we may be creating inadvertently a whole bunch of angst and problems and even driving good researchers to other jurisdictions by having such an open door for the minister to request personal information.

I won't belabour it. Thanks.

8:50

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member just mentioned researchers and various other folks as if he's talking about a

researcher in the University of Alberta. This wouldn't apply to them. This is about the institutions that we are creating, and if the hon. member thinks about it, there is going to be some very significant information and probably in some cases some very significant security. When you talk about biometrics, we may use the fingerprint as a security code to get into a locked lab. When you talk about some of the information that we're going to have to hold as it pertains to the institute's duties, there's going to be some interesting information that we're going to have that could be commercial down the road.

I'll also point the hon. member to section 9(5), which basically says that we're going to hold it as confidential. However, I want it to be clear that this does not apply to the entire research and innovation system. This applies to the institutes, which the hon. member is telling me he wants to be transparent, where we want to be able to find things and be able to go in there and do things.

The reality, Mr. Chairman, is that I cannot – I cannot – in good conscience support this amendment, and I truly do regret that, hon. member, because, you know, we were doing so well.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Well, I appreciate that this is applying to the research corporations, but that's going to include, well, AHFMR or son of AHFMR, research organizations doing medical research.

Mr. Horner: They don't do the research. They hire it out.

Dr. Taft: Okay. So this is where I'm looking for clarity from the minister. The way this reads right now, "the Minister may request from a research and innovation corporation any information, including personal information." Let's imagine we have a research and innovation corporation researching hepatitis. There has been some brilliant research done in Alberta on hepatitis. Well, okay. I think the minister is narrowing things unnecessarily. There will be human research done under some of these innovation and research corporations. [interjection] None? Zero? Zip? Okay. So elaborate. Please elaborate.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, perhaps this will clear up some of the misconception the hon. member has. The institutions are the ones that will be creating the strategic plan to decide where in our framework we're going to go to answer the question. They're going to be the person that's going to take the funding that we provide or that a government department provides or that an outside entity provides and take the question and then go find those researchers in that other framework and say: lookit, this is the answer we need. We are not building research institutions that will have labs and researchers in them. We already have that. If the hon. member thinks about AHFMR as an example, AHFMR provides a chair at the University of Alberta. That chair isn't working for AHFMR. He's underneath the umbrella of the University of Alberta. This would not apply to him. That's what I'm getting at.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. That's what I was looking for here. The way this is worded, however, it gives remarkable scope and depth to the powers of the minister.

Mr. Horner: Now it's forever in *Hansard*.

Dr. Taft: Yes. So now we've got the minister's comments forever in *Hansard*. I don't know if those carry the legal status of legislation, though: "May request from a research and innovation corpora-

tion any information." If the research and innovation corporation is granting out money to whoever the researcher is and that researcher is conducting research, my concern – and I hope the minister can understand this, and I'm sure this minister wouldn't do it – is that should a minister at some point in the future demand information, the research and innovation corporation would then need to pursue it from the researchers. Okay. The minister is going to explain.

Mr. Horner: In that situation, Mr. Chairman, that person would have every right to go to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Privacy Commissioner and lodge his complaint that it doesn't pertain to anything else that's happening. It would be dealt with in that manner as it is today in any other situation.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just briefly get in on the dialogue here about the amendment to Bill 27 that's put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I share his concern that the clause here, 9(2), is far too broadly written. The government has been bedeviled during the session with what I would consider to be sloppy drafting of bills. It's gotten them in trouble on Bill 19. It's gotten them in trouble on Bill 44. Sections giving government powers are drafted far too broadly and without due care for concerns that legitimately might arise. I think this is another one.

For example, because this power on the part of the minister is not constrained in any meaningful way in this section, it could allow the minister to demand personal information of a researcher whose research the government found awkward or embarrassing. There are questions whether or not . . . [interjection] Well, there are no constraints on it, hon. minister, and that's a problem. If there are, I'd sure like to hear what they are, and I will sit down so that you can do that.

Mr. Horner: I would point to, again, "The Minister may request from a research and innovation corporation," not from the University of Alberta, not from, you know, the Alberta research corporation, not from any of those entities that the hon. member is thinking about.

Secondly, if he scrolls down the page to section (5):

If the information disclosed under subsection (2) or contained in records, accounts, reports and other documents of the research and innovation corporation inspected, copied or printed under subsection (3) relates to labour relations, is a trade secret or is of a commercial, financial, scientific or technical nature, the information is to be treated as having been provided in confidence.

That's right in the legislation. That's an offence as well.

Mr. Chairman, we're looking for bogeymen where bogeymen don't exist. I really believe that this amendment is not necessary.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, we're not looking for bogeymen. We're looking for things in the drafting of the legislation that may give rise to unexpected problems or in the hands of a different minister somewhere down the line might give rise to abuse.

I'm sorry; I'm not completely satisfied by what the minister has to say. I know that these are with respect to the corporations, but what information does the corporation have within its possession? That is really the question the minister hasn't addressed. It may possess a great deal of information with respect to the nature of the research that's being conducted, who's conducting it, in fact even

who's being researched. You know, I'm not satisfied by the minister's response.

Dr. Taft: Well, I need to point out to the minister, because I read the whole section a few times, that 9(5) does not include personal information if I'm reading it correctly. It says: "If the information disclosed . . . relates to labour relations, is a trade secret or is of a commercial, financial, scientific or technical." It doesn't cover personal.

Now, personal information may have other protections, but the principle I'd like to proceed on, especially when it comes to collecting people's personal information and disclosing it, is to use the minimal powers necessary, to be minimally invasive. Losing personal information always seems to be a one-way process. Once it's gone, it's never recovered. Once we give up that personal privacy, it seems to be lost forever.

I don't think we're going to advance this discussion too far. I have this sinking feeling that the minister is not going to go for this amendment. I want it on the record, though, that I'm not convinced at this point by the minister's arguments. Let's call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill as amended, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

9:00

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the vigorous debate, the exchange of ideas. I do feel some progress was made. I learned something. I appreciate the minister's gesture of accepting one of the amendments. I wish him well because this is a really important bill.

I would leave one last request to the minister from me, which is that when it comes to developing the regulations, please consult widely and deeply. I would ask you, please, not to just go to the presidential and vice-presidential levels, but make sure that the people actually conducting the research, the senior research, the people who actually are going to be doing the innovation and who are actually getting the millions of dollars in research grants – please consult those people because they haven't been consulted extensively in developing this act. When it comes to the regulations, if it's going to work, they have to be listened to.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: On the bill.

The Deputy Chair: On the bill as amended.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very, very much, Mr. Chair. It's been a long while. I almost lost my train of thought, but it's a good thing that sometimes I write down the odd note here. If you'll indulge me a little bit here, it's regarding a little bit of the minister's comments that he has letters from this university president, that university president, this person here, that person here. I'm reminded, too, by the comments just made by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Really, it's sort of a story, and I think it will bring some clarity to it if you just, like I said, allow me some leeway.

There's a scene in *The Godfather* where Michael is sitting there with his girlfriend, and there's Luca Brasi. It's a very famous scene. It will be on the bill; you'll see how it relates here. Luca Brasi is there speaking, and Kay says, "Who is that very scary man, Mi-

chael?" "You're right. That is a very scary man." They go to another thing, but they come back to this. Michael explains to his girlfriend: "There was a big band leader, and my cousin Johnny Fontane played with this big band leader. Long and short of it, he was in a contract with this big band leader. My father and Luca Brasi went to that big band leader, and they tried to get my cousin Johnny out of the thing." Long story short, they said: "Either you let cousin Johnny out of this contract or your brains will be on the contract. Either/or." Anyways, the gentleman signed the contract, allowing Johnny Fontane out of the said contract. He was free to go. He didn't want his brains on the contract.

Sometimes, Mr. Minister, you have an extraordinary amount of power. When you go get these letters, asking the presidents of universities for letters and for endorsements from various heads of things, they feel like they may be in a situation much like the big band leader's. They have an obligation to sign these letters. I'm not saying they do it as a rule.

Mr. Mason: It's an offer they can't refuse.

Mr. Hehr: It's an offer they can't refuse. Thank you.

I just offer that. That's why you have to go to the secondary levels of research. Thank you very much for allowing me some leeway in that story.

Mr. Horner: Well, I guess I'm a little taken aback. I'm Irish-Scottish, and I'm now a godfather. I don't know what to say about that.

An Hon. Member: Forget about it.

Mr. Horner: Forget about it.

Mr. Chairman, getting it right, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about, is extremely important. Getting it right meant that we started this process 18 months ago. Getting it right meant that, yes, we did consult with well over 90 stakeholders at the one that I remember and probably an equivalent amount of folks in the second and third. We stood in front of them at the last forum that we had, and we drew on the map. We said: this is what you wrote; this is what you said you wanted your new framework to look like. You can ask anyone that was there. I was standing at a podium, and I said: I don't need to do this; you guys are telling us to do this; you're the stakeholders. The research community is saying to us: we want you to do this because this will make it better for us.

So when we wrote Bill 27, what we said was: we're going to change the system and the framework to what you have asked us to change it to. Bill 27 is a reflection of what those folks told us to do. I'm sorry, hon. member; I don't have the power that you may think I have and am perhaps not as persuasive as you think I might be. However, what I'm doing is a response to what those stakeholders told us to do by way of this legislation.

The other point that I will make to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview – and, again, I appreciate the debate, too, and I appreciate his concerns. I'm sure that one day we may see him at one of those institutions. I think that the other thing that we have to take for granted or we have to make an assumption of is that the deans of science or the vice-presidents of science or the presidents of their respective organizations – and by the way, hon. member, I never asked them to write a letter. They wrote them voluntarily. You can ask them that as well. But the deans and all of those folks who came to the consultations were asked to go and talk to their groups. If they didn't do that or if they didn't talk to the specific

people that you talked to in the 7,000 or 8,000 researchers that we have in the province, I don't know what else I could have done in terms of consultation.

It was on the web. It was advertised very clearly. No, it wasn't an open forum because we would have had 8,000 people in a room, and we'd have gotten nothing done. What we said was: "You have a hierarchy of management within your postsecondary institution over research and innovation. Bring us those people who run that system," because they do, "and have them disseminate the information to those other levels, and then give us that feedback." That was done over the course of 18 months.

Mr. Chairman, I agree that this has to be right. But in order for it to be right, it had to be written by the stakeholders, not by us. That's why we're doing it this way.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 27 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It, again, is my pleasure to speak on this bill in Committee of the Whole. Really, you know, we looked at it, and we thought about things, and our opinion is still similar to where it was after second reading. We still believe sincerely that the work of this Legislature can be done with its current 83 members, who are a part of this august Assembly.

We do not see that with the advent of technology, with Black-Berrys, with cellular phones, with, I guess, executive assistants in our offices and computers and staff here at the Legislature that we can't all pick up the slack in these economic times and carry the workload of an additional four MLAs. Simply put, I would hazard to guess that it is easier now to be an MLA; maybe not easier, but technology makes it easier for us to access more of our constituents now than it ever has been. This will continue to be so, so there is a strong argument that we can do the job, that there no longer needs to be an additional four members added to this Assembly.

I brought this up last time, that an additional four members in this House will cost us on a four-year term roughly \$10 million. That is not an extraordinary expense to the taxpayer; nonetheless, it's an expense that we don't need to saddle them with going forward. It's something that's going to be on the books and not just for one election. It's going to be on the books for a longer period of time. This \$10 million could be added to a savings plan, to policing, to helping our colleges grow and expand, heck, even the research and innovation fund. I'd like to see the money go there more so than I would an additional four MLAs.

9:10

I appreciate some of the concerns brought up by some of the members last time at second reading. They were primarily brought up by rural caucus members, who do have to travel a great deal of distance and do have to do their jobs with some of that constraint on them. That said, like I said earlier, the technology and the ability and the tools we have here at our fingertips as legislators should enable us to do that job better than we ever had and continue to represent the interests of Alberta citizens in the fashion they've become accustomed to.

On that note, I guess we could have brought in an amendment trying to reduce the bill, and I don't believe we have. Maybe we'll bring that in third reading when I remember things in my office, which maybe are still there, but I can't remember that right now, so we'll move on from that standpoint. But needless to say, I see where we are, and where we are is where we're at. Those are my initial comments.

I think we can do the job and continue to do the job for our citizens without adding an additional four MLAs. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to participate this evening in the discussion, or the debate, on Bill 45. Certainly, when we look at the proposal here to increase the number of electoral divisions by four – or another way of saying that would be to have an additional, after the next election, four representatives, to bring the total to 87 – I look at it this way, Mr. Chairman. I think it is an unnecessary cost at a difficult time. Many of us are now using electronic devices to consult with not only our constituents but with the government, so there has been a significant improvement even since the last commission, as I said in second reading, in electronic communication. Communication is so fast that in reality you can't keep up with it all, so the need to have four additional members, I think, is inappropriate at this time.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, this morning, almost 12 hours ago or a little bit better than 12 hours ago, I attended a committee meeting, the Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee. You were also chairing that, so you've had a very busy day. It came to the attention of the committee members and those present that we were going to reduce the size of the ad that we're going to place for the Chief Electoral Officer as a cost-cutting measure. Hon. members in the government talked about that as a cost-cutting measure, and I would certainly agree with that. If people are interested, they're going to read the ad. They may have to put their glasses on, but they'll be able to read it. Now, that's an example of saving pennies, and dollars will follow. The health minister would have difficulty with that concept, of course, as would other members on the government front bench.

This is about this bill, and I would appreciate it if I would be allowed some leniency here. We're in committee. You understand that.

We have a cost-cutting measure like this over 12 hours ago, and here we're debating a bill that's going to increase the Legislative Assembly budget by hundreds of thousands of dollars, maybe millions of dollars. We don't know. No one in the government is indicating publicly just exactly what the cost would be to the taxpayers of these four additional seats. Mr. Chairman, that is an example of spending and saving. The health minister is the first one that wants to bring this up. In the morning we're going to save a small amount, which all the members across the way were in

agreement with, but here this evening people don't have any problem with increasing significantly the size of the budget if we pass Bill 45 in its present condition. I have a number of issues. That would be the first one.

The second, of course, is that I really don't think it's necessary to speed up this process in any way. I don't understand why we couldn't wait another year and then have a discussion. The five individuals that are going to form this commission – I was present at the last commission. I made a presentation. I heard other individuals make their presentations. Unfortunately, they weren't listened to. It's really unfortunate. I hope that with this commission it will be different.

In fact, it was the government that took the eraser to the electoral map around Edmonton and removed a seat, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would have one of the largest populations in the . . . [interjection] There was a Liberal member on the committee, but they certainly, hon. member, were not in charge of the map. In fact, that person wrote a minority report, which I'm sure the hon. member has read, and that minority report certainly indicated that Edmonton should not have been penalized politically. Again, we took the eraser to the map. It was Edmonton-Norwood that was eliminated or cut up.

Certainly, Edmonton in the next report from this commission, if this bill becomes law, should get Edmonton-Norwood back. Perhaps Edmonton-Whitemud – I'm not saying that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is not doing a very good job, but the population in that end of the city has grown in the last eight years to the point where that is a natural place for a seat to be added. We're almost, as they say, halfway to Leduc. We all know the troubles there during the last election with the enumeration. Those would be some of the areas of concern.

When we consider what happened to the city of Edmonton with the last commission, we can only speculate on what's going to happen with the next commission. There are five individuals that are going to be appointed to the commission, three from the government and two from the Official Opposition. Now, it will be interesting to see how all this works out. It will be interesting to see when we change the population by striking out 4,000 individuals and substituting 8,000. Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm looking at the current section 15(2)(c): "There is no town in the proposed electoral division that has a population exceeding 4000 people." Whenever this amendment, if it becomes law, is put up to 8,000 citizens, how many constituents as we know them now would this definition apply to? I certainly would be interested in that information.

9:20

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I would just like to say that it is, again, ironic that we started out this morning at a committee meeting saving a few dollars by reducing the size of the ads that are going to be circulating throughout the national press regarding the recruitment of the Chief Electoral Officer, yet here this evening, over 12 hours later, we are discussing a bill that's going to add substantially to the administrative costs of the Legislative Assembly.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. I certainly will be interested, regardless of whether it's this summer or next summer that the commission gets started on the proceedings, and I will certainly make every effort to attend some of the commission's public hearings and make a submission if it's necessary.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise tonight during Committee of the Whole in support of Bill 45, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act. I'm encouraged by the debate on this legislation. It deals with a fundamental system of democracy in this province, and it's essential that Albertans, no matter their location, are represented fairly and equitably in this Assembly, which I think is a point that has been lost in this discussion.

There are certainly some issues that have been raised in this debate, and I'd like to take an opportunity to address some of those tonight. The increase in the number of electoral divisions will mean that the average population in each electoral division will be smaller than what it would be without the addition of four new electoral divisions, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we look to the number of constituents that will be represented by MLAs to ensure that MLAs are able to better interact with their constituents, which in turn leads to more effective representation. I think that in a province like Alberta, where we see a great contrast between very concentrated urban communities and much more dispersed rural communities, it's very important that we acknowledge both pieces of our province and that we don't make assumptions that one approach which will work correctly or well for one part of our province will be equally as responsive to constituents in other parts of the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to talk about the concept of representation by population, or rep by pop as it is commonly known. Under the representation-by-population system elected representatives are chosen by more or less numerically equivalent blocks of voters. In 1991 the Carter decision of the Supreme Court of Canada considered the creation of electoral boundaries, took into account the nature of Canada and the wide variety of communities in our country, and reviewed the extent to which variation from strict representation by population is acceptable.

The Supreme Court held that variations in the size of voter populations among electoral divisions do not infringe on the right to vote that is guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Supreme Court held that the right to vote means that "each citizen is entitled to be represented in government." Representation means having a voice in the issues under consideration by the government and having the right to bring your concerns and questions to the attention of your elected representative. I think that's key, Mr. Speaker, to how we understand and how Albertans understand the democratic process.

The purpose of the right to vote is not a quality of voting power per se but the right to effective representation. It is impossible to draw boundary lines that guarantee exactly the same number of voters in each division. As the Supreme Court has noted, voters pass away; voters move. Even with the aid of frequent censuses absolute voter parity is impossible. However, the court went on to note that other factors also need to be considered when determining electoral boundaries: geography, community history, community interests, and minority representation. These may need to be taken into account to ensure that the Legislative Assembly as a whole effectively represents our province's broad range of interests and backgrounds. In the end there are numerous considerations that may justify a departure from absolute voter parity in order to achieve more effective representation.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to provide some clarification on what our act says about the size of electoral divisions. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act says that the population of a proposed electoral division . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Titles

The Deputy Chair: What's the citation?

Mr. MacDonald: The specific citation, Mr. Chairman – and I've been trying to get your attention for some time – would be 23(c).

The Deputy Chair: You're saying 23(b)(i)?

Mr. MacDonald: No; 23(c). The hon. member is obviously reading off prepared notes. We are in committee, and there is repetition here of the term "Mr. Speaker." I believe the correct term is "Mr. Chairman." So if we could stop that, I would be grateful. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: On the point of order. It's been done on both sides, calling Mr. Speaker, calling Mr. Chair. Taking into consideration what is meant on this, I don't see this as a point of order. We'll carry on.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's wonderful that we're able to really keep this spirit of – what was it? – open dialogue within the Committee of the Whole going on both sides of the House.

Debate Continued

Ms Redford: Now, as I was asked to do previously, Mr. Chair, I would like to provide some clarification on what our act says about the size of electoral divisions. The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act says that the population of a proposed electoral division must not vary from the provincial average by more than 25 per cent. This means that any proposed electoral division can be up to 25 per cent larger or 25 per cent smaller than the average proposed electoral division's size. Allowing this amount of variation means that the commission does not have to make each proposed electoral division exactly the same size. Instead, the commission has the flexibility to consider factors such as community interests, extending municipal boundaries, as I've said earlier, natural geographical features, and the like. It's important for communities to feel that they're well represented by an MLA who is able to understand their community interests.

This act will allow for up to four electoral divisions to have a population that will vary by as much as 50 per cent outside of the average population. The allowance for special electoral divisions recognizes that some parts of our province are particularly remote or may be sparsely populated. The act will require a special electoral division to meet three of five criteria, which we have discussed before and which are set out in the act: the physical size of the area, its distance from the Legislative Assembly building, the size of towns in the area, whether the area contains an Indian reserve or Métis settlement, and whether the area is on the boundaries of the province itself.

Now, everything I've spoken of so far already exists in the act. However, the act would change one small part of these rules. It will relate to the size of towns in a proposed special electoral division. We think that that is an important piece of work that needs to be amended in this act. Looking to the nature of the communities and how they have changed since the last time this act was amended, Bill 45 will increase the maximum size of a town from 4,000 to 8,000 people. Mr. Chair, the reason that this is important for us to address is because since the last time that this legislation was amended and what we talk about in this House all of the time, the nature of this province has changed. The discussions that we have, the legislation

that we pass, not just this legislation but other legislation, reflect the fact that as a province and as a government we are dealing with increasing demands on this province.

9:30

It would be short sighted for us to think that it was possible to continue to represent the people of Alberta and the population of this province, that is continuing to grow, to ensure that we as a government and we as a Legislative Assembly can address the concerns that modern Albertans believe we must address in order for us to be competitive in the world, Mr. Chairman, without amending this legislation. We believe that it is important to amend this legislation to ensure that Albertans can continue to have confidence in the Legislature that represents them, to make sure that their common views, their shared goals for the future will be properly represented through face-to-face dialogue with the people that they vote for.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I would urge people to support this legislation.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to make a few comments with respect to this. One of the key bases for this act or any similar act was a decision of the Supreme Court, which the minister has identified in terms of its impact, which is that no electoral division can be either more than 25 per cent larger or less than 25 per cent of the average. Now, that gives a tremendous amount of leeway. That was a decision, in my recollection, against Alberta because at that time the electoral divisions were enormously different; the variation was enormously different.

I remember helping to put together a submission for the city of Edmonton with respect to electoral boundaries when I served on the Edmonton council. At that time Edmonton-Whitemud, for example, was one of the largest constituencies in Alberta, with over 24,000 at that time, and Cardston was an electoral boundary that had about 8,000. So the range was 3 to 1 at that time.

Of course, when we look at these things, we need to look at the politics behind them. That is key. To simply debate this bill in terms of sort of abstract principles, and to not look at how it actually affects results in this Chamber is, I think, a mistake. What occurred up until that decision was that, in fact, heavily Conservative rural areas had small populations in their electoral districts whereas the cities, which were more inclined to vote for opposition candidates, especially in Edmonton and Calgary, contained very large populations. Of course, that favoured this government, who was the same party at that time, Mr. Chairman, as it is today.

Now, the plus or minus 25 per cent rule still gives very, very broad latitude. In my view the principle of equality of population is a very important one. I think that the range should be less, but that will be up to the electoral commission. This act tends to widen the latitude of the electoral commission, to make exceptions and provide for additional special districts where the plus or minus 25 per cent rule doesn't apply. I don't think the case has been made for that yet by the government, and I think they should make the case. In the last electoral commission, I think, of the four special cases only two were really required. So the question, then, is: why do we need to have more special electoral divisions, with more latitude for the commission? I don't think the minister has made the case for that yet.

With respect to increasing the number of electoral divisions overall, adding four seats to this Legislature is an interesting question. I know that some members have expressed the concern

that we don't need more politicians, that there's additional expense, and that the existing size is perfectly adequate given additional tools – for example, electronic means and so on – to communicate with constituents.

On the other hand, let's again look at the practical impact of not increasing the number of seats in this Legislature. There has been rapid growth in the province, but it's been extremely uneven, Mr. Chairman, and much of the growth has taken place in places like the cities of Calgary and Grande Prairie. That means that other places will lose seats if, in fact, we don't add new seats. In the last electoral redistribution Edmonton lost a seat and rural Alberta lost two seats. Those two seats went, then, to Calgary because the growth in Calgary had been faster than in other parts of the province.

Mr. Chairman, I think, based on my preliminary look at the situation, that the same thing will happen again if we don't increase the size of this Legislature. Edmonton will lose a seat. Rural Alberta will lose at least a couple of seats and maybe more. I haven't really had an opportunity to look at it in great detail. The result of not doing this, then, is to mean that there will be a redistribution that will take away a seat from the city of Edmonton. There'll be a redistribution that will take away at least two seats from rural Alberta. Is that really in the interests of those communities?

We fought very hard during the last redistribution to raise the question of loss of representation, particularly in the city that I represent, which is the city of Edmonton. I think it would be a detriment to the people of this city if they were to have to lose a seat because of uneven population growth. It's not that Edmonton hasn't been growing – it has – but Calgary has been growing faster and is a larger city and will benefit.

The question is whether or not you take away seats from Edmonton and rural Alberta or you add seats and give them to Calgary and potentially to Grande Prairie. That's the challenge that the government is grappling with in this legislation. For my own part I want to indicate that I do not support the reduction of representation in either Edmonton or in rural Alberta. I think this is an important question that we all ought to take into account.

Again, I think that when we look at the bill, we need to look at its practical impact, not just the theoretical or abstract concepts behind it. What I would like to see is, of course, an electoral system that gets away from the first past the post system altogether. If you look at the popular vote received by the political parties in the last election, you'll find that it is not represented under the current system. It's not represented in this Legislature. There are far too many Conservative members here in this Legislature compared to the actual votes received by that party. There are fewer Liberals. There are certainly fewer New Democrats than were represented by the actual votes. There are no Greens in this Assembly. There probably should be some Alberta Alliance members as well if seats were accorded according to the actual popular vote. They're not because the first past the post distorts the representation that we have, and the result is that the Legislature is even more lopsided than it was.

There's no question that the Conservative Party in the last election won a majority of votes, so they should have the majority of the seats in this Legislature, but they shouldn't have 75 or 80 per cent of the seats in the Legislature. That, I think, is a real, serious problem with the kind of electoral system that we have. That's not put forward in this legislation, and I think that it's too bad that the government isn't willing to explore that with the voters. I don't think this Legislature should make unilateral decisions with respect to that. There needs to be an important role of consultation with the public.

9:40

Nevertheless, we have before us a bill that will add four seats to the Legislature. That is, I think, the key piece or the most important element of this piece of legislation that we need to address. I think that people who believe that Edmonton should lose a seat, maybe two, that rural Alberta should lose a couple of seats, maybe more, in order to expand the representation from Calgary, you know, need to be really clear about what the result of their position actually is and be prepared to accept the consequences of their position.

Mr. Chairman, for now that will be my comments with respect to this piece of legislation. I look forward to more debate on it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would be inclined to go along with my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I would be inclined to go along with the Justice minister. I would be inclined to support adding four seats to this Legislature except that I can't get away from the fact that an alderman on city council in Calgary represents roughly twice as many constituents as an MLA in the Alberta Legislature, and a member of the federal Parliament of Canada represents roughly – I think we're getting pretty close to four times, certainly three times as many constituents and change as you and I do.

I'm left asking myself: well, how do they do it? How do they manage to represent so many more people than we do and still respect the democratic rights of their constituents, still go to bat for their constituents, still meet on a regular basis, whether it's in the council chamber at Calgary city hall or in the federal Parliament in Ottawa, and debate issues of interest to their constituents and, hopefully, in the case of the federal Parliament the entire country and, hopefully, in the case of city council in Calgary the entire city? Although watching how things have been going at Calgary city council lately, one wonders whether the ward system sometimes gets dramatically in the way of that, but that's a topic for another time.

I use the city of Calgary as an example for a couple of reasons: one, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood referenced it a few times in his contribution to the debate, and two, because it is a unicity as opposed to the capital region, which is a collection of 23 different municipalities. It's maybe easier to make the example. You know, we have 14 aldermen in the city of Calgary to represent just over a million people, and there is no serious talk that I'm aware of as city council wrestles with the issue of electoral redistribution about adding any seats on council. [interjection] Is there talk? There is talk of adding one.

If the Calgary city councillors were to represent roughly the same number of people as we do, we'd need to go from 14 not to 15 but to 27 or 28, yet they manage. Now, depending on who you're talking to, some might say they manage better or worse than others, but they manage. The Members of Parliament seem to manage, and we seem to be managing fairly well, thank you.

I'm just looking back through some numbers on the Members' Services Committee section of the Assembly website, looking at MLA remuneration figures and considering our base pay as Members of the Legislative Assembly, our tax-free allowance, and our committee work. Most of us in here, quite apart from whether we have additional responsibilities – cabinet, Leader of the Opposition, whip, deputy whip, House leader, whatever – are making in the ballpark of \$120,000 a year.

I look at the Members' Services orders under 9, which deals with constituency office budgets in the constituency services order. I see that each MLA gets roughly \$26,000 for office operations, roughly

\$72,500 for staffing, and then there are a couple of other figures that involve a little bit of calculation to take care of such things as the expenses of mailing, postage, that sort of thing, some promotional activity, and so on and so forth. Again, just rounded off, it's roughly \$120,000 per constituency office to run our constituency offices.

If we get into one of those situations where we're dealing with an MLA who represents a huge piece of real estate sparsely populated, well, there's a matrix for that that takes those sorts of things into consideration, and that can add up to another \$23,256 to that member's constituency office budget.

Here's the point. We manage, most of us, give or take a little bit, plus or minus 25 per cent or less, to run our constituency offices and, by extension, our constituencies for about the same amount of money that we are paid as individual MLAs. So it would seem to me that if the individual MLA needs a little more support to represent his or her constituents, which might be a reasonable possibility, the addition of some extra budget to the constituency services order to accommodate another full-time assistant or perhaps a part-time assistant – I don't know; I'm just speculating here – would turn out to be undoubtedly a good deal cheaper, a good deal more economical than adding another MLA. You add another MLA, and you're adding another \$120,000. You add another full-time staffer, and it's probably going to come in at \$50,000 or less, in around there.

The other thing I can't get away from is that the Legislature of British Columbia now consists of 87 MLAs, and there has been a bit of push-back about that because the British Columbia Legislature until very recently, until this last election really, consisted of 79 MLAs. The majority of respondents to a survey conducted by Statistics Canada said that 79 MLAs were sufficient. There's been some push-back about going to 87. Up until the election earlier this month in the province of British Columbia, 79 MLAs represented a population of a million more than the population of Alberta, give or take. Now it takes 87 to do that, but that's four more MLAs to represent a million more people, or 250,000 an MLA if you wanted to do the math that way.

Of course, that's not how they do the math any more than that's how we do the math, but the point remains, Mr. Chair, that the province of British Columbia has a million more constituents than the province of Alberta, and they manage with the same number of MLAs that the Justice minister is proposing that we go to here in the province of Alberta. You can speak in glowing and eloquent terms until the cows come home about equitable representation, democratic initiatives, and this, that, and the other thing, but you just can't get away from the fact that compared to other levels of government, other provinces, the people of Alberta are overrepresented by the people in this Legislature.

Mr. Chair, I don't know what your constituents tell you when you bring up the matter, but my constituents tell me that we don't need any more Members of the Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta, that 83 of us ought to be enough to do the business of the people of this province. I don't think we can justify going to another four.

Now, I acknowledge the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's concern about Calgary gaining at the expense of Edmonton and rural Alberta, and I don't think it's just a Calgary versus Edmonton thing that he's bringing up here, anything like that. The member is right: Calgary has been growing faster, and Calgary is the bigger city. But I come back to that reference I made to the unicity and the fact that if you take the 23 member municipalities of the capital region and put them together, the population of the capital region is only a smidge smaller than the population of the unicity of Calgary. We're just over a million; you're just under us. That is really what it comes down to.

9:50

Again, as a possible way to break the ice on this, maybe we can consider the capital region or the most built-up section of the capital region as equivalent to the city of Calgary when redistribution actually comes along, so we think of a million people or thereabouts in the capital region being represented by essentially the same number of MLAs as would represent the city of Calgary.

I must admit, Mr. Chair, that I would hardly consider myself an expert on the drawing or redrawing of electoral boundaries at this point, but I haven't come across anything yet that says that every constituency in the city of Calgary or in the city of Edmonton must fall only within the limits of that municipality, that you couldn't spill over like you do, you know, in Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Grande Prairie-Smoky, or the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology's constituency, the name of which escapes me right now. It's St. Albert and Spruce Grove and the islands – I don't know – something like that.

An Hon. Member: Sturgeon.

Mr. Taylor: Sturgeon. Thank you.

We can use some creativity and some innovation here, I think, and dedication. I refer back to – I think that the Justice minister was actually quoting or at least referring to a decision made by the Supreme Court in 1991 under reference re provincial electoral boundaries Saskatchewan when she talked about deviations from absolute voter parity. The Supreme Court did say:

Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation. Deviations from absolute voter parity, however, may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation. Factors like geography, community history . . .

I won't repeat what she said because what she said is very close, word for word, to what the court says.

But after things like "to ensure that our legislative assemblies effectively represent the diversity of our social mosaic," the Supreme Court also added in there: "Beyond this, dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced." So the Supreme Court of Canada has certainly recognized that there needs to be some wiggle room. I'm not sure what the justices of the Supreme Court of Canada would say about the amount of wiggle room that allows a plus or minus 25 per cent error 79 times out of 83 and that on the other four you can be totally out of whack with that.

I'm thinking, Mr. Chairman, that if we choose wisely in terms of the five members of the boundaries commission once this legislation is passed and put those five individuals to work, they should be able to be creative and innovative and within the context of 83 Members of the Legislative Assembly, not 87, redistribute the boundaries in such a way that Calgary gets effective representation, that Edmonton gets effective representation, and that the rest of Alberta, the rural areas of Alberta, get effective representation as well. [interjection] There was some kind of heckle from the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I'll take it that he's just overly tired because he's got one of the biggest constituencies by population in the province, and he's probably run off his feet, if he's not planning his golf tournament, that is, which must be coming up soon, isn't it?

Mr. Hancock: On September 17.

Mr. Taylor: September 17. I'll mark it in my calendar, and I'll see you on the 19th hole.

Mr. Chairman, I think I've made my point. I will take my seat and allow others to continue the debate now.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Due to a stroke of luck or the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview I do now have that amendment that I would like to put before the House. If possible, I'd like to do that now, please.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll pause for a moment while the amendment is distributed.

Hon. members, this amendment will be marked A1. Please proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment is pretty straightforward. It allows us to amend the act by striking out section 4. This will return us to having 83 members in this House and send this new committee to draw the new Alberta electoral map, challenging that committee to do their work by redrawing the electoral map here in Alberta with 83 seats. We bring this bill forward at this time given that we are in a deficit situation, given that it will add \$10 million in spending over every four-year cycle, possibly more to the legislative work we do here in the Assembly.

We have made the arguments before that we are all pretty well paid in this Assembly. We are asking Albertans to do more; we should be asking ourselves to do more. This is simply a chance for this government to not only talk about small government but to actually put it into action. As an opposition it constantly gets said: where can we cut? Well, here it is, lo and behold, an opportunity where the opposition can put forth an amendment where we can cut. We can cut a significant ongoing expenditure to the budget right now by doing this. I would like the people who believe in small government – and hopefully that's all members of this House – who believe that small government works and that small government is better and more efficient government, you know, to do that here today. Let's roll up our sleeves here and do the work ourselves.

I leave it at that, and I encourage others to support the amendment as well as hear from others who would like to speak on this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I want to speak in favour of this amendment. Frankly, if it were up to me, I'd reduce the size of this Assembly. I don't think we even need 83. [interjections] Yeah, I'm getting lots of suggestions with nine members.

There has been some good discussion tonight about, you know, the cost savings of this in terms of direct expenditures. There have been comparisons to how city councillors represent their wards and how Members of Parliament represent their ridings and so on. I just want to add one other point. I actually believe that particularly when the size of this Assembly is combined with the first past the post voting system, where we end up in Alberta with one party with so many members, in fact some government activities are created as make-work projects just to keep the backbenches busy and that that actually leads government into problems.

You know, I think that we create committees that may not be needed. We name MLAs to tasks where the MLA is not an expert. We conduct things as a government and Assembly which I think would be better off left alone. I think that, frankly, having 83 seats in Alberta is plenty, and I don't see any need to add four.

10:00

Quite genuinely, Mr. Chairman, I just don't see that this is needed. I mean, my concern, if you think this through, is that if Alberta

continues to grow, then in another eight years we'll be adding four more, and pretty soon we're not going to have room for them. There has got to be a way to do things smarter rather than bigger. I just think this is misguided and unjustifiable, so I will be supporting the amendment.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I would like to speak in favour of this amendment. As I said earlier, I don't think that we need an additional four seats at this time. British Columbia certainly increased the size of their Assembly, but not only did they look at things recently; they also had, of course, the citizens' forum on electoral reform and what should and what should not be done. They sought direction from the citizens. This government here in this province certainly is not seeking the direction of the citizens. That will come later, of course, through the commission. But, specifically, why do we need an additional four seats? I think we can reach a balance.

Calgary and Edmonton are a reflection of the urbanization of this province. Rural Alberta is no different than the rest of rural Canada. We see small towns getting smaller. We see farms growing larger. It's quite an issue. Young people are leaving the smaller centres and migrating to the cities. That being said, we look at the growth not only in Calgary and Edmonton but Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lloydminster, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, a little bit in Lethbridge as well. Where the growth is is where the seats should be. We talked about communications earlier, the electronic age and the ease of communication.

I think this is a very good amendment. I know we've seen the size of cabinet expand dramatically. It's almost the complete half of the second row there, Mr. Chairman. The government seems to survive with a variety of cabinet sizes, whether it's 16, sometimes it bloats up to 24 or 25, and then it may go down. For instance, over the constituency week the size of the cabinet was reduced by one. It was a 4.4 per cent reduction, I believe. So the cabinet was reduced in size. The Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations was consolidated into Executive Council, I believe.

So there can be a reduction in the size of government, the size of cabinet, even if it's part-time or it's an event that is going to be short-lived and someone else will be appointed in June. Who's to say? But that's an example of a reduction in the size of cabinet. The government is still functioning as far as I know. For how long we don't know. The former Member for Calgary-Glenmore certainly did his job as best he could. We wish him well in his future career.

That being said, Mr. Chairman, that is just one example of how life goes on after a government front bench is reduced in size. We're not asking for a reduction. I'm with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I think we could do with less seats in this Assembly, but to remain at 83 is sensible.

I thank the hon. member for bringing this amendment forward, and I urge all members to give it consideration and vote to keep the Assembly with 83 seats in it after the commission reports. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We'll go back to the bill. No other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 45 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill 24

Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 28

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Bill 28 is a complicated piece of legislation. It touches on a number of things. It touches on a couple of things that could be particularly large. On the one hand this seems like sort of a housekeeping bill, but on the other hand it's not, and it shouldn't be understood that way. The two areas from this bill that are of biggest note are the provision it gives to the government to start the bitumen royalty in kind program, and it also addresses the orphan well issue.

I want to speak first to the bitumen royalty in kind program. In theory, the bitumen royalty in kind plan seems to us to be something worth seriously considering. What it allows the government to do is to take a flow of bitumen that might be worth, in today's dollars, \$30 a barrel maybe, and instead of taking \$30, it takes a barrel of bitumen, and then it upgrades that bitumen, and it gets \$60. It's a way of increasing the value of the royalty being received by the provincial government, at least in theory. That certainly is worth exploring. There are people who are opposed to this just on principle, but we think the economics of this are worth exploring.

10:10

It's not without some concerns. The Minister of Energy has not been very forthcoming at all about how the bitumen royalty in kind program may work, so we don't know how those concerns are being considered. I'm going to mention one of them right now, which

began to become particularly apparent two or three weeks ago, when we saw how the drop in the price of oil created a collapse in the flow of bitumen royalties to the provincial government because the royalty system is now so price sensitive. Frankly, I think being price sensitive up to a point is a good idea. We understand that oil companies, energy companies can't bear the same level of royalty when the prices are really depressed as they can when the prices are really high. But the price sensitivity is now to a point where if we were taking a royalty in the form of bitumen, it would barely be a trickle because the royalty levels are so low.

Where that seems to me to cause complications is that if we sign a deal with an upgrader, potentially a merchant upgrader, to upgrade that bitumen, we need to be able as a government, I would think, to guarantee a flow of bitumen, let's say a hundred thousand barrels a day. When prices are good and the bitumen royalty is flowing in generously, that's no problem, but when prices collapse, I'm curious to know how the bitumen royalty in kind program can be structured to guarantee a minimum flow to a merchant upgrader.

Now, there's lots of speculation these days that North West Upgrading, you know, may come back to life as a merchant upgrader and that the bitumen royalty in kind program will facilitate that because the provincial government will be able to do a deal with North West, guaranteeing North West a supply of bitumen, therefore guaranteeing North West a much more viable operation. But I'm curious to know how the provincial government will be able to guarantee a supply, if that's their plan, when the flow of royalties is so price sensitive.

That's one of the concerns here, and then that leads to a second concern, which is a concern about trying so hard to make the bitumen royalty in kind program work by stimulating an upgrader that the government goes beyond good sense and runs the risk, frankly, of participating in a kind of white elephant upgrader. You know, that may not happen, but it's certainly the kind of thing that this government has got into in the past, and it's not hard to imagine it happening yet again. I think that it's important that a merchant upgrader stand on its own economically, and I can see the bitumen royalty in kind program having a role to play there, but I am concerned that a government desperate to get an upgrader going again may do a deal that, in fact, in the long term hurts the citizens of Alberta.

I just wanted those comments to be on the record, Mr. Chairman, because it seems that engaging the minister in debate otherwise on this issue has actually proven to be quite difficult.

The other issue this bill addresses is expanding the orphan well program. There's a contentious issue there about how orphan wells should be handled. Many people in Alberta feel that we've had a good track record in handling orphan wells. Some people feel that we haven't. Many people feel that it's not a cost that should be borne by the taxpayer, yet that is a possibility that is brought forward through this legislation. The question is: why should the taxpayer be on the hook for cleaning up a well that made private shareholders potentially millions of dollars and that they then walked away from? Luckily, we're in a province where most oil companies don't do that, but it's a risk.

I actually think that someday we should get a little more aggressive on what I might call orphan gas stations, Mr. Chairman. I'm really tired of driving around Alberta and seeing abandoned gas station sites sit there for sometimes decades. I think that we should be looking at ways to make industry more responsible for cleaning up abandoned gas stations. Some of them are on very, very prime urban real estate. Probably the single most dramatic example of that is the old Imperial Oil station on Whyte Avenue, which was shut down probably 10 years ago or more, a prime piece of real estate

that has been completely disabled and has just sat there while it's being vented and so on for years and years and years. I'd like to see a little more aggressiveness from this government in holding those companies to account. But if I go much farther there, I'll be wandering off the topic.

I think that, in the end, Mr. Chairman, the benefits of this bill are notable, that it at least opens the possibility of a successful bitumen royalty in kind program. The devil will be in the details there. You know, our caucus has chosen to support this piece of legislation.

I'll leave it with those comments. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a few comments with respect to Bill 28, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. Now, in many respects this tidies things up. There's a mishmash of different acts and so on that cover our energy sector in this province. This makes a few changes, but basically in many respects it's a housekeeping bill.

I think there are some very important points dealing with orphan wells and the fund to pay for those and allowing the ERCB to impose a levy on oil field waste management facilities and so on. It provides for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to approve various decisions of the ERCB, including designating the proprietor of a pipeline to be a common carrier, declaring a company to be a common purchaser of oil or gas produced from a pool, declaring a company to be a common processor of gas from a pool, and other aspects of pooling. It requires an order in council for an amendment to consolidation of an approval permit. One thing where it doesn't give the authority to the Lieutenant Governor in Council but instead to the minister, which is a problem, in our view: members of the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission would be appointed directly by the minister rather than by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Now, I want to deal with the question of bitumen, which has been the subject of a number of questions that we've asked in this House during this session and is something which is a very serious issue as far as we're concerned. We need to cast ourselves back to the days leading up to the election of the current Premier as leader of the Conservative Party and some of the promises that he made at that stage to eliminate or at least reduce the amount of unprocessed bitumen that was being exported to the United States for upgrading there.

Of course, what we've seen is that this has increased steadily under the current Premier's administration. In fact, absolutely nothing has been done by this government to stop, to constrain, or to restrain the increase in unprocessed bitumen out of this province and the jobs and the investment that go with it, to the point where we've seen just the other day where the Industrial Heartland Association, representing municipal officials in the Industrial Heartland area, has added their voice to those who have been saying along with us that the export of unprocessed bitumen is costing Alberta investment and costing us jobs. They're very concerned about it.

There are only two projects ongoing in the Industrial Heartland but a multitude of projects in the United States, which will be fed by the Keystone and Alberta Clipper pipelines. Not only that, Mr. Chairman, but various energy companies are planning a number of additional pipelines that will connect the entire American energy market to Alberta bitumen and will be capable of carrying the full production that we're likely to achieve out of the oil sands and, therefore, I think, cripple the long-term value-added basis of the economy in this province.

10:20

Now, when the Keystone and the Alberta Clipper projects were before the National Energy Board for approval, we urged the provincial government to intervene and speak against them, but they did not. They reserved a status before the board, but they did not avail themselves of the opportunity to talk about that. I know that the government is absolutely opposed to and terrified of anything that smacks of a national energy program, but it would be possible with a little vision, in my view, for the government to develop a made-in-Alberta energy program that benefited our province and the country. They don't have to abdicate anything to the federal government in that respect. They can take leadership here.

We have talked about how this could be done, Mr. Chairman. We produced a bill, which didn't make it through the Order Paper, in 2007. It was at that time, in the Third Session of the 26th Legislature, Bill 225, the Mines and Minerals (Alberta Value Added) Amendment Act, 2007, by my former colleague Mr. Ray Martin.

Alberta exports more than a million barrels of bitumen every day. Nearly half of that now is exported and upgraded outside of Canada. This is despite the Premier's commitment. Enbridge's Alberta Clipper pipeline will export another 450,000 barrels per day, to be upgraded in Superior, Wisconsin. TransCanada's Keystone pipeline will export another 590,000 barrels per day, to be upgraded in Illinois and Texas. This is, in fact, where the construction and the jobs are today, Mr. Chairman, as a result of this government's failure to stand up for the interests of the province.

In a presentation to the National Energy Board on the Keystone pipeline Infometrica CEO and economist Mike McCracken estimated that the Keystone pipeline alone will cost Alberta 18,000 jobs and \$2 billion in economic output. That's shocking. That's not coming from some raving socialist or wild-eyed environmentalist, Mr. Chairman, but is in fact a very real thing.

An Hon. Member: Fearmongering.

Mr. Mason: I heard someone on the other side say "fearmongering," which is the government's standard response now to any criticism that might be put forward by reasonable people to their policies. But it's not fearmongering; it's a fact.

Our proposal, which I think should've been incorporated in this bill, was a concrete step to ensure that bitumen is upgraded in Alberta. It is entirely within the government's authority to do so simply by requiring it as part of the leases. The government can negotiate or renegotiate existing leases or, if necessary, legislate. They should do that, Mr. Chairman. Our bill showed exactly how that could be done.

It's not that the government doesn't have the authority to do this. It's not that it has not been a concern. It's a concern for the Industrial Heartland Association, it's a concern for people who work in the industry, it's certainly a concern for people who work in construction, and it should be the concern of this government because in the long term they are ensuring that our economy does not live up to its full potential. That's how fundamental and critical this question is.

One has to ask why they would put the interests of the companies who are wanting to export our un-upgraded, non value-added natural resources belonging to the people of Alberta ahead of the interests of the people of this province. It's a really curious question. But, Mr. Chairman, these resources do belong to the people of Alberta, and they are nonrenewable. People who look on the other side, who talk about the oil sands as almost an inexhaustible resource, remind me of people 20 or 30 years ago who talked about the oceans as an inexhaustible resource. In fact, they are not inexhaustible. They are

very finite, and as you dig down, the economic cost of producing the material rises. There's low-hanging fruit, and then it gets a little higher, and it gets a little higher. I think it's important that the government really put in an Alberta-first energy policy.

We need a made-in-Alberta energy policy that starts with keeping the bitumen here. Simply taking some of the royalties as bitumen in lieu of money so that you've got some left over is a weak and inadequate response to this problem. The government needs to exercise its legitimate legislative authority and its administrative authority to protect the long-term interests of Alberta and its economy. It is failing to do so, and the idea that you can take a little bit of your royalties in kind and you're going to have some bitumen that will be left in the province to be upgraded is pathetically weak and not the response that this province needs, that future generations, the next generation of our province require.

So although there is a lot in this bill that is simply administrative and a lot of it is positive – we have no objection to many of the changes that are being made in this sort of omnibus grab bag of a bill – its absolute failure to deal with the question of bitumen and the future economic development of this province is a glaring failure and one which should give all members of this House pause. Why aren't provisions included in this bill that would protect the future development of our province and would ensure that the jobs and the investments stay here? It's not there, Mr. Chairman. The bill is not worthy of support, and I will not support it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure for me to speak. I just would like to make my points relatively quickly as two other members have spoken quite at length and probably much more eloquently than I will on this bill. Nevertheless, I believe that allowing the government to start taking bitumen in kind is probably a step in the right direction. It's something that this government can then use to hopefully build an upgrader system or a processing system, where we're not sending this bitumen downstream. Our friends in the United States, although very nice people, shouldn't be getting the economic value of this one-time resource withdrawal system that we have here in Alberta.

If you look at, like, 30 or 40 years ago, we thought that the old-fashioned way – well, not old-fashioned, but the traditional oil and gas fields were full. We had lots of oil and gas revenues coming in from people out there, junior oil companies going out there, putting a spit into the ground, and finding lots of oil. That, too, has happened with our natural gas and still does happen with our natural gas.

But we know all too well that that is a sunset industry. Yes, there are opportunities for people to go back into old holes, and there are opportunities for some individuals to actually find some new, but all things being considered, that is a sunset industry. What we're looking at now with this, the advent of the oil sands, is that this is Alberta's new future, and part of that future should be developing some provisions that allow for the maximum economic value of this resource to be produced here in Alberta.

10:30

The best way to do that is by either legislating that more bitumen be upgraded here, finding some way to either incent the private marketplace to do it here, or finding some mechanism to get these bitumen processing plants developed here, where we can get the jobs, we can get the profit, and we can move ahead and start adding the value to our universities, our health care system, all of that good

stuff which oil and gas has done. I think we should be doing it in this case. I think it is a failure of this government that we're not further along this process than we are now, that we continue to see development of these upgrading systems down in the United States, and we'll continue to see that unless we put our feet down and say: "Stop. We're not going to do this. We're not going to continue to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. We're going to have these resources be developed for ourselves, for the people of Alberta, to add to our prosperity."

On that note, I think, you know, this is a decent start, so I guess I am supportive of it. But I do recognize what the leader of the third party has said, that this bill is a failure in the fact that it doesn't recognize that this government should have people working round the clock, 24 hours a day, saying: how are we going to develop more of this bitumen here in this province? Really, if you can't find the answer, I don't think you're looking hard enough or you don't have the right people hired. There's got to be a solution to this, it should be done sooner rather than later, and let's get on with it.

Thank you very much for my opportunity to speak to Bill 28.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 28, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. A lot has been said by previous speakers, but I certainly have one question at this time that hopefully I can have answered by the government members.

In December – I believe it was the 10th to be precise, Mr. Chairman – of last year there was a regulation passed that ceded a lot of control at the edge of the lease by this government of bitumen and bitumen production. I'm just curious as to how that regulation will be impacted by this legislation. Certainly, we know that our neighbours to the south are benefiting currently from this government's bitumen policy. Those pipelines, unfortunately, are exporting jobs, value-added jobs, in this province. One only has to look at the price of bitumen. It almost doubles, if not a little bit more, whenever the bitumen is upgraded to synthetic crude oil. Synthetic crude oil in some markets trades at a modest premium.

So there are the economic benefits which have been outlined by previous speakers. Hopefully, the bitumen in kind, the royalty in kind will become standard practice in this province, and the bitumen that is gathered or collected will be used to incent the construction of a local upgrader. I don't think there's any value whatsoever, Mr. Chairman, in allowing for the expansion, whether it's in Borger, Texas, or whether it's in Illinois, of facilities that are existing.

There's no benefit to this province. There's benefit to the producers, there's certainly benefit to the Americans, but there's none to us. We've got to get every nickel and every dime we can from this resource. The government has to date failed to do that, but hopefully this section of the bill will once and for all stop the export of jobs from this province to the American lower 48 states. That will stop. We will see upgrading occur here in a sustainable fashion which will be respectful not only of the local economy but also of the local environment.

I think we can do this. I know we had the royalty review, and I know it was said about taking bitumen in kind. I know the details are yet to be worked out. Who will be the agent? Will it be the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission? Who will act on their behalf? Those details. How will this bitumen be stored if it's necessary to store it, or will it just be a simple exchange transaction?

We will see what happens with this, but certainly the government stepping up and accepting bitumen royalty in kind I think is a very good idea. It will hopefully be used to incent the development in this province of an upgrader, as I said before, and hopefully someone

from the Department of Energy can put on the public record my concerns regarding the regulation and how it will impact this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 28, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 28 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: That's carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 27, Bill 45, Bill 24, and Bill 28.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 45, Bill 24, Bill 28. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 27. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:39 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 26, 2009

Issue 43a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Official Opposition House Leader
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL),
Official Opposition Whip
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC),
Minister of Municipal Affairs
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC),
Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),
Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC),
Minister of Employment and Immigration
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Agriculture and Rural Development
Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),
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Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC),
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Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)
Horner, Hon. Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC),
Minister of Advanced Education and Technology
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC),
Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC),
Minister of Service Alberta
Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC),
Minister of Energy
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC),
Minister of Health and Wellness
Lindsay, Hon. Fred, Stony Plain (PC),
Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Lukaszuk, Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
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McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC),
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Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
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Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
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Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Energy
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 26, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given to us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome a delegation from the Russian Federation, who are sitting in your gallery. They are here in Alberta participating in a week-long public administration reform program, regional economic development study tour with the Canada School of Public Service. Our guests are accompanied today by their interpreter and staff from the Canada School of Public Service and the Russian Federation. I would like to ask our guests to rise and receive a warm welcome from the Legislature. [Remarks in Russian]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seated in your gallery today is Rudy Weibe. Rudy is one of two Albertans chosen to receive the 2009 Lieutenant Governor of Alberta distinguished artist award. Rudy was formerly the curator of the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge and is a professor emeritus of Canadian literature and creative writing at the University of Alberta. An acclaimed author, he has written nine novels, four short story collections, two children's books, and six books of nonfiction. Rudy is accompanied by Susan Green, who is the board chair of the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards Foundation. I would now ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome and congratulations of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two different groups of grade 6 students, one group from the C. Ian McLaren school in Black Diamond and the other from the Turner Valley school. Accompanying the C. Ian McLaren school is the principal, Mr. Garry Tink; two teachers, Diane Lindelad and Carol Anderson; and one parent, Mrs. Jennifer Briggs; and from the Turner Valley school teacher Matt Berrigan and eight parents: Victoria Berrigan, Marlene Whiteside, Dawn Jardie, Katie Berrigan, Sue Burwash, Karen Lyons, Verna Staples, and Brenda Salmon-Cherry. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure again to introduce to you 26 outstanding students from

Jackson Heights school in my constituency, students who are all here today and for the next couple of days attending School at the Legislature. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Pam Schenk, and by parent helpers Mrs. Terri Fuller and Mrs. Janet Krebs. I believe they're seated in both galleries, and I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm applause of this House. Thank you for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise again this afternoon – actually, it was yesterday I rose – to introduce 29 students and six adult chaperones, including teacher Jill Bishop, from E.G. Wahlstrom middle school. It's such a huge school that they come in waves. It was really nice to be able to welcome our first batch yesterday and today, again, our second batch. They have travelled all the way from Slave Lake, 250 kilometres north, and they have travelled for about three to four hours. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the lunch hour today many of the members had the opportunity to hear a little bit more about the challenges that our Alberta international medical graduates have in this province and to answer some questions. I believe that we have quite a number of them seated in our gallery here today, and I would ask that they rise and be recognized by the members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two dedicated Albertans working for the ERCB. The first gentleman is Dwayne Waisman. Mr. Waisman is the ERCB executive manager of the field centres located throughout Alberta. Field centres, of course, are an integral part of the ERCB's work in our communities. He certainly would invite all MLAs to contact their local field centre office if they need any ERCB information or assistance. Dwayne is accompanied today by a gentleman familiar to all members of the Assembly, Mr. Rich Jones. I would ask them if they would please both rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two constituents of mine and three visitors. Chander Mittal and his wife, Anita, reside in Edmonton-Whitemud. Chander is the president of the Bhartiya Cultural Society of Alberta. I've had the honour and privilege of being hosted in Chander and Anita's home in Edmonton-Whitemud. They're with us today in the members' gallery.

They're joined by Jaspinder and Micky Narula, who were originally Calgarians, who have moved to Mumbai in order to pursue their music careers in Bollywood. Jaspinder and Micky have successfully created a niche for themselves in a very competitive industry. They're currently on tour across North America and are joining us in Edmonton to perform at a fundraiser for the Bhartiya Cultural Society of Alberta on Saturday, May 30. They're also

joined today by a good friend of theirs, Avinash Gupta. I'd ask that all of our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. All of us have constituents who really stand out as leaders in their neighbourhood. Today I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly one such member from the community of Belgravia. His name is Richard Law. He's seated in the public gallery. I'd ask him to rise. Richard is a neighbour and friend. He's a businessman. With his wife, Joyce, he's a father of three fine young adult children. He's the kind of fellow who's a real community leader. Whether it's helping to coach with soccer or organizing community events or helping at the school, he's the kind of person who steps up. Please give Richard a warm welcome. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce some special guests with us in the public gallery. Mike Gray and Sean Ouimet are both from the Centre For Inquiry Alberta, a nonprofit group that promotes and defends science, reason, and free inquiry into all aspects of human interest. We also have with us Scott McKinney, Debbie Courchene, and Bradyn Villebrun-Buracas from the University of Alberta. If they'll stand. Our guests are here this afternoon to show their concern for the government's flawed Bill 44. Let's give them a warm welcome from the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Gordon Groat from the town of Devon, which is located in my constituency. Gordon is very active in his community and a great supporter of this member and our government. I would ask Dr. Gordon Groat, who is seated in the public gallery, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Hate Crime

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over 100 people gathered at a forum a few weeks ago to address increased activity of hate groups and the issue of hate crime in Calgary. The forum was attended by members from aboriginal and various minority communities, the city of Calgary Police Service, the Alberta Human Rights Commission, federal government departments, and nonprofit agencies.

While it is disturbing, those harmed by hate crime can feel that they have no where to turn and feel defeated and abused. It was an empowering experience for many participants as they shared concerns and suggestions on how the community can collectively make a difference. Participants discussed community and individual responses to hate groups and recommended more public education on hate crime and racism, greater commitment from governments to address hate crime, development of policies and legislation to protect vulnerable populations, and greater engagement with populations such as aboriginal and minority communities.

Mr. Speaker, this forum is also very timely. In the middle of May Statistics Canada released the 2007 Police-reported Hate Crime. While hate-motivated crimes were down from 2006, accounting for population, Calgary had the highest rate of reported hate crime in both years, and the cities of Hamilton and Edmonton had increased reported hate crimes. Race or ethnicity made up 65 per cent of reported hate crimes, followed by religion and sexual orientation; 50 per cent of incidents were comprised of mischief offences like graffiti of hate signs and symbols, degrading language on public and private properties; and 3 in 10 crimes involved assault and threats. The report also cited that one-third of people accused of committing hate crime were youth 12 to 17 years of age, almost double the proportion of youth accused of committing crimes in general.

Mr. Speaker, we clearly have work to do in this area, but I'm very pleased to recognize the leadership demonstrated by our government to protect vulnerable groups through existing legislation such as our human rights act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Calgary Roughnecks

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to offer my congratulations to the Calgary Roughnecks organization for capturing their second National Lacrosse League Champion's Cup in franchise history in defeating the New York Titans 12 to 10 a couple Friday nights ago.

This championship capped off a stellar season in which the Roughnecks earned home field advantage throughout the playoffs by posting a league best record of 12 wins and four losses in the regular season. Led on the field by their captain, Tracey Kelusky, and the game's most valuable player, Josh Sanderson, who was also named to the NLL's all-pro second team, the Roughnecks cruised through the playoffs to the championship game by outscoring their opponents 32 to 13. Mr. Speaker, not only did the Roughnecks win the National Lacrosse League's Champion's Cup, but they did so in dominating fashion right from the start of the NLL season to their final victory the other night in front of 13,000 passionate Calgary fans in the Pengrowth Saddledome.

Mr. Speaker, I attended my first two lacrosse games this year. While I do not profess to know all the rules, I can assure this Assembly that the entertainment value of a professional lacrosse game compares to that of any other professional sport here in this province. More so than any other professional sport, the National Lacrosse League and the Calgary Roughnecks have attempted to integrate the fans into the on-the-field action of the game. I will admit that I did get a lot of satisfaction from the fan/game interaction. One example is when the opposition team shoots the ball on the net and fails to score and the announcer comes on the PA system while the game is continuing and yells, "What's he got?" and the crowd of thousands collectively yells back, "Nothing."

I want to congratulate the whole Roughnecks organization, including all of the players, head coach Troy Cordingley, and owner and GM Brad Banister, for their incredible season, but more importantly I want to thank them for their commitment and involvement in the Calgary community. Professional sport franchises are more than just wins, losses, and championships. They play a very important and integral role in our communities, especially during these challenging times.

I hope all members can help me recognize this successful season, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Crime Prevention

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Crime affects all of us, even if we've never been robbed or attacked or assaulted ourselves. Crime affects us because of its cost to the broader community and because of the lurking threat that at some point we could become the next victim. For some people that means living in fear, but for others it means taking action to prevent crime from happening. Today I want to speak about a community taking action.

The truth is that many crime rates are lower now than in the past, but crime prevention is as important as ever. One of my constituents, Richard Law, along with approximately two dozen community members have accepted responsibility for maintaining their community's safety by working diligently to watch for, report on, and prevent crime in the Belgravia neighbourhood right here in Edmonton. The approach is simple but powerful. When people see suspicious behaviour in the neighbourhood or learn of a neighbourhood crime – a prowler, a stolen bicycle, a break and enter – it's quickly and widely reported throughout the community by Richard through the use of the web. If someone out for a walk sees something suspicious, they may take a photo and send it to Richard, who posts it for other neighbours to see. The effect is powerful. Very quickly everyone in the neighbourhood is watching out for everyone else.

There's nothing vigilante about this. There aren't organized patrols or citizens' arrests, but there is a close relationship with the police, who find reports come in quicker and more accurately because citizens are paying attention and taking responsibility.

The Belgravia community has never been a high-crime area. This community group with Richard Law as its catalyst is working to make sure it never is. Their responsible and prudent actions make Belgravia and the surrounding area a safer place to live and a stronger community.

On behalf of the wider community I thank these people for their dedication and hard work in bringing people together to respond to crime.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Industrial Eye Safety Program

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There can be no doubt that one of our most precious gifts is our sight. Unfortunately, our family knows this all too well since my dad's dad, Grandpa Rudne-ski, lost an eye while repairing a closed-in cutter many decades ago and had his other eye severely damaged in a farm accident shortly thereafter. It's for these and other reasons that I was very pleased to learn about the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's industrial eye safety program, which was launched earlier this month.

In 2007 the CNIB Alberta received \$95,000 in start-up funding from a court-ordered penalty against an employer who failed to adhere to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The funding provided an impetus to launch an eye safety program in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada. It's a very important program, Mr. Speaker. There are close to 1,700 disabling eye injuries at work in our province alone every year. Like all workplace injuries and illnesses they are preventable. In fact, 90 per cent of these incidents could be avoided simply by using appropriate eyewear.

The CNIB program is delivered by facilitators with vision loss. Utilizing real-life stories, shocking visuals, and interactive exercises, they educate employers and workers about eye safety in the workplace, and they motivate them to follow safe work practices. The funds generated by this program are invested in the agency's

rehabilitation programs for people with vision loss. This is an excellent example of how alternative sentencing puts funds from court penalties for health and safety violations back into preventing future injuries and caring for injured workers.

I'd like to commend all of those involved with the program, including our Minister of Employment and Immigration. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After extensive public backlash this administration is trying to fix the flawed and ill-thought-out changes to human rights policy in Alberta. Yet without scrapping the opt-out provision in its entirety, this government is fixing nothing. In fact, the government is simply duplicating what is already under the School Act. To the Premier: what is lacking in the School Act that makes it necessary to duplicate existing provisions in the human rights policy?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill is up for debate later today, so I'll try and talk in generalities and not refer directly to the bill. But it's really about the right of Alberta parents to have a voice in the education of their children. This government believes in family, believes that the family is the basic unit of our society. Families have built great communities, and these great communities have built one of the best provinces in the world to live.

Dr. Swann: Well, what guarantee can the Premier provide that parental opt-out will not cause a chill not only on curriculum but on the teachers in Alberta?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the amendments coming forward will deal with some of the issues that were raised in the House. This bill was well thought out, and the amendments were discussed in great detail. We're looking forward to their introduction later today.

Dr. Swann: Why have the Premier and this administration ignored the request of thousands of Albertans – teachers, lawyers, schools, parents, and students – to completely remove the parental opt-out?

Mr. Stelmach: By listening to Albertans – those that support the bill and those that may not support, may want to see some improvements – I believe that the amendments coming forward will find the balance. Those will come forward, and the House will vote on them over the next few days.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This administration has put forward several poorly-thought-out policy changes this session and continues to ignore the outrage of Albertans across the province over proposed changes to human rights. In a democracy all voices count regardless of whether they sit in the cabinet or not. The parental opt-out is a matter of conscience and personal and moral and religious belief. The tradition is that these issues are open to free vote. To the Premier: will the Premier maintain the tradition and allow a free vote on the proposed parental opt-out?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in our caucus I don't have to threaten anybody to vote. We have a thorough vetting of every piece of legislation. Members are allowed through great discussion, I may add – it does take a little longer because now we've got 72 members around the caucus table. It does take longer, but when you look at the diversity of our caucus, it's very good, solid input. We're going to have a very good piece of legislation coming forward with some amendments after listening to positive feedback from teachers and others. This will all be implemented in the amendments. I feel good about it. And yes, there will be a free vote.

Dr. Swann: Well, since the Premier seems reluctant to answer the question, I'll ask it again. Will the Premier allow a free vote of his members on parental opt-out? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: I said yes. I'm sure *Hansard* will see my answer in the first question. But yes, all the members will have the right to a free vote. As I said before, in our caucus all legislation is thoroughly vetted. Once a consensus is reached, the bill proceeds before the House. This is, like I said, a good piece of legislation, and we will have a free vote.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier explain to Albertans, including those here in the gallery, why he has chosen to ignore the objections across the province to opt-out and support of free speech in the classroom?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is coming from. You know, I've travelled the province extensively over the last number of weeks when this bill was introduced, and I'm getting a lot of positive feedback. Yes, there are some that have some issues with the wording clarification required in the legislation, and we're going to do that. I believe that all Albertans support that the family unit is basic to our society. Why should we give this up to sort of a nanny state that the Liberals want to see in this province?

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Out-of-country Health Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Ombudsman released his report on the administration of out-of-country health services. The fact that there are 53 recommendations contained within the report speaks to a serious problem regarding transparency and accountability in this program. To the minister. It's the minister's responsibility to ensure fairness and transparency of administration of all boards, committees, and agencies in his ministry. Will the minister accept the recommendations from the Ombudsman and fix this program?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much more arm's-length and transparent one can be but to have an arm's-length, transparent, independent committee of experts that reviews out-of-country claims by Albertans. It's that particular committee that makes the decisions. I'm sure that the Leader of the Opposition – I'm not sure if he's asking for political interference in how this committee operates. It's a committee of medical experts that make decisions based on medical evidence.

Dr. Swann: This is a program relied upon by vulnerable Albertans in desperate situations. There have been previous concerns raised, and the minister took no action. What is the minister's explanation for not fulfilling his responsibility to his office?

Mr. Liepert: Well, it sounds like the Leader of the Opposition is asking for political interference in a committee that is at arm's length from the government, Mr. Speaker. This is a committee that is set up to ensure several things. One, that those who need to seek out-of-country services and cannot find them in this province have that opportunity to be reimbursed. But we also have to ensure – and that's why the committee is in place – that we don't have Albertans jumping the queue and going out of province and getting reimbursed by the taxpayers of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Ombudsman initiated this on his own, one of a few instances in which he has done that, suggests this minister is out of line with that remark.

Will the minister direct the Out-of-country Health Services Appeal Panel to hear the four cases that the Alberta Ombudsman has again identified for redress?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the appeal panel has the Ombudsman's report, and they'll act accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Bitumen Exports

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Kearn oil sands project will export hundreds of thousands of barrels of unprocessed bitumen to the United States. Thousands of Alberta jobs will go south as well. These jobs could stay here if the government had the political will. My question is to the Premier. Will the government ensure that oil sands leases, including Kearn Lake, are amended to require upgrading of bitumen here in Alberta, and if not, why not?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, some of the research institutes are looking at oil production from the oil sands to increase to about 6 million barrels by 2013-15. Whether we get there or not, you know, we'll see how things proceed from today. But as I said yesterday, our goal is to find a balance between adding as much value as we can to the bitumen – there will be some bitumen that will leave the province more for some pricing, to see what is the right price of bitumen. We're also going to be looking at other markets. The hon. member keeps talking about the United States, and I can tell you that we're not going to put all our eggs in one basket. We're going to look at shipping some of our product west through the B.C. ports. To do that, we have to add value to it because you're not going to send bitumen with diluent. What do you do with the diluent at the other end?

The plan is in place. We're working through it. Just to say that there's a new project announced, and then this guy gets up in the House and he's criticizing it already.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it sounds like they're not satisfied with exporting jobs to the States; they're going to export them to China as well. With unemployment up dramatically in Alberta and upgraders like BA, Fort Hills, and Voyager being mothballed, meanwhile there is an upgrader construction boom in the United States. The Premier promised to stem the flow of bitumen and jobs to the United States, but he has done nothing. To the Premier: why have you failed to stand up for Albertans' jobs by not insisting that oil companies invest in upgraders here?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, of course, he's getting onto this bandwagon about upgrading. Like I said yesterday in the House, just in the last election the movement by that group there was to shut it all down, you know, because they were all worried about the environmental issues. Today, not only with additional production, he wants to add the issue of adding value to it, which, again, we have to do in a very balanced, environmental, sensible way. This will take time to get there in terms of adding value to all.

The other thing is that the hon. member keeps talking about these jobs going to the United States or the bitumen going to the United States for upgrading. The president himself said no. He's looking at upgrading here in Alberta with some of the integrated operators and also looking at if there is some value in adding value to bitumen in Canada in other refineries.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier continues to repeat the lie that our party would shut down the tar sands. That's a lie, and I will not accept it. He continues to repeat it.

Albertans need sustainable jobs, not temporary work building projects . . .

Mr. Hancock: Point of order.

Mr. Mason: . . . that create American jobs at the expense of the Alberta economy. If the Premier was truly committed to ensuring a sustainable future, he would ensure that oil sands leases require a minimum percentage of bitumen to be upgraded in Alberta. Why won't the Premier stand up for Albertans and demand the Kearl project upgrade at least 50 per cent here in Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Well, we're well beyond that. We're closer to 70 per cent. Why would we reduce the amount upgraded?

I'm just going to pose this question to you, Mr. Speaker. How is it that this member can get up in the House and make such passionate speeches about adding value to bitumen and increasing production when a former staff member, paid by the Alberta taxpayer, was one of the ones hanging from the rafters at the Premier's speech last year? How is it that somebody can get paid by the taxpayer during the day and during the evening go and support Greenpeace to shut everything down? Can you answer that, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: There also was a point of order raised during that exchange. There was some rather intemperate language that was used there. We're going to deal with this point of order at the conclusion. I'm going to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to do some reflecting in the interim.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

International Medical Graduates

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health and Wellness recognizes that international medical graduates are an important part of addressing the province's shortage of physicians. In addition, full economic integration of internationally trained professionals such as IMGs will also yield social and economic benefits to our province. In 2009 only 69 out of about 149 IMGs that successfully completed the AIMG program were placed in externship, the only way to receive full licensure to practise medicine in Alberta. These positions are low because of the

shortage of physicians to act as preceptors, or supervisors. The questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is an assessment process in place to recognize the prior learning and clinical experience of IMGs in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the introduction, the international medical graduates in this province have an opportunity to play a large role in the delivery of health care going forward. It needs to be stated, however, that the registrar of new physicians in the province is the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the college has been working, I believe, actively to try and ensure that more foreign-trained doctors are registered in Alberta. In fact, in the last three or four years the number of residency seats for international medical graduates has gone from around 20 to some 67 or 69 right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of health: what is your ministry doing to increase the number of preceptors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's one of the challenges, Mr. Speaker. To be a preceptor you have to be a practising physician, and we know that in the province today physicians are stretched. We have a couple of programs that we've attempted to introduce to assist along with some additional funding, but having those residency positions is clearly a challenge.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. The Alberta education system is very good at creating bridging programs. Would the ministry consider integrating the bridging program for IMGs into universities for these professionals?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology and I have had some discussions about how we can remove some of these barriers for our foreign-trained physicians. Currently postsecondary institutions in this province have some international relationships with other universities around the world. We think there are opportunities to actually improve on that. We do know that the College of Physicians and Surgeons has special recognition of training in certain countries. I think in light of the global world that we live in today, we need to do a better job of ensuring that that bridging does take place both between our universities and other world institutions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet more flawed inconsistencies in this government's parental opt-out policy have been pointed out by the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. Enshrining a parent's right to pull their child out of classes on religion in the public system should also enshrine a parent's right to pull their child out of classes on religion in other systems. To the minister: given that parental opt-out will not apply to private, charter, or francophone schools, what specific harm do parents of children in public schools need to be protected from that would justify enshrining only their rights in the human rights code?

Mr. Hancock: What the public ought to be protected from is people who can't read legislation. In fact, under section 36 of the School Act, in terms of application of the act under the charter schools section, it specifically includes under 36(1)(a) that the provision, the definition, with respect to board includes charter schools. So charter schools are actually covered. With respect to private schools that's a choice that the parents make. When they make that choice, they presumably are looking to see what is involved in the child going to that school, so they're opting in at that point.

Mr. Chase: When children enter the public school system, a secular system, parents expect that universal, inclusive ideas will be discussed and debated. If students in public schools need to be able to opt out from learning about religion, then will non-Catholic children attending Catholic schools have similar opt-out provisions?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely essential that students in a secular public school or, in fact, in any school have the opportunity to discuss widely, to share viewpoints. Nothing in the proposed act, which will be debated tonight, will do anything to forestall that. Indeed, Catholic schools are public schools, so one presumes that if you're specifically teaching religion or if you are specifically teaching human sexuality or sexual orientation courses, you would require notification to parents and the opportunity to opt out. Now, if I was running a Catholic school or a Catholic system, I would probably indicate to parents right at the start of the year – again, you have a choice as to whether you want to register in that – that Catholic education permeates what we do in a Catholic system, and therefore you would acknowledge that at the time of registration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again to the minister: will the requirement for non-Catholic children to attend religious classes at Catholic schools be ruled as an infringement on the human rights of parents?

Mr. Hancock: Asked and answered.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Financial Support for Refugees

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago a constituent of mine asked if I was aware that new arrivals to Canada got \$2,500 per month in support payments. I found it a little bit high, so I told him I'd try to get an answer here from the Minister of Employment and Immigration. So my question today to the minister is: can a new arrival into Canada receive equal amounts of money from both the federal and the provincial government in the form of income support or some other category of money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a wide variety of programs and services available across the province to assist any newcomers as they settle. It is true that the amount of federal settlement funding to the provinces is calculated based on the point of entry, and the federal immigration minister is aware of the challenges this poses as people move from one province to the other. Our refugees will get a one-time payment of \$1,300 as they move into Alberta or into Canada, for that matter. We need to recognize that refugees come to us with very, very little assets or no assets at all.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Could I clarify: is that \$1,300 a one-time payment or a per-month payment for a certain period of time?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the \$1,300 is just a one-time payment. Once they land here and become residents of the province of Alberta, anybody can qualify for any type of assistance. So if they need income support and if they don't have resources to meet their basic needs, then they will qualify for any type of program that any other Albertan will qualify for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I know that I'm trying not to get into the federal side of things, but I need to understand from the minister why it is that – it appears, anyway – the province would end up paying quite a bit more money, whether it's through AISH or income support, to somebody that chose Canada as a place to come to, yet the federal government doesn't appear to be paying nearly what the province ends up being on the hook for.

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things that have happened. Generally, you know, all refugees – and we're talking more specifically about refugees rather than the broader class of immigrants – will qualify for that one-time \$1,300. The income support after that is calculated based on whether they're married or not, the number of dependants, the accommodations, their ability to work. We will treat any immigrant like any other Albertan once they are settled in the province of Alberta. Our focus is to try to get people to return to work as quickly as possible. Last week we just signed an agreement with the federal government to give us additional support that we can use to train individuals and provide for the needs that they have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Calgary International Airport

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have asked the Minister of Transportation about the building of the Calgary airport tunnel. The city of Calgary will be voting on support for the tunnel in June. My constituency and city need this tunnel. It's not only vital for local transportation flow but also to the east side and the whole city of Calgary. To the Minister of Transportation: does the government support this tunnel?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not a matter of whether or not this government supports the tunnel. Yes, the hon. member has asked me this question many times, and I've answered it the same. The airport and the roads within the city of Calgary are arterial roads, and they're to be done by the city of Calgary. It's a municipal issue.

I can add to that by saying that we give hundreds of millions of dollars for infrastructure to the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary has to plan what their priorities are and what they're going to build with those priorities, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to hear the minister say that you give out hundreds of millions of dollars for infrastructure. How much is the province committing towards the tunnel, if any?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I answered that question by saying that it's not our responsibility to pick out one particular project. It's up to the city of Calgary to decide what their priorities are and where to spend the money that we send them within their own jurisdiction of the responsibility of their roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just looking for commitment from the minister as to some money towards the tunnel. To the minister again. The community associations and the residents of northeast Calgary expressed to me, to government MLAs, and to the local Member of Parliament their full support for this tunnel. Why is the minister dismissing these concerns of all those residents of Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm not dismissing anything. I just don't understand why that hon. member can't understand that we're giving hundreds of millions of dollars. I don't want to tell the city where they should spend that money. I guess what he's saying is: "Can you make a special little effort? Can you find something special just for us over and above what we already give them?" I don't know if we can or not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Companies

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that our province has established some official connections with OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. I know that many of my constituents, particularly those that are employed in the energy sector, will be interested in the details of this relationship. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister explain the benefits of working with OPEC and how we can protect ourselves in this relationship given the fact that the member nations are some of our main competitors in the energy sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear about this. We cannot and will not become members of OPEC, and we're not interested in becoming members of OPEC. However, benefits relative to having discussions with other jurisdictions, including our competitors, can be substantial for the province of Alberta. This is all about sharing information. This is to ensure that we understand the factors we're facing: global markets, demand, and pricing. Much is to be learned here while also protecting Alberta's interests.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. Given that Alberta cannot become a part of OPEC, can the minister describe how Alberta might participate without OPEC?

Mr. Knight: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, OPEC hosts regular dialogue meetings which include both OPEC members and non-

OPEC producers around the world. We now have an opportunity to participate in these meetings, and we'll do so when it makes the best sense for Alberta. Most certainly, there are opportunities to discuss a wide range of energy issues. I might point out that OPEC countries are committed to \$750 million of investment in carbon capture and storage technology. We're very interested in speaking to them about that. They also, of course, lead in energy supply. We want to lead in the environmentally friendly and sustainable production of energy. We think that there's good opportunity for us to discuss it with OPEC members.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: are there any other potential benefits for the province in participating in OPEC?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we expect that there'll be opportunities for us when we have discussions outside of Alberta at any point to look at the attraction of new investment to our province, and getting attention on the world stage is, we think, beneficial. Also, OPEC has a student exchange program, about which we will be getting more information. There's a good opportunity also for the next generation of Alberta energy professionals to gain valuable world experience in these areas.

Imperial Oil Kearl Lake Project

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I'm following up questions from yesterday concerning the upgrading of bitumen from phase 1 of the Kearl Lake project. Yesterday the Minister of Energy was not particularly clear in his answer, so I'm going to start off just simply: does the minister have knowledge of where the bitumen from phase 1 of the Kearl Lake project is going to be upgraded?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, I think that the Premier has indicated – and it's odd, actually, that the question would come to the House today. I think that yesterday, in fact, the president or the CEO of Imperial Oil indicated that although with this first phase of 100,000, 110,000 barrels the upgrading would likely not be done in their own facility, there are opportunities where there is excess upgrading capacity in the province now. They may be able to make some commercial arrangements there. Also, interestingly enough and relative to something that this member was promoting not all that long ago, it appears as though there may be an opportunity in other parts of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy is responsible for developing the province's bitumen upgrading strategy. This government approved this project, yet it seems that the minister has lost track of a hundred thousand barrels of bitumen a day. I don't see how he can think he's doing his job. How do you defend not knowing where a hundred thousand barrels a day of bitumen are going to be upgraded when you're responsible for the upgrading strategy of this province? Come clean. Come clean.

Mr. Knight: Is he finished with my cleanliness?

Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what's been lost track of here. The hon. gentleman opposite has lost track of 8,000 jobs for Albertans. That's what he's lost track of. What we have here is a situation where a proponent has come to the table – and they've done so, I think, very

prudently – taken a look at the opportunity that they have in front of them in Alberta as we stand currently. They've offered here to proceed with an \$8 billion investment in the province of Alberta. By 2012, as the thing unfolds and production comes into play, it will become abundantly clear what's going to happen with the product, and it's to the benefit of Albertans to maximize the value. There may be bitumen leaving Alberta. There may be bitumen upgraded here. There may be opportunity for value-added. There may be opportunity for petrochemical income. We will work with all of the above.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of maybes in there, but one of the things we know for sure is that in Toledo and Borger and elsewhere in the U.S. real upgraders are being built right now, as we speak. This minister can't tell us if the bitumen from Kearn Lake is going to be upgraded at Mildred Lake at the Syncrude site or if it's going to be upgraded somewhere else. So one last time, Mr. Minister. You are responsible. Where is this bitumen going to be upgraded? Do your job.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:20

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am doing my job. My job is the development of these resources in an environmentally manageable way for the province of Alberta for the good of the people of the province of Alberta. We will continue to do exactly that. We will get maximum value from this product for Albertans over a long term, including the 8,000 jobs this gentleman seems to not be worried about.

Dr. Taft: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Land-use Framework

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the guise of improving provincial planning between competing interests through the new land-use framework, this government is preparing to give itself absolute power, and we all know what absolute power does absolutely. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why does your proposed framework fail to include the democratic checks and balances that would protect ordinary Albertans from cabinet's whims?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we've spent over two years consulting with Albertans, getting their input into building the framework. We've now brought forward some legislation. We've been having open houses around the province, working with Albertans, getting more feedback, explaining this. As the regional plans are implemented, for each regional plan there is an advisory committee representing a cross-section of the communities in each of those communities. That's how we're incorporating full participation of all Albertans in the land-use framework.

Ms Notley: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, the advisory committees the minister refers to may or may not be established and may or may not be representative.

Now, the original land-use framework document emphasized the values of accountability, shared responsibility, and transparency, but those values seem to have gone missing from the final product. If

government wants Albertans to trust what they are doing, the minister needs to understand that changes of this magnitude require uncommon levels of respect for democratic accountability and transparency. With that in mind, will the minister commit to making the stewardship commissioner an officer of the Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the members opposite have been out of power for so long – I guess they've never been in power – they don't appreciate some of the operational details of actually getting something done. We've put together a plan. Is there a lot of executive discretion in it? Yes. But there's no off-the-shelf manual that we're going to take from some other jurisdiction to design the Land Stewardship Act. We're breaking new ground here, and we want a commissioner and a minister that are politically accountable so that the people of Alberta know that if they don't like what's happening, they can hold the government of Alberta responsible.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, a good land-use framework is transparent, accountable, and representative of the people. What this government proposes in legislation is opaque, discretionary, and centralizes power around the cabinet table. Will the minister commit to putting his legislation to an all-party committee so that the principles of the land-use framework can be rescued and preserved and the excesses of the legislation corrected?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have been urging us to go faster and faster for the last couple of years. "When is the land-use framework coming? When is the Land Stewardship Act coming?" Now they want to throw us into a process of more public consultation. I repeat: we have done more public consultation on this piece of policy than probably any other in recent decades, and I'm proud that it's before the House right now.

Imperial Oil Kearn Lake Project

(continued)

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I live in the oil sands capital of the world, Fort McMurray. We have more oil than anywhere else in the world. Let me direct my question to the Minister of Energy. We've had a slowdown, we've observed, in the last nine to 10 months, yet yesterday there was an announcement and a vote of confidence for \$8 billion on a new project. My question to the Minister of Energy is this: how many more jobs and jobs for Albertans will this announcement yesterday create?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I will start off by saying that at least we have some members on this side of the House that are concerned about Albertans being at work.

The 8,000 jobs that are relative to the construction of Kearn in the initial phase are certainly very, very important for Alberta, but on an ongoing basis I might let the member know and let all Albertans know that the potential for employment in this first phase of the project for about 40 or 50 years for Alberta is in the neighbourhood of a thousand people at work.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats often use the words "tar sands," and we're very proud of the words. I understand that Jack Layton seems to think it sounds dirtier if they use "tar sands" rather than "oil sands."

My question relative to the issue of infrastructure has to do with transportation. To the Minister of Transportation. There's been a rumour that the twinning of highway 63 and some of the other infrastructure projects are being somewhat slowed because of the economy. My question to him: is this true, or in fact is the government moving forward under the Radke report relative to building the infrastructure required for such projects?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no direction but straight forward for this government. Let me tell the hon. member that we did run into a little problem this year. We were waiting on some permits federally, and by the time the permits came through, we got into the migratory bird problem and couldn't get in and start knocking down trees and stuff. But we will be – we will be – moving ahead with more pavement and more twinning of highway 63.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Of course, he's responsible for the oil sands secretariat. Some ministers often talk about needing more money. To the President of the Treasury Board: in going forward on infrastructure according to the Radke report, I want to assure my constituents that, in fact, we continue to move forward to create the jobs for Albertans, who pay tax, and ultimately see the oil sands develop to what it really should be in the future.

Mr. Snelgrove: I have to correct one little part of the question, Mr. Speaker. All the ministers are asking for more money, not just some of them.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we have never really slowed down since this Premier initiated the oil sands working group and co-ordinated our different government departments going ahead on providing the much-needed infrastructure both to Fort McMurray and in Fort McMurray, whether it's health facilities or schools. We strongly believe that the best years of Fort McMurray are not only decades and generations ahead of us, but it will be a wealth that Canada will benefit from for centuries. Getting it all right and putting the appropriate amount of money into the infrastructure is exactly what we've been asked to do, and we will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Energy Efficiency Rebates

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is well behind Ontario in dealing with climate change. Ontario's green energy act will create 50,000 green jobs, its feed-in tariffs will expand renewable energy, and their energy efficiency grant programs actually match the federal program's grants. [interjections] Oh, there's a great deal of interest in this. Alberta's, unfortunately, does none of this. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given that windows can account for up to 25 per cent of a home's heat loss, why are windows not covered by the provincial consumer rebate program?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I could stand here and answer a litany of questions: "Why is this not included? Why is this not included?" There's only so much money to go around. We made a determination that we would focus this first round and first phase of an energy efficiency program into areas where the

maximum number of consumers could participate. I would suggest to the hon. member that she has an excellent idea. If we're able to secure a little bit more money from the Treasury Board at some point in time, windows may well be part of a program.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Back to the same minister: can condominium owners apply for provincial rebates for their individual units, and can condo owners pool their rebates for the entire building?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the answer to the second part of the question, as to whether or not pooling could be accommodated, but certainly there are portions of the program, to do with appliances for example, where by all means condominium owners can participate.

The portion of the program that has to do with meeting efficiency standards and the testing that's associated with it is a little bit more complex. I would say that in principle it makes sense to me that they should be able to participate, but on the actual implementation and the details I may have to get back to the member.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I look forward to receiving the information.

Final question to the same minister: given that there are minimum R-value requirements for insulation in houses, when will there be minimum insulation requirements for large buildings in Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is very much part of the commitment that the government has made to do an extensive review of the building code program. Building codes not only apply on the residential side but also on the commercial side. It simply makes sense that we should be thinking about how we can integrate the energy efficiency and conservation initiatives, that are so critical if we're going to achieve our long-term targets with respect to climate change, into the safety considerations that are principally governing building codes. I would suggest to the hon. member that she stay tuned. In conjunction with Municipal Affairs it's our intention to do a very thorough review and update on building codes in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Distracted Driving

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following its review of Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Hand-Held Communication Devices) Amendment Act, 2008, the Standing Committee on the Economy recommended that the ministries of Transportation, Solicitor General and Public Security, and Justice create an offence of distracted driving. My questions are all for the Minister of Transportation. Can the minister provide an update on this matter?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department has done a lot of work to bring forward a report that deals with this issue. What we're looking at covers a lot more than just cellphones. We're looking at the bigger picture and trying to address all distractions behind the wheel because there's no sense drafting a law if it only looks at a little bit of the big picture or the big problem that we have. We're consulting with stakeholders and working with other ministries to make sure that we develop a law that's enforceable.

Mr. Johnston: Given that Strathcona county is the first municipality in Alberta to ban the use of hand-held cellphones while driving, will the Department of Transportation revisit its stance on banning hand-held cellphones province-wide?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before, we've done a lot of work on this. In fact, some of the reports that are out there now show that cellphones are only a small part of the problem. There are other distractions that are a more serious issue than the cellphone distraction. We have to figure it out so that we address all of those so that we're not just bringing one-offs forward like some of the other provinces have done, like some of the other jurisdictions in North America have done and have found out that then they have a different one-off and a different one-off, and they end up with a whole 'sloppage' of things that they can't enforce.

Mr. Johnston: My final question: would the Department of Transportation consider banning cellphone use in playground and school zones as some municipalities are now considering?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, why we keep saying that we want to look at the big picture here is so that we can cover the whole province, one end to the other. I absolutely have no idea why one county or one municipality would bring in a bylaw that's almost unenforceable, because there are only certain little areas and they have to train certain policemen to be able to look after the one case, when they know that we're working on this issue. We're going to bring forward legislation that addresses the whole problem, the big picture.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

President and CEO of Alberta Health Services

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January of this year the Alberta government recruited Dr. Stephen Duckett from Australia to run the Alberta Health Services Board. My first question is to the minister of health. Why did the government set Dr. Duckett's annual compensation level at \$575,000 per year?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the government didn't set the salary. We have an autonomous board that recruited the new CEO, looked at similar situations across the world. I would suggest that considering what some of our previous CEOs were paid, we got a bargain at \$575,000.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the information that I provided to the minister is on a government of Alberta news release, again, if we're going to pay this gentleman \$575,000 and a bonus annually that could amount to \$140,000, is Dr. Duckett still eligible for an annual bonus?

Mr. Liepert: I think that in the question, Mr. Speaker, the member stated that part of the contract of the CEO is that he's eligible for a bonus up to 25 per cent of his salary, and that's the bonus we're talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Again to the same minister: given that we've had surgical cancellations, given that we've had layoffs in the health care system, given that we see seniors without health care, given that hospitals are being reduced or in some places closed, why is this gentleman, under your watch, eligible for a \$140,000 a year bonus?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's clear up the facts. I'd like to have the member show me one hospital that's been closed. He just finished stating that hospitals are being closed. That's wrong. There are not surgeries being cancelled. There are some that may have to be deferred because of cost restraints that a responsible government brings in in its budget. For this particular member to stand up here and spin all that garbage is just that, garbage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Camping in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past May long weekend thousands of Albertans enjoyed our beautiful public lands and provincial parks for a weekend of camping and other recreational activities. Unfortunately, there are always a small number of people who abuse this privilege and damage the environment, leave their garbage behind, and break other rules and laws. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister please explain what his ministry has done to combat this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The May long weekend has indeed become an annual event where Albertans go out and enjoy themselves in our forests and parks, and we think that's a good thing. We want them to enjoy, get out and be in our forests and parks, but what we don't want them to do is to destroy them. I'm happy to report that thanks to the joint task force this year – the combined efforts of SRD, Parks, Solicitor General, and the RCMP – for the third year in a row we reduced the type of destruction and lawlessness that has occurred over the past few years. Part of it is education, a respect-the-land theme. SRD focuses on that with good co-operation, though, from Solicitor General and the RCMP and Parks on enforcement. I'll leave that to the other ministers.

Mr. Rodney: My second question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. There were temporary liquor bans in place in certain provincial campgrounds over the long weekend. I'm wondering what the minister can tell us about the bans and their effectiveness in cutting down problems in parks this past May long weekend.

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. We had about 225,000 campers in the parks system over the May long weekend, and I'm happy to say that of that number of people in the parks only about 1 per cent presented a problem. Generally speaking, it was related to alcohol in banned areas and noise levels. We did have to evict about 275 campers, but, again, a very, very small percentage when you look at how many people enjoyed the parks. We think our enforcement efforts are working, and we're pleased that we're able to offer a very safe and wonderful place for Albertans to recreate.

Mr. Rodney: My final supplemental is for our Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. I'm hoping that the minister can be specific and include numbers in informing Albertans and this House exactly what his department did this past long weekend to enforce our laws and keep Albertans as safe as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the number of people travelling during the long weekend, we knew that we needed to provide increased enforcement to improve highway safety. Almost half of the fatalities that occur in Alberta occur between the May and September long weekends. As part of our agreement with SRD and other agencies, 90 members of our Alberta Sheriff Highway Patrol together with the RCMP provided extra enforcement to not only enforce the Traffic Safety Act but also other offences. On the past weekend our sheriffs laid over 4,000 charges and took 21 suspected impaired drivers off the road. We will continue with this program of education and awareness of motorists concerning highway safety to ensure that our highways remain safe.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

2:40

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm reasonably confident that each of us has had a teacher who made a positive difference in our lives, a teacher whose passion was evident through a strong commitment to students and to the teaching profession. I am sure we still remember that teacher to this day.

Today I am proud to honour 23 of Alberta's finest teachers and principals, who engage our students and encourage them to reach further for their educational goals and, more importantly, for their dreams. These 23 teachers are representative of the thousands of exceptional teachers we are so fortunate to have in our school districts and our province. Chosen from 365 eligible nominations, they have been selected as award recipients for the 2009 excellence in teaching awards due to the creativity, innovation, and dedication they demonstrate every day in the classroom. They are well respected by their teaching colleagues and the greater community and are an inspiration to their students.

Of the 23 award recipients 20 will receive the provincial excellence in teaching award, where they will have access to \$4,000 for professional development to further develop their teaching skills. Mr. Speaker, three out of the 23 award recipients will receive the SMARTer Kids Foundation innovative use of technology award, which includes a comprehensive technology package.

The excellence in teaching awards have been celebrated since 1989. More than 8,200 teachers have been nominated, and more than 400 have received awards. The influence of these teachers, Mr. Speaker, will long be felt by their students.

I'm honoured today to rise to recognize all of the outstanding teachers and principals across this province and to give heartfelt congratulations to the 2009 excellence in teaching award recipients. Also, on May 30 in Edmonton these recipients will be formally honoured at a dinner and awards ceremony with the hon. Minister of Education as well as some colleagues from our Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Evansburg Legion Ladies Auxiliary

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to be part of the 60th anniversary celebration for the Ladies Auxiliary at the Evansburg Legion Branch 196 this past weekend. For 60 years the ladies have reached out to the community and the Legion in an outstanding way. Many families and organizations have benefited from their generous and hard work.

The Evansburg Legion Ladies Auxiliary was granted their charter on May 14, 1949. The original 16 ladies who founded the auxiliary set out to support veterans and the community at large.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of meeting Mary Cumming, who was an original member 60 years ago. Mary is 96 years old and continues to serve the community through work with the auxiliary. In the program is written a little story about Mary Cumming. She joined in April 1949 when physical activities were the most difficult. Holding many offices, including President . . . she was a dedicated worker not only in the auxiliary, but in the community as well. This earned her a life membership, the Meritorious Service Award and the highest award of all – The Palm Leaf.

On June 12, 2009, she will be 96 years old, and she still attends meetings.

I want to thank Janene Barry, president of the auxiliary, and all the past and present members for their tremendous work, for all they have done for Evansburg and the residents of Whitecourt-St. Anne. Congratulations on 60 years, and best wishes for the future.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I'd like to table five copies of a report by the Ombudsman entitled Prescription for Fairness, Special Report: Out of Country Health Services, dated May 2009. Copies of this report were distributed to all members today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a program for the 11th annual Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan parade. Yesterday I shared with the House about the parade on May 17 in Mill Woods to celebrate this very important Sikh holiday.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Pochaiv maple leaf safe house project, that I referred to in my May 5 member's statement about human trafficking in the Ukraine.

Second, I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition with 363 signatures from my constituents on behalf of Landon Karas, whose family believes excessive force was used on their son in maximum security here in Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my capacity as chair of the Standing Committee on Health I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of three letters, all expressing support for the committee's proposed amendments to Bill 52, which were tabled in this House yesterday. The letters are from the College of Physicians and

Surgeons of Alberta, the Alberta Medical Association, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Alberta. These letters may be useful as additional reference material for members reviewing the committee's report.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings today. The first is on behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition, who wanted to table a series of documents that are actually a petition but are not appropriate to be presented as a petition, so we're doing them as tablings. These are some 600 or 800 signatures collected by a young man named Oba Powis, who was working with his MLA, the Member for Lethbridge-East, and has done a good deal of work with his fellow students in Lethbridge around Bill 44.

The second set of tablings is a series of e-mails that I've received over Bill 44, including one from Lisa Barrett with concerns about Bill 44 promoting discrimination; from Luanne Sawatzky, a graduate student who feels knowledge is power; from Krystal Harvey, who is concerned that the goal of education should be to educate and enlighten; from Kelly Ernst, who feels Bill 44 is poor governance and bad policy-making; from Scott Rowed of the Centre for Inquiry Calgary, with concerns that children should have a right to be taught critical thinking and proper science; and from Connie Jensen, who talks about a case from California where a student was stopped from doing a presentation on Harvey Milk.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a PowerPoint presentation entitled Australia's Health 2008: Elective Surgery Waiting Times, by Dr. Stephen Duckett, University of Queensland. One of the take-home messages in this PowerPoint presentation is that if you want to improve access to elective surgery, a.k.a. reduce waiting times, think about incentives.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the required five copies of my letter and receipt dated May 8, 2009, regarding my donation to the Lethbridge Salvation Army Food Bank. As per my pledge in the Assembly of April 2, 2007, half of my MLA indexed pay raise of \$146.25 is donated monthly to a food bank until AISH is similarly increased and indexed and is fair with the MLAs' salaries.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four letters from Albertans concerned with section 11.1 of the proposed Bill 44. Montgomery Moore writes: "I have been a loyal Tory supporter for years . . . I believe it is the role of education to teach children how to think, not what to think." Harris Kirshenbaum writes, "While the 'Alberta Advantage' drains away yet again, we have in Bill 44 yet another stunning example of a mode of thinking trying to return us to the age of the horse and buggy." Richard Leslie, the chair of a school council, writes: "There's an old rock and roll song that says 'leave our kids alone' . . . well, now is the time to

'leave our teachers alone.'" Lisa Hurrel, a parent and school council member, states, "I want our teachers to teach and not be worried about being absolutely politically correct absolutely all the time."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Melissa Luhtanen of Calgary, who is a lawyer who is opposed to the parental notification section of Bill 44. She's concerned that even with the minister's proposed amendments the bill will have a chilling effect on discussion of sexual orientation, sexuality, and religion in classes.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mrs. Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, responses to questions raised by Ms Pastoor, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East; Ms Blakeman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre; Ms Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; Dr. Taft, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; and Mr. Denis, the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, on April 15, 2009, in Department of Seniors and Community Supports main estimates debate.

On behalf of the hon. Dr. Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hehr, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo; Ms Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona; and Mr. Griffiths, the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, on April 27, 2009, in Department of Sustainable Resource Development main estimates debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a purported point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Zwodzesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise a point of order with respect to comments that the hon. leader of the third party made in this House today during question period. I would cite our own Standing Order 23, wherein it says that a member may be called to order by the Speaker under 23(h) if he or she makes allegations against another member, under 23(i) if he or she imputes false or unavowed motives, and under 23(j) if he or she uses insulting language that may cause some disorder.

Today during question period the leader of the third party said words to the effect of: the Premier said a lie. I think we heard it not only once, but we heard it twice. The context, of course, in which it was said was highly unparliamentary, in my view, as cited in sections of *Beauchesne*, which I'll get to in just a moment. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, I recall that even during your term in the chair you have frequently advised this House as to what may or may not be parliamentary and how on various occasions some words can be used in one context to mean one thing and in another context to mean another. However, here I think the leader of the ND opposition clearly maligned the Premier, and I say that he did it intentionally because he said that the Premier had lied or that the Premier told a lie, not once, but he said it twice. He repeated himself in so doing. So this, in my view, would be one of those cases where the context leads to the point of order, I would hope.

Specifically, under *Beauchesne* 489, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, the word “lie” is cited. It’s cited as being on the list of unparliamentary words. In fact, it gives 38 occasions when the word “lie” was ruled as being unparliamentary. Furthermore, under *Beauchesne* 492 there’s an additional list of words, terms, and expressions that “have caused intervention on the part of the Chair,” and the word “lie” appears there quite clearly as well. Coincidentally, the word “lie” does not appear in *Beauchesne* 490 as being a parliamentary word under any occasions. As well, under *Beauchesne* 486 we can see references to the tone in which words can sometimes be used which convey an additional hurtful or insulting meaning. I would suggest that the leader of the opposition New Democrats used that particular tone not once but twice today in referring to the Premier in the way that he did.

Additional references to support this point of order, Mr. Speaker, would be 409(7), where it specifically states what is and what isn’t allowed specific to QP. In fact, it states in 409(7) that “a question must adhere to the proprieties of the House, in terms of inferences, imputing motives or casting aspersions upon persons within the House or out of it.” In this case I think the member violated that particular rule as well.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, *Beauchesne* 428(i) goes on and talks about: a question must not contain imputations. I could give other references. However, one of the most important references that I found were rulings made by yourself in your capacity as chair for this House, which we all recognize has its testing moments. On April 18 of 2000 you found it, quote, totally inappropriate in the context of a question to use the words “lie,” “lied,” or “lying.” You found a similar situation on November 27 of 2001, where the member apologized and withdrew the comment after you brought it to his attention. It goes on with November 24 of 2008, which is not that long ago, where similar findings were found by you.

In this case, Mr. Speaker, I think we all recognize that a great deal of latitude can be and often is given in this House, and we appreciate that as members, but in this particular case I think the latitude was breached. It was breached in a very demeaning way, and I feel that the leader of the New Democrats should at the very least apologize and withdraw those comments.

Alternatively, in closing, if that’s not the case, I would then cite Standing Order 24(1) of our own House rules, wherein it suggests that persistent refusals to adhere to the requests of the Speaker’s earlier advice can also result in a point of order being brought against a member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During this session it has become a routine for ministers of the government to answer questions of the opposition by either misstating the question or by attributing false motives to the questioner. The Premier has repeatedly stated in this House the falsehood that Alberta’s NDP and myself specifically had proposed shutting down the oil sands. I can recall at least four previous occasions this session when the Premier has done that. The last time before this point was yesterday, and I quote from *Hansard*: “For someone that talked about shutting down the oil sands, now all of a sudden he wants to keep everything here and add value to everything.”

I have repeatedly attempted to correct this false statement by the Premier, but he insists on repeating it. I said yesterday: “Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows that we never said that we should shut down the tar sands. The Premier is misleading the House.” Again

today the Premier repeated something which is not true and which he knows not to be true. I believe that the Premier has used his position to falsely accuse myself and my party of taking a position which would be extremely damaging to this province and its economy.

We know that there are tens of thousands of workers, unionized and ununionized, that are employed by operations in Alberta’s oil sands, and we attempt to represent their interests as best we can as well as represent the interests of Albertans as best we can. We would not take any position which would cause tremendous damage to Alberta’s economy. That does not mean we do not have criticisms about how the oil sands are regulated by this government, but at no time whatsoever have we ever done that.

For the Premier to continually repeat in this House something he knows not to be true, which is damaging to us politically and otherwise, is unacceptable to us. I have taken a number of occasions to try and correct the Premier on this false statement that he keeps repeating, to no avail. So, frankly, Mr. Speaker, while I didn’t call the Premier a liar, I called the statement that he made a lie, and I believe it was.

3:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to briefly join the debate and state what I hope would be blatantly obvious, that if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has an issue with something that the Premier said in this Chamber, he has, as any other member in this Chamber has, the option of rising on a point of order. He cannot use that as a justification for his own use of unparliamentary language both in the use of the term “lie,” which he did on two occasions earlier, but now he’s added to that “misrepresentation,” another unparliamentary word. He has the option of rising on a point of order. He didn’t do so. That makes no justification for his subsequent behaviour.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

This issue here this afternoon causes me concern. This is a Tuesday in the week. There’s a lot of business that has to be done in this House. We’ve already agreed that the outstanding orders and policies, basically, we would leave on June 4. Now we’re going to spend a great deal of time on an issue that really need not be dealt with.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood says the following in the Blues:

Mr. Speaker, the Premier continues to repeat the lie that our party would shut down the tar sands. That’s a lie, and I will not accept it.

He continues to repeat it.

And a point of order is raised.

Now, look, all our texts very, very clearly, as pointed out by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, lead to the conclusion that the use of such words is inappropriate, unparliamentary, and not to be used in this Assembly. There’s no defence against it. It’s in our standing orders. In *Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms* a series of sections deals with it. *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice*, 23rd edition, very clearly has sections in it with respect to allegations against members, defence. We’ve already dealt with the question on two or three or four occasions in this Assembly.

When members get involved in the question period and seek not information but wish to create debate, it leads to other kinds of responses that enhance debate. The purpose of question period is to seek information of an urgent nature. We get into debate repeatedly in this question period. That’s part of the leniency factor, perhaps, provided by the chair to allow the greatest opportunity for members

to participate, but it's often violated, and the chair is not going to intervene every time there's a statement because there would be no question period. I'd be intervening 30 times in question period with respect to all of this. That's never been the intent. There has to be self-discipline.

Quite frankly, the words are inappropriate, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I await what you are going to do about it.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but with the greatest respect to you and to this Assembly I stand by my words.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I was afraid of that, and that's part of the histrionics and the theatrics of this Assembly. I indicated that this would probably be something we would look at in the dying days of an Assembly. So I want to draw to the attention of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood Standing Order 24: 24(1), 24(2), 24(3), the naming of a member and the consequences arising therefrom.

I'm going to offer a second opportunity for the hon. member to do the appropriate thing and withdraw his statement with respect to the words in question.

Mr. Mason: With the greatest respect I believe that the Premier has an obligation to withdraw his accusations against me and my party, and if he does so, I am also prepared to withdraw my statement.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the difficulty that I have with respect to the standing orders is that there are no conditions associated with it. This is not a barter system. This is not a trade-off. This is not an "I'll do that if you do that" kind of thing. It's very, very clear. I'm going to repeat it for the third time. Naming a member, section 24(1) of the standing orders: "If a Member, on being called to order for an offence, persists in the offence or refuses to follow the Speaker's directions in the matter, the Speaker shall name the Member to the Assembly."

Section 24(2):

When a Member has been named by the Speaker and if the offence is a minor one . . .

And the Speaker does not view this as a minor one.

. . . the Speaker may order the Member to withdraw for the balance of the day's sitting, but if the matter appears to the Speaker to be of a more serious nature, the Speaker shall put the question on motion being made, no amendment, adjournment or debate being allowed, "that the Member be suspended from the service of the Assembly", for any time stated in the motion, not to exceed 2 weeks.

The hon. member must understand that if the Speaker puts this question before the Assembly, that the member be suspended from the service of the Assembly for any time stated in the motion, not to exceed two weeks, and if the Assembly agrees to that, the member leaves. The member will have no further role because the motion put forward by the Speaker would be for the duration of this session.

Now, I'm going to ask for the third time very, very politely, with all the best of the parliamentary tradition that I can muster. Recognizing that I believe it to be in the best interest of the hon. member to withdraw his statement, recognizing that I will lose a lot of sleep tonight if the hon. member does not – don't make me do it, please – I implore you to withdraw your words.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I am very torn about this, but I have not found a way to get the Premier to stop saying things about me, my party that are untrue. In a civil case truth is a defence. I take it from your comments that that rule doesn't apply here.

The Speaker: No. I'm sorry. We're not having a debate. You're not embroiling me in this. I'm enforcing the rules of this particular Assembly. I made it very, very clear what our traditions are, what our rules are. I quoted from the text, the holy text that we govern ourselves by, the tradition of parliament. Don't do that. You're getting further into trouble.

I'm going to ask you for the fourth time now – not the third time, the fourth time – will you withdraw your words?

Mr. Mason: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You know, I guess the hon. member is really pushing the matter for his own agenda. I can accept that.

I'm going to repeat it again. I've asked it four times now. Naming a member. Four times I've asked the member to respond. The member refuses to follow the Speaker's direction. I'm going to name the member, and I'm going to repeat 24(2).

When a Member has been named by the Speaker and if the offence is a minor one, the Speaker may order the Member to withdraw for the balance of the day's sitting . . .

The Speaker does not believe this is a minor one.

. . . but if the matter appears to the Speaker to be of a more serious nature, the Speaker shall put the question on motion being made . . .

If an hon. member in this Assembly wishes to make a motion.

. . . no amendment, adjournment or debate being allowed, "that the Member be suspended from the service of the Assembly", for any time stated in the motion, not to exceed 2 weeks.

The chair would feel much more comfortable if an hon. member would stand and make such a motion and give me the dates associated with it, and I will immediately put the question to the Assembly.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've been in this Assembly for many, many years, but I've never yet witnessed what I fear we are about to witness. I find it very, very sad and very unfortunate that the Leader of the Official Opposition . . .

3:10

Some Hon. Members: Third party.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Third party. Sorry. I clarify that right now.

. . . of the ND opposition doesn't find it plausible or possible to find some other way to address this. There are things like telephones and visitations that can be made, and I would have hoped that he would have taken that route and followed your advice in the meantime. However, not being given much choice in the matter and finding the words and the tone of the words and the continued refusal of this member to abide by what we as hon. members of this House have agreed to in our own standing orders and what hundreds of years of tradition have spelled out for us to follow, I would move that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood be suspended from the service of the Assembly for whatever time is stated, not to exceed two weeks.

The Speaker: I'm sorry; the motion should be complete.

Mr. Zwozdesky: For one week. [interjections] Not to exceed two weeks.

The Speaker: Okay. Listen: "that the member be suspended from the service of the Assembly" for a period of time "not to exceed 2 weeks."

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, my apologies. I'll specify that it be for two weeks.

The Speaker: Standing Order 24(2) says that

if the matter appears . . . the Speaker shall put the question on motion being made, no amendment, adjournment or debate being allowed, "that the Member,"

the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood,

"be suspended from the service of the Assembly," for any time . . . not to exceed 2 weeks.

A time of two weeks, in other words. Is that understood by everybody?

I'm going to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood one last chance before I call the question.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this is very difficult for me because I believe very sincerely that my reputation has been besmirched by the Premier. I also believe that I owe an obligation to my constituents to be in this House to represent them, and if I was absent for that period of time, I would not be doing my job that I was elected to do. So at this point I will withdraw my remarks and apologize to you, to the Premier, and to the Assembly.

The Speaker: Some members may disagree with the chair about the role taken by the chair. Some members may argue that the chair should have put the question immediately as per the rules, without debate, amendment, or anything else. I believe very strongly in the decorum of a parliament. I believe very strongly in the roles of members. I believe very strongly that members were elected to be here in this Assembly. I understand correctly the difficulties that individuals have at various times. The last thing in the world I ever want to see is any member of this Assembly be banished. There also is a tradition that if a member withdraws and apologizes, the matter is ended.

You may criticize me for this direction. You may do that, and ultimately you can do something further. But I believe that it is in the best interests of the parliament of Alberta to ensure that all members are here. We've heard the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood apologize, withdraw his statement and apologize, and I think we should move on now.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20

Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. Denis]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 20, the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009. Really, this is a good-news bill. It aligns us with legislation that has been proclaimed in other areas of the country: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland. What this bill essentially does is it aligns these other jurisdictions with our province now in allowing RRSPs and other savings devices, registered disability savings plans and other things like that, to be outside of the reach of creditors.

Really, this might seem like good news, and it is because we as legislators, as people who want to encourage a culture of savings in our province, should be allowing for mechanisms like this where people can put their money away in registered retirement savings plans and other devices like that to protect their hard-earned money from future civil forfeiture in a lawsuit.

Simply put, without this type of legislation we're opening up many of our province's entrepreneurs to the opportunity to maybe

not start businesses, to maybe not take that creative step forward or to pursue some risky invention or risky business opportunity that could advance society. For instance, they may be too worried: well, maybe if we try that, someday it'll come back, and all our savings will be gone. Really, that's not the type of attitude we'd like to encourage in, I guess, the entrepreneurial people that we are or in our society.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Basically, if we look at this, what happened before was that unless your money was protected through the Insurance Act, individuals who were involved in a lawsuit against an individual family or an individual member of our society could obtain in a lawsuit registered pensions like RRSPs, DPSPs, and RRIFs. These plans, then, were available for civil forfeiture in instances where it was deemed that the court would go after these instruments in order to facilitate the payment of, I guess, a judgment due and owing by the court. But the thing is that that principle has to be balanced against our principle of protecting people's investments, people who have worked their entire lives to squirrel away a nest egg, to make a living, to try and have some RRSPs, DPSPs, and some RRIFs, to have this money available to them when they are in their old age.

Otherwise, if this money was made available to creditors, what would happen is that these people would be thrown onto, I guess, the government dole. Well, not "I guess." They would be forced to live on the government dole. That would not leave the government or society in a very good position.

What this bill does, again, is align our jurisdiction with other jurisdictions in Canada. It encourages a mentality of saving, a mentality of putting away money for the future, a mentality of people providing for themselves in their old age and not being reliant on the government and still encourages that entrepreneurial spirit we value so much here in Alberta.

It is with pride that I speak in favour of this bill. I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for bringing forward this bill. I'd also like to note that this is really being advised to us by other jurisdictions. The Uniform Law Commission, review boards, civil enforcement agencies, sheriff organizations, and basically the financial planning community all speak in favour of this type of legislation.

3:20

I think it is a good move that will bring the necessary clarification to civil enforcement of our judgments relative to deferred savings plans, and it is a necessary harmonization of provincial laws. It will protect citizens' retirement savings and allow for deductions from deferred savings to be garnished to maintain the rights of the creditors. You can see that there are elements for both in that creditors are going to be able to get a lot of protection, and so will our retirees.

Those are my comments, and I'm glad to see this legislation being put forward. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

Bill 26

Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Mitzel]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, again, a privilege to rise in second reading and discuss this bill on wildlife. Like I indicated, it is an honour to speak on this as I've had a great deal of time to think about this bill since it was first announced. Now, as I've contemplated this more and been able to think about this, it now becomes ever more clear to me as to what is coming. Yes, it has become clear.

The bill proposes amendments to the Wildlife Act. The purpose of the amendments is to eliminate challenges in enforcing the act and to clarify legislation to make it easier for the courts to interpret and deal with offences under the act. This seems to be a very good bill that is before the House at this time. These amendments that have been brought forward at this time are designed to clarify the provisions of the Wildlife Act that deal with enforcement, sentencing, and wildlife control measures. These clarification amendments will provide more certainty for hunters in understanding what the clear penalties are for offences and for wildlife officers performing their duties as well as owners of captive wildlife and controlled animals.

This bill attempts to address certain challenges in enforcing and administering the Wildlife Act. These amendments will recapture costs associated with wildlife control that the government must take in certain circumstances, and this is a good move for revenue generation.

If you look further into the act, if you look at what is happening here, wildlife management is obviously challenging and constantly changing. Providing more certainty in enforcing provisions of the act will only enhance the goal of wildlife management. As we've seen here in the province and as I've brought up numerous times in this Legislative Assembly, we appear to be at a tipping point here where much of our wildlife – you know, a case in point, I guess, is that the grizzly bears and many of our elk species and other species are simply being threatened here. Of course, you have grizzly bears. Estimates are that there might be 500 left here in Alberta, some estimates as low as 238, and I guess we really don't know how many there are.

The simple fact of the matter is that our actions as human beings are taking a severe toll on our wildlife and our wilderness community. When you have animal species like the grizzly bear that are disappearing, well, that should be a sign to us as human beings that, hey, we're doing something that isn't quite right here. We may be overharvesting or taking too much of our forest space or using too much of our water or a whole host of things, a combination of all of these things, that is making it increasingly difficult for wildlife to survive. Guess what? When the wildlife can't survive, I guess that in some time eventually human beings may not be able to survive. Yes, I know that's, hopefully, a long way down the road, and hopefully we will be able to straighten this out.

What I think Bill 26 is trying to recognize is that some of this stuff we've ignored for far too long here in Alberta. I guess the unconstrained development of our wild areas, that was probably the position of governments in the past that appreciated just a more straight laissez-faire approach to governing the wilderness – go out and do what you want and not worry about the consequences – for instance, no regulation of marketplace or just simply no regulations at all, possibly led to a lot of this wildlife being in danger.

That's why, actually, you know, although there are problems with the land-use framework, coming in at this time as well is a recognition by this government that maybe we've gone too far and that maybe we should have had these rules and regulations in place 10 years ago. We wouldn't have had much of the, I guess, unintended consequences of an oil rush up in Fort McMurray, which has left many people questioning the environmental practices or the

land stewardship and our whole concern for the environment, that now exists as a cloud over Alberta.

Bills like this really bring to light that maybe if we had been more attentive to these difficulties, say, 10, 12 years ago, our province would be in better shape today and so would our reputation amongst the communities throughout the world, and there wouldn't have to be money spent on creating Alberta's image and all that stuff because it would already be highlighted around the world that we had done a lot of this stuff that appears to be coming down the pike now. I guess the answer is: better late than never.

Again, just speaking to the definite merits of the bill, it allows us to assess owners of captive wildlife or controlled animals with the cost of transporting, recapturing, or euthanizing animals that were kept in lawful captivity and escaped or were unlawfully released. By doing this, you can have a landowner who can be, I guess, rewarded for land stewardship. I know this is somewhat controversial in that beforehand maybe it was just one of those things that people were supposed to do, but I think we learned over time that if people aren't sometimes financially rewarded for doing the right thing, well, they'll do the wrong thing.

For instance, the tragedy of the commons. You know, we remember back to when people realized that if you overused too much of the commons or if you overhunted or overcut the wood or whatever it was you were doing, all of a sudden there would be no more commons. Without rules and regulations in place, well, you're going to have that kind of tragedy. We're trying to move to a system – and I really hope it works – where we are going to pay people to avoid this tragedy where they're not looking after the wildlife or looking after fish and wildlife and expand it toward monitoring our hunting activities.

3:30

Also, a good thing is that, as I say, it provides the courts with a higher penalty range to deal with those who export wildlife or wildlife parts that are banned from export. Let's face it: although I do have some questions over whether these are actually at a significant enough range that they deter some behaviour, I hope they do. For instance, we on this side of the House believe that our environmental fines in general in this province are probably far too low and that people are willing to risk, I guess, inappropriately violating these laws because the penalties aren't high enough. I think we saw that case, you know, where really 700 or 800 dead ducks were found in the pond.

Really, you know, were the penalties stiff enough? I think many people around Alberta and other jurisdictions are saying: no, they weren't. Maybe this is a recognition here that we have to increase our fines for people who are illegally or unjudiciously exporting wildlife or wildlife parts that are banned for export.

This wouldn't have had to be done, you know, 50 years ago because we had lots of animals around. Maybe we didn't think it would get to this point, where we have so few animals and wildlife, and there's really a recognition that we've reached that dangerous stage of our existence. I think this is a recognition that we're there. Hopefully, we continue to monitor this, and if we continue to have our wildlife disappear from the landscape, we continue to amend these penalties higher and continue to add to our monitoring of these pristine areas, and we'll go from there.

Thank you very much for giving me a second to get organized. I'll allow other members to discuss the merits of the bill as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would stand in support of this bill. For someone who's been privileged to be able to live in other than an urban setting and be exposed to the wild and all the animals and plants, the flora and the fauna that it presents, I can't begin to say how much I think it is very important that we protect the existing wildlife that we have.

One of the things that I think is just recent and that I'm hoping this type of a bill would be able to help: it may empower the ability to actually do and have longer periods of time to do investigations into what I thought was a sacrilege, the killing of the wild horses. They've been killed before, and no one seems to have managed to be able to bring anyone to justice for that, and now it's happened again. I believe there were four horses; one was a mare that was in foal. So I'm hoping that this bill would be able to prevent that sort of massacre again.

Wild horses breed. Yes, perhaps at some point they may have to be culled because of their numbers increasing, and perhaps the Crown land that they run on can't support that particular number in the herd, but I think there's an awfully big difference between scientific culling and just having someone go by with drive-by shootings, so to speak, on these horses.

The purpose of the amendments to this bill is really to eliminate the challenges in enforcing the act and to clarify legislation to make it easier for the courts to interpret and deal with offences under the act. I think that over the last number of years, certainly, the ones that I'm hoping that they'll really be able to get are the poachers and people who have guns and no brains. They go out into the wild and shoot and just leave the animals. Sometimes that animal doesn't die on the spot. Those are the people that I'm hoping that this act will really get. There's no excuse, in my mind, for that kind of behaviour. If it's just a bunch of good old boys getting out there with a bottle of rye and a gun, then let's hope this act will get them. Not wanting to be terribly sexist in that last remark, I do know that actually there was – and I can't remember just how long ago it was – a woman also caught shooting indiscriminately and just leaving animals to die and not taking them away and all those sorts of things that aren't nice.

One of the other things this bill will do, too, is assess the owners of captive wildlife and controlled animals with the cost of transporting, recapturing, or euthanizing those animals that were kept in lawful captivity and escaped or were unlawfully released. I really do think that captive wildlife that are kept in a reserve or in a private field that is fenced in are really the responsibility of those owners. An animal may have come from the wild, but once it's in a controlled situation, I think it then doesn't qualify so much as wildlife as it does qualify as a responsibility and a captive animal of that person that owns them.

The other thing that I think is good is that they authorize fish and wildlife officers with increased access to land to respond to wildlife issues and monitor hunting activities. I've gone through a couple of examples of why I think that is important. I would like to stress at this point that it says: authorize fish and wildlife officers. I'm hoping that that's exactly who would be allowed to do this. I don't believe that sheriffs have the background or the training. In fact, many of these fish and wildlife officers have degrees in environment. They have degrees in wildlife. They understand the wildlife. I think that those are the people we should be allowing to do this. Not only that, but those are the people that we should be increasing in numbers and not using sheriffs as backup.

It does provide the courts with a higher penalty range to deal with those who export wildlife or wildlife parts that are banned from export. I think we all know that this continues to this day. Certainly, it's an underground industry, but it does continue. Unfortunately, some of it is taken from our grizzly bears, of which

I don't believe we have nearly enough to go around, let alone be taking animal parts, especially for aphrodisiacs. We have – the name escapes me right now. Oh, dear. Not Valium.

An Hon. Member: Viagra.

Ms Pastoor: Viagra. Thank you.

We have Viagra to take care of that now. We don't need the aphrodisiac parts of animals. Perhaps we could be exporting that as a very legal industry instead of something under the table.

It also provides another creative sentencing option, requiring a convicted person to pay restitution to someone who has incurred a financial loss as a result of the offence. One of the things that I'm thinking, which would be a very difficult thing to work with – I know that sometimes horses will get loose and will be on the road and can cause very serious car accidents. In fact, people have been killed by a collision with a horse. Certainly, they don't want to have a collision with a moose. However, moose are wild, and it's a little bit harder to get restitution from an owner that doesn't exist. The elk that get loose: if a car is in a collision with an elk, there are certainly very severe injuries. In fact, deaths can occur in that kind of an occurrence. So I think that, within reason, people who own these animals that do get out and cause those kinds of problems should pay some type of restitution.

3:40

The amendments will recapture costs associated with wildlife control that the government must take in certain circumstances, as I mentioned. It's a good move for revenue generation, but I would like to see that revenue go back directly into the ministry of sustainable resources so that that money is used to maintain our conservation officers and to maintain our wildlife and to do the scientific research that is really necessary, that we need to understand exactly what we're doing because wildlife is constantly changing. Certainly, we have our new land-use framework act that's going up, and I know that it will cover some of this, but our wildlife is always changing because of what we are doing to the land. So I think that this will provide certain enforcement that will enhance the goal of wildlife management.

There are more punitive measures that the court could impose on offenders, which serve as a good deterrent to activities such as poaching and illegal exporting of wildlife and wildlife parts, which I have already mentioned. I think that poaching is probably far more prevalent than the exporting of wildlife parts, but I think it's something that is often done under the cover of night. We do know that as much as it is abhorrent, people do hunt at night with lights, and that really is against what I would consider to be a true hunter. We can expand the ability of the wildlife officers to access the land, as I've mentioned already.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will sit down, but I think this is a good act. I'm certainly recommending caucus support this, and I hope that it will go forward and that we will be able to see that more and more people – now almost 80 per cent of our population live urban – will be able to get out into the rural life and be able to enjoy everything that rural life and that rural experiences can give people. I know that even just a weekend of camping for many, many people is as good as a whole week's vacation in some fancy resort. Just get out and commune with nature and be able to be quiet. Leave your BlackBerry at home and enjoy. I'm hoping that this amendment will be able to ensure that all Albertans will be able to enjoy that.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for questions and answers. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I enjoyed the hon. member's comments about these feral horses. I do a bit of riding out in that country myself and have seen them and seen more traces of them because they are quite wary. But just a clarification: did I hear the member say in her initial comments that she was aware that someone was caught shooting these animals? If you were, were you aware that they are charged under the Stray Animals Act, or were you just not aware of that? I just wanted to clarify that. There are laws under our Stray Animals Act and under the Criminal Code. It is illegal to shoot these animals at will, whether it's at nighttime with lights or at any time to do that, and I just want to clarify that. We have laws already in place to deter that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Yes, I was aware of that. I'm wondering if this wouldn't just be an even stronger backup to those laws that do exist. No, I didn't say that I knew of someone. What I had said was that I knew that before these last four horses were killed, there were incidents beforehand and that to my knowledge no one has been charged with that. Now here's a second incident that I'm aware of. So I'm really hoping that very quickly this act may give more money to more conservation officers that could spend time doing the investigation that would bring these kinds of abhorrent people to the courts quicker.

Mr. Marz: If I could just add to that, Mr. Speaker. Being out there and seeing how difficult sometimes it is when you're in country that's only accessible by foot or by horseback, it's sometimes really hard to track down perpetrators regardless of how many laws you have.

The Deputy Speaker: Anybody else? The five minutes are still on. You want to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, then, on the bill.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Few places in the world have as great a diversity of wildlife as Alberta. In the province we have 515 species that are traditionally considered wildlife, and that includes 10 species of amphibians, 95 mammals, 402 birds, and eight reptiles. British Columbia is the only province with a greater number of mammals.

I'm taking this back to an example from Bangladesh, how important it is to protect our wildlife. In Bangladesh they were exporting frog legs and throwing the torso away. That really upset the whole ecobalance. There were mosquitos. Frogs were eating the mosquitos. There were snakes and all that. So I think it's very important to protect our wildlife, you know, not only for the ecosystem balance but for our future generations. We don't want them to look at the pictures; we want them to go in the wild to look at the real stuff.

It is very important that this bill has come forward, and I think we should strengthen it to protect all the species we have out there. There are also 3,500 species of plants and fungi that are in Alberta. I think this bill will go towards protecting all those. I think there should be severe penalties for poachers and people who just go out there and hunt for fun. We should strengthen the bill a little bit further so we get the numbers to build up to the point where we are not afraid of losing all those species.

It is provincial legislation. Protecting and maintaining suitable habitat is critical, too, for maintaining long-term wildlife health and viability. Similarly, wildlife health is an important indicator of the health of Alberta's environment. You know, we talk about the environment all the time. We talk about greenhouse gas emissions and all that. I think this is equally important, to protect the wildlife of Alberta, to protect the ecosystem.

For those reasons I'm supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

Bill 29

Family Law Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Denis]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and speak about Bill 29, the Family Law Amendment Act, 2009. Again, we're on a theme here. This is good legislation as it allows people who are going through the throes of divorce or who have been divorced for quite some time to I guess more adequately deal with the child payments and maintenance payments that are outstanding and due and owing to people after their relationships have come to an end.

What this bill does is that if a party who has been assessed as either owing maintenance enforcement or support of some kind fails to provide an income tax return, a notice of assessment, and a short questionnaire, the child support the next year will be recalculated as if the payer's income had gone up 10 per cent. An additional 3 per cent would be added annually to capture since the order was granted or recalculated. The maximum deemed income increase would be 25 per cent, and that would be applied to orders where five or more years have passed since income was last determined.

3:50

What basically happens now is that if parents are divorced and there are orders out there asking for maintenance, typically, if a person believes his or her spouse is making more money or his or her partner has not provided the requisite income tax return to them or submitted it to the government, that person would have to apply to a magistrate, probably get a lawyer, do what's called a variation order. This can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000, probably more around the \$10,000 mark, and it could be even higher considering a lot of the delays and a lot of the, I guess, tactics that some clients get their legal practitioners to perform to avoid going into these variation orders. Nonetheless, now that has seemingly come to an end at least for a regular user of this maintenance enforcement type of program.

Now if they don't provide the necessary information and they do have an existing order, the payer's income is deemed to go up 10 per cent. This seems reasonable. If you should supply the information to your ex-husband or ex-wife, well, then, by goodness, you should have some sort of penalty attached to your actions for not doing this. You know, a 10 per cent penalty for not providing this information is relatively reasonable, to assume that this is not something that individuals should really feel that offended by. For instance, if they wanted to get rid of that 10 per cent, all they need to do is provide the information. We see that this measure can work. It will make

things easier for people to get what is due and owing to them from their former partner or spouse and move on with their lives in a much easier fashion.

Now, there are maybe some family lawyers who have lost out on some money coming into their pockets, but let's hope they will be able to make do and struggle and emerge despite this avenue no longer being a part of their legal tool box, if you might want to call it that.

We're not the first government to have done this. Five existing recalculation programs already exist. British Columbia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Nunavut currently recalculate orders granted after these programs are created. An interesting thing: Alberta's program will actually help parties with child support orders dating back to May 1997, when the child support guidelines were introduced. This increases access to justice even further as Albertans will not have to go back to court to get new orders so they can participate in child support recalculation programs.

Like I said, this is very good legislation. I congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for bringing forward this legislation as it will streamline the system, allow people to go about their business with a much more easy and systematic approach. This is pretty straightforward legislation that our government should be bringing into Alberta. With the advance of technology and the ability to simply have computers do a lot of simple recalculation methods, judges, magistrates, lawyers, and, more importantly, individuals who use those services don't need to be bothered.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was a privilege to be able to speak in favour of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

Bill 30

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mr. Drysdale]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak in support of Bill 30, which is going to close some legal loopholes regarding red-light cameras. It will also broaden the definition of who is deemed an investigator, including the disciplinary provisions from the recent case of a driving instructor who was recruiting young female students to work at his massage parlour. It will also provide vicarious liability to rental companies regarding accidents. Also, it will make changes to the Maintenance Enforcement Act to have the licence of violators suspended rather than cancelled.

In November 2007 changes were made to the Traffic Safety Act which included, among other things, the introduction of speed-on-green, which changed the role of red-light traffic cameras to be devices that can issue speeding tickets. There was a concern there about these cameras being cash cows. You know, as long as these cameras promote safety on the roads, it's good to have them issue tickets. As long as they're not cash cows, I have no problem supporting this. But I think we should be doing something about enforcing the laws some other ways for these cameras to be more effective in reducing accidents. Amendments to Bill 30 don't address the cash cow issue. Now red-light cameras will be able to

issue tickets if somebody speeds and runs a red light also. The previous legislation allowed only one or the other. I think it's a good thing if it's going to reduce accidents, like I said before.

The changes which are being made under this broaden the definition of who is deemed to be an investigator. You know, are we going to have an Alberta provincial police force? Are we going to expand it further to have that? This opening up of the definition of investigator may allow for the implementation of that in the near future. These amendments will also now include First Nations police officers under the peace officer definition. I think that's a good thing to have.

Another good thing to have is including disciplinary provisions from the recent case of the driving instructor who was recruiting young female students to work at his massage parlour. Originally only the instructor could be penalized, but now with this I think the school will be penalized. You know, that's a good thing. I believe that these driving instructors should get the clear message that they cannot do favours when they're training the students. They shouldn't be doing that. There should be heavy penalties, as far as I'm concerned, with these.

This also provides vicarious liability to rental companies regarding accidents. Also, changes to the Maintenance Enforcement Act, that we just talked about, I believe, under Bill 29, that the violators' licences, you know, will not be cancelled, but they will be suspended. I think this bill goes some way to address the issues, and I congratulate the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for bringing forward this bill. I'm in support of this bill.

Thank you very much.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please. Thank you. This certainly is an interesting piece of legislation. We're looking at five changes, that I see, when we implement the amendments to the Traffic Safety Act as proposed. It's a long time ago, the middle of March, when the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti first discussed this bill at second reading.

Now, reading through this, it looks like the changes that are proposed are all tweaks, as they are described, to the Traffic Safety Act. But I've always had concerns about red-light cameras, and now red-light cameras will be able to issue a ticket if someone speeds and runs a red light. The previous legislation only allowed for one or the other.

I can see where people are coming from whenever they argue that we must have this in order to make our intersections safer. Traffic accidents are certainly a problem. Traffic fatalities are, unfortunately, a major issue. But I fail to understand. The hon. member was talking about this being a cash cow. If we were really sincere in our efforts, why could we not – and I could be one of the guilty ones speeding through an intersection or running a red light or a combination of both. If you really want to deter me from that, I think you should take into consideration my licence and the number of demerits that I could possibly lose as a result of my speeding. Why are these issues not linked more conclusively? I don't know. That was quite a discussion in Calgary last summer.

Again, Mr. Speaker, if we are sincere in our efforts to make our roads safer and to control speeding and to control some of my bad habits, this would be a place to start. I know the deduction of demerits or deduction of points on a licence is a major topic of discussion for many young drivers who are afraid, when that happens, of the consequences. Whether it's behaviour that's bad

enough that they lose their licence or if the behaviour is bad enough to attract the attention of the insurance agent, we know what's going to happen if the insurance agent gets involved in this. Well, those young drivers are going to pay even more for their car insurance, and we all know that car insurance is unaffordable for many young drivers. I have an association with many young people, and that is a major topic of discussion with them. So why could these two items not be linked if this is an issue of traffic safety and not a cash cow?

I know what it's like. I haven't been involved in this lately, but I do know that one time I drove north of Rexall Place, Mr. Speaker – and I wouldn't be the only one that's been caught – where you go up over the Grant Moellmann Bridge and you're going downhill and it turns quickly to a 50 kilometre zone. I consider that camera location to be nothing more than a cash cow. I consider the black Dodge Caravan that parks in my neighbourhood a cash cow as well. I watch sometimes, particularly after dark, and it does not seem to slow traffic down. It has been located there for a number of years now, and the traffic patterns are the same as ever, but someone somewhere is getting a significant flow of revenue.

I'm certainly supportive of this bill, but I would like to urge that when we're looking at a traffic violation – and I know there are issues around this. I know what the hon. member is going to tell us: that perhaps this is not good evidence, that perhaps it's not adequate for an issue around changing how many points I will have on my licence. But you're after my money. We could certainly look at changing this, again, if we're sincere about the issue around traffic safety.

Now, there are a lot of good points in this bill, but there's one that's not in here, and that's the whole issue of banning cellphones in vehicles. I know the county of Strathcona is making a noble effort to at least start Albertans, in particular their own citizens, on the whole initiative of eliminating cellphone use while one is driving a car. That's a good start in the county of Strathcona.

It's going to be very difficult to police. The provincial highways are not caught up in this at all, so the hon. minister of health can jet out to Vegreville any time the minister wants in his car, and he can zoom right through the county of Strathcona and not have to worry about talking to anyone on his cellphone. But I am probably one of the most frequent users of a cellphone in my car, and in order to be protected from myself, if it was a provincial law, I think it would be a very good law.

I'm getting back to the insurance industry here, the number of traffic collisions and the number of accidents in this province. The use of text messaging by some drivers just astonishes me. I see drivers scrolling on their BlackBerrys as well at traffic lights. It's getting to be quite a practice. If we were sincere, again, with amendments to the Traffic Safety Act, that's one that we should consider. We shouldn't leave it up to the municipalities. I just cannot understand why we would continue with the practice of allowing cellphone use by drivers unless, of course, it is a microphone that is mounted in a sun visor or in a similar place so that one's voice could be picked up. You can talk to other people in the car; there's no reason why you can't use a hands-free device.

It's a practice that I would say each and every one of us who has a cellphone and a driver's licence in this province is guilty of. It certainly affects how I drive. I've been very lucky to date where I have not had an accident. [interjection] Yes. You know, some people would even say I'm lucky like Luke, whoever that is, but there are times where I've had close calls, Mr. Speaker. But I think that's one of the things that we could do to improve the Traffic Safety Act that's not included here in Bill 30.

4:10

Now, other members have talked about the changes that have been made. Certainly, this bill is not contentious. There are some good things in it, but I think we could have made it better if we had taken the issue of cellphone use and drivers and put them together. I think we would have safer roads, and we would have less accidents, because there's no doubt in my mind that the use of cellphones and the practice of text messaging, the practice of using the BlackBerry in the car is going to get many of us over time in trouble that we will regret. So that's one issue.

In conclusion to that, I would certainly like to commend the county of Strathcona for their action. I think it was the right thing to do. We on this side of the House, of course, have had many discussions on that. They have been rejected for reasons which I'm not going to get into this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, but certainly that is an issue that I'm disappointed is not in Bill 30.

Now, I'm also quite curious about the Alberta police force. It's not many years ago since we saw on the Solicitor General and Public Security's annual report a photograph of an APP, an Alberta police member. The photograph would be perhaps 60 years old, if not close to 70 now. That individual had boots similar to what the RCMP wear when they're on parade, a uniform that was similar to what the RCMP would have, not necessarily in colour but in style, and this individual was in a car, of course. It was a 1930s model car. That was probably one of the last photographs taken of the provincial police service before, for financial reasons, we turned it over to the RCMP.

I know the RCMP contract is expiring, I believe, in three years, in 2012. I've heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and the hon. Member for Stony Plain in exchanges during question period discuss the RCMP's role in Alberta and the role of the sheriffs, the sheriffs department. I'm not convinced that we're not going to have another Alberta provincial police force. I don't think it is necessary, but when I look at this bill and I see some of the minor changes that are in it, Mr. Speaker, I have concern. When we think of the definition, changing the definition of investigators, I would like to know in the course of debate: will the opening up of the definition of investigators pave the way for the implementation of an Alberta provincial police force?

I certainly am curious about this. Not only do we have questions in the Assembly; it seems to be almost an annual tradition here whenever we have budget estimates. I look around and I see the profile of the sheriffs increasing, whether it's in urban areas or in rural areas. I know they are helpful in policing our roads. They're all over the place issuing speeding tickets, for one. I know because my spouse got one. She deserved it. She was guilty. She was travelling fast, but it was on one of the Minister of Transportation's finer roads up in Grande Prairie.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to elaborate on the state of the highways and the incident with the ticket.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Well, hon. member, I would consider the new twinned highway from Grande Prairie to almost the edge of Valleyview and the sections of that twinned highway on the other side of Valleyview through Fox Creek through

to Whitecourt as one of the finest highways in Alberta. It is relatively new. The surface is without ruts. There are very few cracks that I can see in it.

My spouse was travelling quickly along that road.

Mr. Knight: Was she flying?

Mr. MacDonald: No, she was not flying, but she was apprehended by the sheriffs. She was astonished. She paid her fine, and she moved on. She doesn't travel nearly as quickly now. Certainly, on that road in a car with good tires you can motor along, as they say. She was going too fast.

I would consider that stretch of highway almost from Darwell right up to Grande Prairie as one of the finest in the province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We still have minutes left.

Mr. Kang: I have a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. After you got the ticket from the red-light camera, what kind of driving habit changes have you made?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Well, I travel north of Rexall Place. I go over the Grant Moellmann Bridge. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview would be quite aware of the bridge and the grade that I'm referring to as it crosses the light that intersects the Yellowhead Trail. Certainly, since then – and it's been 11 years – I am conscious of the fact that I had a \$120 ticket, and I have driven the speed limit.

As far as that ticket changing my driving patterns, you'd have to say, hon. member, that it certainly has.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We still have time in the five minutes.

Seeing none, does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 30, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009. Before we get into the exact merits and changes of the bill, I'd just like to point out to this honourable House, as I'm sure the Minister of Transportation knows, the costs to the Alberta economy, the hospital system, insurance companies, what have you. It costs the Alberta gross domestic product \$12 million a day. That's \$12 million a day, traffic accidents alone. It's from, I guess, car repairs to money spent on new vehicles, money spent on higher insurance, time out from injuries, costs to the hospital system.

If you look at the overall impact of what actually makes our society more productive, more efficient, one of the things, a simple thing – really, it's not that simple – is the lessening of traffic accidents. There's no doubt that this legislation as it stands, on the face of it, will go some ways to reducing that. If we look at this, this bill will allow the combination of red-light cameras giving out tickets both for running a red light and for speeding.

4:20

There's no doubt that if you look at the evidence of the statistics and, actually, the speed limits of people travelling on roadways that have these devices, people travel slower. When people travel slower, guess what? Fewer accidents. It's just how it is. There is a lot of talk about Big Brother involvement: this is too much

government; why are people looking at us doing this sort of thing? But in this regard I think the balance of public safety and the tremendous cost it is to our system and our society – simply put, it's a way to get people to slow down. All it is is a reference to a driver's licence number, and a ticket is given out. You don't have the infringements on privacy and all that stuff. It's a simple way that technology can be used to better regulate our highway system.

From my perspective, we should actually have more of this type of thing on our highways, byways, whatever. Why are we having the hon. Solicitor General's men and women in uniform and hiring more sheriffs? We can be using this technology to get people to slow down. Simply put, why not just set – this is just a for-instance. Maybe we could set these up, say, about every 40 miles or so on the highway and move them randomly, set them maybe at 120 or whatever, sort of like the sheriff does. Let people have that leeway, but if they get caught, they get sent a ticket. Guess what? By and large, the statistics say and the evidence on studies done in areas that have these red-light cameras shows that people will slow down. By getting people to slow down, well, you know, you save accident costs.

I think that's what we're doing. People, including myself, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and his wife, like he brought up in his story, sometimes need the help of the government to do what's right and also to protect not only themselves but to protect other people. This is a way that this legislation as well as technology can be used to reduce accidents on our city streets, reduce productivity costs, reduce outright costs coming out of the coffers of our health care system. The quickest and easiest way to do it is through reducing traffic accidents.

I think the hon. Minister of Transportation knows that. That's why he continues to have safety as his job one on our highways. That is a good thing, and we'll keep holding him to that motto to make sure that he doesn't let that down. But if we're speaking candidly – and I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was doing it and sort of floating some ideas. I think he floated a pretty good idea there of maybe having demerits associated with this type of deal. Now, I understand that a police officer doesn't hand out the demerit and that it can happen on a more frequent basis, but we don't have to hand out the same demerits that a police officer hands out. If a person gets one of these tickets, let's say, reduce the demerit to one, you know, regardless of the speed. Tell you what: when they get 12 of these, well, then they're in trouble, but hopefully after about six they've learned the lesson. I think that might be something to maybe explore.

I thought that was a good idea brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, where we take that extra step in not only giving a fine but giving a direct threat, sort of: if you continue to drive like this, your licence will be pulled away as you are a danger not only to yourself but to other members of our community. I guess that if you lose your licence, as my cousin in Lethbridge says, that'll learn you. Sometimes that works. That's one thing I'd like to say.

Hey, while we're floating ideas here, this is another thing. This probably wouldn't be very popular, and I know this government doesn't like to do unpopular things, but I'll just float it here, something that can maybe be tried. Back in the 1980s there was talk about, you know, running out of fuel and us being environmentally friendly and all that good stuff. In fact, I believe we had our speed limits at 100 kilometres an hour. I don't know. Maybe someone could confirm that for me. I believe that was the speed limit, and there's evidence out there put forth that there was a reduction in the amount of fossil fuels used.

When people are driving on highways and going faster, carbon is emitted into the atmosphere at a much greater rate. I guess that in

the name of reducing our use of fossil fuels, reducing our carbon impact, it might be time for us sometime in the near future to look at that and say: hey, Alberta, we're going to do our part, reduce our speed. Not only is this a good thing for reducing our carbon footprint; it's also a good thing for saving our society money. You can make a strong argument. Yes, people will howl. People will be upset. They'll say: oh, my goodness; it takes me another 12 and a half minutes, maybe even 20 minutes to get from Calgary to Edmonton. That is something that maybe at some point we'll want to look at. Hopefully, that type of legislation, which would reduce not only our fossil fuel used but also create a safer environment, would go to that sort of measure.

I realize the difficulty. It would not be an overly popular thing. It would be on the airwaves for days. But I tell you what. After you did it, it'd be like ripping off a Band-aid. People would get on with their lives and realize that it didn't impact them all that much. That's all I'll say about that.

If we look at this bill, there were some other changes that came in that have allowed – I guess organizations involved in the teaching of driving were involved in nefarious activities by luring young women into the massage industry. Simply put, they were using it basically as a tool to get young women under their influence and have some alone time to try and get them involved in these activities. The bill allows, then, not only for that driver to be penalized but for the company to be caught up in what was in fact going on and for that element to be shut down. Let's face it. You know, the people who are teaching driving are primarily teaching it to either younger people or new immigrants in our society, who are more vulnerable populations who may need the support of the government a little more and the government keeping an eye over these types of situations a little more prevalently.

4:30

I would like to comment, too, on what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did. I know the hon. Solicitor General and I have talked about this at great length. At a time when I need a question for question period, I'll dig up the old firewall letter and say: "Ah, here. We'll keep the Solicitor General busy with this. Hopefully, he's forgotten the page in his notebook where he keeps the notes on the 2012 firewall letter, and I can catch him off his guard. He'll maybe admit that, yes, we are having a provincial police force." I don't know whether he is or not. I'm just sort of talking out of turn.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Frankly, you know, to be honest, I'm not sure whether it would be better, worse, or in between. I think that in the name of transparency and open government, if we are doing that, you might as well tell everyone and say: yeah, we're going to do this. That's sort of how we've been implementing the sheriffs and all that stuff. Get there. Otherwise, if it's not, then I think we can continue on that path.

You know, I'm not sold either way. I know that when that day comes, we're going to have to do a hard, more targeted look at it and see what the advantages and the disadvantages are. Hopefully, the government is doing that. But in the case of having a really transparent and open and honest government, I would advise, let's just either sort of announce it, say that we're going to get ready for it in 2012, and here's some of the stuff we've done, and it looks like a better way for Albertans. If not, well, then, let's stick to at least the crib notes to date. I hope the crib notes have been correct and not just sort of a way to pacify some resistance to this that there would be in some communities who have become very attached to

their RCMP departments. They've been here a long time, and they have served our communities very well; there are no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Further, there are also, I think, some benefits to getting some money out of the federal government from time to time to help pay for things on that front. Maybe that can be done through the Alberta police force – I'm not sure – but that's just another way. Just back to the open and transparent government, we might as well do things that way.

I guess those are sort of my comments on the bill. I think this is good legislation. I commend the mover of the bill, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, for bringing this bill forward. It recognizes that although this may not be the most popular thing for people driving on the streets, it is cannon fodder for the talk show hosts, and it's an easy thing for people to get their head around and rally against. Nonetheless, it's good legislation that, once implemented, keeps our streets safer, actually.

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar – I was winding up there, but I forget that he triggers my brain with some of his comments there. Sometimes I try to ignore them, but most times he's right on point, so I will comment further. I do also commend the community, I believe, of Strathcona for passing the cellphone legislation. That is something that we should have done a long time ago in this House. Really, I've only been here a year, but that could have been done a year ago. I guess it could have been done since 2001 that it's been on the books. Yes, I know there are arguments that we can already lay that charge underneath dangerous driving provisions, but then that's got to become a directive from us as a government that we want to lay charges out there because I don't think it's happening.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be questions or comments. The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo made mention of a provincial police force. I want to reiterate that we have a provincial police force in Alberta, one that has served us in this province since 1874. We refer to them as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We are in the process of negotiating a new contract with them, and we're quite confident that the negotiation will be successful. I would ask the hon. member if he sees things differently and if he sees the RCMP being replaced by another police force because that's certainly not our intention.

Mr. Hehr: Well, again, I think that question is better directed at the Solicitor General himself as I'm not in a position to actually do those things or to make those changes or, in fact, implement an Ontario-style police force. You know, if that's a question, if he's asking me if I was the Solicitor General, I'd do a little more research on it, I'd get back to him in due course, and I'd do whatever is best for the Alberta people.

The Speaker: Others?

Mr. Ouellette: I think I probably should just comment on the last two speakers, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and also the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. When they talk about demerit systems on a camera system, it's pretty hard to put demerits to someone when you can't place the person behind the wheel. I think it's just wrong to charge a person for being a good Samaritan and lending somebody their car and somebody happens to do something wrong with it through no control of theirs. How do you actually

administer them a demerit when you don't know who's behind the wheel? That's the reason there are no demerits on that.

Also, you'll find that we do have a little bit of a problem in Alberta with our courts being plugged up by the amount of people that go out there and break the law. Sometimes in cases where you have too heavy a penalty, that's when they jam up the court system and make the lawyers happy. You're better to have strong enforcement and a law that people are willing to say, "Yeah, I was guilty," go pay it, and let the system carry on.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Others to participate in the debate, or should I call on the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to close the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to just make a few comments briefly about this piece of legislation. I think that there are, again, a number of clarifications and tidying of things, closing loopholes, which I think is a good thing, and in general I am supportive of that.

I'm concerned about a new class of investigator. The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti indicated that this new class of investigator – this was probably in the briefing that he indicated this; I don't know if he said it here today – will be for designating mechanics so they can add their expertise in examining vehicles in other premises. It was added because it was often the case that we went to the court with a mechanic who had done inspections on a vehicle and was not allowed to testify because they're not legal inspectors under the current act.

We're a little concerned that there could be room for misuse here. The minister can appoint any individual or group whom they deem qualified to carry out actions related to this act and its regulations, both specific provisions and general ones. It does say that the special investigator is not authorized to do anything outside of the certificate of designation, which they get from the minister, but there are no specifics on what the designations will be, and it's a little bit vague. So that would be something we would indicate that we would like to see tightened up a little bit.

Mr. Speaker, generally, these changes do strengthen the enforcement abilities of police officers and peace officers as well as reinforce the provisions in the Traffic Safety Act, which hopefully will make Alberta's roads safer.

Now, one thing that is a little controversial is the use of red-light cameras or speed-on-green cameras. I know that there's a balance here. A lot of accidents are caused by speeding through intersections and running red lights, and it is a very serious concern. I'm not going to oppose the use of these devices in enforcement there other than to express a concern that I think we need to balance the increased use of surveillance devices in order to enforce the law. It's not just from the point of view of electronic observation or surveillance of the public, but it's also the importance of having real officers available to enforce the law. I think that it's very important.

4:40

I remember a case brought by former Inspector Chris Braiden of the Edmonton Police Service against photoradar. He was opposed to photoradar, and he made some interesting points. His case wasn't successful, but he said that when someone is speeding and photoradar takes the picture and they get the ticket in the mail, it's a very kind of sanitized process. There's no human interaction between a police officer and the offender. But when you actually have real police pulling people over, say, in a speed trap, then if the person has an outstanding warrant, if the person is intoxicated, if there are drugs

in the car, or if the person is just in a really bad state mentally or perhaps rushing to the hospital for a baby that's coming a little faster than would otherwise be expected, the officer can interact with those people and make additional decisions that improve the quality of law enforcement in our community. This is by no means meant to say that we shouldn't have red-light cameras or we shouldn't have photoradar but only that we need to retain a significant human dimension in our policing. It's the interaction between police officers as part of the community with community members that I think enhances our safety and our sense of community.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we're prepared to support this piece of legislation and would like to see the changes contained in it enacted because we think they're in the best interests of the community. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should there be additional comments or questions.

There being none, I'll entertain an additional speaker.

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, no need to close the debate? Okay.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

Bill 31

Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Denis]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and discuss Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. I will right off the hop congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, who brought this bill forward. I believe he said in his introduction that this is the first major revision of the *Rules of Court* statutes since 1967. Indeed, that's a long time, and a lot of things have changed in our society, and the language that is used is different now than it was then. Some of the procedures we do now are different from what they were then, and it just seems to be a well-timed thing to bring forward the *Rules of Court* statutes.

As many people may or may not be aware, the *Rules of Court* are primarily used by litigators who are engaged in the practice of head-to-head combat, both zealously representing the interests of their clients to the best of their ability. Oftentimes disputes arise between the two lawyers or two clients as to how, in fact, a lawsuit should proceed or what the makeup of the lawsuit is and what's going to be the timing in between how things happen.

Many people, actually, just think that when you, say, go to court or bring a suit against someone, an individual or a company, all you do is trot off, fill in a piece of paper, and go to the courts six months, a year, two years down the road, and a magistrate will make the decision. That's not how it is, Mr. Speaker. Along the way there are many things: you need to supply evidence to each side, you need to do what are called discoveries, where you as a lawyer get to interview their client and their lawyer gets to interview your client. Then you may ask for things to be given to you by either side. This is evidence that you ask to be handed over, that you've obtained through the course of discovery.

The next thing you know, the other side doesn't want to give you this information, or they don't think it's part of the lawsuit. Well,

you know what happens? You have to make an application to go to the court to get them to decide whether that information is relevant to your lawsuit. All that stuff and all of those steps – how to get this information from the other side and how to go to discovery and how to get a date with the court and how to apply for things like a settlement meeting or, when a lawsuit is over, how to divvy up the costs that have occurred between your clients – are all contained in what is called the *Rules of Court*.

I remember that when I was starting out at a place called Fraser Milner Casgrain in Calgary – it's a large national law firm – I had the privilege of working for a couple of people. When you'd go into their office, whether it was in the morning or the afternoon, and you'd say to them, "Well, what should I do next? I've got to do this," they'd say: "You know, Kent, there's a book called the *Rules of Court*. Instead of you coming in here and bothering me all the time, why don't you go get that book and look at it?" So, you know, after you get that answer four or five times the first few weeks you're there, you go to their offices a little less and you go to that book first and you try to figure out for yourself what rule, in fact, you're going to use. I'll tell you what: after you've checked that book, then you can go back to your principal and do that.

The gentleman's name was Neil McDermid. He is a QC, and he's actually a tremendous man who taught me a lot and taught me how to use the *Rules of Court*. More importantly, when you went off to court and you lost, he wasn't always that disappointed. He'd tell you about some times in the trials and tribulations of his legal career, that when he thought he had a winner and it turned up the other way, everything usually worked out all right. He was perfectly correct in that.

If you look at sort of what we've done here on the *Rules of Court* – and I've checked some of the language – it's much of an improvement over what was there. It allows practitioners who are starting out in practice or actually have even been in practice for a long time to be more adept at using the rules and regulations. It's easier to find. It's not in such archaic language, old English language. Although law is based on precedent, there's no need to have language from, you know, 400 years ago contained in the rules. They're the same rules. Let's just put it in modern language that people can understand so that when they go to court, when they get served with something, when they read a document from a court, it's very simple to understand, and it's not such a foreign language to them. I believe it'll make it not only easier for practitioners but for those people who simply are trying to navigate the legal system on their own.

4:50

Also, there's been a lot of advancement in the law, and a lot of that, especially around litigation, has been through ADR, or alternative dispute resolution, which is becoming very big in legal circles and is actually used to save our courts some time. There are many ways now in the *Rules of Court* that you can go to ADR. You know, it's actually kind of funny. They call ADR alternative dispute resolution, but some people call it appropriate dispute resolution, where you should always go to ADR to discuss things before you actually go to court. Now many practitioners, because of these changes and more, I guess, incorporating the modern language and modern use of what a courtroom is actually for, use ADR much more frequently. In fact, the changes make it mandatory that parties to any litigation seek ADR before they're able to obtain a trial date. This is very good.

Ontario has had this legislation since 2000, and they've seen trial times fall as a result. In fact, even if people aren't able to solve all their disputes, they're able to solve a couple, or the lawyers can get

together and meet and discuss things and, hopefully, end some stuff. It's just a forced time where they're going to get together and think about what exactly is going to happen before they go to court. I'd like to say that this has been a real work-in-progress. There have been various fits and starts to it, I believe, since people started working on this in 2001.

I'd like to also point out that the Hon. Justice Sheilah Martin, who was my ethics prof at the University of Calgary, worked hard on this. So did the Hon. Justice Keith Yamauchi. He taught me debtor-creditor, and he also actually told some funny stories in school as well. There are many other people on the discovery and evidence section of the new *Rules of Court*. Professor Chris Levy, who is also a teacher at the University of Calgary law school, brought his guidance. You see a lot of legal practitioners who have spent a great deal of time and effort revising, who have dedicated their professional lives to trying to make the court system a little bit easier to navigate not only for individuals who use the system but for people who find themselves involved in it and who maybe don't have a lawyer, who want to take part in it in a more knowledgeable way.

There's one more thing I'd like to add, that Ms Hilary Stout also worked on this, and she was a compatriot of mine with Fraser Milner Casgrain. I know she's talked very fondly of this project and has noted the work and effort that has gone into creating this bill. I'd like to thank all of the legal practitioners who have worked so long and hard on bringing this bill forward. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Egmont for sponsoring this bill, and I'd note he is also a lawyer and has some familiarity with the *Rules of Court* and their importance to the whole system of justice that is one of our pillars of justice.

I thank you very much for allowing me to speak on this bill, and I will allow some other members of this august House to speak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to stand up and speak to Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, knowing full well as I speak that I'm aware of what this bill actually does but that when I get into some of the reading I've done, it's all legalese, and I can assure you I am not a lawyer; I'm a nurse. I think what I'm getting from this is that one of the things, which to me is the most important, is that, in fact, it's going to help make things easier for the unrepresented litigant. That's very important. More and more and more people are finding that they can't afford lawyers, and they are trying to do things on their own. Often they would be someone like me, who has never been inside a courtroom, and just the fact that I would go into one would be intimidating in itself. If I would be going in with very little knowledge and having to cut through heaven knows how many documents of red tape, I'm sure that I would perhaps give up and walk away.

Many of these things – I'm assuming I'm right on this – may help going through small claims courts, which is where a lot of really good work is done in terms of mediation. Sometimes it'll go into mediation processes. In the end it helps everyone. It really is a win-win situation. At least they can make that process go a little quicker. As I've said, I really have never been into a courtroom. Clearly, I pay all my traffic fines by mail, so I haven't had to go to court.

One of the things that this bill will incorporate is that the effect of the new bill will be to limit the sitting time durations for the three nonjudicial members and to limit their reappointment to one extra term. I for one have always been a very firm believer in term limits for any organization – and that probably would include politicians – because I do believe that you can get stagnant in your thinking. I

think that this will bring in fresh thinking, fresh minds, and someone that would be appointed to this particular position would realize the gravity of the judgments that they make and would accept the challenge and not fall into a rut. Just that part of it alone I think is very good.

I think it has been mentioned already that the changes have been needed for a very long time, and as has been pointed out by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, huge numbers of highly qualified people with many, many years of experience have been involved in looking at this and redrafting this bill. I think it's very good, and I'm pleased to be able to stand up and support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Should we call the question on the bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

Bill 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Horne]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, further comments, or are you fine?

Mr. Horne: I'm fine, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the debate on Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. This act is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and I would like to thank him for this valuable piece of legislation. Bill 32 helps to clarify several issues faced by our numerous public agencies. Specifically, the bill will standardize the operation of public agencies by ensuring competence-based recruitment and appointment by making all recruitment information public and also by requiring mandate statements as well as codes of ethics and by legislating periodic operational reviews to ensure efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's 250 boards and agencies play a valuable role in the delivery of government services. I'm proud to say that over the past 40 years I've had the honour to serve on several of these boards, ranging from the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission to various development appeal boards and municipal planning commissions, which I recognize are not government boards: the Health Professions Advisory Board, the federal employment insurance Board of Referees, the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal as well as several disciplinary tribunals. I feel as though this background has given me a reasonable understanding of the diverse roles and operations of our various agencies as well as agencies in other jurisdictions. Moreover, I believe that the proposals made by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act will only serve to improve upon our already effective boards and agencies.

5:00

Particularly during this time of economic uncertainty it is imperative that we ensure that these boards are operating efficiently. After all, Alberta's boards and agencies are directly responsible for delivering almost half of this province's operating budgets. To this

end, I would like to address the various measures proposed by Bill 32 that directly impact the operation of these boards, specifically mandate statements, codes of conduct, and terms of office.

Firstly, Bill 32 sets out that all public boards and agencies must develop a public document that clearly outlines their mandate. This document is to include information regarding roles and responsibilities, recruitment, and training as well as the organizational structure. All of this information is to be made public and would help to ensure that our public agencies operate in a competency-based manner that best benefits Albertans.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 32 proposes to require a code of conduct for each public agency. This code of conduct will require board members to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and require all members to carry out their duties impartially. It is important to note that currently many public agencies in Alberta have codes of conduct. Bill 32 would simply standardize these across the board.

Finally, Bill 32 would set clear guidelines for terms of office. Currently there is a mix of restrictions in place that would limit the length of time a person could serve on a public agency. With Bill 32 in place, terms of service for adjudicative agencies would be set at 12 years, and all other agencies would be set at 10 years. This restriction will ensure that there is a dynamic balance between new and experienced board members.

Mr. Speaker, it's also important to look at how Bill 32 would affect the role of the various ministers when dealing with public agencies. Bill 32 would give the correlating minister the ability to set policies for public agencies that they must follow. This will dramatically improve service delivery, particularly in cases where cross-governmental policies involve several agencies. With this regulation in place, a minister would be able to ensure that all of Alberta's public agencies are working in a co-ordinated effort towards a shared goal. Without this level of ministerial oversight it would be difficult to co-ordinate agencies with overlapping mandates. These policy-making powers also help to promote increased accountability in both government and public agencies.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It is important to note that while allowing the minister to set policies for public agencies is needed, there need to be some restrictions in place, specifically with respect to a public agency's adjudicative functions. Adjudicative bodies make legal rulings on cases that do not necessarily need to go through the court system. Furthermore, they can take pressure off the courts by adjudicating disputes requiring specialized knowledge. Mr. Speaker, as in the court system, it is imperative that they remain impartial, independent, and removed from influence. To this end, Bill 32 proposes to place limitations on the policy-making powers of ministers when they interfere with the body's adjudicative functions.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of transparency, accountability, and efficiency proposed by Bill 32 are clear. Bill 32 will help to not only recognize the valuable contributions of our public agencies but serve to improve upon their already effective operating systems. The creation of standardized public mandate statements, codes of ethics, and term limits will serve to promote public confidence through transparency while the policy-making decisions given to ministers will ensure effective co-operation of committees with overlapping mandates.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that just as I was sitting here this afternoon, I happened to get on my desk an Alberta Ombudsman report entitled Prescription for Fairness. I'd like to just make a few quotations from it that are relevant to this issue. Perhaps to bring it

into context, this Ombudsman report deals with some problems with a particular government agency. It indicates:

Decision letters issued by the Appeal Panel should document its authority to hear the appeal, the names of the members who participated in the decision, identification of the issue, conflicts of interest, all of the material considered in the decision, its findings of fact, how it weighed the evidence, and how it applied the legislative criteria.

I would suggest that those are standard procedures for many public agencies. Unfortunately, in this particular case those guidelines do not appear to have been followed in the Ombudsman's review.

The Ombudsman went on to make three recommendations. Actually, they made more than three, but I would summarize with only three.

Regarding management of the Appeal Panel, the Ombudsman recommends:

- Recruitment of members follows an open and transparent process, and the interview panel include a member of the Appeal Panel.
- New members receive orientation and training opportunities.
- The Appeal Panel procedural binder be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that's exactly what this bill is all about, and I think the Ombudsman's report reinforces the need for such a statute.

Just in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for bringing forward this well-thought-out bill and would encourage all members to join with me in support of Bill 32. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to participate in the discussion this afternoon on Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. This certainly will codify a framework and processes that have been developed to improve the management accountability of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions, and we know there are quite a few of them. I believe the hon. member mentioned that there are 250. Some individuals may not recognize, many taxpayers would not recognize that these bodies deal with about 50 per cent of the provincial budget, certainly showing the importance of the issue. There has been a trend by this government to download or give each one of these agencies, boards, and commissions more responsibilities, more control, and I would say that it is a conscious decision to reduce the importance of this Legislative Assembly.

Now, the hon. minister of health over there, Mr. Speaker, is shaking his head. [interjection] I didn't hear a rattle, no, hon. member.

I certainly was astonished when I was provided a copy of the memorandum of understanding from last summer which set up – about this time last year, it was in the month of May, near the end of May actually – the Alberta Health Services Board. The hon. minister of health signed it, as did I believe it was Paddy Meade and another individual, Mr. Hughes. When they signed that agreement, I was astonished that the legislative authority that was cited for that agreement included the agencies governance framework document. It was the first time I've seen a framework of this nature quoted as a legislative authority to set up this memorandum of understanding, which of course was the document that allowed the regional health authorities to be dismantled or fired and the Alberta Health Services Board to be set up.

I don't know how that happened, but certainly Bill 32, if it

becomes law, will in effect make this framework a statute of the province. I'm still puzzled as to how a memorandum of understanding as the one I described earlier, the public agencies governance framework, could be used and cited as an authority. Now, perhaps the minister of health will eventually participate in debate and enlighten the House on why this framework or how this framework could be used in that manner, but it was.

5:10

When we look at the whole issue around agencies, boards, and commissions, there certainly are issues. We look at the commission that was struck. I believe it had the former chair of the EUB, Mr. McCrank, involved and two other individuals. They reported. The report certainly is of interest. But this bill, Mr. Speaker, Bill 32, will provide the legislative framework that hopefully will improve transparency and accountability. We know that this government lacks transparency and certainly lacks accountability. This bill will also promote excellence in the governance of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions.

Now, this bill also, as I understand it, builds upon the work done by the task force that I spoke about just a minute ago. This task force made 15 recommendations to ensure that the right policies and best practices are in place for all of these agencies, boards, and commissions, and of course they have to deliver their mandates. They get their direction or their marching orders from guess who?

The task force's first recommendation was the introduction of legislation to provide to agencies governance frameworks and standards reflecting the importance of all of these agencies. Now, we saw in February of 2008 that the government released its public agencies governance framework that I referred to earlier. It certainly elaborated on the recommendations of the task force. I notice that implementation of the public agencies governance framework is under way, as I said earlier, in all government departments, including Health and Wellness, regardless of the drafting of Bill 32.

When we look at this legislative framework and we look at some of the issues that surround the government's reliance on agencies, boards, and commissions, we should note again another section of the Auditor General's report – the Auditor is doing a lot of fine work – and I'm referencing the report from October 2008. The Auditor had a lot to say and a lot to report on chief executive officer selection, evaluation, and compensation, particularly regarding board governance. When we look at the agencies, boards, and commissions and how this government relies on them, it's a very important sector not to have legislation governing their activities. We can read the AG's comments and his recommendations. So this bill certainly is necessary.

The bill does put in place the principles that ministers are responsible for the agencies, boards, and commissions under their ministry and therefore allows us on this side of the House to hold the government to account if the agencies, boards, and commissions fail. I can just imagine some day in question period the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall asking a question about one of the agencies, boards, and commissions that would be in Service Alberta. Now, that would include the Alberta Residential Tenancies Advisory Committee, the Fair Trading Act appeal boards, the Cemeteries Act appeal boards, the Funeral Services Act appeal boards, or one that everyone in this province has heard about, the Utilities Consumer Advocate Governance Advisory Board.

Mr. Mason: Wow.

Mr. MacDonald: Wow is right. That's a wow with a capital W.

Mr. Mason: And they say we've got too much government.

Mr. MacDonald: And they say we've got too much government. They don't read their own reports, hon. member. Certainly, we have a big government. We have a big, bloated government here in this province. One only has to look at the budget to realize that. [interjection] I'm sorry, hon. Minister of Transportation?

Mr. Ouellette: For a little, wee opposition it would look that way.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. The opposition is little, but we get by. We certainly get by.

Those would be the agencies, boards, and commissions under Service Alberta that the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall would look at.

Certainly, with the Utilities Consumer Advocate there would be a lot of work to do there. When we look at the number of issues that surround energy deregulation, electricity deregulation, natural gas deregulation, I don't know how the hon. member gets time to spend with his family because that outfit certainly is very busy. Now, what's going to happen? How many complaints are we going to see? How is that advisory board going to work? How is all this going to be set up, Mr. Speaker?

When ratepayers get stuck with an additional \$30 to \$35 a month on their bills to pay for the transmission upgrades, they're going to be scratching their heads, wondering: "What is this amount on my bill? How did that get there?" They're going to say: "Not another hit for energy deregulation. Have I not already paid enough for the government's mistake? Have I not already paid for the last decade for the government's mistake with high power bills?" Yet they'll be hit with this monthly bill, and the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall will have to deal with that through Service Alberta, through the Utilities Consumer Advocate Governance Advisory Board.

Now, we know who appoints the members to that advisory board – obviously, the government through order in council – who these individuals are, how they will be evaluated, how they will be compensated. The Auditor General has some good, sound ideas on how all this should work, but does the government, and will the government follow that?

That would only be one example.

Now, when we look at the framework, Mr. Speaker, that I spoke about earlier that had been developed and was issued publicly in February of last year, we know how important that was. It was of course used to shape some of the important changes to government structures already, in particular – and I referred to that earlier – Alberta Health Services. We know from the Ethics Commissioner's investigation of the appointment of Paddy Meade to the Alberta Health Services Board from Alberta Health what went on there. She's no longer employed there. We have no idea what happened – I'll be the last to know – but maybe the minister of health through the course of debate can enlighten not only this Assembly but taxpayers.

Mr. Mason: If they told you, you'd only spread fear.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, taxpayers, hon. member, may shudder at the cost of this. You know, these appointments were made, and less than a year later, for obvious reasons, there was dissatisfaction, and respective parties parted company. But I don't want to be accused of, you know, getting off topic here. I really want to stick to Bill 32, hon. member.

5:20

This investigation was requested to be conducted by the Ethics Commissioner. It was done, and it was done on the grounds that it

appeared to contradict the Conflicts of Interest Amendment Act, 2007, public service postemployment restriction. Now, in his ruling on the matter the Ethics Commissioner quoted extensively from the task force report as well as the agencies governance framework, which is the basic blueprint of this bill. It's astonishing that these documents were already shaping and forming government practice, so this comes to the point where we should ask a few questions about that. Hopefully, they can be addressed or answered in the course of debate.

What kind of binding power has the agencies governance framework had so far? That, again, is referenced in my opening remarks whenever we were discussing this. Where, legislatively speaking, does it draw its power from, and why is the government legislating this if the framework is already determining policy and actions? So, essentially, that question is: why is it necessary to have Bill 32 as we see it before the Assembly?

Now, in undertaking this review, Alberta was following a number of other provinces that had looked at the same issue of agencies, boards, and commissions and their accountability... [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] We'll get to this more in committee, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The leader of the third party on this.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to continue because I was hanging on his every word and very much trying to anticipate where this is going to go. You know, just to be cut off in the middle of grand thought like that I think is a shame. I'd like to hear the rest of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I will continue because the hon. member is right. This is quite important because not only is Alberta looking at accountability issues and governance issues around agencies, boards, and commissions; British Columbia, it should be noted, has the Crown Agencies Secretariat and a shareholder expectations manual that governs agencies, boards, and commissions there.

Now, the question around that, of course, would be – and this relates around TILMA – do the provisions of TILMA, as we know them, require a harmonization of Alberta's and British Columbia's rules governing agencies, boards, and commissions? Now, other provinces as well have rules, regulations, and best practices governing their agencies, boards, and commissions. Of course, Ontario does. New Brunswick does. In fact, I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to have a look at the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, the CCAF. There is an article written by Mr. Ken Stewart, Trends in Crown Agency Accountability Arrangements. This is an excellent article for those who are interested in these matters.

Four other provinces, hon. member – Ontario, B.C., Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick – have specific standing committees of the Legislature to review Crown corporations. Now, we in this Assembly have or are developing a process with the Public Accounts Committee, where on occasion we see for a two-hour period an agency, a board, or a commission. In the past we have looked at the Treasury Branches, we have looked at some school boards, we have looked at some regional health authorities, so there is no reason why we in this province could not bring before in a timely fashion any number of any one of these agencies, boards, or commissions that are listed.

Now, would it be in the public interest to bring, for instance, from the Finance and Enterprise department the Automobile Insurance Rate Board before Public Accounts, the Capital Finance Authority, maybe the Public Service Pension Plan Board? Maybe we could have a look at the Utilities Consumer Advocate Governance Advisory Board. Travel Alberta: that's a new outfit just getting fired up over there, and I hope it's not in time for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, speaking of British Columbia. I certainly hope there's going to be more to it than that.

We can go through each and every ministry, and we can see the agencies, the boards, and commissions that are outlined there, so that would be how we're starting to deal with it here, through the Public Accounts process. Is that good enough? I don't think so. I think more could be done, and maybe here we could have the policy field committees. There's a lot of work to do. There are 250 agencies, boards, and commissions. Maybe the five standing policy field committees could have a look on occasion at some of those entities. I think that would be a good step. Perhaps we can have an amendment later on to have a look at that. Maybe we can discuss that.

When we look at Ontario, B.C., Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick with their specific standing committees, that's how they're doing it. This is an interesting issue to test the government's commitment to public accountability. Will the government do the same as other provinces?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? Hon. leader of the third party, do you wish to speak on the bill?

Mr. Mason: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to at least get a start at this because this is an important point, an important issue for us, that we have so many agencies, and this act is something that will, you know, govern how this whole thing is handled. It's interesting to ask about how many agencies actually there are because in the original press release that announced the creation of the task force, it said that there were more than 130 agencies, boards, and commissions in the province. But when the release that accompanied the introduction of the bill came out, it said that there were now 250 agencies, boards, and commissions affected by the act. My question is: is this an error, or have we really seen almost a doubling of the agencies, boards, and commissions in this province in that period of time? I'm just curious.

I know the government has grown rapidly, and I know they've got a lot of folks over there to keep busy, but one of the ways not to keep them busy, Mr. Speaker, in my view, is to appoint MLAs to these boards and commissions. That was in fact one of the recommendations that came forward in the task force. There were 15 key recommendations, and a lot of those were good ones. "Establish a more rigorous process for the establishment of agencies." Well, if they've shot up since 2007 to almost double, they haven't followed that one.

A second one was to review agency mandates in order to ensure their mandate remains relevant. That's good if they do it.

"Use... non-partisan and competence-based appointment process for the appointment of directors." Mr. Speaker, this is perhaps one of the most important recommendations of all from the task force, that these appointments should be based on merit, and they should be nonpartisan in nature.

5:30

You know, I know there are a lot of Conservatives in Alberta. I've come to grips with that fact. I've come to the realization that

it's just part of reality, like death and taxes, that you have to accept. Nevertheless, I'm absolutely amazed at how many worthy Conservatives the government can find to appoint to the burgeoning numbers of agencies, boards, and commissions that they do appoint and how few people there are in this province that are qualified from any other political persuasion. It is really something that surprises me.

I think this is an important one, and I'll give the government a little credit here: recognize the diversity of the population and recruit to that end. I think that if they do that, we're going to see a much more representative group of government-appointed organizations.

Another recommendation is to implement fixed terms for directors, which may be renewed to a maximum of 10 consecutive years. It does say that the minister has the power to waive this if he or she feels that it would be beneficial to the agency. I think, Mr. Speaker, that we need a little more control than just leaving it up to the minister to waive that. I think 10 years is a long time. I think for some it's 12 years.

Evaluating the board and director performance and making public the remuneration for directors and CEOs: these are all good things.

Now, all of these recommendations were accepted by the government except for one, the task force recommendation that the government "should not appoint elected or senior government officials to the governing bodies of agencies." The government has said that they would modify this recommendation. Their proposed action said, "Due to the nature of some boards, elected or senior officials will be appointed when their input is important for the agency to achieve its mandate." In other words, Mr. Speaker, the government has left themselves a huge loophole. They put the rule in there. They accepted the recommendation, or something like the recommendation, but they've just let themselves have a loophole they can use whenever they want. You know, why do you even have the rule if the government doesn't have to follow it?

I think that this legislation makes it clear that public agencies which perform adjudicative functions are exempt from some aspects of the act. Those are mainly the sections that require information to be made public. You know, once again there's an opportunity there for the government to provide exemptions when it comes to making information public. Now, there might be some cases where that's justifiable, but, Mr. Speaker, it's well known in this province that this is the most secretive government in Canada. We're constantly pressed to try and put greater requirements on this government to provide information that otherwise would be made public in almost any other province.

The government has provided itself with enormous numbers of loopholes to restrict information from the public. One of the main ones that they've done is to call something advice to the minister, and then it's exempt. In other places it wouldn't be exempt under freedom of information legislation. Government briefing books and so on are all exempt. Pretty much anything the government doesn't want to release it doesn't have to. Now we've got something here that provides additional exemptions from the sections that require information to be made public.

Personal information needs to be protected, Mr. Speaker, and I think there's a case for legal advice and things to do with personnel matters and so on, but otherwise it is the public's information, collected by the government on their behalf with their money, and it ought to be available.

Mr. Speaker, if the goal was accountability and good governance, the government should have accepted the recommendation that no elected official or senior official would be appointed to the governing body of agencies or boards. Now, I'll give you an example. We had the Ministry of Energy – the deputy and his assistant deputy ministers and so on – before the Public Accounts Committee just a

couple of weeks ago. There's an appointed body, a body that deals with energy policy, and it includes stakeholders and so on. The assistant deputy minister is on it, the head of the ERCB, and so on.

Now, that body has recently made some public recommendations that are very favourable to nuclear power in this province. You know, I asked the question of the deputy minister whether or not it was appropriate to have those government officials sitting on a body that's now making recommendations and pronouncements with respect to nuclear power. We all know and the Minister of Energy says repeatedly that the government actually has no position on nuclear power. They may produce reports that are kind of weighted in favour of nuclear power and paint wind power as something that's very dangerous, but they officially have no position on nuclear power. There again, I think there's potential for people to misinterpret the government's good intentions because they have placed their senior officials on a body that is actually in a very real way advocating for nuclear power.

I wonder about the government's statement that this legislation will improve the accountability and transparency of agencies because based on the new framework, agencies are accountable to the responsible minister, and the minister is accountable to the House and to the public. We've seen many cases where the ministers are not being accountable to the public. We've seen, for example, in Children and Youth Services that the advocate failed to table annual reports for three years. So I question, then, whether or not the provision that requires public agencies to be reviewed at least every seven years is a bit of a long time. That's a long time to see if an agency is performing their duties properly and appropriately.

Now, I want to come back to the question of the length of appointments. The act provides that no person shall be appointed as a member for longer than 12 consecutive years if empowered to do an adjudicative function or 10 years in another case. However, after section 14(2) it states that if the minister feels it's necessary to ensure effectiveness of the operation, then the term limit can be waived. I want to repeat my concern that the minister can waive this. The government puts rules and then paints giant escape clauses that render the rules almost irrelevant.

After setting out the steps on how public agencies and the government will become more transparent and accountable, they attach regulations at the end which basically say that the Lieutenant Governor in Council can make regulations that could change pretty much every provision of the act. Here it is again, Mr. Speaker. The government says: "Well, we've got all of these provisions, but we've given ourselves this huge loophole. We can actually make regulations to change the act."

Now, one of the positive changes that the act makes is to ensure that appointments and recruitments of members are to be competency based and that this process will be open and transparent by making information about the recruitment public. The second part of this open and transparent recruitment strategy is that reappointments will only be allowed if a member continues to meet the requirements of the position. I want to just indicate that those are fine principles and fine words, but the question really is in its implementation and in its interpretation. I wish I had more confidence it would be interpreted in the spirit in which it is written.

5:40

I want to raise some specific concerns about the local authorities pension plan and my concern that this act may negatively impact their ability to operate independently. Section 3 requires that all public agencies develop a mandate and roles document that is made jointly with the responsible minister and the agency. I think one of

the concerns here is that there's no room for stakeholders to develop the document or involve themselves in the periodic review that's set up by section 19. That's something I'd hope to hear back on in later debate.

Section 10 states that the minister can set policies and force the public agency to follow them, and this affects the ability of the LAPP to function independently.

Section 12 of the act says that each agency must "participate with its responsible Minister in setting its long-term objectives and short-term targets." Again, I think we need to raise the issue that there appears to be no room for stakeholders to be part of that decision-making process.

Going on to section 13, where it states that a member must be recruited based on the extent to which the person possesses the identified skills, knowledge, experience, or attributes that the agency identifies before selecting the person. You know, I wonder if this would limit the ability of the LAPP stakeholders to nominate people that they want for the board.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comment and question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to hear perhaps a little bit more elaboration on the business of the appointing and the time frames. I've always felt that when you have staggered appointments to boards – and I believe they shouldn't be longer than 10 years – you also have a consistency because you don't lose that board knowledge that goes when you clear out a board. Perhaps the member would like to make some comments on those thoughts.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Yes, I would, Mr. Speaker, because we do have a little bit of experience with that, as does my colleague, both of us having served on municipal councils in cities in this province. It was always a matter of trying to find the right balance. We had in the city of Edmonton, basically, a rule that you couldn't serve more than six consecutive years in any position. I agree with her that having staggered appointments is also very important. You need to strike the balance between experience on the one hand and fresh blood on the other. Fresh blood, new blood, young blood: what is it?

Ms Pastoor: New thinking.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. New people coming on with new ideas and striking that balance, which is very important. I know from some of the work we did with respect to the governance of EPCOR that board reviews are very important, and we always did that according to certain criteria and in conjunction with the chairman of the board, and there was succession planning. There was very much always a plan to refresh the people who were serving on the board of EPCOR and, in fact, on some other boards and agencies. But in a big company like EPCOR, of course, it was well developed and very, very important. I want to just say, if I could, that there's a real concern, going back to the local authorities pension plan, that this bill undermines the governance and reduces the ability of the board of the LAPP to achieve independence. I think that it will permanently restrict the role of stakeholders and will place the direction, goals, and even the continued existence of the plan in the hands of the minister.

So, Mr. Speaker, what else really is new? In addition to this being the most secretive government in Canada, it's also emerging as one of the most centralized, bringing more and more things under direct political control as opposed to having local communities, local stakeholders, and local citizens playing a role in the governance process. I think that this is really not something that is to the benefit of the people of this province.

It really contradicts the tradition, I think, of the Conservative Party in many respects, which tended to talk about the importance of local communities and so on. We've seen that that trend has been reversed. It no longer seems to be the direction of the government. A highly centralized sort of planning, growth of state power, more secrecy: these are things that Conservatives used to be against, but now it seems that this is part of the direction of this government, very much so, and I think something that is deplorable. We need more democracy, not less. We need more community involvement, grassroots involvement, not less, in the governance of our province.

You know, I was there when the regional planning commissions were wrapped up by Steve West, one of the first major steps to destroy local decision-making and planning. If you contrast that . . . [interjection] Yes, it was gone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a second time]

Bill 35

Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. McFarland]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the Gas Utilities Amendment Act at first blush is just a routine housekeeping piece of legislation. Certainly, we look at the hon. Member for Little Bow's efforts with this bill. We look at the highlights of this legislation, and we see where it reflects the transfer of regulatory control of the TransCanada-NOVA Gas Alberta system from provincial oversight to the federal National Energy Board. We look at the National Energy Board, and we look at the old system. Many people would not recognize that the National Energy Board is centred in Calgary. They do a lot of good, sound research down there. They put out a lot of very interesting reports, whether it's on natural gas, whether it's on exports of petroleum or petroleum-related projects. They can give quite an overview of the energy industry not only here in Alberta but in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

5:50

The National Energy Board also does a lot of work on electricity: electricity transmission and electricity exports. According to the hon. Member for Little Bow when this bill was moved and adjourned at second reading, going back not quite a month, "This is an administrative act to give legislative authority to a ruling of the National Energy Board. It's a small and minor amendment." As most members would see if they were to have a look at the legislation. Now, this is what I've been told. We were also led to . . . [interjection] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, because I believe the Minister of Energy was complaining that he couldn't hear me.

Mr. Knight: No. I put my hearing aids in. I can hear you well now.

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, okay. Pardon me.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we had quite an overview of Bill 35 from the hon. Member for Little Bow, but when we're looking at the National Energy Board and the legislative authority, we need to always remember the quasi-judicial ruling and the concern with the NOVA Gas Transmission pipeline owned by TransCanada PipeLines. The ruling was to accept an application by TransCanada to make this pipeline subject to federal regulation. We always have issues with federal regulations in this House.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood certainly pointed out, I thought quite effectively, earlier in debate on Bill 32 that we forget just how far-reaching administratively this government is and has grown to become. We only have to have a look at all the agencies, boards, and commissions. This, as I understand it, is a transfer to the federal regulatory body. The hon. Member for Little Bow assured the House that Albertans who've followed the history of oil and gas development will recall the establishment and subsequent growth of the Alberta Gas Trunk Line. Of course, it's over 50 years old. This pipeline system was the underground transmission system that facilitated the exploration and development of natural gas fields across Alberta. Over the decades the people involved, the hon. member assures us, have become quite familiar with the regulatory process. Some agree with it; some do not.

The hon. member correctly goes on and outlines many things in this bill. Certainly, one of the outcomes that we should be cognizant of is that given the shifts in regulatory controls that have happened over the years towards the federal system, shifts that have happened in co-ordination with more interconnected natural gas systems not only to other provinces but to many of the lower 48 states, the impact of this bill will probably be relatively small.

There are main concerns, and they are that we have to ensure that landowners don't suffer because of the federal regulations and how burdensome they are. We know that Alberta's natural gas liquids and by-products industry, which is a significant industry, is certainly in some cases, not all – and I'm referencing bitumen – significant value added to this province. We have to make sure that that does not suffer, and I am sort of confident from reading the remarks of the hon. Member for Little Bow that that won't happen, but we have to be careful about regulatory control here.

Now, I don't think that there is a real reason to think that either of these issues will come true. The National Energy Board has already addressed, as far as I know, some of the landowners' concerns and has processes in place for additional resolution. With Alberta at the centre of the growing natural gas production in the Horn basin in northeastern B.C. – also, I think, Mr. Speaker, there will be significant natural gas exploration and production in Canada's north as well – the provincial industry here, hopefully, will be well located to take advantage of the liquids and the by-products that were essentially the building block of our economic prosperity around the petrochemical industry. There appears to be no significant legal reason for Alberta to have regulatory control over this Alberta system anymore given its current location at the centre of a national and even an international system of natural gas transmission, which we discussed earlier. Providing landowners are treated properly by the National Energy Board and Alberta's petrochemical industry has the feedstock necessary, these changes should not have any impact, hopefully.

When we look at some of the issues that landowners have, particularly whenever pipelines either cross or the right-of-way is actually on their property for a significant length, the compensation that those landowners receive and what they should get, some of them are very, very upset that they get so little, if anything. If you

look at some of the oil- and gas-producing states in America, if you put a pipeline on someone's property, you pay and you pay annually.

So there are some differences that need to be worked out, but certainly, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this bill and we look at the changes that are proposed, we've got to remember that our Alberta pipeline system in reference to this bill is over 23,000 kilometres long. It's a network that stretches to most parts of the province. The Alberta system started, again, in 1954. It was established by this Legislature and Premier Manning, and of course it was a partnership with the industry. Over time the company added multiple assets directly connected to its core gas distribution business such as chemicals and plastics from the natural gas liquids and others. In 1980 it became NOVA, a Crown corporation, and over time many of the other businesses were spun off, particularly in the recessionary periods in the '80s and '90s. In 1998 the core Alberta system business was taken over by TransCanada.

Alberta is becoming, as I said, less monolithic when it comes to natural gas production in western Canada. We look at the gas production in B.C., in the north. The Alberta system is almost a flow through. It's like an expressway. But in shipping this gas, we have to be careful. We had a discussion years ago in this Assembly about the Alliance line and the natural gas liquids that are in that line; they're whistling through just the other side of Fort Saskatchewan on to a location south of Chicago. Mr. Speaker, we could look at . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. It's now 6 o'clock. The Assembly stands adjourned and will continue at 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Webber

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
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MacDonald

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
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Bhardwaj
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
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Xiao
Vacant

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. Horne
Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor
Dallas
Denis
Fawcett
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Webber

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle
Elniski
Fawcett
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Rogers
Taylor
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery MacDonald
Anderson McQueen
Benito Olson
Bhardwaj Quest
Boutilier Rodney
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 26, 2009

Issue 44e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 26, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Alberta's human rights legislation has not been updated for 13 years, since 1996. While 88 per cent of Albertans have said that they feel protected by our human rights legislation and system, there was a strong recognition that the legislation needed to be updated. In taking consideration of what updates were needed, government took note of that strong support.

But we need to bring forward changes that reflect our diverse 21st century society with a made-in-Alberta human rights law to continue to position Alberta as a safe and welcoming province, make the human rights processes more transparent to Albertans through the establishment of tribunals rather than panels, reflect the Supreme Court decision on inclusion of sexual orientation to acknowledge that we are a tolerant society, remove system bottlenecks which have slowed the resolution of complaints, and recognize that Albertans feel strongly about the rights of parents to make decisions regarding the education of their children, as existing School Act policies demonstrate. These changes as well as appointing a new chief commissioner with a judicial background and making administrative improvements will restore Albertans' confidence in the Human Rights Commission. It will restore the confidence that their complaints will be dealt with respectfully, effectively, and expeditiously by the commission.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 44 strikes the right balance on a variety of complex and difficult issues. I believe that it will improve our province's human rights system in the areas that matter most. Since becoming minister, I've heard a number of issues raised by Albertans, commission staff, former commissioners, and others, and we have addressed them in the following ways.

First of all, section 2 of the amending act amends the name of the act to be the Alberta Human Rights Act. Commissioners, staff, the Sheldon Chumir foundation, and others recommended deleting citizenship from the name of the act. The new name clarifies that the purpose of the legislation is indeed human rights.

In section 3 of the amending act and throughout we are adding sexual orientation into the act. Sexual orientation has been a protected area in Alberta for over a decade. Writing it in makes the legislation consistent with judicial decisions and was recommended by the Alberta commissioners and others.

We've also heard views regarding removing the section on hatred in publications currently in the existing legislation in section 3. We listened to all concerns and decided to retain that section so that

Alberta's human rights legislation balances freedom of speech with our responsibility to others. Although we as a caucus and a government believe in freedom of speech, we also feel the need to protect those who are vulnerable to discrimination with respect to employment, accommodation, and access to services as our primary responsibility. Until we can be assured that the Criminal Code of Canada would ensure protection for those, we have to err on the side of those that we are charged to protect.

It is important to emphasize that the commission operates independently of government. The commission interprets Alberta's human rights legislation and decides which cases to pursue and those not to pursue. Government's role is to help ensure that the qualifications we use to hire our chief commissioner and commissioners include an ability to deal with complex human rights cases.

Section 11.1 would give parents the right to receive notice and, if they choose, exempt their child from courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises that deal explicitly with religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation. The proposed amendments will simply consolidate into law the rights that parents or guardians already have concerning the education of their children throughout a combination of legislation and education policy. However, the bill does not provide the right to exemption from instruction in any additional curriculum areas.

Mr. Chairman, I had meetings with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, our Minister of Education, and the Alberta Teachers' Association on May 4. We also had meetings with the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta School Councils' Association on May 12. I had a meeting with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on May 5. At each of these meetings we promised to consider changing the wording of this section to make the intention very clear.

Bill 44 is being amended to clarify that parental rights do not include withdrawing children from spontaneous discussions of religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation that may arise during everyday classroom teaching. The exact wording of the amendment is: Section 9 is amended in the new section 11.1, (a) in subsection (1) by striking out "explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation" and substituting "primarily . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, are you introducing the amendment?

Mr. Blackett: Yes.

The Chair: You're talking about the amendment you're bringing in, not the bill, right?

Mr. Blackett: I was talking about the bill, and I was talking about the amendment. Do you want to deal with the amendment afterwards?

The Chair: You have to introduce an amendment; then you talk about it.

Mr. Blackett: Okay. Then I will do that, sir. Sorry.

The Chair: Hon. minister, because you introduced an amendment, the page needs to distribute it before you continue on.

Mr. Blackett: Okay. My apologies.

Mr. Chairman, can I continue reading it, or do I have to wait till after it's distributed?

The Chair: Wait until the members have got the amendment in their hands.

The amendment moved by the minister is now known as amendment A1.

Minister, please continue on amendment A1.

Mr. Blackett: Okay. Mr. Chairman, the exact wording of the amendment is: Section 9 is amended in the new section 11.1, (a) in subsection (1) by striking out “explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation” and substituting “primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation”; (b) by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) This section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes, human sexuality or sexual orientation in a course of study, educational program, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.

Bill 44 has absolutely nothing to do with parents’ religious beliefs or teachable moments, those conversations that can arise in a classroom but are not directly tied to the curriculum. It’s important to note that there are very few requests to exempt students from discussions on human sexuality. School boards have an excellent system to address parent concerns, and we respect that process.

I’ll stop there right now.

7:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Following on the precedents of the House and referencing *Beauchesne*, I think it’s 688, I would request that the government amendments be severed for the purpose of voting.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: That should be allowed for separate voting. Could you repeat which parts to separate out?

Ms Blakeman: Into A and B. It looks to me like there are two sections, so it would be two votes, section A and section B.

The Chair: Okay. Do you want to debate the proposed amendment as a whole package and vote on each or debate separately?

Ms Blakeman: I’m fine with debating it in its entirety and voting it separately.

The Chair: All right. We shall proceed along that line, debate entirely and vote separately, A and B.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will admit that I’m not usually at a disadvantage in this House, but I certainly find myself at a disadvantage tonight. We have not seen these amendments, and now I am up debating them without even having been able to read them. This is somewhat of a superhuman effort on my part, but I will do my best to speed-read.

Okay. I’ve had an indication that my plea has been answered. At this point I would like to move adjournment of this debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 52

Health Information Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to

be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Yesterday in the House I tabled the report of the Standing Committee on Health with respect to Bill 52, which was referred to the committee after second reading. There are a number of amendments contained in the committee’s report, and I would appreciate the opportunity to distribute those now to members.

The Chair: The amendment introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford shall now be known as A1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, please continue on A1.

Ms Blakeman: I’m sorry. Could I ask that these amendments be severed for the purposes of voting, please, so that they would be severed into sections A, B, C, and D? I am happy to have us debate this as a whole, but I would like them voted in four separate votes corresponding with A, B, C, and D.

The Chair: Yes. The amendment shall now be debated as a whole but voted on separately, in sections.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, please continue on A1.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to make a few remarks. I will address all the amendments since we’re debating them as a whole. I don’t propose to go through the amendments in much detail. They were distributed to members yesterday as part of the standing committee’s report. Throughout my comments I will make reference to particular amendments, and then perhaps if there are questions, I can help to address those later in the debate.

Mr. Chairman, first of all, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2009, and would like to once again express my gratitude to my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Health for their considerable efforts to improve Bill 52. I think the amendments before us tonight are a testament to the committee’s hard work over this session and the previous session of this Legislature.

The Health Information Amendment Act was referred for further review to the Standing Committee on Health on November 27, 2008, after second reading. Over the past five months, Mr. Chair, the committee has held a series of public meetings totalling more than 20 hours of review on this bill. As part of the review process the committee sought input from stakeholders and the public. The committee listened to 11 presentations and received a total of 59 written submissions.

Based on the feedback received, the committee developed a series of recommendations for amendments to Bill 52, which are now before Committee of the Whole. The recommendations are contained in the committee’s report, as I’ve mentioned. I’d like to take a few minutes now to highlight the key issues that were identified before our committee and to outline our specific recommendations to address them.

The first major issue, Mr. Chairman, relates to a patient’s right to know who has accessed their personal health information and for what purpose. Section 41 of the Health Information Act currently requires custodians to maintain detailed logs of all disclosures of health information, and in the proposed part 5.1 of Bill 52 all interaction with the Alberta electronic health record, including making the information accessible through this resource, is defined as a use of that information. Therefore, the existing disclosure-related logging requirement would not apply to the use of information in the Alberta electronic health record context.

In response to many concerns raised on this issue, Mr. Chair, the committee is recommending an amendment to Bill 52 that requires custodians to maintain access logs for Alberta electronic health record use. Those amendments can be found in part B of the amendments that were just distributed.

The second major issue, Mr. Chair, that we dealt with related to stakeholder concerns about protecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals' health information. The first concern, which is addressed in part A of amendment A1, involves section 46 of the Health Information Act, which enables the minister to request health information from other custodians. If the requirements of that provision are met, those custodians must provide that information to the minister.

Stakeholders expressed concern about the proposed deletion in Bill 52 of the minister's requirement to prepare a privacy impact assessment and to submit it to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for review and comment when requesting information from other custodians. In response, the committee is proposing to reinstate the requirement for privacy impact assessments.

The second concern stakeholders raised relates to the expressed wishes of patients in the context of the Alberta electronic health record. This, Mr. Chair, is dealt with in part B, clause (c) of amendment A1. Individual consent is not required to disclose information to other custodians in numerous situations, including via the electronic health record. However, section 58(2) of the Health Information Act currently requires custodians to consider individuals' expressed wishes when deciding how much health information to disclose.

As I indicated earlier, in the proposed part 5.1 of Bill 52 all interaction with the Alberta electronic health record is defined as use by this bill. Therefore, the existing expressed wishes requirement in section 58(2) of the Health Information Act would not apply to use of information via the electronic health record. The concept of expressed wishes is tied closely to masking, Mr. Chair, and masking is not defined or otherwise referred to in the existing Health Information Act or in Bill 52. Masking is sanctioned by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and used by the department in its role as information manager of the Alberta electronic health record to prevent information from being seen by other custodians attempting to access information via the electronic health record.

7:50

Custodians can unmask information if they need the information to provide treatment and care to patients, but it should be noted that masking is the current tool used to give effect to a person's expressed wishes. If in the future, Mr. Chair, other tools provide feasible options, the language of the act would be flexible enough to accommodate such a change. Stakeholders appear to recognize the limitations of masking both technologically and in its ability to block access to information permanently or from all access points. I should add that as part of the committee's deliberations the Department of Health and Wellness provided a demonstration of the electronic health record and specifically demonstrated and discussed with us the limitations of the masking feature.

Stakeholders have consistently indicated that completely removing the expressed wishes component from the electronic health record provisions goes too far and fails to strike an appropriate balance between the Alberta electronic health record's efficiency and individual privacy. Therefore, in response to this concern the committee is proposing to include the concept of expressed wishes within the Alberta electronic health record provisions.

The third major issue the committee dealt with relates to stakeholder concerns about balancing the protection of individual privacy and confidentiality of health information with the needs of the health care system. Mr. Chair, for this I would refer hon. members to part B, clauses (a) and (b), of amendment A1. This was by far the most controversial part of the bill and the part that was perhaps examined in most detail by the committee.

Bill 52 as proposed gives the minister the ability to compel custodians to make information accessible via the Alberta electronic health record. Custodians who fail to do so are subject to significant fines. In an effort to strike a more appropriate balance and address stakeholder concerns, the committee is recommending that delegation of this authority be put as preferential approach prior to enabling the minister's ability to compel custodians to make health information accessible through the electronic health record.

Just to elaborate very briefly on this, Mr. Chair, what the amendment proposes is that the authority for requiring a custodian of health information to make that information available to other custodians of health information be delegated to the colleges of the respective health professions. Members will note that in amendment A1 there is a more explicit definition of regulated health professions provided for this purpose. The idea for this is to allow the colleges, which have the right under Alberta law and the responsibility to regulate health practice, to in fact be able to develop standards of practice and codes of conduct that reflect the appropriate uses and behaviours of health professionals in sharing health information via this new medium. The committee is also recommending that the corresponding offence provision be removed, and that is addressed in part D of the amendment.

Mr. Chair, the fourth major issue the committee dealt with relates to health information repositories. Although health information repositories exist in other jurisdictions, the concept is new to Alberta. Bill 52 establishes a basic legal framework to ensure that the Health Information Act will apply to health information repositories.

However, Mr. Chair, concerns have been raised about leaving the details to regulation. Health information repositories are intended to improve access to health information for research purposes only. These amendments simply enable health information repositories to deal with research requests in the same manner as custodians currently deal with health information today. Health information repositories cannot authorize the use of health information for any other purpose. In addition, health information repositories do not expand access to health information beyond what is currently permitted under the Health Information Act.

By creating health information repositories, greater protection will be provided to health information used for research purposes. Rather than requesting information from multiple custodians, a researcher will be able to request information from a single health information repository. Since the repository is the single source of entry to that information, Mr. Chair, it mitigates threats to privacy. For example, a health information repository will be able to conduct data matching and provide the final data at the highest level of anonymity. Currently researchers conduct their own data matching based on information received from multiple sources.

In response to concerns about dealing with health information repositories through regulations, the committee is recommending that Bill 52 be amended to include a provision requiring the Minister of Health and Wellness to consult with the commissioner when preparing these regulations. The committee is also recommending that Bill 52 be amended to address the correction and amendment of health information by health information repositories.

A more detailed description of the standing committee's proposed amendments can be found in our report, Mr. Chair. For now, with

respect to amendment A1, I would just direct members to part C to review the amendments that we are introducing.

Mr. Chair, just in conclusion, in addition to thanking committee members, I would like to point out that the committee heard extensively from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, the Alberta Medical Association, and the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We are very appreciative to all for their advice in our deliberations. As I noted earlier in the House today, I have tabled letters indicating support for the committee's amendments from those three entities. In addition, it's my understanding that the Information and Privacy Commissioner issued a news release this afternoon indicating that he had no outstanding concerns regarding Bill 52 based on the amendments proposed by the committee.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to support our committee's recommendation that Bill 52 proceed with the proposed amendments outlined in A1 as distributed. I would urge all members to join me in doing the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A1.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This is my second go-round now with the Health Information Act and amendments and reviews of it. I was so interested, actually, that I asked to be subbed onto the policy field committee on health, which was charged with reviewing Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2009. I was on the committee that participated in developing the amendments that are now before you.

I have to say that my overriding concern with health information has been the protection of people's personal health information because it is such an integral part of our identity and how we move through the world, our ability to get a job, keep a job, marry certain people, have a credit rating and a standing in the community, maintain an individual identity. Protection of that and everyone else's protection of personal health information are critically important in this day and age.

At the same time, we have immense pressure to be more efficient in the way we deliver health care. One of the things that we're told repeatedly is that we need to be able to share health information about people quicker between health professionals. Indeed, as I've often mentioned to this House, there are a number of individuals in Alberta who would find it reassuring to be able to go to a hospital, present to a hospital for health services, and know that that hospital has access to the same information as the clinic they go to at home and that there's no possibility that there's confusion over medication or past diagnoses or diagnostic tests they've had or ailments they've had. The information is all together for everybody to be able to access.

Certainly, for anyone that's ever been in the hospital, that teeth-grindingly frustrating moment when the umpteenth health professional comes in, takes the clipboard from the end of the bed, and starts over from the top with the same series of questions that the last health professional asked you not six minutes ago is very frustrating. You get asked the obvious question: "Is there no way you people can keep track of all of this information? Why do I have to keep giving it to you?"

8:00

That's part of what we're trying to achieve in electronic health records. The challenge for us is — here's that tricky word — balance, and I actually don't know that it is about balance. I think it needs to

be about protection of personal health information, first, and facilitation of how that information gets out and to whom, second. That's my primary cause.

If we go back to the original bill, it is very clear in its opening sections. It sets itself up to say:

The purposes of this Act are

- (a) . . . to protect the privacy of individuals with respect to their health information and to protect the confidentiality of that information,
- (b) to enable health information to be shared and accessed, where appropriate . . . and to manage the health system,
- (c) to prescribe rules for the collection, use, and disclosure of health information . . .

And this is very important.

. . . which are to be carried out in the most limited manner and with the highest degree of anonymity that is possible in the circumstances.

So collect the least amount of information you can possibly do with, and as much as possible keep that information anonymous. Don't go walking around, you know, giving out detailed health information with names, addresses, and telephone numbers attached to it. That's actually set out under the purposes of the bill and has the paramountcy of the protection in there first.

What we had under Bill 52, I felt, did not meet a number of tests around this privacy. What we attempted to do in the committee, having listened to a number of stakeholders that approached us — and I was surprised because I would not tend to view the AMA as a rigorous, progressive, get-out-there group of people, generally speaking. I would have said that they tend to be more, let me say, conservative, not in their politics, necessarily, but in their approach. They were vigorous in how they criticized the bill because they felt it was really going to have a negative effect on the way they were able to provide health services.

Clearly, they felt that the public would not have confidence in the system and would start to withhold health information from them, the primary health provider, and that would cause a breakdown in the system. And I agree. If there is a balance we're trying to achieve here, that's the balance: we run the system well enough that people have confidence in the system and will give us their personal health information, and we can in turn provide the health service that is necessary.

How do we maintain or uphold that public trust, that confidence in the system that we're using? Frankly, when I first started into this, Mr. Chairman, I thought it was all about electronic technology. I thought it was all about, you know, password systems and people not being able to get into certain kinds of information. You know what? It's not. What we know now, from watching how personal health information gets out there, is that it's mostly about being able to detect and stop, hopefully in advance, human deliberation, people who are sloppy and access personal health information of other people when they shouldn't, people who are deliberate about accessing it. Those people wreck the system for everybody.

What are some of the things we've learned about how to stop that kind of unauthorized use of personal health information? One of the famous examples — and I think it's from here in Alberta through our own Information and Privacy Commissioner — is an individual who was having an affair with someone, and his wife was suffering from a major disease. The individual managed to access the personal health records of the wife, who was suffering from cancer, and tracked her progress, one presumes, to be able to judge the likelihood of supplanting the first missus. This, clearly, is not why we collect health information, so that someone can plan their romantic life. I mean, it's a horrifying, horrifying story. It's the kind of thing that people make up bad movies in Hollywood about. Unfortu-

nately, it's not a bad movie. It was somebody's life, several people's lives, and it happened here in Alberta. It happened, and it happened under the system that we have.

So the audit trails that are available is one of the ways that we are able to find out and, hopefully, move in advance of worse things happening, that we're able to get out in front of someone who is accessing personal health information in an unauthorized way. That ability to have those audit trails in place was very, very important, and that's one of the things that turns up in that first series under A, what we're calling amendment A. I'm sorry; this is amendment A1, but this is under the section A. Under section 11 it's striking out clause (b), which was basically getting rid of the necessity of the minister to do a privacy impact statement, which is another tool that we found is very helpful in checking whether this really needs to happen or that person really needs to get access: why are you doing this? If you have to do a privacy impact statement, it gives us, the system, a better sense of whether that is a legitimate access point. The second section was that the privacy impact statements had to happen before disclosing the health information to a custodian listed in various areas. This was about keeping an audit log in place.

The second series, the B series, is around the electronic health record section, and that's what's in section 20. The sponsoring member, the chair of the committee, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, was right. There's actually a lot in this amendment, but there were a number things we were looking for. One, again, is around people's privacy. There was the ability of the minister to compel information from doctors and even from doctors' medical records. Remember, you've got two terminologies here: an electronic health record, which is that sort of electronic in the sky stuff, with the diagnostic and the lab results and your prescriptions and what happens to you in hospital all going into an electronic health record. A medical record is what the doctor is writing on in your doctor's office. So those in many cases are still paper files, but increasingly they've got a little electronic tablet, like a laptop, that they're walking around with, and that's where they're making the notes now, with some sort of super transcriber for bad doctor handwriting, one must presume, like a translation program.

There was a clause in there that was going to force doctors to give information over to the minister if the minister asked for it, including information from the medical record, which was the little one that's taken in the doctor's office. That was a break point, a tipping point, if you will, I think, for the medical profession, that if people were aware that anything they said to their doctor could end up as part of these records, there just would not be public confidence. So it was important to change that.

There is a new series of how the minister could try and get at that information. At this point I always say to myself: I'm sorry; why does the minister of health need to know my personal health information? Well, for a number of reasons, usually to do with tracking and planning for health care management, you know, some of those census questions we always get annoyed about. Why are they asking these personal questions? Well, it helps for allocation of money and to provide social services in that context, and it's similar to what is being talked about here. They're collecting that information so they have an idea that in a population of this age you're likely to have X number of these kinds of surgeries required, for example. So it helps with health planning, which should help us with our health expenditures, so this would be a good thing.

8:10

The other piece that's covered in this section is the masking provisions. This is something that, no surprise, I was very concerned about because I have heard from a lot of people who for a number of

reasons – let me be specific. I've worked with a lot of people in the queer community. There are still people in there who are living with AIDS, and they're doing well living with AIDS. They're leading productive lives; they're working in many cases. But they certainly don't want that information out in the general public, and they need to be careful about that. They need to be careful about who gets that information. As a matter of fact, you know, lots of us have reason to not want to have our health information sort of bandied about out there.

An individual's ability to mask their information from anyone that just looked on the electronic health record was, I felt, an important feature when I started into this. I'll tell you that I've come to the other end of the spectrum on this. I did do a minority report, which is included in the report from the committee and was tabled in the Assembly. Masking means that certain bits of your information literally get masked, like having a piece of paper over it.

Having watched the demonstration of Netcare, I think the masking can give people a false sense of security. If they think that nobody can look at that information for any reason at all, they are mistaken. There's actually a drop-down menu on the Netcare portal, and you can just click on it. It says: this information is masked. You click on the drop-down menu, and it says: I want to unmask it. Then it gives you half a dozen reasons why you'd want to unmask it: this is an emergency situation; this is a public health situation; I want to; they told me to; they gave me permission to. You just click on the drop-down menu, and, bingo, it's open. So it's not masked in the way people think it's masked. But we had completely lost that provision under what was originally proposed in Bill 52. So for those people that want some kind of masking provision, it is available to them under the amendments that have been brought forward under the auspices of the policy field committee on health.

I think we need a lockbox because that actually does lock up information, and you cannot get it, no matter what. The masking provision, as I say, can be lifted for any number of reasons and without having to go back to the individual that it's about and say: can I unmask this information for you? That's why those phrases, those words about collection, use, and disclosure of health information are so important. You need to get very familiar with these in the act because certain things can be done without disclosing it. Certain things have to go back and get your consent to do that. Is it blanket consent or informed consent? All those things get really important.

I'm running out of time again.

Okay. Section C in the amending document is the one that I proposed, and there's actually another piece on the end compliments of my ND colleague who was also on the committee. One of the things that I learned is that a lot of health information that exists is inaccurate, badly input, incomplete, wrong, or wrong person, and you don't realize that unless there's some reason why you have to access your health record and go: oh, my goodness, I don't have that at all.

I actually had an episode with that, you know, in one of those things you fill out in the doctor's office: have any of your parents ever had diabetes or heart disease, blah blah blah, and you check all those boxes. One of them had got some wrong information about a health issue I'd had as a young woman. They actually had me as having had cancer. Wrong. But that's what was in that particular doctor's file. At one point I applied to get more life insurance, and they make you sign a blanket consent that the insurance company can go look at all your health information to decide if they're going to give you more life insurance. Right? Okay. Fine.

I kept getting denied, and I'm thinking: "What goes here? Like, I'm healthy, I'm exercising, I lost all this weight. You know, I'm a vegetarian. I quit smoking. Good God, what do I have to do here?"

I finally said: "What gives? What's the problem?" They said, "Well, you know, you've got this cancer thing on your file." I said: "I've never had cancer. Where did you get that from?" They said, "Oh, well, from your file." I thought: gee whiz. So I went back to every doctor I had and said: go look in your files because one of you has got this wrong. I found the one that had it wrong and said: it's wrong; correct it. That's the only way I found out. We know that despite all of our best attempts – and you guys know me; I'm pretty picky about information and specificity and accuracy and all of those things. There's an example of a really simple, everyday life experience that happened to me. That happens many, many times over and over and over again.

The accuracy of the health information they hold is critical. The health information repositories are really the big new bit of this act. I wanted to make sure that you could correct any information that is held by a health repository that is wrong. With the help of Parliamentary Counsel I was able to draft amendments, which were accepted by the committee, that essentially said that if you identified it to a custodian, as I had done – remember, I went back to the doctor and said, "You've got it wrong; fix it," and they did fix it – the custodian of the information would be obliged to tell any health information repository to also correct it. So you could get your whole file corrected. That was the point of that.

Then section D is removing the absolutely draconian fine that was in place and went back and reflected on any doctor who wouldn't give the information to the minister that the minister was requesting.

I think these amendments have gone a long, long way to making Bill 52 much better. It still felt very much like a rushed and very rigid process to me. I think we could have done an even better job if we could have spent more time looking at the bill and reflecting on what amendments were really needed. But I know the chair of the committee was determined to get it back before the Assembly and, hopefully, I think in his mind, get it passed before we rise from spring session. It felt very rushed to me. I think we did good work. I think we could have done better work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak to Bill 52 in Committee of the Whole and, in particular, amendment A1, that has been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, also the chair of the Standing Committee on Health. I'd like to start my comments by picking up where the Member for Edmonton-Centre left off in terms of the process through which we went with respect to this bill.

As has been stated by everybody who has spoken to it so far, this bill deals with a very important issue. It deals with the treatment of people's personal health information, their very, very private, sensitive information. It deals with the balancing, if you will, or the integrating, on one hand, of tremendous growth in our technological capacity to collect information and to share it electronically and at the same time, while we collect more and more and more information, the need to preserve it in a way that keeps people's ultimate security maintained.

When personal health information, that information that is shared between you and your doctor – I mean, this is something that the medical profession has for centuries made as a key part of their profession, this notion of patient-doctor confidentiality. The information that a doctor receives about an individual is so incredibly personal and has such significant implications were it to be shared with the wrong person. What this bill deals with in many ways is how we balance this growing technological capacity we

have and tendency to collect information against the right of individuals to preserve the security of that information.

8:20

Now, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre already stated, there was a committee, a select standing committee, that was established in 2004 which was tasked with the job of reviewing the Health Information Act. At the time that the Health Information Act was brought in, in 2000 – I believe it was 2000 – it was seen as being very leading edge, cutting edge, and it was very cutting edge in terms of how we protect privacy and manage information. So a select standing committee was established in 2004 to review how that had worked and also to review a number of issues that they perceived were developing as a result of the initial establishment of the act and the legislative authority.

Now, that select standing committee ultimately prepared a report, which included a number of recommendations, many of which were followed up subsequently through statute and many of which were not. But some of the recommendations stated: you know, there are a whole bunch of other issues that we learned about in the course of reviewing this act in 2004 that need to be referred to another committee for more exploration and more discussion. One of those issues was how we manage this concept of the electronic health record and the way information just shoots from one person to another person to another person over this electronic health record without our ever having the slightest idea that that information was being shared. The committee in 2004 recommended that that issue, the issue around who's allowed into that electronic health care information arena, and a number of other issues should be sent to another committee for further exploration and review.

Well, ultimately, unfortunately though, that committee was never struck. What happened instead was that in the fall of 2008 Bill 52, with its many significant consequences, was presented in the House. It was referred to our standing policy committee, and we commenced meeting on it in January of 2009. Well, what we did was that we essentially had one meeting where we received about an hour and a half, two hours of presentations from the people who wrote the bill, who were presenting the bill to us to convince us that it was a good thing. Then we had a day and a half of hearing submissions from a number of different interest groups, who made, as the chair of the committee has already noted, some very worthwhile, intelligent, very helpful submissions to the committee. Then the plan was to have been for the committee to sit down and work through this information that had been presented to us and, in fact, to get further information as we saw fit.

Instead, what happened was that the schedule changed quite dramatically. Suddenly we were given a total of three hours – through the encouragement of the opposition members I think we ultimately ended up with six hours – to discuss and review and analyze this very complex piece of legislation and come up with amendments. As even this amendment A1 signifies, this amendment in and of itself is a very complicated proposal to deal with some of the concerns that were raised, but it was one that sort of came as a done deal to our committee. I have to say that in many respects I think that we are rushing forward on a very serious set of initiatives with only a limited amount of oversight.

I want to put that out there as a start because I do feel that as legislators we haven't really been given the opportunity to consider these issues with the attention that they deserve. Having said that, there is no question that amendment A1 is a step forward in addressing a number of the concerns that were raised to us. There were other concerns that were not addressed through this amendment, which, obviously, are identified in the minority reports that

were appended to the majority report of the Standing Committee on Health. But this amendment does address some of them.

I think an important addition is the notion under the first part, section A, of ensuring that there is, in fact, a requirement for there to be a privacy impact assessment before information is disclosed to a custodian under certain circumstances. So that's good. I don't know exactly why it is that we were ever in a situation where we were ever trying to avoid that. Nonetheless, it's an improvement to have that back in there.

Section B is an interesting addition to the bill. It's a creative one, and I give credit to the people who helped draft this and, of course, I think, to the chair of the committee because I think he put a lot of work into it in terms of dealing with the very serious concerns that were raised by, primarily, the physicians over the prospect of being told that the minister would be able to tell them and ultimately compel them to put whatever information the minister deemed advisable into an electronic health record. Of course, there were tremendous concerns that what would ultimately happen is that we'd start seeing more and more detailed chart notes getting into this electronic health record.

As I'm sure many people in this House know, doctors now have a tendency – I don't know what percentage of them, but certainly mine does – to listen to you and type into their computer as they're listening. So all the notes of the whole discussion end up in your electronic file. Now, the physicians raised a very good point, you know: if this is what we are compelled to include in the electronic health record, it's going to fundamentally change the way patients communicate with us, and it's going to fundamentally impact the way that we're able to provide health care to our patients. That was a good point.

The proposal that is in this amendment essentially gives a lot more authority back over to the professional associations for them to determine what is appropriate to go in and what is not. That's certainly a good start. There's no question that those folks have tremendous expertise in deciding what is the best balance between what the health record needs to have to provide good care versus what would otherwise put a chilling effect on the patient in terms of what they would be willing to disclose or talk about to their doctor. It's certainly a good component.

My concern, though, is that ultimately we are still leaving that decision to another body, and ultimately that body can be overruled by the minister. We all know it's not the minister; it's the officials in the ministry of health who originally didn't have this kind of information or this kind of balance in the first draft of the act. You know, ultimately there is no complete protection because the way this is crafted, the minister can overrule recommendations made by the professional associations trying to limit the amount of information that they need to put into the electronic health record and, hopefully, also limiting certain circumstances.

But it doesn't quite go all the way. There's still that possibility for too much information to be compelled from individuals and put into an electronic health record. We then move into the situation where we're not a hundred per cent sure for other reasons that that information will be protected as well as it could be.

Definitely I give credit to the creativity that underlay this proposal to try and balance those interests. It's worth exploring whether or not it can work. I just raise a caution that there are circumstances in which I could see it not working. That's all I will say on that piece of it.

The last section that I wanted to talk about relates to the health information repositories. That, as the previous member noted, includes amendments that both opposition members put forward. As I outlined in the minority report of the third party, although these

amendments were accepted, they don't ultimately go anywhere far enough to constrain or delineate the rights and obligations of the health information repository.

Put clearly, the bill as it stands right now gives the health information repository the authority to hold personally identifying health information of Albertans. There is nothing else in the bill as it exists now that compels that repository to follow the majority of the rest of the privacy rules which are included in the Health Information Act. There is nothing in the bill itself that sets out the purpose and the objectives of the health information repository as would be the case in, say, other acts, acts in Manitoba that we referenced in committee debate.

8:30

There is nothing in the act right now that gives the Information and Privacy Commissioner a good deal of authority over regulating the health information repositories. A good deal of the authority that the Information and Privacy Commissioner has to enforce the privacy protection which appears in the Health Information Act arises from the relationship between a custodian and their duties under the act and the enforcement provisions that attach to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Because the health information repository is not a custodian under the act, there are large gaps throughout the act that do not apply to the health information repository.

A simple example is that the Member for Edmonton-Centre proposed an amendment which requires the health information repository to report whether it has corrected inaccurate information that has been sent to it. Then they have to report whether they've corrected it or whether they haven't corrected it. If the health information repository were a custodian, the person would then have the ability to look at the information held by the health information repository to check that the mistake wasn't still on the file.

I'm sure everybody in this Assembly has had the experience of trying to get something corrected or changed and having to do it two or three times because it simply won't go away. In this case, because the health information repository is not a custodian, a person will never actually be able to check whether or not the inaccurate information on the health information repository files has been corrected. They must simply take it at face value. This is just a small example of how this new body, which has the legislative authority to collect personally identifying health information of Albertans, has that legislative authority but is not governed by significant portions of the remainder of the Health Information Act. That's why we have some very serious concerns.

Now, the committee – we appreciated it – did accept our own amendment that in developing the rules, the objectives, the purpose, the functions, all the information that should be in legislation describing what the health information repository does, as all those rules are created by regulation around the cabinet table, at the very least the minister must consult with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. That's good. They must consult. But where these kinds of bodies have been created in other provinces, there has been a much more substantial set of descriptions, rights, obligations, rules set out in legislation. All we have in this legislation is the authority for this body to collect buckets of information and the authority of the government to then through regulation create rules that will govern how that information is managed within the health information repository. So we have some very, very significant concerns.

We talk about how the health information repository is designed for research, but that in and of itself is not even clearly stated within the act. I think we all understand that to be the case, but it's not stipulated in the legislation, so the question is: why not? What other

uses may this information ultimately be put to? What legislative limit will there be on those uses?

Those are the kinds of concerns that we have that remain with respect to Bill 52. There's one other set of concerns that I have, but they are not really addressed directly through amendment A1, that I'm speaking to right now, so I'll wait until this amendment has been dispensed with by the Assembly.

Finally, going back to the issue of the electronic health record covered under section B of this amendment, I did also want to mirror the concerns that were identified by the Member for Edmonton-Centre with respect to the whole concept of masking. I do believe that people are given a very false sense of security about what information they are able to control once it goes into the electronic health record. It's very clear to us that there are a tremendous number of situations within which information that a person believes is masked can become available to others on the electronic health record.

We heard that the technology is developing such that at some point it may be possible to mask certain pieces of information but not others. But that information, that capacity, that technology doesn't exist right now. Basically, what happens is that if you as a patient say to your doctor, "I don't want this information widely shared through the electronic health record," everything must be masked. Well, you would think, then: oh, well, that's not helpful either because then nobody ever gets any information. But, no, that's not true because there is a long list of exceptions such that the mask comes off very, very quickly.

I think, ultimately, what's happening here is that people are going to lose a tremendous amount of control over the carriage and the custody of their personally identifying health information. I'm sure some of you may have noticed that just today on the news there was a breach of privacy where a whole bunch of personally identifying health information – this was, of course, just documentary. Nonetheless, a mistake was made. It should be easy to control these things, but a mistake was made, and that information ended up going up and down 97th Street in Edmonton, copious amounts of personally identifying health information about a number of people who were patients at the Royal Alexandra hospital.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to take a couple of minutes because I'm not sure after the theatrics of the last almost hour that we're any wiser on whether the two members are going to support this amended legislation or not.

First of all, let me say that soon after the Premier established the policy field committees, we heard all kinds of comments from friends in the opposition about how these committees were nothing more than window dressing, that they were just going to give government MLAs something to do, and on and on and on, a typical sort of negative way of looking at things. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think that this particular process that we've gone through for the past now almost four or five months has shown that if members of this Assembly want to have a committee actually work, it can work, and this one worked exceptionally well.

We introduced the bill, a bill that was very sensitive, took the time to have the committee look it over, hear submissions, meet with those who had concerns, come forward with some amendments to the point where the chairman of the committee, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I believe, today in this House tabled letters from the Privacy Commissioner, from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, from the Alberta Medical Association, all supportive of the amendments and the bill going forward. We have a letter from

the president of the Alberta Medical Association, who states in his letter to his membership that they are "strongly supportive" of this particular legislation.

Yet I'm not sure if these two members who've just spoken and spent all of this time – I'm not sure what you do to please these folks sometimes, Mr. Chairman. It boggles my mind when we've got, effectively, the entire province onboard supporting this particular bill, and we have to go through the theatrics we've just seen with these two particular members. So I would just like to say that I think this House should right now support the amendments that have been proposed and move on to other business.

8:40

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure for me to rise for the first time on Bill 52 and to make some comments about, in this case, the amendments recommended by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I will say that health information is extremely sensitive, and we've made significant progress in this province through the electronic health record. Nobody would deny that we now have much better access to information, timely information, transportable information for improved quality care, better access for individuals to the appropriate professional, and more opportunity for effective treatment.

Along with these tremendous benefits in the electronic health record have been the concerns that many of us have and have heard about, whether it's in Canada or internationally, because of the access to information through devious methods and for unknown and perhaps devious motives. The concerns that have been expressed tonight and in the past around this bill and actually quite alarmed the medical profession initially have been and are being addressed in some of these amendments. I'm glad to say that the committee did its work, I think. I congratulate the committee for being so inclusive and actually listening to the different points of view on the issues and coming forward with some amendments that really do address concerns raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, by the health professionals, including the Medical Association, and by our own Member for Edmonton-Centre relating to section C, as indicated.

Let me just briefly for the record say that section A, which concerns, again, the questions raised about who gets access and when and to what information by the Privacy Commissioner, will repeal subsection (5)(b) and require that comments of the commissioner be considered and a response be made before disclosing health information to a particular custodian. That gives us a lot of confidence, Mr. Chairman, that at least there is a secondary oversight before that kind of access to very sensitive information is provided.

We recognize that nominal information has to be accessible at any time to researchers to provide statistical analysis, to establish trends in different conditions, and to make prompt associations between particular conditions and particular environmental situations. But apart from that, we cannot assume that people have the best intentions, whether a designated custodian or the minister himself, without having a secondary provision for the commissioner to review it. Section A also provides that the minister or his department, then, must have to perform the impact assessment and consider the comments that the commissioner has made.

On the issue of section B, this largely arises out of issues raised by the Medical Association. The main concern was the power of the minister to trump, I guess, the concerns of professional bodies who spend their lives developing trusting relationships and ensuring the

confidentiality of information. It did raise significant questions for many of us about what it was that the minister or the health department might have at its disposal but, more than that, how careful they would be in dealing with sensitive information because they are a third party and don't have any particularly personal relationship with an individual or recognize the significance of some information. This amendment goes some distance in ensuring that information from a regulated health professional is made accessible in an appropriate way but balanced by the rights and privileges of an individual and their confidential relationship with their professional.

Subsection (b), again, makes prescribed health information accessible. It's clear here that the health professional body will be responsible to direct the health professional to make the prescribed health information available through the electronic health record. The minister is given the authority to direct a regulated health professional to make information available only after consulting with the relevant health professional body, preparing a privacy impact statement, and considering the comments provided by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It also outlines the repercussions of a regulated health professional to follow the directions of either the health professional body or the minister. It further outlines that an authorized custodian may also make prescribed health information under its control accessible to authorized custodians through the Alberta electronic health record.

Subsection (c) also adds a section where a regulated health professional or authorized custodian must consider the expressed wishes of the individual who is the subject to the health information when determining how much of the information to make available through the electronic health record. This is important as it clearly outlines the individual's primacy in deciding what and when and how it can be released.

Subsection (e) outlines that an electronic log must be kept of custodians who use prescribed health information through the Alberta electronic health record: the name or identifying number of who uses the information via the electronic health record, the date and time it occurred, and the description of the information used. This log has to be kept for 10 years. Individuals may ask the custodian or information manager of the electronic health record to view and have a copy of the log. If the individual makes this request, then the custodian or manager must provide it. This is clearly a protection mechanism so that individuals can identify who is seeing their personal health information.

Subsection (e) also adds a section with respect to where a committee must be made that would provide recommendations to the minister on rules regarding access, use, disclosure, and retention of prescribed health information through the electronic health record, clearly important because at least two members of the committee will be from the public, and this will provide some oversight to the rules.

On the issue of section C information may be amended or corrected when it is in a health information repository. This also gives the commissioner some ability for oversight. This was recommended by our Member for Edmonton-Centre and is eminently sensible. The first section, section 72.4, adds correction or amendment of health information by repository, where if a custodian has corrected or amended health information, the custodian must notify the health information repository of the change. The health information repository then must correct or amend the record within 30 days and provide notification back to the original custodian, who must then notify the individual, clearly important in allowing individuals the ability to personally audit their health information and ensure that information is correct and that this change applies to the record that is in the health information repository.

An individual is also given the right to ask the Information and Privacy Commissioner to review a failure by a custodian to notify a health information repository of an amendment or correction. Clearly an important amendment as it was uncertain what type of oversight the Information and Privacy Commissioner would have over the health information repositories: this amendment clearly outlines the oversight the commissioner would have.

The second section added states that the minister must consult, again, with the commissioner in the preparation of the regulations that would govern health information repositories, ensuring that someone with specific knowledge, with concern for the privacy of Albertans would have oversight and be involved in the drafting of these regulations.

Section D simply removes the high penalties associated with unauthorized access to information and removes, therefore, the threat, I think, of inappropriate or unbalanced recourse following access.

With those comments, I would thank the chairman for the opportunity to speak on this and look forward to further debate. I personally will be supporting these amendments.

8:50

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question. We will vote on the four parts – A, B, C, D – separately, as we stated at the beginning.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

The Chair: On the bill are there any other comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I hate to disappoint the minister of health. You know, it really does disappoint me when that happens. Nonetheless, there is one other set of comments that I'd like to offer on this bill, and they, ultimately, relate to an amendment that I am putting forward. Perhaps what I will do is move the amendment and have it distributed, and then I'll make my comments about the amendment.

The Chair: You can send it to the table, and we will distribute it.

The amendment introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona shall now be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please speak on A2.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that I am proposing is one that would amend section 2 of the current Bill 52. Anyone who'd had an opportunity to read the minority report that our caucus put forward as an addendum to the majority report coming from the health committee would know that what this relates to is the initiative within Bill 52 to add totally privately funded health care providers to the list of health service providers who would have access to the health information and the electronic health record scheme. This amendment that's being proposed to Bill 52 would also change the definition of health service such that it was no longer necessary that that health service receive either partial or full

public funding, so that instead it could be a health service which is entirely privately funded.

Now, generally speaking, whenever members on this side of the House raise the concern about the expanded scope of privately funded health care in our province, we're constantly told that we're seeing ghosts, that we're fearmongering, that it's all in our heads. Yet I have to ask: if that's the case, why is it necessary in this particular bill to change the act so that fully privately funded health services and health care providers can get access to this health information scheme? I appreciate that there are already in our system some providers of health care who have historically been privately funded. Those include dentists, for instance. Those include pharmacists in many cases. I don't agree that those folks, if they're providing a health service that's actually necessary, should be privately funded or at least not partially publicly funded. Nonetheless, I know that that's the history, and that's how this system has evolved, so there are some identifiable professions that are often fully privately funded.

However, it seems to me that if we had no plan to expand the scope and expand the number of people who fit within that definition, it would be quite a reasonable thing to simply list those exceptions within the act. Instead, what we're doing is we're changing the language so that any privately funded health care provider and any privately funded health service will now be included. Indeed, between the time that this bill was initially introduced and the time that this issue was discussed in the policy field committee on health issues, you know, two weeks ago, we found two particular health services which were previously publicly funded that are now solely and completely privately funded. So we've seen the list grow even as this bill has been in debate.

Mr. Hehr: Oh. You mean delisting is really privatizing?

Ms Notley: Indeed, delisting is privatizing. Who would have thunk it?

You know, I appreciate that this bill is not the mechanism for the privatization, but it is a vehicle that facilitates the privatization. For that reason I have very serious concerns with the amendments that are included in Bill 52 right now which would ease the transition to adding more and more privately funded health care providers to this arena and ease the transition of delisting. The more we delist, we won't have to keep coming back and changing this legislation every time we delist another service. Needless to say, given the historical position of our caucus on the need to maintain maximum publicly funded health services, this amendment is a concern.

Now, I also raised in the committee another concern that is very serious to me, which I've not been able to receive any kind of assurance or explanation for how it is not a concern, and that is that by including health care providers who are privately funded and health services that are privately funded, we open the door to allowing an individual's employer access to their health information, and we open the door to allowing insurance companies access to an individual's health information, and we open the door to allowing the Workers' Compensation Board access to a person's health information. When I raised this in committee, I was told: "No, no, no. That's not what we're doing. We're just giving the information to the health service provider in their capacity of providing a health service, so that will govern how they use that information because it's only when they provide a health service." But the reality is that the lines are not that clear; they cannot be drawn that clearly.

Ironically, we're going to be talking about the human rights code after this. One area of human rights that this province is desperately behind on is the issue of the duty to accommodate, particularly the

issue of the duty to accommodate injured and disabled employees in their workplace. Now, that is an issue which crosses the border between health care provision and employer obligations day in and day out. Services provided through different sections of the Workers' Compensation Board also cross that boundary day in and day out. Insurance company doctors, insurance company rehab centres, rehabilitation centres that people go to often cross that boundary. Not only do they go to those rehabilitation centres to get their back improved, to rehabilitate from, say, a workplace injury, but those rehabilitation centres then also create a report which has significant implications for that individual's ability to gain employment, become re-employed, or to pursue other economic objectives which they are entitled to.

Now this body, this provider, will have access to everything, and they will be able to go back: you know, Joe injured his back six months ago at work, but now the insurance company physical therapist will find a record of Joe complaining about his back 20 years ago. Then suddenly it's all related to the fact that Joe's back has been sore all this time, and he doesn't need to get any further support from WCB or the employer or the insurance company or whoever.

9:00

This happens. This happens all the time. This has critical implications for people's very security, for their very economic security, for the very way they live their life. When I said earlier that we were concerned about this issue going through the committee too quickly, this is an issue that is very, very serious, with very, very serious implications, and it has not been fully explored. The law around defining those roles, the health care service provider who works for the employer, is not yet clear. This bill does not find a way to help clarify it for the purposes of this act, so we are moving forward on unlocking people's most sensitive and private information and potentially handing the key to people who have no business having access to this information ever. It is of great concern to us that that's what could happen through Bill 52.

As I stated in the committee, we know that there are roughly about a hundred thousand health care employees who are already sort of subject to the confusion around this. As I've stated before, this is an issue that comes up repeatedly, and although the Information and Privacy Commissioner referred us, I believe, to only one or two actual hearings on the matter, I can say from personal experience that the issue does actually come up more regularly than that. It's often addressed through grievance arbitration because the setting within which this currently happens is one where it's very unionized, and that particular group of employees has a much higher level of protection than the average employee across the province. A hundred thousand employees have a different mechanism that protects them from the wrongs that may be incurred through this bill, but this bill would essentially expand it to the 1 million employees in Alberta, most of whom do not enjoy the benefits of that protection.

This is a very serious issue. As I stated before, when the committee in 2004 reviewed this issue, they said that this particular thing needs to be thoroughly examined just on its own, this one issue of allowing privately funded providers of health services into this arena. This issue on its own needs to be fully considered, and the implications need to be fully considered. The same committee completely rejected at the time allowing the WCB anywhere near this scheme, yet it appears as though inadvertently that's what we're doing. We have never been given the opportunity to fully consider the implications, to inquire, to get assurances, to come up with ways in which we could limit the damage done. As a result, the only way

we see that we can ensure that that damage is not allowed to go forward is by going ahead with the amendment that we're proposing today.

The final point that I would make in support of this amendment is simply that as more and more privately funded bodies are able to gain access to this arena within which our very sensitive personal health information resides, we potentially lose even more control in terms of our ability to regulate and to monitor and to protect. Certainly, no question, that which is publicly funded is not by definition the most careful body, but it is something that's closer and easier to monitor should we choose that we need to do that and should we need to do that.

The Auditor General is already looking at these systems as it relates to government bodies. We know, as I've said in the past, that with the registry systems the farther away we get from that body that monitors the safety provisions, the more likely it is that there may be a breach. Obviously, if we're moving into fully privately funded bodies being able to get access to this information, many of which may have head offices that aren't anywhere near this province, again, the risk is increased with respect to our ability to preserve and protect the sanctity of the health information that resides in these electronic health records.

These are the three reasons why I would urge members of this Assembly to support this motion, and I thank you for the opportunity to put it forward.

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, on amendment A2.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A pleasure to rise and speak to the amendments to Bill 52. Some real legitimate concerns are raised here. When I view any aspect of change to the health care system, I view it through four lenses, basically. Will it improve the quality of care? Will it improve the access in a timely way to appropriate care? Will it improve the cost-effectiveness of our dollars spent in the health care system? Finally, does it protect the rights and freedoms of the individual to their privacy?

This amendment raises some interesting questions with respect to the bill and the amendments just passed, the questions being around whether it's aiding and abetting privatization, whether it's increasing the risk of a breach of privacy, and whether it would decrease the adjudicator access to private health information.

I'm not concerned, frankly, with aiding and abetting private health care. I think we already have a significant degree of private services here. The question is: do people who are fundamentally cared for in the public system have access to the same benefits of an electronic health record, whether they're getting services from a chiropractor or getting services in a hospital, through this vehicle? I believe that they do. I find it difficult to argue that an amendment is needed to suppress private access. I don't think that will in any way affect the rate of progress of private health care delivery in the province, and it will compromise the care of people who are accessing both, whether it's ophthalmic surgery or whether it's chiropractic or psychological services in the private sector. I don't see that the existing bill with the amendments that we have just passed would compromise that.

With respect to the increased risk of privacy breach, obviously the more people that have access to information, the more the risk of a privacy breach, but it's impossible to argue on that basis to restrict information from caregivers whom the individual chooses to take responsibility for their health. While technically true that privacy would be at a little increased risk because of increased numbers of people handling the information, in this case, as the hon. member is

mentioning a private provider, it's not somehow logical, then, to conclude that they will be the ones most likely to breach the privacy any more than others, whether in the public or the private sector, providing the services.

9:10

With respect to access to private information by an employer or an adjudicator, that does raise significant questions, and I would like to think that Bill 52 has addressed some of this. We simply cannot tolerate a system where an employer could have access both to the health records and to the qualifications for compensation and privacy of their health information. That simply cannot happen under the current situation, and it should not be possible under the new provisions of Bill 52. I don't believe it is any more likely to happen than in the past, and with the new provisions of Bill 52 I think it's less likely to happen that there would be this conflict of interest between an employer and some of the benefits programs, insurance programs, or workers' compensation programs that this employee may be entitled to and compromised if this private information was passed along. So while I share some of the concerns – and I congratulate the member for bringing these issues forward as they are issues that I hadn't thought deeply about to this point; I think they're important areas for discussion – I don't find sufficient justification to support these as a basis for moving ahead with this bill.

Those are my comments on the amendment recommended by my hon. colleague. I'll now take my seat and listen to further debate. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief. I'd just like to begin by thanking the hon. Leader of the Opposition for making a number of comments that I would have made as well in response to the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

First of all, we'll begin with the premise offered by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that somehow – and I'm not sure how one would arrive at this conclusion – Bill 52 is enabling legislation for future decisions that may be made around insured health care services under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. I think that if I was looking for a clue that that might be in the offing, I would probably look to proposed amendments in other pieces of legislation. It is certainly not a policy objective as stated in this bill, and therefore it's not a conclusion that I would draw easily.

In fact, Mr. Chair, as you may know, approximately 30 per cent of health care services are funded through private sources, and often these are not exclusively funded by private sources. They are cost shared with patients, with employers through their employer health benefit plans. In fact, many of the professionals who provide these services that are funded in this mixed way are in professions regulated under the Health Professions Act of Alberta. Dentists were one that was mentioned by the hon. member opposite. Physiotherapists receive funding through employer-sponsored plans and privately. Occupational therapists do; podiatrists do. In fact, many paramedical professions that we regulate as professional disciplines provide services that are funded through these means.

The intent of the bill, Mr. Chair, is to bring to bear under the regulations that govern the collection, use, and disclosure of health information that same oversight in the public interest as we have currently for the regulation of the professionals who offer those services to Albertans on a day-to-day basis. I would submit that that

is a responsible and appropriate objective of a piece of legislation as important as this one. I would hope that hon. members would recognize that the funding and the disciplines that provide these services are organized in a way that is substantially more complex than has been suggested here this evening.

On the second point, with respect to inappropriate use of health information by custodians, who may have varying reasons for accessing information, all I can say, Mr. Chair, is that this bill does absolutely nothing to change the obligations of custodians with respect to use of health information. We've seen recent decisions, as recently as a month ago, by the Information and Privacy Commissioner that called individuals to account who, in fact, were authorized custodians who accessed information for inappropriate purposes, employer-related purposes. So we can see that when people do make errors in judgment, knowingly or otherwise, the Information and Privacy Commissioner recognizes those cases and calls those individuals to account.

There is absolutely nothing in this bill, Mr. Chair, that removes the right of any individual to exercise their ability to provide consent or withhold consent for an employer or an insurer or another third party to access personal health information. So, again, really, there's nothing here, in our view, that would cause us to consider support for the amendment. I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. They certainly were issues that were discussed in committee at length.

With that, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wish to speak on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'll speak very briefly and then probably call the question, depending on the process. But I just want to respond. Many good points were made. The only point that I did want to identify is with respect to the decision recently made by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. As I'd mentioned in the past to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, in that particular case the Information and Privacy Commissioner was able to delineate the conflicting role of the health care professional and found that the activity was inappropriate. However, given the rationale and the reasoning upon which the commissioner relied to reach that conclusion, it is truly not clear to me that had that particular health care professional been engaging in the facilitation of a return to work, a duty to accommodate, a workers' compensation claim – indeed, the commissioner himself suggested that had the health and safety nurse been dealing with a workplace injury, the answer might have been different.

So it is because of the very decision mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that I am so deeply concerned about what the implications are for this change to this bill and the scope of the opportunity for these kinds of errors in judgment to be expanded so significantly away from those who simply work for health care employers to those who work for all employers, which is the consequence of the proposed changes to section 2 as it currently stands in Bill 52.

With that final point, I will call the question.

The Chair: The chair shall now call the question on amendment A2.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Now we go back to Bill 52. Any other member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on Bill 52.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief. I just would like to make sure that I'm on the record speaking in favour of Bill 52. I think probably remarks have been made prior to this about the work that had been done on this particular bill through the committee the first time.

The Chair: Hon. member.

An Hon. Member: You're in the wrong chair.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. I thought we were in committee so I could . . . [interjection] But I have to speak from my chair. Thank you. I'm in my chair. Thank you for pointing that out, Mr. Chair.

Where was I? Oh, yes. Just that there was some, I think, good work done in the committee. It came out, it came back into committee, and we, I think, went through many concerns that were certainly mine. I'm not a big fan of the world necessarily knowing my business and still maybe am a little apprehensive, but overall the changes that have been made and the amendments that have been brought through as a result of the recommendations from the committee are good. I thank the chair for the work that he did on this committee. I think that it was a lot of work. It was well focused, and everyone had their say in it.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my chair.

9:20

The Chair: Seeing no other member wishing to speak on Bill 52, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 52 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (continued)

The Chair: The committee now resumes with considering Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009. We have amendment A1, proposed by the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on A1.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My thanks for the co-operation of the House in giving us some time to be able to actually read the amendment and take some stock of it. For those of you that are newcomers to the House, you were almost treated to the specialized Official Opposition drone-on as we try to waste time through something until we've got enough time to read it. By adjourning briefly, you weren't subjected to that.

I thank you for your courtesy in doing that although I have to say it was a bit unusual to have government amendments brought forward and us up debating them instantly. Usually there's an opportunity to present them and then adjourn and come back another day or to table them during the earlier part of the Routine so that we've had a chance to look at them for a couple of hours and then come into the House and debate them at night or something else.

It's quite unusual to, first of all, have an evening sitting where we weren't up to speed on staff and be expecting one Parliamentary Counsel to handle all of this and then to have the amendments come onto the floor and have to debate them immediately, so thank you for that.

An Hon. Member: It's not unusual at all.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. It actually was pretty unusual, especially for the last four or five years.

What we have before us is A1, the government amendment to Bill 44, and as per my request we have severed the two sections for the purposes of voting. Essentially, what we have is that section A is dealing with the very controversial section 9, which amends section 11.1 of the original bill, and that was the section that has been commonly referred to as the parental opt-out section. Some people have called it a parental rights section.

This was the part that was new. Many, including myself, argued that, one, you shouldn't be doing it, and two, if you absolutely had to do it, you shouldn't be doing it in the human rights act because this section is giving direction to the school boards, in essence, and telling them, one, that they have to provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student if they're going to have any instructional material or teaching instruction, any classroom time spent on a subject matter that dealt explicitly with religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation, and secondly, that if the school did receive back a written request signed by a parent or a guardian, that student would be excluded from that instruction, and the teacher could not penalize the student academically, and some additional alternative instruction would have to be provided for them to make up for that.

Of course, what goes with this is that if this section was contravened – we're talking about the human rights act, after all – then that gave the parent or guardian the opportunity to bring a human rights complaint against the teacher or the principal or the school or the school board. I think we have not even begun to comprehend what far-reaching, rolling effects this section will have on our society as we know it.

You know, if you look at this from a parental rights point of view, this is something that a number of states in the U.S. have tried to get into their legislation and that has been vigorously opposed. Here with 72 members of a Conservative caucus voting – well, we'll see if it's a free vote – it's quite likely that the government will be able to with their majority implement this into law. I can see this having an effect on allocation of resources, prioritization of services that are offered by government, depending on whether or not you fall under what is being assumed by this particular clause.

The amendment that they're working on is to say “primarily and explicitly” – in other words, add in the words “primarily and explicitly” – dealing with religion, sexuality, and sexual orientation and a small change around human sexuality. In fact, I had an amendment ready to go that would have done exactly that, add the word “human” in front of the word “sexuality” because it had been pointed out to me by a number of teachers that it would be very difficult to teach biology and some of the other sciences if you could not in fact refer to different sexes because that's how it occurs in nature. You had to be able to talk about that, or it would be very difficult for a teacher to work in the classroom and actually impart that knowledge.

Those two changes have been brought in plus an additional clause that's added in that says: by the way, if this is an incidental or indirect reference to religion, religious themes, human sexuality, or sexual orientation, it wouldn't have effect in the larger picture. What we would have, then, is a parental opt-out section – it would

still be in the human rights act, not in the School Act – which would still require notification to parents or guardians about the type of instruction although it's now saying: subject matter which would primarily and explicitly deal with religion, human sexuality, and sexual orientation. It would still require that teachers, on the written request of those parents and guardians, would exclude the student from the instruction. They would provide something alternative. Just to clarify, the subject matter primarily and explicitly dealing with religion, sexuality, and sexual orientation would not apply where this was an incidental or indirect reference.

That amendment does not fix what is in this bill. I think, in fact, that to me this clause is a perversion of what was intended by the human rights legislation and even a perversion of what I think was originally intended by the minister and by the government, which was to strengthen the administrative abilities of the Human Rights Commission and to add in sexual orientation. I cannot countenance this section.

I have gone back into the communities that I deal with and have said: what do you want me to do? Essentially, what I got back from them were instructions saying: “Don't do this. Don't support this.” Here it is:

While I would like to see [sexual orientation] in, I do not want to see it in at the cost of the opt out clause . . . By expressly including sexual orientation in the legislation they are taking back with one hand what they purport to give with the other.

9:30

I think that it also gives a larger message. You know, it was bad enough that we gave a message that the province, although it would begrudgingly offer the service of protection on the grounds of sexual orientation, particularly around housing, employment, and access to government programs and services, there was a sort of megamessage there, “But we don't really like it very much,” because they wouldn't write it into the legislation. Now they've done that, but they've given it with one hand and taken it away with a much larger hand to say essentially with this clause that it's okay to discriminate, that it's okay to have children not learn about certain kinds of people. I just cannot support it, and I think many other Albertans can't support it.

As a result, Mr. Chairman, I have a subamendment, which is at the table, and I would ask that it be distributed at this time.

The Chair: Okay. This amendment is now known as sub-amendment SA1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please continue.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, this is a subamendment, and this is part of what I had to get organized, with the co-operation of Parliamentary Counsel, in no time flat here tonight. Thank you, everyone, for co-operating with that.

Looking at the government amendment, which came in two sections – section A, which was amending section 9, and section B, which is amending section 16, a different section – my sub-amendment SA1 completely strikes out section 9. With that, I hope what I am doing is removing that opt-out section.

Some of the material that I've been reading in support of that are things like the Sheldon Chumir foundation, and they're talking about the legal test for what counts as religion. What we're talking about here is that a family could decide that a student, a child, was not to be exposed to certain concepts, including a concept under that subheading of religion, of many different things. There's been some argument back and forth in this Assembly in question period about: well, of course, you know, it couldn't be mistaken to be such and such and so and so. Well, yes, it can. If you go out onto the street and say to somebody, “What exactly does the word ‘religion’ mean

to you, and how do you see it playing out in the context of the School Act?" you would get as many different answers as people that you spoke to.

I was looking for the legal definition, and in my reading through a number of things, I actually ran across something that will serve that purpose for me in the Sheldon Chumir document, that was sent around to all of us, that is dated May 8. They say:

The wording and potential scope of the proposed opt-out is far too broad and vague. Given that the legal test for what counts as religion, which has been consistently pronounced by the Supreme Court of Canada, is "sincerely held belief," there can be absolutely no doubt that all sorts of things could be construed as dealing "explicitly with religion."

They go on to say:

The sincere Creationist believes that much of science, including evolution, deals explicitly with religion in a highly offensive way by contradicting the word of God. They will want to withdraw their children from at least some science instruction and Bill 44 invites them to do so.

I think they have put that very well.

That goes forward under a number of the other headings that are here. I mean, there's an entire discussion to be had around religion and parents withdrawing their children from curriculum or teaching or instruction based on religion, which, as we've talked about, is a sincerely held belief, but also around sexual orientation and human sexuality. I was talking about the sexual orientation because, you know, here we have it now written in as a protected grounds, and then you turn around and say: but, you know, we can withdraw a number of children out of those classes so that they don't come to understand what this is about, that there are people who have a different sexual orientation on the face of this earth and that they have certain protected rights, as do many others.

We end up with children that are not taught analysis and critical thinking and an understanding that there is a diversity in our world and that you need to learn to work with them in many cases. You can choose to absent yourself from many things, but we all live in this world. We're all moving about on its streets, and there are some things that you need to learn how to work with. To simply remove a child from a class is not going to help them.

I've read through a number of education documents, letters from teachers, e-mails, other policy documents, even the School Act itself, which talks about, you know, looking for situations which can challenge children and push them beyond their normal bounds of comfort so that they do learn that there are different things out there and find coping mechanisms for that and are challenged to think and to be critical and to analyze the material that's given to them, learn to cope with that and work within it.

I think it's important that we do take this section 9 completely out of this bill. It is the one large anomaly that is part of this proposed Bill 44 right from the get-go. We're talking about, you know, writing in sexual orientation, as the Supreme Court directed the province to do some 11 years ago now. The rest of what's in this act is a number of changes: moving this from a commission to more of a tribunal way of dealing with things, some discussions around the titles that are being used, you know, substituting tribunal for panel, and some other changes like that.

Having this opt-out section, I've been told by a number of people, was some sort of a swap, a deal in the Conservative caucus, and that may well be. That may well be what that caucus is happy with, but I don't think that gives us good legislation. As I said before, this could have a very, very far-reaching effect on allocation of budget resources, prioritization of who gets money and for what. Even at the most basic level the administration that is required of an individual school to deal with what's anticipated in this clause is an additional

resource. Additional money will have to be pulled away from other student-focused learning activities to pay for the administrator that has to go through their curriculum every September and say: okay; these are the people that we're going to have to notify that there are religious themes or a religious connotation or meaning or could offend some people that have sincerely held beliefs in these classes. These are the people that need to be notified about sexual orientation appearing possibly in, you know, the poetry section of the English class, and these are the people that have to be notified about human sexuality. Then every time the school contemplates having a special speaker come in at Christmas or anything else that the school wants to do but is not strictly according to the curriculum they've already notified people about, they have to go through that all over again.

9:40

That's no small amount of resource that gets dedicated to notifying a bunch of people about what they're already doing. Here's where, you know, I'm told: well, this is already happening in Alberta, so it's no big deal. Well, if it's already happening in Alberta, then don't put it in this act because this is not where it should be. Aside from the fact that it shouldn't be happening, it should not be in this act.

I think I've stated pretty clearly and with some force and passion why I think it's important that section 9, that is commonly being referred to as a parental opt-out section or a parental rights section, should be removed from this act.

Let me just state in closing that I think that if parents, families, whatever your family unit is, want to, you know, discuss issues at home and have a certain focus on the way they lead their life, that's great. But when we're talking about a public education system funded by a province, by all the taxpayers, where we have a standard and an expectation that students will go out into the world, that we will have a reputation outside of our borders about what the standard of education is – and that's a standard; it means that everybody has that – and then we bring into play something like this, it's just wrong, and I think that it hurts the province. Let me be clear. I'm not saying that parents deciding to educate their children in a certain way is wrong. I think putting it into this act is very wrong.

Thank you for the opportunity to move that amendment.

The Chair: On subamendment SA1, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I want to speak strongly in favour of this particular subamendment because I believe strongly that section 9 of this bill should be struck. I think it is badly conceived, badly drafted, that it's been badly executed and it should be tossed out. That, in effect, I think, is what this subamendment would do.

In some ways it's ridiculous that this issue has come up at all in 2009 in Alberta. I feel like we're back decades ago or even a century or more ago, not in 21st century Canada. Yet here we are debating issues that had been settled long ago and were nonissues until this strange section 9 appeared in what otherwise would have been a good-news bill for the government. I think we're going to end up spending a lot of the evening talking about sex and religion. Those are two topics that tend to stir up pretty strong passions, so I'm looking forward to lots of engagement from people. I can tell you that I'm feeling pretty engaged in this topic right now.

Well, let's start with the sex, Mr. Chairman, the issue in section 9 and in the proposed amendment that talks about – let's see; I've got to get the wording right here – human sexuality or sexual orientation. Now, I'm glad the word "human" is in there because it was a pretty glaring problem before. It's interesting that they chose

to put in the word “human” because I think it reflects how poorly drafted this particular piece of legislation was and is unless we turf section 9.

The way it stands right now is that any kind of reference to sexual reproduction could be caught up in this legislation. Now, this amendment bringing in the word “human” would narrow that down, but frankly it should all be tossed out. I had issues brought to me, and sometimes with great humour, by teachers saying: “My goodness. Now we can’t talk about sexual reproduction at all as this bill is proposed.” I had one of them speak to me. Their son had just finished grade 9 biology, and they learned there about plants, Mr. Chairman. And guess what? Plants in their own special way have sex. Plants get it on. There are male plants and there are female plants, and actually there are some plants that are both male and female. I know that may be shocking and perverse and outrageous to some people in this province. [interjections] Yeah, they’re hermaphrodites, in fact, as the Leader of the Opposition just mentioned to me. I thought that same thing.

Now, I’m not as informed on this as the Leader of the Opposition because he’s a medical doctor, but it happens that I have a printout on hermaphrodites. See? Mr. Chairman, if this bill is carried to its logical conclusion, this kind of stuff potentially could be turfed out of schools. So let me just remind people what hermaphroditic means.

A hermaphrodite is an organism having both . . .
Hold your breath.

. . . male and female reproductive organs. In many species, hermaphroditism . . .

And I don’t know if my pronunciation is correct there.

. . . is a common part of the life-cycle, enabling a form of sexual reproduction in which partners are not separated into distinct male and female types of individual. Hermaphroditism . . .

I won’t go into the Greek origins of the word.

. . . most commonly occurs in invertebrates, although it is also found in some fish, and to a lesser degree in other vertebrates.

Now, I won’t go on. There are lots of pages here, but actually the reason that I thought about this is that I was taught about hermaphrodites in school, Mr. Chairman. It’s true. I think it was maybe junior high. Maybe it was high school. I think that was actually an important thing to learn. I’m getting strange looks. Maybe there are people in here who didn’t have that same kind of education, but here in Alberta where I went to public school we were taught about hermaphrodites.

Now, I think we might as well face the truth, though, that not all plants are hermaphrodites. There are lots of ways for plants to reproduce, Mr. Chairman. This is just basic information that would be available to kids, and under the way this bill had been drafted, potentially kids would be pulled out of classes for this. This is just a bio review of plants, plant reproduction. The first sentence: “Plants can reproduce asexually or sexually.” It goes on: “Sexual reproduction in plants involves male and female plant organs. The female structures involved in sexual reproduction are the stigma, the style and the ovary,” and on and on it goes. Other material is all over the place which is fundamental to our teachings of science.

Now, this is only dealing with plant reproduction, Mr. Chairman. We haven’t even mentioned animal reproduction.

Mrs. Forsyth: Oh, no. Animals have sex, too?

Dr. Taft: Yes. I know. It’s quite something to consider, but animals do reproduce sexually. As one of the articles aimed at kids says – I don’t know if I can find it here. I won’t dwell on this, Mr. Chairman, but I think the point here is that the fundamental point of this part of this bill is just misguided. We get the word “human”

brought in, so at least – at least – we narrowed things down that much.

9:50

But it still raises the question: where is this coming from? Where is this anxiety about human sexuality coming from? I think, more specifically, why did it suddenly emerge in this caucus today or this winter? There’s certainly been lots of talk about the rise of the far right in this caucus, and that’s led a number of people to do a little bit of research. Mr. Chairman, one of the things we found was a speech given by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View before he was actually elected, and I think this speech probably tells much about the spirit behind section 9 of this bill. It doesn’t matter how heavily amended it is, unless we toss it out, as the subamendment proposes, it’s a dismal thing.

I’m going to read you a little bit about this speech. It was delivered to the World Congress of Families. I won’t give the member’s name, but he sits currently as the Member for Foothills-Rocky View. It was delivered before he was elected, so I believe it’s from about ’99. It’s about 10 years ago. I believe he has held to these views, and I think these views have actually shaped this piece of legislation. The speech goes on and on. I won’t read every word of it, but I think there are a handful of key points to be made.

One is about the speech’s references, multiple, to the idea of the natural family. I’ll just give you a couple of examples of that. I’m quoting here from the speech.

Recently, however, the moral dimension of liberal democracy – and the family’s crucial role in it – has been rediscovered by social scientists. This new body of social science recognizes the importance of the natural family to a properly functioning democracy.

It goes on in several places referring to the idea of the natural family. I’ll go on further down. The general idea of the speech is that modern society is being threatened by the move to give gays and lesbians equal rights and by the feminists, so I think that’s the context of this. If I wanted to read the whole speech, everybody would get it, but I won’t subject people to that.

The speechmaker, the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, speaking in 1999, is opposed to these developments. He wants to protect what he calls the natural family, which is an interesting position. I’m going to read a little bit here. He calls the feminists and the gay rights people the new egalitarians. He says:

If the rediscovery of the social value of the family is good news, there is bad news on another front. There is another stream of modernity – represented primarily by the gender feminists and gay rights movement – that target the natural family as public enemy number one. According to the feminist-gay gospel, the great evils of this world are sexism and homophobia, and their breeding ground is the traditional family. Hence, the gay-feminist project has become a social engineering project – to use the coercive power of the state to undermine the existing family and to reconstruct in its place their gender-equal utopias.

I’ll stop quoting for a moment there. Just imagine a gender-equal utopia. My, oh my. Now, that’s a threatening concept, isn’t it, Mr. Chairman? I imagine that’s the kind of thinking that’s behind section 9 of this bill.

Now, I’m going to refer back to this speech, but I’m going to go to something else. I want to address the idea of a natural family because there is this sense that somehow there is a natural family and that there’s only one true family, and that’s a male and a female and kids. But I think the Member for Foothills-Rocky View should probably read some of his western Canadian history. I know he’s actually originally from the United States, but he’s also an academic and a well-read one. I draw his attention, for example, to a recent publication by the University of Alberta Press. It’s an academic

publication. It's called *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, and the subtitle is *Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915*. It is by a woman, Mr. Chairman. Her name is Sarah Carter. What the book outlines, or more than outlines actually – it's very extensive and carefully researched – is the clash of different forms of family. It outlines the very extensive evidence that there were other forms of family in western Canada before this idea of just the nuclear family took hold.

Let's see. I can pick out perhaps, oh, a few quotes. I'm just flipping through the book here, Mr. Chairman. On page 5:

In Western Canada . . . there existed diverse forms of marriage among Aboriginal people, including monogamy, polygamy, and same-sex marriage, and no marriage needed to be for life as divorce was easily obtained and remarriage was accepted and expected.

I'll stop the quote there. But imagine that. There was more than one form of natural family. Or perhaps in the views of some this was not natural. Perhaps the First Nations people before the 1880s were living some kind of unnatural existence. I don't know. Perhaps the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, when he does some more studying, would be able to fill us in a little bit more.

I'll just read a few other quotes here, Mr. Chairman. How about this one? On page 32 of this book:

Some European fur traders wholeheartedly adopted the diversity of Aboriginal marriage law and had a series of wives, or several at the same time. Many fur traders left a wife behind in England or Scotland and at the same time had a wife in the west. Some had several wives in the west.

It goes on at great length. I'll stop that quote there.

Now, this next one is a particularly interesting case. It's on page 37 of this book. Do you know why it jumped out at me? Because it involves a person who was born in 1831 in Fort Edmonton, and Fort Edmonton in 1831 was about a hundred yards from where we're standing right now, very close to home, folks. I'm on page 37. Here's how it goes:

One example was Red River resident John F. Grant, born at Fort Edmonton in 1831, although raised by his relatives in Trois-Rivières following the death of his mother . . . He returned to the west at the age of sixteen and before his death in 1907 he had seven wives and at least twenty-one children.

Now, that is something to contemplate, isn't it, Mr. Chairman?

It goes on:

His earlier wives were from various Aboriginal nations and his last two were Métis.

And on and on he goes.

My point, Mr. Chairman, is pretty clear, that there are many forms of family, and this idea that there's just one natural family, which is espoused at great length by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, I think needs to be treated with some deep, deep skepticism. But I believe it's the thinking behind section 9 of this particular act.

It's interesting, as you go through the book, that there's a discussion of the influence of the Mormon church on attitudes towards marriage and by other groups as well: Doukhobors, Ukrainians, various others. Many forms of marriage were brought to western Canada, and they didn't all fit the ideal of the natural family, but they were families. And you know what? In some of these cases the notion of an illegitimate child didn't even exist because every child was legitimate. Every child was cared for by somebody. It might have been an aunt or a grandparent, but every child was part of the community.

10:00

I'm going to return now to some other points made by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View in his speech. He talks at length about moral relativism, and he says, "The new role of moral relativism in the redefinition of human rights is obvious in such issues as abortion and gay rights." Then he goes on.

Here is the great paradox in this "new improved" version of human rights. Whereas human rights once stood for something objective and eternal, now it stands for the subjective and the temporal. Whereas once human rights pointed toward what is right always and everywhere, regardless of government policy or public opinion; now it means "what I want, here and now."

Interestingly, I think the notion of human rights gets turned around to resist human rights, so the rights of, for example, all citizens to marry somebody they love suddenly get resisted through a perversion of the idea of human rights. That's what I think we're watching here.

He also speaks at length about the role of the courts and how the courts are, in fact, a big part of the problem. I think that's particularly relevant here because what's actually prompted this piece of legislation to come forward at all is a ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, which most Canadians think was a good ruling. I know people in gay marriages, Mr. Chairman, and they deserve the equal rights of all of us. But when I read this speech, you know, you get the idea that the courts shouldn't have made this ruling.

I'm going to quote again from his speech. It says:

A final distinguishing characteristic of the New Egalitarians is their love affair with non-representative, non-accountable institutions: courts, rights bureaucracies and recently the United Nations. Their recourse to the coercive authority of non-accountable institutions is not by accident.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on sub-amendment SA1.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a privilege to rise and speak to the subamendment which appears to have brought some sanity and some wisdom back to this legislation, and it would actually make this bill a whole lot better. We can see that striking out this whole section 9 would take out the essential piece of the act which has been called the parental opt-out clause or the return Alberta to the 1940s clause or whatever clause you want to use. It's simply one of those clauses that has been put in there. I'll read it because every time I read it, it actually still shocks, stuns, and disturbs me that this is happening in the year 2009 here in Alberta, here in Canada, where we're part of the free world that has adopted science, has adopted a progressive agenda, so to speak.

I look at these words. Well, what the minister was proposing to do was strike out "explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation" and substitute "primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation." Well, let's look at that first and just sort of look at the merits of that change. Yes, I'll agree with the members that have spoken from this side of the House so far that human sexuality, well, yes, that is at least a basic element to this bill that should have been included. Again, like the Member for Edmonton-Riverview noted, it just goes to how poorly drafted and how badly thought out the entire bill was to actually have made that mistake in the first place.

But I look at this, and don't get me wrong. I was a lawyer, not accused of ever sitting on the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, when I try to look at these words, "explicitly with religion," "primarily and explicitly with religion," again, that's just lawyerspeak. How it's going to dramatically affect . . .

The Chair: May I interrupt you one second?

Hon. members, please, if you carry on a conversation, there's a place out there, the Confederation Room, or if you do it in here, please lower the level.

Hon. member, please continue.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I read that, and essentially it doesn't make that much of a difference to me. This is still being enshrined in an act. It's still "primarily and explicitly." Well, what does that mean? It's open to interpretation, as are the terms "religion," "human sexuality," or "sexual orientation." Like many things that are of scope and substance, religion and human sexuality and sexual orientation are broad-based topics that in an open, modern society take on a variety of dimensions and interpretations by many individuals, groups, and anyone in between. Simply put, they can come up with a whole host of ideas of what those terms mean. So by simply adding those two things to it, I don't believe they adequately do any justice to the bill or change the thrust or substance of what we are subjecting the Alberta population to.

Then I even see more additions put forward by the minister.

This section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes, human sexuality or sexual orientation in a course of study, educational program, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.

I'll tell you what. If that paragraph isn't open to a legal interpretation, having people chomping at the bit to go try this legislation in 47 different ways, I really haven't seen a paragraph that looks like that, then. Good luck on this having any sort of clarification whatsoever to the bill. I don't know whether it confuses it more, but it certainly doesn't help the entire situation. The entire exercise here has been wasted. The only sane and sensible thing to do is to move to the motion made by the Member for Edmonton-Centre that can amend amendment A1; that is, striking out section 9 as it exists. That seems to be the only thing that we as reasonable people, which I hope we are, in this Legislature can do in a reasonable society.

They were interesting, some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He asked: "Where is this legislation coming from? Who might be asking for this type of legislation to be done?" You know, it struck me. I sort of thought to myself: "Who might be calling for this legislation? Who—maybe from above or below or something like that—might be influencing the current, I guess, Legislature or government at play here?" Really, the only thing I can see here that has come into play is that somehow Ernest Manning and William Aberhart have sent their messages down to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit and have played a trick with many members on this side of the House and said: we are returning to 1945; we are returning to 1945. [interjections] It's a seance.

Those individuals, it's well known, have a play that was written about seances and how they would, you know, maybe conjure up ideas of how faith and their vision of the world and their vision for Alberta would continue on for the long haul.

10:10

An Hon. Member: Permanently.

Mr. Hehr: Permanently. I know.

And this looks like that vision that they had in the early '40s of keeping Alberta, I guess, as a sort of enclave by itself which really wasn't interested in learning the modern ways of science and religion, that we would become a place where ideas were stifled, that really true knowledge really wasn't warranted or we won't recognize other ways except for the models of, I guess, a narrow Christian sect in a one-horse town with only one way of praying and one way of doing things. Well, it looks like that could have happened because, really, that is the only thing that could happen.

You look back to where 1971 was where you really have the emergence of the Progressive Conservative Party. You have people like Ron Ghitter and parliamentarians like Peter Lougheed who said:

"You know, let's throw off the shackles of this type of thinking. Let's get Alberta into a modern world, a modern way of understanding, a modern way of embracing this world view, and to really take Alberta from where it was." I look back to the way it was. At least on the social conservative side of things it was seen by other progressive states as being somewhat backward, okay? I know that's what many people have said, that Alberta at that time was somewhat, I guess, closed minded.

That's why individuals like Peter Lougheed, who when he studied at the University of Alberta—by all accounts at that time a very liberal law school—came out with some of these ideas of moving a progressive social agenda that really saw people embrace different colours, different creeds, different religions, and more of a recognition that we weren't a one-horse town with one steeple and one preacher and we all prayed to the same god and we all married our high school sweethearts and we all just went about our business. Yeah. I guess they realized that, no, things change and the world has changed and the people of Alberta are going to change with it.

So what I can only think that again brings me back to how this legislation got passed is because it's truly a turn-back from where this party was in 1971 even. You look at things coming out of that party at that time were truly progressive pieces of legislation, you know, written by Senator Ghitter. He wrote on tolerance and understanding, a great piece of work that recognizes human differences, recognizes the compassion and caring of all members of the community and their contribution to it, and recognition that society should embrace science and learning and understanding in the classroom. You know, those documents in those early days referenced a learning. You saw in the recent Canadian Press article where Senator Ghitter spoke out and said: "You're right. Something's been lost here." He was actually embarrassed by what had happened.

All I can really say—and I alluded to this the last time I spoke—is that this is, I guess, what you get when you have a governing party that is neither progressive, nor is it conservative. It has become a flag of convenience, I guess, for many people to wave in hopes they'll get elected, and they go in the back rooms and they trade one argument for another and it comes out to some sort of mishmash approach of no direction, no idea of what actually Progressive Conservatism means. It's essentially the big tent party at work. It doesn't know what the heck is going on. So on things like this you get a Social Credit-like legislation that comes into play.

Okay, let's face it: in no uncertain terms this takes us back a long, long, long time ago in a galaxy far away, to quote a famous movie in the 1980s. Let's face it; it does. I think some of the more progressive members—it not only was Senator Ghitter but other members who had been of that party and who have also spoken out. [interjection] Did he? I don't know if he did, but other people have come out.

Anyway, I'm sure I'll get to speak on this more, but that's the only thing I can say. A seance occurred. Ernest and other people who were around a long time ago and who I thought weren't ruling the province are back, and they're having their way, and they're taking Alberta back a few years with this.

Mr. Mason: Bible Bill.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah, Bible Bill Aberhart. Exactly. The Sunday night radio show will be back. Maybe Premier Stelmach may wish to do it, or maybe someone else would—I'm not sure—but it'll be back on the airwaves soon.

Thank you very much for your time here tonight. I'm sure I'll have some more to add a little later.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wanted to speak to this subamendment because I believe that the amendment brought forward by the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit is a positive step towards providing clarity to this section of the bill. I believe that any talk about getting rid of this section and the heightened rhetoric around some of the issues takes us away from what the essence of this particular section in the bill is about. The key issue is: is parental choice and authority over their own children's education a courtesy we afford parents through policy regulation or the School Act, or is it the fundamental right that a parent owns and which properly belongs entrenched in our human rights act?

In my mind, any discussion about how this may or may not affect teachers' ability to facilitate classroom discussions or the administrative processes of school boards is, quite frankly, irrelevant. Like any fundamental right that is enshrined in the act, current practices, systems, and norms must adjust to be in compliance with the rights that are enshrined in the act. It would be a sad day in our province's history when we decided to start cherry-picking which fundamental rights are to be protected or not.

I understand that enshrining something as a fundamental right in the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act is not without controversy. Our society is comprised of diverse individuals, and we are not going to all share the same set of uniform values. In fact, it is this act that is charged with protecting those minority groups that do have different values. I recognize that some might not agree with the parental rights and that parental rights are as fundamental as other rights that are enumerated in the act. I also recognize that for some, in accordance with their value system, parental rights are just as important or more important than some of the other rights that are enshrined in the act.

The bottom line, Mr. Chair, is that parents play a fundamental role in the development of our young people. While our public education system is also fundamental to the development of our future citizens, young people spend less than 15 per cent of their time under the age of 18 in a classroom. This puts a huge responsibility on parents to guide, direct, and oversee the development of their own children.

As I was taught, both in school and by my parents, rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. You cannot ensure effective responsibility without the appropriate rights and protections, and vice versa you cannot be afforded certain rights without fulfilling the appropriate responsibilities. Based on the above reasoning, I believe that this clause is as important as any other within the act.

Even further to that, Mr. Chair, there was mention of the United Nations. I can't remember in what context, but if you go to the United Nations declaration of the rights of the child, principle 7 states that "the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents."

10:20

The UN convention on the rights of the child, article 14, section 2:

States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

Article 18, section 1:

States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

Then article 29, section 1:

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to . . .

(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Notice that it does say at the beginning of that section: "the development of respect for the child's parents."

Mr. Chair, I do believe that if you look at all of this, this is a fundamental right within our society and, therefore, should be enshrined in this piece of legislation.

Additionally, I simply do not agree with the sentiment that because a similar clause already exists in the School Act, this section is simply not necessary. If this type of reasoning would be acceptable, there would be no need to specifically enshrine sexual orientation into the act as we have already for a decade had protections under the Supreme Court decision. Simply, that just does not wash with me, Mr. Chair. Again, I submit to all the opposition parties whether they think it's appropriate to cherry-pick fundamental human rights, which I believe is what they're doing.

With those comments, that's the reason why I will not be supporting this subamendment and why I believe that the amendment brought forward by the hon. minister is appropriate to further specifically define what the intent of the legislation is.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under 29(2)(a) am I allowed to ask . . .

The Chair: No. No.

Mr. Mason: Oh, we're in committee. Okay.

Well, I'm going to speak again, but I can't let that particular speech pass without a few comments, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member is saying that the opposition wants to cherry-pick fundamental human rights, but I submit to you that he doesn't understand the concept of human rights at all. Human rights are not something that exist, that are handed down to us; they are something that society as a whole adopts and chooses to make a right because people need to be protected.

Now, people on the basis of sexual orientation are discriminated against. There's no question about it. They're discriminated against for jobs. They're discriminated against for housing. They are discriminated against and bullied at school. There is a reason why we provide and extend that right to people, because there is an actual situation that those people face in their daily lives from which they need some protection. Society is not perfect. Society has prejudices. They go away with education and over time, but in the meantime we need to have protection for that. The same thing applies, for example, to women, who have also experienced discrimination. People with disabilities require some protection because they are discriminated against.

There is no evidence in this particular case that children whose parents have different religious views or different moral views are in some way discriminated against. In answer to questions today in the House the minister was unable to give an example of any particular instance of discrimination which required protection in this case.

I would like to ask the hon. member: if he thinks this is a fundamental human right and we are cherry-picking and choosing not to

apply it, why are we not providing a basic human right for children in schools against bullying? We could do that. Or if students have certain disabilities or special needs and the school system does not provide adequate facilities or programs for them, we could protect that as a right and say: those children have a right to those programs and those facilities. This act is not doing so.

To suggest that there are these rights that existed before this act was introduced is absurd. What has happened here is that a particular group in the government caucus has enforced a particular approach or a particular view because they choose and they want to make this a right. They do that for certain particular reasons, and the pros and cons of that can be debated here. The very suggestion that we are cherry-picking human rights and that in some fashion the rights that the government is trying to extend in this act existed before and that we are denying them is absurd. This is the political agenda of a small, far-right faction of the Conservative caucus.

Across the United States fundamentalists and evangelical Conservatives have attempted to impose this very type of approach, and they have failed. They have been prevented because it's not a human right, Mr. Chairman. It's not a fundamental human right at all. It is an attempt to impose a certain view in the school system at the expense of a broad scientific education, which I believe all children are entitled to regardless of whether or not their parents wish to take that away from them under the guise of parental rights.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on amendment SA1.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to weigh in on this amendment, and I support it being removed. My remarks aren't going to be nearly as academic, probably, as some that we've heard and that I was actually fascinated with. However, I've listened to a lot of stuff that has been going on since this has been presented, and I still can't get it through my head why it's necessary to put it in this act when, in fact, it is protected under the School Act. I can't get it through my head why it's even being protected under the School Act.

Clearly, I'm a little older than a lot of people in the House. I don't perhaps go back as far as Aberhart; however, what I remember is that even when my children were growing up – I know, certainly, that probably the first sexual education I ever had was in the schoolyard. It wasn't in the schoolroom. It was in the schoolyard. The conversation was in the schoolyard, and the kid that had *National Geographic* was the kid that knew it all. How can you possibly protect our babies from what goes on in the schoolyard? Horrifying. Horrifying. But what happened was that we could go home and talk to our parents.

One of the things that I guess I learned was perhaps a basic thing right out of the Bible: judge not lest ye be judged. One of the expressions that we had in our house – I am the oldest of six kids – when somebody would tell the other one what to do was: who made you God?

As parents we have to allow our children to grow. Yes, we are responsible for them, and yes, we can guide them, but we can't guide them by protecting them from every single thing. Let them go out. Let them go to the schoolyard. Let them see *National Geographic*, for Pete's sake. Then let them bring it home, and then let us talk about it.

10:30

One of the things that has been brought up on the academic side was about feminists. God forbid we should have a feminist. I'm the oldest of six kids. I was so fortunate to be raised in a genderless

family. I'm the oldest, there were four boys, and then my sister is at the other end. If it was your turn to do the lawn, it had nothing to do with your sex. It had to do with that it was your turn for on the chart. If it was your turn to do the dishes, if it was your turn to babysit, if it was your turn to do anything, if your name came up on the chart, it was your job. It had nothing to do with your sex. As far as being a feminist, it was just something that I automatically grew up with, and to this day I'm very fortunate – at least I believe I'm very fortunate – to have grown up in a very open-minded family and also a family that could discuss.

Nothing shocked my parents, at least openly. I'm sure that they were shocked at some of the things that we brought home, but it was never shown openly. It was discussed. Again, it was always: judge not lest ye be judged. This is what we do; this is what we believe. You do what's right. You cannot judge what other people do as wrong.

When I went to high school, I went to a private school, and a goodly portion, well, 10 per cent, of the school population was not of the religion of the school that I went to. We had a large number of Jewish kids in our classrooms. It was interesting to note something, again, that I couldn't get through my head at any point in time. In Winnipeg there was a beach, which was a very important and popular beach, that did not allow Jewish people in up until 1961. So I learned what prejudice was. I learned how wrong it was. I learned how wrong it was to judge someone else until you've walked in their shoes.

Sexual orientation and sexuality. As I said, you know, the best stuff came off the school grounds. Certainly, we learned about the birds and bees in school. We learned how it all worked. Now the kids in school can be taught 10 different ways to do it as long as they don't get caught, and here's how you don't get caught. That wasn't what I learned. However, it appears to be what's out there today. So what? Let your kid come home and tell you what's going on. You know what's going on. Talk to them. Sit down and talk to them. How many times we have seen ads on TV, particularly the ones that go with drugs: talk to your kids. If you're not talking to them, what difference does it make if they're in the classroom or not? I just can't get this kind of thinking through my head.

We are, I think, clearly moving, particularly in the western world, from a strong Christianity base, and we're moving more into secularization. We're moving more into secular societies. I think probably as a fundamental, maybe basic question we should be asking: why is this happening? Why is God allowing this secularism to happen? Why is he allowing what some people consider to be horrible, horrible things to happen? Our question probably, as I had mentioned, would be: why is this happening? I think that probably an answer, perhaps, as a Christian is that we can't know the ways of God. Who are we to know? We should be trusting to do what we believe is right. No matter who you recognize as God, whether it's a higher power, whether it's a Supreme Being, whether it's whatever word you put on God – and there are an increasing number of atheists in our society. We have to wonder why society is changing as it is, but we have to do what's right and not necessarily always perhaps question the ways of God.

I know that this was a little bit more basic conversation than perhaps has been at a different, elevated level, but I still simply cannot get it through my head why anybody would want to take away the joy of learning from any single person on the face of this earth.

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise in support of this amendment. It's a very key issue for the bill,

clearly one that we cannot support without the removal of section 9. Perhaps as much as anything what many Albertans have told me is that this aspect of the bill reflects a profound lack of confidence in the system, a system that we've created to balance the rights of individuals, the rights of families with the responsibility to provide the most abundant and rich and science-based as well as faith-based education.

I guess the surprising thing for me with this bill has been the perceived need on that side of the House or perhaps elements outside the House entirely that want to see a legalism imposed in the case of any perceived lack of consideration of particular individuals and parents, in this case their right to determine what their child might be exposed to or not. The provision for the parents to opt out has always been there. I guess the question many Albertans are asking me is: what is the impetus to make this a more legalistic approach such that if there's a failure of a teacher or a failure of a school or a failure of a board to acknowledge certain elements of religion or sexual orientation or human sexuality, there would be fines, there would be penalties, there would be potential lawsuits associated with this or at the very least a very embarrassing public criticism of teachers, of schools, of a failure of responsibility and a moral misconduct by a particular school, teacher, or board?

Among other issues, people have raised the question of why this government has lost confidence in the ability of schools and teachers and even in parents to supervise their child and the education they're getting and to provide the climate in which issues are discussed and that if there are conflicts with what people believe at home, they be open and discussed and resolved. Clearly, our history has shown us that by suppressing freedom, by suppressing the open discussion of issues and encouraging dialogue, encouraging different points of view, whether it is on sexual orientation or gender or colour or age, we have to be able to hear those discussions in order to become balanced, nondiscriminatory individuals who can engage the world as it is, with all the range of belief systems and understandings of right and wrong and good and bad.

This government has brought upon itself the approbation, I guess I would say, the dislike and a feeling of being offended by those custodians of our educational system that we have given the responsibility to educate our children. It really staggers me that such an inclusion was necessary and that this government was blind to the implications of what it was doing in this particular instance when the provisions have always been there for parents who identified issues of real conscience that they could by their own will and by their proper communication with the school exclude their child from issues that they felt the child was not ready for or that were contrary to their belief.

That's one dimension of why this must necessarily be amended and this section removed. It will never be supported by this side of the House, and it will never be supported by a large number of Albertans. It will create an unmeasurable impact, in fact, on the culture of education, on the culture of our society, where people are feeling already a sense that there is an intimidation extant in this province around different ideas: political ideas, social ideas, sexuality issues. There is already a chill and an intimidation factor that I've heard from many sources. Whether it's professionals or lay people, religious or nonreligious, there is a sense in this province that to speak dissent is to speak against the state in a most profound way and to undermine the state.

10:40

This is a government that has lost touch with the people and lost a sense of what balanced society, open and free speech, responsibility and rights have to do with good citizenship. We have demoral-

ized and, I would say, undermined the democratic process to such an extent in this province, and the example, clearly, is the last election, where only 2 out of 5 people were moved to vote; 2 out of 5 people felt the system was working; 2 out of 5 people felt that dissent and critique were valid and respected in this province.

We have become a culture of sheep, and it's partly because of this kind of philosophy, that we have to enshrine tighter and tighter controls on people, tighter and tighter limits to freedom. In many ways it's really difficult to accept as a 21st century Albertan and Canadian who wants to see us move into the 21st century, whether it's environmentally or politically or, in this case, from a social and public affairs viewpoint.

Mr. Chairman, this is central. We could spend the whole night on this if we choose to. I think if this government can see the error of this particular section and the unnecessary conflict it's creating and the unnecessary added chill to this province and the educators of this province and simply dismiss this section, allow this amendment to go forward, we could move very quickly through this bill. There are aspects of this bill that are very good. They are enshrining the rights of all citizens, including those with transgender issues, sexual identity issues, and different sexual orientations. But this particular aspect of it is simply unacceptable, and it is not going to be acceptable in this province even if you pass this legislation. It is going to create all kinds of tensions and distrust, a further erosion of our culture in terms of open debate and discussion, and again undermine the trust that we have built up in our education system, in our teachers. There is already a process in place, and we somehow as legislators have taken it upon ourselves to enshrine this in a very punitive way in the human rights code.

I hope members are listening. I hope they're thinking about the potential for resolving this issue fairly quickly tonight. This is the key contentious issue in this bill. By removing this part of the bill, we could very quickly move on. You on the other side of the House would have the fundamental parts of this protected, and the rest of Alberta could move forward with the progressive agenda that many in this province are asking for, including teachers, school boards, some religious groups, and the vast majority of Albertans who do not believe that we should be meddling and enshrining in legislation this kind of common-sense direction for parents and families and schools.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to speak. I look forward to the debate.

The Chair: On subamendment SA1 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak in favour of subamendment SA1, I believe it was. This is very similar to an amendment that we would have introduced had we gotten up first. Of course, it's designed to deal with that which is the fundamental problem with Bill 44, without which there is no way any fair-minded or reasonable person could possibly support the bill.

In essence, Bill 44, without the removal of section 9, is, in my view, a capitulation on the part of the government caucus. It's a capitulation to an overall deference to what is throughout the rest of the province a shrinking sense of narrow-minded and fearful examination of the world.

I do believe that, in fact, the last vestiges, in many respects, of the fearfulness and the discomfort and the lack of respect for diversity that drove this caucus to bring this piece of legislation, particularly this section 9, into the House today – I think that it is more dominant in the government caucus across the way than it is throughout the rest of Alberta. I actually believe that Albertans have moved far beyond that portion of this government caucus which pushed the rest

of the government caucus into pursuing this very ill-advised course. Nonetheless, in an attempt to quiet the many, many, many critics, the government came forward with its amendment to Bill 44.

Let me just start by pointing out the many reasons why this amendment doesn't do any of the things that its advocates would suggest that it does. One of the major concerns that has been raised about this very ill-advised, ill-thought-out piece of legislation is the implications to the education system by putting in this parental rights clause and creating chaos from classroom to classroom to classroom across the province. The thought was, basically, that by putting it into the human rights code, begging people to litigate on the issue – that's what happens when you put it in the human rights code – and then putting in this very vague language, of course, we're going to have, without question, a chilling effect on the ability of our educators across the province to expose our children to a balanced education, which consists of critical thinking and analysis of complicated issues.

So the government came forward then with this amendment, which they hoped would clarify the problem so that the teachers would not be fearful of speaking about science, the human rights code, why bullying is bad, so that teachers could actually talk about those things in the classrooms without fear of reprisal. The government thought that maybe we can deal with that problem by bringing in this amendment. It doesn't take a lawyer with many, many years – it doesn't even take a lawyer to understand that with the language that they are adding, “primarily and explicitly,” we could probably spend 15 years before the new human rights tribunal, as they would now like to call it, arguing about what “primarily” means. While we're doing that, we will ensure that teachers across the province fail to teach our kids about the human rights code, about why it's bad to bully people because they're gay, and about large tracks of science. That's why it doesn't help.

Now, the other section in there talks about that it doesn't apply to “incidental or indirect references to religion,” et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Well again, what is “incidental”? What is “indirect”? I'll tell you. It's another 10 years in front of the Human Rights Commission adjudicating what “incidental” and “indirect” are as opposed to “primary”. So it doesn't actually clarify things. It just begs more lawyers to go out and find more clients to spend more time in front of the human rights tribunal. Meanwhile, teachers aren't teaching what I want my kids to learn and what most Albertans believe their kids have a right to learn, and that includes about the human rights code and about science.

Now, I've mentioned the human rights code several times because I am completely of the view that with or without the changes to the legislation being brought forward tonight by the government, the legislation that they are bringing forward right now could well limit the ability of a teacher to go into a classroom and talk about Bill 44 and talk about the human rights code.

10:50

Were the remainder of this legislation to pass, we would have a bill which would say: whereas it is recognized in Alberta as a fundamental principle and as a matter of public policy that all persons are equal in dignity, rights, and responsibilities without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, or sexual orientation. If this legislation passes, that will be in there, but if section 9 passes, a teacher will not be able to teach the code to the students in Alberta, which is just the most inane outcome that I can possibly imagine, that we would, within the very human rights code that we presumably all support, limit the ability of our teachers to talk about it in the classroom.

Let's be clear. The 10 years of interpretive time-wasting in front of the Human Rights Commission: this legislation will not prevent that. In the meantime, teachers will have to question themselves and their principals and their school boards about whether they can teach their kids about the fact that we are on the verge of finally including sexual orientation in the human rights code. Is that indirect, or is that explicit? Is that primary, or is it inadvertent? I don't know. It's in the human rights code. Presumably, we all think that people are equal on the basis of sexual orientation, but apparently when we read that section in a classroom, we won't mention that part of it because it's a section that includes it, so it might be primary. Who knows? That's why on the face of it this piece of legislation is such an incredible embarrassment.

I was watching TV tonight, and I'm sure many people saw the former chair of our Human Rights Commission, Fil Fraser, who I believe was appointed under former Premier Lougheed, talking about how when this human rights code was introduced, Alberta was a leader in the country on human rights and that now, thanks to this, we will be the last-place province in the country when it comes to promoting human rights in our province. He was very, very dismissive of this bill and what it means.

Now, I also think that we won't actually be spending all of our time in front of the human rights tribunal interpreting what is primary, what is incidental, or whatever the language is. It doesn't really matter. The point is: interpreting all these different weaselly words, trying to deal with the communications and political fallout of this really ill-advised piece of legislation. No. We're also going to be in front of the courts and, ultimately, in front of the Supreme Court of Canada. I actually believe that if this passes, there is a very strong case that this code, this legislation, is itself in breach of section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in this country, and as a result we are going to spend lots of time having the Supreme Court of Canada ultimately telling us that our human rights code is discriminatory. But, hey, it's Alberta, and we have the freedom to create, even if it is the freedom to create a second-class human rights code.

Now, I want to go to some of the points that have been made over the course of the last several weeks. I'm sure I won't get to all of them in the time that I have.

Mr. Mason: Take 10 more.

Ms Notley: Exactly. But I'm sure we'll have lots of time over the course of the evening.

I want to talk about this concept that particularly the Premier always pulls out: the family, that this is about protecting the family, that the family is the basic unit of everything in the province; the family is the most important building block of all that comes in the province.

Mr. Mason: It's holy.

Ms Notley: The family, indeed, is holy. The family is that which is the most important entity that can possibly exist.

Now, that's fine. I love my family, and I believe all people love their family. But here's a question for you. For that child who is 8 years old or 9 years old who goes into the classroom in I think it's grade 1 or 2 and they learn about the family and community, and that child has two parents of the same sex, is that child's family less of a family? Does that child have to be told to give notice to other kids in the class before she starts talking or he starts talking about his family when the class starts talking about what it means to be in a family, what it means to be in a community?

When they draw those pictures – I'm sure there are lots of parents here who have had their kids go through this. They draw pictures of their families. They give reports in class on what their families are. They talk about what the role of a mom is and the role of a dad and a grandparent. They talk about how families treat each other. This is all part of the curriculum. This is the social development in grade 1 or grade 2. What happens to the child whose family consists of two parents of the same sex? Does that child have to apologize? Does that child have to leave the room? Does that child have to give notice to everybody else in her class that she might talk about her family?

Does that show respect for the family as the family unit? No. What that shows is that the whole spin around the importance of the family is simply that because if you really respected family, you would respect that family comes in a number of different forms, sizes, and shapes. You need to construct a bill that recognizes the rights of all families to be treated equally, but we have not done that here. This is not about recognizing family as that important unit in our society.

Now I'd like to talk about another question, and I've raised this before. What is primarily and explicitly dealing with sexual orientation, and what is incidental or indirect reference to sexual orientation? Here is an example. A child goes to school, a happy child, a very well-adjusted child, very active in school activities, more likely to be sort of grade 7, 8, or 9, very involved in a sports team, maybe involved in some of the community activities that happen at the school, a very engaged kid. One day the kid is walking home, but he's still on the school grounds, and four of his classmates come along and beat him up because he's gay or because they think he's gay.

What does the school do? Well, the next day – if it's my school and if I'm a parent in that school, let me tell you it had better be happening very quickly – the principal and the teachers are very quickly bringing everybody together to talk about why this can't happen, why it shouldn't happen, why it can never happen again. You don't just sit in a room if you want it to be effective. You don't just stand there and say: by the way, we're going to beat you all if this ever happens again. No. The way to make sure this never happens again is to talk about the issue. I believe, then, that that assembly would be an incident of a teacher talking about primarily sexual orientation and that it's really not an incidental or indirect reference. It's a very clear reference to sexual orientation.

What happens? Does the teacher have to wait 48 hours before notice can be given to the parents? What if the parents who pull their kids out are also the parents of two or three of the kids that actually perpetrated the bullying and the beating in the first place? What happens there? What does that say about us in this Legislature if we would think for a second to pass a piece of legislation that would actually make us have to stop and ask these questions? To me, it is utterly ludicrous. It is so incredibly disrespectful.

Now, I've also said in the past that I think that, in effect, what we're really doing here is actually reducing the rights of gay and lesbian people in Alberta because, as I've said before, we had symbolically chosen to discriminate against them for the last 11 years, but only symbolically. Thanks to legal obligations outside of the control of the Conservative caucus we were not able to legally discriminate against them for the last 11 years, but we were going to symbolically, finally, accept that probably we should have changed our code some time ago.

11:00

Instead, what we're doing is we're actually giving them no additional legal right, but we are both symbolically and legally

qualifying and downgrading a right which had previously been given to the gay and lesbian community by the Supreme Court of Canada many, many years ago. We are treating that community differently, and there is simply no answer to that. Even now, in the amendment being put forward by this government, we continue to treat sexual orientation differently from all of the other prohibited grounds for discrimination.

Now, the School Act already deals with the issue of religion, and an hon. colleague stated: well, I don't really care if it's already in the School Act or not; we should still be able to do this. In fact, the reality is that the School Act works. Members on both sides of the House have clearly identified that for dealing with issues around religious education, the School Act is the most rational and logical vehicle through which to address those concerns. It's working. No one is suggesting it's not working. No one. Not a single soul has suggested that the School Act is not working in terms of how this issue is addressed.

There's no need to put religion in here, and previously sexuality had been included in policy. Presumably, because we're putting sexual orientation into the code, we actually think people should be treated equally. I do. I am not convinced at all that all members on the other side do, though. I believe that at the end of the day the reason we have this travesty of a piece of legislation, this embarrassment of a piece of legislation is because there are too many people in the government caucus across the way who still don't believe in the fundamental equality that we owe to people who are gay or lesbian. I think that ultimately that is why we are on the verge of creating the most poorly written and embarrassing example of a human rights code in the country.

I truly wish that those on the other side who know that this shouldn't be happening, who know that this is a wrong decision would show the courage of their knowledge and vote to support this amendment because with this amendment being passed, which was proposed by my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, we would then have a good bill, and it would be a victory. It would be a victory for diversity, and it would be a victory for everybody in this House. The government could actually come out and say: "You know, we're not actually completely controlled by the rural right wing. We have moved out of the '40s into the second decade of the second millennium." You could say that, and we'd be hard-pressed to say that it wasn't true. But if you carry on with this bill as amended, even with the amendment proposed, which basically just maintains the current status – it has no significant change at all – then you will send a very clear message. [Ms Notley's speaking time expired] Don't worry. I'll get up again.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, do you wish to speak on subamendment SA1?

Dr. Taft: Yes, very much. I want to speak enthusiastically in favour of this subamendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to pick up from where I left off before. I was speaking about the culture within the governing caucus that would lead to a piece of legislation like this coming forward requiring an amendment and then a subamendment such as we have on the floor right now. I believe that a driving force behind this is what some people would say is the real Premier of Alberta, the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, and I think the evidence for his attitudes on this are very clearly laid out in a speech he delivered some 10 years ago, so I'm going to go there.

First of all, I want to address the Member for Calgary-North Hill. I'd like to say to him for starters that although I don't agree with his position, I'm glad he participated. I see there are at least – I don't

know – 25 other Conservative members here. I wish they would also participate. I do want to respond with a couple of thoughts in our exchange.

This member probably knows that addressing childhood hunger in Alberta is a real priority for me, and it's a great frustration to me that alone among all provinces Alberta doesn't provide any direct funding to feed hungry schoolchildren. So I guess one of my questions to the member would be: if children are so important to this government, as he indicated, then why won't this government feed children who are chronically hungry in this province through no fault of their own? The member cited the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, but what about the right to food? Do children have the right to food? If they do, why isn't this government doing something to support that right?

Also, you know, I fully understand that on some issues, in some areas, this is complicated. Parental rights have to be sorted out. We're witnessing the struggle with that right now in a deeply troubling case in Manitoba involving a seven-year-old girl who was turning up at school with hate symbols written on her body by her stepfather, and there's a court case right now, which I assume you're aware of, struggling over the rights of parents to raise children in that manner. These are difficult issues. I think that a much more straightforward issue is the right of children to be fed, and I think it's shameful that this government doesn't respect that right.

But moving on from there, I want to go back to this very, very telling speech from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View before he was elected. I want to make sure it's on the record. I was speaking, when I ran out of time an hour or more ago, about his comments on the court system, so I'm going to pick up there. Just to provide context, the speech talks about what he calls new egalitarians, who are, in fact, in his view, people to be opposed and resisted because they support gender equality and they support equal rights for homosexuals.

I'm now going to quote from further down in his speech.

A final distinguishing characteristic of the New Egalitarians is their love affair with non-representative, non-accountable institutions: courts, rights bureaucracies and recently the United Nations. Their recourse to the coercive authority of non-accountable institutions is not by accident.

I'll skip a couple of sentences just for brevity. He goes on to say – and I think this is a remarkable sentence and something we need to contemplate coming from the mouth of a man who is now a cabinet minister. He said:

Just as Lenin had to create the Communist Party as the "Vanguard of the Proletariat" to construct Marx's workers' paradise, so the courts (and other non-accountable institutions) have become the "Vanguard of the Intelligentsia" in the construction of the new egalitarian utopias.

I think that we need to be very alert to the fact that we have a senior cabinet minister who's pushing a bill through this Legislature that consolidates immense power in his hands and that actually has a clause – I'm talking about Bill 36 – that exempts some of those decisions from the courts. Maybe we know why now, don't we, Mr. Chairman?

11:10

I want to continue getting onto the record some of the views that this minister portrayed because they relate exactly to this bill. He speaks at length and very forcefully about his views on public education. I'll just quote directly, with no interpretation needed.

The family-choice principle should be extended to primary and secondary education. This can be achieved easily and efficiently by expanding the school voucher programs. The state maintains responsibility for the universal availability of primary and secondary education, but parents are given the power to choose the kind of school they want.

Now, let me continue.

We know that state monopolies provide inferior service in every other field of human endeavor. Why do we continue to support it in education?

Mr. Chairman, these are the words of a man who today is sitting in the cabinet of this government.

I'd like to continue. I'll skip a few more paragraphs here, but I urge everybody else to read it. Mr. Chairman, the importance of those comments relating to this bill are clear. We have a cabinet minister whose history suggests deep, deep suspicion of public education. He says that it's an inferior product, and he advocates ways to get around it. He advocates ways for parents to exercise greater rights. You know what? Today we are seeing that played out through this caucus. This bill is evidently a power play by the supporters of that particular cabinet minister.

I will wrap up my references to his speech by quoting one last section, which relates very closely to this subamendment, this amendment, and this bill. It reads as follows:

On the subject of marriage, I would conclude by stressing the importance of resisting the growing pressure to accept so-called homosexual or gay marriage. Homosexuals have – or should have – the same rights to individual freedom and personal privacy that the rest of us enjoy. But they should not have more. Enlisting the coercive power of the state to force people to "approve" homosexual relations is the antithesis of toleration.

And then he goes on and on at length.

Mr. Chairman, it is deeply troubling to suggest that somehow giving members of the gay community the right to marry is giving them any special right, any right more than the rest of us have. We all have the right to marry. All we're trying to achieve here is equal rights, not more rights. I think we should be deeply concerned that a prominent member of this government is prepared to distort the evidence for that sort of end.

I think this speech and the many other positions taken relating to this attitude from a senior member of this government explain why this bill has been brought forward and why it is so contentious. I think it also explains why there is foot-dragging in meeting the Supreme Court ruling of 11 years ago brought forward through the Delwin Vriend case. I think it explains why, in taking one step forward, we are ending up taking two steps backward through this bill. That's why the subamendment is so terrifically important to support.

I wanted to get a couple of points on the record, Mr. Chairman. Moving on from some discussion around the sexual orientation aspects of this legislation, I'm going to dwell for a moment on administration, and perhaps the Minister of Education will engage in this part of the debate. The subamendment would get rid of this problem that I'm going to put to the Minister of Education. I see that the minister of advanced education is here tonight. Last night he set a wonderful example of engaging in debate. Tonight I hope the Minister of Education follows.

There are, as I think this through, some serious administration issues for schools in section 9 of this bill. If we don't toss that, then these administration problems will arise. Now, I ask the Minister of Education to just think this through with me. Imagine a school, say, K to 9, an elementary-junior high school, with 600 or 700 students. There are any number of schools like this in this province. Every one of those kids in every one of those courses will now need to be entered into some kind of filing system or database by whom, Mr. Minister? He's carefully avoiding me.

Mr. Hancock: No. Honestly.

Dr. Taft: Okay. There will be cost to this. Are we going to be expecting the school secretary to manage this database? As each

grade goes through and different components of a science course come up or social studies or religion in the Catholic school system or other things come up at different points in every different grade, every different child's family is going to have to be notified, and if there is a mistake or if somebody is missed, there's the risk of a human rights complaint. So my question to the Minister of Education is: who is going to manage that in the schools? How is that going to be managed? Has anybody thought about the administrative implications of this? The school offices I've been in are already awfully busy.

Is the minister wanting to respond to that tonight? Yeah? Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be very brief because most of what I've heard tonight really doesn't warrant a response. The discussion so far has taken a very extreme view of the proposed section and ignores what the amendment really is trying to do, which is to clarify what probably shouldn't need clarification.

It's absolutely absurd to think that reasonable people, much less a Human Rights Commission or a court in this province, would interpret section 11.1 as proposed to mean hermaphroditic plants, I mean, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was talking about earlier. That's an absolutely absurd interpretation, and no sensible person in this province would understand that to be what was meant by this section. So that's the type of debate.

To get to the specific question that was raised, in the province now under the School Act there is a provision for parents to opt out of religious instruction or a religious exercise or, indeed, patriotic instruction or patriotic exercises. They can opt out of that. That presumably, although the act doesn't say so, would require some notification if there was going to be religious instruction or religious exercises or patriotic instruction or patriotic exercises so that they would have the opportunity to opt out. Under the mandated policy that we have, parents can opt their children out of what would be notionally called sex ed but what we know in the mandated policy is identified as the health curriculum in grades 4 to 9 and the CALM curriculum in high school, where there's teaching about human sexuality.

Now, in past debates in the House, of course, there's been discussion about whether by not putting human into the act, perhaps we were talking about frogs. Well, again, only a crazy person would suggest that that's what this section means. However, it's been clarified in the act now that it's human sexuality, and that includes sexual orientation. There's clarification now that this is not about some of the fears – some of the fears – that were raised by people having read some of the discussion in the media about evolution and other things, notwithstanding that I've consistently said this is not about looking through a religious lens at Shakespeare or at rocks or at anything else. This is not about the teaching of science or the teaching of social studies. This is about the explicit and is now primarily and explicitly about religion.

11:20

Notwithstanding that we've said that over and over again, we put in another subsection by this amendment that's on the floor to make it even clearer that this is not incidental. This is not something that comes up in class that you have to stop the class and give notice on. That's very, very clear in this section, so I hope that members will support this.

To the point the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked me about: what database could possibly be required? You don't have to

keep a database. All you have to do is what you're doing now, which is that if you're going to teach the grades 4 to 9 health curriculum, when the units of human sexuality come up, you have to send a notice home, which is what they're doing. Nobody has to worry about that. If a parent sends in a written request that their child be excluded from that, it's done now. This is not about a massive horde of kids leaving class. This is not about somebody keeping track of all the kids who have to leave class. This is a very simple process that schools engage in now.

It was raised earlier, for example: in a Catholic school how would you keep track? Could you be excluded? Well, in fact, I know that some jurisdictions now – I presume all jurisdictions now – when the children are registered have the parents sign an acknowledgement that they know and understand that religion permeates the courses of study and the exercises and the activities in a Catholic school and to give their permission at that time.

This is not the type of disaster that the hon. member is talking about in terms of administrative process. The interpretations that are being placed on this section, Mr. Chair, are absolutely absurd.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview again.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. I appreciated the minister's engagement in this. One of the key points to make here is that while most people will follow common sense, there are lots of people who will not. There are lots of people who will use this issue to disrupt education in the schools. We've seen letters to the editor – and I'll get into those later in the debate, maybe sometime after midnight – from people who have made it very clear that they don't buy into what most of us would consider common sense.

Now, my next question to the minister. Remember that we've raised the stakes if we proceed with this bill, and by putting people at risk who violate this bill if it goes through, if we don't pass the subamendment, they end up exposed to a human rights complaint. So a practical issue, and maybe the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit would respond or the Minister of Education: what if the child's parents are divorced and each parent gives conflicting views? One parent wants their child exempted and one doesn't. How do schools manage that?

Mr. Blackett: Well, there are two things that the opposition member has forgotten. One is that we've talked about the intention and how we would change that wording. The other part that we have in there is that the director of the commission has the ability to ask that anybody who wants to bring a complaint in front of the Human Rights Commission has to have exhausted all the avenues of appeal that they have. In the school board that means they have to have gone to the teacher, they have to have gone to their principal, to have gone to their school board. Whether it's a single parent, whether it's a divorced couple, the school board has an excellent process to deal with those issues.

To say that somebody is going to be dragged to the Human Rights Commission – and that's the big bogeyman – that's not a fact because here, if you look at it, it states explicitly that notwithstanding section 21, the director at any time that a complaint

- (a) is one that could or should more appropriately be dealt with,
 - (b) has already been dealt with, or
 - (c) is scheduled to be heard,
- in another forum or under another Act . . .

And the School Act would apply in this particular case.

. . . the director may refuse to accept the complaint or may accept the complaint pending the outcome of the matter in the other forum or under the other Act.

There is your protection that you have talked about. That's the protection the ATA was talking about. That's the protection the

ASBA is talking about. There is an excellent provision and an excellent process already in place, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona alluded to. Absolutely believe in that. That's why we made this amendment. That's why this subamendment is absolutely unnecessary because there is a protection there, and we as a responsible government made sure that we put it there.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I read that portion of this amendment, of course, when it was circulated, and I read it as the minister read it out loud now. Frankly, it seems to me to just reinforce the whole idea of getting rid of this entire section because in practical terms it's going to stretch processes out.

You know, I raised kids. My kids went through school. I know how this works. There's a controversy in the school about a grade 4 child attending sex ed, so there's a debate. Then what's going to happen? It's going to work its way through the school process over a number of weeks or months, and then maybe it'll get taken to the Human Rights Commission. By the time it's resolved, so much time has been spent. The curriculum has come and gone. Huge efforts have been put into resolving it.

I think that we would just be better off to chuck this entire section, just not go there. That's why I think the subamendment is important. Obviously, we differ on this.

Mr. Liepert: Let's vote on it, then. If you think it's so good, let's vote on it.

Dr. Taft: Okay. We'll hear from some other people. The minister of health is raring to go. Go ahead, then.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party, on subamendment SA1.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. On the subamendment, and I support it. I think that it's a very good subamendment. I don't think that the amendment that the government has put forward can salvage this dreadful section of this act.

You know, I kind of wonder, Mr. Chairman, about some of the divisions on the other side, how things happened in this caucus that would produce such an appalling clause. I would divide the government caucus into three real parts. There's probably the group that is opposed to this and knows what it is and oppose it, but unfortunately – unfortunately – they're also the people in a lot of cases that have been charged with the responsibility of getting this piece of legislation through. [interjections]

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party has the floor.

Mr. Mason: You know, they know better, but they've chosen to fulfill their responsibilities and fight for something that they don't actually believe in.

Then there's the big group, I think, in the middle, Mr. Chairman, that really doesn't understand what's at stake here and doesn't understand the motivations and the implications of this piece of legislation. I suspect that that probably incorporates a lot of people in the government caucus. But there is also a group that is pushing this that fully does understand what this is about.

Now, I think if you look at some of the sites of some of the evangelical groups in the United States, the social conservative movement in the United States, and look at what they think about parental rights and why they're pushing it and do a bit of analysis,

you'll really get a good sense of what's going on. What really is the thing that's bothering them is the whole question of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. In fact, in the United States the groups that are pushing the theory of parents' rights are extremely concerned about the impact that a potential ratification of this convention by the Obama administration will have on a number of things.

11:30

For example, they're very concerned about its impact on gun ownership because the convention on the rights of the child deals with the protection of children against violence. So they think that this will be used to take away their gun rights. That's one of the things that they're concerned about. They cite cases where courts have found that you can't deport immigrants if they have children who are American citizens, and they want to be able to deport immigrants. There are cases where they've argued that children should not be removed from homes because of the existence of domestic abuse. One particular case they take a lot of exception to is where the Supreme Court ruled that you could not execute a minor for committing a capital crime, and they, of course, want to be able to execute anyone that they want.

They're putting forward a constitutional amendment in the United States, and that constitutional amendment is very interesting. They want this as the amendment:

Section One: The liberty of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children is a fundamental right.

That sounds like some people in this government.

Ms Notley: The Premier. Pretty much like the Premier.

Mr. Mason: It sounds like the Premier.

Section Two: Neither the United States nor any State shall infringe upon this right without demonstrating that its governmental interest as applied to the person is of the highest order and not otherwise served.

And this is the convention on the rights of the child.

Section Three: No treaty may be adopted nor shall any source of international law be employed to supersede, modify, interpret, or apply to the rights guaranteed by this article.

Now, this has been introduced in the United States House of Representatives by Representative Hoekstra and Senator DeMint. They believe that this will bolster existing family law and codify the fundamental right of parents to, quote, direct the upbringing and education of their children. The threat of government infringement upon parental rights comes in the form of a controversial, legally binding international treaty known as the U.N. convention on the rights of the child. If ratified, as urged by the Obama administration, the treaty would supersede even the U.S. Constitution, they say.

Their promoting this in the United States is very similar in content to the changes that the government is proposing to the human rights legislation. I would submit, Mr. Chairman, that this government has been hijacked by a small minority of people with extreme views with respect to this and that this is a parallel campaign to what is being pursued by the fundamentalist right in the United States.

Now, let's take a look at the convention on the rights of the child. This is from an organization called Save the Children, one of the pre-eminent organizations in Canada, on why they believe that compliance to the convention on the rights of the child is important. They say:

The short answer is that because a healthy, sustainable and secure Canada depends on it. When children and young people are protected, respected and included, they become key contributors in shared social contexts motivating a nation to strive for excellence, whether or not this excellence lies in the field of private sector

development, technological innovation, community mobilization, human rights, socio-cultural expansion and so forth. I have seen this time and time again in the programs Save the Children Canada operates here in Canada and throughout the world, when children and young people are valued they establish the conditions that most contribute to human flourishing. We as a nation perhaps best understood this when Canada afforded an opportunity to children to be present at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002 to articulate their right to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

To explore what Canadians knew about child rights and [the] role the Canadian government played in fulfilling its obligations to the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child, Save the Children Canada commissioned an Ipsos-Reid study three months ago.

Well, this was more than three months ago now.

The results were overwhelming: from coast to coast adult Canadians scored poorly when quizzed on issues affecting Canadian children. Only 33% of the 1000 interviewed answered questions accurately when it came to Canadian children living with HIV, in poverty, abuse, labour and child care. Seventy one per cent of those interviewed gave Canada a grade "C" or lower in fulfilling its obligations to improve the lives of Canadian children. These results show that Canadians are concerned about Canada's commitment to children's rights, but they also show that more needs to be done to ensure Canadians are learning about children's lives and rights, most notably, the most marginalized and socially excluded.

Mr. Chairman, the point here is that this move that has taken place in the Tory caucus to create a new category of rights is part of a political campaign closely connected to the evangelical right in the United States. Of course, they are connected there through the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and some of his followers. In my view, this is useful in illuminating some of the rationale and some of the motivation for this particular change.

This change came out of nowhere. As we've indicated before, there is no evidence that these so-called rights were being violated in any way. There were no parents coming forward and saying: "The current system has failed my children. I want to protect my children from learning about certain things that contradict my values, contradict the values we want to raise the child with. Therefore, we need to create a category of rights in order to protect our children and our rights as parents from that." This didn't exist. This was not something that came from the grassroots to the Conservative caucus. The Conservative caucus likes to talk a lot about how they listen to people and how in touch they are and how they reflect the needs and aspirations of Albertans, but there's absolutely no evidence that this came from the grassroots.

This didn't come from people who felt that their rights and their children's rights were being violated and weren't adequately protected by the existing system, but it came from somewhere. That's what I'm trying to perhaps illuminate a little bit for some members tonight, where it came from and what is motivating it. The person behind this is, you know, appearing on, for example, the *Huckabee* show in the United States on the Fox News channel. You can see that this is part of a broader campaign. I'm not sure that all members of the Conservative caucus who may have ended up supporting this change to the human rights legislation were fully aware of it.

Mr. Chairman, one of the things that does concern me and which I don't think the government amendment will deal with is, in fact, that we do have an excellent system for dealing with these issues today. Nobody is saying and certainly I'm not saying that we don't want to deal with parents' concerns that they may have with respect to religious or sexual education. What I am saying is that we have a very excellent system in place now that's the right kind of system, where there's contact directly between parents and the teacher, and

it's resolved right at the front line, right at the greatest point of contact, by actually talking to the people who are educating your children. If you're not satisfied with that, well, then, of course, you can take it up to the superintendent, and if you're not satisfied, you can go to the board and you can go, ultimately, to the minister.

Again, here's a system that is very workable. We haven't had a lot of complaints. That's not where this legislation came from. It didn't come from complaints that the system is not working properly. It came from some outside ideological agenda that's very dominant in certain parts of American politics.

11:40

The real problem, Mr. Chairman, is that this section of this bill will short-circuit the existing system, where the parents work closely with teachers and principals at the school level to resolve these sorts of issues. It will allow a parent who has a difficulty or a problem with how things have been handled to skip over all of that, to render it inoperable because they can then bring forward a complaint directly to the Human Rights Commission.

Now, one of the concerns that I really have had about this is certain comments that were made by the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit at one time and that have been reflected by others, which is that people are reasonable and we will expect that people will behave in a rational sort of way, so there shouldn't really be any problem. Mr. Chairman, you don't write legislation on the assumption that everybody is reasonable and rational. I would suggest that if you talk to any teacher, they will tell you stories about parents who are not reasonable that they have dealt with from time to time over the year. You know, it is not only reasonable people who avail themselves of the law. Unreasonable people may avail themselves of the law as well and often do so more often than reasonable people do.

That is what's going to create the difficulty. We're going to have some unreasonable parents or some people who may think they're perfectly reasonable, but they will avail themselves of this law, and it will undermine the relationship between the parent and the teacher and the principal in the school. It will effectively undermine the local school and the delivery of good education at the local level.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to say that I think this amendment is necessary. I think that without it we're going to have long-term problems on our hands. It may give a little bit of comfort to some in the education profession to have the amendments that the government wants to see, but ultimately it doesn't affect the basic problem with this approach, and that is that you're dealing with the Human Rights Commission as a court of first resort as opposed to dealing with your teacher and your principal and resolving those issues at the local level.

I want to just indicate that I think, Mr. Chairman, that we should pass this amendment to the amendment because the government's amendments fall far short of correcting the problems that were created by this legislation in the first place. They certainly don't correct the basic problem, which is to insert the Human Rights Commission into the classroom and, in a way, to protect rights that don't need to be protected. If you're going to protect rights, then I think we could have a real good discussion about what rights of children should be protected. Should we protect children against poverty? Should we protect children against abuse? Should that be in the Human Rights Commission? I've already mentioned programs and facilities for children who have disabilities or other kinds of learning issues. Should we protect children against bullying? Should we protect children against not being fed before they go to school?

If we want to talk about rights for children that should be enshrined in the Human Rights Commission, I'm sure we can come

up with far better ones than the ones that this government is proposing. The ones they're proposing here don't protect the rights of children at all; they advance a foreign political agenda, and they don't protect and advance the rights of children.

So I want to urge hon. members to pass this amendment. If we want to have a discussion about protecting the rights of children or protecting the rights of families or even protecting the rights of parents, then I think we should have an open discussion and put all sorts of rights on the table and then sort them out as to which ones should take priority, which ones are more important, which will make a difference in people's lives, which will protect people. But to write into this legislation the right of protecting parents' rights to protect their children against being taught, again, certain things is not a right that anyone has identified as something that absolutely is important from actual parents' point of view. I know it is for the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and some of his followers, but it's not something that the parents of Alberta are asking for as opposed to certain far-right groups and certain religious leaders who don't represent, in my view, the voice of parents who actually have children in the school system today.

Like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I also raised a couple of boys, put them through the school system. We dealt with teachers. If problems came up, we talked to the teachers. But we never had a problem with teachers trying to ram some sort of ideology down their throats or a religious view or attitudes towards sexuality that we didn't agree with. I thought the teachers were throughout very professional. They were more interested in teaching children to think rather than teaching them what to think. That, I think, is exactly what we want to promote in this school system, in our education system in this province.

Frankly, I think that this bill is counterproductive with respect to that goal. It focuses much more on what you teach kids to think rather than teaching them to think. I think that that is the highest goal of any teacher. In my experience it was relatively easy to resolve the very few difficulties that we ever had with our children's education simply by talking to the teacher. We never had to go to the principal, and we certainly didn't have to go to the school board.

Mr. Chairman, I urge members to vote for this amendment to the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on sub-amendment SA1.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is, again, a pleasure to speak on the amendment as brought forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. Some of the debate that has ensued has sort of brought some more ideas, I guess, to the foreground that I would like to follow up on and bring comment to in an effort to get the minister and members of the House to accept this amendment on what is, by anyone's account, a flawed bill.

I'd just like to sort of pick up on the points brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who said: yes, we can enshrine any number of rights in legislation to protect children. These are very admirable goals. For instance, for them to have enough food to eat and go to school and learn here in Alberta is a wonderful goal. We could enshrine that if we wished to and all of these things. I don't know. I don't think it would be proper in a human rights act, but I guess we could do it. Or we could say that all children are going to graduate grade 12, and we'll hire them 14 tutors to do so and whatever. We could enshrine that as well. But, again, is that really essentially a human right, you know, or should it be contained in the human rights code? I think the simple answer is: probably not.

11:50

I did some brief research. I really do appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill did make some comments because it is perfectly correct that this is a difficult issue and that parents do have rights and they do have responsibilities regarding children. But here's the deal. I checked on human rights legislation, the United Nations' as well as any other human rights act in Canada. In the United Nations' bill on human rights there is nothing incorporated on parental rights. You can go and find that in ancillary bills, like the rights of a child, but by no means do you have them in an overarching framework act that guides your human rights. Simply, these have been placed there, and they're out of context. If you look at other legislation dealing with human rights, this is out of context, okay? Just simply put, if you look in any manner of speaking at legislation throughout the world, it is out of place.

If you look even deeper, I think that's where you have the political agenda, where this was made as a complicated trade-off. Really, if we're going to give those people in the GBLT community something, if we're actually going to let them put their name, inscribe it in our human rights legislation, well, tell you what: we're going to have to get a little something back here. We can't really allow this to happen here without some form of payback, something we're able to take to the rednecks or whoever who want to believe, who actually still believe this stuff, that these are secondary, second-class citizens. I believe that is essentially what has happened here. We'll give them this, but I tell you what: you know, we're not going to let this happen. We're not going to stand by and watch this happen in Alberta, where we believe this shouldn't be happening. We're going to make sure that we reference this somewhere in our legislation and put our stamp on that we don't think Alberta is a place for this.

If you look at the context, like I said, laid it out in the framework of human rights legislation, this doesn't belong. You go down the list and say: which one doesn't look like the other one? Well, our act. And it's because it's driven by a specific agenda that doesn't make any sense in this type of legislation. So I'd just like to point that out. It was . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, may I interrupt you? The side conversation level is too high. Please lower it.

Continue, hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Nevertheless, that was my second opportunity to speak. I notice the troops have been reinforced. I look forward to their taking part in the debate and maybe adding their thoughts to this bill and maybe weighing in on the amendment. We can discuss this. That's a good thing. That's what we're supposed to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the opportunity to speak. It's been an honour to do so this evening.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. On the subamendment. I'm going to make one last point in my support for this subamendment. I'm going to do so, Mr. Chairman, by reading directly from an Alberta Education publication, a very significant one called Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12. It's a document signed off by the Deputy Minister of Education. It's an important document. I'm going to begin at the beginning — how about that? — the introduction.

Education is the key to our young people becoming full partners in shaping a global future and in shaping our province's and our nation's future. Quality basic education for our young people is key to maintaining Alberta's standard of living and ensuring our competitiveness in the world market. Our education system must

focus on what all students need to learn and be able to do to participate successfully in an economy and society undergoing fundamental changes.

The Chair: Hon. member, may I interrupt you? Again I want to remind hon. members that the level of side conversation is too high. Please lower it down, or there's the Confederation Room out there.

Continue on, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. The last sentence I was reading from this Alberta Education document was, "Our education system must focus on what all students need to learn and be able to do to participate successfully in an economy and society undergoing fundamental changes." I'm going to stop there for a moment. Think about this. We want an education system that teaches students to be able to participate successfully in an economy and to learn what to do to be able to participate successfully. Now, I ask you this, Mr. Chairman: if we exempt kids from learning about religion, how is that helping them to go out into the real world and participate effectively?

Our own caucus and the previous caucus had in it people from a range of religions: Catholic and Protestant, we had a former Protestant minister, we also had a Hindu, and we had a Muslim. In our caucus today we have a Sikh and we have Catholics and we have people who are very active in a number of Christian churches. Mr. Chairman, that's a reflection of the world today. How do we prepare our children for that world if we give their parents the rights to pull the kids out of teachings that might inform them about these various religions? I think, in fact, this provision betrays the very intent of this document.

Then I'm going to continue down this document. "It is a plan for Alberta students to be well prepared for lifelong learning and the world of work." Well, imagine. What if they have to work with people of other religions? Might it be a good thing that they've been taught a bit about those other religions? It goes on.

These initiatives reflect Alberta Education's leadership role in developing programs for students, setting standards for education, communicating these expectations to our stakeholders and supporting improvements to meet student needs.

I will skip a couple of sentences, and then I will finish off with these two sentences, quoting from this Alberta Education guide for K to 12.

Schools have the responsibility to provide instructional programs that ensure students will meet the provincial graduation requirements and are prepared for entry into the workplace or post-secondary studies.

Well, let me ask you, Mr. Chairman, and let me ask all people considering this: how are we preparing kids for the workplace or for postsecondary studies if we can't guarantee what education they've received? How do we know if somebody graduates from grade 12 if they've been exempted from a range of issues? What if they've been exempted from classes on human sexuality? What kind of people are we sending out into the adult world if they haven't had education on human sexuality? What kind of people are we sending out into the world if they haven't had education on religion? This is a betrayal of the responsibilities that the school system of Alberta has.

What about education about sexual orientation? Mr. Chairman, people go through life encountering people who are gay or lesbian. They may not know it. I'll bet you, Mr. Chairman, that there are members of this Assembly who are gay or lesbian, and we work with them every day. It is possible. I bet you it's true. [interjections] Apparently, it's very true. I'm getting all kinds of responses.

My point is, Mr. Chairman, that we need in our society to be able to work and live with people of all kinds of backgrounds. One of the

core principles and objectives of our school system is to prepare our children to work with people of all faiths and people who are gay and people who are straight and people who are lesbians. This particular piece of legislation, particularly section 11.1, betrays that purpose. It goes against the very responsibilities of our school system. That's why I'm supporting this subamendment. That's why I think we need to get rid of this aspect of this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Anderson: I just had to comment on this. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview just commented: what kind of people are we sending into the world that never took a sex education course? Well, I am so afraid to tell this Assembly that I am one of those children that was opted out of sex education by choice. I'd like to ask the hon. members of this Assembly if that lack of sexual education has been a problem for this hon. member and his family of four boys under the age of five? I would submit to you that it certainly, certainly has not been a problem.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

12:00

The Chair: Hon. members, we have subamendment SA1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:01 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Notley	Swann
Hehr	Pastoor	Taft
Mason		

Against the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	Olson
Anderson	Elniski	Ouellette
Benito	Evans	Prins
Berger	Fawcett	Redford
Bhardwaj	Fritz	Renner
Bhullar	Groeneveld	Sarich
Blackett	Hancock	Snelgrove
Campbell	Jablonski	VanderBurg
Danyluk	Knight	Vandermeer
Denis	Lukaszuk	Webber
Doerksen	Marz	

Totals	For – 7	Against – 32
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[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Going back for a moment to A1 and the many things that are wrong with it, we're left with this amendment that the government suggests will somehow address the phenomenal level of concerns that have been expressed by Albertans across the province, whether they be teachers, whether they be

school boards, whether they be the parents who theoretically are the subject of the very protective efforts that this government is engaging in but not really so much. Notwithstanding all that, yeah, they brought in this amendment to address those issues, but of course, as we've said, it really doesn't address the issues. It just creates more confusion in a lot of different ways.

Now, it's interesting because earlier the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit had suggested that their new section 16 might help them out a little bit there because, you know, it gives the commission the ability to basically maybe not investigate and hear the complaints quite as quickly or as rigorously as some of us naysaying, fearmongering, negative nellys think that they will. Instead, it gives the commission the ability to decide whether the complaint is one that could be dealt with more appropriately somewhere else or whether it is scheduled to be heard somewhere else, in a different forum, or under another act. So it's not necessarily the case that all these unreasonable parents, of which apparently, according to the government, there are only two in the whole province, will tie up the Human Rights Commission. No, no, no, because there is this great little section in here.

I have to share with you a personal little anecdote about a legal matter I was involved with before I had the joy of being elected to this Assembly. It centred around the question of whether or not the Human Rights Commission had jurisdiction to deal with an issue or whether one of those other bodies should be the place to deal with the issue. In that case it was an arbitration board. Now, I could stand to be corrected, but my rough guess at how much time that particular question – just that one question in terms of who is the body that has the jurisdiction to deal with this issue was a matter that took about eight years to be addressed through the courts. I think that maybe was because leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada was actually denied.

Anyway, if anyone thinks that this section 16 is going to somehow smooth the way and that, you know, all those reasonable people will look at section 16 and go, "Ah, I'm just not going to bother compelling my teacher to be brought before the Human Rights Commission because there's this thing in section 16," no, no, no. Quite the opposite. I think that that very, very, very effective lobby that managed to convince a significant portion of the Conservative caucus to adopt this ridiculous section in the bill, that being section 9, will dedicate the same level of effort to ensuring that every complaint is addressed at the Human Rights Commission that they can make happen.

That will take a lot of resources out of our public education system, and that will take a lot of resources from our general public purse while this matter is adjudicated. It will generally create confusion and chaos and, to review, go back to that whole process of chilling the degree to which teachers in our province believe that they can teach critical thinking, opposing views, analysis, and again, as I've said before, talk about our human rights code without fear of persecution or retribution.

Anyway, that's the problem with the amendment as it stands. It is just inviting more confusion and inviting more litigation and inviting more debate over the interpretation. As I've said before, as long as that debate and that interpretation and that confusion exist, our teachers and, as a result, our children will learn less in our schools.

It's a good thing that we have the freedom – is it the freedom to create? The spirit to create? I can't remember.

An Hon. Member: Spirit to achieve.

Ms Notley: The spirit to achieve and the freedom to create.

Anyway, we've got to be darn creative because we're not going to be taught a heck of a lot. We've got to be coming up with it all up here because we certainly will not actually be taught about it in our schools. That's that.

Because this amendment is so deeply ineffective, what we would like to do is try to limit – limit – the application of section 9 if at all possible. So it is for that reason that I am proposing another subamendment to the first amendment, and I'm wondering if I could have that distributed.

12:20

The Chair: The subamendment is now known as SA2.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, please continue on SA2.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Basically, the rationale underlying this proposed amendment, as I said before, is to try and limit the scope of the so-called parental rights clause in that rather than giving the authority for people to complain about curriculum that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation, the section would be amended to only include human sexuality.

Where parents, perhaps parents like the parents of the MLA for Airdrie-Chestermere, were concerned that their children might learn things about human sexuality, they would still be able to, well, bung up the system and do all those things that we actually think ought not to happen. Nonetheless, it would still be there, but thankfully they would not have the ability, if this amendment were to pass, to hold hostage our teachers or the majority of children within our classrooms and, therefore, limit their ability to learn about religion and to learn about sexual orientation and, as I've said before, to learn about our human rights code. That is the point of this amendment. Parents would have the right to choose with respect to dealing with when the school decided to teach on issues directly dealing with human sexuality. They would be able to get the notice. They would be able to pull their kids out. They'd be able to take the teacher to the Human Rights Commission if they didn't get the notice. They'd be able to do all of those great things.

Now, in terms of the concerns people here have expressed: well, what about those parents who are concerned about religion? They would still of course have all the protection that they have now under the School Act, that deals with how to give parents the right to pull their kids out of school where there is religious instruction with which the parent is uncomfortable. Of course, as I think has been mentioned before, one of the many reasons why the School Act is a better place for that particular provision to be placed is because the School Act puts the onus on the parent to notify the school board as opposed to requiring the school board to give notice to every parent and then regive notice when the curriculum changes and all that kind of stuff. Administratively, the School Act is a far more workable mechanism.

Of course, the other reason why having it in the School Act is so much more reasonable is that, as we've said before, if you put it in the human rights code, you invite litigation. You invite debate over how the language is interpreted. You invite debate over: well, if this is a right in the human rights code, it's got to have meaning, so it's got to be that when my kid is not in the classroom, they're getting a completely separate course of education and instruction, so you'd better hire yourself another teacher for all those kids that are going to be wandering around the halls because to do otherwise would be to not give full effect to a very substantive right. Why is it substantive? Because it's in the human rights code.

These are the kinds of arguments that get made when you put things in the human rights code. That, of course, is why this amendment would not have this living in the human rights code. It would have it relegated back to that place where it was working absolutely fine up until now without any problems or complaints: in the School Act.

Of course, as I've said before, the other good thing about this is that by not having this reference to sexual orientation in this amendment, we would also manage to deal with that very inconvenient little embarrassment where we're treating certain prohibited grounds differently in the very document which has been propagated to protect people from being treated differently on the basis of certain prohibited grounds. By taking sexual orientation out of this section, we would be able to walk away with our head held high from this very disturbing irony and very disturbing message that we are sending to one particular minority group within our province.

We still have parental rights. Parents who want to be in charge of how their kids learn about sexuality will still have parental rights. Parents who want control over the religious education of their children will still have the School Act. Parents who want to imply either directly or indirectly that it's okay to treat people differently because they are gay will not be allowed to. That's why this amendment would be a good thing. Frankly, I would think that all those objectives are things that people on both sides of the House would want to pursue.

So those brief reasons are the rationale behind this amendment, and I look forward to further debate on it. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on sub-amendment SA2.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you. I rise to support this subamendment. I am prepared to accept it as a compromise. Obviously, my first choice would have been if the previous subamendment had passed, but it did not. So we're now in the process of trying to look for the second-best solution, and I guess this is probably as good a second-best as we're going to get.

I listened to the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I think she sketched out some of the issues pretty well, but I think they need to be reinforced and driven home. One of the things that should be obvious to government members is that if everyone were reasonable, as the Minister of Education suggested maybe they are, then we wouldn't need legislation. He's saying that no reasonable person would ever do anything that disrupted things. The problem is . . .

Mr. Hancock: No. I said that no reasonable person would interpret this as referring to the sex life of plants.

Dr. Taft: Well, the problem is that there are all kinds of people there with different senses of what is reasonable. Some of them, Mr. Chairman, have written letters to the newspaper. I'm going to read just one of those letters here for you. I'm not saying that this person doesn't have a right to these opinions. They absolutely do. I'm reading this to illustrate that there are people who are in fundamental conflict with what's done in schools.

This is a letter that was written to the *Edmonton Journal* and published May 7, 2009. It's from a person from Spruce Grove. I don't need to read their name into the record, although I guess it's a letter to the newspaper, so I might as well. The name is Claire Helmers. The title for the letter, put in by the newspaper, is: What if Scriptures 101 Was Mandatory?

12:30

The letter goes like this:

Rob Wakarchuk states that evolution is a fact, and that there is more evidence to support evolution than there is to support the law of gravity.

He calls the biblical burning bush "mendacious ignorance" that is the "bane of modern civilization."

He claims we need to get into the 21st century by teaching evolution and homosexuality in schools.

I don't know if any of those are true statements about what that person claimed, but this is how the letter reads. It continues.

I wonder if the people in the 14th century said, "This is the 14th century, people. Don't tell me you still believe in God. Get with the times already!"

I've always wondered what the current century has to do with truth.

Then we begin to get into issues where there may be conflict with basic education. I'll continue, Mr. Chairman.

The theory of evolution is as untrue today as it was when it was promulgated in the 19th century, to a great hue and cry of "Don't make a monkey out of me!"

Teaching it and preaching it 10,000 times doesn't make it true, it just makes it familiar and easier to believe.

Why shouldn't a parent who believes that evolution is a lie be able to take her child out of a class that teaches it as fact?

Why shouldn't a parent whose religious beliefs preclude homosexuality be able to remove her child from a class that promotes it as being "normal"?

The letter goes on from there.

The point of the letter, I think, Mr. Chairman, is that for this person evolution is a fiction and a literal reading of the Bible is the truth. Clearly, we have a clash of two belief systems there, and anybody approaching things from a serious, scientific mode is going to say that the underlying structures of those two belief systems are very different.

Mr. Chairman, if we open up our curriculum to the kinds of challenges that are proposed in the legislation, we are going to undermine the learning of our children. We are going to allow children to be pulled out of school and not be taught about things that are scientifically very supported. We have people out there who are going to challenge the curriculum time and again on religious beliefs.

I'll read quickly into the record the definition of religion from the *Oxford* dictionary. It says here: "a particular system of faith and worship." Well, it's a pretty wide-open definition, isn't it, Mr. Chairman? The point is that people coming to the curriculum from any particular system of faith or belief could cause all kinds of disruption, so that's why I think it's a good thing to pull that exemption out of here. We're not saying that children have to be taught any particular religion, but we are saying that there are fundamental knowledges and fundamental attitudes and fundamental skills that are required for functioning successfully in the modern world.

I spoke when this bill first was up for second reading about a book I read a few months ago, long before this legislation came up, called *The Search for God at Harvard*. The challenge put out by this book, which was written by an Orthodox Jew, is that you can explore and embrace and study all kinds of religions, and it doesn't end up threatening your own. The experience of this Orthodox Jew who wrote this book was to go to a divinity school where all kinds of religions were taught. He proceeded with some concern, and he discovered over the course of the year that his own faith in his Judaism was reinforced while at the same time he got a new appreciation of the richness of many other faiths.

I think that's the approach that we should be taking in our school system, Mr. Chairman. I think that we should urge and require the children of this province and this country to sit side by side with children of other religions and not give their parents the option of yanking them out of those classes. I think this is an important idea.

I also think it's important to briefly address the difference between religious faith and scientific evidence. There's a really interesting book out called *Why Evolution Is True*. It's written by a fellow named Jerry Coyne, who for 20 years has been at the University of Chicago, specializing in evolutionary genetics. It's a book that's 250 pages long or so, so I won't read it all. But I think it's worth serious contemplation. He goes on at great length about the difference between knowing something scientifically and knowing something through an article of faith. What we want to do, Mr. Chairman, is keep our school system focused on issues that can be supported by evidence. We need to protect that core.

Now, Mr. Chairman, there's one other concern that I want to raise here, and this relates to the matter of tolerance. Obviously, it's closely related. If we have a school system where parents can pull their kids out because they don't want them to tolerate being taught about other religions, then we have a problem. We're sending the wrong signal to everybody involved in that. In fact, I have to tell you that this entire debate – this entire debate – has sent the whole country and the whole world the wrong signal about Alberta.

I'm going to refer a little bit to the work of Richard Florida, whose work I also talked about in Bill 27. Richard Florida has studied societies that flourish. He's developed theories supported by evidence. Not everybody agrees with them, but they're certainly worth serious thought, and they get serious thought. One of the things he argues is that a key indicator of a society's prosperity and success is its tolerance. The more tolerant a society is, the more welcoming it is to many views and many religions and many sexual orientations, the more that society is creative; and the more creative a society is, the more it flourishes.

I'm just going to read a few items that Richard Florida has written. If anybody ever has a chance to go listen to him, I suggest you do because he's a darn good speaker and very stimulating.

Well, listen, I'll do some summarizing here, Mr. Chairman. Basically, Florida's point is that a tolerant society is a necessary factor in developing a strong creative class, and it's the creative class that keeps a society vibrant and moving forward.

The problem with this bill and the reason I'm supporting the particular amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is that it reinforces, in my view, intolerance. It encourages people to step out of facing and living with their neighbours. It facilitates intolerance. Creative individuals need to feel welcomed in any society if they're going to stay there or if they're going to move there and settle there. If a society doesn't develop tolerance for individuals, if it doesn't encourage diversity, and if it doesn't encourage learning about diversity, then creativity is neither going to develop fully in a particular society, nor is it going to flourish. My concern as an Albertan with this bill, all other things aside, is that we're actually taking steps that fuel intolerance and that we are setting ourselves up for a disappointing future.

Related to tolerance, in Richard Florida's analysis, are talent and technology. Talented people are drawn by tolerant societies. It's as simple as that. Talented people are looking for new ideas. They're looking for creativity. They're looking to embrace, whether it's something as concrete as a range of foods or a range of music. They want a rich stew of society. They want everything there. They want to embrace it, and they want a society that celebrates it. This bill takes us in the opposite direction. Economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity.

12:40

There are a couple of quotes I'm going to put on the record from Mr. Florida which I think speak to the necessity of supporting this subamendment. This is a quote from a book he wrote called *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

Why do some places become destinations for the creative while others don't? Economists speak of the importance of industries having "low entry barriers," so that new firms can easily enter and keep the industry vital. Similarly, I think it's important for a place to have low entry barriers for people – that is, to be a place where newcomers are accepted quickly into all sorts of social and economic arrangements.

And then he goes on.

Places that thrive in today's world tend to be plug-and-play communities where anyone can fit in quickly.

I'll end that quote there, Mr. Chairman, and just ask people to consider: what message are we sending to people with Bill 44? We're telling them that this is not a tolerant society, that it's okay for you to be intolerant of other people's beliefs or other people's sexual orientation, and I think that's a serious mistake.

With those comments, I think, Mr. Chairman, that I'll take my seat and listen to responses from others, but I urge everybody to support this particular subamendment. Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Chair, as I saw my hon. colleague reading from the newspaper, I was flipping through some articles myself, and I thought there was a really good one in today's paper that I'd like to share just to give people something to chew on. It's from Naomi Lakritz in the *Calgary Herald*.

Bill 44 Debate Gives Parents an Unfair Rap

Since when did parents get to be so stupid that they can't be trusted with raising their own children? To hear some of the opponents of Bill 44 talk, you'd think that kids should be removed from their parents' custody and handed over to schools to raise. The teachers – the same ones who complain at bargaining time that large class sizes prevent them from paying adequate attention to their students – apparently know what's best for all those kids they say they don't have time to really get to know.

This week, the [ATA] passed a resolution which expressed fears that Bill 44 "will have a chilling effect on classroom discussion and instruction." The bill's language will be fine-tuned next week when it goes to committee – as well it should be. Education Minister . . . has promised that these concerns will be addressed via clear guidelines. And [the] Premier . . . said, "Bill 44 confirms the existing situation to opt out of religion instruction and sex education. It does not give parents the right to opt out of other instruction on religious grounds."

Parents have always had the choice to opt their children out of sex-ed classes. This is nothing new. When material about sex – gay or straight – is introduced in kindergarten or the early grades and parents feel it's age-inappropriate, they have every right to object to their kids learning it. As far as "instruction on religious grounds," there is no religious instruction taking place in public schools, by their very nature. And comparative religion courses are inevitably option courses anyway, so the students in those classes are there voluntarily.

In her column Thursday, Janet Keeping, president of the Sheldon Chumir Foundation For Ethics In Leadership, asked: "How are children to develop into thoughtful, tolerant adults, if the education system is prevented from exposing them to a variety of perspectives?" Gosh, it sounds like if we leave it up to pea-brained parents, they're sure to bungle the job of producing such terrific adults.

So a six-year-old who is prevented from learning about sexual orientation because his supposedly narrow-minded parents think his innocence is worth preserving [just] a little [bit] longer, is doomed not to develop into a "thoughtful, tolerant adult?" That's ridiculous.

Marilyn Sheptycki, president of the Alberta Schools Councils Association, worries Bill 44 will shut down debate of challenging ideas, thereby interfering with critical thinking skills and tolerance. Really? Then, students must be awfully limited in the things they're debating, confining themselves only to discussing sexual orientation and never going near politics, science, literature, philosophy or history. Which brings us to a far bigger threat to critical thinking skills than missing a one-time discussion of sexual orientation. That threat is the students' lack of exposure to the ideas of great writers and thinkers.

It goes on to talk about how there should be more study of the classics in school.

Referring to concepts of tolerance and such, Sheptycki said: "The way it is now, teachers will be afraid to have those great discussions in class." Since when is school all about sexual orientation, tolerance and other such topics? Nobody objects to teaching kids to be respectful of others, but whatever happened to the 3Rs?

Reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic.

And you can't have any kind of "great discussions" when students can make it through high school "without having read any of the classic novels."

The debate about Bill 44 has left parents with an unfair rap. They're being dismissed as bigoted idiots who are presumed guilty of inculcating their kids with all kinds of wrongheaded thinking which it's the school's self-imposed agenda to undo. Nonsense. The school's job is to educate the child in academic subjects, not to undermine the values being taught at home.

Bill 44 is not going to land teachers before human rights commissions. Before it's passed, the language will be tightened to prevent that. Educators should chill. Oh, and while they're chilling, they might want to do some critical thinking of their own – about revamping a curriculum whose paucity of exposure to the classics already does a fine job of keeping challenging ideas out of the classroom.

I thought that that was a worthwhile thing to share. I think there needs to be some perspective brought into this debate.

I read a letter that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity had put into the *Calgary Herald*, that appeared in the *Calgary Herald* over the weekend. I am paraphrasing, but the allegation was that by passing this legislation, we are basically allowing schools to be turned into breeding grounds for intolerance and bigotry, implying, of course, that the only parents that would dare – that would dare – opt their children out of sex education or out of a religion course are bigoted, narrow-minded, intolerant idiots. It's a travesty, but that is exactly the message that has been sent to parents during this debate. As a parent of four children I find it very offensive.

I think it's, quite frankly, disgusting that a parent's tolerance in education can be called into question because they believe that, frankly, they would like to teach their kids in a home setting about these very sensitive topics. I know for myself that I'll be teaching my children all about tolerance and about gay rights and about the need to treat a diversity of people the same and to care for them and to accept them as contributing members of society and as friends and as family, in some cases, as the situations come. I'll teach that to them, but I'll also teach them the value of what I see as traditional family values and how much success and good things that has brought their dad in life. I'll be proud to do that. I think I can give a balanced education to my children on those things, and I believe I can do so in a nonbigoted and completely tolerant way. So I don't need people on this side of the House telling me that I am some kind of uneducated moron. Effectively, that's what this debate has been.

I would also ask the hon. members to think, possibly, why they have 11 seats in the Legislature right now between the two parties. Maybe it's because when these types of debates come, you are unable to identify with a massive group of people out there: voters,

parents who have kids. Every time some issue like this comes up, you basically narrow them down and belittle them down into self-serving morons. That's, again, shameful.

You know, I ran for the nomination and won overwhelmingly, as many of the members in this Assembly did, and also ran in the election and won overwhelmingly. The reason I did is because I told parents and families that I would stand up in this Legislature and that I would defend their rights and that I would defend their dignity and that I would defend the rights of their children. That's what I'm doing right now, and I would hope that all hon. members of this Assembly would do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

12:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure that everybody both here and listening at home and joining us in the gallery . . .

An Hon. Member: Nobody is listening.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yes, they are. You've got to get on Twitter, my friend. It's just abuzzin'.

. . . really appreciates the participation of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere because, you know, we just got the debate all happening and woke everybody up and re-energized everybody, and we're good for another two, three, four, five hours here. So thank you so much, Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. It certainly got me re-energized, and it looks like the member from somewhere in Calgary is also going to be joining the debate.

I think what's really interesting in all of this – my question back to the member is: what in the current situation is stopping parents from doing any of the activities that he has just described? As far as I am aware, there is nothing currently that stops any parent from discussing any of these issues at home with their child, that prescribes to them in any way how a family would decide to conduct themselves in their home and educate their children. There is nothing currently that would prohibit that from taking place at all.

So I think: all right, if that's not a problem now, if the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere can move through life as he chooses to and raise his four sons as he wishes to, if there's not a problem, then why did we need this legislation brought before us? And he is a huge proponent of this legislation. So what is it that he felt was lacking in the current situation that somehow was impinging on his ability, was prohibiting him from interacting with his family and his community in the way that he wanted to so that he is such a prime proponent of this legislation? The truth is that even in this legislation – I mean, what the issue is is what's happening at school, not what's happening at home.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I have not heard any of my colleagues talk about what needed to happen at home. That is a different realm. That is not a public realm. What the parents that have spoken thus far in this Assembly talk about wanting to do or have done in raising their children: that's at home. That's not part of what exists today in legislation, and it's not part of what is anticipated under this. So I'm not sure how this whole discussion moved away from what is in front of us in this bill and what is being discussed about what will be discussed or will not be discussed in a school setting. Who is allowed to talk about what is in a school setting. It's not at home.

And I haven't heard anyone stand up in this Assembly and call anyone a moron except for the member who just got up and spoke, who then went on to say that the members in the opposition were somehow shameful. So the only group I've heard casting aspersions and throwing names around here is the very member who just spoke. I have not heard any of my colleagues today or the earlier time in second reading for this debate indicate in any way, shape, or form that any parent was a moron in any choices that they choose to make. It just didn't happen. So I don't know why he feels the need. He's the one raising it. He's the one throwing it around. Nobody that we've heard in *Hansard* . . .

Mr. Anderson: Actions speak louder than words, member. Actions speak louder than words.

Ms Blakeman: Actions speak louder than words. Hmm. So which action is he referring to? My action in getting up and debating here?

Let's talk about the casting of aspersions on the members who successfully were elected. They're in this House. They're not the problem. They were successful, and they were winners. Frankly, I'm a little tired of hearing the Conservatives constantly get up and talk about how the members of the opposition, who were successfully elected, many of them with larger margins than other people that are sitting in here, are somehow losers. We are not losers, and it's disrespectful to the people that elected us. [interjections] It's disrespectful to talk about people who were legitimately elected and serve time in this House as somehow not being reflective of their electorate and not being the primary choice of their electorate. [interjection] Oh, that's just as bad.

The focus of this bill is not about what people do with their children at home. It's not. It's about what is being anticipated under human rights legislation that is specifically directed towards behaviour that will be allowed or not allowed in school.

Particularly under section 9, considering the amendment that's in front of us right now, it's a subamendment that is talking about discussions around religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation. Specifically, it's trying to narrow the focus of what would be considered as prescribed or prohibited grounds under this particular legislation and narrow the discussion to human sexuality, which some argue, and I've had them argue it to me, is a slight improvement on the wider scope that actually is in the bill now.

I'm glad I got the opportunity to respond to some of the member's interesting comments, and I'm certainly willing to . . . [interjection] Well, I'm not going to be bullied and I'm not going to be yelled at in this House. I have a right to be here, and I am here. You can mutter under your breath all you want and talk about how somehow my actions speak louder than my words. Well, I have taken action in standing up and speaking in debate on this and supporting what I believe in and reflecting what my constituents believe in. I have the e-mails and letters that are giving me the direction, so I'm very happy to be doing that on their behalf. Part of that is in supporting subamendment A2, which is before us, as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to limit the scope of what is to be considered under section 9, to narrow that down to only being human sexuality. It's a slight improvement on what we have in front of us, but I'm willing to take just about any improvement; therefore, I'm willing to support subamendment A2.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot has been made about the composition of the caucus and the motive behind this amendment and that somehow there was some other agenda. I'd just like to bring the members' attention to the facts of some of the composition within our caucus. We have former members of the teaching profession: from Edmonton-Castle Downs, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, the Member for Battle River-Wainwright, and the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. We have former school board trustees: the members for Edmonton-Decore, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Calgary-North Hill, and our Premier. We have former chairs of school boards: the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, and the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

I would say that we're quite representative of Albertans, and we're also representative of those people who have experience in the educational profession. We as a caucus collectively saw the need to actually give the parents of those some 600,000 students in this province the ability to be able to opt out of a particular course of study with respect to three specific issues and to be notified.

Now, most of those parents will not pull their kids out of those classes. In our CALM classes that we have in this province, we have a total of 47 students that opted out of those classes last year. How many students do you think will opt out of sexual orientation? Well, it will be zero because there's nothing in the curriculum with respect to sexual orientation. And with respect to religion it will probably be the same amount.

1:00

But it is the choice of the parent, the same parent who chooses which type of school that they will go to. Will it be a charter school? Will it be a public school? Will it be a home-school? Will it be a Catholic school? It's the same parents who choose their clothing, the same parents who decide what religion they're going to have. It's the same parents who will decide what kinds of activities and what kinds of friends they will have.

The hon. members of the opposition think that these parents aren't responsible enough, aren't tolerant enough to be able to make that distinction. Well, did you know that we have same-sex marriage in this province? Did you know there was nobody marching in the streets? Did you know that was brought forward by a Progressive Conservative government? Did you know that there are hundreds of those that actually exist in this province? Did you know I actually had a chat with Richard Florida about this?

An Hon. Member: The Supreme Court did it.

Mr. Blackett: Well, no. With respect to same-sex marriage? No, no, no.

You're talking about the fact that we are embarrassing our province because we are showing intolerance. Well, we have shown immense tolerance. There are hundreds of those people. They are in my community. They are my neighbours. They are my friends. That is something that we all in this caucus are able to do. We brought forward the inclusion of sexual orientation because not one single member of the opposition, before we introduced this bill, talked about anything but that with respect to human rights. Not once. I dare you to go through *Hansard* and pick that out and find it for me. I've got all the different references here. If it's Kent Hehr, whether it's April 16, whether it's March 15, 2008, March 21, 2008, or the Member for Edmonton-Centre, October 28, October 29, November 5, November 19 . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you calling a point of order?

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Mason: I am indeed. The minister knows he's not allowed to name members of the Assembly. He should apologize.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Chairman, I apologize sincerely if I offended the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. That was not my intention.

Debate Continued

Mr. Blackett: At the end of the day, when we responsibly sat down with the members of the ATA, when we responsibly sat down with members of the school boards, the concerns that they articulated on behalf of teachers, on behalf of administrators is that they wanted to make sure that they were able to conduct themselves in a discussion in the course of teaching their students without interference. So we have made sure that there is, if notification is given, an opt-out clause. We have nothing else to do with the teachers or the school boards. We made explicit that indirect or indiscriminate comments with respect to religious beliefs, religion, sexual orientation, or human sexuality are not to be there. We also went as far as to say that the school boards have a fantastic system for mediating disputes. That's there. None of the opposition members seem to want to acknowledge that. They want to talk about the same bogeyman that we talked about three weeks ago.

Right now there will be a provision that the director has, who can say that if a prospective complainant has not exhausted the avenues for appeal – that is, going to the teacher, going to the principal, going to the school board – then they have no merit. Their case will not be heard until that appeal has been satisfactorily exhausted. Other people have mentioned that we should do that. It's a fantastic system. Absolutely. We have faith in it. That's why we have put that in there.

We believe in it. We are representative of Albertans. We are representative of parents, of those 600,000 people, and we are representative of each of those professions, whether it's teachers, trustees, or board chairs. I stand by our caucus, our decision, and if you think for one moment that there is going to be a chance that we are going to waver on this particular bill to get one amendment, you are barking up the wrong tree.

Mr. Mason: I'm just going to be very brief, Mr. Chairman. I want to respond to the minister. [some applause] If I get more applause, it'll encourage me to go on a bit.

I want to respond to the minister because the minister seems to think that human rights and the work on human rights in this Legislature started 19 months ago when he was elected, but there's lots of work that has taken place in this Assembly and some very good work by previous governments of this party. In its early days it was actually a lot more progressive than it is today. You know, the minister seems to think that because the opposition raised the question of protecting sexual orientation and not some of the other weird ideas that he has incorporated in this bill as human rights, we have no right to speak on it.

But I'll remind the minister that my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona repeatedly challenged him to bring in changes to the human rights code making sexual orientation a protected right, and he said: "We're not going to do it. We're not going to do it." He had a number of different reasons for not wanting to do it, notwithstanding the fact that that was imposed, but finally he did. Finally he did, but unfortunately that little change which he has only adopted, you know, years after the Supreme Court

of Canada guaranteed that right – he's brought forward an amendment to this code only after a great deal of pressure and after initially telling the House repeatedly he was not going to do it.

Unfortunately, his bill has been hijacked by the extreme right in his own caucus, who are importing some ideology from an American campaign to protect parental rights against the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. That's where it came from. It didn't come from parents demanding it, and I think that's very clear.

So I just want to respond to the minister that he wasn't going to do this, and then he did it, but unfortunately it has been hijacked. Instead of being a very late and long overdue step to bring Alberta in line with other provinces and the Supreme Court decision, I think it's actually now a step backwards because of these bizarre rights that the social conservatives who seem to dominate this government today have imposed.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have listened to all of the comments, and I really do appreciate the hon. minister and the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere taking part in the debate. I think it's good that we do so. Just to comment a little bit back in there, I understand very well that both members are parents. They both love their children much, and I really honestly believe both of them do probably fabulous jobs with their children. I believe in their fundamental right to be able to yard their kid out of the classroom any time they don't want them to talk about anything sexual that they don't want, and I respect that right.

But here's what I don't want to happen: I want that right contained in the School Act, where it was in section 50, not in my human rights legislation, enshrined as a right that no other human rights legislation has, and for good reason. You know why? Human rights are rights essential to all humans. Not all humans have children. Not all humans, you know, actually even want children. Not all humans are able to have children. There's a reason why no other human rights act has this: because it's not a human right that you have a child, that you do all these things, that you opt out. There are separate acts, of course, that deal with these things.

I believe the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill brought up the fact that this is contained in the rights of the child in some innocuous legislation, but it's not contained in human rights legislation in Canada, nor is it contained at the United Nations. There are reasons for that. I don't by any means, there's no one in this party – we respect a parents' right to yard their children out of classrooms in this province when they are opposed to something in the curriculum. Okay? Fair enough. Fair enough. But here's what it is: don't enshrine it in human rights legislation and in language cloaked with what can only be seen as borderline innuendo, borderline giving people a slap in the face, saying sexual orientation, and doing it in this haphazard, sloppy manner that we see before us here today.

1:10

I think that, speaking to the amendment, by all means, the amendment is one of those things where I believe the hon. member from the third party has struck, really, a middle ground. You know, there's not something untoward here. We're not doing a swap – all right? – that with the right hand we're going to give the gay, bi, lesbian community protection. We're going to name them, like we should have 11 years ago. Okay? We're going to do that here. But if there's a trade-off, we've got to say: "Darn right; we're going to mention somewhere in this legislation that we're not that happy about sexual orientation, that this doesn't happen in our communities, that we're not all supportive of it" and go back to our communi-

ties and say: “Hey, look. We stood up on this reasoning. We actually believe in this reasoning. That is why this shouldn’t be in our human rights legislation.”

That’s why I believe, speaking directly to the amendment, this strikes a balance. Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, if you really are seriously concerned about having your rights enshrined about yanking your kids out of school, then fair enough. I believe in your right to do that and I respect your right to do that, and I know you’re a good parent, but just put this halfway point in the bill. We’re not naming sexual orientation.

If there’s nothing wrong with this, if we’re really, truly saying to ourselves, you know, “it’s human sexuality and all the rigamarole that goes with it” – the male-female bit, the male-male bit, the some other people in strange situations bit – and we’re going to talk about that sometimes in our classroom and we’re going to allow people the right in this thing, I still don’t think it should be in our human rights act, but if you really want it there, to say, “All right, parents, we’re going to give you a nod here, and we’re going to do this,” let’s do it this way. Let’s not do the backhanded approach, where we need sort of a wink and a nod that sexual orientation really doesn’t mean anything, but it’s there. You guys, if you look yourselves in the eye, you know it’s there for that reason, and I believe it’s disingenuous when you say that it’s not there for that reason.

Mr. Blackett: It’s not there for that reason.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Well, then, let’s just take it out. Let’s clear it out. The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit says, “It’s not there for that reason.” If it’s not there for that reason, let’s take it out. Let’s look at this amendment. Let’s do it. Let’s take out this inflammatory language. If it’s not there, let’s do it.

Mr. Blackett: How is that inflammatory? That’s not inflammatory.

Mr. Hehr: The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit asked me how the language “sexual orientation” is inflammatory. It wasn’t inflammatory when this government for 11 years wouldn’t enshrine it when the Supreme Court decision came down?

Mr. Blackett: I wasn’t here. I wasn’t here.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, yes, yes. I know the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit is many things. I guess, you know, he can turn a blind eye to this and say that that’s not the reason for it, but the history is clear in this province. For 11 years the words meant something. The words “sexual orientation” meant something. It said to people: “We’re not going to believe in these rights, we’re not going to listen to the Supreme Court, and we’re going to deny people the respect they deserve under this legislation. We’re not going to do it.” So for 11 years it meant something, and all of a sudden today it didn’t mean a thing. Well, I think that’s wishful thinking, sir, and . . .

Ms Notley: It’s disingenuous.

Mr. Hehr: . . . disingenuous at best.

Mr. Denis: Shame.

Mr. Hehr: I’m glad you said that because I believe you were saying that to yourself, hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak on this. I believe this amendment would take out the bad association this province has

had with sexual orientation over the 11 years and would truly erase the 11 years where these words have had a meaning.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak to subamendment SA2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I’ve appreciated the debate. I’ve listened to both sides here. I was trying to track down the column that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere was reading by Naomi Lakritz because I thought there was a reference in there to the effect that nobody is going to get hauled before the Human Rights Commission under this legislation. When I combined that with the repeated comments from the minister about how few actual exemptions there are, requests for exemptions and all the other safeguards now written in this amendment, I find myself wondering: why is the government standing on this at all?

It’s clearly almost entirely about symbolism because there are now so many outs and apparently, according to the minister, so many safeguards. Although I don’t read it quite as extensively as he does, nonetheless they’re certainly spelled out now under this amendment more than under the original drafting. But why are we doing this? I think it’s clearly about symbolism, and I think the symbolism involved is – well, we’re going to disagree on what the symbols mean. Obviously, many members on that side think it’s a symbolism of endorsing parental rights. To me and to many other people it’s a symbolism about facilitating intolerance and discouraging shared experience.

I read into the debate some letters to the newspaper, one in particular about a person who literally takes the word of the Bible and dismisses evolution. Fair enough. They’re entitled to that view, but I don’t think it’s a view that should be brought into the public education system.

I now want to read one other letter which I thought really touched on something that’s important. We claim here, all of us, that we’re thinking about the kids. I think we need to think for a moment about that kid who is, you know, the age of 12 or 14 and beginning to experience sexual awakenings and may be beginning to wonder about their own sexual identity if they’re having homosexual sexual awakenings. How does that kid feel in a class where teaching about that subject can be seen as a violation of a human rights code? I think it’s sending the wrong signal.

I want to read just a few sentences from a letter that was written to me as an MLA. This is not a public letter, so I’m not going to read who it’s from, but I will read a couple of key points. It goes like this:

There are two critical points here. The first is that, for children who may be homosexual, they be given good information that helps them understand their feelings and orientation. The obligation to protect and support the child supersedes the obligation to support the religious beliefs of the parents. The second critical point is that, for heterosexual children, they receive good information about homosexuality in a way that does not demean gay people. This does not prevent the parents from providing their children with their views as well.

I think we need to contemplate that for a minute. We need to imagine the child who is at that very vulnerable age and may be feeling sensitive about their own sexual orientation or may not really even understand it. What kind of social environment are we creating for that child? Are we creating one of support and health and tolerance, or are we creating one that’s going to reinforce a sense of oppression or a sense of denial or a sense of confusion or a sense of humiliation? I’m afraid that the symbolism of this bill is doing the latter, and I think that’s an unhealthy situation.

1:20

You know, Mr. Chairman, it's just a few years ago that some good friends of ours had a son who happened to be the same age as one of our sons. As he was going through school, he just found he wasn't attracted to girls. He found through high school that, in fact, he was homosexual. It was tough for his parents, and it was tough for him. But you know what? The parents came around and have become very supportive, and the school and the children and his schoolmates were all very supportive. I'm concerned that the symbolism of this bill goes against that. This young man has gone on now to a stellar academic career. He's an undergraduate student in his senior year in a very advanced science program. Too many children who come of age and discover that they're homosexual have quite the opposite experience. They become depressed, they turn to other escapes, or too often they even end up in suicide.

I think that we need to be alert to the power of symbolism. We need to show leadership on these issues, and I guess we're just going to have to disagree on the different sides of the House here about what leadership is. I think that the leadership we should be showing as an Assembly, as people who value a tolerant society, a society that welcomes the world would be to accept the subamendment moved by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I apologize for my raspy voice. I'm a little under the weather.

Mr. Chairman, I'm actually listening very intently to the debate on both sides of the House, and I think some good comments have been made on both sides. But I have to tell you that I'm not very proud of being a member of this Legislature today for the reason that perhaps often politicians are given a bad rap, often unjustly, for finding a wedge issue and then milking it to the maximum for political gain. Perhaps this is one of these days when, actually, we may be earning that stripe by doing exactly that.

One member from across the aisle said that we're sending a bad message to Albertans and Canadians and perhaps the world, and I would agree. But I think the bad message that we're sending primarily is because we have found an issue that clearly polarizes Canadians, definitely Albertans into two very well-defined camps, and now we're going spend all night long here really for no meritorious reason. At the end of this, Mr. Chairman – and I think it's fair to predict the future – when it's all said and done, the sun will rise tomorrow, and the rights that are entrenched there will continue to be entrenched, but somehow we will think that we have secured some support of various groups out there in society that will say: "Yes, these are our champions. They stood up all night, and they fought for our rights."

Well, this is an issue that I'm very passionate about, and maybe because of that the Premier has given me the privilege of chairing the Alberta human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund. The last number of months I have spent travelling the province and meeting with various minority groups, be it religious, ethnic. Also, I've made a point of meeting with as many gay and lesbian groups as possible to find out, just in case I didn't know, what it is like to be you in Alberta. What kind of experience do you have being a gay person in Alberta, being lesbian or transgendered in Alberta? Mr. Chairman, I have to be honest with you. Frankly, I've learned – and I intuitively always knew it – that it is not easy to be a gay person in Alberta, and it's probably not easy to be a gay person in Canada or anywhere else in the world because there are wrongful assumptions attached to that title, and there is historic lack

of acceptance of that community. They're really living a very difficult life. Many never publicly admit to being gay.

Mr. Chairman, whether this government has entrenched into legislation the inherent right that the gay community has in this society early enough or late enough we can debate. The fact of the matter is that that right has been entrenched by the Supreme Court of Canada's decision. If you look at any and all publications published by the government of Alberta since the time of the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, that right already was entrenched in the literature that the government was releasing. The fund that I chair was releasing dollars to causes promoting acceptance, eradicating prejudice and discrimination against the group. The group was protected except that it wasn't named in the legislation, and kudos to the minister and kudos to, actually, all members of this Legislature – it's irrelevant which side they sit on – for, I hope, passing that aspect of the bill because that is very important.

But what we're doing right now, Mr. Chairman, is that instead of celebrating the obvious, celebrating the fact that we have gotten to the point where we have entrenched it and we're doing the right thing irrespective of the timing, we have found a wedge issue, and we're going to milk that wedge issue, whether parents have the right to remove a child from a classroom. Well, I'm a parent and I'm a teacher, and I can tell you that if there was anything taught in a classroom that I found objectionable, I would have as a parent exercised the right of removing my child from that particular class. I think all members in this Legislature will agree.

Now, if this bill passes as it is on the floor right now, that will not change except that it will be written into the legislation. I'm not sure what the problem with that is. Could it have been written into the School Act? Perhaps. The fact of the matter is that now a practice that has taken place in the province for many, many years – parents have exercised the practice of being able to remove their children – is codified just like we wanted to codify the protection that our gay community is to have in the province of Alberta. It was very important for the gay community. Even though they were already enjoying the benefits of legal protection, it was so important for the gay community to have that codified. They wanted it codified. It didn't change anything. Tomorrow they will not have any more rights because those rights have already been put in place by the Supreme Court of Canada, but they wanted it codified for a symbolic reason. Kudos to them. I agree with them, and I'm glad that they have it codified.

I can by extension also understand why these parents who have objections to certain aspects of curriculum – I personally don't, but apparently there are some who do – want it to be codified: because it also means that much to them. They already have the right of removing their kids, but it means that much to them.

So we have two groups of people, Mr. Chairman, seemingly polarized – I wish they weren't – who were enjoying certain privileges, but now they insist on having those privileges or rights codified. How can you argue that one group is right in their desire to have their rights codified and the other group is wrong in that desire? It simply doesn't make a lot of sense. But we're going to sit for another six hours over here because we found a wedge issue, and the argument, as I'm hearing it, is that we are pro gay and they are anti gay. Well, I haven't polled our caucus, nor do I care to poll any other caucus, but I can tell you – I can speak only for myself – that I don't believe that members of this Legislature are either pro or con. We don't have the right to be pro or con. It doesn't matter how we feel. The fact of the matter is that these are human beings, these are citizens of Alberta, and they have any and all rights and privileges like you and I do, Mr. Chair.

So I would implore the members of this Legislature to reconsider and understand the fact that we have two groups that simply want to

codify their rights and have the assurance that one day a different government isn't elected or a new curriculum is put in place that would jeopardize their rights. That's what it's really all about. But if we choose to sit here for a number of hours for simply political reasons and try to prove what big supporters we are of one group or another, Mr. Chairman . . .

An Hon. Member: There'll be no one to service.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Maybe that's right. Maybe ultimately there will be no one to service because we're not doing either group any justice. Thank you.

1:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to sort of respond briefly to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I don't think discussing human rights and staying up late in the evening is a matter of political gain. It's a matter of human rights and treating people with dignity. I don't buy the argument that this is for political gain.

On our side many people who have contacted us feel this is a very important issue that should be debated, and for him to dismiss it in the manner that he did, that this is for political gain, I believe doesn't serve the teaching community, who have been in contact with us about this bill, the gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgendered community, who have been in touch with us about this bill, the many school boards, who have been in touch with us on this bill and wished us to really try and dig in and try to make some amendments here and battle this.

I don't believe chalking it up to political gain is what we're doing here. We're doing what our constituents ask and what they believe they are entitled to and what I believe the rules of this House allow us to do. I don't see, you know, us getting political gain out of this right now. It might get a line in the paper tomorrow: they stayed up till 5 o'clock. But that's not why we're here; we're here to honestly debate this.

Anyway, if we move to the merits of the amendment and why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs should actually – I know he didn't talk too much about the amendment, but if I could bring him back to actually why we're a little worried. I, too, congratulated the minister when I spoke on this – I believe it was in second reading – on bringing sexual orientation into the act. It had been 11 years ago when this happened, the Vriend decision. It was one of those things that was brought in and that this government resisted under the words "sexual orientation."

For some reason previous governments and this government as well objected to the words "sexual orientation" being put into our then human rights legislation. That has been rectified now, I guess, because this government had a problem with the words "sexual orientation." Otherwise, if they didn't have a problem with it, I'm assuming they would have done what the Supreme Court asked. Otherwise, call me crazy.

Some Hon. Members: Crazy.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. I know I asked for that.

Call me crazy, but there was a problem with that language, okay? Let's say there was. I think anyone would be naive not to believe that that, in fact, was the case. Then to wake up today and all of a sudden say: "Those two words don't mean anything. It's blank slate time here in Alberta. We wiped out everything in the past." I know

the hon. Minister of the Treasury Board doesn't like to look in the rearview mirror, and it's always straight ahead. These two words don't mean anything anymore. It's straight ahead. Don't look in that rearview mirror. No point in doing that right now. Everything is right as rain here in Alberta. We've got it straight. But, no. Sexual orientation: these two words come up again. They come up again here in this bill, and they cause many people concern. They cause the teaching community concern and other communities concern: the gay, lesbian, bi, and transgendered community, for one, and others of many stripes and what have you.

Needless to say, that is the reason why this amendment is choosing to go down to just the words "human sexuality." Human sexuality. It's enshrined. You can take your children out of class. This is a halfway point where we're willing to meet the hon. member on human sexuality. We take out those two words that for whatever reason this government didn't want in. We take them out. Then you've got human sexuality.

I'll tell you what. It's not the best bill in the world, but, you know, it's put forward. I can live with it. I think, hon. member, I'd like to hear your comments on why you object to just changing this bill from including those words, "sexual orientation," that right up until today this government didn't like for some reason, and we'll now just put these two words in. I'd like to hear his comments on if that would suffice him and allow that to codify these rights. We're okay with it. We've spoken in favour of that.

Those are my comments. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and join this debate. I have to say that I've listened impassionedly during the day, during the night, and sometimes during the graveyard shift as we are right now with some speeches here, and one of the best speeches I actually heard was from the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. He makes some good points.

I just want to add a couple of items here to the history. There's a lot of talk here about the Vriend decision. This actually came down from the Supreme Court in 1998. It read sexual orientation into our law. I remember this very closely as I was a law student at the time. Essentially, it's been there for seven years. Many ask: why do we need this? I'll tell you why we do. During some consultations on Bill 52 a group said to me that sexual orientation was not a protected ground of discrimination. That was incorrect. But at the same time it hit me to this point: not everyone understands the intricacies of the law or of this legislation, and this is why we need to add sexual orientation to the provision of the legislation. I submit to this House that you should not have to have a legal background to understand your rights or to be free of discrimination, to be free of discrimination in employment, to be free of discrimination in housing. Our laws must be clear. This is why sexual orientation is being added to section 4, and I'm pleased to support this.

As the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs indicated, there's another side to this coin. That ground against discrimination was already there, but we put it in law. Similarly, parental choice was there in the School Act as it is right now, but at the same time, for the same reason we want to put it into legislation.

Now, Mr. Chair, I don't have the privilege of having children of my own. I do come from a long line of teachers in my family, and I have to say that as a child my parents were the first and the best of my teachers. I learned from a very young age that many people have different values, many people have different families. While everybody may be alike in many aspects, it's up to the parents – not the government, not the state – to raise the children.

It's important also to never be judgmental towards others who may have different lifestyles. This legislation reflects just that: a parent's right to set parameters for raising their own child. I've heard again: this provision is in the School Act; what's the benefit? Well, first off, advanced notification to parents on matters of religion, sexuality, or sexual orientation. This is, again, why this subamendment is unacceptable, striking out religion, human sexuality, and sexual orientation and just leaving human sexuality. Rather, we need to enshrine this clause in legislation.

As I've stated earlier, our own laws must be clear and understood by all, and that's why section 11.1 achieves this: parental choice. Many misconceptions we've dealt with earlier. The Member for Calgary-Nose Hill talked about, at the outset of this debate, that this doesn't have anything to deal with evolution or anything with historical fact in the past.

My submission is that we must oppose this subamendment because it goes against the whole character of this bill. If we're going to respect rights on one end, we also must respect the same rights on the other end. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak?

[Motion on subamendment SA2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are now back to amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to propose a subamendment to amendment A1, so I will circulate those through the pages.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause, then, while they're circulated.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will refer to this amendment as subamendment SA3.

1:40

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. For the record and those of you listening in the gallery and elsewhere, the subamendment reads as follows: be it moved that amendment A1, clause (b), be amended by adding the following after the proposed subsection (3). This would be, then, subsection (4). "No costs incurred under this section by a school board shall be taken from funds voted for the Ministry of Education." That's the full substance of this proposed subamendment.

It seems inevitable that this piece of legislation is going to move through, but when we think through the administration of it, I think we need to get specific here. We need to think about resources. It would be naive to say that there will be absolutely no costs related to this bill getting passed. The amendment proposed is, if anything, in some ways more complicated than the original. Regardless, in either case there are going to be costs, and I just want to enumerate briefly what some of those costs might be.

Clearly, there are going to be records kept for every single child from K to 12 in every school in Alberta specific to this. Each one of those children is going to have to have a form sent home from school, maybe multiple forms because there will be multiple subjects covered in various grades. Those then have to be compiled, sorted, stored, and kept in some kind of bring-forward system so that when the exemption has to be implemented, it's brought forward at the

right moment. So there are those costs there. I know from my own experience at schools that school offices are already darn busy places. They often tend to be crowded, too, so there are questions of how those resources will be handled.

I think that beyond that there will sooner or later be cases brought forward. There will be complaints filed. Somebody will slip up. Some school secretary will be sick on the day that an exemption was supposed to occur, and the kid will be taught when the parents wanted them exempted or whatever. It's going to happen. Or maybe it'll be a frivolous complaint. However it happens, there will be a complaint, and then there will be costs incurred for that.

The number of students in school in Alberta – I don't know the exact number. The Minister of Education is here. It's got to be in the few hundreds of thousands. So we can be darn sure that there are going to be complaints filed. When those complaints are filed, the lawyers will get involved, and right away the costs start to climb. They'll climb very quickly, you know. Then we don't know how long this will go. We don't know how many other kinds of people might be entailed, but every step of the way there are going to be costs.

This particular subamendment is intended as an insurance policy, as it were, or as a barrier that prevents those costs from being taken out of the Education budget. I imagine, for example, the school that's closest to where I live. It's a very small elementary school, about a hundred students. They're students from very highly engaged families. It's not hard for me to imagine one of those families at some point filing this kind of complaint. There are lots of lawyers there. There are lots of professionals in that neighbourhood. Well, if the costs of dealing with that complaint came down on the school budget, a little school like that is really going to suffer. It wouldn't take long if there are lawyers involved for the cost to climb into the thousands of dollars.

What we are wanting to achieve by this proposed subamendment is that an action taken under the human rights act does not cost money that's meant to be spent under the School Act. We don't want to see money taken out of the classroom to support this bill. That's pretty straightforward. I hope that members opposite will understand that this is intended to protect the budget integrity of the school system, and I hope they support this.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He has mentioned costs in this subamendment and mentioned lawyers' fees. I'm no longer a practising lawyer, so I can't talk about what lawyers' fees are these days. I have to say that his intent is good, but in practice this amendment is bad. I have to say that because it is going to actually involve more costs in tracking these costs, and there is only one pocket, be it education, human rights, or otherwise. This is just going to result in more administration costs. I don't know how much it is going to cost, but at the same time this is a bad amendment. I would encourage all members to oppose it. I'm not sure where the intent really comes from here. Is this just to give more bureaucrats more things to do? Is this to hire more people in our civil service? I don't know. But this is a bad amendment, and I would encourage all members to oppose it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I actually think this amendment should be supported. I was trying to figure out

how to do a similar, related amendment because what I was trying to do was make sure that even if a teacher had been found in violation of section 9, they wouldn't personally have to pay a cost and wouldn't be liable for any kind of punishment. I wasn't able to successfully convince Parliamentary Counsel that there was a way to do that, but this was the alternative.

I think, actually, the member has done the honourable thing, and that's to make sure that the school doesn't end up having to pay the costs here, that it's not pulled away from educational dollars towards students. I think that ultimately what we're trying to do here is give the students in the education system the best possible experience and make sure that the money is spent on them and not on others.

That's the problem with punishment and liability and responsibility clauses in legislation. I think that often we seem to make two mistakes. One is that in trying to reinforce that this is a serious matter, we put the amounts too high. When these get to be adjudicated in front of a court, the judges look at the punishment, and if it's very high, for example in a monetary fine, they go: well, that's an awful lot of money. So the test is going to be very high to make sure that somebody has broken this law in a vigorous enough way that we're going to charge them the absolute top dollar. What happens, I've found, in a lot of cases is that it's never charged because the test is too high and people don't meet it.

We have to be clear on what we're trying to do with this legislation. From our point of view, it's to try and minimize whatever damage we think is being done specific to section 9, and that is that there is a chill that's being put on teachers about their ability to raise and react to and teach the various prohibited sections, but the cost of it appears to be coming forward on the school board. I mean, who will pay the costs if we have the situation that's described? If the secretary or the school administrator is not there on the day that these notices are supposed to go out in the school, the teacher is now in violation. They're brought up before the Human Rights Commission, and there are definitely costs involved there. Who is liable for it? Do we really want to have the dollars pulled away from the kids in the classroom? I would argue no. That's not what we're trying to do.

I'm more than happy to support the member's amendment, and I urge the rest of my colleagues to do the same.

1:50

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess it's just coincidence that I happen to be sitting here listening occasionally and reading this book called *Risk: The Science and Politics of Fear*. It explains very clearly what people do when they're trying to misrepresent a position or trying to somehow make an issue that's not real. You can create the fear. Then if that doesn't work, you create the result of the fear or what could possibly happen. That's fine. But, you know, I have to wonder. If a school board or staff or someone in their organization has done something that requires a legal opinion or process, then logically that board or that organization would pay. Or I guess you could go take it from, oh, say, seniors. They're not here tonight, we're not worrying about them, so we'll take it from them. Or maybe from health care. That's a good connection. We can't take it from education. We're not going to tell you where we're going to take it from. We don't even know what it's going to be. We don't even know if it's going to be anything.

I can just about guarantee you that what we've paid the security staff here tonight to listen to their politics of fear is more than will be spent worrying about what they're worrying about. I just think it's ironic that I just happen to be reading *Risk: The Science and Politics of Fear*, and it's going on right here in front of our eyes.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Nothing could better represent the politics of fear but section 9 of Bill 44. It raises a question in my mind and surely has in other members as well: what are some people afraid of? What are they afraid is going to happen in the school that their children are going to be exposed to that requires the entrenchment of this in human rights legislation? I'd like to know from the extreme right that's driving this agenda: what is it about these subjects that you fear so much?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on subamendment SA3.

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely. I'm responding to the way the President of the Treasury Board talked about subamendment SA3. Thank you so much for the opportunity. You know, what I find interesting is why the members in this Assembly are more than willing to accept a legal cost to be covered for our activities through the risk management fund, but when you point out a similar situation for another sector . . .

Dr. Taft: This legislation is creating the risk.

Ms Blakeman: This legislation is creating the risk for other people, actually, but there the similarities end.

While the members opposite can understand and accept and value the risk management fund covering their decisions and any liabilities they may create in doing their job, they don't seem to understand that when it transfers to a different sector like the teachers or the principals or the schools boards but specifically the teachers, which is what this particular amendment was on. I just find it really curious that there's a clear grasp and understanding when it comes to protecting their liabilities with the risk management fund but not to understanding how those liabilities could be created or, indeed, what they will cover for another sector, in this case the teachers.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think it is important for us as MLAs to understand that by passing this legislation, we are creating a liability for others that did not exist, we are creating a risk for others that did not exist, and that we are making absolutely no provision to counterbalance that in any financial way.

What's going to happen – and I guarantee it. I'll take the President of the Treasury Board out for a steak dinner sometime on this. I'm sure he'd be thrilled to go with me if this guarantee doesn't work. I guarantee there will eventually be complaints filed under this, and I guarantee that that will lead to costs. All I'm trying to do is make sure that those costs don't come out of the budgets of the schools or on the backs of the teachers. The Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely right. We all sit here as MLAs covered under the taxpayer dollar by the risk management fund, but, oh no, we don't want that benefit to go to anybody else. It's good for us, bad for the others. I think that's wrong, particularly when this bill is creating that risk in the first place.

I don't know that there are any other comments on it. Yeah, we have one more comment, and then we can keep moving.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Movement is good, Mr. Chairman.

Well, I'm certainly interested in the point that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has raised, Mr. Chairman. He's raised the fact that in order to enforce this or in order to accommodate the types of activities that are going to go on, it's going to take resources away from our school system. So any time a parent decides to launch a case before the Human Rights Commission, there are going to be a lot of costs, and they won't all be borne by the Human Rights Commission and certainly won't all be borne by the parent.

You know, teachers are going to have to take time off to prepare for this. The school administration, the school board, and the principal all will have to take time in order to prepare the case and, potentially, to appear. They'll need to take staff time to be interviewed by complaints officers, and depending on where all of it goes, it could have a substantial impact on a given teacher or a given school. That will come not only as a financial cost, but it will come at a cost for the children, the children who will not have the full attention of their teacher because their teacher is busy defending themselves under a human rights act that enshrines a bizarre set of rights that, as far as I'm aware, no other jurisdiction has even thought of.

I think it's well warranted. I don't want my child's education or any of my constituents' children's education negatively impacted even a little bit by this wacky piece of legislation and by charges that might be brought or cases that might be brought by parents who could have just as easily resolved the issue by talking to the teacher in the first place. That's part of the educational responsibility of both parents and teachers as well as schools, and I think that it's worked very well. This creation of the government is in fact going to do just as I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview rightly points out. It's going to consume resources that need to go to the education of children rather than being sucked up by absurd and unnecessary complaints to the Human Rights Commission under an absurd and unnecessary clause to this act.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

If not, I will call the question on subamendment SA3.

[Motion on subamendment SA3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to amendment A1. If there are no members that wish to speak, I will call the question. We are doing this in two motions.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

The Deputy Chair: We're back to the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:00

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I have some amendments at the table. At this point I would like to move the amendment. We're finished with A1, right?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Good. It would be the one that is adding in "aboriginal heritage." So it's adding in "aboriginal heritage" as a prohibited grounds of discrimination. I'll allow time for that to be distributed.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause, yes, while the amendment is passed out.

Okay. Hon. member, please proceed. This amendment is A2.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Essentially what this amendment is doing is adding in the phrase "aboriginal heritage" wherever the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination occurs in the act. This is springing directly out of the recommendations that were done by the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership. The point that they make around this is that for aboriginal people it is not clear to them that the human rights legislation is there to serve their people as well as others, that there is confusion as to whether this legislation applies to them at all.

For a number of us that deal with these issues all the time, that would seem to be pretty clear. Human rights legislation is supposed to cover everybody and specifically to cover those groups that have traditionally experienced a particular kind of discrimination, whether that's the withholding of services or difficulties in finding employment or housing. In fact, given the language that we currently have, there's an argument that aboriginal peoples would be covered under the word that's used, race, or under ancestries. Both of those words appear in the list of prohibited grounds and discrimination.

What Sheldon Chumir found was that there is a lack of understanding, that the human rights legislation does apply to aboriginal peoples, and, furthermore, that there's a real reluctance for aboriginal people to go to the commission to take advantage of their services. The foundation goes on to say that this group of people are the group that face the most severe discrimination. This is the group that could most benefit from the commission's services yet is the least likely to seek out those same services. What the Sheldon Chumir foundation believes is that the Human Rights Commission and the legislation could be more useful and accessible. I'll just quote a section.

The Alberta Human Rights Commission must be made truly useful and accessible to Aboriginal people in the province. While we . . . That's the Sheldon Chumir foundation.

. . . recognize the difficulty of responding to this challenge, there are changes that could be made to signal that the provincial government is serious about protecting the dignity of Aboriginal people. For example, in Nova Scotia, discrimination on the basis of "Aboriginal origin" is explicitly prohibited by law.

They argue that aboriginal heritage should be added into the legislation. In fact, it appears as recommendation 12 of their report.

It was one of the areas that really struck me. Clearly, in Edmonton-Centre I have a number of urban aboriginal people that live in the riding, and many of them, I will say up front, are very successful. But there are also those who are not and seem to struggle in many ways to be able to take advantage of the services that are there in ways that people from other identifiable disadvantaged communities don't seem to have the same difficulties with.

So in looking at that and in looking at what was possible under this human rights legislation while we've got it open, I thought this might be an area where we could improve on Bill 44 and what's proposed under Bill 44, and therefore I'm happy to move amendment A2, which does request that Bill 44 be amended in sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13 by striking out "family status or sexual orientation" wherever it occurs and substituting "family status, sexual orientation or aboriginal heritage," which brings in that aboriginal heritage phrase and is more inclusive and clearly identifiable to members of that community.

Thank you for allowing me to move that amendment. I hope that I can get the support of the Assembly in passing this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I applaud the hon. member's intention in this bill. It's something that we had looked at, actually, last fall, when we got the Sheldon Chumir report. We had talked to our legal counsel, and they suggested that aboriginal people, even though they are First Nation people, are covered under ancestry. They didn't feel it was necessary to include a separate area with respect to aboriginal people. So we've gone with the legal advice, and we feel that ancestry as it is included now is sufficient to cover the aboriginal people.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. At some point as a society – particularly, I'm thinking of Canadian society – I think we will need to begin to revisit the basis of how we categorize discrimination. I'm reading from Bill 44 and its reference to the existing act. The existing human rights legislation addresses discrimination specifically in regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, as the minister just pointed out, place of origin, marital status, source of income, or family status. This won't get resolved tonight. It may not get resolved for many, many years, maybe not in my lifetime. But the issue of race, I think, is going to have to be hashed out, and it's going to be a very slow process.

2:10

What do we mean by race? I was just spending some quick time on the web here because I've actually wondered about that question for quite a few years. I'm struck when I go to the United States. You know, I think I'm figuring out what's going on, they all speak the same language, and then I realize, after I read the newspapers for a few days, that there are some things that are just really different. There's a really different discourse in the United States on some things. Health care is one, guns is another, and race is another. I haven't lived in the States. I mean, I've read the history and so on, but I haven't absorbed that by growing up there. So issues in the United States get cast as issues of race at times when it wouldn't even have occurred to me here.

I don't want to downplay the existence of racism, whatever it is, in Canada, because it's there. Yet is it racism or is it discrimination on the basis of something else? Is it discrimination on the basis of colour or on the basis of ancestry and ethnicity or all kinds of other things? I actually have found myself wondering – gee, I'm going way out on thin ice here – if in some ways the best way to begin to get rid of racism is to stop talking about race. Just let it disappear. Instead, we recognize that there is discrimination on lots of other bases, as I said: colour, ethnicity, religious belief, gender, all those kinds of things. So that's kind of stewing in the back of my mind when I read this proposed amendment from the Member for Edmonton-Centre, which specifically addresses aboriginal heritage.

Actually, I think the minister made kind of an interesting point there although I would never totally go against the Member for Edmonton-Centre because I think so highly of her. But it's a complicated issue. I'm getting really into hot water here. In my constituency there are a number of people of aboriginal heritage, and there are hundreds of thousands in Alberta, and there are millions in Canada. I think we have to admit, whether we call it racism or something else, that there is discrimination against people of that ancestry or of that heritage. I think the idea here of specifically naming aboriginal people is acknowledging that in Canada's experience people of aboriginal heritage have had a particularly broad and systemic experience of discrimination and that if we are to take genuine steps towards addressing that, then maybe we need

to take some particular step in naming them and giving them a particular acknowledgement under this act.

So having said all kinds of things there that are wading in all kinds of directions, I think the spirit behind this is a good one. Given the experience of aboriginal people in this country I think this is something that should be supported.

Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak on this amendment and to speak in favour of this amendment as well. It's interesting, you know. The history of how the rights of our aboriginal Canadians are addressed through human rights statements in our country is a varied one, and it's actually been the case in the past that aboriginal heritage has not necessarily been something that has been pursued as prohibited ground for discrimination in part because many aboriginal people themselves advocate more for a parallel system of justice and a parallel system of governance and a parallel sort of polity almost, if you will. They don't necessarily see the mechanism for the amelioration of the many, many systemic and historical injustices that they've had to suffer as being treated equally with all other groups, cultures, races that coexist within the nonaboriginal society. For that reason, for instance, we see in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms actual exceptions to certain parts of the Charter as it applies to aboriginal communities in order to recognize what at the time, anyway, was an acknowledgement of a more collective approach to analyzing rights and obligations and the law and that kind of thing.

As a result, when I first see the concept of aboriginal heritage being introduced, my first response is to hesitate a bit because I'm not a hundred per cent sure that that's what the aboriginal community itself would pursue. Having said that, I think we know that, you know, the aboriginal community itself is not monolithic. There are aboriginal people who are living on reserve and in communities where they're able to engage in that parallel community-building and community-functioning. But there are, of course, many aboriginal people who live, for instance, in the city of Edmonton who are making a go of it within the broader community, as they should be able to. Certainly, we want them to be as successful as possible.

It's in cases like that, then, that we need to analyze whether or not we're doing a good job of ensuring that there is equality being afforded to aboriginal Albertans, and I think most of the statistics really tell the story. We know that the statistics show the state of any measure, whether it be education or health care or income or, you know, the percentage who make up the population within our prisons. We know that the aboriginal community is under great stress in a way that is not proportional to their population, at a rate that is much greater than the actual number of aboriginal people.

Clearly, we're not doing a good job of ensuring that equality. I think that, on one hand, we can't abandon the primary mechanisms through which we can support aboriginal communities in their search for equality, whether it be equality in a parallel system or equality within our system but giving them as much autonomy and support for their parallel situation as they seek. At the same time, I think that this amendment will assist in those cases with the description I think one of the members talked about, or perhaps it was in the Sheldon Chumir foundation report where they talked about aboriginal Albertans describing how they would get jobs in, you know, industry A, industry B but then would have to leave them because they would be subjected to so much racism just simply within the community at large.

We know that that's a problem, and we know we need to do something to improve how we are educating Albertans about the need to treat aboriginal Albertans with respect and dignity and, ultimately, with equality. Just, of course, with the asterisk beside it being that true equality doesn't mean that you're treated the same; true equality means that you're treated in the way you need to be in order for your situation to advance at the same rate that others would.

2:20

It's with that in mind, then, that I support this amendment. I think that we need to do a better job. Granted, one might say: well, you know, it's already covered in other provisions of the act. But I do believe we've just spent several hours agreeing to go ahead with the inclusion of a rights clause which is actually already covered in other pieces of legislation. So, clearly, that is not a barrier to moving forward on an issue in an area where we know we need to do a better job and work harder and reach out more effectively to a community that definitely needs our support to ensure true equality within our province.

With that in mind, I do support the amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre, and I urge all members of the Assembly to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to rise and speak to the human rights amendment we see before us brought by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. It is with a note that I found here from the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership, their very good report on human rights and the recommendations that were made therein. This amendment emanates from their recommendations, and I have no doubt that Janet Keeping and her staff, who have studied this issue over the last three years, have a firm understanding of what the human rights situation is and how it can be best accommodated.

Looking at the landscape and the nature of this amendment, it's true that amongst our aboriginal people in Alberta there's widespread confusion as to whether the provincial human rights statute applies to them. In many circumstances it does, but most aboriginal people the Chumir foundation spoke to did not know this. There was also widespread reluctance amongst aboriginal people to go to the commission, in any event. Those are the words of the Chumir foundation.

At the same time, you can almost take what they call judicial notice of the fact that for people, natives, at least in my history and experience and as it goes further to even when I was younger and older, the group singled out most for, I guess, public scorn or ridicule or social commentary or what have you has traditionally been the native population. This has existed for some time, and I don't believe — hey, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying it's always a treat to be other minorities and all that sort of stuff, but I think a special set of ridicule is saved for our aboriginal peoples. This is truly reprehensible yet is seemingly referenced in the work of the Sheldon Chumir foundation.

As the member from the third party just indicated, anything we can do to ameliorate those differences or to rectify those inequities to help a community that is significantly behind the curve in terms of almost any socioeconomic indicator of health, whether that is the amount of time they live on this earth, the amount of education they get, the amount of employability they get, the amount of individuals who graduate from high school — you go down the list, and here in Alberta we'd be hard pressed to find one category that our aboriginal people aren't scoring either the lowest on or near the bottom.

Clearly, we as legislators should have that in mind in looking for opportunities where we can give a hand up to that group to try and do better and to create opportunities for themselves and to be able to access things like the Human Rights Commission when they feel their rights have been trampled upon. That's why I am speaking in favour of this amendment. The minister correctly points out that this is referenced in ancestry, but again this is one of those places where maybe we'd do a little extra, a little bit of a nod to a community that has been disadvantaged and is having a difficult time getting ahead and getting, I guess, some form of social justice or even human rights justice in this province, that we maybe put this in there and offer that opportunity for them.

I appreciate speaking in favour of the amendment. At some point in time, I guess when we don't need it, we could always retract it and say: that's great; our native populations have been restored to a situation that is acceptable. But at this time I don't think we can say that.

So I'm supporting the amendment, and I encourage all other members to do so as well. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Blackett: Chairman, I'd just like to say, again, that it's very noble. We have to do more for the aboriginal community in terms of awareness of the Human Rights Commission, what their rights are under that commission. I think that is something that the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund should certainly focus on.

There are, I think, roughly 600,000 aboriginal people in Alberta. If you single that group out, what are you saying to the 400,000 people of Chinese ancestry or the people from India? They all have long histories of discrimination. Is anybody's more important than another? When you single out one group, then you automatically are leaving others aside. We believe all these different groups should be helped and recognized, and discrimination is reprehensible, but we thought that covering it as one and not singling out one group — because the next group will be coming forward and saying: we should be included in there. All of a sudden we're going to have a list of 50 different areas in terms of protected grounds.

I'll just leave it at that.

Mr. Mason: Well, you know, Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak briefly to this amendment. I guess the minister has just made the point that I think the drafter of the amendment wanted to make, which is: why are you picking and choosing certain groups or certain rights to protect and not others? It occurred to me that that was the case. I think the minister has made the point of this amendment, with apologies to my colleagues in the opposition, better than anyone over on this side, which is to illustrate that the government is picking and selecting some groups that are going to get protection or that we'll be protected from and not others. It's just curious because they've never really explained why those particular groups are included and others are not.

He has just made a really good argument against including some of the things that are included in this bill, which, again, really begs the question: where did this come from? It didn't come from the complaints of parents. It came from a campaign of the religious right in the United States. That's where it came from, and it has found its way into this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's pretty clear that we should, if we're going to include family status and sexual orientation, also include aboriginal heritage. The fact that the minister has identified that there are lots of other groups that could be included as well, I think, simply outlines the point being made by the mover of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:30

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for recognizing me. I had an additional amendment.

Dr. Taft: We even lost the people in the gallery. Bye.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, there goes the last fan of the evening, gone, walking out the door, and we're still here.

All right. I would like to move another amendment, and this is an amendment for sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13. It's essentially adding in the concept of gender identity to be another ground that prohibits discrimination. So I'll let that be distributed, and you will call me when you're ready.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. Thank you.

Hon. members, we'll call this amendment A3. Please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment is intended to include the concept of gender identity under those areas that are protected under our human rights legislation from discrimination and, let's be honest, specifically protected from discrimination on the grounds of employment, housing, and access to government programs and services. But that does tend to flow outwards and does sort of establish an expectation that any one group that is protected under this would find itself receiving equal treatment in the community.

The reason that I specifically included gender identity is that this is not covered under sexual orientation. I know that currently the Human Rights Commission is accepting cases of gender identity under the auspices of sexual orientation, but they are under no obligation to do so. It's not the same thing.

This is a concept that can be a struggle for people to understand. Gender identity is an issue of being, if you can think of it this way, arbitrarily assigned one body, yet your personality does not match that. We had a very good example of it in the Assembly here when the budget was brought down and the minister announced that he was no longer going to cover the cost of gender reassignment surgery.

We, in fact, have never had surgeons qualified or interested in doing that here in the province, so people have always had to travel out of the province to get that. Believe you me, this is not something that someone does on a whim. This is a series of very painful and complex operations, so you can understand that someone only undertakes that if they really felt driven to it, that it was really something that they had to do in order to lead a fulfilled life.

I know that for some people this seems pretty out there, but those individuals that I work with – and, indeed, there are some members in the House, I think – have come to understand that gender identity is an important part of our lives, and for most of us it's a done deal. It's not a question. It just is. But there are a number of individuals for which it's not a done deal, and it does involve a number of, as I said, very painful and complicated surgeries to match them up with the right body. So gender identity is not about sexual orientation. It's not about who you like or who you want to be with. It's about who you are.

We recognize that this exists as a medical condition. We have until this year paid for the surgery. It was recognized for many, many years in the – I never remember the name of this, and the medical people have all gone home. It's the psychiatric diagnostic manual.

Ms Notley: DSM-IV.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. The DSM-IV is our bible, if you will, of medical diagnosis. I struggle with that because I had never regarded gender identity or transgendered individuals as having a mental illness, and clearly the medical profession has now come to that same point because it's no longer listed. That may be the reason why the government decided that they were no longer going to fund the surgeries, but actually we don't know because we never got an explanation from the minister.

But there's no question that individuals who are transgendered face in many ways a double jeopardy because there are questions about their sexual orientation, but also, I mean, people don't understand what's happening and most people are afraid of the unknown. You know, looking at transgendered individuals, for a lot of people they just don't understand what's going on. As a result there is a great deal of discrimination against them, misunderstanding, some very real difficulties about which facilities they can use or are allowed to use, a misunderstanding about what their place in the family is, et cetera, and then there are all the medical issues that go along with that.

So to me it's very clear that, actually, the two groups of people that in my experience are the most likely to experience severe discrimination and a lack of access to services and a struggle to find appropriate housing and sometimes even employment are people with aboriginal ancestry and transgendered individuals. Clearly, that's why I had the previous amendment and why I've brought forward this amendment.

I know that this is a struggle for a number of people in this Assembly to grapple with this concept, which doesn't mean that it is not meritorious, and I would urge my colleagues in the Assembly to make that leap and to understand that this is a group of people that is in need of protection, that this is a different issue than sexual orientation, and it shouldn't be assumed that they would be captured under that definition. As a matter of fact, I mean, as I said, they are currently, but that doesn't mean that they will be in the future because they are not specifically mentioned under this legislation under protected grounds. I think they need to be. We make ourselves a better society when we recognize the people who are truly vulnerable and are in need of some assistance now.

I would ask people to support this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:40

Mr. Allred: Mr. Chairman, I have not been participating in this debate to date. I've been sitting here somewhat bored by some of the trivia of some of the amendments. But I note that this amendment creates a bit of a redundancy in that the word "gender" is already included, I think, in all of the sections that have been mentioned. So if we add gender identity, I'm not sure that it adds anything to the particular clauses. In fact, I think it causes a lot of confusion. I'll just read section 3 as it would appear with the amendment: whereas it is recognized in Alberta as a fundamental principle and as a matter of public policy that all persons are equal in dignity, rights, and responsibilities without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability,

ity, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I find that very, very confusing. I don't know what the heck the difference is between gender and gender identity, so I would urge members to defeat this amendment, and let's get on with things.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to stand up and speak in favour of Bill 44 and this amendment, which adds gender identity to the debate. I'd just like to commend my colleague for Edmonton-Centre for bringing forward this amendment. She is always on the cutting edge of human rights and knowing in the right direction they're going and getting there faster than most people can. Really, this is one of those issues that has come up, and the medical evidence is there that gender identity is a real and not a trivial cause. It is there, and it is a struggle for many people, many families, and people really feel like they are left out to twist in the wind with no protection or no rights or no understanding of what they're going through.

I believe that this gender identity addition is welcome at this time for other reasons. You notice in Ontario that when their health minister attempted to cut the funding to transgendered reassignment surgery, well, guess what? They found that a violation of their human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism act, so clearly it is a violation of a human rights act, at least in Ontario, and by rights it may happen here at some point in time.

Nevertheless, whether that is the case or whether it is or is not there, what I would say is that gender identity is an issue. I believe that this is timely as I believe it will be a matter of course in other jurisdictions soon. It would be, really, truly a feather in Alberta's cap to say, "We were the first to identify gender identity," not like in this one, where it took us 11 years after to identify something so simple as sexual orientation.

Nevertheless, I'm supportive of the bill. I'm supportive of the people who struggle with this issue yet choose to live life according to the way they want to. Just if society could be more accepting, this would go a long way to enshrining their rights and having society move in a more accepting manner, which I think should be the goal of all Legislative Assemblies.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will allow someone else to speak on the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm pleased to be able to get up and join in on this debate in support of this amendment. This is an addition to the list of prohibited grounds which I think the members of this Assembly should give due consideration to.

It's interesting. Gender identity is not an issue of gender per se, nor, as has been pointed out, is it an issue of sexual orientation. People who suggest that it is an issue of either really highlight the need for this to be actually included properly within the legislation. It is a real issue. It's an issue, actually, that affects the estimates with respect to how many people it affects.

I was pleased to be able to attend an awareness presentation at a local church on Sunday where a number of people from within the transgendered community talked about their personal experiences and shared them with members of the congregation as well as members of the public in order to help educate people on what the experience is to be a transgendered person in Alberta. Two of the comments they said right off. They started out by saying, "I'm not

gay," or "I'm not a lesbian; that's not what I am; that is not the experience that I have." Then they went on to describe the remarkable number of ways in which they are faced with discrimination day by day in very small sort of almost innocuous ways.

For instance, one person talked about how when she applied for a job and had to have a criminal record check done, she had to give them both of her names. In doing that, of course, she then was compelled to disclose that she had previously been, certainly on the outside, a man. That then allowed for a number of decisions to be made with respect to whether or not that person would get the employment that they were seeking. Another example that was given was the issue of whether transgendered individuals would be given the opportunity to adopt children. Another example of sort of the chronic, systemic kind of challenges they faced was where they would have gone through the process of changing the gender but then for a variety of reasons in a variety of ways were accepted by neither gender or had challenges being accepted by either gender.

So it really was a very informative opportunity for me to learn more about the experiences of these people. I want to say that the folks that were there were very, very courageous to get up in front of a room of, you know, a hundred or so people and describe these very personal experiences in their lives with a view to trying to promote education and promote understanding and promote tolerance.

The reality is that while right now our commissions are in many cases reaching in order to ensure that these people's rights are protected, they're doing it in the same way that our commissions were previously reaching to protect the rights of people whose sexual orientation was different, as directed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Vriend decision, basically saying that you can read in certain prohibited grounds. So our commission has been reading in this prohibited ground. But like the fact that it was never really appropriate or fair or symbolic or in any way embracing the true equality that people were seeking by our failure to include sexual orientation for so many years, the same really exists with this community as well.

So it is a community that is subjected to a great amount of discrimination. As I say, in the same way gay and lesbian Albertans were protected by virtue of the Vriend decision through the Supreme Court of Canada, without being specifically named in the code in the past, these members of this community will be, too. But it's a question of whether this Legislature would demonstrate more foresight and forethought than they did with respect to the previous addition to the list of prohibited grounds and actually get ahead of the curve. I know it's a lot to suggest that this Legislature might get ahead of the curve on human rights issues, but what the heck. It's late at night, and we can dream. I guess that's what this amendment is about.

In a sleep-deprived fit of naïveté and hopefulness, I urge members of the Assembly to support this amendment in the name of bringing our human rights code up to date. Thank you.

2:50

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak?

I'll call the question on amendment A3.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're speaking to the bill now. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, do you wish to move an amendment?

Mr. Hehr: I wish to move an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause and have the amendment distributed, and then you can open.

Mr. Hehr: That would be great.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this is amendment A4.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I bring this amendment. It is again a recommendation by the Sheldon Chumir foundation that returns an element of free speech to our way of life here in Alberta and is, I believe, really the way our society is meant to operate and how we are supposed to best communicate ideas. I look to the Sheldon Chumir foundation, who studied this issue long and hard. I, too, agree with their recommendations, and that's why I bring them forward here. Free speech is a fundamental right in this society that shouldn't be intertwined very easily with our human rights commissions.

I'll go into it further and explain my amendment. I know that from time to time earlier when questions were asked to the hon. minister in this House regarding sexual orientation, I remember hearing the hon. minister of sustainable resources yell back over to our side: what about free speech? I actually believe that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness also yelled: what about free speech rights? I honestly believe that maybe someone from the back – and I can't be held true here – possibly the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, may appreciate the amendment I am bringing forward as I heard he was yelling something similar when the other ministers were talking. That was just rumour and innuendo. I guess now we'll see where the rubber hits the road.

Let me just talk about this for a second. I quote directly from the Sheldon Chumir foundation.

Many of the most virulent criticisms leveled at human rights commissions over the last few years concern provisions that seek to make statements of opinion illegal. Some of the high profile cases have concerned opinions on the part of the Christian right about the evil (in their eyes) of homosexuality and cartoons and articles perceived by some Muslims to be offensive or even, according to their faith, blasphemous. We do not endorse the sometimes offensive views expressed by people and organizations who have come under attack pursuant to legal provisions such as section 3 of the HRCMA. But we do have grave misgivings about the threats to free expression inherent in such provisions.

Accordingly, they have offered some revisions, which you see before you in the act. Really, these are sort of changes, but the nuances are clear. This will return the wording of our act to the pre-1996 version, which reads:

- 3(1) No person shall publish, issue or display or cause to be published, issued or displayed before the public any statement, publication, notice, sign, symbol, emblem or other representation that
- (a) indicates discrimination or an intention to discriminate against a person or a class of persons, or
 - (b) is likely to expose a person or a class of persons to hatred or contempt
- because of the race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age . . .

Et cetera.

Accordingly, the Sheldon Chumir foundation recommends that s. 3 of [the act] be amended to read as it did prior to 1996. This would remove the words "issue," "issued," "statement" and "publication" from s. 3. It would also remove the part of the law which refers to material which is "likely to expose a person or a class of persons to hatred or contempt." In our view . . .
The Sheldon Chumir foundation's view.

. . . this would suffice to remove the menace presented by s. 3 in its current form.

Okay. So what does all this mean? Essentially, what we've seen human rights legislation used for as of late has been some cases that should not be there. For instance, we saw that when the *Maclean's* article written by Mark Steyn, because it referenced Muslims, found itself before the Human Rights Commission when, really, it was just matters for discussion. The public should be entitled to have this knowledge and should be able to read accordingly. But, anyway, this journalist found himself in front of the Human Rights Commission.

We also have seen other things. An individual printed cartoons making fun of Muslimism. They were in cartoon fashion. The only place in the world where any charges were brought was at the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism office. In no other area of the world, to my knowledge, were any criminal proceedings, human rights, or otherwise violations found. This is the only place where this occurred. Really, these are examples of things that shouldn't happen at our Human Rights Commission.

Seriously, we look at this. Whether we abhor what people say, whether we abhor what people print, whether we abhor what people are doing, this always has to be balanced against our expression of freedom of speech. If we look at that, the topic of free speech in any liberal society, if one is not allowed to express oneself freely, this right is seriously impinged upon. In fact, I brought this up the other day. John Stuart Mill argued in *On Liberty* that a struggle always takes place between the competing demands of liberty and authority. He argued that we cannot have the latter without the former. I'll read this quotation from that famous book.

All that makes existence valuable to any one, depends on the enforcement of restraints upon the actions of other people. Some rules of conduct, therefore, must be imposed, by law in the first place, and by opinion on many things which are not fit subjects for the operation of law.

Freedom of speech: this right is sacrosanct.

Now, let's also remember that free speech is not unlimited, and we do have provisions in our criminal code which limit free speech. There are two occasions that this happens. It's when someone uses speech that is considered hate speech. We have seen examples of our courts stepping in where they have seen examples of this occurring, and they have said: "Hey, we're not going to take it."

3:00

An example of this was in 1990, when Mr. Keegstra, a teacher from Eckville, was espousing what was termed – basically, he denied that the Holocaust had occurred and was teaching this to his classroom. Anyway, he was charged under 319(2) of the Criminal Code with wilfully promoting hatred against an identifiable group by communicating anti-Semitic statements to his students.

Now, there is a defence to this, and that's if the statements uttered were true. Clearly, in this case Mr. Keegstra's statements weren't true. He had no defence, and he was prosecuted. His free speech was limited because it was found to be hate speech. That is how people are protected and how people should in fact be protected. The free speech. We're protected there.

Here's another incident, where Mr. Zundel was publishing stuff that was clearly untrue and was clearly offensive and prescribed hate. He was charged for spreading false news contrary to section 181 of the Criminal Code, which provides that "every one who wilfully publishes a statement, tale or news that he knows [to be] false and that causes or is likely to cause injury or mischief to a public interest is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment." Mr. Zundel was locked up for many years and I think eventually deported. Again, there is the protection for free speech.

The simple fact of the matter is that we shouldn't really limit free speech willy-nilly. Even though these ideas may be repugnant to you and me as we sit here, repugnant to most individuals on the street, we must allow for some form of this debate to go on in society. It's with this debate that we better ourselves, where we get ideas, and where people actually can be exposed and you can see people who are talking this nonsense and you can say to them: "No. This is nonsense." They are not encouraged to do this behind closed doors.

With that being the balance, I would suggest that there are provisions in our Criminal Code which deal more effectively with freedom of speech and when it borders on hate crime, and we should leave it in the Criminal Code context. I don't believe this is handled well through our human rights boards. What happens is that people are dragged to these committees for publishing and sometimes saying things which may be abhorrent but that, nevertheless, they are allowed to say. There's a place for them to be taken to task, and that is through the Criminal Code.

What I will say is that there are very few of these claims made to the human rights jurisdiction. Only 3 per cent of these types of claims go through. More importantly, the justice sort of meted out by the Human Rights Commission is rarely satisfactory to anybody, neither the person who receives the infraction nor the individual who made the claim. You see that in people who have made a claim under this, and it takes five, six years and a whole lot of money, with no really satisfactory results and no really satisfactory end to the issue; for instance, you know, sanctions that are unenforceable, sanctions that really are undemocratic and without limit.

You can see that this amendment essentially is a call, I believe, a step in the right direction of returning free speech to where it should be. I believe it is better served, as does the Sheldon Chumir foundation, through our courts system. I believe that this is a good bill that would allow for us to allow for our society to indulge in free speech and for ideas to be shared yet to espouse ideas that we abhor and bring light to them.

Anyway, sir, those are my arguments. I'd appreciate hearing some members from the other side as there may be some interest in this.

I understand that this bill has not come without some concern from some groups. I have talked to some of those groups, and I understand the uneasy balance that exists, that people, some of the minority groups, believe that their rights are better protected under the human rights and citizenship act. I disagree with them fundamentally on this issue. I believe their rights are protected under the Criminal Code and that we should err on the side of free speech and not stifle this speech when, in fact, it's simply value systems that we don't share.

I understand it's not an easy decision. Nevertheless, if we always took the easy road, we wouldn't get very far, and sometimes taking the easy road actually puts our democracy in jeopardy and stifles things. But those are my arguments, and I leave it open to the House to tell me where I'm wrong or where I'm right or whatever the day may hold.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Fundamentally the government caucus believes in free speech. We've had a long discussion, both inside and outside of caucus, amongst our members. Though we advocate free speech, we have a tremendous concern amongst many of our members. We have a very diverse caucus, as

the Premier has said, probably the most diverse in Canada in terms of ethnicity, gender, background, age. We represent pretty much a microcosm of what Alberta is.

When we have a discussion, it's a free discussion, unlike the allegations that are made that there's somehow this religious right movement that's influencing our policy with respect to section 11. Well, if that were necessarily the case, then this would have been a slam dunk. We would have taken publications and statements out of there.

At the heart of the Human Rights Commission is that we've got to protect people against discrimination, and that's with respect to a combination of things, with respect to employment, with respect to access to services. We felt that by taking publications and statements out of there, there wasn't enough of a safety net that's there in the Canadian Criminal Code. The test to get a conviction by a Crown attorney is very high, and the test to even get a conviction is even higher, and it's not a slam dunk.

There are many different ethnic groups. Many different groups of new immigrants to our province have expressed concern. If you look at the last 500,000 people that have come to our province, probably 60 per cent to 70 per cent would be in those different ethnic groups, and that's where we live. So although we advocate free speech – and you're right; it's only 3 per cent of the cases – we have to make a decision as a caucus. Do we err on the side of free speech? Or do we err on the side of representing and protecting those people from discrimination because we're not comfortable with the safety net that's provided through the Canadian Criminal Code? We had to err on the side of the people that we're elected to represent.

So though many of us individually believe in the principle – I've gone on record as saying that I believe in the principle, you know, I would have thought this would have been one of the contentious issues where people would have said: "Ha ha. There is a right side," and this is the carrot to go with the sexual orientation piece. If you use the logic before, like I said, we would have put this in as a slam dunk, but we actually as a caucus had to look at it, and we think we made the right decision. Over time it may be challenged.

3:10

The other part of it is that by changing the commission, the administrative changes can't be overstated. The people who have a fear about many things don't have enough confidence in the commission being able to deal with a case in an objective manner, an impartial manner, a transparent manner, and one that will be done expeditiously. One of Ezra Levant's major complaints is not because the decision was thrown out but because it took 900 days to do that.

Hopefully, in looking at free speech and in looking at the commission, which is headed up by Blair Mason, a person with a great legal mind, one that's viewed universally as somebody that's impartial, hard-working, fair, honest, he will impart that knowledge and that wisdom and that belief through the rest of the commission. We will be able to take those cases, as limited a number as they are, and we'll be able to deal with them in the proper fashion and get the resolution that should be.

You know, sometimes we have to make those tough decisions, as you said, and we can agree to disagree. I don't think that in principle any of us disagree in this Legislature. But this is one of those times we had to make that decision, and we'll stand by it.

Mr. Hehr: I thank the minister for his comments. It was no easy decision for myself to put forward this amendment, too. I am a visible minority although not really of the traditional sort. To many of my friends who have a disability: fine; they're using the access of

the Human Rights Commission. I guess at the start it was very palatable. Towards the middle they realized that this was fraught with difficulty, and by the end they had a bad taste in their mouth. That's why I've come to this decision on free speech, almost to save them the frustration with the entire hassle. Still, at the end of the day, I don't believe that the Human Rights Commission can deal out effective punishment that can satisfy either the person being charged or the person being absolved or whatever. I don't believe it is the proper forum for it.

But I understand the minister's comments. The precautionary principle is not always the worst principle. We advocated for it from time to time. It's just that I've come to believe on the balance of probabilities that in this instance the free speech side of this won out on me. Hence, that's where it is. I think that eventually, if these amendments don't work for, I guess, the human rights code, we can always come back, hopefully, with this government or another government. We can see how it works in some other jurisdiction first, so we can ease minority concerns on this issue that their rights are truly protected under our Criminal Code. I think that it would be better served.

Again, I appreciate the minister's comments. He expressed his opinion in an open and fair manner, and I applaud him for that. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Are we ready for the question on amendment A4?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 44. Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 44 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 20

Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Sure. I'm pleased to rise to speak. I feel all invigorated again now that we're on to a new bill.

Mr. Denis: Please don't feel too much vigour.

Dr. Taft: I'm just stretching the truth a bit there, the first time I've ever done that in this Assembly.

Bill 20 is the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009. It's an act we will probably support, and I think I'll turn the floor over to our critic, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I believe I gave comments on this in second reading, and they are similar to those. This is good legislation, and I'll commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for bringing it forward. Essentially, this bill allows for the protection of retirement savings funds as well as disability savings funds, RRIFs or whatever they're called, and all this stuff. In this society we encourage people to save, and guess what? We haven't done a good enough job as a society or maybe as a Legislature or maybe as an education system in encouraging a culture of savings. Maybe this act goes some way to promoting that culture of savings.

What this bill does is protect the civil enforcement of these types of savings devices from lawsuits. Say a person has started a business and worked his whole life to have a thriving business and puts money into RRSPs and RRIFs and whatever it is you call it and all of a sudden something goes south in that business that he's worked his whole life at. Before this legislation came about, a lawsuit could be filed. Not only could that gentleman's company be taken but his entire savings account. What would happen then? Well, that family, that man or that woman – the company would be gone – would be reliant on the government for, I guess, help and assistance and be essentially thrown on the government dole. We don't really think that's a proper result. I don't believe that would encourage entrepreneurialism and/or saving, which are two things here in Alberta that we value, hon. minister of the Treasury Board, right? We value entrepreneurialism and the culture of saving. But there's no joy in Mudville tonight.

Anyway, here we go. If we value those things, go ahead and try and have those things, and I think this bill does it. It brings us up to speed with Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland, who have already implemented these types of bills. Many other groups have recommended these types of ways to keep outside of the legal system people's money that has been saved. We are supportive of it, and I appreciate the member, again, for bringing this forward.

Just as a final comment, this was also recommended by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. They thought this type of bill was good, and if it's good enough for the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, well, my goodness, it's good enough for me.

Thank you very much, and I'd turn it over to any other member who wishes to discuss this.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 20, the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

3:20

Bill 23

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a very short comment. There was one minor piece that we wished to make an amendment to, and I ask that the amendment be distributed. It's essentially with respect to section . . . [interjection] No, it's a very small thing. It changes the date from May 1 to July 1.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll pause for a moment while they're distributed.
Okay.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Section 9 of Bill 23 indicates that section 310, sending assessment notices, is amended. Section 310(1) says, "Subject to subsection (1.1), assessment notices must be sent no later than May 1 of each year." The amendment would simply change May 1 to July 1. It provides for a little bit more flexibility in the system so that there's no rushing of deadlines but doesn't really change the import or effect of the act. I would ask for support of that amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: You know, again, getting an amendment and having to instantaneously comment on it without being able to consider it, even if it does appear to be simple – I'm just not prepared to do that, actually, Mr. Chairman. I can't support an amendment when I haven't had time to review it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?
I'll call the question on Bill 23, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Hancock: On the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: I'm sorry. I got ahead of myself. You're right. I stand corrected. We are voting on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Now to the bill. Any other comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the bill as amended.

Ms Blakeman: We have been speaking against this bill, and at this point I think I would continue that, mostly because it's taking away the right of property owners to appeal decisions that are made by the local appeals boards and that used to go on to a municipal level. This is changing that. It's restructuring how the appeals are heard and decided. Now we're going to have a composite board rather than the levels that we had before.

The problem with the levels that were existing before was that there was a very long backlog in trying to get cases heard – 23,000 appeals were filed last year – and it's over a year for appeals to be heard and decided. There are some additional costs that are associated with that. Both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary have tried to increase the fees, and there's been a great deal of push-back on that from just about everybody and their pet spaniel.

The Municipal Government Board, that's available now, seems to be a better solution than what the government is suggesting. The act is silent on who would fund the composite board, and we believe this could create even more bureaucracy and be even more costly for the municipalities than what they're bearing now.

We have heard from a number of individuals with concern over the lack of impartiality that will result from these changes, and at this point we're not prepared to support Bill 23.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?
If not, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 23 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

[Mr. Denis in the chair]

Bill 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments or amendments? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to provide the committee with information on Bill 26 regarding its most important sections. To be more specific, the critical sections will address spoiled or wasted game meat under section 3 of this bill, amending section 41(1) of the Wildlife Act; on the export of wildlife and wildlife parts the proposed amendments will deal with section 92(3) of the Wildlife Act; giving officials increased access to land to perform their duties, primarily under section 5 of this bill, amending section 66 of the Wildlife Act; and restitution payments for those who incur financial losses when others commit offences under the act, dealt with partially under section 10 of this bill, amending section 96 of the Wildlife Act.

The Wildlife Act is integral to the protection and proper management of Alberta's native and nonnative species for the sustainability of the province's biodiversity and ecosystems. The proposed miscellaneous amendments to the Wildlife Act will clarify and strengthen the legislation in the areas of enforcement, sentencing, and wildlife control measures. Put simply, we need to ensure this act is up to date in order to better address current and future challenges.

Mr. Chairman, we all know that it is disrespectful, wasteful, and illegal to throw away edible game meat. The Wildlife Act requires that big game and game bird meat is not wasted, destroyed, spoiled, or abandoned. There have been many cases involving spoiled meat brought before the courts, but there have been problems proving to the courts what evidence is required to show that meat that was once edible has now become spoiled. In some cases fish and wildlife officers have testified to the poor condition of game meat by stating that the meat was no longer suitable for human consumption. Despite these testimonials the court did not accept the evidence.

The amendments to section 41(1) of the Wildlife Act will clarify what constitutes wastage and the spoilage of big game or game bird meat. To do this, methods to enter evidence will be established and applied in the courts. The amendments will require game meat to be kept fit for human consumption. This will eliminate the defence that any meat in question was intended for animal food, which was the excuse often used. The amendments would also ensure that hunters follow the regulations for exporting wildlife. Currently an export permit is required to export wildlife or wildlife parts. Export permits are not issued for certain wildlife parts such as a bear paws or bear gallbladders.

Bill 26 will also provide the courts with a higher penalty range to deal with those who have been convicted of this offence involving such wildlife. This would help deter the illegal export of wildlife or

wildlife parts. Higher penalties will deter those involved in this sometimes lucrative smuggling.

Mr. Chairman, the section 5 amendments are about ensuring that our fish and wildlife officers are able to carry out their other expected duties. At times there have been challenges to the authority of fish and wildlife officers to access land. For example, an officer needs to be given reasonable access to land to respond to the report of dead wildlife in order to determine whether the animal's death resulted from illegal activities.

The amendments will authorize fish and wildlife officers' access to land to respond to reports of dead, injured, diseased, or dangerous wildlife and to monitor hunting activities while still protecting privacy rights. The amendment will authorize access to land, but the act will continue to prohibit entry into any building, tent, or other structure or the search and seizure of any property without a warrant if one is required. This amendment is not intended to infringe on privacy rights but, rather, to give fish and wildlife officers more support so they can perform their expected duties.

In response to concerns of the farm cervid industry about removal of consultation prior to attributing costs, I'm putting forth an amendment to Bill 26. I would ask the pages to deliver the amendment, and then I'll speak to it.

3:30

The Acting Chair: We'll pause just while the amendment is circulated. This is amendment A1.

We're now debating on the amendment. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Chairman, I'm proposing an amendment to Bill 26 that deletes from the bill the amendment to section 60 of the Wildlife Act. Section 60 would then remain as it reads today. The amendment will ensure that Bill 26 accurately reflects the issues of the farm cervid industry and that procedures for dealing with escaped animals under the Wildlife Act will not change.

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to introduce the amendment. I look forward to discussion on it.

The Acting Chair: Debating the amendment, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Chairman, it's such an honour to have you up there.

My question to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat: can you just explain a little bit why you brought these changes in, and now you're going back to the original wording? Why the amendment?

Mr. Mitzel: The amendment was brought in because there wasn't enough consultation with the cervid industry, the elk ranchers and deer ranchers, and the imposition that was being created on them had not been under full consultation. After working with them, it was decided that it would be better to leave it exactly the way it is now with the enforcement that they have and move on with that. That is why section 60 will remain exactly as it is in the Wildlife Act now and not be changed as had been suggested prior.

The Acting Chair: Debating the amendment, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Chairman, just to speak briefly on this, the captive wildlife or controlled animals that have escaped or were unlawfully released from captivity are dealt with by section 60 of the Wildlife Act and amended in section 4 of Bill 26. Captive wildlife are species native to Alberta and include farmed elk and deer while controlled animals are nonnative species that require a permit for live possession.

We all recognize that at times animals may escape from their enclosure. We recognize that in all cases of these animals escaping, the owner is considered the most appropriate person to recapture the escaped animals. We expect that owners will make a reasonable effort to recapture their animals, and government officials support them in those efforts. However, there have been instances where owners have been unable or unwilling to recapture their animals. Mr. Chairman, when this happens, our officials play an active role in the recovery of these animals, and costs are incurred.

Currently under the Wildlife Act we are able to recover costs such as staffing costs from the owner or operator to recapture the escaped animals. But once the escaped animals are recaptured, there may be additional costs to transport the recaptured animals or destroy them if necessary.

The proposed amendment to section 4 by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat is timely. I understand that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the bill's sponsor, and the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka have had discussions with stakeholders such as the Elk Commission, and they've expressed concerns regarding new provisions that seemingly extinguish consultation with owners in cases where the animals would have to be destroyed. The amendment of section 4 in Bill 26 was designed to provide more flexibility in dealing with escaped cervids. I believe this amendment went too far in streamlining the process.

To ensure Bill 26 adequately addresses the concerns raised by the farm cervid industry, I urge all members to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: On the amendment the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to see you handling this meeting in such a fine fashion.

I would just like to speak on the amendment. I appreciate the hon. member coming forward to me prior to us beginning the session and doing his level best to explain to me the amendment. That said, you know, in all good conscience – and I believe it probably is a decent amendment – I need a little more time to think about this, and I'll vote against the amendment.

I would like to say that the hon. member did do his level best to get it to me. But just in all good conscience, so I can run it by this, that, and the other thing, I'm going to vote against the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Acting Chair: Now back to the bill.

[The clauses of Bill 26 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 44, 52, 20, 23, and 26.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 20. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: bills 52, 44, 23, and 26. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:39 a.m. on Wednesday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 27, 2009

Issue 44a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

William C. Semple, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

The Speaker: Hon. members, the procession today was led by Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms Bill Semple. Mr. Semple will be retiring following this session. Today was probably the last time that he was in a position to lead the procession into the House.

Bill first served this Assembly between 1980 and 1981, when he was a constable with the Edmonton Police Service and was assigned to providing security at the front door of the Legislature Building. He would return to this building a little more than 10 years later to join the Legislative Assembly security staff in 1992. Bill has served this Assembly since that time and then was appointed to the position of Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms in November of 1999.

To mark this occasion, a farewell tea was held for all this morning at which remarks were given recognizing Bill's dedication and outstanding service to all Members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. I am sure that I speak for all members when I wish Bill the very best in his retirement.

Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery is Bill's wife of 44 years, Ruth, and his daughter Shandra as well as honorary Sergeant-at-Arms Oscar Lacombe and former Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms Al Gowler.

At this point I would ask them to rise – all of them, including Mr. Semple – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. [applause]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a group of students from Bonanza school. I'm very, very proud to introduce this group because, for one, I don't have very many school groups that visit the Legislature. This group has had to travel, I would say, well over seven hours to get here. Bonanza school is located west of Spirit River but probably closer to Dawson Creek. They're just a few miles out of Dawson Creek along the Alberta-B.C. border. Again I would like to welcome them. Accompanying the group of students are a number of adults: Bonnie Tittford, Penny Lepage, Gary Remenyk, Randy Carlstad, Shelley Moorman. I would like the group to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of individuals who are visiting the Alberta Legislature from my constituency, just bordering the constituency of the hon. Member for

Red Deer-South. We have with us today 10 students from Destiny Christian school who are seated in the members' gallery, and they are accompanied by their principal, Glenn Mullen. As I have said before, I think it's so important for children to visit the Legislature. As you know, they will be tomorrow's leaders. I would ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have another introduction today on behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and the MLA for Drumheller-Stettler. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group visiting from Altario school. They're grade 6 students, and they are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jinel Ference, and accompanied by their parents, Mrs. Nancy Ference, Mr. Kyle Koch, Mrs. Stacy Evans, Mrs. Laurel Galloway, Mrs. Michelle Kelts, and Miss Jody Evans. They've come an awful long way from Altario. That's, like, a four-hour bus ride. I know that they will also be our new leaders someday in this province. I'd like them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my great honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly several dedicated members of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. The MS Society of Canada aims to be a leader in finding a cure for MS and in enabling people afflicted by MS to enhance their quality of life. It is the only national voluntary organization in Canada that supports MS research and services for people with MS and their families. The society is creating hope for today by helping to make life a little easier for those who are afflicted by this disease. Our commitment to a better tomorrow for those with MS is represented through the carnations which each hon. member of the Assembly is wearing today.

It's my honour and pleasure to welcome several supporters of the MS Society today to the Legislature. They are in the members' gallery. I will ask them to rise: Dr. Garry Wheeler, vice-president of the Alberta division; Mr. Steven McLaughlin, volunteer; Mrs. Julie Kelndorfer, director of volunteer resources; and Mr. Darrel Gregory, director of communications. Please join me in welcoming our distinguished guests with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very exceptional individuals. They work for me in the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency. Sue deMoissac has been my constituency assistant for four years and is doing a tremendous job of taking care of the constituency. Also, Angele Theroux is a STEP student working in the office. She has got her psychology degree and is looking at getting her masters, and I'm very pleased to have her as part of the team. They have risen in the members' gallery, and I'd ask this Assembly to please give them the exceptional warm welcome they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly one of Alberta's greatest radio voices and a gentleman that is very well known in my home town of Drayton Valley. I'm very proud to have Mr. Dave Michaels of Big West Country radio 92.9 in Drayton Valley in the public

gallery here today. Dave plays a very important role in our community, and he does an exceptional job of keeping the community entertained and very well informed on the morning show. I would ask Dave now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two members of the Victoria Cross Memorial Park Monument Society. The society is working on developing a monument dedicated to all the Canadians who have received the Victoria Cross. I'll be discussing more about this group and their project leader this afternoon in a member's statement, but for now I would like to introduce Mr. Ron Evans, the president, and Ms Marian Youngs, the vice-president. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce another school group. Actually, this school group is old classmates of mine, accompanied by their wives. The gentlemen in the public gallery were all classmates with me many, many years ago at SAIT in Calgary, and through the years our families have kept contact through various survey conventions and social functions and travel. I'm very pleased to introduce them here in the Assembly today. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names. On the left are Monroe and Ellen Kinloch, Norm and Elaine Mattson, Len and Fredda Leiman. Just as an aside, I would comment that Len and Fredda's daughter Jaren is the best friend of our very own Clerk of *Journals*, Micheline Gravel. I'd ask the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: I suspect that some stories can be told.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Jagmohan Singh. Mr. Singh is a retired professor from the university in Ludhiana, Punjab, where he taught electronics. He is in Alberta presenting a history of his uncle Shaheed Bhagat Singh through first-hand anecdotal evidence. Shaheed Bhagat Singh was a famous freedom fighter who was hung by the British government at the age of 21 for his role in India's independence movement. His legacy lives on in the independent Republic of India. Mr. Singh is joined today by his brother Manjit Singh Dhaliwal, who is my constituent. I ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted today to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of Alberta's truly exceptional fine craft artists. These are all artists who are participating in the Cheongju International Craft Biennale. With them are some staff from the Alberta Craft Council. If I may introduce, please, Linda McBain Cuyler, who is a fibre artist – please stand, Linda – Meghan Wagg, who is a jewellery artist; James Lavoie, who does wonderful glass pieces; Mary Sullivan Holdgrafer, who is a fibre artist; and

with her today is her husband, Gary Holdgrafer. Accompanying them all is Tom McFall, our beloved executive director of the Alberta Craft Council, a man that many of you already know, and, of course, Joanne Hamel, who is the project co-ordinator for the Alberta Craft Council. I am going to do a celebratory member's statement in a bit, but please join me in welcoming these wonderful Alberta artists to our Alberta Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guests from the Candora Society of Edmonton. They're here on a tour with their instructor to give the class an opportunity to see the Legislature at work. The Candora Society is a nonprofit organization with a mandate to address the needs of low-income residents of the communities of Rundle and Abbottsfield in northeast Edmonton. The name Candora stands for can do in Rundle and Abbottsfield. The Candora Society is community driven, and the focus is on individual strengths and abilities. The society connects individuals to increase understanding of each other, reduce isolation, build self-worth, and enrich the community. They are Nora Makath, Alise Shol, Rita Ayele, Elijah Motende, Zipporah Ogoti, Sibongile Nyathi, Elzamzani Amna, Patrick Chieriro, Monica Pozzuoli, Achol Billeu, and Roger Barba. I'm sorry if I mispronounced any names. I would like them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Victoria Cross Memorial Park Monument

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently in Canada there is no single monument that recognizes all of the recipients of the Victoria Cross. The Victoria Cross, of course, is Canada's highest military honour for bravery. The Victoria Cross Memorial Park Monument Society has been active in their plans for this memorial since the naming of the park in 1987. In addition to the monument, other ideas for this project have included an assembly area and education stations to inform the visitors of the historical significance of the Victoria Cross.

This monument will be a symbol of remembrance for the brave and valiant Canadians who serve our country and who have fought for our freedom. It will be visible from the ground and from the air, signifying its importance to our past and to our present.

This project is supported and endorsed by the Royal Canadian Legion and the city of Edmonton, and members of the society, I might add, have also applied for funding through the Alberta lottery fund. The Victoria Cross Memorial Park Monument Society is committed to constructing this monument, and I believe it is a great way to recognize our bravest military heroes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Unintended Victims of Crime

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Concerns about violent crime and gang activity are being heard right across Alberta as well as in my own constituency. As if the senseless loss of human life is not enough, these crimes claim other victims as well.

Mr. Speaker, on January 1 a deadly attack took place at a family-run Vietnamese restaurant, the Bolsa restaurant, in my constituency, and this restaurant had absolutely no ties to gang activity whatsoever. Despite having no connection to crime, this reputable business has been tarnished, in crisis, and it is struggling to keep its doors open.

Last week I had the privilege of meeting with one of the owners, Viet Tran, a resident in the constituency of Calgary-Montrose, as well as Constable Mike Ellis of the Calgary Police Service. Mr. Tran disclosed to us that his business has decreased 30 per cent since the incident at his restaurant. Fortunately, the landlord has given him a break on his rent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've extended my appreciation to Calgary's chief of police, Rick Hanson. He recognizes the ripple effect that gang activity has on the community, and he has met with the proprietors of the restaurant we're speaking about today. But it's up to the people of Calgary to support these unintentional victims of crime and not shun them for something that was completely out of their control. As Albertans we need to recognize that violent crime makes victims of us all.

I'd like to reassure Calgarians that this particular business and the family who runs it became caught up in a string of deadly and irresponsible acts, again due to no fault of their own. Sadly, this could happen to any one of us. We need to rally behind each other when tragedy strikes and try to minimize the collateral damage inflicted on each other in the wake of these senseless and violent criminal acts.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Cheongju International Craft Biennale

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a long-time supporter of Alberta artists I am proud to say that Alberta artists will be heading overseas to participate in the South Korea fine craft cultural tour for two weeks in the early fall.

Now, this tour's highlight is the Cheongju International Craft Biennale, which is fast becoming the largest Asian craft event and for which Canada is the guest country for 2009. We were selected as the guest country, by the way, thanks to the Alberta Craft Council's All About Alberta international exhibition, which started at the Smithsonian Institute and then travelled to the 2007 biennale. The impression our artists left in 2007 prompted this year's honour.

Aside from Canada and South Korea, 50 other nations will present the work of their finest artists, making this a wonderful showcase for our own homegrown talent. Around 50 artists from Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Black Diamond, High River, Sundre, Hobbema, Canmore, and Longview will participate, a wonderful range of creative artists from all across the province. Organizers expect that 750,000 people from dozens of nations will visit the biennale at Cheongju, truly a fantastic exposure for our artists.

The biennale will feature a 10,000 square foot exhibition of work by 200 of Canada's leading craft artists; 29 of those artists are from Alberta. We are talking a massive display of works in ceramic, wood, metal, fibre, glass, and so on: sculptures, furniture, jewellery, everything.

The Alberta Craft Council is supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and many thanks for that. Calgary Arts Development and the Edmonton Arts Council all worked very hard to ensure that Alberta artists would have their chance to shine on the international stage.

Our arts and cultural sector is one of Alberta's most important industries and a renewable, sustainable industry at that. On behalf

of the Official Opposition and I'm sure all of my colleagues in the Alberta Legislature I thank all of the artists and the organizations that supported them for taking Alberta's cultural exports across the Pacific to Cheongju.

Thank you so much.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Debate on Bill 44

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Early this morning a controversial and widely protested bill was passed through this House. The government had a choice to debate this bill with openness in the day or early evening, which would have allowed the public to sit in the gallery, the opposition to have sufficient time to make amendments, and the media to report as it happened. Instead, the government hid the debate under the cover of darkness, when most Albertans are busy putting their children to sleep. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: if this administration is proud of Bill 44, why did it choose not to debate until late evening? Why not debate during the day, when people can participate?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I recall, I was in this House at 7:30 last night, when we started debate, and we concluded at 3:15. We had a long, rigorous debate with exchanges from both sides of the House. If that's not what Albertans want, I don't know what is.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, our provincial image is important. This administration confirmed that with a \$25 million investment in a slogan to help our image nationally and internationally. I'm just curious. Can the minister tell us what that slogan is?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve. You know what? Our slogan and our image are enhanced by many things that we have here. It's enhanced by our arts. It's enhanced by our cultural policy. It's trying to make access available to all Albertans irrespective of where they live and irrespective of their socioeconomic status. It's building capacity in our communities to house the performing arts and visual arts. It's about focusing on excellence, and it's about supporting our cultural industries. Albertans are proud. Albertans have a great image. Albertans are tolerant. Albertans are respectful. The rest of Canada will see that, and we will do everything as a government to make sure that we convey that to the rest of the world.

Dr. Swann: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. The slogan includes "freedom," the freedom to learn. It's a nice slogan, so it's unfortunate that the passage of this bill is besmirching the reputation of this province. Already internationally people are writing about the unique position this province has taken in Bill 44. What does the minister have to say to our international partners?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're a free and democratic society, and we're allowed to have a difference of opinions. We're allowed to have different opinions in this House. We're able to debate those opinions. The people of Alberta are free to be able to express their opinions on both sides of it. The one thing that we don't need is rhetoric. We're not besmirching anyone. There has not been one person in this government that has said anything that would in any way be misconstrued as besmirching a member of the teaching profession or the school boards. We have said that we

believe in families. We believe in family values, we believe in education, and we believe in a parent's right to impart their beliefs on their children's education.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Community Health Councils

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 15, 2008, the minister of health stated in a news release: "It will be important to ensure that local health needs in rural Alberta are met under this new governance model. Community Health Councils will ensure representation at the local level." Currently the future of these councils is unknown and certainly in doubt. We have one provincial health board and an administration that clearly does not like dissent. To the minister of health: why will the community health councils be reduced and disrupted, and how will this affect Alberta's health services?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I wondered how long it would take the Leader of the Opposition to read the *Calgary Herald* because that was the essence of a columnist – I don't know – three or four days ago, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Leader of the Opposition is correct that we are going to enhance our community input into the new Alberta Health Services Board, and in due course the Alberta Health Services Board will be announcing the structure of the new health councils.

Dr. Swann: Well, indeed, this minister is disrupting the health councils, one more disruption in a health system that is already on the ropes with change. Is this further destabilizing going to maintain health services and its ability to respond to local needs? We already have these councils. Why do you need to restructure them again?

Mr. Liepert: There's only one individual here who's on the ropes with his own party, Mr. Speaker, and that's the Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Why is it that this minister wants to stifle dissent of Albertans regarding the chaos that he has created in the system?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I've said this many times. We've gone through a year where we have made significant changes to the administration of the health delivery services of this province. This is the largest merger in Canadian history, an \$8 billion organization and 80,000 employees. I would say that that administrative change has been successful beyond our wildest imagination. It's largely due to the professionals who are delivering services 24/7 in this province and has nothing to do with the rhetoric of these naysayers, who sit here and have nothing good to say. It's criticize, criticize, criticize.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Elective Surgery

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact that hip surgery could be considered elective instead of a medical necessity has many of my constituents and citizens from across this province very worried. It raises a simple question. To the minister of health: will the minister table the exact definition of elective surgery and how that determines the urgency of each patient's treatment?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it isn't the minister who determines the priorities when it comes to surgeries; it's the medical

community. I would add to that that if this particular member can show us within the confines of the Canada Health Act where it falls, I'll be glad to sit down with her and discuss it. We have said in this House that we are going to follow the principles of the Canada Health Act. We are doing that, and we will continue to do that.

Ms Pastoor: Actually, probably my question would be the same because we can't seem to find a definition there. Who created the definition for elective surgery? Was it medical professions? Was it the ministry of health? Was it the Alberta Health Services Board? If it was the Canada Health Act, where can I find it on the Internet?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I would suggest that if she wants to find out where she can find it on the Internet under the Canada Health Act, she might contact the federal government. That's a federal piece of legislation, not provincial, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Pastoor: Nice cop-out. Nice cop-out.

Will the minister tell this House what percentage of elective cosmetic surgeries are being performed in Alberta hospitals as opposed to hip, knee, and cataract services?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that's such a detailed question that if she actually wants the answer to that question, put it on the Order Paper. I'll be happy to get it for her.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Electronic Health Records

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad the minister is all warmed up.

This Progressive Conservative government can't be trusted with our public health system. Repeated attempts to cut services, privatize, and generally charge more for less represent this Tory government's track record. Now privacy rights of patients have been betrayed in two separate incidents. Why has the minister of health failed to ensure that patient records aren't literally blowing in the wind for anyone to find?

Mr. Liepert: You know, Mr. Speaker, I sent a note to this particular member yesterday because he got all worked up because of some comments the Premier made about his position on the oil sands. My note to him said: what's good for the goose is good for the gander. I keep hearing from this gentleman about: oh, you're privatizing health care; it's American-style health care. Well, I'm not going to use unparliamentary language, but I would suggest that maybe the member over there could learn a little bit from his lesson yesterday.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, disposing of medical records in a Dumpster is like locking them in Fort Knox compared to the risks of the electronic health record system proposed by this minister. The Auditor General has already reported a serious breach of government computers by sophisticated offshore interests. That's the Auditor General. How can this minister assure Albertans that their health records are going to be more secure just because they're stored on a computer somewhere?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we've had extensive debate on Bill 52, and we've had extensive public consultation. As I said

in this House yesterday, we have the Privacy Commissioner, we have the College of Physicians and Surgeons, we have the Alberta Medical Association saying that this is a good piece of legislation. There was good work done to ensure that the privacy of Albertans is protected. The only people who can't seem to figure that out are the two lonely people sitting in the corner over here. I would suggest that that's one of the reasons why there are only two of the lonely ones sitting there. It's because Albertans do not believe in their philosophy of fearmongering and scaring people.

2:00

Mr. Mason: I have a feeling we're going to get some company after the next election, Mr. Speaker.

This minister proposes that health information be stored in repositories under the control of private companies. We've already seen security breaches affecting Albertans from the government's wonderful private licence registries. No wonder Albertans can't trust this PC government to look after their public health care system. To the minister of health: when will you admit that your electronic health record system leaves Albertans' health information seriously at risk? Mr. Speaker, people feel about as secure as a teenager in a slasher movie.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the way I figure the math, the last time we had a provincial election, the number of seats this party had went from four to two. Now, if I continue that math, we can deduce how many are going to be there after the next election.

I do want to address the issue that the member raises, however. The fact that we have a situation where individuals' personal medical records have been not disposed of properly is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services has committed that they will conduct an investigation into the circumstances involved. As well, it's my understanding that the Privacy Commissioner has agreed to take a look at this situation.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, at a publicized event last week the hon. Premier told the Sherwood Park and District Chamber of Commerce that our electricity transmission system cannot meet our needs. The system that delivers electricity to every home, farm, business, and industrial site in the province is being described as aging, congested, and inefficient, and that is bringing up concerns amongst my constituents. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Electricity is there when I need it, the lights come on when I turn them on, and I've had no reliability issues – and neither have my constituents – in recent memory. Why do we need the transmission lines, and why now?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I think that the answer to the hon. member's question lies in the fact that the province of Alberta is indeed a growing, productive province. We have an increase in the consumption of electricity that is beyond most jurisdictions' in North America. We have an aging system that's being held together by a very dedicated group of people at AESO. The opportunity for us to build on and fortify this infrastructure for Albertans is now.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what are the risks to Albertans if we don't get transmission lines soon?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker: what are the risks? I don't want to in any way alarm any members of the House or alarm Albertans unduly. However, we don't have to look very far in our

history to understand and see the effect of circumstances where brownouts or rotating brownouts relative to keeping the grid active have affected Albertans. Without an opportunity to continue to move forward on an initiative relative to a very critical infrastructure, those types of circumstances will very likely be repeated.

Mr. Marz: My final question to the same minister. One of the biggest potential delays to a project of this magnitude, as I see it, is that of access to private land. Compensation rates to landowners for siting of transmission towers are significantly lower than those offered for other energy installations such as oil and gas wells and wind turbine towers. Can my constituents be assured by this minister that they will be treated fairly and comparably to other types of energy and industrial installations on the issue of compensation?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very serious concern for all Albertans and most particularly Albertans that are impacted as landowners relative to any type of infrastructure or other build-out that would take place in development. I cannot stand here and indicate to Albertans or to the member that, in fact, we could guarantee or that I could guarantee as the minister that people that are having infrastructure placed on their property relative to a transmission system would be compensated in an equal manner to infrastructure that may be placed there by some other private concern that is not regulated under the Alberta Utilities Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 30, 2009, the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration made a commitment to this House to provide information regarding the employment standards and the occupational health and safety investigation at the Horizon oil sands site. He certainly did that, and he is to be commended. Now, in this letter that the minister has provided to me, and I quote, Canadian Natural Resources Limited agreed to make \$3.1 million available to Employment and Immigration in March 2009 so that these workers can be paid. End of quote. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why did it take two years and, unfortunately, two fatalities before the government of Alberta finally investigated the fact that 132 temporary foreign workers from China were cheated out of at least \$3.1 million?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the information was not available to us till we started investigating the deaths of the workers and what had caused that. Upon investigation – and I need to say that that process is going through the courts – when we did that, that's when we did find out that the employees had not been paid fully.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that Canadian Natural Resources Limited has to pay twice to try to get the work done, they are also a victim in this matter. Why was there no inspection by employment standards in the four-month period April through July of 2007, when this cheating went on? This was one of the largest construction sites employing temporary foreign workers in the province. Why were you not keeping your eye on that project?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I will not comment any further than to say that CNRL have been charged with a number of counts towards violations, and I will leave some of the courts to decide those things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Here we have 3.1 million reasons why the temporary foreign worker program is flawed. It's failed 132 workers. It's failed a company that wanted to employ them. Will you now as a result of this despicable record cancel the program completely?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. There's still a great role for the temporary foreign workers that are presently in Alberta, and there's no doubt that as the economy picks up, we will be requiring additional help. We know that in the future we will be short of individuals in all industries and all sectors, and we will be depending on help from outside the province of Alberta, so we will not cancel the temporary foreign worker program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Electricity Transmission Lines

(continued)

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the government's actions described in the provincial energy strategy is "to review and streamline the regulatory process for transmission siting." Many of my constituents have either participated in transmission hearings or are landowners who may be directly or adversely affected by the proposed power lines. My questions are all to the Minister of Energy. Could the minister explain what's meant by the streamlining process? Surely you're not about to reduce how landowners' rights are heard.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, that, in fact, would be what we're absolutely proposing not to do. Process around the siting is always a challenge in many jurisdictions and no different in the province of Alberta. Specific siting for routes is determined within Alberta's open and transparent process for siting. Landowner issues will be heard and continue to be heard, impacts will be mitigated to the extent possible, and all landowners will receive fair compensation. Timely approval for transmission is essential to meet the electricity needs of Albertans.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's fine and dandy, and I'm glad that the minister has mentioned that landowner issues will be heard, but how can you ensure that landowners have the time to share their concerns with your department and with the proposals?

2:10

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can be sure because, as enshrined in our legislation and in the mandate of the Alberta Utilities Commission, they must listen to landowner concerns. Decisions on sitings will continue to be made through the Alberta Utilities Commission hearing process, and the concerns of directly affected and adversely affected landowners must be addressed. That is, in fact, the law in the province of Alberta.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister. You know, with all of this issue about siting transmission lines, communities like

Whitecourt have huge, huge load. Why not just build the generation closer to the load? Wouldn't that be much easier than upsetting all Albertans?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, the idea is certainly one that we have explored. The idea of distributed generation, although it is done to some degree in Alberta now, requires some additional technology and work going forward. We believe that in the next two to three decades most certainly the ability for us to have opportunities where generation is done in a distributed manner, where it's closer to load, may very well be effective, but at this point in time technology does not allow us to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Energy Efficiency

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government chases projects that are both capital and time intensive instead of taking advantage of the low-hanging fruit. For example, this government is spending \$2 billion of taxpayer money on CCS while wetlands store carbon for free. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Given that wetlands store CO₂ for free, why are Albertans still waiting for a wetlands policy?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question because I think she has identified a very common misconception about the storage of CO₂, and that misconception is that somehow, magically, wetlands could absorb CO₂. The fact of the matter is that wetlands do store CO₂, but they don't reduce the amount of CO₂ that we have. The member knows very well that we have an abundance of wetlands in this province and that we have a policy in place that is currently in practice to protect those wetlands and to ensure that they stay there.

Ms Blakeman: You're still missing a big opportunity.

Again to the same minister: why are feed-in tariffs, which would grow renewable energy in Alberta, not included in Alberta's climate change strategy?

Mr. Renner: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I didn't hear her question. What was the specific example? Are we still talking wetlands, or are we into something else now?

Ms Blakeman: Feed-in tariffs.

Mr. Renner: Feed-in tariffs. Okay. Thank you. That's probably something that the Minister of Energy could address, but the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that that is very much something that we would be interested in exploring into the future. For the information of those members who are not familiar with the terminology, it's a process that's used in some jurisdictions where alternative small producers like solar or microwind can feed into the grid at a preferred rate and encourage the development of alternative energy on a much smaller scale.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Alberta's insulation requirements, the R-value of walls and roofs and basements, are some of the lowest in the country. When will the minister

require homes in Alberta to be as energy efficient as houses in other provinces, an action that would actually save people money?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's the same question this member asked yesterday if memory serves me correctly. We talked yesterday about the need to review building codes. I would question the premise of the question, that Alberta has standards that are significantly different from other provinces. I remind the member that building codes are set nationally. There is a review under way. We've committed to have a review under way. Again, it's very much part of our strategy to reduce our carbon footprint over time, but it's going to take some time to develop that strategy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Fish and Wildlife Management

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are avid fishers, including my husband. This winter part of Moose Lake was closed to fishing. Unfortunately, an infraction took place. After phoning the nearest fish and wildlife officer on duty, we discovered that he was two and a half hours away. By the time that officer got to where the infraction took place, it would have been too late. There are two local officers, but they were not on duty, and unfortunately they did not have their vehicles at home with them. My first question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: in order to prevent these situations from occurring, why are local officers no longer on call and able to take their vehicles home with them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy to try to clarify the situation here. When our officers are on call, they are allowed to take their vehicles home with them and respond appropriately, but when they are not on call, they have to leave their vehicles at their office. The reasons for this policy are twofold. One is economy; we want to make sure government vehicles are used for government business. Two, also there's interest on the part of our officers that when they're not on call, they actually have some peace and quiet with their families. Having said that, in smaller communities with only two officers, it's often difficult to provide 24-hour on-call service.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what happens to all of the revenues that are collected from fish and wildlife infractions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The collection of fines under fish and wildlife, like all collection of fines in the province of Alberta, are administered by Alberta Justice and, like these other fines, go into general revenues. I would point out that with the new legislation being introduced this session, the opportunity for creative sentencing will allow, in the appropriate circumstances, for fines to be directed to remedy damages that have occurred. Also, a related point: of the licensing revenues for fish and wildlife 50 per cent goes to the Alberta Conservation Association. That was over \$10 million last year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is also to the same minister. Fish and wildlife officers are doing a great job across Alberta. However, there are a few faults within the fish and wildlife system that impede their ability to effectively do their jobs. How are we going to address these issues of inefficiency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to second and reinforce the hon. member's recognition of the good work that our fish and wildlife officers do. This is a big province, and there's a lot of area to cover. I would have to stress, though, that our working relationship with the officers is governed by a collective bargaining agreement with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and within that context we're working to achieve better efficiencies, specifically with respect to the vehicle policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Land-use Planning

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Land-use planning is of great importance to our province; however, it is also necessary that it be done responsibly and that we get it done right to avoid serious problems in the future. What worries me is the concentration of power and limited judicial review of land-use issues. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: why has this government put forward a land-use policy which concentrates such an abundance of discretionary power in the hands of cabinet and limits judicial review by Albertans? Is this what the government means by open and accountable government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That, of course, is the identical question that was asked yesterday by another member opposite. Refer to *Hansard* for that. I believe we'll be discussing this in Committee of the Whole today, and there are some amendments relevant to that question, so I'd suggest we defer until that time.

Mr. Hehr: So you would prefer to not answer any more questions on this issue, hon. minister? Is that what you're saying?

Dr. Morton: I think I would prefer to conduct the business of this House the way it's supposed to be conducted.

Mr. Hehr: If that's the way the minister prefers to do it, I prefer it as well. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Health System Restructuring

Ms. Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we have said before, this government can't be trusted to protect health care, and even our most senior medical educators are now expressing their concerns. Last Friday, 13 department chairs from the U of A faculty of medicine wrote to Stephen Duckett. They cite universal cynicism throughout the system and state that "questions are constantly being

asked about who is providing the input, how are the decisions made, and who is accountable.” To the minister of health: when will you admit that more and more Albertans simply don’t trust you to run our health care system?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Never, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the doctors identified the same problems with health care that the NDP does, including the ER wait time crisis and its root cause. The doctors write: “The numbers of chronic care patients who are blocking acute care hospital beds remain a significant problem and continue to be one of the bottle necks for movement of patients out of the ER.” To the minister: how many more experts have to go on the record before this minister will admit that his decision to backtrack on long-term care beds hurts health care?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I’ve answered that question on numerous occasions. This member chooses either to not listen or to recognize that we are doing a number of things relative to ensuring that the acute-care facilities in our province are actually dealing with acute-care cases. We have a number of projects that are under way. I can repeat again, as I’ve done many times, that we’ve also provided additional funding for home care in our budget that we’ve just passed in this House so we ensure that we’re looking after our seniors in the right place at the right time.

Ms. Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, just more and more people are outlining their concerns with where this minister is going.

Now, another reason the Conservatives can’t be trusted with health care is the lack of transparency and the delay in putting forward a budget. The doctors have raised worries over references to alternative financing models in continuing care, and they want to know if the government’s real agenda is to privatize care and force Albertans to pay more. To the minister of health. It sounds like not even the doctors trust you. They want you to be more clear about your plans to privatize health care. Why won’t you be?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I speak regularly to the head of the Alberta Medical Association. He has expressed no such concerns as this member is raising. So I’m not quite sure who she’s referring to, but I would suggest that I could probably find 13 people who would have quite a different opinion than what this member has. We’ll take her 13 opinions, and we’ll live with them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently the assured income for the severely handicapped program, or AISH, provides significant health benefits to those living with a severe permanent disability. Under the current program guidelines a person can lose these health benefits if they earn over a specific income threshold. My question is to the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What options are available to persons currently covered under AISH who might lose their coverage because of an income surpassing this threshold?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we encourage our AISH clients to work as much as they are able to because employment provides

much more for them than just a financial benefit. If an increase in a client’s employment income causes them to no longer be able to have a financial benefit from AISH, the person may continue to receive health-related assistance such as prescription drugs, essential diabetic supplies, dental, optical, and ambulance services through the Alberta adult health benefit administered through Alberta Employment and Immigration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if a person previously covered under AISH loses their source of income, how long does it take to reapply for coverage, and are there processes in place to ensure that they never go uncovered?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that AISH clients who make the courageous effort to work full-time may encounter health setbacks that prevent them from working full-time. To assist former AISH clients who may again need financial benefits, we have a process to allow them to have their benefits reopened without needing a full application. The process is called rapid reinstatement. It supports clients who have been off AISH for less than 24 months and did not leave AISH because of a change in their medical condition.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In addition to conventional health needs, many AISH recipients have medical conditions that require special procedures and products such as power wheelchairs and MedicAlert services. If a person loses their AISH medical coverage, will they still be able to receive support for these special medical needs?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, former AISH clients can access benefits from the Alberta aids to daily living program, which is available to eligible Albertans with a chronic medical need. Former AISH clients can access health benefit coverage from the Alberta adult health benefit program. This program offers eligible clients the same benefit coverage as the AISH program.

Civil Recovery of Health Costs

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, the health minister has been front and centre in an effort to cloak the lack of adequate actual police officers on our city streets by introducing policy on the fly that is meant to show that this government is actually tough on crime. The other day the health minister lauded his government’s safe communities initiative; however, in looking through that report, I did not see any reference to people convicted of criminal offences having to pay for medical expenses incurred as a way to deter crime. Accordingly, I ask the minister: what evidence did he rely on that shows that this type of bill will actually reduce crime or lead to healthier communities?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we can debate the bill all we want in question period, but I would suggest that it’s up for debate shortly, and we’ll be happy to have that debate at that time.

Mr. Hehr: Well, it was announced today, Mr. Speaker, that Calgary drug courts had received \$800,000 in additional funding. To the minister of health. To participate in a program, an accused must plead guilty. Isn’t this government sending a mixed message by

asking someone to enter a guilty plea as a condition for treatment but threatening to make the same group of people liable for costs associated with health care services?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hehr: Can the minister of health tell me how many more civil servants, prosecutors, bill collectors, and hospital administrators this government is going to need to hire in an attempt to recover costs for medical expenses from people at the bottom end of the socioeconomic ladder who commit these crimes?

Mr. Liepert: That sounds like something that belongs on the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Unlicensed Itinerant Contractors

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been asked by some of my constituents about door-to-door contractors, referred to in law enforcement circles as travellers. It seems like a typical sales pitch among these travellers involves a reduced rate on a particular job, followed by poor-quality work, and the consumer ends up paying considerably more to fix the shoddy outcome. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. What are you doing to protect Alberta consumers from these disreputable travellers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What's being referred to here as a traveller is a contractor who moves from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, often performing quick jobs and leaving as fast as they came. Under the Fair Trading Act all contractors who accept money before work is completed or discuss a contract away from their normal place of business, like your home, must be licensed by Service Alberta and post a security deposit. If a contractor is unlicensed or violates the Fair Trading Act with unlawful business practices, such as sending a bill which is larger than what was originally promised, Service Alberta will investigate.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how does your department investigate the complaints from Albertans stuck with these big repair bills as a result of poor work done by these travellers?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta investigates complaints about prepaid contractors and can take enforcement actions, including undertaking director's orders, suspension or cancellation of licences if they have one, and even criminal prosecutions. So it's really incumbent upon the consumer to contact us and to ask questions when they are uncertain when someone wants to do work for them. In 2008-09 we conducted and completed 180 investigations of the work of these so-called travellers. Of these 180 investigations 13 resulted in fines or jail terms.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, since awareness, then, is obviously the most important part of protecting Alberta consumers, my last question to the same minister: what are you doing to educate Alberta consumers about these so-called travellers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, for consumers to know their rights, this is a really important area for them to do their research. We keep in touch with the law enforcement agencies in other jurisdictions, and this is a really good example of the media working in partnership with Service Alberta to make sure that the word is communicated as well. Sometimes these individuals are hard to find and investigate and charge, but we do our best to try to find them. We also have the tipsheet on the Service Alberta website. But I would strongly encourage all consumers that have concerns about door-to-door salesmen: again, you have the power to not sign those contracts and to say no.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Building Construction Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During consultations with the building trades government was warned that proposed changes to the building codes will result in mouldy roofs and walls. Despite these concerns and with no solutions offered, the changes were approved. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why were the concerns of builders not addressed when making the changes to Alberta's building codes?

2:30

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure how to make it more clear that the high-intensity residential fires had a committee. That committee involved fire chiefs from across this province. It involved municipalities. It involved the Safety Codes Council. It involved the key stakeholders, which were the builders. From those consultations, from that work is where the codes were developed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think protecting people from fires is important, but it shouldn't be at the expense of building mould-free homes. To the minister again: how much longer will Albertans have to wait until the problems of nonventilated soffits and gypsum boards are addressed and not merely discussed?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I know that there needs to be a balance. There needs to be a balance with safety. There needs to be a balance with affordability. Thirdly, there needs to be assurance that the technology that's available is being used. That is the key to ensuring that firefighters have the time necessary to respond and also that individuals who live in the residence have the time and the ability to leave their home.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the government shouldn't wait until mould develops before they do anything about Alberta's building codes. To the minister again: given this government's inaction on leaky condos, what comfort can new homeowners take in knowing that recent changes to building codes will make their homes more likely to develop mould?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, far before there was any change in regulation, there was a handful of individuals that came forward that had concerns about the building practices. I asked my parlia-

mentary assistant to consult with the individuals that did have problems, with, again, the housing key stakeholders, with municipalities, with the condominium association. The building of codes is the work that is done in co-operation with all those involved. Albertans need and deserve to feel safe in their homes, and they deserve to have the best codes in Canada, which they have.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

PDD Community Boards

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The persons with developmental disabilities program provides supports to enable Albertans with developmental disabilities to participate in their communities. Constituents of mine are very upset that certain programs such as the Family Voices/Rotary employment partnership, family resource centre, and inclusive postsecondary education programs have been discontinued in the northwest region. My question today is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Why in the world would the northwest region cancel these programs?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, each PDD community board is responsible for assessing the needs of its region and delivering services to meet their goals within their budget allocations. They must also ensure that caseload and cost-of-service increases are being addressed. It's important to note that there are 9,100 Albertans served through the six PDD community boards, and funding for the program this fiscal year is almost \$604 million, up \$33 million. The northwest region, which serves about 350 individuals, has been allocated \$22 million for the '09-10 budget year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if they are meeting their goals, then families are getting the positive outcomes out of these programs that they need. Other PDD regions are bragging about their successes as well with these programs. Then what is wrong with this whole situation when they're achieving the results? The people need these programs.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, overall the PDD program provides similar supports to Albertans across the province. In this case the programs were not continued because they were not achieving the outcomes established for these programs. The model for the program was taken from another region, where it worked well, but in the northwest region it wasn't working. That's why the local board is working with families in the region to develop a model that will work and, most importantly, to provide the appropriate assistance to clients of the PDD program.

Ms Calahasen: My final question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. If families can't access these needed programs and they do not want to leave the northwest region, what alternatives can the minister provide so that these families' children have the same opportunities as other Alberta families in the same situation?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program is provincial in its scope, as is the need to set balanced priorities to support the best outcomes across Alberta. However, each regional board is responsible for identifying their unique priorities and to manage their fiscal resources. The northwest board has determined that the highest

priority is to support new individuals and those who are at risk. We will continue to work diligently with our stakeholders, including community groups such as the Rotary Club, to find innovative solutions to help people achieve their full potential regardless of which region they live in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Bitumen Exports

Dr. Taft: Well thanks, Mr. Speaker. The past couple of days I've been asking the Minister of Energy where the bitumen from the Kearl Lake mine will be upgraded, but he doesn't seem to know or he's not telling. Now, Kearl Lake production is so vast that it would fill a 12-storey office building in two days. To the minister: how can the Minister of Energy claim to have a bitumen strategy when he doesn't even seem to know what's going on with over a hundred thousand barrels a day of production from the Kearl Lake mine?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, one thing I can assure the member opposite: it will not be filling any office buildings in downtown Edmonton. Again, you know, it's a very interesting line of questioning because I did answer the question yesterday on where the likelihood is that this bitumen may end up. But let's be fair about the question in the first place. There is a point of severance in the province of Alberta legally with respect to bitumen. Past the point of severance the owner of that property can process it in a manner that they see fit.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there won't be any office buildings in Edmonton filled with jobs from this because apparently it's all going to be exported to other parts of Canada or the United States.

The minister talks about having no control over bitumen after a point of severance. How, then, can this government claim to have a strategy that will require 70 per cent of bitumen to be upgraded here? It just doesn't square.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite will know very well about the program that we're currently working with as part of our royalty structure, and that is the bitumen royalty in kind project and process that we're working at. We believe that our opportunities to manage the bitumen barrels that we own on behalf of Albertans will be part of our ability to move this forward. The member begins to lean towards this idea that somehow or another we should actually regulate or somehow change the legislation around how we manage these resources. It's been very clear from the outset of these talks that, in fact, we are not going to do that.

Dr. Taft: All right. So we're not going to regulate. We're not even aware where a hundred thousand barrels a day seems to be going. It's not something you lose track of in the bottom of your briefcase or slip in beside your desk or something. It's a hundred thousand barrels a day. To the minister: when are we going to see a detailed, coherent working strategy to achieve this government's goal of 70 per cent of bitumen upgraded here? When are we going to really see the details?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, we're seeing it in real time. It's happening today. I don't know if the hon. member actually realizes the fact

that today nearly 70 per cent of the bitumen that's produced in the province of Alberta has upgrading to some degree in the province, either to SCO level or, in certain circumstances, beyond that to refined products. So when are we going to see it? Right now. Open your eyes. Take a look around. It's happening today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

2:40 Temporary Foreign Workers
(continued)

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Federation of Labour issued a report in April of this year with 21 recommendations related to the working conditions of temporary foreign workers, including five recommendations related to the Alberta government. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. What is your department doing to respond to the recommendations pertaining to the provincial government that are related to enforcement?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, first, we appreciate that the report took the time to recognize our substantive steps to address concerns related to the program and the workers. We are doing a lot of what the report recommends, and I need to indicate that Alberta is far ahead of other provinces in its support for temporary foreign workers. With our temporary foreign worker advisory office there are employment standard officers visiting workplaces of employers with temporary foreign workers, and the telephone service that we provide is in 170 languages.

Mrs. Sarich: My second question is to the same minister. What are you doing to ensure that the general information meetings are being organized with all the newly arrived temporary foreign workers to provide basic employment and human rights as the recommendations suggest?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we provide information in person, over the phone, over the Internet, and electronically. The advisory office has held numerous seminars, 24 in fact, in partnership with our supplemental agencies across the province. They teach workers about their rights and responsibilities. We also host how to hire foreign workers sessions as needed for employers, to ensure they know the rules. We work very closely with Service Alberta to communicate with temporary foreign workers, employers, and community groups about the rules that employment agencies need to follow when they're recruiting workers to Alberta.

Mrs. Sarich: My third question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. What are you doing to respond to the provincial recommendation that the Fair Trading Act be amended to deal with restricting brokers who operate in Alberta from charging their recruitment fees and the penalties against brokers who breach the act?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, as I said in this Assembly before, there is currently an exemption which allows employee recruiting companies to charge a fee to domestic workers for their services. As I've stated previously, we will be removing this. That will no longer happen. Effective September 1 this exemption will not be allowed. These businesses also will have to be licensed through Service Alberta. The September 1 deadline is enough time to allow businesses to adapt to the new rules, and they can make changes as they need to.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 107 questions and responses today. In 30 seconds from now we will continue the Routine with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, commonly known as NATO. NATO was formed when the North Atlantic treaty was signed on April 4, 1949. Canada was a founding member of NATO, together with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal. It is the longest standing political and military alliance of nations.

As a founding member of NATO Canada has held an active role in the development and implementation of NATO's policies and activities. Initially formed to address humanitarian crises and military instability following the Second World War, NATO was instrumental in maintaining peace during the Cold War and in promoting the free and democratic ideals of its member states in the face of repressive and totalitarian regimes.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO's role shifted in the 1990s, and membership has grown to 28 nations. NATO played a key role in ending conflict in the former Yugoslavia and later in Kosovo. Canada was a full participant in these historic military and peacekeeping operations.

Today NATO's forces are engaged in many areas around the world, including Canada's mission in Afghanistan, which is a vital part of NATO's efforts to maintain stability and end organized terrorism in the world. Most recently NATO was involved in the interdiction of Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the contributions made by the Canadian armed forces and those of our allies and congratulate member nations on 60 years of helping to maintain peace, stability, and democracy in the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Drayton Valley Pathways Career Fair

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure to attend and open the first annual Pathways Career Fair in Drayton Valley on behalf of the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. It was very exciting and rewarding to have a role in bringing this wonderful event to my community. This career fair is a great opportunity for students from across the town and county to explore career options and find out what training they will need to enter varying careers. Since the petroleum industry is a cornerstone of Drayton Valley's economy, there was a big focus on the oil and gas sector at this year's event. However, Pathways offers many different streams, from health care to engineering and nearly everything else in between.

Events like this career fair are so very important in today's economy. Sixty per cent of new jobs, that are becoming increasingly technical and specific in nature, require postsecondary training. One of the great benefits of career pathways is that this program enables students to begin and in some cases complete postsecondary

certificates while still in high school. Through the generosity of Keyera Energy nearly \$200,000 a year is invested in nine career pathways students, including two from our local high schools, both Bryce Knutson from Frank Maddock high school, who will be studying civil engineering, and Kurtis Neigel from Holy Trinity Academy, who plans to study engineering. They have received generous scholarships, summer employment opportunities and have the potential to receive jobs upon graduation.

I would especially like to thank Kevin Thebeau and Cindi Allaby from Keyera Energy for their leadership in investing in our youth. Over 1,300 junior and senior high school students attended this career fair. Special thanks goes out to Patrick Martens, the two school boards and local principals, the town, the county, the industry, and local agencies for making this annual event possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Calgary-Montrose School Visits

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week during our constituency week I was pleased to visit many schools in my constituency. I met with students in Mrs. Price's class at St. Peter; Ms Gillon, Ms Jones, and Ms Murphy's classes at G.W. Skene; Mrs. Schellenberg, Mrs. Miller, Ms Hontzias, Mr. Kelly, and Ms Campbell's classes at Abbeydale.

It's, indeed, my favourite part of the job because when you visit with these young children, Mr. Speaker, you see something profound in their eyes, and that something profound is hope. They haven't been exposed to the day-to-day negativity we see in our world as much as perhaps some of us in this Chamber see. They see potential, and they see less borders between human beings. We talked about things like bullying and finding ways to take down borders, these artificial borders that we have between human beings.

Mr. Speaker, I asked them to do two things. One was to think about and communicate with me their dreams. These were their personal dreams, dreams for what they wanted to accomplish in the world. I must say that there were some veterinarians, skaters, and even some MLAs in the crowd. Then I asked them to share with me dreams for the world. I think every individual has a responsibility to dream about the ideal world so they can work towards making the world that ideal world. The response was incredible. The students want a healthy environment. The students want a world free of racism and sexism. The students want a world that has more promise than it does today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of my responses to questions raised relevant to Alberta Culture and Community Spirit's estimates and business plan.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 28 tablings today. As much as I would enjoy doing them individually, I suspect you might not. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from my constituents and northern communities voicing their concerns with respect to the future of the Edmonton City Centre Airport.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings of five letters received from my constituents opposing the delisting of chiropractic services. The letters are from Doug Banks, Pat, Rob Wells, Lorna Hayes, and Brad Bogstie.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it's a letter that I referred to in question period earlier. It's dated May 13, 2009, and it's from the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration. It is regarding the \$3.1 million that I quoted in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Verna Yiu, acting vice-dean at the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at the University of Alberta, written on behalf of the faculty's clinical chairs and sent to Stephen Duckett, CEO, Alberta Health Services. I referred to the letter in my questions today. It raises a number of concerns about the current direction of Alberta Health Services.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority Act the 2008 Alberta Capital Finance Authority annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, responses to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and Ms Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, on May 5, 2009, in the Department of Environment main estimates debate.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 35

Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned May 26: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we were talking about the Alliance pipeline yesterday afternoon under Bill 35 and the implications of that pipeline. In the time that I have left, I think it's very important that we get some other issues on the record, and hopefully they can be addressed. I know there have been previous attempts to address them.

I've heard, certainly, from constituents from Edmonton-Gold Bar who have property in rural areas. We referenced that yesterday. Of course, on their property they have pipelines that are crossing their land, and they have issues with this bill. Now, we know that this bill is going to result in an application to reclassify I think it's 25,000 or 27,000 kilometres of Alberta pipelines of various sizes. There's

going to be a significant shift of the regulation away from Alberta regardless of whether the National Energy Board is sited in Calgary. There are some that say this is a shift to Ottawa's control.

Now, landowners who have been granted rights-of-way or easements for any of these lines are certainly going to be affected. During the course of debate if I could have some reassurances from the hon. Member for Little Bow, I would appreciate it. But how will crossing restrictions be affected by this law?

Abandonment. How will the provincial rules that are now in place – the financial ability for abandoned pipelines always, as we know, rests with the pipeline owner. Landowners certainly have been protected. As soon as this shift in regulation occurs, when a pipeline is abandoned, the ownership of the buried line as well as any and all future legal or financial liability associated with it is placed in the lap of the landowner. I would like to know how this will work with this new bill. We know that many landowners have issues.

Abandonment is not that big of a deal right now, but as these pipelines age and more of them end up abandoned – some of them, Mr. Speaker, would be up to 35 years. Some of them would be over 50 years old. Who knows what is going to happen here? As I understand it, under existing Alberta rules if a landowner ever does get in a disagreement with the operator, he can hire a lawyer to contest what the operator is doing or has done and recover his costs. Under the proposed new rules there won't be any provision for landowners to recover legal costs. If I'm wrong on that, if the hon. member could correct me, I would really appreciate it. If the information that I have is inaccurate or incorrect, please correct us on the public record.

Now, loss of ongoing annual payments. We talked about that a little yesterday. Under existing Alberta rules landowners are entitled to an initial lump sum payment when they grant an easement. In certain circumstances the landowner is also eligible to receive ongoing annual payments. We referred to that yesterday, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Surface Rights Board has ruled in favour of landowners, stating that there are situations when landowners should keep receiving ongoing annual payments on an easement or a right-of-way to compensate them for interference and the overall impact of pipelines. With Bill 35 going through, if it does, as I understand it, there will no longer be any provision for landowners to receive these payments. Again, if that's inaccurate or incorrect, I would appreciate on the record the member's comments.

There are several other changes that landowners have concerns about. They include the depth of cover requirements, maintenance and integrity digs, and a dramatic expansion of what the industry calls the control zone. The control zone is an area on either side of a pipeline that the operator can control and upon which it can restrict farmers' activities. Under the proposed new rules the control zone is much wider than under existing Alberta law and in nearly every case is actually wider than the easement or the right-of-way that exists currently.

Now, landowners have brought these issues not only to my attention but, I think, to every member of the House. Certainly, some of these issues have been brought forward by individual constituents, as I said, who have property in rural areas. If I could get some clarification on these issues that landowners have before we go any further with a different stage with this legislation, I would be very grateful, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will conclude my remarks on Bill 35 and cede the floor to another hon. member. Thank you.

The Speaker: The floor is open.

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Little Bow to close the debate?

Mr. McFarland: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments and the questions. I will have specific answers for the six concerns that you've got. As far as I'm concerned, from what I've had here, the control zones, recovery of legal costs, the abandonment, and crossing restrictions are probably the most important ones. But we'll endeavour to get you specific answers to those right away.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a second time]

Bill 41

Protection for Persons in Care Act

[Adjourned debate April 28: Dr. Brown]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to continue the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in second reading to the debate on Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act. This is an act that has been overwhelmingly frustrating to me and to a number of my constituents because it came in much ballyhooed as the bill that was going to address all of our issues around abuse or suspected abuse of people in care. Generally, the overwhelming majority of people in that situation are usually frail elderly people who are in long-term care facilities, what used to be known as nursing homes. But it also covers off younger people who have lifelong debilitating diseases that have reached a point where they're no longer able to live independently, people with CP, for example, or MS, et cetera.

3:00

My experience with this bill was that every time somebody would come to us and say, "We think there has been abuse," usually physical abuse actually, and we raised it in the House or we tried to approach the powers in charge here: well, no, actually, it really couldn't do that, and, no, it couldn't actually ask that question, and, no, it actually couldn't go there. In the end, it was admitted to me on several occasions that this was essentially an educational tool, and it was really there so that it could impart knowledge about how the system worked and the fact that you shouldn't abuse people that are in care, which I would have thought was kind of an obvious one but evidently needed to happen.

To back up the various cases that I've worked on for my constituents, I have now had a closer association with someone who was in care. They had their arm broken. A very frail person had their arm broken. We shouldn't be breaking the arms of people that are in care, especially not in institutional care, long-term care. The facility, I must say, acted with alacrity, launched their own investigation, contacted me repeatedly to give me a status update, gave me a final report, actually, really pulled out all the stops because I was going to have to leave town, and I let them know that, and they really made an effort to let me know what was going on before I had to leave.

The protection of persons in care investigator? I still haven't heard from them. This incident happened the end of November; this is the end of May. Not a word. No written report. No investigation filed. Nobody has contacted me. I'm not hard to find, Mr. Speaker. You know, you could google it and get an address for an office. I'm not hiding under a rock here. It's pretty easy to find me. To me that underlines so much what is wrong with this system. We have a piece of legislation in place that is supposed to be an investigative arm, an educational arm, yes, but also an investigative arm, for when things go wrong and people in our care institutions are injured.

Injured, by the way, also covers more than physical injury. I'm

sorry, I'll just quickly look that up because it does cover that: yeah, bodily harm, serious emotional harm, withholding or prescribing of medication inappropriately. I think we've all had calls and cases around, for example, overmedication or psychotropic drugs or a family member is feeling that people have been overmedicated in order to keep them malleable and co-operative. "Non-consensual sexual contact, activity or behaviour." How bad is that that that we would have to contemplate someone in a care facility being a victim of sexual assault? That's just appalling to me, but it's covered in this legislation, which it should be. It also includes misappropriation or converting amounts of money or valuable possessions – that's the sort of financial piece of this – and failing to provide adequate care, nutrition for example, and medical attention or specific care that would result in bodily harm, which was the situation here.

Partly, I think, to me, in having had the facility's report, my understanding of the incident or my analysis of the incident at this point is that they were short-staffed. A staff member attempted to do a two-person transfer by themselves. Even though there are now aids to help people do transfers from wheelchairs or Broda chairs into beds and back out again, still there's a reason why, when it says a two-person transfer, it needs a two-person transfer. But lots and lots of times you're in a facility and you can tell that somebody is going to end up having to be transferred using a mechanical device and one person. That does not fit the rules of what I just described. In fact, I think that's what happened: because of the way the sling was manoeuvred and the fact that it wasn't two people, the individual's arm was broken.

Just imagine being a frail person in a long-term care facility and being transferred to your bed, and they break your arm before Christmas. Wow. Merry Christmas. This resulted in a number of trips, of course, to emergency facilities and then a return to emergency. And you're dealing with someone who is so frail they're on a gurney. They can't be transferred to a wheelchair for transportation – all of these things I've learned – and the emergency can take them on a gurney, but it's a special room, and it's down the hall, and they can't leave them unsupervised. So they actually will not take them unless there is someone in a guardianship role who can meet them at the door of the hospital and stay with them through the examination, the X-ray process, et cetera, and then until the medical personnel are available to transfer them back. You can imagine, given the timing of all of this, how difficult it was to organize to have someone who was in a guardianship or a responsible position to organize all of this, to be at the hospital, and the time involved. It was just a nightmare.

So I'm really interested that we now have this act back in front of us revamped. It's not an amending act. For those that are following along at home, probably 90 per cent of the bills we deal with in here are a such-and-such amending act, so it's amending the original bill. But this one isn't. What's happening here is that this bill is completely replacing the previous version of the bill and, one hopes, updating and improving it. But we're not tinkering here. We're not amending a couple of little sections. This is a total revamp of the bill.

I'm hoping that under this bill we would be able to address some of the long-standing issues that we've found. Essentially, most of the problems that have come to my constituency office and the one that I just described I had to deal with personally were around the actual rigorous investigation and reporting back. You know, I've just reread through this legislation, and some of it's not all that different. Maybe I missed a step. Maybe I was supposed to phone somebody up and say: "Yeah. Broke this person's arm. Could you investigate it?" I don't think that's necessary.

In reading through this act, what I'm getting pretty clearly – and

what I got at the time – was that it happened in a care facility. There's a requirement that certain people that are in charge are required to report this, and the report should flow through. There are even requirements that, you know, the report comes back in writing after a certain period of time. In the case I'm describing, it didn't happen at all. Still hasn't. What are we talking – November, December, January, February, March, April, May – six months. Not a word. Nothing in writing.

How is our system failing frail people in care so badly? As I say, I'm not hard to find. You know, my name was on all the appropriate records. It should have been pretty easy to find me if somehow something got lost. You could have just googled it and found a business address and sent the report to me, but nothing. There's something seriously wrong in a system where you can't even get a written report or any acknowledgement that something has gone seriously wrong and we hurt someone. We – a collective we, an institutional we – hurt someone. I mean, just imagine any one of us how much we'd like to have our arm broken going from a chair to another chair. Not much, and we did this to a frail elderly person.

3:10

So are we going to get improvements from this act? Yes, what we've got here is more detail about what is supposed to happen in the process when an abuse is filed and as it tracks, almost an audit trail, through the complaints officer to the investigator to the director and then what that decision is. There is some timing that's involved here about going back to the complainant. You can self-complain, by the way – it has to happen within a two-year time period – but otherwise it would usually flow through the institution because that's where most of these people are.

There's a duty that the individual who is a service provider, who provides care, that there is a report that's done. They cannot start an investigation if they feel the abuse is frivolous or vexatious, that the report was made too late. Remember, I mentioned a two-year time period. Then there's an odd clause: "having regard to all of the circumstances, no investigation is necessary." Maybe that's what I got caught in. But nobody followed through and said: this is why you're not getting any kind of a written report back.

My questions would be directed to the sponsor of this bill, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill. What is the criteria for that decision-making? How can one care provider arrive at that decision, that "having regard to all of the circumstances, no investigation is necessary"? What is the report process that then happens? I'm assuming at some point you'd go back and go: we're not going to do an investigation here, so quit asking. It certainly gives us timelines in connection with other things but not with that decision, "having regard to all of the circumstances, no investigation is necessary." How do we find that out?

The fines levied on individuals and on service providers have been substantially increased from the previous act. But you know what? Because there seemed to be such difficulty in actually launching an investigation under this act, and to be told regretfully and solemnly that it's mostly an educational tool, I'm not surprised that they never – I mean, in our experience, in our casework there were very few that actually resulted in a conclusion, so there wasn't a fine that was levied because there was no investigation that was carried through. So I don't know that it's going to be helpful that there's a bigger fine, and I guess I'd be interested in hearing what the thoughts were behind that.

Now, there are some additional concerns around regulatory powers and, particularly from my point of view, access, use, and disclosure of personal health information by those complaints officers. That became a factor in the case I described as well

because they had to hunt me down and needed me to verify that I had guardianship status to be able to access the health files. Well, I didn't, actually, and in my mind the individual was capable. They should go and ask for their permission to get into the files. With great reluctance they finally did, and the individual was able to give the permission to get into those. Once again, how that information is handled and who gets access to it and where the guardians fit into that puzzle becomes really important in these cases.

I'm aware that I'm nearing the end of my time here. I have put some questions on the record that I would like to get answers back to. You know, as I say, I'm hopeful about this legislation. But, frankly, we just have not had good experiences with it either through my office offering services to my constituents – and remember, 14 per cent of my constituents are seniors, so these are not unheard of cases for me – and, clearly, as direct experience with what I would consider to be the failure of an act thus far.

Thank you for the opportunity to put that on the record, and I look forward to getting some responses and participating in debate as it moves through Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to join debate on Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act. This is an interesting piece of legislation dealing with an interesting regime, which by its very nature, I suppose, can't help but be controversial and attract a certain amount of criticism because, of course, it deals with adjudicating in some ways and investigating very sensitive and significant situations for a very vulnerable group of Albertans.

I haven't had a chance to do a comprehensive comparison of this piece of legislation with what's in place, so what I'm going to do at this point is just raise some concerns with respect to what we've seen thus far with respect to the bill and hope to receive some information back from the minister as we move forward into other debate.

It's interesting. My experience with this piece of legislation actually is multifaceted. As someone who has constituents who have tried to utilize the protections afforded through this legislation, I've been able to observe the degree to which complaints can or can't be resolved through the legislation. Of course, we've observed some concerns with the process in that capacity. The other way I've been involved with it is through my previous role working with the nurses' union in terms of assisting staff who are the subjects of the complaints. So I've actually been on both sides of the cases in different contexts with respect to this act.

My experience thus far is that there need to be improvements in the administration of this program in terms of the natural justice provisions both for the complainant as well as the person who is the subject of the complaint. There also needs to be an improvement in terms of the remedial opportunities which are at the disposal of the person doing the investigation because it often seems as though all that really happens is that there are recommendations, which may or may not ever be effectively followed up.

I think one area of concern that we have, assuming that this ultimately reflects an improvement in the overall system, is that this relates solely to dealing with protection for adults who receive government-funded care or support services. Now, in many other contexts in this House we've talked about the strategies that the government is employing right now to open the door for more and more privately funded continuing care models throughout the

system. So I am concerned that there may be a point where there are homes that ought to be subject to the complaints and review process under this act which will not be because they are privately funded.

I think that the percentage of privately funded, where the actual resident is paying more and more of the fees, is going to grow. That, of course, becomes a major concern for us. I'm not sure what that looks like right now. I know there are obviously a lot of private-sector providers who still receive public funding. I'm not sure of the degree to which there are any private-sector providers who don't receive public funding. I'm assuming that as long as they receive any public funding, they're under the oversight of this act, but I could use some clarification on that.

3:20

One of the other things that happens in this act which is of some concern is the question of the definition of abuse under the act. What we currently have is that abuse is "intentionally failing to provide adequate nutrition, adequate medical attention or other necessity of life without a valid consent." The new definition of abuse would be:

"abuse" means an act or an omission with respect to a client receiving care or support services from a service provider that . . . results in failing to provide adequate nutrition, adequate medical attention or another necessity of life without a valid consent, resulting in serious bodily harm.

On one hand, the definition of abuse is potentially broadened because you're no longer seeking to show intent to abuse. There are examples – and I have examples in my notes here – where seniors received significant bodily injury as a result of a failure of care, but it was ultimately determined that it was not the intention of the provider for the senior to be injured; therefore, the complaint was not sustained. I think at a certain point the intention, particularly of the person who is the direct agent of the injury, is less of a concern because oftentimes – and we've certainly outlined this repeatedly throughout the course of this session – what happens is that there are in effect incidents of abuse not because anyone intends it, or certainly not the direct agents of the injury, but there are forms of injury that occur because there's simply not enough staff to care properly for the residents of these facilities.

So you see people not having their dressings changed. You see people having their dinner delayed such that they're, you know, becoming ill; their health is jeopardized. You see them being kept in bed till 11 or 12 o'clock because nobody can come and help them out of bed. These kinds of things are not things that the direct agents of this type of transgression intend, but at the same time it is something that should be addressed because it's ultimately the outcome of short-staffing, which shouldn't be allowed. Of course, we have no mechanism for measuring what is or isn't short-staffing because the government refuses to put staffing limits in place.

We can have this fabulous little piece of legislation that talks about protection of persons in care, but if we then define abuse in the way it's being defined here, we effectively render the primary source of injury as being something that's not covered under this act.

Now, what's interesting here is that the new act in that sense is an improvement because the new act doesn't ask for intent anymore. So that's good. Theoretically, then, you can now look at injury that arises as a result of systemic decisions in a particular facility that are not the direct intention of the front-line providers. That is absolutely what should happen because in most of the investigations I've been involved with where a front-line provider has failed to adequately care for someone, it's because they were presented with a choice of two competing needs, and they would choose the need that was most urgent. But it didn't undermine the fact that the competing need was also urgent. It's just that it wasn't as urgent as the other one. What really should happen is that both needs are cared for, but it can't

possibly happen because we are so chronically short-staffed in these settings, and we're not monitoring it properly, and we're not setting standards. So that is a problem.

In the new legislation we no longer have the requirement for intention, and indeed we do have this idea of abuse meaning an act or an omission with a client, and that's good because that's often how the kinds of difficulties we hear about occur. But the problem becomes that at the very end that omission needs to result "in serious bodily harm." Now, we have the situation with the senior who is in bed, not having their dressings changed often enough, not being toileted often enough, their bedsores become infected, and they end up in the hospital because they've now got infected bedsores which need to be treated in the acute care setting and the infection that results from that.

Now the question becomes: what omission resulted in what serious bodily harm, and who's going to prove that? Well, medical providers. But if that arises as a result of an omission, how is this person going to prove that omission A resulted a week later in serious bodily harm B? I mean, we're going to get into this ridiculous adjudicative model where in most cases the complainants will not have the resources to engage in what becomes, effectively, medical litigation. So it's going to result in a situation where many legitimate complaints of abuse are not founded.

Perhaps the issue is that one ought not use the word "abuse" because the word implies, you know, an egregious intent, and certainly on the part of the front-line workers that is not what's going on. But there is a failure in care. There should be the ability for people to file a complaint for a failure in care or an inadequacy of care or a negligence in care management or however you want to phrase it. It can be phrased in a way that you're not actually suggesting that people are intentionally abusing, but you are still identifying the fact that adequate levels of care are not being provided to a very vulnerable group of citizens within that setting.

That is a concern, and I'd like to hear back from the minister on how she sees us avoiding the litigation that will arise from that criteria being in the definition, that the omission resulted in serious bodily harm, and whether or not the psychological outcomes of the omissions are also included in what constitutes serious bodily harm.

Now, as I've mentioned before, we have tabled in the House about 250 working short forms just from this session that represent about four facilities in the province, so it's a drop in the bucket. We know there is a chronic problem in our care facilities, and we know it's not being addressed. We know those ones haven't even been investigated yet – or last I heard they certainly hadn't been – so that is a concern for us.

I think I'm running out of time.

The other concern that we want to raise quickly is that I am told there is some confusion about whether under this act the person harmed and/or that person's representative is entitled to a copy of the investigation report. It seems to me that they should automatically have a right to that investigation report. In my own experience I've seen investigation reports – and going back to my previous comments, the principles of natural justice and, shall we say, administrative and adjudicative professionalism need to be enhanced within this particular system because we've observed cases where investigative reports are based on third- or fourth-hand anecdotal pieces of information, where that information is never put to the person about whom it relates, basically just very, very sloppy investigative procedures that very clearly, were a person able to observe them, they would be able to counter a lot of the findings. But if they're not given access to these findings, then we lose a really important tool and a very important right.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

Again, going back to issues of natural justice that exist within this system, there need to be improvements there. If the information I have is correct – again, I'm happy to be told it's not – that investigative reports are not provided to complainants and/or their representatives or the people about whom the complaints relate, then that is certainly a very important concern with respect to issues of natural justice.

The final thing is that it appears to me this legislation is including a provision which is very similar to one that was included in Bill 24 last session, which this caucus raised very serious concerns about, where the complaints officer has the capacity to simply dismiss a complaint. Now, I haven't been able to look at this in enough detail, but I am curious as to whether this is the same kind of process that we had in Bill 24, public trustee amendment act, where a complaint officer could simply dismiss a complaint, and the decision to dismiss was not itself appealable. If that's the case, again, you end up with a very significant amount of gatekeeping, which is not appealable, except of course through the Court of Queen's Bench. Again, to go back, this is designed to deal with the protection of our most vulnerable Albertans, and that's not accessible to them.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a) for five minutes of comment or question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had anything else she wanted to say.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate that. I just really wanted to finish outlining my concerns around the process of asking vulnerable Albertans, most often seniors, who are already very ill – they're residing in these care facilities and requiring care – to essentially get representation or themselves somehow manage to get to the Court of Queen's Bench to appeal or to do a judicial review application. I'll tell you right now that 99 out of 100 folks would not even know how to begin that process. Probably 50 out of 100 lawyers wouldn't know how to begin that process. So it means that there is, effectively, no substantial or real avenue of appeal for folks whose complaints are dismissed by a complaints officer.

Again, I welcome correction on this issue. If this provision is not being framed along the same lines as the one about which we had raised concerns under Bill 24, then I'm happy to be told that I'm incorrect on that, but my initial scan of the bill is that we are in fact adopting exactly the same model, which, as I say, allows for a gatekeeping provision which, I would suggest, challenges the rules of natural justice. Certainly, when you're dealing with such a vulnerable population, that is a population for whom the rules of natural justice are perhaps most important.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak in the five minutes?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is a bill that deserves some good public discussion. I would bet there's probably not an MLA in this Assembly who doesn't have some constituents living in facilities that will be covered under this piece of legislation or, at the very least, family members of people who will be covered under this legislation. I know that I've got a number of facilities in my

constituency of Edmonton-Riverview that will be directly affected by this and, if I added them all up, probably hundreds of constituents, certainly a few hundred constituents who would be directly affected by this because they do live in facilities covered under this, and they are people who are vulnerable. They are people who are some of the most vulnerable, actually, in our society.

I think this is an important piece of legislation because it's doing something that governments need to do, which is to look after people who are too weak or too frail or too vulnerable to look after themselves. That's a core responsibility of government. Sometimes when we're discussing things and weighing out how to spend money and allocate resources and energy in this Assembly, I find myself wondering: well, is that particular thing a core role for government or not? That helps me sometimes to sort out: well, you know, we could maybe avoid doing that. But there are some things we can't avoid, and I think that protecting persons in care is one of those things that we can't avoid, and we shouldn't.

It's unfortunate that we have to do this because it's about addressing serious harm and harm caused by other people. You know, you'd like to think that when somebody is in care, they're surrounded by caring people and that they won't be harmed. But, in fact, humanity being what it is, every so often there's somebody in a position who shouldn't be there but ends up there and does cause serious harm, and that's why we end up having to make rules. If everybody was reasonable and compassionate and sensible and so on, we could probably do away with most of the legislation in this Assembly. They aren't that way, so we need bills like this.

The intent of this bill is to, as the title says, protect persons in care, and we'd all agree that's an important intent. I wanted to speak briefly about the definition of abuse, which is in section 1(2) of the act. I'm not going to dwell too long on this piece of legislation, but I did want to talk about this in particular. I'm quoting from the act.

"Abuse" means an act or an omission with respect to a client receiving care or support services from a [support] provider that

- (a) causes serious bodily harm,
- (b) causes serious emotional harm,
- (c) results in the administration, withholding or prescribing of medication for an inappropriate purpose, resulting in serious bodily harm,
- (d) subjects an individual to non-consensual sexual contact, activity or behaviour,
- (e) involves misappropriating or improperly or illegally converting a significant amount of money or other valuable possessions, or
- (f) results in failing to provide adequate nutrition, adequate medical attention or another necessity of life without a valid consent, resulting in serious bodily harm.

Now, when I read that, the first phrase that jumped out at me – and it's repeated at least three times in the definition – is "serious bodily harm." I think we need to think about that. Serious bodily harm seems like a fairly low standard to set for abuse. There is no definition in the legislation that I've noticed of what serious bodily harm means, so it's obviously up to interpretation, but when I think about it, there is a lot of abuse that could occur that doesn't end up in serious bodily harm. It ends up in mild bodily harm or bodily harm that's not serious, and I find myself struggling with this adjective "serious." How are we or, under the provisions of this act, how are the investigators and the director going to decide if something is serious bodily harm?

Is a bruise serious bodily harm? If a resident is acting out in a way that a staff member thinks is inappropriate and they get squeezed by the staff member and scratched, is that serious bodily harm? Well, probably not, but gee, it would seem like a form of abuse.

Ms Blakeman: That depends. What if you're a 95-year-old with osteoporosis?

Dr. Taft: Well, of course, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre is pointing out, if you're frail, an elderly person with osteoporosis, something as simple as a squeeze can break a bone. But I'm thinking, actually, that under the scope these aren't just going to be people who are frail elderly. These could be, you know, younger persons in a long-term care facility, or they're going to be people in social care facilities, which includes, actually, a tremendous range of facilities, or people in mental hospitals. I think we need to debate in this Assembly: what is serious bodily harm? Is a slap across the face serious bodily harm? If not, would two slaps be serious? I think we'd all agree that that certainly could be construed as abuse if it wasn't done in self-defence, but in this act it may not actually be defined as abuse.

Now, I can understand why there needs to be some description in there because if it was just bodily harm of any kind, you could end up with, you know, trivial things, a paper cut or something like that. But we may want to consider adjusting this word "serious" to something different – I'm just thinking out loud here – to "nontrivial" or "notable" or something. With the word "serious," one of the first things I come to is when you hear reports of people injured in a car accident. Well, they're critically injured, which means there are actually medical definitions of these terms. I don't know them, but critically injured means you're in a life-or-death situation.

Serious injury is one step up from being critical. That could involve broken bones. It could involve serious injuries that are painful and disabling and medically significant but not critical. Is that how we are to read this word "serious"? In the medical world serious bodily harm could well be taken to mean something quite devastating.

3:40

I think that as we go through this bill and consider it clause by clause in Committee of the Whole, we should consider what the word "serious" means. Of course, the extension of that, then, is that the same question needs to apply to subsection (2)(b), which says that abuse would involve serious emotional harm. I understand that there are no black and white definitions here, and I don't think we can set that standard. But serious emotional harm: what is that going to entail, and how is somebody to assess that? How is the director or the investigator to assess serious emotional harm? Is that something that's lifelong? Maybe it's not debilitating, but it's going to be with you for years, a sense of fear. If you're abused by particular people, that lingers for the rest of your life. Would that be serious emotional harm? Or is it something that reduces you to tears? What is this?

I think we're going to have to struggle in this Assembly with these kinds of issues if we're doing our jobs as MLAs. When we pass this, we need to understand that this law will be the guardian, as it were, that protects all kinds, thousands of vulnerable Albertans who will be looking to us. If we set the standards too low, as we may be doing when we say "serious bodily harm," we're not doing our jobs. I hope that some of the members on the other side actually give this some serious thought. We could have a very, very valuable discussion on improving the definitions of this act, a discussion that would give greater protection to people in care and make the jobs of the people who have to enact this bill a lot easier.

I'll keep my comments to that, Mr. Speaker, but I will issue a challenge to members of this Assembly. Please, read those definitions and think about it, and imagine yourself or your parent or your

loved one in a situation where it isn't abuse unless it's serious bodily harm. Is that good enough?

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for question and comment. Any hon. member wish to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a second time]

Bill 42

Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate April 28: Mr. Anderson]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise to speak and join debate on Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009. I will say that this is one of those bills where I just have to pause and consider and really put my thinking cap on as this has really challenged me on what exactly we're trying to do. Many of the aims in the bill are great. We're trying to protect people who go to bars and restaurants from troublemakers, gang members, et cetera, and we're trying to make places safer for the general public as well as give our law enforcement officials an ability to battle crime, all of which are extraordinarily valuable goals and aims and should be attempted to be done by government. On that account this is a bill that is well intended and fairly well meaning in that respect.

Yet at the same time, Mr. Speaker, I am caught in the crux that while there's a lot we can do to be battling crime – and I'm supportive of many of the measures that we do in here; for instance, more police in the streets. I believe our communities, especially Calgary and Edmonton, other jurisdictions are significantly short-staffed if you compare them to other jurisdictions across Canada that have city sizes and city crime rates similar to ours. So I would, of course, support any move to support our police officers on the streets and add more people to investigate gang crime, investigate gang violence, to crack down on drug houses, to crack down on people who peddle cocaine or people who indulge in gang violence and those type of measures. There's no doubt that this act sort of attempts to do some of this.

What Bill 42 would allow is for bars to collect personal information on patrons as a condition of entry, allegedly in order to identify troublemakers and prevent gang activity. You see, that's the whole thing: identify troublemakers and prevent gang activity. Well, that's a two-pronged objective, and at first glance it seems logical, but to identify troublemakers, you know, again, it's a very broad definition of troublemaker. When I look back at my youth and some of the individuals that I associated with, who played on my junior hockey teams and the like, we might have been identified, maybe, as some of these troublemakers or whatever you might call it.

For instance, after a game we'd all go in with our junior hockey jackets and start drinking a lot and all of that sort of stuff. Well, I think it's fairly easy to say that we might have been seen as troublemakers, especially when there are 20 of us in there with junior hockey jackets after a game and all of that sort of stuff and the testosterone is flowing and you're drinking a lot. The next thing you know, there are 20 of us, so is that a gang? Are 20 junior hockey players in a pub after a game celebrating, all with jackets, team colours, acting like . . .

Mr. MacDonald: It depends on whether you won or lost.

Mr. Hehr: Well, you know, if they won, they'd probably be celebrating, so they'd be drinking a lot. If they lost, well, a good possibility they were trying to drown their sorrows, so they'd be drinking a lot as well.

Ms Blakeman: We're getting your point. There's liquor involved.

Mr. Hehr: Liquor involved. That's more what I'm trying to point out.

Although we know what they are, gangs to us are bad people who are running around with guns and cars and dealing drugs and all those things like that. But very often gang members look like you and me, everyone on the street and don't parade around in a gang like junior hockey players or lacrosse teams or what have you. I'm just open to the possibility that those are loose definitions and are easy to interpret.

3:50

If we look a little further at what we always do in these situations, we have many fundamental rights and freedoms which we as a society cherish, and some of those are freedom of expression, which we had a very long discussion on last night, some of these things are freedom of association, our ability to hang out with whomever we want as long as we're not, I guess, doing illegal or immoral acts or things of that nature and those types of things. Then again, we're not allowed to do these things with impunity. There are reasonable limits that we as a society place on our freedom of expression and our freedom of association. That's what laws like this touch on. Are we reasonably limiting the freedom of expression or freedom of association that we are allowing members of our society?

There's also another way we look at this. The law we craft to battle crime or have safety in a public venue: is this law related to the activity we want to suppress or of that matter? I wasn't a practising criminal lawyer, but it's called the Oakes test. It's where the objective . . .

Mr. Denis: It's constitutional.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. It's not criminal; it's constitutional law. Thank you very much to the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

It means that the objective of the limitation of the Charter right must be sufficiently important to warrant the overriding right. Let's look at that. Yeah, it's important that we protect people from crime, but is this bill doing that enough that we take away this freedom of association and freedom of expression that we're trying to? The means we've chosen to achieve the objective must be proportional to both the objective and the law. The objective is that, yeah, we're trying to reduce crime. And the law is: what is legally permissible?

There's also what's called the proportionality test. Are the measures chosen rationally connected to the objective? Let's look at that. Are they rationally connected to the objective? Does collecting identification in a bar necessarily lead to a reduction in gang violence, criminal activity, anything of that nature? Well, I don't see that in my research, and I have done some on this matter and have looked for this because, like I said, I've thought about this for a long time.

It's not like I came here, put on my civil libertarian hat, and said: I'm not going to support this bill because it's coming from the members opposite. I really struggled with it. But I could see really

no place where this is rationally connected to the objective of sort of rounding up gang violence or even stopping violence in bars, which I would hazard to guess happens sometimes by gang members but, relatively, a lot less than we speak of or a lot less than, say, the incidents of 18-year-olds' hockey teams or 20-year-olds' rugby teams or 25-year-olds' university football teams, whatever it is. And I'm not just harping on athletic teams. You know what I'm saying. People of that age who go to the bar drink, get rowdy, have fun, and do that stuff.

Ms Blakeman: That's age discrimination.

Mr. Hehr: It might be age discrimination, but I think people can take judicial notice of the fact that that happens from time to time. I saw a smile come across the hon. minister of agriculture's face, so maybe he knows of what I speak. But I won't sully him with that brush, not I. Anyway, those are the concerns when I look at this bill.

Let's just go to the sectional analysis here, the wording of the actual bill. This is really important, where I've tried to sort of paint a picture here of why I think this might not be the best thing. In section 69.1(1) "gang" means a group of people engaged in a pattern of unlawful behaviour or in creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation in a community." Yeah, that sounds like a gang. Again, it sounds like a lot of things could be considered a gang, and that's just sort of how it is.

Let's look at another section I have highlighted:

- (2) For the purposes of this section, a person is associated with a gang if the person
 - (a) is a member of the gang,
 - (b) supports, facilitates or participates in the gang's activities, or . . .

That seems fair.

- (c) is in the company of a person described in clause (a) or (b).

What does that mean? If you're with one of these people who are in a gang, are you now directly deemed to have knowledge of this person? Are you subject to, then, police interrogation? Are you subject to be yarded out of the pub? [interjection] I hear some discussion going on in the background. I'm sure the hon. member may be able to illuminate me.

I'm just pointing out: "is in the company of a person described in clause (a) or (b)." So this person isn't really a gang member, but he's in the company of a person who is a gang member or may be a gang, as it says at the top. I don't know who's interpreting this, whether it's a police officer or whether it's Mr. Vickers at the pub in Calgary. I'm not sure.

Now, here's where it comes in. What happens is that you collect this information at the door of the pub and perceivably the police then request the information – I don't know if it's sent to them – and then a police officer comes on the scene.

If anyone is following along or paying attention, then they can look at subsection (4) about when the police officer gets involved.

- (4) A police officer need not rely on personal knowledge in concluding that a person is associated with a gang but may rely on information from others, including but not limited to
 - (a) information regarding
 - (i) any admission of association with a gang,
 - (ii) use of names, signs, symbols or other representations used by a gang,
 - (iii) a person's presence at the scene of unlawful behaviour by a gang, regardless of whether the person participated in the unlawful behaviour.

Did you hear that? A person's presence at the scene of unlawful behaviour by a gang. So I guess if a person's standing there, if a

gang or whoever, a hockey team or whatever you have, does something and a person has seen this, they are going to be affected by this.

Here's the next one:

- (v) frequent association with persons associated with a gang,

and

- (b) any other categories of information set out in the regulations.

Well, that seems to me a whole lot of people. The police officer doesn't need the personal knowledge. Those things do give me cause for concern. It doesn't seem that this legislation is drafted with any sort of limitations in mind. It affects a whole host of individuals who may, might, possibly, maybe not, maybe knew the gang member when they were in grade 9, and the gang member is now, you know, 20 years old. If they're at a bar, maybe that guy has subjected himself to some interviews by the police. These things worry me and maybe overly so.

Again, I go back to that basic principle that, you know, we've got to balance these things with what we're taking away. We saw that in the United States, possibly, eight years ago when 9/11 happened. Automatically we started stripping away freedoms or independent liberties. I believe these independent liberties can be taken away in short periods of time – war, insurrection, or what have you – but maybe we can take other measures. Maybe we can do the right thing in hiring police officers or do the right thing on that front. We don't have to quite limit our freedoms in quite a way.

For instance, you know, we do have here section 69.1. It's sort of referenced that this language is so broad that an individual could be excluded or removed by the police if police were told. As for the personal knowledge, no personal knowledge is required if the police were told that an individual has received benefits from a gang.

4:00

So say there is someone there who sees some people at the pub who they really don't like and they say: hey, I'll tell the police that this guy has received benefits. Maybe they bummed a cigarette from a gang member sometime or something of that nature. Maybe I'm going overboard with the example, but the simple fact of the matter is that this is overly broad. If you can show me some research papers that say that collecting information at the bar is good for gang violence – I've read some of these books. Never have I seen that really as a way to infiltrate gangs, stop gang violence, do whatever. What I've read is that it's an infringement on our society's way that we do business.

I see a lot of this stuff coming down the pike. You know, we all know we're short of police officers in this province. We all try to put our heads in the sand and say that that's not happening. We make a lot of hay lately in doing stuff: we're going to collect medical fees back from people who do crime, and we're going to start taking personal information to clamp down on crime. These are all great sound bites with very limited ways of actually reducing crime.

There are two ways you do that. One is, I guess, on the enforcement side, and the other side is giving kids an opportunity to do better. That's through things like junior kindergarten, maybe getting people some beds in mental health clinics, getting some individuals drug counselling when they need it, that softer side of the law that also has to be present with the harder side of the law. A little bit of the stick-and-carrot approach. You know, you give them the stick; you get them that mental health bed, you get them the drug counselling, or you get the junior kindergarten going. Yeah, that's going to keep crime rates down and gang activities less. Let's give new immigrants to our cities the support they need to develop second

language training and to get jobs. Let's not turn our backs on them so that they're looking to join gang activity. All of these things could be done to reduce gang activity.

Let's make sure our policing is adequate, while at the same time let's be cognizant that sometimes these laws are good, where we can do these things without overly infringing on our civil liberties and with the purpose of being rationally connected to the object at stake: reducing crime or some such matter. I think we should do that. This one, in my opinion, doesn't quite get us there. I appreciated the fact that the legislation did do a lot better on things of privacy; that was an improvement. I know we're getting there on this.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere wish to close the debate?

Mr. Anderson: No. I was going to answer the hon. member's questions. I will not close the debate. Sorry. I was just trying to answer his questions.

Ms Blakeman: We're in second reading, and if the sponsor speaks again, he closes debate. So can the rest of us debate?

Mr. Anderson: I just wanted to answer his questions. That's all.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Who wishes to speak now? The hon. Member for Edmonton Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. All right. I had to fight to get into debate on this one. I guess that's appropriate.

An interesting bill. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009. This is sort of a clean-out-the-fridge bill in a sort of funny way, but maybe there hasn't been an amending act to the Gaming and Liquor Act for some time. We're covering a lot of bases here, so when you want me to speak to the principle of this bill, there's a lot that's being covered.

We start out by amending some sections on the composition of the board. The most salient point of this seems to be that it's removing the deputy minister of the department of gaming – of course, it doesn't exist anymore, so the deputy minister, I guess, who would be responsible for gaming, which would now reside under the Solicitor General – from holding a position on the commission, which they had traditionally.

Then we move into some other administrative details around the chief executive officers not being eligible to vote or to be the chair, which seems to also be a change here. How long members of the board can serve: there's a maximum amount that's being instituted there. The exercise of powers and duties: some certain things can only be done by the chief executive officer. There's a fines section, the power to establish fines. Actually, when you read through to the end of the act, there's a fairly in-depth section that turns up under 91(2.1). It does show up at the end there. And fines imposed by the chief executive officer, under this bill's section 18, in the original bill amending section 93.1. So a number of administrative details about how the commission actually works, and I think they're actually changing the name of the commission to something else.

Then we get to the good stuff. This is a bit of a trip down memory lane because some of us will remember – I'm pretty sure this is what this is about – that there was a plebiscite held in the province around VLTs and that there were a few, a handful, who voted to remove VLTs.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Rocky Mountain House.

Ms Blakeman: Very good. Ten points.

There was almost an instant legal battle that came back from the venue facility owners who had VLTs in their place. I think what we've got here is the end of that era. For any of you who are interested in Alberta history, you should make note of this. Essentially, it's under section 12, which is amending section 48 of the original bill.

All agreements between the Commission and retailers respecting video lottery terminals existing immediately prior to May 19, 1999 and any rights of those retailers . . . are hereby terminated and cancelled in the following municipalities.

In the county of Lethbridge, Lacombe, the MD of Opportunity No. 17, Wood Buffalo, Canmore, Coaldale, and Stony Plain. So that's the end of that agreement with those retailers. Isn't that interesting.

That was such a moment in Alberta history, you know. It was interesting that those communities that did in fact vote to have the VLTs taken out I don't think actually ever did get them taken out. The retailers went to court, and the province agreed that they would leave the VLTs operational while the court battle was on. I don't even know what the end of the court battle was by the end of it all, but it went on so dang long that I think everybody got their money out. The only people that didn't get what they wanted were the individuals that had voted to have the VLTs removed from their communities. So you see what I mean about a clean-out-the-fridge act. There's all kinds of stuff in here.

Then it goes into conditions of liquor licences. It repeals a whole section on liquor agencies authorizing people to act as their representative, et cetera.

4:10

The new section, the good stuff in this bill, if you want to put it that way, starts at section 15, and it is being added under the original bill's section 69: "Risks to public order and safety in licensed premises – gangs." Somewhere underneath me I hope there is playing appropriate theme music along the lines of *Jaws* or something.

An Hon. Member: I can't hear it.

Ms Blakeman: Hum a little louder. There we go.

It does start out, as my colleague has mentioned, by defining "gang." I think he's right. He raises some reasonable questions. You know, I like fast sports cars, expensive sports cars. [interjection] Well, this pertains because I used to have a black Honda Prelude, the really sexy looking one, and I had incredibly expensive tires and rims on this car.

Mr. MacDonald: What kind of sound system did it have?

Ms Blakeman: It had the sound system. It had everything. I bought it from a young man. Oh, my God, it was a beautiful car, a really beautiful sports car: black and I used to keep it polished up. It just shone like a licorice jelly bean.

Anyway, at that time we were doing a lot of work in one of my communities, and I ended up going to regular meetings with the local beat cops, who used to tease me so much because I would drive up in what they would call the drug dealer car. At that time this was the car that all the drug dealers loved to have. A sad ending to this story; I'll just skip ahead a little bit. One of the first drive-by gang shootings that happened in Edmonton happened not that far from my home in the river valley. And guess what? It was a young man driving that car.

Dr. Taft: Not your actual car?

Ms Blakeman: No, not my actual car – sorry – but exactly the same model and colour and tinted windows and the fancy . . .

Mr. Hehr: Fuzzy dice?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, please, let's get serious. There were no fancy dice. Geez. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but sometimes you've just got to put your foot down.

The point of this is that, you know, I was getting teased by the police officers because I was driving – I had the paraphernalia, if you would like, of what at the time was a very common gang and drug dealer possession. There I was driving the quintessential drug dealer car although I was not a drug dealer and, in fact, was an MLA. But, you know, they all had such a good time with this, when I would drive up to these meetings, about how we were going to combat crime in one of my communities.

So you've got to be careful when you make a definition that is overly broad about how you are going to delegate subjective authority to people on the street, that are going to use that as criteria to decide whether somebody is a gang member or not. Now, I don't think a police officer would have mistaken me for a gang member, but, you know, as I say . . .

Dr. Taft: You'd be a gang leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. My colleagues are also teasing me about this.

There's the point. You know, if you want to look at a real close definition of what is being considered here, they start to talk about "use of names, signs, symbols or other representations used by a gang." You have to be very careful when you write legislation that is going to set the criteria that someone on the street, perhaps in the heat of the moment, uses to determine whether somebody might be a gang member or associated with a gang member. That's where the language here gets very interesting. It's one thing to say that you're a gang member and we know you to be a gang member. But to start using language like "in the company of a person" that's a member of a gang or "supports, facilitates, or participates in the gang's activities," that's casting the net a bit wider here, so I think we have to be very careful with this.

My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo had a bit of fun but also some seriousness around, you know, a gang being a group of people engaged in a pattern of unlawful behaviour or in creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation in the community, talking about various kinds of sporting teams out overimbibing in the community. But I think his point is well made.

We need to be careful about this. Where my hair starts to stand on end is section 16. This is around the collection of personal information by licensees, people that are granted a liquor licence through the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission to operate a facility that sells liquor. This is a big deal. I mean, you're not going to be successful having a restaurant or a bar or a, you know, cool spot to hang out unless you've got a liquor licence, and you are at the whim of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission as to whether you get that licence. So putting criteria in place here that create either an expectation or a responsibility is significant.

I have done a fair amount of work around the issue of personal information, personal health information, the collection, use, disclosure of health information. What is in section 16 is not going to cut it in my books. What it's allowing is that the licensee – let's

call him a bar owner; just allow me that – may, before allowing a person to enter those premises, collect the person's name, age, and photograph. Now, what it does not talk about is a number of things that it must talk about in order to pass muster with this girl and I think with all of us in this Assembly.

Just let me take a slight little tangent here and go: well, I mean, the common argument is that you're knowingly giving over an informed and a blanket consent when you choose to go into this bar. You know, if you don't want to give over that information, go to a different bar. Well, that may not be possible in smaller communities. That may place quite a burden on somebody if they're out with a particular group of people and they don't want to get separated from them. You know, they don't know this city or they don't know that area; they don't want to be separated from that group of people, so now they're going into the bar not entirely willingly and having to give over personal information.

Here's some of the information that needs to be nailed in this legislation before we approve of that. In what manner is that information going to be kept that they have now collected: a person's name, age, and photograph? How long is that information to be kept for? What is the time span? In what manner is it going to be kept? Is it electronic? Is it on a shared database that people could e-mail to other people? Well, they do anticipate that one bar owner can contact another bar owner and share the information. That becomes problematic.

What is the audit trail? How do we tell who looked at this person's personal information? We need to know that. But there's no mention of an audit trail in this section.

Who can they disclose to? It talks about that they can give it to another bar, another licensee, but is there a limit on who they can disclose this information to? Can they sell it? Can they use it for marketing or commercial purposes? No mention of that in here.

Have they got, actually, some kind of written consent, or are they taking the fact that someone has given them the information and entered the premises as some sort of blanket consent? That will not stand up as informed consent. Again, I have a real issue with this.

How will this information be disposed of? You know, is it in paper form? Are we going to put it in a box and leave it in the Dumpster so that we've got people's name, age, and photograph out there? Hello. Identity theft. And this is the government that's participating in this.

So this section absolutely is unacceptable.

There are a number of other things in this bill that I'm sure could be argued and I may even well agree are perfectly acceptable and needed. But what is anticipated here is flat-out dead wrong. You cannot take people's personal information in this day and age and not account for it in a fairly thorough way. We have an entire office of the Privacy Commissioner that's all about that. We have a hugely detailed Health Information Act. And then we're going to have the Gaming and Liquor Act just let bar owners take personal information with no other criteria that they need to adhere to? In my opinion, that's criminal, and I won't support it.

Thank you.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 42 is interesting. I enjoyed the remarks from the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Centre, and I certainly would agree with her. Her selection of cars, I'm not going to comment on that, but it must have been a very good car, and it wasn't a Pontiac.

Now, Bill 42 seeks to allow bars, again, to collect personal information on patrons as a condition of entry in order to identify troublemakers and to prevent gang activity. This amendment to the provincial Gaming and Liquor Act would also permit bars and nightclubs the authority to share information about problem patrons with each other. Finally, as I understand it, the intended amendments pose serious constitutional issues and raise numerous Charter breaches that have already been found to run afoul of privacy laws.

I know how some members across the way view the Charter, but this bill is a trend that I see in this spring legislative session from the government. They're exercising considerable authority here, whether it's Bill 19, whether it's Bill 36, whether it's Bill 42. Bill 44: there are some issues, of course, around that. But I don't understand why it would be necessary. I can understand where businesses are coming from, but I don't understand why it is so necessary to have this legislation.

The Alberta Roundtable on Violence in and around Licensed Premises was a round-table that was sponsored by Alberta Gaming in partnership with the Alberta Solicitor General and public safety three years ago. Three years ago there was a report that came out, and one of the individuals who participated as a round-table participant stated regarding admission practices: "You can pick and choose your customers. If you've had an issue with a patron, or think you'll have an issue, don't let them in." That is sort of the free-market approach to this, yet we have the issue here of allowing bars to collect personal information on clients or customers or patrons, whatever you want to call them, as a condition of entry in order to identify troublemakers and to prevent gang activity.

Now, gang activity. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo gave us quite an outline of what may or may not constitute gang activity, and I would agree with him. It's wide open to interpretation. Any staff, any bouncing staff in any establishment could consider any group to be members of a gang or associated with a gang.

I know information has been collected in the past, and this has been done by bars and nightclubs before without any legislation to enforce the collection of personal identification. I think that if any individual in this province wants to go to a bar or a nightclub and they have a few dollars in their pocket and they want to have a social drink with friends and they're of legal age, of course, then that should be it. But I know we have a lot of issues around certain neighbourhoods with a high percentage of bars and nightclubs in them. We have to recognize that in some situations, in some instances, it's certainly a problem.

Now, there used to be a website – and I apologize, Mr. Speaker; I can't find it, whatever it's called. I'm going to look that up in *Hansard*. Anyway, it could be in Solicitor General and Public Security, under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, or it could be in Community Spirit. However, this website used to provide details on violations of the Gaming and Liquor Act. It would be interesting to have a look at that now. I have tried, along with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, to find that website, and I cannot. Three or four years ago it was routine. I could find it.

What kind of violations would be on this website? Well, Mr. Speaker, there would be violations posted for overserving of clients or patrons or if there was a fire code violation. For instance, if Joe or Jane's bar had a licence for 250 people and the inspectors came along and counted 325 in there, well, it was a major issue. That would be posted. Overserving, serving underage individuals, serving beyond hours: there were any number of issues that one could identify from that website.

Dr. Taft: Any involving exotic dancers?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, there was, hon. member. There certainly was. Now, maybe my research skills aren't what they should be, but I'm of the opinion that this website has either been removed or it's been hidden. We've had some good looks, and we've spent some time trying to find this, but we cannot. If that website was available, we could see if there were any patterns, if there were any bars in certain neighbourhoods or nightclubs where there were repeat offences. Then maybe those owners could be made to clean up their act, so to speak. This portion of the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act would be unnecessary.

Now, when we talk about gang activity, I can see, you know, the sincerity and the effort here to control, limit, or restrict gangs and their activities. But I think we would be better off, Mr. Speaker, if we were to look at the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act in another way or if we were to look at the Solicitor General and Public Security department in another way.

It puzzles me why I hear so often from people throughout the province about our gambling industry and our casinos and the use of those casinos by organized criminals to launder their money. There have been many ways suggested to me, which I have outlined in the past in this Assembly, as to how we could control the laundering through casinos of large sums of money that has been raised or collected or acquired through criminal activities by gangs. I think that if we really want to put an effort to controlling gang activity in this province, that's one of the places I would like to start.

I'd like to get tough on gangs by controlling where they launder their money that they have acquired from their activities. There are a number of ways of doing that. I would be quite willing to discuss this with the hon. minister or with the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere if they would like because I think this would be in the best interests of the province. I think we could reduce the activity or the activities of various gangs throughout the province.

4:30

Mr. Hehr: Hit them in the pocketbook.

Mr. MacDonald: Hit them in the pocketbook. Exactly. I think we should hit them in the pocketbook.

As the number of casinos has expanded across this province, the number of hours of operation have expanded. It's easier and easier for those criminals to launder their money through our casinos, and I want to see this government put a stop to it. If they won't, maybe the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo will come forward with sensible legislation to restrict and limit their activities.

Mr. Hehr: Or at least suggest it to the Solicitor General.

Mr. MacDonald: Or work with the Solicitor General to get that done.

Now, when we talk about the bars and the nightclubs around the province, whether they're in rural or urban areas, there are a number of interesting things that occur. I drive too fast on occasion, but on occasion I also drive responsible young adults who are going out for a night on the town to their selected location, which is a bar or a nightclub.

I don't know how many other hon. members are driving around late at night, but it's astonishing to see, particularly in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona – and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona may have noticed this herself. It will be very, very cold, it could be windy, it could be snowing, but you will see dozens of young people, all of legal age, of course, lined up at the bars on

Whyte Avenue or over here in Edmonton-Centre at Jasper and 109th Street.

They're lined up to eventually get into the establishments, and they've got a T-shirt on or they've got a light coat on. I could never understand why they didn't have heavy coats or a winter coat on. I couldn't understand this, so I asked a group of them one evening: what's with this? They looked at me like: wow, where's this guy from? They save money by not having to check their coats. I had no idea that some outfits charge \$5 and \$10 for a patron to check their coat. These people want a little bit more money to party, so their idea is not to wear a coat. Well, I think it's wrong.

When I refer to the round-table that occurred three years ago, that was one of the issues that was discussed. I'm quoting here again, Mr. Speaker:

Participants faced a number of challenges in implementing these admission practices. Most importantly, the efficient screening of patrons requires sufficient staff numbers to prevent lineups, congestion and the violence that can result. Extra personnel are needed to staff coat checks.

I think it's a means of revenue generation myself.

Conflict can arise if patrons don't want to check their coats, and insurance costs can go up if coats are lost.

Now, when we see the results in the front of the establishment of a group of people between, say, 18 and 30 years old standing there shivering for up to an hour before they get into the place because they want to have that extra \$10 to maybe buy a shooter or two, we've got issues. We've got issues how we govern our nightclubs and our bars.

Now, we have to have a look at what the Solicitor General and Public Security in their round-table had to say about pricing and serving practices because I think this is important to this debate and particularly to this bill.

- eliminating the use of glassware and glass beverage containers
- limiting or prohibiting drink specials.

We hear that all the time on the south side, particularly in the Whyte Avenue area, where there's a large concentration of bars in a very compact neighbourhood .

- limiting the duration of happy hours
- limiting hours of service
- monitoring patrons' liquor consumption and refusing service to patrons who are intoxicated
 - Licensees have the right and the responsibility to refuse service.
- promoting food service.

[Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] Oh, I'm disappointed. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for comments or questions?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm pleased to be able to join debate on Bill 42. This is, you know, one of those bills that's difficult to get your head around because, of course, it starts out by appealing to concerns that are pretty universal amongst a lot of people with respect to concerns around their security and their safety in their community and their neighbourhood. There's no question that we've heard a lot in the last period of time about violence in bars and gang problems and all those kinds of things, so bringing forward an act like this certainly does make it appear, at least on the surface, that, oh, we're being tough on crime and that we're taking actions to stop crime.

I'm not necessarily saying that that's not the case, but it's one of those things that is certainly much more complex than just saying: oh, we're giving police more power to enforce antigang activity in

bars. Really, what it comes down to is engaging in a much more sophisticated analysis around what the barriers are in terms of enforcement in the bars and particularly in those bars where gang activity is a serious problem. You know, it's not just a question of all these gang members sneaking into these bars and that nobody can do anything about it. There are also issues about sort of the will to enforce in a lot of different cases, and it varies from bar to bar.

It's interesting. Just to follow up briefly on the comments that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was making as his time to speak elapsed, he talked about the stakeholder consultations and the various strategies that were being considered to deal with the amount of violence that occurs where there are too many bars or too many people in bars. There's a tremendously complex dynamic there around how you maintain public safety, how you balance people's desire to have bars to go to and the right of bar owners to open bars in places. How do you balance that right against community safety and against community standards and against the safety of the people that are in the bars?

Frankly, there are, as far as I know, much simpler issues that need to be addressed in terms of enforcement within those bars before we get to the point of, you know, ramping it up and coming up with the very sort of high-profile antigang legislation, simple things like insisting that the occupancy numbers are regularly enforced, just simple, simple things like that which don't happen because they're not enforced.

I certainly know this from my own riding, where we do have a very high concentration of bars along Whyte Avenue. There have at times been some real difficulties with respect to certain bar owners that were not prepared to enforce occupancy regulations and were not prepared to enforce drink limits and were doing the cheap drinks and all that kind of stuff. I'm not saying that all bar owners are like that, not by any means. There are other bar owners in the community who are very respectful of community needs, who are engaged in discussion and dialogue with the community as a whole and who are, you know, good corporate citizens. It's not a global thing, but there's no question that there are a lot of issues, and in some of these bars that are problem bars, there are a lot of other things that need to be addressed.

Having said that, though, I'm sort of in the process of trying to quickly engage in a more one-on-one type of consultation with constituents on this issue, but it is difficult given the pace with which we are addressing all these issues in the House, you know, and the fact that we are in night sittings and early morning sittings and day sittings and everything else and apparently some attempt to have this moved through two different readings just today.

4:40

Having said that, this legislation certainly does appear to do that which is occurring in a number of pieces of legislation that this government has brought forward, and that is that it's moving to push the legal envelope, as it were. It seems as though, you know, there's a whole second employment strategy, a quiet one, in this government, which is to employ all those out-of-work lawyers, although I wasn't sure that there were a lot of them, to defend this government with respect to the numerous pieces of legislation they bring forward that have constitutional implications. I think there is some concern that this piece of legislation is one of those pieces of legislation that's going to run afoul of constitutional requirements.

Without getting into a position where we are saying that the bill is unredeemable, I do think it's important to talk about some of the concerns that we have at this point with the bill and that have been raised in different settings. We have of course heard from different legal groups that raised concerns. They outline that which I've

already mentioned: the likelihood of this bill standing up to legal scrutiny were it challenged in the courts; the question of whether or not the authority being given to bar owners is even really necessary given their common law rights to control access and egress to their establishments and whether or not what we're really just doing is opening the door for them to collect whole bunches of personal information that ultimately isn't necessary; and then, again, the whole additional authority being given to police officers. Maybe this is necessary; maybe it's not.

I certainly would like a great deal more detailed information about where law enforcement authorities think the problems are in the system vis-à-vis cracking down on these problems. We're at this point on the verge of giving police officers the ability to remove people from licensed premises with a very, very broad amount of authority. As has already been mentioned, for instance, a police officer can remove somebody if they believe that they're associated with a gang. They don't have to reasonably believe. They don't have to have evidence upon which they believe it. It can be on a second-hand basis. It doesn't need to be reasonable belief; it just needs to be a belief of the police officer.

Then the whole question is: are they associated with a gang? That can as has already been pointed out involve someone who, you know, has never engaged in any criminal activity and isn't in any way knowingly associated with any kind of criminal activity, whether it's gang activity or otherwise, being removed from premises by a police officer in breach of sort of their fundamental rights under the Charter. That's a concern because it's a very wide net that this legislation is casting, and I'm not entirely sure that it's defensible or sustainable in accordance with other laws of our country.

From the bill, as I said, the police officer doesn't need to rely on personal knowledge in concluding that a person is associated with a gang but can rely on information from others, including information about association, the use of names, signs, symbols, other representations used by a gang, all that kind of stuff. You know, I'm certainly not anywhere nearly knowledgeable enough about what is or what is not gang symbolism and gang dress and gang behaviour, but I do think that there's been a certain popularization of it somewhat in the media, and I think it's not at all surprising that you would see evidence of that in some cases without it actually being backed up by any kind of criminal activity. As well, the courts have previously said that considering someone to be associated with a gang just because they were present when unlawful behaviour took place is contrary to previous legal decisions. So that is a concern.

We've also raised concerns about the issue of allowing bar owners to collect personal information from people before they enter the licensed premises. I know we've heard that the Privacy Commissioner has very reluctantly given I wouldn't say endorsement to this legislation. I think he has very reluctantly removed his objection, but even in so doing, I believe there are still cautionary notes with respect to what he says. Although he gave guarded support to the bill, comments in his news release say that he's not convinced that kicking these people out of bars will make the bars any safer. It's not clear that these measures are actually going to make these bars safer, and there is even less justification for allowing police officers and bar owners to judge patrons on very little evidence.

In a *Calgary Herald* article he was also quoted as saying that he's worried that people may be put on a collective bar blacklist for reasons that don't merit that kind of sanction. He says that something that gets a person kicked out of a bar one night does not necessarily merit that person being forbidden from entering numerous bars on a permanent basis. These are good points, and I think, again, we need to be careful that we're not, you know, swatting a fly with a sledgehammer.

Now, we had previously the case where the Privacy Commissioner had ruled that bars had to stop scanning people's drivers' licences. However, we are still in a position where we're relying on regulations under the act to define how the bar owners need to collect, use, and disclose this information. So we don't actually have clear protection yet in this bill. All we have are regulations that will outline the fact that we may get clear protection. That's a concern.

Another problem with the bill stems from the criteria that allow a licensee to share a patron's personal information with other licensees. The bill says:

If a licensee has personal knowledge or reasonably believes . . .

At least there we have the reasonable standard injected. Not with the police officers, but we do there.

. . . that a person . . . has, at any time within the preceding year, engaged in an activity referred to [in various sections], the licensee may . . . disclose the person's name, age and photograph to other licensees for the purpose of allowing them to determine whether they wish to allow the person to enter licensed premises.

Now, the question then becomes: how do we monitor that bar owners are using this information for the purpose established? How do we monitor that that information is not being used for secondary purposes? Who out there is going to be hired to engage in these monitoring activities? Of course, when you give people the authority to collect personally identifying information, you then have to exercise the restraint which comes with that privilege of holding that information. Yet it doesn't appear to me that there are any plans afoot to monitor, regulate, or enforce how that information is used. So that is somewhat concerning to us.

Ultimately, the definition of a problem patron can be quite broad. We've heard from the Civil Liberties Association, for instance, that the definition is also very difficult because the way it's drafted, it can be applied very differently by different bar owners in different settings depending on the context. The actual trigger point where your information starts getting passed around to an undisclosed number of other bars is not even easily identified or easily measured. In one bar the trigger point could be down here, and in another bar the trigger point could be up here. You just have no idea.

4:50

Maybe just because you happen to walk in the door with somebody wearing gang insignia who happened to start a conversation with you on the way into the bar, so you're chatting with them without having any knowledge that they are or are not involved with a gang, you know – who knows? – suddenly your name is on a list, and it's being shot around to an undisclosed number of bars for, yes, the purpose of ensuring that you don't come in. But, again, we don't even know whether that's the purpose that will ultimately be used for.

We will, ultimately, I suppose, if you complain, if you subsequently discover that people seem to be approaching you with information about you that you can't imagine how they would otherwise have gotten. But, I mean, it puts the onus on the person to investigate and try to figure out why their information is out there in that manner.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. You were talking about the collection of information in the bars and nightclubs, and you were concerned about the secondary purposes that perhaps could be used for as that information was collected. I certainly agree with you. I don't think

it's necessary that we collect that information. Do you have other concerns about how that information may be used?

For instance – and I'm not saying that this would happen, but I would use this as an example – a number of bouncers in a particular establishment may be very interested in the personal information of young members of the opposite sex, and they could use that information to perhaps ask for a date. There's a lot of information being provided here, and there is no control of it. Do you have other concerns?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. I mean, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar makes a very good point, that there are a variety of secondary uses to which that information could be put. Again, as we know, the member himself outlined some of the discussions that occurred in the stakeholder consultation on the operations of bars, and in that consultation it was very clear that enforcement on a variety of issues was complex and difficult to manage. Now within that environment, where we've identified that enforcement – we have staff turnover. You know, it's a very dynamic, shall we say, industry. Into that environment, where alcohol is sold, by the way, so, you know, people aren't always operating in the most wise fashion, we are giving up access to personal information and then hoping that someone is going to be able to monitor and track how that's used in a professional way.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar makes a really good point. There's no question; you may well find that in that particular setting patrons could find themselves being contacted for reasons completely separate from any genuine concern about their criminal activity and more in relation to, you know, the efforts of some people to contact other people because they're interested, whether they be of the same sex or opposite sex. It really doesn't matter.

Yeah. I mean, it all comes down to the fact that there's a lot of information being taken. The rules under which the right to take that information is triggered are very unclear and inconsistent from bar to bar, and the monitoring of the information, based on the ability to monitor within that industry on other standards, makes me very worried that we are not really set up to monitor and protect that information in a way we should. As I've said before, we don't even have the rules for how that will be done clearly laid out in this legislation. Of course, it's all being left to regulation, where we all have to sort of cross our fingers, close our eyes, and hope it all works out okay.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, within the five minutes?

Mr. Hehr: No. I'm all right.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak? Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you already spoke.

Mr. Hehr: Then I'm done.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, do you wish to close the debate?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to take a couple of minutes to thank the Assembly and my colleagues for

debating this bill. I think it's a very important bill to debate. There was some very good debate and some very thoughtful comments on both sides.

It is a very sensitive issue whenever you're dealing with people's personal information. You know, we have a Privacy Commissioner. We've taken the step to give this legislation to the Privacy Commissioner, and the Privacy Commissioner has made a ruling on it and has said that it does uphold our standards of privacy in this province. Although it's nice to maybe opine on how the Privacy Commissioner came to that conclusion or whether he wanted to make that conclusion, he did make that conclusion, so I believe that this legislation does respect the rights of privacy.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo raised some concerns about this legislation allowing police to essentially grab people out of bars and question them, you know, for no apparent reason. This legislation gives police no such power. This is not criminal legislation. This is legislation where if police have a good-faith belief that a person is a member of a gang because they have a gang tattoo or they are conversing with a member of a gang for a long period of time, if they are wearing body armour in the presence of a gang member, et cetera, they can take that information into account and can ask that person to leave the premises. This does not mean that they can make an arrest. This does not mean that they can take the person in for questioning. That's not what this legislation does. I think it's important to realize that.

If we read the legislation, it says that a police officer, as the hon. member pointed out,

need not rely on personal knowledge in concluding that a person is associated with a gang but may rely on information from others, including . . .

Then it goes through it.

- (a) information regarding
 - (i) any admission of association with a gang,
 - (ii) use of names, signs, symbols or other representations used by a gang,
 - (iii) a person's presence at the scene of unlawful behaviour by a gang, regardless of whether the person participated in the unlawful behaviour,
 - (iv) receipt of benefits from a gang, and
 - (v) frequent association with persons associated with a gang.

There are reasons laid out here. I believe that these are good enough reasons, not to make an arrest, but that's not what we're talking about here. We're not talking about arresting anyone. We're talking about public safety in licensed establishments, where we have had shootings and stabbings and other terrible incidents occur. This simply gives licensed establishments and police the opportunity to make sure that these places are safe places for the average Albertan to go out and have a drink with their friends and go dancing with their date and all that sort of thing. I think that's important. We should be able to do that without getting stabbed. [interjections] I'm going home right after the session, so I'm getting excited.

I also wanted to remind the hon. member that this is a private establishment. A licensed establishment is a private establishment. You have a right to know who is in your establishment, and unless it is on a list of enumerated grounds in the human rights legislation, you have a right to deny them access to your establishment for a variety of reasons. This is not a public place. It's not a park, where you can go at will. This is someone's business. If you come in there and you're a known gang member and you have a well-known gang tattoo and you're wearing body armour in order to intimidate or to do whatever, you have the right as a bar owner to deny access. That's what we have to keep in perspective here.

5:00

I think that this is a good example of a community solution to a community problem. We can't just rely on front-line officers to do all the policing, to be all the eyes and ears on the ground when we're talking about violence and gang violence, et cetera. We need to empower businesses and people to participate in the solution, and that's what this legislation does. It does something about a problem that we have, and I would urge all members of this Assembly to support the legislation.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today during Committee of the Whole and speak in favour of Bill 29, the Family Law Amendment Act, 2009. I'm encouraged by the opposition's support of this important legislation, which deals with improvement and necessary change to the province's child support recalculation program, which is targeted to open by the end of this year. It's essential that this amendment be made to the legislation for separated and divorced parents and children of their relationships.

Mr. Chairman, there were no specific issues brought up during the second reading debate. However, I'd like to reiterate some key points of this proposed amendment and why I would submit to you and through you to all members of this Assembly that this has to be passed. This legislation will improve access to justice by enabling the child support recalculation program to provide a simple, low-cost way for parents to keep their child support orders current.

In the discussion we currently heard that this amendment provides appropriate incentive for parents to disclose their income to the child support recalculation program, ensuring that the results of the recalculations are therefore fair. The recalculation program will help ensure that children receive the best support their parents can offer as their financial circumstances change from year to year. Mr. Chair, it will also help child support payers whose incomes have gone down by reducing the amount of child support that they have to pay, a principle again of fairness. It will also help children and support recipients by increasing the child support they receive if the payer's income has gone up. In either case it will help parents meet the obligations they have in law to ensure their child support orders are adjusted to match their incomes accordingly.

I must also add, Mr. Chair, a bit of a human side. Over this weekend I was out with some friends of mine on Saturday night – for those of you who think I'm a stiff, we were watching UFC – and I ran into a young woman who had just had a baby. She was asking me what happens and what her rights are if the father doesn't pay child support. This is exactly what this is about.

If these rights are not available and made clear and simple to an

average individual, what often can happen is that these people can fall on the government assistance rolls, which, of course, are paid for by taxpayers. Conversely, if we have a good system like this is going to put on for average, everyday people, we will ensure that children receive the support they need from the people that are required to pay it.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to once again emphasize the importance of this legislation, which I'm pleased to see members of this Assembly recognize, and I would encourage all hon. members to support this bill through Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on Bill 29.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for giving me the opportunity to speak at the Committee of the Whole stage of this debate. I believe I already provided some comments on this in second reading and again shall do so today.

I would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Egmont for bringing forward this bill. It's not only a well-intentioned bill, but it is, in fact, a very good bill. It allows for people who have been involved in each other's lives who have support obligations either through spousal maintenance or through child maintenance to utilize a system that will make it easier for them to obtain some justice.

What primarily this bill provides is that if a party fails to provide an income tax return, notice of assessment, in short a questionnaire, child support the next year will be recalculated as if that payer's income had gone up by 10 per cent. An additional 3 per cent would be added annually to capture since the order was granted or recalculated. The maximum deemed income increase would be 25 per cent and would be applied to orders where five or more years had passed since income was last determined.

This amendment encourages parents to comply with their obligation to provide income disclosure. It also ensures that one parent's failure to disclose their income as legally required does not mean that the other parent and children are denied services from the program. The five existing recalculation programs – in British Columbia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Nunavut – currently recalculate orders granted after their programs were created. Alberta's program will help parties with child support orders dating back to May 1997, when the child support guidelines were first introduced. This increases access to justice even further as Albertans will not have to go back to the court to get new orders so they can participate in child support recalculation programs.

This program is expected to be operational later this year. In discussion with the department it appeared that other jurisdictions were canvassed and that these measures were included so that what was happening would be up and about as quickly as possible for Alberta citizens. The only thing that is not included in the amendment which possibly could be a part of this whole enterprise is the possibility of reclassification from outside this jurisdiction. It was related to me that due to retroactive calculation for maintenance enforcement payments in Alberta in addition to other conflict of laws issues made in this area for further expansion of the act, that can maybe come in at some other time.

What we're looking at here is a good bill. What happened previously when individuals were involved in a relationship and had children – when the federal guidelines were established in 1997, what would happen is that when individuals would finalize their arrangements, separate, and go before a magistrate or even work things out on their own and come up with an order for payment that was due and owing under the guidelines, which is guided by either one or both of the spouse's income, then payments were made thereafter. That's how the system worked.

5:10

However, what would happen is that this would go along for a year or so, and either one spouse or the other spouse would inevitably make more money. That tends to be the progression, especially during that time period in Alberta. You have individuals who maybe in 1997 were making, say, \$50,000 – that's a decent sum – and they had two kids. If you go to the child support payment guidelines, they would say that you owe X, Y, and Z to your two kids and your spouse. Well, if that's what he was making in 1997, you know, lo and behold, he or she was adventurous, went out and made some more money, and next thing you know, three years later, in the year 2000, that individual was making double that. That individual was making \$100,000.

This individual, although well meaning and well intentioned, did not report this to his ex-partner, and he or she was not providing the extra income to go to their children, was merely saying: "I was making \$50,000 three years ago, and the money I was paying under the maintenance enforcement program, well, that was good enough. We don't have to incorporate this extra \$50,000 that I now make in addition to what I was making three years ago." You know, that individual, for whatever reason believed that his or her family had enough with his payments in 1997.

But that's not how the court system works, Mr. Chair. The court system demands that the rules be followed. So, you know, when one spouse had an inkling that the other spouse had increased his or her rate of pay to \$100,000, well, that individual has a right to receive more benefits under the child support recalculation program or what other maintenance enforcement protections that are out there. Of course, the person who made \$100,000 wouldn't necessarily want to just give up this money freely and willingly sometimes. The other partner, he or she, would have to go to a lawyer and say: "Mr. or Mrs. Lawyer, I believe my former partner is making significantly more money now, three years later, than he was when the initial order was granted for maintenance enforcement or payment under the child support act, and that individual is not willing to give me additional money. So what should I do?" And that lawyer would say: "Well, what you have to do is, first off, pay me a retainer. If you give me a retainer of, say, \$10,000, I can help you." With that retainer of \$10,000 that lawyer would get busy, draw up some papers, send a statement of claim or statement of review or a maintenance enforcement review, whatever the case would be, to his or her ex, and that individual who had received this letter would say: "Oh my goodness, it looks like I have to go to court some time to figure this out."

When that individual got his letter from his ex-partner, ex-wife or ex-husband, that individual would then go to a lawyer. Of course, he or she would sit down, and that lawyer would say: "Well, here's what we have to do. You can either agree right now that your salary is \$100,000 and probably pay this, or we can go to what's called a hearing. I can represent you there, and we can battle it out in court and really decide how much you make." Well, oftentimes that was the option that was chosen, so \$10,000, again, was the fee you had to give the lawyer to take the case. Lo and behold, these two individuals would end up at the courts some time later to discuss how much was due and owing under the new provisions. If we look at that, what was really only necessary was the record of employment and the income tax statement. That would have been filed with the courthouse, and then they could have made a decision from there.

Generally speaking, you know, this is a lot more sensible way for couples to do it. You know the old way of sometimes getting a lawyer and battling for every nickel and dime against a deadbeat dad or a deadbeat mom was not in anybody's best interest. In situations

like this now you have this child support recalculation program that exists that allows people to use it and former families to use the program if necessary. If they are unsatisfied with it, they can then decide whether they want to get a lawyer and pursue it further. That is their choice. This, at least, allows some recognition that if one of the deadbeat dads or moms is not filing their income tax, they're at least going to get some increase in the payments due and owing. It just basically punishes wilful laziness or wilful deceit, whatever it is, of individuals who are trying to hide income from their former spouses.

Like I said at the beginning – I'll end with a similar sort of refrain – this is a good bill that recognizes technology, that sort of makes it easier for people to use the system, doesn't infringe on anyone's freedom of expression or freedom of association or anything like that. Bill 29, the Family Law Amendment Act, is simply a good bill that we will be supporting with all the voracity and tenacity and vigour that Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition can bring up.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, the amendments to the Family Law Act as proposed here in Bill 29: I know that parties in our constituency will be pleased with this. At least, I think that this amendment will encourage parents to comply with their obligation to provide income disclosure annually regarding maintenance enforcement issues. Now, when a party fails to provide an income tax return, notice of assessment, and a short questionnaire, child support the next year, as I understand it, will be recalculated as if that payer's income increased by 10 per cent. An additional 3 per cent would be added for each additional year since the order was granted or recalculated. The maximum deemed increased would be 25 per cent and would be applied to orders where five or more years have passed since income was last determined.

5:20

I'm not going to go into the details of this case, but I was just reading a file of a constituent. On Monday I got the information that was provided to me. We're trying to help this individual out. This individual has three children. Thousands and thousands of dollars in arrears are owed to this individual. This individual is just scraping by with the three children, and the spouse is delinquent, not interested in helping out in any way. I think we've got to get very, very tough and diligent on these individuals who are refusing to, essentially, support their own children.

Mr. Hehr: It reminds me of that Kenny Rogers song.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm not familiar with that Kenny Rogers song.

Mr. Hehr: It's a fine time to leave me, Lucille.

Mr. MacDonald: It's a fine time to leave me, Lucille. Okay.

Mr. Hehr: "Four hungry children and a crop in the field."

Mr. MacDonald: "Four hungry children and a crop in the field." Well, in this case there are three hungry children and no crop in the field.

Mr. Hehr: That's what I'm talking about.

Mr. MacDonald: You're absolutely right, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

However, when we look at some of the steps that have been made, Mr. Chairman, regarding maintenance enforcement issues – and I think it goes back to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's time as Justice minister – there was significant improvement made to the process. Now, some people may disagree. There may be some individuals who have been delinquent who would strongly disagree with my statement, but something had to be done, and I certainly support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, who initiated some of the changes.

The new legislation states, as I said earlier, that if a party fails to provide an income tax return, notice of assessment, and short questionnaire, child support the next year will be recalculated as if that payer's income had gone up by 10 per cent, et cetera. Now, I think this amendment will encourage, Mr. Chairman, parents to comply with their obligation to provide income disclosure. It also ensures that one parent's failure to disclose their income as legally required does not mean that the other parent and, most importantly, the children are denied services from the program.

There are five existing recalculation programs: in British Columbia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Nunavut. They currently recalculate orders granted after their programs were created. Alberta's program will help parties with child support orders dating back to May 1997. I can't remember the specific file I quoted earlier, if it goes back that far or not, but it went back quite a few years. Now, this amendment, as I understand it, will also increase access to justice even further as Alberta citizens will not have to go back to court to get new orders so that they can participate in the child support recalculation program. The program, as I understand it – and the hon. member, I believe, talked about it – is to be fully operational by the end of the year.

Mr. Hehr: That's what they say.

Mr. MacDonald: That's what they're telling you. Okay.

Now, in discussion with the department it appeared that other jurisdictions were canvassed and that these measures are included to address what is perceived as a shortcoming of the other recalculation systems. The only thing that I understand has not been included within the amendment is the possibility of reclassification from outside the jurisdiction. If a mother or a dad moves to Saskatchewan or B.C., then what happens in cases like that?

Now, the child support recalculation program. Mr. Chairman, maintenance enforcement conducted a client survey of both the creditors and the debtors. The survey was intended to help maintenance enforcement better understand the needs of clients so that they can improve client service in collections, and I think we need to commend them for that. It's a very, very difficult issue. I know that at our constituency office these are very, very tough files. There's more than one side to each and every story, but you have to deal with it, and people have to support their families; there's no doubt about that. Whether the couple are living together or not, it's very important that the children are well looked after and well supported.

Now, if this amendment becomes law, which I certainly hope it does, we on this side of the House support this effort to ensure, among other things, the smooth operation of the courts and greater certainty for Alberta's maintenance enforcement clients. I think this is a very common-sense streamlining that has been a success in other provinces. As I mentioned, these are welcome initiatives, and the penalties included in the act to ensure the collection of family maintenance remain a priority. We could go through the child support recalculation service, but I don't think that is necessary.

Certainly, when Bill 29 was introduced, the amendment was to ensure that we try to keep defaulters in line, make the new program easier for child support payments to be acquired and distributed.

With those remarks, Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude by indicating that through our constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar we routinely, unfortunately, have files where there are significant outstanding debts owed between parties. Hopefully, this will ensure, even if it's in a small way, that those obligations are always respected and those obligations are always met by either party involved in the family matter.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is any other hon. member wishing to speak on this bill? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 30

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, amendments relating to the bill?

Mr. Hehr: Just a comment. It was my understanding that that bill got pulled this afternoon.

An Hon. Member: Bill 31.

Mr. Hehr: Ah, yes. So this is traffic. Nice. I would like to comment briefly.

The Chair: We have Bill 30 now, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered relating to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on Bill 30.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to once again join in on the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009. I had the privilege of speaking on this just yesterday, and it was actually a good discussion.

Mr. MacDonald: You haven't been caught for speeding since?

Mr. Hehr: No. I have not been caught for speeding yet, but I'll tell you what: it was a relatively good discussion between all sides. All sides took part. The hon. minister in his always affable way took part in the debate. We actually bantered on some recommendations and some ideas not only in regard to this bill but possibly future amendments or future, I guess, safety measures that will come into play in our traffic safety.

5:30

There's no doubt that traffic safety is very important to Alberta people. In fact, I was just mentioning the other day that traffic accidents cost Alberta society \$12 million a day. Twelve times 365. I don't have a computer here, but if someone could calculate that,

that's a lot of millions of dollars. It might even be – is that a billion dollars? It may be. Anyway, a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of productivity, a lot of pain, a lot of anguish, all caused by traffic accidents.

What any expert will tell you is that one of the primary causes of accidents is speed. People have said this for as long as I've been around: speed kills. If we can find ways to, I guess, limit speeding and encourage effective driving that not only protects drivers from themselves but, of course, protects other members of society from those drivers who tend to ignore the rules and regulations that we are to live by, well, then, so be it. We need to write legislation and laws and hire police officers and in certain instances put up red-light cameras, which we've chosen to do in this act. What this bill does is it allows us now to have a ticket sent out for both running a red light and speeding. I thought that was a good thing. If you're doing both, why not get a ticket for both?

We also had an interesting discussion yesterday, and it was led off by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It was regarding the issuance of demerits for these types of things. The minister had a fairly good point on this issue. He said: why should we issue a demerit to someone who gets one of these photoradar tickets when it may not be them in the car? Yesterday I thought: "Now, that seems sane. That seems like a reasonable thing to do." For instance, even a minor speeding ticket, say if you're going 65 in a 50 zone through a red light, that's going to be at least two or three demerits. Can anyone help me with that? Let's assume two, three demerits. I'll tell you what. If that happens quite a few times, you can be out of your licence in a fairly quick way.

I went away thinking about that and sort of left that day agreeing with the minister and saying: how foolish was I to throw in with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar when I should be leery of that sometimes? I went away last night, and I thought about this for a second, and I came back. Now I understand the rationale behind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Sometimes I get caught up with the always affable minister's expressive behaviour. You know, I must have been so enraptured by his physical presence and oratory prowess that I threw in with him that quickly. But I went back and I saw this.

Now, here's why we might want to consider some demerit system when people get a traffic ticket. When a person would get a photoradar, maybe we issue one demerit, say if they're going 65 in a 50 zone or any time that car goes through the thing, however egregious the offence. Say you've lent your car to your 16-year-old son and he gets caught doing 140 in a 50 zone and, yeah, it's caught on photoradar. We issue that one demerit.

You know, we as car owners have to be somewhat responsible for whom we are lending our vehicles to. Oftentimes it's parents who lend their car to their child or grandparents to their grandson or a gentleman to their girlfriend, yada yada yada, whatever the deal may be. People are constantly lending cars in our society and possibly to some bad risks. This not only affects the people on the road, but I'd hazard a guess that when people are in other people's vehicles, they may not even be as cautious as they are in their own, and that could be a point.

I believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is on to something, where we could find some way to incorporate a demerit system in here. This would not only slow people down. It would work on licensing, and people would get the point even more so than just paying a fine. There would be an actual punishment, if you rack up 10, 12, or 15 of these, where you lose your licence, and that would be fair. You would be in charge of your vehicle, and you would know who was driving it, and it would provide that extra mechanism of safety.

I'm not fully advocating for this yet, but it is an idea that really could be worked to in the future, that something could be managed to keep reducing our accident claims, reducing the costs on society, the costs to our health care system, our businesses, our whole thing like that. I think it's an idea worth exploring, and I'm actually glad for that discussion last night because it made me think about this issue further.

There's another sort of scenario I'd like to continue on. Although we didn't get a lot of thinking done last night because we were debating stuff till 4 in the morning, during the odd moment I was still thinking about this Bill 30, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009. I thought, you know, more about the environmental situation in this province and how as a province, because of our oil and gas industry and because we wanted to grow and prosper and provide jobs for our people and provide our citizens with more wealth and because we have this here and because there is a recognition that this is going to be a CO₂ producing venture that we're undertaking, we should maybe look to being even more diligent with our speeding and maybe what we set our rates at on the highway.

For instance, right now they're at 110. If we move them down to 100, this would not only save lives. It would save a tonne of CO₂ going into the atmosphere. We could be leaders on that front. We'd say: "Yeah, yeah, yeah. We do provide extra CO₂ into the environment because of our oil industry, that we're providing for the world, but, hey, look at what we're doing. We're going to reduce our speeds to try and do our part." Put on top of that that we're putting in California air emissions controls on all our cars, so we're doing better on that. Also, then we're going to add tax incentives for people who buy cars that get over 55 kilometres a litre, all that sort of stuff that just this type of legislation can do. We can be leaders in other ways. Even though I see us growing our emissions through our continued oil sands production, growing our emissions maybe by doing, hopefully, more of our own upgrading of bitumen right here at home, we can reduce emissions in other ways. One of those ways where Alberta can be a leader is maybe on reducing speeds.

Those are my comments. I think it's a fairly good act, and I commend the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for bringing it forward. Thank you very much.

5:40

The Chair: On Bill 30, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I, too, listened with interest. I appreciated the comments and the suggestions yesterday from the Minister of Transportation regarding photoradar and why, in his opinion, it would be unwise to issue demerits to change driving behaviour that way as well. I appreciated his input into the debate, but I'm certainly not convinced of that. I think there are ways of doing it. I don't know whose interests are being served here. It certainly could be the rental car industry. It's a big industry. They may have issues that we are unaware of regarding the behaviour of past customers with their vehicles.

Mr. Hehr: And gang members.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, I don't know if I'd go that far.

Certainly, the car rental industry is a big one. Many people may be unaware that in Dallas, Texas, there is a tax on each and every transaction from a car rental agency that is used to pay for a sports stadium. I was startled to find that out. It's megabucks at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. This is one of the ways that the local government there has raised money to pay for a sports facility. Now, that's a little bit off subject here, and I'm aware of that Mr.

Chairman. Certainly, how the car rental industry would react to an initiative where the driver of a rental vehicle, he or she, who is caught either speeding through an intersection or failing to stop at a red light and the infraction is captured on a stationary camera above the intersection, how this would be policed or enforced, who would be responsible: these are interesting issues. I don't think it's the end of the issue.

As more and more photoradar tickets are given out, it surprises me that the insurance industry is not interested in that information. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was jetting through amber lights as they turn red and had frequent tickets, his insurance carrier may be interested in that behaviour or that chronic pattern. We all know the lobby that the insurance industry has. It's puzzling why they do not want to know more about this because it's an indication of our driving habits.

I can assure the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod that I am worried now. I hope my insurance agent doesn't read yesterday's *Hansard* and jack up my rates.

Mr. Hehr: That's because we don't have public insurance.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, we could look at that.

In committee this afternoon, Mr. Chairman – and I don't think we discussed it fully yesterday. I have some concerns, actually, about the opening up of the definition of investigators and whether or not this will pave the way for the implementation of an Alberta provincial police force.

Now, I know we've had an exchange. We've had many exchanges in this House, various members, around this whole issue. But this goes back to what I said earlier this afternoon. This spring session there's a lot of draconian legislation, a lot of authoritarian legislation coming through here, whether it's Bill 36 from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, whether it's Bill 19 from the Minister of Infrastructure and how Bill 19 relates to Bill 46 from two years ago. There's a lot of legislation which I consider to be authoritarian.

I was reading with interest an open letter to former Premier Ralph Klein that appeared in the *National Post* on January 26, 2001. It's in the comments section. The byline has the current Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper; Tom Flanagan; a current member of this Assembly, the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who at that time, in 2001, was a professor of political science and an Alberta Senator-elect; we have a couple of other individuals, and we have Ken Boessenkool, who the last time I had heard of him he had worked in Alberta Finance as a former policy adviser to Stockwell Day, who is Minister of International Trade in the federal government. Mr. Boessenkool – I was reading on the Internet the other night – is a potential candidate for the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta in the by-election in Calgary-Glenmore. This is what I read on the Internet now.

Mr. Hehr: He might be being encouraged.

Mr. MacDonald: He might be being encouraged to run.

There are many issues in this so-called Alberta agenda letter that was presented to Ralph Klein publicly through the *National Post*, but the third item – and this goes back to our definition regarding investigators – and I'm going to read this, Mr. Chairman:

Start preparing now to let the contract with the RCMP run out in 2012 and create an Alberta Provincial Police Force. Alberta is a major province. Like the other major provinces of Ontario and Quebec, we should have our own provincial police force. We have

no doubt that Alberta can run a more efficient and effective police force than Ottawa can – one that will not be misused as a laboratory for experiments in social engineering.

The one thing I would certainly agree with the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development on here in that statement is that Alberta is a major province. It takes its place next to other major provinces like British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. I can't understand how the hon. member at that time as a professor of political science could ever link the RCMP to social engineering, but this is in this article that we have acquired through the archives.

Now, I know there are certain individuals in the province that want a provincial police force. I, for one, think the RCMP is doing a very, very good job. I know the Sustainable Resource Development minister wants to have a provincial police force, but I cannot agree with the hon. member. I think the Mounties do a very, very good job. There certainly are issues with the Mounties in other parts of the country, but I certainly cannot say there are any issues here.

I had the pleasure of going up to K Division not too long ago to ask them to inquire into a matter that I'm still working on, and that's the conduct of the election in Edmonton-Gold Bar. Unfortunately, they couldn't help me out. Maybe they can and will in the future, Mr. Chairman.

5:50

I have concern about this issue that some members opposite have with the RCMP, the Mounted Police. I still am asking, requesting that if there is information available, if there has been a cost-benefit analysis done to ensure that we will have improved service at reduced cost if we're to have our own police force, well, show us.

Ideology in some cases with this government has overruled economic common sense. One example of that, Mr. Chairman, would be electricity deregulation, where we're still footing the bills for that one.

I have a lot of concerns about the direction that we're going in. I'm puzzled, again, how Alberta could run a more efficient and effective police force than Ottawa can, than if it's under Ottawa's control. The RCMP certainly are independent. They're like the military. They're independent. They should be independent from political control. All police forces should be independent of political control. And if the hon. member, who obviously supports a provincial police force, has any examples where the Mounties were used as a laboratory for experiments in social engineering . . .

Mr. Hehr: I want to know.

Mr. MacDonald: I want to know. The public would be anxious to know that as well. Anyway, I'm not going to go through the rest of the issues regarding this letter on the Alberta agenda, but it certainly is amazing. It is amazing. I'm not saying it's accurate or that it reflects popular public opinion, but it is amazing. I don't think it reflects the values of this province nor of our country. I will certainly say that.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, those are some of the concerns that I do have, and I'm going to watch and see how the Alberta provincial police force unfolds. Every time I go in the fall of the year down here to show respect for police officers who have unfortunately fallen in the line of duty, I do see the Edmonton Police Service present, I do see the Calgary Police Service present, I do see the scarlet tunic of the Mounties present, and in ever growing numbers I see the sheriffs.

Mr. Hehr: They have no oversight.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know where the oversight is for the sheriffs, but I think the sheriffs are baby steps towards this provincial police force, which I don't think we need. You know, their numbers are growing. The budget for them grows. I know they do some good work, but I'm not convinced that it's in the public interest or the taxpayers' interest to expand any further the role of the sheriffs. Unless, of course, there is a secret – now, this is called the Alberta agenda, but we could have a secret agenda here to implement a provincially operated and controlled police service. I see the hon. members across the way. I don't know if they have not been paying attention, or I don't know why they're silent, but certainly they're stirring there now, Mr. Chairman.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and cede the floor to another hon. member regarding Bill 30. Thank you.

The Chair: Seeing no other hon. members who wish to speak, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 30 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 32

Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act

The Chair: Are there any hon. members who wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In consideration of the time, what I'd like to do is attempt to respond to some of the questions that were raised in second reading debate on this bill yesterday, and I'll just continue to work away at those until time is called.

One of the questions that was raised yesterday, Mr. Chair, by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was the question of whether TILMA, the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement, would require harmonization between Alberta and B.C. for rules governing agencies, boards, and commissions. The answer to that question is no. TILMA, as it's known by its short form, deals with

trade, investment, and labour mobility only, and its purpose, as I think the House is aware, is to aim to eliminate barriers that would create restrictions in those three areas. It in no way requires harmonization of matters such as those addressed in Bill 32, which have to do with standards regarding governance of agencies, boards, and commissions. Alberta and British Columbia may each independently address the appropriate governance structures for their respective agencies, boards, and commissions notwithstanding TILMA. I hope that information is helpful.

Another question that was raised yesterday had to do with the role of stakeholders under the bill, specifically with respect to the provisions in the bill, Mr. Chair, that provide for the periodic review of the agencies, boards, and commissions and specifically the mandate and roles document, which they're required to create under the proposed legislation. The answer to that question – I think the point was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – is simply this: the bill does not outline a formal role for stakeholders in review of that particular document, but that is not to suggest in any way that stakeholder input is not essential to good governance. Stakeholder input will for many agencies form an important part of the agency review process.

As you'll recall, Mr. Chair, the premise of the bill is that agencies, boards, and commissions are responsible to the minister for their functions, the minister whose portfolio includes those ABCs. The minister is, in turn, responsible to this Assembly and to the Alberta public. So what we would anticipate is that ministers would want to proactively seek the input from stakeholders in the course of conducting these reviews. It's an important element of their mandate, and it is certainly likely, as we've seen in other situations under other legislation, that issues such as stakeholder and client satisfaction would form the basis of short-term targets and long-term objectives for the agency as jointly set by the agency and the responsible minister. Ministerial accountability to the Legislative Assembly and the public, as I've said, includes accountability to that portion of the public which are a given agency's stakeholders. This accountability is a key principle underlying this bill.

Mr. Chair, there are a number of other items on the list here that I've made from second reading debate yesterday, and I'd proposed to go through those . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. It's 6 o'clock so the committee is now in recess until 7:30 tonight.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 27, 2009

Issue 45e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act

Mr. Marz: Mr. Chair, I would move adjournment of Bill 32.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

The Chair: Hon. members, before we proceed, there is an opportunity for declaration of conflict of interest. Does any hon. member wish to take that opportunity?

Seeing none, we will proceed.

Ms Blakeman: I was going to make a joke about not having a conflict because I actually am allergic to beef, but it's not particularly funny. [interjection] Oh, one person laughed. There we go.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 43 in Committee of the Whole. I do have an amendment, which I have delivered to the table, and I'll come to that in a few minutes.

This has been an interesting debate on Bill 43 because I think it does have its roots in a question of whether the government is willing to allow a particular group of people to pursue their own democratic process or not. What we have in Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), is a situation where we have four agricultural commissions in the province that do not currently allow for a refund to be requested. I think there are mostly agricultural, rural background people here, so I don't need to go into the details of what the check-off stands for although, for those at home, about \$3 an animal is what we're eventually talking about here.

So you have the commissions. Most of them allow for the producers to request a refund of that check-off, but the four that don't are the Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Pork, Alberta Lamb, and the Potato Growers of Alberta. They have not given themselves that, but there is the ability under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act for producers to hold a plebiscite to make changes to their own commission plan. So if they choose to, they have a venue that is currently available in legislation to make changes to their commission plan. For those that are searching for that, it's in section 24 of the existing act. Bill 43 is looking to change that, basically to override it or replace it, so that all of the commission plans would have refundable service fees. That means that in this case those four producers would not be able to make that decision for themselves. It would be made for them.

Clearly, the producers of those four commissions that are involved in this are not happy about this. They have contacted a number of the government members as well as members of the opposition. They see this as a move that caters to the larger producers, who clearly benefit from those refunds. I mean, if you're running an intensive livestock operation and you've got several thousand head of cattle sitting in your yard, that's a lot of money at 3 bucks a head.

The Liberals are approaching this from a standpoint of saying that, you know, these producers should have the right to make this decision for themselves. We disagree with the government essentially overriding that or stepping in front of their ability to make use of section 24 of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act to make that decision for themselves. There has been some discussion, some feelings in the community that this is a retaliatory action by the government against certain producers, and we've gone over all of that. For anyone that wants to follow it, it's in the debates that have already gone on in second reading.

The government has said that this is about choice for the producers to basically decide whether their representing organization is doing a good job in the way they're spending that money, and if the producers don't like it, they can request that refund of service. But I think really what it is is that the producers already have this choice through that plebiscite, and the government is basically stepping in and supporting one group over another. They're essentially internally picking winners and losers, which I would have said, generally speaking, politicians avoid doing. We have lots of intersectoral disputes in just about any community we're involved in, and my advice has always been to let those groups decide, not to step in the middle of that and pick winners and losers. But the government chooses to do something else in this case.

I do have an amendment if I could ask that it is distributed at this point.

The Chair: The amendment shall be known as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please continue on A1.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This amendment is proposing four changes to Bill 43, and correspondingly the amendment has four sections to it: A, B, C, and D. They are making changes to the respective sections of the bill which exempt the four producer commissions from having nonrefundable service fees, so that's beef, pork, lamb, and potatoes.

Section A of the amendment makes the four producer commissions that are listed exempt from the service fees being refundable. Section B makes the four producer commissions listed exempt from the new proposed sections 23(4) and (5) of the existing act. Section C of the amendment replaces the government's proposed amendments to section 24 of the existing act to make it so that a plebiscite is required for beef, pork, lamb, and potatoes should a plan be amended to change provisions on service fees being refundable. Section D of the amendment adds to the government's proposed addition to section 26 of the existing act, which is the refundable service charges, by stating that this section does not apply to producers of beef, pork, lamb, or potatoes.

The intention is that this amendment would allow those four commissions – beef, pork, lamb, and potatoes – to continue with the service fees being nonrefundable, but it also allows for the producers to decide for themselves through a plebiscite whether or not they want them to be refundable. It's really clarifying the situation because without this amendment Bill 43 takes away the democratic ability or right of those producers to determine for themselves through a plebiscite as set out in the act whether or not their service fees should be refundable.

7:40

I can tell by the looks on the faces that those people that are from the rural areas understood exactly what I just said – thank you for that – and I'm sure that there's someone that can respond to the amendment.

We've spent some time on this and have thought about this quite a bit and actually have debated it a fair amount over the last couple

of weeks, particularly led off by our agriculture critic, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, so this is our best consideration of the way to make our way through this situation. We think what the government has done does not honour that democratic process. It doesn't honour the ability of those commissions to make decisions for themselves. We disagree with the government arbitrarily stepping in front and making this decision for them, particularly in this situation where they've been fine. Why the government decided to step into this one at this point has not been made clear, so we would urge all members to support this amendment, and I look forward to vigorous debate.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: On amendment A1 the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Like so many other aspects of governance, there is a situation here where a group of people are having sidelined their right to have a say in their own production both individually through the ability to use a plebiscite and collectively as an association, whether beef, pork, lamb, or potato producers. They have been sidelined by this government with Bill 43, and what we're trying to do with amendment A1 is give them back their voice that Bill 43 takes away.

Now, I realize that the people who are most affected are, unfortunately, in a conflict of interest in terms of debating this bill. Had they been here to speak to the amendment on behalf of the constituents they represent, I would think that they would have been supportive of amendment A1. We have heard before the Ethics Commissioner's ruling from individuals within this House who have concerns. One individual from southern Alberta talked specifically about the problems potato growers had and the number of correspondences he had received in his constituency office.

This, like so many other pieces of legislation, seeks to give back to individuals their collective voice. As so often is the case, the government has gone in favour of the large producer to the detriment of the smaller producers. The big factory farms, as was the case with the BSE crisis, the American producers, the large feedlots had their cattle slaughtered first, and then the smaller individuals were lucky to get what was left, and of course we didn't have sufficient slaughter facilities at that time in this province. They were all American owned. Ranchers Beef came up with an attempt to provide some alternative slaughtering close to Calgary. Unfortunately, it just did not have enough animals to process on a daily basis, and it went under. But that was one of the few opportunities where independent producers tried to have a Canadian, an Alberta voice in the marketing of their produce and the slaughter of their animals.

The pork producers, as we all know, are suffering tremendously through no fault of their own with the flu that is going around and has been falsely attributed to pigs. They need all the help they can get.

With regard to the small beef producers, they're frequently a family-run outfit, and maybe they take on the feeder aspects of it. Possibly they've got a cow-calf operation. But they're, not to make fun of the word "potatoes," in the larger scheme of things the small potatoes. They're the small family farms that Alberta has historically arisen from, and they're being left out. What amendment A1 to Bill 43 attempts to do is give them back their lost voice.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Now, for whatever reason this government seems to be afraid of plebiscites. They seem to be afraid to give people their voice. They

would rather attempt, either in closed-door cabinet sessions, Lieutenant Governor in Council, call it what you like, to try and control the direction agriculture is headed and not necessarily for the best.

In the second reading of this Bill 43, I talked about the Canadian Wheat Board and the millions of dollars the Alberta government spent trying to undermine that organization, which is prairie-province-wide. It's not just Alberta but Saskatchewan and Manitoba, obviously. When farmers and producers were given the choice, they chose to collectively market their wheat, and they would have chosen, given the choice, had there not be such political manipulation, to market their barley as well. Now with that attempt to beat up our neighbours – Saskatchewan, Manitoba – the bullying is being brought specifically into our province, and the people on the short end of the stick are the people in beef, pork, lamb, and potatoes.

In so many pieces of legislation we've seen go through this House – and those of you who were here last night saw direct evidence of it – when a small group of powerful individuals who manage to gain the government's ear put forward their thoughts, the thoughts of the majority of Albertans are sidelined. In this case it's the small producers, the family farms, the salt of the earth of this province whose desire for a voice through plebiscites has been taken away.

Amendment A1 attempts to give them back their voice, and if democracy is important in this province, I would hope that you would take into account the wishes of the individuals. Those of you who are able to still be here from rural ridings, please look into yourselves, look at your own consciences, look at the correspondence that you've received from your constituents, and vote with the majority of your constituents, allowing them the democratic opportunity to vote on their own livelihood both through their production and through their economic viability.

Alberta was built, as I say, as a province in a co-operative situation. People got together. They raised barns. They helped their neighbours. That was part of the historical Alberta experience. Alberta had a few sort of outlaw types in terms of American whisky traders coming up and individuals monopolizing land and building it up at the expense of their neighbours. It's time to get back to the history of co-operation, and I'm hoping all members present will recognize the democratic right of people to determine their livelihood individually and collectively.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

7:50

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of amendment A1. I'll just go into a little bit of background. There are approximately 20 agricultural commissions in the province, and they can charge service fees called check-offs when a producer sells products. The majority of the commissions allow for a refund to be requested by the producers under the individual commission plans. However, there are four which don't: Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Pork, Alberta Lamb, and the Potato Growers of Alberta. However, there is the ability under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act for producers to hold plebiscites to make changes to their commission plans if they wish, as outlined in section 24 of the existing act.

With Bill 43 as it currently is, it would make it so that all commission plans have refundable services fees without producers deciding for themselves. This is going to take their democratic right away from them. This is like enforcing something upon some of

them which they don't want. The producers of the four commissions listed above are upset that their producers were not able to determine for themselves through plebiscites as to whether or not they want these funds to be refundable.

I think the government is not listening. They claim to be consulting, and they claim to be listening to Albertans. That is always the case. When there's a big hue and cry out there, then the government turns around, and they start to change things with amendments. Many of them see this move as catering to big producers, who will benefit from these user funds. Huge feedlots seek to gain an enormous profit, particularly for cattle, at \$3 per head. We believe the producers should have the right to decide for themselves whether or not the service fees should be refundable. The government is blatantly acting in the interests of big feedlots at the expense of small family farms.

The bill will take away the democratic right of the producers under the act to conduct plebiscites to amend their plans, determining whether or not service fees, or check-off fees, should be refundable. This act by the government appears to be a retaliatory action against Alberta Beef Producers for criticizing the implementation of the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency. It is also being made in the interests of big corporate feedlots, who will benefit from the refund of hundreds of thousands of dollars in their service fees, so it is not in the interest of small producers on face value anyway.

The government has said that this is about the choice for producers to determine whether or not their producer organization is doing a good job representing them; therefore, they could request refund of service fees if they feel the organization is not doing a good job. However, the reality is that the producers already have the choice to a plebiscite as set out currently in the legislation. This move by the government is aimed at supporting the interests of big corporate players.

Amendment A1 proposes to make four changes to Bill 43. The amendment has four sections to it – A, B, C, D – which will all be considered together. I think we should all support these amendments because these amendments will go a long way in addressing the concerns of the four producers, and that's the Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Pork, and the lamb and potato producers. If passed, this amendment to Bill 43 will allow the commissions for beef, pork, lamb, and potatoes to continue their service fees being nonrefundable and would also allow for producers to decide for themselves through a plebiscite whether or not they want them to be refundable. Without this amendment Bill 43 will take away the democratic right of producers to determine for themselves through a plebiscite as set out in the act whether or not their service fees should be refundable, and we strongly encourage all members to support these amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Interestingly, I represent an urban riding but have certainly heard from many, many, disgruntled small beef producers, those that are struggling, those that have struggled through BSE and have managed to come out the other end fairly intact but are still struggling. I believe and they believe that this is really not beneficial for them.

Many of these beef producers are really hoping, and their sons are also hoping – and I know, in fact, of one family where the daughters are hoping – that they will be able to maintain the family farms and maintain the independence that they have known which allows them to work on a small farm. It's the independence that has made this

province what it is, and it's the independence that allows instant changes that would better the producers and their production line. They can change it very quickly when it's a smaller organization, and therefore they can benefit. Being dictated to by larger organizations, particularly the people that cut the meat up and stuff, being at the whim of the large corporations is not what the small independent beef or pork or lamb or potato producers want.

Certainly, in southern Alberta potatoes are a huge, huge item. In fact, many of them are at the mercy of the pricing that is involved between Lamb Weston and McCain, so having that little bit of independence that they can have they certainly want to maintain. At least, that's what I'm hearing in my office.

I'd like to just quote, maybe, some statistics. We're not talking, as someone has mentioned before, small potatoes. These are not small dollars. The Alberta industry statistics for 2008: farm cash receipts from cattle sales are \$3 billion; farm cash receipts from hog sales, \$398 million; farm cash receipts from lamb and sheep, \$17 million; farm cash receipts from potato sales, \$150 million. This is not chump change. These are large, large dollars, and these are the large dollars that keep the Alberta that we really want to keep. We do want to maintain our rural areas. We want to make sure that we have the small towns, that we've got the small producers that can actually afford to raise a family and not have to have both the mother and the father working off the farm.

The value of beef and live cattle exports is \$1 billion. The value of pork and live hog is \$342 million. The value of lamb and sheep exports is \$164,000, and the value of potato exports is \$239 million. I mean, these are large, large dollars, and I think that it behooves us to be able to do all that we can to be able to listen to these producers and do what they're asking us to do.

The broad participation of producers and relatively predictable funding levels enable the Alberta Beef Producers to be an effective voice for the cattle industry in Alberta. That's what they want to do. They want to be able to speak for themselves.

8:00

The check-off funds provided the resources to successfully defend the industry against the last U.S. countervail challenge, launched in '98 and concluded in '99. I think we're all very aware of the R-CALF association out of Montana, that may be quiet at the moment, but certainly they have not gone away and have right from the get-go given our cattle producers a hard time.

Our investments in legal and trade advocacy activities were important factors in opening the U.S. border to Canadian beef and cattle after the BSE episode as well as recent improvements in access to Asian markets, Canadian trade policy, and the impacts of the COOL implementation. Check-off dollars also provide significant benefits to Alberta producers through work on policy, regulatory issues, production research, promotion campaigns, animal health and welfare concerns, communications activities, land use, and environmental stewardship. These are very important aspects not only to their production, not only to their industry but to all of Alberta.

Let's look at the production research, promotion campaigns, animal health and welfare concerns. Certainly, those are huge. Knowing what some unfortunate hog farmers have had to go through with the swine flu, certainly these are important pieces of information that they need. It isn't just kept within their own industry. This is information that they share. And they pay for it. I fail to see why this amendment wouldn't be an indication that, yes, this House has listened to what this group of independent producers, farmers, the salt of the earth, the people that are the backbone of our rural areas are asking us to do.

The Alberta cattle industry has a small number of very large producers who would have a great deal of influence if the check-off was made refundable. Cattle organizations would become more accountable to these large producers rather than accountable to all producers. They don't want to be accountable to large producers. They don't want to be swallowed up. They don't want to be dictated to. They want to be able to negotiate on their own. They want to be able to understand the marketplace and be able to stand up for themselves, not be told how much their product is worth. They want to be able to negotiate.

A situation could arise where policy influence would be based on the size of the individual operation rather than the number of producers supporting a position. This would appear to be what's going to happen right now. This bill as it stands really does lean towards these large, individual operations rather than all of the producers getting together and being co-operative as they have done for the last probably 100-plus years in this province. As I said, it would limit the ability of an organization such as the Alberta Beef Producers to represent the interests of all the producers.

I really believe that amendment A1 is important for all of the reasons that I've mentioned, but more important than anything I really believe that if we would pass this amendment, it would prove that this House has really listened to the people that have sent the letters, written the letters, and have asked, close to begging, to please listen to them and to please have this type of an amendment go through, which would give them back the power of their own producers, which is what they want.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would ask that all of those in the House that have the ability to vote on this please really consider what we are doing to the backbone of our rural communities if we don't look at this amendment, show that we've listened, and actually pass it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was here for the discussion during second reading, and I've reread the notes, and I've drafted a bunch of comments on questions and issues that were raised during second reading. Some that have come up during the amendment are very similar. I know we'll probably have further discussion in Committee of the Whole, so I'll save those for the end of Committee of the Whole.

In reviewing the amendment proposed, Mr. Chairman, I really think I need to point out to the members of this House that everything that's proposed in the bill is completely being undone in this. I mean, it's equivalent to simply defeating the bill. Passing this bill is incredibly important, and I think we need to proceed, so I would encourage all members to vote against this amendment.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:06 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hehr	Pastoor
Chase	Kang	Swann

Against the motion:

Ady	Griffiths	Morton
Benito	Horne	Oberle
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Olson
Blackett	Johnston	Prins
Boutilier	Leskiw	Quest
Campbell	Liepert	Renner
DeLong	Lindsay	Sarich
Drysdale	Lukaszuk	Webber
Evans	Marz	Zwozdesky
Fritz	McQueen	

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back to Bill 43. Any members wish to speak or comment? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There were some questions that came up in second reading, issues that came up during the discussion on the amendment, and I'm sure there will be similar issues or repeated issues that will come up through the rest of Committee of the Whole. I would like to take the opportunity to address a few of those questions.

First, there were a couple of questions from the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. A question about how producers will be represented provincially and nationally should the majority of producers claim a refund. I'd like to point out to that member that membership in national organizations in all of the 20 commodity groups is voluntary. Each and every commission in consultation with their membership will need to assess the value and benefits that they get from belonging to a national organization just like they will have the ability, should this legislation pass, to decide whether or not they're getting benefit from their provincial association.

I'd like to point out that I know that a few people have commented or said on occasion that it will make it difficult to belong, have a membership in a national organization unless the levy that's collected is mandatory. But, Mr. Chair, the nine other commissions right now that have a mandatory refundable check-off currently support a lot of different national organizations, and they support research. So carrying through with this legislation does not preclude being a member of any national organization.

8:20

The hon. member had also suggested that neither the Alberta Lamb Producers nor the Alberta government had been lobbied by sheep producers themselves for a refundable check-off, so he was wondering why the government would include the Alberta Lamb Producers in Bill 43. Mr. Chairman, since 1987 – that's 20 years ago – every single producer commodity commission that has been created in this province has had a mandatory refundable check-off. These four organizations that preceded 1987 that have a mandatory nonrefundable check-off: all we're doing is making our legislation consistent. Quite frankly, it's worked very well for the other nine organizations. There's nothing that suggests that it can't work very well for these four and bring them up to speed with what we've been doing for the last 20 years as we've created new commissions.

There were some other questions, as well, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie had commented. He had said: big guys are the only ones that want this. I have a lot of letters. Now, I'm not suggesting to the opposition or to anybody in this House that there is only one point of view. I mean, my name is on the legisla-

tion. I'm carrying it. I've had less than 50 calls and e-mails and letters out of the thousands of producers that could potentially be affected by this, and there is no clear line of support or opposition. It's about even. In fact, the last letters that have come in in the last few days out of those less than 50 responses I've gotten have probably pushed support for this legislation.

There is absolutely no clear line that big producers are lining up in favour of it and small producers are lining up opposed. There's not even a trend or a tendency. I've had a lot of small producers phone or e-mail or call, suggesting that they support it, and I've had some large producers call, suggesting that they have concerns about it. In fact, some of the lines from some of the comments – and I'm not saying these are all the comments; these are just some.

Just to clarify to everyone in this House that this is not black and white and this is pitting big guys against little guys because nothing is ever that black and white, there is a small potato grower who has said: "Having individual choice in our industry has been lacking for . . . too long. To be successful, an organization, commission, or association requires a membership of solid supporters. Supporters that choose to be" there on their own.

Another comment was made about the potato growers association. The producer said: "We believe in freedom of association (as the Constitution states)" we should have and that "currently we are forced to belong and to pay the levies . . . we whole-heartedly support Bill 43, as we believe that being forced to belong to an organization is unconstitutional. Furthermore, all commissions should have to prove that they show value for producers" and let producers make the choice on their own.

Another one states: "Choice matters. It makes organizations more accountable and responsive to producers. A refundable checkoff is a plebiscite" every year.

The last one I wanted to read – and I want to read this one specifically because it's been argued over and over and over again that the whole point to this legislation is to pit big producers against little ones: big ones support this; little ones don't. "As a paid up member of Alberta Beef Producers, I believe that organization needs this to help them to be more democratic, accountable and responsive to me as a beef producer on my family farm."

This is not corporate versus family or big versus little. There is such a diversity of opinions, and as I said, it's not black and white; there is some controversy. But out of the less than 50 responses I've had – I was actually kind of surprised I didn't get more comments, given that there are thousands of producers out there.

The comment was also made by the Member for Calgary-Currie that without cow-calf guys feeders are sunk, and that's where he left it. I found that very interesting because without feeders the cow-calf guys are sunk, too. I always found this interesting about the supply chain. I hear arguments from cow-calf producers on occasion that say that they're mad and tired of being hammered by the feedlot guys. They don't give them a fair deal. But I hear feedlot guys say that they're tired of being hammered by the packers. And then I hear the packers say that they're tired of being subjected to a U.S.-only market.

It's so strange that in an organization like this there would be different groups along the same supply chain that would consider each other enemies or start to talk about each other like "they're out to get me," or "I'm out to get them," or vice versa. A cow-calf guy has nothing to do with his animals unless he's got a feedlot to put them into, and the feedlot has nowhere to send them to unless there's a packer, and the packer has nothing to do with them unless there's a market to sell them into. Every single one of these divisions within the supply chain has to work together if they're going to be successful. There is no us versus them in this because none of them succeed unless the other one succeeds.

In fact, the Member for Calgary-Currie even made a comment – where is that comment? – that the big guys or the feedlots were going to make servants, I believe it was, of the small guys, or the feedlots were going to make servants of the cow-calf producers that are going to be subject to them. I don't understand how this is going to work when every single part of the supply chain has to be successful or nobody is. If all the cow-calf guys go broke, who's going to fill up the feedlots? I find this very strange. I want everyone to realize that this entire supply chain, this entire industry has a symbiotic relationship of interdependency, and every single one of their successes depends on everyone else along the chain being successful.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo even suggested that the family farm makes no money, but feedlots always make money. I invite any member of this Assembly from an urban region to come out to rural Alberta, come out to my constituency and answer the phones for a little while and talk to constituents. They'll find out that black-and-white statements like that – that the family farm never makes any money; the cow-calf guys never make any money; the feedlots always make money – are not true. Just two years ago feedlot guys were phoning me in my constituency saying that they were losing a hundred dollars a head. Family farm guys weren't doing too bad three years ago. I mean, these black-and-white statements don't serve the industry well. Every commodity in agriculture has tough times because of the cycle of economics. It's not that one is always successful at the expense of the other.

There was also a comment from the Member for Calgary-Currie – and this is probably the strangest comment I've ever heard in this House – that the little guys care more about the health and welfare of their animals than the big guys do. You know, that's an emotional argument, talking about little versus big, family versus corporate farms. How big is a family farm allowed to get before it's not a family farm anymore? How small does a corporate farm have to be before it's called a family farm?

There's a farmer with 50 cows. He's got a couple of sons that are teenagers that work on the farm, and it's a family farm. Would you define a family farm as three brothers who farm? They have 200 cows that they calve out, and they do grain operations, and they have a small feedlot. There's one right near my hometown. There are three brothers, and it's a much larger operation than much of its neighbours. It's incorporated just like many of its neighbours are. Is it a corporate farm, or is it a family farm? Those arguments about family farm versus corporate farm are meant to be emotional arguments that distract us from the real crux of what we're discussing, and that's the future of the industry.

Another comment that was made was that we will be picking winners and losers. The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the Member for Edmonton-Centre commented, and I think the Member for Calgary-McCall, actually, had made a similar comment about it. Quite a few people have made the comment that we favour larger ones over smaller ones, that we're picking winners and losers. Our legislation right now forces all producers to pay. When the discussion comes up about, "Well, if we change this, it's going to favour the big guys over the little guys," intuitively, then, if we leave the legislation the way it is, because it's provincial legislation, we are picking smaller guys, if that's the way you want to argue it, over bigger guys. By eliminating this legislation, we're not picking anything.

Producers individually are allowed to decide what they're going to do with their own money. If we leave the legislation the way it is, we are picking winners and losers, but we're not picking small guys over big guys or big guys over small guys. If we leave the legislation the way it is, we are picking an industry association over the

success of the producers and the future of the industry itself. We're securing an organization that may not necessarily reflect producers big or small unless there's some accountability to those producers.

8:30

The last comment was about democracy and the plebiscite. The Member for Calgary-Varsity and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona commented that a plebiscite gives farmers choice: let farmers make the choice; we're taking away farmers' democratic choice. You know, it's got to be said that producers right now still get to vote for their directors. They still get to have those elections and vote for their directors. But I don't know necessarily if the association is always so democratic.

Just two weeks ago we had a discussion in this House about democracy and about the electoral boundaries review. If we're talking about democracy and democratic representation as the focus, then you have to compare the zones that some of these organizations represent. One zone has 3,400 farms in it, and a neighbouring zone has 8,200 farms in it, kind of like a constituency in the city having 80,000 people in it and a constituency in rural Alberta having 35,000. We talked about the need for fairness because of democracy. Even if you go by the number of cattle, there's a zone that has 1 million cattle on farms; there's a neighbouring zone that has 400,000.

If we're talking about democracy, what about some of those principles? Some of those boards have had their zones come forward with motions. In fact, every zone has come forward at some point with the same motions, and their board has overridden those motions. If we're fundamentally talking about democracy, the very board that's sometimes arguing and inciting the opposition members to talk about democracy and our right to choose has itself overridden motions that have come forward out of all of their zones consecutively. I don't know if it's fair to say that we're removing their democracy when they're not always necessarily the most democratic.

The bigger question that we need to ask is whether or not the fundamental purpose of some of these organizations is to be democratic or to drive the industry forward, to make it successful. I mean, imagine if there were choices made by the democratic organization that drove the industry into the ground. Is that good for the economy? Maybe their first focus should be on driving the industry forward, growing it, reaching into new markets, driving the industry ahead. Try and do it as democratically as possible, but when you weigh the two principles, which one is most important, the democracy or the future success of the industry? I think the choice is obvious. It's the future success of the industry.

Mr. Chairman, I think I have addressed most of the concerns. I just want to reiterate that this legislation will make all of our practices around the 13 producer commodity groups consistent by giving the last four organizations the same choice that's already given to the other nine organizations, which function really well and successfully by providing more money for research and by participating in national organizations. It also gives choice, which ensures accountability, leadership, and responsiveness to producers who fund those organizations with their own money.

Mr. Chairman, in absolutely no other business association does this government force businesses to be members of those business organizations. We don't do it for chambers of commerce or any other business association. It's a choice of those businesses which organizations they participate in.

This is not fundamentally about the future of the industry associations. The future of those industry associations is not a choice for this government to make by having legislation that mandates that every producer pay that organization. That is not a

choice for this government to make. That choice rests squarely and strictly with the producers who support that organization and their ability to choose whether or not they're going to support that organization. That, Mr. Chairman, is democracy at its finest, it's choice at its finest, and I believe it will create industry organizations that will make sure they're more responsive to the producers that they represent, more reflective of all the producers' needs and opinions that they represent and will make them eternally accountable year after year after year and, quite frankly, make them more effective organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the charge of inciting democracy I plead guilty as charged. The future should be determined by the people, by the majority, not the dictates of a privileged minority.

The Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out some important statistics that come from Alberta industry statistics 2008: farm cash receipts from cattle sales, \$3 billion; value of beef from live cattle exports, \$1 billion; size of the industry in Alberta, 5.4 million cattle and calves; 28,750 farms produce cattle and calves.

Plebiscites are one form of democracy, a form of freedom of choice. The hon. member mentioned that very few individuals participated in terms of e-mailing or writing him letters. That's what I would consider to be the passive approach. What I would like to know is: in preparing Bill 43, how were these producers contacted? Was it just something simply up on the web? Were any polls taken amongst the various producers, 28,750 farms? Were there public consultations held? If there were, where and when did they occur? I'd like some proof that the people were consulted beyond just simply a website or a little ad in a local paper.

The hon. member shared communication, and I'd like to share a communication, too. This was written on May 1, 2009, and I think most members would have received a copy of it. It says:

Dear Honourable Member:

I am writing to you as a cattle producer who is very concerned about legislative action that is taking away my right to choose how my producer organization is funded. On April 28, 2009, Agriculture and Rural Development Minister [fill in the blank] announced the tabling of Bill 43, legislation making service charges (check-offs) refundable for Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) and three other commissions. The Marketing of Agricultural Products Act currently allows cattle producers to choose . . .

Oh, heaven forbid that in a democracy we should have choice.

. . . whether service charges are refundable or non-refundable and any changes in the nature of the service charge should be directed by producers.

They're the ones directly involved. They need to have a voice.

The Act allows the government to conduct a plebiscite to determine our opinion on a matter of this importance.

As a cattle producer, I urgently request that you follow the democratic process that is available to you and conduct a plebiscite of cattle producers on the question of whether the ABP service charge should remain non-refundable or become refundable. This is my industry and my organization. I have a right to make this choice.

Why wasn't this plebiscite conducted? If the results were clear and that's what people wanted, then I could be supportive of this legislation. The cattle producers of Alberta have not given ABP any indication that they want the check-off to become refundable. During the recent plan review ABP circulated a discussion paper which included a question on refundable check-offs. By a 2 to 1 margin the producers responding to this question voted for a nonrefundable check-off. At a recent fall meeting the only resolution on check-offs to pass was a motion to continue with the

nonrefundable check-off. It seems clear to Alberta Beef Producers that most producers see a nonrefundable check-off as the best way to support an organization representing their interests and want that check-off to remain nonrefundable. Alberta Beef Producers believe that any change in the collection or distribution of the check-off must be directed by these producers.

8:40

Here we have in Bill 43 the government overriding the wishes of the majority. I would like to know: of the 28,750 farms, what was the vote? How many individuals voted for nonrefundable check-offs to be mandatory? How many chose to have their own decision? Without those types of democratic voting statistics, this just appears to be big government back in the business of being in business, and that's clearly not what the people want. If you have any poll results or votes, I would ask you to table them to demonstrate that the people are behind this piece of legislation, or I would suggest that it needs to be further amended.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a couple of little comments, and that is that I live in the Lacombe-Ponoka constituency, and it has the largest cattle auction in all of Canada. I'm surrounded by cow-calf producers and some feedlot people as well. I have about, I believe, 20 per cent of the pork production in the province in my constituency. I also have a number of potato farms, fairly large seed growers that produce seed into the provincial market. So I've been talking to some of these people.

There are some concerns about the legislation and not because people are so much against it. I think they don't understand the intent of it, and I think I would like to ask the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright if he can answer today or maybe in the future, in the amount of time before this legislation comes into effect – I believe it's a year, and in that time there are probably some regulations that have to be put together – what the role of the producer groups could be in consulting with the marketing council or the ministry in the development of these regulations to find out what portion of their check-offs, all or none or what part, how the refundable part of the check-off is going to work. I think these producers want to know these things. I think we should have some of these answers, and if we can assure these people that there's a fair and honest and open process to deal with these check-offs, I think producers' fears would be allayed.

I believe that some of the concerns were about: we're going to lose a voice. But I think this could actually create new voices in the industry, particularly in the beef industry. I look forward to a very bright future for the beef industry if they can work together co-operatively between the different segments of the industry that have I wouldn't say opposing or conflicting interests but different interests that the hon. member mentioned between the cow-calf people, the backgrounders, the feeders, and the packing industry. They do have different interests, and I think it's time that these different groups can work together, each have their own voice, and give this industry much more strength and responsiveness to the market demands not only in Alberta but Canada, North America, and the world. I'm looking forward to some of these assurances for my producers and this government.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Just a question. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka lent his expertise based on the fact that he's in the centre of a significant beef-producing area. I'm just wondering if organizations that raise elk, for example, or raise deer are affected in any way by Bill 43, or is that marketing strictly for beef, pork, lamb, and potatoes? Are independent producers of elk or domesticated deer subject to different legislation?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much. That is a really good question because I have produced elk, bison, cattle in the past, pork, and potatoes along with barley and canola, so I have paid into all these different commissions. I have never, ever requested a refund from any of them because I felt that the organizations were doing a good job. Your question was: how does this Bill 43 affect those other commissions? It absolutely doesn't affect them at all. They already have the ability to ask for a refund. But I believe that in those organizations, particularly for the elk and the bison, they have a set period of time within the year. All check-offs are mandatory, so every producer pays a check-off and has a set amount of time to request in writing a refund if they wish. I have never ever asked for a refund, and I don't even know anybody in my organizations that have.

These organizations might get a small amount of refund requests, maybe 8 or 10 per cent. What they do in the long term is adjust their budgets to account for that, and they're very successful. They become more accountable. People actually get involved in the governance because they know that when they're involved in the governance, they have a more accountable organization. If the organization is not accountable, some people can actually pull out, or they can form their own organization, a sister organization. They might have, instead of one voice, two voices representing different aspects of the industry.

I see nothing but positive coming out of this. There's going to be a transition period where there's some unrest and some fear, but I think the industries and the producers will get over that if they understand what the intent of the legislation is. I think everything will settle down. I think these industries have a very, very, bright future if they can get everybody working in the same direction.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 43 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? It's carried.

Bill 36 Alberta Land Stewardship Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Chair. I rise to begin discussion at committee on Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. This bill is the legislative means to implement the land-use framework, the most sophisticated land-use regime yet proposed in Canada.

First, I'd like to briefly review the bill. It's a complex piece of legislation. Sections 3 and 4 create the legislative authority to develop and implement regional plans. Further authority is granted under section 51 to establish a regional advisory council for planning regions. Regional plans provide more certainty to municipalities, industry, and to all Albertans, and government will work with municipalities and industry to help align their plans with the regional plan. Sections 7, 8, and 9 provide for the content of these regional plans, including vision, objectives, and policies to achieve the vision and objectives. Section 11 allows a regional plan to alter or amend a statutory consent. This authority is considered necessary to allow regional plans to achieve their mandate to manage the cumulative effects.

In part 2 section 15 of the bill sets out the effect of a regional plan on the provincial government, its boards and agencies and local governments and authorities. It makes it clear that the regional plans are binding unless otherwise provided. The regional plans have the legal status of regulations and in case of conflicts with other regulations take precedence.

Regional plans. Sections 15(3) and (4) make it clear that regional plans do not create any new cause of legal actions in our courts of law except for the commissioner under section 18. I want to emphasize that nothing in this part of the bill alters the decision-making powers or appeal processes created through other laws.

There has been some concern expressed with the sections under division 3, sections 20, 21, 22. Again, I want to emphasize here that what they require is that local governments be in compliance with regional plans and file a statutory declaration stating so, which is to say that local decision-making powers will not be altered by the bill. By way of example, local authorities will continue to make decisions to meet local needs. Municipalities will maintain their authority for municipal development plans, area structure plans, land-use bylaws in subdivisions, and development standards.

Section 19, also in part 2, states that the act does not create any new rights to compensation but recognizes and leaves in place all existing provisions for compensation such as exist in the Mines and Minerals Act or the Forests Act.

8:50

Part 3 of Bill 36 sets the legal foundation for the use of four key conservation and stewardship tools. It lays the foundation for research and development for market-based instruments in section 23(a) and for pilot projects in subparagraph 23(b).

Section 25 provides further authority to support conservation, environmental, and agricultural objectives.

Division 2 deals with conservation easements. Conservation easements are voluntary agreements that place protections on private lands by landowners to protect and enhance the environmental and ecological integrity of their lands.

Sections 35 to 43 deal with a new instrument, conservation directives. Conservation directives have the same or similar objectives as conservation easements but may be imposed by a regional plan.

Section 38 creates a right to compensation for landowners who suffer a loss of value as a result of land conservation directives, and this type of landowner compensation, for what are known as regulatory takings, is the first in Canada.

Section 46 authorizes conservation offset programs. Offset programs have been used in other jurisdictions with success.

The last conservation and stewardship tool is the transfer of development credits as described in sections 47, 48, and 49.

Part 4 outlines the regional planning process and the administrative matters, including in section 56 the establishment of the land-use secretariat and its functions in sections 57 to 61. Sections 52 to 55 define and describe the responsibilities of the regional advisory councils. Section 62 contains other functions and responsibilities that the secretariat will handle. Section 61 covers the complaint mechanism. It does not create additional processes for landowners or industry to deal with. Rather, it supports the use of existing processes under existing acts and regulations, including existing appeal processes.

Part 5, the last substantive part of Bill 36, deals with transitional matters, including amendments to other legislation. The majority of sections from 68 to 95 in this part deal with aligning decision-making and planning with regional plans. Importantly, none of the changes alter existing rights to appeal decisions of the government bodies under these other statutes. In fact, sections 76 and 90 include amendments to the Forests Act and the Public Lands Act to require the establishment of fair appeal mechanisms under those acts, which did not previously exist.

Now, having summarized Bill 36 as introduced, there have been discussions with colleagues, communications with stakeholders both in industry and environment that have highlighted the need for some clarification in a few areas of Bill 36. As a result of these discussions I'm proposing some amendments for consideration by this Assembly, and I'll wait a moment for the distribution of those amendments to take place before speaking to them.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A1, and we'll wait until they're distributed.

Hon. members, the request has been made to have these severed. Hon. member, are you talking about severed in discussion or severed in voting?

Mr. Hehr: We just want the amendments severed for voting.

The Deputy Chair: Severed for voting?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

Dr. Morton: So should I continue?

The Deputy Chair: Yes, please continue. We will discuss the entire amendment. Then they'll be severed for voting on A, B, C, and D.

Dr. Morton: Okay. Thank you. Members can see that the proposed amendments are indicated as A through I, and I'll quickly describe each one.

Amendment A makes four changes to section 2, the definitions section. The first change clarifies how regional plans apply to Métis settlements in Alberta. A new clause is added following clause (a) to define compensation board. For settlement patented land the term refers to the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal, established under the Metis Settlements Act. The tribunal already has jurisdiction over disputes affecting settlement lands. For lands other than settlement patented lands, the term refers to the Land Compensation Board.

The next change to section 2 deals with the definition of effect. In clause (g)(i) the words "the economy" are added before the words "the environment," and the words "a community" are added before the words "human health." These changes, adding "economy" and "community," completely reflect the intention of the land-use framework to strike a better balance amongst the three objectives: economic, environment, and social.

The third change to section 2 amends clause (l) by striking out the words “section 222 of.” Amendment A’s final change to section 2 is clause (v) subclause (iv). These are replaced with a new section adding the words “but does not include a General Council Policy.” Again, that addresses the special circumstances of Métis settlements.

I’ll move, then, to amendment B. Amendment B addresses section 11 of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. Amendment B clarifies how regional plans will apply to statutory consents. Statutory consents are any permissions required under an act or regulation before an activity is carried out such as permits, licences, and approvals. Section 11 of the bill is replaced with a new section. Subsection (1) of the new section clarifies that regional plans may, to achieve or maintain an objective or policy, call for the amendment or extinguishment of a statutory consent or the terms and conditions of a statutory consent but only by express reference to that statutory consent. In other words, it must be made explicit.

More substantive changes are in the new subsection (2), which requires the government to give notice to the holder of a statutory consent of the objective or policy that is to be achieved or maintained. It also gives the consent holder an opportunity to propose an alternative means to achieve or maintain that policy or objective. This amendment provides additional procedural safeguards to the holders of statutory consents without undermining the objectives of section 11.

Amendment C, again, addresses Métis settlement issues. Amendment C changes section 17(2) by striking out the words “made and approved under section 226” and substituting the words “or anything authorized under or by the Co-Management Agreement, as amended, referred to in Schedule 3.” This ensures that policies made by the Métis Settlements General Council are not adversely affected by regional plans and that Bill 36 does not affect the governance structure created for Métis settlements.

Moving, then, to amendments D and E, Bill 36, as indicated earlier, enhances the conservation and stewardship tools available to protect heritage landscapes, views, habitat, and agricultural lands. Amendments D and E recognize existing responsibilities and accountabilities of ministers when regional plans seek to use these conservation and stewardship tools.

After section 26 amendment D adds a new section, 26.1, to ensure that any tax-based conservation and stewardship tools are implemented only with the approval of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Amendment E strikes out section 32(2) and substitutes a new section to deal with prior notice to ministers for registering a conservation easement. The amendment requires that the ministers of Infrastructure and Transportation in addition to the Minister of Municipal Affairs also receive prior notice of these plans to register a conservation easement. This amendment recognizes the Infrastructure and Transportation ministers’ responsibilities in planning major infrastructure and transportation routes.

9:00

Amendment F deals with section 42 and, again, concerns Métis settlements. In subsection (1) clause (g) is struck out, in subsection (2) clause (i) is struck out, and two new subsections are added after (2). The new sub (3) clarifies the ability of the general council to make a general council policy with respect to settlement patented land. The new sub (4) provides clarity that references in the act to regulations made under section 42 include these general council policies.

Moving, then, to amendment G. It addresses conservation directives. In section 43 the word “nothing” is struck out, and the words “except for section 36, nothing” are substituted. This change

makes it clear that municipal authorities are bound by conservation directives and regional plans.

Amendment H adds a new monitoring requirement. It is designed to improve monitoring and reporting on how regional plans are achieving their objectives. The amendment adds a new clause, (c.1), to section 57 of the bill. The new clause calls for the appointment of a committee at least once every five years to evaluate the objectives and audit the policies of regional plans. This type of check was requested both by industry and environmental groups, and the committee will provide an independent assessment of the progress of the regional plans and make a public report to the stewardship minister.

Finally, amendment I is consequential to the definition added in amendment A. Amendment I strikes out references to the Land Compensation Board and substitutes “Compensation Board” in sections 37(2), 40(1) and (2), 41(1) and (2), and 42(1), again, to account for the Métis settlements’ special status.

Mr. Chairman, we all know that Alberta is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Our plains, foothills, mountains, parklands, Canadian Shield, and boreal forest support a prosperous society and a magnificent array of wildlife and fisheries. They also provide an abundance of energy, forestry, and other natural resources that have provided generations of Albertans with good jobs and economic opportunity. Our challenge is to manage and develop our lands in a way that sustains the prosperity of Albertans without undermining the beauty and ecological health of our province.

Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, will help us strike this balance. It will help us define the future of our province so that it will be as good for future generations as it has been for us, which is the definition of stewardship. Accordingly, I would ask all members to support these amendments. I look forward to our debate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any comments on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak on this most important bill and on these amendments that are now before us. If we look at this bill and how these amendments will affect the bill, there is no doubt that we have been waiting for some time for a bill like this to set the land-use framework into policy for beginning to, I guess, divide our province into a more manageable state, like I’ve mentioned before, that the land-use framework references. Rightfully so; we may have reached the tipping point in this province.

We’re all hopeful on this side of the House that this is the start of good things to come, where our environment and our land and our water are all headed in the right direction, that creates a balance between human needs and our environmental needs. I know this has been a difficult task. This is a very large bill that affects a great deal of other bills in this province.

If we look, in particular, at amendment A, what it specifically does is clarify what compensation board means. It’s really rather seemingly small, but it could mean quite a bit. It adds in the words “the economy” and “a community” to the list of the effects as defined in the subsection that is amended.

Currently the definition of effect in Bill 36 includes:

- (i) any effect on the environment, human health or safety, a species or an objective in a regional plan, regardless of the scale, nature, intensity, duration, frequency, probability or potential of the effect, and
- (ii) a cumulative effect that arises over time or in combination with other effects.

The government's intent in adding "economy" I see as maybe to deal with the potential backlash that comes from various groups who say: the regional plans are affecting me, my business economically. Of course, this is going to be a concern. It's a concern for us in the Legislature. It's a concern for Albertans in general. The economy is always a question for us in this House to be concerned about as we want Albertans to thrive in that matter.

Yet I do feel somewhat concerned in this the land-use framework that this organizing amendment in Bill 36, which is going to see the Alberta Land Stewardship Act create the land-use framework, seems to be pointing this out at a rather late stage. That does give me some cause for concern. I know the hon. minister is a very smart man. I'm not saying anything untoward, but this is really just one of those changes that gives me some measure of concern in that: where is the balance here? My understanding of what this act is going to do is to look at a better representation of how we've dealt with our land and our water and our resources. By adding the word "economy" – and I am skeptical – I think this adds more of a pressure that's already existing on our environment. We're already at a tipping point.

Now, when we have this added word, that is going to be of equal assessment with much of the stuff that is going on in the bill, it really is troublesome. There are many cases of economic gratification on land-use decisions. I guess that's the nature of it. We've already seen those decisions made here in this province, and we've seen them before my time in the Legislature.

I read about the Balzac racetrack, the moving of water there, and all that sort of stuff that the land-use framework is going to deal with. Hopefully, in those types of situations of, I guess, chicanery – I don't know whether it was that or not – we're going to err on the side of caution with the land-use framework. That kind of situation is not going to happen. We're going to recognize that water transfers and water areas, you know, you're not supposed to monkey with. I realize I'm just pointing that out as an example. As an example, I believe the Alberta Land Stewardship Act has been brought in to sort of rectify those situations that have come in. I believe this act is going to rectify a lot of those or has been brought in to rectify a lot of those things that have happened, possibly up in the oil sands region and other places.

9:10

Yet when this word "economy" comes down, I can't help being, nonetheless, a little more worried, a little more – well, this is all well and good. Yes, it got everyone excited that we've turned the path here to really recognize that we are at that tipping point, that we may already be living beyond our means as a society. We may already be using more water than we should. We already may be using more land than we should. We already might be polluting the air more than we should and all that stuff.

And we're continuing now. We're going to do it. We're going to add more people. We're going to add more economy and all that stuff. I know that's going to happen, nevertheless; those are just the demographics of our world. We're adding more people, and we're a place to have jobs – and I know that – where people are going to come to work and come to settle and all that stuff.

Yet this word – and maybe it's just me being a nervous Nellie or what have you – gives me some concern. Maybe if I am being a nervous Nellie, well, I hope I'm bringing up a situation that we can't support this amendment. If it comes true sometime in the future that everything is all about the economy – this somehow at a late stage in this bill is going forward after much time and much work put into it. All of a sudden we get pressured into putting forward this word, and it changes the balance. Although this is somewhat of a centralization of power, it's an act that people have been calling for and wanting to protect our environment.

I guess those are my comments in regard to this amendment, and I leave it to others to talk about it if they wish. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to make a few comments regarding the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. I want to begin by saying that I fully support the minister and what he's trying to do with respect to the principles and objectives of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. The establishment of this kind of an integrated approach and in particular the amendments that are before us are of very significant consequence to the aboriginal communities in this province and in particular to the Métis settlements, which I'll get to in a moment.

I think we all know that an integrated approach like this is really necessary to address the cumulative effects of land management and resource development decisions and what a vital step that they are to ensuring a sustainable future for Albertans. But, again, I want to focus in on the amendments as they impact the Métis settlements in particular.

This is a broad framework document, as we all know, and when it was first brought forward there were some areas that caused some concern to me and, in turn, to Métis settlements in particular. I should say to First Nations as well. But the minister was very amenable in listening to the concerns that I had raised, and we had a good discussion. That culminated in an immediate meeting with the Métis settlements and with other aboriginal people. The result of those meetings is now reflected in these amendments that are before us, Mr. Chairman.

Just a couple of points here. We know the importance of land and land management to all of us, but I think it goes without saying that there's an even deeper appreciation primarily because of the ages of history that surround aboriginal people for the respect that they have for these lands: for the land, the air, the water, and everything else connected. As I studied these amendments and discussed them, I found some comfort in knowing that the concerns had been addressed. My concerns were focused primarily on the implementation of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act and how the act might affect the principles and objectives of Métis settlements, of the Métis Settlements Act, which is our own legislation. As we know, the Métis settlements and their lands are unique. In fact, we're the only province in Canada that has specially designated lands set aside. So the amendments which the hon. minister mentioned – and he specifically referenced Métis settlements in his comments – are critical to maintaining that balance that we have and the respect and recognition we have for Métis settlements in our province. I have to recognize that the Alberta Land Stewardship Act is, of course, outside the federal jurisdiction with respect to First Nation reserves. Nonetheless, these amendments will address the major concerns.

Let me just say that the proposed amendments are the result of a number of discussions that I've had with the minister and that the Métis settlements' representatives have had with the minister, and I was privileged to sit in on those meetings and to help arrange them. These amendments reflect the unique relationship that Alberta has had and wishes to continue having with Métis settlements for many, many years to come.

These amendments ensure that the overarching policy objectives that Alberta agreed to in 1985 and in 1989 remain intact. We should all be reminded that the Legislature passed a unanimous resolution in 1985 agreeing to transfer land to and to bring forward new legislation for Métis settlements. This was a historic moment for our province, and we're now improving, if you will, on that history while we're also improving the quality of life with respect to land

management in general, I hope, for all Albertans. This is a critical part of Métis settlements achieving greater local autonomy and greater economic self-sufficiency. The proposed amendments to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act ensure that Alberta's commitments under this unique legislation will continue to be honoured and improved upon.

Amending the act in this manner will allow the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal to hear matters related to land compensation and to ensure that through these amendments those decisions are consistent with the Metis Settlements Act, which, by the way, already gives authority to the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal to hear matters such as loss of cultural value related to land. The Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal is a culturally appropriate quasi-judicial tribunal whose decisions are appealed to the Court of Appeal directly.

The other amendment to the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, as has been referenced, ensures that the Métis Settlements General Council, which is their governing body, can continue to make laws within their own geographic area, in particular laws related to land, without having regional plans made or amended and without any impact on Métis settlements' ability to make such laws.

I find these amendments to be consistent with our relationship with the Métis settlements and to be consistent with our commitments in the 1989 accord, which was all about helping achieve local autonomy and so on, and to the corresponding legislation that was passed in 1990.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to take my seat in a moment. But I just want to say thank you to the minister, who has wrestled with these issues now for I think about two years, if not a day more or less, for the numerous meetings that have been held that result in these particular amendments that will help benefit our relationship with the Métis settlements, in particular, but I hope also with aboriginals in general and hope for a speedy resolution and implementation.

My last comment is to suggest that there will still be opportunities for additional input to be given with respect to the implementation of this particular act. We still have some regional advisory councils that will have a role to play. Aboriginals will feature prominently in those as well. Therefore, I'm very supportive of these amendments before us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes. Speaking directly and somewhat generically to the amendment, I want to compliment the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. I know how hard he has worked. The words that the Minister of Aboriginal Relations brought into it were words like integration and collaboration, and I want to second those comments.

9:20

This may appear slightly off topic, but it has to do with the amendment, and it has to do with Alberta land stewardship. I just want to pass out a very large thank you to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the Solicitor General, and the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. That is because they demonstrated land stewardship over the May long weekend. Through their collaborative integration we had a very successful weekend, and I see that as a terrific example of Alberta land stewardship. The people who wanted to be out to have a good time were able to have that good time. For example, the off-roaders who followed the laws and stayed on the path had a thoroughly enjoyable time, and even those who wandered slightly off didn't seem to be opposed to the

finer they got. They realized that they had overstepped their bounds. I'm hoping that this enforcement, this integration, this collaboration that was so successful on this long weekend will be carried on into the future, that this wasn't a one-shot effort.

With regard specifically to amendment A1, the only area that we have trouble with of all the series of alphabetized amendments is section A, and it's kind of a philosophical concern. We do not believe that the environment should be playing second fiddle to the economy. We do not believe that short-term gain that produces long-term pain is acceptable. I know how hard the minister has worked to achieve the balance between the environment and the economy, and I am very appreciative of the five-year review clause that was built in because that will give people a chance to evaluate the success of the plan.

There's no doubt at all, no one would argue the absolute need for a land-use framework in this province. I appreciate, again, all the effort that has gone into the preparation and the moulding and shaping that the amendments to Bill 36, which have just been presented, attempt to do. As I say, I will be voting with my colleagues in favour of all of the amendments with the exception of section A because I do not believe the economy should take priority over long-term sustainable environmental conservation and protection.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As my colleagues have made clear, we have reviewed the government amendments to Bill 36 and, for the most part, are willing to support them. I've been quickly trying to go through and sort of do a fast comparison about what's being proposed. Yes, indeed, we think that in many ways this is an improvement on the bill as first presented. The sticking point, of course, is that definition that is appearing under section 2, specifically clause (g), which is giving us a sort of list.

I've come to understand that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development understands effective language very clearly, and I take him seriously. So I know that when he has ordered it with the economy first and the environment second, followed by the rest of the list, that's the prioritization. That's not a mistake. It's not alphabetized or put in that order randomly. That is deliberate, and that is where I have trouble with what is being anticipated in this bill.

This whole bill has been a struggle for me. As the Environment critic for the Official Opposition I'm supposed to be, you know, reviewing acts of legislation to see if it has an undue effect on our environment, proposing alternatives, et cetera, et cetera. Overall, we hear from a number of sources, and in our own minds we understand that we need this bill. We need an overall plan about how we are going to use the land in Alberta. We need some kind of a framework that is going to allow the increasing number of competing demands coming from different sectors: from the municipalities, from the agricultural community, from the oil and gas development and exploration community, from forestry. You know, there are just so many different competing sectors right now that are trying to get their piece and get dominance, frankly, over how the land is going to be used and get the land framework and the use of that land to what is going to help them the most and is going to give them the most advantage. So it's clear that we need some kind of a plan.

This is a sticking point for me, and it causes me great concern. I'm an Albertan. I understand that a good deal of the wealth that I enjoy, that funds the things that are important to me – like the arts,

like education, like health care – flows from our industrial sector, particularly oil and gas. I get that. We've certainly talked about royalties and endowment funds and all of the rest of that for a very long period of time. But I think it's a mistake to write a land-use framework that gives the number one position to the economy. That's what we've got. Under section 2(g) – and these are the definition sections that appear at the beginning of the bill – what we have now is:

“effect” includes

- (i) any effect on the environment, human health or safety, a species or an objective in a regional plan, regardless of the scale, nature, intensity, duration, frequency, probability or potential of the effect, and
- (ii) a cumulative effect that arises over time or in combination with other effects.

What we're looking at now, given the government amendments, is a list that reads: “effect” includes (i) any effect on the economy, the environment, a community, human health or safety, a species or an objective, et cetera, et cetera. So as you hear the minister talk about trying to achieve a balance between the environment, the economy, and the social sector, we've now had a prioritization. I read this as a prioritization. Having watched this minister for some time, I don't think this was accidental. I do see it as a prioritization, and that is the problem for me.

It's not because I happen at this point in time to be the Environment critic. Six months ago I was the finance critic. You know, these things come and go. I'm not doing this just because that's the position I'm holding at this time but because I've become increasingly aware as I look at choices that other countries have made. In some cases they get up and look out the window and go: “Okay. I've got a bank account, but – guess what? – there are no leaves on the trees outside,” or “I have to take my children to an indoor facility to play because their asthma is so bad they can't go outside, and given the number of particulates in the air that we have in this particular region, you know, they can't go outside and play or they'll have an asthma attack.”

It's that same argument about health and money. Money means nothing if you are dying of something. It means nothing. I mean, you might have fluffier pillows and more people standing around your bed. You're still sick. You still feel like crap. You're not enjoying life, and you're dying. So all that money isn't doing you any good. It's the same issue here. I don't think we have achieved much if what we do is say that the economy always gets priority and first position and preference as we start to make decisions about allocations of things here.

Now, I understand that we needed to put the word “economy” into this section, because there was already some signalling that those people that felt that they had an economic interest could claim that the framework had no impact on them because there was no right, no ability in the bill to make a decision based on an economic decision. People were signalling that they weren't going to co-operate because the bill didn't have the power to do that or the bill was not giving itself that power.

9:30

It's already getting late. This is the second night I've been in here for a long time. I won't belabour the point. We will have an opportunity to come back and talk about this some other time. It would be nice if we didn't have to do this all tonight, but I suspect the government is going to make us do it all tonight.

I think that is the concern. I think we make a mistake if we prioritize or signal that our preference is that the economy comes first in a list of prioritized considerations that we make as we look at land-use planning.

Thank you for the opportunity to put that on the record. I'm certainly willing to support all of the other sections in this government amendment, but I cannot support the section named A in the government amendments. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Chair. I might just respond to the comments that have been made about amendment A. Basically, I appreciated some of the compliments – thanks – from members opposite, but I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill here on the adding of “economy.” If you would go back and look at the land-use framework document, the final version that was released in December, it talks of objectives of economy, environment, and social objectives. That kind of triad is used pretty consistently.

I know that the Member for Edmonton-Centre thinks I'm crafty when it comes to language, but I think that in this case it's quite innocent. I'd point out that in several other sections – like, if you look at section 7 of the act, in section 7(a), talking about information, the wording is “economic, environmental and social characteristics.” If you look at section 7(b), again it talks about “economic, environmental and social opportunities.” In fact, most of that sequencing is just alphabetic, not anything else.

I think I can also say with some certainty that while there are a number of rules of statutory interpretation that apply to specific trumping in general and more recent trumping, less recent, and so forth, sequencing doesn't have any legal meaning at all when you have a series of things like that. I may not be innocent, but in this case the sequencing there is innocent and, I think, legally irrelevant.

I'd point out that there are four components bundled into section A. One of them is adding “environment.” The other three all deal with some of the accommodations for the Metis Settlements Act. It seems to me that it would be a mistake for your caucus to be on record voting against the accommodations that were requested by and made for the Métis settlements.

In light of what I've said about the irrelevance of sequencing and the importance of the Métis settlement components, you might want to reconsider voting against A.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to amendment A1?

I will call the question. Hon. member, you had asked that all the votes be severed on this. Is this correct?

Ms Blakeman: Yes, please.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We will go ahead with the voting on amendment A1. We'll be severing them all.

[Motion on amendment A1A carried]

[Motion on amendment A1B carried]

[Motion on amendment A1C carried]

[Motion on amendment A1D carried]

[Motion on amendment A1E carried]

[Motion on amendment A1F carried]

[Motion on amendment A1G carried]

[Motion on amendment A1H carried]

[Motion on amendment A1I carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now speaking on Bill 36. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have some amendments on section 3(1), that I would like to distribute at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, this will be amendment A2. We'll pause for a moment while these are being distributed.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment is really one of those simple things. It is just changing two words, from "may" to "shall." But it has a larger context to it in the fact that we could have done this in many situations through the act. As you are aware, there's some concern from this side of the House that there is a tremendous centralization of power that we have seen throughout this bill. We've seen many departments, many acts, many individuals – in fact, the whole province of Alberta divided up now into seven sections with one controlling minister and one controlling decision-maker, a cabinet with very little scrutiny to it at the end of the day.

This minor thing we are trying to do here by changing the language from "may" to "shall" is quite obvious. Instead of having some of that power always residing behind closed doors, always residing in the power of the cabinet, all the power located not in this Legislature, all the power not discussed and debated out there in public, well, this is one of those things that we believe and we're making a symbolic stand here a couple of times – well, it's more than a symbolic stand – a real stand that this type of language should have been more present in the act.

For instance, in this situation it should be happening. You can see that it's very simple, that the Lieutenant Governor in Council "may" establish integrated planning regions under this section, to the Lieutenant Governor in Council "shall" establish integrated planning regions. I assume that this is going to happen. In fact, it would be nonsensical for me to believe that this is probably not going to happen under the act.

9:40

However, just some of the stuff in the act that creates this, the overlying central power, is causing me some concern – actually, more than some concern, a lot of concern. I think there's a loss of democracy, a lot of control. Very few people have power over the course and direction of the province of Alberta for a long time. Let's face it, the governing power always has a certain amount of ability to do that. However, in this case it appears that some of this power is not being, I guess, wielded in the manner it was before or wielded differently now in that it goes to the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This is a significant change. We've seen it, I guess, now as a theme throughout, over the course of my Legislature time. I think it will be something new.

For many of the members who were elected here last March 5, maybe we will spend our – hopefully not. Let's not think that. Maybe that is the way things will be for time eternal, this type of legislation, and that's just become a matter of course. Maybe some day in this Legislature we'll forget that at one time things didn't always happen behind the front bench and that at some time things

were different in Alberta, that more things were discussed in an open and honest fashion. Maybe that's just me reminiscing about the good old days, which were really not that good. We're maybe not that old, anyways.

Nonetheless, these are the worries we have as a caucus and the worries that I've heard expressed already by the third party. I was going to discuss it in question period, but the hon. minister was right, that we had a chance to discuss this tonight, and I feel glad that he corrected me on my faux pas this afternoon. I had the opportunity to get things out tonight.

That is primarily what the amendment is about. It was a pleasure to be allowed to speak on the amendment. You can gather from my comments why this amendment was made. I open it up to other people if they would wish to comment.

The Deputy Chair: Do members wish to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm pleased to be able to rise and support my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo in the first of his amendments, which appears before the Assembly as amendment A2. Yes, I think you'll see that a number of the amendments that we're putting forward tonight are changing "may" to "shall." In this case we're looking to establish that the cabinet shall establish these integrated planning regions. We think that this is an important component of what's being considered under this, and we would like to see this amendment supported by all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Chair. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo indicated that he's concerned that "may" leaves too much discretion for cabinet. In a legal or technical sense he's correct. But the Member for Calgary-Buffalo also said, and I quote: it's nonsensical to believe that this is not going to happen. End of quote. And he's right. This is going to happen.

The hon. member said that he wants more accountability. Well, our definition of accountability is political accountability, and one of the ways we get that is for the opposition parties to hold us accountable. Changing the word from "may" to "shall" simply moves it from a political forum into the courts. On this side of the aisle we think there's more democracy in elections than there is in appointing judges. We think it's actually more democratic to have political accountability. So I'd encourage people to vote against this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. I understand the minister's point that there's a certain amount of democracy in having the cabinet being ultimately responsible, and it's a fair argument. I think at the end of the day, though, there has to be an apparatus or a body that can evaluate some of the decisions that are going to be made that deal with plans and things on the economy, the environment, the social nature – and I've already forgotten the last one – whereas I think decisions can be made that are outside of these best-laid plans and can go against, I guess, maybe the best interests of what the initial land-use framework was. It can get caught up a lot of times in the political rather than the best use or the best intentions of what this legislation was established to do, which I believe was really to balance things

because we are reaching that tipping point. I do commend the minister on using that language again and in his report, the tipping point, which is here and is now and can't be ignored any longer.

Simply having some apparatus like the courts ensuring that, you know, these best-laid plans are followed – I'm not accusing anyone here or anyone in the future, but there have been in the past governments that have done things that have been untoward and gerrymandered with the best-laid plans. Hence, the court is one of those institutions that tries to act as a check. I'm not telling the hon. minister anything new. He has taught classes on this and developed his own theories on what is best, and I have some of my own.

So instead of going around in a circle, I'm going to leave it at that. I think I've made my point, and the hon. minister has as well. I appreciate him taking the time to answer that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just a very brief comment. Neither the hon. minister of sustainable resources nor I have a background in law. The hon. minister has a very admirable background in political science based on his years of teaching and having lived on both sides of the border and having seen the application of politics. But I do not believe that changing "may" to "shall" takes it out of the hands of the government and puts it into the hands of the court.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We're now back to the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. I would like to move another amendment just to double-stamp the point here. I will be quick, as I know we're in a long evening. If we could just pass out the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We will pause for a moment. This will be amendment A3. Is this amendment to section 7?

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. This will be amendment A3, and we'll pause while it's being distributed.

Please proceed, hon. member.

9:50

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I thought that this was a brilliant move when I did this earlier today. In hindsight now this might not be best. I already made my argument on this amendment, and just to say it again: this is a symbolic move that says there is a lot of power being centralized in this bill, and we on this side of the House are worried about this centralization of power. You can refer to the rest of my earlier notes in *Hansard* if you want to hear my arguments again, but I'll spare the hon. members that indulgence in the House at this time.

So those are my comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a great honour to stand up and speak in favour of amendment A3, striking out "may" and

substituting "shall." Substituting "shall" will definitely bring more certainty and more affirmative action. All of the information relevant to the history of the planning region, its geography, and its demographics must be taken into account and used in the development of regional plans. As an example, information on water supply is essential to any regional plan, so we need to ensure that these elements are considered. With "may" it may or may not happen, so I think with "shall," you know, we are ensuring that it will happen.

I would urge all members to support amendment A3 so that we can bring certainty, and that will bring clarity as well and some affirmative action in this. For those reasons I urge all members to support amendment A3.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Chair. I would oppose this amendment for the same reason that I opposed the last amendment. As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo said, and I quote: it's nonsensical to believe that this is not going to happen. It is going to happen. Changing "may" to "shall" is not going to change anything except, again, open the door to judicial review.

If you want accountability, I think Albertans would prefer political accountability rather than judge-made law, so I would encourage people to vote against this.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd beg the indulgence of the Legislature to stand and speak for the first time to this bill and to get some comments on the record with respect to this bill, which in many respects is progress for Alberta and represents a much-needed dimension to planning in the province after many years of recognizing excessive demands on the land, unfettered development, especially in areas of intense growth and development like the oil sands. It's an area that we have been pressing for years for a bigger plan on.

Failing to plan is a plan to fail, and I think this government is recognizing that. In these times, particularly when we're seeing limits placed upon developments by infrastructure, by social impacts, by limits on the environment, and indeed by climate change, we have to take very seriously the commitment to a broad-based, integrated land-use framework. I applaud the minister and this government for moving forward on this, a challenging and important initiative that has had some consultation. Obviously, some of the consultation has been taken into consideration with the development of this bill, the land-use framework, otherwise known as the Alberta Land Stewardship Act.

I just want to be clear on the record that the principles are vitally important; the practice is also vitally important. For many of the individuals and groups who have reviewed this with us and, certainly, in my review of it, there are some very positive elements and some real concerns, obviously, in the details of how this is implemented and in the regulations. Some of the issues have been raised before in this House. I simply have a need to put on the record some of those concerns, chief of which are the broad discretion of the cabinet and the lack of accountability.

It's clear to us that without a very strong alternate view and an option to appeal and to address some of the political influence that

essentially can interfere in land-use decisions, there is a vulnerability to a plan which places so much power behind closed doors. We want to be very clear on record that without more checks and balances and an opportunity for transparency of these decisions – who is benefiting, who is paying, how these issues are going to be honouring the spirit of the land-use framework, that look at cumulative impacts, that look at long-term impacts, that look at not only the economic bottom line but at some of the serious implications for balancing this province in the way of social, environmental, and economic sustainability that Albertans expect of us and demand of us – we have no excuse for not ensuring some checks and balances that protect our future and our children's future.

The guiding principles are there. The implementation raises real concerns. We will be watching closely, as many of the groups in the province will be. There are obviously municipalities, rural districts, industries that also want to see their children and their grandchildren taken care of and want to see a mechanism in which the implementation of this plan is clearly in the long-term interests of the province and is not compromising some of the good principles that have been expressed but are not represented in the actual implementation.

From our point of view, the need to limit the control of cabinet, a political body which has limited science, limited access to thinking in terms of the longer term, based on political interests: we have serious concerns that the checks and balances may not be what they could be, and we hope that some of the amendments that are being recommended will be considered seriously to not only do the right thing but to be seen to be doing the right thing in terms of the public perception.

Albertans want to share in this plan. Albertans have a deep and abiding commitment to the long term and need to have very substantive input into the regional plans, which are very well based upon river systems and watersheds, as they should be. What isn't as clear and isn't as accountable to local citizens and other interests is how their input can truly be reflected in the ultimate decisions that are made for their region.

So I hope that in putting some trust in this government and supporting the essential thrust of this bill, we will see the realization of some of these checks and balances and that, indeed, we will honour the spirit and the reality of the democratic process by ensuring that people do have access to significant influence on how this will be implemented.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and continue to listen to further amendments which are constructively designed, again, to ensure not only the spirit of accountability but the reality of accountability.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to Bill 36? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: I'd like to make an amendment to 52(1).

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, what section are you talking about?

Mr. Hehr: Section 52(1). Sorry.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Hon. member, we'll pause for a moment while this amendment is being distributed.

Hon. members, this will be amendment A4, as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. This amendment comes straight from the Environmental Law Centre. They've recommended it, so I believe it. It made sense to me at the time. They did some work on this front to try to better this bill. I'll actually even just read into the record what their suggestions are. These amendments would make additional "may" action items into "shall" items. There's no reason why each of these items should not be mandatory.

Bill 36 makes many elements of the process structure discretionary. It is not mandatory that Cabinet establish land-use planning regions, in spite of the detailed descriptions and maps of the intended regions in the LUF document. Nor is Cabinet required to develop land-use plans for any regions that may be created. All aspects of how planning should take place, from the scope of the process to the roles of the governance bodies to the forms of public consultation and communication, are left to be determined by Cabinet.

These are actual suggestions from the Environmental Law Centre. Something to this effect: cabinet is required to make planning regions.

On this one in particular:

A regional planning process must set out the roles of the various governance bodies, establish the terms of reference for the process, specify the required public and stakeholder communication and consultation, and require the development of provincial land-use policies to guide regional land-use decision-making (changing "may" to "shall" for [this] section).

Anyway, this amendment would add the requirement to follow through with this component, so that's why I put this forward. I know that it's very similar to what we had before.

I'd invite some other hon. members to speak out on this issue.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to rise and support this amendment. Again, the challenge to the minister and to this government is to shift from discretionary to required action, especially when this government has so much control over the regional planning councils and, indeed, the secretariat. There is a real conflict between the kind of control that this government is taking over the process and what Albertans are telling us they want to have in terms of not only the spirit of participation but the fact of participation.

Without more clarity and with the power vested in the cabinet, it's clear to many of us that we are vesting in a few people without evidence of their capacity to make these kinds of decisions in the best interests of a particular region way too much power. We on this side feel very strongly that there is far too much control left in the hands of elected representatives, to be sure, but not necessarily representatives of particular areas where regional plans are going to be made.

This is, again, an area that raises questions about the sincerity of this government with respect to democracy, democratic process, appeal processes, accountability, transparency. These are words that we bandy about, but we're looking for evidence in the legislation that we are serious about that. I would urge the minister to consider this afresh and look for ways to send a very strong message that people are welcome, that people's views and people's influence on this process are going to be required, and that there are checks and balances on this government and its arbitrary use of decisions that may or may not be in the long-term public interest.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Yeah. I'd, again, encourage members to vote against this amendment. I doubt it'll come as any surprise to the members opposite that for the one regional advisory council that's already been appointed and met, we have already created terms of reference. Section 52 is about terms of reference. We've done terms of reference for the first regional advisory committee, and we're in the process of doing them up for the South Saskatchewan. So, again, this is unnecessary, and I'd encourage people to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: Do other members wish to speak?

Dr. Swann: To the minister. The terms of reference have been created. The question is: who created the terms of reference? How much participation did the local individuals have, and to what extent are they able to make the changes that may well become necessary to those terms of reference?

The Deputy Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. My question would be along the same lines perhaps as the leader. I'd like to have it clarified why the terms of reference would be different for each region.

Dr. Morton: There'll be some similarities in the terms of reference for the different regions, but there'll be differences as well because the different types of environmental challenges that face the different regions vary from region to region. In the lower Athabasca you're dealing with oil sands. There are no oil sands in the South Saskatchewan. In the South Saskatchewan you're dealing with some fairly serious water scarcity issues. Again, while there are some water issues in the lower Athabasca, they're of a very different type. So there'll be some similarities in the terms of reference but also differences that reflect the differences in the challenges that face different parts of the province.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Mr. Hehr: I'd like to move an amendment to 50(1)(c).

An Hon. Member: We're still voting on this one.

Mr. Hehr: Oh. Sorry about that. I apologize, hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: If no one else wishes to speak, I will call the question on amendment A4 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Deputy Chair: Back to Bill 36.

Mr. Hehr: I'd like to move an amendment. It's on 50(1)(c).

10:10

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while that amendment is being distributed.

Hon. members, this is amendment A5. The hon. Member for Calgary-*Varsity*.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To officially move the amendment and read it into the program: in section 50(1)(c) by striking out "describe the public and stakeholder communication and

consultation required" and substituting "describe the public and stakeholder communication and consultation that must be undertaken during the development of each regional plan."

The hon. minister of sustainable resources pointed out the need to have unique plans for unique regions. He talked about different issues, different challenges; for example, how the oil sands of the Athabasca region are different from the drought-parched areas of the South Saskatchewan. What amendment A5 attempts to do is to give the people who are on the ground in those locations an opportunity to have direct input.

Now, I've noted in previous comments that I appreciate the fact that there will be five-year reviews built into the system. But if you have people onside to begin with, the chances of successful reviews are going to be that much better. In other words, if you plan correctly in the first place, then evaluating the plan should produce the results that were your objectives and priorities. And it's absolutely essential that the people in the region have significant input.

This further clarifies the public and stakeholder consultation to take place during the development of regional plans. It ensures that the public will have a chance to be involved in the regional planning process by including the words "that must be undertaken."

I don't believe that the word "must" requires a court intervention. What it does require is that the people who are most affected by the plan in their region have the opportunity not only to be consulted but to be collaborative participants in the development of the plan. That is the reasoning behind amendment A5.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Chair. Again, a well-intentioned amendment but one that's unnecessary. There are ample provisions already for the public in each region to participate in the development of the regional plans. The regional advisory councils include 15 to 17 members of the communities, that represent a broad cross-section of sectors and interests within each region. Again, looking at the lower Athabasca region, that regional advisory council is already holding forums and open houses in the communities in the lower Athabasca to solicit public input. It's not a question of what might happen; this is already happening. So the amendment is unnecessary. I'd urge members to vote against it.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

We'll call the question on amendment A5 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Varsity* on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my honour to rise and make an amendment under section 15.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. We'll pause while that amendment is being passed out.

Please proceed, hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: As it's proposed, the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* moves that Bill 36 be amended in section 15 by striking out subsections (3), (4), and (5). This will remove sections of the bill that prevent a person from bringing an application or proceeding

before the court. As it is currently in the bill, section 15 is, frankly, undemocratic, and clearly we on this side believe with many Albertans that there needs to be more accountability and access to the courts, as there would be under any significant issue in this province. We need a system of checks and balances. Albertans must be given that freedom and that opportunity to challenge decisions that are blatantly wrong. To remove that flies in the face of what this government says that it stands for.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is the first time that I've actually had the opportunity to stand up and speak to this bill. I would like the opportunity to say that I realize that the work required to put together a bill of this magnitude was enormous and was certainly very overdue, as we all know. I compliment the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development for shepherding this bill through the multiple other ministries that were involved. I think it's been an impressive show of focus and ability. Is it perfect? No, but it is a good start.

As with everything new it takes time for actions to prove themselves, but I don't think that I see enough latitude for correction outside of the centralized power of the ministry. Despite the explanation by the minister of his differencing between politics and the judicial – I agree that that's the ideal. However, as I see what I believe to be an increasing democratic deficit in the province, I look more and more to the courts for openness and fairness. This is not how the process should end; however, it appears that that's what's happening.

10:20

Should this bill be tweaked? Absolutely, and that's why these amendments are being brought forward, certainly, one by one. This particular amendment falls right into the remarks that I just made, that I really believe that there isn't enough outside latitude. Bill 36 has limited avenues for Albertans to challenge cabinet's power and decisions that may be inconsistent with the regional plan. If they're inconsistent, it still allows that power to override, actually, the regional planning groups, that the minister has referred to. Bill 36 has effectively shut the door on Albertans' ability to challenge decisions by judicial review. Judicial review is an important tool because it allows the courts to review laws and decisions made by the government to determine whether they were made fairly, in accordance with required procedures and authority.

Bill 36 also expressly prohibits any individual or group from bringing an application for judicial review as well as any other cause of action related to noncompliance with the regional plan. Instead, all judicial review applications will be channelled through a government representative, the stewardship commissioner, who will determine whether or not the matter may be brought to the courts. That is a tremendous amount of power in one person's hands. I believe that it is way too much. I think that it is overpowering. I also think it would be very intimidating for anyone who would challenge that particular stewardship commissioner. That commissioner will determine whether it would go to the courts, but since the stewardship commissioner would be appointed by the province and will be a member of the provincial civil service, it's unlikely that he or she would bring an application for judicial review against cabinet or a provincial government department or agency for noncompliance with the regional plan.

I think that in a case like this the expression "follow the money" is one that could be used. I think the question again is: who signs the paycheque? That's where the power lies. Who really signs the

paycheque here? We can often determine what people's behaviour would be.

Only the courts should be permitted to determine whether an application for a judicial review has merit. This is not the role of a government appointee as it undermines the check-and-balance function of the judicial review process. As my words, I hope, have indicated, I feel very strongly that always the elected political side should take precedence over the courts. I think that when the BNA Act came back to Canada, a lot of that was shifted to the courts, and I think that the power should be in this House. However, I also firmly believe that there must be an open process whereby people can challenge those decisions and not feel intimidated and not feel that they have to knuckle under or, in fact, back off. As I've said before, I think that this is a question of following the money. Who signs the paycheque? You can figure out what their behaviour would be.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to add to the comments by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. Simply put, this is an example of the power grab, of cabinet's power and authority in not allowing the traditional judicial review process. This is an important tool, and it would allow courts to review these laws and decisions made by the government. These laws and decisions are made by the government, hopefully, in the best interests of the people, and they should be interpreted by the courts. Sometimes if we leave these things in the hands of politicians, there are external pressures that come up from time to time that impact their decisions that may not be within the spirit in which they originated the initial legislation.

That's what judicial review was created for. It's tried to take that temptation out of the hands of politicians who want to gerrymander or monkey with the system to create things. We're all human beings here. We all have pressures. We've got people yelling at us about this, yelling at us about that. It's pretty easy to say: "All right. We'll make this decision this one time. Yeah, it might go against the general principle of things, but it's only one time."

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

Once you start doing those things, once you start not allowing for judicial review, well, that's not very good. At least, that's the perspective I'm putting forward. Many people I've talked to about this bill are worried about that concentration of power and lack of judicial review available to people who are using this framework.

Anyway, those are my comments. I appreciate the chair's time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Very briefly, this mistrust of the judicial system is a concern to me because that's at the heart of a number of amendments that we're putting forward.

We've just had an hon. member – and I can name him now – Ron Stevens, appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench. I would assume that whether it's a federal government appointee or whether it's a provincial government appointee, these people are chosen based on their capabilities.

When we're talking about the seven watersheds, the DFO, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, is going to have input into a number of the decisions that will be made, and hopefully it will be of a collaborative, collegial nature. But whether it's, for example, the long-anticipated completion of the southwest ring road going over the Weaselhead through successful collaboration of several

government levels, including the band council of the Tsuu T'ina and the Tsuu T'ina Nation voting on the agreement, there is a collaborative process that provides input.

With regard to the judicial process decisions are going to be made, and to suggest that judges have their own intent, that their intent somehow is different and selfish in interpretation – these are people who are chosen from amongst the ranks based on their legal background. They are appointed based on their capabilities. So to suggest that somehow the judicial system is going to operate in opposition to an established government, I don't see that as a problem.

It's checks and balances. We have elected politicians, and we have appointed judges. But who appoints them? It's the politicians. So it's a closed loop, and both have to be there. That's why this particular check that is being proposed in amendment A6 is of such importance. It's a matter of trust. Do we trust the people we appoint?

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A6? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Chair. What was only hinted at in the earlier amendments is now out in the open for everybody to see. The opposition members would like to see as much of this as possible pushed over into the courts.

Dr. Swann: It's freedom.

Dr. Morton: It's not freedom. It's loss of control. It has nothing to do with the impartiality of the judges. Judges have no training whatsoever in the scientific and statistical analysis that's typical in this type of policy. To move those kinds of decisions over to the judges is to move it into a forum where there's, frankly, no expertise. Judges are trained to make legal decisions. These are policy decisions. They'll be made by responsible ministers working with civil servants who are trained in the various biological and environmental sciences. That's where it should be.

10:30

Frankly, I think that if we're just doing political self-interest, confusing who's responsible for public policy by making this all judicially reviewable, that would probably be in our self-interest because then we couldn't be held accountable for it. What we're doing in this piece of legislation is saying that the government of Alberta, at least in this first iteration, in this first 10 years of land-use will make the decisions, and you can hold us accountable. There won't be any confusion about whether it's judges that are making the decisions or not. Frankly, I think this shows a certain amount of courage on the part of the government, and I'd urge members to vote against this amendment.

Dr. Swann: Again, Mr. Chairman, nobody is saying that politicians shouldn't be making policy decisions. What we're saying is that all citizens should have access to the courts when they feel they are being violated, when fundamental values and principles and planning of a community are violated by a particular plan. It's a check and balance. I think most citizens in a civilized, democratic society need and recognize the need for an option. We're not saying it would be used frequently at all, but it has to be there.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A6? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: On the bill, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have several amendments that I'd like to put forward, and I'll start with the first one.

The Chair: This amendment is now known as A7.

Hon. leader of the third party, please continue on A7.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This amendment has several parts. The essential intent of it is to require the government to be committed to its own policy and to require a number of things that currently are optional to become mandatory.

In the first instance, section 5, the entire section, which is entitled Lieutenant Governor in Council Not Constrained, will be struck. Essentially, it now says that a regional plan may be made or amended whether or not a regional advisory council has been appointed for a planning region to which a regional plan or an amendment applies, a regional advisory council or other person has provided advice, or that the secretariat has provided advice with respect to a regional plan. These are all requirements. This section allows the cabinet, essentially, to make or amend a plan regardless of whether or not those steps have been followed. We think those steps ought to be followed, so we're proposing to strike section 5.

Section 50 is amended as well. In this particular case there's a long list of things under section 50 that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may do. This takes the first several, (a) through (e), and makes them mandatory on the part of the government so that the government must authorize the commencement of a regional planning process, a process to amend a regional plan, or a process to review a regional plan. It must set the terms of reference. Part (c) has already been voted, I think, in a Liberal amendment, so you'll see that that part is whited out. But it also requires the description of the role and function of a regional advisory council and the direct recognition, consideration, or development of provincial policies and guidance on how they are to be respected and so on. Those become must do things.

The remaining sections are put in a subsection (1.1) and retain the current status that they have; in other words, that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may do those things.

In section 8 of the bill a similar process is done where section 8(1), which is already a must, adds a number of portions from sub (2) where it currently says that a regional plan "may" do these things. This amendment would make it a requirement to provide for one or more thresholds for the purpose of achieving or maintaining an objective; to name, describe, or specify indicators to determine or to assist in determining whether an objective or policy in the regional plan has been, is being, or will be achieved; and for describing or specifying the monitoring of thresholds, indicators, and policies and so on. All now are moved into section 8(1), that is requirements. The remaining clauses there are moved into section 8(2) and retain the status of "may."

Mr. Chairman, basically, this amendment is designed to increase the mandatory requirements on the government with respect to the planning process. So much of this bill is optional. So much of it gives a wide discretion to the government, wide powers to the government, centralization of authority but also a great deal of latitude and freedom on the part of the government to do what it wishes, when it wishes, and how it wishes to do that.

We believe that the process that has been set out here is generally good, but we believe that municipalities, individuals, landowners, all of the stakeholders need to have greater certainty that these plans will in fact actually be carried out as they are intended and not just

turned on a dime or abrogated because the government decides. These are by way of additional constraints on government power under this plan, and I know that many members of different philosophies in this House believe in having constraints on government power.

I would hope that members would see fit to support this amendment. I think that it strengthens the planning process, constrains government power, and democratizes the process of planning in this process.

Thank you.

10:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A7.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking specifically to A7 and supporting it, I would refer to this as the do as I say, not as I do amendment because what it does is require the government to follow through. It requires the government to commit to carrying out its stated policy. It requires the government to live up to Albertans' expectations.

Now, I'll wait, obviously, to hear the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's reply, but what I see is the intent of amendment A7 is to remove the wiggle room. I don't think that in the wording it brings the judiciary into the enforcement. It clearly points out that the government is responsible to not only itself but to the people of Alberta who elected it to carry out its stated policy.

We do have arm's-length individuals who attempt to keep the government on track. We have our Auditor General, who looks at the financial aspects, and we have the Ombudsman, who looks at the fairness aspects. Basically, I see this as actually empowering the government to live up to its stated policies. If anything, I see it as empowering rather than restricting. It's saying: you've said you're going to do this; live up to your stated policy.

Therefore, I support amendment A7.

The Chair: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on amendment A7? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, I'd urge members to vote against amendment A7. It's at best unnecessary and at worst pernicious. It's unnecessary because we're doing all these things anyhow, and it's pernicious because it basically takes away the discretion and flexibility that's appropriate in a policy exercise of this scope and novelty. As I said in question period yesterday, there's no off-the-shelf recipe book from some other jurisdiction that has already done something like this. This is uncharted territory. It makes sense to leave discretion and flexibility for the first iteration, or first generation.

I don't see too many youngsters over on the other side there, but there's another generation of political leaders who will probably be here in 10 years on our side. Maybe once we've had a decade of experience with this, some of the changes that the members opposite would like we can firm up, change the may's to musts, but for this first go-round I think the "may" is a much more appropriate approach.

Again I'd urge people to vote against the amendment.

The Chair: Seeing no other speakers on amendment A7, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the bill.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I would like to move one of the amendments on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and that is amending section 61(6). I'll wait for that to be distributed.

The Chair: We'll pause a few moments for distribution of the amendment. It is now known as amendment A8.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, please proceed.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm moving this amendment, which would be A8, on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. This amendment is amending the Alberta Land Stewardship Act in section 61(6) by striking out "or without."

Section 61(6) reads:

If the secretariat is satisfied that there is clearly non-compliance with a regional plan, the stewardship commissioner may refer the matter, with or without a report.

In other words, we would be taking out the "or without," so it would say that the stewardship commissioner may refer the matter, with a report or recommendations, to either or both of the following who have jurisdiction or authority with respect to the matter: (a) a Minister or government department, or (b) a local government body.

The point of this is to require that reports would be provided for cases of noncompliance as compared to reports being optional. I think what this does, ultimately, is give an audit trail, a clear record of where there has been noncompliance. It's a fairly small amendment but, I think, one that would be helpful overall in the bill, and I urge my colleagues to accept this amendment. I think it increases the accountability of the process.

Thanks very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A8.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We're awfully reliant in this province on self-reporting. If someone hadn't basically externally blown the whistle on 1,500 dead ducks or hadn't blown the whistle on human waste being released from one of the sites in the oil sands, chances are we wouldn't have found out about them.

Now, there aren't sufficient personnel in either Sustainable Resource Development or in Environment to do the tracking, so what this says is that when there is a case of noncompliance and it has been pointed out, the government is required to follow up on the circumstance. The government has the capabilities to prioritize the reporting, but there's an expectation in this particular amendment, A8, I believe, that the government act upon all reports. If the government doesn't feel it's important to act, then what's the point of the government?

The Chair: Are any other hon. members wishing to speak on amendment A8?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

10:50

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have another amendment, which I'll provide.

The Chair: This amendment is now known as A9.

Hon. leader of the third party, please proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act, be amended as follows: section 4(1) is amended by striking out “may make or amend regional plans for planning regions” and substituting “must make a regional plan for each planning region, and may subsequently amend any regional plan.”

Mr. Chairman, the intent here is similar to the previous amendment that I raised. The introductory clause, entitled How Regional Plans are Made and Amended, says that “the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make or amend regional plans for planning regions.” Again, we want to hold the government’s feet to the fire with respect to its commitment to establishing regional plans, so we are simply saying that it must make a regional plan, and it may subsequently amend any regional plan. A very simple change, a significant one, and I urge members to support it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A9.

Mr. Chase: Yes. I think it must have something to do with the fact that we’re amending an environmental bill, but I’m going to refer to A9 as the daisy-petal-picking amendment. What the hon. member of the third party is requiring of the government is commitment. As opposed to I may or I may not, he is saying: I must. It’s that type of commitment that our relationships are. Whether they’re our relationships with our significant others or our relationship with our constituents, there is an expectation, a requirement, a commitment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on amendment A9?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m rising to put an amendment from my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo on Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act, in section 18(3)(b) by adding “who is non-compliant,” after “person;”. I’ll wait till they pass it out.

The Chair: Right. We’ll pause for the pages to distribute the amendment. This amendment is now known as A10.

Mr. Kang: This amendment focuses on the power of the court around the conduct of a person. The very broad granting of power in Bill 36 is also evident in relation to compliance and enforcement matters. While it is most common to create offences and penalties in either statutes or regulations, the bill enables cabinet to create offences and establish penalties through regional plans. This distances the penal aspect of the land-use planning system further from this apparent legislation, Bill 36, and makes it more difficult for those who may be subject to land-use plans to determine the legal requirements they must meet to avoid a penalty. Further, the Court of Queen’s Bench is empowered to issue orders dealing with noncompliance with Bill 36, a regulation, or a regional land-use plan.

Under section 18(3) the court’s powers include the ability to make any order to manage the conduct of a person without further limitations. These compliance powers should be enforced in areas of noncompliance and need not be overly broad. The court’s powers in issuing orders to deal with noncompliance should be modified to limit it to addressing conduct causing noncompliance.

I think for those reasons I urge all members to support the amendment to section 18(3)(b). Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A10.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What A10 provides is the rules under which noncompliance would be determined. It spells them out clearly so that a person realizes under what circumstance they’re not being compliant. It takes the mystery out of it, it puts the regulations in rules, and it also requires enforcement. Just simply stating, “you’re noncompliant and, therefore, we’re taking your land or we’re redirecting the usage of that land,” without having the rules is not acceptable. So what, as I say, amendment A10 attempts to do is clearly define the rules of noncompliance and clearly define what the enforcement measures for noncompliance will be. It creates a level playing field, and it creates the rules by which the game will be played on that field.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development on A10.

Dr. Morton: Yes, Mr. Chair. I have trouble saying this, but I actually think this amendment might make sense.

Mr. Mason: It’s just late, Ted.

Dr. Morton: Yeah. Yeah.

All the other subsections to 18(3) – (a), (c), (d), and (e) – talk about noncompliance. This one is open-ended. I think, actually, this would be an improvement, so I encourage people to accept this one.

The Chair: Seeing no other to speak on amendment A10, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A10 carried]

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

11:00

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I have another – no, Mr. Chairman. I’m not going to make that amendment at the moment.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on Bill 36? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill.

[The clauses of Bill 36 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 34 Drug Program Act

The Chair: Are there any comments or amendments to be offered with this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Unfortunately, Bill 34 with regard to drug programming has limitations. I do appreciate the fact that the

government has, for example, increased funding to recognize I believe it's Avastin for fighting cancer. That's a very important recognition. However, this particular Bill 34 doesn't go far enough in terms of approval of recommended treatments that other provinces have noted, and it doesn't sort of reach out in terms of bringing in at least the other provinces – B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba – and making it a more inclusive program and, therefore, a less expensive program, which would benefit Albertans because of its inclusive nature. Bill 34 just basically does not go far enough in terms of the approval.

Also, within Bill 34 we see sort of vestiges of the concerns with regard to seniors and funding for Blue Cross aspects. Yes, we're pleased that, for example, 60 per cent of Albertans are going to pay nothing or next to nothing, but unfortunately that tab is now being forced on the remaining 40 per cent. Those seniors who have contributed to such an extent all of their lives, contributed both in the aspects of their work and also in their contributions to the economy, are not recognized within Bill 34.

What has happened is that the government has basically done away with health care premiums, which all of us were required to pay, and I'm very grateful that those health premiums have been done away with. There has been some discussion that had we had that extra billion dollars from those fees, we might not be facing the imposed cuts. However, I do believe that health care is a universal benefit. By keeping people healthy, whether it be through proposals like Bill 34 in terms of drug programs or recognizing the preventative, proactive care, keeping seniors in their homes longer, a whole variety of support systems, we'll end up with an improved health care delivery.

There is no doubt that the most expensive increase in health care delivery is in drugs. The sooner we as a province collaborate and co-ordinate our drug purchases and push for a national pharmacare program, the better off we'll be. Unfortunately, Bill 34 doesn't take us sufficiently far in that direction, and therefore we are unable to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the bill? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to say a few words with respect to this. The bill establishes a drug program, but it doesn't specify the contents of it, so it gives enormous latitude to the minister, almost a blank slate, to develop something as he wishes.

Now, I know that the government is concerned about the growth of health care costs. Health care costs grow in significant part because of the rapid increase in the costs of new drugs. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, some of the biggest companies, with the greatest cash flows and some of the highest profits in the world, convinced the Mulroney government about 15 years ago to extend patent protection for drugs. This was strongly opposed by the generic drug industry, which is largely a Canadian-based industry. But the large and international pharmaceutical companies prevailed on the government to essentially increase patent protection for new drugs from 10 to 20 years.

Now, the effect of that was essentially to provide a monopoly on new drugs for the company, the pharmaceutical corporation, that developed them in the first place for more or less the full marketable life of that drug. By the time 20 years are up, there are usually new drugs on the market, and the drug becomes obsolete. That essentially means that there's no effective competition from some of the smaller Canadian-based generic drug companies. So generics have

declined in significance as a result of that. Giving monopolies to the international pharmaceutical companies, of course, has an impact on prices, has an impact on the costs, therefore, to the health care system. Now, that's a federal issue, but I think it was a very, very negative development. Of course, the pharmaceutical corporations promised to do more research and development in Canada, but I think that that promise has largely been unmet.

Now, we buy a great deal of drugs in our health care system. As I said earlier, it's one of the major cost items that we have. We took a look at this a few years ago, and we took a look at different systems that are used, for example the formulary in British Columbia, and so on. But one of the most interesting examples of a drug administration in the western world was in New Zealand. Now, New Zealand is a small country, but it has a population of about 3 million. It's about the size of Alberta in that sense. They were able to make very substantial changes to their costs by introducing a system where all of the drugs for the entire health care system were purchased in bulk, and they used the negotiating power that they had as a bulk buyer to negotiate lower prices with the big drug companies. Of course, they do use generic drugs wherever possible, as well.

11:10

We thought that that was an interesting approach and one that might be useful here in Alberta. The research that we did indicated that in the first year this type of system in Alberta could save the health care system \$110 million. Those numbers are a few years old now, but we thought that the research was very solid on that. So the question we had was: if you have a choice between reducing your health care expenditures by cutting services to people or charging them more or paying less to big companies that supply you with drugs or some other input for your health care system, which would you choose? We certainly chose and would choose and would urge the government to choose paying less to the big pharmaceutical corporations for our drugs.

In fact, we did a little bit more research in terms of solving the problem that the government is tackling here of the seniors' drug program. The problem had been for some time that prescriptions for seniors were capped at \$25 per prescription. Of course, lots and lots of seniors have multiple prescriptions, and as we talked more and more to seniors, we found that it was quite common for seniors to have eight or 10 or a dozen or even more prescriptions, each one capped at \$25 a month. But eight prescriptions at \$25 per month is still \$200 a month.

If you took the saving that you could find and applied it to seniors' drugs, you could in fact reduce the copayment that seniors pay to \$25 a month for all the prescriptions that they had, not cumulative but just \$25 a month, if they had one or a dozen prescriptions. You could do that using the savings from the bulk purchasing program, and you'd be able to improve the seniors' drug program substantially with absolutely no increase to the taxpayer, simply from the savings that you'd achieved by purchasing your drugs.

Now, I know that the minister is struggling to find some other way to do that. He doesn't want to do it our way, and I guess that's not a big shock to us. Nevertheless, we think that this approach is one of the innovative ways of finding savings in the health care system. I don't think people pay their taxes in order to pay premium prices on drugs.

I think one of the problems that we have with this is not only that there's a group of seniors who now will pay premiums which are geared to income. We continue to believe that a universal system is preferable to an income-tested system. In our view, there is already a very complex bureaucracy established for testing income, and that

is, in fact, the income tax system. Of course, in Alberta that's a little different because we have the flat tax. Nevertheless, income-tested programs add bureaucracy and don't add a great deal of equity, in our view. So I want to just indicate that we object to the proposal that this be income tested, and we particularly object to making the drug program optional because we feel that some seniors who feel they cannot afford the premiums will opt out, and I think that that will produce very unfortunate results.

I think there are some positive things. I think the establishment of a single government-sponsored drug plan with a common drug list is a good thing. Currently there are five ministries that provide that coverage, and I think that that consolidation is probably a good one.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that we're not going to support this bill because we believe it leaves too much power with the minister to determine the program and because of the things that we are aware of about the proposed seniors' drug program not being as equitable or, in our view, as efficient as it should be. The focus, as we say, needs to be first and foremost on cutting costs and negotiating favourable prices with pharmaceutical suppliers and to do that on a comprehensive, system-wide basis. That's the approach that we think fits the bill, and this bill doesn't.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman. Thanks very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on Bill 34.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking specifically to Bill 34, the Drug Program Act, I'll be succinct. Society is judged by how it protects its most vulnerable. Seniors, when they're in a hospital circumstance, are frequently referred to in a derogatory fashion as bed blockers. Why would we not want to keep seniors in their homes as long as they possibly could ensure their quality of life? Seniors shouldn't be forced to choose between the cost of a drug or the cost of groceries or the cost of maintaining their homes. There should be support for seniors within their homes. Part of that support is what the government took away in 1994, and that was the educational portion of the property tax that was supposed to be eliminated for seniors once the good times came in, and we've had 14 years of good times leading up to this recessionary period.

The most expensive part of our life, unfortunately, is the end and treating people with dignity and being proactive. The costs of subsidizing all seniors' drugs is considerably less than the cost of daily treatment in hospitals at a cost of approximately \$1,800 a day or the palliative care that is only available to seniors who have the extra means to afford that kind of care. We need to allow seniors to not only live with dignity but in their final days to die with dignity, and part of that process – and it becomes increasingly so – is drug support.

My concern is that Bill 34, while it does create a province-wide drug program, which has the potential for saving, puts too much of that expense onto seniors themselves, and it's for that reason that I'm unable to support it.

11:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on Bill 34.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also want to speak on Bill 34, the Drug Program Act. I also have concerns with the bill. For seniors the fact is that their income is based on line 150 from the income tax form and the total income instead of line 236, which is net income. For seniors who do not make enough money to pay income taxes, this is not applicable, but income thresholds need to be higher. The fact is that in effect this is an increased tax on seniors and is against the provincial 10 per cent flat tax, and it is primarily sick seniors who will end up paying more.

The fact that what seniors will have to pay will be based on income, they believe, goes against the principle of universality, and seniors believe that it is an invasion of their privacy that they will in fact be revealing their income, whatever they make. Mostly seniors plan their retirements around what they believed would be stable pharmaceutical costs, and with the economic downturn many seniors had major losses on their retirement funds. This plan will mainly affect middle-income seniors while having little effect on low- or high-income seniors.

Changing the Alberta Blue Cross nongroup coverage. There are currently more than 145,000 Albertans who are enrolled in nongroup coverage with Blue Cross, and the premiums for the nongroup Blue Cross have not been adjusted since 1993. Coverage is available to any Albertan and also to the individuals with pre-existing conditions.

Currently the nongroup premiums are \$20.50 for singles and \$41 for families. Proposed changes in the pharmaceutical strategy would be to increase the premiums for singles to \$41 and \$82 for families by July 1, 2009. There will be another increase for singles to \$63.50 per month and for families to \$118 by July 10, 2010. This is a 200 per cent increase from the what premiums currently are. The government has said that a subsidized premium rate will be available and that rates would be released in the coming weeks, in December most likely, yet this information has not been released.

The main reason that the government gave in the pharmaceutical strategy for increasing premiums for nongroup coverage was to achieve alignment with employer and private health insurance premiums, but this is not going to help the people who are vulnerable. They probably will be pushed to the sidelines. Maybe they will end up paying more with bad health, and it will be costing Alberta health care more if the people are not taking their medications if they cannot afford to buy them.

There are other reasons for concern here. Why is the government trying to align government-provided programs with the private insurance companies? The government is not supposed to be looking out for the best interests of the insurance companies; they are supposed to be looking out for the best interests of Albertans. How much money is Blue Cross losing before the premiums will be increased? How much money does Blue Cross stand to make with an increase in premiums?

The government estimates revenues from the supplementary health benefit premium to increase from \$25 million to \$34 million, an \$8 million increase. This is hitting seniors in their pockets. I think seniors shouldn't be paying anything because they paid their dues all their life that they worked. I think we're penalizing the seniors who have saved up some money for their golden years. I don't think it is right to even have any means test put in place for seniors.

An Hon. Member: Who's going to pay for it? Me.

Mr. Kang: Well, somebody's going to pay for you when you're old, so I think we have to show a moral responsibility to look after, you know, the seniors, the vulnerable, the poor.

The Chair: Hon. member, we have a chair here, so please address the chair.

Mr. Kang: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I apologize for that. I think I got thrown off track here. I got interrupted.

Under the old plan 60 per cent of seniors paid less or nothing for drugs, the same as the one announced on April 23, 2009. Single seniors who make between \$12,000 and \$24,000 will pay more on this plan as opposed to the old one. This is still burdensome to

seniors in Alberta. They shouldn't have to pay for the fiscal mismanagement of this government. The middle-income seniors did not see any relief from this change in plan; only a small minority of low-income seniors will benefit.

By being able to opt out of this program, the government is allowing a greater share of the market to be opened to private insurance. I think the government is encouraging the private insurance to come in and fill the void. If they make the government-sponsored drug plan program bad enough, they make it more expensive, it makes private health insurance look good. I think people will fall into that trap, and they will be buying private insurance. Before too long they won't be able to afford it, and I think that they will lose all the benefits they have.

By changing the plan from a deductible system to a premium and copayment system, the government is making it more difficult for seniors to analyze whether they will be any better off with this new system. I think it's causing more confusion among seniors.

For those reasons I don't think I can support this bill, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak on Bill 34? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 34.

[The clauses of Bill 34 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 35

Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on Bill 35.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be brief, given the hour. I thought I would provide a historical vignette in the form of a brief bedtime story. NOVA, prior to its being called NOVA pipelines, was Alberta Gas Trunk Line. I had the opportunity in 1967 to work for Alberta Gas Trunk Line out of Rocky Mountain House, got a chance to see some wonderful central Alberta area because we covered an awful lot of territory and had some interesting adventures painting the posts, marking the pipelines orange and white. It's always a good idea before you paint the inside of a corral's fence posts to check what's in the corral. That's a good safety move.

11:30

In 1968, again working for Alberta Gas Trunk Line, I moved south to Fort Macleod, and we again covered a significant portion of southern Alberta. Just for the record, Alberta Gas Trunk Line was a wonderful Alberta company. It didn't lose any of its brilliance when it became NOVA. While I'm somewhat sad to see the regulation be federal, it does make sense that it be incorporated as part of the existing TransCanada PipeLines.

Therefore, after that brief but hopefully entertaining historical vignette, I'll take my seat.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak? The hon. Minister of Energy on Bill 35.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make a couple of very brief comments relative to this piece of

legislation. Of course, I think that it's fair for me to put on the record that, in fact, the legislation became necessary because of an application that was made by TransCanada to move their jurisdiction from the Alberta Utilities Commission to the National Energy Board. The National Energy Board, of course, is the proper constitutional jurisdiction when any of these types of utilities would move product or services across borders, either interprovincially or internationally.

With the advent of a lot of activity in northeastern British Columbia and the possibility of product from that part of western Canada to come into Alberta in order to use the services of the Alberta hub and the systems that we have in place here to process natural gas and the tremendous connections that Alberta has to the North American gas markets, I think it is a piece of business that TransCanada is looking at that will, at the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, certainly benefit Albertans a great deal. TransCanada, of course, has been a very responsible investor in the province of Alberta for many, many years. We believe that their continued support relative to gathering and moving natural gas around the province of Alberta, now in and out of the province of Alberta and certainly into the North American market, is something that we should look forward to and certainly support.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Seeing no other speakers, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 35.

[The clauses of Bill 35 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 41

Protection for Persons in Care Act

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This act has been worked on, and I'm very pleased to support it. There are a couple of amendments I'm going to bring forward because there are a couple of areas that I think I would like tweaked on it. This bill completely repeals the former Protection for Persons in Care Act. It provides greater detail to the process that happens when a report of abuse is filed as it goes from the complaints officer to the investigator to the director and the director's decision. The maximum amount for fines levied on individuals and service providers is greatly increased from the former act. The only concerns with this bill, as I have mentioned already, are in regard to the regulatory power and to the access, use, and disclosure of personal health information by complaints officers, investigators, and the director.

This is a very important bill. It has been a long time coming. The Protection for Persons in Care Act, the one that it's repealing, certainly was old. Many of the horrific tales that I heard as a member of the MLA task force in 2005 have triggered part of the thinking behind this bill and why it's important that we work with it.

I also believe that this bill goes hand in hand with a voluntary procedure which is called, of course, the personal directive, which

I personally believe is one of the most important documents that people can sign. I also believe they should be signed at the age of 18. A quick example I would use is that many young people are hurt in car accidents, and because there is no signature on who would look after them, it then falls onto the parents, but in fact it isn't really a legal obligation because these directives haven't been signed. Often, unfortunately, the decision may well have to be made to take someone off life support. If that person's wishes have been made in that personal directive, then that's where this would fall in. So I really believe that that voluntary process falls in line with this Protection for Persons in Care Act because under this that personal directive is recognized and actually is protected.

There has been a lot of criticism about this bill, and it's based on some very real, horrific episodes from the past. I think that some of the people feel that this bill isn't strong enough and that, in fact, when people are declared incompetent, they will lose everything and there isn't anything to protect them. Again, as I've said, the personal directive would cut in, and they could be protected.

But I think that as with all new acts they need time to be evaluated. They need time to be worked through, and there is an evaluation process included in this bill. It is a good bill. As I said, I would like to tweak it for the couple of concerns that I had already mentioned, so if I could have my amendment passed out, please, I could address it in a moment.

The Chair: The amendment shall now be known as A1.

Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, please proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. I would like to move that Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act, be amended as follows: in section 1(1)(m) by striking out "or" at the end of subclause (vi), by adding "or" at the end of subclause (v), and by striking out subclause (vii). The second part of that would be in section 26 by striking out clause (a), and I will get to that one.

The section states with regard to the definition of a service provider: "Any person designated by the regulations as a service provider." This section needs to be taken out because the definition of who this act applies to, I believe, should be written into legislation and not left up to regulations.

11:40

The government's rationale for having this provision is that continuing care is changing rapidly, and therefore they need to be flexible to change the definition of service provider to keep pace with the changes. However, my stance would be that any changes that happen to the way that continuing care is provided should be done in a measured way so that legislation is allowed to keep pace with the changes to the service that seniors receive. By putting it into the regulation, I think it still provides a focus that these changes can be made around. They can all be made under that legislation. It doesn't have to be left up to regulations that can actually be changed, of course, as we all know, by order in council.

I think that with the umbrella that is over what we know as continuing care, that covers long-term care, designated assisted living, enhanced lodges, et cetera, et cetera, we need something that people can hang their hats on, that is absolutely steady. With regulations they change too much.

For that reason, I would ask support for this amendment A1.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to amendment A1. Our hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, our shadow minister for seniors, has

noted that Bill 41 is kind of 92 per cent of the way there. What clause (a) is trying to do is add 4 per cent, and clause (b) will add another 4 per cent and bring the score for this particular bill up to 100 per cent, providing that the House is supportive of the amendment. What it tries to do is what we have frequently argued in this House, and that's to put the information into legislation so that the rules and the application of those rules are clear-cut so that everyone knows what they are. The alternative, putting them into regulation, hides them.

In the interest of transparency and accountability, which is always our main interest in keeping things in legislation as opposed to moving them into regulation, I would urge my fellow colleagues, Members of the Legislative Assembly, to finish their support for seniors that they've begun in Bill 41 and support amendment A1.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I simply want to put on record why we're not able to support the amendments recommended by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I recognize that she has some knowledge and expertise in this area. But, very briefly, if we were to follow her first amendment with respect to deleting section 1(1)(m)(vii), which reads that service provider means "any person designated by the regulations as a service provider," we would substantially alter the definition, obviously, of who a service provider can be. I don't think we want to do that because a lot of thought has been put into that definition already.

With respect to the request to amend section 26 by striking out clause (a), I appreciate what the opposition members are saying, Mr. Chair. They don't want the Lieutenant Governor in Council being given the ability to make regulations that would designate a person or a class of persons as service providers, but that, too, is fundamental to the operation of government. I don't think we've had any problems with that in the past, and I don't foresee any problems in the future, quite frankly, with it. The regulations are there. They're very public.

Therefore, unfortunately, I would ask members to not support these amendments.

The Chair: Seeing no other speakers, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on Bill 41.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be very brief with the next amendment that I would like to bring forward, so if I could ask you to have it passed out.

The Chair: This amendment is now known as A2.

Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, please continue.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to move that Bill 41, Protection for Persons in Care Act, be amended as follows: in section 1(3) by striking out "or" at the end of clause (d) and by adding "or" at the end of clause (c) and by striking out clause (e); in section 26 by striking out clause (b). The thinking behind this amendment is that section 1(3) sets out the circumstances when an act or omission does not constitute abuse, and 1(3)(e) states that an act or omission "in the circumstances prescribed in the regulations" would not constitute abuse. My argument for this is that a definition which is so fundamental to the operation of this legislation should

not be left to regulation. The determination of what does or does not constitute abuse should be written into the legislation, where there is some ability for oversight by the public. If the government is envisioning circumstances that would not constitute abuse arising in the future, they should anticipate that fact now and put it into legislation or amend the act in the future when the circumstances do arise.

I think it's very important that we all understand clearly what constitutes abuse. The many horrific stories, sad stories that we heard when we served on the MLA task force could be as basic as the fact that someone isn't being fed. It can be because, as we've heard from the third party with some of the letters that they have tabled, there simply isn't enough staff to toilet people properly, to get them out of bed properly, to in fact insist that they are fed.

My contention, based on my experience, is that abuse can be as a result of not having enough staff. You can't just keep pushing your staff as far as you can, because the mantra that's out there right now is that there's time to do the work, but there's no time to care. That is what bills like this are so important for. There must be the time that people are cared for but with respect and with dignity, and unfortunately those two things do require time.

11:50

I think that abuse should be clearly defined on how we would get around, as I've said, abuse being as a result of not having enough staff. That kind of abuse doesn't necessarily have to be verbalized in the legislation, but certainly I think that it has to be recognized that if someone isn't toileted, if they're not being fed, if injuries that they have are not being reported in a timely manner, that is clear abuse. I think that it would be very easy to put it into legislation.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will ask for support for this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A2.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to amendment A2, what the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East is attempting to accomplish, as I say, is completing the circle on the intent of Bill 41. In 2005 the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East along with the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills and the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka were part of a fact-finding mission that toured the province because of concerns raised with regard to long-term care by Auditor General Fred Dunn. He found that in just a third of the areas that he was able to surveil, there were a number of problems, from individuals who were not professionally trained passing out medications, the lack of patient-to-caregiver ratios, the lack of upholding of professional standards. It was for that reason that the task force toured the province and heard horrendous stories. As the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East pointed out, the abuse in many cases was not intentional. It was out of neglect. Again, the neglect was not intentional. It was due to the fact that there was not sufficient staffing available to provide the care necessary.

Now, as of a year ago January I lost my mother. For the most part she had a very good experience in Cedars Villa in Calgary, very close to the Spruce Cliff area. But even though she was treated for the most part well, if my dad hadn't come in every single night to help get her ready for bed, she would have been up that much longer because there were not sufficient people to get her ready. Because in the latter stages of her life she required a lift and a sling in order to lift her from her wheelchair into her bed, if my father hadn't come in and assisted with that care, again, she would've been very late not only getting up in the morning, potentially, but at night.

My father tried to make it easier for the caregivers, and myself and my wife and my daughter, my sister, and my brother all tried our very best to come in and support not only our mother but the staff in

terms of the care for our mother. We would do such small things as setting aside outfits that were of a co-ordinated fashion so that my mother, who had been throughout her life a very meticulous dresser, could continue to have the dignity of having co-ordinated outfits. When, due to failing health, those garments were soiled, we made sure that there were accommodations. In other words, skirts now became more of an apron with little ties in the back.

We did everything in our power to support the system, but that isn't the case for a number of seniors who don't have advocates, who have lost their spouse or have either had no children or do not have children living in the area. They're left to the best intentions of care within the long-term care service providers. What amendment A2 attempts to achieve is to add to that guarantee of dignity, add to that guarantee of respect, add to that guarantee of care. It indicates that it recognizes the shortages as opposed to the shortcomings, and it attempts to address them.

It is my hope that my colleagues in this House will see fit to support amendment A2 and, in so doing, recognize the vulnerability of seniors and the needs for their extra support. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on amendment A2.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've studied the amendments proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East, and I've listened to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Varsity very carefully. I want to just say quickly and briefly that I used to be responsible for the protection of persons in care in a previous ministry, and in that respect I'd just like to make it known that I and everyone that I've met in this Assembly over the years I've been here all care very deeply about people who are in care. However, you simply cannot write into legislation every single thing that needs to be done or every word that has to be incorporated, nor can you write into legislation every definition that you would like. It's just too complicated to try and do.

In many cases some things are actually better dealt with or more appropriately dealt with in regulation, and that includes this case in point. You need flexibility to deal with changing circumstances, and you have to be able to do it oftentimes very quickly, efficiently, expeditiously, and in a manner that, of course, is dignified and in honour of the people being served. That's why it's important to retain the sections in this amendment and not strike them out. I appreciate the spirit with which they were given, but the practical experience that I've had with it and other members here might have had with it would suggest that, unfortunately, we're not able to support this amendment, and we should in fact leave it in.

The Chair: Seeing no other member wishing to speak on amendment A2, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make just a few general comments with respect to this bill and want to indicate that in general this is a positive development, a positive change. It's essentially the old act of the same name, but it creates an expanded legislation regarding reporting of abuses involving clients who are in care. I want to just indicate that section 10, which lists the duties of a service provider, has expanded significantly on what is currently in the legislation. It lays out steps the providers must take in order to protect their clients from any sort of abuse as well as to make it necessary to provide clients with information on what to do when

such cases occur. It also clarifies that a service provider will take all steps necessary for client safety. Generally, I think, the act – and I won't get into the details; I have a number of things here in my notes to talk about, but given the hour, I'm going to go over it.

12:00

There are a couple of concerns, and here's one of them. The change in this act, or the previous act, says that

“abuse” means an act or an omission with respect to a client receiving care or support services from a service provider that

- (f) results in failing to provide adequate nutrition, adequate medical attention or another necessity of life without a valid consent, resulting in serious bodily harm.

They've added “resulting in serious bodily harm.” So, then, the question is: does somebody have to be badly injured in order for it to be abuse? I think this is a concern, and I would hate to think that you couldn't deal with this or intervene in some way until somebody is badly hurt.

Mr. Chairman, we've tabled around 250 working-short forms from unionized employees working in long-term care facilities in Alberta during this session alone. The problem, of course, is levels of staffing. In our view, in our experience the vast majority of people working in these facilities are caring people who sincerely try to do the very best for the people under their care, and they're so severely short-staffed that they can't adequately bathe people, change people, toilet people, much less make sure that they get all of the companionship and emotional support and so on that they might require. That is the basic problem that we're dealing with.

This act deals with a different kind of abuse, active abuse, and that certainly is far too prevalent, more prevalent, I think, than we believe. As such, it's a positive step, but I would just ask the minister who is responsible tonight about the whole question of including the clause “resulting in serious bodily harm” and whether or not the government would be prepared to consider amending that or taking a serious look at that. I think that it moves a lot of abuse out of the purview of the act. At least, that's my interpretation, which may not be correct, but I'd like to hear otherwise.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chair, I'd be pleased to forward that on to the minister who is now responsible, but I wouldn't want it to preclude our concluding the debate in committee on the bill right now. There are always ways to look at things later and address them, and I'll undertake to make sure that the point raised by the hon. member of the third party does get addressed.

The Chair: Seeing no other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 41 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's been an excellent evening of debate, and on that note, I would move that the

committee now rise and report Bill 29, Family Law Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 30, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 34, Drug Program Act; Bill 35, Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; and Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No.2); and that we also report progress on Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. I hope I got them all.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 29, Bill 30, Bill 43, Bill 34, Bill 35, Bill 41. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 36. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 32. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Those in agreement with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Mason: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order.

Point of Order
Reporting Bills from Committee

Mr. Mason: I don't believe the motion from the Deputy Government House Leader included Bill 41, so it couldn't now be reported.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe it is on the list.

Mr. Mason: It's on his list.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, we heard the report.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Mr. Speaker, just to clarify the point, according to my very thorough and complete notes I did mention Bill 41.

The Deputy Speaker: All right.

I'll put the question again. Those in agreement with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, please say no. The report is concurred with.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:08 a.m. on Thursday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, May 28, 2009

Issue 45a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 28, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we the members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly on behalf of the hon. Member for Little Bow a group of students and teachers from Calvin Christian school. The Member for Little Bow always talks about how proud he is of the students and how encouraged he is that these are the future leaders of the province. Accompanying the 22 students from Coalhurst are Rose Slingerland, Marvin and Erica van den Hoek, Lourens and Peggy Van Essen, and Tony and Christine Vandenberg. I would ask that the students, the teachers, and the parents from Calvin Christian school rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again it is my pleasure to rise to recognize the third group from E.G. Wahlstrom middle school who are visiting the Legislature this week. Unfortunately, again they are not here, but we won't have an opportunity to be able to introduce them again because they'll be leaving early, and I thought it was really important for us to be able to recognize them. They are accompanied by their teacher, Christina Nuxoll, and they are also joined by parent helpers who are making sure that they get home safe. I would ask that this Assembly extend a very warm welcome to them as they visit the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 24 students, teachers, and parents from Thorhild central school. The grade 6 kids are here for the tour and to take in some of the day's festivities. I'd like to welcome Mr. Mike Popowicz, Sharon Lakusta, and Gerald Gargus and their 21 students. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce three very special young ladies in my life. The first is my wife, Liz – 34 years we'll be married next month – and my beautiful daughter-in-law Crystal and our newest granddaughter, a very special young lady, Alyssa. I ask the three of them to stand up and receive the warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. member is aware of the size of the diamond that's required for a 34th anniversary, is he not?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two ladies who are very, very important to me, one who has been important to me for several years now and one who is about to become very important to me on the 6th of June. I'd like to introduce first of all Ms Anita Zacharias, my constituency manager. Anita and I are no strangers to each other, having worked together in what is, I think, now our third endeavour, starting in Fort McMurray on the Horizon oil sands site several years ago.

With her today I am pleased to introduce to you my new constituency summer student, Miss Natasha Soles. Natasha has a particularly enviable resume. Virtually, it's better than mine; however, I'll highlight it for you and say that she is a member of the TUXIS youth parliament and has also served on the AUMA conference as a youth delegate. Her work experience includes a considerable amount of time with Amberlea Meadows Equestrian Centre. I look forward to a very, very productive summer. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you one of my constituents from Edmonton-Ellerslie, Sandra Badejo, and her mother, who is visiting us from Nigeria, Ewemade Igbinovia. Sandra had a baby last fall, Josh Badejo. Her mother came to Alberta to attend her grandson's baby dedication on November 23, 2008, at Mill Woods Pentecostal Assembly, a dedication which I was happily a part of. The day she arrived, she left 40 degree Celsius temperature in Nigeria and came to minus 30 weather in Alberta. I sincerely hope that Ms Igbinovia is enjoying her stay in Alberta and ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you five guests in the public gallery today. First, Sabreena Braich was my STEP student last year and is with me again for this summer and is here today to see question period. She is joined by her parents, Sunny and Balwinder Braich, and her cousins who are visiting from Seattle, Aseem and Navi Cheema. It has been great to have Sabreena helping out in my constituency office, and she has been a great help. I would like to ask Sabreena and her family to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the generosity of our Department of Employment and Immigration I have the privilege this summer of working with two STEP students. The first, Lauren Hutchison, is a STEP student in my constituency office in Calgary-West and is a second-year sociology student at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. The second STEP student works in our office here in Edmonton and jointly works with the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Billy Anderson is a second-year political science student at Carleton University in Ottawa and is also the son of the executive assistant to

the minister of government services. One of the jobs that Bill has in our office is that he opens the mail. He had an interesting experience yesterday. I would ask him and Lauren to stand up and be recognized in the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests to introduce today. It's my pleasure to introduce a constituent of mine, Steffi Stehwien, and a friend and colleague of hers, Donna Eaton, who are guests in the public gallery today. Steffi is the mother of Aaron Shoulders, who was murdered in 2003 and whose murder remains unsolved in Calgary. Donna Eaton is the mother of another murder victim, Brooke Clapson. Brook's killer was caught, convicted, and sent to prison in 2000 and granted escorted day passes in 2008. I'll be talking about this some more in my private member's statement later on this afternoon. For now I would ask my guests to rise, please, and accept the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a good friend of mine and his daughter from Vermilion. Dr. Lee Arthur is an instructor at Lakeland College. He's kind of the new face of agriculture. He's into elk ranching. It's a very, very multi-generational family history of agriculture in our area, very strong community people. His wife is a nurse at the Wainwright health facility. It very much reflects what goes on in rural Alberta. They're here today to take the message home that I do show up occasionally to work, and I would really like that Dr. Lee Arthur and his daughter Brigit stand and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

World No Tobacco Day

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about World No Tobacco Day. World No Tobacco Day is celebrated around the world every year on May 31. Although tobacco is a legal product, this annual celebration informs the public about the dangers of using tobacco and unites people around a common cause to work towards a tobacco-free world today and for future generations. This year's theme, Tobacco Health Warnings, will focus on health warnings on tobacco products that can motivate people to stop using tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services is hosting its annual World No Tobacco Day provincial celebration today. This conference offers an opportunity to hear from leading tobacco reduction specialists and also to celebrate the 2009 recipients of the Barb Tarbox award. Barb Tarbox, of course, was the antismoking crusader who spoke to more than 50,000 students about the dangers of smoking before she passed away from lung cancer caused by smoking in 2003.

The Alberta government maintains its commitment to reducing tobacco use in our province. With the Tobacco Reduction Act Alberta has had some of the strongest legislation controlling usage, display, and sale of tobacco products in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services continues to develop and review programs and services to reduce the usage of tobacco in

Alberta, help those who want to quit, and prevent young people from starting to smoke in the first place. The goal of achieving a tobacco-free Alberta is the responsibility of all of us individually. If you are a smoker, consider seeking help to quit. If you are a young person, don't start smoking in the first place and do all you can to discourage your friends from starting to smoke. All of these efforts will help us create a tobacco-free province and enjoy a healthier Alberta as a result.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Unsolved Murder Victims

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Martha and I are delighted to have our daughter, Jenn, back home for the summer after she spent this past school year studying in England, and I'm really looking forward to getting out to Victoria in a little over a week to spend a couple of days with our son, Scott, who decided that after three school years on the coast it was time for him to spend a summer there to fully appreciate living next to an ocean, big bodies of water being rather hard to find in his hometown of Calgary.

Our children are adults now and spend more of their lives under their own roofs than under ours, which is as it should be, but it doesn't change the fact that we miss them and look forward to the times we do have to spend together. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to imagine what it would be like not to be able to see them ever again, and I cannot imagine how much greater the pain of losing a child would be if that child had been murdered and, years later, the murder remained unsolved.

I understand that sometimes police cannot solve the case or that even when they're pretty sure they know who did it, they can't accumulate enough evidence to get a conviction. I understand that no unsolved murder case is ever closed but that they can go cold, that the file gets put away on a shelf pending the discovery of new evidence someday. The detectives move onto other cases they can solve, and, Mr. Speaker, the rest of the world moves on as well. But the case never does get cold and the pain never does go away for the unsolved murder victim's loved ones, and they need to know – we need to tell them – that we haven't forgotten them.

Mr. Speaker, we have the capacity under the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act and the resources within the victims of crime fund, and I propose that the province make a commitment to the families of the unsolved murder victims to make a modest annual payment to them from a memorial fund every year until their case is solved. It's not meant to be a compensatory payout for their loss but a symbolic gesture to remind people like Steffi Stehwien that we haven't forgotten about her murdered son, Aaron, anymore than she has, that we share her pain, and to remind us of our duty to support the police in their efforts to solve these difficult crimes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Lago Lindo Community League

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Lago Lindo Community League, a dynamic community league in the city of Edmonton and in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago, in 1984, Edmonton was a city of 560,000 when the Lago Lindo Community League was formed. The Premier of the day was the Hon. Peter Lougheed. Laurence Decore, for whom my constituency is named, was Edmonton's rookie mayor

at the time. The Edmonton Oilers had just won their first Stanley Cup. Three Premiers, four mayors, and almost five Stanley Cups later Lago Lindo Community League and its countless number of volunteers are dedicated to serving all of the people in north Edmonton, including the neighbourhoods of Lago Lindo, Klarvatten, Schonsee, Crystallina Nera, and Joviz.

Through the Lago Lindo Community League their hall remains an essential gathering point for the community and others at large. For example, you will find preschools serving many local families, safety courses for children learning how to ride a bicycle, Red Cross babysitting courses for youngsters looking to enhance their skills and to earn some extra dollars, and numerous recreational and sports programs and events for children and youth. What would a community league be without a hockey rink? Lago Lindo Community League boasts one of the area's best outdoor rinks, with new polymer boards and a separate flooded area for recreational skating.

Mr. Speaker, our local community leagues in our communities are foundational for the role that they play in building strong communities, fostering relationships, and improving the overall quality of life for all those around them.

Lago Lindo Community League will celebrate this milestone and momentous occasion on June 26 to 28. I wish to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all those involved in the continued development of the Lago Lindo Community League over the past 25 years and wish them continued success as they move forward into the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Milk and Liquid Cream Container Recycling

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is committed to reducing waste wherever we can. One way to do this is to increase the number of beverage containers we recycle. Approximately 2 billion beverage containers are sold annually in Alberta every year. Of these, about 500 million containers end up in landfills each year. The provincial recycling rates for milk containers are of particular concern. Currently only 60 per cent of milk jugs and 22.5 per cent of milk cartons are returned for recycling. These numbers are far too low. That is why this government decided to incorporate milk containers into the deposit-refund system, and we are grateful to the dairy industry for their co-operation.

As of Monday, June 1, Alberta will be the first jurisdiction in North America to implement a deposit-refund on milk containers. The purchase of all ready-to-serve milk product containers will be affected, including fluid milk, fluid creams, whipping creams, buttermilk, and drinkable yogourt. The deposit will be the same as the deposits on similar-sized containers already part of the deposit program: 10 cents for containers one litre and under and 25 cents for containers over one litre.

With no net cost to consumers a deposit-refund helps encourage people to take the extra step necessary to return their empties for a refund. We know that most Albertans are supportive of this move. During consultations Albertans said that they would recycle more milk containers if they were part of the deposit-refund system. Adding dairy beverage containers to the deposit system is just one more step in building a culture of conservation in Alberta. We're very proud here in Alberta to be showing environmental leadership in this area and many others as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

High School Completion

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to highlight a recent Alberta Education initiative to invest \$4.2 million to help keep students engaged, supported, and motivated to stay in school. Through the province's recently announced high school completion framework, school jurisdictions will receive funding to help them identify barriers to completing high school and then develop plans and address the issues. Currently Alberta's five-year high school completion rate sits at 79.5 per cent. The province has a goal of increasing that result to 82 per cent in the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, finishing high school is an important step for young people to create a positive future for themselves, their families, and then their communities. There is no magic formula that's going to make kids stay in school. It is a complex issue. The high school completion framework tackles this complexity by focusing their various programs and initiatives into five categories: personalized learning, successful transitions, collaborative partnerships, positive connections, and tracking progress.

Community collaboration is at the heart of the high school completion framework. We need to work together to ensure that our children complete high school with the skills and knowledge needed to fully participate in the community and workplace now and in the future. Supporting those efforts as well as ensuring that we have the tools and supports needed at the provincial level will all make a difference one student at a time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Parental Choice in Education

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This administration has rebranded Alberta as backwards and intolerant. We had the chance to wipe away the stereotypes through the inclusion of sexual orientation in human rights legislation, but this Tory caucus could not stomach giving rights to gays and lesbians without some sort of appeasement. This is a shameful way to treat human rights, a sad legacy to leave to our children from the Premier and the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. To the Premier: why is the Premier reinforcing the stereotype that Albertans are backwards and intolerant with the passing of this parental opt-out clause?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, to reiterate the statement I made in this House some time ago, for an opposition member to rise in this House and make accusations of that sort, looking at the diversity of our caucus from the many ethnic backgrounds and religious backgrounds and colour and creed that have come to run as members for the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta and actually win quite a sizable majority, that tells me that it truly reflects Albertans, Alberta's wishes, their policies as we advance them here in the House. Once again, I find it regrettable that a member would point to members of this caucus in such a derogatory fashion.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, stifling education through parental opt-out will hurt no one more than our children and reflects a lack of trust both in the system and in the parents and in the children themselves. Why has the Premier chosen political opportunism to appease caucus members over what is best for our children's education?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, in our caucus it's total input for all members. This is a decision that was reached by caucus. It's one that I firmly support. I along with all members of our caucus firmly believe in the basic rights of parents. I stand behind that decision, and I'm not going to waver from it. That's simply put. I can't say it as clearly as what I've just done now.

Dr. Swann: Well, there has never been any question about listening to the caucus. The question is: are you listening to Albertans? School boards, school associations, teachers, parents, religious and human rights groups, and students adamantly oppose this parental opt-out and have sent letters, contacted their MLAs, and have met with government officials, all to no avail. Why have you ignored our population, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, in a previous preamble he said that we were stifling education. That is totally wrong. Alberta is a province that offers the most choice in education, from public, separate education to charter schools to independent schools to home-schooling. In fact, in my visit to Munich we spent close to two hours with five senior cabinet members of government, and their number one question was: why is your education system so successful? How is it that your students are performing so well in comparison to many other jurisdictions around the world? I'm very proud of our education system and will also defend our education system anywhere, not only in this Assembly but anyplace around the world.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Government Aircraft

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a few drinks it is important not to drive home. This government obviously recognizes this because following the last three Progressive Conservative Association fundraising dinners for the Premier, this government's MLAs flew back to Calgary following each event on taxpayer-funded planes. To the Premier: please tell the House that it is not government policy to use taxpayer-funded planes to fly government MLAs home following Progressive Conservative fundraisers.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that is quite a serious accusation to make. I believe it would be very wise for that hon. member to withdraw that because I can tell you that we do have receipts of the costs of chartered aircraft to every Premier's dinner, whether it is in Edmonton or in Calgary or in Lethbridge or in Grande Prairie or in Fort McMurray and every second year in Medicine Hat. I don't know where the hon. member is coming from, but maybe a better choice of words would be better. We just went through an incident this week where you used very wise discretion as the Speaker of this Assembly, and I don't think those are appropriate accusations to make as we are working towards the end of, I think, a very successful session.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier please tell the Assembly who approved these taxpayer-funded flights?

The Speaker: Well, I think, hon. member, we just heard that there were no such things. We're going to have a point of order in here that is going to lead to some very difficult situations.

If the Premier wants to add something further, he can.

Mr. Stelmach: You know, I don't want to go down to the bottom of the barrel, but sooner or later – you know, in this Assembly in the last number of weeks we had serious accusations from the opposite benches. There are a number of them that I let go by, and some of them really hurt, especially when the leader of the third party referred to me as Stalin, something like: Stalinistic era brought by this government. Does he not know my background? Does he not know what that one individual did to millions of Ukrainians, how he starved them out? I let that go by. I'm not letting this thing go by. Either he apologizes or comes up with the proof. Enough is enough.

The Speaker: Okay. During that last interjection, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I saw you rise. You're rising on a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

The Speaker: Now, hon. Government House Leader, I also saw you rise prior to that. Do you want to rise on a point of order, too?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier table those receipts, please, that it was chartered?

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. member, one of the purviews of the question period is that political party activities are not a purview of question period. There's no requirement for the Premier to table things that happened that had nothing to do with the government of Alberta.

Third Official Opposition main question, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Victims Restitution and Compensation

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last fall this Assembly passed the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, which allowed for the seizure and sale of property obtained during the commission of a criminal offence and the distribution of these proceeds to victims of crime. Often the most profoundly affected, whose health, safety, and livelihood are compromised possibly forever, are the loved ones of unsolved murder victims. To the Premier: seeing that homicide investigations often do hit dead ends and may go unsolved for years, will you create a memorial fund under the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act to provide a modest symbolic annual payment to families who are suffering through this experience?

Mr. Stelmach: I'll take the suggestion under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you to the Premier, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier again. Awards from the victims of crime fund to families who have lost a loved one because of a homicide are only available as a one-time, lump-sum benefit. I would ask that he would consider changing this restriction to allow family members to access a modest portion of the fund's \$50 million surplus as an annual award.

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, I believe he's giving some suggestions to the minister who's responsible. I'll take it under advisement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the Premier.

This time to the Minister of Justice, if I may: can the minister provide – and if she doesn't have these numbers right at her fingertips, I would appreciate a written answer when she has the opportunity – the exact dollar value of all property seized to date under the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act and the total amount made available to Albertans so far who have been victimized by crime?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right; I don't have that information. But I will provide that to you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Alberta Treasury Branches

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Alberta Treasury Branches' annual report yesterday confirmed why Albertans don't trust this government to manage their money. The ATB lost nearly \$225 million but still paid out \$25 million in bonuses for people responsible for the failure. What's worse is that this government stood by and watched while these executives used loopholes in their own rules to put money in their own pockets. How can the Premier condone \$25 million in bonus payouts to ATB bankers when they lost nearly a quarter of a billion dollars?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the ATB operates at arm's length from government, and decisions about performance are the purview of the ATB board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this government is responsible as the owners of the Alberta Treasury Branches and the people that appoint the board. According to ATB rules, if you lose money, you don't get a bonus, so the ATB brass simply didn't count the losses on bad investments like the mortgage scam in the United States. This is a scandal. To the Premier: will you do the right thing and hold the ATB brass accountable and take away their undeserved \$25 million in bonuses?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, the Alberta Treasury Branches board is separate. It's arm's length from government. They made the decision. This is based on whatever understanding they had for the year previous is my information. They've indicated that into next year they will be reducing all of the bonuses to senior executives at ATB, but this is based on the previous year's agreement.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that bonuses are paid on a performance basis, and when the losses threatened to vaporize the bonus pay, the ATB brass moved the goalposts. This government is letting the bankers pay themselves four times more in bonus pay than the ATB made all last year. To the Premier: how can you justify allowing the brass to keep the \$25 million in bonuses when they only made \$6 million in profit?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, most Albertans look at the Treasury Branches as a very solid institution in the province of Alberta. It is for a very good reason kept at arm's length from government so that it can maintain its independence and provide services to Albertans. By the numbers of Albertans that are signing up for services the Treasury Branches are offering, it's obviously very successful. They have reduced their bonuses to the senior executives by 50 per cent and to the junior executives by 25 per cent. They are still offering a record number of services. They have record deposits, record lending. Except for the asset-backed paper issue that many, many banks around the world were involved in, they have done a very good job of providing services not only to rural but to urban Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy indicated in the House yesterday that he is looking at additions or upgrades to the electricity transmission system. I'm sure the minister knows that this is certainly an emotionally charged issue. My first question to the minister is: how can Albertans be assured that these upgrades are really needed?

Mr. Knight: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's fair to say that the electricity utility system in the province of Alberta, including the generating and transmission of bulk electricity, is an enabler of development in this province. Albertans can be assured that in order for us to continue to develop, this is a basic requirement of that development. We have an independent system operator. The AESO is responsible for the operation of the grid and determining future need. Already we see demand creeping toward 10,000 megawatts, of which we have a capacity to supply about 12,000. We're coming very close to a point in time where these upgrades are absolutely necessary to continue Alberta's development.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. We've had very few problems with the electricity system in Alberta to date. We certainly haven't had anything like the blackouts they've had in Toronto, for instance. So what's the rush? Why do we need to act so urgently?

Mr. Knight: Again, Mr. Speaker, the situation is quite plain, I think. There is a lot of lead time required in order to build these types of facilities. The system now is clogged to the point where it actually costs Albertans about \$250 million a year in lost power relative to congestion in the grid. It takes time to lead into this thing, so I think that the time to act is now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, again to the same minister. I'm sure he's aware that some people believe there is a plan to export power from Alberta to the United States. What is this all about? Please explain it to us.

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again – and I've answered this question a number of times – absolutely not. This has nothing to do with us as a province or the ratepayers in the province of Alberta being asked to or being involved in the export of electricity as a

commodity from Alberta. Certainly, there are opportunities in the future for the commodity to be exported. At that point in time, of course, people that are independent in the business, privately owned enterprises, will pay their own freight with respect to any export of power out of the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Parental Choice in Education

(continued)

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has attracted attention from our nation and from the world for all the wrong reasons. This government's \$25 million branding boondoggle will not erase the negative image this government's regressive position on human rights has created. Freedom to Fake, Right to Discriminate is Alberta's new tag line. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why are you enshrining the right to discriminate on the basis of religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation in our public school system?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as a black man who grew up through discrimination, why on earth would anybody right thinking believe that I would support discrimination? The Human Rights Commission: we have Bill 44 before us to help improve the administration of this worthwhile commission. We have put money towards it. We have put resources towards it. We have a leader in the hon. Blair Mason who is second to none. We will work on those things that will improve it and restore Alberta's confidence in the institution.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: I think you've been set up.

To the Minister of Education: other than your generic blogging, why have you remained silent on the erosion of our secular public school system by a faith-based minority?

An Hon. Member: He's not really black.

Mr. Blackett: You know, I guess I have been set up, sir. Mr. Speaker, my parents told me I was black, and I obviously . . . [laughter]

One thing that we know, Mr. Speaker, in the diverse caucus that we have – we have people of Ukrainian ancestry; we have East Indian ancestry, Chinese ancestry, Polish, German, the whole gamut. None of us are fooled into believing what we believe. We all come here with independent thought, and we should respect the fact that all Albertans, 3 and a half million people, have independent thought, and we should have the courage to be able to believe in what we believe in. It's a free and democratic society that we live in.

Mr. Chase: I certainly wish those wonderful statements were true, and unfortunately, Mr. Minister, I was attempting to ask a question to the Minister of Education. But great on you, leaping to your feet.

To the Minister of Education: why are you spending \$4 million on an Inspiring Education road show when Bill 44 clearly indicates how closed minded this government really is?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think we're spending \$4 million on a road show, so the first part of the question is wrong.

What we're doing is going around talking with Albertans, having a dialogue with Albertans about the future of our education system in this province so that the children and grandchildren of this province can have the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they will need to participate in a global community and a global economy. That is very, very important work. We have an excellent education system today where people come from all over the world to take a look at what we're doing now, but we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to build that education system for tomorrow.

The comments that he made about Bill 44 and the School Act, where parents have the opportunity to determine whether they agree with the teachings about religion and teachings about human sexuality or whether they wish to do it themselves: that parents have the right on those sensitive issues to determine whether they're in alignment with what's being taught or whether they'd like to engage as a family in doing those teachings does not besmirch the excellent education system we have today nor the need to prepare for tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Transmission Lines

(continued)

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Electricity is something most of us just take for granted. We expect those lights to come on when we flip the switch. We all know that transmission infrastructure, including major power lines, are a necessary part of providing electricity to our homes, but that has also led to much discussion in our province about the process used to determine where this infrastructure goes. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister explain what his department is doing to proceed with electricity transmission upgrades in the province?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can. The provincial energy strategy, of course, indicated that the government of Alberta would take responsibility for planning a comprehensive upgrade to the transmission system. We will bring forward legislation to do just that. This government will be responsible for planning this publicly needed infrastructure just as we are responsible for planning highways, hospitals, and schools. Again I say: the time to act is now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Albertans will have questions about this legislation, can he please explain why he is planning to bring it forward so late in the session?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, we know that Albertans are going to have questions with respect to the issues, and that's why we're planning to bring forward some issues here next week. We want to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to learn more about the issues over the summer. They can then have informed discussions, and there will be legislation that would be debated relative to the issues this fall.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Assuming that we're unable to bury our major transmission lines as they do in other parts of the world, we can expect landowners to be concerned about overhead transmission lines. Is the minister planning to change the process that allows landowners to bring their concerns forward?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear about this. Absolutely not. The system and the process that we use relative to where sitings occur and what will be built and the timing will not change. That is a process that's directed by the Alberta Utilities Commission. Input from landowners that are directly affected or directly affected Albertans is an essential part of the process. It's their mandate. It's legislated. That absolutely will not change.

The Speaker: It strikes me that that last exchange of questions and answers had to do with debate on a bill that has yet to be introduced. Perhaps it would be pertinent to have the bill introduced.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2004 this government imposed special provisions at the Horizon oil sands project. This special provision, called division 8, exempts the project from the Labour Relations Code's collective bargaining provisions. The Christian Labour Association of Canada represented the 132 Chinese workers who were cheated out of over \$3 million in wages at the same site. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. If a collective agreement was in place, why was no one enforcing it? Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the claims of nonpayment were found out while we were interviewing the Chinese workers in the wake of the deaths of the two workers in April of 2007. That's when we found out that the payments were not made. We're doing regular inspections, and as of that particular time we started our actions to assure ourselves that the payments were made to the workers. Most of that money owing is for overtime or the extra time that the individuals had made on the job site.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed that he didn't answer the question. I'll try another variation of it now. Again, why did the government impose this division 8 deal at the Horizon site, which allowed the 132 temporary foreign workers from China to be exploited and cheated out of not only their overtime but their vacation pay and their regular pay?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we did not allow anybody to be exploited and cheated. You know, our role is to assure that everybody who's working in Alberta gets their fair pay. The minute that we found out that those things were happening, we launched an investigation. As soon as there were some discussions that there was money missing, we did start trying to make sure that the individuals that are short of money will receive their due pay.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the collective agreement from the Christian Labour Association failed to protect these workers, given that employment standards failed to protect these workers, why did it

take so long for this government to finally find out that over \$3 million was owed to over 132 temporary foreign workers from China?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, this has been a very, very lengthy investigation. As I indicated, we found out following the investigations that were started in 2007. We identified the shortfalls. We are working on making sure that the individuals that were shortchanged their money are being identified. Since then we've introduced a number of measures to try and minimize that, including a strong advertising campaign to all of our workers in Alberta so that they know and understand their rights when it comes to the workplace.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Métis Settlements Funding

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta provides Métis settlements with funds to support their ongoing operations related to governance, accountability, and sustainability. This support is very important to the two Métis settlements that are located in my constituency: the Elizabeth settlement and the Fishing Lake settlement. In addition to this funding I also know that while the government of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council currently have an interim funding agreement in place, the settlements are eagerly awaiting a more secure long-term funding agreement. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: when will the long-term funding agreement with the Métis Settlements General Council be concluded?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, concluding a long-term funding agreement within four Métis settlements in Alberta is part of the Premier's mandate letter to me. It's based around three particular pillars, which include effective governance, enhanced accountability, and long-term sustainability. Initial work on the long-term agreement has already begun. We do have a process in place that includes a groundwork committee that has been set up to look at the exact issues that would put credence to those three pillars, and we hope to have this all completed by early 2012 at the latest. It could be sooner.

Mrs. Leskiw: My next question is also to the same minister. What type of performance measures are tied to the current interim funding agreement, and what type of performance measures do you expect will be part of the long-term funding agreement?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the performance measures that are part of the interim funding agreement are centred around the three pillars that I just mentioned. They include a vast array of accountability and performance measures such as policy reviews, criteria reviews, strategic plans, development plans, implementation plans, efficiency analyses, training plans for staff, conflict-of-interest policies, and so on. That's just to name a few. What the final document will look like could well be comprised of some of these or all of these or new performance measures as needed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. My final question is also to the same minister. Given that our Métis settlements constitute a level of government that is similar to that of our municipalities, why are settlements then expected to provide performance reports on funds

they receive from the province while our municipalities are not? Why the selective treatment?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's not selective treatment. You could refer to it as special treatment that recognizes the unique relationship that the government of Alberta has with the Métis settlements. The funding that goes to the Métis settlements is governance-related funding whereas funding that goes to municipalities is not governance related per se; it's much more program specific. It's a whole different set of criteria and accountability frameworks. We recognize that the settlement councils are, by and large, younger governments, and we will get to the stage that we're aiming for in our targets and objectives within a couple of years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Groundwater Monitoring

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Environment claimed that cuts to groundwater testing will not have short-term detrimental impact because "there is plenty of time for us to gather the information." The minister's opinion is not shared by the experts. In addition, the department chopped \$12 million from its overall budget without knowing what programs the money would come from. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Now that we are two months into the budget year, would the minister explain exactly how the department will cut \$12 million from its budget?

Thank you.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that question is entirely impossible to answer in the 35 seconds that the rules of the House allow for. Let me refresh this member's memory and remind her that we spent about three hours of quality time together over in the Annex about two weeks ago, and I think we went through a great amount of detail with respect to my budget. If there are some issues that are still unclear to her, then I suggest that she sit down with me, and we'll go over it in some further detail at the right time.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you. That is why I asked the question. You were not able to provide very much detail at the time, aside from what you'd cut. Thank you for the invitation.

The next question I have is: given that the budget cuts have reduced water monitoring, how does the minister expect water for life partners to increase their understanding of the state of Alberta's drinking water, aquatic ecosystems, and the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater resources?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue with respect to groundwater monitoring – and she referred to it in her preamble to the first question – is that the information that is garnered from monitoring of groundwater is accumulated over many, many years. When you are having a series of wells that are being monitored, you really don't garner the kind of information that you need over a period of one or two or even five years. It's when you start to compare long-term trends over 10 and 15 and 20 years that you can start to interpret that information. That's what I was referring to the hon. member by saying that whether we reduce the frequency of testing in these wells to annually or biennially, in the long-term it's not

going to have a fundamental impact on how we analyze that data 20 years down the road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the information is key to understanding the risks to groundwater, how can the minister know there won't be any detrimental effects if, in fact, the department's collection of information is skipping a few years in that cumulative effect?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's remember that most of the issues that we're dealing with with respect to groundwater are to determine the connectivity between groundwater and surface water: if we have pressure on our surface water, is that going to affect the availability on groundwater? The reverse is also true: if we put undue pressure on groundwater, is that going to have an unanticipated negative effect on surface water? I use as an example the experience they had in Australia. When they used too much surface water, they found that they were severely affecting the groundwater that's available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Parental Choice in Education (continued)

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, by acquiescing to the religious right, this Conservative government is steamrolling the American fundamentalist concept of parental rights into our human rights code. Bill 44 is making Alberta a laughingstock. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: why has the minister surrendered to the religious right and ignored the wishes of the majority of Albertans by moving ahead with Bill 44?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the only embarrassment that we have in Alberta is that we have members of the opposition who can't once stand up and say one thing positive about this province that they live in. That's the embarrassment. There are over 600,000 students in this province, and they have parents, and parents are also representative of this province. They have beliefs that could be on the left side of the spectrum, the right side of the spectrum, or in the middle of the spectrum, but one thing they all believe in: they are the ones responsible for the education and the upbringing of their children.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government need look no further than Winnipeg to see how backward Bill 44 is. If it were law in that province, the teacher who scrubbed swastikas – by the way, a religious symbol according to the parents – off the arm of a little girl could face prosecution before a human rights tribunal. So why is the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit pushing a law that could protect the right of anti-Semitic parents to teach their children hatred before protecting the ability of teachers to fight against it?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, thank goodness Albertans are educated people. The hon. member should read the legislation before she comments on it. It's absolutely – absolutely – ridiculous and irresponsible to go on with this line about what we are going to do to these people. How is that helping anybody in Alberta, going on with this irrational fear of what will happen? Parents will be notified of the three areas with respect to human sexuality, sexual orientation, and religion and will have their chance to opt out. Many of

them probably won't opt out, and that is what it's all about. I don't see where this bogeyman is. Up there? Over there? It's absolutely ridiculous.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister talks of so-called parental rights, but I'm concerned about children's rights to a balanced, expansive education that includes learning about all of our human rights code. Now, American leaders of the religious right must be so proud of their allies across the floor. This government is muzzling our teachers and threatening them with tribunal hearings if they dare speak of evolution or sexual orientation to children. How can the minister justify a law that encourages intolerance under the pretense of parental rights?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member preaches intolerance because she believes her view, her narrow-minded view, of the world is the way that it should happen: their narrow-minded view and that propagated by the media is the way that we should raise our children. Parents have the temerity, the audacity, to say: I should be involved in that decision-making process. Well, our government stands firmly behind Bill 44. We stand firmly behind parents. We stand firmly behind family values and our communities that made this province what it is today.

Commercial Fishing Quotas

Ms Calahasen: My constituency is blessed to have almost every economic advantage, from oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, tourism, mining, to sport and commercial fishing. Due to the world's economic situation some of these industries are experiencing hard times. Sometimes our own government policies or regulations can also create problems for these industries. One of these is commercial fishing, more specifically with regard to fishing quotas in zone E. When a commercial fishery is open for whitefish, the incidental harvest of for-sport fish can result in the fishery being closed before the whitefish quota is reached. It happens more often than not. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What can your ministry do to make zone E commercial fishing quotas more fair?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Lesser Slave Lake for advocating on behalf of her commercial fishermen. We've met with those fishermen recently and reviewed the issues there. We understand the problem occurs, as she has explained. There is a quota set for both the target fish, usually whitefish, and the nontarget fish. When too many of the nontarget fish are caught, then the zone gets closed, the area is closed. We meet with the commercial fishermen every year to discuss options and to discuss ways to try and maximize their harvest while at the same time protecting the sustainability of the nontarget fish, and we'll continue to meet with them.

Ms Calahasen: The livelihoods of these commercial fishermen are at stake because of a quota policy that appears to be applied differently. To the same minister: is the sport fishery being managed in favour of the commercial fishery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is no. We have to manage our fisheries for all species to ensure sustainability.

It is true that the quota for zone E has been changed recently, but as I said earlier, these quotas are reviewed every year based on data from the previous years. Again, I can assure the Member for Lesser Slave Lake that I'll ask our biologist to meet with the commercial fishermen to review the situation and see what we can do for next year, but I have to emphasize that the bottom line is the conservation of all fish stocks.

Ms Calahasen: I'd love to be at that meeting, Mr. Speaker.

I'd ask the same minister. The commercial fishermen of zone E have also been concerned about ad hoc restrictions which impact their industry, as I indicated. To the same minister: how do officials decide whether to close a commercial fishery earlier, and what do they use to do that?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the quota for nontarget species in all zones is set before the season begins between zero and 25 per cent, and then there is a monitoring of the catch during the season. As fishermen approach the quota on nontarget species, our biologists meet with the commercial fishermen and discuss alternative ways to reduce the nontarget catch so they can continue to catch the whitefish. The fact remains, however, that once the quota of nontarget fish, the sport fish is met, the season has to be closed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Government Aircraft (continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the Alberta government aircraft passenger manifest, after the Premier's dinner two separate planes left Edmonton City Centre Airport just before 10 p.m. heading back to Calgary. For these two different flights two different reasons were given. To the President of the Treasury Board: what was the supposed news conference or event that one of the planeloads of Tory MLAs was attending in Calgary after the Premier's dinner at 10:30 at night?

2:30

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, every Thursday the government flies MLAs and ministers back to Calgary every week that we sit. That has happened continually. We have never been asked before if that's an appropriate use of government aircraft. It leaves depending on when we're done with our House sitting, and it depends on how the members can align to get the various planes to go. Some may go earlier; some can go later.

As to the exact reason for them going and to what particular event, I'll have to check the records, but the hon. member will know that every flight and every manifest is put on the website for all Albertans to see.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the manifest it says that the purpose of the flight was to attend meetings and a news conference with government officials. To the President of the Treasury Board again: what were the meetings with government officials about that the other planeload of Tory MLAs had in Calgary after the Premier's dinner at 10:30 at night?

Mr. Snelgrove: Boy, it would be pretty clear to me that if it said that they were going to attend meetings, he could ask them what their

meetings were for. Mr. Speaker, as much as I'd like to know – actually, I don't have any interest in knowing. These people in this government are incredibly busy. Many people will know that many worked here Tuesday night until 3:30 in the morning. Several of the ministers were in Medicine Hat by 8 o'clock the next morning or into Calgary. We can't do it without transportation, without airplanes. The hours they put in, the meetings they attend, the people they meet in Alberta: probably second to none.

So trying to raise some kind of issue around the fact that we occasionally have very successful Premier's dinners around Alberta – and our party is very successful at separating our party from the government. It may cause them a little bit of jealousy that they can't seem to interest anybody in Alberta to jump on their bandwagon. The airplanes this government uses are published transparently monthly, and any other questions they have around it are absolutely inappropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not about jealousy; it's about accountability. I think the MLAs seemed to be especially busy on the Premier's dinner night.

To the President of the Treasury Board again. One of the government MLAs apparently brought along a family member on one of these flights. What is the policy for the government MLAs taking spouses or family members on the government airplanes?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we have a very, very clear and published document and priorities for how the planes work. The Lieutenant Governor is first and his family and aides. The Premier is second. Cabinet and MLAs follow in order of the urgency of the trip that they're trying to do. We believe very strongly that the sacrifices many MLAs make are enough that if we can accommodate a family member joining them that is not replacing or displacing anyone on an airplane – flying with an empty seat to the same place makes no sense. If we can accommodate a family member, a spouse in air transport that is going already and not displacing any other members, then we're happy to do it. It's very little return for the time that these hon. members spend working on behalf of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Safe Communities Initiatives in Brooks

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's safe communities initiative is working proactively on the enforcement side of crime reduction but also on the prevention side. Last week I had the pleasure of welcoming the chair of the Safe Communities Secretariat, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, to Brooks to visit my constituency. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General. How is Brooks contributing to the overall strategy of the safe communities initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think Brooks is a wonderful example of a community that represents where Alberta is at this year, 2009, and this century. It's a traditional rural community that's introduced industry. There are a lot of new people coming to Brooks. Brooks as a community has given a lot of thought to how they want to build their community, include new people in their community, and define their values as a community. I was fortunate enough to be able to go to announce the SuperKids project, which is

a safe communities innovation fund partnership between the RCMP and the town of Brooks to ensure that they're able to talk to kids about what it means to be a wonderful citizen in their community.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the positive assessment of the community of Brooks.

What kinds of issues is this project specifically addressing in the community?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The SuperKids program is a partnership that was launched within the community in partnership with the RCMP. What the RCMP and schools do is go out and talk to kids about what their responsibilities are as citizens. They do something which is quite interesting. They give children tickets, but they give children tickets for good behaviour. If kids are riding bikes with their helmets on, wearing their seat belt, picking up garbage, crossing the street at pedestrian walks, then the RCMP reward them for that work. The important part of the work is not the rewarding for positive behaviour, but it's the opportunity to have a conversation with young Albertans about what it means to be a contributing member to society.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister. The safe communities initiative fund supports a range of projects in communities. I'd like to know: what will be the other opportunities for other communities to also participate in this initiative across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The safe communities innovation fund is an opportunity for us to celebrate the work that communities are doing around this province. It's a \$60 million fund over three years. There will be three opportunities for communities to apply for funding. There are some projects that are big, some that are small, but the most important thing about these projects is that they are demonstrations of partnerships between organizations and communities that want to do good work and to support initiatives that are already happening in communities.

SuperKids in Brooks is one example of that. We have programs in Edmonton and Calgary where the police are partnering with social workers to work in schools. We also have projects that are dealing with domestic violence. We're helping kids identify the risks that could come to their lives if they got involved in drugs. But, Mr. Speaker, they are community driven. It is not government telling communities how to make their communities safe but government supporting communities in important work that they recognize needs to be done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Chiropractic Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Health Quality Council reports that nearly a million people sought chiropractic care last year. Low-income Albertans are particularly affected by the delisting recently of this service and are already the

largest users of our health care system. It's obvious to Albertans that the minister of health has no idea of the consequences his decisions have on the people of Alberta. To the minister: where does the minister expect those who can no longer afford chiropractic services to take their medical problems?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition used a phrase that said that chiropractic services are largely used by low-income Albertans. I'm not sure who he's been talking to, but the Chiropractic Association of Alberta tells me that about 90 per cent of people who use chiropractic services are not low-income Albertans.

Dr. Swann: I actually said that the poor are the largest users of the health care system, Mr. Minister, not of chiropractic services.

My second question to the minister: will the minister table the medical evidence that was used to determine that chiropractic services should be delisted?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, again, how can the hon. leader make a statement that says that low-income Albertans are the largest users of the health care system? I mean, you know, it destroys the credibility of his question in any case.

Dr. Swann: Clearly, the minister isn't willing to answer the questions.

Did the minister perform a cost-benefit analysis to assess the demands that will result on the health care system from delisting chiropractic?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of services that are provided in Alberta that the government does not fund. As I've said in many instances in this Legislature, we had to make some tough decisions. I think, obviously, the Liberals today are in a spending mood; today is not a savings day. But this government has a consistent policy. We brought in a budget. We had to ensure that our budget was prudent in these days of economic restraint. What we've done is made some tough decisions, and unlike the Liberals we're going to stand by our decisions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 90 questions and responses today. To five members: we were unable to get to you.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements in the Routine.

2:40

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Aboriginal Peoples

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. June is aboriginal month, and since 1996 June 21 has been celebrated as National Aboriginal Day. As most of the celebrations will happen while the Alberta Legislature is in recess, we would like to take this opportunity to recognize the First Nation, Métis, Inuit, and nonstatus indigenous peoples of Alberta.

We all know that aboriginal peoples were the first to inhabit the territory that we now share with them and that our history together has been a troubled one. While small steps forward have been made towards reconciliation and appropriate recognition, we have a long path yet to travel. Aboriginals still suffer a much higher rate of poverty, don't get the same educational opportunities, and are the

victims of racism and discrimination. Because of this, they are overrepresented in our jails and underrepresented in governing bodies such as this.

Thankfully, in recent history the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized the unique status of our aboriginal peoples and has forced Parliament, Legislatures, developers, and other bodies to consult with them on issues that impact on their traditional territories and on their interests. While we have seen progress on this front, all too often their concerns are still, effectively, ignored at the expense of unfettered development.

As our society becomes more urbanized, many aboriginal people are migrating to our cities, where they are experiencing new and unique forms of discrimination, both overt and systemic. In centres such as Edmonton 50 per cent of the aboriginal population has less than a high school education. This naturally leads to greater poverty, which contributes to greater discrimination. We need to do more to support aboriginals working to break this cycle.

But aboriginal month and National Aboriginal Day do not exist merely to highlight the negative. They are also important opportunities to celebrate the rich culture of these peoples and their contributions to Canada and Alberta. Our visual arts, our dance and theatre, our spiritual world view, not to mention our knowledge of the land and our system of law and order all have been deeply impacted by Alberta's original peoples. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

Today I want to say thank you to the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and best wishes for National Aboriginal Day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on that last member's statement, just to advise all hon. members, on Monday next, June 1, there will be a special event here in the rotunda of the Legislative Assembly at 12:15 to commemorate aboriginal peoples month.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll follow much the same process as I did yesterday. I'd like to table 20 copies and the appropriate number of copies of letters from Albertans expressing their concerns about the fate of the City Centre Airport.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of my response to a question raised in this Assembly by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar relevant to Municipal Affairs hosting expenses at the AAMD and C spring and fall conventions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a publication by Plan Canada entitled *Welcoming Communities: Planning for Diverse Populations*, published by the Canadian Institute of Planners, supported by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition I have a number of tablings. The first is from Ken Markkula with concerns about the WCB that he feels have been ignored by the Premier.

The second is from Gayle Simonson, who objects to Bill 44.

The third, again tablings for the Leader of the Official Opposition, from Steve Schembri, with concerns about AIMCo's investments in Precision Drilling.

Two petitions: one not in order to receive a presentation but one specific to the Alberta pharmaceutical strategy for seniors with people objecting to that and asking the government to scrap it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four more constituent letters from individuals expressing frustration with Bill 44. Connie Jensen writes: "It is unfortunate that students have to continue to pay for the narrow mindedness and short sightedness of a government that is fuelled by expediency and ignorance." Doug Germaine writes: "This blatant filtering of public education by the Alberta government is an attack on a child's right to an open and diverse education." Frank Durnford writes: "Bill 44, as it stands, simply institutionalizes intolerance and ignorance." Nancy Lowery writes: "Tolerance comes from exposure to different ideas, views and experiences."

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the decertification of child and youth care workers in Alberta. The letter is addressed to the Premier and was sent by Holly Heffernan, president of the Calgary and District Labour Council Women's Committee. Holly writes: "We are asking your government to reverse this decision and to work with CYCAA to ensure the best possible care is available to our children and youth."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got five copies here of Alberta government aircraft passenger manifests to support concerns I raised during the question period, so I'm tabling those five copies.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to Standing Order 7(6) I would now ask the Government House Leader if he could share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week commencing June 1, assuming there's government business on the evening of Monday the 1st.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. On Monday, June 1, 2009, we do anticipate an evening sitting, and although I always list these in the order of the number of the bill as per precedent, the timing of how they come up I will comment on as well.

Monday at 7:30 in Committee of the Whole Bill 32, Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act; and Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009. For third reading Bill 23, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 25, Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 27, Alberta Research and Innovation Act; Bill 29, Family Law Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 30, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 33, Fiscal Responsibility Act; Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 45, Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 52, Health Information Amendment Act, 2009.

Now, I just would comment that we anticipate scheduling first at 7:30 Bill 25, the Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009, in order that members who have declared a conflict of interest, as a number did at Committee of the Whole, might be able to arrange to have it dealt with in an orderly time frame there.

On Tuesday, June 2, in the afternoon we anticipate second readings of Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act; Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act; Bill 49, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 51, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; and third readings of Bill 32, Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act; Bill 34, Drug Program Act; Bill 35, Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 36, Alberta Land Stewardship Act; Bill 42, Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); and Bill 41, Protection for Persons in Care Act. In the evening under third reading the same list as I mentioned for the afternoon.

Wednesday, June 3, in the afternoon in Committee of the Whole Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act; Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act; Bill 49, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 51, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Thursday, June 4, 2009, in the afternoon third reading on those that I just mentioned in Committee of the Whole for the day before.

As is always the case, of course, Mr. Speaker, it would all be as per the Order Paper. I would indicate to hon. members that I mentioned Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), in a number of spots, but my anticipation is that that one will be called first at 7:30 on Tuesday to accommodate members who may have to declare a conflict of interest as per the letter that the Speaker tabled earlier.

So that would be Bill 27 being first at 7:30 on Monday and Bill 43 being first at 7:30 on Tuesday.

2:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, two issues with respect to points of order. First of all, the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In question period today, as you and all members are aware, there was a question from the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to the Premier relative to flights on government aircraft, specifically referencing the flights on government aircraft, as I understand it – and I don't have the Blues; although I'd asked, they're apparently not available as yet – to and from Premier's dinners, which are a party function.

It's under section 23(h), making allegations against another member; (i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member; and (j), using abusive or insulting language. The Premier actually responded to the first question, indicating that government planes were used for government business. The hon. member, then, in his second question, as though he had not heard the answer to the first question, basically, went on to say – and I don't have the exact wording of the question – again that government aircraft would be used for party business.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is a very serious allegation to be made. The Premier made it very clear. We do not use government planes for party business, and that, I think, was clarified in a subsequent series of questions later on in question period. I can tell you that I've had the honour and privilege of flying back and forth to attend Premier's dinners across the province, and I can tell you that the

nature of the aircraft that are used – let me just say that they are charter aircraft, and they are not government aircraft. In flying back and forth to many of those dinners, not all, unfortunately, I can assure the House and the Speaker that when the Premier said that the party uses charter aircraft to go to Premier's dinners, he's absolutely correct in that. The flights back from those dinners are on planes other than government planes.

The specific point of order that I'm raising, however, Mr. Speaker, revolves around the admonition that you've often given the House, and that is that we are to take what we say in this House and to believe the word of hon. members. The Premier in his first response clearly indicated that we do not use government aircraft for party business and that we do not use government aircraft for Premier's dinners, that we charter aircraft to do that.

Now, the hon. member persisted in his question even after that response by the Premier. It was totally inappropriate to do so. There are other ways of asking questions. In fact, he came back later on in question period and asked questions of the President of the Treasury Board in a different manner, which allowed the President of the Treasury Board to clearly enunciate government policy. But I would ask that the hon. member be admonished for his first series of questions and be asked to apologize to the House for that series of questions in that he very clearly did not listen to the response, continued to cast aspersions on the Premier and, quite frankly, on all members of this House who attend the Premier's dinners on a regular basis.

I would suggest as well that if he had any question or concern about whether there is an appropriate separation of government and party that those are questions that have an appropriate way for both investigating and pursuing, and it's not to raise them on the floor of the House, to cast aspersions in a form of drive-by smearing, to make those public allegations without backing them up in any way or without having the courtesy of listening to the answer and then rephrasing subsequent questions if necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to the point of order that has been raised by the Government House Leader. I believe that there is no point of order here. Essentially what we have is that the job of the Official Opposition is to ask the government questions that meet the criteria and parameters that are laid out in our various parliamentary books, which I believe in this case he did. Quoting from *Beauchesne* 409: "A brief question seeking information about an important matter of some urgency which falls within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed, is in order." I've checked, you know, and we didn't ask if something was correct in a newspaper. We didn't seek a legal opinion. It wasn't sub judice. So the question was in order.

I have the question as the member read it. In fact, it is not specific to any given member. The provisions of Standing Order 23 as the Government House Leader read into the record, you know, are about casting aspersions on a specific member or making allegations against another member or unavowed motives to a member, and the language that the member used in his questions was not specific to any given member. I believe that the opposition should ask questions about circumstances which appear inconsistent, and that is certainly what was going on here today.

So we have a question, and like my colleague the Government House Leader I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I'm sure that the Speaker does. The question as written was: "Please tell the House that it is not government policy to use taxpayer-funded planes

to fly government MLAs home following Progressive Conservative fundraisers." That's a pretty legitimate question, and the Premier did not exactly answer that question, but he did make a statement on the general topic.

Now, the Government House Leader has made much of the fact that the Member for Calgary-McCall then went on and asked a question that he felt shouldn't have been asked. It was a follow-up question and related specifically back to the theme of the questions. The Government House Leader seemed to be saying that the member didn't listen. Well, frankly, it's hard to listen in here sometimes. I actually can recall an exchange between myself and another minister of the Crown yesterday, I think, in which I thought I had pretty good articulation and enunciation, but my colleague across the way didn't hear the question. Of course, we are all adhering to a 35-second rule, so for a member to stand up and say, "I didn't quite hear you; could you repeat it?" that's it. We've lost our opportunity to use that particular moment to ask a question. It happens all the time in this House. We need to be a bit forgiving. As I say, it can indeed be noisy.

The second question as written here was: "[Could] the Premier please tell the Assembly who approved these taxpayer-funded flights?" That is quite a legitimate question.

Mr. Hancock: Not when it didn't happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has the floor.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. The final series was in fact reflecting exactly back on what the Premier had said, and there was a request to provide the receipts showing that, for which the Speaker corrected and admonished the member.

I believe that under these circumstances there is no point of order. There was certainly no attempt to cast aspersions. The language here has been pretty careful, to say: "Here's a situation we've noticed. We have flight manifests." In teeny tiny print, I might add, Mr. Speaker. It's clearly laying out that flights left from Edmonton city centre going to Calgary. The purpose that's listed on the flight manifest is to "attend meeting(s) with government officials." It contains a mix of people – ministers and government MLAs – some of whom live in Calgary, some of whom do not. The purpose, as I said, was to attend a meeting. It's charged to Executive Council, and it did, indeed – the itinerary said that they left at 9:50 p.m., but they actually left at 22:47. Anyway, there are two flights that go off containing a variety of passengers. To us this coincides exactly with the date of a party function, and I think that it is perfectly appropriate that the Official Opposition would question and ensure that these two things were not related. That was the reason for asking the question.

As the government member mentioned, there was a second set of questions on exactly the same theme, in which we followed up to specifically question what was the government policy on members.

3:00

The Speaker: Well, let's just deal with the point of order.

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I would argue that there has been no violation under 23(h), which is what was specifically mentioned here. It was a question that was asked and the government clearly feels was answered.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional comments with respect to this purported point of order?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. To be clear, why it became inappropriate in the supplementary is the fact that the hon. member would know that if it was a government plane, there would be no receipt. It would be on the government logs. If it was a charter airplane, it would be a party charter airplane, and it would not be under the purview of this Assembly. So to continue to cast aspersions that we are misusing government aircraft and that because there is not the presentation of receipts, therefore it must be real – it was definitely made to try and cast aspersions to bring disrespect to the House, to the Premier, to government, and it is well outside of what should be accepted in here.

The Speaker: I'm not going to go on all afternoon with this thing. I can wrap this up in a moment.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to the point of order.

Mr. Chase: Just very quickly, with regard to the tabling it clearly states Alberta government flight logs at the top. It was based on the fact that this was logged . . .

The Speaker: There is no tabling. We're talking about – sorry. Sit down, please. We're not talking about any tabling; we're talking about a point of order here. There has been no tabling involved. Something on the point of order.

Mr. Chase: Yes. With regard to the point of order the documents that the questions were based upon were based upon the Alberta government . . .

The Speaker: Well, I'm sorry. I've got to repeat it again. There are no documents. We only have the text of the session. That's all. No document.

Does anybody want to say something more on the point of order? If not, I'm kind of dealing with this matter. We have business to do here this afternoon.

Okay. There's an ambience in this place. There's a mood in this place. It's been a trying week for some. It's been a tiring week for others. There's sensitivity with respect to all sorts of things. But let's really hear and listen to what the *Hansard* Blues say happened here today.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, after a prelude about drunken drivers and drinking and driving, says, "To the Premier: please tell the House that it is not government policy to use taxpayer-funded planes to fly government MLAs home following Progressive Conservative fundraisers." Correct question. In order. Nothing wrong with the question. The response from the Premier:

Mr. Speaker, that is quite a serious accusation to make. I believe it would be very wise for that hon. member to withdraw that because I can tell you we do have receipts of the costs of chartered aircraft to every Premier's dinner, whether it is in Edmonton or in Calgary or in Lethbridge or in Grande Prairie or in Fort McMurray and every second year in Medicine Hat. I don't know where the hon. member is coming from, but maybe a better choice of words would be better.

And then there's something further about an incident this week. Okay. You judge the response.

Then the Member for Calgary-McCall comes again. "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier please tell the Assembly who approved these taxpayer-funded flights?" At which point in time the Speaker interjected.

Well, I think, hon. member, we just heard there were no such things.

We're going to have a point of order in here [because] that is going to lead to some very difficult situations. If the Premier wants to add something further, he can.

The Speaker should not have said the last thing. That would have negated the second point of order we are going to have.

Then the third question came about when the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall said: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier table those receipts, please, what was chartered?" The Speaker interjected and said:

Hon. member, one of the purviews of the question period is that political party activities are not a purview of question period. There's no requirement for the Premier to table things that happened that had nothing to do with the government of Alberta.

And we went on.

That's a legitimate question that was raised. Whether or not the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall heard the answer that came from the Premier, he certainly could not be led to believe the question of receipts or no receipts, and he wouldn't know, as per the explanation given by the hon. President of the Treasury Board, why the government could not charter aircraft as such. So it seems to me that the questions were quite legitimate.

I go back to where I started: the ambience on the fourth day of the week at the end of a session, mood, a lot of anticipation, thinking ahead of oneself, a trying week, a tiring week, and perhaps oversensitivity. That is not a point of order.

Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on your point.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), when a member "makes allegations against another Member," and 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." The Premier used words to the effect that I had called him a Stalinist. This came out of the question that we just dealt with from Calgary-McCall. It was a bit of a diversion; the Premier wanted to stand up and talk about something that happened quite some time ago. The Premier was quite wrong in suggesting that I had called him a Stalinist. I've got the *Hansard* here of March 9. I said, "Rural Albertans are furious that a rural Premier and his cabinet would propose such a Stalinist law. To the Premier: why won't you admit that this policy tramples the land rights of rural Albertans?"

I did not call the Premier a Stalinist, but I called the bill such. This was actually subject to a public clarification in the form of a letter to the editor in the *Edmonton Journal* on March 27 written by the chief of staff for the NDP opposition caucus. It states there:

Mason absolutely did not accuse Premier Ed Stelmach of being a Stalinist. Mason characterized Bill 19 as such, for its authoritarian provisions allowing government to trample the land rights of rural Albertans without compensation or defined right of appeal.

Mr. Speaker, I will always stand up when someone puts words in my mouth and says that I said something that I did not actually say.

Now, having said that, the Premier has also stated that those comments caused him personal hurt. You know, this might be a bit of an unusual situation, where I'm standing up making a point of order to insist on my right to be quoted accurately and correctly and, at the same time, to make an apology to the person whom I'm raising the point of order against. It was not my intention to cause the Premier or any other member or any other person personal pain or hurt as a result of that statement, and I want to apologize to the Premier for doing so.

You know, when I feel an apology is required as a result of my behaviour or what I say, I don't need to be compelled to do it, but I do ask, Mr. Speaker, that you recognize, in fact, that I've been again misquoted by the Premier and had words ascribed to me that I have not uttered. You know, I want to reiterate that I find that unacceptable. I believe that it's contrary to the rules of this Assembly, and I think that the Premier needs to deal with that appropriately.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. An interesting point of order. First of all, I would like to thank the hon. member for acknowledging that his words could be hurtful to the Premier and to others and for making the apology. I appreciate that, and I'm sure the Premier will appreciate that. I would also appreciate it if the letter, whether over the signature of the chief of staff – I forget the title – or whether over the hon. member's signature, was tabled in the House. That would be quite an appropriate thing, too, to clarify.

3:10

It is very clear that on both March 9 and March 4 – on March 9, as the hon. member indicated, on page 275 of *Hansard* it refers to a comment by the member that “rural Albertans are furious that a rural Premier and his cabinet would propose such a Stalinist law.” Now, the hon. member can parse that however he wishes, but I think most ordinary readings of that and most people hearing it would hear it in the manner that the Premier heard it. That is referencing the Premier and his cabinet as Stalinist. In fact, if that was not the case, there would not have been a rationale or reason for the NDP chief of staff to write a letter of clarification to the *Journal*. By the very fact of having written the letter of clarification, they clearly understood that the ordinary person hearing that comment and reading that comment would understand what the reference was or at least, even if that reference wasn't intended, what would be heard.

The second reference that I would refer to is on March 4 at page 221 of *Hansard* where the same hon. member indicates that “this government is proposing a bill that gives them unprecedented power . . . Joseph Stalin would be proud.”

Again, language is very important. Language is, in fact, critical to what we do. While we all try and use language which is very expressive and we all try and make our point in very memorable ways, we also have to be careful because certain things in world history carry a great deal of hurt and emotional baggage. References to the Holocaust being tossed around can be very hurtful. References to Hitler. These are things that people hold close to them. These are things that have created great hurt to many peoples in the world and should not be used lightly.

I would suggest that “Stalinist” used in any fashion like that very clearly references to people what was referred to. I would suggest that the way in which it was used on both of those occasions would cause that kind of understanding among people hearing it as to exactly what was being said.

Again, I would end by saying that if that was not the case, there would have been no need for a letter of clarification to the *Journal*. The appropriate thing to do would have been to bring a letter and table it in the House to say: “This was said. It's been misunderstood. It's not what I intended. I apologize for it, and here's a letter saying so.”

I think it's very commendable of the hon. member. I won't comment on the language in which he couched it, but the apology itself, obviously heartfelt. I appreciate that; I think that's commendable. But, in fact, the reference by the Premier was also quite understandable.

I think that's been clarified now by the hon. member's point of order and the context in which he's put it. I think that should end the matter.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly I'd like to make the point that I think the language at the time, when the statements that are being discussed right now were made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, two months ago now,

is not actually the issue right now. The issue here is that today the Premier characterized the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood as having called the Premier a Stalinist. That is the issue here today. The point that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is trying to make by referring to those previous statements is that that is not what those statements said at the time.

Now, there's been a lot made about the reaction to those statements at the time. As you, yourself, Mr. Speaker, have said in the past, the appropriate response then would have been to raise the point of order over those statements.

As well, with respect to the letter to the *Journal*, the reason the letter was sent to the *Journal* was because it was correcting a mischaracterization and a misreporting that occurred in the *Journal*. It makes perfect sense that the effort was made as soon as possible to correct the record when it was reported inaccurately. That is what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood did at the time, and that is what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is attempting to do now. It is using the tools available to us as members of this Assembly in the House to correct the record where it is possible to do so. It's on that basis that we are asking the Speaker to rule and to request that the statement be withdrawn.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on this point.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I understand from a number of comments that you have made to me over the last five years the importance of discretion. I also understand the sensitivities associated with ethnicity and race. I'm very aware of that. But sometimes those sensitivities can be simply diversions. If, for example, a member had referred to the Pol Pot regime or Ho Chi Minh or Benito Mussolini, somebody who had some ethnic connection by marriage or by birth could potentially rise up and say: you're defaming me; you're defaming my connection; you're not being sensitive. If somebody called me a wild Irishman, I would actually be proud of that connection, but the point I'm making – and I think you made it earlier with your other comments – is that let's not let the end of a session interfere with trying to whiteout history. Maybe we have to be careful in terms of our historical references. Maybe we should be using words like totalitarian or draconian or autocratic. But I look forward to your explanation.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, we've had a tradition of decorum in this Assembly for a great number of years. As an example, a quick look at our *Hansard* basically indicates that since 1987 we've had 14 documents with 21 references to the word “Stalin” used. It depends to a great degree on what the context of it all is, how we're going to deal with it.

Secondly, there are many, many references that we can follow, too. It's the context of everything else. But one thing is true in this Assembly going back a long time. There are certain words that because of the sensitivity of the placement of the individuals in history basically have been withdrawn as the result of a request by certain members or others.

As an example, the word “Adolf” was used on March 3, 1994. One member referred to another member and called him Adolf. That word was withdrawn at the request of the member. On May 27, 1988, the Deputy Speaker in committee basically ruled that it was improper to make disparaging remarks about a foreign head of state when a particular member said, “Ayatollah Khomeini to write a book on religious tolerance.” The word “communist” has been ruled out. One member accusing another member of being a card-carrying commie was considered to be inappropriate. Just less than two years ago the Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, when he was in the chair, caused a member to withdraw the

following statement, “The Progressive Conservative Party is becoming partially communist,” in the context of which it was raised and which it was used.

Now, we have a lot of other expressions, too, that we don’t allow. We don’t allow words like coward and cowardly and what have you and all the rest of that.

3:20

Today here’s what was said midway through what the reference was from the Premier:

There are a number of them that I let go by, and some of them really hurt, especially when the leader of the third party referred to me as Stalin, something like: Stalinistic era brought by this government. Does he not know my background? Does he not know what that one individual did to millions of Ukrainians, how he starved them out? I let that go by. I’m not letting this thing go by. Either he apologizes or comes up with the proof. Enough is enough.

Well, I’ve sat in this House, and I’ve certainly heard the words “Stalinistic era” used by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in certain questions and documents in recent days. I’ve never heard, however, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood refer to another hon. member in this Assembly as Stalin. I’ve not heard that used, and it’s not clear to me that, in fact, anybody is suggesting that he did use it. But the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is denying it and basically saying: I never used it against an hon. member, and I didn’t do that against an hon. member.

I’ll go back to what I said before. There’s a mood, there’s an ambience, there’s a tiring, trying environment that does not bring out the best of everybody. I think that it’s inappropriate for one member to suggest that another member called him that if he didn’t, and I think it would be appropriate for the Premier to reconsider accusing another member of calling him Stalin if he didn’t. I understand the sensitivity. I understand as well the comments put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who offered an apology. I heard that apology this afternoon for sensitivities. I heard the hon. Government House Leader stand up and say: well, that was interesting, this whole point of order with respect to all of this. I find this not trying. I don’t find this tiring. I just think that we can do better.

We’re now going to move on to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 37

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Snelgrove: On behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise I’d like to move third reading of the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

The Speaker: Should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 37 read a third time]

Bill 38

Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon.

Minister of Finance and Enterprise I move third reading of Bill 38, the Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question, hon. members?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a third time]

Bill 39

Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise I would like to move third reading of Bill 39, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I think things started to go just a little fast here, so I want to get up and speak to this because I think, you know, it’s important that we don’t miss opportunities because things are going so fast and you’re trying to find your page and just in case some members wanted to have a chance to speak to this.

Mr. Speaker, generally, we’re supportive of the bill. I think that there are some concerns, of course. The section regarding search and seizure without warrant: the officer currently has to believe on reasonable and probable grounds that a contravention of the act has taken place and getting a warrant would cause delay that might lead to the loss or destruction of evidence. The bill would change this section so that the officer only has to have reasonable grounds for that belief. Well, that’s, you know, a bit of a concern that I wanted to highlight.

I think the provision for increasing a penalty on money owing to the Crown because of neglect, carelessness, or wilful default or fraud or evasion – the penalty is raised from 25 per cent of the amount owing to 50 per cent – is probably something that’s good. Fines are increased, and I think that’s something that we support as well.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I think the bill makes positive changes. We think it’s important for taxes and fines to keep pace with the times so that they continue to act as sufficient deterrents. It’s important for the government to be able to properly enforce the collection or remittance of tobacco taxes so that no one is profiting unfairly from the illegal collection or failure to remit tax.

Mr. Speaker, there is plenty of evidence that raising tobacco taxes is the single most effective way for government to discourage their citizens from smoking. These taxes also need to keep up with wage increases in order to be effective. In 2008 Alberta had some of the most affordable cigarettes in Canada when the price of cigarettes was compared to the average wage. Since we’ve recently had a further increase to our minimum wage, from \$8.40 an hour to \$8.80 an hour, it’s imperative that taxes rise, too.

The Campaign for a Smoke-Free Alberta has been advocating for tobacco tax increases. A letter they sent to me on November 7, 2008, claims that Alberta’s \$2.25 per pack increase in 2002 contributed to a reduction in tobacco sales of 24 per cent in 2003. So this can go a long way towards decreasing the amount that Albertans smoke.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say in reference to this issue generally that it’s interesting that the government is always prepared to raise sin taxes, particularly when we talk about tobacco and liquor, but not corporate taxes. In fact, the government has repeatedly reduced the effective rate that large corporations pay on their profits at a time

when some companies in Alberta even in the last couple of years were making annual profits that exceeded the entire domestic product of some countries. The fact is that the government is always willing to bear down on people who smoke or drink or whatever but not really go after the big money. I'm not saying that we don't want to increase taxes in these areas, because of the deterrent effect, but I do want to highlight the government's drive to reduce corporate taxes as a source of revenue.

The other point that I'd really like to make is that it's unfortunate that the increases in taxes on cigarettes are not being allocated towards reducing smoking in our society and to help people quit smoking, desist. It is, in fact, a cash cow as far as the government is concerned, and I believe that we should be spending more of that increase on tobacco reduction strategies. Simply raising the taxes is not a sufficient effort on the part of the government to control the use of tobacco.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I do want to indicate that we think the increases in tobacco taxes are appropriate, and we will support Bill 39, the Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, as a result. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

3:30

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to get on the record about this bill at third reading. We have had the opportunity to discuss this at second reading and in committee stage. We feel that it's a good bill. We're going to support it. Sometimes brevity is the soul of wit, and you need not say a lot about legislation that the government has essentially gotten right. So there you go.

The Speaker: All right. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available if there are questions or comments with respect to that lucid presentation by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Nobody wants clarification that the government did good or anything like that?

Okay. We'll go on. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be very quick. When this was in Committee of the Whole, I asked a question with regard to the potential hypocrisy of the government raising the tobacco taxes, which I firmly agree with, but also at the same time investing in the heritage trust fund to the tune of \$600 million. If Bill 39 is looked at by itself, there isn't a problem. But the government is, as far as I know – and I would love to be corrected; I hope this is not the case because I believe in ethical investing – also talking about launching a lawsuit against tobacco companies to recover health costs. If this is the case, then we have to make sure that our own cage is clean, so to speak, before we go after the tobacco companies, which, as I say, it appears that we're still investing in.

Also, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood pointed out the importance of using the revenue that is generated from this sin tax for proactive, preventative measures. I would echo those concerns and hope that part of this money that is increased will go directly to AADAC, which is now under the central health board's responsibility, and that we would be using some of this money to advertise and have public school programs for children discouraging tobacco use.

The government's step of putting the cigarettes behind curtains was a very good first step. Increasing the tax is a good second step. Now we need to take the third and the fourth and the fifth steps; that is, get out of the business of investing in tobacco and apply the revenue that we've received towards proactive, healthy living and public education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a third time]

Bill 40

Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 40, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is again another one of those bills that we've talked about at second and in committee. It's a straightforward bill. It makes a couple of changes: ensures eligibility for the Alberta tuition credit, parallels eligibility for the federal tuition credit, and makes changes to ensure that our dividend tax credit is administered in accordance with the existing government policy. It is straightforward, and we have no problems with it. We will be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?
Should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a third time]

Bill 10

Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 10, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sorry to keep you confused as to who was going to jump up on this particular bill.

We are supportive of the direction this bill is taking. We have pointed out in other bills that involved not only assisted living but long-term care that there is a tremendous shortage of qualified staff. It's not out of negligence or deliberate neglect, but seniors continue to suffer whether they're in the assisted living complexes or in the long-term care.

Currently there is a lawsuit that has been allowed to go forward against the government by seniors who feel that the 40 per cent increase that occurred approximately six or seven years back was unfair, so it's very important as we move ahead with legislation that we're not disadvantaging any seniors.

The supportive living is absolutely essential. As I noted in debate last night with regard to a seniors bill, keeping seniors in their homes and supported as long as we can is the way to go. Organizations which the government, to its credit, supports such as Meals on Wheels are ways of keeping seniors not only in their homes but connected. Therefore, in supporting this Bill 10, I would just

encourage the minister to look at the vulnerability of seniors and what is best for them, that being to support them within their homes with the types of nurse practitioners, whatever it may be, regular visits to help them maintain their dignity and also their home.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others to participate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'm supportive of this legislation, too. I think it does move in the right direction, with note to what the Member for Calgary-Varsity said.

With your permission I'm just going to veer – I don't know – I hope not off topic, Mr. Speaker. This brings up something that I would like to get on the record, which is that not only do we need more affordable and properly licensed and regulated and managed assisted living facilities in this province, but it's become clear to me in conversations that I've had with seniors across my constituency and, you know, across the province that we need to move on from here. This may be a good start, but it's only a start. We need to move on from here with a much more comprehensive continuum of housing for seniors.

I mean, most seniors, Mr. Speaker, want to remain as independent as they can for as long as they can, but one of the inescapable facts is that very often as we age, we do have to move from our own home into some kind of assisted living or designated assisted living or increasingly higher levels of care. Each one of those moves can be incredibly disruptive and incredibly hard on a single senior or a senior couple. Sometimes it separates a couple of seniors, and that can be very, very hard as well.

We need to be starting to wrap our heads around now, not only for the sake of our own aging parents but for our own sakes not all that many decades down the road, a better designed continuum of seniors' housing that allows seniors the ability to go from essentially independent living in, say, an apartment, a suite of their own in a seniors' complex, with meal privileges if they wish to take advantage, with full kitchens for most of the time when they don't want to, on through, you know, a little higher level of care, on through some care that's starting to approach long-term care, right up to the point where some of us are going to need to spend our final months in a dementia ward. Those housing types need to be located in close proximity to one another so that we can move as effortlessly and with as little disruption as possible from one type of housing to another as we need to.

3:40

I just wanted to get that on the record because I'm certainly hearing that from a great number of seniors who I've been talking to. I thought this might be a good time, with your co-operation and permission, Mr. Speaker, to allow that to happen.

That said, I'll take my seat and see if others want to join the debate or if we should call the question.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon.

Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne I rise today to move third reading of Bill 11, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak in support of Bill 11. This bill proposes a more punitive penalty for fishery violations and power to the courts to include penalties that bind offenders to return fisheries to their healthy state.

Alberta's fish stocks have been declining steadily since 2000. The main reason for this has been overfishing and loss of fish habitat due to rapid development. Bill 11 hopes to address the issue of overfishing by introducing punitive measures to discourage overfishing. In the event that anglers are charged under the Fisheries (Alberta) Act, strict penalties are introduced. Essentially, this serves as a great deterrent.

The fish resources of Alberta are limited in diversity and abundance by the small amount of suitable habitat due to the relatively small amount of surface water. Surveys in Alberta have indicated that about 800 lakes and 1,500 streams have a self-sustaining sport fish population. An additional 300 ponds are stocked regularly with trout to expand fishing and harvest opportunities. There are going to be economic benefits to sport fishing in Alberta.

The act addresses the deficiency in the existing act, namely the lack of punitive actions sufficient to deter violations of licence provisions. A good measure in this bill is dealing with the punishment of bad land-use practices that have caused the destruction of fish habitat.

Ultimately, these amendments to the Fisheries (Alberta) Act are long overdue as fish stocks have been in decline for years. We are glad to finally see some action taken to protect Alberta's fish population.

One factor that should also be considered is the enforcement of these measures; in other words, more fisheries officers to ensure compliance and enforce the act. Without this element these changes will not be as effective.

For those reasons I'm supporting Bill 11, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly. You may have gathered this, but I'm extremely proud of my father, Bryce Chase, and his connection with the Sarcee Fish and Game Association as well as the Alberta Fish and Game Association. Father, as well as planting literally thousands of caraganas around sloughs and lakes for bird and wildlife habitat protection, has also spent a tremendous amount of time dumping stumps into lakes for fish feeding areas.

One of the activities that the Sarcee Fish and Game Association takes on each year is a physically handicapped fishing derby. Father has taken along individuals in wheelchairs, individuals who were in need of assistance due to visual impairment. Rain or shine these annual fishing derbies in stocked ponds have been a highlight for these individuals.

I thank the hon. sponsor of this bill for bringing it forward. Obviously, protecting our wildlife, whether they be in streams or in the forest, is absolutely essential. And I thank the minister of sustainable resources for the monitoring that his ministry does.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 12
Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to move third reading of Bill 12, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak in favour of Bill 12, brought forward by the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. The intent of the bill is to simplify the processes the board uses to resolve disputes and to implement more informal, flexible forms of dispute resolution. Amendments are included to allow the board to have a more efficient process to manage its workload. As the workload with the board has been going up, I think this bill will go a long way to addressing that concern, and I think the board will be able to speed up the hearing process.

This bill is intended to deal with administration procedures and effectively streamline them in order to more expeditiously resolve surface rights disputes. This is a very important bill as it relates to the compensation for landowners who have resource activity on their land. Any changes to it must be carefully considered and must achieve an optimal balance between the rights of landowners and the rights of operators.

I think this bill is a step in the right direction, and for those reasons I think I'm going to be supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional members to participate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 13
Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to support Bill 13, the Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 13 will improve the judicial system and the court efficiency by providing justices of the peace with more flexibility and options. The Justice of the Peace Amendment Act will permit a sitting or presiding justice of the peace to serve past age 70 up to a maximum age of 75 or until his or her original 10-year appointment expires, whichever occurs first.

Currently the Justice of the Peace Amendment Act authorizes justices of the peace to be appointed for a 10-year term. The act also contains a provision for mandatory retirement at age 70. Bill 13 will change this and will ensure that experienced justices of the peace who want to and are capable of serving part-time or full-time in their capacity for their full 10-year term are not prevented from doing so because they've reached the age of 70. It will also ensure consistency with similar provisions pursuant to the Provincial Court Act,

applicable to judges and the Court of Queen's Bench Act, applicable to masters in chambers.

The amendments in Bill 13 will improve the efficiency of Alberta courts and, most importantly, increase Alberta's access to justice.

It is now my pleasure on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to move third reading of Bill 13, the Justice of the Peace Amendment Act.

Thank you.

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak in support of Bill 13, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. Under the current act justices of the peace are appointed for a term of 10 years but cannot sit past age 70 even if their appointment hasn't expired. With this bill I think the proposed amendments would allow a justice of the peace to sit past age 70, up to a maximum age of 75 or until his or her appointment expires, whichever occurs first. The proposed amendments would be consistent with provisions of the Provincial Court Act applicable to judges and with provisions in the Court of Queen's Bench Act applicable to masters in chambers.

This bill will likely have an almost entirely positive effect on the administration of the courts. Similar amendments, as mentioned above, were used to overhaul the rules of appointment terms of masters in chambers last sitting. For those reasons, we support this effort to ensure the smooth operation of the courts and career security for Alberta's justices of the peace. This problem was, you know, known for some time, and I'm glad the government is moving to address this problem.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional participants?
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Bill 14
Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's a pleasure for me to move third reading this afternoon of Bill 14, the Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act.

As we have all come to understand, this \$2 billion investment by the government, the province of Alberta on behalf of all of the people of Alberta and most certainly, I think, people of Canada, is a very clear signal of our commitment to the responsible development of Alberta's resources. Mr. Speaker, CCS, of course, is a technology that has been proven in places around the world, most particularly in Canada, and I would like to again reiterate that this is our support of the science of solutions.

Carbon dioxide is not just created by industry. We also know that our normal course of daily living generates a certain amount of CO₂ emissions and perhaps, in some circumstances, Mr. Speaker, the largest amount. They're not the sole responsibility, these CO₂ emissions, of industry alone. We believe that everyone must do their part to reduce emissions. This particular piece of legislation of the province of Alberta and our support for carbon capture and storage funding is done, I think, on behalf of Albertans to indicate, of

course, that we realize that each Albertan needs to play a role. By this support, we are doing so.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just want to share our support for this particular bill. We do realize that the government has to take the first step in terms of initiating exploration and improvement of carbon sequestration technology. I'm extremely pleased that the government has seen fit to support the University of Calgary's Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, which does a tremendous amount of the postsecondary research on carbon sequestration. As the hon. Minister of Energy noted, we have examples such as the Weyburn field in our neighbouring province of Saskatchewan, which sequesters CO₂ through a pipeline from North Dakota.

We know that the technology is one of the tools in terms of a cleaner atmosphere. We're going to be in a position where, hopefully, the Alberta government, our federal government, and the governments of the United States will be able to figure out what is best individually and collectively for us. There will be discussions in the future about carbon capture, and then comes the somewhat muddying of the waters, where it's not only carbon capture, but it's trade as well.

I want to put it on the record that I am hoping that the trading that is done is of an internal Alberta nature, in the same way that I'm hoping that bitumen upgrading will primarily be done in the province of Alberta so that we can get the best advantage from the risk that we are taking. I just want to put it on the *Hansard* record that we are supportive of the sustainable development of the oil sands – we see the advantages to Alberta for years to come – but we want there to be a very measured balance between the economy and the environment. The economy can be sort of a short-gain circumstance, but if it causes long-term pain in the form of reclamation or water pollution, then we have to re-evaluate the methodology we use for our exploration, and now we have to look at sequestration.

I mentioned sort of lining up with our national government and lining up with the States, but we also have a responsibility to line up with the world. Currently Alberta's cost per tonne is valued at \$15, and the European average is \$30. I know that the hon. Minister of Energy will be representing Alberta's interests. But in protecting Alberta's interests, we also have to work in a collegial, collaborative, global fashion to make sure that Alberta is not only a leader in terms of the technology associated with carbon sequestration but is working in concert with the rest of Canada, the United States, our neighbour and major trade partner, and also the world in general. We realize that we have to eventually move beyond our nonrenewable resource dependency on oil, in its various forms, and natural gas and that what happens now in terms of our planning and our preparation will be key to Alberta's success and sustainability.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is on the debate, not 29(2)(a), right?

The Speaker: This is on the debate.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. I just want to, very briefly, Mr. Speaker, get back on the record, you know, comments that echo, I think, what I said at second reading stage. Carbon capture and storage is a good idea. It is the centrepiece of the government's attempt to avoid the

consequence of carbon pricing on a national or international level. That in and of itself may or may not be a bad thing. I'm not sure that it is a bad thing.

However, I still have concerns about all of our eggs or far too many of our eggs being in this one carbon capture and storage basket in terms of how we're going to tackle climate change and carbon emissions in the province of Alberta. Whether we get the chance, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity is hoping, to do an internal cap and trade arrangement or whether we get caught up, advisably or otherwise, in a North America-wide cap and trade arrangement, I think that we are going to find ourselves dragged to a position where we have to have more tools in our box than just carbon capture and storage. There are other opportunities in terms of encouraging energy conservation, which I think is the single biggest one that we should be going hard on.

With that in mind, I would reiterate that while there is this commitment in principle to the original \$2 billion that was going to be put towards the Green TRIP initiative, we are not at \$5 million in the budget this year. We're not in practical terms acting on that commitment to nearly enough of an extent. I think that we need to work hard on the issues of public transportation, improved rapid transportation, energy conservation, some good strategies to retrofit – I gather the Member for Edmonton-Centre was laughing about something else.

4:00

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Totally.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, she was. Because I was serious.

Ms Blakeman: Absolutely.

Mr. Taylor: You know, on some good strategies around retrofitting houses, especially, because there's a tremendous amount of energy wastage and contribution to the carbon footprint there, on conservation strategies across the board: I think that's where this government really should be focusing in addition to the carbon capture and storage. I believe that there's more that we can do to encourage the development of alternative energy forms as well. Even though I recognize that we're not going to replace oil and gas or anywhere near that in the short term with renewables, with alternative energy sources, we must be starting down that road and working on the technology now.

I firmly believe that we achieved a status before the economy went south on us as an oil and gas superpower in this province. I firmly believe that going forward we need to establish and reaffirm our status in Alberta for the rest of the world as an energy superpower. We need to be good at all forms of energy: at the technology, at the knowledge, at the ability to sell that technology and sell that knowledge around the world, at the ability to sell other forms of energy around the world as well. Energy is our lifeblood. It has been conventional energy up until now and, increasingly, nonconventional oil and nonconventional gas. We need to ensure as we go forward that we continue to have energy in some form or other, in many forms, as our lifeblood, and we need to be producing it in an environmentally responsible way. We need to be leaders. We need to be leaders at all times in all forms of energy and energy conservation.

I would simply urge that the government not stop here at carbon capture and storage as the one magic trick that they have for dealing with global warming. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Calgary-McCall, do you want to participate under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Kang: No, I don't.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments?

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to participate in the debate.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two billion dollars is a big investment. I don't think any jurisdiction in the world is putting that kind of money towards carbon capture and storage, and I think we could be the leaders in this. Environment and energy development go hand in hand, and we could be the leaders if we balanced the two.

I think the flip side right now is that the government is entirely relying on this technology to provide not as much as GHG reductions. They're just in the planning stages. I think much more needs to be done. We should spread it around to have the efficiency savings. Maybe we should commit to retrofit homes with new windows, new furnaces, public transit initiatives, and incentives for green energy development. I think we can only be the leaders if we do all that.

I think the world is looking at us. Like the Member for Calgary-Currie said, we are an energy superpower, and when the economies of the world come back – India and China, all those countries – they will be looking to us for energy, and I think we should be ready and prepared to cash in on that boom. If our environment suffers at the cost of energy development, I don't think that would be good, sensible long-term planning. We should be leaders in this technology, and we can sell this technology to every other country in the world.

I will give you the example of New Delhi. Things were really getting way out of hand because, you know, it was very, very polluted, and the government decided to do something about it. They banned all the diesel vehicles from certain areas of the city, and they banned all those small autorickshaws. Because the government had the will, they cleaned up the environment in no time in New Delhi. Before, it was very hard to breathe. People were using dust masks. They were using bandanas. They were covering their noses and mouths. You know, when one got home, the dust mask was all black outside. When you go out now, that problem is not there anymore. I think that with that kind of money going towards cleaning up the GHG, we should go further to be leaders in the world on saving the environment.

You know, I think those concerns should all be addressed. I think we could be a leader in the technology. We can sell that, and we can all benefit. Our coming generations will benefit from this. It's a very good step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Additional speakers? Should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move third reading and provide a brief summary of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009.

Section 25(3) of the Peace Officer Act ensures that only fully sworn police officers can call themselves constable or special constable. Auxiliary constables are not fully sworn police members. They have limited authority granted to them under the Peace Officer Act. The intent is to establish clear, distinct identities for sworn officers and auxiliary constables and keep the term "constable" exclusively for sworn officers. However, complying with section 25(3) would require police services with auxiliary programs to change their auxiliary constables' uniforms and insignia, creating extra costs for those services.

Mr. Speaker, this was never the intent of the Peace Officer Act, and these extra costs would be especially burdensome in these uncertain economic times. This proposed amendment would allow police services to ask the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for an exception to this section of the act. They could then use similar but not identical uniforms and titles for both sworn and auxiliary constables, who attend scenes together. Passing this amendment will ensure that police services with auxiliary police programs do not have to use limited budget dollars to make changes to the uniforms and insignia. There are no costs to government related to this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In support of Bill 16, the Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009, yesterday I put on the record how pleased I was with the co-ordination between conservation officers, Sustainable Resource personnel, sheriffs, RCMP, and I need to include in that list the peace officers/special constables because what I am seeing, to my great delight, is a greater co-ordination of services. I had asked previous questions of the Solicitor General about how individuals could potentially transfer from force to force and what type of training would be required to do that transferring.

4:10

Under the auspices of Bill 16, if you'll permit, Mr. Speaker, I want to send out a large bouquet of congratulations and good wishes to Rick Gardner, who is based, I believe, out of Red Deer, and he is in charge of the sheriffs program for southern Alberta. Rick Gardner has got to be the greatest advocate for the sheriffs department possible. He spent a tremendous amount of time with me over the phone clarifying a ticket that a constituent of mine had received, and he has had a tremendous amount of previous policing experience with the Calgary police force, just an absolute great fellow doing a wonderful job. He assured me that while it appeared that the sheriffs' training in the first hand was somewhat limited, when that training is combined with on-the-job mentorship with RCMP officers and senior officers, that combination is a tremendous asset both on the highways and in the wilderness areas.

I am supportive of Bill 16 and its intent of clarification of special constables and their designation as peace officers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional comments?
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

The Speaker: Just a comment. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, seek some advice with respect to a comment you made just a few minutes ago when you said that you called a police officer in this province to seek advice on behalf of a ticket that had been received by a constituent of yours. Get some advice with respect to that matter, please.

Bill 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've listened over the course of the debate on Bill 20, the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009, to some of the input received during second reading and Committee of the Whole. I'm confident this legislation will further help Albertans to provide for themselves during their senior years.

A lot of people don't understand exactly how the Civil Enforcement Act works. The Civil Enforcement Act actually provides for relatively few exemptions if there is a judgment against someone. For example, if I had a second vehicle, say a blue van, at my place, that could easily be seized. The proposed amendments would change the law so that creditors don't have access to funds in a noninsurance RRSP, a deferred profit savings plan, known as a DPSP, or a registered retirement income fund, known as an RRIF. It would also exempt RDSPs from creditors, encouraging families of persons with disabilities to plan for the future needs of a disabled family member. Mr. Speaker, this bill also provides opportunities to increase the individual's independence, which is consistent with this government's goal of independence for all Albertans.

It's now my pleasure, therefore, to move third reading of Bill 20, the Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I hadn't, I'll admit quietly, been paying an incredible amount of attention to this bill, but I'm paying a lot more attention to things that have to do with RRSPs these days, so that kind of caught my attention. I started to go through the bill, and indeed I have learned a few things recently.

Therefore, I and my colleagues have been supportive of this bill as it's moved through the various stages and will continue to be supportive of it in third reading. It does help us harmonize with the rest of Canada. I think this is one of the suggestions that has flowed from the Uniform Law Commission. They've recommended a redefinition of the scope of garnishment and moving away from the sort of old definitions and concepts of debts and accruing due and substitutions. I mean, you get into a lot of legal-beagle language here, but essentially it's recommending that a debtor's property, subject to specific and principled exceptions, be left alone.

What we need here, what I need here desperately – this provides creditor protection of retirement savings to noninsurable registered retirement savings plans. My understanding is that the federal legislation, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, excludes certain classes and types of property that could be claimed by a trustee through a litigation process. So under the auspices of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act those properties that are exempt under provincial statutes are taken by the federal statute.

Prior to this the only forms of retirement savings plan that were generally exempted from execution by creditors under Alberta law were pension plans or insurable RRSPs. The life-insured forms of RRSP insurance products that were previously exempt in that they're

essentially life insurance contracts have been addressed through the Insurance Act.

We've got a Uniform Law Commission that's recommending this. When we look across the country, we're looking at Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland that have similar legislation. I think that as we as legislators look at the ability of government to provide for people in retirement years, we can clearly see a need for individuals to be having more of their own savings to be able to use for retirement. Fair is fair here. We need to try and enable that and encourage it as much as possible. So when you see legislation like this, you understand that it is signalling to people: please, you know, save your own money in RRSPs, and we'll do our best to make sure that that isn't swept away from you except under truly exceptional circumstances. That's what I'm seeing in this legislation, so I'm happy to support it today.

There are a number of other sort of administrative parts to this, but essentially it's creditor protection for the noninsurable kinds of registered retirement savings plans. So it sounds good to me.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Other participants?
Shall I call the vote?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to move third reading of Bill 24, the Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009.

Provisions in Bill 24 will allow Alberta to better prepare for an outbreak of a highly contagious livestock disease and respond to emergency situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health.

There's been vigorous debate in second and Committee of the Whole, and I look forward to the support of members of this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a major stretch, but because you had concerns with regard to me contacting a sheriff with regard to a ticket, I was not arguing the nature of the ticket. I was asking for clarification of the laws around the physical condition of a driver's licence. That information was provided, and I was appreciative of that information.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

4:20 Bill 26 Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to move third reading of Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009.

The amendments contained within the bill address certain challenges in enforcing and administering the Wildlife Act. Since this bill was introduced on March 10, we've had good opportunity for constituents to contact us on the amendments. I heard their input, answered their questions, and I thank them for their input.

Bill 26 is important to everyone who cares about wildlife. The

amendments also allow us to address some of the challenges associated with ensuring wildlife are secure.

I ask the Assembly to support Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009.

Ms Blakeman: I'm remembering this one now. This is the bill about: if you have captive wildlife and they get away from you, this allows the Crown, I think, to charge back the costs of capturing them and euthanizing them. No. He's shaking his head.

An Hon. Member: That was pulled.

Ms Blakeman: That was pulled. I'm not reading all the amendments. Oh, dear. I'm so sorry.

We have been supportive of this act. I'm remembering my colleague talking about this. The purpose of the Wildlife Act was to strengthen the provisions relating to possession of and commerce in animals. Yes. I've got that right. Does that still include recovering costs from owners on Crown actions? No, that was the part that was pulled. Okay. [interjection] Say it again.

Mr. Hancock: Section 4 was deleted.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, yes. Okay. That's the section I was talking about. Okay. Good.

We're certainly supportive of enhancing powers of wildlife officers and enforcement provisions and giving the courts more authority to order compensation to property victims stemming from damages as a result of offences under this act. Yes, indeed. I'm tracking this one. Good.

I actually have no notes on any real concerns that we had raised. There are certainly more punitive measures that the court can impose, so we expect it should be more of a deterrent on activities such as poaching and illegal exporting of wildlife and wildlife parts. I mean, I think what we're interested in is that there's protection for the staff that we have out there and that they have the tools, both statutory and physical, that they need to do their jobs but also that we are doing everything we can to discourage poaching. I think there are always two parts to poaching: one is just sort of stripping off the prize parts that you want and leaving the carcass there, which is appalling on its own, but then also the sort of exporting of those parts. Anything that we can do to give our wildlife officers better tools on that and to be able to deter illegal hunting I am very keen on.

At this point on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who is our SRD critic, I am very happy to support third reading of Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 28

Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for

me to rise this afternoon and move third reading of Bill 28, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Loquacious in his explanations as always. Thank you to the Minister of Energy.

The Official Opposition had been supportive of this, particularly because we were seeking clarification around regulatory powers and orphaned facilities and wells. But this, essentially, is around facilitating bitumen royalties in kind. Surely, we do not refer to this by the acronym BRIK. I hope not.

Two impacts of the bill: one is changing impacts of the Oil and Gas Conservation Act with regard to the orphan well fund, and the second is facilitating the taking of bitumen royalties in kind, which then requires changes to a number of other acts, so we end up with an omnibus bill that actually then has to go forward and make adjustments in a number of other bills. So we're into a number of things like the Natural Gas Pricing Agreement Act and several others, according to a quick read-through that I've had of this bill.

My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and our critic on energy has been on the record a number of times talking about our support for the bitumen royalty in kind program and process. We think we should be passing legislation that facilitates that system coming into play.

I'm never happy about omnibus bills because it's always possible as you go through these things that you can make a mistake. It just gets more complex when they're an omnibus bill, and we no longer are allocated the additional time in debate to talk about them. But we did put a number of our concerns on the record and received some responses back.

The instruction that I have from my colleague is to be supportive of this bill in third reading. It's possible some of my other colleagues have some additional comments. If not, thank you very much for the opportunity to indicate our support for Bill 28 at this point.

The Speaker: Others to participate, or should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, June 1.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: Just my final reminder to members that at 12:15 in the rotunda on Monday there'll be a special little event with respect to aboriginal month in Alberta.

Have a great weekend. Get some rest.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:28 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to May 28, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c11]

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c12]

- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c13]
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c9]
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407-8 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1408-9 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409-11 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1411 (May 28 aft., passed)

- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c14]
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cL-2.5]
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1265 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329 (May 26 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329-30 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)

- 26* Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1265-68 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1330-31 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 27* Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve.), 1229-40 (May 25 eve., passed with amendments)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246-49 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1413 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1268-69 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1358-60 (May 27 eve., passed)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1269-73 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1360-63 (May 27 eve., passed)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1273-75 (May 26 aft., passed)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1275-80 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1363 (May 27 eve., adjourned)
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- (May 27 eve., passed)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1280-81 (May 26 aft.), 1344-45 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- (May 27 eve., passed)
- 36* Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft.)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- (May 27 eve., passed with amendments)
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)

- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406-7 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1345-50 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- (May 27 eve., passed)
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft.)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1350-58 (May 27 aft., passed)
- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- (May 27 eve., passed)
- 44* Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1283-84, 1294-1329 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1240-46 (May 25 eve., passed)
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft.)
- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c8]
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft.)
- 52* Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health), (May 25 aft., reported to Assembly)
Committee of the Whole -- 1284-94 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)

- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1209-15 (May 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c10]
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1215-22 (May 25 aft., adjourned)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)
- 208 Life Leases Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 1208 (May 25 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
- Pr3 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 1, 2009

Issue 46

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
Cao, Wayne C.N., Calgary-Fort, Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Sustainable Resource Development
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Advanced Education
and Technology
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC),
Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL),
Deputy Leader of the Official Opposition
Official Opposition House Leader
Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (PC)
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC),
Deputy Government Whip
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Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
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DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
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Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC),
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Groeneveld, Hon. George, Highwood (PC),
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Parliamentary Assistant, Municipal Affairs
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Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 1, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Canadians and as Albertans we give further thanks for the precious gifts of culture and heritage which we share. Amen.

Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery is a young lady named Akina Shirt, and she will lead us today in the singing of our national anthem in Cree. It was several months ago that she sang the national anthem in Cree at a hockey game televised nationally, across this country. For many Canadians it was the first time that they heard their national anthem sung in Cree. Today this will go across the province of Alberta, and it may very well be the first time for many people in Alberta that they will hear their national anthem sung in Cree.

[*O Canada* was sung in Cree] [applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Akina. All the best in your singing career as you go forward.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is such a privilege and an extra pleasure today to introduce some special guests, who are seated in your gallery, who are here to help celebrate Alberta's first-ever Aboriginal History and Culture Month, ushered in and prompted by the sponsorship of a motion by that name as brought in by our honourable and esteemed colleague from Lesser Slave Lake. Thank you, Honorary Chief, for doing that for us today.

Mr. Speaker, our guests include – I'll ask those that are here to rise, and if they're not here yet, they will be acknowledged later – from Treaty 8 the grand chief, Rose Laboucan; from the Métis Settlements General Council the president, Mr. Gerald Cunningham; from the Métis Nation of Alberta Association Mrs. Audrey Poitras and Vice-President Muriel Stanley Venne; and, on their way in, Regional Chief Wilton Littlechild from the Assembly of First Nations, Chief Allen Paul from the Alexander First Nation. I believe Vice Grand Chief Carolyn Buffalo from Treaty 6, as well, will be joining us. Please, hon. members, on this very special and historic first-ever Alberta Aboriginal History and Culture Month, welcome our guests with the enthusiasm they deserve.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce Akina Shirt. You've already introduced her. She's with her mother, Jean Cardinal. In February 2007, as you indicated, Akina sang the Canadian national anthem at a Calgary hockey game. She made history that day. She sang the anthem in Cree, as you indicated. This talented young woman was also asked

to perform the anthem at a Government House francophone event. Of course, she wowed the attendees by singing in three languages: Cree, English, and French. She also graced us with her talent today as she sang for us just moments ago, and she also opened our celebration of aboriginal history and culture earlier this afternoon.

Aside from being immensely talented, Akina is also actively involved with the community. She has become a public speaker, delving into topics such as education, what it means to be a role model, the importance of having supportive parents, and, of course, the perseverance to develop a talent or a skill. Mr. Speaker, I'd ask that Akina stand and get the recognition that she so deserves because she has one heck of a beautiful voice.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly a very successful and talented young Albertan, Rosie Templeton of Coaldale. Rosie, a grade 11 student in Kate Andrews high school in Coaldale, was chosen from among 90 of the province's top 4-H members as the 2009 Premier's award winner, the most prestigious accolade in the 4-H program.

Rosie is currently a member of the Readymade 4-H Beef Club and the South Country Judging Club. During her seven years in 4-H Rosie has held many executive positions, including her present tenure as president and previously as secretary, historian, and club reporter. Her exceptional skills, Mr. Speaker, have earned her this great honour.

In addition to her duties as the Premier's award recipient Rosie will serve as youth ambassador, representing 4-H events throughout North America and promoting the opportunities 4-H offers. Rosie is starting off her year in fine style, visiting us today and meeting with the Premier a little later.

Mr. Speaker, Rosie is seated in your gallery with her parents, Carolyn and Byron, and her sisters, Roberta and Jocelyn. I ask that they now rise to receive a very warm welcome from the Assembly. Rosie, by the way, is the blond one.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of 53 students from Red Deer-North's Gateway Christian school accompanied by two teachers and their five chaperones: Mr. Jim Driedger, Mrs. Klaaske DeKoning, Mrs. Rolanda Huizenga, Mrs. Connie Kloss, Mrs. Colleen Dilallo, Mrs. Melanie Boorse, and Mrs. Christine Hopkins.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to see these exceptional students from Red Deer here today. As our future leaders in Red Deer they're up here learning about Alberta's legislative process. I believe they're seated in both the members' and the public galleries, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our House.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House the Ogden House Senior Citizens Club and their kitchen band, the Railroad Rascals. Today the Railroad Rascals are celebrating their 25th anniversary at the Alberta Legislature Grounds, and we experienced a lively, energetic performance earlier this morning helping to launch Alberta's Seniors' Week.

Mr. Speaker, since they are 80-plus years young, I wish to read the names of the band here: Terri Gorieu, Gail Sanderson, Marg Heggart, Bob Heggart, Marianne Wilkat, Hazel Hudson, Dot Rennie, Roberta Labute, Omer Labute, Janet Faulkner, Millie McPhedran, Marion Headley, Betty Larkin, George Stagg, Bill Redding, Bev Craswell, Diane Dmytryshyn, Ed Cooper, Ivy Cooper. These are the majority of the members. But there's one member that I need to point out. She is now 106 years old. She could not take the bus up here with them, but she plays well with the band in Calgary. With that, I want to ask them to rise and receive recognition from our Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: And you call them the rascals?

Mr. Cao: They call themselves the Railroad Rascals.

The Speaker: That's what they call themselves. That's better.
The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly four hard-working staff members from our Department of Health and Wellness. We have Daphnee-Lyne Carrie, who serves as a public affairs officer in the communications branch and is currently working on our pharmaceutical strategy. Morgan Heard is an interim communications assistant in the communications branch and a bachelor of communication student majoring in public relations at Mount Royal College in Calgary, we believe soon to be Mount Royal university. Zahra Upal is a bachelor of arts student majoring in sociology at the University of Alberta. Sameer Premji is a pharmacist completing his master's in business administration at the University of Alberta. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask all four individuals to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise before the Assembly to introduce staff members from the international qualifications assessment service, or IQAS, branch. Today is their 15th anniversary. IQAS staff work with immigrants, employers, professional regulatory associations, and postsecondary institutions to provide information, resources, and assessment services. Since 1994 IQAS has issued over 37,000 assessment certificates and evaluated credentials from over 10,000 educational institutions from around the world. I'm proud to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly several staff members from the IQAS branch. They are Kathleen Morrow, Jeff Stull, Darlene Fisher, Grace Waszkiewicz, Sandra Zarate, Suzanne Smith, Colette Shannon, Haichen Sun, Nadiya Soroka, and Stefan Sokolowski. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, if I might, I see that Chief Buffalo has now joined us in the Speaker's gallery. She wasn't here when earlier introductions were made. Chief Carolyn Buffalo is the chief of the Montana band in my constituency. I'm very pleased that she could be with us today. She actually coaxed her daughter and a friend out of school to come and join us. They're in the members' gallery: Chloe

Buffalo-Jackson and Alysha Raine. They thought that they could get as much of an education here today as they might have had back at school. We're very pleased to have them with us. If they would please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have another introduction. I have a lot of pride in introducing you to 10 great young Albertans and their leaders. They along with hundreds of their friends form the Hobbema cadet corps. They have brought great credit to their families, their community, their province, and, indeed, their nation. Some 30 of them have just returned recently from a trip to Jamaica. There's going to be a group of Jamaican young people coming to visit them over the summer. They're here with their leaders – Captain Salty Lee, Captain Trent Young, and two RCMP officers, Sergeant Mark Linnell and Constable Richard Huculiak – who deserve a hatful of medals for the work that they've done volunteering with this group. If they would all please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature representatives from both the Insurance Bureau of Canada and Alberta's fire and emergency services. They are here today because they share the passion for strengthening Alberta's fire and emergency management systems. With us today – and I'll ask them to rise as I introduce them – are Fire Chief Brian McEvoy from Bonnyville Regional Fire Authority and immediate past president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association; Fire Chief Bob Galloway from the county of Leduc; Fire Chief Terry Senecal from St. Paul; Deputy Fire Chief John Lamb from the city of Edmonton; retired Fire Chief Randy Wolsey from the city of Edmonton; Randy Siemens, emergency service co-ordinator from Lamont county. Also joining us today from the Insurance Bureau of Canada are Mr. Don Forgeron, president and CEO, and Mr. Jim Rivait, vice-president, Alberta and north. Also joining us today in the public gallery are Brad Hoekstra, secretary of the Alberta Firefighters Association and the Canadian firefighters' association, and Greg Holubowich, president of Edmonton Firefighters Union. I'd ask them all to rise and accept the welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special people from the Calgary-Mackay constituency office. Seated in the members' gallery is Ms Krista Taldorf, my constituency assistant, who very capably manages my office in Calgary. She has a diploma in nonprofit management, and she herself is a very active volunteer in Calgary. Next to Krista is Mr. Tudor Dinca, a third-year policy studies student at Mount Royal College, a very enthusiastic, very polite young man who would never call me by my first name. He is spending his summer working as a STEP student in my office. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Meghan Melnyk and her mother, Karen Melnyk. Meghan is my STEP student and works out of my constituency office. She offers excellent service to the constituents of Calgary-Fish Creek, and I'm very grateful for her help. I'll ask that Meghan and Karen rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you. Two guests have met with me today to talk about some of the insurance issues. Jim Rivait has been pleased to present, newly on the job, on a particular job, a person who is returning to Alberta for a visit but who actually spent time in his community of Vegreville, Don Forgeron. I'd ask them to please rise and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Aboriginal History and Culture Month

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my heart soars like an eagle because my people's history and my people's culture were celebrated this afternoon here in the Legislature. Hundreds and hundreds of years ago and still today indigenous people of this country celebrated the beginning and all the month of June as a time to carry out their ceremonies such as tea dances, sun dances, naming ceremonies. In fact, the chicken dance was just completed this morning. What this does is send out the people, once they have thanked the Creator for life, and pray for the best for future generations.

My heart soars like an eagle today because after many, many years my people are being given the recognition they deserve. On behalf of all the elders, grand chiefs, chiefs, Métis presidents, Métis leaders, and aboriginal people in this province I have many thanks to give. First, to you, Mr. Speaker, for hosting this wonderful day, for making sure that it went off the way it should, thank you very much. Your staff are some of the best in this Legislature, and they did an exemplary job to make sure that it went off well. Thank you to them. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, for his support and always being there for the aboriginal community, we thank him. To my friend President Dr. Sam Shaw from NAIT and his staff and the culinary team who were so wonderful with the food they prepared for us downstairs. I know that we all enjoyed the wonderful taste of the aboriginal cuisine. To Akina Shirt for her beautiful rendition of *O Canada* in Cree. To the dancers, the musicians, to Dreamspeakers for their constant co-ordination, and to my colleagues, all of you here, for all your support as we pass the motion for June to be recognized as Aboriginal History and Culture Month. My heart soars for the people who were involved.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Laser Surgery in Calgary

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Events that played out this weekend in Calgary displayed the chaos and inconsistency that are plaguing Alberta's health system. One day Alberta Health Services will not accept funds from a donor; the next day they will. The impact that the uncertainty of this laser surgery has had on patients who are waiting and on professionals has not been positive. To the Premier: how can the Premier justify two laser suites in Edmonton while Calgary is forced through neglect to go hat in hand to private donors?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the board of Alberta Health Services

made decisions based on evidence brought forward by medical professionals. Since then I believe there has been a corporate donor that has stepped forward that is willing not only to cover the cost of the laser machine but also the operating costs for the next year. This will give the board time to review many of the other difficult decisions that they have to make over the next 12 months.

Dr. Swann: Well, how can the Premier defend the absolute incompetence this situation has revealed in Calgary regarding keeping prostate surgery available in that city?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, the board has delegated the responsibility and the authority to make decisions based on the provision of health services across the province of Alberta. Again, the board listens to the input from the health professionals that bring forward their opinions on the best delivery, and they made the decisions based on that evidence.

Dr. Swann: Well, let's try the health minister, then. How does this minister defend this incompetence threatening the very program of laser surgery that would reduce complications and wait times: the quality of care in the city of Calgary?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've made no apologies for the fact that we have a situation that the Alberta Health Services Board is going through in terms of analyzing and assessing all of the different procedures and programs that were in place in the various regions in the province. Alberta Health Services is about to produce their budget to their health board in the very near future, and within that budget will be a number of funding requirements, and this may very well be one of them.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bitumen Upgrading

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of all the many decisions we make in the province that affect our future, a local bitumen upgrading industry is just about as important as it gets. A recent article in the *Financial Post* by Wilf Gobert makes the point very clearly. "The upgrading of bitumen in Canada is possibly the greatest economic challenge for policy makers in our history." Local businesses, unions, and Albertans who are looking to make a decision on their future need clear information from this government. To the Premier: what are you going to do to ensure more upgrading happens in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, a few days ago in the House, we're working through a very intense policy discussion. This is, of course, one that involves so many different things: of course, environment because of load on various airsheds if we add all of the upgrading at the same time. It also means transmission, ensuring that there's the pipeline capacity to move all of the finished product either to the United States or, quite frankly, even to the coast so that we can ship it to other markets. The other is that there are energy requirements, huge requirements for electrical energy into the Industrial Heartland. Those corridors have to be identified, and those transmission lines have to be built. So there's a lot of input into the overall decision. Do we want to add more value to bitumen? Yes, and that is the plan.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Energy minister talk

a lot about bitumen royalty in kind as being the saviour here, but very little action has happened. Again to the Premier: when will we see a bitumen royalty in kind program? How long are we going to have to wait?

Mr. Stelmach: Very soon. I know that the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise are all working together collectively on a policy that will answer all of the issues that come forward, to make sure that all of the various issues are considered and that all input comes to make a good policy decision, and that'll be done very, very shortly.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier: if the royalty in kind program does not do enough to bring bitumen back to Alberta, will the Premier force companies to upgrade here? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're adding, I think, to about 1.3 million barrels of production; about 700,000 barrels of bitumen are upgraded here. First of all, we have to of course produce more barrels of bitumen and move the upgrading in conjunction with the increase in the production. There have been a few projects just recently announced that will increase bitumen production, and now we're following up with a policy to ensure that more and more of the bitumen is upgraded here.

In terms of working with industry and working with, you know, the federal government, it is a complex issue, and we just want to do it right. We will do it without – I don't know what the hon. member refers to as forcing because I know that that was something the opposition didn't want to do before. We will work with all industry to make sure that we reach our goal.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Government Aircraft

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I tabled documents regarding flights back to Calgary on government planes after the Premier's dinner here in Edmonton. These flights were signed off by the Executive Council, for which the minister responsible is the Premier. To the Premier: what was the news conference or event listed as the reason for the flight that left Edmonton at 10 p.m. on April 30 this year, the same night as the Premier's dinner?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, since the session started, every Monday, or Tuesday in the case of a holiday, the airplane picks MLAs up from Calgary and flies them to Edmonton. Every Thursday night, at the time that's most appropriate for the majority, it flies back to Calgary. On the night of the Premier's dinner in Edmonton it was decided that the plane would fly later. It costs not \$1 more to leave at 9:20 or 5:20.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was not the appropriate reason to delay the planes. Before, the planes left at 5:30. Clearly, there was a connection between the dinner and the planes back to Calgary.

To the Premier again: what were the meetings with government officials that had the other flight leaving at 10 p.m. the same night as the Premier's dinner?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there were no flights leaving at 5:30.

The flights have all been dedicated from day one, if the hon. member wanted to go on the Internet and see the logs, to attending meetings with government officials. I guess that if they would like us to write a story about what some of these folks have to do all week, we could. The simple fact is that we use the government air services to ensure that the people that do the work here can get to and from Calgary or other parts of the constituency. The only Thursday that there were absolutely no government airplanes in the air was the night of the Premier's supper in Calgary, April 2, when no government planes were needed and, therefore, were not flying.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just want to know what the news conferences or meetings going on with government officials at midnight, after the Premier's dinner, were.

To the Premier again: given that flight crews and ground crews are working until almost midnight deadheading back to Edmonton, what are the additional operating costs to flying to Calgary and back this late at night?

2:00

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, I guess it was just foresight, Mr. Speaker. When we bought the airplanes, we got headlights on them so they can fly at night. Thankfully, the air service crew that works for this government really goes out of their way to make sure that whether it's getting to a northern community, to Lethbridge, to Medicine Hat, anywhere in this province, they're there so that we can accommodate these trips. I would wonder what the hon. member would expect that the people that were flying back to their families at 10 o'clock on Thursday night were going to do. I would suggest that after a week up here listening to this, they wanted to go home for some sanity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Government Accountability

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The list of this government's broken promises is growing fast. The Premier promised to create 600 long-term care beds, and he hasn't. He promised more bitumen would be upgraded in Alberta, and it's not. He promised to get more money for our oil and gas, but he's given away nearly half a billion dollars in royalties. My question is to the Premier. What value does the Premier think Albertans should place on this government's promises given that track record?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, he raised a number of topics in his preamble. With respect to royalties we did announce a royalty incentive program a few months ago. This is to assist the gas industry, that is seeing some unbelievably low prices. This is all about, of course, creating jobs, and it's not only creating jobs in the bigger centres of Edmonton and Calgary, but it's moving those jobs out into rural Alberta. It's not only the drilling activity; it's the tire shop that repairs the tires, the restaurants, the motels, jobs right across the province. I believe that the decision made by this government was the right one. Gas prices are still depressed, and with the unusually large finds in Louisiana and Texas, we're going to be suffering through some low prices for a while.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, while this government is giving out half a billion dollars in oil patch welfare, they're cutting health care,

delisting services, and letting emergency wait times soar. The priorities of this Conservative government couldn't be more clear. To the Premier: why won't you admit that your priorities lie with your friends around the boardroom table and not with those waiting hour after hour in hospital emergency rooms?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, of course, another error in the preamble. The health budget has been increased by \$550 million. It's not a cut; it's an increase of \$550 million. We're one of the few jurisdictions to do that, especially during such difficult economic circumstances.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can say that, but we all know that they're cutting services. Wait times are getting longer. They've cut out gender reassignment surgery. They've cut out chiropractic care. There's, you know, a real drop in the level of service. How can he justify cutting the services in health care that Albertans receive when he's giving the oil patch a half billion dollar royalty break?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing the hon. member doesn't realize: those people that are out working, that actually have a job, pay taxes. They pay taxes to the provincial government, which supports a lot of the programs we hold dear, which are health and education and social services and infrastructure. People working pay more tax. That is a very simple equation, and that is what we're promoting in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Fire Safety in Seniors' Facilities

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Shortly after 3 a.m. on Sunday approximately 160 seniors were evacuated from a private assisted living facility, Lifestyle Options, in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured, and all residents have been temporarily relocated. As you can imagine, my constituents are very concerned about fire safety in similar living settings. My questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As the minister responsible for fire safety in this province how can he assure my constituents that similar buildings are safe?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I do want to say that the seniors' residences are very safe. Seniors' residences are built to code, and they must have emergency plans. It is unfortunate what happened this past weekend, but I will say that the emergency plans and the codes did work. I would very much like to commend the firefighters, some of them that are here today and the firefighters that continually protect our communities, and the staff and all of the community for all of the efforts that they do in supporting these individuals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I look forward to echoing that appreciation later in a member's statement.

As the minister has mentioned, he has introduced changes to building codes in the recent past. My constituents would like to know whether the new or amended fire safety codes could have prevented this fire.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you at this particular time if the new codes could have prevented this fire because we haven't yet determined the cause of the fire, but I do want to say what the new codes do. The new codes were designed to buy time for people to get out of their homes and for firefighters to respond. In this particular case it did work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the minister. Lifestyle Options is a multilevel assisted living facility, and there are many of them throughout the city. My constituents would very much like to know whether there are different codes that provide special protection for apartment living facilities.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the strongest building codes in the country. Yes, there are different types of codes for different buildings. The larger and taller the building is, the greater the safety requirements because of the increased risk to lives and property. The use of the building will also determine the requirements. Again, we have very strong building codes for all buildings, whether they be single- or multifamily. The safety of Albertans is this government's top priority.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister's claim that the changes to the homeless eviction and prevention fund and the elimination of all new rent top-up supplements was just an administrative change, the awful truth has become clear: a lot fewer people qualify now for housing assistance, and there's a lot less money for the few who do. The minister knows it costs \$600 a month to provide someone with a rent top-up and \$1,200 a month to keep them homeless in a shelter. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: why, then, given the math, won't the minister recognize that her efforts to stop the bleeding in her own budget are effectively negating the progress towards ending homelessness in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear. This actually is a very good program change we've made with EI and this ministry for individuals who do require rent supplement. Yes, there are waiting lists for rent supplements. There always have been; there will continue to be. But we are working very hard as a ministry through our affordable housing program and through our homeless program for capital dollars that we've had, which we've talked about in this Assembly. There is over \$800 million over the next three years for housing of this type, and that will provide units for people so that they are no longer on the rent supplement program.

Mr. Taylor: By that time the people who are on the waiting list now might actually be at the top of it.

If the minister still contends – and it sounds as though she does – that all the help they need is there for all the people who need it, then why is virtually every social agency reporting that their clients cannot access the housing help they need?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, if the member is referring to people that are in need that require a first month's rent, that require help with arrears or require help with eviction, then that's with the Minister of EI, and I'll ask that he respond.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the major obstacle for many people to get their own apartment is coming up with the damage deposit, why is the amount available for the damage deposit now limited to \$350? Where is that enough to get an apartment?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to respond. Albertans, whether they've received a notice of eviction or they need an emergency damage deposit, can apply to our ministry for income support. We determine the criteria. We look at the assets and the income and expenses of that particular individual. They do talk about \$350, but that is for singles or those without children. Others and families with children can qualify for up to a thousand dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

2:10 Milk and Liquid Cream Container Recycling

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a mother I can empathize with families who contact me with their concerns about the addition of milk containers to the deposit system. This change may have an adverse effect on many families, seniors, and others living on a fixed income. My question is for the Minister of Environment. Doesn't this change cause undue hardship for families with young children?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, this is a program, with respect to the myriad of other beverages that are available to consumers in Alberta, that has worked extremely well in the past. In the consultations that we engaged in with Albertans leading up to this change, there was a very clear message that the vast majority of Albertans wanted us to proceed with milk containers in the same way that we do with soft-drink containers. I'd remind the member that it is a refundable deposit, and if the containers end up at the bottle depot, they'll get their money back.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Many communities already have an effective voluntary recycling program in place. In fact, Calgary just introduced curbside recycling this spring. So why make this change now?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we have a voluntary system in place right now, and it does reasonably well with respect to the plastic jugs that milk is sold in, about a 60 per cent return rate, but a deplorable 22 per cent return rate for paper milk containers. Clearly, that's not good enough. The kind of results that we're looking for is 85 per cent across the board, and we believe that with the refundable deposits in place we'll be able to achieve that return rate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the same minister. The province announced it would introduce

this deposit on new jugs last fall, and I know many families who have saved up their milk jugs. Will Albertans receive a refund on containers purchased before June 1 if they take them to a bottle depot?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we made it very clear at the time that we made this announcement that there would not be refunds paid on containers that had not had deposits paid. So the short answer is no. They will not be able to get a refund for containers that they've saved. The containers will be clearly marked: Alberta deposit. They'll have red expiry date stamps rather than black, so it'll be very clear which ones are refundable. However, the bottle depots, to their credit, have agreed that they will accept all milk containers. They will, however, only pay you for the ones with red.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Nursing Shortage

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that summer is here, there is a fresh group of nursing graduates available to Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services. There are nearly a thousand graduates who would most likely love to stay and work here in the province. The problem is, however, that there is in effect a hiring freeze. To the minister: will the minister tell Albertans how many positions are available to new nursing graduates?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition is not quite correct. There is not a hiring freeze. What there is is a determination by the Alberta Health Services Board as to the right numbers. The various facilities are not permitted at this time to simply go out and hire nurses whenever they feel like they should, so it is going to be for the first time in quite some time a more orderly process in how we fill some of these positions.

Dr. Swann: Well, the fact is that Alberta Health Services' website states that there are only 30 positions needed in Alberta. I think the minister needs to explain. A month ago there was a shortage of 1,400 nurses in the province; now, according to the website, only 30. How does the minister explain this math?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I would say that the Alberta Health Services Board is doing exactly what the opposition leader suggested on several occasions in this House. They are working smarter, Mr. Speaker. If he'd take the opportunity to meet with the college of registered nurses, they would probably tell him exactly what they're telling me, and that is that 27 per cent of a nurse's day is spent doing nonnurse work. So we'd better ensure that within our health system we have the right people doing the right thing.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that is clear is that projections of a year ago of the number of nurses retiring have certainly changed in the last year due to economic circumstances. So there are a whole bunch of factors involved. Surely the Leader of the Opposition wouldn't be asking us to go out and hire nurses that we don't need and then lay them off in the next few months.

Dr. Swann: Well, we have in fact heard from such groups as the association, and they are pretty upset. This minister needs to explain why he's prepared to compromise quality of care for the bottom line. With the massive expenses that have gone into increasing enrolment and looking around the world for these health professionals, how is it the minister can say that less staff are needed now?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, nobody has said that less staff are needed. What we have said is that we need to ensure that those who are trained are doing what they're trained to do. The college of registered nurses: yeah, I'd challenge them. Phone them up. Have a meeting with them. See if they tell him the same thing they told me: 27 per cent of what a nurse does on a daily basis is nonnurse work. If he wants us to be paying registered nurses' salaries to be changing bedpans, then have him stand up and say so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy stated last week that the Alberta Utilities Commission is responsible for setting compensation rates for transmission lines. Many landowners tell me these rates have been significantly lower and basically not in the market. What can this government do so the AUC gets the message that their rates are totally out of sync with reality and adjusts them accordingly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarification, the AUC is not responsible for setting the compensation rates, but they are responsible to approve the rates. The opportunities for transmission facility operators and landowners to get together and negotiate what they feel is a fair compensation is available to every landowner or person affected by these pieces of infrastructure. Of course, if they cannot reach an agreement, there's an opportunity at the Surface Rights Board for them to seek appeal.

Mr. Marz: To the same minister: what other avenues are available to landowners to get fair compensation from the AUC compared to other types of installations?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I think what needs to be understood here is that there is nothing that has been taken away from landowners with respect to their ability to negotiate with the transmission facility operator, the same way that they may negotiate with other enterprises that may want to come and do something that affects their rights and surface rights on the land that they own. Again, I must emphasize that every landowner has the ability to negotiate what he thinks is a fair settlement, and if they are not able to do that, there are avenues of appeal.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. This Assembly passed a motion last fall to review surface rights compensation rates. Given that such a review may give some direction to entities such as the Surface Rights Board as well as AUC, has any consideration been given to this motion at this time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, that was Motion 512. I want to assure the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that we've not forgotten that motion but that in discussion with stakeholders it was agreed that there are a number of procedural issues dealing with the Surface Rights Board that should be addressed first.

That's basically what we've done. My parliamentary assistant, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, introduced legislation in this session, Bill 12, that addresses those issues. Those amendments will streamline procedures and save time and money for all parties involved.

We've also introduced alternative dispute resolution and mediation, that, again, is in the interest of all parties involved, and of course we introduced the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, implementing the land-use framework. I can assure the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that one of the next steps will be to review the issue of landowner compensation. I'm looking forward to that, just as he is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Fire Safety in Seniors' Facilities

(continued)

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that my questions today are somewhat predictable. With more and more seniors being reassessed from long-term care to only needing supportive or designated assisted living, more seniors who have mobility and cognitive issues will be housed in DAL and AL facilities. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister answer to whether the Lifestyle Options of Whitemud retirement community had a fire safety plan in place that was in accordance with the present Alberta fire code?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would really like to express my concern for the seniors who lost their homes this weekend. I'm very happy to hear that the injuries were very minor and that we had no loss of life. I'd like to also express my appreciation for the emergency response teams that did such a good job of containing the fire.

Mr. Speaker, in the continuing care system we have three streams. The first stream is home living, or independent living; the second stream is supportive living; and the third stream is long-term care. Both of these streams were in the independent living stream.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. If neighbours who happened to have been awakened at 3 o'clock in the morning needed to be volunteers so that the residents could be safely evacuated, does the minister consider these plans to be sufficient for resident safety? If it isn't your portfolio, perhaps the minister whose portfolio it is would answer.

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, I will say that there are plans, whether they be evacuation plans or emergency plans, on all residential facilities. When the question was asked: is there a plan? Yes, there is a plan. Is there supposed to be a plan? Yes, there's supposed to be a plan. Do we have different codes that apply to facilities that have different types of individuals that live in those facilities? Yes, there are.

Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: Perhaps I will direct my question to the same minister and perhaps ask him to elaborate a bit more on that. I wanted to know: during the provincial review on the fire codes were these continuing care facilities reviewed as separate entities, and are there

actually evacuation standards that go with those fire codes for these particular facilities?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, the review that we did on safety codes had a lot to do with residential, multiresidential, multidwelling buildings. The codes that were changed had a lot to do with single-dwelling residences and bringing some of those codes to a standard that is already in place for multiresident buildings or for, let's say, seniors' residences.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Children's Services Reports

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a foster child died last year, the minister of children's services refused to share details of a special case review, but after a child in care was traumatically injured this year, she promised to make that review public. However, when I asked the minister for an update during budget estimates, she didn't have one. Today I am asking: when will the minister quit stalling, cut the red tape, and make the special case review public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right that we did commit to making our special case review public. At this point, like I said a couple weeks ago, I'm not sure when that day will be that we can release that information, but I will as soon as I can.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, last year the ministry of children's services also agreed to review the role of the child advocate. When I asked her about that a few weeks ago, she admitted to having the report but refused to release it until her communications staff could put her spin on it. My question to the minister is: why won't the minister release her report about the children's advocate before the end of this session instead of waiting for the cover of summer recess?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to just correct. What I did say is that I had received the report – it's a very well done report; it was written by experts both internally and externally as well as it involves some youth in care – and that I was working on a government response. I do expect both to be coming forward shortly.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, these reports have been coming shortly for months and months and months now.

Case reviews of injured foster children in overcrowded foster homes are crucial to protecting the safety of children in need. The minister's strategy to delay, delay, delay is the wrong choice when children in care are at risk. These children need help now, and the minister is ignoring the problem. When will the minister stop delaying and commit to a date for making the special case review and the report on the role of the children's advocate public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to

point out that, first of all, we're not sitting on anything. Just a reminder that the commitment to go through with a review of the advocacy system and compare with other systems across the country, that decision was only made at the end of November and the work started in December and January. So I would suggest that, actually, they did work rather quickly, and we will have a government response rather quickly. The first report she's talking about was just committed to a couple of months ago.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Air Quality Monitoring

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, our province benefits from important industrial growth and development. Albertans expect that our environment will not be unnecessarily sacrificed. An important part of this is the quality of the air that we breathe. My questions are all for the Minister of the Environment. With industrial development and also natural events, such as the recent grass fires near Edmonton, what's the government doing to monitor air quality?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can assure the member and all members that we are in fact monitoring air quality in this province 24/7, 365 days a year. Now, the Alberta air quality index monitors for five pollutants, and that includes ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter, PM_{2.5}. That's tiny, tiny particles that are in the air that are so small that they could be ingested into the lungs. Those are the ones that cause the most harm. Can we do better? Of course we can, and we're working with the Clean Air Strategic Alliance to develop a new policy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard in this House that Alberta uses a different measure for air quality than the federal government and other jurisdictions. Can the minister explain: why isn't Alberta using the federal index?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're very confident that Alberta's air quality index is the right index system for this province. Our index is much more sensitive to short-term events. It's based on near real-time hourly pollutant concentrations. The federal index is based on three-hour averages and concentrations and only covers three pollutants as opposed to the five that we have in the Alberta index. The federal only has the particulate matter, the ozone, and the nitrogen dioxide.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentioned the development of a new provincial clean air strategy. When can Albertans expect to see this strategy and provide input?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, CASA has had this matter under discussion for some time, and I'm expecting to receive the recommendations from them later on this summer. We'll take those recommendations as the basis to develop a new strategy. I expect that we'll begin some public consultations in early 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Electricity Transmission System Upgrades

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans face a staggering increase in their electricity bills because of this government's policies. It was a decision by former Minister of Energy Murray Smith to override the EUB and transfer 100 per cent of the cost of upgrades to the electrical grid from industry to the consumer. That cost is now expected to be a staggering \$10 billion to \$14 billion. To the Minister of Energy: will this minister reverse Murray Smith's arbitrary move to burden consumers with the entire cost of the transmission system and go back to the recommendation of the EUB?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as has been the custom, the issue that we're speaking about here has been simplified beyond all reason. There has never been a point in time in the province of Alberta where consumers did not pay the bill. Whether you charge it on the generating side, charge it intermediately, charge it in the transmission system, charge it on the regulated part of distribution, consumers – consumers – in the province of Alberta have always paid for electrical generation and the means to distribute it to where consumers require it.

Dr. Taft: Yeah, well, we could debate that and bring the EUB into it if he wanted.

Secrecy is the order of the day with this government. Credible industry reports peg the cost of upgrading Alberta's electricity grid at \$14 billion. To the Minister of Energy: Albertans need to know just how much they're going to be fleeced because of this government's bad decisions, so what are the full costs of the transmission upgrade?

2:30

Mr. Knight: Again, Mr. Speaker, there's an hon. member here that's talking about something that happened I don't know when ago, but the EUB doesn't exist anymore. It's just not here, so it's not relevant, whatever that is.

What we're talking about are the short-term upgrades to the transmission, critical infrastructure in the province of Alberta. The bill as we see it today, the estimates that have been made by AESO and others in the energy industry, is about \$8.1 billion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans used to have far cheaper electricity than the U.S., but the more integrated we've become with the American market, the higher our power prices get. We're ending up having to outbid California for our own electricity. Can the minister guarantee that Alberta's electric system and this grid upgrade are not being done to rearrange the system to export power to the U.S.?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, simplifying a system that's very complicated – and I understand the reasons why some individuals here may want to ask simple questions; perhaps that's all they understand. But I can tell you that for consumption and generation infrastructure the size that we have in the province of Alberta, we are the least integrated and interconnected with any of our jurisdictions around us. It's absolutely critical. Anybody that's in the business would suggest to you that we need to increase our intertie in order

to bring power into Alberta as well as move power out of Alberta at times when it's beneficial.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Passport Requirements

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new American law came into effect today, the western hemisphere travel initiative, which requires all travellers crossing our borders, both U.S. and Canadian citizens, to possess a valid passport or other approved document. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. With our busiest tourist season rapidly approaching, won't this initiative put a huge dent in our multibillion dollar tourist industry, and if so, what does your ministry plan to do to counteract this?

The Speaker: It's speculative, but go along.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, U.S. visitors don't need these additional documents to enter Canada, but to get back home, they are going to need these documents starting today. The industry has been anticipating this for some time, and Travel Alberta has been working with the Canadian Tourism Commission to get information out to U.S. visitors and encourage them to get this documentation. Travel Alberta has also got a website that was set up that referred U.S. visitors to the U.S. passport website when they were considering trips to Alberta.

Mr. Rodney: My only supplemental question is to the same minister. With all that is going on in today's global economy, I can't imagine the timing for this could be much worse. Could the minister tell us what the Alberta tourism industry itself is doing to deal with this?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, most of the U.S. visitors that arrive in Alberta, fortunately, I suppose, for us, arrive by air, not by land. For the last year they've already had to have passports, so they've been prepared. Our most recent statistics show that we have had small increases in U.S. visitors over the last year whereas other parts of the country have seen a decline.

Mr. Speaker, if it is a hassle for us to get passports to go on holidays, I'd like to suggest that all Albertans stay in the province this year. We've got some great values. You could go to the Travel Alberta site and get one of those traveller cards that give you all the discounts. So stay in the province. It's not a hassle.

The Speaker: The hon. member? Fine.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Investments in Tobacco Companies

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was World No Tobacco Day. While this government has taken steps to reduce tobacco use in Alberta, it also has a history of investing in the tobacco industry. So we have a situation where there is legislation to reduce tobacco use, a bill to allow the government to recoup health care costs from the tobacco industry, yet as far as we know, this government still invests in tobacco companies. That's kind of hypocritical, I think, investing in an industry on one hand and then suing it on the other. It shows the government's continued wavering on the issue. To the minister of finance: does the government still

invest in tobacco companies, and if so, can the minister tell me how much?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, certainly in the conglomeration of vehicles in which Alberta Investment Management Corporation invests to manage the government funds, there may still be some dollars in tobacco. However, in the area of the cancer legacy fund there's a directive not to have any investment relative to the \$500 million that was originally set aside to generate dollars for that. This question has been asked in the House a number of times. Quantifying exactly how much may be a part of any investment configuration would be difficult to do. I can determine with the chair of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation whether or not we can ascertain that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that. I would appreciate if she would do that, and I wonder if she would consider extending the directive that the cancer legacy fund operates under to other investment vehicles and instruments that we have in our provincial portfolio. As Norway publicizes decisions made through its ethical investment strategy, would the minister follow suit and make public specific ethical investment decisions made by AIMCo at the time or after the time that they are made?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there may be some of the investments in companies that have interests in tobacco-related industries that have been long-term investments locked in for a period of time. I will however undertake to answer that question. I would indicate that I met with the ethics committee in Norway relative to their investment management influences. They interview a number of companies. They provide advice before work is done. Although we haven't implemented that type of ethical investment management committee, it is something that perhaps in the future we could look at. We haven't closed the door to that, but we haven't implemented anything as yet.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, one more supplemental question to the Minister of Health and Wellness this time. Could the minister tell the House what the estimated cost of tobacco use, direct and indirect, to the health care system in Alberta is?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't have in front of us an exact number, but I can assure the member that we're somewhere in the billions. I guess it depends on how narrowly defined you might want to go.

I will say this, though. Our Tobacco Reduction Act, which was proclaimed in I guess it was January 1, 2008, is one of the strongest pieces of legislation in this area in Canada. We proclaimed it in 2008 because, unfortunately, some of the statistics in 2007 weren't very good. As an example, the number of youth between 15 and 19 that smoked increased from 15 per cent in 2006 to 20 per cent in 2007. So we have to continue to do things to ensure that we deal with this issue, especially at a young age.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The municipal sustainability initiative has provided support to keep projects in Alberta's communities and is a very successful program. I understand that recently changes have been made to the program. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What changes have been made to the municipal sustainability initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has implemented some changes to ensure that MSI continues to meet Albertans' needs. Municipalities have more flexibility to accelerate projects. They can use up to 75 per cent of their projected funding. Interest costs are now eligible costs to help accelerate projects. We are ensuring that the funds are used for projects with a strategic value. Projects must be at least 10 per cent of the community's funding, except for not-for-profits and liabilities. These changes will increase the effectiveness of MSI.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. My second question is to the same minister. My municipalities in Livingstone-Macleod are asking us why these changes were made.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first let me say that the program has had great success. We are continuing to evaluate MSI and the program. These changes improve the program's accountability to Albertans and ensure long-term planning. We are committed to maintaining the tremendous success of this valuable program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. My third and final question for the same minister: can the minister please provide details on how these changes benefit Albertans?

2:40

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we made these changes to ensure that MSI projects continue to build stronger communities. These changes encourage the best use of infrastructure dollars. They let municipalities take advantage of low construction costs to accelerate projects. This will also create new jobs and stimulate Alberta's economy. MSI has a positive impact on our communities and will continue to have. The MSI initiative is an initiative that is very important to Albertans.

The Speaker: That was 94 questions and responses today. In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Fire in Edmonton-Rutherford Assisted Living Facility

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the fire that occurred in my constituency yesterday was not the only fire that occurred over the weekend affecting a seniors' residential facility. Soderberg House in High River was the site of a major fire in which 22 of 87 residents were affected. Again, very fortunately only five were injured in a minor way and were subsequently

transported to hospital. In my own constituency, as we mentioned earlier, a fire at Lifestyle Options, a private assisted living facility, resulted in the evacuation of all 154 residents, two of whom were taken to hospital, again with non life-threatening injuries.

I had the opportunity yesterday to be both on the site of the fire in my constituency and, as well, on the site where the residents were moved at approximately 5 a.m. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, and would like to report to the House that the plans that are in place to support people so unfortunately affected worked very, very well. Staff of the Edmonton fire department, EMS of the city of Edmonton, the Edmonton Police Service, the Canadian Red Cross Society, the community care access team of Alberta Health Services, and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency all worked very well together in close co-operation to ensure the quick transfer of residents. In the case of those who were receiving designated assisted living or other types of health support, alternate placements were made within a matter of two to three hours to provide for the needs of these residents in other locations around the city.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to extend the appreciation of my constituency to the neighbours around the Lifestyle Options facility, the staff of that facility, and neighbouring residences in Edmonton that came to assist residents in the difficult time that they faced.

On behalf of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and myself, thank you to all of these stakeholders who helped.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Environment Week

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Environment Week is an annual tradition in Alberta during the first week of June, and it coincides with the United Nations' World Environment Day on June 5. This year Alberta is celebrating its 20th Environment Week. This milestone presents an excellent opportunity to reflect on our personal actions and reaffirm our commitment to take action for a healthier environment every week and every day because everyday actions do make a difference.

For example, Mr. Speaker, last year during Environment Week the government launched the one simple act campaign. Since that launch Albertans have pledged to take action, and collectively those simple actions have potentially saved as much carbon dioxide as almost 400 trips by car across Canada, over 260,000 bathtubs of water, and over a quarter of a million kilograms of waste.

Communities are also promoting healthy environmental behaviour, and many are hosting special events in celebration of Environment Week. At green stops throughout the province Albertans will be celebrating the environment through nature walks, community cleanups, waste awareness activities, green fairs, photography contests to name just a few. These activities not only encourage environmental action; they educate Albertans about why this action is necessary.

I encourage everyone to visit the Alberta Environment website and click on the Environment Week icon to find out about the activities in their home communities. It is my hope, Mr. Speaker, that the changes in behaviour we explore during Environment Week will continue to grow throughout the year. As we all know, one simple act can collectively make a tremendous difference.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Neil Kennedy

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 23 I had the pleasure of attending the annual general meeting of the Bissell

Centre. The Bissell Centre cares for many people. The centre could not do this without its many partnerships with community agencies and its big volunteer base; 1,823 people volunteered nearly 14,662 hours of service in 2008 alone. This support through volunteerism assists the agency to provide many essential supports to many people. Every person is always welcome at the agency.

Neil Kennedy is one volunteer among many who make certain everyone feels welcome at the Bissell Centre. Neil Kennedy, a long-time community member and volunteer at the centre, was the recipient of the 2008 individual human rights award from the human rights city Edmonton project for his volunteer work over the past 10 years.

Described as a community leader, Neil goes out of his way to make things better for people around him. He has volunteered with the Bissell Centre for 10 years in a number of programs as well as spoken out on behalf of the Bissell Centre at functions and events. Neil is well known within the inner city as a man who is respected for his hard work and ability to bring people together. His work has been an inspiration to many and embodies all the great qualities of an outstanding volunteer. He is one of many outstanding volunteers that make the Bissell Centre the place that it is today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Seniors' Week

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to invite all Albertans to join me in celebrating Seniors' Week 2009, which runs from June 1 to 7. The theme of Seniors' Week 2009 is Seniors: A Strength of Alberta, which reflects the positive impact seniors have in strengthening our communities and our families.

I encourage all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to recognize the contributions seniors make across the province. There are many examples of how families, individuals, and organizations depend on our seniors. These include such things as grandchildren learning about their culture and history from their grandparents, new employees benefiting from having senior colleagues as mentors, and, of course, the countless hours that seniors spend with helping community groups and functions. You see this pretty well everywhere you go within the province.

This annual celebration of seniors is sponsored by the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, which is currently chaired by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. This morning the Seniors' Week kickoff event took place at the Calgary Zoo, where seniors and Albertans of all ages took in the festivities. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and the chair of the seniors' council as well as other dignitaries joined in the tribute to older Albertans.

To continue making this a special week, numerous events are being held by various organizations across the province to celebrate Seniors' Week. A complete list of events is on the Seniors and Community Supports website by following the Seniors' Week link. I hope all members have an opportunity to attend an event in their community. Your participation will show Alberta seniors how much you appreciate everything that they do for our communities and our families.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ronald David Woodward

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this

opportunity to recognize the retirement of Mr. Ronald David Woodward, the president of Red Deer College. Ron Woodward is an exceptional individual that I have had the honour of working with from the time of his appointment in 1998.

A leader, a mentor, a connector, a builder are a few of the words that can best describe Ron Woodward. He is respected within central Alberta but is also well known all over this country for his work, commitment, and advocacy for the community college system and his strong belief in the value of learning and the important role that community colleges have within our society. He is learner focused and has a special talent for developing strong and complementary relationships between the colleges and groups within the community.

2:50

Mr. Woodward has nurtured effective partnerships with a number of different groups and people, but one that particularly stands out in my mind is his work with the chairman of the Red Deer College board of governors, Herb Der. Herb's term as chairman of the board is also coming to an end in the next few months. Together these two gentlemen have provided exemplary service to the college and the surrounding community. As a result of their complementary skills Red Deer College has matured and flourished.

Mr. Speaker, after 35 years of serving the college community system in different capacities, Mr. Woodward is going to retire. With all the contributions that Ron and his wife, Donna, have made to both the community college system and the community, I am thrilled that they are going to call Red Deer their home.

As such, I would like all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the accomplishments of Mr. Ron Woodward.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta believe that public education should be balanced, scientific and encourage critical thought, and petition the Legislative Assembly to amend Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 by striking out section 9 to remove (a) the onus on school boards and teachers to enforce "parental choice" regarding teaching related to sexuality, sexual orientation and religion; and (b) the ability for school boards and teachers to be subjected to complaints before the human rights commission for discussing these matters in class.

The petition has 903 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Bill 49

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure and honour to be able to introduce today to this House Bill 49, otherwise known as the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

Mr. Speaker, this bill comes before us as a result of extensive work and collaboration between the government of Alberta, in particular our Minister of Municipal Affairs and the entire department, our firefighters and leaders in the firefighting industry, and also the Insurance Bureau of Canada. This bill will give firefighters

the assurance that when they respond to alarms and when they go to save lives and property, they don't have to second-guess their decisions, they don't have to worry about litigating later, but they can focus on what it is that they're trained to do the best, and that is saving lives and property.

Mr. Speaker, we will engage in some more extensive debate in second reading, but I would ask all members of this Assembly right now to support the introduction of the bill in first reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 49 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave to introduce Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, the bill addresses a major challenge of how to add critical transmission infrastructure facilities to meet the needs of Albertans and the needs of our province's economy. This bill will enhance the approval process for projects. Under Bill 50 the government will approve the need for critical transmission infrastructure, and I underline "the need for," not the actual routing or siting or those issues. Specific siting remains an open, public, and transparent process under the regulatory authority of the Alberta Utilities Commission. That process is not affected by Bill 50.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the program from the 2009 excellence in teaching awards dinner, that transpired this past weekend, celebrating 23 finalists from across Alberta. This event was in recognition of the tremendous contributions that teachers make to the education of our children and youth from across the province. A heartfelt thanks from both the hon. Minister of Education and myself.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 820 Alberta parents, compiled over roughly a 72-hour period, which reads as follows. This petition urges

the Government of Alberta to follow through with its proposal to enshrine in Alberta's Human Rights Legislation the right of parents to be notified when school curriculum or materials include the explicit teaching of religion, sexuality or sexual orientation, as well as the right of parents to opt their children out of participation in such curriculum or materials without academic penalty to the child.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to also table a document with the names of 800 residents collected over the last 72 hours. The document reads as follows:

We, the undersigned, urge the Government of Alberta to follow through with its proposal to enshrine in Alberta's Human Rights Legislation the right of parents to be notified when school curriculum or materials include the explicit teaching of religion, sexuality or sexual orientation, as well as the right of parents to opt their children out of participation in such curriculum or materials without academic penalty to the child.

I will therefore table five copies of these documents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to table a petition today on behalf of the Minister of Transportation regarding the issue of banning hand-held cellphones while driving. This petition was presented to the minister this morning at Crawford Plains school by a grade 6 class in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta respectfully support the proposal to ban the use of hand-held cell phones while driving." The petition has 449 signatures from Albertans, and I have the appropriate number of copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of tablings today all relating to Bill 44 and all, I think, generated since 5 o'clock on Friday afternoon. The first is letters from three members of the GLBT community – Tamara Gorzalka, Tyler Gschaid, and Lawrence Porter – all asking for Bill 44 to be defeated and noting, they're telling me: Bill 44, not in our name. The government's proposed changes are unacceptable to them despite sexual orientation being in.

The second set of tablings is from parents, educators, and the general public, eight letters expressing their opposition to Bill 44 from Helen Sadowski, Kevin Elias, Scott Rowed, Norman Gall, Sue Huff, Tracey Braun, Michelle Houston, and Dave Cournoyer.

Then a series of letters from 84 junior high, high school, and postsecondary students in Alberta. They want to assert their right to learn in an open-minded, compassionate, and tolerant environment and protest the measures in Bill 44 that would limit that right. A number of these students have included personal stories of their reaction to Bill 44.

Finally, a really passionate letter from Linda Hunter, the minister of the Wild Rose United Church in Calgary, signed by 75 members of that congregation, expressing their views that Bill 44 opens the door to censorship of public classrooms. It precludes learning to respect the right of each to be at the table. They feel it's anti-intellectual and regressive and oppressive.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Members, I must advise that under Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine has now concluded.

3:00

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 205

Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: We are speaking to amendment A1. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to stand again in this House and speak to this amendment really quickly. Whenever you're dealing with essentially putting restrictions of any kind on free speech, it's a sensitive topic. It's a topic that can stir a lot of emotions in people because, frankly, people are usually very passionate about their right to say what they want when they want. So when writing this legislation, pains were taken to make sure that the restrictions that we placed on free speech were ones that not only the majority of Albertans would find appropriate but were the least restrictive possible given the sensitivity to free speech.

The biggest underlying premise of the bill is that we said: look, if we're going to limit free speech, if we're going to limit third-party election advertising in any way, we're going to make sure that third parties are under no more restrictive rules than political parties. The reason we did that is because the feeling, the feeling that I have anyway, is that we need to have a level playing field. We need to make sure that we can't say to one group: okay, you can advertise, but you can't advertise in certain ways or in certain amounts, but we over here as political parties can do whatever the heck we want as long as we can raise the money.

That is why I do not support the amendment of the hon. member although the hon. member's intent is very good. His intent, of course, is that we shouldn't have these what in the United States are known as political action committees able to target certain ridings unfairly and target certain individuals that may be vulnerable. That's all well and good, and that's a laudable goal. The problem is that to do it in this way makes things uneven. Political parties can target any riding they want. They can put \$2 million, \$3 million, \$4 million into one riding, attacking a specific candidate. So what's good for the goose is good for the gander. I think that it's important that if we're going to restrict free speech in any way, if we're going to curtail what political advertising is permitted, then everyone needs to be treated the same.

I wanted to address one other argument really quickly. There is federal legislation and B.C. legislation which does have a provision similar to what the hon. member is proposing here. The problem is that this legislation as a whole is completely different from those two pieces of legislation. It's an entirely different take on third-party election advertising. The reason it's different is because the federal legislation and the B.C. legislation cap. They put a cap on the amount of money a third party can advertise in an election. It's a hard cap. I believe it's about \$150,000. That's the rule.

If you're going to have cap legislation like that, I guess it makes sense that you can go in and cap what is allowed in each individual constituency against a candidate. But that's not what this legislation does. We don't cap under this legislation third-party advertising; we cap contributions. We limit the amount of contributions that can be given by any one individual or corporation to a third party, but we do not cap what can be spent. If a third party can raise for their cause millions of dollars from hundreds of voters, then they can spend that. So there are fundamental differences between the legislation being proposed under Bill 205 and the federal legislation and the B.C. legislation. It is important to understand those distinctions.

Lastly, there is the issue of practicality. Under this amendment it would be very difficult logistically to be able to determine, given

that media coverage doesn't stop at boundaries, doesn't stop at jurisdictions, et cetera, when \$3,000 is spent in a certain riding or when it is not spent in a certain riding, given that a television broadcast, a commercial, can go over several different ridings.

With that in mind, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to say that I will not be supporting this amendment for those reasons although I do applaud the hon. member for his intent with the amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on the amendment.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I listened very carefully to my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere and certainly recognize the point of view which he has maintained. I don't agree with it, however, and I would like to extrapolate a little more. In the last discussion, last Monday, I had some difficulty with speaking. I'm still not a hundred per cent, but I'm going to try and expand, perhaps, a little bit on my reasoning for bringing this amendment.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere mentioned that the British Columbia legislation, which proposed something equivalent to what is being proposed in the amendment, has an overall cap. I want to make it clear that I'm not proposing any such cap, and I don't think that either he as the sponsor of the bill or I as the sponsor of the amendment has proposed any sort of spending cap in any way, shape, or form, nor have we dictated in any way how people can spend that sort of money that's being raised. The hon. member in his bill has proposed some restrictions on fundraising with respect to third parties for the purposes of political advertising and campaigning, and I'm fully supportive of his bill whether or not my amendment is approved by the House.

I do think that the amendment makes sense in view of a number of considerations, particularly those which involve the possibility of outside interference in elections. I think that if we look at what happens in the United States with these political action committees, very powerful organizations all the way from the National Rifle Association to the pharmaceutical industry, the coal organizations, and the steel organizations, they target individuals in quite a direct and very effective way in many cases, target individuals with smear campaigns, negative campaigning.

I want to say in a general sense that democracy is a fragile institution, and democracy is the most precious thing that we have. I had two parents that I'm proud to say served in the forces of this country during the last world war, and I had a grandfather who served overseas with the Canadian overseas regiment in the first war. What they fought for was democracy. Democracy can be taken from us in a lot of different ways, one of which is by some sort of totalitarian takeover of a government, and that's what the government fought against in the war.

3:10

It can also be taken away in more subtle ways. I'll give you an example. Right now in Russia, which was part of the former Soviet Union, the media is controlled by the government, and advertising for campaigns is controlled by the government. When the news media – radio, television, newspapers – are controlled and when there's a disproportionate coverage of one party or another, that can also lead to a decay of democracy.

There's a third way, which is perhaps even more subtle yet than just taking over the media and having a purported democracy, and that is where we allow a distortion of the balance in the political system to take place through the expenditures of money. Money, as some people say, is the mother's milk of politics. Well, I say that

politics does need money to get the message out there, but there has to be some sort of a level playing field.

My honourable friend from Airdrie-Chestermere suggested that we want to put the third parties on the same ground as the candidates and the other political parties. Well, I disagree with that. I think that if people want to express their voice at the ballot box, if they want to influence it, there are ways to do that. One way is to run for office, whether it be in the five or six or seven different political parties that we have existing here in Alberta running in our elections or as an independent or some other voice. We have lots of avenues for people to enter the political process. But when we look at outside third parties' involvement in the political process and we allow them an unfettered amount, an unfettered scope to involve themselves in a campaign through advertising or electioneering of some sort and spending an unlimited amount of money against or for a particular candidate in a particular electoral district, we are on a slippery slope of going down that path to the loss of democracy in my humble estimation.

Let's look at what happens in the United States right now in the Congress. The House of Representatives is elected every two years, and I've been told by individuals who have worked in some of those offices that the congressmen spend over half of their time raising funds and lobbying for funds from political action committees. I think the influence of those committees is nefarious in many instances, and we need to restrict in some way the activities of those. Now, it hasn't happened here in Alberta, nor, as far as I'm aware, has it occurred in Canada yet. But all we have to do is look south of the border to see what the potential might be if we allow unfettered campaigning on behalf of certain political action committees in a particular riding and targeting with negative advertising, smear advertising, and all the rest of that type of campaigning and what that might do to our political system here in Alberta.

For those reasons, Mr. Chairman, I think that as part of this overhaul, which is a very good one, as I mentioned, we need to have some restrictions on third-party spending against given candidates in a given electoral district. With those comments, I'll take my seat at this moment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is my pleasure to speak in favour of the amendment to Bill 205, Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 205 is a very good bill. I'd like to commend my colleague from Airdrie-Chestermere for all his efforts put into this bill, but I believe that it needs some fine-tuning to become a stronger piece of legislation. The amendment would serve to strengthen this legislation and also to match the federal government's provision in their own legislation.

In the federal provision this proposed amendment mirrors the maximum amount of funds allowed in one electoral district, \$3,000. This is an area that is three times larger than our own ridings, provincial electoral divisions. This amendment will help to promote fair elections and prevent third-party special-interest groups from blanketing a riding with an overwhelming campaign or with a great deal more ads than any politician could afford to match. The Supreme Court has stated in 2004 that such spending limits do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court stated that the limits of \$3,000 per electoral district were a reasonable amount.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to comment on political action committees, that the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill just

mentioned. Political action committees are third-party organizations with the goal of getting a certain political candidate elected. The size of this group is irrelevant to their classification. As you know, these committees have become a major issue in our neighbour to the south. Millions of dollars were being spent in close campaigns by third parties. These funds are used to buy up huge amounts of media and to promote a specific viewpoint, which may not be the same viewpoint shared by the communities at large.

While we have not seen this type of occurrence in Alberta elections, there are signs that such campaigns may not be far off. These large expenditures of money in elections by third parties may serve to influence not only the public but also the very candidates in the election. This goes against the very democratic principles upon which Canada and Alberta were formed. Third-party interests with deep pockets and self-centred interests should not be permitted to manipulate the democratic process by buying up media space and attempting to push a certain political agenda that favours their special-interest groups.

We have no limits on campaign spending by candidates or by parties. This amendment would not change this in any way. Candidates would be free to spend as much money as they deemed fit on their own election platforms. Nothing in this amendment restricts the amount which political parties can spend in any given electoral district. This proposed amendment also does not alter the total amount which could be spent by a third party during an election in the province as a whole or in a given city or region.

Third parties and candidates would still be free to use attack ads as well. This is not affected by this proposed amendment at all. The proposed amendment would not control total spending, nor does it affect the spending in a particular city or area of the province as long as it doesn't single out a specific candidate. This amendment only addresses limits on advertising for or against individual candidates in a given electoral district.

3:20

The danger lies not just in influencing the election, however, but perhaps in the intimidation of members of the House or candidates for office from taking strong stands or expressing their honestly held opinions on what might be controversial issues, whether it would be pro or anti nuclear, for or against oil sands development or coal-fired plants, for or against amendments to the labour codes, on regulating the insurance industries, or on dozens of other issues which may arise. From fear of an overwhelming and undefeatable campaign against them by a third party, candidates may not vocalize or promote their own honestly held opinions and beliefs, and as a result certain viewpoints may be stifled and even eliminated.

I urge all my hon. colleagues to support this amendment to what is already a very good bill, which is Bill 205. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to the amendment.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a liberal society, in a free and democratic society, one of the most fundamental rights is to criticize government, and part of that ability to criticize government is the ability to collect funds and spend it in the media to criticize government. So any time government looks to put restrictions on that right, we have to do so very carefully.

I think the author of Bill 205 has structured it in a way that basically minimizes the restriction that's put on this right to free speech, the right to criticize government, in the sense that Bill 205

merely imposes the same reporting restrictions on third-party groups that we already expect of organized political parties. It seems to me that that strikes the balance. The proposed amendment goes further than that and puts more restrictions on voluntary groups or private groups that want to collect money and buy time to criticize government. It puts more restrictions on them than we do on ourselves, on political parties. So I would oppose the amendment and encourage others to do likewise.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: To the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I had thought the vote had gone the other way. My hearing is deficient.

Now, I listened with interest to the debate on amendment A1, but this afternoon in committee on the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, I have a number of things that I would certainly like to get on the record in the time allowed. It's an interesting bill. I don't know how the Chief Electoral Officer or the office of Elections Alberta will have the time to administer all this. They are having difficulty keeping up as it is with investigations of financial affairs and records. You go over to the office and look through the records, and certainly there's more work to be done, which they acknowledge.

Elections Alberta started auditing some candidates and some constituency associations but not all whenever they file a financial disclosure statement. I think all reports should be audited, not just a select few. But specifically with this bill, it comes about after we had the million-dollar or the \$2 million plus ad campaign before the last election. It may have even been during the election. I do remember watching the Super Bowl, and there was an ad.

An Hon. Member: Relevance?

Mr. MacDonald: It was relevant. It was relevant then, and, hon. member, it's relevant now because the ad said that there was no plan. Whenever I look at health care or I look at the electricity deregulation of this government, those ads were right. There is no plan. There was no plan when the Super Bowl was on a year ago, and there's no plan now.

An Hon. Member: Albertans didn't think that way.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, that gets to another point, as to how much money each respective party has. What I find quite odd about this legislation is the definition of election period, Mr. Chairman, which reads:

"Election period" means the period commencing the day a writ of election is issued for a general election and concluding at the end of polling day.

Now, does that mean it's business as usual before the election is called? Can any organization anywhere in this province have an ad campaign either promoting the government's health care reorganization or pointing out flaws in it? I can't imagine who would promote that reorganization other than some private hospitals in America who

see this as a market that they do not currently have access to. [interjection] You don't believe it? Well, hon. member, many people who are passionate about public health care certainly believe it.

So that would be my first question, and hopefully I can get that addressed. This election period definition: what do we do with the period leading up to the election? Is that a third-party advertising free-for-all?

Also in the definitions here, Mr. Chairman, I see that in 39.1(1)(b) "political advertising" means advertising in any broadcast, print or electronic media including telephone, fax, internet, e-mail and text messaging with the purpose of promoting or opposing any registered party or the election of a candidate.

And it goes on. How does the author of this bill, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, propose to control the Internet, propose to control how text messaging will be regulated? That to me, again, sounds like a very heavy-handed manner. The Internet is free for all uses and purposes as far as I understand, and not even the CIA can get control of the Internet. That's what I read. So how we could control the Internet is another question that I want to have answered.

Could we, if this bill was to become law, be having an online discussion or an online forum linked to a website? Would that be considered political advertising under this bill? How is all this going to work? Now, we go on a little further with the definitions under political advertising, and it goes on to say that it does not include a television program or a website or online discussion forum. How is that going to work? Again, if I could get an answer to that, maybe I would be a little bit less reluctant and more supportive of this bill, but I just see this bill as targeting certain individuals and certain groups and restricting and limiting their free speech.

We go on further in the definitions section here. Mr. Chairman, I'm quoting again. It's interesting in 39.1(1)(b):

- (iii) the transmission of a document in any form directly by a person or a group to their members, employees or shareholders or other persons who have given permission to the person or group to receive information from them, or
- (iv) advertising by the Government in any form.

Now, the government, of course, can carry on business as usual. We know \$25 million had been used in the propaganda campaign to try to change the government's image abroad and here at home. We do know that there were photographs of siblings, a brother and sister in Northumberland, over by Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the northeast section of England, that somehow wound up as part of the branding campaign. Interesting to note that the Public Affairs Bureau even used that photo in the focus groups. So to say that it was an oversight or a mistake is wrong. The \$25 million is an example of the unlimited resources the government would have, and that's not included in this third-party advertising.

3:30

Now, also I'm curious with the definition in 39.1(1)(b)(iii). I'm not going to read it again because I know there are others that want to participate in this, but would a union need to get permission if they were to transmit documents in any form? Do they need to get permission from those individuals before, for instance, they could even talk about a political action campaign starting? Members have said that this levels the playing field. I would certainly disagree.

When I look at the definitions that are under section 248(1) of the Income Tax Act – I've had a look at this – I'm still puzzled, and I need further clarification from the member as to why we're using that definition of a registered charity. That seems to be a trend in legislation this spring, to use that definition. It's not the first time that I have seen this section of the Income Tax Act quoted, and I don't recall that before. I know the Income Tax Act has been

changed recently, in fact as recently as last year, but I'm curious about that. I'm curious about that. Some people view that as a legal loophole; others do not. If the hon. member could clarify that for me, I would be grateful.

Now, of course, we see in section 39.2(5) that numbered companies shall not be registered under this section. I would like to know why that has been pulled out of there. A union has to register; a numbered company does not. If I could have an explanation on that, I would be grateful.

Again, whenever we go through this bill and we go to section 39.5, of course, we've got more work for the Chief Electoral Officer, who is already overworked. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

I hope I have more time later to participate in the debate.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to start by thanking the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for this timely piece of legislation.

The overarching objective of Bill 205 is to clarify the parameters of third-party spending for election advertising during a provincial election. This bill supports this government's commitment to ensuring that our electoral processes remain fair and transparent. While this Bill 205 offers a number of notable sections, I'd like to specifically address sections 48(1.1) and section 49.1.

Section 48(1.1) prescribes the penalties third parties could face if they contravene section 39.10, which related to the third-party election advertising report. Specifically this section reads: "The chief financial officer of a third party that operates a third party advertising account who contravenes section 39.10 is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of \$10 000." As prescribed in section 39.10(1), the third-party election advertising report must be provided to the Chief Electoral Officer within six months of the provincial election polling days.

As per section 39.10(4)

the third party election advertising report shall include

- (a) the amount of contributions for third party election advertising purposes that were received during the year,
- (b) for each contributor who made contributions of a total amount of more than \$375 for third party election advertising purposes during the period referred to in clause (a), their name and address and the amount and date of each contribution,
- (c) a financial statement setting out income and transfers and the amount of expenses in total, and
- (d) the time and place of broadcast or publication of the advertisements to which the expenses relate.

Mr. Chairman, the report requirements prescribed in this section will enhance the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to thoroughly examine the advertising activities of third parties during elections in Alberta. Specifically, the Chief Electoral Officer will be able to determine the amount of financial contributions third parties have received.

Section 39.10(4)(b) will allow the Chief Electoral Officer to determine what individuals or groups have donated significant funds to third parties for advertising purposes. This will allow for accurate assessments of any real or perceived undue influence within a municipal election.

Subsection (4)(c) will ensure that third parties have met their fiduciary duty with respect to receiving and expending the financial contributions that they have received. The financial statements

would be required to include all revenue and expenses related to the third-party election advertising account. This could help election officials determine if, in fact, the funds received for election advertising were used in an appropriate manner.

Subsection (4)(d) would allow officials to determine when and where election advertising is going to take place and what expenses were related to the specific advertisements. This will add an additional level of accountability as an election official will be able to review the advertisements to determine the accuracy of the filed financial statements.

Furthermore, the election advertising report would be available to the public, adding an additional level of transparency and accountability. The electorate would be able to effectively ascertain what groups and individuals had donated significant funds to a campaign and if third parties have conducted themselves in a professional manner. However, section 39.10(1) would only be effective if there were legislated repercussions for not allowing the prescribed requirements.

Part 4.1 further ensures that third parties submit their advertising report and also allows the Chief Electoral Officer to cancel their registration if they fail to do so. This would help ensure that larger organizations with significant funds at their disposal do not violate part 4.1.

Mr. Chairman, the two sections that I spoke to today will ensure that there are financial consequences for violating the requirements of the third-party election advertising report. This report is paramount in ensuring that third parties conduct themselves in an appropriate and professional manner.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. When I look at the details of this proposed legislation, I am still at a loss to understand how we're going to put so much more work on the Chief Electoral Officer when that office has indicated that they don't have enough resources to conduct what they consider necessary now.

I remember that before the Legislative Offices Committee the former Chief Electoral Officer, the one that was fired or did not have his contract renewed – you can pick one of those two – basically said that it's a free-for-all, the financial disclosure, the amount of money that's raised, where it goes, where it's spent, who donates. It was just out of control. Yet through this bill we're going to give that office more work to do without adequate resources.

3:40

Now, specifically in section 39 again, in 39.8(2), this restriction limits unions, in my view.

A third party that collects periodic dues, assessments or initiation fees for its members may consider each individual payment as a separate third party . . . advertising contribution to the third party's advertising account where the payment is not related to the employment of an individual or to fees associated with membership in a professional association.

So union dues or dues that are collected by a union from each individual member cannot be used for that third-party advertising account, and that is a further restriction on unions.

The next section, section (3): "No third party shall use a contribution for the purpose of third party election advertising if the third party does not know the name and address of [each] contributor." How are unions going to be able to comply with this? Whenever you read the fine print in here, Mr. Chairman, there's no doubt that we've got only one group in mind that we want to restrict and limit, and that is organizations, whether we agree with it or disagree with

it, such as the no-plan ad crowd. Let's not pretend that it's any different because that's exactly what this bill is trying to do.

Now, we can limit and restrict others. I would be more inclined to support this bill if we were going to fix up our own financial disclosures and how much can be donated and by whom. We seem to be making rules this spring for each and every organization or group but ourselves. Of course, we saw the mayor's comments in the *Edmonton Journal*, the mayor of Edmonton, Mr. Mandel, over the weekend and some of his colleagues, who claim that they were not consulted with restrictions and limitations that are placed on municipal elections. I know they were outraged. I was surprised that they weren't consulted.

After I read that article, Mr. Chairman, I came to the conclusion that, well, if they're angry about that piece of legislation, wait until they figure out what's happening with Bill 36 and all the overrides that are going to be in place against municipal governments if that legislation becomes law. So we'll see. [interjection] I'll be watching that – you bet – hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and they'll be watching you.

The Deputy Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. This hon. member certainly is entitled to participate in the debate, and this hon. member, if he was committed to openness and transparency, your leadership race, all the money that was donated to that, you would certainly have made that public.

Dr. Morton: Thousands.

Mr. MacDonald: Thousands and thousands of dollars, yes.

Specifically, Mr. Chairman, to Bill 205 and in the time that we have left, whether this will survive a legal challenge is another issue. I heard Charter issues and Charter arguments going back to 2004, but we need to have a look at what happened recently in British Columbia. In May of 2008 the government of B.C. passed Bill 42, the Election Amendment Act, 2008, which among other measures – get this – introduced limits on third-party election advertising and extended the third-party election advertising limits beyond the 28-day campaign to cover the 60 days prior to the scheduled start of every campaign.

That's where our bill here is different, and that's why I think the drafters of this legislation – and I'm going to go out on a limb and say that the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development probably had Gerald Chipeur have a look at this draft legislation. But I could be wrong; I could be wrong on that account.

The difference is in the election period prior to the writ being dropped. That's a major difference between what was quashed in the courts in B.C. and what we have before us today. Certainly, we have to look at the four B.C. labour unions: the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of British Columbia, the British Columbia division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the British Columbia Nurses' Union. They objected to some of the restrictions and limitations that were placed on them by this Bill 42, and they took the whole issue to court. Now, what happened when that was taken to court? Well, we know the outcome of that, and don't be surprised if the same thing happens here, Mr. Chairman. The B.C. government lost their attempt with Bill 42 to limit pre-election advertising.

Let's be clear: there is a difference between our definition here in this proposed Bill 205 and what the B.C. government did. There's a difference there, but the intent is still the same. The Court of Appeal quashed the provincial government's hope of throttling a potential large campaign of third-party advertising in the days

leading up to the start of the recent campaign. The justice refused to even grant a stay that would have suspended the decision, as I understand it. The government has served notice that it wants to appeal the decision.

We've got to make our law, if we're going to make one, one that will perhaps survive a court challenge, and I don't think this will. I think individual Charter rights are being restricted and limited by this legislation, and I don't think that if it goes to court, this piece of legislation would be upheld. I just don't think it would.

Now, I would certainly encourage hon. members – in fact, maybe tomorrow, when I have an opportunity to photocopy this B.C. Court of Appeal decision, I will table it, and over the summer hon. members can have a look at this. Here we're talking about individuals who believe that on the grounds that it unjustifiably infringes their rights and freedoms under sections 2(b) and (d) and section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are the four unions that thought that. Of course, we know what happened. As they say, "The rest is history," or it's proceeding through another level of court.

I can't support this bill for those reasons. I think we're picking out and restricting and limiting the ability of one group to participate democratically, that ability to express their opinion, while we're not restricting and limiting other groups. We're picking and choosing who can say what during an election. I would agree with hon. members who spoke earlier that there has to be some sort of control. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill is about enhancing and providing clarity, openness, and accountability to freedom of speech. Bill 205 would provide regulation for third-party advertising during provincial elections. It would do so by requiring that funds used for election advertising originate from a political advertising account registered to a third-party sponsor and that this account be registered with the Chief Electoral Officer. In addition, Bill 205 clarifies the definition of third-party sponsor, eligible donor, advertising, and political advertising. This is an important piece of legislation that needs to be examined with due diligence.

3:50

Mr. Chairman, I find sections 39.5(1) and (2) particularly interesting and would like to further explore the meaning of these sections. Section 39.5 deals with the identification of third parties on electoral advertising and reads:

39.5(1) Every advertisement that is the subject of a third party election advertising expense must contain the name of the third party that sponsors the advertisement as registered with the Chief Electoral Officer and indicate that the third party authorizes the advertisement.

(2) The Chief Electoral Officer may establish rules for the content of notices in advertisements under subsection (1).

In essence, this section states that third-party election advertising is subject to rules.

Currently political parties are subject to rules as well regarding advertising disclosure while third parties are not. The public deserves to know who is placing election advertisements and who is trying to influence their vote. To fully understand section 39.5, I must take a moment and reference back to section 39.1(1)(c), which defines third-party advertising as "political advertising that appears

during an election period and is placed by a third party." Mr. Chairman, the first word in section 39.5(1) is "every." Every advertisement by a third party is subject to the rules as stated in this subsection. It's important that rules are applied across all forms of advertising and that certain mediums are not exempt from these rules. Each of these advertisements, as stated, must contain who is sponsoring the advertisement. This is central for the sake of transparency and for knowing exactly who is behind the advertising.

Additionally, the names appearing on the advertisement must be as registered with the Chief Electoral Officer. This is essential as groups may go by several names or may join forces with others for the sake of election advertising. It must be clear who is authorizing the advertisement. By using "registered," it can be assured that the appropriate paperwork has been filed with the Chief Electoral Officer. Section 39.5(1) strengthens the overall meaning of Bill 205.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, subsection (2) of section 39.5 is an important line in this legislation. Firstly, I must note that the Chief Electoral Officer is the main component of this subsection. This subsection establishes that it is the Chief Electoral Officer, also known as the CEO, that establishes rules regarding third-party advertising, therefore avoiding political interference. It is established that the CEO may establish rules. By including the word "may," it gives him or her the ability as they see appropriate to establish rules for what is suitable in advertisements and required for third-party identification. Furthermore, by including established rules for the content of the notices, it is clear as to what the rules are being established for.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, section 39.5 allows for there to be a more level playing field with third-party groups when they advertise during elections. By establishing rules, it is clear as to who is doing the advertising. Together subsections (1) and (2) of section 39.5 are integral to this bill. It is clear and concise wording, leaving no room for misinterpretation. Ultimately, Bill 205 will provide for greater transparency within the election process.

Mr. Chairman, at the end of the day the goal here is to get everybody involved in the democratic movement, in advocating for issues that are important to them. All we're asking here is for everybody to declare who they are and what they are advertising and campaigning for.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for bringing forward this bill, that has fostered an interesting debate and discussion. I look forward to further debate of Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. This act is being put forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I would like to thank him for this timely and effective piece of legislation. The benefits of this proposed legislation have been covered in great detail during the second reading debate, and I will not review these comments except to say that if passed, Bill 205 will assist third parties by bestowing on them a framework of transparency.

Today I'd like to draw the Assembly's attention to a section of the bill that I find very skillfully worded. Section 39.8(1) is the area of the bill that addresses which groups are ineligible to make campaign contributions to a registered third-party election advertising account. Specifically, this section reads:

The following shall not make contributions to a third party for third party election advertising:

- (a) if the contributor is an organization, an organization that has not carried on business in the province of Alberta for one year prior to making the contribution;
- (b) if the contributor is an organization, an organization whose primary purpose is to engage in political advertising;
- (c) a registered charity within the meaning of section 248(1) of the Income Tax Act . . .;
- (d) a candidate for election;
- (e) a registered political party;
- (f) a registered constituency association;
- (g) a member of Parliament;
- (h) a member of the Senate;
- (i) a sitting member of the Legislative Assembly; or
- (j) a prohibited corporation.

Mr. Chairman, this section is large and addresses many important areas; therefore, I will separate some of the ideas to help with clarity. First, subsection (a) proposes limitations on organizations who wish to contribute to third-party election advertising but reside and engage in business outside of the province. The rationale behind this part is actually rather straightforward. Simply put, Alberta's provincial elections should be run for the benefit of Albertans and Alberta businesses. Restricting non-Alberta organizations will ensure that there is no undue outside influence shifting the political debate within the province.

I don't quite have time to go into all of the other details of this, but in ending I do want to applaud both the intent and the wording of Bill 205, specifically section 39.8(1). I applaud the hon. member for bringing forward such a valuable piece of legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, given that we've had 120 minutes and pursuant to Standing Orders 8(7)(a)(ii) and 8(7)(b), which state that all questions must be decided to conclude debate on a private member's public bill which has received 120 minutes of debate in Committee of the Whole, I must now put the following questions to conclude debate.

[The clauses of Bill 205 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 205 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For:

Ady	Drysdale	Lukaszuk
Anderson	Elniski	Marz
Benito	Evans	McQueen
Berger	Forsyth	Morton
Bhardwaj	Fritz	Oberle
Blackett	Griffiths	Olson
Boutilier	Groeneveld	Quest
Campbell	Johnson	Renner
Danyluk	Johnston	Rodney
DeLong	Leskiw	Sarich
Denis	Liepert	Webber
Doerksen		

Against:

Kang	MacDonald	Pastoor
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Totals:	For – 34	Against – 3
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[Request to report Bill 205 carried]

4:10

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report Bill 205.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 205. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 206

School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, for second reading.

Our society is changing rapidly. We have all these new technologies – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, text messaging – and somebody is probably inventing a new way to communicate right now as I'm speaking. All of these new technologies have put a new face on an old problem, bullying. It used to be that a bully's insults were heard by 30 other kids in a cafeteria. Now it's out on the web for 6 billion people to see. These days electronic media is a crucial part of kids' culture. They can't imagine life without it. They run home from school and the first thing they do is log on so that they can talk for hours using instant messaging, bulletin boards, and chat rooms. But the chatter and the gossip can spin out of control and become degrading.

Bullying has always had the potential to turn school into a living nightmare for some children, but now the problem is going beyond the schoolyard. It's bad enough that a bully can make a child's life hell in school, but these new technologies are allowing for 24/7 bullying. You can put somebody down with a text message at supertime, lewdly doctor photos of them and post the photo on Facebook at 8 p.m., and threaten them on Twitter at bedtime. The keyboard has indeed become a weapon.

Mr. Speaker, to deal with these types of incidences, we need to think creatively. Bill 206 will be the first legislation in Canada that expressly bans bullying by electronic media. Specifically, it will ban bullying by means of a school computer or the Internet, access through a school computer, or at any time where such activity may reasonably be expected to cause a substantial and material disruption at school.

We're taking extraordinary action to deal with an extraordinary problem. Bullying is so damaging to the mental health of our children. I talked to one mother whose seven-year-old was bullied so viciously that they had to pull him out of school. He was so traumatized that he currently receives therapy from a psychiatrist because he's suicidal. Seven years old, Mr. Speaker.

I talked to another mother today whose son was bullied maliciously. I have a file two inches thick on this case. It contains emergency room reports of the horrific injuries that the boy sustained, including an eight-centimetre blood clot in his testicles. It also contains pages of letters that the mother wrote trying to protect her child. Ultimately, the only action that was taken was that the boy was moved to another school. On June 5, 2008, with a few weeks left in the school year he started his car in a closed garage and slipped away from all of his worldly cares. What a terrible tragedy, Mr. Speaker.

We can't let our youth be terrorized in a way that affects them for life. Our schools are diverse, and this is a good thing. They're reflective of the vibrant and diverse society that we have in Alberta. Unfortunately, sometimes differences make children a target for bullies. Bill 206 makes it illegal to harass somebody on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability. That doesn't mean that these are the only behaviours targeted by the bill. Other forms of harassment include stealing the possessions of an individual, physical or sexual assault or threats of physical or sexual assault on that individual, threats of death to that individual. These are ugly and serious behaviours. We have to stamp them out so that they can't ruin the lives of our youth.

For anyone keeping score at home, I've used the word "bullying" or a variant of it nine times so far. That's because bullying is a very important part of this bill. But it's not the only type of behaviour in school which endangers students. Weapons don't belong in school. They're dangerous, and they're harmful. We've had this sad fact illustrated to us by the tragedy that occurred in Taber 10 years ago. Jason Lang was only 17 when his life was so tragically ended. He was shot by a student who brought a gun to school. You can open the paper any day and find other children who've been killed at a school somewhere around the world.

This bill will allow our police to act immediately when a weapon is found. Right now it can be difficult for police to act when they find a weapon in our schools. The provision of the Criminal Code puts the burden on our police to prove intent. So if the police find a billy club in a kid's locker, they often have to wait for them to use it or to threaten or injure another student. I've talked to our police officers countless times about this, and they're frustrated. Mr. Speaker, there is no good reason for a billy club in school. It doesn't improve your math skills. It's not part of any physical education class. What could a student possibly be using it for? We know that these types of devices are used to inflict harm. It makes no sense to wait until harm occurs to take action. Bill 206 will make weapons in our schools illegal and allow police and school officials to take immediate action.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that drugs are dangerous for our youth. Recently two teenaged girls west of Edmonton died after taking ecstasy, and events in Vancouver have illustrated the violence associated with the drug trade. Two high school boys in Surrey were

killed last week in an event that may be drug and gang related. We need to keep these types of danger out of our schools. That's why this bill will make the possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia on school property an offence.

One of the key pieces of this bill involves mandatory reporting. In my conversations with our police officers they have told me that they often are only contacted when an incident spirals out of control. Suddenly they have to go to court regarding an incident that they have no prior record of. Making schools document all incidents which compromise safety, including bullying, drugs, and weapons, will give our justice system the tools to deal with cases early and effectively.

I urge all of my colleagues to support Bill 206 and take an important step to make our schools safe for our youth.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and participate in the debate on Bill 206. I listened to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I certainly know that she is well meaning with this legislative initiative. Any time we can enhance the safety of students and teachers by amending the School Act to include explicit sections on banned items and bullying, I think we should give it due consideration. However, there are some issues that I do have with this bill. Certainly, no student, Mr. Speaker, deserves to be bullied. At the same time school authorities need to be empowered, not limited in their ability to use their judgment.

4:20

Now, there are those that would consider this bill to be unnecessary. The School Act already protects students from bullying. If the bill is passed in its current form without amendments, principals, in my view, will have less authority to suspend students, and I don't think that's what the original intent of this bill was.

We certainly had a discussion last session on a very, very similar issue. But when we are defining "bully" and "banned item" and we look at the earlier concerns that had been expressed in this Assembly and earlier concerns surrounding Bill 44 regarding the exclusion of sexual orientation and disability, if we're going to exclude that in the definition of bullying . . .

Mrs. Forsyth: No.

Mr. MacDonald: We're not going to do that?

Mrs. Forsyth: It's in the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: It's in the bill. I appreciate that.

Mrs. Forsyth: Read it.

Mr. MacDonald: I have read it. Other members may not have, but I certainly have.

Now, we are looking at this bill, and we are looking at the procedure that teachers and principals must follow if a student is suspected of either possessing a banned item or is bullying another student. The principal in collaboration with a peace officer can determine an educational measures program for the student to participate in. A principal must advise the board of placing a student in an educational measures program, and the board must advise the minister of any contraventions regarding bullying or banned items from the bill. The school board has the responsibility to ensure that there are educational measures programs. Certainly, I had a meeting

the other day with some school board officials. They certainly talked and wanted to talk at length about Bill 44, but they had very little to say about this private member's initiative.

Now, there's been certainly a lot of coverage on bullying since last fall; in particular, on kicking ginger, or kicking redheads. Now, who on that side of the House is supportive of that initiative? I can only imagine. The notice on bullying redheads, or the Kick a Ginger campaign that was on the go, is not included under race or ethnicity or ginger-based bullying, which is part of the proposed definition in section 2 here, Mr. Speaker. I was appalled at that Kick a Ginger campaign. I know students who were victims of that. Regardless of what may pass as, you know, lighthearted sport on the other side of the benches here, certainly people that I know don't appreciate campaigns of that nature.

Now, there was an article in a recent Alberta Teachers' Association newsletter. The newsletter is in agreement with what is being recommended here in this bill. It states that although the bill is well intentioned, there are serious problems with the bill itself. Our neighbours in British Columbia passed a law requiring schools to have codes of conduct for students and, therefore, zero tolerance for bullying. Ontario states that bullying is a cause for suspension.

Overall, this bill is a good idea. I certainly think it can be improved although this bill has been improved because of the definition of bullying. Now, I'm not certain that we're doing everything here that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek would like us to do, but it's a start. It certainly is a start.

I think we should amend the bill to completely strike out section 5 as it is written. There are two main problems with section 5. Again, it seems to contradict legislation in the School Act. We talked earlier about eroding or reducing the power or the control that principals have. I would also appreciate clarification as to what educational measures programs are. What will be involved in initiating them? Where is the funding going to come from to make all this work? Others certainly have indicated that this legislation is poorly written. I don't know if I would go that far, but I think it certainly needs to be amended to make some clarifications here and satisfy the concerns that have been outlined previously, Mr. Speaker.

Now, if we look at section 3 and if we look at section 4, they appear to be fine, but specifically what if a peace officer and a principal disagree? Who has the final authority? Does this section mean that a principal alone cannot determine whether a student must take part in an educational measures program? What is the motivation behind requiring the involvement of a peace officer in these infractions, and should there be a peace officer in every case of a contravention? Now, those are just some of the questions around section 4.

Specifically, section 5. Section 5 amends section 24, which states the conditions under which a student can be suspended. It states that with the exception of a contravention of banned items or bullying, a student cannot be suspended if they don't comply with section 12 or failed to participate in an educational measures program or caused injury to others in the school, whether it be a taunt or whether it be physical bullying. Now, this section is attempting to ensure that a student that is found guilty of a banned item or bullying will take an educational measures program, and only if the student fails to participate in the program will that student be suspended. I among others think that this section should be struck. A student may be found guilty of bullying, be required to enrol in an educational measures program, and so shall not be suspended, all the while being guilty of 12(f), which is failing to respect the rights of others as well.

If the student is guilty of contravening section 12(f), then there is a reason to suspend the student. On the one hand, the bully should participate in the educational measures program and should not be

suspended but should be suspended considering whether an injury has occurred. This would make the proposed legislation contradict existing legislation and, I think, would create a basis for appeals by one party or the other.

Now, currently principals can suspend students who have been found guilty of bullying or of possessing banned items. This amendment states that if a student is guilty of bullying or possessing a banned item, the principal cannot suspend the student but should make the student participate in this educational measures program. As a result this amendment would create greater restrictions, in our view, on the available courses of action for principals.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise in support of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. As a teacher of 36 years I have a wealth of experience in dealing with the problems that bullying causes. I have witnessed many accounts of this type of harassment during my tenure as a school professional. From name-calling to physical abuse, students become victims of bullying for years. Names can follow a student through their entire school life, from elementary through high school. Bullying is something that we as elected members of this province should do everything in our power to prevent.

Mr. Speaker, you do not have to be a teacher to know that bullying exists. Many of us had first-hand experience with this form of control that one person or a group of individuals exerts over others. We may have seen a classmate or a co-worker constantly being mistreated by another. We may have witnessed a family member come home frustrated, or we may have been unfortunate enough to have gone through this mistreatment ourselves. If any member of this Assembly has ever experienced first-hand the negative effects of bullying, I'm sure they would want to do everything possible to rid our school system of this form of abuse.

4:30

Bill 206 is a positive step forward to achieving mental well-being for staff and students. This comfort and security is vital for a productive learning and teaching environment. By amending the School Act, the proposed legislation would better equip our schools with a direction on how to handle incidents involving bullying or other conduct that creates an unproductive learning atmosphere.

Without a safe school setting students begin to react negatively to their place of learning. Mr. Speaker, many individuals will avoid situations where they feel threatened. It is a part of human nature to protect oneself. Some children are fearful to play in certain areas of the school grounds during recess and will avoid these areas. Many students hate taking the bus because of the treatment they get from other students, so they avoid it. Other individuals learn to take the long route home to keep safe. I've seen students stay home from school entirely because they felt unwelcome in a school. This is unacceptable for schools in this great province.

[The Speaker in the chair]

These are passive reactions to bullying, but some students don't react passively. Many parents tell their children to fight back and stand up to a bully because that is the only thing a bully understands. In extreme cases these students may feel threatened and lash out with violent reactions against the bully. There are cases of children

bringing weapons to school in order to protect themselves, keeping knives, bats, and even guns in their lockers. With the tragic events that have happened over the past 10 years across North America, there needs to be a mechanism in place that will stop this violent reaction before it becomes irreversible. Under Bill 206 all schools will be required to record and report any incidents that involve tools or devices that can be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others or the possession of drug paraphernalia.

Mr. Speaker, the Internet has ushered in more difficulties for teachers and students when it comes to bullying. The Internet can become a tool in the hands of a bully. Rumours can spread quickly and to more people than ever before. It is hard to prevent every single instance of bullying that could occur on a daily basis. It is even more difficult to prevent Internet abuse from spreading and hurting the individual in question. With the availability of Internet through cellphones and other electronic devices many students have access to the Internet for hours of the day. I have known girls who use the Internet MSN Messenger to spread rumours about other girls. It became so bad that the girl had to switch schools because she could not tolerate the torment she received in the school about what took place over the Internet.

There are some parents and individuals who do not take bullying seriously. They may say things like, "Oh, well, kids will be kids" and defend the student responsible for causing another student's grief. Bullies may be part of the cool crowd, and the social hierarchy makes it hard for a student to rat them out to the principal or the teacher for fear of being ostracized by their peers even further. We cannot just pass these actions off as nothing because there are a great many children, adolescents, teenagers, and adults who are affected daily by this harassment.

Mr. Speaker, the root cause as to why these actions take place is highly debatable. Family life, music, movies, magazines, newspapers, websites are among the hundreds of reasons why one individual may bully another. I don't think that this Assembly should have to wait until the exact cause of bullying is determined before taking action. We as a government work towards stopping this problem by increasing the ability of students, teachers, and family members to handle this complex issue.

Bullies need to be dealt with so that other kids can feel safe and welcome at their school. That is why I'm so supportive of this legislation. By requiring all persons on school property to conduct themselves in a peaceful manner so as not to cause any mental or physical stress on others, Bill 206 provides the opportunity to protect every individual within our learning institutions. This legislation is a positive step towards dealing with the increasing problems both teachers and students face each and every day.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this piece of legislation and urge all members of the Assembly to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to speak to Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. Certainly, I would like to express my gratitude to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward. I think that it's probably one of the most important bills that we'll actually discuss in this House for a long time because it affects our children right from grade 1; it affects our future leaders; it affects the young children that we expect to be the leaders in our society. We expect them to be educated, and without an education in this world as we know it today, particularly in technology, we are or we will be behind the rest of the world.

One of my contentions, particularly on the elementary school level, is that I really believe our schools are getting too big, and certainly we have cutbacks in teachers. There are fewer eyes to watch what's going on, and there are more and more kids coming in. Kids are being bused from many distances. These little kids are six years old, and if there's bullying that goes on at that level, it does follow them all the way through their high school years, particularly – actually, not just even in grade 1 but in grades 2 and 3 as well. If there's bullying at that level, it does affect them for their entire school life. So this is very important if we are expecting to create a civilized society going forward in terms of how we treat other people and in terms of how we want to be treated ourselves.

It is a repeat of Bill 210 from the last session, and I'm glad that this has come forward again because it defines "bully" and "banned item" and meets our earlier concern regarding the exclusion of sexual orientation and disability in the definition of a bully. It states the procedure that teachers and principals must follow if a student is either suspected to possess a banned item or is bullying another student.

One of the things that is so very difficult to ascertain is really mental bullying. The psychology that has already been mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in terms of being able to use the Internet and Twitter and Facebook and all of the other mechanisms that the young people today use to communicate really can be very, very – and, as was sadly pointed out, can actually lead to suicides.

There are more bullying incidents in the schools than we actually know of because many are not reported. Kids are too frightened or, in fact, the parents then move their child to another school, and the child that was the perpetrator never really is identified, which is sad because now we have someone that has gotten away with that bullying, and they will continue that behaviour quite possibly into their adult life.

The principal in collaboration with a peace officer can determine an educational measures program for the student to participate in. One of my problems with that is that the perpetrator can then be put into this educational measures program, but the point is that they are still physically in the face of the person that they have bullied, and that person knows that the perpetrator of their bullying is still in the school and is still basically, to use the local language of the kids, in their face, and it's very difficult for them to avoid them. I really think that when a perpetrator has been identified, they should be suspended. Even if it's just for one day, at least the point is being made, and the person being bullied knows that they are being protected in some fashion.

4:40

The principal must advise the board of placing a student in an educational measures program, and the board must advise the minister of any contraventions regarding banned items or bullying. I think the intent of this is very good, but how it's actually going to be enforced is not really clear in my mind. Bullying episodes are increasing whether we like it or not, and to have this kind of reporting system go all the way up to the minister takes time. I'm not saying that perhaps it shouldn't happen, but I'm just not sure that this is a really good use of the time of the principal and the school board.

The school board has the responsibility to ensure that there are educational measures programs. I know that in Lethbridge we have excellent police officers in our schools. They have mediation skills. They have skills to be able to defuse violent situations or even mentally violent situations. These police officers are trained. Having police officers in the school, I think, is another good example of how taxpayers' money is in my estimation used well to be able to protect our students so that they can learn.

Anybody that's being bullied simply cannot concentrate in a classroom even if who they're afraid of is in another classroom or, in fact, may well be probably in grades older than them. But just trying to concentrate on something and learn and listen to a teacher when you're afraid to even step out of your classroom door just doesn't happen. They simply don't learn.

As we know, certainly, no child deserves to be bullied. There's a fine line to be established between teasing and bullying. Some teasing can be done in fun, but there's always that little extra where it can slip over into the bullying. I'm not saying that teasing isn't good. I think we see it in our sports teams. You have nicknames for each other, and it does create camaraderie.

I think Robin Williams, who is a very well-known comedian, is an example of a kid that was bullied and has told the story many times. The only way he could get around it was to try to handle the situations with humour. Well, not everybody has that innate ability to be able to dissipate bullying, particularly verbal bullying, with the counter of humour. He has gone on to describe himself, as many comedians have, as being introverted, for one thing – often kids who are introverted do get picked on – and also that he suffers from depression. Many comedians have said that, which is kind of a dichotomy of behaviours. Children who are bullied often do end up with kind of a dual personality because they have to be able to react in a situation that is often against, really, who they are.

The other thing that I would be interested in seeing is along the same lines of how I think schools are too big. I would like to see the stats of bullying in public, large schools versus bullying in private, small schools. I don't know whether private schools keep these sorts of records, but I would assume that if they have been legislated by the Alberta education act, then of course they would have to keep these stats. I think it would be interesting to study those particular statistics.

One of the other things is that we keep talking about peace officers. I know that in Lethbridge we're fortunate to have police officers. I'm wondering why we would want a peace officer versus a police officer. I guess I just want a good old police officer who's had that training in mediation, who's had that training in dissipating violence. As I've mentioned, I think it's important to have school officers on-site.

I think I've mentioned that I think the perpetrators should at least be suspended if just for one day because for the child that's being bullied, that person is always in their face. Sometimes children have to switch schools, and many parents I know would like to try to get their children into private schools and, of course, couldn't possibly afford that. [Ms Pastoor's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, being put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I think it's fair to say that many members of this Assembly would support a bill that protects the safety of children and staff in schools. This is exactly what Bill 206 intends to do, and as a former police officer I feel this bill is long overdue.

Bill 206 would require all people on school property to conduct themselves in a safe and peaceful manner that would not be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others nor impact the school's safe learning environment.

Additionally, Bill 206 would prohibit the possession of drug paraphernalia as well as any tool or device that is intended to cause

harm to others on school property or during school hours. Any of these violations can result in police intervention. Also, the principal can call a meeting with the student, parent or guardian, and police to discuss appropriate consequences and next steps for the student. Mr. Speaker, involving local authorities has become essential because bullying and the possession of harmful devices have escalated to a level that only these professionals are trained to deal with.

The intent of Bill 206 follows one of the government's top five priorities, promoting strong and vibrant communities and reducing crime so that Albertans feel safe. There is federal and provincial legislation in place to protect the safety of individuals. This bill works to extend that same protection on school grounds. Bullying and possession of drug paraphernalia and/or any device that can potentially cause harm to others pose serious threats to the safety of students on school grounds and, ultimately, in our communities. Weapons are a growing concern for schools because many have been found on students on school property. Any type of weapon that is on school grounds compromises the safety of staff and students.

Mr. Speaker, early intervention is a vital part of preventing children from falling into a cycle of bullying. Bullying, which is characterized by a repeated pattern of unprovoked aggressive behaviours carried out to harm or control another person, can be linked to future criminal behaviour. It can also be linked to family violence. It is clear that the targeted and sometimes innovative strategies such as those proposed in Bill 206 are needed to ensure appropriate intervention and protection.

It is also important that follow-up support is provided. This was reinforced by the Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying. The round-table was announced in October 2003 to gather stakeholders and communities together to recommend solutions to the problem of family violence. The expert panel emphasized the importance of early childhood development and school-aged strategy as society's best chance to create positive change.

In addition, Alberta's Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force was established in March 2007 to gather input and ideas from Albertans on ways to reduce crime, enhance community safety, and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system. The executive summary of the keeping communities safe report says that not enough is being done to prevent crime. They identified that starting young and addressing the factors that put children and youth at risk is a proven strategy and one that will have the best results in the longer term. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 provides the necessary support recommended by the Alberta round-table and the Alberta Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force.

Stats Canada did a nation-wide study that was conducted in voluntarily participating schools in the 2007-2008 school year, surveying over 30,000 students. Of those who participated in the study, 23 per cent of secondary school students and over 36 per cent of elementary school students reported having been bullied at least once in the previous month. Further research shows that bullying of overweight children gets more frequent and more violent as they move into their teen years. This can scar a child's self-esteem and severely hamper, even ruin, their quality of life.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, bullying is not the same today as it was a generation ago. Now bullying can be fatal. It can get to the point where a child who is being bullied no longer wants to attend school. It is a child's right to obtain an education, and it is our role to make sure that children are safe while they are on school property, including school buses. Mr. Speaker, we need to make sure Alberta's schools remain welcoming to students so that they are excited to come to school. We want children to be inspired to learn, but this could be difficult if they're feeling isolated and insecure as a consequence of bullying.

Most of us here are mothers or fathers and care deeply about our children and our communities. We will go to any length to make sure they remain safe. That is why I support Bill 206. I want to do everything I can to make sure my grandchildren's safety is not compromised. I fully acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that this government has an aggressive plan to make sure Alberta's communities are safe, but there is still more work to be done to make sure our schools are safe. I feel as though Bill 206 fits into that plan. Bill 206 will allow the government to maintain control of this issue by giving the schools and police the tools they need to prevent or intervene when bullying becomes a problem and, perhaps more importantly, before it becomes extreme.

Mr. Speaker, bullying behaviour is unacceptable at any time and is not a normal part of growing up. Bill 206 is an opportunity to teach children right from wrong when they are young so that they do not continually repeat destructive behaviour throughout their lives. I support Bill 206 because I put children's safety and security first, and I am sure the children of our province would support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. This is an interesting bill. I want to start out by congratulating the sponsoring member for her insistence on putting it forward again because I know this is her second attempt to get it forward. I don't question for a moment her commitment to addressing and trying to deal with a very important issue, that I think probably almost all of us in this House share an opinion that that issue is one we need to take very, very seriously and do everything we can to address, and that is the issue of bullying in our schools.

I do applaud the member for this initiative and for taking the time and using this opportunity to put this issue on our agenda here in the Assembly so that we can discuss the issue and address a number of the factors or circumstances relevant to the debate. I guess at this point that while I appreciate the objectives and the goals of this bill, I'm not sure whether this bill is the best vehicle for achieving these objectives. When I say that, I say that quite genuinely. I really am not sure. I have some questions with respect to how the bill would be interpreted and some technical questions in some respects in terms of its implications. So I will put those out there, and then I look forward to the opportunity to have further debate and discussion on it as the bill works its way through, which I assume it probably will.

The first question that I'll put to you, because I'm afraid I will run out of time, may seem a bit rhetorical, but truly it's not. It is something that I genuinely believe we need to address, and I'm sure it will come as no surprise to the sponsoring member. I very much appreciate that this bill we have before us today includes amendments to the definitions of bullying to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground upon which bullying could occur.

I note that within the bill there is the provision that where it's determined by a teacher in consultation with the principal that bullying may have occurred, the principal and, ultimately, a peace officer will consult with one another to talk about a potential program of education to which the perpetrator, for lack of a better word, would be invited to attend in order to have that person, hopefully, learn something from that education process such that we would mitigate and prevent further bullying activity in the future.

So, of course, it should be no big surprise that my question is: how will the provision in this bill, were it to pass, work in conjunction with the proposed section 9 of the human rights code, that would potentially allow a parent to withdraw a child from a specific course of education that might deal with the issue of sexual orientation? In fact, I'm quite convinced that everybody who works, particularly, in education and in particular around issues of bullying – in fact, I've consulted with many over the last two or three weeks – will tell you that sexual orientation or suspicions of minority sexual orientations form the foundation of 40 to 50 per cent of the bullying that occurs in the school setting.

Obviously, if you're truly going to mitigate it and prepare a course of education that will prevent it in the future, you simply can't have a passing or incidental reference to sexual orientation in the education that arises. You have to talk to the perpetrator of the bullying about the issues around sexual orientation in order to promote understanding and, ultimately, discourage and persuade that person to not engage in bullying in the future.

My concern, of course, is that we might well have a parent come along and say: no, my kid is not going to participate in that. Right now, as it stands, it's not clear to me that there is anything to stop a parent from doing that. That is a concern I have, and I look forward to hearing from the member about how that particular outcome can be avoided. On the face of it I don't know how it can be avoided, and that is of grave concern.

The other question I have, somewhat related to that but also relating to all types of bullying, is just the question of what the authority is right now of the school – and I genuinely don't know – to suspend students who do engage in bullying. My understanding is that they have the authority to suspend at this point. Is it arguable that this bill might actually undermine that ability to suspend? I don't know the answer, but if the answer is yes, then I guess I'm concerned about that because I think that there are occasions where the bullying becomes so systemic and so engaged and so deeply embedded that for the sake of the victims of the bullying it is necessary to remove the bully from that setting.

So those are two of, probably, about six or seven questions that I have, but I suspect I'm coming close to the end of my opportunity to speak right now, so I may have to adjourn debate on this bill and come back to it in the future.

An Hon. Member: Question, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Notley: I am not sure.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have the floor. What you choose to do is your business.

Ms Notley: I look forward to there being more opportunity to debate this bill, so I will adjourn debate.

The Speaker: There is a motion to adjourn the debate. The hon. member wants to adjourn the debate.

[Motion lost]

The Speaker: Well, it becomes redundant anyway. Standing Order 8(1) requires that at 5 o'clock Motions Other than Government Motions be called.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Labour Protection for Farm Workers

510. Dr. Swann moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to introduce amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect paid farm workers while continuing to exempt family members and other unpaid labourers.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to stand in the Legislature and put forward Motion 510 on farm worker safety. We've risen in the House repeatedly on the issue of farm worker safety and farm worker protection. This caucus has met on many occasions with people in the field, with farm workers and farmers, and talked about the issues, and increasingly Albertans are supporting the notion that is proposed here in the motion.

5:00

At the present time Alberta's farm workers have no right to refuse unsafe work, no protection regarding hours of work and overtime, no compensation if they're injured on the job. Even more, they're not allowed to unionize. In 2001 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in *Dunmore versus Ontario* that excluding farm workers from labour relations legislation was unconstitutional, yet in Alberta farm workers are exempt even in 2009 from most provisions of the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code. They're exempt from mandatory Workers' Compensation Board coverage, and they are exempt from occupational health and safety legislation. This is an anomaly in the land, and more and more Albertans becoming aware of it are saying that this needs to change, especially those who stand for human rights and equality and the constitutional right of all labourers to be protected in terms of their person in their workplace.

There are a number of ways in which Alberta's paid farm workers are not treated the same as other workers. One of those is the exclusion from the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The definitions in the Occupational Health and Safety Act clearly exempt farming and ranching operations. I quote section (s):

"Occupation" means every occupation, employment, business, calling or pursuit over which the Legislature has jurisdiction, except

(i) farming or ranching operations specified in the regulations.

Excluded operations then include farming and ranching operations that relate to

- (a) the production of crops, including fruits and vegetables, through the cultivation of land;
- (b) the raising and maintenance of animals or birds;
- (c) the keeping of bees.

These are excluded.

What is included is equally interesting, Mr. Speaker. It includes operations involving the processing of food or other products from the operations, the operation of greenhouses, mushroom farms, nurseries, and sod farms. It includes operations involving landscaping, and it includes operations involving the raising or boarding of pets.

Mr. MacDonald: What about horses?

Dr. Swann: Well, no. Those are excluded. Those are considered animals.

Those working with horses are exempt from protection under the Occupational Health and Safety Act even though there is significant risk associated with those, far more than raising mushrooms, I guess I would argue.

Mr. MacDonald: Even Spruce Meadows?

Dr. Swann: Even Spruce Meadows.

It is inconceivable why those workplaces should be covered but not all other farm and ranch operations. Changes are needed, Mr. Speaker, and we encourage the government to bring forward amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act to no longer exclude paid farm workers. The government repeatedly has said that education is the answer to farm safety and that, quote, common sense will prevail. However, this offers little protection to farm workers. It is unfair, and it needs to end in Alberta. Workers' rights can no longer be ignored in the area of farm workers, especially those who are paid.

Imagine if we had no labour laws or occupational health and safety legislation in this province. Would the government say that common sense will prevail and that education is the answer to all workers? Clearly not. It's absurd to say that education can be a replacement for labour and safety laws. Both are required. It's not either/or. Education is clearly not enough, else why would we have consideration for other workplace conditions, many of which are much less risky than raising animals or cleaning grain augers? What happens when a worker raises a safety concern at his workplace and his or her superior tells them, "Just keep doing it" and ignores the concern? If the worker refuses to work, he or she could be fired, and it would be legally quite okay to do so because the laws do not apply equally to farm workers at the present time. They have to choose between unsafe work with the risk of being injured or killed or potentially being fired for not doing the job.

I know all members of the House stand for fairness and equality and human rights. It's surprising that it's gone on this long, and I expect that with the renewed interest and commitment in this House to human rights, we're going to see those changes. This motion is trying to move things forward more quickly.

Farm workers could be experts in farm safety and know everything they need to know about how to work safely, but they cannot control what happens to them if the boss doesn't create the conditions for health and safety. It's important to note that these circumstances are not the norm. At least we would hope they are not the norm. There are many employers of farm workers who take the extra steps, make the extra expense, and ensure the safety of their farm workers, but that does not mean that the problems do not exist.

Again, imagine if all workers were excluded from occupational health and safety. Certainly, there would be workplaces which maintain high standards and keep their workers safe, but there would be no protection for those workers who face unsafe situations. Why are we treating farm workers differently?

Farmers should no longer be excluded from workplace health and safety legislation in the 21st century. This government has legislation to protect livestock: pigs, cattle, chickens, and sheep. The law covers everything from abuse to illness to lack of food or water or ventilation or transportation. Alberta laws provide for inspection, enforcement, and penalties for the mistreatment of animals, yet this same government has deliberately exempted paid farm workers from the same conditions for health and safety.

The Animal Protection Act penalizes owners who neglect their stock. If the same farmer has unsafe practices that jeopardize the health and safety of their workers, accidents do not trigger mandatory occupational health and safety investigation. There is a double standard of massive proportions.

Since 1997, 223 Albertans have died working on farms, and there have been thousands of injuries. In addition to those thousands, there are many more that go unreported because there is no legislated requirement to identify farm-related injury, so some hospitals report, and some hospitals do not report farm-related injuries of workers. Every death is one too many, and every preventable injury

is one too many. Had paid farm workers been included under occupational health and safety and not deliberately exempted, these numbers would be much lower. The evidence is in other provinces across the country.

It's important to note that there are, indeed, different circumstances for some farms, particularly family farms. The second part of the motion notes that continued exemption of family members and other unpaid labourers exists under this motion. We recognize that sometimes children will be helping their parents on a farm. Late into the night neighbours and friends will be helping the farmer out. In these cases there is a valid argument for exemption.

However, paid farm workers, particularly at large corporate farms, are another matter indeed. The government cannot use the uniqueness of family farms to exempt all farm workers. Corporate feedlots are quite a different concern. These are industrial sites, more akin to the factory floor than the family farm. Injuries and deaths on these feedlots are still too common, especially when safety regulations could prevent further accidents. We believe that workers on corporate farms clearly deserve the same protection under the Occupational Health and Safety Act as other workers in the province. Several members of our caucus, including myself, Mr. Speaker, met personally with several Alberta farmers and farm families who have endured the loss of a loved one due to accidents on corporate farms. We've heard their stories as well as the stories of others they have shared with us, and it's clear that changes need to be made.

Just a few months ago a provincial court judge in his report following the fatality of Kevan Chandler made recommendations to this Legislature as follows.

It is recommended that paid employees on farms should be covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act . . . with the same exemption for family members and other non-paid workers that apply to non-farm employers.

Secondly, the justice recommended that

training programs be set up by the Department of Agriculture to address ways to minimize the risk of hazardous activities, with a system to record training received by both employers and employees.

Since the filing of that report the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Employment and Immigration have indicated that they are now looking into the matter. However, we have seen these commitments before without action. For these consultations going on now, it is important that the government meet not only with the employers, the farmers, but also with the employees, especially those who have been hurt or the families of those who have been injured or killed.

5:10

Ultimately, this is about the protection of farm workers. The government owes it to them to listen to their stories and their concerns. Now is the time to give paid farm workers the rights they have been denied for so many years. Alberta is a province where all workers deserve to be treated equally and have equal rights and protection under the law. We must end the exclusion of paid farm workers from the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Therefore, I urge all members to support this motion to make amendments to include paid farm workers under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand before this Assembly to talk about Motion 510. The

strength of rural Alberta is critical to the strength of our province as a whole. Rain or shine – and I guess I can say that in this particular case we'd sure like more rain – the farmers of rural Alberta work hard to meet the agriculture needs of our province. They provide the fuel that feeds us. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs and as a rural MLA I am committed to supporting these rural Albertans who do so much for us in return. Their safety and well-being and their success is a priority for our government.

Prevention is the key. Improvement in technology processes and awareness of safety issues have made huge headway into the safe farming practices. I firmly believe that this is where we must go and where we must continue to focus our attention. We must continue to invest and support the efforts to increase the knowledge and awareness of farm safety. By doing this, we will actually prevent accidents from occurring in the first place. This will have a real impact by supporting farmers and the agriculture industry.

Community groups have played a huge role in preventing farm accidents. Agriculture and Rural Development supports numerous community initiatives, and I can say to you that our minister supports with his heart the 4-H Foundation, the funding for the Farm Safety Centre.

Mr. Speaker, many campaigns have already made a huge impact, the first being the community safety campaign. It's called: be careful; we love you. It is a campaign that was started in western Canada, and it was basically a heart with those words written on there just to let family members know that there are challenges. There are, if I can say, areas where safety needs to be looked at more carefully: our government's farm safety program; a public education campaign; there is also the safety up campaign, which targets young farmers.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, prevention is the key, and it needs to be done through education and awareness not only with the agriculture producers and labourers but also with the manufacturers of farm machinery. This is the right thing to do and will have a real impact on industry. Maintaining the safety of farmers in our province is essential. I do not believe that this motion will address or achieve the issue of prevention, and therefore I cannot offer my support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Prior to that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly constituents from Edmonton-Mill Creek. Unfortunately, the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs could not be here, so I am introducing them on his behalf. I'd like to introduce to you the Wedman family – Don Wedman, Betty Wedman, Janel Wedman, and Eric Wedman – and their friend Breanne Johnson. If they would rise, I'd like to ask my friends to offer them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, an introduction as well?

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take this opportunity to include an introduction of Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, who have been very faithfully raising the issues of farm worker safety across this province for several years. If they would like to stand up and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Labour Protection for Farm Workers

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The motion that we're dealing with this afternoon on farm worker safety is appreciated. Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you are to be commended, as is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, for diligently bringing this issue up time and time again because it's time that this province joined the rest of the country in providing some form, at least, of protection for workers on farms.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We do know that farms have grown significantly in size. We have a smaller number of farms that have grown bigger and bigger and bigger. The activity that's occurring on these farms is significant. Workers certainly need the protection of the Occupational Health and Safety Act. I can understand where the hon. member is coming from whenever he makes the exemption for family members and other unpaid workers, but there is no reason in the world why workers that are employed on our farms and ranches and in our industrial operations associated with farming cannot be protected by occupational health and safety laws.

We only have to look at the income supports that are available for farm workers who through no fault of their own are injured. The injury is so severe that they can no longer work. They've got bills to pay as well as anyone else. When we see what happens to them, whether they wind up on social services or on AISH, it's the taxpayers who are footing the bill for this. It's not the local farm operation where the accident occurred, but it's the taxpayers that are providing income support to these individuals, and it's very modest. It's a very limited amount of money, and I don't think it's fair. It's not fair to the injured worker. It's not fair to the taxpayer. There has to be some form of compensation available to these individuals. I think that if we adopted this motion, we would go a long way to doing that.

Now, when we look at the whole argument and we hear from the government that educational programs work, well, the statistics would prove that to be false. As well meaning as these educational programs are, they're certainly not reducing the number of accidents or deaths.

5:20

Now, according to the Alberta farm workers, whenever we do not allow these workers to be protected by occupational health and safety, it's a denial of basic human rights. I would certainly agree with that because that is true. We can go through a long list of individuals who as a result of their activities on a farm lost their life. In 2006 for the lack of a safety harness Kevan Chandler was buried in a silo on a feedlot operation and suffocated as a result of the grain. Now, there was no compensation. It was difficult to look his widow in the eye, but there was very little done about this operation until, of course, there was a court case. The whole idea here is: well, if

you're not satisfied, go to the courts. Many of these individuals can't afford the legal costs.

Let's read into the record some of the things that were stated in that court. An Alberta Department of Employment and Immigration employee advised the inquiry or the court that

their employees establish and maintain workplace safety rules and provide technical support for workers or employers. They help interpret provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and its regulations. If necessary, they can recommend that prosecution for a violation be conducted.

This individual, however, notes that farming is exempt from the Occupational Health and Safety Act by the farming and ranching exemption regulation, Alberta regulation 271-1995. This employee attributed this to a greater desire in other industries to establish uniform workplace safety rules, whereas the agricultural community was more interested in education.

We talked about this before. Education: a good idea, but it's not working effectively.

This employee that was testifying from the department of employment

felt that the non-farm employers appreciate having workplace guidelines in place governing hazardous activities. This allows employers and employees to become aware of what is required to be safe. Employers that follow these guidelines can use them to enforce proper behaviour by their employees, and to claim due diligence if the guidelines are followed and an accident occurred.

Now, the testimony provided by an employee from the Alberta department of agriculture at the same inquiry

agreed that [the department's] approach to farm safety was to provide education, with the emphasis on children.

Not for the workers but for the children that are associated with the family that runs the operation.

There are three employees of the Alberta Department of Agriculture involved in educating 50,000 Alberta farmers, whereas there are 84 Occupational Health and Safety inspectors from the Alberta Department of Employment and Immigration monitoring 140,000 non-farm employers.

That's quite a difference, Mr. Speaker. That's why I think that if we were to support this motion, it would go a long way to protecting all workers in this province regardless of whether they work in a factory or they work on a farm.

I really think that we need to have a long, careful look at this motion and, hopefully, adopt it because we do know what was said in the report to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, in the public fatality inquiry into the death of Kevan John Chandler in Black Diamond, Alberta. I think we need to act on the suggestions or the recommendations that came from that, and this motion gives us the ideal opportunity to do that.

Now, Alberta is the only province that I'm aware of, Mr. Speaker, that completely excludes farm workers from labour legislation. Many groups, including the Alberta farm workers themselves, have asked that family farms be exempt – the hon. member has done that – but that employed farm workers be covered under the legislation.

When we look at some of the hours that these individuals work, there are a lot of long hours. There are 12 to 15 hours per day during cropping season. They can go weeks without a day of rest. Many of these workers do not make much more than minimum wage. Some of them are on a monthly salary. Room and board are provided. I don't know how some of the individual farm workers that I have met over the years are getting by with that kind of money as a monthly salary. It was just amazing to me when they told me how many hours they actually worked and what their monthly salary was and the condition of the bunkhouse. One individual, in particular, told me that he thought some of the animals under his care had better living accommodations than he did. This particular

individual is now getting by on a very, very modest sum from AISH, and he would be far, far from retirement age. He got caught, unfortunately, in the power takeoff of a farm tractor, and he's lucky to be with us today.

The Federation of Labour also has some issues regarding this.

In conclusion, I would urge all members to please support the motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the manner in which the motion reads, which has been well cited here by the mover, as well as the intent of the motion; namely, that Alberta's paid farm workers, who are currently not covered by the act – the note is that the farms would be recognized as work sites, but family members and unpaid labourers would not fall under legislative protection. Well, one of the issues I have – and perhaps you would deem it to be a technical issue – is the manner in which this motion has been presented. For example, its intent is to introduce amendments, quite specifically, to the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

At this time our Minister of Employment and Immigration has been tasked with reviewing and getting considerable review on the definition of the farm sites themselves, the farm as a family operation versus the farm as distinguished by some sort of nonfarm business on farmland, and to engage in getting industry feedback. I was very satisfied that the work done by Agriculture and Rural Development and by Employment and Immigration would provide for us this fall something that may be of value.

What I want to identify, especially because of time I spent in Geneva listening about the rights of the child, is my concern that if you distinguish between the rights of family members and unpaid labourers in a bill relative to paid labourers or paid workers, you might be providing some with a false sense of having rights that another member may not have. For example, does that family-farm worker lose their rights because we recognize an extraordinary right for some other group that might be working alongside that family member? I'm not sure, especially if that person happens to be a youth member of that family. It might behoove Alberta to do what Alberta often does and define things in an Alberta context relative to what Alberta would want, which may not be under the umbrella of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

That's one of the issues that I have with this. This is very specific to engaging this Legislature in approval or bringing forward amendments to that act to deal with this issue. I would rather hear a little bit more on the investigation that will happen because of the process already initiated by two of my colleagues on this side of the bench. It does not mean, in wanting to vote against this, that I care less about those individuals. I'm concerned, in fact, about the distinction that's presented here, and sometimes on this side of the House, I admit, we have argued distinction. What about the family farm member? I think we need to have all of those kinds of pieces of material in front of us before we can make any kind of decision.

5:30

I respect very much, too, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs himself as a farmer has identified very strongly the kinds of things that Alberta has wrestled with on this issue at one time or another that may make it very difficult to provide for under the context of this bill. When I myself was in a position of working on adjudicating how we would manage this issue, it was no small agony to try to determine what was the right course of action. Currently I would urge that the Assembly support the ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and Employment and Immigration to complete

their task, to undertake that thorough review, to make sure that we've defined things properly, to be sure that we look through the lens of the rights of the individual in the family, what rights they maintain if we're suggesting that only those that are paid workers or unpaid labourers from a volunteer perspective would be covered by a piece of legislation that others may not be covered by. I have always maintained that education was an important component of it.

I mean, the real issue in this Legislature should be around how we protect our people, how we step in to protect them in a way that is universal at best. In a situation where this motion distinguishes between those and sets up what might be deemed to be two or perhaps even three classes, I think we should know an awful lot more about it to see whether that's the appropriate way.

There are many times, too, Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature where we've approved specific bills dealing with specific industries and specific organizations. To put this under the broad context of occupational health and safety may not be what we would choose to be the right way in the future, and I'd very much like to see us engage in that debate before precipitating that it can just be a resolution by a few amendments to an existing bill. I'd like to understand thoroughly the intent of that and who was getting leveraged perhaps in exclusion of who we were ignoring in the process.

So I would urge this Assembly to allow the process that we've initiated to take place and to defeat this motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak in favour of this motion. This is a motion which we support in full. I will make a couple of comments in a moment about the fact that I don't know that it actually goes far enough, but it certainly highlights a very critical issue that has been discussed by members throughout the House throughout this session and one that we need to address quickly. There have been a number of comments about why that is, very salient comments made both by the Leader of the Official Opposition as well as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I'd like to take an opportunity to just briefly comment on some of the arguments that have been put forward against this motion. There has been some talk about sort of the romantic nature of rural Alberta and how the energy of Alberta is premised on, you know, the historical family farm and how that's so much part of who we are as Albertans. I just need to say that I find that somewhat ironic given Bill 43 and given the decision of this government to very clearly choose big agriculture and big agricorp over maintaining and preserving the integrity and the longevity of the family farm, yet when it comes to this issue, we're going to suddenly wrap ourselves in a notion of rural Alberta that the government is at the same time running away from as quickly as it possibly can.

With respect to the role of 4-H and education programs in terms of playing a role in ensuring safety and preventing the injuries and the deaths which occur on our farms on a regular basis due to the lack of protection and prevention and safety standards, I would just say this: if that model were to work, then presumably what we ought to do is simply let Mothers Against Drunk Driving run some courses, run some ads. We'll get rid of the speed limits, we'll get rid of the drinking and driving laws, we'll get rid of the penalties for breaching those laws, and we'll get rid of police officers because presumably all you need to do is have education and lots of good advertisement. I mean, we know that won't work, and that's why it's not working for our farm workers throughout this province. That is why they are being injured and why they are dying: because we are not doing the job that every other province in the country is doing.

With respect to the comments made previously about how we need to check about: how will this one clause affect this one little class? Could we do it a different way? Could we come up with a different Alberta way? Well, the reality is this: every other province in the country provides this kind of protection to their farm workers, and the consultation process is simply a mechanism for delay and distraction. We know what the answer is. The answer is to apply health and safety protection and legislation to employees on farms the same way we provide it to all other employees in the province.

If we are concerned about the implications to family members, well, I know a lot of daughters and sons and nieces and nephews that work in stores owned by their parents and who work in restaurants owned by their parents and who do lots of things in family businesses. This is no different. It is simply a question of protecting those paid workers who work for farmers, many of whom are new immigrants, who have never had the opportunity to go anywhere near a 4-H meeting, by the way. So we need to do that because people are getting injured.

Now, I mentioned that my one concern was that this bill did not go quite far enough. A couple of members talked about the rate of injury and death on Alberta's farms and actually identified the fact that we don't know if the statistics are accurate. Part of the reason we don't know if the statistics are accurate is that it's actually the Workers' Compensation Board that collects those statistics and compels the hospitals and the doctors to report when there is an injury related to work. By failing to include the application of workers' compensation to farm workers, we then will still unfortunately fail to get a clear picture with respect to how many people are truly being injured on our farms, primarily on the large farms, where they are employees working for a paycheque.

Now, recently in Manitoba the workers' compensation law was expanded to include farm workers as was employment standards law, including provisions against excessive overtime, providing for premiums where people were working too long, providing for minimum wage. All the kinds of protections that we provide to all other workers in the province were extended in Manitoba to farm workers. I would suggest that, again, that is something that ought to happen here because, as was described by two of the previous speakers in favour of this motion or moving this motion, farm work is such that at certain times of the year the hours are incredibly long and people are working well into the night. The fact of the matter is that we say that people who work beyond a certain number of hours – I believe it's 44 hours in a week – should be entitled to overtime under the Employment Standards Code. That's simply treating your employees fairly. I'm not sure what it is about being a farm worker that makes you exempt from fairness, but it appears to be a popular notion within the province of Alberta.

The other thing that I would like to ultimately see, which was pursued by the unions in Ontario, was the right of farm workers to have access to organizing and becoming part of a union should they so choose. Particularly, this would be applicable to the large corporate farms. In Ontario there was kind of a part-way law created for farm workers, and that law was challenged. Ultimately, the Ontario government was told that their prohibition on farm workers having the ability to unionize was in breach of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Now, unfortunately, the Liberal government in that province is appealing it.

5:40

In my view it is a position that we should seriously consider, in that farm workers should have the ability to join a union should they choose. Why? Well, it goes back to some interesting stats, that were put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, simply

that even if you're covered by the health and safety legislation, there are 84 health and safety inspectors and currently 140,000 employers. So how do you assert a safe workplace in your workplace? You need to have a mechanism to ensure that you can compel your employer to provide for a safe and healthy workplace because inspectors aren't going to be able to do it for you. There simply are not enough, which is why, generally speaking, we have a very poor health and safety regime for all employees in Alberta. Frankly, in Alberta the best and only way to ensure that you can compel your employer to keep you safe is through the activities of your union or, alternatively, through a joint employer-worker health and safety committee, which, of course, is another thing we don't have in this province, unlike every other province in the country.

These are all things that we should be offering to farm workers because they have a dangerous job. How do we know they have a dangerous job? Because they keep getting injured and they keep getting killed and they keep ending up in hospitals. We had a public inquiry and a judge who oversaw a public inquiry who recommended that we are far, far overdue, long overdue, in expanding the application of not only health and safety legislation – well, he talked about health and safety legislation but, I would suggest, also about workers' compensation legislation and all other employee rights – to farm workers.

Where you're worried about the impact that has on families, well, you treat them like you treat families in any other business. That's the way you work it out. Ultimately, there is no reason to treat these people differently. There is no reason to force their families and their widows to have to go to court to sue to get an income when somebody in the family is killed. They should all be able to have access to the kind of protection and income security that any employee would.

It's for that reason that I see this motion as a good start to addressing the long-standing inequity suffered by Alberta's farm workers, and I urge all members of this House to support it.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and talk about Motion 510. I want to start off by saying that I'm not a farmer, but I spent enough time working on my uncle's dairy farm to appreciate that there's no romantic part of farming, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona talks about. When you shovel cow dung every night after 50 dairy cows are finished in the barn, there's nothing romantic about that.

I want to talk about the part of the motion that says that farms are to be recognized as work sites but that family members and unpaid labourers would not fall under legislative protection. I think that, first of all, putting farms right now as work sites would create just a bureaucratic nightmare for farmers to try and work under. A perfect example would be that as a work site all workers would have to fill out workplace hazard assessments. I can tell you from my 30 years of working in industry, in coal mining, which is one of the most regulated industries in Canada, that workplace hazard assessments just don't work. What those mean is that every worker before they start their shift has to fill out a workplace hazard assessment form of what their jobs are going to entail during the day and assess any workplace hazards that they're going to see, and they have to try and address those. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in the mining industry, for example, I know that workers on four days of work take a piece of paper, photocopy it four times, sign their name, and hand the thing in. So it does nothing.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that since family members and unpaid labourers would not fall under legislative protection, I think

you're compromising the motion. I think that this is just a tactic to get this motion through because I think the opposition knows that family members and your regular farm people wouldn't support this motion as it stands right now.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the ongoing consultation process that the ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and Employment and Immigration have undertaken in looking for industry feedback to look at regulating nonfarm businesses operating farmland is the proper way to go. The feedback process, I believe, will examine ways to distinguish between family farms and corporate farms for regulatory and legislative purposes, and the recommendations will be forwarded to the government in time for the fall session. I strongly believe that this is the way to go. I find farming to be a very unique enterprise, and I think that we should leave it to the people that are in the business to come up with their rules and regulations.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I talked to the industry task force that about four years ago looked at the occupational health and safety regulations and came up with all kinds of new regulations where they combined all of mining – oil sands, quarries, and coal mining – into one regulation. I can tell you from personal experience that, for example, under blasting regulations, the new regulations that were put in place put six of my people out of work because they couldn't pass the blasting tickets that were required by the government even though these people had 30 years of experience in blasting in the mine. So regulations aren't always the way to go.

In my mind safety training is the best way to prevent farm-related accidents and, for that matter, the best way to prevent accidents anywhere in any business. As such, the government currently employs several safety programs for farming. There's the Alberta farm safety program, which is an awareness and prevention program, designed to motivate farmers to work and play safe on Alberta's farms. This program provides statistics, educational resources, and plans for safety-related community events.

There's the Safety Up! program, Mr. Speaker, which is a new farm safety campaign aimed at young farm workers aged 17 to 24, and Agriculture and Rural Development is working closely with the Alberta Farm Safety Centre to support the safety smarts program for kindergarten to grade 6 in rural schools. The focus is on increasing awareness of farm safety issues. I think that's important, that you get to the kids when they're young and teach them the safety practices. The safety smarts program has been running in southern Alberta for eight years now. With the increased industry and government funding the program will be expanded province-wide this year, and we've committed \$120,000 over three years to support this very important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to you also about safety training and about regulations. Again, I can rely on 30 years of experience. You can have all the safety regulations you want in place, you can have all the safety equipment you want in place, but if people do not use common sense and follow those regulations, they're absolutely worthless. For example, going into a coal plant where there are signs that say, "put on your safety glasses; this is a safety glass area; this is a hard hat area; this is a hearing protection area," I know that on doing hundreds of safety tours, you catch people without their eyeglasses on, you catch people without their hearing protection on, you catch people without their hard hats on. So you can have all the regulations you want, but it boils down to education; it boils down to a culture. You have to have a culture in your workplace where people work together to make sure that they look out for each other and are safe.

Mr. Speaker, I think another important part of this is injury statistics. The farm accident monitoring program, FAMS, collects

data on farm accidents that rural hospitals provide on the nature of farm accidents in Alberta. It is impossible to compare statistics between jurisdictions. There are significant differences in how stats are collected, and stats don't always tell the story. Unlike other provinces that may count only paid workers' deaths, Alberta stats also include accidental deaths that occur and include deaths resulting from recreational activity on the farm. I think that's a key point.

I think what's more important, Mr. Speaker, is that data from the WCB shows a significant decrease in lost-time claims from 2006 to 2007. Lost-time claims have decreased by 19.5 per cent, disabling claims have decreased 18 per cent, and in addition to a reduction in claims there has been a reduction in the duration of injury claims by 25.8 per cent. I think we're headed in the right direction, and I think that if we have the consensus of farm people coming to the agriculture department and Employment and Immigration saying, "This is what we have to do to make our farms safe," that's the way to go.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that one fatality on a farm is too many – for that matter, one fatality at any workplace is too many – and we must do what we can to continue to resolve that. But I strongly believe that education, information, and raising awareness of the potential hazards are the best ways to facilitate safe farming practices and, for that matter, all work practices.

Motion 510, Mr. Speaker, is redundant. We have already begun the consultation process to address this issue, and it's the best way to serve Albertans. It is impossible to legislate behaviour. I can't stress that enough. There is little evidence indicating a problem with agricultural safety. Safety is a personal commitment between employers and employees working together to create a safe workplace.

Mr. Speaker, I won't be supporting Motion 510.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise in favour of Motion 510. I will speak a little bit about my experience as a farm worker. In 1971 I worked on a dairy farm. I was 19, young, and when I started my job was given no training. I think the gentleman who I was working for didn't even know that he was supposed to train me. I was there 24/7. I think I had a couple days off every two weeks or something, and I was getting paid about 450 bucks. I was there on the farm. You know, I didn't come home; I was staying there.

Now when I look back, I don't think that the conditions I worked under were very safe. One night the cows took off. You know, they broke the fence. And here we were running around in the middle of the night with a blizzard out there, couldn't even see anything, trying to gather the cows. My concern is that now, when I look back, there were safety issues there, too.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs was talking about education. If education alone will do the job, then I don't think we need to put any cameras at red lights. We don't need sheriffs. We don't need police. We don't need safety laws if education alone will do the job. You know, here we are talking about safety and well-being and the success of not only the farm workers; we're talking about the success of the farmers, too. Agriculture is the backbone of our province, I would say.

I think that with Motion 510 we are just trying to improve farm safety here. I don't see any reason why members from all sides of the House shouldn't be supporting Motion 510. We are just talking about having these slogans, putting the slogan on the heart that "we love you; be safe," and all that. Had they been working, then we would not be having any injuries or deaths on the farm.

Like the member before me said, even one injury or one fatality is one too many. We cannot afford to have any more of those injuries or deaths on the farm. I think that for those reasons we should all be supporting Motion 510 so that we can give rights to farm workers, including workers' compensation and all the other rights they should have which they have been denied for a long time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief. It's obvious, probably, to everyone in this Assembly that I am not a farmer, never have been, probably never will be. But relative to this Motion 510 I just want to reiterate what I've been hearing in debate today; that is, that this motion is redundant. We have a study, and we've got, you know, two ministers out looking at this issue. I believe it is more complex than some of the hon. members across the way maybe have been able to, in their minds, categorize it. I say the family worker, the employed worker, the family member that's – I mean, there's a lot of complexity around when you work at home and who's there, who's not paid, who is paid.

I did marry into a farming family. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I was quite shocked one day when I was at the farm and my brother-in-law, who used a little motorcycle to herd cows all the time – all the time – used it as a vehicle to do the job that they were working on, one day was out just recreating. I remember him walking in the door, and he'd been just out playing in the ditch and took all the skin off his face. By the time I wedged the dirt out of his mouth and out of his eyelids and determined that it wasn't ketchup on his face, that he'd really injured himself, we had quite a significant injury there.

I would say that we already have somebody looking into this. They've committed to come back to this Assembly in the fall, to come with some recommendations. This motion is redundant.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I hate to interrupt, hon. minister, but under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I'd like to invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to close debate on Motion 510.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to all the members who've commented on this motion. I think it should be obvious that we've been wrestling with this issue for over a decade. It's clear that we're discriminating against farm workers.

We are treating them as second-class citizens. We are imposing undue and unfair, unjust burdens on them and their families when they're injured without compensation or without recourse apart from the courts.

I don't think anyone would be remiss in supporting this motion. It's not a commitment to anything except to extend our work as a Legislature to ensure that we're providing reasonable, equal, just access to occupational health and safety legislation and the protection of these workers and their families. So I hope hon. members will stand in support of this very basic motion that would bring us in line with the rest of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 510 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Kang	Pastoor	Swann
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Against the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	McQueen
Anderson	Elniski	Morton
Benito	Fritz	Oberle
Berger	Griffiths	Olson
Bhardwaj	Groeneveld	Prins
Blackett	Johnson	Renner
Campbell	Johnston	Sarich
Danyluk	Liepert	Sherman
DeLong	Lukaszuk	Webber
Doerksen	McFarland	

Totals:	For – 3	Against – 29
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 510 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:08 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Webber

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
Kang
MacDonald

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Benito
Bhardwaj
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
Lukaszuk
Notley
Rodney
Sarich

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Campbell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor
Allred
Amery
Bhullar
Marz
McFarland
Taft
Weadick
Xiao
Vacant

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. Horne
Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor
Dallas
Denis
Fawcett
Notley
Olson
Quest
Sherman
Taft
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Webber

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Oberle
Elniski
Fawcett
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Rogers
Taylor
VanderBurg
Weadick

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw
Allred Jacobs
Amery MacDonald
Anderson McQueen
Benito Olson
Bhardwaj Quest
Boutilier Rodney
Calahasen Sandhu
Dallas Sarich
Doerksen Taft
Forsyth

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock
Amery McFarland
Berger Mitzel
Calahasen Notley
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Doerksen Pastoor
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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 1, 2009

Issue 47e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 1, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, I wish to have unanimous consent to revert to introductions briefly.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all members for allowing me to revert to introductions. With us today are two constituents from Edmonton-Castle Downs who are eagerly awaiting the debate on Bill 44 no matter what time of the night it may come. One of them is Mr. John Winslow, owner and operator of JRW Logistics, a safety professional and a very active blogger and a Twitterer as well. Cellphones are not allowed up there, so he won't be twittering, but he'll be listening. His partner, Richard LeSueur, resource development co-ordinator of the Alberta Food Bank Network, is also involved with Kiwanis in Edmonton and with the Heritage Festival. I welcome both of these constituents. They're already standing. I'd ask the Assembly to extend a warm welcome.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 25

Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to move third reading of Bill 25.

The Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009, legally transfers the pre-1992 unfunded liability to government effective September 1, 2009. The amendment act will also incorporate changes to the payment and governance arrangements pertaining to the pre-1992 unfunded liability. Under the November 2007 memorandum of agreement the government agreed to pay the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, it's procedural that I need to interrupt you here. This is a money bill, so we need a minister to move it.

Ms Evans: I would be pleased to do so and allow my colleague to complete his comments if that would be appropriate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister of finance has moved Bill 25.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, please proceed.

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm almost finished. As I was saying, under the November 2007 memorandum of agreement the government agreed to pay the teachers' portion of the pre-1992 unfunded liability payments till August 31, 2009, then assume the total pre-1992 unfunded liability on September 1, 2009.

I'd encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to fully support third reading of Bill 25. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, it has just occurred to the chair that this bill is about the teachers' pension. There was a note from the Ethics Commissioner that if whoever is present in the Chamber has a conflict of interest, please declare and absent yourself from the Assembly, from the debate.

Mr. Olson: Mr. Speaker, I have a conflict, and I'll withdraw and not take part in the debate or the vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. As the Ethics Commissioner has made it extremely clear in his ruling to this House that I do not have a conflict of interest even though I am a retired teacher in receipt of a pension, I will proceed. However, I will not vote on this although the Ethics Commissioner has indicated that I have every right to vote on Bill 25. When it first came up, I indicated that I would not be voting on this particular bill, but I will put forward some comments.

I'm extremely supportive of Bill 25. It's the right thing. It should have been done decades ago. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Please continue.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. As I indicated, Bill 25 is a very good piece of legislation which should have been resolved decades ago. Had it been resolved decades ago, if the government had lived up to its portion of the unfunded liability, the debt associated with the unfunded liability would not be at \$8.6 billion at this particular time.

This bill solved a lot of problems. It created labour peace for five years for students, teachers, and parents. It recognized the value of teachers both in terms of their pensions and also in terms of their right to receive a wage raise equivalent to those that MLAs had been receiving, the difference being that MLAs to a large extent voted for their own increases whereas teachers were subject to the collective bargaining process.

Bill 25 created an environment whereby the major focus for teachers and students was learning because, as I say, with the exception of concerns over working conditions a five-year period of peace was bought. Based on my 34 years of teaching and having served on numerous strike committees, that peace is something that I value to a great extent. Later on this evening we'll be talking about Bill 44, and I'll reserve my comments to that time, but it's the diametric opposite of the value that's being put forward in Bill 25.

Now, it is my hope that this government recognizes that the longer they delay paying off the unfunded liability, the greater that unfunded liability will climb. I've already stated in previous debates that the government's current deficit has exceeded the \$23 billion that Ralph Klein was so keen on bragging that he had paid down. When it comes to the infrastructure deficit, when you add on this particular \$8.6 billion, when you add on at least another \$1.5 billion in unfunded liabilities of other public-sector groups, when you add on \$4.7 billion worth of debt, you see that we are in worse shape than we were back in 1993, when the government used various draconian methods, basically on the backs of public servants, to defeat the debt at that time. Thanks to the rise in nonrenewable oil and gas prices, some of the harm that was done was softened.

However, in the process we lost half our hospitals in Calgary. It seems that we are, or at least the government is, about to repeat history in terms of driving individuals away.

Bill 25 is a laudable bill. It is something that every Albertan can celebrate. But unless, as I began, the government takes sequential steps in a timely manner to pay off this deficit, it is projected to rise to as high as \$45 billion over the next 40 to 45 years. To date the government has basically been paying the minimum payments, which is the equivalent of just paying what your credit card states is your minimum payment, and of course the interest increases. That amount has been approximately \$83 million a year. Unless the government makes sizable payments over the next series of years despite our recessionary experience, the debt is only going to worsen. The sustainability fund, the stability fund will have been burned through by that time.

I urge the government to not only pass Bill 25 but live up to the payment expectations and remove the unfunded liability so that we can enjoy the fruits of our educational labour now and into the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

7:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick comment on what I have just heard. The member feels and claims that with the passage of this particular piece of legislation addressing the issue of the unfunded pension liability that teachers have had, the government has – and I’m quoting him – bought labour peace. Well, I find that very insulting. I wonder how teachers out there would feel if they knew that this member of the Liberal opposition feels that their peace – their desire to downsize classroom sizes, their desire to have adequate pay, their desire for ongoing professional development, all that – has been bought with dollars, that we bought their peace, that we basically paid them off to be quiet and not strike and not complain for the next number of years because they have received a number of dollars.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of chairing the committee that dealt with the unfunded pension liability. I can tell you that nothing was bought. Teachers, as professionals who care about the quality of education and our children’s education, would not allow their respect for the profession and their care for the children to be bought simply with dollars for labour peace. The settling of this unfunded pension liability simply was deemed by government to be the right thing to do at that time and not in exchange.

Perhaps the member, if he wanted to rise and talk on the issue, should read the agreement. It is not in exchange for anything. It was deemed to be the right thing to do for Alberta teachers, to attract more teachers in the future, for the teachers of the future, to shift the responsibility from more seasoned teachers that was placed on the younger teachers, and, basically, to bring stability into the education system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it’s difficult not to rise and address this comment because it’s just insulting to education and to individual teachers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to just make a few comments with respect to this bill, but before I begin, I’d like to compliment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. This is the nicest thing I’ve ever heard a member of this party say about a union. In fact, it’s almost the only nice thing that I’ve ever heard members of this party say about unions.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that the government had a long-term problem on its hands with respect to that liability, and we also know that the young teachers were being badly hurt and paying exorbitant amounts in order to service the liability, which really was created in the first place by the government.

Just to clarify the situation, this was a negotiation. The teachers had a long-term goal of getting a resolution for the pension liability, which they accomplished. The deal that was reached was for a four-year agreement. You know, perhaps it was a little indelicate the way it was put by one of the previous speakers, but in fact it was a negotiated settlement and, I think, a good one. I think this was all around a good deal. I’d like to commend the Alberta Teachers’ Association for their patience and perseverance because it wasn’t too long ago that a previous Education minister seemed to delight in provoking conflict with the Alberta Teachers’ Association.

There was a very long and successful fight that was waged by the teachers for fairness and justice. I want to mention not just the current president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association but the past president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association, Larry Booi, who led a very successful battle against this government’s intransigence.

Ultimately, the government did reach an agreement that I think is balanced and provides benefits for both sides, which is the essence of reaching an agreement under collective bargaining. That’s what you strive for, and I would say, Mr. Speaker, that 80 or 90 per cent of the time that is actually accomplished. It’s more easily accomplished when there is a fair and balanced playing field, but notwithstanding the lack of such in this province, there was, in fact, a decent agreement. I think that it will provide a good security for the future and fairness to those younger members who are entering the teaching profession.

I am pleased to support this bill, and I’m happy to do so on behalf of my caucus. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 25 at third reading. Okay. Let’s just acknowledge that the government brought this bill forward because it was the right thing to do, and the Alberta Teachers’ Association, immediately after this all was worked out, negotiated an unprecedented five-year collective agreement because it was the right thing to do. Now we’ve taken the partisanship out of it, and we get back to the business of talking about the bill.

I want to reiterate and agree with the comments from my colleague from Calgary-Varsity regarding the need, now that this bill is about to become law, to get down to the business of funding the unfunded liability, paying down the debt, if you will. The faster we do that, the better.

There are a couple of reasons for that. I know the minister of finance can very much relate to the first reason because I know that this has been an important issue to her in recent months, perhaps even years, the notion that there are a whole bunch of Albertans and a whole bunch of Canadians who do not have the savings anymore – if they ever did, they certainly don’t anymore given the stock market meltdown – to fund their own retirements. The leading edge of the baby boom is coming up on retirement age pretty quick, and there are a whole bunch of us to follow. I believe, if I remember my population demographics correctly, it was either the year that I was born or the year immediately after that the baby boom hit its biggest bulge. We’ve got 10 years to go, those of us who are my age, before we hit the traditional retirement age of 65.

You know, some of the experts, the actuaries and investment professionals, say that that might just about be enough, 10 years, to make back what people lost on their retirement savings plans, might just be enough time. It's going to take that long, they think, because of the nature of this economic meltdown, because of the nature of the credit crunch, because of the nature of the housing meltdown in the United States. There are a lot of fundamental and systemic things wrong with our economy. The chickens came home to roost, if you will, starting a couple of years ago down in the United States. When a global economy unwinds with the speed and the ferocity that this one did, you need to take some time to put the pieces back together again. So we are looking at perhaps a 10-year time frame, perhaps a little bit shorter, perhaps even longer, but it's going to be a while. That's just talking, Mr. Speaker, about individual Canadians' retirement savings plans.

I was shocked and appalled to read today that of the Canadians who are in the 60th to 80th percentile of income level, those who are still working and who have not yet retired, the median RSP is only worth \$35,000. That's all. I know the minister of finance has been talking with her provincial counterparts and with her federal counterpart about options around some kind of government pension plan or pension supplements, however it may come down in the next several months that they work on this, to help make sure that when baby boomers do retire, they're not a horrendous drain on the taxpaying workforce that follows them. I know that's a great concern to her.

I look at a bill like Bill 25, and I say, "Well, that hardly solves the problem across the board, but it does solve a good chunk of the problem," again provided the minister and her counterpart the President of the Treasury Board and the rest of cabinet commit to paying down this unfunded liability in as timely a fashion as they can afford to.

7:50

The other thing was a personal experience, and it happened over the weekend in two different places. On Saturday morning I attended the Western Canada high school graduation. I was a platform guest there. That is a phenomenally enjoyable annual event, to see students from arguably one of the best high schools in the province, if not the known universe, graduating and about to take on their adult lives.

When you're a platform guest at the Western Canada high school graduation, of course, the first couple of rows that you look out on before you look at the graduands are the teaching faculty. I should have done some research on this. I didn't think to until this struck me as I was listening to the Member for Calgary-Varsity speak to this. I know that I was looking around at the teachers and trying to guess their ages. Now, teaching can be a stressful profession, especially at this time of the year when every single sports team in your school but one is still advancing to the city-wide finals and when exams are coming up and you've got a graduation ceremony to prepare, and all the rest of that. But I swear, Mr. Speaker, there were not a whole lot of teachers of the Western Canada faculty who looked to be under the age of 30. There weren't a lot who looked to be under the age of 40. I think that that's a problem.

No matter whether you're talking about teaching, nursing, politics, broadcasting, sanitation engineers, bus drivers, grocery clerks, no matter what endeavour you want to talk about, the profession, the job, the skill, and all the people in it are reinvigorated by the addition of new, young, fresh, eager talent, and that talent has been missing relative to, I think, the desired potential for hiring new teachers. That's been missing both in the hiring and especially in the retention of teachers in this province because absent Bill 25, far too

high a percentage of Alberta teachers' paycheques goes to their pension plan. They can get a better deal teaching in British Columbia, teaching in Vancouver, teaching in Saskatoon, probably even teaching in Toronto, and that becomes over time a real problem.

The passage of this bill and the serious attention to the prompt paydown of the unfunded liability by this government stand to turn that around and reverse it and attract a lot of new talent to the teaching profession in Alberta at just the time when it's needed because the baby-boom teachers are starting to retire in droves – well, they may be putting it off a little bit given what's happened to the economy, but they're looking forward to retiring as soon as they possibly can – and certainly retain those younger teachers once they're into the system.

Now, the other experience I had on the weekend, Mr. Speaker, was at the Lilac Festival on 4th Street S.W. in my wonderful constituency, in my fantastic – what do you call your constituency, hon. member?

Ms Blakeman: Fabulous.

Mr. Taylor: Fabulous. Okay. Mine is wonderful. Mine is terrific. Mine is rock 'n' rolling. The constituency of Calgary-Currie.

It's one of the most awesome annual events anywhere, I think, in this province, certainly one of the most awesome one-day events, where a hundred thousand people or more turn out to attend the Lilac Festival. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I had a booth there, and we talked to an awful lot of people – an awful lot of people – quite a number of whom were teachers. Based on what the teachers told us – most of the rest, you know, had a variety of things to say – you may have some damage control to undertake a little later on tonight when we get around to third reading debate of Bill 44 because they certainly are not happy with that. But we take our victories where we can, Mr. Speaker, and Bill 25 will certainly ease the pressure on the classroom and incent new teachers to teach here in Alberta rather than going somewhere else. Once they're in the classroom, hopefully, it will help to incent them to stay.

I'm going to support this bill, and I would urge all other members in the House to do the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, now the chair shall call the question on Bill 25.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As hon. members will recall, we commenced Committee of the Whole on this bill last week but only had three or four minutes, I believe, so I'd like to take just a few moments now to complete answering some of the

questions that were raised in second reading debate on the bill. Last time I addressed questions regarding potential implications for the trade, investment, and labour mobility agreement with British Columbia and, as well, the question around the role of stakeholders under the review of agencies, boards, and commissions that is mandated through the proposed legislation.

There are a few other points I'd just like to quickly mention, Mr. Chair. One hon. member raised the question: why does Bill 32 give ministers the ability to waive maximum years of service for agency appointees? As I think most members know, Bill 32 allows for a person to be appointed to an agency in excess of the maximum years of service when the responsible minister believes that to be necessary to ensure effective operation of the public agency. This sets a strict standard to be met before there can be a deviation from a general rule of 10- and 12-year maximums. The flexibility is necessary to ensure that there is always adequate succession planning and staggering of appointments – in other words, good governance practice – and to address the situation of agencies whose members have such highly specialized expertise that recruitment of new and fully qualified replacement members is not always possible. Again, as we discussed in second reading, the bill has significant flexibility built into it to support the governance practices that are proposed in the legislation.

Another question was raised with respect to the appointment and re-appointment of senior and elected officials to agencies, boards, and commissions. Just on that point, Mr. Chair, I wanted to say that it's certainly true that the task force recognized that there can be good reasons in specific situations to appoint senior and elected officials to an agency, board, or commission. Indeed, there are certain circumstances where it is vital to have the specific knowledge and expertise of a department's representative. Consistent with this the framework provided that elected or senior officials should only be appointed to agencies when their input is important for the agency to achieve its mandate and when that input cannot be provided by any other member of the agency, board, or commission who is not a senior or elected official.

8:00

The task force report based its recommendation on potential conflicts of interest and undermining of the role of the chair. These are issues which can be fully addressed through codes of conduct and mandate and roles documents as provided for in the act. I'd just add, Mr. Chair, that both of those, the codes of conduct and the mandate and roles documents, are public documents which will be available on the Agency Governance Secretariat website for all to review and to raise questions with respect to if necessary.

Another area that was questioned in second reading. Actually, I believe it was a question raised by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who was concerned about the possibility that the bill could restrain the independence of the local authorities pension plan board of trustees. Again, to answer this, Mr. Chair, we have to go back to the basic intent of the bill, which is to provide a general set of governance principles that will be applicable to all agencies, boards, and commissions, approximately 250, as we discussed last time.

Key principles underlying the bill include the principle of agency accountability to government and ministerial accountability to the Legislative Assembly and the public. These principles apply to all agencies, including the local authorities pension plan board of trustees. Once authority has been delegated to an agency, it is responsible to government for how it carries out that responsibility. Of course, Mr. Chair, we have to remember that the delegation of responsibility is through other legislation, enabling legislation for the particular agency, board, or commission in question.

Bill 32 reflects the fact that in order to be held properly accountable, an agency must have sufficient autonomy in carrying out its responsibilities. The bill does not propose to improperly restrict any agency's autonomy, especially its autonomy with respect to its day-to-day operations. The bill's requirement for competence-based appointments applies to all appointees to public agencies whether they are appointed directly by stakeholder groups or appointed by government in response to a nomination by stakeholders. Mr. Chair, I would find it hard to envision anyone making an argument that in some way a move to competency-based appointments is not in the public interest or is not in the interests of better functioning of any agency, board, or commission. Surely there can be no serious objection to that.

Another question that was raised, Mr. Chair, had to do with the mandatory review of agencies as proposed in the legislation. A suggestion was made that every seven years is not long enough. Just in response to that, briefly, the reviews include a thorough evaluation of the agency's mandate and operations. Reviewing every seven years provides a better balance between the extensive costs of undertaking reviews for the almost 250 agencies and the importance of monitoring ongoing agency effectiveness. Seven years is the maximum time between reviews. Individual ministers may choose under the legislation to conduct the review at shorter intervals. So, again, the flexibility is there.

Finally, I'd just like to talk briefly about the question that was raised, I believe, by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar about policy field committees. The member questioned whether those committees should have a role under this bill. As members will know, Mr. Chair, under the standing orders, I believe specifically 52.07, the annual reports of each agency, board, and commission are permanently referred to their respective policy field committees. Further, "A Policy Field Committee may on its own initiative . . . inquire into any matter concerned with the structure, organization, operation, efficiency or service delivery of any sector of public policy within its mandate." Given this broad jurisdiction, I would submit that the mechanism already exists for the policy field committees to make inquiries into any agency, board, or commission. It is not necessary and really not consistent with the intent of the legislation for them to be given any further specific role under this bill.

I hope, Mr. Chair, that I've addressed at least the major questions that were raised in second reading debate. I will take my place and await to hear from other members.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Well, this is a very, very important piece of legislation, Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, 2009. It will codify a framework and processes that have been developed to improve the management and accountability of agencies, boards, and commissions. Those bodies deal with 50 per cent of the provincial budget, showing the importance of the issue.

There are, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, a couple of hundred of these boards, agencies, and commissions in this province. The list just goes on and on and on. It fills one, two, three, four, five full pages of fairly small print in the Agency Governance Secretariat inventory. Like I said, this represents half our provincial budget. This represents half our provincial spending. This represents half the government's annual operating expenditures, for which this government must be accountable to the taxpayers.

We're in an interesting position, a bit of a dichotomy, I guess, where, on one hand, these agencies, boards, and commissions need

to be able to operate at arm's length from government, and on the other hand they need to be accountable to the minister to whom they ultimately report, especially if there's money involved. Now, that doesn't mean that the minister has to sit there and hold their hand. That doesn't mean that the minister has to attend every meeting. I wouldn't for a moment suggest that the minister should do anything close to that. But as we're setting up the way things are supposed to work under Bill 32, we need to make sure that we're setting things up in such a way that the boards and agencies and commissions are accountable through the minister to whom they ultimately report, through the government to the people, the taxpayers of Alberta, since they do spend so much of our money: spend it, invest it, are responsible for the expenditure of it, are responsible for the role that our tax dollars are put to by this government through the agencies, boards, and commissions that report to it.

How to attack this. You know, on one level I'm tempted to say, "Well, we'll have to see how this works out" because in regard to the mandate and roles documents, for instance, Bill 32 will require agencies to have a mandate and roles document developed within three months, and those documents will be developed between the agency and the minister responsible. That's good. There's a three-year limit on the document. At the end of three years it has to be reviewed and updated. I think that's good.

There are transitional issues addressed around mandate and roles documents. Say, for instance, an agency, board, or commission already has a document drawn up that meets the requirements of this act. It can carry over. That's good, I think.

The section regarding codes of conduct requires agencies, boards, and commissions to implement and make public a code of conduct governing members and employees. This is an important issue, Mr. Chair, because agencies, boards, and commissions are working for the public, yet they are not directly accountable to the public in the same way that elected officials are. This makes the code of conduct a key way for the public to have some checks on these bodies. I think that's pretty key when they're responsible for spending 50 cents out of every tax dollar that we fork over to the government of Alberta.

What's crucial here, Mr. Chair, is that there is monitoring of these bodies to ensure that the codes of conduct are being followed. Now, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford said that mandate and roles documents and codes of conduct are to be public documents and that they will be available on the Agency Governance Secretariat directory. He didn't say when. I'm going to assume – and perhaps he wants to add a little bit of clarification here – that they're going to be ready and available within three months of the passage of this bill. If not, I'm hoping that he can give us some sense of when they will be.

8:10

You know, while just making the mandates and roles documents and the codes of conduct public and accessible and available to the public – please, don't get me wrong here – is vitally important, and I don't want to downplay the importance, in and of itself it's not enough.

One of the things, I think, in terms of codes of conduct, that is going to be of vital importance is whether the minutes of the meetings of agencies, boards, and commissions are taken and made public and posted so that we the people and we the people's representatives, the elected officials in this Assembly, can know when conflicts of interest arise and can see that these codes of conduct are being adhered to.

I bring this up, Mr. Chair, because it came to my attention about a month ago that potential or perceived conflicts of interest are not

always perceived by the people who find themselves in that position. Case in point: the decision by AIMCo to, depending on who you are and on which side of the fence you sit on this issue, bail out or make a wise investment of our dollars in the heritage fund, or perhaps a bit of both, in Precision Drilling. The issue became public, and then we raised the further issue in this House that the vice-chair of AIMCo, George Gosbee, is a very good and long-time friend of the founder of Precision Drilling, Hank Swartout.

Now, Hank Swartout has not had anything directly to do with Precision Drilling for I think it's a couple of years now. He stepped down as chair or chief executive of Precision Drilling and sold his shares, retired in essence, from his role as founder – well, if you can retire as founder; I don't know if you can – as the guy who is running the business he started, and divested himself of his shares. Mr. Gosbee has no direct involvement in Precision Drilling. However, Mr. Gosbee and Mr. Swartout, who have a long-standing business and, it seems, personal relationship, co-own a business which, admittedly, has nothing directly to do with either the energy industry or the decision by AIMCo to invest in an energy company.

Quite apart from the optics of that, which, as I think all members of this House who have any oil and gas or oil field servicing businesses in their constituency know very well, was widely interpreted across the industry to be a situation of the government deciding to pick winners and losers in the business, they do co-own a heliskiing operation. When I last checked – and that was very recently – unless there's been something that changed in the last few days, they are both directors of North West Upgrading. They both sit on the board of North West Upgrading.

While nothing official has been announced or even hinted at by the government officially and publicly, the word on the street, the buzz on the street, is that North West Upgrading is widely speculated to be in line for a contract from the government that involves the upgrading of bitumen in kind. Now, whether that comes to be or not remains to be seen. Again let me stress, Mr. Chairman, that what I am putting on the record here, if you will, is what the buzz on the street is. And the buzz on the street can be horribly wrong or devastatingly accurate or anything in between, I suppose.

What it comes down to is that it is not best practice for a person who sits on the board of AIMCo – whether they hold the title of vice-chair or not is, I think, not the most relevant factor here – to be involved in discussions of and finally by his own admission voting on whether to invest public dollars in a company that was founded by a good friend and long-time business associate. This is probably going to get some people mad at me, which doesn't bother me because that happens on a regular basis and has for years predating my getting elected. One of the things about being a talk show host is to get people mad at you on a regular basis.

You know, saying that Mr. Swartout has no fiduciary, no pecuniary interest in Precision Drilling is certainly one thing, Mr. Chairman, and the facts are that he doesn't. But walking away completely from the company that you founded, a company that you started from scratch and built into the biggest driller in North America now, I believe, and then watching the company get into trouble, which Precision Drilling did do with its purchase of – oh, boy, the name escapes me – the drilling firm down in Texas that prompted the need for, again depending on which side of the fence you sit, the bail-out/wise investment of public money on behalf of the people of Alberta, you know, asking a guy to completely step away from that, from what has been his baby, is a bit like asking a parent, once their flesh-and-blood baby celebrates his or her 18th birthday and officially in the eyes of the law becomes an adult, to walk completely away and wash their hands totally of anything they ever had to do with the parenting of that child. It doesn't happen.

Yes, your child is now an adult, seen by the law to be fully capable of getting married, getting drunk, going off to war, signing contracts, going into debt, making investments, buying lottery tickets, getting divorced, now even getting married to same-sex partners, whatever that person wants. In the eyes of the law that person is an adult and can go ahead and do that, and that includes making bad decisions of the sort that adults make and, you know, having to live with the consequences of those decisions. But, of course, Mr. Chair, when parents get involved or when parents are involved – and they are; there are no two ways around that – it's just not as easy as walking away and washing your hands of it. If your adult-age kid gets himself or herself into a jackpot, you bleed inside for them, and your instinct is to go to bat for them, and your instinct is to talk to people, to seek out people who may be able to help get them out of trouble, ameliorate the situation, whatever. I don't think that it's all that different in business.

I'm not for a moment suggesting that Mr. Swartout did anything improper. I'm not for a moment suggesting that Mr. Gosbee had anything but the purest of intentions when he voted in favour of that investment. He looked at it, I'm going to suggest to this House, and thought that it was a wise investment to make on behalf of the people of Alberta. Certainly, in the first few weeks after the investment it appeared that that's the way it had turned out, but the fact that he voted, given his prior direct relationship with Mr. Swartout and given that their paths do still cross on a regular basis in other areas, doesn't really pass the smell test. It's a perceived or potential, or perhaps both, conflict of interest, and I don't believe that this bill adequately addresses that.

8:20

When I start to see the mandates and roles document for AIMCo and the code of conduct for AIMCo, perhaps I'll change my opinion and perhaps not. I think that this bill falls at least a little bit and perhaps a lot short of actually achieving best practice around the issue of conflict of interest. I would strongly suggest that there's some work that we could do on this bill that would improve those sections. I think I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair, and let others join the debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to join debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. I was pleased to see the introduction of this bill because over my now 13 years in the Assembly there's been a sort of ebb and flow of whether the government chooses to take responsibility for what the public agencies that it creates are actually doing. I can remember being in Public Accounts and questioning the Auditor General on, you know, how responsible, on what kind of procedures and policies these various delegated administrative organizations – that's the other terminology for them – had. How did the government keep track of them? Which were the best ones? Who was on the board? How were they chosen?

The response from the Auditor General at the time was that it was very uneven, and actually the ministry that was the best at it was the then ministry of – oh, boy. It's changed names so many times. I'm going to guess it was called community development then. Of course, they were responsible for a lot of the foundations that gave away lottery-money grants. A number of other agencies were under them. So I have watched this progression for some time.

Of course, with the creation of the regional health authorities that was another way of the government being able to step back and say:

well, we're not responsible. We actually had ministers of the Crown saying: "Don't ask me that question. I'm not responsible for that. Go and ask the regional health authorities." Well, we couldn't ask the regional health authorities. They don't sit in this House. We went through a period of time when the government ministers would not respond to any questions on health care because the regional health authorities were delegated to do this work, so the minister wasn't going to respond, or the Premier wouldn't respond to it. You know, we went back and did some digging and looked through the legislation and went: "You know what? Yes, you are. You're listed in the act as the minister that's responsible for this act. You set their budget and allocate it. You have to answer the questions about it. We have no other ability to question anybody else."

Fine. Then we were able to get the minister of health to answer questions about health and health delivery even though the vehicle that was being used for it was the public agency that was then known as the regional health authority. We had something of the same sort of thing happen when the Alberta Health Services Board was set up, what was known as the superboard.

I was very pleased to see the preamble in this bill. The preamble is first. It sets the tone and the context for the rest of the bill. If you kind of wade into these bills – and this is a biggie, folks. For those of you following along at home, at 51 pages this is a bigger bill than you usually get in this House. If you sort of get partway into this bill and you kind of get lost and you forget what the heck this is all about, go back to the preamble because that sets the context for what this is about. What we have here is:

Whereas Ministers of the Crown are accountable to the public for the activities and performance of public agencies in their ministries;

Whereas public agencies are responsible for their activities and for the fulfilment of their mandates, and are accountable to their responsible Minister respecting their activities, successes and failures;

Whereas public agencies require varying degrees of authority to fulfil their mandates; and

Whereas clear communication and transparency are desirable with respect to the governance, mandates and activities of public agencies;

Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice, et cetera, et cetera, and they go on into the actual part of the bill.

This clearly sets out that there is a line both ways on responsibility and accountability, but ultimately the minister is responsible for giving those delegated administrative organizations or public agencies or agencies, boards, and commissions, however you want to talk about them, a good structure and good policy to carry forward their work. Those agencies must be responsible and account back, which has also been a long-running problem. The agencies themselves weren't necessarily giving the minister a report, so it was hard for the minister to stand up in budget debates, for example, or in the Public Accounts Committee and say, "Yes, well, I know this particular public agency has been doing thus and so." If there was no reporting structure, how did the minister know?

This is a good idea. This bill is a good idea. It is setting up that structure of governance. There is an expectation there that these public agencies, boards, and commissions will have governance policies in place, that they will have an auditing function in place, that they will report back to their responsible minister, and that their responsible minister will be responsible and will be able to be kept informed and will be able to answer questions in this House in being accountable back to the taxpayer, from whence the money came.

Let me also be clear here that that includes when the money is coming from lotteries. There's been a big division here about: well, you know, we don't have to talk to you because our money came from lotteries. Well, yes, you do, actually, because one way or

another that is money that this government has to be declarative for and has to be transparent about how they spend it.

You know, the other thing that happened, which I hope is clarified through this, is that we would have a situation where the government set up a delegated administrative organization or an agency, board, or commission, whatever you want to call it, and gave them responsibility for completing a task without giving them authority to complete a task, which was also a bit of a trick. So when they actually had to order somebody to do something, they actually didn't have the authority to do it. These, I hope, have been addressed.

Most of this is flowing from recommendations that were made in '04-05 from the Auditor General under cross-ministry recommendations. Their two key recommendations were that "the Deputy Minister of Executive Council update Alberta public sector governance principles and guidance so that they are consistent with . . . good practices for recruiting, evaluating and training directors" – and my colleague has spoken somewhat about why that becomes really critical – and secondly, the Auditor General recommends that "guidance include a statement that governing boards evaluate and report publicly their own performance against both . . . public sector principles and their own board governance policies" so that they test themselves and they answer back. They're responsible.

This is important. It is covering 250 agencies and a schvack of money. [interjection] Yeah, over a hundred billion of public assets. That's a lot of money. It does cover a range, you know. Going from banking, health care, education, regulatory management, social services, it goes from AIMCo down to some very small organizations that the government creates to carry out its business.

This has been a 20-year movement in a change of structure. Government used to do everything through its own departments and its own public servants. Increasingly we see things now sort of farmed out to these agencies, boards, and commissions and/or contracted out to a different sector, usually the not-for-profit sector, particularly around social services, for example. It is really important that we have that same rigour, that same muscular reporting strength to come back through to this Assembly so that ministers are empowered to give us some straight answers, frankly, and are able to get the information to do that. So I am very glad, having gone from that very first time I raised this with the Auditor General – I think it was my first or second budget debate, so '97 or '98 – to see this come forward in the manner that it does.

8:30

I think the second thing that's really critical is that what we don't have right now is a good grasp in these agencies, boards, and commissions, mostly because they didn't have to. There was no requirement made of them – not that there was any sort of nefariousness; it just wasn't there, and people didn't think of it – that that same level of understanding of conflict of interest be instilled into these agencies as we operate within this House. In many cases they're dealing with as much money as a minister is and have as much of a long-reaching effect on the public.

We've run into that, and here's one tiny little example. You know, there has been quite a bit of controversy around the Mazankowski centre and troubles with the building there. So we were a little shocked, actually, to see that one of the people that was appointed to the new Health Services Board was, in fact, the CEO of the company that had a major contract with Alberta Health, a number of different contracts, actually, to provide engineering and building services. This person is now sitting on that Health Services Board, which is, to my ear, the definition of conflict of interest. That Health Services Board is now deciding on giving contracts back to building and engineering firms to build more health services,

more hospitals, more clinics. That is the very definition of conflict of interest.

Not a lot that can be done about this when there's nothing that sets that out in the structure. We, in fact, had made a complaint to the Ethics Commissioner that this needed to be looked at, and the response we got back from the Ethics Commissioner was: there's no MLA involved in this. So that took away one venue. But there was nothing really in place. There were no rules there in which that conflict of interest could be recognized. That is far more serious when we don't even have the structures in place that recognize things like that.

I mean, we used to have a situation in Calgary where we had – let me see if I can remember this. The individual owned a private clinic that did eye surgeries, I think. [interjection] No, it's the other one, the brothers. Say it again. [interjection] No. Okay. It was some kind of surgery that ended up being contracted out – let's say hip surgeries – and the individual who was on the regional health authority was also a director of medical services and also owned a private clinic. Once again, they could essentially be on the governing body that gave themselves and their private company business. That is a conflict of interest.

I'm hoping that this piece of legislation will stand as a really exemplary structure that will give us strong, healthy, transparent, and accountable public agencies, boards, and commissions in which all public members and members of the public are confident and comfortable in looking at their structure and understanding what they do and understanding where their money is coming from and where it's going and that reports up to the ministers. This idea that we would actually be appointing people into those very important positions so that they could then work themselves into additional contracts would be a thing of so far in the past that it would get buried with the dinosaurs and turn into more oil for us to pump out of the ground.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for my being allowed to comment on Bill 32 in Committee of the Whole. I'm happy to support the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. I hope it does really turn into a shining example and that we are first in the nation in our accountability on this. Please let us lead this in something that is exemplary.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for sponsoring Bill 32, Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. I also want to thank him for stating the underlying principle associated with this bill, and that principle is competency.

Over the years, as the hon. members for Calgary-Currie and Edmonton-Centre pointed out, there has been a great deal of suspicion. It's not just clouds of suspicion. It has been more like a storm of suspicion that has swirled around the appointments of members of agencies, boards, and commissions. As has already previously been pointed out, a hundred billion dollars of Alberta expenditures have to deal with this bill. It has been pointed out also that the agencies, boards, and commissions account for 50 per cent of government spending. So getting the right people in place is extremely important.

For example, George Gosbee, who is obviously a very intelligent man and a wonderful Alberta entrepreneur, is also an owner and shareholder in an investment banking company that researches and recommends how oil companies, gas companies, et cetera, should function. Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie already pointed

out the Gosbee-Swartout connection and the overlap with AIMCo and Precision Drilling. One of the reasons Precision Drilling, that investment, soared as quickly as it did had to do with the layoff of a significant number of employees. Whether Precision Drilling will continue to be effective remains to be seen, but those initial increases were at the expense of the laying off of a significant number of employees.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre also pointed out the potential conflict with the appointment of the CEO of Stantec onto the Alberta Health Services Board. It's going to be really hard for that person to be in attendance at major meetings, especially those that involve any type of infrastructure, because Stantec has a very good reputation in this province for building a variety of forms of infrastructure; for example, for being involved in the construction of the Trans-Canada highway on 16th Avenue, going between University Heights and the Foothills hospital, where Calgary-Varsity begins. For that individual to be able to contribute his entrepreneurial advice, as I say, the number of times he'll have to absent himself from meetings because the potential of contracting is discussed is a concern. Also, because he's the chief shareholder for the Stantec company and he was not required to divest himself of any Stantec stock, that also adds to the perception of conflict of interest.

However, I remain hopeful that Bill 32 is going to address what to a large extent had been a partisan patronage trough where competency was secondary to Conservative connection. I'm hoping that in this new era of professed transparency and accountability we'll actually see it materialize.

Also, the Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out her historical membership on Public Accounts. I'm pleased to say that I am currently and have been since being elected in the fall of 2004 a proud member of Public Accounts. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre noted, the Auditor General was critical in 2005 of two key aspects of ABCs. They had to do with the public-sector governance principles and guidance that needed to be consistent with current good practices for recruiting, evaluating, and training directors and that it wasn't who you knew but what you knew that had to be important. Also, the Auditor General pushed to include a statement that governing boards evaluate and report publicly. So there's the accountability and there's also the transparency that is so important and that, hopefully, Bill 32 will bring into practice.

8:40

This government has been noted for pushing more and more information from legislation and hiding it into regulation. Hopefully, the rules for Bill 32 will be as transparent and accountable as the principles upon which it is based. I'm willing to suspend reality in the hopes that this improvement in transparency and accountability actually takes place, and I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is following in the accountable traditions of his predecessor, Rick Miller, who is currently lending terrific counselling and advice to our caucus.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I see my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo would like to participate if not now, in the near future.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to rise and speak on Bill 32, Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. I, too, would like to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on bringing forward a piece of legislation that has been long overdue on the plains of Alberta, and I am hopeful that it will ring in a new day of accountability. I say that I'm hopeful because I think in many

instances for far too long in order to get a position on a board or commission, competency might have been a secondary trait the government was looking for in individuals to sit on these boards.

I believe that maybe what they were looking for first was whether that member was a card-carrying member of the Progressive Conservative Party or a donor to the Progressive Conservative Party or a door knocker for the Progressive Conservative Party. You can sort of see where I'm going here. I think everyone knew that, and everyone had bought into that. I think I read an article once that in a hospital district up north 23 of the 25 members were card-carrying members of the PC Party. Now, albeit there are a few PCs up there, nevertheless, when you are going to have a board, you'd think you'd find some people who are maybe of a different line of thinking. Those are some of the things that have crept up in Alberta and seem to creep up from time to time. Hopefully, this is the beginning of the end of that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre brought up conflict of interest. Even in my brief time here I've had the occasion to ask the hon. minister from SRD what the conflict of interest rules were to sit on the Surface Rights Board. You'll remember that just recently two members of that Surface Rights Board were actively engaged in selling tickets to the Premier's dinner. Now, call me crazy, but that says that there is a conflict of interest here. I'm not saying that these people are untoward. I'm not saying that anything bad is happening. All I'm saying to anyone paying attention is that this is a conflict of interest, and it shouldn't be happening. I'm hopeful that this bill will allow some rules and regulations to be put into place where we don't have this anymore.

I just really hope the Tory party doesn't get smart and just say: "We're not going to do this anymore. We're not going to actually print their names anymore. We'll keep doing business as usual, but we won't print their names on a thing that says they were head fundraisers." Let's hope that that's not the case of what actually happens. Let's hope that they go back, implement some of these rules. They look back at what a conflict of interest is and try and follow through on that. It would allow, I believe, for Alberta to run together as a province, some decisions made by our boards and agencies to run smoother without political interference or the like. That is one thing that I would really like to see.

If you even take a look at the example that's been brought up twice here tonight about the current makeup of our superboard and the fact that a gentleman sits on there who builds hospitals, builds government projects, and then is deciding on them in a closed-door meeting, yeah, maybe he abstains himself every time these decisions are made, but I tell you what: he's cozying up to some people with a pretty significant amount of power. You all know that when you're friends with somebody, it's more difficult to vote against that person than when you don't know him from Adam and you're really just voting on the issue. When you know that Fred or Jamie or Jeff are coming back into the room and they're going to know whether they get a contract out of it or not, well, you know, it's a little harder to look them in the eye and go for coffee with them and go to the next meeting.

That's why these rules are in existence. People aren't necessarily bad people. They just say: "Ah, man. Am I going to give Fred this contract or Joe? Well, I see Fred in the meeting next week, and I don't see Joe for another couple of years. Fred gets it." That's just sometimes how the cookie crumbles.

Anyway, I tried to simplify that a little bit. We'll see how that goes. Hopefully, that gets us onto the road of some broader based accountability in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. It was a privilege to be able to rise and speak on this bill. It's a start in the right direction.

The Chair: Any other hon. members? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak to Bill 32. I did speak to it at second reading, so my comments will be quite brief. In general we support the bill and support the direction that's been undertaken and want to express appreciation to the task force that did review this issue. They did invite me to come and make a presentation to them, and I did that.

I want to just indicate to you a couple of points. I'm disappointed that the government has not accepted the recommendation to remove elected officials, remove MLAs from serving on these committees. I think that this has weakened the work of some of these bodies, weakened their independence, and it's increased the degree of political influence on them. So I'm disappointed that that isn't here.

I would also like to just make an additional recommendation. I think that we should have a commission of nonelected people with a very strict mandate that it be impartial, that it use its best efforts to ensure that all appointees represent the community broadly, that it make recommendations for appointments to agencies, boards, and committees based on competence, and that there be some disclosure with respect to relationships, including political affiliations, in the appointments of people, an independent commission rather than the political process we now use. This may refine it and cure some of the worst abuses. It will still be fundamentally a patronage-based system.

In my view, an independent commission of nonelected people with a clear mandate to be objective and to be impartial and nonpartisan would be a really good step that could be taken to ensure that all appointments to government agencies, boards, and committees are made on the basis of merit as opposed to partisan outlook. I would make that suggestion as a way to strengthen this legislation and to strengthen that process. I know that the government isn't going there; nevertheless, I think they should consider it. Certainly, we'll continue to push for that as we go ahead.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for your patience.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on this bill? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 32 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

8:50

Bill 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's, again, a privilege to speak to Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009. Primarily this bill is driving at allowing bars to collect personal information on patrons as a condition of entry in order to identify troublemakers and prevent gang activity. This amendment

to the provincial Gaming and Liquor Act would permit bars and nightclubs the authority to share information about problem patrons with each other.

This idea has been tried before in Alberta and has run into problems with the Privacy Commissioner. This is another attempt at trying to get this bill passed. This time I know they've sort of used the language of the day, which, again, is very strong on gangs, that represent a scourge on our streets. I believe they are a problem. So they've incorporated that language into this act to say that it's targeting gangs who, I guess, are carrying on, allegedly, coming into some nightclubs in various locations.

I guess that if I could offer some suggestions to this bill that would make this better, as we are in committee, it would be primarily looking at the definition section. That's 69.1. When we're talking about a gang member, it says there: "‘gang’ means a group of people engaged in a pattern of unlawful behaviour or in creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation in a community." "A pattern of unlawful behaviour." Certainly, I can see that that would be a gang member, but "or in creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation in a community" seems to be an awfully broad definition. Is that three people standing on a sidewalk? Is that 10 people in a corner in a bar? Is it five people in the side room? It just seems like a whole lot of, I guess, impetus or a wide range that people could go into with what is the definition of a gang.

I think it's very difficult, actually, for an owner of a bar or a person running a liquor establishment to really be in the best position to decipher whether or not these people are involved in a gang or gang activity. I think it's fraught with peril when we actually use this system as a matter of course.

Let's look at the next thing.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a person is associated with a gang if the person

(a) is a member of the gang.

Sure. That's okay.

(b) supports, facilitates or participates in the gang's activities, or

(c) is in the company of a person described in clause (a) or (b).

Well, look at that. Once you start going there: a person in the company of a gang member. Well, if I'm going to the pub and I'm with some guy I met on the afternoon street and he seems like a decent guy and we talk up a friendship, sort of talking about the New York Yankees game or the Boston Red Sox game, and then all of a sudden we end up in a pub in downtown Calgary, the next thing you know I'm putting my licence in, and I'm getting rejected from going into this pub regardless of the fact that a man is not a camel and he's very thirsty and needs a drink. I think that's an infringement of his civil liberties, and it just shows some overbreadth to this legislation, who's going to be hanging out with these – you know, it's not really well-tailored legislation.

I'd like to see that part of the bill, (c), "in the company of a person described in clause (a) or (b)" – if you're a gang member, yeah, maybe this legislation should apply to you, but if you're just hanging out with a gang member or you might not know that this guy is a gang member or the girl is a gang member, well, you shouldn't be caught by this. It should be a gang member – and that maybe has some justification for this law – but by no means should this apply to you when you're in the company of a person described in clause (a) or (b) and you have no knowledge that that guy is a gang member. It is just over broad and, I think, affects far too many people who are just simply minding their own business.

Now, here we go to what a police officer can do when they're interpreting when a person is a gang member or when they can evict a person from a nightclub.

(4) A police officer need not rely on personal knowledge in concluding that a person is associated with a gang but may rely on information from others, including but not limited to . . .

(i) any admission of association with a gang.

Well, that would be by the individual himself. I doubt that that would be freely forthcoming at a bar on the night in question, where that guy would say when the police officer came up: "I admit it. You got me. I'm a member of a gang. I will leave immediately." I don't think that's going to happen that often.

The "use of names, signs, symbols or other representations used by a gang." Well, to be honest with you, I don't see a lot of guys running around the streets with, "Hey, I'm a gang member" on them. You know, I guess there are some people with Hells Angels patches on, but I'm not sure if that is what this law is intending. In fact, I've seen them in bars all across this province. Are they allowed now to go to one of these nightclubs? Maybe not. Maybe that's not the gang we're looking for. Maybe we're looking for other gangs. I don't know. So that is a real troubling section that I would try to rework, to clarify. Maybe it's a certain type of symbol that we're looking for, but that seems to be an awfully wide range of things you're looking for.

"A person's presence at the scene of unlawful behaviour by a gang, regardless of whether the person participated in the unlawful behaviour." That one is really troubling. I'm walking down the street and a guy, a gentleman that I don't know from Adam – I think that's the term. They're referring to the guy in the Bible, I think, by that saying. Anyway, that gang member robbed someone, and the police saw me witness that, and they think that I somehow had something to do with this even though I didn't. Well, the next thing you know, I'm not going to be able to get into a pub or go have a drink even though the fact is that I'm really thirsty. I think that is bothersome to me a little bit.

Or here's another one: "frequent association with persons associated with a gang." Well, okay. "Frequent association." How much do you have to hang out with a person? Is that once a month, twice a month, 15 times a month? What is the definition of frequent? I think that's, again, far too over broad. You're trying to kill – what is the saying? – a fly with a mallet. It looks like that's what we're doing.

Anyway, I think I'm getting to the long and short of it, that this amendment is far too broad. It captures far too many people. Hey, I realize that gangs are a difficulty and that we should be using whatever measures we can to stop them. I just don't think this is a viable method to really stop them. I've never seen any evidence to it, any written evidence, any evidence in terms of a crime report that says: this is a way to stop gang violence cold. Never. No one can point me to that literature. I've looked. No one can point me to that literature.

9:00

Let's also talk about another thing. We already have ways – these are private clubs. A gentleman can disallow anyone from coming into their establishment any time they want: no, you're not allowed to come into my club. If they had knowledge of it or whatever, there you go. Don't allow them in your club. If they're a troublemaker, don't allow them in the club. Simply don't allow them in. Those things are available.

We also have a thing called the telephone. You've got some people in there that you're really suspicious of? You pick up the phone and say: hey, could I call the police? If the police deem it important enough, they will come and do some police work, which may get us to a secondary point, which is why we see all these bills coming out. Maybe there's a recognition that we do have a lack of

police officers if you compare us to other policing agencies across the nation in other large centres. If this is, I guess, our knee-jerk reaction to trying to cover that up or trying to look tough on crime without actually putting boots on the streets, well, fair enough, but I just think this is fraught with difficulty, that it reaches far too many people and randomly targets people for simply hanging out and going into a club.

Anyway, those are my comments. I think this bill needs a lot of work to be saved, but it could be saved if it narrowed down a lot of these definitions and was really defining maybe to say that a gentleman who's been convicted of gang activity will no longer be allowed in here, something of that nature. They've got a lot of creative guys in the backroom there who could go to work on this, narrow it down, who could probably make it something that will stand up to, I guess, a test somewhere down the line.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to indicate that, you know, I'm quite torn on this. I represent an area that has a great deal of concern about crime activities. Certainly, people in my community are very vocal that they have a right to live in as safe a community as people in other parts of the city or in other parts of the province, and they want action to be taken.

On the other hand, this is one of a series of bills that gets at solving these problems by just nibbling away around the edges at the civil liberties of people. We've seen that in giving the right, for example, to police to seize without a conviction cars that might be involved in prostitution or drug use. That is a concern.

We contacted the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, and they had quite a lot to say about this particular piece of legislation. I think that I'd like to put a few of those concerns on the record. Having said that, I think that it's quite clear that we need to step up our efforts to combat gang activity. I think that, ultimately, letting gang members operate unchecked in bars or anywhere else is what has led to a great deal of the problems we've seen in our community, not the least of which is the gun violence, the drive-by shootings and murders that we've seen in the major cities in this province. It's a very, very serious situation, and I think that enhancing the intelligence available to police on gang activities, on balance, is the right thing to do. But I do want to make mention of some of these concerns.

The bill allows a police officer to remove a person from licensed premises if the officer "believes [that person] to be associated with a gang." The Criminal Trial Lawyers Association believes that definition is too broad. If you're in the company of a gang member or a suspected gang member, then you're potentially at risk here. They believe that this provision contravenes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms' guarantee of life, liberty, and security of person as well as the freedom of association and assembly. Guilt by association, they say, is not a sufficient reason to bar people from licensed establishments.

They have a concern with allowing licensees – that is to say, bar owners – to collect personal information from people before entering the licensed premises and the ability to share that information with other licensees. In my view, Mr. Chairman, that's not a concern that I feel really strongly about. I think that bar owners operate private businesses. In my experience they've always been able to choose their clientele and do so regularly.

One of the problems that I do think is going on – in 2008 the Privacy Commissioner ruled that bars could no longer scan people's drivers' licences after a University of Calgary law student made a

complaint. The Privacy Commissioner has made that ruling, but it's quite clear that this activity is ongoing. I talked to my son and asked him if he'd ever had his licence scanned on

Whyte Avenue, for example, and he said that, yes, that happens, depending on the bar, but it happens frequently, and it's still going on. I think that the government needs to make sure that that activity is curtailed.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that on balance I think we need to take steps to ensure that our bars are not breeding grounds for criminal activity and, in particular, the activities of gangs, which have become a real scourge in our province and something that I think we need to step up the action against. I have consulted with the people in my communities, who wish to see more steps taken to protect those communities, to protect their kids from gang activity and from violence.

I believe that on balance this act will help do that, so with considerable reservation I am prepared to support the bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I am not prepared to support this bill, not unless somebody can point me to a very, very clear, compelling, evidentiary example of a jurisdiction – federal, provincial, state, or municipal level – somewhere in this world, outside of the Communist world, where the chip, chip, chipping away at civil liberties and constitutional rights and freedoms actually makes the populace safer than they were before. Of course, we're human, and it seems to be a human trait that every time we develop a new piece of technology, we think that that is going to save us somehow if only we can put it to its fullest, maximum, use. We've been at this game, as far as law enforcement is concerned, for quite a number of years now, quite a number of decades, yet I don't see society getting any safer.

9:10

I'm not altogether sure that Canadian society is in real terms getting that much more dangerous, by the way, but it's not getting that much safer. I think that more to the point, it's not getting to the point where it is perceived as being safer, yet it seems that with every passing season somebody in government, whether it's this government or some other, wants to use technology to chip away at a little more of our rights and freedoms in the name of crime prevention, crime fighting, and public safety.

It's not enough to look like you're tough on crime. You've got to be tough on crime. You've either got to go big or stay home, and I would contend that bills like this really don't go big on crime fighting. They're designed to look like they're going big on crime fighting. They're designed to take a lazy approach to crime fighting, and they're designed to take a lazy approach to crime fighting at the expense of civil liberties and our constitutional rights. If we can just let bar owners scan people's drivers' licences, then we'll keep all the bad guys out of licensed establishments, says a bill like this. Furthermore, we'll let the proprietors of those establishments share that information with all the other licensed establishments, we'll let the police come in without a warrant, and all this will make us safer, and we'll get all the criminal element out of every bar and public house in the entire province. Then it'll be a wonderful day, Mr. Chair, when Alberta is safe for good, law-abiding citizens to go out for the night and get faced.

Well, here's a news flash, Mr. Chair. When people get faced, whether they do it in a bar or whether they do it at home, they sometimes get out of control. If they get out of control at home in

a good way, then probably not much more happens than the bed starts to spin uncontrollably, the bathroom gets visited, you know, unintentionally, and then the next morning the bottled Aspirin gets depleted somewhat. But when it happens in public – and it can happen in private, too – when the drinking gets out of control, criminal activity can follow: spousal abuse, violence, assault. When you take that out into the broader public world and you let people get faced, then they can get themselves and others into a pickle either in the establishment or on the way home from the establishment.

I had a visit from a couple of bar owners, who were not Paul Vickers, by the way. I had a visit to my constituency office early this year from a couple of bar owners. I'm not sure that I necessarily fully support them on this, but I thought it was a very interesting point of view. They expressed concerns over the death of happy hour and minimum drink pricing, that the unintended consequence of that decision by this government – and by the way, full disclosure: on this side of the House we actually called for that before the government got around to doing it.

The unintended consequence and unforeseen consequence is that young people are now bringing booze in their cars and sitting out in the parking lots of establishments and power drinking so that they get a good buzz on before they go in. They're drinking fast enough and drinking in enough quantity that it catches up to them. It hits them, you know, like a sledgehammer after they're in the establishment, but they scoot into the bar before they are appearing to the bouncer to be as drunk as they are, and it's causing problems for the bar owners. These are problems, the bar owners suggested to me, that didn't exist back in the days of happy hour drink specials. Now, a whole other set of problems existed back then. But that was, I think, an unintended consequence. It did not exactly do what we thought it was going to do, which was lessen social disorder and lessen the potential for criminal activity.

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – I'm going to get that one of these days; it's just a complicated name – made reference to the fact that he had consulted with the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, and so did we. I want to quote just a couple of very brief passages from the letter that they wrote back to our leader, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

The citizen must know what the law states so as to permit individuals to govern their actions. We note that section 69.1 defines a "gang" very broadly. The definition is so broad that it would include, for example, sex trade workers, and those with criminal records. Section 69.1(3) allows the police to exclude or remove from licensed premises any person the police believe to be "associated" with a gang. Those "associated" with a gang are defined as members, those who support, facilitate, or participate in the gangs' activities, or those who are in the company of "gang" members.

This is so expansive, the letter goes on, Mr. Chair,

... that the mothers, for example, of sex trade workers could be excluded or removed from licensed premises merely by virtue of their association to their daughters. Parents of children convicted of minor criminal offences could also be targeted.

The letter from the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association goes on to say:

In this country, the freedom of association and the freedom of assembly are such important principles that they are enshrined in section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We as Canadians take pride in living in a state where we are permitted to associate with whomever we choose, and where our movements are not subject to state control merely because the police may not want us to associate with certain people. The Charter also enshrines the right to life, liberty, and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

The letter goes on to say:

This is a protection which extends to those who choose to go to licensed establishments as well. The notion of guilt by mere association is offensive to civilized persons.

The letter goes on, but I won't quote any more from that. I think you get the point and the thrust of the letter.

By the way, although I am not a lawyer, in the research that we have done in consulting with lawyers, to the extent that lawyers will ever go on the record as saying that they're going to prejudge how the Supreme Court would rule on an issue, I have grave doubts that this bill could possibly survive a Charter challenge. I have grave doubts that this bill, if passed, would manage to go unchallenged in the courts. So at the end of the day we're going to be back where we were, quite frankly, when the Privacy Commissioner ruled on the practice of scanning drivers' licences at the nightclub Tantra.

Mr. Denis: It's under appeal. The privacy thing is under appeal.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, and the Court of Queen's Bench upheld the finding of the Privacy Commissioner.

Mr. Denis: That I didn't know.

Mr. Taylor: See, Member for Calgary-Egmont, you learn something new every day. It's upheld on appeal.

We're going to end up back in the same place after all this collective chasing of our tails, and in the interim we'll have given an indication that this Assembly supports needless limiting of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms just because it is perceived to make it easier for bar owners to do what they ought to be doing anyway, which is stopping bad guys at the door and saying, "No, you can't come in" and calling the cops if there's a problem. It, I think, further encourages the view that I have that when faced with the choice of funding especially our big city police agencies sufficiently to allow them to do the job of keeping the million people who live in the greater Edmonton area and the million people who live in the city of Calgary safe and to prevent crime and to apprehend the criminals once the crime has been committed or the choice of doing something whiz-bang that involves cameras, surveillance, scanning electronic identification cards, collecting information for the sake of collecting information about all and sundry, who in this case happen to feel like going out for a drink, this government's tendency is to go for the cheap and dirty, easy, lazy technological option. I'm not going to use the word "solution" because I don't for a minute believe that it is a solution, and I don't for a minute believe that it will be allowed to stand as a solution. The courts will have at this, and they will make mincemeat out of it.

Mr. Chair, I cannot support Bill 42 in its current form or anything even approaching it. I think we should just tear it up and start over again.

Thank you.

9:20

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't want to delay things, because I want to get on to Bill 44, but I just want to remind the hon. member that this is not about people who drink too much and go out and create a nuisance or drink and drive. This is about gang activity. This is about people involved in activity that's led to people being shot down in the street in a whole number of communities, a very serious problem. They don't go in there to get faced. They go in there to deal drugs and make deals and engage in the planning of organized crime. That's why it's called organized

crime. I think that it's something that we need to be prepared to consider. It's a question of whether or not people have a right to be in a bar, not whether they have a right to vote or a right to freedom of speech. The bar owners have been collecting and sharing information on their own independently for some time now. I would question whether or not the hon. member can make the case that that is an illegal activity to do that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to those comments from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I think if you go back and check the Blues when they're available, hon. member, you'll discover that I was not for a moment suggesting that this particular piece of legislation was designed to keep people from drinking too much and carrying on. In quoting from the letter from the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, I think I made clear that in the process of attempting to catch the gangbangers to which he refers, this is going to capture in the net all kinds of other people who we ought not to capture. This is using the proverbial, you know, nuclear deterrent almost where it's not required and where the principles of fundamental justice, our constitutional rights, and the requirement for probable cause in an environment where we're properly funding police agencies so that we, frankly, have enough cops on the street to enforce the law, should be enough to keep these gangbangers from going into bars and using bars as the place where they're going to plot their nefarious activities.

I mean, I suppose that we could go back to the Hollywood version of them doing it in the backroom of a pasta joint or pizzeria, something like that. My point here is not to cast aspersions on any one identifiable group or other, but organized criminals will plot and carry out criminal activity in an organized fashion, and they will find someplace to do it. This may discourage them. It may. I remain unconvinced that it will. I don't know of any evidence of anyplace where this does work with shining regularity. This may convince them not to conspire in bars, but they will conspire somewhere else. In the meantime you are capturing potentially everybody who goes into that bar and collecting, with no probable cause, personal information on them that you can then turn around and share with whomever.

I would simply ask the hon. member: to what end? How does the end justify those means?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to sort of preface my earlier comments, it wasn't that I didn't take an eye to this bill in a way that it may have some possible merits to it. I just think that, in balance, if you look at it, some of the freedoms and rights that we're giving up and that they're taking away from people – I don't mind if this thing was tailored specifically to a gang member. Great. You know what I'm saying? I don't mind. My civil liberties have an ebb and flow to them, sir, that tend to be stronger on certain people than they are on others. I'm not a clear civil libertarian on all issues or on crime and punishment.

All I'm saying, sir: in this case there was a real attempt here to try and go after a bad thing, which is gangs. I'm the first one to admit that these are bad things. Bad things happen out there, and if these groups of bad people who are going around dealing drugs, prostitution, causing chaos on our streets, what have you, can be stopped, most of the time we should give our police the ability to do that and/or in other situations the ability to make people safe in their community.

The only thing is that we've got to sometime look at whether the bill is actually accomplishing that goal without taking away our fundamental freedoms, and in this case I can see no clear, logical way that this takes away from crime activity. It might be less of a headache for the bar owner, maybe, but by no means does this lessen crime activity. Okay? The organizations are not going to cease. They're not going to stop doing their stuff, what they have to do. What is going to happen in a bar if there is drug dealing there? Well, you know, it's going to be done by low-level people, which are probably still the ones doing it. And guess what? That bar owner should be on the horn to the police officer right away and saying, "Hey, there's a person dealing drugs in my bar; I want him out of here" or "I saw this guy last week dealing drugs in my bar; I don't want him in there." That's what each individual bar owner should be able to do. He should be able to call the police.

If you look at the definition of gang and gang member, the fact that no personal knowledge needs to be had before a person can be denied entry into a bar, the fact that a person doesn't even have to be a gang member, could merely have known a gang member or seen a gang member walking on the streets, is just too wide. There's just no evidence that this will get rid of gang activity, make people safer, make our communities safer. If it did, I could possibly support it, but right now I don't see that as being in play.

Since it doesn't solve any of those problems, it is too high of a price to pay on our civil liberties. If it did accomplish some of those goals that I previously mentioned, maybe I could support it. I just don't see it doing those things that the goal is defined to do.

I thank you again for belabouring this debate further. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I'll be quick. I do not believe that you can do better than actual feet on the beat. If you want to prevent gang activity, then you have greater support for police officers. The police officers work with the community in terms of increasing educational awareness. They go into the schools. They deal with the kids as community resource officers, and they discourage involvement in gangs right from the very beginning. If you provide opportunities for youth early on and supervision, involve them in sports and a variety of activities, their chances of getting involved in a gang are reduced right from the very beginning.

I don't believe that bar owners trading identity cards combined with street surveillance cameras and all other kinds of civil-liberty-stretching circumstances, a Big Brother society, are going to solve this problem. There are a whole lot of better and cheaper solutions. The first one is education and support, and the second is working with police officers.

9:30

I am very aware that in Calgary Electric Avenue, 11th Avenue, was a war zone. It was a place where as either a policeman or a paramedic you would not want to have to have your night-shift duties. Gradually what happened was that a lot of the activities on 11th Avenue were shut down because of, to a large extent, the violence, but it was simply moved down to 17th Avenue, the Red Mile. I don't know whether you'd call a bunch of people wearing red shirts with Cs on them gang members or just hockey supporters, but there does come a point where, based on your association and your assembly, a gang mentality can break out, and that's not going to be dealt with by changing cards.

It's important to note that Maurice Tougas, a former colleague, was the individual who first brought up the idea of reducing the

cheap drinks in happy hour, which were the cause of a tremendous amount of the violence and the bad behaviour, whether it was gangs or just simply individuals who got hammered. But bar owners also have a responsibility beyond just simply collecting identification, and that's to do with overserving. There has to be a point where you realize that that person should not be served any longer. You also have a responsibility, as far as I'm concerned, as a bar owner for seeing that that individual, your patron, gets safely home.

In Edmonton there's been a fair amount of violence associated with Whyte Avenue, and again it's not necessarily gang related. To a large extent it's been hockey celebration related. But Whyte Avenue and the area surrounding it have been cleaned up to a degree by the amount of police presence. When there is a constable on every corner, as is the case during the playoffs, the behaviour seems to improve dramatically.

Entrusting bar owners with managing personal information is somewhat of a stretch considering that the Auditor General has pointed out this government's inability to control its own electronic records, whether they be health records or whatever. The Auditor General has pointed out the electronic hacking footprints in terms of delicate information. So the idea that bar owners are going to be absolutely custodial in terms of the information and the protecting and the sharing is a bit of a stretch and an extra imposition on bar owners.

I'm also concerned about the so-called gang identification and gang association. There have been situations of racial profiling that have taken place in Calgary – and I'm aware of it in Edmonton – where because you're a member of a particular race whose skin is darker than the traditional Caucasian, you're more subject to identity checks than your white counterpart might be unless they've got their head shaved and Aryan Nations marking, tattoos or something like that. I know that my son-in-law, who is a lawyer with Bennett Jones, is of East Indian descent, and as a young university student he and his friends were subjected to that type of racial profiling.

Sometimes a question is asked just as part of identification, and there are no racial overtones to it. But this past weekend I was running along the river, and I came across an individual who, incidentally, was Caucasian who seemed to be in difficulty. This individual was standing out on the road, and I came up to him and asked him if he was in trouble or if I could help. When he didn't respond, I didn't want to intimidate him, but I did see that there was a city truck in the vicinity, and they provided me with a police number. I phoned and said: "I'm concerned about this individual. He seems to be in a stuporous state. He's standing on the road, and I'm worried about his well-being." The first question the police officer asked me was, "Is this person Caucasian or First Nations?" That concerned me a little bit because there was the potential of jumping to a racial conclusion. Now, I did have a good conversation with the officer I was speaking to, and to my reassurance he indicated that a car would be sent out and that the well-being of this individual would be looked after. I was very appreciative of that.

I'm not willing to give up civil liberties. I'm not willing to allow a large net to be cast in the name of preventing gang association or gang penetration into bars. As I began and as I'll end, police are the answer, and support for our police forces will go a long way to resolving this problem.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. As I raised in second reading of this bill, which is Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009, I was waiting for amendments to come from

government that would have corrected the severe omissions that are appearing in section 16 of the bill, which is amending section 69(1) of the originating act. That is about empowering the licensee, usually a bar owner, to collect personal identifying information of an individual. This is placing an unfair burden on the licensee because they now have a whole bunch of personal information about people, and there are no requirements on them and no help for them to understand what they're supposed to do with this information.

As we move into this realm of databases and cyberspace and instantaneous transfer of information and we come to better recognize how personally identifying information can be used both for us, for example electronic health records, and against us in this particular example or in identity theft, we are moving into a different realm. This bill fails to recognize that and to grapple with it and to give tools to the licensee to help them and tools to the rest of us to not be in a position where we have to hand over personally identifying information.

There's nothing in here about the manner in which the personally identifying information will be kept. Is it on paper? Is it on a CD? Is it on a DVD? Is it in somebody's computer that they can take home and it can be stolen or on a piece of paper they can leave in a garbage can out back of a restaurant at the end of the night? For how long is this identifying information kept? In what form is it going to be kept? Is it easy to access? Is it being sent by Internet back and forth as they are able to share the information with others, as is allowed for and empowered in this act? Is there an audit trail as to who looks at that information? Can anybody that works in that restaurant or bar look at the information that they have collected? How many times? What else can they use the information for?

There's no context or control that is offered in this bill other than that they can collect the person's name, age, and photograph, if you can imagine – a photograph and their name and their age all put together – and we're just going to let this float around out there in cyberspace somehow. There's a blanket consent that is assumed here for the collection of this, and they are allowed to disclose it without getting additional consent from others. This is just an old-fashioned way of looking at something. This government has got to move into this millennium and understand that you cannot collect personal information from people without pretty specific boundaries around how it's going to be collected, used, and disclosed, how long it's going to be kept, who needs to look at it, and a number of other issues. If you can get it around the health information records, you've got to get it with information like this. I will not support this bill while you're collecting information like this from people without boundaries around it.

Thanks.

9:40

The Chair: Is there any other hon. member who wishes to speak on this bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 42 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report bills 32 and 42.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 32 and Bill 42.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Before we proceed on Bill 44, I have a request to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests. Would I have your consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware that a number of people have joined us in both the public and the members' galleries in anticipation of the debate on third reading of Bill 44. I'm sure there are people that are watching the video streaming at home, and I'm sure Twitter is a-twittering. So welcome to everyone.

I wanted to acknowledge and welcome those people who have come down tonight at a quarter to 10 to join us as public witnesses to this debate. Specifically, if I might introduce my old friend and colleague from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, except that when he served, he called it the city of Edmonton ward 4. Michael Phair, if you would rise, please.

I also know that in the members' gallery we have Jan Lukas Buterman. I think Jan is still up there. If we could welcome Jan.

If I could ask all of those who have come tonight to witness the debate on Bill 44, both sides of the debate, to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading (continued)

Bill 44 Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce third reading of Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, which will strengthen our human rights system for all Albertans.

Much of the discussion about Bill 44 has centred on changes to the legislation and most recently on amendments. Although parental rights and freedom of speech are important and deserve discussion, there are other proposed changes that also deserve some attention.

Last year when I began reviewing Alberta's human rights system, I quickly saw that legislative changes were required to improve the

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission's processes. The commission receives about 30,000 inquiries a year for Albertans. Out of those 30,000 inquiries we're also seeing the number of actual complaints filed with the commission increase. Within the past year we've seen an increase of 16 per cent, with the number of complaints received by the commission jumping from 680 to 788 in 2008-09. The commission's current processes simply cannot accommodate that type of demand. This is evidenced in the number of complaints that remain unresolved in the system as of the end of March, with 940 complaint files compared to 810 the year before.

If we're going to meet our commitment to make a human rights system available for all Albertans, we need to help the commission improve the way it manages its complaint files. First, we are going to clarify the intent and purpose of both our human rights legislation and our human rights commission by taking the word "citizenship" out of their names. Citizenship is actually a federal responsibility, and including the word simply creates confusion. We're going to bring new staff on board to respond to inquiries from the public so that other commission staff can focus on those complaints that are already in the system.

Section 12 of the amending act clarifies wording to describe the two sides of the commission – the mediation investigation side, with investigators who report to the director, and the adjudication side – by referencing the commission and tribunals. We have heard that some people were confused that the commissioners do both, but they do not, and we have clarified that by calling them tribunals. Section 12 of the amending act also clarifies that the new chief of the commission and tribunals is, indeed, chief of both sides of the Alberta system.

We have heard that the commission needs strong leadership, and we have that in place. We hired a new chief commissioner in February. He brings extensive experience as a member of the Court of Queen's Bench to this position.

By amendment the commission may refuse to accept any complaint if the matters are being dealt with through another forum or under another act. Section 16 of the amending act reads: "The director may refuse to accept the complaint or may accept the complaint pending the outcome of the matter in the other forum or under the other Act." This is part of our response to address a concern we heard from many Albertans that complaints take too long to resolve. If the commission staff are receiving over 30,000 phone calls a year, some of them will relate to matters in other forums. We have added an amendment to require individuals to pursue other appropriate forums or acts.

Section 17 and elsewhere in the amending act also addresses the concerns that complaints take too long to resolve. We have addressed this by adding additional resources to the commission and also implementing a new process to address appeals more quickly.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, Bill 44 strikes the right balance on a variety of complex and difficult issues. We have after 13 years written sexual orientation into the act. We also have written in respect for parental rights, and we have administrative changes. We feel that by making these difficult and somewhat controversial decisions, however, we are acting in the best interest of Albertans. As elected officials that is what we are here to do, and we support Bill 44 in its entirety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in third reading to Bill 44, the amendment act to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. I do not see Bill 44 as a

serious attempt to grapple with the threats to legal protection from discrimination. This should have been an attempt to enshrine protections, and instead what has happened is that there has been created additional discrimination against the same group that it purported to start out to protect. In other words, the government is taking back what they purported to give. They purported to say, "We're going to put in the grounds of sexual orientation as a prohibited grounds of discrimination," and it has resulted at the end of this bill in, in fact, establishing an additional tier by which members of that group can be discriminated against.

I think additionally the government has created chaos by introducing ideology into our education system, and it failed to eliminate the conflict of interest that existed in the resolution of human rights complaints. In moving from a commission to a tribunal, it did not deal with the advancement of human rights and with the adjudication of human rights.

9:50

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the engagement of Albertans in this debate, and I want to thank them for their engagement in this particular debate. I know we will have people watching this debate through the video streaming and Twitter and through various websites and reading *Hansard* after the fact. In fact, we have people joining us in the gallery tonight. I am always excited by that engagement of Albertans in the process of what we do on the floor, and I thank you each and every one, even if we disagree, for engaging in that process. I think it's an important one for democracy.

What is interesting is that I think I could argue with great success that we are just starting the process of engaging the public in this debate and, in fact, the debate will end tonight. [some applause] I get it that some members on the other side are eager for that moment to come, but I don't think that's appropriate, actually. I think when you start to see the engagement of Albertans come up from the grassroots, you should be allowed to continue that debate to hear from them as much as possible and to understand the effect that what we do on this floor carries on outside of these doors into the lives of Albertans.

We had a number of ways of engagement. I want to start by recognizing the work of Oba Powis, who was a high school student from Lethbridge who was against Bill 44 and within a couple of weeks at his school of LCI in Lethbridge collected 700 signatures and more than two dozen supporting letters in his petition against Bill 44, working through his MLA, the Member for Lethbridge-East, and those, in fact, ended by being presented in this House.

That was mirrored and carried on through a young woman who contacted me late Friday. Katherine Creelman, a grade 10 student at Archbishop MacDonald high school, actually approached me to ask about how to do a petition on Bill 44. I wrote back and said, "You know, I don't think you can get a petition done and have me get it through the parliamentary processes that are a necessity before we'll be debating it on Monday night, but if you send me a letter, I'd be happy to table it in the House." Well, what was I thinking? I did not consider Facebook, and of course she had a Facebook group. She sent it out on Facebook, and by Monday morning I had 84 letters from students, many, many of them dealing with very personal stories. Some of them were more or less a template, but an awful lot of them were not. That is a wonderful kind of engagement, especially from younger people that are in junior high and high school and university, to get involved and understand how legislation affects them. So thank you so much, Katherine and all of the kids that were involved in that Facebook and in sending me letters.

I think we often see in this House – and I sort of put emphasis on how much work and effort you put into something is how I give

back to it. Someone that takes the time to come out here and sit on these hard seats for hours and hours gets a lot of credit from me, someone that writes a personal letter or an e-mail, someone that comes and has a meeting with me or their MLA in some way: all of those are an investment of time and energy and thought into the process. Petitions: a little less effort involved, but still you're reading the prayer; you're taking the time to sign your name. An online petition is a little less effort again because it's a little easier to hit the buttons, but still it is engagement, and it's important that we recognize that.

So thank you to Katherine and the 84 students that got engaged that way. I was a little depressed earlier when I heard that there had been some 700, 800 signatures that had been presented in the House and then it was pointed out to me on one of the many electronic news outlets that it was an online petition, which, as I say, still counts. I appreciate all of the effort that they put into it, but, boy, I really prize those students' letters and e-mails.

I also want to note the effort that was put into this debate by the Wild Rose United Church, who tried hard to contact me on Friday to talk about what their minister, Linda Hunter, could put into her sermon on Sunday and talk about in the church, in the before-and-after activities. In the end we could not connect, but they did manage to write up quite an in-depth and thorough letter, and 75 signatures from that congregation signed on to that letter.

From the Alberta and Northwest Conference of the United Church of Canada a letter was circulated last week noting that at their conference a resolution was overwhelmingly adopted by over 400 conference delegates asking for the removal of provisions regarding education in Bill 44 and then going on to talk about how important they think human rights and protection against discrimination for certain groups are. Again, thank you very much for those efforts.

I want to talk a bit about the larger issues that were put into play. Essentially, for those of you that are following along, the debate in third reading is a debate on the anticipated effect of the bill once it is passed. There is an assumption that once you get this far, it's going to get passed in an amended state or as it was first presented. In this case the government did present amendments, and those amendments were accepted. They have a majority to make sure that happens.

What we had happen with this bill was that we started out, as the minister said, to make some administrative updates and corrections to make it a better functioning commission and to include, finally, sexual orientation. We ended up with this additional somehow purported to be a balancing by putting in a parental opt-out clause, which is now commonly referred to as a parental rights clause. That slopped over into affecting an entirely innocent group of people, and that is our teachers and those working in our school system, including the trustees.

All of a sudden, something that if it needs to be – and let me underline that. I would argue that the arguments are not strong that that needs to be the case. If it needs to be, that should be in the School Act. In fact, as we're often told now, there is an ability to withdraw students from class if parents object on certain grounds now. So that process exists. It should be in the School Act. But what the government chose to do was to put in a section in this act that then impacted an entirely different and, I would argue, innocent group of people, and that is our teachers. It put them in a precarious position. Some would call it a chill and that we're likely to see a chill come into the classrooms because now there is a requirement that schools will identify sections of their curriculum that could stray into grounds that would be considered religious or dealing with human sexuality or sexual orientation.

They have to go through their curriculum and send out letters to all of their parents identifying that. They have to create a database.

Just imagine how that's money that's going to be sucked out of your kids' education because they have to create a database and keep track of all of this stuff. They're going to have to deal with negotiating, mediating between divorced parents when one wants one and one wants the other thing for their kid: in a class, out of a class. This school system now has to keep track of all of this, so some secretary is madly tearing her hair out trying to figure out how to organize all of this stuff now. That's a cost that will take away from the education of our kids in classrooms, and frankly I resent that because I want my taxpayer dollars going into educating kids, not into organizing how people can pull them out of public education.

This bill, by the way, affects public education, which includes our Catholic school system in Alberta. But my understanding is that it does not affect the charter schools and the private schools because they are defined differently under the School Act.

10:00

We now put something in this act that flows over onto and into our classrooms. They now have to notify parents and get instructions back from parents about pulling their kids out of school. There's still a very vague definition about what could be considered a subject matter that is dealing primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality, and sexual orientation. When I spoke in Committee of the Whole, I talked about how religion is often a sincerely held belief. So we have very little basis for definition to understand what we have now subjected our schools to and the problems that they will have to deal with as a result of what's been brought up here.

I think families are important. We look for families to bring stability into our communities. Stability in our communities means, generally, stability in our cities and in our wider society. But where I differ, I think, is what my definition of a family is, that very core unit that starts to create that stability. In my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre one of the reasons it's fabulous is the people that live there and the way they choose to build their family units and build their community and build our city and build our society. I am not willing to make that definition, as I have been reading about, of a natural family, which seems to be some definition that doesn't match very well what I see out in my community. I think that's very short-sighted and does not move us forward as a more tolerant society.

Back to the classroom. We're now allowing people to pull their kids out of school through some definition that's not very clear around religion, human sexuality, and sexual orientation. But we don't get into those larger issues now of dealing with difference and tolerance and analysis and critical thinking that we're supposed to be bringing our kids through this system for. I mean, how do we get there if kids are pulled out of class whenever a topic might be offensive or troublesome for their parents?

I've already talked about different definitions of religion and religious instruction. Where do we end up 10 or 20 years down the road when we look to: what is our standard of education in Alberta, and what have we done with our society? Have we taken children in and taught them how to do critical analysis, to deal with difficult subjects, to be challenged around their tolerance? That is how you become a stronger society.

When we look at what's going to lead us forward into a new economy – they talk about creative economies; they talk about knowledge-based economies – that is about tolerance and diversity. That is about creating communities that people want to move to to have their families, whatever form that is, to build those communities, those cities, and those societies that will make us exciting for years to come and give us an alternate form of energy, if you will,

and diversify our economy. So this starts to ripple out in a way that I think was not anticipated here.

One of the things that I was looking at was:

If we ignore [things] like abortion rights, same-sex marriage, employment equity, racial discrimination, and hate speech, how will we teach our children to ask hard questions when their liberty, equality, their dignity, and their privacy are under threat? How will they know when they are being treated unfairly? We must prepare them to ask the hard questions that people living in democracies must ask.

Indeed. That is from *Cultivating Habits of Democracy: Asking the Hard Questions*, by Danielle McLaughlin from the Canadian Civil Liberties Education Trust.

We still haven't particularly dealt with the issue of impromptu questions. Although the government amendment does indicate that it should not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes, human sexuality, or sexual orientation in a course of study, I am not convinced that that is going to solve the problem that has been identified in so much debate.

We ended up putting in human rights what belongs only in the School Act, and I'm not convinced that it is appropriate there. I'm definitely not convinced that it is appropriate to put it there. The issue is not one of parental control at home. It's what happens when we are now enshrining those parental rights into a public school system that is funded by taxpayer dollars. That public school system has farther-reaching effect. I think that is the issue that we've created, possibly unknowingly but, hopefully, not deliberately through this act.

In the end I'm not going to be supporting this bill. I started out with such hope and such enthusiasm and even such joy that finally sexual orientation would be included under human rights and I could quit asking the poor minister when he was going to do it. Yay. I thought this was a point of celebration for me and for many in my community, and I have come – whatever it is now – six weeks later to urging my colleagues to vote against this bill. It does not do what it purported to do. It, in fact, creates two levels of discrimination, and although it includes sexual orientation under prohibited grounds in one section, it then goes ahead and says: but you can discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in the school system by pulling your kids out of any class where it might be mentioned.

That to me is horrific. That is one step forward and two steps back, and we should be beyond that in this province. Frankly, I don't think that intolerance is actually in the wider Alberta population. I think that intolerance is here on this floor, and that is my greater disappointment with the process that I have seen develop here over the last six weeks. As well, we have engaged teachers in schools in activities that are far beyond what should have been appropriate and expected of them, and we have placed them, I think we will see in the future, in an untenable position.

I want to make sure that I thank again all those who wrote and twittered and stayed engaged with this and came tonight, came the other night, stopped me on the street, the seniors that stopped me at the seniors' teas this afternoon and last week, that engaged on Facebook, that created their own websites, that went to our websites here. I thank all of you again for your engagement. It's very important that you do that. It's very important that you continue to do this. Particularly for the students: you guys are going to vote soon; you may be voting in the next election, so pay attention. You've got sharper memories than some of the older generation, and I'm expecting you to remember what happened in this exchange. You'll be able to hang onto that information for the two and a half years you need to hang onto it for.

Those are the bulk of the comments that I wanted to make. There was just a couple of other interesting e-mails that I got along the way

that I want to highlight as I go. One woman who wrote to me – I think I can identify her; I won't give her name – wanted me to know that she was currently a student at the University of Alberta, and she did not agree with Bill 44 and did not agree that parents should have the right to pull their kids out of human sexuality courses. Had she not been taught about human sexuality within the Edmonton public school board, she would not have known that she could escape a sexual abuser, and that had been very helpful information to her in her life. I thought: okay; hadn't thought of that one as a plus for why we need to have that kind of information available.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to extend my thanks and my congratulations to the hon. member for the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I think you put that very eloquently. I think you put the defence of what is right and what we should be doing in this bill as opposed to what we are doing in this bill very succinctly, very well. I don't know if I can top it, but I can certainly add to it and support it.

I will not be supporting Bill 44. I cannot support Bill 44. It's bad enough that it took 11 years for this government to get around to doing what the Supreme Court of Canada told them to do, which is to write in that you cannot discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, but having taken that long to do it, they've put conditions, they've put asterisks on this particular human right through the inclusion of the parental opt-out clause, and in my book that's still discrimination.

10:10

The way that this really came home to me, the way that it was really driven home to me was, actually, yesterday when the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I were standing in the sunshine cooking at the Lilac Festival in my awesome constituency of Calgary-Currie. A woman came by that I know and I've had some professional dealings with over the years. She was carrying her little boy, who was maybe three or four years old. He's not in school yet. Susan started talking to me about Bill 44. One of the first things she said – she thanked me and she thanked us for everything that we have done in terms of bringing this to the public's attention, bringing it to the forefront, putting up a fight against Bill 44, putting up a fight against the parental opt-out clause, and so on and so forth. Susan, to that I say, "You're welcome."

I think my colleague from Edmonton-Centre is right that we've just now started to engage the broader population in this debate, and engaged they are. My goodness, engaged they are, Mr. Speaker. Of all the people who stopped to talk to me at our booth on Sunday – and there were many, many, many, many – I would say 50 per cent wanted to talk about Bill 44, and 50 per cent wanted to talk about everything else put together. It has become a hot topic. It has become a matter of great concern.

Anyway, back to Susan and her little boy. We were conversing. We were carrying on a conversation about Bill 44, and the conversation was going in, I think, the usual direction that a lot of conversations between Liberal MLAs and people who are opposed to Bill 44 go. Then all of a sudden she said: I'm concerned about this guy when he gets into school; I'm concerned what's going to happen when he talks about having two mommies and how the school is going to handle that if they can't talk about it, if they have to shut it down, if they have to stop the conversation for fear that somebody in the classroom might have a parent who would object to an explanation of what that's all about.

The damage is still going to be done in that he is going to have revealed that he has two mommies. Then without any kind of contextual explanation of how that can be, what that means, what the ramifications of that are, this little boy – he's a little sweetheart, you know – is suddenly going to be quite possibly, quite likely, the object of scorn by his classmates in around about maybe grade 3, grade 4, grade 5, something like that. Now, this is not something Susan said. I'm speculating here based on my own experiences as a parent as to when the bullying tends to start and the other carryings-on like that. He's going to be identified by his classmates as some kind of freak, some kind of weirdo, because he doesn't have a mommy and a daddy; he has two mommies. Because of the parental opt-out clause in Bill 44, if it comes up in class, which it probably will, there is no way for the teacher to deal with that and make it a teachable moment. This is not good.

Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting, reflecting on my life and my progress through life and how that has dovetailed with the progress that society has made in the time that I've been alive and going back not too long before then. I was born in 1953, and only 10 years earlier, in 1943, the government of this land, of this country, was doing everything that it possibly could to keep Jews from coming into Canada, Jewish refugees from the Holocaust.

I remember growing up in Sarnia, which is a border city in Ontario, and across the river is the city of Port Huron, Michigan, which is just a little smaller than Sarnia. When I was growing up in Sarnia, it had a pretty stable population of about 50,000, and we had four black families in the entire city. Port Huron, across the river, about half its population was black, and they all lived south of one particular street. The part of Port Huron south of that street – I think it was 36th Street, if I remember correctly, but I'd have to really look at a map – was the bad side of town, of course. The rich side of town was where all the white folk lived, north of that street.

I remember hearing somebody say at some point along the line how well off all the black people in Detroit were. They made that comment because we happened to be driving down an expressway in Detroit, and we saw a few black people go by in cars like Cadillacs and Buicks and that sort of thing, which undoubtedly they got at employee pricing because they probably worked for General Motors or Ford or Chrysler. It was just assumed that, oh, we've got rich black folk in Detroit. Then it was only a couple years after that that Detroit's heart and soul was ripped from its very body by the 1967 riots, which demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that the black population of Detroit was nowhere near equal partners with the white population.

The following year, at Easter time or thereabouts, Martin Luther King was assassinated. I remember standing, indulging my then developing passion for birdwatching, on an island in the mouth of the St. Clair River, looking across Lake St. Clair to where two pillars of black smoke were rising from Detroit because there were riots again, standing by this well-to-do white woman from Michigan who blamed it all on the Communists, that the Communists were in there instigating this whole thing, stirring up the rabble.

Well, we've come a long way from there, come a long, long way from that point. We've come to a point where, I think – and this is a lot easier for a white guy to say because a white guy is born privileged, born advantaged. He never experiences much in the way of discrimination, or if he does, he can laugh it off as something else. But most of the time in this country black people and white people really do enjoy equality. I think that most of the time in this country we've achieved a level where we don't see colour as anything that divides us but, in fact, as something that enriches us: difference in colour, difference in skin tone, difference in religion, difference in culture, difference in background, difference in the country of origin of our family versus your family, difference in language.

Oh, we still have our squabbles. Truth to tell, we often forget, apart from the language difference, how much like brothers Albertans and Québécois are. We both have that same streak in us that likes to stir up the pot. We've come a long way.

I remember that my grade 11 physics teacher was the first Indian I'd ever met, the first immigrant from India. There was Mr. Patel and his wife, and I believe he had two daughters. One of his daughters was in my class. Now, this was Sarnia, a small city. It would've been a slightly different experience, obviously, if I was growing up in Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver or something like that. But I remember when Mr. Patel first came to teach at Northern. None of us could figure out where he was from because he had this weird accent we'd never heard before. He went on to become one of the coolest teachers – and way too cool to be a physics teacher – that I ever had the pleasure of being in class with and being taught by.

10:20

We've advanced, maybe we've even evolved, but we've still got this hang-up. We've had lots of other hang-ups that we've overcome, so I think we can overcome this one, too. We've still got this hang-up about people of different sexual orientation than our own. It's not nearly as big a hang-up as it used to be, because it's not unusual in Calgary-Currie or Calgary-Buffalo or Calgary-Mountain View or Edmonton-Centre or, I'm sure, Edmonton-Strathcona or quite a number of other constituencies in the cities to see and to run into and to meet gay people, lesbians, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, who are living side by side with the mainstream straight majority and who are making it in life and who are no longer closeted.

I think of my own kids' experience at high school. In fact, a very good friend of my daughter is gay, and both my daughter and my son knew kids in grade 10, grade 11, grade 12 who were out. Man, I cannot imagine. I cannot imagine anybody in the late '60s, early '70s, when I was in high school – we had five grades in high school in Ontario; it's not that it took me five years to do three grades – having the nerve to come out, be out, maybe even to be out to themselves then. Well, it's different now, and it's better now, but it could be better still. It could be a lot better still because we could have just brought in in Bill 44 an amendment that says: you cannot discriminate against someone on the basis of his or her sexual orientation. Period. Full stop. End of story.

The ability of parents to opt their children out of classes where sex education and religion are taught exists in section 13 of the School Act, has existed in section 13 of the School Act. Well, it has existed in the School Act; I don't know if the School Act has been amended and it has been changed to a different section. But it has existed since my kids were little enough to take their first human sexuality or health courses – it came up under health – in I believe it was grade 4. You've always been able to opt your kids out of that if you objected to that. There's no need to transfer that or clone it from the School Act and include it in the human rights act unless you want to telegraph, unless you want to send a message that gay people aren't really as good as the rest of us. You're putting an asterisk beside their inclusion in the human rights legislation. There's no other reason to do it. As for our kids learning something... [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

Well, I can't continue on. I'll have to stop there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, sorry. We have five minutes for comments or questions under Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does any member wish to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to Bill 44 at third reading. There's a lot to say about this bill, and there's a lot that has already been said, but I'd like to start by just talking about how even though we are obviously on the verge of having this bill passed for the moment this evening, it's not, in my view, the end of the debate. Eleven years ago the Supreme Court of Canada told this government that it was discriminating against people on the basis of sexual orientation. Of course, it took this government 11 years to agree to even consider bringing their human rights code in line with our Charter of Rights and Freedoms or every other human rights code in the country. A lot of work went into making this government do that. Now, unfortunately, as we've heard tonight, they decided to bring that provision in alongside another provision which actually undermines the first one and takes the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community back several steps.

My point is this: they didn't stop fighting when the government steadfastly decided to ignore the Supreme Court of Canada for the purposes of maintaining a level of intolerance which has only been seen here in this Legislature, and I highly doubt that that community will stop at this point either. I suspect that this issue will be debated over and over and over again. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that people in this caucus will make sure that it is debated over and over and over again until this government finally has the courage to do the right thing and actually put in provisions protecting the human rights of Albertans who happen to have minority sexual orientations.

Having said that, while we're not really at the end – we're only at a point in the road and a new beginning on this particular issue – I want to talk a little bit about what this bill does. There's been a lot of talk about how this bill is about parental rights, but I want to talk a little bit about the parental rights that are being ignored through this bill. I'm sure a number of members will note that there are a few people up in the gallery tonight watching our discussion. I know from personal experience, from actually knowing most of them – many of them are actually from my riding, and it's so great because I didn't even know they were going to be here – that many, many of them are themselves parents. They are here because as parents they are deeply offended by what is happening to their rights and the rights of their children.

What rights am I talking about? Well, I'm talking about the rights of those parents to be able to expect through their public school system a balanced education, one that is based on teaching diversity and engendering tolerance for diversity, an education which promotes inquisitiveness, an education which promotes critical thinking, an education which is widespread and exposes our children to things beyond which they might otherwise simply be exposed to in our house. That's why we send them to school. That's why we decided education was a good thing for kids because schools actually help our kids grow.

There are a lot of parents who are deeply, deeply disturbed by the imposition and the infringement on their rights tonight by this government bringing this piece of legislation into place. That's why they're here. When we talk about parental rights, I'm talking about the parental rights of the majority of Alberta parents, who are not in support of this bill.

I'd like to talk as well a little bit about the issue of what's going to happen in our schools. Earlier today we had a brief debate on a private member's bill around a very worthwhile objective of

preventing bullying in our school system. But the deep irony of that bill was that it was actually talking about a mechanism where a principal and a peace officer would collectively determine whether or not on the basis of a number of grounds, including sexual orientation, bullying had occurred, and they would then put together an education program which the bullier would be asked to attend or to be part of. I found that deeply, deeply ironic, Mr. Speaker, because, of course, as they were promoting this very bill, we are now talking about Bill 44, which would allow the parent of the child who may have bullied another child on the basis of sexual orientation to refuse to let that child attend the very education program that another government member wanted to put into place in the schools.

It seems to me that with a lot of folks here one hand really does not know what the other hand is doing. This is what happens when you get into a very political consensus-making process: you end up with very bad language and very bad ideas. That's what we've got here in Bill 44.

10:30

I want to talk a little bit about what it's going to look like in the schools. The Member for Calgary-Currie did talk about that a little bit with respect to the kid who wants to come into school and talk about his two mommies or two daddies. I know that some of the people up in the gallery here can remember that poster that all of our kids make – and I can't remember if it's in kindergarten or grade 1 – the all about me poster, where they work for about a week on a poster. They put in pictures of their family and their pets and their favourite place to go, and they do a little story about each of their family members. They work for days putting together this poster. Then they each get a chance to get up in front of their class and talk about their family and who they are and where they come from. It's how they learn about community and how they're part of community.

Well, as has been rightly pointed out, now we're going to have this problem. The teacher is going to be really worried when one of the little kids comes forward and wants to talk about his two dads or his two moms. Is that talking about sexual orientation? Are we getting too close to the line? Is it inadvertent? Is it covered under the new amendments? Is it not? Well, the amendments, as I've said already before, are simply an invitation to spend three or four times as much money on legal fees as we would have already with the bill because it does nothing but inject uncertainty.

This is what's going to happen when a teacher, a kindergarten teacher or a grade 1 teacher, sits down to try and decide how to teach that lesson. Do they invite the kids in their class whose parents are part of the sexual minority community to talk about their family? If they do, do they give notice to the other families? Then what happens to that kid if some of the other kids are pulled out because it's a sensitive topic, quote, unquote, that some parent would rather have discussed at home? And what does that say to the child in that family? Well, I know what it says. It says that we are a deeply intolerant society. The irony, of course, is that this is happening within our public schools.

Earlier today we had a number of representatives from the GLBT community speak on the steps of the Legislature. I was particularly touched by the comments made by Lance Anderson. Many people in this Legislature may recall that he and his husband, Blair Croft, worked very, very hard to push this government to allow them to adopt a child. Lance was on the Legislature steps today talking about how deeply offended and rejected his family felt once again as a result of the initiatives taken by this government through this bill. I just wanted to say to him that it's really not Albertans who are rejecting them but, rather, simply the members of this Assembly that

are going to go ahead tonight and vote for Bill 44. I do believe that the vast majority of Albertans are far ahead of the vast majority of government members, who want to push forward with this particular piece of legislation.

I'd also like to talk briefly, of course, about sort of the litigious part of all of this. I've mentioned it before, but I want to say it again. I actually believe that we are on the verge of passing an amendment to our human rights code that will actually put our human rights code in conflict with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms once again. I don't know how many times a government can have its human rights code assessed and described by national judges, by the law of the land as being itself in breach of equality provisions and not start to get a little bit embarrassed. I realize it's been 11 years since this government has been told that their human rights code was in breach of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Is it that they're getting bored and that they need it to happen again, that they need to make an amendment because it's been a while since they've been to the Supreme Court of Canada and they miss Ottawa or something and they need to go back to be told again?

They will be told again, and they'll pay money to be told again. Alberta school boards will pay money for this government to be told again, and Alberta families will pay money to be told again. We will all spend a lot of money being told that Alberta's human rights code is substandard to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This doesn't make me proud, and I don't know how it could possibly make members on any side of the House proud. But that's where we're going, and it's not hard to understand how that will happen. It's pretty clear from an on-the-face reading of what this government proposes to do to our human rights code.

I'd also like just to speak very briefly about the issue of – well, again, I think it really comes down to the issue of tolerance. I've heard speakers in this House talk about how families should have the right to discuss, quote, sensitive topics themselves, and they don't want that discussed in the school. But I have to say that if we as a province and as an Assembly are prepared to say that the issue of sexual orientation must be included in our human rights code, we cannot then turn around and call that a, quote, sensitive topic and refuse to discuss it in our public settings the way we would talk about any other minority characterization. Of course, sexual orientation is a different issue. We can't do it. We can't do it without basically saying that we're creating a second tier, a lower tier of human rights. That's what this government has decided it wants to do. It wants to create a lower tier.

I'm sorry that it's sensitive to some people. You know, there was a time when being part of a different race, part of a different culture, being part of a different gender was a sensitive topic. There was a time when talking about women being in this Legislature was a sensitive topic, but that doesn't matter because there was also a time when as people who are part of government we decided that equality should go across the board, regardless, so we included it in our laws. Once we did, our public institutions needed to respect that fact.

Instead, what we're doing here is that we are including the rights of sexual minorities into our human rights code and then saying that it's still okay to treat them differently. It is absolutely the wrong place to have this discussion. The School Act had some provision for that in the past although I'm not entirely sure how long that would have lasted anyway. Regardless, if it didn't last, that would have been the right thing as well. Ultimately you put it right front and centre, Mr. Speaker.

The government clearly has not moved forward. We are still dealing with a government that is being primarily run by a very right-wing, conservative group of people. There was an attempt at

one point to characterize them as moving forward, as being part of a new generation, that they're not really Tories anymore, that it's a new group. Well, no. It's the same group that would not change the legislation 11 years ago. Albertans need to understand that that's what they're dealing with, and if they want a government that actually reflects the values of the rest of Albertans, they're going to need to fight for it. I think this bill is an invitation to Albertans to do just that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions or comments. Does any hon. member wish to take that five minutes?

Seeing none, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege as always to speak on bills, but this one doesn't necessarily warm my heart, shall we say. I, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, represent a constituency, called Calgary-Buffalo, located in the heart of downtown. In my community we have many different people who see family as just a loving expression of two individuals who raise children in the same way as everyone else does although it doesn't seem to be recognized as the same. We have a large population of our GLBT community, who I'm very proud to represent.

In fact, my first question in this House was to the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit on when we were going to bring sexual orientation into our human rights code. That was the first question I asked in this House, and it was chosen for that specific reason. Those rights should be included in our human rights code and are, I guess, now included in our human rights code. I say "I guess" because it's a little bit of what I've said before: what the large print giveth, the small print taketh away in this bill. I'll talk about that a little further on. I've got a few other things on my mind before I get to that.

10:40

If we look sort of as a province where we've come from, 11 years ago, give a few days, the Vriend decision was decided by our Supreme Court of Canada, where at that time they told our province to include sexual orientation into our human rights act, to make it part of what's written into the documentation. They said that for a reason. Gay and lesbian and transgendered and many other people were suffering discrimination here in Alberta. They said: let's write it into the code, and then there can be no ifs, ands, or buts about it, and also people can feel then that their government is supportive of them and that their government is representing them, and they can join the mainstream of other Canadian Legislatures that had already done that naming in their human rights code.

Nonetheless, we chose a different path here in Alberta. We sort of ignored it at first for a while and then, I guess, you know, would discuss it only sometimes. Then probably when it got to be this time when a new government got voted in, some people said: hey, you know, maybe we can bring this in at this time; maybe it's time to do this stuff. So what we've had, then, is 11 years of foot-dragging, 10 up here. Where's here? Well, that's kind of open for debate. We do have sexual orientation being now listed in our human rights code as protected grounds. For what it's worth, I guess, that was, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre said, a step in the right direction. But at the same time, if we look at the inclusion of sexual orientation enshrined in our parental rights clause, it is essentially two steps back.

So are we anywhere further? I would argue not. In fact, much debate has been centred on this bill. I think the government has

gone to great lengths to say that sexual orientation is not included in this bill as a slight towards gay or lesbian people. Oh no, we didn't include this in there as a slight to gay or lesbian people; it's just in there to reference sexuality, to allow parents to be able to opt their children out of sex ed classes and other things they deem appropriate. But I don't think so.

If we look at the history of that word and what it has meant to this government, the fact that they have kept sexual orientation has meant something to this government for 11 years. I think that at this time for them to say that sexual orientation is not really put in that act as any backhanded sort of comment to the gay and lesbian community is a stretch at best and very difficult for me as what I consider a sane individual to believe that this has occurred as just some sort of one-off, that it's there merely for parents and that it's not an actual slap to the GLBT community. I believe it is, sir, and I think anyone would believe that. But I'll talk to that a little bit later too.

If we look at other human rights acts across Canada and across the United Nations and other places, human rights acts are considered the sort of supreme test of what a province believes are the inalienable human rights of its citizens. I looked across all of Canada, and nowhere are there parental rights regarding children in any of this legislation. You know why? Because it's not a human right to have children. Simply put: people . . . [interjections] No. What I'm saying is that people choose to have children. They choose to have children. Some people don't have the ability to have children, so they don't have children. Some people don't want to have children. Okay?

So guess what? That's why in human rights, really, they don't include parental clauses there. You know where they put all parental rights clauses and all that? In some other act to the side or in something like the education act here, where we say that our parents shall have the right to take their kids out of class, like we had the common sense to do. Because I believe in everyone's right to be able to take their child out of a classroom if they don't agree with what's being taught there. Fair enough.

Why didn't we leave it there in the human rights code? You know why I don't think it was? Because I think it was a dirty little trade, Mr. Speaker. I think at the end of the day that it was a dirty little trade. It said: "Here's what we do. We're getting pressured all over the place. We're starting to look silly. We're the last place in Canada that has not included sexual orientation in our human rights code. So you know what? It's time we do that. But tell you what: we're going to let the GLBT community know that they're really not welcome here. We're going to sort of put it in, and we're going to dress it up a little." There's a saying here: if you put lipstick on a pig, sir, it's still a pig.

I'll tell you what. They might have tried to dress this up with a little bit of lipstick, a little bit of fancy language, call it a parental opt-out clause, call it whatever you want, but all it was was straight, utter, bigoted nastiness that I believe goes against what Albertans stand for, what I believe people in Alberta come to expect out of their government, and what really we as a people would deem acceptable. I believe that. That's how this got in there.

Guess what? We already had that the parents had the ability to take their kids out of class. Like I say, I respected that right. That didn't happen this time. Somehow those words "sexual orientation" ended up there. The hon. member from the third party offered a way to take sexual orientation out of that language in an amendment that would allow this government simply to just enshrine parental rights but without the words "sexual orientation" in it. I remember we debated that for some time. We said: "Yes. It's still not a very good bill. It's still not the way the other 10 provinces have done this. But

guess what? We can take the words 'sexual orientation' out of this bill, and it will be a little less offensive to these members of our community."

You know what? This government said, "No. We don't mind offending them." We had a chance to do that. You guys all sat there. The hon. member who has been razzing me here, a couple of them, were here when they could've chosen with that amendment to take the words "sexual orientation" out of the bill. You were here when that happened. Yeah. And that didn't happen, okay? Why not? Why didn't that happen? Why did we leave those words "sexual orientation" in there? Well, you know, I think, like we heard, the proof is in the pudding is why it's still in there. I believe that, and I stand by my saying that.

I'll just conclude sort of the way that I started this bill. I think that if you look at what people who founded the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta did, people like Ron Gitter, who actually started the first human rights code, came out and said that this bill is an embarrassment to Alberta. He said that, and I believe he wouldn't have done that willy-nilly. He did it because he felt it. He felt an obligation to say that. I have a feeling that the governing party has returned to its roots of, say, the 1960s. Well, this party wasn't there but maybe has adopted some of the roots of the 1960s or what some of the mindset was in this province at that time.

10:50

I don't believe this language is progressive. I don't believe this language does anyone any justice, much less any Albertans who are looking for a full, inclusive set of human rights to be delivered to the population.

I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak. I'll wait to hear from other members. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions or comments.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I need to stand up today and congratulate this government and the minister for introducing this legislation. I am very grateful to see that it's about to be passed. I would say to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that I do believe that the right to have children is a human right. Not only that; I would say that the one place where it is not a human right is China. In China when that right is not respected, there are interesting things that happen, pretty brutal things that happen. So I would say that it is a human right to have children, and I take exception to any saying to the contrary.

Now, I went to a public school. I'm a public school graduate. I learned a few things in public school. I learned a little bit of English, for one. Members of this party have been accused in this Legislature of being intolerant; they've been accused of being many things, as you are affirming now. Let's look at the definition of intolerance that I learned in school: intolerance is an unwillingness to recognize and respect differences in opinion and beliefs; intolerance is narrow-mindedness about another's cherished opinions. That is the definition of intolerance.

Now, Bill 44 allows parents to quietly choose, when they believe that two very narrow subjects are being taught to their children and they want to be the first ones to teach those innocent children these subjects, to make that first impression on their minds about religion and about sexuality. They want to make sure that in these most delicate topics they have first dibs on their kids, so to speak. So we're giving them the option here of being able to pull their children out for these narrow topics and give parents first dibs on their children. That is being called intolerant.

Let's compare this with debate from the opposition. [interjection] I'll get to that, hon. member. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity in a letter to the editor dated May 17 says, "Bill 44, unless amended, has the potential of turning inclusive secular schools into bigotry-breeding battlegrounds with teachers and students caught in the parental religious rights crossfire." Is that the language of tolerance? I say no, it's not.

The same hon. member as well as the leader of the third party have accused our Minister of Culture and Community Spirit of being duped, of being used to bring this bill forward, the inference, of course, being that because of who he is, he is being used to bring this human rights legislation forward. Is that the language of tolerance? I would say not. Every member on that side of the House has stood up in this House and has said: we know better, the state knows better what our children should be taught with regard to sexuality and with regard to religion. That is what they have said. They know better than parents how to teach these things. Well, there's another definition I learned in public school, and that's arrogance. It is: marked by or arising from a feeling or assumption of one's superiority over another. That is very evident here. Hypocrisy – another interesting word – is: to act in contradiction to one's stated beliefs or feelings.

I would ask these hon. members opposite how they can believe in a concept such as the separation of church and state, yet they believe that the state is better suited to teach objective religion to our children. That's the separation of church and state?

They believe, they say, in human rights. They believe in a various bundle of rights that everyone has. They would look at the United Nations declaration on human rights and quote it over and over again about equality and all these good things that are in there – and there are great things in there. It's an amazing document. Yet they choose to ignore in that document article 26, which says that parents shall have a prior right to determine how their children are educated. That's hypocrisy.

Ms Blakeman: The choice about a public or a Catholic school, for God's sake.

Mr. Anderson: I'm going to get to that exact point, hon. member. You made my point dead on. You believe in public education, the importance of public education, and I believe in that, too. Yet you advocate in the same letter that I'm reading here that any parent who objects to religion or sexual education being taught by parents to their children, anyone who would dare opt their kids out on those grounds, should leave the public school system and go to a Catholic school or private school or charter school. Apparently, a tolerant public education, Mr. Speaker, does not include tolerating the children of parents who believe that they should teach these kids these subjects. Extremely hypocritical.

Now, going back to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who said that we are already doing this in policy and partly in the School Act. That's the argument. Okay. That's a fair argument. So why are we doing it now? Well, let's apply that same argument in adding sexual orientation to section 3 and through all the different provisions in the legislation. The reason we're putting sexual orientation in there is not because it's changing anything that this government already does. We already respect the rights of people of different sexual orientations. That's not why it's in there. The reason we're putting it in there is because it's the right thing to do. The reason we're putting it in there is because no person, regardless of whether they are gay or not gay or any other sexual orientation that they may have, no one should be denied a job because they're gay. No one should be denied housing because they're gay. It's the right thing to do to put it in there.

That's why we're putting parental rights into this, not because we have to do it but because it's the right thing to do. We need to recognize a parent's role as the primary educator of their children. We are doing it because it's right. We're doing it because we want to reassert that the family and not the state is the fundamental unit of a successful society. We want to do it because we feel that it is necessary to protect the rights of those embarking on the most important job that any of us will ever have, and that is being a parent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere a question. His riding borders mine on the south, and as a rural riding it's, I think, quite similar to mine. I've heard very little on this particular bill compared to many of the other bills, but it seems to be drawn on two lines. One is the parents that support this bill. Almost all the calls I got from parents support the bill, and the few I got from teachers don't support it, but all in all I haven't gotten that much response from it.

As recently as the weekend I got to speak to a number of my constituents and even a few right at a convention I was at. Basically, conversation left my hands because it became between a parent and a teacher, and those lines were very evident there: the teacher on one side of the issue, parents on the other side. I assured the member of the teaching profession that we did introduce some amendments to the bill and that we'd be sending them out to him. Without seeing them, at the time he couldn't guarantee that he would be happy with them, but he seemed a little bit more assured with the amendments that we talked about. Could you tell me if the response in your riding has been similar to mine or quite a bit different?

11:00

Mr. Anderson: Absolutely. The response has been similar. There is no doubt that there are teachers with concerns. Part of those concerns has been due to a lot of the fearmongering and a lot of misinformation that has been out there and has been put out there intentionally in a lot of ways to push this bill back. Some of the concerns are legitimate, and I believe that this government has been very clear, especially the minister as well as the Minister of Education, in clarifying those points of uncertainty with teachers.

I will say this. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona earlier had mentioned that she believed the majority of parents were against this bill. I could not disagree with her more on this point. About three days ago I had a parent approach me and say: "Rob, I don't know what to do. What's the avenue? How can I as a parent support your bill, support the bill of the government, support the bill of the minister? I think that it's really important to support it, but I don't know how." I said, "Well, there's not much time to do a formal petition," much like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre stated, "but what you could do is you could maybe do an online petition and get some of your friends to sign it." She said, "Okay," and she went off and did that.

Well, within 72 hours roughly 900 people, just from one person starting out an e-mail chain, had signed this online petition, and it's still growing. It's getting near a thousand now. This technology is great because it allows you to make a comment as well as sign the petition. Some of the comments. Valerie Garratt from Calgary, Alberta, says: I should have the right to parent, educate, and protect my children as I see fit. Then you have Willis Winter from Calgary,

who says: the government must respect the fundamental rights of citizens in a democracy; one of those rights is the right to direct what the parent views as the appropriate education and guidance of their children; dictating what must be taught is not appropriate in a democratic society.

Taralee Runge from Red Deer, Alberta, says: I believe we as parents have the right to decide whether we want the schools to teach this kind of extra curriculum; I believe it is for us to teach them these things in life, not some stranger. Sherry Adams from Edmonton, Alberta, says: parents have every right to determine if they want their children to opt out of a class that violates their conscience or their personal beliefs without any penalty to that child; that right should definitely be respected.

I could go on. There are hundreds and hundred of comments like this.

Some Hon. Members: Go on.

Mr. Anderson: I just might.

There are many others, but the point is, hon. member, that there are thousands and thousands of parents, the silent majority, severely normal Albertans that are extremely happy with this legislation, that believe it's right to affirm the right of parents as being the primary educators of their children in these subjects. I think that it's a credit to this government that it has stood up for what is right on this matter despite the inevitable cries of foul that come from the opposition benches.

I hope that that answers your question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the millennia innumerable wars have been fought over the separation of church and state. For a brief period of history during the Crusades Christians, who conveniently forgot that Muslims and Jews share a common ancestry dating back to Abraham, put aside their differences in an attempt to impose their interpretation of the one true faith on the Holy Land and drive the infidels, anyone who didn't share their beliefs, out of Jerusalem. After the Crusades they went back to beating each other up, all in the name of the same God. Not only did Catholics battle with Protestants, but various sects of both religions fought internally for their faith.

Bill 44, unless amended, has the potential of turning inclusive, secular schools into bigotry-breeding battlegrounds, with both teachers and students caught in the parental/religious rights crossfire. While Bill 44 proposes to protect sexual orientation in the workplace and in tenancy, the right to discriminate would be enshrined in the public school classroom.

Parents through the School Act have always had the right to temporarily remove their children from classes of human sexuality and religion. However, sexual orientation isn't as clear-cut. What further muddies the waters is the Premier's earlier but later recanted assertion that parents have the right to object to discussions of evolution based on their personal religious beliefs. Parents currently have the taxpayer-subsidized choices of private schools, charter schools, and home schooling. Turning inclusive, secular public schools into faith-based battlegrounds is in no one's best interests.

Bill 44 in its current state is a regressive piece of legislation that turns back the clock rather than moving a tolerant Alberta forward. Bill 44 not only maintains but actively promotes the negative Alberta stereotype of red-necked intolerance which the latest *Maclean's* polling affirms is not the case.

For a variety of reasons Alberta is under scrutiny not only nationally but internationally. The government's \$25 million

greenwashing, rebranding efforts continue to stumble, from thousands of ducks drowning in toxic tailings ponds to pirating pictures of a Northumberland beach to promote Alberta's unique landscape. Freedom to Fake, Right to Discriminate is more representative of the branding perception by which Alberta is being viewed and judged both internally and externally.

Erasing a negative stereotypical image is considerably harder than creating and maintaining a positive view. Hollywood thrives on promoting villainous stereotypes. Remember the 1970s movie *Deliverance*, which portrayed gap-toothed, developmentally challenged banjo-playing hillbillies running amok in the Ozarks, terrorizing a group of urban adventurers?

Fast forward to 2004 Alberta and the filming of *Brokeback Mountain*, which was also set in the 1970s. Does anyone in this Assembly think the choice of Alberta for the backdrop was purely coincidental? The red-neck stereotype featured prominently in the childhood memory flashback of the gay cowboy who had been violated, murdered, with his body dumped into the ravine, foreshadowing what was to become of the ill-fated relationship of the two protagonists. The conflict between discretion and discrimination, which created the tension in this fictional film, is about to be played out in classroom reality in 2009 Alberta if Bill 44 in its tinkered amended state is passed.

Fact is frequently stranger than fiction. What was actually taking place in Alberta circa 1970? The majority of MLAs in this House look back with fond memories on a significant political event that occurred in 1971, with a young Peter Lougheed stepping onto the stage. One year later this progressive, in all senses of the word, leader put an end to the sterilization process that had been the norm in Alberta mental institutions for decades. State-sanctioned castration and hysterectomy had been institutionalized procedures for dealing with individuals loosely diagnosed as suffering from disability or deep depression. Shock treatment and frontal lobotomies, as featured in another 1970s movie . . . [some applause]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor, please.

Mr. Chase: Shock treatment and frontal lobotomies, as featured in another 1970s movie, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, were still in vogue as accepted procedures for dealing with mental illness.

Flash forward two decades to another Premier attempting to block compensation payments for individuals who had been caught up in the state's fondness for sterilization. The public outcry over this insensitive approach caused Ralph to blink, and compensatory payments were made as part of the recognition of past and present political folly.

Flash forward almost two more decades to the public outcry over Bill 44, which so far has fallen onto the deaf ears of a government that claims to be transparent and accountable yet appears to be so blinded by faith-based bigotry and intolerance that its members are willing to sacrifice the historical secular and inclusive public school system.

By enshrining prejudice in the name of religious tolerance, this government has taken Alberta back to the controversy of the Scopes monkey trial of 1925 in Tennessee. To divert Albertans' attention from their prejudicial proposal, they have played and replayed the racial discrimination defence card, that due to their caucus's ethnic diversity they are shocked that anyone would dare to accuse them of promoting intolerance. However, that is exactly what Bill 44, which does not apply to private schools, will do to previously inclusive, open-minded, secular-based public schools by enshrining in law the right to discriminate on the basis of human sexuality, religion, or sexual orientation.

11:10

Bill 44 is this regressive government's latest attempt to cater to a private minority at public schools' expense. Last year the per-pupil grants to private schools were increased to 70 per cent of their public component. The government further catered to private interests by paying for private school infrastructure at public expense. The fact that private schools have been exempted from the destructive ramifications of Bill 44 is a testament to how far a minority, dogmatic tail has wagged this government.

Tonight's vote will be a history-shaping event during which the shepherds will be separated from the sheep, the leaders from the lemmings. The votes of those who haven't learned from the mistakes of history will be recorded tonight in *Hansard*. For the sake of the future of public education I urge all members, particularly those on the government side, to consider the true meaning of progressive and balance both your conscience and your constituents in your voting decision.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to introduce an amendment. I'll wait for you to pass that amendment out.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have introduced an amendment, so proceed on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am moving that the motion for third reading of Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 44, the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a third time because the proposed notice provisions contained in the bill will cause a chill in expression that will adversely affect Alberta's education system.

This amendment states that we need to pull the bill because of section 9's negative impacts on teachers, students, and learning in our public schools. Children should be learning the full curriculum, and the teaching of that should not be subject to the penalties of the human rights act. This is an issue for the School Act, and that is where it belongs.

The major basis of dispute between the government and the opposition is what constitutes parental rights. As a parent I believe I have the right to introduce – and did – to my daughter and to my grandchildren a certain view of religion that they could choose to embrace, accept, or not. What I did not do, however, was pack amongst their lunch my particular religious preferences or prejudices and send them off to school to share with their classmates. What Bill 44 does is it makes it an opt-out, intolerant act if you so choose to absent yourself from discussions of human sexuality, any type of discussion of religion, and sexual orientation.

Now, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere talked about perceived intolerance. Whether that intolerance results in a child pulling themselves out of an inclusive public school classroom because of a parent's viewpoint, that is prejudice, particularly when it has to do with discussions of sexual orientation. Under the School Act we already dealt with concerns over human sexuality. If parents for whatever reason want to continue to tell their child that, you know, "The stork arrived, and that's why you've got a new brother," that's their right, but in terms of inclusive education and providing children with a much larger understanding, then I have concerns about children not being subjected to open and universal discussion.

This amendment basically says that under the name of religious tolerance or religious opting-out parents can interfere with the public school system and pull their kids out from their class whenever there are topics where they find the potential of controversy. In other words, "Children, you don't have to be tolerant of your classmates

on these grounds: human sexuality, religion, or sexual orientation. Feel free to discriminate, leave the class, cover your eyes, cover your ears, cover your mouth. Stop thinking. Just do what mommy and daddy say because mommy and daddy are your parents, and they know best." If we do not separate school and home, then we have a problem. Parents, instill your views, but don't force them on the school system because that's not where religion belongs. It belongs in the home, not pushed into the school.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs on the amendment.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult to sit through this debate without getting engaged.

An Hon. Member: Give it a whirl.

Mr. Lukaszuk: I'll give it a whirl.

Mr. Speaker, what particularly concerns me right now is that this debate has devolved, not evolved but devolved, into a bit of a mockery. It's not often you see this in this Chamber, but as we're here debating and speaking on something that is perceived by both sides of the issue, of the spectrum – those in the galleries I imagine have some defined points of view, and other members may have others – this entire debate right now is being narrated by various members in this Chamber on Facebook, on their computers, just showing how this debate is really not about the subject matter but how it is about showing what big heroes we are to our supporters.

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood should receive a certificate because his typing skills are phenomenal. I'm just sitting and watching his Facebook face, and he literally is narrating step by step what's happening in this Chamber. His last comment – and I will use the last name because I'm quoting. I'm quoting, Mr. Speaker, so you can't rule me out of order: Stelmach arrives to much thumping.

It has nothing to do, Mr. Speaker, with the debate, and I know that they want to now stop – there's an amendment on the floor to stop this bill from passage. This debate has nothing to do with what's in the bill anymore. It has to do with getting the crowds out there riled up, and it's just about spin and PR right now because, frankly, this bill does nothing. It does nothing for either side. It does not give our gay community any rights that they didn't previously have since the Vriend decision from the Supreme Court of Canada. All of their rights have been entrenched in government's literature, and they have been exercising all of these rights.

11:20

Yes, they were not codified. Perhaps they should have been codified earlier, but they weren't. Today, as a result of this bill, they are. So all we are simply doing as government is affirming in writing the rights that they have had for the last 11 years, and now with the passage – hopefully, if this amendment fails – of the bill, these rights will be codified.

On the other side of the spectrum, Mr. Speaker, there is a group of parents out there, and I have, actually, a large number of them in my riding, who have been exercising a certain right because of policies and regulations by school boards and in the School Act, and that was the right to remove their child from certain classes. Maybe we should read that section of the act. Everybody has been talking about a child who has two dads, and indeed there are many of these children right now who by way of having gay parents, by way of divorce have mixed families. This is the reality. Somehow members of the Liberal opposition and the NDP opposition want to

create this picture that members of this caucus live in some kind of a cocoon and that we don't have these constituents. As a matter of fact, we have members of the caucus that live in such families, that have blended families.

Mr. Speaker, look at the bill itself, section 11.1(1):

A board as defined in the School Act shall provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I recognize a point of order from the leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, while I enjoyed the hon. member referring to Facebook as if it had anything to do with the amendment, he's now debating the bill and not the amendment. He should be called to order and asked to speak to the amendment which is now before the House correctly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member on the amendment.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, hon. member, for proving my point because the moment you start talking about the bill itself . . .

Mr. Mason: The amendment.

Mr. Lukaszuk: . . . and the amendment to the bill, you obviously, hon. member, have an issue with it. You're proving my point: the bill and the amendments are no longer relevant; it's about the spin that you're managing to put on it.

As I was reading, Mr. Speaker:

A board as defined in the School Act shall provide notice to a parent or guardian of a student where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, prescribed under that Act include subject-matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.

Mr. Speaker, in my riding right now I have a rather large group of parents who for religious reason – for religious reason – do not wish their children exposed to music, and they require that these children be removed from classes where any form of education or instruction entails music. Well, these parents have been enjoying the privilege of being able to remove these children from class, and education carries on. As a matter of fact, it doesn't really weaken public education because the alternative would be that if not allowed to remove those children from that one particular class, these parents would have to opt for plan B, which would be either home-schooling or a private religious school.

I personally as an educator and as a parent am not a big advocate of home-schooling or private religious schools, but that's a choice that's offered to Albertans. So by not allowing a parent to exercise his or her option of having a child removed from a certain aspect of education, what you are really doing is forcing that parent into a private or home-schooling situation.

This doesn't only pertain, as you like to focus, to sexual orientation. There are parents out there, and I know a number of them, who would have issues with their children being educated on certain aspects of heterosexuality simply because they don't feel comfortable with (a) a child learning it at a certain stage in life because they may find that their son or daughter is simply not mature enough to absorb that information; or (b) they feel that they can do it better as a parent, that they have built a better relationship with their child to discuss such a sensitive issue than a teacher would have. Now, are we to deny them that right? How is entrenching in law one set of rights which are already being enjoyed and exercised by a group of people any more important than entrenching in that very same law

the rights and privileges of another group of people who are currently exercising these privileges? Mr. Speaker, I do not see the difference.

As a result of this, I think public education could possibly be strengthened because parents now will be able to carry on with the enrolment of their kids in public education and will not have to exercise home-schooling, and they will be satisfied knowing that their children are not learning anything that they don't particularly approve of. These parents simply don't trust the state. Maybe some members of this Chamber find it difficult to accept the fact that there are people out there who simply don't trust us in our ability to draft curriculum that would be satisfying every single parent. They do not want to give the state the right to have the final decision on what their child learns. They want to make sure that they as a parent of a child have that last choice, and I think most Albertans would agree with that.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of this Assembly to defeat that amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you stood up before.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the amendment as moved by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, which is essentially asking that the bill not now be read a third time because the provisions that are in the bill will cause a chill in expression that will adversely affect Alberta's education system. In fact, that's what's happened to us. We started out with a bill that was about human rights, and we've ended up with a bill that's about schools and parental rights. Not the same thing.

I think there are a couple of issues that we want to talk about here. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs actually introduced quite a bit of it. There are a number of choices that are available to parents in the system now if parents do not like or approve of the public system. They have a number of options, and they were outlined earlier. They could home-school their children if they chose. They could send them to a private school, which used to be the sort of enclave of the truly wealthy, but now since we provide 70 per cent of the funding for that, it's not quite so much anymore to be able to send your kid to a private school. So that's a choice that's available. Of course, we have a number of charter schools that are set up to deliver a very particular kind of education. It is under the school system but is not included in the sections that are included in Bill 44. So already there are choices that are offered to these parents if they do not like the way the public school system operates.

I am a child of the public school system here in Alberta, and more than that, my parents were both teachers in that system. I believe in that public school system. I think it strives for excellence, and I think, in fact, it has produced excellence. I appreciate that they tried very hard to give a range of experiences to me as a student and continue to do so. I think that a public school education should be something that has a value and a standard to it in the same way that we look at public health care, for example. Indeed, you can opt out of public health care if you want. You can pay cash or you can opt out completely or you can get other kinds of insurance that will cover your health care costs. But that doesn't mean that we change the quintessential quality of our health care system.

11:30

I believe that a public education should stand for something. I am confused, and I have failed to hear a compelling argument about how having different children pulled out of different classes for different reasons over a period of time is going to give us a standard

of education that is recognized outside of Alberta as an Alberta education because this kid didn't do evolution because of some reason, and this kid didn't do biology, and this kid didn't do English. I think that what we do is start to create a patchwork in our education system. That's my concern about what we've created with Bill 44 by adding this in.

We went from talking about a parental opt-out section to a parental rights section, much more muscular talking about parental rights than talking about a parental opt-out section. And, indeed, we had a parental opt-out section. That's what existed. We didn't need to put it into legislation. So you think to yourself: why would we? Given the chance, from a government that professes to be of an ideology that wants less government and less legislation, why was there such eagerness to put more legislation in place around this and more rules and more administration around this and put more into something that then had to be dealt with?

Let me move on to talking about what the effect of that is on our schools. I touched on that during my earlier remarks. What we've done is create the necessity for each of our schools, many of which are dealing with 500, 700, 1,000 students, to establish a system. Does it happen that each school is responsible for developing their own database and for paying for it and for bringing in the IT specialists that are going to help them to run this database, or is this going to be a school-board-wide initiative that has to pay for this?

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Ms Blakeman: It's relevant because in the amendment, if you'd care to read it, it talks about adversely affecting Alberta's education system. I think that having to pay for a computer system and IT support is going to adversely affect Alberta's education system, particularly because it's going to pull the money off.

One of the things that we tried to get through as an amendment when we were in Committee of the Whole was an amendment that would try to not have the effect of a teacher hauled before the human rights tribunal, the liability, to have to be assumed by the school.

So right there are two things that affect the school very directly. One is having to devote the resources, both the staff resources and the financial resources, to developing and maintaining this database of parental preference around what they want their various children to do. And, of course, you could be dealing with one or two parents, and you could be dealing with several different children in the school, so this starts to be a complicated database that you're dealing with.

Second is the effect on and the cost to teachers. The bottom line here, what we have created is the ability of a parent to bring a human rights complaint against a teacher for having taught something in a class that would be around – once again, I'm going back to the language here – “religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation.” For teaching that or having course materials or instructional materials that possibly deal with that – think poetry, plays, books, images, science, math, all kinds of ways that this could be perceived as being offensive to someone – for having any of that material available that somehow is offensive to a parent, now you can end up bringing a teacher before the human rights tribunal and all of the costs involved with that.

This is not chump change, guys. You start to get lawyers involved in this and a number of different hearings, and it can be appealed upwards from the Human Rights Commission into the court system, so you can potentially commit somebody to a significant amount of money for this. When we look at what we have done that could adversely affect the school system, well, I think that's where the chill on the teachers comes from.

Somebody earlier talked about seeing a line being drawn where on one side were parents and on the other side were teachers around how this bill is coming out. I actually think that's pretty accurate, not to mention the people that this is actually affecting the most because their very beings have now been deemed to be open for discrimination based on what is anticipated under section 9, which is amending the original section 11. I think this is a whole section, an anticipated effect of this bill, that has not been dealt with.

I approve of the amendment being brought forward because I think we do need to deal with this and understand what it's going to cost in staffing and in financial resources and in an emotional investment for how teachers approach their classrooms. When you see those teachable moments come by – well, yes, we're now supposed to be protected from things that are sort of casual. Sorry; I'm searching for the amendment so that I've got the right language here. Impromptu things are not supposed to be grounds for bringing a teacher before the human rights. But even that, I think, could run us into difficulties because we're not getting a real clear definition of those circumstances.

Frankly, this is all going to play out by test cases. That's how law is developed and precedent is developed, by test cases. If we don't write good, clear legislation on this floor, we end up costing those individuals that get involved in it and the court system and ultimately the taxpayers a fair chunk of change because we weren't specific enough in what we did on this floor.

Given that, I would recommend very strongly to my colleagues on the floor that you support this amendment, which, in effect, would result in the bill not now being read a third time because it brought in a whole section that was not originally anticipated and is affecting the school system and teachers and school boards and school councils in a way that was not originally anticipated.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favour of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader of the third party, you stood up before.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to this amendment because I believe this is a good amendment. I think that we shouldn't give this bill third reading tonight for a whole bunch of reasons, but I think this amendment puts its finger on one of the very important reasons why we should not give this bill its third reading, and that is the chilling effect that it will have on education.

Now, I want to begin, Mr. Speaker, by talking a little bit about the government amendment, which is allegedly set out in order to deal with this. It says that this section – well, there are two. Section (a) says, by striking out “explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation” and substituting “primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation”; and (b), by adding the following: “This section does not apply to incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes, human sexuality or sexual orientation in a course of study, educational program, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials.”

Mr. Speaker, at first blush, someone might be led to believe that these amendments by the government have solved the problem set out in the Official Opposition's amendment here. I don't think that that is the case because we talk about primarily and explicitly, but let's take an example and just work it through and see how this might affect it.

11:40

You might be teaching your children about the Holocaust, and you might be talking about concentration camps and telling the children

what happened, having a discussion of that bit of horrible history. You might talk about Jews being sent to concentration camps. You might then talk about Gypsies being rounded up and sent to concentration camps. One of the students might ask a question about whether or not homosexuals were rounded up by the Nazis and sent to concentration camps. If that subject comes up and one of the parents has explicitly written under the act that their children are not to be taught about that, then it may create a serious problem for the teacher.

The problem is that the teacher won't know. The teacher won't know until there have been cases brought and considered by the Human Rights Commission. They won't know where the decision will come down and where the line is because this act gives the power to determine that to the Human Rights Commission. So in that particular case, if parents were not satisfied with the way it had been handled and couldn't resolve it with the teacher or the principal and so on, then in fact there is a possibility – a possibility – of a case before a tribunal of the Human Rights Commission, the teacher being hauled before the Human Rights Commission tribunal, and that tribunal adjudicating whether or not there had been a violation of the rights of the child or, as the government likes to call it, the rights of the parent. It is that possibility, it is the potential for that to happen that will create the chilling effect that this particular amendment talks about.

Now, it's not just the NDP, it's not just the Liberal opposition that has this concern. Mr. Speaker, you know, some of the backbenchers say, "Oh, what a bunch of nonsense," and they scoff. But these concerns have been expressed by teachers, by school boards, by school administrators. These are precisely the concerns of the professionals who work in the field.

I don't underestimate at all the concerns of parents in this matter. There are many parents who have great concern with respect to this. Many of them are in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs' constituency. He is really, clearly, feeling a lot of pressure with respect to this. It's clear. When we talked about Bill 44 at the committee stage, the hon. member talked about this being a wedge issue. He doesn't seem to want to debate that. Tonight he complained that members were twittering or talking about Facebook or talking online about the debate that's here, anything but tackling the real issue, the fundamental issue of Bill 44. It's very clear that a lot of government members are getting a lot of heat from a lot of parents on this bill. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, rightly so – rightly so – if a government would bring forward this bill.

Let's not forget that this bill is under human rights, but it is primarily human rights in the education system, in the classroom. Isn't it curious, Mr. Speaker, that before this bill was introduced, this government did not consult with school boards, and school boards have objected to that. They did not consult with parents, and parents have objected to that. School councils are officially on record as objecting to the lack of consultation. School boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, parents, everybody involved in the delivery of public education, who are primarily affected by this particular piece of legislation, were not consulted by the government because it started out as a human rights bill. The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, after rejecting opposition calls for months to make sexual orientation a protected right, finally decided he would bring it forward, 11 years after those rights had already been granted by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Vriend* decision.

That was, of course, just the start of this bill, Mr. Speaker, and the Tory caucus got involved, the great multicultural, broadly-based, diverse caucus that the Premier is so proud of but which acts just like any Tory caucus in its narrow approach to fundamental human rights. What happened is that it got changed from a human rights

bill into an education bill that inserted the Human Rights Commission into the classroom.

Now, there are amendments here from the government that have tried to mitigate that, but, you know, if you ask the professionals, if you ask the parents, you'll find that they think that these don't do the job. This amendment that's been brought forward says: "Let's not read this. Let's not give it third reading. Let's not pass it into law, and here's why. Because it will create a chilling effect in the classroom." This is not just what the opposition is saying. This is what parents are saying. This is what teachers are saying. This is what school boards are saying. So for the government members to sit on their high horses and say, "Oh well, the opposition, you know, doesn't know what it's talking about" – they're wrong.

It's clear, Mr. Speaker, that this government has not consulted with people in the educational community, and it's brought forward something that's ideologically driven. It's brought forward something that's potentially very damaging to the education of our children. It might be the right of one parent to pull their child out of a discussion about sexuality or religion. That right already exists, and we have never contradicted that despite what Airdrie-Chestermere has said. But what has happened is that they've made it a right and inserted the Human Rights Commission into a system that was working perfectly well. It was working perfectly well. When we asked the minister, when we asked members opposite if they could produce a single case where some parents' rights to have their child absent when they talked about sexuality or they talked about religion were violated, some practical reason why we might need this bill, they were unable to produce a single case.

The question is: why is it here? Well, Mr. Speaker, it's here because there's an ideological drive in that caucus. It's a social conservative group that's driving the agenda, that's hijacked the government's agenda. They've inserted this ideological principle, which comes from the social conservative movement in the United States, where they're actually seeking a constitutional amendment to the American Constitution to insert parental rights. They're having very little success, quite frankly, in the United States, but they're having more success here in Alberta because of the lack of leadership that's taking place in this province on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it's imperative that we should not give this bill third reading tonight. We should stop it and allow the government to do what it should have done in the first place, and that is to produce some justification for this change, to say: here is where rights have been violated, and we need to fix it. That's how rights come about. They need to consult with parents, they need to consult with the public, and they need to consult with educational professionals, things they should have done. It's sheer negligence that that has not occurred, but it's so typical – it's so typical – of this government to proceed in that direction, driven from the back seat by the social conservative rump of the Tory caucus instead of talking to the people they should be talking to, the people of Alberta: the parents, the teachers, all of the people who are involved in education.

This is fundamentally, Mr. Speaker, an education bill now. It's no longer a human rights bill. It talks about how education will be delivered and what things you can and cannot talk about in school and the rights of parents to interfere in the education not of their own children but to interfere in the education of all other children in the classroom because of the chilling effect on education. It's not just the child that should be taken out of the classroom. It's not just that child, because parents can do that now, but it's the impact on the overall educational process taking place in the classroom, which means that certain things that could be talked about and should be talked about no longer are.

11:50

So if that hon. member wants to take his children out of class when certain things are discussed, the impact is that it affects the education of my child and every other person's child, and that's what's wrong with this. It's not that they are exercising their parental rights. It is that they are exercising a negative influence, a baleful influence on the education of the rest of our children. That's why parents are in the gallery. That's why parents are so strongly opposed to this bill. They see it for what it is, an attempt to prevent the full, critical education of their own children under the guise of protecting the children of specific parents. That's what it is, Mr. Speaker, and that's what's wrong with it.

I'm glad the Premier is here tonight. I'm glad he could hear this speech.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment to Bill 44. Not wishing to repeat anything that's been said before but simply to get to the practicality of the issue, it's clear that we have a strong division not only in the House but across the province on the issue. It's concerning a great many people: human rights people on both sides, I suppose, parents on both sides, school boards, mostly against this bill.

I guess what I would argue is that as a body of men and women elected to represent the population, the fact that this has created such division and perhaps a 50-50 split, as the *Herald* would have suggested in one of its polls, behooves us to pause and get out of this frame of reference in which there is that right-wrong, us-them, good-bad about this whole discussion and recognize that if we are going to serve the best interests of the public and our children, we may need to take a hiatus. We may need to pause and think and confer and discuss with members of our community, members of our schools, members in the human rights community to try and get this right.

I appreciate that on both sides of this question there is legitimate concern for children, for the future, for education. I guess that from a very practical point of view we're at an impasse in the province, not only in the House. This is something that is very dear to the hearts of many people in the province. There is a clear split, and in the interests of being democratic and responsive and actually wrestling with this for a little longer, perhaps, and hearing more from the public and from the schoolteachers, who are going to be most affected by this, I think it behooves us to support this amendment and put this off for a while. There's nothing lost by putting this off till the fall, nothing lost except pride on both sides, I suppose, that neither wins this particular debate. But I don't think we're here to win or lose the debate. We're here to do the right thing by our children and by what code of conduct and human rights we wish to stand as 21st century Albertans.

My plea to everyone is to consider the possibility of simply postponing the decision on this, supporting this amendment and making sure that we do the right thing in something that is so critical as our children's education and to honour the human rights that we all want to stand for in the long term.

I won't take any further time but simply want to put that on the table, Mr. Speaker, as a constructive option for us to move this issue forward and recognize the legitimate perspectives on both sides on this debate. The fact is that we have a split across the province on this issue, and those most severely affected – children and teachers as well as parents – may want to be heard more clearly than they have been and get by the rhetoric, get by the polarization. I guess

that is what I'm seeing on this issue, that perhaps isn't serving those who are most going to be affected by this.

Thank you for the honour to speak, and I look forward to the vote.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit on the amendment.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hyperbole and the conjecture and the excessive rhetoric certainly comes from the opposition benches. Last week I said that there are other Albertans, that there are other parents that believed in our position on this bill, to which you said that there was no one else that did. Now you say today that the *Calgary Herald* says that it's 50-50. Well, I'd argue that next week it'll be 75-25 because the silent majority of those people out there that you derided, that you dismissed, that you said are represented by parents' councils – parent councils do not represent the parents of 600,000 people. You have to get that through your head.

In terms of whom we talk to in this caucus, that you say is somehow hijacked by this right-wing cabal, is it myself? Is it the Minister of Education? Is it our Premier? Is it the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods? Is it the one from Edmonton-Meadowlark? Is it Edmonton-Ellerslie? Where is it?

An Hon. Member: Show yourself.

Mr. Blackett: Show yourself.

When we consult with our own caucus, with our 72-person caucus, we have three former school board chairs. We have three school board chairs. We have seven teachers. Because you do not believe in what they believe in doesn't mean that they're wrong, doesn't mean they're not representative. You have to understand through your narrow-minded, little view that there are contrary views, and because we don't believe the same thing as you do doesn't mean that we had any nefarious intent.

Back to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. You forgot the second part of the amendment, as you so conveniently do when you go on with your rhetoric. You forgot the fact that if there's a process, which you agreed is so wonderful, within the school boards, it says specifically that those individuals have to go through that process: go to the teacher, go to the principal, go to the school board, and that has successfully resolved every complaint, according to the ASBA, that has happened in this province. So there is no need to go to the Human Rights Commission. That was an amendment we put in in response to them.

At that meeting at the end of the day they didn't say: well, the whole world is going to come to an end. Their response was: we would rather that we don't have this section in the bill, but if we have it and we have to work together moving forward, we will work with you. So they will sit down with representatives of the Human Rights Commission and work out a system. They'll work out a template. They'll work out a system of notification. It's not very hard for them because they already have one now.

You say that we need an amendment. You say that we didn't delay. We don't need any of that. We have consulted with others. You just choose to deny the fact that we have. You say that we talked to no one. You say that we don't represent parents. Who are all these people in here? Where are the hundreds of thousands of people out there that you say are against this bill? I've had 350 letters. I get that in one day on other issues. So I categorically deny your outrageous assertions.

You know, someday, actually tomorrow, the sun will rise, teachers will conduct their classes, and all will be well with the world. Six months from now, when there's still not a human rights case, all will

be right with the world, and we'll be focusing on fixing the administrative changes that this bill was intended to do. Sexual orientation will be a protected ground within the legislation, as we had intended. Those tolerant parents that you give no credit to, that are going to pull their kids out by the hundreds: it's not going to happen either. They want a chance to have a discussion with their children. They want to have a chance to discuss those issues. If you are offended by the fact that they are sensitive issues, that's too bad. Those parents are whom we represent, 3 and a half million Albertans, not your little cabal, not your five little ridings or your nine little ridings or your special-interest groups. We represent 3 and a half million people on this side of the floor. That's why we're going to carry this bill forward, and we're going to vote on it tonight.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the amendment.

Ms Notley: Yes. Thank you. A pleasure to be able to get up and speak to this amendment. I do appreciate the minister taking the time to get up and engage in the debate because I think it's an important one. We don't agree, but it's somewhat disconcerting to see the lack of participation on the part of the apparently very large and fully consulted caucus.

12:00

A few points, I guess, just to go back to some of the points that the minister just raised. I mean, I think it's fabulous that the caucus talked to itself. I think that's great. Of course, we've all heard that there are lots of them, but I have to say that at the end of the day talking to oneself even if one is a large caucus is not consultation. You know, you're a parent. I'm a parent. I don't stand here purporting to speak on behalf of lots of parents because I happen to be a parent. The reason I'm speaking on behalf of lots of parents is because I can't run into a parent for the last two weeks without every single, solitary one of them telling me how much they are opposed to this. You are right: school councils are not necessarily elected to represent on every issue. But they are probably one of the most representative groups of parents out there. I've yet to see the 350 letters from parents that say they support this, but I have seen the thousands that don't.

Now, in terms of other people out there, I mean, I think it was mentioned before, but I just saw a little note here that the student group which has been up on Facebook since Friday is now up to about 2,400 members, so it's continuing to grow. As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has noted, we have school boards opposed to it, teachers opposed to it, parent councils opposed to it, human rights groups opposed to it, the GLBT community, for whom this legislation was theoretically originated in part, opposed to it. So I appreciate that the 72 government members talked to themselves about this, but at a certain point no matter how representative those 72 folks think they are, when you've got that many groups saying that this is wrong, I find it hard to believe – I don't want to use the word "arrogant" because we had a whole discussion on the definition of arrogant, but it seems to me that there might be a picture of what I've just described beside the word in the dictionary were we to look it up right now.

I want to follow up just a little bit on the comments that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made because it truly does reflect the concern that I have and that I've been hearing. This is not about the right which currently exists under the School Act or school policy for certain families to pull their children out of classes. Now, that's a different issue, and we could have a long and probably

very interesting discussion about that and how that should be framed and how it should be done. But it is about the right of parents and kids to not have discussion inhibited or limited or frozen within the classroom because of a poorly constructed law that is implemented through a poorly thought out system by a bunch of people throwing amendment after amendment at it with nobody really thinking about what the actual, ultimate implications are.

I made this point before, but I want to make it again because it doesn't appear as though the minister heard before. He talks about the amendments that were made that talk about how, "Oh, well, you have to go to the school board first and you can go to this place first and there are all these other places you have to go to resolve the issue before you can go to the Human Rights Commission." The problem is that once you've got something in the human rights code, you've just opened up the door for litigation because it's in the code. The fact of the matter is that there are cases out there that are almost decades long now about the fight between whether something is properly in front of an arbitration board or properly in front of the human rights code.

What the government has written into this legislation has just created a whole new area, a whole new body of law. There are dozens of lawyers that are going to be able to make a career out of interpreting this piece of legislation, and they will do it on our tax dollar at the expense of our education system and at the expense of our kids while they learn less because teachers are trying to figure out whether they can afford the legal costs of all of this. So what the government has proposed is not a solution. It is an invitation for more debate and more litigation.

On that issue I would really be incredibly grateful were the minister to actually table for the House any legal opinions that he had received or, probably, all the legal opinions that he had received on this issue. It does strike me as a bit perplexing that if this is such a clear bill and if there will be no problems and if everything will all be fine because we're all reasonable and we'll all wake up a year from now and discover there's not one legal issue arising from this, that if that's the case, why can't the minister table the legal opinion? I don't understand. It can't prejudice you. It's the same legal opinion that ultimately would be argued in court even if somebody does decide to challenge it.

It's ultimately going to come out anyway. Why not share it with Albertans? Why not assure us that we're not running afoul of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Why not assure us that we're not injecting a tremendous amount of legal uncertainty into our human rights code? Why not do it? Unless you've received legal opinions even from inside your own ministry saying that this is an ill-advised reconstruction of what was otherwise an incomplete human rights code. I can only go with what I'm given, so the absence of assurances means that I along with many other members of the House and the many groups that I've mentioned have to conclude that, you know, the government is knowingly embarking on a path that they know is going to trigger a tremendous amount of litigation.

We just have to go back to this whole issue of what this is going to actually do in the classroom and how it's going to impact the ability of kids to learn and the ability of teachers to teach. Just tonight, you know, I think I've received about 10 e-mails from different teachers saying, "Just today in the staff room we were talking about how we were going to change how we teach this subject or that subject," and parents, of course, who are very upset.

I go back, of course, to that because we have not ever actually implemented the recommendations from the Learning Commission. As I'm sure I've mentioned in the past, one of my kids has spent their time in school in a class that's never gone under 28 children from kindergarten onwards. Anyway, in that class there would

probably be at least two families, statistically speaking, where the parents are of the same gender. I really worry about how those kids are going to experience their education, and I also worry about how my kids are going to learn about those kids and what that's going to do to their education.

There are so many other resources that we need in our schools, and this bill is pulling those resources to the wrong place. Instead of effectively limiting the degree to which we can in our schools actually teach our kids about the human rights code and its history, we should actually be working on programs to enhance tolerance and the acceptance of diversity within our classrooms.

I worry that because we've got this in the human rights code, when a parent exercises their option to pull their kid out every time there's something they don't like, they will very soon say that they're being adversely impacted, that there's a form of adverse-effect discrimination because their kid is sitting in the library unattended. So then suddenly an aide gets pulled out of one class to watch the kid or the children in the library. Now suddenly the classroom with 28 kids and one teacher and two aides has 28 kids and one teacher and one aide because the other aide is having to address the fact that sexual orientation is a, quote, sensitive topic, in the words of some government members.

I do worry that people think that's a sensitive topic. Inclusion of that issue into our human rights code should mean that we all believe it's not a sensitive topic anymore. It should mean that we are all prepared as adults to talk about sexual orientation, people who are gay, the same way we talk about women getting the vote and different ethnic minorities having the right to, you know, equal employment, equal tenancy, and equal access to jobs. We should not somehow suggest that some of that is still sensitive.

12:10

It's in that debate at the very heart of this that we find what is the problem with this and what is the underlying sentiment behind this government's desire to move forward with this bill. That's why people are so concerned about it because at the very core of it there's a little kernel of something that most Albertans are very uncomfortable with, and it's that little kernel that I'm uncomfortable with and all opposition members on this side are uncomfortable with.

I think the best thing to do would be to not read this a third time. I think the best thing to do would be for the government to take this issue back, to finally, once and for all, adhere to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and put sexual orientation into our human rights code. Then if there are ongoing concerns, if there are real issues, real examples of problems that are raised by parents – because, of course, we've yet to hear about any of them. It's not discussed in the media. It's not some huge outcry where parents are saying that their kids are being brainwashed into being, you know, gay-loving sex freaks; there's not that kind of issue out there. But if there were, we go back to the School Act, where the issue should be addressed, and we figure out how to do it better. We save face, and we don't make Alberta the laughingstock of the continent, and we do a good day's work.

It's on that basis that I think we should all vote in favour of this amendment. I certainly will be, and I'll be encouraging others to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other speaker on the amendment, the chair shall now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment RA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:12 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Swann
Chase	Notley	Taylor
Hehr		

Against the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	McQueen
Anderson	Elniski	Morton
Benito	Fritz	Oberle
Berger	Griffiths	Olson
Bhardwaj	Groeneveld	Prins
Blackett	Horne	Quest
Boutilier	Johnson	Renner
Campbell	Johnston	Rodney
Dallas	Knight	Sarich
Danyluk	Liepert	Stelmach
Denis	Lukaszuk	Webber
Doerksen	Marz	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 35
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[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 43(d) and pursuant to Standing Order 49 I wish to move that the question now be put.

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is known as a motion for the previous question, which is the question on the motion for third reading of Bill 44. It's a debatable motion.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm sorry. Could I get the citation again, please?

Mr. Renner: Forty-nine.

Ms Blakeman: My understanding with this is that it comes into play only after a hoist motion. Am I incorrect? This comes into play after both a hoist and a reasoned? No. It's coming into play separately. Okay.

I would argue that this should not be adhered to. The very fact that we have more and more people interested in the debate of this bill, admittedly aside from those that are in the House – I sense that there's not a lot of appetite for that amongst my hon. colleagues, but there certainly is appetite for it beyond the House. We've already talked about the rising interest from those outside of the House, whether it's through an online petition or an increase in the number of e-mails that are being received. Therefore, the need, the necessity for the government to get up and preclude any further debate, including, I might mention, the opportunity for the leader of the third party to actually participate in third reading, aside from speaking specifically to an amendment, is really unnecessary.

Once again, you know, you've got 72 votes here, guys. What does it matter to you? When people want to speak about this, what is the great need to shut it down? What are you afraid of? What do

you think somebody is going to say that necessitates your having to, you know, use a little-used citation in the standing orders to shut down debate?

You know what? That's going to become the news story, not what happened about this. The news story will be that the government used a heavy hand to shut down debate in the Legislature. Why would you do that? [interjections] Well, this is a debatable motion, and I'm sure some of you can get in on it.

You don't need to do this. You already have your votes. You know that you're eventually going to win this. What does it matter to you to have to sit here for a few minutes longer and listen to some people that want to say something about this bill? Clearly, there is an appetite for it outside of this Chamber. Maybe that's what you're worried about. Maybe that's what you're trying to subvert and avoid, that discussion that's taking place elsewhere.

It's your choice. It's the government's choice in the scheduling of this bill to put this on at night. We could do it during the day. We could do it tomorrow. We could do it Wednesday. We could do it Thursday. But I think the government likes to put it on at night so that it can do things like this in the middle of the night, when there are not so many people around to notice it, conveniently. [interjections] Well, it's a debatable motion, so I invite people to get involved and get engaged in the democratic process.

I would argue that there is no need at this point for the government to have to bring this in. It's a matter of a few more speakers at most before this bill reaches the end. I think it's wrong to be taking away that opportunity from the leader of the third party in particular. [interjections] Everything I've said has been on point here, boys. If you want to argue, get up and argue.

So far I fail to see where the government has a need to invoke Standing Order 49 and bring it into play in this case. What's it going to cost you, another couple of minutes? Forty-five minutes and the debate is done. But you will turn this into a debate about how the government had to be heavy handed and shut down debate when there were one or two people left to speak on this. For shame. Why on earth would you need to do that?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I just want to remind you that this motion for the previous question allows the debate on the bill and the motion as well.

Thank you.

12:30

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is disgusting. They're laughing, they're certainly enjoying themselves, but the fact of the matter is that neither the leader of the Liberal opposition nor I have been allowed to speak. Now you say I can speak to the bill?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, the government is moving to cut off debate on a bill that was generated with very little consultation. As my hon. colleague has said, they talk to themselves, and they think that's consultation. They've got seven teachers in their caucus, so they think that's enough. They don't have to talk to 7,000 teachers in the rest of the province. They've got a couple of former school trustees in the caucus, so they don't have to talk to any of the school boards. They can proceed. Now they're using the most severe form of closure to shut down the debate. Not only did they hold the debate in the middle of the night on this bill, but in their arrogance they're using every tool at their disposal to limit the debate and to make sure that this ill-advised bill goes through.

Mr. Speaker, I've talked earlier about the lack of consultation. I've talked about where this bill really came from. There are a

couple of glaring things that I would like to reiterate. First of all, as I've mentioned, section 9 of this bill primarily affects the public school system. It affects the classroom. It affects everybody affected by the classroom; that is, the children, their parents, their teachers, and school administration, school boards as well. Those are the people who are primarily affected. None of them have been consulted. This is a glaring error, a glaring fault that I don't think should ever have been allowed to happen. I think that that's one of the real problems that I see with how this government proceeds in general. It talks about parents' rights, but it hasn't really discussed parents' rights with parents. Now it finds that parents are, in fact, rather divided on the whole question. I think that that is one of the most serious problems with the bill.

I think another serious problem with the bill is that they haven't really taken into account how the whole system will affect children other than the children of those parents who wish to withdraw their children from certain parts of the curriculum, that being human sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion. Now, those rights exist today, and a system exists that seems to be working very well by all accounts. The impact on other children, the rest of the children is what our concern is. We don't want the quality of their education to be affected by this bill. We don't want the quality of our children's education to be affected by the decisions of other parents about the education of their children. That's why the current system is so much more effective than what is being proposed, because parents can ask that their children withdraw from certain parts of the curriculum.

Despite the intentions of some members on the other side to suggest that we don't support that, it's not true, and we've never said so. But again we see the real pattern of saying that your opponent stands for something that he doesn't stand for and then attacking that position. We've seen that from the top on down in this Legislature. Instead of dealing with the actual position of your opponents, you create a false position and then attack that. It's a lot easier task to kick down a straw dog, Mr. Speaker, than it is to demolish a truly held and in some cases even thoughtful position of your opponent. I think that that's one of the problems that we face with respect to this.

I think that it's important that we make it clear to this government that it can't just proceed based on its own wishes, that it's responsible to govern for all of the people of Alberta and not just a portion of the population. What this smacks of is the imposition of a minority's views on education – it could be a significant minority – on the majority, and I think that that is a very risky proposition for any government no matter how large its majority. I think that it's not something that's truly democratic and not something that I think that a wise government would undertake.

I want to just suggest to all members of the House, particularly the government, that the fight on this issue does not end tonight. You may impose closure, you may silence us tonight in this debate, and you may ram through this very, very bad bill, but the fight on Bill 44 does not end tonight. It doesn't end when it's proclaimed, and it doesn't end when the first charges against a teacher are laid by an irate parent or by a special-interest group of some kind. This will be an issue going forward. This will be something that will continue. Mr. Speaker, the battle to repeal Bill 44 starts tomorrow and will continue through the next election and until Bill 44 and our human rights legislation is put within its appropriate parameters and not used as a tool of a particular minority in order to attempt to impose their view of education on all the rest of us, because the rest of us won't accept that, and we will continue to go forward.

I really find the use of closure here at 20 minutes to 1 in the morning to ram through this bill abhorrent. It's disgusting. But it has a beneficial side, Mr. Speaker, because it really underlines the

arrogance of this government and their own belief, almost messianic belief in their own correctness, their own being right, and their willingness to use whatever tools are at hand to force through their view of education on the majority. I'll urge all members to not accept this motion, to not vote for it, and to allow the debate to run its natural course.

Quite frankly, I thought we were coming to the end of the debate or near the end. I wished to speak directly to the bill and not have to also deal with this particular manoeuvre on the part of the Deputy Government House Leader. Quite clearly, this has been planned in order to short-circuit legitimate debate, and it ought not to be allowed, in my view. It's a sordid end – words almost fail me, Mr. Speaker – to a bill that really has no place in a modern, educated, sophisticated, and scientific province as Alberta ought to be. This is a relic of the past. This is a throwback to a simpler and allegedly happier time that probably never really existed anyway, and it's, I think, beneath us all.

Thank you.

12:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, stand and oppose this standing order on parliamentary process and the shutting down of debate. Clearly, this is an issue that has exercised all of us a lot, has stimulated a lot of thinking and discussion across the province. That can only be good, especially for something as contentious as limiting opportunities for teachers and students to discuss fully issues of great importance and certainly great controversy in our society.

I had previously in my comments hoped to address the question of hoisting this bill and giving us all time to reflect and take the time with our constituents, with our organizations that we care about, that care about us, but that's clearly not going to be the case. We are going to be shut down within minutes, and again it appears that pride goes before the fall. I think this government will have to answer for this not only in Alberta; it's already being discussed across the country. Even in America this has now become news.

I guess it raises the question of what it is we think we can do so uniquely in Alberta to advance human rights that we should impose this and in many ways threaten the very foundations of public education because I understand this doesn't apply to the private education sector. That's of some interest, that we have a bill that holds public teachers in a different way accountable to human rights and to charges under the Human Rights Commission but doesn't hold accountable private and charter schools.

We are embarking on a rebranding of Alberta. We've heard a lot about the government's \$25 million rebranding and a lot about the image of freedom and creativity. In the context of this human rights legislation, this amendment, one sees a real contradiction, and that's what I think many people that come to me and have written to me about this issue – educated people, professionals, people from different religions have said to me: this is a backward step; this is a branding of Alberta that we don't want to be branded with, a reflection of a more bigoted past and a more discriminatory approach to differences and to different lifestyles, different faiths. It isn't the kind of open and democratic society that I think we all believe we're trying to move towards.

I have to wonder about the Premier's commitment to a free vote when we see in this past vote just how much freedom there is on the other side to speak their own individual perspective on this issue.

When we heard the Minister of Education just a couple of weeks ago on air speak about the fact that there have been no complaints about the public education system and the act in relation to the

opting out of children for certain subjects, one really has to wonder why it was necessary to put this into law and to create a context in which teachers now feel the heavy hand of legislation. This from a government that says that they want to minimize laws; they want to enhance individual freedoms: smaller government with fewer laws. This is one more that seems to be contradictory to a philosophy of small government and minimal legislation, especially legislation that's hard to enforce. We've already talked about the vagaries of how we define religion and sexuality here on many occasions this past couple of weeks.

To speak more specifically to this motion for closure, it raises again the questions of just how much this government respects democracy. I for one have experienced a profound loss of democracy in the province. That's why I'm in the Legislature today. Having been fired in 2002, it was very clear to me that this government doesn't respect democracy. They don't like dissent; they like to have it their way. More and more Albertans, professionals and nonprofessionals, are telling me that they fear speaking out in this province because of repercussions, overt and covert repercussions: job promotions, hiring, opportunities lost, family members who lose opportunities because of speaking out in dissent on some of the issues that these members feel is their right because they are a majority and have been a majority for decades.

The question, I think, that these members have to wrestle with is: to what extent are they committed to free and open discussion? How is it reflected in the Legislature? How is it reflected in our electoral system, in our financing of our electoral system and campaigns and openness in campaigns, openness to revealing campaign donations, the connections to party affiliations? All of these are questions about honouring democracy and respecting this institution that we say is going to protect the public interest, going to protect the majority and, at the same time, preserve minority rights, in this case sexual orientation and issues around different sexuality and religion.

I don't want to prolong the debate. I don't think there's any reason to prolong the debate. What I needed to say was that I am profoundly disappointed with Alberta today in terms of its commitment to democracy and with this government in particular and its unwillingness to look at the warts and fix them, to genuinely care about democracy and to raise this in their constituencies, to raise this in their caucus, to change the electoral system, change the way we finance campaigns and report on campaigns, to make it very clear that boards and commissions and agencies will no longer be fed with Tory insiders, that we will make a serious commitment to openness and accountability and a willingness to hear opposite points of view.

In this case a large number of Albertans don't agree with this bill. We've all been hearing from them. Let's respect that and put this bill on ice for six months and let Albertans talk to us. Let Albertans vote. Let's have a referendum, including on section 9 in this bill. Section 9 is the contentious part of this bill. Why not ask Albertans just how many of them would support that? I could live with 51 per cent. I don't think this government could live with 51 per cent. I think the evidence is in. We are making a mockery of our modern-day society in retrenching attitudes and values and discriminating on the basis of particular orientations.

I'll say no more, Mr. Speaker, except to say that it's a profoundly disappointing day for me in Alberta and in this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the motion and the bill.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the hour I can't help but think of images such as the dark ages into which we're descending or the notion of the thief in the night. In this case the thief-in-the-night analogy is the idea of someone attempting to steal freedom of

speech, the democratic right of debate, and that's what, unfortunately, Bill 44 is all about. Bill 44 is attempting to stifle discussion in an inclusive, secular public school system. It will stifle it, as I refer to it, by causing the teacher to stop, drop, and roll over because some student or some parent objects to a discussion that is brought up in class.

Now, the hon. minister who represents Culture and Community Spirit has been suggesting through his tinkering amendment that spontaneous discussion would not be limited, and he went on at great length to suggest that six months from now – I think he referred first to the sun shining tomorrow. Yes, it will shine tomorrow, but our Alberta democracy will be a little bit more clouded over as a result of the eventual passing of this bill than it was before we had this discussion.

12:50

Now, this government's idea of consultation – and it's been pointed out by other members, so I won't belabour the point – is looking into a mirror. What this government is seeing is basically 72 faces looking back and saying: "Thumbs up. It's okay. I agree completely with you." That insular attitude is what's wrong with democracy in this province, the idea that one can bring their prejudices with them to the classroom and at least temporarily shut down discussion until the fire bell is pulled on any kind of discussion on universal themes because some person believes that somehow their religious right or their concerns with regard to human sexuality or sexual orientation are somehow being infringed upon.

Well, tonight we're seeing this played out in this House, an attempt to stifle freedom of speech, an attempt to shut down discussion based on individuals' beliefs that they have a superior right to govern. When the hon. Leader of the Opposition put forward the idea of a referendum, the laughs and the giggles from the government group just rose to the ceiling. That should tell Albertans exactly how this government values freedom of speech or the opportunity to have input into decisions.

You take it for granted. You are so caught up with your own self-worth, you're so caught up with the fact that a whole 21 per cent of Albertans have voted for you that you think that gives you the right to ride roughshod over the rest of Albertans.

Now, there has been very little tabling on the part of government members indicating support from their constituents for Bill 44. We've heard of an ongoing electronic poll that suggests that numbers are growing. We will no doubt see in tomorrow's papers and papers that follow up about the number of hits on a particular topic. Those can be easily manipulated. What can't be manipulated is the idea of a plebiscite or a referendum. This government very much needs a checkup because they have taken their right to govern to the point where they have left Albertans out of the process.

This is another night of shame. We've had a series of these nights that have gone on well past midnight, where opposition members have in previous cases not even been allowed the opportunity to put forward amendments. At least we got one amendment on the floor tonight before the suggestion of shutting down further discussions was brought up. This is typical of autocracies, where individuals believe that because at this particular time in history they have a majority, the majority of Albertans still support their views.

The majority of Albertans do not support your views; 79 per cent of Albertans did not vote for this government. You will be lucky in upcoming elections to get the 21 per cent that you got in the last one. History will not be kind to individuals collectively that attempt to ride over democracy and put it under their totalitarian heel.

Mr. Blackett: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: It's a point of order. The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Blackett: Unparliamentary language. There's no need to be calling anybody here totalitarian, Mr. Speaker. I'll expect their apology.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, it's very early in the morning. Maybe you'll help out and move on.

Mr. Chase: Well, considering that the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit didn't provide a citation, his point of order is as full of air as the discussions that he's brought forward tonight. There wasn't a point of order. There was no citation. If "totalitarian" fits, wear it.

The Deputy Speaker: I would advise us to please watch our parliamentary language. We'll go on now but watch what we say from here on.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I understand that as the mover of this motion I would have an opportunity to close debate. No? I'll call the question, then.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the previous question carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:56 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	McQueen
Anderson	Elniski	Morton
Benito	Fritz	Oberle
Berger	Griffiths	Olson
Bhardwaj	Groeneveld	Prins
Blackett	Horne	Quest
Boutilier	Johnson	Renner
Campbell	Johnston	Rodney
Dallas	Knight	Sarich
Danyluk	Liepert	Stelmach
Denis	Lukaszuk	Webber
Doerksen	Marz	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Swann
Chase	Notley	Taylor
Hehr		

Totals: For – 35 Against – 7

[Motion on previous question on Bill 44 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 49(3) and *Beauchesne* 521(2) I must now call the vote on the original question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:09 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Drysdale	McQueen
Anderson	Elniski	Morton
Benito	Fritz	Oberle
Berger	Griffiths	Olson
Bhardwaj	Groeneveld	Prins
Blackett	Horne	Quest
Boutilier	Johnson	Renner
Campbell	Johnston	Rodney
Dallas	Knight	Sarich
Danyluk	Liepert	Stelmach
Denis	Lukaszuk	Webber
Doerksen	Marz	

1:20

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Swann
Chase	Notley	Taylor
Hehr		

Totals:	For – 35	Against – 7
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[Motion carried; Bill 44 read a third time]

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the hon. members to get comfortable in their seats; this is long speech. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My speech will also be lengthy, and I will have some further comments on this tomorrow. However, at the moment I would move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, the Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3

Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now like to move that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. later on today.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:25 a.m. on Tuesday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 2, 2009

Issue 47a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Mitzel, Len, Cypress-Medicine Hat, Deputy Chair of Committees

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. From our forests and parkland to our prairies and mountains comes the call of our land. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have with us today 26 visitors from Norwood elementary school in Wetaskiwin, who I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. They're here with their teacher, Marcie Hofbauer, and parent helpers Arlene Moussa, Angela Mantai, and Kathy Nicholson.

I was interested in a little chat I had with a guide, who indicated that as she had taken these young folks through the building, she was very impressed with their good manners and also their strong knowledge of what we do here. That's a credit to their teacher and their parents and also to them.

I think they're in the public gallery. If they would rise, I'd ask that this Assembly give them their warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you a group of 23 visitors from Robert Rundle elementary school in St. Albert. Robert Rundle elementary school produces some of the finest students in the province. Actually, three of my children graduated from Robert Rundle many years ago. I'm pleased to introduce 21 students plus teacher Chris Akins and parent helper Mrs. Linda Dennis, who are all seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to stand and for the members to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three guests this afternoon. The first is a great young lady who's working in my office in Spruce Grove as my STEP student for the summer, and that's Reed Wolodko. She's a young woman with a great future who is doing a great job for us in the constituency with a can-do attitude.

The second is my constituency office manager, who everyone here knows is really the lifeblood of the MLA's job. I'm very, very lucky, Mr. Speaker, to have Carol Stewart, who has been with me from the start, since I got elected.

Accompanying them, Mr. Speaker, is another special individual to me. In order to do the work that we do, all things at home must be taken care of, and it's the strength of that home life that really makes it easy for us to do the job that we do. For the last 29 years

this lady has been the rock behind all the things that I have done, and that's my wife, Aukje Rose Horner.

I'd ask all three of them, please, to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning you hosted the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association bursary and essay contest award presentation ceremony at the Legislature Building. These bursaries are presented annually by the Alberta branch of the CPA to young people from TUXIS, the Girls' Parliament, and the grade 6 essay contest. The Royal Commonwealth Society of Canada contributes to the essay contest bursary.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members the award winners and their guests, who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery. Please, our guests, rise as I call your name: the first place CPA essay contest winner, Jack Quest from Strathcona constituency; the second place CPA essay contest co-winner, Katelyn Borle from Sherwood Park constituency; the second place CPA essay contest co-winner, Kevin Yin from Strathcona constituency; the Alberta Girls' Parliament co-recipients, Sarah Knowles from the Calgary-Shaw constituency, Shelby Vincent from the Highwood constituency; the TUXIS recipient, Nicole Larson from the Strathcona constituency. Will our guests – the award winners and their families, educators, and friends – please all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's such a pleasure today to be able to rise and introduce to you and through you some great staff from the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. In particular, they work in the parks division. Their names are Heather Lazaruk, Anita Padlesky, Marcy Bresler, Gloria Cheng, Peter Weclaw, Graham Morris, Emily Chamberlain, Robin Walczak, Erin Saunders, and Deborah Johnstone. I'd ask that they'd rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to introduce to you and through you our new summer student in Culture and Community Spirit, Julie Van Boom. Julie is working towards her education degree at Dordt university in Sioux Center, Iowa. Aside from her schooling, she also finds time to do a great amount of volunteer work. During the summer months she lives and works on her parents' farm just outside of Fort Saskatchewan. I'd ask Julie to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you Mr. Paul Mabbott, a young student who will be working in my constituency office as a summer STEP student. Paul is from Cochrane. He completed a year of journalism studies at Carleton University. When he returns to Carleton, he'll be starting his history degree. He joins us today to see the proceedings of this House and to view the debates in question period. Paul, if you would please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special guest, Miss Angie Lee. Angie is 12 years old, lives in Edmonton, and attends George H. Luck elementary school. Angie has faced her battle with ALL, acute lymphoblastic leukemia, with great courage and positivity. Angie's wish is to attend the teen choice awards, where she hopes to catch a glimpse of one of her favourite bands, the Jonas Brothers. With the help of the Children's Wish Foundation Angie's wish will be granted this August. Angie is seated in the members' gallery along with her mother, Sandie Lee, and Stacey Johnson of the Children's Wish Foundation of Canada. If I could ask them all to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a young man whom I hold in very high regard. Samim Aminzadah worked as a summer student in my constituency office last year, helping deal with the concerns of residents and with the day-to-day operations of the office. He learned that it can be very busy and at times quite challenging. Samim is in his last year of political science at the University of Calgary. We all wish him well as he hopes to enter the Faculty of Law. I think you'll do well there, Samim. My constituents and I are very fortunate to have Samim working in my office again this summer. Samim, it's so good to have you here in the Legislature. I'm going to ask that you rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you two guests I have today. I'd ask them to rise as I mention their names. The first one is very familiar with this building. He was working here many years ago, 18 years altogether, I believe. His name is Brian Hlus. Please stand.

My other guest is Annette Gerdes. She works for the city of Edmonton in the deputy city manager's office. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you a dedicated volunteer, Ms Jena Krystofiak, and her parents, Doug and Asifa Krystofiak, seated in the members' gallery. You may recognize Jena from the cover of the latest edition of Travel Alberta magazine. She will be attending the U of A in the fall with the goal of becoming a neonatologist. Jena uses her dance performances to support community organizations in their efforts to raise awareness of local, national, and international issues, including the World Partnership Walk last Sunday, May 31, at the Legislature Grounds. I ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a few special

people. I had the distinct pleasure of being the keynote speaker at the M.E. LaZerte high school graduation. Part of the reason was that over the past 18 or 19 years I've delivered 200 children, I've had a chance to attend to their bumps and bruises and their stitches and broken bones and asthma attacks, so for me they were like my family. I'd like to introduce a few special people. One is Taylor Mah. I met Taylor years ago in my work, and he was just a little fellow. I said he'd be six foot five one day. I was wrong; he's six foot six. As well, his father, Gene Mah, and another young fellow – his name is Baljot Chahal; Baljot was the valedictorian at the school – as well as his father, Paramjit Chahal. I heard this young fellow speak. I said: "You know what? One day you're going to be in the Legislature here. We need young, bright people like you here after we leave." I'd like to ask these people to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two groups of constituents who are visiting the Legislature today. With us today are Elk Island public school board chair Bonnie Riddell; principal of Wye school Ms Patty Berry; Mrs. Tanya Jordan, a teacher from Wye school. They're in the Legislature to attend the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2009 awards ceremony, which took place earlier this morning. As you know, Mr. Speaker, my son, Jack, was one of the award winners, so my lovely wife of 15 years, Fiona, is also here today to celebrate. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction. I'd also like to introduce my constituency office manager, Laurette Strong, and STEP student Kristen Pue. They do a wonderful job in my constituency office, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to have them with us this afternoon. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly someone who taught me the value of hard work, honesty, and, as well, how to reuse and recycle long before it was in style. I would now ask my father, Mr. Alvin Berger, who is seated in your gallery, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Brain Injury Awareness Week

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Brain Injury Awareness Week, which runs from May 30 to June 7 this year. Each year there are approximately 10,000 brain injuries in Alberta alone. This is a time to learn more about brain injuries and to show our support to brain injury survivors and their families.

Brain Injury Awareness Week is an opportunity for Albertans to be aware of brain injury prevention. By working together to educate Albertans, we can prevent more brain injuries. In addition to wearing approved helmets for recreational activities, brain injuries can be prevented by wearing seat belts, obeying speed limits, and using safety equipment such as hard hats in construction areas.

One of the ways that this government has supported brain injury survivors and those who assist these brave and courageous individu-

als is through the Alberta brain injury initiative. The initiative is a network of supports and services which assist individuals with an acquired brain injury to live, work, and participate in their communities to the fullest extent possible.

Another way the Alberta government provides support services to survivors of brain injury is by providing funding for the Alberta Brain Injury Conference, which took place about a month ago. This biennial conference is an opportunity for Albertans to come together and share information and learn more about acquired brain injury. It is also a great venue for survivors of brain injury to meet other survivors, share their stories, and connect with those who face similar challenges and have achieved similar triumphs.

As part of Brain Injury Awareness Week events are being held across the province. The activities range from the Courage Canada Trail Ride in Innisfree to a film viewing about brain injuries at the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital in Edmonton. More information is available on the Seniors and Community Supports website.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I encourage this House and all Albertans to take part in these events to recognize those among us living with brain injury and to promote awareness of how to prevent brain injury. The impact is very significant, and we should look for all ways possible to better support brain injury survivors and their families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Carbon Emissions

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. When I was a kid, we were strongly cautioned against swimming in the North Saskatchewan River because we could be exposed to typhoid or hepatitis and various chemicals. In those days people, municipalities, and companies freely dumped waste into the river, which was treated like a sewer. Today the river is far cleaner, a place where people swim and boat and fish through the summer. People don't pour their used oil into our river, nor does the city dump raw sewage into it. We all agree that investigations, fines, and penalties are in order for that sort of behaviour.

Unfortunately, we don't yet treat the air with the same respect we treat the water. Every time we drive our cars, we dump waste from the burning fuel into the air. Every coal-fired power plant, every factory, almost every building treats the atmosphere like a sewer. One solution is to start charging a cost for dumping into the atmosphere. This government, to its credit, has begun charging what it calls a levy for major carbon emitters. A variation on this is the so-called carbon tax, which has been the subject of heated debate and opposition.

Now, this is just my personal view, Mr. Speaker, but I think we need to reframe the debate around carbon levies and carbon taxes. Language is very important. Let's call these things what they are, not a tax or a levy but a dumping fee. If you dump carbon into the atmosphere, you should pay a fee, just as you would for dumping a load of trash at the landfill, just as you would pay a fine for tipping dirty oil from your car down the sewer or your household trash into the ditch. For the sake of the planet let's reframe this debate. Language really does matter.

I don't like carbon taxes or levies, but I can live with a carbon dumping fee. After all, I'm ready to stop treating the atmosphere like a sewer, and I think a lot of other people are, too.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Henry Bergen

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to celebrate the great honour and award that one of my constituents, Mr. Henry Bergen of Coaldale, has been selected to receive. On May 21, 2009, the Alberta Order of Excellence recipients were announced by the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, and I'm pleased that Mr. Bergen was one of the eight lucky recipients.

The Alberta Order of Excellence is the highest honour the province of Alberta can bestow on any citizen. The Order of Excellence is awarded to individuals from all walks of life but who share one common factor: they all work to make a difference, to make Alberta a better place, and to make contributions to our future that will stand the test of time.

Mr. Bergen studied at SAIT, training in automotive mechanical trades, machinery, welding, economics, and psychology. In '68 he launched GEN Manufacturing, a company that develops tools that avoid overtilling of land. He and his company received the industry achievement award from the American society of agricultural engineers in September 2001. He has become a major player in the agricultural business, and in the spring of 2008, Mr. Speaker, he was the recipient of an honorary degree from the University of Lethbridge. He also received many other awards, including the Order of Canada in 2007 for his work promoting zero-till land management practices. Mr. Bergen has always been ahead of his time and unafraid to take on challenges.

Other recipients of the Alberta Order of Excellence include Shirzad Ahmed from Calgary, William Bowes from Grande Prairie, Sister Helen Hengel from Calgary, Bernadette McDonald from Banff, Kenneth Sauer from Medicine Hat, Barrie Strafford from Calgary, and Harold Wyatt from Calgary.

These Albertans are greatly deserving of this award, and I hope that this Assembly and all of you would join me in congratulating each and every one of them.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Budget

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, fiscal conservatism is no longer an adage that can be claimed by this Tory administration. Unprecedented wealth has slipped through the administration's fingers, and what are the people of Alberta left with? Cancer centres kept open by private donations, sick children being treated in tents, and a budgeting process based on the hope for improved commodity prices. These problems were created by this administration and their failure over years to manage our resources responsibly. They have failed. To the Premier: how does the Premier explain a record \$4.7 billion deficit and a health care system in chaos?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the amount of money that the government has set aside, let me start with just the last 10 years: \$117 billion net transferred to Ottawa, over \$23 billion paid off in debt, considerable savings in endowments to universities, the science ingenuity fund, the \$17 billion sustainability fund, and since 1993 to today \$41 billion in new infrastructure and actually about \$19 billion just from about 2006 on in infrastructure. When you pull that all together, that's a considerable amount of investment that went to the people of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I wonder how the Premier can explain the net loss in our primary savings account in this province since Premier Lougheed left office.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think many Canadians, Americans, and people around the world are asking that question, how through the lack of transparency in banking regulations in the United States, in Europe – I'm, quite frankly, very proud of the fact that we have stricter banking regulations in the country of Canada, that have stopped a lot of the precipitous drop in savings that, you know, has caused banks to go bankrupt in other countries as a result of rapidly decreasing, very volatile energy prices.

The other problem is that our best trading partner, the United States, is going through a tremendous economic downturn, trillions of dollars in debt. We're going to have to watch our relationship there very carefully because I'm afraid of perhaps an increase in rates, maybe inflation coming in the future. We have to plan very carefully.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier commit today in the public interest to an independent value-for-money audit of government spending?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we do have a very good discussion on public spending right here in this Legislative Assembly. We've just had, I believe, 20 days of discussion on the budget. The opposition asked questions, good questions, with respect to the spending. The budget has been delivered, and it will continue. Next year we'll deliver another budget, and it'll be openly debated in the House here as well.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Health Facilities

Dr. Swann: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The changes this Premier has made to health care this past year have created anything but progress. Through this whole experiment the Premier and his minister have released no information and left the public and professionals guessing as to what is coming next. To the Premier. Internal Alberta Health Services documents indicate that this government is currently in talks with doctors' groups for leasing publicly built hospitals such as Fort Saskatchewan and the urology centre in the Rockyview in Calgary. What is the Premier's reason for turning these public facilities over to doctors' groups?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, Mr. Speaker, just before I came here to question period, the opposition was giving out papers to the members of the media. Now he's brought forward some allegation. I'm not aware of what's happening in terms of a doctors' group, not naming the doctors' group. Without further information I can only take that question under consideration and will definitely find out what the question is all about and who the group is.

Dr. Swann: Well, let's try the health minister, then. What specific doctors' groups are you in talks with over private hospital use?

Mr. Liepert: Well, we talk to doctors all the time. You know, I'm not quite sure what this – Mr. Speaker, I've been waiting for this. The member used a term again that he's used in this House, calling it an "experiment." There's only one experiment under way in this province, and that is the experiment the Alberta Liberals launched last December with this new leader, and I would suggest it's been a failure.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, again to the health minister: what other facilities are you considering turning over to health groups?

Mr. Liepert: None, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Automobile Insurance Rates

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, here we go again. The auto insurance rate review is under way, and the insurance industry is again calling for a whopping 40 per cent increase in premiums. Nation-wide the insurance industry has seen a 2,000 per cent increase in its profits in the past five years, yet it still tries to make us believe that it can't afford to pay injury claims without a cap in place. Once again this government has taken the side of insurance companies as the finance minister has contended that without the cap insurance rates will increase by 20 per cent. I'm sorry, but Albertans will find that unacceptable. To the minister of finance: does the minister agree with the proposed 40 per cent increase in insurance rates, or, put another way, where does the minister stand on the industry's claim that that's what it needs?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, as the spring session goes into the summer, I find it wonderful that the hon. member opposite and I are agreeing on an issue after all this time. He sounds as uninterested in a 40 per cent increase as I am. The request last year was 37 per cent. It made huge headlines. What did they get? Five per cent from the insurance rate board. What did they get in the years previous? Nothing until they got 5 per cent last year, and they substantiated that claim to the insurance rate board. That's how they got it. But I am no more interested in seeing Albertans take a hike of 40 per cent than the hon. member opposite is. Good news, hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: We agree on something. Mr. Speaker, I'm gobsmacked.

Maybe the minister can explain this to me because the sense that I get is that we either all get shafted by the insurance companies with higher premiums, or the cap goes back in place and only the injured get shafted. That seems to be the choice that we're being presented with between the industry and the minister, and that's not much of a choice, but, you know, Mr. Speaker, I might be prepared to go along with it if the minister would table some sort of proof. Will the minister table the evidence on which she bases her claim that rates will go up by 20 per cent if the ruling against the minor injury cap is upheld on appeal?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be premature for me to speculate further on the hon. member's question. We still haven't had the court ruling. We thought it was coming in December, January, February. We keep waiting for it. At that time we can more fully disclose and discuss strategy. But the hon. member makes a good point, that the requests are extraordinarily high, and we have no interest in substantiating them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: will the minister commit to implementing a freeze on auto insurance rates?

Ms Evans: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'll just make one comment. Before we put the cap in place relative to the auto insurance, before

we had that, we were having an escalation of rates that was significant. Today our rates are 13 per cent lower than they were when that cap was put in place. So we've had good news since 2004 because the action of the government at that time precipitated a much more reasonable insurance rate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Vehicle Vicarious Liability

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. On its website the Truck Renting and Leasing Association brags about a December 18 meeting with the finance minister in which she agreed to introduce legislation to cap vicarious liability for car rental companies at \$1 million. This leaves those with serious and permanent disability as a result of car accidents involving rental vehicles unable to collect enough of a settlement to live a life of dignity. It saves the company \$9 million. It's Hertz, Avis, and Enterprise 1, brain and spinal cord injury victims 0. My question is to the Premier. Why did you allow your finance minister to cut a backroom deal with the big car rental companies at the expense of those who are permanently disabled in accidents?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any backroom deal with any rental agencies. The minister that's responsible for that area will respond to the question.

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no secrecy here. There's no backroom deal. This legislation was introduced publicly in the Legislature and debated in public. When it was introduced for first reading on March 16, it was accompanied by a news release sent to every newsroom in Alberta. Although this is what's in place for the car rental companies, it does not imply that people with serious injuries cannot go through the courts or get their claims resolved in some other fashion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The association is giving credit to the lawyer who represented them, and he is none other than Mr. Joe Yurkovich, the vice-president of the Edmonton Progressive Conservative Association. This entire deal reeks of Tory friends and insiders making deals to save millions on the backs of injured Albertans. My question is to the Premier. Why is a leading Tory insider lobbying the finance minister for reforms which save rental car companies millions of dollars and deny rightful compensation to injured Albertans?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I really don't understand where this hon. member is getting all that information. We brought forward legislation a year ago that capped the same on leasing companies. We're doing exactly the same thing that the province of British Columbia did, and we're doing exactly the same thing that the province of Ontario did. That was to make it fair for everyone and not make people that had no responsibility whatsoever for who was driving their vehicle responsible for something that they shouldn't be responsible for. It also does not stop the person from going after the driver if they've done something wrong. That's who should be responsible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this illustrates very clearly policy development with this government. You have Tory insiders coming in, getting meetings with ministers, taking an industry group in there, finding a way to cut their costs, saving them \$9 million – they brag about it on their website – and we have a policy that disenfranchises people who are permanently and badly injured in car accidents. This is a serious problem, and I want to ask the Premier: why don't you change your way of doing business? Why don't you put the disabled people, the people who are badly injured, first instead of your friends in the insurance industry, in the car industry, the medical industry, or whatever industry it is?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the gentleman that the leader mentioned – I'm not aware of any Edmonton Progressive Conservative Party, so I'm not quite sure what he's talking about. Anyway, it is a person that's well known to Edmontonians.

If, you know, Stelmach Lease Agency owned a car and would lease it to a driver – okay? – and the driver took the car for a nice drive to Jasper and got into an accident, well, the way the situation was prior to these changes, the owner of the vehicle, which would be Stelmach Agencies or whatever, got sued. But I wasn't driving. It was the person behind the wheel that caused the accident. The situation was that in all provinces, to make it reasonable, in terms of who to sue for the actual incident, it's the driver behind the wheel. It's not the owner of the vehicle in this case, which is a leasing agency. It's just not fair. That's why it was capped at a million dollars, or else nobody would be leasing cars in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Alberta Bond Offering

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans support this government's continued investment in priority capital infrastructure projects in spite of the economic slowdown we are experiencing. Some of my constituents have asked about the potential of establishing a capital bond that could help finance important infrastructure projects and create a potential investment opportunity for Albertans within Alberta; however, they're looking for more information. My first question is for the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Is the establishment of an Alberta bond under consideration by this government?

Ms Evans: Yes, it is, Mr. Speaker. We want to give Albertans an opportunity to invest in their province. We understand that with that investment it is like Alberta as a government borrowing from its constituents. We have in our budget a line on the borrowing for \$1.1 billion. We are examining the best ways to enable Albertans to invest in Alberta through this type of process, through the bonds.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister my first supplementary: could a bond program be developed that would be attractive to Albertans looking to invest their money in Alberta without costing undue charges to the government above what would be competitive?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the thing we're looking at, the various features of many types of bonds. There are probably about six types of bonds. We know that Alberta has a triple-A credit

rating. We know that there are ways and means in which some of the bond issues could be more advantageous to some of the people for longer term strategies, some perhaps for shorter term strategies. This past weekend we heard several ideas where people want to invest in Alberta infrastructure, accelerate the pace of infrastructure. So there are a number of different things we'll look at for the future of bonds in Alberta. We have had successes in bond sales here in Alberta before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would an Alberta bond fund be a feasible and competitive method of financing infrastructure projects, and in what time frame could this be developed for Albertans?

Ms Evans: We're looking at it over the next few weeks and months. If we were to develop a bond specific to infrastructure, we have to make sure that it is competitive. We want to make sure that we assess everything from the interest rates, the principal, what would be carried, how it would affect the debt picture, and so on. There are a number of different pieces to look at, but we're taking a very close look at it in conjunction with some of the other experience more recently felt in other parts of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The March 2009 chief executive officer report to the Alberta Health Services Board notes that at the start of this year there were 1,277 vacancies under the category of direct nursing. Now there is supposedly a surplus of nurses in this province. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why did the government order Dr. Duckett not to fill these 1,277 direct nursing positions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member has some documentation from somebody in government who he alleges made this order, I wish he'd show it to me because it didn't come from me. What has happened in the last year are a number of things, and I think I explained it yesterday in the House. Number one, the new CEO has determined that we need to ensure that we have nurses doing what nurses are trained to do. Number two, it has been determined that, likely because of economic situations, a number of projected retirements have been put off. So there's no real secrecy here. Times change. I guess I would ask the question: just because a number was used last year, does the opposition want us to go out and hire that many nurses if we don't need them and then have to lay them off in a few months?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone knows that the hon. minister of health gets his marching orders from the Premier's office.

My next question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. With the \$45 million that is budgeted this year for health workforce development, who exactly is the government planning on training given that this minister and this Premier have ordered 1,277 nursing positions not to go filled by the Alberta Health Services Board?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think we need to remember that nursing shortages can remain an issue in the future. As the minister of health has indicated, we need to look at it on a long-term basis and take a very long-term strategic planning approach to our workforce and the amount of people that we will need in the future of the province.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, given that sick Albertans are waiting in emergency rooms for services or emergency surgeries, who are they to believe, the Minister of Employment and Immigration or the minister of health? Again, to the Minister of Employment and Immigration: who ordered, to your knowledge, the 1,277 nursing positions not to be filled? Was it the minister of health, or was it the Minister of Immigration and Employment?

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there is nobody that has given me any orders in terms of cutting numbers or doing those changes that are happening. But I want to indicate and re-emphasize that as a government we continue to plan for the future by preparing more Albertans for health careers. That includes our physicians, our nursing – both RNs and LPNs – and anybody involved in the health professions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Cumulative Environment Effects Management

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard several times in this House that the cumulative effects approach is the future of environmental planning and management in Alberta. I know the Industrial Heartland is viewed as a pilot for this new approach for protecting our land and water. My question is for the Minister of Environment. What have we achieved from the cumulative effects management approach in the Industrial Heartland?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to report that we have achieved a significant amount in this pilot project. We have set clear targets for industry with respect to air and water. On the water side we actually have an implementation framework already in place that involves not only industry but the municipalities in the area. The use of recycled waste water from municipalities is an integral part of how we're going to be managing the water in the area. We have begun and are moving very significantly along the lines of planning for how we're going to deal with sulphur management in that area as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a strong supporter of the cumulative effects management approach, but several industry representatives in my constituency have voiced concern about the specific targets for NOx and SOx. Again to the Minister of Environment: how do you respond to these concerns?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, any time you put limits in place, it's not something that you should be surprised at that someone would have some concern that there may be a point in the future where those limits are reached. Two things that I want to point out to the member: first of all, the limits that we've put in place far

exceed the position that we are in today, and secondly, I have indicated to industry that if there are errors in calculation, if there are assumptions that are inaccurate, we would be willing to have a look at those. The bottom line is that there's no point in having limits if you're not prepared to enforce them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. How is your ministry preparing for the upgrader projects and other applications in the Industrial Heartland given the current economic situation?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to progress on our planning as business as usual. As a matter of fact, there have been some changes in timelines, but work is continuing to proceed in the heartland region. In fact, in some cases capital costs are declining, and it's incenting some of the projects that have been put on the back burner to proceed. In addition, we have to consider that the bitumen royalty in kind that is under discussion with government will have a significant impact on opportunities in the Industrial Heartland. So we expect this development to proceed, and we're planning on it in an appropriate way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Peter Lougheed Centre

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Peter Lougheed hospital expansion was meant to add much-needed capacity to an overburdened health region. This expansion has been turned into simple replacement. In order to add 140 new beds, another 140 old beds have to be closed. This is government math that Calgarians are familiar with and are sick of. To the minister of health: why did you commit to expanding the Lougheed without any commitment toward operating funds? This makes no sense.

Mr. Liepert: Well, what makes no sense, Mr. Speaker, is that the member is making an assumption that may not be true.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will there be sufficient operating funds given to this hospital so that an additional 140 beds will actually translate into an increase in capacity?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, any health facility expansion or capacity increase in this province is part of the annual budget of Alberta Health Services. I think this member was here when we passed the budget for our department. Alberta Health Services will be receiving some half a billion dollars in additional funding this year, and they will be charged to spend it accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we are getting mixed messages here. One day we are expanding the health care system. Another day we are cutting back.

To the minister again. The Peter Lougheed and the prostate laser are examples of how out of touch you and Alberta Health Services are with the citizens of Calgary. When will you begin to listen to what Albertans are telling you that they need?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the only mixed messages that consistently come into this House are from that group over there, who one day want to spend and the next day want to save. They have to determine whether they're savers or spenders. You can't suck and blow at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mental Health Services

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents know all too well that just because your children have become adults does not mean that your role as a parent is over. This is the case for several of my constituents in Edmonton-Decore who must deal every day with adult children who live independently but suffer from mental illness. The situation becomes very difficult and cumbersome when their adult independent children go off their medications. These parents often feel powerless to help their loved ones and are concerned that they do not have access to the right supports for their children with mental illness. My first question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister please explain what his department has done to support treatment and prevention of mental illness?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear that we need to ensure that we do a better job of treating mental illness as part of the overall health delivery system. You know, this province can be very proud of what we have brought forward in the last couple of years. We introduced a provincial mental health plan a couple of years ago and, most recently, a children's mental health plan. We've made amendments to the Mental Health Act. I think that more important is not plans and acts but what's really happening.

I had the opportunity last week with the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka to tour the Centennial Centre in Ponoka, Mr. Speaker. This is a world-class facility that this province has put in place that doesn't institutionalize individuals with mental illness. It's a world-class treatment facility that allows these patients to get back into the community and be productive members of society.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the same minister. Can the minister share with us at this time and explain what a community treatment order is and how this will help all those suffering from mental illness and their families?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the community treatment order is another tool, I guess, that was brought in as part of the Mental Health Amendment Act in, I think, 2007. It's a tool to encourage compliance so that individuals with severe and persistent mental illness are admitted but then are also monitored and given options in terms of when they may or may not choose to take their medication. It doesn't force treatment upon individuals but simply encourages those who are on medication to comply and to continue to be productive members of society and, quite frankly, eases some of the burden that is placed on family members.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the same minister. Currently what supports and resources do families of the mentally ill have available to them?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I mentioned, the community treatment order is clearly one of those tools that families do have as an option. But, you know, we do have some, I think, 16 designated mental health facilities around the province and almost a hundred community health clinics throughout the province. These provide mental health intake and assessments and diagnosis and, to some degree, some treatment services. Then, of course, we have our more expanded services, that I referred to, such as the Centennial Centre and, certainly, Alberta Hospital Edmonton and others across the province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Children's Services Workforce Complaints

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ability for employees to feel that their opinions and concerns are respected is one of the most important aspects in ensuring a satisfied and productive workforce. This is especially important when the staff involved work with vulnerable children and may feel the need to speak in the child's best interest as opposed to that of their department. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: will the minister table the current internal complaints policy that is being used for issues staff have with both human resources and case-specific concerns?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have several mechanisms in place in which to take a look at workforce issues and workload issues. I can tell you that we have managers and supervisors on an ongoing basis that are always taking a look and monitoring workloads as well as a provincial committee that works with our unions. I think there are all kinds of mechanisms to take a look at what you're talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You didn't answer the question about tabling those policies. Hopefully that will follow.

Will the minister answer whether there is any whistle-blower protection within her own ministry for staff who feel that there is an issue that needs to be raised yet fear reprisal. If not, can the minister explain why this necessary protection for Children and Youth Services staff has not been implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I would say that I think we do have lots of mechanisms in place. I would always encourage staff to come forward to their manager or supervisors with any concerns.

Mr. Chase: Unfortunately, lots of mechanisms in place – without referring to specific mechanisms, which I've asked you to table, we're just talking generically, and I'm looking for specifics.

Since early March you've had in your possession the report regarding the Child and Youth Advocate. You've been asked on many occasions, including yesterday by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to table this report, and the answer has always been that soon it will be released. Will the minister finally commit to tabling this document by the end of business today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just reiterate what I said yesterday. It is true that I have a copy of the report. We have been working through a government response that I've mentioned in the last couple weeks. Just a reminder to the House that that response does have to go through an approval process. I can tell you that we're very close to the end, and it is my intention to release it shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Automobile Insurance Rates

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Insurance companies want to jack up car insurance rates by 40 per cent. The finance minister says that 20 per cent might be reasonable if the cap is struck down by the courts. The notion is ridiculous, and it's a gouge. The government promised rates that would meet or beat those in other western provinces. I guess we can chalk that up to another broken promise. Does the finance minister really expect Albertans to cough up a 20 per cent insurance hike from companies that are making billions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fear factor of significant increments based on experience we had some five years ago would suggest that rates might increase if, in fact, the cap was removed. We have to wait until the court case validates whether or not the manner in which we've pursued this is going to be successful. It's been suggested to me that if we win, well, there'll probably be an appeal from the other side and vice versa. I don't think we should prematurely examine and make any finite decisions on this. I think it's speculative. It was suggested very strongly, certainly, by our experience in years past that we would have to be careful so that we didn't have significant cost increases.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the 20 per cent figure was a number that the minister used just a few minutes ago in question period here. Drivers don't want to hear about that. Some have lost their jobs, their wages have been cut back, and they can't afford to spend another penny on inflated car insurance.

In Saskatchewan, where they have public insurance, they're proposing a 4 per cent hike in fees. Here private companies are lobbying for 40 per cent. It's a gouge, Mr. Speaker. When will the finance minister stop the gouging and stop breaking promises to ensure that Alberta's insurance rates are as low as or lower than any other western Canadian province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For one thing, if the hon. member retrieves the Blues, he'll find that I was not the person that talked about 20 per cent in the Legislature.

The other thing. Although you can cherry-pick and cite other jurisdictions and say, "They look better; they sound cheaper" and all the rest of it, I would be very surprised if the hon. member would advocate for something that would give less value for the injury. I mean, our focus is what kind of injury is sustained, what the person should receive in fair compensation. In Alberta we believe that we

should be compensated for pain and suffering. Other jurisdictions don't always do that. So you can't examine things, a complex question, in a simple question-and-answer period and get a satisfactory conclusion on this. We are defending Alberta ratepayers, Alberta people who are consumers and buy auto insurance. We're doing a good job, and I think the public trusts us for that.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, with respect, if the minister can't see how unacceptable this is, then we have a bigger problem than we thought. The fact that the minister even feels comfortable discussing a 20 per cent rate hike is disturbing, and it just shows how out of touch this government is with Alberta families. When will the finance minister either stand up to the insurance companies once and for all or admit that public auto insurance is the only solution?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the risk of being redundant, I will say once again that I have not been the person discussing any particular percentage that might seem reasonable. I have been the person that spoke just moments ago in question period and outside this Chamber. The suggestion of the media was: did we support a 40 per cent increase? No. And we didn't support a 37 per cent rate increase last year. What did they get last year? Five per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is missing the point here. The rate board adjudicates based on the information they receive. We receive that information from the rate board, and then we respond.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are about 65,000 children in our province who are registered to receive financial support through enforced child maintenance orders. I want to know that these children and the children who live in my constituency specifically are receiving the support they deserve. My first question goes to the Minister of Justice. Does the province have anything in place to monitor child support orders?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Department of Justice we have a very successful maintenance enforcement program that has really built and grown in the last 20 years. We want to make sure that not only are we able to enforce court orders and agreements that parents have come to or been directed to pay, but we also want to talk publicly about the fact that people have an obligation to pay support for children, who need to have love, commitment, and the support of both parents, whether they're living together or not.

Mr. Prins: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's all well and good, but we know that there are still parents in Alberta not paying child support. So what tactics is the province going to use to get these people to meet their obligations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The maintenance enforcement program over the years and with the co-operation of the courts has developed a series of approaches that they can use once a court order has been granted and registered with maintenance

enforcement in order to ensure that child support orders are paid. If people do not pay those orders, then we're able to put in place a number of collection procedures, which include seizing their bank account, seizing personal assets, garnishing wages, places liens on property, to ensure that we're able to collect money from people that have an obligation to pay.

Mr. Speaker, last week we announced the Help Us Find website, which unfortunately highlights people who have made very few payments in support of their children, and we're going to make sure that we encourage the public to help us to hold those people to their obligations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I have a constituent with two young children whose ex-husband lives on a reserve near me, and he refuses to pay his court-ordered maintenance. My final question is also for the Minister of Justice. How is the maintenance enforcement program going to work with those of my constituents whose ex-spouses live on reserves?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So much of the work that we do at maintenance enforcement relies on the fact that we are able to collect debts and orders from people that haven't fulfilled their obligations. Now, this does present a particular challenge for us for people who work or have property on reserves which are First Nation. They fall under the jurisdiction of the Indian Act; therefore, we have to take a different approach with them. We work very closely with Indian affairs in order to ensure that information is provided to bands to enforce those orders, and we have had some success. We also work very closely with – and I know the Minister of Aboriginal Relations has been very vocal on this issue – and we have had very good support from band leaders. We think that there might be other opportunities to explore with respect to the responsibilities that the federal government has and will be pursuing those.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Sour Gas Levels at Mildred Lake

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hydrogen sulphide, also known as sour gas, is highly toxic and could lead to eye irritation, sore throat, cough, nausea, and shortness of breath, and that's at its very, very lowest levels. It's average annual concentration at Mildred Lake in northern Alberta has increased 135 per cent over the last 10 years. The air in Wood Buffalo went from exceeding the standard 13 times five years ago to 350 times this last year. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. How does the minister explain exceeding the standard 350 times? What the heck is going on?

2:30

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of the monitoring of air comes down to determining what are the levels at which the various operators are allowed to emit and determining when exceedances occur. The point at which the allowable limit is set is far less than the point at which there would be any risk to humans. The member is pointing out a serious concern that we have, a concern that we have taken up with the operators out there. We'll be doing everything that we can to bring that under control, but I can assure the member that these exceedances do not equate to human health risk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thanks very much. This morning the level of sour gas at Mildred Lake was twice as high as Alberta's standard. To the minister: with consistent exceedances why isn't the government forcing compliance?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we are holding the operators accountable. I must reiterate yet one more time: there is a difference between an exceedance on an operating permit and human health risk. I can assure this member, I can assure all Albertans that should there be a point at which our air monitoring indicates that there is a health risk, we would be dealing with it in a decidedly different way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Well, Mr. Minister, it's 350 times, and it is sour gas.

My final question to the minister is: why isn't the sour gas monitored in Fort MacKay, which is the closest populated area to Mildred Lake?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we rely on a series of monitoring stations, some of which are permanent and some of which are mobile. The member knows perfectly well that we do have on occasion the ability to move mobile monitoring into locations that we feel are in need of monitoring. If the member has reason to believe that that mobile monitoring should be taking place, I would ask her to bring it to my attention.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Alberta Arts Days

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My family, like a lot of Alberta families, really values the arts. In our family for the last 10 years we've had an annual arts week, and we have a film festival. Family Day weekend we had 170 people at our house. So I was really delighted to hear that the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit announced Arts Day last year, and now we're even more delighted to hear that it's being expanded to a three-day event. I do have a few questions for him, though. In this time of economic uncertainty, of course, we're always mindful of costs, so I'm wondering if the minister can give some assurance that he will be prudent with the spending as we engage on this expanded event?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's always important to remember that we're in tough economic times, and we should always be fiscally prudent. But you know what? We have to keep on living. The air that I breathe right now is full of oxygen. We don't take that out of it. We don't take arts and culture out of our province, which shows such great diversity and shows great benefit for us. Right now in tough economic times we need a diversion. We need to look at the arts to help us escape for at least an hour or two the drudgery and the problems that we encounter in our daily lives. Also, it's a great opportunity for us as a province to showcase our tremendous artists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. Again for the minister. Last year I know there was a provincially organized event that took place in Calgary.

As a rural MLA I really want to stress that the arts and culture are alive and well all over Alberta and certainly in rural Alberta. I'm wondering what the minister has done in terms of engaging the rest of the province in these events.

Mr. Blackett: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, last year we had over 30 different communities – large, small, and medium – across the province participate. Whether it was Barrhead, whether it was Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Cardston, Banff, Didsbury, Three Hills, you name it, they were involved in it. This year, instead of just focusing on Calgary, we're going to be in Fort McMurray, we're going to be in Edmonton, we're going to be in Olds, we're going to be in Calgary, and we're going to be in Medicine Hat. We're going to cover all five regions of the province, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Olson: Well, I understand that last year schools and libraries, in particular, felt as though they might have missed an opportunity, so I'm wondering if you're doing anything this year to make sure that schools and libraries get the opportunity to take part in this event.

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, an excellent question. We want to make sure that this is a group of days that all Albertans feel they can participate in, so with the Minister of Education we're involving all K to 12 students this year, whether it's drawing a picture, writing a poem or a story, participating in a musical or a play or in a sports and recreational activity. We include that as part of culture as well. Also, we have our libraries, which are a gateway for our new immigrants. We are going to utilize them. We're going to make all of our provincially owned facilities through arts and culture available free of charge to all Albertans so that they get a chance to have a little slice of culture.

Taser Testing

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, prior to Christmas a national news organization reported that certain tasers were firing outside the limits that the manufacturer was guaranteeing. In Alberta we found that we had some of these tasers in use, and the Solicitor General organized for some of them to be tested. The last time I asked this question, there were still some of these tasers out on the street that hadn't been tested. I'm just following up on that. Have all of those tasers that were scheduled to be tested now had that procedure completed on them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To answer the question, we are anticipating that all of our tasers in this province will be tested by the end of June.

In regard to the recent article, I believe that the RCMP had 249 of the earlier models, the M26s, in Alberta. They've all been pulled off. In the remaining police forces in the province there were only 15 of them that were being used. They have been tested. The ones that proved to be good are back in service. The ones that weren't have been pulled. Any that have not been tested have also been pulled. So it's looked after here in Alberta due to our proactive testing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The follow-up question – and I believe that the Solicitor General indicated this in estimates

– is: will you be committing to a regular testing regime of all tasers within this province, and if so, when can we expect this to begin?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, an excellent question. Yes, we did commit to regular testing. We're putting the final finishes to that very quickly here. We'll likely start off with a program where we will test them probably fairly frequently. Depending on those test results, we'll re-evaluate the program as time goes on. We hope to have that in place fairly soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question for the Solicitor General. It's my understanding through some of the research that I've done that the RCMP have a little more stringent guidelines on the use of tasers. People have commented on this, saying: why don't we just simply adopt the RCMP guidelines to maybe improve on the standards already used in Alberta?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, we did a thorough review of our guidelines a little over a year ago. We did put them in place, and they are probably the most stringent in Canada. Our guidelines are pretty much in agreement with the new guidelines that the RCMP came up with a few months ago.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Thorhild Landfill

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a landfill being proposed in my constituency, in the county of Thorhild. The status of this landfill is dependent on rezoning hearings by the county. Some of my constituents are looking for clarification regarding this process. I would like to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why won't the province get involved in discussions on sensitive projects such as this?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, rezoning is a planning and development issue, and decisions on these matters rest with the municipality. It is up to the local council to make local decisions such as surface development. If I can say, there is a process in place, and the decision on the application has not yet been made. So the process needs to be completed.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in the event that the rezoning is successful, what are the next steps in the process, and what role does the province play, if any, in the evaluation and decision-making for this municipal project?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have provided a framework for an accountable process under the Municipal Government Act. Again, I want to repeat that the decision to amend the land-use bylaw is the responsibility of the municipal council. If rezoning is approved, the next step would be to apply for a development permit from the municipality. I will say that if it's granted, then the development permit can be appealed through the local subdivision and development appeal board. The third step would involve obtaining of approval from Alberta Environment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the concerns my constituents have shared with me focus on the possible environmental impact of the landfill. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Environment. What can the minister do to assure my constituents that this landfill won't harm the environment in our region, and what role does his department play, if any, in the approvals or oversight of projects like this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department plays a significant role in the approval process for any landfill. There's a comprehensive, rigorous approval process. But I want to emphasize to the member that it is the department, not the minister. The minister stays out of these kinds of decisions for, I think, a very appropriate reason. These things are supposed to be based upon environmental, scientific information, not politics. Eventually this project would require an Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act approval and possibly even a Water Act approval. I can assure the member that we would review carefully and ensure that the strict guidelines are met, that compliance is assured, and that impacts in the area would be lessened. Again, as the Minister of Municipal Affairs has already pointed out, this project has not yet been applied for, and we are awaiting an application. At this point there is nothing that we will be doing on this project.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Children's Wish Foundation of Canada

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year, sadly, thousands of Canadian children between the ages of 3 and 17 are diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Granting wishes to children diagnosed with high-risk, life-threatening illnesses is the primary business of the Children's Wish Foundation of Canada, which this year celebrates its 25th anniversary. As I read this statement today, Children's Wish is in the process of granting its 15,000th wish to a child in a community somewhere in Canada.

The magic of a wish provides children and their families with an opportunity to share the joy of a special experience and an escape from the day-to-day challenges of the illness. For a child whose wish is about to be granted, the pain and discomfort of their illness somehow becomes more bearable. For many the excitement of planning and anticipating their dream has a dramatic effect on their healing. I commend Children's Wish for their commitment to bringing wishes to life for these courageous youngsters and for supporting families during the most difficult of circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, Children's Wish is a symbol of hope and a chance to provide children and families with special memories. I invite all Members of the Legislative Assembly to acknowledge Children's Wish for the important work they have done with 1,300 families right here in Alberta and the work they continue to do with families across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Penbrooke Meadows Community Cleanup

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Sunday I partnered with the Calgary East Church of the Nazarene and the South American Pentecostal Church for their Faith in Action event. Instead of going to church, both congregations along with other volunteers spent the day cleaning up the community of Penbrooke Meadows, the community in which I was born and now so proudly represent.

We had 98 volunteers out who picked up garbage from the streets and back alleys, helped residents with yardwork, picked up discarded electronics and other refuse from residents' homes, provided bins for the free use of the community, and cleaned graffiti. By the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we filled four garbage trucks with refuse and collected over eight bins of electronics to be recycled. A number of residents also received help with their yardwork.

The day was capped off with a joint service involving the two congregations. Mr. Speaker, it was a touching service. Pastor Ricardo's kind words of prayer for me left me speechless and, yes, even a little teary-eyed. I would like to thank pastors Douglas Webb and Ricardo Escobar for offering their hand in friendship to me and for taking the initiative to organize such a great project. I hope we make this an annual occurrence.

This event was about service in the community, Mr. Speaker. It was about people from different walks of life uniting in service, uniting in our common pursuit to make a positive contribution to the world around us. When we unite in service, we bring down the many artificial barriers that separate humankind, and this project did just that.

This cleanup is a step towards building a stronger community. I hope this initiative inspires other residents of Penbrooke Meadows to make a difference. Specifically, I hope we can find more households to adopt a park, a street, an alley to keep clean, Mr. Speaker. I encourage them to do so, and I thank the congregations.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Victoria Settlement

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, May 23, there was a very special event in my constituency of Athabasca-Redwater. The signing ceremony for the commemorative integrity statement for the Victoria district national historic site of Canada and the Victoria Settlement provincial historic site. This commemorative integrity statement outlines the planning, managing, operating, reporting, and remedial action for the Victoria Settlement in Alberta. This designation will help ensure that this area is preserved for future generations to enjoy.

The Victoria Settlement was first established by a Methodist mission in 1862. Then in 1864 the Hudson's Bay Company built their trading fort nearby, which is now Alberta's oldest building still standing on its original site. By 1900 Scottish, Métis, and Ukrainian families, including the forefathers of our Premier, began populating the area and established a school and a hospital, and the area has been slowly growing ever since. The Victoria district settlement is one of the jewels in my constituency from both a cultural and historical standpoint and is an example of the rich heritage in Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Speaker, this site is one of a number of sites in my constituency which hold significance historically for Alberta. Athabasca Landing on the Athabasca River was the gateway to the north and the transportation hub for the Hudson's Bay Company. The Athabasca Landing Trail, the first registered road in Alberta, played a vital role in the development of northern Alberta. Amber Valley,

which was one of Canada's earliest black settlements, is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the dedicated volunteers of the Victoria Home Guard Historical Society and the Smoky Lake Heritage Board and volunteers Graham Dalziel, Pauline Feniak, Noreen Easterbrook, and Joyce Peats, who all worked so hard to have this site designated a national historic site by the government of Canada. My constituents and myself also wish to thank the Premier and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations for attending this very special ceremony a couple of weeks ago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure as the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo to present here this afternoon to the Alberta Legislature a comment by over 450 citizens encouraging the government to promote municipal integrated fire and emergency medical services throughout the province with one administration and not a duplication of overhead.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

2:50

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona I'd like to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta believe that public education should be balanced, scientific and encourage critical thought, and petition the Legislative Assembly to amend Bill 44, Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 by striking out section 9.

The petition has 226 signatures, and that is in addition to approximately a thousand signatures we presented yesterday.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice that at the appropriate time I will be rising on a point of privilege concerning the May 26, 2009, ruling of the Ethics Commissioner, which excluded me from participating in debate on Bill 43. This decision unfairly and inappropriately prevented me as an MLA from fulfilling my duties.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a series of tablings. The first is the program for the 50th anniversary graduation at William Aberhart high school, located in Calgary-Varsity. L'école Banff Trail had a similar 50th anniversary celebration just around the corner. It's a feeder elementary.

Secondly, I am tabling a follow-up e-mail from Alison Ainsworth expressing concern about the lack of government support for her severely autistic seven-year-old daughter. The letter is addressed to the Member for Red Deer-North, in whose constituency the Ainsworths are now residing. Alison appeals:

The current and updated documentation, as provided by the family to FSCD, states clearly by every one of her current specialist team

of more than 20, that my child's behaviour surrounding safety, sleep, and anxiety resulting in significant self-harm to her hands, arms and torso, needs to be supported by psychology.

I would like to table a letter regarding the potential damaging effects of noise not only in the wilderness but also in residential areas. David Sulz writes, "The noise created by off-road vehicles is as destructive, if not more, to wildlife and to the enjoyment of wilderness areas by Albertans."

Mr. Speaker, today I'm tabling two e-mails received in my office from Calgarians who express their concerns about the decision to delist gender reassignment surgeries. They're worried that it will end up costing the government more in the long run. Allison Leonhardt writes, "I ask you to please bring up reinstating funding for Gender Reassignment Surgery." Willow Brocke writes:

Those of us who are mental health professionals in the constituency, who are already overwhelmed and under-resourced in treating mental health conditions that are not curable with surgical intervention – are counting on you to be wise and do the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, I am tabling three letters and e-mails received in my office from Albertans who are disappointed and angry about this government's decision to eliminate the Wild Rose Foundation. The letters were received from Alison Steward, Dr. Robert Dickson, and Robin Doherty.

Mr. Speaker, I am tabling three letters and e-mails received by my office expressing support for Motion 503 and urging the government to follow through on the will of this Legislature and eliminate provincial achievement testing. The correspondence was received from Jackie Seidel, Elisha Danielson, and Andrea Gough.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table four letters from individuals concerned with section 11.1 of Bill 44. The letters have been received from Tyler Gschaid, Scott Rowed, Cheryl Zelmer, and Julia Smith, who basically summarize the concerns. They are asking, "How can an understanding of other people and of beliefs other than one's own be harmful to Alberta's youth?"

Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling six letters and e-mails received by my office from Albertans who are angry about the government's decision to increase fees for seniors' drug programs. This correspondence was received from Donovan and Eunice Williams, Ron Summach, Craig Thorn, Janice McNabb, Stewart Taylor, and Dennis Sanders.

I'm also tabling 13 letters expressing grave concerns over the delisting of chiropractic services. These came from Esther Davidchuk, Roger Zwack, Fernand Theunissen, Brian Donaldson, Mariola Kolanos, Christa Duclos, Jaimie Jessop, Dorothy Harrison, Don Findlay, Freya MacLean, Robert Stephenson, James Nielsen, Lina Gareau, and Veronica Petri.

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling my final tabling, the names of 284 Calgarians who ask the government to ensure podiatry remains covered by Alberta health care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to table five copies of a special booklet entitled *Inspiring People: 2008 Aboriginal Review*, which essentially outlines Syncrude's aboriginal review and their leadership role in the employment area, education and training, business development, community development, and the environment. Syncrude is truly a leader with aboriginal communities, and I want to thank them for this and provide it for the emolument of all members here.

Thank you.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Member for Stony Plain I stand today to table five copies of a letter from Esther

Gehlert regarding the unfortunate death of Lorraine Adolph at an Alberta hospital.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a cease-and-desist order to the hon. minister of health urging the hon. minister to "cease and desist from further dismantling of our public health care structure," and it's signed by people from Edmonton.

I have one more tabling. In reference to my question earlier today this is the chief executive officer report to the Alberta Health Services Board, March 2009, and I would urge all hon. members to have a read through this document. It's quite interesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of *Travel Alberta Stay*, the summer festival and event guide, which features Jena Krystofiak dancing at Edmonton heritage days. I had the pleasure of introducing the lovely and talented young Edmontonian in the Assembly earlier today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today that, unfortunately, I couldn't get through yesterday.

The Speaker: Well, we just about can't get through today either, so keep 'er going.

Ms Pastoor: Five copies of a letter from Tyler Gschaid fully outlining that Bill 44 finally was obeying a federal court order but that section 11 was regressive thinking and, therefore, flawed in this bill.

The second one is five copies of a letter from Kathleen Shigemi, who suggests that Bill 44 "flies in the face of the new Social Studies curriculum that focuses on multiple perspectives, and includes religious perspectives on a variety of historical and current events."

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, return to order of the Assembly MR 8, asked for by Mr. Mason on April 6, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta, response to Written Question 4, asked for by Mr. Mason on March 16, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act the Workers' Compensation Board Alberta 2008 annual report and return to order of the Assembly MR 10, asked for by Ms Notley on April 20, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Tarchuk, Minister of Children and Youth Services, response to Written Question 8, asked for by Ms Notley on April 6, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, response to questions raised by Ms Blakeman, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, during Oral Question Period on May 26, 2009, regarding the Alberta energy efficiency rebate program.

The Speaker: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Merci, M. le Président. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly two friends who are visiting us in the members' gallery today. Marie-Laure Polydore of Edmonton is originally from Guyane, or French Guiana. Rêmi Ogouma is visiting from Ottawa, and she is originally from Benin, West Africa. These ladies are woefully trying to help me improve my French. I would ask that our guests rise – and I wish them bienvenue – and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: On the point of privilege?

The Speaker: Absolutely.

Privilege

Ethics Commissioner Advice on Conflicts of Interest

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pursuing a point of privilege under Standing Order 15. I'm pursuing this privilege on the grounds that I as an elected member of this Assembly was prevented from carrying out my duties during both debate and voting and, further, was informed that I could not raise issues in question period. There is no more serious breach than preventing a member from carrying out his or her duties to constituents.

3:00

I am pursuing this privilege against the Ethics Commissioner, who, as an officer of the Legislative Assembly, is a creature of the Assembly and accountable to the Assembly. Here are the facts and the timelines that go with it, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to do this with care.

On the afternoon of Monday, May 25, the Speaker read into the record of this Assembly a cautionary letter concerning Bill 43 from the Ethics Commissioner, which is recorded for everyone to read on pages 1206 and 1207 of *Hansard*.

Second, prompted by actions of the Speaker, by your reading the letter into *Hansard*, I phoned the Ethics Commissioner to clarify the situation regarding my in-laws owning a small herd of cattle.

Third, on Tuesday, May 26, the Ethics Commissioner wrote to me saying that I must recuse myself from debating or voting on Bill 43 because my father-in-law owns a small herd of cattle. I will table that correspondence.

Fourth, on Wednesday, May 27, in the evening the debate and vote on Bill 43 in Committee of the Whole was pursued and recorded in *Hansard*. Bill 43 passed through Committee of the Whole. I did not attend as per the ruling of the Ethics Commissioner. No one in the Assembly at the time identified a conflict of interest.

Five, the following morning, Thursday, May 28, I was considering asking a question relating to Bill 43, so I phoned the Ethics Commissioner to ask if I could in fact ask questions in question period relating to Bill 43. He advised me not to ask questions in question period relating to that issue. In the course of the phone call I noted

that *Hansard* showed a number of government MLAs from the previous evening who appeared to have farm connections similar to or closer than mine participating in debate on Bill 43 and, indeed, voting.

Six, on Thursday, May 28, in the afternoon I wrote the Ethics Commissioner asking for written clarification of his ruling that I could not participate in question period relating to Bill 43. I will table that correspondence, too, Mr. Speaker.

Seventh, on Monday, June 1, after morning phone calls from the Ethics Commissioner indicating he had made mistaken rulings, my office received at 1438 hours, 2:38 in the afternoon, a letter from his office reversing his decision of May 26 and, to his credit, apologizing. I will also table that correspondence.

Mr. Speaker, there is, I believe, little question that I was blocked from fulfilling my duties as an MLA. I am the opposition critic responsible for Bill 43, and as such I had had extensive written and verbal correspondence on the bill. As you know and everyone here knows, it's a contentious piece of legislation with deeply held views on both sides, exactly the kind of thing that should be hashed out here.

As the critic I had acquired a good understanding of Bill 43. I had asked questions concerning it in question period before it came to the Assembly in Committee of the Whole. I had prepared a number of amendments to introduce during Committee of the Whole. I had a significant list of stakeholders across the province who were counting on me to raise their concerns. In short, I had given a serious commitment to fulfilling my duties as an MLA and as a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. I was not able to do these things because of the rulings of the Ethics Commissioner. I scrambled to make do in the best way possible through such things as having amendments made in other members' names, but it is clear my rights as an MLA were infringed.

When I read *Hansard* the day after Bill 43 passed through Committee of the Whole, I was surprised to see that a number of government members who may have been in a similar position to me participated in debate and voted on Bill 43. One of the first questions that came to my mind was: am I being held to a different standard than government MLAs? Mr. Speaker, that can be a serious concern for opposition MLAs in a province where one party has been completely dominant for four decades.

However, Mr. Speaker, the concern I want to emphasize today is about the rights of MLAs, all of us, to fully participate in this Assembly and about the general lack of understanding of conflict of interest that led to my rights as an MLA being infringed.

Let me deal first and ever so briefly with the rights of MLAs to fully participate in this Assembly, which is, of course, crucial to a matter of privilege. I'm concerned that these rights are being increasingly curtailed and that the current ruling is not the only one to do this. In recent weeks MLAs have been cautioned by the Ethics Commissioner about participating in debate on matters relating to teachers' pensions if they are themselves teachers or have family members who are teachers. A number of MLAs dutifully recused themselves from debates and voting even though the Conflicts of Interest Act says that a private interest does not include a matter that is of general application or that affects a person as one of a broad class of the public. This is section 1 of the act, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware of at least one other ruling, this one from the previous Ethics Commissioner, that was startling in its effects on my rights as an MLA. I will read a portion of that into the record. This stems from the fall of 2007. It arose during the debates on royalties. As it turns out, through inheritances from homesteading my family, my wife, owns a fraction of a per cent of the mineral right, so in the course of royalties I wrote the then Ethics Commissioner. I said:

Dear Mr. Commissioner:

As I have indicated and filed previously with your office, my wife owns a partial interest in a freehold mineral rights point on some farmland in Alberta. This interest is generating some income for her from oil and gas production. She inherited the interest, and it goes back to her family's time as homesteaders.

Given the current debates on royalties, including discussion of freehold mineral rights, I want to ask your advice on my involvement in this issue. Given that there are thousands of people who own such rights, it seems to me this is a program or policy of general and widespread application and that I should be able to participate freely in the public debate. Can you please advise me as soon as possible.

The response was startling, and I think all of us need to be concerned about this as MLAs. This is dated October 19, 2007, from Donald Hamilton, at the time Ethics Commissioner.

Dr. Taft:

Thank you for your e-mail requesting my advice on your ability to participate in matters relating to the royalty review in Alberta.

To be consistent with advice I have given to other MLAs in similar circumstances . . .

I don't know who, but I think we need to be very alert to this as a group of MLAs.

. . . my advice is that you do not participate in the debates or discussions on the royalty review.

I do appreciate that there are a number of citizens who hold mineral rights but their circumstances may vary and not all may take the same position on the issue of royalties. For that reason, it is my advice that there is a private interest and that it is not a matter of general application.

Donald Hamilton

Ethics Commissioner

I was Leader of the Opposition. This was the largest issue in the province at the time, and I had just been told I could not participate. I was startled. I sought legal opinion, and I can tell you that counsel was startled, too.

I wrote back. I won't go through all of this, but I pointed out to the Ethics Commissioner, and I quote from my correspondence:

In the entire 105 page report of the royalty review panel there are just two sentences concerning freehold mineral [rights]: "Freehold Mineral Tax: That a flat 6% tax apply regardless of level of production. Retain the base exemption of \$1600."

In 105 pages that's all that the report addressed.

So, Mr. Speaker, my point in reading this is that the events and rulings of the last week are the culmination of what I think is a very worrisome trend, and that's why I'm bringing this to the floor of the Assembly for all members to consider. The ruling of this commissioner in recent days brings to a head a trend that has been building from the time of the previous commissioner. It is a trend that I believe is misguided and misinformed. It is based on a wrong-headed approach to conflict of interest. And if it continues to develop, it will not only erode the fundamental privilege of MLAs; it will become a recipe for paralysis of the Legislature.

3:10

It is also important to note that these decisions by ethics commissioners create a false impression that this Assembly is being tough on conflict of interest. In fact, I was not in conflict of interest with Bill 43. I should have had every right to debate, to vote, and to ask questions in question period. It's because Bill 43 did not create a private interest. It applied to a broad class of the public, numbering in the tens of thousands, and it was of general application. The same logic applies to the teachers' pensions issue, and it also applies to the matter of freehold mineral rights, each of which apply to tens of thousands of people.

Mr. Speaker, in asking you to find a point of privilege, you may consider what is the remedy. After all, if there's no feasible remedy, then why bother? Because I have sought views on this in the last 24 hours quite broadly, I've been informed from very credible sources that in many jurisdictions in this country this could lead to a resignation by the Ethics Commissioner, but I don't believe that's necessary. I do believe we need to consider other, more constructive remedies. In the long term these could include amending the Conflicts of Interest Act to set a minimum qualification for the commissioner, such as having a background in the legal profession. But, more urgently, the remedy I would seek is to have the commissioner prepare an in-depth working paper for study by all MLAs and, of course, by the Ethics Commissioner himself on the nature of conflict of interest and on standards of best practice.

Ironically, until we as an Assembly and the commissioner understand conflict of interest better, we think we're being tough on the issue when we are simply being misguided. On the one hand, we carefully recuse ourselves from issues that are not conflicts of interest under the Conflicts of Interest Act, and then on the other hand, we stand by while any number of people appointed to government boards fall short of best practice and in some cases are in obvious conflict. Over and over this Assembly passes legislation or approves appointments that do not meet standards of best practice.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years the corporate world has gone through a dramatic improvement in standards concerning conflict of interest. Part of that process was a systematic, industry-wide process of education for people in the corporate worlds. It is time this Assembly followed suit. It would be a wonderful remedy to this privilege if, in fact, it led to the Ethics Commissioner undertaking a serious education program for all MLAs concerning best practice on conflict of interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member.

Is there an additional member who would like to be recognized on this subject matter? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question of privilege that's been raised is a very serious matter. Well, any question of privilege is a very serious matter, but in this case it involves a question being raised against an officer of the Legislature on a particularly critical issue, and I would want to indicate that I think the issue itself is a critical issue. The question of the definition of private interest and when an interest is not a private interest because it is a matter of general application to the public is a very critical issue for many of us. Bill 25 has certainly raised that issue for members of the House, as has Bill 43.

The critical piece – I'm using the word "critical" too many times, so I'll find another word. The real question here for a question of privilege is not the issue itself, which is important. As the Speaker you will know that as Government House Leader I have approached the Speaker and the Attorney General, the Speaker to act on behalf of all members of the House and the Attorney General to act on behalf of members of Executive Council and people appointed by Executive Council, to approach the Ethics Commissioner to deal with this broader issue of private interest and general application because it's a very critical issue to members of the House doing their work. However, it should be clear in all of the expressions that the hon. member raised and in the letters that we received that the Ethics Commissioner provides advice, and it's up to each and every one of us as members of the House to determine our participation.

When I excluded myself from the House with respect to Bill 25 because of the advice of the Ethics Commissioner, I specifically said: I'm excluding myself because the Ethics Commissioner believes that I have a conflict of interest. In fact, I did not believe,

myself, that I had a conflict of interest. I believe that the law of general application would have protected me in terms of participation in that debate, but it wasn't an issue that I was prepared to make a point of at that particular time. It is an issue that I think is important and I think should be addressed in an important and appropriate way.

But that's not a question of privilege of the House because the question of the hon. member being able to do his duty is one that he has to determine. Every member of this House has to determine when they should be present and when they shouldn't be present, and only each of us as an individual, knowing our personal circumstances, is in the position to make that decision. We should and we can ask for advice, and we do ask for advice, and when the Ethics Commissioner provides advice, it is prudent to follow that advice until, if one disagrees with the advice, one can get it changed.

The issue of whether or not an individual member is precluded from doing his duty. If the doors are locked and they can't get in, that might be a question of privilege. If one's character is besmirched in an inappropriate way to the extent that they no longer can carry the trust of their members, that might be a question of privilege. But the question of whether one can attend and participate and vote on an issue, whether they have a question of conflict or not, is a personal question for members to determine themselves. They can take advice on that, and I would quote the letters that I have. I know the hon. member referred to several letters. There are two letters here. In one of them it says, "It is my advice that you may participate in further debate," and the other is, "It is my opinion that the term . . . would include that of your father-in-law and that you must therefore recuse yourself." "It is my opinion": that's what's being asked for here.

I don't want to diminish in any way the importance of the issue. I think it's a very important issue because I think members ought to be able to participate fully in every matter that comes before the House unless there is an expressed private interest. But this is not a matter which should be determined by referral to the privileges and elections committee for some determination as to whether the Ethics Commissioner has or has not impeded the interests of a private member. I would say it is not that and should not be that for this particular reason: if the House was to do that, it would undermine, in fact it would eviscerate, the role of the Ethics Commissioner in its entirety because if we were to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has the floor.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question, and I would ask that the hon. member . . .

The Speaker: Come on. Keep coming.

Mr. Hancock: I will. I lost my train of thought there because of the chirping from Calgary-Buffalo, which was entirely inappropriate.

The point that I was making is that we cannot eviscerate the role of the Ethics Commissioner by having it open to the House determining a question of privilege on the basis of any ruling that we might disagree with. That would undermine the role of the Ethics Commissioner entirely. That would put every ruling of the Ethics Commissioner with respect to the participation of a member in question.

When I say ruling, I want to put it in the context that I said earlier. We have the privilege of being able to approach the Ethics Commissioner as individual members with the benefit of privacy to outline our personal circumstances and ask for advice as to whether our personal circumstances would put us in a conflict. We get that advice, and then we either take that advice, which is the prudent

thing to do, or do not take that advice, as we wish, but it is our decision to do that. It is not, in my view, appropriate for this House to undermine that role of the Ethics Commissioner by second-guessing, by in fact saying: you gave me wrong advice, and that interfered with my ability to do my job. If you believe the Ethics Commissioner has given you wrong advice, then look to somewhere else to get advice, and then act on the benefit of your conscience and your understanding of your position. That is the position that I think we need to be in while understanding the very important issue that's been raised about how far, how broadly we want to have interpreted this question of private interest or general public application.

3:20

I think the hon. member is exactly right when he says that at some point in time, after having these discussions and having the benefit of what's happened with respect to these two bills, we may need to look at the conflicts act itself and determine whether it needs to be changed in any way. But I think the appropriate process right now is for the discussions to happen with the Ethics Commissioner from the perspective of the Speaker on behalf of members and the Attorney General on behalf of Executive Council, both groups of people that are affected by the Conflicts of Interest Act and any opinions of the Ethics Commissioner, and determine whether there can be some bulletin published or direction given as to where that line might be. I don't think you can ever be definitive about where that line is, so it always is a matter of opinion. We cannot undermine and eviscerate the role of the Ethics Commissioner in this way, by allowing a question of privilege to determine this type of an issue.

The Speaker: I guess it's going to lead to further discussion. Now, I want to be very, very clear to hon. members. I will recognize anyone who chooses to participate in this matter today. This matter was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview as a very personal item. It was his privilege within the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. It was not a discussion with anyone else. It was his experience. He knows it better than anyone else. So we will focus entirely on the subject matter that was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to do that, and I'll try to be quite brief. I simply want to say with respect to the role of the Ethics Commissioner, which was part of the privilege that was raised by the hon. member, that it is incumbent on all of us to carefully heed the advice of the Ethics Commissioner. To suggest that if we disagree with the Ethics Commissioner, in some way we should be prepared to reject his advice or go outside to get other advice, I think is not a fair statement. If you think about it, if the Ethics Commissioner gives you advice and you don't follow it and another member then raises a question against you, which could lead, ultimately, to the loss of your seat, and an investigation is initiated by the same Ethics Commissioner, who then provides a report to this Assembly, what are the other members of the Assembly going to rely upon in order to make their judgment? Are they all going to go out and get their own separate legal opinions? No.

In fact, you can almost count on the fact that all members of the Assembly will rely on the judgment and the opinion of the Ethics Commissioner to make a judgment about your own personal situation and whether you have a conflict of interest. The result then is a vote in the Assembly that ultimately could cost you your seat. So I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has made a very serious and valid point, and I think that the approach suggested by the Government House Leader goes nowhere. The reality is that we depend upon the Ethics

Commissioner for advice, and if we don't accept it, then he is involved in the process that follows from that, and other members of the House are very dependent on his advice in deciding what further action to take. The net result of that is that you simply have no choice but to accept the advice of the Ethics Commissioner.

The Speaker: Additional participants? The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand a matter of privilege, your function is limited in these cases to deciding whether the matter is of such a character as to be an issue of privilege and whether or not it should entitle the House to make a motion with respect to the issue. In my respectful submission I think that the matter of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is a serious matter. It raises issues of a broader concern to all of us as Members of the Legislative Assembly, and I know that I for one would be loath to reject the advice of the Ethics Commissioner. In fact, I think that I share with the Member for Edmonton-Riverview the belief that when the Ethics Commissioner gives a ruling or a direction in a particular matter, I would be bound to follow that advice.

In my respectful submission, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to propose a motion, but I wonder whether or not it is an appropriate circumstance where one member of the House, perhaps, would make a motion to refer this matter to the committee on privileges and elections to investigate the matter further and perhaps to report back to the House.

The Speaker: No ruling has been made by the chair yet, so it's a bit presumptuous to talk about motions.

Dr. Brown: Well, when you make your ruling, Mr. Speaker, I guess that is an option for the House if you should decide that this is an issue of privilege.

But, as I said, I think it is a serious matter, and I think it warrants further investigation by the House.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Sorry, hon. member. One shot.

Dr. Taft: I can't close debate? Okay. Thanks.

The Speaker: Are there additional comments to be made by hon. members?

Hon. members, this issue was unknown to the chair until 10:55 this morning, and the last involvement that the Speaker had with respect to this matter was when the Speaker rose in the House and, in fact, read into the record the advice provided by the Ethics Commissioner. All members will know that the chair was pretty forceful with respect to heeding the advice forthcoming from the Ethics Commissioner. It was very clear. The chair was also unknowing, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, about any ruling with respect to royalties that was made to the member in times gone by.

This is a matter that I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for raising in the House. This is a very serious situation. The chair, having been in this Assembly for nearly 30 years, appreciates the importance of a member wanting to participate and having the broadest general application and ability to participate as an elected person. The chair also knows that we have a Conflicts of Interest Act and that there have been rulings with respect to this. The chair is aware of the changing advice given to the hon. Member

for Edmonton-Riverview, and the chair can fully understand because when I read the letter that was provided with the first advice on May 26, I must say that a few questions came into my head with respect to that ruling. Then on June 1 to get a letter that shows a different perspective can cause some issues.

Look. I do not recall when a question such as this has been raised in this House, but I do know that it applies to the integrity of all 83 members of this Assembly. All 83 members must be assured, then, that when advice is sought and advice is given, they can move forward with comfort and a feeling of assurance. The chair will not comment further on some of the opinions expressed here in the last few minutes as to whether the chair agrees or disagrees with them. That will come at a later moment.

I intend on taking this matter. I take it as a very serious situation – and I underline the words “very serious situation” – because it involves the integrity and the privileges of all members of this Assembly and their participation in this Assembly and their belief that the advice given to them is of the highest possible quality that can be provided. Hopefully, I'll be in a position to come back tomorrow with a statement with respect to this.

I recognize as well that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview sought what I would believe to be a very professional remedy with respect to this. I do not recall any request being made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for having a motion or the matter referred elsewhere other than to prescribe some certain steps to be taken to basically create a working paper to look at standards of best practice, to review all of this. There's a variety of ways that that may be done, but I do want to take the time to think about this. Hopefully, it will be tomorrow afternoon that I will return with a statement with respect to this.

I want to repeat again that this is serious. Basically, it involves the contempt, I think, of an officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. In essence, that is the underlying statement that we're talking about and the assurance associated with it. I appreciate the comments of all members, and I will deal with this further.

3:30

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 43

Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and move third reading of Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

I truly appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the support that was received at Committee of the Whole and the vigorous debate that was engaged in. It is regrettable that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview couldn't participate. Bill 43, if everyone recalls, gives fundamental right of choice to producers of four commodity groups, namely beef, pork, sheep, and potatoes.

There was only one question that remained from Committee of the Whole which I had not had a chance to answer. That was about exactly how the refund process would work. In fact, the change will go into effect for each of the commissions in their 2010-2011 fiscal year. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka was exactly correct, Mr. Speaker, when he said that the regulations will have to be put together after this legislation is passed. The regulations would specify the refund process and likely use a process that's similar to

the other refundable commissions, where there is a payment period and a refund period. The existing refundable commissions have varying regulations. Some have a refund period that's only once per year, some have a refund period that is twice a year, and some do it quarterly.

I can assure all the members of this Assembly, all the members of the commissions, and the members of the public that once Bill 43 is passed, Mr. Speaker, the Agricultural Products Marketing Council will consult with each of the commissions and members to ensure that the regulations work appropriately for them, their producers, and the commissions themselves, to make sure that they're effective and they don't create any tremendous undue burden by spending a lot of time dealing with the refunds and commissions at inappropriate times.

I appreciate the support that was given in Committee of the Whole to this legislation, and I anticipate the continued support through third reading. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, I'm giving you first chance to participate in this debate. You've got 20 minutes.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will go from memory on the discussion of Bill 43.

The Speaker: Usually the best speeches, by the way.

Dr. Taft: I realize this has been a contentious piece of legislation, a difficult one for the government and one that has led to some pretty bitter feelings in the agriculture sector.

I guess we can deal with it beginning from the point of principle as it's been put to me. One of the first people I called in the cattle industry who talked to me about it captured it in a sentence. He said: this is about a few people with a lot of cattle versus a lot of people with a few cattle. I thought that was a pretty good summary of the interests here. The concern is that the few people with a lot of cattle are carrying the day and that the provisions in the current legislation that are there to allow a plebiscite on this issue, in which the many owners, each with a few cattle, could exercise a vote on the basis of equal suffrage, on the basis of one person, one vote, are being revoked or being overruled, that in fact the democratic processes under the bill are eliminated and that a default position is being pushed through that favours the few owners with the many cattle.

There is an issue here of people in the beef, hog, lamb, and potato industries feeling that what they assumed were democratic rights are being steamrolled. I can understand that. I know they feel very strongly, and frankly I'm sympathetic to them.

The concern further is that if Bill 43 is passed – and it looks like it will be – there will be an impact on the viability of the various producer organizations to really fulfill their jobs. The Alberta Beef Producers are concerned that a handful of large operators may cost their organization hundreds of thousands of dollars a year or even more than that and, as a result, curtail their efforts to support the industry. So there's the democratic issue here, and there's the economic issue, and I am sympathetic, frankly, to the large number of smaller producers on both fronts.

There's a third issue here, Mr. Speaker, which has to do with what we might call collateral damage, a term borrowed from, as we all know, war. It's, I think, a term that was concocted in an effort to reduce some of the ugliness related to civilian casualties in war. Regardless, the collateral damage here would be the impact on the pork producers, the sheep and lamb producers, and the potato

producers. They very strongly feel that this is really a beef issue. It didn't involve them at all. Nobody in the pork industry was particularly outspoken on this issue and nobody in the sheep or potato industries either, yet they're caught up in this because of the real conflict within the beef producer sector. So there's that issue as well.

Then that, of course, raises the matter of fairness. If you're a pork producer happily going along raising your pork when there's no particular issue of any note around the functioning of the check-off and the viability of the producer organization, suddenly it feels like the rug is pulled out from under you because of the conflicts occurring in the beef sector. Then you can see why they feel it's pretty unfair. The same applies to the potato sector and the sheep sector.

Mr. Speaker, there's a series of fundamental problems with this bill: democratic, economic, and fairness. That's why we have opposed this bill.

Now, we've heard all sides of the debate. I've had correspondence from those who support the bill, and clearly the government supports the bill. There's a gulf between the two sides that's not going to be bridged. The decision will be made, and things will move on.

I guess I'm left most fundamentally questioning on the basis of the democratic matter here. Given that there were grounds in the existing and historic legislation for a plebiscite to be held, why didn't the government simply allow the plebiscite to be held? After all, that is how elections generally are run. In the stock market people get to vote by how many dollars they have, but in the political arena it's been historically for very good reason one person, one vote. That was the set-up for the producer organizations. I think it's a regressive step for democracy that we've abandoned that principle and, instead of one person, one vote, in effect said one animal, one vote or one dollar, one vote. It's an unhealthy trend.

I am concerned about a tendency in this government in many different areas to consolidate power, to in my view weaken democratic institutions, and to justify it in the name of economics. I know that some government members have done that. The Member for Battle River-Wainwright has explored this issue in some of his debates on Bill 43 and has come out saying that when the chips are down, this is, first and foremost, an economic issue. For me it's first and foremost a democratic issue. So we lock horns, and since there are only a few of us and there are a bunch on the government side, we lose. But that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm convinced that it's the right outcome.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise at this point to Bill 43. I might as well say on the record, although I said it at some length half an hour ago, that I really do regret not being able to participate in debate in Committee of the Whole because of the ruling of the Ethics Commissioner. I had a bunch of really good amendments and very well-prepared notes and an awful lot of people around this province looking to me to carry their case forward. Speaking for a few minutes in third doesn't equal that, but I'll take it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To move the process along, I would like to introduce an amendment. I will ask the pages to pick it up and distribute it, and then I will speak to the amendment.

The Speaker: We'll wait till it's circulated.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, please proceed. I believe that there are enough copies out.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am moving that the motion for third reading of Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No.2), be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No.2), be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

Speaking to the amendment, Mr. Speaker, there has been tremendous conflict with regard to Bill 43. Questions that I asked during the committee stage such as, "How were producers contacted? Were any polls taken? Were there public consultations held, and if so, where and when?" couldn't be answered. So I'm left with the feeling that this bill has been imposed on the agricultural community as opposed to being proposed by the agricultural community.

Without repeating details that I brought forward in the Committee of the Whole debate, I want to emphasize the point made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview with regard to the few who own many cattle and the many who own a few cattle. In terms of the total number of cattle in this province: 5.4 million cattle and calves. In terms of the number of individuals involved in raising those cattle and calves: 28,750 farms. Those are a lot of individual farms that I don't believe received the consultation necessary to have the opportunity to provide informed input into the consideration of this bill.

What we have is the traditional western style battle of various groups over the usage of the land. I can't help but think of westerns where we had the cattle barons hiring gunslingers to run off the farmers and the shepherds. This type of conflict is antiproduative to this province.

Now, in dealing with our discussion this afternoon and the point of privilege, it was noted that the Ethics Commissioner barred the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview from debate on this bill at Committee of the Whole but later reconsidered this ruling. Others in the House who participated in the debate on Bill 43 could have had potential conflicts of interest but were still able to participate, while the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was not able to.

I believe that time is needed, not only time for the members within this House to get back to their constituents, the 28,750 of them – and those are just the farms. We can assume that there are other family members involved on those farms. I think the Ethics Commissioner needs an opportunity to clarify prohibitions affecting the participation of Members of this Legislative Assembly and to share these clarifications with all members of the House. I don't believe this bill is ready. I don't believe the homework has been done that is necessary to assure that not only the economic interests of the few are met but the livelihood and the survival of family farms and ranches throughout the province that are at stake.

As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out, the underlying consideration that is most key to this bill is the democratic right to express an opinion, and I don't believe that the individuals who live on the 28,750 farms that produce cattle and calves have had an opportunity to have their opinions taken into account. I don't believe that the 2,180 farms that produce lamb and sheep have had their voices heard, nor do I believe that the 1,570 farms that produce hogs have had an opportunity for input nor, it follows, would the 400 farms that grow potatoes and the individuals who live on those farms.

Now, Bill 43 is taking a very drastic measure in terms of removing the rights of a plebiscite. That is draconian, to say the least.

Therefore, I believe that the hon. mover of this bill has good intentions, but he and I are both teachers, and we know what happens when you don't do the research and the homework assignment is incomplete. Using that analogy, I think that in the six months that intervene – I know that farmers and ranchers are extremely busy. The seeding has taken place. They're praying for rainfall to help with their animals and help with the production. Mother Nature has a tremendous influence on the success of farms, whether they're of the potato nature or cattle or sheep or hogs. If we're going to get this right, if we're going to do service to the over 31,000 individuals involved in agricultural undertakings in this province, I don't believe that Bill 43 meets those requirements.

Hence, what I am saying is: let's do our homework right. Let's allow six months of public consultation to take place, and let us give those 31,000 individuals an opportunity for full participation. This may be the last time they get that opportunity, Mr. Speaker. If this bill goes forward and eliminates the plebiscite, I have grave concerns about the state of democracy being eroded even further. Therefore, I have proposed this amendment, and I look forward to others participating in the discussion as to: is this homework complete, or is there more work to be done?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on an amendment. The debate will be restricted to the amendment.

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Chase	MacDonald	Taft
Hehr	Mason	Taylor

4:00

Against the motion:

Ady	Hancock	Quest
Allred	Horner	Redford
Anderson	Johnson	Renner
Benito	Johnston	Rodney
Bhardwaj	Lukaszuk	Rogers
Blackett	Marz	Sarich
Boutilier	Mitzel	VanderBurg
Brown	Morton	Vandermeer
Dallas	Oberle	Webber
Elniski	Prins	Woo-Paw
Griffiths		

Totals	For – 6	Against – 31
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[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 43 lost]

The Speaker: The amendment is defeated. According to our rules if such amendment is defeated, the question is immediately put on the motion for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 49

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me. It's a pleasure today to rise and commence discussion on Bill 49, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

This bill will extend the good-faith clause, under which our Alberta firefighters work, to municipalities and fire departments. What it will do is reduce the time fire departments and firefighters spend in courts responding to liability claims, and in turn it'll increase the time that these valuable firefighters spend protecting their communities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you may ask yourself: what would a firefighter be doing in a courthouse? Well, a trend has developed in Alberta, an unfortunate trend, where following a fire, following a loss of property, in the settlement of insurance claims very often, more often than not, fire departments and municipalities are named in lawsuits. Naming someone in a lawsuit sometimes is a routine thing, but in these cases these lawsuits are actually pursued. What happens is that firefighters are then asked to attend examinations for discovery at various law firms. Experts are hired from outside of the jurisdiction, often even from outside of the country, and these firefighters are being questioned on what it is that they did or did not do during that emergency, during the fire, and what more they could have done to perhaps save the property further and, therefore, diminish the liability of the insurance company for paying out and settling a claim.

Mr. Speaker, an example occurred not that long ago. All of us will remember a fire in a condominium complex in Clareview in Edmonton. Minus 30 to minus 35 outside, the middle of winter, in the middle of the night a semiconstructed condominium site caught fire, with exposed timber burning. Firefighters showed up from several fire departments. Their hoses were freezing. Firefighters ended up in emergencies because of slips and falls and other injuries.

Well, a number of years later this matter has reached the courts, and a fire chief from California – yes, Mr. Speaker, a retired fire chief from California – was retained by the defence, and he was questioning what our Edmonton firefighters could have done differently. What experience did he have? I don't know. But I tell you that in most of these cases all of our municipalities settle these claims because fighting these claims is very expensive. What they do is settle them for a certain percentage of whatever the statement of claim demands, which is Alberta taxpayers' money. The money that's being transferred by our MSI funds to municipalities now is being expended on settling these claims instead of being expended on services for Albertans.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, what is even more troubling – and every firefighter will tell you this – is that firefighters feel horrible about having to appear in an examination for discovery or even a trial and being questioned by someone three years later on what they could or couldn't have done in a moment of an emergency, under a given set of treacherous circumstances. Everybody can be an armchair critic a number of years later.

There's a stake for us as Albertans in this, Mr. Speaker. I don't want to see our firefighters running into a fire, saving lives and saving property, and now having to second-guess themselves, to second-guess their instinct, to second-guess the training that they have received for many, many years and doubt whether they should or should not do something because they may become liable and

may have to one day appear before a judge or a justice or perhaps in an examination for discovery. That is not what should be on their minds at a time when they're going into fire and when they're going into emergencies and are responding and are saving lives. These are costly ventures for municipalities. They are frustrating ventures for firefighters.

Now, in my recent discussions with our retired fire chief from Edmonton, when I asked him, "How is your retirement treating you?" even though he is fully retired, his response was, "I am very busy." He still has a number of court cases and examinations for discovery that he has to attend and prepare for for many, many years to come. So we are now pulling firefighters out of retirement to attend to these matters.

What also is very important, Mr. Speaker, is that in much of rural Alberta our firefighters are volunteers. It is difficult to find volunteer firefighters because that demands a great deal of time and commitment from them. It takes them away from their gainful employment. They have to be trained. Imagine being asked to volunteer and do all that yet be told: by the way, there could be an insurance company questioning some day whether you did your job right, and you may have to appear before judges or before lawyers and be questioned on it. It's frightening, and it's discouraging volunteer firefighters from being enrolled.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will put an end to this. What this bill will do is extend the good-faith clause, meaning that any and all decisions made during an emergency that are made in good faith – and we imagine most, if not all, decisions of firefighters are made in good faith – will not be subject to future litigation or will make future litigation significantly more difficult for plaintiffs in these cases.

This bill also is a bit of a success story because it came as a process of collaboration. Even though insurance companies in these cases are usually the plaintiffs, credit has to be given where credit is due. The Insurance Bureau of Canada has met with me on numerous occasions, Mr. Speaker, and fully supports this piece of legislation. They understand how important this issue is, and they now understand the ramifications of laying these lawsuits against municipalities. They do support us in passing this particular legislation, so at this point I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Insurance Bureau of Canada and all of their member companies who have collaborated with me in drafting this particular piece of legislation. I know that they are comfortable with the wording of it, which probably diminishes the chances of them ever trying to appeal any decisions in the future, because they are the co-drafters of this legislation.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, this bill responds to resolutions passed by the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, who have requested that the municipal act be amended because they were on the receiving end of the frustration of having to have their municipalities, fire departments, and firefighters continuously appear before courts and judges. Also, we have consulted with department staff, obviously, within the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. We have consulted with firefighters, which included the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary, so consultation should not be a problem.

Mr. Speaker, it is time we support our firefighters. The day couldn't be more appropriate. We just had some massive fires in Edmonton in a seniors' facility, and in the absence of this legislation I can assure you that with a fire like this, where firefighters responded in droves, a loss may follow to offset the cost of the claim that may have to be paid. I would encourage, at this point, all members of this Assembly to support our firefighters, to give them

that peace of mind so that they know that when they go into a fire, that's the only thing that they have to worry about: the safety of others' property and their own safety and not worry about lawsuits and appearing before judges and lawyers in the future. That's the last thing they should be doing. They're trained to do much more important things than that.

I will take my seat at this point, Mr. Speaker, and ask all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Did I hear the hon. member say that he was moving a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Lukaszuk: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to move second reading of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, on behalf of the Minister of Energy.

The amendments in Bill 50 propose that the government of Alberta take responsibility for approving a need for critical transmission infrastructure projects to meet the electricity needs of Albertans. We will do that based on the expertise of our province's Electric System Operator, a nonprofit body with the responsibility of ensuring that Alberta's electricity system operates in the public interest of all Albertans.

At the same time the government will ensure that the regulatory processes continue and that landowner and public concerns are addressed about where transmission facilities are located. When it comes to transmission sitings, landowner issues will be heard. These folks must have a say in the process. That's part of the legislation we debated here previously. The impacts of these new transmissions will be mitigated to the extent possible. Landowners will receive fair compensation. That's an issue that we've heard here in the past few days, and it's one that will continue to be addressed by the Alberta Utilities Commission. The way these matters are addressed will not change. In fact, these issues aren't even part of this legislation. That's because those decisions on the siting of critical transmission infrastructure projects have been made.

We know these lines are needed, but the actual routing has not been determined. That remains part of the Alberta Utilities Commission's regulatory process, just as it is today. With Bill 50 we are simply moving approval of need from the Alberta Utilities Commission to the government of Alberta. From a public policy perspective this just makes good sense. The technical input and analysis are done, and the provincial government, elected by the people of Alberta, will now be responsible for determining when and which lines are needed.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister introduced a document called the provincial energy strategy last fall. Some thought it had some good ideas, some nice pictures and so on. There were some folks across the way who said there was a lot of meat to the document. Well, that document specifically indicates that the government of Alberta will take responsibility for a comprehensive plan to upgrade our transmission system in Alberta, and that's exactly what Bill 50 does.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there have been no new major power lines built in Alberta since the 1980s. Think about that. Our population has grown by over 1.3 million people since 1986, with nearly 400,000 people coming to our province in the last four years alone. More Albertans means more schools, hospitals, community

centres, office buildings, shopping malls and so on, all requiring massive amounts of new electricity.

What else has happened since the 1980s? Mr. Speaker, we've seen tremendous advancements in technology: computers in nearly every home, the advancement of the Internet, multiple TVs in homes, and other conveniences, which all require power to operate. As we look to the future, this demand will only grow.

Well, let's take a step back. Where are we today? Our transmission system has been working at or near its limits for extended periods of time. In recent years you've heard about new peaks in electricity consumption during both cold snaps in the winter and extreme heat in the summer, and that means that more than ever before Albertans are at risk of losing their electricity service. The Minister of Energy believes that's something he simply cannot accept, and that's why the government is moving ahead with Bill 50.

Upgrading the electricity system will be expensive. These projects are worth an estimated \$8.1 billion, Mr. Speaker, and yes, the ratepayers of this province will be expected to pay their share of that cost based on the amount of electricity that they use. That means about 80 per cent of the costs will be borne by industrial and commercial businesses operating in our province. Yes, there will also be costs borne by households. Those costs will ramp up over time, but it is estimated that costs will be around \$8 a month for an average household, again based on their consumption.

Let's remember a couple of things, Mr. Speaker. First, these costs have always been covered by ratepayers. It was either bury the costs of the electricity like it was in the past, or it will be broken out in bills as it is today. So that's not new. And remember one thing: there's a real cost to consumers of doing nothing at all. It's not free to maintain our entire transmission system as it exists today. Last year the inefficiency of our transmission system resulted in more than \$220 million in electrical line loss. That means there was a need for additional electricity to be generated and then, of course, the environmental impacts that come from generating that wasted electricity, power that is lost on the lines in the form of heat. Not only are consumers on the hook for \$220 million in lost electricity, but that's also enough power for 350,000 homes a year. Our system operator is successfully managing the demands on the transmission system, and they're getting by; however, the situation we're facing increases the risk of widespread power outages and unreliable service. That risk and the costs will only grow if we don't act now.

Now, some might be thinking that this isn't an issue because the lights come on when they flip the switch. The system is working right now, isn't it? We've seen what system failure can mean in the United States and eastern Canada, and to a much lesser extent we've seen what it can mean here. Consider July 24, 2006. That morning a transmission line tripped out, and as a result, two generators were isolated from the system. Then the Alberta-B.C. tie-line tripped due to a lightning strike, resulting in customer outages in Calgary, including their C-Train. Or how about May 15, 2007? A farmer accidentally drove his tractor into one of the 24-kilovolt lines near Red Deer which runs between Calgary and Edmonton.

Some might suggest that these issues are minor inconveniences; however, as we look to the future, the potential for greater failure exists. Albertans are not willing to accept anything less than a reliable source of power. They expect the lights to come on when they flip the switch. I would suggest it's the responsibility of this Assembly to ensure that that happens.

We know the risks, so what are the benefits, Mr. Speaker? If we are going to maintain our lifestyle and our province's economic growth, Albertans require an adequate, reliable source of competitively priced electricity. They expect it, and they depend on it. Alberta needs more generating capacity, but as they say in the

electricity business, transmission must precede generation. In other words, private investors, who pay for all the new generation in Alberta, are the ones who must make decisions on when to build new electricity generation. Why would those investors pay for new generation if they have no way to ship their product to Albertans? Further, if we are to encourage the responsible development of our resources, advanced clean-coal technology and coal gasification for example, we need the transmission capacity in place to deliver this product into the marketplace.

Coal in Alberta is cheap, and it's relatively easy to get, and there's a lot of it. There's an economic advantage to us to have it developed and for us to use it to generate power, particularly since Alberta has limited capacity for hydro power. Since the federal government is moving ahead with a yet unspecified plan to phase out traditional coal-fired generation, advanced coal technology is a must for Alberta.

4:20

That leads me to another important issue, the price of power in Alberta. There has been much made about Alberta's electricity prices under our restructured electricity market. The one way to help drive electricity prices downward in Alberta is through increased competition in the market, and that means unlocking all potential sources of electricity throughout the province to meet the needs of all Albertans.

I know there have been some that suggest we should simply build generation close to where the electricity is being consumed. There could be some potential for that in the future, but at this point in time that just doesn't reflect the reality of Alberta's electricity system. We operate on a single grid that serves all Albertans. The minister is not interested in creating two or more islands in the province to serve the needs of certain cities or regions. His job is to serve all Albertans, and properly fortified transmission systems will do just that.

There are proposals to bring on new generation of all types, from wind in the south, advanced coal in the centre part of the province, cogeneration in the north, and so on. These projects, including renewable energy projects, are simply waiting for new transmission line capacity to meet the electricity demands of Albertans. We know we need transmission. It's time to act, and it's a good time to act.

As we've been discussing throughout this session, the global economic slowdown is affecting Albertans. While these projects are costly, we've seen a recent decline in the price of steel and other products, and Alberta has the labour force available and able to take on projects of this size. It just makes good sense to move now on so many levels.

I realize it's June, Mr. Speaker, and folks might be wondering: why is the minister bringing forward new legislation now? Well, the simple answer to that is that it's important to have this bill before the Legislature before the Assembly rises so that all members will have their summer to discuss the important issue with their constituents. Awareness of these issues is, first, an important step for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn second reading debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 1

Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the question be put.

The Deputy Chair: Any other comments or questions?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Bill Pr. 3

Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments or questions with regard to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to make a motion with respect to an amendment, so at this point if we were to distribute copies of that amendment, I'll proceed.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we will pause for a moment while the amendment is passed out.

Mr. Dallas: Okay.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you may proceed.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill Pr. 3, Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act, be amended as follows: the preamble is amended in the third recital by striking out "and liabilities."

The Deputy Chair: Any comments or questions on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Oui, monsieur. Je suis certain que Les Filles de la Sagesse apprécient beaucoup cet amendement. Alors, nous allons le supporter.
Merci.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other comments or questions on the amendment?

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are now speaking to the bill.

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill Pr. 1 and Bill Pr. 3.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill Pr. 1. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill Pr. 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: All those members who concur in the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

4:30 **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading
 (continued)

Bill 36
Alberta Land Stewardship Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act.

Bill 36 provides a legal foundation to the land-use framework to manage our land and natural resources for now and for decades to come. We have consulted widely on Bill 36 and listened to criticisms and concerns from Albertans, from stakeholders, and even the opposition parties, and made amendments that have improved the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. We've made amendments that ensure that the Métis Settlements General Council continues to make decisions consistent with the Metis Settlements Act. They also ensure that the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal continues to hear matters related to land compensation on Métis settlements. Amendments to the bill have strengthened accountability and reporting on regional plans by appointing a committee every five years to evaluate whether regional plans are meeting the purposes of this act and to report publicly on their findings.

Concerns were raised over executive power with respect to statutory consents. Existing statutory rights to compensation, such as they are, are not changed by Bill 36. However, if cabinet decisions and a regional plan require or cancel approval for a disposition, we have put a new process in that ensures fairness for the holders of these dispositions, requiring that reasonable notice to the holder be given and that the holder of the disposition be given the opportunity to propose an alternative means of achieving the

objective. This amendment provides new procedural protections for disposition holders that did not exist before.

One opposition amendment actually narrows the remedial powers of the courts. I was encouraged to see, perhaps, that the opposition is learning that unfettered judicial discretion is even more to be feared than unfettered political discretion since at least cabinet is accountable for its decisions.

There were other concerns raised about accountability, and I'll repeat what we said the other night: decisions about regional plans need to be made by elected representatives and not by the courts.

Mr. MacDonald: Didn't you guys say: after Ron Stevens was gone?

Dr. Morton: We covered that base, too.

There were concerns raised, helpful concerns communicated to us about the continuing role of municipal and local authorities. I want to reconfirm that municipalities are represented and will be represented on regional advisory councils, will be consulted as stakeholders as the regional plans are developed, and will continue to exercise their existing powers within the framework of the regional plans; that is to say that local authorities will continue to make decisions to meet local needs. Municipalities will retain their authority for municipal development plans, area structure plans, land-use bylaws, subdivisions, and development standards.

This legislation also respects the property rights of Albertans. We've introduced a new conservation and stewardship tool, the conservation directive, which may be used to conserve valued landscapes, ecologically sensitive areas, and scenic landscapes if this is expressly identified in a regional plan. But we have ensured that if a directive is used in a regional plan, landowners will be compensated for any loss in market value to the land that may result. This is a first in Canada, and one that Albertans can be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 in the water for life initiative the government of Alberta committed itself to a place-based approach to sustainable development, a regional and watershed approach to sustainable development. Now, six years later, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act is the bookend, the logical follow-up to the water for life policy. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act is the most comprehensive land-use policy in Canada and, indeed, in North America.

Bill 36 is a timely response to the growing pressures on our air, land, water, and wildlife in a growing and changing Alberta. In a growing and changing Alberta if we want to keep what we value about life in Alberta, we have to change how we manage that growth. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act represents innovation. I cannot tell you that the Land Stewardship Act is risk free, but no innovation is. To innovate is to risk. I can tell you that Alberta was not built by people who were not willing to take responsible risks.

Our hydrocarbon legacy is a blessing, and our development of this resource has provided generations of Albertans with good jobs and economic opportunity. But there is the challenge to manage this development in a way that doesn't undermine the beauty and ecological health of our great province. The Land Stewardship Act is how we will manage this challenge. It is our opportunity to help define the future of our province so that it will be as good for our children and grandchildren as it has been for our generation. This is what stewardship is all about; this is what the Alberta Land Stewardship Act is about.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise and speak on Bill 36. I've had the opportunity to speak at the other

two stages prior to this, so I won't belabour this much longer. I'd first just like to commend the minister on bringing forward a bill that is very necessary and, in fact, timely for the Alberta landscape. We've needed this type of framework put into play for some time.

It's a detailed and comprehensive bill that, hopefully, will lead us to a path of better resource and land management, that can balance our growing population, growing water use, growing economy, all of those things, all with the recognition that we are running out of land, running short of water, and our air is becoming more and more polluted, in some areas anyway. That's what this bill does. It sets a framework for us to try to manage that. It understands that we in Alberta have probably come to a tipping point, where we can no longer just continue to go about doing whatever we want to various plots of land, various streams, various riverbeds, what have you, without some sort of centralized or some sort of regional plans, which are in place here.

I've put these concerns on the record before but might as well do it again. That's what I'm here for. We do see this as being somewhat of a very large concentration of power in Lieutenant Governor in Council, in cabinet, in that decisions regarding the land-use framework happen at the council level, happen behind closed doors, and are not openly reported to the public. Also, we pressed strenuously for some amendments that would allow for some judicial review to this plan.

I think, at least, what I would put forth is that this is a good plan, but – guess what? – politicians can resist anything but temptation. You know, sometimes although we have a good plan, we get into a rough spot later on, and we say: "Well, let's tinker with this or tinker with that. Maybe we'll shove a shopping mall here, and it'll appease things for a temporary time. It'll get people off our back. It may get some donations coming in the door, what have you, and we'll go back to the land-use framework in a couple of months." You know, I realize that's a scenario that has happened from time to time. That's why we pressed for judicial review. I think anyone around this hall would agree that these things have happened in the past, and that's why we've gone to judicial review.

Nevertheless, it is what it is, sir. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on this for the third time. Let's hope that the land-use framework adds to the continued road to Alberta becoming a more sustainable province.

Thank you very much.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, in third reading. Bill 36 is the product of over two years of intense public consultation and is the first legislative step in both the implementation of the land-use framework and the development of regional planning. This act will accomplish three important goals. First, it will provide a means for the government to meet its economic, environmental, and social objectives; second, it will provide a means to plan for the future; and finally, it will ensure sustainable land development while taking into account the cumulative effects of human development.

Through the extensive consultation process and also during the last election campaign Albertans have stressed the need for long-term, effective planning at the regional level. To this end, both the land-use framework and Bill 36 will implement a regional planning model, allowing for effective implementation of provincial policies. Specifically, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act will eliminate exemptions that existed in previous planning legislation that related

to resource infrastructure and pipeline transmission systems. In the past these exemptions created undue complications that made effective land-use planning more difficult. In essence, Mr. Speaker, Bill 36 will create the legislative framework needed to ensure that the unique considerations of regional planning do not conflict with the effectiveness of provincial policies.

As my hon. colleague for Airdrie-Chestermere has stated, the new regional planning does not mean creating a heavy-handed, centralized bureaucracy in Edmonton. Rather, it means looking ahead, weighing options, anticipating the future, and attempting to forecast the cumulative effects of development. That, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, is what planning is all about. This, in turn, means accumulating a lot of land-use data and making intelligent decisions based on that data. The end result will be the creation of an effective planning and zoning process.

There's no question in my mind that long-term land-use planning and zoning is in the greater public interest as can be seen in the case of projects like the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads. A further example of regional planning can be found in both the capital region plan and the Calgary regional partnership. While this legislation clearly supports these long-term development projects, it also remains committed to addressing the cumulative effects of development. After all, the impact of a public project on land can extend for many years and can have many unplanned consequences. Bill 36 recognizes this potential and creates legislation that addresses not only planning issues but long-term developmental impacts as well.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona stated earlier in the debate that the land-use framework could truly be one of the most important government initiatives ever introduced and could put Alberta quite high up in terms of responsible land-use policy with respect to other jurisdictions. I agree that the land-use framework is one of the most important government initiatives and will ensure that Alberta leads North America and probably the world in land-use planning. We will now have a hierarchy of land-use plans, leading with the provincial plan, the land-use framework, down through regional, municipal, area structure plans, and the more prescriptive land-use bylaws.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has over the years been renowned for having the best land-use planning legislation in North America and even the world. We in Alberta have a long history of land-use planning going back, I believe, to the first planning legislation that was introduced in, I think, 1913. The former Planning Act, which was folded into the Municipal Government Act in the late 1990s, was and continues to be very effective planning legislation at the municipal level. Unfortunately, the well-developed system of regional planning was withdrawn in 1995. This created a number of regional disagreements which this legislation will cure. We need to get back to a system of regional co-operation and collaboration on the land-use front for the greater public interest. Mr. Speaker, Bill 36 will continue this tradition and ensure our continued leadership in the realm of effective land-use planning.

Bill 36 is a groundbreaking piece of legislation and has earned my full support. With that, I will conclude my comments and urge all members to join me in support of Bill 36. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the fact that the hon. mover of Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, noted even the support of the Official Opposition. Not to belabour the point, but even is what Bill 36 is all about. "Even" suggests balance, a balanced approach between the environment and

the economy. I appreciate the clarification that the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development explained within the amendments, that it was strictly alphabetical order that economy preceded environment, but we know that both are of equal significance.

Reference was made to the water for life strategy 2003 and Lorne Taylor's initiatives. The whole point of Bill 36 is correctly built on the foundation of Alberta's seven watersheds, and water protection needs to be at the heart of all decisions that we make. It is disconcerting to me that while we're moving ahead with greater concerns over cumulative effects, a reduction in water testing and environmental stewardship is taking place because, for whatever reason, they are not considered sufficiently economically valuable to receive funding within the Department of Environment. I am also concerned about potential cutbacks to the front-line representatives of Sustainable Resource Development.

What I would like to do is very quickly acknowledge some key water stewards in this province. I would like to acknowledge the Leader of the Official Opposition, the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View, who pushed this government to pretesting prior to drilling and having that testing involve testing of isotopes so that we had an understanding of the predisposition of the water prior to the drilling for oil and gas. That's absolutely essential.

I want to thank Dr. Brad Stelfox, who is Alberta's absolute expert on cumulative effects – Dr. Stelfox's projections have been recognized by all Albertans, government members included – for his ability to lay out what could be without pushing what should be and leaving that up to the people of Alberta to decide. I would like to also recognize the work of Dr. David Schindler, who for years has been a leading advocate on water conservation and protection. Last but not least, I would like to thank a young man by the name of Dan Woynilowicz of the Pembina Institute, who has written numerous papers and provided numerous talks and PowerPoint presentations on the importance of protecting water, our number one Alberta resource.

Thank you very much for allowing me to participate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, thank you. On the bill, Mr. Speaker. It's with interest that I rise to participate in the debate on Bill 36 this afternoon. Certainly, I don't share the enthusiasm that other hon. members have regarding this legislation. To be truthful, I have many reservations about this bill. I have read it, put it away and then picked it up again and reread what I had read, and I'm still, unfortunately, not impressed, with all due respect to hon. members.

4:50

I hear of the public consultation process that occurred. It was two years in length. I heard the hon. Member for St. Albert talk about that. I certainly read, like many others, the comments from the mayor of Edmonton over the weekend in the minister of health's favourite newspaper, the *Edmonton Journal*. The mayor of Edmonton was outraged at the lack of consultation regarding the private member's bill which passed through the Assembly.

Now we have under this bill amendments to the Municipal Government Act, which is going to override local governments. Also, if the provincial government is not satisfied that the orders of the government or the minister in question are being adhered to, I'm looking at a section here that would allow the provincial government to withhold money: "withholding money otherwise payable by the Government to the municipal authority or regional services commission pending compliance with an order of the Minister." That's a lot

of power. That's, in my opinion, very, very disrespectful to local levels of government, whether it be a city or a regional municipality. I don't understand why that is necessary if we are to have compliance with a regional plan.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview initiated the whole public debate around land management and plans to go into the future for land and our water. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview certainly would not consider this amendment to the Municipal Government Act necessary. In fact, the hon. member presented a plan, and there was nothing like that in the ideas and initiatives that were presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

So I take strong exception to this government, a government that has been in power for the best part of four decades, again taking this authority to suspend the authority of a council to make bylaws in respect to any matter. It's quite simple: you are overriding local government, and if you feel that a government is not abiding by your wishes, well, then you're going to withhold money. I fail to understand why we would need to do this. If in the consultations that were made the governments that you consulted with agreed to this – I see where the AUMA has endorsed this bill, but I don't know if they endorsed that particular amendment.

Also, there is a section in here that will force urban unions if necessary. I know the Premier worked very hard in getting groups together from around metro Edmonton so that they could work together in a more effective and efficient manner. There wasn't any need for Bill 36 at that time. The Premier, to his credit, got some good work done. But this bill is unbelievable.

Also, in the time that I have, judicial oversight. I think we need judicial oversight. There are three legs to the democratic stool. There's the executive branch, there is the judicial branch, and of course there's the legislative branch. I can see why the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has his issues around judicial oversight. The judiciary, Mr. Speaker, do not make the laws; the laws are made here in the Legislative Assembly. They simply enforce them if necessary, if a matter comes before them. There are three sections of this bill that allow complete override by the minister or by the cabinet. I just don't understand why we would need to have that: no review by the court.

This also applies to a decision of an appeals body. I'm going to read directly from this because I think this is draconian, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking at section 74(3):

On receiving the report of the appeal body, the Minister may, by order, confirm, reverse or vary the decision appealed and make any decision that the person whose decision was appealed could have made, and make any further order that the Minister considers necessary for the purpose of carrying out the decision.

I think that is completely unnecessary. Why do we need to have this ultimate authority? Then after this ministerial override of an appeals process, I don't see how we can say that this is fair to landowners or fair to Albertans. There's no review by the court. There's absolutely no review by the court, and there are two other sections in this bill where there is direct reference made to no review by the court.

Now, I don't think, whenever this bill was drafted by the minister, that the hon. minister wanted people to go into this in detail. If we look at part 5, the transitional provisions, related amendments, and coming into force of this legislation, sections 68 to 94 are conveniently listed as related amendments. There are significant amendments in there, Mr. Speaker, that I think this Assembly has failed to take notice of. There are significant amendments to the Public Lands Act, among other pieces of legislation, that I don't think we have dealt with effectively in the time we've had to debate this bill.

I'm amazed. I know we need to have a land-use law. I know that is necessary, but what I do not feel is necessary is the absolute power

that we are providing to the minister and to cabinet. I think that whenever landowners eventually become more aware of this bill as it's implemented, they're going to have a lot of questions, like I do.

I know that earlier in this session we had a long and lengthy discussion on Bill 19, but one of the last amendments, I think the very last amendment, is an amendment to Bill 19. That's section 3. I think 3(1), to be precise. Of course, we're striking out the notwithstanding clause and substituting: "Subject to any applicable [Alberta Land Stewardship Act] regional plan and notwithstanding." "Notwithstanding" goes back in there. We all know what that means. I'm really, really disappointed. I was told before, whenever we were debating Bill 19, that there was another shoe to drop with this, and this is it, this amendment, the very last amendment in Bill 36. Everything is connected here. Unfortunately, the connections do not bode well for the landowners of this province because I think they're going to be bulldogged here. The province has got this benevolent attitude that whatever they decide is right. I'm sorry. I cannot accept this bill in this form.

In conclusion, I want to say that we need a land-use framework, but this bill, for myself, just doesn't meet the test. I'm sorry. I cannot accept this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:00

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to third reading of Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act. I think it's an interesting bill, and there are different aspects of it that are worthy of comment. I think the first one is the approach that's been taken in general, the overall approach to the issues. They flow from the choice of the ministry to head this up. I was somewhat surprised when Sustainable Resource Development was selected as the lead ministry in developing this plan. Normally I would have thought it would have been Municipal Affairs. I think you would get a different approach depending on which ministry was taking the lead on this particular bill.

A lot of the concepts in the bill I think flow from the fact that it's Sustainable Resource Development that is heading it up. For example, the division of the province into regions based on their watersheds wouldn't occur to the average Municipal Affairs minister as the way to develop. I'm not saying that it's a wrong thing at all, just that it seems to come from that. There is some good thought put into different provisions that allow for the conservation of land and resources in natural areas. It outlines four in particular. In that respect I think it's interesting, and there are some positive things that have come out of it.

The real question, I think, that bedevils the leaders at the municipal and provincial levels, which is the second thing I wanted to mention, Mr. Speaker, is the whole question of intermunicipal planning. Alberta used to have a system of regional planning councils. I was serving on the executive of the Edmonton regional planning council at the time the then Minister of Municipal Affairs, Dr. West, directed all of the regional planning commissions to wrap up their affairs.

Now, there were some disadvantages to the whole approach. Basically, in the Edmonton region, the one that I'm familiar with, Edmonton appointed I believe it was nine members of the regional planning commission, and then there was individual representation from other towns and rural municipalities within the boundaries surrounding Edmonton. So there was, I think, a pretty good balance in terms of representation between the city itself and the regional area, and we worked through a lot of areas.

The principles there, though, were important because it gave focus to a balance or appropriate roles for rural municipalities and urban municipalities. In other words, it had a major objective of preserving agricultural land and preventing urban sprawl although in those days that wasn't really a popular term to call it. Effectively, it operated in a way that acted as a check on urban sprawl.

Once it was wrapped up and the new approach was in bilateral plans, that had to be negotiated bilaterally between adjacent municipalities, that broke down, and we saw a great deal more urban sprawl taking place. It's actually culminated in the last few years in a situation where municipal counties are consciously attempting to ring municipalities on their borders with urban-style development. They do that for a very clear reason, Mr. Speaker, and that is to ensure that as development occurs, the tax base occurs in their jurisdiction and not in the urban municipality.

I've had complaints about this when I've met with mayors right around the province, not just from larger centres but some smaller towns as well. That's been a growing concern, and I think it's very, very dangerous. For example, a city like Edmonton provides many of the services for all of northern Alberta in terms of health care, to some degree in education, certainly in social services, provides many of the cultural and recreational opportunities for the region, and deals with policing costs and health costs, at least until recently with ambulances.

To deprive the central municipality of tax revenue allows, I think, some suburban municipalities to have increased tax revenue but not some of the responsibilities, so there has to be a balance there. Our view is that urban styles of development belong in urban municipalities, and rural development, which can include heavy industry, by the way, should be occurring in rural municipalities. We need to make a clear distinction between them.

Now, it's possible that this act can do that, but it does that, I think, in a way that troubles me, and that brings me to the third thing that I really wanted to talk about, which is the centralization of power. The decisions that are being made in this act reside ultimately in the hands of the cabinet. We've established the principle of the provincial government as Big Brother, sorting out potential disputes in plans and knocking recalcitrant municipal children into line. It's this aspect, I think, that concerns me the most, Mr. Speaker, and makes me wonder a little bit why some of the municipal organizations haven't raised more of a fuss about this.

I know that in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, when I chaired the governance task force, we were very clear that municipal governments were an equal order of government to provincial and federal governments, and we were also clear that they should not be subject to a high degree of control by provincial governments. In fact, we objected strongly to the whole doctrine that municipalities should be the child of the province, but it seems to me that this principle is very strongly incorporated into this piece of legislation.

I also think, Mr. Speaker, that this is yet another example of the government's own trend towards centralizing power in the political leadership of the province. Specifically, I'm talking about the cabinet. There are so many decisions that have previously been made by other organizations in the province that are now being made at the cabinet level, even with respect to, you know, government grants to community organizations; for example, the Wild Rose issue that we have dealt with. There is more and more centralization of decision-making and the exclusion of bodies that are less partisan, less political, that aren't part of the cabinet or the government. They're falling like tenpins, in my view, in terms of any decisions that might be of great significance, including financial decisions and some of the decisions around municipal planning.

I know the hon. minister mentioned just a few minutes ago that he hoped the opposition was beginning to see that political power or

power vested in the political side was superior to power vested in the courts because the government, at least, was accountable. I rather prefer an approach where there's some distribution of power so that there are checks and balances. I like the concept of having some checks on power, whether it's judicial power or political power. I think that when you centralize it all in one or the other, you're not really counterbalancing perceived overreaching by the courts. You're not substituting it with something that really deals with that whole question.

5:10

What you really are doing is just transferring the problem into another sphere or into another jurisdiction. I think that the real answer is not to take power away from the courts and give it to the government. The real answer is to distribute the power more evenly and allow more participation and greater participation at the community level in the making of decisions. I don't think this bill does that in any way.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to, I guess, wrap up by saying that while I think there are some innovative and positive things here and that I don't think putting this bill under the leadership of Sustainable Resource Development was a mistake in any way and has produced some, I think, real benefits, some real positives in the bill, I don't think that the solution to intermunicipal planning or the overcentralization of power in the hands of the cabinet are really features of the bill that can allow me to support it. I think that we need a bill that more clearly addresses some of the principles, some of the urban principles that we need to see, and concentration of population and sound urban planning.

A real direction to oppose urban sprawl should be set out. I just want to indicate in passing as well on that point that the government seems to be very, very committed to the whole concept of ring roads, ring roads, ring roads everywhere. One of the things that produces urban sprawl, that puts in place infrastructure for urban sprawl more than any single investment government can make is ring roads. You can see this in American cities. You look at Minneapolis; you look at many other cities. The ring roads around major cities allow the creation of satellite communities for miles and miles and miles around. If you look further at some of the cities and the impact of that on urban cores, it's decay. It's decay because tax money, tax base flows out to the surrounding municipalities, and everybody that can afford it gets out of town, and they live in these municipalities. The inner core still has all of the responsibilities for the region in many, many areas and can't afford those commitments, so blight and urban decay are the result, and that's not what I want to see.

I think that if some of those principles were laid out in this bill, I could support it, but on balance it doesn't address the emerging issues of a modern, rapidly growing and rapidly urbanizing province, and for that reason I cannot support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Does the hon. minister wish to close?

Dr. Morton: I call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a third time]

Bill 27

Alberta Research and Innovation Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take pleasure in moving Bill 27, the Alberta Research and Innovation Act, for third reading.

The act provides for a considerable amount of restructuring with respect to the research and innovation agenda for the province. It preserves, in my view, some of the good work that has been done in this province over the last 25 to 30 years in terms of investment in research. It recognizes that innovation and unleashing innovation is the future of the province and that we need to have a very strong approach to it and provides a real structure to move us forward into the next era of innovation and development in a knowledge-based economy.

I'd ask the House to join me in supporting and voting for Bill 27 in third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Certainly, Bill 27 has caught the attention of many hon. members. In conclusion, in debate in third reading, even though I'm not supportive of this enterprise, I would like to again put on the public record my appreciation for the time of the minister and his staff in providing the Official Opposition with their view of this legislation.

Much has been said about this bill during the course of debate. Certainly, there have been amendments presented by this side of the House. There have been amendments, in particular, put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who, of course, has the University of Alberta within his constituency. Postsecondary education has been an issue that the hon. member has been very vocal on, and he certainly has an opinion on what would make for a very strong postsecondary institution, including, of course, the University of Alberta.

There have been amendments put forward, as I said, to improve this legislation. Certainly, the government did look at one and consider it and accept it, but there are still outstanding issues around this bill, particularly whenever we look at what will be done here when we consolidate or we bring together through the Alberta Research and Innovation Act the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Energy Research Institute, the Forestry Research Institute, the Alberta Information and Communications Technology Institute, the Life Sciences Institute, parts of iCORE transferred from Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, the endowment funds for medical research, and the foundation for science and engineering research. So we're looking at a pool that will be in excess of \$2.5 billion when all is said and done.

I can understand where the department is coming from. I could appreciate what the minister was talking about whenever he was visioning this part of the world as a centre of excellence for research and development, and I can understand that. But I'm not so certain that we have the ability to govern this new enterprise. I'm looking at, again, some of the outstanding issues that we have in particular on the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology from the Auditor General. Whether it's the last report or going back two to three years, the Auditor General has put up some flags. We talked about this in second reading, and I'm just not convinced. It's like increasing the allowance of your teenagers: more money, more scope. The more money they have, the faster they can get around town.

5:20

I would urge caution here. I know the minister has put on the record his view, his attitude toward this and why we need this, but I'm not convinced at this time that we do. I'm not convinced that we have the ability to govern this. More and more this government has the habit – it's not a disturbing habit, but it's a habit – of more and

more activities occurring outside the potential view of the Legislative Assembly. This is another example of that.

Sure, we're going to have experts, and they're going to be from all different fields and professions, and they're going to have the best interests of the act at heart. I have no doubt about that. But the \$2.5 billion, Mr. Speaker, is money that belongs not to the government, not to the minister, not to the research community. It's taxpayers' money.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I don't see the public interest, the taxpayers' interest here. I hope I'm proven wrong. I hope, if this bill becomes law, that everything works out. I hope what the minister told me in the briefing comes true. But I'm a little skeptical. One only has to look at some of the examples that were brought up by the Auditor General to validate the skepticism that I have expressed.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be extremely brief. I am extremely proud to be the representative of the University of Calgary, which is one of the top research institutions in Canada, never mind the province of Alberta. One of the most effective areas or departments in which this research is undertaken is in the ISEEE, which is the Institute for Sustainable Energy, Environment and Economy, and at times "experiential learning" is substituted for "economy."

It's absolutely important, however, when we're doing research, that that research not be strictly focused on industrial aspects. There is no doubt that we need to move beyond our dependency on nonrenewable resources, but if the types of research are restricted, then the outcomes are also limited.

I previously referred to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where research determined the nature of the society that was being built. I'm very concerned, for example, that while I support tremendously innovation and technology and advancements in medicine and while I support in those areas, particularly, the government's sponsorship through medical trust funds of a program that's jointly operated by the University of Calgary and the Foothills hospital that allows students from all over the province to conduct their own research in a lab setting with mentorship from a number of well-known and capable research experts, as I say, cross-connected with the University of Calgary and the Calgary Foothills hospital – this is wonderful – I've also recounted the terrific advancements in nanotechnology. I've referred previously to the Alastair Ross research centre and Smart Technologies, that has recently opened up.

What I believe we are lacking and where we need to expand our research is research into the humanities, research into areas of sociology, research into psychology, research into the important role, as the button we were given today indicates, of the arts and culture. I believe that these areas, if we're going to be a rounded society, require research dollars as well. It shouldn't be just a matter of how quickly and safely we can get things out of the ground, but we should look at our human potential and the importance of those discussions. I truly believe that had more thought been given to sociological effects and aspects, the government might have reconsidered how quickly Bill 44 was put through, and they might reconsider the effect it's going to have on education in this province and, as we put forward in an amendment, the potentially chilling effect. The point I am making is that while I support the notion, obviously, of research and innovation, I want to see the scope expanded to go beyond just the areas of medicine and science and include areas such as humanities.

We're a complex group; there's no doubt about it. Recognizing and studying that complexity so that we can be more tolerant and understanding of a variety of viewpoints and having the opportunity to discuss those viewpoints is extremely important. What I see in one sense is an exclusion of open-ended discussion in Bill 44, yet Bill 27 is talking about reaching out. So I say: let's extend our reach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to debate.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to speak to Bill 27. As I had an opportunity to speak earlier and listen to many other people, I too shall be relatively brief. One of the continuing themes that we've seen come up, at least in my short time in the Legislature – and I believe this has been a relatively new habit of the government – is to continually put power into the cabinet, the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Needless to say, if memory serves, this is another one of those bills that does it.

What you have here is a tremendous amount of money being put towards what looks like a very good cause. Well, what is a better cause than research and innovation? Everyone in Alberta knows that we have to learn to diversify our economy to try and move to a knowledge-based economy, whatever that may look like. We have to get off sort of the fossil fuel treadmill, even to a certain extent our production of beef in this province. If you look at it taking a thousand litres of water to produce one pound of beef, well, you know, it doesn't take a long time to figure out that that might not be the most sustainable area of things to be involved in.

Anyway, when you look, then, at this fund being essentially controlled from the Premier's office and the cabinet, that's an awful lot of money that can get set in picking a direction of where you want research to go or in looking for a particular solution to Alberta's problems: "Alberta's future is in carbon capture and storage, so we're going to put all this money into here," or "Alberta's future is in, say, the raising of Holsteins, and we're going to go one hundred per cent in favour of creating the best Holstein cow available."

Mr. Chase: Hopefully, it's not that black and white.

Mr. Hehr: Hopefully, it's not that black and white, yes.

Anyway, I'm just saying that if we allow that to occur, it sort of defeats the purpose of the winners coming out of the laboratory, the real competitiveness that can happen in a lab, and the real, I guess, advances that can occur there from the ground up and not from the top down. That's where you see the real winners in this type of innovation, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview put forward many amendments that I believe would have gone a long way to spurring that creative process from the ground up, where the ideas and the friction that are created in competition in the labs would rise to the top.

5:30

Nevertheless, it appears that this government again has preferred a top-down approach to how this is going to go. Let's just hope that it works out. I think this bill is fraught with peril, that we may be looking back some 10 years from now and saying: where the heck did the money go? But let's hope not. Let's always look at the glass half full, or let's look at the sunny side of life as the session is almost over.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was an opportunity to speak and get my points on the record.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Seeing none, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to this. This is an extension of the concern that I talked about and other members have talked about on the continuing centralization of decision-making in a political way. It's very, very problematic when it comes to academic research, so I think that the framework laid out in this bill is cause for concern for a number of reasons.

First of all, there's a real lack of detail about the new framework, how it will affect researchers and their funding. We've got the legislative skeleton here in front of us, Mr. Speaker, but we don't really know how it's going to operate. We don't know what kind of day-to-day functions it will serve and what the transition to the new framework will look like. We don't have details about the public reporting requirements of these entities that are being created, so we don't know how accountable they'll be to the people of Alberta. The only public report that the bill guarantees is an annual report from the minister of finance that summarizes the activities of the endowment funds during the previous fiscal year.

We have been in touch with a number of researchers who are funded through the existing government institutions, and they seem to be quite worried by how little they know about the changes that are going to be made and how they will be affected by them. I think this is especially problematic at a time when the global economic situation has made finances so uncertain. For example, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research just announced that it will only be awarding \$39 million in research money this year. They gave out \$59 million in both of the years 2007 and 2008. The reason that they're giving out less is because the endowment fund lost a considerable amount of value.

Now, I think I'm just going to make an aside here, Mr. Speaker, to say that the overdependence on endowment funds in education is potentially a real problem, and the recent economic circumstances have demonstrated the limitations of that approach. That doesn't mean that we should throw out endowments altogether, but let's be clear. When we save lots of cash and invest it in the stock market, we are taking significant risks, and it won't always be there when we need it. It's a bad time, I think, to be compounding financial uncertainty and insecurity with organizational uncertainty and insecurity.

Mr. Speaker, there is some evidence in Bill 27 that the government is trying to get more control over research money, and this is a big concern. AHFMR and the AHFMR endowment fund are currently under the AHFMR Act – I think you should use just an acronym or something for some of these things, just one word like “SMART” so that it's easier to say, but that's just me – and it says that:

The Minister of Finance must, at the request of the Foundation made on reasonable notice, pay from the Endowment Fund to the Foundation money that, in the opinion of the trustees, is required by the Foundation for the furtherance of its objects.

There's a similar clause in the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act with regard to that foundation. However, the section in Bill 27 regarding endowment funds says:

The Minister of Finance and Enterprise must, at the request of the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology made on reasonable notice, pay from the specified endowment Fund money that, in the opinion of the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, is required to carry out the purposes of the Fund, which include the funding of the research and innovation corporations.

So any removal of the funds from the endowment fund now has to come through the minister.

The ministry has also been talking about aligning research with government priorities through this new framework. This is precisely the problem, Mr. Speaker. You do not want to have the government directing research so that it aligns with the immediate political priorities of the government. That will undermine the research effort in this province and will create no end of problems. We will essentially have a research program in this province that will not produce the long-term results that we wish. Putting politicians in charge I think is very much wrong.

Mr. Hehr: Fraught with danger.

Mr. Mason: It's fraught with danger, and I think that we should resist the temptation.

I think this frightens researchers because more government intervention basically means less opportunity to get innovative, leading-edge research funded. If you're not working on what the government is interested in, then you're out of luck. This could drive some of our top researchers out of Alberta if open calls for submissions are replaced with calls for submissions in specific research areas. It also represents an opportunity for government to favour the areas of research their friends are involved in. I hate to say that I think the government is capable of doing that, but I do.

The ministry says that the conversation about funding priorities is a two-way conversation between the government and the universities, but the bill only really accounts for the priorities of the government being primary. Also, the alignment of the new research entities would align departments according to the ministry, and this is one of the motivations for structuring research entities in this way. The addition of a cross-government portfolio advisory committee which has the relevant ministers on it indicates that the ministry's priorities for research are going to have a much bigger influence on what gets funded through the research entities.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in the current legislation specific powers and purposes for various research entities are outlined. However, Bill 27 only says that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations about the capacities and powers of the corporations, so it's unclear whether the new corporations will have the same abilities as current entities and whether the government will be taking more control over research operation. Once again, there's a lack of transparency about how these entities will actually operate. Thus, it's unclear how the public will be benefiting from the results of these research corporations' initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I think that AHFMR – I'm just going to call it that – has been an extremely successful force for medical research in Alberta and has put Alberta medical research on the map internationally. Changing the way government sponsors medical research in Alberta is a risky move because the government is trying to fix something that isn't really broken. Where have we seen this movie before, hon. members? We risk losing some of our top researchers due to the uncertainty that this transition is causing as well as the threat of more government interference in the distribution of research funding.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just indicate that there are concerns about loss of academic freedom. There are implications for being able to retain people that have been recruited. I've mentioned government interference in research priorities.

5:40

I think, Mr. Speaker, there's a concern about the immediate status of researchers funded through current programs and their future funding that simply needs to be addressed by the government. There's a great uncertainty in the research community over this bill

and the future directions of the government and the decisions that will flow from the passage of this piece of legislation. I think the principles of academic freedom have stood the test of time against all sorts of governments far, far more tyrannical than this one. I want to be positive about this and suggest to hon. members that this is not the most tyrannical government that's ever tried to interfere with research funding. But, frankly, I think we could do better, and this act is part of a worrisome trend. It's interesting that the two bills, the last one that we just spoke about, about land use, and this one, have some common features, and that is cause for considerable concern.

That being said, I want to indicate with great regret to my hon. colleagues that I will be unable to support Bill 27 at third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology to close debate?

Mr. Hancock: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

**Bill 45
Electoral Boundaries Commission
Amendment Act, 2009**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise this afternoon to move third reading of the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009.

I believe that this legislation is important because it provides for the way forward for our province. It ensures that we have the opportunity to make sure that Albertans are well represented as we continue to have new people come to our province. I think it's a very good balance between the representation that we need to have in our government and in this House with respect to urban and rural MLAs.

I would urge all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with intent. Again, I enjoy the sentiment of what my hon. friend on the other side just said, yet I don't think I can support this bill either. The simple fact of the matter is that at this time – and I think we all know this as I've tried to train you guys; get ready for this – Alberta needs another four MLAs like . . .

Mr. MacDonald: A hole in the head.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Mason: Unless they're New Democrats. Then it's okay.

Mr. Hehr: Yes.

Needless to say – I've put this on the record before – it costs approximately \$10 million for four more members to sit here for four years. I think that at this time in the Legislature we can roll up our sleeves, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, a good conservative mentality, rise to the top, and lead by example. On that front I'd like to bring some fiscal sanity back to the House, urge all members to vote against this unnecessary expenditure, and recognize that with cellphones, computers, technology, what have you, we can do a good job representing the citizens of Alberta and do not need another four members at this time.

I urge all members to send this bill back. Let's send it to the drawing board, and let's let the electoral redrawing committee do this with only 83 members in this House, not 87. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour and in light of the fact that we've had some late evenings, including last night, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:46 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Webber

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
Kang
MacDonald

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
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Chase
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Amery MacDonald
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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, June 3, 2009

Issue 48

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 3, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the ambassador of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Lan Lijun. Accompanying the ambassador today are Mr. Jiang Shan, minister-counsellor, embassy of the People's Republic of China; Mr. Tian Yuzhen, second secretary, embassy of the People's Republic of China; and Mr. Wu Xinjian, the consul general in Calgary. This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta. I had the pleasure of hosting a lunch for him earlier today.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and China have a rich history of co-operation, including a twinning relationship between Alberta and the province of Heilongjiang that dates back to 1981. Alberta also has international offices in Beijing and Hong Kong, which have helped to strengthen our trade relations, and China is Alberta's second-largest export market. Looking to the future, I believe there is tremendous potential for greater collaboration between Alberta and China.

I would ask His Excellency the ambassador and his delegation to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three bright young Albertans seated in the members' gallery. Their names are Miss Madeleine Gauthier, Mr. Rory Dumelie, and Miss Danielle Bailey-Heelan. Rory, Danielle, and Madeleine are accompanied today by their unsung supporters, their parents: Mr. Patrick and Stephanie Dumelie, Mr. James Heelan, and Mr. Denis Gauthier. This is truly a group of outstanding Albertans whose generosity and caring for this province is unparalleled. I would ask now that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visiting group of 63 folks from my constituency and the Greentree school from Drumheller made up of students and parents and teachers. It's such a pleasure to introduce these wonderful young people. I had an opportunity to have my picture taken with them and had them up to

the office. They truly, truly are a bright bunch of kids that I know are going to make us proud. With them today are their teachers Lesley Smith and Kirstin Sutcliffe. They're also accompanied by parent volunteers Jacquie Lemal, Michelle Olsen, Jim Brown, Norm Fournier, Donna Weiss, Koren McDougald, Brad McDougald, and Lenore Rowbottom. I would now ask them if they would please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of Alberta's environmental leaders who are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. Today Miss Georgia Turcott of Canmore is Alberta's honorary Environment minister. Georgia is one of approximately 1,400 students who participated in this year's minister for the day program. Earlier today she along with her deputy ministers did an excellent job of briefing me on their environmental concerns.

Mr. Speaker, Georgia is joined by her 11 deputy ministers in the public gallery, and I would be pleased if I could introduce them at this time. They are Alyssa Ermineskin of Wetaskiwin, Asma Azad of Calgary, Abby Cardinal of Westrose, Dharma Ozsust of Ardrossan, Ethan Wagner of Airdrie, Tosin Odugbemi of Stony Plain, Aqila Walji of Calgary, Dylan Yanke of Medicine Hat, Maria Ayala of Calgary, Julie McIntosh of Edmonton, and Georgenea Senetza of Smoky Lake, along with the minister for the day, Georgia Turcott. I ask that they all rise and receive the recognition of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to acknowledge that they are joined by a number of teachers and parents, who have done an excellent job of bringing these young people into a true leadership position, and I congratulate them all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of bright and friendly grades 5 and 6 students from Standard elementary school in my constituency. They are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Susan Moncks and Mrs. Dora Will and one of their parents, Mrs. Michelle Lomond. I believe they shared the coach with the Greentree school, that was just introduced to you. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Legislative Assembly of Alberta is a host site for the annual Historica Fair and initiated an award to recognize participants who demonstrate outstanding achievement in celebrating an aspect of Canadian parliamentary democracy, governance, and political history with a specific focus on Alberta. It is now my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly the winner of this year's award, a grade 7 student who presented an enthusiastic representation of the life and work of Louise McKinney. Please join me in congratulating Moira Wyton from the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts in Edmonton. Moira is seated in the Speaker's gallery with her parents, sister, and grandparents. I would ask our guests to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is of my summer STEP student in my constituency office, Alyssa Brotto. Alyssa has proven to be a very smart and hard-working addition to the office, dedicated to helping my constituents. In addition to working in the constituency office this summer, Alyssa gives swimming lessons and is a lifeguard as well. Come September, Alyssa will be returning to the University of Alberta, where she will continue her bachelor of arts degree and her bachelor of education and become a high school social studies and English teacher. Could I ask everyone to join me in welcoming Alyssa to the Legislative Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is of my constituency assistant, Josie Jason. Josie has been my assistant since I was elected. I know my office would not be running smoothly if I didn't have her. Josie approaches each day with enthusiasm and a sense of humour that allows her to overcome and deal with the many challenges she has every day. Please join me in welcoming Josie Jason.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.
1:40

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to present to you two guests today. Judy Lytton is a long-time resident of the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. Judy has just completed her book called *The Orphan Wild Rose*, a personal biography. Accompanying Judy is Theresa Lightfoot, who has assisted Judy with photographs and compiling her words into book format. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce two good friends of mine from Three Hills that are here today. They actually drove up all those great students from the Greentree school. They are seated in the public gallery: Mr. Scott Morrison and Mr. Alex Cunningham. Alex and I served together formerly on the Three Hills hospital board. If Alex and Scott would rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just need to point out that we're joined in the gallery today by Brady Whittaker, executive director of the Alberta Forest Products Association, who's working so hard on behalf of his industry in these tough times. Welcome, Brady, to the Legislature.

Privilege

Ethics Commissioner Advice on Conflicts of Interest

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday there was in this Assembly a petition for a question of privilege, and I'm prepared to make my ruling with respect to this matter now. This purported question of privilege was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview yesterday, June 2, 2009.

To summarize, the member's purported question of privilege was that the Ethics Commissioner interfered with the member's ability to perform his functions by providing conflicting advice as to whether the member could participate in debate on Bill 43, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

In documents provided to the Speaker in support of this purported question of privilege, the member included letters from the Ethics Commissioner dated May 26, 2009, advising him that as a result of the holdings of the member's father-in-law he had to recuse himself from participation in debate on the bill and from voting, and a letter dated June 1, 2009, where the Ethics Commissioner apologized for his earlier advice and informed the member he could participate in further debate and vote on Bill 43.

Under Standing Order 15(6) the Speaker's role in the question of privilege is to determine whether the matter was raised at the earliest opportunity and whether it constitutes a *prima facie* question of privilege. With respect to the formalities the member indicated yesterday that he'd received the Ethics Commissioner's letter after the proceedings in the Assembly had commenced on June 1. He provided notice to the Speaker's office at 10:55 a.m. on June 2, which the chair finds to be in compliance with Standing Order 15(2), and the chair finds that the matter was raised at the earliest opportunity.

At the outset the chair notes that it was clear from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's comments yesterday that he was driven by a desire to comply with the rules that the members have set for themselves in the Conflicts of Interest Act while wanting to participate in debate on a matter for which he had prepared extensively. His justified frustration was apparent.

While this matter was raised by one particular member, it reflects a sentiment that is found throughout the Assembly of members being dedicated to observing the rules while wanting to represent their constituents.

In this case there is no doubt that the member was prevented from participating in the debate at committee stage on Bill 43. However, any obstruction that occurred was because of advice from an officer of the Legislature whose mandate and functions are set out in the Conflicts of Interest Act. The member did not suggest that there was any malicious intent on the part of the commissioner or that the commissioner was acting outside the scope of his duties.

The Ethics Commissioner occupies a unique position as the Assembly has delegated to that individual the ability to know a member's and his or her family's most intimate financial details and to apply the Conflicts of Interest Act in a fair and even-handed manner. It is a position of ultimate trust. While the position and duties are defined by a statute, his recommendations are subject to debate and approval by the Assembly when he proposes a sanction against a member. Just as the commissioner must expect members to be forthright in their disclosures, members have the right to expect that the decisions and advice from the commissioner are rigorous and consistent.

In this case the commissioner admitted to having made a mistake which deprived the member of his ability to participate in a critical phase of the legislative process.

In conducting research on this matter, the chair discovered that on October 6, 2005, Speaker Milliken of the Canadian House of Commons found that there was a *prima facie* question of privilege involving the actions of the then Ethics Commissioner, Dr. Bernard Shapiro, which can be found at *House of Commons Debates* pages 8473-8474. The matter was referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which found that the commissioner was in contempt of the House but did not recommend any sanctions or penalty. That report was presented in the House of Commons on November 18, 2005. In that case the issue was that the commissioner discussed a complaint against a member with the media in violation of his duty of confidentiality and that the member was not provided with written notice of the investigation and the charges against him.

In this case the Ethics Commissioner was fulfilling his duty to provide advice to a member. The essence of the complaint is that the advice was wrong, which was admitted by the commissioner, and that the error deprived the member of his ability to participate in debate.

The Assembly is not without recourse against officers. For instance, under section 36 of the Conflicts of Interest Act the Ethics Commissioner may be suspended or removed from office for cause or incapacity by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Assembly. If the Assembly is not sitting, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices may recommend suspension, but that suspension is only effective until the end of the next sitting of the Assembly.

The Conflicts of Interest Act is a code for members. It does not provide for an appeal of advice provided by the commissioner. The chair is reluctant to find that there is a *prima facie* question of privilege as that could be interpreted as providing an avenue for appeal for members from advice from the Ethics Commissioner.

The chair would as well like to make a comment on something said by another member during his participation in the debate on this purported question of privilege. It is this chair's view, and one supported by the Conflicts of Interest Act, that members must act in accordance with advice from the Ethics Commissioner. Under section 43(5) of the act no proceeding can be taken against a member "by reason only of the facts so communicated and the compliance of the Member, former Minister or former . . . staff member with the recommendations." In short, members should not engage in opinion shopping as they are only protected if they comply with the Ethics Commissioner's advice.

At this time the chair is of the view that there is no *prima facie* question of privilege but does not want to end the matter there. In the chair's view the member was most gracious in speaking to the issue of remedy. He was not seeking a proverbial pound of flesh but wanted to ensure that there were measures undertaken to review what constitutes a conflict of interest so that members could perform their functions while not furthering their private interests.

In the chair's view there is much merit to this suggestion. Even prior to this question of privilege discussions were under way to ensure that caucuses and officials could provide their views to the Ethics Commissioner so that there was harmony between the intent of members in enacting the legislation and the commissioner in interpreting it. Towards that end, there are some actions that the chair would like to advise members of that will or, in the chair's view, should occur.

Number one, the Ethics Commissioner has agreed to meet with caucuses to discuss and receive input on the application of the Conflicts of Interest Act. This invitation must be taken up.

Number two, Parliamentary Counsel and counsel from the Department of Justice and Attorney General are to meet with the Ethics Commissioner to discuss the background to the act, previous reviews of the act, and approaches to interpretation.

Number three, the Speaker and Minister of Justice and Attorney General are to be available to discuss any issues that the Ethics Commissioner might have concerning the application of the act.

Number four, the Ethics Commissioner is to provide prior to the commencement of the fall sitting a general overview of the interpretation of the act with respect to what might constitute a private interest of such a nature to require a member to absent himself or herself from the proceedings of the Assembly, committee, or other forum.

The chair reminds members that a special select committee of the Assembly under the able chairmanship of the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill reviewed the Conflicts of Interest Act a few years ago.

The committee issued its report in May of 2006. The bill resulting from that review was introduced in the Assembly on April 18, 2007, considered by a policy field committee, and given royal assent on December 7, 2007. It came into effect on April 1, 2008. The chair points this out as there was a great deal of background material on this subject found in the report and the proceedings of the committee. Research should be done, in fact, with the historical records of that committee.

1:50

While it is hoped that any consultations are productive, the chair would like to offer a comment as he is not a disinterested observer in the proceedings of this Assembly. In fact, it is the chair who witnesses and deals directly with the impact that the Ethics Commissioner's rulings and advice have on the deliberations in this Assembly.

As the discussions move forward, the chair hopes that all are mindful that constituents often expect that their elected representative's experience will play a part in the decision-making process. Of course, no one is disputing that if, for example, a member or a direct associate would derive a real and tangible benefit from a contract or such, the member should recuse himself or herself from the deliberations. The issue is where to draw the line between private interest and public duty.

One of the recommendations of the select special committee that reviewed the act in 2005-06 was that the preamble be expanded to include provisions such as:

- The Assembly as a whole can represent the people of Alberta most effectively if its Members have experience and knowledge in relation to many aspects of life of Alberta and if they can continue to be active in their own communities, whether in business, in the practice of a profession, or otherwise.
- A Member's duty to represent his or her constituents includes broadly representing his or her constituents' interests in the Assembly and to the Government of Alberta.

Bill 2 amended the Conflicts of Interest Act to add a new recital to the preamble, which reads:

Whereas Members of the Legislative Assembly can serve Albertans most effectively if they come from a spectrum of occupations and continue to participate actively in the community.

In the chair's view these principles are a good basis on which to guide discussion on the interpretation of the act.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Communications

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From fiscal '07-08 to fiscal '09-10 this administration's total communications budget increased 55 per cent. The ministries that had the largest budgets or received the largest increases are those that have the worst image problems. Alberta Environment, Energy, Health and Wellness, Sustainable Resource Development are among the big spenders, and of course the Premier's Executive Council has received a considerable increase in the communications budget. To the Premier: if the government needs to cut program spending in order to reduce its budget, will the Premier commit to communications being the first area audited and considered before cutting core social programs?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. One, with respect to the overall programs that we hold dear – health, education – we

continued increases in the budget for education, advanced education, health, and social services. That is coming from our sustainability fund, that we've put together to deal with particular situations. With respect to the Public Affairs budget, that budget was debated here in the House. The hon. member will recall the fact that for the budget that was allocated to Public Affairs, we actually did not spend all that money in Public Affairs, and it was part of the 250 some-odd million dollars that went into savings at the end of the year to balance our budget.

Dr. Swann: Well, the Premier in his own ministry, Executive Council, spent \$11 million on policy development and \$25 million on communications through the Public Affairs Bureau and the new rebranding scheme. What is the Premier's rationale for spending more on spin than on trying to improve government services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member is referring to a three-year budget, the business plan. We are continuing with promoting Alberta to a global marketplace. It is very, very important that we do that. We get the message to the American decision-makers. We have done some work, obviously, in Europe, and we'll continue to do that because we do depend on exports of our commodities to markets, and that is what creates the wealth in Alberta that supports many of the social programs that the hon. member is talking about.

Dr. Swann: Well, given that some of his own ministers can't remember the new million-dollar slogan, would the minister say to Albertans that this is a responsible way to spend 25 million public dollars?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yes, it is. Just coming back from Europe and listening to the questions that were asked by investors – and I believe there was a few trillion dollars collectively that investors held to look at investment around the world. The fact that we were there and talked about some of the misinformation that was delivered to those investors by other groups dealing with the misinformation, giving them the correct information and inviting them to invest some of that money in the province of Alberta is integral if we're going to keep our economy growing and support all of the programs that we enjoy.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Health Facilities

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans find it concerning that the Premier only hears about important decisions occurring in one of the most critical ministries through internal documents we tabled in the House. Yesterday I asked the Premier questions regarding talks that Health Services is having with doctors' groups for leasing public health facilities. The Premier did not know what I was referring to and said he would find out. Again to the Premier: will the Premier give the reason that Fort Saskatchewan hospital and the urology centre at the Rockyview are under consideration for being turned over to doctors' groups?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll make it very clear. I don't care what kind of information he has. I can assure people living in the constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville that the hospital will remain as a publicly funded institution in the province of Alberta. No question about it.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier now confirm that this is the reason why the Fort Saskatchewan hospital is under review and repurposing of the facility may happen?

Mr. Stelmach: I don't know where he's going. I just drove – actually, I stopped by to pick up some potted plants for Marie at the Home Depot. The hospital is being built just a bit south of the Home Depot and the other centre. Construction is proceeding. It looks like they've got the elevator shaft poured. This is, of course, a replacement facility for the Fort Saskatchewan facility that does a lot of work, a good partnership with the hospital in Lamont and other physicians in the city of Edmonton. It's part of the ever-growing partnership and collaboration of our doctors and specialists that are doing good work in the province of Alberta, and they'll have a brand new facility to work in.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Albertans, including professional groups, are really unclear what this government is concealing about the plans for the health care system. Could the Premier talk about what other facilities are under consideration for professional groups, including doctors' groups, to have a role in? Be open.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, a little angel is saying, "Don't say this," and a little devil is over here. He just questioned me about the cost of communication in the province of Alberta, and now we're saying how we're going to communicate to Albertans. We're going to keep communicating with Albertans. Just, again, to all Albertans: we're working very, very hard to ensure that our system, this good health system that we have, remains publicly funded, that it remains there for future generations, and we're going to do whatever we can to improve the effectiveness and the quality of care in our province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Transmission System Upgrades

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May 2003 the government behind closed doors overruled a regulatory process and shifted all the costs of transmission upgrades onto the monthly electricity bills of Alberta consumers. Six years later we now know that this decision, made behind closed doors, shifted over \$7 billion from the power generators to electricity consumers, who have already seen the full effects of electricity deregulation as it was implemented by this government. To the Premier: why did the government make the decision behind closed doors to overrule the regulatory process and shift an additional \$7 billion onto the monthly bills of consumers and not leave it where it belonged, with the power generators?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the little devil is getting ahead of me, but I won't listen to him. I don't know. Maybe there was a window behind these closed doors that the hon. member was peeking into and could see who was around the table. I don't know.

Let's be honest. Let's be honest with all Albertans, all Canadians, and all Americans. One of the biggest issues we're facing on this North American continent is an aging, very inefficient transmission system. At the end of the day it's the consumer that pays the cost. If anybody says that some company pays the cost, that is bunk. That's absolutely not true.

Now, here's the thing. The other day we heard some comments with respect to carbon. Okay? Well, today because of this aging

and inefficient system – can I just compare it to a water pipe? This water pipe has some holes. If you're sending, let's say, 10 gallons of water through that water pipe, you're losing an X amount of water. Well, when somebody turns on their hair dryer or plugs in their car, all of a sudden we have to send more electricity down the line. Guess what? We lose more. This is not only adding to the carbon footprint, but we're also burning more coal to make more electricity to lose more in the line getting to where the consumer is.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. The Premier knows full well – and he doesn't have to get his little devil to tell him this – that the generators of electricity are the big winners in electricity deregulation and consumers again are the big losers. Now, given the fact that we need an additional \$2 billion plus to upgrade our provincial interties, will the Premier guarantee here this afternoon in the Assembly to consumers that they will not have to foot the bill for the \$2 billion in intertie upgrades that are needed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to is a good transmission system within the province of Alberta. Here's the issue. In southern Alberta we have a potential of generating a considerable amount of wind energy. That's where the wind blows, except the consumer doesn't live where the wind blows. Okay? They live in Calgary. They live in Edmonton. We have to tie that wind energy, green energy, to a good transmission line, that we add the extra energy to, to get it to where the consumer is.

We have tremendous potential in the future for more green energy. It could be even in-stream generation, power generation. It could also be more biomass. I mean, there's a huge movement towards biomass. It's the future, really, for Alberta. Wherever we're creating that biomass energy, we have to also transmit those electrons to where the consumer lives. This is the discussion; this is where we're going.

The other thing is that there are all kinds of costs attached. You know, one paper says \$14 billion; one paper says \$8 billion. We'll know what the cost is when we actually get to the design stage. All I know is that we have to replace those transmission systems.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. This report which was issued yesterday indicates the total cost will be over \$16 billion, and I would strongly urge the hon. Premier to read that.

Now, speaking of costs – again to the Premier – how can inflation be blamed for the skyrocketing costs for these transmission upgrades, which have increased from 3 and a half billion dollars to over \$14 billion, plus the \$2 billion for the intertie? How can inflation be blamed now for this dramatic increase when we see other construction projects in the province with a reduction in costs up to 40 per cent?

Mr. Stelmach: First of all, with respect to the intertie.

Mr. MacDonald: Did you read the report?

Mr. Stelmach: Can you give me time to answer? You asked the question.

Mr. MacDonald: It won't matter.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I guess if it won't matter, why are you asking the question?

One of the things on the intertie is that it's clear that the Alberta consumer won't be paying the cost. However, to deal with this issue of aging lines and this cost of inflation, we were living in inflation-

ary times, obviously, in the last number of years. All of these costs that we have that are quoted by the opposition and by one of the newspapers vary from \$8 billion to \$14 billion.

All I'm saying is that we have to make the decisions. Let's identify where the transmission line is going to go, number one. Number two, let's get on with the design and getting them constructed because four to five years from now there may be areas of this province of Alberta that are actually going to be short of electricity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Children in Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness that Albertans learned of a horrible tragedy in Strathcona county on Monday. A man's and a woman's bodies were discovered following a police investigation into the alleged theft of a pickup truck. Now, the two 14-year-old boys that were charged with that crime were in the care of the Minister of Children and Youth Services. To that minister: will she now launch a full public inquiry into the crisis within child intervention services in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is an absolutely tragic incident, and my condolences go to the family and the friends of the victims. Now, obviously, because we will have legal proceedings, I can't say too much, but I can tell you that these two youths are in our care. They also have been placed in a residential treatment facility. We have taken an initial look at the decisions that surrounded that placement and found that they were appropriate. We also have confirmed that the protocols surrounding the reporting of AWOL youth were also followed by that facility. There was never any indication that either of these youths was ever a risk to themselves or others, but obviously as we move forward with more information, we will continue to look at the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this minister's watch we have seen the death of two children in care, the traumatic injury and hospitalization of another, and now two teenagers in care are accused of murder and accessory after the fact. It is clear that there is something very seriously wrong with the entire system. So will the minister announce today a public inquiry into child protection services in Alberta in an effort to find solutions to a system that is so obviously in crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The system is not in crisis. I would like to remind everyone here that we have 9,000 children in care receiving services from thousands and thousands of volunteers, staff members, and foster parents, and they do an awfully good job. We also know that across the country, because of our Alberta response model, we are seen as a leader in child welfare. We know that our Alberta Foster Parent Association is considered one of the top in the country. We had a full foster care review last year that considered our system a good one. They said we weren't perfect, had recommendations, and we've adopted them. As well, the Auditor General has fully audited our ministry and said that it was a very well-designed system.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister's inability to fix the problems with the foster and the group home system has had tragic results. Residents and community representatives in Strathcona county have expressed concerns to the ministry in the past about the particular facility in question. It is not enough to simply express sympathy and concern after the fact without addressing the circumstances that led to the tragedy. Why won't the minister initiate a public inquiry? Why isn't she interested in fixing a broken system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, this situation has been absolutely shocking and devastating for everyone, including the other residents of that facility, the staff, and the community that the member refers to. Our immediate focus is to make sure that we get support to those people. I can tell you that as early as tomorrow we do have CFSA and the RCMP meeting with the county out there to address any issues. In fact, they were all together this morning for the sharing of the information on the circumstances here.

Back to the comment about looking into circumstances, we have taken a look at the two most important things, decisions around the placement of these youth as well as protocols being followed in the facility, and like I said, they have been.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Clean Energy

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now, as we sit here, in Ottawa and in Washington and later at an international conference in Copenhagen discussions are being had and decisions are being made on clean energy production at the highest levels of government. These decisions will have a direct impact on Alberta's economy for all Albertans as energy consumers and also those who make their living in the energy industry and from related spinoff industries. My question is to the Premier. What will the Premier do over the coming months to make sure that Alberta's interests are clearly and forcefully represented?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that as a growing energy producer and, of course, the engine of the Canadian economy, a lot of the eyes of the world are on this province. We're going to have to manage our relationship with Ottawa, with Washington, and with some of our other partners around the world very carefully. Decisions made elsewhere have a direct impact on the province of Alberta, a direct impact on our global competitiveness, and they also will have at the end of the day an impact on our quality of life and standard of living. I will undertake this summer to again meet with the western governors in Utah and the Western Premier's Conference and continue to work with federal officials with the Minister of Energy and also the Minister of Environment to make sure that we are at the table for all of these discussions.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you. Clearly, our federal government is a huge player in these discussions on these issues. My second question again to the Premier: have you spoken to the Prime Minister on this issue, and if so, has he offered anything by way of assurance that Alberta's interests will be protected?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I did write to the hon. Prime Minister outlining Alberta's concerns as we enter into the clean energy dialogue. If climate change is the new national priority, we have to make sure that at the end of the day there is balance, that Albertans alone won't be singled out as having to absorb the total cost, burden, of any policy that's implemented. Our concern, of course, is over coal-fired electricity generation – that is the largest carbon footprint that we have in Alberta – followed by transportation and, thirdly, by the oil sands. The discussions have been fruitful. All I'm saying is that I don't want to have Albertans burdened with the cost of something in national policy that should be shared across the country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is again to the Premier. You know, this could have huge, huge implications for all Albertans and Canada. What really is at stake here for Alberta and Canada?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that Alberta has taken a leadership role, knowing the fact that as we produce energy, we need to transition to cleaner barrels of oil and a lower carbon footprint and electrical generation. The problem is that if the cost of energy really increased rapidly, then it will have an impact on our economy, but because we are the engine of the Canadian economy, it'll have an impact across Canada. My concern is that if it is a policy that places a further burden – I made it very clear to the Prime Minister that the net contribution to Ottawa over the last 10 years, just the last 10 years, from Alberta was \$117 billion. So if there are further interregional wealth transfers, we'd better look at what Alberta has already contributed to Canada and find a solution so that, again, we find a balance that treats everyone fairly across Canada and doesn't focus on the province of Alberta. That will be my top priority over the summer.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Workforce Employment Services

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given that the unemployment rate for Albertans in the construction industry is 13 per cent, for manufacturing it's 8.7 per cent, for mining and gas it's 8.5 per cent, and for youth in this province it's over 12 per cent, what is this government doing to retrain these individuals so that they can get back in the workforce?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we've got quite a number of initiatives to make sure that unemployed Albertans get to work or have the ability to work. Inasmuch as the member quotes numbers, we need to keep in mind that the unemployment level overall in the province of Alberta is more like 6 per cent rather than some of the numbers that he is identifying. He leads us to believe that our numbers are considerably higher. That means that we've got 94 per cent of Albertans working, that there are still some sectors that are short of employees.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't believe that this hon. member has very little sympathy for unemployed construction

workers and for youth in this province between the ages of 16 and 24 who cannot find a job.

Again to the same minister: given that only 25 per cent of unemployed Albertans are receiving EI benefits, when is the Minister of Employment and Immigration finally going to stick up for and defend the interests of the unemployed in this province?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're very actively engaged in offering additional training and upgrading to individuals that are looking for work. I'm very, very sympathetic to those who don't have any jobs. Any time somebody loses their job, it's very disconcerting for them, and I'm, again, very sympathetic to them. We also do job matching. We're making sure that we are continuously posting those jobs that are available. We've got thousands, as a matter of fact probably between 4,000 and 5,000 jobs that are posted on our website that are available. We do take a very active role in matching individuals to those particular jobs.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. We know you're very actively engaged in recruiting temporary foreign workers – that's the truth – but for the unemployed people, you're just leaving them out in the cold. Now, I personally wrote on behalf of our caucus to the federal government in February urging them to make EI payments more fair for unemployed Albertans and to make the same rules apply across the entire country. Why haven't this minister and this government put more pressure on the federal government to make sure that the unemployment insurance rules are fair regardless of where the unemployed live, whether in Alberta or Ontario?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, there still is a good role for temporary foreign workers in the province of Alberta. Having said that, our priority is still to make sure that Albertans are first, that those individuals that the hon. member indicates – our youth, our aging population, or those from the aboriginal community or the disabled community – have opportunities to work when they can. We're going to do everything for that to happen.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has talked to the federal government concerning EI reforms. I, too, have written to the minister. I have a scheduled phone call with the hon. minister tomorrow morning, as a matter of fact, to talk specifically on that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Federal Economic Stimulus Funding

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the federal budget announced earlier this year, a number of economic stimulus funds were announced along with it. I'm hearing from many municipal leaders that the initially welcome news that the federal government would finally be participating in infrastructure spending has not been accompanied by project announcements and the money that was originally expected. My questions are to the President of the Treasury Board. Can you update this Assembly on the status of the federal stimulus spending on infrastructure in the province of Alberta?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting discussion with the federal government with regard to the stimulus spending on top of the many different funds that the federal government has brought forward through the building Canada fund. However, we have agreed to and have signed off on the stimulus funding frame-

work as well as the knowledge infrastructure program, that they have signed with the province. It has flowed. Just as recently as two weeks ago the Minister of Transportation announced \$227 million for 73 projects around Alberta, and on May 4 the minister of advanced education announced 348 million joint dollars on 28 projects around the province. We are certainly continuing to work with our federal counterparts to bring forward the money.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Again to the President of the Treasury Board: do these previous announcements represent all of the federal monies available, or can we expect additional announcements in the near future?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we haven't announced even all of the projects that are currently under some of the project funding as we are working off our capital plan and from our priorities. We would expect that probably in the area of another \$350 million will flow to Alberta communities and projects through this. We also are anticipating the regulations around the RINC fund, which could see another \$150 million, potentially, go to recreation projects throughout the province of Alberta. While we have not been part of talks of an Ecofund or a community adjustment fund around environmental issues, we expect that that's on the way, too.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Once again to the President of the Treasury Board. While it appears that there's a lot of effort under way, my understanding is that these federal stimulus funds and the projects they fund have to be completed by March 2011. That's not a lot of time that we're talking about to complete significant infrastructure projects. What is the holdup in getting all of the projects announced and the federal money into the province of Alberta?

2:20

Mr. Snelgrove: The hon. member is correct. It was a bit of a problem when the federal government talked about shovel-ready projects, Mr. Speaker, but then they wanted new projects. It's very difficult for the province to set aside their current capital plans – we have a very thorough capital plan – and go to meet some of the criteria, so we've been working very carefully to get that to the funding. It can be a problem for some. This program is based on a reimbursement. Approximately 25 per cent of the funds will be at the start of the project, and then the communities in the province need to complete these projects before they're eligible to receive the rest.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have to assume total financial responsibility to ensure that the funds are expended in the two years, and we need to be very careful that these projects fit that criteria so that we're not in a position to reimburse the funds.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Income Support for Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the buck passes between ministers, people are losing their homes while others can't get off the street. Worse yet, the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs thinks cancelling the HEP fund program was a good-news story, and the Minister of Employment and Immigration doesn't

understand that \$350 for a damage deposit, even for a single person, isn't enough given rents for apartments in this province. Both ministers seem clearly out of touch with what's happening on the street. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: what support, other than going to a shelter, is available for someone who is unable to qualify for emergency funding and can't wait the two years to get a rent supplement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that I'm very in touch with what's happening out on the street, hon. member. I visit often with the organizations and the agencies in a number of municipalities across Alberta, and I know exactly what they're looking for for services. What you're referring to right now, emergent funding, is with Employment and Immigration, and I'll ask the minister to respond.

Mr. Taylor: As I said before, the buck passes.

Since the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs is no longer in charge of eviction prevention funding and likes to make that clear every time I ask a question, even dancing around the edges of that, the next questions are to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. How much money did that minister's department receive to handle the other minister's caseload of people who are looking for emergency funding for housing and used to look to her for it before they dropped the program?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think the important thing to recognize is that individuals that require help will get the help on a timely basis and get the amount of help that they require to be able to find the proper accommodations. We know that in this province there is more available housing than there was a year ago, and we also know that rents in a lot of communities have gone down, so it is making it a lot easier for those with lower incomes to access accommodations or housing.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, no, it isn't. Trying to keep or get into an apartment is a bureaucratic nightmare now that eviction prevention funding is under the Minister of Employment and Immigration's responsibility. What is that minister doing to make the process easier to access, I mean, other than saying that it's easy and other than saying that he's got a big heart and that he's going to look after everybody eventually? Or is the goal, ultimately, to save money by pushing people off the system and into a cardboard box in the river valley?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, our goal and our role is to provide a hand up for those particular individuals, and we want to ensure that they get proper accommodations. We do work with individuals, and those that need emergency assistance will receive that type of assistance, and those that require regular housing help will receive that help.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Vehicle Vicarious Liability

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I was truly outraged to hear in this House unduly caustic and self-serving allegations from the leader of the third party regarding so-called backroom Tory deals on the issue of vicarious liability. My question is to the

Minister of Transportation. Can you please clarify for this House the intention behind the changes to the rental car industry and vicarious liability?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. The hon. leader of the third party made some terrible, misinformed comments yesterday in this Assembly. The hon. member alleged that a so-called Tory insider acted on behalf of the truck renting and leasing association in regard to Bill 30. What this individual did is what most other stakeholders do on countless issues. He wrote a letter, for a completely different group than the one cited by the hon. member, to myself and the finance minister proposing amendments to a piece of legislation that was passed in this Assembly last year. If the member had done his research, he would have seen that none – none – of the proposals lobbied for were accepted. I'm happy to clarify this for him.

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: is it the intention behind this policy to limit what an insured person can get in compensation for a traffic accident?

Mr. Ouellette: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. What this legislation does is harmonize with other Canadian provinces the provisions on vicarious liability, where the rental car companies are not held responsible for the actions of those who actually drive the vehicle. It's about doing what's right. Why should someone who gets hit by a rental car be treated differently than someone who is involved in an accident not involving a rental car? That is the issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why is this being brought forward now and not before?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, this bill has been in front of the House since March 16. Further, the hon. member and his colleague in the third party spoke in favour of the bill they now seem to be trashing. I refer you to *Hansard* of May 26, 2009, on page 1273. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood says, "Mr. Speaker, I just want to indicate that we're prepared to support this piece of legislation and would like to see the changes contained in it enacted because we think they're in the best interests of the community." That's a bit confusing. Has the hon. member suddenly changed his mind, or did he not actually read the bill before he spoke on it?

The Speaker: Well, just as I thought everybody was falling asleep, that was quite a wake-up call. I would like to remind, as I've just been reminded by Parliamentary Counsel, that the point of question period isn't usually to hold the opposition to account.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mortgage Fraud

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the slowing of the economy, the widespread mortgage fraud that occurred during the boom is beginning to become apparent. Cases of mortgage fraud are on the rise, and Service Alberta's investigative unit assisted police on more than a thousand cases of mortgage fraud last year alone. To the Minister of Service Alberta: what steps are being taken to address the rising number of cases of mortgage fraud in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to families facing tough times, mortgage fraud and those kinds of things, I know that our department is made aware of incidents that occur when people contact our department. On an ongoing basis we are aware of situations that go on, and we are looking at those, but again it's about making sure that consumers know where to ask the questions and know where they can get support.

Mr. Kang: To the minister again: how is the minister increasing the enforcement ability of industry, such as the Real Estate Council of Alberta, to help deter these crimes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have regular meetings with the Real Estate Council of Alberta and with the organizations based in Edmonton and in Calgary. They have a great emphasis on consumer education, consumer awareness when purchasers are looking at getting mortgages and on making sure that they assist with making good decisions that they can afford as well as making sure that they are working with the right individuals and are protected.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is the minister working with the banks to investigate these crimes and prosecute the criminals involved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the role of the banks with the federal government, again, we are aware of those situations that are going on. For Service Alberta, from the consumer education point of view, it is our department's responsibility to make sure we give the consumers the tools and the information and to make sure they are accessing the information with respect to the federal banks and the banks here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Electricity Transmission System Upgrades (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government intends to spend \$16 billion to upgrade Alberta's electricity transmission system and have ratepayers pay the bill. As a result, Albertans are going to see large increases to their electrical bills, but power producers get off scot-free. My question is to the Premier: why isn't this government forcing electrical companies to share the costs of transmission upgrades?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the leader of the third party's understanding of economics is just as weak as the Leader of the Opposition's. Do they think Santa Claus is going to come down and pay? What are your alternatives? Our electrical system has not been upgraded for two decades. It's old. It's overloaded: \$75 million line loss a year because of overcrowding. Do you want to wait till the brownout? We don't. We need transmission now, and that's what this party is going to do.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister needs a little economics lesson about his beloved free enterprise system. It's clear in a free market that the producers sell for whatever the market will bear. If they have increased costs, they can't necessarily pass them on because the people will buy less of the product. It's basic economics 101. They might have to take a cut in profits, something this minister doesn't want to see happen. My question is: why don't these companies have to share as they once did in the cost of these very, very expensive upgrades? Why are you going to let consumers' power bills go through the roof, Mr. Minister?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, let's stay on the subject of economics. Obviously, the hon. member has something to learn here. Electrical energy powers this province. That's what runs it. It creates jobs. You're the head of a party that claims to represent working families. I haven't seen much evidence of it this week in other debates. Maybe that's why they typically get less than 10 per cent of the vote. This party wants Albertans to have the jobs tomorrow that we have today. We need transmission now.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, so do we. He's setting up a straw dog. The question is: who's going to pay for these lines? He and his government are going to have the consumers of this province shell out hundreds of dollars more every year, maybe even every month, for power bills because they won't go after their friends in the power industry and make them share in the cost of these lines. Why not?

Dr. Morton: Okay. Mr. Speaker, economics lesson 3: repeat, \$75 million a year already being lost in line loss. That needs to be corrected. You'd be interested to know that this province actually imports more electricity right now than we export. We actually export at a low cost and import it back in at a high cost. Better transmission will save Albertans money and will put them back to work. We want Albertans to work. I don't know what you guys are thinking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Payday Loans

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Service Alberta announced that the government of Alberta will be regulating payday lenders, and it's my understanding that the minister settled on a maximum cost of borrowing of \$23 per \$100 borrowed. My question is for the minister. How did you decide that \$23 was an appropriate maximum amount for payday lenders to charge?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta reviewed research on the business of costs for the Canadian payday loan industry from a number of sources, including independent research information prepared for payday lenders. We wanted to strike a balance between the interests of industry and the need to protect consumers and ensure they are borrowing at a reasonable cost. Keep in mind that that is a maximum cost of borrowing. Since we have introduced rules for disclosure of information to consumers and prohibitions on practices such as rollovers and discounting, Alberta consumers will know exactly what they're paying for and be able to shop around for the best rate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First supplemental to the same minister: why does the federal government have to approve the cost of borrowing amount?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the federal government delegated the responsibility of regulating payday loan lenders to the provinces; however, federal legislation still requires that they approve the maximum cost of borrowing. We'll be working very closely with them on that. In the meantime, this regulation will still come into effect on September 1, 2009. This will give businesses an opportunity to become licensed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last supplemental to the same minister: how will you enforce these regulations, and what kind of penalties will be in place for those who break these new rules?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To make sure payday lenders comply with our regulations, we will be conducting random audits of payday lenders and will investigate consumer complaints. We can use a wide range of enforcement actions, including suspending or cancelling a lender's licence or prosecuting them in court. Also, payday lenders must forfeit any interest or fees owed on a loan if they do not comply with the regulation, giving them a strong incentive to follow rules. For those payday lenders who completely ignore the rules, the Fair Trading Act includes fines up to \$100,000 or up to two years in jail or both.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has claimed that they will follow through on their promise to pay the unanticipated increase to teachers' salaries due to changes to the average weekly earning index. Unfortunately, their promise has not been so far followed up with the necessary dollars to cover the salary increase. As a result, school boards have had to cut programs, reduce supplies, and raid their piggy banks to cover a promise the province made but has yet to deliver on. To the Minister of Education: what progress has there been in determining where the money is going to come from, and what is the timeline for school boards to receive these much-needed funds?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first assumption that the hon. member makes is wrong. There has been no determination of what the actual amount of the average weekly earnings increase for Albertans has been. StatsCan had a process by which they determined it, which would have driven out an increase of 4.83 per cent. They changed their process, which under their new process drives out a 5.99 per cent. Our agreement with teachers is that their salaries will increase by the amount that the average weekly earnings of Albertans increases, and we need to determine in discussions with the Teachers' Association and the School Boards Association and, of course, across government how to appropriately measure that. The fact that StatsCan has changed the way they measure it causes us a problem, and that's the problem we need to resolve. What

we've said is that we will fund whatever the appropriate amount is, and we will do that.

Mr. Chase: Unfortunately, as Alberta burns, you appear to be fiddling, and school boards can't be waiting for that fiddling to end. You haven't answered where it's coming from, but maybe you will in the follow-up.

Luckily, due to its frugality the Calgary school board will not have to lay teachers off this year in order to afford the salary increase promised by this government, whatever that should be. How does the minister expect other school boards who aren't as financially secure to find the money to pay for teachers' salary increases?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear to school boards that whatever the amount is, we will fund it. So there's no reason for any school board in this province – and I've had that discussion with them directly on the phone to the board chairs and superintendents on budget day. I was down at the ASBA on Monday speaking to the School Boards Association, making it very clear that whatever the average weekly earning increase for Albertans is that we need to pay in accordance with the agreement with teachers, we will fund that. He doesn't need to worry about that piece, nor do school boards. They should budget on the basis that they will have the money for their teachers' increase. They don't need to cut teachers to solve that problem.

What I have also said to them is that they should not prejudge that that average weekly earnings index is 5.99 per cent because if they prejudge that, they may put themselves in a very difficult position. So they should hold their budgets open. They should budget on the basis of 4.83 per cent for average weekly earnings until we determine what the actual number is with all those affected. When we do, if it's more, they'll get the funds for the more.

Mr. Chase: And in the meantime they'll be forced to rehire young teachers, who they were forced to let go because of the intransigency of this government. The ASBA is looking for the government to act ASAP. It's not happening. Given that public school boards have been forced to make cuts within their operating budgets to fulfill this province's salary grid promise, why has the minister not proportionally reduced private school funding to last year's levels to help make up for the public school funding shortfall? Spread the pain.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, he obviously didn't hear the first two answers. Let me say it again. We have said to school boards – and they have a very clear message from us – that they should budget for average weekly earnings at 4.83 per cent. There's no need to cut back. We've provided the funds to support that for teachers. We provided funds at 3 per cent, which should cover their other wage increases, and there's no need for them to cut back on teachers or let young teachers go on that basis. If they have to budget for more money at a later date because the average weekly earnings are higher, they will have the money to do that. We've made that clear to school boards, and I hope now that I've made it clear to the hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:40

Industrial Site Remediation

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Brownfield sites are vacant and underused properties that have been contaminated. In my community of Whitecourt old bulk fuel stations remain contami-

nated. They are eyesores, and they tie up valuable land. These sites are owned by major oil companies that operate in this province. My questions are all to the Minister of Environment. What's this government doing to encourage remediation of these contaminated sites?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member has identified a very serious problem. As you know and I'm sure other members of the House know, in rural Alberta in particular but throughout Alberta abandoned retail gas station sites are a real scourge for small towns. We need to do something about that. We need to get something moving. One of the things that discourages the owners of those sites, apart from the costs of remediation, is that they don't completely eliminate the risk that they have associated with those cleanups. So today we announced a remediation certificate program that will remove that risk, that will once and for all give some assurance to the landowner that they will no longer be responsible for the liability on that site once they've cleaned it up to appropriate standards.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, that assurance is fine, but what happens when the provincial or federal government changes the targets, which always seems to happen? Again back to the minister: what about this issue of moving the targets continually?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are assured at this point in time that the standards that we have in place in 2009 are appropriate standards that will ensure that on an ongoing basis there is no risk to further development on those sites, provided that they meet the standards that we have in place today. By participating in this voluntary program, the owner of the site will remove that uncertainty that is associated with future governments changing standards because once they have the certificate in hand, they will be relieved of any need to adhere to new standards should they arise in the future.

Mr. VanderBurg: To the same minister. Again, these sites have been contaminated for 25, 35 years in my community, and it's an expensive and time-consuming endeavour. To the minister: who's going to pay for this?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a long-standing principle in Alberta, and that principle will not change with the introduction of this new program. In Alberta the polluter pays. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on what side of the equation you're looking at, this program does not absolve anyone from paying the legitimate and true costs of remediation of contaminated soil. What it does do is bring certainty into it. It removes some contingent liabilities that may be there, and we believe that this will be sufficient incentive to get a lot of work done on a lot of those vacant properties throughout the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and responses today.

There's a rumour going around that this may very well be the last day of the spring session. A number of pages will be retiring, so I'm going to call on the hon. Deputy Speaker to make some comments.

Page Recognition

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Deputy Speaker I would like

to draw to the attention of all hon. members that we will have to send off four of our wonderful pages at the end of this spring session. They are Michael Molzan, the Speaker's page; Andrew Ralstin; Hyun-Soo Lim; Maryna Muzychenko. I ask you to join me in recognizing the great efforts of our pages, who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out their tasks with attention to duty and in good humour and suffer some very late nights of work with us. On behalf of all members I present to each of the departing pages our memento gift. These gifts are from the personal contributions of all members of this Assembly, and along with these gifts are our best wishes.

I would like now to ask our Deputy Chair of Committees to present the four gifts to the Speaker's page, Michael Molzan, representing the four pages. [applause]

The Speaker: Their work is not yet done. I think tonight they have the speaking contest. Is it tonight? Last week. Sorry. Okay. One day we'll have the awards announced for that as well.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a few priceless volunteers whom I will have the pleasure of presenting a minister's seniors' service award tonight. The awards honour Albertans for outstanding volunteer service to seniors. Individual Albertans who will receive an award are – and if they could stand as I call their name – Eric Longeway from Calgary, Dorothy Carleton from Banff, Dorothy Hodgkinson from Mayerthorpe, Irene Nordean from Picture Butte, and William Butterwick from Foremost.

I also have the pleasure of recognizing two organizations for their service to seniors with a minister's seniors' service award. Representing the New Horizon Drop In Centre in Grimshaw are Anne Toker and Irene Foster, and representing the Seniors Outreach Network Society in Edmonton are Fran Matthews and Sylvia Galbraith. Mr. Speaker, I know I speak for all members when I say we truly appreciate the contribution they make in enriching seniors' lives across the province. I would ask the award recipients to now receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to welcome numerous guests accompanying the recipients: Don and Jean Ingwersen, Terry Carleton, Mike Carleton, Sylvia Carleton, Darla Morrison, Kyrstyn Morrison, Tori Morrison, Lyndon Nordean, Ardis Branch, Vernon and Elaine King, Delores Butterwick, Helen Diebert, and Mona Flett. Also here with our recipients are Laura Paradowski and Leslie Sorenson from my ministry. I would ask them to all stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Minister's Seniors' Service Awards

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To follow up from the minister of seniors, today I rise to recognize the recipients of the

12th annual minister's seniors' service awards. Tonight I'll have the pleasure of joining the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to honour six individuals and two organizations for their exceptional service to Alberta seniors. These individuals and organizations demonstrate how volunteering enriches our communities. In doing so, they set an important example for all Albertans. By giving so generously of their time and their talent, the award recipients enrich and support seniors in communities across Alberta.

This year the award recipients were selected from a list of more than 70 nominees, Mr. Speaker. The selection criteria for the recipients was based on positive impact on seniors and the community, the need for the service they support, and the quality, originality, and diversity of their service. Please join me in congratulating the six individual recipients who will be honoured tonight: Joe and Vernie Bruder of Pincher Creek, William Butterwick of Foremost, Dorothy Carleton of Banff, Dorothy Hodgkinson of Mayerthorpe, Eric Longeway of Calgary, and Irene Nordean of Picture Butte. As well, please join me in congratulating the two organizations who will be honoured tonight: the New Horizon Drop In Centre in Grimshaw and the Seniors Outreach Network Society in Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Seniors' Week

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise to recognize Seniors' Week, which reminds us of the important contributions Alberta's seniors continue to make to our society and our families. Their efforts have helped to build and shape Alberta into the wonderful province it is today. As the Member for Edmonton-McClung I'm pleased to recognize the many special seniors in my constituency, where almost 8 per cent of the population are seniors. This government continues to be dedicated to providing strong support for our seniors. In fact the 2009-2010 budget increases its level of commitment by increasing the budget for Seniors and Community Supports to nearly \$2 billion.

2:50

I would like to highlight two seniors' facilities within my constituency of Edmonton-McClung. Touchmark at Wedgewood and Caleb Manor on the west side of the Anthony Henday freeway are home to many seniors, and I am proud to say that such excellent facilities are available in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to thank our seniors for making Alberta a wonderful place to live. I will continue to work hard with my colleagues to represent seniors' interests and to make sure that they will have the quality of life that they deserve.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, a day when communities across Alberta and around the world engage citizens about how to learn about the signs of elder abuse and the steps that they can take to prevent it. Unfortunately, there are many forms of elder abuse, and any senior can be a victim. Two of the more common forms are financial and psychological abuse, and in some cases seniors experience more than one form of abuse at the same time.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that we can do something about this. We can be part of the solution by helping to identify elder

abuse by watching for common signs of abuse like unexplained injuries, financial irregularities, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal, to name a few. As part of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day the province is working with the Alberta elder abuse awareness network to distribute a new screening guide, a guide designed to help front-line service providers and caregivers identify situations where abuse may be occurring and to suggest steps to take to assist seniors in these situations. The screening guide, along with fact sheets, posters, and other materials, has been sent out to more than 2,400 organizations across the province. More information on elder abuse is available on the Seniors and Community Supports website at www.seniors.alberta.ca or by calling the seniors' information line at 1.800.642.3853.

In recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I encourage all members of this Assembly to wear the purple ribbon you received today on your desk to help raise awareness of this very important issue.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Calgary Airport Runway

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend I had the pleasure to attend a large and lively yes-tunnel committee meeting. Several individuals representing various committees spanning the entire city of Calgary attended the meeting to support the airport tunnel. They support the tunnel because they want to maintain the good quality of life they currently enjoy. Without the tunnel there will be severe costs to the economy and the environment. Without the tunnel Calgarians will face increased delays, reduced productivity, and more business closures.

The airport needs this new runway, apparently, because airplanes are too often idling on the tarmac waiting for an open runway. Idling airplanes waste fuel and emit carbon into the atmosphere, so if a new runway can alleviate that problem, that is terrific. However, the same problem applies to thousands of cars and trucks idling on our roads if the airport tunnel isn't built. Doing nothing comes with a steep environmental and economic price. Upgrading Deerfoot Trail is not an option. That won't solve the problem of accessing the airport from the east side, and upgrading Deerfoot is far more costly than building the tunnel.

Clearly, the tunnel is the best option, but my frugal constituents are mindful of the costs of building a new tunnel. We understand that options for either a segmented tunnel or a continuous tunnel would cost \$200 million. In response to the overwhelming demand from the citizens of Calgary, federal officials are meeting in Calgary to get funding in place to build this tunnel. It is time for the provincial government to step forward and fund their share of the tunnel now. Doing so will keep traffic and commerce flowing in northeast Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

CAPP Steward of Excellence Awards

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I had the privilege along with the Minister of Environment and my colleague from Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to attend the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers stewardship of excellence awards dinner. The evening was a celebration of the efforts of Alberta petroleum producers to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Mr. Speaker, oil companies are a competitive lot, so we should not be surprised that as true Albertans they compete for superiority regarding a clean environment, safety, and social leadership. For example, Canadian Natural Resources was recognized for building the first fisheries compensation lake in the oil sands. Imperial Oil's contractor safety program was identified for its commitment to worker health. BP Canada's A+ for energy program has helped teachers across Alberta discuss energy and energy conservation education in their classroom. Nexen corporation was recognized for their extensive and effective community consultation on their Balzac Crossfield expansion project. Devon Energy received the prestigious president's award for their new pipeline technique that reduces right-of-way impact by 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta companies are showing environmental, safety, and social leadership day in and day out. This year's winners represent just a snapshot of this commitment to our province. The goal of the steward of excellence awards is to take today's best practices within the oil and gas sector in Alberta and turn them into tomorrow's standard, and these five projects demonstrate that we are well on our way.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating all the award winners for their efforts.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

University of Lethbridge Strategic Plan

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In May the University of Lethbridge presented its new five-year strategic plan to the Lethbridge community, promising to stay true to what has made the university and its students so successful for the last 42 years: fostering a personal, supportive learning community; ensuring that professors are inspired scholars who include research and creativity in their classes; and delivering programs relevant to today's world. The plan also charts an exciting new path for the U of L to expand its graduate program, a mandate encouraged by this government. Significant progress has already been made on this.

For example, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that all members remember the announcement made last year in Lethbridge when the U of L became the inaugural recipient of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research's Polaris award, that brought \$20 million in research funding and helped attract Dr. Bruce McNaughton.

The U of L has also become a world leader in water research, and the Alberta Water and Environmental Science Building opened last year. This project was possible because this government recognized that great discoveries will be made there, thanks in large part to our \$22 million contribution to this project.

A third example is the creation of the Prentice Institute for Global Population and Economy and the appointment of Dr. Susan McDaniel to lead this important initiative. The policy work that will be done by the Prentice institute will help the private sector and government to make prudent policy decisions by taking into account demographic and economic shifts.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the U of L will introduce exciting new programs this fall, including a master of fine arts and a master of music and, a first in western Canada, a bachelor of music degree in digital audio arts. The university will also offer a new bachelor of nursing after-degree program in collaboration with Lethbridge College and a land agent bachelor of management degree in conjunction with Olds College.

I would like to congratulate the U of L for its forward thinking in this strategic plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of an e-mail I received from Nate Gartke, who is a grade 10 student in my constituency. Nate wrote to me to convey his support for Bill 44 and applaud the good work this government is doing to ensure that children can be educated in the best wishes of those who know them best, their parents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of two different books written by Mr. Harpreet Singh Sandhu. The first book is called *Canada in Brief*, and the other is an issue of *Guru's Word*, which is a religious book for Sikhs.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we've now arrived at 3 o'clock, and according to our standing orders, rule 7(7), I must advise the House that there is at least one member who wishes to do some tablings. We will need unanimous consent to continue. Is any member opposed to going beyond the 3 o'clock standing order item? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:00

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate June 2: Mr. Oberle]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to participate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A brief backgrounder. The shortest political speech I ever gave was to a group of children about to open a playground at a Catholic school in Calgary-Varsity, and my speech was: "Children, the only thing keeping you from enjoying this playground is me. Thank you very much." My speeches today will be of a similarly short nature.

Concern has been raised with regard to electoral boundaries. The Liberal opposition does not believe that we need more constituencies; in fact, we believe we could do with considerably less. We also recognize the need for rural MLAs to adequately represent their constituents, but in the balance we also recognize the need, as in all democracies in this world, for representation by population. So a delicate balance that all constituents of this great province are recognized has to be struck, and we don't believe that will be struck by increasing boundaries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?
Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 45 read a third time]

Bill 32**Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to move on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford Bill 32, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act.

This act puts into effect the work of a commission that was established. There's been discussion about that work and the benefits of having a very clear process and procedure for Alberta public agencies governance, and this act, I believe, will put that into effect very well for Alberta. I would encourage all members to support it for third reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. As the hon. mover of the bill, the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, pointed out yesterday, the whole point of Bill 32 dealing with agencies, boards, and commissions is to hire people based on their competency. That is, obviously, the most important factor, and the Liberal opposition supports the notion of competency. It's what you know, not who you know, that should count.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a third time]

Bill 34**Drug Program Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged to move on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness Bill 34, the Drug Program Act.

With this act there will be an opportunity to make sure that our drug programs in Alberta are appropriately aligned and set up so that Albertans can have access to appropriate pharmaceuticals when they need them, and I would commend it to the House and ask for support for third reading.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Alberta Liberal opposition cannot support this bill because within it a solution has not been found for the 40 per cent of seniors whose Blue Cross individual coverage will be tripled as a result. It's wonderful that 60 per cent of Albertan seniors are getting reduced prices, but the other 40 per cent are picking up the tab for this unfortunate circumstance. Their health care premiums have basically been traded for increased drug costs, and this is causing them great economic and physical hardship. They have been forced to make choices between paying their mortgages, buying their groceries, or having the medication that will sustain them and provide them a quality of life. Therefore, we are not supportive of Bill 34.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, stand in opposition to this bill. One of the main reasons I'm in opposition to it is because I've had too many seniors come through my office with actual, hard numbers about how this is going to affect them and how their choices will be limited. In fact, the conversations are: which drugs are they going to cut out? Which ones do they really need, and which ones don't they? For that very, very hard, in-your-face example of how this is affecting many seniors, I could not support this bill.

The Speaker: Other speakers?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

Bill 35**Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to enter the final debate on Bill 35, the Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009, its third reading. As mentioned in prior debates in this House, it's an administrative bill to amend existing legislation and give force to the ruling of the NEB, the National Energy Board, keeping in mind that the NEB is a federal regulator whose decisions, like those of our Energy Resources Conservation Board, are quasi-judicial.

There is a great future for Alberta in unlocking our vast pools of unconventional natural gas. Likewise, there is great potential for continued growth in Alberta's value-added sector. This is something that we've all talked about and I believe everyone sees as a desirable outcome.

To achieve that, our Alberta-based petrochemical industry needs access to increasing volumes of ethane feedstock from natural gas. This will provide more jobs for Albertans. As we move forward, some of that feedstock will come from natural gas that's transported across our borders into Alberta. The transportation of that gas must by necessity be federally regulated. Bill 35 speaks to that particular point and, in a broader sense, speaks to Alberta's future success in using the NOVA gas system, which will further diversify our economy and add value to our natural resources.

I encourage all members to support passage of this bill, and I thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member . . .

Mr. McFarland: I would like to move third reading.

The Speaker: Thank you. That's kind of important.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal opposition recognizes the administrative nature of this bill and is supportive of it. In previous debate I recognized the important role of the Alberta Gas Trunk Line, which later became NOVA, which has now had the pipeline authority taken over by TransCanada. It's absolutely essential for our economy that this gas be moved, and therefore we support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a third time]

3:10

Bill 42

Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 42, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009.

This amending legislation is intended to improve the safety of the law-abiding public in and around Alberta's licensed premises. It does so by giving police and bar operators the authority they need to effectively address violence in bars and nightclubs. Violence is too often related to gangs and problem patrons in these establishments. With the full support of the police and licensees Bill 42 helps make Alberta's communities safer, more secure places in which to live, work, and play.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Alberta Liberal opposition does not support Bill 42. It does not believe that simply allowing bar owners to exchange the identities of potential patrons who may or may not be involved with gang activities is proactive. We believe the emphasis, the energy, and the funding should go directly to police forces, as we have stated numerous times before. It's feet on the beat as opposed to trading information that will have a strong influence on the reduction of gang violence. As I have mentioned before, as a teacher, the way to eliminate gangs is by providing a good education, involving community resource officers at the school level, providing kids with opportunities to do the right thing so they don't end up as older individuals doing the wrong thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few words on this in opposition. Certainly, there are some good parts, and I think that the intent is good. However, here we go again. The good guys pay. It's the good people that we are asking to turn over their identity cards. Where is the privacy in this? Where is the trust when I turn over my identification because I want to go into a bar? I might be looking for one of my kids. Who knows? Why would I trust these people?

The Speaker: It's an age matter.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. I didn't hear.

The Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. Really, for you it would be an age matter, just to be sure that you are 18.

Ms Pastoor: Well, yes.

The Speaker: Sorry. I know I'm out of order.

Ms Pastoor: No, no. That's very true, and it has been a long time since I was ID'd. However, young people going through should have the same concern that somebody has private information.

Again, as I've said, it's the good guys that pay. We should be helping our police to go after the bad guys, and the good guys should be able to walk into a bar and not have to trust that the information that they're handing over to the bouncer at the door is going to be guarded safely.

For those very short reasons and the fact that it's been a long time since I was ID'd, I probably won't be involved with this. I'm still opposed to it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a third time]

Bill 41

Protection for Persons in Care Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 41, the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

The act has been rewritten to include a number of substantive changes that will help protect more Albertans who receive government-funded care and support services. Bill 41 speaks to the responsibility of Albertans to report abuse and for service providers to take reasonable steps to protect clients from abuse while they are providing care or support services. The Protection for Persons in Care act will expand the scope of the act to capture a broader group of service providers that deliver care and support services, include protection provisions for people who report abuse or assist in an investigation, improve the minister's ability to fulfill a more preventative and protective role, and increase the offence provisions within the act and the fines. As well, the act now outlines duties of complaints officers, investigators, and the director so that they will have more flexibility and scope to fulfill their duties.

This is legislation that reflects this government's priority to protect our most vulnerable citizens, and I urge all hon. members to support this bill on third reading.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It does give me pleasure to stand up and support this bill. There has been a great deal of work done on this bill, and some of it has come from the work that was done in 2005 on the MLA task force, and certainly the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has also done some really good work to bring this together. It's a new bill, and I know that there has been controversy around it based on many unfortunate incidents that were prior to this. I think that this bill will help address some of those issues of abuse and neglect that had been happening prior to this.

One of the things that I'm happy to see is that there is an evaluation process in there. It also has a timeline, which is one of my big mantras. I like evaluation, and I like timelines so that we can look at things. One of the other aspects to this that isn't a part of this bill but that certainly goes adjunct to it is the fact that the government will be doing education on personal directives, which is actually an adjunct behaviour with this bill.

The only other thing that I would like to say, that I'm still not happy about, is that I still would like to see "police officer" stated in here rather than "peace officer." I think that police officers can move serious complaints through the system a lot faster than peace officers.

With those comments, I'm pleased to see this go forward. There's been a lot of work done on it, and I know that many, many people, who we can't even identify going forward, will be the beneficiaries of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I, too, am rising in support of the intention and, hopefully, the resulting application of this bill. One thing that did not occur within Bill 41, which I hope will soon occur, is the establishment of a seniors' advocate. Whether it's in assisted living or long-term care, a number of seniors are abused not by direct negligence, not by direct neglect but by understaffing. There is also abuse of the workers in terms of the low pay scale that they receive for the very important work they do in looking after seniors. Hopefully, as part of revisions of Bill 41 the seniors' advocate, the treatment of individuals, both those that are giving the care and those in receipt of the care, will improve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a third time]

Bill 52 Health Information Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 52, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 52 was referred to the Standing Committee on Health by this House on November 27, 2008. I would like to thank this all-party committee for its hard work in recommending amendments, which were passed in this House, that reflect a consensus of opinion in response to the many concerns raised by average Albertans, doctors, and the Privacy Commissioner to improve the effectiveness of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all colleagues to support third reading of Bill 52. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We also, the Liberal opposition, recognize the hard work of committee members to make the privacy associated with records that much more intact. A number of physicians and their patients still have reservations about how the information will be protected and with whom it will be shared. These remain still of great concern. Hopefully, working through Bill 52, that information will be held back from those who are not entitled to it and will be speedily accessed by those in need of it. It's also important to note that a person's medical records belong equally to them as they do to their physicians.

3:20

One of the problems that has occurred to date is the passing on of records when a physician retires to the individual taking over that responsibility. It's particularly difficult in rural Alberta, where there is a shortage of physicians. When one person retires, there are times when there's not another person to take their place, and those

records are basically frozen until that time. Bill 52 moves towards correcting that problem, and hopefully physicians and patients and patient Albertans will have the opportunity to recognize that the government does hold their information in the securest format possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 52 read a third time]

Bill 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise it's, indeed, my privilege to move third reading of Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberal opposition is certainly not opposed to fiscal responsibility but considers this alignment of terminology an oxymoron in Alberta. We question the fiscal responsibility that led the government into the highest deficit historically in this province, \$4.7 billion. As I've stated before, that is just part of the debt: \$8.6 billion in terms of the unfunded teachers' liability, well over \$10 billion in defrayed infrastructure, at least \$1.5 billion in other public service unfunded liabilities. As I've stated before, we have exceeded the \$23 billion that Premier Klein paid off on the backs of civil servants. So fiscal responsibility is something that has not yet arrived in Alberta.

A savings plan has not arrived in Alberta. The combined approximately \$13 billion to \$14 billion of the sustainability fund and the capital fund will be eaten through in rapid time unless this government comes up with a more substantial savings plan, that also recognizes the importance of doing things in a traditional manner when it comes to infrastructure, avoiding long-term 32-year P3 debt and taking advantage of our current recessionary circumstance, where labour is less expensive and materials are less expensive and, therefore, we can accomplish a lot of catch-up in terms of public infrastructure. As a former teacher I would like that money to be spent on school maintenance as well as construction. Of course, shelled-in hospitals are not able to serve patients, so we need the staffing in those hospitals and the construction completed.

We cannot support the Fiscal Responsibility Act because it's simply irresponsible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 33, the Fiscal Responsibility Act. I think the limit on the nonrenewable resource revenue that can be spent is gone, and there's no legislation on annual spending increases, no commitment to savings other than a vague statement to top up the sustainability fund to \$10 billion if surplus dollars become available – if they become available. This bill just lets the government spend every penny they have. This move makes them less fiscally responsible than they were before, you know, when we were swimming in money. If we couldn't be fiscally responsible then, how are we going to be fiscally responsible now? The only limit now on deficits and drawing from the sustainability fund is that the fund can't be drawn below what is in the account, meaning that the government can spend every penny in the

sustainability fund and can spend every penny of nonrenewable resource revenue without any of it having to be put into the sustainability fund.

While the Treasury Board had the authority to draw funds out of the sustainability fund, there was at least, in principle, a limitation on how that could be done. The justification used for this is to improve flexibility as the previous legislation was too complex. The Fiscal Responsibility Act is actually quite short and specific, so calling it complex seems like a bit of a reach.

There was a clause that stated that \$2 and a half billion had to remain in the sustainability fund as a contingency for natural disasters, which has been removed. You know, this doesn't seem like a fiscal responsibility act; this seems like a spend, spend, spend act. The Fiscal Responsibility Act was nothing more than a stunt in the first place since it was never actually effective. I don't know how this government is being fair to future generations by removing any caps, or limits, on the amount of resource revenue and savings in the sustainability fund that it can spend. What is the plan if the money runs out?

I think this government made a big mistake spending this money very wildly. You know, they were spending more aggressively than the money was even coming in, spending 23 per cent more per capita, I believe, than other jurisdictions. The spending has been going up 10 per cent year over year, and \$60 billion is just gone like that. Had we tied the spending down to inflation and population, I think our budget could have been about \$27 billion instead of \$37 billion. I think we have been spending like drunken sailors here. There was no plan to save for a rainy day. Whatever money the government claims to be saying they have saved in the sustainability fund will, if this keeps up for another maybe two or three years, all be gone. What are we going to do then?

We take into account the shortfall of teachers' pensions. If, God forbid, there's any other major disaster, you know, I think we are going to be in deep, deep trouble. We claim to be the richest jurisdiction in North America. Look what happened with laser surgery. You know, we couldn't even afford to spend \$100,000 on the machine. What happens if there is, like I said, some major disaster? What are we going to do? Are we going to depend, maybe, on private business to bail us out? Are we going to go cap in hand to Ottawa? That's what has been happening already.

For those reasons, I'm going to oppose Bill 33. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like a few remarks on the record in opposition to this bill. A number of things have been taken from this bill. The previous legislation stated that any amount of the nonrenewable resource revenue over \$5.3 billion was to be transferred to the sustainability fund. It's been removed. Previous legislation stated that \$2.5 billion had to be retained in the sustainability fund for public emergencies, amounts payable under the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, expenses paid or payable for the capital account, and payments to the First Nations. That has been removed.

Section 3 states that the capital account is dissolved into the sustainability fund, which, as we've just heard, has basically disappeared. Any surpluses that may occur in subsequent years shall now be transferred into a sustainability fund. Section 3(1) states that the purpose of this section is to use the sustainability fund to fund deficit years "with a view to adding to or replenishing the Fund in years in which there are cash surpluses." It's vague and it's really meaningless, when you see what else has gone on within this bill.

3:30

The only provision on fiscal responsibility in the whole bill is section 3(6), that simply states that the sustainability fund cannot be drawn below zero, effectively meaning that the government can now spend every penny available until there's no money available, using the excuse that there's no point in saving because there will always be money coming in. I think that's a very weak argument.

The section legislating the contingency allowance equal to 1 per cent of the revenue for fiscal policy purposes, i.e. the \$5.3 billion, has also now been eliminated.

For those reasons stated, I cannot support this bill.

The Speaker: Others?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

Bill 23

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 23 is essentially a bill that is brought forward to improve assessment complaints and appeals processes with respect to municipal governments across the province.

I would move it for third reading and ask the House to support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I find myself, as I frequently am, in support of the Minister of Education. Bill 23 is a bill that takes some of the laborious assessment process off the shoulders of the municipalities, which they are gratefully handing back to the province. Considering that the assessments are based on provincial regulations, it does make sense, and it also opens up the opportunities for residential owners to appeal the process.

What needs to be taken into account, and I hope that Bill 23 does, is the fact that just the geographic location of a residence should not be its prime consideration. There are a lot of seniors who are living in downtown areas where their property values have risen considerably higher than the value of the home in which they are currently trying to continue living. Until the assessment process recognizes not only the value of the property but the nature of the dwelling on that property, seniors will continue to pay exorbitant taxation rates. Of course, we all are waiting, and as we get closer to approaching seniors, we recognize the fact that the government took away the exemption that seniors had in paying the education portion of their property tax in 1993. Seniors are patiently waiting for that exemption to be given back because taxes continue going up and their fixed allowances remain. I would hope that maybe it will be Bill 24 in the fall that will address and finally give back to seniors that exemption for the educational portion of their property taxes.

However, we are supportive. This is a step in the right direction, as the hon. Minister of Education pointed out. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

Bill 29

Family Law Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are just a couple of comments that I want to get on the record in third reading, much to the chagrin of my friend from Airdrie-Chestermere. The way that the law currently is on this is that a parent that does not actually submit his or her financial information year over year is deemed to have a 10 per cent increase, and this would accelerate that increase after the first year. The one thing I would just like all hon. members to consider in this legislation is that many of these people just simply fall onto the social assistance or other government assistance rolls if it's impossible for them to collect their child support. That is something to consider. This is in the best interests not only of parents and children but also of taxpayers.

With that, I move third reading of Bill 29.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Alberta Liberal opposition supports the notion that the family – well, basically, that it takes a village to raise a family is the concept that's put out there. It's also very fortunate if you have two individuals involved in that raising, whether it be a mother and a father, two mothers, or two fathers. The love and support they provide for the child is absolutely important to their development.

Back in November of 2007 I put forward Motion 511, which was unanimously accepted by this House. It called for a unified family court process. This, unfortunately, has not occurred within the framework of Bill 29. But I and thousands of families across this province hope that there will be a simplification of the court process so that the interjurisdictional wranglings that occurred between the Court of Queen's Bench and the provincial court are eliminated and families can be served more quickly, efficiently, and without the heavy costs associated with court battles.

Taking children into custody as opposed to requiring larger support not only for the parents but in this case, as Bill 29 points out, from the parents is extremely important. That financial disclosure and the requirement of a parent to live up to the expectations of raising their child or, if not directly within the home, at least providing the support for the raising of that child is absolutely essential. That is one of the many reasons we support Bill 29.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 30

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to stand and move third reading of Bill 30, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009.

I think it's very important that we keep our roads and all of our other transportation issues in Alberta very safe. I think that there are

a whole lot of things within this act that are needed today. I'd like to move it now.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We also are supportive of the intent of Bill 30. One thing that remains unaddressed in this bill and, hopefully, will appear in the fall is the government's distracted-driving legislation. The government to date has equated eating a hamburger and talking on a cellphone as equally distractive, the difference being that the hamburger doesn't talk back, although for some members that may be the case. However, we are supportive of the intent of Bill 30. If you find yourself talking back to your hamburger, then I suggest you get the appropriate psychological care required.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also supportive of Bill 30. As well, I spoke in favour of that before, too. There were some concerns, issues we had. I think that verbally those issues have been addressed. You know, we were talking about an Alberta provincial police force, and those concerns have been addressed.

3:40

The concerns I had, as the Member for Calgary-Varsity raised, about cellphones being used when we are driving, hopefully, will be addressed in the future soon, too, so that we can make the streets, the roads safer for all Albertans. You know, it's costing \$4 billion a year for accidents. It costs us lots of money in productivity and health care and insurance costs. I think we should be much more vigilant for the safety of Albertans.

I will be supporting Bill 30, Mr. Speaker, as long as we get the other issues addressed in the fall session. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall was the third speaker here, so we do have our Standing Order 29(2)(a) if anybody wants to exercise it. I gather that nobody does.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak on Bill 30 in third reading. As the Minister of Transportation had tremendous fun pointing out in question period today, our caucus had previously spoken to Bill 30 and at that time had indeed spoken in favour of it.

However, we are, in fact, not entirely perfect, both of us, our tiny little caucus. I'd like to think we are, but we're not quite. We are tiny but not perfect, unlike other people with similar names, and that is because as much as we do work as hard as we do, we don't get a chance to read everything through in as much detail as we would like, particularly when you're going through this many bills. So periodically there is an oversight.

In this case we believe that there was an oversight on our part with respect to our analysis of the bill and the concerns that we needed to raise in regard to that analysis, notwithstanding that we hadn't had an opportunity to raise them till now. In particular, as the leader of the third party has stated in question period, there is a concern around one element of this bill that would limit the liability of motor vehicle rental companies to \$1 million.

It is on the basis of that concern, then, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to move an amendment to the bill at this point. Distribute it?

The Speaker: You should have sufficient copies with Parliament Counsel's initials on them. Yes, the pages will bring the first one to me, and we will distribute the rest and to the table as well. Just wait, hon. member, till we arrive at the point that there's some distribution.

Hon. member, you may proceed. Please read into the record your amendment.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment reads that the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 30, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a third time because the bill limits the liability of motor vehicle rental companies to \$1 million and thereby fails to protect the interests of individuals injured in motor vehicle accidents.

May I speak to the motion now?

The Speaker: You are on the floor, and you're recognized. Narrowly to the amendment.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thank you. The reason that we are proposing this amendment is because, as I've said before, the act otherwise addresses safety issues in a way that is satisfactory to our caucus. It is our concern that this particular element does not and, in fact, may well result in harm being done to victims of motor vehicle accidents.

Essentially, as I believe the leader of the third party has already pointed out, the concern arises where someone is a victim of a traffic accident and incurs injury which exceeds \$1 million. Many years ago, of course, we wouldn't have thought that that would happen very often, but as we know now, that can happen quite often. It can happen in terms of lost income, and it can also happen in relation to the cost of care, depending on the severity of the injury. If there's more than one person that is a victim of the accident, that form of injury can go further than that.

Now, I do understand that, of course, people who rent vehicles – and I'd certainly be happy to be contradicted by the minister in this regard. My understanding is that if this passes, what will happen is that when a person chooses to rent a vehicle, they would be given the option to purchase additional insurance. But it is not my understanding that they are compelled to purchase additional insurance. Now, obviously, the person who makes that decision puts their own future in jeopardy because they themselves know that should they get into an accident and should they cause an accident where damages exceed \$1 million, they would be personally liable for those additional damages.

My understanding – and, again, I'd be happy to be corrected by the minister if I'm incorrect – is that it is still the option of the person renting the vehicle whether they will buy that additional insurance and that it is possible that they might rent a vehicle and choose not to buy that additional insurance. Of course, it's not the person who is concerned about the extra money that we worry about; it's the person who's just barely scraping together enough money to be able to afford to pay the cost of renting the vehicle.

Then we have a situation where that person does ultimately cause an accident. Let's just say that there are a mother, a father, and two children in the vehicle, and both parents are fatally injured. Well, at that point, let me tell you, we've established an amount of damages that far exceeds \$1 million. Then the person who has rented the vehicle and opted not to buy the additional insurance is damage-proof or can't be sued because they effectively have almost no assets. At the end of the day the person who suffers as a result is the victim in that accident.

I will be quite honest. I appreciate that a similar amendment was made with respect to leased vehicles last fall. Again, we did not

understand the consequences of it at the time, nor did we note it. Now, I believe that with leased vehicles it's more often the case than an employer is paying for additional insurance, but even then there is a problem.

Here I think you will have more cases of people who rent vehicles choosing not to buy additional insurance and not being covered for additional insurance. Indeed, I can think in my own life where that actually happened. They were acquaintances of mine. The people that were injured ultimately were paid directly by the people who had rented the vehicle because they didn't have the insurance that they thought they had.

Again, I would be perfectly happy to have the minister tell me that our interpretation of how this works is incorrect, but my understanding is that this opens up the potential for people to be on the road with a maximum amount of insurance of \$1 million. That, to us, is of great concern because it is the victims of those accidents who will pay the cost of that.

It's for this reason that we're asking that the bill not be read a third time. What happens is that ultimately in the next session the government can come forward without that section included.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On the amendment, the hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be very brief here and try to calm what she believes. Really, what we're saying here has nothing to do with if you get hurt in an accident, the maximum you can get is a million dollars if there's a rental car involved. What we're saying is that the rental company, that is not responsible at all other than renting somebody a vehicle because they're supplying a business, shouldn't be the ones held responsible, but we are still holding them responsible for that up to a million dollars. In any other vehicle out there, as you know, in Alberta the requirement is only \$200,000 for insurance.

3:50

This isn't insurance we're talking about; this is capping the liability at a million dollars for a company that may not have been responsible for any of it. You still can go after the driver of the vehicle, the person that rented it, the person that actually caused the accident. Maybe the person has some worth; maybe they don't. That's not for us to decide. But I will say from what she was commenting on, if you go talk to rental car companies, most of the people renting cars and stuff are the people that are travelling and the people that need it for business, and most of them have money in their pocket, Mr. Speaker, to the opposite of what the hon. member was trying to say.

All we're trying to do here is bring out parity, bring out fairness across the board with everyone else out there, and not hold responsible the person that maybe wasn't the one that caused the accident or the one that was responsible. But it sure as heck isn't there to try to limit somebody, no matter how catastrophic their injuries are or their accident was, to this \$1 million. One catastrophe is too many, Mr. Speaker. I've been told by our researchers that of all the accidents we've had, hundreds of thousands of collisions in a year, there are only 30 that have ever had a claim of over a million dollars. But that's not the point here because one would be too many.

We're saying that we're not limiting it to that million dollars. They still have the people that were responsible for the accident to go after, Mr. Speaker. We're trying to make it fair. We're also following the other provinces of British Columbia and Ontario, that have brought in the same legislation. We just overlooked that last year on the other bill when we did it with leasing agents, and now all we've done is added car rentals to it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you very much. Speaking on the amendment, which talks about the cost of insurance payments, one of the concerns that has been previously discussed with the highway safety amendment act was that in that particular act the fine for driving without insurance was actually less than the cost of insurance, so people would continue to drive on the highways and take their chances as to whether they were going to be pulled over or not. So this is sort of reminiscent of the concerns with regard to insufficient or nonexistent insurance. Related to the insurance area is what is currently before the courts, and that's the caps that the government has attempted to work with the insurance companies to place on undefinable soft-tissue injuries. This has the potential of resulting in a 40 per cent increase.

I understand why the hon. member brought up the notion. We have to balance, obviously, the responsibility of the driver and the responsibility of the rental company. It's a very complex issue, and I'm not convinced that in the time remaining we can adequately deal with it. I do appreciate the hon. member for bringing up this concern. It's one of many concerns dealing with improper or inadequate insurance policies.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member brought up a valid concern. The intent is good. Like the Minister of Transportation said, the majority of Albertans carry \$200,000 of insurance. I believe I've got a million dollars of insurance coverage. So what happens if I get into an accident and the damage is more than that million bucks? They could come after me. We should be somehow trying to address the concern the hon. member brought up. The concern is there. I think we should address that concern: if the damage is more than a million bucks, what happens then? I think the intent is good. The concern is good, but how are we going to address it? I don't think we can do that today. But it's a very valid concern.

On that note, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Others on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 30 lost]

The Speaker: We're back to debate on the bill.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, you're now going to go into Committee of the Whole. This probably won't take very long. I want to wish all of you the very best as you go through the summer. You will adjourn probably in a few minutes, but I will not be in the House, so all the best to you for the summer. You know when you're coming back according to Standing Order 3(4)(b).

Length of Service of the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, before you leave, given that you're not

coming back, may I just mention for the record that it has come to the attention of elected members that you were elected on November 21, 1979, and have now served 10,788 days in office. You are now as of tomorrow the longest serving Progressive Conservative MLA in the history of the province. Now, of course, that brings you to being the fifth-longest serving Alberta MLA, the longest serving currently sitting Speaker in the House and, of course, as shown by your ruling today, certainly among the wisest.

We just wanted to have that on the record. [standing ovation]

The Speaker: You're very kind. Thank you very much.

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move the first of two amendments to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you're moving an amendment. Do we have it here?

Mr. Elniski: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause a moment while we pass out the first one.

Hon. members, may we revert for a moment to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

4:00 Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our summer staff member at the NDP opposition caucus. Isabelle Lecours was born in Longueuil in the province of Quebec. She obtained a college diploma degree in social sciences at Champlain college at St. Lambert, and she is currently completing a bachelor's degree in communications in poli-sci at Université du Québec à Montréal. Isabelle is interested in national politics, international relations, and diplomacy. She aspires to achieve a doctor's degree in political science. Her ultimate career objective is to work for the United Nations, and I've no doubt that she will learn many things here that will give her much assistance at that time. I would now ask that Isabelle please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Bill Pr. 2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll read the first amend-

ment into the record with respect to Bill Pr. 2, Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. The following is added after section 4: under 4.1 section 2(2) is amended by adding “subject to the laws of those jurisdictions” after “Canada.” Under 4.2 section 8 is repealed, and the following is substituted:

8 The members of the corporation are not as members liable for any liability, act or default of the corporation.

Under 4.3 the following is added after section 9:

Filings with the Registrar of Corporations

9.1(1) The corporation shall, once in each calendar year, file with the Registrar of Corporations the following:

- (a) the annual financial statements and auditor’s report;
- (b) a list of the directors and officers of the corporation, with their addresses and occupations.

(2) The corporation shall file with the Registrar of Corporations a copy of the by-laws of the corporation and any amendments or additions to the by-laws.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any comments on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the amendment, and we’ll call this amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking specifically to the amendment, I want to draw the House’s attention to 4.3, section 9.1(1)(a), where the corporation shall, once in each calendar year, file with the Registrar of Corporations the following:

- (a) the annual financial statements and auditor’s report.

That addresses accountability.

- (b) a list of the directors and officers of the corporation, with their addresses and occupations.

That deals with transparency. We’re all about accountability and transparency, Mr. Chair, and therefore we support this amendment. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to introduce a second amendment to Bill Pr. 2, Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

The Deputy Chair: This will be amendment A2, and we’ll pause while it’s being circulated.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to move that Bill Pr. 2, Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be amended. The following is added after section 8:

8.1 No action for damages may be commenced against a director or officer of the corporation for anything done or omitted to be done by that person in good faith in the performance of the person’s duties or functions or the exercise of the person’s powers under this or any other enactment.

The Deputy Chair: Any comments or questions? This is amendment A2. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I recognize the fact that this is an amendment that came from an all-party committee and that, therefore, I am obliged to support it. I have a little bit of difficulty with the language in 8.1, where it says, “No action for damages may be commenced against a director or officer of the corporation for anything done or omitted to be done by that person in good faith.”

I understand and I appreciate the nature of whistle-blower legislation. I appreciate the fact that a person is doing their best, whether, as was discussed yesterday, it’s a fireman, and that we need to protect these individuals in the jobs that they are doing. I just hope that good faith is matched with good intelligence and that, therefore, good results occur.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on amendment A2.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak in favour of the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. This amendment would put the directors and officers of the Caritas Health Group on the same footing as the regional health authorities’ directors and officers, and the wording which is proposed in 8.1 directly tracks the provisions in that other statute. I think it’s reasonable. It’s something that we accord to people who are acting in public service. Firemen, for example, also have the same sort of exemption from liability provided that they’re carrying out their duties in good faith.

I am supportive of the amendment as proposed and would urge all hon. members to vote in favour of the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

I will call the question on amendment A2 as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We’re now on Bill Pr. 2 as amended. Shall I call the question on that?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill Pr. 2.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill Pr. 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

4:10

**Private Bills
Third Reading**

[The members indicated below moved that the following bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

Pr. 1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act	Anderson
Pr. 2 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009	Elniski

**Bill Pr. 3
Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we end, I think the hon. Member for Red Deer-South wanted to infuse some humour into this as he's going to test my French, so I'd like to move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Merci, M. le Président. M. Goudreau et moi, nous sommes d'accord que Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act est une bonne loi. Alors, nous allons la supporter.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appear to have come to the end of the day's agenda, and we appear to have come to the end of the session's agenda. There are a number of bills remaining on the Order Paper which, we've indicated, will be left over for discussion in the fall. That being the case and given the hour, I would move, mindful of Standing Order 3(4), that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on October 26.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:13 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 3(4)]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to June 03, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft.)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c11]

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c12]

- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c13]
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c9]
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407-08 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1408-09 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409-11 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]
- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1411 (May 28 aft., passed)

- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c14]
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cL-2.5]
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1265 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329 (May 26 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329-30 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1527-28 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1447-49 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

- 26* Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1265-68 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1330-31 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1412-13 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 27* Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve.), 1229-40 (May 25 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1507-10 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246-49 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1413 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1268-69 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1358-60 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1269-73 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1360-63 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528-30 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft.)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1273-75 (May 26 aft., passed)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1275-80 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365 (May 27 eve.), 1449-55 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft.)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1526-27 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1384-87 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1280-81 (May 26 aft.), 1344-45 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524-25 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 36* Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft.)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1371-84 (May 27 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1503-07 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)

- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406-07 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407 (May 28 aft., passed)
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft.)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1345-50 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387-90 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525-26 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft.)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1350-58 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1455-60 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365-71 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1497-99 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
- 44* Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft.)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1283-84, 1294-1329 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1460-80 (Jun. 1 eve., passed on division)
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1240-46 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1510 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1523 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft.)

- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c8]
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft.)
- 49 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1500-01 (Jun. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Knight)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1501-02 (Jun. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 52* Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft.)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health), (May 25 aft., reported to Assembly)
Committee of the Whole -- 1284-94 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1526 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft.)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft.)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1209-15 (May 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c10]
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft.)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft, defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft.)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1215-22 (May 25 aft.), 1427-33 (Jun. 1 aft., passed on division)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft.)
Committee of the Whole -- 1433-38 (Jun. 1 aft., adjourned)
- 208 Life Leases Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 1208 (May 25 aft.)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

Pr2* Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1530-31 (Jun. 3 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

Pr3* Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft.)

Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, October 26, 2009

Issue 49

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 26, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, we'll now proceed to the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all members and all guests to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Paul Hinman Member for Calgary-Glenmore

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've received from the Acting Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore containing the results of the by-election conducted on September 14, 2009, which states that a by-election was conducted in the constituency of Calgary-Glenmore and that Mr. Paul Hinman was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at Arms, Mr. Hinman approached the Mace]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have the honour to present to you Paul Hinman, the new Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who has taken the oath as a member of this House, has inscribed the roll, and now claims the right to take his seat. Hon. member, please take your seat.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a very, very special guest, His Excellency David Jacobson, the newly appointed United States ambassador to Canada. The United States is our closest neighbour. It's also our province's largest and most important trading partner.

In addition to serving in the White House, assisting the President, and the ambassador's successful career as a lawyer, he has worked to advance nanotechnology and the economic competitiveness of cities, two areas in which Alberta is very interested. Members may

recall that Mr. Jacobson visited Alberta just a couple of weeks ago. We are certainly very appreciative of the fact that he took the time so early in his tenure to learn first-hand about Alberta, especially about our energy sector. Today I look forward to speaking with the ambassador about the close relationship that exists between our province and his country, and I am confident that under Mr. Jacobson that relationship will continue to grow and to be strengthened.

I would like to congratulate our new ambassador on his position. I'm looking forward to, again, building the relationship on behalf of all Albertans. I wish him every success in this new position and let him know that he is always welcome in our great province of Alberta. I will ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to stand and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the new leader of the Wildrose Alliance, Danielle Smith. She's just gone through a vigorous leadership campaign and was very victorious in that, and it's a pleasure to introduce her to the floor. I ask that she stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 30 students from l'école St. Angela in the fine constituency of Edmonton-Calder and their teacher, Miss Sophia DeRose. All of the students are here this week attending the School at the Legislature. I would ask them to all now rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through to members of the Assembly 25 students from Sweet Grass school. They are accompanied today by their teacher, Mrs. Nicki Gardner. They've been here learning about the legislative process and have asked some very tough questions. I'd like to invite them now to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 27 Alberta government employees from Employment and Immigration. They represent a variety of areas in the ministry. Some of these individuals work directly with Albertans to improve their work-related skills; promote and enforce fair, safe, and healthy work environments; and provide support to those in need. They also help newcomers settle into their communities. Others work in corporate roles like IT, data development, finance, administration, intergovernmental relations, and information and privacy. Each staff member plays an important part in helping Albertans reach their potential in the workplace. I believe they are in both galleries. I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a special guest, John Hampson, who is sitting in the members' gallery. John has served for the past year on the Children and Youth Services Youth Advisory Panel, and John and his fellow panelists this past year tackled a number of important issues, including our gang strategy, homelessness, and provided ongoing input into the Alberta mentorship partnership. John is attending the University of Calgary and has recently become a constituent of Banff-Cochrane. I would ask that he rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. [applause]

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what that was for.

An Hon. Member: First time up.

Mr. Webber: First time up, yes.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly our new U.S. consul general, Ms Laura Lochman. Ms Laura Lochman has replaced Mr. Tom Huffaker, who was our past U.S. consul out of Calgary. Tom was and continues to be a good friend of mine. He is now with CAPP in Calgary. Laura has replaced him. I've met her on a few occasions, and she has just been an absolute pleasure. Today I understand that she apparently represents the largest geographic area of any consul general in the United States. Laura, welcome to Alberta. Welcome to Calgary. We look forward to working well with you through your office and with the ambassador. Thank you for coming today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two wonderful young Albertans: first, Riley Georgsen from my constituency, who is here with his new bride, Samantha. Riley is now living in Calgary with Samantha. Of course, Calgary is better for that. Riley has been an amazing young person in volunteer work in the constituency. He also is probably single-handedly responsible for bringing me into the new century technologically and getting me in touch with young people in Alberta through the new mediums. I would ask for them to please rise now and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a guest who is in the public gallery, Mr. Raghbir Singh Badesha. Mr. Badesha is a teacher by trade and is very interested in the Canadian political system, so he is here today to watch question period. Question period is a great opportunity for him to witness our democracy in action. I would like to ask Mr. Badesha to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise. With us today is Alberta Firefighters Association president, Mr. Craig Macdonald. A few days ago a half-dozen or so of our members geared up in firefighters' outfits and entered a live fire just to see the risks and dangers involved in the firefighting profession. To say the least, the atmosphere in that chamber was hotter than we sometimes face over here in this Chamber. Firefighters will be approaching members of this Legislature as time goes on, asking for the addition of two additional cancers onto a list of presumptive cancer legislation with the Workers' Compensation Board. I would ask Mr. Craig Macdonald to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Also, I have a very young and, indeed, inspiring constituent. Mr. David Adomako-Ansah has struggled with several health problems. After contracting lupus, he had a stroke. Then he was on a Berlin heart awaiting a heart transplant. Also, a pacemaker was implemented. Recently, in February, he had a heart transplant. While going through all that, Mr. Speaker, imagine: he has started a not-for-profit agency and started raising money for the Stollery children's hospital through basketball. He has created a foundation called the Dunk on Disease Foundation. Now he's fully recovered. He's attending NAIT. He will be a broadcaster when he graduates. He tells me that he will not stop raising money for Stollery for as long as he possibly can. I would like to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. He's truly an inspirational man.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, seated in the members' gallery, two constituents from Edmonton-Meadowlark. The first constituent is Brent McGillis. He's a hard-working Albertan and an ironworker.

My second constituent is Sharon Crawford. Sharon is an advocate for the transgendered community and no stranger to the Legislature as her father is the hon. Neil Stanley Crawford.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, seated in the public gallery, the future doctors are in the House. We have 50 medical students from the universities of Alberta and Calgary, who are here for the Pan-Alberta Political Action Day. They are meeting with MLAs regarding the rural integrated clinical clerkship, which places medical students in rural communities for 36 weeks of training.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three individuals who attend upon the House today to remind particularly the Minister of Health and Wellness that there are a number of issues around gender reassignment surgery that remain unresolved. I'd ask them to please rise. They are Mercedes Allen, Jan Buterman, and Amy Swanson. If you would please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly additional members of the Trans Equality Society of Alberta and transgendered

community supporters. My guests are concerned about the lack of consultation given to the decision to cut funding for gender reassignment surgery. They believe that all potential cuts to health care should be given careful thought about how they affect Albertans, and they feel it's reasonable to ask the same regarding gender reassignment surgery. I would now ask my guests, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise as I call their names: April Friesen, Sabrina Dow, Gina Bennett, Eva Ryckman, Terry Ferguson, and Michelle Drinkell. If you could join me in providing them with the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce a very special guest this afternoon and a very good friend of mine. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Bill Smith. Mr. Smith is a former firefighter. Many members of this House will know that he is also a well-respected lawyer in the Calgary community. He is the incoming president of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, and we are very excited about that. I'd ask all members in this Assembly today to join me in extending a warm welcome to Mr. Smith.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three people representing Meyers Norris Penny. These people are here today to witness the introduction of Bill 53 later this afternoon. I would ask Mr. Cal Carpenter, Mr. Tim Dawson, and Mr. Lanny Westersund to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a couple of my bosses, constituents from Calgary-North Hill, Jessica Powless and Greg Conlin. It would be fair to say that I would not be sitting here today if it weren't for the hard work and dedication of Jessica. She was a tireless worker on my campaign, and I owe her a great deal of gratitude. Her boyfriend, Greg Conlin, is a power engineer at Enmax and is not only a born and raised Calgarian and Albertan but a born and raised Calgary-North Hillian. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly two individuals among dozens who showed up at the Legislature today to show their concern about the progressive erosion in the health care system. They are Carol Kujala and Gerry Chiasson. Please rise, and we'll extend to you the welcome of the Assembly.

The Clerk: Oral Question Period.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed, there have been some changes.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if it would be appropriate to ask for unanimous consent of the House for today only, because it's

our first day back, to allow continued introductions and then the ministerial statement and responses that were anticipated.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(1.1) says, "At 1:50 p.m., the Assembly shall proceed to Oral Question Period with the balance of the daily routine to follow." There's a request being made here by the Government House Leader to waive this section of our standing orders and to proceed with the Routine, which would include the conclusion of introductions and dealing with the subject matter of a ministerial statement and the appropriate response. Unanimous consent would need to be granted.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank the hon. Government House Leader for that one.

From my constituency of Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, it's my pleasure to introduce a gentleman who has called Fort McMurray his home for over 30 years. In fact, he ran a restaurant, a 24-hour café, for the last 25 years, and now he runs my constituency office. I'd ask the honourable representative from Fort McMurray, Vaughn Jessome, to rise. Also, with him today is Rolando Nicolas. They are both in the gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two other excellent Wildrose Alliance members. They are tireless soldiers that have helped me in the by-election. I'd like to introduce to the Assembly Said Abdalbaki and his cousin Mustapha Abdalbaki.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe that that concludes my list of those who indicated to me their desire to do an introduction today. Did I miss anyone?

Well, then, let me draw to your attention the presence today in the House of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, who today is celebrating an anniversary of birth. Happy birthday.

Ministerial Statements

H1N1 Influenza Vaccination Program

Mr. Liepert: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I thank all members for changing the House rules for today. I think it is an important day because today marks the launch of Alberta's H1N1 pandemic flu vaccine program across the province. I'd like to take this opportunity to join our chief medical officer of health in urging all Albertans, including every member of this Assembly, to join in the effort to control this new virus by taking advantage of the incredible efforts of the medical community to make a safe vaccine available in such a short time.

As I stated in a previous statement to the Legislature, the province is prepared. We received approval from Health Canada last week for the new vaccine. It's been shipped across the province, staff have been trained, clinics are now up and running, and we've communicated to the public the importance of protecting themselves, their families, and friends. There's just one more thing that has to happen: Albertans have to roll up their sleeves and help us get the job done.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we take medical advances for granted. Here we are, in a situation where a new virus appeared in April,

challenging public health officials around the world, and within six months we have a safe and effective vaccine ready for delivery. It's actually quite amazing compared to pandemic situations in the past. Yet we still see polls saying that people are reluctant to get their shots. They say that there's too much confusion. Some say that the vaccine isn't safe, et cetera. Well, I'm here to give the people of Alberta a simple message: we have a safe, effective vaccine, don't listen to the naysayers, and get immunized.

Mass clinics started delivering the vaccine across Alberta today, focusing on the high-risk groups first. I'd ask everyone to please check www.albertahealthservices.ca for the nearest clinic. That means that people under 65 with chronic health conditions and their caregivers, kids between six months and five years of age, pregnant women, health care workers, and people in remote or isolated settings and communities, all these groups, should get immunized as soon as possible. No one will be turned away at the clinics, but we are aiming to have those groups who can benefit the most come forward first.

The vaccine will be offered initially through mass immunization clinics as this is the most efficient means of immunizing a large number of people in as short a time as possible. Alberta Health Services will also look at the possibility of resuming immunization programs for the seasonal flu in seniors' lodges once a critical mass of the general population has been immunized for H1N1.

In the next several weeks, once the vaccine stockpile in Alberta increases, we'll distribute that supply to other vaccine providers, including family physicians, pharmacists, and private vendors who contract with large employers to set up immunization clinics in the workplace.

As our chief medical officer confirmed last week, we are now in the second wave, as predicted, and people need to keep practising those other common-sense behaviours as well. They include coughing into your sleeve, staying home if you're sick, washing your hands, and calling Health Link for further advice if you're not getting better.

Now, I'm not a medical expert, but those who are all say the same thing: the vaccine is the best way to control this pandemic. I urge all Albertans to go out and get immunized.

As we move further into the flu season, Alberta's chief medical officer of health in conjunction with other health experts will continue to provide timely, accurate, and important information in our fight against H1N1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness is correct when he says that Albertans should ignore people spreading disinformation about the safety of vaccines. The safe, responsible thing to do is to get immunized as soon as possible for the H1N1 influenza.

This morning about 9:20 I drove past the immunization clinic at Westmount mall in Edmonton. I was hoping to get immunized myself. I was startled to see a lineup that went out the door and stretched way around the outside of the building. Hundreds of people were trying to do just what the minister has asked, get immunized. But the organization is clearly not in place for this to succeed.

We are already in our office getting phone calls from across the province that the immunization clinics are swamped. We're being told that there are few, if any, provisions for disabled people, that seniors, pregnant women, children, and others are being expected to stand for hours. People are asking why, for all of Calgary, in a serious pandemic that has been foreseen for half a year, there are

only four immunization clinics and only five in Edmonton. Nine clinics to urgently immunize 2 million people won't do the job.

If this is the best this government can do, it is not good enough. The shortfalls of the immunization campaign are almost certain to lead to a surge in emergency wards and intensive care units. People will become critically ill and some will die because they do not have immunizations, and some of those people, perhaps many of them, will not have immunizations because, despite months of preparation time, this government could only open nine clinics for 2 million people.

We have a chance here if this government acts immediately to correct this problem. I urge this administration to act this afternoon and order urgent action to expand the immunization program. Even if the current clinics run 24/7, the flu season may be over before a large proportion of the population is immunized.

Mr. Speaker, my plan originally for this statement was to join the minister this afternoon in a simple plea to Albertans to get immunized. Clearly, it's not Albertans who need to hear a plea. They are trying to do their duty. It is this government that needs to pay attention. While I urge all Albertans to join the long lineups at these immunization clinics, my real plea is to this government: act now, this afternoon, to put in place an immunization program that really works.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Just hold the clock, please.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin, just a brief statement for clarity with respect to the order of question period with a changed situation in the Legislative Assembly. The routine today and tomorrow – that is, day 1 and day 2 of this session – will be exactly the same as it was when we left here in June earlier this year. On Wednesday the fifth question will go to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore and replace the ordinary government question, and on Thursday the fifth question, which is ordinarily a government question, will go to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. During tablings this afternoon I'll table a schematic to deal with this particular matter. So we're on the same routine today and tomorrow, slight adjustments on Wednesday and Thursday.

First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

2:00

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer the Premier changed the plans for Alberta Hospital Edmonton three times in two months. Only after rallies and public outcries did he realize the mistake and recently created an implementation team to help clean up the mess. To the Premier: why did the Premier wait months after the initial announcement to sort out any consultation and involve those most affected?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I support the Alberta Health Services Board in their plan to move people into the community. It definitely improves their quality of life. I also listened to the position taken by the board when they said that it may take two to three years. I certainly thought that was an appropriate length of time to move the number of people and to ensure that the supports are in place in the community. This implementation committee will ensure that that is going to be done. I look forward to the work that's going to be done by the committee over the next number of months to place many

people into communities across Alberta to ensure that they have a much better quality of life.

Dr. Swann: Well, again to the Premier: will the Premier guarantee that the team's recommendations will be made public before any closures?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are no closures. People are moving from an institution to community-based beds, and we want to make sure that that transfer is done in the best interests of the patients, those that are presently residing in the Alberta Hospital. Our number one priority is to make sure that people are looked after, supports are in place, and their quality of life is improved.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier say that no beds are going to be closed when it's been clear in the public that up to 80 beds will be closed when these people leave Alberta Hospital Edmonton? What does this mean?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, we're moving people out of an institution. So many community groups have supported the Alberta government in its position to give people a better quality of life, moving them out of an institution and moving them to a community bed. They move from one facility, and they'll move into accommodations that appropriately reflect their needs. We'll make sure that the services are provided and give them a quality of life. Why in the world would these people want to keep people living in institutions for the rest of their lives? What kind of quality of life is that?

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pandemic influenza is here. The vaccine will save lives, and I applaud the tireless efforts of health officials and front-line workers delivering this important preventative measure. I myself will be getting the vaccine when I have hours to spare. Unfortunately, there are only nine flu clinics available between Edmonton and Calgary to cover over 2 million people. My questions are to the Premier. With years of planning for pandemics already completed, how is it that there are only nine clinics providing immunization to over 2 million people in Alberta today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as the minister communicated earlier, there are specific populations that we're asking to receive their H1N1 flu vaccine. Over the course of time the vaccine will be available for all Albertans, but we're asking those that are more susceptible to the flu to receive their vaccine today. We'll ensure that all other Albertans, including those that may not be at risk as much as others, receive their vaccine in the province.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was a real dodge.

Will the Premier actually admit that his leadership is responsible for the lack of staff and the lack of funding for these essential clinics in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we said many months ago that even though the budget is under pressure, this is a priority, that we want to ensure that all Albertans have an opportunity to receive the

vaccine. There are some that still are undecided whether they should or not. We certainly encourage everyone to receive the vaccine. We will do everything in our power to make sure that everybody receives the vaccination.

Dr. Swann: Will the Premier, then, commit to opening new clinics within days to address the backlog of individuals who need this vaccination?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. We've had a number of discussions in this House in the past about whether or not government listens to our chief medical officer of health and our public health officials. This plan that was rolled out was clearly the plan of the chief medical officer of health and public officials around the province. For us as political members of this Assembly to interfere in that rollout would be inappropriate.

Now, let's make it clear that every Albertan who wants the vaccine will receive it. They may not be able to receive it in the first hour of the first day. We need to ensure that with limited supplies we get it to the most vulnerable the quickest we can, and that's the reason for the clinics as they're set up today.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. The intent of this government and this Premier is clear: they want to force Albertans to pay for billions of dollars of electricity transmission lines without any independent hearing to see if those lines are actually needed. That's what Bill 50, introduced by this government, means. Why is the government taking such a casual attitude towards Albertans' money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, a number of public hearings have been held in the province of Alberta with respect to the need for transmission. We also hear from Albertans about moving to various forms of energy – whether it be wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, coal-fired, natural gas – ensuring that there is competitiveness in the generation but also moving the energy from its source to where the consumer is. Our lines are congested. They're aging. We're losing a lot of electrons on the line as a result of the congestion, roughly a quarter of a million dollars a year. The plan is good. We'll proceed to start with the critical infrastructure that's necessary to grow this province into the future.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, many electricity experts are saying that the plan is not good, that some of the lines in this gold-plated plan are not necessary, but the government explicitly refuses to hear their points at a public interest hearing. Instead, at the last minute they're giving less than two weeks' notice for one single committee hearing. That's less notice than you get if you're being fired. Will the Premier admit that this is simply window dressing, simply cover for him on a controversial issue just before his leadership review?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think that over the next few days we'll hear this kind of misinformation in the House, all tied to leadership. I can tell you I'm not backing away from the principles that got me here no matter what the threat from the opposition is.

Let's clarify again the misinformation that the member gave earlier. There is a policy field committee that'll be meeting on

resources and the environment. This has been instituted by this government. We've never had public policy committees ever meet in the province, and they're there to hear submissions by the public. On the 2nd and 4th we'll be hearing from the Canadian Wind Energy Association. The Sierra Club will give a presentation on grizzly bears. The Alberta Geothermal Energy Association will provide a presentation on potential for geothermal energy development. Also, the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, the Independent Power Producers Society of Alberta, Enmax, and EPCOR are all expected to provide presentations about electricity transportation. That is fact, not what that person was talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Just a second, hon. member. Did I hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre rise on a point of order?

Ms Blakeman: No, sir.

The Speaker: Now, what did the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood rise on?

Mr. Mason: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that we have that straightened out.

If the Premier thinks that having public input on Bill 50 is necessary – and Mr. Speaker, I'm not convinced that he does if he's only setting aside two days of hearings – why not pull Bill 50, send it to the standing committee for a proper series of hearings? The two-hour sessions are not nearly enough.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the bill is going to get the most public hearing right here in this Assembly. We've got a couple more stages to proceed, and it'll be done here. All these members can bring the points of view of their constituents to this House, and we'll debate the bill. That is the way democracy works, I believe.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party in the Assembly, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

2:10 Public Health System Reform

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. More than 60 per cent of Albertans think the Premier is taking Alberta in the wrong direction. Public outcry over this government's secretive health reforms and service cuts has never been louder, but the Premier says he's going to ignore it. The fact is that this PC government simply can't be trusted to protect public health care and is leaving patients out in the cold. Why is this Premier ignoring the wishes of Albertans, not to mention common sense, and continuing his reckless plan to dismantle public health care?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as you know and this Assembly knows, this government is firmly committed to publicly funded health care. We want to make it the best ever. We want to make sure that we sustain it for the young people who are out there when they need it in the future. That is the goal: to embrace publicly funded health care, ask our health care professionals to work with government and others to ensure that we have a system that's going to be accessible,

that's going to of course improve the quality of care, and make sure that it's there for the future, meaning sustainable. Those are the goals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Premier refuses the opportunity to commit to support public health care. He only commits to funding publicly funded health care, which means taking taxpayers' money to pay their friends in the private health care business, insurance companies, drug companies. That's what they mean when they talk about publicly funded health care. My question is to the Premier. Will he admit that his government intends to use taxpayers' money to pay private companies to deliver private health care in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker . . .

Ms Evans: Patience.

Mr. Stelmach: Take a deep breath.

. . . we're committed to publicly funded health care. Health care will continue to be delivered by professionals. You know, they try and twist and talk about the American two-tiered style of health care. I forgot about that today for some reason, but, you know, he'll keep repeating it. All I'm saying to all Albertans is that we are firmly committed to publicly funded health care. We want to work with all health care professionals so that it's the best system ever. We have the opportunity to do it right here in this province of Alberta. Why tear at each other? Let's work together and make sure that that system is here for the next generation.

Mr. Mason: More on publicly funded health care.

In the two years since he became Premier, the percentage of Albertans who think he is taking them in the wrong direction has steadily risen. They're tired of misleading announcements, tired of government secrecy, and they oppose the Premier's direction on electricity transmission, health reform, and long-term care, but the Premier's response is to stay the course. When will the Premier admit that he's chosen the wrong direction for Alberta and start listening to the people who put him where he is?

Mr. Stelmach: In some other poll that I read, 89 per cent of the public in the province of Alberta don't even know who the hon. member is. I don't know what poll he was following, but you know, we can leave the politics and the debate for later.

We're firmly – firmly – focused on making this the best system available to Albertans. You know, yesterday I had the opportunity to bring opening remarks at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress. Over 3,000 – 3,000 – delegates came to Edmonton to talk about innovation, research, the commercialization of that, and the way we deliver cardiovascular care in Alberta, which to many at that conference says, "Alberta has taken a leadership role; we want to do what you're doing in the province of Alberta and take what you have accomplished to the other provinces so that we can reach out to as many people as you have" in terms of the kind of cardiovascular care we have in Alberta, leading across the country of Canada. Others tell us that, and he tries to drag it down.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a keen interest in the announced province-wide vaccine program for H1N1 because my constituents are frightened, and I know we know why. Many questions have arisen, and I would like the Health and Wellness minister to please tell us how rural Albertans are going to be addressed in terms of the H1N1 vaccine when in our constituencies I have 80,000 square kilometres, I have 45 communities, and we only have two places where the vaccine is going to be provided. To the minister: what are we doing for rural Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the difficulty we have today is that this is a new virus, a new vaccine, and it's still to a large extent being produced as we speak. We have limited quantities at this stage. We want to ensure that we have the maximum ability to monitor that those vaccines are getting to the appropriate individuals who are in the high-risk group. So I ask for some patience. There's no question that in rural communities, especially in isolated communities like the member's, it will take a little more time, but we're working towards getting every Albertan vaccinated.

Ms Calahasen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that we're trying to stop the whole issue of the scare tactics that are occurring, but there are a lot of scare tactics that have been occurring, whether it's through various websites or lobby groups. To the minister: could you please tell Albertans the potential time frame of immunization clinics that could occur in the next little while?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the really good news is that this vaccine actually has come on stream some two to three weeks earlier than we had originally thought it was going to. The original belief was that it wouldn't be ready until possibly mid-November. That would have had a very compressed time frame as we led up to the holiday season. The fact that it's available here now, in the final week of October, gives us that extra three-week period. I believe that by mid-December the vaccine will have been well distributed throughout the province, and any Albertan who wants to be vaccinated will have the opportunity to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Calahasen: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if we are going to make sure that all Albertans can be vaccinated, why then are we using mass clinics instead of getting it out to as many health care providers as possible, especially in rural Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: I would like to elaborate on the first answer. One of the problems you have if you disseminate small batches across the province is that you lose the ability to monitor whether the patient is actually receiving the vaccine. The last thing we want is having this vaccine sitting on a shelf somewhere and not getting to the appropriate individuals.

Again, I have to come back to the fact that this is a plan that has been laid out by our leading public health officials. I'm not going to sit here as an elected member and tell them that what they're doing is wrong. I believe they are the experts, and we should trust them. I would say that a month from now this will all be not an issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Inspiring Education Public Consultation

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inspiring education? Mr. Minister, your do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do government spent millions of taxpayer dollars on a feel-good travelling public relations road show entitled Inspiring Education. You spent thousands more on self-congratulatory Success by 6 newspaper ads. The hypocritical actions of your ministry have more to do with conspiring than inspiring. Do you expect students, parents, teachers, or trustees to be inspired by your first round of \$80 million cutbacks to educational programming?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I may get to the actual question, but first I need to correct the suppositions. First of all, the advertisement with respect to Success by 6 was an advertisement on a fundraising piece that was done by me privately with an organization. It's not government money, doesn't involve government money. This is the 10th year we've run this very successful golf tournament to raise money for Success by 6 because I care about kids and their start and I care about that organization, what it does in our community.

I certainly won't apologize for spending money doing what governments do, which is to look to the horizon and plan the future. So Inspiring Education, which has been actually well accepted both in stakeholder communities and in the public as a very robust discussion about the future of education, is a very, very important investment for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, if you want to achieve success by six, full-day kindergartens, fund them; half-day junior kindergartens, fund them; pay for breakfast programs rather than for ads. Are teachers to be inspired by a five-year contract, supposedly bargained in good faith, whose conditions have been unilaterally rewritten by your government halfway through the term?

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll get back to the \$80 million later, but on the average weekly earnings question, that is implicit in what the hon. member has said, again I need to correct the misapprehension that he's put forward. Nobody has ripped up any contracts or in any way denigrated the contracts. There's a very simple issue to be determined, and that is the question of how you determine average weekly earnings when the people who used to determine it changed the process. The contracts were written on one basis. There's a new basis in place. There's a very legitimate discussion between ourselves and the ATA with respect to how that should be calculated. We have agreed with the ATA to move forward in arbitration on that issue. It's not a question of not honouring the contracts – we want to honour the contracts; we will honour the contracts – but we do need to have an interpretation of the meaning of that term.

Mr. Chase: Then we have our Premier going around with a cup to public-sector unions saying: please take a wage freeze. I suppose that's part of the contract.

Do you honestly believe that grade 12 students, forced by your ministry's failure to schedule appropriately, will be inspired by having to write math and chem 30 exams on the same day?

Mr. Hancock: First of all, they won't have to write chem 30 and math on the same day. A schedule is going out. There was a schedule published. Two jurisdictions indicated that. As soon as I got feedback that that was what happened – I hadn't seen it – I said to my department that it's not appropriate to have two exams of that

nature on the same day and that we needed that fixed. The new announcement with respect to the exam schedule will be out imminently.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Homeless People

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, and rightly so, there is a great deal of discussion regarding pandemic planning for H1N1. My question is for the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What is your ministry doing to prepare for the second wave of the outbreak, with specific reference to our homeless population?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the homeless population is extremely vulnerable to the H1N1 virus, and they have very complex needs and a host of other needs as well. I can tell you that since they live in close quarters, traditional advice like stay home and rest is just not going to work.

Hon. member, we have taken this very seriously, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you as well that immunization clinics will be offered at shelters on-site. They are expected to begin as early as this Friday, and you'll be pleased to know that our homeless population, whether they're sheltered or unsheltered, will be immunized on an urgent basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and final question is for the same minister. Obviously, we can't afford delays or duplications for these important people. What has the minister's focus of discussion been with the Ministry of Health and Wellness in this respect?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, this is a question I have heard before, and I've heard it repeatedly. We have been working closely with Alberta Health and Wellness. We've been working closely as well with Alberta Health Services for several months, and that's to develop a pandemic planning guide, which I reviewed with my staff as recently as last week and have, you know, a number of times over the past few months. That guide, I can tell you, speaks to prevention, how to slow or stop the transmission of the virus. It outlines the resources that are available. It gives a very clear communication protocol, that they will notify health officials, notify officials in our department whether or not there have been any of their people that have been infected with the virus. I'm confident that our shelter advisers or shelter operators, our medical support staff, that people were talking about here earlier, are all very well prepared to deal with this virus in our shelters.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization (continued)

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. In his ministerial statement the minister said, "Alberta Health Services will also look at the possibility of resuming immunization programs for the seasonal flu in seniors' lodges once a critical mass of the general population has been immunized for H1N1." Will the minister tell this Assembly what per cent of

Albertans need to be immunized for H1N1 to reach that critical mass?

Mr. Liepert: I don't know if there's a specific number that I can lay out today. That will be a judgment call by the chief medical officer of health and public health officials across the province.

You know, the other issue that we have to keep in mind here, Mr. Speaker, is that this is out of the norm when it comes to delivery of health care services, and we want to ensure that we've got the right professionals involved in this particular immunization. There will be some hiccups as we move through it, but we're going to work to ensure that the process is as smooth as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Again to the same minister: will this minister take action and immediately order the opening of H1N1 vaccination clinics at seniors' facilities? This would reduce waiting times at mass clinics and, frankly, relieve stress on worried seniors who have to travel, stand, go to great lengths. Will he push that forward immediately?

Mr. Liepert: I didn't catch the very outset. Is the member referring to the seasonal flu or the H1N1?

Dr. Taft: The H1N1.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think I answered that question before. The intent with H1N1 is to get to the most vulnerable as quickly as possible. It has been determined that our seniors population is not the most vulnerable to the H1N1 virus. It clearly has been with the other seasonal flu, and that's why over the past couple of weeks we've had the seasonal flu vaccination program under way, and it has focused on our seniors population.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks again. H1N1 is unusual – obviously, the minister knows – in that it hits young people particularly hard, yet as far as we can see, there are no clinics where young people are most concentrated, in postsecondary institutions. Again to the minister: will the minister take action and immediately order that vaccination clinics for H1N1 be opened at major postsecondary institutions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, either the member is not listening or is choosing to misinterpret the facts. As I said in my statement, those most vulnerable are between the ages of six months and five years. The last time I checked, none of those go to postsecondary institutions. I also said that those who are most vulnerable are those under 60 with chronic conditions, and for the most part that doesn't include those who are in mass numbers at postsecondary institutions. But I will say that once we get those who are the most vulnerable, once we get additional supplies, we will ensure that on workplace sites, at universities, where there is the ability to vaccinate a mass number of people, we will do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Liability Insurance for Search and Rescue Organizations

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent media stories have focused on the lack of liability insurance protection for some Alberta search and rescue teams, which may result in volunteers withdrawing their services. Search and rescue plays a vital role

during emergencies, and I've experienced this first-hand in my Fire Ops 101. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister tell Albertans what is being done to address this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to say that search and rescue is a very important part of our emergency management system. We have been working with Search and Rescue Alberta to address these issues with them.

Mr. Speaker, if I can say, when volunteers go on a search and rescue mission, they should not be liable. I will say that at the outset. As well, we are examining all the options of liability and disability coverage for the volunteers that are involved in search and rescue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us if the liability insurance issue is unique to Alberta?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, we did meet with the president of Search and Rescue Canada this morning, and it provided us with a national perspective. We are very close to reaching an interim solution, and we hope to finalize this in the very near future.

Also, Mr. Speaker, in January we are hosting the federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting, and we're going to discuss at that time with the ministers involved how we can be more responsive in a long-term solution for this challenge. It's very important to note that we are supporting the fundamental safety services to Alberta.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the same minister. Can the minister tell us what support there currently is for search and rescue groups?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, at the present time we have well-trained and responsive search and rescue teams, and in part of our commitment to those teams we're providing \$150,000 a year for training. We provide WCB coverage. We're also working with the search and rescue teams to develop training and certification standards. Also, this last weekend we supported an exercise that took place at Rocky Mountain House, the largest of its kind in Alberta. Because of this support Albertans can have confidence that their safety and security are being well served by search and rescue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Contentious WCB Claims

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. My first question is this: why has the government failed in the last seven years to implement a long-standing contentious claims review tribunal to once and for all have a look at many of the frustrated injured workers and their files at the WCB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member refers, no doubt, to the Doerksen report and the Judge Friedman report. There were a series of reports going back as far as 2000 making recommendations for changes. Since 2000 there have been a number of changes that have been instituted at the WCB level. There were at that particular time, in 2000, about 59 recommendations that were made, and I'm pleased to announce that we've made progress on the majority of those recommendations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's not what the injured workers would have to say.

Again to the hon. minister. An amendment was passed to the workers' compensation legislation in 2002 to implement a long-standing contentious claims review tribunal. Why has the government failed to implement that and take one final look at many of the issues that the injured workers bring up in our constituency offices almost on a weekly basis?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the member I think alludes to Bill 26, which paved the way at that particular time, in 2002, to set up the Appeals Commission as an independent, arm's-length body, and that was done. The process now of hearing appeals has been changed since that particular time. The Appeals Commission was given a lot more independence and, rather than responding to WCB directly, is responding to me as the minister, certainly removing that relationship that they had with the WCB, enabling them to give better hearings.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the amendments to the act that were voted on by this Assembly give the hon. minister the power through regulation to set up a tribunal that will once and for all have a look at these long-standing contentious claims, why is the minister and why is the government refusing to at least look one final time in the files of these injured workers and see if there's not something we can do to help them?

Thank you.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of changes that were made, but one thing that stays common is that if there is new information that pertains to that particular individual, new medical information, then the individual's files would be reviewed. Having said that, if there is no additional information, we would suspect that the decision would be the same as it has always been. Now, since then there were other changes that occurred in terms of operating files from 2002 and on. We've evolved and WCB has evolved a new way of resolving appeals which actually focuses on resolution, modification, and various agreements wherever that is possible. There has been a new medical panel established and a number of other things.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Long-term Care

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January of 2008, conveniently on the eve of the last election, the Premier claimed he would create 600 new long-term care beds. However, the true plans of the most secretive government in Canada were brought to light in a

leaked document that our caucus released in September, a report that called for the closure of thousands of long-term care beds. To the minister of health: how can he explain the difference between what the government says to the public and what they ask the staff to plan behind closed doors?

Mr. Liepert: As the Premier outlined in the House earlier, we believe strongly on this side of the House that you create a health care delivery system where you take the care to the patient and not make the patient fit into some system that some group has designed that may very well be out of date. What we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, what we are moving towards is a continuum of care, and in places where seniors reside – it may be their own home, it may be a lodge environment, and it may be assisted living – we're going to offer the opportunity to provide care in that facility where that particular patient feels more comfortable. If that's not good enough for those who are advocating on behalf of some of their supporters who happen to fund them, well, that's just too bad.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are about 800 senior citizens right now who would prefer to be in a long-term care bed, and they can't get one. Meanwhile, services that are critical to seniors' health which are free to long-term care patients will be transferred to assisted living facilities, and those services will be part of a thousand-dollar-a-month special service contract when those seniors live there. What will the health minister say to the seniors who simply will not be able to afford the care they need in the place that they did not ask for, that this government forced them into by cutting long-term care beds?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, any senior that needs health care gets health care. That's part of the system, the universal, publicly funded health care system that we have in this province. I would challenge that particular member to get out of the city of Edmonton, travel this province, visit some of the facilities that our seniors are living in, and see the care that's provided in those facilities instead of listening to these dredged-up reports that are sometimes a decade old that seem to be the genesis for scaring people, fearmongering, political rhetoric. I could go on and on and on, but that's what it is.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, (a) the report I'm referring to is actually six months old, not 10 years old, and (b) just last week I was in Medicine Hat, where I was told that not one person in long-term care could possibly survive in a meaningful, healthy way if they were asked to be in assisted living.

During the election the government made grand promises to care for our seniors, but once they got behind closed doors, they abandoned them. Why won't the minister once and for all stop his secretive plan to download costs onto the backs of Alberta seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, my guess is that the people that that member was talking to probably belong to a public-sector union or the so-called enemies of medicare or one of these groups that is just part of their little organization out there, Mr. Speaker. I heartily doubt that that member even bothered to venture in to visit with seniors in a particular facility.

Last week in Lethbridge with the Member for Lethbridge-West we visited a facility that I challenge the Member for Lethbridge-East, whose constituency it resides in – there is not one member of this Assembly who would not die to have that particular facility in their constituency.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure (continued)

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary city council and Enmax are united in their opposition to Bill 50 and the transmission line between Calgary and Edmonton. They are telling us it is very costly, not needed, and was decided without proper public consultation. Can the Minister of Energy explain or identify the benefits of this line to Calgarians, please?

The Speaker: Briefly, Minister, as this bill will be up for debate during this session.

Mr. Knight: Yes. What I can do is indicate to the member that a robust grid in the province of Alberta allows the least-cost generation to reach all Albertans, not just the member's constituents but all Albertans. Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, reliability of the system is paramount, and no generation facility operates 24/7, 365 days a year. The reliability of delivery to the citizens of Calgary is paramount in this discussion.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. There is a lot of confusion about the role of AESO. Could the minister explain as to what AESO is, who appoints AESO members, and does AESO have the authority to make recommendations that will cost Albertans billions of dollars?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, with the situation, of course, that we have in front of us with the transmission upgrade, quite simply, when you look at the pieces of it, if we're talking about the upgrade that would happen in south Calgary, again it amounts to reliability. The number of people that are in the south Calgary area now, including but not limited to a new hospital, require that reliability of the system. It's that reliability that will affect and in fact enhance the opportunities for Calgarians along with all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there is a major upgrade planned for a Calgary substation. Can the minister elaborate on this project and, with this upgrade, if the transmission is still needed?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I think that the answer is similar to the ones before. What happens there with respect to south Calgary, quite honestly, is very little argument relative to that particular issue. Calgarians understand that those pieces of infrastructure are needed – are urgently needed – in Calgary. They need the reliability, and they certainly are going to get it when we continue to build into this transmission system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Water Allocation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Environment minister, living firmly in the past, said last week that the first in time, first in right, or FITFIR, system has served reasonably well over the last hundred years. But FITFIR does not protect drinking water or the environment during periods of drought. My questions are to the minister. Times have changed. Why is the minister not

willing to take the recommendations made by numerous water groups, including some of his own, and update this legislation to put people before industry and not some antiquated system of whoever got there first?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the member would suggest to this House that the decisions have already been made. I can assure her, as I have been assuring Albertans, that that's far from the truth. What we have committed to is to engage in a discussion around a new revised water allocation policy. That discussion has yet to take place. What I have said is that we have to look at ways that will recognize some of the historic rights associated with water but will also allow us to share the water and recognize that this is a limited resource that must be accessible to all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the South Saskatchewan River has recently been rated the most threatened river in Canada and studies show that with climate change, a growing population, and expanding industry the river will become even drier, why is the minister insisting that merely tinkering with the allocation system will be enough to meet the looming water crisis?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. We have a standing agreement in place with our downstream neighbours, namely Saskatchewan, that 50 per cent of the stream flow will flow through to Saskatchewan. So to paint this as nearly dry is an exaggeration in the extreme. That being said, that is one of the basins that we're concentrating on because clearly there is, as we speak, a moratorium on additional licences. That doesn't mean that there is not sufficient water for new development. It means that some of the existing users are going to have to have a facility to share the water with some of the new users.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that Albertans' right to water for their basic human needs is already compromised by the current system, why won't the minister commit to completely overhauling the highly inefficient water allocation system and prioritize the basic human needs of Albertans over uses of water such as watering lawns and golf courses? Albertans first.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think that's kind of what we're doing. There are a number of needs associated with water. Basic human needs are absolutely critical, no doubt, but so are the needs of the watershed itself. Healthy aquatic ecosystems are equally important. If we don't maintain the viability of the river, then we compromise in a significant way the enjoyment of humans to consume that water. Mr. Speaker, that is very much the purpose of the discussion that we are about to enter into.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Electricity Transmission Upgrades

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents have had many questions regarding the need for new transmission lines in our electricity system. My questions are for the Minister of Energy.

Albertans are hearing many conflicting messages concerning the cost of transmission upgrades. Can you please clarify what the cost to Alberta consumers would actually be?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, I most certainly can. In general terms, for every billion dollars of capital deployed to build infrastructure in the transmission system in Alberta, the average consumer at home would pay about \$1 per month.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if consumers are faced with the possibility of an additional cost, \$1 per month, on their bills, can you please explain what benefits they would see with increased transmission capacity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, yes. Again, Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. If you look at the system that we have in Alberta currently, the system is aging, definitely. You know, we're all aging, and the system is aging. What we need to do is get some new technology on the ground in Alberta – more efficient, moves power better, less line loss – and at the end of the day I believe that Albertans will see the benefit in the economics and in the reliability of the system to supply the power that they require.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can you please clarify the steps that will occur with respect to the rollout of the transmission upgrades? There seems to be a lot of confusion around that.

Mr. Knight: Well, again, as we go forward with respect to the transmission system, as the determination is brought forward by AESO that the system needs to be upgraded and reinforced, what will happen is that the pieces that are required to be built will go through the system of consultation through the AUC for the permit and licensing, siting, the cost, and the technology used. By the way, Mr. Speaker, the AUC will as part of their mandate determine these things in the public interest, and they'll move forward in a timely manner over, probably, the next couple of decades.

Police Officer Supply

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, both Edmonton and Calgary's police forces are dramatically understaffed in comparison to other Canadian cities in terms of the number of police officers per capita. Recently the Edmonton Police Commission noted that it would need to reduce the number of sworn police officers on its city streets during this budget cycle. My question today is for the Solicitor General: will the Edmonton Police Service be receiving the funds promised by the government in order to recruit and hire 35 new members this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that the Premier of this province promised 300 additional police officers over three years, and we've actually met that goal over the first two years. However, that being said, we're in the budgeting process, and we'll review that budget.

Hopefully we'll be able to provide additional police services to both Edmonton and Calgary and the RCMP.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's the type of answer that I'm worried about. We've had that type of answer in the media now here this afternoon.

Given that the Edmonton Police Service is already understaffed compared to other major cities, why can't you confirm with us that it is going to be a priority of your government to get the additional 35 officers out the door?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, looking back on the last two years and the gains that this government has made in regard to policing and safe communities in the province, I don't think we have to take a back seat to anybody. As I've indicated, we're in the budgeting process, and depending on how things go, we'll see what the outcome is.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, although I hear the Solicitor General, those gains have still left us 20 per cent behind other major centres in terms of policing numbers. Why won't this government commit to having a safe and secure number of police officers on our city streets?

2:50

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, in regard to safe and secure communities we have seen a downturn in the crime rate in this province. With the steps that we've taken, we're assured that, hopefully, those things will continue to follow in that direction.

Also, the hon. member doesn't speak to the fact that since 2006 we've formed ALERT, which also has played a big role in crime reduction in this province. In fact, in the last year it has taken about \$85 million worth of illegal drugs off the streets of this province, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 88 questions and responses today, and we're now going to come up against a standing order again at 3 o'clock.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bev Thirsk
Robert Thirsk

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bev Thirsk and Robert Thirsk are truly inspirational Albertans. Bev is a greatly gifted educator who is as talented as she is humble. Recently Bev shared a fabulous presentation with all in her school, documenting her experience in Russia last spring to watch her brother, Bob Thirsk, blast into outer space. The students then dressed up in space-themed costumes. Everyone was mesmerized by a 10-minute Q and A session with Bob as he orbited Earth in the International Space Station, and all responded to the event through composition, art, and music.

After I spoke with Bev a number of months ago when Bob was honoured by the U of C with an honorary doctorate, she was kind enough to contact him directly on the ISS, and he was kind enough to respond with the following unedited passage:

Dear fellow Albertans:

It is with great pride that I represent my country on our first long-duration mission on the International Space Station. I have now lived and worked aboard the station for more than four months. My days are incredibly busy, sometimes challenging but never

boring. My duties include the ongoing maintenance of my new home, manipulation of Canada's robotic jewel, the Canadarm2, and participation in a number of world-class science experiments on behalf of Canadian researchers and the international scientific community.

In spite of my hectic schedule I do take the time to enjoy the spectacular views of our planet. Every time I fly over Canada, I look down in awe. I feel particularly closer to home when we pass over Alberta, the province where I grew up and completed some of my education which was pivotal in preparing me for this incredible endeavour.

To all my fellow Albertans I say thank you for your support. Your pioneering spirit sustains me on this mission of exploration. In the new year I look forward to visiting Alberta and sharing with you this incredible journey.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in thanking and congratulating Bev Thirsk and Robert Thirsk for proving that, indeed, the sky is not the limit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Premier's Awards of Excellence

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to take this opportunity to recognize the dedication and innovation of the Alberta public service in improving services for Albertans. At the 15th annual Premier's awards of excellence ceremony 25 teams of provincial government employees received awards for very diverse projects. The contributions of more than 1,400 members of the Alberta public service were acknowledged.

The Premier's awards of excellence exemplify superior client service, excellence in business practices, and outstanding leadership. The recipients' projects ranged from infrastructure projects to social work, from promoting the province internationally to streamlining regulations. As well, some initiatives involved provincial cultural events and technological advancements.

Provincial employees honoured at the ceremony work across the province. Their achievements have benefited Albertans across the province as well. This collective work, Mr. Speaker, demonstrates how the public service is continually improving the lives of the people that we serve. Since 1995 375 teams of employees have received the honour of distinction.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta public service works hard every day to improve the lives of Albertans. I would like to congratulate the recipients of these prestigious awards. Heartfelt thanks to all public servants for their ongoing hard work, creativity, and commitment to excellence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

It's a Crime Not to Read Program

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Late last month I attended the Calgary Public Library Foundation awards recognizing excellence in Alberta's literary community. As part of that celebration the Calgary public library and the Calgary Police Service celebrated an innovative partnership called It's a Crime Not to Read. The program involves police officers visiting grades 2 and 3 classrooms to read aloud to children and to encourage reading and literacy.

It's a Crime Not to Read allows the police to have positive interaction with kids and their families, building a sense of trust and rapport. Research has shown that children who read and do well in school are much less likely to participate in criminal activities. This important program helps set children on the right path in life.

For libraries the program introduced the public library as a welcoming, safe, exciting, and friendly place in the community. If we can get a child to cross the threshold of a public library, we can change their life forever and for the better.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has much to be proud of in its public library system. Programs such as It's a Crime Not to Read demonstrate the innovative approach our libraries take as they enhance the quality of life in our community. Today's library is about bringing people and ideas together. A library is about building literacy of all kinds: reading literacy, computer literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and more. There are few organizations that touch as many lives as our public libraries.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute Alberta's public libraries and their inventive approaches to building informed, literate, inspired, and productive communities and individuals in every corner of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Fiscal Accountability

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dickens, Douglas, and Duckett. When purely mathematical solutions are applied to ethical questions, the result is frequently failure. Charles Dickens described the dreariness and drudgery of those struggling to eke out an existence in Victorian England. In Dickens' fact-based fiction wealth of character triumphed over poverty of person in his tales of redemption.

With less than 10 shopping weeks remaining till Christmas, our fiscal surplus has vanished for the second time in 20 years, replaced by a deficit in the billions. The Premier has assumed the role of a very convincing penny-wise, pound-foolish Scrooge. His much alive and callously calculating accomplice, Stephen Duckett of superbord infamy, is the present stand-in for Scrooge's former partner and mentor, Marley.

As the plot unfolds, spectre Stephen warns our in-the-red Premier that he will be visited by three spirits. As the bell tolls, the ghostly Getty appears to warn our Alberta Scrooge about the perils of betting on the future by borrowing in the past, which ultimately ends in bust. On cue the second ghost arrives in the person of former New Zealand slash-and-burn 1990s fiscal failure, Sir Roger Douglas, whose philosophy, so closely followed by the man without a plan, Ralph Klein, led to Alberta's late 1990s bust-to-boom body count. The third and final phantom, in the spectral form of Peter Lougheed, points the way towards environmental, economic, and social redemption if the Premier will only listen and thereby recover from his personal repeat role in Alberta's boom-and-bust cycle.

Will the current irrational funding cuts to Children's Services, Education, Health, and Seniors produce less disastrous results than those previously felt under Getty and Klein? Will the Premier face his own knives of November with his upcoming leadership review? Will the Premier last long enough to learn the lesson lost to his former colleagues, that a society is judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable? Let's hope and pray for a Dickensian denouement to the current moral malaise playing out in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

School Libraries

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October 26 marks the seventh annual National School Library Day. Today across the province school library staff will be holding book fairs, celebrating excellence in school library programs, hosting guest speakers, and

linking up with community organizations to highlight the vital role of school libraries in the lives of our students.

The libraries in Alberta's schools contribute to students' social, cultural, artistic, and academic development, which help create a foundation for success in everyday life. I think that everyone in this House has fond memories of visiting their school library, perhaps to choose a favourite book, and the special pride we took in being able to take that book home and share it with our family and friends. School libraries are often the hub of the school, providing a place for students to gather, share, learn, be creative, and use their imaginations.

Mr. Speaker, October is also Canadian Library Month. Last year I had the privilege of chairing the MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in Alberta. It gave me the opportunity to connect with many Albertans who are passionate and committed to quality library service in our province. Alberta has benefited from the deep dedication of these people, and their dedication is matched by this government, which is also committed to a strong, province-wide public libraries system.

I'm pleased to rise today to honour the National School Library Day, the Canadian Library Month, and the many people who tirelessly support our libraries. In particular, I'd like to recognize the Canadian Association for School Libraries for its hard work to promote awareness and the importance of libraries in our schools and communities. I'd also like to recognize the teachers, parents, and principals who work hard to ensure school libraries stay a strong and integral part of the educational experience of our students.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) reads: "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has caught my eye.

Mr. Renner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Following the lead of the Government House Leader and hoping for a similar outcome, I would like to seek unanimous consent to waive standing orders today only so that we may proceed with completion of the daily Routine. With some extenuating circumstances with ministerial statements, et cetera, I think it's appropriate that the members consider waiving the standing order, again, today only.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the request has been made for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7). I will ask the question, and the question will be the following: does any member object to our waiving the standing orders so that we may conclude the Routine? If so, say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Family Doctor Week

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and recognize October 26 to 30 as Family Doctor Week across Canada. This week across our nation we proudly acknowledge Canadian family physicians for their dedication to patients and their communities and their outstanding contribution to the delivery of high-quality health care.

The Alberta College of Family Physicians and the College of Family Physicians of Canada will cohost the annual Family Medicine Forum this Thursday to Saturday in Calgary. The purpose

of the forum is to provide family physicians from Alberta and regions across this nation with the opportunity to sharpen their knowledge and skills by participating in continuing medical education sessions.

Mr. Speaker, family doctors directly impact the health of individual Albertans and the health care system as a whole. In fact, adding a family doctor to a community improves access while at the same time reducing costs and human suffering and mortality. Each day family physicians make diagnoses, treat patients, and co-ordinate care with other health care disciplines. They advocate on behalf of their patients and their communities to promote health and prevent illness.

This week I encourage everyone to take time to thank their family physician for the care and advice and compassion given on a daily basis. I would ask my hon. colleagues to join me in thanking family physicians for their dedication to improving the health and wellness of all Albertans and all Canadians.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like today to present a petition on behalf of 105 Albertans. The petition reads as follows: we the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation to deinsure abortion in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Bill 53

Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today and I request leave to introduce Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

This amendment will extend nonvoting share ownership of professional corporations to family members. If passed, our province's accountants, lawyers, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, and optometrists will have the ability to access some of the benefits of being incorporated, including some tax benefits. These benefits are currently enjoyed by the same professions in other western provinces.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 53 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Bill 55

Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to move first reading of Bill 55, the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009.

The current act is set to expire on December 31, 2010. We are

proposing an amendment to the act which would extend the act to December 31, 2016. This allows the Alberta government to hold Senate elections beyond 2010 should we decide to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a publication entitled Racism-Free Workplace Strategy: Breaking the Barriers, National Summary.

My second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of Book of Proceedings: Breaking the Barriers Open Session, Racism-Free Works!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from Katherine Wilson, one of my constituents. The letter describes how her husband waited in an acute-care bed for a space in long-term care but died before a space became available. She says that the system desperately needs "more continuing care beds, more nurses, and more doctors."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three letters today from constituents, that have come in since the break. The first is from Margaret Doran, who writes with her concerns around health services and particularly the appointment of Dr. Duckett and some of the choices he's made. She states that his "ideas and 'objectives' are not welcome" and that he should tell his boss.

The second tabling is regarding the tents at the Stollery for the treatment of children. Jenny Adams, also a constituent, raises her concerns about losing specially skilled doctors to work in other hospitals because we don't have a proper facility and notes that "sick kids are our future too."

The final letter is from Marianne B. Hemery, who asks, "Why are Electric cars not Road Legal in the province of Alberta?" and notes that she's appalled at the callous disregard of the Conservative government "for the poisoning of our beautiful land by the Oil Companies."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I have a number of tablings that I have to deal with today. First of all, I'm going to table copies of a chart demonstrating the operation of the new rotation for Oral Question Period along with five copies of the new projected sitting days calendar for the fall sitting. In addition to tabling this, I'm going to have circulated to all members this rotation as well.

Secondly, I'm also tabling copies of a letter dated October 19, 2009, from the Member for Calgary-Foothills advising me of the resignation of that member from the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, and the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee.

Third, I wish to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter dated October 23, 2009, from the Ethics Commissioner together with an enclosure titled: quick guide for members. The chair is advised that the guide is intended to serve as a general overview of the interpretation of the Conflicts of Interest Act as to what might constitute a private interest in the act. Members will recall that this was one of the items suggested in the chair's June 3 ruling on the question of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, found at pages 1512-13 of *Hansard* for that day. In addition to tabling these appropriate copies, I'm going to ask to ensure that the Clerk will have appropriate copies made for all members and circulated in the House this afternoon.

In addition, I'm also tabling copies of a brochure produced by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta titled Page Biographies, Legislative Assembly of Alberta, 27th Legislature, Second Session, Fall 2009, where we have a number of new pages that are in our midst.

Hon. members, pursuant to section 46(2) of the Conflicts of Interest Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner covering the period April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009. I distributed copies to members on September 3, 2009, but pursuant to Standing Order 55.01 this report now stands referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

The last tabling today is pursuant to section 28(1) of the Ombudsman Act. The chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the 42nd annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009. This report was previously distributed to members on Tuesday, October 13, 2009.

3:10

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Tarchuk, Minister of Children and Youth Services, responses to questions raised by Ms. Notley, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and Mr. Chase, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, on May 6, 2009, Department of Children and Youth Services main estimates debate.

Statement by the Speaker

Identification of Members on the Seating Plan

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will proceed shortly, but just one point of clarification. Interestingly enough, on days such as this when there have been changes in the Assembly, the chair does receive a number of notes as to: why is so-and-so referred to as such? As an example, in our seating plan if you are a member of the majority party, you are listed in here as an Alberta Progressive Conservative. If you are a member of the Official Opposition, you are listed in here as a member of the Alberta Liberals. If you are a member of the third party, you are part of the Alberta New Democrats, and we have listed in here a member from the Alberta Wildrose Alliance and an independent.

The question is: how come we're not calling the other two independents? Why are we identifying Wildrose? Well, historically we recognize individuals according to their party affiliation by which they have been elected, and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was elected as a member of the Alberta Wildrose Alliance. Historically those members who have either voluntarily or involuntarily left the caucus in which they were elected a member, we refer to them as an independent. That's why the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is referred to as an independent.

This goes back in precedent to our previous seating plan that we

had, that members can look at. Going back to the previous seating plan of 2008, the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner was referred to as a member of the Alberta Alliance, and the Member for Edmonton-Manning, when he either voluntarily or involuntarily left the caucus he was with, was identified as an independent. That's the historical clarification for the rationale to describe the way this occurs. So if one of your colleagues who may be away, out of my speaking sound limits right now, may ask that question of you, you now know the answer to it forever and ever.

We have no point of order. After due deliberation by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood the hon. member has declined to participate further in this.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 206

School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned June 1]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was participating. Whom shall I recognize next?

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms. Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I commend this Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This act is a forward-looking act because Bill 206 works towards maintaining the safety and security of our schools and our students. Of course, it does this by mandating the documentation of students' actions by defining which actions are considered inappropriate and by giving schools the tools to deal with difficult situations. Providing schools the additional tools of allowing police intervention and consultation when dealing with serious situations is a giant step forward.

Since my teaching years bullying has evolved. It is my understanding that it can now be more aggressive and involve new mediums like the Internet. Bill 206 would allow our disciplinary measures to evolve similarly. Bill 206 accounts for the fact that one type of recourse is not suitable for every student who bullies. Mr. Speaker, kids experiment – we know that – some simply for the sake of experience. For many of these students time outs or being sent to the principal's office can be very effective. For others, however, it may not be.

If these students remain unco-operative and their indiscretions become severe, teachers and principals have few options with the exception of suspension and, in extreme cases, expulsion to compel their students to behave appropriately. These measures, however, are a last resort, and even then, Mr. Speaker, they do not effectively address the issue. While these penalties send a message to a student, a message of "this behaviour will not be tolerated," the consequence can just as easily be spun into a reward of sorts for a student who has a limited desire to attend school in the first place, and we've seen plenty of that.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that sometimes these are not really punitive measures for the student. Further, it is likely that these students, who are already misbehaving, will simply find peers outside of the school who facilitate their negative behaviours. This may in the end heighten the draw to skip class, a result that completely counteracts

the initial goal, which is to motivate the student to attend school, to behave more appropriately, and to improve their performance. The fact is that as soon as the student is off school property, staff are unable to observe and assist them in any way, which can be, in the end, counterproductive.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, an article published in the *Globe and Mail* addressed the issue of expelling and moving students to new schools. The article draws attention to the fact that students who have a disposition to violent behaviour are highly likely to find new conflicts in a new environment in which they are placed. School resource officers have said that in the case of students who are drug trafficking, a school transfer simply means a whole new set of clientele. Often these students face multiple expulsions until they end up on the street, and then the issue is one of community safety. Sometimes they will simply drop out before disciplinary measures force them to do so.

It has been shown that schools that issue more suspensions have higher dropout rates. This makes for a tough balance for school staff and school boards. They have to seriously consider, when contemplating suspension and expulsion, what is best for the student who has misbehaved and what is best for the school environment.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 creates a new way to manage bullying behaviour, one that has a renewed sense of promise. First, by requiring the documentation of these behaviours, students are being held accountable for their actions. Mistakes made by students will not simply be forgotten, and in cases where the behaviour is repetitive, these records can be accessed to show ongoing or escalating behaviour. This, indeed, is a powerful message. This bill will provide an alternative to a traditional school suspension or expulsion by bringing together the principal, the parents, the student, and the police to discuss an appropriate and effective course of action for serious bullying. It will convey the message that bullying will not be tolerated.

Mr. Speaker, psychologically these students need support, and an expulsion does not provide that support. Suspension or expulsion is unlikely to motivate change. That is why I believe these alternatives are crucial. Keeping children in school is important to Alberta Education, to local authorities, to communities, and to parents. Bill 206 would provide the needed tools to address bullying and will provide students with the opportunity to recognize and change their behaviour patterns.

Mr. Speaker, speaking as a former teacher, I stand before this Assembly in full support of Bill 206. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I am very pleased that the mover of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought it forward, and I give credit where credit is due to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for having thoughtfully brought this forward.

I want this to succeed for a variety of reasons, Mr. Speaker. The first is to honour the memory of a young high school student, Alex Wedman, who is no longer with us because of bullying. Alex suffered bullying in junior high school. He was so severely kicked in the groin that he required several stitches to help to remediate the problem.

The bullying he received in junior high school followed him to high school. When he graduated from grade 10, he tried to leave his bully behind by switching high schools here in Edmonton. Unfortu-

nately, on the first day of registration in his new high school to his horror and to his family's horror, the bully had shown up in the new school to which he was transferred. Attention was brought by Alex's mother and father to a variety of individuals within the school system all along the course of the bullying. Unfortunately, the interventions were not sufficient, and Alex Wedman went into his parents' garage, turned on the vehicle, and as a result committed suicide because he could no longer take the bullying that he had received.

3:20

This is a very sad circumstance which this bill is attempting to address. This past fall we heard of children being hazed with hockey sticks, some with nail studs, down in the southern portion of the province. There is a sort of male, foolish rule that suggests that you keep it to yourself, you tough through it, that you go through initiation processes, and that's part of being a man. Well, I suggest that beating or being the recipient of a beating has nothing to do with manhood. It's physical violence. It should not be tolerated.

Now, in order for Bill 206 to have an effect, it needs to have funding attached. It needs to have education components attached. The education components have to start at the earliest grades. Kindergarten children, or if we ever have junior kindergarten in this province, need to be given the opportunity to have the whole notion of bullying discussed. Teachers require in-service in order to recognize the characteristics of bullying. In the case of elementary schools be on the lookout for it at recess. In junior high schools be on the lookout for it during classroom discussions. Quite often the bullying takes place in phys ed classes, where a shot is given or a smack on the back is delivered.

We need teachers to be given the type of in-service training so that they can recognize and react to bullying early on so that situations that occurred to Alex Wedman do not occur to other students. Far too many children in this province have committed suicide because they have been driven to it by relentless bullying. It's extremely important in the universities as part of curriculum instruction that would-be teachers going through their masters in teaching program receive education on identifying bullying.

Teachers are busy individuals. They do their best, but in order to prevent needless injury and death, our best must get even better. We're frequently the first line of prevention in bullying. If a child comes to us or the parent of a child comes to us as teachers and tells us about the bullying, whether it's cyberbullying, which seems to be primarily the area that female students prefer, or whether it's knock-down physical abuse or name-calling, bullying has to be addressed, and funding for those programs must be in place in order to ensure that the bullying is ended. With the teachers who are currently teaching, as I say, we need in-service. In-service costs dollars.

A message that I've tried to put out through Children and Youth Services, that I put out last month at the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families, is a simple message. It says: Safe Kids Save Dollars. If Bill 206 is going to have the effect that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has intended, then there have to be dollars following the bill. There have to be the educational components provided in order for bullying to end.

Right now schools have very few options. Quite often simply expelling the bully provides a holiday and a type of recognition for the bullying, but the bullying continues. Suspension isn't the answer either for the child being bullied or for the bullying. It just transfers the program. We need in-school efforts and support in a sustainable fashion if we are going to end bullying.

I compliment the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Through her communities and crime task force she travelled the province, and she

heard from a variety of individuals, including myself at the University of Calgary and at another forum based in Calgary, about the need for funding for community resource officers. Those are police officers who spend time working with children in the schools. Currently, if a high school is sufficiently lucky, they'll have a resource officer attached to them. That support does not extend down to junior high schools on a regular basis, and it's extremely infrequent for school-based resource officers to be operating in elementary grades in elementary schools, where bullying often has begun.

In my own life I have been bullied. As a junior high school student in grade 8 in Richmond Hill, Ontario, I was the new kid on the block. My father was in the air force. We moved frequently, but I had never faced bullying before. I know what it feels like to be kicked and pounded and harassed and chased home. I don't want that to happen to any other Alberta children or any other children in this world for that matter. It had a profound effect on myself in terms of having to overcome the fears associated. Fortunately, between my parents and a teacher who was very concerned, I was taken under the individual's wing, and the bullying at least was reduced. It didn't end, but it was reduced, and I thank that teacher and my parents for having gone through that process.

As a teacher I vowed that there would never be bullying in my classrooms or, if I could prevent it, in the schools that I attended. I would hope that through Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, the provision will be made to fund the necessary education programs for students, for teachers, and for parents that will make this bill a success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, mover of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. Our schools are facing challenges that are becoming increasingly more sophisticated. The safe learning environments that our schools strive to maintain are being threatened by bullying, violence, and drug use. By banning drug paraphernalia and providing novel disciplinary measures aimed at the prevention of major problems, Bill 206 provides substantial procedures in addressing these challenges.

Mr. Speaker, our school resource officers best understand these potential problems. These officers are regular uniformed police officers that work in our schools policing, protecting, and mentoring students. The officers act as counsellors, providing information to students about drugs and related topics and providing supports to students in need. Developing relationships with students allows them a greater awareness of what is going on in schools in terms of potentially threatening and illegal activities. These school resource officers are able to gain valuable knowledge that often leads to prevention of potentially dangerous situations. These officers are ideally placed and become a resource in terms of reporting some disconcerting trends within our schools.

3:30

Unfortunately, cases of bullying among students and incidents of drug use are increasingly seen in our schools. I believe this threatens our schools' safe learning environments. Bill 206 would outlaw the possession of drug paraphernalia on school property. Mr. Speaker, some pieces of drug paraphernalia used today could be sitting on your kitchen counter or coffee table, and you would not realize what they were. Many everyday objects are now, in fact, drug-related

equipment. Pop cans, bottles, pens, cutlery, paper folds, and portable scales could all be considered drug paraphernalia. For example, the screw cap of a broken light bulb is now commonly used in the process of making crystal meth. It is also considered dangerous because it could be used as a weapon. This is a perfect illustration of the potential linkage between drug paraphernalia and violence.

Our school resource officers deal with these cases on a daily basis. Currently possession of drug paraphernalia is not directly an indictable offence. Although drug paraphernalia can be used as evidence in the case of a trafficking charge, as I alluded to earlier, it is difficult to prove that a pop can, for example, is intended for drug use. This inability to effectively deal with the possession of drug paraphernalia has resulted in numerous serious and potentially deadly situations.

There was an incident last year which nearly resulted in the death of a student, a potential death that could have been prevented. In this incident a female student at a particular school was frequently found to be in possession of drug paraphernalia. She continued to possess the items even though she had been reportedly suspended. After returning to school, this girl coaxed another female classmate into smoking marijuana. The other girl had never been known as one to experiment with drugs. Soon after smoking the drug, the young classmate became gravely ill, and an ambulance was called. The girl who provided the drugs realized the urgency of the situation and admitted to the police and medical personnel what she had given to her female classmate. The drugs were, in fact, impure, and the girl nearly lost her life.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this illustrates how stronger disciplinary measures coupled with a ban on drug paraphernalia are necessary to intervene in situations such as this. It is concerning that a situation like this can develop in our schools, that even when someone has repeatedly been found to be in possession of drug paraphernalia, our school resource officers at present are not able to effectively address the situation and prevent future problems. I believe that the possession of drug paraphernalia is not only an obvious indication of drug use with a particular student; it can be an indication of a safety issue that affects the entire school. The role that drug paraphernalia plays in the overall drug culture is recognized in Bill 206.

This is a culture that threatens the safe learning environment that our schools work towards. Alberta students and school staff are better off without these objects in our schools, regardless of their intended use. If Bill 206 is implemented, resource officers and staff would have another tool to eliminate drug paraphernalia in schools. This ban may not solve all drug-related challenges, nor is it likely to solve all bullying-related challenges. However, the measures proposed in Bill 206 would provide a valuable tool that may help prevent many serious situations.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to speak personally of a tragic event that occurred in my constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. In the spring of 1999 a 14-year-old boy armed with a rifle walked on the grounds of W.R. Myers high school in the town of Taber. He opened fire and hit three people, taking the life of one of them. The loss of this life is an obvious tragedy, but so is the story of the boy shooter, who had been the victim of frequent bullying incidents throughout his youth and adolescence. At one point he was doused with lighter fluid and threatened to be lit on fire. It is sad that he had to become reclusive and extremely fearful and eventually dropped out of high school. This shooting took place only eight days after the Columbine high school shootings, where two boys aged 17 and 18, who were both repeatedly bullied, entered the school, killing one teacher and 12 students and injuring 21 other people.

These tragic incidents are a demonstration of the impact that bullying can have not only on an individual but on a community. Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 206 is a measure targeted at preventing these incidents. For these reasons, I endorse the intent and focus of this bill, and I believe that many Albertans would welcome its passage. I commend the member for bringing it forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, being put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Bill 206 would require everyone on school property to conduct themselves in a safe and peaceful manner in order to maintain the well-being of others. In addition, this bill would create a clear definition for bullying and provide mechanisms that would help ensure a safe learning environment at school.

Now, as MLAs we deal with high-conflict type issues, yet I doubt that anyone in this Legislature was actually physically endangered here on the way into the Legislature, nor were we physically bullied in any way today. That tends to be something that adults in our society can count on, that they can go about their business without being physically intimidated. Yet our kids, that we care about so much, are often in the situation in schools where they do not have that basic safety that we as adults have, so I do believe this is a very important bill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 would provide students with support as they could be referred to educational measures programs, and because there is mandatory reporting in this bill, the actual problems will get dealt with. There will be various ways in which they can be dealt with, things including mental health, drug abuse, and anger management programs. These programs, which are alternatives to expulsion and suspension, would more effectively help youth by addressing their problems.

These educational measures programs are also used in other legislation. In fact, there's a similar provision under the youth criminal justice act where extrajudicial measures can be used. Extrajudicial measures mean measures other than the general judicial proceedings used to deal with a young person alleged to have committed a crime. They include referring the youth to a program or agency in the community once the youth consents or referring to an extrajudicial sanction, which is part of a program sanctioned by the Attorney General.

These extrajudicial measures provide support services to youth, which is similar to the intent of the educational measures program proposed in Bill 206. Mr. Speaker, if a student's behaviour is severe enough, Bill 206 would allow either the police officer and the principal or the courts to compel the student to participate in these educational measures programs, which are essentially rehabilitative programs. There's no single definition of what constitutes an educational measures program because these programs take into consideration the student's individual circumstances, and from there it would be decided what measures or support programs work best for that youth.

Every situation is unique. Therefore, these educational measures programs would be able to reflect that and effectively provide youth with the appropriate assistance. For example, Alberta Health Services provides several support services for individuals suffering from addictions, which could be considered an educational measures program.

3:40

Bill 206 is important. It ensures protection for the students who are being bullied, and it also provides support for the bullies, who may be acting out due to problems in their personal lives. Since these youth are our future, we need to have the tools to better address these problems early on so we do not perpetuate the cycle of violence and addictions. For this reason I support Bill 206, and I encourage all members to do so as well.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, you wish to speak, right?

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 206, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Our government is committed to promoting strong and vibrant communities where all Albertans feel safe. Bill 206 actively promotes this goal by targeting what some may consider the root cause of many forms of social violence, school bullying. Bill 206 proposes to extend the tools of educators and police officers, providing more ways to address schoolyard bullying more effectively. In addition, Bill 206 will require full documentation of all bullying incidents.

While these initiatives are well targeted, I feel the strength of this bill is how it addresses the evolution of bullying. When I think of bullying, I envision physical violence and playground name-calling. Seldom do I think of Internet chat rooms, text messaging, and e-mail. The sad reality is, however, that bullying has become well adapted to the information age. Mr. Speaker, this cyberbullying includes any form of bullying that uses an electronic medium. Using sites such as Facebook and MySpace, bullies engage in harmful behaviours such as spreading hurtful stories, engaging in name-calling, or even making personal threats on others' safety.

The Internet removes the human face from personal interactions. Individuals do not see the harm their words or actions inflict. Individuals who would otherwise be restrained from bullying can become empowered by their online anonymity. Technology shields bullies from the emotional harm they cause while offering no such protection to the victims. Adding to this shield of protection, cyberbullying also dramatically expands the scope of public ridicule. Simply put, online bullying exposes the victim to the criticisms of the cyberworld. Now, to be clear, Bill 206 does not attempt to control the entire cyberworld – that would be impossible – but it does ban bullying on all school computers and intranets.

While the methods of bullying may have a broader scope, the beginnings of bullying often remain the same, schoolyards. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 will give teachers and police the tools to intervene more effectively in cases of bullying starting in the schoolyard. If cases of bullying can be identified and addressed at the schoolyard, it is hoped that cyberbullying might be stopped before it even begins.

Cyberbullying is only one example of how bullying has evolved in the information age. While the clicks of a mouse can spread hate and intolerance, they pale in comparison to the gut-wrenching shots of a gun. We only need look to the tragedies of Columbine, Virginia Tech, and Taber to find some reminders of why bullying, isolation, and hate cannot be tolerated in our schools. Bullying, acts of intimidation, and physical threats instill fear in the victims, and people who fear for their safety will take steps to protect themselves. Increasingly, this protection is taking form with the use of weapons. Weapons and weapon violence in schools are related to bullying, and

it's an issue that must be addressed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is designed to help stop bullying before it escalates into violence involving weapons.

Victims of bullying need to feel as though there are effective solutions in place to justify coming to teachers for help. Current punishments such as detention, suspensions, and expulsions may not be effective enough in deterring the most hurtful forms of bullying. Under Bill 206 principals would be able to call police to meet with the students and their guardians. In severe cases, especially those that involve weapons, police officers would be given the power to impose court summonses on these offenders.

With these bans in place teachers and police officers not only would be able to seize the weapon but also would be given the power to confront the student more effectively. The earlier an authority figure can confront and intervene in a case of bullying, the greater the chance that the use of weapons can be avoided.

Bullying in schools is not a new phenomenon, but the methods of bullying have adapted themselves to the information age. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is an effective antibullying proposal because it clearly addresses these adaptations. Granting school administration and police officers new tools for establishing appropriate consequences for bullies allows them to intervene more effectively in cases of both cyberbullying and bullying involving weapons.

In closing, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill, and I would urge all members gathered here to support Bill 206. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak today to Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Schooltime is a time to learn, grow, and dream about endless possibilities. Unfortunately, many young people go through a difficult time for various reasons, and one of those reasons is bullying.

Typically, what happens at a school playground is that for some reason somebody chooses to exploit somebody else. We can all remember back as children; I'm sure many of us in this Chamber experienced this ourselves first-hand. I personally remember I was bullied. I looked a little different from anybody else where I grew up. Walking home, you'd have to defend yourself against the bullies. Sometimes there would be two bullies, sometimes three. You'd take a different way home from school or to school. If you were in the playground, you couldn't do activities that you wanted to do because the bullies would intimidate you regularly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really saddened that we're actually still having this conversation here today. Thirty-five years have passed. This isn't a conversation we ought to have. This kind of stuff shouldn't be happening.

Bullies can take the fun out of school, where bullying happens the most, and turn most simple things like a ride on the bus or a stop at a locker or a walk to the bathroom into a scary event that's anticipated with worry all day long. School is a place where children go to learn. They go to read, not to worry about whether they're going to be safe.

Children who are bullied often experience low self-esteem, depression, whereas those doing the bullying may go on to engage in more destructive antisocial behaviour as teens and adults. Bullies, who often have been bullied themselves, may pick on others to feel powerful, popular, important, or in control. Often they antagonize

the same children repeatedly. It's just easy to pick on that same person all the time.

Sadly, bullying is widespread, Mr. Speaker. According to a U.S. poll in 2004 86 per cent of 9- to 13-year-old boys and girls polled said they'd seen somebody else being bullied, 48 per cent said they had been bullied, and 42 per cent admitted to bullying other kids at least once in a while. Boys were more likely than girls to say that they would fight back, whereas girls were more likely than boys to say they would talk to an adult.

If a school is rife with bullying, it simply doesn't feel safe. It poisons the social environment for everyone and has long-term consequences not only for the victim but also for the bully. Bullying is a social relationship where an individual repeatedly picks a conflict with another individual. It can be verbal, physical, psychological. Perpetrators are equally likely to be boys or girls and to be physically or emotionally or verbally aggressive and now with the Internet, through cyberspace. Extortion, intimidation, and destruction of property are all parts of this behaviour pattern. Although black eyes or broken limbs are a concrete sign that your child may be a victim of bullying, there are many other different ways and different signs that children have that may not show a bruise.

Bullying, Mr. Speaker, affects the whole community. As they grow up, playground bullies may transfer their abuse to other forms of harassment or violence and become workplace bullies. Boys who were bullies in elementary school are more likely to have criminal convictions by the time they're in their 20s. This is not surprising given that many bullying activities are offences under the Criminal Code if they were done by adults.

Victims, on the other hand, typically suffer withdrawal and anxiety, their school performance may drop, and they may try to avoid going to school altogether. In rare cases they lash out in revenge, endangering the entire school.

3:50

Hear no evil; see no evil. Mr. Speaker, most children know when there's bullying, but they don't report it because they don't believe anything is going to get done. In fact, they believe that bullying is going to get worse because that's what happens: problems tend to fester under the surface.

A study of Toronto schools found that a bullying act occurred every seven seconds, but teachers were aware of only 4 per cent of the incidents. Seven out of 10 teachers but only 1 in 4 students say that the teacher almost always intervened. Close to 40 per cent of the victims say that they have not talked to their parents about the problem. Ninety per cent of children say that they find it unpleasant to watch bullying. Peers are present in 85 per cent of bullying episodes on the playground and in the classroom.

Now, why do kids bully? There are many reasons that they become bullies. Bullies frequently target people who are different. They seek to exploit those differences. They choose victims who they think are unlikely to retaliate. Bullies may also turn to abusive behaviour as ways of dealing with a difficult situation in their own home. Mr. Speaker, hurting people hurt people. Bullies might not realize how hurtful their actions can be, but some know the pain first-hand because they've been bullied. Some bullies think their behaviour is normal because they come from families in which everyone regularly gets angry and shouts or calls names and has physical altercations. They copy what they know, and just like the children they're tormenting, bullies themselves often have low self-esteem.

Victims are too fearful to ask an adult to intervene, but they can start by asking for help. Mr. Speaker, this is why we're here today. The objective of Bill 206 is to promote and improve the safety of our

schools for our children as well as for school staff by providing a legislated definition of bullying in the School Act along with a ban on bullying on school property. In addition, Bill 206 would prohibit the possession of drug paraphernalia or any tool or device that could potentially harm our children. Within this legislation all schools will be required to document incidents that involve bullying, possession of any drug paraphernalia, and tools or devices that can be injurious to the well-being of others.

No parent wants their children to experience the degrading realities of bullying. Many students – our children, our future – believe that there is little that they or anyone else can do to stop a bully. As a society we have to do away with the notion that bullying is an acceptable part of growing up. There have been a number of well-documented cases that you've heard today where the victims of bullying have violently retaliated, and some have taken their own life as a result.

The strength of Bill 206 is that it gives police the discretion to lay a mandatory court summons for severe cases of bullying, possession of any drug paraphernalia or tools or devices that can be injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others. While we have programs in our schools and in our communities that target bullying such as those that prevent family violence or the presence of school counsellors and school resource officers, it would seem that something more is needed. Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 seeks to provide schools with the additional tools they need to deal with bullying more effectively by prohibiting these dangerous items.

Bill 206 provides schools with the ability to do more and to more easily identify and address dangerous situations, and by providing the option – the option – of involving law enforcement in severe case and allowing disciplinary measures such as a court summons or community service, I believe that Bill 206 will go a long way in changing the prevalence and effects of bullying.

Mr. Speaker, it's for these reasons that I will be supporting Bill 206, and I look forward to hearing from the rest of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this bill.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is an important piece of legislation. If passed, not only will it help protect victims of bullying, but it will also provide support for bullies themselves. Bill 206 requires an amendment to the School Act providing options or tools to teachers and other officials for effective management of incidents of bullying, violence, threatening conduct, possession of unsafe tools or devices as well as drug paraphernalia. Additionally, Bill 206 addresses the new phenomenon of online bullying.

Mr. Speaker, bullying is an age-old problem that in recent years has become more pervasive with outcomes that are far too often tragic. The impact of bullying can be profound. It can wear down the confidence of the victim and lead to consequences such as suicide and murder. Not only does bullying impact the victim but the bully as well. They learn that this type of behaviour is effective and acceptable, which can lead to carrying these attitudes with them for life. Bill 206 will provide teachers, principals, and school resource officers the tools to effectively identify bullies and assertively address this problem.

Currently suspensions and expulsions are the norm for dealing with cases of bullying. However, this is not likely to address the root cause. When a child is sent home on a suspension or expulsion,

often a parent is not there to supervise. They may be working or are unable to effectively parent due to problems that they themselves may have. In addition, while at home on a suspension or expulsion a child will have greater access to television, movies, and video games which, more often than not, can teach aggression as an acceptable form of problem solving, thereby aggravating the issue.

Furthermore, bullying is not limited to a school setting. All too often bullying starts in schools and continues in the community, thus creating greater social and criminal issues. If a child has no one to supervise them, they may begin to hang out or gravitate to those in the community that have also been expelled and, potentially, others that may have addiction and behavioural problems. By keeping children in school, as Bill 206 would do, these students are more likely to receive education and support. Further, being at school, where a peaceable environment is promoted, will help to teach acceptable behaviour, especially in comparison to walking the streets in our communities. Students are not required to participate in any remedial activity during the time away from school; therefore, the causes for their suspension or expulsion are not being addressed.

Mr. Speaker, catching and addressing these unacceptable behaviours early is key to students learning right from wrong and, therefore, aiding in becoming successful adults. Altogether, this is important in the promotion and maintenance of safe communities. Bill 206 gives schools resources to help children before bullying becomes a lifelong problem and results in even more serious or severe consequences. Those that cause problems in schools will often turn to a life of crime, drugs, and gangs, and these have immense impact on communities.

It has been shown that targeted strategies are needed to ensure appropriate intervention, protection, and follow-up support for those individuals involved, which includes both the bully and the victim. Bill 206 would be another tool to help break the cycle of violence, complementing our other initiatives. For example, Alberta Education offers effective behaviour supportive training, or EBS, to teachers across the province. EBS is an effective tool that includes helping teachers build a list of school-wide expectations that are directly taught and consistently reinforced throughout the school by all adults. In addition, it aids in the direct teaching of social skills and positive behaviours that specifically demonstrate what behaviour expectations look like in each setting or context. Bill 206 will work in combination with these strategies. Additionally, Bill 206 can work in conjunction with mental health programs and alcohol and drug abuse programs, allowing the child to receive the help that they need. Mr. Speaker, a child is not likely to have access to these resources if they are not at school.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003 this government recognized that bullying was becoming a concern that needed to be addressed. As a result, the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying was created. The Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, which presented its final report in 2004, emphasized the importance of early childhood development and school-age strategies for managing aggressive bullying behaviours. These strategies can prove to be society's best chance to effect positive change and address behaviours that perpetuate family violence and bullying across generations.

4:00

The consultations that occurred across the province led to a provincial bullying prevention initiative. The bullying prevention initiative through the joint efforts of Alberta Education and Alberta children's services comprises three websites that have been developed to help children, youth, and adults learn about bullying and how to deal with bullying issues. Bill 206 can work to complement this bullying prevention initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the ultimate goal of Bill 206 is to identify the problem and work at addressing it. Bill 206 can help end the cycle of bullying and stop this kind of behaviour in future generations, ultimately helping all entities involved, from the victim to the school administration to the community.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support Bill 206 and urge all other members to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise for the first time in this session to speak in favour of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for introducing this bill, which I fully support.

This piece of legislation seeks to ensure that Alberta's youth are able to grow and prosper in our world-renowned education system. It would provide legislative direction that would require all persons on school property to conduct themselves in a safe and responsible manner. It would apply to all school property such as school buses, the Internet, and educational intranets. Further, this bill would also ban drug paraphernalia and any tools or devices that could cause harm to others on school property. This bill would help to ensure that an individual's activities do not negatively affect the physical or mental well-being of those around them. All together, this would help reduce and eliminate one of the most detrimental activities within our school system: bullying.

One of the strengths of Bill 206 is in the creation of a legal definition of bullying which seeks to identify the many forms of bullying experienced by Alberta's youth. Now, Mr. Speaker, the proposed definition would explicitly include harassment towards individuals based on sexual orientation and physical disabilities. By creating this legal definition of bullying, school officials and our legal system will be given the tools necessary to continue to provide the safe learning environment that our youth require.

However, Mr. Speaker, by simply defining the activities that are considered to be part of bullying, we must make certain that our schools can effectively address these situations. Many Alberta youth experience the effects of bullying on an ongoing basis and may feel as though they have no effective recourse to end their unfortunate circumstances. This can be attributed to a number of reasons such as fear of reprisal or fear of harassment or the common belief that bullying is simply a part of growing up. It's not. These unfortunate situations may cause bullying victims to internalize their anger and discontent for their current situation, which can severely limit their academic or personal growth.

Mr. Speaker, our society has come a long way in recognizing the negative and long-lasting effects of bullying. More importantly, we have conclusively established that bullying is not simply a part of growing up. We only have to look at the tragedies of Columbine and Taber back in 1999 to identify the potential consequences of not effectively addressing bullying in schools.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 gives our youth and school officials the necessary resources to recognize and address bullying, and even more importantly it removes the onus from the victim of identifying and remedying the situations of bullying. The fear of further bullying or being deemed a so-called tattletale by the broader student body may prevent those being bullied from coming forward and filing a complaint themselves. This can embolden bullies and result in more victims within our schools. These injurious activities can severely damage our children's self-confidence and may prevent them from achieving their full potential not just in their childhood but in later life.

Given this, Bill 206 provides a very effective provision which allows schools to become a complainant against a bully rather than simply having the victim initiate a complaint against an offending individual. For example, Mr. Speaker, if a resource officer were to see a student being bullied by other students, the officer would be able to initiate the complaint process against the offending students. This would provide students, bullied or otherwise, with the peace of mind that those working within the school system will be cognizant of bullies and have been given the necessary tools to address the circumstances. At the end of the day, this will reduce the students' fears of reprisal or intensified bullying as they do not have to be the ones that bring forward a complaint. This is not to say that those who suffer from bullying should not or cannot report the activities to appropriate authorities; however, this recognizes that there are many players in the ongoing struggle to end this problem and that school officials can play an important role in helping to end the torment of bullying.

Mr. Speaker, there are members of this Assembly who have experienced or witnessed the effects of bullying while attending school. I was moved earlier by the speech from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I also recall the time when my mother, who was a teacher, came home from her grade 6 class, came to me in university and told me that she was attacked and bullied by a student. This is simply not acceptable in a civil society. These people, though, have witnessed the negative consequences of such actions, such as the pressures those being bullied may face when they look for ways to end their anguish.

Mr. Speaker, this provision will help alleviate victims from concerns of reprisal by allowing schools to become the complainant. For this reason I fully support Bill 206, and I want to say thank you again to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this important initiative.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. This bill was brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I would like to take this time to thank her for this noble piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 proposes that a number of amendments be made to the School Act to help address the serious issue of bullying in our schools. Bullying is an affront to our shared values of tolerance and acceptance and cannot be tolerated. Bill 206 confronts this contentious issue head-on and proposes decisive measures that I feel will effectively sideline the future of bullying in our classrooms.

While I've heard praise for specific measures proposed in this legislation, I would like to address how Bill 206 in its entirety would work to keep children and youth out of the court system. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that bullying can be a criminal offence. Harassment and verbal abuse can impart long-lasting emotional scars that in far too many cases have led to violence or suicide. Similarly, physical violence and assault generate fear and hostility. These are the trademark symptoms of bullying and are clearly illegal under the Criminal Code. While many of these cases would be prosecuted in youth court, in serious cases of bullying often the last resort is a court hearing and a criminal prosecution. Court cases for bullying in schools can be treated in the same manner as an assault or a harassment case and in convictions can lead to serious penalties like prison time, probation, or restraining orders. It is important to state

that these punishments are necessary, particularly for severe cases of bullying, and in no way will Bill 206 contravene these measures.

What Bill 206 will do, however, is create a system that will help address and resolve cases of bullying before they escalate to a court summons. With the measures proposed by this particular bill, school principals and their administration would be able to call meetings with parents, the student, and resource officers, as examples, if the offence merits it. This meeting would enable resource officers to become involved early in the cases of bullying and potentially prevent them from escalating to cases that end up in a court of law. Having resource officers attend meetings gives added weight to the conversation. Bullies would know that not only were their actions severe but that perpetuating those actions could lead to serious criminal charges.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, most deterring: criminal charges can lead to criminal records. A criminal record is a serious document, that can follow a person for the rest of their lives. It can prevent them from finding employment and travelling abroad as well as dramatically affect people's perceptions of that individual. Bill 206 will complement local operational school systems that will help keep children away from the court system and serious consequences.

4:10

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is not removing the potential for a court hearing and a criminal record for bullies; instead, it is creating a system that addresses bullying before it reaches this level of seriousness. In fact, if it is merited, the resource officers and the principal and others involved can refer the student to court, but in these circumstances the student would be tried under the School Act as opposed to the Criminal Code. This provides yet another mechanism for officials at the local level to address bullying without fearing that the student will acquire a permanent record.

That is perhaps why I am most supportive of Bill 206. On one hand, it offers clear protection to the victims of bullying, giving them the comfort of knowing that a resource officer is able to intervene on their behalf. On the other hand, Bill 206 recognizes that being a bully often happens in the formative years of a person's life and that imposing severe punishments on children and youth at early ages could essentially destroy their lives. After all, in many cases bullies are themselves victims of household abuse or neglect or other circumstances. Rather than simply imposing a mandatory court summons for all the cases of bullying, Bill 206 gives officials the discretion to choose whether or not to require a court hearing. This gives flexibility to the system. For example, it is possible that a case of serious bullying could be dealt with more effectively through communication or support programming rather than prison terms and probation.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 recognizes that bullying is a serious offence that has the potential to destroy lives, but to the credit of the hon. member this bill also recognizes that a criminal record has the same potential. Rather than simply legislating serious consequences for bullying, Bill 206 creates a balance wherein victims are protected from their aggressors and aggressors are protected from themselves.

In closing, I applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward Bill 206. I truly believe that this legislation extends protection not only to the victims of bullying but to the bullies themselves. I stand in support of Bill 206 and urge all members of the Legislature to join me.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, you indicated to me that you wished to speak on the bill.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak on Bill 206, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. The intent of the bill is to enhance the safety of students and teachers by amending the School Act to include explicit sections on banned items and bullying. I'm sure that even the majority of us, too, experienced bullying at one time or another. When I went to school, I was the victim of bullying, too. The only way I could escape bullying was because I was a shining student in my school, and the bullies always wanted some favours from me, needing help in their math or in English or social studies, so that's how I was spared. I'm sure, you know, like I said, we all experienced bullying at one point or another. Bullying goes on in the workplace, too.

This bill is almost a repeat of Bill 210 from last session. It defines bully, banned items. It meets lots of our earlier concerns regarding the exclusion of sexual orientation and disability in the definition of bully. It also states the procedure that teachers and principals must follow if the student is suspected of possessing a banned item — enough has been said about drug paraphernalia and all the other items — or bullying another student. The principal in collaboration with a peace officer can determine an educational measures program for the student to participate in.

That's where I have a concern, too, about the educational measures program. The principal must also advise the board of placing students in an educational measures program, and the board must advise the minister of any contravention regarding the banned items or bullying. The school board also has the responsibility to ensure that there are educational measures programs. Although the bill has been improved because of the definition of bullying and includes a number of discriminated groups that earlier versions did not, there are still some worries about the actual mechanics of how the students would be punished. Although the definition of bullying is more inclusive than prior to the last session, children do not have to have a reason to bully.

I think we should amend the bill to strike out section 5. There are two main problems with section 5. First, it seems to contradict legislation in the School Act, and second, it erodes the powers currently held by the principal to suspend students guilty of bullying or of possessing banned items.

We also need some clarification as to what educational measures programs are and what will be involved in instituting them. Where is the funding going to come from? In light of the big deficit I think we have to look at the funding for those programs as well. What exactly is an educational measures program, and are these programs already in place? For the school boards that don't currently have these programs in place, where is the funding going to come from? Again, that's the question that arises time and again. Do these programs have to be expanded if this legislation passes?

Section 5 amends section 24, which states the conditions under which a student can be suspended. It states that with the exception of the contravention of banned items or bullying, a student can be suspended if they do not comply with section 12 or has failed to participate in an educational measures program or has caused injury, mental or physical, to others in school.

This section is attempting to ensure that a student that is found guilty of a banned item or bullying will take an educational measures program. Only if the student fails to participate in the program will the student be suspended. I have concern with this section. A student may be found guilty of bullying, be required to enrol in an educational measures program, and shall not be suspended, all the while being guilty under section 12(f), which is failing to respect the rights of others as well. If the student is guilty of contravening section 12(f), then there's reason to suspend the student. On one hand, the bully should participate in the educational measures

program and should not be suspended but should be suspended considering causing an injury. This would make the proposed legislation contradict existing legislation and would create a legitimate basis for appeals.

Currently the principal can suspend those who have been found guilty of bullying or possessing banned items. This amendment states that if a student is guilty of bullying or possessing banned items, the principal cannot suspend the student or should make the student participate in an educational measures program. As a result, this amendment would create greater restrictions on the available courses of action to principals.

I suggest taking a serious look at section 5. The consequences would be that the mechanism of placing a student in an educational measures program before suspending the student would be deleted. It would also result in resolving contradiction and continue to allow principals to choose whether a student should participate in an educational measures program or be suspended outright.

Those are my concerns. Otherwise, I support this bill. Thank you.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you have up to five minutes to close the debate.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to close debate on Bill 206. I want to thank all of my colleagues; my researcher, Elizabeth Clement; my assistant, Brock Mulligan; police; school resource officers; kids; parents; and a special thanks to one mom who shared her heartfelt, sad story with me, which I mentioned when I started the debate. Thank you, Betty.

As I said before, this bill is going to make our schools safer. It's going to prohibit acts of intimidation, which, I may add, Mr. Speaker, includes hazing, and bullying which is disseminated by electronic media on and off the school grounds. Additionally, it would prohibit the possession of weapons and/or drug paraphernalia. All of these issues detract from safety in our schools and hurt many young people and teachers in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the committee stage of the debate and ask all members to support second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Before the next item, I would ask for unanimous consent for Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (*reversion*)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To my colleagues in the Legislature, I am delighted to be joined by three individuals, constituents all, from the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre who have been very helpful in advising and guiding me and certainly in making their concerns and issues known about the upcoming Bill 208. In fact, I managed to facilitate a meeting between the mover of the bill and some of my constituents, for which I thank the member. I would ask the following individuals to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Dave Farquharson, who lives in the Lions Village life lease; Ornal Jorgenson; and I think Mrs. Francis Reid is also here today. Please welcome these individuals to the Assembly.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(*continued*)

Bill 208 **Life Leases Act**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mittel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand today and open second reading debate on Bill 208, the Life Leases Act. The objective of Bill 208 is to create a legislative framework for life-lease living accommodations within the province. Essentially, the Life Leases Act would function in much the same way as our condominium act or our Residential Tenancies Act. Bill 208's framework would address issues related to safety deposits, entrance fees, dispute resolution, security of occupancy as well as disclosure requirements.

Mr. Speaker, life leases are arrangements whereby a tenant is granted the exclusive right to occupy a dwelling for the remainder of their life. To be clear, the occupant does not own the property, as in the case of condominiums, nor do they rent, as in the case of traditional apartments. Furthermore, perhaps because of this unusual arrangement, there is currently no legislation regulating life leases in Alberta. A legislative framework would provide a sense of security for the occupants of these living arrangements, and knowing that life leases are regulated by the government may in turn make life-lease accommodations more attractive to potential tenants.

This accommodation is basically tailored for seniors. Alberta's population is aging, and over 25 per cent of our population will be seniors by 2020. Bill 208 will provide this framework by requiring four broad sections within all life-lease arrangements.

First, this bill would guarantee the right of leasers to have input within their life-lease community as well as guarantee a level of control over the operation of their residence. Essentially, this would function much in the same way as a condo board does in a condominium.

Second, Bill 208 would define requirements surrounding the concept of entrance fees. Mr. Speaker, an entrance fee would be defined as a substantial portion of the total occupancy cost paid in advance. Simply put, an entrance fee is the mortgage of a life lease paid up front. In addition, the Life Leases Act would require that this entrance fee is to be completely returned to a potential tenant if the tenant withdraws from the lease before it is accepted by the landlord. Furthermore, Bill 208 would stipulate that when a tenant terminates their life lease, no less than 95 per cent of the entrance fee must be returned to them.

The third main section of this bill deals with the occupancy and possession dates. For example, this bill would stipulate that tenants would have a three-day cooling-off period in which they could change their minds about their life lease and then get all of their money back. This cooling-off period is intended to give tenants the chance to reflect on their life-lease agreement and to make sure that it meets all of their needs.

Mr. Speaker, I believe there should be complete transparency regarding these contracts because, after all, these life leases will be addressing their future, and as seniors there needs to be an absolute assurance of the security of their investment. The last thing any senior would want to worry about in contemplating their future living arrangements is whether or not it's a risky proposition.

The final section addressed in this bill deals with the upkeep and maintenance of the life-lease complex. It would be stipulated that the landlord would be responsible for the upkeep and maintenance

of the building and that major repairs should be funded out of a reserve fund.

Mr. Speaker, the end result of these four sections would be the creation of a framework supporting life-lease development. After all, I believe that life leases will eventually play a large role in meeting Alberta's future housing needs. For example, various forms of life leases have already become a viable and popular option for many Alberta seniors. This is not surprising. Life leases are an attractive option for fixed-income households for a variety of reasons.

First, they're affordable. In fact, the majority of life-lease complexes are owned by nonprofit organizations. These organizations often develop life-lease complexes in order to provide affordable housing options to fixed-income seniors, and as a result of this, life leases are relatively affordable when compared to condominiums or traditional homes. The lease arrangement also assures an equity position with regard to their savings rather than renting, which would gradually deplete their savings.

A second characteristic of life leases that would make them attractive to seniors is the various support services that they may offer. Mr. Speaker, many life-lease communities offer options such as housekeeping, laundry, and even cooking services to their tenants. These services are great for seniors who wish to remain independent in their own homes but also would like assistance with day-to-day chores. The goal is to respect the clients and to be able to respond to their needs with dignity, kindness, and compassion. Essentially, life leases allow seniors to age in their own homes. It is a safe and secure home environment.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, life leases are an attractive option for Alberta seniors because of their communal nature. Most life-lease complexes provide communal gathering areas and recreational facilities, depending on the individual lifestyles and personal preferences. These can range from swimming pools to billiard rooms to banquet halls to bars. A senior living in one of these communities would not only have access to these facilities but would also be welcomed into a community.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, ensuring that seniors have choice regarding where they live is a cornerstone of this government's health care plan. Legislating a framework for life leases would essentially create more options. More options, in turn, mean more choice. I feel that Bill 208 is timely, effective, and fair to both life-lease landlords and tenants. I believe that Bill 208 has the potential to make life leases an attractive living option within our province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments and look forward to the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and my compliments to the mover of the bill. This is a much-needed piece of legislation in this province. Frankly, I was working on my own version, so I'm very grateful that the member has saved me a lot of hard work.

Now, I'm going to talk about some of the things that we would like to see included or adjusted in the proposed legislation that the member has put before us. Don't misunderstand me; that's not to say that this isn't overall a pretty good bill and a pretty good stab at it. As was mentioned, life lease is a great option, particularly for seniors. Using money that they may well have accumulated in their family home, that money, because of the way this particular housing option is organized, allows them to often get a much more well-

appointed or a larger unit in a very nice facility. Essentially, the developer is able to save on borrowing costs by using the entrance fee; therefore, that money saved can be redirected into, frankly, a much nicer place to live.

I am very fortunate in having one of the three life-lease units in Edmonton in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. The two other ones in Edmonton are in Riverside and Castle Downs. I think mine is actually the longest one; that's Lions Village Raitown, just over on 109th Street here. So I've had to learn a lot about life leases over the years. The biggest problem is we had no governing legislation, so I think this is a really great piece of legislation brought in front of us.

Having said all that to put it in context, there are a couple of issues that my constituents who are joining us in the gallery today have brought forward to me – and I think I added on one of my own here – and feel is of importance. We'd like to see them included in amendments to the bill as we move forward with this. Very quickly, the list is: a preamble, the retroactivity of the bill, audits, the trustee sections, the Canada revenue act, and, if we have time, the use of excess funds.

I think it would be helpful if we had a preamble to the bill that recognized that the overriding principle of a life-lease act was to protect the consumer. I think there is a fair amount of protection, and indeed this whole housing option makes it very attractive to developers. Frankly, I'm not worried about the developers here. I'm worried about the human beings that are going to live in this and to make sure that in a preamble we would be able to shape the legislation by saying that this is primarily for consumer protection. We would like to see a preamble added to the bill that laid that out as an overriding principle.

One of the things that we're noticing is that when we develop this legislation – and I'll refer back to the condo act, which is the one we have in front of us – we're really good about laying out how we start these and all the nitty-gritty about who is responsible for which piece and how we divide it all up to begin with. Well, what we didn't anticipate in the bill – and I'm hoping that we can overcome that problem in this piece of legislation – is: do we design a piece of legislation that works for us 30 years down the road? That's the situation we now have with condominiums. For anybody representing the larger cities we have – or just about any riding now has condominiums in it – the condominium act that we have does not anticipate what it's like living in that building 30 or 40 years down the road. So I'm trying to make sure that we don't make that same mistake with this legislation.

Second, and I would say from my constituents' point of view the largest area of concern, is the way the bill is written. This appears in section 2(1). For those of you following along, it appears on page 3 of the actual bill. It does not capture those that are already in units. It only goes forward. Frankly, that's not uncommon, but I think we need to revisit that decision.

What we have is: "every unit that is the subject of a life lease and every residential complex that contains such a unit, where the life lease is entered into after this Act comes into force." We would advocate that that last subsection, "where the life lease is entered into after this Act comes into force," is deleted. Now, I'm committing myself, but if I can't get the member to do it, I may bring forward an amendment when we're in Committee of the Whole that would delete that section because then it would capture those that are already living in life leases. As I said, you know, there are already three of them in Edmonton, there are probably at least that many in Calgary, and there may well be others in places like Medicine Hat or Red Deer or Lethbridge, et cetera, et cetera.

The problem that we run into, of course, is that there is a certain amount of turnover that we have. In checking with my constituents, they were saying: yeah, it's about 10 per cent. You know, people move on; they go into long-term care; they may pass away. There's about a 10 per cent turnover. If we did that, for example, in Lions Village Railtown, we'd end up with about six people a year who would come in after the act took effect, but everybody else in the unit would not be covered by the act. So increasingly we have disproportion as to who the act applies to, and I think it's important that we anticipate that problem and deal with it. We need to have some sort of retroactivity or a phase-in where we capture the people who are already in life leases.

I mean, let's not kid ourselves. This is, I would say, the most vigorous kind of living situation that seniors are choosing in this day and age. Although it's a building designed for seniors, it really is independent living. These are very, very vigorous, active people who are living there, so we're going to end up with them in these units for a very long period of time, another 20 years or 30 years potentially. We just don't want to see that kind of disproportion on who's covered by the act and who isn't, so we need to address that.

Holy mackerel. I've got two minutes left.

The next issue that was of real concern was the audits. We need clarity in the act around the audits. In particular, we need an independent auditor. There has to be a clear separation in audit statements between various buildings that are owned by the same organization, whether that's private or not-for-profit, and the information has to be made available to the leaseholders. Right now there is no current requirement for reliable, consistent annual financial reports to be given to the leaseholders. And we need to sort out the problem of an audit versus a review. I don't want to see smaller buildings take an unfair financial hit to produce an audited statement; nonetheless, the people that are leaseholders deserve to know what's happening with their money and how it's being handled. So we do need monitoring.

We need a criteria, a method that this is going to be done by; we need enforcement – for example, a fine system if these statements aren't made available – and adequate penalties, perhaps on a sliding scale; and we need to address the issue that the majority vote can remove the requirement to produce an audited report. That can come around through various kinds of coercion or a landlord telling people it isn't necessary. I think the review has to be there, and it cannot be waived for any reason.

The fourth area is around a trustee, and that's covering sections 19 to 23 in the act. My question is: why does the act view the trust money as the landlord's money and not the tenant's money? There are some issues that have been raised by my constituents around who is determining the trustee. It needs to be a professional designation, and it needs to be more clearly laid out than what we have currently in the legislation. It could go under the section 1(1)(p), that description of a trustee, but I think that it needs to be someone with an actual professional designation, something more along the lines of what we're seeing in section 22(1)(b). So who determines this and the fact that it should be a professional.

4:40

The trustee should also be mutually acceptable and independent, and the communication must be freely given, and access to the trustee must also be freely available. I think there are a number of court cases before us right now that run counter to that.

Thank you for the opportunity. I didn't get through my list, but I will in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 208, the Life Leases Act. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forward this very timely and pragmatic piece of legislation. Bill 208 recognizes and addresses important issues which affect one of our province's most valuable demographics, our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 would address specific concerns regarding seniors' housing by providing legislative direction for senior citizens living in life-lease units. The bill also provides individuals interested in life leases with peace of mind, knowing that life leases are protected by legislation. The life-lease concept is fairly new in Alberta, and there is currently little legislation that regulates life-lease complexes. However, there are life-lease facilities currently operating within the province and within Lethbridge.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to understand the concept of a life lease before one can discuss the need for legislation. One example of a life lease currently operating in our province is Martha's House located in Lethbridge. It's operated by St. Michael's health, and it's a member of Covenant Health of Alberta. Martha's House affords lessees with the benefits of life-long tenure within the life-lease complex with the payment of an entrance fee while also providing a variety of extended care services. Lethbridge's Martha's House serves as an example of an effective and valuable life-lease property. However, the nature of life leases prompts questions surrounding how Bill 208 would apply to existing life-lease tenants and landlords.

Examples of care options at Martha's House include the rights for lessees to choose optional meal services, on-call doctors, and other personal care services are available. Mr. Speaker, life-lease facilities such as Martha's House provide lessees with varying degrees of care and the opportunity to be part of a stable community. Martha's House provides an example of the benefits that a life lease has to offer our senior citizens.

Bill 208 will not change the daily operations of our provincial life leases; rather, it will further protect the investment that Alberta's senior citizens have made in their life-lease properties while also creating confidence for property owners that they, too, are protected by legislation.

Mr. Speaker, a prospective tenant must know the financial obligations going into a life lease and as well once it is terminated under any and all circumstances. Bill 208 will require this information be granted by the landlord to the prospective lessee so that they can make informed decisions regarding their future. Under Bill 208 any change in completion or possession must be disclosed to the prospective tenant.

Bill 208 would also permit potential tenants who express interest in a life lease to place a deposit, known as a prelease payment, on a particular unit. This payment would ensure their right to provide the landlord with the appropriate entrance fee, effectively solidifying their tenancy in that life lease. Bill 208 will require these prelease payments to be held in trust, to be either added to the entrance fee upon tenancy or refunded to the individual if they decide not to enter the life lease. This would ensure that a lessee's prelease payment to an existing life-lease complex will be secure. I do not mean to imply that currently prelease payments are being withheld, but to encourage confidence in the security of investing in these type of complexes, Bill 208 addresses the rules around prelease payments.

Mr. Speaker, solidifying a long-term living arrangement is an important decision for our Alberta senior citizens. Where prelease payments are received to place a hold on a life-lease unit, the payment of an entrance fee grants a lessee entry to the life-lease complex. The entrance fee paid to the landlord provides seniors with secured tenancy and in some cases the access to care facilities.

Given the significance of a senior's decision to enter into a life lease, Bill 208 provides a three-day cooling-off period to the prospective tenants during which the lessee can cancel their life lease and receive a full refund of their entrance fee. Any withdrawal of the offer to lease prior to the landlord's acceptance would also require the entrance fee to be repaid in full to the prospective tenant within 14 days of withdrawal. Mr. Speaker, this allows our Alberta senior citizens adequate time for reflection and careful consideration regarding their future in a life-lease facility.

Upon entry into the life lease the entrance fee must be responsibly managed in order to ensure that the full amount is available to be refunded to the lessee at the end of their tenancy. Bill 208 would require the landlord of current life-lease properties to now hold the lessee's entrance fee in trust for the duration of their tenancy, using any interest accrued to provide upgrades or additional services to the life lease. What this allows, Mr. Speaker, is both the security of the lessee's entrance fee and maintained or improved life-lease facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 establishes the rights of lessees in securing entry into a life lease while also providing new rights to tenants after they have established residencies in the life lease. Alberta's seniors deserve the right to be informed and involved in their life leases. These are their homes. Bill 208 would establish these rights by requiring landlords of an existing life-lease complex to hold annual meetings with lessees and disclose financial statements to ensure that tenants are well informed regarding the fiscal status of their life lease. During these meetings lessees are also encouraged to voice any concerns regarding the operation of the life-lease complex. Bill 208 will ensure that Alberta seniors have the opportunity to be actively included in the operation of their life-lease complex. This is their home, and we must never forget that.

On certain occasions a life-lease community may be subjected to a mortgage sale, a tax sale, or a foreclosure order which would change the landlord. In each of these scenarios it is crucial that the lessees are given an appropriate amount of time to address their options. First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, it is imperative to note that Bill 208 requires that each lessee will receive a full refund of their entrance fee. Following a change in landlord, lessees have the right to remain in their unit till the end of the month. In addition, Bill 208 would provide the option to lessees currently residing in a life-lease property to remain in their current unit under new management with the new landlord.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 provides lessees with the security to enjoy their senior years free from concerns regarding their housing situation and protecting their very valuable investments while also allowing the opportunity to take an active role in the operation of their life lease.

With that, I would like to again thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for putting forward this comprehensive and well-thought-out piece of legislation, and I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you indicated to me that you wish to speak.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity, particularly due to the fact that three years from next month, when I'm assuming we'll probably be running another election, I'll be a senior and I will be looking more intently at life leases than I currently have. I consider myself to have a good lease on life right now. I feel healthy and far from wealthy but wise, no doubt.

The work that has been done by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the efficacy that has been noted by the hon.

Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, to name a few of the individuals who have contributed to today's discussion, point out the need for life leases and also the need for guarantees. We're aware, particularly in B.C., of the leaky condo syndrome, and we have to make sure that within this lease legislation there is protection for seniors who invest in life leases with so much of their funding up front that should there be structural problems within the formation, they're not stuck for the repairs.

4:50

Seniors need to be made aware, in the same way that condo owners need to be aware, of any debts that the housing development may have. I know that I was unpleasantly surprised by some of the costs of projects in the condo that I'm currently living in in Edmonton. Also, as has been pointed out by other individuals, the need for a trustee, with all the meaning of the word trust applied to that trustee, to manage the monies that are collected from the seniors in their life leases is absolutely important.

With the condo situation currently condo organizations seem to be prevented from investing the condo association's money in GICs because that money has to be always available for repairs and expenditures. I would hope that in the proposed legislation with regard to life leases, the money, or at least a portion of the money, could be safely invested, with of course the agreement of the lessees, in some type of safe interest gaining investment so that if repairs were required, seniors would not have to dig further deeply into their savings in order to render their housing development more acceptable or at least maintain its current situation.

One thing the Life Leases Act doesn't do in the case of for-profit organizations is protect the lessees, the seniors, from rent gouging. Several members of this House can remember what became close to a 30-hour debate on affordable housing and rent controls. There doesn't appear to be anything within this legislation to protect seniors from escalating rents, and in order to make this document even more acceptable, some type of provision for rent protection would be most welcomed. Seniors should have a sense going in, especially those who choose to go in a for-profit organization. They should be able to sign a contract indicating what would be a reasonable rent increase over the years and under what conditions the rents would be collectively agreed upon to be raised.

We've had situations throughout Alberta where because there was no ceiling on rents, the only legislation allowed that you could raise the rent by whatever you liked if you only did it once a year. I know that there have been very creative landlords who have managed to get around that by charging extra fees for cable, extra fees for heating, and sometimes repairs that were supposedly structurally important to the whole facility were then foisted onto the individual in the specific condo or, in this case, long-term lease. So it's extremely important for seniors, whether they've been able to accumulate savings over the years which they would theoretically like to pass on to their descendants or in the case of vulnerable seniors who life has not been kind to, that their investments be protected.

The whole notion of a life lease is a very positive one, and it's turning out that adults as young as 55 are looking at these types of developments because of their potential security.

With those thoughts in mind in terms of setting what can be reasonable increases, guaranteeing structural support so that there aren't any surprises, I think this Life Leases Act goes a long way in terms of achieving the sustainability and fiscal stability that seniors are looking for. Like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre who preceded me, I will be looking forward to amendments that close the loopholes with regard to the potential of gouging because of

structural construction deficiencies and the concerns over the possibility of rent gouging and also, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned, the role of the trustee in looking after the financing of the life-lease building that seniors find themselves in.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing forth a strong piece of legislation which is probably 80 per cent of the way there. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am excited today to rise to speak in favour of Bill 208, the Life Leases Act, brought forward by my friend the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. I have to say that the last few speakers have had some good points, the members for Lethbridge-West, Cypress-Medicine Hat, and, yes, the members for Calgary-Varsity and Edmonton-Centre as well. [interjection] Yes, I am feeling well today.

I have to say that Bill 208 is important because life leases are quickly becoming an attractive alternative living arrangement for many seniors in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I've been one of the principal shareholders of a property management company in Calgary for a number of years, and real estate has always been of interest. I think that this is really a step forward when it comes to looking at options for accommodation, particularly for our seniors. Life leases, however, are a living arrangement whereby a tenant purchases the right to occupy a residence for the remainder of his or her life. Now, they do not purchase the property outright, as is the case in a condominium sale, for example. Rather, the land is held by the sponsor group that manages the complex.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous types of advantages in dealing with this type of arrangement. First, life leases tend to be more affordable than standard condominium ownership. We have seen a dramatic rise over the last decade in the cost of real estate in this province, particularly in our cities. Secondly, life leases offer a greater predictability since there are no rent increases. Thirdly, most life-lease arrangements offer some form of support service such as housekeeping or meal preparation, which, again, are particularly important to seniors.

Now, Mr. Speaker, because of some of these advantages, life-lease living arrangements are an attractive living option, as I mentioned, for seniors. The Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned that people even 55 and older would consider living in such a place. They're a viable choice as they provide services along with, essentially, the freedom of home ownership. Because life leases are targeted toward seniors and because many seniors live on fixed incomes and cannot suffer large financial setbacks, it becomes particularly important to continue to ensure that tenants are protected when entering into such an arrangement as a life lease.

Bill 208 provides exactly this protection. Without a doubt, the most effective way to ensure that any consumer or leaser is protected is to ensure that they have access to information. To this end, Bill 208 requires that life-lease landlords disclose several critical pieces of information to potential tenants before they accept a prelease payment. Now, just for clarity, Mr. Speaker, a prelease payment is a holding fee that is paid to the landlord while the complex is being constructed.

The bill would require landlords to disclose the estimated entrance fee, which is essentially the down payment that is required for the complex itself. This disclosure would inform a tenant of how much money they would be expected to pay up front when moving into their unit pursuant to a life lease. After all, Mr. Speaker, a consumer

is not going to pay a holding fee if he or she is unable to pay the final cost of the lease.

The second required piece of information that would be disclosed by a life-lease landlord would be the projected completion date. Again, the need for this information to me is patent and clear. A consumer might not be willing to put a holding fee on a property if he or she were unable to occupy that property for several years.

Now, the third piece of required information deals directly with the entrance fee. Essentially, the landlord would be required to disclose the minimum amount of the entrance fee that would be held in trust. Mr. Speaker, when a tenant lives in a life-lease complex, landlords are required . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded, so we can continue the next time.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

511. Mr. Vandermeer:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review how complaints are addressed by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission to ensure a fair process for both complainants and respondents.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the human rights legislation passed this spring, I will not be moving my motion as the intent of it has already been achieved.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Executive Vehicles

513. Mr. Kang moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require that all vehicles purchased through the executive vehicle allowance be low-emission vehicles.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta, pursuant to Treasury Board directive 06/88, is responsible for providing vehicles to certain senior government officials. Currently, the employee may choose whichever year, make, model, or optional equipment they wish. The employee must abide by a certain yearly price limit determined by the ministers of Finance and Service Alberta or exceed the limit and pay the difference. The price limit for an executive vehicle was \$43,500 in 2008.

The government has insisted that it is moving in that direction of increasing the fuel efficiency requirement for executive fleet vehicles. A list of ministerial class vehicles for 2009 shows two cabinet ministers choosing hybrids. I congratulate those two cabinet ministers, and they know who they are.

Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta claims that vehicle management has initiated the arrival of 92 hybrids, including five in the executive fleet. That is according to the Service Alberta annual report 2008-09. Service Alberta's minimal progress is likely the result of the fact that the ministry merely encourages the purchase of low-emission and hybrid vehicles rather than requiring it. The 2008-09 annual report on page 12 and the minister herself both indicate that

executives are encouraged to purchase low-emission vehicles but not required to.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, what kind of cars could the government purchase? Some of the most efficient examples include the 2009 Toyota Prius, which gives 48 miles to the gallon in the city and 45 miles per gallon on the highway; the 2009 Honda Civic hybrid, 40 miles per gallon in the city and 45 on the highway; and the 2009 Nissan Altima hybrid, 35 miles per gallon in the city and 33 miles per gallon on the highway. Instead, what kind of cars are they purchasing? The Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: a 2008 Infiniti EX35. The Minister of Health and Wellness: a 2007 Jeep Grand Cherokee. That one only gets 17 miles in the city and 21 miles on the highway, and the Infiniti gets 16 to 17 miles per gallon in the city and 23 to 24 miles per gallon on the highway. The Minister of Justice: a 2008 Audi A4, getting 15 to 21 miles per gallon in the city and 25 to 31 miles on the highway. It all depends on how hard she pushes on the gas pedal.

Naturally, we want the government fleet to be green. Members on this side of the caucus have repeatedly raised the issue of fuel efficiency requirements for the government vehicles. In 2008, when the caucus members questioned the government regarding low-emission vehicles, like on April 24, April 29, May 1, May 20, June 4, and in October of 2008, the minister's response every time was some variation on: we are moving in that direction. Every time we raised the issue, the minister said that we are moving in that direction, but I think the minister is too, too slow in moving in that direction: no definite answer, no concrete date or vision to phase out all the high-emission vehicles from the government fleet.

Given the increasing concern over global climate change – we hear about it every day – every other day some country is taking pretty harsh steps to clean up their environment. With the need for greater energy efficiency in our daily lives, the case for low-emission vehicles should be clear. Lately the cabinet on the islands of the Maldives was going to hold their meeting under water. They were taking lessons in scuba diving, sign language. I think we are lucky enough; we are not at that point. The islands of the Maldives are only about seven feet above sea level, so they will be the first ones to go down if we do not take care of the environment. Beirut, Bangladesh: the examples are numerous.

More generally, low-emission vehicles such as hybrids and/or alternative fuel vehicles make sense environmentally, and reduced emissions will contribute to cleaner air not only for us Albertans but for Canada and for the whole world. It will make a significant difference in terms of climate change and public health: a lot less asthma, a lot fewer other diseases related to the environment. Low-emission vehicles will also make sense economically considering the lower fuel costs overall.

Greening the government fleet is a more effective use of taxpayer dollars. If the public must subsidize these cars, it is not unreasonable to expect that the use of such vehicles is in the public interest. A low-emission standard for executive vehicles will demonstrate leadership and commitment at the highest level of government to fuel efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to see environmental leadership from this government. What kind of message does it send to have the highest levels of government able to drive inefficient gas guzzlers at public expense? If anybody should be concerned about the greenhouse gas emissions, the concern should start right here, and it should be the government leading the parade by example. The minister claims to be moving in the direction of more low-emission

government vehicles, but drifting in a particular direction is still drifting. This motion will make the government's determination to improve the fuel efficiency of its executive fleet clear to Albertans. The total cost to taxpayers of executive vehicles was approximately \$2.1 million in 2009. That's according to the most recent list provided to the library.

Other provinces are moving forward in greening their government vehicle fleets. In Alberta we are going to be left behind. For example, in B.C. they have been taking action since the year 2000. The government set their goals to reduce. Their target was to reduce the greenhouse gas emission by 16 per cent from 2000 to 2005. They've been going hybrids, biodiesel, and driving smart. They have been promoting different kinds of initiatives for driving, even in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and I think we are falling far behind.

5:10

This motion, Mr. Speaker, is also comparable with the government policy, and the Minister of Service Alberta has also been very supportive of this idea in the Assembly. "The vehicles that we are moving towards will be hybrid vehicles, as many as we can." This is "something that we certainly need to move towards." "With respect to the whole executive fleet and greening the whole fleet, that's something that is very important." That's from the minister. We should not be dragging our feet to move forward very quickly to put Alberta on the path to lowering our greenhouse gas emissions drastically.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I rise to speak in support of Motion 513. This is just one way in which Albertans could see their government as setting an example for regular Albertans by showing some personal restraint. We have vehicle fleets, and members of cabinet and a number of deputy ministers and so on have access to vehicle allowances. If they were to demonstrate the type of conservation, a word that goes right along with conservative, then people would see this government as true conservatives in terms of conserving gas and doing the "right thing" as opposed to the far-right thing, as we've recently seen with our newly elected Wildrose leader.

Now, credit where credit is due. We as members of the Assembly receive vehicle allowances in terms of the number of kilometres we drive, and we also have fleet cards, which assist us with our gas mileages. It's wonderful when we see examples of individuals putting aside their own necessary physical comfort for a vehicle that does the job.

Now, I want to take a moment to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Calder. While he is not a cabinet minister, he is right in the theme of redemption, that I began my member's statement with. He has realized some of the mistakes associated with coffee sweeteners, he has realized some of the problems associated with Twitter, and he has, to use almost Christian language, been reborn in the form of a Smart car driver. This wonderful man, who has changed his lifestyle, was featured in the *Edmonton Journal* this weekend in his Smart car delivering diapers, thousands I believe, that could barely fit within the confines of the Smart car. He managed to somehow buckle them down, and he delivered these to an agency. It's that type of leadership, Mr. Speaker, that we're looking for from the government as a whole.

We as individuals, as I say, benefit from the generosity afforded to us courtesy of the taxpayers and the vehicles that we choose to drive. I myself admit that I started as a member driving from Calgary in a V10, a 1999 Dodge V10, but I saw the light. I saw the

light. I now drive a Dodge Compass, Mr. Speaker, that gets very close to 35 miles to the gallon on the highway. I know that it's not a Smart car, but it is a smart purchase for me, and the taxpayers are benefiting from the fact that when the big brute Dodge leaves the garage on the few occasions to pull the fifth wheel trailer, it is myself who pays the bill and not the taxpayers. What Motion 513 is looking for is the government setting the example, recognizing that at least for in-city travel . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the support from the hon. sustainable resources minister, who is a Calgary-Varsity resident and wants only the best for not only Calgary-Varsity residents, but I'm sure he wants the best for all Albertans. I'm sure he will be one of the individuals voting for Motion 513 because he's a believer in conservation. The hon. minister of sustainable resources by his own title wants to see sustainability in this province. We need to start right here within this House, right here within this government and purchase vehicles that show restraint, that will deliver the job because of their hybrid efficiencies but not cost either the environment or the taxpayers undue concerns.

Now, as I say, this Motion 513, which the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall proposes, I would like to suggest is just the starting point, that we as individuals take account of our own purchases and the bills that we submit, that the taxpayers so thoughtfully pick up on our behalf because, after all, we're elected to do their bidding. But if we could show the type of restraint personally that is being shown in Motion 513, then possibly by leading by example, Albertans would be encouraged to look at the types of vehicles they drive and the recognition that while this province was built on nonrenewable resources and we are trying to be more efficient in our extraction of those resources and our utilization of those resources – wouldn't it be nice if the people of Alberta could look at the province because they're getting into the hybrid mode.

Yes, we're behind other provinces like B.C., but we know that we can surpass B.C. We have the ability even in our recessionary experience, and possibly because of our recessionary experience we know the value of a dollar. If we can save those dollars and save those emissions by driving smartly, as Motion 513 proposes for the government fleet to adopt, we're so much farther ahead.

Now, the hon. sustainable resources minister mentioned my fondness for my truck. I will confess that I have a fondness for that truck because I feel safe within that truck. I feel safe pulling a 24-foot fifth wheel on the few occasions when I venture out, usually no farther than the Bow valley to enjoy the camping experience with the solar panels firmly attached to my roof to provide the necessary survival mode. However, the reason I mention my fondness for my truck is that it would not be smart, for example, for either sustainable resource officers or conservation officers or fishery individuals to be driving along rural roads, particularly forestry roads, in Smart cars. They would find themselves in great difficulties, particularly as the weather worsens. But where we can, where it's an urban circumstance or primarily a highway circumstance as opposed to forestry roads, I would encourage the hon. members of this Legislature to quickly pass Motion 513 for not only the good of Alberta, but let us be true leaders for this nation and for the world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to actually speak in favour of this motion. I'm inclined to support this motion. I would be more inclined to support this motion if it had been a little bit more inclusive, if it hadn't been written in such a way that was designed to perhaps score political points as opposed to environmental points, because the motion refers only to the executive fleet. I know that there are some reasons and some rationale behind that, but the fact of the matter is that if we really wanted to do something, we would expand beyond and concentrate on more than the executive fleet. When I say that I will probably support this motion, I would be more prone and feel much better about supporting this motion because in fact I believe that there would be more opportunity for this motion to actually result in action on the part of the government if the motion had been thought through just a little bit more.

In fact, the Member for Calgary-Varsity has just been talking a little bit about some of the shortcomings in this motion where there are practicalities that are associated. He talked about some. He talked about weather related and road condition related, but there are also some practicalities that are limiting factors for even the executive fleet. One would assume that the executive fleet is only ever driven in good driving conditions in urban centres, but that's not always the case. There are circumstances where some of the vehicles that are part of the executive fleet have to deal with some difficult kinds of terrain and, more importantly, some remote areas. Some of the ministers in particular but some of the other officials that drive these vehicles find themselves in very remote areas, and service in those remote areas on some of the more exotic vehicles is difficult. Hybrid, for example, is not available in all communities yet. The capacity to do repair on hybrid vehicles requires a very significant investment on the part of the dealer. If a dealer in a small town is not, you know, allocated more than three or four hybrid cars in a given year, at this point in time – it will certainly, undoubtedly change in the future – they're not in a position to be able to buy the necessary equipment to service the vehicles, so there are limitations.

I recognize that the motion does not refer specifically to hybrid vehicles. It does talk about low fuel consumptions, and I give the member credit for that because I don't think that we should be restricting ourselves just to one technology. There are a number of other alternatives that would achieve the same result, so from that perspective the motion is well written.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why I say that we need to think beyond the executive fleet is to look at government-wide operations. We operate about 3,400 vehicles in this government, and there are a lot of those vehicles that would be appropriately targeted for this kind of low fuel consumption target. The Member for Calgary-Varsity pointed out that there are some that clearly wouldn't be. We've made some progress. Admittedly, there's room to make more progress, but we have in excess of a hundred vehicles within the government now that are hybrid vehicles. We have a number of other vehicles that although not hybrid would be classified as being low fuel consumption standard. So we're making some progress.

I would urge all members of the Assembly to think about this motion. I urge members to support this motion because it's sending a message that the government needs to hear, that Albertans need to hear. But let's not just target the executive fleet. Let's think about government-wide operations, and let's be reasonable. Let's not try and get a one-size-fits-all in place and put in a policy that may or may not be practical. Let's instead think of a motion like this as being an opportunity for government to have another look at its overall fleet operations and determine whether or not there could be opportunities for other vehicles to be targeted.

I'm the Minister of Environment. I certainly could not in all good conscience stand up in this House and oppose this motion. This

motion is inherently urging the government to do good things for the environment. What I do point out, though, is that the motion, perhaps, is targeted a little bit more to a very specific, small segment of vehicles that the government operates. One would have to question whether there is political motivation in limiting that or if in fact it was done because the member honestly felt that this would be an appropriate way to move this agenda along.

From my perspective, I'll support the motion, but I'll support the motion almost on the assumption that the words "where appropriate" or "when possible" or "where feasible" would be read into the motion. I know we can't amend motions. There's not a process to amend motions, but the motion also says to "urge the government." It's not binding in that perspective. So from the point of view that I believe that we can send a message to the government, to my colleagues in government, I support this motion. From the point of view of having a hard-and-fast rule, I think that it's an example of trying to fit one size into all packages, and that doesn't necessarily work when we start dealing with issues like this. But, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the Minister of Environment for the previous comments. I know that it may be a surprise to some that we're debating Motion 513 today, but I do hope that there are more speakers on the government side than just the one because I think there is an opportunity here to talk about possibilities in other things that we could be doing as leaders to try and set an example of how we can make a better world and a better Alberta.

It's possible that the motion is before its time, and that wouldn't be the first time that I've seen that in my years in the House. I'm remembering the then Leader of the Official Opposition Ken Nicol, who introduced and campaigned long and hard for a stability fund, which I think is now called the sustainability fund after it was adopted by the government. I'm thinking of the legislation from the then Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, Alice Hanson, on violence against women and family violence prevention, which then came back under the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and was accepted by the government, or, you know, even the idea of a savings plan and various endowments that we're now hearing the government talk about. So it's not the first time that we've had members of the Liberal opposition introduce an idea that took a while to get traction with the hon. members opposite, but that doesn't mean that it's not possible. I am an optimistic person, obviously, in that I'm still standing here in this House.

But I think there's a real opportunity here, and I don't want to see the government miss that opportunity to lead by example.

5:30

I often cast back to some advice that I got from a very well-placed executive in the oil sector who said: well, you know, Laurie, we look to the government to kind of point the way, to show leadership where they think we should be going, and if we don't see any movement from them, if we don't see any examples set, well, we're not going to put ourselves out there. So, you know, people do look to the government members, the front bench, the Assembly members as a whole to lead the way on issues like this. It's okay; you can be a bit cutting edge. That's all right. You could be a little zippy. You could add that to your resumé.

I think the other issue here is around – and this is a touchy subject, so I'm trying to come into this carefully. We are aware of a

branding issue that we have in Alberta, particularly with our neighbours to the south. They've taken some very particular stands about environmental protection and taken some very deliberate moves there that are reflecting back on us. We had those municipalities that actually listed us as having dirty oil. We're struggling with that. It's a communications problem, but it's also an action problem. It is not enough for us to just be paying for more glossy brochures of lovely mountain scenes, going: no, no; really, we're very green. People are looking to us and scrutinizing us to see if we actually are taking action behind those words.

With mass communication, with the constant use of the Internet they can check up on us. It's not as though we can sort of send out our brochure and hope nobody looks back. They can be checking on this debate in the House. They can check the published list that we got from the library of who was driving what kind of vehicle. I mean, it's not hard to get this information. I think it is important that we move forward on this.

I'll use a personal example, and I'll say up front that I have an advantage in that this is my riding. I can walk to work, which I know most of the rest of you can't if you're coming from your constituencies.

An Hon. Member: Long walk.

Ms Blakeman: Very long walk.

I also know that many, many of you, in fact, have purchased condominiums or rent apartments in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre, so I do encourage you to walk, and I think some of you do.

I made a commitment a couple of years ago to try to reduce my driving, you know, down to three days a week and then two days a week and down to one day a week. Just recently my partner and I decided to go down to one vehicle, share one vehicle as a move in having a smaller environmental footprint. Obviously, vehicles are a way that you can do that. We've taken the next step in that move, and we bought a hybrid. It's working out pretty well. Thankfully, I got winter tires put on it. I was in Lethbridge on the weekend and had to drive back. From Nanton to Balzac it was nothing but snow, but it served me very well. We can all take these steps. They don't have to be huge and showy. They can be small and incremental.

I think the opportunity to pass a motion like this signals that the government is interested and, you know, is interested in starting with itself. When we talk about the executive vehicle allowance, that is starting with ourselves. It could have been mischief-making, which was, I think, the point that the Minister of Environment was talking about, but knowing the member who sponsored this, he's not as much a mischief-maker as some of my colleagues. So I'm going to take it that he was pretty straight ahead on that.

Indeed, you know, maybe we could have expanded it to talk about the larger government fleet. Knowing that we have 3,400 vehicles that are considered government fleet vehicles and a hundred that have now been purchased that are hybrids is great, but it's 3 per cent of the whole fleet. I think we need to be a bit more muscular in how we approach this if we are going to try to lead by example.

I think that the Minister of Environment also made some really good points. You know: don't narrow the box. Don't try to shove everybody into driving around in a Toyota Prius because it just doesn't work. The wonderful thing about Alberta is that we've got 83 different constituencies. Some of them are pretty far away, a lot of roads, a lot of miles between here and where you finally stop, at home or your constituency office. Expecting someone to drive a Smart car to Slave Lake is just dumb, and it's pretty unfair for the person that has to drive it. But for some of the people that are in

urban centres, a Smart car might be a good idea or any of the other hybrids that are available. Frankly, Lexus has just come out with a really high-end, complete hybrid vehicle. Well, you know, we've got some people over there: what they want is a nice vehicle. Fine. I'd be much happier if you chose the Lexus hybrid than if you chose something else, like my colleague's V10 or whatever it was. There are different possibilities that are available to match a number of different driving requirements but also personal tastes.

In this Assembly we still allow members of the executive branch and the deputy ministers and various other chairs of committees, et cetera, to choose the vehicles that they want to drive aside from the fleet cars that are made available for people that are driving on government business. You know, if we're going to do that, fine. But there's a range of cars that you can look at that are low emission. I think that's what my colleague was trying to capture.

As I come to closing in support of Motion 513, the issue is whether this is binding. You know, there's support for the motion from my hon. government colleagues if it's voluntary. Just a little reminder that our voluntary requirements have not had a lot of uptake on them. I would prefer if there was something, as I said, a bit more muscular, a bit more vigorous, a bit more committed to actually following this. I don't necessarily see this as having that proviso added onto the end of the motion, but I don't see that that's a reason not to support it. I hope that we will get a great deal of support from a number of other members of the House today in support of my colleague from Calgary-McCall and his Motion 513.

Thank you very much. I do urge everyone to support the motion.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to stand and talk to the motion. I'm going to talk to the motion to say that, you know, in principle there is merit, especially the merit of environment. But in practicality I sure do not want to see this go in any compulsory type of direction. Let me tell you a couple of reasons why. One of them, of course, is my location. Number one, the last time I bought a vehicle, my dealer very much talked to me that he felt the vehicle wasn't secure enough, if you want to call it that, that it didn't have enough stability for the conditions that we have to operate under. Also, the discussion was around that if it's used predominantly on a highway, that that also causes a concern because you're not going to get the value out of it that you think. Thirdly, there are really no vehicles being manufactured except one truck – and it's not the truck of my choice – that offers the option.

I will say this to you, that in my constituency it is really imperative that I have a vehicle that, unfortunately, has to be a four-wheel drive. Some places I can't even get to in a four-wheel drive, and depending on road conditions, most of the time I have to use that four-wheel drive.

5:40

Mr. Speaker, I also want to bring attention – and I can't see anybody here that was with me – that as recently as last Thursday, I believe it was, we were at the fire safety building, and we had discussions and had a demonstration of safety and what firemen need to do in order to be very effective at car accidents. One of the major concerns ends up being a vehicle, what you would call in this situation, that you can't hear run. You get into an accident, and it takes more time. You can't hear the vehicle run, and you subconsciously forget about that. You don't know if it's running, and you start to try, at the time of an emergency, to take the individual out that may be hurt in a vehicle. Then all of a sudden what happens is

the vehicle takes off. You have to make sure that all of those hybrids are blocked up initially. All of this takes just a little bit of extra time.

All I say to you is don't make it compulsory. I understand that from the aspect of the hon. member opposite: "Yeah. Just shut it off." That's easy to do if a vehicle is running, but you don't know if it's running. That's the point.

Ms Blakeman: It's lit up like a Christmas tree.

Mr. Danyluk: It's not a Christmas tree. Lights stay on in any vehicle. I mean, I would love for you to come to the fire department and let them explain to you some of the challenges that they have with hybrids.

Mr. Speaker, my point being, I want to stress that, yes, there are some practical places that these vehicles could be used, but please don't try to impose them on everybody because we will not be able to represent our constituents in rural Alberta to the ability that we can with the vehicles we have in place. Will they develop to the point where maybe we can? Yes. Did I ask when I bought a new vehicle, being the environmentalist that I am? No.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to come in to speak to Motion 513. This motion would require the executive fleet to be comprised of low-emission vehicles. I think it's definitely an idea whose time has come.

Just to go back in time a little bit, Mr. Speaker, as recently as 2004 this government was actually still contemplating the science around global warming and whether it was, in fact, true or not. Thankfully, we've passed that day, but as other people in this House have mentioned, we still have a challenge in this province of projecting I guess what would be called clean environmental standards. I think that one of the ways we could do that here to silence some of the naysayers out there, silence some of the critics of our oil industry, silence some of these people who are protesting up north is to do some of the little things correctly. One of the little things would be to have our government lead by example and require the cars of at least the executive fleet to be low-emission vehicles.

If we do these little things, some of the big things that we can't really do – let's face it; we can't really limit the amount of oil that we produce because that is subject to what the world wants and what the world needs and what the world markets are prepared to pay. We're not at fault for that, but what we can keep in control is what we actually do ourselves as individuals and as government. This would be a great way for the government to lead by example. Go to low-emission vehicles; provide a little bit of cover for our oil and gas industry. Like you say, let's move to the forefront.

Let's put out a nice big announcement paid for by the Public Affairs Bureau that we send out to Saudi Arabia that the Alberta government fleet has now gone to low-emissions vehicles. We seem to be using the Public Affairs Bureau for quite a bit lately. You know, a lot of money is coming out of that thing. I heard the Premier's address to the province. Well, I hear these advertisements on the radio all the time, at least in between Edmonton and Calgary, on the looming brownouts and blackouts that are coming to Alberta. It looks like we are putting the Public Affairs money to use, so we might as well maybe do it this time. We'll send it around the world and say: Alberta gets in with the 21st century, and look what they're doing here. I really think that might be a good thing. In fact, it would be a good thing. It would show that our leaders get it. It

would show that our Premier gets it. It would show that we, too, are trying to do our part as an oil-producing area of the world to at least do some of the small things correctly when a lot of times the big things are out of reach or can't be moved on as quickly as we'd like. That is one of the things.

I also bring up a little bit of sort of what has been discussed here earlier, the debate on whether we make this compulsory or not. It is an interesting debate. Sure, we're loath, especially in a jurisdiction like Alberta, to limit choice. I know it's a darn difficult thing. Personally, I would love to see us be able to come in here and write a law that says: no one shall drive a Hummer. You know, I for one would think that's a decent law, that really at this time and day there comes a point where you look around and say: does society need this? At certain times in certain constituencies we may in fact need that Hummer, but it's so limited that I think governments maybe should be moving in the direction of saying that sometimes this stuff is unnecessary. Sometimes for the overall betterment of mankind and protection of future generations maybe this type of stuff should be limited.

Now, I just point to that as an example. If the government tomorrow acted on that, I know they'll have thousands of people, including car owners, average Albertans, producers of these vehicles, protesting on the Legislature steps saying: "This is unfair. This is un-Albertan. My choice is taken away." I realize that. But that's the trouble sometimes when you make things – decisions like this have to be made with some sort of, I guess, force to them. That one is difficult to do it on, but this one is not. We have people, in particular leadership here in Alberta, that would be able to comply with this, I believe, relatively easily despite some of the protestations we've heard here tonight.

I believe that limiting choice, especially to a narrow group of people, could in fact be used and could in fact be used to show Alberta in a positive light. Sometimes I think that possibly governments have to get better at making some of these hard choices that may in fact have to limit some choice on the extreme edges. You know, we're loath to do it . . .

Mr. Elniski: The problem with socialists.

Mr. Hehr: I heard that, and I'm not a socialist. But, needless to say, governments should in fact at some point in time get into limiting things. There are certain times that leadership comes from being able to say: "No, I guess we're not going to be kids in the candy store. No, we're not going to get everything we want. No, because it says that we're going to do it." That type of comment is absurd. We have to get down to the fact that sometimes we have to make decisions that are better overall, that are better for future generations, that are based on science, and that sometimes say that we're going to do things differently.

I'm glad I came here and got the opportunity to speak to Motion 513. I believe it's something this government could do that would have relatively little impact on our executive fleet's daily lives. I believe that they would be able to choose a vehicle that would still allow them to be able to move around freely, that hopefully would get to 99.9 per cent of the constituents. Maybe a local coffee shop could be used to meet some of them who couldn't be met at certain locations. If some meeting of the minds or the Internet could be used or the telephone could be used to maybe meet those people, that 1 per cent of people we could talk about, maybe some alternative could be reached.

Thank you very much for allowing me the time to speak, and we'll move on from there.

5:50

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has just done us a great service. He's really pinpointed the difference between a liberal and a conservative. A conservative looks at behaviour that he doesn't approve of and he says, "I'm not going to do that." A liberal looks at it and says, "Not only am I not going to do it; I'm going to make it illegal for everybody else to do it as well." So thank you for that clarification. It may explain your great success at the polls.

Again, I'm going to support everything the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has said for reasons to vote against this, but I just want to remind everybody of what the motion reads, what you're voting for. The motion reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require that all vehicles purchased through the executive vehicle allowance be low-emission vehicles.

So it's not limited. It's not optional. It's required. It's all vehicles. As the Minister of Environment has already pointed out, there are several thousand cars, 3,400 vehicles, in the government fleet. Over a hundred of them already are low-emission. So where it makes sense, we're beginning to move in that direction. Not only is this motion political grandstanding, but it's also redundant. I'd urge everybody to vote against it.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to close.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to all the members for their participation in the debate. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say a final few words on Motion 513.

For the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The minister brought up an important point about fire safety. We do not think that this is a reason to oppose this motion. Our fire safety personnel are very well trained, and they have handled a number of innovations when it comes to vehicles, electric windows for example. Our fire personnel are very smart and committed, and they will figure something out about this, too.

This motion will urge the government to observe low-emission standards for all executive vehicles as just a start, and this motion makes sense, Mr. Speaker. Low-emission vehicles lead to improved quality and contribute to the fight against global climate change. By going green, the government can also save taxpayers money and fuel costs. Finally, there's a symbolic value to this initiative.

I want to thank the Minister of Environment for his support of the motion. The Minister of Environment is right. This is not done to get any political points here. There's a sincere, genuine concern about the environment, and that's why the motion was put forward. The government's fleet should be low emission wherever possible but not necessarily hybrids.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning. That's why I said that I urge the government to purchase low-emission vehicles. The senior leadership for our government should be setting an example for all Albertans, and this is the way to do it.

The government's progress on this initiative has been disappointing. Only two members of the cabinet have used their taxpayer-funded vehicle allowance to purchase hybrid cars. That's what I said before, too. Service Alberta mentions that five more are on the way for the executive fleet. To those who might object that these low-emission standards are too expensive, we respond that hybrid vehicles are comparable in price to vehicles ministers and senior

bureaucrats are driving as we speak. To those who might object that this motion is redundant because the government is already committed to increasing the proportion of hybrid vehicles in its fleet, we respond that this is simply not enough.

The Minister of Service Alberta still insists on merely encouraging our public servants to drive low-emission vehicles if they so choose, but Albertans expect real standards when it comes to protecting the environment. The Minister of Service Alberta has repeatedly said in this House that the government is moving in the direction of increasing the proportion of low-emission vehicles in the executive fleet, but drifting in a particular direction is still drifting, Mr. Speaker.

I urge all members of this Assembly to join me in voting for this motion so that Albertans can be assured that we are moving strongly in this direction of a greener, more sustainable government and so we can help protect our environment for future generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 513 lost]

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, may I suggest waiving the bell time?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Hehr	McQueen
Chase	Horne	Renner
Dallas	Kang	Sarich
Denis		

Against the motion:

Benito	Elniski	Lukaszuk
Bhardwaj	Fritz	Morton
Blackett	Groeneveld	Oberle
Danyluk	Jacobs	Prins
DeLong	Johnson	Rodney
Doerksen	Johnston	Webber
Drysdale	Knight	

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 20
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 513 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now stand adjourned till 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 6:02 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

Issue 50

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a very attentive class from Inglewood elementary school. The class made their way from Edmonton-Glenora to the Legislature today to take in a tour of the building and to witness the excitement of question period. Just before entering the Chamber, I had an opportunity to meet the students and pose for a picture as well. They are very excited to be here. I would like to thank the class for coming today, and I would now like to ask the students as well as their teacher, Rodney Corkum, and parent volunteer Wendy Heather to rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 10 high school students from the Strathmore high school. These students are members of a political thought class that is here to tour the Legislature today and will in about 10 days also be travelling to Ottawa. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Mr. Rob Pirie and Mr. Steve Alexander. They are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton-Riverview, like all of Alberta, is a wonderfully diverse place, and it's a great pride for me that I have the distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through to all members of the Assembly the grade 6 class from l'école Notre-Dame, which is a school in my constituency, in fact only the second francophone school to be opened in Edmonton. Its mission is to bring la Francophonie to life for its students while letting them develop to their full potential. They are seated in the public gallery. They are accompanied by their teacher, M. LaRochelle. I would ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 17 very bright grade 6 students from Norwood school in my constituency.

They're accompanied by their teacher, Ms Shannon Chinery, and parent Kim Eades. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly our two new researchers in the Alberta Liberal caucus, Ms Avril McCalla and Mr. Ben Whynot. I'll ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if my guests have arrived or not, but I'd like to introduce two former colleagues of mine from Teck Coal, where I worked for 30 years: Mr. Terry Fredin, the general mine manager, and Mr. Mark Symbaluk, director of environment. I'd ask them to rise if they're here and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the co-chair of Greensense, an organization in Lethbridge. He's here today to highlight his support for green and renewable energy, and I would like to ask Tom Cain to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly roughly 50 members of the Coalition for a Nuclear Free Alberta. The coalition is an umbrella group of about a dozen grassroots organizations from across the province. The coalition's objective is to raise awareness about the true risks and costs of nuclear power. They believe that this province will do better to invest in renewable energy alternatives. They're here because they've not been invited to any open conversation with the government about nuclear power. I would now ask that my guests rise. I hope they are here. I saw them waiting outside on the way in. If they are seated in both the members' and the public galleries, please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is the anniversary of his arrival on the planet Earth, the birthday of the hon. Member for Peace River. Please join with me in conveying appropriate wishes.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Child Abuse Awareness Month

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October is Child Abuse Awareness Month and as such is the perfect time to learn more about the negative impacts of child abuse and neglect on families and on society as well as to consider how we can work together to stop it from happening. I trust we can all agree that no child should have to live in fear, especially of their parents or loved ones. No matter what the circumstances are, no child should ever be victimized. Preventing child abuse and neglect is a community responsibility.

It is reliant upon family members, neighbours, teachers, health professionals, and all others involved in a child's life to report any suspicions they may have about possible abuse or neglect.

During Child Abuse Awareness Month Albertans are encouraged to call the confidential child abuse hotline to report situations of suspected abuse or neglect. Anyone who suspects a child or youth is being abused can call 1.800.387.KIDS. Mr. Speaker, over 8,600 calls were received last month alone, and each of those calls represents a child or youth who may have been at risk. I commend callers for their courage in stepping forward. Any one of those calls may have helped a family cope with a stressful situation that could have brought harm to a child. Any one of those calls may have saved a life.

I encourage individuals and communities to support children, youth, and families by continuing to be vigilant in reporting abuse or neglect. In doing so, we'll create stronger and safer communities here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Waste Reduction Week

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we celebrated the ninth annual Waste Reduction Week in Canada, and people from across the country and this great province took part in activities to help reduce waste and divert waste from landfill. Celebrations like this remind us how we need to start looking at waste as a resource.

Government showed leadership recently by providing Ecotrust grant funding to two projects to do just that. One is a plant in Drayton Valley, the second project to join the Bio-Mile, that will convert waste product from the forest industry to energy. I am proud to see this initiative move forward in my hometown because it will create forest-related jobs, reduce our environmental footprint, and will help with the long-term sustainability of the community.

The second is a project that will transfer waste heat from the city of Edmonton to homes in Strathcona county. When the city of Edmonton's plant is fully operational, the city will divert 90 per cent of its waste from landfill.

During Waste Reduction Week I had the pleasure of visiting two schools, Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley and Our Lady of Peace school here in Edmonton. Grade 4 students in these schools reminded me of the kind of enthusiasm children have for making changes to the recycling habits in their communities. Participating classes registered and conducted a five-day waste audit in the classroom and pledged to reduce waste in the classroom for the rest of the year. Throughout the year we can take steps in our homes, our workplaces, and for our future leaders in the classroom because our resources are indeed too good to waste.

That's why I'm encouraged by the results of increasing beverage container recycling across the province. Since last October beverage container recycling in the province has now risen from 76 per cent to 81 per cent. Our goal was to reach 85 per cent in just three years, so we're well on our way. And since dairy containers have been added to the bottle depot return system, we have already seen significant changes in the recycling behaviours of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

1:40

House of Refuge Mission

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 25 years the House of Refuge Mission has provided food and other aid to the

poor and homeless of downtown Edmonton. House of Refuge always welcomes everyone with warm food, coffee, and spiritual comfort. It is open to all seven days a week, 365 days a year. But on October 22 the mission was issued a closure statement by Alberta Health Services for reasons of public safety. The mission remains open to serve coffee, juice, and prepackaged food, but they can no longer provide the hearty prepared foods such as soups and sandwiches that their clients depend upon.

The good people who run the mission realize that they need to provide a safer, more sanitary environment, but in their own words they are "rich in Spiritual resources [but] poor in practical resources." So today I would ask the community to please step up and help the mission with the practical resources they need to continue their work to provide to those who need it most.

The House of Refuge Mission needs the following: legal aid to determine their best course of action, financial assistance to repair their current rented property or help with finding a new property that meets Alberta Health Services' requirements, assistance in finding prepared foods for the downtown homeless people who won't be able to go to the mission and get a hearty meal until this crisis is resolved, and, finally, some short-term action from this government to feed and clothe the homeless while long-term solutions move forward.

The mission serves between 100 and 300 homeless citizens each and every night, people who for whatever reason don't have access to other charitable resources. These folks have no support system, often very little beyond the clothes on their back. The mission does important work that deserves the support of our community. I urge both citizens and government to help get the mission and its people that they serve so well back on their feet.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Alberta Hospital Edmonton Implementation Team

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 6 the hon. the Premier directed the establishment of an implementation team to provide oversight with respect to changes proposed for Alberta Hospital Edmonton. As the Premier's designate on the committee I'd like to provide an update on our work.

We have three tasks: first, review and, where necessary, recommend changes to future plans for Alberta Hospital Edmonton, including proposed transfers of some existing beds to community-based settings and general hospitals; second, consult with clinical staff, employees, community stakeholders, and, most importantly, patients and their families to ensure their concerns are thoroughly considered; and third, consistent with the Premier's commitment, ensure that community-based mental health resources necessary to support patients affected by any change are in place before implementation proceeds.

Our members, Mr. Speaker, are community and patient focused. We are conducting a systematic and detailed review of proposed changes in three of the hospital's four program areas: geriatric psychiatry, adult acute psychiatry, and rehabilitation psychiatry. As previously announced, forensic services will remain at the present site. Our consultations with patients, staff, and stakeholders will run concurrently with a review of each program area.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier's direction in this matter is a powerful statement about the importance this government places on mental health and mental health care. In the final analysis, this exercise is not about buildings. It is about people and, specifically, how we care for our families, friends, and neighbours affected by mental illness in the communities where they live.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. Our government is committed to making mental health service delivery part of mainstream health care delivery. This means offering access to more mental health services in the community where it is in the interest of patients to do so and not until the necessary community supports are in place. Albertans suffering with mental illness and the 1 in 5 of us that will follow them deserve no less.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Piikani First Nation Housing Project

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the honour of attending an event to commemorate a unique training partnership at the Piikani First Nation community in Brocket on October 2. This is a joint project between Alberta Employment and Immigration and the federal government as well as the Piikani First Nation. The project provides much-needed housing while at the same is training 32 members of the Piikani First Nation in the trades of carpentry, plumbing, electrical, and welding. They can now take that training and apply it to a career that will benefit them and their families as well as their community.

The Piikani First Nation also benefits greatly from this project. There will be 12 new homes built in the community, the first new homes, Mr. Speaker, in 15 years.

For the people of the Piikani community the event symbolized what can be accomplished through the power of believing. I was touched to see many of the people who attended the event that day wear red T-shirts with the word “believe” in bold white letters across their backs. If we are to be successful in lowering the unemployment rate for aboriginal Albertans, all of us must believe in projects such as this one.

The project has been a success in this community, and there are many more just like it happening in other communities across Alberta. I am excited to see what can be accomplished through the power of belief and partnerships.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Firefighters and Military Personnel

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great humility that I rise today to pay honour to those who serve with pride and protect us when we need them the most. Last Wednesday and Thursday I had the privilege with a number of my caucus colleagues to experience and learn about the extreme challenges that face both our firefighters and military personnel. Also last week we became very aware of a frightening and unfortunate situation that unfolded up the street at the WCB offices, a situation that could have been much worse if it weren't for the professionalism and expertise of our law enforcement officers.

Mr. Speaker, with this fresh in my mind I wanted to take the opportunity to thank all of the men and women in our province and right across Canada who put on a uniform every day to serve and protect us in the most difficult of circumstances. These individuals are the most selfless in our society, putting their lives on the line for our safety, security, and happiness. From crawling through a burning house without being able to see because of thick toxic smoke, sometimes not finding the source of the fire until surrounded by flames, or scouring the hinterland of Afghanistan for weeks at a time, living out of nothing but a light armoured vehicle while requiring a constant state of alertness, or remaining calm and

professional after being thrust into a volatile situation, where every move you make could cost lives, these are the day-to-day experiences of our brave men and women in uniform.

I also want to thank the families and loved ones of these men and women. Mr. Speaker, I can't imagine the feeling of kissing or hugging a loved one each and every time they went off to work knowing that it was possible that they may not return home the same or even at all. I would love to call these men and women and their families heroic, but I can't. It does not even begin to justify or describe the sacrifices that they make. These people are our guardian angels. They show up in times when we need them the most, when our safety and security are threatened, and in the most dire and trying of circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Thanksgiving was a few weeks ago, but it took me until last week to figure out what I'm truly thankful for the most.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Bill 54

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce Bill 54, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a direct result of the hard work of the Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee, an all-party special committee of the Legislature that in 2006 undertook a complete review of the act and tabled a report to the Legislature in November 2007 outlining recommendations for amendments. This bill incorporates a number of their proposed amendments.

The main proposals for change include emerging issues such as notifying the commissioner or individuals about security breaches that place personal information at risk and informing individuals when services involving personal information are occurring outside of Canada. Mr. Speaker, as required for any new legislation in a rapidly evolving area, this bill also does some updating and fine-tuning of the existing provisions of this act.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 54 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Vaccination

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has been warned for the past year that its handling of Alberta Health Services was creating an organizational train wreck. Albertans are now living that train wreck, and they're angry. Yesterday this government said that it had only days to get ready for the pandemic vaccine, yet national news stories since September 16 were telling the country that vaccines would be out in the third week of October. To the

Premier. Your minister has had more than a month to prepare, and he has failed. What do you say to Albertans who are standing in the cold and wet for hours because your government created health care chaos?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let's put this in perspective. This is the largest flu vaccination program of its kind in the history of the province of Alberta. I want to acknowledge all of the hard work of the front-line health care providers for the many, many hours administering the flu vaccine. Any other detail the minister of health will cover.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have direct reports, corroborated by photographs which I'll table later, that large numbers of workstations in the big-city immunization clinics are unstaffed while Albertans shiver in lineups for hours. To the Premier: how can it be that Albertans have to wait outside while immunization stations are unstaffed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to put things in perspective. In this province today the health care system is delivering health care uninterrupted, the way it did yesterday, the way it did a month ago and a year ago. We are undergoing, as the Premier said, the largest immunization in the history of this country. So above that delivery model, that is operating on an hour-to-hour basis throughout the province, we layer over this mass immunization program. Alberta Health Services has made best efforts to go and recruit as many health professionals as they possibly can. They are doing an outstanding job. I must admit that the take-up by Albertans has been significantly higher than we anticipated out of the chute on this program, and that's a good thing. We will work towards ensuring that all Albertans can be accommodated as soon as possible.

Dr. Swann: That's hardly credible, Mr. Speaker, when in past immunization clinics there were dozens of centres for providing immunization. Why have we cut back, then?

Finally, to the Premier. There are widespread reports that some government MLAs have had special immunization clinics provided. Can the minister of wellness confirm whether or not special provisions were made for government members?

Mr. Liepert: Well, if there were special provisions, they must have been for those guys over there, Mr. Speaker, because I can tell you that unless one of our members is in that higher risk category, we will be in line like everyone else. To make those accusations is politicizing an unfortunate situation, and I would suggest that if this member has got evidence as to who he's talking about, table it in this Legislature.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last spring we've been hearing from across the province – from physicians, nurses, technicians, administrators, from the public – that Alberta Health Services is in organizational paralysis 18 months after the last re-organization. Because of the decisions of this Minister of Health and Wellness we now see evidence in the H1N1 as a symptom of

this. To the Premier: what is he doing to hold this minister of health accountable for this mess in the health care system today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, on any average day within the province of Alberta over 5,300 people are at some emergent care centre; another 500 are in an urgent care centre; 165,000 laboratory tests on an average day; 27,000 hours of home care provided; 140 babies born, on the average, every day. That's good. A mini baby boom in the province of Alberta tells us that people still look at Alberta as a land of opportunity. At least 700 are going through emergency in an ambulance on any given day. And we spend about \$30 million a day on health care in this province. That's what's happening in the province of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's become all too common in recent years for every acute-care bed to be plugged in Calgary and Edmonton; in other words, not a single hospital bed available in either big city. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: as this pandemic begins to hit, is it true that there's no surge capacity in existing beds to take care of H1N1 victims?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we can stand here and we can fearmonger and try and scare the public all we want. But what I've noticed in the last 24 hours is that the public has said, "We are taking this situation seriously; we are going to get vaccinated because we do not want to be in emergency taking up hospital beds," as the member alludes to. Now, I can say that in the past week we have had 12 hospitalizations, not out of the ordinary, so there is no indication, that I'm aware of, that what the member is alluding to is actually occurring. We do recognize, however, that the crest of this flu will probably happen sometime in November, and that's why it's important over the next two or three weeks for people to get vaccinated.

Dr. Swann: One of the tents bought to provide extra capacity in case of pandemic has been operating for 18 months as the emergency ward at the Stollery children's hospital. Will this tent be emptied and converted for pandemic purposes? If so, what will happen to the normal emergency demands at the Stollery, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually there's a plan that doesn't include what this particular member is referring to. Let me be clear. As of Thursday we're expecting another shipment of the vaccine. That will allow us enough vaccine dosage to now start distributing across the province to physicians and hopefully by next week to pharmacists. We've got some 400 certified pharmacists who can administer the vaccine. We will be having it available in some of the health clinics around the province. We have to remember that there was a limited amount of vaccine at the initial tranche because, despite what this member says, the original intent was that this vaccine would not be available until November. It's earlier than anticipated. That's a good thing. I would suggest that when we get into this time next week, I think this vaccine will be available across the province in a number of areas – physicians' offices, pharmacies – and they'll go on to some other issue.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Premier. The parliamentary assistant for Energy was recently

quoted as saying that next week's meetings of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment would be, in effect, a public consultation giving the public an opportunity to discuss Bill 50, and the Premier indicated as much yesterday in his answers to my questions in question period. But the standing committee is not holding hearings on Bill 50 next Monday or Wednesday night because Bill 50 has never been referred to it. To the Premier: why is the government claiming the public will be able to have their say on Bill 50 when that's not the case?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, very selective hearing on behalf of the member. I listed as to who will be present at the meetings, I believe, on the 2nd and the 4th. There will be some people talking about grizzly bears. There will be some people presenting a topic on green energy. There will be some from Enmax if they accept the invitation. There will be some from other generators, and they will talk about the value of generating electricity from all sources in the province of Alberta. There may even be some discussion about transmission. But the issue here is a little bit of a play on words. When we talk about committee, the committee is here. It's one of the stages of the bill. So here in this Legislature, once the bill goes into committee stage, we will have a full and open debate in the Legislative Assembly, right here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 50 will result in billions of dollars' worth of infrastructure getting slapped on Albertans, yet this government's response to the outcry over this is a discussion on grizzly bears along with some presentations from some of the power generators. Look, I don't suppose grizzlies like big, high-voltage power pylons in their backyards anymore than anybody else does, but doesn't the Premier see that this closed, undemocratic forcing through of this bill is completely and utterly inappropriate?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Well, I guess if the Liberals aren't interested in grizzly bears, then they don't have to attend. They don't have to listen if they're not interested in wildlife. All I know, Mr. Speaker, is that in the province of Alberta we lose about \$250 million worth of generated electricity because of congestion and old transmission lines. We also know that we're growing demand the equivalent of two cities of Red Deer every year. We also fully understand that if we're going to grow the value-added, we need more energy in different parts of the province, especially the Industrial Heartland and Fort McMurray.

We'll have, again, the opportunity to talk about the bill, debate it here in the House just like any other regular bill. We laid it over the spring so that people could read the bill, bring their comments to their MLAs, and that's where the debate will take place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I guess we could get into a discussion at another time about which one of us is the grizzly and which one is the salmon, but we'll leave that for another time.

The dissent over Bill 50 is widespread, Mr. Speaker. Even the PC Constituency Association of Foothills-Rocky View has a resolution going in front of next week's convention of that party asking that "the government of Alberta not proceed with Bill 50 in the fall session of the Alberta Legislature." Why won't the Premier listen to all of these concerns with this multibillion-dollar boondoggle and pull this flawed bill from the government agenda?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, well, at least we have a party that's open and transparent and actually has people that come to an annual meeting as opposed to the Liberals, that I don't know even if they do have an annual meeting and nobody brings up issues within their discussion.

All I know is that we've had a number of public consultations on need. We're going to discuss the bill here in the House. We'll debate it just like any other bill that comes before the House, and they'll have equal opportunity to get up and talk about the bill and make all kinds of different allegations. But at the end of the day we know that we have to move the electricity from one corner of this province to another. It's got to be done much more efficiently and effectively. I don't know why in the world we'd be burning more coal, creating more carbon, and still getting less electricity to the consumer.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for High-risk Albertans

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The health minister's handling of the H1N1 vaccine program is failing to reach high-risk communities, where early immunization should have been targeted. The minister doesn't care about inoculating the homeless or aboriginal and First Nations communities. Yet in Edmonton there is no program in place to inoculate the homeless. The H1N1 flu shot should have been available in shelters from the start. This government's flu vaccine program has been badly planned, badly organized, and badly led. My question is to the Premier. Why have you allowed your health minister to ignore the vulnerable communities, who are at the greatest risk of being cut down by the H1N1 virus?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our housing minister has the full details on how we will be preparing to immunize all of the homeless people in the province of Alberta.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be very pleased to meet with this member – I know that we did address this question yesterday in question period – and actually go to the good organizations we have in Edmonton that are offering the vaccine to our homeless. We could go to the Hope Mission, which has a well-established tradition of 80 years of looking after our homeless, and Boyle Street. There are a number of good organizations. We've had some very, very good staff – Susan McGee, whom I am sure you know, and others – who have been working on that pandemic plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how the housing minister knows about an immunization program, but I can tell her and I can tell this House that the agencies in the inner city of Edmonton cannot get the vaccine, cannot get word from Alberta Health about when they'll be able to start offering that vaccine. I have no idea what the health minister knows about that, if anything, but certainly the question is to the Premier: why has this government failed the homeless, the people in shelters and rooming houses, who are four times more likely to die a premature death because they are so vulnerable? Why have you ignored them? Why haven't you provided vaccine for them, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know what? I'm going to take the word of this nurse over any bus driver any doggone time.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we could all refer to each other by our previous occupations. I could do that to the Premier, but it's beneath me. It should be beneath him as well. We're all members of this Assembly, Mr. Premier. Your arrogance is beyond belief.

I want to know why aboriginal groups will not get the H1N1 flu shot immediately. They're lagging behind in remote and impoverished communities. This government's own MLAs are saying that a single clinic is expected to service 45 remote northern communities where many aboriginals and First Nations groups live. How can the Premier explain that from the very outset his immunization program ignores aboriginal communities at greatest risk of contracting the H1N1 virus?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Instead of rising on a point of order, why don't I just set the member straight right now and save the House some time later? We have an aboriginal communities initiative that involves people from the First Nations. It involves people from the Métis settlements. It involves people from the Métis Nation of Alberta. It's an extremely effective group. I can tell you that we've already ensured that vaccinations have been provided to the majority of the communities that are referenced. At the same time, we also have the five zones set up by Alberta Health Services, and the aboriginal community members are working with them. We also have 20 native friendship centres that are disseminating this information so that full access to the clinics will be available. In most cases it already is, and if not, it should be available by the end of this week.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Aboriginal Albertans

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Alberta live in rural and isolated communities. In Bonnyville-Cold Lake I have two Métis settlements and three First Nations. The federal immunization priority list has identified the aboriginal population as a priority group to receive the H1N1 vaccine. My questions are to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. I want to ensure that my aboriginal communities are a priority in this government's response to H1N1. What is the plan for H1N1 vaccination for the First Nations in Alberta?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the aboriginal communities are definitely a priority for our government and for the government of Canada, and we're working very closely on the response plan to ensure that the H1N1 vaccine is provided to all the reserves in Alberta as well as all the Métis settlements. I just commented on the MNA group and the people living off settlement and off reserve. However, we're also working with the Public Health Agency of Canada and with our own aboriginal communities committee, which is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that these clinics are up and running as quickly as possible.

I'll just close by saying that I've just spoken to a number of chiefs today just to verify that the vaccines have arrived. They have, and in most cases they're already being provided through the clinics' vaccination programs. So we know it's working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that the federal government plays a lead role in supporting First Nations people living on reserves, can the minister tell us what steps are being taken to ensure that residents of the Métis settlements are also getting access to the same level of support?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, among other things we have the provincial Emergency Management Agency, which is working with the local municipalities to ensure that there are no gaps in the provisions for the planning of the H1N1 clinics nor in prevention initiatives to stop it from ever taking root.

Specific to your riding, hon. member, I can tell you that the Elizabeth Métis settlement has the vaccine. I can tell you that the Fishing Lake settlement has the vaccine, and they have been vaccinating since 2 o'clock today. I guess they've just started. So there are plans already in place, and the rest will be up and operational very soon, in a matter of days.

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. Given that close to 65 per cent of aboriginal people in Alberta live in urban communities, are there any special strategies to overcome the challenges faced by these individuals?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we in Aboriginal Relations are working very closely with the Ministry of Health and Wellness. We're in touch with them on a daily basis. I can assure you that the five zones that I referred to earlier are ready and up and running, and they're receiving aboriginal people as one of the priority groups along with others that the Minister of Health and Wellness and our Premier have mentioned as being in the vulnerable area. So the planning is in place. There are no gaps so far. We care deeply about all Albertans and will ensure that they get the services they require in this respect.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:10

Physician Supply

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Throughout this summer we've been hearing loud and clear that Albertans are concerned about access to a family doctor, whether it's getting a family doctor in the first place or getting in to see the doctor in a timely fashion. For example, almost 20 per cent of Calgarians do not have a family doctor. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. Alberta is growing, and we are losing ground and falling behind the target for family doctors per person. Why isn't the government doing more to encourage physicians to enter family practice?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not quite that simple. Let me explain the situation that actually does occur in Calgary. We have a PCN at Crowfoot village mall that has moved to a different model of delivering health care. They've moved to a team-based model. They're using other professionals in delivering health care. They're under a different payment system, and they're seeing 25 per cent more patients. So I would suggest that if 25 per cent of Albertans don't have a family doctor – if all of our physicians moved to team-based care under a different payment model, that would allow us to have those 25 per cent who don't have family doctors all getting team-based care in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. To the same minister: then is the minister saying the government is abandoning its targets for increasing the number of family physicians per capita?

Mr. Liepert: I don't think that if the member checked *Hansard*, he would see that at all. The Minister of Advanced Education can elaborate if he so chooses, but we're actually increasing our number of seats at the postsecondary institutions and medical school. In fact, I met with some of them yesterday. They are very pleased with the move that the government is making relative to rural initiatives. They are very pleased about the fact that they're going to have opportunities to work in team-based care, Mr. Speaker, and they very much believe like we do: if you keep doing things the same way you've always done them, you're likely not to get any different results.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the medical students are very concerned that the rural integrated community clerkship program, it is rumoured, is being cut. I ask the minister here in the Assembly today: can the minister make a commitment to increase the number of medical students who choose to practice in rural settings, and will he continue to see that the rural integrated community clerkship program is supported and expanded?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, now I know why they came into my office wondering if this program was going to be cut: because they probably met with this member, who was spreading rumours, before they were at my meeting.

I can assure this Assembly, although we have not finalized our budget for next year, that if that was one of the things that I put on the table with this caucus, with these rural members, I'd be run out of the room.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Over the past two months there has been a great deal of confusion over the changes at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. I have heard from my constituents that these changes are going to result in mental health patients being forced onto the street. How can the minister allow this to happen?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised that this member has heard this from constituents because I heard these irresponsible statements across the floor here just yesterday from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. They are absolutely irresponsible statements. What we have so often been accused of on this side of the House is: well, what's the plan? So we roll out a three-year plan for the treatment of mental health patients, and then you have these kinds of statements that scare that member's constituents, and I understand why that is. We will not move one patient until we have the community setting that treats that patient in an environment that is superior to where they are today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Two months after it was announced that the Alberta

Hospital site would not be redeveloped, an implementation team was put in place. Can the minister tell us what this committee has done and why this work was not done in the first place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that in hindsight there are probably occasions when every one of the members in this House would take a look at what we've done and maybe would have done something a little bit differently. So you take a pause. You say: is there a way that we can ensure that this particular rollout is going to be smoother than what we've got as the belief out there? The Premier has asked me, and we have appointed a committee. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford delivered a very impassioned statement in this House today a little earlier very much outlining what the committee work is going to entail. I'm very confident that this committee made up of stakeholders, many of them involved in the mental health community, is going to ensure that this transition is a smooth one.

Mr. Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. We don't need to be causing more stress on the mental health patients and their families. There's so much confusion out there. Can the minister give the House any detail on the plan for the patients and their families?

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I think is not well known is that on any given day in the capital region of the province there are more mental health acute beds in service outside of Edmonton hospital than inside Edmonton hospital. On a daily basis patients are moving back and forth from the community to Edmonton hospital, and that will continue. So if you happen to read by open letters from certain physicians or certain psychiatrists at Alberta Hospital that there are actually patients moving back and forth between the Edmonton institution and the community, yes, there are. Always have been; always will be. But I can assure you that as recently as yesterday in discussions with Dr. Duckett there is no intention to move any unit from Edmonton hospital into the community before April, May of 2010.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you rose on a point of order as a result of something the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness said in response to the first question of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I think he meant someone else, Mr. Speaker. I didn't talk about mental health yesterday.

The Speaker: You want to rise on a point of order later?

Mr. Mason: No. That's good enough.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, fine. We're making progress. This is good.

Lethbridge-East, followed by Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Conversion of Agricultural Land

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have now been given the agricultural portfolio to be the critic for, so the Minister of Health and Wellness will just have to wait for another day.

Agricultural land loss poses a very real threat to agricultural producers in Alberta; 86 per cent of the land we've lost has gone to residential subdivision, oil and gas activity. This government invests

hundreds of millions of dollars in agriculture, yet conversion and loss of land continue to accelerate. Alberta must continue to have internationally competitive agricultural practices. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. We can't wait any longer. What concrete measures have you put in place in the last year to protect agricultural land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the Member for Lethbridge-East for being the agriculture critic. And I congratulate her for the question because now we get in on some sanity. She didn't ask a question that was fearmongering because the question is a true question, and it is a bit of a fear for us in Alberta. I appreciate the question.

Agriculture and Rural Development certainly is concerned about the agricultural land that's disappearing out there. Unfortunately, it happens around the big cities, all the cities, the big towns, the more progressive towns. It's a problem that we have out there, a problem that we intend to deal with. We know that the land-use policy and property rights, Mr. Speaker, certainly are very important issues to our agricultural producers.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. To the same minister, of course: what are the definitive plans to ensure that our farmers aren't selling off the back 40 to survive?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, we have some issues in the works, thank goodness, Mr. Speaker. We certainly know that the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land is important to all Albertans and, indeed, to all municipalities. I encourage all Albertans and municipalities to join in with the minister of sustainable resources with his land-use framework. It's an important part of it. It'll be important to you, hon. member. The South Saskatchewan River basin, of course, is coming up this year. They've put together a committee. It's largely agricultural, but it's an across-the-board committee. I would certainly encourage you and your people to get involved in that part of it because a huge part of it is going to be devoted to land use.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That partly answers my third question because what I was going to ask you is what you've done to ensure that the protection of the agricultural land is a priority in the land-use framework regional plan. Perhaps you could speak to that. You have a bit. Please elaborate.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a priority, of course. But, you know, as ag minister it's a priority for me, it's a priority for my department, but it certainly has to be a priority for the agriculture people out there. They're the ones that have to get involved in this. They have to make their thoughts and worries and fears, whatever they may be, known. They have to get to the people on this board. There are going to be consultation meetings, I understand, but we have to be more involved. I sometimes think that agriculture is the weak sister in all the land-use framework, so I appreciate where you're coming from because it's certainly where I intend to go with agriculture.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Deposit-refund System

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been less than six months since the government introduced milk containers into the deposit-refund system. Most constituents I've talked to about this change think it's a good idea, but not everyone is convinced. I've also heard from nonprofit groups such as food banks who say that they face added expenses. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Doesn't the addition of milk into the deposit system provide too much hardship for food banks and other charities, especially as we move towards the Christmas season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be very clear at the outset that we completely support the work that a lot of these nonprofit organizations are doing, and we'll do everything that we can to assist them and appreciate some of the financial pressures that they're under. But let's also not forget that the goal of this program is to increase the amount of recycling and keep containers out of landfills. I'm pleased to report that to that end a number of the organizations that are involved with processing these containers, from the handling facilities all the way through to the dairy board, are meeting as we speak and trying to seek some solutions to assist some of these very worthy nonprofit organizations to deal with some of the pressures that they're under.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister. Many communities already have an effective voluntary recycling system in place. In fact, Calgary just introduced curbside recycling this spring. So why make this change?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I applaud some of the work of some of the municipalities throughout the province. But I have to remind the member that there are only limited parts of the province that are covered by such a program and that even under that program the return rate was not nearly approaching the 85 per cent that we've set as a target. We believe that by raising the issue of milk containers and including them in a deposit-based system, we should have similar kinds of results that we're experiencing with juice and pop.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement to the same minister: has the introduction of milk into the deposit system really made a difference in recycling rates? Mr. Minister, what percentage of containers are being recycled under this initiative?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's early in the process to make conclusive statements, but clearly the imposition of deposits has had a tremendous effect on the return rate. In fact, the numbers have almost tripled from what they were prior to the deposits being in place. The detailed results have been reported, and we will be releasing those details on the exact percentages tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Water Allocation in the Crowsnest Pass

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Environment gave assurances that there is enough water for new development despite the fact that the South Saskatchewan River basin is closed to new water licences and Okotoks and Strathmore are projected to run out of water in the next couple of years. To the Minister of Environment. The Crowsnest Pass was denied a water licence last year because of the closure to the water basin. So why does the minister continue to say that there is enough water for new development?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, what this member forgets is that the per capita consumption of water in southern Alberta is tremendously higher than similar kinds of communities elsewhere in the world. So there's an opportunity there, a huge opportunity, if we get our act together with respect to water conservation. But I've also said and I said yesterday that the reason that we're engaging in the review of the water allocation system is to provide for a way of having the existing water users share available water with some of the new users.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given that the Crowsnest Pass is appealing for their right to drinking water, with court costs at about \$20,000 for their municipality, and that last year the province spent \$85 million in a lawsuit over water rights, how much of the taxpayer money is the minister willing to spend before he moves on new water rights legislation?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the appeal that the member refers to is the subject of the Environmental Appeals Board. I'm not going to comment on that because at the end of the day the final decision rests with me, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment until I've received the advice from that board. But I must say that the rhetoric that's coming out of this member is incredible. We have taken a proactive approach. We've talked about the need for us to review our legislation, to provide for a facility so that the water – and I remind the member that the amount of water is a finite amount of water, not infinite. We can't go on assuming that we can just issue licences whenever and wherever they're requested.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. So, Mr. Speaker, Albertans do not have secure access to water, to drinking water. We don't have a fair allocation system. The first in time, first in right is an archaic system, and it sucks, frankly. We don't have enough water left over to protect our ecosystems. For more than a year now the minister has been saying that he might possibly, maybe, at some point, is thinking about, should get around to doing something. Mr. Minister, can you put a date on this review, on this legislation, on the Water Act that's going to be before us? Put a date on it.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member talks about the last year and, in her words, the inaction on the part of this minister. I'd remind this member that we've had a thorough review and recommendations from the Water Council through their WATSUP committee. Dr. David Percy from the University of Alberta has provided me with a detailed recommendation and review of the system. We've had the Alberta water institute doing an interjurisdictional review. All of those reports are now on my desk. They are being combined and put into a policy. I can advise the member that that policy will be ready to bring forward to the public either later on this fall or early next spring.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Nuclear Power Consultation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Albertans from across the province are saying that they are not interested in bringing nuclear power to our province, but instead of listening to what they have to say, the most secretive government in Canada chose to meet behind closed doors with only selected participants. Will the Minister of Energy today release the results of their managed consultation so that the rest of Albertans can get in on the discussion and tell this government once and for all that they don't want nuclear power in our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to that question is no because I don't have the report. When it's available, when they've finished doing the work, at that point in time we will assess it and make Albertans aware of the result.

2:30

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in contrast to Alberta, Saskatchewan held a transparent public hearing process that began in July and ended in August of 2009, and they released the findings last month. They reported over 80 per cent opposition to nuclear power. Now the government of Saskatchewan is backing away from it because it's too expensive and it's unreliable. Why won't the Minister of Energy come clean with Albertans, admit that nuclear power is not viable, and move on to real efforts to build renewable energy in this province?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm not able to speak for the energy minister or the Premier of the province of Saskatchewan, but what I can do is indicate to you that there are probably at least three times more people in the province of Alberta that we need to consult with in the first place. Should it take a little bit longer to get it right? I believe so. That's exactly what we're intending to do. We will get this right, and when Albertans have given us what they think is the answer relative to this issue, we will make that available to Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that very interesting because, in fact, in Saskatchewan they had public hearings, with over 2,600 people attending. How many people showed up to your public hearings? None.

We know that in order to be a viable source of energy for Alberta, at least four nuclear power plants would have to be built, at a cost of somewhere around \$30 billion. Today in Alberta there are wind-powered projects just waiting for approval that would bring the power of one of those plants online immediately at a fraction of the cost with none of the risks. Why won't the Minister of Energy listen to the few Albertans he has consulted, talk to the rest of them, and reject once and for all the costly, inefficient, and environmentally unsustainable spectre of nuclear power?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that there is not a single application from the province of Alberta or Saskatchewan that I'm aware of that's in front of the nuclear regulators in Canada today, none.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Education Funding Formulas

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been hearing from three of the school boards in our riding about recent cuts of some \$80 million to school board budgets. In addition, I think many of us have seen the ads where the ATA and the ASBA have expressed their interest in this issue. To the minister: if investing in our education is really so critical to the economic prosperity and recovery of this province, why would the minister contemplate taking some \$80 million from some of our school boards when they themselves feel it would be counterproductive?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the budget was presented earlier this year, it was clear that there was an in-year adjustment that was going to be required, and every department was asked to do a value review of their functions to determine what savings could be made to meet that target for the adjustment. Our assigned target was \$80 million. We looked at what was happening in our department, and we took \$24 million out of the budget to the department by seeing what could be deferred, what could be done differently, how we could do it in a different way. That's 20 per cent of the budget to the department itself. The others were assigned to the school boards to come out of reserves.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I accept the explanation, as a former trustee myself the question begs answering: why would a board that is fiscally prudent and puts money aside for identified projects be penalized or have money taken back when those boards who haven't been as fiscally prudent have nothing to contribute?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what we were trying to accomplish was to make sure that the students in the classroom were not affected by this adjustment. That was the important outcome that was necessary for the process. When we went to the school boards, we first adjusted two grants that could be adjusted by virtue of results from Statistics Canada. In other words, we do one top-up grant for cost indexing and another one for socioeconomic status, so those would have been adjusted in any event. School boards would have expected that. Then we went to school boards and said: we'll take up to but not more than 11 per cent of your operating reserve and ask you to take it out of operating reserve, not out of the classroom. In other words, we all saved for a rainy day. We all saved for a purpose. Now is the time when we need to use some of those resources not to cancel projects but to stretch them out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I guess the next obvious and final question is: of the boards that you took money from, when we return to balanced budgets, would you specifically look at returning money to those specific boards who contributed to this situation in the first place?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is having conversations with boards around the province and asking them to participate with us in the value review process so that decisions can be made, as we go forward, on a thoughtful, evidence-based, and value-driven basis, and we will be doing that with boards. There will be some

changes as a result of our discussions, undoubtedly, in funding formulas. I have to say that not all boards would agree that the funding formulas have been effective for all of them to date, so they're all thoughtfully working with us on developing the right funding model, recognizing that we're in difficult fiscal times but also recognizing that all of our decisions need to be based on evidence and value driven.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Government Accommodation Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twelve million dollars has been spent on hotels and food by this government here in Alberta over the last two years. In a recession, with tens of thousands of Albertans losing their jobs, unfortunately, and many seeing their retirement savings dwindle, this government actually increased spending on hotels last year by over \$2 million. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board. How can this government justify a \$2 million increase in spending on hotels in a recession year when at the same time the province is faced with a deficit of \$7 billion?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, you can take the downturn in the economy and the recession and you can sit there and pretend that you can't drive your way out of it or that you can't change. We've seen several things change in this government, and to get change right, you need to talk to the people that you're working with. The Minister of Education has gone through one of the most, we've heard, enlightening, stimulating, effective ways to talk about a new way of delivering education. Well, these people come from all over Alberta. The minister of health has been involved in working with health providers. We actually believe on this side that there is value in meeting with Albertans, sometimes where they live, sometimes in Edmonton or Calgary, and we'll continue to consult with Albertans so that the results we get going forward make us stronger than ever.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. I can't understand why you can ask civil servants and nurses and others to work longer for less when you yourself won't tighten your belt. Why is this government telling ministries to cut programs for Albertans while it continues to spend millions of dollars at the Fairmont hotel, the Delta, Banff Park Lodge, the Hilton, the Crowne Plaza, and even the Fantasyland Hotel? That's just to name a few.

Mr. Snelgrove: I've got a hunch they've named a room after him in the Fantasyland Hotel. I won't know for sure.

Mr. Speaker, one of the pillars of going forward is to make sure that we not only sell our products around Canada and around the States but around the world. We are attracting businesses here to come and look. We are attracting governments and organizations to come and see what we're doing in Alberta and how we're doing it. It's important for us, the MLAs and ministers, to travel to where we're going to be doing business and understand these people. So, yes, we are investing and going around the world and developing markets for our products, and we're proud of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the hon. minister's favourite hotel was the Hotel Macdonald.

My third question is to the minister of children's services. There was \$160,000 from children's services last year spent at the Radisson hotel and convention centre. Was that money, that 160 grand, spent for children in need, or was it spent for senior management?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will get that information to this member.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Reclaimed Waste Water

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. A major greenhouse and gardening business in St. Albert is currently building a large, new, environmentally friendly operation adjacent to Big Lake provincial park. As one of their many environmental initiatives in designing their operation, they proposed to reuse grey water for landscaping and other environmentally friendly purposes. Apparently, they were denied a permit to use grey water because the Alberta building code requires that grey water must go directly into an approved sewage system. My question to the minister: does your department endorse the environmentally friendly concept of reusing grey water for other purposes?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a growing interest in using grey water to help protect the environment. We don't have any regulations or codes in place to mitigate risks at this time, and I do want to emphasize that there are health and environmental risks. But we have established a group, a reclaimed water working group, that will develop regulations and standards and guidelines to facilitate safe use. Until this framework is established, reclaimed waste water cannot be used in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the St. Albert greenhouse development and several other housing proposals for grey water systems in the city of St. Albert and I know in the county of Lac Ste. Anne and I'm sure there are other areas as well, is your department actually proposing amendments to the Alberta building code to recognize proactive environmental advances in construction technology?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a good concept that could help protect Alberta's environment. The working group will explore the benefits and the risks. When the risks are mitigated, we will update the code. I just want to emphasize that the initiative very much supports the Alberta water for life strategy. Presently, Environment can issue a site-specific approval. More importantly, using reclaimed water for various purposes can help conserve the water resources of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: is your department prepared to initiate pilot projects to keep abreast of new environmental developments?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I think the issue of a pilot project would probably be more in the purview of the Ministry of Environment, so I'll answer the member's question.

Clearly, recycling of water is critical if we're going to be engaging in water conservation. I referred to that even earlier in question period today. Grey water is already used in some industrial applications. The current policy has a case-by-case analysis done, and that would be available to this particular development.

In the long term, though, Alberta Environment is working very closely with Municipal Affairs to review the policy, to develop a new policy so that we can have a much more robust system that will allow for these kinds of innovative projects to be approved on a more consistent basis and with far less hassle than would be the case today on a case-by-case basis. I applaud this particular development. I'm aware of it. I understand that it is truly leading edge. I'm hoping, whether it be a pilot project or any other way, that we can accommodate this project but, more importantly, we are able to develop that broader context for a policy in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 84 questions and responses today.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an electronic petition received in my office over the summer months. This petition states:

We, the undersigned, request Alberta Health Services re-examine their decision to relocate Ambulance Dispatch Services to Calgary from Medicine Hat.

It is our opinion that moving Ambulance Dispatch Services to Calgary is detrimental to our region.

A total of 1,386 individuals signed their names to this petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings from constituents today. The first is from Ian and May Dalziel, and they are writing with concerns around the condominium act and looking for legislation that could limit the percentage of rental units in a condominium.

The second tabling – actually, it does look to be a form letter – is from Lawrance Landry, also in my constituency, laying out concerns around French immersion funding.

The next is from Walter Sheluk, also a constituent – he managed to misspell my name, but that's okay – who is very unhappy with the direction of the current Alberta government in "attacking the citizens of Alberta who are ill" and is critiquing Dr. Duckett's performance.

Finally, from Anthony Falls, also a constituent. He makes the point that living downtown, he can "see on a daily basis what happens to people who can get the help they need." He's referring specifically to Alberta Hospital Edmonton and asking that it be redeveloped.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first tabling I have is a letter that I received from the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness regarding the revised drug plan for seniors, and certainly his response is, as usual, interesting.

The second tabling I have is copies of a petition that was organized by Dorothy Black, and it was presented to our constituency office on October 16, 2009. It is from citizens across the province petitioning the Legislative Assembly to vote against Bill 50.

My third tabling is the accommodation expenses from the government of Alberta blue book for the year ended March 31, 2008, and the blue book for the year ended March 31, 2009. It's prepared by the Alberta Liberal caucus. I would think the Public Affairs Bureau will be checking my math, and they're welcome to do that, Mr. Speaker.

My last tabling is the accommodation expenses from the government of Alberta blue book for the year ended March 31, 2008, and for the blue book for the year ended March 31, 2009. The totals are there for everyone to see. This is regarding my questions earlier in question period.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition. In his question today he referred to photographs, so I am tabling copies of photographs. They are from the Westmount influenza clinic yesterday, and they show all kinds of unmanned vaccination stations despite the crowds of people in the clinic.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the executive summary of a report referred to today by my colleague prepared for the government of Saskatchewan entitled Future of Uranium Public Consultation Process. The report was delivered on September 15, 2009. It concluded that "the overwhelming response to this public consultation was that nuclear power generation should not be a choice for Saskatchewan."

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: for the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, the ATB Financial 2009 annual report and pursuant to the Securities Act the Alberta Securities Commission 2009 annual report.

Orders of the Day Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Alberta Capital Bonds

16. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to respond to this motion, and I want to assure you that I'll be listening intently to the ideas of my colleagues here in the Assembly as we work through the motion. The fact that we are having this discussion is due to the visionary leadership of our Premier as he unveiled his plan, The Way Forward, to Albertans in his address to the province on October 14.

Alberta is a beacon of hope and a magnet for international investment. Albertans have told us that they, too, are looking for a way to proudly invest in our province. A retail savings bond program targeted at capital infrastructure projects would provide Albertans with the opportunity to invest in a secure financial instrument and to participate very directly in building an even better quality of life for Albertans. That's why we're looking forward to offering Alberta capital bonds as part of our borrowing strategy. Alberta capital bonds are a retail bond program that would give individual Albertans an opportunity to invest in building needed infrastructure.

2:50

Judging from the volume of calls, letters, and e-mails that both my office and our department have been receiving, interest in buying Alberta capital bonds once again is high. Just to be clear, a bond is simply the legal instrument; that is, it is the promise to pay the government's issue when borrowing from multiple investors as opposed to a loan from a bank or another single third party.

There are several points around the bonds program where we are seeking advice through debate on this motion. The first point relates to the question of the type of bond or bonds that should be offered. There are a variety of types of bonds that could be offered for sale to Albertans, two of which are quite common and have been issued by the province in the past. These include conventional bonds, which pay a fixed rate of interest over the life of the bond, and variable-rate bonds, which pay an interest rate that is reset once or twice yearly to reflect movements in interest rates over time. I would suggest that offering three-year fixed-rate and five-year variable-rate bonds would be a viable option for the Alberta capital bonds program.

One of the other questions around the program deals with who should be able to buy Alberta capital bonds. In line with their name, a valid option would be for them to be sold only in Alberta and only to Albertans. What better way for Albertans to invest in their province and support needed infrastructure?

Another issue around bonds would be what the minimum and maximum amounts should be for purchase. In the past we've gone with a hundred dollar minimum, which I believe would be appropriate again. This would allow Albertans with even modest means to become involved. In order to keep the bond program focused on individual Albertans, there needs to be a maximum amount set for purchase after a full discussion here on this motion. In our borrowing we need to find the balance between opportunities for larger investors to get involved as well as opportunities for individual Albertans to take part. It is important to provide opportunity for individual Albertans of varying capacity to invest. I believe that a reasonable maximum amount for Alberta capital bonds gives the citizens of this province their chance to take part.

One of the questions we have been getting around these bonds is if Alberta capital bonds will be RRSP eligible. Our proposed selling period, next February, is during RRSP season, so I see this as an opportunity for another level of encouragement for Albertans to get involved in the Alberta capital bonds program.

We've also been asked where people can buy their Alberta capital bonds. As with our previous bond issues Alberta capital bonds would be available across the province at financial institutions such

as banks, credit unions, at ATB Financial branches, and also through investment dealers. The most frequent question we're getting from Albertans is: what kind of interest rate will they offer? The interest rate will have to be determined at a date closer to when sales start. We don't want to upset the investment market or increase our debt service costs any more than necessary, so the rate should be close to Alberta's market rates at the time the bonds go on sale.

Before I conclude, let me please remind you that the original capital bonds were first issued in the spring of 1987, with the last bond issue in 1997. The 1997 issue of these bonds raised \$206 million to help pay for infrastructure projects and to help offset budget deficits. I want to reiterate that our new issue of Alberta capital bonds will give Albertans the opportunity to invest in this great province while supporting capital infrastructure projects such as roads, highways, schools, hospitals, and bridges. It is an exciting moment for Albertans, with their individual aspirations and dreams of a better financial future, to have their chance to take an active role by investing in their province in the form of an Alberta capital bond.

I look forward to the discussion and hearing from all members of the Assembly as to what their advice would be and encourage all members to participate in this important discussion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and then I will recognize the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Government Motion 16, Alberta capital bonds. I listened to the hon. minister with considerable interest. She is talking, of course, about a bond process that this province has used before. She correctly states that Alberta first introduced Alberta capital bonds in 1987. The name was changed less than a decade later. The bonds were originally – originally – used to pay for capital projects and to offset budget deficits.

Now, we have to be very careful here. We realize, to our astonishment, that we now have a \$7 billion deficit. If we look at the consolidated financial statements from last year and read the fine print, there's a \$2.8 billion deficit from that year as well. The deficit is growing, the sustainability fund is, unfortunately, shrinking, so we have to be very very careful here. I'm not saying that this is not a good idea, but I'm certainly urging that this Assembly, in light of this government's fiscal track record, proceed with caution, Mr. Speaker, on this matter.

I would remind the House that the government – and it was listed in the 2009-10 budget – has already borrowed \$1.1 billion by issuing bonds on the capital markets. Now, any additional issuance of bonds to the public would go above and beyond that amount that was quoted in last spring's budget. These bonds would go towards capital spending. At this time be mindful that we were talking a little bit earlier about bonds in the past being used to fund deficits. If we were to use this money for financing of the three-year, \$23 billion capital plan, that would be noteworthy. If one is to look at the annual report of the province of Alberta, you can see where last year, 2008-09, the total capital plan anticipated was \$8.7 billion dollars, but the actual amount spent in various places, whether it's on the highways or municipal infrastructure, postsecondary facilities, schools, hospitals, was \$7.5 billion dollars. There was an unallocated amount of \$1.1 billion.

We have some of the highest per capita spending in the country on capital projects. The Premier himself said in his televised address here two weeks ago that in some cases it was up to a 40 per cent saving. Contractors, like the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster – he used to be a contractor. I'm sure the hon.

member had a very sharp pencil and could give a good price on a project in the oil patch. If any gentleman in this House would know that now is the time to see if we can get some of these contractors to sharpen their pencils, it would be him. I was surprised to hear the Premier say that there could be savings of up to 40 per cent, so perhaps it's time to stretch out this \$23 billion dollar, three-year capital plan into a longer period of time to see if we can realize some significant savings like the Premier was talking about. So that would be one reason why we certainly should be proceeding cautiously with this debt.

The second issue, of course, is the fact that we already have the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, where municipalities can use the government's very good, to date, credit rating to borrow money for capital projects. Certainly, I see that as an item that should continue. If we look at the debt now from Alberta Capital Finance Authority and if we look at the annual report from the province, we will see that between 2008-09 there was a \$1 billion dollar increase in loans and advances made under the authority of the Alberta Capital Finance Authority Act.

We also need to point out, before we go into further debt, the obligations under public-private partnerships, the famous 3Ps. Now, if we look again and compare 2008 and 2009, we see that 2008 was restated. It was roughly \$1.6 billion, but it skyrocketed up to \$4.7 billion in 2009. So, you know, we can call it an obligation, but in reality it's a debt. At some point we're going to have to pay this money.

3:00

When we look at what's going on and we look at the money that we have available in the stability fund, I would again, please, caution all members of the House that perhaps these bonds are a very good idea, but we have to put limits on these bonds. I am not convinced that this government can manage our money. I'm sorry; you just don't have the track record.

If we are to proceed with this – if we are to proceed with this – I would like to ask the hon. minister of finance to consider that if these bonds are for sale only in Alberta and can only be purchased by Albertans, the capital projects that they are to finance, perhaps we can let some good Alberta contractors through an open and fair bid process get some of the work that these projects would finance. I'm getting calls in our constituency office from people who are driving by the ring road projects. They see the sign, and they want to know who Flatiron Construction is, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we all know Flatiron is from Denver, Colorado. There are other outfits building 3P schools that I think are from Guernsey island or somewhere like this. But I think we should also consider, if we're going to proceed with this plan, making sure that Alberta companies, if they're qualified and have sharp pencils, can get the work. I don't think we should be considered unreasonable if we were to stick up for a few of the Alberta contractors in these difficult economic times.

I know we have an infrastructure backlog in this province, but I would like to note, Mr. Speaker, two of the departments that are responsible for a lot of the infrastructure spending or the funding, the capital projects in this government: Infrastructure and Transportation. Now, in Infrastructure last year there was an amount – and perhaps the President of the Treasury Board can tell me – of \$1.5 billion that was transferred at the end of the budget year into, I believe, the stability fund. Did that come from savings in capital projects that were deferred or cancelled in the Department of Transportation or in the Department of Infrastructure?

We think there is a shortage of monies. Certainly, there appears to be whenever we look at the \$7 billion deficit. But in the Department of Transportation last year there was an unexpended amount of

half a billion dollars. A lot of it came from natural gas rebates, but there were other interesting projects that were either cancelled or used less money. If this money is part of that \$1.5 billion, it would be reasonable, in this hon. member's opinion, that perhaps we have money set aside or deferred for capital projects that the House or, certainly, this member is not aware of. I would like to have that clarified before we go any further on this debate on the Alberta bonds.

Also, in municipal support in the Department of Transportation there's the municipal infrastructure program, the Alberta cities transportation partnerships, the federal gas tax fund, the federal public transit trust, the Canada-Alberta municipal rural infrastructure fund. All these funds had unexpended amounts, and I would like to know: where is this money now? It obviously wasn't spent last year. There seems to be a panic on behalf of this government to raise additional funds.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would just again like to remind the House that there are a number of questions here that, hopefully, will be asked, but we do have a \$7 billion deficit anticipated this year. We know the results from last year. We know from some of the individual items in the respective departments that there was money unspent on capital last year. Why is it necessary to borrow more? We've already borrowed to our limit that was anticipated in the budget.

These are questions that I think should be answered before we vote on Motion 16. It certainly would be interesting to see how many Albertans would be willing to step up and buy bonds around RRSP time. Hopefully, if there is significant investment, the maximum benefit to Albertans through the construction of capital projects would proceed, and it would proceed in a timely fashion and also with a price tag that certainly is reasonable. If at this time I could have those questions answered through the course of the debate, I would appreciate it.

Again, there need to be measures of control placed on these capital bonds. Without a cap, I believe, or a limited time frame to issue the bonds, there's no certainty that this government will show fiscal restraint. I know there was fiscal restraint shown in Transportation and Infrastructure for whatever reason last year, and if I could have that explained to me, I would be very grateful.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now proceed to hear from the President of the Treasury Board, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and then the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to take the opportunity today to probably stay a little bit away from numbers and statistics because I think this concept of the art of the possibility here, what we can do with Albertans and what Albertans can do with their money to contribute to making the province they've chosen to live in a better place to be, is the question.

We are in a tremendously solid financial position compared to just about anywhere else, and we have started on a very aggressive program of building the infrastructure we need. All the while it begs the question: where is the money coming from that we spend? It comes from Albertans or industry that works in Alberta. And what are we doing with it? Well, we're providing the operational dollars for the different programs, and we're addressing their needs. We're building their roads. We're building their schools, their hospitals, and whatnot.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's a subject that the Premier has talked about for many years, the opportunity to allow Albertans, to encourage Albertans to invest in this infrastructure. It probably became more urgent with us witnessing a global meltdown that robbed many people, many Albertans of their cash, their investments. In many ways, Mr. Speaker, it robbed them of their hope and of their dreams for a comfortable retirement, and that's really unfortunate. We look at Alberta as a place where we can provide what many people would want, and that is certainty and stability, and have the bonus of helping to create an even more solid economy that they can be a part of.

I know a lot of the talk around the bonds has been around the tremendous comfort that seniors would have, knowing that their investments were invested in the Alberta government, in infrastructure in the Alberta government with a fair rate of return. But I would say that the best way, probably the most sure way, to make sure that you have stability for seniors, Mr. Speaker, is to have opportunity for youth. I think young Albertans will be a large class of the people that will want to invest in these bonds.

3:10

Our priorities may change as we go through life. As a young businessperson I may be more interested in investing in the roads or the other infrastructure that I see as the economic enablers. As I start to grow older and start to raise a family, I may think that I would like to invest a little in schools and in health care facilities because that's where my interest is. When I'm starting to see a lifetime of return from investing into these bonds, I'll realize that I am building that opportunity that I want as a senior in this province. As I get older, I may look for the opportunity to invest in bonds that build the seniors' facilities that we're actively building right now and different kinds of health care facilities.

So I think: what better form of direct democracy than allowing people to invest their money, to put their money where their mouth is? If they would like to invest in these bonds, then they can. Certainly, there'll be no pressure other than knowing that they have a place to put some money that's going to benefit them, maybe their parents, certainly their children, and overall the economy of Alberta.

So when we talk about the bonds, I see this as the start of a new way of doing business in Alberta. This isn't a result of the economic meltdown. We are one province that can proceed with our capital plan. We've set aside billions of dollars in our sustainability fund to be able to assure the building sector and Albertans that we are going to be able to continue to complete our capital plan.

The hon. member mentioned P3s. There's no question that the P3 opportunities have many, many different benefits that have been talked about in here. But one of the detractions is that much of the foreign capital that comes with it comes from out of the province. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that where possible we need to allow Albertans and the investment community in Alberta to invest. I, for one, think there are more opportunities than just the bond.

It goes back to the unfunded pension liability we picked up from the teachers. I believe – and I have talked with many teachers that would agree – that if we filled the shortfall in that unfunded pension plan with assets that provide a return, the teachers then have an opportunity to invest in schools that benefit our children. We have an opportunity as a government to accelerate our building programs around schools. It's a win-win. I think the care that people take with things they own or have a share in is greater, and I think that when the mindset becomes quite clear that it's Albertans owning Alberta's infrastructure, we'll all take a little more pride in how we deal with it. Certainly, the opportunity that we will be able to benefit from in having more available cash is true.

Now, I absolutely agree with the minister and the hon. member that there needs to be a balance in how much money we would attract, how much we can invest. We have to maintain the very practical, sensible approach of ensuring that we're building what we need where we need it, that we're building facilities that we have the staffing for, that fit into the existing capital plan. I don't think that it would be a real stretch, Mr. Speaker, to know that people would certainly be even more comfortable as we follow a capital plan.

The world has changed with being more innovative. I would certainly not want to use the banking community as being innovative in a good way because what we saw there were ways to take money from people with no accountability. I think that the last couple of years have shown people that if you can invest where you know, with people you can trust, they'll take that opportunity to do it.

I look at the capital plan that we're faced with, Mr. Speaker, and the \$20 billion and change that's in that plan. We don't look at it as a problem. We look at that as what we're building for the future. It's the ring roads. It's the hospitals. It's the schools. We know – and it's been stated many times in this room – that we're building far more per capita than anywhere else in Canada, and you know, that's okay with Albertans. Rarely do we get a call that says: "Hold my school," or "Stop my hospital project," or "Don't worry about my new road; I'm just fine."

Mr. Speaker, Albertans realize that a successful economy is knowledge based. It needs healthy communities in every sense of the word, and it needs the infrastructure to allow business to thrive, and they pay the bills for what we're trying to do for those who can't. So I think we have to accept that normal doesn't live here like it used to and that the opportunity we've got now – and I would certainly disagree with the hon. member about our history of finances. Albertans have asked for this repeatedly. The Premier made it, actually, one of his leadership mandates when he started, to give Albertans the opportunity to invest in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are a lot of details that will be worked out around who sells them, the rate of return. Obviously, we'll use prudent money management when we work on that. I for one would like to have the opportunity when I'm no longer in this Legislature to invest in these bonds for the simple fact that I have the confidence that it'll be there, that it'll pay a fair return, and I think many Albertans are in the same frame of mind that they would love to have the opportunity to invest in this province we all live in.

I look forward to the debate. I know that we can come up with challenges to it. Fair. I also know that we have the staff and we have the vision to put together the appropriate amount of bond issuing. I think that as this develops, Mr. Speaker, it will develop into one where it can be accessed through the municipal borrowing process and other entities that you may not want to directly get in the bond business but certainly can benefit from the wealth that Albertans have accumulated and want to reinvest in Alberta.

So this, Mr. Speaker, is really simple. It's about letting Albertans reinvest or invest in Alberta. It's what we ought to do. I look forward to the discussion. It certainly opens up the art of possibility, that lives here in Alberta more than anywhere else I've ever been.

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comments or questions if any member wishes to. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the President of the Treasury Board. I actually think this is an interesting idea. One of my concerns, however, is that there will be kind of a menu choice, if I understood correctly. My first question. Maybe I didn't

understand correctly, but I got the impression that people investing in these bonds might be able to decide: does it go to the local hospital in Lloydminster, or does it go to expanding highway 2 or to a new skating rink somewhere else? I'm going to express right here that I'm uneasy with that because it seems to me that then our capital program becomes a bit of a popularity contest rather than necessarily investing in what's needed. Are sewers going to be a popular item for capital bonds when they're up against competition for a seniors' lodge or a new arena? I'm wondering if the President of the Treasury Board has any information or views on just having people buy the capital bonds in general as opposed to having them check off specific projects.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, hon. member and Mr. Speaker. I thought I was clear when I said that we have a capital plan in place and that we have the prioritized projects in the capital plan.

As to the bonds, originally we talked about the bonds being more appropriately at this time for seniors' facilities, obviously facilities that are prioritized already in our capital plan. I agree: I don't think we want to get in a position where a wealthy community or wealthy groups start to dictate our capital plan. I agree with you. If I left that impression, I didn't mean to. My intention is that you will put together a priority plan that fits our capital plan, that has all the checks and balances in the two, you know, whether it's staffing, appropriateness, and you would work that out.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.
3:20

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I found the hon. minister's speech informative and quite interesting. Now, you mentioned that one of the Premier's campaign promises was a similar policy to this. The Premier also made a campaign policy to increase the amount of bitumen that was upgraded to synthetic crude oil in this province. Given that the government is now willing to take bitumen in kind as a royalty, could these bonds be used to finance a merchant bitumen upgrader in this province?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, these bonds are very specifically targeted for public infrastructure. While I certainly applaud and agree with our ministers of Finance and Energy that we need to work on the BRIK policy and how that can move forward, it's about involving business. It's about using what we have in Alberta to get upgraders or upgrader/refineries or whatever mix it is to come here and to help us achieve the policy objectives of the Alberta government. But raising capital for business ventures is clearly, clearly outside the issue that we're talking about here, bonds for public infrastructure.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members?

Seeing none, then the chair shall recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and discuss the motion that is before the House today, which is the issuance of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

As was indicated earlier, Alberta has a bit of a history doing this. It first began introducing Alberta capital bonds back in 1987, and

they were later changed to the Alberta savings certificates in 1996. Around 1997, when our finances turned and things began to get a little bit better for the province, these methods of financing Alberta's, I guess to use a new terminology, way forward came to an end at that time as Alberta coffers became, once again, filled with royalty revenues from the oil and gas industry. We began again to then spend those for our development, our projects, our infrastructure, our horse racing, whatever you want to call it that this government spent on over the last number of years.

Now, when we find ourselves here in 2009, again with the money tree not pumping quite, I guess, literally, like it was at one time, we again have gone back to capital bonds to try and raise revenue for the government, which is essentially debt. You know, that is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, we possibly could be using some of these funds right now to go to the marketplace and to raise money, and it may be a good time to do that. Interest rates are relatively low. If you go to a private investor and they were given the opportunity of saying, "Well, we'll raise capital and only charge you 2 per cent, 2.5 per cent interest on this money for the next 10 years," a lot of people would say, "Hey, that's a heck of a good deal," especially if you can afford the payments. Alberta appears to be in that situation.

Having said that, there were also some comments brought up by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar which resonated very true with me. This government had, at least by many accounts, including by opposition members of this House, pretty extensive spending habits over the course of the last little while, whether these have been legacy projects or program spending or whatever was the flavour of the day. With that history in mind and with Alberta's boom-and-bust culture and our history of having to go into debt and then get out of debt at other times by resorting to the money tree in the backyard, the oil and gas industry, those comments resonated with me; I mean, particularly those.

We already have a \$23 billion capital plan that's out there that is fairly extensive, fairly detailed, and fairly aggressive compared to other jurisdictions. With the slowdown in the economy that \$23 billion may be more than enough to get us by, to increase the public infrastructure space that is necessary. If we can always, hopefully, build the schools and the hospitals that people need with that money, it's better than going into debt even further than we appear to be going, and hopefully that won't be necessary.

Given those concerns, I would say that we can't just give a blank cheque to how many government bonds we're going to issue, or we could be in trouble here. I think it is necessary that, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, we should put some limits, some constraints on how many times we will go to the marketplace in the next little while to raise funds. I think that would be prudent. It would allow us, once we reach that limit, if that limit ever arrives, to then come back to this House to discuss whether we need any more money. At that time it may well be necessary, but I don't think that putting in that extra step of coming back to the House and discussing whether more money is necessary to pay for whatever Albertans need or what we deem necessary is a bad thing. It's just another opportunity to keep Albertans apprised of what is going on with government expenditures, and it would allow us to then look at the issue more closely and take a second look at whether the finances are truly necessary.

Those things being said, as long as there is a recognition that although this may be an okay time to be going to the marketplace for funds and that, yes, there is an argument that we're giving Albertans a nice way to invest in their future, well, yeah. Sure. Why not? We can paint it up that way, but at the end of the day this is still debt.

You know, the average Albertan has many ways to invest in the marketplace to get capital bonds, other places besides the Alberta government. They can walk down to their local Alberta Treasury Branches and talk to the teller, and she'll direct them to the financial department. They'll say, "You want some bonds; well, here's a list of things we can get you into" or "Here's a group of mutual funds where you can get bonds that average you back probably more money than we're going to pay out on this bond issue over time." Let's not fool ourselves that we're doing this great service for the Alberta people here by issuing these bonds. Hopefully, they're picked up, hopefully they'll provide us with a little bit of comfort room and hopefully an ability to do good things for Albertans. But let's remember that this is debt that Albertans and Alberta's future generations will have to pay back, and we should always be cognizant of that going forward.

It's been a privilege to get up here and speak to this. Again, hey, I'm hoping this works out. I'm hoping we put this money to good use. But at the same time I urge caution in the approach we're taking right now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments, questions.

Seeing none, the chair now shall recognize the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to Government Motion 16, which provides for the availability and the sale of government savings bonds for all Albertans, or Alberta capital bonds, or Alberta savings bonds. Savings bonds would provide Albertans with a safe and secure investment tool which would be fully backed by the government of Alberta. I've been in favour of savings bonds. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo mentioned just a moment ago about other areas going to banks or whatever to look at the list of bonds that are available. I have to admit that I've done that, and I consider them a very secure instrument. Really, once purchased, they may be redeemed at a later date, at which point the government would pay back the principal and any interest accrued.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, savings bonds are a key element to achieving the goals of The Way Forward, our Premier's bold vision of an Alberta that emerges from the economic recession stronger than ever. It's comprised of four elements. First, this government will take firm action to deal with the fiscal challenges we face. Second, we'll draw upon the savings we wisely invested in the boom years. Third, we'll continue to invest in public infrastructure to get value for the taxpayer, to support jobs, and to prepare for a return to economic growth. Fourth, we'll make sure that our energy and other industries are competitive and attract the investment we need to develop Alberta's resources.

Mr. Speaker, savings bonds will provide several benefits and opportunities for Albertans. First, this would be an excellent saving tool for Albertans. Backed by Alberta's triple-A credit rating thanks to our record of strong fiscal management, they will offer an exceptional rate of return. Second, the government of Alberta will invest the funds collected from the sale of these bonds into critical infrastructure projects to help maintain our communities. Bondholders will be able to know exactly what projects they're helping to build. It could be anything from improving our transportation network, including new roads and highways, to schools and medical facilities. As an investment tool savings bonds would offer a more competitive rate of return than a regular savings account from any bank.

While banks may attach certain conditions to their accounts, Alberta savings bonds will offer maximum flexibility for investors. No matter what age, Alberta bonds make an ideal savings solution. For young Albertans a savings bond could grow substantially over a period of time, providing a useful tool for a variety of future needs. For young adults savings bonds could provide an additional tool to save hard-earned money. Moreover, young adults could use their hard-earned savings for postsecondary education, for purchasing a home or a vehicle.

For young families savings bonds are a way for parents to invest in their province's and children's future. The savings bonds that a young couple purchases may end up helping to fund the construction of a new school that will one day educate their child or the hospital that may help deliver a future child of theirs into the world. A young couple may wish to purchase bonds to save for their children's postsecondary education. In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the government may choose to use the funds gathered from the sale of these bonds to help finance improvements to our postsecondary institutions such as new lecture halls or more student spaces.

The bonds that the couple purchases will accrue interest over 18 or more years until they're withdrawn for the child's postsecondary education. It's important to note that families who purchase capital bonds could also withdraw their investment for other critical needs. These could include a down payment for a new car, a home, or home renovations.

Mr. Speaker, savings bonds would also benefit those who have given so much to build this province, our senior citizens. For seniors a savings bond is yet another way to contribute to building a stronger Alberta. Bonds purchased today by seniors may be used to help fund major projects in their communities. They can take great satisfaction in knowing exactly which projects their bonds helped to fund. As savings bonds will provide a favourable rate of return, they will provide an attractive means to save their hard-earned money. In addition, they will also be an ideal solution for individuals or families who wish to diversify their savings portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of return on savings bonds will, I hope, compare quite favourably to a savings account individuals can open at their bank. Furthermore, banks generally charge a fee to maintain a savings account, and depending on the account, the bank may require a fee for withdrawals from that account.

Another popular option for savings is a tax-free savings account, a flexible, registered, general-purpose savings account which was introduced by the federal government on January 2, 2009. These savings accounts permit Canadians to contribute up to \$5,000 annually as well as withdraw any amount at any time tax free. Similarly, it's my hope that the government permits Albertans to purchase and withdraw savings bonds tax free as well.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a bold plan that will help Alberta emerge from this economic recession stronger than ever. I believe that savings bonds will strengthen Albertans by providing an exceptional savings option that will offer a favourable rate of return. With record-low interest rates and construction costs savings bonds purchased by Albertans will help to fund critical infrastructure projects for an exceptional value.

I strongly believe that this motion speaks to the values that define us as Albertans, working together to build a stronger province for future generations. For these reasons I'm very proud to stand in support of Motion 16 and strongly urge my colleagues from both sides of this House to support it as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes for questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I have a number of questions for the hon. member. The hon. member in his speech indicated that the government had a record of I believe it was strong fiscal management if I heard him correctly. I would like to ask the hon. member: does he consider the track record in the last year with Alberta Health Services – we went from nine regional health authorities. We fired them, and we created this one streamlined system that was supposed to control costs and improve service, and in reality what has happened is that it's over a billion dollars in deficit, people are being laid off, and facilities are being downgraded. Does the hon. member consider that strong fiscal management?

Mr. Mitzel: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting question. You talk about strong fiscal management. You talk about a point that the hon. member has raised. Now, I think the one thing that the hon. member has not raised is the fact that this is included in the 20-year plan, Vision 2020, with regard to health services. I think that if you looked at the whole thing and took it as a whole, you'd probably see how it fits. Now, look at all the rest of the management we've got. You look at all the money that has been saved. The sustainability fund: that's up to \$17 billion. If you look at all of these other ones and put those all together, I would have to say that there is a track record of strong fiscal management.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again specific to Alberta Health Services, does the hon. member think that providing a \$22,000-a-month pension to the CEO of the Calgary health region after eight years' service and giving that individual 26 or 28 years of pensionable service for eight years' work and having the taxpayers make the entire 100 per cent contribution to that \$22,000-a-month pension is strong fiscal management?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you can take any figures you like. You can start at a very high level, and you can drill down to a very, very low level. What you do when you go down to the low level is you get involved in micromanaging the nitty-gritty. In fact, what we're talking about with the Alberta savings bonds is something at a 30,000-foot level that looks at all of Alberta. There are instances that have to be looked at and worked with in all departments, whether it's agriculture or oil and gas or anything else, and you've picked one item and looked at that and asked how it fits with strong fiscal management. You look at that, and you'll find that we're talking from a very, very high level here on all of this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. If we're talking about micromanaging the nitty-gritty, I would caution the hon. member that if you look after the dimes and nickels, the dollars will look after themselves. How could you explain this example – giving after only nine months of service to an individual who was the former deputy minister of health, Paddy Meade, a quarter of a million dollars bonus for nine months' work when she was let go – as a sign of strong fiscal management?

3:40

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. MacDonald: That's relevant. Of course it is, hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, I think that the contract arrangements that were possibly made with the individual he talks about and Alberta Health Services are something that I'm not privy to, nor do I have a part in that. I think we work with contracts. As well, Alberta Health Services has a job to do, and they're working through that.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I think I now understand why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar hasn't got two dimes to rub together.

I wonder if I could ask the hon. member: rather than the sniping or whatever you might call it that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has been doing, I wonder if that member has heard one constructive suggestion from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar as to how to move forward and improve a very strong record of sound fiscal management. One constructive suggestion.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, on reflection, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to use the five minutes?

Seeing none, the chair now shall recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and offer my support for the government motion to issue Alberta savings bonds. The effects of the current economic recession have been felt across the world, and many Albertans have many stories that exemplify the effects of the challenging times they face. These have been trying times for Albertans and our province. However, we have reason to be optimistic for our province has positioned itself to emerge from this recession with a stronger economy and with stronger public services.

Albertans are known, Mr. Speaker, for their hard work, for their dedication to their families, and for the pride they have in their communities and province. In 2003 with the help of hard-working Albertans our government paid off the provincial debt. This was a momentous feat that our government and our citizens should take pride in. After all, it serves as one example of contributing to Alberta's legacy. Also, since 2003 our government saved a percentage of our revenue while still providing Albertans with effective and efficient public services. After paying off the provincial debt, we have amassed \$25 billion in savings: \$8 billion in the heritage savings trust fund and \$17 billion in the sustainability fund.

Mr. Speaker, our government had the strategic foresight to realize that the prosperity and growth which our economy witnessed during these good years would be interrupted at some point down the road. The current global recession and the global financial crisis had an impact on government revenue. However, the sustainability fund was intended for economic times like the one we are currently facing. With the heritage trust fund, the sustainability fund, and the hard-working citizens of our province we have the potential in the near future to return to the days of growth and prosperity. Our government cares about people and continues to position and strengthen Alberta to emerge from the recession with a stronger economy. One way in which we can take strides towards recapturing the growth and prosperity in our economy is by reintroducing Alberta savings bonds.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has achieved the highest credit rating possible. In fact, Alberta has the highest credit rating of any province in Canada. Because of our massive savings our province has received a triple-A credit rating. The ratings system identifies the level of security that an investor has in their investment. Few organizations are able to achieve a triple-A rating. Our triple-A

credit rating is the highest rating available and is based on our past savings initiatives and our province's superior economic performance. Alberta savings bonds would provide Albertans with a convenient and secure savings platform.

Alberta savings bonds will also provide peace of mind for the investor, knowing that a repayment of the initial purchase price and interest are guaranteed. A particularly attractive feature of Alberta savings bonds is that they are an investment in our province which can enable the opportunity for public service and infrastructure projects.

With the reintroduction of Alberta savings bonds, Mr. Speaker, many questions will be asked regarding specific conditions, including the maximum amount available to purchase and who would be eligible to buy Alberta savings bonds. First, Mr. Speaker, let me address the maximum amount available to purchase. The Alberta savings bonds will allow an individual to have the opportunity to diversify their investments in a secure and stable manner, and I am truly confident that our government will set an appropriate limit that will allow our government to control the amount of bonds sold with the opportunity to reassess the maximum amount available for purchase.

The second question, Mr. Speaker, is regarding who will be eligible to purchase Alberta savings bonds. Alberta savings bonds, for example, should be sold solely to Albertans to allow the citizens of our province to enjoy the benefits of our government's savings practices. The credit rating which our government has earned provides security to the investor and allows the investor to display their optimism and confidence in Alberta's future. The security which these bonds provide is a direct result of our government's savings and positive economic past. Thus, only Albertans should have the option to purchase savings bonds.

Furthermore, Albertans should know the specific projects that Alberta savings bonds will fund. The projects chosen should benefit all Albertans in order to make investing in Alberta savings bonds more attractive.

Mr. Speaker, our rising population – today we have approximately 50,000 people migrating into Alberta per year – has led to an increased demand for infrastructure projects. Not only are infrastructure projects needed for our increasing population; they create jobs and provide value for Alberta's taxpayers. Investing Alberta savings bonds in infrastructure projects is a step toward returning to sound economic growth and additional planning for Alberta's future. For example, Alberta's increasing population has meant more vehicles on our roads. Upgrades to our provincial highway network are necessary to allow for the efficient and safe transportation of people and goods throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta capital bonds can be used to improve our provincial highway network and to provide value for our taxpayers. The Ministry of Infrastructure's three-year capital plan, for example, includes funding to complete two interchanges on highway 63 within Fort McMurray. The population growth that Fort McMurray and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo have experienced over the past 10 years is staggering. Reports suggest that the population is expected to exceed 100,000 by the year 2012, which is just around the corner. Being home to one of the world's largest single deposits of oil, a commodity which is viable to the economic growth of our province, may require improvements in infrastructure to improve efficiency and keep up with the demands of an increasing population.

Although the details for the Alberta bonds are still in their early stages, I would like to highlight some of the current infrastructure projects going on and suggest that future projects like these may benefit from the funds generated by the Alberta bonds. Our

government has acknowledged the significance of the oil sands to our province's economy. Funds generated through capital bonds could in the future fund the completion of projects like the completion of the two interchanges on highway 63 within Fort McMurray. Projects like these are a major step in providing roads for future Albertans to enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, another project that is identified in the Ministry of Infrastructure's three-year plan is the continued twinning of highway 63 between Edmonton and Fort McMurray. This stretch of highway has experienced increased volume due to the rapid population growth around the oil sands. There will continue to be a need for improved and new infrastructure. To deal with this need, Alberta bonds could be used to mitigate future growth.

3:50

Our government has recognized that this stretch of highway 63 is vital for the efficient transportation of goods and services to and from Fort McMurray. By twinning this stretch of highway, we are increasing efficiency and improving the safety of this very important highway. The twinning of highway 63 is consistent with the government's commitment to provide connections between major urban centres and high-growth industrial areas.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the money invested in our province through the purchase of Alberta savings bonds should be used to fund infrastructure projects such as these. This would improve the value of tax dollars provided to Albertans while improving efficiency, safety, and preparing our province for the population growth which we will experience in the coming years.

This population growth also brings the need for other public facilities such as schools. That is why this government has initiated building 14 new schools in the Edmonton and Calgary regions. Although some of these schools are being built through a public-private partnership, some will be delivered through the design-build approach, which is where the government finances the design and construction. Although these 14 schools are creating 12,700 more spaces for Alberta students, future projects that are similar to these schools, I believe, should be considered when investing the funds raised through the Alberta savings bonds. They are ensuring that our province is prepared for our population growth.

The third point of this government's economic recovery plan as outlined in *The Way Forward*, in fact, is to continue to invest in public infrastructure. The projects I just used as some examples of sound investments in our province's future: I wholeheartedly believe that they are the types of projects that will contribute to this province moving forward and its legacy for generations to come and making a strong recovery.

I am deeply interested in other members' discussions and continued advice from even my constituents of Edmonton-Decore and all Albertans regarding Alberta savings bonds, and I warmly welcome all the input. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for questions and comments. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore mentioned in her remarks about the government's superior economic performance, and near the conclusion the hon. member provided examples of sound investments. My first question to the hon. member would be this: does the hon. member consider the \$45 million that was spent in achievement bonuses in the last fiscal year another example of a sound investment at a time when everyone else is being asked to work harder for less?

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, I'm struggling regarding the relevance of the question to this particular subject.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Just to clarify for the hon. member, in your remarks you talked about the superior economic performance of the government, you elaborated, and in conclusion you provided examples of what you thought were sound investments. Again, my question is: do you consider the \$45 million that we spent in senior management achievement bonuses in the fiscal year 2008-09 an example of a sound investment? Yes or no.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order, *Beauchesne* 459, relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore was talking about, and when she talked about sound financial management, I believe she was referring to \$25 billion worth of savings that have accumulated during surplus times and how those particular dollars were allocated. In fact, I recall her distinctly saying that \$8 billion of the \$25 billion went directly into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, which is very good, sound economic planning, which is what she was talking about. A further \$17 billion was set aside into the sustainability fund, another example of good, sound, prudent planning. It is, in fact, as a result of that good, prudent planning that we now have a \$17 billion daily cash account upon which we can draw should the need be here, and the need is here. That all, of course, arose several years ago when we made the conscious and conscientious decision to in fact allocate those monies for rainy days such as is the case in Alberta today. As a result, I would ask your indulgence to call the member to order on the point of relevance because I think it was relevant whereas the comments he is making are totally irrelevant. I think he is inventing purposes to suit his own claims.

Mr. MacDonald: In response, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that I was the one that was paying attention to the hon. member's speech, not the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek. Now, it was clear, and the hon. member said it on a number of occasions. She provided examples of sound investments. It had nothing to do with sound financial planning or any of the other comments that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek has provided as examples. You're totally offside here. This is not a point of order. The hon. member talked about examples of sound investments. It had nothing to do with financial planning or anything else.

I'm sorry if the hon. member was busy working at his files and not paying keen attention like I was to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore's speech. I dare him to stand up and then accuse me of not being relevant when the hon. party whip over there got up before and was completely out of order, but the House chose to just ignore that. This is frivolous, and I think we should continue with the debate in the five-minute allocation that we have left. I would again ask the hon. member, if she can, to please answer the question. Yes or no.

The Deputy Speaker: I have to rule on this thing, this point of order raised here.

First of all, this is the five minutes for comments and questions – comments, which have a large latitude. I just want to rule that there is no point of order but also want to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to be narrow in your questions, to the point. Thank you.

Debate Continued

The Deputy Speaker: Do you still wish to answer the question, hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore?

Mrs. Sarich: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still maintain that I'm struggling with the relevance of the question. I do believe the deputy House leader has highlighted the points that I emphasized in the time allocated, and I have nothing further to add on this subject. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: On my list here the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to support the government's motion for this Assembly to approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities. I'm also excited to rise today to speak to this government motion because I look forward to the potential benefits that it would bring to all Albertans.

Essentially, this motion would re-establish government of Alberta savings bonds. The savings bonds would be a safe and rewarding investment for all Albertans because they would guarantee a return while giving all Albertans the opportunity to purchase them. This motion is a worthwhile cause with endless potential benefits for this province, Mr. Speaker. The funds generated from these savings bonds could be invested in many ways. For instance, one way could be in Alberta's infrastructure as this investment would be advantageous for all Albertans and future generations to come. This is an exciting possibility because Albertans would pocket their dividends while watching their investment go towards infrastructure projects that benefit the province.

4:00

There are many reasons why some of these funds should go towards maintaining and expanding the province's infrastructure. After all, investing in our infrastructure provides multiple benefits to Albertans. First, as Alberta's population continues to grow, it is more important than ever that we continue to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place that will support this province's future growth.

The government is already aware of this, which is why we have allocated nearly \$7.2 billion for infrastructure projects this year as part of Alberta's 20-year capital plan. This three-year capital plan totals \$23.2 billion and provides significant investment in infrastructure such as health facilities, schools, postsecondary facilities, municipal infrastructure, highways, climate change initiatives, and regional water systems. On capital projects like this this government is spending double the per capita average of other provinces, which shows our serious commitment to Alberta's future. This also means that we are taking advantage of lower construction costs and increased availability of labour. This is a value-added strategy, Mr. Speaker.

The capital plan is an example of this government's foresight and long-term planning, which help to ensure a continued high standard of living for all Albertans. For instance, Albertans will benefit from

54 new and replacement schools across the province, which will accommodate more than 31,000 students. Money will also be invested in school infrastructure revitalization projects such as repairs, health and safety upgrades, mechanical system replacements, and energy efficiency improvements.

The capital plan funding will be evenly distributed as \$5.8 billion will be provided over the next three years for Alberta highways, \$5.6 billion for municipalities, and \$1.2 billion for postsecondary facilities. More specifically, this \$1.2 billion investment in postsecondary facilities will create spaces for more than 16,000 students in high-demand programs, and it includes funding for new facilities, additions to existing to existing institutions, and approximately \$328 million for infrastructure maintenance across the province.

Mr. Speaker, everyone benefits from our capital plan since nearly \$1.7 billion will be used for climate change initiatives such as supporting technologies that reduce greenhouse emissions and increase efficiency of energy use and production. This includes carbon capture and storage projects as well as initiatives through programs like the green transit incentive program, the climate change and emission management fund, and the Canada ecotrust for clean air and climate change.

Furthermore, Albertans will have access to more patient-focused services through capital funding in health care, with more than \$3 billion over three years for expansion projects, construction of new health facilities, health information systems, and vaccines. This funding will also relieve pressure on the acute-care system and emergency rooms by building a more robust outpatient and ambulatory care system.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on, but it is very clear that this government is committed to maintaining and building our infrastructure. With that being said, the government of Alberta savings bond could be another form of investment in ensuring that Alberta is well positioned for the future.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, public infrastructure projects help stimulate the economy – I would know that because I finished economics at the University of Alberta – which is another reason why the savings bonds have the potential to be extremely profitable for Albertans. After all, infrastructure projects create many jobs. In this way this government motion could be a vital component of the government's commitment to stimulate the economy and support employment. It is estimated that every \$1 billion invested in infrastructure spending supports 11,600 jobs across the economy, from engineering and construction to the retail and service sectors. In fact, capital planned spending this year is expected to support more than 80,000 jobs, Mr. Speaker. In this way the government of Alberta savings bonds would be going towards creating more jobs as an increase in infrastructure spending equates to more employment for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, my third and final point is that by expanding our infrastructure network, the province would be continuing to ensure open access to trade, investment, and labour mobility within Alberta, between provinces, and with other countries. Investing in our highways supports the operation of Alberta's essential energy, forestry, and agriculture industries, all of which require safe and efficient transportation routes. In addition, developing ring roads, twinning highways, building interchanges, continuing construction of trade corridors, and pavement rehabilitation all help to ensure that our cities are accessible and free flowing. This ultimately ensures that our cities are attractive places to live, work, and invest. This, I believe, is the vision of our good Premier for this province.

Mr. Speaker, this government motion could support Alberta's interprovincial trade policy, which is to pursue free trade in goods, services, and investment and access for people between Alberta and the rest of Canada. It could help make certain that Alberta's industries are globally competitive and continue to attract investment to develop our resources. Investing a share of the savings bonds in infrastructure would be an example of an innovative way of raising funds without increasing taxes. This government motion has the potential to be another way for Albertans to voluntarily invest in programs that are very important to them. It is always good to have several methods of attracting investment. This government has made a commitment not to increase taxes. Therefore, other forms of generating investments which benefit all Albertans are a worthwhile venture.

Mr. Speaker, in the end, these savings bonds could help advance Alberta's economy by increasing trade, creating jobs, and ensuring that our province is ready for future growth. The government of Alberta savings bonds would not only be an investment in Albertans' futures but could also be an investment in the future of this province. I cannot think of a better investment. For these reasons I support this government motion for this Assembly to approve in general the issuing of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the member who just spoke might have ideas of projects in his constituency that he might want to see funded through these capital bonds.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A few days ago there was a fire hall that was opened in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. I'm very proud to say that this government really supports the infrastructure projects and facilities that would be needed in any community to meet the needs of our constituency membership. I think this is a good example: 5,200 calls were made to the emergency response team that serves the community in meeting their immediate needs. I'm very proud to say that this is really the essence of these capital bonds that this government is thinking of approving.

Thank you very much.

4:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Correct me if I'm wrong. I think fire halls in Edmonton are actually municipal infrastructures. If I am correct in that, then my question to the member would be: is it the government's intention with these capital bonds to also finance municipal infrastructure?

Mr. Benito: Well, I think the intention of this government motion is very clear, Mr. Speaker. It is to support the infrastructure projects and facilities. We should not limit ourselves to the short-mindedness of anybody in this House. It can be anything that supports the government's initiative when it comes to infrastructure projects and facilities, and it is very broad. This is the reason why, you know, we are doing this motion as a broad concept at the same time.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other members, the chair shall now recognize – in fact, I have a list here. I'll just name a few: the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the Minister of Seniors and . . .

Mr. Hehr: A question.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, you have a question. All right. Sorry.

Mr. Hehr: I just have another question for the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I believe that during his speech he was commenting something on stimulating the economy and economics at the University of A. I was just wondering if this is sort of a means by his government to undertake essentially debt to stimulate the economy, to play a role in the economy at the time when it's down. Was that what you were saying there?

Mr. Benito: Well, you know, I've been in business for more than 20 years. I'm involved in real estate development, selling of real estate, commercial, residential. I know; you know, I've seen it first-hand. Any development that any government will do in support of any infrastructure always will stimulate the economy. I could confirm that because of my experience, having an economics background, also, from the University of Alberta. I firmly believe that this government motion will really stimulate the economy, no doubt about that. Personally, for myself, I feel very strongly on this, and I'm a firm believer in this government motion.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I guess the follow-up question: would you consider yourself a Keynesian, then? You've taken these courses in the economy. Would you believe that governments do have a role to play, then, in economies when things are in the muck, shall we say, like they are now and through the issuance of bonds? That's what you're doing.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, if you wish to reply. [interjections]

Hon. members, if there are questions or comments, address them to the chair. Thank you.

I have a list here. I just want to read it out so that you gentlemen and ladies can be prepared: the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, the hon. members for Edmonton-Castle Downs, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Strathmore-Brooks, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Now the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to get into this debate. I guess that when this topic came up, I probably had more questions than answers. I think a lot of the time I'll spend today is putting out some ideas that a lot of constituents have asked me when they're hearing about these bond issues. Probably before my time, that I can recall anyways, Alberta capital bonds were used. Maybe some of the members opposite that have been around longer than I have could refresh my memory about what capital bonds were used for, but I think maybe the sky is the limit on this issue.

Maybe offering a bond right now could give a lot of people the surety that Albertans can invest in Alberta. You know, why should we always have to buy a Montreal bond or an Ontario bond or a Suncor bond? Why couldn't we buy an Alberta bond? Especially, I look back at the senior population and my constituents. You know, in the '80s, when the economy went bad, I remember my wife

coming home and saying: "What are we going to do? Our mortgage rate is going to go up to 20 per cent." I also remember that Sunday at my parents' house and my parents thinking: "Wow. Isn't this great? Twenty per cent." For the senior income it was pretty good, but for those of us that didn't have any money, not so good.

Well, the reverse has happened this time in the economy. Maybe this instrument could give our seniors that are getting a fraction of a point in their savings accounts in interest some surety for future income, but maybe it will also give them an opportunity to invest in the future for their children and their grandchildren and for generations forward. I know that our senior population has been there for us, and this will also give them another instrument to be there for Albertans.

I say that there's a Canadian savings bond instrument right now, so again, why not an Alberta savings bond? I know that my parents were very involved with buying Canadian savings bonds. They were proud to do that. They were proud to be Canadians, and they were proud to be Albertans. I think this will again inspire that proud-to-be-an-Albertan, proud-to-be-a-Canadian atmosphere. I think I'm feeling pretty good about this idea of a bond.

We heard some of the previous speakers talk about a preference for Albertans. Well, I know you have to be competitive out there in the market when you're issuing a bond, but maybe there is an instrument that our finance minister could consider when Albertans are purchasing an Alberta bond. Maybe we wouldn't have to pay Alberta income tax on the money generated by an Alberta bond. Why not? Why not have the preference that way, Mr. Speaker? I think the sky is the limit on this issue.

You know, the member opposite talked about municipalities: should they be part of this? Well, maybe they should be. In Whitecourt-St. Anne we have a foundation that's made up of all the municipalities, and they pool their resources for seniors' facilities. You know, right now when they want to build a seniors' facility, well, they get in line for the grants that, hopefully, they can access from different levels of government, but then they go to the regular institutions for lending. Well, maybe they should be able to line up at Alberta financial services somehow, maybe through a bond, maybe through the same instruments as municipalities can borrow from through their sources for an arena or a water pond or a sewage lagoon. Maybe foundations should be able to line up for this funding if this bond idea is successful.

Again, previous speakers talked about preference for Albertans. Well, I see this as larger than Albertans investing in infrastructure, in multiple levels of capital expenditures. I'm thinking that this should be an RRSP-deductible issue. We'll have to get the federal government involved if it's going to be RRSP. We'll need to have some discussions with our federal counterparts because what better instrument to invest into than a bond that's backed by a government with the credit rating that we have? Why not use that? That's an asset. I think it's an underused asset. Why not get out there and promote that asset? Yeah, I think the minister should have a meeting with her federal counterparts and talk about an RRSP. [interjections] You know, I can't hear. I'll put my earpiece in. Afterwards you can question me all you want, but I can't hear this stuff. If there are smart aleck remarks coming about my hearing, it had better come to you, not through the background here because I can't hear that stuff, okay?

4:20

Mr. Speaker, I think these bonds are worthy of investigating. I think these bonds are worthy of investing in. The sky is the limit. I think we should not restrict ourselves from discussing anything in this Legislature about this idea. I think it's good for Albertans. It's

good for Canadians. Yes, I think we should have some kind of preference, but maybe that could be built into a tax instrument. Yes, I think they should be RRSP eligible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll have five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me reassure the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne that there is much too much respect for him in this Assembly for any smart aleck comments to be made. I don't want to speak for my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, but he was simply making the point that as bonds these almost certainly already qualify for RRSP eligibility. That's what he was just trying to tell you, so we probably don't need to consult the federal government.

My comment or observation to the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is simply that I'm left almost with my head spinning here with his enthusiasm for this. A bond? This is debt we're talking about. Let's not kid ourselves. We're doing something here that's going to take this government into debt. When I hear the enthusiasm from an apparently fiscal conservative group for debt and hear them talking about the sky is the limit and so on, I'm startled, and I'm worried.

We worked hard, suffered a lot, and I think made some very serious blunders in getting out of debt, and to now hear this caucus wax enthusiastically about going into debt, apparently without limit – at least, that's the kind of comment I'm beginning to pick up – really concerns me. It concerns me as a legislator and as a citizen, somebody who seeks balance from its government. The lurching about here on fiscal policy from this government is nothing short of frightening.

I would just urge all members to understand what we're talking about here. We're talking about big-time debt. Now, maybe it's justified, but let's know clear-eyed exactly what's going on here. We're talking debt. So if we want to get into debt, let's think carefully here. It may well be that to build a new hospital or to build a seniors' centre or something, debt is okay. But I just want everybody to be really clear here. Your motion is about taking this province deeper and deeper and deeper into debt.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, very good points by the opposition member. When I talk about the sky is the limit, the sky is the limit in the discussion that we should have. I appreciate your comments.

I remember when Liz and I got our first mortgage for our house. We didn't go into that debt very lightly, but we also knew that there was an opportunity for an investment so we could raise our family, and we could have a piece of real estate that we could call ours. Yeah, we called it ours and the bank's for a while. There's no doubt about that. But when we considered where we were going to borrow the money from, you know, one of the first issues in our minds was: "Well, we're going to borrow the money from a local bank, somewhere you can get some advice from, and we're going to borrow the money from maybe" – at the time the Alberta Treasury Branches was the instrument that we felt best to use.

If this government decides that we need to borrow money in the future, why would we want to go to a New York bank? Why would we want to go offshore? I'm saying: let's get it here. That's my point, opposition. I'm saying that we should not restrict ourselves to the discussion. Your discussion is valid, and there are good points that you've made. But I'm saying that if we're going to borrow, let's borrow here.

Plus, member opposite, I want to know what we're borrowing for, too. You know, I'd like a list that says: "Okay. This is why we're borrowing." I'll give you an example of the Whitecourt Hilltop school, that I graduated from, that my sons graduated from. About two years ago it went out for public tender to do a major retrofit and teardown of some of the 40-year-old wings in the school. Twenty-four million dollars was the lowest bidder. Plus, we had to encourage a second bidder to come along. It came out six months ago: \$13 million. What a time to invest. What a time. What an opportunity. Why – why? – constrict ourselves to this discussion?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to add my thoughts to those of my colleagues regarding this motion that would see the creation of Alberta capital bonds. These bonds would be a good investment opportunity for Albertans. They would also provide Albertans with another way to participate in building and strengthening our province.

I'm especially hopeful that funds raised through these bonds could help further support Alberta seniors and persons with disabilities. I'm excited about Alberta capital bonds for another reason as well, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited because Alberta capital bonds speak to me of the future. They speak of the future of this province and the future of our children and our grandchildren. I'm excited because they allow average Albertans to participate, young and old, rich or not so rich. Young parents who have a hundred dollars or \$200 can buy bonds to invest in the future postsecondary education of their children. There are many grandparents that I know who have grandchildren who own every toy and technological gadget available. What a wonderful way this is for grandparents to give gifts to their grandchildren, a gift that keeps on giving. When the children cash in these bonds when it comes time for their postsecondary education, they will remember how much they were loved or are loved by their grandparents. [interjections]

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to commend this government for reintroducing the idea of government bonds. I notice my colleagues across the way are having a little bit of a chuckle, but I have to tell you that if I had the opportunity to invest in these bonds, I'd probably stand in line to be able to purchase a bond for a child's birthday or a child's Christmas present because, unfortunately, my grandchildren have too many toys.

As the others have mentioned, the Alberta government has had success with bonds in the past, including the capital bond campaigns in the late '80s and early '90s. The capital bond program being proposed today would greatly assist Alberta in moving forward during this difficult economic time.

I agree with others who have said that the bonds should be available only in Alberta and only for Albertans. I believe such a bond program can help foster a greater sense of Alberta pride and a real connection among Albertans with projects funded through their investments. By purchasing these bonds, Albertans would be guaranteed a competitive rate of return while giving them the opportunity to invest in a real and hands-on way in the future of their province.

Issuing capital bonds will also complement our government's four-point plan for economic recovery. For those who may need a refresher, that plan calls for reduced spending, the use of cash reserves such as the \$17 billion sustainability fund to cover revenue shortfall and protect key programs, ensuring Alberta's energy sector and other industries are globally competitive and continue to attract investment, and continuing to invest in public infrastructure.

It was no surprise that investing in public infrastructure was the main focus of this year's provincial budget. That's because investing in public infrastructure is a key way to stimulate economic activity during a recession, and I believe that capital bonds can play a significant role in supporting these efforts.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, it's a personal priority for me and a priority for this government that seniors have access to the right kinds of facilities to allow them to maintain their independence and to maintain essential connections to family and friends. The majority of seniors reside in their own homes. Some require home care supports and help from neighbours and family members. However, for those seniors who require additional personal and health care needs, there are facilities available for them, and our commitment remains to increase the quality, supply, and choice of continuing care.

In support of this priority our government committed more than \$190 million in capital funding in March of this year to help build and modernize more than 3,000 affordable supportive living spaces and lodge units across Alberta. In addition, since 1999 the Alberta government has invested \$246 million in capital funding toward developing or upgrading about 4,800 supportive living housing units. As announced in Budget '09-10, our commitment is reinforced through the allocation of additional capital funding to support the development of additional spaces. In light of these and other investments I believe this government has made significant strides forward in supporting the needs of Alberta's seniors.

But my colleagues and I in government recognize that more can be done. As it says in our government's economic recovery plan, *The Way Forward*, while "the foundations of our publicly-funded system are good . . . there are things we must improve or the system will not meet the needs of a growing and aging population." I wholeheartedly agree with this statement, and capital bonds can help. Funds raised through capital bonds can further support our priority of ensuring that seniors are aging in the right place using our continuing care strategy.

The benefits of this strategy are evident in communities across Alberta. In Red Deer, where I live, I can point to several examples where lives have improved and the community as a whole has improved as well from investments under the continuing care strategy. We have two major projects in Red Deer. We have Michener village, which has 220 long-term care beds. It will be completed in the spring of 2010 thanks to some support from this government. We'll have assisted living, we'll have independent living, and we'll just have regular living in what we call the community of care. Now, Bethany CollegeSide, which is also long-term care, will also have assisted living and will be a community of care.

Now, why is a community of care important to me? I'll tell you why. I experienced first-hand the sadness and almost the tragedy of a couple, an older couple, my grandparents, married over 65 years, being separated because one had to go into long-term care and the other couldn't be close to him. Knowing what that can do to that couple, my grandparents, and knowing what it can do to every other couple that has been together for a long period of time, to have a community of care where they can live in different levels of care but be close together is very important to me, so that's why I talk about a community of care and why it's important.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, Alberta's aging population is a key priority for this government. Every month Alberta has a thousand new seniors. The current number of seniors in this wonderful province is 386,000. This government remains committed to Alberta's seniors, and the focus on increasing the supply and

choice of continuing care spaces is reflective of that. As such, I believe that a portion of the funds through Alberta capital bonds could go toward developing and modernizing facilities for seniors.

I know Albertans are concerned about the help provided to seniors. They tell me so. I believe those same Albertans would be eager to support the government with these projects through a capital bond program, and I know Albertans would be proud to say that they helped support seniors and people with disabilities in the community. They would be proud to say that they helped build their province, and they would be proud to say that they helped their children or their grandchildren.

Whether this includes a facility for seniors or a roadway for them to travel on to visit their grandchildren or a school, a university that trains doctors, it doesn't matter. They'll be proud to be part of that because at the end of the day that's what this bond program should be all about, Albertans investing their money to support a meaningful and real, tangible difference in their province and their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for questions and comments to the minister.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. I believe I heard somewhere in that speech – it was very eloquent and spoke of future generations and all that stuff – that you enjoyed this type of capital project and capital spending to stimulate the economy at this time. Are you, then, embracing that governments have a role to play in economies and in stimulating in times of economic downturn?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would agree with that. I think that it's very important to stimulate an economy in times of recession. It's not the time to stop spending. One of the things that's very important is to keep people working.

The interesting thing is that even in this time of economic recession we're still building the population of Alberta in more ways than one. We have lots of babies being born. We heard the Premier say that we have – I don't know – how many hundreds of babies being born every week in Alberta. We have people still coming to Alberta. So we still need to build infrastructure. What better time can there be than now, when prices are lower because bids are lower, because people need the work and want the work, compared to a boom time, when everybody is so busy that the prices are so high, they're unaffordable? This is the time to be building infrastructure. I can't think of a better way to build infrastructure than by having Albertans help you do that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: I'm done.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a brief question to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. She was talking in a very impassioned speech about the many good things that capital bonds are going to do for this province. But I'm wondering if she has at all considered the fact that this is going to be

income, then, earned to parties in Alberta and therefore subject to Alberta taxation, and perhaps then we will gain some money back from any of the interest paid on these bonds. I wonder how she feels about that.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I said that this was the gift that kept on giving. Obviously, that's part of the giving. It comes back to us in more ways than one. Although I hadn't exactly considered that, it's an excellent point. It just helps to prove my point that Alberta capital bonds are a gift that keeps on giving.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no others who wish to question or comment, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to participate in the debate on Motion 16. We've heard, certainly, some very interesting perspectives this afternoon in the course of the debate. I'm going to take the opportunity to comment on a few of those and then submit some of my own thoughts.

I guess to begin with I'd like to go back to the speech of the President of the Treasury Board, when he characterized what he hoped this debate would be. I believe the term he used was the art of the possible. For my part, Mr. Speaker, that's really what I'm hoping this debate will be about, a debate about Alberta's future. There probably isn't a whole lot of point in talking about the mechanics of how bonds would work unless we have a clear vision of the type of province we want to build in the future and what strategic role Alberta capital bonds might play in helping us get there. The President of the Treasury Board also talked about opportunities for youth, providing security for seniors, and I also think that's a similar invitation for us to maybe talk about this on a bit of a higher level.

For myself I guess just a few things in terms of the financial position of the province and why we might want to consider capital bonds as part of our economic policy. To be blunt, it goes back to the question of why we paid off the debt in the first place, Mr. Speaker. We have a budget in the order of \$36 billion in this province. The projected assets for the end of this year are in the range of \$35 billion. As for my thoughts, while I certainly don't subscribe to the idea of using bonds to cover operating deficit costs, I don't know very many successful business entities or other governments in the world that don't use the strength of their own balance sheet to fund their own future growth.

4:40

So I think we need to be cautious when talking with Albertans about the intent of the bonds – they're capital in nature – and we need to give them the freedom to believe that the strength of the balance sheet that they have built over successive generations and which we now have the privilege of stewarding as government is really an opportunity for us to invest in that growth and to provide for our collective vision of the future. I guess that's where I start in terms of why we need to be considering capital bonds. There isn't much point, Mr. Speaker, frankly, in the sacrifices that Albertans have made in the past if they don't have the opportunity to put those assets to work not only for the benefit of themselves but of future generations.

I raised the question a bit earlier about, you know: why did we pay off the debt, what is our vision of the future, and what strategic role do bonds play in that? I guess for me, and as the Premier often discusses, it really has to do with the question of our eventual transition from a largely resource-based economy to what we hope

will be a knowledge-based economy and perhaps a day when the revenue and investment that is generated from intellectual property and the development of knowledge capital, the commercialization of that capital, exceeds the revenue that's available to us through natural resources, which I think we'd all acknowledge are very, very important to us but also very volatile by their very nature.

I'm hoping that through the course of the debate we'll hear a bit of a discussion about how we move to a knowledge-based economy, what sort of infrastructure is required in order to get there, what level of integration is required between our postsecondary institutions and our business community, the education system in Alberta and what role that plays, and also our opportunities internationally and how we might position ourselves to market intellectual property to a much greater extent and perhaps aspire to be a global leader in that field. That's certainly one of the reasons that I chose to run for public office, and members around all sides of the House have talked about this in the past. Why don't we put on the table some specifics about how we might use capital bonds to help us get there?

There were a few other points raised that I'd like to respond to. The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports talked extensively about what I'll call social infrastructure. The opportunity to use funds raised through the sale of capital bonds to invest in seniors' facilities was one example.

We have an equally big challenge when it comes to health care in this province, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the House to look at two factors. The first is the level of per capita spending in Canada on health care – we're about third in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development – and then the performance of our health care system internationally, which is at best middle of the pack in the last few benchmarking reports that I've looked at. It suggests to us that we're probably not getting the best bang for the buck from the money that we're spending on health care in the country. That's measured in terms of health outcomes, health system performance, and the overall health status of the population. I think we need to look at the opportunity that capital bonds could play in strengthening health infrastructure.

I guess the second is a fact that's often referred to in this House, and that's the percentage of health care spending that goes to labour costs, to funding for the salaries and benefits of health care professionals that deliver services. That figure, while it's come down in the last few years from about 80 per cent of total spending, now stands in the range of 75 per cent. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that every dollar that we choose to spend from government on health infrastructure – on capital costs for hospitals, for clinics, for other facilities – is a dollar that's not available to us to deliver a greater level of health services that meet the needs of Albertans. I think capital bonds can play a tremendous role in building that health infrastructure.

The minister may or may not have referred to this – I'm sorry; I can't remember exactly – but my research shows that in addition to the \$119 million in provincial capital funding that was announced in March to modernize more than 3,000 affordable living spaces, if you look at all of the spending before that, add it up, the result is that this province has invested \$246 million in capital funding in the last 10 years to support the development or modernization of about 4,800 supportive living housing units.

I don't offer that statistic, Mr. Speaker, solely as a way to point out the government's recognition of need and their willingness to invest. I point out and I ask the House to consider the proposition that that \$246 million in capital funding also represents funding that wasn't available to us to provide home care or other direct services to seniors and others living with disabilities, although I think we all agree that our hope for them is that they can live as independently as

possible in the community. There are certainly some opportunities there to build some infrastructure through capital bonds that will allow us to put more into these sorts of direct services in the future. We're certainly going to need to do that in view of the demographic shift, the aging population, and so on. We've talked about that at length in this House in the past. So I'd offer those thoughts as reasons why we should be considering this proposition.

In terms of the specific offering, hon. members of the House have offered a number of thoughts about how the bond issue might be structured. I thought the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo made a good point when he talked about the possibility of offering the bonds in set limits. We might want to look at a particular series of bonds to suit specific purposes, and maybe we proceed in stages. That's perhaps something we should consider.

I also think that we need to look at the financial opportunity that we're offering Albertans in terms of not just investing in their own province. I'd be the first to agree that that's very, very important. But if we look at the contributions by Albertans through taxes to federal coffers minus what we receive back in services, I think most of us are aware that the net amount, the net contribution of Albertans to the rest of the country is about \$18 billion per year. That's a very substantial sum, Mr. Speaker. I think there are many Albertans, myself and my own constituents included, who, if they had an opportunity to target more of that money to Alberta, to Alberta projects, to Alberta's future, would readily choose to leave that money in this province and to make it available to pass on to future generations. I think that's a valid point as well.

I think I'm going to conclude there, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd just like to reiterate my initial point. I think this should be a debate about the future of this province. I think that as elected members we should all have a clear vision for the province's future. It should be based on our own experience, of course, and our own thoughts, but more importantly we should be able to reflect well the views of our constituents.

I know that, for my part, in the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford I'll be consulting extensively on this question with my own constituents. It's going to take a bit of work to explain the debt/deficit difference, but the more we reiterate in this House that we're talking about capital funds that are available for investment, that it's debt that's prudently undertaken, that it's with due regard to the balance sheet, the strongest balance sheet in any jurisdiction in North America for a government, I think we can have that discussion with them. But if we engage in discussions about fear, about entering a slippery slope and Albertans being back where they were in 1993, I think we do them a disservice. They have the opportunity and the privilege and certainly the right, Mr. Speaker, to chart a course for the future of this province and to expect that all of us as members of this House can contribute positively to developing strategies to achieve that vision.

With that, I'll conclude. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you talked about health care costs in your speech, and you indicated that labour costs are 75 per cent of the total health care bill. Does that 75 per cent include all of the individuals, including contractors, working at Alberta Health and Wellness, the individuals that work at Alberta Health Services, and also the people who would be contracted out, whether it's for other services provided to the regional health authority like long-term

care? Where exactly do you get that number of 75 per cent for labour costs in the health budget?

Thank you.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for that question. The figure I quoted is a national average. I got that figure from the Conference Board of Canada. In terms of how the specifics of the health care budget in Alberta break down compared to that percentage, I wouldn't have the answer to that question.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you.
May I ask one more, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Unless there's other indication.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for really putting some thought and actual ideas into it, not merely platitudes and saying that this is the greatest thing since sliced bread, that Alberta is going back into debt again after a wholesale reversal of what this government told us for the last 15 years. It's really nice to see some actual thought put into what he would like to see out of a capital bond project. He's right on one thing, that this government hasn't been successful in 40 years of trying to diversify our economy. That is painfully evident right now as the money tree in the backyard, the oil and gas industry, isn't producing, and we're broke. A bit of a recognition of that in your speech in that we've got to look to developing our knowledge-based economy, possibly our wind, our environment. How do you see sort of your bond project, if you were talking about that, this capital bond project, being able to do those things? I'd like to hear your ideas on that.

Mr. Horne: I'll thank the hon. member for what he said, but I'm not sure whether he's offering a comment or a question.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the strength of the balance sheet of Alberta today is directly due to over 30 years of very solid financial stewardship by this government. We can have all the debates we want about spending on a year-to-year basis, and people will have various opinions across the House, but the fact that we have the balance sheet we do, that it is the strongest of any government in North America, is not a credit to the individual members of this House. It's a credit to successive generations of Albertans that worked to make that possible. I don't think we can state that often enough. With due respect to the hon. member, I guess my comment in reply would be that it's not about us; it's about Albertans. That's really what the nature of this discussion should be.

In terms of the question around how the funds raised through the bonds might play into planning in the future, the way I look at the 20-year capital plan, for example, is that it's a portfolio of projects. So rather than looking at individual projects, we look at an entire investment portfolio that is closely linked to a strategic plan for our province going into the future. I'm really talking here about 20, 30, 50 years down the road, the next generation. I see the bond issue as a way to provide a regular system of cash flow to fund that portfolio, not without the opportunity for us to discuss and debate changes that might be made as we proceed through time and as priorities change. But I really see it as a stable flow of cash for a long-term capital plan

rather than a way to fund individual projects. Hopefully, we'll hear some other ideas on that as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You have only three seconds.

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, dear.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to take part in this debate. Not often do we have an opportunity in this Chamber to discuss something that actually has the opportunity to inspire not only us in this room but all of Alberta. [interjection] The member across is making a snide remark about the term "inspire." But maybe he's right. You know, there's something about this Chamber that somehow precludes us from talking about things that actually inspire, precludes us from talking about things that could be. Instead, we often talk about things that can't be. It often requires of us, and particularly members of the opposition, to find the negative underlyings in no matter what it is that we do.

Well, there is one motion on the floor right now, that actually is not binding us. It's a motion, Mr. Speaker. It is not very technical in nature. It doesn't ask us to define the mechanisms of how these bonds would operate and what the percentage of lending would be and whether they will be offered in bulk or not and whether they will be offered only in Alberta or not. This motion only asks of us to blue sky about what can be done if such a bond was in place. Would it be the proper thing for government even to consider such a bond in the first place? It's unfortunate that the use of the word "inspired" is laughed upon in this particular Chamber. Perhaps it is the architecture of this Chamber that is not conducive to being inspired.

Mr. Speaker, these bonds would be for capital investment and capital investment only. It is very important to delineate that because if any member was to rise in this Chamber and say, "We have a shortage in operating dollars for running our programs or paying salaries and hence we should consider bonds," I would be the first one to rise in opposition to that because all we would be doing is incurring operating deficits which then lead to debts, and there is no end to that cycle. But this is for infrastructure debt, infrastructure that will employ people not only while it's being built but once it's built. Whether it's schools or nursing homes or whatever institutions they are, they will in turn end up employing Albertans who will be paying taxes and who will be serving the ever-growing Alberta population.

Also, I agree with the member of the opposition that it is an opportunity to diversify Alberta's economy. He refers to it as the money tree. Well, I'm not sure if money tree is a proper analogy, but if it is to be used, let's not forget who planted that tree in that backyard in the first place. Mr. Speaker, oil sands are available in provinces to the east and provinces to the west, and they haven't been explored. They had an opportunity to plant that tree. They didn't. It was this government that planted that tree. That's why we have the revenues from it. So I'm not sure if it is a good analogy, but if you want to use it, I might as well make a comment about it.

Another thing is that the opposition often talks about ethical investment. I agree with them that if money is to be invested by government or by individuals, it is important to know what it is that you're investing into. Coincidence would have it that tomorrow, actually, I will be going to a bank, buying a registered education savings account. Probably a chart will be put in front of me of various investment portfolios, but frankly, to be honest, Mr. Speaker,

I won't have an idea what it is that I'm investing my money into. It could be an operation in Europe or in Asia. It could be an investment house in New York. The fact is that I will be making my decision based on the risk factor and the rate of interest that will be given to me as a dividend, and that's how most Albertans invest right now in various vehicles that are available to them through banks.

Now, that would be an option. You know, as an Albertan I think I would feel much more comfortable knowing that my money is backing the operation and construction of facilities that are utilized by Albertans in my province, in my Alberta, that somehow my dollars, which I would have invested anyhow in a different investment vehicle, are building this province, that one day I can say: you know, I contributed to building, perhaps, this building or building this chain of buildings or supporting seniors or education or whatever it is. If I am going to invest these dollars anyhow – and I will – I might as well know where these dollars are going.

I know that some were laughing when the minister of seniors was talking about the sentimental aspect of it, but there is nothing wrong with being patriotic. There is nothing wrong with supporting your own province. We are doing that anyhow. Many of us volunteer in our own province. Many of us give endless donations to various charities and societies. Why not use our investment portfolio and see it as another way of donating and investing in our own province? I don't think there is anything wrong with that. I think it's actually the right thing to do. You invest at home first, before you send your money abroad.

5:00

I don't think there is anything ideologically wrong with using your equity, which this government has built up. As was properly pointed out by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, our balance sheet is impeccable. We have a triple-A rating on international markets. We have some \$75 billion worth of liquid equity between all the endowment funds and all of our accounts. Why not use that to the benefit of Albertans? After all, why did our forefathers work so hard and save all that money and put us in the position that we're in right now? Why not leverage our ability to borrow and borrow from Albertans to build infrastructure for Albertans?

I would encourage members of this House to start focusing on the possibilities because I think that the possibilities really are endless, not endless in how much money we borrow but endless in how we utilize this new way of generating dollars and improving and investing in Alberta. I would encourage all members to blue sky a little about it because that's why we've been elected by our constituents, to be here and come up with solutions, come up with solutions to real problems.

There are simple solutions that many governments are doing. You know, you can just go out there and deficit spend. The outcome would be the same; you would still end up building a hospital or a school. But would it be the wisest way of doing it? Would it allow Albertans to participate in it? This allows Albertans to participate.

Mr. Speaker, I am very encouraged by this motion. I wish we had more motions like this on the floor that simply allow us to explore the possibilities. Let the bureaucracy of the minister of finance figure out the fine details and bring them back to us in the form of a bill of what this bond would look like. But at this point I think we should be discussing it. I encourage all Albertans out there to think about it and give us MLAs feedback on it: how they feel about it, what they see the future of such a bond would be, and how they see such a bond being constructed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes for questions and answers. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I have a question for the hon. member. Given that the Fiscal Responsibility Act was amended, allowing assets of the capital account, which the hon. member talked about, the balance sheet – these monies from the capital account in the case of 2009-10, the current fiscal year, were transferred from the stability fund. Now, has the hon. member given any consideration to the fact that if we're raising these bonds to be used for capital, could that money be transferred into the stability fund and used to fund operating deficits? Have you given that any consideration or thought?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, the reason we have this motion on the floor is to have that discussion. If you're suggesting that that would be the right thing to do, I will gladly take that as your input, that you're suggesting that money be transferred from one to the other and cover the operating expenses of the Alberta government. I personally suggest that that is not the right thing to do. In my opinion, if such bonds were to be issued, I would want them to be well defined because I want to have the ability to tell my constituents that these dollars will be enveloped, or dedicated, to infrastructure spending only. But your suggestion could be as good as mine. The fact is that I'm glad that you're engaging in this discussion because that's what it's really all about.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Clearly, the hon. member doesn't understand the amendment that came through this House in the spring which amended the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Assets of the capital account were transferred into the stability fund for this financial year. Okay? I can understand why the hon. member would be cautious, but can you guarantee that with this motion we will not be raising money through this issuance of capital bonds and have that amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility Act allow the government to quietly transfer all or a portion of this money on the balance sheet from the capital plan through to the sustainability fund and then withdraw it for operating funds? I'm not for that. I never did say that. What I want to know from the hon. member is: are you concerned that as a result of the amendment to that act possibly this could happen?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, see, that's exactly why I spent the first three minutes of my speech talking about the atmosphere of this Chamber. This member, it appears, has spent some time, obviously, trying to figure out a conspiracy theory: how this could go wrong and how money could possibly be siphoned from one account to another to somehow not tell constituents, Albertans, that money is being misdirected and misspent. But he hasn't taken the time to read the wording of the motion, which is actually one sentence long. The motion simply encourages the government to explore the possibility of having a bond. It doesn't tell you what the bond will look like. It doesn't limit this discussion at all. We haven't even conceptualized what this bond would be, and he already has a conspiracy theory on how the money will be misspent.

Mr. Speaker, the next motion should be that we somehow restructure this Chamber because, obviously, there are either air circulation problems or maybe the architecture is not conducive to talking about things that are inspirational because they seem to focus on conspiracy theories on subject matters that haven't even been developed yet. Imagine what theories they must have on things that are actually currently in place.

The Deputy Speaker: The next speaker would be the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and speak to this government motion and its benefits to education in Alberta. As we're all well aware, the world is facing a period of economic uncertainty, and Alberta is not immune to its effects. As we work our way through this recession, we must not abandon our long-term goals for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, continuing to plan for the future while laying the foundation for a strong economic recovery is this government's highest priority as we move forward. To this end Alberta capital bonds could support capital infrastructure projects that will help our province remain competitive in the global market. We have an opportunity here to take advantage of historically low interest rates and continue our commitment to investing in Alberta's future.

Included in this vision is a continued commitment to education in our province. Education lies at the heart of Alberta's future prosperity, and it is imperative that the money generated from the sale of Alberta capital bonds be used in part to ensure that our education system remains one of the best in Canada. Alberta is proud to have one of the most skilled and educated populations in North America. For example, 60 per cent of Albertans 25 years of age and older hold a postsecondary degree, diploma, or certificate. Initiatives and programs to encourage this kind of lifelong learning are integral to a dynamic and competitive economy.

While we're fortunate that Alberta is rich in natural resources, knowledge is increasingly becoming Alberta's new renewable resource. Our outstanding education is at the centre of this change, and Alberta students are the future of this new knowledge-based economy. This is why, Mr. Speaker, continued investment in education is a key component of our economic recovery plan. With the money generated from these bonds, I encourage the government to further support the many innovative education initiatives currently under way.

5:10

For example, the Alberta schools alternative procurement initiative, known as ASAP, plans to deliver 14 new schools, which will result in the creation of more than 12,000 student spaces by 2013. Among these schools will be 10 elementary and middle schools and four high schools. In addition, the construction of these new schools will provide Albertans with additional jobs. By using the revenue generated from the sale of Alberta capital bonds to build future schools, we will be giving Albertans the opportunity to invest directly in the province's future. It is the people of this great province that will be creating jobs, building communities, and strengthening our economy. Also, we must take advantage of low building and material costs so that we can get the most for each and every dollar we spend. By making these investments now, we're setting the stage and preparing ourselves for when economic growth returns to our province.

Another important education initiative is Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta. As many of you know, I have spent the last year and a half as the chair of the steering committee on the Setting the Direction project.

Mr. MacDonald: I didn't know.

Mr. Bhardwaj: You do now.

Mr. Speaker, the Setting the Direction steering committee presented our recommendations to the minister in June of 2009. He

recommended that a new special education framework be created in order to continue Alberta's proud history of meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities and diverse needs. Protecting Alberta's most vulnerable, including children with special needs, must remain one of our government's top priorities. Programs such as those that help students with special needs must be sheltered in times of decreased prosperity. Albertans need to know that this government is committed to meeting their families' needs and the needs of those who are less fortunate.

Alberta Education has also initiated a unique discussion about the future of education in this province. The Inspiring Education initiative is based on five key values – opportunity, fairness, citizenship, choice, and diversity – and involves parents, teachers, and other education stakeholders. By engaging in this kind of productive discussion, we will continue to provide a secure and bright future for our children.

Another of Alberta Education's innovative programs is Alberta's high school completion framework. This initiative recognizes that Alberta's future prosperity rests on our ability to generate a well-educated workforce that is responsive to change. Unfortunately, not all of Alberta students are able to complete the requirements for a high school diploma. Alberta's high school completion framework reflects one of our education system's key priorities, which is to ensure that all of our students are successful both in school and in life. The framework includes a strategy to address some of the obstacles and challenges that students face in finishing high school. By giving our future leaders every opportunity to succeed, Alberta's high school completion framework helps to strengthen our economy today and for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, all of these initiatives aim to improve the quality of our children's education and contribute to Alberta's future. After all, a quality education system not only inspires a passion for knowledge and lifelong learning but contributes to the overall vibrancy and strength of our economy and our community. One of this government's priorities in the past has been to ensure strong communities throughout the province. It is through the support and education of our youth that we're able to build the foundation that is needed for a strong community.

By using Alberta capital bonds, we will be making an important investment in Alberta's future, and we must make sure that these programs continue to receive the support they need. This is the kind of investment that will see us emerge from these uncertain times stronger and more vibrant than ever. Education is a pillar of any strong and prosperous community, and I'm proud of the accomplishments of Alberta's world-class education system. In turn, what is required to maintain the world-class quality of this system is continuous support and investment. Offering Alberta capital bonds will enable this government to strengthen its commitment to quality education in Alberta. To this end, these bonds should be available primarily to Albertans as they have a vested interest in the future of this province.

This is, however, a chance for our government to promote Alberta as a great place to invest on both the local and global stage. As such, all those who would like an opportunity to invest in Alberta's future should be able to purchase Alberta capital bonds. By offering Alberta capital bonds on the global market, we can ensure that the Alberta economy remains competitive. We can also attract the key foreign direct investment that is required to strengthen our economy and promote Alberta on the world stage. In addition, the bonds should be readily available at all major financial institutions in order to make it as easy as possible for people to invest in Alberta's future.

Alberta capital bonds make sense in both the short and long term, and I wholeheartedly support this motion. Mr. Speaker, I would like

to thank you for the opportunity to speak to this government motion, which promotes strong community foundations in the face of this recession and will work to strengthen the quality of education in Alberta. I would also like to applaud the government for its strong leadership in these difficult economic times.

With that, I would ask all members to join me and stand in support of Government Motion 16. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now call on the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to join in the discussion this afternoon on this important government motion. Government Motion 16 proposes the general approval of the government of Alberta issuing capital bonds in support of public infrastructure projects and facilities. I think this is a good idea and certainly a very interesting opportunity for Albertans. I also appreciate the opportunity to engage in the exchange of ideas with regard to what might work with regard to the issue of capital bonds.

I find it interesting that the Minister of Finance and Enterprise referred earlier this afternoon to the fact that Alberta hasn't issued bonds since about 1997, which is more than 12 years. I think that the whole matter of this being an idea that needs further development is where the opportunity lies. In terms of the detail of how capital bonds might work, I think there's a wide range of opportunity that obviously is available to us with regard to this, and I look forward to further detail coming forward from the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Certainly, I think the opportunity for families, for parents, for grandparents to invest in an instrument that is within the province of Alberta provides an interesting concept for investing in the future educational needs of their children and grandchildren. I think that there's a whole range of opportunities that can be developed as a result of this.

It's not really my intention to spend a lot of time with regard to what exactly the bonds should look like, but certainly from the perspective of being responsible with regard to these types of instruments, I think the fact that they are secure should be reflected in the rate of interest and the return that they bear so that this becomes something that works not only for people who are investing in them but is also a useful instrument for the province of Alberta. I find it interesting that a number of other jurisdictions have similar issues of bonds: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, other provinces that all have issued bonds for their residents. I do think that with regard to what we're talking about here, it's important that these are restricted to be available to Albertans and only Albertans.

5:20

The second part of this motion refers directly to the investment in infrastructure projects and facilities. I think this is consistent with Motion 501, that was passed at the beginning of this session, that also talks about aggressive investment in infrastructure projects in this province. I note from our budget that this government has in this fiscal year proposed to invest \$7 billion in capital infrastructure projects. That's a very significant investment in the future of this province, and I think the concept of inviting Albertans to invest in some instruments that support that is consistent with many of the types of projects that we already invest in.

I think particularly of the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit. I would expect that as members, when we drive through our

communities, we see a whole range of infrastructure projects that really make us proud of what our communities have accomplished. I know that in my constituency every community has projects that already have a great deal of investment from volunteers in the community, particularly the projects that are supported by the Ministry of Culture and Community Spirit, that already have at least 50 per cent investment from fundraising projects that community members have really led. I think that the idea of issuing Alberta bonds just adds to the pride that Albertans already have in many of the projects that have been supported.

This afternoon I was thinking for just a few minutes about the range of projects that are supported in our communities. I had mentioned Culture and Community Spirit. There's Agriculture and Rural Development; Tourism, Parks and Recreation; Municipal Affairs, a very significant investment in our communities; Infrastructure; Seniors and Community Supports; Housing and Urban Affairs; Health and Wellness; Education. Most of the ministries of this government invest in our communities, and I think that the concept of adding to that because of the issue of government bonds is something that we should take a good look at.

I certainly appreciate the input of other members through the course of the afternoon. While I think this is a blue-sky opportunity, an opportunity to take a look at what we can do, we also have to exercise balance in this whole thing, as I mentioned earlier, so that this is an instrument that works not only for the people who invest but also for us as government, an opportunity to support, again, the infrastructure projects, the roads, bridges, overpasses, hospitals, schools, and community facilities that all of us enjoy.

With that, I will lend my support to Motion 16 and look forward to the further development of this concept. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to stand up and to speak to the government motion.

I want to start off by saying that we all know that Alberta is a commodity-based province. Whether you're a farmer or you work in the energy sector, viability is a word that we all very much understand. Albertans have asked us to temper the hills and the valleys of our economy, and thanks to the consistent leadership of our Premier we have planned and prepared for times like we are facing now.

Earlier this month the Premier laid out our government plan to position Alberta for a strong economic recovery. A key part of this strategy is to continue to build our communities by investing in our provincial infrastructure. This will lay the foundation for future generations. This is a priority of our government, and it always has been. Let me say that again just for the members opposite. This is a priority for our government, and it always has been. This is why we created the municipal sustainability initiative. This consistent funding helps finance important infrastructure projects in our communities. It gives communities the ability to move forward now and to be able to plan for the future, Mr. Speaker, because strong communities benefit all Albertans.

Whether you are a new Albertan or you have deep roots in the province, Albertans love Alberta. They love the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve. They love the opportunity this province offers, and they also love their communities. Albertans especially love their libraries, schools, hospitals, and recreation facilities. The

Alberta capital bonds are an opportunity for Albertans to show their pride in their communities. These bonds are a chance for Albertans to invest in the communities they love, and this will help build a better, stronger Alberta in the future for everyone. I notice that there are a couple of members on the other side that are wiping tears.

I will say that I do share the Premier's commitment to strong communities. This has guided our ministry and guided myself in everything we do. We want Albertans to continue to take pride in their communities, and by providing the opportunity to purchase these bonds, this will be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, again, this is why I am so pleased to support this motion, because this motion supports Albertans. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to rise today and speak to this motion. This motion is just another example of how forward-thinking ideas can improve Alberta's quality of life today and tomorrow. By issuing Alberta capital bonds today, we will be able to reap the benefits for many years to come, but it is just one step in a larger strategy to further strengthen Alberta's economic position.

This government has a clear plan to lead Alberta out of the recession, and I would like to speak specifically to the four points of the plan for economic recovery. The first part of this plan focuses specifically on the fiscal challenges that we currently face, and while this government will not make reductions in the programs that Albertans rely upon, we will have to live within our means. That's why the first step in our plan will responsibly limit government spending, and our goal is to have Alberta back into a surplus position in three years. Alberta capital bonds will help achieve this objective by maintaining and creating further economic activity in this province.

5:30

The second part of our plan is to use the cash reserves that are in the sustainability fund. Now, these funds will cover revenue shortfalls through this period. I want to take a moment to speak specifically on the foresight that this government had in creating a sustainability fund. Over the past few years the amount of money that we have saved was substantial. Seventeen billion dollars – that's not millions; that's billions – went into the sustainability fund specifically for times just like now. This government fully understood the volatility of the energy markets and the correlation between these markets and our budgetary revenues. That's why in years when we had significant surpluses, we did not spend it all, as some of the members opposite urged. We put money into savings, and now is the time to use these funds so that we can protect our key programs. This government had the discipline and the foresight to save, and because of this Alberta is in a better position than any other jurisdiction in Canada and most likely better than any jurisdiction in North America. By issuing Alberta capital bonds, we will continue to lead Canada in economic activity so that we will overcome the economic downturn earlier and in an even stronger fiscal position.

Now, the third part of our plan is to continue investing in public infrastructure. Over the past few years this government has invested in the construction of new schools, new hospitals, new senior facilities, and new highways: all projects that were very, very highly prized and very highly needed for Alberta. Today all across this province we see cranes standing high. Now, whether it's at the south Calgary hospital or the Calgary and Edmonton ring roads, we

see men and women working hard to build the infrastructure for tomorrow. While one day members opposite say to spend more on infrastructure and the next day they say we should spend less and stop building infrastructure, this government has had a plan and will stick to it to build the needed infrastructure.

That's where this motion comes in. By reintroducing Alberta capital bonds, Albertans will be investing further into provincial infrastructure and continue to build up Alberta's future. While investing in these projects, Albertans will also be receiving financial returns for their investment. Now, I know that in the past I've been investing in Ontario bonds. I've been investing in B.C. bonds. I've been investing in all these other bonds because Alberta didn't have any bonds. I would have loved to have been able to invest in Alberta bonds. Just think of the prospect of investing in infrastructure projects that would directly benefit your community now while at the same time earning a competitive interest rate.

Now, if we can provide a competitive interest rate, Alberta investors will find these capital bonds a smart and secure investment. Because of our solid credit rating and also because of this province's fiscal history, investors will have confidence, knowing that their investments are secure, because, hey, there's no other place in the world that has a higher credit rating than Alberta does. Now, together with a high rate of return and the opportunity to build up our communities, there will be a win-win situation for Albertans.

Across this province the cost of building infrastructure has declined and in some cases up to 40 per cent, which, in effect, provides better value for the taxpayer now. In addition, by investing in the infrastructure projects, we will be prepared for the expected growth for many decades to come. We need new schools to educate the leaders of tomorrow, we need new health facilities to care for the increasing and aging population, and we need new highways and transportation corridors to facilitate projected economic growth.

This leads me to the fourth part of our economic recovery plan, which is to make sure that our energy and other industries are competitive and attract the investment we need to develop Alberta's resources. Mr. Speaker, this section of our plan is made possible by the first three parts. By living and spending within our means and returning to surplus, by expending our cash reserves to maintain services, and by building up our public infrastructure, we can be assured that Alberta will continue to be the most competitive environment for businesses. This is important because if Alberta is competitive, the business that resides in Alberta can also be competitive, which will lead them to be world leaders in their sector. That is what Alberta is.

Our students are world leaders in their academic fields. We have world-class health centres and physicians, and we have world-class infrastructure. But as this motion exemplifies, we are also world leaders in fiscal responsibility. We were prepared for this economic downturn, and with the passage of this motion we will continue to be leaders in fiscal responsibility for years to come.

I urge all members of this House today to stand in support of this motion. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess just sort of a question as we continue to go down the line of government members who embrace this form of government debt, embrace this bond issue. I was just wondering if looking back now, in hindsight, with us going down this path of taking on government debt, you look at the law you guys passed or the former Klein government passed where they said that we'll never go into debt again. Do you think that was rather a silly law given the situation we're now in?

Ms DeLong: This actually doesn't have to be a situation of debt. In other words, if we have cash on hand – okay? – which balances off the bonds, we are not in debt. So as long as we have cash on hand to balance it off – you know, our assets are way over our liabilities – it gives Albertans the chance to invest in really solid bonds.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I was listening to the hon. member's speech, and just before the hon. member concluded, she stated that we in this province were prepared for the economic downturn. If that's true, how did we go from an \$8 billion surplus to a \$7 billion and counting deficit so quickly?

Ms DeLong: I am really pleased to be able to answer that question. The number one thing that really irks me about this whole thing is that "deficit" – okay? – is the technical name for it. But if you knew that you wanted to go to university, you would save up some money. You would put it aside. When you went off to university, you would be spending more than came in, but, my goodness, you'd have the savings there. So you wouldn't call it a deficit; you would call it just saving ahead and planning ahead and using your money wisely. That is exactly what we are doing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no other questions, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Minister of Environment.

5:40

Mr. Renner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to address this motion this afternoon. I've been listening intently all afternoon, and I've heard some really well-thought-out presentations about this whole concept of capital bonds. I've heard some, I think, valid concerns that have been raised by both sides of the House. This at the end of the day is not designed to be some sort of blank cheque, that government can go on some sort of free-for-all spending spree. What this is all about is allowing the government the flexibility to take advantage of some of the lower than expected tendering that we're experiencing as a result of some of the depressed economic conditions that we find ourselves in. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, it gives Albertans an opportunity to invest in their own province.

I think that there are a couple of things that we have to spend a little bit of time thinking about today and throughout the discussion on this issue of capital bonds before the government moves forward. After all, Mr. Speaker, this is a motion that indicates that this Assembly supports the development of capital bonds. This is not the operational side. This is not the motion that is going to, upon being voted on, bring about capital bonds the next day. Clearly, a lot of work needs to go into dealing with the process and putting in the necessary background that will accompany bond issuance.

What this discussion is all about, what this debate is all about is an indication of whether or not the members of this House are in support of the concept of capital bonds and whether the members of this House recognize some opportunities that would be associated with capital bonds. But equally important, Mr. Speaker, are some of the challenges and some of the cautions that the members of this Assembly would bring forward to the government in the development of the bonds.

Clearly, what I've heard, Mr. Speaker, from the opportunities perspective is that this will allow Albertans to invest in their own province. But the challenge of that is that there may be Albertans who, while they would like to participate in this structure, may find themselves in a situation where the bond issue was set too high. If

you somehow set a minimum of \$10,000 or something like that, I think I've heard pretty clearly that that's maybe a market that this Assembly would not support. I've heard reference to people purchasing bonds in much smaller denominations that could be used to be the basis for some kind of ongoing legacy or foundational family investment for children and grandchildren and those kinds of things. What I'm hearing is that there are a number of members who are suggesting that we should have these bonds available in lower denominations, perhaps \$500 or a thousand dollars, so that a larger cross-section of Albertans could participate.

I've also, I think, heard that there may be a need for us to put an upper limit on the issuance of these bonds. We should think about whether or not an upper limit needs to be in place because, as we've heard, this is the kind of investment that many of the seniors in Alberta would look to to bring some kind of income stability to, in some cases, very limited investment portfolios. If the interest rate is enticing enough, the last thing we need is some institutional investor coming in and taking up the entire bond issue in the wink of an eye. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, there are investment houses out there that could take up a few hundred million dollars before you even know what's going on. I've heard around the room today that that's probably something that would not be recommended or supported by the members of the House. Clearly, this needs to be aimed at Albertans, and it needs to be aimed at Albertans, perhaps, of more modest means, so there need to be some parameters put on it.

I've also heard, Mr. Speaker, that this is not something that we should associate with Albertans investing in specific projects. This is not the kind of issue that someone would come out and say: I will buy these bonds if you build my school. That's not what this is all about. This is about allowing the government to deal with the 20-year capital plan in, perhaps, a little bit faster fashion, recognizing that the opportunities that we have now may not be here in the balance of that 20-year plan and the costs – some of the projects are coming in at a much reduced price – may not always be there. This is not designed to all of a sudden create a whole bunch of expectations that suddenly everybody's wish list can be fulfilled if Albertans invest in these bonds. This is about making some prudent investments based upon what is already an established capital plan.

I also think that this is an opportunity for Albertans to initiate and show that they want to be investing in their own province. They want to have that opportunity to be proud Albertans to be investing in the future of this province. Above all, Mr. Speaker, I think that's what this investment opportunity is all about. It's about prudent financial management on the part of the government, and it's about allowing Albertans to take pride and invest in their province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, the chair recognizes the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 6 p.m. and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:48 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

Issue 51

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 28, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated. Hon. members, I'm going to rise, but I'm also going to do something else which is entirely out of the ordinary. For the members who sit to my right, may I ask you to stand up and move to the left side of the Assembly. [Members moved from the east side of the Chamber to the west side]

Thank you very much. No, I'm not asking the people to my left to move to the right. That would be a coup that I do not have the authority for. That is not part of the whole thing.

Centennial Window Unveiling

The Speaker: Hon. members, the city of Edmonton has given the Legislative Assembly of Alberta a unique gift commemorating the 2006 celebration of 100 years of democracy of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This kind gesture celebrates the beautiful resources and landscape of Alberta as well as the opportunities and hope for the future of our beloved province.

To my right, on the east side of the building, you'll see two pages standing. I'm now going to ask the pages, Alexandra Candler and Andrea Bailer, to unveil this very generous gift from the city and the people of Edmonton. [The centennial window was unveiled to the applause of members] The generosity of the city of Edmonton and the people of Edmonton lives on, from the canopy over the Speaker's chair, which was donated in 1980 to celebrate Alberta's 75th anniversary, to this gift today. The Legislature and the capital city have been enriched by this stained-glass window, which will provide members of this Assembly and all visitors with a unique view of this great province of ours.

As all can see, in the centre is a figure representing Queen Victoria's daughter Alberta. She receives the viewers with one arm extended in welcome and another full of bounty. Above her the northern lights shine. Flowing through the centre is the North Saskatchewan River. The Alberta wild rose blooms in the foreground, a flower known to grow in challenging climates. The rich colour blocks of fields and golden wheat offered by Alberta symbolize a wealth of opportunity and hope for the future. The red of St. George's Cross extending along the bottom of the window alludes to the arms of the Hudson's Bay Company and the progressive industry which founded the city. The theme of the window's design is Alberta: the Land of Opportunities, which is a true reflection of the Alberta we live in today.

The stained-glass window is located on the east side of the Assembly, and the question is: why on the east side of the Assembly? It is to catch the morning sun and the dawning of the day as the picture itself was done to commemorate the dawning of the new province of Alberta 100 and some-odd years ago and the opportunities to go with it.

I'd ask members to return to their places, and I will continue with some introductions. [Members returned to their desks]

Hon. members, this process began a number of years ago when the chair was visited by a number of councillors from the city of Edmonton. There are three councillors in the city of Edmonton who

are former Members of this Legislative Assembly: Councillor Karen Leibovici, Councillor Linda Sloan, and Councillor Ed Gibbons. Along with the mayor, over time discussions occurred as to what would be an appropriate gift. The conclusion was that it should be something like what we have received now.

The city of Edmonton then took the initiative through its own forces to meet with arts people in the greater community and selected the artists who created this piece. The artists are Barbara and Pawel Jozefowicz, who are unable to be with us today. I believe that they are in Poland today. We advised them that they can access this channel in the virtual world. If they have, I want them to know that their creativity was well received today.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Joining us in the Assembly today are a number of very distinguished people that I would like to introduce. As I call out their names, I'd ask them to stand, and I would ask you to withhold your applause until we have introduced them all. First of all, the illustrious mayor of the city of Edmonton, His Worship Stephen Mandel; Karen Leibovici, ward 1 councillor and former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; Linda Sloan, ward 1 councillor and a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta; Ron Hayter, ward 2 councillor; Kim Krushell, ward 2 councillor; Amarjeet Sohi, ward 6 councillor; Dave Thiele, ward 6 councillor; Joyce Tustian, Edmonton deputy city manager; Blaire McCalla, communications consultant; John Mahon, executive director of the Edmonton Arts Council; Ted Kerr, centennial window selection committee member; Alex Sokolowski, brother to the artist.

Also joining us here today and seated in the public gallery are others directly involved in this very special project: with the Edmonton Arts Council Kristy Trinier, public art director; Laurie Stalker, grants director; Katia Michel-Wasney, grants assistant; David Turnbull, public art conservator; Sean Borchert, public art program officer; Sarah Patterson, public art assistant; some very distinguished people who assisted us in bringing this project to fruition from Alberta Infrastructure – Norm Furler, craftsman; Brian Oakley, director; Henry Zuehlke, project manager; Lyle Butchart, facilities manager; Jim Werenka, operations supervisor; and Peter Caron – along with a number of people from the Alberta Legislative Assembly Office.

Hon. members, I'm going to ask all of our guests to receive our warm welcome.

Thank you, all. Thank you very much, again, to the people of Edmonton and the city of Edmonton for this generous contribution.

Hon. members, 2005 was the 100th anniversary of the province of Alberta, 2006 was the 100th anniversary of the first Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, and 2012 will be the 100th anniversary of the existence of this building. In the next several years additional projects will be initiated to reach us in the year 2012.

Thank you.

1:40

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great for me to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 88 students from Innisfail middle school who are seated in the members' gallery. They're accompanied by their teachers and parent helpers Mrs. Judy Bourne, Ms Kim Morison, Mrs. Dale Jensen, Mrs. Rosemarie Piechalski, Mrs. Dusty Daines, Mrs. Carolyn Flower, Miss Jennifer Mann, Mr. Gord Tulk,

Mr. Calvin Bacque, Mrs. Connie Johnston, Mrs. Sherry Hunley, Mrs. Yvonne Bradshaw, Mrs. Jenna Grant, Mrs. Stacy Koenning, and Mrs. Val Layden. Today the students had the opportunity to tour this beautiful building and participate in a mock Legislature. I had a chance to meet with them briefly this afternoon. As I've said before, I think it's so important for all of these children to visit the Legislature because, as you know, they're going to be tomorrow's leaders. They're such bright minds here today, and I'd like them all to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very good friend of mine, Mr. John Short, a real gentleman who many Albertans know. It's a real privilege to have a legend here. Of course, you've got to be old to be a legend, and I don't think he looks as old as he is. John has had an incredible career as a journalist, beginning at the age of 15 at the *Globe and Mail*. He came to Alberta in 1959 and has had many interesting jobs in journalism, very accomplished. He worked with TV and newsprint, but he really found his calling when they realized that he had the perfect face for radio, and that's what he did for many years, as many of you will know. He is much dedicated to Alberta, much loved by Albertans, has taken an incredible interest in amateur sports and charities, and now sits on the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, and we value that very much. If my colleagues could join me in welcoming him to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Miss Fareeha Saleem of my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. Fareeha is in her third year at NAIT, finishing her bachelor of business administration. She is here to write her term paper regarding leadership, and she is shadowing yours truly for some good three hours of the day. I would ask Fareeha to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often a person has in life a friend from elementary school to in your 50s that you meet with and have constant contact with, and today I want to introduce you to a good friend of mine who is exactly that. We went all through school together, raised families together. He's a past mayor of Whitecourt and now works with the Alberta Forest Products Association. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Brady Whittaker. I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a past assistant of mine, who I lost moving into cabinet. His name is Mr. Marshall Thiessen. He was a great assistant for me in my past four years as a private member. I thank you, Marshall, for all the work you've done for me. He is also a great Flames fan, which is what really endeared us together, the fact that he was a Flames fan. I'd ask Marshall to please stand and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers across our province dedicate countless hours to ensuring that Alberta students are engaged and are successful in learning. They spend time in the classroom teaching, supervising extracurricular activities, grading assignments and tests, oftentimes at home, working with parents and families, and generally doing everything that they can to make our children's school life the best it can be. The hard work and dedication of teachers often goes unrecognized despite the fact that they are mentors, motivators, and facilitators to engage our students in developing the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to thrive in the modern world.

Nominations for the 2010 excellence in teaching awards are now being accepted, and I encourage students, parents, teacher colleagues, and community members to nominate a teacher or principal for their invaluable commitment to education in our province. Now is the perfect time to recognize a special teacher or school principal for their contribution to student growth through innovative or creative teaching.

We have successful students because of the tremendous work of our teachers, Mr. Speaker. The excellence in teaching awards have been celebrated since 1989, with more than 8,500 teachers nominated and more than 400 who have received awards. Last year 365 teachers were nominated, and 23 received awards. I am pleased to rise today to recognize all of the extraordinary teachers and principals across this province and encourage you to nominate a deserving teacher.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Public Consultation on Health Care

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer and fall I've been touring the province to speak with Albertans about their hopes, their dreams, their deep concerns with the state of our province today. As part of the process I and my colleagues in the Official Opposition organized a series of town hall forums for seniors concerned about Alberta's health care system, one of our most precious public institutions.

I am encouraged and inspired by the turnout at these forums and by the passion with which these engaged citizens, primarily seniors, spoke about their lack of confidence in where this government is taking public health care and long-term care. Based on several years of personal experience, these citizens overwhelmingly told me and my colleagues that they do not believe the Premier and the minister of health can be trusted to manage our health care system.

These citizens are extremely concerned by the serious shortage of health care professionals across the board in the professions, from doctors to laboratory services. They're upset about the callous deinstitutionalization of patients at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. They're worried about rising costs and falling quality of long-term care and continuing care while millions of dollars were spent on bonuses, severance packages for senior officials, and public relations.

My colleagues in the health care sector have also expressed fears, bewilderment, and frustration, yet this government plunges ahead, ignoring the good advice of Albertans, discounting the long-term effects of their agenda of cutbacks, staff hiring freezes, and creeping

privatization. Alberta's seniors have spent their lives building this province. At the very least, a responsible government would immediately ensure that there is enough quality public long-term care and home-care services for our seniors. This would be a huge improvement over the flawed first-bed policy of this administration, which too often separates seniors from their families and supports.

A responsible government would also ensure that every Albertan has a family doctor, which would improve care, reduce overcrowding in emergencies, and reduce hospitalization. A responsible government would listen to seniors, welcome professional advice, and stop this chaotic experiment with our most cherished public health system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Terra Centre Diaper Drive

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I participated in an event called Baby Heroes to raise diapers and awareness for the Terra Centre for pregnant and parenting teens. As a grandpa of two little boys, Dominic and Orion, I know how tough it is for their parents to make ends meet and provide the best for their children.

My wife, Barb, and I decided in good humour to see how many diapers we could get into my Smart car and donate them to Terra. I mentioned this to a friend on a social media site, and within four hours we had raised 2,000 diapers. The goal then became 10,000, and when all was said and done, people as close as this Chamber and as far away as southern California contributed both money and diapers.

I am very pleased to report that last Friday we delivered 12,064 diapers to the Terra Baby Heroes collection centre in West Edmonton Mall. We loaded the car, and we quickly realized that we could not carry the diapers in one load, so we made two trips from the parking lot into the mall without major incident.

Most of the support for this event was generated on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, and last week we proved that the social media community has become a very important part of the village. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Baby Heroes diaper drive for making it the huge success that it was. By supporting Terra, you have given teen parents and their babies a real chance to succeed.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over and over again in the past few days this health minister's excuse for long lineups at immunization clinics has been that they only had a few days' notice of an early release of the vaccine. However, in a national news story of September 16 the chief public health officer said, "Seven to 10 million doses . . . should roll out by the third week of October." To the minister of health. Both Health Canada and national news agencies were telling Canadians in mid-September that the vaccine would be available the third week of October. Either the minister was unaware and therefore incompetent or he's deliberately misleading the public. Which is it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess one of the things that's really bothered me in the last couple of days is that we have an

individual who has training as a public health doctor in this province. This is an individual who is choosing to politicize an event that thousands and tens of thousands of Albertans believe is serious enough that they have to get immunized, and that's a good thing. Now, we can stand here all day and argue about semantics, about whether or not the vaccine was going to arrive at the end of October or it was going to arrive in November, but the reality of it is that we have the vaccine, we are immunizing Albertans, we are trying to provide priority for those who need it first, and it is an incredible success.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government's own pandemic plan indicates up to 11,400 hospitalizations needed. Will the minister tell this Assembly how many of Alberta's acute-care beds will be available for H1N1 surge?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been consistent in saying that if they are required, we will ensure that they're available. There has been no indication to date that that's the case. Again, this particular member, instead of taking a responsible approach to this, is trying to politicize an event. I would suggest that if the member really cared about this issue, he would be standing in this House and he would be expressing his appreciation to all of those front-line health care workers who are busting their butts.

Dr. Swann: This minister's own pandemic response states, "It is expected Alberta's total hospitalizations will range between 3,800 [and] 11,400 . . . of whom 15 to 25 per cent will [need] intensive care." Alberta's major hospitals and intensive care units are routinely at a hundred per cent capacity, Mr. Minister. Where are you going to find 570 beds for intensive care patients?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, what we intend to do is ensure that as many Albertans as possible get vaccinated so that as few as possible have to use our health care system. Wouldn't that be the ultimate thing that we should all be striving for instead of standing in this Legislature spreading fear, I would probably say even misinformation in most instances? I think it's irresponsible, especially for someone who has the training that this particular individual has.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Continuing Care for Seniors

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer I travelled Alberta and met thousands of seniors at seniors' forums. After meeting and speaking with so many concerned and angry Albertans, one thing is clear: Alberta seniors do not agree with this minister on continuing care. To the minister. Moving seniors' public long-term care facilities to private designated assisted living facilities will drain the savings of significant numbers of seniors. How can you justify this?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've said on a number of occasions in this House that what this government is going to do is move the care to the patient and quit taking the patient and sticking them in a square hole in the system somewhere. I would challenge this particular member to stand up, and I would say: is he referring to the Good Samaritan Society, is he referring to Covenant Health of the Catholic faith as private providers? They are the entities out there that care about the care for seniors. I would suggest that this

particular individual again trying to politicize on the backs of our seniors is despicable.

Dr. Swann: Well, clearly, this minister is not listening to Albertans. Seniors are being reassessed for designated assisted living facilities after being in public long-term care, and many find they cannot afford the increased cost. Again to the minister: what are you doing to assist those seniors so they're not left destitute in some cases?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I said in my last answer, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is we're going to ensure that the senior has the care where they best need it. If a senior is in a lodge environment or a senior is living in their own home and can no longer function on their own without some care, is this member suggesting that we should all of a sudden take that individual, stick him or her into a long-term home rather than taking a couple of hours and providing the care in the situation that they're most familiar with?

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would ask whether the minister is building a case for this as a viable option. Is he going to be tracking the number of increased ambulance visits to some of these designated assisted living facilities in order to prove his case and whether this would indicate adequate or appropriate staffing in these institutions as opposed to what they've been getting in long-term care? Are you going to be tracking ambulances?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government are going to build a case to provide the right care for the patient in the right place. If he doesn't like it, then I suggest that's something where he should be going out there, not spreading misinformation, and talking about real-life situations because that's what we're seeing. That's what all of my colleagues are seeing in their communities.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Long-term Care for Rural Seniors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate my legislative colleague from Lethbridge-West taking the Minister of Health and Wellness to one of our designated assisting living facilities in Lethbridge. However, I was disappointed that the minister did not avail himself of the opportunity to inspect the long-term care facility with me. To the minister. Alberta Health Services statistics show that rural hospitals have the highest percentage of seniors waiting for long-term care. How can the minister justify ignoring the needs of our rural seniors?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why I didn't visit the long-term care centre is because in the city of Lethbridge this government is investing so much money that it took us an entire afternoon to just go take a visit to the new high school that's under construction, to go to the hospital and see the cancer radiation therapy unit that's about to be unveiled, to meet with mental health officials in Lethbridge. What did I forget, Member? We had a busy day. I just want to take a minute and say that the facility that we did visit, the DAL, which is in partnership with Covenant Health, is one of the finest facilities with the best care you will find anywhere in North America.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that, and I agree. However, we have an excellent long-term care facility in Lethbridge, and you have to see it. It happens to be my alma mater, and you should still see it.

My next question is: will the minister exactly spell out how much he wants seniors to pay for necessary supplies and services such as bedding, incontinent supplies, and the extra care services, which means extra beds and, in fact, could mean feeding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will take the member at her word that they have an excellent long-term care facility in Lethbridge, and I think that's probably true because we have excellent long-term care centres around the province, but long-term care centres on their own are not the answer.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in touring the designated assisted living facility, we actually went into rooms. We actually talked to residents of the designated long-term care centre, and overwhelmingly their response was, "We love it here," so I would suggest that that member should start to go visit the residents of that designated assisted facility instead of taking all of her questions from a researcher who lives in Edmonton.

2:00

Ms Pastoor: They say that they love it here because they are in the right place for them. There is still a place for long-term care. It's assessment that decides where they go, not their condition.

To the minister. Seniors who live in seniors' facilities are more at risk than those that live at home. Will the minister guarantee that there will actually be enough supply of the H1N1 vaccine for Lethbridge, which currently has none, so that vaccination programs can be expanded to seniors' homes?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I won't comment relative to what the member said about Lethbridge not having any vaccine. That's not my information.

However, I must remind the member that with this particular influenza, seniors, unless they've got some chronic health conditions, are not high risk. Ultimately, we will get to those seniors, whether they live in a lodge, whether they live in a long-term care centre, whether they live in Lethbridge or they live in High Level.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Nursing Shortage

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant reasons this government's swine flu vaccination program is so fraught with problems is that Alberta is severely short of nurses. As of July over 500 nursing students can't find work, and over a thousand nursing positions posted this spring have been left vacant. The minister's plan to eliminate nurses has left Alberta unable to cope with the most threatening public health pandemic of our time. Why won't the minister of health admit that he has helped create this crisis by cutting nearly 1,500 nursing positions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the one part of the member's question is so absurd that it kind of colours everything else in the question. I didn't even hear the last part because the first part was so absurd. Where did he ever get the impression that my job was to eliminate nurses? Now, give me a break. Nurses play an integral role in our health care system. They don't play the only role; there's a role for all health care professionals. For him to stand there and say that I'm trying to eliminate nurses is absurdity at the best.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, there are over a thousand nursing positions that haven't been filled because of the hiring freeze. The minister is eliminating nursing positions, and his hatchetman, Dr. Duckett, is part of his strategy.

In order to staff flu shot clinics, this government is taking nurses out of schools, baby care programs, and chronic disease programs, and now it's preparing to redeploy home-care nurses as well. They've hired fewer temporary seasonal nurses for the flu clinics this year. I'd just like to ask the minister: why won't he admit that by eliminating hundreds and hundreds of nursing positions, he has left the health system unable to respond appropriately to this pandemic?

Mr. Liepert: I won't admit it because it's not true, Mr. Speaker. This particular member is trying to take a situation where we are trying to ensure that the right care is provided to the patient in the right environment and somehow suggest that by doing that, it's tied to the most recent immunization that we're currently undergoing. You know, his question makes no sense.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier talked about having to run a health care system and dealing with the pandemic as if they were two separate things. It really speaks to the lack of capacity this government has created. It has had months to prepare. Failure to ensure appropriate staffing levels to accommodate for a public health outbreak has left the system unable to cope. It creates serious doubts about Alberta's capacity to cope with any health emergency, whether it's a pandemic or some other type of emergency. Why won't the minister admit that his scheme to cut nursing positions has left Albertans vulnerable?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, nothing but untruths. Because of the outstanding work of the front-line health care workers in this province, in the first two days of our immunization program we have administered in excess of 100,000 doses of vaccine. In addition to that – and this member would probably like to hear this – we have supplied to First Nations enough vaccine to vaccinate 50 per cent of the population. Many of them are running out of vaccine. That's an incredible success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Calgary Rockyview Hospital Laser Equipment

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be here representing the wonderful people of Calgary-Glenmore. One thing that we can all agree on as elected representatives is that we need to stay in touch and listen to those people who we represent. Thousands of Albertans across this province want to send the Premier a message about his health care superboard. Health care must be patient centred, not government centred, and the Premier's superboard puts bureaucrats in charge. Albertans want medical professionals in charge that understand their needs as patients. Will the minister of health listen to Albertans and return health care decision-making to local communities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll just take one member of the Alberta Health Services Board – I think he may even have an Order of Canada – Mr. Franceschini, who's an incredible businessman in this community. I can name a whole bunch of others. If that member wants to look Mr. Franceschini in the eye and call him a bureaucrat, let him go right ahead, because that's what I heard him

say. It tells me he is as out of touch with health care as he was with rural issues when he represented the former constituency.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the minister and all Calgary MLAs were silent when the superboard removed the GreenLight laser equipment from the Calgary Rockyview hospital. Does the minister agree with the superboard in its decision to remove the GreenLight laser equipment from the Rockyview hospital?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that issue was taken care of a long time ago. I think that was well before the member moved into Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, he needs to check out history.

The minister has insulted the people of Calgary-Glenmore and all Calgarians by removing the GreenLight laser equipment from the Rockyview hospital. Does the minister consider their health concerns as he does their democratic decisions, as simply the flavour of the month?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the minister did no such thing. The particular piece of equipment that this member refers to was in the hospital on a trial. The company that had it in on a trial had determined that the trial had ended and had made a decision that they were going to remove it unless it was taken on full time. That issue was resolved. To the best of my knowledge it is continuing to operate. I'm not sure; I think the member should be a little more prepared about his own constituency if that's the kind of question he's going to ask.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

H1N1 Pandemic Ethics Framework

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's the Minister of Health and Wellness's day today. My questions are to him. The government's H1N1 pandemic response plan indicates that anywhere from 570 to 2,850 Albertans are going to need intensive care. It also predicts that 130 to 400 Albertans are going to die of H1N1. Given the overloaded intensive care system there will be very difficult ethical decisions. Alberta Health Services has developed a pandemic ethics framework to guide clinical and operational decisions. Is the minister aware of this framework, and can he tell us what it involves?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, pandemic planning is extensive to the point where you should have in place the most extreme situation. I will not apologize for our officials having in place a pandemic plan that deals with the most minor of a situation and the most extreme situation. What this member is referring to is the absolute extreme situation. To stand in this House and say that somehow the department is predicting that hundreds of people are going to die from H1N1 is not accurate.

Dr. Taft: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, I'm quoting directly from his department's own plan. I didn't make the numbers up. They're a direct quote from his department's documents.

To the same minister: given that the pandemic response plan says that this ethics framework can be used to include the public in developing a response to the community challenges created by H1N1, can the minister tell us if the ethics framework will be made public?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't deny that the numbers were in our plan. All I said in my answer was that it is the most extreme situation. I will take the member's question under advisement.

Dr. Taft: Well, let me urge the minister to make this framework public. The government's pandemic response plan says, "By providing transparent, equitably applied criteria, based on fundamental moral principles and values, the Pandemic Ethics Framework will serve to guide the difficult decisions that will . . . be made during Pandemic (H1N1) 2009." Mr. Minister, doesn't the public have a right to know?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, if the member is reading from the pandemic plan, then why doesn't he just photocopy it?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:10 **Calgary High School Construction**

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government announced today that it has signed a contract to begin work on the four new high schools being built as part of phase 2 of the Alberta schools alternative procurement project, ASAP, which will result in 14 new schools. Now, a rumour has it that our Bowness high will only be upgraded after the northwest high school is built. So my question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. It seems like so far phase 2 has just been a series of announcements. When are we going to start seeing results?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing results right now. We made an announcement today on the four high schools that are conventional builds, and Albertans will be pleased to know that the first project with the four high schools came in 40 per cent less than engineering estimates, so we're extremely pleased.

We're also pleased that the ASAP 2 that we're going forward with for 14 schools will provide the spaces for thousands of students in six different communities in the province. They'll be here, and they'll be here on time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My first supplemental to same minister: in light of current global economic conditions and provincial fiscal restraints, will these high schools be financed with borrowed dollars, or are they being paid for with savings that we have in the bank right now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. These four high schools are in our four-year capital plan, and they've all been budgeted for. As I mentioned, there was a 40 per cent savings based on what our engineering estimates were, and that translates into \$40 million of savings to Albertans for these top-notch, state-of-the-art schools, that are going to provide great environments for our students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you. My final question to the same minister. We haven't heard much recently about the 18 schools being built under ASAP phase 1, announced in the summer of 2007. What is the status of these schools?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity this summer to tour the schools in Calgary in the first ASAP package. They were ahead of schedule for the most part. They're wonderful looking buildings. They're on schedule, on time. They're going to open their doors to 12,000 students in the province of Alberta. They're about 75 per cent complete at the moment. We're actually ahead of schedule with them, Mr. Speaker, so they'll be there for the students when they need them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Home Moving Industry Regulation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of Albertans have had painful experiences with shady moving companies such as being charged unfair hidden fees or losing their possessions. Just last month the Better Business Bureau's branch for northern Alberta identified home movers as the industry with the second-highest number of inquiries province-wide. To the Minister of Service Alberta. Ontario introduced new protections for consumers dealing with moving companies four years ago. Why has your ministry not moved faster by introducing reasonable rules for the home moving industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the moving industry I am very aware of the concerns that consumers are experiencing with some of the companies that are out there, and we also do know of the good experiences. With respect to consultations and moving forward, as always I meet with many individuals on a monthly basis, and that is a conversation that has come across my table as well. As well, I've written to many Albertans on this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. This ministry seems to be reviewing everything with no end in sight. When can Albertans finally expect action on appropriate standards for the home moving industry? Can you offer a specific date or timeline?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The joy of Service Alberta is that there are so many individuals and so many things that we're looking at, and as a minister it's up to me to make good decisions on behalf of Albertans as to where we need to make good regulations and regulations that don't burden individuals and businesses. With respect, we did the gift card regulation and the payday loan regulation, and those are areas where we had to go in and support Albertans. So as always I am prepared to look at the moving industry and any other number of topics as well.

Mr. Kang: I think it's about time the minister stops looking, Mr. Speaker, and starts doing something about the moving industry.

To the minister again: how many formal complaints against home movers has the ministry received? What kind of action did the ministry take against moving companies found to be engaging in unfair business practices?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, on a yearly basis the number of complaints we get with respect to moving companies is under 50. Moving companies can be prosecuted under the Fair Trading Act.

Again, it is about consumers. When you sign up with a moving company, go and do the research, visit the company. If the company, perhaps, does not have an office and they're operating out of a home, you need to know that information. We have tools to empower the consumer to make the best decisions for themselves, and it's about assisting them to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Reservists' Leave for Winter Olympics Service

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The reservist leave act, which was proclaimed earlier this year, allows Alberta's reservists to take unpaid leave to serve our country. There's also provision at the discretion of this minister that allows reservists to take unpaid leave for domestic deployment. To this minister: is this simply just paper legislation, or is there some action being taken here?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I've recently signed a ministerial order allowing Alberta reservists to help provide what I'm confident will be outstanding security for the upcoming Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Vancouver. I'm told that upwards of 60 Alberta reservists will be part of a 300-member contingent from western Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. One thing this minister did not mention is what sort of time frame is being considered for this particular leave. I'd appreciate his comments.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we can all appreciate that significant training is required for the Olympics, not just for the athletes but for security details as well. As such, although the games are only for a few weeks in February and March, some reservists are beginning their training now and could be away from their employers for upwards of six months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a final to the minister. I appreciate these comments, but at the same time we also must consider the rights of the employers involved here. I'd like to know from this minister: what sort of inconvenience does a six-month leave put on the employer, many of whom might have to hire others in difficult economic times to fill the void?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, considerable notice to the employer is required. First, a reservist must provide at least four weeks' written notice of the date on which the leave will start. In this case, the reservist must also give at least four weeks' written notice of the return-to-work date. I'm very confident that the majority of Alberta employers agree that this might be a minor inconvenience in order to supply some very solid security for a major world event.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Services

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1991 I suffered a spinal cord injury. After being treated in acute care, I immediately went into rehabilitation at the Calgary General hospital. I was lucky as research clearly shows that it's important to move to rehabilitation as soon as possible. It has come to my attention that lately it is now three to four months for some spinal cord injury patients to get into rehab. To the minister of health: why is care for spinal cord injury patients so much worse now than it was when I had my injury some 18 years ago?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I would endeavour to ensure that the member's facts are accurate. I want to check to make sure of that, and I will respond to his question when I have the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This delay in availability of rehabilitation services is not only an affront to the woman or man who has suffered a spinal cord injury, but it also adds additional costs to the system as they're shuffled from acute care to home to possibly long-term care and then back to rehabilitation. Does the minister accept that on top of the medical impacts on the person who's had the spinal cord injury, this also seems to be an unnecessary cost to the system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe I've said in this House before that one of the things that troubles me about wait-lists is that somehow the Canadian way of having to wait for health care is okay, that it's just a matter of how long. I think we should be shooting for a vision in this Assembly that our health care system is there when we need it. So I'm not going to acknowledge that any particular wait time is acceptable. In many cases the member is absolutely correct: wait-lists actually cost us money.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of housing. After people leave acute care, or if they're lucky enough to get into rehabilitation services after this happens, oftentimes what is happening: they are being shuffled off to long-term care facilities, the Bethany or some other places like that. These are often 18-, 19-, 20-year-old individuals. It seems like they're being warehoused. Is this really the way forward here in Alberta for individuals like this?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't speak to why people have moved from acute care to the long-term care that you're referring to, but I can tell you that we do have 1,600 housing units

in Alberta that assist people with special needs, and that would include people that require wheelchair access. I think we do a fairly good job with this, actually. Through our rent supplement program we do assist people with lower rents and with affordable housing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for the Homeless

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government truly intended to prioritize immunization for homeless Albertans, special plans would have been made to ensure that it happened. That's what the Manitoba government did. In Winnipeg they set up 30 special clinics that targeted that city's disadvantaged and were open for business yesterday. Here we're having lots of meetings, but we still have no firm date as to when similar inner-city rolling clinics will be opened. Will the health minister explain his department's complete failure to prioritize this particular group of vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we have a very thoughtful plan that's been put in place. It was put in place, as I said to you previously, over the course of several months. We've worked closely with Alberta Health Services officials, with medical officers of health. We've worked with the department overall, the health department. I can tell you that our homeless population is extremely vulnerable, and they were assisted immediately and in various areas of the province. An example would be that High Level began administering their vaccine; that was completed on Monday. We've completed the vaccination program for Fort McMurray. In Calgary, as I mentioned earlier as well, we have vaccine that was available yesterday, and the clinic is moving ahead there.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we still have no firm date for the inner city of Edmonton and when those vaccines will roll out, and we should by now.

Now, former Manitoba Premier Doer started planning for his province's response to H1N1 back in the spring. He then made it a priority at the Premiers' meeting in August. As a result, Manitoba's system is experiencing none of the chaos that ours has this week. Why was our minister of health, by his own admission, caught by surprise when other governments seemed perfectly capable of planning in advance?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, as is so typical of these two individuals in that party, the question generally has no resemblance to the truth because it's a known fact that all across the country this same situation has evolved. There are some areas that are better than others, and some of that has to do with population. Some of it has to do with the take-up by the population.

You know, I was interested to read in the local media this morning, Mr. Speaker, a comment by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood relative to the homeless situation here in Edmonton. The next paragraph was actually asking someone in a homeless situation whether the member was correct or not, and that particular person said: no, he wasn't; we actually have a very good working relationship with Alberta Health Services.

Ms Notley: Actually, that person also said that there was no date yet for when the vaccine would be available for her agency.

The government of Manitoba planned ahead, so they had 12 clinics ready to go in Winnipeg alone and lineups that did not exceed 90 minutes. Equivalent preparation in Edmonton would mean that we'd have 13 clinics operating today. In Manitoba they hired 600 retired doctors and nurses who were recertified and ready to go well in advance. Here we're scrambling for staff. Why was this government caught so unprepared for what we've all known was coming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to answer this question from this member. You really are misleading the public, and you're doing it through this forum. I think that you need really accurate information. We've offered to take these members to the clinics that are available here in the city of Edmonton, through the Boyle-McCauley health centre. A vaccine is being offered through the Boyle centre community organization. As well, we're going to have nurses as of Friday doing outreach on the street, offering the vaccine to homeless shelters. We have the vaccine being offered at Hope Mission as well on Friday for our homeless. So for you to say that, it's uncalled for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Cattle Age Verification

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All my questions are for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. As you know, Alberta has strengthened traceability and quality assurance measures on livestock, specifically mandatory age verification on beef, yet some of my constituents remain concerned that their customers are not asking for these measures, they're not necessary for market access, and they're increasing the cost only for the primary producer. Can the minister tell us: are these measures going to bear fruit in terms of market access, and how are these measures being received to date by our trading partners?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, there is a demand for traceability and age verification in our livestock system. Foreign governments are telling me that the emphasis on traceability and age verification are the minimum requirements for market access. International markets are demanding that their suppliers have strong traceability in place today. I certainly received a letter from the Japan Meat Traders Association applauding Alberta's work on traceability. An unintended consequence that we've derived from traceability is that we hear that the Americans are now buying age-verified and traceable beef from Canada and shipping it into the south Korean market because they cannot supply those cattle from their supply.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent correspondence circulating among beef producers in my area claims that McDonald's Canada actually purchases beef from South America because it's less expensive, suggesting that age verification is not part of their purchasing criteria. Can the minister please respond to my constituents on that claim?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, I certainly can, Mr. Speaker. The e-mail is a hoax. Let me say that again. The e-mail is a hoax. It originally started in 2002 and every so often starts the rounds again.

McDonald's Canada sources all of its beef from Canada, more than 64 million pounds a year. Also, all of their patties are produced in Spruce Grove, Alberta. In fact, McDonald's recently sent a letter to the federal minister as well as all provincial ministers expressing their support for traceability. At this time only Quebec can supply animals over 30 months of age that are age verified and traceable. So it is absolutely a clear indication that the market is demanding and pushing for traceability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My primary producers tell me that they'd be comfortable with additional traceability and age verification measures if they knew they would be paid for that work. Some of my constituents claim that the cost of age verification adds as much as \$50 per head to a primary producer, yet there's no premium for that work. Can the minister please respond to my primary producers who are frustrated that there's no value for them to comply with mandatory age verification?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, this can be very discouraging. We've provided \$30 million through AFRP 2 and have field staff available to help producers with their own operations. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the cost to age verify is significantly less than \$50 a head. As a matter of fact, a national industry organization estimates the cost at less than \$1 per head.

When new markets open, Alberta has to be ready with the age-verified beef that they're looking for. As I mentioned earlier, there is very little U.S. packer interest in cattle that are not age verified. Mr. Speaker, we need to use every weapon at our disposal to get the livestock industry back on its feet and out of the funk that we've been in for six years now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Horse-racing Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over \$300 million of gambling revenue, \$200 million in the last five years alone, has been directed from racing entertainment centre slots to horse racing in Alberta. The profitability of the industry is declining, fewer people are going, and there are fewer race days and less money bet. Instead of directing money to support the NGO sector or even to create new green economy jobs, the government throws more money at the horses. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: given that the popularity of horse racing has been declining for 20 years, what was the business case for continuing to support horse racing?

2:30

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, horse racing has been an important and integral part of Alberta's way of life for many, many years, something that many Albertans feel very strongly about. It supports revenue that goes to our department, and it supports itself through some of the funds that flow through our department that help with their breeding programs and other pieces of that.

On the business case, at the time I wasn't part of that discussion, but I know that today, as it was then, horse racing is something that Albertans believe in, and we believe in supporting Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Back to the same minister, then: how is propping up a particular industry with \$300 million, 80 per cent of the revenue in that sector, not in the business of being in business? How is that not so?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as we've experienced today: a lot of misinformation. The industry generates \$399 million annually in economic benefits; 33 and a third per cent of the net proceeds from slot machines located at racetracks goes into community investment programs, which benefit all Albertans; 15 per cent of net proceeds is allocated to the track operators; 51 and two-thirds per cent of the net proceeds is returned to the horse-racing and breeding industry. In 2009-10 approximately \$35 million is expected to be returned to Horse Racing Alberta for the horse-racing and breeding industry. Horse Racing Alberta uses this funding for racetrack operations, infrastructure, and breeding programs.

Ms Blakeman: Yes, minister. Those are all the same facts that are in the Horse Racing Alberta brochure that I quoted my facts from.

Now, speaking of picking winners and losers, what makes horse racing so important as to receive the same allocation in funds during a recession when wellness groups or youth recreation and food banks have all had their money eroded? Why is horse racing so important that it gets the same allocation?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta actually believes in living up to its commitments. As far as I know, none of these organizations have received less funding from us. You know, we sit here when the member from the opposition talks, "Let's promote rodeo" because, somehow, all of a sudden that day they — the Liberals, that is — decide that they support rural Alberta. But every chance they get to take a swipe at the hard-working people of this province who happen to be in rural Alberta, they do.

Mountain Pine Beetle

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, speaking about the hard-working Albertans, some of Alberta's most major forest industry is located within Whitecourt-St. Anne, Mr. Speaker, as you know. The woodlands manager at Blue Ridge Lumber states that central and northern Alberta suffered another major in-flight of mountain pine beetle from British Columbia and the federal mountain parks during July this year; the mountain pine beetle has gained a stronghold in the majority of Alberta's pine forests and presents a major threat to Canada's boreal forest. My questions are all to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Where is Alberta focusing its efforts against the pine beetle?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne is absolutely right. This summer's in-flight from British Columbia is one of the most severe we've had, apparently more severe than the 2006 in-flight. The effect it's had is to push the eastern edge of the pine beetle infestation much further east, now in west-central Alberta between Hinton and Slave Lake. Accordingly, we've moved our control efforts to that leading edge to try to prevent it from spreading eastward into the rest of the boreal or southward into the eastern slopes. Behind that front edge we're working with forestry companies to do salvage operations and then, of course, to replant new forests.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, it's essential that all levels of government and industry remain increasingly committed to fighting the mountain pine beetle. Again to the same minister: does your department have adequate resources to meet this new threat?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has committed very significant resources to the fight against the pine beetle already, and within the current fiscal restraints we will continue to do so. Up to this point this year we have committed an initial \$10 million for our spring campaign. Currently we are mapping out our fall and winter strategy based on the surveys we're doing. On a positive note I can tell you that the federal government has been in contact with us, and they've heard our message. This isn't just an Alberta issue or a B.C. issue anymore; it's an issue of concern to all of Canada. We're working with the federal government to get involved as well.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my communities and our industry I want to thank and encourage the minister and his staff at SRD to continue the fight and to keep up the good work. But I want to know from the minister: how does this specific event change Alberta's approach to managing beetle infestations?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm again that this government is committed to healthy, sustainable forests and, accordingly, a healthy, sustainable forest industry and forest communities. This year's flight does threaten that industry, though, a \$9 billion industry, 38,000 jobs, but also affects the boreal, the eastern slopes, the watersheds, and the habitat and recreation that it provides. We are finishing our aerial surveys. We've been doing that in September and October. Based on that, we'll develop new strategies. Probably we'll do less single-tree removal and more stand removal and also, of course, continue our replanting. But, again, containing the spread of pine beetles is not just a concern to Alberta; it's a concern to all of Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education hypocrisy. Albertans want those in charge of directing our public education system to adhere to high standards. However, this government's approach to education continues to be: do as I say, not as I do. Because the Ministry of Education doled out \$2.5 million in achievement bonuses this year while punishing students with cuts in excess of \$80 million, the minister owes Albertans an explanation. Are these stratospheric bonuses intended to reward senior bureaucrats for their ability to slash the Education budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered the question about the \$80 million the other day. The hon. member obviously didn't hear the fact that none of the \$80 million that we've reprofiled in the Education budget has come from the classroom or affected the students. None of it. We went out to the school boards and said: you have reserves in place; we understand that you saved those reserves for certain purposes, but we're going to ask you this year in the in-year adjustment – and an in-year adjustment is never an easy thing or a fair thing to do – to take a portion of the \$80 million, not the full \$80 million, a portion of the \$80 million out of those

reserves, not out of the classroom, not out of teachers, not out of students. So the hon. member has it wrong on that account. He also has it wrong on other accounts, which I hope I'll get another chance to address.

Mr. Chase: Here's your chance, Mr. Minister. The minister has been travelling the province, clawing back the surpluses of school boards that tried to accountably build up their reserves. How can the minister preach fiscal sacrifice to our school boards when he overspent in his own internal office budget by \$2.5 million this year?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would know from my answer the other day that of the \$80 million that we had as an in-year adjustment, we took a full \$24 million directly out of the department's budget so that we wouldn't have to pass as much on to the school system: \$24 million. That's about 20 per cent of our budget. The hon. member is obviously looking at one line in the budget to see whether there has been management. What he has got to take a look at is the overall budget and understand that sometimes you have to go to extra effort to make sure that all stakeholders are part of a considered and rational process of decision-making, and sometimes you spend some money doing that. We do, and we don't apologize for it.

Mr. Chase: Well, \$2.5 million of overbudgeting in your own office must have bought an awful lot of pencils and erasers.

This minister needs to finally start aligning his words with his actions when it comes to cuts to public education. What concrete assurances can the minister give to students, parents, teachers, and trustees that even more draconian classroom cuts aren't being dreamt up for next year's budget?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, concrete assurance is the Minister of Infrastructure's job, and he just announced today that we're going to be pouring concrete for four high schools in the province almost right away. We're moving ahead to make sure that we have schools in the right places, that we have teachers in the classrooms for our students, and that we keep our eye on the real agenda, which is to make sure that the students in Alberta have a good education not just for today – world-class, by the way. People from around the country are coming to take a look. I understand that just yesterday at Bishop Grandin in Calgary were people from Australia coming to see what a great job we're doing here so that they can duplicate it over there. But in response to the spending that we're talking about, part of what he's talking about is the fact that we're also looking to the horizon to make sure that we have that great education system for tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:40

Community Initiatives Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's communities are the building blocks for our province. It helps to provide the communities with facilities and resources for Alberta's families. All my questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. How does the community initiatives program strengthen our local communities?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, we strengthen our communities by supporting them and sustaining them. We put funds into the programs in our communities as stakeholders, and we invest in those projects that the communities deem to be important. To build us a province of strong communities, we have to make safe communities as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that some changes have been made to the CIP program. How will these recent changes affect the CIP program?

Mr. Blackett: Well, first of all, in consultations around the province with different stakeholders and the not-for-profit community, we realized that we had to make some changes to make it more effective for them and to deal with the programs that were funded through the previous Wild Rose program. One thing that we did is move our decisions to a quarterly process so that we can have decisions made and monies funded and expended and passed out to the communities in a more orderly fashion, and it wouldn't be such an administrative burden on our department. We also cut back the amount of money that we were putting out there for such things as schools or a hockey team going to Europe. We want to put that into the community. We have given a group the status of being able to get money on a nonmatching basis, which was available under the Wild Rose Foundation. Now instead of \$50,000 they get up to \$75,000, and for those international projects they still get the \$25,000 that they were eligible for before.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: with these changed deadlines, can you tell me what's happening with the applications of some of my constituents and associations who have already applied?

Mr. Blackett: Well, the process is still a process. What we've done is we've got more resources now. We've got the different granting programs all working together to deliver it better. What is happening is that that means we have more time to work on the actual applications, we have more time to process, and we have more time to actually do some outreach in the communities to make sure that those organizations who are in desperate need, especially today – we have to remember that 5,000 people a month are still coming to Alberta, and that stretches the resources of those great agencies that are already out there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine, and I'll call on the hon. Member for Little Bow to participate but in 30 seconds or less.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

International Space Station Live Satellite Hookup

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand before the House today to report yet another Alberta first. On September 23 the hon. Minister of Education and I participated in a unique education event that touched the lives of many in my constituency and throughout the province of Alberta. Students and teachers from many of the Palliser regional schools and the community were part of a live satellite hookup with the International Space Station at County Central high in Vulcan. This is the first time an event like this has taken place in Alberta for school-aged children.

Canadian astronaut Dr. Robert Thirsk and his fellow astronauts answered a series of science and technological questions for eager students while they were hurtling live through space at seven kilometres per second.

I became aware of this special project in February of 2009, when I first met with representatives from Alberta Education and the Canadian Space Agency, particularly Marilyn Steinberg. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of them for their dedication in making this project a reality. I'd also like to acknowledge the efforts and vision of Palliser regional school board; Kevin Gietz, the superintendent; and the County Central high school students and staff, who were staunch supporters of this learning opportunity.

The support demonstrated by our government recognizes our government's goal to ensure that Alberta students are unique and receive stimulating learning opportunities. Through the SuperNet students in rural Alberta can receive the same opportunities in education as those in urban centres throughout the rest of the province. I rise today to honour the many people in education who continue to contribute greatly to our students' educational experience and to congratulate the Palliser regional school board, County Central high, and the community of Vulcan, which hosted this once-in-a-lifetime event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I take it the hon. member communicated with Mr. Spock.

Mr. McFarland: "Live long and prosper," he said.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise to acknowledge Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which was established to promote awareness of breast cancer and to raise funds for breast cancer research. In Alberta about 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime, so early detection is vital. Screening mammograms can usually find breast cancers several years before they can be felt. Early detection through a mammogram means early treatment, and early treatment means a better chance of survival.

Through the Alberta breast cancer screening program Alberta Health Services is encouraging all women aged 50 to 69 to have a mammogram at least every two years. Women aged 40 to 49 and aged 70 and older should talk to their health care provider about the need for a mammogram. In addition, all women should follow a healthy lifestyle that, one, eliminates smoking, two, limits alcohol consumption, and three, includes a healthy diet and regular exercise.

While breast cancer death rates are declining – and that's good news – we must continue to take steps to prevent this disease and reduce its impact on women in our province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

The Doorway Street Youth Transition Program

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to recognize an exceptional Calgary organization, The Doorway, which helps young adults living on the streets successfully move into mainstream society. Over the weekend I had the honour of participating in The Doorway's annual walk and run. I must

confess that I walked. The Doorway, made up of four staff members and 10 community volunteers, was founded as an experiment in social change in 1988. Its initial goal was to test a cost-effective model for assisting street youth in becoming self-sufficient and productive members of society.

I especially like the fact that their method helps promote self-determination, ownership of the individual's life, and, perhaps most important, accountability for one's choices. Mr. Speaker, The Doorway has had a high success rate in getting youth off the streets and helping them stay off the streets. In fact, over the past 21 years 700 young people have successfully transitioned off the street.

Mr. Speaker, the event was not just about raising money, though. It was about a series of steps towards empowerment. Every step we took was a step towards breaking down barriers, a step towards a less judgmental society, towards breaking down stereotypes, a step towards progress in personal responsibility, a step towards empowerment and towards unleashing the vast potential of those in the midst of challenging times, and a step towards reaching out to those who feel forgotten and offering them a small piece of our hearts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 55 and section 6(4)(d) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act it is my pleasure to rise today and table the 2008-09 annual report of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. The report is available on the committee website, and copies will be distributed to all members today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister and staff of Alberta Finance and Enterprise and the Alberta Investment Management Corporation as well as the staff from the office of the Auditor General and the Legislative Assembly Office for the dedicated support they provided to the committee throughout the year.

Thank you.

2:50 Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 122 people. The petition calls for the rights of currently practising massage therapists to be grandfathered so that the therapists may upgrade their skills gradually without losing the right to practise while the upgrades are taking place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, object to the development and use of nuclear power in Alberta, and we petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to develop an energy policy which encourages conservation, promotes the use of safe, clean, renewable energy sources and explicitly rejects nuclear power in this province.

The petition has 1,032 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Bill 209

Children's Services Review Committee Act

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Children's Services Review Committee Act, Bill 209.

The committee shall undertake a comparative review of the provision of children's services by employees of the government under the minister's administration and the provision of children's services by organizations and their employees on behalf of the minister, including but not restricted to the quality and effectiveness of the services; the remuneration of the individuals; their training, development, and qualification; their workload and type of work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of the Capital Region Board's annual report for 2008. This report provides a summary of the board's activities during the 2008 calendar year and up to the completion of the growth plan at the end of March of 2009.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 16(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table the 2008-09 annual report on the fund.

Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and as chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it's my pleasure to table the 2009-10 first-quarter update on the fund.

Copies of these reports have previously been distributed to all members.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today from constituents, all of them concerned with the bed closures at Alberta Hospital. The first is from Kevin and Pascal Wallace, who note that

in the alleyways behind our condo, we witness and experience the wandering individuals who are clearly suffering from various mental illnesses. To close more beds is, in our opinion, guaranteed to expand the population of mentally ill homeless people.

The second tabling I have is from more constituents, Ken and Pat MacDonald, who note that they're against the closure and ask to work towards redeveloping Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The final correspondence from constituents today is from Roger and Georgina Lufkin, whose condo is just down the street from my office. They actually form it as a petition.

We, the undersigned residents . . . petition the Legislative Assembly to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating . . . at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It is a letter that I wrote to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, dated August 7, 2009, asking for answers regarding the \$100 million in five internally restricted funds that are to be liquidated and used to pay down the debt of Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mildred Dunlop in Whitecourt. She has concerns that “the Seniors and Citizens of Whitecourt are in great need for an Extended Care or Nursing Home in Whitecourt.”

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the appropriate number of copies of a letter dated October 27, 2009, from the Member for Calgary-Egmont advising my office of the resignation of that member from the Health policy field committee, effective immediately, is now being tabled as well.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mrs. Ady, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, pursuant to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation Act the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation 2008-2009 annual report.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You just tabled a letter from the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont resigning from one of the committees of the House. As is normal, there have been changes.

Committee Membership Changes

17. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to the following standing committees be approved.
 - (a) Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: that Mr. Rogers replace hon. Mr. Webber;
 - (b) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: that Ms Redford be appointed to fill a vacancy;
 - (c) Standing Committee on Resources and Environment: that Mr. Denis replace hon. Mr. Webber, that Mr. Jacobs replace Mr. Griffiths;
 - (d) Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services: that Mr. Griffiths replace Mr. Jacobs;
 - (e) Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee: that Mr. Rogers replace hon. Mr. Webber;
 - (f) Standing Committee on the Economy: that Mr. Hinman be appointed to fill a vacancy.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Any participants?

The Government House Leader has nothing further to say. He doesn't want to close the debate because there was no debate.

Shall I call the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Alberta Capital Bonds

16. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

[Adjourned debate October 27: Mr Campbell]

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and participate in the discussion on Government Motion 16, Alberta capital bonds, an important discussion, I believe, in determining our strategy as we emerge from the global economic downturn. The economic downturn has presented a challenge to Alberta's industries and our government, as it has to many others in Canada and abroad.

While no one fully anticipated the circumstances which confront us, we are in a relatively good position in Alberta. Thankfully we have the sustainability fund to cushion the effects that we face. The sustainability fund is a significant resource for times like this and something that most other jurisdictions do not have and none in Canada that I know of. It is clear that we must maintain and remain committed to replenishing it. The reason we have the fund is the very reason why I'm confident in The Way Forward.

Alberta's industries attract business from around the world, and hard-working people want to establish roots here. We have committed to maintaining a competitive business environment, keeping our corporate income tax low. We will continue to maintain strong foundations for our communities, providing the necessary services for Albertans and their families while keeping the income tax at its current level.

Mr. Speaker, while we find ways to improve the efficiency of service delivery, we also have some continuing priorities which cannot be ignored. We have a responsibility to continue investing in our province and building for tomorrow. This includes, first and foremost, investing in infrastructure. Building infrastructure and keeping our capital plan in sight will maintain a solid foundation for years to come. While our savings will provide a large portion of funding, we can also explore other avenues of raising capital.

3:00

Motion 16 proposes the issuance of savings bonds similar to the Alberta capital bonds of the late 1980s and 1990s, a motion that I fully support. Mr. Speaker, issuing bonds to raise capital has a number of benefits at this point in time and would fund important infrastructure priorities. First, savings bonds would promote savings and provide a direct return to their holders. Alberta savings bonds would be among the best investments one could buy as they would be backed by our government and, by extension, the economic climate that our government promotes. Much of the returns could remain with Albertans, and they would be investing directly in their province's future.

In considering who the bonds should be available to, Mr. Speaker, I believe that individual Albertans and Alberta business owners should have the first opportunity to purchase the bonds. This way, Albertans and their families will have increased savings down the

road. Typically bonds are also purchased by financial institutions for investment portfolios that they manage. Mutual funds, for example, are comprised of a number of different investments with varying degrees of risk, including stocks and bonds. I am sure that financial institutions would be keen to include Alberta bonds in their investment portfolios as they provide a low risk and guaranteed rate of return to any fund. Many Albertans invest in mutual funds with a number of different financial institutions, so it may be appropriate to allow financial institutions to purchase some amount of the bonds, but again I would like to see individual Albertans and their families given the first opportunity since the bonds would be a secure, long-term investment opportunity.

It would also be preferable to allow as many Albertans as possible the opportunity to purchase the bonds. The bond issuance would be structured, then, with an appropriate maximum purchase amount and a reasonable low minimum. This would afford a fair opportunity to most if not all Albertans.

Speaking for my constituency of West Yellowhead, Mr. Speaker, I can say that there are a number of opportunities to invest in infrastructure using capital raised from the proposed bond issuance. Like many constituencies in the province West Yellowhead relies on highways, primarily highway 40 and highway 16. These highways provide transportation between communities and, most importantly, to the rest of the province and across the border into British Columbia. Road infrastructure supports trade for local economies and allows for the integration with the rest of the province in numerous industrial sectors. The primary industries revolve around natural resources as with much of northern Alberta. Forestry, oil and gas, and mining are the industries that most of the communities in my constituency were born out of, and these industries continue to be the main growth catalyst.

The coal industry in Alberta could only grow when the tracks were laid to Edson and Grande Cache and the Edson Trail allowed people to settle in new communities. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, reaching remote areas allows our industries to flourish. Obviously, we've come a long way since the journey through the mud and muskeg on the Edson trail, with good road infrastructure throughout West Yellowhead and much of the province, and we must keep this up. Maintaining solid infrastructure in our remote areas promotes new industries and economic diversification for our communities.

Community-based infrastructure is also crucial for promoting economic diversification. New industries within a community often rely on new people in addition to new business ties with other regions, Mr. Speaker, so it's important to have sufficient community-based infrastructure in place to make all of our communities attractive places to live, work, and raise a family. As we make our recovery, we must remain committed to funding infrastructure that will lay the foundation for future economic growth, and we must be aware of opportune infrastructure investments for both rural and urban areas that will have some benefit to the province overall. With the cost savings that we stand to benefit from, it is a good time to build, depending on, of course, the project. In raising capital through the issuance of bonds, we can provide a great opportunity for investment to Albertans and value that will remain for years to come in Alberta communities.

As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that we will keep our priorities in mind and target funds only to necessary and opportune areas. Infrastructure is one key area for my constituency and, indeed, the entire province. The provincial economy depends on local economies, and local economies depend on basic infrastructure to a large extent. We have maintained a commitment thus far, and I trust that we'll keep sight of our infrastructure requirements moving forward so that future generations do not have to catch up on the crumbling roads.

With clear priorities and prudent spending, Alberta will emerge from this economic downturn as strong as ever. Challenges have been thrown at us in the past, and while this one may have been more intense, we are seeing positive signs already. With continued leadership and determination and a resolute commitment the way forward is ever-promising, with new opportunities on the horizon.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing what my fellow members have to say on this matter in the discussion today. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. Okay. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to speak about the Alberta capital bonds.

The Speaker: Well, no. We're still under the question-and-comment period.

Mr. Hayden: Oh. I'm sorry, sir.

The Speaker: That being the case, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the motion with respect to the issuance of provincial bonds. I want to talk a little bit about the path that the government has been going down in terms of infrastructure, and I particularly want to talk about how that's going to be financed.

Mr. Speaker, it's become clear to me that when the province was actively involved in the pursuit of paying down the debt under the previous Premier, one of the things that was done in order to do that was to minimize expenditures on infrastructure. As a result, our infrastructure aged and required replacement. It had higher costs of maintenance because if you let your maintenance go, then the costs rise, and that's actually what happened here. So we got to the point where although we had paid down our financial debt, the debt on our infrastructure was growing at the same time. We didn't get ourselves out of debt, but what we did do was shift where the debt is. If you double up your payments on your mortgage on your house and you don't fix the roof or the foundation, you have incurred a real debt nevertheless. Even though you've paid off your mortgage, you may not be further ahead. I submit that that's precisely the position that the government put this province in.

Having said that, I am pleased to see that there is an increased interest in infrastructure projects in this province and that there are more expenditures going towards infrastructure, which is badly needed not only to replace the outdated infrastructure that was not replaced in a timely way but also, of course, to facilitate the growth of the province. I also think that investment in infrastructure plays an important stimulative role at a time when the economy is not what it once was, if I can just put it that mildly. So I think that those kinds of expenditures are timely, and I'm pleased to see that the government is continuing to go ahead with them.

I want to talk about the situation around our budget, at least as the President of the Treasury Board saw it when I asked him questions during the estimates debate. I'm going to quote a little bit from *Hansard* from that committee on April 28 of this year. We had quite a discussion on it. I have to thank the minister because he was quite forthcoming, and I got a much better understanding of where the government is going in terms of the budget of the province.

Now, one of the things that I learned is that in next year's budget – well, we knew this from the budget – the government is looking

for \$2 billion in savings. When I asked the minister, he talked about \$1.3 billion of that coming from reductions in the operating budget of the government. So \$1.3 billion of the \$2 billion coming from reductions in the operating budget. Now, keep in mind this is back in April, so things may have changed, but I thought it was quite interesting.

He also talked about the expenditures on capital, and he talked about planned expenditures of \$7 billion, of which he admitted that the government was intending to borrow \$1.1 billion. That means that out of the revenues of the province infrastructure spending of \$5.9 billion would be financed. So at the same time as the government is looking for \$2 billion and \$1.3 of that coming out of program expenditures, they're paying from government revenues from that year \$5.9 billion.

3:10

I asked the minister a question. I said: why not increase your borrowings on the capital side by \$1.3 billion, so it would be \$1.1 billion plus \$1.3 billion, or \$2.4 billion, in debt financing of infrastructure, and you won't have to make dramatic program cuts on the operating side? You know, he said something about how I should probably talk to the Treasurer or something like that, and we didn't really get much farther on that point. But I think that it's interesting and I think that it's relevant here because if by issuing government bonds for capital projects, for infrastructure projects, we can in fact replace some of the general revenue money flowing into infrastructure, which – I don't know if in the province they call it pay-as-you-go, but that's certainly the name we had for it in the city of Edmonton. When you paid cash for your infrastructure instead of borrowing, we called it pay-as-you-go. So instead of \$5.9 billion, we reduce that by \$1.3 billion. Basically, we wouldn't have to cut.

I want to just make this clear that the decision to reduce spending in next year's budget by \$1.3 billion is a conscious decision that doesn't necessarily have to be. The government could, by increasing its borrowing or, I guess, reducing the amount they're spending on infrastructure, ensure that we do not have to make those cuts. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we have enough money coming in in order to avoid any cuts at all to program spending in next year's budget, but we would either have to reduce the capital budget or we would have to borrow more.

It brings me to the question of bonds. I've looked through some of the speeches yesterday and some of the government comments. I'm not sure that I was able to find what the issue was going to be. In other words, how much debt through bonds does the government intend to undertake, and will this be used to offset borrowing in the market or to supplement it? In other words, if we used these bonds to supplement the borrowings we're already doing, it would be possible, in my view, to fund all of our program services in the next year with no cuts whatsoever. There is revenue available to this province in the budget, according to the government's own estimates, that is sufficient for that, plus a considerable amount left over to pay for infrastructure. The question is whether or not the government wants to cut and lay off on the operating side in order to finance more spending for infrastructure on the capital side.

Mr. Speaker, I think that bonds are a reasonable way to go if you are going to borrow, and I know that the government has had a hard time over the last few years getting back to the point where they're even prepared to let those words pass their lips. They used to be dirty words on the government side when I first came here. Now the government seems to have adopted a more reasonable position. In my view, borrowing on the operating side, running a deficit on the operating side, is wrong. It's unnecessary, it's not responsible, and the government shouldn't do it except in extreme circumstances.

But it is reasonable and prudent to borrow on the capital side. All governments do it. Municipal governments have been doing it for many years. What you need is a revenue stream sufficient to retire the debt.

One of the things about major infrastructure expenditures that lends itself to borrowing is that they're often very long-term projects that are used for a long period of time. It's not fair for the current generation or current group of taxpayers to pay all of the costs of a major capital project if it's going to last for 50 years. So by borrowing you spread the costs and the responsibility of that infrastructure over the generations of people that are going to use the infrastructure.

I think that the idea of getting Albertans involved in lending the province money to build capital projects is sound. I have no objection to it, and I would rather borrow the money from Albertans than I would New York banks. I think that it makes sense, so in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to support the government's proposal. I think that it's a good one. But I want to urge members opposite to really question and challenge the whole idea of limiting the borrowing on the capital side, spending what could be operating money on capital projects when it means layoffs of employees and rollbacks, perhaps, in their contracts but certainly reductions in services for Albertans, whether it be in education or health care or any of the other important services that the province offers. These cuts are not necessary, based on the information given to me by the President of the Treasury Board, absolutely not required. They are a deliberate decision of the government, which could be changed if a different set of priorities were adopted.

Mr. Speaker, with that, just to indicate that I do think that the bond program, although we haven't seen it in any detail, in concept is a good idea and one that I am quite comfortable in supporting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have previously sent to the table officers an amendment that I would like to propose. When that amendment is distributed, I'd be pleased to argue it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the amendment is being circulated. Please proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. The amendment, which members will soon receive, suggests that Motion 16 be amended by striking out "the issue of Alberta capital bonds," which is an open-ended target, and substituting "the issue of a maximum of \$250 million in Alberta capital bonds."

The concern we have as the Liberal caucus is that the government has collected so much money over the previous 15 years through a variety of revenues, mostly having to do with the good fortune of our nonrenewable resource revenues. We've had a very stable gas economy for a number of years, and our oil was rather stable during those years as well. Unfortunately, when the bottom fell out of the market globally and the government's revenue was reduced to the point where the government is now running a \$7 billion deficit, we're concerned about the government's ability to manage money. What we're suggesting with the \$250 million limit in Alberta capital bonds is: demonstrate to Albertans how well this \$250 million worth of bonds will be managed, and if you can demonstrate a better fiscal track record than what we've seen over the last 25 years, then we would consider raising a higher amount of bonds to support infrastructure.

Now, we are grateful to the government for acknowledging one of the Liberal proposals, and that is the stability fund. Because of the adoption of the stability fund, we have what the government calls a sustainability fund, which, when combined with the capital fund, provides a \$16 billion buffer that other provinces do not have the good fortune to have. However, you cannot brag about your buffer without actually utilizing it for the good of the province, and rather than starting to commit dollars out of that buffer in terms of capital projects or preventing operational cuts, the government continues to talk about how wonderful it is to have that \$16 billion instead of doing something with it. What we have seen already, first out of the chute, is in the Education ministry a cut of \$80 million. In terms of the health care superboard and the reorganization of health care, instead of delivering efficiencies it has delivered \$1.3 billion in combined health debts.

3:20

Now, with regard to the \$250 million being a starting point, what we see is a series of cuts, for example, to health services. We have seen podiatry services no longer being funded. We have seen chiropractic services no longer being funded. We have gone from a need for 1,400 nurses to a hiring freeze, and the only nurses that are currently being sought out to any large degree are temporary, contract nurses. Where the buffer, as I refer to it, the \$16 billion buffer, if utilized strategically, would help offset the need for cuts, unfortunately, the cuts continue. Not only do the cuts continue, but the cost of providing services is being passed on to a variety of individuals. Seniors, for example, have seen the cost of their Alberta Blue Cross health care insurance rise threefold, and this is affecting them very directly.

The government has talked about buffering Albertans, whether it be in Education or Health or Children and Youth Services, where there has been a freeze, from the very beginning of the announcement of the budget. What we're saying with this particular motion of \$250 million is: demonstrate a new track record; demonstrate that that \$250 million will be assigned to very specific projects from which we can see the value.

In addition to the \$16 billion buffer in the combined sustainability fund, various ministries have within their budgets pockets of significant amounts of money. For example, in the health care budget there is approximately \$1.7 billion assigned for capital building. Now, considering that the southeast hospital's costs rose threefold from, initially, in the area of \$500 million to very close now to \$1.5 billion, there isn't a whole lot of wiggle room in that particular budget. It would make sense, as I say, on an assigned basis to utilize a portion of the \$250 million in capital bonds, that we are suggesting, to designate towards, for example, completing the number of mental health care beds that were cut from that particular project.

We're very concerned that these bonds be very specifically targeted and accounted for as part of the fiscal responsibility. We have seen what happens when the way out of a bust is cutbacks. We've gone through it in the 1990s. We saw the beginnings of the centralization of budgeting with the loss of autonomy of school boards to collect the educational property portion of their budget. That used to give them the autonomy to control half of their budget. They no longer have that ability. We've seen the move, as I said, towards the centralization of health care. We're supposed to have faith that at some point the bleeding will stop and the success of the program will be enhanced, but again the government is calling on Albertans to have faith, trust us: we're not going to set any limits to the borrowing or the issuing of bonds.

So the government has gone from its dependence on the fluctuation of nonrenewable resource revenues to its dependence on casino and lottery funds, and now it's hitching its falling star to Albertans investing in bonds.

Now, if Albertans were to look at some of the investments this government has made in the last year and a half, \$3 billion was lost from the heritage trust fund. We've had investments in asset-backed commercial paper which produced disastrous results – for example, Alberta Treasury Branches – and it's the Alberta taxpayers that are on the hook for paying back that amount of money.

Again, what we're proposing in this particular motion is: let's have a reasonable experimental sum, \$250 million, in terms of capital bonds. If this initial amount serves as an incentive for much-needed capital projects, great. Then there will be confidence, and we can guarantee that it will almost be like a commercial for Albertans to see how well the government has done with its initial \$250 million bond investment.

What Albertans have seen over the last 15 years is infrastructure deficits increasing dramatically. In Calgary alone the combined infrastructure deficit of the school boards, Calgary public and Calgary Catholic, is rapidly approaching a billion dollars. The overall infrastructure deficit – and the hon. Minister of Infrastructure can correct the figures that I'm rounding off – is in the area of \$10 billion. Now, that's on top of our \$7 billion debt. We have the unfunded liability in the teachers' agreement that is in the area of \$10 billion. The point I'm trying to make here is that when you combine our current deficit of \$7 billion with the \$20 billion that I have pointed out in terms of infrastructure and the education unfunded liability, we're rapidly approaching and surpassing the \$23 billion deficit that Ralph Klein faced. The way out of that deficit is not further borrowing. Therefore, we have to be strategic.

Now, if Albertans are going to buy into the notion of bonds, then they have to have confidence that when it comes to cashing in those bonds, the interest will be there. The government can say: well, you know, look at our total overall worth. If we look at AIMCo, for example, we're looking at in excess of \$70 billion. Well, it's not as though we can take that \$70 billion of government buildings and roads to the bank and cash them in and start paying off the interest on the bonds that Albertans have invested in. The majority of the assets we have are of a fixed nature and are not something that we can, as I say, cash in.

So what we are proposing in this particular amendment is: let us take a \$250 million experiment, a type of leap of faith for Albertans. It's easy to sell the notion of the \$250 million in bonds. Building a Better Alberta, for example, might be the slogan. But if Albertans are going to be convinced that they've paid out their taxes – they've heard the Auditor General's reports about billions of royalty dollars not being collected according to the old royalty system, and now they've seen five changes to the current royalty system. They've lost faith in the government's ability to manage our resource wealth. They have been lining up for days in the cold around the outside of shopping centres to get simple flu inoculations. They have seen a lack of efficiencies in a number of government departments. They have witnessed \$44 million of bonusing going out in the midst of a recession.

3:30

So the Alberta taxpayer has to have a reason to, I would suggest, re-invest in the Alberta process. It is for that reason that we're saying: start with a reasonable amount, a quarter of a billion dollars of bonds. Prove to Albertans how expediently this investment can be utilized. Promise specific school constructions. Promise that hospitals will be built in a timely manner with the capital funds generated from the bond issues. Let them know that highway 63 –

for example, a series of the \$250 million bond issues would be bought potentially by people from the Fort McMurray region to finally see the twinning of their deadly road, highway 63. Give Albertans specific reasons for specific bond issues.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available on this amendment, questions and responses. We're dealing with an amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: I just wanted to say that I think that, you know, it is a good idea that you've come up with in terms of limiting what this bond issue should be, but I do believe that it is something we should very carefully consider, that putting this particular number on might not be the right number. For instance, we want to make sure that the people of Alberta who want to invest in Alberta do have that option. In other words, we shouldn't make that ceiling too low. Yes, this is something new and exciting, and I think it's something that Albertans want in terms of Alberta bonds. Yes, I think that we shouldn't jump into it with, you know, an unlimited limit on the top. But I do believe that that is a number that should be studied, and I would ask that we get further feedback from the finance department on this issue. I do not believe that we should be deciding in this Legislature with insufficient information on one particular limit today.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Others to participate on Standing Order 29(2)(a)? Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: I'm sorry. I was going to participate, not question and answer.

The Speaker: No, we're still on 29(2)(a).

That being the case, no further questions, I'll now call on, as I indicated before, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure on the amendment.

Mr. Chase: Mr. Speaker, if I may, a clarification: is there not further discussion to be held on the amendment that has been introduced?

The Speaker: That's what I just finished saying, hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sit down, please. I'm calling on the hon. Minister of Infrastructure to continue the debate on the amendment.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Similar to the speaker previous, I don't think that we have the proper information with respect to what an appropriate limit would be at this time for the bonds. I think that there are questions that would need to be answered and need to be debated and discussed with respect to possibly even numbers of issuances, limits both high and low for investments, and rules surrounding that. So I have to speak in opposition to this specific amendment.

The Speaker: Others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

Ms Pastoor: On the amendment, yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to say that I was pleased to hear from the other side that the idea, the concept, of actually setting a limit would be a good one. The other thing that I would like to see is where this limit is set, despite the fact that we think that a quarter of a billion dollars is a

large chunk of money to be sort of allocated. But this will come back as a bill, so we will hopefully have more specifics.

What I think should happen is that you have the projects on the table. You know what those projects are going to cost and then go to the citizens, to Albertans, and say: these are the projects, and this is how much money we need. I would suspect that the quarter of a billion dollars may well cover the projects that actually the government has in mind.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Additional speakers?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall under section 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Kang: No. I will talk about the amendment.

The Speaker: Okay. Anybody want to participate under 29(2)(a)?

Then I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on the amendment.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak in favour of the amendment because that's why we have the budgets, so the government should know how much their infrastructure budget is for the next year. We cannot have just an open-ended bond issue and get faster into debt than we need to. It's a good idea to build infrastructure. I think that in 1993 when the government was cutting back, they cut back too deeply on that, and that's the mistake we made. It's a good idea to issue the bonds and then build the infrastructure when we can build it cheaper, but there should be some kind of ceiling put on issuing the bonds. I'm tabling the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is available for question or response to the last speaker. Does anyone wish to participate?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferalo on the amendment.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of the amendment brought forward by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity. I think this is a good measure that shows a level of prudence going forward that we would be wise to accept in this Chamber. If we look back and simply have legislation written as a blank cheque, where governments can continue to go back to the capital markets on an unlimited basis without having some sound debate in this Legislature on what the ramifications are both for now and for the citizens of the future in Alberta, I think that would be done with great peril.

There is no need to look further than the ebbs and flows of our finances here in Alberta. Over the course of our existence they have tended to skyrocket when oil prices are high and, of course, then plummeted down to the bottom when oil prices are low. What we have to do in this province is find some middle ground where we have a stable funding mechanism in place that goes forward and takes these ebbs and flows of the vagaries of the economy in stride – and we don't need to needlessly herk and jerk – and go forward in whatever direction the economy seems to be going. The government could go forward and plan on a more stable basis. I think that is a direction that we need to go.

As I got to speak to the regular part of the bill yesterday, I was supportive of this bill but with some limits to it, and this would actually be a limit. I know the Member for Calgary-Bow said that this is a new and exciting thing, but I think we only have to look back to 1986 when this was also maybe considered a new and exciting thing that went until 1997. That new and exciting thing led to some consequences. I guess I would caution that lipstick on a pig

is still a pig. If these things result in accumulating a vast amount of debt, although this may look like a new and exciting program now, these vast accumulations of debt will need be paid for by future generations of Albertans.

3:40

So let's watch the way we dress this up. This is debt. Despite that members of this hon. House are trying to put forward that this is some great opportunity, it's debt. Now, hopefully it is financed by regular Albertans, and hopefully we have a limit on it like the one suggested by my hon. friend from Calgary-Varsity. Nonetheless, if we don't accept this amendment, I think it would behoove us in this House to come up with another amendment, another reasonable limit that we can discuss. Should we reach that limit and should we reach a time in Alberta where we have to for the security of our future come back here and issue another round of bonds, then we do so with some sober second thought and some more discussion in this House and listening to our constituents.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to confess a little confusion here, and I'm wondering if I could ask the hon. member opposite to clear that up for me. First of all, we're debating a motion here, not a bill. The government has proposed a motion surrounding capital bonds, and in debating that motion it would open to all of us to make suggestions about whether we think it should be capped or whether we think it should be, you know, applied to certain kinds of projects. I mean, any member is free to stand within this House and propose to shape the future direction of the government here. I'm a little confused as to the purpose of an amendment at this point anyway.

I'm wondering if that member or other members opposite are aware, because it doesn't seem like they are or that that particular member is, that the government just doesn't get unending, wide-open borrowing power as a result of this motion or any other motion in the House. In order to proceed with borrowing or expenditures, our government has to table a budget in this House, and that gets freely debated. So the point of this particular amendment is kind of missing, at least in my mind, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the comments. It's just that, needless to say, I think it is imperative on why I spoke to the amendment. Although it may not be specifically the correct time due to the correct channels or even the appropriate time, I think it always is a wise discussion in this House to look at our past financial practices, some of the things that have gone wrong in the past, and maybe what we can look forward to in the future. But if we brought them up at the wrong time, well, so be it. We got a chance to discuss it, discuss sort of the perils of what Alberta has been through, the future as we see it and hope it is. I hope we didn't delay the member from going somewhere else, if he had to be somewhere else, to listen to this. Nonetheless, I'm hopeful that our comments are taken in the vein they are offered in sort of helping us go forward on a reasonable and prudent financial footing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available should there be additional comments. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Yes. Very, very specifically to the hon. government whip: what we're suggesting is providing structure.

Mr. Oberle: You're supposed to be asking him questions, not me.

Mr. Chase: This is a comment as well as a question, sir. You asked a question which I am providing a comment for, and that comment has to do with providing structure. We cannot simply operate on the trust-us methodology and have decisions made by the government members for which our only input is a discussion in the budget. That's why it's very important that we structure our discussions with regard to the purpose of bonds and the amount of bonds we would consider looking into.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I take it that there's no further comment under 29(2)(a).

Okay. We're back to the debate, then, on the amendment. The hon. Member for St. Albert on the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments. Firstly, I would just like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for clarifying the process. Further to that, in reflecting on the amount, I appreciate the need to exercise some caution. When we think of \$250 million these days – as I recall, just a year or so ago the city of Edmonton proposed and is now building an overpass, and I believe the cost of that was \$250 million. Really, \$250 million isn't an awful lot to work with, so I really am concerned that we put such a low limit on it at this point in time. I think that as the hon. Member for Peace River has suggested, the budget is the proper place to get into details of debate on the amount. Therefore, I'm urging members of the House to defeat the amendment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We're in a new time period. We're in a recession. As the hon. Minister of Infrastructure pointed out, we're able now to build, traditionally, I'll add, as opposed to P3, four new 1,500-student high schools at the price of \$93 million. So \$250 million now, where infrastructure is 40 per cent cheaper, will actually have a fairly big bang for a quarter of a billion bucks. It would have purchased for us, using the high school analogy, 10 high schools, much needed, that would accommodate 1,500 students apiece. So please do not suggest that \$250 million will not go considerably further now than it did in the time when that overpass was being costed out.

The opportunity during a recession to wisely invest in capital infrastructure that will have the greatest benefit for Albertans goes without saying, and the idea of strategically investing in communities for specific projects that those communities would like to see built and gaining interest on those bond investments could be attractive if Albertans have confidence in the investments.

The Speaker: There's still time under the Q and A, 29(2)(a) here. No, no, no. That's not correct. The hon. Member for St. Albert started participating at 3:46. There's still time. He gave his debate on the amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity raised questions under Q and A. Any additional questions under Q and A?

Then we're back now to the debate on the amendment. Are there additional speakers on the amendment?

If there are no further speakers on the amendment, then the question will be called.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Speaker: We're now going to return to the debate with respect to this particular motion. The next person up to be recognized is the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak today with respect to the Alberta capital bond issue and a retail bond program for Albertans. This would give Albertans an opportunity to invest in their own province. It would give them an opportunity to be involved in the building of the infrastructure that they all need in their own communities. It's even more critical at times like these that we build this infrastructure.

Projects do a number of things for us in Alberta and for Albertans. The projects we are working on now are keeping thousands of Albertans working. It also shows the commitment of this government to a strengthening economy and to a recovery that will be very well placed. The building and the upgrading that's needed in facilities, as I mentioned, gets many people working. It injects the capital into our economy. That being said, we must ensure that that investment is strategic and that it provides very good value for Alberta taxpayers.

3:50

Investments in services, transportation networks, and facilities is going to meet the needs of a growing population and improve the quality of life for Albertans and continue to support the economy for years to come. We have to remember that many of the investments that we make in infrastructure serve us not just today but serve us for generations in this province, and we need this infrastructure to support Alberta's economic rebound. This is a global correction, Mr. Speaker, and this is a global correction that's going to bring Alberta out stronger than before we entered into the economic correction that's taking place.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

I'll just speak for a moment about: why build? Well, it's one way to invest in our future. As I mentioned before, it generates employment in our province. It's estimated that every \$1 million that's invested in infrastructure projects supports 1,160 jobs. When we break that down and we take a look at what that means to Alberta now for the investment that we're making, this year's investment brings close to 80,000 jobs to the province of Alberta. These include jobs of construction workers, but it's also the spin-off employment in the supply sector and the retail sector. Of course, very importantly, it provides work for the skilled tradespeople that we want so badly to keep in our province and attract to our province.

Alberta capital bonds would be available only in Alberta and only for Albertans, including corporations and Alberta-based trusts. Our finance minister talked a little bit yesterday and has been quoted, and I just want to show my support for some of the comments that have been made. The bonds, of course, would offer a competitive rate of return, and they would be backed, of course, by the province. In saying that they'd be backed by the province, it's recognized worldwide that Alberta is one of the safest investment environments available in today's economic climate. By investing in infrastructure, Albertans would be investing in our future as a province. They would be able to invest and the bonds must be set and the investment must be set at a level that all Albertans have an opportunity to invest and benefit from these bonds.

The 2009-12 capital plan contains significant infrastructure investments. It's an integral part of our economic recovery plan. Over the past three years nearly \$20 billion has been invested in capital projects, and this includes roads, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure. We can look at the list of projects completed last year alone, and it's, of course, huge: things like fire halls, adding waterlines, paving highways, building interchanges – the list goes on and on and on – renovations and expansions of health care facilities, openings of schools and adding postsecondary classroom spaces, creating additional affordable housing. All of these projects employed Albertans, and all of them positively impacted our economy.

Work is under way now to establish the 2010-13 capital plan. We continue to invest in infrastructure. The key component of the plan is to deal with current economic conditions, and we're taking advantage of the improved pricing in the construction sector, as has been mentioned. Construction is less expensive, and as stated today in this House, the latest project came in at 40 per cent less than engineering estimates. So we're getting more value for taxpayers' dollars on the projects that we're doing now.

As we look forward at major government facility projects, of course, there are some very large ones out there that we're working on at the moment: the construction of the new remand centre here in Edmonton, 8,000 new child care spaces by 2011 on top of the 6,000 spaces already provided. Health-related capital projects are being reviewed and aligned with the strategic plan to improve the service available to Albertans. I would mention also as we stand in this beautiful building the redevelopment on the Leg. Grounds of new spaces in a more environmentally friendly and energy efficient environment that we're working on. We want to work towards improvements. The results are going to be better systems for our people, better facilities for our people, and an improved quality of life.

Budget 2009 announced that Alberta would borrow \$3.3 billion over the next three years to finance capital investments in infrastructure. The Fiscal

Responsibility Act, of course, prohibits borrowing to finance operating shortfalls, deficits in other words, in those areas. However, the act does allow us to borrow to finance capital investment for infrastructure.

The normal way a province borrows is by issuing bonds rather than borrowing from a bank. Bonds can be sold in capital markets, to large institutions, pension plans, and so on, but they can also be sold to individual retail investors. The savings bonds that we're talking about are just that. Both methods are going to be required for the \$3.3 billion. A bond is simply a legal instrument, a promise to pay, that I think will work very well for what we're intending. It can be sold at financial institutions such as banks and credit unions and through investment dealers.

To this point, Mr. Speaker, the province has borrowed \$1.1 billion through public markets. Of course, that was grabbed up immediately because of the safety of an investment in this province. We're considering borrowing the remainder over the coming months. Alberta needs to be able to borrow money at the best possible terms, and we are able to do that because of our excellent credit rating.

Previously issued bonds had a maximum purchase of \$100,000. ATB's recent issue of the government growth notes had a maximum of \$25,000. Having a maximum purchase limit keeps the focus on individual Albertans as investors. I mentioned earlier that it needs to be affordable for all Albertans to take advantage of it and be able to realize the investment opportunities that are there for them.

Long-term planning is key for our province to keep moving forward. We know the economy is recovering and will recover

more, and people are going to continue to move to this province. Right now, even with the correction that's taking place globally, we are increasing our population by the size of a Red Deer every year. The reason that they're coming to Alberta is that this is still where the opportunities are far superior to other areas. We have to make sure we're ready for these people, and we have to have the things in place that they need, from schools to hospitals to roads to public transit. If you just looked at the Red Deer phone book and looked at the infrastructure involved in that phone book, it would give you an idea of what we have to do as Albertans. Before we do anything else, we have to provide that infrastructure for these new Albertans. We need this infrastructure. People will continue to come. We need to be cost-effective and innovative. We're not talking about creating new projects. We have a great list of priorities in the province, and we have a great plan for where the most important needs are. Those are what need to be met first.

We've set the standard in so many areas with P3s, core schools, modular designs, standard designs. We're applying those innovative ideas to health facilities now. We're doing these things in the best interests of Albertans. We're doing it to protect their investment with the tax dollars that they give us to work with.

We expect to be back in a surplus situation, but while we move to that, we need to focus on helping seniors, low-income Albertans. We need to support the services to Albertans that they need the most. I'm talking about health care, education, and seniors' benefits. I think Alberta capital bonds would enable Albertans to invest directly in the province's future, and I know they have faith in that future. They can invest in public infrastructure. They will receive value as a taxpayer. They will also support the promotion of jobs in the province, and they will help us prepare for a return to economic growth. Albertans will know which hospitals, schools, and other public projects they're helping to build. We will let them know that. Individual Albertans can participate, and they can participate in building Alberta's future. Mr. Speaker, I think it's a win for us all.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm pleased to hear that the government has learned somewhat from the mistakes of the 1990s. We got out of that bust period on the backs of public-sector employees. We got out of that particular bust on the backs of seniors. There was a building freeze, basically, during that time period. So the idea of building our way out of the bust does have a most definite appeal.

4:00

As the Minister of Infrastructure stated, the notion that we can get 40 per cent more for our dollar than we could during that highly inflationary time period, driven to a large degree by the government's approval of so many projects going on at the same time that we didn't have the workers or the capital for those projects – the recession has taught us a degree of restraint, and it has also given us some hope for how we get out of our current recessionary period.

I am very pleased that the Minister of Infrastructure agrees with me about the specificity of the projects that we need. Yes, we need schools. Yes, we need hospitals. Yes, we need roads. We have needed those facilities for the last 15 years, and this does give us an opportunity.

I also appreciate the fact that the minister spoke specifically about the specificity of projects. We could issue a series of bonds, for example, that would be, I'm sure, snapped up in a particular community if they knew that those bonds were going to build a

school in their area. This has been the case in northwest Calgary, where parents previously proposed paying half the value of building a school with sort of a bond circulated circumstance, with the government covering the other half. It makes considerably more sense than sending parents out to casinos to pay for educational basics.

It makes absolute sense, and I'm sure a number of seniors as well as juniors, for that matter, would invest in long-term care for themselves and in the cases of their family members. If they could put this money into specific long-term care projects through a bond issue, then it would make terrific sense. So I'm pleased to hear from the hon. Minister of Infrastructure that we are building our way out of this area as opposed to breaking the backs of individuals.

To the minister the question would be . . . [interjections] Just for those who don't know the rules, this is a comment as well as a question opportunity.

Point of Order

Question-and-comment Period

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, the Government House Leader has raised a point of order.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 13 I'd just like an interpretation from the Speaker. This is five minutes set aside for comments and questions, and under the general provisions that have been in play with respect to comments and questions generally, there is a short comment or question allowing for a short response, not for one person to use five minutes. There may be others who wanted to raise questions or comments who are not afforded the opportunity if one member uses it all up with his very, very long comment. I'd just like an interpretation from the Speaker. Usually the comment or question is kept short. There's nothing stopping him from having a second one if no one else wants to have a question, I guess, but for him to presume that he has the whole five minutes to re-enter into the debate is not in accordance with the practice of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I think that the Government House Leader is absolutely right that by tradition the question-and-answer period allows for questions and answers to clarify certain specifics of a particular speech that's been made, but I don't see anything in here that states specifically that a person can't take five minutes to ask the question.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. If you wish to cut down on my conversations, the way would be for more members of the government to participate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: My question to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure is: do you think it would be valid to have bonds for specific projects that local communities could purchase to achieve the infrastructure in their area that they've been waiting to see rise?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe there are some possible merits to what the hon. member is suggesting. My biggest concern, though, is that the priority list that we have in the province with respect to infrastructure projects that need to take place does not include any calculation with respect to the wealth of the people in that particular community. They deal directly with the need in

that particular community. So for a community that may not have the financial ability to raise funds for bonds, it wouldn't necessarily mean that the people in that community didn't badly need a seniors' residence or badly need an elementary school or badly need a high school. I would suggest it wouldn't serve us well to go away from our priority list because it's based on the needs of the people of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in debate on Government Motion 16 and to move another amendment to the motion. I have the amendment here. I will deliver it to the table, and then as soon as there is an opportunity to distribute the amendment, I will speak to it.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. We will pause for a moment until the pages deliver the amendment.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment is being distributed now. If I can just grab a copy of it myself – I gave all the copies to the table – I'll read the amendment into the record. I move that Motion 16 be amended by striking out "the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities" and substituting "the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government for a maximum term of 10 years in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities."

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this amendment is in some ways similar to the intent of the amendment proposed by my colleague for Calgary-Varsity, which was voted down in this House a few minutes ago. The intent of the amendment is to put some parameters on this motion that we are discussing in the House today. The motion as brought forward by the government read simply: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities."

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the way I read that, there are two clear interpretations that you could take from that. One is that all we're being asked to do here is sort of in principle say: "Well, yeah. You know, it's a good idea, kind of like motherhood and sunshine and puppies and rainbows and lollipops and hotdogs at baseball games. It's a good idea. Yeah, I think I like it." The other interpretation is that we're being asked to pretty much hand over a blank cheque to the government to determine the parameters of this thing as they see fit, and I have a problem with that based on the spending records of this government over the last few years that I've been in this House.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I took a look at the closing numbers on the TSX today just before I got the chance to rise and speak here, and I notice that the TSX is down 248 points today, down more than 800 points from its 52-week high, which I believe was reached just last week or perhaps the week before. It's been on a downward slide for a few days now. Certainly, when you look at numbers like that, you go, "Well, gosh, Alberta capital bond: set period to maturity, set interest rate, backed by the government of Alberta," which despite its profligate spending ways is, you know, judged by most financial institutions and analysts to be in somewhat better shape financially than the taco stand down the street, that sort of thing. It might be a good investment. You know, I might like to go out and buy a whole bunch of these things. But, by the same token, I want to know that five or 10 years hence, on the off chance that these guys are still in power, the government of Alberta is actually going to be able to pay

me back when it's time for me to cash in my Alberta bonds. That's why we're trying to put some restrictions on just what they can do with this motion.

4:10

Now, I recognize the comments of the Member for Peace River, I believe it is, a little earlier to the effect that motions like these are in a sense more principle motions, I guess we could call them, and that the details are to follow, but what we're discussing right now is the landscape of the thing. You know, there's a very different shape to a landscape that's a prairie landscape and a landscape that's a mountainous landscape or a landscape that ends in a fairly big and deep body of water, that kind of thing, so I think it behooves us in this House to put some shape and form on the landscape that we're debating.

I'm proposing that we amend the motion so that it would read, "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government for a maximum term of 10 years in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities" as a way of doing that. Now, let me explain. When I talk about a maximum term of 10 years in this amendment, I'm not suggesting that we're saying: this is how long the term of each bond issue should be. What we're suggesting here is that this motion give the government a window of 10 years to issue bonds, at the end of which time the government has to come back to the Legislature with another motion saying: we want to continue doing this.

I would remind the Speaker and all members present – and I guess this goes to the notion that if you can live long enough, everything old becomes new again – that we have been down this road before, in fact by the very same name. In 1987 Alberta first introduced Alberta capital bonds. Now, let me see: 1987. That was 22 years ago. That was a generation ago, and the Premier at the time, Don Getty, was leading a government that was racking up – what? – a deficit. That's what it was, a deficit. It was racking up a deficit because energy prices weren't what they used to be. There were a number of other circumstances that came into play that were not identical to what we're facing today. That's certainly the case. We certainly have not had to cope with 20 per cent interest rates or anything like that in this go-round, like we did the last time, but every economic setback, every economic downturn brings with it its own set of circumstances that are unique to that downturn and its own fresh set of hell, if you will, for people who are caught in it, and this one has the potential to do that, too.

In 1987, when we brought Alberta capital bonds in, the government of Alberta was starting on a course, that turned out to be pretty costly in a number of ways, of running successive deficits and putting the people of this province into a collective debt. We all know what the end result of that was. It was brutal cuts and deep cuts in 1993 and '94 and '95, in through there, that balanced the budget – true enough – but as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out, it balanced the budget on the backs of a lot of people who in some cases are still trying to recover from that exercise today and balanced the budget on the backs of infrastructure, which is what this is supposed to be all about.

We walked away from, we abandoned the savings bond program, the capital bonds, or, as they were renamed in 1997, the saving certificates program, because the province felt at that time that there were more effective ways to raise capital. I think we should remember that in going forward on this because the issuance of capital bonds right now, today, seems to be an effective way of raising capital, but we have been down this road before, and we came to a conclusion, whether rightly or wrongly – it's not for me to say right now – that there were, in fact, more effective ways to raise capital than this.

What that says to me, Mr. Speaker, is that we should not rush headlong into the issuance of capital bonds as an exercise in patriotism and, you know, near sovereignty almost, where everybody is going to rally around the flag and feel so proud to be Albertan, and we're going to get some infrastructure out of the deal as well. I'm not saying that we shouldn't go down that road at all. Far from it. All kinds of provinces and other political jurisdictions do this sort of thing. It has a place. It has a purpose. I think its place and purpose are timely right now. Yes, in general, to use the words in the motion, this is the right way to go but with limits, with parameters, with a leash on those who would spend taxpayers' money, with a leash on those who would avoid spending taxpayers' money today by selling these bonds to raise money that has to be paid back with taxpayers' dollars five years, 10 years, whatever we set the term at, down the road.

The safety and security of provincial bonds notwithstanding, it is very hard to predict where the economy of any particular country or province is going to be 10 years down the road, 15, 20 years down the road. You can say in very broad, general terms that, well, we will have grown, that the trend line will probably continue to go in an upward direction from the left-hand side to the right-hand side of the graph. But what you can't predict is where the peaks and valleys in that upward trend line are going to be over the course of that period, and it's even tougher to make that kind of prediction in a resource-based province like the province of Alberta, where we can live or die, we can sink or swim based on the price of an mcf of natural gas today.

It behooves us – and this amendment is one suggested way of doing it – to put some limits on ourselves today as we debate this government motion, to say that, yes, we approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government but not at any price, not in any amount, not for any, you know, indefinite length of time but for a set length of time, for a set amount of money – well, that one was proposed and already rejected – for whatever parameters we want to put on this. That's the intention of this amendment, saying that we want to change it to read that we're approving in general the issue of capital bonds by the government for a maximum term of 10 years in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

In this amendment we haven't placed a dollar limit on it. We tried that earlier, and the House, in its wisdom, decided that, no, we don't want to go that route for whatever reason: we don't have the expertise, or we don't have the evidence to suggest what the dollar amount should be perhaps. We're putting a limit on it that says that we'll urge the government to issue Alberta capital bonds as a prudent way of raising money by going into debt for the next 10 years, but we don't want to go any further than 10 years before we are compelled to revisit this concept and see whether we're still on track with it.

I think that describes the amendment and the reasoning behind the amendment pretty well, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take my seat now and see if there are any questions under 29(2)(a) or if anyone else wants to speak to the amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is amendment A2.

Just before we ask for Q and A, I just want to caution, as I mentioned prior, that the five-minute Q and A is to ask for comments, to ask for questions of the individuals, and out of respect and fairness to all the rest of the members in this House it's been the practice to keep your questions short. It's not five minutes of another part of the debate. Keep your questions short and keep your comments short as well so that more people can participate.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

4:20

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I need to ask the hon. member for a little clarification of his remarks. And I apologize; I'll paraphrase. I don't have the *Hansard* transcripts here. He said something to the effect that despite its profligate spending ways the government of Alberta finds itself in a financial position slightly better than the taco stand down the street. I think I'm pretty close to where he arrived at. I wonder if I could ask the hon. member what he meant by that. Did he mean, in fact, that taco stands, a euphemism for small business I think was the way he was using it, are generally in bad shape or shoddily managed or anything like that? I hope he didn't mean that. Did he mean that the province itself is in bad shape? I would challenge him to compare us to any jurisdiction in the world and talk about whether we're in bad shape or good shape. I challenge him to find a jurisdiction in North America that's in anywhere close to as good a shape as the province of Alberta.

If he didn't mean that, Mr. Speaker, then did he mean to convey that somehow the members maybe on this side or in this whole House somehow take this whole issue very lightly and flippantly? I want to assure that hon. member that I for one and, I'm pretty sure, the members on this side of the House take this issue deadly seriously. We're talking about jobs, people's incomes, people's family situations here, and we're talking about the path of a government here, whether we should assume debt and a whole bunch of very weighty issues. Maybe the member could read that I took that flippancy a little bit personally or insultingly. I wonder if he would comment if, in fact, that's the way he meant it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I will comment if he left me any time to do so. Yes, the member was paraphrasing, but I think that if he goes back and reads the Blues when they're available or goes back and reads *Hansard* tomorrow, he will see that I meant what I said, and I said what I meant. I think I was pretty clear in saying that despite the profligate spending that goes on by members of the government opposite – you know, God, look at the budgets for the last few years, for heaven's sake, and the year-over-year increase in the amount of spending that has gone on on this government's watch – most financial analysts, most institutions, perhaps all of them, certainly most of them, would rate the financial position of this province as good, and I said that. If the Member for Peace River didn't hear that, well, it's not my responsibility.

The Acting Speaker: Q and A is still available.

Mr. Oberle: I want to thank the member for that clarification, Mr. Speaker, and I would point out, as he just mentioned, that, well, at least on the days that they were criticizing our spending – I can never remember which day they were doing that. Half of the time last year they were criticizing our overspending, and the other half of the time they were criticizing our underspending, so a very inconsistent message from that side. But I do want to thank the member for his clarification there. He's essentially clarified that, yes, he is treating this whole issue flippantly, and I'm glad that Albertans heard him say it.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps we could eat up the rest of the time debating which one of us thinks the other is the more flippant in this House. You know, where this member is coming from is rather baffling to me, quite frankly. I don't think I've said anything that would indicate that I am treating this issue flippantly. In fact, the whole purpose of this amendment is to bring some guidelines, some limits, and some sober second thought to this notion that we're just going to go off and

holus-bolus sell bonds until we got no more bonds to sell. I don't know. Of course jobs are involved; of course the economy is involved; of course we have an infrastructure deficit. Gee, I wonder how we got to that point. Was it maybe something that this government didn't do for 15 years? Maybe, perhaps.

This notion of whether today is a spending day or a savings day always tickles me, Mr. Speaker, because I always find it difficult to understand why members of the government opposite seem to have such a hard time wrapping their heads around the notion that, in fact, like any family of Albertans anywhere in this province, you spend and you save and you invest all at the same time. You do all those three things. It's called prudent budgeting. If you don't do those three things, you're going to have creditors coming after you demanding that you pay back your debts, or you're going to end up dirt poor in your retirement.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking on the amendment, I think we should defeat this amendment for exactly what the hon. member who brought it forward said. He said, and he clarified it: I'm not talking about the term of the bonds; I'm talking about how long the government can have to set out the bonds. I think that with just the very nature of the confusion, although it matches some of his other speeches in terms of confusion, this is why we deal with the specifics of these sorts of things in legislative bills as opposed to motions. This is the intent that we're working on, not trying to make it, you know, as detailed as possible and putting a bunch of parameters around it. So I would encourage, actually, all hon. members to defeat this motion based on the argument that the hon. member presented himself.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm just wondering if the Minister of Advanced Education feels that the 10-year period under which bonds could be issued, each set of bonds over a series of 10 years, is an encumbrance on the government. Does that somehow limit the government's ability to fund raise through bonds? Is the hon. Minister of Advanced Education concerned about the need for structure, a plan, a definition, an end date, an evaluation period?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that *Hansard* will provide some clarity to whatever that question was, but I think that the whole issue around financial planning, the whole issue, as a corporation or an entity, around when you borrow and what you borrow for and how long you're going to amortize it, all of those questions, as the hon. minister of finance suggested in her speech – and I would encourage hon. members to refer to *Hansard* about what her intent was upon bringing the motion forward – was to look for advice, to look for some of the parameters, not to change the motion but to look for the parameters around which we might be able to put this forward for all Albertans. I do hope that I will have an opportunity at some point in time to provide my comments on this, but let's speak to relevance in this House and the rules of this House. We're talking to an amendment. Again, I would ask all hon. members to defeat this amendment on the basis of the amender's own argument.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Mr. Chase: I'll try to make my question simpler. Do you not

believe that in the process of providing advice for the finance minister, there is a role for amendments, a role for amendments that have specific timelines or specific structures to them?

Mr. Horner: Again, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the rules of this House and how we debate issues and a motion. A motion is something that is going to give advice to the hon. minister. I believe, hon. member, that in the context of your speech as well as some of your colleagues' from that side, several times you've talked about putting conditions around and putting certain parameters around the bond issue. In fact, I agree with that. But at this point in time we have no idea what the legislation looks like that we would present bonds to. Why would you start throwing amendments up before we even have any idea what we're going to do?

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the intent of this motion is to put on the floor of the House the concept of the Alberta government looking to offer a vehicle for Albertans to invest in the future of Alberta through capital issuances based on whatever the parameters are that are built into the bond issue itself. I know that my colleague the President of the Treasury Board also talked about the interest rate. Am I to assume that the hon. members are going to now provide us with an amendment that the interest rate must be at some level in terms of the motion? That would be as silly, in my view, as this amendment, before we even get to debate over legislation that we don't have on the floor of the House.

Mr. Speaker, again, the motion is to provide advice to the government through the debate within this House. It's to provide advice to the government in terms of the preparation of some potential legislation that we might do. It is not about cornering the whole issue into a little box before we even get a chance to debate the legislation on the floor of the House. I think that would be unfair to members that may want to become involved in the debate down the road. I think it would also be unfair to do that before we've had an opportunity to hear from Albertans, who are no doubt listening to this debate today and want to have some contact with their personal representatives in this Legislature from their constituencies. I think it's important, Mr. Speaker, that we hear from them about what they feel about this motion so that we can craft appropriate legislation to bring forward something that is of value to this House and can be debated on the floor of this House in a more appropriate manner.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the hon. minister of advanced education if he didn't just do the same thing that he accuses me of doing with the amendment in terms of making an argument that defeats his own point. If the intent of a motion, sir, is to provide advice to the government, then it would seem to me that included in that intent is the option, the possibility, of this House putting some limits on that.

The Acting Speaker: We are still on the amendment. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to follow up on the comments of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

The Acting Speaker: We're talking to the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Yes. I'm speaking to the amendment.

When I first got this amendment and read it, it was my interpretation that the amendment meant a maximum term of 10 years to maturity. The hon. member in his speech in introducing the amendment has indicated very clearly that he's giving the government 10 years to continue to issue bonds. Mr. Speaker, I would certainly agree with the hon. minister of advanced education that we should defeat this, but I would go one step further, and I would ask that in view of the fact that this is an ambiguous amendment, you rule it out of order.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Chase: Well, actually, I'm very keen, Mr. Speaker, to hear your ruling as to how this could possibly be out of order when it is very specific. There is a time period in the framework of the motion, and it does not tie the hands of the government, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out. They have 10 years to basically pull this province out of its recessionary period by the wise use of capital bond granting. I will sit and look forward to your ruling.

The Acting Speaker: To the point by the Member for St. Albert, the amendment is not out of order.

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, I anticipated that possibly the rules didn't allow it to be ruled out of order, but in view of that fact I think the hon. minister of advanced education is quite correct: it is ambiguous, and it should be defeated.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Apparently, it's ambiguous. What within the time period of 10 years, the ability to issue bonds within each of those 10 years, is ambiguous?

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, as I thought I clearly stated, it can either mean a maximum term of 10 years to maturity of a single bond, of a single issue, or it can mean that the governments for the next 10 years can issue bonds. It's that simple. It's ambiguous.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie introduced his amendment, he clarified any concerns about the 10-year period. He very carefully spelled out – and it's available in *Hansard* – that the 10 years is not a maturity factor. In each of those 10 years bonds could be brought forward by this government.

The Acting Speaker: We're still speaking to 29(2)(a).

Mr. Allred: Mr. Speaker, I think that's exactly the point. We know what the intent of the mover of the amendment is, but if you read the amendment, it has two different meanings. It can mean the maximum term to maturity, or it can mean that we can issue bonds for 10 years. It's unclear.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else wish to speak on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is starting to remind me of Abbott and Costello: Who's on First, Who's on Second, Who's on Third? Nevertheless, let's just put it to this. We're

making these amendments to try to put some clarity to a motion. Let's not get so worked up about the form. Let's take it for what it's worth and move on from there. At least, that's what I suggest. So when you take one of our amendments, take it as advice for when you're formulating your bill. Let's not get all worked up.

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone else?

Mr. Allred: Well, Speaker, I agree entirely with the last speaker. We need clarity, and it's not clear.

The Acting Speaker: We're speaking to the amendment. Anyone else wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. That's the beauty of this legislative experience: we provide suggestions; we provide clarity. As members of the opposition we have extremely limited ability to put forward suggestions. It wouldn't be surprising if people were discouraged by the amount of ridicule or criticism or concerns that members of the government have on the very few occasions afforded us to discuss the governance of this province, which we were elected by our constituents to participate in.

Now, speaking very specifically to the amendment, with regard to the 10 years it's been clarified. It's each year in any of the 10 years. So that part of the discussion is hopefully over. What the 10-year period provides, and the reason for suggesting it, is a framework. It's a structure; it's a plan; it's a definition. It's a very specific time period. I view it as a stopgap measure. If by the issuance of bonds along with whatever other global circumstances occur – our gas market goes up – this government has not been able to pull us out of our current recession, then we won't need to worry about Albertans having any confidence in buying bonds from this government because this government will no longer exist. It will have been voted out of its current position.

What Albertans are looking for and what the Premier promised to deliver during his leadership speeches was accountability and transparency. This province and Albertans expect a check-and-balance way of operating. Unfortunately, the government has cut too many cheques, and as a result we've got a negative balance. But that's not the type of check and balance that we're looking for within this province.

I attempted to approach it by limiting the number of bonds issued. That was defeated. So what we're proposing instead is to give the government more flexibility, to give them some type of fiscal management credibility, which is hard for us based on what we've seen over the last 25 years. We're saying: "Okay. Here's a defined period. Here's 10 years. Let's get it right within that 10-year period."

As to the notion that this is just a motion of direction towards where the government could potentially head to resolve a position through a particular tool in the tool box, issuing bonds, when it comes to actual legislation, our hope is that some of the discussion that's being held today and was held yesterday and will probably continue to be held tomorrow – what are three afternoons in terms of getting the legislation right?

It's not a problem if you reject an amendment on sound fiscal reasoning and if in the rejection you offer something in its place or amend it to the degree where it becomes more effective. Albertans don't just expect the opposition to be critical. They turn off when they hear: no, no, no. They're looking for alternatives, and that's

what we're attempting to do in terms of the amendments that we're introducing today. To suggest that there is a proper time and a proper place for innovative discussions for shaping legislation just limits the amount of discussion that we can possibly have. While we have a democratic opportunity to put forward alternatives and discuss them and value them, then we need to take advantage of that particular time and particular situation.

4:40

I would like to almost put the government in the reverse position that they currently find themselves. Instead of saying, "Well, this amendment doesn't cut it," work with the amendment or offer an alternative to the amendment that we could all get behind. The idea of collaborating, of attempting to head in the same direction, as our all-party standing policy committees are intended, is probably the Premier's greatest achievement. Yes, the opposition notions can be voted down because of the idea that majority wins, but at least there is recognition, by putting opposition members on these committees, that maybe these elected individuals have something to contribute.

So I would urge when you're speaking against a motion, would you please come up with a substitution, an alternative. Point out the flaws, by all means, in the amendment, such as we have here, limiting at 10 years, but please provide another suggestion, a solution which will enliven our debate and our discussion and potentially give direction to our finance minister for giving legislation that is going to help us get out of the current recession that we're operating in now, partly globally caused, to a great extent caused by in-house fiscal mismanagement.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to talk about the importance of not only the motion of suggesting 10 years of limitation for capital bonds but for the opportunity to discuss the importance of our getting all our heads around the best piece of legislation, going forward, around the bond issue.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment, 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I'm meaning to comment, maybe question the Speaker, but I do need to refer to the original motion for just a second, which says: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities." Now, the member in his comments suggested that by having this fight about amendments, we were somehow stifling his ability or that caucus's ability to have input on that issue. I would say that quite the opposite is true. The motion is on the floor. I think the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had it right: if you've got something to say about the motion, let's get it out on the floor, have the debate, and move on. It seems like pretty reasonable advice here.

There are some important questions here. Should it be limited in issue? Should the bonds be issued with a 10-year term, which is what the current amendment says, or should they be issued over a 10-year period, which is different but also a legitimate question? Should they be restricted? Should the bonds apply to an already existing capital infrastructure priority list, which does exist, or do we somehow come up with some other process? Those are all things that could be tabled in response to this motion, which would help the minister shape the coming legislation, which is required and which, again, has to hit the floor of this House. At no point is the government ever going to have some unending, unlimited spending authority that doesn't get back to the floor of this House to be debated.

So I'm struggling, and I ask the hon. member: why the insistence on amendments? Why don't we all get to talk about what we would like to see happen in our constituencies or our province with our seniors? Should this bond issue be limited to Albertans, for example? Those kinds of things. We all want to talk about what good we see or not in this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: On the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate that feedback, and I say that with all sincerity. In that short discussion you brought up about five different concepts that could be considered in the creation of the bonds, but the way the motion is stated at this point, it is absolutely open. Do we have general agreement on the concept of issuing bonds? Well, based on our amendments, you can see that we believe the idea of issuing bonds is a good one under certain qualifications. We cannot write a blank cheque without the discussion, so thank you for contributing to that discussion. Those were very valid ideas.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, you wish to speak?

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much has been said about these amendments. I'm not going to make some suggestions, as the hon. member had indicated before, about things that should be in here, but the fact is that when you read this one and as the Member for Peace River has just indicated, it raises a number of other things that have to be described and worked on. If you read the motion that's before the House, it's a concept we're asking to move forward with. Certainly, with the discussion this afternoon you've put on the table some of the things that you would like to see, the fences around the motion, and I think that that's what this whole discussion was for, but you should have been able to do it through your speeches to the original motion, not by bringing in a bunch of amendments.

I would urge the House to not go along with these amendments. I would ask the hon. member if he doesn't agree that it would be a wise thing for us to do what we on this side always do, to go out and talk to the people and see what they want.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I think you've hit the nail on the head. The importance of seeking input from Albertans is absolutely essential but not the type of input that is e-mailed to a website. I'm talking about face-to-face community gatherings, where individuals have a chance to contribute to the discussion. I'm not talking about select invitations. I'm talking about the type of circumstance we have within our standing policy committees or all-party committees where anyone can provide a submission, where anyone can appear before our standing policy committees. In other words, I'm looking for a wider open opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to participate on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are back to Motion 16. The next person on my list is West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: I closed debate yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry. I didn't have that on here.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good thing I didn't leave thinking I was not going to get on the list today. I just want to make a couple of very brief comments today. I won't take long, and I'm sure others will have a chance to get in on this.

As the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has already pointed out, our caucus will be supporting this motion and the general principle included within it. I just want to review a couple of sort of general points that would explain why that is. The first point that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood made talked about how it is that the government goes about financing the work it does and the initiatives that it engages in throughout the course of governing and talked about sort of the different funding models for that.

I've had an opportunity to read through some of the comments that other members of the House have made, and I found it interesting that it appears as though the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was actually making points that were not dissimilar to what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was saying. Now, perhaps I'll subsequently be told that I completely misinterpreted it, but I'm going to just take it for what it looks like at this point.

4:50

In essence, you know, he was making the point that if you free up money from capital spending and develop other ways to finance that capital development, instead you can take that money and spend it on direct services, or another way of putting that would be on operating costs. Of course, this is the point that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was saying, that it is not necessarily the wisest course of action in the current economic situation that we're in to insist on developing our capital assets on the basis of a pay-as-you-go model. That's a very, very rich approach to developing capital assets. Obviously, I think we've had all the members discuss the different levels on which those are not the circumstances that Albertans are facing at this point.

Instead, I would suggest that subject to the principles of wise financial oversight – you know, the kind of wise financial oversight that would have ensured we didn't have some of the outrageous executive compensation payout bonus things that we've seen over the last few months, the kind of wise financial oversight that would see us properly funding the Auditor General to engage in value-for-money audits, that kind of wise oversight – we ought to be trying to maintain much of our current operating expenditures and much of our current service levels. We know – I mean, the research is out there – that if you're trying to stimulate the economy, the greatest number of jobs per dollar invested are created through investment in primarily health care and education.

If you're trying to stimulate the economy and trying to support a transition away from a natural resource based economy to a knowledge-based economy, you achieve that through those kinds of investments, so this would be the worst time to cut, for instance, a billion dollars out of our health care budget or additional billions of dollars out of advanced education or out of our schools or, you know, shoving 35 kids together in the same classes because we can no longer maintain or even achieve – we've actually not achieved them in many cases – reasonable class sizes. All those kinds of

things are dollar for dollar more effective stimulant investments, so we ought to be trying to do that as much as we can.

The point that was being made before by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is that rather than taking our annual budget and engaging in a pay-as-you-go approach to capital expenditures, there is room to engage in some borrowing. Let's face it: all we're doing, really, is calling it what we've always known it was, which is debt. Whether you now borrow through capital bonds to finance the long overdue investment in many capital projects or whether you pretend you've eliminated the debt while you meanwhile have an infrastructure debt that is accruing right beside you, sort of like an elephant in the room that you choose not to identify or talk about or point out to the cameras, the fact of the matter is that we had the infrastructure debt two years ago. We have the infrastructure debt now. If what we're trying to do is eliminate that infrastructure debt by proper investment, allowing Albertans to participate in that through the capital bonds is a reasonable way to go, and it's something we all understand. There's a shortage of funds. We need to figure out the most moderate and reasoned approach, and this has the potential to be that.

Now, I of course echo many of the concerns that I think I've heard from both sides of the House with respect to: what's the limit, how many bonds are issued, for how long are they issued, and how far into debt are we prepared to go? I think these are all legitimate discussions that we need to have. Frankly, I think the government needs to make a case for the particular amount that it's looking for and put that information before Albertans so that we can all hear back from Albertans in terms of what they are or are not comfortable with in relation to what wise and prudent fiscal advice we receive. That's the first point. I'm just really reviewing the point again that had been made earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

In addition, in reviewing some of the comments made by members opposite, I did note that the minister for seniors and community living talked about the opportunity to use these funds to invest in infrastructure and capital spending for the care of seniors, and I think that she is quite right. I'm not sure that I necessarily accept her characterization that that's what's happening right now.

I do believe that part of the reluctance on the part of the government ultimately to follow through on their election promises with respect to the opening of new long-term care beds and/or the rebuilding or upgrading of current long-term care beds arises in part from their clear understanding that probably half the long-term care facilities in this province are struggling under the weight of this massive infrastructure debt that this government has allowed to accrue over many years and that, in fact, the current long-term care centres are themselves at a breaking point in terms of their physical capacity.

What we would like to see, of course, is that whether it's long-term care or whether it's publicly owned and operated models of graduated care within the same setting, the government definitely consider using some of these bonds to invest in these kinds of services that will ensure that seniors receive the care they need when they need it – and then here's the key part – without paying a cent out of their pockets for it beyond what is currently in place in long-term care settings.

I would be very concerned if we took this money, if it was possible – and I may be told that it's not possible and that I needn't worry about this, but we shall see – to subsidize private developers and others who are getting into the seniors' housing business and who, as part of coming up with their luxurious apartments, are also crafting these fabulous little contracts for additional medical services that people have to buy. That is not a good use of our money, and

subsidizing those kinds of operations is not a good use of our money. I'm not entirely sure whether the phrasing in the current motion, which talks about public infrastructure projects, would negate that kind of investment or not. I just wanted to make that point.

The final point that I did want to make as well comes again, I guess, from how one defines public infrastructure. Of course, part of the capital plan does include what we have in our caucus consistently characterized as a boondoggle in the making, which is, of course, the carbon capture and storage investment. I would certainly not want to ever see Albertans sucked into investing in something that is so clearly poised to become historic, perhaps, in terms of the efficacy of that expenditure and the value for money of that expenditure to Albertans and the fact that probably there is almost no value for money in that expenditure to Albertans. Again, it may well be that the motion referring to public infrastructure projects and facilities would negate any bonds being related to that particular investment, but if they don't, then that's certainly something that we need to discuss more fully in the future.

Those are all my points for now. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to this matter, and I look forward to further debate and further information with respect to the particulars of what these will look like. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

5:00

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. A question I have that I'll frame to you. I was here yesterday and found the conversation here rather a sea change, one of embracing debt, deficit financing, and wrapping your arms around this in a feel-good way. You probably were paying close attention to this Legislature back in 1999. Some of the members of this House who were here – probably there are still seven, eight, or nine of those members who are still here – can be found in *Hansard* with: we will never go into debt again. I was wondering if you'd like to comment on whether this is a government that is just wisping along with no real direction or whether they just say things to suit their course.

Ms Notley: That's an interesting question, and I'm not entirely sure how to answer it. The reality is, first of all, that when the current government had previously wrapped itself in the cape of slashing and burning and cutting and deficit reduction and the so-called debt elimination, I think the key point here to recognize is that there never really was an elimination of the debt. What we're dealing with now is another way of dealing with the debt that's already existent and that always did exist. It comes down to a question of positioning and spin and all that kind of stuff. There's no question that we're in a position where this government is having to engage in more spin than they're used to – well, actually, I don't know if that's really fair because there's a lot of spin – a lot of back-stepping and trying to recharacterize positions that had previously been quite opposite to what they're doing now.

Having said that, though, I am not an advocate of saying that one only buys a house if one has \$350,000 in their pocket right now. That's not how people finance. One makes sure one can pay the utilities every month, one makes sure that one can maintain that house, one makes sure that one has a payment plan to get rid of that mortgage, but I would not suggest that you don't buy the house because you don't have the money in your pocket right then. I, of course, as I've stated before, fully believe that we're in a situation now where we have to look very carefully at ways to stimulate the economy. I am a firm believer that investment in the public sector

is one of the most efficient ways to stimulate that economy. I hope to see that this will be a mechanism to maintain the greatest level of investment in the public sector that we can in the light of the current economic situation.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Based on your comments, hon. member, do you think the government is heading in the direction of going from *Edward Scissorhands* to *Bob the Builder* with these bonds?

Ms Notley: I worry about the child who is watching both *Edward Scissorhands* and *Bob the Builder*, I've got to tell you, but that's certainly one fair way to characterize it, hon. member. Beyond that, I think I'll leave the answer there.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak on Q and A, 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Chase: To sort of lose the comedy and put clarity, do you believe that the money that would be invested in capital infrastructure through the bonds issuing could then be freed up from our \$16 billion buffer to support operations?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, that's generally the point that was being made earlier today by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. He also referred back to discussions that he had with the Minister of the Treasury Board during budget estimates last spring, where he essentially made that argument, that, in essence, we're spending too much from our operating expenditures on new capital projects. That would be our hope, that this would be a mechanism through which we could ensure that we're not making the kinds of cuts that this government made in the '90s, which we are still reeling from.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: On the motion the next speaker is the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise today and offer my support for the government motion to issue Alberta savings bonds. The effects of the current economic recession have been felt around the world, and Alberta certainly has been no exception. These have been trying times for Alberta. However, we have reason to be optimistic. Albertans are known for their hard work, dedication to their families, and pride in their province.

In 2003, with the help of hard-working Albertans, our government paid off the provincial debt. Since 2003 we have amassed \$25 billion in savings, \$8 billion of that in the heritage savings trust fund and \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. Mr. Speaker, our government had the foresight to realize that strong economic growth would be interrupted at some point down the road. With the heritage trust fund, the sustainability fund, and hard-working Albertans, our province has the potential to quickly return to the days of growth and prosperity.

One way in which we can take strides towards recapturing this growth and prosperity is the issuing of Alberta savings bonds. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has worked hard to achieve and maintain a triple-A credit rating. In fact, Alberta has the highest credit rating of any

province in Canada. The rating system defines the safety of investing in bonds. CIBC says of investments in bonds with a triple-A credit rating, "Earnings are considered stable, the structure of the industry in which the entity operates is strong, and the outlook for future profitability is favourable." CIBC also says of triple-A rated bonds, "The entity has established a credible track record of superior performance." In this time of economic uncertainty Albertans and my constituents in Red Deer are looking for a safe place to invest their money. To invest in Alberta savings bonds is to invest in Alberta. With the knowledge that these bonds have strong protection for the repayment of the initial purchase and interest, purchasers can be reassured that this is a sound investment.

The reintroduction of Alberta savings bonds poses many questions, including what the interest rate should be and who is eligible to buy Alberta savings bonds. We also need to ensure that Alberta savings bonds are an attractive investment. To do this, the interest rate tied to Alberta savings bonds should be determined through an analysis of interest rates paid by other triple-A rated bonds coupled with an analysis of alternative investments. I have full confidence that our government will consider these two factors and set a competitive interest rate to attract maximum investment and that this would allow our government to provide a secure investment for Albertans who believe that Alberta will emerge from this recession as a global leader.

Alberta savings bonds can be used to fund numerous capital projects in many different areas that will benefit the citizens of Red Deer as well as all Albertans. Furthermore, I believe that Albertans should know what projects that Alberta savings bonds will be used to fund and think that Alberta savings bonds should be used to provide Albertans with better health infrastructure. Alberta has the second-highest per capita health care spending in Canada. However, by many measures our health care system is performing at about an average level. Mr. Speaker, Alberta capital bonds can be used to enhance our overall health care performance and improve our quality of life through capital investments in health care infrastructure. I believe that the Alberta government's Vision 2020 for health care identifies the five key goals to increasing our quality of health care and making the system sustainable. With the funds generated from Alberta savings bonds, we can invest in infrastructure projects. I believe that this will help us achieve our goal of providing the right service in the right place and at the right time.

5:10

In order to improve performance in health care, we need to ensure that Albertans are receiving the care they need in the most appropriate facilities. For example, Albertans can receive a number of services outside of hospitals and long-term care settings. By increasing the number and availability of community-based services such as community health and urgent care centres, we can reduce wait times in our hospitals and long-term care centres. This will improve both the quality and the efficiency of health care provided in Red Deer and throughout the province.

Moreover, our government is already addressing this issue by providing our seniors with more choice and new ways of receiving health care. Under the new continuing care strategy Red Deer seniors will be able to receive health care supports in their homes and communities rather than having to go to a hospital or a long-term facility. Seniors will have the option to get an appropriate level of treatment, which they might have previously accessed in a hospital visit, but in the comfort and the convenience of their own home. In turn, this frees up more hospital beds and reduces wait times for critical care patients in Red Deer.

Another example of the Alberta government's innovative approach to health care is the Johnstone Crossing community health centre opened in Red Deer in 2008. This is a remarkable facility as clinics, immunization, education, counselling, treatment, and support services are all offered under one roof. What this means is that patients will have more convenient, efficient, cost-effective, and timely access to health care, and surrounding public health centres will experience less pressure.

Mr. Speaker, another great example of this kind of facility is in the Okotoks community health and wellness centre. In 2004 this facility was opened in order to provide urgent care 12 hours per day seven days per week. Patients can go there to receive their immunizations, well-child services, mental health services, and speech-language services. Because of this clinic the number of emergency room visits in surrounding hospitals has declined since 2004. This change has increased efficiency and decreased wait times.

Innovations in Red Deer and Okotoks are great examples of improvements to our health care system. The Alberta savings bonds could be used to help provide more facilities like these. This would undoubtedly improve both the access and quality of service in Alberta in keeping with Vision 2020 by providing the right service in the right place and at the right time.

Mr. Speaker, using Alberta savings bonds to provide community-based infrastructure such as physician clinics and urgent care centres, we will ensure that our health care system will be able to handle the population increases our province will experience over the next 20 years. Not only will our population increase; our population will be aging as well.

I believe that money invested in our province through the purchase of Alberta savings bonds could be used to fund health care infrastructure, specifically community health clinics and urgent care centres. This would improve the services provided to the people of Red Deer and all Albertans, improving the quality of life and preparing our public infrastructure for the population growth our province will experience.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time to speak on this very important issue. I look forward to hearing other members' thoughts on Alberta savings bonds.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. Member for Red Deer-South. Just for clarification, hon. member, I believe in the first part of your speech you were talking about the savings that were accrued in the last number of years, and I think you said the figure of \$8 billion in the heritage trust fund. It's my understanding it's \$14.3 billion. Would you please clarify that?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for that, hon. member. In fact, I did some double-checking on that myself. What I'm referring to is the amount of contribution that we have made since 2003 to the Alberta heritage trust fund. Since 2003 we actually increased the amount by making contributions in the amount of \$8 billion, and obviously in that same period of time was when we accrued the \$17 billion in savings that are now in the sustainability fund. I hope that clears that up.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. A comment, a clarification, and a question. Maybe I'll actually start with the clarification. I support

the Minister of Infrastructure's concerns about only certain wealthy individuals being able to access bonds and therefore enhance their neighbourhoods at the expense of other individuals throughout the province. Obviously, there has to be some kind of a leveller, but we should be attempting to reach the highest common denominator as opposed to the lowest common denominator. We should be able to have bonds that cover both.

Now, specifically to Red Deer, formerly when I was the Infrastructure critic, I had an opportunity to visit the Red Deer municipal airport. They have done some very forward thinking. They've purchased land with the hope that if a rapid rail system does go through, it will include Red Deer, and I know that the economic development from having people being able to fly into Red Deer as well as fly out and connect with the larger world would be of great economic benefit to Red Deer. Do you think of the bond issuing for the Red Deer municipal airport as a priority project? Do you see its importance?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Dallas: Well, thank you for that, hon. member. In fact, I'm delighted to stand and speak briefly about the regional airport in Red Deer. As you may recall, the regional airport in Red Deer is unique from the perspective that the signatories, the operators of the airport, are actually a partnership between the city of Red Deer, Red Deer county, and the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce. You may recall that in my role both as the president of the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and later as the CEO of the Chamber of Commerce I've been a strong supporter of the airport and the infrastructure there. You are correct that they are creative, innovative, and have developed a long-term plan and a vision for the airport, which they're having a good deal of success with.

I guess that when I think about the priorities for how we would utilize the bond issue that we propose, first of all, my reference was to health care as a personal priority, but, secondly, I believe it's very important to plan your work and work your plan. In this case the government has created a long-term plan in terms of capital projects in the province, and it has a three-year plan in terms of specifically what projects would be funded going forward. So even though I'm a homer and love Red Deer, I suppose that, as opposed to suggesting that we would jump the queue and perhaps find investment opportunities specifically in Red Deer outside of that plan, I would have to answer that I believe in the three-year plan, and that's where we need to be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A project that occurred in Red Deer with the best of intentions was public housing specifically built for people with disabilities, and we know that that funding, unfortunately, went astray. Would you put reservations or restrictions on the type of builders or organizations that could take money from the bond issues to create the projects?

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, hon. member. [Mr. Dallas's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and participate in the debate on the government motion. I will be introducing an amendment to Motion 16.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: All right. I will have the pages distribute those. This will be amendment A3.

Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 16 be amended by striking out "in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities" and substituting "in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities by Alberta companies."

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the members from the government side with lots of interest about Motion 16, how it's going to help build us all the infrastructure projects such as hospitals, bridges, roads, stimulate the economy, and create badly needed jobs. We have been there before. We have done it in 1987. We issued Alberta bonds, and then they were changed to Alberta savings certificates. It was lots of money: \$5.7 billion were raised by those bonds and certificates in 10 years. It is a good idea to issue Alberta bonds to build those infrastructure projects, but keep in mind that it's not free money. It will be debt we will be accumulating, but that debt will be a positive debt. At some point in time that debt will have to be paid back.

The last bond issue matured in 2004. When we go back to 1993, the whole idea was to cut down the deficit, cut down the debt. Sure, we paid down a \$22 billion debt, but at the same time we created another bigger infrastructure debt. All those cutbacks on the infrastructure projects, on health care, on education – you name it – created a much bigger debt. We haven't even recovered from those cutbacks of the '90s, and here we go again. Because of the fiscal mismanagement of the government, I think, you know, we are in a hole again, and we are talking about a \$7 billion deficit. That's the deficit we know of.

We have been having some of the higher per capita spending in the country on capital projects. The Premier said in a televised address that there were up to 40 per cent savings on the projects' bids which were coming in now. They were lower now than when the economy was hot, so we were committing \$23 billion over three years to build infrastructure projects. If it's coming out 40 per cent cheaper, I think we can stretch our capital projects a little bit further, Mr. Speaker.

We should also have a look at P3 projects. If this money is going to go to the P3 projects, I don't think that will be a good idea. If you're issuing Alberta bonds, that money should strictly be going towards pay-as-we-go projects. The P3 debt has already ballooned to almost \$4.7 billion, and here we keep on talking about \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. My question is: how much money is there in the sustainability fund? Is it still \$17 billion that we have? Or are we taking into consideration all of the debt that has been racked up?

Mr. Speaker, sure, it is cheaper to borrow now, but we have to look at our overall debt, that we are accumulating faster than we think. I wonder what happened to, you know, that \$17 billion. Again, is it still in the sustainability fund? Or have we got \$9 billion left? I hear in the news that there's only \$9 billion left. Somebody says only \$7 billion left. We have to take a good look at all the money we have and all the debt we have so we can have some kind of budget for how much we can issue in Alberta bonds.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there's an infrastructure backlog, and this is the best time to build that infrastructure. This is the best time to catch up on our infrastructure backlog. There were some monies unexpended, for instance, in the Department of Transportation, about half a billion dollars. We should look at all the departments and see if there is some unspent monies sitting in other departments or if the capital projects have been deferred.

Sure, investing more money into infrastructure projects is going to stimulate the economy and create very badly needed jobs. Like the Minister of Infrastructure said, every million dollars we spend creates 1,160 jobs. That's why I'm proposing this amendment, so that we create all the jobs, and Albertans get first crack at those jobs. There are a lot of Albertans running out of their EI benefits, and this will go a long ways to help those Albertans have jobs.

Another thing, I think the hon. member raised a very good point about capping the Alberta bonds, putting a cap on it, like \$250 million. That's why we have the budgets. In the last budget, Budget 2009, the government stated that it would be borrowing \$1.1 billion a year for the next three years to pay for capital expenditures. On September 21, 2009, the government issued \$600 million in provincial bonds to the capital markets. These bonds were issued for a rate of 4 per cent over 10 years and sold out within minutes of being issued. Then an additional \$500 million in bonds was issued on October 7, 2009. That was at a rate of 2.75 per cent over five years. This equals \$1.1 billion. If the government can say in the budget that this is how much they will be borrowing, I think we can have some kind of idea how much in Alberta bonds the government will be issuing yearly. That's the question we are raising. We have to have some kind of plan here because we will have to pay down that debt in later years.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, we're speaking to the amendment. This is part of the amendment, right?

Mr. Kang: That's where I'm coming, sir.

The provincial bonds issued will be for Albertans only. The reason I'm making this amendment is because it will be Albertans' money that will be spent in Alberta on infrastructure projects, so Albertans can benefit from the Alberta capital bonds. If they can do it in the U.S., I think we can do it here, too. It will go a long way to stimulate our economy, create those badly needed jobs, and put Albertans back to work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for comments or questions. The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the hon. member could describe a couple of things for me. The first one would be: what is the definition of an Alberta company? Is it percentage ownership, registration in the province? If they do business in other provinces or have shareholders outside of the province, are they an Alberta company? Are they an outside company?

5:30

The second thing that I'd like to ask him is: is there a cap on the number of Alberta companies that must bid, and if there's no competitive bid, will we be able to go outside for other bids? The other thing that I'd like to know is: given the fact that we have a western economic agreement with the three provinces, are we going to exclude Saskatchewan companies from bidding on capital projects in Alberta that might have Albertans working for them? I guess I'm kind of curious as to how you'd want to do all of that, hon. member. The other thing is: if there's only one bidder and he sets a price so high that it's kind of in the stratosphere, are we going to say, "Yes, that's good"?

The point I'm getting at here, hon. member, is that, again, you're creating an amendment to a motion that complicates the entire

motion and gives no real advice. In fact, your advice is that you would like to have preferred status for Alberta companies in the bidding. That's fine. Put it in *Hansard*. But when you put a motion like this – and I have all of those questions, which, I might add, I believe to be valid – it makes the amendment difficult for us to vote for, Mr. Speaker, and I would encourage all members to vote against it.

Mr. Kang: I think it's pretty clear that when I say "by Alberta companies," the companies should be registered in Alberta and that the majority of shareholders should be in Alberta. That's where we're coming from. You know, I don't think there's only one company in Alberta doing one business. There is more than one company that could be bidding on the projects, and they will be competing for the projects.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Yeah. Just a quick question. By breaking the TILMA agreement, does the hon. member have a concern that what he's suggesting could stop Alberta companies from seeking employment and seeking work outside of the province of Alberta? That would be the result.

Mr. Kang: We're talking about Alberta projects only. They will be Alberta bonds. Those companies will be registered in Alberta, and then they will be able to bid on them. That's what I said. Sure, TILMA may have some effect on that, but I think we should be protecting Albertans' jobs first.

Mr. Hayden: Just for clarification, does the hon. member understand that this completely would go against TILMA, would ruin the relationship with the province next to us, and limit the ability of Alberta workers and companies to bid on business in other spots in western Canada?

Mr. Kang: I understand that, but those companies could be registered here in Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would just like to ask the hon. member a few questions and, particularly, relative to this protectionist idea that he's trying to introduce into this motion. Like my colleagues before, the two ministers that just asked questions, does the hon. member not foresee that we would have some backlash from other companies and other provinces and also North American wide? We're also part of a North American free trade agreement. Does the hon. member not see or wouldn't you expect that we would have some backlash and probably take away some of the advantages that you are trying to create from Alberta companies right across the entire economy of this province? I'd like to hear some of your comments on that, hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Well, lately in China they have done it, and in the U.S. they have done it. If they can do it, I think we can do it, too. It will not really exclude our companies from doing business there.

Ms DeLong: I just wonder whether the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall believes that the people of Alberta should have to pay for

something – say that the only bids from Alberta were 10 times as much as what you could get from outside of Alberta. Do you believe that the people of Alberta should be held to that and that they should have to pay that exorbitant cost just because of a policy that says that we have to buy from Alberta?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) has finished now. We'll move on.

Anyone wish to speak to the amendment? Hon. Member for St. Albert, to the amendment.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very disturbed at the tone of this amendment. We've worked so hard in this country to break down provincial trade barriers with mobility agreements, with TILMA. Now we're working with Saskatchewan, even NAFTA. I think this flies in the face of so many things we've decided in this country and in the province in the last 10, 20 years. It just creates a protectionist state. We've really got to vote this down.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I understand the concerns that have been raised with regard to the wording of the amendment. The intention of the amendment was not to freeze out the western tiger concept of dealing with British Columbia or dealing with Saskatchewan through to Manitoba. We've talked in this House before of the importance of trade. What it was trying to achieve – and I will suggest that the wording could have been considerably stronger – was to look at the Alberta advantage and the idea of Albertans having opportunities to not only invest in bonds but having opportunities, as the hon. Minister of Infrastructure indicated, where we would like to see Albertans potentially getting first crack at the jobs. But, obviously, if people are making ridiculous bids, we would not accept those types of bids. Whether it was a priority project or not, it would have to be put on hold until such a time as a reasonable bid was provided.

One of the things that this amendment is looking at is the notion that so much of our infrastructure has been built on lower wages, on non-unionized organizations, on the backs of temporary foreign workers that have had no voting or protective rights as they enhanced our Alberta projects, whether it be the Chinese labourers and workers who worked in the oil sands but weren't paid for their work or whether they were the temporary foreign workers that were brought in and told that they would have certain accommodations and certain remuneration only to find out that that wasn't the case.

What we're trying to do is not build a wall around Alberta, as our current Prime Minister has suggested, and a letter to that effect was also cosigned by our Minister of Environment. Rather than protectionism, what we're trying for is promotionism in terms of promoting the best opportunities for Alberta companies to participate in the process in a fair, compensated manner, not, as individuals have pointed out, to the exclusion of other companies. I'm not sure to what extent or whether members of this House would suggest that all projects that are government sponsored be wide open and that the lowest bid will determine the project versus the quality of the company in order to build the project.

We've got a number of organizations that have offices in Alberta that do building world-wide. The fact that they're registered as an Alberta company would not prevent them from being considered for other particular projects. We have trade offices in Calgary from a whole series of countries indicating their desire to do business with

us, and if they have an established presence or they have shares in, for example, an oil sands project, that would in theory have them considered not only to be a global company but a company operating in Alberta with established offices and established credentials.

5:40

Mr. Horner: That's not what he said. He said majority only.

Mr. Chase: And I take your point, minister of advanced education, that we need to clarify the wording. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall drew somewhat of a short straw on this particular amendment, but the intent of this amendment is to get the best advantage within the economic global circumstance for Alberta companies. What we have seen, for example, in the Fort McMurray area was division 8, where the first company in got to underbid all the other companies that were following in on a project. A good example of that is an outfit, CLAC, that poses as a union and then underbids everyone else.

What we're saying is that we want Alberta companies, unionized and non-unionized, to be a part of the rebuilding process for which the bond issues are directed. I apologize to members of this House that the wording appeared exclusionary. I understand that the way it's read. I appreciate your pointing that out. What we should have said is: give Alberta companies the opportunity to be considered in the bidding process, not have an advantage but a consideration. I fully understand where you're coming from, and I appreciate that contribution.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions and answers. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarity and for the record I need clarification if the hon. member thinks that there have ever been jobs that the provincial government has put out for infrastructure that have excluded Alberta companies and not encouraged them to bid. Secondly, I wasn't clear on the end of the statements from the hon. member, but in the beginning I did hear that they should be limited to unionized companies and exclude all other Alberta companies and companies outside the boundaries. So just for clarification.

Mr. Chase: I'd be very pleased to clarify. I did not suggest that only unionized companies could bid. That would not be correct. I attempted to clarify that we're a global competitor and we need to be accepting bids from all companies.

With regard to: have Alberta companies ever been shut out of the bidding process? What has happened is that we have had great demand, for example, for electricians up in Fort McMurray, and we've had great demand for pipefitters, but because these individuals were unionized and because we had an apprentice system and an expectation of the journeymen supervising the apprentices and so on, the unionized Alberta employers were considered too expensive within the Alberta process, and therefore they were bypassed. At the height of the boom, particularly in Fort McMurray, there were a number of qualified, unionized individuals who were prevented from participating in the projects because less expensive foreign labour, non-unionized, undercut their ability to work in their own province.

We brought forward a number of plebiscites calling for the government to recognize and consider unemployed Albertans, First Nation Albertans, and farm-working Albertans for employment. These people were at the end of the line with cheap foreign labour, cheap partly because they didn't have any democratic rights to back up their ill treatment.

I hope I've provided that clarification. It's not just Alberta unionized individuals; it's not just Alberta individuals who should be able to bid on the projects. But working Albertans have been shut out in previous circumstances because the government was not willing to pay the standard contractual wage that had been provided for projects in Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. Just do a quick clarification, member, if you would, please, with respect to your comments about CLAC. Are you aware that CLAC is in fact recognized by the Alberta Labour Relations Board and that CLAC itself does not bid jobs? I'd just like you to explain to us, please, what it is you meant when you talked about them.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: CLAC is known for their pretense of a union. CLAC is known for underbidding projects.

Mr. Elniski: They don't bid jobs.

Mr. Chase: They are part of the process for lowering the wages of working Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. May I seek additional clarification from the member with respect to how CLAC has in some way the ability to influence wage rates on construction projects?

Mr. Chase: That's what I was talking about with division 8. If CLAC is the first organization in, then according to Alberta labour laws, the first organization to reach a contract determines what the

contracts of subsequent contributors to a project involve. If CLAC says that they'll do it for this amount, every other project has to pay the amount that CLAC would get, with the limited benefits that CLAC members receive.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Campbell: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like the member to clarify if he understands what the Labour Relations Board is all about and how unions are certified in this province to bargain on sites.

The Acting Speaker: We're speaking to the amendment now. The time for questions and answers is over. We're speaking to the amendment, amendment A3.

If there are no others, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very interesting afternoon. Seeing that we are approaching 6 o'clock, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, October 29, 2009

Issue 52

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, October 29, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we humbly represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a very special group of people who are associated with a very important organization situated in the constituency of Calgary-East, the Council of Sikh Organizations. This group is led by four community leaders: Mr. Virender Bhatti, Mr. Amandeep Khangura, Mr. Avinash Khangura, and Mr. Avtar Rehill. These very special seniors have had an opportunity to tour the Legislature this afternoon, and they had the distinct privilege of being in attendance at the morning poppy presentation. I had the opportunity to meet and participate in a memento photograph with them, which I will be providing to each one of today's visitors. I would like to sincerely thank all of these seniors for making the journey today. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [Remarks in Punjabi] Hello and welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a group of students and their teachers, Ms Susan Jolliffe and Ms Jeri Wylie-Smith, from Bow Valley College in my constituency. I've been over to Bow Valley College numerous times since I've been elected, and I can assure you that both the teachers and the students there are very interested in what we're doing at the Legislature and how democracy is being handled here in Alberta and in Canada. It's been a wonderful experience. If they can please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Legislature, I'd be greatly happy.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Hébert family. The Hébert family are long-time residents of the city of Edmonton, and they're an example of a fine, young, hard-working Alberta family. They are here to observe government in action, and they are a great reminder of the importance of our jobs and why we must continue to work very hard to make sure that Alberta is the best place to live in. Mr. Damon Hébert is accompanied by his wife, Heather Mateer, and their children Brennan and Quinn. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three guests in the gallery today that I would like to introduce. Actually, I'm going to introduce two of them. I think my colleague from Livingstone-Macleod is going to introduce the third one. We've had meetings today with the leadership of the Alberta Medical Association. Joining us today is Chip Doig, the newly elected president of the AMA. Accompanying him is Ron Kustra of the offices of the AMA. I'd ask them to stand and be recognized by this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. It's a great honour and pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Dalsit Kaur Grewal Consion, sister of the present premier of Punjab, Sardar Parkash Singh Badal, who is visiting her daughter in Calgary. Accompanying her are Mr. Darshan Dhaliwal, past president of the Council of Sikh Organizations, and his wife, Mrs. Parmjit Kaur Dhaliwal. They were also blessed with a grandson in October. Mr. Dhaliwal has been a strong supporter of me all the time. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a physician member of the Pincher Creek Good Health Team in the incredible constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. Dr. Tobias Gelber is an integral part of a group of innovational health providers and is seated in the members' gallery. I would now ask Dr. Gelber to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

CFB Edmonton Visit

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of us in this Chamber ran for office with the hopes of making a difference, helping leave this province better than we found it and making an impact for Albertans. Well, we soon realize, however, that on many days in this job it's really Albertans that make a big impact on us. For many of my caucus colleagues last Thursday was just one of those days, a day we will not soon forget.

Thanks to the leadership of the Premier and the invitation of Brigadier General Mike Jorgenson our caucus was privileged to be hosted by dozens of Canada's finest as they gave us a taste of their life on CFB Edmonton. In army fatigues we rode in LAVs and in tanks, fired weapons, inspected equipment, witnessed air force jets fly over, and visited with real-life heroes. On behalf of my colleagues I'd like to publicly thank Brigadier General Jorgenson, Lieutenant Colonel Bradley, majors Aleknevicus, Hildebrandt, Hynes, Mackay, Mackey, Morrison, Master Corporal Corbett, and all the soldiers for hosting us to an inspiring day.

The most moving part of the day came as I watched an emotional Premier and Mrs. Stelmach bid a personal farewell to a small group of soldiers as they deployed for their mission in Afghanistan. The commitment and sacrifice of these heroes and their families is truly humbling. I know this Assembly and all of Alberta will join me in thanking them and praying for their safe return.

But, Mr. Speaker, as you know, some of our soldiers do not enjoy a safe return, a fact that hit home to an Alberta family on Tuesday. Lieutenant Justin Boyes had barely begun his mission in Afghanistan when he made the ultimate sacrifice while leading his men of the

Princess Patricia's. We are deeply saddened to hear of his loss, and on behalf of all of my colleagues in the Assembly I'd like to express our sincere condolences to his family and friends and in particular to his wife, Alanna, and his three-year-old son, James, on this tragic loss of one of our heroes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Energy Efficiency Consumer Rebates

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to reducing our environmental footprints, Albertans are not asking why; they're asking: why not? Albertans told us clearly that they have a role to play and that they want to act. They told us overwhelmingly that consumer incentives need to be part of our climate change action strategy.

With this in mind, Mr. Speaker, six months ago we launched a program to help Albertans realize these possibilities. We did this by creating a \$36 million, three-year investment in energy efficiency consumer rebates. Rebates ranging from \$100 to \$10,000 are available for new home buyers who purchase energy efficient homes, to existing homeowners who improve their energy efficiency, and to taxi operators who are transitioning their fleet to hybrid vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, the rebates continue to be a wise investment in difficult times, ensuring an environmental focus while at the same time stimulating spending and creating jobs for Albertans. When it is fully subscribed, the rebates will help Albertans reduce greenhouse gases by about 1 million tonnes. Now, in context, that's the equivalent of taking more than 200,000 cars off the road per year.

I'm pleased to say that in the first six months of the program nearly 14,000 cheques have been sent to Albertans, for approximately \$2.5 million in rebates. Mr. Speaker, approximately 6,000 Albertans have taken advantage of the home evaluation rebate to learn more about energy efficiency in their own homes. The next most popular rebate, with more than 4,000 issued, is energy efficient clothes washers.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning. I'm encouraged by the tremendous response of Albertans, but we can do more. We need to spread the word. We all have a role to help in the transition of our province to a low-carbon economy in the future. Consumers have the power to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions through their day-to-day energy decisions. The choices we make, big or small, really do have an impact. For information on what purchases are eligible and how to apply for a rebate, Albertans are encouraged to visit climatechangecentral.com. That's climatechangecentral.com.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

1:40

Opiate Drug Doda

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Calgary-McCall there is growing concern over a harmful and addictive substance called doda. Doda is created by grinding up dried poppies into a fine powder, then using that powder, rich in opiates, to make tea. This addictive concoction is growing in popularity in the East Asian and South Asian communities in Calgary, especially among blue-collar workers such as taxi and truck drivers and factory workers. Members of my community and even members of the Calgary Police Service have asked me to remind the

members of this Assembly and, indeed, all Albertans of the seriousness of this issue.

I want to thank the ministers of Justice and Health and the Solicitor General for their written responses to me regarding this issue. Their letters helped clarify why doda currently exists in a legal grey area, as the powder must be tested for opiate levels each time it is seized by police. Sometimes the opiate levels are too low to lay charges, but what about traffickers offering stronger doda? Surely such concentrations are out there on the streets.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I urge citizens and the government to remain vigilant. Any substance derived from the opium poppy presents health risks not only to the users but to the people around them, particularly when we are talking about people operating motor vehicles. And, of course, there are the serious consequences, both personal and cultural, of this addiction.

Drugs destroy lives, communities, and families. I urge my fellow citizens to shun doda and all other illegal substances, if not for themselves then for the sake of their loved ones.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Pincher Creek Primary Care Network

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am pleased to rise again to acknowledge the innovative health care delivery that takes place in my constituency at the Pincher Creek community health centre. This member's statement is quite unlike the doom and gloom member's statement we heard on health yesterday. This PCN is a model that sets a shining example for other facilities across our province. It is innovative and full of energetic and committed health care professionals. The Chinook primary care network has been a leader in delivering excellent primary health care services, with a strong focus on improving access, chronic disease management, and interdisciplinary family practice.

The Pincher Creek PCN was well ahead of the curve and championed change to improve patient care. Pincher Creek has demonstrated significant achievements in improving patient access, a 20 per cent improvement in access despite an increasing number of patients. The leaders of this PCN now teach other primary care network clinics how to improve access. This facility provides acute and continuing care and offers 24-hour emergency services, intensive care, obstetrics, surgery, and palliative care. It even has on-site diagnostic imaging and laboratory services.

We applaud the health professionals who make this PCN a success and are thankful to the constituents in the area who have embraced the change in health care service delivery in order to receive better access to care. The doctors at the PCN can see more patients because the facility is run more efficiently and the right provider is providing the right service to patients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring to the attention of this Assembly the proclamation of the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, which comes into force tomorrow, October 30. This is indeed good news that all members can feel proud of. This act arose from extensive public consultation with over 4,300 Albertans as well as legislative reviews involving both sides of the House. I got a chance to review the details of this act as a member of the Standing Committee on Health. I am very pleased

to see this progressive piece of legislation, that balances individual rights with more protective measures, finally come into force.

One of the important cornerstones of this legislation is the importance of an individual's dignity and autonomy. Not only is the act designed to help people remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. It provides more choices to people who need assistance in making personal decisions. Just as importantly, the act is designed to enhance the protection of vulnerable Albertans through enhanced screening of new co decision-makers, guardians, and trustees, a formal complaint and investigation process, and a more standardized and rigorous capacity assessment model.

I was personally pleased to see the number of public information sessions held across the province to inform Albertans about the changes being introduced by this legislation. I think that once Albertans learn more about the changes, they will appreciate the positive benefits that the act provides. Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports and the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General as well as their staff for their commitment and dedication in developing this progressive and world-class piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Nursing Shortage

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the denials of the Minister of Health and Wellness, the nursing shortage is very real. According to the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta there was a shortage of 1,483 nurses in March, and these positions have not been filled. Alberta Health and Wellness continues to project a shortage of 6,000 nurses by 2016. Yet as of July over 500 nursing graduates were not able to find work in Alberta because of a hiring freeze, forcing them to go somewhere else to find work.

I've talked to nurses who, over the last few days since the H1N1 vaccine arrived, have been overworked and short-staffed. Nurses are being pulled from their regular positions to help administer the vaccine. Not only did the government lack foresight and vision regarding this public health emergency, but they have been systematically eroding the public health care system at the same time. The minister's scheme to cut nursing positions has left Albertans very vulnerable.

Over the long term an acute shortage of nurses will leave all Albertans without the proper care they need and, indeed, deserve. We need to value the critical work and valuable expertise that our nurses provide every day on the front lines of our health care system, not only during public health emergencies but in our hospitals, seniors' homes, and clinics every day. This means that instead of cutting nursing positions, we need to consider a more proactive hiring of nurses as well as effective strategies for retaining those experienced nurses we do have.

At our NDP health care hearings, being held all across Alberta, we are consistently hearing the message that high levels of nursing care reduce mortality rates and contribute significantly to overall better health in our communities. Mr. Speaker, this is what we should all be striving for, and I urge the government to resume its efforts to increase the number of nurses in our health care system.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to present this petition with over 1,200 signatures on it from people across Alberta. The petition reads: "To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in Legislature Assembled: We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to vote against Bill 50."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 105 Albertans, and the petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation to deinsure abortion in Alberta."

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 56

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to beg leave to introduce Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

The bill removes the requirement for the Deputy Minister of Finance and Enterprise to be a member of the board of Alberta Investment Management Corporation, AIMCo.

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Bill 57

Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 57, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act.

This legislation will help to increase the efficiency of Alberta's justice system. Currently under the Criminal Code applications for certain warrants can only be made to provincial court judges or justices of the peace. Applications for other types of warrants must be to the Court of Queen's Bench. This act will allow Court of Queen's Bench justices the jurisdiction of a justice of the peace, allowing them to issue all types of warrants under the Criminal Code.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 57 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 57 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Preparedness

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a former public health officer I am committed to solutions, and I can tell the Premier that the best way to stop public fear around H1N1 is presenting a clear plan and demonstrating the capacity to deliver services without prolonged wait times. This spring I made several suggestions to the Premier prior to H1N1 arriving. To the Premier: how will the Premier demonstrate that there are enough doctors and nurses for this outbreak, as I suggested?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, just the other day I sent a letter to the health critic acknowledging the fact that the hon. leader was signed off on the pandemic plan, if we get there. But I just want to take this opportunity to thank all Albertans for their civic duty. I know they're lining up in lineups, cold weather, et cetera, but they are getting their vaccinations, and this will go a long way in preventing any kind of a pandemic in the future once we get our population vaccinated.

Dr. Swann: Well, for the record, Mr. Speaker, I signed off on the pandemic plan, not the vaccination plan.

Again to the Premier: how will the Premier assure Albertans that there will be enough acute-care bed capacity with the increased H1N1 patients?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, part of the pandemic plan is to put in place with the health care professionals a detailed plan to ensure that we have the capacity to deal with a pandemic if it ever should happen. But, on the other hand, Albertans are doing their civic duty in spite of, you know, long lineups and cold weather and all of the other issues that we're facing. They're doing their civic duty and receiving the flu vaccine, which will greatly reduce the risk of a pandemic in the province of Alberta, quite frankly, a province that is leading in terms of getting its population vaccinated as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Premier is basically this: will the Premier commit to increasing staffing and stop cutting acute-care beds at this time?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I committed on behalf of our government to ensure that we will do whatever we can to prevent a pandemic in this province. If people do get ill, we'll take whatever steps are necessary to make sure that our citizens are protected and that they do receive the medical attention that they require. I know that we're in tough economic times, but this is a serious situation, and we want to prevent further costs down the road by ensuring that people do receive their vaccine. But if we do need the additional beds, they will be there.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. The public needs information and action to reduce fear, information and action this government is not demonstrating. One thing they're giving is the number of hospitalizations in Alberta, and overnight it increased by 15 to 233 hospitalizations. Calgary is taking the largest load at 95 patients. Again to the Premier. The minister of health has been asked questions several times and has not given an answer. Will you tell Albertans how

many of the 6,800 acute-care beds in this province will be available for H1N1 patients today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that detail in terms of what beds will be available for whatever issue at any particular time rests with the medical profession. They will make those choices based on the evidence that's presented. It's not the role of this Assembly to determine that; it's through health care professionals, and I have every trust in them to do that properly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's hospitals are already overstressed and facing the largest number of H1N1 cases in the province. Meanwhile, the Peter Lougheed expansion leaves 140 beds sitting empty. Will the Premier order these closed units in the Peter Lougheed to open to provide the relief needed for this outbreak?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has a plan and can give the details once again to this Assembly and to all Albertans in terms of dealing with a possible pandemic. But, again, I stress the fact: please, I know, longer lineups, et cetera, but get the vaccine. We'll keep providing the vaccine as soon as even more is made available. I mean, we've come a long way in the last six months, from not having the vaccine to getting the research done, providing the vaccine, getting it, obviously, produced and now distributed across the country of Canada. We worked very hard as Premiers with the federal government to make sure that money was available, and now we're doing our duty as Albertans to ensure that we have staff in place and the vaccine in place to make sure that people are vaccinated.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More beds are useless, in fact, if there are no staff to provide the care. I guess my question for this government is whether they've contacted retired nurses and doctors to help staff and work immediately to increase the prevention programs.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, there has been a plan in place for some time, long before this pandemic started to take place. In fact, we've had a policy in place through our department where we have paid for updated training for nurses if they wanted to come back, even part-time, out of retirement. That still exists. Part of the staffing of this particular immunization program is around either moving those who are working part-time into full-time roles, or if there are health care professionals who are retired in the community and want to come back and work, we're open to that. We're quite flexible.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the next 10 years, according to the government's electricity transmission plan, there will be at least \$14 billion worth of transmission lines built across this province. The government is claiming that it's all vital that we build this now. In the United States President Obama just announced \$3.2 billion in spending on the smart grid for the entire

United States. British Columbia's 10-year plan calls for just \$2.5 billion in new line spending. To the Premier: why on earth is this province so far out of line compared to other jurisdictions?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, part of the critical infrastructure that is required is around \$5.8 billion. There are about four lines that are critical.

Getting back to the Americans, I spent a considerable amount of time with the Western Governors' Association and Secretary Chu, Secretary Vilsack, and Secretary Salazar. Their number one issue in the United States is more efficient transmission. They're having the same issue in the United States that we have here. They are going through some unbelievable issues, of course: huge, huge deficits and larger debt.

Secretary Chu was very clear. He said that the only way they can reduce as quickly as possible some of the carbon that they're producing as a result of the inefficiency in transmission lines is to start building new ones. They're beginning to undertake that. That's nice to hear. There's a lot more to come on that particular file in the United States.

Mr. Taylor: Well, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. The Premier isn't an expert on transmission needs, I'll admit that I'm not an expert on transmission needs, but among those who are experts, there's widespread disagreement. But this government doesn't want to address that disagreement; it just wants to make it disappear. So it cuts the public needs hearing out of the regulatory process. No more controls on spending. To the Premier: where is the check and balance on the spending of billions upon billions of dollars on transmission lines? Where is it in the system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Utilities Commission is responsible for making those determinations. We know that we're growing demand in this province the equivalence of the size of the city of Red Deer twice in one year. We'll see another 50,000 people move to this province this year. You know, they're going to bring their families, they're going to be working someplace, they're going to be plugging their cars in during winter, they're going to heat their homes, and it's all increasing the demand.

Another issue we have is moving some of the green power to where the consumer is. We've got some good cogen going on in the province of Alberta. We want to tie that into a very good, new, very efficient grid so that the next generation has the same opportunity as we all have to have electricity at their fingertips.

Mr. Taylor: We'll have more electricity at our fingertips potentially than we could possibly imagine if we go ahead and build this gold-plated transmission system when we need something considerably less over the short term.

The lobbyist registry is finally coming online, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately it's too late for this particular issue. But billions and billions of dollars of Albertans' money is too important to let this remain secret. Will the minister table in this House details of the discussions he and his ministers have had with the companies who are in line to build these multibillion-dollar power lines?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the need for more electricity in this province is very, very clear. We import roughly 1.6 million kilowatt hours every year. That's how much we're short, and most of the time we bring that into the province of Alberta at the highest cost. This is all part of a general plan to make sure that we have very efficiently transferred power in this province and also at a very, very

reasonable rate. I know, given that we see construction costs across Canada coming down, especially here in Alberta, there's an opportunity to start on some of the critical infrastructure that's very, very necessary and will actually help bring in more industry in the province of Alberta so we can grow more jobs and pay for all of these social programs that we dearly enjoy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Nursing Shortage

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, this government's struggle to cut wait times at flu clinics in Edmonton and Calgary is about to be made more difficult by the increasing number of people infected with the flu who are showing up in hospital emergency rooms. The surge has begun, and the sick are beginning to learn just how dearly the health minister's plan to cut nurses is costing the province. Lineups and wait times are rapidly growing at already-crowded waiting rooms. Will the health minister please outline for us his plans to ensure that emergency rooms are properly staffed to handle the surge of H1N1 patients?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes the best plan is to go talk to the people. Last night I spent some time at the University of Alberta emergency room. I met with the staff there. Yes, there is an increase in visitations to the emergency room. At the U of A, as an example, they've taken on their own initiative: what is the children's clinic during the day has now become a triage centre simply for influenza patients from 4 in the afternoon till midnight. All indication I had last night was that, yes, there is an increase, but they are dealing with it, and there was no panic that I saw last night.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, he didn't outline his plans to deal with it, and I hope he'll take the opportunity to do that.

Now, yesterday the minister said: "Where did he ever get the impression that my job was to eliminate nurses? Now, give me a break." But it's clear that there's a serious shortage of nurses in the system, and we're struggling to cope both in terms of flu clinics and in terms of emergency rooms as a result of this pandemic. Will the minister stand up and say to the 500 nursing students who have graduated in nursing and don't have jobs available to them because of his hiring freeze that, in fact, he will offer them jobs to ease the problems that have been created in our health care system?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, if the member actually wants to be serious about what he's asking about, maybe he should sit down and talk to some nursing students, as the Member for Lethbridge-West and I did last week in Lethbridge. What we discussed with the nursing students was that we cannot guarantee jobs for every graduate that comes out of any training in this province. However, we want to ensure that when highly trained nurses come out of university with their degree, we want them to be involved in the front end of the health care system doing what they are trained to do, not necessarily in the back end of the system, because other professionals are trained to do some of the work that nurses are currently doing today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have met with nursing students. Nursing students actually came to the NDP caucus public hearings on health care and made a presentation. They were enticed into this profession by this government, and now they're about to graduate after four years and there are no jobs. There are 1,400 vacant positions that have been frozen, Mr. Minister, and there are 500 nursing graduates. The math isn't that hard. Why don't you hire these students?

Mr. Liepert: Well, in fact, Alberta Health Services on a daily basis is hiring new nurses, Mr. Speaker. They're offering opportunities for nurses who have been working part-time or casual to move to full-time. We have to remember that the economy in this province has changed in the last year. Many nurses, primarily those who are female, were working part-time. There's been the desire by some of them to move to full-time. We're accommodating that within the system. Each time you move an individual from part-time to full-time, obviously that squeezes the system and takes up a position that may have been open for a graduating nurse. We're working within the economies out there today, and I believe that over time there will be adequate opportunities for every graduating nurse in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Long-term Care in Fort McMurray

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members of this Assembly know very well what goes on in their own constituencies. Our senior citizens who have built this province – it's important for MLAs to listen to their bosses at a coffee shop or anywhere in their constituencies. The government uses some of this information in making decisions, which is good. Eighteen months ago a detailed government report recognized the gap in my city of almost 100,000 citizens that did not even have one long-term care centre, by comparison. The government announced to build a long-term care centre, which was welcome news. My question today is to the minister of health. Why did he contradict these findings in the government report when 12 months later he commented: the urgent need is no longer, and the average age of your community is just too young?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I will try and answer the member's question. Because I have been accused in the past of talking gibberish, I'll try and make sure that what I'm providing the member is factual. One of the things that did change in the last year and a half is the fact that we went from regional health authorities, who had their capital plans built around their region. We're now with one region throughout the province, and we have to ensure that we're providing health care equitably throughout the province. When we did the reassessment within the budgetary constraints that we had, it was determined that the Fort McMurray long-term care centre was not the highest priority. Not to say it won't happen, but it won't be in the three-year capital plan.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The average age is too young, and it's not urgent: I guess I beg to differ. As MLAs we don't deal with averages; we deal with real people, real Albertans whose families have helped their loved ones. So my question is to the minister of health. What would you want to say to a senior

citizen, Charlotte Mitchell, who lived in her home for 99 years? She just celebrated her 101st birthday. She's in an acute-care bed in the hospital, and based on your previous comments, she will have to wait until she's about 103 or 104.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only go by the best advice that we receive. The advice that we received is that Fort McMurray has the youngest demographic in the province. The growth rate in seniors is projected to decline, not increase. The acute-care beds in Fort McMurray are underutilized, and many of them are being used for seniors' care. We also have to remember that what we're trying to design in this province is a model where we take the care to the patient and not create a system where we're forcing the patient into the system. There is a lodge in Fort McMurray that has some 42 spaces, and we want to ensure that we're providing the right care there if required.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question centres on this. When a government makes a commitment with funding, should it not honour that commitment first, in this case to our seniors? Three weeks ago in my community we welcomed the announcement of more new money, \$241 million. But the difficulty is that it doesn't reflect the priorities on the infrastructure list. Nowhere on there is there mention of the announcement from 18 months before. So my question to the President of the Treasury Board would be this: can he assure this member in this House that he will put that commitment of 18 months ago to the top of that \$241 million new money that was announced three weeks ago to show that respect for our seniors?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I have to be able to make the same commitment to all members of this House on an equitable basis. We have to understand that priorities change and that the way that growth develops, the way that the pressures on government expand or morph sometimes needs a second look. But I will commit to the hon. member and to every member in this House that the number one priority of this government is to deal with Albertans openly and honestly, to deal with the most vulnerable Albertans firstly, to continue with the priorities that are set out by the Premier of making sure, not losing sight, that while we continue to provide health care and education, we also acknowledge the economic enablers that need to proceed to pay all the bills.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

2:10 Cellphone Use and Vehicle Safety

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year a standing committee of this Legislature referred the issue of cellphone use while driving to the Minister of Transportation. Their committee wanted this province to be leaders. Now, a year later the minister is saying that we have to wait even longer before he finally takes action to address this danger on our roads. To the Minister of Transportation. Action was expected, sir. Why are we waiting so long?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've told this hon. member many times before that there's more than just cellphones that are distractions in this province and with drivers right across the country. Yes, there are other provinces right now bringing legislation – Ontario just put theirs into play at the beginning of the week

– but they’re all doing one-offs. If you look at our last report that I looked at about distracted driving, cellphones were about the middle of the road of distractions. We have a huge number of distractions out there. Our first priority is safety, making sure people keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel. We want them to pay attention while they’re driving. But to answer his question, we haven’t found all of the . . .

The Speaker: You’ll have a chance, I’m sure.
The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we are talking about the same thing, people keeping their eyes on the road. This government talks about needing to see how other provinces handle this, but many, many jurisdictions in North America alone have long ago taken action to address the distractions of cellphone use: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, California. To the minister again: how many more examples does the minister need before he takes any action?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, all of those examples he’s talking about, all of those people are talking. Some of them have enacted. The ones that he’s saying have enacted. Others are going to. But there’s no proof today yet that it’s reduced collisions on the highway. We’re wanting to make sure we get it right. That’s why we’re taking our time, to make sure we get it right.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has already taken a long, long time. How many more accidents will happen? How many more lives will be lost? I think the Minister of Transportation must be overworked or something else. When can Albertans expect the study period to be finally over and the Minister of Transportation to act on this?

Mr. Ouellette: I’m really happy he recognizes how hard I work. I love that when I hear people say, “That minister is working so hard.”

Let me tell him through you, Mr. Speaker, that we absolutely are working on making sure that we get the proper legislation in place before we bring it forward. But I have to add that if he’s looked at our stats that have come out, we have reduced our collisions by 10 per cent in this province and our fatalities by 10 per cent from ’07-08.

The Speaker: There are no childish pranks allowed in this Assembly, to my two children to my left.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Preparedness (continued)

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As H1N1 moves across Alberta, there will be a greater need to identify and treat those Albertans who have contracted the disease. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. As Alberta’s emergency rooms fill up, what will be done to ensure that people with H1N1 are treated and not just waiting in emergency rooms?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I dealt with that a little bit in my answer to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. In addition to what’s happening at the hospital site itself, Alberta

Health Services announced today that they are opening three influenza assessment centres where team-based care will be available to treat those patients who are suffering from influenza. I have signed a ministerial order which will allow nurses to prescribe. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we’ve taken the opportunity to allow through ministerial order doctors to prescribe medication by telephone for patients who are exhibiting symptoms of H1N1. So we’re attempting not only with our vaccination program to keep Albertans out of emergency rooms and doctors’ offices but also make it easier to access.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. How will the primary care networks like the one in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore, located at Northgate Mall, work with these influenza assessment centres?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don’t know that there’ll be a direct relationship other than the fact of what will allow a clinician’s office within a primary care network to be able to triage to these particular centres either by telephone or in person. I think what is important is that this assessment centre will very much work within the team-based concept where nurses, nurse practitioners, not just physicians, will actually be diagnosing and prescribing to patients.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Will these influenza assessment centres be in operation after H1N1 has peaked?

Mr. Liepert: That’s a very good question, Mr. Speaker, because I’ve said on many occasions that sometimes very good ideas come out of trying circumstances. If this proves to be something that we should take a look at in continuing going forward, I think that I’m certainly open to that. I think some of the other initiatives that I’ve just talked about are other things that we should be looking at going forward. So I certainly would take that as: if it’s a means of increasing access to the system, we’ll absolutely take a look at it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

H1N1 Preparedness in Seniors’ Living Facilities

Ms. Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s better to be safe than sorry. Page 22 of the Alberta Health Services pandemic H1N1 response plan states, “All continuing care facilities . . . are expected to be self-sufficient, to the greatest extent possible.” This is concerning. There are already questions about staffing and care levels in some of these facilities. To the minister of health: will the minister admit that in his plan for a pandemic continuing care facilities will be left to cope with an increasingly complex system of cases?

Mr. Liepert: If I understood the member correctly, it is: what are we going to do to ensure that residents of long-term care are protected? Unless there are chronic conditions that put them in the high-risk category, they are not in the initial rollout. I think what we need to remember here, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a vaccination plan that will take place over several months. We are now in day 4. We do not have an endless supply of vaccine. In fact, we have some

600,000 doses, and it is arriving as it's manufactured. We need to ensure that the right patients are receiving the vaccine appropriately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. It wasn't just long-term care I was referring to. I was referring to continuing care, which can be lodges, enhanced lodges, assisted living, designated assisted living, and long-term care.

Whether it is seasonal flu or H1N1, in a seniors' living facility illness spreads quickly, and often isolation procedures are necessary. Can the minister guarantee that there will be enough staff to meet this possible situation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't run the long-term care, enhanced living facilities, all of the above that the member mentioned. We trust those who do operate these facilities. They know better than we do. I would suggest they probably know better than the member knows how to manage a facility. They are professionals, and they will deal with the circumstances.

Ms Pastoor: I would know very well how to look after the care in a facility.

Having round-the-clock registered nurses on-site as a temporary measure will reduce the number of seniors that will need ambulances to take them to severely crowded ERs and acute-care beds. Will the minister order that all senior living facilities have registered nurses around the clock when they are needed?

Mr. Liepert: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:20 Arts and Culture Funding

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are increasingly looking to arts and cultural activities in the province as a source of celebration and entertainment, particularly during these challenging economic times. The recent Alberta Arts Days was only a three-day event. My question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. As the minister responsible for promoting arts and culture in Alberta, do you think that Alberta Arts Days did enough to inspire Albertans to come out and support our artists in communities?

The Speaker: Well, okay. Try and stretch that one. We're dealing with government policy, not information questions. If that's government policy, do you think, go ahead.

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about Alberta Arts Days, a celebration. Last year we had the first, in 2008, one day. Thirty communities participated across the province, a hundred and some different events. In 2009 we expanded that because we wanted to include schools; we wanted to include libraries. We wanted to have our young people exposed to it. We wanted to make sure that the people that are less fortunate and the people that are new immigrants to the country are exposed to it.

This year, in tough times, Mr. Speaker, we had 116 communities, up from 30. We had 571 events, up from 100. We had 80 schools and 110 different libraries participating. I think Albertans have overwhelmingly said: we believe in arts and culture. That was in communities from hamlets to villages to cities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental again is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Annual celebrations are fine, but there are also specific commitments that you agreed to in your ministry's cultural policy, the Spirit of Alberta. Do Alberta Arts Days actually deliver on any of these commitments?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, they absolutely fulfill those commitments. We talked about the Spirit of Alberta, four key points that we want to go forward with. We want to have access to all Albertans irrespective of where they live or their socioeconomic status. We want to build capacity in our communities to house the performing and literary and visual arts. We want to promote excellence. We want our artists to be recognized like our hockey players and our Olympic athletes, some of the very best in the entire world. We want to make sure we preserve our cultural industries. Having our artists in all different parts of the province onstage together celebrating Alberta: that's what we're supposed to be doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is again to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Were the dollars spent on Alberta Arts Days the best use of funding that could have gone instead directly to the organizations?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that the government of Alberta spent \$700,000 on Alberta Arts Days. That was not money that was taken away from arts organizations. That was actually money to facilitate the 571 productions that we had. You know what? We funded five of them; we paid for artists. But the communities across this province stepped up themselves, and they put this on. They did that with their own dime. That's what we're trying to do – we're a hand up, not a handout – and Albertans have responded.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

H1N1 Pandemic Ethics Framework

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Health Services pandemic plan estimates there will be between 130 and 400 deaths from H1N1. The same plan predicts a demand for ICU space that will overwhelm capacity, so life-and-death decisions about who gets treatment will need to be made.

Mr. Speaker, could I have some order in the Assembly, please?

The Speaker: I would ask for order, please. Yes.

Dr. Taft: Thank you.

The Speaker: That's the first time, by the way, in 13 years that I've used the word "order."

Dr. Taft: The public has a right to know the ethical basis for these life-and-death decisions. The pandemic plan briefly mentions an ethics framework but does not include it. Will the minister of health make public the pandemic ethics framework that is briefly referred to in the pandemic plan?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will take that question, and I will discuss with Alberta Health Services what they're referring to. I'm not quite sure what this member is all twisted out of shape about, but we'll figure it out, and I'll report back to the Assembly.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'm concerned about is the basis for which life-and-death decisions are going to be made, and the medical community is well aware that this is coming. People need to know how decisions like that are going to be made. They can, for example, make preparations if they know that a loved one won't be on a priority list in an intensive care unit.

I'm going to table later today a pandemic ethics framework from Ontario which is fully public. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell the Assembly why Alberta's ethics framework has not been made public?

Mr. Liepert: I think I answered that question, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Taft: You did no such thing, and you're sloughing off your job.

Why has it taken this administration several months longer than Ontario to even, apparently, begin to address the issue of an ethics framework for life-and-death decision-making?

Mr. Liepert: Just to be clear, if the member didn't understand my earlier answer, I said that I would check with Alberta Health Services, and I would provide him with an answer. I'm not sure what he didn't understand about that, but I think his problem is that he didn't know how to rephrase his supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Employment Standards for Sick Leave

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike other jurisdictions in Canada, Alberta's Employment Standards Code provides no protection whatsoever for workers who miss work because of illness. In many cases these workers are in the service industry, and they have the most interaction with the public but at the same time have the least amount of job security. Why won't the minister of labour amend our Employment Standards Code to protect Alberta workers who fall ill?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are no provisions under our Employment Standards Code that speak to paid sick leave, but I might add that there are no jurisdictions in Canada that address paid sick leave.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't talking about paid sick leave. I was talking about the right to be away from work without pay and not lose your job, which is not a right currently enjoyed by Albertans, unlike most of the rest of the provinces.

Now, Alberta Health Services estimates that up to 35 per cent of Albertans will fall sick and have to stay at home for the next seven days. Why can't the minister of labour use common sense and display common decency and join most of the rest of Canada in protecting the jobs of sick workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, for many Alberta workers sick leave is addressed through their collective agreements, company human

resources policies, or other arrangements with their employers. This has worked really well in our province in the past, and I would suspect that it will continue to work quite well in the future.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it works well for employers, not for workers. Vulnerable low-paid workers are not in any position to negotiate on an equal footing with their employers. If the minister doesn't understand that, he doesn't understand his job.

Now, the government itself is calling for employers to stop asking for doctors' notes, yet the government's own policy is that they ask their employees for doctors' notes after three days. Will the minister take his own advice and get rid of this policy for his own employees?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are collective agreements, as I've indicated. It's working, and it's providing solutions between employers and employees. The employers as well as the employees have certain rights in terms of responding to some of the activities that occur within their work environments.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Most of my questions have actually been asked just previously, but there is one piece that has not yet been addressed, and that is a final question to the same minister. Is there anything to stop an employer from firing an employee who might be laid up at home with H1N1?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I would say that these workers and their employers should be having good discussions about the provisions in the event of any type of illness. There are no reasons to have to wait until a worker is sick before determining possible solutions, even if they never need to have those solutions exercised. I would continue to encourage all employers and employees to be proactive, to become aware of the sick leave arrangements that may be available to them, and to use common sense.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Affordable Accessible Housing

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of housing assured Albertans that she is doing a good job of providing accessible affordable housing to people with disabilities. Well, it isn't a good enough job for the 30 people with disabilities in Calgary who need accessible housing, many of whom have been waiting over a year now. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: what does the minister have to say to these people in Calgary who have been waiting, sometimes over a year, to get an affordable, accessible unit?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to meet with these – I don't know if they're your constituents, hon. member, or if they're a particular group in your constituency, but I have been meeting with this member's constituents on a regular basis as you refer them with these types of issues. I'd be pleased to meet with this group in order to assist them with whatever it is that their need is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for that kind offer. However, I did just call down and get that information from the Calgary housing people down there, so maybe the minister could place a call down to those people and find out who the 30 people are who've been waiting sometimes up to a year, maybe doing her job instead of asking me to do it for her.

Nevertheless, of the 1,600 units that are available, how many of these have been rotated in the last year with new people coming onboard these affordable, accessible houses?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, I'm sure you have the answer to that question as well if you had the answer to the first question. But I'm uncertain about the number here today, about the 1,600 units and what became available and how those are being filled, you know, with an immediacy right now. I don't know that.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess what I'm saying is that the 1,600 housing units you provided for affordable and accessible housing are full. When can we see some more affordable, accessible units provided so people are not in long-term care, on the street, or wherever they may be hiding? We want some affordable, accessible units on the street. When can we expect some more to be available?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we've had a request for proposal for affordable housing. We have a mandate of developing 11,000 housing units over a five-year period. We are over halfway there within the first 24 months. Of that housing I can tell you, hon. member, that we've ensured that developers and municipalities, nonprofit organizations are definitely providing housing that is accessible for people with disabilities. So I can tell you that that's happening today.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Grade 12 Diploma Exams

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Education announced that the grade 12 diploma exams in math and science will no longer include a written response but will only include multiple choice numeric responses. Given that the Minister of Education has talked many times about the importance of our students developing literacy and communication skills, why would he dumb down the exams by removing the section that tests these essential abilities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, a context, I think, is necessary. Over the last number of months, over a year that I've been in the portfolio, I've certainly heard from students, from teachers, from school boards that we have too many exams, it takes too long, and it's too much exam anxiety on the students: too much, too much, too much. When we looked at what we could do differently, we determined that the correlation between the part A and the part B, the written and the multiple choice and numeric portions of the exams in maths and sciences, was extremely high. In other words, students were doing as well on the part A as they were on the part B. If you're looking for an exit result, which is what the

diploma exams are, and you're getting the same mark on both exams, one of them is redundant. So reducing the number of exams for students, reducing the time frame for exams answers the questions that I have been asked.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The teachers that I've spoken with say that multiple choice questions cannot properly assess all of students' abilities or allow them to show their thinking processes. How does the minister expect our students to be fairly assessed if the diploma exams don't reflect all of what they are learning in the classroom?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, while teachers in the classroom are really pivotal and key to student assessment, obviously, as part of learning, we do have very strong assessment expertise in the Department of Education working with teachers from across the province to design valid and reliable questions. Multiple choice and numeric questions are valid and reliable. They test not only knowledge but comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Most of our questions are at the application and analysis level while some are at the synthesis and comprehension level. In other words, it's not just testing and regurgitation of facts, and you can't succeed by guessing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. In addition to changing the format of the math and science exams, the Department of Education changed the exam calendar so that students were to write math and chemistry, two very challenging tests, on the same day. It is my understanding that this has been changed. Can you clarify this and how you'll let staff, parents, and students know, and can you ensure that this will not happen again in June?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we have sent out a revised exam schedule for both January and June to all jurisdictions. It'll be communicated in the same way that the original exam schedule was, through the classroom to the students immediately. It's also on our website.

I think what happened is that when we looked at how we could shorten the amount of time taken for exams and return more time to the classroom and less stress on the students in writing exams, we got a little bit overexuberant in that, perhaps, and that resulted in the doubling up of the chem and math on one day. We've changed that. They'll be written on separate days. We've responded to that concern that's come in from students across the province and also to the concern about exams being written on the 28th and 29th of June. We've backed that schedule up. The new schedule is out. Schools should have it as of yesterday, and it's on the website.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Child Protection

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is constantly making changes to practice without making the necessary changes in policy, which causes confusion and inconsistency in casework across the regions. The Auditor General and the children's advocate have raised concerns regarding the lack

of clear policy, especially surrounding investigations of maltreatment of children and youth already in care. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: what is being done to ensure consistency in practice and policy across the child and family services authorities and the designated First Nations agencies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that when we're talking about workloads, there are actually two things that would be helping to take care of what you're talking about. One is the work that's being done on the casework practice model. As you know, that's been implemented across the province. The other is workload issues, which I've mentioned before. We have all kinds of mechanisms that are in place to make sure that we have appropriate workload levels for all of our staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. With the rising number of students in care and a freeze on working staff employment, a crisis is occurring as we speak.

Since the establishment of a working group in 2008 what specifically is being done to address the very real and problematic lack of regulation surrounding investigations of maltreatment of those children and youth who are already in government care?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure what the member is talking about here. What I would suggest is that if you could get more information to me, I will get a response.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate that follow-up.

Will the minister provide a date for when clear and consistent policy will be in place regarding investigations into the maltreatment of children and youth in government care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the member is talking about in terms of the maltreatment here. Please do follow up, and I'll get back to you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The new Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act received royal assent last year. However, I have heard from constituents expressing concerns that the new legislation does not respect people's rights to make their own decisions. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: is this true information?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this is certainly not true. In fact, the opposite is true. The Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act provides more, not fewer, protective measures and options for Albertans who need help making decisions. It focuses on the least intrusive approach to respecting an Albertan's right to make decisions for as long as possible.

This is good legislation. The significant amount of work and effort over the last four years to get to this point has been worth it. This progressive legislation benefits Albertans both today and in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement to the same minister. The other concerns I have heard relate to capacity assessment. Can the minister advise the House on how capacity assessments will be done under this new act?

2:40

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, another great improvement in the act is the more standardized and rigorous capacity assessment model. The act's regulations clearly outline the represented adult's rights during the capacity assessment process, including the purpose of the assessment and their right to legal counsel. In addition, in-depth training is being provided to capacity assessors, and guidelines have been developed to further standardize the assessment process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement to the same minister. There have been a lot of stories in the news this past year about the abuse of vulnerable people, specifically seniors. Will this new act do something to better protect seniors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the abuse of vulnerable Albertans is a significant concern of this government. This act is a great step forward. It provides more safeguards and protective measures. This includes enhanced screening of new co decision-makers, guardians, or trustees as well as a formal complaint and investigation process.

I would also like to add that it's not just me that thinks that the AGTA is great legislation. New South Wales in Australia have asked for details on AGTA as they review their legislation. Again, Alberta is leading the way forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 92 questions and responses today.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Rules

Go Green Initiative

The Speaker: Just a couple of comments before we move on. First of all, there were a couple of interjections by the chair today, one having to do with a question that said: what do you think? Well, please, let's all remember that we're dealing with policy questions here and government policy questions, not dealing with personal opinions from people, particularly ministers.

Secondly, for a couple of my colleagues here to my left *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* page 520 deals with exhibits being inadmissible in the House. A little reading over the weekend might be in order.

Thirdly, thank you all for all of these little pamphlets being returned to me about Go Green. Remember, there are three of them because there are three documents that we're trying to basically say that you can access in ways other than printed material. One is Votes and Proceedings, one is the Order Paper, and the other is *Hansard*. That's the reason there are three. Secondly, it was a subjective decision to do it in one day only and not kill some more trees to do it in four days. But my experience is that it usually takes about four days to get the message through. So today is the last day of the messaging with respect to this. On Monday you will not see this.

Let us continue the Routine in 30 seconds from now.

Introduction of Bills

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're back on the Routine now.
The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 58

Corrections Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 58, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2009.

These amendments clarify the roles of monitoring and recording and allow for electronic monitoring or recording of nonprivileged inmate communications. The intent here is that it will increase the opportunities that we have to intercept and report active or planned criminal activities within our communities.

The amendments also will allow remission to be granted to offenders serving sentences for provincial statutes or municipal bylaw offences, Mr. Speaker, which are nonviolent crimes. This encourages good behaviour and encourages inmates to take courses to improve their quality of life so that when they get out, they're active in society, and it will reduce the offender population, which should give us significant savings within our facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 58 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 58 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Bill 60

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill proposes two categories of amendments. One category of amendments will impact midwives, acupuncturists, and dentists. The amendments add teaching, management, and research activities to the scope of practice statements for these three professions. This change will allow their colleagues to regulate members' practice in these areas. It's important because it enables colleges to put in place measures like ethical guidelines for research.

The second category of amendments reserves additional titles for the nursing, paramedic, and pharmacy professions. All health professions reserve titles that may be used only by registered members. These titles enable the public to distinguish accredited health professionals from others who may provide a similar service but do not have equivalent knowledge and training.

I'd ask all members to support this bill and to move this bill to the next stage. I move first reading of Bill 60.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 60 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 60 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of annual reports for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the historic resources fund, and the Wild Rose Foundation, as well as the annual review for the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings. I have e-mails from concerned Albertans Mariella Villalobos, Jenny Regal, Stephan Verrier, Marsha Hales, Marilee Sharpe, Joy Lutz, Agnes Thurmeier, Kelly Russell, and Kelly Waterman urging the Minister of Education and the Premier not to cut funding to education because the future prosperity of Alberta depends on the knowledge and skills of its children and because it's even more important now to invest in education.

My second tabling is a letter from Mr. Leslie Zydek to the Education minister stating that he has always found the minister to be very honest with teachers in the past, reminding the minister of his comments at the teachers' convention in February, and asking him to "honour the agreement that is in place with a 5.99% increase and help to build some faith and trust back."

My last e-mail is to the Premier from Joan Farkas, who is "outraged that due to your lack of leadership, your lack of planning, and your completely inept financial management" your cuts "to education, health and social services demonstrate that you . . . do not care about Albertans."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a report released by the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership entitled *Dashed Dreams, New Realities: Calgary's Talk Frankly about the Impact of the Economic Downturn*. The report is sponsored by Alberta Global Forum, University of Calgary; Calgary Counselling Centre; Calgary Foundation; Canada West Foundation; and the Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership.

The second is an information pamphlet on the Ukrainian Museum of Canada, the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, Alberta branch. This is an organization that has a museum in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. I was able to be at a most recent exhibition of their collection, and it's pretty impressive, so I'm happy to table copies of that information brochure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated August 25, 2009, that I received from the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors regarding the delisting of chiropractic services from Alberta health care insurance benefits. It's signed by a Dr. Clark Mills, and it's certainly informative.

The second tabling I have today is a letter dated August 20, 2009, from the Capital Region Board: regional action, global opportunity. It's addressed to the hon. Minister of Transportation and also to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure. It's a letter regarding the importance of the Green TRIP program to the capital region.

Thank you.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling a document that I referred to in question period today. This document is titled Adult Critical Care Triage and Resource Allocation Protocol for Pandemic Influenza. It's dated July of this year. It's from Ontario, and the purpose of it is "to apply to an influenza pandemic, when demand for critical care needs outstrips available resources."

Thank you. It's important reading for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors radiation health administrative organization annual report for the year ended June 30, 2009, with attached financial statements; the Alberta Dental Association and College 2006 radiation health and safety program annual report January 1, 2008, to December 31, 2008, with attached financial statements; the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association radiation protection program 2008 annual report with attached auditor's report on the radiation protection program; College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta radiation health administrative organization annual report for the period April 1, 2008, to December 31, 2008; University of Alberta authorized radiation health administrative organization annual report 2008-2009; University of Calgary radiation health administration organization annual report for the period April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009, with attached financial statements; pursuant to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act the College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists annual report 2008.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(6) could I ask the Government House Leader if he would share with the House the projected government business for next week.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Monday, November 2, is occupied with private members' business.

On Tuesday, November 3, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we would anticipate a debate and progress on Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act; Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act; Bill 49, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2); introduction for second reading of Bill 55, Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 56, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 57, Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 58, Corrections Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 59,

Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009; and Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009. Some of those bills will be introduced for first reading, of course, on Monday. Time permitting, Committee of the Whole on Bill 31, Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and I believe members have been advised that there will be amendments proposed for that; then Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act; Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act; and Bill 49, Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2).

Wednesday afternoon, November 4, for second reading Bill 53, Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and Bill 54, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009; Committee of the Whole on Bill 55, Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009; third reading of bills 46, 48, 49; and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, November 5, in the afternoon for second reading Bill 56, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009; Committee of the Whole on Bill 53, Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 54, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 56, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009; third reading of bills 31, 53, 54, 55; and as per the Order Paper.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Alberta Capital Bonds

16. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

[Adjourned debate October 28: Mr. Hancock]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to continue.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do want to take the opportunity to spend just a few minutes to talk about Alberta capital bonds and the opportunity that I think they provide for Albertans and for Albertans' government.

Alberta is and has been recognized as one of the best places to live, to work, and to raise a family. Certainly, I think all Albertans are very, very proud of the province that we have. When we looked at what we aspire to in terms of the 20-year horizon for Alberta and talked a number of years ago about unleashing innovation and leading and learning and competing in a global marketplace and making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit, that was about how we help to unleash the potential that Albertans have in a province that has a wonderful wealth of resources and a wonderful environment to live in.

When we talk about the best place to live, to work, and to visit, we're really talking about how we proceed with the development of our resources and our economy while we maintain the wonderful environment, the big blue sky, the clean water, the place that we have, the quality of life that we have, which includes not only our environment but also our ability to celebrate the arts, the ability to share our culture, and then, of course, the need for us to develop our potential through making sure that we have an excellent education system and making sure that we have the opportunity to ensure that there's health care available for our children when they need it, for our parents when they need it. That's what we talk about when we talk about Alberta being the best place to live, work, and visit: the ability to unleash our potential, our human potential and the potential

of the place in which we live so that we can trade out into the world, be citizens of the globe and trade into the world economy.

Now, there's a world recession happening, and Alberta has become an unwilling participant. The reality is that some of the things that we rely on in our current economy – the ability to export particularly our carbon energy products, oil and gas – depend on a world price. That world price is set to a great extent by demand, and when you're in a world recession, demand goes down. We have this recession happening that has impacted our citizens in terms of their ability to invest their hard-earned resources, the money that they've saved for their retirement, the money that they're building towards their retirement. It's impacted the revenues to government in terms of what we do going forward. It's created this uncertainty in the economy.

Now, luckily, as most prognosticators would say, Alberta was best positioned going into this recessionary time, and Alberta is best positioned to come out of that recessionary time, but in the meantime there are some issues that need to be dealt with. One of those issues is: how do we help Albertans to weather the financial crisis that's happened across the world? It truly is a financial crisis. I've talked to seniors in my constituency and even members of my own family who probably shouldn't have had money in the market because when you're a senior, you're really looking for stable investments, for income-based investments, essentially investments that will give you an interest stream and an income, but because of the meltdown of the financial market, interest rates are at an all-time low. There aren't good places to put your money to get an interest income return, and going into the market to get those interest instruments puts people at risk. We've seen people whose portfolios have been, if not devastated, certainly diminished significantly, and they're not in a position to recoup that because they don't have the time left in their lives to be able to recoup that.

We have people, senior citizens, but we also have others who are saving through their RRSPs, who are saving in other ways to try to make sure that they can take care of themselves and their families in future years, and they're at a loss as to where to put their investments at this point in time. With interest investments, as I say, if you put your money in the bank, which is the safe, secure place, in Canada at least, where deposits are guaranteed up to a certain level, you only get a .5 per cent return. I haven't looked recently at the Canada savings bond return, but it's pretty low. There's a lot of money that's parked on the sidelines, that's not actually going into our economy to help bring us out of this recession.

3:00

We also have the other fortunate position to be in; that is, that Alberta is recognized as being a very, very strong, well-managed, well-governed jurisdiction. It's been recognized, as some of the members of the opposition have indicated in their comments in the last couple of days, with a triple-A credit rating, which you don't get by being a place of fiscal mismanagement. You only get it if people recognize that you have sound management.

Here we have a government with a triple-A credit rating, an ability to get the best rates, with a strong covenant, a good place to invest. In fact, we find people coming from all over the world to look to invest in Alberta. When you look at that sort of a scenario, you say – perhaps I could add a little bit more before I get to that conclusion. We also are looking to say: in Alberta, where we were well positioned going into it but are participating in this world-wide recession and do have some issues, what is the best way to prepare to come out of that recession, to make sure that we can be leading-edge and that we can trade out into the world? When you have that discussion, you have to say: well, we want to have our people prepared. We

need to be up to date. We need to be leading edge in education, and that requires some physical infrastructure although probably not in the same way as we've traditionally done it over the years.

We have to invest in our education infrastructure. We want a healthy, vibrant population, which means we need strong health infrastructure. We want to have places where people can enjoy quality of life so that their families can know that they have a good place to stay, that they're going to be safe and well cared for. We need seniors infrastructure in terms of long-term and continuing care places. We need our economic infrastructure. We need roads. We need power lines. We need utility corridors. We may want to be talking about looking to the future in terms of a corridor, perhaps for a high-speed train link or something of that nature. We need to be looking ahead to the grids as we're ready for development but want to contain certain elements of that development so that we can preserve our environment. We need environmental infrastructure, water treatment, those sorts of things.

We're also in a time where one of the silver linings, of course, in the cloud is that costs have been reduced, so it's a good time to look to infrastructure, to build that infrastructure. It has two benefits. One, we get the infrastructure in place that we need for that long-term growth of the province, for that long-term growth in our human potential and our physical infrastructure, and we can do it at a lower cost than we've been receiving for the last number of years.

Here we have a population with money to invest and no place to invest it. We have a province that's poised for growth again, that needs to be ready for that growth, needs to have the infrastructure – the human infrastructure and the physical infrastructure – in place for that growth not only so that we can trade out into the world but so that we can protect our environment and continue to build our quality of life. It all comes together very nicely in the concept of saying that Albertans want to invest in Alberta. Albertans want to have the opportunity to put their money in a safe place, get a reasonable return, know that that return will be assured, and have the pride of being able to build the infrastructure that we need, the human and physical infrastructure that we need, for that future of the province that we are so poised for and so ready for.

Capital bonds, Mr. Speaker, are an instrument that we've used before in this province, but they're an instrument that would be particularly well suited, in my view, for the time that we have today. It allows Albertans to invest in Alberta, to take pride in being part of building the physical infrastructure that we have and the human infrastructure that we need. It allows Albertans to show their confidence in Alberta. It allows Albertans to have access to a covenant which is strong, an investment which is assured, and a reasonable return on that investment. It's a good time for us to do the work. It's a good opportunity for us to have Albertans employed. It just makes sense for all those purposes.

Now, we heard yesterday that there should be constraints around it, that we shouldn't borrow too much from Albertans, that we shouldn't leave it out for too long, that we shouldn't use the money to hire anybody but an Albertan. I think those were the gist of the three amendments that were tabled yesterday, and maybe there'll be more today.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think we should constrain the idea at this stage. As we build forward and as we go out with an instrument for the investment of Albertans, we should be looking to the full power or the potential of this tool to make sure that we can have a sufficient amount of bond available, a sufficient level of investment available for Albertans so that all Albertans have an opportunity to participate.

I remember when my aunt passed away, quite a few years ago now, and in her estate were her Alberta Energy Corporation shares.

Albertans had a chance to invest at that time in a government company that was set up for a purpose that would provide them with, in that case, some risk, yes, but an opportunity to be a part of the growth and development of this great province. They took that opportunity with great pride, some of them investing as little as a hundred dollars. I don't know if you could even invest less than that.

But it's not about how much. It's about every Albertan having that opportunity not only to have a secure investment but to have what I would call a prideful investment, an opportunity to put your money into something you care about, not just into a bank, not just into some investment that may go somewhere else, not having to worry about whether it's an ethical investment or whether the company that you're investing in is doing something in some part of the world that you may or may not agree with, investing here at home, in our province, to build this place so that we can be poised, so that the future children of this province and our grandchildren and their children will be able to live and work in this province and trade out into the world. What could be a better concept? What could be a better way of bringing the concept together than to have Albertans who are proud of their province have the ability to invest in a stable investment, get an appropriate return on that investment, and help to build the future in this way? Mr. Speaker, it's an idea whose time has certainly come again.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. To the hon. Minister of Education. I certainly listened with interest to your remarks regarding Motion 16. You said that you were reluctant to constrain the idea by having limits to the amount of the bonds that could be purchased. I'm just looking at your own budget from 2008-09, and I see where you were precisely over budget in your ministry support services by \$2,474,000. It's not quite 10 per cent of your budget. At the same time that we see that overexpenditure in your ministry budget, we see some of the same senior managers who would be working out of that office receiving almost the identical amount, ironically, in an achievement bonus of \$2.4 million. When you talk about being reluctant to constrain the idea, my question to the hon. minister is this: when your own track record here is not very good in your department, in your ministry office regarding sticking to your budget, why should taxpayers have faith in this government to give you, essentially, a blank cheque to go into debt for any amount that you so choose?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, in the comments that the hon. member makes, he sort of mixes things up. He talks about my office. Well, my office wasn't \$2.5 million over in its budget. I think we spent about \$60,000 more than was budgeted. Actually, in the budgeting process it's interesting. You do things line by line in the budget, but you do have the opportunity to move things around to areas of need. I did a little bit more travelling, actually, last year in terms of going to Singapore. Alberta is recognized as one of the leading-edge education jurisdictions in the world, so we got invited to Singapore. There'll be a report out soon on that conference, about looking to the future of education and what the best jurisdictions in the world are doing in that regard.

3:10

I went to London to meet with 69 ministers of education from around the world to talk, again, about what's happening in education in the world, which is pretty profound for Alberta. While we're leading edge now, we compete in a world economy, and we need to know what it's going to take for our children and our grandchildren to be educated to compete in that world economy. I don't apologize for that, nor do I apologize for the \$2 million that he's talking about, an overage in ministry supports, which was spent primarily on Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction, and Speak Out Alberta, three initiatives which are clearly set up for the sole purpose of making sure that not only are we leading edge today but that we continue to be leading edge for tomorrow, all those things I was talking about in terms of developing the human potential of this province. That's why it's important.

Mr. Speaker, he needn't take my word for it that we do fiscal management well. The bond agencies around the world, the financial agencies around the world, that rate the best places to invest, rate Alberta as a triple-A best place in the world to invest, the best credit rating that you can get. That's an independent assessment by people who put their money where their assessment is. He doesn't have to take my word for it that fiscal management is good. He can take the advice of the people who have managed money around the world that this is the best place to invest your money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River on the Q and A side.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if I might ask the hon. minister to clarify, based on the comment of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and a number of comments I heard from that side last night to the effect that we're talking about an unconstrained blank cheque, unending spending, those sorts of things. I wonder if the minister might want to clarify that we're not actually debating whether the government is going to spend any money here, unconstrained or otherwise. We're debating whether or not this House supports the notion of bonds. Any actual spending won't be authorized by this motion. It would be authorized by subsequent legislation and a discussion around budget, all of which comes back to the floor of this House. I just want to clarify that point.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the hon. member makes a very good point. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar as chair of the Public Accounts Committee would know that all spending by government is both voted by the House and accountable to the House, and it has nothing to do with where the money comes from. It's a question of: before you can spend money, you have to get authority to do so. The hon. member would know that we are constrained by the processes of the House in terms of what you spend, but what he was referring to in his question was how much you should . . . [Mr. Hancock's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: We have to now move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to participate in the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry that I had to cut off the Minister of Education when he was in full flight because I know how much he enjoys that.

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to join this debate on Government Motion 16. I have done my best to listen from my Annex office on the Tannoy and to follow up on the parts that I missed by

reading the *Hansard*. I'll apologize in advance if I have misunderstood or missed somebody putting something on the record, but I don't think I have. What I heard in listening over the two days was essentially two debates running concurrently or woven together. One was a debate about the content of Motion 16, and a second was an ongoing debate about the process that we're involved in today.

Let me look at the debate around the motion itself. I'm just going to remind myself what the motion actually said because it's worth reviewing at this point. Essentially, we're looking at the idea of Alberta bonds being considered by the province. I read the remarks from the finance minister as she laid this out on Tuesday, and she had some very good points in the way she laid it out about what she was looking for from people and some questions that she put on the record that she wanted to see answered.

I'm on page 1578 of the *Hansard* from October 27. She essentially put a couple of things out that she was looking for. We're talking about Motion 16: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities."

Then she talks about and a lot of people have talked about how much Albertans want to invest in this. That, of course, is not in the text of the motion, but the minister of finance did mention that Albertans are looking for a way to proudly invest in the province. That is the way she put it.

Then she got into some questions, that she was seeking advice through debate on the motion on a couple of things: the type of bond that should be offered, who should be able to buy the bonds, whether it should be a fixed rate of interest over the life of the bond or a variable rate, shorter or longer, minimum and maximum amounts available for purchase, whether it would be RSP eligible, suggestions on where it could be available to purchase, and what kind of interest rate should be offered. Interestingly, I didn't hear a lot of debate that answered those specific questions, but there was a lot of sort of visioning and . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Blue skying.

Ms Blakeman: . . . blue skying – that's fair – of what people imagined this could result in. Fair enough, if that's the way people wanted to debate it. But from our side, the Official Opposition side, we had a number of issues. Actually, we did try a little closer to answer some of the questions that she had raised.

The Minister of Education and others have raised a number of times the credit rating that this province receives, but the idea of fiscal management is larger than a credit rating. It's not only about comparing ourselves with outsiders but also comparing ourselves with ourselves and with our own performance over the years. Of course, the one big thing that we're dealing with right now is that we've gone from \$8 billion up to \$7 billion down in a period of about 12 to 15 months, so on our own performance I think that argues that there's a fairly significant turnaround here. Is the government responsible for some or all of that? Most definitely. Are they responsible for all of it? No. Clearly not. You know, there are a lot of people who suffered a downturn in their finances. I'm not going to lay that whole issue at their door. But did they make choices that made this worse for us? Yes, I would argue that they did.

Now, the second part of this is the limits that are placed. We brought forward a number of amendments yesterday to try and put some limits on that motion: the idea that there would be a maximum of a quarter of a billion dollars that would be borrowed through the creation of this debt. In other words, we couldn't embrace a debt

larger than a quarter of a billion dollars through the issuance of this bond, that we would not go into debt for longer than 10 years with the issuance of this bond, and that we would have an Alberta-first policy for those who would be the recipients of the contracting work that flowed through the infrastructure projects that were enabled through this bond. Those were the concerns that we raised. We put them in the form of amending motions to the motion because we wanted to make sure that they were recorded and that we were able to refer to them later, and it's a way of getting the discussion on the floor, which it clearly did.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons for debt. Of course, you don't ever want to be incurring debt for operating because that money is gone, and you have nothing to show for it other than the fact that you ate a meal. But, again, it's gone. You provided a program, but it's gone. You have no tangible asset for it.

Going into debt for capital projects is a different matter entirely. You end up with an asset. What we need to be careful of here is that the money that we borrow now so that people can enjoy or make use of the infrastructure today, which is equivalent to someone taking out a mortgage for a home – you're not going to save your money until you're 60, and when you've saved that \$350,000, then you can go out and buy a home. You're going to buy that home when you're 30 or 35, get a mortgage, and pay that money off over the life of that so that you can enjoy it at a good time in your life. That's what we're looking at doing now, but that's where we have to be careful that we're doing that in the right way. We have to be careful that the money, the debt, is paid off before the asset is either used up, we need to rebuild it, or we need to put massive amounts of money into it. So those are the issues that the Official Opposition has concerns about around the issuance of these bonds.

3:20

The second thing that has happened is a lot of questions about whether we were able or why we were raising issues like this around the motion. In fact, the Member for Peace River just raised it again today. But when I went and looked in my documents, in fact, you are certainly allowed to do that because in *Beauchesne* 552 it does say quite clearly that you can put a motion on the floor. That's okay; that's what you're supposed to do. You can also amend it. That appears in *Beauchesne* 567 and 569. *Beauchesne* 567 says, "The object of an amendment may be either to modify a question in such a way as to increase its acceptability or to present to the House a different proposition as an alternative to the original question." It also references *Erskine May*, page 395. Of course, 569 says: "A motion may be amended by: (a) leaving out certain words; (b) leaving out certain words in order to insert other words; (c) inserting or adding other words." There's a second section there as well. Certainly, what the Official Opposition was doing yesterday was well in order, and that was reflected in the rulings from the Speaker.

There's been some discussion that, well, this is just a general motion, and we should just talk generally to it and trust that at some point we'll be able to get down to the nitty-gritty of it. But what I looked for very carefully was any kind of a guarantee from anyone that there would be legislation that would follow, and all I could find was remarks that this would come up again in the budget debate. Well, the way the budget debate is structured now, it's done in committee, and if we're lucky, members of the Official Opposition might get in maybe two at-bats, maybe 20 minutes of questions for an entire department. To be able to concentrate on one issue such as the issuance of bonds as a part of the debate on the entire department of finance would not satisfy what we would be looking for as a vigorous give-and-take in debate. So, of course, we have used this opportunity over the last couple of days to do exactly that, and in fact we should be doing exactly that.

Now, the other way is through Public Accounts, of course, and that's after the fact. We'd be talking about whether it was appropriate to be issuing these bonds in Public Accounts way after the fact, so that's not an appropriate place either for us to be doing it. I hope that's helpful to those that were not understanding the process that was being used by the Official Opposition.

I do want to demarcate the difference between a visioning exercise, marketing, which we have also heard some members use, and a business case. I was really looking for the business case of why these bonds would be a good way for the government to be embracing debt, to be knowingly entering into a position of debt for infrastructure. The motion before us does clearly indicate that the monies would be used for infrastructure. Good. Fair enough. But this government has already reached the limit that it set out for itself and that its members all supported in the budget. It said that it would go to no more than \$1.1 billion of debt, and they've done that already. To now embark upon a second series of debt, to take on additional debt beyond what the government has already allocated itself in the last budget, the budget that we're in, is I think problematic. I need to be much more convinced that there would be a limit on the bonds that are going to be embraced as new debt here, that there would be a time limit set on when the debt would be paid off so that we weren't in sort of perpetual debt here.

I think it's very appropriate to be embracing an Alberta-first policy. There was a great deal of pretty pointed discussion and criticism of the member for putting that motion on the floor yesterday and all kinds of detailed demands for clarification, which of course was very interesting because they had spent the earlier part of this debate insisting that we should be having a very wide-reaching and wide-ranging debate. But when the opposition starts to speak, boy, the government wants details. You've got to love it. I think it's very appropriate that we say that if we are going to get into debt and the government will owe Albertans that money – that's what this is all about; it's about debt – I think it's more than appropriate to say that we have an Alberta-first policy.

Now, of course, you have to be reasonable with all of that. You're not going to say, you know, that we would take an Alberta company even if they're a terrible company just because they're an Alberta company. Of course you're not going to do that. Nobody here would be suggesting that you would. But I think that as a general policy to say that if we can look to and encourage Alberta companies to be engaged in these infrastructure projects, which the province has gone into debt to fund, I think that's very appropriate. I feel much better as an Albertan knowing that we're incurring debt that will at the very least benefit Alberta companies rather than saying, "Yeah, boy, let's go into debt so that we can give money to companies that are in other countries or even other provinces."

The issue of, well, goodness, we're going to get into real trouble with TILMA – not necessarily. I don't think that need be a huge issue. I mean, we have trading partners there, and I don't think that saying Alberta first but Saskatchewan and B.C. second is that big a deal. Again, if we're embracing debt here, if the government is looking to embrace debt, I would like to see us have a reasonable Alberta-first policy. I have a union-first policy in my office, for example. I always look to buy products that are made in a union shop first. If I can't find it, then I'll go outside of that. I'm not going to say: no, I won't buy it because I can't find a union-made article. If I need the article, then I'm going to go somewhere else and get it, but I'm going to look for union-made first. That's the point of that, and I think it's a good idea to have an Alberta-first policy here.

That is what I was looking for with this motion, a clarification that we would have a limit on the amount of debt that we were going to

incur as a result of these bonds, that we would have a limit on the time that we would be in debt for these infrastructure projects, and that we would have an Alberta-first policy to go along with it. I'm not comfortable with the looseness and the lack of detail in the motion. I'm not comfortable because I don't see another opportunity.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available should one want to participate.

There being no interest in that section, we shall now move on to recognizing the next speaker. The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to express my support for the government motion to issue Alberta savings bonds. In a time of economic uncertainty every person and entity – individuals, families, businesses, and government – are inclined to take a look at previous spending patterns and identify new opportunities to invest wisely. When I look back at this province's budgeting, I find myself truly proud to be an Albertan. When I consider that moving forward there'll be the opportunity to purchase Alberta savings bonds, I can take pride in the fact that I'm part of this government. This province continues to demonstrate a level of sound financial planning that rivals any other jurisdiction.

Issuing savings bonds is another testament to this government's legacy of financial sustainability. For example, in 2002, following a successful elimination of the provincial debt, the government acknowledged not just the need for change in our budget structure but also the changing economic environment. In response to this, the financial management commission was struck to review fiscal and accounting policies and to ensure that Alberta remained a leader in fiscal planning. One of the key recommendations made to government was the establishment of the sustainability fund. Mr. Speaker, it was recommended as a means to stabilize volatile resource revenue. This is what I mean when I refer to sound financial planning. It was forward thinking and fiscally responsible, and now this planning and saving is paying off. In a time when the global economic climate is less profitable than it used to be, Alberta remains a leader in terms of recovery. While others are running major deficits in order to stimulate their economies, this province is able to use dollars from the sustainability fund to fuel capital projects. By issuing Alberta savings bonds, this government is providing Albertans with a unique opportunity to invest and save. The issue of these bonds is a demonstration of this government's economic leadership.

3:30

In addition to the sustainability fund, in 1976 an act of the Legislature established the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. This fund is designed to provide prudent stewardship of savings from Alberta's nonrenewable resources by maximizing financial returns. In fact, this year the fund is expected to exceed the forecasted net income, and due to the strong growth in the equities over the first quarter the net income is estimated at \$1.34 billion in 2009-10, up from the \$711 million forecast. Mr. Speaker, this trust fund is unique to Alberta. No other province has such a fund. It's a demonstration of the prudent financial leadership that this province takes, leadership that's being demonstrated again and again with the establishment of the Alberta savings bonds.

Furthermore, as part of this effective financial planning, residents of this province benefit from Alberta's tax advantage. Mr. Speaker, Albertans have the lowest personal income taxes in Canada as a result of this low single tax rate system, no general sales tax, and the lowest gasoline tax rate amongst all of the provinces. Further,

Alberta's business taxes are amongst the lowest in the country. This is a result of low corporate income tax rates and no payroll or capital taxes. Businesses, like individuals, also benefit from the lowest gasoline tax and the absence of a provincial sales tax. These competitive tax rates will continue despite the economic downturn as we've heard our Premier announce that taxes will not be raised.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a history of creating sound financial plans, effective budgets, and being innovative in booms and busts. This continues today with this government's commitment to limit spending and live within our means while using the sustainability fund to cover revenue shortfalls and protect key programs. Further, the effective planning can be seen with the promise to continue to invest in public infrastructure and thereby invest in our province while creating jobs. Keeping taxes low and creating Alberta savings bonds are additional initiatives that complement this government's fiscal leadership.

It will provide an innovative way for Albertans to do two things, invest in their province and save their hard-earned money. This is a way to ensure that we're able to continue making necessary investments in Alberta's future, demonstrating our confident and balanced approach to managing the effects of the global economic downturn.

Mr. Speaker, our province remains strong and competitive due to sound financial planning, and The Way Forward, our four-point economic recovery plan, will continue to effectively manage these economic circumstances responsibly because the plan is built on our province's proven track record of sound financial leadership. The plan calls for limiting government spending and living within our means while continuing to protect the programs and services that Albertans need most. These include seniors' benefits, education, and health care. Further, we will make up three-quarters of the revenue shortfall with the sustainability fund, ensuring that we do not assume any unnecessary debt.

In addition, the Alberta savings bonds will support continued investment in Alberta and Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I believe we should actually use the funds received from the bonds to fund infrastructure projects. This will continue to create jobs, support seniors, and put the money that Albertans have invested back into their pockets. Further, Albertans will know where their funds are going and will be able to see the benefit of investing within their community. In particular, I believe that the focus on seniors and seniors-related infrastructure should be considered amongst the infrastructure projects that are funded.

Additionally, I believe we should focus on oil sands development and related infrastructure such as highways. Mr. Speaker, this is in line with the last point of the economic recovery plan, which is to ensure that our industries are globally competitive and continue to attract investment in Alberta. Investment in the oil sands will ensure preparedness when the markets recover. Mr. Speaker, overall, I believe that issuing Alberta savings bonds is an innovative way to continue to build our province's reputation of fiscal responsibility.

In order to ensure that this initiative can benefit all Albertans, I believe these bonds should be issued in reasonable denominations with the options of fixed and variable interest rates. The bonds could be RRSP eligible and even available for this year's RRSP season, and this will further encourage savings. Mr. Speaker, issuing Alberta savings bonds will help to ensure Alberta's return to long-term stability and prosperity. It'll provide Albertans with the unique opportunity to invest in their province. Overall, it is a continued demonstration of this province's innovative and effective fiscal planning. I'm proud to stand in this House today and support this government motion and sincerely urge all hon. members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to participate.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question for the member who just spoke would be one relating to this kind of a vehicle, a public bond investment, but wondering about an adjustment to this particular approach. Now, I know that the Industrial Heartland is very close to the heart of this member, that there are some serious delays and challenges there, and that it right now looks like it's not going to play out the way we thought it would a year or two ago. There has been talk about establishing a Crown corporation to handle bitumen upgrading. One approach to that would be an adaptation of this, like the Alberta Energy Company of many, many years ago, where public financing could be made to establish a Crown corporation to facilitate bitumen upgrading within Alberta, particularly in the Industrial Heartland. I'm just looking really for discussion here, don't need a final answer. Is that an approach that this member might like to take? It's a variation on this capital bond. Instead of investing in a road or a seniors' facility, you'd be investing in a Crown corporation to upgrade bitumen in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you wish.

Mr. Quest: You're right. The Industrial Heartland and its development is certainly very important to me and all of our members. That type of investment certainly isn't something I personally would see where these bonds would be going. This would be solid capital. This would be infrastructure. This would be roads, buildings; again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I think, referenced, projects that would have a long-term, solid benefit over an extended period of time, something really concrete. At this point, although, again, I'm very passionate about the Industrial Heartland and believe that we will see significant development there, I'm not sure that this would be the vehicle to use for that type of development.

The Speaker: Others to participate under 29(2)(a)?

Others to participate in the debate? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, do you wish to proceed? You're recognized.

Dr. Taft: Sure. Thank you. On the debate in general, Mr. Speaker, on Motion 16. For the record the motion reads: "Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities." Now, Mr. Speaker, I have to open my comments here with an observation of irony, I suppose, and paradox in that we have here a motion brought forward by the government urging itself to go back into debt. We have a caucus that has spoken enthusiastically about this. The paradox, of course, is that this government has run and this caucus was largely elected on the basis of the record of getting out of debt. I think it has to be observed that this government, which had the Fiscal Responsibility Act and, you know, various other provisions for avoiding debt at all costs, is now speaking enthusiastically about getting into it.

3:40

I think the people of Alberta need to be aware that this is a sea change. This is not a tinkering; this is a sea change in the thinking of this government. I'm not sure that it's the right sea change, I'm not sure that it's the wrong sea change, but it's definitely a 180-degree change of direction. It does make one wonder and I'm sure it will make many in the public wonder what this government exactly stands for. What happened to that ironclad, defining commitment of the previous Premier to never get back into debt?

I think we need to be careful that this in the full flood of history doesn't turn out to be 1986 all over again, which is when this government last began to really start to pile up debts. We were told that, well, it was for good causes and that, you know, it was only going to be short term and so on, but in fact it turned out to be very long term, a very difficult situation to get out of.

I'm just raising serious yellow flags here again that this idea needs to be seen in the clear light of day for what it is. This is a motion urging the government to go back into debt. We have a government that's already moved quickly back into debt. They issued well over a billion dollars of, in effect, commercial bonds earlier this year. I don't know where that billion dollars has gone. But the trend is dramatic. That's a rapid acceleration in debt, and it's something that we all need to think through as legislators very carefully.

I fully recognize a case to be made for debt. This is not something that should be determined on purely ideological grounds. It should be made on the basis of pragmatics. The case for debt right now would, for example, include the fact that interest rates are at historic lows. If you're going to go into debt, there's no better time than right now to be out there borrowing money. That needs to be considered. I'd be interested to know – there are no details in this motion – what is the term considered for these bonds? I mean by that the time frame, not the interest rate that's offered. Is it guaranteed that these will be a five-year term or a 10-year term? What will it be? Certainly, there's a case to be made that this is the time to be borrowing.

There's also the case to be made – and I've heard it from one or two, at least, of the government members – that this is a reasonable way to stabilize the long-term capital infrastructure of the province. I felt and I think history proves that some of the dramatic cuts to capital expenditures from 1993 to about 1998 were mistakes and that this rushed urgency of the last Premier to get out of debt at all cost has led to problems. We see our roads breaking down. We see shortages of hospitals, schools, and so on. This is a tool that could bring some long-term stability to the infrastructure of Alberta.

There's also a case to be made that, in fact, infrastructure should be paid over a long period of time because it's used over a long period of time. So I am recognizing in these discussions – and they'll probably be turned around and used against me at some point in the future – that there is a case to be made for debt.

But there are also some serious cases to be made against debt. The first one I've already alluded to, which is simply that we're already seeing this government go into debt through commercial paper and bonds. We're now seeing it go through these kinds of capital bonds. If this pace of debt continues to grow, we will find that we are in deep debt within just a very few years.

There's also a concern that I have that we are now sending the government out there to compete with the private sector for financing. So if you're running a private company and you want to go to the market to raise capital, as tough as that is these days, it's just going to get a little bit tougher because people now have a further choice here, the provincial bond. I'd be interested to know if any effort is being made to consult with people who raise money for the private sector about the wisdom of this program and if it runs the risk of pushing private money off the table. I think that needs to be considered as well. We don't need to make it that much more difficult for private capital to be raised.

My understanding – and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar points this out – is that there are no overall limits to what the scale of corporate bonds in this government issue might be. I mean, we've talked about over a billion dollars already, hundreds and hundreds of millions more. The Auditor General, actually, points out that there is no limit, so we might find in a year or two that we're

\$10 billion or \$20 billion back into debt. It seems to be piling up, if I was to do the math quickly, certainly at the rate of many hundreds of millions of dollars a month right now, so we do need to be careful.

Mr. Speaker, as with many things, there are multiple sides to this issue. I think, just to reiterate, that this fundamentally represents a sea change in this government. I can tell you that they didn't run in the last election on the basis of taking Alberta back into debt. I don't recall that being in the government platform. I don't know if anybody else did. In fact, they ran on the basis of being the party that took Alberta out of debt, so I think there's, you know, a public obligation here. That having been said, I like the idea of long-term stabilization for public infrastructure. Interest rates are low. I'm concerned about competing with the private sector for capital.

I will finalize by saying that if this government had managed Alberta's wealth at all effectively, we wouldn't need to have had this decision because we would have more than enough money in the bank, as Norway and Alaska and lots of other places do.

With those comments, I will take my seat and see what unfolds.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Then I'll recognize the next speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and contribute to the discussion on Motion 16, which proposes the option of raising capital by issuing Alberta savings bonds. I am totally in support of this motion because savings bonds are an attractive option for a number of reasons.

Savings bonds offer Albertans the opportunity of a safe and secure long-term investment that will promote savings and financial security for each investor. Mr. Speaker, those who purchase the bonds would be investing in the future of our province. Purchasers would be assured that the money raised from the bonds would support important capital projects that are needed in the near term. Moreover, the projects supported would be vital to our province's overall economic growth and the long-term vitality of our communities.

In addition to being a great personal investment opportunity for Albertans, the proposed bond issuance would also provide an opportunity for the government and all Albertans to invest in the necessary infrastructure now, when we can take advantage of the cost savings. Mr. Speaker, this is an opportunity that I would like to stress. There is a potential to save a significant amount of money, getting more out of our dollars. Mr. Speaker, it is projected that costs will be as much as 40 per cent lower in some cases compared to previous project costs.

3:50

Some may be skeptical, Mr. Speaker, that the cost savings are enough to justify the spending, but it is about more than the cost savings, which simply add to that great opportunity. The infrastructure projects that would be funded by the bonds would not be pet projects or unnecessary roads and facilities. The projects would be in the vital spending areas that are core to the foundations of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I can confidently say that in light of our priorities for The Way Forward any spending will be a direct investment, steel in the ground, so to speak. The entire province and all Albertans stand to benefit from investments in our core infrastructure as it supports not only our communities and the day-to-day lives of Albertans but also the economy for years to come.

Prime examples are the ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary. I am eagerly anticipating the opening of the northeast and northwest Stoney Trail sections of Calgary's ring road next week, Mr. Speaker, on November 2. I know that my constituents in Calgary-East as well are excited about the opening of the northern ring road portions, which represent about 45 per cent of the total planned ring road. Undoubtedly, anyone using Calgary roads will see the direct benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I share this enthusiasm with the rest of my Calgary colleagues and, indeed, everyone here, including the opposition members, because the entire province benefits from crucial infrastructure upgrades like that of the Calgary ring road. From the efficient transport of goods and materials to their destination, wherever it may be, to the time savings of everyday commuters the benefits are clear. Both industry and communities require a foundation of infrastructure, and I am proud that we remain committed to providing this crucial investment.

Further investments in the Calgary ring road will help us work towards a modern, efficient road network in the region. This is just one example of the type of infrastructure investment that I trust will be supported through the proposed bond issuance. Roads, Mr. Speaker, community facilities, seniors' facilities, and health facilities all represent key areas of infrastructure which will support Alberta's prosperity today and tomorrow for future generations. Failing to make new investments in these areas and to maintain the infrastructure that we have in place would be simply irresponsible as it would only increase the cost for future generations. The bond issuance that is proposed by the motion would provide capital for the types of projects I have highlighted, and the benefits are clear. The northwest and northeast portions of the Calgary ring road are just one example of the types of infrastructure projects that we can and must invest in, especially at a time when significant cost savings are possible.

I look forward to the rest of the discussion on this proposed bond issuance, and I urge all my colleagues to support this motion.

The Chair: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the Q and A side.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. There have been a lot of suggestions from the other side of the House that this is a proposal, it's a motion, it's a blue-sky document. Certainly, I heard from the hon. Member for Peace River earlier this afternoon that this is the case. To the hon. Member for Calgary-East. How is it that on the Alberta Finance and Enterprise website is this statement: "Alberta Capital Bonds will be offered for sale in February 2010"? If this is just a proposal, why is this definite statement already on the finance department's website?

Mr. Amery: Well, let me say from the outset here that all of us on this side are speaking on and supporting this motion because we believe this is a safe, secure, and dependable motion for all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I know, I assume, that the opposition on the other side will be, of course, voting against the motion.

I have a little story to tell here. Years ago, Mr. Speaker, when our children were arriving in this world, we thought about saving some money for them, trying to create some secure investments for them, so we shopped around. The best thing that we could find at that time was Canada savings bonds – by the way, that was my wife's idea – so we invested in Canada savings bonds. We found out that these Canada savings bonds double every 10 years. By the time that my children were of age to enter into a postsecondary institution, that money just came from heaven. They were able to fund their education, and we're all happy for that.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing is that I support this motion because it will allow all Albertans to invest in their own province. It gives you a good feeling. It gives me a good feeling when I am driving on the Stoney Trail – right? – next Monday, on November 2, when that portion of the Stoney Trail opens, to say: well, I have invested in this road. It gives me some good feelings when I'm driving by a hospital in my constituency to say: well, I invested in this hospital. It gives me a good feeling when I am driving by a university or a postsecondary institution to say: well, this is the result of my investments and other Albertans' investments that created all these good things for the province.

I heard other questions from members of the opposition asking a particular member as to: what has been done in your own constituency? Mr. Speaker, this is more than one constituency. This is more than my constituency and more than the hon. member's constituency. We're talking about the whole province of Alberta, the province that we love, the province in which we live, work, and raise a family.

The hon. Government House Leader mentioned the recession that hit us about a year ago. Nobody expected that there was going to be a recession. Many seniors around this province, Mr. Speaker, have lost a huge chunk of their savings. Alberta savings bonds are a safe, secure, and dependable investment, and I urge everybody to support this motion.

The Speaker: Well, we're down to one second, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. That was a pretty long anecdotal response, but we're out of time for that section.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and join the discussion on our government's motion to issue Alberta savings bonds. Savings bonds have been recognized as a convenient, secure, and low-cost product to facilitate savings and capital. They are a solid investment opportunity for Albertans to invest in their own province. As a province we have utilized this investment tool in the past with success. We recognized before, as we do now, that bonds can be used to help build a tomorrow.

Savings bonds offer prudent and hard-working people a mechanism to save for their future while enabling governments to raise capital for projects like roads, schools, and hospitals. Through Alberta capital bonds Albertans will be able to invest directly in our province. Bonds can act as a tool for Albertans to facilitate the industrial and social development of our province. For these reasons our government should introduce bonds for purchase to Albertans with the intent that our savings bond program will replicate the achievements of similar programs in other jurisdictions.

4:00

Savings bonds are particularly appealing to low- and middle-income earners because they offer these individuals an opportunity to attain their saving goals within their risk tolerance. As we know, savings help families gain a stronger financial footing, and those who are on firmer financial ground are in a better position to be active participants in the economy. Over the past year many families have probably reassessed their own household savings rate and acknowledged the importance of having assets to fall back on in tough times.

As a government we, too, recognize the importance of savings, and due to our savings we entered this recession in a stronger position than any other province in Canada. Thanks to some \$17 billion in Alberta's sustainability fund, coupled with strong fiscal

management, our government is able to continue providing the quality programs and services Albertans rely upon.

Our disciplined stewardship of our province's balance sheets has also earned Alberta an excellent credit rating. Moody's September 2009 report pegs Alberta's credit rating at triple-A and notes that Alberta has a strong net asset position and is rated at the high end of all the Canadian provinces. Moody's report states that Alberta's triple-A debt rating reflects Alberta's minimal debt burden and corresponding high shock-absorption capacity.

Our government will continue to improve our fiscal standing through prudent measures like limiting government spending and issuing savings bonds. Savings bonds are a vehicle to help Albertans build assets now and will enable our government to fund infrastructure projects at a lower cost. For this advantage alone I would recommend that Albertans be able to purchase a set amount of bonds so we can finance public projects that are essential to our long-term growth and prosperity. These projects will complement our government's 20-year capital plan, which sets the course for us to meet the needs of a growing population. The revenue generated through Alberta capital bonds should be used for supporting new transportation networks and strong infrastructure, specifically in Alberta's unique northern community.

I know that in my constituency these bonds could help further develop roads that are in desperate need of upgrades such as highway 55 and, as a result, supply people in many communities with jobs. Constructing new highways will improve connections between Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon. These connections will boost trade opportunities and will not only benefit Alberta's northern communities but communities across our province. Alberta bonds can serve as a catalyst and could help support some of these important infrastructure projects. Now is the time to fund infrastructure projects that will keep tens of thousands of Albertans working.

The province has already invested in projects in my constituency. Highway 28 between Cold Lake north and Cold Lake south is a prime example of this. Improvements to roads lead to an increase in mobility of goods throughout our province, and this mobility is essential to encourage trade and attract investments in Alberta's north. These links can be enhanced by continuing to improve our northern transportation networks, such as twinning of the Peace River bridge to improve safety and traffic operations in the area for industrial development and upgrading of highway 43 between highway 16 and Grande Prairie to expressway standards as well as building a new bypass at the town of Whitecourt to facilitate increased traffic and transport to the new Prince Rupert terminal. We should also continue to plan and build new east-west trans-Alberta connector highways across northern regions.

Now is the time to invest, time to fund infrastructure projects that'll keep tens of thousands of Albertans working, when construction costs are in some cases even 40 per cent lower. Alberta will return to economic growth, and we want to ensure that we have a strong network of highways, postsecondary institutions, and community and health facilities to spur our prosperity.

To help us remain Canada's economic engine, we should move forward with initiatives such as Alberta capital bonds that will work in tandem with our government's economic recovery and 20-year capital plan. Our economic plans will enable us to continue to fund infrastructure while moving us back into the black and saving for Alberta's future within three years. Our plan will also work to ensure that our industries are globally competitive and continue to attract investments to develop Alberta's resources so we can take full advantage of emerging trade opportunities. Furthermore, our plan focuses on helping seniors and low-income Albertans by

supporting the programs and services Alberta needs most, such as health care and education.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to offer my support to this government motion. I believe Alberta savings bonds will complement the great work our government is doing in support of our plan to enhance Alberta's quality of life and return us to economic growth.

I will now take my seat and look forward to listening to the views of my hon. colleagues on this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of questions for the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. She seems very, very plugged into the government policy, so I'm sure she'll have the answers to this. Can she give me a subtotal of all of the wish lists that we've heard described over the last couple of days? There's highway 55 in her constituency. Then later she talked about housing for seniors. I heard the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talking about schools. I heard the Member for Red Deer-North talking about seniors' housing. Obviously, there's a great wish list, and I'm just wondering if there's a subtotal somewhere that I could be let in on the amount. That's question 1.

My second question is that this motion is about creating debt. It's about setting up a system so the province can borrow money to do something. And my compliments to the Public Affairs Bureau. I have to say that everything I've heard has been consistent in the messaging of allowing Albertans to share and wonderful phrases about how they can invest and they can drive by a highway and go: I am so proud of my piece of this highway. I guess my question is: is there an understanding that this is about creating debt? Do you understand that this motion is about going into debt and that not all Albertans will be buying a capital bond?

All Albertans are taxpayers and will be sharing ultimately in the debt that's created. So if this government sells a billion dollars' worth of bonds, we have to pay that money back to those people with interest, which creates a debt for every Albertan because that's where the money comes from. Do you understand that this is about debt rather than flowery phrases about a few people that can afford to invest and buy a bond? I'm not clear on that, so maybe you can help me understand that.

Let's just go with those two questions for now. She's so plugged in, I know she'll know. [interjections]

The Speaker: Sorry. We're going to talk through the chair.

Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, do you wish to respond?

Mrs. Leskiw: No.

Mr. Snelgrove: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, I would wonder if she would be aware of the difference between an investment and an asset in the future of Alberta and debt or, because apparently some don't, if she would know the difference between appropriate use of public borrowing as defined by just about every democracy and country in the world right now and gibberish or if she thinks that there's a future for her constituency in an Alberta that's prosperous and forward looking.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Stop the clock at 1:57. We're dealing with a point of order now. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

4:10

Point of Order**Allegations against a Member**

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's just interesting that I've heard so much in the last couple of days about respectful give-and-take of ideas, and then we have ministers of the Crown who should be respected ministers of the Crown who get up and make statements which are truly casting aspersions. Under 23(h), (i), and (j), which are all about saying unnecessarily nasty things to characterize other people, which we just didn't need in this debate – the minister could have controlled himself, but he just couldn't. He had to get in there and say an allegation against another member. With the hand gesture he was certainly indicating this member because there's no one else on this end that it could possibly be at this time.

I don't think it's a motive to say that anything that I was referring to was gibberish, but it was certainly using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." I would ask that the member withdraw that. I mean, I'm more than willing to engage in the debate. If the member had listened to what I'd been saying, I clearly outlined the case for borrowing for capital projects, so clearly I do understand it.

I'm asking the minister to contribute to some good give-and-take in this Assembly, to encourage a good give-and-take and respect between the two sides of this House, and withdraw his comment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: No. We're not going any further. It's 11 minutes after 4 on the fourth day of the first week, and the chair is going to deal with this matter right now.

Two segments ago under the Q and A – part of the Q and A is to deal with policy questions and debating questions – the chair almost intervened when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar personally went after the hon. Minister of Education over his budget, which has absolutely nothing to do with the debate that we had. But the chair didn't. The hon. Government House Leader responded, and it was dealt with.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, you turned around on at least two or three occasions and looked directly at the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and said, "Do you understand?" Boy, if that isn't suggestive in a lot of ways that could lead to a lot of violations of 23(h), (i), and (j) – but the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake did not.

Then the hon. President of the Treasury Board got up and, for whatever machismo or honourable reason, in order to defend the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, used the word gibberish. Well, okay. Gibberish is not a word that we've ever ruled out to be inoffensive in the past.

So I'm just saying that it's not a point of order. We're going back. We've got one minute and 57 seconds in this Q and A. If anybody wants to raise a question with respect to the submission made by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, please prepare to do it, but we're dealing with policy things. We're not putting down people, and we're not being suggestive that somebody who says something in this House is ignorant or does not know what they're talking about. That is wrong, and there's no more issue on this issue. There is no issue. No. I'm not going forward on this; 1:57 left. Okay.

Ms Blakeman: Well, under 13(2) I'm allowed to ask the Speaker to explain.

The Speaker: I just did. I said the matter is over. Do you want to participate in the Q and A side?

Ms Blakeman: Yes.

The Speaker: There's 1:57 left. Proceed through the chair.

Ms Blakeman: I have a question. I'm wondering, given the statements that I heard the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake make, if she does understand the difference between creating debt and offering something . . .

The Speaker: Please sit down. If we want to have a debate on semantics, you can have a debate on semantics. But I think that for the most part people do not attack one another personally.

Ms Blakeman: It's not an attack. It's a question.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, please. Just listen to yourself. Just listen to yourself.

There was a question. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, if you wish to proceed, go ahead.

Mrs. Leskiw: No, I'd just like to make a comment. I may not know all the semantics about what goes on with Alberta bonds, but I do know that my own father bought Canada bonds for all us kids when we were growing up to invest in this country that he adopted as his home. I believe in this province like my father did. I believe that to invest in Alberta is the prudent thing to do. I know that when we can invest in Alberta and invest in infrastructure to keep Albertans working, it's a good thing. I may not understand all the things that go around with the fine print, but I do understand that anything to do with investing in this great province to keep as many people working as possible is a good thing.

The Speaker: There are 45 seconds left if anybody else has a question.

There being none, I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning to participate in the debate.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to give my support to Government Motion 16, which proposes to introduce Alberta capital bonds. The global economic downturn has affected everyone throughout the world – governments, businesses, seniors – but Alberta is the only province which saved money for the rainy days. For example, the Alberta government saved \$17 billion in the sustainability fund, which it will use to help cover revenue shortfall. In addition, the Alberta government has a 20-year capital plan, which it will use for capital infrastructure projects, about \$22 billion over three years. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are known as hard-working people, Albertans like those in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning, who told me that they would like to invest money in Alberta savings bonds.

By promoting investment and saving within the province, Albertans stand to gain a lot, providing benefits for them and their families down the road. I hear the same from coffee shops to dinner tables: Albertans want to invest in Alberta. After all, this is a good way to invest in the province's infrastructure, infrastructure such as highways, schools, and seniors' long-term facilities. Mr. Speaker, I can see every Albertan being proud to invest in capital savings bonds, knowing that their investment will build the province.

I hope that Albertans are able to buy RRSPs. The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise needs to work with the federal government so that Alberta capital bonds will be RRSP eligible.

Other generations will benefit from this investment. I also expect that they will have great returns. They will benefit from projects like twinning highway 63. This project will link the rest of Alberta.

There will be economic potential for Fort McMurray which will ultimately promote population growth and economic development. Not only would this project efficiently move goods and services, but it will also prevent road accidents and save lives.

Mr. Speaker, building infrastructure will give Albertans jobs. At the same time, getting up to 40 per cent of the savings cannot be wrong. In turn, these savings can be used to develop seniors' housing, long-term care centres so that seniors can live in the community that they have lived in all their lives. Alberta has a triple-A credit rating. It's a good opportunity for seniors to invest like other Albertans. These capital bonds will give Albertans a good return on their money, money that will stay in the province. The bonds will position us well ahead of the curve as we come out of the economic downturn. This money will end up in Alberta roads, schools, and long-term care, not in New York. After all, these projects will be needed.

Approximately 50,000 new people are expected to move into our province, and it's easy to see why. Now Alberta is the only province with no sales tax, low corporation tax and personal income tax, but it has a strong education system and strong, safe communities. Mr. Speaker, I came to Canada in 1979 with my parents. I landed in Vancouver, B.C., but I learned fast, and within two years I moved to Edmonton, the city I now call my home, the province where, I am proud to say, my oldest son graduated from the University of Alberta with a bachelor of commerce degree. I was impressed with our recent discussion at the dinner table when he said that offering Alberta savings bonds was a wise move for the Alberta government.

4:20

We will also continue to promote a business-friendly environment and a solid foundation for all Albertans to grow their roots. Mr. Speaker, with Alberta's economic track record, bright future, and the leadership of the government the bonds would be one of the safest investments you could make. When I was talking to my son, he talked to his friends at the same time, all university students. He said: "Dad, when I talk to my friends, they all like this good idea. They all just want to participate. They'd like to buy bonds." This is a good way to build our province, of which we are all proud.

In closing, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise for introducing the motion and urge all members to support it. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Effective April 1, 2005, the Fiscal Responsibility Act requires that the financial assets in the debt retirement account must be equal to or greater than the amount of the accumulated debt at the fiscal year-end. During 2008-09 the province complied with the act. My question to the hon. member is this: if we borrow – I'm just going to pick a figure – \$500 million in bonds, can the hon. member guarantee that we will still comply with the act in the next fiscal year?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member if he wishes to respond.

Mr. Sandhu: No comment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The previous member, for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, raised an issue that I think should be on the mind of the Member for Edmonton-Manning and all of us, which is

Alberta's debt rating. Now, we've been told in debate here that Moody's debt rating agency gives Alberta a triple-A debt rating on the basis of Alberta's minimal debt. The fact that we have a relatively small debt gives us a high debt rating. So my question to the Member for Edmonton-Manning is: is he concerned that as we begin issuing bonds – and make no mistake; bonds equal debt – as we begin driving Alberta back into debt, our debt rating is going to start diminishing again?

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to participate?

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, hon. member. We're selling capital bonds, and we're investing at the same time in infrastructure which is for generations to use. We build bridges. We build highways. We build seniors' facilities. The benefits from all the money we're going to pay are going to Albertans. We need to build these facilities. All the members here, everybody wants their roads, everybody wants schools, everybody wants bridges, so we are investing money back to Albertans. That's all I can say.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona also rose.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a question for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. My understanding is that the member in a previous life was a very successful builder, so my question would be: would you have been able to build your business, create jobs in your own company, create jobs for subtrades, create jobs in suppliers, generate wealth for all those people all the way down the line, would you have been able to do any of that plus, obviously, supply some people with some very nice homes in the process, would you have been able to achieve anything without creating some debt?

The Speaker: Once again, that's pretty personal. Hon. member, you're on the edge if you want to respond, then.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, hon. member. You know, when you're building anything, nothing comes free. You have to take money from somewhere to build. So in selling the bonds, creating money, money goes back to Albertans. At the same time we're building infrastructure. Like I said, highway 63 could save people, could move stuff to the economic engine for the whole of Alberta. The highway could be used for everybody. Everybody gets the advantage when we get good infrastructure built, but it's not going to come free. It's going to cost money. I think we have the opportunity. We could save 40 per cent on the costs. It's very low these days, and we can build and invest this money in Albertans. Albertans get the benefit of that return.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. I think the debate of this issue has been good, and it's been healthy. There may be a time when this province does have to borrow money once again. I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Manning if he thought that... [Mr. VanderBurg's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Sorry. That's it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill on the debate.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and to speak to Motion 16. I want to acknowledge the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who referred to what he

called a sea change in policy for the government, where we are projecting to run a deficit. As he knows, of course, we had a budget debate in this House. We talked about the necessity of running a temporary deficit. If there was a sea change, however, I would suggest that it's with the Liberal opposition. It's one of those sea changes like the tide that comes every 24 and a half hours or 25 hours.

Yesterday I listened with great interest as members of the Official Opposition were alluding in a negative way to some budget restraints in the fields of education and health care. Today two members also were talking about why couldn't we fund more health care centres and why couldn't we fund more nurses and why couldn't we put nurses in all of the seniors' facilities and so on. Yet they seem also to be reticent about supporting the whole idea of a capital bond. I would point out that the motion says "approve in general." We seem to be stuck in debating how long the bonds are going to be and how much the bonds are going to be and all of the nitty-gritty, but we're talking about approving in general the issue of capital bonds by the government.

Again on the issue of a sea change, extraordinary times these are,

and I would say that extraordinary times call for extraordinary solutions. I would just point out that a Liberal government in the province of Ontario right now is running a deficit. In fact, they're projecting a deficit, according to my figures, of \$24.7 billion this year, and as of September 30 the government of the province of Ontario had a \$193.3 billion debt. Wow. There's a difference. By contrast, this province has no net debt. Zero. None.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is but one part of Canada. Canada is part of what is becoming an increasingly interdependent world economy. We have been experiencing a global economic recession. It has brought with it low commodity prices, and the province of Alberta has not been immune from the effects of this recession. So make no mistake about it . . .

The Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. You will be recognized next when this debate returns. You still have a number of minutes.

It's now 4:30, and the House stands adjourned until Monday afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to October 29, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c11]

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c12]

- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c13]
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c9]
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407-08 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cS-23.5]
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1408-09 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c22]
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c31]
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c27]
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409-11 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 cC-2.5]
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]

- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1411 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 1, 2009; SA 2009 c30]
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c14]
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cL-2.5]
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1265 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329 (May 26 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c18]
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329-30 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1527-28 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2010; SA 2009 c29]
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c17]

- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1447-49 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force September 1, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c32]
- 26* Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1265-68 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1330-31 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1412-13 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c36]
- 27* Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve.), 1229-40 (May 25 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1507-10 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.7]
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246-49 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1413 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c20]
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1268-69 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1358-60 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c21]
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1269-73 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1360-63 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528-30 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c35]
- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1273-75 (May 26 aft., passed)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1275-80 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365 (May 27 eve.), 1449-55 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.5]
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1526-27 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 cF-15.1]

- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1384-87 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2009 cD-17.5]
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1280-81 (May 26 aft.), 1344-45 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524-25 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c24]
- 36* Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1371-84 (May 27 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1503-07 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-26.8]
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c15]
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c34]
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406-07 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c33]
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c16]
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1345-50 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387-90 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525-26 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cP-29.1]
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1350-58 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1455-60 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c23]

- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365-71 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1497-99 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c28]
- 44* Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1283-84, 1294-1329 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1460-80 (Jun. 1 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c26]
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1240-46 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1510 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1523 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c19]
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft., passed)
- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c8]
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
- 49 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1500-01 (Jun. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Knight)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1501-02 (Jun. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 52* Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health), (May 25 aft., reported to Assembly)
Committee of the Whole -- 1284-94 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1526 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c25]
- 53 Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
- 54 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 1569 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
- 55 Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
- 56 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
- 57 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)

- 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
- 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009 (Quest)**
First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1209-15 (May 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c10]
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1215-22 (May 25 aft.), 1427-33 (Jun. 1 aft., passed on division)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1433-38 (Jun. 1 aft.), 1547-55 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
- 208 Life Leases Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 1208 (May 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1555-59 (Oct. 26 aft., adjourned)
- 209 Children's Services Review Committee Act (Chase)**
First Reading -- 1610 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)
- Pr00 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c37]
- Pr00 Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1530-31 (Jun. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c38]
- Pr00 Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c39]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, November 2, 2009

Issue 53

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 2, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. Renew us with Your strength. Focus us in our deliberations. Challenge us in our service to the people of this great province. Amen.

Hon. members and to all our special guests, today we will proceed with the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led in the Assembly today by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all here to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: For the schoolchildren in the Assembly today, yes, that is the same Mr. Lorieau who does the singing at the Edmonton Oilers hockey games.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House here today 43 extraspecial students from the Edmonton-Mill Creek constituency who attend Julia Kiniski elementary school. Today they are accompanied by two outstanding Alberta teachers, Susan Skillings and Dale Mandryk. They're here to learn about the democratic process, and I want to say thank you for having invited me to be there for reading week with you. Please, if you would all rise, we'll thunderously applaud you. Thank you for coming.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you 30 students from l'école St. Angela, who I believe are seated above me in the public gallery, and their teacher, Miss Meghan St. Pierre. An interesting note is that all of the grade 6 classes at l'école St. Angela will be participating in School at the Legislature. I would ask them all now to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure and an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 26 grade 9 students from Ponoka composite high school. They are very bright and eager young students. They're here with their two teachers, Mr. Brady Teeling

and Mrs. Lacey Elliott. They're seated above me in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a group visiting this afternoon from St. Kevin school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are in the public gallery. I would now ask them to rise as I introduce them. This is a small delegation. It's led by teacher Mrs. Tammy Genge and parent helper Mrs. Laura Tetrault. The students accompanying them this afternoon are Zane Cumby and Rainy Gosselin. If they would now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you three constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie who are seated in the members' gallery: Otto Wollin; his wife, Traute; and son Harold. On September 10, 2009, Mr. Otto Wollin celebrated his 90th birthday, a celebration I was honoured to be part of. Some interesting facts about the couple: they met in January, got married in May, and moved to Edmonton on October 30, 1949. I want to thank them for 60 years of making Alberta a better place with their presence here. I would now ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two special guests, dear to me, who are in the public gallery, Mr. Jagan Nath Gupta and Mr. Amit Gupta. Both of these gentlemen are here today to watch question period and see democracy in action. I would like to ask these gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One week ago I stood in this Assembly and announced the launch of Alberta's H1N1 pandemic flu vaccine program, the largest immunization ever in the history of this province. I urged all Albertans to join in the effort to control this new virus and get vaccinated, and mass clinics started delivering the vaccine last Monday. Now, I announced at that time that our efforts would focus on high-risk groups first, but I also said that we would not turn anyone away. And Albertans heard that message. In fact, the response was so great that clinics in Edmonton and Calgary were quickly overwhelmed. In the first week, thanks to the tireless efforts of this province's health care workers, almost 400,000 Albertans received their flu vaccinations. That's over 10 per cent of Albertans, and no matter what anyone says, that's an amazing accomplishment.

We also found out late last week that the amount of vaccine that was going to be shipped to all provinces was going to be significantly reduced over the next two weeks. Less than expected vaccine shipments from the manufacturer in Quebec and a huge unanticipated demand at mass clinics resulted in a perfect storm. So on Saturday our public health officials made a decision. Under the direction of our chief medical officer of health we suspended our mass immunization clinics. Alberta Health Services officials have spent the last two days refocusing their immunization plan to target only high-risk groups over the next few weeks. A new plan will be rolled out tomorrow. Details will be announced by Alberta Health Services. Priority will be given to children six months to less than five years of age, pregnant women, and, shortly after, people under 65 with chronic health conditions.

Now, I need to assure all members that strict enforcement of this new plan will have to be implemented, and we are working through measures to ensure that we have a reasonable approach to ensure compliance. No one likes to turn away citizens of this province from receiving their vaccination, but unfortunately, with a limited supply, we are left with no choice.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, there will always be Monday morning quarterbacks who will be critical of our program, but the facts speak for themselves: Alberta has vaccinated approximately 10 per cent of our population in just six days, and that will reduce the impact on our health care system.

During the next two weeks we will refocus our efforts on vaccinating only those at high risk, and over the next two months, as our vaccine supply increases, we will fulfill our obligation to vaccinate all Albertans that so choose. Mr. Speaker, that is a commitment that this government has made and it will stand by.

Thank you.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on behalf of Alberta's Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first duty of a responsible government is to protect its citizens. The minister of health's abysmal record over the past 18 months proves that this administration has utterly failed to carry out this sacred responsibility. Tens of thousands of vulnerable Albertans – cancer patients, children and pregnant women, and the chronically ill – are at serious risk thanks to the lack of good leadership and management from the health minister and the Premier. Abruptly shutting down Alberta's immunization clinics when we still have hundreds of thousands of doses of vaccine available shows that this administration is panicking at a time when Albertans can least afford it. It's just the latest bad decision in a long line of them.

For years we and others have warned this administration that their mismanagement has left the health care system with no capacity to cope with a major crisis. Even on routine days our major hospitals are at or over capacity, with not a single bed available. It's become normal for patients to wait in emergency rooms for days.

For the last year and a half this minister has sown discord and chaos throughout the public health care system. He dissolved the regional health authorities and the advisory groups – AADAC, the Alberta Cancer Board – with no transition plan and no evidence to base these decisions on. He oversaw the unexpected termination of three medical officers of health last spring and the chief of the provincial lab early this summer, people who would have been invaluable during this pandemic. He denies our critical nursing shortage despite the evidence. We raised a red flag about the breakdown of management in August this year, when my Health

critic wrote a five-page letter to the Premier with detailed questions and concerns about preparation for H1N1. It took two months for this administration to reply, with little more than an acknowledgment of the letter and a copy of some of the planning documents.

Alberta has been unprepared for any kind of health care crisis for years thanks to Tory mismanagement, and now the chickens have come home to roost. We have no surge capacity in our hospitals. Our system is already struggling to deal with the demands of a growing population and increased numbers of senior citizens. This administration has left the health care system in such a state that our health care professionals no longer have the confidence and the capacity to deal with any large-scale disaster.

Mr. Speaker, I implore this government to provide the necessary resources to immediately inoculate high-risk Albertans as quickly as possible. Open a sufficient number of well-staffed clinics to handle the load. Invite all available health care professionals, including students and retired professionals, to assist. As a physician myself I would be happy to again offer my services for this.

It's all well and good to talk about Monday morning quarterbacking, Mr. Speaker, but when the general manager is on vacation and the coach has no playbook, Albertans are left with little choice but to let their leaders know when they've dropped the ball. No more excuses.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the leader of the third party to respond to the ministerial statement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a request for unanimous consent. That means everybody has to agree. If one person disagrees, consent is denied. I'm just going to ask one question. Anyone who is opposed to allowing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to participate, please say no at this time.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House.

The ministerial statement we just heard sounded more like a ministerial fairy tale: after a few unavoidable bumps along the road, the H1N1 ogre is defeated by the heroic health minister, and everyone lives happily ever after. I wonder how this fantastic tale will be received by those who have stood for hours and hours in lines and still didn't get vaccinated or those who attended the pointless assessment clinics, standing in line for hours with people already sick with H1N1. As if the virus doesn't spread fast enough on its own, this government designed a program to help it spread faster. I wonder how vulnerable Albertans, those who should have been a priority, feel about this fairy tale as they watch those who are strong enough to stand in line for many hours get the vaccine which they needed.

Mr. Speaker, I received this e-mail from my sister in Calgary on Saturday.

Dear Brian,

I just wanted to tell you to keep hammering away at . . . And she uses his name, but I'll say the Premier.

. . . about this vaccine fiasco. We just went up to the closest clinic at 5:45 a.m. (it opens at 8:30) and clearly people had been there all

night long. The lineup stretched the entire length of the mall and down the street. We couldn't see the end of it. I estimate about 3000 people. This is at 5:50 a.m. for a clinic that opens at 8:30. This is the 6th attempt I have made to get the vaccine and I am considered high risk because I am immuno-suppressed because of the drug . . . that I am taking.

It is unbelievable that the Governments (on all levels) can create this kind of panic and not have the resources to deal with the resulting chaos. They created it because a poll showed that 47% of Canadians weren't going to have the vaccine and so they went to work with their scare-mongering tactics and whipped people up into a frenzy and now they can't handle it.

I think [the Premier and the health minister] are getting off entirely too easy on this.

Your loving sister,
Jo-Ann.

The minister has outlined his plan B, and it looks like what other provinces did from the start; that is, giving priority to those Albertans who are more likely to face a serious illness or death as a result of contracting H1N1. Better late than never, but Albertans will not soon forget the fear, confusion, and chaos of Alberta's H1N1 immunization program. I hope there is a happy ending, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans should not believe the fairy tale they heard from the health minister today.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Devon Energy Steward of Excellence President's Award

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate Devon Energy for its extraordinarily innovative pipelining practices. Devon's pipelining strategies are so effective that the company received the 2009 steward of excellence president's award. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers presents the steward of excellence awards every year, acknowledging improvements in environmental, health and safety, and social performance. This award honours Devon Energy's ability to reduce their pipeline footprint on agricultural land. In fact, Devon's new technique, called innovative pipelining strategies, reduces right-of-way impact by approximately 50 per cent. This greatly benefits farmers as well as the environment. This technique helps to ensure that we continue to have responsible resource development, which is one of this government's top priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Devon Energy collaborated with Alberta Environment's partners in resource excellence initiative, which includes producers, contractors, inventors, landowners, and regulators, and it is obvious that these efforts have paid off, since they successfully minimized pipeline disturbance. Hopefully, other companies can learn from Devon's best practices and collaborative partnerships. I look forward to the future because this initiative is only the beginning in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise in this Assembly to say a few words about the single-largest transportation project in Alberta's history. Several members and I attended the opening for the new Stoney Trail ring road in Calgary this morning. This road represents an investment of over \$1 billion by this government in Alberta's highway network. This new

44-kilometre road is the concrete result of a forward-thinking vision that began over 30 years ago. Today I wish to honour those who had the vision and the ambition all those years ago to start planning the transportation and utility corridors around our two major cities. Their foresight is paying dividends for Albertans today and will continue to benefit Albertans well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary is a major city in a growing province that needs and deserves a world-class road on which to move its people and goods safely and efficiently. This road will allow Calgarians more time to do what matters most. We are a government committed to enhancing the quality of life of all of our citizens. Whether you live in Monterey Park or Tuscany, Citadel or Applewood, Signal Hill or Marlborough Park, this road allows Calgarians more time to spend doing things that matter most. This road means that Bobby in Citadel can visit family in Marlborough Park more often. My constituent in Monterey Park can get home from work in Tuscany sooner to help his children with homework. A young family in Signal Hill can get to the North East Sportsplex sooner for hockey practice. This road is about government giving Calgarians more of what they value: time.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given the complete failure of his ministry in responsibly dealing with pandemic H1N1, something this administration has been planning for for years, will the minister admit that he is ultimately responsible?

Mr. Liepert: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, ultimately responsible, but with responsibility we also have to deal with the facts. As I outlined in my ministerial statement, we have 400,000 Albertans who will not be using our emerg wards at our hospitals. The concern that this member has just been expressing not only in his statement but consistently in this House is that we lack surge capacity. Well, what better way to deal with a so-called lack of surge capacity than to vaccinate? It has been tremendously successful in getting 400,000 Albertans vaccinated.

Dr. Swann: Well, this minister clearly still doesn't get it, that it's the high-risk people that end up taking up the surge capacity, Mr. Minister.

Again, the minister has shown himself to be incapable of managing the system. Will he now do the decent thing, the right thing, and resign?

Mr. Liepert: I guess it would be nice if it were that simple, Mr. Speaker. You know, somehow this particular member seems to be implying that this has only happened in Alberta. Well, I'm here to tell you that all Canadians – all Canadians – have rallied around the necessity to get vaccinated, and all governments are dealing with the same issue. I can tell you what we will do. We will roll out tomorrow a staged approach going forward, and as I said in my statement earlier, high-priority Albertans will now be the priority.

Dr. Swann: My final question. To the Premier: given the disaster this week for your administration will you fire this minister today?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have every confidence in my

minister. I also have confidence in our medical officer of health. I met with both this morning plus the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Solicitor General to ensure that as we move forward on the plan that will be articulated tomorrow by Alberta Health Services, all ministries that have anything to do with providing more comfort, reducing the waiting lines throughout all of the clinics across Alberta put all the resources that we can to ensure that this is done in an orderly manner. Tomorrow there will be further news in terms of availability of the vaccine and how we're going to proceed.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has a leadership review coming this Saturday. This is a key opportunity to show true leadership. To the Premier: does the Premier accept ultimate responsibility for the failure of Alberta's health care system to cope with this H1N1 pandemic?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as Premier of the province, of course, all of the issues and responsibility rest in this office. I can tell you that from what information I have and in looking at the news right across the whole nation, this province has vaccinated 400,000 Albertans of all categories – all categories – in terms of high risk and low risk. They did their civic duty. Yes, they stood in line, but you know what? That's 400,000 more people that have a vaccination, that are now at little or no risk because they've received their vaccination, and they'll take the pressure off our emergency wards.

Dr. Swann: With hundreds of thousands of doses of H1N1 available today in the province, why are those most vulnerable to H1N1 sitting on their thumbs waiting for this vaccine when you contacted people this weekend and closed clinics? Why do you not open these clinics today to provide those vaccines to those people?

Mr. Stelmach: Well, misinformation: there are not hundreds of thousands of doses available.

I'll ask the minister to respond to the latter part of the question.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we will deal with in rolling out tomorrow is the fact that we need to ensure that we go in a staged approach going forward because we don't want to get in the situation of stopping and starting. If we were to listen to the opposition, we would have had multiple clinics open throughout the province on days 1 and 2, and our vaccine would have expired. Albertans would have been showing up, and there wouldn't have been vaccine. We want to ensure that going forward we have a consistent approach to vaccination.

Dr. Swann: Health care professionals are now calling and are not receiving H1N1 when it's available even though they're the ones that are facing the people with H1N1 in emergency departments and in the hospitals. What do you say to these health professionals, Mr. Premier, with doses of vaccine sitting available?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's ironic how the position of the Leader of the Opposition has changed over a matter of days. Early last week he was supporting all Albertans to go and receive the vaccine, and I guess that on November 1, yesterday, and into today, November 2, he has now changed his position. At the beginning of the week he encouraged everybody to go to clinics and get their vaccine, and as of yesterday, well, they should have prioritized the high risk. You know what? Everybody can predict the past, even the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier needs to take immediate action to repair the damage that this minister of health has already done to our health care system. Again to the Premier: will the Premier immediately contact retired doctors and nurses and students to assist in administering this vaccine as soon as possible?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, those are decisions made by the medical officer of health. I know that last week the minister signed a ministerial order allowing more health care professionals to administer the vaccine. Again, I have full confidence and trust in Dr. Corriveau and Dr. Predy, and they are doing a good job given the limited supply of vaccine that's available to every province. We will make the best decisions based on the medical evidence that's presented by the doctors.

Dr. Swann: Interesting that the Premier is now interested in evidence when we've been ignoring evidence for the last couple of months.

Every Albertan knows that the hospitals have no spare beds and no extra staff. Will the Premier commit to staffing our hospitals properly for this pandemic?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, last week I mentioned that we'll make every resource available to ensure that we get through the vaccination program and deal with any other circumstances that might avail themselves in the province, but once again I want to reiterate that it's not an issue of not having enough medical professionals to administer the vaccine. The issue is that there is a shortage of the vaccine made available by the only one supplier in Canada, and that shortage is experienced by all provinces in the country of Canada.

Dr. Swann: Finally to the Premier: when the immunization clinics open later this week, will the Premier ensure that these clinics have the capacity to not keep the most vulnerable people waiting for four hours for their injection? Will you guarantee that?

Mr. Stelmach: The plan will be unveiled, and certainly what we have learned from the past week will be taken into consideration. As well, there will be very clear communication. I just urge all Albertans to listen very closely to what we unveil tomorrow so that they can access in those high-risk groups, children and also pregnant women. There'll be clear indication where the clinics will be and at what times the vaccine will be made available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for High-risk Albertans

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Day after day Albertans waited in line for hours at flu clinics, camping overnight, missing work, and risking infection from others, only to be turned away again and again. This government has created fear, confused people with contradictory messages, and did not ensure that high-risk populations were vaccinated first. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, can you explain to Albertans how you have failed in handling the largest public health crisis our province has ever seen?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in reply to the question from the leader, there were a number of doses of vaccine that were said to be

available to the province in the earlier stages of planning. That changed significantly towards the end of last week. We have to make changes in the way the vaccine will be now administered, especially to those high-risk groups that I had mentioned: children six months to five years and also pregnant women. As I said, the plan will be unveiled tomorrow as to when the clinics will restart, where the clinics will be. We also want to make sure that where the vaccine will be administered, it's as comfortable as possible for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Opening just a handful of urban clinics to serve 3 million people was a terrible mistake. Failing to target high-risk groups, forcing those least able to line up and camp overnight in the dark and in the cold is unforgivable. Creating assessment centres where the sick are crowded together with the uninfected is not only stupid; it's irresponsible. Why won't the Premier admit that his government has made mistake after mistake after mistake?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the advice in terms of how the vaccine should be administered comes directly from the medical officers of health, and quite frankly I do have confidence in them. They have the experience, the education. They know the evidence behind it. We listen to their advice, and then we incorporate whatever decisions based on the evidence brought forward by the physicians.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First the government scared people so that tens of thousands descended on clinics that couldn't handle the load. Massive lineups meant that only the strong and healthy could get the vaccine while the vulnerable people who needed it most had to return home, sometimes in tears. Albertans want to know who is accountable for this mess. Who is ultimately responsible, Mr. Premier? Is it Dr. Corriveau, is it the Minister of Health and Wellness, or is it you?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to put some things in perspective here. Last week in question period this particular member was asking us what we're doing about the homeless. Well, let me tell you what we did about the homeless. The homeless have been vaccinated. Last week we heard about our aboriginal population, another very high-risk group. I can tell you that our aboriginal population has been vaccinated. Another high-risk group is our health care workers. Every health care worker in this province who wanted to get vaccinated has been vaccinated. Let's talk about the success of this program, not continue to dwell on the fears of this particular member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization (continued)

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the mass H1N1 vaccination clinics were temporarily closed. Most of the focus has been on lineups in the cities, but the people in my area have great concerns there isn't a plan for rural and remote communities. Planned clinics in Cypress-Medicine Hat were advertised on the government website and then cancelled. To the Minister of

Health and Wellness: what are you doing to ensure the pandemic plan includes Albertans in rural areas just as much as those living in cities?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question, unlike what we've just heard. That particular plan will also be part of what Alberta Health Services will be announcing and communicating tomorrow. I should say that there's no question that our intention in some of the smaller communities around the province was to try and get the vaccine to physicians and pharmacists as quickly as we could. The tremendous take-up of the mass clinics derailed that particular effort. There probably are some areas of the province that did get neglected, and that's what we have to deal with going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past few days my office has taken calls related to the mass immunization clinics set up for the H1N1 vaccine. Many never did get the vaccine after waiting in long lines, and they would like some answers. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: what is the plan for school-age children that cannot wait in line for the H1N1 vaccine?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, I don't want to preannounce what Alberta Health Services is going to be announcing tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. That will be dealt with.

Keep in mind that school-age children, unless they have underlying medical conditions, are not the high priority. I know I've had some members ask me about vaccinating in schools. Again, as the Premier has indicated, the chief medical officer of health is the quarterback of this planning process, and he will adjust as we need. Right now school-age children are not the highest priority.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Seniors in my area lit my phone lines off the hook last week and this weekend with complaints about the long lines either inside or outside in the cold. With the clinics temporarily closed this week will vaccinations for seniors also be reviewed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, there will be some review, Mr. Speaker. Again, unless seniors have underlying medical conditions, they are not in the highest priority category. As we've heard here today, with a lot of yipping across the way, we want to ensure that the highest priority, those at highest risk in the province, are dealt with, and that's what we will be announcing tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Medical Tent at Stollery Children's Hospital

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness threw Alberta's health system into confusion and crisis when he dissolved the health regions and the Alberta Cancer Board. We've been receiving increasingly panicked calls from cancer patients who urgently need the H1N1 vaccine. Because of chemotherapy some of them literally cannot wait until tomorrow, and they cannot stand in line for hours. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does he understand that dissolving the

Alberta Cancer Board created a leadership vacuum in which nobody considered the high-risk needs of cancer patients?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Services Board has a mandate to provide equitable health care across this province; it doesn't matter where you live. That will be the same policy and priority that will take place with the H1N1 vaccination program. The member should listen attentively tomorrow when Alberta Health Services rolls out its plan.

Dr. Taft: Well, in a bizarre example of how one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing in the department of health, because this minister created total chaos, the pandemic tent at the Stollery children's hospital, having been set up 18 months ago, was taken down last week just as the pandemic hit. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how does he explain leaving up the pandemic tent at the Stollery for 18 months when there was no pandemic and then taking it down the first week the pandemic hits?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, it was the day that I visited the University emergency, last Wednesday, when the head of emerg at the University was proudly showing me the fact that the tent was gone and construction was going to start the next day. If the member is going to suggest here that he doesn't like that idea, well, then, I suggest he should say so because it's in his constituency, and there are a lot of constituencies around this province that would gladly have health care construction tomorrow.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the physicians from that department who were talking to me are saying, quote: it is beyond stupidity to take down a pandemic tent that has been set up for 18 months the first week the pandemic hits. Will this Minister of Health and Wellness take steps to ensure that that pandemic tent is set up somewhere else, where it can be used for the purposes it was paid for?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this just shows that this member doesn't even know what's going on in his own constituency because the tent was never set up for pandemic purposes. The tent was set up for emergency services at the Stollery children's hospital. Now, with the announcement that this government is going to proceed with the construction of the emergency services at Stollery hospital, is this member suggesting that we should stop just because we have a vaccination program going? I suggest he should stand up and say so if that's what his view is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning I had the privilege of joining the Minister of Transportation and several other members of this Assembly at the opening of the northeast and northwest Calgary ring roads. Obviously, people in Calgary are very excited to be able to use these new sections of the ring road. I know this project has been in the works for a number of years, and it's great to see it come to fruition, but I do have some questions. To the Minister of Transportation: can the minister tell this Assembly what has led up to this opening and the timeline behind it, please?

2:10

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, this vision began 30 years ago, and today it became a reality. That foresight is paying dividends for Albertans today and will continue to benefit Albertans in the future.

Thinking big and planning for the future and being innovative is what Alberta is all about.

Today we opened 44 kilometres of world-class ring road that will benefit the residents of Calgary and our entire provincial highway network, Mr. Speaker. This new road will help move people and goods safely and efficiently in and around Calgary. It is such a good road that I hope the hon. member will make sure he obeys the speed limit in his new blue van.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. We're all concerned about money these days. How much did this program cost, and how can we ensure that Albertans got good value for their money?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the single-largest transportation project dollarwise in Alberta's history, an investment of over \$1 billion by this government: Stoney Trail northwest, \$460 million; Stoney Trail northeast, \$650 million, in 2007 dollars. The northeast was built as a P3 project. In fact, when the Premier was Minister of Transportation, he knew we could do things better. We have now successfully used the P3 model on both Calgary and Edmonton ring roads. P3s are only considered when a thorough business case. . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. member has the floor. If he doesn't want it, he doesn't have to take it.

Mr. Denis: Well, Mr. Speaker, one more question to the same minister. Now that the northern sections of the Calgary ring road are open, when can I expect to drive my blue van on the southeast leg?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the southeast section is out for tender right now, and we expect to start construction in the spring of 2010 and open the road to traffic in the fall of 2013.

As far as the southwest section we all know that the Tsuu T'ina Nation voted against the agreement in July. We respect that decision. We are moving forward, and we're committed to completing the ring road. We're now working with the city of Calgary to find an effective transportation solution that will meet the immediate traffic issues in Calgary and support this province's long-term plans. This work is going well and moving ahead. There have been no decisions made. I have to admit that we probably will have a tough time meeting our 2015 guideline on that southwest now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Climate Change

Ms. Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While the Premier is fearmongering on climate change, the rest of the world is taking action. A report came out last week stating that Albertans can enjoy continued growth and prosperity while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. That message is clearly lost to this government. To the Minister of Environment: given that Shell is asking for stricter greenhouse gas targets and regulations to stay internationally competitive, when will the minister protect our energy industry's assets and reputation by implementing absolute targets and meaningful regulations?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind this member that

Alberta still is the only jurisdiction in Canada that actually has legislation in place that mandates reductions in CO₂. That being said, Alberta has been more than open in working with our partners not only at the Canadian national level but internationally, with particular emphasis on our neighbours to the south, and has been engaged very actively in discussing a balanced approach on a go-forward basis so that we can achieve that very target that the member is alluding to.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. A prominent Calgary-based solar energy firm is moving to Ontario. Why will this government not invest in renewable energy and stop the wealth transfer and the loss of jobs?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, because this government believes that it's not the role of the government to invest in energy. It's the role of the private sector, and we'll do everything we can to assist them.

Ms Blakeman: No wonder they're leaving.

Again to the same minister. According to a government of Alberta report, if energy efficiency measures had been instituted in 1990, we would be emitting 60 per cent less emissions and enjoying an annual \$2.2 billion return. Will the minister tell us: what was the business case for doing nothing?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, that is just a gross exaggeration of reality. Nothing could be further from the truth. Again I remind this member that this government is the first jurisdiction in all of Canada to bring forward legislation that requires reductions in CO₂, and that has led to some very direct results. In addition to the fact that we have \$120 million in a technology fund, the bonus, as far as I'm concerned, is that there have been a great deal of savings that have accrued through industry working very diligently on that very energy efficiency file that she talks about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Tourism Marketing

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Virtually every industry is feeling the impact of the global economic downturn, and experience teaches us that, sad as it is, tourism is often one of the first sectors negatively affected in a recession, for obvious reasons. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. How extensively was Alberta's important tourism industry negatively affected this past summer season?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. We have heard from tourism operators, and there was a decrease in our international visitors in this province. But the silver lining in this is that the Travel Alberta corporation ran the Stay campaign for the last two years, and Albertans have really taken that to heart. Our campgrounds, our RV units, and our attractions saw a major increase this summer, just Albertans using the Alberta product. So they were busy, and this helped go a long way to offset the decrease in the international market.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. With all the information that she has access to, can she tell us when the industry is expected to recover and also what the province is doing to help speed up that process?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to predict how quickly we'll see a rebound in the tourism market, but we know that it's resilient and that it's weathered tough times before. We're doing things like investing in major high-profile events like seven World Cups coming to Alberta and the 2010 Winter Games to generate awareness. Those World Cups alone will generate some 41,000 30-second commercials that will go right back into those European markets and remind them why this is a great place to come visit.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Commercial Vehicle Driver Safety

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report contained many concerning investigations. One was this government's commercial vehicle safety programs. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Why has the government failed to make driver training mandatory for the operation of commercial vehicles?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there is driver training available for any level of driver in Alberta. If they want to go take class 1 training, Red Deer College has a great program for that. We do make sure that we test those drivers so that they're safe on the street, but I don't think I have to tell them who has to teach them how to drive. We just have to make sure that they're capable and they're safe when they're out there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about making it mandatory, not just leaving it up to the person to have the safety training or not.

The Auditor General points out that there are some commercial vehicle carriers who operate indefinitely despite identified safety issues. To the minister again: what measures is the minister going to put in place to ensure that carriers cannot repeatedly fail safety tests and continue operating?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, all of the different companies that are in the business are on a point system, and at some point in time they do lose their running rights. I can't off the top of my head recall exactly how that system is in place, but I do know that the system is in place to make sure that our roads are safe.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: when will the system be in place to monitor commercial vehicle drivers and carriers so that our roads are made safer?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of different systems in place to make sure of everything he's talking about. PIC, our partners in compliance program, is one of the highest rated programs across Canada. If you rate high enough to belong to partners in compliance – there are automatic readers now on the highway, if you've seen them, right by our scale houses. They allow people to miss the scales because their compliance is so high with our

regulations. We do have random checks even on them to make sure that they comply. We are continually working on our traffic safety plan, and we are continually trying to make sure that our roads are safer for you and everyone else to get home to their families in the evening.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for High-risk Albertans (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Alberta's most remote Métis settlements are hoping to get their H1N1 immunizations sometime this week, there is no word about whether they will have enough vaccines for every member of their community. Last week in Fishing Lake they ran out of vaccine after only 100 of the 700 people living there got their shots, and they still don't know when they can expect their next batch. My question is to the minister of health. Why did the health minister not plan ahead enough to ensure that these most highly vulnerable Albertans had enough vaccine for their entire population before inviting healthy Albertans to line up at mass clinics?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear and I restated in my statement today that over the course of approximately the next two months we will ensure that every Albertan has the right to be vaccinated if they so choose. Now, the population that the member is referring to is part of our high-risk group. That will be exactly what Alberta Health Services will be detailing tomorrow.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in Alberta there are roughly 40,000 pregnant women, and there are around 200,000 kids between the ages of six months and under five years. After hours and even days waiting in lineups, many of these Albertans were turned away because of this government's first-come, first-served policy. Can the minister tell us how many pregnant women and how many young children are still waiting for their vaccine because of this government's hapless invitation to low-risk Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea because I haven't asked every woman who got vaccinated whether she was pregnant or not, and we are not going to do that. What we are going to do is lay out a plan tomorrow that will deal with women who are pregnant and with young children. I would suggest that the member wait, and we'll have the details tomorrow.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in most other provinces people aren't waiting. In almost every other province in the country they had a solid plan ready to go that ensured that high-risk people got the vaccine first, unlike here. In contrast, yesterday the minister was quoted as saying that he had no idea how many Albertans even fall into that category. How can Albertans possibly trust that this minister has the capacity to care for their health when he doesn't even know the basic information needed to put an effective pandemic plan in place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the chief medical officer of health was asked yesterday how many Albertans fell into what was deemed to be the high-risk category. It was his best estimate that it could be as high as 30 per cent. I would suggest that the member take the advice of the chief medical officer of health, and we will assure her that those will be the next group that we will deal with.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Edmonton Ring Road

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Transportation. The contract for the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday ring road was let a little over a year ago, and I continue to be amazed at the progress they're making in the vicinity of St. Albert. The roadway is taking shape, and several overpasses appear to be nearing completion. In fact, they even put the first lift of asphalt down in several sections. If this pace of construction is occurring throughout the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday, does the contractor anticipate that this project will be completed ahead of the fall 2011 completion date?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta is making a major investment in highway infrastructure at a cost of \$1.42 billion to construct the northwest Anthony Henday. Again I'd like to stress the vision of this great government 30 years ago. I understand that possibly 30 years ago today's Speaker was the deputy minister of transportation with that great vision.

But I'd better get back to answering the question here. I'm pleased to say that the project is on schedule and on budget. Construction has been progressing very well on the 21-kilometre roadway, and the complete project is on schedule to open in the fall of 2011.

The Speaker: It's not my fault, Mr. Minister, that it took 30 years. The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to learn these little historical anecdotes all the time. I appreciate them.

My first supplemental is to the same minister: can we anticipate that the Anthony Henday and Stony Plain Road interchange will be completed at the same time as the northwest sector of the Anthony Henday ring road?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have to answer yes. The province is investing \$169 million to construct a major interchange at Stony Plain Road, and that interchange is scheduled to open in the fall of 2011 alongside the northwest leg of the Henday. In addition, the province is investing \$45 million to construct the Lessard Road interchange and the Callingwood Road interchange, and both of those interchanges will also open in the fall of 2011. This means that by 2011 motorists will have no traffic lights from Lessard Road in the south to the Manning Drive freeway in the north.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is indeed good news.

To the same minister: why did the province not include the paving of the ramp at the 137th Avenue flyover as part of the current construction work?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, there will ultimately be a full interchange at Anthony Henday Drive and 137th Avenue. The current stage 1 construction of a flyover will meet today's current traffic volumes. I think that hon. member knows that. Most importantly, the flyover will keep a free flow movement of traffic on both 137th Avenue and the Henday, and there will be no traffic lights. When development proceeds in the area and when there's a need to pave the interchange ramps, the province will of course be looking at the

developers and the two cities, which I've explained to the hon. member. I've talked to both mayors, and everybody is onside for that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Provincial Marketing Costs

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier didn't think it was important enough to address Albertans when the recession hit or when tens of thousands of Albertans were losing their jobs or whenever we went \$7 billion into deficit. Only when the Premier's own job is on the line does it suddenly become urgent to address Albertans on television at the taxpayers' expense, of course. My first question is to the President of the Treasury Board: how can the President of the Treasury Board justify spending over \$134,000 of taxpayers' money just weeks before the PC leadership review?

Mr. Snelgrove: I guess the hon. member could try and make the connection. The fact, Mr. Speaker, is that Albertans need to hear a lot of what's important without the filter of media or some of the spin that could be put on by the opposition. The simple fact is that \$134,000 to a budget of roughly \$36 billion or \$37 billion is probably the least amount percentagewise that any corporation would ever spend to get the go-forward to the people that they're working for. It's not our money; we're very aware of that on this side. It's Albertans' money. It was a very careful, conscious choice to let Albertans know the way this government is going forward.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Good governance should sell itself. If it has to be glossed up through expensive marketing campaigns, then there's something wrong with the government. How much of the \$134,000 spent on the Premier's address was for marketing and advertising in advance of the speech itself?

Mr. Snelgrove: Let's just back up and say why it's important that Albertans understand. The hon. member made a statement there: "What happened there? What about the \$7 billion deficit?" Mr. Speaker, the projected deficit after second quarter last year was \$7.8 billion, \$8.5 billion. That never happened. They can't seem to get it out of their minds that that's what would have happened if oil had stayed where it was, our surpluses. Our deficits are projected on best information at each quarter, and if the hon. member stays tuned to the end of the second-quarter update, we'll see what the numbers are then. We don't make these numbers up, Mr. Speaker. We use very real projections from real companies to give Albertans a best indicator of where our financial situation is.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: you were certainly making up those numbers when the budget was tabled here last April.

Now, again, on top of the \$25 million branding campaign and the millions spent through the Public Affairs Bureau, this government has spent an additional \$24 million in contracts with the marketing firm DDB Canada over the past three years. Why is this government spending millions of dollars marketing itself when it could be

directing the money towards public health care or public education, for an example?

Mr. Snelgrove: Selling what we have in Alberta is a big job, and the millions that he – Mr. Speaker, we're talking about billions that we're saving on behalf of Albertans: \$25 billion that we've saved in the last five years, \$17 billion in the bank, \$8 billion in endowments, \$20 billion put into infrastructure, \$17 billion in a savings account. No other province in Canada, no state can even consider it. They're worried about whether we take the opportunity and the time to tell Albertans what the real financial picture is. Maybe they ought to take a look at the real financial picture.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Temporary Foreign Worker Wages

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been brought to my attention that the food service and hospitality sector is being forced to pay wages that in many cases are not reflective of the marketplace that they're operating in. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why is the Alberta hotel industry forced to pay temporary foreign workers wages higher than Alberta workers doing the same job?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is certainly referring to the temporary foreign worker program operated solely by the federal government. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada assigns a prevailing wage rate for each occupation and each region. If an employer wants to hire a new temporary foreign worker, they must pay this rate, and because the rates are assigned by geographic regions, some employers have received a labour market opinion with wages that are higher than in their community. For example, communities that are near high-cost communities are affected. My department is aware of this particular issue and will be working with our federal counterparts to address this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental, then, to the minister: Mr. Minister, will you immediately seek a meeting with your federal counterpart to address this issue on behalf of Alberta's employers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I will be sending a letter to my federal counterpart as Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development shortly to outline our continuing concerns. This has been an ongoing issue for quite some time. We need to reopen our dialogue with our counterparts in Ottawa, and hopefully this will resolve the issues being addressed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rogers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, in your answer you acknowledged that this is not a new issue. Wage disparities within the temporary foreign worker program are an ongoing problem for Alberta's employers. Do you have a plan of action to solve this problem once and for all?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the temporary foreign worker program is the responsibility of the federal government, and generally employer complaints are referred to them. However, we've had occasion where we act on behalf of employers, and this

is when we see significant disparities in the wage rates between communities within a region. Our goal still remains to hire Albertans first, then Canadians. We have staff and resources to help employers address their labour needs. Employers in the capital region, for instance, have access to labour market information centres or job boards, the employer connection events as well as designated business and industry liaison services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The global economic downturn is hitting university and college students and their faculties hard. The University of Alberta is facing a \$59 million shortfall in its next budget, the University of Calgary has begun to lay off 200 of its employees, and the universities of Lethbridge, Mount Royal, and Grant MacEwan are similarly experiencing funding shortfalls. It is imperative that institutions scrambling for lost dollars do not download unfair burdens onto the backs of our students. My questions are to the minister of advanced education. Is the minister in discussions that will allow postsecondary institutions to raise base tuition rates beyond the government's own tuition caps?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, several months ago we brought in a budget in this House which indicated to our postsecondaries that the 6 per cent increase that they got this year in their budgets brought their total base operating grant increases over the last five years to more than 40 per cent. That's unprecedented in North America and certainly in this climate right now, where you have places like the University of California, Berkeley, cutting 20 per cent across the board on their faculty on their entire campuses. I think it's important that we recognize that we're not immune to that economic situation. So we have put it out to all of our postsecondary institutions that we're open to their ideas, to the things that they can do to make our system more accessible, more efficient. We're going to continue.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister of advanced education commit to keeping the mandatory cap limiting tuition increases to the consumer price index, and will he make sure that institutions aren't allowed to wiggle around the caps to increase costs to students?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that what I have suggested to the postsecondaries is that I'm open to any and all ideas that they can bring to us. We're not actively engaged with them in those discussions, but if they bring forward some proposals that are fair and equitable to the students, that are fair and equitable to the taxpayers of this province, and that are fair and equitable as it relates to the economy and this society, we will look at those.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary institutions are going to be making painful cuts to programs and staffing levels to avoid going into the red. How will the ministry monitor those decisions to ensure that students do not end up paying more for less when it comes to the quality of their education?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the hon. member has been

aware of the Campus Alberta approach that we have built over the last 18 months in this province, that is the envy of many jurisdictions in the world, really. We've had a number of other jurisdictions coming to talk to us. Within that Campus Alberta context we sit down with all of the postsecondaries, all of the chairs of the boards of governance, and all of the presidents, and we talk about best practices within the system. It's all for three clients. It's for the student, it's for the taxpayer, and it's for the economy and society. It isn't about the institution. It's about those three clients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bufferlo.

English as a Second Language Programs

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having a knowledgeable and skilled workforce is key in meeting the future needs of our economy. Between 1988 and 2008 the number of identified English as a second language students in Alberta has tripled from about 15,000 to 50,000, yet those students in Alberta are faced with one of the highest dropout rates in our province. In a recent study by the Coalition for Equal Access to Education students and parents have expressed concerns that the schools allocate less than five hours per week to ESL instruction and that schools stop teaching ESL to students when students are considered at the levels . . .

The Speaker: I'm afraid we're going to have to move to the answer now. I don't know who the question is to, though. The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to clarify that the dropout rate for ESL students is not one of the highest in the province. In fact, at 4.4 per cent it's actually lower than the provincial average of 4.8 per cent. Neither are acceptable. But ESL is not higher; it's in fact lower.

We have developed tools and resources to provide clearer direction on intake and assessment of ESL students. We have curriculum – for example, the K to 12 ESL proficiency benchmarks, teaching resources, second language guide to implementation for kindergarten to grade 9, and a senior high school program of studies for ESL, assessment resources; there's a list of assessment resources for English as a second language – and, of course, professional development. So we are working with the system to provide that kind of education.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. What specific policy and requirements does the ministry have in place to ensure that schools are accountable for ESL funding they receive from the school boards?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, funding is provided to school boards for students who have insufficient fluency in English to achieve grade level expectations; in fact, \$1,155 per eligible funded child or student up to a maximum of seven years. Additionally, enhanced ESL funding is available to assist boards in providing support services for immigrant students who have little or no formal schooling. But we don't tell school boards how to allocate their monies or what to do with their monies. We give them the money based on their student population, and we hold them accountable for the results.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. What performance measures does your ministry have in place to ensure that schools in Alberta systematically address cultural diversity and competence in all aspects of school structures and functions?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the measures that we do utilize is comparing the results of the ESL students to the results of students overall. This enables jurisdictions and schools to assess how well ESL students are doing and to develop strategies to improve their results. An example of this would be the diploma examinations, where 77.1 per cent of the ESL students achieve the acceptable standard compared to 84.4 per cent of students overall. We measure overall accountabilities, and we're able to differentiate between ESL students and other students to determine whether they're achieving at the same level as other students. Then school boards can put in place processes and systems to ensure that ESL students have that ability to get to the same level as other students.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today. In light of the time and our standing order rules we're going to proceed back to the Routine with Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a hole in your Duckett, dear Premier, dear Premier. There are several holes in our health care, unclear Premier, unclear Premier. The fear-filled flu fiasco that unfolded last week saw first nine, then 10 primarily outdoor only accessible clinics struggling to provide indiscriminate inoculations for a meagre fraction of the 2 million-plus people yet to be served in Calgary and Edmonton. The doctors and nurses, the sheriffs and peace officers, the mall security guards, the merchants who, despite having their store entrances blocked, brought out refreshments and allowed those standing for hours to use their facilities are to be congratulated for their support of the thousands of Alberta health care refugees.

It is unfortunate that these people who lined up in the cold and dark in order to secure a spot, a shot for themselves or a vulnerable family member, won't have the opportunity to line up and cast their vote in the Premier's leadership review this Saturday in Red Deer. Prior to this past week it seemed that no graphic images could symbolize poor health planning more than the implosion of Calgary's general hospital. However, this superboard-supporting government has now surpassed that save a buck now, pay several later gang with its latest short-sighted scenario.

Ralph's plan for the SARS pandemic was to simply stockpile surgical face masks. Our current Premier's plan appears to be to create chaos and confusion for his Survivor Albertan show. In this Darwinian dash children under five and pregnant women are pitted against able-bodied men in the struggle for the serum. The last one standing before the line is cut off gets to play another day. In this week's episode tension builds as the clinics close, leading up to the leadership review. Will the Premier survive this weekend's confidence vote? Will Albertans survive this government's health care . . .

The Speaker: Alas, we must move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital Fundraiser

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week on October 27 the Edmonton Glenrose hospital foundation was a beneficiary of a fabulous fundraiser, and this really needs to be highlighted. Edmonton's Chinese community decided to put together a fundraiser dinner, not for themselves, not for the benefit of the Chinese community only, but for the benefit of all Albertans. They raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Glenrose rehabilitation hospital.

The honorary chair, Mr. Speaker, for the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation happens to be our Premier's better half, Mrs. Stelmach, who spearheaded this fundraiser. Our Minister of Employment and Immigration and my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark and myself had the pleasure of participating in this dinner. I would like to extend my sincere thank you to all members of Edmonton's Chinese community for having the citizenship, duty, and obligation of raising money for such a fabulous cause.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Adoption Awareness Month

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in recognition of Adoption Awareness Month. Every November we celebrate the tremendous contributions adoptive families make in the lives of children and youth who dream of having a loving family to call their own, something that most of us take for granted. At any given time Alberta has about 200 children and youth ready and waiting to be adopted by families who will help ensure these kids have the love and support they need to achieve their full potential.

Alberta's adoption program is considered by many to be one of the best in the country, exemplary in its aggressive, proactive approach to recruiting families for children and youth who need loving, nurturing homes. Just last month, Mr. Speaker, recruitment efforts were enhanced by the launch of a new grassroots strategy that reaches out to Albertans across the province. A Child's Hope is designed to get people talking about the many benefits of fostering, providing kinship care, adopting, or mentoring a child or youth who needs our help and support. Families who have adopted say that at the time they decided to reach out and give a child or youth a loving, stable home, they had no idea how much of a positive difference the experience would make in their own lives.

Mr. Speaker, there is no better time or better place to adopt a child than right now, right here in the province of Alberta. Every kid deserves to grow up in the kind of caring environment that they can call their own. I encourage all families interested in adopting to first consider kids in our province and visit the adoption website at www.child.alberta.ca to find out more about the amazing children and youth ready and waiting to be matched with you to bring love, joy, and fulfillment into your home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Anniversary of the Birth of Guru Nanak

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and talk a little about a very important day to the Sikh religion. Today, November 2, marks the 540th birthday of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founder of Sikhism. Every year Sikhs around the world celebrate Sri Guru Nanak Dev's birthday with an Akhand Path, or reading the holy scriptures, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, from start to

finish. This reading takes about 48 hours and concludes in the early morning of the guru's birth.

Mr. Speaker, the Sikh community is doing a lot to mark this special day. The Sikh community of Edmonton and the Punjabi Media Association of Alberta have joined together for the third annual food and fundraising event. This time there is \$50,000 plus three tonnes of food. Every year near Sri Guru Nanak Dev's birthday the members of the Sikh community join together and raise food and money to help support the Edmonton food bank. I would like to give special thanks to Desh Punjab Radio and Radio Sursangam for their radiothon, which fund raised a lot of money. The fundraising portrays Guru Nanak's concept of Langar, or the community kitchen. The Sikh community raised \$2.5 million for the Mazankowski Heart Institute's Guru Nanak Dev Healing Garden.

I am proud of the hard work of these organizations, proud of the positive impact they are having on our community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 113 Albertans that reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to:

- Grandfather the rights and status of all currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta in a manner that they may continue their practice undisturbed and, when necessary, gradually upgrade to newly-proclaimed standards of training, so as not to force current therapists to lose their ongoing income whilst upgrading and so to ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

These signatures are mostly from Calgary.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 30 I wish to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the government's inadequate preparations for the pandemic H1N1 influenza program.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member will be doing this?

Ms Notley: I'm giving notice on behalf of the hon. member.

The Speaker: Okay. But the hon. member said that she would be rising to do certain things. Is she doing this on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood?

Ms Notley: I'm giving notice on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Bill 59

Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 59, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill supports the implementation of community treatment orders by clarifying, firstly, the role of psychiatrists in issuing and overseeing community treatment orders; secondly, the criteria that will be considered by mental health review panels when reviewing community treatment orders; and the Mental Health Patient Advocate's legal authority to access records and information for investigations involving community treatment orders. Mr. Speaker, these community treatment orders will enable individuals to maintain their mental health treatment in the community. These orders will be introduced when the remaining sections of the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, are proclaimed, which is expected to occur early next year.

I ask all members to support this bill and to move this bill to the next stage. I move first reading of Bill 59.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 59 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 59 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Bill 61

Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move first reading of the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009, otherwise known as Bill 61.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is designed to not only simplify and unclog our currently busy court system, but it also aims at making sure that more police officers spend their time actually on the streets, doing the work that they want to do, and not in busy courthouses. Among many other clauses in the bill it will allow for the filing of evidence by police officers by way of affidavit as opposed to having to appear in person. The details of the bill will be unveiled in second reading.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 61 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 61 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter written by Faith Paul, and I

certainly have permission to table this letter. It is her letter to me dated October 27, 2009, and it outlines reasons that we should consider keeping Alberta Hospital open.

The second tabling I have is a document from the Friends of Medicare. It's titled Stop the Cuts, a rally November 7, 11:30 a.m., with march and rally to PC Party convention at 12, at the Kinsmen community hall in Red Deer. Reserve your seat on a free bus from Edmonton and Calgary. Contact friendsofmedicare.org.

Thank you.

Emergency Debate

The Speaker: Hon. members, we do have a matter of business to deal with, and that's an application under Standing Order 30. I'm going to listen attentively to the arguments, but I'm also going to limit the number of speakers with respect to the application for the motion as there is a process in the standing orders to deal with this. I'll invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to make a brief statement with respect to the urgency of this matter, and we'll recognize one spokesperson from each of the other two caucuses in the House. Then we'll make a decision.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Preparedness

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As required under Standing Order 30(1) I gave written notice to yourself at least two hours prior to today's sitting. My colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona gave oral notice of this motion during today's Routine, and copies of the motion have been distributed to members of the House.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that this motion meets the urgency requirement under Standing Order 30. Each day for the past week we have seen Albertans reacting with frustration and confusion to the government's pandemic H1N1 influenza program. The H1N1 virus is a significant threat to the health of Albertans. We have seen over the last week that there is extremely high public interest in protection against the virus, but we have also seen the government send out very mixed messages about when individuals should seek to get immunized. The government has now been forced to change its plan, which adds to public concern about the spread of the virus and raises questions about whether the government had properly prepared for the second wave of the virus. I believe the government's most recent decision to stop mass vaccinations while a new plan is developed to immunize only high-risk populations underlies the urgent need for this House to discuss the government's plan for minimizing the spread of H1N1.

We know that over the past week many Albertans in high-risk categories stood in line for hours without being able to get vaccinated while others with lower risk received a vaccination. Others in the high-risk categories were unable to get to a clinic and stand in a long lineup because of their health problems. We also know that other provinces were able to deliver the vaccine to people at higher risk first. Albertans need to hear why this did not happen in our province.

Beauchesne's 387 says that a debate under this standing order "must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate." Mr. Speaker, the H1N1 vaccine program is clearly within the responsibility of this government, and I know of no other motions or other such opportunities which would allow this House to have a full discussion of the issue. This is a most urgent question, very much on the minds of Albertans throughout the province, and it seems to me that this motion would give opportunity for this Assembly to discuss this most urgent question. So I submit that

clearly this motion meets the urgency requirements under Standing Order 30.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it would have been, I think, preferable if this motion had been worded in a more appropriate way, I don't think there can be any question that the issue of the H1N1 virus and the preparation by government and by the health authority to make sure that Albertans get vaccinated is a very, very clear issue on the minds of Albertans. I think it is quite appropriate for us in this House to address that kind of an issue in this open forum so that Albertans can know and understand clearly the amount of preparation that has gone into pandemic preparation and the way in which this government and the Health Services authority have been able to make sure that as many as Albertans as possible get vaccinated as quickly as possible. So while I cannot agree with the wording of the motion in terms of inadequate preparation, I certainly do agree and would urge all members of the House to support the concept that we adjourn the normal business of the day and speak to the preparation for the H1N1 pandemic influenza program.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As always with Standing Order 30 there are two categories of tests: one is that the genuine emergency that exists must be proven and, secondly, that there is no other opportunity for a debate to have taken place on the particular issue. In this case I will argue the second category first, that there has been no other opportunity for us to have any substantial debate; therefore, following the words of the Government House Leader, it would be appropriate to do that this afternoon.

3:00

It is within the administrative competence of the government. There's no government bill on the Order Paper. There's nothing on notice on the Order Paper, nor has the Government House Leader indicated to me in our presession meeting that there would likely be a bill coming forward specific to the H1N1 implementation. There's no private member's bill, public bill, or private bill. Of course, there's no budget, and again there's no indication that there would be a supplementary supply budget that would open up for debate on this. There are no government motions. Oral Question Period allows us a very, very brief time: 35 seconds to ask the question, 35 to answer. A number of mentions, including *Beauchesne* 408(1)(e) and (f) and 408(2) and 410(7), all speak to brevity, which is not a debate on the issue.

The second category, the genuine emergency. We're seeing a number of issues take place. This caucus heard this morning from a resident at the Royal Alexandra, a few blocks from here, admitting that those residents are admitting people suffering from H1N1 to that hospital and to the emergency ward while the residents themselves have not been inoculated and are not being allowed to be inoculated. That increases their risk as health care providers substantially and, of course, affects their families. As well, it increases the risk that the virus will be passed on by those very same health care providers.

The government has inoculated a little over 10 per cent of the population, but it has not completed or even started in some locations. Again I reference health care providers and a number of those from particularly vulnerable groups. I will focus on cancer patients, as raised by my colleague earlier today, who have very

strict and limited windows, given their cancer treatment, of when they would be able to sustain a vaccination. They are not physically able to stand in lineups, but there have been no provisions made for them that we're aware of. So that's a third group of very vulnerable people who have not been able to be helped. I would argue that they would qualify under the genuine emergency considerations that are before us today.

So I would ask the Speaker to please rule in favour of the Standing Order 30 application. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to make a decision with respect to this matter. Standing Order 30(2) provides an opportunity for members to speak, allowing as many of them to be in the debate as possible. I've heard the three petitions we've had here with respect to this.

The motion itself certainly arrived at my office in time, met the requirement of two hours' notice. It arrived at 11:27, so it beat it by three minutes.

Secondly, the question here is whether or not there is "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." For those members who follow this sort of thing, *Beauchesne's* paragraphs 387 to 390 and Marleau and Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 586 to 589, deal with this particular matter.

There are two key points with respect to this and a third one which is quite subjective. In fact, all three are quite subjective, but the third one is important as well. First of all, to meet the requirements of urgency, there must not be another opportunity for members of the Assembly to discuss this matter. Secondly, the matter must relate to a genuine emergency. There's one other that I do take into consideration, and that is the general mood of the House with respect to this as well. The chair certainly has heard spokesmen on behalf of the other caucuses in the House advocating that there might be something to this today.

I am a little concerned about the specific words of the motion itself. Having said that, ordinarily the motion itself, the wording in it, might not necessarily meet all three tests, but the third test – that is, the general mood of the House – is one that I'm considering today. No hesitation on my understanding that there is an element of questioning going on in the province of Alberta with respect to this matter.

I also wish to advise that the Canadian House of Commons will also be proceeding to such a similar debate as this almost immediately now. There's a two-hour time difference between ourselves and the Canadian House of Commons, but the Speaker there ruled a few minutes ago that, in essence, such an opportunity should be afforded to the men and women of the Canadian House of Commons as well.

In essence, I'm going to find that the request for leave is in order. We are going to move to this, but it's your decision as to how we move to this and if we move to this. There are rules with respect to how we move to this. Standing Order 30(3) requires that the question be put to a vote of this Assembly. If there are any objections to the question, then the chair will ask those members who support the motion to rise in their places. So if there are any objections to my question, members then have to move physically in order to endorse and uphold what the Speaker has ruled with respect to this.

I'm going to ask the question. Shall the debate on the urgent matter proceed? All those in favour, say yes.

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Speaker: Those opposed, say no.

Okay. We are now going to proceed, and you can follow the rules in our standing orders with respect to this. I should advise all members that, in essence, you have a 10-minute speaking time with respect to this.

Standing Order 30(6) says, "An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly," and there are some conditions which the standing orders provide with respect to this emergency debate. Whoever is in the chair this afternoon may have to bring this to the attention of the members participating. A key one is that "not more than one matter may be discussed on the same motion." So we do have a motion. It's very clear what the motion is. There has to be attention to the motion per se under the debate. It also will preclude any further discussion on this matter by way of a Standing Order 30 application on this subject for the remainder of this session if it's a similar concept. So this is the shot.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I'll invite you momentarily, but might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a good citizen and friend of mine from my constituency, Denis Ducharme. Denis Ducharme is our former MLA. He served our community extremely well for 11 years. His early retirement and encouragement have allowed me to fill his shoes, which was not an easy task. I would like to now ask Mr. Ducharme to stand so that we can give him the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Emergency Debate

(continued)

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Preparedness

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are going to proceed. We'll proceed in this order. First of all, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, then I'm going to recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, then I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and then we'll try to find a rotation as we go forward. After the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview I will recognize the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations. They're the next four speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to have this debate in the House today. I know that the Government House Leader indicated some disagreement with the suggestion in the wording of the motion that the government's preparations were inadequate, but I assure him that this is about the fourth draft of the motion, and this is by far the most favourable reference to the government that we have.

I want to say that I've never seen a situation yet in this province in the time that I've been elected to this Assembly where there was so much anger on the part of many Albertans towards an action of the government. Each day for the past week we've seen them responding with frustration and confusion to the government's pandemic H1N1 influenza program.

The H1N1 virus is a significant threat to the health of Albertans. We've seen over the past week that there is extremely high public

interest in protection against the virus. Although severe illness due to the virus may be relatively low, the number of people infected could be so large that the disease will put a severe burden on schools, businesses, and public services due to a high rate of absenteeism, not to mention, Mr. Speaker, the surge in emergency rooms and in our health care system generally.

3:10

Albertans got the message that the government was trying to deliver, that H1N1 immunization was an urgent matter which all responsible citizens should take. The minister of health urged in this House last Monday, "Albertans have to roll up their sleeves and help us get the job done." But, Mr. Speaker, the government was not prepared for the very high level of public participation in the vaccination program. The news of the past week has been filled with stories of long lineups at clinics, people waiting for hours and hours to be immunized, only to be turned away.

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, in my response to the minister's statement I read an e-mail from my own sister indicating that even though she's a high priority for immunization, she has made six unsuccessful attempts to get immunized in the city of Calgary. There is, in fact, a very, very serious problem. The government will argue – and I'm sure the minister will when he gets up – that the indicator of success of this program is that 400,000 Albertans have been vaccinated. That is not the real measure of the success of this program. In fact, we heard earlier that according to Dr. Corriveau, up to 30 per cent of Albertans may in fact be considered in the high-risk category. That's just under a million people, Mr. Speaker. Now, we've just expended our first tranche of vaccine of 400,000 doses on people in, essentially, a random way. In fact, I would go further than that; I would say that the way it's been set up, with the requirement that people stand in line for lengthy periods of time, has favored strong and healthy individuals who are most likely not on the list of people who should get the vaccine.

The question is important, Mr. Speaker. Why do we have certain people who are considered vulnerable on a higher priority list? The simple fact of the matter is that these are people who are more likely to have a very severe illness and may more likely die if they are infected with H1N1, and that's why they are a priority. But the government has allowed people to get to the front of the line. In fact, they've set up a system that allows people who are stronger and healthier to get the first dose, to be inoculated ahead of people who actually need the vaccine. That's the problem. That's the core problem with what's happened. Now, we've got another 80,000 doses coming, but that is insufficient to even cover some of the categories of vulnerable priority individuals. That is why this is a fundamentally flawed and, in fact, very badly organized and managed process. There are some secondary things: for example, the fact that people have to line up, that particular target groups weren't targeted.

Mr. Speaker, we've run out for the moment, I guess, of large supplies of the vaccine, and the government has now decided that they're shutting the entire program down. This very day, Mr. Speaker, in Ontario the government announced that they would be doubling the number of clinics. I think that's about 100 additional clinics. Today they're opening another hundred clinics, on the same day that Alberta is shutting down all of its clinics. But the clinics are very different. They're not mass immunization where everyone can come. They're specific; they're small. They're specifically targeted to the key groups that need to be immunized, and if you're not one of those people that qualify at that clinic, you don't get immunized. That's important, Mr. Speaker, because that is what protects the lives of people who are most vulnerable.

Manitoba I think has done a much better job as well. For example, a call was put out in Manitoba last spring to retired health care professionals to work in the vaccination clinics. The recertification necessary for them to inject people with a vaccine was fast-tracked. The result was 600 workers who were ready to help staff the clinics. This allowed Manitoba to set up more clinics than we've seen in Alberta. In Winnipeg, for example, which is a little smaller than Edmonton, 12 clinics were set up compared to only four in Calgary and five in Edmonton. Like Alberta, Manitoba initially made its immunization program available to everyone regardless of their risk factors, but it has now decided to immunize only target populations. Ontario, on the other hand, has only provided the flu shot for these target populations. People in these high-risk groups have been able to make appointments at flu shot clinics with minimal inconvenience. Ontario has now announced, as I mentioned, that they'll double the number of clinics.

In Alberta the experience of the past week has shown that this government failed to properly prepare for the second wave of the H1N1 virus. The government failed to ensure that the most vulnerable Albertans would receive the vaccine quickly. People across the province have spent frustrating hours in lineups at clinics, and now they're closed while the government goes back to the drawing board.

Well, all provincial governments have had to deal with the sudden shortage of vaccine. This is not the provincial governments' fault. This is the federal government's responsibility. I'll put it mildly, I guess. But how we are positioned to react to that is the question, and how soon this government knew about that shortage is a question that I would like to have answered.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to address the whole question of the pressure that's now going to be put on our health care system by people who are infected with H1N1 influenza, and that's a very serious problem. Because of the minister's health care reform, led by Dr. Duckett from Australia, we are in a process of limiting the number of nurses in the health care system. Now there's a hiring freeze which applies generally, and that's another question of the level of funding. The strategy of Dr. Duckett is to replace nurses as much as possible with other health care professionals and remove the number of nurses that are involved in the health care system, but there's plenty of research that shows that there's a direct relationship between the number of nurses in a health care system and the incidence of mortality and morbidity within the health care system. So taking nurses out of the system makes it less responsive, makes it less able to respond, and there are other cuts that do the same thing.

In general, the changes that have been made to our health care system by this government have thrown it into chaos, and it is unable to respond. I heard the Premier say just the other day: well, you know, give us a break because we're trying to run a health care system, too. It just struck me as someone who didn't understand that a health care system has to have the capacity to deal with things like a pandemic. My last point is that, in fact, the government doesn't seem to get the fact that they've had months and months to prepare for this pandemic yet have failed to do so adequately.

Mr. Speaker, just in closing, I want to say that the government has completely failed Albertans in this respect.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just two housekeeping matters. First of all, because this was a change to the Routine today, there was no opportunity for the chair to say: Orders of the Day. So, yes, you can proceed to have that liquid refreshment, whether it be tea or water or the like. I'll make that very clear. Secondly, there is no Q and A of five minutes awarded to this, so we're moving right along. I've got a long list of speakers at a maximum of 10 minutes each. There are

over 20 now on the list. We're going to proceed in the following order for the next six speakers: the Minister of Health and Wellness, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, then the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, and then the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

3:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually my pleasure to stand here this afternoon and participate in this debate. I'm sorry that we have to participate in a debate where we have the member introduce this particular motion, worded in such a way that it takes away from the incredible good work that our public health officials have done in preparing for this influenza campaign. As I've said on many occasions, this is a plan that has been well thought out, it's a plan that has been put together with other provincial officials and the federal government, and it's a plan that was put together by our chief medical officer of health and public health officials. To say that somehow Alberta was inadequately prepared is to take a direct shot at those hardworking officials within our government.

I find it really quite remarkable because we have this particular member who introduced this motion today introducing it somehow on the basis that he could have predicted what happened last week. I remember that when I made my ministerial statement in the House last week, he did not even respond to it. I would have thought that when he had the opportunity to respond, Mr. Speaker, he would have stood up, and he would have said, "You are inadequately prepared for this pandemic," but he didn't. He sat there. He didn't move. He didn't say one word. So, you know, this member, I've noticed over the years that I've been in this House, has this incredible ability to see miles ahead by looking in the rear-view mirror. He always does that.

Mr. Speaker, this is also a member that, any chance he gets, tells us about how good he is at looking at an individual and assessing whether or not they're in the high-risk category. I remember when the Member for Edmonton-Riverview last week stood up and responded to the ministerial statement. He said that he went to the clinic to get his vaccination shot, and the lineup deterred him. Now, he may very well have been in the high-risk category. I can't tell by looking at him whether he is or isn't, but I'll bet the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood can tell because he seems to be able to predict that none of our people who took this vaccine were in the high-risk category. Absolutely despicable.

Now, the member just referred to Ontario. I would refer him to last week's *Globe and Mail*. All there was was lineups in Ontario all across the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, so don't try to lead this House, Member, that somehow this isn't happening somewhere else in the country.

Now that I've got that off my chest, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the most successful week that we have had when it comes to vaccinations in this province. This is the largest in the history of the country. There is no template. Our officials in public health, working with the federal government and the other provinces, had to put together a plan and then launch it. I can remember that I was at a health ministers' conference in Winnipeg in August, and the discussion around that table with the federal minister and the other provincial ministers was the fact of the concern about how Canadians were not going to take up this challenge to get vaccinated. In fact, we were talking about numbers somewhere in the range of 30 per cent.

We had a great deal of concern that aboriginals, for instance, in the high-risk group were not going to get vaccinated, and those

groups that are highly vulnerable were going to put great pressure on our health care system. I am so proud to stand here today, Mr. Speaker – and I know the Minister of Aboriginal Relations is going to speak to this – and say that we've done an incredible job of vaccinating a large percentage of our aboriginals in this province. We've done a very good job in getting to a large majority of the homeless in this province, and I hope that the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs addresses that as well. We have in our best estimation – because, again, unlike the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I can't look at someone in a line and say whether they're in that high-risk category or not; I trust them that they're in that high-risk category. They're a large portion of that 400,000 that we have vaccinated.

You know, we launched this campaign last Monday, and we had an incredible take-up on Monday. There was no question that as we moved into Tuesday and Wednesday, it was reported that our lineups had dwindled considerably. I know my colleague from Edmonton-Calder sent me a note last week in the House that he had received a note from a constituent that in 15 minutes they went and got their vaccination. But something happened mid-week last week, Mr. Speaker, and it was the unfortunate death of a young boy in Ontario. We could just see things turn. We could see the panic start to set in. Once that started, it was very difficult to turn around. In addition to that, about 24 hours later the federal government issued a release that said that we were going to be running short of vaccine. Those two situations, Mr. Speaker, caused what were eventually, on Friday and Saturday, situations that were no longer acceptable.

The chief medical officer of health called me on Saturday morning. He outlined what he wanted to do. As I have throughout this, I supported his recommendation, and his recommendation was that we stop all of the clinics, that we take a pause, that we bring out a plan that will deal with those that are most vulnerable. Our vaccine supply stands at about 180,000 doses in Alberta right now despite the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, where I think he was quoted today as saying that we have hundreds of thousands of doses of vaccine. That is incorrect, Mr. Speaker. We have somewhere in the range of 180,000.

We are anticipating that this Thursday we will receive about another 50,000 of the regular vaccine plus some for pregnant women, the unadjuvanted, and then we have no guarantee next week what we're going to get. We are in a situation where if we don't ensure that we have a staged rollout of this over the next two weeks, we will clearly run out of vaccine. We'll have to shut everything down again, and that is not what we want to have happen.

I just want to take a couple of minutes here. I'd like to thank all of those who have been involved in rolling out this campaign, everyone from our chief medical officer of health to public health officials to front-line health care workers to all of those who took it seriously and actually stood in lineups. I would just quote. Through the noon hour I was speaking to the head of the Alberta Medical Association. He assured me that he's got a meeting with the Leader of the Opposition tomorrow, and he's going to make sure that he passes on the fact that there is no other way that you can describe 400,000 people being vaccinated in six days as anything but a tremendous success, Mr. Speaker. That's coming from the medical community.

I would just conclude that we will hold to our commitment that all Albertans will be vaccinated by Christmas, all of those that choose to be vaccinated, and I would just ask that we talk about what we can do to ensure that we accomplish that. Laying blame, pointing fingers is going to get us nowhere, Mr. Speaker.

With those few words, I would ask all hon. members to participate in this debate, support our public health system, and not fall for the

member who introduced this particular motion because, quite honestly, for the most part, again, he has no idea how the system operates and is attempting to only score cheap political points, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a list of approximately 18 members, and the following six will be recognized immediately: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, then the Minister of Municipal Affairs, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll start just by trying to raise the spirit a little bit here. My initial intention last Monday morning was to actually work with the government and to help advance the public interest in obtaining vaccines, and that's the spirit in which I went to the clinic on Monday morning. I think it's regrettable that the minister of health and other members here are somehow holding that against me. I saw the extensive lineup, and I didn't stay. It was pretty apparent immediately that there were problems. But like everybody, I'll assume, in this Assembly we in the end want this to work out.

I'm going to just cover a few key points here. I'm going to begin with what are for me among the many dozens of e-mails and phone calls I've received on this issue in the last week, some of the most heart-wrenching, and those are coming from cancer patients. I had an e-mail Thursday or Friday in which the subject title read: Please Help My Sister. It came to me from a woman living in a smaller town in Alberta who was pleading on behalf of her sister here in Edmonton who was in cancer treatment, and her immune system was compromised. She was unable to stand in line, and she was unable to get the vaccine because no provisions had been made for cancer patients.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

As things turn out, she's not alone. I have had other people contact me, including people phoning me at home on the weekend yesterday in something of a panic. For example, in one case a constituent of mine scheduled for chemotherapy the day after tomorrow – he's in the midst of a series of chemotherapy treatments – had been told that the only day in which his system would be able to absorb the effects of the vaccine was today. When they announced yesterday that there would be no clinics open today, his family and he were, frankly, frightened. I think it's shocking, and I would urge the minister, please, to pay attention to ensure that special provisions are made for cancer patients so that when their systems are able to accept the vaccine safely, that vaccine is provided.

3:30

It's hard for me to believe that we are at this point, with a supposedly sophisticated health care system, where that kind of provision was never made and those cancer patients were not thought about. I've heard a similar account about a child with leukemia in Lethbridge who is having difficulty getting the vaccine. I just think that we have really, really dropped the ball with cancer patients, so I would plead to the minister and urge the minister to make sure that there are special provisions for cancer patients in the plan that gets rolled out tomorrow.

The second point I would raise is one I raised last week, and that's

the development of an ethics framework for what we hope will never happen but could happen, and that's a situation in which there are not enough resources to look after all people requiring critical care. This kind of situation has come close to occurring in the United States and could occur here if we get into an extreme position. My information is that while there is reference to developing an ethics decision-making framework in the pandemic plan – I've read that – there is, in fact, no ethics framework in place.

Just so people understand how serious this is, imagine a situation in which 10 patients require ventilators and there are only five ventilators. Who gets the treatment, and who doesn't? What's the basis of that decision? These are very real issues. Can you discriminate, for example, Mr. Speaker, in that situation on the basis of age? On the basis of disability? On the basis of ethnic background? Can you discriminate on the basis of survival possibilities? What are the frameworks by which people will make those decisions? Those things need to be laid out. They need to be thought through, finalized, and made public in advance. As controversial and difficult as that is, it has been done elsewhere, and I recommend to all members of this Assembly and, frankly, to all Albertans a document put out by Hamilton Health Sciences in Ontario addressing specifically this. I tabled copies of it last Thursday. So, Mr. Minister, please get your department finalizing that ethics framework, and when it's done, please make it public.

My third point is around surge capacity. I have been warning this government for years that it has created a health care system in which there is no surge capacity. There is literally no capacity for something as serious as a major bus crash or a major plane crash, much less a pandemic. In fact, a couple of weeks ago I was in a meeting with doctors where this topic came up. They were telling a story in which two or three years ago they were put on notice to prepare for the possibility of a huge influx of patients because a passenger jet in the area was in some crisis. Well, luckily the passenger jet landed safely, but the doctors were saying: "There was nothing we could do. We didn't have a bed available. We didn't have the equipment. There was nothing available."

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's important for people here who don't know that historically the ideal operating rate of a hospital is about 85 per cent so that on any given day you would have about 15 per cent spare capacity. That allows for all kinds of absorbing of challenges in the system, but, most importantly, it allows for dealing with a genuine major emergency like a pandemic.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been more than a decade since the major hospitals in Alberta had anything close to a 15 per cent surge capacity. In fact, as we've often heard in this Assembly, they routinely operate without a single spare bed. So we need to address that. We can address that through permanent measures like reopening the empty beds at the Peter Lougheed hospital and other hospitals. We can do it through interim measures like a pandemic tent, which potentially could be very helpful. Ultimately, we need a long-term solution to this. We need to rebuild the capacity of our health care system so that it can provide necessary services at times of major emergencies.

The fourth point I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker – and I hope the minister and his officials are paying attention – is that given the situation we've got with lineups, let's at least make the best of what's not a very good situation. What do I mean by that? Well, how about providing chairs for people to sit in? If we have a lineup, and we know there's going to be a long lineup, then, you know, let's dip into the sustainability fund or the emergency fund somewhere and rent some chairs and put them at the clinics so that our women and children and seniors and so on who are expected to stand for hours can actually sit. You know, that would help people. That's a simple gesture that would help people.

How about looking for ways to shelter people from the weather? We've been very lucky. Last week was relatively mild, but this is Alberta, and that could change any given day. Many of these lineups are occurring out of doors. I think it's time that we took some serious consideration to provide some shelter for people.

Those kinds of simple gestures can mean so much. I think this government could probably find it somewhere to find some chairs, maybe put up some urns of coffee, and turn this into something a little bit more humane.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude my comments by reflecting on what I see as the underlying causes of these problems. As much as we've heard that there are problems in other provinces – and in some provinces there are – there are a number of provinces where this has gone really smoothly, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and B.C. being three examples. They have proceeded by targeting high-risk groups at the beginning, and they have succeeded extremely well. They've avoided the long lineups. They've had a much higher uptake of high-risk groups. They've targeted aboriginals. They've targeted patients in hospitals. They've targeted health care workers.

So how did we end up in this situation? Well, my belief, Mr. Speaker, is that the problems we have here are a symptom of Alberta Health Services' being in general turmoil, of a situation in which effectively the executive head of this organization was cut off. That was done when the regional health authorities were disbanded, and the cancer board was disbanded, and so on. We have great front-line workers – we'd all agree with that – but the system itself is in chaos.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members for allowing this debate to proceed. I want to make some comments primarily from the standpoint of being the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. I believe the minister of health has covered a number of issues that pertain to Albertans in general, so I will try as much as possible to reflect what I believe is happening and is of importance to our aboriginal clientele in Alberta.

I want to begin, first of all, by saying that while I support the gist of the motion, I am a little disappointed with some of the inflammatory wording in it. To suggest that the government of Alberta was inadequately prepared for the pandemic is to somehow suggest that we had some crystal ball in knowing exactly what this strain was supposed to be all about and that we could somehow persuade the provider, GlaxoSmithKline, the people who are making the vaccine, that we had some way of impacting how much of it to make, when and where, and so on, and that's simply not the case.

3:40

I believe that what we're doing here today, Mr. Speaker, is of a positive nature nonetheless. I say that because while we wait for additional vaccine to be provided to this province, as every province is waiting, there are some things that we could focus on in the interim to help stop the spread of it and to help stop the fearmongering that sometimes accompanies things like this. I'm not suggesting for a moment that this is intended to diminish the importance of the issue; it certainly is in fact intended to elevate the importance of it. But it's important that we not panic at this time and that we send out messages of things being addressed as quickly as possible given the circumstances that confront us today. There is little purpose in pointing fingers at anybody or in accusing anyone with blame. Rather, I think we need to focus on the fact that as vaccine comes available, it's going to be distributed as quickly as possible, just like

it was last week, to the rest of the province so that everybody who wants this vaccination can have direct access to it. That includes the aboriginal population.

Mr. Speaker, in that respect my ministry is an integral part of a very intensive rollout and a co-ordinated effort to monitor this situation closely and to help ensure that aboriginal people in Alberta, regardless of where they live – on reserve, on settlement, or off reserve, off settlement in our communities – receive the information, the care, the supplies, and the services that they want. We identified that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in the province of Alberta are important populations to focus on, and we base that decision on the experience that we had with the first wave of H1N1 back in the spring.

Alberta's plan for pandemic influenza is for all Albertans – let's be clear – and that includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations living here. The aboriginal communities pandemic influenza liaison committee has been established. It meets weekly. This is essentially a subgroup that's been established to provide a forum for discussing the specifics for Métis people, for example, living in Alberta. I should stress that given that 50 per cent of Alberta's aboriginal population is less than 24 years of age, of additional concern is the number of very serious cases appearing in young people in both the previously healthy and in those with pre-existing medical conditions.

Planning for H1N1 influenza pandemic involves many partners to complete the planning. We've worked very closely with Alberta Health and Wellness, with Alberta Health Services, with the Public Health Agency of Canada, with Health Canada officials to ensure as smooth a rollout and as smooth a provision of vaccines as could possibly be undertaken. We've worked with the chief medical officers of health. We've worked with the lead responders within their staff branches to ensure that the positive messaging on what to do to prevent this further spread while we wait for vaccinations has occurred.

As part of that comprehensive and multisector, multiplanning structure Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness have created a specific forum to address more specifically the needs of aboriginal people in Alberta through the committee that I just mentioned and through other strategies to mitigate risks and to minimize any further complications. In fact, the recently released federal immunization priority list identified aboriginal populations as a priority group. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that when the minister rolls out his plan with the medical health officers tomorrow, the new plan, we will see some very concrete ideas on how they're going to go about dealing with the completion of the phenomenally successful program of last week.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I was the associate minister of health in 1999, 2000, and 2001, I can recall going to provincial, federal, and territorial ministers meetings when we talked about the next pandemic. I'll confess to you that it was a little bit confusing at the time to hear people in 1999 planning for a pandemic that they had no idea what it was going to be about or what the strain was going to look like or what the virus was going to be like, but that it was going to happen within five years. That was a little bit confusing. But let's make no mistake about it. The fact is that you don't know what the strain is going to be. All you know is that on average about every five years there is some type of pandemic or a pandemic scare.

That's precisely where we are today: 1999 to 2004, 2004 to 2009. As we're solving this particular dilemma that's before us today, we're already, I am sure, in health circles across the country looking at what the pandemic will be five years down the line. But you cannot – you cannot – prepare enough vaccine that far in advance.

You don't know what the strain of the virus is going to be. You don't know, as a result, what the shelf life of that medicine is going to be. You don't know how quickly you're going to reproduce it. You don't know how it's going to ramify and how it's going to affect different population groups and different population ages. Those factors are simply unknowns. I want to congratulate the people at GlaxoSmithKline for having done a pretty incredible job of providing as much vaccine as quickly as possible and for helping us in Alberta get it a week earlier than we were anticipating. That's good news.

To the people who have been standing in line, I want to express our sincere apology once again. I'm truly sorry that that happened, that there were long lineups and there were long waiting lists. That is unfortunate. I'm also sorry that a number of people were not able to get in at all after having waited a long time. But that's not specific to Alberta. If you take a look at what's happening elsewhere, you will find that these lineups are occurring in those provinces as well. I say that because I was having some informal chats with other ministers last week when I was in Toronto for the meeting of federal-provincial-territorial and aboriginal ministers and/or leaders when we met to talk about a number of issues pertaining to the aboriginal community. There was no one that was immune to the lineups to some degree.

I want to applaud the medical experts, the people who have designed the program and had the successes that they had last week. I know they will recognize that things could have gone better, obviously. Hindsight is so perfect all the time. This is a national vaccine shortage. That's what this is.

Last week I assured First Nations on reserve that we were working hard on their behalf to ensure they had adequate supplies. I'm happy that all 47 First Nations in this province received the vaccine, and they rolled out as quickly as they could as much of it as possible. I'm happy that there's a specific plan in place, which now, obviously, will be modified tomorrow, to help Métis settlements. The Elizabeth Métis settlement had a clinic on October 27. The Fishing Lake Métis settlement had a clinic that started on October 28. The Buffalo Lake Métis settlement had one that started on October 29. The plan was for the remaining settlements to start as early as Thursday or Friday of this week and continue on next week. That would be the Kikino Métis settlement, the Paddle Prairie Métis settlement, the Gift Lake Métis settlement, the Peavine Métis settlement, and the East Prairie Métis settlement. So those plans were in place. I know they will now need to be modified because of the quick take-up of the vaccine that was provided to us.

I don't want people to leave their listening and watching of the day to feel insecure or to feel in some way threatened. That is not to undermine anything that's been said to date in terms of the critical importance. I do want people to have a sense that we are doing the very best we can but that we're reliant on the supply. We're totally reliant on the supply. We have people in place. We have locations in place. I could list you 15 or 20 different locations in the north half of the province just within about a 150- to 200-mile radius where this is happening and will occur.

So thank you, and please let's be patient and work our way through this as positively as we can.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do feel that it's very important that we take the time today to have a little more debate on this subject of the H1N1 pandemic. It's been very discouraging for the people that have been calling me in my constituency. I heard

from some seniors on the weekend that, again, they opened up a new clinic, and the accessibility was unbelievable, how far they had to park and walk in order to get there.

I want to back up here and talk about all the planning that has gone on. It hasn't been in depth enough to really look at the whole situation. Again, probably the most concerning thing, that has been brought up by the good Member for Edmonton-Riverview as well as all the others, is the fact that so many people are having to stand outside and wait. The number of people that are having to stand outside is not acceptable, and I hope that is going to be addressed tomorrow. We need to look at different facilities and where we're going to have these people come in. This is Alberta, and it is critical that they are in areas that enable people to come in, whether it's school gyms, whether it's such places as conference centres, downtown exhibition grounds. We need to really address this going in there.

3:50

The other thing that I'm concerned about, that we seem to be missing in the debate, is a prioritization. We've heard of the first three, but what are we going to do after the young children have been vaccinated, those people with health risks? What's next on the list? Albertans need to be informed in realizing that. Some of the concerns that I've heard: I've had teachers that are teaching elementary school and are not able to get out to receive their vaccination because they're at work and they can't get there. I think we need to really focus on that area of young children and who they're exposed to in the areas they're at and to realize how we get that vaccination there. It would just be prudent, I think, for a health person, especially out in some of the smaller areas, to be able to go to these different schools and ensure that the teachers are vaccinated so that they're not exposed because we can't afford to have our teachers go down along with the students and be in there. I think that we need to realize those things. Daycare workers: have they been contacted? Is there a situation ready to touch the daycare workers?

Most important of all, though, is there a plan in place, and are they ready to mobilize into a hotbed where the pandemic could reach an unparalleled level, where they can't reach them? Are they ready? They need to start informing Albertans. I believe also, again from Edmonton-Riverview, that a very important part is the ethics framework. It hasn't been addressed. It needs to be addressed, and Albertans need to know and understand these things. We need to make it public. It's incredibly important that the public is informed.

Another one of the things that's very frustrating – and I think that Alberta Health Services needs to do a better job – is to really let people know because of the rumours now when someone passes away: oh, it was H1N1. It's immediately put onto this area that “Oh, this has happened” only to find out three or four days later that it wasn't so. I think they need to be on top and in front of information on what's happening during this pandemic so that the fear doesn't spread and get out of control.

There are many areas that we need to be concerned. I think that they need to publicize. It was good to hear from the minister, and maybe I've just missed it with all of the news, that we have 180,000 doses – how are those going to be broken up and spread around the province? – and to realize there are 50,000 more coming in. I think this is important information that needs to be presented to Albertans so they understand the situation. Then when we understand, the frustration level isn't so high.

There are just so many areas, Mr. Speaker, where we need to a better job of prioritizing, we need to do a better job of planning, and then we need to do a better job of educating and informing in those

areas so that people do understand the ethics and the decisions that are being made and why they're going forward. I think it's most important that it needs to be raised to a nonpartisan level. We don't need the hits back and forth attacking individuals or this or that. Let's look at the problems, let's address them clearly, and let's have some solutions rather than the nitpicking and pointing out that this has gone wrong or that's gone wrong. It has happened. There's been incompetence on many levels, it seems like. Like I say, even such things as realizing where people can park to be covered from the weather because that's going to be our next major problem. The weather is going to change. Have we planned to look at moving into better facilities that will enable people in a more comfortable way to receive it?

Another area that also hasn't been addressed – maybe it will be going forward – is when you go into an emergency and you have the triage nurse that lines people up. I don't understand for the life of me why they haven't taken people out and moved them ahead and formed two lines, just like in emergency, or three lines, and said, you know, "Here's young people, here's pregnant mothers, here's people at health risk," and actually know that. So when people arrive there, they can realize that these two lines are going first, this is the third line, and if, in fact, they hit those high-risk people first, then we'll be able to be touched. There were so many people that showed up that weren't high risk standing in line and forcing those who were high risk to not get there. Just how can you be there giving those shots, realizing how many people have come through that haven't been asked? Ask the people.

I don't expect the member, or any member, to be there doing the triage, but there are some simple screening questions that could be asked, and then people could move quickly along and get through. It might be as simple as the fact that, you know: "I need to get mine done because my children are coming home at 4 o'clock. I've got to be there in order for them to have someone at home when they arrive." There are multiple questions. We need to do a proper assessment. We need to do better planning. Like I say, we need to be looking at better facilities where people can go. What's the access? Can they use public transportation? Do they have to walk a kilometre to get there? Is it going to be outside if the weather turns?

All of these areas need to be addressed, need to be made public and the people of Alberta told why they're making these decisions, to not just seem haphazardly to be thrown out and each week changing, looking back with 20/20 hindsight as the minister talks about. Well, maybe we do need to be using some 20/20 hindsight because the best way to predict the future is by looking at the past. They fail to be looking at the past and seem to be giving excuses, saying, "Oh, we couldn't plan for this; we couldn't plan for that" although many things could and should have been planned for. Let's make sure we have it right going forward.

I'll step down at this time and listen to the other good members for their ideas on how to set this forth to treat the people of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter this important debate and advise the House of the actions of my ministry. As I said last week, homeless shelters do face special challenges as they work to minimize the spread of the H1N1 virus. As members may know, Alberta has 30 shelters located across the province in all of our major cities and in many of our smaller cities. These shelters

are home to some of our most vulnerable people, people who don't fit into any one demographic but have one thing in common: they have nowhere permanent to stay, so they live on the street.

Homeless people come from all walks of life, Mr. Speaker. Many have jobs, some haven't worked in years, some are addicts, some have debilitating mental illness, many have multiple and serious health conditions and often are chronically ill. All are extremely vulnerable to disease. They sleep in very close quarters at the shelter, and when they do fall ill, they typically become much sicker than healthy people do. So you can see why it's so critical to prevent this virus from getting a serious hold on one of our most vulnerable populations.

I want to speak to the absolute nonsense that I heard in this Assembly last week, and it was from the opposition, Mr. Speaker. That nonsense was all about that we had no plan to protect the homeless or to protect some of our most vulnerable people. In speaking to that, I hope that you listen carefully because there was a lot of work done to assist people that are homeless and people that need protection. That good work was done by our shelter advisers, our shelter operators, working closely with Alberta Health and Wellness and working closely with Alberta Health Services. That considerable work began over the past several months to prepare for the second wave of H1N1, that we knew was coming this fall.

Mr. Speaker, through that work an H1N1 planning guide, the operational planning guide, was developed. Importantly, there was a specific portion of that that dealt with vulnerable populations, and that meant our homeless population as well as included in that. This planning guide was reviewed. It was revised with shelter operators last month. It was created in a way that allowed shelter operators to use their experience, their knowledge, their skills, and their resources for managing contagious disease. They have incredible knowledge. I can tell you from the shelters that I have visited over the past week, which have been a number, that people felt by the debate that was occurring that people were second-guessing the knowledge that they had at the shelters and the experience in how they would be handling the H1N1 virus. That experience, as they shared with me, included managing TB, the Norwalk virus. I mean, the drop-in centre said they had 185 people that contracted the Norwalk virus. They kept them at the shelter, handled it very well as with other communicable diseases.

They do this on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker, in caring for people at shelters that have been ill. So the provincial pandemic guide for vulnerable populations built on this experience, and it identified the critical issues that we needed to plan for this virus. They developed a communications distribution plan for service providers, and they ensured that they had access to appropriate educational materials and procedures. Most importantly, as I said, my ministry worked with Alberta Health Services to develop a strategy for the immunization of both the sheltered and the unsheltered homeless populations and the staff from homeless-serving agencies.

4:00

Alberta Health Services officials met with the organizations. They ensured that their site plans were accurate and that they would meet the need that they saw coming into each shelter because each shelter in each municipality is completely different. That included how to treat the homeless at the shelters, that it was going to be appropriate and that it was going to be effective. They also met to ensure that a sufficient supply of medical supplies was in place at each shelter. These meetings were extremely productive. In fact, one outcome was agreement between the shelters to work co-operatively to leverage the services and the supports among the shelters.

When I said about it being appropriate, I mean, everyone here as well has talked about handwashing, ensuring that people are washing their hands on a continual basis. I can tell you that at the shelters, when you enter a shelter, that's a resource that they're using.

Yes, they're sharing the pamphlet information, et cetera, with people that are homeless, but you can imagine how extremely difficult it is to have people that are entering the shelter follow through with just a generic pandemic planning guide, which is why the homeless were included in this guide. I know the tremendous work that's been done, and I'm going to ask that people here in this Assembly actually thank the shelter operators and thank the shelter advisers for the good work that they've done in protecting our most vulnerable people.

Flu clinics. We had a question about that last week as well, that there weren't any clinics that were being held at shelters. I can tell you that they've been held across the province over the past week. They've been held in Edmonton, Calgary, High Level, Fort McMurray, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge. A clinic was held just recently at the Hope Mission here in Edmonton on Friday, the Calgary drop-in centre. It's very orderly. As I said, the various shelters are protecting our most vulnerable people.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow when they roll out the new plan in protecting the vulnerable people that they've identified, as they move forward with this, I'm hoping that people will support that plan, that they'll recognize, just as the Minister of Health and Wellness said, you know, that we're pausing and looking at how we move in the future. It really does have to do with the resources that are available. That resource, of course, is the vaccine and how it can be distributed as we move forward. I know that that will include the clinics and our shelters as well continuing to operate along with that rollout.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on the emergency debate on pandemic influenza. There are three key issues that I have with the way this plan has rolled out, and I've been raising them in the House and out. They revolve around communication, resources, and ensuring that hospitals are capable of managing the extra demands.

On the issue of communications what is needed, clearly, is to reduce the level of fear by having a communicated plan and demonstrating on the ground that you can deliver on the plan. Neither of those were, unfortunately, provided to the public, so we did indeed have consistent anxiety and overreaction to the offer of vaccination. That plan has to be based on good science and ethical guidelines, which have been part of the pandemic plan for as long as I've ever been involved in it, which is over a decade. It focuses first on those at risk. There's no question about that. Other provinces followed that. For some reason we didn't.

The second key issue, then, is ensuring that we have the resources to deliver the vaccine in an efficient and effective way by professionals. Again, we tried to save money and go cheap on this program and had only five in Edmonton and four in Calgary when we could have had many more settings to provide the service, especially if we'd called on retired and student resources that should have been called on until we had the several hundred thousand high-risk people that need it first.

The third has to do with hospitals and having the capacity to respond to the extra demands in emergency departments, in waiting areas, in beds, and in intensive care units. We have cut the service to the bone, and it's clear that there is no capacity for dealing with

the extra demands that are coming with this pandemic. In spite of lots of warning, lots of heads-up, this government chose to continue its freeze and cost-cutting measures at the expense of our most vulnerable populations.

The statement I issued early on in the pandemic indicated that the target of all vaccination programs is to get at least 80 per cent of the population vaccinated. There's no question that the cut-off when people start to be protected and the transmission of an infectious agent starts to go down is when we get over 80 per cent of the population covered. That does not negate the priority that high-risk individuals should take in any vaccination program, and to confuse the two from my statement on pandemic is really unfortunate.

I also have three letters here from citizens who wanted to be known in the public by their letters of concern. John Jessiman from Calgary writes:

At 10:15 AM . . . I was turned away from the old [Alberta Children's hospital], as were countless others, by a couple of stressed [emergency medical technicians] (their ambulance idling by the door) in an attempt to line up for the H1N1 vaccination for my daughter, Kathleen, since she is advised by her family physician to get the shot,

before having to enter hospital December 4.

At that time, I was informed by the paramedics doing "door duty" that there would be a nine hour delay for me if I were allowed [at all] inside. All the other clinics in Calgary are similarly oversubscribed and closed today as of sometime before I was turned away. There are reports that people with [serious] symptoms . . . were made to wait outside the other side to the old [Children's hospital] until . . . 8:00 AM . . . while perfectly well people were allowed to wait inside . . .

I have to ask, what if all these people were actually ill with [this] mutated . . . virus. Do the . . . conservatives have enough coffins on order? This is a gong show, from this man's point of view.

I woke up the other day with the thought that the current government of Alberta is extremely reminiscent of the So-cred's when my family moved here in 1966: imperious, detached, and oblivious.

They should resign in embarrassment; they've transported us to the third world.

I hope some of this will be helpful to hammer these . . . bums. A second one from Monika Rieger, also from Calgary.

I thought you should be aware of a situation here in Calgary . . .

The groups allowed to go to the clinic at the Oval are: pregnant women, young children, seniors and family members accompanying anyone in those groups.

Notice that disabled people are specifically NOT included in those groups. And yet, there are many who are not seniors but have equal difficulty standing/waiting in the long lineups . . . I am such a person. As well, I am in the high risk group (because of lung illnesses) who should be getting the vaccine as soon as possible.

I have tried to contact my MLA and Alberta Health Services and have had no response from either one. At the moment, the Deputy Medical Officer's staff is trying to get an answer for me as to why [I was excluded.]

Please email or phone me if you would like more information [and] . . . use my case in the Legislature or anywhere else to put pressure on the government and/or Alberta Health Services about this issue.

The third one is from Karen Bose.

I'm sure I am not the only unsatisfied Albertan with the way Alberta Health Services has conducted the . . . clinics. It is a glaring example of mismanagement, inefficiency, and short sightedness. I am an asthmatic, and all three of my young children are severely asthmatic. We are the definition of high risk. We have not been

able to get near a vaccination clinic because of the horrendous lineups. These clinics should have been designed to target just the high risk populations first. Why was this not done?

And she goes on.

I guess the final question that all Albertans are asking is: why, with hundreds of thousands of doses still available, have we shut down clinics when we have vulnerable people remaining and health care workers that still could benefit from this and are being exposed today, as they were yesterday, as they will be tomorrow, because of delays in getting the essential service that is there, and people are willing to give it, but this government has stopped the clinics for some unknown reason?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

4:10

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the comments that have just been raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition definitely bring me, if I can say, the energy to speak.

Mr. Speaker, whether it's the government or whether it's the opposition, we have some responsibility. This is not a House that should be spreading fear. This should be a House of reason. This is not the avenue for scare tactics and political advantage. Our government is guided by a pandemic plan which is flexible and scalable. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is currently supporting Alberta Health and Wellness as it takes action under the pandemic plan. This plan was not developed today. We have been working on this plan for three years. We've been working on this plan as a cross-ministry, with many ministries involved. This needs to be adaptable. Why? Because every situation is different.

We are providing updated and timely information to our partners, whether it's municipalities, First Nations, Métis settlements, and other government ministries. Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to co-ordinate and support a response to this pandemic, whether it remains mild, as it is now, or whether it becomes more serious. The safety and security of Albertans is an essential priority of this government and our Premier.

Shortly after our Premier became Premier, he created the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. The agency's mandate is to support communities and industry before, during, and after emergencies. When any emergency occurs, be it a pandemic, a flood, or a fire, agency staff are there to assist and inform. The agency collects and shares timely information. This helps us all to work together and share resources to respond to emergency events. Mr. Speaker, let me repeat: this helps us all to work together. This House should be working together. Everything we do as a government focuses on co-operation and collaboration. This philosophy shapes my ministry in everything we do. Together we will continue to build safe and strong communities that our families, our friends, our neighbours, and our sisters would want and deserve.

I want to thank the front-line health workers for their tireless efforts in administering the H1N1 vaccine to Albertans. As has been described many times today, 400,000 Albertans have been vaccinated so far. There is no doubt that that is due to the efforts of dedicated public servants. I applaud their professionalism and dedication in ensuring that Albertans are safe.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to add some of my comments to this debate flowing from Standing Order 30 requesting an emergency debate on the government's preparation for H1N1. This is of great interest to me because, as some members of the House may know, I spent the greater part of September going out and making presentations on the work that I've done as their member to all of the seniors' residences and activity centres in my constituency.

Of course, one of the things that I made sure to talk about – I actually did up a special brochure – was preparation for H1N1. I was primarily concentrating on the fact that in Alberta we have not had a major crisis, in memory, where people might be ill in their homes and others couldn't reach them or couldn't reach them for a period of time. There could be some additional problems. The way I was explaining it was, you know, in Quebec they had the ice storm; in Ontario they had SARS. There are places in Canada that are a little better prepared to deal with this on a sort of personal basis.

I was urging my seniors and, indeed, my constituents to take reasonable precautions, the whole thing about the handwashing and the use of the sanitizers, that sort of thing, but also to not panic but do plan on how they could prepare their home, make sure they had food supplies and supplies for their pets and that they had some additional things that may be helpful, masks and gloves and water and things like that in their home, in case they were sick for a period of time and there was possibly a lag in others being able to come and assist them. I was trying to get people to kind of use their common sense, not to panic but to make arrangements so that they could be as comfortable as possible.

I actually didn't talk at all about, you know, whether they'd be first in line or last in line for an inoculation for a vaccine because I didn't know. So I actually didn't talk about that part.

If I may offer my advice to members of the House as well, please don't panic, but please do plan, and I think we'll all be a little farther ahead.

The second thing I did was that I phoned around to some of my contacts in the federal government and anybody else I could find that might have been working on pandemic planning because I wasn't getting a sense from the government of what was going on. I've got to say here, folks: you guys are becoming so hypersensitive about security and any information leaking out that you're doing yourself a disservice in this area and in a number of other ones. I couldn't readily get a good feel for where the government was in its pandemic planning, so I asked around, and the response I got was: well, they're doing not too badly. I mean, it's not a flat-out disaster, and I was glad to hear that.

The two exceptions were that there were problems in the system because of the chaos created by the constant restructuring in the health system and that that was having some fallout, and the second area that I was advised to look for was surge capacity. I would argue that that continues to be a critical area where I'm not getting a sense from the government that that is well under control. When I use my common sense and look at, you know, the news reports, when I look at the number of code reds, I look at what people are saying in the media, I look at what people are saying that work in the hospitals, we don't have a lot of surge capacity, and I don't know how big our need for that surge capacity may be. I mean, at one point they were talking about 15 per cent of the people that got H1N1 would die when the average is more like 6 per cent. I don't have a sense of that. But I also don't have a really clear sense of where this government is on that surge capacity.

I'm noticing that in this debate there is a reluctance from – and maybe there's a reason for that. Maybe government members are feeling a little defensive about what's been coming at them around this. To be fair, I don't think that reflecting on what people have

said to us should be taken as a personal attack by members of the government, but it is reflective of how the public is feeling or at least how certain people in the public are feeling. So when this debate started, I went out and phoned my office and said: please bring over a couple of the e-mails that we've received that we can verify are from constituents of Edmonton-Centre. I still get ones from across Alberta, and I'm sure you'd like to deal with your own people, and I'm happy to send those back to you. But these are from Edmonton-Centre, and I will table these at the appropriate time tomorrow.

One woman, Ann Campbell, notes, "Why [were] the at-risk people not handled on a priority basis?" Well, my friends, that's a question that's been asked by an awful lot of people. The government made a choice to open it up and say: please be considerate; at-risk people should go to the front of the line, but we're not going to police it. It was a choice they made. People are interested in why that choice was made. Indeed, Ann is asking that question. She also asks:

Why is vaccine not being made available through the primary care networks where many of those with chronic disease are registered and attend?

And, I would add, attend regularly.

Why are the clinics that have been established under staffed? How many dollars have been spent on pandemic planning?

All of those, I think, are pretty reasonable questions and should be aired and asked, especially in a forum like this.

4:20

I also have a question from Victoria Stevens. She says that there's a

sheer terror that the media and our government has been feeding them. Yesterday, the clinics were shut down due to a shortage of the vaccine, this after the government assured Albertans that there would be enough for everyone.

So there is confusion out there, and it would be helpful if the government could be more open in sharing some of that information for people because I think they're genuinely seeking it. She also asks:

Why did the government change their minds? Why did the government decide that allowing the masses to take over is better than making sure our most vulnerable are taken care of? And why is the government pushing this vaccine so forcefully on all Canadians?

I'm assuming she's asking why there's been such a campaign to get the uptake on H1N1, but then clearly she prefers that people should be in a priority lineup, and she names them: "pregnant women, children under . . . five, aboriginal peoples, and people with underlying severe health problems."

The other thing that I will say just by way of a hopeful statement is that one of the schools in my constituency was one of the ones that had an outbreak in the first round of H1N1, an absolutely devastating thing to happen to a school, as you can imagine. They had to close the school. They had to admit that they had a child in the school who had tested positive. They had to clean the school. If you can imagine if they said to us here today: "Sorry, but if there's H1N1 in this building, everybody get out your rubber gloves. Here are the bleach wipes. Go to it. Scrub down the walls, every door, every telephone, every armrest on every chair." That's what that staff had to go through at that school. They did it with great good humour.

Here they are six months later, and they have had no further outbreaks in that school. They went to an extraordinary length to be able to deal with it, and they really pulled together to do it. That school is Grandin school, and I am so proud of that school. It's a small school, but boy do they have spirit. They're led by a fabulous principal, Reny, and he and his staff really did a marvellous job with that. So there is life after H1N1 as they well show to us, and by pulling together, they got through all of that.

The last thing I want to mention and to recognize is, in fact, the work that has been done by many of the front-line workers. Again, as part of coming into session, I had gone out and met with a number of the not-for-profit groups that work in Edmonton-Centre. As you know, we have a lot of them because there's a lot of service provision through that sector delivering either contracted work for the government or charitable work.

You know, all the shelters are in downtown Edmonton in my riding, a lot of the missions, the church groups that offer support, the soup kitchens, and groups like that but also organizations like the Boyle Street Co-op. They were certainly watching this and waiting and planning. They were worried, and they were looking for information at the same time, but of course they're going to do a good job. They're looking after people who are extremely vulnerable, and the staff there know it. Again, they were trying to get out ahead of this and get as much information as they could ahead of this so they could prepare as much as possible for the protection of their own staff but also the protection of the clients and people that come to them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for asking leave to have this very important conversation. While I may not necessarily agree with all the wording, I would agree with the intent, that this is a very important issue that affects all of us in our society. Now, I'd also like to thank all of my colleagues in this Legislature for their unanimity in agreement with the hon. member to have this discussion.

I'd just like to talk to you just to explain to everybody about pandemics and H1N1. Now, to put everything into perspective, years ago we had the SARS that had hit the world, and that caused a lot of fear across the world. That's when all these pandemic plans were implemented. The planning began all across the nation in all the hospitals and all the health regions and provinces. Then there was H5N1. H5N1 was this scary bug that we all worried about because it truly has anywhere between 10 to 20 per cent death rate.

H1N1. We didn't know much about this when it first struck. You'd watch CNN and see Dr. Sanjay Gupta running through stairwells of hotels. We didn't know what was happening. As we gained more evidence and more data, this is what we do know about H1N1, to put it into perspective not only for my friends here in the Legislative Assembly but also for all Albertans.

Regularly every year we expect about 4,000 to 5,000 Canadians to die from the regular influenza flu, and that's tragic. Those people are usually the very young and the very old. With H1N1, from the Australian experience we've learned – we have the fortune of having our winter after theirs – that assuming nobody was vaccinated in this province, we would expect about 875,000 Albertans to contract the H1N1 influenza. The challenge there is that nobody has immunity at this point in time unless you were born before 1918. Of those, we expect 400 deaths – 400 deaths – assuming nobody was vaccinated in this province. We will have a large number of people who will get quite sick and require hospitalizations. So 875,000 are expected to get the flu. A few thousand are expected to get sick and have to be hospitalized. Of those, 400 are expected not to survive.

Now, what we really need to concentrate on is, number one, prevention: the importance of handwashing and maintaining your distance from people who are sick and, if you are sick, to stay home and to decrease transmission of the virus.

Number two, the vaccination programs. This is the largest mass vaccination program in this nation. I do have to apologize to all those folks who waited for so many hours and weren't able to get the vaccine. I am, however, very happy that we were able to roll out 400,000 vaccinations in a very short period of time very efficiently. Now, the challenge is that our supply of vaccine is not fully there as we had expected.

Now, of those 400 deaths there are a number of people who are identified as high risk: those between the ages of six months and five years; pregnant mothers; those with chronic medical conditions, who have diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, neurological disease, who are on immunosuppressant drugs; many members of our remote aboriginal communities; and many members of our society who have morbid obesity. I am aware that right now today we have 16 confirmed cases in intensive care units on ventilators. I'm also aware that there are a few 23- and 26-year-olds and 50-year-olds who have no risk factors who also are on ventilators.

We still have 3.2 million people to vaccinate, Mr. Speaker. We're very early in this. I'm glad this is an emergency debate. As an emergency doctor when these things happen, we always ask for calm. We all need to just calm down a little bit. We have a lot of work to do. We have a long way to go. We have 3.2 million people, I'd like to repeat, still to vaccinate. For any vaccination program to be successful, there is something that we call herd immunity. My neighbour here may not be at high risk, but they may have a family member at home who is high risk. To get herd immunity we need 60 per cent of the members of our society to get vaccinated. I'm thankful to the members of the opposition that they agree with the vaccination program because there are many people out there who don't agree with vaccinations.

Now, the peak of the flu is expected in about six weeks' time, and we'll have another wave in January or February. Today is not the peak of the flu season.

On the vaccination program there is something called an adjuvant. An adjuvant is really an oily substance that they place in your arm. It helps to maintain the vaccine in that location for a longer time so we get a better immune response, and we only need to use one-quarter of the vaccine. You're getting a better response with one-quarter of the vaccine. We've been able with the adjuvant to stretch our vaccine supply fourfold. The challenge recently with the supply is that because of the uncertainty and concern over pregnant women, they're designing a special dose just for pregnant mothers, and they've had to put production of the vaccine on hold.

4:30

So I ask all Albertans, number one, to wash your hands before you eat, to wash them regularly, and if you're sick, to stay home. Now, of those patients who do get sick, if you're a high-risk Albertan, you need to see your health care provider. We have a treatment for the flu. You need to get that treatment, preferably within 48 hours. We can stretch it to 72 but preferably within 48.

Secondly, of those Albertans who get very sick, the initial symptoms will be sore muscles, aches and pains, cough, loss of appetite, fatigue – that's normal when you get the flu – but if you've got chest pain, shortness of breath, or signs of significant dehydration, if you're feeling faint or just really sick, you need to see a health care worker because, one, we need to get you some fluids, some rehydration, we need to assess your vitals, and we need to get you this medicine for treatment if you do get very sick from H1N1.

For the vast majority of Albertans – I don't have the exact number, but it's in the 90 per cent range and then some – most patients will be absolutely fine. They will be sick from the flu. They will have fever and chills. I ask that they stay home and get

lots of rest, drink lots of fluids, and don't transmit the virus to members of your family or members of your community.

The challenge we face on the front lines is that because of all this fear that you hear in the media, everyone is so scared, and they're showing up at the emergency departments. Yes, they have the flu, but they're not that sick. Then we have a number of people who actually probably need to go to the emergency department because they're in the high-risk group or they are very sick. What that's doing is placing an undue burden on the front-line staff. They're working tremendously hard, Mr. Speaker. You have to give them credit. I still work every Sunday alongside many of the health care workers in this province. They're working very hard to provide care to Albertans. I want to remind everybody that H1N1 is not the only medical issue out there. What this does is place a challenge on delivering health care to everyone else. This is a national issue. It's not a made-in-Alberta issue. It's not a made-in-Canada issue. It's an international issue as well.

Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that this is not SARS, that this is not H5N1, we still need to deal with this issue. We have a health care system to run, and we need to run this together. I have had the opportunity to visit the emergency departments in Edmonton and Calgary. I just phoned my colleague at the pediatric emergency department. They're open for business. They're very busy with a lot of people showing up with suspected H1N1. All of the admitted patients have been moved out of their wards so they can deal with all the sick children showing up at the Stollery emergency for northern Alberta.

We have these flu assessment clinics. One opened up yesterday in Duggan in Edmonton. They saw 311 patients quickly, rapidly, and they relieved a lot of the burden on the front lines in the emergency departments.

There is a stage zero to stage 4 plan that they have for the intensive care units. I met with ICU docs. We're at stage 1. There's a long way to go. There are plans in place to deal with this if it ever gets that bad.

Mr. Speaker, I just ask all members of this Assembly to unite to work together on this issue and for the solidarity to support front-line staff, and I ask all Albertans to be patient and to allow those who are high risk to get the vaccination program first. If you fit in that high-risk category and you're sick, please get treatment early.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to speak at this emergency debate regarding the Alberta government's preparedness on the H1N1 pandemic. I guess that before I get into playing a little bit of Monday morning quarterback, I would like to begin by thanking all of the front-line health care workers who have been out there, who have been administering the vaccines at the various locations and trying to do their best to ensure that Albertans are safe and free from illness.

The second thing I'd like to sort of talk about just quickly is a little bit on quarterbacks in general. If we look at yesterday, we had the venerable Brett Favre go back into Green Bay, and he had a game plan. He went there – they actually won the game – and threw four touchdown passes. No doubt this morning in Minnesota people in coffee shops, people around town are analyzing his play and analyzing the plan he put into place and analyzing what he did. Today, obviously, people are saying: "Brett you did pretty good. You threw four touchdowns yesterday. You led us to victory."

I guess Brett Favre, unlike our minister of health, has been known

for a long time. He's been a quarterback prize since he's been 10 years old. On occasion on Sunday afternoon when you go out there and light it up and you play great and the plan you devised was followed through and executed and you delivered, people are going to talk well about you because you followed through and executed your plan. If you don't deliver on a plan or if you don't play well or you don't produce, that is when people are going to look at it and talk about it. It may not be as glorious as you want, but that's why you're the quarterback. That's why you get paid the big bucks. That's why sometimes you get to go in the parade and all that stuff. I guess that now is a little bit of that opportunity for us to do it, and I don't think it is a bad thing that some of that Monday morning quarterbacking is possibly going on in this House.

If we look at what has happened, I don't disagree with the health minister when he says that some three months ago they were looking at numbers where great fear was placed on whether people were even going to get the health care vaccination, whether people were going to go and get the H1N1 vaccine. I can see this as highly concerning both to him and to other health ministers across the nation, so they did start probably beating the drum a little bit, letting people know to get out there and letting more people know than possibly the ones who were most likely to get the H1N1 virus, hence our decision to open up our lines to everyone. Every man, woman, and child regardless of ability, disability, need, or vulnerability would be accepted at our lines last Monday morning when the clinics opened. That was a conscious decision made by this minister and, I'm assuming, some other ministers around the country, that led to exceedingly long lines almost the first day or at least the second day, when people came out and started coming.

Now, the health minister is right also when he says that when the gentleman out east, the poor young boy who fell victim to H1N1, passed away as a result of this pandemic or this flu, that caused a great many more people to take this seriously, to go out and get their inoculation shot, and to a certain extent mobilized a population that wasn't necessarily going to get immunized. It drove them to the tents to get vaccines in numbers not expected.

However, when we look at that, when that was happening, probably a decision had to be made at that time to be more forceful about limiting those who were in healthier or healthy conditions from going and getting their vaccines, by no means an easy feat but one that could have been done and could have been enforced, and I believe that therein lies sort of essentially what happened here.

4:40

We weren't as bold as we should have been earlier last week to come out and say: healthy Albertans, you're not going to get the shot. That would have been a difficult thing to do. We'd already called out to mobilize the masses to go, but there had to be a decision made earlier to say no, to say: "No. We're going to get this to the people who need it, the people who are vulnerable, the people who are more likely to succumb to this illness and more likely to die." I believe that could have been done earlier, and I believe it should have been done earlier. That's my Monday morning quarterbacking for you.

A little bit on the numbers. We have inoculated 10 per cent of the population. Of the 10 per cent that's inoculated, I guess that if you look at that at its face value and don't dig any deeper, it is a reasonable number. But if we look down and dig deeper, because we didn't go back earlier in the week and say, "No; healthy men and women who are ages 20 to 60 are not going to get this vaccine regardless unless you're in certain circumstances," with that 10 per cent – and I'm just estimating; I'm no expert on these things – I would say that probably you missed, you know, a large portion of

the target population. As the estimate by one of the health minister's right-hand men was that 30 per cent of Albertans are vulnerable or should be on a priority list for this vaccine, maybe 3 per cent of those actually got the vaccine because the lineups, the way they were situated, made it more easy for those who were stronger, less infirm, less vulnerable to get the shot. That was, I think, a valid concern and legitimate for us people calling into the phone lines to judge the quarterback's play. A legitimate complaint, and I will stand by that.

Going forward – I guess it was mentioned earlier – I'd like to hope that we sort of now have a plan in place that outlines how to get the most vulnerable the shots they need. I would like to add – and this just came in from a constituent today – what I think is a very valid issue: to look at teachers possibly being added to this list of people who should receive the vaccine. [interjection] I didn't quite hear.

Mr. Liepert: I said: we've got a shortage.

Mr. Hehr: I know, but even with the shortage possibly teachers could be added to the list of people. I'm not sure. Again, that is why the minister of health will have to prioritize. I'm saying that if there's any possibility to have teachers on that list, he should prioritize. If he can't, I understand. There are a great many people on the list who are in vulnerable situations.

Nonetheless, those are my comments, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this. I was also happy about Mr. Favre throwing four touchdowns yesterday afternoon.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, followed by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Ms. Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to join in this debate about a very, very important issue, that issue being in particular the government's inadequate preparations for the pandemic H1N1 influenza program. I will stick to the inclusion of that word "inadequate" notwithstanding that I appreciate that some members opposite get a little prickly at it, but I'm afraid that that is the situation that we are faced with here in Alberta.

I want to say that that is the case notwithstanding our acceptance of the fact that there are some situations, some factors that impact governments across the country to which we were no more subject than anybody else, so I understand that there are some issues that are out of our control.

One of those issues was the unpredictable uptake, absolutely. I understand. Public health officials typically spend their time trying to talk people into vaccination, and they probably had underestimated the degree to which the press coverage of H1N1 over the last several months had created a desire on the part of all Canadians to be inoculated. That's fine, and I appreciate that that was an issue that spread across the country. I also appreciate that the shortage of the vaccine is not something that is in the control of this government but that, rather, is something that is in the bailiwick of the federal government and the relationship that they do or do not have with the vaccine producer.

Having said that, though, notwithstanding those challenges that faced all governments similarly across the country, I believe that in Alberta we managed to take those challenges and multiply them and create a problem that was much bigger – much bigger – than it needed to be. That exists, basically, in two ways: first of all, in the distribution of the vaccine and, secondly, in what is to come, which is going to be the treatment of Albertans when some do ultimately succumb to the flu and need enhanced treatment.

Let's just talk a little bit about the distribution of the vaccine. There's been much backslapping across the way about the fact that they were able to get 400,000 Albertans vaccinated. But, of course, as I think a number of members in this Assembly have already noted, public health experts across the country agree that the success of a vaccination program rests in part on how quickly you vaccinate those most at risk and those most likely to be subject to the spread of the particular flu or pandemic in question, the virus in question. So the number, 400,000, is not really particularly relevant if that actual number advertises over and over and over again how we managed to misplace our resources in such a grand way. What we did in Alberta, unlike most other provinces, is that we failed to prioritize the distribution of that vaccine. We did that in part by sending very, very confused messages throughout the province. We didn't do that just through our public health officials, but we started by doing that right here in this Legislative Assembly.

For instance, in question period on Tuesday, October 27, before news had spread widely about the fatality out east, the minister of health said, "We do recognize, however, that the crest of this flu will probably happen sometime in November, and that's why it's important over the next two or three weeks for people to get vaccinated." That is not a message saying: let's just have the priority people – the vulnerable people, the kids under five, the pregnant mothers, and those in remote communities – get vaccinated. No, no, no. That's a message designed to get everybody out, and it's not one that's consistent with what the government has since suggested in their approach.

Two days later the Premier himself says, "But, again, I stress the fact: please, I know, longer lineups, et cetera, but get the vaccine." That's what the Premier was saying to Albertans last week. Interestingly, though, at that point apparently the minister of health was starting to get a little bit worried because in the very same question period the minister of health said, "We need to ensure that the right patients are receiving the vaccine appropriately." So they started to be moving along that line, but of course they gave no clear indication to Albertans that if you're not part of the at-risk group, don't go anywhere near the clinics. They didn't say that. They just kind of hedged their bets, and that created the kind of chaos that we have now.

On the weekend I heard from a woman who is an elementary school teacher who is six and a half months pregnant who waited in line for four hours at a clinic outside of Edmonton, in Spruce Grove I believe it was, and was unable to get the vaccine and then did it again the next day and was unable to get the vaccine and has still been unable to get the vaccine.

The other thing about how the government has managed this that is very problematic, though, is where we're at now. Now we have the minister of health saying: well, we're just going to trust that the high-risk people show up to get the vaccine; we're not going to ask them if they're pregnant; we're not going to ask them if they have a chronic problem; we have no idea how many of those 400,000 people that were vaccinated actually are part of the high-risk group that we need to focus on now. To me that's just awe inspiring.

4:50

Presumably now that we've finally seen the light and we've decided to administer this in the way every other province has, we are not going to let the general population in on this game until we have fully vaccinated the targeted group that we should have been focusing on last week. But how can we decide when to change the rules of the game if we don't know when the targeted group is vaccinated, if we haven't kept track of who amongst those targeted

people were vaccinated within that 400,000 group? It's shocking to me that this is the information we're getting back from the minister: I have no idea; we're just going to trust them. Wow. Who is running this show?

Then we hear the government talk about how, well, we have all these problems and all these challenges across the country, and we're doing no better or no worse than other provinces. In fact, I would suggest that that's not the case. Several times the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs and the minister of health have made statements like: all the First Nations communities have received the vaccine. Now, I'm going to take them at their word, and I'm going to believe that's the case. But what, of course, is the critical point is that the First Nations groups received the vaccine because that was a federal government responsibility, and they started working on that very early on. Back when we all knew it was a problem, they decided to work on it.

Meanwhile, the Métis settlements, which are under the jurisdiction and are the responsibility of this government, we heard today have not for the most part been fully vaccinated. It sounds as though the majority of the communities haven't received any vaccine, and we know that some of the communities that were mentioned by the minister today as having received them, although the vaccine was there and there were clinics, ran out of vaccine before they were able to fully vaccinate them.

What we have, then, are two examples of how government can work. One is how it worked with the First Nations communities; they got their vaccine. One is how it's working with the Métis settlements; they're a little bit behind the eight ball: maybe this week although we might have to meet with them and reconfigure the distribution because we're a little short now, so we don't know for sure. It's not rolling out for them the same way it is for other communities, and the difference is the provincial government versus the federal government. So that's a problem.

Basically, the other thing I wanted to just lay out very quickly, though. There's been a lot of suggestion that in being concerned about the distribution of the vaccination, somehow we are attacking front-line workers. I want to just put it on the record that that could not be farther from the truth. Quite the contrary. We hear constantly from the front-line workers who are trying to distribute this vaccine, or who were trying to distribute this vaccine, that they're desperately short-staffed, that there aren't enough of them, that they're being pulled from their other jobs because we don't have enough staff.

Interestingly, I was in B.C. this weekend and had an opportunity to chat about these issues with a number of senior public health officials there. They jokingly referred to Alberta as the new South Africa because they've been so successful at hiring Alberta nursing students over the course of the last several months. The fact of the matter is that we have a shortage because of the clear decisions made not by any front-line workers, not by any public health officials, not by Dr. Corriveau, but by this government and this cabinet. So that issue needs to be addressed and accepted by them.

Finally – I just have a few seconds left – I want to make the point that last week we asked this government about how they were going to deal with the situation if the worst-case scenario arises and 35 per cent of Albertans experience symptoms with the flu. We asked them to tell us what would happen about the fact that we have one of the few employment standards codes that does not protect people's jobs if they are away from work sick. We did not get a satisfactory response. We got a response that referred them to collective agreements, which is lovely, but I don't expect them to amend the labour code any time soon. That's something we need to hear back from the government on.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to rise to debate the government's pandemic H1N1 vaccination program. It's interesting that the mover of the motion made reference to a fairy tale in a negative way during question period today in regard to the H1N1 vaccination program. Four hundred thousand Albertans were vaccinated during week one, including the homeless, health care workers, aboriginal Albertans, children, pregnant women, Albertans under 65 with underlying health conditions, and many Albertans not considered high risk. That's the stuff that fairy tales are made of. It's a good-news story.

However, because of projected reduced shipments of vaccine and the risk of people being exposed to the virus while in long lineups, the program will be revised to ensure that those deemed to be at high risk will be vaccinated first. Children from six months to five years will be the first priority, Mr. Speaker. I am confident that the new direction will be supported by Albertans, including peace officers, who will be at the next level to receive vaccines – and I repeat – after all those who are identified as high priority have received or have been given the opportunity to receive the vaccine. Police are not at a high risk of developing serious health issues if they become infected; however, their absence from work could be a public safety concern.

There has also been some question as to when inmates should receive this vaccine. I believe they should be vaccinated at the same time the vaccine is available to the general public, not before.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's plan from the start was to focus on those at the greatest risk, focus on them first. All Albertans will receive the vaccine or access to it, and I believe the majority support how this program has been rolled out and will be rolled out.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let's applaud those dedicated staff who are working long hours to ensure that Albertans receive the vaccine in an orderly fashion. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to join this debate on this very important topic. While I don't agree with the members opposite in terms of their assessment of the situation, it is certainly important that this House have a good discussion on the methods applied to date.

I, too, want to start off by commending Dr. Corriveau and his team. When we look at the fact that this province, the province of Alberta, has vaccinated over 400,000 individuals, something that's probably maybe not quite but close to half of the population of the province of Saskatchewan, I think we have to feel very proud of our team, Mr. Speaker, the team of individuals that are carrying out this work, and as a province for the job that we have done so far.

What we have seen is a very large and significant vaccination of a large portion of our population in the face of a situation where we have what I would call a very frightened public. I would encourage the members opposite to contain themselves, to stop the fearmongering, because I do fear that a lot of what has driven the lineups that we saw last week and the uncertainty that has been created is because of a lot of the rhetoric that we have heard.

I would say that this has been a great success, even with the lineups that we saw and even the disappointments by some who were unable to get the vaccine. Let's remember that it was clearly

stated – it was stated by the minister of health, it was stated by Dr. Corriveau, and it was stated by everyone who is looking after this very important file – that those at greatest risk were the ones who were encouraged to be first in line, Mr. Speaker. Now, while there was a decision made not to turn anyone away, there was a lot left up to the discretion of individuals, clear-thinking people, that if they were not in the high-risk category, they should not have come out.

Mr. Hehr: Were you here last week?

Mr. Rogers: I believe you were as well, sir. I believe that, again, the rhetoric that we hear, through the chair – I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sorry for the distraction from elsewhere.

Mr. Marz: Calgary-Buffalo.

5:00

Mr. Rogers: I wasn't going to name the member.

Mr. Speaker, it has been made very clear from the outset that the supply of this vital vaccine would be a major factor in how this program would be rolled out. As we know, this is a vaccine that has been developed in a very short span of time, and I want to commend all the researchers and everyone that has been involved in researching and producing this vaccine in a very short time. But then we have the reality that it has to be manufactured, and there is a lot to manufacturing a very technical product like this. We know that last week it was found out that there was a need to manufacture a special batch of this product for pregnant women, and that slowed down some of the production and distribution of the vaccine.

I just want to say that I believe that Alberta is very well served by Dr. Corriveau and his team, and I would encourage all the wannabe quarterbacks to let the professionals do their job. We can second-guess in here all we want, Mr. Speaker, but I think it's important that the people that have the expertise, that have been tasked with delivering and carrying out this very, very crucial program on behalf of Albertans, be allowed to do their job and that we give them our full support.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a few remarks regarding this debate about the H1N1 virus and about the plan to respond to the influenza outbreak. I'm not going to partake in ascribing blame to this or that individual, whether they be elected officials, public health managers or officials, or workers in the health care system. I'll leave that criticism to members of opposition parties or to the political pundits. At best blaming others is a nonproductive pursuit; at worst it's political opportunism. Nor will I indulge in scaremongering; instead, I'd like to try to put the present pandemic into some sort of perspective.

Pandemic is a scary word, but according to the shorter *Oxford* dictionary, it simply means a disease that's prevalent throughout a country, a continent, or the world. Diseases can be, as we know, serious, or they can be less serious. Historians will tell us that the influenza pandemic of 1917 was one of those that was very serious. It was responsible for millions of deaths throughout the world, and medical science had no real answers to that pandemic. People lived in dread from the disease as those around them succumbed to serious symptoms and often to death. In fact, at that time we didn't even know what the structure of viruses was. We didn't have things like

genetic decoding in those days. We didn't know the structure of viruses by electron microscopes.

Mr. Speaker, we are truly fortunate to live in a country like Canada in this present day and age, a developed country, and even more so to live in Alberta, where we have one of the finest health care systems in the world, although by the criticism of some of the opposition in this House on an ongoing basis, one would wonder whether we had such a great health care system.

Our health care system is one where every citizen has access to first-class, free, public-funded care. We lead the world in many areas of treatment, and unlike in 1917, it's a modern system, where we have tools at our disposal to look at the structure and the genetic code of viruses to learn about how they mutate and change and about how the human body responds symptomatically to those different strains. But, Mr. Speaker, expectations must be tempered by the knowledge of what is possible given the timelines and the resources available.

In North America, Mr. Speaker, influenza usually affects people in the November to April period. We know that influenzas can be serious for certain people in our population vulnerable to one strain or another, and not everyone is vulnerable to the same type of strain. As we become exposed to them, we develop immunities to similar strains. But to put things in perspective, every year in Canada seasonal flu causes anywhere from 2,000 to 8,000 deaths – every year, just to put it in perspective.

Now, recognizing that it can be serious for some, for a number of years health care providers and governments in Alberta and across Canada have instituted programs to vaccinate anyone who wants to receive seasonal influenza vaccine. The strains are targeted. Usually they include the three most common strains that are prevalent in the spring, and then they get to work and produce a vaccine for the fall. By taking the vaccine, our immune response is triggered, and our bodies generate specific antibodies. This is not an exact science, however. Because viruses mutate, they change their composition, and the antibodies produced inside our bodies become ineffective or less effective in attacking the viruses, which brings me to the H1N1.

The H1N1 strain of influenza was first reported in March or, according to some other authorities, as late as April of this year. Yes, March 2009. That's not even eight months ago. In April 2009 Canada launched a public awareness campaign about the H1N1 virus, and the government of Canada got to work on a response. It should be remembered, Mr. Speaker, that for most of us in the population H1N1 will only bring on mild symptoms. However, it was recognized that H1N1 was one of the most widespread strains of influenza, and on June 11 the World Health Organization declared the outbreak to be a pandemic.

Knowing Canada's scientists and technicians and industry, they were already at work on a response to those threats. They rolled up their sleeves, and working with colleagues around the world, they developed a vaccine which is effective, and most importantly it's safe. These developments and the testing protocols don't happen overnight. Testing, clinical trials, et cetera, take time, and it wasn't until about 10 days ago, in fact October 21, that Health Canada declared version 1 of the H1N1 vaccine to be safe and effective – October 21.

In planning for the use of vaccine doses, public health officials believed that given the limited resources available and given the fact that we had supplies of the vaccine in stock and that the approval had not yet been given, the best way to plan the uptake of the vaccine was to concentrate the resources in a few large clinics, where assembly line techniques could be utilized to move people through the process as quickly as possible. To that end, individual

staff could distribute information sheets for completion by the patients. They could counsel and inform the patients so that they would have informed consent to the vaccinations. This was a reasonable way to proceed given the fact that there were vaccine doses in stock and more were expected. This will be, as the minister has said, the largest program of vaccination in the history of Alberta.

Let's look at what was accomplished in the first week of the availability of the H1N1 vaccine after approval by Health Canada: 400,000 people vaccinated, an amazing accomplishment. That's about 1 in every 8 Albertans. Not only will those people be protected, but they will not be transmitters of the virus to others in the population, and despite what some people have said in the House, we don't have to get to 80 per cent before we get some protection. It depends on who you're in contact with. If you're in contact with some of those people that have already been vaccinated, you'll be protected as well by the fact that those other people have been vaccinated.

Having several hundred thousand doses awaiting approval for Health Canada to deploy, it was a reasonable assumption that the best way to proceed would be to vaccinate as many people as possible in the shortest period of time. But what happened to upset the original plan for vaccination were two things. One, the response was much greater than expected. Why? People listened, first of all, to the advice of the medical community to get the vaccination, to be sure, but beyond that a few notorious but extremely rare cases where robust and healthy persons succumbed suddenly to the virus were widely reported on the front pages of our newspapers and our television and radio news. Secondly, the deliveries of the vaccine doses were not as quickly made available as originally contemplated. In view of these two facts, unplanned limitations of supply and much-increased uptake, the plan began to bog down.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, let's calm down, put the matter into perspective. The plan as it was originally rolled out was a judgment made in the best interests of Albertans based on the best predictions of response of Albertans and based on the expected supply from the manufacturer of the vaccine. It was a plan to maximize the speed with which the vaccine could be made available and utilized as soon as it was approved by Health Canada. As I mentioned, that was only October 21 when the vaccine was declared to be safe and effective.

In view of the evolving facts as we know them, our public health officials have changed their plans to prioritize the high-risk population, those with chronic conditions – such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease – pregnant women, or those with weakened immune systems. But let's remember, Mr. Speaker, that for most of us the H1N1 influenza will only produce mild symptoms. What will happen now is that the higher risk people will go to the front of the line. Let's realize that it takes time to get things right.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing forward to this House Standing Order 30. I also want to thank the House leaders of the two parties for consenting and contributing to the discussion. I'd also like to thank the Speaker for agreeing to have this most important discussion take place.

There's a bit of a joke out there that suggests: I went to a fight and a hockey game broke out. Albertans don't really want to see us dropping our gloves and beating on each other while the puck remains at centre ice and nobody seems interested in getting that

puck to the goal. That said, it's important that we learn from our past mistakes and go forward.

In my member's statement today I said with a degree of tongue in cheek: will Albertans survive this government's health care deorganization? What was at the base of that conclusion to today's member's statement is that Albertans don't know anymore who's in charge. The antidotes to ignorance and fear are education and assurance. What we've seen recently is a very quick redesign of our health care system. Albertans are obviously supportive of health care professionals such as Dr. Predy and Dr. Corriveau, who are doing the best they can given the marching orders that they've been provided by this government.

Now, what we have is a great degree of, as I say, ignorance and confusion, and it's up to us as members to try to shed some light on the topic. In terms of light-shedding, I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, an emergency physician, who provided a very good summary of what the actual risk is and who the people are that should be on that priority list for receiving their inoculations. I also want to thank the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for providing a little bit of biological background information.

What Albertans are looking for is leadership, and within that leadership they're looking for information. Some of you may have heard while driving up to Edmonton yesterday CBC's *Cross Country Checkup*, hosted by Rex Murphy. On that particular program in terms of information the head of the national Canadian health association, who is in charge of pandemic plans, was providing a great deal of information. For example, he talked about, as did the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, how this H1N1 flu is so vastly different and that our world conditions and modern technology are so vastly improved from the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918.

Now, my name, Harry, comes from my grandfather, Harry Cooper, who barely survived that 1918 flu epidemic. However, as has been pointed out, in terms of getting the information out, people like myself, who were born before 1955 and don't have contributing health difficulties, should obviously be at the very end of the line if they're in that lineup at all. But when it comes to vulnerable individuals such as children under age five, we have to ensure that they're being looked after very early on in the process. I would suggest, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned, that these ethical decisions as to who's at the front of the line, who's second, third, fourth, and who's at the end, need to be discussed.

Well, obviously, the absolute first to be inoculated have to be our health care professionals because they're the ones whom the rest of our population is reliant on. We have to protect them first so that they can do their job. But I would suggest that along the lines of who's next, please, let the children under five be the next in the line.

Here is an e-mail that a number of MLAs, I am sure, have received similar comments on from constituents.

We just returned from the Avenida Clinic where we stood in line with two small grandchildren, ages 1 and 3, from 8:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m., only to be told at that time along with hundreds of others that we should come back tomorrow or another day because there were too many people in line.

Here are the things the grandfather had issues with.

Why is there no effort to take in little children who are at most risk, instead of the mixed message the politicians are giving out about everyone getting the vaccine? Why are there not sufficient clinics to disperse the workload? Why are local doctors not given the vaccine so that they can deal with their patients?

These are legitimate questions which, hopefully, the minister of health in his announcements tomorrow will clarify so that we know who's next and so that we know which clinics are providing the help for various individuals.

Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore and the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo both talked about: where in the lineup do teachers fit? I'd like to offer a little bit of a suggestion. I think that teachers probably fit in the line somewhere after the children under age five, who are at risk, they probably fit somewhere in the line after the people with immune deficiencies, and they're probably in that line standing beside policemen, firefighters, and other emergency services.

5:20

Now, in terms of emergency individuals, just think what would happen if the majority of teachers in a particular school came down with the virus. That means that the majority of the children in those schools would have to be sent home, which means that the majority of the parents of those children would have to be at home looking after them. You see the ripple effect.

If we're going to continue to go forward and be productive and proactive and, in this case, H1N1 preventative, then these orders and priorities have to be given considerable thought. We are in a pandemic situation, but it doesn't have to be a pandemic pandemonium. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark pointed out, we've had three months of learning experience from those down under, who have already gone through their flu season. We can learn from their experience. We've had the SARS pandemic come through. We've had emergency circumstances where emergency measures took place. I'm talking about the ice storm that took out power and left a number of individuals in isolated communities.

We have gymnasiums. We have auditoriums. We have arenas where we can keep people at least seated and in the case of ice arenas, obviously, not nearly as warm. We've got the two Jubilee auditoriums, for example, in Edmonton and Calgary. We can during the day, when these arenas are potentially available, solve part of our problem.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and join the debate on this important issue. I think it's fairly important here that we make some effort to separate reality from political theatre if we're really going to add something to the debate here. Out there there is a reality. There is an international pandemic going on, and there are a lot of people working very hard to do something about that, to plan and address the situation. In here there's a lot of political theatre going on that I don't know adds to the debate.

I'll give you an example. Since I've stood in this House, every minister of health, including this one and the previous ones, has been accused of not accepting the advice of health care professionals, of ignoring the advice of health care professionals. We've been criticized for cutbacks, which, incidentally, have never happened in the time that I've stood in this House. Nonetheless, we're accused constantly of cutbacks and that we don't heed the advice of our health care professionals. We're accused of privatizing the health care system, which is so far from the truth it's ridiculous. There's no minister in the country that's more supportive of public health care, certainly more so than Liberal governments in B.C. and Quebec. But we're accused of it and that the minister won't listen to his health care professionals.

So here we are today, accused of ignoring the advice of health care professionals in a situation where, very clearly, without dispute the minister has been following the advice of his health care professionals. Today, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official

Opposition and the leader of the third party stand and call for the minister's resignation. The Leader of the Opposition stands and calls for the minister's resignation, and we are supposed to believe in this House or out there that that member, if he was still a public officer of health, would today be criticizing the minister for following the advice of health care professionals. We don't believe that. That's absolute balderdash. That is just political theatre. He's scoring political points.

Today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, in arguing that this debate should happen, addressed the issue that there's no other place where we could have a debate. How curious, Mr. Speaker, that that party never used all of their members' statements to talk about H1N1. That member used her question in question period to question the Environment minister about carbon. There's lots of opportunity. But here we are having the debate, and that's great because there are a few points that should be gotten out.

Perhaps the biggest criticism that we hear from over there – it came from the third party, the New Democrats – is that we're creating panic, that we're fearmongering. This minister has been the calmest voice in Alberta. There's where the fearmongering is coming from. I'll give you an example. Today in giving an example to his concern that we don't have an ethical framework, which isn't true, by the way, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview used the example: "What if we had 10 people needing ventilators and only five available ventilators? How would the government make that decision?" He could have mentioned that (a) the situation does not exist and that (b) the health minister or this government doesn't make that decision; health care professionals do. That's fearmongering, and it's irresponsible.

It's ridiculousness, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, pleads that we should prioritize at-risk populations. Everybody else: sorry, it's at-risk populations. He would have us believe that he would stand by while we turned away seniors who are not at risk from vaccination clinics. Never in a million years, and everybody knows it. It's political theatre.

From the Liberal Party: we should target at-risk people except, well, teachers and then police officers right after them, Mr. Speaker. And they're accusing us? They're not following the advice of health care professionals, pure and simple. Thank goodness we have health care professionals making decisions. They don't even understand that at-risk doesn't relate to whether or not we're at risk to catch H1N1. We all are. It's at risk of getting serious complications from H1N1. No teacher or no police officer, unless they have an underlying health condition, is any more at risk than I am in this House.

Because of some supposed failure that the minister has committed, Mr. Speaker, now they're calling for his resignation despite evidence to the contrary. We have rolled out a vaccination plan early. It just boggles the mind. We're following the advice of the federal Health minister and Canada's chief medical officer of health, but somehow there's a failure. It just boggles the mind. Today, while the NDPs stand and argue that the health minister should resign, the NDP in Saskatchewan argue that maybe the Saskatchewan government should follow Alberta's example and vaccinate a few people. It just boggles the mind, absolutely boggles the mind.

We should talk about a little bit of reality here. Today, Mr. Speaker, there are people out there catching H1N1 or at risk of catching H1N1, and there are public health officials out there planning and adjusting plans to deal with it. There are health care providers out there, thousands of them, providing care to Albertans, saving lives. It's because of people like them that people like me can sleep at night, and I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to all of

them for the excellent work they're doing and will continue to do through this crisis.

So let's just overlap for just a moment, Mr. Speaker, where reality meets political theatre. This debate was so important to all of the opposition parties. Of the 13 chairs I see over there, there are four occupied. For a good part of the afternoon there were three occupied. That's the importance of this debate to those parties.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order.

Point of Order Speakers List

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry. We tried to get people on that list, as you well know, Mr. Speaker, and you've told us that there are not enough on the list. So to say that we were not here and we're not participating: you've taken up the list. They won't even let us on.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member has called a point of order on this. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre said that she tried to get people on the list and could not get them on the list. That is not correct. As the Speaker advised me when he left here, they were on the list as they showed up. I accommodated a couple of these, and now there's one last one that has come in, and we have – what? – three or four speakers left, three if they go 10 minutes. So it is not a point of order.

Hon. Member for Peace River, are you done?

Mr. Oberle: I'm done, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for the time in this House and for the opportunity to participate in this debate and recognize our health care workers across this province.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

5:30

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just first of all want to say thank you to all the front-line workers all over Alberta. They are the calming influence when individuals come in for a vaccination or a checkup. I also have the privilege of having one of the immunization clinics in my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, and that is Westmount, at which the Minister of Health and Wellness was able to drop by. I am very aware of the long lineups in the cold and appreciate the tenacity and patience of Albertans.

I want to speak about the power of the spoken word. I believe it is our job as elected officials to ensure that the right information gets out. Previous ministers have spoken about the multifaceted approach to pandemic planning that began three years ago. This government's H1N1 pandemic plan is responsive, and that is key, especially with the challenge of the vaccine supply. So it is ironic that some view the vaccination of 400,000 Albertans as a negative. We are responsive, and that is indicated by the flu assessment clinics that are operating. This is all about working with all of the stakeholders to stay calm and be effective and flexible in the days ahead.

As a parent of teenagers I am very well aware of the talk at their school and the unfortunate panic that can set in. It is a challenging time for principals and teachers, and we need to ensure that our children know exactly what is happening. I encourage my constituents and all Albertans to stay informed, be prepared, and look after themselves and their families.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a lot to add to this debate as we've heard a lot from both sides, but there are just a couple of items that I did want to mention to this House. I'm not a medical doctor. I'm also not a health care professional. But I do understand process. I look at the number of people and at the categories of people that are at risk, and I see, number one, pregnant women. Well, you don't necessarily know that somebody is pregnant when you look at them, so you would have to have an individual going through the lineup and saying: "Are you at risk? Are you a pregnant woman? Are you a person under 65 with chronic health conditions?" You would have to be asking people for their children's age, 6 months to 5 years. You'd be asking people: where is your domicile? I don't see lawyers on this list, I guess, so they couldn't have asked me anything. I wouldn't have been on the list.

All kidding aside, Mr. Speaker, the other thing I did want to mention is the hon. Leader of the Opposition today. I listened to his speech. He's a doctor. He's a trained doctor, and I'll tell you this: he is quite an intelligent man. But I have to say that I really question whether or not the Leader of the Opposition understands the gravity of engaging in the type of political rhetoric that he did today. Here we have potentially the largest immunization program probably in my 34 years, and all I hear from him, his biggest issue, is removing somebody from his job, namely the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. This type of rhetoric is counterproductive to what we're discussing here.

These are my comments. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to engage in this debate. Much like in the words of my colleague from Peace River I would like to start by thanking all of the health care workers who have been working in clinics throughout the province and sometimes under conditions that they are not normally accustomed to, with volumes of patients that they're not normally accustomed to. We are dealing with a very unusual situation, and they are responding to it in a way that I think Albertans can be proud of in all parts of Alberta. Just to put it in perspective, they have been inoculating some 50,000 people per day. That's almost the population of Red Deer, frankly, the population of St. Albert, every single person in St. Albert every day. Those numbers are astonishing. So I think they deserve our gratitude and all Albertans' gratitude for the fine work that they're doing.

Going further with putting things in perspective and avoiding this theatre – Mr. Speaker, I don't mind talking to empty chairs; sometimes they're more receptive to information than the people that actually sit in them – this is only the eighth day of inoculating Canadians. Out there in all of Canada there are some 6 million vaccinations being circulated among clinics; however, up to now 1,046,000 have actually been administered. In all of Canada 1,046,000 have been applied, and of that, 400,000 have been in Alberta, which means that Alberta has inoculated almost 50 per cent of the entire population. So I think that any and all provinces can be looking at us and saying: wow, this province has actually managed to inoculate 400,000 people when the rest of Canada only inoculated 600,000 people among all provinces and territories. Again, this speaks, Mr. Speaker, to both things: (a) our health care workers really stepping up to the challenge, and (b) Albertans are very responsible.

Imagine the alternative. Imagine if we had an epidemic of this

nature world-wide and government announced to Albertans and asked them to get inoculated and they scoffed at the message and said: "Nah. Not important. They're overreacting. I'm not going to get this. I'm not going to get sick." Imagine if that was the alternative, and nobody showed up; here we are with 400,000 vials of vaccine and no one lining up to take this. I think the alternative, actually, is quite good, and we are victims of our own success. The communication worked very well. The public health care workers worked very well, and Albertans are very receptive to this important message.

Mr. Speaker, another thing that needs to be highlighted: all First Nations and all members of Métis settlements and bands who wanted to be inoculated by now are inoculated. There is not one province or territory in this country that can claim that. Homeless people in shelters: whoever wanted to be inoculated has been inoculated. There isn't one province or territory in this country that can say that. Now we will be addressing emergency responders because we do believe that they are the next most important group to be inoculated if they are to be helping others in the event that their help is requested. Again, no other province can say that.

Now, this rhetoric coming from the other side of this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, has nothing to do with helping Albertans. It has nothing to do with preventing the spread of illness. All it has to do with is scoring very, very cheap political points. There's almost something despicable about using an epidemic, an epidemic from which some individuals have already died and some more may die, to score cheap political points. If they were sincere, if this was really important for the reasons that they state it is, other than political reasons, we would see much more engagement over here in this Chamber. I don't see any of that. This was an exercise in putting a motion before this Legislature and suspending all important debate that could have taken place in this Chamber just to show Albertans that they are active, that they are doing something about it.

But really – really – it means nothing because this minister of health and our medical advisors, who are micromanaging this process, are doing everything that can possibly be done. Nobody's holding back anything, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that we're dealing with a moving target. New scientific evidence and information comes flying at us daily, which causes us to shift our plan. Imagine if we didn't shift our plan, if we sort of predetermined that we were going to do it one way, and new evidence was becoming available contradicting our way of doing things, but we said: "No. We already made a plan. We're not changing our mind. We're sticking with the initial plan." What would the opposition then be saying? "You're not listening to evidence. You're not adjusting accordingly."

Mr. Speaker, sadly, this is all about politics. There were times, I understand, not during my political career, when if the country or the province was in a serious situation, actually all political parties would set aside their partisan biases, their hopes of scoring political points, and work together, not talk about purchasing caskets. Having a medical doctor talking about coffins, in my opinion, is not becoming of a practitioner, of a physician. This is not a way of supporting Albertans. This is not a way for us to work together to benefit Albertans. This is a way to try to capitalize on a situation where they think they may score one or two political points, and that's nothing but shameful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to enter into this debate on the motion put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Obviously, this is a very important issue to all of our constituents, no matter what sort of segment of the population or demographic they comprise. This is something that a lot of the members of our communities have seen and read in the newspapers and in the media, and they have some real concerns.

5:40

I do want to get into some discussion on this whole analogy of quarterbacking. There's been lots of talk about the concept of a Monday morning quarterback, but that's not the only type of quarterback that's out there. I do say this as someone who is an ardent fan of the game of football. There's also this idea of an armchair quarterback, the one who has never been out on the field, who sits there in their armchair, in their La-Z-Boy, and drinks beer and eats peanuts while they watch the game. Mr. Speaker, these types of people don't have to go through the decision-making on the field.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason the Leader of the Official Opposition has decided to be the Monday morning quarterback, who can always second-guess after the game is over, and he also takes the persona of the armchair quarterback, someone who is able to say something, puts statements out there without having to be held accountable for putting those into action on the ground with our health officials and with the general population. In fact, it's actually a sad state because in our democratic system the notion is that the Official Opposition is the government-in-waiting. If that's the case, you would hope that the leader of that particular party would see himself more as the backup quarterback rather than the armchair quarterback. So, Mr. Speaker, I do want to make that comment.

I make that comment with this caveat as I continue on. As said by many, I am not a health care professional. In fact, I probably know very little about the complex nature of not only the H1N1 virus but the ins and outs of public health plans and pandemic planning. In fact, there are probably some of my constituents who know a lot more than I do, Mr. Speaker. I say that because I think what is a shame is that we have a number of members, particularly those in the opposition, who want to stand up in this Legislature and make all sorts of suggestions about what we should or should not be doing, who should be getting the immunizations and who should not be getting the immunizations, should we have chairs in the facilities, what facilities we should be doing them in, how many of the facilities we should be doing them in. Those, quite frankly, are decisions that need to be made by our public health officials.

I believe our minister of health has done a great job of listening to their advice in the interests of making sure that we take this very unfortunate and very unique circumstance and deal with it in a way that's measured, balanced, and appropriate.

I also think that it's important, as we get into this discussion, to realize what the role of the opposition is and the role of the media. I do recognize that the role of the opposition and of the media at times is to question the government in its direction, particularly from a policy standpoint. What I don't believe the role of the opposition and the media is is to create fear within the public. In fact, they should be teaming up with the government to try to provide accurate communications to individuals and our constituents so that they feel comfortable and they know what is going on.

I believe one of the challenges that we have, Mr. Speaker, is that we have always indicated that we are focusing on this initial tranche of vaccinations on those that are at risk. We did tell people that they would not be turned away if they did go to a clinic. What has

happened is that in a very short period of time I think people's perceptions have changed as to who is at risk. We have seen a 13-year-old boy in Ontario fall to this particular H1N1 virus, a very healthy 13-year-old boy in all respects who loved to go and play hockey and who participated in lots of different extracurricular activities. I think that scared a lot of people. A lot of people who are for the most part healthy then make their decision based on their own reasoning that they are now at risk, okay? There is no way that any sort of public health or pandemic plan can account for those quick changes in public perception.

I will go back to my football analogy, Mr. Speaker, and that is that any good football team plans for success. They don't plan for failure. I believe that our health officials have planned and put a plan in place that they believed would be successful. But much like in a football game, you have to make adjustments. You get injuries. The wind changes. The opposition does something that you didn't think they would do. What do you have to do? You have to go in at halftime and make adjustments. In fact, the most successful teams are the ones that make the adjustments.

I believe that's what our health minister and our public health officials have done. Over the weekend they have seen the landscape change. Maybe it is that they take a time out, Mr. Speaker. That quite often happens in football as well. The quarterback gets up there, and he sees that it isn't exactly the current situation that they planned for when they were going to call that play, so they call a time out, go back to the sidelines, and talk about that.

Mr. Speaker, it's with that that I very much look forward to the minister's announcement tomorrow on how we're going to move forward, knowing that the landscape has changed around the idea of the volume of vaccines that we're going to have as well as the perceptions that people have out there as to who is and is not at risk. Part of that is that I'm hoping that our communications will be much clearer for people, my constituents as well as everybody else's constituents in this Assembly, as to how they move forward. I just ask for the citizens of Alberta and right across this country to be patient. This is something that we all need to work at together because there are very challenging circumstances. I wish it was just as easy as saying that we already have the 3 and a half million vaccinations that we need in this province and that we can disseminate those.

My final point is this. Even though there are decisions made and there's a plan put in place, some of those decisions in that plan don't necessarily paint a rosy picture. Sometimes there are checks and balances that have to be put in place. One decision might mean that we might take a hit in another area. I do know that when it comes to the immunization of the province, we've talked about thresholds of 60 per cent or 80 per cent or getting those that are the most at risk up first. Sometimes when you have a limited number of vaccines, like we have right now, you would like to do all of it all at once, but you can't. There's a check there that says: okay, we need to do this first and not this.

I think that we would do ourselves a huge disservice if we completely ignored trying to get as many people vaccinated just for the groups that are at risk because, as we've seen, this is a very, very unpredictable virus. It's important for our communities to understand that they do have access to be protected from this, and if that's what makes them feel comfortable, if they're willing to go stand in line for five hours, which I think is a huge sacrifice, then we as a government need to be able to step up and provide that for them.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will end my time speaking by just thanking all the health care professionals and all our public health officials for stepping up to the plate at a time that's very challenging for them. I know that a lot of them are being second-guessed right

now, and I just wanted to offer my personal support on behalf of myself and my constituents for taking interest in their well-being.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate having the opportunity and appreciate your reviewing, perhaps, your original decision. [interjections] Oh. Okay. Well, however this happened, I'm appreciative to the House. Thank you.

5:50

I have a couple of questions. I'm going off on, perhaps, a different tangent to what I've been listening to over the last number of hours. I guess my question is: how did we exactly get into the situation that we're in now? I know that the WHO probably has a definition – I don't have it – and I'm sure that perhaps Canada Health has it as well, which Alberta Health, I'm sure, would follow. What exactly is the definition of a pandemic? What is the percentage of the population that must be affected that would actually create a pandemic, and how do we know they're affected if we don't test? This is the word that has put the fear of God into everyone not only in this province but across the country. How do we know that this is really H1N1 and not the flu?

I listened to one of my legislative colleagues speak this afternoon who, like myself, is a medical professional. He was speaking of going forward. He was speaking of the things that we need to do in a very calm, orderly, medical fashion. I'm seeing an attempt at having this happen, that now we have identified high risk, and they will get the numbers of vaccinations that we have and that sort of thing. But how did we get to this situation? I really think that we have to start doing more testing because I don't want to see this mess next year. I really want to know how many of us really have had H1N1 or how many have just had the ordinary flu.

In time will H1N1 become just one of those ordinary flus that come through every year? People get vaccinated for the flu every year – well, not everybody but a lot – and they get vaccinated for the flu that came through last year, not the one they think is coming. So I just find that a lot of this is nebulous information. Yes, the media was involved in getting the information out, and unfortunately as time went on, the information changed. People got to the point where: who do they trust? Who are they really listening to? What is the data that is backing up the conversations that the media ran with? People listened to their friends, and they did listen to their doctors, that said: go and get the vaccination. Now my understanding is that the doctors will be able to do it in their offices. Fine, but they couldn't do it before. So the message changed on the vaccination.

One of my big concerns is the planning, and I really do think that there is nothing wrong with planning. I don't think that it's fearmongering by saying: this is what we should be doing in case of. I've brought up the instance of what-if in the seniors' facilities in this province. That is not fearmongering. That is asking the question: what do we have planned? I don't care if we ever use the plan, but the plan is there in case of. The fact that we would have the possibility of H1N1 in any seniors' facility, and anyone who has – I'm sure many people in this House have parents or loved ones in seniors' facilities and realize how quickly something can spread through a seniors' facility, particularly when they all eat communally.

Where is the plan to be able to say: please keep these seniors in these facilities. Do not put them in the ambulances. Do not put

them in the emergency wards. Do not put them in acute-care beds. It's not where they belong, and they don't have to be there. Even if they have H1N1, an RN, who could be on a temporary basis assigned to a facility, gets on the phone, gets the order from the doctor, and has it delivered accordingly. There is no need for those seniors to leave their home, which is exceptionally disrupting to them. Often, particularly for the older ones that may have a touch of dementia or Alzheimer's, it is so upsetting to them that some of them come back and they're never really quite the same. Keep them where they belong. Have a good RN in there that has a connection with a doctor who understands what's going on – most of them do – can give them, perhaps, the order for Tamiflu or one of the other drugs that help this sort of thing, and keep it contained within that facility.

Also, one of the other things that they would have to do is isolation. When you isolate someone, it's extra laundry, it's extra dishes. They may be fed in their room. There are any number of things that can happen, but the point is good planning. Hopefully, it will never be used, but a good plan is a sure plan, and better safe than sorry. Those are some of my comments.

One of the other questions would be on the exact numbers of who actually will be requiring the vaccinations and how they would be distributed. Certainly, I don't believe that any seniors that are in any facilities should have to go someplace. Those vaccinations should be taken to them. I realize that they are low risk. Most people over the age of 65 have probably been exposed to this, but that's not the point. The point is that should it happen, then those vaccinations should be brought to them.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I realize that the time is getting late this afternoon, but I can make my comments in a very few minutes, and I thank you for the opportunity to engage in this debate this afternoon. I've found a number of the presentations that have been made very interesting with regard to this situation. We have a very broad range of professional experience represented by members of this House, and I think that's a very positive thing for us. Personally, I have had a little bit of experience with a former situation that involved a zoonotic disease.

What we're really facing here today and I think many people here have spoken about is the challenge that we have in terms of accurate communication and appropriate response for Albertans and, really, all Canadians. I think that one of the things that is important for us to do is pull together in the interest of good communication. I found it particularly appalling earlier this afternoon following a good announcement by the minister of health in making a minister's statement and then observing subsequent messages that really exchanged good professional information for political rhetoric in response to that. Really listening to a lot of what has happened and been spoken about in the news in terms of variance of opinion addresses that challenge.

We're at a time where we need to communicate accurately with Albertans. We need to pull together to do that. We need to use good information, and I think there has been some good information presented here this afternoon. I refer particularly to the analysis of the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill with regard to the situation that we're in. I would call on us all to use our influence and our professional experience to help deliver the accurate message to Albertans because I certainly appreciate the challenge that people have across this province and across this country to understand what the situation is and what the appropriate response is.

I would also like to join those who have thanked our medical

professionals across this province and across this country who have worked hard to address this situation. I think we've done a good job to this point in Alberta. I only hope and pray that we get the appropriate response and get ahead of this, as I know all members of this House do, but in the context of that also call on everyone, both sides of this House, to engage in accurate and thoughtful communication with Albertans so that at the end of the day we're delivering the message that they need to get.

I want to express a particular compliment to the minister of health, who has, I think, done an excellent job of communicating with Albertans with regard to the H1N1, and to our medical officer of

health, who has continued to communicate the situation as it is and what the appropriate response is.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my comments and repeat the call for everyone to engage in accurate communication with regard to this situation in the interests of all Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak?

Hon. members, the time is 6 o'clock. The House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Issue 54

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it gives me great pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House visitors from my constituency of Edmonton-Decore. There are 55 wonderful students, our future leaders, from the Edmonton Christian school northeast campus, which also is celebrating its 60th anniversary and 10th year of partnership with Edmonton public schools later this month. Also, this happens to be the alma mater of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

It gives me distinct pleasure to welcome these students. They're joined by their teachers, Mr. Greg Gurnett, Miss Elaine Junk, Mrs. Melanie Sigrist; parent helpers Mrs. Charlene Stoklosa, Mr. Don Gerdun, Mrs. Karen Vandermeer, Mrs. Colleen Barbe, Mrs. Lori Bourgeois, Mr. Fred Woudstra, and Mrs. Evelyn Wiebe. I would now ask the students and their teachers and parent helpers from Edmonton Christian school northeast campus, who are seated in the members' gallery, to please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you. We have a group of students today in our gallery who are also your guests, Mr. Speaker, as they participated in today's marvellous service for Remembrance Day; that is, two classes from St. Timothy elementary school in Edmonton, which happens to be residing in my riding of Edmonton-Castle Downs. These 44 students are accompanied by Mrs. Leana Perri, Mr. Sheldon Biamonte, and Ms Natalie Onyschuk. I would ask all the students to rise and accept the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, may I thank you for hosting a very wonderful Remembrance Day service this morning.

I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Hailey Cervo, who is seated in your gallery. Hailey is from Nobleford, Alberta, and was first-place winner of the Alberta-Northwest Territories command and dominion 2009 senior poem competition. We all had the great pleasure of hearing your touching poem today during the Legislature Remembrance Day service. Hailey is joined today by her dad, Lorne, and her grandma, Alice. Unfortunately, her mom, Crystal, had to work and stayed at home today. You may be interested to know that Hailey will be attending the national service in Ottawa on November 11. She along

with three other category winners in the seniors competition will be laying wreaths for the youth of Canada. She's going to meet the Governor General, and more significantly her poem is going to be in the national War Museum on display for a year. I would ask that Hailey, her dad, and her grandma please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you Donna and Herb Kopp, who reside in Barrhead, Alberta. Herb is a fellow Rotarian and past president and treasurer of the Barrhead Rotary Club as well. They have brought with them today two exchange students: Camille Houbaille, Westlock Rotary student from Belgium, and Andrea Suárez Lárraga, Barrhead exchange student from Mexico. Their visit is made possible through the long-term exchange program which is sponsored by Rotary clubs throughout the world. The Barrhead and Westlock Rotary clubs are pleased to welcome Camille and Andrea for a one-year stay in our communities. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 13 speakers from this morning's Safe Communities Showcase. The showcase took place at the Radisson Hotel in Edmonton, where six presentations highlighted the successes of grassroots crime prevention initiatives and demonstrated the personal commitment and excellent work that is being done at the community level. The presenters joining us today are Sheila Bradley and Leslie Munson from addiction prevention in schools; Serri Lasuik and Paul Hawthorne from the youth diversion project; Deborah Hopkins, Doreen Roy, Nola Smith, and Randee Rurka from the positive parenting program; Cheryl Gardner, Dr. Tanya Boles, and Constable Clayton Okell from the Edmonton and Calgary police and crisis teams; Sharon Steinhauer from the Saddle Lake Boys and Girls Club; and Dr. Pamela Thompson from Pathways to Housing. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly and our thanks.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you today to all members of the Assembly three students from my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford: Miss Elizabeth Otto, Miss Rongjia Liu, and Miss Stephanie Bohaichuk. Elizabeth, Rongjia, and Stephanie are students of the Harry Ainlay and Louis St. Laurent schools in my constituency. This summer they participated in a University of Alberta program known as WISEST, designed to encourage excellence in scholarship and research, and all three had the opportunity to come up with some very impressive projects. I'd ask Elizabeth, Rongjia, Stephanie, and the people accompanying them today to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you two people that are near and dear to me that have already been introduced to you: somewhat unusual, perhaps. They are a part of the Edmonton northeast Christian school group, and they are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise as I mention their names. The first is my favourite sister-in-law, Karen Vandermeer. The second is one of my favourite nephews, Carter Vandermeer. I would ask that you all give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm frequently impressed with the constituents of Edmonton-Riverview whom I've introduced here, but none impresses me more than the person I'm going to introduce today. His name is Doug Pruden, and he's in the public gallery. I'd ask him to stand. Now, Doug is recognized most recently in the current *Guinness Book of World Records* for completing – get this – 1,025 one-arm push-ups on the back of the hand in one hour, a feat he completed on November 8, 2008. He's also been declared a grand master of push-ups in the U.K. and in Germany. He has a number of other records, and this is pretty humbling for all of us, I think, including 1,781 back-of-hand push-ups in one hour, 5,557 on-fist push-ups in over three hours, 1,000 – I can't believe this one – on-fist push-ups in just over 18 minutes, and 1,777 one-arm push-ups in an hour, to name only a few of his records. Congratulations on your stamina and dedication, Doug. Please give him a warm welcome.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I rise as an Albertan of German descent to acknowledge the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Many of us can remember 20 years ago the dramatic television footage from Germany on November 9, 1989, and the subsequent celebration of freedom, but while this was the end of the Iron Curtain for most of us, it was a new beginning for Germany and for Europe. It symbolized the first step in German unification, which formally concluded October 3, 1990. Not only did this event reunite family, friends, and neighbours; it inspired people across the world.

While reading about the upcoming celebrations to commemorate this special anniversary, I learned of an international project called Mauerreise: the Journey of the Wall. Twenty symbolic wall bricks are being sent from Berlin, which started in May 2009. Their destination, Mr. Speaker? Places like Korea, Cyprus, Yemen, and other places where everyday life is characterized by division and a similar border experience. In these places the bricks will become a blank canvas for artists, intellectuals, and young people to tackle the wall phenomenon.

I applaud this international effort in raising awareness for the problems that come with divisions within a nation and look forward to seeing some of the end results. Mr. Speaker, I did see some of the end results this summer, when I had the fortune to visit Berlin. What are the results? Where there was once a wall, there is now a modern, cosmopolitan city. I also had the opportunity to visit East Berlin, where I saw a Stasi prison, which is now a historical site.

This anniversary serves as a reminder to me of how proud I am to be an Albertan and how fortunate we are to live in a country that is free and united, free of oppression of dictatorial regimes inspired by

fascism and communism. We must never take our freedom for granted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Family Violence Prevention Month

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Family Violence Prevention Month started in 1986 as a local initiative in the little town of Hinton, where concerned residents launched a family violence education and prevention campaign. This grassroots effort inspired the Alberta Legislature to support family violence prevention as an ongoing provincial initiative, resulting in the inception of November as Family Violence Prevention Month. For most of us family is who we turn to for support, comfort, and protection, but for some Albertans family can be a source of violence, danger, and fear. Family violence hurts everyone. It touches every group in every community. It knows no socioeconomic, educational, or cultural boundaries.

Family Violence Prevention Month is an opportunity to remind Albertans that we all have a responsibility to help end the cycle of violence because, Mr. Speaker, victims of family violence are often silenced by fear or don't know where to turn for help. As caring friends, families, and neighbours we all must do our part to end the silence and stop the violence.

The government of Alberta is doing its part and continues to be a leader in addressing the issue of family violence. As an example, through the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative nine government ministries are working together to address family violence. We have strengthened legislation to protect victims, established domestic violence courts, increased funding to women's emergency shelters, supported sexual assault centres, and provided funding for community-based programs and victims' services. The government's safe communities initiative also supports several programs to prevent family violence and support its victims, including outreach pilot projects aimed at improving access to resources for aboriginal and immigrant communities.

Albertans who suspect that someone is dealing with family violence are encouraged to call the toll-free family violence info line at 310.1818. The 24-hour, seven-days-a-week info line offers help in more than 170 languages. Additional information and resources are also available on the website, www.familyviolence.alberta.ca.

All Albertans deserve to feel safe and live with respect and dignity in their communities. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health Care Spending

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is downsizing Alberta Hospital, limiting diagnostic testing, and forcing patients to wait longer and longer for surgeries. This government claims that health care spending is out of control and needs to be curtailed. Well, if anything is out of control and needs curtailing, it's not the public health services Albertans depend on. It's this government's lavish spending on a few lucky, hand-picked friends inside our public health care system.

Jack Davis, for example, is receiving over \$22,000 a month from a lavish pension plan. He contributed not one penny to this plan, and he was credited with over 28 years of pensionable service even though he only worked for the health authority for a little over eight years. He's receiving a gold-plated pension based on over 20 years of work that he actually didn't do.

Here's another example of out-of-control spending in the health department. The total cost of paying out severance packages for the transition from nine health boards to the one cost taxpayers \$23 million; \$18 million of this was shared by a mere 30 senior executives. On top of that, there wasn't even a defined process for handing out these severance payments. In fact, Alberta Health Services overpaid to the tune of \$41,000.

On top of all this, the Auditor General's report shows that accounting practices and processes during the transition from nine boards to one were incredibly mismanaged. There was no oversight, no consistency. The 2008-09 budget hasn't even been approved by the minister or the Alberta Health Services Board in a year when the operating deficit is approaching \$400 million in Alberta Health Services.

The minister of health has admitted that he bears the ultimate responsibility for all of this. Therefore, it's long past time for this minister to do the right thing, the honourable thing: resign.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Stephen's Backpacks

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I was honoured to bring greetings from our Premier and our Minister of Children and Youth Services at a thank-you luncheon for foster parents. I was inspired by all in attendance and suggested that someone write a book celebrating the incredible achievements. Immediately thereafter Nancy and Jim McPhee offered me a copy of their book, *Dream Out Loud*, the proceeds of which assist working families to get off the street.

The book raises awareness of early intervention and the amazing benefits it can bring to set up a child for success, and it draws attention to the great merits of children helping children despite their own challenges. It features the journey of Nancy and Jim's son Stephen. A few years ago, Mr. Speaker, when he was only five years old, Stephen proclaimed: mommy, I need to help them.

That's right, Mr. Speaker. A preschool boy who happens to have autism was pledging to help the homeless. Stephen decided he would make 'packbacks,' as he called them. He packed his newer toys and whatever else he thought appropriate, including mitts, hats, toys, candies, and socks. The McPhees made 15 backpacks, which they gave to those in need on a cold Christmas Eve. Shy little Stephen gave one to a 16-year-old boy with Down's syndrome.

In 2007 the community of Airdrie caught Stephen's passion, and the result was 265 backpacks. In 2008 the province got involved. Over 1,000 backpacks came of that, and they were distributed to homeless children all over the province. In August 2008 Stephen also raised 600 pairs of shoes for schoolchildren who didn't have any, and in 2009 he nearly doubled that. Stephen's Backpacks Society is now a national charity with warehouses, hundreds of volunteers, and corporate sponsors.

Mr. Speaker, when Stephen popped into the lives of the McPhees, they had no idea what direction their journey might take them, and they might never have dreamt that their little one would one day become a recipient of the Alberta Great Kids award and be named a Global 2008 Everyday Hero.

Stephen has taught us all to dream out loud, and anyone who wants to join him in these and other projects can buy a copy of *Dream Out Loud* at Alberta Safeway stores and visit stephensbackpacks.com.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Pan-Canadian Paralympic School Week

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the torch has been lit, and the countdown is on to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. With only four months to go, excitement is growing in Canada and around the globe. I'm sure many of my colleagues here in the House remember a similar experience when Calgary hosted the '88 Winter Games.

The period leading up to the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games presents an unparalleled opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to engage students in an event that will be receiving world-wide attention. In my capacity as deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I'm very pleased to stand today and recognize November 2 through 6, 2009, as Pan-Canadian Paralympic School Week. Paralympic School Week offers a special opportunity for students across the country to explore the values that Paralympians bring to their sport and to recognize and celebrate people with disabilities and their achievements.

All schools in Alberta and across Canada are invited to participate in this week-long program. Teachers can download a resource guide which contains suggestions for planning school-wide and classroom-based activities for a range of grades and subject areas. The guide helps teachers create Paralympic-style events right in their classroom, discusses the values of the Paralympic Games, and showcases people with a disability who are making a difference. Anyone interested in the Paralympic School Week materials or other Olympic education resources can visit the Department of Education website to find out more.

Mr. Speaker, this is an exciting time for Canada. I hope everyone, and particularly all members of this House, finds a way to support and participate in this extraordinary event.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Alberta health minister took complete responsibility for Alberta's H1N1 pandemic plan. On Sunday clinics to administer the plan were closed, the only clinics in Canada that were shut down. On Monday it was the same. Today it is the same. Yesterday the federal Health minister indicated that the national plan identified high risk and health workers to get the vaccine first, a plan this minister did not follow. This cannot be regarded as anything but a complete failure. To the Premier. Yesterday the federal minister also said that we have sufficient vaccine for high-risk individuals. Will you now fire the health minister?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you know, the only response we have from the opposition is: fire this person; fire that person. But this individual has changed position now three times. His first position was: let everyone in the province of Alberta be vaccinated. That was towards the end of last week. Then he changed: no, only high risk. Then back to everyone, and today I really don't know where he is: high risk or no high risk? All of a sudden he's now on the fourth position in about five days.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that is untrue.

Yesterday in this House the minister of health asserted that “every health care worker . . . who wanted to get vaccinated has been vaccinated.” I later spoke to health workers in Drayton Valley and the Royal Alexandra hospital here in Edmonton. They have not been vaccinated despite repeated attempts to do so. For misleading the House the Premier must fire this minister.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, misinformation, and the minister will clarify.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two areas that have not had a pause in terms of vaccination. One is health care workers, so that is continuing, and at the same time we are also continuing our vaccinations wherever possible with our homeless community. Every Alberta health care worker will have the opportunity to be vaccinated and has the opportunity to be vaccinated right now because that is not part of the pause that’s currently under way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of health also asserted that the pandemic tent at the Stollery children’s hospital was not planned as a pandemic tent at all. I have documents which I’ll table later that show this is not true. Again to the Premier: will you fire this minister for deliberately misleading the House?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, those are quite serious accusations, and it’ll be up to the minister of health to decide how he will proceed with those allegations. I think it’s getting beyond ridiculous. This is a serious situation in the province of Alberta and the country of Canada, and quite frankly we can play around with this issue in the House, back and forth, but it’s a serious matter. We want to get the correct information out to all Albertans, those at high risk, ensure that we provide the vaccination in a better model than we did last week, and we will do that. In the meantime let cooler heads prevail. This is the largest vaccination program of its kind in recent history at least, if not in the history of the country of Canada or at least in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Vaccine

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health is responsible for what happens in his ministry. That’s one fact he cannot spin, he cannot hide from. The confusion, fear, and outrage seen now throughout this province are due to this minister’s conflicting statements, changing plans, and inability to admit his mistakes. Again to the Premier: what is your excuse for holding onto over 180,000 doses of vaccine for three days when you could have been delivering these to high-risk groups and health workers who need it?

Mr. Stelmach: Again, working on information, it’s just like today in the scrum. You know, one reporter on one side: 200,000 doses of vaccine missing. Another reporter from another station said: no, no; it’s only 20,000. You know, even the media are now working on: well, is it 200,000 or 20,000? Now we hear in here 180,000. It just goes back and forth, back and forth. If you want to win political points, go ahead, but I’m not going to do it on the backs of Albertans that are good civic citizens, who want to get the correct information. This minister is working with the medical officer of health and also

Alberta Health Services to get the vaccinations out there as quickly as possible to all of the high-risk groups.

Dr. Swann: Why did this minister of health for three days – three days – rejig a plan that finally now corresponds to what other provinces and the federal government had indicated was necessary? Surely it’s clear to this Premier that this minister has to go.

Mr. Stelmach: No, the minister does not have to go. In fact, the minister is working every hour of the day trying to ensure that there is a reasonable process in undertaking the largest vaccination program in the history of this province. Just the other week we heard, again, that the supply of doses from the one manufacturer in Montreal was interrupted. That is different information than we had the week prior. The medical officer of health had to make a change in the plan to deal with the change in the number of doses that were available to the province of Alberta.

Dr. Swann: Well, I’m going to try the Premier again on the first question. What is your excuse for holding on to thousands of doses of vaccine when there are thousands of vulnerable people and health workers that needed those vaccines in these last three days, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe yesterday in the debate this came up, that in Alberta we have 400,000 people that were vaccinated, and in all of the country of Canada the amount is about 1.4 million. So of the 1.4 million in all of the country of Canada that were vaccinated, 400,000 of those are here in the province of Alberta. That’s pretty good.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Restructuring

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health is facing a test of the health care system he shattered 18 months ago, and frankly the public has given him a failing grade. Again to the Premier: under this minister of health’s incompetence the health authority’s deficit has skyrocketed to \$1.3 billion. What will it take for you to fire this minister?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the budget in health services, notwithstanding the constant words – let’s put it very mildly – by the opposition in terms of cuts, cuts, cuts, the Alberta Health Services, the department of health have seen an increase in the last budget of \$550 million. They will see another increase in the budget that will be introduced here in the House in February. It may not be as large as the budgets that were increased 10 to 12 per cent in years previous, but there will be increases.

Secondly, we’re also looking at the help of all health care professionals to see how we can deliver those services much more effectively and efficiently. We’re looking to those that work in the system to give advice to the minister so that we can put a sustainable health program in place.

Dr. Swann: I don’t need to remind the Premier that this is the most vital service government provides to Albertans. It’s this minister of health’s incompetence and mismanagement that has led to confusion and mixed messages about 246 beds being cut from Alberta Hospital Edmonton. Will the Premier fire this minister?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe he's referring to the Alberta Hospital. We have a situation in the province where many of the community organizations and those that represent mental health organizations have requested this government for years to move people out of institutions and put them in homelike settings in the community, which I think will greatly enhance the quality of life for the people that may be suffering from mental illness and other related issues. We will work with the Alberta Health Services Board. We've put an implementation team in place to make sure that this is done properly to improve the quality of life for those people that are living presently today in institutions.

2:00

Dr. Swann: In 1989 there were 13,300 acute beds in this province, and under this government the total of acute beds now has been cut to 6,800. The minister of health wants to reduce that further when we have the greatest need. Why, then, will this Premier not fire this minister for not protecting our health care system and for future generations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that just tells us how misinformed the Leader of the Opposition is. I can tell you that today, given how health services were delivered in the '80s, cardiac – you know, open-heart surgery – patients are up within hours after surgery. People that spent days in hospital for cataract surgery are now operated on in day surgery. They come into the hospital in the morning, and they're released later that afternoon. The health delivery has completely changed, and to say that we need the same number of beds we did in 1989 I think, quite frankly, shows us that the leader has a total misunderstanding of how quickly the health system has changed for the better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Hockey Teams

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hockey players are not at high risk for swine flu, yet the Calgary Flames were given preferential treatment with government-supplied vaccine. So were their families and their coaches. This was no doubt a measure taken by the team's owners to protect their investment. Some pregnant women and young children now face a greater risk of very serious disease or even death because millionaire hockey players got a vaccine they did not urgently need. My question is to the Premier. Why is the Premier putting the investment of the Calgary Flames owners before the health and safety of pregnant women and young children?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that issue is under investigation, and I applaud the member for bringing it forward. Once the investigation is completed by Alberta Health Services, we'll have further information to give. The one thing, though, is that if it has happened, somebody has broken the rules, and we want to find out who it is because it is deplorable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want to know why government vaccine was secretly distributed to NHL players by Alberta Health Services while high-risk groups like expectant mothers were left waiting in line. The Calgary Flames owners have an investment to protect and together have donated

more than \$44,000 to the Progressive Conservative Party since 2004. Why has the Premier permitted millionaire friends of this PC government to receive preferential treatment over vulnerable Albertans like pregnant women and children under five?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, this is an issue that was brought forward as of yesterday. Obviously, upon further investigation we'll have more information, but of course to drag this kind of nonsense, again, just adds to this whipsawing back and forth. Again, part of the group tends to just excite everybody at a time when we need calm. We need the time for our health care professionals to do the work that is absolutely necessary to provide the number of vaccinations that are necessary for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. CNRL chairman and Calgary Flames owner Allan Markin has donated more than \$20,000 to the PCs since 2004, team governor Harley Hotchkiss has donated nearly \$15,000, chairman N. Murray Edwards has donated \$3,500, and owner Alvin Libin has donated \$2,000.

Mr. Hancock: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mason: Why won't the Premier admit that he's allowed his friends to jump the queue for the government flu shot, leaving vulnerable Albertans unvaccinated and risking serious illness or even death?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, many of the people that the member mentioned have contributed greatly to the province of Alberta. Harley Hotchkiss is funding total brain injury research under Dr. Sam Weiss. Every one of those people that have been mentioned has significantly contributed to the wealth of this province. They may have given money to this party. I'm sure they gave it to that party. The member from Calgary is smiling because I know he's received some. I don't know if they did give to the NDs. Probably not, but it doesn't really matter. The thing is that all those names that have been mentioned in the House publicly have contributed tremendously to the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Safe Communities Initiative

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week we are recognizing the people working to keep our communities and families safe. As part of the second anniversary of Alberta's safe communities initiative I was pleased this morning to attend the Safe Communities Showcase. My first question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Could the minister please explain how community programs are contributing to overall crime prevention and reduction in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased today to have the opportunity to meet with a number of community organizations from across this province both in Edmonton and via the web to talk about the work that they have undertaken through the safe communities innovation fund. There were representatives from SuperKids in Brooks, mentor programming from the community of

Drayton Valley, and members of the Calgary and Edmonton police services from the police and crisis teams. The one thing that they all had in common is that they understood the importance of providing support, direction, and mentorship to young people who may be at risk of making bad choices in their life. There are a number of opportunities in a child's life where if they do have the right direction and information, they should be able to make the right choices with our help.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is for the same minister. Safe communities supports a variety of projects that address community action and diversion. What kind of progress are we seeing in these areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to strike a balance between enforcement, intervention, and prevention, and the emphasis on the safe communities innovation fund is around prevention. The youth diversion pilot project based out of Edmonton focuses on youth with mental illness and diverts them from the criminal justice system to appropriate health resources, and the Saddle Lake Boys and Girls Club is providing holistic and culturally appropriate programs and restorative justice programs in the community that it represents. Crime prevention is extremely effective at a grassroots level. We all know that. It's important for us to highlight successes and challenges that community agencies have to ensure that we can think through how we deliver our programming in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you. My final question is again for the same minister. What can we expect as safe communities moves forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're now into the second year of our safe communities innovation fund and the safe communities initiative overall. We've had some tremendous success with respect to legislative reform, the gang prevention summit co-hosted by the Solicitor General and I earlier this year. We've also had tremendous support from the community and feedback from the community with respect to how we as government need to support the work that they're doing and how government departments need to work together, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Health and Wellness Executive Search Contract

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A careful digging into government books shows that a numbered company was paid \$135,000 by the Department of Health and Wellness last year. If you dig through a second layer of numbered companies, you'll find that the \$135,000 went to a company 50 per cent owned by the election campaign manager for the Minister of Health and Wellness. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can he tell the people of Alberta why his department paid \$135,000 to 1024226 Alberta Ltd., a company half owned by his campaign manager?

Mr. Liepert: I can only assume, Mr. Speaker, that he's referring to the search that took place for the board members for Alberta Health Services, which was an open, tendered competition. My recollection is that the winning search firm that was selected was a search firm out of Calgary called Boyden. One of the partners in that firm is a gentleman named Brent Shervey, who was my campaign manager. It was an open competition. If the member would like to have sent over the documentation that we have, I'd be happy to supply it to him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll take the minister up on the offer, so ship me the documents.

Again to the same minister: what was his personal involvement in the decision to have the Department of Health and Wellness hire his campaign manager's numbered company? Is it just coincidence that his campaign manager's company was hired, or was there political influence?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I can say that the competition was conducted by the HR department of Alberta Health and Wellness. At the time they did the search, they asked me about the fact that this particular company had been the successful bidder and, I believe, the lowest bidder, Mr. Speaker, but I'll clarify that because I was not involved in the actual selection process. I was informed. I don't see why any company in this province who does business should be precluded from doing business with this government if they meet all of the guidelines in the RFP.*

2:10

Dr. Taft: In May 2009 the Minister of Health and Wellness told a legislative committee that he wasn't going to have a board of health care professionals running Alberta Health Services. Well, no kidding. The only health professional on the board is a doctor from Toronto. Again to the same minister: did he give direction to his campaign manager to avoid recruiting to the board of Alberta Health Services any health care professionals from Alberta, or is it just coincidence that it turned out that way?

Mr. Liepert: I can't recall the exact documentation that was provided as part of the search, but it was done by our HR department, and I'd be more than happy to give whatever is not privileged information to the member, and then he can go on his witch hunt, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Cattle Price Insurance Program

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our livestock industry has experienced some very challenging times over the last several years, and with the current economic downturn and our strong Canadian dollar the gap between the risk and reward in our cattle markets has become even greater. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. With economic challenges like a global recession, a fluctuating Canadian dollar, market access issues, and high feed costs what has the government done to lessen the impact on our livestock producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

*See page 1731, right column, paragraph 7

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government certainly recognizes that the cattle market can experience some significant price swings, and the need for livestock insurance certainly was identified by the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. In response, we implemented the cattle price insurance program, the first one in Canada, by the way. CPIP, as it is called, is available through Agriculture Financial Services Corp. CPIP provides the Alberta feed industry with the ability to manage risks such as the exchange rate, which is a real fluctuation barrier right now, so this certainly contributes to a more sustainable industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question. I'm pleased that our government has found a way to assist the cattle industry during these challenging times, and I'm proud to hear that it's a made-in-Alberta solution. To the same minister: can you tell us briefly how the cattle price insurance program actually works?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly can because we worked with the industry to develop this program, so we know how CPIP meets their needs. It's market driven, and it's flexible. CPIP provides producers with a guaranteed minimum price where the guaranteed price and the associated premium reflect the current market situation. Producers can customize their coverage levels and policy length to suit their specific needs. The bottom line is that with government funding, administration costs, and producers funding the premium, CPIP is a valuable investment in an operator's long-term success.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what has the industry's reaction been to the cattle price insurance program?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to report that we're off to a great start with CPIP, and the uptake by the industry has been very positive. AFSC was flooded with inquiries when the program was announced, and many eligible participants are taking advantage of it today. More importantly, AFSC is monitoring how well the program is working and gathering feedback from industry to aid in developing programs that we can meet further on for better tools in our industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Alternative Energy Investment

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, in defending his lack of support for renewable energy in Alberta, the Minister of Environment stated, "This government believes that it's not the role of the government to invest in energy." Well, I'd say that spending \$2 billion on carbon capture and storage, \$200 million on technologies to improve oil and gas production, and \$30 million to clean up abandoned wells, drilling credits, and new well incentives all add up to a government investing in energy. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why is this government willing to invest only in fossil fuels and not in the wind and solar energy sector?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to an exchange that we had yesterday when she talked about the fact that there was an investment that was ongoing in Ontario that was encouraging the development of renewable energy in Ontario. The difference is that in Ontario all of the power production is owned by a Crown corporation, Ontario Hydro. The same situation doesn't exist in this province. In this province the power production is owned by individual, privately owned companies. Those same privately owned companies that we have operating in Alberta have had significant investment. In fact, the CCS dollars went to an electric generator here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Well, Alberta enjoys more sunny and windy days than almost anywhere, yet Ontario will be the wind and solar power capital of Canada and will have created 50,000 green technology jobs in doing so, not even to mention what they're doing in Texas. Why is the minister letting our jobs and investment in our province leave the province for Ontario and Texas?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the process that's being used in Ontario is a process that has been broached with the Alberta government. Frankly, as Minister of Environment I'm not entirely opposed to it. It's something that's called feed-in tariffs. Essentially what it means is that all of the consumers of power in a jurisdiction would pay an environmental surcharge on their bill, and then that surcharge, that lump of dollars that is an environmental tax, for lack of a better term, is then reallocated to the producers of environmentally sustainable power. It has some merit, but it's something that I'm not sure the government would arbitrarily impose upon Albertans without first asking them if they are in favour of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister. This government is willing to compete fiercely with Ontario and with some other places in the States for everything else. So why – why? – is this government willing to let Ontario and Texas walk away with our jobs and walk away with investments in green energy technology?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I remind the member once again that in Ontario the electricity-producing corporation is owned by the government. It's a Crown corporation. They're moving money from one pot to another. It's not the government that is doing it; it's their Crown corporation. We don't have that same situation in Alberta, and frankly I don't think we want that situation in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Trade Mission to Asia

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For two years I had the distinct pleasure of serving as parliamentary assistant to the minister of agriculture. I was always very proud of the minister for his resolute dedication to fiscal restraint. He seemed to manage every taxpayers' dollar as though it was an investment for his grandchildren. I have a question for the minister. He announced last week that he's travelling to Asia for a trade mission. Given the economic circumstances the province is enduring right now and the great need

for fiscal restraint, I'm wondering if he can explain why he now needs a trade mission to Asia.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has a plan for a strong economic recovery, but it's important that we continue to keep Albertans working by ensuring that our industries are competitive and are attracting investments. Access to the Asian market holds a tremendous potential for Alberta's agriculture and food industry and particularly for the beef industry. On a trip in 2007 I gained a better understanding of what these markets and their consumers wanted for their livestock and for their meat products. Since then the industry has been working to better meet these demands, and I will be providing an update on our progress in identifying more ways to supply these markets.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentioned how important these markets are, but right to the south of us we have a market of 250 million people. I'm wondering why we want to focus our attention on markets that are halfway around the world and what sort of benefits they are supposed to provide.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, Asia is a growing market for our export opportunities. People in Asia, as we all know, are now eating more protein, and it's a growing market for the types of products produced here, like our famous Alberta beef. There are also opportunities for industry to tailor products to suit the specific consumer tastes in these regions. Alberta producers depend on exporting, and we have the products here that consumers in Asia want. They're not only interested in our beef. They're interested in pork, canola, honey, and barley; you name it.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This won't be the first time that the minister has travelled to Asia, and I know he believes we are going to get some benefits. Are we building on benefits that came from other trade missions that he went over to Asia for? Did we accomplish some goals already that we're going to build on?

Ms Blakeman: Nice question, but it's still on the website.

Mr. Groeneveld: It's a good question, whether it's on the website or not, Mr. Speaker.

When I visited Asia in 2007, they told me that age verification and traceability are the minimum requirements for market access. To help meet these requirements, we created the Alberta livestock and meat strategy and, indeed, the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency. Market access is a top priority for ALMA. They are working with Alberta industry, government, and key foreign members to advance access for our Alberta products. As a matter of fact, one of our board members joined federal Minister Ritz on a mission to Hong Kong in January, where an agreement in principle for incremental market access was secured. It was a direct result of our being there the previous year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

H1N1 Preparedness in Seniors' Living Facilities

Ms Pastoor: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I asked the Minister of Health and Wellness about the pandemic planning for seniors' living facilities; however, he only talked about the vaccines and not the care that the residents may require. In Alberta Health Services' pandemic plan it states that "all continuing care facilities . . . are expected to be self-sufficient." My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness would be: could he explain exactly what self-sufficient means?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am not part of the delivery system of health care. I will have to ensure that Alberta Health Services has adequate plans in place; I'm confident they do. I'm not exactly certain what self-sufficient means – I can only make some assumptions – but I do know that as part of that pandemic planning our seniors' care has been considered to the fullest.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister speaks about the right care in the right place. Would it then not make sense to treat residents in the facility that is their home rather than having to use an ambulance to shuttle them back and forth to ERs if there is H1N1 influenza in that facility? I think this sounds like policy to me, not delivery.

Mr. Liepert: Well, no, it's not, Mr. Speaker, because we don't operate the long-term care centres in this province. Any pandemic planning would have been developed with those operators and would have been done with the ultimate care of the patient in mind. I'm not sure what the member is referring to relative to transferring back and forth by ambulance. I'm assuming that if the facility cannot handle or if the patient gets to a state where they need to go to an acute-care setting, that's the arrangement that's in place.

Ms Pastoor: Well, deregulation rears its head again. Housing care. I'm speaking of care. Care comes under health. Will the minister commit to monitoring and tracking the number of expensive ambulance calls to continuing care facilities as a way of measuring how these facilities are coping with residents who require assessments?

Mr. Liepert: Sure. I'd be happy to get a report for the member from Alberta Health Services.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Aboriginal Albertans

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government was taking credit for the federal government's success in ensuring that the First Nations were the first to receive the H1N1 vaccination. Unfortunately, when it comes to what the province is actually responsible for, they fall short. While the Calgary Flames were jumping the queue, we're told that this government only started meeting with Métis settlements' reps last Thursday. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: why didn't this government take the lead and ensure that all remote Métis settlements got the vaccine first?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Public Health Agency of Canada and, in fact, Health Canada are responsible for delivering the vaccines to First Nations throughout the dominion, including Alberta. However, our role in that respect was to help ensure that the vaccines actually got there, and I personally phoned, oh, about eight reserves from down south all the way up north to make sure that that had happened, and it did occur. In fact, this morning at a special strategies meeting of western Canadian officials Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead complimented both the government of Alberta and the government of Canada for how carefully that was done and indicated to us that it was one of the most successful rollouts in their history.

I'll comment on the Métis later.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the people of the Paddle Prairie settlement are hours away from the care they'll need should they fall ill with H1N1. That's why Health Canada, as you identified, said that they and others in isolated communities should have been first on the list to get the vaccination. In this government's first plan – I don't know how many we've got at this point – they were not going to get their shots until week 2 or week 3, and now that may be delayed even further. To the same minister: why wasn't Paddle Prairie the highest priority last week, as they should have been?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have eight Métis settlements here. Two of them were prioritized for early delivery. They were in fact provided the vaccination on October 26, day 1. We phoned there as well to ensure that the vaccines had arrived. They had. As part of that vaccination plan a number of others were scheduled. For example, Paddle Prairie, that's being referred to, was scheduled for November 6. I haven't seen the details of the new plan, but I know that as soon as the vaccination supply is increased again by the provider, they will be among the priority groups that will be serviced.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, 400,000 people vaccinated, and they don't have it yet. It's a tale of two governments. Under the feds all 47 First Nation bands in Alberta have received their vaccine. A hundred per cent. A success. Under the provincial government's authority only 3 of 8 Métis settlements have received theirs, 38 per cent. A failing grade. We've known for the past six months that remote communities were among those at highest risk. How could the Alberta government fail to ensure that remote communities received the vaccine the moment it became available? If the feds can do it, why couldn't you?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the federal government's jurisdiction with respect to the reserves in Alberta covers approximately 100,000 people. Our responsibility covers an additional 3.2 million, 3.3 million. There simply was not enough vaccine to go around.

I have spoken with the Minister of Health and Wellness, and he has assured me that Métis settlements, including the five remaining ones, and numerous other category groups are the top priority. They will be provided the vaccine as soon as possible. I remain hopeful that the November 6 plan for that particular Métis settlement as well as the ones that are coming on stream next week will be adhered to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

High School Completion for High-risk Students

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On October 20 I attended an information session put on by Terra, a centre for

pregnant teens, helping teenage mothers to complete high school. I must say that they're doing a wonderful job. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What steps is your ministry taking to help these young women complete high school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of programs across the province, one of which includes the Terra centre, for example, that work in partnership with school boards. In this case Terra works in partnership with the Edmonton public school board to support teen moms in achieving their academic success, getting their high school completion. The partnership between Terra and Braemar school helps the students achieve their potential both as students and as parents. Many of the Alberta school jurisdictions have developed programs that support pregnant and parenting teens to complete their education. It's a very, very vital part of making sure that every Alberta youth, regardless of their circumstance, has the opportunity to achieve their potential.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that vulnerable students are the most at risk of not completing high school, what initiatives is your ministry taking to help other high-risk and vulnerable students to obtain their high school diploma?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many reasons why students don't finish high school. There's not one single answer to that. In the spring of 2009 we did launch the high school completion strategic framework, which outlines strategies, including personalized learning, successful transitions, collaborative partnerships, positive connections, and tracking progress. We have the Alberta mentoring partnership, we have a province-wide wraparound research project, we have a provincial protocol framework for success in school for children and youth in care jointly with Children and Youth Services, we have the children's mental health capacity building project jointly with Health, funded out of the former Mental Health Board, and the aboriginal parent and community engagement. There are a number of projects across the province. I think it's fair to say that one of our highest priorities is making sure that every child can get an education.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister. In recent years the province's high school completion rate has flatlined. What is the minister doing to improve the rate and ensure that the province is graduating students that are capable and ready to contribute to the workforce or to the postsecondary institutions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, from the years 2004 to 2007 the five-year high school completion rate has increased steadily and now remains at a constant 79 per cent, so we actually over the five-year term have had good growth in that. It's still not good enough. A lot more needs to be done.

As I said, we launched the high school completion framework at the beginning of this year. Initiatives associated with the framework

were either at the research stage, the pilot stage, or the first years of development. Currently departmental staff are meeting with school jurisdictions to help them understand the high school completion framework and get their advice on best practices around the province that can be shared among jurisdictions.

Grizzly Bear Protection

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, last night many members of this honourable House had a presentation from Carl Morrison with the Sierra Club and Dr. Steve Herrero, an expert on grizzly bear conservation, on the need to list the grizzly as a threatened species now. We heard the findings from the best grizzly conservation science in the world. Despite some government members' questioning of this science, I found it very informative. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. You passed the grizzly bear recovery plan. What do you think of this plan?

The Speaker: Opinions are not part of the purview of the question period. If the minister wants to comment, go ahead.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we've barely heard from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo this session, so I'm happy to answer his question. Dr. Stephen Herrero is a distinguished alumnus, professor emeritus at the University of Calgary, somebody I've known for over 25 years, so I'm happy to comment on their remarks last night.

We appreciate their concern with the grizzly bears, and we share them. This government has taken more steps than any other jurisdiction in western North America to do that. We've had a five-year DNA study. We've suspended the grizzly hunt. That study is being reviewed by peer review right now. We have our BearSmart program. I challenge the hon. member to find another jurisdiction that's put that much resource into grizzly bears.*

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'm glad the minister feels that the grizzly bear recovery plan is a good plan, but I'd appreciate knowing why he hasn't put any long-term funding in place to pay for this plan.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked me last spring to detail funding on grizzly bears. I sent him a letter in response to his April 9 questions in the House. I'll photocopy the letter and send it back to him again. The Grizzly Bear Recovery Team recommended three years ago that we spend \$2.8 million on grizzly bears. We're close to \$4 million now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You should maybe discuss with these experts, who do not believe that the grizzly bear recovery program is now being funded. Why do they continue to say that you're not funding this program, then?

The Speaker: Well, again, how does the minister respond to what somebody else is saying?

If you want to go ahead, try it.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, let's put the bare facts on the table, okay? Not only is our DNA study cutting-edge science, but it's currently being peer reviewed, scientifically reviewed by some of the participants in the most successful grizzly bear recovery program, which was the one down in Yellowstone park. We have some of the top grizzly experts in North America on the job, working for the government of Alberta and working to protect our grizzlies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Health Care Registration Services

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Six months ago the government changed the way Albertans register for health care. They can now do it through a registry office. My questions are to the Minister of Service Alberta. Has your department maintained proper service levels for Albertans needing to apply for or update their health care registration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the registration process is the same, but Albertans now have more locations to go get their health care cards. Previously there were only two locations, in Calgary and Edmonton. Now we have 23 different registry offices across Alberta handling this. This is, indeed, a very successful pilot project.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. To the same minister: with registry agencies being privately owned and operated, Minister, how are you assuming that Albertans' personal health care information is being protected?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Registry agents providing a service have no access to Albertans' personal health information. The transactions they do are similar to the other ones that they do with respect to all of the drivers' licences and things like that. This is one of the requirements under the Health Information Act, so the registry agents do not have access to that information. We also work with Alberta Health and Wellness, and we conduct audits on a regular basis to ensure the information is being handled properly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally to the same minister: what are your plans for expanding the pilot program so that all our registry agents across the province can offer health care registration services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current pilot project runs until March 2010. At that point we're going to be evaluating and deciding what are next steps. But I can tell you right now that it's going very well. So far we've had 21,000 Albertans come and register for health care through a registry agent. This is just one of the creative and innovative ways that we can provide better service to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Health Board Senior Executive Contracts

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the minister of health was asked about who was responsible for signing off on senior executive contracts in Alberta Health Services and in the regional health authorities, the minister indicated that the final

*See page 1731, right column, paragraph 2

signature is his. To the minister of health: why under your watch did Jack Davis, leaving Calgary health region, get a \$2.3 million severance and a \$22,409-a-month pension for life?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, this member is going to have to show me where I said in this House that I was responsible for signing off on contracts for the former regional health authorities. I never said that. I would ask him to retract that statement unless he can show that I said that in this House.

What I have said in this House is that one of the reasons we have moved to one health board that's accountable to this government is because we did not have the ability to approve those contracts that were signed by the previous regional health authorities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the hon. minister of health's information at the Public Accounts Committee meeting on October 26 the minister indicated: "The final signature is mine."

Mr. Liepert: Where?

Mr. MacDonald: In Public Accounts. Look at the *Hansard*.

The Speaker: Okay. Through me, continue with your question.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

My second question: why under your watch, hon. minister, did Paddy Meade receive a quarter of a million dollar bonus as part of her severance after only nine months of work?

Mr. Liepert: That's a different question, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to answer that one. He knows the answer because he asked the chairman of the Alberta Health Services Board at Public Accounts, or one of his colleagues asked it. But I'll repeat the answer that the chairman of the board said. He said that there were actually three phases of this situation. One was the previous regions, one was the interim board, and the third phase is the permanent board. During that interim phase the compensation package was much more tied to what the old regions were involved in. That has been changed – there now no longer are contracts like the member is alluding to – and this minister does have final say on those contracts.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why under your watch will one terminated chief executive officer remain under the lavish pension program for another two years, costing the taxpayers an additional \$290,000?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very simple. There were several of the former CEOs who the new board determined they did not want to lose from the organization. I would suggest that we should be looking to retain the best people we can. Those two individuals that I can think of – there might be a couple more – had contracts with the previous regional health authorities. In order to keep them, we would have had to pay out the contract and rehire them. Does that make any sense? No, it does not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Bow Habitat Station

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government has a mandate to educate the future generation on environmental

stewardship. Phase 1 of the Bow Habitat Station was recently completed, and I'm excited about it for two reasons: one, it is in my great constituency of Calgary-Fort, and because I expect it to foster education on the relationship between human activities and the health of aquatic systems and fish populations. My question is to the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What role will the Bow Habitat Station in Calgary play in providing educational services?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for taking us to such a happy conclusion today. Yes, it was a fun and happy day last month when we had the grand opening of the Bow Habitat Station. We wouldn't have had that without the good efforts of the hon. member.

The most important renewable resource of this province is our children. That's what the Bow Habitat Station is about: education on stewardship and conservation of Alberta's rivers, lakes, and water. There's a broad array of hands-on exhibits, the big show, four galleries, some aquaria with Alberta fish, some hands-on learning things. When it comes to water, the kids are learning that what's good for fish is good for us.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. In light of the recent upgrades what is the minister's long-term plan for the Bow Habitat Station?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the primary focus at the moment is a teaching facility for the schoolchildren of Alberta. Currently the programs for grades 1 through 5 align with the Alberta Education curriculum. These include the exhibits, the interpretive wetland, and the Livingston Fish Hatchery. In the coming three years programs will be expanded to include the junior high curriculum as well. Currently we are opening it simply as an educational facility, but by next year it will be open to the general public and also be a tourist facility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. If a habitat station concept like that is so great, does your ministry intend to build more educational habitat stations across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that the Bow Habitat Station is unique. It has arisen out of community efforts. The Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery has been there for 30 years and provided the vision and resources. There's been a wonderful volunteer society. The Bow Habitat Station Volunteer Society was formed in 1992. I'll take this opportunity to acknowledge the important work of its president, Mr. Lloyd Horn. In 1995 the volunteer society came up with the idea of expanding the educational outreach component of the hatchery. This is the origin and the genesis of this wonderful facility for the conservation and stewardship education.

Again, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to water, W.C. Fields was wrong. If it's good for fish, it's good for us.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes question period for today. There were 96 questions and responses. In a few seconds from now I'll call on the remaining member to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Government Accountability

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, during the Calgary-Glenmore by-election I met with thousands of great people in my community, and I have listened. I have heard their concerns about Albertans' economic situation and the lack of fiscal accountability from the Premier and his government. I have heard their concerns about government accountability and their muzzling of MLAs. I have heard their concerns that health care decisions should be returned to local boards in our communities rather than big government superboards. Indeed, I have heard from people all across this province, and they feel that their concerns are not being addressed by this government. I have listened, and it is their concerns that I bring to Edmonton. Their concerns are my priority.

Instead of listening to everyday Albertans, this government, to quote the President of the Treasury Board, continues with the priorities set by the Premier, priorities that have not been in the best interest of Albertans. Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, is but one example.

Most recently the government's mishandling of the H1N1 vaccine program has become a personal crisis for those at highest risk. Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know why this government has failed to prioritize and distribute the H1N1 vaccine to communities and individuals most at risk, and still we wait for them to act. Albertans no longer trust this government as it continues to centralize power and decision-making instead of empowering local health authorities with the responsibility of distributing the H1N1 vaccine to those most at risk. This government has impeded an efficient and effective local vaccination plan, and the H1N1 vaccine program is only the most recent example of this government's failure to properly prioritize.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans want to know when their priorities will become the priority of the Premier.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 51

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 51, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 51 contains a number of provisions which are noncontentious. I'll briefly list those acts which are affected by this particular bill: the Alberta Evidence Act, the Fatality Inquiries Act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Companies Act, the Family Law Act, the Government Organization Act, and the School Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I just wanted to table five copies of a statement on the Liberal website by the Leader of the Opposition urging all Albertans to get your shots as soon as possible: "I'll be getting my shot soon. I encourage you to do the same."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. the Premier and in my capacity as deputy chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the council's 2008-2009 annual report. As you know, the council works to improve the lives of Albertans by advising, reporting, and making recommendations to government and other stakeholders on issues of interest to Albertans with disabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2008-2009 annual report for the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. The council is a vital communication link that works with Albertans and seniors' organizations to share information about the issues that are important to seniors with our government.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday during the debate on immunization that resulted from the Standing Order 30, I quoted from two different e-mails from constituents and promised to table those documents, which I am pleased to do now. The first is from Ann Campbell, who was raising questions about why those at risk were not given priority and a number of other issues that she was concerned about around the immunizations.

The second is from a Victoria Stevens, who wondered why the government change their mind, and why they neglected the vulnerable.

The third e-mail is from another constituent, Julie McGuire, who has been a great advocate on behalf of the grizzly bears. I think this is her second letter to me, which I am happy to table. She lists a number of requests, including listing grizzly bears as a threatened species, reinstating the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team, and dedicating a budget for recovery, which is above and beyond what the minister talked about today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the guest I introduced earlier is still here, and I'm rising on his behalf to table some documents about his achievements. They include photographs from his doing push-ups in various locations around the world; articles, some in more than one language; the rules for competition; and the various Guinness world record certificates. I'm proud to make these part of the official proceedings of the Legislature.

Thank you.

2:50

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon.

Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Disciplines Act the Health Disciplines Board's annual report, January 1 to December 31, 2008.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader on a purported point of order.

**Point of Order
Imputing Motives**

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the exchange earlier today during question period in the question from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood directed at the Premier we heard some of the most despicable and scurrilous language that I think we've heard in this House. It really is an affront to the rules of the House and Standing Order 23(h), making an allegation against another member; 23(i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member; and 23(j), using abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

If that wasn't bad enough, Mr. Speaker, it also violates, in my view, rule 481(f) in *Beauchesne*, which states, "make a personal charge against a Member," which mirrors our standing orders, and 491, which refers to: "The Speaker has consistently ruled that language used in the House should be temperate and worthy of the place in which it is spoken." Also, 493(4) in *Beauchesne* would suggest that "the Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply."

In the exchange the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood brought into it discussion about an issue which is clearly of significant importance to Albertans. We spent all yesterday afternoon on an emergency debate on his motion about the importance of Albertans' understanding what was happening with the H1N1 virus, what was happening, more importantly, with the vaccination program, and how all Albertans needed to be conscious and aware of the need to be vaccinated but also to clearly put a priority on those people at risk. That was the context of yesterday afternoon's debate. That's been the context of questions, some more informative than others, over the course of the last week.

But today the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood stooped to a new low in terms of the level of questioning by bringing into that very important debate a practice which is used in other places, which, quite frankly, I've always found totally offensive, and that is to allege false motives against a member of the government, in this case against the Premier, by suggesting that anything that an hon. member in this House would do and an hon. member of government would do and that the Premier would do would be linked to campaign contributions. It's particularly scurrilous to make that kind of a statement in the context of such an important issue to Albertans with no basis for making that statement.

Mr. Speaker, in looking at *Beauchesne*'s, I've had to really temper what I would say about the statements that were made because a number of the statements that one would be tempted to make have under 488 been ruled unparliamentary. For example, the statement that he's "scarcely entitled to be called gentlemen" was ruled out of order April 17, 1876; "honourable only by courtesy" was ruled out of order on April 30, 1880; "disgracing the House" was ruled out of order January 17, 1896; "a cowardly slanderer and a bully" was ruled out of order February 21, 1907; "stooping to pretty low motives," February 2, 1956; "cheap political way," December 2, 1960; "dishonest insinuations," March 10, 1960.

Now, just because terms have been ruled out of order doesn't mean that they're always out of order. In some cases they may actually be in order if they are appropriate in the context, but I don't

want to go there. I don't want to move off the language that was used by the hon. member today by asking you to rule that any of those statements which might otherwise have been entirely inappropriate in the circumstance are in order. Rather, I think we could go to things that have been ruled parliamentary to use, and that would be "spurious charge" and "unscrupulous."

Mr. Speaker, whatever language one uses, it should be clear to every member of this House and every Albertan that it's one thing to bring up political banter. It's one thing to make charges across when you've got evidence to base something on to say that something wrong has happened, but it is absolutely unscrupulous and spurious, when we're supposed to be treating each other as honourable people in this House, to raise in a question that someone, particularly in light of the answer that the Premier gave to the previous question that the incident was under investigation and that there would be serious charges, particularly if it was true, did what the hon. member alleges. That would be something that would surely be investigated for criminal charges. To raise that in the House simply to make cheap political points is the most obnoxious and foul attempt to demean the character of all members of this House, not just the Premier but all members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should be asked to apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to participate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise, of course, to ask that you do not follow the request made by the Government House Leader with respect to his alleged point of order. I think that the issue here that is relevant is that the Government House Leader refers to an alleged situation where allegations were made against another member. The Government House Leader suggests that perhaps there was some type of imputation of false or unavowed motives, and he also suggests that abusive or insulting language likely to create disorder was used.

To start with the last point first, I believe that it was actually at this point now that the hon. Government House Leader just spent five minutes reading through a list of language which has previously been ruled abusive or insulting. A clear review of every word and every bit of language used by the hon. leader of the third party in his question, of course, included not one word that would remotely come close to being abusive or insulting, so I would suggest that that's simply not applicable.

The next question comes: was an allegation made, or was there some claim that false motives drove a particular member? I would suggest that if you look very clearly at the question that was asked by the leader of the third party, what the leader did was that he asserted three facts, all of which are on the public record or which are known to be truths within this Assembly. The first fact is that, unfortunately – and I'm sure that many members on the other side agree with all members of the opposition on this – some citizens received preferential treatment in the access to the much-desired vaccination. We know the Premier acknowledged that that occurred. As well, it was reported in the news that some people got access to the vaccination not in clinics, so clearly they were treated differently. It's a reasonable assumption to suggest that it was preferential because they got access to the vaccine and they were not in clinics, which nobody else had the opportunity to receive.

The next thing that the hon. leader of the third party suggested was that there was a relationship between those people and/or people who had a business interest in the team and the PC government, and that is a matter of public record. It may be an uncomfortable thing

for people to hear sometimes, but there is a reason why these things are a matter of public record, Mr. Speaker. There is a reason why campaign donations to successful and unsuccessful people that run for office are a matter of public record, so that the public can have a public discussion about that in the way that that may or may not be a factor in the deliberation of public policy. We're not suggesting it is, but the fact that it's a matter of public record is simply that: it's a matter of public record.

3:00

The third thing that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood stated was that he talked about the Premier permitting a certain thing to happen. Now, I would suggest that that is a reasonable characterization of the principle of ministerial responsibility. When something happens in the government for which the member in question is being questioned and for which that member has responsibility under the tradition of ministerial responsibility, it's reasonable to suggest that it was permitted. It may not have been intentional, and we didn't suggest that it was intentional. It may not have been planned. There may not have been motives. There may have been none of that stuff. But that is not what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood stated. He simply characterized what I would suggest is a known position within this Assembly about ministerial responsibility. Ultimately, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood did not make an allegation, and he did not describe or articulate a motive. He simply outlined that which is on the public record.

While it's unfortunate, I appreciate that members on the opposite side have been subjected to a great deal of criticism both in this Assembly and in the public sphere over the last 10 days for a number of issues relating to the vaccination program and the way in which it has been laid out. Notwithstanding that that makes them perhaps a bit more sensitive, it's something that's going to be discussed and, throughout the discussion, all other elements of the mistakes that have occurred throughout the rollout of the vaccination program. The government has accepted as a fundamental premise that under the theory of ministerial responsibility it's a reasonable thing to be discussed in this House, and this matter is no different.

I would suggest that notwithstanding the discomfort that members opposite may feel with this, there was no allegation. There was no description of a motive. [interjection] Read the *Hansard*; it wasn't there. This is all information that has been publicly discussed, publicly posted on the elections website. As a result, I do not believe that the words of the leader of the third party meet the criteria for any of the three items that the Government House Leader referenced in his point of order.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It's a very narrow point of order. A lot of what has been said is totally irrelevant to this point of order.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you want in on this point of order?

Mr. Chase: Yes, please.

The Speaker: It's very narrow. Proceed. I'll sit you down if you wander.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I see this as an incident of a government kettle calling an NDP pot black. In complaining about allegations and unparliamentary language, basically the equivalent of suggesting that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood take a bite out of a bar of soap, the Government House Leader used these terms . . .

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. member, please, sit down. Before I recognized you, I clearly made a statement that much of what had been said is totally irrelevant to this point of order. You are now continuing in that same vein. This is not about the Government House Leader or anything else. If you want to participate on the point of order that was raised, do so, but what you just finished saying is totally irrelevant. On the point of order, or I'll sit you down again.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The point of order had to do with an allegation being made of impropriety, and the manner in which the allegation was made, I would suggest, is as improper as the supposed allegation being discussed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Anybody else?

Okay. Sometimes it's amazing to me how when we get our way, we don't recognize that we actually got our way, and we just keep going. I listened very attentively to a question that was put forward today to the Premier by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I heard the Premier respond that he thought it was a very serious matter. He took it upon himself that he was going to have an investigation done to find out what this was all about and that when the investigation had concluded, he would report. Well, it seems to me, that's just about where the matter should end. I don't know. We win, but we somehow then just keep going. I guess we have to learn to either have the ability or the agility to understand this and deviate, then, from the script that we have.

Regardless of what was said, I thought everything that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood had wanted was responded to in the first question. But the hon. member goes on:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. CNRL chairman and Calgary Flames owner Allan Markin has donated more than \$20,000 to the PCs since 2004. Team governor Harley Hotchkiss has donated nearly \$15,000. Chairman N. Murray Edwards has donated \$3,500, and owner Alvin Libin has donated \$2,000.

Okay. All, I suppose, statements of fact.

Then at that point the hon. Government House Leader jumps up: "Point of order, Mr. Speaker."

Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood goes on:

Why won't the Premier admit that he's allowed his friends to jump the queue for the government flu shot, leaving vulnerable Albertans unvaccinated and risking serious illness or even death?

It seems to me that the point of order should have come after that statement because that's the one that basically gave something to somebody else. I just don't understand it.

Okay. It's public record that people make contributions. There's nothing wrong with that. You can use that. That's all part of the public record. We passed laws in this Assembly to basically say that political parties had to admit publicly who they got all of their funds from. I read very diligently every year how much the PCs get, how much the Liberals get, how much the NDs get, and now how much the Wildrose Alliance gets. I mean, the lists are there. I always check to see who, you know, are the biggest contributors. There's one lady on the NDP list that gives 100-plus thousand dollars every year, it seems, out of her estate or something. I'm quite impressed with that. I think that's what she gives.

I don't know why, after the Premier would respond that he's taking this matter seriously and that he's going to review it, an allegation would be made: "Why won't the Premier admit that he's allowed his friends to jump the queue for the government flu shot?"

Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, there may be another forum in which you make your arguments about these not

being allegations or anything else, but in this forum it strikes me that it was an allegation. You know, I'm not gifted in terms of the arts that one would find at a certain law faculty or anything else. Just kind of common sense is what sort of runs my way. "Why won't the Premier admit that he's allowed his friends to jump the queue for the government flu shot?"

Then you go further on. Another statement was made here during this discussion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Quote, some constituents received access to the vaccine. End quote. Whoa. What's all that about? What's all that about?

I don't know why we get into this. You're recognized to raise a question, you win with the response that you get from the leader of the province of Alberta, and then you go on with something else. I mean, what's the purpose of all of this?

I don't like the language. I've got to dig down there hard to find this ability to move and shift. I mean, if you're going to get hit by somebody with a bodycheck, you sort of move so you don't get creamed. In this case you kept going for no reason at all. I think you certainly are more gifted than that, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and you could have used better phrases. You'd already won, so why would you keep going on and doing that? I don't know. I don't get it.

I'm not going to, you know, dismember you or disembowel you or anything else. Maybe you could just add some clarification here to solve this issue so we can move on, that it was not the best temperate language.

Mr. Mason: I will certainly do that, Mr. Speaker. I was attempting to connect facts together, and perhaps I did that in a way that created a strong impression that I was making an allegation against the Premier when I was asking for him to elaborate on the connections that obviously I saw. It's clear that that's created a great offence on the other side, and I apologize for doing that. I will try and phrase my questions more carefully in the future.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 56

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'm pleased to spend a few minutes discussing Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009. To refresh everybody's memory, what Bill 56 does is remove the Deputy Minister of Finance and Enterprise from the board of Alberta Investment Management Corporation, or AIMCo. The deputy minister was appointed to AIMCo's board when AIMCo began its transition to a specialized arm's-length organization. AIMCo's roots can be found within Finance and Enterprise as Alberta Investment Management.

This transition period began in 2008, and we felt it was prudent to maintain that link between the department and AIMCo until AIMCo was fully up and running as an independent organization. I'm pleased to say that AIMCo has been fully functional for some time, building a talented base of staff and knowledge to manage our investments. In fact, AIMCo is preparing to move to their new downtown Edmonton location early in 2010, and it will be setting up its own IT department separate from government. As one of the

final parts of their transition removing the deputy minister from its board will help to make it clear that AIMCo operates as an arm's-length organization.

Thank you.

Dr. Taft: Did you not want to adjourn?

Ms Evans: I would be quite prepared to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 57

Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 57, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act. We are always looking for ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our justice system, and this legislation will do exactly that. Right now law enforcement must make applications under part 15 of the Criminal Code to obtain a warrant authorizing the use of a tracking device or a number recorder to a provincial court judge or a justice of the peace. Applications under part 6 of the Criminal Code for other types of warrants, like applications for wiretaps, can only be made to a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench. In some investigations multiple applications must be made because warrants under both parts are needed. In these cases more work is involved on the part of the police, and more court time is needed as two decision-makers must familiarize themselves with the lengthy and complex documentation typically submitted in support of these kinds of applications.

Bill 57 would give Court of Queen's Bench justices the same jurisdictions as justices of the peace in cases where law enforcement is applying for warrants under part 15 of the Criminal Code, authorizing the use of a tracking device or a number recorder, and applying for a warrant under part 6 of the Criminal Code. This will reduce the administrative time needed for law enforcement to apply for warrants. By reducing the number of applications that law enforcement needs to make in complex investigations that involve multiple warrants, court time can be used much more efficiently.

In conclusion, Bill 57 will increase the effectiveness of the justice system by decreasing the amount of court time and police resources needed in cases where complex and multiple applications are required.

I urge all members to support this important legislation and ask that we would now adjourn debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I've just been advised that you did not move second reading, so perhaps you should move second reading as part of the discussion.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 57.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 58

Corrections Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 58, the Corrections Amendment Act.

This legislation will expand the monitoring and recording of inmate communications and will also allow offenders of provincial statutes and municipal bylaws to earn remission for their sentences. Earned remission, Mr. Speaker, allows the offender to earn reduced time through good behaviour, compliance with facility rules, and program participation. It's an incentive for them to behave well and to participate in programs while they're in custody.

Currently earned remission is available only to individuals serving sentences for offences under federal laws or where the offender's sentence includes convictions for both provincial and federal offences. Individuals serving sentences solely for provincial offences or municipal bylaw offences, which are generally less serious and nonviolent offences, do not currently have the opportunity to earn any remission. Examples of these types of offences, Mr. Speaker, include driving without insurance, gaming and liquor offences such as public intoxication, and petty trespass.

In fact, there have been situations where individuals convicted of much more serious Criminal Code offences have spent less time in jail than provincial statute offenders. In 2007-2008 individuals convicted of provincial statute offences spent an average of 9.9 days in jail. With one-third remission that would decrease to seven days. Now, I know that doesn't sound like a lot, Mr. Speaker, but this decrease in time spent in custody is expected to reduce the number of offenders in our provincial facilities by 40 people per day. Based on that estimate, we're looking at \$175,000 in savings per year.

Apart from Yukon, Alberta is the only jurisdiction that does not allow earned remission for provincial statute or municipal bylaw offences. These changes provide several benefits, including encouraging good inmate behaviour, reducing the offender population in our facilities, and making our legislation consistent with other jurisdictions.

The other amendments for the Corrections Act are about inmate communications. Currently recording and electronic monitoring of offender phone calls is permitted. In fact, Mr. Speaker, many legal decisions have recognized that inmates of a correctional facility have a reduced expectation of privacy. That's not going to change. This bill, however, would allow for recording and monitoring of all inmate communications rather than just phone calls.

Rather than labelling specific items, we use "inmate communication" to expand the scope of the communications that can be monitored and recorded to include written, oral, and electronic forms of communication among inmates and between inmates and the public. British Columbia uses the term "inmate communication" in its Correction Act, and making this change will prevent the need to list individual forms of communication. New forms always arise, and we won't have to change it in the act.

Electronic communications would be passively recorded. This means that conversations would be recorded directly into a database with no one monitoring them, no one listening to them. These recordings would be listened to only if there are reasonable grounds to do so, as set out by the act. Communications between an inmate and his or her lawyer or any other privileged communications that an inmate is entitled to would not be recorded or monitored. The practice being proposed is used in British Columbia and by Correctional Service Canada.

These amendments will provide us with greater opportunities to intercept and report active or planned criminal activity, which will make our communities safer, Mr. Speaker. This legislation allows us to address communication technology as it evolves and gives law enforcement another tool to help prevent crime. It also gives offenders an incentive to participate in programs, follow the rules of our facilities, and get back out to be productive members of society faster.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I conclude my comments, and I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 59

Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move Bill 59, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009.

Community treatment orders, which will be issued by two physicians, one of whom is a psychiatrist, will enable individuals to maintain their mental health treatment in the community. These orders will reduce the need for hospitalization and help to keep more hospital beds available for those individuals who need a greater level of care.

Bill 59 includes amendments that support the introduction of community treatment orders which were established by the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007. It is expected that the provisions in the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, relating to community treatment orders will come into effect early in 2010.

Throughout 2008 consultations were conducted with numerous stakeholders, including the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, the patient advocate, Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Medical Association, as well as practising psychiatrists. These stakeholders provided input and helped to identify the need for the amendments contained in this bill.

I'd like to provide you with a brief summary of the proposed amendments. The section 9.6 amendments. To support community treatment orders, the 2007 act provided that if a person subject to a community treatment order did not accept the treatment and care outlined in the order, a psychiatrist could issue an apprehension order. This order allows for an examination to determine whether the individual should continue to live in the community. An apprehension order may not be issued until after the psychiatrist has tried to contact the person and re-establish treatment and care.

3:20

This bill also incorporates an amendment that clarifies the role of psychiatrists. The amendment ensures that any psychiatrist, rather than only the psychiatrist that issues the community treatment order, may issue an apprehension order. This amendment is supported by psychiatrists who participated in the consultations.

The section 9.7 amendments. In the 2007 act a provision was also included that permits a physician to be designated to act in the place of a psychiatrist when the psychiatrist is not available. This provision was included so that people living in remote areas that do not have a resident psychiatrist could also have access to community treatment orders. These designated physicians must consult with a psychiatrist before exercising their authority under the act. This bill clarifies that designated physicians, in addition to issuing, amending, and cancelling community treatment orders, may also issue apprehension orders.

Section 42 amendments. This bill also clarifies the criteria a review panel may consider when hearing reviews related to community treatment orders. It also responds to issues raised by review panels.

Section 45 amendments. In addition, Bill 59 clarifies that the authority of the patient advocate to request information on records when conducting investigations applies notwithstanding the Health Information Act. Supporting the role of the Mental Health Patient Advocate is essential to the protection of those with mental disorder.

ders. The patient advocate's role was recently expanded to include the authority to investigate complaints on behalf of persons subject to one mental health certificate. It will also include people subject to community treatment orders. This amendment ensures the patient advocate is able to access records that are vitally important to the advocate's ability to conduct a full and meaningful investigation.

Lastly, section 52 amendments. Section 52 confirms that technical irregularities within the forms required under the act are not sufficient to invalidate actions taken under the act. The amendment to this provision extends this rule to community treatment order forms as well.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this bill demonstrates our recognition of the important role of the mental health services in our health system and signifies this government's continued commitment to supporting the availability of these services to Albertans in need. I would ask all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

With that, I move to adjourn debate today on Bill 59. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Health Professions Act provides the legislative structure that supports the regulation of health professionals by their health profession governing bodies. Bill 60 amendments will keep the regulatory environment current. The amendments in the bill are routine amendments that have been requested by the colleges and reflect the evolution of the Health Professions Act.

First, the bill will amend the practice statements of three health professions. The practice statements contained in each profession's schedule under the act identified the activities of a health professional that are subject to the regulatory control of the college. The respective colleges have requested that the professional practice statements for acupuncturists, schedule 1, dentistry, schedule 7, and midwifery, schedule 13, under the Health Professions Act be expanded to include the activities of teaching, management, and conducting research. In response Bill 60 will amend the practice statements for acupuncturists, dentists, and midwives to allow the respective colleges to regulate the practice of members who are engaged in teaching, management, and research within the profession.

Second, the Health Professions Act reserves certain titles for each profession. This bill updates the titles reserved by three health professions. A reserved title may only be used by qualified and registered health professionals. The Alberta College of Paramedics is developing its regulations under the Health Professions Act. The titles of paramedic, primary care paramedic, critical care paramedic, and several provisional titles along with the respective initials are to be added to the list of reserved titles for this profession.

The College of Pharmacists has begun the process to amend its professional regulation to accommodate pharmacy technicians as regulated members and has indicated that titles for pharmacy technician students and provisionally registered pharmacy technicians are required. The bill will also amend the title of schedule 19 to include pharmacy technician. This will clarify that the Alberta College of Pharmacists regulates both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Lastly, Bill 60 will update the titles reserved for registered nurses

in schedule 24 to include graduate nurse and graduate nurse practitioner.

The respective colleges for these health professions have either requested or have been consulted on and support these changes. Mr. Speaker, this bill demonstrates our recognition of the important role health professions have in our health system and signifies this government's continued work with the governing colleges to ensure that legislation meets their needs. I ask all members to support this bill and move this bill to the next stage.

I move second reading of Bill 60 and ask for the debate to be adjourned. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As usual, a pleasure to rise in the House. It is my pleasure to speak today to Bill 61, the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act.

This bill further extends our Premier's commitment to creating safe communities, and as a result of this legislation we will see more police officers actually working on the street and doing the work that they have been trained to do and that they want to do as opposed to spending time in courthouses and other hearings. The amendments in this legislation will help to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Alberta justice system as well.

I will touch upon three amendments that will help update this Legislature on this particular bill. The Provincial Offences Procedure Act sets out the rules for prosecuting offences under the Alberta provincial statutes and municipal bylaws. The amendments in Bill 61 include changes that will update the legislation and help decrease pressures on court time and law enforcement. Bill 61 will expand the circumstances under which police officers may submit affidavit evidence if they were not a primary witness to an offence. For example, as something I imagine every member in this House can relate to, in operations like speed traps there is often one officer responsible for operating the radar, who actually witnesses the offence, the speeder, one officer is directing the offenders to the side of the road, and the third officer is actually physically writing the ticket. In some cases when a ticket is disputed by the offender, all three officers are required to attend court when only one of them actually saw the offence. Imagine three police officers in a courthouse and not on the street.

Right now in situations like speed traps the officers who did not witness the actual offence can submit affidavit evidence, meaning they do not physically need to go to court. The amendment in Bill 61 will extend this kind of situation in which police officers can offer this affidavit evidence to situations like stop signs and seat belt violations. This will allow police officers to spend more time on the streets, where they are needed, and less time in our courtrooms. It will also reduce the amount of court time used in these cases.

This won't of course impede the accused's right to cross-examine a witness. In situations where affidavit evidence will be used by police officers, the Crown must give advance notice. The accused would notify the Crown if they would like to cross-examine the officers. If the accused wants to cross-examine the officer, they can. If they do not, the officer can submit their affidavit instead of coming to court.

Another amendment in Bill 61 allows the accused person who

currently has to attend court personally or by agent to plead not guilty to do so by registered mail instead of actually taking the time of the court in appearing in person. In some cases an accused will receive a summons to appear in court to enter a plea. Sometimes the court the accused must attend is far away, and appearing may be a hardship or an inconvenience as one would have to appear to plead not guilty and then appear again at the specified trial time. Right now for some offences an accused can plead not guilty by mail, allowing the court to set a trial date and notify the accused of the trial date by mail. These are generally offences that would not result in a warrant being issued if the accused failed to appear. Under the proposed amendments, Mr. Speaker, accused persons could plead not guilty by registered mail if they are charged with an offence that would result in a warrant. By using registered mail, the accused can check to ensure that their plea has reached the designated court.

3:30

Bill 61 will also increase the amount a justice of the court can award as compensation for damages, from \$2,000 to \$25,000, in cases where the property damage is readily quantifiable. In situations like traffic accidents there is often evidence on the amount of damage of the property such as a damaged vehicle. A presiding justice has the ability to order compensation. Under Bill 61 the maximum the justice can award will increase to \$25,000, as I said earlier. This will be applicable in straightforward cases where there is quantifiable damage to property.

Mr. Speaker, the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act will help increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the justice system. The amendments in Bill 61 will help update the legislation, free up court time and resources, and reduce the amount of time police officers need to spend in court. I urge all members of this House to support and vote in favour of Bill 61.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 48

Crown's Right of Recovery Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move second reading of Bill 48, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act.

This proposed legislation will enhance government's ability to recover health care costs resulting from wrongful acts or omissions. This authority currently exists in part 5 of the Hospitals Act. Issues have arisen within the current legislation which make some cost recoveries difficult or impossible, impacting the effectiveness of existing programs. Clarifying and updating existing provisions increases government's ability to recover health care costs, and this ends up being a benefit for all Albertans.

Cost recovery involves more than just hospital costs, so it makes sense to set out these provisions in stand-alone legislation. Bill 48, the new stand-alone legislation, has been drafted in two substantive parts. Part 1 of the bill will enhance the province's ability to recover health care costs and ensure stakeholders are fulfilling their obligations under the law. The cost-recovery process consists of two components. The first is a specific claim-by-claim recovery. These recoveries can include automobile-related injuries involving at-fault drivers from outside Alberta, medical malpractice injuries, product liability, slips and falls.

The second component of cost recovery is an aggregate assessment established annually by the Minister of Health and Wellness,

paid by automobile insurers. The aggregate assessment is the minister's assessment of the cost of health services provided to Albertans injured through the use of an automobile insured in Alberta. If an automobile insurer licensed in Alberta contributes money to Alberta's aggregate assessment, government will not recover costs for that insurer for motor vehicle accidents occurring that year. In addition, we've added new provisions that will allow government to recover health care costs from those convicted of criminal offences if they are injured while committing a crime.

Part 2 of the bill will expand the scope of the Crown's right to recover costs to include the authority to recover health care costs incurred as a result of tobacco-related disease. This authority will mirror legislation passed in British Columbia and other provinces and will enable Alberta to commence an action against tobacco manufacturers if the province chooses. No decision has been made to proceed with legal action at this time.

This bill enhances the province's ability to recover health care costs caused by wrongful actions or omissions and is an important government initiative in our work to improve the sustainability of the health system.

I move second reading of the bill and ask all members to support this bill.

I would move to adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 46, the Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act.

This bill is an important one because it will make our communities safer as well as provide needed clarity to health practitioners. This legislation will make it mandatory for health practitioners to report gunshot and stab wounds. Similar legislation exists in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba. Under the Health Information Act health care practitioners, including physicians, nurses, and EMT paramedics, have the discretion to report gunshot or knife wounds in limited circumstances, but they are not required to do so. This act will give health practitioners clarity regarding when disclosure of information is required and what information they should supply to police when individuals are treated for gunshot and stab wounds.

Mr. Speaker, law enforcement is not seeking a carte blanche access to medical charts, files, or confidential doctor-patient information. The only information health care professionals will be asked to give is the name of the patient, the name of the facility, and the type of wound. In the case of EMT paramedics, they would have to give the same information and location of where the victim was treated if the person is not transported to hospital.

This bill balances a patient's right to privacy of health information with law enforcement's need for information to help maintain public safety. Health care professionals are already self-regulated, so penalties for noncompliance with this act are not necessary. Patient treatment will also be top priority for health care professionals. They would only make the disclosure to police as soon as they can, without interfering with the patient's treatment or disrupting their activities. This legislation won't create extra paperwork for health facilities because the disclosure is to be made verbally.

Unreported gunshot and stab wounds pose a public safety concern,

and this bill identifies and addresses this important public safety matter. The information police receive as a result of this legislation will help police ensure that there isn't a threat of further violence and may even help prevent violence, injury, or death. Reporting gunshot and stab wounds may bring serious incidents to the attention of the police sooner rather than later, so they can assess the threat and take the necessary steps to prevent further violence. By putting police in the position where they can check the situation out, they would also be able to alert other agencies if necessary. Likewise, police could protect the public in the case where the perpetrator returns to the scene or to the victim. This legislation supports our government's commitment to safer communities.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve to live, work, and raise their families in safe and secure communities, and Bill 46 is another step toward that goal. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 49

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate June 2: Mr. Lukaszuk]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Municipal Government Amendment Act, that has been read a first time, addresses a very important issue. Most members may not be aware of the fact that once firefighters do their work and appear at a fire, put out the fire – most properties in Alberta, you hope, are insured so that the owners of the properties are paid whatever the loss may have been – what happens later is that very often fire departments and municipalities are sued by insurance companies that underwrite the property that has been burnt and allege negligence on behalf of the fire departments and the municipalities, basically stating that more could have been done to save the property.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, our firefighters in this province don't hold anything back. When people run out of a fire, they run into a fire, and their priorities are such that they save lives first and then property second. It is very unfortunate when following a fire, firefighters have to appear in front of lawyers and in courthouses, having to testify and justify the work that they did and justify how well they have done it, particularly where hired guns are hired by insurance companies, consultants, alleging that they could have done more and questioning decisions that they made in a moment of urgency, doing their best based on their pretrained instincts, and later armchair critics criticize the work that they have done.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, as I'm speaking, the city of Edmonton alone, I understand, has \$35 million worth of litigation on the books from past losses. Unfortunately, most of those cases are so difficult and expensive to litigate that municipalities and fire departments simply settle them 10, 15, 20, 30 cents on the dollar. Now, what happens is that it offsets the costs of insurance companies paying out these claims, obviously. But what it also does is create another burden on the taxpayer, who has to foot the bill if a municipality pays for it. Bill 49 will put an end to that. It will basically say that firefighters are working in good faith and are doing everything they possibly can based on their training. Any decisions made by firefighters in good faith, from the moment that the bell rings at the fire station to the moment that they return, will not be questioned and will not be subject to litigation.

Credit has to be given where credit is due, Mr. Speaker. This bill

has been endorsed by the Insurance Bureau of Canada, who did see the wisdom in stopping this practice of litigating against fire departments and municipalities and actually were kind enough to assist this province in co-writing this particular legislation. So kudos has to be given to the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Also, kudos has to be given to all the municipalities that have unanimously supported this bill and, last, but definitely not least, to firefighters in Alberta, their union, their association, and their legal department, who have also assisted in drafting this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think I need to speak at length. It is simply the right thing to do. Stop litigating against our firefighters to make sure that they don't second-guess their decisions and that they proceed doing the work that they do best and that, as in the previous piece of legislation I just introduced, they don't spend time in courthouses but actually spend time on the street fighting fires.

I thank all the members of this Legislature, too, for listening to this. I hope that they will support this bill as it is, as I said earlier, the right thing to do for our firefighters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and join debate on Bill 49, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), in second reading today. I won't take up a lot of the House's time on this one because we are supportive as well of this legislation. I think it goes in the right direction. I think the member opposite was absolutely correct in saying that this is the right thing to do.

The legislation would protect anyone working for or volunteering for a fire service organization from being liable for the loss or damage to anything when they're performing their duties in good faith. Mr. Speaker, I guess that basically what that means is that as long as they are in the process of trying to extinguish a fire, trying to rescue someone from a burning building, or whatever else falls within the scope of their duties and in good faith they feel that it's necessary to perhaps do some damage to some part of the building in order to save the rest of it, for example, they're off the hook for that because they've done what we expect firefighters to do, what they've been trained to do, and what in good faith they should do. If the firefighter were to pick up an axe on his off time and smash down the door of his neighbour's house, this bill would not cover that sort of thing, certainly.

You know, this seems absolutely reasonable with just one proviso. I think I'd like to put this on the record here, and perhaps we can talk about it a little bit more at committee stage. Less liability, I think, Mr. Speaker, means that there needs to be greater responsibility, not on the part of the firefighters themselves but on the part of the system, if you will, to make sure that our firefighters are trained to the best, most current standards and that they're using the best equipment and technology available. In many cases – and this is especially true when we're dealing with volunteer fire departments – some of that equipment is getting creakily old and stands to get a lot older, or a much higher percentage of it, I should say, stands to get creakily old over the course of the next few years. We have to I think address that issue and have to make sure that when we send our firefighters out to do their jobs in good faith, whether they be career firefighters or volunteer firefighters – and it's especially important in the case of volunteer firefighters because we rely on their volunteer efforts to perform a vital service for small communities. There is real concern behind this legislation that it's getting tougher to find volunteer firefighters because they want to fight fires; they don't want to fight lawsuits in court, plain and simple. I

think we owe a duty to them to make sure that they're going into a dangerous situation, often a life-threatening situation for them and perhaps for others, with the best training, the best equipment, and the best technology that's available.

One other minor concern. Again, I think we can probably get to this in a bit of a back-and-forth at the committee stage. To me and to us it seems relatively uncontroversial to extend this protection to motor vehicle accidents because the actions of a firefighter can have considerable consequences to occupants in a badly damaged car. Maybe I missed something that the member said – and I'll go back and check the Blues – but I'm not entirely sure why that exception was made, why that wasn't covered in the bill as well. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I'll check the Blues. It may come up again in committee, and we'll talk about it a little more at that point.

In Calgary and in Edmonton a number of lawsuits have been launched by insurance companies in recent years that sought in total almost \$60 million in compensation. In one case one significant lawsuit was resolved out of court. I don't think this is what any of us in this House or any of us in this province want to see happen to our firefighters. There may be building code violations to talk about. There may be all kinds of extenuating circumstances to talk about. But when fire breaks out, Mr. Speaker, we want our firefighters to be able to get there in the quickest time possible and do what they need to do to put out that fire and save lives.

In principle we will be supporting Bill 49. We may get into a little more discussion at the committee stage about the specifics of it, but on that basis I'll take my seat, and we'll see where the debate goes from here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 49, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2). I want to begin by commending the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for bringing forward this piece of legislation.

This has been an issue that has concerned municipalities in this province for a long time. I don't think that our municipal governments and particularly our fire departments are there in order to constantly defend whatever they do in court against insurance companies. They're there to put out fires and to prevent fires and to do the best they can. They should not be a reservoir of money for insurance companies to mitigate the payment of claims, and that's really what's happened.

Whether or not municipal governments and fire departments are responsible for worsening a situation, the fact is that they act in good faith to try to protect property and protect lives, and I don't think that they should be spending large amounts of public resources in courts defending their actions and constantly having to look over their shoulders. We know that they work hard. They take risks and face dangers on behalf of Albertans and the property of Albertans.

There's another aspect here, and that has to do with volunteer fire departments, who are very important in rural areas. It's clear that the present situation is a deterrent to individuals getting involved in their local volunteer fire department. It seems to me that we all agree that a policy of encouraging people to be involved with volunteer fire departments is what's in the best public interest.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, I would rather see our firefighters fighting fires than fighting insurance companies. I think that the bill is a reasonable

step that supports firefighters in the work that they do and protects municipalities from unreasonable litigation attacks by big insurance companies who use it as a means of recompensing themselves for the payments that they have to make to the people which they insure.

As such, I want to indicate that we'll certainly be supporting this particular piece of legislation, and we urge that it should be passed by this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.
Additional speakers?
Call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a second time]

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Quest]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand and discuss Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act. I will be supporting this bill. It is not uncontroversial, but it will on balance probably be a good thing for Alberta citizens. I would like to discuss the bill in more detail, outline some of the advantages as well as some of the concerns that we may have to monitor here in Alberta and decide, perhaps, at some other time whether this legislation is working. Like I said right now, on balance I believe this is a decent step and one that is needed out there, but at the same time it is with some reservation.

As was noted by the introducer of the bill, other provinces have already gone down this path and introduced mandatory disclosure of gunshot and stab wounds. Those are Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and I believe one other. It's not that Alberta is the only one who has introduced this type of legislation.

At the nub of the issue is the balance for patients who are going to our emergency wards who have suffered gunshot or stab wounds, who are, first and foremost, primarily patients at the emergency ward. Let's face it. It's not without care or concern that we make laws regarding the mandatory disclosure of medical information. It has been our tradition in Canada and, in fact, it's been reinforced a long time that, generally speaking, we respect a patient and his doctor, his medical adviser's right to sort of keep this information between themselves.

Generally speaking, people have had the right and the privilege to discuss their medical conditions when they're getting medical treatment from their doctor or even other health practitioners in an open and fair manner, discussing all sorts of things that they wouldn't generally otherwise discuss with their neighbour, some things that are very private to them and that they want to keep between themselves and their medical practitioner. Let's be honest. In the case of gunshot and stab wounds most of the time these types of incidents come to the attention of our medical practitioners in the emergency ward through examples of suicide, in particular, when dealing with gunshot wounds. Many of the people who come to our hospitals have tragically decided to make attempts on their life.

In some of the information I read by some of the medical institutions who are not in favour of this legislation is the fact that most of these people are trying to seek help and trying to get healthy and trying to move on with their lives. Sometimes the concern by some of the people who have commented on this bill is that this may

actually impede their way to seeking help, to seeking treatment. That is just one of those things that I think we have to continue to monitor with our implementation of this bill, whether we are going to scare away people from coming to our emergency wards, from seeking help, from getting the care from their medical practitioner.

On the other hand, let's face it. People who maybe make an attempt on their life may sometimes have a mental illness difficulty or something like that that may need some alert of the authorities for other protection, whether an incident has happened at home or whether an incident has happened at the neighbour's. You know, there are arguments on both sides of this, but again it'll come down to some careful managing on the Minister of Justice's behalf, hopefully to continue to monitor this situation, and hopefully it will be in the best interests of our society.

If we look at this, the police officers have clearly wanted this legislation. They look at this as being able to respond to some of the gang shootings that have been occurring here in Alberta and have been calling for an ability to get this information quickly and easily and with an ability to go out there and, hopefully, find the perpetrators of these heinous acts. I agree that on balance this bill allows the information to get to the police officers and, hopefully, get to an arrest of these people who have perpetrated these violent acts.

Like I said, in principle I am in favour of this bill going forward but not without some reservations and not without my two-bit advice to the hon. minister to continue to monitor this act going forward. Hopefully, an analysis of this bill in two or three years will lead to the conclusion that it was wise to bring in and that there won't be any changes that are necessary at that time, but if there are, hopefully those changes are made.

The last thing I'd like to sort of bring up is that there are some implications here that may have some Charter scrutiny. If there are some people out there in the community who wish to challenge this, there are opportunities for that to happen. I don't need to advise the hon. minister on what those are. I'm sure she is well aware of that. Hopefully, this bill will survive that scrutiny should it happen. Nevertheless, it's out there, those challenges could be made, and this bill could find itself redundant at some point in time.

Nevertheless, like I said at the beginning of this, at the outset, we're supportive of this legislation with some great reservations on the fact that it does have implications to individuals in our society seeking medical care and on their privacy.

It is with those thoughts in mind that I've appreciated the opportunity to speak to this bill this afternoon. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

4:00

The Speaker: Additional members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, my reservations with this bill perhaps run a little deeper than for my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. My concern with this bill is that it appears fraught with a potential for unintended consequences. The premise is very simple. If someone is involved in an altercation where they might be wounded by a weapon, they go to a doctor or they go to an emergency room. That matter needs to be reported to the police, and that will help the police do their job.

On the face of it that would appear to make sense, but I think if you look a little further into this and consider different possibilities, you'll find that it could have a different outcome than what is intended by the bill. One might be that a person who needs care who might be a victim, not necessarily a perpetrator, might not go for the medical care that they need. There are lots of reasons why victims

would not necessarily want to go if their injury had to be reported to the police. I think that that's the most obvious of them.

There are a number of concerns as well because it really does provide limits on people's personal freedom. It interferes with the patient and doctor relationship. What concerns me here – and, you know, those things are not absolute. I want to be clear. I don't think that the patient-doctor confidentiality issue is absolute, but I think that we need to intrude on it carefully and for well-founded reasons.

It concerns me that the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Paramedics, and the Alberta Medical Association were not consulted in the drafting of this bill in this respect. I think that's a concern. They have all expressed concern about the difficult position the bill would put health care professionals in in balancing their obligations to their patients and their obligations to the police. The Alberta Medical Association also indicates that it's uncomfortable with the vagueness of the bill and the fact that the information that must be reported is under the control of regulations.

Not only that, but the Information and Privacy Commissioner has expressed concern that this bill will interfere with the provision of emergency medical care. He wants the government to clearly state what information needs to be reported. Mr. Speaker, the bill in its present form doesn't do that.

Other concerns that we have. The law has the potential to needlessly stigmatize the mentally ill and the suicidal. Although stab wounds that appear to be self-inflicted are exempted from the law, it may in fact be extremely difficult to judge that. Self-inflicted gunshots are not exempted, meaning that if a person shoots themselves, the wound must be reported. No good will come of opening up suicidal and ill people to scrutiny from the police through reporting their wounds as though they were due to criminal activity.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, health care providers are not law enforcement officers, and there's a real question as to whether or not they should be given law enforcement duties. We want to retain as much as possible the obligation of health care providers to the patients. The bill has the potential to erode patients' trust in doctors and make people less willing to seek medical attention when they really need it.

Mr. Speaker, I can see the potential for a number of circumstances in which people who require medical attention would not seek it under the provisions of this bill, and I think that would be extremely unfortunate. While the intent of the bill on the face of it is good, I think that it is not sufficiently thought out in its present form to be supported by the Assembly, so I just want to indicate that as it stands in its present form, it's not something which we can support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. No members wish to participate?

Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to continue debate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is coming from. I also understand the support in general that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is professing. I urge the government – and I'm very pleased that the Minister of Justice is here and attending to the debate because I'm hoping that she will contribute to assure us that potential human rights, civil liberties, privacy concerns will not be violated either intentionally or accidentally with this legislation.

As I say, we need to have a very delicate balance. The intentional wounding of an individual and the victim: that information needs to be reported. Where it becomes unclear is in the case of mental illness. The idea of self-harming is just one of the many factors that

are associated with types of mental illness. I'm not wanting to be picky about things here, but to what depth is a stab versus a severe cut? One of the characteristics, again, is of people cutting themselves because of their mental illness. The doctor, I would suggest, or the person treating the individual would probably have a fairly good sense as to how many times this person has shown up in emergency before. They would also have a reasonably good sense if the arm was up and the cuts on the arms were from a defensive circumstance, warding off an attack, or if the angles suggested that they were self-mutilation. That's where the balance has to take place. To what extent is the doctor required to report these incidents?

We're fortunate in Canada that we don't have the same type of gun availability or gun desirability as our southern counterparts, but we still have a number of klutzy people who by uncarefully cleaning their guns or through unsafe storage have the potential of wounding themselves. That's beyond the individuals who do it with deliberate action in the hopes, unfortunately, of ending their lives. It's not a black-and-white issue. That's why we rely on the professionalism of medical experts to do the determinations. We don't want to limit the professional judgment of doctors in these particular circumstances.

4:10

Both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the hon. member representing Calgary-Buffalo, a lawyer, have talked about the delicate nature of doctor-patient privilege. Earlier today in this House when Bill 58 was mentioned, they mentioned that there would not be eavesdropping on the discussions a lawyer had with his incarcerated client. That would not be subject to listening in or overt scrutiny. We have to be careful, as we say. We want the best for society, but we have to balance what's best for society with individual civil liberties.

One of the concerns I have, too, is the changes that are happening with regard to, for example, the closure of approximately 250 beds or thereabouts in the Alberta Hospital here in Edmonton. The police forces, the EMS, the emergency physicians have expressed concerns about releasing individuals into the community without the necessary support and treatment. These individuals who have been under the guidance of medical professionals at the Alberta Hospital are among the most likely to do some self-inflicted damage. That damage to themselves is in the realm of the patient and the doctor. It's not necessarily something that requires the involvement of the police. They need professional psychiatric or psychological treatment, and that fine line as to who has that information passed on and the privacy is, to a degree, a concern.

Now, I appreciated the honourable mover of Bill 46, the MLA for Strathcona, indicating when it would be that the doctor or the medical professional would have to do the reporting. He made it quite clear, Mr. Speaker – and I'm pleased that he did – that the doctor wasn't to drop his scalpel or whatever instruments he was using to remove the bullet to, you know, dial the police force. In other words, his or her recognized professionalism supersedes the need to go from doctor to informant, or information provider, so as there's not any prejudicial language being used here.

Now, when I have had the misfortune of having to show up at the emergency, I cannot remember a time when there weren't police officers there. The police officers were frequently with somebody who had been beaten up or who had been involved in an accident. My sense of things is that there probably is a police officer at each of the emergency hospitals for a fair amount of the time. The police officer, just in the general way of making the rounds, I would think, would be able to access files and see the nature of the patients,

specifically those where there was some type of violence involved. They could find out that information without necessarily slowing the treatment of a wounded individual down.

Depending on what day – or it seems that it happens more in the evening – emergency professionals are taxed to the maximum in terms of providing treatment. They're racing to do their professional best from situation to situation. Adding the extra reporting responsibility has to be balanced with, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona mentioned, their first duty, providing the medical support and treatment.

So while we are in agreement with the notion of reporting gunshot and stab wounds, we just urge the Minister of Justice to tread carefully, to not remove the protective nature of a doctor whose primary business is the Hippocratic oath and to do no harm. Combined with those two thoughts, their primary purpose is the treatment of patients as opposed to the reporting to police officers. This is important, but I would just urge caution so that doctors' civil rights and their patients' civil rights are not compromised.

Thank you very much for those considerations.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Strathcona to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a second time]

Bill 48

Crown's Right of Recovery Act

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Liepert]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The way the court systems are set up, judges have the opportunity to decide on compensation for victims of crime. They have an opportunity for the person who perpetrated the crime to make restitution to the individual that was harmed. They have all kinds of legal precedent with which to make these decisions. When we as legislators set out the laws, which judges and lawyers then have to operate under, we have to be very careful that what we're putting forward as a law can be maintained.

Now, a person injuring themselves while committing a crime and then having to pay back whatever the cost of their treatment was sounds fairly reasonable except that we operate in a universal health care belief that, again, going back to the Hippocratic oath, a doctor through his professional oath and commitment is expected to provide that kind of treatment regardless of how the injury occurred. Therefore, there's a degree of concern as to, one, under what circumstances that bill is to be paid. There is the concern of how the person who is potentially incarcerated is going to have the funds to pay their medical bills when the rate which they receive for, say, working in a prison shop or whatever is such a small amount. Part of the decision, then, is: does the person get kept in jail longer in order to pay their bills, or do we try to encourage them to get counselling within the prison system, to develop a skill within the prison system, and then do we release them and garnishee, I think the term is, their wages once they're out?

4:20

This sort of crosses over the victims of crime legislation to a degree because these individuals, particularly the criminals who get

caught, aren't the brightest bunch, and the notion that they have managed to save large sums of money and can pay the bills is frequently not the case. The majority of criminals are people who, based on their poor decision-making, have gone to crime. There are obviously a few exceptions, but being able to pay is a concern.

Then there is the extended slippery slope argument with regard to smokers. Because they have an addiction, should they be paying for the complete extent of their treatment? If you take it a step further, individuals who, through their reduced gene pool, have a series of illnesses that are hereditary: to what extent are they responsible for paying their bills? I don't want to take this too far in terms of extending what is the principle of a criminal paying for their own treatment, but we have to be careful how far this gets taken.

Now, with regard to the second part of Bill 48 and the suing of tobacco companies, I'm all in favour of that, except that – we've talked about the Hippocratic oath – we've got to be careful that we're not hypocritical when we launch our suits. Now, hopefully there's someone in this House – I see that the hon. President of the Treasury Board is here. Up until recently we had over \$600 million invested in tobacco stocks. It's going to be rather hard for us to sue a tobacco company while still maintaining their stocks. As I say, that is a concern.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are other members of my caucus who would like to participate further in debate, so if I may, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 48 at this point.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 31

Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered? The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today in Committee of the Whole to speak to Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. I recall that earlier in this year we had a bit of debate. I wanted to take the opportunity to thank everybody who has been united in support of this bill.

As I mentioned, the *Rules of Court* are currently going through some major revisions. These rules, which have not been comprehensively upgraded since 1968, govern the practice and procedure of the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal in Alberta. Many may ask why we need major revisions. I've gone through these rules several times throughout my past career. I remember that there are rules such as rule 16.1(1) being for facsimile service of documents. Way back when, apparently, there were no fax machines. It's really important that we take a look at these rules and actually go through them every generation or so. Alberta Justice has been working with the Alberta Law Reform Institute, ALRI, the Rules of Court Committee, and other stakeholders to simplify, update, and implement the *Rules of Court*.

Mr. Chair, the House amendments being introduced today will implement recommendations made after Bill 31 was introduced and are necessary to make provisions in the statutes consistent with the terminology and procedures used in the new rules. Implementing

the new rules requires consequential amendments to many statutes in order to reflect the different procedures and terminology used in the new rules. I'll give you an example. Under the new rules it would not be necessary to specify in an act the kind of application being made to the court. As a result, you'd see phrases in acts such as application by notice of motion, application by originating notice, or many lawyers would refer to it as application by originating notice of motion. This is all being simplified and sent into one, quote, application.

Mr. Chair, terminology will also be updated and be more comprehensive. For example, if an act states that a person may be examined on their affidavit, the word "examined" will be replaced by "questioned."

The Chair: Do you have an amendment?

Mr. Denis: At the end, yes.

Another important feature of this bill is that it limits the number of years a nonjudicial member can serve on the Rules of Court Committee and limits the number of times they can be reappointed. This will encourage a balance between the renewal and experience on the committee, which makes recommendations to the minister on the amendments to the *Rules of Court*.

Mr. Chair, the bill will also relocate provisions relating to the enforcement of money judgments from the *Rules of Court* to the Civil Enforcement Act, the end result being that all substantive provisions relating to the enforcement of money judgments will be located in the Civil Enforcement Act and the accompanying regulation.

This bill will also make housekeeping and other consequential amendments to various statutes and add new rules.

Again, this is important legislation for Albertans. The new *Rules of Court* will contribute to a fair, accessible, timely, and cost-effective civil justice system, which will ultimately increase access to justice for Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Those are my comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I can't imagine anyone being opposed to reforming the *Alberta Rules of Court* in order to make the litigation process as fair, timely, and cost-effective as possible. I want to point out that I tried to move a motion to accomplish a similar action as Bill 31 puts forward. That was a motion that was accepted unanimously in this House, and that was Motion 511, calling for a unified family court. It was amended to call for a unified family court process.

I have gone to court to understand better the family law process. While the Family Law Amendment Act attempted to speed up the legal process, I have yet to see in the number of individuals who have come into my office, because I am the critic for Children and Youth Services, anything in terms of speed, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, or in the case of children and youth the whole notion of the best interests of the child.

4:30

Possibly Bill 31 will have overreaching ramifications toward justice for children and their families, but I haven't seen it happening. I have concerns that families are being separated from their children. I have concerns that advocates, lawyers who are representing families wishing to be reunited with their children, are prevented from in a timely manner producing evidence and argument that would support their claim for reuniting their family.

A concern I have as well was brought to my attention on October 5 by lawyers who work for children and for families who have had the misfortune of having their children apprehended, who pointed out to me that when a person is alleged to have committed an offence, that offence remains as part of their record although it has been proven in court that the allegations were false. The speedy resolution of a court case should indicate that when a person is falsely charged and proven to be innocent, then there should be a mechanism within the court statutes to erase any evidence of a false allegation rather than having this false allegation follow the individual for the rest of their life and interfere with their seeking a job or the reunite of their children within their families.

If Bill 31 can accomplish what it's intended to do and, as I say, have implications or set precedents for how the justice system works for children and their families, then I'll not only support it; I'll stand up and cheer. As I say, the Family Law Amendment Act didn't accomplish what it was intended to do. We have Court of Queen's Bench, for example, dealing with divorce, and just about every other issue that involves a child is dealt with at the provincial court. I would urge, in terms of creating legislation, moving towards that unified family court process because I believe that what Bill 31 is all about has the same reasoning as to why we, like so many other provinces, need to have a unified family court. It's been established for years in other provinces, and I believe it would lead to a considerably quicker and better resolution of the best interests of the child if this were to be realized in Alberta.

I'm in support of Bill 31. I come at it from an outside observer who has become very involved with trying to champion not only what is in the best interests of the child but what is in the best interests of the child and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. At this time I'd like to move a government amendment to Bill 31, which I will pass to the page.

The Chair: We'll take a few moments while the pages pass out the amendment. Hon. members, this amendment shall be known as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont on amendment A1.

Mr. Denis: I think I made most of my comments earlier, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We shall now get back to Bill 31 with the amendment. Any hon. member wish to speak on Bill 31?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 31.

Mr. Hehr: Are you talking about the amendment or the bill?

Mr. Liepert: The bill.

The Chair: On the bill. We already passed the amendment.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on Bill 31 as amended.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for your patience and willingness to put up with, I guess, my inability to hear you three times say that we were going back to discussing the bill. I thank the hon. minister of health for reminding me in the very calm and succinct manner that he is known for. He let me know that, and I thank him.

Just some brief comments on Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. It is a bill that is very long overdue, one that has probably had many people in the legal community singing this government's praises in that it is finally seeing some changes to it. As indicated, the *Rules of Court* had been in practice or stayed exactly the same since 1968. No doubt, I have heard from legal practitioners that many of the changes that they have heard about and, in fact, have looked at since the government introduced these bills are going to be welcome additions for the legal community.

I do note that this bill was worked on quite extensively by many members of the legal community under the rules of court project, that was in existence probably for five or six years, that diligently looked over the entire *Rules of Court*, which is a large, voluminous book with many different sections and many different principles at play, yet they sat down and went to meeting after meeting, long day after long day for many years and came up with rules of court that will no doubt allow for lawyers and practitioners alike to more easily practise their trade. It will also allow things to happen in a more timely and efficient manner.

4:40

Some of the outcomes of this bill are the codification of the rules using a plain-language approach to law and legal terminology. This will also help those self-represented litigants who find themselves in our legal system. This principle will no doubt ease their transition when a lawyer opposite or a judge references a rule or a regulation in the *Rules of Court*. They will at least be able to understand it. There will also be a major effort to ensure that the rules and their application are isolated from items that are more appropriately addressed in the Judicature Act or the Court of Queen's Bench Act or other acts. This bill ceases to consolidate rule-making powers in the Judicature Act, as I mentioned, as presently there are several acts that provide sufficient authority or contain rule-making power.

Another thing that is now present in the new rules is that the rules will no longer have taxing officers as this has been removed from the act and substituted with the term "review officer" or "assessment officer," which again looks to more plain language. It also codifies the powers and responsibilities associated with the enforcement of money judgment in the rules.

It also makes mandatory that parties to any litigation seek alternative dispute resolution before they're able to obtain a trial date. I believe this is a very good step that will save those people involved in litigation a great many costs, as the most significant costs incurred in a legal suit, of course, are in the trial phase, where both lawyers are present for long and arduous days in front of a judge. If these things can be avoided by going to alternative dispute resolution, well, then, that's a great thing. Making it mandatory may allow for some situations where cooler heads can prevail and a settlement reached before it hits the courtroom floor.

The changes also incorporate some modifications to the workings of the rules committee, specifically concerning employment for nonjudicial members of the committee. The effects of the new rules will be to limit the sitting times for the three nonjudicial members and limit their reappointment to one extra term.

These again, like I said, are welcome changes that the legal community will no doubt be very happy with.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, I would like to again thank all of the

people involved in the rules of court project for their long and diligent process in revising the *Rules of Court*, which could not have been an easy task. It could not have been easy to agree on all the many changes and amendments that were proposed therein. I would in particular like to make note of a friend of mine, Ms Hilary Stout, with whom I had the pleasure of practising law at Fraser Milner Casgrain some years ago. I believe she is currently practising at a firm in Calgary. I have the pleasure of running into her about the fourth or fifth day of the Calgary Stampede every summer, when the lawyers and the Calgary Bar Association have their Stampede party.

Mr. Denis: I was there.

Mr. Hehr: Yes, hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, I did spot your presence there. I believe the hon. Minister of Justice was also there. We were there discussing the law with people and how our court system could be done better. Most people would not associate that with the Calgary Stampede. But, I tell you, at that one tent on that one afternoon much of that was being discussed on a hot summer day.

Anyway, thank you very much for giving me the time to speak to this in Committee of the Whole phase. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on Bill 31 as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Speaking to Bill 31 as amended. When I first rose, I indicated my support for what Bill 31 purports to do in terms of improving the litigation process in terms of making it more fair, timely, and cost-effective.

I, again, want to bring up a circumstance that arose after meeting with the trial lawyers' association for youth and families. We are very aware of Justice Côté's concerns and contempt of court charges that were filed against an employee of Children and Youth Services, Director Ouellet. Now, Director Ouellet prevented a child being returned to the foster parent for over six months. You'd think that when Justice Côté laid out his concerns over Children and Youth Services defying his recommendations and not returning the child to the foster parent, that would have been the end of it. Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, that wasn't the end of it, and Children and Youth Services continued to appeal the process, to put all kinds of legal impediments in front of that child being returned to the foster parent, who had looked after that child very well, as the justice noted, for the larger number of years of that young child's life.

When that child was returned to the foster parent, the foster parent had none of the rights of a parent reinstated to her. The child was returned in a disheveled, dirty state. The foster parent had no ability to advocate on behalf of the child, to seek medical assistance should the child need assistance. So the lawyer had to go back to court again to gain that small but critical right that a parent has to seek medical services for their child.

Although Justice Côté slammed Director Ouellet and, in slamming Director Ouellet, slammed the way in which Children and Youth Services dealt with this particular case, the case continues to be appealed by Children and Youth Services, making the day-to-day life of that mother hell and compromising what is, and I quote, in the best interests of the child.

If Bill 31 can address these issues, where because a court judgment does not go in favour of a government ministry, the ministry puts every legal blockade in its quiver of opportunities to prevent justice and the best interests of the child happening, then, again, I'll be a large cheerleader for Bill 31.

4:50

When Justice Côté brought out the contempt of court, I had hoped that he had basically fired a rifle into the air that would warn all front-line individuals about following the dictates of a justice when it comes to contact with a child. So many people have come into my office and said that the social worker defied a court order to provide timely access that was given by a judge, where they did not have the child available for a family member or directly interested party at the time which was ordered by the judge, or they basically threatened the parent with further handcuffing circumstances if the parent objected to their ignoring of the court order for access. Again, whatever will help get rid of the convoluted chaos that so many parents and grandparents and children are caught up in within the legal system.

I applaud the member for bringing this bill ahead, and I wish it full speed, and I'll throw in Godspeed.

The Chair: Hon. members on Bill 31 as amended?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 31 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 49

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I caught a bit of the debate earlier on this particular piece of legislation, and I wanted to get on the record with this because there are a number of my constituents that will be affected, all of my constituents in a way, I suppose, because they all have fire coverage. A number of them specifically are firefighters, and there are a handful of those sorts of facilities as well as police stations in my constituency, so I wanted to make sure that this bill successfully passed through the Legislature. It seems like a pretty obvious thing we should be doing, an important gesture to make to the people who stand on guard for us every day as firefighters and police officers and others.

The effect of the bill will be to protect members of fire service organizations from liability of actions that they are performing in their duties, assuming they are performing them in good faith, and I think we would all agree that's a good thing. We don't want our firefighters racing off to a fire having in the back of their minds that, gee, they're going to be up for a risk of a liability suit of some kind should they cause some damage or injury in the course of pursuing their job. It's a bit surprising to most Albertans, I think, that in fact that is how things stand, that fire services as corporate entities and sometimes firefighters as individuals can be named in lawsuits by insurance companies in particular if the insurance company feels it can squeeze an extra dollar out of that sort of process.

I think everybody in this Assembly and probably just about everybody in Alberta, outside of the property insurance industry, understands that we want a fair situation for our firefighters. We want to treat them with respect because, after all, we are asking an awful lot from them. We're asking them to commit their time and

energy and put their health and occasionally their lives at risk. We don't need them to also be putting their financial situations at risk as well, and we don't need our municipal governments or volunteer firefighters at risk either. They need all the resources they have to make sure their equipment is brought up to date and that their training is adequate, not to be out there fighting lawsuits from insurance companies and paying settlements.

I think it's worth noting in here, Mr. Chairman, that there is a fair bit of evidence and concern that the state of equipment and training that firefighters have in Alberta and in Canada needs some attention, that a lot of equipment, particularly in volunteer firefighting forces, is out of date and is rapidly getting further behind date and that a lot of the people who are involved and committing their time out of personal time as volunteers need their training to be constantly upgraded. So I'd much rather that the efforts of our fire chiefs and our local councils and our firefighters and everybody else involved was focused not on issues of liability but on issues of training and equipment and quality of service.

I think this piece of legislation will help achieve that, Mr. Chairman, so I'm glad to see it brought forward. I would hope that we might see further legislation in this same spirit brought forward in the future addressing other related issues such as liability risk for firefighters or police officers at automobile crashes, which I don't believe is adequately addressed even in this legislation. I'm pleased to support this bill. I think it's likely to go through the Assembly quite cleanly, judging from the comments of others, and I think that it'll be a better Alberta because of the work we're doing on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The hon. mover of this bill will not be accustomed to the praise I am about to pass on to him, and he may require the services of the fire department to resuscitate him. Hon. member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, you are following in the hallowed fire halls of a predecessor, Richard Magnus. Firemen are extremely grateful for the legislation that your predecessor has brought into this House in terms of recognition of job hazards and a series of cancers. Richard Magnus, the former MLA for Calgary-North Hill, also brought in the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, which recognized the potential dangers for not only firemen but also for police officers and a variety of public service individuals and the dangers they face on the highways.

My best man 40 years ago at my wedding was a firefighter. His name is Rob Tomlinson. Rob recently retired from the Calgary fire department as a captain. In discussions that I had with Rob, he talked about some of the dangers that he faced. One particular circumstance that came to mind was a fire in a restaurant. There were so many false walls because of all the renovations that had taken place that trying to put out that fire was next to impossible. He talked very graphically about the phones literally melting and running off the wall. So protection of our firefighters and allowing them to get on with their work without fear of litigation is absolutely important.

5:00

A point I would like to make with regard to my support for Bill 49 is the need for firefighters who suffer from posttraumatic stress to have their concerns taken seriously by the Workers' Compensation Board. I have had an individual come into my office who lost his family, lost his home, lost every possession he had, and was living out of his car because the Workers' Compensation Board was not recognizing his posttraumatic stress. Well, thanks to the Alberta

Ombudsman, who intervened on his behalf, things have changed. He hasn't got back his family, he hasn't got back his house, but he's got back to a large extent his sense of dignity, which was taken away from him when he was released from the Calgary Fire Department.

In a recent meeting with WCB I asked if they had any statistics on front-line individuals like firemen or policemen whose cases in the WCB of posttraumatic stress were closed because of suicide, and they indicated they had no such statistics.

We have to recognize the valuable job that these front-line workers do intervening, risking their lives for our well-being. Bill 49 takes us that much closer to recognizing the worth of not only the firefighter who is fortunate to be employed by a city but all of those volunteer firefighters in rural communities throughout Alberta who every time they leave the station have the possibility of confronting unknown dangers and who lay their lives on the line for our betterment.

In summation, I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for bringing forward Bill 49. I'm pleased to see that his heart has not created such palpitations, that he's not under stress that would require a firefighter to intervene for his personal well-being. But he knows they would be there.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to speak briefly on this issue as many members have canvassed a number of things, which I will as well. This legislation is good legislation. I, like the Member for Calgary-Varsity, would like to congratulate its mover, the MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who has brought this forward. It's good legislation.

What it does is allow for our firefighters, whether they're employed with a firefighting organization or whether they're volunteer firefighters, to be protected from lawsuits as long as they're doing the good work associated with their responsibilities as firemen. This seems like a reasonable thing for us to be doing. People who are involved in these types of professions should not be subject to lawsuits because of the nature of their job. This is probably legislation that's been somewhat overdue. I'm glad to see that we have moved that and given recognition to the firefighters and the protection they need. Let's face it; it goes without saying that firefighters do honourable and capable work on behalf of all Albertans, and we are in gratitude for the work that they do on a daily basis.

I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was also correct to point out that this type of legislation should also be extended to other incidents for firefighters, perhaps when they're investigating motor vehicle accidents, or when police officers are trying to assist people who have been involved in motor vehicle accidents. This seems like a logical extension of this type of reasoning that should go forward in those instances, and I would encourage possibly the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to bring forward this type of legislation in the near future as well.

Just as a side note, it looks like lawsuits have been launched in the neighbourhood of \$60 million against firefighters with regard to some of their work, so there's no doubt that this type of legislation is necessary. I'm glad we have brought it forward at this time.

I have nothing else to say on this. I appreciate the time given to me to speak to this very commendable legislation. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very, very briefly, just to get it on the record, because the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and I had a conversation outside the House about this, if I could just refer back to a point that I made during second reading debate on Bill 49 on the question of subsection (2) of this bill not applying in the case of an accident involving a motor vehicle. I believe I said something at the time to the effect that it would seem rather uncontroversial to extend it to motor vehicle accidents because the actions of a firefighter can have considerable consequences for the occupants of a badly damaged car. I was thinking at the time in terms of the things that firefighters do when they respond to a car accident: everything from extricating an accident victim from a badly damaged car to providing advanced life support to providing first-responder first aid in very many cases.

What I would like to do, Mr. Chairman, is just give the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs the opportunity for clarification on that point because I think I was reading it wrong, and there may be others in the House that were reading it wrong. I think he can clarify this. Once he does, I'll be quite happy to support this bill.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, first of all, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank all members of the opposition for fully endorsing the bill. As far as I can tell, based on the speeches, we can perhaps anticipate unanimous support for this piece of legislation, which makes me feel really good.

With respect to the Member for Calgary-Varsity I don't know what to say. You know, when opposition supports my bill, I'm thinking: hmm, maybe I'm doing something wrong. But when he so overtly supports my bill, I'm thinking: "I'm missing something here. There's something in there. I'm definitely doing something wrong." Maybe we'll figure it out later, but in all sincerity I thank all of you for supporting it.

You brought up a name that is well known to many of us here in this Chamber, and that's one of our past members, Mr. Richard Magnus. Indeed, he deserves a large part of the credit for this legislation being on the floor and for many other pieces before because he has, in a sense, as a legislator adopted firefighters in this province and has recognized some of the needs they have and has managed to pass them into legislation. I would want the record to show that, indeed, he has sensitized me to the issues of not only firefighters but all emergency responders, including police. Since I have nothing but respect and admiration for these particular civil servants, I'm sort of picking up the torch and taking it from him. So thank you.

There were comments made relative to the equipment and training of our firefighters. This is not the forum to argue it, but I spend a great deal of time with firefighters, and they tell me that, actually, some of the equipment that is being made available to them in Alberta is some of the best available anywhere else in the world. They were recently showcasing to me heat-sensitive cameras that are now readily available to firefighters. When they go in darkness and smoke into a fire, they can see, almost like in daylight, everything that happens before them. These cameras cost, I understand, some \$35,000 a unit, and every fire station has several of them. In some jurisdictions in Canada and the United States none are available. Is there room for improvement? Probably. But I think we're doing quite well both with equipment and training.

5:10

Now, training is very important because when these firefighters arrive at the scene of a fire, very often they rely on their instinct. There isn't time to sit down and plan things out. They are trained, and their instincts are trained. Their instincts most often, if not

always, are right. They just instinctually do the right things, so training is very important here. That's where the good faith part comes in. You know, when firefighters arrive at a scene – and it doesn't have to be a fire; we're focusing on fires here, but it could be a car accident because usually they are the first responders – they act in good faith. That means they act based on their training. They don't reserve any effort or any equipment or any resources to accomplish the job that has been given to them, and they definitely don't put themselves before the needs of the victim or the task that is at hand. That, in my mind, is good faith.

If we're to encapsulate the meaning of this bill, if one ever needs to interpret it from *Hansard* for the purposes of some judicial reviews or judges' considerations, the purpose of this bill is simple. From the moment the bell rings in the fire station and the firefighters take off in their vehicle to the moment they return back to the fire station, as long as they acted in good faith, they ought not to be subject to any litigation for negligence.

Now, there is one exception, and a member of the opposition, Calgary-Currie, identified that perhaps the wording is ambiguous, so it's important that we put it in *Hansard* as well for the purposes of interpretation. Subsection (3), that he referred to, refers to a motor vehicle accident in the event that firefighters while travelling in their own motor vehicles were in a car accident. Obviously, that would be subject to tort litigation, and if they were, indeed, liable according to the motor vehicle act, then other insurance policies would be involved. It does not pertain to them extracting victims or attending to a car accident as first responders.

Mr. Chairman, I thank everybody for supporting this bill. I think there is something – I'm not sure what term to use – distasteful about suing firefighters or any emergency first responders when they do what they do for us. I don't imagine most of us in this Chamber can imagine the risk that they take from day to day. For someone or some entity to then litigate against them simply for financial gain – because there's no other gain from it – is distasteful, to say the least.

At the same time credit has to be given to insurance companies. As I indicated earlier in second reading, the Insurance Bureau of Canada has actually endorsed this piece of legislation, and they have actually provided their resources in the drafting of this legislation. So insurers that are under the umbrella of the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which we know are not all because the Insurance Bureau of Canada doesn't represent all the insurance companies in Alberta and in Canada, have endorsed it. They saw the wisdom of this particular legislation.

Now we have the support of municipalities, we have the support of firefighters, we have the support of the insurance industry, and I hope to gain the support of you, members of this Legislature. Once we pass it, not only will it result in the benefit of not having firefighters in front of judges and/or lawyers in examinations for discovery, but it will also result in a financial gain. As I indicated earlier, there's about \$35 million right now in Edmonton and I imagine some more in Calgary and it's fair to assume that outside of Edmonton and Calgary the numbers would be probably equal. So it's a win-win-win for everybody in Alberta.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. Unless anybody else wishes to speak to this bill – there is, I see – I would otherwise ask for a vote.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I did not complete my comments with regard to firefighters and posttraumatic stress, and I want to pass on a concern that I have about front-line workers in Alberta, whether they be firemen as this bill deals with, whether they be municipal police, RCMP, or so on. We don't have a program that

deals specifically with front-line-worker posttraumatic stress within this province. The federal government has a support program – in fact, it operates out of the Calgary-Varsity constituency – where support is provided to military service personnel coming back from a circumstance that caused them to have posttraumatic stress. To a degree it works for federally employed RCMP, but for police officers, firefighters, EMS who witness horrific circumstances that can terribly undermine their psyche and their mental well-being, we don't have programs to provide them with the psychological assistance provincially that is the equivalent of the federal program.

As I stand to support Bill 49 and recognizing that we're relieving firefighters of a potential part of their stress – that is, concentrating strictly on the rescue and the fighting of fires – I want to fight for those firefighters and for police officers, whether they be municipal or whether they be sheriffs or whether they be RCMP, to have the opportunity to receive the psychological support provincially that is being provided federally.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on Bill 49.

[The clauses of Bill 49 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, discussion? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to provide the committee with information about Bill 46, the Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act. This legislation is about the safety of Albertans. Gunshot and stab wounds pose a public safety concern, and this bill identifies and addresses this important matter. Reporting gunshot and stab wounds to police allows them to go to the scene to protect the public from possible escalation of violence or retaliatory measures. Likewise, police can protect the public in cases where the perpetrator returns to the scene or to the victim.

Bill 46 also gives health practitioners the clarity they've asked for regarding when disclosure of information is required and what information they should provide to police when individuals are treated for gunshot or stab wounds. Currently under the Health Information Act health care practitioners, including physicians, nurses, and paramedics, have the discretion to report gunshot or knife wounds in limited circumstances, but they're not required to do so.

Back in 2004 an all-party committee reviewed the Health Information Act and recommended that Alberta consider stand-alone legislation to clarify circumstances under which health care practitioners should disclose such information to police. Hundreds of stakeholders, including health agencies, emergency responders, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons, were involved in those consultations. As a result of those consultations the act is a good balance between a patient's right to privacy of health information

and law enforcement's need for investigative information with respect to public safety. Police would only be provided with limited information; that is, the patient's name, location of the health facility, and the type of wound, not the health details. Police are then bound by privacy legislation that clearly details how they must handle information they receive during their duties.

Bill 46 clearly lays out what's expected of health care professionals. It defines what type of health facilities will be required to report. The legislation also describes what constitutes a stab wound. For example, in cases where a health care facility or an EMT believes a stab wound to be self-inflicted or unintentionally inflicted, as raised by the Member for Calgary-Varsity in second, there would be no need to report. This would also prevent stigmatizing or criminalizing mentally ill persons and eliminate unnecessary reporting for those who have accidentally cut themselves.

5:20

Mr. Chairman, this bill provides liability protection for health care professionals while ensuring there is no undue burden created for them. There is no extra paperwork as disclosures are to be made orally and only after it's reasonably possible to do so without interfering with the patient's treatment.

During second reading there was some concern raised that health care professionals would be doing police work. Just to reiterate: name, location of the facility, and type of wound. That's it. Other provinces have similar legislation, including Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and it's working well in those jurisdictions. There have been no constitutional challenges and no reports of people being afraid to seek treatment in those provinces.

Mr. Chairman, Albertans deserve to live, work, and raise their families in safe and secure communities. This legislation is another step towards that goal.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any hon. member wish to speak on Bill 46? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciated the comments from the Member for Strathcona. The background of this bill is actually very interesting. It does raise some kind of serious ethical questions that do need to be treated with care because we over and over are at a phase in our society where we're compromising confidentiality. We're intruding into things like doctor-patient relationships, and there's an incremental effect to this. We take these things along in little steps, and each little step of the way seems sensible in its own right, but when you add them all up, you realize that something bigger is unfolding here, that a larger trend is under way. I think it's that larger trend we need to be alert to.

For example, there are legal requirements for physicians to report suspected cases of child abuse. Now, who's going to argue with that? It seems like a sensible step to take although it does compromise the patient-physician relationship. Now we're looking at another compromise in that relationship, which would be mandatory reporting under some circumstances of information where there is a gunshot wound involved. I suspect that the public doesn't have very much trouble with this legislation, and I think that there are sufficient safeguards in place here that when the chips are down, I'm not going to have trouble with it either and that as a caucus, you know, we'll follow the lead of our esteemed critic in this area, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I don't want to speak for him, but I think that we'll probably end up supporting this piece of legislation.

I'm not convinced it's going to have a lot of impact on crime rates. I don't think we're going to see a dramatic increase in the

percentage of serious crimes that are solved. The information I have is that the majority of gunshot wounds are actually self-inflicted or accidentally inflicted. In the matter of self-inflicted what we really need isn't police work but psychiatric treatment, most likely, and in the second case, accidental wounds, we probably need better gun training and maybe even stricter gun control. Who's to say? But that, thankfully, is a debate for another time.

Mr. Chairman, I've read some of the background on this. I've read – you know what? – an interesting column by a columnist for the *Edmonton Journal*, Paula Simons. She takes issue with the bill. There's been some interesting analysis done in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* and more widely. I think that when all is said and done, if we proceed prudently, this is a bill that from time to time is going to make police work easier and more successful, and after all I think that's a good idea.

I would like to move adjournment of debate on this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: Shall progress on Bill 46 be reported when the committee rises? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and Bill 49, the Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2), along with progress on Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 49. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 31. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 46. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Alberta Capital Bonds

16. Ms Evans moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the issue of Alberta capital bonds by the government in support of the development of public infrastructure projects and facilities.

[Debate adjourned October 29: Dr. Brown speaking]

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was commencing some remarks last Thursday, and I will continue with the remarks that I'd intended to give at that time. As I said, Alberta is simply one part of Canada, and Canada is part of an increasingly global world economy. In view of the global economic recession, we have experienced low commodity prices, and our province certainly hasn't been immune to the effects of the recession. Make no mistake about it, governments, no matter how large or how responsive they may be, cannot by themselves control the world-wide economy. However, Albertans can be assured that their government has taken action and will continue to take action to address the financial situation and the needs of Albertans.

The government, led by our Premier, has a plan for the future, and our plan is known as The Way Forward. It will reassure Albertans that their government understands the priorities. It includes a number of points: keeping an eye on spending, using savings to fund critical programs, maintaining low taxes and the business environment, making sure that we're globally competitive, and making sure that infrastructure spending is maintained to encourage jobs and prepare Alberta for the future. Unlike other parties, who rigidly state that they would never allow a deficit, our plan will keep Alberta moving forward by maintaining essential social programs, including health care, education, and help for seniors, disabled persons, and the less fortunate. At the same time it would limit our spending so that we can balance our budget within three years. Mr. Speaker, this is the fiscally responsible way forward.

5:30

One of the most important measures of fiscal responsibility is getting value for taxpayer money. Today, Mr. Speaker, building infrastructure projects provides value for money to an extent that we have not seen in a number of years. Costs for construction projects in Alberta are more competitive and up to 35 per cent less than what had been projected just a year ago. Alberta capital bonds would provide an investment in infrastructure projects that are a priority to Albertans. That is why building infrastructure is a central component of our government's plan, but it is also important to be fiscally responsible in the way that government finances infrastructure projects.

Mr. Speaker, let me iterate a few of the economic benefits which would accrue to investors in Alberta capital bonds and to their province. First of all, these bonds will be backed by the resources of Alberta and Alberta's triple-A credit rating. This credit rating has been earned because of the sound financial management of this Progressive Conservative government. Alberta capital bonds would be among the safest investments in the world. With no net debt, billions in savings, and among the brightest economic forecasts in the world, it has been globally recognized that Alberta is a model for fiscal responsibility. In addition, our low tax regime has made it known world-wide that Alberta is among the best places to invest now and in the future.

Secondly, Alberta bonds would encourage Albertans to save. Albertans and people across North America in recent years have been saving less and spending more. In fact, easy credit policies meant that many consumers overextended themselves and didn't save at all. That was part of the responsibility for the downturn in the economy. Purchasing Alberta capital bonds, with their security and knowing that they will support important public projects, will be an effective method for Albertans to save for the future. The bonds would encourage Albertans to keep their investment money right here in Alberta, where it would be used to benefit Albertans. By keeping money in this province and through the construction of funded capital projects, these bonds will act as an effective economic driver.

Perhaps the most compelling arguments in favour of issuing capital bonds are job creation and building Alberta infrastructure which will support future economic growth. In my view it would be simplistic and economically irresponsible to step on the brakes and stop building capital projects because of a decline in resource revenues. In Alberta we have a pool of highly qualified tradespeople, and by continuing to invest in infrastructure, we will keep those qualified workers here in Alberta and keep Albertans working. The funds from these bonds will become available for public projects immediately, helping with our economic recovery. The funds will create jobs in the construction, engineering, natural resource, and other sectors that are involved in building schools, roads, health care facilities, seniors' facilities, and other infrastructure priorities. Mr. Speaker, Merit Contractors, Canada's largest open shop construction association, has commended this government for their long-term and strategic approach to capital spending. They believe that this alternative financing method will help deal with the backlog of infrastructure projects that have developed during Alberta's rapid growth.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, our Progressive Conservative government has a plan, and this motion for Alberta capital bonds clearly fits into The Way Forward. It is the right plan and the fiscally responsible plan. If we stick to it, we will recover from our economic challenges better than ever. Over the past decade the population of Alberta has grown by 20 per cent, a tribute to the sound policies brought in by your PC government. We expect that Alberta will continue to attract people to move here from other provinces and other countries. With our government's plan we will have infrastructure in place ready for the thousands of people projected to make Alberta their home over the next decade. We will have the schools in place to educate their children, and we will have the hospitals and seniors' care facilities in place when they are needed.

This plan will work, and through initiatives like these and with the impetus of Alberta capital bonds I am confident and optimistic about Alberta's future. I thank the government for introducing this motion, and I urge all members to give it their support.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've heard quite a bit of discussion over this motion that talks about how much the interest rate should be and how the bonds should be issued. Quite frankly, I'm not the financial expert that can best decide how that works, so I'm rather indifferent to the way the operation sets up. To me the most important principle we have here is the bonds themselves and the fact that Albertans can buy into Alberta's future.

I'm going to start off by making it very clear to everyone here and anybody who might be listening that I hate debt. I abhor debt for the provincial government, absolutely. When we eliminated the debt and we had surplus dollars, I wasn't even a very big fan of the \$400 cheques that went out to Albertans sort of as a dividend to Albertans. Quite frankly, rather than see a cheque go out, we could have issued bonds then. Albertans could have bought bonds from the Alberta government and earned interest on that.

The reason why, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta is owned by Albertans. It's ours. It's not as though Alberta itself is a separate entity, and Albertans just participate in the greatness of Alberta. They own it. It's theirs. They own the schools and the hospitals and the roads. They own the trees and the forest and the oil. It's theirs. That's because in the last hundred years it has been built by Albertans, by people who moved here a hundred years ago from far-

off lands, came here with a sense of adventure and actually built this province out of absolutely nothing. You know the old image of the settlers coming here and building houses out of timber raw off the land. They owned the Alberta that they built, and we still own it today. I think that by issuing bonds, it's an opportunity to help still give the notion to people or maybe reinvigorate the notion for Albertans that they own Alberta. They own this province.

I know I'm far too young to have experienced the idea of war bonds or victory bonds, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if I have this false sense of nostalgia or where it came from. Maybe it's watching too many old movies or something. But I remember the posters about war bonds and victory bonds and the discussion that people had. They bought war bonds, which were called victory bonds, because they bought into the victory that was supposed to come during the war. It was up to them. There was this notion. Again, maybe I'm confusing it with nostalgia, but it seems to me that people of the day bought victory bonds not because they were going to get 8 per cent interest or 6 per cent interest or it was going to be a better deal than over here; they bought them because they were buying into the notion that they had to help with the victory. Maybe they weren't over fighting on the front lines and helping people in hospitals, but they were responsible if their nation was going to be victorious in war.

To me these bonds that we're talking about, the capital bonds, are like that. Maybe one of the most unfortunate things, if I was going to complain about anything to do with these bonds, is that they're called capital bonds. That's the most unsexy term you could ever come up with. It means bricks and mortar.

Mr. Lukaszuk: You want to call them Lukaszuk bonds? James bonds?

Mr. Griffiths: No, but we could call them legacy bonds or something like that that gives the notion that when Albertans are buying these bonds, they're buying into building Alberta's future, not just buying bricks and mortar that we're going to use but actually buying into the future of this province. I hope we come up with a better term. I'm not particularly keen on the James bonds. Something like legacy bonds, I think, would give the notion to Albertans that they're buying into the future of Alberta. It's their responsibility because they have ownership of this province. They don't just take whatever the government gives them or the way things operate; they're responsible for helping to build it as well.

All Albertans have a responsibility for that. I know I'm bound to get heckled a little bit because it's a Democrat in the U.S. I'm about to cite, but I finally came to understand what JFK's words meant when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

I give a speech all over the place, and when I give the speech about how to make your community successful, I actually look the audience right in the eye, and I tell them: Albertans are spoiled. All western Canadians are spoiled. Canada, North Americans are spoiled. We seem to have this sense of entitlement that gets stronger and stronger every day. What am I going to get from the government? What am I going to get from this program? Who's going to give it to me now? Where am I going to get this from? There's always the what's in it for me factor.

5:40

Western Canada wasn't built by people who came over here and said: "What are you going to do for me? What are you going to build for me? What's in it for me?" They came over here and said: "What am I going to do to help build for the next generation and the

generation after that and the one after that?" They asked: "What can I give?"

The notion behind these bonds is not – it's irrelevant, quite frankly, whether we get 3 per cent or 5 per cent or 8 per cent or it's a better investment over here. I bet that when the majority of Albertans – hopefully it's something more like legacy bonds, not capital bonds – get the opportunity to own a piece of Alberta, it doesn't have to be a building where they say: "I own that one." Knowing that they're helping Alberta get through a tough time, the Alberta that they own, might leave them a little bit inspired to say: "Wait a second. This is my responsibility. This is something I can help contribute to." I think that does more to help build a sense of pride, a sense of nationalism, a sense of community, which sometimes I think a lot of jurisdictions around the world, sometimes ours included, lack when we get the what's in it for me mentality. It divides us and doesn't pull us together with unity.

See, I don't know if the guidelines are going to allow this or not, but I really would like the opportunity to buy some Alberta bonds for my sons so that regardless of how long they hold them, when they do cash them in, they see that they owned a piece of Alberta and they helped drive it through some tough times, that they helped create the Alberta that they're going to enjoy. The bond doesn't have to be particularly assigned to a university building that they'll attend. It doesn't matter. They own a piece of Alberta. They're contributors to Alberta. They're Albertans that own Alberta. I don't know. I just think that it would help also instill in them as they grow up a sense of ownership about the future success of this province.

You know what? The future success of this province isn't going to depend on the policies of that party or this party or that party or this government. It's going to depend on 3 and a half million Albertans that decide that this is not a big deal, this little dip in the economy. This is not going to be the end of us. This is just a new beginning, and we have incredible opportunities to fix it ourselves, as 3 and a half million Albertans, together, united. These Alberta bonds are the perfect opportunity to give ownership and responsibility to each of those Albertans.

I fully support this, and I encourage everyone in this House to as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. That was an impassioned speech that not only spoke to some things in the past but looks ahead to, hopefully, our brighter days here in Alberta. Then again, as he's been in this House for quite a while, I believe since 2002 or 2003, in around there, I do have to comment on the fact that this represents some kind of a sea change in thinking for this government, or at least what was evident back there at that time when he first joined the Legislature. You might remember that there were bills passed that said that we will never go into debt again. There were laws passed saying that we won't allow this, that, nor the other thing. In fact, it was stated quite frequently in the last election by candidates, maybe some in here alike and other people. So this has been said. I thought it was an admitted fact that this government wouldn't tolerate debt.

Needless to say, there are arguments that times change, whatever. You do what you have to do when you get there. But is this a recognition of essentially an adoption of Keynesian economics by this government or a throwing of true conservative principles to the wind, an embracement of debt, which I've seen happen not only here but in other governments? I'd just like to hear the hon. member's comments on that and what he thinks about that or what I'm missing on that.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't say whether it's a wholesale change. I mean, circumstances have changed, so perhaps we have to adapt our prevailing principles and policies to make sure that we account for new circumstances. But I mentioned before that to me this isn't a wholesale change, and this has nothing to do with conservative economic policies. You know, this isn't throwing them out.

I mentioned before that when we had the cheques for \$400 that went out to every single Albertan, I was diametrically opposed to them then because there's no ownership. It's just a cheque that comes to you, and great; then you go spend it. There's no ownership. Debt, borrowing from another country or another nation or something to run, especially, program spending: a very poor decision. But any time there is an opportunity for Albertans to take ownership and responsibility for the future of the province, I don't think that's a bad thing. Even when we were running large surpluses, rather than sending out those cheques, I would rather have seen Albertans be able to buy bonds and pay them interest. Then they're still investing in Alberta and reaping the rewards rather than getting a cheque.

This has never been a wholesale change for me. This is exactly what I stand for.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I just want to commend the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. It's obvious that he's a teacher because he's dramatic, he's passionate, and he doesn't require a script. He goes from the heart and from the head, and I thank him for those teacher talents that he has brought to bear in this Assembly.

There was a degree of nostalgia brought back with regard to victory bonds. I will admit that I was born almost two years after the Second World War ended, but my recollection is that as well as victory bonds there were also ration coupons. What I am talking about is the need to balance the notion of living within our means. We have a \$16 billion buffer. Before we start going wholesale into the potential of debt as well as the potential of building with bonds, let's use that \$16 billion strategically, and let us tie the bonds to very specific projects. I agree with the notion of ownership of Albertans and having pride in this province. In order to continue to have that pride, we need to be specific in the projects we select. Obviously, public works and infrastructure such as schools and hospitals have to be key, of course, closely followed thereafter by roads, that provide our economic opportunities.

To the young member opposite: do you agree, as you began your discussion, on the importance of living within our means?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've always been a fiscal conservative. [Mr. Griffiths' speaking time expired] Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the motion? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and offer my support for the government motion to issue Alberta capital bonds. The current global recession has been a challenging time for Albertans and our government; however, even

during these challenging times our province has many good reasons to be optimistic about our future. One way that our province can further improve our position during and after the global recession is through the Alberta capital bonds. I'd just like to say that there are many benefits to purchasing Alberta capital bonds, and I believe these benefits should strictly be available to Alberta citizens and companies.

I would also like to say that as we were prepared to cope with the recession, we should continue to prepare for Alberta 20 years from now. One way of doing this is through community-based facilities. Calgary-Mackay is a relatively young community as are many other communities in our province. I think that by investing in some of our community-based facilities, we can have facilities that provide immunizations and well-child services along with speech therapy and mental health services. Many of the community health and wellness centres have translated into decreasing emergency room visits in surrounding hospitals, which increases the efficiency of services provided and decreases wait times. I think that these bonds could also be invested in supporting our education system as we need to have a well-educated and skilled workforce to meet the needs of our future economy.

5:50

I'd like to just say in conclusion that my grandparents bought government bonds. It was part of the legacy that they left to us. My grandmother just cashed them shortly before she died last year. I participated in purchasing government bonds in the '70s as a teenager new to this country with money earned from my part-time job, and this money later was used to help with my postsecondary education.

Mr. Speaker, I think that our government's motion to introduce Alberta capital bonds allows Albertans to participate in a safe investment opportunity to invest in our province and the infrastructure that will support core public services. It's just a good thing for all involved.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments, discussion. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If you'll recall last week when we talked about the potential of restrictions on the use of the Alberta capital bonds and competing for projects, there seemed to be a tremendous resistance to keeping the successes or the engagement, using only Alberta companies, et cetera, in this Alberta capital bond circumstance. I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay: if I heard you correctly, are you suggesting that only Alberta citizens and Alberta companies be permitted to purchase these Alberta bonds, or

should we be encouraging wider participation in the purchasing of these bonds? If they're sufficiently attractive to Albertans, should we not be extending the opportunities beyond this province?

Ms Woo-Paw: Well, my personal opinion is that, I think, in this initial round we'll focus on Albertans, and I'm certainly very open to considering citizens of Canada to participate.

Mr. Chase: Are there particular projects, hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, that you would like to see prioritized in terms of the public infrastructure that's being built? Did you have a wish list of the types of construction you'd like to see done?

Ms Woo-Paw: I was speaking in somewhat general terms. I think that we have a growing province, and I think that what Mackay is in need of is shared by many communities across our province. I think that having community-based facilities that would meet the needs of our growing population is a good thing, and this is very much what we need as a growing province. Some of the things I mentioned are things that we need in Mackay, but I'm sure that's shared in other parts of the province as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm trying to prompt you as the former chair of the Calgary school board to potentially declare your fondness for school construction as part of infrastructure. I don't wish to put words in your mouth, but I want to give you the opportunity to put on the record the importance of school infrastructure.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you for the opportunity. I think that there is a great need in our growing province for more education facilities for young people.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on Motion 16?

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been another invigorating day of debate and great progress. On that note, since it is nearing 6 o'clock, I would move that we in fact do call it 6 o'clock and that the House stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Second Session

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Issue 55

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Parliamentary Assistant, Environment
Morton, Hon. F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC),
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Deputy Leader of the NDP Opposition,
NDP Opposition House Leader
Oberle, Frank, Peace River (PC),
Government Whip
Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC),
Minister of Transportation
Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL),
Deputy Official Opposition Whip
Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Redford, Hon. Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC),
Minister of Justice and Attorney General,
Deputy Government House Leader
Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC),
Minister of Environment, Deputy Government House Leader
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Education
Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Health and Wellness
Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
President of the Treasury Board
Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC),
Premier, President of Executive Council
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Tarchuk, Hon. Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC),
Minister of Children and Youth Services
Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AL)
VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-St. Anne (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Weadick, Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Webber, Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC),
Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC),
Parliamentary Assistant, Employment and Immigration
Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC),
Minister of Aboriginal Relations,
Deputy Government House Leader

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 4, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 58 enthusiastic and inquisitive grade 6 students from Earl Buxton elementary school located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying the students are their teachers, Mrs. Johanne Gorgichuk, Mrs. Joanna Rozmus, Mr. Ken Auch, along with parent helper Mrs. Ana Pietucha. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 50 students from the Almadina ESL charter academy located in my constituency, Calgary-East. Almadina charter academy specializes in ESL and houses more than 650 students, with a long waiting list. Under the leadership of the principal, Mr. Jamal El-Rafih, and the vice-principal, Mr. Hammoud, Almadina ESL charter academy has come a long way since its inception. The students are accompanied today by their teachers, Mr. Rabi El-Masri, Mr. Abdullah Elladen, and Mr. Anwar Tarrabain, and they're all seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is a special introduction for me today because it's the first time I've been able to introduce a class from Grant MacEwan University, and I think that's pretty exciting. The class is from the Jasper Place campus, which is on the northwest corner of my constituency, and it's a class in journalism. I met them beforehand, and they grilled me with rapid-fire questions. I felt right at home. Anyway, they are seated in the public gallery. They are accompanied by their instructor, Mr. Roy Wood. There are 25 of them. I'd ask them to rise and would urge everybody to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, today marks part of a tradition that was established here, I think, in about 1994, where we have Take Our Kids to Work day. Some members would probably know that it's a national annual program, and it gives students an occasion to observe the working environment of their parents or caregivers. It's important for our

children to have these opportunities, particularly as it relates to their parents and the work that their parents in this particular case do for the people of the province of Alberta. I would ask that the following people rise as I read out their names: Penny White, parent, and Bill Harding; Debbie Fortin, parent, and Damien Doris; Linda Humeniuk and Christopher Wertz; Glen Gartner and Michael Gartner. I would ask that all members of this Assembly give these folks the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you Breanna Grolway. Breanna has come to the Legislature today to participate in Take Our Kids to Work day as well. She's in grade 9. This is a great program because it allows children to come in and see what the Legislature is all about. It's very exciting for Breanna. She has the rare opportunity of watching her very enthusiastic mother, my scheduling assistant, Cheryl Grolway, easily tackle every task that comes to her on a daily basis. I'd like you to join me in welcoming her to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, in the public gallery, Jordan Louise Alberta Johnston, my granddaughter. Jordan is here today job shadowing. She would like to be a page in a couple of years' time, and she wants to go to medical school in the future. She's in grade 9 at Pigeon Lake regional high school. I'd like you to give her the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of very special people from the Smoky Lake area who are organizers of the Great White North Pumpkin Fair and Weigh-off. They are treasurer Pat Palechuk and her executive assistant, husband Ed; secretary Pat Elashuk; directors Will Chaba, Eva Lewicki, Ernie and Joy Prusko, Richard Sadoway. As one of my colleagues pointed out, they've paid me a great tribute by coming dressed the same colour as my hair. They are seated in the members' gallery behind me, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Some members did say: what hair?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased today to be able to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a family that lives in my constituency; that's the Zyp family: John, Bettie, and Danielle. First, I want to recognize Bettie, who supports the many endeavours of the other two. Bettie, would you please rise? John, you rise as well. John is a visual artist, of course, living in Edmonton-Centre, and has been very helpful to me in my constituency association. Danielle, their daughter, is also a visual artist, and Danielle has been very generous with her time and advice to help me understand the issues facing people with mental illness. Please welcome to the Assembly the Zyp family.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see so much orange in the gallery today.

I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a recent nursing graduate from the University of Alberta who is both passionate and committed to her chosen profession. Izabella Cwieklinski is a constituent of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. She graduated in August of this year only to find that there were no jobs available for her in Alberta. My guest's hope is that the government will show a real commitment to keeping Alberta nurses in Alberta who've received their education here. I'd also like to add that Izabella is currently working on a casual basis with the H1N1 flu campaign program. I would now ask that my guest rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Great White North Pumpkin Fair and Weigh-off

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first weekend of October every year is an exciting time in my constituency, and this year certainly did not disappoint my family and me. The weekend marked the 21st annual Great White North Pumpkin Fair and Weigh-off in Smoky Lake. When the event started over two decades ago, it was simply a group of friends trying to grow big pumpkins, but today it has become much more. It now attracts over 6,000 visitors to a town of only a thousand. The pumpkin weigh-off is just part of a whole weekend that now includes live entertainment, food venues, an amusement park for the kids, a gigantic farmers' market, a petting zoo, and a golf tournament among other things.

Like all great events in Alberta the festival would not be what it is without the commitment and initiative of the great people of Alberta. I would like to acknowledge the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Growers Association and, in particular, one local Smoky Lake family whose continual commitment has helped to make this festival into what it is today: Dr. Fred and Mary Lobay and their sons John and Robert. Fred is the local doctor in Smoky Lake, and his wife, Mary, truly is the driving force behind the pumpkin passion in their family.

1:40

This year their son John grew the prize-winning pumpkin, breaking the site record with an incredible 1,199.2-pound pumpkin. Other record holders are Alan Makarchuck's 825-pound squash, Don Crews' 117-pound watermelon, and Mary Lobay's 92-inch – that's seven feet, eight inches – gourd.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge the volunteer committee, all but two of whom I introduced in the Assembly earlier today. Although they can't be here, I'd like to commend the hard work of volunteer president Barry Wood and former Smoky Lake mayor Carole Carpenter.

The committee starts planning in January, and without their 10 months of hard work I'm sure this great weekend would not be what it is. I know this Assembly will join me in congratulating the past achievements of these volunteers and their festival as well as wishing them well into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Youth Engagement Environmental Grant Recipients

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've devoted most of my life to promoting the interests of children and youth. I strongly

believe that our young people can accomplish great things, and I'm constantly witness to the truth in this belief. Students at an Edmonton junior high school have reaffirmed my conviction.

I'd like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of a group of students at St. Thomas More school. Earlier today my colleague the hon. Minister of Environment participated in an event at the school to acknowledge the first recipients of the youth engagement environmental grant, a province-wide opportunity. This outstanding group of students – and many more are to follow – has shown environmental stewardship in action and the important role that they can play. They saw a need in their school and took action to meet it. Working together, the students created a new paper-sorting and recycling program at their school. The grant they received today is allowing the students to purchase recycling bins for every classroom in the school as well as cover start-up costs for the program. This will benefit the school and the community for years to come.

The youth engagement environmental grant program is the result of a partnership between the Emerald Foundation, a nonprofit organization that engages Albertans in environmental stewardship, and founding sponsor ConocoPhillips. A second sponsor, the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation, has also joined this program. Clearly, the vision and contribution of these organizations will help foster the environmental leaders of tomorrow.

These students are taking action to make the world a better place. They are providing the important and inspirational leadership roles that children and youth can play in our province, and I encourage others in the future to participate and do the same.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating the students at St. Thomas More school on their initiative and hard work. I hope you will be inspired, as I am, by the knowledge, enthusiasm, and desire to make a difference that these young Albertans are demonstrating.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Calgary Airport Runway

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The citizens and business owners of northeast Calgary are very concerned about the possibility that the Calgary Airport Authority will close Barlow Trail within 69 weeks without having a construction plan in place for traffic and LRT access that includes the Airport Trail tunnel.

I rose to speak on this issue in the spring, and I acknowledged then that the new runway at Calgary's airport is a necessity to meet growing demands. I also pointed out that the Calgary Airport Authority's construction plans would divide northeast Calgary from the airport, severing Barlow Trail north of McKnight Boulevard and, therefore, cutting off the northeast transportation link to the airport.

Calgary International Airport will need the new runway, but the people of northeast Calgary and beyond still need access to the airport. Area businesses and commuters depend on ready access to this vital transportation hub. The Airport Trail Access Committee, composed of a group of concerned Calgarians, is lobbying the Calgary Airport Authority and the city of Calgary to include a tunnel under the new runway so as to keep our vital transportation link open to all.

On behalf of my constituents in Calgary-McCall I'm proud to support their work. On November 9 the Airport Trail Access Committee will meet at the Sheraton Cavalier hotel to discuss the importance of the Airport Trail tunnel. I will attend that meeting, and I invite all affected Calgarians, including my fellow MLAs, to attend as well. It is a very important issue for the people of northeast Calgary, and I encourage all citizens to make their voices heard.

The modern era of commerce, communication, tourism, and environmental standards requires all citizens to have quick, reliable access to our airports. I'm confident that the provincial government will help make the airport tunnel a reality by contributing their financial share of the cost.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo Constituent Concerns

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak on behalf of what my bosses, the citizens of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, are saying and what they've been sharing with me. I am certain that all members of this Assembly agree that they are very proud to represent their constituents in what's going on in every corner of coffee shops across Alberta.

What have citizens been saying to me at our coffee shops? Well, number one, this Assembly, they say – and it's nice to see sometimes – should reflect the discussions that go on in the coffee shop. Inasmuch as much of what is said in here has to be a bit more diplomatic, it's still nice to see. It's the strength of Alberta, the grassroots of our democratic system.

I was also told by my constituents that they never have and never will accept gibberish as a response to Alberta questions because it's far too important. In fact, one of them looked up in *Webster's* dictionary what gibberish meant, and it says, quote: meaningless, unintelligible talk; also babble, gabble, drivel, and gobbledygook. I don't know how to spell gobbledygook.

Albertans as a whole believe in true accountability, as do members of this House. They ask: "Where does the buck stop? Who is responsible? Is it with elected officials?" I also might add, fairly: is it also with nonelected officials or, in fact, perhaps both?

Someone made a decision in the recent H1N1 fiasco in Calgary, that we're all very aware of. My constituents said to me: if you don't have the answer by now, you will never get it because the more decentralized things are, the closer you are to home versus the more centralized you are, the less chance of ever finding out because more people are involved.

Finally, I want to say today how refreshing it was to hear Ken King say that he is responsible in what happened with the Flames.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Matthew Rice

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with pride that I rise today to recognize an extraordinary individual in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore and the organization that he has dedicated service to over the years. Five years ago Matthew Rice was awarded the M.G. Griffiths certificate by the Royal Life Saving Society for the bravery and skill he demonstrated at the scene of a car accident near Stettler on August 9, 2003. Matthew, a trained lifeguard, was able to immobilize the semiconscious female driver of one of the vehicles involved, which, paramedics said, saved her life.

The M.G. Griffiths certificate is the second-highest national rescue award the Life Saving Society gives out, and Matthew was recognized in the House by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and now Minister of Transportation, who was his MLA at the time. Matthew has continued to be deeply involved with the Life Saving Society and was recently awarded the Commonwealth certificate of thanks, recognizing at least two years of significant

service in the categories of instructor, examiner, committee or branch member.

The awards Matthew and dozens of others have received pay tribute to individuals who have shown remarkable bravery and perseverance in the rescue of others in all types of extraordinary circumstances, whether it be at a swimming pool, beach, or the scene of a car accident.

In addition to the yearly awards, the Life Saving Society works throughout the year to prevent drowning and water-related injury through a wide variety of training programs such as Water Smart public education campaigns and aquatic safety management services. It is also the Canadian governing body for competitive lifesaving, a sport recognized by the International Olympic Committee. Our own hon. Lieutenant Governor serves as the society's patron, hosting its annual investiture ceremony.

Mr. Speaker, people like Matthew Rice are protecting our citizens and strengthening our communities through the work of the Life Saving Society, which can be and often is the difference between life and death.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government finally came up with a new plan for H1N1 immunization. Clinics shut for four days when there was vaccine available. The minister of health finally came up with a plan that should have been in place from the start. To the Premier. The Premier did not answer my question yesterday about wastage of vaccine. Given this criminal waste of potentially life-saving vaccine, will you fire this minister?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, rather than continuing this line of questioning, I just want to assure Albertans that the two medical officers of health, Dr. Corriveau and, of course, here in Edmonton Dr. Predy, had a news conference and also rolled out the plan for the next group of people at risk: when the clinics will be held and the locations. We've also had a tremendous offer from the city of Calgary and the city of Edmonton to use the Commonwealth here and the Saddledome in Calgary, so it looks like even municipalities are coming to help and support what is the largest vaccination in Alberta's history.*

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is the Premier's justification for delaying four days to come up with a plan when this plan is what the federal government has been suggesting all along? This clearly shows a wilful disregard for expert opinion. Will you now fire this minister?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister has been working with the medical officers of health over the weekend and has the information in terms of the expert advice that he received.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the Leader of the Opposition is not focusing on is the fact that we have limited supply. We have been in conversation with the chief medical officer of health today, and we have embarked on the plan that we announced, but we also have this issue where next week it's going to

*See page 1724, left column, paragraph 4

be very tight in terms of supply. What we don't want to do is stop and start, so it'll be a narrow, focused approach rolled out into next week.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge that the Premier has ensured that there are serious consequences for the decision to provide the Calgary Flames with a private vaccine clinic. The Premier fired the most senior bureaucrat. I guess I'm asking the Premier now why he does not fire the most senior person responsible.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in a previous comment I talked about the Saddledome. It's actually the Grandstand.* I don't want to have everybody going to the wrong place. Please look at the ads; look at the newspapers. Go to the website and get the information.

With respect to the issue with the Flames there's just been a release by the Alberta Health Services Board, by the chair and also the president and chief executive officer. There's information in there in terms of what action they've already taken and what action they will be taking in the very near future.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for High-risk Albertans

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the new vaccination plan children five and under are receiving the vaccine tomorrow, followed by pregnant women on Friday. People with chronic conditions will not be included in these vaccines, only once there is sufficient supply, but no details are available on this. To the Premier: will a pregnant mother bringing a child under five to a clinic receive the vaccine, or will she have to come back on Friday?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it depends on the pregnant woman, if she wants to have the vaccine with the adjuvant or without. Without it it'll be offered on Friday. Again, the minister has the information and can expound further.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, somehow the Leader of the Opposition is leaving the impression that only tomorrow we are dealing with children from six months to age five. We have been very clear that we will be through the weekend vaccinating children between the ages of six months and five years. In addition to that, starting Friday, we will be vaccinating pregnant women. If a pregnant woman has a child in that age group, she can come from Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday.

Dr. Swann: When clinics open again tomorrow, they will only be located in Edmonton and Calgary. Yesterday afternoon I received a number of phone calls from areas like Red Deer and Lethbridge on where they figure into the government's plan. Will the Premier provide some details for Albertans outside the metro areas so they will at least know they are more than an afterthought to the Premier?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to answer that question. You know, part of this issue is that when responsible medical people are involved in a pandemic, what they try to do is ensure that the public has the best information and not misinformation. Now, this particular member knows full well that if he went to the Alberta Health Services website, he would see all of the locations of the

clinics. They're all the same as they were initially, when the rollout started. For him to stand in this House and try to relay misinformation to the public is irresponsible as a medical practitioner.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last two weeks have shown disturbing problems with Alberta's pandemic response. Will the Premier both request and support the Auditor General in performing a special investigation into the effectiveness of Alberta's pandemic response?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I know the two political parties are having a debate on who should ask the question because I think the third party raised it this morning in Public Accounts. All I'm asking is – we'll participate in any review by the Auditor General; I have no issue with it – please don't pull anybody off the front lines that are administering the vaccine to do the interview and create an even longer lineup of people in this province.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

H1N1 Pandemic Ethics Framework

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Several times in the last few days I've raised questions about the ethical framework being used for decision-making around the H1N1 flu vaccines. As of last week, at least, the government's ethics framework was not completed, yet decisions with serious ethical consequences were being made. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: when will the ethics framework, that is briefly mentioned in the government's pandemic plan, be completed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this particular member seems fixated on dying. We're fixated on ensuring that we have as many Albertans vaccinated as we possibly can to keep Albertans from having to access our system of health care. So he can continue on this "What do we do if and when?" and we're going to focus on keeping people healthy.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm fixated on good decision-making.

When H1N1 first hit, everyone was told that there were four priority groups because of increased risk of serious illness and death. They were young children, pregnant women, people with chronic health problems, and aboriginals. The plan rolled out yesterday gives priority to pregnant women and young children but not to aboriginals or to those with chronic health problems, including cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. Will the minister of health explain the framework that was used to make these decisions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, let's ensure that we have it clear because somehow the opposition seems to think that politically we're making these decisions. We are not. These decisions are being made by our chief medical officer of health in consultation with all health professionals, and at the advice of the chief medical officer of health the most susceptible to getting H1N1 and having serious consequences are those children between the ages of six months and five years and, in addition, pregnant women. Mr. Speaker, with limited supplies it was the recommendation that that's the route we go, and unlike the opposition I am not going to question the authority of our medical experts.

*See page 1723, right column, paragraph 10

Dr. Taft: My question is again to the same minister. The 400,000 Albertans who received the vaccine are not the 400,000 who most needed the vaccine. As larger quantities of the vaccine become available, this government needs to ensure that those who need it most get it first. Will the minister of health commit to rolling out the vaccine on the basis of good ethics, and will he make the decision-making framework for those ethics public as soon as possible?

Mr. Liepert: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting. I decided last night to take a look in *Hansard* as to the response by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview to the ministerial statement in this House a week ago Monday, and I also took a look at the questions from the Leader of the Opposition that same day. Not once in that response to the ministerial statement or in the questions from the Leader of the Opposition was it even mentioned about prioritizing high-risk patients. All of a sudden they come up with this idea. It was this government who suggested in the ministerial statement that all Albertans should get vaccinated but that the priority should be our high-risk patients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

2:00 H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We are witnessing a very serious world-wide pandemic. The response of public health officials and the government has been inadequate, to say the least, yet medical experts tell us that the next pandemic may be far deadlier still. My question is to the Premier. What steps does he propose to ensure that the government response to the next pandemic is better planned and better organized?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, once again, we're working with the medical experts in this field, people that have years and years of education and study in this area. We listen to their advice. The advice comes to government. The minister, of course, listens to that advice and rolls out the plan in partnership with the Alberta Health Services Board. That was done the week prior based on the availability of the supply of the vaccine. Since then the availability has diminished. We're getting less of the vaccine compared to what we were told earlier. The doctors, of course, have adjusted that plan, and they're focusing on the most high risk, being children between six months and 60 months and also pregnant women. That is the rollout today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, since the Premier doesn't have an answer to the question of what they'd do better the next time, I'm going to ask him about the Auditor General. Today I asked the Auditor General to conduct a special investigation into the handling of the H1N1 vaccination program by this government once the vaccination program has been concluded. With a view to improving the government's response to the next influenza pandemic, will the Premier support the request that the Auditor General investigate the present vaccination program once it is concluded?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said earlier, we'll participate in whatever investigation the Auditor General wants to do. It's his choice. He makes the decision. All I'm asking is that it's done at the conclusion of the vaccination process so all of the evidence is in place. I also

want to see a comparison to other jurisdictions in Canada, what other provinces have done, because my information is that in terms of the size of our population we have vaccinated more people on a population basis than any jurisdiction in Canada.

Mr. Mason: Those are both reasonable suggestions, in my view, Mr. Speaker.

Medical experts tell us that an influenza strain with a mortality rate of up to 20 or 30 per cent is possible, even likely, at some point in the future. Given the stakes involved, will the Premier join me in requesting a comprehensive evaluation of the government's handling of the vaccination program, and will he guarantee this House that there will be no attempts by his government to interfere with the decision of the Auditor General with respect to this investigation?

Mr. Stelmach: You know, once again, in the question there's always this innuendo about some interference. When has government ever interfered with any investigation by the Auditor General? Every day this comes up. We have a huge situation before us, right across the country of Canada and, in fact, right around the world, and he's again claiming there's some sort of interference over and above what all our medical people are shouldered with in terms of delivering the vaccination to as many Albertans as possible in the shortest period of time given the critical supply of the vaccine.

You know what? Maybe sometime they can give us an answer here in this House as to how you can get more vaccine produced so that everybody has an equal chance. We're dealing with a limited supply, and not once will they ever mention: "Why wasn't there more vaccine available? What is the issue?" They always have to blame somebody else. Really, tackle the doggone issue, and that's supply.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Sour Gas Well Licensing

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The court's ruling over the ERCB's protected area zone around a sour gas well has thrown the industry into further chaos. Saskatchewan, under Premier Brad Wall, has experienced record economic surpluses while Alberta, under this Premier, has experienced record economic deficits. Alberta is losing jobs and families to Saskatchewan. Confidence in Alberta as a stable place to do business has been compromised by this government, and this new court ruling has added to that instability. Will the Premier act in a timely manner and ensure that the sour gas industry doesn't go the way that much of the oil and gas industry has and be driven out of this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the court has made a decision based on the decision made by the ERCB. The minister has been in contact with the ERCB and will explain to the House the procedure from today on.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the issue, of course, it's not anything that the government did or that the ERCB did, and we are not in any way negatively affecting the opportunity for Albertans to go to work as they always have done relative to this very important industry in Alberta. However, the court has determined that there are two zones, an emergency response zone and a protective alert zone, around these particular

installations. They have indicated that the ERCB should consider persons living inside of the larger zone.

Mr. Hinman: Yes, but they've halted the industry. It's more vague words but, as usual, no action.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve better. Our safety record in the oil and gas industry is one of the best in the world. This is about the people who work in the industry that is vital to our province. What actions is the Premier going to take to ensure the winter drilling program is not compromised and that thousands of men and women in the oil and gas industry have work this winter?

Mr. Stelmach: As the minister mentioned, this is with respect to sour gas licensing. Of course, the court has made a decision. I don't think the member wants this Assembly to go against the court decision. We respect the court, and we will work with the court to ensure that the ERCB follows the guidelines established by the court.

Mr. Hinman: That's true, Mr. Speaker, but we need to act quickly. We have a safe, reliable supply of natural gas to heat our homes, businesses, and public institutions. This government must stand up for the oil and gas workers of Alberta, who help provide us with safe, reliable, and certain supplies of clean energy. Is the Premier going to act and rectify this problem, or is he going to add to the instability by letting it drag out in the courts?

Mr. Stelmach: As I said, we're going to work with the court. Safety is a top priority for the ERCB. The court raised this issue. We'll deal with it in the appropriate manner. We can't go against the court, unless the hon. member feels that we should, but that's not what this government does. It doesn't break the law.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks about desperately needing to move forward on Bill 50, but the public isn't convinced, and they definitely don't want to see their ability to raise concerns eliminated from the regulatory process. So what's the government's response? Spend taxpayers' dollars to buy advertising promoting the massive transmission construction the government wants to impose on the people of this province. To the Minister of Energy: why are you trying to sell this turkey to Albertans with our own money?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 50 is a piece of legislation that's absolutely critical for the future of Alberta as a province and for the future of all Albertans in this province. What it does not do: it does not remove the rights of any Albertans to have their concerns heard before the Alberta Utilities Commission in open, public, transparent meetings that will be held in a courtlike setting and give everyone that wants to intervene the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Taylor: Maybe so, Mr. Speaker, but what this government is sure trying to do is convince every man, woman, and child in the province of Alberta through this taxpayer-funded propaganda campaign that the sky is about to fall and we're hours away from rolling blackouts if this whole shemuzzle isn't approved. To the

minister again: how much taxpayer money has been spent on this pro Bill 50 propaganda campaign?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is very interesting because I think that the member opposite has indicated that he knows what this government is doing. He's never been in government. How would he know what we're doing?

Mr. Taylor: No, Mr. Speaker, but I have been in media, and I know something about the power of advertising.

The Premier has refused to properly refer Bill 50 to committee, stating that the appropriate place for debate is this Legislature. Good enough. If the government believes so strongly that this Assembly is the right place to have discussion on Bill 50 – and I wouldn't even fight you on that – why is he spending thousands upon thousands upon hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars to advertise its stance before debate even begins?

2:10

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I think that there's a responsibility not only of the government but of other players and stakeholders in this particular issue. It could be individuals like the Alberta Electric System Operator. Perhaps they have a mandate, some authority, and a responsibility to Albertans to tell Albertans what it is that they are going to build in this province for the province's future. That's all that's going out with respect to advertising. AESO have done this on a regular basis over the last number of years and will continue to inform Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Sour Gas Well Licensing (continued)

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Right now people in my constituency of West Yellowhead are concerned over the ERCB ruling on the suspension of sour gas project licensing. My question is to the minister. Why has the ERCB suspended the issuance of sour gas licences?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we did have a bit of an introduction into this question although it was much more kind of tangled up. Nevertheless, it's quite clear what this member is asking. The answer to the question is that there is a determination by the Court of Appeal that the ERCB perhaps should have considered additional people inside of a protective alert zone relative to these two or three pieces of infrastructure that are now in place. The ERCB needs to have an opportunity to look at what that means relative to moving forward. It does not stop them from processing any applications. What they cannot do at this point is give out licences; in fact, no threat – no threat – to Alberta's gas supply. We're talking about 69 pieces of infrastructure that are involved at this moment. I would suggest that in a couple of weeks this thing will be dealt with.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister answered my first supplementary question.

My second supplement to the same minister. Albertans are being hit hard in the oil and gas industry. I'm just wondering what assurances the minister can give hard-working Albertans who will be affected by this decision that it will be done in a timely manner.

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the ERCB is taking this very, very seriously. It's an issue that they need to resolve in order to continue to move ahead with licensing and permitting of these types of facilities. As I have said, I believe that within a very short space of time they'll have an opportunity to look at their legal obligation with respect to the issue, deal with it, and then continue to give out the licences and permits, as they always have, in a very timely manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Wetlands Policy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Water Council's recommendations for a new wetlands policy have been on the minister's desk since September '08, and for over a year the minister has promised that the policy will be out shortly. Well, news flash: shortly does not mean more than 14 months later. As we continue to wait for the minister to actually do something, wetlands continue to be destroyed. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. When will the minister finally replace the inadequate, 17-year-old interim policy and start protecting Alberta's wetlands?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is accurate on one count, and that is that we do have an interim policy that has been in place, believe it or not, since 1992. So it is time that we develop a policy that applies to all of Alberta because that interim policy only applies in the white zone, only in the cultivated areas of the province. Everyone knows that there is increasing pressure now coming into the green zone, the rest of the province. It's a very complex, very complicated process. I can assure the member that we are spending an inordinate amount of time ensuring that we get it right before we come forward.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. Seventeen years. Given that Alberta has lost another 580 square kilometres of wetlands over the past year while the minister has hemmed and hawed over those recommendations, will the minister commit to replacing those wetlands that have now been lost and adopting the Alberta Liberals' no net-loss policy?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I just wish it was so simple, and I wish that that would be something that this government could absolutely commit to. The fact of the matter is that there are wetlands that have tremendous environmental, ecological value, and there are other wetlands that, perhaps, don't have that degree of importance. It's ludicrous to have a policy that applies equally on an acre-for-acre basis across all forms and all classes of wetlands. I think that that is the crux of the issue, and that is where we're spending so much time, to ensure that we have a policy that recognizes that there are very valuable wetlands, that maybe no net loss is inappropriate because it doesn't go far enough.

Ms Blakeman: Dither, dither, dither, and we lose wetlands every time you dither.

The Alberta Water Council does great, great work, but if the minister never acts on their recommendations, what value are Albertans getting for their \$1.7 million investment in the council?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the work that the Water Council does is invaluable in helping the government to formulate policy. But the fact of the matter is — and it's something that the opposition

members fail to realize — that the government is the policy-setting body, and ultimately this Legislature will deal with any changes in legislation that are required to develop that policy. That is the truth of the matter. It is a complex issue. Like everything else in the environment it's a balancing act: how do we maintain the balance between protecting the environment and ensuring that we continue to have economic growth at the same time?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Influenza Antiviral Drugs

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada has a national stockpile of 55 million doses of two antiviral drugs, Tamiflu and Relenza. Both are effective in treating H1N1 flu virus. This stockpile is enough for all Canadians. Antivirals are recommended for the treatment of moderate to severe illness and for people who are at risk. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell me how many antiviral drugs Alberta currently has stockpiled?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't have an exact number for the member, but I do know that I asked the chief medical officer of health that question about a week ago. He assures me that we have adequate supplies for all Albertans, that they are dispensed around the province. I do know that there have been situations where people have contacted our office and said that pharmacists did not have them in stock. I think this is a temporary thing as they reorder, but I am assured that we have adequate supply through the winter season.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that doctors currently are the only health care provider who can decide what treatment you get, will Alberta Health Services consider allowing nurses or paramedics to make those decisions so we're not filling up our emergency departments?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that was one of the initiatives behind the influenza assessment centres that have been set up in Calgary and Edmonton and are about to be expanded elsewhere around the province. Within those influenza assessment centres we have provided that nurses can prescribe. We've also taken the initiative that doctors, if they believe that it's an H1N1 situation, can prescribe by phone, and you don't actually have to go see your doctor. We've made some of those initiatives to try to ensure that it's as convenient as possible for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Avenida clinic is in my constituency, and it's dealing with horrendous lineups, parking problems which are causing loss of business to merchants, and no public washrooms. Is there a plan going forward to deal with these problems?

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The plan is clear: no lineups would be the preferred route. All things being equal, if Albertans over the next three or four days who fall into the various categories all don't come at once, we believe that we can serve Albertans throughout the province in the two categories that will be eligible in the next four

to five days without having any kind of lineups, because that was not a situation that we enjoyed.

2:20 Charitable Gaming Consultation

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, although Albertans expect restraint during the current economic downturn, the Solicitor General struck a committee comprised of three government backbenchers on September 10 to take a taxpayer-funded jaunt around the province and consult charitable organizations on changes to casino table revenue distributions. To the Solicitor General: in order to save money and protect charities, why didn't you refer this matter to the appropriate standing committee of the Legislature rather than sending these MLAs out, like a Monty Python sketch, in search of the Holy Grail?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's quite the preamble. Interestingly, the hon. member talks about economics, and he's willing to send a policy field committee made up of eight or 10 members instead of an MLA committee made up of three members.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to many charity organizations from Calgary and Edmonton, and these charities are worried that their portion of gaming table revenue will be dramatically cut to favour charities in rural communities. To the Solicitor General: despite this flying circus travelling around the province, has the decision already been made to transfer funds from urban to rural communities?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the only decision that's been made is that we would go out and consult with those who are doing great work in our charities around the province and get their input on how we can balance this problem out.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the Solicitor General's protestations a lot of charities think the fix is already in. On that note, I wonder if the Solicitor General can provide the rationale behind what are potentially devastating changes for Alberta's larger municipal charities.

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, the only fix that's in is that the charities are giving feedback and indicating that they all want to work together to make sure we have a great model in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Employment Standards for Sick Leave

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, when the minister of employment was asked about sick leave and an impending pandemic, he referred us to workers' collective agreements. Now, while I agree that more Albertans should enjoy the benefits of union membership, this government's archaic, antiworker labour laws ensure that most do not. Instead, workers are covered only by the Employment Standards Code, which, as we've said before, does not protect their jobs if they get sick. I ask again: why won't the minister amend the code to bring Alberta in line with much of the rest of Canada and protect workers from being fired when they're sick?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware that there are a lot of other jurisdictions across Canada that do have that type of protection

in their legislation. As I indicated last week, there is no reason why workers or employers should wait till people get sick to talk about these issues and determine their possible individual solutions if and when the issue should arise.

Ms Notley: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the solution when there are no rights in legislation is that you're fired if you take a day off. The fact of the matter is that most other jurisdictions do have that kind of protection.

Now, with your own health officials predicting that up to 35 per cent of Albertans will fall ill, liaising with and advising employers would be a prudent part of any pandemic plan. To the minister: in addition to bringing our employment laws into this century, why won't the minister, in the meantime at least, publicly call on all employers to honour the right of employees to take sick leave in the event that they fall ill?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we do encourage employees to protect each other and to stay home if they are ill. But that's not only specific to H1N1. That's specific to any type of sickness at any time during the year. You know, additionally, if employers feel that they cannot deal with the employees and the employees feel that they've been mistreated or not properly dealt with, I encourage them to call our employment standards contact centre. There probably are other avenues that will be available or could be available to them.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's the problem. They'll call your contact centre, and they'll be told that there is nothing protecting them in our legislation. Meanwhile Albertans are told to stay home if they're sick, but they could lose their jobs if they do so. Employers are told not to ask for sick notes, but the government and AHS itself continue to ask their own employees for sick notes. They're told to stay away from other people so they don't spread the virus, and then they're forced into crowded waiting rooms full of sick people to get proof that they're sick. To the minister of employment. Alberta's workers need this government to display some common sense when it comes to their employment rights. Why won't you?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that there are very few jurisdictions, if any, in Canada that address specifically paid sick leave. You know, certainly, we again encourage individuals to sort it out before they get themselves into a difficult situation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Support for the Homeless

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Undiagnosed or untreated mental illness can lead to unhealthy behaviours, including addiction and in some cases criminal activities. These behaviours impact the individual and the community. My questions are to the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs. What is being done in your ministry to help the homeless who have a mental illness?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the strategies in our 10-year plan, as you know, is to no longer discharge people from public institutions like hospitals or correctional facilities to live back on the streets. Two years ago we did establish the Pathways to Housing program. It has a hospital discharge team, and their responsibility is to provide housing first and then the supports that

people need to stay successfully housed. This team, as I've told you before, is highly specialized and provides service on a 24-hour basis. In June we added a second team, and that team houses people who are leaving a correctional facility who have a mental illness. They no longer, then, have to go back to live on the street.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what concrete steps are being taken to ensure that this program is effective?

Mrs. Fritz: You know, Mr. Speaker, I have had this discussion with this member before. I can tell you, hon. member, that this program is very effective. In fact, it has a 100 per cent success rate because all clients have remained housed, they continue to work toward their goals, and the individuals are no longer required to be in a corrections system at all. I can tell you that the Pathways correction team works closely with the police, the courts, the correctional agencies to deliver the program. And the community is not at risk. I know that's one of your concerns, hon. member, but they're not at risk. Also, safety and stability is essential for clients so that they can recover and, as I said, so that they're no longer living on the streets.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: would the program which is being done in Calgary be brought to Edmonton?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this question is arising, hon. member, from your being at the Hope Mission launching of Immigration Hall this past week. I know that you have a keen interest in this program coming to Edmonton as the people from the homeless community here in Edmonton have been asking you that. I have been working with the Minister of Justice, who is doing excellent work through SafeCom. We're working with the Pathways to Housing team in Calgary, and we are in discussions as to whether or not that program can be extended to Edmonton, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Grade 12 Diploma Exams

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education recently removed the written portion from grade 12 math and science departmental exams. Parents and teachers are concerned that this decision won't allow students to demonstrate that they understand the reasoning process behind the questions they're answering. Last Thursday in the House the minister argued that the student scores in both the written and multiple-choice sections of the exam were relatively identical. To the minister: if this is the case, then why not eliminate the multiple-choice portion and leave the written portion?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I should indicate that in the department we have experts in assessment, and they work with teachers across the province to develop valid and reliable exams. Test questions are created. They're tested. They're field tested. We're very confident that the exams that we have are, in fact, valid

and reliable, that they test knowledge. You can't guess and succeed. It's about a 1 in a billion chance of passing an exam by guessing. Multiple-choice and numeric response exams are a time-honoured way of testing. They are valid and reliable, and they're easy to make, to administer, and to mark. So it makes sense to use that form. Now, that doesn't mean that literacy in math and science is not important.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm not sure where out of the air the minister pulled that 1 in a billion statistic on multiple-choice exams.

The decision to strip the exams of written material appears to be purely a cost-saving rather than an educationally sound measure. If the minister is really looking to reduce costs, why doesn't he simply scrap the provincial exams altogether, as the Calgary board of education has recently recommended doing for grades 3, 6, and 9?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason we do achievement tests at grades 3, 6, and 9 is so that we can report to the public about the efficacy, the value of the education system, whether we're succeeding or not. So we have provincial achievement tests. They serve a different purpose. They also can be used very well within the school system as one of the educational tools. But it's important to have that kind of assessment to understand where we're going. Now, can we change that? Absolutely we can change that. We're always open to discussion about more effective ways of doing things and more effective ways of using our resources.

It's not a question simply of saving money. It's a question of getting the best result and investing the resources you have in the most appropriate way to get that result. Going back to the diploma exams, if you're doing two exams and getting the same result, then perhaps one exam would be appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The minister knows very well and has spoken about the importance of diagnostic testing, with diagnostic testing done at the beginning of the year as opposed to when the students have left and don't get their results until three months later, when they're in a different division. I hope you'll consider this.

In the interest of reducing student anxiety while claiming to monitor student progress, will the minister at least consider reducing the 50 per cent value of these one-shot, two-hour grade 12 multiple-choice tests?

Mr. Hancock: Well, I think I heard the word "consider" in there, and so I'd have to say: of course. I've indicated to the system that we're prepared to consider anything. It's only appropriate to consider whether anything can be improved from time to time. The question that then has to be asked in terms of whether you should reduce from 50 per cent to some other number would be a question of how much weight should be placed on a provincial diploma examination in order to ensure that you have a consistent method of assessment across the province so that the marks that go on the diploma and that are used for scholarships and postsecondary application, et cetera, are fair to all students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Grade 3 Achievement Tests

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring I brought forth private member's Motion 503, which urged the government to "eliminate provincial achievement tests for grade 3 students and consider alternative assessments for learning." On March 16, 2009, Motion 503 was carried. Teachers and parents across Alberta are wondering what action the government has taken pertaining to the elimination of grade 3 PATs. Mr. Speaker, my question is the to Minister of Education. What has this government done in re-evaluating the grade 3 PATs since Motion 503 was passed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again an important question. We do have concerns from across the province, particularly at the grade 3 level, with parents and teachers saying that there's a high degree of stress placed on students. Firstly, I would say that there's absolutely no need for that stress. The assessment that we're doing in grade 3 is about reporting the results of the system. It has no effect on the students' ability to pass or fail, and it plays no part in the assessment of the teacher. It's a valuable tool. The question, then, is: if you're going to give up that valuable tool, what are you replacing it with? What are you going to use to get the type of information you need to assess the system and to help in the assessment of the students?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. The grade 3 PATs cost the government approximately \$5 million each year. With the recent cutbacks in education could this not be a way to save money without affecting the learning of grade 3 students in this province?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the entire program of provincial achievement tests for grades 3, 6, and 9 actually costs us approximately \$4 million. The grade 3 achievement tests account for approximately \$600,000 per year of that. Now, if you moved to diagnostic assessment as a tool or to some other tool for formative and summative assessment, one of the things that you'd know is that that will actually cost more money, not less. So while we are interested in designing better tools to do formative and summative assessment, we also have to be cognizant of the fact that doing it that way will actually cost more, not less.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you. My final supplemental is to the same minister. Mr. Speaker, when can Albertans expect a definite answer regarding the status of grade 3 PATs? Will the grade 3s this year be expected to write them in June?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We have had discussions with the ATA and with other stakeholders about the role of PATs at the grade 3 level and moving to a better tool for formative and summative assessment. That discussion is ongoing. We're looking at the various tools that could be used for that. It's important not to move, I believe, to cancel the existing tests, which do have value for the

system, until we know that we've got something to move to. The question really can only be answered by saying that if and when we have the new tool in place and are ready to engage in it, then we'll be in a position to cancel the old tests, or if we're certain that we're going to be able to move there, we can cancel the old tests. Will that happen by June? I don't know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Cabinet Policy Committees

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has five cabinet policy committees: on the economy, on health, on community services, on resources and the environment, and on public safety and services. Committee membership is reserved for PC MLAs only. Last year \$1.1 million was spent by these committees, an overexpenditure of 77 per cent from the budget. My first question is to the minister of finance. Is the cabinet policy committee system, which cost taxpayers \$1.1 million, ever used for partisan political purposes?

Ms Evans: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. It's against the law. We wouldn't operate that way.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister: then if that's against the law, why is the PC Party convention resolution booklet divided along the lines of those five cabinet policy committees?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, a good part of what we do in development of policy is consult Albertans. They're not just PC Albertans. They're PCs, but they're also people that have written to their MLAs or spoken to their MLAs. It's only logical that if people are going to consider some of those things at the convention, there would be some discussion, but it is not the primary reason for the business. Our primary reason is to get the information, look at the information from whatever source. We do not sit and function in a CPC for the pure purpose of discussing PC resolutions.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: does the hon. minister consider it wrong that the taxpayers are funding \$1.1 million in total for these five committees, and they are being used this weekend at the convention in Red Deer to filter Progressive Conservative Party policy?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, what an enormous distortion of the truth. Absolutely ridiculous to listen to this.

In fact, the kind of discussion that will happen this weekend is absolutely a partisan event, and if people have discussed at a CPC anything that deals with what's going to happen there, it's ancillary to the kinds of discussions that happen at CPCs. The thing that I find most offensive – the people of Alberta expect us to develop and refine policy. This is an opportunity for us to do this. But more than that, we have now got all-party committees that focus on a number of things, members' services, looking at regular and different issues. There's never been a Premier that has had such outreach to gather in the members of the opposition. Then they criticize the development of a policy at any one of our committees. I don't understand it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

PDD Funding for Community Agencies

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In its 2009-2010 budget Seniors and Community Supports had originally allocated \$24 million to help the community agencies who are funded by the Persons with Developmental Disabilities with staff recruitment and retention. However, this amount has been reduced to a one-time bonus payment of \$14.4 million. I have many constituents who are disappointed by this change. They are concerned that already underpaid employees are going to take their bonuses and look for work elsewhere, that this extra money will not help with staff retention. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: why have you reduced this funding for staff recruitment?

2:40

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that with this \$14.4 million my ministry has invested more than \$74 million to help contracted agencies hire and keep staff since '05-06. We are being responsible by balancing our commitment to staffing resources with managing the program's finances in light of the current economic situation. That is why we are retaining the rest of the funds until later, when we can reassess the situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister, and it also relates to staffing. Minister, what has your ministry done to assist community agencies with their staffing challenges?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program has and continues to support the community disability services sector on their human resource strategy. This includes activities to support recruitment and retention of agency staff. As I mentioned before, an investment of \$74 million since 2005-06 supports the fact that we do appreciate the good work and efforts of our agencies and their dedicated staff.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also for the same minister. It's obvious that agency staff are crucial to supporting persons with developmental disabilities, who are a vulnerable group of Albertans. However, some of these Albertans require an even higher level of support because of their complex needs. Question: what is the PDD program doing to keep up with the unique needs of these vulnerable Albertans?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, PDD is a well-funded program. Funding for the program has more than doubled since 1999, while the number of individuals served has increased by about 21 per cent. As part of this funding this year's budget includes an increase to address the increasing complexity of clients' needs and caseload growth. Close to \$12 million is budgeted this year, with \$5 million for complex cases and \$6.8 million for caseload growth.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today. Two ministers have indicated their desire to add supplementary information to answers they gave yesterday. I'll recognize first the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and as all know, once I recognize the minister, the individual who was raising the question with the minister yesterday is eligible to raise an additional supplement.

The hon. minister.

Grizzly Bear Protection

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to clarify comments I made in response to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's questions on grizzly bears yesterday. Yesterday I indicated that our DNA study is currently being peer reviewed by some participants from the successful Yellowstone park study. I'd like to correct that record to indicate that the peer review by grizzly bear experts, including a researcher from the Yellowstone team, was conducted on our entire grizzly bear recovery plan in 2007. A summary of that review is posted on our department's website. It is a different independent scientist who is currently undertaking a review of the results of the DNA study and other material as part of the review on the status of grizzly bears.*

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much for those comments. I only caught some of them, but I guess that a question that's been on my mind and some other people's who study the grizzly bear issue here in Alberta would be: why aren't we listing them right now as a threatened species or a species at risk?

Dr. Morton: Well, the answer is: because they're not a threatened species and because we have half a dozen different initiatives, including something I forgot to mention yesterday, and that is the mapping of the primary core, primary and secondary grizzly habitats, which in conjunction with regulations that will be brought in under the amended Public Lands Act as part of the Alberta Land Stewardship Act will give greater protection from unregulated motorized access into those core grizzly habitat areas. So we're moving forward a very substantive policy change on this file. It doesn't require the type of action that he's suggesting.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Health and Wellness Executive Search Contract

Mr. Liepert: Yes. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked me about a contract with a certain executive search firm relative to the search for the Alberta Health Services Board members. In my answer I said that the department had done an RFP. It shows you how unattached I was to what they were doing, because there was not a full RFP. What there was, which is not uncommon in these situations because of time sensitivity, was a request for submissions from about I think it's five or six executive search firms. I will at the appropriate time table the letter and the appendices that go with that letter, Mr. Speaker.**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview if you wish.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister being forthcoming. My concerns around this are somewhat related to the track record a previous minister of health had with a consultant named Kelley Charlebois and a series of violations of government regulation at that point. So I'd look to the minister of health of today to reassure us and back it up with documentation that all the rules as laid out in government procedures as well as recommended by the Auditor General were actually met in this particular case.

Thank you.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge they certainly were. As I said, I'll table at the appropriate time the copy of the letter and the appendices, and the member can have a look for

*See page 1698, left column, paragraph 6

**See page 1694, right column, paragraph 5

himself. I also would suggest that if the member somehow doesn't believe what is in these documents, he has the ability to FOIP additional documentation. We are somewhat restricted as to what we can supply unless a submission has been made for freedom of information, and we'd be happy to abide by that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that will now raise the total, then, of questions and responses to 100 for today.

We'll continue the Routine in just a few seconds from now, when I'll call on an additional member for Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Agri-Trade 2009

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every November for the past 25 years agricultural producers, exhibitors, and people from all over western Canada meet in Red Deer to showcase the ever-changing world of agriculture at Agri-Trade, and this year is no exception.

Agri-Trade is a partnership project between the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce and the Westerner Exposition society. This year the trade show is themed What's New in Agriculture and will run from November 11 to the 14 at Westerner Park. This year over 500 exhibitors will reveal the latest in research and development as well as improved production models and systems to help our ag industry with the crop year ahead. It will be a great opportunity to learn about the latest in GPS technology in addition to practical rural applications for green energy alternative power generation.

Organizers know the importance of keeping Agri-Trade fresh, meaningful, and practical for today's ag producers. Exhibitors are encouraged and rewarded for bringing new ideas and practical applications to the show with the prestigious ag innovation awards. The 2009 Agri-Trade ag innovation award winners and finalists will be recognized on November 11 at the Red Deer Lodge for their excellence in bringing innovative agriculture ideas to fruition.

I'd like to invite all members of this Assembly to attend the 26th annual Agri-Trade and join me in recognizing the farmers and exhibitors for their commitment, hard work, and dedication to this very important industry.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Member for Highwood to present a petition signed by 20 concerned Albertans from the High River area urging the government to grandfather all currently practising registered massage therapists to enable them to continue practising while upgrading their skills.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition to this Assembly of 122 names. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds." Most of the signatures are from the Calgary area.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting a petition today signed by 295 people from Lethbridge, Glenwood, Magrath, Raymond, Fort Macleod, Grande Prairie, Shaughnessy, Medicine Hat, Coalhurst, Warner, Stand Off, Picture Butte, and New Dayton in which they ask the government of Alberta to grandfather the rights and status of currently practising registered massage therapists and to ensure that their clients will be able to use their insurance in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, did I hear you correctly? A tabling?

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I want to table five copies of a letter I referenced earlier.

The Speaker: Additional tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters that I would like to table today. The first is a letter dated July 16, 2009, from our office in Edmonton-Gold Bar to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness asking for details on the accumulated deficit by Alberta Health Services of \$342 million and how this money will be paid back according to Alberta Regulation 15/95 of the Regional Health Authorities Act.

The second tabling that I have today is information. It's a letter dated July 16, 2009. It is a letter to our office from the hon. minister of employment and immigration in Ottawa, and it has to do with EI programs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter I'd like to table plus the appropriate number of copies. It was received at our offices, and it is from Ms Katie Rogers, a board member of Child and Youth Friendly Calgary who is very concerned about the changes that may be occurring to the charitable model as the casino funds could be changed in the upcoming months here in Alberta.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the Environmental Protection Security Fund annual report, April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Danyluk, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the Safety Codes Council 2008 annual report; pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2008, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report, April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009, the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2008, and authorized accredited agencies activity summary 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is my first opportunity to advise all members of what November is, what month it is and what day it is, what days there are and what weeks there are.

November is Adoption Awareness Month, Amaryliss Month – that's Huntington syndrome – the Christmas Seal Campaign, Diabetes Awareness Month, Family Violence Prevention Month. It's Prostate Cancer Month. It's the National Community Safety and Crime Prevention Campaign, National Health Food Month, Osteoporosis Month.

Then specific days in November. November 1 is World Vegan Day. November 1 to 7 is Down Syndrome Awareness Week, as it is National Pain Awareness Week. November 2 to 6 is Skilled Trades Week, as it is Pan-Canadian Paralympic School Week, as it is Media Literacy Week, as it is National Technology Week. November 2 to 8 is Canada Career Week. November 4 was Take Our Kids to Work.

November 5 is the International Volunteer Managers Appreciation Day. November 5 to 11 is Veterans' Week. November 6 is International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict. November 8 is World Town Planning Day. November 9 is International Day against Fascism and Anti-Semitism. November 11 is Remembrance Day. November 12 is International Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Day. November 12 is also World Usability Day. November 14 is World Diabetes Day.

November 15 is International PEN Day of the Imprisoned Writer, as it is World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. November 15 to 21 is Bullying Awareness Week. November 16 to 20 is Geography Awareness Week. November 15 to 21 is also National Addictions Awareness Week, as it is National Marfan Awareness Week, as it is Restorative Justice Week. November 16 is International Day for Tolerance. November 18 is National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims. November 19 is World Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Day, as it is World Toilet Day.

November 20 is Africa Industrialization Day, as it is Universal Children's Day, as it is National Child Day, as it is the 20th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the convention on the rights of the child, as it is Sir Wilfrid Laurier Day. November 21 is World Hello Day, as it is World Television Day. November 21 to 28 is YMCA World Peace Week. November 22 to December 6 is Opération Tendre la main. November 24 to 30 is National Home Fire Safety Week. November 24 to December 1 is National AIDS Awareness Week.

November 25 is International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. November 25 to December 6 is the White Ribbon Campaign. November 28, an interesting day, is Buy Nothing Day. November 29 is International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. November 30 is Computer Security Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 13(2). That was quite a long list. Did the hon. Speaker miss a very important 30th anniversary date that's going to occur in November in the constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock?

The Speaker: Oh, well. We'll move on to Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 49

Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an immense pleasure to be able to rise and bring to third reading Bill 49. I have to start by thanking all members of this Legislature on both sides of the aisle for supporting this bill through both readings and Committee of the Whole. Also, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the community of firefighters, in particular their association, the Fire Chiefs Association, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, and, of course, any and all employees of Municipal Affairs Alberta who have collaborated in drafting this particular piece of legislation.

I need not describe this legislation in detail as it has been debated at length through the readings. But now, as of today, Mr. Speaker, and upon proclamation of this bill our firefighters will have the peace of mind knowing that they can do what they do best in goodwill without having to question their decisions, without having to worry about having litigation filed against them stemming from the work that they do in goodwill, saving our lives and saving our property. So once again I encourage everybody in this House to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and certainly an honour to be able to stand up and speak to this bill. I attend the firefighters remembrance day every year. We roll through the names, and as each name is read, the bell sounds. It is a very emotional ceremony, but it also points out that our firefighters don't just die from accidents; they also die from diseases that they can actually catch while in service. This bill doesn't have particularly anything to do with that, but I just wanted to mention how much we owe to our firefighters, who put their lives on the line for us every day.

Under the bill firefighters, fire departments, and municipalities will not be liable for damages caused by responding to a fire emergency. I guess my question is: how on earth did we ever get to this point? How did we really lose our sense of any common sense when we send people out to fight on our behalf, and then we have to worry about insurance companies fighting in the background?

Insurance companies appear to be running our lives. I think of mothers who would just love to throw a pile of kids in the back of their van and go down to a park and either have a picnic or whatever. They're terrified in case something happens because they might not have the right kind of liability insurance to take their kids down the road. How did we get to this situation? One of my hon. colleagues has mentioned lawyers. Isn't that funny? That's my next point. Really, the only ones that win in any of these kinds of situations are definitely the lawyers.

3:00

If insurance companies want to waste their money fighting each other – and we all know that insurance companies have many stables of lawyers on retainers – that's fine. Good for them. But I don't believe that public taxpayer dollars should be used to defend them in these insurance claims or however people are trying to claim against

the municipalities. These are municipal dollars. These are taxpayer dollars. This is the money that could well be spent on upgrading equipment, upgrading the skill levels, hiring extra firefighters, and retaining these very invaluable public servants that put their lives on the line for us. One of the amounts that appeared – I think it's Calgary and Edmonton. The lawsuits were seeking \$60 million in compensation. That's \$60 million that comes out of the taxpayer's pocket. I think it is, from that point of view, absolutely wrong.

It stipulates that someone is not liable so long as they're acting in good faith. Well, the cynic in me comes out when I hear that sort of stuff. What on earth would make us think that we have highly trained people, i.e. the firefighters, that would actually want to go out and harm people? That is not their training. That is not why they're there. I think that the average person in the human race actually wants to pay it forward. They want to go and help their fellow man because – you know what? – maybe further down the road they are going to need help.

I think this is a good bill. I think it's time that we protected those that give their lives to protect us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity to say a few words about Bill 49. The first thing I would like to express is my gratitude to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for bringing this forward. I know he worked well in advance of the drafting of this legislation on the whole idea. I think firefighters certainly should be in the fire hall, hopefully responding to calls as they come in and spending less time with various legal teams going over what should or should not have been done on the last call. I appreciate the hon. member's efforts.

I also would like say on the record that another individual, a former fire chief in the city, Randy Wolsey, has worked very, very hard to bring this legislation forward. Certainly, it's been discussed at the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association among various other levels of government. Hopefully, this will resolve all the issues that have been discussed.

I would just like to particularly stand up and thank those individuals, the hon. member, and also the former fire chief of the city of Edmonton for the work that they have done on this bill. I certainly would agree with the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East that this is sort of a confusing issue, why firefighters aren't just being left alone to do their jobs and not have to worry about the legal implications. Surely, the insurance industry is getting by, and they don't need to second-guess our first line defenders that protect us all from fire.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that being the third speaker, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this bill. I think a number of participants have already spoken about the many benefits of the bill and the apparent craziness, of course, of firefighters having to go in and recount the reasonability of an action they took in the course of trying to deal with an emergency in very stressful situations. That whole process, of course, does strike one as being quite inappropriate, so to the extent that this negates that, that's a good thing.

I know it's a late date for a question, so I'm going to simply talk about it a little bit and hope that maybe the members opposite might find some way to include an answer in the course of their ultimate

statements on it. My only concern that I guess I have about this bill – I hope I'm wrong, and alternatively if I'm not, I hope there's a willingness on the other side to look at returning to it if it becomes a problem – is that by limiting the liability to the body, so saying that where there is good-faith action, all that kind of stuff, the firefighters will not be liable, what you don't do is negate somebody's liability for actions of the firefighters.

This wasn't actually, I think, necessarily something that lawyers generated; I think it was insurance companies that generated it. Insurance companies that didn't want to pay out would turn around and go after the firefighters in a way to say, "Wait a minute; you know, we paid for this, but it wasn't our decision to dump X amount of water onto this," and all that kind of stuff. They try to limit their liability by mischaracterizing the actions of the firefighter. That's not good, so I certainly appreciate that the firefighter ought not to be drawn into this.

The concern becomes whether what happens is that the litigation then ends up being between the insurance company and the homeowner, let's say, for example, where the insurance company says: "Well, in fact, we would pay it, but this damage arose because the firefighters went nuts. They were doing it all in good faith, but it really wasn't the best course of action, so for that reason we are not going to pay out X or Y percentage, because of the firefighters' enthusiasm in terms of fixing the problem." Then what happens is that it actually turns into litigation between the consumer, the insurance purchaser, and the insurance company, and actually, interestingly, the firefighters still get called into it to give evidence one way or the other. They're not liable, but ultimately the people who shoulder it are the consumers who have bought insurance.

I would have thought that maybe the better way to craft the act would have been to have said that damages that arise from the good-faith efforts, blah, blah, blah, are not subject to lawsuit or whatever, that kind of thing. You identify the damages as opposed to the perpetrator so that you don't still have different parties fighting over the same thing. That is my concern. I absolutely appreciate much of the best intentions behind the bill, but I worry that we may inadvertently be shortchanging the consumers of insurance, the homeowner, the person who has the fire, for instance. I would have preferred to have seen the liability eliminated as opposed to the holder of the liability being limited, if that makes sense.

Anyway, those are my concerns, and I look forward to hearing maybe some comments back on that issue from members opposite. Notwithstanding that, I believe the hon. leader of the third party has already suggested that our caucus will be supporting it, and we will be, but I certainly hope that there will be some attention paid to this additional issue in the future and some consideration given to remedying that problem if it should arise.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Speaker, I won't be rising again on this bill as I will be asking for the question at the end of this debate, but just to address the comments by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, individual firefighters under the Alberta Municipal Government Act are already protected. Any employees of the government of Alberta and/or any municipality who are performing any duties that are relevant to their employment are not subject to any litigation; the employer is. In this case we are sheltering the employers, being the fire departments. No fireman or firewoman out there should have to be concerned that now they individually will be litigated against as opposed to the fire department or the municipality. Those loops now are effectively closed.

3:10

Now, what insurance companies choose or choose not to do relative to the actual policyholder or homeowner is something that we cannot address through the Municipal Government Act. That act is not relevant to it. Obviously, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona knows, being trained in law herself, that under tort litigation if there are grounds under which a statement of claim can be laid, obviously insurance companies can still proceed against other parties. My goal in this bill, Mr. Speaker, was to protect firefighters, fire departments, and municipalities so that taxpayers don't pay out and they can peacefully do their work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. Additional speakers?

Shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs to close the debate?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will ask for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a third time]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

19. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that a Select Special Auditor General Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Mitzel, chair; Mr. Lund, deputy chair; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Campbell; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Marz; Ms Notley; and Mr. Rogers, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Auditor General and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

- (1) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (2) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (3) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (4) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (5) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we have had an indication from the Auditor General that he would be retiring, and it's appropriate to move forward now to set up a committee. The members that are being put forward are members who sit already on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

The Speaker: Additional comment from anyone?

[Government Motion 19 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Evening Sittings

20. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the remainder of the 2009 fall sitting unless, on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a considerable amount of business on the agenda. We know that Bill 50 is of significant interest to people and are anticipating that there will be a lot of members who will want to speak to that. We had more members than I anticipated that wanted to speak to Government Motion 16. It's prudent to plan to have the time available so that the business of the House can be properly dealt with.

The Speaker: Hon. members, under Standing Order 4(1) this is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Chase]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in second reading to Bill 48, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. I find this bill really frustrating because here was a really good idea that had a lot of support and a lot of support outside of this Chamber; that is, specifically parts 2, 3, and 4, which would have enabled the province to go after third parties. It's called third-party liability. Specifically, this was around tobacco products. We had something that people in the House and outside of the House were really interested in. For some reason, well, certainly unknown to this member – I sure hope it makes sense to the other side – they decided to marry an additional piece to it. That is part 1 of this act, which is about chasing down criminals to make them pay for a right to recover health costs.

I don't know why they would put these two things together, but they did. I don't know if they were trying to be cute – I hope not – but I think that they tied something that is important and credible to a piece of political theatre. Certainly, in reviewing the media reaction to the proposals when this bill came out from the minister of health, that's what it is. It's political theatre. It's playing into a Conservative agenda to look tough on crime. You know what? I'm supportive of a number of measures to actually be tough on crime, but I'm not very supportive of political theatre to appear to be tough on crime, and that's what we've now got in this bill.

You know, when I had a call from a community member who runs one of the agencies that is trying to stop smoking and stop the effects of smoking and a number of other things, here he is going: "Please,

please, please, will you support this bill? We understand it's got this part 1 to it, and we're not too keen on that, but please don't let that stop you." Well, he understood immediately the problems that were created by this little piece of political theatre.

Let me go specifically into the background here. You know, let me talk about some stuff that could be done and that has been proven to be effective if we want to actually cut down on crime. We can talk on the social justice side, and then we can talk on the punishment side of things as well. I know my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is going to speak to this as well. He has a keen interest in being tough on crime, and he's got some things to add to this discussion.

Here are some of the things that can be done that we know work. It's things like literacy. It's things like housing. It's things like drug treatment. Here's an example of where the government did do something right, where they instituted the drug treatment courts, where someone who's appearing before the courts – and it's really around drug use which is contributing to an individual's participation in a number of crimes, generally petty but very time consuming to the system. You know, diverting into a drug treatment court is very effective: very cost-effective, very effective for the individual, very effective for society.

If you actually want to do something that's going to cut down on crime, get involved in something like that. But to get us involved in something where we're now going to try and chase down somebody that has been, first of all, convicted of a crime, and then we're going to try and chase them down and get court costs from them for whatever health costs this crime incurred in the health system – you know, the minister has made the point that not all criminals are poor. Fair enough. Not all of them are, but a lot of them are. How much money are we going to be willing to spend for our Crown prosecutors to chase down a bunch of low-lives who don't have that much money so that we can extricate what little bit of money they do have from them? What is the point of that?

Secondly, we want to chase down people who do have some money that we can extricate from them. Again, where is the systems audit on this? Where is the business case that actually shows me that this is worth while doing aside from some sort of, well, political theatre, some sort of gimmick to show the world, to wave the flag that this is a government that's tough on crime?

3:20

What I see here is a government that wants to spend taxpayers' money in order to make people believe that they're tough on crime, but how is chasing down a criminal – make sure that they've been convicted – for costs that they incurred in the health care system actually going to change anything except for some sort of after-the-fact punishment? The likelihood that significant monies would be recovered to actually be worth the expenditure of monies to obtain that money to me seems to be very small, but I welcome the business case if the government can produce one. Frankly, I haven't seen it so far, and this bill has been on the Order Paper since the spring, so there's been plenty of time to produce that evidence.

Legal aid is another issue that's in here. It would be truly a stroke of genius from the government if we end up with the government spending money through the Crown prosecutors to chase people for this money and then end up with people qualifying for legal aid to be able to fight the Crown prosecutor's case back again. The taxpayers of Alberta will end up paying both sides of the same case in which we're trying to extricate money from someone who may or may not have it.

You know, it's one thing to go after drug barons who demonstrably have yachts and houses and jewellery dripping off of them, but who are the preponderance of people that are involved in crime?

They get caught because they're stupid, and if they're stupid, what is the likelihood that they are really effective businesspeople and are racking up a lot of money through their particular crimes that we can then obtain when they somehow end up in hospital as a result of this crime?

Not too keen on part 1, as you can tell, Mr. Speaker. Parts 2, 3, and 4, on the other hand, are something that we had all been looking forward to, actually. The idea that we can enable legislation that gives the province the ability to launch a lawsuit against a tobacco company and recover the cost of health services for treating tobacco-related illnesses and disease is a good one. We have seen that there is a business case for that one. It has played out in a number of other places.

We'd in fact be joining seven other provinces in legislating this ability to recover costs. We've got British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and New Brunswick. Out of those, we already have two that have launched lawsuits against the tobacco companies, and that's British Columbia and New Brunswick. We've had the constitutionality of this tested, and it appears to be holding up whereas I have severe reservations that the constitutionality of part 1, in fact, would be able to make it through a Charter challenge or a constitutional challenge.

How do we benefit? How do Albertans benefit from something like this suit against tobacco companies to recover the cost of health services? I think there's an argument about justice, to be able to hold them accountable for the wrongful behaviour; there's a disclosure argument, to be able to get at internal documents; there's a possible compensation argument, compensation for those health costs, which again come back to the taxpayers; and I think also an argument that would encourage companies to change their behaviour through an incentive or a disincentive program – one would argue this is a disincentive program – through getting them to stop acting in a way and promoting people purchasing their products. You know, we've got some good ideas to be doing the sections around the third-party liability.

One of the interesting parts of this is retroactivity. It looks to me that in section 50 of the bill – and I know that in second reading I'm not supposed to be going and doing a sectional analysis – there is no limitation to the retroactivity of this legislation, which is an interesting point because if this applies to both part 1 and parts 2, 3, and 4, we've opened quite a Pandora's box there. I'm interested in hearing from the sponsor of the bill if they can clarify that one.

I'd really like to support this bill.

Mr. MacDonald: But you're reluctant.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I don't know why the government chooses to do this. There must be method in their madness, but truly all I can see is the madness of this. Other than the theme of chasing down someone who's done something wrong in order to get costs, the difference between a third-party liability situation with multinational tobacco companies and chasing down crooks to try and recoup some kind of cost to the health care system, I think, are worlds apart. For me the likelihood and the scale of what we are talking about here makes the argument.

I'll be looking to see how others are reacting to this legislation. I mean, clearly, the government has enough votes to pass this bill, but I'm interested in that business case. I'm interested in what kind of policy documents, what kind of background information, what kind of commission studies they looked at – and maybe they can table them so that we can all see them – to decide that this was a good idea. It looks to me like something that came fairly off the cuff. They thought it would look good and they would just throw it

in. As a result, they've now created a less than optimum situation.

I know that my colleague from Calgary-*Buffalo* does want to speak to this, so I'm going to make way for that, but just one final observation. We do end up with a number of people in our system who are either committing crimes as a result of drug addiction, which, frankly, doesn't make them a great person – it makes them a drug addict and kind of stupid, in my opinion – but also people who have mental illness. I would argue that I think there would be a disincentive here for pleading guilty to those crimes if they know that with that guilty plea they are then going to be pursued for some sort of cost repayment. There's a disincentive there.

I was speaking earlier about incentives and disincentives to change behaviour. There's been a lot of work done in the court systems to try to get people to plead guilty and save us the cost of a court trial, and here we've created a situation which is a disincentive to pleading guilty to a particular crime because as soon as they do, assuming that there have been health-related costs here, they're going to get nailed with somebody chasing them for a payback of those costs. So there's another example of where we've created more money, or at least not saved it, in order to pursue this fairly narrow avenue with the fairly unlikely outcome of being able to recoup the amount of money that was spent on those original health costs.

A couple of observations. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Did the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Strathcona* catch my eye on this matter? Then the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill in second reading, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act.

As has already been stated, this is a bill that is sort of like a poison pill. There's a good piece in the bill, but then there's a piece within the bill which is very, very problematic. You know, I don't actually think it was accidental; I think it was done on purpose. It's really quite frustrating because there's one very good policy objective which is reflected in this bill and one very, very bad one.

3:30

To speak about the good policy objective first, the whole question of having the ability to sue tobacco companies for the costs of health care that are incurred by our health care system in treating people who suffer from smoking-related illness and disease, I can say that I was actually very privileged, in fact, to have been part of the Attorney General's office staff in B.C. in the late '90s, when we were first sitting around the table there talking about whether this piece of legislation ought to be introduced and whether this type of thing ought to be pursued. In fact, it was the B.C. government that first initiated this process across the country. It was very interesting sitting behind the first row of people at the table and taking notes, listening to these very thoughtful legal minds talking about the degree to which this issue would fly in Canada. Ultimately it was determined that we could proceed with it, and we did. Then, of course, years and years and years of litigation by the tobacco companies have resulted in only a relatively recent decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to pursue the matter or to at least give governments the opportunity to pursue the matter.

We know that hundreds of millions and indeed billions of dollars have been recovered from tobacco companies in the U.S., so we know that it is a worthwhile project to pursue this avenue of recovery. Let's be clear: tobacco companies are not themselves the patients. They are simply the companies which profit off the sale of an addictive and very, very unhealthy substance, so it makes perfect

sense that at this point we might start looking to them to help defray the many, many costs which we experience within our system as a result of people becoming addicted to tobacco.

That's why, of course, we completely agree with this piece of legislation and, in fact, have called on this government in the past repeatedly to bring in this type of legislation, so that part of the legislation is very good. The problem, of course, is that it's tied to another piece of legislation or another initiative which is deeply, deeply disturbing. It's all very sort of easy and convenient to take yet another swipe at criminals in one of those superficial, populist attempts at making political points.

What, in fact, is happening with this piece of legislation represents a very, very significant attack on some very, very important principles, both legislative as well as political, not only in this province but across the country. The idea that we can introduce into what should be a universal system of health care the notion of fault-based responsibility on the part of the patient is fundamentally the top of a very, very slippery slope because that's what this legislation would do. Patients who have through a criminal act incurred health care costs will now have to pay back the system, and that is, in essence, a fault-based assessment of their entitlement to universal health care. Once you start down that road, you know, today it's criminals; tomorrow it's drinkers; the day after it's obese people. I mean, who knows? Right? It's a fundamental principle.

Ms Blakeman: Skiers.

Ms Notley: Absolutely. Skiers, mountain climbers. There's a spectrum, and once you decide it's okay to examine that spectrum, then there's really no clear limit that's placed on it. All you need is to have the public sufficiently concerned about that particular group of people at that particular given time, and then, yay, you've got the ability to add them to the list of people who may not be entitled to public health care or universal public health care.

The other point that needs to be made, which has already been made but which is really important, is that if you look at the profile of criminals in Canada, if you look at the profile of people who currently occupy our remand centre and our prisons, we know that they are disproportionately aboriginal. We know that they are poor. We know that they have a disproportionate connection to a dysfunctional child welfare system. We know that about a third of them suffer from untreated, undiagnosed, unidentified mental illness. This is the profile of the people that this government wants to spend a bunch of money going after.

It doesn't surprise me. It doesn't actually fall too far outside of the general sort of approach to issue management that this government adopts. You know, we stand up for the poor put-upon oil company, and if we can find a way to go after someone that doesn't have any money yet another time, we'll do it. Nonetheless, it just don't make sense. It doesn't make sense from a pragmatic point of view because, of course, most of these people don't have the money, and I would suggest that most people understand the nature of our justice system and our criminal system well enough to know that the simplistic, reactive "Oh, chain them up and throw them behind bars and also hit them with a bill" kind of approach to managing justice issues is absolutely not the effective way to go.

It's interesting. I heard the hon. Attorney General on the radio this morning talking about some very progressive initiatives that the government is undertaking, the underlying assumption of which is that criminals aren't born, they're made, and that if we're really going to really reduce crime and criminal activity, we need to get into the communities and we need to support the families and the criminal before they become a criminal. Then if they do actually

engage in a criminal act, we need to come up with less punitive and more rehabilitative mechanisms to change their course so that they can become contributing members of society. These were very progressive, well-thought-out points that were being made, yet, you know, good luck doing that while we're also mailing them a bill for their broken arm or their surgery or their stab wound or whatever it is. I mean, it just doesn't really all seem to come together in a very well-thought-out kind of way. It's this particular piece of legislation that, I would say, represents a very unfortunate wrong turn off a path that otherwise might actually bring about some good results.

Those are sort of our general comments on this bill as they stand now. We'll get into it in more detail. We absolutely cannot support a bill that would fundamentally undermine universality and which adopts such an ineffective, punitive response to the issue of trying to reduce criminal activity and making our communities safer and, ultimately, which also appears to be, at the very least, a cost driver, something that incurs costs as opposed to saving costs.

Anyway, those will be all our comments at this point. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Comments, questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: My questions are to the member who spoke last here. How successful will the government be in suing the tobacco companies when they are taxing cigarettes? You know, how long will the lawsuit take? There's a precedent in the U.S. — the governor won — but how many years will it take and what kind of money will it cost, in your opinion, to sue the tobacco companies?

3:40

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you choose to respond?

Ms Notley: Only to say that I haven't done all the research on that, but I do believe there's tremendous potential to recover great amounts of money notwithstanding the important points made by the member, which I'm sure the tobacco companies themselves might also raise. But I still think there is merit to that element of the bill.

The Speaker: Additional questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Then the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue the debate.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act. It is particularly advantageous to me to go after two very well-thought-out speakers prior to me, who have given me much to think about and had many good arguments as to why this bill has both positives and negatives attached to it. I, too, will start with what I see as the positive in this bill.

If we look at the part of this bill which is directed towards suing tobacco companies for recovery of tobacco-related health costs, this is one of those things that has been long awaited, I believe, in Alberta both by people who have watched the litigation happen in other provinces as well as in neighbourhoods south of the border.

There is no doubt that tobacco companies have made a great deal of profit basically selling an insidious product that gets people addicted and has significant consequences for them. Yes, there is a choice element to that. However, at the end of the day if you're in business, the government has put you in business. You still have costs associated with doing business, and the costs associated with being in the tobacco business are paying for the health-related costs that they incur. This is going to be a way for our government to get its hands on a recovery of some dollars that they've expended on

both trying to keep Albertans alive and in some cases, in many cases, trying to keep people comfortable as they die from tobacco-related illnesses.

Going back — and this is some time — both my grandparents on my father's side passed away from what I believe were most likely tobacco-related incidents. My grandfather passed away at about 72 of cancer and my grandmother at about 65 from a massive heart attack. Both of them, as well as loving me, loved cigarettes immensely, and they'd smoke a couple of packs a day. There is no doubt there was a certain amount of choice to it, but at the same time when they were growing up, they were addicted and maybe not aware of some of the challenges and difficulties of, I guess, getting off those products. Needless to say, I think it's long overdue that our province should go back and get some of those health care costs afforded by an industry that has, I guess, to a certain extent preyed on people's weaknesses. Like I said, this is long overdue.

If we look at the other part of the bill, that I have more trouble with, it is the argument that people who are charged with a criminal act or found guilty under an act and have incurred medical expenditures to someone else are going to be liable for paying these services. At first blush, second blush, third blush I think anyone who looks at this bill will no doubt recognize it for what is, political grandstanding. When people hear it without thinking about the consequences, they'll say: yeah, this is great; a criminal shouldn't get away with that. They may say that at first blush. When they think more about the ramifications for, I guess, society, for the betterment of our province, for the betterment of us going forward as a collective people and as neighbours and friends with children, or whatever the deal is, this doesn't appear to be very good legislation.

It flies in the face of what many of our forebears and many people in Canada still believe, that the greatest thing about Canada is the universality of our health care system. It doesn't matter whether you're a smoker or a drinker or if you're a young criminal or an old criminal; somehow, if you need health care, it's going to be available to you. I think this legislation before us infringes on this principle of universality.

I guess it is very easy for us to say: yeah, criminals are the people who we are going after; they don't deserve this type of treatment; they don't deserve getting health care. I tell you what. If we take a long look in the mirror, maybe sometimes there are some of us in this room that may not deserve health care on some days. Nevertheless, you know, but for the grace of God there go I, and right now I can get some health care. Everyone in this room I think can get health care, but there may be a day and a time when — you never know — the shoe may be on the other foot.

Many of the people who find themselves in front of the criminal justice system are not only poor but young, maybe 18 to 25. They find themselves involved in a racket or a situation where they've done something wrong. After spending some time in jail, after doing a five- or six-year stint for something they did while drunk or high or just being stupid, the next thing you know, they come out. They went to prison. We try to do all these decent things for them in prison. We talk about, you know, giving them some opportunities to go back to school and all that stuff. The guy comes out at 25 or 26 and, lo and behold, there we are with another half million dollar fee for them to pay off. How does that really lead to that person getting on with his life?

I know these are difficult things, and it's not always black and white. But I think that in this case we're better off thinking about those things and thinking about the ramifications of what the greater principle is towards the universality of things and why they came into effect in the first place. We weren't casting judgment, so we weren't castigating people who are poor or rich, black or white, who

are walking this way or walking that way from being refused health care.

There are a few other points I would like to make, adding onto that general theme. Not only are people more subject to being involved in the criminal justice system when they're young but also when they've had a mental illness, when they've had a drug addiction, when they've come from broken homes, yada yada yada. Let's face it. It's easy for us to pick out, you know, some of the more high-profile cases of people who, I guess, we always think of when we make this kind of legislation. But if we think about the fact that a lot of these people do have problems and that by coming out of a system – is our society going to be better off or worse off because of it? Well, I'd suggest that in this case we'd probably be worse off.

3:50

Furthermore, I really appreciate the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. Where's the business case? If there was a business case that this would actually save taxpayers some dollars and not be political theatre, well, hey, that's another thing.

Hey, I'll support this government. If they want to get tough on crime and hire as many police officers as they want, fair enough. Tell you what, dude: go nuts. Let's prioritize. Let's do things. Let's catch up our policing numbers to what they are in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, places like that, to a population per capita number that's reasonable. Let's face it, guys. If you're worried that you're looking soft on crime, that's where you really do it. Yeah, you can get some headlines with this for a couple of days, and you can flog it out to whoever you want, but it appears to me to be bad legislation and not well thought out.

Those are some of the things. I'll support you all the way in your wanting to go nuts on crime by hiring the correct police officers, by keeping people in jail, lobbying for long offences, and all that stuff. Anyway, that's where I am.

Now that I got sort of done with that part, I do have some other news to bring to the forefront here, whether it's news or a procedure. It is an amendment. If it is possible, sir, I'd like to have that distributed. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Just wait a second, sir, while the pages distribute this amendment, including one up here so that I know what you're talking about.

Mr. Hehr: Do you mind if I read that into the record, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You can proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much. For those following along at home, my amendment reads that "Crown's Right of Recovery Act be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Health in accordance with Standing Order 74.2."

The Speaker: You're on the amendment. Do you have anything further to say on it?

Mr. Hehr: Yes, I do.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Right now the Standing Committee on Health has no legislation before it. With this proposed legislation I think there's been an admission by the Minister of Justice – and she may wish to

comment on this amendment – that this could be fraught with legal challenges, that this could be an expense to Alberta citizens and may in fact delay things going forward if we don't send this to the committee on health to really discuss it, to vet whether this is the right thing to do for Albertans.

I think it really would allow us to discuss whether recovering the costs from criminals would violate the Canada Health Act. We could maybe spend some time, bring in some people with knowledge on that who would be able to discuss it. We could also bring in some groups in the community to see whether that's really where we want to go here in Alberta with fighting crime and to hear from them whether this is a way for us to fight crime or whether we should concentrate on other more traditional methods. I think it would be an excellent opportunity to put the all-party committees to work, which is what they're meant to do, and it would be a great discussion piece. It looks like the rest of the bill, that everyone here spoke positively of so far, would sail through, and we could go from there.

I invite other members to support this legislation, and I invite some other members to say why or why not they would find this amendment appropriate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're now dealing with an amendment. The amendment document says June 2 on it. That's incorrect. The amendment was moved on November 4, 2009. That's a minor matter of bookkeeping, so that's appropriate.

We're now on the very fine line of the amendment, which is a referral amendment.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to support the Member for Calgary-Buffalo in his amendment to refer Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act, to the Standing Committee on Health. For a couple of reasons I'm willing to support this. I'll admit that this creates somewhat of the same dilemma we had earlier in that it will slow down the passage of this bill, which I think a number of us are unhappy to see. Nonetheless, in order for me to be able to support the bill in the state that it's in, with part 1 attached to it, I need some information that's not forthcoming from the members in the Chamber. So I would be looking for it to be referred to the Standing Committee on Health with the hopes that they would invite certain stakeholder groups in to present to us on the feasibility of part 1.

[Mr. Lund in the chair]

I mean, I would be interested in hearing from John Howard Society, for example, or Elizabeth Fry Society on how likely this part 1 would be to be successful given their particular knowledge of people who end up being incarcerated. Of course, John Howard works with people both inside and outside of the corrections system, but they certainly have a very specific expertise, as does Elizabeth Fry.

I would like to hear from the experts that work with our aboriginal populations, which is another group, as my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona mentioned, you know, that is overrepresented in the inmate population and in the remand centres as well in Canada.

I'd like to hear from advocates for the mentally ill about how likely this is to be successful. Are we dealing with, perhaps unbeknownst to me, people that end up being convicted and serving time, that have a mental illness and have a whole pile of money that I haven't been aware of, having served many of those same people as my constituents for a number of years? Maybe they've all been

sleeping on mattresses stuffed with hundred dollar bills all this time that I didn't know about.

I think it would also be useful to hear from someone that's working with the drug treatment courts for what their take on this particular proposal would be.

I think there's an opportunity for us to hear from experts in the community that may be able to advise us on the feasibility of this. You know, if it's going to work, then I might be willing to go there, but without trying too hard, I can see a whole bunch of reasons why it's not going to work, and I have to figure out what I'm going to do if this legislation goes forward with part 1 in it. That's the problematic part. I've got no problem supporting parts 2, 3, and 4, but part 1 is hugely problematic.

Therefore, I appreciate my colleague's attempt to try and shine some light on this by bringing forward an amendment to refer the bill to that standing committee for possible input. I mean, the committee can take a reference of a bill and from there work a number of ways on how to gather information and report back to the House. There is a time limit on it that has been established. There is a requirement that within a certain period of time there be a report back to the House.

4:00

There are a number of ways of working through that committee and getting certain tests met, which have not, unfortunately, been able to be met by the government when they have taken this on by themselves. But because of what the standing orders offer us and that we could take advantage of through this referral motion, I think it's a possibility of finding a way to work with this particular piece of legislation. I sure wish that the government hadn't decided to create this particular bog, but they did, so I appreciate my colleague's attempt to try and give us a way out of the bog.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I urge all of my colleagues to vote in favour of the amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other speakers on the amendment? We will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise in favour of the amendment from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Right now the Standing Committee on Health has no legislation before it. With the proposed legislation, that could be in violation of the Canada Health Act, there is a necessity for greater scrutiny of this bill, which would be accomplished by referring the bill to the committee.

The reason this bill should be referred to the Standing Committee on Health is directly tied to the recovery of health services costs incurred during the commission of a crime. However, it is important as to when the bill is referred to the committee. If this legislation passes second reading and then is referred, the principle of the bill is fixed, and it is questionable whether the offending sections would be able to be extracted. So this bill must be referred before the vote on the bill has taken place in second reading.

There have been several experts that have suggested that provisions that would allow the recovery of costs from criminals would violate the Canada Health Act, so there comes the universality of the Canada Health Act. Even the Minister of Justice stated one time that she believes the government is confident that the legislation could resist a court challenge, so the government expects a court challenge as well. An issue that has the government anticipating a court challenge most definitely needs further assessment and consultation. This would be best accomplished through referring this to the committee, where there will be enough time for a serious cost-

benefit analysis of this bill and for stakeholder consultation as well. The fact that the government already seems to be anticipating a legal challenge to this legislation is enough to suggest referring this bill to the committee.

I believe the government is playing a political game with health care. The reason for this is that the government feels Albertans do not believe the government is tough enough on crime. To counter this, they most likely proposed this legislation and piggybacked this onto the other legislation.

At first reading and hearing of the ability to recover health care costs from criminals, many Albertans could be very supportive of this, but, Mr. Speaker, the point is: how are the criminals going to pay it back? They don't have the money to begin with. If the criminals were well off, I don't think they would be committing the crimes. The majority of criminals will not be able to pay the funds for the health care service they receive, so the benefit that can be obtained from this legislation may be negligible with respect to the criminal aspects.

To reinforce the point, they could very well endanger Canada Health transfers. Under the universality of health care this will endanger the transfer of payments from the federal government. This is especially important considering that after the budget was raised this year, the government was saying that they feel they are entitled to \$700 million that was withheld, that they didn't receive from the federal government.

Also worth mentioning is: how much money is the government willing to spend defending the constitutionality of this legislation? One of the main reasons why collecting funds from criminals will not be a success is the fact that the majority of them will not have the ability to actually pay back whatever amount their health care cost was. This entirely removes any incentive from the rehabilitative aspect of our criminal justice system. Why would an individual plead guilty to an offence if they knew that they would be culpable for a sizable amount of money? What would be the cost of legal aid when every individual who is charged with a criminal offence is not only going to fight their charge but also the government attempting to collect funds from them?

This is also a problem with the criminal offender who may have mental health or drug addition problems. Would these individuals, who received treatment for their respective illness, when found guilty be responsible for the entire cost of what is often long-term treatment? This creates a disincentive for the rehabilitation of these populations to enter back into society as contributing members when they know that they will be responsible for what most likely will be a sizable amount of money.

For these reasons I support this amendment brought by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I think we should all support this amendment and scrutinize this bill further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) applies. Does anyone have any questions or comments?

Seeing none, on the amendment the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been mentioned – and I think it's quite true – certainly sections 2, 3, and 4 are necessary and part of a good bill, but then they slip something sort of really silly in. Section 1 is kind of silly. One of the things that I note – and I totally approve of this – is that we actually could sue tobacco companies in terms of getting money back for people that are often costing the health care system large amounts of money. These types of laws are in other provinces and certainly in the States. However,

here in Alberta it's very interesting that if we sue the tobacco companies, we actually are suing ourselves because we are shareholders in the tobacco companies through the heritage trust fund. So I'm not quite sure how we end up suing ourselves on that one.

Then the other part in section 1 about collection of health care costs. It really is, I think, quite silly when you think about the people that we actually would have a chance of getting at because surely we know that the criminals who can afford to pay for this, if we ever catch up with them, can clearly afford lawyers that will make sure that they never pay it. So those aren't the people that we're probably going to go after.

What I can envision here is something like *Dog the bounty hunter*. We can hire someone who will then create a reality show, and they can go and collect from these people. I mean, heaven knows where they would find them. The price of the reality show – I mean we would have to totally rename it. We couldn't possibly call it *Dog the bounty hunter*. I mean, surely we can come up with a better name in Alberta. But that reality show could pay the price of the collector; i.e., that bounty hunter. You know, I'm sure that there would be no shortage of candidates for that job, especially if they could – well, let's hope that maybe we could clean up the show a little bit better than the actual original *Dog the Bounty Hunter*. This could create a totally cost-neutral way of collecting these dollars from these people that probably don't have them in the first place. There isn't a business plan in the world that isn't delighted to be able to have part of their bottom line that is a totally neutral collection system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) applies. Are there any questions or comments?

Seeing none, then we shall recognize Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise in support of the motion that this bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Health. This bill does include very complex issues. As we've stated already, the precedent set by this bill is unmatched, as far as I can tell, throughout the country. The threat that it represents to the provision of universal health care is significant, and the lack of information that has been provided to all members of the House in that regard is something that we should be concerned about. As members of the Assembly we should all be seeking more information before moving forward with such a radical and ill-advised proposal.

In particular, as has already been mentioned, we've not yet been provided with any information to suggest that presenting criminals with hospital bills, whether they are incarcerated at the time, struggling with probation at the time, or even still in the hospital at the time, will have any impact in terms of crime reduction and, in fact, whether or not it will not actually result in increased crime in that, ultimately, people will be compelled to commit more crimes in order to pay off these bills that they have incurred. Who knows? Really, truly, it seems like a completely irrational mechanism for crime prevention. That particular purpose seems unclear or disconnected from the legislation in question.

In terms of whether it's a good financial management strategy on the part of the government to somehow reduce their health care costs and that would somehow benefit taxpayers that way, again, we've been provided with no information about how it is we might possibly benefit as taxpayers just concerned about nothing other than dollars and cents. We have no idea what amount of income this would generate for taxpayers, and I suspect that's the case because the

government has no idea. Certainly, for the committee itself that would be something that would be reasonable for it to pursue. We have no idea what the cost to taxpayers would be on the flip side of actually pursuing these bills from criminals, again something that I think Albertans have a right to know about and learn about before embarking on such a radical project.

Finally, as we've said before, I think it's really important for us to have a clear understanding of who it is we're dealing with here. I mean, we're talking about undermining the universality of our health care system. As I said, it's all easy on a very superficial basis to imagine the worst-case kingpin drug dealer driving around in his black-tinted Hummer, you know, handing out drugs to small children. Of course, not only do we want to give that guy a bill for his health care; we want to do a whole bunch of other things to him, too, because as members of the community we're so offended that that person even exists. However, the fact of the matter is that we really need to have a much more informed assessment of who it is we're actually dealing with, who it is we're actually planning to bill for their health care costs, whether we are picking on those people or whether we are for the most part picking on very underprivileged groups in large degrees. You know, we need to hear about that.

We need to hear from the police. We'd like to hear from the police to find out if they think this would be anything other than an opportunity for more crime to be committed, for them to be dragged into more ridiculous processes where, you know, criminal A, after being put either on probation or maybe through some community diversion project or whatever, is out there in a process of controlled rehabilitation, and suddenly they get nailed with a bill for \$15,000, and then they don't pay it. At what point do the police get drawn in to actually help the government recover this ridiculous amount of money? So back in they go, and the police, in fact, are finding that the number of sort of criminal incidents are going up because we've decided to start adding this extra form of penalty, slash, billing people for their criminal activity, slash, whatever we can do we'll do to penetrate the principle of universal health care with some type of public support kind of ill-advised strategies.

There's a lot of information that needs to be gotten, I think. As I say, as far as I understand – and I'm certainly quite prepared to be corrected – I don't believe there is a similar piece of legislation anywhere else in the country. Does anyone know? And if there even is a similar piece of legislation in other parts of the country, well, then I'd like to know how it's working and what people think about it and whether it's actually been implemented or not or whether it's been not proclaimed because the people that passed it in a fit of political fury, looking like they were being tough on crime, then realized that the administration of it would be so onerous and so ridiculous that they didn't bother. Who knows? But this is the kind of information that all members of the Assembly should seek to have before them before they vote on something as radical as this.

For this reason I completely support the notion of having the matter referred to the Health Committee for a more considered and thoughtful and responsible and informed review of such an important issue.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) applies. Are there any questions or comments?

Does anyone else care to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for his

amendment and his suggestion. I hope the Assembly agrees with the suggestion that we refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Health for further study in accordance with our standing orders. I've heard from many hon. members this afternoon in the course of the debate at second reading, and there were a lot of good issues brought up during the discussion. Certainly, the Standing Committee on Health would have the time.

We all know that there was another committee struck outside the field policy committee process that is looking at some of the issues around health care or the management or the delivery of health care and what's going on with Alberta Health Services and how all this is going to work. I can't understand why that committee is necessary. After all, the consultants that appear through the public accounts blue books were hired by Alberta Health to do the same thing. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, there certainly is time available for the Standing Committee on Health to have a second look at this bill.

4:20

I know that some members of the public may be confused between cabinet policy committees and the field policy committees. I would like to remind hon. members that only government members or PC caucus members can belong to the cabinet policy committees. To my knowledge they don't meet in public. Their minutes are not available to the taxpayers, who fund the whole process. Last year, as we know, it was well over budget, 77 per cent over, incredibly, the total sum that the five cabinet policy committees spent. The total sum, of course, was \$1.1 million. I certainly know that the field policy committee would have it within their budget. They wouldn't be breaking their budget if they were to have some more meetings and have a good second look at this bill.

I don't know whether the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is on that field policy committee on health or not. Now, I should, but I don't. But if she's not on it, she could make an appearance – the standing orders certainly allow that – to make some of the suggestions to the committee, if this amendment is passed, that she made to the House in general this afternoon.

Certainly, when we look at the field policy committees and how important they are to the Legislature – I know they're very important – I'm surprised that there are not more bills or more issues or other matters referred to them. Certainly, that's allowed by the standing orders.

It was interesting, Mr. Speaker, to see on Alberta Justice's website a document. It's a year old. It's dated November 2008. It's A Guide to the Legislative Process: Acts and Regulations. One only has to look at the table of contents here. It's a very hands-on document that explains the roles and responsibilities in the preparation of legislation, the client department, the client's lawyer, the Legislative Counsel office, the legislative process, statutes, passing a bill. In passing a bill, in the Legislature portion, of course, we break it down into first reading, second reading, and policy field committees before we proceed to the Committee of the Whole.

Certainly, I would urge all hon. members to have a look at this, the Guide to the Legislative Process: Acts and Regulations, and reference specifically the field policy committees, like the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is doing with his amendment. The field policy committees are a part of the legislative process. Let's put the hon. members who are sitting on that committee to work and have them have a second look at Bill 48 and address some of the issues that have been discussed here this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon members, section 29(2)(a) is available. Any questions or comments?

Other speakers on the amendment?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 48 lost]

The Acting Speaker: Any members prepared to speak on Bill 48?

Seeing none, then we will close debate on Bill 48.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a second time]

Bill 53

Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Weadick: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Since being elected in March 2008, a number of Lethbridge professionals have approached me and asked: when is this coming? I always respond that it's being discussed and is on the table, that they should just stay tuned, and I'll try to get back to them as soon as I can. Well, today I'm really pleased to be sending a message back to my Lethbridge constituents and to people around the province to say that it's on the table, and discussion is officially under way.

I appreciate the work that the ministers of Finance and Enterprise, Employment and Immigration, Justice and Attorney General, and Health and Wellness along with their policy advisers and legal teams have done to get us where we are today. To them I say that this is a phenomenal piece of legislation; congratulations, and job well done.

Before us today we have proposed legislative revisions to four acts involving three ministries. If passed, these changes will extend nonvoting share ownership of professional corporations to immediate family members. These professions include doctors, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists under the Health Professions Act and the Medical Profession Act; lawyers under the Legal Profession Act; chartered accountants, certified management accountants, and certified general accountants under the Regulated Accounting Profession Act.

The proposed legislation deals with the extension of share ownership and does not change the professional corporation structure. Professionals will continue to maintain full responsibility for the services of their corporation, and of course they will continue to be held personally liable for the professional services they provide.

If passed, family members eligible to own nonvoting shares will include spouses, children, and common-law partners. Same-sex couples are also covered in this legislation. The proposed changes do not extend share ownership quite as broadly as in British Columbia; however, they will allow professionals to pay dividends to immediate family members, which will improve the professionals' ability to income-split with their families. Restricting share ownership to immediate family members limits Alberta's exposure to aggressive tax planning, which increases as more individuals become eligible to hold nonvoting shares.

Mr. Speaker, the revisions before us will bring the share ownership of these professions more in line with professional corporations in other western provinces. Let us not kid ourselves. Every profession looks at their counterparts in other jurisdictions and asks: what about us?

This isn't just about levelling the playing field among provinces; it's also about levelling the playing field right here in our own backyard. These revisions will also bring doctors, lawyers, accountants, dentists, optometrists, and chiropractors more in line with other Alberta corporations. Family members can already own shares in other corporations, including engineers, architects, and veterinarians. This change will simply allow professionals and their families to enjoy the same benefits.

You know, when I read over any proposed legislation, whether I'm sponsoring a bill or even before my time as an MLA, I always ask myself: who would be against this, and who would have a beef with what's being proposed? Mr. Speaker, I suppose some Albertans could be concerned with Bill 53 since they might think this is a case of the rich getting richer at a time when government revenues are down. I have no reservation in tackling the argument head-on. Government has determined that the benefits associated with extending share ownership to nonprofessional family members outweighs the estimated \$1 million in reduced personal income tax revenues. These changes will better align Alberta's professional corporations with neighbouring provinces and with other corporations operating within Alberta. This will improve the attractiveness of Alberta and help encourage professionals to practise and do business in our province.

Mr. Speaker, these proposed legislative revisions are about being fair. They're about levelling the playing field among other corporations within Alberta, and they're about levelling the playing field between Alberta professional corporations and their counterparts throughout western Canada.

I am proud to carry Bill 53 and encourage all of my legislative colleagues to support it. Thank you very much.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West's remarks regarding Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. Certainly, he's right: we are amending the Health Professions Act, the Legal Profession Act, the Medical Profession Act, and the Regulated Accounting Profession Act. Essentially, this bill will allow income-sharing with their spouse and children by members who have a registered professional corporation.

In the first look at this bill I thought it was a good idea, a very good idea. We are in the process of contacting each of the respective professional bodies that this act will affect, but we haven't heard back from them all yet. It has been very difficult to get a meeting teed up. We have been phoning back and forth and e-mailing back and forth with the hon. member to get this set up. We did finally have one of our representatives, one of our representatives from the research department, talk directly to the sponsor of the bill, and I appreciate the hon. member's time.

When we are considering through this legislation allowing income-sharing with their spouse and children by members who have a registered professional corporation, we have to have a good look at this and at what exactly it means for the bottom line of the province. But before we do that, Mr. Speaker, if we look at a doctor, for example, who has registered as a professional corporation, that individual can transfer shares, if this bill becomes law, to a spouse or child and, as I understand it, reduce the income tax that is required to be paid.

The amendments also clarify that nonvoting shareholders – for example, a spouse or a child of a registered member of the professional corporation that has had shares transferred to them – have no liability in the business of the corporation. The registered member

of the professional corporation still has full liability and must carry liability insurance for his or her business. That's noteworthy, and that is important.

Now, as I understand it, this bill will allow Alberta to be competitive with British Columbia, I'm told, in light of TILMA and with Ontario, both of which have similar tax perks in their legislation governing professional corporations. I looked at that, and I'm going to get to that in a moment here, Mr. Speaker.

According to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, as I understand it, the estimated average tax savings for each professional corporation in Alberta as a result of these changes will be \$12,000. I would like clarification on that because the hon. member in his opening remarks on this legislation indicated that we would lose \$1 million or thereabouts in lost revenue. That just doesn't add up. Certainly, there are a lot more than 100 professional corporations registered in this province. One of these two figures is wrong. If we did not get an accurate number when the bill brief was provided, I would certainly like a correction on that.

There are a lot of professional corporations. I would like to know precisely how many in each discipline would be affected by this. We could be looking at a significant loss in tax revenue collected by the government. I don't know if this legislation will mean that more professional corporations register elsewhere, outside this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if we look at the amount of money that's collected in income taxes in this province, if we look at the consolidated financial statements from last year, it's \$12.9 billion, the same as it was the year before, in 2008. If we look at the government's fiscal plan for this current year, we will see under tax revenue for 2009-10 that there is an anticipated tax collection of \$14.7 billion, and of course 58 per cent of that is personal income tax, and 16 per cent of that, or \$2.4 billion, is corporate income tax.

Now, if we go over a couple of more pages in the fiscal plan and we have a look at the major provincial tax rates for 2009 – and the hon. member can clarify this for not only myself but members of the House – it is my view that professional corporations would be under the general rate for corporate income tax.

Mr. Denis: It's not necessarily true.

Mr. MacDonald: It's not the general rate, hon. member?

Mr. Denis: It's not necessarily true.

Mr. MacDonald: It's not necessarily true. Okay. I'm going to have a great deal of interest when the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont speaks because hopefully he can clarify this.

If we look at the general corporate income tax rate for Alberta, it's 10 per cent. If we look at Ontario's, it's significantly higher, at 14 per cent. Again, if we compare it to B.C.'s, our rate is slightly less than B.C.'s. B.C.'s is 11 per cent. So I think we're competitive already – that is my point – with or without this legislation at this time.

Now, if we look at the small-business rate, B.C.'s is lower. Ours is 3 per cent, B.C.'s is 2.5 per cent, but Ontario's is almost double ours. Theirs is 5.5 per cent. The threshold for B.C. is a hundred grand less than our small-business rate, and Ontario's threshold is the same as ours, a half million dollars.

Those are the tax rates, and how this amendment will affect our bottom line at a time when there are scarce financial resources is the question that I have at this time, Mr. Speaker, for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. I'm not necessarily saying that I would vote against this bill, but certainly we need to know how many professional corporations there are – I'm sure the hon. Member for

Lethbridge-West has that information – in this province and how many of these corporations would be affected by this legislation. Again, I have to question whether it will be a million dollars in light of the information that we have received during the bill brief.

I can see where the hon. member wants to present these amendments and allow Alberta to remain competitive, but as I pointed out in the tax plan here from Budget 2009, we are, I'm glad to say – and hopefully we will continue to be – very competitive with our neighbours. I never thought of comparing where we are to Manitoba or Saskatchewan, like the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore suggested in question period earlier today. He was questioning the government on why Saskatchewan seems to be more attractive than Alberta today for some certain specific industries. But Manitoba's tax rates are slightly higher than in our province.

Mr. Denis: An NDP government.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, it is an NDP government, hon. member. You know, I'm amazed, Mr. Speaker, at the hon. member's knowledge of political history in western Canada. Particularly, he used to be a member of the Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, and he knows everything that's going on here west of Kenora. I'm certainly impressed with his political knowledge.

Mr. Denis: Like the B.C. Liberals?

4:40

Mr. MacDonald: Some of them, hon. member, are very, very competent, yes, just like any other government.

Now, this bill will allow for Alberta, as I said, to be more competitive with B.C. and Ontario, but I want to get some more details from the hon. member regarding that competitiveness.

Certainly, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there's a need for caution. We need to exercise caution on this bill as it will impact Alberta's tax revenue. If I could get some questions answered through the course of debate, perhaps in committee, I would be very grateful.

I would like to thank the House for their time.

The Acting Speaker: We acknowledge Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must apologize to you. I don't have a face cloth for you in this role.

All kidding aside, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, being carried forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. Before I begin, I also want to thank all of the other members that have had a hand in this important piece of legislation.

Of course, this would introduce changes to several current acts, most notably the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, the Legal Profession Act, the Health Professions Act, and the Medical Profession Act, Mr. Speaker.

Essentially, Bill 53 stipulates that immediate family members of professionals within a professional corporation could be eligible to hold nonvoting shares in that corporation. Let's think about what exactly this means. I start up a corporation with somebody else. I can decide how the share distribution goes. There are, however, restrictions on professional corporations. This seeks to limit some of these restrictions. As it stands right now, there is a restriction that only the principal can own it: the lawyer, the doctor, the accountant, or what have you. Simply put, what the change would do here is it would give the husband, wife, partner, or child of a professional the ability to own shares in that professional's corporation. However, they would not be able to vote on any decision being made by that corporation. Strictly nonvoting shares, Mr. Speaker.

Now, going back a little way here, professional corporations, or PCs as people have mentioned them, not referring to the political party, Mr. Speaker, were created in the late 1970s to allow some professional groups to take advantage of tax benefits. Now, in turn, these tax benefits made Alberta a more attractive choice for needed professional groups, most notably chartered accountants, certified management accountants, certified general accountants, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, and, yes, even lawyers. I can say from personal experience that lawyers are not necessarily a bad thing.

Bill 53 would further enhance Alberta's business climate for these professionals and could possibly prompt more professionals to establish themselves in Alberta. This could mean more doctors helping to deliver patient care and reduce wait times. This could also mean more accountants, ensuring that Alberta corporations remain competitive on the world stage, and again all three accounting designations apply. This could also mean more lawyers supporting the legal process and providing counsel to Albertans. After all, Mr. Speaker, this would mean that a professional could rest assured knowing that their family could benefit from investment in this particular professional corporation, as is the case with any other corporation, as I mentioned.

To be clear, family in this bill refers to spouses, children, common-law partners, and does include same-sex partners, as the Member for Lethbridge-West noted.

Mr. Speaker, not only would the amendments in Bill 53 create an environment for professional recruitment; it would also bring us more in line with other western provinces and make us more competitive. Currently under our trade agreement with British Columbia, TILMA, there is no obligation for us to change our PCs' ownership policies. However, this is only because tax measures are exempt from this agreement. It has been determined that lifting the professional corporations' share ownership is not a TILMA matter, but it deals with tax planning.

Now, changes to Alberta's tax system, Mr. Speaker, most notably the implementation of a single rate of personal income tax, the only one in Canada, and the integration of small-business dividend income have eliminated most tax planning concerns in this province but not all. As a result of these changes we are now able to shift our professional corporations' share structure to be much more closely aligned with the rest of our neighbouring provinces. Again, it's about competition, about being competitive with our professionals here.

In addition to matching more closely with other provinces' legislation, Bill 53 also brings professional corporations closer in line with other private corporations, as I mentioned earlier. To give you an example, the family of an individual working in a corporation like an investing firm or an oil company are certainly allowed to own shares in that corporation. Why should it be any different with a professional corporation? Bill 53 would extend this allowance to professional corporations on a fair and a competitive basis. It's true that changes made by Bill 53 will result in a decrease of tax revenue by about \$1 million. I'd argue for the aforementioned reasons that this is arguably money well forgone.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do want to respond to a couple of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He incorrectly stated, as he often does, that a professional corporation wouldn't apply for a small-business income. I've actually confirmed just by e-mail with a tax lawyer who works at the tax firm of Felesky Flynn in Edmonton that it is, in fact, active business income. It does get the small-business deduction. This does apply up to \$500,000.

This member is incorrect about many things, such as earlier on the last bill when he mentioned to me about someone who had been

charged with drug possession. I welcome him to mention this outside the House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) applies. Are there any questions or comments?

If not, then we'll move to Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that my colleague from Lethbridge-West has explained this bill very clearly and that my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar has asked the appropriate questions, to which I would also like the answers. I think that this is a bill that certainly should go forward if for no other reason than it keeps us competitive with the other provinces in this country. I would suspect that as we go forward with this, many of the other provinces will try to catch up, which then levels the entire country, and then TILMA, of course, would be irrelevant in that conversation.

The sectional analysis on this bill is that it really is the same for every profession that has been mentioned, which is the health profession, the legal profession, the medical profession, and the regulated accounting profession. Even within these professions some others have been mentioned that would fall under these. Clearly, this is a bill to enhance the tax advantage in this province. Part of the reasoning, of course, was to attract and keep. One of the areas that I think we have to work on in this province is to attract and keep our physicians. This bill may come forward, particularly in that area.

We have, I think, probably enough – I probably shouldn't say that – lawyers and accountants in this province. Always welcome more, of course. It's more the Medical Profession Act and the Health Professions Act that I am particularly interested in. Clearly, we are at a disadvantage in this province when we don't have the number of health professionals that we actually need.

Now, the sectional analysis on this one is basically the same for each profession that I've already mentioned. As has been mentioned, it allows spouses, common-law partners, and children of registered active members of corporations to be considered shareholders or beneficiaries of that professional corporation. The shareholder status is also extended to trusts held for children.

The addition of the word "voting" before the word "shareholder" is one word, I believe, that turns this entire bill with this amendment, that moves it into an entirely different realm of how the taxes are going to be applied and how the money can be changed from the corporation and create the shareholder designation for members of the family. The children will be recognized as anybody under the age of 18, and then at that point they would of course be transferred in and become the adult shareholder.

I can see a number of advantages, clearly, to having these tax breaks for the children of these professional corporations. One of them is the fact that it would help them all, hopefully, to go to university and give them dollars, which would perhaps keep them from having to get loans, so there would be more money for others who really would need the loans to be able to go to school. I think that that's a positive way of looking at this. Perhaps they wouldn't be paying as much income tax, but being able to go to school and actually pay your way through really does help society as a whole.

4:50

I would wait to hear the answers to the questions that were put forward by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar in terms of the tax implications. I'm not an accountant. All I know is that I have to pay taxes, and that's about as far as it goes. My accountant tells me what I have to pay, I write the cheque, and I'm on my way. I would be interested in those answers.

With that, I'll take my seat but do compliment the Member for Lethbridge-West because I do feel that overall this is certainly a good step forward for the province of Alberta.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any questions or comments?

If not, we will recognize the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise in support of Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. I had the pleasure of listening to the Member for Lethbridge-West, the sponsor of this bill, and I agree that this is a tremendous step forward in creating a level playing field for professional corporations in Alberta. It's only fair that professional corporations enjoy similar tax-planning opportunities – and I heard other members say that – as other corporations in this province, and it's fair that the people in Alberta's professional corporations enjoy similar tax-planning opportunities as their colleagues in every other western province.

The Member for Lethbridge-West acknowledged the efforts of our policy staff not just in my ministry but at Health and Wellness, Justice and Attorney General, and Finance and Enterprise. I know it's not every day that an omnibus bill is debated in the House. This bill encompasses four acts and three ministries, and it required significant discussion and co-ordination across government to get to this point. I would also like to acknowledge the stakeholders who have been involved in the consultation process from an early stage, Mr. Speaker. Doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, chiropractors, and optometrists were all represented and were made aware of the proposed legislative revisions during their development. I'm pleased to say that all of the professional regulatory organizations that provided comments have applauded the government of Alberta for bringing these changes forward.

I agree as well with the Member for Lethbridge-West that it is important to provide a level playing field for professional corporations and that the playing field is consistent across professional corporations. I'm confident that these proposed legislative revisions accomplish this. These revisions extend nonvoting share ownership to immediate family members. This will allow professionals to pay dividends to family members, which will improve the professionals' ability to split income with their families.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Employment and Immigration I am responsible for the Regulated Accounting Profession Act, which oversees three of the eight groups affected by Bill 53: the chartered accountants, the certified management accountants, and the certified general accountants. I'm assured that the accounting profession is very much looking forward to these revisions taking hold.

Bill 53 comes, no doubt, with a price tag. There are tax revenue implications associated with the implementation of Bill 53, and those are estimated to be around \$1 million per year. Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a price worth paying as it creates the level playing field along with tax-planning benefits that many others can currently access.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Any questions or comments?

Any other members want to join in the debate? I'll acknowledge the Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 53, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-

West. As I heard the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, they have raised concerns about the lost revenue, \$1 million. To me the number seems small.

As we know, the intent of the bill is to amend the Health Professions Act, the Legal Profession Act, the Medical Profession Act, and the Regulated Accounting Profession Act to allow spouses, common-law partners, and children of registered active members to be the beneficiary or the shareholders of their professional corporations. This amendment will extend nonvoting share ownership of a professional corporation to family members. If passed, our province's accountants, lawyers, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, and optometrists will have the ability to access some of the benefits of being incorporated, including some tax benefits. It's about time that we have the same level playing field, you know, as other provinces. I commend the member for bringing this bill forward as these benefits are currently enjoyed by the same professions in other western provinces.

The impact of the bill. This will allow income-sharing by members who have registered professional corporations with their spouses and children. For example, a doctor who has a registered professional corporation can transfer shares to his spouse or child and thus reduce the income tax that is required to be paid. This amendment also clarifies that nonvoting shareholders, for example a spouse or child of a registered member of the professional corporation that has had shares transferred to them, have no liability in the business of the corporation. The registered member of the professional corporation still has the full liability and must carry liability insurance for his or her business.

As I said before, this bill will also allow Alberta to be compared to British Columbia, especially in light of TILMA, and Ontario, both of which have similar tax benefits in their legislation governing professional corporations. According to the Member for Lethbridge-West the estimated average tax saving for each professional corporation in Alberta as a result of these changes will be about \$12,000. That will be income tax lost to the government. As I said before, it has been brought out that it will be only \$1 million. The minister is hoping that more professional corporations will register in Alberta and that more will decide to stay here to offset that income tax loss.

This is a good bill. The amendments will allow Alberta to remain competitive with British Columbia, particularly in light of TILMA, and with Ontario. Without this first step in allowing more flexibility of tax planning for professional corporations, these corporations could move their business to other provinces to take advantage of these tax perks allowed there. So this will benefit lots of corporations, and they will probably stay in Alberta because we are creating an environment where they don't have to move.

Specifically mentioned in the bill briefing session by the Member for Lethbridge-West was the fact that Ontario and British Columbia allow similar income-sharing by their professional corporations, but they go much further in areas such as allowing grandchildren or the parents to be shareholders or allowing trusts to be set up as a means to channel money and thus reduce the income tax paid. Alberta didn't want to go that far by allowing the most generous tax planning tools that other provinces allow, so this bill will allow Alberta to be somewhat compatible with B.C. and Ontario while not allowing for too many more ways for professional corporations to reduce the income tax that they pay. Maybe at some point in time the Member for Lethbridge-West will go that far. Who knows? There's a need for caution on these amendments. They will impact the tax revenue for the government.

5:00

There's the argument that this will encourage more corporations to register here in Alberta as well. That remains to be seen. That will increase long-term revenue for the government when we are compared with British Columbia and Ontario.

With those comments, I will support the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn the debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 54

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 54, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009.

Just a bit of background, Mr. Speaker. In 2004, when the Personal Information Protection Act came into force, private-sector privacy was a relatively new concept in Canada. The act established a set of sound, common-sense rules for the collection, usage, disclosure, and protection of personal information by way of organizations. In order to ensure that this act was effective and practical, it was determined that this act had to be reviewed by a special committee of the Legislative Assembly soon after its implementation. In May 2006 the Select Special PIPA Review Committee was appointed to undertake a comprehensive review of this act. In November 2007 the review committee's final report came out, and it detailed 39 recommended changes to the act.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed bill incorporates the majority of the review committee's recommendations as well as some of the departmental recommendations, with the goal of enhancing protection of personal information for Albertans.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight some of the key amendments to this act that we're proposing here. A number of the amendments are being made to reflect normal business practices, which would make it easier for organizations to comply with the act. The process of obtaining consent from individuals will be simplified by allowing an organization to obtain consent through an intermediary or third party. As well, it would be easier to enrol groups or families into insurance and benefit programs with the reforms that we are proposing. Organizations will be able to provide a position name or title for individuals to contact if they have privacy questions, so organizations will not have to update forms or websites due to staff changes. Organizations will be able to use personal information without consent when identifiable information is needed for audits that are required for business purposes.

The act clarifies that employers can use the information of former employees without consent to administer pension and other benefit programs. These rules concerning the handling of information of prospective, current, and former employees will be more consistent. Obligations concerning the retention of records will also be clearer. Organizations will be required to dispose of personal information that they no longer need for legal or business purposes within a reasonable period of time. Organizations need to retain records relating to a commissioner's investigation for one year after the investigation.

Mr. Speaker, two new provisions will provide new information to individuals so that they can make informed choices to protect their

privacy. Organizations will be required to report significant security breaches to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Where there is a real risk of harm, financial or otherwise, the commissioner will be able to ensure that individuals receive adequate notification. To ensure that this provision is effective, it will be an offence for an organization to fail to report a significant security breach to the commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, when organizations send personal information of customers or clients outside of Canada, they will be required to advise these individuals that personal information is transferred elsewhere for processing. This includes, of course, the United States, for which the PATRIOT Act applies. An individual will be able to ask for more information about the transfer or restrictions that the organization has placed on the data processor with respect to the use or disclosure of personal information.

Several changes will be made to the Information Commissioner's processes and powers. For one, the investigation process will be streamlined, which will allow the commissioner to discontinue investigations into complaints that lack merit or sufficient evidence. The act will now allow for up to one year for the completion of an investigation or inquiry, recognizing that the current three-month period is too short and in most cases needs to be extended. The act will also specify that the information protected by solicitor-client privilege can be disclosed to the commissioner without affecting the said privilege. The act clarifies that the commissioner may disclose the information related to the commission of an offence to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to decide whether a prosecution should proceed.

Also, Mr. Speaker, several changes are being made to the offence provisions under the act, one of which I mentioned. The new offence provisions will enable the Crown to prosecute a person who violates the act's, quote, whistle-blower protection provisions or who conceals evidence during a commissioner's investigation or inquiry. A more appropriate standard would be established for prosecuting offences, whereby proof of intent to violate the act will no longer be necessary; rather, the standard will be whether the organization has acted reasonably in carrying out these responsibilities under the act. The time limit to prosecute an offence will be increased from six months to two years, consistent with other types of legislation, recognizing that it often takes time before a breach of privacy becomes known to affected individuals.

Other amendments are being made to the act to make it easier to understand. For example, definitions that are used currently in the regulation will be removed as part of the act. I'm sure the opposition will be happy with this. There will also be some housekeeping amendments.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the act will also address future reviews of the act. The next review will begin by 2015, with ongoing reviews thereafter. These reviews will consider the act and its regulation and what has happened during that time.

I look forward to further debate and would like to thank the House for considering this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Having sat on half of this committee, it originally started meeting in the summer or spring of 2006, and it had a mandate for 18 months, and in fact in kind of a big rush it ended up concluding its activities in the late fall of 2007. Of course, then we went into an election immediately following the new year in 2008, and now we're in the next Legislature. I have been frantically trying to read back through all my

binders of notes, trying to remember what the issues of great concern were for us.

The membership on the committee changed quite a bit. There was a cabinet shuffle in the middle of that, so we ended up with I think three different . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Is there another cabinet shuffle coming?

Ms Blakeman: Oh, I don't know.

We ended up with I think three different chairpeople over the life of that particular committee.

Just for folks that are following along with this here, we have sort of four different pieces of legislation that cover protection of personal privacy information in Alberta and in Canada. We have the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which covers governments and then, implemented in an incremental way, also included what was originally called the MUSH sector, which was particularly unattractive, later called the MASH sector, which covered municipalities, academic institutions, schools, and hospitals. So FOIP covered all personal information that's held by governments and the ability of people to ask for that information.

This was followed by the Health Information Act. The Health Information Act covers peoples' personal health information.

We had the federal PIPEDA, which is the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, I think. The deal was that if a province came up with its own legislation that met the test of PIPEDA or exceeded it, then they could have their own legislation. If they didn't do anything by a certain drop-dead date, they had to conform to the federal PIPEDA. Alberta, of course, never likes to conform, so they came up with their own act, so we have PIPA.

5:10

Of course, what we looked at in the review did not include any item that was covered under any of the first three that I mentioned: under FOIP, under the Health Information Act, or under PIPEDA. We were only looking at what was covered under PIPA.

What exactly are we talking about here? I'm quoting from the overview that was given to us on June 28, 2006. For anyone following in *Hansard*, it's under PI-6, Personal Information Protection Act Review.

PIPA is about protecting the personal information held by the private-sector organizations in Alberta. The act governs how those organizations may collect, use, and disclose personal information about their customers, clients, and employees.

It does allow

organizations to collect, use, and disclose personal information for reasonable business purposes.

What exactly is personal information? Okay.

Personal information is information that identifies an individual, such as a name, an address, a telephone number, an e-mail address with a user password, a unique identifying number such as a [social insurance number] or an account number, an employee number, a photograph, or biometric information. Personal information is also information about that individual; for example, birthdate, gender, race, religion, education, employment history, financial history, medical history.

You can tell from that list why a driver's licence is so important, because it captures a lot of the information that I just mentioned in that list.

Okay. That gives you what the act is and what the personal information is, and we were to review whether the act was actually working or not because we were a couple of years into the act, enough to know whether it was working or not. We reviewed a number of different issues and made decisions on those.

One of the things, most interestingly, that caused us a lot of discussion – yes, the Member for Rocky Mountain House and I are looking at each other and remembering that there was a lot of discussion about this – was how to deal with not-for-profit organizations. Well, there was a decision not to include them, and we've since heard in fairly strong language from the Privacy Commissioner his disappointment that the act does not respond to that inclusion. The definition that we were looking at of NGOs, nongovernment organizations, or not-for-profits included anyone that was registered under the Societies Act, anyone under the Agricultural Societies Act, or anyone under part 9.

The not-for-profits that came in to see us, some of them on my request, like the community league organization and the United Way and some of those, what they said to us was, "Look, we can deal with anything; just tell us very clearly what's in and what's not, what you expect us to do and what not." More than half of them have no paid staff, so they are dealing with volunteers that would have to adhere to the requirements of how they would come under the act. This became a significant point of discussion for us, and they're not, in the end, included in what we see before us in Bill 54.

So who cares? I mean, why should we be the least bit concerned about the way the private sector – and this is essentially covering the private sector – deals with personal information? I just want to give you a couple of examples of where this can go really wrong. I'm actually quoting from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner annual report '07-08. Here is an example of something that was investigated. Ticketmaster was investigated under the PIPA Act. The complainant had tried to purchase tickets through Ticketmaster, and during the transaction they were told that they couldn't proceed unless they provided and consented to Ticketmaster's use of personal information privacy statement. Of course, the individual who was trying to purchase tickets was concerned that in signing this, Ticketmaster would then have the authority to share his e-mail address with event providers for marketing purposes.

In fact, the investigator did find that Ticketmaster had contravened PIPA by requiring online customers to consent to the use of personal information for the event provider's marketing purposes as a condition of a transaction to purchase tickets. It was also determined that the online opt-out process did not allow customers to make an informed decision about consent, and it didn't offer them a reasonable opportunity to decline or to object to what was being asked of them. Very reasonable. You know, we should be able to just engage in a business transaction without being mined and all of our personal information being mined and kept on record to be used later to market other products back to us. We have a right to say: "That's enough. All I want to do is buy a ticket from you. I don't want to have you in my life for the rest of my life."

How personal information is collected, how it is used, who it's disclosed to, and how much they have to come back to you and say, "We're going to do something else with your personal information; do we have your consent to do it?" so that seeking of the consent – one of the issues that I've always had with this process in FOIP, in health information, and in PIPA is the use of blanket consent forms. I don't feel that that is informed consent. It's often used as, I would call it, a form of coercion: if you don't give us this blanket information, we can't provide you with the service that you're seeking. A minor example of that is with Ticketmaster, but in a lot of other cases it is allowed, and I don't feel it's fair game. I'll have to continue advocating to have my point of view included in legislation there.

I mean, that's why we care about this. We want to have rules in place that allow business to operate without being unnecessarily encumbered by this process. At the same time we want to be able to

protect individuals from having their information inappropriately collected and used and disclosed to others. That's the balance that you're trying to seek through this legislation. Did we hit that balance in the review that was done here?

I'm trying not to repeat what the sponsoring member has already put on the record, so forgive me if I do. I just couldn't write fast enough to take all the notes. We are looking at this amending act allowing employers to use information of former employees without consent in order to administer pension and other benefit programs. This is going to give a process of obtaining consent from clients to be simplified to allow an organization to obtain consent through an intermediary. That one I'm not so keen on, but I'll come back and talk about that when we're in the Committee of the Whole process on this.

The act will have organizations able to provide a position name or a title for individuals to contact if they have privacy questions. The individual's name isn't there, but their title is there. So you would phone up and ask for the director of such and such. Organizations are not required to continually update their forms and business cards and their online website and things like that. You can just list the title of the organization.

Organizations can use personal information without consent when identifiable information is needed for audits that are required for business purposes. That's our fault because we the legislators put requirements in as a test, as a way of clarifying, especially around audit processes, and therefore businesses have to meet that test. This is part of what they need to do.

5:20

There are a couple of new provisions in here for individuals, to allow them to make informed choices. This was mentioned by the member, that organizations will now be required to report security breaches to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Included in that is that it will be an offence for an organization to fail to report.

When organizations send the personal information of customers – this is what we call the PATRIOT Act amendment, which was actually originally brought up by the predecessor to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. He was the one that identified that we were going to have to adjust some of our legislation in order to protect Albertans from the effect of the PATRIOT Act, which basically flowed from 9/11 in 2001, saying that any information that U.S.-based companies had, they could use and take it. So any time that someone in Alberta had their information collected by a subsidiary that then reported back to a mother corp, our information was now used and was into the U.S. system, and they could keep that information on us and use that information on us. We as legislators think we have the right to protect Albertans, and we set out to do so. That's what's included in this.

Organizations that are sending personal information of customers or clients outside of Canada are required to advise those same people that that information is being transferred somewhere else, the idea being that it allows people to say: no, I don't want you to send that information, and as a result I'm going to not order your product or not be involved with whatever you're doing. The individual can ask for more information about the transfer and any restrictions that the organization has placed on the data processor with respect to the use and disclosure of their information. And there were some administrative changes that were made at the request of the Information and Privacy Commissioner that happened and some changes to the offence provisions.

At this point, because really what I want to do is get into the detail of some of the discussions that we had around certain sections and a more in-depth discussion of that is not appropriate in second reading, I am willing to vote in favour of second reading, which acknowledges the principle of the bill. I am certainly in support of

protecting Albertans' personal information but also having them as involved in the process as possible. Some of the provisions that we were able to do here I'm very much in favour of, but I think others merit more discussion.

At this point I will conclude my remarks on second reading, having stated that I would be supportive, and I will look forward to a more in-depth debate during Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to join in on second reading debate on Bill 54, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009. This is certainly a very complicated piece of legislation. I don't refer necessarily to the amending legislation, although it's not exactly without substance either, but to the original piece of information outlining the protection of the private information of individuals held by private bodies.

You know, it's an important piece of legislation that we have. Obviously, nationally it was recognized that we had a huge gap in terms of protecting the rights of people to have their information be protected in terms of not being shared with other organizations without their knowledge and also in terms of giving people access to information held by private bodies, especially for those people to know what exactly certain private bodies have on their files about individuals. We know in today's electronic age that this is a growing problem. So the principle of the legislation is not a bad one.

Now, as has already been mentioned, the federal government engaged in an analysis of this problem and adopted PIPEDA, and it's sort of the gold standard in terms of privacy protection. The government ultimately concluded that Alberta's legislation – I believe they concluded, anyway – was sufficiently similar to PIPEDA that it would be allowed to stand. I'm assuming that that's the case. I'm not sure if there was a formal conclusion in that regard. I'm still trying to figure that out. But there's no question that PIPA does have, generally speaking, less rigorous requirements than the federal legislation. It's grey – it's grey – and the language is different, and ultimately the feds decided that as long as it was substantially similar, I think, they'd let it go. Ultimately, the purpose behind this piece of legislation is a good one.

Now, as has already been mentioned, the amendments that we're seeing now arise from a rather considered review by a group of MLAs prior to the last election. Of course, I was not here then, and I haven't had a chance to review those recommendations at great length, but I will assume that most of them were fairly well considered and arose from fairly extensive consultation with interested stakeholders. As has probably been noted already, the Privacy Commissioner has indicated that most of what is found in this bill is quite appropriate, with the exception of the failure of this bill to include reference to or a greater inclusion of nonprofit agencies under its authority.

You know, that's an interesting question, and I look forward, actually, to hearing debate on that and more information on that from government members. Clearly, the committee had recommended that these nonprofits be fully included under the authority of the act. They noted that it provided consistency and clarity. They noted that it provided for a more effective reciprocal relationship between nonprofits and other organizations that did have a statutory obligation to protect private information. They also noted, of course, that nonprofits deal with a grand scope of information of individuals and that, therefore, there's a need to ensure that they're globally covered. All those arguments were included in the report of the committee to support a more substantive inclusion of nonprofit organizations within the scheme of PIPA.

Now, there were, however, at the time also concerns raised by some of the nonprofits, who said: "Whoa. We can't even begin to meet the requirements of this act, so it's going to put an onerous responsibility onto us in order to meet the requirements of this act." At the time the committee seemed to think that those concerns could be remediated, and in their report they suggested that they could be remediated by phasing in coverage over the course of a year and also – what was the phrase? – that there would be some support and that the administrative burden of complying with PIPA could be mitigated by the provision of resources and support to the organizations during a one-year period. Now, I think that's probably true, but then this raises the question: where would that support have come from? Probably from the Privacy Commissioner's office. So is it the case that we're now dealing with the fact that this particular recommendation is not included in the legislation because the Privacy Commissioner's office simply does not have the resources to provide the support necessary to these nonprofit organizations to bring them into compliance with PIPA?

5:30

I had – I wouldn't necessarily call it the privilege – the experience of spending a bit of time as a consultant assisting organizations with their efforts to come into compliance with PIPA, and I will say that it's a very strenuous task. It does require some fairly significant administrative resources to be in compliance with the act. While that's worth while and while the objects of the act are worth while, there's no question that there are some very significant demands on organizations to meet the obligations of the act. So the question becomes: can we or can we not find the resources to assist these nonprofits? Is it or is it not ultimately worth while in terms of achieving the overall objectives of the act? That's something we need to talk about.

The only other point that I'll raise at this point is that notwithstanding that I wasn't around when the committee made its recommendations, I do have, certainly, a very significant concern about recommendation 10, which is reflected in Bill 54, which talks about deemed consent where people are buying insurance policies and looking to have an interest in or derive a benefit from those plans. There are some significant concerns I have around that issue. They relate in particular to the linkage between that and certain changes that have been made with respect to the Health Information Act and information that doctors can now have and the degree to which that, then, is considered personal information that's held by the organization and how that information is shared.

Insurance companies hold excruciatingly detailed and personal information about people, and the idea that they can do that and collect it, use it, and disclose it at their discretion on the basis of a deemed consent is very concerning – very concerning – to me because I believe that that's one of the major consumer issues that probably originally generated the desire to bring in pieces of legislation like this.

Anyway, those are our starting comments about this piece of legislation. Again, in general we support the principle of protecting people's access and protection of their personal information. I'm not sure if there is anyone else speaking at this point. I believe there is, so with that, I will close my remarks at this point.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to contribute questions or comments pursuant to Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll call on the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure also to lend support to Bill 54, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009. This bill is the result of a review by the

Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee, whose report was tabled in November 2007.

Given the increasingly global nature of business today it is very common for Alberta organizations to transfer clients' personal data to a service provider outside of Canada, quite often right off the continent, for processing or storage. It may be a retailer that sends information on a credit card application to India for processing, or it might be a business consulting firm that sends customer information to the United States or some other country for storage or processing.

Now, this is a legitimate business need, so the committee believes that Albertans who have concerns about their personal information being sent outside of Canada should be able to find out where their information is going. To achieve this, the bill requires an organization to inform customers that their personal information may be leaving Canada for processing. This allows individuals to ask for further information on the company's policies on this and to make an informed choice whether or not to disclose their personal information. The amendment shows that the government takes the privacy of Albertans' personal information very seriously and that Albertans also value being informed about the use of their information. I feel that this amendment is necessary to continue to increase public confidence in the protection of their personal information.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to further debate on this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members who wish to contribute questions or comments pursuant to Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll call upon the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the previous speaker said, in a global economy it becomes much more important to protect the personal information of Albertans. We hear, indeed, in the news every day about credit card thefts, drivers' licences, duplicate passports, false passports being issued, duplicate cards, false cards, so it becomes much more important to protect the information of Albertans.

Bill 54 is a step in the right direction towards protecting personal information with the amendments to the Personal Information Protection Act, Alberta's legislative framework for the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information by private organizations. A review of this act is required every three years to ensure it is consistent with the standard business practices, changing technology, and developing needs of the citizens. Bill 54 introduces a number of amendments to the act that were recommended by the all-party committee in November 2007.

As practically every Albertan interacts with private-sector organizations that may at one time or another need to collect, use, or disclose personal information about individuals, the consequences for the average citizen when their information is misused or mishandled can be very, very severe such as in the case of identity theft, fraud, or the divulging of highly sensitive information. As a result, any substantial alteration of provincial privacy laws can have quite an impact.

With Bill 54 some of the most significant outcomes would be new standards for organizations intended to make compliance easier. Rules for the handling of current, former, and prospective employee information will be standard. Consent from clients can be obtained through intermediaries. Businesses will be able to use position titles as contacts for privacy-related questions. Organizations will also be able to use personal information without consent when required to do so in the completion of audits.

There will be new notification standards for organizations. Two major new notification standards for organizations are the requirement to notify the individual when an organization is intending to

transfer personal information to a service provider outside of Canada and, number two, a requirement to notify the individual if a security breach has occurred that may significantly affect them.

This is also going to change the timelines. The time permitted for an inquiry or an investigation will increase from three months to one year, and the time permitted to prosecute an offence will increase from six months to two years. A review of the act will take place every six years rather than every three years. I think six years is a little bit too long a time with the changing technology.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner will be permitted to cease investigations he or she considers to be of little merit. New offence categories will also allow the commissioner to enforce other additions to this act as well.

5:40

Overall, Bill 54 will assist organizations in complying with the act while providing individuals new rights to be notified in instances where the security of their personal information may be compromised.

A number of changes made to PIPA by Bill 54 are contained in the Select Special Personal Information Protection Act Review Committee final report, tabled in the Assembly in November 2007. In fact, the comparison between Bill 54 and the key recommendations section of the all-party committee report shows considerable correspondence, and out of nine key PIPA-related recommendations all but one was incorporated into Bill 54.

However, there are some aspects of Bill 54 that deserve critical attention. The report urged that all nonprofit organizations be subject to the act currently, and certain organizations are exempt depending on their classification and the degree to which their activities are commercial in nature. The commissioner has publicly expressed the disappointment that not-for-profits were not brought under the act. Certain sections that could be highlighted as in need of greater discussion could be an exceptionally wide latitude given to the commissioner to not proceed with an investigation, the greatly extended timelines for review of the act, and the fact that the Lieutenant Governor in Council can by regulation exempt organizations from notification requirements involving service providers outside of Canada.

Several amendments are being made to reflect standard business practices of organizations, and it is expected that the changes will make it easier for organizations to comply with the act. Employers will be able to use the information of former employees, without consent, to administer pension and other benefit programs. The rules concerning the handling of the information of prospective, current, and former employees will be more consistent. The process for obtaining consent from clients will be simplified by allowing an organization to obtain consent through an intermediary. Also, it will be easier to enrol groups or families into insurance or benefit programs. Organizations will be able to provide the position, name, or title for individuals to contact if they have privacy questions. Organizations will not have to update forms or websites due to staff changes.

The two new provisions will also provide new information to individuals so that they can make informed choices to protect their privacy. The organizations will be required to report significant security breaches to the Information and Privacy Commissioner where there's a real risk of harm, financial or otherwise. The commissioner will be able to ensure that individuals receive adequate notification. To ensure that this new provision is effective, it will be an offence for an organization to fail to report a significant security breach to the commissioner.

When organizations send the personal information of customers or clients outside of Canada, they will be required to advise these individuals that their personal information is transferred elsewhere

for processing. An individual will be able to ask for information about the transfer and the restrictions that the organization has placed on the data processor with respect to use and disclosure.

Several changes will be made to the Information and Privacy Commissioner's processes and powers. The investigation process will be streamlined by allowing the commissioner to discontinue an investigation of complaints that lack merit or sufficient evidence. The act will now allow up to one year for the completion of an investigation and inquiry, recognizing that the current three-month period is too short in most cases and needs to be extended. The act will specify that information protected by solicitor-client privilege can be disclosed to the commissioner without affecting that privilege. The act will also clarify that the commissioner may disclose information related to the commission of an offence to the Minister of Justice so that prosecution can proceed.

There are several changes being made to the offence provisions in the act. New offence provisions will enable the Crown to prosecute a person who violates the act's whistle-blower protection provision or who conceals evidence during a commissioner's investigation or inquiry.

There are very good provisions in the amendments here, Mr. Speaker. I think I will be supporting PIPA with some reservations.

With that, I would like to adjourn the debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 55

Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great personal pleasure that I rise for second reading of Bill 55, the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act. Albertans have long supported the concept of a democratic Senate, one that's equal, elected, and effective, the triple-E model pioneered by Albertans 25 years ago. In 1985 all parties of this Assembly – I remind the Liberals of that – endorsed this view. On two further occasions, in 1987 and in 2002, the Legislative Assembly reiterated its commitment to a democratic Canadian Senate. To respond to the will of Albertans, the government of Alberta passed the Senatorial Selection Act in 1989 to govern the election of Alberta Senators.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, Alberta was successful in having two elected Senate nominees appointed to the Senate. Stan Waters in 1989 won the first Alberta Senate election and received an appointment to the Senate by Prime Minister Mulroney in 1990. In 2007 Prime Minister Harper appointed Bert Brown, the recipient of the most votes in the 2004 Alberta Senate election. These appointments were historic events that Albertans should be proud of. The late Senator Waters and Senator Brown represent the only Senators in Canada that have a democratic foundation. Their election by Albertans and their appointment sow the seeds of reform, an example of democratic representation that other provinces can follow.

Mr. Speaker, the current Senatorial Selection Act expires on December 31, 2010. The government initially included an expiry date in the act, hoping the act would be a temporary measure in advance of national Senate reform. The national reform has not yet occurred, unfortunately, so I am proposing that the Senatorial Selection Act be extended to December 31, 2016. This is the sole change to the act, and it is consistent with its previous renewal. It's a mechanism in place to hold provincial Senate elections if we decide to do so and nominate elected individuals to represent Albertans.

Over the past year the Prime Minister has appointed a number of unelected individuals to the Senate. However, he has indicated that where a provincial democratic process exists, he will respect the results. It's important that Alberta maintain its democratic process so that the voice of our province is heard in the Senate. For over a quarter of a century Alberta has strongly supported the reform of the Senate. With the Senatorial Selection Act the government is honouring this basic democratic principle. We remain committed to the idea that our national institutions can better serve all Canadians.

5:50

An appointed Senate is a relic of the 19th century. It's time to bring it into the 21st century. Albertans have a right to choose those who represent them in Parliament. All Canadians have a right to choose those who represent them in Parliament.

Therefore, I encourage all members to support Bill 55, the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to stand up and speak to this. If you see the actual bill in your hand, I think it's about a sentence and a half. So clearly the whole object is to be able to extend this sunset clause. No problem with actually extending it, but I think that just because it's only a sentence and a half, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't discuss it.

As has been pointed out by my hon. colleague across the way, the Liberals had voted in favour of the electoral process. However, due to some concerns and various provisions the Liberals at the time voted against the bill in later stages. I'm not sure that I personally am necessarily in favour of an elected Senate. I'm not sure that I'm opposed to the fact that the Prime Minister can appoint. What I have a problem with is the fact that you might appoint political persons. A lot of the people that have been appointed to the Senate lately are really people that are at the top of their game, and I think that they bring a totally different perspective as the second voice, the second eyes for the House of Commons. I'm not sure that that's a bad thing. I think the perspective, possibly, from unelected people often is different.

I'm not sure that what we need are more elections and more elected people that would break off into party lines. Although they are appointed by different governments and it looks like the House is balanced one way or the other, with the proper change of government as we've had, the House balances itself out. In the old days, if you'll go back and read some of the *Hansard* from the Senate, it truly was well debated. People worked together, and the partisan lines were not as clear as they are today, which is unfortunate because that's not what the Senate is supposed to be.

I would like to at this point in time adjourn this debate. I believe that there will be more conversation around this bill. As I've already mentioned, it's really just extending the sunset clause, but it does deserve further debate.

I adjourn Bill 55. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that pursuant to Government Motion 20, that was passed earlier today, the House not sit this evening and that we now call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, November 5, 2009

Issue 56

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 5, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and to ourselves. We ask for Your guidance in our deliberations in our Chamber and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise to introduce to you some very special guests seated in both galleries who during this past weekend spearheaded another incredibly successful fundraiser and food raiser for Edmonton's Food Bank. In three short days this group, with significant help from the community, helped raise over \$61,000 in cash along with three truckloads of food, all of it to help feed the needy in Edmonton and area.

I'm going to ask each of them to rise as I call their names and to remain standing until all have been introduced. We have two groups. First, from the Punjabi Media Association we have President Gursharan Singh Buttar, Gurbhalinder Singh Sandhu, Gurnam Dodd, Amarjit Singh Purewal, Laat Bhinder, Dr. P.R. Kalia, Harjit Singh Sandhu, Kamal Layal, Rajwinder Kaur, Harjinder Ahluwalia, Vattandeep Singh Grewal. Representing the four gurdwaras in our area are Paramjit Singh Ubhi, Surinder Singh Hunjan, Darshan Gill, Gurdial Virdee, Avtar Thind, Gurcharan Sangha. If I've missed anyone, please join us and rise as well. I think that's our guests. Mr. Speaker, this group of individuals, which represents primarily the Sikh community, has done an incredible job for the third year in a row. They did it in honour of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, who was born over 500 years ago and believed that food should be provided to those in need.

In conclusion, I want to thank my colleagues from Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Mill Woods, Calgary-Montrose, and Calgary-McCall for their tremendous support of this group and their efforts. [Remarks in Punjabi] Many thanks. Thank you for coming.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I also would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly five additional very special guests who just launched a North American first from right here in Edmonton, Alberta, earlier this week. The people I'm about to introduce to you are extremely passionate about education and health care, particularly for our children, and it is in that vein that they have created an educational resource animation tool called IBERA, a software package, as it were, for use in schools throughout the world, with a particular focus on but not restricted to aboriginal children. It has already been introduced in Australia, where it was born, and now it's coming to North America through our province.

I would ask that these promoters and issuers and caretakers of IBERA please rise as I call their names, and we will then applaud them together. First is the CEO of Native Counselling Services of

Alberta in Edmonton, Dr. Allen Benson, who now hold the rights for North America. He's joined by four guests from Australia, including Leigh Hughes, project director of IBERA; Shaun Tatipata, an aboriginal health worker and clinician from the Australia area; Mr. Anthony Castro, an aboriginal islander; and Kane Ellis, who is also from the Northern Territory. Gentlemen, your product, IBERA, will revolutionize the knowledge of health and the human body, and it will help in the delivery of that understanding to our children. We are very grateful, and we wish you much success with IBERA.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Premier it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a group of young folks from the Vegreville Composite school. I believe they are seated in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by teacher Ms Tracy Cook. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special constituent of mine named Shirley Johnston. She and I can relate to each other because she's long suffering. She has been following her husband around the world. Now she lives in Calgary-Shaw, but she has also called home the Canadian Forces bases in Baden, Germany; Gagetown, New Brunswick; and Calgary. She is the mother of four sons: Ed, Eric, Don, and Darcy. I also know that her mother and her three sisters are very special to her, as is her pet schnauzer. As I said, she is very long suffering. She is married and is the wife of the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, and next week they'll be celebrating their 36th wedding anniversary. I would ask Shirley if she would rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to make two introductions. My first introduction is 33 students and staff from the Coralwood academy in Edmonton-Calder. The Coralwood Adventist Academy features a Christian education program, offering both in-classroom and home-schooling support. With us today are teachers Mrs. Marian Rochford, Mr. Colin Forde, and Pastor Dan Rochford. I'd ask you all to please rise and receive the traditional greeting of the Assembly.

My second introduction this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is a family from St. Albert who is involved with the Chrysalis organization in my constituency. They're here with us today to help us raise the awareness for National Down Syndrome Awareness Week. It's my pleasure to introduce to you today Miss Alyssa Garstad, Miss Taylor Garstad, and parents Kevin and Alanna Garstad. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 11 very

distinguished Albertans. They are members of the Petrolia 60 Plus seniors' group. They are President Nick Malychuk, Past President Betty Mullen, Secretary-treasurer Grace Smith, and members Mrs. Joyce Coen, Mrs. Jacqueline Moulden, Mrs. Nellie Shymko, Mr. Ernie Smith, Mrs. Marie Sandford, Mrs. Shirley Sorobey, Mrs. Mildred Malychuk, and Mrs. Joyce Williamson. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their dedicated service to the community. I'd ask them to rise and receive our very warm welcome.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an extreme pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three extraordinary guests sitting in your gallery from my constituency, Edmonton-Glenora: Tanya and Michelle Ponich and their mom, Rosalind Mosychuk. I'd like to mention quickly that some of the members may recognize Tanya and Michelle's last name from Mr. Michael Ponich, who served as a Social Credit member for the Vegreville constituency from 1944 to 1955, and was their grandfather. Michael Ponich served this province greatly in this Legislature, and his family continues to make a profound impact on those around them.

His granddaughter Tanya is a shining example of this. When Tanya was born, she was diagnosed with Down's syndrome and leukemia, not expected to live more than a month. When she continued to recover, the doctors realized they had misdiagnosed her leukemia and that Tanya had defied the odds, only the first time of many. Throughout her life Tanya has continued to prove that Down's syndrome makes life difficult but will not hold her back. She became a part of an early childhood intervention pilot program at Mayfield elementary school, which integrated her into the regular classroom until the end of high school. Mr. Speaker, Tanya also partakes in an extensive exercise program. She remains an advocate for people with disabilities, giving speeches in the United States and Canada. Tanya has even written a 20-minute pilot for her own soap opera, entitled *Murder, Madness and Mayhem*. It has taken sheer determination not only by Tanya but by her entire family to give her the support she has needed to get to where she is today. Please join me, all members here today, to give her the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Rick Fraser. Rick is in the members' gallery. He's a constituent of Calgary-Hays. He was born and raised in Calgary. He's a proud husband to Mishelle and father to Carson and Thaine Fraser. He's an advanced life support paramedic in the city of Calgary for Alberta Health Services. He also represents over 500 paramedics as president of the Calgary Paramedics CUPE local 3421. He has worked in EMS in Alberta since 2001. He is also a paramedic instructor at the University of Alberta Augustana Faculty in Camrose. He's also a director in Calgary-Hays, and he's a strong advocate for a strong and sustainable health care system for Albertans through empowering allied health care professionals. I'd like you to give him the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 12 nursing students at the University of Alberta. They're here today representing Alberta's nursing students who feel frustrated that the job opportunities that were available when they began their training have gone, but the shortage of nurses in Alberta remains. They are among 80 per cent of the current graduating class who may have to leave Alberta to find work in provinces which still acknowledge that they need to hire nurses. My guests will be standing together tomorrow with hundreds of other nursing students on the steps of the Legislature to show unity in opposing the restructuring of Alberta Health Services. They have a common goal of quality public health care for all Albertans. I would now ask that my guests, who are seated in the public gallery, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. They are Shannon Harrington, Natalie Cloutier, Emily Caird, Aneta Chodorski, Amy Walczak, Ashley McEwen, Stacie Heck, Molly Ryks, Jenna Tiedmann, Kristine Torres, Catherine Turner, and Carly Burdziuk. Please give them a warm welcome.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Remembrance Day

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Wednesday morning at 11 this great nation will fall silent. Canadians from coast to coast will pause to remember and revere the momentous sacrifices our men and women in uniform have made to safeguard our shores, defend our freedoms, protect human life, and keep peace around the globe. In Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa Canadians have risked and sometimes lost everything to protect human life and human rights from warlords, rogues, and tyrants. Their sacrifices have ended wars and prevented wars from the birth of this nation to this very afternoon.

While we in this Assembly often quarrel about the issues of the day here in Alberta, I know we all share at least one common trait: the enormous respect and gratitude we feel for every Canadian who puts on a uniform to keep the peace and defend our country. Here's to the men and women, past and present, who have put their lives on the line for our freedoms, our way of life, and for many innocents around the globe. Here's to the families and friends of our soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Without their support and sacrifice our armed forces could not function. On November 11 we will remember. Your valour fills our hearts with pride and eternal thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary – Edmonton-Calder.

Tanya Ponich

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad we're north.

I'm truly honoured today to rise again to speak about National Down Syndrome Awareness Week and the outstanding visitors that we have here today, with both Tanya and Alyssa, their terrific sisters, and their great parents.

Tanya was born with Down's syndrome and over the years has become a real advocate of hope and support for individuals with Down's syndrome in Canada. She is a voice of strength and courage for each person that is labelled disabled and seeks to provide support to those in need.

Tanya's accomplishments are very impressive. In 2008 she was selected as Global Edmonton's woman of vision because of the

support and leadership that she provides to others in the community. She has been featured in books and has made presentations to audiences across Canada and the United States. One of the most interesting connections between this Assembly and Tanya, of course, is her grandfather, who we heard about earlier, Mr. Michael Ponich, who was the MLA for Vegreville from 1944 to 1955. During that time he also served as party whip.

It is a pleasure to have Tanya here today to celebrate her accomplishments in the community, just like her grandfather's so many years ago. I would like to thank both Tanya and Alyssa and their families for taking the time to join us here this afternoon. It's the perseverance, strength, and energy that allows them to tell their stories that will motivate others in their community to raise awareness and support for individuals with Down's syndrome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Vancouver 2010 Olympic Torch Relay

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to join Albertans and all Canadians as we celebrate the countdown to the biggest show on earth, the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games. One of the greatest symbols of the games, the Olympic flame, will arrive in Alberta tomorrow, reigniting our Olympic spirit and reminding us of the tremendous legacy we created in Calgary in 1988. The flame will arrive in Alberta for a quick but memorable one-day visit to Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and Cold Lake before heading into Saskatchewan.

Along with my constituents I am honoured that Grande Prairie will be the first stop on this epic two-stage trip across our province. We will welcome the torch relay back to Alberta on January 13 for eight unforgettable days. All Albertans will have a wonderful opportunity to experience the Olympic spirit in action. By the time the flame returns to B.C. on January 21, it will have travelled to 76 Alberta communities and covered nearly 3,400 kilometres of our province, carried by a thousand Albertans. Most Albertans will be within a one-hour drive of our extensive torch relay route.

I encourage all Albertans to visit alberta.ca/vancouver2010 to find a map of the torch relay route and the celebration site nearest you. Let's show Canada our Olympic spirit and celebrate the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Civic Participation

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to deliver my fifth civic participation presentation during Canada's Citizenship Week, which is intended to encourage all Canadians to reflect on the value of citizenship. Through these presentations, organized by groups such as immigrant-serving and community-based organizations, I had the opportunity to talk about civic participation and Canadian citizenship, to encourage people who do not yet feel that they are full members of society that not only is it never too early to be engaged in society but that it's critical that they find ways to impact positive change and to model for their children active citizenship.

These candid sessions offer all participants speaking different languages opportunities to dialogue beyond the spectrum of civic participation, from volunteering to political participation, but also to examine barriers to meaningful and full participation in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share some encouraging trends that I have observed from these recent encounters. The participants are

diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, and professions. Most are skilled workers or trained professionals. The youth group I presented to on Saturday afternoon was attended by about 25 young people from different parts of the world. Similar to other sessions these are newcomers who have only been here between a few months to a few years.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the collective, more strategic focus on integration in our society versus the traditional focus on recruitment and settlement of immigrants from community groups, governments, and funding bodies alike. With greater acknowledgement of the important role institutions in society need to play in communicating the importance of engagement, community groups have the support to provide people the tools to participate, and participants are motivated by understanding the significance and benefits of active participation. I believe we are heading in the right direction in creating the kind of dynamic and active citizenship that our public policies intend.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: First question for the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The last two weeks have shown that not only is this health minister incapable of managing the health care system, but we have a Premier who is unwilling to admit mistakes and take real action that would protect the interests of Albertans. To whichever minister is responsible for health care in this pandemic we are in today: what is the explanation for this government policy to delay regularly scheduled immunizations for serious diseases, including meningitis, diphtheria, measles, mumps, and rubella until December or January?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness I want to make a couple of comments. First of all, let us remember that we're not just dealing with an Alberta situation here; we're dealing with a world situation. This is a pandemic. In short, what that means is that the supplier, in this case GlaxoSmith-Kline, is obligated to try and help the entire world with the amount of vaccine that's required. We have responded as best we can, and I think our health care workers deserve some applause for the good job that they're doing.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it the policy of this government to make scapegoats of bureaucrats rather than have an inept minister do the honourable thing and resign?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, again, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness let me just indicate that as soon as issues were found out pertaining to what I assume the member is driving at, action was taken. A full investigation has been launched, and it's going to be completed as soon as we finish the next round or two of vaccinations. We hope to have that done before Christmastime, so let's be patient. Let's deal with the priority today, and that is those people most at risk. That's what we're focused on doing.

Dr. Swann: Let me ask it in a different way. Is it the policy of this

government to deny responsibility for the minister of a ministry and let a bureaucrat fall for a minister's problems?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the policy of this government is to look after the needs of all Albertans, in a priority order in this case. That is clearly what we are doing. We were fortunate to have received the immunization packages a little in advance. Media got the message out. We got the message out. Unfortunately, there was not enough vaccine at that time. There is more vaccine now available to us, and we're dealing with those priority issues right now. Our policy is to help those people who are at highest risk, and that's why today the program started to help out those children who are between six months and less than five years of age. Tomorrow we'll deal with part 2, which will be pregnant women, and then we'll go on down the line to help out everyone that needs the help before Christmastime.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Second question.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Aboriginal Albertans

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, two months ago we in the opposition sent a letter to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations stressing the need to have plans in place to deal with First Nations, one of the risk populations. A focused response clearly is needed, and the federal government has affirmed this, putting it in the highest risk category for H1N1 immunization. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: were you consulted on the decision to delist high priority immunization for First Nations for this week? Were you consulted?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, if this is dealing with First Nations on reserve, then clearly that is a matter under the purview of the government of Canada. We have worked with the Public Health Agency of Canada. Our officials have also worked with Health Canada. We've worked with Alberta Health Services. We've worked with the Ministry of Health and Wellness. To my knowledge, the vaccines were provided.

Now, they, too, might be following in the footsteps of others in that there might be a shortage of vaccines. It's a world-wide problem, Mr. Speaker. It's not just First Nations; it's not just other Albertans; it's a world-wide problem. It's a national shortage in our country. We're dealing with it with very capable health care providers doing the best job that they can.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister doesn't seem to want to answer questions today.

Were you consulted before the decision was made to remove First Nations from this week's high-risk vaccination program? Were you consulted on this? Yes or no.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, that's a different question. The first question was about First Nations, and that's under the purview of the government of Canada. They don't necessarily have to consult with me. Did they personally phone me? No, they didn't. Did I personally phone several reserves to make sure they got the vaccines? Yes, I did.

Now, in terms of high-risk groups I spoke with the Minister of Health and Wellness every day for the past number of days. In fact, as early as yesterday I have been assured that we will be providing the vaccine on an as-scheduled basis as quickly as possible to the Métis settlements, which do come under the jurisdiction of Alberta Health Services, and to other high-risk priority groups.

Dr. Swann: As of today, Mr. Speaker, 439 people have been admitted to hospital with H1N1. Can the minister tell this Assembly how many aboriginal and Métis people are among those in hospital due to H1N1?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's a very difficult question to even attempt to answer because not everyone who is of aboriginal extraction self-identifies. It's up to them if they wish to do that. So it's almost an impossible question to answer. Let me take that question under advisement and see if I can find some statistics for the hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite what this government claims, the case for massive transmission development is anything but proven. Two professors of economics and engineering at the University of Calgary yesterday put out a scholarly paper stating that the power lines between Edmonton and Calgary, the ones that the government wants to force on Alberta consumers, the ones that the government wants to call critical transmission infrastructure, are "an overbuild that is not warranted by its economics." In a proper regulatory system, of course, these opinions would be heard by the regulator and would influence the regulator's decision. To the Minister of Energy: why do you want to cut experts such as these out of the regulatory process?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to be clear about one thing, and that is that the government of Alberta did not proclaim anything about critical infrastructure. It's AESO. AESO is an independent group of about 250 technicians and engineers that have the ability and the resources to determine what is necessary for the electrical transmission system and the electrical system, generally speaking, in the province of Alberta. I didn't determine this; AESO determined it.

Relative to the situation with the HVDC, Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that there are many people with differing opinions relative to what technology should be employed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Which would make a good case for continuing to have those experts express their opinions in front of the regulator that this minister wants to do away with.

You know, this government isn't willing to hear experts who disagree. Its favoured approach is instead to spend taxpayer money to manipulate public opinion. Yesterday this minister doggedly refused to answer my very simple question about the government's pro Bill 50 propaganda campaign. The government is spending taxpayers' dollars trying to convince Albertans that they just have to pay billions of dollars for new transmission lines. It's time to answer the question, Mr. Minister. How much is this costing?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm not exactly sure what it is that the hon. member would like me to answer. If he wants me to answer the question around how much of AESO's budget is expended giving Albertans information that they desire and need relative to this system, I guess I could make some attempt to find out what number that would be. But I have to tell you that as far as the whole business is concerned about who is putting information in front of the public and who isn't, I think that at this point in time it'd

be fair to say that almost every stakeholder is putting information in front of consumers.

2:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Geez, this is funny. Not every stakeholder is spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars advertising on radio, on television, and in the newspaper. The minister dodged my question yesterday when he would not state in this Assembly how much this propaganda campaign is costing. To the minister: how many taxpayer dollars are you spending on advertising on this pro Bill 50 campaign? Simple enough for you?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know what constitutes advertising. Apparently, he's an expert in the field. So if he would like to send me a letter that indicates which pieces of this stuff he considers to be information for consumers and which pieces he considers to be advertising, perhaps what we could do for him then – you know, he's the expert on advertising. He told me that yesterday. That's fine. If he's the expert, let him tell me which pieces are advertising and which pieces are distributing information that Albertans want.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

(continued)

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, there are so many empty seats on the other side today, you'd think the next election had already happened.

The government has made a scapegoat of the bureaucrat who let the Calgary Flames jump the queue for the H1N1 vaccine. Albertans want to know why this government repeatedly encouraged masses of low-risk people to get vaccinated when the clinics first opened and why the vaccine wasn't exclusively targeted for high-risk groups from the start. If a bureaucrat was fired for letting a hundred people get ahead of the vulnerable, will the Deputy Government House Leader tell us who's going to be fired for encouraging a few hundred thousand people to go ahead of the high-risk people who needed the flu shot first?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I think what we need to stay focused on is the fact that today is the beginning of a revamped immunization program which, by and from all reports so far – I know it's early in the day – is going quite well. I have already indicated in an earlier question what is going to happen with respect to the issue in Calgary, and I've also indicated that that will be done as soon as the immunization program is completed. We hope to have that done by Christmastime.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. Mr. Speaker, the bureaucrat who was fired was operating in a leadership vacuum where nobody knew what was right, what was wrong, who was supposed to be getting priority, and who wasn't. Why won't the Deputy Government House Leader admit that the people who were responsible for this vaccine were operating in a leadership vacuum where anything could've gone wrong and often did?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, there's only one thing that went wrong, if at all, and that is the shortage of vaccine. We just have to

explain that very carefully. That particular supplier has now guaranteed an additional number of doses. Those doses are being rolled out on a priority basis, as I have indicated. We will continue doing that until the needs of the most vulnerable are met, and then we'll deal with those who are not as high at risk.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the minister is right. There's only one thing that went wrong, and that was that the wrong party is in the government of Alberta at this time. From where I sit, the leadership vacuum that is crippling the government is obvious. I look across the way, and no one is here to answer for Albertans.

Instead of scapegoating one individual, a low-level bureaucrat, why won't the Deputy Government House Leader admit that the chaos and confusion surrounding this entire vaccination program ultimately comes down to a total failure of leadership at the highest level?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we have the priorities, we have outlined them, and I resent the hon. leader of the third party referring to me, who's providing good, solid information, as somebody who's not here. You know, here we are. You're asking questions, and we're providing you answers. The fact that you don't want to believe the truth: that's up to you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Government Accountability

Mr. Boutilier: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. MLAs from all political parties bring great ideas to this Assembly because we're connected to the elected bosses who elect us and who we follow. My question to the acting Premier today would be simply this: is this government being run by elected people or by nonelected, politically appointed people based on the contradictions we've been seeing in the last seven days?

Mr. Horner: The hon. member well knows that this province is being run by a Premier with vision, with leadership, and with a very strong team of elected officials backing him from across this great province.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, ideas that are brought to this administration are either heard or not heard. I know there is much frustration on that side from people stopping their ideas from coming forward. The minister of health in this very Assembly said that there would not be a long-term care in Fort McMurray to 2012. He has contradicted the Premier when the Premier was in my city council three weeks ago and said in front of hundreds of people that it would be done. Can you explain the contradiction of the minister of health and the Premier of this province, who promised my constituents it would be done?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is bringing up a conversation which I wasn't privy to, so I can't say what the Premier said. I can't say what the minister of health said. The hon. member is obviously saying that he believes that this was said and that he believes a commitment was made. We'll take it under advisement and advise the Premier.

Mr. Boutilier: I have to really ask the question: who is running this asylum? Is it elected people or is it nonelected people? There are great ideas over there, listening to Albertans at coffee shops,

bringing them here, but they fell on deaf ears. This weekend the question will be: will you be listening to the people of Alberta or to people that are nonelected in politically appointed positions? My question is: when will the listening start for MLAs in terms of the ideas they bring falling on deaf ears in this administration?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member obviously feels that he's not being heard from where he's at. I would encourage the hon. member to come over to any one of the ministers who are on this bench. Come and have a chat with us. We have an open-door policy. I would suggest to all of the hon. members here: are you being listened to by this government? I think the answer would be a very solid yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Condominium Property Act Consultation

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shoddy construction practices continue to leave condo boards and owners burdened with large repair bills after the developer is out of the picture. Albertans are still expecting action from this government on new legislation to protect condominium owners. To the Minister of Service Alberta. This is yet another example of inaction from your department. Why has Service Alberta still not completed a review of Alberta's condominium legislation?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Condominium Property Act we are right now working with Municipal Affairs and a number of other ministries, moving into a consultation process beginning early next spring. The Condominium Property Act was last revised in 2001, so it's indeed time to look at it. There are letters that come across my desk and the Minister of Municipal Affairs' every day, so there are a number of concerns out there that we need to deal with.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's what the minister has been promising all along. Can the minister provide us with an actual timeline with actual deadlines for when she will bring forward this stronger legislation for Alberta's condominium owners?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, with respect to the Condominium Property Act you have to take into account the building code as well, which is with Municipal Affairs. Part of a really good consultation is making sure we hear from all stakeholders and respect the opinions of everyone who's at the table. Being that it was last reviewed in 2001, we knew it was a very lengthy process. That's why we are beginning it next spring. As a matter of fact, the letters that we are getting are already being funneled into the department and being looked at as we speak.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again: will the minister commit to including in the legislation tough new sanctions against shoddy residential construction practices?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, that would be with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but it's important to note that in the letters that are coming across our desks, there are a lot of concerns out there, as the hon. member has raised. That is something we want to look at with respect to when individuals purchase property, that they know what they're getting into, whether it's a condo or whether it's a home. That's really important to myself in my role as minister of consumers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:10 Vancouver 2010 Olympic Torch Relay

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great day today to be an Albertan and a Canadian. [Mrs. Leskiw sported red Olympic mittens]

My constituents are really excited about welcoming the torch relay to Cold Lake tomorrow as it makes its first trip through our great province. A local community committee has been working extremely hard to organize this celebration in my constituency. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. How are Albertans involved with the torch relay as it travels through our great province?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we are feeling the love. We're feeling the spirit. [Mrs. Ady sported red Olympic mittens]

It's been 20 years since the torch came through the province of Alberta, and tomorrow that torch is re-entering this province, first going to Grande Prairie, then going to Fort McMurray, and then to Cold Lake, and you know, we're excited. As you heard earlier, a thousand Albertans are going to carry the torch through some 76 communities. A recent Travel Alberta guide that was put out shows where all those torch relays are going, where the celebrations are going to be. I would encourage all members to look, and I'll be tabling this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement is to the same minister. What else is being done to shine some of the international spotlights on Alberta around the games?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're going to be promoting Alberta business, culture, and tourism because we know the world is watching. We announced already seven world cups that will give us a little taste of what to expect in 2010 as well as 450 hours of international TV coverage reaching 150 million viewers. This is a wonderful moment for Alberta, and we're going to take advantage of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Can you please tell me about how Alberta artists and performers are involved in the torch relay?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd say that my hands feel somewhat naked.

Mr. Speaker, of the 18 communities that are participating in these celebrations, they'll all involve local artists who will showcase the diversity, people, and cultural flavour of their regions. The arts are

an integral part of our cultural identity and our strength. These celebrations provide our province with the opportunity to showcase who we are and what we're made of. It gives them the freedom to create and the spirit to achieve. They will show the rest of the world what we here in Alberta already know, and that is that we have among the most astonishing level of artistic talent and accomplishment within our borders. The government of Alberta, through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, is providing each of these 18 communities with up to \$10,000 for these celebrations.

Charitable Gaming Consultation

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Solicitor General why he was sending Huey, Dewey, and Louie – I mean, three backbench MLAs – out on a taxpayer-funded junket to various places around Alberta to have meetings on casino table revenues. In my estimation this is a complete waste of money. Given that a standing committee of the Legislative Assembly is already in place and their members are already paid, why did this minister not have Alberta charities consult this all-party forum instead of wasting taxpayer money on sending these backbenchers out to attend closed-door meetings?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought I addressed that question yesterday. While the hon. member is referring to a circus, the only circus is in the tone of the question that the hon. member is asking.

It's pretty simple mathematics when you look at sending 10 to 12 members across the province through consultation instead of three government members who are doing it basically on expenses because they're already maxed out on their committee pay. So it's a savings; it's not an extra expense.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that answer quite amazing because we have these all-party committees, and people come in and present to us. It really is amazing. So my question to the minister: do you know how these all-party committee meetings work?

Mr. Lindsay: As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I know exactly how the all-party committees work, and they do great work in the mandate that they're set up for.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess then he knows how they work, and he chose not to use them, and he chose to waste taxpayer dollars.

Nevertheless, a resolution from the 2008 Progressive Conservative Association AGM proposed by the constituency association of Drayton Valley-Calmar stated: Provincial Pooling of Casino Slot Proceeds. To the same minister: is the Alberta government now instituting this motion that has the apparent goal of taking revenue raised in Calgary and Edmonton and Lethbridge and other major centres and spreading it throughout the province?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that the information I've got back from the great committee that's doing some great work in the province, meeting with all of the charitable organizations across this province, is that they're all committed to working together to ensure that there's fairness in the gaming model. At the end of the day I'm sure the report that'll come back from the three MLAs will indicate that, and we'll move forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

(continued)

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new study released by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy yesterday concluded that the proposed Calgary-Edmonton HVDC – that's high-voltage direct current – lines are an overbuild. To the Minister of Energy: are the conclusions reached by this study correct? Is this a case of overbuild, or is it a staged prebuild?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, there has been a tremendous amount of interest relative to the build-out of transmission in the province of Alberta. The most contentious piece at the moment seems to be this idea that we should or should not build high-voltage direct current lines in the province of Alberta. I believe that the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary was looking at this from the point of view of: what is this HVDC system's eventual capacity? It is a lot. What I can tell you is that this will be a staged development. Once we have the linear pieces of this infrastructure in place – and, by the way, the linear pieces are less expensive to build than AC lines – we can build onto them and work for the future of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister. My constituents continue to be lobbied by various interest groups who state that there has been no public engagement with respect to these lines. Can the minister shed some light on what public consultation has actually occurred on this matter?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, of course, you know, the situation relative to transmission reinforcement in the province of Alberta is something that's been worked on for a number of years. What I can tell you and what I can tell all Albertans is that, number one, since 2007 relative to this issue of transmission there have been over 300 public open house meetings where any and all Albertans were invited to come and share their opinion with respect to what it is we're doing. I don't think that there's any other piece of public policy that's been moving on the landscape here in that period of time that has had anywhere near that amount of public scrutiny. If they want to come, please do.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Energy alone has held more than 20 meetings on this piece of legislation in the past couple of months.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Given what the AESO has heard in landowner consultations, why is it so important to build these HVDC lines as opposed to AC lines?

Mr. Knight: Well, there are a number of reasons, of course, Mr. Speaker. The first one would be, as I have indicated, that we can stage the development of these lines, start off with a thousand megawatts on each of these lines, and then it's plug and play after that. When we need to reinforce the system further, you could put a thousand megawatts at each end by adding AC/DC conversion on the ends of the line. You don't have to go back and trouble landowners. You don't have to go back and build new infrastructure. You don't have to go back and create a situation where you put Band-aids on the system every 10 years. This is built for the future.

It can be staged and developed in a manner that best suits Albertans in the long run.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Grade 12 Diploma Exams

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of my inability to interpret educational baffle-gab, I have prepared a translation test to help the Minister of Education qualify and quantify his responses from yesterday, upon which he will be graded, with his results published by the Fraser Institute. HB pencil ready, Mr. Minister. Multiple-choice tests (a) assume that there's only one correct response, (b) emphasize the final product over process, (c) are easy and inexpensive to mark, (d) any or all of the above. Letter only, please.

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, being a slow learner, I missed the first part of the question, so I can't answer the (a), (b), (c), or (d) part.

Mr. Chase: Grade 12 students don't have those options.

Question 2. The Ministry of Education's justification for giving equal value for an entire year's work to a two-hour multiple-choice test is (a) students who have slacked off throughout the year deserve one last chance to redeem themselves, (b) primarily designed to justify the Ministry of Education's existence, (c) teachers' professionally varied and cumulative evaluations of standardized curriculum aren't to be trusted, (d) all of the above. (A), (b), (c), or (d)?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, this is precisely the type of problem we try to avoid by having experts design exam questions which are valid and reliable and actually test functional knowledge and ability to calculate, all of those things, the six things that I mentioned in the House the other day that are necessary to test in a reliable manner. This particular teacher should go back and learn assessment qualities.

Mr. Chase: Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but due to budget cuts we had to remove the written rationale portion of the multiple-choice test.

Question 3. When selecting a successful college or university applicant, a variety of factors are taken into consideration including (a) the student's academic record throughout their high school experience, (b) a singular focus on their departmental exam mark, (c) their extracurricular interests, including community involvement, (d) both (a) and (c). Would the minister like a lifeline?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, most of us would know that colleges and universities, postsecondary institutions across this province, first of all, put a great deal of reliance on the Alberta diploma because the Alberta diploma is based on a standardized assessment, which gives a reliable indication of a student's ability. Not only in Alberta but institutions across North America accept the Alberta diploma. In fact, other places want the Alberta diploma because it has such a strong standard. Other jurisdictions don't have that kind of reliability, so their marks get degraded. The fact of the matter is that most postsecondaries look beyond the actual marks now. They understand that internationalization, community service: all of those things are important. Depending on the faculty and depending on the purpose, they look beyond the marks.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

PDD Funding for Community Agencies

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports likes to throw out the occasional platitude about support to people with developmental disabilities. Yet, as usual, when cuts happen, those who can least afford it are first on the chopping block. The minister has in the past admitted that front-line community agency workers aren't paid anywhere near what they should be and that this interferes with disabled Albertans getting the help that they need. Why, then, would the minister allow the PDD board to roll back plans to deliver already-budgeted modest wage increases to these same workers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the member opposite is speaking about the \$14.4 million that we released to the board to be paid to the front-line workers as a one-time bonus. In our budget this year we did budget a larger number, but as everyone here is aware, there is an economic downturn. Instead of disappointing the front-line workers by giving them something that we didn't have, we made sure that they got something that we did have. Since 2005-06 we've added \$74 million to this program, with an increase of clients of about 2 per cent.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the needs of people with disabilities don't change just because we're going through an economic crisis. Funding that was in place was already sadly lacking. PDD has told community agencies to expect 10 to 15 per cent cuts next year, which has forced them to cancel the wage increase, and it's also forcing them to cut other essential programs. How can this minister suggest that the already meagre budgets for agencies that support the developmentally disabled have any room for further cuts?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any cuts of 10 to 15 per cent. I'm assuming that the member opposite must have got this information from the same source that was incorrect last time when they made other announcements that were highly incorrect. Once again, I'm not aware of any cuts of that nature to the PDD program.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is what community agencies are hearing from PDD.

Now, just a year ago the minister said: "We fully recognize that adult Albertans with developmental disabilities who have behavioural, mental health, or other complex needs require specialized supports." You can't attract the workers who provide these specialized supports if all you offer them is minimum wage or just a little bit above. How can this minister claim to care about people with disabilities while not ensuring that we maintain the funding for the supports that she admits they need?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, this year we did give \$14.4 million to the agencies. We had another \$6 million that we produced for the increase in clients for the agencies and, besides that, another \$5 million for complex-needs residents. There is no doubt in my mind that I care about our PDD clients. I've proved it in many ways.

Mr. Speaker, one more point that I'd like to make. The member opposite forgets to mention that at the beginning of this year we did give a hundred dollar per month increase to 95 per cent of our PDD clients through the AISH program as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

WorldSkills Calgary 2009

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we're all aware, the 2009 WorldSkills competition was held in Calgary during the week of September 1 through 7. I recognize the importance of providing opportunities for Alberta's youth to foster these important life skills. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. What was the cost of the 2009 WorldSkills competition, and what benefits did it provide to the competitors?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the event was a tremendous success. For any of us who were able to attend to see what happened, Calgary certainly enjoyed the benefits of that. We invested \$24 million into the WorldSkills competition as well as \$1.7 million to transport thousands of Alberta students to that.

Having had the opportunity to speak to some of the students and some of the teachers who attended, they thought it was a tremendous, life-changing experience for many of their students. More than 59,000 students attended WorldSkills, Mr. Speaker, and had a first-hand opportunity to avail themselves of different trades of some of the best and brightest of the world. More than 151,000 visitors from across Canada, across Alberta, and across the world came to Calgary, where two distinguished Albertans received medallions of excellence for their achievements.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, Alberta decided to give \$16 million in state-of-the-art equipment from the competition, part of our investment, to the schools and the postsecondaries in this province. I think that's a tremendous benefit.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister. Mr. Minister, there's talk about the WorldSkills legacy, donating new equipment to Alberta schools. What schools benefited from this program, and what criteria were used as to where the equipment went?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, all 45 school jurisdictions and postsecondary institutions that applied received equipment, and the school boards were responsible for deciding the type of equipment they were looking for, the type of equipment that would fit best in their high schools in their jurisdictions. As well, the postsecondaries submitted their applications, and they were ranked based on the priorities that we have within the department as to the areas of expertise that each of these colleges and postsecondary institutions wanted to put into their high-demand programs. Again, it was all done in the spirit of co-operation and collaboration from both departments and from all of the school jurisdictions that applied.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: how are programs like the registered apprenticeship program benefited by the WorldSkills legacy?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the RAP apprentices are enrolled in CTS courses throughout this province in postsecondary and in high schools, and the high schools and postsecondary institutions now have flexibility given the new equipment. This was state-of-the-art equipment, so our students are now working on equipment that they will see in industry when they leave our postsecondary and

high school institutions. I think that's a tremendous benefit not only for our RAP apprentices but also for high school students, who may just decide to stay within the K to 12 system and get the training that they need to further their careers and further their education once they leave those institutions.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

2:30 Employment and Immigration Spending

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public accounts of Alberta list many examples of this government's out-of-control and wasteful spending. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why did the minister waste \$2.6 million on bonuses to senior management last year when other necessary programs for people in the ministry ran short of cash?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we certainly have contractual obligations. We set targets and we set certain objectives that have to be met, and if those targets are met and the objectives are achieved, then we will pay the bonuses, as we've done in the past.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister knows that the targets were not met, the objectives were not met, but the bonuses were paid anyway, and other people who needed services did without.

Now, again to the minister: why did the minister waste \$565,000 last year advertising in the *New York Times*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* when other needed programs for people in the ministry ran out of money?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of mandates that we have as a ministry, and one is to be ready to have the right people with the right skills at the right places for the future operation of the province of Alberta. We all know that we will be short of people in the very near future, as we were up until a few months ago, in the province of Alberta. We still need to be ready when the pendulum swings the other way. We need to be able to maintain our presence around the world to be able to attract the types of people that are required in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why did the minister waste \$1.1 million last year hiring Geneva Health International to recruit nurses from overseas when this very government now refuses to hire the nurses that were recruited in the first place? That's a complete waste of money and a very stupid policy.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, a lot of that work was done when we did have a high demand for individuals, professionals of all types, including those that have trades. We target certain demographics across the world, and we are spending our money in areas of the world that we feel will benefit Albertans the most.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Charitable Gaming Consultation (continued)

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Charities in my constituency have expressed concerns about the amount of money they receive from holding a casino event, how the proceeds are pooled, the length of time it takes in between their casino events, and the number of volunteers required to work at these casino events. To the Solicitor General: what are you doing to address these very important concerns?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many rural and urban Albertans told this government that they are unhappy with the issues that the hon. member has referred to. We listened and formed a three-member committee to look at these issues. This cost-efficient committee has heard from 862 eligible charities during 13 meetings to date to gather input and ideas. Two more meetings will be held in northern Alberta next week.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. My constituents say that this review is pitting Calgary charities against rural charities and that cities will lose out. Mr. Minister, is this the case?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, from the chirping across the bench, Mr. Speaker, I guess the hon. member is right. Let me be very clear. Our government does not believe in pitting one region against the other. The MLA committee has formed to respond to specific concerns from charities about how casino events are scheduled, how gaming proceeds are distributed, and the number of volunteers that are required. This process is about this government's commitment to help ensure that Alberta's charities can earn revenue to support their many worthwhile projects and services. In 2008-2009 roughly 3,500 licensed charities raised \$252 million in proceeds from casino events, \$252 million.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. There's been a little bit of criticism from across the way that the consultation process is done in secret and that the process is flawed by having participants work in round-table discussion instead of making formal presentations. Would the minister please inform all members of this House why this particular method was chosen?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, information on the MLA committee meetings and processes has been publicly available since I first announced this committee in September. Possibly if some members opposite would have taken the time, they could have added some valuable input to this committee. The round-table format of these meetings allows eligible charities to share perspectives and work together to try to find potential solutions on the issues raised. Participants have said that they appreciated the opportunity to participate in this process. Charities that can't make the meetings can still participate by sending in written submissions. This government is looking to find the most equitable solution to the concerns raised by these charities, and that's why we're asking them for their thoughts and their ideas.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Continuing Care Fee Structure

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A concern that has been brought to my attention is the lack of information that is available regarding changes to continuing care. Hopefully the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports can clarify some of the concerns that I have. Is the minister considering changing the fee structure for accommodation rates for continuing care facilities?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, there are no plans at this time to change any of the fee structures for continuing care, for long-term care, or for designated assisted living. Just so that the member knows, last year about this time an increase of 7 per cent was allowed for long-term care accommodations, and we helped to support about 8,700 seniors who were in long-term care at that time.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that, Madam Minister. The next time that this may come up, would you have public consultations to ensure – let me put my two questions together, and then I'm down to one. Actually, would you have public consultation, and would you ensure that the rate for the seniors would never be above inflation?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, public consultation and consultation with our stakeholders is a very good thing, something I would consider for making any serious move in continuing care. As far as any predictions about what the increases may be and if they would never go above the cost of living, I can't promise anything at this time, but I know that at this time no increases are being decided on or considered.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Identity Theft

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With today's technologies it's possible to be a victim of theft without ever seeing the thief. Identity theft, in particular, is one of the fast-growing crimes that can devastate a person's finances and entire life. The criminals are getting smarter with the use of technology and always seem to be one step ahead of the police. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. Given that your ministry is responsible for consumer protection, my constituents are asking: why aren't you doing more to educate Albertans about the dangers of identity theft and how to prevent it?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, identity theft is one of the fastest growing types of fraud in Alberta today. Service Alberta works with the Solicitor General, local police and law enforcement agencies, and other groups to help prevent identity theft, and certainly it's highlighted during the anniversary of safe communities week. We have a number of resources in place to educate Albertans about how to prevent identity theft, including presentations to seniors. There's a lot of information out there. The award-winning DVD video called *Changing Faces* teaches Albertans how to protect themselves from identity theft.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Identifications such as drivers' licences and birth certificates contain valuable information that can easily be used to steal someone's identity. To the same minister: given that identity thieves adapt so quickly, what is your ministry doing to ensure that drivers' licences and birth certificates are as current and secure as possible?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's drivers' licences and birth certificates are one of the most secure documents in North America. We introduced a new, secure, state-of-the-art licence in 2008. As a matter of fact, some of the latest security features were just updated earlier this year. It's really important that we try to stay ahead of the counterfeiters and always, always update our technology.

2:40

Mr. Benito: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what does your department do to prevent, investigate, and prosecute people who try to get false information or identification through a registry office?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the registry offices and the excellent work all of the agents do across Alberta, we have a special investigations unit and front-line staff to watch out when criminal action is taking place. We use facial recognition technology to verify the identity of people applying for drivers' licences or ID cards. As well, the information is in the vehicle system, which is reviewed by Service Alberta for irregularities. When staff do uncover these situations, we act quickly and get the police to investigate, charge, and prosecute. Last year alone our department investigations resulted in 133 criminal and 36 regulatory charges being laid against 56 individuals.

The Deputy Speaker: We have concluded question period. We will continue with Members' Statements in 35 seconds.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Centennial of Grouard

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. On September 27, 1909, the community of Grouard was officially incorporated as a village in the new province of Alberta, and the residents honoured Bishop Grouard by naming the new village after him. After all, a year after his consecration as a bishop, in 1891, he visited the St. Bernard Mission in Grouard. A hundred years later many people gathered in the small village to commemorate Grouard's 100th birthday.

Grouard's history is rich and fascinating. In 1912 Grouard became a hub for many people. By 1914, five short years after its founding, over 1,000 residents called Grouard home and enjoyed the services of two schools, a dentist, four doctors, an eye specialist, three churches, a steamship company, a local newspaper, an active board of trade, 20 general stores, two department stores, a hardware store, two bakeries, two butcher shops, a tire shop, two jewellers, three implement agencies, a flour and feed store, two laundromats, six livery barns, a harness shop, three blacksmith shops, two motor

garages, five real estate offices, five poolrooms, a motion picture theatre, a skating rink, tennis, baseball, and hockey clubs, a dominion lands office, a government telegraph office, a Royal North-West Mounted Police headquarters, a public health officer, an immigration hall, a hospital, a fire engine brigade, two sawmills, a bowling alley, a 24-piece brass band, two law offices, two drugstores, a post office, numerous restaurants, a rural telephone system, and a 16-kilometre-long main street named Bouillion Street. In other words, Grouard was growing to be a well-established community, on its way to being recognized as the capital of the north and the first city in the last great west.

However, Mr. Speaker, the confidence in the future of Grouard as a major bustling metropolis would not be sustained. Economic development at the time relied heavily on railway development, and in 1915 it was decided that the newly developed Edmonton, Dunvegan, and British Columbia Railway would bypass the town of Grouard to the south by a mere 12 miles. This established the railway towns of High Prairie and McLennan, causing Grouard's population to drop by two-thirds, and the portage/water routes died.

Mr. Speaker, I would like all members of the Assembly to join me in commemorating a remarkable 100 years of history for my hometown, Grouard.

Education Funding

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's education system is on the brink of a government-inspired crisis. We need to protect funding for public education, not cut it. With an anticipated \$340 million expected to be cut from the 2010 budget, school boards, teachers, and parent councils have united in their recognition of the dire consequences should these cuts go ahead. Moreover, the uncertainty and fear arising from the prospect of these cuts is creating chaos in a system that is already struggling to meet surprise mid-year budget clawbacks.

If that's not enough, the province has given education stakeholders a brief opportunity to have any impact on revisions to the School Act, which many believe have already been drafted. Vague requests for stakeholders to weigh in on questions of governance are issued while straightforward discussions with the school boards this would affect are avoided.

In the midst of talk of restructuring and profound funding cuts the government is also reviewing its provision of special-needs supports to Alberta kids. One of the items on the chopping block: coding, one of the few mechanisms of certainty in a system that has been increasingly destabilized by the actions of this government.

Finally, while these very significant changes are being discussed behind either partially or completely closed doors, the government has spent unnecessary dollars consulting experts, only to invite the public stakeholders to draw pictures of what they think the future of Alberta's education should look like. The title of this initiative? Inspiring Education. Where is the inspiration in threatening transformative cuts to the public system while maintaining an increased level of funding to the private schools? Where is the inspiration in having parents fund raise for their schools by working casinos to meet the basic instructional needs of the classroom? Where is the inspiration in driving school boards to increase class sizes, limit special-needs and literacy funding, and close community schools? This government is not inspiring education for our children at all. Rather, it is stifling the very future of this province with short-sighted and uninspired solutions offered up in the middle of self-generated chaos. Stop the cuts. The future of Alberta's children depends on it.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 74 Calgarians. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

- Grandfather the rights and status of all currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta in a manner that they may continue their practice undisturbed and, when necessary, gradually upgrade to newly-proclaimed standards of training, so as not to force current therapists to lose their ongoing income whilst upgrading and so to ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first set of tablings are copies of correspondence from Calgary-Varsity constituents Neil Thurber, Habib Syed, Nasser Hamid, Janet and Gary Moore, and Aldred Epp, all of whom have asked to have me voice their opposition to Bill 50 for reasons including, and I quote: trying to circumvent the public's view; planning is not benefiting Albertans; pushed through and decided upon behind closed doors; alternatives must be explored, but Bill 50 would prevent them from being identified and debated publicly; and a proper public and industry review can result in a more realistic solution.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of correspondence from Calgarians Gabrielle Enns, Isabell Emery, Jennifer Reddy, Jenny Regal, Kelly Russell, Kelly Waterman, Antonella Fanella, Dave Roseke, Michelle Coolidge, Sarah Clarke, Marlies Sargent, Brenda Herring, Ken Yasenchuk, Meghann Springett, Alicia Motuz, Tim Kitchen, and Patricia Paterson that was sent to the Minister of Education and the Premier urging them not to cut funding for education because it is more important in these times than ever to invest in our children's futures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a research paper from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy done by Jeffrey Church of the department of economics and William Rosehart and John MacCormack of the department of electrical engineering at the U of C entitled Transmission Policy in Alberta and Bill 50, worthwhile reading for the Minister of Energy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table five copies of the Travel Alberta festival and event guide that features the Olympic torch relay and the Alberta World Cup events.

2:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for information, please, a letter that I wrote on July 27, 2009, to the board chair at that time of the Edmonton public school board regarding the whole issue of school closures and the demographics that are used to make those decisions regarding school closures.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the annual report of Alberta Education's Speak Out student engagement initiative. The report, entitled We're Listening, outlines what thousands of high school students have said about their education in online forums around the province and at the annual student conference held in Edmonton this May. The input these students offer has informed many department initiatives, including Inspiring Education, and I encourage all members to read it and learn what Alberta students had to say.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Lindsay, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, responses to questions raised by Mr. Hehr, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo; Dr. Brown, hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill; Ms Woo-Paw, hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay; Mr. Mason, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood; and Mr. Kang, hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on May 6, 2009, in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stelmach, Premier, return to order of the Assembly MR 4, asked for by Ms Notley on behalf of Mr. Mason on April 20, 2009.

Projected Government Business

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that next week is the constituency week, at this time I would ask the hon. Government House Leader to please share with us the projected government business for the week commencing on the 16th, which is government business on the 17th. I understand there may be a need for night sittings by then.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, November 16, in the afternoon, of course, is private members' business. In the evening we would anticipate second reading of Bill 51, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 53, Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Committee of the Whole on Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act; Bill 54, Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 55, Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 56, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009; and for third reading Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act, of course depending on progress on some of those bills this afternoon.

On Tuesday, November 17, in the afternoon for second reading we would anticipate dealing with Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and in the evening second reading of Bill 57 and Bill 58 as well as Committee of the Whole on bills 51 and 53, third reading on 48, 54, 55, and 56, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, November 18, in the afternoon second reading on Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and in the evening second reading on Bill 59, Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 60, Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 61, Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009; Committee of the Whole on Bill 57, Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 58, Corrections Amendment Act, 2009; and third reading on Bill 51 and Bill 53; and as per the Order Paper depending on progress.

On Thursday, November 19, in the afternoon Committee of the Whole on Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 55

Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 4: Ms Pastoor]

The Deputy Speaker: Does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The leader of the third party on Bill 55.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009. Now, this act simply extends the expiry date of the existing act from 2010 to 2016. It has the effect of extending a bill that would provide for the election of nominees, I guess you could call it, for the Canadian Senate. Of course, the Constitution of the country reserves the appointment of Senators to the Crown on the advice of the Prime Minister of Canada, so that's how the Senate is currently appointed.

What the government has put in place is that in the earlier days, when they were under, you know, a lot of pressure from the Reform Party, which proposed that we have a triple-E Senate – let me think if I can recall what all the Es stood for; elected was one, effective, and equal – of course, this provincial government bought into that American-style constitutional amendment and created a fiction, which is that we elect our Senators in this province, and the bill that we're extending provides a mechanism to do that.

I want to say that the New Democratic Party in this country was the forerunner of senatorial reform. Far before the Reform Party was created, the NDP was actively campaigning for a triple-A Senate, not a triple-E Senate. Abolish, annihilate, and abandon is the position that we took and still take today. The Senate in this country is a fundamentally undemocratic institution, and it's, moreover, a redundant and an unnecessary institution.

Attempting to reform it so that it looks like the American Senate really doesn't speak to the basic issues, the differences between the Canadian and the American Constitution. In the United States it's possible for federal, state, and even municipal jurisdictions all to legislate in the same area. So that means that the states, particularly, need to be protected from the intrusion of the American federal government into areas where they traditionally have jurisdiction. Now, the 10th amendment to the American Constitution also protects states by saying that "powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

What I want to say is that in the United States, because of the powers of the federal government and the lack of a clear division of powers which we have in Canada, the states need some protection from intrusions by the federal government. So the Senate, which represents the states in Washington, has a purpose. But here in Canada the provinces have their own areas of jurisdiction under the

Constitution, and those can be protected from federal jurisdiction by appeal to the courts.

So the argument in favour of an equal Senate doesn't hold. It remains an undemocratic institution. It's modelled, incidentally, on the British House of Lords. It was originally intended as a House for the privileged, for people with property, and for 1867 the property requirement was very, very substantial. Now, that's not changed. It's rather modest in today's money, but at the time it was designed to be an unelected institution appointed by the federal government in order to provide a check on the passions of the mob, or the people, in those days.

We think that the Constitution of the country should be changed so that we eliminate the Senate. A number of provinces used to have upper Chambers in this country, and they have abolished them all because they're unnecessary. I believe that the Senate of Canada is unnecessary as well. So for the government to continue an act which essentially is a charade – that is to say, creates the fiction that we're electing Senators when, in fact, they're appointed by the Prime Minister – you know, is disingenuous and dishonest. I think we ought not to pursue this direction anymore.

3:00

Further, these elections are foisted on Alberta municipalities, who have to conduct senatorial elections in the October elections, and there are additional costs to the municipalities for doing so. To the best of my knowledge the government has never compensated municipalities for adding this cost. There are, of course, extra costs to administer, count, tabulate, record, and pass on to the provincial government who, in fact, is elected.

Mr. Speaker, we think that the bill has outlived the current legislation, has outlived any purpose that it might once have had. The time when Albertans were all excited by the idea of a triple-E Senate has passed, and I think that the government should let the senatorial act expire, as was originally intended. I think the Senatorial Selection Act was passed in 1989. That's 20 years ago. We don't need it anymore. We should stop beating our heads against this wall and stop pretending that we have the right to elect Senators and, instead, acknowledge that the Constitution is as it is and will not be changed.

The current amending formula of the Constitution of Canada means that provinces that have an interest in retaining the unbalanced membership in the Senate can block any attempt to reform it, and they will. Ontario and Quebec will block it. Perhaps the Atlantic provinces will block it because they get more seats even than the western provinces. I think we should just call a spade a spade and say: "Listen, this Senate is fundamentally flawed. It's undemocratic. It was created on a model of the House of Lords. It's reserved for people with privilege." What it's become, of course, is the ultimate patronage reward in the country. You can't get better than being made a Senator if you're a Tory bagman or if you're a Liberal bagman. That's where you go.

Ms Blakeman: It could be a bagwoman.

Mr. Mason: I'll correct the language.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: That's the heaven that you're rewarded with for being a bagperson. That's where you go. That's the heaven you get to go to if you've worked really hard for your – pick one – political party.

Ms Blakeman: Are there no ND Senators? Wasn't Broadbent appointed?

Mr. Mason: No.

Mr. Speaker, you know, it's filled with Tories and Liberals who've raised millions and millions of dollars for their political parties, and they are then supported until they're 75 more than adequately – let me put it that way – by the taxpayers while many of them continue to do political organizing and fundraising for the political parties that appointed them in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, we will not reform that place by electing or pretending to elect Senators from this province. They're not actually elected; we just pretend. We go through the motions and pretend that we are actually picking a Senator. I think this act is actually very dishonest with the people of Alberta. I don't think the government should continue the charade of saying that we're actually picking Senators because, you know, we're not. We're just picking people whom we hope the federal government, the Prime Minister, will recommend to the Queen to be appointed to the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly think there are many reforms that we can make to our political institutions. One of them is to eliminate the first past the post system. That means, you know, for example, that with 52 per cent of the vote the Progressive Conservative Party occupies 80 per cent of the seats in this Assembly. That's just wrong. You know, if you're looking for democratic change, for things that are wrong, that are unbalanced and undemocratic that you want to change, let's start with the electoral system we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we can look a little bit at electoral financing. You know, in Manitoba they got rid of corporate and union donations to political parties, which skew the decision-making process because, as much as some hon. members on the other side find this concept offensive, money is given to political parties in exchange for the hope that when they're the government, they're going to do things for the people that gave them the money.

Mr. Hancock: Never.

Mr. Mason: The hon. Government House Leader says, "Never." You know, in many ways the Government House Leader is a bit Pollyannaish. I think it's quite clear, for example, in this province that the oil companies fund the Conservative Party, have funded the Conservative Party at least until now, because they want a favourable royalty regime and favourable protection from environmentalists and all of that sort of thing. They've got it to a large degree, but they want a little bit more, so now they're funding the Wildrose Party because they want to put pressure on the Progressive Conservative government to move a little more to the right and give the oil companies even more than they already get. The amount of money that the oil companies give to both the PC Party and the Wildrose Alliance is very, very large.

We should look at the financing of our political process – money buys power – and we ought to extend the current disclosure requirements to cover leadership conventions, even nomination contests within parties. They're part of the political process in this province. We know that the Premier and the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development still have significant donations that they haven't revealed from their leadership race, and we know that in the Wildrose Alliance their new leader, Danielle Smith, has refused to reveal where she got her money from. I think that that's wrong.

There are lots of areas, Mr. Speaker, where we could bring about some significant democratic reform to the system that we have: how we elect people, how we pay for elections. We might even pass some legislation ensuring some government accountability or enshrining ministerial responsibility in law. That might be most useful in dealing with this latest H1N1 vaccination fiasco because

the government has abandoned the long-standing parliamentary tradition of ministerial accountability.

There are lots of things, if the government is really interested in reforming and democratizing our political system, that they could do. But pretending to elect Senators, making municipalities pay for the elections, and creating these silly Senator-in-waiting positions, where they wait for years and years to be appointed, hoping that the Conservatives will win the federal election so that they have a chance of being appointed because the Liberals certainly will never appoint them, is a farce, and it should be discontinued.

I urge all hon. members to join us in voting against Bill 55. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for questions and comments.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'm wondering if the member is interested in expanding on his last point.

Mr. Mason: I thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but, you know, I think I covered all of the aspects of this. I think that in practice this has been a farce, and it doesn't tackle the basic question before us of how to make our political institutions more democratic.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes for comment and question.

Mr. Berger: Just a couple of quick questions. Judging from the comments made by the hon. member across the floor, I'm just wondering if he's actually offended by democracy in electing a Senator, if that's the offensive part, or if the offensive part is actually that his party has never been in power and never got anybody to that level, if that was the offensive part. I just want to clarify those two things.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's a rather insulting question. I think the hon. member, you know, pretends he didn't hear what I said. I said that the Senate in Canada is unnecessary and undemocratic and that there are a number of steps we can take to make our existing parliamentary system and its financing more democratic. I think that the government should do that. I assume that he heard that and just ignored it in order to score some cheap point.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations under this five minutes?

Mr. Webber: No, Mr. Speaker, not under the five minutes. I would like to speak on this bill, though. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak on the bill?

Ms Blakeman: On the bill? Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In January of 1992 I was one of the people that was selected from many across Canada to participate in one of the five Shaping Canada

constitutional forums that were sponsored by the then Progressive Conservative federal government. I attended the conference in Calgary which was charged with exploring alternatives for institutions, including the Senate.

The five conferences were the federal-provincial division of powers, which was held in Halifax; the Senate, which was held in Calgary; the economic union, held in Montreal; the distinct society, the Canada clause, and the Charter, which was in Toronto; and a concluding conference in Ontario. I had actually wanted to attend one of the other ones, but now many years later I am actually very grateful that I was able to attend the one on the Senate because I think that more than anything it has continued to stay alive.

When I'd gone back and looked at some of the proposals that we were examining at the time, one of the examples in front of me, an article written by David Elkins from a magazine called *The Network*, which was a newsletter of the Network on the Constitution, talks about Australia having a triple-E Senate that was elected, equal, and effective and had been since the country's official creation in 1901 and about what experiences we could draw from that. But the method of electing the Senators was incredibly important, and what was put before us was that the first past the post system used for a senatorial election is not effective. All it does, actually, is entrench a particular kind of partisanship, and it very much affects the kinds of interests that get represented, and that ultimately affects the functioning of the Senate. So the single transferable vote was the preferred method there.

What's written in here is that the moral is that

if you favour quick, decisive action by government, then abolish the Senate. But if you value compromise enough to endure the conflicts between House and Senate which this new legitimacy will bring, then reform the Senate [partly] by making it elected.

We look at: what are the key elements of this? One of my frustrations with this government's approach toward the Senate is in choosing simply one piece of Senate reform. It entrenches a whole series of things that are really quite unpalatable and which I find it surprising the government would be supportive of. In fact, it entrenches these very things by simply taking the system that is in place and electing members over top of that.

What we need to look at is a whole package of things. I spent five days in Calgary in 1992 looking at what this package needs to contain. It needs to look, particularly, at the distribution of the number of Senate seats. It needs to look at the process to change, which is the constitutional amending formula. It needs to look at the equality of the Senate. What is the purpose of the Senate seats? We have Members of Parliament who are elected on a geographic basis to represent the interests of the people that live in a geographic boundary. The idea of the Senate seats was always meant to work with a much larger constituency or issue base or interest base. Originally it started out with a sort of regional flavour to it, but if we are going to reform the Senate, it brought into play a number of other, more modern concepts that were open for us.

When I look at Bill 55, the government's bill to open up their Senate bill again – and, really, all it's doing is extending the dates so that they don't have to deal with this right now – I'm disappointed because I've always seen Senate reform as a huge opportunity for which there is no uptake right now. That's disappointing because there are lots of possibilities that we could work with in Canada to help refresh our democracy and to possibly do some pretty interesting things.

The current amending formula that was being worked with at that time – it's actually still in place – was unanimous consent for the provisions referred to in section 41, the consent of Parliament for certain provisions relating to the national government, consent of the

provincial Legislature for those provisions relating to the provinces, and consent of Parliament and the provinces relating to provisions applicable to more than one province, et cetera, et cetera.

The Meech Lake accord would have made two changes. The unanimous support of Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies of all the provinces would have been required for amendment of a number of additional matters such as Senate reform and the creation of new provinces, which currently require the consent of Parliament and two-thirds of the Legislative Assemblies for amendment. Compensation would have been provided to a province opting out of any amendment transferring provincial legislative power to the Parliament. None of this is simple stuff. It all requires a fair amount of hard work.

What were the pieces that we were looking at? Well, number one was that the Senate should not replicate the patterns of representation that were already present in the House of Commons. Another point of real contention was whether the Senate would be allowed to deal with what's called money bills. We deal with that issue in this Assembly because, essentially, a private member's bill, which covers anyone that's not in Executive Council and not a minister – we can't bring forward any private bill that has anything to do with money. Essentially, the question was around the Senate: would a money bill category be immune from Senate scrutiny? Really, when you look at it, money bills account for between one-half and three-quarters of the House of Commons business, so not allowing the Senate to consider money bills actually gave them not very much to be dealing with. That was another big piece of what we were looking at.

Those powers came into play in a number of ways. We were looking at Senate powers regarding normal legislation, regarding money bills, on ratifying appointments, on constitutional amendments, on the role of language and culture legislation. Could the Senate introduce money bills, never mind commenting on them but actually introduce a money bill, and could the Senate defeat the government? Those were the issues that we were contemplating.

3:20

Where it really started to come home to me was when we looked at what would be entrenched. When I hear the talk about a triple-E Senate, which was very big at the time, what really frustrated me was that I looked at where we were, and I thought: boy, if this is all we did, all we do is entrench an unfairness to my province; why on earth would we willingly do that? Here's the distribution that we have: P.E.I. has four Senate seats, Newfoundland has six, New Brunswick has 10, Nova Scotia has 10, Saskatchewan has six, Manitoba has six, Alberta has six, B.C. has six, Quebec has 24, and Ontario has 24. If we just went with what's in front of us with the government's proposal for electing Senators, we're forever entrenched with six Senators. Why on earth would we do that to ourselves?

A big piece of senatorial reform, which is the larger picture, is trying to figure out what should be the distribution of seats. We spent a long time on this. We looked at all kinds of possible distributions. The elected and effective, the triple-E Senate that you hear people talk about, would have basically assigned 10 seats to every single province, so we would have had P.E.I. having 10 seats and Alberta having 10 seats. Well, make that one work for me. Or if you came from Ontario or Quebec or B.C., imagine how you'd feel knowing that you had 10 seats, so did Alberta, and so did P.E.I. I don't believe that the idea of absolute, equal seats as a distribution was a very realistic or helpful way of looking at Senate reform considering all the other possibilities.

You know, folks, this information is available from me if you

want to see it. But there were all kinds of possibilities that were considered, going from sort of six seats each for everybody except for Quebec and Ontario, who got 10, to a sort of six, 12, 18, and 24 formula, that moved from the smallest to the largest with that allocation, or one that had six for P.E.I., 12 for everybody except for 24 for Quebec and Ontario. You can see that there are all kinds of possibilities, depending on how you're trying to sort that out.

If you start with the idea that you're expecting Senators to not represent people on a geographic basis, that you're trying to get them to represent either on regional issues – or what I was interested in was representation from other constituency groups. One of the other things that we kept looking at was a certain number of the seats that were set aside and designated for aboriginal representation. I'm pretty sure we were looking at 5 per cent. Of course, the discussion that went along with that is, "Okay, if it's 5 per cent for aboriginals and that's representative of their population base in Canada at the time, we should be saying 50 per cent for women," which, of course, I was very much in favour of.

You also start to work in some of those other mixes like new Canadians or representation from particular cultural groups that are heavily invested in Alberta. You could be very creative and imaginative. This is a huge opportunity to bring other voices into our chambers of decision, to have those voices represented at the table or at the Senate desk to be able to comment on the legislation that was proceeding through those two Houses. To me, I saw it as a huge opportunity to engage more of our population in this and to have those voices amplified and represented in the House. I was really excited by this concept, and clearly I still am. But you're not going to get that until you deal with how the seats are distributed, and just saying 10, 10, 10 across the board doesn't work, as far as I'm concerned.

While I was in favour of elected Senates – fine by me – you have to deal with a system that is not a first past the post system, or you just entrench everything. If you're going to elect, you need to look at your electoral system. You absolutely have to deal with how the Senate seat distribution goes. In order to do that, you must change the amending formula for the Constitution about who gets to weigh in on this. There was quite a good formula that was looked at. I think it was a 7-50, so it had seven of the provinces representing 50 per cent of the population. The idea was that you couldn't just have Ontario and Quebec gang up together and amend the Constitution and leave everybody else out. It had to be seven provinces representing 50 per cent of the population, which I thought was a pretty good formula. I was willing to sign on to that one. Clearly, I still am.

The scope of the Senate power, which I talked about earlier. Would they be able to comment or debate on money bills? Could they even introduce money bills? Could they be involved in ratification of appointments and that kind of thing? What would be the scope of what they did? There were lots of possibilities here, but the triple-E just didn't do that. Triple-E is really the most basic approach to senatorial reform and, forgive me for saying, the one with the least amount of flair and creativity to it. Canada is a creative country. We are an innovative country. I'd like to see more innovation brought to this debate than that triple-E.

This is the one that I'm referring to, the one that was developed by McCormick, Manning, and Gibson in their book *Regional Representation* and then reiterated by Alberta's select committee on senatorial reform in 1985. "Strict equality of the provinces in the form of identical numbers of Senators . . . The Senate should represent . . . populations . . . purely and single-mindedly." [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] I'm out of time.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, we have five minutes for questions.

Dr. Taft: Yes. I was absolutely intrigued by the member's comments, and I'm wondering if she had anything else to say.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, clearly I did, so thank you for that.

I was just talking about the triple-E Senate. I wanted to close off on that because I think it was the most basic approach to senatorial reform. It just looked at absolute, identical numbers of Senators. It looked at an election but did not comment on any kind of electoral reform, so it would end up using a first past the post system. In fact, we have had, I think, one set or two sets of senatorial elections in Alberta, and that's exactly what they did. They just dumped it onto the municipalities and said: go ahead and run it exactly the same way. We had no innovation there.

For the scope of it they actually moved back a step because once again it was to be done on an absolute representation of the provincial population. The criticism that was brought forward during the debates that I attended was in the way it would be applied to the ratios. I've already pointed out the differences between Ontario, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island. Really, that's brought home by the fact that there are probably a dozen Ontario municipalities that have more population than Prince Edward Island in its entirety. We have to have buy-in from the population when we do things like this, and that kind of ratio just does not get buy-in. It becomes laughable to people.

I think there's great possibility in senatorial reform. There's lots to talk about inside of all those categories that I outlined for you. It was a very exciting opportunity to go and spend five days with a diversity of people from across the country talking about Senate reform. I'm disappointed that it never went any further because I think it should, but I don't see that creativity or anything else involved in the bill that's before us.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other hon. members who wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

3:30

Dr. Taft: On the bill, yes. Thank you. I realize it's a brief bill, but it does open, I think, an opportunity to reflect a little bit on the nature of the Senate, which this bill, ultimately, is trying to address; that is, to bring in elected members for the Senate. I've got mixed feelings about the whole business of elected members. Frankly, I can't remember the last time I had a constituent talk to me about this issue; it's way down on the public agenda. It doesn't mean it isn't significant.

I just wanted to bring to the attention of the members of the Assembly an interesting bit of history that I think is worth thinking about in terms of how the Senate is arranged. I am holding in my hands right now a copy of a map from the book called *Canada: An Encyclopedia of the Country*, volume 1, page 17, printed in 1898. The member for Edmonton-Centre described the number of seats in the Senate per province. What this particular map does is propose what was considered to be the correct boundaries for provinces in 1898. It's quite a different map than what we've ended up with, and it would have quite a different impact on the Senate.

There are a total, in fact, of 18 provinces and territories proposed in this map of the dominion of Canada, and it's quite interesting how

different the west and the north would have been and how different the Senate for the west and the north would have been if this had been fulfilled. Atlantic Canada remains the same, except Labrador is broken off and treated on its own. Ontario and Quebec are geographically much smaller and would have smaller populations and, therefore, would have less claim on the Senate. Northern Quebec is actually carved off into a separate territory called Labrador Ungava. British Columbia remains the same, but the prairies are dramatically different. You have a province called Athabasca right across the top from the B.C. border halfway into what's currently Manitoba, and it comes south to an area that's about 100 miles north of Edmonton. Alberta is cut and basically loses its top third. Saskatchewan loses both its top third and bottom third and ends up as quite a small province, and the southern part of Saskatchewan would have been a province called Assiniboia. Manitoba loses all of its north to a new province called Keewatin.

It's an interesting time to reflect on the history of our Senate and the history of the country and how this is allocated. The fact, for example, as the member for Edmonton-Centre talked about, that Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick currently have more seats in the Senate than Alberta seems way out of whack. Maybe instead of just electing Senators, we should actually open up a debate to rethink the entire Senate. The New Democrats want to abolish it. I think there's actually merit in that perspective. I also think there's merit in considering other ways to make the Senate more meaningful.

I think this bill actually falls really short of doing something significant. It's like the easiest way out. There's no obligation on the federal government to appoint elected Senators. It's expensive, it takes up time, and it seems very low on the public radar. So I think this is kind of the lazy way through this particular issue. It's not bold. It's not very interesting. It's not very productive. I guess that's maybe where we're at these days with the government. But I think we can aim higher, so I would suggest that we have the sponsoring member take this bill back and throw it wide open to see where the people of Alberta really are because I don't think they're aware of where this bill is proposing to take them.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. If anybody wants to have a look at this map, I've got it right here, and I'd be happy to pass it around. It's really pretty interesting.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions. The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I for one would be interested in seeing that map, hon. member. I don't know of what interest it would have been at that time with senatorial elections or whether they were appointed. Interestingly enough, my great grandfather came to this province two years before that map, and I'm quite sure that when he was trying to eke out a living south of Pincher Creek raising horses for the North West Mounted Police, he couldn't have cared less about who and what in the process for the Senate. I guess the point that I'm trying to make is that five generations later, or six with my kids, it probably is an issue, and they probably are interested in having elected, responsible, accountable Senators rather than having somebody that is politically appointed till the age of 75 and really has no responsibility to any electorate except an allegiance to the person who appointed them. So I'd be interested in seeing the map.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Taft: I'll send it right over. I'm interested to hear the personal

history of the member's family. I'm just not convinced, as we debate here right now, that the ranchers around Pincher Creek are going out tonight to discuss whether Senate reform really matters or not. I just don't think that they are. Maybe they are. I don't think the constituents of Edmonton-Riverview are, but, hey, maybe we should give them the chance. I think that was the spirit that the member was suggesting. Maybe we should throw this debate open broadly and see where the public is. Perhaps next session one of the members from the government can come forward with a process to revisit the issue of Senate reform. In the meantime, I'll shoot a copy of this map right over.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to use the five minutes?

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you wish to speak on the bill?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, when we look at Bill 55, we see the amendment from December 31, 2010, through to December 31, 2016. I certainly can support this bill. I don't see anything the matter with it whatsoever. Other members have expressed a view, but I hope that at some point we will have an elected Senate, not an appointed Senate. I don't know if I would be around. I'm not holding my breath.

I listened with interest to a previous speaker talk about the Reform Party and what they thought of the Senate and what is going on now with Mr. Harper's government in Ottawa. I was trying to remember the names of all those who have been appointed recently to the Senate. I was trying to remember what the balance is between the Liberals and the Conservatives in the Senate. I should know that. I apologize; I do not. But I do know that there were many people appointed recently from the Conservative Party from all different walks of life and from all different regions of the country.

I think we would be better served not only if the Senate was elected but also if there were term limits put on those elections, if one could only sit for a certain number of years. For instance, if you were elected once, you could maybe be elected twice. I think that for some of these appointments that are being made now, individuals can in some cases sit in the Senate for up to 20, 25 years. In some cases it may be longer.

3:40

I do know that Senators do very, very good work. I had the opportunity two years ago to attend an event where the Liberal Senator from southern Alberta, Senator Joyce Fairbairn, was in attendance. She had organized an event around adult literacy, a cause that she has worked for all her life and has really championed since she has been in the Senate. She has done a lot of fine work to improve the literacy rate for adults in this country. Unfortunately, 1 in 5 individuals has either reading difficulties or cannot read at all. Not only does she work in Alberta, but Senator Fairbairn works across the country trying to make a difference and reduce that statistic.

I think that if we picked a Senator and looked at the work they do, the majority of them have our fine country in mind whenever they do their work, and they do valuable work. The idea that they can be appointed – I would agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood regarding the appointments. In the past there was a perception, and I believe it was true, that only the political

elite were appointed, and political insiders were appointed. In all fairness, I don't believe that to be the case now with some of the latest . . .

Dr. Taft: Isn't one of those that Stephen Harper appointed one of the political elite?

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Harper certainly appointed members of his own political party. I could be wrong, but I assumed that some of the individuals that he appointed were not affiliated with any party. Now, I could be wrong. I find it very difficult to keep up these days, obviously, like everyone else, with so much going on.

Certainly, Bill 55 extends the sunset clause for Alberta's senatorial elections through another six years, so 2016, after the current clause would have expired next Christmas, in 2010.

I would be of the view that Senate reform is a very slow process, a very, very slow process. This is a step, a slow process to change how Senators are selected. I worked on the 1989 Senate race for the Liberal Party, of course. Our candidate didn't win, but it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun to work on that campaign. Mr. Waters was the eventual winner, and we all know the difficulties he had after he was elected. Again, it's a slow process. Let's see what happens. Hopefully, at some point Senators will be elected and there will be limits on their stay in the upper House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations to speak and close the debate.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View for moving Bill 55 for second reading yesterday. Unfortunately, I was not able to be here, but I understand that the member did quite an admirable job in stressing the importance of this bill, and I thank him for that.

Mr. Speaker, section 54 of the current act states that this act does expire on December 31, 2010. As we all know here in the Assembly, this amendment would change the wording to: this act expires on December 31, 2016. This is the sole change to the act, and it is consistent with the previous renewal.

As is evident, Mr. Speaker, this is a very straightforward bill. You know, it's a simple bill, and it sends an important message, that Albertans remain committed to the effort of reforming Canada's Senate and we will do our part to ensure that our representatives in the Senate have a democratic mandate. Even if it's much to the dismay of the opposition, we will fight to have Senators have a democratic mandate.

To date we have seen two democratically elected Senators appointed from Alberta. Thanks to our past Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and to our current Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, for appointing these two individuals. We would like to see more in the future, Mr. Speaker. Albertans hold their democratic values dear, and the passage of this bill will ensure that those values continue to guide our approach to this national institution.

Mr. Speaker, that's all I have to say, and I'd like to end it here. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a second time]

Bill 51

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General I'd like to move Bill 51, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, for second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

The chair shall now call the question on Bill 51.

[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a second time]

Bill 54

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 4: Mr. Kang]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 54, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009. This is, certainly, one of the latest reviews of the PIPA legislation. I've been involved in a couple of these all-party legislative reviews in the past. This bill would be the result of the review that recently took place. A review is mandated every three years. This update is almost as slow as Senate reform in Canada. It goes back to November 2007. I thought we had already dealt with that review.

Now, there are a number of changes to the act that are technical in nature and involve either the clarification of certain terms or the transfer of certain regulations to legislation. Some of the major changes to the act involve service providers outside of Canada, notification requirements for security breaches and timelines, and, as I understand it, the streamlined processes for the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

3:50

The Privacy Commissioner and his staff had reacted to changes to the Personal Information Protection Act. That office, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, indicates here in the documents that I have that most of the amendments to the act which have been introduced and we are debating at this time in the Assembly are in the best interests of Albertans. But they do note that it's disappointing to see the nonprofit organizations and agencies not under the act. Now, the reason for this disappointment is evident. We have had discussions in our caucus about this, but we need to be careful here. There has to be this balance. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly talked about that. I'm not going to bore the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud with any more remarks regarding that discussion.

We need to continually update this legislation. It's not that long since the initial bill was presented in this Assembly. We need always to think of individuals, persons who rely on this act for the protection of their personal information. The world is changing. Everyone knows there are huge databases whenever all this information is put together. The consequences can be enormous. There are commercial applications for this information. There are also applications that are less than savoury, to say the least. Criminals, unfortunately, can profit if they have access to that information.

When we look at this legislation and we look at the recommendations from the all-party committee, when we look at the concerns or the issues that are raised by the commissioner and we put the whole

thing in balance, I think this is – I'm not going to call it a compromise, Mr. Speaker, but certainly it is the best way to proceed at this time.

Now, there are those that say it should be a complete free-for-all with personal information, and everyone should have access to everyone's information at any time. I certainly disagree with that. Hopefully as this legislation unfolds and in another few years it's back before the Assembly, there will be no violations of this act and people's personal information will not be used for inappropriate circumstances.

With that, I would like to conclude my remarks. Hopefully Bill 54 will pass, and hopefully it's what's needed at this time in the province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the bill.

Dr. Taft: On the bill, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak in favour of the bill. I am glad that the initial legislation had a mandatory review process built into it, and I'm glad, as I understand it, that that's going to continue because the issues around protection of privacy are evolving so quickly as technology itself evolves so quickly. I think all of us probably have stories on both sides of this issue, where on one side freedom of information and protection of privacy laws have probably got in the way of common sense, where you can't share or obtain information that really is entirely innocent, and on the other hand we've certainly read of cases where people's personal information has been abused. So this is a piece of legislation that's trying its best to navigate that difficult path to balance the interests of all sides as technology sometimes shoots ahead in unanticipated ways.

I notice in this bill that the Privacy Commissioner for Alberta has generally supported it although he has expressed some concerns, and I think it's worth reading that right into the record here. I'm quoting from a news release of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta dated October 28, 2009. It quotes the commissioner himself, Frank Work, saying:

I am extremely disappointed that a recommendation to bring all not-for-profit organizations fully under the scope of PIPA is no longer going forward. All this does is create confusion about which non-profits are in and which are out.

His job is to advocate for protection of privacy, but there is more than one side to that issue, and given that the commissioner otherwise supports the legislation, I do take some reassurance from that. So, Mr. Speaker, I think we should as an Assembly move this piece of legislation forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes for comments and questions.

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a second time]

Bill 56 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 3: Ms Evans]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that because it was just this past week when we talked about the AIMCo amendment relative to the removal of the Deputy Minister of Finance and Enterprise from the board of Alberta Investment Management Corporation, it's likely not necessary to go into any further debate or discussion on it. I think that we're very satisfied that the talented staff at AIMCo are beyond transition now and functioning as a fully arm's-length organization. So I would propose to adjourn debate on second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you already adjourned once before, so we will continue the debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate the time to get to discuss Bill 56, the amendment to the AIMCo Act. I received in my mailbox over at the Annex earlier this morning the annual report, a separate annual report, from AIMCo, and I have to admit to the caucus members that I was guilty of reading it during our caucus meeting this morning, and the House leader didn't catch me. I was having a close look at that, and I didn't, unfortunately, finish reading it. I regret not having it here this afternoon.

4:00

When we look at this bill, which removes the requirement that the deputy minister of finance be a board member of AIMCo, I'm not sold on the idea entirely that we should remove the gentleman, Mr. Wiles, at this time. He was before us at Public Accounts the other day. I was sitting there, thinking about this proposal to remove the deputy minister from all activities at AIMCo, and I thought that maybe now is not the time. It may be appropriate at some time in the future to do this, but at this time I really think we need to have a representative from Alberta finance directly on the board.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General this fall had a number of issues that he outlined about AIMCo and how it works since it's been set up. Certainly, one of the recommendations that he suggested was that there be more co-ordination between Alberta finance and, of course, the management at AIMCo. That is one reason and one reason only why we should perhaps reconsider and leave the deputy minister, at least for a period of time, not on guard but certainly representing the interests of the government directly.

If you look at other portions of the Auditor General's report, he has a lot to say about AIMCo and some of the directions that they have made. Now, we do know that AIMCo was established on January 1, 2008, and that, of course, it was to provide investment management services to various Alberta public-sector pension, endowment, and special-purpose funds through a corporate structure. We do know that prior to that investments were managed by the department of finance. AIMCo's pool of investments is close to \$70 billion. The Auditor audits AIMCo's internal controls.

Now, the Auditor points out many interesting things besides what I referred to earlier; that is, how we should have more of a co-ordinated effort between Alberta finance and AIMCo. But there are other recommendations as well that we should look at. One of them, it's interesting to note, is that AIMCo should "improve its processes and internal controls to achieve completeness, accuracy and increased efficiency in financial reporting." Well, if we left the deputy minister in an active role, I think we could have greater assurance that this would be done.

There were some errors not corrected by AIMCo, and I think we need to point this out, Mr. Speaker. This is on page 236 of the Auditor General's report.

While reviewing the financial statements of the Heritage Fund's

third quarter, which ended December 31, 2008, [the audit] found that adjustments in four equity pools and the timberland investment pool had not been recorded in the investments general ledger for more than a year. These unrecorded adjustments were the result of incorrect income allocation, accrual of derivative income, discontinuance of hedge accounting and accumulated miscellaneous errors.

The Auditor is pointing this out.

It's like you would have one of your children, Mr. Speaker, and you would give them an allowance, and you would give them a bigger allowance as they get older. That's fine, but you have to have some control on it.

This is a big step for this province to put all the money into one basket, give one group of individuals authority to invest it on our behalf and hope that things work out. I'm confident that they will work out in the future, but let's do it a step at a time. Let's leave the deputy minister exactly where he belongs for the next couple of years, on the board keeping an eye on things. Regardless of what we do and what we say and hear, there are a lot of issues that are beyond the control of this Assembly. There are market forces. There are ups and downs in the market, of course, that no one – no one – has any influence on nor control of. But in order to keep our eye on things for the next couple of years, I would urge the deputy minister of finance and the Assembly to reconsider and just have that individual in a watchdog position just in case.

We do know, unfortunately, that other fine recommendations of the Auditor General have been in some cases totally ignored by this government. I'm not suggesting here for a minute that none of these recommendations would be ignored, but I can't say for sure. I'm just uncomfortable with the whole idea of giving so much scope, so much range, to the AIMCo board so quickly. I think that is a natural check and balance by the government. We'll see. AIMCo certainly has received a baptism of fire because of financial conditions in the markets. I'm confident that things will recover.

I would also point out that other jurisdictions have board members that represent certain interests. They appoint board members from certain parties. I would like to know – and, hopefully, we can get this answered during the course of debate – will anyone on the board of directors be representing the local authorities pension plan? There are other public-sector pension plans that are involved. Will they have any direct representation or say in the board? Of course, many individuals across this province that are looking forward to a local authorities pension plan when they retire would have an interest in this. They certainly would have more than a passing interest in the investment patterns of this organization. What kind of consideration is going forward to place certain individuals on the board representing the interests in these pools of money?

Also, if I could ask at this time if there will be any representatives from the general public on the board. I looked at the board . . .

Ms Evans: That's what there are. That's all the rest of them. They're all from the public.

4:10

Mr. MacDonald: They're all from the public. So which individual – and I should know, but I don't have that annual report with me – on that board represents the interests of the LAPP, the local authorities pension plan, now? Which individual represents the interests of the other pension pools? I don't believe that's how it's set up at the moment. Other jurisdictions have a few checks and balances on that because people have interests in this. If that could be clarified, I would be grateful. We'll see how this works out, Mr. Speaker, but certainly those are some of the comments that I would make.

Before I conclude, I would also like to remind the House that in the hon. minister's annual report is the breakdown of exactly how

the deferred incentive pay will work for the senior executives of AIMCo. It was quite interesting. We asked for more details. We're going to look forward to receiving them from the officials of the department through the clerk of Public Accounts to all the members. For instance, the senior executive, the CEO, I believe, was to receive – and it's all deferred payments – half a million dollars from last year. These amounts are determined by two quite complicated formulas that are based on investment strategy, and these, of course, are listed as a liability in the finance department's annual report, as I recall. There were members of the management team and key select senior managers I think is how it was phrased in the annual report. I would like to know how much money eventually would accumulate in this deferred system, that is to be paid to these individuals.

I would like to make that as my final point, that that is one of the reasons why we need to keep our eye on this organization as its governance structure develops further from its implementation last year.

I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 56 at this time. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Dallas in the chair]

The Acting Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 46, Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act. I think this is the third time I'm seeing this baby come around. It first came up in connection with the Health Information Act review. It was one of the considerations that we were making. I thought that there'd been a private member's bill that had been introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. I really, really hated that amendment coming forward under the Health Information Act. I think that it should have come forward as we now have it.

I'm willing to support a stand-alone bill that talks about reporting of gunshot and stab wounds. This is what we should have done from the get-go. If the HIA didn't actually get changed as a result of the member's bill – and, you know, maybe it died on the Order Paper; I just can't remember. But this is the appropriate way to do this, and this is the way they've done it in other provinces.

There are a number of arguments for and against it, but the ones that I'm paying attention to are what you're trying to balance here: the safety of society, the safety of the medical professionals that are dealing with someone, balanced against a reasonable protection of personal health information. What was happening before, putting it in the Health Information Act, which was requiring health professionals to basically make a subjective and unsubstantiated guess at something and basically tattle on a patient because they may or may not have received this wound in a particular way, was really inappropriate. I think that since then we've now discovered that it's a very faulty way of being able to deal with this issue. This is the proper way to deal with this issue.

As always with an act, you've got all the definitions up front.

Then you've got what it doesn't apply to, which clearly is anything that's self-inflicted or unintentional. The attempt there is to shield people who may be under mental duress or mental illness to try to protect them from sort of undue scrutiny given the situation. Then it goes on to the mandatory disclosure, that emergency medical personnel or the facility have to disclose to the local police service the person's name; what it is, a gunshot or a stab wound; the location of the health care facility; if it was reported by an ambulance driver, for example, where the location was that they attended the individual. Then, of course, the always included and never appropriate catch-all phrase: other information that may be required by the regs. Then the disclosure can be made orally and some other sort of practical parts of this.

I think this works better. I mean, to someone that wasn't used to the intricacies of this, having somebody do this kind of disclosure under a stand-alone act versus under the Health Information Act: who cares? It's about reporting somebody that's got a gunshot or a stab wound. But the way it's done, I think, is very important.

4:20

Now, one of the things we always need to be careful of: have we produced legislation that's Charter proof? Of course, whenever you're talking about disclosing information about someone or reporting them to the authorities in any way, have you made it Charter proof? I think what comes into play here are sections 7 and 8. Section 8 is the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure and the reasonable expectation of privacy. I think that even if mandatory gunshot reporting legislation did permit unreasonable seizure of health information, the legislation could be justified under section 1 of the Charter. I mean, we're just trying to be common sense here. This is not about getting incredibly fancy about anything. You know, if somebody comes into a medical establishment and they have an injury that's clearly as a result of a crime or an accident, both of those things come into play here, and that's appropriate. That needs to be reported to the authorities, and nobody should be surprised about this.

Actually, anybody that watches any kind of American crime television will be very familiar with this one because this kind of stuff is in place in a number of other jurisdictions. Actually, in Canada my memory is that it was – yeah; here we go. Four other provinces – Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Nova Scotia – all have this kind of legislation in place. So we're not the first, but we're not the last on this one.

The compelling arguments for this are that it should increase the security for the personnel within and without the hospital, the medical facility. It should allow police to move quickly enough to preserve any kind of evidence that's available. You know, they're not going to interfere with medical personnel attending to someone, clearly, and you can lose evidence that way but as soon as possible to be able to get access to the individuals. That's part of what's considered here, and I think it is considered a reasonable restriction on personal freedom and disclosure of personal information.

With the Oakes test, which is commonly used to justify a Charter breach, it has to be sufficiently important to override the right. Well, I think there are a number of arguments for that one around the safety of the medical personnel and whoever else was out there because there could be someone else that wasn't found at the same time that could be at the other end of that exchange, for example. And the means chosen to achieve the objective must be proportional to both the objectives and the law. All this is saying is that they have to report it or disclose it, but beyond that, it doesn't say anything else.

I'm usually pretty vigilant about the Charter of Rights and health

information disclosures, but to me this seems to be reasonable. I think we have enough expectations on our health personnel that we have to be giving them clarity. They don't like being in the middle of something, where they're not sure what they're supposed to be doing. So nice, clean legislation is a help to them. It allows them to know when to do their job, what exactly is expected of them. It's pretty clear in here.

I hope that the regulations don't get unnecessarily complicated and complex because, again, that makes it difficult for them to figure that stuff out. Even just all the information that you're carrying around in your head. I mean, there are days, I swear, if I have to understand one more thing or there's one more bill tabled in this House, I'll forget how to walk. I'm very sympathetic to medical personnel who are dealing with all kinds of procedures and treatments and other patients that are on the particular ward, and then they've got to remember a whole list of rules about how they're going to have to disclose something. So as simple and straightforward and uncomplicated as possible while protecting somebody and being reasonable about somebody's health information and their Charter rights.

I'm very willing to support this bill. I think this is far in preference to what was done before, if it was done, and I'm happy to support Bill 46 in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 46 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 46.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Dallas in the chair]

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 46.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 31

Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move Bill 31, the Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, for third reading.

The Acting Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak, or shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the hour I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on November 16.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Monday, November 16, at 1:30 p.m.]

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Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to November 05, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c11]

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c12]

- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c13]
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c9]
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407-08 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cS-23.5]
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1408-09 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c22]
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c31]
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c27]
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409-11 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 cC-2.5]
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]

- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1411 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 1, 2009; SA 2009 c30]
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c14]
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cL-2.5]
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1265 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329 (May 26 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c18]
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329-30 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1527-28 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2010; SA 2009 c29]
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c17]

- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1447-49 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force September 1, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c32]
- 26* Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1265-68 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1330-31 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1412-13 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c36]
- 27* Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve.), 1229-40 (May 25 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1507-10 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.7]
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246-49 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1413 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c20]
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1268-69 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1358-60 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c21]
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1269-73 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1360-63 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528-30 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c35]
- 31* Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1273-75 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1711-13 (Nov. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1773-74 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1275-80 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365 (May 27 eve.), 1449-55 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.5]
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1526-27 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 cF-15.1]

- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1384-87 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2009 cD-17.5]
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1280-81 (May 26 aft.), 1344-45 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524-25 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c24]
- 36* Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1371-84 (May 27 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1503-07 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-26.8]
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c15]
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c34]
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406-07 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c33]
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c16]
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1345-50 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387-90 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525-26 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cP-29.1]
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1350-58 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1455-60 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c23]

- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365-71 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1497-99 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c28]
- 44* Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1283-84, 1294-1329 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1460-80 (Jun. 1 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c26]
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1240-46 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1510 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1523 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c19]
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1706-07 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1708-10 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1716-17 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1772-73 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c8]
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1706 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1710-11 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1735-42 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
- 49 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1500-01 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1707-08 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1713-16 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1733-35 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
- 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Knight)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1501-02 (Jun. 2 aft., adjourned)
- 51 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1700 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1770 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
- 52* Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health), (May 25 aft., reported to Assembly)
Committee of the Whole -- 1284-94 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1526 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c25]
- 53 Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1742-46 (Nov. 4 aft., adjourned)

- 54 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 1569 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1746-51 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1770-71 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
- 55 Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1751 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1765-70 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
- 56 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1703 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1771-72 (Nov. 5 aft., adjourned)
- 57 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1703 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1703-04 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 59 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Sherman)**
First Reading -- 1666 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1704-05 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009 (Quest)**
First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1705 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009 (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 1666 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1705-06 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)
- 203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1209-15 (May 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c10]
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1215-22 (May 25 aft.), 1427-33 (Jun. 1 aft., passed on division)
- 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1433-38 (Jun. 1 aft.), 1547-55 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
- 208 Life Leases Act (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 1208 (May 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1555-59 (Oct. 26 aft., adjourned)

209 Children's Services Review Committee Act (Chase)

First Reading -- 1610 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)

Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c37]

Pr2* Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1530-31 (Jun. 3 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c38]

Pr3* Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c39]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday, November 16, 2009

Issue 57

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 16, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome back.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. We give further thanks for the gifts of culture and heritage which we share. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Today we'll be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Paul Lorieau, and I would invite all here to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, I'd like to draw your attention to a new face at the table in front of me. Stephanie LeBlanc joined the Legislative Assembly Office in August of 2008 in the position of legal research officer. She was born and raised in Regina, Saskatchewan, and received her law degree with great distinction from the University of Saskatchewan in 2006. In addition to her role in providing legal research to committees, she will now also be assisting Parliamentary Counsel at the table as part of our commitment to training and development. I'd ask all members to note Ms LeBlanc and welcome her to this Assembly.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly His Excellency Margers Krams, the ambassador of the Republic of Latvia. Alberta has a long-standing tradition of co-operation and collaboration with countries around the world, including those throughout the European Union, of which Latvia is a member. I had the pleasure of hosting the ambassador at a luncheon at Government House earlier today. He joins us in the Legislature this afternoon to observe our debate. I ask the ambassador to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 76

enthusiastic and inquisitive grade 6 students from the George P. Nicholson elementary school, more affectionately known as GPN school, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. I've had the privilege of joining them for reading week earlier in October. I can tell you that they're indeed an exceptional group of students, full of very good questions when I was out to the school. They are accompanied today by their teachers, Ms Jan Antoniuk, Mrs. Maxine Sprague, Mrs. Dawn Schmitz, and education assistant Mrs. Gail Stannard along with parent helpers Mrs. Bernie Lassu, Mrs. Lisa Ladd, Mrs. Julie Brooks, Mrs. Lina Kebbi, and Mrs. Verle McConkey. They're seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, and I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 27 students from my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods, St. Elizabeth elementary school. The group is led by their teacher, Mrs. Sherri Zimmermann, and language interpreter Miss Hilda Schroeder. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. My first is a group from Malmo elementary school, who I met with and spoke to before our session today and who I hope to speak with again at greater length in their classroom. There are 23 visitors, very bright students, and they are accompanied by a teacher and two parent helpers. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, but wherever they are, I'd ask them to rise and to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is of three concerned citizens from Parkland county and that area. They're here to observe question period and the tabling of their petition regarding the construction of a new care centre in Stony Plain that is very badly needed. Later on we'll be tabling the first of 1,500 names on that petition today. I'd ask them to rise as I read their names. One is Jo Szady, who is the chair of the resident family council of the Good Samaritan care centre. The second is Zig Szady, who helped collect the names for the petition. I must say that these two people are also very active in environmental and energy efficiency issues. The third is Iolanda Duke, who is the secretary of the resident family council of the Good Samaritan care centre. You're welcome. Please give them a warm reception.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development staff from the Agricultural Products Marketing Council. They're here today as part of their public service orientation tour. Dave Burdek, Maryann Urbanowski, Tunde Vari, Mike Pearson, and Rachid El Hafid are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to now rise and receive the usual warm reception of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly very special guests from my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. They are all sitting in the public gallery. They are Mr. Stan Fisher, president and CEO, Paul Teterenko, Wendy King, Kay Willekes, Lucas Gelink, Christine Teterenko, and Sharon Cohen. These visitors are from St. Michael's Extended Care Centre Society. I will be speaking more about the group in my member's statement later on. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

1:40

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly, seated in the members' gallery, two bright students who I met in the past year. One is Janet LeBlanc. I had the honour of meeting Janet during a French course we took at the Faculty of Extension. The other one is her daughter Rémi LeBlanc. I had the pleasure of meeting Rémi in the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark at the St. Francis Xavier high school awards ceremony. Unfortunately, her name wasn't called. I said: why don't you come down to the Legislature, meet my friends, and we'll introduce you as a Rutherford scholarship winner in the Legislative Assembly? She also happens to be a political science student, and we'll be seeing more of her in the future. To Rémi, I'd like to congratulate her on all of her academic achievements and wish her the best for the future. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

National Philanthropy Day

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, November 16, we celebrate National Philanthropy Day. Whether it's volunteering for a local nonprofit organization or donating money to a charity or helping someone in need, Albertans of all ages, all walks of life, and throughout our province work to better the lives of others every day. It is with this attitude and the belief in goodwill that we recognize National Philanthropy Day.

Philanthropists come in many forms, from a neighbour or friend who gives up their weekends to volunteer at a homeless shelter to the child selling summer lemonade to support a local cause, the musician who lends his or her talents for a benefit concert, the person who donates \$20 or \$20 million. Each of these people may be doing different things, but they are all working towards the same goal.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helps support their community and especially those that are most vulnerable. In this time of economic uncertainty supporting charities and the work they do is more important than ever. It is at such times that we act on those values that have built this province, looking out for one another and helping those in need and the least fortunate.

Albertans are some of the most generous people anywhere, donating \$1.4 billion in 2007 alone. Our province also has one of the highest charitable tax credits in Canada, meaning that there's a benefit to donating more to your favourite charity or not-for-profit organization. Including the federal tax credit, Albertans receive a 50

per cent nonrefundable tax credit for every dollar donated over the \$200 threshold. Mr. Speaker, that program is endorsed by none other than our Auditor General. The enhanced charitable tax credit will help our dollars work even harder to support these organizations. Just remember: donate often and keep your receipts. It will make a difference for you at tax time, and it helps to build strong and healthy communities.

Mr. Speaker, as we recognize National Philanthropy Day, let us all take a moment and ask ourselves one question: what can we do to make our neighbourhood, our community, our city, and our province a better place?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I join the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit in thanking those citizens who donate their time, talents, and money to our charities and nonprofits. The generosity of these people deserves celebration. I feel blessed to have known some wonderful philanthropists.

That being said, I believe that we must also recognize the challenges facing Alberta's nonprofit sector. As baby boomers age, they are volunteering less, and so far younger generations have not yet stepped up in great enough numbers to take their place.

The sector is also being challenged by this administration's constant failure to provide stable public funding. Our charities and nonprofits are consistently being asked to do more with less. With this administration cutting millions from core services, the problem can only be expected to get worse.

One of the primary responsibilities of government is to provide protection and leadership in those areas where private enterprise and charitable institutions cannot. Perhaps they could look to the Muttart Foundation for inspiration and ideas. This Edmonton-based philanthropic foundation does amazing work, dispensing funds to many causes, including NGO management development. One of their programs provides funding for not-for-profit managers to take a one-year educational sabbatical, a program that has kept many experienced, talented managers here in Alberta working in a vital sector.

Albertans are remarkably generous, but our philanthropy should not be mistaken as an endorsement for another round of massive cuts to the public sector. Government has a role to play, and it's time for this administration to stop off-loading their responsibilities to a sector that's already being pushed to the limit.

In recognition of that and on behalf of my colleagues in the Official Opposition I would like to thank again all those who donate time and money to make our society a better place. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I trust you're requesting an opportunity for one of your members to participate in this?

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The other one.

The Speaker: That will require unanimous consent of the Assembly, so I'll ask the question: is the Assembly prepared to hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona?

[Unanimous consent denied]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

St. Michael's Extended Care Centre Society

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that St. Michael's Extended Care Centre Society operates in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. St. Michael's was created in 1974 to fill a need for care for people from Ukrainian and other Slavic backgrounds in the city of Edmonton. As the health sector has changed over time, St. Michael's has redeveloped and adapted to fill these needs. St. Michael's has an excellent reputation. They are known for the wonderful, quality care they provide to their residents.

St. Michael's is probably best known for Baba's Own perogies, which you can purchase from their main office or some stores around Edmonton. I must say that they are the best perogies I have ever had, and I'm sure many members, including yourself, Mr. Speaker, and the hon. Premier himself, would agree with me.

St. Michael's is currently running their long-term care capital campaign. The centre is almost 30 years old, and many renovations need to be made to upgrade it to current standards. This campaign is called There's a Little Angel in Each of Us. They had a fundraising dinner, called the Blue Angel Dinner, which I was very pleased to attend last Thursday with you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to support St. Michael's in this and all of their other fundraising efforts.

I would like to thank the capital campaign cabinet members for their hard work on this project and all of the staff at St. Michael's for making it a great place and a true gem in our community. May God bless all those involved with this wonderful organization.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All members will be glad to know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and I attended an event for the St. Michael's extended care 25th anniversary celebration, and true to form, when I asked the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning what his three favourite foods were, he quickly responded: perogies, cabbage rolls, and nalysnyky. He got a hundred per cent for the response.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

International Education Week

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today marks Alberta's sixth year of participation in Canada's celebration of International Education Week from November 16 to 20. This year's theme is Promoting Global Citizenship. This is a wonderful way for Alberta's education system to promote the benefits of cross-cultural understanding in today's rapidly changing world. International education activities expose teachers and students to social and cultural differences, new educational methods, and diverse global perspectives. These activities include student and teacher exchanges, school partnerships, visiting teacher programs, foreign language consultants, and international student programs.

Mr. Speaker, 2009 marks the 30th anniversary that Alberta Education has been co-ordinating teacher exchanges in the province. Today the Alberta teacher exchange program has partners in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, and Switzerland. For several years now many Alberta teachers have taken on the challenge of leaving their homes and classrooms to live and teach in communities right across the world. Last year there were a total of 19 teachers that participated in full-year exchanges to Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., and Switzerland. Nine more participated in short-term exchanges to Denmark and to Germany. Not only have these teachers and their families changed and grown from their experiences. So, too, have the members of the communities they visited.

I would like to congratulate past and present participants alike, who recognize the value of international education in our schools, Mr. Speaker, and who have made this program such a wonderful success. What a wonderful opportunity to share Alberta with the international community and promote global citizenship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier publicly admitted that there were mistakes in the H1N1 rollout this past month. To the Premier: will the Premier explain what mistakes were made?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the comment last week with respect to the rollout of H1N1 flu vaccination said that, yes, that first week we could have accommodated people in buildings so that they didn't have to wait outside. Although it wasn't that cold, it certainly could have been a lot colder at this time of the year. We've learned from the situation. I called a meeting last Monday with Alberta Emergency Management, with Health Services, the minister of health, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and the Solicitor General and put a plan into place. That plan is working very effectively because we don't have any waiting lists whatsoever.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: was it the Premier's decision or the health minister's decision to send an ambiguous message about who qualified for the vaccine in the first week?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, all advice on medical matters comes from the medical officer of health. I have great faith in and support the medical officer of health. He's doing a good job in spite of the circumstances in terms of interruption of supply of vaccine. I have tremendous faith in his advice. That's the advice the minister of health follows, and that's how the policy is set.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are many documents relating to pandemic planning in the province that outline what the priority groups for vaccination would be in the event of a pandemic, and there are the four categories we've heard so much about. Will the Premier explain why plans that were laid out years ago were thrown out the window? Was this a political decision or a medical decision?

Mr. Stelmach: Once again, a medical decision.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Hospital Admissions

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The CEO of Alberta Health Services has stated that now is when we will see the largest strain on the acute-care system and intensive care beds. Today there are a total of 830 Albertans who have been hospitalized for H1N1 this year. Again to the Premier: what proportion of the 6,800 acute-care beds in Alberta are being occupied today by H1N1 patients who were high risk and didn't receive their vaccine?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information in front of my fingertips. I don't follow every day's admissions into the hospitals throughout Alberta, but we can certainly get some more information on it. If it's relevant, we'll provide that information to the House.

Dr. Swann: Well, it's clearly relevant, Mr. Speaker, the number of people who should have had the vaccine and didn't and therefore ended up in hospital with H1N1. Will the Premier present that information, table it in the House?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, let's put this into perspective. Just a number of months ago Canadian public health officials were unable to identify the virus. They had to identify the virus. They had to start production of the vaccine and distribute that vaccine across Canada. From a Canadian point of view a lot of effort was put into ensuring that there was enough vaccine available for the very remote communities in northern Canada, so that was done.

We, of course, heard from the minister, heard from the medical officer of health in terms of what vaccine would be available, and the plans were built on that availability. That availability was interrupted without any warning to the federal government or to any of the provincial ministers, and as a result we had to change our plan.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For months we have been asking the Premier to ensure that our hospitals are properly prepared for H1N1 patients, yet we've received no evidence that this has happened. Will the Premier table the intensive care unit surge capacity plan, which is still not available, and show Albertans that we really are prepared to cope with the extra demands in intensive care units in this province?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health has all the detail.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I had a lengthy discussion with the CEO of Alberta Health Services today. As we stand here on the 16th of November, our health system is coping extremely well. There are some areas where at times pressure has been applied, but there is a contingency plan in place. As I said at the outset, the system is coping extremely well and not out of the ordinary for the flu season.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta don't like this government's attempt to cut them out of the process of determining whether the multibillion-dollar high-voltage transmission lines that it's about to foist upon us and make us pay for are needed. The government is already letting ATCO and AltaLink move ahead with the planning of the lines between Edmonton and Calgary before Bill 50 has even been debated in this House. Then when the PC Association was setting up its conference the weekend before last, it took sponsorship money from AltaLink. To the Premier. This bill is so obviously contentious. It so obviously matters to Albertans. Doesn't he see that this looks as though AltaLink gets access to government in exchange for cash?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the legislation will be before the House, I believe, tomorrow for second reading, and there'll be opportunity for active debate. But as I said before, there's a critical need for new transmission infrastructure in the province of Alberta. We will not be able to achieve all of our economic goals if we don't have new infrastructure in place, and that's the purpose of the bill.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's why they call it question period, not answer period.

Given that AltaLink has already been picked by the government to build one of the lines at the heart of the controversy over Bill 50, given that the line in question will cost \$1.5 billion or more, and given that the electricity users of Alberta are going to get stuck with the bill for that, how can this Premier assure Albertans that his government's transmission policy isn't being impacted by these corporate sponsorship donations?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, over 30 public meetings were held across the province. Hundreds of people came forward to deliver evidence based on the need for new transmission. We are working on that. We want to of course do everything possible to tie all of the green energy sources that we have available to us, ensure that we are competitive in terms of our electricity rates, and move badly needed electricity from one end of the province to another. That is critical to Alberta's economic goals.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, earlier this session I asked the Premier which lobbyists he and the other members of cabinet were meeting with behind closed doors on Bill 50. I'm still waiting for that information. The people of Alberta and this House are still waiting for that information. Albertans, who are going to be paying for these lines for the next 40 years, have a right to know what the companies that'll profit from them are saying to cabinet. To the Premier: when can Albertans expect to find out who's been trying to influence this government on Bill 50, or are you just waiting until after the debate is all over?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the opposition supported this government's position on legislation that was passed in this House – of course, that's the lobbyist registry – that provides the transparency and openness that this government is all about. He can go to the registry and get that information any time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Strathcona.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend the Premier responded to falling support among Albertans and even his own party by promising to correct mistakes his government has been making. Perhaps the most serious mistake has been this government's handling of changes to the health care system. Massive changes to health care delivery without a mandate, without a plan, and without public consultation have Albertans angry from one corner of the province to the other. My question is to the Premier. Will you direct the Minister of Health and Wellness to stop the overhaul of the health care system until a comprehensive plan is placed before Albertans and public input is sought?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister is doing all of the above that the hon. member mentioned. He does have a committee in place to look at whether there are legislative changes that are necessary in the future. He has also consulted with Albertans through various organizations. But at the end of the day we've seen the cost of health care delivery in this province increase over 180 per cent in the last 10 years. All Albertans know it's not sustainable, and all I'm asking is for all Albertans to come together, especially our health care professionals in this province, to work on a plan together so that we can sustain it for the next generation because it is our duty.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have neither been informed nor consulted. The Premier said that change is coming, but he won't say what it is or when it will be. That's not good enough. Albertans are increasingly skeptical about this Premier's promises. Will the Premier tell his health minister to lay off until Albertans are both informed and consulted about government health care plans? Yes or no?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, well, at least he's not asking for his resignation today. He's just asking to lay off, I guess. [interjections] Oh, that's what he means: lay off now. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to consult with Albertans. Recently having travelled to a number of communities in Alberta, we've heard a lot from medical/ health care professionals – doctors, nurses, other allied health care professionals – that are working together in communities to see how they can improve access, improve quality of care, keep costs reasonable but at the same time, again, ensure that we have this really good system, that all Albertans enjoy, for the next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier suggested that it's not his policies but his communication that's flawed. Albertans are very unhappy with the Premier's health care policy. The best spin doctors in the world won't change that. You can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig. My question is to the Premier. Will you change direction on health care as Albertans demand, or is your promise of change just more spin?

Mr. Stelmach: I'll take your direction, Mr. Speaker. We'll keep consulting with Albertans. This is actually a very good discussion that we're having because many people are coming forward and coming forward with good ideas on how we can change the way we deliver health services for the positive, how we can also deliver more seniors' accommodation in the province of Alberta. That is one part of our population that has gone through some difficulty this last number of months with the downturn in the economy, losing some of their savings, and, of course, not getting very much in the bank in terms of what they have saved. We're all working together, and I know that Albertans will come together and find a resolution to some of the challenges we're facing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month the mass H1N1 immunization clinics were temporarily suspended due to long lineups at clinics and a short supply of the vaccine. Since then the province has rolled out a more targeted campaign for priority groups

eligible to get the vaccine. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: now that everyone deemed a top priority for immunization is able to get it, what is the plan for making the vaccine available to the general public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our chief medical officer of health later this afternoon will be outlining plans for the remainder of this week, but in a nutshell we are at the point now where 1 in every 6 Albertans has been vaccinated, and that is a very significant achievement. We will be, starting I believe tomorrow, offering vaccine to seniors in this province who are over the age of 75 and to their partner or spouse. Then, in addition to that, we'll be later in the week rolling it out to additional seniors, and those details will be provided this afternoon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the program does open up to the general public, will people continue to have to go to these mass clinics, or will there be other options available to them for getting this vaccine?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's something we're going to continue to monitor as the week wears on, but we believe that by the end of this week we will be in a position where we can probably start to distribute the vaccine across the province to physicians, to pharmacists, and to other providers. It has been a careful calculation of ensuring that we have the appropriate amount of vaccine, so as we move through the next four or five days and we see the take-up with the general population, it will give us a better sense of whether we'll be able the following week to distribute on a broader basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to ensure that supply issues don't create another scenario in which people are going to get the vaccine, only to be turned away at the door?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's one of the reasons why we plan to roll it out in a staged way yet even this week. The last thing we want to see is seniors standing in line behind others who may be able to cope better than our seniors population. Starting with those who are over 75 and their spouses or partners I think will work well, but again we want to manage it in a way to make sure that we don't get into the situation that we had earlier in the week. All indications of the past week are that the panic has subsided, but Albertans are still aware that the vaccine is necessary.

I just want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank all of those who have been involved in this program over the past three weeks through the health care system. As I say, a tremendous achievement, probably the best on a per capita basis anywhere in Canada, when at least half a million people in this province now are vaccinated.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Pastoral Care in Health Facilities

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health and Wellness and the CEO of Alberta Health Services have shown that

they're not concerned with real people but only with what can be measured and put on a chart or a graph. Caring, empathy, comfort, and dignity are neglected. To the minister of health: can the minister explain why pastoral care is being cut across this province?*

Mr. Liepert: Well, I asked that same question of the CEO of Alberta Health Services, and he assures me – because I had someone, when I was in Lacombe recently, ask that same question. I've been given the assurance that that is not happening. I'd be happy to inquire further as a result of the member's question, and if there's something that's different, I'll answer the House later in the week.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'll look forward to that answer.

A nationally and internationally recognized and respected pastoral care clergyman who devoted 23 years of his life at the Royal Alex hospital was terminated and escorted out of the hospital by security guards like a common criminal. Mr. Minister, what on earth is going on in this province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, one of the things I have learned in the short time in this House, Mr. Speaker, is not to take very much of the preamble of the opposition's questions as fact, so I will inquire into that and report back along with my earlier commitment.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am more than convinced that the minister will find that, in fact, that is a fact.

Will the minister agree that the priceless value return from the people who do chaplaincy work is worth the meagre amount that they take out of the health care budget?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, I'm not familiar with what part of the health care budget we would be talking about. I will endeavour to get the answer to the member, as I promised earlier in question period, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

International Trade

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Way Forward is Alberta's four-point economic recovery plan, and one of the points in the plan is ensuring that Alberta's energy sector and other industries are globally competitive and continue to attract investment. This point is especially important to my constituency in the Alberta Industrial Heartland. My first question is to the new and able Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister tell us how his ministry is helping to ensure Alberta's industry remains internationally profiled and competitive in the midst of this global recession?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, and thank you, hon. member. My first question. I'm honoured that I take my first question from such an honourable person, so thank you very much.

I'd have to say that, yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, my ministry is focused on maintaining a strong presence on the world stage even through these tough economic times. We will continue to defend our export markets. We do have numerous trade missions as well throughout the globe, and we will continue to do so in order to build

our opportunity for this province. We also have nine international offices. I won't name them all, but I will tell you that through these offices we will continue to promote Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year the Alberta Industrial Heartland associations and local municipalities do a great job to send a trade mission to Texas to encourage investment in this growing region of Alberta. They are planning their next one for March of 2010. To the same minister: what is his government doing to help this important group of community and business leaders build stronger relationships with our neighbours to the south and help to attract new business and value-add to the Industrial Heartland?

Mr. Webber: Oh, boy, that was a long question, Mr. Speaker, and I will try to answer everything that was asked. Our offices do work in DC with respect to providing essential services to help Alberta companies compete south of the border, including Texas, as the hon. member alluded to. My department does not, though, provide funding to these organizations to cover their costs. We do, however, have department staff that can promote and provide advice and facilitate meetings with senior officials across the United States, not only in Texas. We do have a very strong relationship with governments and businesses in Texas. In fact, our Premier just recently went on a trade mission himself down to Texas. I would encourage any Alberta business or community member to contact my department if they are looking for information on trade missions.

Thank you.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: in our current economic situation are we getting good results from our investment in these international offices, and does it make sense to continue to invest in these international offices?

Mr. Webber: That was a great question as well, Mr. Speaker. During these tough economic times the specialized knowledge of local markets and the advocacy efforts of our international offices are critical. As I mentioned, we do have nine international offices in trade.

An Hon. Member: Where are they all?

Mr. Webber: Please, please. I can't even hear myself think in this room. It's getting so busy here. Thank you very much. I've been trying to answer questions.

Anyway, we are facilitating a number of networking opportunities throughout the world. We have 200 trade shows, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Unfortunately, hon. minister, doing this doesn't give you more time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Homeless People

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After questions in this House about vaccine clinics for the homeless in the inner city a flurry of phone calls erupted from the minister's office, and on

*See page 1815, left column, paragraph 10

October 30 a clinic opened at the Hope Mission and was then cancelled. Other clinics for the Boyle McCauley health centre, Operation Friendship, and Boyle Street Community Services centre never opened. The agencies who serve the inner-city population were surprised they were not provided with vaccine to distribute as part of last week's expansion to include vulnerable people. To the minister of health: what can the minister tell these agencies about timelines now?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I don't want to sound like someone who's going to take another question under advisement, but I have to. It is my understanding, in consultation with the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, that the vaccine had been provided to the homeless. Now, I don't have where exactly it was provided to the homeless, but I will check into it and get an answer by tomorrow for the member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Yes, if the minister can confirm that government will release vaccine supplies to these agencies to administer for the inner-city population of vulnerable people, which, of course, includes the homeless and those who are immune compromised, we would appreciate it.

Mr. Liepert: I can give the member that assurance.

I'm going to ask the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs to supplement the answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. I'm pleased to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that at Hope Mission we did vaccinate 289 people. With the change in the priority plan that has occurred most recently, the homeless are very much in the high-priority area. I can also assure this member that the Boyle health centre will be receiving the vaccine very shortly, I think tomorrow or the next day, and they will be out vaccinating more of the homeless.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the Edmonton Police Service requested special treatment for its front-line officers and was turned down the same day that a special clinic was held for friends, family, and team members of a hockey club, when will the minister release the ethical guidelines that established the priority ranking for vulnerable people and allowed for these two groups to be treated in the order that they were?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've dealt with the issue in Calgary relative to what the member raises. I am pleased to say that effective today any of the first responders – firefighters, police – can get vaccinated. They are in that group. They can go to a mass clinic any time today and going forward. In addition to that, we will be making arrangements today with the various municipalities around the province to provide the vaccine. In most cases the municipalities are wanting to do the vaccination themselves. If they choose to do it that way, we will provide them the vaccine, and those arrangements are being made today by Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Sour Gas Well Licensing

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents work within the sour gas industry and have expressed concerns regarding the recent ERCB suspensions on issuing sour gas licences. My questions are all to the Minister of Energy. Can you please elaborate on why the ERCB suspended the licensing in the first place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'll preface my comment and answer here with the statement that the province of Alberta under the direction of our regulator, the ERCB, for about 60 years has had a very, very solid record with respect to developing these resources in the province.

What had happened, Mr. Speaker, was that there was an inconsistency in the area description of emergency preparedness zones and a protective action zone. The courts rightly noticed the discrepancy and asked the ERCB to take corrective action.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Back to you again. I do agree that the ERCB has had a great working record in this province, working with the oil and gas industry and helping to develop it. But I'm concerned that this may have a negative effect upon the ability of the sour gas industry to get back to work and to business as usual. Can the minister comment on that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker. People are very concerned across the province with respect to this issue. I can tell the member, the House, and all Albertans that the issue has been recognized and dealt with. I believe that the 69 licences that were affected by this decision have now been released.

Mr. VanderBurg: Again to the same minister, and thank you for those comments. The resizing of these protective action zones is more than industry; there are people that live within these regions. What impact on the safety of Albertans who reside in these zones will occur now?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, of course, as you would know, the number one mandate that the ERCB has is the protection of Albertans relative to development of industry in the province of Alberta. What's happened here is that the clarification of protective action zones has absolutely no effect on the health and safety of Albertans. As a matter of fact, the clarification will in fact enhance the protection and safety of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Fine Arts Education Curriculum Review

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fine arts contribute so much to our society, economy, and the development of our young people. However, this government is using a curriculum review to deliberately weaken valuable fine arts programs in our schools. Students, parents, and teachers are outraged. My questions are to the Minister of Education. If the government truly believes in the importance of our fine arts programs, why is this minister dramatically cutting the amount of student instructional time for fine arts in the K to 12 curriculum?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that this member couldn't be further from what actually is going on than he is in that statement. First of all, the arts are not peripheral to education. The arts are fundamental to education in this province, and they will remain so.

What the hon. member is referring to is the fact that we are doing a review of the arts curriculum, which hasn't been done in 20 or 25 years in the province. In September a draft of a framework for the preparation of a new curriculum was posted on the website and sent out to stakeholders for comment. It was put up specifically so that people can comment on it, get back to us, and let us know what they like about it and what they don't like about it. We're hearing back from lots of people. It's part of the public process of consultation before you do anything with the arts. Nothing could be more fundamental than arts to education.

Mr. Chase: Well, unfortunately, the ministry is putting out mixed messages; for example, cutting down five credits to one credit and limiting the amount of time.

The minister talked about consultation, so here is the question with regard to consultation. Given that the government failed to properly consult with Albertans prior to this review, will the minister commit to extending the January deadline for feedback on these proposed changes?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, these are not proposed changes. This is a proposed draft for a framework to discuss what the curriculum should look like. In that draft framework what they've put up is one process which would suggest that modules for the arts could be set up. There's no intention at all to move away from intensive arts courses for those who want to take intensive arts courses. What it's really trying to accomplish is to move arts right into the curriculum and right across the curriculum because, as we know, moving forward, innovation and creativity are going to be fundamental skills for 21st century Albertans.

2:20

Mr. Chase: This daft draft that you have put out is causing confusion. This government has already damaged any kind of discussion of religion and sexuality with Bill 44, and now it's targeting the fine arts. Will the minister tell Albertans which aspect of the K to 12 curriculum he intends to undermine next?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I won't comment on what is daft. I'll only say this, and I'll say it again. We've been talking about Inspiring Education. We've been talking about what education looks like 20 years from now, what we need so that Albertans can be prepared to trade out into the world. We know that as part of that, innovation and creativity are fundamental. The arts is fundamental and core to our curriculum. It will remain core to our curriculum. We will continue the discussion with Albertans as we have for the past year – going out with focus groups, going out with discussion groups – in the way that curriculum is normally developed. We've put up a framework for discussion. That framework is open for discussion until the end of January, and once all the feedback comes in, there'll be more opportunities for everyone interested to participate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Critical Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nothing has changed in the way Tories do business since their much-anticipated convention.

Half of their party's most faithful told them that they wanted Bill 50 scrapped, but this government says it won't even listen to them. To the Minister of Energy: why do you insist on eliminating public input into the proposed transmission lines? What are you afraid of?

Mr. Snelgrove: The big bad wolf.

Mr. Knight: No, not the big bad wolf.

Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter is that since 2007 there have been 300 open, public meetings . . .

An Hon. Member: How many?

Mr. Knight: Three hundred.

. . . with respect to the transmission system in Alberta and how we should move forward with it. I'm not sure what part of that is not understandable, but we've done a lot of public consultation. We will continue to do that, and the AUC will still direct at the end of the day a public and open meeting with respect to siting and the other issues around transmission.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough. Experts are telling us that the Premier and the minister are exaggerating the true need for the massive transmission expansion that's being proposed; meanwhile, the government's spin doctors warn of apocalyptic power outages and crumbling infrastructure. This dichotomy of opinion is the very thing that public hearings are meant to sort through. Why is the minister so afraid to test his arguments in public? Is your spin really that thin?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times that I would have to actually repeat this. However, I will do it one more time and perhaps more. The Alberta Utilities Commission has a mandate to work in the public interest, and their mandate includes – includes – the fact that there will be open, public hearings where intervention is not only allowed but encouraged to make sure that at the end of the day, in the public interest, the decisions they make are the right decisions for all Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government is proposing to allow the power companies to spend billions of dollars to overbuild capacity completely at the expense of the consumer and without giving them the chance to voice their opinion. Power companies are looking at massive profits, and you're asking the general public to finance it. Why won't you withdraw this antidemocratic and unnecessary legislation that railroads Albertans into paying more for power they don't need?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased, actually, to engage with the electrical engineers that she has used, obviously, to indicate that we're doing something that is not in the public interest. If they have more engineers than AESO that have a better idea of what we should do, I would be very pleased to engage with them. The 200-plus – 200-plus – professional electrical engineers and technicians are the people that plan the system for Albertans. I think that that speaks for itself.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Employment Insurance Benefit Program

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like many other jurisdictions Alberta is facing higher than normal unemployment numbers. Some must rely on the federal EI program for temporary support.

However, Albertans are subject to different criteria due to regional variations in eligibility requirements. An applicant in my constituency of Calgary-East, for example, must work at least 665 hours to qualify, compared to the lower extreme of 420 hours in Newfoundland. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: what is being done to ensure that Albertans are treated fairly in the EI system?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that it is very difficult when somebody becomes unemployed, and we are concerned that benefits vary based on local unemployment rates. We've raised this particular issue at several federal-provincial-territorial meetings of first ministers. Our view is that EI should provide Canadians with equitable support regardless of where they live. But besides reforming EI, our top priority is getting Albertans back to work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the minister raising this issue, what has resulted from Alberta's lobbying efforts to reform the EI program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and the other western provinces are in general agreement when it comes to EI reforms. The federal government announced it would provide additional EI benefits to unemployed long-tenured workers. While we support those changes to employment insurance, we still feel it does not address the issue of access to EI benefits regardless of where individuals live.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Employment and Immigration: what measures are in place for Albertans who cannot find work and cannot qualify for EI in their region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've got two major federal funding agreements to support those who do not qualify for EI. These agreements support a wide range of training, employment, and career development opportunities. This week, for example, my staff are organizing job fairs for recruiting employers like Momentum, Southland Transportation, Blockbuster, and Sun Life Financial. This year we plan to help over 155,000 Albertans through a range of provincial and federally funded employment and training services.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's former Chief Electoral Officer provided this government with a wealth of material to improve electoral practices before being unceremoniously shown the door. Research from the 2008 election revealed that 61 per cent of those who didn't vote would have been more likely to cast a ballot if they could vote at any polling station. Will the Minister of Justice commit to amending the Election Act to change these outdated residency requirements?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The former Chief Electoral Officer did provide a number of recommendations that we are currently reviewing and will bring to the Legislature in due course.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, on that, what about allowing advance polling stations to be placed in high-traffic areas such as malls and universities to improve voter participation? This was also in the Chief Electoral Officer's report. I was wondering if the minister will be committing to this any time soon.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a second recommendation from the former Chief Electoral Officer. I don't know if the hon. member has ever had an opportunity to be involved in administering an election. What I will tell you is that in a province of this size, with 3 and a half million people, if you start to remove residency requirements, you run into a number of incredibly problematic situations with respect to how you actually calculate the ballots on a constituency-by-constituency basis.

The recommendations will be reviewed. The legislation will be tabled. He can introduce those issues at that time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister is correct. There were numerous problems with the last election, and the former Chief Electoral Officer was trying to comment on those through his 85 recommendations.

Really, you know, I guess the next election is probably only two years away. Do you think we could have some legislation drafted by your department that maybe implements one or two of these things by the time that election comes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that in my first two questions I did suggest that there would be legislation coming forward. I would also suggest respectfully that those two particular recommendations would not help to resolve problems but would add problems.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

2:30 Geothermal Energy for Home Heating

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the ministers of Energy and Environment. As we move toward a clean energy future, Albertans in their efforts to be part of the green energy solution are researching alternatives for heating their homes. I know that in my constituency alone more and more residents are examining the advantages of using geothermal energy as a sustainable heating source. My first question to the Minister of Energy: what are the practicalities for Alberta homeowners wanting to switch to geothermal energy as a means of keeping warm during our frigid winters?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, first of all, of course, what the member is talking about is solar energy that's stored in the earth's surface. There are opportunities with heat pumps to recover that energy, but

switching becomes a bit problematic because of the economics of switching. However, most certainly, a lot of interest is being paid to and a lot of development being done on new build using a geothermal heat source for home heating.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: have subsurface studies been conducted in Alberta to determine the capability of Alberta's soils to make effective use of this energy source?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, yes. The answer to that is that the ERCB have the Alberta Geological Survey residing in the ERCB, and they are currently doing mapping of the province of Alberta relative to our geothermal capacity, the deep geothermal capacity. Again, they have already I think identified some very positive news for Albertans. There are opportunities where we could have things such as electrical power provided by deep geothermal heat and also things like district heating. It is doable, and there are places in Alberta where that exists.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Environment. Does the Department of Environment anticipate developing any programs to encourage the development of private geothermal systems in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, clearly, there's no doubt that the government and Environment support the concept of geothermal. It really would be a strong plank in our commitment to our climate change strategy, that talks about reducing the overall carbon footprint through energy efficiency.

There are two areas, Mr. Speaker. One is for the residential side. On the residential side we do have an existing program right now where consumers can apply for up to \$10,000 for investments that will significantly increase efficiency in home heating, and I would suggest that there are certain geothermal projects that would or could qualify under the EnerGuide rating. On the industrial side I think that there is promise that industry is showing interest in the area as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

All-terrain Vehicle Safety

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems content to be the least responsible jurisdiction in the country when it comes to ATV safety. Yet another province, this time British Columbia, is moving ahead with safety laws for ATVs while in Alberta this government sits and does nothing. To the Minister of Transportation: why are you sitting around doing nothing while other provincial governments are acting to protect their citizens?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely disagree with the hon. member. This government is always up and moving. We're never sitting around doing nothing. But I'll tell you: we really, honestly believe in safety. There are all kinds of things that we do for safety on ATVs. We have learn-to-ride education on it. That's the biggest

thing. If you don't educate people on what the machine is, how they should ride it, what it's capable of, you can put on all the gear in the world, and it isn't going to help you. We're saying: teach yourself all the safety features of the equipment that you could possibly wear, also all the safety equipment that's there on the machine, what size of machine you should have for the weight of the rider, and make sure that if they're under age, you supervise them properly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister talks a lot about developing helmet laws, but actually doing something is another matter, and while he was standing, he was still doing nothing. When can Albertans expect to see action rather than talk from this minister with the introduction of a law to require helmet use on ATVs?

Mr. Ouellette: Everyone that I know that rides ATVs that uses their common sense puts on a helmet. I've had ATVs my whole life, and I've had lots of people come over and enjoy the use of them. I've had people bring their children over. You know what, Mr. Speaker? If you brought your children over, I wouldn't let them ride my machines unless you put helmets on their heads. That's just common sense.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now we're going to talk about common sense. When asked about this issue, this Minister of Transportation talks a lot about how he feels that we need to rely on common sense, not laws. Well, helmet use on ATVs is as important as seat belts are in motor vehicles. Could the minister then explain why it is the government's policy to enforce the wearing of seat belts in vehicle law rather than relying on common sense? Why is it a law?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as things evolve, so do regulations, so do laws, so does everything. With ATVs we're working on a whole bunch of different issues. There's a difference with seat belts. The highways are all public. The roads are all public. But 95 per cent of the people that ride ATVs ride them on private land. We don't have jurisdiction on that private land. Therefore, we're looking at how we can make this work so it works everywhere. If you can't make it effective, if you can't police it, and if you can't enforce it, there's no sense having the law.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students across Alberta are expressing concerns about the prospect of having their tuition dramatically increased to help carry the load for postsecondary institutes having operating deficits. Three years ago the government limited tuition increases to the rate of inflation. Can the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology tell us if removing the tuition cap is being considered?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like any organization, when institutions are looking at tightening their belts, they look at almost

all of the things around the bottom line. I can tell you that the tuition fee policy still governs how tuition rates are increased in the province. For 2010-11, as an example, we know that that limit will be at about 1.5 per cent. There is no discussion in this ministry right now about removing that tuition cap, if you will, the CPI. Some institutions have indicated to us that when we did the cap, as an example, I believe we rolled tuition fees back to 2004 levels, and when you look at other jurisdictions and across the country in terms of Canada, perhaps some of these programs need to be looked at. However, we've made it extremely clear to the postsecondaries that we're only going to be looking at something that's fair and equitable for the three clients we serve, and one of those clients is the student.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Recently the University of Alberta discussed implementing what they described as market modifiers. Can the minister explain market modifiers?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that Campus Alberta has discussed, and I alluded to it briefly in my first answer, is: are we comparable and competitive across the country in terms of tuition rates? Is it affordable? Is it accessible? With those three principles, if you will, in mind we have said that everything is open and on the table. We're in very interesting times when you have jurisdictions like the University of California, Berkeley, slashing their budgets by 20 per cent. We're not looking at anything like that. We do need to make sure that nothing is off the table when it comes to achieving efficiencies, when it comes to adjustments in the system. But the institutions cannot apply a blanket tuition increase. Whatever proposal they bring forward to the department has to be fair, has to be equitable, and has to have a proper case behind it.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my third question to the same minister: do I understand that to mean that the minister is endorsing the use of these market modifiers on certain programs?

2:40

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I've suggested to the institutions is that we are open to whatever proposals they might want to bring forward; however, I am extremely concerned that those proposals have to be fair. They have to show a very solid reason as to why we would look at adjusting the base of a particular program or a particular tuition. It has to be fair not only to the institution but, for sure, to the student, the taxpayer, and society. Those are the three clients that we serve in Campus Alberta, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine. We're still on members' statements, but in the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you some guests that are here to witness the tabling of a petition regarding the construction of a badly needed new care centre in Stony Plain. These students heard about

the petition and have been studying this issue as a project for their school. I'm very encouraged by the interest that these students have taken in their community. As I say their names, I would ask them to rise: Kyla Dobson, Brianna Dechaine,* Shelby Elder, and Shelby's mother, Lynette Elder. Please join me in giving them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly an old colleague and friend of many of us, Mr. Denis Ducharme, former MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Denis and his wife, Rose, were good friends of a lot of us in caucus. As a former seatmate I am still looking to renew acquaintances with you, and I welcome you back to the Assembly. Next time bring the Road Runner.

Thank you.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Public Health Care in Alberta

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our public health system is Alberta's most cherished institution. More than that, public health care forms part of our core identity as Canadians. As Canadians we value universal access as a human right. There is nothing of greater value than the life of a human being, and as a society Canadians have chosen to take care of each other by creating a publicly funded health care system accessible to all, rich and poor. The ministry of health, therefore, is the most important department in government, charged with protecting and carefully managing the public institution that protects and nourishes life itself. It's a ministry that demands thoughtful, compassionate, and knowledgeable leadership.

Alberta's ministry of health today lacks this kind of leadership. From the beginning the Member for Calgary-West's tenure as minister of health has been disastrous, especially in light of a predicted, planned pandemic. He has proven his incompetence time and again: disbanding the health regions, AADAC, and the Cancer Board without a plan; dismissing top-level public health physicians before the pandemic; giving out millions in bonuses and severance packages for work left undone; running up massive deficits; opening new beds only to close old ones, with no net gain; downsizing Alberta Hospital Edmonton; spending tens of millions on new facilities only to let them stand empty due to a lack of doctors and nurses; allowing public long-term care to disintegrate; and failing Albertans with his botched H1N1 vaccine rollout.

Through it all this minister has refused to admit mistakes. His arrogance and lack of compassion for the thousands of lives that his decisions have affected are unacceptable. His refusal to give straight answers to this Legislature and firing staff instead of taking responsibility himself shows incredible disrespect for the status and tradition as a minister of the Crown. Surely, the Premier must realize by now that Albertans are sick of this minister and his ignorance of public health.

One last time on behalf of all Albertans I implore the Premier: remove this minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

National Bullying Awareness Week

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Too often bullying is dismissed as a harmless and normal part of growing up, but bullying can have devastating consequences, especially on children and youth who may be kept from reaching their full potential by the hurtful words and actions of others. Something that can deeply scar so many lives should not be dismissed as just normal kids' stuff. Bullying must not be tolerated any time, anywhere.

During national Bullying Awareness Week, from November 15 to 21, Albertans are reminded to think about the harmful impacts of bullying and to take steps to prevent it from happening in their homes, their schools, and their neighbourhoods. Alberta has shown tremendous leadership in creating safe and caring schools and promoting the prevention of bullying across the province. Through the bullying prevention strategy government ministries work closely with community groups and schools to prevent bullying at the local level. Preventing bullying isn't just a job for government or schools. As caring Albertans we all have a role to play in ensuring that people feel safe, supported, and respected in their communities.

Albertans who would like more information about how to address bullying are encouraged to call the toll-free, 24-hour, seven-days-a-week bullying hotline at 1.888.456.2323. This helpline, Mr. Speaker, which I established when I was minister of children's services, has received 1,200 calls since it was established three years ago. Additional information and resources are also available at www.bullyfreealberta.ca. The website features fact sheets, prevention strategies, and links to other interactive websites designed to raise awareness about bullying. I encourage all Albertans to make use of these resources and become part of the solution to bullying. Together we can create brighter futures and safer communities for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

National 4-H Month

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. I rise to recognize and wish you all a happy National 4-H Month. Today I want to acknowledge this incredibly valuable organization. Throughout the month of November we will be celebrating this organization.

Mr. Speaker, 4-H is one of the longest running youth organizations in our province, shaping the lives of youth and adults for more than 90 years. With over 250,000 alumni 4-H is one of the most respected and admired youth programs in Canada. This is a reputation that is well deserved. By following the 4-H motto, Learn To Do by Doing, 4-H helps build communities by developing leadership and interpersonal and technical skills of members, giving youth the skills they need to succeed in life, and creating a network of friends across the entire country.

Agriculture is vital to our province, and 4-H plays an important role in developing tomorrow's leaders in the agricultural industry and rural communities. Our youth want to be involved, accepted, valued, and heard. In 4-H they run the show. That's what makes it so successful.

None of this, Mr. Speaker, would be possible without the support of family and the terrific volunteer leadership from adults in the community. In honour of National 4-H Month I want to acknowledge the outstanding work of Alberta's 4-H clubs and extend a warm thank you to the volunteers and applaud our young people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Louis Riel

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 124 years ago today, November 16, 1885, the leader of the Métis people, Louis Riel, was executed in Regina by the Canadian government for his part in the Northwest Rebellion. A commemoration held here in the Legislature for the beginning of Métis Week, attended by our Premier, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, leaders of the opposition parties, and Métis leaders, was to honour Louis Riel, a man who believed in his people, the Métis.

Today was not only significant of his death but signified the challenges that he experienced, like acceptance of being Métis, acceptance of the Michif language, acceptance of his culture and his heritage. He fought hard and stood steadfast in having Métis rights recognized. It is a rare act, indeed, to stand up for what you believe in. In Métis circles today everyone knows Riel died for what he believed, and present-day Métis continue to work towards that belief.

Riel predicted his legacy before his hanging as he said, "I will perhaps be one day acknowledged as more than a leader of the half-breeds, and if I am I will have an opportunity of being acknowledged as a leader of good in this great country." His dream of the recognition of Métis and being recognized as a leader doing good in this country continues to be awakened in the Métis people of this province and has occurred in a number of ways: the establishment of Métis settlements, the first in Canada; the recognition of the Métis Nation of Alberta and the agreements with this province; the Michif language development, which is occurring by Métis; most of all, the awakening of pride in the music and dance of the Métis, like the young people who performed today.

Of course, there are still many challenges. However, like Riel, I believe in the Métis. I know they will thrive and will continue to fight for what's rightfully theirs. Yes, Riel's dream and prediction is awakening.

2:50

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to present on behalf of my colleague a petition signed by almost 1,500 Albertans, several of whom are joining us in the public gallery today. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to free up the allocated construction money for the Good Samaritan Care Centre and start building the facility immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from 44 Albertans who have signed following the format prescribed by our Legislative Assembly out of 326 who have signed a petition to the same call. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government . . . to:

- Grandfather the rights and status of currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta in a manner that they may continue their practice undisturbed and, when necessary, gradually upgrade to newly-proclaimed standards of training, so as not to force current therapists to lose their ongoing income whilst upgrading and so to ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

This is the proper number of copies.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, do you have a tabling?

Mr. Cao: I do have a tabling here. This is the petition to the minister of health by the same group, physical therapists, and it's signed by 282 members and to the same cause that I just said in my petition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter dated November 2, 2009, from the Alberta Children and Youth Services minister, and it is an answer to a question that I raised in this House on October 27.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings today. The first is another wonderful festival in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre and elsewhere in Edmonton. This is the Exposure festival, which is Edmonton's Queer Arts and Culture Festival, running for the rest of this week, so I'm tabling the listing of events and locations.

The second tabling I have is from a constituent, Cara Kane, who is writing to indicate her support for parts 2, 3, and 4 of Bill 48 but not with part 1, which is the punitive part of that. Parts 2, 3, and 4 are around tobacco litigation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling an information package from a group known as Save Our Fine Arts. I attended a meeting on Monday just north of Beaverbrook high school, which is a fine arts program. The connected material indicates two ways of connecting to the organization. One is at www.saveourfinearts.ca, and the second is a Facebook site entitled Petition Against New Alberta Fine Arts Curriculum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I want to table five copies of a letter that last week I tabled in response to a question from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Unfortunately, the tabling last week was an unsigned letter, so I now would like to table five letters that are signed.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act, the 2008-2009 annual reports for the following departments: Aboriginal Relations; Advanced Education and Technology; Agriculture and Rural Development; Children and Youth Services; Culture and Community Spirit; Education; Employment and Immigration; Energy; Environment; Executive Council; Finance and Enterprise; Health and Wellness; Housing and Urban Affairs; Infrastructure; International and Intergovernmental Relations; Justice; Municipal Affairs; Seniors and Community Supports; Service Alberta; Solicitor General and Public Security; Sustainable Resource Development; Tourism, Parks and Recreation; Transportation; and Treasury Board.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Finance and Enterprise, pursuant to the Government Accountability Act the consolidated financial statements of the government of Alberta, annual report 2008-2009; and Measuring Up: Progress Report on the Government of Alberta Business Plan, annual report 2008-2009.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 205

Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to rise today and lead off third-reading debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act. Bill 205 is a made-in-Alberta bill that addresses third-party finances and contributions disclosure. It places clear parameters around third-party advertising during provincial elections in a way that advances free speech and the right of people to express their views during an election period.

The concept of this bill is not a new idea. In fact, Mr. Speaker, across North America many jurisdictions have laws governing third-party financing. Some jurisdictions place spending limits, which would limit the amount that a third party could spend on election advertising, while other jurisdictions ban third-party advertising altogether. For example, the federal government and British Columbia have capped the amount that a third party can spend on election advertising.

That is not the case with Bill 205. We do not want to ban, cap, or limit the ability of third parties to spend on advertising during provincial elections. Rather, what Bill 205 aims to achieve is a hybrid of many different approaches where the overall goal is to place third parties on the same level playing field as political parties. The logic behind this is clear. For example, if we were to put a cap of a certain amount of money that a third party could spend on election advertising, then basically we'd be giving political parties a monopoly on speech during an election. Instead, Bill 205 is fair for all those participating in election advertising. Bill 205 finds the balance between respecting the rights of free speech with the need to keep our democratic playing field fair and level.

I would like to highlight some of the provisions of this legislation which would exemplify this balance. Bill 205 establishes a mechanism called the third-party election advertising account. All third parties would be required to establish such an account in order to run political advertising during a provincial election, much like political parties must do as well. In addition, contributions by donors to this account would be set at a fair limit of \$30,000 during an election year and \$15,000 in a nonelection year. This also correlates with the contribution limits currently imposed on political parties.

Mr. Speaker, all of the funds placed in these accounts could be spent by the third party during a provincial election. In other words, if a third party can raise millions of dollars from many different donors, they are free to spend every last cent of that during an election. This concept limits the influence that can be brought about by large contributions without preventing the participation of large amounts of donors. Essentially, if a few wealthy organizations or individuals are proponents of an idea, although they are free to advocate that idea, their ability to use their large wealth to dominate

the media during an election will be reasonably limited under this legislation.

These measures provide for the advancement of interests and ideas based not on the wealth of a few but upon that idea's ability to attract popular support among many. I want to be clear that in no way does this legislation control, stifle, or restrict free speech. In fact, freedom of speech will be enhanced by this bill by giving all ideas and viewpoints a more equal opportunity to flourish within our open and democratic society, and this is essential in a place like Alberta, where we believe so adamantly in the right of free speech.

3:00

Another important aspect of this bill relates to the transparency of third parties. One part of transparency in an open democracy is identifying who is supporting which idea and/or party so that voters can determine the intentions behind certain proposed ideas and legislation. Bill 205 enhances transparency in this regard by requiring third parties to identify themselves on all advertising and promotional materials. Identification is important in ensuring accurate communication between a third party and its targeted audience.

Bill 205 will also require a third party whose political advertising expenditures exceed \$1,000 in an election year to submit a financial report to the Chief Electoral Officer, which would then disclose all advertising spending. Furthermore, this report would identify the donors who contributed more than \$375 to a party's election advertising account. Again, these measures would be similar to the rules governing political parties.

Ultimately, these steps will achieve greater clarity and accountability surrounding third-party advertising and provide the electorate with more information about who is financially supporting an idea. Mr. Speaker, we believe in transparency and accountability and in freedom of speech. These fundamental principles are clearly protected throughout Bill 205. This bill strikes the balance between enhancing democratic fundamentals while achieving a more equitable and level playing field for third-party political advertising during elections. I believe this bill will strengthen transparency and democracy for all Albertans, and I encourage all members here today to stand in support of Bill 205.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. This Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, suffers from a similar circumstance to Janus on a two-faced Roman coin. On one side it talks about transparency, accountability, and freedom of speech, yet on the other side it talks about limitations.

The side of the bill I support is the notion of accountability and transparency in terms of where the funding is coming from, who the donors are, and the size of the donation. Unfortunately, this type of transparency and accountability is lacking from our own government in terms of how it conducts its own leadership races. The Premier, for example, has yet to disclose where \$163,000 came from in terms of support, and the hon. minister of sustainable resources refuses to provide any information in terms of donors who supported his failed leadership bid. Therefore, the notion that this government is putting forward of transparency and accountability is at best questionable.

This government uses taxpayers' money through its Public Affairs Bureau with over 100 full-time employees to put out what can best be described on a regular basis as either pabulum or propaganda designed to support the Progressive Conservative Party, which is the

governing party of this province. So the accountability and transparency that Bill 205 purports to promote in terms of transparency and accountability and freedom of speech in reality seeks to limit those opportunities, to limit them specifically during an election period to the sum of \$30,000. During a nonelection period it wants to further limit it to \$15,000.

Now, I would have no trouble with the clauses that talk about: where does the money come from and which organizations are behind it? It's very similar to the very limited offerings in our lobbyists registry, where basically a name is all you get and maybe a topic that was being discussed, but it doesn't seem to go beyond that. If we want to be truly transparent and accountable, then eliminating the fear that some third party because of its pockets is going to influence the outcome of an election is rather ludicrous.

We saw what happened in the last election, where negative advertising, although very expensive negative advertising, had at best a limited effect and probably actually resulted in some sympathy vote for the government because it appeared that the leader of the government was being singled out for attack in terms of sort of fading black-and-white advertising, voice-overs, and so on. Obviously, Albertans don't respond to negativity on a large scale. They're looking for solutions alternatives.

If the third-party advertising is talking about what needs to be done, what should be done, and how we as a province could improve our transparency and our accountability and utilize our freedom of speech to put forward alternatives and concerns, then I would suggest that I could support Bill 205, but in its current unfortunate, schizophrenic circumstance the government has to decide whether transparency and accountability trump freedom of speech or whether they're equally important. Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that members will realize that if you have a good product, as it seems has been the case for 38 years according to Alberta voters, you shouldn't be threatened by another party attempting to express an opposition point of view.

No campaign that I'm aware of these days can operate successfully under \$30,000. That's an unfortunate situation that only individuals who are capable of raising beyond that amount are likely to have an opportunity to get elected. It narrows the possibility and rules out the democratic experience for a number of Albertans who have good ideas but, unfortunately, shallow pockets. This is just one more method for Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, to limit the voice of third parties who may not agree with the direction the government is heading.

Premier Klein had a way of singling out individuals that he disagreed with. For example, he would throw members of Friends of Medicare in a lump with the Raging Grannies and any other group that opposed what his view of the right direction of the world was. It was hardly a subtle way of attempting to squash opposition, and I must admit, Mr. Speaker, that I proudly wore my left-wing nut pin that the Premier used to castigate and denounce anyone who didn't follow his far right agenda.

At least he was straightforward. What Bill 205 is doing is more of a subtle gag. It's not nearly as subtle as what happened with the superboard in terms of Dr. Duckett saying to all Alberta health care employees that they would not be allowed to blow the whistle. If they didn't like what was happening or if they didn't appreciate Dr. Duckett's comments, for example, on nurses apparently being the highest paid in Canada or taking inordinately lengthy coffee breaks, they were told basically to shut up.

Alberta has amongst its legislation a blockage of freedom of speech. Whistle-blower legislation is not only frowned upon; there's an attempt to extend that gag. That's exactly what Bill 205, Election

Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, is doing. It talks about transparency and accountability. It talks about freedom of speech, but in fact it is attempting to limit freedom of speech. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, as I began, it's a two-faced bill, and I can only support one of the faces. Therefore, I'll have to vote against it.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased moments ago to hear the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere move third reading of Bill 205, and I just have some comments to add.

I do want to thank this member for his work on this issue. It's one that's important to me as well, and this aspect of the election process that he has talked about, about adhering to ideals that we've come to associate with democracy – namely, fairness, equity, and honesty – is also quite important to me as well. Mr. Speaker, I do believe that through this legislation this member has helped not only to highlight the need for consistency across jurisdictions but also to shed light on the necessity of ensuring an equal and level playing field during elections.

Bill 205 also recognizes that we need to know certain things such as where and from whom our influences are coming. To this end, the purpose of this bill is to specify rules around third-party election advertising in the province, specifically related to contributions. Mr. Speaker, this is to be achieved in part by clarifying the definition of what constitutes political advertising. Within Bill 205 political advertising is defined as that which promotes or opposes registered political parties in the province or the election of candidates in the Alberta Legislature. This would also include any advertising that may be more issue specific, wherein voters are encouraged to vote for or to not vote for parties or particular individual candidates in a constituency that supports or opposes a particular cause or point of view. It may seem somewhat convoluted, but just follow with me here.

Establishing the core definitions is necessary to help determine what falls within the contribution rules to be established by Bill 205. One such rule, Mr. Speaker, includes the regulation of spending on political advertising by requiring that funds relating to that advertising operate through an established third-party election advertising account. Contributions to these accounts could be made by either the sponsor or by eligible donors, all of whom would be required to follow rules similar to those for registered political parties as found within the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

In this case eligible Alberta donors and third parties would include individuals, corporations, nonprofit groups, and trade unions. All around it's not a self-serving exercise, Mr. Speaker. However, they cannot be charitable organizations, nor can they be those with political affiliations such as a candidate, as every member of this Assembly has been, a constituency association, or a registered political party.

Mr. Speaker, some may suggest that these rules, if implemented, could limit or control the flow of information, ultimately restricting free speech. Now, this argument is based, I would submit to you, on the flawed premise that in order for society to have free speech, we must only have two choices: allowing all free speech or allowing no free speech at the same time, all speech at all times by all people. Fortunately, the choice isn't between allowing everything or nothing. It's about determining where the measured and appropriate boundaries do exist and where we want them to exist and what's in the best interest of our democracy in this province.

The simple fact is that we do place limits on freedom of speech and expression for many reasons, Mr. Speaker. One case is to limit cases of libel and slander, another is to eliminate the abuse of power, and another one is to ensure some measure, mode of decorum, professionalism, and good taste, which, of course, we have in this Assembly. Indeed, every society acknowledges that some limits need to be placed on free speech in order to achieve a balance between rights and responsibility. This is consistent with section 1 of our Charter. Whether it's in workplaces, public venues, or political debates, some limits in society are necessary to ensure that we balance appropriately the rights and freedoms with personal responsibility and, of course, good governance.

In the end we're always making assessments and judgments about how much to allow and how much to limit. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it is this common-sense approach that best serves this province, and it is the one that would help guide the implementation of Bill 205 and ensure a more measured mindset in political speech.

Besides, Mr. Speaker, the problem is not that there are too many restrictions or the kind of advertising that may actually take place but, rather, that sufficient rules do not exist to keep the playing field level. Without a level playing field advertising may allow certain political interests or agendas to monopolize the political dialogue, particularly during elections. In this way, far from being an attack on freedom of speech, Bill 205 would enhance it. How? By implementing a simple, fair, and transparent set of rules. Allowing them to donate and to support third parties that reflect their opinions and concerns allows for more direct voter participation from an individual basis. For the voter these rules help better identify who is trying to influence their vote through advertising. It also puts third parties on an equal footing with political parties, making advertising and rules more consistent across the board and preventing one third party from having an unfair advantage over another third party.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is also consistent with the example set by the Premier over the last few years. This Premier has brought in a lobbyist registry since he came in. This Premier also has brought in all-party committees. This is consistent with accountability that's been set from the top here.

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation talked about ATVs. You may ask me: what do ATVs have to do with accountability? Well, the distinction that the Minister of Transportation issued was that ATVs are usually on private land whereas vehicles like the one I drive are usually on public land. Likewise, there also is a distinction in accountability. The distinction is that this would apply to public elections.

The previous speaker, the Member for Calgary-Varsity, talked about how this should also apply to private elections. I disagree. I don't feel that for the last leadership race that happened, the leader of the Wildrose Alliance Party should have to go and disclose her donations. Why? Because that's a private election. Neither should anyone who actually ran for a political party in this province. It's a clear distinction between public and private. Obviously, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona disagrees with me. Again, I'm quoting a *Vue Weekly* from October 22, 2009.

Again I say, Mr. Speaker, that there's a distinction between public and private elections. This deals with public accountability. A private election: it's none of my business what happens in another party, who contributes to another leadership candidate's coffers or war chest. That's how they run their own business. This is about public accountability.

I would ask, therefore, just in conclusion that we should be supporting Bill 205 to the fullest degree. I'm happy it has made it to third reading, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in order to speak in a very cautious and limited way in favour of this bill, and that is because it is a bill which moves us in a very, very halting and substandard and inadequate way towards the right destination, which, unfortunately, is too far off in the distance to see, but at least we're going in that general direction. That is about ensuring and enhancing transparency and accountability when it comes to election financing and also structuring our election financing in a way where the value of an individual's dollar does not overtake the value of their vote, which, unfortunately, is a little bit of a question mark in Alberta at this point.

We are moving towards having third parties governed by the same legislation that governs the political parties and candidates in Alberta, and that's a good thing for all the reasons that proponents of the bill have identified. The difficulty, unfortunately, is that the rules in Alberta which govern political parties and candidates are themselves inadequate. We have in Alberta what I would suggest are the most freewheeling election financing laws in the country, and it creates a number of problems.

I'll start first by just mentioning one shortfall which the previous speaker ended his comments on, which is the failure of our election laws to require candidates, either for leadership or for nomination, to disclose the sources of their funding. I suggest that the argument is that these are private organizations, so why should we know how much they raise and from whom as they go about selecting their leader? That's an interesting argument. However, I would have loved to have seen them or members of the government use that argument during their leadership contest for the current Premier because I'm pretty sure they ran around telling people that if they wanted to have a say on who the Premier should be, they ought to buy a Tory membership and use that Tory membership to select the Premier. I'm quite sure that that was the exact language that people were subjected to.

3:20

You know, there was certainly some merit to that position, and that is why, of course, those same people who buy those memberships have a right to know who supports and funds different leadership campaigns. I find it interesting that to this date we have still not heard who financed the Premier's successful leadership campaign, nor have we heard about who financed the unsuccessful leadership bid of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. I suspect we might find that there are some similarities between that donor list and those who financed the new leader of the Wildrose Alliance Party, but there again we don't know.

This is politics. This is politics, and I think that to the extent that you can open that up for people to see it, then that's what should happen. You know, I suggest that that should also be the case for people who run for nomination because, again, in many cases that nomination battle in some parts of the province ultimately amounts to the decision around who is going to be elected in that area. In my own nomination – very, very small scale, of course, compared to the huge dollars that the members opposite engage in – I made a commitment that all those who donated to my nomination would have their names disclosed to the public because we felt that that was an important part of the political process. When one particular donor asked that their name not be disclosed to the public, I simply sent the money back to that person. I would suggest that that is the approach that all members of this Assembly should take.

Now, with respect overall to the funding and the rules around funding elections in Alberta the bottom line is this: we have a very inadequate set of rules. We allow for a maximum of \$30,000 in election time. We allow for a maximum of \$15,000 in other years. Depending on who you're getting your money from, that can add up pretty quickly if people actually take advantage of those maximums.

It was interesting to me. Last Sunday I happened to be listening to the radio and heard an interesting political discussion on CKUA radio, and one of the people speaking there was the former Minister of Energy for this government, who is now a private citizen, Rick Orman. They were talking about the royalty rate issue, and they were talking about whether or not the apparent ascent of the Wildrose Alliance would result in yet even more cuts to the royalty rates enjoyed by oil companies in Alberta. The discussion was around whether there was a political desire for it on the part of the people of Alberta or not.

Interestingly – and I paraphrase here – one of the conclusions that Mr. Orman talked about was, well, whether it is or isn't something that the people of Alberta want. The political power base in this province is in Calgary because that's where the money to fund politics comes from. It comes from the oil industry. They fund politicians whether it's the Conservatives or the Wildrose Alliance or, to a lesser extent, the Liberal Party. This is what he said. He said: for that reason, we could expect to see more movement towards reducing royalty rates even more because that's what the political power brokers in Alberta want.

That, my friends, is what is wrong with election financing in Alberta, and I would suggest that in the long run what we need to do is have third parties subjected to election financing rules. But we should then adopt the election financing rules used by the federal government, used by the province of Quebec, used by the province of Manitoba, where donors are individuals. The end. Corporations don't get to donate. Unions don't get to donate. Voters get to donate. So voters remain the people who ultimately control the outcomes within our democratic system and are not, instead, the innocent observers on the sidelines.

It is for that reason that we will give reluctant support to this bill but with the very strong proviso that there is a tremendous need for the province to overhaul the election financing rules overall. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. You know, when I see situations that develop such as the one that led to the impetus for this bill, I'm always really curious about what started that. Why did this whole situation create itself?

If I may hazard a little hypothesis here, I think there's an immense amount of voter and active citizen frustration out there with the political system that we have. People feel that they cannot influence the political parties. They cannot influence or move the party that has been in power for so many years in Alberta. They can get involved with other parties, but it doesn't help to sort of shift or move that monolith that's in place, so we end up with these splinter groups developing which are not political parties, but they may have come out of a special interest or they may have set themselves up as an alternative to the process.

We end up with groups like Public Interest Alberta, Parkland, Pembina. That right there is a mix of sort of very specific focuses,

Pembina, obviously, on environmental and natural resource issues. Then there's a whole other group in there that are the sort of traditional think tanks that tend to come out with a particular political bias like Canada West and the Fraser Institute, the centre for public policy, and a few other ones like that. I'm talking about the homegrown ones. I am talking about ones like the Greater Edmonton Alliance, Public Interest Alberta because I do see them as flowing from that active citizen frustration that they could not either get entry to or kind of move the system that they were in.

Interestingly, I think it has actually served to in some ways entrench the system that we're in because it certainly has syphoned money off of people who may have otherwise supported a political party, particularly political parties that were not the governing party. Those donations now tend to go to those groups, and of course they are active around election time. So these are the groups that now the attempt is being made to capture. Of course, we have the very famous one from the recent election, which was a coalition of various unions and trade associations and worker associations that were specifically trying to make a point about the last government.

Out of a particular set of circumstances we have citizens moving in a particular direction and creating a certain entity in order to explore something that suits them better than what we're currently offering them. That I take as a statement and an encouragement to work harder on how we're offering up our individual access points to political parties. Certainly, in a younger demographic it seems they're not very interested in joining political parties, and they say they never will be. It just doesn't work the way they want it to.

So who's going to be captured under this legislation? That's what we're looking at in third reading. What's the anticipated effect of this bill when it comes into place? Well, I wonder if the sponsor of the bill anticipated that it would likely capture groups, possibly, like Public Interest Alberta, where it would now be having to disclose its finances, but in fact it raises money for a number of other activities that it gets involved in. So how do we divide up that transparency? Do they have a right to say: well, we spent this amount of money during the election campaign or during the prescribed period, and that's what you may have access to and look at, but the rest of our activities have taken place over a number of years and have involved policy development and conventions and all kinds of other activities. They did a series of seniors' workshops, for example. You don't get access to that because it's not specifically directed to third-party advertising around an election campaign. I don't think that has been anticipated or explored by the sponsor of the bill, and I wonder if we have not created a rather large can of worms as a result of that.

3:30

The second thing for me that is a deciding factor in support or nonsupport of the bill is what I call the YISBYs, which is: yes, great idea, but not in my political party, or not in my backyard is another way of looking at it, so support for the general idea but not to apply to us, thank you very much. And here we have it. In fact, it was illustrated by a couple of the speakers supporting the bill. Great idea; love transparency; everybody should have to admit to this, well, except not for leadership campaigns and not for nominations. That is where you create the problem. As soon as you start to have exceptions to transparency, you create that problem.

There are some people that do not have to admit to this now – there's a curtain they can stand behind; there's a half-open door that they are looking through or that we can look through – and that's where the problems are created. So it is that sort of YISBY. I have to, I think, give credit to someone else for coining that particular term. I won't name them at this point, but it's not me, so I can't take the credit for it.

But that to me is the problem with what's anticipated here. If we had said, "Yes, we're going to throw this open, and we are going to

deal with everybody that gets involved in third-party advertising in an election campaign," and had a really clear and fairly wide-reaching definition around that but also around the rest of the political process – if we're going to talk about it, then let's do it.

It should be around nominations. It should be, in particular, around leadership. Where do we have a dividing line there? Well, I would argue that there shouldn't be one. You know, here we had the Wildrose Alliance. Well, they refused to give us, to make public, who donated to their leadership campaign or supported any given leadership candidate. But we had exactly the same thing when we had a leadership campaign in the governing party, and indeed that was what people were being approached with: you, too, can buy a membership and vote for your choice of the next Premier.

That's exactly what they were selling, and I was horrified at the time that people that I knew and loved in the community could be enticed to buy a membership in a political party that they told me they did not support – why? – because they were going to get to vote for their choice of the next Premier. That entire contest is not covered under what this legislation would cover, and that to me is the fatal flaw in the bill because as soon as you start to create those YISBY moments – yes but not in my political party – that's where the problem starts. People fail to be convinced that there's credibility in the process when they can see immediately that well-publicized and well-known opportunities to hide behind that curtain or hide behind that door out in the hallway are within recent memory. So I appreciate what the member was trying to do in throwing open that transparency; I think he's failed to do it.

I have been fortunate to attend twice the COGEL conferences, which are the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws, and they have been great opportunities for me, and I've learned a lot. I went to one a long time ago in Texas and more recently to one in Chicago, and both times I was really struck by what happens in the U.S., where there are no spending limits, but the trick is that everybody has to fess up.

Even in that system they have people that go to great lengths not to be seen donating the money. So they donate it through the names of their children, and companies donate it through the names of their executives who they give bonuses to – I'm moving my fingers in little air quotation marks there – with the expectation and the directive that those bonuses are funneled through to a political party. So even in a system where there are no limits – anybody can donate any amount of money, but you must fess up to it; you must put your name on it – there is a certain reluctance to have your name attached to a political donation, to be seen supporting a particular candidate. I think that even if we got this far, it still wouldn't solve the problem.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. By clearly defining the parameters around third-party spending on election advertising, the proposed legislation would help level the political playing field. Indeed, Bill 205 recognizes the importance of political advertising and seeks to ensure that all Albertans, be they third-party sponsors or eligible donors, are more fully aware of the range of views that their donations may support. This helps safeguard free speech for Albertans and limits the ability of individual interests alone to direct a political dialogue and perhaps outcomes. At the same time, it enhances the ability of third parties to bring more ideas to the forefront, whereas in the past they may have been unable to do so.

To achieve this, Bill 205 would put in place a number of guidelines helping to bring a greater degree of structure to election advertising as well as a greater transparency over sponsorship. Third parties would be required to register an election advertising account and could only maintain one of these at a time. Furthermore, if they spend more than a thousand dollars on election advertising, third parties are required to disclose this spending to the Chief Electoral Officer. They must also disclose the identity of those eligible donors which contributed more than \$375. An eligible donor would include Alberta residents as well as nonprofit and not-for-profit organizations and corporations, provided they conduct their activities within the province, as well as trade unions.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation would also bring greater consistency and continuity to election laws in Alberta, an important element that helps the legislation integrate more easily into the rules and regulations that currently exist by specifying who can contribute to these accounts. For example, Bill 205 would bring third parties under similar contribution and disclosure requirements that political parties in Alberta must adhere to.

The bill would also limit the amount that donors may contribute, again, similar to political parties. Eligible donors would have their contributions to election advertising accounts capped at \$15,000 per year and up to a maximum of \$30,000 during a campaign period. But, Mr. Speaker, it's important to point out that while there's a limit on how much each donor may contribute to third-party accounts, Bill 205 does not limit the amount that a third party can spend on political advertising. Doing so would place an unnecessary boundary on the actions of third parties and inhibit free speech.

In addition, limiting the amount that may be spent on election advertising implies that the greater amount that one spends, the more likely it is that their ideas will be supported. However, this is less often the case. Greater wealth does not necessarily equate to more worthwhile political ideas. Instead, it's allowing discussion to take place, and the exercise of free speech allows the ideas to develop. Besides, in cases where a third party may have done an exemplary job of raising funds from a great number of individual donors, even to their individual maximums, they should be entitled to spend these funds as they see fit.

In this way Bill 205 is more targeted, addressing and resolving only those gaps and inconsistencies that exist in the current legislation that need to be corrected. As the saying goes, it's not trying to reinvent the wheel. In fact, I find this to be one of the selling points, Mr. Speaker. This is because there's a role to be played by third parties in the political process and the opportunity that election advertising can play in the exercise of free speech.

For one thing, it helps voters in their ability to make an informed choice. Election advertising allows third parties to contribute to the election dialogue by providing other points of view on election issues or on a candidate's platform. This allows the voter to consider issues in greater depth, and the ensuing discussion helps to clarify aspects of an election platform, allowing voters to look at issues that they may not have considered. Oftentimes third-party advocates may be more informed on the intricacies and substances of more complex issues. They can therefore ask more direct questions, challenging election candidates to deepen their positions. In the end, helping voters to become more informed allows them to be more confident that their choice most closely reflects their sensibilities.

3:40

This also strikes at the heart of something deeper; namely, the rights of citizens, either as individuals or within associations, to have the freedom to discuss with each other the issues that they believe

matter most. While there are certainly other methods such as public forums, it is most often through mass communication avenues that we convey many of these ideas. Particularly in the modern age, when electronic communication is overtaking print, the ability of third parties to use political advertising is key to conveying political critique and fostering a continuing dialogue. Although face-to-face discussions on political issues still exist, we're not always able to have these dialogues in person and with as diverse an audience as we may like. Therefore, we often rely on political advertising and the ideas promoted by third parties to bring matters of public interest forward to ensure that the concerns of all Albertans are raised and answered, Mr. Speaker, particularly during elections, when this often matters the most.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, the extent to which we respect the plurality of ideas and support freedom of speech on political discussion signals our respect for democracy, which is fundamentally based on these concepts. Therefore, I would support Bill 205, and I encourage all members of the House to do so as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere for bringing forth this bill. Currently third parties in Alberta are not subject to any rules regarding their conduct with respect to election advertising. Bill 205 would establish rules to create legislative definitions of third parties and election advertising. Further, it would establish a process that these bodies would have to lawfully follow when conducting election advertising in Alberta.

By establishing a process, Bill 205 is designed to support third parties in their election advertising endeavors while enhancing the transparency of communications during the election period. This would ensure a greater consistency of transparency-related rules across all politically motivated bodies in our province. Mr. Speaker, currently political parties and candidates must follow a comprehensive process that guides the collection and disclosure of their finances. They use these finances to fuel their campaigns and opinions, to communicate their messages to the public.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Despite the fact that third parties do not have political candidates who are running for office, they too are political bodies, and like political parties, they also seek to inform the public of certain issues or promote or oppose a certain platform or candidate. Mr. Speaker, it would therefore make sense that they should follow a similar process in terms of the acquisition of funds as well as disclosure of contributions and expenses made for election advertising. Bill 205 seeks to accomplish this.

Under Bill 205 an individual or entity that wishes to run an election advertising campaign that promoted or opposed a particular candidate or political party either directly or indirectly would be known as a third-party sponsor. Their advertising would be known as third-party election advertising, and all funds used to fuel any political advertising would have to be paid out of a third-party advertising account, which would be registered to the third-party sponsor.

In addition, any and all third-party election advertising accounts would have to be registered with the Chief Electoral Officer. Third-

party sponsors would have to submit financial statements, including disclosure of contributions and expenditures from this third-party election advertising account, to the Chief Electoral Officer for examination and public disclosure.

Bill 205 would also establish a process for the collection of funds placed into a third-party election advertising account. Under Bill 205 donations would be limited by source and amount. For example, Mr. Speaker, to contribute any money to an election advertising account, the contributor would have to satisfy the rules of being an eligible donor. This entails that individual donors would have to be residents of Alberta. Organizations that are eligible donors would be trade unions, registered not-for-profit organizations, or corporations so long as they hold an office and carry a business in Alberta. All of these elements of Bill 205 set out to establish a clear, defined, and transparent process for third parties to follow when engaging in political advertising. This process would aid third parties in organizing their activities.

Mr. Speaker, in light of Bill 205 I believe it is important to examine the process of third-party election advertising on the federal level to see its success in enabling, not inhibiting, third parties in the political system. In the year 2000 the federal government in passing Bill C-2 established a newly defined process for third parties to advertise during political campaigns. The new process requires third parties to register with the Chief Electoral Officer during an election and places a spending limit of \$150,000 on political advertising per third party per election.

I believe this process assists third parties in their political advertising endeavours. This belief is based on the fact that since the federal legislation was enacted and a clear process for third-party advertising was defined, there has been an increase with every election in the total number of third parties that have registered. For example, in the November 2000 federal election, shortly after the enactment of this legislation, a total of 48 third parties registered with Elections Canada. In the election held in June 2004 there were 63 third parties that registered. In the election held in January 2006 there were 80 third parties that registered. Mr. Speaker, the fact that more third parties registered with the Chief Electoral Officer is indicative that establishing a clear process is facilitative for third parties.

In addition to an increase in third parties registered across these three elections, there has been an increase in the amount of money spent on political advertising. In 2000 there was just over \$675,000 spent collectively. In 2004 the number jumped to over \$710,000. In the 2006 election the total amount spent on third-party election advertising was well over a million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, these trends suggest that a definite process would further enable third parties rather than inhibit them. Ultimately, Bill 205 would establish a clear process to facilitate third parties in coordinating funding and running advertising campaigns during an election. Furthermore, because under Bill 205 a third party would follow similar rules as political parties, they would adhere to a greater level of transparency and accountability.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I stand before the Assembly in support of Bill 205. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 205, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 205 works to establish definitions of third-party sponsors and to legislate guidelines for these groups to raise funds and run election advertising campaigns. Currently there are no formal definitions or rules that third parties must adhere to when engaging in political advertising during provincial elections.

Bill 205 would change this by establishing a clearly defined, fair, and transparent process. For example, Mr. Speaker, it would define political advertising as advertising that either directly or indirectly promotes or opposes the election of a political party or candidate to the Alberta Legislature. It would require third parties to identify themselves on all advertising and promotional material.

3:50

Further, Bill 205 would ensure that funds used to run an election advertising campaign originated from a third-party advertising account. In this way all third-party spending used for advertising would be required to originate from the advertising fund. Fundraising would also be regulated in that only eligible donors could contribute to this fund. This would mean that only Alberta residents, registered corporations, nonprofit organizations, and trade unions that hold bargaining rights for employees in Alberta could make contributions to the third-party advertising account.

Under Bill 205 donors would be required to adhere to similar contributions and disclosure rules as those that govern political parties. That would entail that eligible donors could contribute as much as \$15,000 to a third-party advertising account in a given year and a maximum of \$30,000 to aggregate to a third-party advertising account.

Mr. Speaker, time has run out, but I will let my hon. colleague know that I support third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I hesitate to interrupt, but Standing Order 8(7)(a)(iii) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the bill to close the debate. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to move third reading of Bill 205 and would like to thank all members for their contribution to the third reading debate on this bill. This bill sets these parameters in a way that levels the playing field for third parties while at the same time advancing free speech and the rights of people to express their views during an election period. This is important to me and my colleagues, who believe strongly in the advancement of free speech.

Again, I would like to thank all the members who have participated throughout this Bill 205 debate, and I would encourage all members to support this important bill. With that, I close debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a third time]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 206 School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to begin committee stage for Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I want to start by

thanking my colleagues for their input during second reading. Their comments were very helpful to me as I moved forward with this bill. I've had feedback from some of my colleagues and from some other stakeholders about the intent of this legislation, and I want to make one thing very clear. This bill is about protecting students and staff in our schools; it's not about usurping the power of the school boards or the principals or the teachers. The students who are bullied frequently live in a constant state of torment. This bill aims to protect them.

As I mentioned during second reading, I've done a lot of work with stakeholders to make sure I got this bill right. I've talked with parents, I've talked with police, I've talked with principals, and I've also talked with the Alberta Teachers' Association. The ATA expressed some concerns that section 5 of Bill 206 could take away the power of principals to suspend students whose conduct is detrimental to school safety. This was completely inadvertent and not consistent with the bill's intent. I fully appreciate that suspending a student is sometimes necessary.

To ensure that there is no conflict between the intent of this bill and its provisions, Mr. Chairman, I would like to table an amendment to Bill 206. This amendment deals with section 5 of the bill, which impacts section 24 of the School Act.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, we'll pause while the amendment is being passed out. This will be amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This amendment proposes to strike out section 5 of the bill and substitute the following. Section 24 is amended (a) in subsection (1) under (i) in clause (a) by striking out "section 12, or" and substituting "section 12, 12.1 or 12.2," and under (ii) by adding the following after clause (a): "(a.1) the student has failed to participate in an educational measures program, as directed under section 23.1, or"; and (b) in subsection (7) by striking out "section 12" and substituting "section 12, 12.1 or 12.2".

With this issue cleared up, I'd like to make a couple of points about Bill 206. Some have asked if I would include more provisions to define certain behaviours as illegal. I've been asked if I would include a specific section on hazing or to protect those who are bullied because their family is poor. There certainly is some merit to this position. At the same time, defining behaviours too narrowly leaves room for the offender to argue that their behaviour is not covered under the act. I don't think anyone wants to get into that kind of debate. The bill in its current form will outlaw all behaviours which harass or intimidate other students.

The provision in this bill which deals with bullying has sparked a lot of interest. My phone has rung off the hook with people asking questions and offering feedback. This is very positive, Mr. Chairman. It's high time that we have this discussion.

There is another part of the bill, though, that I want to highlight. Bill 206 would make it illegal to have drugs, drug paraphernalia, or weapons in our schools. Period. No more wrangling about the student's intent or whether that billy club was really going to be used to harm another student. It would be illegal to have these things, and the bill would give our police officers and school staff the ability to deal with it.

It's also going to tackle the problem of cyberbullying head-on. We know that being bullied on Facebook or your cellphone or Twitter or any one of the myriad of other technologies out there can turn a student's life into a living hell. Mr. Chair, sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Or will they? Ugly. Faggot. Slut. Fatso. I hate you. You are sad and disgusting, and you will never amount to anything.

Mr. Chair, I just finished a book, which was given to me by a mom whose son was tormented. He eventually took his own life. This book is about other kids who were bullied in school and ended up committing suicide. The name-calling was the start of many more things to come.

Mr. Chair, Bill 206 is a positive trend for our schools, and I'm asking my colleagues to assist in helping me pass Bill 206. Thank you.

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, may we interrupt for a moment to have Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek mentioned a book that was given to her by a very concerned parent, and if I'm correct, that book is *Bullycide*. It talks about children who were driven to suicide. Today in this House we have with us the lady who provided the hon. member with that book. Mrs. Betty Wedman, if you wouldn't mind standing up. Betty knows all too well the importance of this particular bill and prevention. Can we give Betty recognition and a round of applause for being here.

Bill 206

School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers)

Amendment Act, 2009

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on the bill as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking to the bill as amended, in order to be successful, the bill has to have two things behind it. One is funding, and the other is teeth, or strong language, in order to make sure that the honourable intentions of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek can be realized.

Now, as part of the parliamentary procedures we realize that private members' bills cannot ask specifically for funding. For this bill to be successful, there has to be funding to develop curriculum programs for use throughout Alberta schools. There has to be funding for in-services for teachers who are currently teaching, including principals, administrators, so that they can recognize bullying in all its aspects. There has to also be funding for curriculum development at the university level for students entering the Education faculty. This is absolutely essential for this to happen, and hopefully it will follow in order to make Bill 206 the success that both the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and I would like to see happen.

I would like to also talk about successful programs that have been piloted in this province. I'd like to share with the members a letter that I received from a lady by the name of Lisa Dixon-Wells. She's the founder of a nationally recognized bully prevention program called Dare To Care. Dare To Care, thanks to funding from EnCana, has operated in a number of schools throughout Alberta and has raised the profile of the importance of being proactive in preventing bullying.

I'd like to share with the members some of the concerns that Lisa Dixon-Wells brought up. She says:

I read with great interest, the article in the Calgary Herald on Sept 20th.

That article was written by Sarah McGinnis, an education writer with the *Herald*, on the subject of Bill 206.

The provincial legislators are looking to implement a plan that will mandate that schools report all bullying and weapons-related incidents to Alberta Education annually (Bill 206). This letter is to support your stand that the Bill itself will do very little to reduce or even address the horrible stories of bullying and violence in our schools. Through years of experience working in schools around this province, I absolutely agree that the only solution is to implement a comprehensive and proven bully prevention program in all schools in Alberta. If everyone would start speaking the same language around bullying, start defining bullying consistently and correctly, and if everyone had the tools to recognize the problem early and intervene effectively, then, and only then, will we start making significant progress in helping the 15% of students in every school that are the vicious targets of daily physical and emotional assaults.

And that 15 per cent, Mr. Chair, is just the extremes of bullying. Lisa Dixon-Wells goes on to say:

It is my strong belief that a school can have the most committed staff, the most solid discipline policy, and the most supportive parent community available to them, but if the school fails to mobilize the students themselves nothing is going to change. Only 4% of bullying is ever reported by students so a Bill alone will not change the pervasive, hidden nature of bullying. Almost 80% of every school community is made up of a silent majority of students. These students are the eyes and ears of our schools. They know what's going on in the locker rooms, the bus, the gym and the hallways. These are very caring students who are very capable of dealing with normal, day to day conflict. But when it escalates into bullying, these students become almost debilitated . . . much like adults in the community. They are fearful of making the situation worse, fearful of retaliation, fearful of being seen as a "rat", and fearful that adults will not take it seriously. Bill 206 is going to do nothing to dispel this fear. Education and support will.

Now, Mr. Chair, I would like to talk about the second part of my consideration, beyond the funding that is necessary to implement a successful bullying program for children, for their teachers, and for curriculum instruction. In order to do that, I have an amendment that I would like to have distributed, and when that has been done, I'll talk about the need for strong language.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we'll pause while this amendment is distributed.

Hon. members, we will call this amendment A2. I'd ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to continue, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As I pointed out in speaking to the previously amended Bill 206, we don't have the option as private members to lay out the types of funding that we believe would be necessary to accomplish the ends of the legislation that we are putting forward. What we can, however, do is strengthen the wording, provide a degree of teeth to the legislation. We can

change may to musts in order to ensure that the action actually takes place, and that is the gist of amendment A2, that the members have before them.

4:10

The amendment states that Mr. Chase is to move that Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 4 by striking out the proposed section 23.1(3) and (4) and substituting the following.

Now, if hon. members wish to follow along with the original bill, I'd just like to highlight some key changes. Section (3) remains basically as it was indicated with the exception that

if the principal believes on reasonable and probable grounds that a student may have contravened section 12.1 or 12.2, the principal . . .

And here's a key word: must. Members, you might want to circle that key word because it's at the heart of our discussions. "The principal must." It allows the principal discretion on whether or not he believes bullying has occurred, but once he has recognized the fact that the bullying has occurred, then there is a compulsion on the part of the principal to do something about it.

The rest of the wording continues, but instead of the principal "may meet and consult," it says that the principal

must meet and consult with the student and the student's parent and, if a peace officer has been consulted under subsection (2), that peace officer.

So the key part of (3) is changing "may" to "must."

In section (4), similarly, the idea of may is turned into must.

If the peace officer after having been consulted under subsection (3) believes on reasonable and probable grounds that a student has contravened section 12.1 or 12.2, the principal and the peace officer must.

That's the difference. Instead of may, it's must. It's a requirement that action be taken.

Now, going beyond the may to musts is (4.1), where it says: "Where the peace officer and principal deem it appropriate." In other words, the decision is still being left in the principal's hands as the administrator of how many thousands or, in a small elementary school, hundreds of children. So the principal still has that option of taking appropriate action. It's not binding the principal in this case to take appropriate action, but it says:

Where the peace officer and principal deem it appropriate, other persons belonging to the school community may be directed to participate in an educational measures program under subsection (4).

There is not just simply an aggressor in a bullying situation. There are also all the children that that bully has impacted the lives of. So simply developing a program for the bully as though it were a singular inoculation and not dealing with bullying as a major disease, so to speak, that not only affects the bully but the victims of the bully – and after the fact every other child and every other teacher in that school needs to be brought into the creation of the solution. Unless that happens, then we're dealing with one-offs, one bully at a time, and that is an incoherent attempt.

In putting forward amendment A2, the key factors I pointed out are the musts and the (4.1) section. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek on amendment A2.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've listened to the hon. member very intently, and quite frankly I'm not opposed to changing it from "may" to "must." He made some valid points, so I am prepared to accept his amendments.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A2?

Hearing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: Back to the bill as amended.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I very much appreciate the collaborative process that has just been demonstrated in this House. We're doing what we've been elected to do, and that's to put forward legislation that is going to improve the lives of Albertans, in this case Alberta children. Mrs. Wedman is here today to see that what happened to her son Alex is not repeated. That is the intention of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and that is what we all have to be directed toward accomplishing, the well-being of children.

As I pointed out in arguing amendment A2, it's not just the bully whose attitude has to be changed, but it's the climate of fear that surrounds the school, that ripples out from that bullying. We have to address the factors that turned the bully into the bully, that continue to make victims of everyone who stands by and does nothing to intervene to prevent bullying from happening. That is why I support the hon. member's intent, and I am hoping that a government bill that has the funding requirements necessary to make Bill 206 realized will follow in subsequent legislation.

I thank the hon. members of this House for collaboratively working together to improve the bill through the discussion process, through the amendment process. I would suggest that democracy is alive and well and operating in this House at this time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today and join in the discussion in committee stage on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I believe that establishing definitions for what constitutes banned items and bullying would enhance the foundation for effective conflict resolution and ensure a safe learning environment for both students and teachers. In light of this, I'd like to speak to section 2 subsection (1.1). This section states that bullying includes all actions outlined in clause (b.1) which are conducted through electronic media. In turn, subsection (ii)(b.1) of Bill 206 defines what constitutes bullying. It states that bullying includes written abuse directed at an individual and threats of physical and sexual assault on an individual.

Mr. Chairman, due to the prevalence and popularity of electronic media outlets, bullying can now be conducted without face-to-face interaction both on and off the school grounds. Electronic media sources include text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail, and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. Text messaging along with websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have provided students with the opportunity to share information and network with friends.

The speed at which information travels through the Internet and cellphones is an attractive feature to users; however, these electronic media outlets can have serious drawbacks when students use them to intimidate and bully fellow classmates. The issue of electronic bullying affects students of all ages, from elementary school to postsecondary and continuing education programs. Bullying through electronic media sources has an equally damaging effect on students' academic lives, social lives along with the students' mental and

physical health. The legislation is clear that bullying in the forms described is equally as intolerable when issued over the Internet or through cellular phones.

Mr. Chairman, we're all well aware that bullying takes place in our schools, and we know the emotional and physical distress it causes its victims. In fact, we've witnessed the tragic effects that bullying can have on students. Delivery of threatening or abusive messages through electronic media sources is no exception. Students subjected to these threats and abuse may fear entering the school just like students who are subject to more conventional bullying.

Furthermore, electronic media can be used not only for students to bully or threaten fellow classmates but also to humiliate the individual on a public stage. An example of this is the numerous social media outlets that allow users to post status updates on their personal page and post comments on their other friends' pages. When these updates and comments are threats or demeaning remarks directed at a particular individual, all the user's friends have the opportunity to view the exchange. This type of repetitive harassment, which works to maintain an imbalance of power over another student, is unacceptable. This behaviour cannot be tolerated through electronic media sources inside or outside the school walls.

A student's time outside of school should generally consist of leisure activities, homework, and time spent with family and friends. These activities coupled with the student's time in the classroom provide the basis for a healthy social relationship both at school and at home. Many students who are bullied see their home as a refuge from the harassment they encounter while at school. However, now with the use of cellphones and computers verbal abuse and threats can be issued at any time.

4:20

Bill 206 recognizes that electronic media sources can be used to foster a culture of fear and intimidation by stating: "bullying includes any of the actions outlined in clause (b.1) that are conducted through electronic media." Section 2 subsection (1.1) ensures that Bill 206 is inclusive of bullying that occurs through these harmful mechanisms.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that under certain circumstances it is important to change our approach. Bill 206 acknowledges how conventional bullying has evolved and how important it is to be inclusive of electronic media within our legislation. This approach will continue to protect the teachers and students in Alberta from harassment and bullying. It's true that preventing bullying inside school walls is necessary to ensure that students can achieve their full academic potential.

Alberta schools should be a place where both students and teachers feel safe and comfortable, a place of learning and healthy social interactions. Mr. Chairman, section 2 subsection (1.1) enhances our ability to effectively achieve this environment. This is the basis for future academic pursuits and career ambitions, therefore creating a comprehensive approach to protect individuals from bullying that's crucial to the development and success of our students.

Mr. Chairman, just to draw a parallel, numerous electronic media outlets provide a forum that is similar to a school assembly. We would not tolerate a student being verbally abused in front of the entire school while other students watched. This is why the inclusion of an electronic media clause is so important. Our students cannot be expected to perform at their peak if they fear physical assault or have been repeatedly slandered and demeaned regardless of how the comments are issued.

Countless studies on electronic bullying have concluded similar negative effects on students as the bullying that occurs in the schoolyard or the classrooms. The prevalence of electronic media has transformed the issue of bullying beyond a simple schoolyard issue. By focusing on electronic media sources in addition to bullying inside our schools, we take a comprehensive approach to a very serious problem.

I believe that Bill 206 is a step forward in eliminating bullying and intimidation in our schools and in further promoting a safe learning environment for both students and teachers. That being said, I urge all members to vote in favour of Bill 206 at this stage.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to get up and speak again to this bill in committee stage. This bill obviously has a very, very worthwhile intent to it. When I spoke to this bill – I think it was in the spring – in second reading, I outlined my concerns with how it was perhaps a little bit incongruent with decisions made by this Assembly with respect to Bill 44. But separate and apart from that issue, I would like to talk about the rest of the bill and what it's attempting to do.

I think there are some good elements to the bill in terms of dealing with the problem that I think exists in almost every school, probably, across the province. One of the things that I do like about the bill is sort of the notion of setting out a clear process of response and setting out some mechanisms of accountability in terms of how bullying is identified as well as how it's responded to once it's raised by the student or friends of the student or parents or whomever.

Certainly, in that sense it's very good because as things stand now, I have to say that there's not really a consistent response in many of our schools. It's often subject to the discretion of teachers and principals, and while there's something to be said for that, the fact of the matter is that from the perspective of students and from the perspective of parents they need to know what the process is, and they need to know what they can expect to have happen and what they should be able to ask their teacher or principal to deal with. The reality is that there is inconsistency on the part of teachers and on the part of principals in terms of their relative skills in dealing with these kinds of issues when they arise.

I'm not, as I think I said before, a huge fan of the role of the peace officer in this particular legislation although, again, I do understand that it's trying to raise the level of seriousness that is directed towards the assessment of the activities or the behaviour in question. I appreciate the value of that. Again, I think that when you get into issues of trying to change behaviour, the punitive aspects of changing that behaviour, ultimately you're almost at the last. You're at the end of the line on that at that point if you have to start engaging in punitive action because that's probably your least effective mechanism of changing behaviour, in changing the culture within the school setting. I understand that it was not the intent to take away a teacher's or a principal's ability to suspend a student. I'm sorry if I missed if that was part of the amendments that were put into place. I'm going to assume that they were – I'm not sure – and then I'll check before I go forward to vote on this.

The other point that I'd like to make with respect to all of this, though, which I think is really important for all of us as members of the Assembly who are working on this problem to consider, goes back to the point that I was making about how if you're at a point when you're engaging in punitive actions and you're taking someone out of the school or you're bringing in a peace officer, in many

respects you're at the end of the process. You're not likely to get a change in behaviour from the bullying student, nor, frankly, are you very likely to make a fundamental change to the culture within that school setting.

Most people who engage in behaviour modification strategies with children at risk know that the better mechanism for changing behaviour is through basically changing the behaviour when the child is motivated to do it simply by offering them other alternatives and other options rather than through punitive options. For instance, the fact of the matter is that you can find relatively simple mechanisms to change the dynamic on the school ground so as to negate the potential of bullying. So rather than having 15 kids go run to a part of the school ground that's not supervised, where it's partially hidden from supervision, you actually have more staff time dedicated to organized activities, to intramurals, to staff on the playground who can intervene and actually establish more positive behaviour by all the students on the playground by organizing activities or whatever.

What this links into, of course, is the fact that many of our schools are suffering from a shortage of staffing, and much of that work right now on the playground is being done by volunteers, usually by parents and relatives of children. They are the ones that are on the school ground, often, trying to manage the behaviour of students. They either do it on a volunteer basis or on an honorarium basis, which works out to much less than hourly wages. These are the people that our system has essentially invited to engage in this behaviour management. Now, obviously, the better approach would be for there to be trained staff there on the playground, in the gyms, in the lunchrooms, behind the bushes, wherever, ensuring that negative behaviours don't ever start, and part of the reason that doesn't happen is because there simply isn't the capacity in the school system.

4:30

In one sense this bill goes towards this broader issue; you know, do you simply put all your efforts into punitive actions, or do you try and prevent the crime from happening in advance by providing the kinds of supports that would negate it or discourage it from happening? I'm not saying that my solution is the only solution, and I'm not saying that there aren't elements of this bill which are worth while because there are.

What I'm saying is that it's not the only answer and that if you are going to control the playground and control the school grounds and control those places where bullying occurs, you need to have the resources to do it. If you can do it there and build productive, positive, mature relationships amongst and between your students, you're less likely to have bullying in that setting as well as off the school grounds through cyberbullying, through people walking home, whichever. It really comes down to whether you're going to invest in the resources and the supports to really try to reduce and limit incidents of that sort.

At this point those are the primary observations that I'd like to make on this bill. I will review it in more detail before we get to third reading to assess the implications of the amendments that were made earlier this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to rise today and join debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. This debate

is particularly timely in view of the fact that this is National Bullying Awareness Week. This legislation will provide a novel mechanism to deal with acts of intimidation or bullying in Alberta schools. Furthermore, it will prohibit the possession of weapons and drug paraphernalia on school grounds.

Currently, Mr. Chairman, section 24(1) of the School Act provides a teacher or principal with the authority to suspend a student if their conduct is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school. Bill 206 will enhance this provision by mandating all schools to address and document all incidents that involve bullying or possession of any drug paraphernalia, tool, or device that may inflict harm on others. This will ensure that all circumstances of bullying and possession of weapons are acknowledged and dealt with.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to understand what may be deemed a weapon or drug paraphernalia under Bill 206. To this end I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to section 2, provision (a.1). That section defines a banned item as “a weapon as defined in the Criminal Code” of Canada or “a controlled substance and offence-related property as defined in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act,” again of Canada, and “any item listed in the regulations as a banned item for the purposes of this Act.” Essentially, section 2, provision (a.1), speaks to banned items, including weapons and controlled substances, that under Bill 206 will be prohibited from schools.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 206 refers to Canada’s Criminal Code for the definition of a weapon. The Criminal Code states that a weapon consists of

- any thing used, designed to be used or intended for use
 - (a) in causing death or injury to any person, or
 - (b) for the purpose of threatening or intimidating any person
- and, without restricting the generality of the foregoing, includes a firearm.

This means that any object used by one student against another student to inflict or threaten harm against a fellow student would constitute a weapon.

Such items could include the use of common school or personal property such as scissors. Furthermore, it could include items we traditionally associate with being weapons such as knives or, in a worst-case scenario, a firearm. Through preventative measures Bill 206 hopes to avoid circumstances where the weapons are used to harm other students. By effectively confronting bullying when it occurs and leaving no doubt that it is unacceptable behaviour, students may be encouraged to cease and desist from carrying on in these objectionable actions.

Mr. Chairman, as mentioned earlier, Bill 206 also prohibits drug paraphernalia on school property. To this end it defines such banned items as a controlled substance and offence-related property as defined in the controlled substances act of Canada. The prohibited substances outlined under the controlled substances act are too numerous to name in this speech. However, a few include cannabis, amphetamines, and methamphetamines.

Furthermore, offence-related property means, with the exception of a controlled substance,

- any property, within or outside Canada,
 - (a) by means of or in respect of which a designated substance offence is committed,
 - (b) that is used in any manner in connection with the commission of a designated substance offence, or
 - (c) that is intended for use for the purpose of committing a designated substance offence.

These provisions clarify what constitutes offence-related property when substance-related offences are committed. When such an offence is committed, these definitions provide important clarity for

all parties who may be involved, including students, teachers, parents, and the police. Ultimately, Mr. Chairman, the clarity provided by these provisions will ensure the effectiveness of this legislation. Bill 206 reaffirms the fundamental value that we share as Albertans that weapons and drugs have no place on school property and that every child deserves a safe, world-class education.

I believe that the provisions I have described today, which clarify what constitutes a weapon as well as controlled substances and offence-related property, are key elements to this legislation. Mr. Chairman, there is simply no place for weapons on school property. The physical and emotional harm that they are capable of need not take place, in fact must not take place. That is why Bill 206 unequivocally states that regardless of intent the mere possession of these weapons is unacceptable and constitutes a serious offence.

For these reasons, Mr. Chairman, every instance of weapons possession must be documented, and police intervention may be called for when dealing with a student who commits such an offence. This intervention would take the form of meeting with the offending student, the parent or guardian, and school administration to discuss appropriate consequences and the next steps for the student. In addition, police would have the authority to lay a mandatory court summons, or they could provide recommendations to courts that would be appropriate for the offender. I believe that these measures offer a constructive alternative or perhaps complement a suspension when addressing serious offences, thereby helping to prevent future instances and the escalation of these activities in our schools.

Bill 206 will help to provide greater safety for all of our children in schools across Alberta; therefore, I would like to throw my enthusiastic support behind this well-intentioned and constructive piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It’s a great honour and a pleasure to speak in favour of Bill 206, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I’d like to thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing in an amendment to strike out section 5 and to amend it. I’d also like to thank her for accepting an amendment from my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

I want to congratulate the member for bringing in this bill because bullying has no borders. The last time I spoke, I said, you know, that I was a victim of bullying, too. This bill will go a long way to address this bullying problem in the school system. This legislation will improve the quality of life not only of the students but also of the parents and families affected by the problem of bullying. I know there are so many students who don’t want to go to school. They will just skip school because they are afraid of bullies. They will just, you know, wander around in the shopping malls, go to movies.

4:40

Bullying doesn’t start in high school or in junior high school. Bullies, I think, start at a younger age. We had a meeting with the Calgary police chief, and then we started talking about bullying. They said: you know, this problem has to be nipped in the bud in the earlier years. I think this bill will strengthen the hands of the school boards and principals, and we will be able to tackle this problem with teeth in the law. I’m glad to support this bill, too, because this bill goes a long way in addressing bullying in gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, cultural background, and you name it. I think this will almost cover it all.

I congratulate the member again for bringing in the bill and accepting all the amendments we were hoping to have put in. I think this bill has come pretty close to a perfect bill. You know, maybe in the future we will not have to tinker too much with this. I congratulate you on that, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Thank you very much.

I fully support this bill, sir. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to join the debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, as brought forward by my friend, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this well-thought-out piece of legislation.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 206 will help to ensure the safety of all children and staff on school property, including school buses and school-sponsored activity. Additionally, this bill clearly defines what constitutes a bully. This definition is important in order for the goal of this bill to be achieved. The full definition of bullying is referenced in many sections of Bill 206. However, I would like to specifically discuss section 2, subsection (b.1), sub (i), and sub (ii).

In section 2, subsections (b.1) and (b.1)(i) state that to "bully" means to repetitively harass an individual to maintain an imbalance of power over that individual by

- (i) gestures, verbal abuse or written abuse directed at that individual, including gestures and abuse that are based on the individual's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability.

As well, in section 2, subsections (b.1) and (b.1)(ii) include the stealing of possessions of that individual in the definition of bullying.

Mr. Chairman, these sections explain in detail what it means to bully. In order to properly discuss these sections, each one needs to be examined and addressed in greater detail. First, as referenced in section 2, subsection (b.1), a bully is someone who repetitively harasses an individual to maintain an imbalance of power over that person. This means a bully would be someone who continually harms or threatens another person. If the word "repetitively" was not included in this definition, some behaviours may be incorrectly defined as bullying, which would ultimately reduce the effectiveness of the legislation.

It is pivotal that the definition of bullying be accurate and not too far reaching as we do not want to inadvertently suggest that all acts, in fact, result in bullying. This definition has to be specific and clear in order to address the behaviour of those individuals who are regularly cruel or overbearing and not the person who may have gotten into an argument with another individual at one point in time. In this way Bill 206 achieves the balance.

Mr. Chairman, that being said, it is necessary to use broad language when protecting others. An example of this is how section 2, subsection (b.1) uses the word "individual" rather than the term "youth" or "child." I can appreciate this because a bully may harass a teacher or another person on school property who may not be a youth or child. This wording, therefore, ensures that Bill 206 would protect everyone on school property.

As mentioned previously, section 2, subsection (b.1) says that bullying means to "repetitively harass an individual to maintain an imbalance of power over that individual." Mr. Chairman, an imbalance of power creates inequity. Section 2, subsection (b.1) addresses this imbalance in order to ensure that everyone is treated as equals.

Second, Mr. Chairman, section 2, subsection (b.1)(i) goes on to provide ways in which this imbalance of power could be maintained. Some of these ways include gestures, verbal and/or written abuse directed at someone. The language used in this part of the bill is general enough to include many different types of harassment. Words and gestures can be very hurtful, which is why it is critical to have these terms included in the definition of bullying. The subsection affirms that any gestures, verbal or written abuse directed at someone are not permitted. This alone covers many different types of abuse. However, in case of confusion this definition provides even more clarification by including specifics such as gestures and abuse that are based upon the individual's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability. Therefore, this would ensure protection against any sort of discrimination.

Third, section 2, subsection (b.1)(ii) is another part of Bill 206 worth mentioning. It addresses how an imbalance of power could be maintained through bullying by stealing another person's possessions. Mr. Chairman, students bring valuable items with them to school. Some are sentimental, some are religious, and some are necessary medications, for example. That being said, stealing a person's nonvaluable items can be another form of bullying as well. An example of this could be as simple as someone's pencil constantly being stolen. Something as small as this could be frustrating for an individual and may affect that person's performance at school. Stealing in general is cruel and can severely affect the individual's well-being or self-esteem, which is why the subsection is necessary in the definition of bullying.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, this definition of bullying protects everyone on school property and does not wrongly accuse an individual of being a bully. In short, section 2, subsection (b.1)(i) and (ii) provide clarity, and as a result there would be no confusion around what constitutes bullying. Ultimately, these sections would ensure that Bill 206 is effective.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to rise and speak on these important sections.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward a piece of legislation that endeavours to make our schools a safer place for students by providing administrators and teachers with more tools to fight bullying.

This afternoon I'd like to discuss section 2 of the bill, specifically provision (b.1), clauses (iii) and (iv). Mr. Chairman, this bill would be incomplete if it did not clearly define what bullying is, and defining "bully" is the sole purpose of provision (b.1) and its four clauses. The provision defines someone as bullying when he or she repetitively harasses someone else, maintaining an imbalance of power over that person. The ways of harassing and maintaining this imbalance are then described in the four clauses that follow.

Gestures, verbal and written abuse, and theft are outlined in clauses (i) and (ii). Gestures and abuse include those based on a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and mental or physical disability. Much of the bullying seen on a playground is of this nature, and it can have lasting psychological ramifications for its recipients. But bullying can and sometimes does escalate into violence or the threat of violence. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, clauses (iii) and (iv) further define the ways a bully can repetitively harass and gain an imbalance of power over a peer by

- (iii) physical or sexual assault or threats of physical or sexual assault on that individual, or
- (iv) threats of death to that individual.

4:50

We can all recognize physical assault as being part of bullying. Probably many in this House have either seen it first-hand or experienced it first-hand. Movies and television are rife with images of bullying, being a tough kid looking to meet his victim after school on the baseball diamond or in the alleyway. But, Mr. Chairman, I think we can all agree that reality is not like the movies, where a bullying victim often prevails as a hero. If anything, the prevalence of these images in popular entertainment trivializes the suffering of those who find themselves as a bully's target. Still, physical assault is widely recognized as a tool that bullies use to retain power over their victims.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to also take a moment to highlight the importance of the second portion of clause (iii), sexual assault, as it's written into the bill, as a bullying tactic. Like physical assault, sexual assault can also be used to maintain an imbalance of power. The fear of an assault can also terrorize a victim.

Mr. Chairman, this brings me to the last portion of clause (iii) and to clause (iv), where the threat of violence is included as a bullying tactic. The threat of violence is outlined in the bill as threats of physical or sexual assault on that individual or threats of death to that individual. It doesn't matter how plausible the threat seems to an outside observer for the threat to work. The bully's intended victim must believe that the bully is both capable and willing to act out that threat.

In today's information age and with technology, delivering a threat has become much easier. Kids who might not have had the nerve to threaten a peer with harm in person can feel empowered behind the anonymity of a keyboard or the distance of a cellphone text message. Again, I think we've all experienced that with e-mail in our own offices. People are much braver when they're using that technology than they are face to face.

Threats, however they're delivered, can torment their target even if they aren't carried out. No child deserves to live in fear. This fear can be debilitating and as equally detrimental as the act itself. Therefore, threats should be included among the harassing behaviours that bullies can use.

The clear definition of the verb "bully" provided in Bill 206 is an important tool that can be used if the bill is passed because it empowers teachers and administrators to define a tool in identifying a bullying student and provides them further tools to respond accordingly.

For these reasons I wholeheartedly support the intent and the wording of the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, and I encourage my colleagues in the Legislature to do the same and help stop bullying. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and join the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. As a former teacher of 36 years I would like to sincerely thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this timely and well-crafted piece of legislation.

As this Assembly heard during second reading last spring, Bill 206 intends to prohibit acts of intimidation or bullying in Alberta's schools and will provide a mechanism for dealing with these unfortunate events when they occur. It would require all schools to

address and document cases of bullying, possession of drug paraphernalia, tools, or devices that may cause harm to other students. In short, this piece of legislation seeks to ensure that Alberta's children can learn and grow in an environment that is free of detrimental activities associated with bullying.

I would like to specifically address section 12.2, which reads:

No student shall bully another [person]

- (a) in a school, on school grounds, on a school bus or at an activity sponsored or approved by a board,
- (b) by means of a school computer or the Internet accessed through a school computer, or
- (c) at any other time where such activity may reasonably be expected to cause a substantial and material disruption at school.

Mr. Chairman, I believe the strength of this bill is in how it recognizes that acts of bullying are not only limited to such things as name-calling. Bullying in today's schools can be perpetrated in many different forms using various media. As such, we have to ensure that we give school officials the necessary tools to effectively mitigate the ever-evolving forms of bullying.

Mr. Chairman, cyberbullying has become more prevalent as the Internet has become more accessible to students. We hear of situations time and again where popular social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace are used as a tool to bully. Students who bully may create fake social networking profiles as well as groups with the intent to inflict serious mental harm on their victims. Indeed, these new tools may create more mental anguish as their actions can be witnessed by a larger audience. Section 12.2(b) recognizes this reality and effectively bans a student from using a school computer as a tool to bully.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(6), which provides for consideration of motions other than government motions at 5 p.m. on Monday afternoons, the committee will now rise and report.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 206. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Canadian Forces Training and Service Recognition

516. Mr. Cao moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and personal development that military personnel gain from training and service while in the Canadian Forces as equivalent to civilian qualifications.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to rise today to introduce and open debate on Motion 516, military personnel qualification recognition. The Canadian Forces are highly respected by Albertans, Canadians, and our international partners. They are there to protect and help us both domestically and internationally, at home and abroad. The Canadian Forces seek to bring peace and stability in conflicts around the world in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Croatia, and Haiti.

Canadian Forces personnel receive a high level of training while employed as both regular force members and as reserve force members. The qualifications and skills they learn and the education they receive is first class. Mr. Speaker, Motion 516 builds on the good work that this government has already implemented in Bill 1, Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009. We can build on this by recognizing the skills that are learned when one is a member of the Canadian Forces.

This government has already made strides in recognition of skills with the implementation of their prior learning assessment and recognition, or PLAR. PLAR is a powerful tool that can be used by many, including those in the Canadian Forces. PLAR is a process that identifies, assesses, and recognizes skills learned in informal, nonformal, experiential, or formal means. In addition, the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act recognizes certain skills and trades that are learned in the Canadian Forces. However, I believe that it is essential that all trades and skills are recognized. This is why I have brought Motion 516 forward, urging the government to continue to work with professional organizations, the Canadian Forces, and Canada's ministry of defence to ensure that more skills and qualifications are recognized.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, the catalyst for bringing this motion forward was hearing from my constituent, a lifelong Canadian Forces member, a Mr. Andrew Downey of the Erin Woods community in Calgary. Upon leaving the forces, he was unable to have the skills that he had learned and practised transferred over to the civilian world. It cost him time and money to go through training repetition and recertification of the skills he had practised for many long years in the military.

Now, at this point I recognize that the Canadian Forces are currently working on the red seal trades to standardize skills. This is a step in the right direction. The red seal trades are vital to our economy. Additionally, the Canadian Forces offer assistance with achieving accreditation for military experience through civilian training accreditation programs. Mr. Speaker, as I have said, there has been considerable work done by the Canadian Forces and the Alberta government. However, this motion encourages that this commitment continues and that more qualifications and skills are recognized. By recognizing the qualifications and skills learned in the Canadian Forces, we can have forces members re-entering civilian life having marketable assets they can use to their advantage.

Our Canadian Forces should be respected. They defend this country, bring peace to troubled areas around the world. Mr. Speaker, Alberta can take the lead and encourage the rest of the Canadian provinces to recognize the valuable qualifications and skills learned by our Canadian Forces. I encourage the hon. members to support this motion, and I look forward to further debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'm hoping that at some point in the debate the definition of "recognize" will come out because at

this point "to recognize" is vague. Is it just a symbolic recognition, or will there be policy changes to reflect the equatability between military and civilian qualifications? This is extremely important.

I'm the product and I would suggest that I'm the proud product of military families. My grandfather Edward Arthur Chase was a British cavalry officer during the First World War. While he was gassed at Ypres, he managed to survive, and for that I am eternally grateful because I'm here and speaking on this important motion today. My father, Edward Bryce Chase, had a proud military career. During the Second World War he was a pilot flying in Burma, and I have previously recounted some of the experiences that he had where his major enemy was the monsoon-like weather that occurred in the Burma area.

I fully support the notion of recognizing the value of not only military service but the training that takes place while one is in the military. My father did his training as a pilot both here in Alberta and then in Britain before shipping out to Burma, where he flew Wellingtons. Much of the work he did was evacuation of injured individuals, casualties of war. My father had an opportunity to upgrade his qualifications because he enlisted directly out of grade 12. He had to take his grade 12 by correspondence because in the small town where he was from, Meota, Saskatchewan, the opportunities for grade 12 were limited. So, father, after surviving the Second World War, had an opportunity to attend the University of Saskatchewan at the Saskatoon campus, and there he received his degree in psychology. So he had both the military training of being a pilot and the civilian training required in psychology.

When father was finished his university education, he re-enlisted, and we were sent out to Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec, where he worked in the personnel selection unit intaking individuals who were coming into the service and recognizing the skills that they had and how they could best be put to use within the military circumstance.

While father was in the military, he went through a series of courses with regard to instrumentation on a variety of planes he flew, such as the Otter. The plane that he finished up on out of Namao air base just outside town was the C-119, or the Flying Boxcar. In terms of military transferability father spent a lot of time on instrumentation. He logged a considerable number of flight hours. He served as a mentor to junior officers, and father rose through the ranks based on not only his civvy qualifications but his military qualifications.

As part of his military training, for example, in addition to instrumentation he took courses in survival. That was part of his experience. Also, although he was in the air force, there was weaponry training. When he was in Burma, for example, there was training on how to escape, and he's just recently donated to the military museum a silk map indicating escape routes from Burma in the event that he would be shot down or behind enemy lines. So the military training is of significant importance.

In 1959 we were transferred from the base at Namao to Toronto, where my father went to a military staff college. He rose in the ranks from a flight lieutenant, going into staff college, to a squadron leader, leaving staff college. We then went on to Ottawa, where again my father served in a more civil service end of the air force. Finally, in 1966 my father was the commanding officer of the personnel selection unit, which was responsible for transferring individuals out of the military into successful civilian postmilitary careers. Throughout the experience, I must admit, I was a guinea pig for psychological testing, for ROTC and a whole variety of other testing in terms of suitability and the quality of testing and so on.

There is no doubt that there are skills that are transferable from the military towards the civilian experience, and there are very few

military individuals who, when their military service is completed, can afford to simply retire because, unfortunately, military pay, while it has improved, is not the be-all and end-all. I think even generals might find that they had to be considered for consulting.

The transference of the skills acquired in the military is extremely important. However, how we qualify those services has to be taken into account. Obviously, some training is less adaptable to a civilian experience. I mean, for example, firing a series of munitions doesn't completely translate. So it will be important and I look forward to further discussion as to how it is that we, in quotes, recognize the qualities and attributes acquired during military service. Beyond a doubt it's important that we recognize these attributes, that we recognize the contributions of individuals who have undergone military service, whether it be in the reserve or whether it be in the active services.

With that, I look forward to further qualifications and discussions of this interesting motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and speak to Motion 516 as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Many things make me proud to be an Albertan and proud to be a Canadian, but one thing distinguishes itself above others, and that is the sacrifices made by the Canadian Forces. From their victories in the two world wars to their courageous efforts in Afghanistan today the men and the women of the Canadian Forces have always been a source of pride which all Canadians share. Across this province thousands of Albertans have accepted the call to duty in the Canadian Forces with honour. Today, whether it's Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world, our men and women in uniform are defending freedom and standing up for the values that we take for granted in this country.

There are currently about 90,000 individuals enlisted in either the Canadian Forces or the reserve forces. In carrying out their duties, Mr. Speaker, these men and women are being trained to carry out many activities that involve great skill and education. In the military, as I am sure many Albertans can attest to, you learn a different set of skills, skills that are not taught in our public school system or in our colleges and our universities. I believe these skills should be acknowledged. This is why I strongly support the direction of Motion 516.

This motion specifically moves to recognize the qualifications, the skills, the knowledge, and the personal development that military personnel gain from training and service in the Canadian Forces as equivalent to civilian qualifications. Currently, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Forces, the federal government, and the province of Alberta have already introduced the recognition of certain skills and are working on furthering this with suitable industries by working with both the Canadian Forces and Alberta's professional association for further skill recognition. For example, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology has implemented the advancing prior learning assessment and recognition. The advancing prior learning assessment and recognition is a process of identifying, assessing, and recognizing skills, competencies, and knowledge of individuals learned by informal, nonformal, experimental, or formal means.

In fact, the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board already recognizes military credentials as being equivalent to a trade certificate in several occupations. These include automotive service technicians, carpenter, cook, heavy equipment technician, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanic, and parts technician. In

addition, individuals may receive advanced standing in other trades through a prior learning assessment. Mr. Speaker, these are crucial steps forward in supporting our Canadian Forces so that after these men and women have carried out their duties, they can move back into their communities and work to support their families without having to be retrained and re-educated in a field where they have sufficient knowledge.

As a government I believe it is our duty to continue to do everything we can in showing our support for our military personnel. By recognizing the knowledge and skills that our heroes are able to gain while serving their country and risking their lives, we are one step closer to truly showing our appreciation for all they do. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I support Motion 516 and urge all my colleagues in the Assembly to do the same.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Motion 516, military personnel qualification recognition. I would first like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this motion forward. Motion 516 encourages the government "to recognize the qualifications, skills, knowledge, and personal development that military personnel gain from [their] training and service while in the Canadian Forces as equivalent to civilian qualifications."

Mr. Speaker, this motion is extremely important to me because many of my constituents, especially the Cold Lake residents, are active in the forces. The 4 Wing air base, located in Cold Lake, is one of the largest Canadian Forces air bases in Canada. Fifty-three hundred people live on the base in my constituency, which comprises approximately 45 per cent of our local population in Cold Lake.

Recently I have received calls from many of these constituents with concerns about transferring their military accreditations over to civilian jobs once they finish their service in the military. Many of these individuals don't stay in the Canadian Forces for their entire careers. Many would like to pursue other opportunities in Alberta, often in the trades, but feel that they will not be able to get the qualification recognition that they require. By increasing the credentials that can be transferred over to civilian jobs, military tradespeople would be more confident in pursuing this lifestyle and career choice. They would know that if they ever decide to leave the forces, they have the experience and the skills to fall back on when looking for an alternative career.

The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board already recognizes military credentials for automotive service technicians, carpenters, cooks, heavy equipment technicians, refrigeration and air conditioning mechanics, and parts technicians. Why can't we extend that to include other occupations in the Canadian Forces? The skills that the military personnel develop during their time in the forces are truly world class and, as such, should be recognized as equivalent to civilian qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, many individuals in my constituency and others across Alberta will benefit immensely if Motion 516 is passed. It is a great way to show respect to our troops and give them a chance to succeed in civilian life, just as they have in their commitment to the Canadian Forces.

Again, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for introducing Motion 516 and encourage all members to vote in its favour. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour today to rise to speak in favour of Motion 516, brought forth by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Motion 516 seeks to encourage the government of Alberta to recognize the skills and qualifications of military personnel as being equivalent to civilian qualifications. If we pass Motion 516, it will create more opportunities for Albertans. It will allow military personnel to have an easier transition to a career outside of the Canadian Forces. In addition, it would help instill confidence in those joining the Canadian Forces because it would give them an opportunity to pursue other interests once they have finished their service.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 66 per cent of the industrial land in Edmonton is found in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder. As a result of this, many of my constituents work in the trades because there is such a high demand for the type of work that they do. Edmonton-Calder is also home to many senior citizens' homes, and some of those seniors living in these homes are veterans. If they'd had the opportunity to receive this type of accreditation back when they were finished serving in the Canadian armed forces, I imagine it would have helped them considerably. It would have acted to increase the availability of skilled workers in Alberta in the past and also in the present day. In addition to this, it would give our troops the marketable skills that they need to pursue a career outside of the military.

The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board already recognizes military credentials as being the equivalent of trade certifications in certain occupations, and while I am not in favour of watering down the qualifications, I would like to see expansion to other trades. The schooling that military personnel receive while serving the Canadian Forces is, indeed, very similar to the training that they would receive in civilian certifications. So why not make it equivalent?

Mr. Speaker, our troops are providing a great service to this country. They are dedicating their time and putting their lives on the line for us. Motion 516 simply helps us to honour the sacrifice that these people have made for us and will help raise the awareness of military service in Canada and the skills that individuals learn while they are employed there.

I would again like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this motion forward. If passed, this motion will benefit many of the constituents of Edmonton-Calder as well as troops all over Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

5:20

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly. As a past reservist I wanted to put a few comments on the record as the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Many members have already mentioned the fact that our department through the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board does actually cross-qualify many of the trades that our Canadian Forces do, the automotive, carpentry, heavy-duty mechanic as a few examples. The quality of the students that we have in our postsecondary of reservists and Canadian Forces personnel, the quality of the tradesmen that are coming to us from those disciplines is second to none, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to work with DND, the Department of National Defence, on trying to ensure where there are easy crossovers or crossovers that we can identify that would, as my hon. colleague mentioned, not water down the trade certificate, because these are in many cases national trade certificates, but certainly work with the forces to identify where we can change them so that when a member

leaves the service of the Canadian Forces, they can easily transfer into whatever trade they were trained in in the military.

If this motion is passed – and I would urge acceptance of this motion – we will instruct our department to redouble their efforts in working with the Department of National Defence so that we can get more of those trades cross-qualified.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly urge my colleagues to pass the motion.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to this motion and to thank the Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing it forward. I think it's entirely consistent with the support this government or, indeed, this Legislature has shown for our armed forces in our province, and it's certainly worthy of every consideration.

I'm just fearful, Mr. Speaker, that this is beyond a provincial level. Any recognition of certification that we provide to a member of the armed forces based on equivalence or anything else, once we've granted that person a tradesman status, automatically means they have tradesman status in other provinces by trading agreements, certainly with some of the agreements that we have with British Columbia. So that would mean that British Columbia would have to be in agreement with our approach. It goes beyond provincial certifications for such things, for example, as pilots' licences.

I began my career in forestry as a helitack firefighter in British Columbia, and we worked almost exclusively with military pilots. The hill they have to climb after hundreds or thousands of hours of helicopter experience in the military is that in some cases they just about have to start over for civilian certification, and that's a federal jurisdiction.

So it's a fantastic effort and a discussion that has to happen, in fact, a discussion that's long overdue, but it's a discussion that has to involve other provinces and the federal government as well as the Department of National Defence. I think it's a fantastic effort. I again congratulate the member for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Then I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to close.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all my hon. colleagues who have spoken on this motion. I would like to thank my many constituents, in particular Mr. Andrew Downey, for having brought this public issue to my attention.

Mr. Speaker, I would like once again to emphasize that Alberta is a province that values our Canadian Forces. Many of us recently had an opportunity to experience first-hand the skills that our Canadian Forces have. This government has already taken steps to honour our forces members with job-protected leave for the reservists. I believe that by recognizing the training, skills qualifications learned in the forces as equal to civilian qualifications, we further honour and respect our forces members.

With Motion 516 I really call on the Alberta Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology and the Alberta Ministry of Employment and Immigration to continue to work further with the Canadian armed forces and the Canadian ministry of defence in training programs and skills so that they can be seamlessly transferable.

Over this past hour there were many, many interesting topics discussed, and while there may be some concern on the wording of the motion and many details need to be worked out, I believe that any of this can be overcome and that recognizing the skills and

qualifications of our Canadian Forces is the right thing to do. I ask my hon. colleagues for their favourable consideration of Motion 516. Motion 516 is really a small contribution to last week's Remembrance Day, when we honoured our veterans and armed forces.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 516 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we have concluded the business on the Order Paper for today, I would move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 17, 2009

Issue 58

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to welcome students from John Barnett school from my riding of Edmonton-Manning. I was very happy to attend the school's 40th anniversary back in June and meet several students and staff members. These 22 bright young grade 6 students along with their teacher, Mr. Glenn Newby, have toured our Legislature and learned a lot about our building and the provincial government. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege and a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly and all Albertans a large group from the Lacombe Christian Reformed Church Seniors Club. There are 50 of them here along with four tour guides. A group of seniors this size are like a bunch of junior high kids. They run around, and you need to have tour guides to keep them together. The tour guides are Cindy Prins, a cousin of mine; Judy Van Haren, my sister; Eleanor Drost, my sister; and Lynn Richardson, my cousin. Among these seniors, I want to introduce to you and to all members the senior of all seniors, my father, Mr. Ralph Prins. You might want to stand up.

I have a number of uncles and aunts, and they've all come out to see me. They are Uncle Klass and Aunt Jenny Brink; my aunt, Helena Kits; Gerrit and Dorothy Meindersma, uncle and aunt; Jake and Agnes Prins; and my uncle, Simon Swier. There are about 14 of them, I think, that are related to me. I also have with me today my wife, Pauline Prins.

An Hon. Member: Did they vote for you?

Mr. Prins: Yeah, most of them voted for me.

Another one I want to introduce to you is my new legislative assistant, Renee Reitsma. Her grandmother is a part of this group but was unable to travel today, so she's not here.

I would ask all these wonderful seniors from Lacombe to stand up and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: I can't top that, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly four representatives from the Department of Culture and Community Spirit, who are here on a public service orientation tour. I'd like to commend them for the

excellent work they do in our department. We have with us today, seated in the members' gallery, Mechelle Silveira, Eileen Daskoch, Tanya Davies, and Joyce Zilinski. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly another group of hard-working, dedicated staff members from Alberta Environment, who are joining us today to get a little bit of flavour for what the legislative side of the workings of government is all about. They are 27 hard-working employees from across the province. I know that all members will share my view that we're very, very pleased that we have an opportunity to share what we do on a day-to-day basis with all of the folks that support us in a very meaningful way to ensure that we can do our job properly. I'd ask that they rise and receive the recognition of all members of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have eight members of the department here, who are equally as hard working as the other members of our civil service.

An Hon. Member: They probably have to work a little harder.

Mr. Liepert: They probably work harder – you're right, member – just to deal with that member.

Mr. Speaker, they too are on a public service orientation tour, and in the interests of time I won't introduce each one. I would just ask all eight to stand and be recognized by the members of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature Mr. Pol Ngeth. Pol is in Edmonton to present at the ninth annual Diverse Voices 2009 family violence conference on how to deal with cultural gaps around issues of family violence. Pol is a registered social worker with a master's degree in education and a master's in social work from the University of Calgary. He has held positions with Alberta Health Services, child and family services, and he is a multicultural counsellor for the men's group at Immigrant Services Calgary. Accompanying him today is Mr. Kimpeou, who is a member of the Khmer-Canadian Buddhist temple, Calgary. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I would like to ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Mr. Ken Knowles, president and CEO of Northlands, sitting in the members' gallery. Northlands is one of the oldest and most historic nonprofit, volunteer organizations in Edmonton, having been founded in 1879. Every year Northlands attracts over 4 million visitors to more than 2,500 events, which help to put Edmonton and Alberta on the map. At this time I would like to ask Ken Knowles to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Then join me today in wishing the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung a happy birthday.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Edmonton Northlands

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From November 11 to 15 83,904 fans kicked up their heels at the 36th annual Canadian Finals Rodeo at Rexall Place. I want to congratulate Northlands for all their success this year at the CFR and also recognize the incredible impact they make in our great city.

Mr. Speaker, Northlands rocks Edmonton with 2,500 events each year, that attract over 4 million visitors to Alberta's capital city. Aside from the CFR there are also Farmfair International, Capital EX, Rexall Edmonton Indy, the best of horse racing, headliner concerts, international events, trade shows, conferences, and more. That number is expected to grow with the unveiling of the Edmonton Expo Centre on December 1, which will contain a total of 522,000 square feet, effectively doubling the size of Northlands' existing trade show and conference space and increasing its international reputation.

Mr. Speaker, an example of Northlands' influence on the world stage can be seen in a recent article from *Venues Today* ranking Rexall Place 10th in the world and second in Canada as determined by gross ticket sales at all ticketed concerts and events in arenas with a capacity of over 15,000. It is interesting to note that Rexall Place is used 240 event days in a year and will once again be on the world stage from December 6 to 13 with the Roar of the Rings Canadian curling trials.

Once again, congratulations to team Northlands and Ken Knowles for doing such a wonderful job for our city.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

1:40 Intermunicipal Cost-sharing Agreements

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and bring to the attention of this House a major achievement in my constituency. The neighbouring municipalities of Northern Sunrise county and the town of Peace River signed two important intermunicipal co-operation agreements recently. One is an operational cost-sharing agreement, which provides compensation for the provision of regional services, and the other is a capital cost-sharing agreement, which builds a capital reserve by mutual contributions and provides a process for establishing future expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, I could stand here as an MLA and say all kinds of things about how far-reaching or visionary these agreements are – and they truly are – but today I'd sooner stand here as a resident of one of these municipalities and say thank you. You've acted as neighbours should act, and you've acted to make our communities better places to live.

I would like to thank the councils of each municipality for their hard work in bringing forward these agreements: from Northern Sunrise county Reeve Agnes Knudsen, Deputy Reeve Evens Lavoie, councillors Ricky Boucher, Ed Dziengielewski, Carolyn Kolebaba, and Darlene Cardinal; from the town of Peace River Mayor Iris Callioux, Deputy Mayor Berry Heinen, councillors Leslie Ayre-Jaschke, Don Good, Wanda Laurin, Neil Martin, and Geoff Milligan.

Mr. Speaker, great work to all involved and congratulations. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Public Education

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I had the pleasure of meeting with university students enrolled in the Education program at the University of Alberta. Like thousands of other Albertans they are gravely concerned by this administration's plans to cut education funding to the bone. We should all be worried because Conservative administrations keep proving that they don't value public education. It's always among the first programs cut whenever Tory governments get themselves into fiscal problems.

Public education is a core service, one of the fundamental investments that should never be cut. Education is vital to our economy. Where will our skilled workforce come from if not from our schools? Where will our writers, poets, and artists come from? What about Alberta culture? With Bill 44 this administration has already damaged free speech in science education in our schools. Now they're looking at watering down the fine arts curriculum. They've already seized tens of millions of dollars from school boards, money that should have been used to lower class sizes, fund full-day kindergarten and half-day junior kindergarten.

This administration likes to brag about the foresight it used to set up its sustainability fund, originally, I might add, an Alberta Liberal idea. But isn't the sustainability fund supposed to protect core services? Why leave this money sitting almost interestless in a bank account when it should be used to prevent costly cuts that will hurt public education now and into the future?

Already Alberta suffers from the highest dropout rate in the nation and the lowest enrolment in postsecondary programs. The minister of advanced education is considering eliminating tuition caps, which will reduce enrolment further. These are shameful statistics that reflect this administration's contempt for the importance of public education.

Albertans will not tolerate a return to the bad old days of the 1990s. This government must stop the cuts, or Albertans will just stop the government. Simply stated, Mr. Speaker, education equals economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Médiathèque French Multimedia Library

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 17, 2009, I had the pleasure of attending the opening of Médiathèque, a newly renovated and expanded French multimedia library in Calgary. Along with the Minister of Employment and Immigration I had the honour of speaking with many students and francophone authors attending the opening. I'd like to acknowledge M. Thomas Chaurin and M. Pierre-Yves Mocquais, who were key to conceiving and creating this new library.

Located in the historical Memorial Park Building, a site that remains the home of Calgary's first public library, Médiathèque provides Albertans of all ages access to more than 6,000 resources in French, including magazines, books, DVDs, audio CDs, and children's materials. What makes this collection even more special is that contemporary and mainstream works acquired by the library have been created by francophones living across the globe. Many works come from parts of French-speaking Africa.

Partners from the Calgary francophone community came together to create the new Médiathèque library. They are the Calgary Foundation, Alliance Française, the government of France, and the provincial government.

The new library promises to be a great support not only for Alberta's multicultural francophone community but also for the more than 150,000 students learning French across our province. Through Médiathèque Calgary residents can connect with their community and fellow francophones around the world. I encourage everyone to visit the Médiathèque library when you are in Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Inspiring Education Public Consultation

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a world-class education system, but Albertans are telling us that it can be even better. Let me tell you one of the great things the government is doing about education in Alberta. Over the last 12 months the Inspiring Education initiative has reached out to thousands of Albertans to learn what they think Alberta's education system needs to focus on to best prepare our kids for their future.

One very special aspect of Inspiring Education is that all Albertans, whether they are members of the business community, nonprofits, FNMI, seniors, those incarcerated, have a stake in education and are all being engaged to help inform education policy recommendations. The public input aspect of Inspiring Education culminated with a groundbreaking three-day forum for more than a thousand Albertans who joined us in person and more than 350 who joined us online.

Mr. Speaker, Inspiring Education is not about demanding that more money and resources be put into education in Alberta. It is about developing a policy vision for the future of learning that will serve us just as well in good fiscal times as in bad and help inform how we can most strategically and effectively allocate the resources that we do have.

Inspiring Education is also about the example that we set for young Albertans. To teach about creativity, innovation, perseverance, and adaptability, our system also needs to constantly look for new, positive ways of doing business. Mr. Speaker, very soon our steering committee will have a report for the minister, but one of the most valuable outcomes of Inspiring Education has been the broad, forward-looking dialogue itself that we have begun with all Albertans on the future of our most important investment.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close with a quote from one of those Albertans.

I can now live with myself, knowing I had a say in my future's future. Our First Nations peoples had a chance to have a voice in their future, and I wasn't going to pass up that opportunity, even if I had to sleep in my vehicle. At least we had a chance to voice our thoughts without repercussions to us, our children, or children's children. Thank you for hearing us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Tara-Jean Popowich University of Lethbridge Women's Pronghorns

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to this House about some exceptional young women who have made myself and Lethbridge exceptionally proud. On October 25 Tara-Jean Popowich was named the winner of the second season

of the popular CTV reality show *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*. She beat out thousands of other contestants to earn the top spot last summer, and then she went on to shine week after week until Canadians voted to name her as the season's champion.

Tara-Jean was born and raised in Lethbridge and began her formal dance training at Joy's dance academy, a local dance studio. Tara-Jean tried out for *So You Think You Can Dance* last year but was eliminated before reaching the top 20. This year she was obviously better prepared and wowed the judges. Amazingly, Mr. Speaker, she did all this with injured ribs. Now Tara-Jean and her fellow finalists are on a cross-country dance tour, and Lethbridge can't wait for her to come back home for her performance in her hometown November 29.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate one of the most amazing sports teams my hometown has ever produced. On November 9 the University of Lethbridge women's Pronghorns rugby team brought home its third straight national championship after beating St. Francis Xavier 20 to 3 in Vancouver. In addition to the win, five Pronghorns were named to the tournament all-star team, and another was named MVP. That was Andrea Letal. They achieved this under the watchful eye of Neil Langevin, the reigning Canadian Interuniversity Sport coach of the year. The national title came on the heels of winning the Canadian finals, with an 86 to 0 win over the University of Victoria. I think it's safe to say that with numbers like that, these young women are not only the best female rugby players in Canada; they're a force to be reckoned with anywhere in the world.

I would ask my fellow members to join me in congratulating the U of L women's rugby Pronghorns and Tara-Jean Popowich for their monumental achievements this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Emergency Hospital Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Sheldon M. Chumir health centre is the only facility in downtown Calgary that provides 24-hour urgent care to one of Calgary's most populated areas. To the Premier: will the Premier immediately release the proposed plans that would stop the Sheldon Chumir clinic from being open for 24 hours?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health can answer that question specifically with respect to the operation of facilities.

Mr. Liepert: Well, I wish I could, Mr. Speaker. I don't know the operational hours of every health care facility in this province, but I will endeavour to get the answer to the member, maybe as soon as before the end of question period.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have lost trust in this Premier and this minister of health. The Premier has still not answered for the fact that the new East Edmonton primary health care centre will not be providing family doctors and urgent care services that were promised. What is the Premier's explanation for this new facility standing half empty?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday and many times in the House, we're focusing on ensuring that the health care system that we enjoy in this province is sustainable. We also want to improve access, and we're doing that through training more nurses and doctors in the province and ensuring that we ensure a quality of care in the province as well. We're continuing down that path, obviously under some difficult circumstances in terms of the revenue flow to the province, but we're going to do the best we can.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can this Premier justify in a pandemic situation – in a pandemic situation, Mr. Premier – that we're adding greater load on emergency departments in our major cities?

Mr. Stelmach: Because it's a pandemic. But I'll have the minister of health respond.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I answered that question pretty much yesterday. I check on a daily basis with Alberta Health Services, and their answer to me today is consistent with what it has been. There are occasional hot spots in the province where there are surges in emergency, but overall the system is coping well. We always have, during seasonal flu, surges in emergency, but I'm told it isn't anything out of the ordinary, so I'm not sure where the member is getting his information from.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Education Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems content to leave wasteful spending on everything from executive bonuses and slick public advertising untouched. Instead, again they turn to health care and education as the first targets for cuts. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier make a firm and unshakeable commitment to Albertans and to future teachers who were demonstrating on the steps today that he will protect public education from short-sighted cutbacks?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the bonuses that the member has referred to, those have been eliminated. That will provide a saving this year of something around \$44 million.

With respect to the secondary and postsecondary, in terms of secondary, K to 12, the minister has met with the individuals that were here to talk about some of what they think was the correct information in terms of how the minister is proceeding. He had an opportunity to talk with them, and I'm certain that on the second question he'd be able to respond in terms of the dialogue that he had.

Dr. Swann: Well, we've been here before, Mr. Speaker. Our schools are barely recovering from the 20 per cent cuts inflicted in the governments of the 1990s. We've still got the lowest high school graduation rate in the country. Will the Premier at least acknowledge here and now that these extreme cuts have damaged our credibility and our graduating and should never be repeated?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the only people that are talking about extreme cuts are the ATA in their advertising campaign. What I've been talking about with school boards and superintendents is understanding that we're in a fiscal situation,

using that fiscal situation to its best advantage in examining everything we're doing to determine whether we're doing the right things and whether we're doing them in the right way. That's what we're up to. It's not a question of massive cuts or destroying the system. We've got the best education system in North America and certainly one of the best in the world, and we're going to continue to provide the proper educational opportunities for every child in this province.

Dr. Swann: Our schools have ridden this government's boom-and-bust fiscal roller coaster for far too long. When is this Premier going to start treating education as an investment by delivering a plan for sustainable funding to our children and teachers? When?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we do have a sustainable plan. It's one of the reasons we've saved \$17 billion in what we call a sustainability fund. We're going to use that \$17 billion to cushion the rapid drop in the revenue stream to the province. That will cover about three-quarters of the perceived revenue loss over the next few years, and the other quarter will come from adjustments in our budget. We'll be working through those over the next number of weeks, and we will deliver a budget that's going to reflect the priorities of Albertans.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Lobbying Government

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday our Energy critic asked the Premier about donations made by AltaLink to a recent Progressive Conservative convention. The Premier dodged every one of the questions. Albertans deserve answers, Mr. Premier, especially when it's regarding decisions to foist multibillion-dollar transmission lines on the public. So I'll ask again. To the Premier. The issue is obviously contentious; it matters to Albertans. Doesn't he see that this looks as though AltaLink gets access to government in exchange for cash?

Mr. Stelmach: No. That is absolutely wrong. All I can say is that all those that are lobbying on behalf of any company in this province have to be registered. We finally do have a lobbyist registry. We got here after a lot of work. The purpose of it is to ensure that we're open and transparent with the Alberta public.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, all Albertans know that AltaLink has already been picked by the government to build one of the lines, a line that will cost about \$1.5 billion, and the electricity users of Alberta are going to get stuck with the bill. How, then, can the Premier assure Albertans that this government's transmission policy is not being impacted by these sponsorship donations?

Mr. Stelmach: The bill that the member is referring to I think is before the House today. It simply says that we are in bad need of ensuring that we have a more modern, efficient transmission system in the province of Alberta to ensure that we can connect different parts of the province to not only coal-fired electricity generation but biomass and wind and many of the other forms, the gas powered, that are coming on stream. That is the purpose of the plan. We don't want to get left behind because we will never be able to grow our economy unless we have a good, efficient transmission system in the province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier, then, guarantee that all those sponsors listed on the brochure will be included in the lobbyist registry? Yes or no, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm sure that those that are lobbyists in this province are now fully aware of the new law and will follow the law. I can't walk around and say: you must register; you must register. They know if they're lobbyists, and they'll do what is right, and that is follow the law of the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Long-term and Continuing Care

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, since public support for this Premier and this government has started to tank, the Premier has talked a lot about change. So far it's just talk, and he continues to steer Alberta in a direction that 6 out of 10 Albertans think is wrong. While the Premier promised 600 more long-term care beds during the election, a government report proves they're planning just the opposite. My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier tell Albertans what, if anything, has changed about this government's plan to close long-term care beds?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're not closing long-term care beds. In fact, we want to add to the current inventory, and we'll do that. I also want to see the model that we deliver in this province change so that we actually improve the quality of life for our seniors. Rather than splitting our seniors up after 60 years of marriage and sending one to one community and one to the other, our plan is to ensure that every senior in this province has an opportunity to retire in the community that they helped build.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's interesting because the government's report says that the continuing care strategy targets a significant reduction in long-term care beds. This is what senior officials of many departments are working from, so I don't know whether to believe this document or whether to believe the Premier. Far from being a change, this is more of the same: deception, secrecy, and spin. These are the hallmarks of this PC government. Nothing has changed; nothing will change as long as this government is in power. Will the Premier do something really different for a change and tell Alberta seniors exactly what his plan is for their care?

Mr. Stelmach: I can tell you that we're not going to follow the traditional model of putting our seniors in institutions, and that is exactly what the NDP want to do in this province. We're not going down that path. We're going to offer housing that reflects the needs of the senior. Rather than moving that senior from a lodge, then to a nursing home, and then to a long-term care institution, why cannot we keep them in one facility and just add the services that are necessary? What he's got is an age-old issue. That is how we improve the quality of life for all of our seniors – they deserve it – not that antiquated idea that the ND Party has.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said that they're not going to cut long-term care beds, but in fact his own report says the opposite. This is just more spin. It's evident that the promise of change is just that, just spin. This is a government that can't

distinguish fact from fiction and where the truth comes in a plain brown envelope. Since the Premier will not spell out his plans for seniors' care in Alberta, will he at least admit that as far as this government is concerned, nothing has changed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue with our plan to change the model of delivering housing and homes for our seniors in retirement. As I said before, no matter how hard they push against that plan and don't improve the quality of life for seniors in this province, I can tell you that with every breath of energy I have, I'm going to oppose what they want to do. They want to keep people in institutions. They don't deserve to be in institutions. They deserve to be in homes, and that's what we're going to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Seniors' Issues and Concerns

Mr. Prins: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just very, very encouraged by the answers that I've heard from the Premier just now related to seniors' issues, but there is more to it than that. Apparently, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta tabled their 2008-09 annual report on November 3, which was just last week. The report outlines challenges, needs, and ideas with respect to seniors as heard by council members as they toured across the province. My question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is the Alberta government doing to address the challenges and needs outlined in this report?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, seniors are a priority of this government, as we just heard our Premier speak about. We value the information and advice that we get from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, and we consider their advice in the programs and services that we develop for our seniors. An example of this is that when we read the report, what we did in our last budget was that we increased the Alberta seniors' benefit for our low-income seniors. That was thanks to advice from the report. That was so that low-income seniors in Alberta continued to qualify for one of the most comprehensive benefit packages in this country.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is for the same minister. One of the challenges expressed by seniors in the council's report was the delivery of health care services in their own communities, where they live. What is this government doing to address these concerns?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, as I tour around the province, I hear about these challenges from seniors all the time as well. I know that we're working hard to build a system, a sustainable health care system and a continuing care system, that will provide the right service in the right place at the right time for all Albertans. This includes the new continuing care strategy, Aging in the Right Place, which includes four levels of supportive living. These four levels allow seniors to live as independently as possible within their own homes and in their communities, the communities that they helped build.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. My last question is for the same minister. We also know that our province's population is

aging, with more and more Albertans becoming seniors every year. How does this government know if its plans for continuing care will meet the needs of this aging population in Alberta?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, in May 2008 I established the Demographic Planning Commission, which received feedback from over 10,000 Albertans. This is a great example of how this government seeks input from Albertans. Respondents clearly expressed that they want sustainable programs and services, and they want to stay in their communities. We are aware that by 2016 there will be more than half a million seniors in Alberta alone. Under the continuing care strategy the government supports a variety of supportive living or assisted living options so that seniors will have more choices to best meet their needs when the time comes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Sour Gas Levels at Mildred Lake

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The levels of hydrogen sulphide, or sour gas, at Mildred Lake are alarming. By the end of September sour gas levels already surpassed last year's record, exceeding the standard 376 times. Now, strangely, the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association is reporting that the increase is possibly due to malfunctioning analyzers and may not be due to extreme sour gas levels. To the Minister of Environment: these abnormalities have been publicly reported for over two months, so what is it? Is it faulty equipment, or is it high sour gas levels?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the hon. member that it is not faulty equipment, but it is a misrepresentation or interpretation of the results. The fact of the matter is that there are times when there are exceedances, and when those exceedances occur, it is imperative that the company take appropriate steps to resolve the issue. Where we become concerned to the extreme – and that's where the member should become concerned to the extreme – is when those exceedances occur on an ongoing, regular basis.

Ms Blakeman: I would have said that 376 times in nine months is ongoing.

Given that the air monitors in Wood Buffalo have been found with their hydrogen sulphide samplers disconnected and were only serviced after receiving notice of an upcoming audit, has the minister increased inspections of Wood Buffalo's air monitors?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of the circumstance that the member refers to. I'll happily check it out and advise her accordingly.

Ms Blakeman: Good. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, coincidentally, the same year that Saskatchewan accuses Alberta of exporting our acid rain to them, the minister slashes his air monitoring budget. So to the Minister of Environment: why is the minister compromising Alberta's air quality and reputation by deliberately underfunding air monitoring?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's not so much the amount of monitoring that is important; it's what is done to ensure that we maintain quality of air, ambient air quality. Doubling the monitoring isn't going to improve the air. I would suggest to the hon. member that she's got her priorities a little bit mixed up. We should be focusing on ensuring that we have the necessary plan in place to assure

Albertans and those who live downwind of Alberta that we're doing everything we can to protect the air.

Trade Mission to Asia

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has just returned from a trade mission trip to Asia with the federal agriculture minister. Can the minister tell this House what was the objective of the trip?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the focus of this mission was to further promote Alberta's agriculture and food industry and advocate for market access in both Japan and Hong Kong. We all know that Japan and Hong Kong are two of our high-priority markets for our agriculture and food industries. Japan recently had a change in government. It was more than important; it was critical that we not lose the momentum and the ground that we had gained with their previous government and the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. You mentioned that these markets have great potential to benefit the agricultural industry in Alberta. Can you give us an update on the market situation?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly was able to promote a variety of agricultural trade and investment opportunities, but more important, probably, I could promote the safety and quality of our agrifood products. We also met with numerous government officials about market access for our products. The mission provided face-to-face opportunities to follow up on previous trade discussions, so we were able to update key decisions on the development of our traceability programs both provincially and nationally.

Mr. Drysdale: My final question to the same minister: can you tell us what is now being done to follow up on this mission?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, we heard again, of course, how important traceability is to our customers, and I'm more than pleased that the livestock industry is delivering on that important issue. They were very clear that if we want to be a serious player in that global market, traceability programs have to be in place. This is already mandatory in Alberta. We're further encouraged by the recent announcement by the federal government that a national traceability program will be launched in 2012.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:10 Investments in Tobacco Companies

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has refused to implement an ethical investment strategy and continues to allow investments in tobacco companies. A new policy initiative would allow this government to recoup health care costs from the tobacco industry. However, the hypocrisy is a little bit hard to ignore on this one. To the minister of finance – this appears to be the semiannual question – how much does this government invest in tobacco companies through the heritage trust fund?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, I can get that information. It's a difficult thing to provide because many times tobacco companies or corpora-

tions are part of conglomerates where the investment is done on a larger scale, so it might be one of 80 different companies that's part of a single investment that might be made by Alberta Investment Management Corporation. What I can tell the hon. member is that anything that has been invested on behalf of the cancer legacy project has been done exclusive of any investment in tobacco companies.

Earlier, I believe, when one of the hon. member's colleagues asked this question and we looked at what potentially was the answer, it may have been about 1.8 per cent, but I'd like to seek clarity on that, Mr. Speaker, before I went further.*

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate that clarity as well.

Would the minister table a listing of all the companies in which the government invests money through the heritage trust fund? I understand the difficulty of separating it, but it can be done. We would send messages: please don't invest in porn companies, arms, or tobacco.

Ms Evans: Well, I hope there's no suggestion in this House that we are investing in porn companies. Please. I mean, I hope that's not the suggestion. If I've misheard and it's "foreign," then obviously we're investing in companies that have a multinational context. But I would be very pleased to get what is provided.

Note, Mr. Speaker, that we do have, with the hon. chair from Calgary-Fish Creek, a meeting scheduled annually, a public meeting on the subject of our investments. We had one in Calgary very recently, and the hon. member's own colleagues asked some questions, none of which related to a complete listing. I know that if they'd asked for that at the committee, it would have been available.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Further to that, how much does the minister expect to save through recouping medical costs from the tobacco companies? Will these savings then be reinvested back into the same companies? If that happens, we're suing ourselves.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, that bill is before the House. We have made no decision whether there will be any legal action launched against tobacco companies, so that question is somewhat premature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Underground Electricity Transmission Lines

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received hundreds of letters and e-mails in my office from many concerned constituents and community groups who attended several public meetings about a very important issue. My constituents have asked me to raise in this Assembly their issues with the proposed Heartland transmission project power lines along the west end TUC. My constituents aren't questioning the need for transmission infrastructure. Rather, they're asking for consideration of their request for the power lines to be built in a safe and responsible manner. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What is the minister doing to address the concerns of my constituents regarding the siting of high-voltage power lines in highly populated areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to make it very clear that the government is not involved in the siting of transmission in the province of Alberta. That rests solely with the Alberta Utilities Commission, a quasi-judicial body that holds open, public hearings with respect to the siting of transmission lines. That will continue whether it's in the Heartland area, in the Edmonton region, or anywhere in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is to the same minister. Many of my constituents feel strongly that burying this line would significantly reduce the health, property value, and aesthetic impacts of the overhead 500-kilovolt lines. What is the status of the study commissioned by the minister on the feasibility of burying transmission lines, and when can we expect the outcomes of that study to be made public?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, actually there are two studies that are under way. My department has commissioned a study by Stantec. They're an international engineering firm based here in Alberta, and they will look at the options of underground transmission as they relate generally to the province of Alberta. They have expertise and have been looking at the options here and in other places in North America and around the world, I believe. I'm expecting that I would have a report from them before the end of this year.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, AESO, the Alberta Electric System Operator, is also doing a study relative to underground transmission as it would relate to the heartland region.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Sherman: Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental question is to the same minister. Will the minister support the burial of transmission lines through highly populated areas, some of which include schools, homes, daycare centres, and hospitals?

Mr. Knight: First off, Mr. Speaker, again, I think I should make it clear here that Health Canada has found that there is no significant link between overhead transmission lines and human health. I know that the hon. member is a doctor and would be aware of the information, I'm sure. Also, I would like to point out that burying lines does not necessarily eliminate all of the things like electromagnetic fields. Even though the levels are safe, the issue will remain. Any time that you transmit electricity through wires, you will have this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for First Responders

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's delivery platform for H1N1 vaccination was said to receive a shot in the arm this week. However, I have some questions, or shall I say concerns, regarding its rollout. My questions are for the Solicitor General. Across the nation other sensible jurisdictions chose to vaccinate first responders, including police officers, earlier this month. What was your rationale for waiting until now?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the health minister spoke to this a number of times. I don't know of any police officer in this

*See page 1815, right column, paragraph 9

province who would want to jump to the head of the line in front of pregnant women and children between six months and five years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Solicitor General: given the significant delay in vaccination availability, haven't you failed in your duty to advocate for the health and safety of front-line police officers and corrections personnel in this province?

Mr. Lindsay: Not at all, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the very nature of the work of first responders indicates that they would obviously be at a higher risk to contract the virus. But, again, these people are generally very healthy, and they don't get associated with the severe reactions that those who are most vulnerable do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first responders want to help this government fix the vaccination problems. They have offered to do the vaccinations themselves. I guess now the question to the minister of health is: why are you making police officers and other first responders who have offered to do this themselves take up space in the main vaccination process?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if that particular member was here yesterday or he just simply was not paying attention, but what I said yesterday was that starting yesterday, if any first responders wanted to go to a mass clinic and get vaccinated, they were eligible to do so. I said at the same time that Alberta Health Services was making arrangements to get the vaccine to the various municipal authorities around the province so that they could do exactly what this member is suggesting today. So I'm saying to the member that if he would contact those municipalities, he would probably find out that they are doing today exactly what he is suggesting they should be doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Income Support

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to Food Banks Canada 24,000 more Albertans are going hungry this year. These are numbers that even this government can't ignore. Clearly, the government's response to the economic crisis is yet another example of how they are leading Alberta in the wrong direction. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: why is it that in this province, the richest province in Canada, so many more people are going hungry?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we had negotiated with the federal government and added some additional money within our budget to take care of our most vulnerable people, those who might have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Our intent is to try to provide a helping hand to get individuals back into the mainstream, into the workforce as soon as possible.

2:20

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it clearly hasn't worked.

According to this report the number of children who don't have enough to eat in Alberta is amongst the highest in the country. Now, we know that children who grow up in poverty face even greater

challenges to break the cycle once they are adults. How can the minister justify his ongoing failure to address our growing poverty when we know that we will be paying for this for generations to come?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the number of people that have approached our office has increased quite dramatically over the last four or five months. There's no doubt, if the hon. member would remember, that we increased our income support benefits last November in response to some of the rising challenges that Albertans have. I can say that those added supports have helped thousands of people to meet their needs.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, they clearly didn't help the 24,000 additional people going to food banks.

The government's job loss projections were way off the mark. As a result, as you noted, we're seeing the number of families forced to rely on the government's paltry income support programs up by over 10,000. Now, the people who are lining up for food charity are a direct result of this government sticking its head in the sand and ignoring the problem. What does the minister have to say to the thousands of Albertans who are unable to feed their families because of their failure to take action?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of approaches that we've used for that. First is that income support will always be available for those that are unable to support themselves. We added considerably more money last year to address those that require additional income support. But what people really need is the type of help that will get them back on their feet, so we've spent on the other side a lot of effort to retrain people and help them to find a job and to be able to provide for themselves and for their families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Southwest Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently, along with many other hon. members, I was honoured to attend the extremely successful grand opening of the northern half of the Calgary ring road. And the great news continues. Plans indicate there will be a complete ring road around the entire city of Edmonton by the year 2015. However, there is a large gap in southwest Calgary's ring road plans. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. What is your ministry doing to ensure that Calgary has a complete ring road in the future, just like Edmonton?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, as this hon. member likely knows, the Tsuu T'ina Nation voted against a deal putting the ring road through their lands. We respect that decision, and we have to look at other options. I can tell this hon. member that we're working very closely with the city of Calgary on those options, and it's going very, very well. We hope to sign a memorandum of understanding by the end of the month, and when that happens, I think we'll be moving forward. I encourage the hon. member to stay tuned and pay attention to what's going on in his city.

Mr. Rodney: We've certainly got our finger on the pulse, and I'm very glad that the minister does as well. I commend him for the portion of the ring road which is set to be completed in Edmonton by 2011, but I am concerned, as you know, about the planning phase for Calgary's ring road. What details can you give us on the timeline for the Calgary ring road?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to inform the member that a much bigger section of the Calgary ring road is beyond the planning phase than was mentioned in his question. We opened the entire northern section, 45 per cent of the ring road, just a couple of weeks ago. We're going to start building the southeast section this spring, and it'll be finished by the fall of 2013. So by the fall of 2013 roughly 70 per cent of Calgary's ring road will be done and all free flow. As I mentioned in the House before, we may not be able to complete a little part of the southwest by 2015, but we're working as fast as we can to get it done.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister, who has suggested that one of the options for the southwest portion of the ring road in Calgary is that this section would have an 80 kilometre an hour speed limit and be two lanes, instead of four or six, which would of course limit the amount of open land required. We're very concerned in the southwest about this little section he referred to. Why would the minister consider this section of the ring road to be the only section of the Alberta ring roads for Edmonton or Calgary that would have lower speed limits and fewer lanes?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where he got that kind of information from, that there might only be two lanes or something, because it's absolutely false. Our goal is to build the highest standard of road that we can. The planning is being done right now. We're trying to find a balance between building the very, very best road possible with the least disruption to people's lives and the least impact on the environment. We'll go for the highest standard of road that we can get. All I've been saying to my own officials in engineering is: don't be so rigid, let's look at all the scenarios, and let's make sure we can get the job done and have free-flow traffic all around Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Lobbying Government (continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our research indicates that AltaLink is not registered as a lobbyist in this province under the new legislation. My first question is to the acting Premier. Why is AltaLink allowed to sponsor part of the political convention that occurred and was organized by the PC Party in Red Deer in November? Why are you allowing this outfit to sponsor a portion of your convention?

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it probably won't come as a great surprise to the hon. member and to most Albertans that there are a lot of companies in Alberta that support this government and have for decades. There is legislation. We try very hard to separate the party business, which really has no purview in this House, and government business. There is a lobbyists registries act that's in place, and if the hon. member wants to take time to learn it and understand, everyone who wants to lobby government will need to register. That's the law.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, there are only a few companies that will benefit directly from the new transmission and distribution policy that this government is anticipated to bring forward. My second question again to whoever is acting Premier: is Capital Power, who also sponsored part of the PC convention in Red Deer, registered under the Lobbyists Act?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it would probably just be simpler if the hon. member could find any indication at any time where sponsoring a political event has given them an inside track or personal gain from this government. If he's got any indication of that, anything rather than inference, just stand up and say so. Go out on the steps and talk about the companies that he's making accusations about, or give us an example of any kind where they can show that being a member of our political party has given them an inside track or influence in this government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to whoever is acting Premier over across the way: how much money was spent by AltaLink and by Capital Power sponsoring the PC convention in Red Deer in November?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, to whoever is acting as a critic for this particular thing, I have no idea, and it's really none of my business.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Notre Dame High School Expansion

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Notre Dame is the only high school within the constituency of Calgary-Mackay, which has a population of over 60,000 people. This school was built for \$17 million, at half of the original budget. When I visited the school, students were trying to have a music lesson on the stage, where they do not have adequate space to possibly play the instruments, and it is the only high school built without a theatre recently. My questions are to the Minister of Education. The Calgary Catholic school board has identified the expansion of Notre Dame high school as its number one priority capital project for several consecutive years. What is taking the ministry so long to address the identified facility inadequacy at Notre Dame high school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, Notre Dame high school is the top capital priority for Calgary Catholic this year, but I think it's worth noting that in the ASAP 1 program we are building 18 schools, including nine in Calgary, six of those for Calgary public and three for Calgary Catholic. In ASAP 2 another six schools are being built in Calgary and two in the neighbouring area. So Calgary has been well served by capital for schools in the last couple of years, and the programs are ongoing. Those schools will be open in 2010 and 2012, I believe. Significant progress is being made with respect to school capital in Calgary, but there's no question that the Notre Dame school is high on our priority list and will get addressed when we have the capital budget to do it.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. My second question is to the same minister. Are there design standards set for high schools in Alberta? If not, why not?

Mr. Hancock: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, there are standards for high school facilities. They're outlined in the School Capital Manual, which is available on the Education and Infrastructure websites. The manual specifies standards based on school capacity for classroom

sizes, science spaces, gymnasiums, libraries, music and art spaces, career and technology studies, ancillary spaces, et cetera.

There are also environmental design standards. Infrastructure requires that all school capital projects, in fact, I believe, all public buildings now built, achieve a LEED silver standard, which is the leadership in energy and environmental design standard agreed building rating system. Those standards are in place, but within those standards jurisdictions do have the flexibility to reconfigure their school design.

Ms Woo-Paw: My last question is: would the minister have a personal visit at the school the next time you're in the Calgary area?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would be delighted to visit that school the next time I'm in Calgary. I'll be in touch with her. If it's in her constituency, she'll know when I'm coming to Calgary, and she'll be able to arrange that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

U of A Sustainable Development Campus

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, this October an international team of planners with the Urban Land Institute pored over the opportunities for the U of A to achieve landmark environmental standards as it develops its south campus. The planning results were pretty exciting, actually, and I want to congratulate the ministers of Environment and Energy for showing leadership on environmental design. My question, the first one, is to the Minister of Environment. What is the status of the plan that came out of that week-long exercise?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge that I, too, believe that the work that was accomplished in this week-long exercise will be invaluable as we begin to understand what sustainable development is all about. As I understand, the group that was here, the Urban Land Institute, prepared a preliminary report, which they have presented to the university and to those that were involved on the Friday of the event, and they're preparing a more detailed final report, which we will anticipate receiving shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks. The Alberta departments of Environment and Energy were very involved in this process, as was the U of A, but the Department of Advanced Education and Technology didn't seem to be. So I guess I'll go back to the Minister of Environment for the moment. Are all government departments involved in this working together, or are there conflicting views between the departments on this planning process?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we should be clear that the emphasis of this program was twofold. One was to assist the University of Alberta in the development of a plan that they want to put in place for a sustainable developed campus. The reason why Alberta Environment and Alberta Energy were involved is because it's in our interest to meet the core business that we are responsible for, to more fully understand what opportunities are available for us for not only this project but any sustainable development project in Alberta. That's the reason why Alberta Environment and Energy

were involved. I would say that Advanced Education was involved in that they are one of the prime sources of funding for the University of Alberta, who were substantially involved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I think I'll go to the minister of advanced education for my last question. The members of the panel included some of the top urban planners, designers, and developers on the continent. They proposed what I think is a pretty inspiring goal for the south campus for the year 2035: "If everyone on Earth lived like the [proposed] community at the University of Alberta's South Campus, we'd arrest climate change and live sustainably within the limited resources of our . . . planet." My question to the minister: will this government consider making it a condition on any development funding for the south campus that the university's development plans meet this target?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, officials from our department were at this planning session, and I would like to commend both the departments of Energy and Environment for working with us as a cross-government initiative. We're doing that more and more in this government, and it holds great promise for a number of issues.

I would also point out to the hon. member – and he has been well advised of this over the course of the year and a half, two years that we've been talking about it in this House – that Campus Alberta looks at the capital projects around the province and prioritizes those capital projects through the Alberta access planning framework document that we produce every year. This will be encapsulated in that. It is also my hope, Mr. Speaker, that when the report is fully vetted and we've had an opportunity to look through the entire part of it, this report would also go to the Campus Alberta Strategic Directions Committee, which is all of the chairs of the boards of governors of Campus Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Provincial Tax Incentives

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In August furniture manufacturer Haworth Inc. announced that they were transferring their operations from Calgary to a plant in Michigan. Their rationale: because the Michigan state government had just passed a tax incentive program. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. What is the minister doing to ensure that Alberta's tax structure is the most competitive in North America so that we don't see more of these transfers of jobs?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, that's actually an excellent question. There have been recent reports from Ontario and other provinces that many of the places south of the border have been looking at incentives plus bonuses to get people to come and take their industry there. So on a regular basis we judge and take a look at not only a Canadian scan but a North American scan.

Certainly in Canada I can tell you that even with the proposed changes to the small-business tax in British Columbia, for the overall tax package, for the overall tax advantage Alberta certainly still leads Canada. You will find some select states who have made

changes, and you will find some select cities in states who have made changes, but if you look at the overall tax basket and what is offered here in Alberta, we do believe that we're not only leading in Canada for an advantage but in most of America.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last month the School of Public Policy from the University of Calgary authored a report by Jack Mintz that suggested Alberta was losing its tax advantage and suggested a proposal that it start shifting its taxes away from investment and savings towards a consumption tax, a concept similarly endorsed by this Assembly last year in a motion brought forward by the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. To the same minister: can the minister tell this Assembly if she's looking at these proposed changes as outlined in this report?

Ms Evans: No. Quite simply, no. We would, if we were to ever consider a sales or a consumption tax, by our own laws have to bring a referendum forward. Our Premier has spoken very eloquently both last summer and last fall: no tax increases, no new taxes. A consumption tax would be a new tax.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, the current economic global recession has created a real restructuring within the global economic climate both in Canada and across the world, and I think that as a government we ought to be looking at where our place is. My question to the minister is: what is she doing to ensure that Alberta's industry and Albertans are consulted in regard to any potential changes in tax structure that may assist our province to recover from the economic recession?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, because we have no plans to change tax structure, we're working with Alberta economic development authorities throughout the province to take a look not at taxes per se but at the regulatory framework and in conjunction with all MLAs and ministers to look at any barriers to doing business, look at more cost-effective ways of sharing our efforts, and look at principles of overall cost, user fees, and the many mixes of things that go into making us truly competitive. Along with that, there are things that labour and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology are looking at. Many of the ministries currently, I think, will be talking about those in the business plans and in the plans that we have to create more awareness of what we can do in the weeks and months ahead.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. There will be four more.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness wanted to supplement an answer given yesterday in response to a question from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, which will allow an additional question and an additional response. The hon. minister.

2:40 Pastoral Care in Health Facilities

Mr. Liepert: Yes. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Member for Lethbridge-East asked me to explain why pastoral care is being cut across the province.* I did some checking with Alberta Health Services, and what I can tell the member is that at the Royal Alexandra hospital four supervisory positions have been eliminated. However, two staff chaplain positions were created in addition to provide direct high-quality patient care. A clinical pastoral care teaching position was also created and offered to one of the staff members whose position had been eliminated. I am assured by

Alberta Health Services that there are no plans to eliminate spiritual care and will continue to value the important contribution.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on behalf of?

Dr. Swann: Yes.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the widespread perception, including those in the spiritual community, is that you do have plans, Mr. Minister, to reduce spiritual supports. Can you say that there is or there is not any plan to reduce spiritual support in the latter time of life?

Mr. Liepert: I will repeat what I just said, Mr. Speaker, because like the Member for Calgary-Buffalo I guess the Leader of the Opposition was not listening to what I just said. I've been assured by the CEO of Alberta Health Services that there are no plans to eliminate spiritual care, and we'll continue to value the important contribution.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise would also like to supplement an answer also as a result of a question from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Investments in Tobacco Companies (continued)

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to be clear and to put this on the record relative to the question of overall investment of heritage fund dollars in any tobacco-related company.* Point two seven per cent is actually invested in the amount of \$42,073,239.29. Of that, \$36,839,582.04 is part of a passive investment through an index product, S&P 500 or MSCI EAFE, and actively, externally through external investors \$5,329,968.59 is part of investments that may contain tobacco products. Relative to the listing, I'll come back with that at a later date.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks on behalf, Mr. Speaker. The minister made it clear in her responses earlier this afternoon that the cancer legacy fund explicitly does not invest in tobacco products. Why in the world wouldn't you extend that same limitation to all government investments? After all, tobacco kills, and we all know that. So why don't you just do the right thing?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the heritage fund by its very nature is considerate of longer term investments. Many of these investments are long-term strategies that are in longer term products. We have had this conversation in the House before. I will go back and find out the details of it, but I believed it was important to give the numbers today.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that is a number of 102 questions and responses today.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two separate petitions I'd like to present, the first one signed by 182 residents in Lethbridge and area. The petition reads:

*See page 1780, left column, paragraph 1

*See page 1811, left column, paragraph 2

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

Grandfather the rights and status of all currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta in a manner that they may continue their practice undisturbed and ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

A second one, Mr. Speaker, very similar but worded differently, signed by 319 residents in Lethbridge and area, reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

Grandfather the rights and status of all currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta in a manner that they may continue their practice undisturbed and, when necessary, gradually upgrade to newly-proclaimed standards of training, so as not to force current therapists to lose their ongoing income whilst upgrading and so to ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings, the first of which is a program. Last night the hon. members for Calgary-Buffalo, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Whitemud, and I had the pleasure of attending the new teacher induction ceremony at Barnett House. A particularly memorable moment came when a 40-year teaching veteran, Sherry Robbins, observed that children do not care how much a teacher knows but, rather, want to know how much a teacher cares.

My second tabling consists of the requisite number of collated copies of e-mails from concerned Calgarians Marli Nichol, Laura Anderson, Leslie Chapman, Jacqueline Christensen, David Fettes, Jean Gaucher, Carmen Giancarlo, Tara Growden, Kellie Jackson, Catherine Marshall, Meaghan McInnis, Michelle McRorie, Philip Sarsons, Marion Stahr-Elaschuk, Hailey Taylor, Holly Theriault, John Whidden, and Adine Whitfield, all urging the Minister of Education and the Premier not to cut funding to education because the future prosperity of Alberta depends on the knowledge and skills of its children and because it's even more important to invest in education now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Currie I want to table two letters: one from Roger Gagné, a citizen of Grande Prairie, who quotes from the Calgary School of Public Policy, "showing that the proposed \$3.1-billion power line between Calgary and Edmonton, in particular, would be inefficient and overkill for provincial electricity and generation needs," the other from Bill Partridge of the Building Owners and Managers Association of the Greater Calgary Region indicating the same, that "we are not convinced that Bill 50 is a good initiative."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a report prepared for Alberta Seniors and Community Supports in May '09

titled Long-Term Care Accommodations Variable Fee Structure Advisory Team Session Summary. I referred to this report in my questions earlier today. The report shows that the committee was directed to look at targets for reducing long-term care beds.

The second report, Mr. Speaker, was referred to by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona in her questions today. It's the appropriate number of copies of a report by Food Banks Canada titled HungerCount 2009, which shows that the greatest increase in food bank usage by far is in the province of Alberta.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report 2008-2009, the College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta 2008 annual report, the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors annual report to government 2008-2009; pursuant to the Opticians Act the Alberta Opticians Association annual report 2008; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Health Quality Council of Alberta 2008-2009 annual report; pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate office 2008-2009 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, pursuant to the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act the persons with developmental disabilities community boards consolidated annual report 2008-2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, pursuant to the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board annual report 2008-2009.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you want to see a happy man, look at the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Today he and his young bride are celebrating their 44th wedding anniversary.

2:50

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate June 2: Mr. Blackett]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to participate in today's second reading of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. On October 14 Premier Stelmach laid out our government's . . .

The Speaker: No, no, no.

Mr. Campbell: Oh, sorry. Our Premier laid out our government's way forward position for a strong economy in our province in a province-wide televised address. This four-point economic plan included a commitment to invest in Alberta's infrastructure. Along with roads, schools, and hospitals, this includes investing in our electricity transmission system, infrastructure that's critical to all Albertans who use electricity to power their homes and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 plays an important role in our way forward. As with roads, schools, and hospitals Bill 50 gives government the responsibility to approve the need for such critical infrastructure. I'll speak today about how Bill 50 is crucial to Alberta's long-term success and prosperity, and I'll speak about how it doesn't take away the voices of Albertans in the decision-making process. We're all aware of the tremendous debate surrounding Bill 50. Detractors say that we don't need new infrastructure, that the cost of projects would fall heavily onto the shoulders of Albertans, that government will push through projects behind closed doors, and that concerned Albertans will lose their say.

I appreciate the opportunity to address these fears with the facts. Mr. Speaker, there's been much talk about the cost to Albertans if Bill 50 is passed. I would suggest that the cost to Albertans would ultimately be much higher if we do not pass this bill and if we don't act immediately. Rumours abound about the cost for the critical transmission infrastructure projects included in Bill 50. The price seems to increase daily, depending on what you're reading or who you're talking to.

The fact is that Bill 50 approves the need for four critical transmission infrastructure projects. The estimated cost for the four projects is \$5.6 billion. But what does this mean to Albertans? It means that the average residential customer will see an increase of less than \$6 on their monthly bill, or less than \$72 a year, once all four projects are in service. We expect that to be around 2017. The cost will be addressed in increments starting around 2012 and increase over time as the projects are completed.

Another fact is that the amount that Albertans pay for transmission has always been based on the amount of power they consume. Let me say again that Albertans will pay a higher price in the long run if we maintain the status quo. Today there are generators who cannot connect to the system because there's not adequate transmission in place. If we don't correct this situation, we will lose some of our investors, creating a lack of competition, followed by an increase in energy costs. There's a very real threat of power outages, blackouts, and brownouts, and the costs to society would be very high. As a government we cannot accept this, and as a government we will not accept this.

As a government we know that public input is crucial to the democratic process. Mr. Speaker, the simple fact is that Bill 50 does not take away the public's right to be heard. Bill 50 speaks to needs only. The Alberta Utilities Commission will continue to be responsible for making decisions on the siting of transmission facilities. This includes determining a specific location for individual power lines. In doing so, the Alberta Utilities Commission will continue to ensure that Albertans whose rights may be directly and adversely affected by a proposed transmission development are informed of the application. These Albertans will continue to have the opportunity to voice their concerns in the review process. We strongly encourage affected Albertans to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the claim that the planning of transmission projects is happening behind closed doors is unwarranted and untrue. In fact, the AESO, the Alberta Electric System Operator, carried out extensive public consultations on various proposals to develop or expand the transmission system. The AESO developed their long-term transmission system plan after 92 open houses, attended by more than 2,500 attendees, 48 meetings with small groups, 148 presentations to municipalities, and distribution of more than 1 million copies of *Powering Alberta* magazine.

Let's be very clear about the AESO, Mr. Speaker. The AESO does not own any generation facilities, it does not own any transmission lines, nor does it construct any transmission facilities. In short, the AESO has no vested interest in recommending that building certain infrastructure is critical.

Following the approval of Bill 50, which approves the four critical transmission infrastructure projects, the AUC will conduct public hearings to determine the specific route for a transmission line and locations for substations. A number of things are considered at the facility hearing, including the specific location of proposed substations and the route of proposed transmission lines; impact on residents, the environment, and agricultural operations; visual impacts; technical issues; and safety matters. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker: Albertans have been heard and will continue to be heard. The public's participation will remain an important part in the development and siting of all transmission infrastructure projects in Alberta.

When it comes down to it, Bill 50 is about ensuring Alberta's future remains bright, and I mean that both figuratively and literally. Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 means keeping the lights on in Alberta homes and businesses well into the future. It means facilitating continued growth in the province by making sure we have the necessary transmission infrastructure in place so that more power is added to the grid as needed. It will be needed not in 10 years, not in five years but this year, and we need to take action now. Bill 50 prepares us for the future today. It addresses the issues of inadequate and inefficient transmission systems immediately, making sure we have a reliable and competitively priced supply of electricity.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

The Speaker: I have a very short speakers list so far: the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, then the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I indicated the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore after the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Hinman: Under 29(2)(a) could I ask questions?

The Speaker: This being the second person, there's no question available on the second. It starts on the third. You can ask one of the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Go ahead.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, now that we have that sorted out, I can't help but notice that the sky has not yet fallen, that since Bill 50 was introduced in this House, the lights have not gone out. Well, they did go out briefly last week, apparently, in my apartment here in Edmonton and in the building where I have an apartment, but that was strictly a building problem. The lights have not gone out, yet government members opposite and the AESO, which we've heard described by the Member for West Yellowhead as having no vested interest in this at all – and technically he's right – and various others continue to present this issue of Bill 50 and the need to pass this legislation as though we are hours away from rolling brownouts. They've been presenting it that way long enough, and the rolling brownouts have yet to occur, so I'm just a little bit skeptical myself.

Bill 50 is a bad bill in principle which seeks to do something that – you'll get no argument from me – we actually do need to do in the province of Alberta, and that is to upgrade an electricity transmission grid that has not had substantial upgrades to it in quite a number of years. We do need to upgrade it; it's getting old. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to break down any time soon, but

it's getting old. The province certainly has grown. The population of this province has grown, the industrial and commercial base of this province has grown, and the consumption of power has gone up. Maybe not so much this year – and I hear tell that the AESO is about to go back and revisit its projections in light of the economic downturn – but certainly we had for a number of years there quite a run on electricity. Interestingly enough, the vast majority of that increased electrical consumption was done by industrial users who built their own generating capacity and cogenerating capacity, and a relatively small percentage of that was an increase in demand by the general population.

Now, I think, Mr. Speaker, it's probably a good time to point out that the general population of the province of Alberta really isn't responsible for all that much of the power that is consumed, the electricity that's consumed in the run of a day, week, month, or year in this province. In fact, according to the Department of Energy's own data residential use of electricity amounts to 17 per cent, or did in 2008 – the numbers will not be dramatically different this year – farm use was 3 per cent, and the rest was industrial and commercial: 54 per cent industrial, 26 per cent commercial. Now, the biggest of the big industrial users are tending to generate their own power, and often in cogeneration situations, granted, there's a need on the part of those users, those generators to be able to dump their excess power when they have it onto the grid and have it go somewhere.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, when a generator generates electricity, that generator, no matter who it is, whether it's a company engaged in a manufacturing or industrial enterprise, whether it is a company like TransAlta or EPCOR or Capital Power or Enmax, is generating power to provide to electricity users. Once that company generates the power, that company really doesn't care where the electricity ends up. All that company is concerned about, and rightly so, is having the ability to put that realized generating capacity onto the grid and have somebody else deliver it somewhere where it's needed. This is really key in the case of coal-fired generators, and I'll come back to that in a second.

3:00

The point here, though, that I was making in terms of consumption of electricity in Alberta by sector is that there has been much talk about the impact that building this gold-plated Lexus of a transmission system will have on individual homeowners' electricity bills, whether it's \$8 a month or \$2,000 a year or anything in between. I'm not even going to stand here and argue the numbers at this point. We can get that specific, if we need to, at committee stage. What we're forgetting when we talk about that is the impact that paying for this grid, paying for the package of upgrades to this grid will have on industrial users, will have on commercial users, will have on institutional users, will have on employers. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that there's a risk here that we're going to make some of them uncompetitive. We're going to make some of them pick up and move to Saskatchewan if we go through with this whole thing hook, line, and sinker as has been proposed or even if we go through it in stages.

There are a few things to take into consideration here. Number one, Bill 50 does remove the right of public input at the needs-assessment stage. Yes, it still provides for the AUC to hold hearings on siting and things like that, but if a high-voltage 500-kilovolt direct current transmission line or two have already been declared critical transmission infrastructure by this government – and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Speaker, but I don't know of any electrical engineers or, for that matter, even electricians sitting in cabinet, so I don't know where the expertise comes from for the minister or the Premier or the cabinet to make the decision as to whether this is

critical transmission infrastructure or not – if that declaration under Bill 50 were to be made, then there is no choice, really, but to go ahead with holding the siting hearings.

What kind of extra pressure does that put on the AUC to approve whatever siting, you know, within reason, has been already spelled out by the AESO? I mean, there's going to be a lot of added pressure on the AUC to just roll through with this thing. We have to remember that whether they're industrial, commercial, institutional, residential, or farm consumers, consumers are getting stuck with a hundred per cent of this bill. Therefore, consumers, in my view, Mr. Speaker, have the right to challenge the need for the expenditure and the right to an impartial laying of the facts by the AUC.

Politicians, as I mentioned, are not experts at electricity. We should not be making decisions about critical infrastructure, and neither should AESO because AESO's credibility on this score is suspect, too. It's not because AESO are bad people. They're good people. They're well-meaning people. Indeed, as I think the Minister of Energy pointed out yesterday in question period, they may have 200 electrical engineers working for them, on call to them, that they can consult for their opinion as to where you need to put these lines. But, you know, they could have 200 or 2,000 or 2 million, for that matter, and it wouldn't make a difference so long as AESO is restricted by the mandate this government gave AESO to consider one and only one remedy for every problem that AESO encounters. That remedy is: build more transmission lines. That's the only thing they can consider. So what other answer are they going to come up with?

Well, Mr. Speaker, if you don't go down the route of approving Bill 50, there are other options because under the Electric Utilities Act as it exists now, there are opportunities and requirements. The AESO is required to submit a needs identification document for every line it wants to build. The others who are involved in that situation, the actual owners of the transmission facility, have the means to object if they believe that AESO's proposal is stupid or dangerous or ill-informed. These sorts of things are the things that the minister and cabinet and government want to punt, and I don't think there's any justification for that.

You know, it doesn't matter, as far as the general public is concerned, that AUC will still be holding siting hearings, because the general public still doesn't get a public hearing around the need for the line in the first place. This public hearing, Mr. Speaker, is called a public interest hearing. A public interest hearing. The AUC holds these hearings, which I understand the Department of Energy thinks take far too long, slows the process down by two years. As I referenced earlier, we're mere hours away from rolling brownouts, according to the proponents of this thing. They hold these public interest hearings to determine and to allow you, Mr. Speaker, and me and the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose if he wants and independent experts, most importantly, to weigh in as to whether the social, economic, and environmental impacts of building said transmission line are in the public interest or not. History is full of absolute rulers with absolute power who got the trains to run on time, but it turns out that none of them was so hot at acting in the public interest on an ongoing basis, and I think that's worth keeping in mind.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 would be something that I would be very happy with if I was the operator of coal-fired generating facilities because coal-fired generating facilities are really hard to start up if they shut down. Of course, you have to shut them down periodically for planned maintenance, and every once in a while one of them goes down for unplanned maintenance. Then you have to start them up again. These are not facilities that you turn off and on with the

flick of a switch. It takes awhile to power these things up. They are difficult to power up. It is much better if you've got a big old smoke-belching coal-fired generating station, once you've got that thing on, to keep it running 24/7, 365 with, you know, the scheduled maintenance intervals.

That power, Mr. Speaker, that electricity that that big old coal-fired generating plant is producing: well, it has to go somewhere. Interestingly, the coal-fired generating stations are mostly located west of the city of Edmonton, and the load, the people who need the power: well, they're in Edmonton; they're in the Industrial Heartland. They're also in the south, in and around Calgary and down in southern Alberta. These lines will function very well at getting coal-fired generating capacity, coal-fired generated electricity from Wabamun or wherever down to the people in Calgary, as an example.

Okay. That's great. The people in Calgary need power. Everybody knows we Calgarians, although we do try, could try a little harder to be better conservationists when it comes to using electricity. That's a fact. But, you see, it kind of hooks us on the dirtiest power that there is. Parenthetically, one of the things that really galls me about some in the environmental movement is that they're trying so hard to tar the oil sands with this tar sands, dirty-oil label, brand. They've succeeded to some extent. Interestingly, all the oil sands developments currently in operation generate 36 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions, and the handful of coal-fired generating stations generates 44 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we could flip those relatively easily because, after all, the infrastructure, the building infrastructure and the related infrastructure, is in place. We could switch those existing coal-fired plants to gas reasonably easily and reduce our carbon footprint from the production of electricity to 40 per cent of what it is today. I think that would be significant. Plus we're missing a golden opportunity here by imposing an old-school solution on a problem that actually presents a raft of new opportunities that we're on the cusp of: distributed generation; building the generating capacity close to where it's going to be consumed; things like the ability, which is not that far away, of individual homeowners to engage in a little bit of cogeneration on their own behalf, taking the waste heat off their furnace and using it to generate the power that is going to provide much of their home-based consumption needs, might even power their car when they plug it in at night once they've got an electric car. We've got gas-fired generators versus coal. I spoke about that.

3:10

So there's a raft of opportunities here, some of them pretty exciting, for greening our grid. One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that is key here is that we do need to take a sustained, sustainable, predictable, logical, sensible approach to expanding and modernizing our grid so as to make it possible for an individual homeowner to dump excess power that he has generated onto the grid for somebody else to use or to make all kinds of things possible: the generation of more wind power, et cetera, more renewables. Those things do require a more modernized grid but a greener grid.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. member if he could elaborate further on prospects for greening the production of electricity in our province.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Yeah, to an extent I will. I'm not an expert in

it, just like I suspect you're not an expert and just like I suspect nobody else in this House is really an expert in electricity. There is great potential for generating electricity via the use of wind power. It may even be not only confined to southern Alberta. We generally think the greatest generating capacity for wind is in southern Alberta, in that corridor from the Crowsnest Pass sort of over to Lethbridge, but there may be capacity to build wind-generation facilities in other parts of the province because wind does not necessarily blow across Alberta on a consistent basis, like it does under this dome sometimes. So if the wind isn't blowing in Lethbridge, but it is blowing east of Red Deer, why shouldn't we have wind turbines there to generate power, for instance?

There is biomass as well, which we have started to work with but which we could do much more with, in my opinion.

There's solar, which we basically haven't started to work with. If you look in Europe, if you look in Germany especially – and, granted, this has involved heavy government subsidies, and this is not something that I or anyone else in this House can recommend without this House having a discussion on whether they want to go down the route of subsidization. In Germany the government there has subsidized whole solar farms where, literally, farmers' fields have been turned over to, you know, a combination of growing crops and arrays of solar panels that generate a fair amount of electricity.

Now, none of these situations, none of these examples is the ideal solution to all our electrical woes or our environmental woes. It's going to take a combination of strategies, but there is real potential there. There is real potential, hon. member, for you to have what is called a Stirling engine fitted on your furnace in a couple of years' time probably, once they've been properly tested, and with the waste heat from your furnace generate some of the electricity that you use in your house. If you decide to trade in – well, it's not a New Yorker that you're driving – some kind of Chrysler on a plug-in hybrid or a plug-in electrical vehicle on down the road, maybe it will recharge your car's batteries overnight.

There are some very, very interesting possibilities here. We're on the cusp of those possibilities, Mr. Speaker, and we're not likely as a province to take a world leadership, state-of-the-art, leading-edge role in developing those possibilities and creating the jobs surrounding that if we build this gold-plated transmission system that works best to keep the coal-fired plant rolling and the coal fires burning.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Mr. Hinman: I'd like to ask the hon. member – he referred a little bit to the CO₂ emissions in the province: 38 per cent coming from the oil sands, 44 per cent from the coal-fired plants. I'm wondering if he has any more data on if, in fact, we were to replace that. Not that I'm a CO₂ skeptic, because I have questions on whether that should even be driving our economy, but we are subject to a tax that could be coming from foreign countries on exporting our electricity if we have the coal-fired areas there. I'm wondering if he knows what the actual reduction would be. He talked about 40 per cent on that versus coal. Does he have any idea on the megatons, on what that reduction would be in the province and the overall percentages and whether or not – I know he's been an advocate and spoken a lot on the Kyoto protocol – if in fact we were to convert that, we would meet the Kyoto protocol by converting to gas-fired as opposed to coal-fired plants?

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I don't have those particular figures at my fingertips, and I would have to go back and do some research on that to come up with a specific answer to that question. Having said that, would it meet our Kyoto targets all by itself? I don't know. Would

it get us a lot closer? Well, obviously. If tomorrow with gas you're producing 40 per cent of the emissions that you produce with coal . . . [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member; we must now forge ahead.

We'll recognize the following speakers in this order: the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the Leader of the Official Opposition and the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and to speak to this bill as it currently is becoming the number one issue for the taxpayers of Alberta. It's been brought up several times already, and I'm sure as the other speakers rise, they'll also be referring to this. The job of the government is to ensure that the taxpayers' money is used wisely. It's amazing to me, as I've done some research on this, trying to find out why the government is saying that we're in a crisis situation. Why are they allowing AESO to circumvent our system, that we've had in place for years and has served us well, to declare a crisis when my understanding of the legislation is that one must submit a report if, in fact, there is a crisis or a problem anywhere in the system? There's been no report submitted to AESO, to the AUC, so I wonder why they bring that up when, in fact, they haven't been following their own legislation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The root of the problem, that I understand in talking to several experts in the field – there are some out there, and why they're not referring them, I don't understand – is that AESO is bound by a horribly flawed transmission policy. The problem is that if you are a repairman and all you're given to repair with is a hammer, you're not going to have a very elegant job of repairing something. You'll have more dents than repairing. Their policy is about transmissions. It's a flawed plan because basically what the policy states is that any cost isn't the question. It's unconstrained transmission of electricity.

Albertans, if they're frustrated with anything about constraint problems, it's on our highways. In Calgary-Glenmore a major concern is that the ring road is not passed. It's got a problem, and there is no plan B to address it. It's going to be 2013 or longer before the ring road is addressed there. The local traffic is terrible. It needs to be addressed immediately. That would be a crisis to many people every morning and every evening in Calgary-Glenmore.

But to have a fear that we're not going to have electricity in Calgary-Glenmore is not a crisis. It hasn't happened. It has been said for years that it's going to happen. Yet this government wants to put in Bill 50, declare that there's a crisis and that these power lines must be built at a tune of an expected overnight cost, they figure right now, projected \$14.9 billion. That's an extreme amount of money.

We have a huge deficit, and I believe the government will be revealing here later this month or early in December that we're going to see the projected deficit escalate, I would suspect, to over \$10 billion even though the price of gas and oil has gone up. Yet they say that we need to spend up to \$14 billion to upgrade our electrical lines.

It's interesting that they always talk to and refer to that these lines haven't had any upgrades in 20 years. Yet when you look at the depreciation factor on these companies that own these power lines, their assets are increasing. Obviously, if the assets are increasing,

there has been maintenance work, there has been expansion, and it's going there. It's a concern that why would Albertans need to foot a bill for \$14 billion when, in fact, it isn't a crisis. The brownouts haven't been arriving.

The world basically has changed significantly since these proposals were brought forward. It's interesting if we go back and look at some of the AESO reports. In 2002 they put out a report, and they said there was a need of \$1 billion in transmission upgrades. In 2004 they put out a report. Again, we're all familiar, I believe, in this Assembly with the 2004 report and the need to spend \$600 million in today's dollars – it was \$300 million back in 2004 – to upgrade a line from Edmonton to Calgary, that 500-kV line. It's interesting that that was challenged in the courts. The courts actually ruled on that – I'm trying to see where I've got that document – but the court overturned that application when it was going through a needs basis and said that AESO was biased in their presentation. So that transmission line was defeated.

3:20

Now, in 2007 AESO came out and said that \$3.5 billion was needed, and the provincial energy strategy was saying about the gas prices going up through the roof: we need to do this immediately. Gas prices have since collapsed, and it's changed the entire outlook going forward of that industry and also the generation of electricity. It's a major concern.

The southern Alberta transmission reinforcement project under AESO, in 2008 they were talking about \$1.8 billion, but actually reports are coming out now saying there's going to be a \$3.4 billion expected cost. Again, Alberta taxpayers are wondering: why are we doing this?

Another interesting part of all of this and the question that comes up: AESO has put out this latest report saying they need two direct current high-voltage lines, one on the east and one on the west, to, I guess, give us security of the system and ensure that it is viable when, in fact, that's a huge overbuilding of it. The good member earlier referred to the cost of building a Cadillac or a Lexus or something else when, in fact, we don't need it. Albertans that are speaking to myself are highly suspicious when they look at the NorthernLights line from Fort McMurray going down to California, that all this is is a link in that line for Capital Power, I believe. Or is that the Canadian? Gosh, I'm getting my companies mixed up here now. Anyway, the bottom line is that the taxpayers are going to foot thousands of kilometres of transmission lines for a company in order to export down to the States.

It's also interesting when they talk about the crisis needs in that we have this constraint. When you actually look on the AESO website, you see that that constraint starts at 10 or 11 o'clock at night, but it peaks at 2 or 3 in the morning. There isn't a constraint on Alberta infrastructure here. It's because all this generation is going on, and there's no use for it, so they want to export it down to the States. We need to look at it and say: is that a crisis at 2 in the morning because we can produce electricity but have no place to ship it? What's interesting is that you pursue the idea of exporting. I'm all for it. If we can produce electricity and export it and Albertans can benefit from that, that's great. But if, in fact, we're exporting it and we're subsidizing those companies and the transmission companies, we have to question that.

My understanding is – and we'll be checking the data to ensure that it's correct – that when they're shipping the electricity out through the night, they get a much better rate for the transmission line, saying: well, it's not being used, so we'll give you a reduced rate in order to export your electricity. The companies say: well, let's build up more generation because we can ship it out; we don't

have to pay the full transmission cost. My understanding is that only one-third of the actual line cost is being paid, with the thinking that, well, because it's not being used, one-third is better than nothing for the traditional line costs. Again, that's what's creating the constraint in the system. It's at 2 in the morning, not at 6 in the evening, when we're supposedly hitting our peak time. Or at 7 or 8 in the morning there isn't a constraint inside the transmission lines here serving industry and the people of Alberta.

So we need to go back and ask that question: who really is going to benefit from building these transmission lines? Is it the Alberta taxpayers, or is it going to be the generators or the transmission people that use taxpayers' money to build these lines? It looks to me that it's pretty much staring us in the face that this is for the generators and for the transmission companies, not for the Alberta taxpayers. We truly do need to question that and to bring that part of the process.

Again, the most disappointing part and the concerning part for those people that are following this and realizing what this government is trying to scare Albertans into buying – and they're spending a lot of money in advertising as well as those companies that will benefit – is that we're in a crisis situation, such a crisis situation that we need to empower the minister to make that decision rather than go through the needs process that has served this province so well for 50 years.

I might again repeat that in 2004, when AESO wanted to put that line through there, it was challenged by an individual in the Lavesta area group, Joe Anglin, who took that right through to the courts. That line was defeated. It said that it didn't meet the needs test and that there was a bias in that.

I want to go back, though, and repeat what the problem is. I've asked some of these engineers, "Why are we messing up so bad at AESO? Why are they saying we need to have these things?" and they say, "Well, it's because of their policy, their mandate that they're given." Their mandate is to build unconstrained power lines for the transmission of electricity through the province. We need to change that. We need to have a mandate for AESO – and they are very capable engineers. They do understand the big problem. It's just that their mandate is constrained to transmission lines when what their mandate should be is to develop an energy policy, not a transmission policy. Therein lies the crux of the problem. Are we going to have an energy policy or a transmission policy?

It's also interesting, talking to some of these engineers, that the rates – it depends on the different companies that are very much involved in the economics of power and energy. They say that one 36-inch pipeline, which we have several of, transmits as much power as six 500-kV power lines. More interesting, the line loss and the efficiency is much greater with that. We have a huge potential here to push the gas through pipelines to local production of electricity versus trying to push it through power lines and having the loss, the overhead, the magnetic concerns that many residents have as those power lines go through.

The good member here from Edmonton-Meadowlark earlier asked the question: could we bury these power lines? All of these areas are not being pursued and thought of – why? – because of a policy that says we need transmission lines. But what we need to do is be able to transmit power. Even on that, let's look at the NorthernLights line from Fort McMurray down to California, that has been talked about so much for almost 10 years now. If we put in the pipeline rather than the power line, how much more efficient is that?

As I say, there are just so many areas here that one has to ask: why is the minister insisting that we pass this new Bill 50 so that we can declare that there is a crisis, the sky is falling, we need to immediately address this and build these lines when, in fact, nothing may happen?

It reminds me of 1977. There are a few in here that will remember that. The U.S. was talking about converting to the metric system. Canada at that point says: oh, we're going to jump on that and be ahead of them and be there. It cost industry a lot of money to retool our cars and all those things to metric, and the cost to our economy was immense by pre-empting and saying: oh, we're leading the pack in doing that. To put these overhead high-voltage direct current lines is false thinking.

Another analogy an engineer gave me. He says we have \$14 billion, that he believes will end up being \$20 billion, that we're going to put into power lines. He says, "That's the equivalent, Paul, of going and actually buying copper lines because we want to be able to have a good communication system here in the province when, in fact, what we are now is wireless and fibre optics." Why would we do that?

If Edison were alive today, he would recognize and understand our grid system because we haven't moved forward to a smart grid. We're not making those decisions. The most important thing that we need to do is realize that we need to discuss and debate and look at taxpayers' money. We have \$14 billion to \$20 billion that they're saying we need to spend immediately in order to prevent brownouts and crises and in order to attract industry here to the province. It's not true. I see the Minister of Energy shaking his head and his finger and saying that this isn't true, but once you give that mandate, if they're going to build a high-voltage line, they're not going to build a little one. It's going to be a big one. The power isn't here. It's going to go ahead.

3:30

Another part of the flawed system is, though, that if we compare to the U.S. and FERC, their plan there for power, it actually would be illegal to follow the U.S. policy here in Alberta because of our mandate to AESO saying that this is about unconstrained movement of electricity. So we could have someone like Bruce Power come in and put up a plant in northern Alberta somewhere, and then the taxpayers are responsible for building those lines so they can get the power out. That isn't in our best interest.

The system is wrong. It needs to look at the costs and the benefit of local generation versus long transmission lines. It's not in the policy to address that, and we need to change those things. I would urge this government to recognize these shortfalls in Bill 50. It's not going to serve the interests of Albertans. We don't have the \$14 billion to invest now or in the next couple of years on these major transmission lines. We need to focus and realize that electrical generation has changed a great deal. The cost of gas has changed dramatically from 2006, 2007.

I'll look forward to continuing the debate on Bill 50.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology under Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes for comments or questions.

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker, please. Just a couple of questions. I was wondering. The hon. member mentioned several times, actually, that there was an immediate cash cost to this program of \$14 billion to \$20 billion. He tossed a lot of numbers around there. I'm just curious if the hon. member could answer what the cash-flow timelines are that he knows of as to what this expenditure is going to be. Is it \$14 billion in 2011? Is it \$14 billion over two years? Is it three years? He could probably enlighten the House with his knowledge of that.

The other thing is that he kept talking about the AESO having a mandate for unconstrained power transmission. I'm curious where

he got that from because as I recall, reading the mandate of AESO, it doesn't say that specifically. I'm curious.

The other thing is that he's mentioned that we're building a bunch of power lines for export to the United States. I'd be curious to know if he has any documentation or evidence that that might be the case, that AESO is somehow involved in that, because AESO is really for the people of Alberta as a not-for-profit. There may be some for-profit guys doing it.

Also, when power is exported late at night, I think he said: well, they pay nothing. I'm understanding that they pay a tariff. I'm curious if he could clarify that for us.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I thank the hon. member for those questions. It's quite obvious that he wasn't paying close attention. I'll start with the last one, where he says that they pay nothing. I actually said that they only pay about one-third of a dollar to export because the lines are there. I didn't say that they paid nothing. I said that they paid a subsidized rate of 66 per cent.

If we look at the Powering Albertans into the Future put out by AESO, on the front page – this time they've conveniently not put the year of the report, but I believe it's 2008. When you turn to page 12 – and I'd be happy to get these copies over to the hon. member – they talk about the critical transmission infrastructure: Edmonton to Calgary, \$3.1 billion; heartland, \$300 million; Fort McMurray, \$2 billion; southern Alberta, \$2 billion; south Calgary, \$100 million; total, \$8.1 billion. Additional critical transmission infrastructure, CTI tier 2: the northwest \$500 million; the northeast, \$1.4 billion; total, \$1.9 billion. Then transmission infrastructure under development: bulk transmission system infrastructure currently under way, \$570 million. Then we have the cost estimate in 2008 dollars, long-term regional transmission system plan, a total of \$3.8 billion. When you add those all up, hon. member, it comes to a little over \$14 billion, I believe. I'm taking that directly from the AESO website. The time frame when they're doing that I don't believe is in this report.

You asked the question, saying that I said that this was for export. What I said was that many people have asked me to build these huge transmission lines. Again, as human beings we're supposed to have deductive reasoning. We were able to look and say: well, if we do this, what's the result? A former Premier often referred to that, unintended consequences. Or are they intended consequences? To build these huge power lines, it's obvious that it's for sending somewhere else.

We don't need that much power here in the province. We're meeting our current needs. Seventy per cent of all of the growth in the last six years that we've been talking about have been met by backyard generation. If AESO was to open up or the Alberta Utilities Commission to become more user friendly and competitive, you would find that local generation would come forward at a much quicker rate.

We also have to look at the reality of where our energy comes from. It is coming from carbon fuel, and if we look at that – you asked four questions, so I'm trying to answer them all for you – it's transmitting and moving gas that is far more efficient than electricity. Yet the AESO only focuses and looks at transmitting electricity, which isn't an energy plan on how we're going to reach – and, again, I am going to say that what's really important if we want Alberta to return to the Alberta advantage is the cost of energy. If energy is reasonable and competitive on a world basis and on a North American basis, then our industry will be. But if we're going to add \$14 billion to the infrastructure for transmission lines when local generation can bring it forward, we have to question that.

There's a report that I've got here. [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. This is an important piece of legislation, and the public discussion is also important. I believe that it represents how our government is continuously forward thinking and working hard for Albertans not just for today but for the province's future prosperity as well. I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the importance of this bill by highlighting what it will ensure for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's population has grown and will continue to grow in the years to come. Due to our province's resources, prosperous economy, which, by the way, is the envy of other economic situations across the world, our competitive tax scheme, and the beautiful scenery that we have in our province, to name a few things, our population will endure and enjoy these assets that our province has.

Every home requires electricity, so as our population increases and as our cities and communities expand, there is a mounting demand for this electricity. As a fact, no major additions to the transmission system in our province have been built for more than 20 years. Mr. Speaker, our transmission system today, however, is aging, is congested and inefficient, and the grid system is nearing its capacity. When this happens, we begin to lose energy along the lines during transfer. This is known as line loss and comes at a cost. For example, in 2008 the cost of the line loss was approximately \$220 million. In addition to this, because the grid is reaching capacity, we will not be able to add to it, and our electricity system could become less reliable.

Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that Alberta will need to increase its generating capacity by 50 per cent over the next 10 years. By investing in new transmission infrastructure, we are ensuring minimal line loss and the reliability of transmission, thereby effectively planning for population growth within our province. Furthermore, with efficient transmission in place investors are more likely to sponsor generation, which will ensure a competitive market for this public good. Bill 50 will create opportunities to secure competitiveness for Albertans, reliability, and cost-effectiveness.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Electric System Operator, also known as AESO, initially determines the need for transmission infrastructure projects. AESO is a not-for-profit electricity system planner. It is independent from the electricity industry and operates in the public interest through a statutory mandate. AESO has technical expertise to prepare long-term plans, and in June 2009 they posted on their website that long-term plan.

Currently, once they have determined the project to be necessary in our province, the Alberta Utilities Commission undertakes open and transparent hearings with the public on the siting of the transmission facilities and locations. Bill 50 will effect change in these processes for the development of critical, and only critical, transmission infrastructure. This means that the government of Alberta will be responsible for proving the need for the critical major transmission lines, just like it does and accepts responsibility for the infrastructure that is in the public good. Some examples are hospitals, schools, and roads.

Projects that are not considered critical will continue to follow the same step-by-step approval process that involves the Alberta Utilities Commission. However, under Bill 50 projects that are urgent will be managed expeditiously through an approval process that involves the government of Alberta. This does not alter AESO's role. They will continue to determine the need for the projects.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be very clear in saying that despite the changes in the approval process of the projects themselves Bill 50 maintains the ability of Albertans to participate in the consultation process that is undertaken when evaluating and determining where to site these infrastructure projects. As such, Bill 50 upholds the opportunity for dialogue regarding the location of critical infrastructure. To that effect, Bill 50 provides the government of Alberta the authority to approve four critical – and I repeat critical – transmission infrastructure projects, which include the development of transmission lines between Edmonton and Fort McMurray, Edmonton and the Heartlands region, Edmonton and Calgary, and then within the city of Calgary. However, it is not a formal decision on where the lines will be placed. Following the passing of Bill 50, Albertans will have the opportunity to advise on the siting of these transmission lines.

Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons that I believe that this bill is integral for Albertans and our electricity system infrastructure. I therefore stand before the Assembly and would hope that colleagues of the Assembly support Bill 50 and any other considerations that may come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Five minutes.

Mr. Taylor: On Standing Order 29(2)(a), yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question to the member around this notion that should Bill 50 be passed in this House, the people of Alberta would still have all the rights that they currently have to enjoy these open and fair hearings in front of the AUC around the issue of siting of the transmission lines. I would point out that the government of Alberta has already given AltaLink and ATCO permission to plan the two high-voltage DC lines between Edmonton and Calgary. You know, that seems a little bit like putting the cart before the horse or least getting a jump on the whole siting hearing process since we haven't even passed a bill that allows the minister or the government to declare these two lines to be critical transmission infrastructure and avoid the needs hearing.

Here's the question, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member: why should the people of Alberta take comfort and confidence in the notion that these siting hearings are going to be available to them going forward for all time when up until we started debating this bill, they had every reason to think that the needs hearings before the AUC were going to be before them for all time, and now the government is proposing under Bill 50 to take those needs hearings, those public interest hearings, away? In other words, hon. member, if the needs hearings, which have been there for decades, are suddenly to disappear, what comfort and confidence can the ordinary Joe or Jane in the province of Alberta take that you're not going to do the same thing to the siting hearings this time next year?

Mrs. Sarich: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the Alberta Utilities Commission is responsible for making decisions on the siting of the transmission facilities, which includes the determination of the specific locations. They've been provided that mandate, and Albertans should be assured of that mandate. It is the expectation that they would follow through with that mandate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While, yes, that's true – they have been provided with that mandate – I would remind the hon.

member that they actually today and until such time as this bill actually passes this House, if it does, have the mandate to hold the needs identification hearings for all high-voltage transmission lines that are proposed in the province, not just for the ones that aren't currently defined as critical transmission infrastructure. So you take away the AUC's mandate on the one hand. How am I or anybody else in this province to believe that you're not going to do that on the other hand later on? I mean, what's the assurance? There's nothing here that says that you can't do that. There's nothing here that said that you would do what you're proposing to do with this bill to the other part of the AUC's mandate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me reiterate a couple of finer points. Bill 50 provides the government with the authority to approve the need for critical transmission and the transmission infrastructure. This means that the government of Alberta is responsible for approving the need for the major transmission lines, just like it does for the infrastructure, and accepts the responsibility for hospitals, roads, and schools because it is defined as a public good.

Bill 50 does not change the province's commitment to ensuring open and transparent processes for the public to participate in. That responsibility for the siting lies with the Alberta Utilities Commission. I am confident that they've been exercising and will exercise in the future the mandate that has been provided to them, and Albertans should be assured of that as well.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under the five minutes, hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore?

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. Is the hon. member aware of the court case of the Lavesta group against the 500-kV line in 2004? You keep saying that there's input, but there isn't any input on the needs basis, and that's the most critical part. For anybody to be able to say, "Oh, I'm going to be able to produce this" and for Albertans to have to pay for it, I mean, that's a wonderful business. The whole purpose of the Energy and Utilities Board and now the Alberta Utilities Commission . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. You know, electricity is kind of like water. We depend on it as an essential service for human life, and we take it for granted, understanding little about where it comes from and what it takes to preserve it in amounts and timing and locations that are needed. It's an essential service powering our lights, our interaction as individuals on the planet. We work through computers, we use it in our heating system, and increasingly it's important in our transportation systems, in fact.

Historically we've depended fundamentally on fossil fuels for generation of electricity and coal, in particular, from central and northern Alberta. Increasingly we are seeing a demand for a shift in the 21st century to new forms of energy, and I think that's in the context of climate change the most serious crisis affecting the planet in our lifetime. The question is whether we're going to move into the challenge and embrace the responsibility not only to our own citizens but to the rest of the planet to reduce our carbon footprint,

to reduce demand, to improve efficiencies, to improve conservation, to increase renewable energy development in this province in a way that will be timely and significant to the global need for change.

3:50

We have some significant hydro, and there may be some real opportunities to do more there. That will also reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The natural gas supplies are clearly going to be a consistent contributor to our electricity generation in this province for decades to come.

The real challenge, I guess, for us is to think differently about both the types of energy we're creating, where we're producing it, and its proximity to use. Clearly, the urban centres, industrial centres like the heartland, and to some extent the oil sands are the greatest areas of demand. I guess the question for us is: are we going to continue to produce power centrally and transmit it throughout the province, or are we going to look at some innovative alternatives that would move us both towards less waste and to greater dependence on renewable sources?

Currently the demand for electricity in the province is still well below supply, but there is much evidence that we continue to squander our electricity, and we could be saving both the cost of electricity and the generation of emissions if we looked at much more innovative and higher investments in some of the demand reduction scenarios that have been used in Europe and elsewhere to reduce, as I say, both cost and emissions.

Currently we produce virtually all the power we need, though at times we import some electricity from B.C. and in concert export back power to B.C. at times when that's appropriate. It's like with other commodities: we want as Albertans a fair, competitive market that ensures the lowest prices and stability of supply. As I've indicated, some people's very lives depend on a consistent supply of electricity, and all of us want to see that endure. Stability, then, and diversity of supply are critical to us thinking about what's before us in Bill 50.

The distribution has until early in the 2000s been incorporated into the costs of the power producers, but this administration has shifted the cost of transmission now to the public. Since 1996 and deregulation we are seeing significant increases in costs that, frankly, Albertans have some legitimate questions about. What would have been the costs today if we had continued on a regulated rate system? Are we providing the best longer term options for the public in the long term, or are we acquiescing to corporate and other interests over the longer term costs and reducing our emissions?

The Alberta Electric System Operator has the responsibility for fairness in the operation and management of the electrical system, and as has been indicated, the Utilities Commission is responsible to site and establish some of the needs. We are looking, again in a climate of distrust in this province, at trying to build people's sense in this province that they participate in a democratic process, that they are going to be presented with the best evidence, that we are going to use forward thinking about both generation and transmission, that we're going to try to reduce demand at the same time as ensure consistent supply. Albertans want to know that we're providing the best of evidence and having the best of debates around this issue, that was established over time and as recently as the last year and a half segmented off into what's called the Alberta Utilities Commission to review these issues and provide objective, debated considerations around how the decision will be made about both siting and transmission.

On the face of it the need for either new transmission lines or upgraded transmission is clear. The question is: what is the best way forward? I think that with many Albertans the Alberta Utilities

Commission is best suited to help us determine some of those conditions, including the siting, which has to do with efficiencies, has to do with cost, and has to do with reliability. The decision to subvert that process smacks of self-interest. It smacks of centralizing power and decision-making at a time when Albertans are already suspicious of a government that hasn't managed the electricity system in a way that serves the greatest efficiency and the greatest savings for Albertans. We need public engagement. We absolutely depend on people paying attention to what we do as legislators to ensure that we reduce both demand and wasteful use and that we ensure the most optimal generation and distribution.

We criticized the conduct of the regulators, to be sure, in 2007, when concerned citizens who raised some similar questions were spied upon and marginalized in relation to Bill 46. This appears to be a reaction to that Bill 46 fiasco, and it appears to be taking it out of the hands of the public, out of the visibility and out of the debate that people are looking for, and it does not present a solution. It actually aggravates a situation in which Albertans do not trust this government to produce a thoughtful, evidence-based plan that is going to serve the long-term public interest in the most cost-effective way.

Mr. Speaker, some of our key questions will be raised and some amendments suggested over the course of time, but I'd just highlight some of the key questions that we have around this bill. Two high-voltage lines, direct current, are being planned between Edmonton and Calgary. These would be DC overhead lines. I guess a basic question that could be asked is: why are we opting for DC lines when AESO's own document states that longer distances, in the range of 700 kilometres, are the most cost-effective use of DC technology? I'm not an expert. I don't know the answer to that question, but it seems to me that that's part of what the Alberta Utilities Commission is charged with doing and ensuring that we understand why some of these decisions are being made.

Another has to do with the building of one high-voltage alternating current line going from south Edmonton to the new substation in the Industrial Heartland. Probably needed, but is the government planning to bury this line? Are we satisfied that we've allayed some of the concerns of Albertans in that area about the siting, and are we going to have a full debate about who benefits and who pays for that particular line?

Another commitment of Bill 50 is two high-voltage lines from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, one from Genesee-Wabamun and one from the Industrial Heartland. Again, legitimate questions can be asked by those most affected.

These are extremely costly projects. Some have indicated that, based on available data, the costs could soar up to \$20 billion. If the costs are being transferred from industry and commercial operations on to customers, we have estimated that charges on electricity bills could triple over the next 10 years. That includes \$300 a year for a typical 2,000-square-foot single-family home and up to \$400 a year for the average small-business customer consuming 1,600 kilowatt hours a month. Clearly, the cost to Albertans is only part of the issue, but it's one that is at the forefront, particularly with a government that has gone from multibillion-dollar surpluses to now the largest deficit in our history. There is serious question about the capacity of this government to manage our economy and to manage such things as the health care system and the electricity system in the public interest.

If Bill 50 is passed through the provincial Legislature, Albertans will no longer have a say in the need for these costly projects or whether they are being developed in the most cost-effective way. I guess the question that I have along with many Albertans is: why are we pushing through this bill in such haste? Is industry screaming for

relief? Are individuals, commercial operations, industry included, pressing for this change? These companies also deserve to have clear, open, evidence-based decision-making that they can have input into.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, that pretty much summarizes some of the key concerns that I have and that some of my constituents have. It appears to many of us that this may be a gold-plate option that requires some constraints, debate, discussion. We have a forum for this in the Alberta Utilities Commission. There are serious questions about why it should not be allowed, in fact facilitated, to carry on with this role. We will continue on behalf of Albertans to call on the government to renew its commitment to a commission that they themselves established for this very purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a couple of questions that I would like to ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition relative to this issue. The first one is if you would please advise us as to what would be the first stage of southern transmission rebuild relative to its timing and cost.

You talked about alternates and so on. I wonder if he would just inform us of how much hydro capacity the province of Alberta has and where it's located and how much of the current generation in the province of Alberta is gas fired.

Mr. Speaker, another couple of things. He'd indicated that at some point in time someone else besides consumers paid for transmission. I'd like him to explain to me and indicate to the House if historically the cost of transmission did not end up on a consumer's bill.

Mr. Speaker, one more thing. There's some suggestion here that there's been no opportunity for public engagement and that we've taken away the opportunity for public engagement relative to the issue of transmission and particularly these pieces of critical transmission that are before us in this bill today. I wonder if the hon. leader would enlighten the House as to how many open, public meetings have been held on transmission refurbishment in the province of Alberta since 2007.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to some of these questions. I'm sure the Energy minister has much deeper knowledge than I have. In fact, that's what we pay him for.

The question, I guess, in relation to various forms of electricity generation is well established and well published, and fossil fuels continue to be the primary form of electricity generation in this province. We have benefited from that. There's no question that we will continue to be dependent on fossil fuels for decades to come. I guess what we're looking for is leadership to both reduce demand and to enhance the renewable elements of our portfolio for electricity production. When companies like Enmax raise questions about the possibility of generation closer to use, as it has in Calgary, I want to know that that has been discussed.

Mr. Knight: Fossil fuel is fossil fuel.

Dr. Swann: Yes. I want to know that that's been discussed, why the decision for transmission which is much closer to source, much less

wastage, would not be a consideration in this particular discussion. I don't know the answer. I think the Alberta Utilities Commission and some of the experts from universities and from producers need to be heard from. We need to be making decisions in the best long-term interest of Albertans, and if we're not hearing from those people and basing our decisions on those kinds of expert advice, then I think we are missing the boat. What this bill does is take it out of the hands of the Utilities Commission and put it into cabinet, that has, I would argue, variable understanding of electricity generation and transmission. I don't think that that serves the public interest long term, and I don't think most Albertans believe it does.

On the other question, public engagement, I've met no one that was aware of some of the summer consultations that occurred in the last year around this particular issue. Yes, we've had many consultations across the province on various upgrades, but I don't believe we've had anything like the kinds of expert advice and debate around these particular lines, these high-kV lines between Calgary-Edmonton, Edmonton-Wabamun, Edmonton-heartland, and Fort McMurray. There is clearly a need for this. Albertans are not confident in a decision that would come out of a cabinet decision, and it's clear that we need to clear the air. Albertans will not be satisfied and will not be confident and you will have much more backlash if you push this through. It's very clear to us that people are not confident in rural or urban areas that this is an honest, evidence-based approach to making such an important long-term investment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party on the bill.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed with respect to this bill. There's the need for the transmission that is contained in the bill, and there's the question of the process by which this transmission will be approved, of which the bill is a significant point.

I think that this comes back, Mr. Speaker, to the previous hearings that were conducted by the ERCB with respect to the 500-kV line through central Alberta and the strong opposition that it engendered, the scandal of how those hearings were conducted, which really undermined the whole process that was there. That is to say that the ERCB was spying on the proponents participating in their meetings and so on, and this was all brought to light, which caused basically the whole process to be overturned. What the government has done, instead of going through the proper process again in a clean way, is they've decided to eliminate this untidy democracy and the objections of landowners.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that if you actually look at the bill, you'll see that the regulatory body no longer has the authority to determine if the bill is necessary, if it's in the public interest, if it's environmentally sound, if it's in the interests of the economy. Its role is simply reduced to siting it. That's the first problem with this particular piece of legislation.

Then there's the question of the four projects that are outlined in the bill and whether or not they are necessary. Now, government members have made a great deal of the fact that we have an old infrastructure that may not be adequate for our needs as we go forward. I don't dispute that, Mr. Speaker. I think it's clear that, in fact, we do have an aging infrastructure, and it needs to be upgraded and modernized. The question is: how much, and how do we know how much? This is the problem that people are having real trouble with, deciding whether they believe the government that nearly \$8 billion or over \$8 billion worth of infrastructure in total is actually necessary or whether something a little more modest would do

because, as we know, this is going to be paid for on the bills of electricity consumers.

Now, I had the opportunity to get a briefing from the minister's department and also by one of the senior strategic planning engineers of AESO. He took me through the transmission plan. You know, sometimes when this happens, Mr. Speaker, a little light bulb goes on in your head, and you begin to see what the problem is. The problem, of course, the root of this problem comes back to the government's misguided plan some years ago for electricity deregulation. What they've done is create a strange hybrid system where the retail of electricity is deregulated and privatized and generation is also deregulated and privatized. In the middle is a transmission system which is still a publicly regulated body, which is AESO.

There's no longer system-wide planning for electricity generation and transmission because of the privatization on the generation side. You have dozens and dozens of potential sites for electricity generation, whether it's wind power or more coal power or more hydro power, but they don't know which ones are going to go ahead and which ones are not going to go ahead, so they have to build a transmission system that's capable of transmitting power from any one of those plants or whatever combination to the markets. They build what the AESO people call a robust transmission system. Well, Mr. Speaker, I call it a redundant, excessive, overbuilt, and far too expensive electrical system. That's a direct result of this crazy, irrational, deregulated scheme that this government brought in. It's following the logic of the government's deregulation.

4:10

The second thing. We talked also with some former employees of the electricity consumer advocate's office. It's very interesting. One of the points, I think, that was made there and confirmed with other people that we talked to in the industry was that the decision of the government to place the entire cost on the electricity consumer removed the incentive on the part of power companies and AESO to make sure that the transmission system was built on the most economical basis possible. Mr. Speaker, it's a bit like if you're going to buy a car. If you have to pay for it, you will choose a very different car than if the government tells you that your neighbour will be forced to pay for whatever car you choose to buy. You might be happy with a Ford Focus if you have to pay the shot, but if your next-door neighbour has to pay for it and you get to choose the car, you'll get a Lexus or a Maserati or something that you don't need and is way too expensive. That's the system that the government has put in place.

Now, the minister, in his question to the Leader of the Official Opposition, talked that traditionally consumers paid all the costs of transmission, and that's true. Under the regulated system ultimately the costs of generation and transmission were rolled into a cost, the money was borrowed over a period of time, 20 years or more, and the repayment was added to everybody's bill. That was the system. The difference here is that there was a system to make sure that the transmission and the generation were built in the most economical way, that it was necessary, and that it was in the public interest. That is the very same process that Bill 50 is eliminating, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, historically transmission was paid for by electricity consumers, as was generation, but that was part of a regulated system in which people were allowed to scrutinize the claims that were being made by the power companies and were allowed to challenge their costs. They couldn't just pass their costs directly on to the consumer. They had to show that, in fact, it was a necessary cost and that it was being built in the most economical way. This bill and this

minister are taking that away from the people of Alberta. We will never know if \$8 billion is enough, Mr. Speaker. They could come forward with a \$12 billion or a \$16 billion cost, and we will never know because we can't scrutinize it in a public forum. The government has taken that away. There is no opportunity for someone who wishes to oppose it to be funded by the proponents in order to provide evidence that the transmission facility is too expensive or is unnecessary.

Now, Mr. Speaker, take a look at some of the stuff that they're going to build. They're going to build a DC line. Normally DC lines are used to transmit electricity very long distances, and they're very expensive. They can be double the cost, even more, of AC transmission. The distance between Edmonton and Calgary isn't normally the length where a DC line is required. It's a very, very short distance for a DC line. So this raises the question of what the ultimate plan is. Are they going to continue with this DC line right down into Montana? Are we going to have power companies building generation with their transmission paid for by other people so that they can sell power for profit into the United States? How does that benefit consumers? It simply doesn't, but that's the kind of system that this government is setting up with Bill 50.

I think we need to be very skeptical of the government's and AESO's claims that \$8 billion of infrastructure is actually necessary to solve the problem. The government has tried and AESO has tried to scare people into believing that the towers that transmit our electricity are about to fall down at any time, that we're going to be plunged into darkness, in fact, that we're going to freeze in the dark. Mr. Speaker, you know, I know enough about these kinds of things to tell you that, in fact, what happens with old and obsolete infrastructure is your maintenance curve, your cost of maintenance, steadily rises to the point where it's no longer economical to maintain. It does not mean that the system is unsafe or that it's about to collapse. It means that maintenance costs are eating up more and more of the budget to maintain an older infrastructure, and it needs to be replaced.

And it does, Mr. Speaker, but not \$8 billion. The total value of our existing infrastructure for transmission in the province is a little over a billion dollars. They want to build a new transmission core to that that's worth eight times the total current value of the transmission infrastructure. It's absurd, and they're doing it because they're going to make the ratepayers pay all of the shot. So we're building at our cost a transmission infrastructure that allows anybody in Alberta to build a plant to make a profit and hook in, and the cost of getting their product to market is picked up by us, by the electricity consumer.

Mr. Speaker, I really think that this is not a bill that this Legislature ought to pass, by any means. The greatest problem here is that we can't sort out these issues. We have to take the Minister of Energy's word for it. We have to take AESO's word for it that we need this and we have to pay, rather than having it scrutinized through a proper regulatory process. I think that's the biggest flaw in the bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, in order to deal with that basic flaw in this bill, I have an amendment. If we could maybe just stop the clock, I will provide this amendment to the table and the chair.

The Deputy Speaker: We have an amendment. Let's pause.

Hon. leader of the third party, we have your amendment, so please continue with your amendment.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that second reading of Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by striking out all words after "that" and substituting the

following: “Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a second time because the bill fails to provide for public consultation prior to the approval of critical transmission infrastructure.”

If I can just speak to that, Mr. Speaker, what we are referring to is changes that are contained in the bill to existing language which requires the regulator to take into account whether or not this is in the public interest, whether it's necessary, and whether it meets environmental and economic requirements of the province of Alberta. That's what Bill 50 takes out of existing legislation with respect to the four projects that are contained in the act, and I just want to indicate to the House that I don't believe there's any justification for this.

4:20

I do not understand what's wrong with a regulator looking at the public interest. I don't understand what's wrong with a regulator asking, “Is this actually necessary?” and then hearing evidence from both sides or from all interested parties as to whether or not it's necessary and it's the most economic option available because they're there to protect the ratepayers. We can't count on this government to protect ratepayers. In fact, they do quite the opposite. They love to gouge us. They gouged us throughout the whole deregulation of electricity, and that's not their interest. But the regulator at least is supposed to take into account the pocketbooks of Albertans, who have to pay these electrical bills, and whether or not the infrastructure is actually affordable and necessary.

Why is the government taking that out? I don't understand it. I'd like to hear from members opposite why they think we shouldn't do that, why we shouldn't look at the economic viability of the project, why we shouldn't look at whether it's environmentally responsible. Why shouldn't we look at those things? Why is the government taking that away from us? I think it's wrong, Mr. Speaker, and I think that we ought to not pass this bill until the government has fixed that problem.

You know, I'm really concerned, Mr. Speaker, that the government, because it understands – and I agree with this – that there is a need for some upgrading and modernizing of our infrastructure, is going overboard. They're going way over the top. They're doing away with a regulatory process, and they're imposing four projects without proper scrutiny. You know, it wouldn't be the first government to do that, but I think we should take it out.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to speak to the amending motion that's before us.

The Deputy Speaker: To the amendment?

Mr. Renner: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: You don't want to use the five minutes?

Mr. Renner: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Continue on with the amendment.

Mr. Renner: In speaking to the amendment, Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member has raised a number of concerns, and I understand that he is using a procedure that is available to all members of this House to introduce an amendment at second reading, but I think that he's premature in bringing this amendment

forward. It doesn't give members of the House ample opportunity to even debate the merits of the bill beyond second reading.

Clearly, there have been members that have expressed issues around this bill. I've heard in some of the speeches before and I anticipate in other speeches that may come forward at second reading that there may well be members proposing amendments at committee stage. I think that to proceed with this amendment at this point in time precludes members from even having the opportunity to introduce amendments and discuss some of the more detailed concerns that they may have with this bill. So I interpret what the hon. member has done here as really taking an opportunity to use the rules to actually remove the ability of members to continue to have debate.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I too would like to take an opportunity to use the rules that are available to us to extend the debate. I would like to move pursuant to Standing Order 43(d) that the question now be put. My understanding is that would allow any member who wishes to speak to this motion to do so, and at the conclusion of that we would then proceed to carry on the necessary votes to allow us to determine whether or not this bill should go to committee.

Mr. Knight: If I might, Mr. Speaker, you know, we do have an opportunity here now to continue this debate, and if I do understand correctly, I still have an opportunity to make some suggestions or comments here relative to the amendment before us. I stand corrected if that's not the case. But I understand that I do have that privilege at the moment. Would that be correct?

The Deputy Speaker: If the chair could pause for some advice.

Well, the chair has advice that we will continue on with the amendment, and then when we have further advice, we will make a decision on the amendment.

Please proceed on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: So the Deputy Government House Leader's motion is then out of order? Is that what you are saying?

The Deputy Speaker: We will hold off on that.

Mr. Mason: Okay. I have a point of order with respect to it, Mr. Speaker, when you're ready for it.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

The hon. minister on the amendment.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point, then, I would like to make some comments relative to the amendment. The wording of the amendment is, I think, a bit important here to understand what's being said. The premise for this is that the bill fails to provide for public consultation prior to approval. In some of the comments that have been made earlier in discussion on the bill itself, there most certainly has been evidence put on the floor of the number of open, public, transparent meetings and opportunities available to the public to have input. Members of the public would include any stakeholders involved.

Speaker's Ruling

Moving the Previous Question

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, just some advice here regarding the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader. *Beauchesne 527* says that “the previous question has been moved upon the various stages of a bill, but it cannot be moved upon an

amendment.” So the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader is not in order.

Minister, continue on with the amendment.

Debate Continued

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, you know, it's been stated here, but I'd like to clarify something relative to this because there appears to be some suggestion by some members opposite, as a matter of fact a number of them, that there has been no opportunity for public input relative to the four pieces of transmission that we're talking about here. For that matter, there is a fifth piece of transmission infrastructure that is, actually, in the bill – and that's the southern fortification – that's gone through all manner of public meetings, including the AUC's needs hearings. I can tell you that with respect to these pieces of transmission, just what we have in Bill 50 – we introduced this bill in the spring. We carried it over the summer for the specific reason – the specific reason – of having an opportunity for all Albertans, including all stakeholders, to bring forward their suggestions relative to this legislation and their comments and questions.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, AESO held with respect to this over 40 open, public meetings. The Department of Energy across the province of Alberta held an additional 20 open, public meetings where we encouraged Albertans and encouraged stakeholders to come forward with their comments, suggestions, and questions relative to this piece of legislation. I would suggest to you that I cannot think of anything since I've been elected here, certainly, which is not very long, any single piece of legislation that's been in front of this body that has had as much opportunity for public input as this piece of legislation has had. For that reason I would encourage all members to oppose this particular amendment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party under Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. Minister of Energy neglects is that there's a difference between consultation, which the government can ignore, and a proper process of regulation in which people who wish to intervene can do so and often can have some of their costs met by the proponents so that they can do research and hire lawyers and consultants in order to make the very best possible case and that there's a legal requirement on behalf of the regulator to take those things into account. That's very different than holding public hearings around the province. It may be that they had 200 public meetings around the province where people were allowed to have their say, but there's no requirement for them to actually listen to the people, and, I would submit, in the most basic way they ignored them.

I'd have to ask what the value of doing that is if people come and they're angry and they don't want the power line and they don't believe that power lines are necessary and they think they're too expensive or whatever it is they say, and the government simply says, “Well, we'll make a note of that,” and nothing fundamentally changes. How is that a valid regulatory process? It's not. You know, I'd like to ask the minister this question. As a result of those 200 public meetings around the province what about these major projects did you actually change?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly valid points that the hon. member makes relative to the process. There is nothing – absolutely

nothing – in Bill 50 that removes the mandate of the Alberta Utilities Commission to work in the public interest. The Alberta Utilities Commission has to make decisions on all of the hearings and all of the issues that they address, and they have to make those decisions in the public interest.

When you move into the permit and licensing stage of any of these pieces of development, it's very clear that all of the issues that the member brings up will be – will be – addressed by the AUC. They do have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to look at issues such as health, safety, the technology employed, the cost, the proximity to individuals and certain people, be they landowners or renters or people living in congested areas or businesses. What effects these pieces of infrastructure would have on them are considered by the Alberta Utilities Commission before they render a decision on the permit and licensing of these facilities.

Mr. Speaker, you know, there was a question put at the end of a ramble, and by the way that ramble has been heard now, I think, just since I've been sitting here, for two hours, I suppose, and a bit. I don't know. But I think it's the fourth time, the same stuff repeated over and over and over and over again. That's fine because, of course, I guess if they want to hear themselves talk, it's good. It's good.

The question is: what was done with the information that was provided to AESO and to the Department of Energy with respect to these particular pieces of infrastructure? I would suggest to you that all of the members in the House, you know, will want to have an opportunity to engage in the debate and see at the end of the day what differences have been made from perhaps an initial thought that we had 10 years ago, eight years ago, five years ago, three years ago, and now with respect to how we should move this province forward in the development of the resource base, the development of living space, the development of the health care system. Mr. Speaker, they all require a robust transmission system, and this is what we're going to provide for Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on the amendment.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I want to rise and take issue with something that the minister said as he replied to the amendment introduced by the leader of the third party because as I read this amendment, it says in part that “Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a second time because the bill fails to provide for public consultation prior to the approval of critical transmission infrastructure.” The response in debate that the minister gave to the leader of the third party's amendment was not focused on what the amendment talks about. This is not about the public consultations that have taken place about the bill. This is about the future public consultations that will not be able to take place, that will be prohibited from taking place by the passage of Bill 50.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that's a very, very important distinction to get on the record because the minister would have you believe that anyone and everyone on this side of the House who has risen to speak against Bill 50 so far today has somehow denied the efforts made by this caring, compassionate, want to do the right thing government to make sure that, oh, 3,475,000 of us or however many there are today in the province of Alberta get our chance to speak to Bill 50 before it's debated here in the Legislature. You know, I applaud the minister's efforts and the Department of Energy's efforts and the

AESO's efforts and anybody else who's made the effort. I mean, it's just been an awesome sight to behold. It begs the question of, if they'd been so darn good at consultation and getting everybody's opinion, why it is that they have proceeded with this bill when they should know darn well that the more the people of Alberta learn about this bill, the more upset they are with it.

One of the things – it's not the only thing – they're upset about, obviously, is the impact that it's going to have on their electricity bill. One of the things that they're upset about is the idea that that minister over there and his cabinet colleagues can go behind closed doors and in some kind of star chamber arrangement, having perhaps taken the advice of the AESO – maybe not; we don't really know – having perhaps taken the advice of TransAlta Utilities . . .

Mr. Mason: Some of the sponsors of their convention.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

. . . or AltaLink or TransCanada. I doubt that they'd take Enmax's advice from the way the debate outside the House has gone so far, but EPCOR or Capital Power or anybody else who comes down the pike. Certainly not Enron anymore, but if they were still around, they might take Enron's advice. They can decide that this particular high-voltage transmission line is a critical piece of transmission infrastructure, and there's not one of us outside that room, whether we're elected representatives or just ordinary civilians, who can challenge that. Oh, sure, we can go to the AUC hearing and say: well, you know, can you move the pylon 25 feet to the left or the east or the west? But we can't do anything about getting in on the discussion of whether this really is a piece of critical transmission infrastructure.

4:40

You know, I'm really torn about whether to support this amendment or not because if the amendment passes, that's the end of this bill. On the one hand, that is a good thing. On the other hand, it means that this bill will go down to ignominious, inglorious defeat without any of us having actually gotten the chance to get from these guys on the government benches a clear definition of what constitutes critical transmission infrastructure and how they're going to determine that.

Mr. Mason: You've got to get your priorities straight.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. The leader of the third party just muttered that you've got to pick your priorities. You know, priority one is stopping a bad bill, and priority two is satisfying my curiosity. I can satisfy my curiosity on my own time, so frankly I'm pleased to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Proceed.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there was one thing very clear and that I certainly do agree with, and that is that the member opposite indicated that he's not an expert with respect to these matters. But there are some other questions that arise. One of them for me would be that given the fact that the member is not an expert, it makes me wonder why he would be so vociferous about the fact that probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of 200 – well, I know there are 300 and some people in the AESO, but more than 200 of them would be engineers and technical experts that have been hired to do a specific job for Albertans. They are experts. They are able to work their way through the requirements for a proper transmission grid to be in place.

Mr. Speaker, on the idea that somehow or another these people are fools and that they do not understand and don't know the difference between an ordinary piece of wire that's strung across somebody's yard for Christmas lights and a situation where there are critical pieces required for the movement of this commodity throughout the province, what I can say is that I'd like to ask the individual across the way, the hon. member, if he could tell me what the grid reliability standards are that we must operate under in western Canada because we're connected to a grid system in the northwest. There are reliability standards that we must meet.

Mr. Speaker, the people that we have hired there are experts. They understand the grid reliability requirements, and they're telling us that to meet grid reliability requirements, these pieces of infrastructure are critical to move forward in a timely fashion. I may be biased, and I would admit that, but I have to tell you that rather than listening to the member across the way tell me that these people don't know, I would rather listen to the individuals that are there, that are hired, that are working on behalf of all Albertans to make sure that this system does work. I would most prefer to listen to them.

I would like the member opposite to explain to me how the grid reliability standards were determined and whether or not AESO understands them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie if you wish.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. We were talking about rambling a few minutes ago, and it's interesting that in this latest ramble the minister has accused me of saying that the 200 to 250 to 300 electrical engineers who work for the AESO don't know what they're talking about, that they're stupid, that they're uninformed. I'd advise the minister to go back and read the Blues, read what I said in *Hansard* in second reading debate, reread what I just said in speaking to this amendment, and find anywhere in there that I questioned these people's intelligence, their expertise, their parentage, anything. Because I didn't. I said that it doesn't matter whether the AESO has 200 or 2,000 or 2 million experts on its payroll as long as the AESO is operating under a mandate that's as restricted as the one that it's been handed by this government, which is essentially to address transmission issues with one answer and one answer only, as I understand it.

Again I will agree with the minister, perhaps the only point we will agree on this session, that I am not an expert, and I don't think he is either on this sort of stuff. You know, it comes down to this: that mandate basically says that the only recourse AESO has to solve any of its problems is to build more transmission infrastructure. Okay. That's fine. If the minister wants to go back and reread my words from earlier, he will discover that I said that, obviously, there is the need for some upgrade to the transmission system. In fact, I don't think I'm the only one on this side of the House who has said that. What I will say right now in response to the minister is that I don't care how expert we are . . . [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member.

We are speaking on an amendment. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What I find interesting about this debate is that the dark knight of the electric horseman of the apocalypse opposite frequently accuses members of the opposition of fearmongering. Now, I'm sure this minister, based on his energy background, is able in the dark of night to find the light switch and turn

it on. And if it fails, as the government has suggested, because of imminent brownouts, then he's going to have a little bit of difficulty, and he's going to have to go back to the kerosene lamps that possibly he has as hand-me-downs from his grandparents.

The point of this is not to question the expert advice but to realize, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, who those experts are working for and the shortness of the arm in terms of the arm's-length distance from the government, by whom they are paid to provide the advice.

Now, the difference between the hearings that the minister has talked about where selective note-taking was undergone: if the information provided appealed to the government, it was recorded, and if that was not the case, well, it just sort of disappeared. Now, when the hon. Minister of Energy was talking about the hundreds of hearings, I'm wondering whether those were the hearings that were with the spies present or whether they were hearings that resulted after the fact. The first set of hearings were declared null and void because of the underhanded manner in which they were conducted, with people listening in on conversations, the equivalent of wire-tapping, that got, I gather, an 80-year-old grandmother so incensed that she was prepared to take a shot at one of the government representatives.

What is very disconcerting to me, speaking specifically to the amendment, of course, is the lack of valid public consultation. A good example of public consultation – and it was a very lengthy process of public consultation – was the Compton hearings with regard to allowing more sour gas wells to be drilled at the edge of southeast Calgary, within a kilometre of the southeast hospital. Now, I had been an intervenor in that process, and I was somewhat discouraged that it took almost two and a half years from the time I gained intervenor status to the time when I had the final say as an intervenor in that process, but I would much rather have a two-and-a-half-year process to get it right than to be pushing it, as the government has done.

What the government has done has taken public consultation and turned it into selective invitation. We have seen a series of acts preceding Bill 50 take away the diplomatic, democratic opportunity for discussion and debate and put it into the hands of the cabinet. In other words, things have been taken out of legislation and put into regulation. We're seeing, basically, the bodies of democracy leading all the way up to this particular bill. We've seen Bill 46, and we've seen Bill 39 and Bill 19, where the government has taken more and more of the public consultation opportunities, the opportunities for debate and pushed it into a cabinet decision.

4:50

Now, the hon. Minister of Energy talked about the role of the Alberta Utilities Commission. Basically, what Bill 50 is about is cutting the power lines, cutting the connection between the Alberta Utilities Commission to make an independent decision and the dictates of this government. That's why this particular amendment is so important. People are incensed, and part of the reason they're incensed is because they don't have the information that, apparently, the Minister of Energy claims the 200 experts have. Well, I would suggest that that's what public consultation is about. Like the Compton hearing, present your evidence. Give Albertans reason for confidence and trust that what you're proposing is evidence based, that there is a science underlining the proposal.

I don't claim to be an electrical expert. I manage without the help of four colleagues to screw in a light bulb, usually successfully. What I have heard in terms of doing research on electricity is that, for example, the company 3M has come up with a type of wire that is so improved in its capability and its ability to carry power that by

just the restringing of the current lines, you would get triple the power-carrying capacity that currently exists. It's this type of scientific research that we need to be hearing in a public consultation/hearing process such as, again, the Compton hearing.

We've had opportunities in the past, before the door of democracy started closing closer and closer and closer to being absolutely shut, where experts were gathered, where legal experts, engineering experts, and scientists had an opportunity to present an argument, and then the panel of experts gave reasons for their ruling. In the case of Compton both the city of Calgary and what was then the Alberta health region indicated that the evacuation possibilities for 350,000 southeast Calgarians were compromised. We've had similar hearings shut down the possibility, at least temporarily, of hearings on sour gas because people in the immediate vicinity weren't included as part of the hearing process.

What the hon. leader of the third party is saying is that if critical transmission infrastructure is indeed necessary, as the government suggests, then let's have those hearings. Let's have that information provided to the public, and let's also have a justification of the need to control that information only in the hands of the Minister of Energy. Asking for more time to get it right seems to me to be the wise way to go. In terms of if timing is of the essence, I would suggest, going back to the mid-90s, that Murray Smith and the undermining of the regulatory process was the beginning of what we're now seeing in terms of the end of democratic discussion and debate.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on what I believe is a sincere attempt to allow the experts the opportunity to share their knowledge. Those experts are not limited to those on the payroll of this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make a couple of comments. I appreciate what the hon. member has said about the bill and about the amendment, and I'd just like to take a look at one of the pieces here that is in the bill. It says that section 19 is amended by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the Commission shall not refuse an approval of a transmission line or part of a transmission line designated as critical transmission infrastructure as defined in the Electric Utilities Act on the basis that, in its opinion, it does not meet the needs of Alberta or is not in the public interest.

In this bill before us the commission will no longer be able to withhold its approval of a piece of transmission infrastructure that's been designated as critical because it does not, in its opinion, meet the needs of Alberta or is not in the public interest. The question I have for the hon. member is: why would such a provision be necessary? Why would the government through legislation prevent the commission from opposing some infrastructure brought forward to it because it wasn't in the interest of Alberta? Is there any possible reason?

Mr. Chase: I'm afraid that what is happening is that we're seeing a growing arrogance, a growing disconnect, a singular attitude where the government in a patriarchal fashion knows what's best. The government, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, has defined public interest according to what they believe. What they have done: any type of arm's-length connection between the Alberta Utilities Commission and the Minister of Energy has been severed. It's been amputated. In the place of the Alberta Utilities Commission we have a dictatorial expression from behind the closed cabinet

door of what the public interest is. Any notion of public interest has been lost in that particular clause that you referenced and in the whole notion of: "We know best. We'll move ahead. We'll expropriate your land. We'll run the wire where we wish, over ground, underground. We know best." This omniscient attitude that the government has put forward is sticking in the craw of regular Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hinman: Correct. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity referred to Murray Smith and the undermining. I'm just wondering if he is referring back to, I think, 2002-099. The EUB released a decision transferring – well, it was about the congestion in the lines. The board found that it was appropriate to allocate some of the cost to the generators. That, to my understanding, wasn't acceptable to many of the generators, and Murray Smith, actually, at that time as the Energy minister tossed that out. Were you referring to that, and could you expand a little bit more on the change in regulations and how the government started to step in and overlook the needs process even at that early stage?

Mr. Chase: I'd be glad to expand. It actually goes back to the mid-90s, where Mr. Put On a Sweater, Murray Smith, the solution for freezing in the dark and cold or not having a light, determined that the solution for Albertans was simply to buck up and dress up. It didn't matter whether you were a senior huddling in front of the imagined warmth of a candle. He undermined the whole system in the mid-90s. He created such instability in the market that no power generators were prepared to go ahead and create the type of power and transmission that we're now short of. What Murray Smith did in that time period that you're referring to is held two failed power auctions. The reason I say two is because there were so few bidders in the first auction that basically he reduced the price and had a second auction. In those dual auctions Albertans were on the hook . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. We're going to continue the discussion on the amendment.

The next four speakers will be the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, then the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

The hon. Member for St. Albert. We are on the amendment.

5:00

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking on the amendment, firstly, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie for clarifying the intent of the amendment.

Secondly, I would suggest that this is not the time nor the place to be debating this amendment. Bill 50, as the hon. minister indicated, was very clearly tabled in the spring session with the intent of getting public input over the summer, and I think we all agree there has been a lot of public input over the summer. So I think we owe it to the hon. minister to see if he's prepared to table any amendments in Committee of the Whole based on that input that he has received over the summer. I think we should therefore continue debate on second reading, and hopefully we'll all come out of this a lot smarter after hearing everybody's opinion. But I think we should hold this type of amendment until we get into Committee of the Whole and see what the hon. minister is proposing, and we can go from there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for St. Albert if he's aware if there have been summaries prepared of the input that was received and whether or not that has been made public. It seems to me that having undertaken what we hear is 200 or so public meetings with respect to Bill 50, there ought to be some conclusions that could be drawn that might be made available to all members of the House. I'd certainly ask him if he's aware if the views of Albertans who did attend these meetings have been summarized and made available publicly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I'm not aware of any summaries. I've probably had the same pile of information that all members of the House have received from various bodies concerning Bill 50, but I don't have any summary, if that's what you're asking for. No.

The Speaker: Any further discussion under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The fact that a member of the government, and an esteemed member, I might add, doesn't have a package of information upon which to make an evidence-based decision or is not aware of any extra information, given your insider status, if you don't have it and you're not aware of where it is, you can imagine how we feel as members of the opposition that distant from whatever scientific evidence the government purports to have.

Now, in terms of consultation and collaboration keep in mind that this government spent over a year and a half with its environmental all-party policy committee debating whether or not we should have a return on milk cartons. Yet there seems to be over spring to fall a push to do transmission lines and put the tab on the backs of the taxpayers. I'm just wondering how the hon. Member for St. Albert feels about the speed at which we appear to be rushing towards a commitment of up to \$20 billion without the sober-second-thought process that a standing policy committee might provide.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to participate?

Mr. Allred: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, there have been questions asked. I've asked many questions myself. But the question that was asked by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was if I had a summary document. I don't have a summary document. I have the AESO documents and several other documents that are public information off the web or wherever as well as a lot of the documents that were sent by special-interest groups, but I don't have a summary document.

The Speaker: Additional questions under 29(2)(a)? Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yeah. I'd like to ask the hon. member, being from the government side, one of the things that so many people come and approach me on and that seems to be kind of missing in the discussion. Yes, there's been lots of public consultation, but to the government member: do you know if there's been a needs test? Before Bill 50, if it stays the way it is, when you apply to the board, then those interested groups can go and have a needs test on whether it's needed. But under section (3) section 19(1) is notwithstanding

now. The needs process will no longer be brought forward, and there's no appealing. I just wonder if, in fact, the whole purpose of this is the fact that last time the line was challenged and it went to the courts. The court said that there wasn't the need there, so it was thrown out. Does this hon. government member have any comment about the need that needs to be there, not just public consultation but the actual process of showing AESO that the need is necessary?

Mr. Allred: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for that question. As the hon. minister indicated, there have been several consultations, going back, I believe he said, since 2004-2005 and again this summer. There have been several reports as well that have been issued by the department and by AESO that have established the need. Very clearly, the AESO report establishes the need, and I believe that is what the minister has based the intent of this bill upon.

The Speaker: Additional questions?

Hon. members, we're on the amendment. Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, did you want to speak on the amendment, or did you want to speak on the debate?

Mr. Kang: I want to speak on the debate, sir, but I'll speak on the amendment.

The Speaker: Okay. Then, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, are you on the amendment or the debate?

Mr. Hehr: The amendment.

The Speaker: Then proceed.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a privilege to rise and speak to the amendment raised by my hon. colleague from the third party. I think this amendment really provides almost a look at what is wrong with the bill as well as gives us an opportunity to stop and reassess as to what actually public consultation is, for in fact we here as a democratic body, that's what we are about: public consultation.

Right now the way Bill 50 reads is that what is coming down the pike is that the government is taking away a citizen's ability to apply to the Alberta Utilities Commission and make a presentation to them regarding the needs of the system, whether electricity is warranted, whether a whole host of things are actually wanted by people in the area. What is currently happening under the bill is it takes away from individuals – both experts and, I guess, just simple Joe and Jane Albertans – the opportunity to go before the Alberta Utilities Commission and lay out the evidence as they see it before them and provide reason and rationale as to why an electrical system should or should not be placed in a certain area.

This system has seemingly worked. It was seemingly set up by the government at one time to almost take the political decision-making ability out of the hands of the government. That's why the Alberta Utilities Commission was set up, to take the political decision-making out of it, out of the government's hands. At least, that's what I fully believe was the reason for it.

5:10

It recognized that the Premier, that the Minister of Energy, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Lethbridge-East were not going to be experts in the distribution of power lines or the provision of power. What it did was set up an Alberta Utilities

Commission. It allowed, then, for people to go forward and say with their arguments, "Hey, we think this is what happened," or even hire an expert. Maybe there are some people out there who claim to be experts, and they go up and they say: "Hey, we're experts in this. We don't think this is right. We don't think our area needs this much power. We don't think consumers need to be saddled with a bill on X, Y, and Z project. We think we're good for right now."

At the end of the day the Alberta Utilities Commission, which was made up of appointees who are presumed to have knowledge and I assume are experts and I assume have a department behind them with great knowledge and great skill, take all of this evidence, they balance it out, and they say: well, here's what Alberta needs or that this area of Alberta needs. That's what it was set up to do because we realized at one time in this House, when we set up the Alberta Utilities Commission, that we weren't experts and that also – guess what? – politicians are subject to pressure from various organizations, various constituents, various, shall we say, bodies around that may influence the political decision, rightly or wrongly.

Okay. That's what happens, guys. Whether it's companies, whether it's individuals, whether it's whoever you have that come to the government, throw their weight around, for whatever reason, you know, a government may actually bend to those decision-makings, not suggesting anyone has here, by all means, but saying that that's what happens. That's why you set up an Alberta Utilities Commission: "Hey, guys. Sorry; it's not a political decision. This is a decision that we set up one-off so that you couldn't come here and toss your weight around and tell us which way to go and we'd have to go do it or else there would be repercussions." That for better or for worse is what we did.

What we're now doing here – here's what I think, anyway. What's happening is that you guys know this is going to be hard. Giving Albertans a voice is going to be hard. You know as to doing this, or whatever it is, that there are going to be people going to the Utilities Commission making all sorts of pronouncements, valid or otherwise, and it's not going to be easy. But guess what? That's why you set it up. That's why it's there, and it's not supposed to be easy. It's supposed to be to allow people to go there and do their thing. You guys simply have put this bill through to get it off the front page by Christmastime and move on, to simply take away from average Joe and Jane Albertan the right to go ahead and speak their mind at this commission. That's why you've done it, and I think that even when you look yourselves in the mirror in the morning, that's why it's happening. I don't think it's fooling anybody.

Anyway, I think this would be a good bill, that would still allow us to go through with the valid reasons for a good amendment in that it would go for the valid reasons for the setting up of the Alberta Utilities Commission in the first place: to take the decision out of the politicians' hands and into the experts, or the experts as we deem them in Alberta.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak in support of this very good amendment by the member of the third party.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in '99-2000 and leading up to the failed power auctions, the Minister of Energy of that time, Murray Smith, sold through an auction process approximately \$8 billion to \$9 billion of Alberta taxpayer purchased and supported transmission lines for under \$3 billion. Now, compared to the bill that this set of transmission lines could be running up, all at the taxpayer's foot, though the residential areas are only taking up 20

per cent of the power or less that's being utilized, do you have concerns about the monetary expenses that are being foisted on taxpayers? First, we had the giveaway of our existing circumstance under regulation and deregulation, and now they're talking about taking that process even further and again sticking taxpayers with a considerably larger bill.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you for that question. You're hearkening back some time period. But I do remember the call to arms of deregulation actually was, "Hey, Albertans are going to get so much choice," which has not really turned out to be the case, and "Albertans are going to get provided power much cheaper," and that has not been the case. On that point I think those two things have fallen on deaf ears.

Am I worried that the transmission capability is maybe built up by influences and is maybe extending power to other jurisdictions, not necessarily for Albertans, and that it's going to be paid for by Albertans, who are actually being dragged into a business of exporting power to lend profits to private companies? Yes, my spider sense is tingling on that issue. And it's not only me who says that; this is other so-called experts in the area. I'm sure many people would call Mr. Holden from Calgary an expert. I'm sure many other people would call the two professors from the University of Calgary, who issued papers on this saying that this is a bad deal for Alberta taxpayers, experts on this.

What I'm worried about is that the experts are not given an opportunity to go to a regulator designed to hear these positions and these different arguments and make a decision on behalf of Albertans. It's made behind closed doors. Those are some fundamental worries for me.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) remains open. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak in favour of the amendment.

The Speaker: No. Hon. member, we're still on the question-and-answer side.

Mr. Kang: Sorry. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, my questions are on amending section 17 with this bill. It goes on to add 17(2) onto section 17. This subsection is important for infrastructure deemed as critical by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The existing provision for a public interest hearing is cancelled. So how important is this amendment, you know, to not have this added on to the bill?

Mr. Hehr: Well, that's a very good question. We've seen continued, I guess, decision-making powers go behind the cabinet wall, and this is a continuation of this with this bill. I actually liked the way the government had previously set this up, with an Alberta Utilities Commission designed with experts to hear other experts and individuals with legitimate or even illegitimate concerns, whatever it is, the right to be heard and allowing them a place to go and explain themselves. This process has now been cancelled, null and void, in order to get this off the press pages and to say that it's done in an expedient fashion. That's the only rationale for it.

The Speaker: The last speaker that I have on my list to participate on the amendment, unless others will advise, is the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in favour of the amendment from the hon. leader of the third party. The reason why I feel it's so important that we pass this amendment is because this isn't a crisis situation. If we have any crisis here in the province, it is the deficit this government is running. It's out of control. To increase the deficit to the Alberta taxpayers by saying that we need to have these power lines is not looking out for the best interests of Alberta taxpayers, as they mention and seem to think is what is critical and what we're trying to do.

5:20

More importantly, I guess, if we're looking at this amendment and why we should be turning this Bill 50 down, saying that we don't have the needs process, the amendment says that, "the bill fails to provide for public consultation prior to the approval of critical transmission infrastructure." Now, if I was making this amendment, I would say that it fails to provide for the need for the approval of critical infrastructure. That to me is key, that the bill sets up and empowers the minister to be able to decide that there's a need. Many people have referred to it. I do not believe that the minister is the expert to say, "We need this," yet he's in a position over and above the AESO that when he says, "This is what we need," the power lines go forward. In fact, the process needs to go back to as it was in the old days.

I believe the true reason why this bill has come forward goes back to a challenge in the courts between the Lavesta area group and the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. In that situation, where they were trying to pass a 500-kV line from Edmonton to Calgary, the board gave the approval. It was appealed in the courts, where the process was appealable. Bill 50 will take that appeal ability away from the people and industry here in the province. So it's critical that Bill 50 be amended as brought forward in this amendment, that it be not now read a second time because there is no urgency.

The amount of money that's going to be spent to make this decision is somewhat, as I said earlier, like going back and saying that we're going to invest in copper lines. This isn't the proper investment going forward for Albertans, especially not Alberta taxpayers. If private industry wants to put these lines forward and raise the money in the open market, I wouldn't have a problem with that. But the fact is that they're asking the Alberta taxpayers to do that, and that's not in our best interests.

It's just interesting that when you read the results of the Court of Appeal on the Lavesta group, it says, "The Board's counsel will be instructed to invite the Court of Appeal, notwithstanding this decision, to provide an interpretation of those sections." And to go down a little bit further: "As a result of concessions made, we are allowing the appeals and the appellants are receiving the remedy to which they are entitled." Then it goes on to say, "In summary, we allow the appeals on the basis of apprehension of bias. We vacate all of the decisions and orders under appeal." They said that there was a bias going forward. That bias comes forward in the mandate that this government has given to the AESO and the Alberta Utilities Commission in saying: here are the restrictions you must operate under and that we need to have transmission lines. We don't look at any other solutions to it. We say that the transmission lines are needed; therefore, you rule and give these corporations the permission to do it. It's interesting that the government has already given these two corporations the go-ahead to do the engineering for these lines when, again, there is no need.

The Minister of Energy spoke earlier, asking the Leader of the Official Opposition: do you know about the reliability of the grid system and whether or not that reliability is being met? My

understanding is that under Alberta legislation if there's a reliability problem and a corporation knows about it, in its line or in its generation, it's obligated under Alberta law to make application and to make the AESO aware of that reliability problem. There is no application, to my knowledge, in front of the board saying that there is a reliability issue.

Again, the reliability problem is that at 2 o'clock in the morning there's congestion of the electricity in this province. It's not Albertans that need that electricity. Again, we see that what we're doing is using the false pretense of saying: well, we have the lines; they're available, so we should be exporting our electricity, and we won't make them pay for the full cost of the lines. If, in fact, we had a congestion problem during our peak periods, I could see the thought process in that, that we need to upgrade our electrical lines because of the congestion. But that isn't true. So we can't use that line of thinking, saying that we need to have these lines because of the congestion. The congestion is at 2 to 3 in the morning, when we have more production and not enough use in the province. So they want to export it.

Again, the mandate to the AESO and to the Alberta Utilities Commission is to see that there's an unrestrained flow of electricity throughout the province, and that, I guess, spills over to the fact: export any excess that we have because that will be in the best interests of Albertans.

Another thing on why this amendment needs to go forward. It was interesting when I was door-knocking in Calgary-Glenmore. The wonderful seniors that I came upon that were still living in their houses that they bought new in 1960, 1962, 1963. I just couldn't help but ask them: what did you pay for those houses? The lowest priced house was \$11,700. The highest price in that time period was \$16,700. Now, for the minister of housing to come in and say, "You know, this is old infrastructure; we need to replace it," and tell those seniors that they now have to pay \$450,000 for a home because, well, it's aged, isn't so. The debate that keeps being brought up is that our infrastructure is old and needs to be replaced. No, it can be maintained. Those houses are still sound; they're solid. They're 50 years old. Our lines are only 20 years old.

It's interesting about AltaLink. I believe the S&P put out a report showing – now, where did I place that report? – the value of AltaLink and saying that the infrastructure is in great shape. Here it is. A 2008 the Standard & Poor's report says:

AltaLink's monopoly transmission assets have inherently low operating risk and have demonstrated good reliability performance. Furthermore, 60% of the existing asset base is less than 20 years old. As the company expands its transmission infrastructure during the next several years, the age profile will improve further, as will AltaLink's operating efficiency.

There isn't this old infrastructure that people keep referring to. Telling all the people that have houses in the province that are over 20 years old that we now have to rebuild them at today's cost: those houses are fine. We'll maintain them. They're there for the people of Alberta, and that's what's critical.

Is there a crisis? No, there isn't a crisis. The most important thing that we can do – again, the minister keeps referring to and saying that we've had over 200 open houses. Yes, but we've never gone through a needs requirement, and that's the key in this. Do we need it? The experts will say no. Are we mandated to build transmission lines? The experts will say: yes, that's our mandate; that's what we need to do. This province is running a horrendous deficit. We do not need to put a burden on the taxpayers of another \$8 billion or \$10 billion or \$15 billion. It could escalate more if we're not careful.

We need to accept this amendment, to vote in favour of the Bill 50 amendment, so the people of Alberta will not be burned by this

government in its desire to build transmission lines. For who? That's the real question. Why is the needs process being bypassed? We need to have that because we'll find out who really will benefit from the building of these transmission lines and why the government is giving the go-ahead.

I understand that it was open season down in Las Vegas on the 17th of October. They've started to put bids on power, and they're already looking at that, to be able to hook in to the new Alberta transmission lines that are coming forward. That's the real smoke behind all of this.

We need to accept this amendment, and I hope that all members will vote in favour of this amendment.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. First of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Wow. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, that was a very interesting piece of information that you shared with us there, that Standard & Poor's report.

The Speaker: Well, you know, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, you're a fine man, but please speak through the chair so the chair can follow.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I've gotten a little careless at this late hour.

That was a very interesting piece of information that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore shared with us because it seems to suggest that one of the fundamental arguments that the government has put forward in favour of Bill 50, at least in the public arena, is maybe based on a fallacy or based on some erroneous information. Could I possibly get the Member for Calgary-Glenmore to speak a little bit more about that S&P report to answer this question? If we've been told and if one of the underlining reasons for Bill 50 is allegedly that we have this very old and creaky, 20-year-plus transmission infrastructure and if, in fact, an objective analysis of AltaLink has shown that 60 per cent of that infrastructure is less than 20 years old, is it the member's opinion that that in and of itself is reason enough to support this reasoned amendment?

5:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. The fact of the matter is that there's a lot of smoke and mirrors around this bill. They're saying that we're in a crisis. So many people, the seniors, have been talking to me and saying: you know, this is a Chicken Little story. The fact is that the sky isn't falling; it's not critical. If you look at the AESO reports that have come out in 2002, 2004, 2007, and 2008, they're all changing, and why? Because the mandate and their operating instructions have been changed to say: "We need to do this; we need to do that. We need to accommodate for high gas prices."

Two years ago we were in a situation where gas prices were going through the roof. It's interesting in that policy paper put out by the University of Calgary that they say that in order to justify generation and the transmission lines, the price of gas would have to go up to \$65 a kilojoule. The S&P report really does reflect that. Companies, when it comes to the S&P report, need to put on their best front. The bottom line is that they have an excellent bottom line. Their infrastructure is good, no different than someone who's living in a 20-year-old home. We need to address this idea that it isn't

critical, that it isn't crumbling. I hope that answers the hon. member's question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore to elaborate a little bit more about the bid process that took place in Las Vegas, I think he said, for applicants who are going to be building connecting transmission infrastructure to southern Alberta.

The Speaker: This has to do with the amendment, does it?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. I think so. It has to do with his speech.

The Speaker: Okay. I'm looking forward to getting the answer.

Mr. Hinman: I've got so many papers here on my desk to find, to pull out each one. My understanding is – and I'm going to have to just go off the top of my head on this because I can't find the paper right now – a Canadian company has opened up bids on a transmission line going through to Las Vegas. I could bring you more information tomorrow on that or later this evening. The bottom line is that they are opening it up to see if they can sell the electricity, and if they can get the bids and the demand is there, then they will be able to hook up and go through the connections. Again, that's my understanding as to why these high-voltage DC lines are coming into place.

Many members have spoken to the fact that you need to transmit over long distances, so if that link gets put in from the north down to Calgary, it's a much shorter distance to go forward. The bids are going forward for electricity. It started on the 17th of October down in Las Vegas, and I'd be happy to get more information to you at a later date on that.

The Speaker: Others to participate under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. Does he have any information about what kind of shape our present transmission system is in? Is it in worse shape, is it in good shape, or is it in fair shape? Why is there so big a rush to . . . [Mr. Kang's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but the time for this section has now left us.

Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, do you wish to participate in the debate on the amendment?

Mr. Kang: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak on the amendment. This amendment is about the changes being made to the Alberta Utilities Commission, but right now as the act stands,

when the Commission conducts a hearing or other proceeding on an application to construct or operate a hydro development, power plant or transmission line under the Hydro and Electric Energy Act or a gas utility pipeline under the Gas Utilities Act, it shall, in addition to any other matters it may or must consider in conducting

a hearing or other proceeding, give consideration to whether construction or operation of the proposed hydro development, power plant, transmission line or gas utility pipeline is in the public interest, having regard to the social and economic effects of the development, plant, line or pipeline and the effects of the development, plant, line or pipeline on the environment.

This section is being amended by adding section 17(2), and this subsection is important, it goes on to say, for infrastructure deemed as critical by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The existing provision for a public interest hearing is cancelled. It is not made optional but is, instead, explicitly bypassed. The act currently states that the AUC

shall, in addition to any other matters it may or must consider in conducting a hearing or other proceeding, give consideration to whether construction or operation of the proposed hydro development, power plant, transmission line or gas utility pipeline is in the public interest, having regard to the social and economic effects,

as I said before. That hearing no longer takes place for this particular infrastructure. The government is portraying this move in different ways. One relates to the critical denomination; namely, that this move will streamline the approval process, thereby allowing for those vital projects to be expedited and free from unnecessary hassles of the regulatory process.

Another argument the government is using is that the determination of the public interest in affected property rests in the elected government, not in the regulator. This line of argument is based on appropriate accountability, as indicated by this line from the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit on second reading of the bill: "The provincial government, elected by the people of Alberta, will now be responsible for determining when and which lines are needed." This argument, however, is kind of tenuous.

We have this regulatory process system precisely because the government interest is not necessarily the same as the public interest. To have the public interest heard, we need to have the hearing process in place. This amendment deals with that, and for that reason I support this amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, did you move?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member. The motion basically says that the bill fails to provide for public consultation prior to the approval of critical transmission infrastructure. I guess I'd just like to make a few comments with respect to that and then perhaps a question. It seems to me that the minister has told the House that, in fact, there was a great deal of public consultation on this bill, and it's true. The government did introduce this bill in the previous sitting of this Assembly, and then it was available for public consideration in the meantime, and I think that that's commendable. I think, you know, that does provide a little bit more opportunity for the public to get to know what's really before us, but it hasn't stopped the public concern and that's, I guess, my concern. In fact, we had all of these meetings, but we don't really know what the consensus was if there was, in fact, a consensus.

5:40

Now, we're further informed by the minister and other members here that based on that, we're going to see some amendments, so the motion is premature. But they haven't told the House what that is, what they heard. The comments that I observed – and there was some coverage of some of these meetings – were that there was a lot of hostility towards this bill. It's based on a number of different things. It's based on people not wanting power lines through their

backyard or across their property for a number of reasons. It interferes with people doing their farming work and so on. There's a lot of concern about the electromagnetic radiation as it affects people, as it affects the health, and there's a lot of controversy about that. I think that that's a question that probably came out in the public consultation, but we don't know to what degree it was an issue.

So there are land-use issues, and there are questions about public health, but also, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of concern about, you know, the cost of this infrastructure and whether or not we really need this very expensive package that's envisaged in Bill 50. In fact, it's unprecedented, in my experience, for the government to specify specific projects and exempt them from regulatory scrutiny and say that these are the ones that you're going to build, and you can decide where they're going to go, but you can't decide whether or not they're in the public interest. Specifically, the bill says – and I read this before – that “the Commission shall not refuse an approval of a transmission line . . . on the basis that, in its opinion, it does not meet the needs of Alberta or is not in the public interest.” Clearly, the government has already decided that these transmission projects are in Alberta's interest and are in the public interest, but we can't find out, you know, specifically why and what the government has based that on or what the public has actually had to say about that.

It really strikes me that the hon. member in his comments with respect to Bill 50 and the amendment that I put forward puts his finger on the issue, and that is that not only are there questions about the necessity of all of these projects, not only is there a question of the cost, but in fact there is a real question about the validity of the consultation that has actually been taken into account. I'd like to ask the hon. member if he could just expand a little bit on those comments because I thought they were quite valuable and hope that all members of the House have a chance to speak to them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, that was really kind of neat. We have five minutes under Standing Order 29(2)(a). Your question took four minutes and 58 seconds to raise. Now, you know, this chair has stated on previous occasions that he was not going to apply the 35-second, 35-second guideline, but it's amazing that perhaps the chair will have to start applying that if we want to have this going back and forth because this certainly removed an opportunity for the distinguished Member for Calgary-McCall to make a comment in response to the question that took four minutes and 58 seconds.

Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you want to participate on the amendment?

Ms Pastoor: On the amendment, yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much. I think that this is a good amendment for a couple of reasons because I'm looking at what the intent of this actual amendment is. All they're asking is that it not be read a second time, which is, in fact, asking that we put some more time between this bill being pushed through and before the public actually having a chance to hear and be able to continue the conversations that are going on out there.

Clearly, the citizenry in this province, those who have been paying attention, are absolutely divided. We have those that are saying it's great, and we have those that are saying: not under my watch do I want this to be happening. Each side does have significant numbers and arguments to prove their case. I think that because this bill has created such controversy in the public now that it's finally getting out there, it is flawed. I think the fact that the government is probably going to have its own amendments would lead one to believe that, yes, it does have to be fixed up, so I think all this amendment is asking for is some time to be able to do that.

More and more people are beginning to question how they, in fact, are going to be affected. Clearly, anybody on a fixed income – seniors, people on AISH, people on low incomes – who works from paycheque to paycheque is going to be very apprehensive about a bill being pushed through without them really understanding how it's going to affect them. Yes, this was introduced in the early summer, and there was time in the summer for us to speak to people. However, we all know that during the summer people are more distracted and that some of the meetings, certainly, were more the invited persons that would be sitting around that table, and as has been mentioned, we have no idea what was said around that table. I certainly know what I'm hearing out in my community, and as I say, it is very divided.

As I mentioned, more and more citizens are starting to ask: “What is really going on out there? How is this going to affect me? I was promised that deregulation would lower my electrical bill, and clearly that did not happen.” It became a very important bill that seniors and anyone on a fixed income had to look at on how they were actually going to pay that. I think that as MLAs we all have had people come to our offices who simply cannot meet their utility bills, and we've had to help them in some fashion.

One of the other questions, too, is that I think they think that they're losing their voice. The other question, I think, is that if we're going to be a part of this, why couldn't we be a part of the profits? The other question that has been posed to me has been: when those transmission lines – and certainly it is a huge possibility. Those transmission lines could be sold to China, India, Saudi Arabia, or the United States, and Albertans will still be sending their utility dollars out of the province and even, of course, possibly out of the country. If this is going to go on for 40 years, I'm not sure that those figures are correct. Is it 40 years? Is it going to be even longer? In that 40 years how many times will those transmission lines be sold? I think it's pretty clear, if we watch what goes on in the world today, how businesses and commodities are bundled. These will be bundled, and they will be sold, and Albertans will still be on the hook for the costs.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment of the debate on the amendment.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we now adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 17, 2009

Issue 59e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 53

Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 4: Mr. Kang]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak to Bill 53 in second reading, that being the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. I listened fairly carefully to the sponsor of the bill and his outline of what he was expecting this amendment act to produce, but I've heard from a couple of people who are raising some concerns about where the bill fails to address something or it goes too far and where it doesn't go far enough.

I'll admit that I don't always agree with these comments because, let's face it, part of what's being anticipated here is that in allowing family members to fall under the professional corporation that the professional sets up to support their business, there are choices that are then made available to those concerned that are essentially about making use of different tax rates. Ultimately, what we end up looking at here is a way for people who are doing pretty well to be able to take advantage of lower tax rates or to avoid paying taxes at all. In my mind that's always called "forgone revenue" because other than for the legislation in front of us, we would have been collecting a certain amount of tax.

It's a tool that government can use. There are always incentives and disincentives, and for public policy the incentives and disincentives that are most readily available to government are taxation schemes. My question in these situations is always: what do we get for the forgone revenue? You make a decision that you are going to accept less tax or no tax because you're trying to encourage people to do something or not do something. So I say: all right, if we're going to be accepting less tax into the coffers, into the general revenue of Alberta, and have less money available to pay for health or environmental protection or culture, what are we getting for it? What behaviour are we trying to change? What are we trying to achieve here? That is what I'm missing out of the explanation from the member, and I think it's something that we need to consider when we look at schemes like this.

Aside from this, it'd be a great idea for people that are professionals – accountants, lawyers, dentists – who can set up a professional corporation and then decide to put these shares amongst their family members. What do we as a society gain from that? Or is the purpose to enable these individuals to pay a lesser rate of tax or to share their good fortune with their family members or those they choose? How do we as a society benefit from that?

So a couple questions here. My understanding is that part of the incentive behind this was to bring Alberta into line in the TILMA agreement with B.C. around how they handle their professional corporations. What we have right now is that you can't have a professional corporation in B.C. and transfer it straight through into Alberta. You'd actually have to shut it down in B.C., move to

Alberta, start it over in Alberta. So if my understanding is correct and part of this is to make a transition according to the TILMA agreement that the government has signed, to make that transition straight across so you don't have to do that, then this bill did not accomplish that because it doesn't put in place what we need for those companies to operate in both provinces or to move from province to province.

This is specific to the professional corporations. Obviously, standard corporations are able to do that between B.C. and Alberta and vice versa, but we're talking about professional corporations in this particular instance. So it doesn't comply with TILMA. Why? Why did you do this and bring it before this Assembly when it doesn't comply with TILMA if that's what we were trying to do here? A first question.

Two, the classes of people that are allowed to be involved with these nonvoting shares, some point out to me, are unnecessarily restrictive. On some of these I agree, and on some of them I don't. If we stay with the status quo of what we have, we have a situation where people involved in professional corporations are required to essentially take their excess cash out periodically by way of what I'm told is called a butterfly transaction and then put it back in again. If you have a holding company, which could be created, but this bill does not create those holding companies, you wouldn't be required to do that. It's pointed out to me by people involved in professional corporations that, you know, it's not cheap to be able to sort of do this butterfly transaction every three to five years as is currently required. So why couldn't they make use of a holding company? It's very common in other places for small businesses but is not anticipated in this legislation.

There is limited use of family trusts. It appears that you can only have a family trust that has minor children as beneficiaries. That does ignore the sandwich generation. It does ignore having the possibility of having parents as a nonvoting shareholder. Again, that gives you the opportunity to choose what tax rate you'd be using, and of course someone that was a senior would be operating under a lower tax rate, so it is opening up that possibility. Maybe you intended to do that; maybe you didn't. But it does not allow for and recognize that sandwich generation. I'm a sandwich generation. A lot of my friends are currently caring for their aged parents, and they're still looking after their kids who are in school or in university. This act doesn't let them do anything except for minor children.

The point was also made to me – and I'm not sure what to make of this – that adult children perhaps should not have access to their parents' business and that you could have a family trust holding shares instead of the adult child directly, so you could prevent a situation where you had an adult child having influence on a corporation. The second point that's made around that – and this one, frankly, is one that I flat out disagree with, but the point is well made – is that if you have an adult child who's involved in that family trust and they are married and get divorced, then that parent's professional corporation has to find a way to compensate the departing spouse, for which I would say: "Yes. That's entirely appropriate. That's why we have a Matrimonial Property Act." But perhaps others would argue the other, which is that they don't want to be able to have those ex-spouses having access to the professional corporation's assets.

This also ignores the fact that there are adult children who are disabled and can't hold property in their own name because it would affect their AISH benefits, but having it in a family trust would allow that disabled child, whether adult or not, to benefit from being a member of that professional corporation and perhaps gain some assistance that they wouldn't be eligible for otherwise.

The last point that was made to me was that it ignores others in the family that may be in need of assistance from time to time. For example, an adult sibling or an aunt and uncle who may be in need of some additional help from which the professional corporation could gain a tax advantage by giving them that assistance could take advantage themselves of a lower tax rate if they were dealing with someone who was, for example, dependent for an extended period of time, a disabled person for example. That is not available under this bill either. So a number of points have been raised about things that were – I'm not sure – either deliberately or inadvertently left out of the act.

7:40

Some of the points, as I said, I agree with, and some I most definitely do not agree with. I don't think that using a family trust to get out of having to compensate an ex-spouse is what we intended when we wrote legislation like that. But I can understand that if you were a parent who was a lawyer or a physician who had set up a professional corporation and you'd given a nonvoting share to your adult child whose family now breaks up, yes, you would be in a position where you would be expected, out of that professional corporation, because your adult child has a nonvoting share, their spouse is entitled to some of that money, and maybe that's not what you intended when you worked so hard all those years. Those kinds of things need to be taken into consideration, and maybe that was considered by the sponsor of the bill and that option was deliberately not made available as a result of that. I don't know, but I am interested in hearing it.

I understand the concept behind what is in Bill 53. I'm not sure if there was any kind of consultation in the wider public. I had people contacting me looking for an opportunity to speak to a committee or to a public hearing on this bill, and they couldn't find one. At that point I had to tell them: no, it's already in debate, so you're not going to find one now. But I incorporated some of their comments into the ones that I've raised tonight, so they're on the record.

In the end I'm undecided about whether to support this bill in principle or not because I'm curious as to why certain things have been left out and other things have been put in. According to what I heard the sponsor say they wanted to do, I think they fall short in doing it in this bill, and I'm wondering why. But I also never heard the sponsoring member say anything about TILMA, yet clearly that is – I mean, definitely people in the sector understand that that's what's behind this bill, an expectation that it is going to, you know, mesh the two provinces together under that agreement. So why wasn't that mentioned?

I'm struggling to support something when I still have so many unanswered questions. Given the composition of the House I'm sure the bill will pass second reading, and my one little vote is not going to stop that, but I'm still interested in getting the answers to those questions. I look forward to Committee of the Whole and to getting some answers back from the sponsoring member at that time. We can proceed from there.

Thank you for the opportunity to put those concerns on the record. I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The hon. member, my colleague from Edmonton-Centre, did a very good job of explaining the yin and yang, the pros and cons and concerns of the bill. Like my

colleague from Edmonton-Centre, I look forward to further qualifications and explanations that were raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

In terms of the so-called pros of this particular act, one thing it will do is bring us into line with existing legislation, to a degree, in both British Columbia and Ontario, although as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre noted, it won't provide the same degree of tax relief – some might say tax evasion – that the other provinces allow. But what it will do is encourage professionals, whether they be health, legal, medical, accountants, and so on, to do well in the province of Alberta. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, in their doing well are we benefiting from their financial wellness? I think it could be argued that if we are able to attract more professionals, whether they be doctors, lawyers, dentists, et cetera, then the chances of our quality of life improving would be noted and of value.

One of the concerns I have, though, is that with the tendency towards delisting, some of the benefits that would potentially be derived from these services will no longer be available. For example, this amendment will extend nonvoting share ownership of professional corporations to family members. If passed, our province's accountants, lawyers, doctors, dentists, chiropractors, and optometrists will have the ability to access some of the benefits of being incorporated, including some tax benefits. These benefits are currently enjoyed by the same professions in other western provinces, as has been previously noted, as well as in Ontario. However, in Ontario and B.C. chiropractic services are part of the health services funded under universal health care. The government has recently pulled the plug on chiropractors, so the encouragement for chiropractors to continue practising in this province has been considerably undermined by cutting them from the list of covered services.

Likewise, when it comes to optometrists, the government has cut back on, for example, paying for eye exams. It used to be that the cost of an eye exam – in other words, being proactive and promoting good eyesight and good eye care – was something to be considered under our universal health care coverage. That coverage no longer exists. On top of that the number of surgeries – for example, for glaucoma – has been reduced. So, again, optometrists may literally be looking elsewhere. These are concerns that we have to take into account.

Now, as for encouraging lawyers to incorporate, my brother is in that position and my son-in-law, who has recently become a partner with Bennett Jones, has part of that potential ahead if he so chooses. I hope that my son-in-law together with my daughter will keep me in the style that I have been accustomed to. Therefore, if they choose to incorporate, I think this would be of value.

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

Mr. Chase: Now, was that relevance or relatives? I'm sorry. I didn't quite hear the comment. Possibly the Speaker can interpret the comment for me. He may have heard it better from his position than I did from mine.

I'm willing to believe that by having these professionals supported to a greater extent in this province, the potential of their practice and our benefit from their practice will be increased. So I go into this with a degree of naïveté but a desire to increase the number of professionals in this province and support them. In this case we're providing them with tax incentives. Hopefully, they're going to spend their savings in terms of building this wonderful province we find ourselves in. If that's the case and that money is returned, then the bill will have achieved at least part of its goal.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre also pointed out the limitations on dependants in terms of who can be a part of the so-called family corporation, and the thought of the dear aunt or the dear uncle or cousin James not being able to be covered as part of the corporate status does create a bit of concern, but I would hope that the increased wealth and earning potential that incorporation brings will also bring with it a degree of mercy and consideration for other family members.

7:50

The Member for Edmonton-Centre also pointed out what happens when the so-called corporation starts to disincorporate in terms of divorce and breakups of families, family feuds. We all know what happened in New Brunswick with the McCain brothers and their corporations and the bitterness that resulted. Of course, I'm sure there were families of lawyers incorporated that did rather well by their arguments and falling apart, from a corporate point of view.

I look forward to further clarification. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated, we're looking to be further educated on the benefits of this particular legislation. We do understand that it brings us in line with other western provinces and Ontario, and if this will have some degree of restoring what used to be referred to as the Alberta advantage, then it has potential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is available for those who wish to Q and A.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a couple of comments that I'd like to make on this. I believe that when this first came forward, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had asked a number of questions regarding how much work had been done on the anticipated loss of revenue as a result of not collecting these taxes and how they were planning on recouping that tax that they would lose, which, of course, is revenue to the taxpayers of Alberta. The concept itself, I think, brings the rest of our professionals in line with the rest of the country, but I do think that that question on the numbers – I think that the average tax savings for each professional corporation in Alberta as a result of the changes was estimated at approximately \$12,000, and it could mean an initial loss in tax revenue collected by the government. I know that there were further numbers that they had talked about in terms of getting that back and the anticipated number of people that this would help to retain. I think it's very important that we retain particularly our professional doctors.

Although it isn't mentioned here, I can see perhaps other medical organizations/people becoming incorporated. I'm thinking of, perhaps, nurse practitioners, who would then in fact have their own practices and would not necessarily be tied to a doctor's office, but even if they were tied to a doctor's office, they still could be incorporated. I can see benefits for perhaps other people, coming down the road.

I think that, clearly, in time this bill will be opened again, should it pass at this point in time, to include grandparents and other parents and perhaps disabled children, who would also be able to have their care looked after under this kind of an arrangement, so that it would fall in line and meet the TILMA regulations or the obligations that have been set up under TILMA.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would look forward to some of the answers when this is passed into committee.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak briefly on this interesting bill, Bill 53, Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, maybe not so briefly if people are actually listening. I think that the sponsor of the bill, when he introduced it a few days ago, actually did a very good job of summarizing the competing policy considerations and probably the crux of the issue that one would have to measure in terms of deciding whether or not to support the bill.

In essence, he talked about providing what is in effect a tax cut for professionals as a means of attracting them and keeping them in the province. He identified, however, that that would probably be contested by those who might suggest that now is not the time to be offering tax cuts in Alberta, a time when we're hearing about the need to tighten our belts and to cut our funding and to be responsible and for everybody to pitch in and all that kind of great stuff that the government likes to roll out when they get into financial trouble. I think, actually, that that was a really nice summary of the dichotomy of issues that we need to address in considering this bill.

Do we need this particular change in order to maintain a level playing field with professionals in other jurisdictions and in order to promote equity among professionals within Alberta? Well, I think it's certainly true that there are some professionals already within Alberta who get the benefit of this while others don't. But I would also suggest that for some professionals, if this is passed, there will be additional inequity caused because for every lawyer that works in a private corporation, in an incorporated professional office, there's another one that works on staff, some even for the government, heaven forbid. They do the same job, yet one gets this tax break, and the other doesn't.

For every doctor who sets up their own little private clinic and maybe even starts doing a little private, delisted stuff on the side, they get to income split and enhance their tax outcomes, while the doctor who just out of the goodness of their heart might choose to work in one of the very few primary care centres where doctors are salaried will have yet another impediment to making that decision, even though we know that decision is, ultimately, probably the best decision for the provision of health care across the province. So there's inequity no matter what you do. You're going to pass this legislation to fix one form of inequity only to create another form of inequity amongst the same group of professionals. I'm not convinced that the inequity issue amongst professionals within Alberta is a particularly compelling argument.

Now, if you look at the issue of whether there's equity across jurisdictions, that too is an interesting question. Yes, there's no question that some professionals who have the opportunity to engage in this income splitting in other jurisdictions don't currently have that opportunity here. Let's also look at other things that happen in Alberta. For instance, the blended tax rate in Alberta for people who earn over \$126,000 a year, which is, of course, the group to which this would apply primarily, is 39 per cent, whereas in B.C., for instance, the blended income tax rate for that same income group is about 45 per cent. So the fact of the matter is that these professionals in Alberta are already gaining an income tax bonus by being here.

So what are some of the other things that compel professionals to stay in Alberta, to invest in Alberta, to want to set up their business here and grow our economy and grow our communities? Well, I would suggest that there are other issues above and beyond tax cuts, and I would suggest that they relate to quality of life, whether you're

talking about the fact that we have a sort of an Alabama-esque approach to the environment versus the more progressive approach that once existed in B.C. and to some limited extent still does, whether you're talking about issues of child care, and I speak for myself, as prior to being elected, I could have been characterized as a professional. Issues around affordable child care are extremely compelling, issues around where you ultimately decide to settle and to live, because child care may or may not cost you \$1,500 a month, depending on the jurisdiction that you live in. Certainly, we know that in Alberta we have the lowest per capita funding for child care in the country.

8:00

Another issue, of course, is having a robust system of public education. How big are our class sizes? What kind of access to special services do our kids have? How committed are we in Alberta to public education? This is the kind of thing that would impact my decision on where to locate.

Even more connected to professionals is the issue of tuition and the issue of tuition for professionals. We just heard that the government is actually thinking about removing the cap on tuition in order to significantly bump up the cost of tuition for the very professionals that we purport to want to keep here through this tax cut. This is an interesting irony. We're saying to the students that they're going to have to spend \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year on their education costs. I've heard from dentistry students, for instance, who tell me that that's roughly what they spend right now.

What that means, basically, is that low- and middle-income very smart students don't have access to become these professionals. The only people that get to go to school and become these professionals are the wealthy. Then once they exercise the privilege that comes to them from being from a wealthy family and they become these professionals, we'll keep them here by giving them a tax break. Wouldn't it be a better way to grow our professional pool by actually increasing access to these professional programs to all members of the population rather than just the wealthy few and that we do that, rather, not through tax cuts but by ensuring an ongoing commitment to investing in equitable public services, including advanced education, and equitable access to professional degree programs throughout the province? That's what we're not doing right now. Those are some things that I think are equally compelling when it comes to determining what would make professionals want to stay in Alberta, what would make Alberta attractive to those professionals.

I also want to talk about a different form of equity, and that's equity with respect to people who are earning this general amount of money. Why is it that a lawyer who earns \$150,000 a year and has a spouse who stays home should be able to income split, but a boilermaker who earns \$150,000 a year working just as many and probably many, many more hours than the lawyer, in much less enjoyable working situations and working environments, does not get to income split? Well, the difference is that one is a professional in a professional corporation and the other is an employee. Again, we're looking at inequity being established through this particular piece of legislation.

So when it comes to tax cuts and increasing taxes and that whole thing, my view is that there needs to be a progressive tax system, one that ensures enhanced and equitable access to the public system that we build and that there needs to be equity amongst all types of professionals and all types of workers in Alberta, whether they be neurosurgeons, whether they be exceptionally lucky floor cleaners. Whatever the case is, it should be on the basis of the income they earn, not the job they do.

Generally speaking, that is sort of a summary of the concerns we have about this bill.

There was a really interesting point made by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar when this bill was first introduced a couple of days ago wherein the sponsor of the bill talked about how this bill, if passed, would represent about a million dollars of foregone income tax revenue. Conversely, that member was told in a briefing that we're actually looking at it being worth about \$12,000 per professional corporation. Obviously, there's a huge disparity. I don't know if one number included federal taxes while the other one didn't. I'm not sure. But I certainly would want to hear from the sponsor of the bill very clearly what the expected foregone revenue is to provincial coffers as well as to federal coffers. Quite frankly, we receive money from the federal government, so we ought to maybe think about what it is we're planning to forgo when we go about suggesting that they should receive less.

Those are the questions that I have, and I'm looking forward to receiving information in that regard from the sponsor of the bill as discussion of the bill moves forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak?

Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a second time]

Bill 56

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 5: Mr. MacDonald]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Bill 56 is an interesting piece of legislation because, on the one hand, it seeks to give the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, AIMCo for short, greater autonomy. It achieves that by removing the requirement that the deputy minister of finance be a board member of AIMCo.

Again I'm using those terms "yin and yang" and "pro and con." On the pro side it would allow the government to divest itself, to a degree, of decisions made by AIMCo. Now, for example, decisions made by AIMCo this past year saw a reduction of about \$3 billion in our heritage savings trust fund and an overall loss of investment through some unwise practices such as asset-backed commercial paper, accounting for about an 18 per cent loss in investments. That being said, there were a number of jurisdictions whose losses were in the 30 per cent category.

In one sense it allows the government off the hook to a degree. It can't necessarily be accused of meddling in the affairs of AIMCo, being an independent investment management corporation which still has to report to the minister of finance. After a fashion the minister of finance could say: well, yes, they are arm's-length independent, but they still have to report what they are doing back to me as the minister of finance.

We have the good fortune right now of having Leo de Bever, I believe the gentleman's name is, who was very successful with the Ontario teachers' fundraising arm. Obviously, this individual has quite a degree of credentials behind him, so one would assume, based on the fact that we didn't suffer as great losses as we might have during this recessionary period, that allowing him and other

members of AIMCo a freer rein, less of an oversight leash to do the economic investments to the best of their ability, could potentially be a good thing, but at the same time, on the other side of that coin, is the notion that leaving in AIMCo's hands the corporate well-being of this province, which is \$70 billion plus, is a tremendous responsibility for an organization such as this even given the credentials of the person who is currently the head of AIMCo. At whatever point that Mr. de Bever decides to move away to greener pastures, as in the notion of greenback pastures, then, you know, obviously, the search begins again.

So I'm conflicted, as I so frequently am in this Assembly, as to whether this further independence of AIMCo is a positive thing in terms of the oversight for Albertans in general in terms of the accountability and the transparency, or should there be representation on the board such that the ongoing day-to-day activities are being monitored? I'm hoping that the minister of finance, when speaking to this bill, will be able to provide me a degree of sort of fiscal security in that AIMCo will still have a sufficient tether and connection to the ministry of finance so that risky-type ventures will not occur.

8:10

While saying this, I recognize the fact that right now in Alberta we have a deficit approaching \$7 billion. Also, the government has trumpeted the fact that we have between \$16 billion and \$17 billion in our combined capital and sustainability fund, money that, as I mentioned in my member's statement this afternoon, appears not necessarily to be utilized to the extent that it should be; in other words, being used as a buffer to provide continued investment in education and health care and children and youth services.

I guess if we're going to compare the track record of AIMCo versus the track record of the Treasury Board or the finance ministry, we would suggest that AIMCo is scoring higher marks and, therefore, deserves a greater freedom in its choice of investments. As I say, I remain in a quandary, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, members from the government side will be able to provide me a degree of calmness with regard to: have we struck the right balance by removing the deputy minister of finance and that direct oversight as is proposed in Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009?

I look forward to further debate, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully those answers will be provided. I'm sure further questions will be raised as I note my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wishes to participate.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to be able to rise and speak generally in favour of this bill as it seeks to remove the requirement that the deputy minister of finance be a board member of AIMCo. I guess it goes back to sort of a general philosophy that I think governments should have. I think governments have a job to do; that is, to try and maximize what they see as being in the best interests of both society as well as individuals and to make rules and regulations accordingly. One of those things right now that we have set up to be managed by our government is the many pension plans and investments and a heritage trust fund that we at one time actually believed in putting money away into and is under our financial management.

I think what we have set up here with AIMCo is a good thing. It's a body of experts that are involved in the field of finance and enterprise and maximization of capital dollars that takes a very

strategic bunch and a very committed group who have developed expertise in these financial instruments in order to maximize profits for Alberta. This is a good thing that the government has set up. It's a good thing that they've set it up because I don't believe governments or even us as a body would have the same expertise the members of AIMCo have. Simply put, our backgrounds are too diverse. We are pushed and pulled in too many directions to have the ability to manage funds in the nature of \$70 billion, that we trust AIMCo to do. So AIMCo is in itself a good thing. I believe that over the long run it will serve the Alberta people well.

I also recognize that the Deputy Minister of Finance and Enterprise would like from time to time not to be a member or required to be a board member of AIMCo, so this is a good amendment, I think, to put in. It allows for opportunities to reduce conflicts of interest that can occur from time to time. We saw that happen just recently when there was some concern over the purchase of some natural gas outfits in Alberta. I think it's a good thing that the minister of finance and the deputy minister don't have the obligation of being there on that type of basis to alleviate those conflicts of interest when they arise and the necessity for them to take part. Like I said, I think this bill makes a sort of amount of sense from that point.

I think we will be calling for an amendment at some point in time on this legislation, but that's more into allowing more of the pension groups who are involved in providing AIMCo with their money maybe getting some representation in the AIMCo board so they have some care and control over the direction that they see their group's money invested in. I think that would be a fair and reasonable thing for the government to consider.

But at this time I'm generally happy with the direction the government has set with AIMCo. I believe that their setting up experts to handle our money is a wise and prudent thing despite the fact of the recent ups and downs in the marketplace. I believe they're going to be able to handle those better than we in this Legislature could even dream of handling.

Nevertheless, that's my story, and I'm sticking to it for now. It was a privilege to be able to speak to this tonight.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise – really, this time it is briefly – to speak to Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act. This is an act that at least at first glance we do have some concerns with. We're not entirely sure why it is that the government wants to remove the deputy minister, which is, of course, the primary purpose of this act. Perhaps I've missed it. I've been trying to look for the comments by the bill's sponsor when it was first introduced. I know we've received correspondence from the minister of finance, but at that time it simply said that it would now be appropriate to remove the deputy minister from the board. I'm not entirely sure why exactly it's appropriate to remove the deputy minister from the board.

It's my understanding that at this point AIMCo manages roughly \$70 billion of public assets. Obviously, then, that work is extremely important to the people of Alberta. I don't question – at this point I certainly have no reason to, generally – the skill level of those people that the government has put in place. I appreciate that as the only shareholder in AIMCo the government remains in a position of some authority with respect to the body and also, of course, that they have the regulatory authority to set or manage investment strategies

or practices or procedures through the legislation. But it seems to me that the Auditor General has identified a bit of a concern around the co-ordination of work between the ministry of finance and AIMCo. I'm not entirely sure why it is that it wouldn't make sense, then, to keep the deputy minister on the board in order to ensure that that particular recommendation of the Auditor General can be addressed.

8:20

Although the overall act governing and establishing AIMCo allows for the minister to inquire into the activities of AIMCo and to ask for information and to have that information provided, it seems to me that without having a representative who reports directly to the minister about the activities of AIMCo at the board level, the minister would not necessarily be in a position to know when to ask, when to inquire, and when to exert the authority that is effectively given to her through the legislation setting up AIMCo.

It seems to me, then, that this is more about sort of symbolically crystallizing the arm's-length nature of AIMCo so that in the event that things don't go so well with AIMCo, there's an opportunity, I suppose, for the government to try and move away from responsibility associated with anything that might go wrong. We certainly saw that with respect to the decision to invest in Precision Drilling that was raised last spring, I believe it was, when in response to that the minister of finance, I believe, but it may have been the Premier, suggested that the government had no direct involvement in that decision and that we were simply going to defer to the good judgment of the board. Then, subsequently, we determined that, no, in fact the deputy minister of finance was part of that decision. Now, that may or may not make the decision right or wrong, but what it does do is that it ensures that there is a mechanism through which Albertans can hold the government accountable.

Let's remember, I mean, that we have endowment funds in that \$70 billion. We have pension funds in that \$70 billion. I mean, this is money which is extremely important to the people of Alberta. It would seem to me that there ought to be some mechanism of accountability, if only were the minister wanting to be sure that they have complete knowledge and oversight of everything that is occurring with that board.

We know, for instance, that the board did allow itself rather generous compensation packages very recently. The two top AIMCo executives received roughly \$5 million in compensation. Now, to me that's something that I think the minister should remain knowledgeable about and should be prepared to answer Albertans for. She may well want to answer Albertans by saying that the only way you're going to get someone of this calibre is to pay them that amount of money. That may be a completely legitimate – a completely legitimate – answer. I don't know. But what I do know is that there should be enough of a relationship between those people who are accountable to the electorate and to the public of Alberta and those people that are making those kinds of decisions that an answer must be given rather than simply a position taken that: well, it's a decision made by an arm's-length board, and I have no capacity to take responsibility for any of it.

There's no question that you always have a bit of that conflict: do you want arm's length to reduce government intervention, or do you want a closer relationship to enhance accountability? It's a common concern, but I think that at this point I've not seen a compelling argument for why it is we would reduce that accountability and the need to take responsibility on the part of the government. At this point, then, we will not be supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise, do you wish to close the debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a second time]

Bill 57

Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Weadick]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. At first look this bill attempts to achieve to a degree what I was putting forward with my Motion 511 calling for a unified court, which was amended by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright to a unified court process. What it's attempting to do is streamline the process and give similar powers. It harmonizes the process of warrant applications for telecommunications warrants, which at present may only be heard by a provincial court judge or a justice of the peace. Now these warrant applications can be made to a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench, so in theory and hopefully in practice there are more opportunities for a warrant application to be heard, which promotes the idea of a faster and more expedient form of justice.

Not being a lawyer, I do not have the understanding of some of the downsides of potentially adding another layer or level of approval. What I see at this point is that this is, as I say, attempting to achieve a more fluid justice system by granting the authority to individuals and considering that a judge is a judge is a judge regardless of which court they're overseeing.

At this point I'm stating that I believe it's a step in the right direction, and I look forward to hearing from other members of this House such as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who has the legal background to be able to analyze this agreement to a greater extent. Obviously, my honoured colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, having had his background and training in law, will be able to provide greater insight either in second reading or the committee stage, and the hon. Minister of Education, for example. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill obviously has background and can further add explanation as to the importance of passing Bill 57. I look forward to hearing from my esteemed colleagues who have the legal background to provide the evidence necessary for further support for this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: I am rising to support this bill primarily for two reasons, I suppose. This is a bill, which others probably have mentioned already, that will give Queen's Bench judges the authority to hear applications for the introduction of tracking devices or number recorders, and this will add to what is their current authority over wiretaps. Obviously, this would result in increased efficiency if the same adjudicator could hear all three applications as they often occur simultaneously. It doesn't make sense for them to have to go to a Queen's Bench judge in one case and a justice of the peace for the other two instances.

I'm told that the courts have been consulted on this change and, in fact, support it. I think that in most legislative amendments that govern the administration of our courts and our judiciary, that ought

to be the primary measure of whether the legislation is appropriate or not. Obviously, through it having the support of the courts, it's difficult to suggest that it ought not to be supported. In addition, this would bring Alberta in line, I understand, with Ontario, B.C., Quebec, and Saskatchewan. Again, it seems to be working in other jurisdictions, so why not do it here?

It is with those comments that we will be supporting this bill. Thank you.

8:30

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the further sort of legal clarification that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona provided. I would ask: do you have any concerns about court hierarchy? In other words – I don't know why it would occur – in theory could a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench quash a warrant that was heard by a justice of the peace? Is there the potential for conflict instead of co-operation in terms of applying and quashing? I don't have the legal background to know this and would appreciate your interpretation.

Ms Notley: I really have to say that I do not purport to be an expert in this area. Not speaking as a lawyer, I suspect it's not actually the case that that would be a problem. I think they already can overturn it. This is really more about making sure they can make all the applications in the same forum, I believe, like all other members of the Assembly are reading the legislation. I don't think that would be a concern, hon. member.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. Any other members wish to speak?

[Motion carried; Bill 57 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of additional points that I wanted to make during this at-bat in Committee of the Whole on Bill 48, Crown's Right of Recovery Act. One of the things that I believe I heard either by the sponsor of the bill or one of the first speakers to this bill was that some of the local antitobacco groups were in favour of part 1. In fact, I had a telephone conversation with Action on Smoking and Health, and that was followed up with an e-mail in which he clarified that his organization has not offered an opinion on part 1 of this bill because, as he rightly points out, criminal justice is not his mandate. Their mandate is, you know, to eradicate smoking and the use of tobacco products in our fair province. So to have said that they were supportive of part 1 is not correct, and I now have it in writing to support that.

Of course, they at the same time supplied me and, I'm sure, every member of the House with lots of information on how everybody else is doing. British Columbia has currently got an appeal going on a court case that they, in fact, started in I think 2005 on tobacco damages and the Health Care Costs Recovery Act. You know, they were proven right when that went to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court denied permission to appeal on August 5, 2007. New Brunswick has also gone through a similar series and in September of 2007 announced that it had lawyers that were being brought together to sue for tobacco-related illnesses on a contingency fee basis. That was filed March 13, 2008, and is ongoing. So far there are Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador who have commenced actions.

I fail to understand and have also failed to get a satisfactory explanation from the government proponents of this bill as to why they included part 1 because it was going to make what should have been clear sailing for a bill, you know, in any number of sports metaphors, a slam dunk to pass with parts 2, 3, and 4 in it. Whatever possessed them and what was the compelling argument to include part 1? We have failed to hear that argument put on this floor in a way that's at all convincing to me, anyway. Why they had to make it that difficult I don't know. I mean, fair enough; Albertans saw fit to put 70 of you people in here. I'm sure you're going to pass your own act, but the number of problems it creates, I would argue, far outweighs any solution that it was actually presenting here.

The second and related question to this is: where is the government going with this? Now, the minister of health was quoted in some newspaper articles as saying: no, no, no; it stops here. You know, we're not going to go any further than sort of chasing down criminals to recover health-related court costs. He swears that it's not going to go any further than that, and I go: well, yeah, you said that about a lot of other things that weren't going to go further, and we saw them go further. You know, there were going to be a limited number of private clinics, and there'd only be so many health care procedures that would be contracted out, and it would save us money instead of costing us 10 per cent more. There are all kinds of promises that I've heard from this government that have just turned out to be absolutely specious. Where are they going with this?

The obvious conclusion is that it's being put in place so that the government can start to pursue people for medical conditions in their life over which they may or may not have any control; you know, chasing down overeating people to pay for diabetes, denying smokers any kind of surgery or treatment for pneumonia or making them pay for the costs of that. I just think: oh, yeah; go to court and try to prove that this person's pneumonia was caused by the fact that they smoked for X number of years. What if the person has quit smoking? I mean, all I can see are a huge number of complications and an awful lot of taxpayer money being paid out to lawyers to argue this in court. Even if it's lawyers that are on the government payroll, taxpayers are still paying for this, so to me this defies logic.

The government has failed to make a compelling argument about why it would stop there. It seems very clearly to have started on a progression of things and has given me no compelling argument, other than the minister saying that it won't happen, as to why it's not going to continue on. I would like to see the business case for this. I would like to see some evidence from other jurisdictions where they have pursued this kind of thing, that this actually pays off for Albertans, that it actually doesn't cost Alberta taxpayers more money in trying to implement this than whatever costs they think they might be able to recover.

8:40

Now, the minister has made the point that, yes, of course they'll be able to recover money from criminals for health-related costs

because not all criminals are poor. True, but I tend to argue – and I bet you we could find some evidence that would tend to say that – that the smart ones are also the rich ones, and they're probably not the ones that got caught. On the other hand, the ones that weren't quite so bright are the ones that got caught, and they're probably the ones that don't have a lot of money on them. So I think there are other things at play there rather than whether they actually have money or not.

I am still waiting to hear some compelling arguments from the government as to why it has chosen to take this particular route. I think it has just created a huge mess for itself, and I don't understand why they did it, why they attached this to this particular bill and made something that should have been very straightforward and easy incredibly complicated and now, I think, slower moving.

I'll take my seat, and hopefully I will hear something from government members as to why these choices were made that would encourage me to support this bill wholeheartedly rather than with a great deal of trepidation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm pleased to be able to get up and speak again on this bill, which is a very, very unfortunate bill. It's a bill, as has already been mentioned, that includes some good things, but it includes such entirely, horrifically ill-advised things that the good things are really, truly overwhelmed.

Basically, this act would amend the Hospitals Act. It would remove certain things from the Hospitals Act and move them into the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. That's including, of course, the provision for the right of the Crown to recover costs of health care services for personal injuries that are the result of wrongful acts or omissions around negligence, medical malpractice, that kind of thing – that's already there – and a provision for the right of the Crown to charge automobile insurers for a portion of the money they make on third-party liability insurance. That's fairly simple as well.

But the other two provisions that this would add that are not in the Hospitals Act, of course, are the right to recover health care costs for injuries received in the commission of a criminal offence, section 34, and the right to recover health care costs for the wrongful acts of tobacco companies. Now, as we said more generally when we had the conversation about this in second reading, the issue of the tobacco company thing is a good one, and it's one that we fully, fully support. We absolutely support the general aim of the bill to establish a separate piece of legislation regarding the Crown's right to recover health care costs, and we would in most cases support any provision which would allow the province to sue tobacco companies.

Tobacco companies perpetrate tremendous levels of ill health on populations, and they profit from it. The degree to which our health care system is strained right now as a result of people's addiction to tobacco is quite unacceptable. One of the quickest ways to cut health care costs in our province would of course be to have tobacco no longer available to people and to reduce all of the negative implications that arise from tobacco consumption. Unfortunately, we have this very laissez-faire sort of scenario. We have people who smoke, and of course we have companies who sell to them in a way that is specifically designed to enhance the addictive nature of that particular habit. They enhance the addictive nature of smoking, and people struggle to get off the smoking, and then people are sicker, and then all people pay the costs of health care.

That is why jurisdictions across North America, at least, have pursued with varying levels of success the notion of going after tobacco companies to take some of those profits and put them back

into the health care industry, as well, of course, hopefully to also discourage those very companies from engaging in a lot of the practices which enhance people's inability to stop smoking, whether it be their advertising, whether it be the enhancement of the addictive qualities of the tobacco agent regardless of how exactly people ultimately consume it. As a result we see that British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario have launched lawsuits against tobacco companies, and Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador have introduced legislation such as this.

This is all, as I've noted before, a result of the 2005 Supreme Court ruling that unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the first legislation in this regard, which originated in B.C. under the then NDP government. We've already talked about the reasons for this. The provisions around suing the tobacco companies have been supported by the Canadian Cancer Society and the Edmonton tobacco reduction network. We know that this is an exceptionally – exceptionally – worthwhile piece of legislation. I would desperately like to be able to vote in favour of it.

The problem is that this government has seen to attach it to a desperately offensive additional section of the legislation. It is the penultimate poison pill. They're using motherhood legislation to hide or camouflage or to otherwise sneak through this Assembly a different provision, which is as negative, I think, ultimately, to our health care system as the tobacco component of this bill is positive. That is, of course, that element of the bill that would give the government the ability to recover health care costs from criminals. I'm going to talk about that in more detail, but suffice to say I'm not a big fan of that component of the bill. It's for that reason that at this point I'd like to introduce an amendment to Bill 48.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, we will pause for a moment while the amendment is being distributed.

We'll call this amendment A1, moved by Edmonton-Strathcona on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Notley: Thank you. What my amendment proposes to do is to strike out sections 34, 35, 36, and 37 of the bill as it currently exists. In so doing, the amendment would strike out all sections that deal with the Crown's right to make criminals pay for any health services they receive because of injuries received in the commission of a crime. We are proposing this because we object to this element of the bill.

8:50

Just to go back a little bit, the government, I suspect, has proposed this element of the bill on one part as part of their typical sort of republican approach to politics, where we all pile on and sing very loudly about our efforts to be, quote, tough on crime. This is one of a series of pieces of legislation that follows along that line.

Nonetheless, this is not a piece of legislation that will bring about that outcome. Rather, it will probably have no impact on the commission of crimes. It might in fact increase crimes, and it will of course perpetuate a much bigger crime, which is the continuation of the government's efforts to undermine our public health care system. We know that the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association has come out against this provision, but we also know that others who are engaged in the business of trying to reduce crime have suggested that this piece of legislation will have no impact on crime reduction, and it may in fact result in an increase in crime.

This bill, as I believe we've stated before, effectively infringes on the principle of universality in health care. Our health care system is premised on universality. It always has been. It is one of the

principles of the Canada Health Act that medically necessary services must be provided to everyone at no cost, and the bill as it currently reads infringes that fundamental principle in a significant way.

As I have suggested before, the bill will not reduce crime. There is no reason to believe that the threat of having to pay health care bills will deter criminals from committing crimes. Indeed, we've heard absolutely nothing, not anything, from this government to suggest that this is the case. They are bringing forward this very radical piece of legislation without an iota of research, without an inkling of policy considerations that would merit it. There is actually no stated rationale, and there is nothing to support the implied rationale behind this element of the bill. So it is, I would suggest, an extremely ill-thought-out section of legislation that is simply designed to constitute political pandering, and I would suggest that ultimately it's a very amateur attempt at political pandering.

The bill will also, I would suggest, interfere quite significantly with the role of the judiciary and the long-term historical practices that we have developed in this country around how it is you assess criminal behaviour and establish appropriate penalties. In essence, what we're going to do is that once a criminal is convicted of a crime, not only are they subject to the penalty that a judge, using their expertise and their reliance on the common law, will assess based on the specific elements of the crime and the relationship of those elements of the crime to what the law says is a reasonable penalty, but in addition to doing that, we are also going to have this surprise fine, punitive fine, that gets dumped on the criminal.

For instance, we could have a criminal that marches into somebody's house and brutally assaults three or four people and in the course of doing that injures his finger, and as a result of it, when all is said and done, he is presented with a \$2,000 physiotherapy bill. Conversely, we could end up with a young person who is addicted to crack cocaine who commits their first theft of an item under \$300, and in the course of that they trip down the stairs in the house that they are breaking and entering into and become paralyzed from the neck down. Suddenly, that 19-year-old first-time offender, who's also very addicted to a substance, is going to be presented with a multimillion dollar fine on top of the penalty that the judge might otherwise impose. There is absolutely no rational linkage between the penalty which this criminal must pay and the crime that they have committed.

What we do, then, is we take this whole process out of the judiciary, and we subject it to the irrationality of fate, and we just go on our merry way. It is truly one of the silliest ideas I have ever seen. It really, really defies common sense, not only of people with a legal background but the common sense of people with any common sense. It's surprising to me that they would suggest moving forward on something like this.

The final issue that we have with respect to this piece of legislation, of course, is that it opens the door to a fault-based fee structure for health care services. Right now we get to recover because somebody is a criminal. Next we'll recover because somebody has been convicted of a provincial offence or a summary conviction. Next we'll recover because somebody has been fined. Next we'll recover because somebody smokes. Next we'll recover because somebody is obese. You know, it just will never end. There is no way to justify this provision without effectively accepting a presumption which automatically would lead to other fault-based allocations of health care costs to patients.

It is for this reason that I urge members of this Assembly to support our amendment and to fix what is an otherwise excellent

piece of legislation, an otherwise excellent initiative on the part of the government, to accept this amendment and to subsequently remove this one small piece of intense, intense stupidity. I pause there, but I have to say it. It just is stupid from so many different angles.

So I certainly hope that members will consider supporting my very politely asked for amendment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a privilege to rise and speak to the amendment moved by my friend from the third party and to comment. Just at the outset, this is a really good amendment in that what it leaves is a very good bill, the first two parts of it, in place and allows us to move ahead on being able to sue tobacco companies as well as harmonizing some legislation with our motor vehicle accident claims and situations like that. But I must also pick up where the hon. member left off, that this is really a stupid bill if we look at the part that we're really trying to pass here.

I understand the mentality of the government wishing to in fact be hard on crime or at least appear to be hard on crime. I say this as a person who has been a victim of crime. I guess at one time this may have had even some sort of appeal to me. As some of you are aware, I was injured some 18 years ago through a drive-by shooting, which is an illegal act. At some point in time, maybe briefly – this was no easy thing to go through, Mr. Chair, just to be perfectly honest. It hasn't been easy.

9:00

When I look back and I think about this legislation and what's it's trying to do, I think: does this legislation have anything to do with preventing crimes like this? I say that no, it has no bearing at all on whether it's going to impact crime. No one can point me to a study where when criminals go out and do bad things, it resonates in their minds that maybe they're going to have some added health care costs tacked on after they're out of the slammer or after they serve a term in jail or after they get caught. That has never been shown to me, and I don't think it's been shown to me because it doesn't exist.

Also, then, as a disabled person who was a victim of crime, I'd like to comment on the fact that, yeah, maybe for a short period of time this might have had some sort of appeal to me in the fact that, jeppers creepers, this guy is going to have to pay for these medical costs, which, no doubt, for an individual like me were quite extraordinary to the state, probably in excess of, when you add it all up, when everything is said and done, over a million dollars. It's probably going to be a million more by the end of the day, before I go to my eternal reward. Probably just the complications of the whole matter are going to make it vastly expensive to the state. So I think about this myself. Well, jeppers creepers, this guy who did this heinous act, this crime – and we're getting tough on it – by golly, he's going to pay for this for the rest of his life. I think about that.

Really, what are the ramifications? I have to move from myself as the individual. Well, I might see some minor personal satisfaction even though I'd hope I'd moved on from whatever bitterness occurred in that moment some 18 years ago to: what are the broader implications on society? So there I look at what bargains our society has struck. On that matter, under the Canada Health Act we have struck the bargain that no matter how rich or how poor you are, how good you are, how bad you are, how in between you are, how much you smoke, how much you drink, how much you do good on one day, how much you do bad on the next day, how well you treat your neighbour, or how well you don't treat your neighbour, you are

going to get medically necessary health care. For good or bad that is the bargain we have struck, and I think it's a fair bargain.

The other part of that bargain for society is that if you break the rules, you're going to go to jail. Okay? And if you break the rules, you will serve your time back to society by spending a time either in our provincial jail cells or in our federal jail cells. That to me has been the way we have wiped the slate clean and said: "All right. From here we're going to go on, and we're going to try to do better next time. We're going to build a society."

What we're doing right now is complicating those two principles, the first one in particular. We're starting to move down that slippery slope where it is that you, sir, are not good enough to get medical care; you, ma'am, are not good enough to get medical care. It simply interferes with things that are Canadian, that we base our values and principles on.

The second thing that I look at in this is: how about the offender? How about that gentleman who some 18 years ago shot me? How would this legislation affect him? Well, to be honest with you, like I said, I don't think anyone can point to the fact that this legislation would do anything to stop him from committing that crime. I tell you what. If anyone could point me to that, I'd get onboard this bill. I'd sign up. I'd go tell those criminal trial lawyers how necessary this is. I'd be the first one. However, we can't because we know it's nothing but rhetoric to take out and say that we're getting tough on crime with.

What we have to look at is: would this person who perpetrated the crime on me actually have stuck around in Alberta to have paid off his debt to society? Or are we maybe creating an underground economy? Maybe this guy would've said: "Well, you know, a million, 2 million bucks. That's quite a bit to pay. I feel bad for what I did, but I've kind of moved on. I've done my two years. I tell you what. I might work under the table here, or I might move to another province. I might go here, or I might go there. But this doesn't seem like something I'm going to deal with." That's one example. Another example is: what are we going to do? Have our lawyers set up a whole bureaucracy dedicated to tracking down these people, which people are going to pay back the health care costs? The bureaucracy in the keeping track of this mess; it's just bad legislation.

If this bill does pass without taking this section out, I think what will happen is the government will put it out in their flyers and say: we're getting tough on crime. I don't ever envision that this thing would take place. It simply would be ridiculous to the advancement, I think, of a decent Alberta or, actually, even a better Alberta. I'm hoping they're just using it as window dressing to say that we're getting tough on crime, because that would actually be somewhat refreshing. In a way if it makes you feel better, go ahead; go nuts and all that.

Whether we're putting this dramatically into play, I think it has serious implications for our society. First, that bargain we have struck is that health care is for everyone despite how good we are or despite how bad we are, whether we get caught doing a crime today, whether we get caught speeding tomorrow and accidentally run someone over in a crosswalk. Well, those are some difficult things. I think we're playing with fire on this legislation, I believe, for some of those reasons contained herein and some of those basic values that we've based Canada and Alberta on up to this time. I think they're worth standing up for, and I think they make us a better community and a better government and an example to other jurisdictions that tend to look to the betterment of humanity and the rebuilding of lives and that sort of stuff other than what this bill attempts to achieve.

I thank you very much for allowing me speak to this bill this evening, Mr. Chair. We'll go from there.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief, but I did want to get my comments on the record. I think I've already spoken before on how absolutely silly part of a section of this is, and the section that is being addressed under this amendment, I think, was the part that I thought was the silliest. In fact, I was sort of convinced it had been put in for comedy relief.

A couple of the points have been made by the previous speaker. I certainly support this amendment because I think it's almost impossible to enforce. It would cost heaven knows what to actually collect. It would create another very costly bureaucracy to administer this. It would undoubtedly have many high-priced lawyers on consulting contracts. I think that is certainly not what this province needs: another whole bureaucratic department.

I think that some of this looks like a bit of political pandering, so it would be really interesting to know who they had to appease in the government caucus to come up with this amazing idea.

I would just really like to encourage and ask the members of this House to support this amendment, which would then make Bill 48 a very, very good bill that this Legislature could be proud to pass. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just wondering if the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, in view of his objections to the bill, which he articulated, would have a similar difficulty with the long-standing practice of the province of Alberta for subrogated claims for hospitals when someone has caused a motor vehicle accident?

9:10

Mr. Hehr: I understand the question, and generally there's insurance involved in those things. That's why it has been set up there. Through the insurance company and through insurance practices it has been set up that way. Right now our criminal justice system as well as our Canada Health Act is not set up that way. What you're doing is two different things. I believe, you know, it's easy to draw that comparison, but they're not. They're based on an insurance principle that we have on subrogated claims, and it's not the other way around. So I would say that messing with this principle is something we should not be doing.

Dr. Brown: In essence, you're requiring the guilty party – in this case the one that is guilty of a tort in having caused, you know, an accident – to pay the hospital claim.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, through the chair.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. In speaking in support of the amendment, what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is trying to do is separate the Dr. Jekyll from the Mr. Hyde part of this particular bill. She has also pointed out – and several other people have used adjectives talking about it – the hypocrisy that is associated with this bill. What's she's trying to do is save the baby and toss out the bathwater.

The concern that just very briefly I want to say is that suing tobacco companies makes absolute sense except as the minister of finance pointed out during question period, when in an answer she indicated that Alberta has small investments in tobacco. Well, to that, Mr. Chair, I would say that's like being a little bit pregnant. If

you have interests in tobacco, then, as was pointed out earlier, you're suing yourself. That part of the legislation won't be cured by this amendment, but the amendment does remove the portion that is strictly based on getting tough on crime, being vindictive. The person is already injured, so let's hit him a couple of times with a shovel or the take-no-prisoners attitude. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo pointed out, we have universal laws, a universal-access right to treatment.

I know, Mr. Chair, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a keen desire to participate in the debate on Bill 48. I'm sure he would find this amendment intriguing; therefore, I would like to at this time adjourn debate on the amendment of Bill 48.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 51

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments that are offered with respect to this bill?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 51 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 54

Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to continue debate in Committee of the Whole for Bill 54, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009. I've gone back and tried to read the notes that I took and the *Hansard* of the committee meetings because I sat on the review committee from which flowed these changes. As I look at it, it appears that out of the various particular issues that we dealt with – that actually were kind of prechosen because there was a workbook that was distributed, and it had particular questions that people were encouraged to answer, and they did, of course. So the agenda is somewhat set by the choices that are made in preparing the discussion document, or discussion guide, I think they call it.

Nonetheless, we dealt with a number of things, like the idea of the business product or the work product, which, in fact, is reflected here in the legislation; some clarifications on behalf of the Privacy Commissioner which would allow him to not have to do a complete investigation. You know, he could refuse to investigate something. You need to allow that kind of administrative discretion in some cases. We have to believe we've hired good people who have good legislation to work with to help them make those decisions.

We needed to deal with the PATRIOT Act in the U.S. and the fact that any time a multinational corporation received personal information from Canadians or from Albertans, more specifically, it went into their parent company in the States, and they could then use that

information the way they wanted to, not subject to our laws. There's a requirement now that if you are collecting personal information and you know that it could end up in a U.S. multinational office, the Alberta recipient of the personal information takes the steps to make sure that the information is not passed on or that the individual knows that it will be passed on, whichever is appropriate there.

In fact, the one area that seems not to have come out in any way, shape, or form in the amending act was bringing the not-for-profit, voluntary, charitable sector completely under the scope of PIPA. I remember we had a number of discussions about this because they were half in and half out. If they had a commercial product or a commercial venture, the NGO sector – let me call it that as a shorter way – would get captured under PIPA because the part of it that operated as a commercial venture would be covered or would have to adhere to the regulations, but the rest of the organization may not. So you could have a church that ran a brunch on Sundays in its basement and charged money for it. Well, that part of it and personal information around that would be included, but the rest of the activities would not.

We were very concerned as a committee that we not tax the capacity of not-for-profits in having to adhere to the requirements of PIPA, knowing that there were a lot of not-for-profits in Alberta. I think there are, like, 19,000 of them, and probably 8,000 of them operate without full-time staff. Expecting that somehow a volunteer-based organization is going to be able to understand and adhere to all of this can be a bit of a stretch. Nonetheless, as we look at the fact that that very organization, even though it may have no staff, may be collecting personal information about Albertans, would we expect that it will adhere to how it treats that personal information? The bottom line is yes. The Privacy Commissioner has also indicated his expectation that the not-for-profits would be brought under PIPA and his displeasure that they were not.

9:20

I had asked specifically that certain not-for-profits would be brought in to speak to the committee, so we had groups like the chamber of voluntary organizations, the community leagues, and a few other groups like that come in. Really, what they said to us was: "Either way, just make it consistent because right now it's really hard for us to know whether we're in or whether we're out and to figure that out. Again, we're just trying to provide our service. We're just trying to put on, you know, yoga for kids and skating for adults. We're trying to do our activity, not worry about all these other things. So just be clear. Either tell us we're in, we're consistently in, or tell us we're out, and we're all out. But this, 'Well, you're in if you engage in this kind of activity but not in that kind of activity' is, frankly, really confusing."

The committee in the end – and we wrestled with this a lot – had recommended that they all be brought in just to provide that greater clarity and consistency. In recognizing that capacity issue, we had recommended that there be a phase-in of this and that there should be some monetary assistance available to organizations to ease their way into that compliance.

Maybe that's the reason why the government decided not to include it as they weren't interested in offering the financial assistance to build the capacity in these organizations to do this. As a result we have maintained an inconsistent application to the not-for-profits, we have maintained a confusion for them on how they are supposed to be behaving, and we've left a lot of employees and volunteers and other Albertans that have an interaction with those organizations also with their personal information and the protection of it not covered under this legislation. I think that continues to be an issue, and I think it's something that we need to hear from the

government as to why that choice was made in a more thorough way than what we've heard thus far. I look forward to the sponsor being able to give some explanation on that.

Another question that I had as I started to go through this. This is sort of a technical question, but as I look at the beginning of the bill, under the definitions section – and, of course, that's at the front of every bill; it's an important part of every bill because it tells us how we understand the rest of the bill – there's a part that is confusing me. Usually you would have something flow logically. I found something that doesn't flow logically to me.

When you look at the definitions, under section 1(m) in the existing act, which appear on pages 4 and 5 of the printed version, you have a discussion there about record and the definition of a record, meaning "a record of information in any form or in any medium, whether in written, printed, photographic or electronic form or any other form," et cetera, et cetera. But under the act what's being added under that section which starts talking about a record is something that is, to my eye, unrelated. I'd like an explanation of that.

What it starts talking about adding under this clause that talks about a record is (m.1) "regulation of Alberta," meaning a regulation as defined in the Regulations Act, (m.2) would be a regulation of Canada, and (m.3) a service provider. What does that have to do with records? It has nothing to do with records. You're amalgamating two things together that are totally unrelated in a definitions section, which I think is creating confusion. I'd like an explanation as to why that's happened because (m.3) as proposed in the amending act, appearing on page 3 – and for the purposes of people following along, this is actually section 2(vi) – still under the record section, adds in:

"Service provider" means any organization, including, without limitation, a parent corporation, subsidiary, affiliate, contractor or subcontractor, that, directly or indirectly, provides a service for or on behalf of another organization.

Are we somehow supposed to link that this is about records coming from regulations of Alberta, regulations of Canada, and service providers? This is not logical to me, and I'm just wondering if this was meant to be created in a different area, that it was meant to create a completely different section, or if it was meant to flow under the records section. If I could get that answered, I'd appreciate it.

Everything else under that section looks fine to me. Then it just flows on through the rest of the amending act, essentially incorporating the details of what's needed to implement the decisions that were made by the committee. As I say, the decisions were arrived at after a great deal of discussion, and they're all pretty necessary, I believe. I talked about the PATRIOT Act already. There was also a section to deal with administration of pensions without having to chase the person down and find out about them and deal with them directly. That would be an issue where the notification clause or the disclosure clause is being exempted to allow someone to get the work done.

There were also some small things like allowing the business title to be attached. This was around that whole work product discussion. The organization could give the position name or the title when communicating with a person about whom they have a privacy concern. They'd be saying, "Please, you need to speak to the district manager" rather than giving the individual's name, and that wasn't a possibility before.

The preparation of audits and audit-related amendments, really, to allow organizations to collect personal information without consent in the case of former employees as well as current and prospective employees. I never liked those sections because doing it without

consent, I think, flies in the face of protection of personal information, but you can see that at a certain point it is very difficult to get that consent if you're trying to, you know, deal with old files from former employees and things like that. If you can't find them, you've stuck that business in an untenable position because they can't get rid of this stuff. They can't do anything with it because they can't get the permission to do it from a long-gone employee. So you can see that, you know, in trying to kind of take the red tape out of this and make it possible to implement it, we've had to forgo some of the protections that people like me would prefer to see in there, but I recognize the sort of reality of getting the work done.

Some of the other things you've heard other people talk about, the security breaches and the requirement to disclose a number of things, as I've said, for the commissioner. I was okay with everything else that was included in this act, and I spent a lot of time on it.

Those were really my biggest concerns around it, the reasons for not including the not-for-profit organizations and that very strange section where we're including a whole bunch of disparate elements under that definition of records, which simply did not make sense to me.

Having sort of done that on a word-by-word, clause-by-clause basis, I appreciate the opportunity to do that in Committee of the Whole on Bill 54. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I just wanted to offer my thanks to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and to the all-party standing policy committee that has done so much of the work in preparation for Bill 54. That goes to show the functionality and the importance of the all-party committee. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out that all but one of the nine recommendations were accepted by the mover and organizer of this bill. She also pointed out the need to bring all not-for-profit organizations under the same umbrella.

9:30

I recall a circumstance which, I believe, is related to this particular bill, where the War Amps were prevented for a period of almost two years from receiving the information from the drivers' registries. The War Amps, we all know, do wonderful work, and their main fundraiser is through the key tag promotion. I would hate to think that these very worthwhile not-for-profit organizations would be denied this type of information. They're not into information sharing. They're into the notion of doing good work for children and adults who have suffered amputations.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre also pointed out some of the discrepancies with regard to parts of the bill; for example, the records with regard to service providers and nonprofit organizations somehow being thrown into the mix and not flowing logically. Again, without going into too much detail, she expressed a desire for clarification, which I hope the hon. mover of this bill will provide or possibly a committee member who had second thoughts about the ninth of the nine recommendations that were put forward.

With regard to the protection of information there are all kinds of self-checks, to a degree, that we can look after ourselves. For example, we get into sort of a holidayish mood when we're going to a boat show or a home renovation show, and we fill out the little free draw form for that wonderful basket of jellies. What happens? Three weeks later we're getting calls for time shares or, you know, some Fabutan product that is going to make us that more attractive to our constituents. To a degree a little bit of self-awareness can protect us.

When it comes to larger issues of information protection and information sharing, that's where we have to be careful. Sometimes that information sharing is based on a criminal circumstance, where a computer has been hacked or an uncoded, unencrypted health record circumstance has found its way into the wrong hands. That's a different matter, but it does lend credence to the fact that we have to believe that our personal information is being protected, and that's part of what's happening within this bill, recognizing that every three years it goes back to an all-party committee for further improvements. This would be the sixth opportunity for a revision.

Again, I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has pointed out the primarily positive aspects and intents of this bill, and we look forward to the clarifications surrounding those areas that have not been fully explained.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll take my seat and look forward to further qualification.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It is a pleasure to rise to speak in more detail about this rather extensive bill. Unfortunately, I was not around when the committee reviewed this bill, so I'm not as familiar with it as some. I have to say that I did struggle somewhat trying to plow through this rather extensive bill with a limited amount of time at my disposal to do that. Nonetheless, I'm going to mostly work off the bill itself, having just gone through it to try to figure out what it says. Because we didn't actually ultimately get a whole sort of three-column document or anything in our briefing, I'm just going through that now.

Of course, the sponsor of the bill did indicate when introducing the bill that although it included some elements that had been recommended through the committee that reviewed the act, it also included some additional elements. I'm going to try to cross-reference between them, but if I don't quite do that, I apologize.

There are many things within the bill which are worth while, and I'll try to point those out as I go. There are some others about which I have some concerns and then still others about which I have some questions. I suppose that, just to start, one key point which everyone probably has mentioned, because I think it was identified as a deficiency by the Privacy Commissioner, is the failure of this bill to bring nonprofit organizations into its scope, so they are still not compelled to adhere to the privacy and protection of privacy provisions and protection which this bill attempts to give to regular citizens in their private dealings throughout the province.

Of course, it is difficult. I appreciate that there are a lot of nonprofits that will struggle to bring themselves into compliance with this piece of legislation. Conversely, however, we have a government that has really excelled in downloading very significant, impactful services onto the nonprofit sector. While they say that they can do that without compromising service, to then suggest that we can't provide to the recipients of those services the kinds of protection that a bill like this would provide because those nonprofits are too stretched kind of runs against the notion that it's okay to download so many services onto the nonprofit sector.

You know, either the nonprofits are properly funded to provide the kinds of services that they do or they're not. Then the question becomes: at what point ought these important objectives that are being performed by some of these nonprofits, which remain outside the scope of this act, be performed by those particular groups? While I, too, see the concern that they would have about complying with the act, I think that if the government truly thinks that this bill and the protection it provides are important, then we ought to be

considering providing the resources necessary to allow those nonprofits to come into compliance with the act and to provide adequate protection to the people whom they come into contact with.

Another concern that I have that is included in this act but which does not appear to have been covered in the review that was conducted by the committee is the way the act proposes to treat information that employers hold about employees once that employment contract is terminated. I didn't see any mention of that in the committee recommendations. I may have misread it. I will say that I have some very, very significant concerns that the employee remains in a position of having fewer rights to control the employers' collection, use, and disclosure of their private information once that relationship has terminated.

That's particularly the case because often the employer will be using that information in matters where the employee and the employer are at loggerheads, or alternatively they'll be using it with respect to the administration of benefit plans or the administration of long-term disability or disability plans. I will talk about that later on, but I have a very serious concern about that because I've spent far too much time watching how insurance companies as well as employers expand the scope of the information, that they believe they are entitled to, in order to advance a certain position.

9:40

There are, frankly, incidents in the system where employees are exploited or they have their rights compromised by the actions of either the employer or the insurance company as a result of them exploiting their access to personal information that ought to be within the control of the employee. This change, by changing the definition of employee and extending it to that posttermination relationship, is something I have a very major concern with.

Section 5 in this bill enhances that concern as it assumes that there will be deemed consent for insurance purposes. Well, for insurance purposes includes contesting a claim. For insurance purposes includes challenging medical information and rustling up information that ought not to be used for that in a way that the applicant would never consent to or that the recipient of the benefits would never consent to. I have a tremendous concern that we are once again creating a second-class citizen. If you're a contractor, when that contract ends, the exchange of information needs to be managed in accordance with this piece of legislation, but if you're an employee, your employer has, apparently, an unending access or certainly an enhanced access to your private information as a result of the way this legislation is crafted.

I appreciate that those who were sitting on the committee identified that it's "business practice" of insurance companies, but I also appreciate that the regular business practice of insurance companies is often simply not acceptable and is often challenged in the courts and then has to change. I don't know that we necessarily should use insurance company regular business practice as a guide for developing legislation which is otherwise supposed to protect the rights of individuals against inappropriate collection, use, and disclosure of their personal information.

Section 8 of the bill is a bit of a concern as well. It expands the ability of an organization to collect, use, and disclose information without consent beyond that situation where a statute or regulation requires that collection, use, or disclosure to a situation where municipal bylaws and professional regulatory instruments would also require that disclosure. I'm not exactly sure where that came from. That didn't appear to come from the committee although maybe it did, but again it does just expand, generally speaking, the opportunities for information to be collected without asking the person for consent. Of course, every time you expand that, we have

concerns because the idea is that people are supposed to be able to consent to the collection, use, and disclosure of their personal information.

The amendments under section 17 of the bill. I'm not sure what this means, to be quite honest. It appears that when a person is asking for an organization to provide to them personal information held by the organization about the person asking, now instead of saying, "I'd like you to provide me with copies of this information that you have," you now have to say to them, "I'd like you to provide me with all information that you have in this record or that record." I'm not entirely sure whether this will end up being another barrier to a person being able to get access to the information that an organization holds about them if they are unable to specifically identify the record in which the information exists. That's simply a question.

Section 19(a) in the bill I think is a good change. That's where an organization refuses to respond to a request by somebody looking for information. At a certain point that refusal to respond is deemed to be a refusal overall as opposed to making a person wait forever and ever and ever only to have the person say: no, we don't want to give you this information. So that's a good thing.

I'm less excited about section 19(b), which seems to limit the ability of a person to request a review of an organization's refusal to excuse access fees in the event that the person cannot afford them or whatever the circumstances are where they've requested that the fees for getting access to the information be waived. So that's a bit of a not-as-good thing. I'm not sure what the rationale for that was.

Section 15. This is really a question that I have. It appears to me that section 24 of the current act is amended to limit an organization's obligation to provide information about the use or the purpose of the information that's collected where it's not in the custody and control of the organization. While I can see that it would be difficult to give access, it would seem to me that you would still have to know the use and the purpose for that information. So I am curious about what the rationale is behind that.

Section 23 of the bill is a good thing because it does limit slightly the types of items where fees can be charged, in particular if a person contacts an organization and asks, "Can you please tell me who has looked at my personal information?" It used to be that the organization could charge for that. Under this amendment they can't. That's a good thing.

Section 24. A little concerned about that one. Section 24 of the bill qualifies what was previously an unqualified obligation to maintain the accuracy of the information relating to a person. That obligation, of course, existed on the part of the organization that held the personal information. Now that obligation has been qualified with the use of "reasonable" effort to keep that information accurate. Again, this is something that was identified when PIPA was first brought in. One of the reasons many people suggested that PIPA was not actually an adequate replacement for the federal PIPEDA was because it was overflowing with the use of qualifiers like "reasonable" and things like that so that it seemed that there was a lot of wiggle room for organizations to get out of their obligations under the act.

Section 25 is a good thing, and I know that it was promoted as such by the government with respect to this bill. That's the section of the act which requires notification of unauthorized access to personal information that's held by an organization. The concern I have about that: while that is excellent, again, the qualifying language in this provision is really quite something. They have to give notification of "unauthorized access" but only where a "reasonable person" would conclude that there was a "real risk of significant harm." So you've got three qualifiers there, which

probably is going to reduce the amount of notification by a good 50 per cent, if not more.

I'm not entirely sure why it is that if there was an unauthorized access to somebody's personal information, it just wouldn't be a no-brainer that you would give notice to that person that their personal information had been breached, that their privacy had been breached. I'm not sure why we have to assess whether the harm that would come to them is significant, and I'm not sure why we would have to assess whether the risk was real or superficial or delusional. I don't even know how exactly you would assess what "real risk" means.

Section 26 is a good thing. It appears to actually require organizations to dispose of information at a certain point, and that is good.

9:50

Section 34 is a provision which I have great concerns with. It's a provision which actually looks a lot like what we have seen in other pieces of legislation that this government has brought forward where there is any kind of internal review, investigation, and complaint process. It seems to be standard now that the government wants to give the administrative body the complete discretion to simply decide that the person filing the complaint is vexatious or frivolous or a whack job or taking up too much of their time or annoying or whatever, so they don't have to investigate. They don't have to receive the complaint. They don't need to review it. I have a real problem with that. I have a problem with that in the context of the adult guardianship act, and I believe there was another act that's been through here in the last year and a half where that same provision was put in place. I think that that's really quite arbitrary.

If you're going to put in place a complaints and investigation process, then the person should be able to make the complaint and the investigation, and then it should be adjudicated accordingly. Particularly, in this case it's not simply limited to where the commissioner thinks it's vexatious or frivolous; it's also where "circumstances warrant." Well, I would really love to know what that means. Does that mean, "I don't have enough people on staff to investigate this, and therefore the circumstances warrant that I will not pursue your complaint; I will not investigate your complaint"? I mean, that language is, in my view, quite unacceptable because we don't know what the criteria are for where circumstances warrant and where the complaint procedure under this legislation would then be stopped and withheld from citizens of the province. So that is a concern.

I think that's pretty much most of it, again, having really just flipped through the bill as quickly as I could this afternoon to figure out what was going on in it. As I said, some good additions to the bill but also some areas that we are concerned about, some omissions that we are concerned about, and also the addition of qualifiers to rights within a piece of legislation which, relative to its federal counterpart, is already quite qualified and already allows for a tremendous amount of flexibility on the part of most organizations relative to the federal standards.

I look forward to hearing from the sponsor of the bill with respect to some of the questions that I've put forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words about the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009. In earlier comments we spoke about the importance of informing customers when their personal information may be processed outside of Canada. I would like to now move to another privacy protection point which is new to the act, specifically the notification of individuals when a significant security breach has occurred.

The loss of customer or employee data can have serious consequences for individuals, ranging from humiliation and anxiety to financial loss, identity fraud, and other criminal acts. Requiring businesses to disclose a significant security breach will allow affected individuals to take steps to protect themselves from further harm. This amendment demonstrates to Albertans that protection of personal information is a matter of great concern to this government.

The Personal Information Protection Amendment Act will strike a really great balance between the protection of individuals from harm and protection for businesses from undue economic burdens. The requirement to report is not automatic. Only a breach that meets a certain threshold will have to be reported to the commissioner. Then the commissioner will decide whether affected individuals have received adequate notification and also can order remedial measures if needed. More importantly, reporting is mandatory. Failing to report to the commissioner a breach that meets the threshold is an offence under the act.

I feel that this amendment would go a long way to increase public confidence in doing business within Alberta organizations, and I appreciate the opportunity to put forward additional comments on this matter. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 54 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried

Bill 55

Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all the hon. members for their comments and suggestions and debate on Bill 55. Now, I heard voices of support for the bill, and I am certainly pleased about that. As well, I heard voices of disagreement, which I would like to address today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview both suggested that what Canada really needs is comprehensive Senate reform, and I absolutely agree. Alberta has been committed to comprehensive Senate reform for over a quarter of a century. We want a Senate that is elected, we want a Senate with equal provincial representation, and we want a Senate with effective powers to fulfill its mandate of representing provincial interests.

We recognize that Alberta cannot accomplish these changes alone. These are fundamental reforms that would impact the lives of all Canadians. But abandoning the democratic principle because change will be difficult is not the Alberta way. Alberta is proud to do our part and continue the efforts to reform the Canadian Senate so that all Canadians can benefit from a democratic upper Chamber.

It has been mentioned several times now that our legislation has been making an impact. So far two elected Senate nominees from

Alberta have been appointed to the Senate. In addition, the federal government has expressed support for our provincial Senate nominee process and affirmed the Prime Minister's commitment to continue appointing Alberta's elected nominees. As well, our legislation has served as a model for Senate reform efforts in other provinces, including Saskatchewan, which has already passed its Senate Nominee Election Act.

Further, I'd like to address the comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who suggested that we should advocate for abolishing the Senate altogether. Mr. Chairman, the Senate is an important part of our parliamentary democracy and an important part of our country's heritage. Appropriately reformed, it could serve a vital role in representing provincial interests within the federal legislative system. Rather than giving up on the Senate, we strive to improve it so it can better serve all Canadians. I'll repeat again: Albertans want Senators who are accountable, and Alberta wants a Senate that appropriately reflects the federal character of our country.

The hon. member also raised a concern regarding the costs of Senate nominee elections held concurrently with municipal elections. I would like to emphasize that the legislation in question simply provides the legal framework to enable Senate nominee elections. The legislation does not mandate the timing of the future elections. However, in response to the hon. member's concern, I would refer him to Alberta regulation 118/98, which governs grants to municipalities to pay the costs of conducting a vote. Also, I would refer the hon. member to the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Senate nominee election held in 1998, the last Senate nominee election held concurrently with a municipal election. Page 79 notes that grants to municipalities totalled nearly \$3.2 million to cover election expenses.

Mr. Chairman, we recognize that Senate reform will not come overnight. Although some members across the floor suggest that with the Senatorial Selection Act we have somehow trimmed the sails and are riding the wave, quite the opposite is true, and I think the progress we have seen so far with our legislation speaks for itself.

Again, we stand firm on our commitments to defend Albertans' democratic rights and to ensure the voice of our province is heard in the Senate. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10:00

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just be very brief. I think that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations was quite clear in what he was trying to achieve with this bill. I might point out that it's his first bill as a minister, so congratulations to him for that.

This bill as it stands, really, is quite innocuous. All this bill is asking for: it just simply extends the life of the Senatorial Selection Act. It doesn't curtail any further discussions on what people think should happen to the Senate: Senate, no Senate; elect, not elect. It has nothing to do with that. All it is is buying time for when and if those solid discussions would take place because, as the minister has clearly pointed out, part of this is constitutional. It would take forever to change unless they do it within certain ways in each province.

I'm asking for the support of the House for this bill, and we can save the discussions on the other items for another day.

The Deputy Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this rather entertaining bill. Not surprisingly, I'll be parroting the general opinion previously offered by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in that this is a piece of legislation that we can't support because, quite frankly, it just provides a foundation to continue with what is currently a very ineffective system on the federal level.

As has been previously stated, our view is simply that the Senate should be abolished. It is not something that reflects the democratic makeup of our country. The historical rationale behind appointing a Senate has long since dissipated in terms of sort of the historical political concerns that underlay the initial construction of the Senate. The current elements of the Senate that we would effectively be promoting and encouraging the continuation of are, in my view, quite unacceptable.

Whether we elect our Senators or whether we have elections where the government chooses to appoint our Senators, we're still dealing with the current situation, which is that the Senate itself does not reflect the national population distribution in that, you know, Alberta has six Senate seats, and New Brunswick, with about one-fifth of Alberta's population, has 10 seats. Eligibility for appointment in the Senate is still based in part on property ownership, and once appointed, Senators just get to hang around there until 75. Whether we have this legislation or do not have this legislation, that's exactly what's going to happen.

Having had this legislation, we've actually, if anything, encouraged the continuation of the Senate. We've encouraged buy-in to what is a fundamentally antidemocratic institution.

You know, this was something that came up originally as a means to make a political point when there were substantive discussions around Senate reform a long, long time ago. There have been no meaningful discussions around Senate reform for, I would suggest, about a decade at least. This piece of legislation will simply give credence to what continues to be a dysfunctional system and one that is costly and one that has long since outlived its purpose. The bill has outlived the purpose, the process in Alberta has outlived the purpose, and frankly the Senate has outlived its purpose. For that reason, we cannot support the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 55 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report bills 51, 54, and 55 and report progress on 48.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 51, Bill 54, and Bill 55. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 48. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 46

Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to provide a brief summary of Bill 46, the Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act. This act makes it mandatory for health care facilities or emergency medical technicians who treat gunshot or stab wounds to disclose to police the injured person's name, type of injury, and location of treatment.

Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 46, the Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pride to stand up in support of this bill here tonight. It is one of those bills that really is a little bit contentious as it's never an easy balance when we infringe sometimes on some of those privileges that we've had here in Canada, I guess. Some of those that we have taken for granted are, for instance, when we tell our doctor something or when we tell emergency staff. But Bill 46, notwithstanding those reservations, tries to strike a balance in the situation where the general public could be in fear of someone who has perhaps shot a person or may be out at large or whatever the deal may be. It strikes a balance in that only a limited amount of privileged information is shared with the officer, and that officer can go about his business.

As mentioned in both second reading and Committee of the Whole stage, I asked the Minister of Justice and possibly the minister of health to monitor this for possibly whether it is interfering with health care treatment and whether there are problems in the bill going forward. Right now I think it does strike that balance on a fair basis going forward on what we'll continue to monitor in Alberta.

I thank you for allowing me to speak on the bill, and with that, we'll hear some other speakers.

10:10

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to this piece of legislation. Fulfilling my title as opposition member, of course, I think I'll have to get up and be the opposing voice on this one. I say that with some hesitance because I do appreciate that there are some worthwhile objectives that are being pursued in this bill, and I also understand the degree to which there is already a

situation where health care professionals are often required to report things by law which would otherwise violate patient-doctor privilege. For instance, child abuse is one example, but there are other examples. I appreciate that there is merit to that. In this case were the bill constructed a little bit differently, I might even be convinced to support this bill. Unfortunately, I'm not convinced that this bill has been constructed in quite the best way that it could have been.

Basically, the bill suggests that the health care professional must report any other information that may be required by the regulations. This reflects a common practice of this government to move everything out of legislation and into regulation. This is a significant thing because we don't know exactly what kind of additional information might have to be reported to the police about a particular person.

Of course, the thing of it is that we're often talking about victims here, so we are looking at victims and we're saying we must automatically contact the police here, we must provide them with this information, and we're also going to require health care professionals to provide other information about the victim to the police that we're not going to talk about in the Assembly. So that is a concern. This government, when it comes to anticrime legislation – because it's so popular to be anticrime, we sometimes take a great big huge mallet to hammer in the little tack, and we don't figure out whether there might be a slightly less blunt tool to get to the same objective, an objective which, I've stated before, has merit but one that has to be addressed carefully because we are balancing very important rights against each other.

It's also a concern, frankly, that this bill appears to have been brought into play without adequate consultation with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Paramedics, or the AMA, and we've heard them express concerns about this bill and the position that this would put them in. Again, I would be much more inclined to support this bill if I knew that it had gone through consultation with those organizations and it had their endorsement.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner has also expressed concerns about the bill and the degree to which it might interfere with the provision of emergency medical care and, again, wanting the government's piece of legislation to clearly state what information would be provided because we are talking about impinging on a fundamental right, the right to have the relationship between the doctor and the patient compromised for a larger public purpose.

When you're going to do that, you should stipulate very clearly how broadly that right will be compromised and in what circumstances and, specifically, how it will be compromised. To say, "Oh, we're going to compromise it depending on how we write the regulation at some point in the future that you're never going to know about," well, is just not responsible governance when you're balancing those two sets of rights. We just had a government member get up and talk about how much this government values protecting people's privacy, yet now what we're doing is moving into a situation like this, where we've not really thought out very clearly how to balance these competing and both worthwhile objectives.

So, finally, I do have a concern about what this law might do to the mentally ill and, particularly, those who may have attempted suicide. I appreciate that the legislation tries to deal with that with respect to stab wounds, but it does not deal with that with respect to gun wounds. Once again, that whole thing there – the mental illness, the attempted suicide, the treatment that came before and after that – potentially may be reported to the police at great length because, again, exactly what is reported to the police is not clearly limited in this piece of legislation.

So I appreciate the objectives, and I'm not opposed to the objectives. I just think that the tool in this case is not a very refined

one and that we could do better. Until such time as we do, we can't support this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was in on part of the development of this, unfortunately, because it flowed out of the health information review that was done in the early part of this decade, let me put it that way. I don't remember the exact date. Maybe 2003. At the time there was a presentation from several of the large urban police forces that they wanted a clause inserted into the Health Information Act. They felt that it was urgent that they be able to compel medical personnel to alert the police force and, actually, to allow the police force to sort of troll through the hospital wards looking for people. I really objected to that at the time because I felt it wasn't the job of health professionals to enable the police officers who, you know, hadn't hit their quota for the month to wander up and down the halls looking for people who would match outstanding warrants for particular problems.

It was put to us that, you know, there was urgency for this. I said: what urgency? They're not in hot pursuit. If they were, there's legislation to allow them to take certain actions. They're clearly not looking for children that are at risk, because there's legislation that would cover that. They're also not looking for seniors who are at risk, because, again, there was legislation that would cover that. The argument was: well, you know, we get these bad guys, and they end up in the hospital, and we need to be able to find out whether they've committed crimes, and there are other people, perhaps, who might be in need to track this down. And I said: well, then do what other jurisdictions have done and actually bring in a gunshot and stab wound act which would give clear direction as to what was expected of medical personnel because you are changing their relationship. Frankly, we don't train our medical personnel with a cop's checklist of what kind of information and observations they're supposed to be making about people. We train them to identify and triage the difficulty of a particular medical problem and to pursue treatment for that.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is correct. The bill did go partway towards what I had expected it to do but fails to give us the clarity that we were seeking. You know, if we're going to start crossing and blurring those lines between what we expect our professionals to do, you need to be addressing that through some sort of college or professional association, not doing it through some kind of legislation. I expect that clarity in there. If you are going to be messing around with people's personal information, particularly personal health information, you'd better be pretty clear about exactly what the parameters are. This bill has failed to accomplish that to the degree that I expected it to address this particular problem.

I can give some inkling to the previous speaker of what kind of information they'll be looking for because some of it was the information they were trying to get under the Health Information Act. They wanted to know the location of the individual, their current home address, their social insurance number, their health care card, their appearance, obviously their contact information, location information, but also a lot of details about the medical condition that the person was in, which I feel is inappropriate. If you're trying to chase down a bad guy for some reason, you know, you may well be able to present an argument to me about why you need their location information, but their medical information, I would argue, should not be part of that.

10:20

You know, it's so frustrating to me that this government, with all of the resources that it has, having been in power for as long as it's been, having control over everything it's got control over, still manages to give us half-assed bills. Sorry. I'm not supposed to use language like that, and I apologize for that.

It's not well done. It's disappointing, but you know what? It's also a cost factor. When you don't give clarity in legislation, you wind up with a big old mess, and big old messes cost money. It costs money for somebody to clean it up, or it costs money for someone to fix it. That's what bugs me. We have this government that proclaims that it's, you know, fiscally responsible, yet every time I look up, we've got another piece of legislation in front of us that either cannot explain how it is spending taxpayers' money, cannot explain what benefit it is expecting to get from foregone revenue, or just creates a big old mess that costs money for taxpayers

to clean up. That's why I get annoyed with you. You should be able to do better with the resources that you've got.

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?
Does the Member for Strathcona wish to close?

Mr. Quest: I'd just ask to call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having completed the business for this evening, I move that the House do now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:22 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 18, 2009

Issue 59a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 87 students and six teachers from Edith Rogers school from my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. The group is led by their teachers, Mr. David Hunt, Ms Candace Gordon, Mrs. Leigh Oswin, Ms Erin Johnson, Mr. Marek Ziomko, Ms Susan Smyth. They are seated in the members' gallery, and some of them are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to do today. I'm feeling very lucky, very special. The first introduction I would like to do is that of 16 visitors from NorQuest College, Capital Centre. I think they're in both galleries today. With them are their teachers or group leaders, Mr. Herb Waller and Mrs. Ruschell Moorhouse. I would ask them, if they are in the galleries, to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. There they are. Thank you so much.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very pleased and honoured to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special woman that I'm honouring today, and that is Barb Dacks. Barb is the owner-publisher of *Legacy* magazine. I'm doing a member's statement later to honour her. *Legacy* magazine was first published in 1996 and in fact was a finalist for Alberta magazine of the year in 2006. She's here with her husband today, Gurston, and I think Gurston is going to be introduced by someone else. Also joining her is her son Joel and her daughter-in-law, Lesley Dacks. With her as well is Mark Dutton, who has worked with Barb for *Legacy* magazine as the art director and designer. I would ask if they would all please rise and accept the welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of visitors from Lebanon as well as their local mission co-ordinator, who's an old friend: Mr. Fouad Makhzoumi, founder of the Makhzoumi Foundation and chairman of the National Dialogue Party; Mrs. May Makhzoumi, pharmacist by profession and chair of the Makhzoumi Foundation; Mr. Saba Zreick, vice-chair, National Dialogue Party, and general secretary of the Makhzoumi Foundation; Mrs. Huda Kaskas, director of the Makhzoumi Foundation; Mr.

Samer El Safah, director of the Makhzoumi Foundation; and Mr. Joe Hak, a good friend, as I said, a proud Albertan, mission co-ordinator, and the president of the World Lebanese Cultural Union.

Mr. Speaker, the Makhzoumis are ardent promoters of democracy and human rights in Lebanon. They are visiting Alberta today to celebrate the launch of the Makhzoumi Lebanese studies endowment fund at the U of A in the Faculty of Arts. The Makhzoumis generously contributed \$250,000 to the development of this new academic endowment in the hopes that it will eventually reach \$1 million through the joint effort of the Lebanese community in Alberta and the university. The proceeds of the endowment will be used for a variety of initiatives with the ultimate purpose of promoting an understanding of Lebanese culture and history and its contribution to world civilization.

I met with the delegation earlier this afternoon. Our guests have also met with the Premier and, I understand, will be meeting with the Speaker, the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, and the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology to discuss the positive political, cultural, and economic ties between Lebanon and Alberta. I would ask that our guests rise and please accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the Professional Arts Coalition of Edmonton. Today PACE hosted an Arts at the Assembly luncheon in the pedway for all MLAs to promote and celebrate ongoing support for the arts. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask each of them to rise as I introduce them: Daniel Cournoyer, president of PACE; Lorna Thomas, chair, Arts at the Assembly committee; Candace Makowichuk, PACE administrator; Kelly Jerrott, event co-ordinator, Arts at the Assembly; and committee members Heidi Bunting, Karen Brown Fournell, Will Cramer, and Alison Turner. They've done a fantastic job of trying to communicate with other MLAs on the importance of arts and culture and get more government support. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to see an old – or should I say former? – professor of mine, who is in the gallery today. His name is Gurston Dacks. When I look back over my many, many years as a student, there are only a handful of teachers who really stand out. One of them is Professor Dacks. He taught in the department of political science for many years at the U of A. He established the Canadian studies program. He's very interested in aboriginal issues and Alberta public policy. He also spent time as an administrator. Throughout his career I'm sure he has inspired many students in addition to me and has been a real academic leader in this province. I'd ask Gurston to stand and receive the reception of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Yes. We should start avoiding the use of the word "old." I'm getting rather sensitive.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Daniel Lessard. Daniel is a grade 11 student at Jasper Place high school. He's a constituent of Edmonton-McClung but studies in Edmonton-

Meadowlark. Daniel is a bright, inquisitive young man. He wants to be a police officer, and he wants to contribute to this society. He's interested in politics and how decisions are made, so he's here to job shadow not only myself but every member here. He's going to keep a close eye on us. Daniel, I hope you enjoy the day. I'd like all my colleagues to welcome my guest. I'd like Daniel to stand and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you today to all members Mr. Zsolt Zombor. Mr. Zombor is a teacher at Louis St. Laurent high school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. This year Mr. Zombor participated in a project with BP Canada called the A+ for Energy program. The program awards grants and scholarships to schools for teachers to implement innovative energy and energy conservation projects in their classrooms. I'm delighted to report that Mr. Zombor and his project were awarded \$10,000. The title of the project was Energy Efficient Tailings Pond Clean-up. I'm sure that in doing so, Mr. Zombor has made a great contribution both to his students and to our education system as a whole. I'd ask Mr. Zombor to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't see my guests in the members' gallery, but perhaps they're in the public gallery. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some of our councillors from the municipal district of Provost who are up here this week for the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties convention. They are Lenard Kjos, who is the deputy reeve; Jack Roworth, Thomas Schneider, and Barrie Tripp, who are all councillors for the MD. They are accompanied by Tyler Lawrason, who is the CAO for the MD, who used to be an executive assistant right here in this building and now is one of my great constituents. I'd ask them, if they're in the public gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Edmonton-Mill Woods Constituency Awards

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2008 provincial election campaign opened my eyes to the extraordinary people who live in my corner of the city. It was my second run at political life, and I met mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, students and young professionals, new Canadians and long-time citizens. They came from different backgrounds, but they shared three common qualities: a desire to become better, a love for their families, and a passion for their community.

I made a promise during the campaign that if I became the MLA, I would start an annual tradition of recognizing these tremendous community-minded individuals with awards and recognition. Thanks to a lot of hard work from supporters and groups in my constituency like the Friends of Edmonton Millwoods Multicultural Association that tradition has begun. On Saturday, Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of hosting the first annual Carl Benito awards of excellence. These awards recognized a mother, a father, a youth, and one particularly exceptional individual for improving the quality

of life for the people of Edmonton-Mill Woods through their home, work, community service, volunteer efforts, or a combination thereof. I'd like to mention the 2009 Edmonton-Mill Woods mother of the year, Mrs. Sofia Yaqub; father of the year, Mr. Buzz Baizley; youth of the year, Anuj Gupta; and citizen of the year, Elizabeth Barter.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe that our youth truly are the future of this province. This is why I decided to incorporate outstanding student awards as part of the annual awards of excellence. On Saturday outstanding student awards were handed out to a total of 177 students who have demonstrated academic excellence, outstanding educational achievement, and the will to pursue postsecondary education.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that he violated one of the principal rules of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Alberta Tourism Awards

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to congratulate the finalists and the winners of the 2009 Alberta tourism awards. The Altos were presented in Banff recently during Travel Alberta's annual conference.

The awards celebrate excellence in our \$5 billion tourism industry. From the unique Sweet 16 partnership in central Alberta, in which communities are working together to promote summer events, to establishing more environmentally friendly practices in our accommodations sector, the nominees represented the very best that Alberta has to offer our guests from around the world. They also demonstrate Alberta's tremendous creativity and can-do spirit. Just one of the many examples includes one award winner who attracted more than 3,500 visitors to an event with a budget of less than \$1,000.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all of our colleagues to join us in congratulating all associated with the Alto awards, including our Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and in thanking industry leaders for their exemplary work in building an even stronger tourism sector in Alberta in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Legacy Magazine

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the mid-90s eight magazines produced by the department of culture had their funding cut and ceased publication, but Barb Dacks saw an opportunity and a need. She felt strongly that there were stories to be told and emerging artists to be nurtured in celebrating built heritage, arts and culture, and multiculturalism.

To honour what we have received from the past and what new creations would be carried forward into the future, she named her publication *Legacy*. For 14 years Barb Dacks has produced a visually stunning magazine filled with stories, feature articles, photos, submissions from new and emerging artists and writers, reviews, and information of all the possibilities to see, hear, and experience Alberta arts, architecture, and culture.

To meet Barb is to meet a stylish, enthusiastic whirlwind of energy and ideas. She's fun, aware, and involved, and she is everywhere. She is also the first person to wax enthusiastic about her staff and collaborators at *Legacy*, and I must particularly

recognize long-time graphic god Mark Dutton, associate editors Eva Radford and Naomi Lewis, and writer Ron Chalmers. I think a special thank you is in order for her husband, Gurston, who has supported her in the magazine from the start. I also recognize the creative, imaginative people who inspired Barb. With them she shares that impulse to create and to share.

This is my thank you to you, Barb. With the most recent issue, winter 2009, Barb is ceasing publication of *Legacy* and moving on, moving on to plan a book or two and to welcome her first, not one but two, grandchildren, expected this February.

You have left us a great gift, a legacy indeed, which will still be available online. You have been a joy to watch and to get to know. Many, many, many thanks from me and, I'm sure, my colleagues in the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Canadian Patient Safety Week

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Canadian Patient Safety Week, which was recognized November 2 to November 6. Now in its fifth year, the goal of Canadian Patient Safety Week is to increase awareness of patient safety issues and share information about best practices in patient safety.

This year's theme was Ask, Listen, Talk. Each year Albertans experience an estimated 7,000 adverse events out of the millions of patient interactions they have with health care providers. Some of these events include medication and procedure errors while receiving care in our hospitals. Adverse events not only affect the patient's health but are an additional burden to the health system in terms of longer hospital stays, greater use of resources, and delay of care for others.

The Canadian Patient Safety Institute relies on the efforts of thousands of health care professionals and their professional colleges as well as private and public health care organizations and health facility operators to help spread the message that good health care starts with good communication.

Patients have the right to receive clear information about the care they are receiving. Earlier this year the Health Quality Council of Alberta released a useful guide to help Albertans get the most out of their health care experience, and this is called *It's Ok to Ask*. The guide encourages patients to be open and honest with their health care provider and ask questions when they don't understand their health condition and treatment options. This practical guide can be found on the council's website at www.hqca.ca.

Canadian Patient Safety Week reminds us that we all have a responsibility in patient care. To mark this important week, I encourage everyone to take an active role in advocating for our health and the health of our loved ones. By taking time to ask, listen, and talk, we can do our part to ensure that our health care system provides the best in safe and effective care possible.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all the good, hard-working front-line staff for all that they do to make this system what it is today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Alberta Rhodiola Rosea Growers Organization

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 30 I was joined by the hon. the Premier and the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development; Blaine Calkins, the MP for Wetaskiwin;

His Worship the mayor of Thorsby, Mr. Allen Gee; and several other industry representatives. We were in Thorsby in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar to celebrate the opening of the Alberta Rhodiola Rosea Growers Organization facility, which is the first of its kind.

The opening of this impressive 6,000-square-foot primary processing facility could not have come at a better time to give our economy and agriculture a much-needed boost. Job creations from plants like the one in Thorsby help keep rural Albertans in their communities, and this facility will have an incredible impact on Thorsby and the surrounding area.

Rhodiola rosea, which is also known as roseroot or golden root, is a herbal remedy that helps the body to adapt to stress by strengthening the immune, nervous, and glandular systems. This plant is well suited to grow in Alberta as it can only germinate when it is very cold. There is a high demand for this crop, and Alberta production has already been sold through 2012 to German and Alberta natural supplement firms. The plant takes about four to five years until it is ready to harvest, but it is hoped that through continued research into roseroot we will produce a three-year growing cycle.

I want to thank the hon. the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for their support of rural Alberta and projects that will stimulate economic development, especially in the agriculture sector, and the village of Thorsby for all of their work on this project. I look forward to seeing the progress of this facility and the economic benefits that Thorsby will see in the years to come. I also look forward to hearing more about the uses of the Rhodiola rosea plant, and I am confident that ARRG will continue in their creation and development of innovative technologies from this plant in years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Facility Administrative Cost Savings

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services created a \$1.3 billion deficit for themselves and yesterday announced how they were going to trim their budgets this year, supposedly without affecting patient care. Almost half the savings, \$252 million, will be through cuts to facilities management. Cuts to facilities management. To the Premier: will the Premier explain what the facility management cuts actually are?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Health Services yesterday announced a roughly \$650 million reduction in the administration, nonclinical services like finance, human resources, information technology, et cetera. This is part of an ongoing process to trim down the administrative expenses, especially following the number of regions we had consolidated into one. This is part of their longer term goal of reducing not only their operating deficit but to ensure that we do sustain our health care system and put every available dollar into front-line services.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Does cutting facilities management mean actually reducing hours or services, eliminating facility maintenance perhaps indefinitely? Are those included in facility management cuts?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the details in front of me of the announcement yesterday, but clearly if the hon. leader will go on the website, I saw where it had the entire list of where the dollars were coming from. That information is public information.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, how can this government argue that their cuts to health care aren't affecting patient care when they've eliminated 290 general acute beds from Edmonton and Calgary and another 246 beds planned for Alberta Hospital Edmonton? How is this not affecting patient care?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader is only telling half the story. The other half of the story relative to the beds in Edmonton and Calgary is that 800 spaces are being created in these two centres so that we can ensure that the patient is being cared for in the right environment, and the member knows this. We have far too many patients in acute-care facilities who can be better cared for in alternate facilities.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Lobbying Government

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The list of sponsors for the Progressive Conservative Association convention this month makes for intriguing reading. I've got a copy of it here, actually. Among the sponsors are nonprofit agricultural organizations established by government legislation, and they receive taxpayer dollars through government. My questions are to the Premier. Is there a law in Alberta prohibiting nonprofit organizations established under government statute from receiving donations to political parties – from giving donations to political parties?

Mr. Stelmach: I don't know if they're receiving – I think that was the question, whether they're receiving political donations. I don't think they do. But, you know, in the spirit of transparency and openness the Leader of the Opposition has the full list. Would he be able to tell this House how many of those companies on that list have actually given money to the Liberal Party?

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's interesting that the Premier is unwilling to say whether or not this is appropriate. I can tell you that Albertans do not think it's appropriate for public funds to be handed to nonprofit organizations and used to sponsor a political party. Why does this Premier, why does this government not clearly indicate that this is not appropriate? Are you willing to stand and say so?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what organizations he's referring to, but like I said, you know, they brought this up last week, and they're bringing it up again. I said, you know: openness. They brought in I think it was AltaLink yesterday in terms of what they contributed to the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta. Tell us what the same company contributed to the Liberals. Look, everybody is here. It's open, transparent.

Dr. Swann: To the Premier: what action are you prepared to take to stop this kind of sponsorship from happening in Alberta? This offends Albertans.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, first of all, let's identify what the hon. leader is talking about. He has a pamphlet that he got from the convention. I don't know what groups he's referring to. Anyway, if there is something in legislation that prevents anyone from contributing to any political party, then let's identify it. If it's groups that can legitimately contribute in some small part or a big part to any political party being part of the democratic purpose, then it's fine, but if you're breaking the law, then let's identify the groups.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a recognized fact by all but the most naive that special-interest groups and money can and do have influence on political decisions. It is also recognized by all but the most naive that rules and regulations are needed to protect the public interest from the power and access that money and special-interest groups have. That's why we supported the Lobbyists Act. To the Minister of Justice. AltaLink is in one business and one business only, the building of transmission lines. Now, can the Minister of Justice explain how the purchased sponsorship by AltaLink of a political party's convention, that has access to cabinet ministers, is not an act of lobbying?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, this House did unanimously, I believe, support the lobbyist registry act. A part of that act is that for people who feel that they're in a position where they need to be registered, they should register. I'd turn the question back to people that have to make that decision, and that's not us.

Mr. Hehr: But I guess Albertans see this as a clear case of lobbying, so I was just wondering. If they haven't already registered and if they don't already do so, will you explain to Albertans right now why the Lobbyists Act isn't covering these types of situations?

Ms Redford: Mr. Speaker, there's a law in place. There's a set of rules. The reason we put those rules in place is to ensure that there is transparency. We also have the opportunity for public comment and discussion. There is an act in place. There are people responsible, who will take the right decisions that they need to take under that act, and I presume that they will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there at least appears to be some confusion as to whether a paid sponsorship of a political party's convention by AltaLink, a company in the business of building transmission lines, could be perceived as unregistered lobbying, will the minister do the right thing and investigate this situation or maybe, better yet, appoint a special prosecutor to investigate this?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think there's someone who's confused here, and I wouldn't want to suggest who that might be. There is a Lobbyists Act in place. There is an Ethics Commissioner, who is responsible for that act. It sets out what everyone's obligations are, and I expect that people will observe the act. It's the law of Alberta, and appropriate actions will be taken and steps followed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Bitumen Exports

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Premier has proclaimed that change is coming. One of the changes this Premier promised a long time ago now was to reduce the flow of unprocessed bitumen to the United States. The opposite has occurred, and thousands of Alberta jobs have gone south. Will the Premier please tell Albertans whether or not the change he is now promising includes keeping his original promise to reduce exports of bitumen to U.S. refineries?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the policy that we have in place in terms of adding as much value as we can to forestry, of course to agriculture products, and to bitumen stays in place. We now presently have a request for proposal that's out there, that will be replied to, I believe, by the end of January or mid-January. It's for the first 100,000 barrels. We'll see the results of that RFP, and we'll continue to build on that process.

But, you know, this thing about thousands of jobs going south: I wonder where they went. The Americans just shed over 20 million jobs, the highest unemployment ever, well, since the Depression at least, so let's just stick to the facts. We're doing what we can to increase value-added in the province, but let's not misrepresent the facts.

Mr. Mason: Well, misrepresenting the facts, Mr. Speaker, is an interesting concept because this Premier knows that there are tens of thousands of current jobs at refineries and upgraders in the United States that are being built in anticipation of pipelines that are now under construction to take Alberta unprocessed bitumen to the United States. So the Premier needs to be very careful when he accuses other people of misrepresenting the facts.

The new oil sands projects that have been rekindled – Firebag, Kearn oil, and Jackfish Lake – are all bitumen export only, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier admit that nothing has changed when it comes to breaking commitments or failing to protect Alberta jobs? There is no change. It's business as usual.

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are focused, as I said, on adding more value. Part of adding value is to look at new markets. This government is supporting a pipeline to the west coast as well. We can't tie ourselves just to one market, that being the United States. We need other markets, emerging markets in China, in India. That's where we have to get to. So we have a lot of work ahead of ourselves, and we're working very hard with the neighbouring provinces and the federal government to bring that plan into place.

Mr. Mason: More pipelines to export unprocessed bitumen, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what we don't need.

This Premier sits back while jobs go south and down the pipeline and welfare rolls and food bank use in Alberta soar. Thousands of Albertans face unemployment while U.S. workers take their jobs. It's unacceptable, even more so because the Premier got elected on a promise to stop this. If Albertans want change, Mr. Speaker, they will have to look past this PC government.

Mr. Stelmach: I don't know if there was a question. All I know is that if he was that concerned about the pipelines being built – if you don't have a pipeline, how can you send synthetic crude anywhere? So he's kind of up in the air there. If the hon. member is that concerned, you know . . . [interjections] I sat quietly when he asked a question. I hope he does the same when I'm giving him an answer even though he didn't have a question.

If he is that concerned, why was it, then, that a former staff member of that party was hanging from the roof of the Shaw Conference Centre on behalf of Greenpeace and saying that we should shut everything down in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Provincial Spending

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Calgary-Glenmore along with thousands of Albertans across this province want to send the Premier a message: the projected \$8 billion deficit is unacceptable and hurting Albertans. The Premier has stated there will be no new taxes and he'll make cuts to his budget while at the same time proposing new and unnecessary pieces of legislation estimated to cost Albertans billions more. The Premier cannot expect Albertans to accept major deficit spending when he won't even cut his own wage. When will the Premier be honest with Albertans, lead by example, and give back all of his 30 per cent pay raise, not just a token 15 per cent of the raise?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, percentages. I was very clear in the news release on showing leadership in terms of trimming spending of government. All I have influence on, of course, is my salary and that of cabinet. All cabinet ministers took a reduction of over \$6,000, and my reduction was 12,000 and some-odd dollars a year.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the raise was unwarranted and undeserved, and the gap continues to widen.

The Premier has jeopardized our health care through the centralization of power and decision-making via the superboard and has further insulted Albertans by handing out exorbitant wage contracts to unelected government appointees. Will the Premier do the right thing and listen to Albertans and renegotiate these exorbitant wages?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure who he's referring to, so he'll have to clarify and be very specific. There are quasi-judicial authorities in the province of Alberta – ERCB, AUC, AESO, AFSC, a whole number of them – that do work on behalf of the province of Alberta. They are quasi-judicial in authority, making decisions on applications, whether it be for development or environment. But, you know, if he can be more specific.

Mr. Hinman: Therein lies the problem. He has no realization. The wages have been exorbitant, Albertans have been insulted with the golden handshakes. He knows exactly who he's made these contracts with.

The Premier has stated that he'll make \$470 million in cuts to this year's budget while proposing billions of dollars of new spending on two lines of unneeded infrastructure. Will the Premier be honest with Albertans and admit that additional deficit spending is additional taxes on Alberta's families, workers, and children?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think he's referring to a bill that's before this House, and that is Bill 50. Of course, I can't comment on it because it's before the House.

With respect to spending on infrastructure, I can tell you that we are going to continue to build the infrastructure that's absolutely necessary in this province. We need more highways. We need more roads. We need more schools. We need more seniors' facilities to ensure that we can move the seniors from acute-care hospitals into

accommodations at least into those communities that they helped build. So we will continue to invest public dollars in infrastructure. It's keeping people employed, and we also need the infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Support for the Horse-racing Industry

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the closure of Stampede Park and the indefinite postponement of the Balzac track, we are now down to one class A horse-racing track, located at Northlands in Edmonton. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. What is the justification for allocating the same amount of money to Horse Racing Alberta when it has one-third as much racing activity as before?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty simple. We entered into a 10-year agreement with Horse Racing Alberta. It's a legal contract, and we believe in honouring our obligations.

Ms Blakeman: So the minister is telling us that even if there is no horse racing going on, because I'm told that horse races are costing Edmonton Northlands money, and they would like to get out of that particular business, they will continue to put money into Horse Racing Alberta when there are no horse races going on in Alberta?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, everybody in this Legislature should know that the government is undergoing the budget process right now. We have said, our Premier has said that all things that we have in this government are on the table. We are taking a look at those in terms of spending, so we will take a look at that.

Ms Blakeman: Well, let me make a suggestion. How about if the minister pulls the plug and reallocates this money to some sectors that are growing, unlike horse racing, sectors like arts, culture, cultural industries, sport, or recreation?

Mr. Blackett: I should tell the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, the people from PACE have already left here.

The hon. member knows full well that the money that comes through Horse Racing Alberta is derived out of slot revenue that is located at the racetracks. It's a flow through where 15 per cent of the net proceeds are allocated to the track operators, and 51 and two-thirds per cent of the net proceeds are returned to the horse-racing industry, and they're used for breeding programs, marketing, and purse enhancement.

Right now, as I said before, Mr. Speaker, we are re-evaluating. If she has any further questions, she may want to direct them to the Solicitor General.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Submetering for Energy Use

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Years ago large apartments across the province were built with no unit utility meters. You know, at the time maybe it was the right decision, but with utility costs on the rise, in many of these older apartments the landlords are using heat submeters to try to capture the cost of the electricity, of the heat, of the hot water. But we have a little bit of a problem on the units that have hot-water heat. They've used these submeters, and the submetering isn't accurate. There are some real

concerns. I've had problems. The Minister of Service Alberta has had some problems. I wonder if the minister can tell me what she has done to make sure that these sometimes vulnerable Albertans are protected.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, today I did announce a regulation with respect to heat submetering in that landlords can no longer use uncertified heat submeters to bill tenants. I firmly believe that renters, especially those with lower fixed incomes, deserve to be billed fairly and to have clear and understandable information on what they're paying for, and that's what this regulation is doing. Having this regulation in place will assist renters, and they'll be able to know full well what they're paying for with respect to their utility costs.

2:10

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, again to the same minister – and thank you for that regulation – I'd like to know who you consulted with for that regulation and how this regulation will limit how much landlords can bill the existing tenants through a different process.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This consultation that we did was with the landlords, the tenants, the Alberta Utilities Commission, Measurement Canada, and with RTAC, the Alberta Residential Tenancy Advisory Committee. This committee gave excellent advice. The regulation today only allows heat submeters to be used to bill tenants, and there are not any heat submeters certified by Measurement Canada at this time. In the event a heat submeter does become certified by Measurement Canada, we will address this regulation again, but in the meantime this regulation takes effect.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I thank the minister for protecting Albertans and sometimes vulnerable Albertans. But those same buildings did not have electricity or gas metering as well, and I understand the submetering was installed to protect the rising costs of utilities in those buildings. What's the minister doing to make sure that we're protected from submetering issues with natural gas and electricity?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Measurement Canada regulates electricity and natural gas meters, and there are no issues with those. It's the heat submeters that we're looking at, and they've been in place in Alberta since about 2007. This is a principle about tenants actually paying for the energy they're using, and renters deserve to have the confidence to know that they are paying for the right amount of energy. That's exactly what this regulation is doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

PDD Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring budget the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports promised \$24 million to PDD service providers for recruitment and retention of staff. That promise to underpaid PDD staff and to those who cannot live in

dignity without their support has been broken. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: will the minister admit that by cutting \$10 million of their funding, front-line PDD staff will fall further behind government workers who do the same job?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, PDD and other vulnerable citizens in Alberta are very important to this government. In fact, they're a priority. We did have a \$24 million line item for PDD funding. The economic situation has changed. I wanted to make sure that our PDD front-line staff received some funding, so we were able to extend \$14.4 million for them. In the last four years we've extended \$74 million altogether for recruitment and retention of our staff in PDD.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The remaining retention funding can only be used for a one-time bonus. Does the minister believe that a one-time bonus will actually keep staff rather than overdue permanent wage increases?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I visited with lots of groups in PDD, and I've seen the great work that our front-line staff do. It's very important to me that we can keep them. I felt that this was the best way to extend money that we were able to extend from our budget to show them our appreciation. It was a one-time bonus that I hope at this time of the year they could appreciate. Once again, it's the economic situation that has created this situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That's sort of akin to a Klein buck that was spent instantly.

The eligibility requirements for PDD have changed, which will decrease the number of new PDD recipients. How much money does the minister expect to save in the future from both the funding cuts and by changing the eligibility?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we have put the eligibility requirements into regulation, but they're the same requirements that we were using in policy all the way along, so I don't expect that there will be a decrease of clients. We'll be able to ensure that through the eligibility requirements we have a fair assessment policy for all of our clients throughout Alberta. Those who need help most will receive help most, and we'll keep this program sustainable.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Municipal Franchise Fees

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to address the issue of local access fees. These local access fees are costing Albertans many hundreds of dollars, and many of my constituents feel that this is simply a hidden tax on their utility bill. I tend to agree. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: would you please tell me what's up with these fees?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting and clever question. I do want to say that I'm going to attempt to answer it. I want to say, first of all, that transparency is very important to consumers and for them to understand their utility bills, but local

access fees are charged by municipalities and passed on directly to consumers. These fees vary in the province. The city of Medicine Hat doesn't charge a fee. The city of Edmonton has a mid-low fee at \$3.70 a month, average. The city of Calgary, in answering the question, is in the highest range at \$12.85. This fee goes directly to the municipality, and it is up to the municipality to justify the fee for their ratepayers and explain its use.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite happy that the minister mentioned Calgary. But that aside, on this issue the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in 2007 indicated that "the City of Calgary is charging itself to use City land, but then passing the charge along to citizens." A significant portion of this franchise fee revenue comes from Enmax. To the same minister: why is this allowed?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act does allow municipalities to levy fees related to the use of municipal land. It's up to the municipalities if they determine that they need to or should do this. In the case of municipalities that own their own utility company, it is a transfer of funds. I guess some municipalities such as Calgary charge this as a percentage of the whole bill plus a fee based on consumption. This is a local decision.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. In light of the concerns about local franchise fees and the previous minister's comments will this minister commit to an investigation of these fees to help reduce electricity fees for the average Albertan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Service Alberta would be very happy to work with Municipal Affairs on this issue of local franchise fees. It is so important for consumers to have clear and understandable information on their bills, and we know that there are a lot of questions out there. The Utilities Consumer Advocate gets calls on a number of these and other issues, and this is something that consumers need to do. Consumers always need to ask questions when they look at the bills, and that's what the UCA is here for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Postsecondary Education Costs

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Providing affordable education leads to diversification within the economy and will soften the blows of the boom-and-bust cycles that plague our province. Sadly, this government is again failing to recognize the widespread implications of its short-sighted and ill-conceived budgeting process. It is shameful that in a province with such a wealth of resources we have such a dismal postsecondary participation rate. The rate will only get worse as the government allows the cost of education to continue to rise. How can the minister be allowing postsecondary education to become even less accessible to many Albertans who will no longer be able to afford the higher tuition rates? Where is the Alberta advantage?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure what the hon. member is talking about. Our CPI cap is in place. This year I think it's running at about 1.5 per cent as the maximum that tuition rates across the board would be able to rise. In fact, over the last six years our postsecondaries have received an increase in their base operating grant of well over 40 per cent. That is second to none in any jurisdiction in Canada and, I would add, the United States.

Mr. Chase: That's cold comfort for this year and the next two years, where zero per cent is projected.

Tuition hikes will ultimately lead to a decline in our already bottom level postsecondary attendance rate. Does the minister not understand that by further limiting the number of people who can pursue advanced education, he is greatly impacting the ability of our economy to forge forward with trained individuals? Education equals economy.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the comments that the hon. member made were true, I would agree with him, but they're not true. The tuition rates that we have in terms of the CPI cap have been set. The CPI cap is still there and I would suggest is a very warm comfort when you look at other jurisdictions that are experiencing 20 per cent cuts to their faculties and staff. The University of California, Berkeley, I think is on their second round. Across Canada postsecondaries are experiencing a great deal of difficulty. In fact, I know of two provinces who have removed the freeze on tuition increases. That's not happening in this province.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister of advanced education realizes that enrolment in other postsecondary institutions in other provinces is as much as double our 17 per cent.

Given that many students in Alberta already have to rely on food banks and due to an ever-declining standard of living are forced to choose between education and eating, how will the minister determine which punitive proposals for tuition hikes will be accepted?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've not received any proposals at this point in time, so it's very difficult for me to answer a hypothetical question. The hon. member likes to throw a lot of rhetoric out there, he likes to do a lot of that sort of grandstanding, but at this point in time I've received no proposals for those types of increases. I would add that we have a fabulous working relationship with the students and the institutions of Campus Alberta, one that this hon. member might want to avail himself of.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This set of questions may seem a bit familiar, but since we didn't get a clear answer on the last round, I'll go at it again. No matter what terminology the minister of advanced education uses, this government is inviting proposals from universities to allow students to be asked to pay more for their education. That's the bottom line. Now, a better educated population will diversify our economy and should be encouraged, not squelched. Why would the minister consider adding to the burden of students rather than investing in them so that our province can actually recover from this recession?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government and this Premier have invested heavily in our postsecondary system over the last several years. In fact, I would say that we lead the nation in terms of the support that we provide not only to our postsecondary institutions but also to our students. We have the most generous scholarship and student finance package in the country. We have the best postsecondary institutions in the country. We have a new framework for our postsecondaries that allows for students to move as freely as possible within the system of Campus Alberta.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we even announced, hosted by yourself, the Athabasca University legislative drafting proposal that goes global. We have a world-recognized postsecondary system that is the best for students, taxpayers, and society.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, a typical dentistry student already pays more than \$40,000 a year for tuition and supplies, and that's before living expenses. Ordinary Albertans pay taxes that support these programs, but this government's plan will make sure that their kids will never be able to afford to enrol in them. Why is this minister even considering proposals that would make entrance into the professions possible only for children of the wealthy?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, our student financial assistance programs are designed exactly for that type of a situation: to help all students in the province of Alberta achieve their dreams. Having said that, I must also point out, again, that I've received no proposal on dentistry, on welding, on anything that the hon. member is talking about, so it's a hypothetical situation at this point in time.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has invited just those kinds of proposals.

Now, the government's new marketing slogan, Freedom to Create, Spirit to Achieve, needs a caveat: bring lots of cash. Mr. Speaker, making tuition fees for professional programs even more inaccessible for all but the rich is neither fair nor equitable. Instead, it's elitist, and it will limit opportunities. To the same minister: why won't you admit that in the midst of a recession creating further barriers to higher education simply makes no economic sense?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I believe that if you were to canvass the postsecondary institutions in our province today, you would hear from them that they have the most supportive government of the provinces of Canada. You would find that the students have had the most access to their minister that they've had in any other jurisdiction of this country. You would find that they believe that they have the best postsecondary system in North America. It's unfortunate that this hon. member doesn't believe so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Pharmaceutical Strategy

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of weeks ago the Minister of Health and Wellness announced the second phase of Alberta's pharmaceutical strategy. I'm more concerned and interested in the plan to increase bulk buying of pharmaceutical drugs; however, in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore there are still constituents who are voicing some concern that the new plan will only help the companies who develop and sell pharmaceutical products. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how will this plan ensure that patients will see a reduction in the cost of their prescription drugs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is correct. Earlier this summer we did bring forward the second phase of a pharmaceutical strategy, and it dealt primarily with the price of generic drugs. Immediately prices for new generic drugs are being reduced from 75 per cent of brand name price to 45 per cent. Starting next April the existing generic prices will be reduced to somewhere in that same range.

Now, with respect to brand name drugs the prices are set internationally. We have the ability to negotiate product listing agreements with manufacturers, and sometimes there are volume rebates. We are going to work hard at doing that on behalf of customers in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's my understanding that Alberta has agreements with the federal government regarding patents and licensing. How will this new strategy impact our co-operation with the federal government?

Mr. Liepert: Well, as I mentioned, the federal government is responsible for monitoring the internationally set drug prices. I think what's more important in our relationship with the federal government – and we've been pushing for this as provincial ministers for some time now – is to have a national pharmaceutical strategy, not to be confused with the NDP's pharmanplan, that would deal with such things as the high cost of drugs for situations where there are special cases. Despite the fact that the federal government hasn't moved on that, Alberta has. We're proud to be one of the few provinces that have done that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the same minister. Everyone understands that drug prices increase each year. If there are no formal discussions with the federal government, then what has the government done to address concerns regarding the lack of co-ordination amongst the provinces?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member is correct that setting of pharmaceutical policy is a provincial responsibility. That being said, we have had discussions with our western counterparts, especially B.C. and Saskatchewan because of the like-minded thinking governments of the three provinces, to look at how we can better co-ordinate our pharmaceutical strategies. One of the things that has happened, as an example, is that Alberta Health Services in conjunction with the regional health authorities in British Columbia have worked out an arrangement for bulk purchasing of drugs for within their systems. I think that ultimately will be good for the taxpayers of Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization Costs

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Fighting the H1N1 pandemic is costing money, which, as long as it's properly spent, is certainly well worth it. The cost of things like vaccines and clinics and staffing, hospitalization, public education are over and above the normal

expenses of a health care system. It's reported that these costs could hit a hundred million dollars. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister actually tell us what the costs of fighting the H1N1 pandemic are expected to be? Are they in the range of the hundred million dollars that has been reported?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, earlier on this summer when we were anticipating the vaccine program, I did say that the cost could be as high as a hundred million dollars. Now, I think it's fair to say at this stage that we've revised those numbers. We don't have anything concrete yet. As an example, initially it was thought that the majority of people would have to have two doses of vaccine. That's been revised to one dose pretty much across the board. Obviously, there are significant cost savings there. All I can say is that we will ensure that we have a full costing of the program, and it will be significant.

Dr. Taft: I appreciate the answer. Given that Alberta Health Services is already facing a huge deficit, it would be unfair if the one-time pandemic costs were added to that deficit. That would, I think, simply fuel further cuts to the health budget, cuts that would be unjustified. To the same minister: can he tell us if the pandemic costs will be added to the already \$1.3 billion deficit of Alberta Health Services?

2:30

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, as we move through the winter season, we'll have a better sense of the exact cost. It would be my intention to go to Treasury Board. That is my intention. I can't promise what Treasury Board is going to say or do, but it would be my intention to go to Treasury Board because I think this particular pandemic is an unusual expense. I look at it in the same way as how we fund forest fires. Those are the things that are not expected, not budgeted for. That would be the plan but a little further down the road.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Well, let me help the minister with his pitch. My question, then, I guess, will go to the President of the Treasury Board. The pandemic does seem to be in the category of an actual disaster like a bad forest fire season or a tornado or a flood, and these costs are covered normally through extraordinary expenses through the sustainability fund or some special allocation. To the President of the Treasury Board: will this government ensure that the costs of the pandemic are not drained from the health care system but are covered as an extraordinary, one-time event in the same manner as any other natural disaster?

Mr. Snelgrove: I want to thank the hon. member for the question because it is a serious question, and it's something that we need to develop a policy around as we go forward. I would hope that it's the last time that something like this would happen, but it's probably not going to be. We had discussions with the minister of health over a month ago, six weeks ago, about the importance of keeping track of all of the effects of this, even to include hospitalization. The benefit of that is that it will help us track our system, the costs and the most effective use of the resources around it. I take the hon. member's question as good intentioned, and we will do what we can to work with the minister of health and address the exact issue he has talked about.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Didsbury Hospital Helipad Closure

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again it has been announced by Alberta Health Services that they've closed the helipad at Didsbury hospital, and once again the fingers of blame are being pointed at Transport Canada, but once again Transport Canada is hesitating to accept any responsibility in this matter. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister clarify who is ultimately responsible for the closure of this helipad at Didsbury?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member and I have had several conversations over the summer, and the one thing we have concluded is that they're appropriately named. They're a helipad. We've had a summer where it has been – I won't go there. We've had, I think, a communication issue. There have been issues with Transport Canada and Alberta Health Services, and I guess that at the end of the day, with respect to the most recent decision, Transport Canada and Alberta Health Services have jointly agreed that this particular helipad will be closed. Alberta Health Services has promised to provide Transport Canada with a remediation plan, and that's in the works right now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since there have been no changes with this helipad since it was originally opened, why is it being now closed? What has changed?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's one of the issues. My understanding is that this particular helipad is in an unapproved, developed area, and that's what was giving Transport Canada concern. We have several others in the area. I know there's one in the Member for Rocky Mountain House constituency; in that particular case it's a different issue. As I say, Alberta Health Services has undertaken to do a remediation plan, and we'll work with Transport Canada in an attempt to get these facilities operational, and we'll wait for those plans to come forward.

Mr. Marz: Could the minister detail the process of getting this helipad reopened, and when will that happen?

Mr. Liepert: Well, what has to happen through this process is to sit down and take a look and see what the cost is to have this particular helipad and some of the others operational. In some of these situations, Mr. Speaker, other things have to be taken into account: how far away from the health facility is the airport, or are there other alternatives that could be used, and is it justified to spend the money to ensure that these are upgraded to meet Transport Canada regulations? That's exactly the work that's going on now. I believe that the commitment by Alberta Health Services was: before the end of the year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Executive Salaries and Travel Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the acting Premier: what is the justification for the \$2 million increase in the total salary and wages for senior executives in the Premier's office over the last six years?

Mr. Snelgrove: I would guess that's what their salaries added up to at the end of the five or six years. It's pretty simple.

Mr. MacDonald: That cavalier attitude is one of the reasons why we have such a huge deficit.

Again to the acting Premier: what is the justification for the \$60 million increase in travel and communications expenses by this government as reported in the government of Alberta's consolidated financial statements?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we in Alberta are sitting on one of the most important energy developments in the world, and it's got to be done right. The people around the world that are looking to us for secure energy supplies, amongst other things the stuff we do in our universities, the stuff we're doing in health care research – we've got a great story here in Alberta, and we're committed to spreading it around the world. They talk about wanting to grow the economy, but we can't talk to people. They talk about getting development or diversifying our economic pie, but we should stay home in a dark little cave and not learn anything. The responsibility of this government is to get our message to the world and to Albertans about what we've got and where we're going.

Mr. MacDonald: I could say something about the minister's cave, but I won't.

Would the President of the Treasury Board commit to scaling back the \$2 million increase in salaries in the Premier's office and the \$60 million increase in travel and communications budgets before you slash public services in this province?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think that if you were to ask anyone in these rows here and there, I'm an equal opportunity axer. The Premier's office has been asked to live up to the same commitments that every other department has had. The Premier has made it very clear to us that our priorities as a government are going to be health and education. We're going to continue to build the infrastructure Albertans need to grow the economic pie. From that point everything is on the table; everything is being looked at. It's a process that started three years ago next month when this gentleman became Premier, and it's one we're committed to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Provincial Spending (continued)

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's program spending over the past decade or so has become somewhat unsustainable. Program spending has increased by more than 159 per cent since 1997. During that same period our inflation and population growth rates have increased by only 72 per cent. In other words, our program spending increases have been more than double our inflation and population growth rates. To the President of the Treasury Board: is our government committed to capping increases in program spending to the rate of inflation plus population growth?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, what I guess I would say I've learned in my past business and in government is that we learn from the past here; we don't live in it. We've taken a new approach, like I said, starting three years ago, understanding not what can we spend but what we need to spend on these very important issues that face Alberta. It's also needed to be understood that the growth that happened in the last 10 years was primarily on health, education, and advanced education. If the hon. member wants to tell us what 2,000 or 3,000 nurses we shouldn't have hired, what 3,000 or 4,000 teachers we shouldn't have hired, what schools shouldn't have been

built, and what roads shouldn't have been built so we can have an extra \$40 billion or \$50 billion in the bank, then I'm open to that. The money was well spent, well invested in Alberta.

Mr. Anderson: We can be responsible with our spending and still build the infrastructure that we need, Mr. Speaker.

Multiple studies examining U.S. states clearly show that spending limitation laws tied to inflation plus population growth have been effective where implemented. Unlegislated policies to the same effect, however, have had little impact on actually controlling spending. To the same minister: will our government be open to examining the option of legislating a cap on government program spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend a conference in Kansas City this summer with the states. Many of them are committed to different kinds of taxation limitations, spending restrictions, mostly taxing. I don't think anyone in this House wants to get in a position where our hands are tied to make the appropriate decisions for Albertans.

California is a perfect example of where people have been afraid to tackle the decisions head-on: so we'll put it out to a referendum; we don't want to make the tough decision, so we'll just ask them, and then we'll have to live with it while the thing goes down the drain.

We've made responsible decisions here in the past three years. We're going forward. This year we used the number of population plus inflation, and we will spend what we need to, not necessarily what we're able to or what some other people think we should.

2:40

Mr. Anderson: California, actually, does not have a spending limitation law, which is one of the reasons why they are in so much trouble right now.

The chambers of commerce, the Canadian Bankers Association, the Fraser Institute, the Taxpayers Federation, CFIB, and many others have extensively studied and recommended capping government spending increases to the rate of inflation plus population growth. The Premier has also publicly endorsed this policy. To the minister: with such widespread agreement for this principle, why would our government only make this a policy rather than enshrining it in legislation as a cornerstone of a long-term fiscal framework?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I can't be sure, but of the groups he mentioned, not one of them delivers health care in this province, and not one of them delivers the education in this province. It's very difficult to go to Albertans and say: "Guess what? Your kid needs to wait" – and he's got a class size of 63 – "but we've got \$35 billion more in the bank." The people of Alberta have the opportunity on a regular basis to vote for a government. They give that government in this province a four-year mandate to do what they think is right with their resources. Albertans in the past have supported overwhelmingly the direction this government has taken.

Have we made strides to try and limit our program spending? Absolutely, but we're going to do it responsibly. We have been asked conclusively from across: don't do what we did in the '90s; across-the-board cuts don't work. Thoughtful allocation is far better than having to deal with unintended consequences. We've been given direction by the Premier. All cabinet is buying into it. It's on a go-forward, not a look backwards, and I'm looking forward to the next five or six years of Alberta's future.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

We will go back to the Routine in just a few seconds from now. We'll continue with the last member in Members' Statements in about 15 seconds.

Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to members of the Assembly. I'm honoured to rise and introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a very special guest who is seated in the public gallery today. Raju Tuladhar is a professional tapestry artist who lives in Kathmandu, Nepal, which is a city of 1.2 million and the capital of one of the poorest countries in the world. Raju studied from the age of 12 at Kala Guthi, Kathmandu Style and Design Institute. His creations are now exhibited and sold in North America as well as in Nepal. He's visited Canada twice so far, in 2007 and again this year. Raju returns to Nepal this Saturday after spending six months in Alberta creating and exhibiting his incredible tapestries and spending time with his many Canadian mums. I would ask all members of the Assembly to please join me in welcoming Raju today and wishing him a safe journey back home to his family and friends, who are eagerly awaiting in Kathmandu.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

International Day for Tolerance

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1995, the United Nations Year for Tolerance, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that designated November 16 as the International Day for Tolerance. For more than 100 years Albertans have worked together to build a stronger, more tolerant society. Today Alberta is recognized around the world as a welcoming home to individuals and families of all origins, faiths, and cultures. With our world-class education and health care system all Albertans have the opportunity and the tools to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, the International Day for Tolerance is an opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made together, and I can think of no better reflection of that progress than my colleagues in this Assembly. I'm very proud to be part of one of the most diverse Legislatures in the history of this province, indeed this country. However, we also acknowledge that work needs to be done. Discrimination continues to affect Albertans across our province, from schools to the workplace, and as in other provinces and countries we are working to educate and build awareness of discrimination so that all Albertans may live in a province of mutual respect and tolerance. We must all do our part as Albertans to ensure that such hatred and intolerance has no place in this province that we all call home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, a petition?

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a petition with 862 names representing southern Alberta communities, 22 in total, and they stretch from Milk River, Taber, Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, Claresholm, and all of the communities in between. They ask that the government of Alberta grandfather the rights and status of registered massage therapists to ensure that the clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from these current therapists.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first petition I'd like to present reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the current number of acute care mental health beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton." The petition has 317 signatures.

The second petition, which I'd like to present on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to include Complex Decongestive Therapy in the list of accepted therapeutic procedures covered by Alberta Health Care." The petition has 37 signatures.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 62

Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and request leave to introduce first reading of Bill 62, the Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009.

Bill 62, Mr. Speaker, will allow and maintain the ability of ambulance attendants to share information which they observe or collect when they are dispatched to an incident with police investigators.

With that, I'd like to move first reading of Bill 62.

[Motion carried; Bill 62 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a set of retablings and tablings. My first set of retablings is copies of correspondence from Calgary-Varsity constituents Neil Thurber, Habib Syed, Nasser Hamid, Janet and Gary Moore, and Aldred Epp, all of whom have asked to have me voice their opposition to Bill 50 for reasons including trying to circumvent the public's view; the plan is not benefiting Albertans; for being pushed through and decided upon behind closed doors; alternatives must be explored, but Bill 50 would prevent them from being identified and debated publicly; and a proper public and industry review can result in a more realistic solution.

My second retabing is the requisite number of copies of correspondence from Calgarians Gabrielle Enns, Isabelle Emery, Jennifer Reddy, Jenny Regal, Kelly Russell, Kelly Waterman, Antonella Fanella, Dave Roseke, Michelle Cooledge, Sarah Clarke, Marlies Sargent, Brenda Herring, Ken Yasenchuk, Meghann Springett, Alicia Motuz, Tim Kitchen, and Patricia Paterson. They were sent to the Minister of Education and the Premier, urging them not to cut

funding for education because it is more important in these times than ever to invest in our children's futures.

2:50

My next set of tablings is on an educational theme. It's the report to the community that President Harvey Weingarten gave on behalf of the University of Calgary – it's entitled *A Strong Idea* – as well as a magazine entitled *U*, University of Calgary, Fall 2009. As I'm sure many members know, the president is leaving the university this year and over his nine years has contributed greatly to the growth of the University of Calgary, and it's been my honour to work with him since the fall of 2004.

I'm tabling the program of Opportunity Knocks, which was the National Housing Day fifth annual breakfast, that took place in the Stampede grounds this past constituency week.

I'm also tabling a program entitled Rich Man Poor Man: Healing the Gap, a fundraiser for the Calgary drop-in centre, a student-run medical clinic, which is currently being run by Dr. Hurley. The donations from the dinner will help to establish the clinic.

Lastly, I'm tabling the Diwali Show 2009 program of the Hindu Society of Calgary. It was a delightful program, that many members were able to enjoy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I'm tabling copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek requesting that Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, be given early consideration for third reading.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Mason moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a second time because the bill fails to provide for public consultation prior to the approval of critical transmission infrastructure.

[Adjourned debate November 17: Ms Pastoor]

The Speaker: All right. Hon. members, when we left yesterday afternoon, I advised that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East was to be in the House to deal with the 29(2)(a) provision, and that hasn't happened, so I may not recognize her when it comes to debate on second reading.

Additional speakers on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I listened yesterday afternoon to this reasoned amendment as proposed regarding Bill 50, and I'm happy at this time to have an opportunity to speak. Certainly, the public is not sold on the need for Bill 50. Interested parties across the province have had a look at this bill. It was initially presented to the House here in June. Actually, on June 1, I believe, the hon. Minister of Energy laid the bill before the House. We had all summer and the fall to have a look at it, and the more and more people looked at this bill, the more and more concerned they got. This is why I would urge the Assembly, with all due respect, to pass this amendment.

Now, when we look at the bill and we look at the need for critical transmission infrastructure, there is enough legislation already in place to fulfill the requests or the wish list or whatever you want to call it of the AESO and their long-term transmission system plan. We need to have transmission routes – there's no doubt about that – but we have to maintain an open, public, and transparent process. The idea that the cabinet may designate as critical transmission infrastructure a proposed transmission facility, as is indicated on page 5, certainly is interesting. The cabinet is going to override here any what I would consider assessment that is necessary to ensure that the transmission needs to be built in the first place.

Now, I can see why the government, particularly this government, is panicking again whenever it looks at its electricity and transmission policies because the electricity policy and the transmission policy, of course, are linked. When we look at deregulation – and we're essentially, Mr. Speaker, 10 years into the whole process of deregulation – we were promised in this House time and time again that if we were patient and we waited, we would see the economic benefit of deregulation. It hasn't happened. Bills keep going up.

The argument across the way, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to note, was that once natural gas prices come down, well, we're going to see power prices come down because natural gas is used as a fuel for many of the peaking plants. Natural gas has diminished in price. It's probably in some markets one-third of what it was two years ago. Has the price of power come down? The price of wholesale electricity? Certainly not. So there is one argument that the government can't say is working.

They said that we would have all this competition, of course, and that competition would drive down prices. That hasn't happened either. Now, what we do know is that with energy deregulation the long-term planning function – and this is where the transmission system has come into such a state of neglect – of the transmission system was just set aside, and as a result of that we have no major upgrades. We've had no major upgrades in I think it's 16 years, but what we have seen is certainly an increase in the energy emergency alerts, whether it's the summer or the winter. It is routine now for there to be emergency alerts, and in some cases people are actually requested by the system operator to scale back their use of electricity. Now, we have seen blackouts in this province. Oddly enough, they have occurred in the summer, during air conditioning season, and not during winter at 30 below, but I'm not sure that that's not going to happen here in the near future.

If we look at the reserve that is needed and the reserve margin that we now have on the Power Pool, we can see that as electricity generation has become scarcer and less reliable, the reserve margin is going down and down. I'm surprised that this government hasn't enthusiastically embraced the Enmax proposal, Mr. Speaker, to build up to 800 megawatts of natural gas generation on the edge of Calgary. Not only would it reduce some of the need for the 500-kV transmission between Lake Wabamun and Langdon, I believe, in Calgary – and the hon. member may laugh. But I would really ask the hon. member – and he has his computer there – just to check in with the Power Pool of Alberta and see exactly what kind of reserve margin we're even dealing with now and what they anticipate the reserve margin in this province will be, for instance, in 2010 and 2011.

If we had given the Enmax proposal the go-ahead, at least part of that power plant would be commissioned when we need the power the most. Calgary and the Calgary area is the area of the province that is affected most by the folly of deregulation. There are shortages there of baseload generation capacity, and Enmax is trying to fix that. It's quite odd that we were talking earlier in question period about this policy resolution booklet, or whatever it was that

was at the PC convention, and these corporate sponsors were involved. Certainly, there was corporate sponsorship from Trans-Alta, from Capital Power, and from AltaLink, but I didn't see – and I could have been wrong – Enmax. Enmax wasn't a sponsor of that convention. Now, hon. members can correct me. I don't have a copy of this policy booklet, or whatever it was, with the sponsorship on it in the front there. If I'm wrong and hon. members could correct me, I would appreciate that. But I didn't see sponsorship from Enmax on the copy I looked at, and that tells me a lot about this bill or what we shouldn't have in this bill.

3:00

The Speaker: Actually, hon. member, we're talking about the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: You're absolutely right, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate your guidance.

The Speaker: You're welcome.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I don't know how, Mr. Speaker, I neglected that.

The reasoned amendment is going to give additional time for organizations or corporations like Enmax to convince this government that they have a solution to part of the transmission bill.

Now, we have heard many different estimates of what that cost would be. I have correspondence here from government members that was provided to their constituents – and the constituents provided it to me over the summer and the fall – that said that the bill would be, like, \$8 a month. Some had the bill as high as \$14 billion.

Enmax, if we were to follow their proposal, that bill would be reduced at least by some amount. When you consider this bill and you see what this bill is going to do through cabinet order, force transmission lines wherever cabinet decides, there doesn't seem to me to be any economic consideration in this. It's what cabinet wishes to do. I don't think that's fair to just have this behind-the-closed-doors decision and present the bill, Mr. Speaker, to the consumers. The ratepayers of this province are going to be stuck with the bill.

We already know that this cabinet made a flawed decision when they enthusiastically supported deregulation and forced it upon the consumers. Consumers had no say in this. The only thing that they can do is pay the bigger and bigger bills each and every month. They got no benefit from this.

We could do that, but, Mr. Speaker, with this amendment, if this amendment was passed, we could have a series of public meetings across this province. I know there are public meetings going on. Joe Anglin, he's having public meetings. I'm told that some government MLAs are having public meetings. There was a public meeting out in the west end of Edmonton, and I believe there's going to be another one at the AgriCom on transmission infrastructure. There was a public meeting in Sherwood Park earlier in the summer.

Citizens, certainly, before they're going to be stuck with this bill, want to know, first and foremost, what's going on and why they have to pay. Many, Mr. Speaker, consumers are astonished to learn that at one time the regulatory process in this province decided that the bill, the tab, whether it's \$2 billion, \$4 billion, or \$14 billion, would be equally shared between the generators of the electricity and the consumers of the electricity.

What happened, again with no public consultation, is that a former Minister of Energy, Mr. Smith, in a ballroom in Banff stood up and made an announcement that: no, we're shifting all the costs onto the bills of consumers regardless; that's how it is. The EUB made a ruling that it should be shared equally, but, no, the Minister of Energy in this government, the same political party that still governs, decided that it was consumers who should foot the bill. We asked at the time how much that bill would be, and we were scoffed, we were jeered, and the bill . . . [interjection] Yes, it's true, hon. minister; it's true. This bill has grown from \$2 billion to \$4 billion to, astonishingly enough, \$14 billion and even higher. Consumers are going to have to pay this. It's not a laughing matter.

Some industries with high electricity costs and no electricity-generating capacity of their own are contemplating leaving this province and going to places like Saskatchewan or Manitoba.

Mr. Liepert: Who?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, they certainly are, hon. minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Name them.

Mr. MacDonald: Name them? AT Plastics, for one. That's one.

Now, when you look at the commercial, the industrial, and the residential users and break them down, if industrial users because of the high cost of electricity, a direct consequence of electricity deregulation, decide that they're going to have their own behind-the-fence generation, which is how they're going to operate because they can generate electricity a lot cheaper than what this crowd across the way can deliver it to them for, Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid that more of these transmission costs will wind up on the bills of consumers because we're going to have a smaller pool of consumers paying a bigger portion of the transmission bill.

Hopefully there are going to be a lot of industrial sites that are developed in this province. I would suggest to the hon. members across the way that one of the unintended consequences of this bill, unless we support this reasoned amendment, is that industrial sites will have their own generating capacity, and they will be exempt or they will be outside the grid. They will be connected for convenience purposes, but they will essentially be on their own, and we will stick residential consumers, who already have high bills, with even more of this 14-plus billion dollar tab for transmission if this bill goes forward.

That's one point at this time that I would like to make. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to remind hon. members that the public is not sold on the need for this bill. This amendment gives the government another chance, and they should take it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Speaker's Ruling Question-and-comment Period

The Speaker: Just a second before we set the clock for this. Yesterday we had the situation – and we've been having this situation for some period of time now during this 29(2)(a) – where a member stood up and spoke for four minutes and 58 seconds before arriving at a question. In other words, he filibustered somebody else's time frame. The rule clearly says that this is to provide for members to participate, and they should be brief, and they should provide for a response. The guideline that I tend to follow under question period is approximately 35 seconds. I intend

now on following such a guideline under 29(2)(a). The intent of 29(2)(a) is to maximize the number of questions and maximize the number of responses. So that is how we will now proceed. There will be no more filibustering of this section.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you know the time frame.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your direction on that.

The hon. member referred to Enmax, saying that maybe they could get the message to this government. But perhaps he could expound a little bit more on his experience in the needs process that used to go on in order to build power lines and how that's been changed in this bill and, so, why this amendment is important to be accepted so that we can look at the needs process that is exempted from the AUC if this bill passes. Would you expound on that a little bit?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I and others feel that Bill 50 is unnecessary. There are existing laws, as I said before, regarding the acquisition of rights of way for the benefit of the public at large and giving landowners the rights that they deserve. What we're missing with this and are going to continue to miss unless we give it this second chance that the reasoned amendment is going to provide is an analysis of the true needs of Alberta's electricity system.

Now, I will remind the hon. member that we had a spy scandal happen down in Rimbey in the community hall.

3:10

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you very much, hon. member.

Additional questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm wondering if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has a percentage of what percentage of the bill residential homeowners will have to pick up. In other words, if residential owners receive 20 per cent of the electricity from these new transmission lines, what amount on a population basis are they going to have to pay? My concern is that it seems that taxpayers are being heavily affected by these new bills, and I'm just wondering if you have percentages.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, if you wish.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I'm disappointed I didn't get a chance, but I will in committee get a chance to discuss the situation in Rimbey.

My big issue here is the transmission charges: 61 per cent are picked up by industrial consumers, 19 per cent by commercial, 16 per cent by residential, 4 per cent by farms. If the industrial consumers decide to go on their own with behind-the-fence generation, the 16 per cent of residential consumers are going to be stuck with a larger portion of this tab. I want the government right now, before we go any further with this bill, to tell me what they're going to do about this. This is a real concern.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional questions? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise. I just have a question for the member. At the beginning of the member's

comments he discussed the emergency situation, a couple of instances of the lack of power, cases when emergency orders were issued, people were asked to scale back, and he went towards the end of it where there's actually no need for additional transmission. Without getting into the Bill 50 thing – there's much debate to come here – could the member just tell us whether he thinks there's a need or is not a need for additional transmission in the province? It wasn't real clear in his speech, and I'd like to know where he stands.

Mr. MacDonald: No. It's clear to me that the hon. Member for Peace River was not listening. What I did say was: there is not a need for all this transmission upgrade. If we follow through with the Enmax proposal to add more generation on the edge of the load in Calgary, there will be less need to stick consumers across the province with the total bill for the upgrades between Wabamun and Langdon. Clearly, if the hon. member – I would ask him to now, if he has a computer there, go to the Power Pool, the Alberta Electric System Operator, and he can see for himself, if he can understand it, the reserve margin and the capacity that we direly need in this province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Oberle: One additional question, then, Mr. Speaker. I wonder what the member would propose to say to the power users in Calgary or, for that matter, the rest of the province when natural gas rates go back to \$9 or \$10. What's going to happen in the Calgary power market?

Mr. MacDonald: I wish I had a crystal ball to know where natural gas prices are going. I'm sure the minister of finance and the Treasury Board president would also like to know. Now, if the hon. member has some insight into natural gas prices in the future, you should share them with your colleagues.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Well, that worked well.

Is there further discussion or debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to step up after that lively and well-interspersed exchange. I rise to speak in favour of the amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that Bill 50 not be read a second time because of the bill's failure to provide for public consultation prior to the approval of the critical transmission infrastructure.

This element of the bill that we are identifying at this point as being such a problem resides in that part of the bill that would change the process around the consideration of the needs identification document such that the needs identification document need not be required to be submitted to the AUC should the government designate a particular project as a critical infrastructure transmission. As a result, then, the matter is not considered through the public hearings that would otherwise be provided through the AUC.

We raise this amendment because, of course, among other things, while we have some very serious concerns about the merits of the transmission lines that are being proposed, there is value simply to the issue of whether or not Albertans are going to be given the opportunity to be fully consulted, as they would be through a public hearing process, that would be negated as a result of Bill 50 in its current form.

I'd like to talk just a little bit about why it is that we believe standing up for the public hearing process is so important and why

we think it's a matter that's important to Albertans across the province regardless of their view, ultimately, on whether or not these transmission lines ought to be approved. Basically, we need to ensure that this is a matter that is not left simply to cabinet to assess; rather, it needs to be considered through a public, transparent process that is governed by an independent regulator.

Now, we appreciate that the government is a little uncomfortable with this because, of course, the last time this issue was considered by a theoretically independent regulator, we had a little problem with that theoretically independent regulator engaging in inappropriate practices vis-à-vis their supervision, shall we say, of stakeholders who were appearing before that so-called independent public regulator. So I understand that the government is a little bit nervous about this. Nonetheless, where independent public regulators actually work functionally in a way where they actually engage in their business in accordance with the laws and common law that outlines the way they are expected to function, the independence of that regulator adds, ultimately, to the quality of the decision that is made as a result of the independence and as a result of reducing the political interference.

Flowing from that, then, we know that when you go through a public hearing process, it is less likely that approval or conditions or denial of same would be driven by merely short-term political interests. They would be more likely to focus on long-term, long-run benefits and the consideration of whether the costs associated with the particular application can be maintained.

That's something, again, that we think Albertans need to know about. At this point there are a lot of different suggestions out there in the public about what this particular critical infrastructure process is really designed to do. Is it designed to deal with a so-called problem with respect to our domestic electricity transmission, or is it really designed to allow for future export opportunities, the capital infrastructure costs of which would be borne disproportionately by consumers, who would not get the benefit of the profits arising from those power export opportunities?

In this particular case there is an issue around the long-term implications of this project. We know that it is through an independent public hearing process that we are most likely to get a dispassionate assessment of what the long-term benefits and consequences are of this project.

3:20

As well, with all due respect to members of cabinet, who would consider the issue of regulations ultimately adopted by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the regulatory agencies that oversee these public hearing processes typically have expertise, historic awareness, and background knowledge to understand and evaluate and adjudicate the issues which are being considered. I would suggest that it's unlikely that the members of cabinet who would be consulted in the process of determining whether regulatory exceptions would be allowed for this particular project would have the same level of expertise, historic awareness, and background knowledge to understand, evaluate, and adjudicate this complex issue.

Now, the regulatory processes that this bill in its current form would remove, that we are objecting to in the course of this amendment, are designed to take the interested parties' positions and subject them to public scrutiny, to test the arguments that are put forward, and to ensure that people and parties and stakeholders with interests – some vested, some not vested; it doesn't really matter – are able in a transparent, open forum to see what everybody else's argument is, and they can evaluate it, and they can determine how the decision is being made. Those arguments are best tested in that kind of forum. When you remove access to that forum, you are far

more likely to undermine the quality of the decision that's being made because you simply haven't tested it against opposing views. You haven't tested it against the implications of the project in question for citizens across the province, all citizens.

We need to have a full and transparent discussion particularly on the issue of the needs identification because we know already, even without this project and the projects that are identified in this bill being subjected to the full public hearing process, simply through certain parties having an opportunity to get access to the media and to talk amongst themselves in a rather haphazard and disorganized kind of way, that there is certainly more than one set of expert opinions, I would suggest, out there about the need for these projects. We know that certain experts are suggesting that these projects are not necessary, that they are not needed, that the doom and gloom that's proposed by the government is not actually something that's about to come to pass.

Now, I'm not going to get into the merits of that because that's not what this amendment is about. What I will say is that there is enough difference of opinion out there that it makes no sense at all to not test that difference of opinion in the most transparent and objective and independent setting possible. To do that, of course, would be in the best interests of all Albertans.

Now, another reason why we want to ensure that that process is maintained and why it's so important to allow for that kind of public hearing process is because when we do that, we also guard against the whole issue, the whole potential, whether it's perceived or whether it's real, of private interest having an undue influence on the decision-making process. Quite frankly, there has been an interesting discussion within this Assembly over the course of the last few days about the fact that one particular party that stands to benefit from this bill going forward unamended has also been able to donate significant amounts of money to the governing political party. Now, that may or may not be of relevance. There may or may not be an association between the two. We really don't know. But the best way to ensure the confidence of Albertans in the objectivity and the merits of the decision we're discussing is to take that decision and test it in a public and independent forum. Why would we, then, go forward on a bill, a significant component of which is to take that very process away from Albertans, to take the decision about what constitutes critical infrastructure and put it behind the closed doors of cabinet?

Public regulatory processes also go through a process, and the public regulatory process does not currently exist in the bill where the alternatives are made available and the regulator is required to consider the alternatives and explain why they may or may not be the appropriate course in this particular case. That continues, again, to be a very sort of important constraint on any real or perceived collusion between decision-makers and various organizations with vested private interests.

You know, I think it's really important to have a really well-thought-out explanation of the rationale. At this point, when we've had debate on it in this House, people who ask questions about it are primarily met with rather surly denials that there's any issue at all, that any of the complaints or the legitimate concerns that have been raised by vested interests and nonvested interests across the province that happen to oppose this bill are simply wrong. We don't get into any sort of well-thought-out, well-supported, well-researched rationale for why it is that they're wrong. We're just told in this rather surly way that they're wrong and that we should just close our eyes and trust the government and move on. I simply don't think that that's an appropriate way to move forward on something that could cost this province or its consumers upwards of \$8 billion. I mean, that's just a grossly irresponsible way to move forward.

The final point that I would make around the merits of a regulatory process of having a public hearing is that it allows, of course, for public participation, and through that we contribute to the public's understanding, the public's sense of the government being accountable to them and of the legitimacy of the process as a whole. I think that because in this case there have been a number of concerns raised about what the plans identified in Bill 50 will cost the public and what they will cost consumers, the public needs the opportunity to know what they would be paying for and why they would be paying for it. At this point they're not getting that opportunity. They're not being given that information clearly by the government.

Again, for the reasons I've identified before, a public hearing process is the forum within which that information would be most clearly communicated, most objectively communicated, and most effectively communicated in that the public would be invited to participate, and we would have ongoing discussions that would hopefully engage the public in order for them to be aware of what it is we're talking about and what the consequences are.

The public really does need to know what the consequences are of this bill, and I would suggest that they can't simply rely on the government. I look, for instance, at one piece of communication that came from the government that talks about what kind of changes we would see under Bill 50 . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. member of the third party what she thinks the rationale for setting up the Alberta Utilities Commission was by politicians in the first place.

The Speaker: We're on the amendment now, remember? That's the subject matter of our debate. Go ahead.

Ms Notley: The amendment itself talks about the need to reject this bill because it negates the transparent public hearing process that would otherwise be associated with the consideration of the needs identification document. That relates to the member's question because, of course, the Alberta Utilities Commission was created because of a very failed public hearing and consultation process. We have a problem in this province, where we previously had an EUB that was supposed to be engaging in neutral, objective, independent . . .

3:30

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've just got a couple of questions for the member opposite with respect to the amendment. The amendment, of course, being a hoist, removes Bill 50 totally.

The Speaker: No, it's not a hoist amendment.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, excuse me. The amendment would remove the ability for this piece of legislation to do some other things as well. I'm wondering if the member would mind sharing with this Assembly whether or not she would suggest that things like . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hon. member, if you wish to respond.

Ms Notley: Well, I have to say that I'm not entirely sure where the question was going. In this particular case the amendment is premised on the fact that beyond the other merits that may or may not exist within the bill, the bill itself takes away a critical public consultation component to something which could potentially cost Albertans upwards of \$8 billion. So regardless of the merits of moving forward and all the other kinds of stuff that the government may have good reason to pursue – and I'm not suggesting that you don't; maybe you do; maybe you don't – the fact of the matter is that a fundamental principle is that we ought not to be taking away from Albertans the ability . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the amendment it says, you know, that it fails to provide public consultation prior to the approval of the critical transmission infrastructure, and I support this amendment. My question to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. In the old process, if we don't change this bill, there's the needs requirement hearing, and the document has to be served. What would be the power, do you feel, of actually having a needs hearing in front of the AUC versus the minister making a declaration saying, "Oh, I already know that we don't need to have a needs hearing"?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, if you wish.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, I think you've really hit the nail on the head about why it is that we believe so strongly in the importance of this amendment, because what we're talking about, as I was saying before, is something that could potentially cost Alberta taxpayers \$8 billion. That kind of decision needs to be tested in an independent setting that is transparent, where the public hears the submissions made by everybody that's got a vested or an unvested, whatever you want to call it, interest and where they can evaluate all the people that come forward. Whether they can sit and watch or they can participate doesn't really matter. When you're talking about that kind of money in the future, that's the process that should be in place.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Minister of Energy, did you have an additional question?

Mr. Knight: Yes, Mr. Speaker, if I might. The business about public consultation. I'd just like to ask the member opposite if she would consider that 300 open, public meetings that have been held respective to this particular piece of business since 2007 would not be considered public consultation.

Ms Notley: No, I wouldn't because what we need is to have public meetings that are managed by an independent regulator, where all the public knows about every meeting and everybody gets to go to every meeting should they want and where we don't have selected groups in one place listening to selected submissions in other places. The fact of the matter is that the public hearing process with the EUB previously has been seriously undermined in the eyes of Albertans. To then move away from a public hearing process when the former chair of the EUB promised that they'd go back to the drawing board because they messed it up so much last time . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there additional members who would like to participate in this debate on the amendment?

There being none, then I'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment to second reading lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:34 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Kang	Swann
Chase	MacDonald	Taft
Hehr	Notley	Taylor
Hinman	Pastoor	

Against the motion:

Allred	Griffiths	McQueen
Brown	Groeneveld	Mitzel
Calahasen	Hancock	Olson
Campbell	Horne	Quest
Cao	Jablonski	Rogers
Dallas	Klimchuk	Sherman
Denis	Knight	Tarchuk
Drysdale	Leskiw	VanderBurg
Evans	Liepert	Vandermeer
Fawcett	Lindsay	Woo-Paw
Forsyth	Marz	Zwozdesky
Goudreau		

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 34
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[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 50 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 49 I would move that this question be now put.

Speaker's Ruling Moving the Previous Question

The Speaker: If all hon. members would look at their Standing Orders, you'll see Previous Question, 49(1), (2), and (3). In essence, what this procedure now does is put us on a path for continued debate on the second reading of this bill. At the conclusion of all those who want to participate in the debate, a vote will be taken, and if it's found to be in the affirmative, then we will go immediately to the vote on second reading. This now provides all members an opportunity to participate once again in the debate on Bill 50.

The time constraints are as they always have been: 15 minutes for individual members, with Standing Order 29(2)(a) availing itself for five minutes, and an opportunity for the leader of the government and the Leader of the Official Opposition to speak for up to 90 minutes on this. So, in essence, if all 82 members in the Assembly were to participate, we would be looking at approximately – what? – 327, 328 hours. If it's three hours a day, it could be nine days. So there is opportunity here to participate in the debate. Even those who have already participated have an opportunity to participate again.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 13(2) if I could ask for clarification for members of the House then. The motion that we are currently speaking to, then, is the motion that the previous question be put. It is not, in fact, speaking to the general principle of the bill as we understand it in a usual debate for second reading. Is that correct?

The Speaker: No. My interpretation and interpretations of the past have been very, very wide: participation on the bill rather than simply the words of the question. So you have free rein to participate in continuing second reading of this bill, and you begin afresh. Even if you've participated before, you may participate again. I can give you all the statements that I've given in the past, and you might refer to this. Essentially, you have wide range of debate even if you participated before.

3:50

Ms Blakeman: Under 13(2). We are indeed speaking to "that this question be now put," but the Speaker has indicated that he'll give us very wide latitude. This, of course, would also preclude any other amendments being put on the floor.

The Speaker: That's one of the rules under 49 and the tradition with respect to this. There are no further amendments. We're now dealing with the second reading of Bill 50. Wide ranging. Every member has an opportunity once. No amendments.

Ms Blakeman: It is a form of closure, although we no longer have closure available to us in the standing orders in this House, in that members may only now speak once. Whether they've spoken before or not, they may now only speak once, and they are restricted to that. Correct?

The Speaker: Well, I'm not going to carry on a continuing debate with respect to this. It was quite clear, which I've already given. In fact, members will have two opportunities. If some members have already spoken, have already participated on Bill 50 at second reading, they'll now be given a second opportunity to speak on second reading. This is very wide open. You've got up to 20 minutes each with Standing Order 29(2)(a).

You may now continue, whoever wishes to participate on Bill 50. None?

Ms Blakeman: It's closure.

The Speaker: You'll all have a chance. Over the next nine days there will be all kinds of opportunity.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to participate today in the second reading of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 50 plays an important role in Alberta's way forward. Like with roads, schools, and hospitals Bill 50 gives government the responsibility to approve the need for critical electricity infrastructure. Make no mistake; the need for transmission infrastructure is critical. I know there's been plenty of debate about the need for new and upgraded infrastructure. Some of our detractors say that new transmission is unnecessary, but certainly the facts speak for themselves. It's a fact that Alberta's population has

grown by 32 per cent in the last 20 years. We're now home to 3.65 million people compared to 2.49 million people in 1989.

It's pretty obvious that we have a lot more business and industry than we had 20 years ago. In fact, our business, industry, and retail sectors have quadrupled, yet in the last 20 years we haven't seen any significant upgrades to the transmission system. Mr. Speaker, it seems pretty clear that Alberta has outgrown its transmission system, yet we're continuing to rely on electricity transmission infrastructure that was built to meet the needs of an Alberta that looked much different than it does today.

While it did serve us well, Alberta's transmission system now is aging, congested, and inefficient. Many of our existing generators are nearing the end of their useful life. In fact, over the next 20 years more than 2,000 megawatts of generation will be retired from service, and it's predicted that we'll need another 11,500 megawatts of new generation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Bill 50 will allow Alberta to continue moving forward. The projects included in Bill 50 will provide the necessary infrastructure to keep electricity flowing across the province. These projects will ensure that Albertans continue to have light when they flick the switch and ensure that businesses can continue to operate and grow, adding more jobs to the province and contributing more revenue to our economy.

Bill 50 is for Alberta. It's not, as some people have suggested, a money-making scheme for power generators to export electricity out of our province. Alberta is and always has been a net importer of electricity. That means we currently have to bring in more power than we export so we can meet the needs of Albertans during peak hours of demand. In fact, some days the transmission lines within the province are so congested that we can't even move our own power to some parts of Alberta, and we have to import instead. The fact is that projects included in Bill 50 are for Albertans, for power for Alberta.

Improving our transmission system also means we'll be better able to use low-emission electricity and renewable resources. Alberta has hydroelectric resources in the north, we have wind power in the south, and we have biomass in the northwest. What we don't have is efficient means to bring this power to where it's needed. Bill 50 will help us do that. Improved transmission infrastructure will allow us to optimize the use of these natural resources, enabling us to connect more renewable resources to the grid and providing Albertans with more clean energy choices.

A more efficient, less congested grid also ensures that Albertans get access to competitively priced electricity any time of the day. Yes, Mr. Speaker, despite the misconceptions being perpetrated about the sky-high cost to Albertans if Bill 50 is passed, there are economic advantages to improving transmission infrastructure. In fact, the cost to Albertans would ultimately be much higher if we did not pass this bill and if we don't act immediately.

Bill 50 approves the need for four critical transmission infrastructure projects. The estimated cost for the four projects is \$5.6 billion. That means the average residential consumer will see an increase of less than \$6 on their monthly bill, or less than \$72 a year, once all four projects are in service, and we expect that to be around 2017. The cost will be added in increments, starting around 2012 and increasing over time as the projects are completed.

I'd also like to speak to the misconceptions about Bill 50 taking away from the public's right to be heard. Bill 50 speaks to need only. The Alberta Utilities Commission will continue to be responsible for making decisions on the siting of transmission

facilities. This includes determining the specific location for individual power lines. In doing so, the Alberta Utilities Commission will continue to ensure that Albertans whose rights may be directly or adversely affected by a proposed utility development are informed of the application. These Albertans will continue to have the opportunity to voice their concerns during the review process. We strongly encourage affected Albertans to do so.

Alberta's transmission infrastructure plays an essential role in the well-being of our province, our economy, and our high quality of life. Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 facilitates continued growth in the province by making sure that we have the necessary transmission infrastructure in place so that more power is added to the grid as needed. Bill 50 sustains Alberta's success and prosperity well into the future by taking action now. Bill 50 prepares us for the future today.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: The hon. member was next.

Mr. Hinman: Under 29(2)(a).

The Deputy Speaker: All right. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The good member who spoke about Bill 50 speaks to need only and says that this is good to move in there, but for the last 50 years we've had a regulatory body that has always taken the needs process in order for all interested parties – those that generate, those that transmit, the consumers, and experts – to step in and determine the needs. Do you really and sincerely feel that Bill 50 and putting that power in the position of the Minister of Energy is going to be good for Albertans and Alberta businesses and ensure not just an efficient but an effective . . . [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, there's been lots of debate about the need. Lots of people say that there's no need, but I'm not sure if they're qualified to say that. I take my advice from the AESO. They're an independent body of experts in the province that say that there is a need, and I suggest there is. I don't want to be sitting in this House four years from now when the power goes off in people's homes when it's 45 below and they're freezing and they're looking at us and saying: why did you let this happen? That's why today I'm supporting this.

Mr. Chase: Under 29(2)(a) I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti if he plans to be around in the next election after his constituents receive their increased power bills. [interjection]

My second question, if not interrupted by the hon. minister of health, is the consideration: do you believe what you've said, that we're going to have blackouts and power outages, or is this just more of the fearmongering that the opposition is so frequently accused of?

4:00

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I don't know about fearmongering. I believe in AESO, and they're the ones that have said that we've been reaching critical points lately. Building this kind of infrastructure takes years, so I don't want to wait till the lights go off before we start.

As far as being around at the next election, I think I have a pretty good chance at being there. But there's not going to be an increase on the power bill by 2012 anyway, so it won't be an issue then.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Yes. I would like to ask the hon. member what he will say to the seniors, to those that do not have jobs, that are increasingly becoming jobless in this province, and certainly to low-income. Many people are working two jobs and struggling. How will he explain any kind of an increase in their utility bills?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, we could go on forever, but seniors will be the ones most affected if their heat goes off. I'd hate to be 70 years old with no power. The bills: I mean, they can speculate all they want, but maybe with more transmission, the rate of electricity will drop down, so their bill may be lower.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said that he's relying on AESO. Would the hon. member please explain why the 2007-2008 AESO report said that we only needed one small line, about \$570 million, and now the '09 report says that we need \$5.6 billion? There's a huge gap, and the only thing that's changed in the market in that time is the fact that the people that have been taken off of the . . .

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Hinman: You're not the Speaker. Your rhetoric is just so appreciated. There was a question.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the question was there, but I still believe what AESO says. AESO says that today that's exactly what we need, so I believe them, and I support the bill.

Mr. Hinman: I'd appreciate being able to finish the question. AESO in a 2007-08 report said that it wasn't necessary. We had three prominent members that got off the board. Then Bill 50 has come forward. This is about a needs test. They're usurping the power of the AUC to have a needs test. So how can you say that AESO supports this when the previous four reports from AESO said that we don't need it? Only the current one does. How do you explain the change in the reports from AESO?

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, we could go on forever. He just said that AESO's last report says that we need it. Well, times change. The economy changes. They've changed their opinion, and I agree with what they say.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the bill.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there's going to be a lot of time, I suspect, spent addressing the questions around this bill. I hope debate progresses quickly, and I anticipate all members of the House getting their views and the views of their constituents and their respective communities on the record regarding Bill 50 before we are expected as consumers to pick up the tab.

You know, in this case we have a bill where the government, the Minister of Energy is going to call the shots, and the consumers are going to pay the bills. There's no way around this. It's clear that cabinet will have the final say on any transmission improvements or significant upgrades.

People can tell me that, you know, this bill has nothing to do with electricity exports, but that simply is not true. If you look at the bill and you look at the definitions that are included, we're talking about interties. Interties are included in this bill. A previous speaker had indicated that we are importers of electricity, not exporters, but we're both. With our shortage of electricity here now, we are at certain times of the day importing significant amounts of electricity, as much as the interties have capacity for. Other times, at night, late at night we are exporting electricity. The British Columbia Powerex Corp. is drawing our baseload generating capacity as we sleep, and they're building up their hydraulic capacity, opening their dams at peak times, and selling us back the power at a real handsome return for themselves.

This was another consequence of deregulation that this government has not thought out. But I do not want to stray from Bill 50. Hopefully, during the course of the debate I'm going to get an explanation from government members across the way. I can't remember who is the Provincial Secretary these days.

Mr. Hancock: It would be the Attorney General.

Mr. MacDonald: The Attorney General. Okay. I'm going to leave it in the hands of the Attorney General. I almost said eternity general, like this is some sort of Tory dynasty.

Mr. Liepert: It is.

Mr. MacDonald: It is. See, that's the problem. That's what you think. That's exactly what part of the problem is here. It's that attitude.

Now, earlier this summer there was an Order in Council 311/2009, which was an amendment to transmission regulation that was put forward in 2007. That transmission regulation, to be precise, is Alberta regulation 86/2007. This transmission regulation this summer autocratically, regardless of the cost to consumers, allows the minister to call the shots and then get it rubber-stamped by his cabinet colleagues. Now, it's interesting to note what this transmission regulation now considers critical transmission infrastructure, and I'm going to quote.

24.1(1) In this section, "critical transmission infrastructure" means a transmission facility that, in the Minister's opinion, is critical to the safe, reliable and economic operation of the interconnected electric system.

(2) The Minister may determine

- (a) who is eligible to apply for the construction or operation, or both, of a critical transmission infrastructure.

So the minister may determine who is eligible. He may pick one person, one corporation. Who knows? But we have with a stroke of the pen given the minister this authority already, before we have dealt with the matters that are in Bill 50.

Now, the minister may determine also who is responsible for upgrades or enhancements to critical transmission infrastructure.

The ISO, Independent System Operator, has a role to play in this.

(3) The ISO must have regard to a determination made by the Minister under subsection 2 . . .

which I just quoted,

. . . when carrying out the ISO's functions under the Act and regulations, including

- (a) taking into account, when preparing a needs identification document under section 34 of the Act, that the Minister has under section 24.1(2) determined the person who is eligible to apply to construct or operate, or who is responsible for upgrades or enhancements to, a critical . . . infrastructure.

So it looks like you've quietly given yourselves the authority and the scope to do this already in the middle of the summer.

I read this with interest. I brought it up at a couple of public meetings that I had the pleasure of attending, and people were astonished. They wanted copies. They were downloading this amendment to the transmission regulation. The consumers, the folks who were at this meeting, couldn't understand, if this was the process that the government wanted to follow, why we needed Bill 50. I couldn't understand why we were giving the Minister of Energy additional powers when in the past, regardless of which respective individual is in the department as minister, we can't seem to fix deregulation.

4:10

A previous speaker spoke about a competitive price for electricity in this province. Well, there is no competitive price for electricity in this province. We had some of the lowest cost electricity, Mr. Speaker, before deregulation. Now we have some of the highest in North America. We weren't blessed with a lot of hydraulic capacity like other jurisdictions. We rely on coal-fired generation for most of our base load and, of course, natural gas.

It is interesting to note that the hon. Member for Peace River spoke earlier about his interpretation of where natural gas prices were going to go, but at this point I would like to remind the House that Medicine Hat, the fine citizens of Medicine Hat, had the common sense and the good fortune of staying clear of deregulation. No one would know that more than the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat because I'm sure he enjoys some of the lowest cost electricity on his residential power bill of any member in this Assembly. The only guy that might have a lower power bill would be the hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Denis: Calgary because of the fees.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Calgary has fees, and hon. member, it was this government that initiated the whole franchise. It's not a fee. It's a tax. I appreciated your questions on this matter earlier. See, Mr. Speaker, he's distracting me again, that rascal.

I would get back to comparing Medicine Hat's power bills to the consumers' in the rest of the province. They're significantly lower. One of the reasons why they're lower – and perhaps instead of debating Bill 50 here, we should consider giving Enmax some of the same authority or scope that the city of Medicine Hat now has, and that is to acquire for themselves natural gas production rights so that they can produce electricity for their citizens and also sell the natural gas for heating purposes in the winter. Medicine Hat, my research indicates, has drilling rights throughout Alberta, north of the city of Medicine Hat now, around the Suffield range. They have some nice producing wells there. They also go to Saskatchewan, southwestern Saskatchewan. They have some drilling rights there as well to supply themselves with affordable, reliable supplies of fuel for their needs. Perhaps instead of ramming this bill down the throats of consumers and just ignoring the presentation of Enmax, we should consider giving Enmax and other outfits that are interested the same deal that we provide to Medicine Hat.

Members across the way should be interested to note that not only does Enmax have a difference of opinion from others on Bill 50, but I received as one of the Edmonton region MLAs a letter from the Capital Region Board: regional action, global opportunity. This letter is dated November 12, 2009, and it's to the hon. Minister of Energy and also to the chair of the Alberta Utilities Commission. This is regarding the heartland transmission project. This is a group, the Capital Region Board, that's comprised of 25 municipalities in

our region, and they are writing to advise the Minister of Energy and the chair of the Alberta Utilities Commission of the position recently taken by their board regarding the heartland transmission project proposed by EPCOR and AltaLink.

Now, I'm not going to bore the minister of health with all the contents of this letter, but specifically I would like to point out that the capital region municipalities are writing to request, and they wish to ensure, that before any approval is given to the heartland transmission project, a comprehensive evaluation is completed that addresses need as well as economic, social, and environmental impacts on the capital region and its residents. They go on to make some other suggestions, but that's very important because it clearly indicates to me as one of the individuals that was copied on this letter that this group is not convinced, nor are they satisfied with the direction that Bill 50 is going to take this whole transmission and distribution of the electricity system in the province. They, too, have questions just like folks in other parts of the province have. I'm clear in my understanding that they are concerned about who is finally going to pay for these upgrades. If we can reduce the cost of the upgrades that have been forced on us because of the lack of long-term planning resulting directly from this government's misguided and mismanaged electricity deregulation program, then so be it. We've got to have some upgrades. Do we need \$14 billion worth? Do we need to site generation, baseload generation capacity on the edge of the load, as the electrical engineers would say? Yes, I think we have to do that.

With Bill 50 who will benefit if this is built? Clearly, the individuals with their joint-venture projects out at Keephills will benefit. Will consumers benefit? I'm not so sure. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti talked about his confidence in this bill and what it will mean to consumers. I don't share that confidence. I think consumers have been duped. They have been tricked by this government into thinking that electricity deregulation would improve competition and reduce costs. That has not happened.

I don't want to get off subject or get accused of being off subject, but how bad is energy deregulation? Well, a constituent came in this summer to our office and showed me his natural gas bill. He had been away for a period of a month, Mr. Speaker, and he had no energy consumed; not one lick of natural gas went through the meter. He didn't even have a pilot light turned on, but his bill was over \$30. It was the D and T, distribution and transmission, costs. It was a gas bill, but it's also a reflection of our power bills.

Consumers tell me, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, that they feel cheated because they don't understand all the line items on their power bill. Why has this person got their hand out and why has that person got their hand out at the end of each and every month wanting more and more of my money – that's scarce as it is – when I have to pay my power bill? The only thing we know for certain with Bill 50 is that they're going to see additional charges.

Now, the hon. member, I believe, said that it was going to be six bucks a month as the tab for consumers. I read in correspondence provided by other members of this House – and I'm going to get some copies and table it – that it was eight bucks.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions or comments. The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If my memory serves me correctly, this hon. member in 2006 stood up in the House and questioned why we were proposing a power line from Edmonton to Calgary, suggesting that all the power was going to be exported to

the United States. Then after a brownout or close to a brownout condition in Calgary in '07, he stood up and accused the government of poor planning on building lines. Just to be clear, I wonder if the hon. member could let us know, in 50 words or less, where he stands today.

Mr. MacDonald: I certainly would. Now, as the hon. minister knows, it has been our party's policy long before even the spying scandal in Rimbey happened – and I don't know if you were Solicitor General at the time, hon. minister, or not, but what happened was that we were encouraging generation to be built on the edge of the load. If the hon. minister could understand the power system in this province, he would realize that Calgary has been chronically short of electricity because of economic expansion and population growth for some time. We suggested that you don't have to go ahead with this cadillac line between Lake Wabamun and Langdon like the government wants to build. It's going to benefit AltaLink and TransAlta. I don't know whether TransAlta gave that hon. gentleman money during the election, but I know they didn't give this side any money, and he'd better be careful.

Thank you.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask the hon. member. He's been doing a lot of research and looking at the purpose of these lines. In your estimation, because of the size of these high-voltage lines that they're wanting to put in on a short-distance span here in the province, do you believe that what they're really doing is planning and giving the go-ahead for a nuclear facility in the Grande Prairie area and, therefore, need that large line for export? Would you expand on that a little bit?

Mr. MacDonald: Well, certainly, hon. member. I thank you for that question. There's no doubt in my mind. You only have to look at the volumes of reports that have been put out by various organizations supporting this government's long-term economic plan, which is to export electricity from this province to markets as far away as California and Las Vegas. If we're not careful and we allow them, they will turn Alberta into the ashtray of North America. So we have to be very, very careful.

I'm not convinced that any nuclear reactors will ever be built, whether it's 1,000 or 2,000 megawatts, in Peace River, but I understand the proposal has been changed. If you look at the Alberta Electric System Operator's website, you will see in the anticipated projects page that they are talking about some nuclear reactors, significant in size, being built. I think they're going to be built over in Saskatchewan, east of Fort McMurray, because if you look at the latest long-term transmission systems plan . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, answer the questions within the time limit.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. In terms of this north-south transmission my understanding is that two of the large coal-fired generators at the Wabamun plants are going to be shut down in the near future. Does it make sense to continue this north-south transmission, particularly when coal is becoming a less desirable way of generating power?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. My recollection is, I believe, that the next coal-fired baseload generating station in Wabamun to be decommissioned is number 4. I think it's about 150 or 140 megawatts; I'm not quite sure. It is going to be decommissioned. Others have already been decommissioned. It's interesting to note that when we're talking about decommissioning costs, some of those costs, not around Wabamun, at least not yet, in other areas of the province have been transferred from the previous owners or operators of those facilities to the consumers. So that's interesting. I'm straying off the question that you did ask, but we have to watch for that as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to participate?

May I have your unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly members of the MD of Pincher Creek council and their support staff, who are seated in the members' gallery. It's great that they ended up here for another meeting today because if we could only have them down on the floor to talk to this bill, they would tell you how much wind power is locked in. Their particular MD supplies 43 per cent of the wind power in Alberta at this time. Thank you for coming out. It's an apropos time to have you here. Please rise and receive the warm welcome.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (continued)

The Deputy Speaker: We now get back to Bill 50. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join the debate on Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 50 will introduce amendments that streamline the approval process for critical transmission infrastructure. "Critical" is the key word here. Bill 50 will not alter the standard approval process for all transmission lines. To be clear, there will still be a requirement for all transmission projects to go through extensive public consultation as part of the Alberta Utilities Commission's process. Rather, Bill 50 will identify critical projects that are necessary for the continued reliability of electrical transmission in this province. After all, Alberta's transmission system has not been upgraded for over 20 years. That is what is alarming. But there's no point on dwelling on this; rather, we must move forward.

Specifically, Bill 50 lists four critical key projects that will be needed by our transmission system. First, there's a need for high-voltage lines between Edmonton and Calgary. Second, there's a need for a new line between Edmonton and the heartland region.

Third, lines are needed between Edmonton and Fort McMurray. Finally, there's a need for the creation of a substation in south Calgary to help reinforce the southern half of the province.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to point out that these projects were identified as being critical by the Alberta Electric System Operator, or AESO. I believe that in Alberta we need a stable power system that will serve our needs now and well into the future. We don't need Band-aid solutions like small local systems or regional generation. Rather, we need a robust province-wide system that not only connects the north with the south but connects Alberta more closely with our neighbours, specifically through our expanded intertie system along our borders. We need a system that ensures reliability while positioning Alberta for future population growth, and we need a system that connects all Albertans with their choice of power provider, be it coal, natural gas, or increasingly green energy like solar and wind power.

I'm sure many of the members of this House are aware that my constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat has the potential to hold some of the largest wind farms in Alberta. Southwest Alberta has already proven itself with the wind farms located there, and many companies in southeast Alberta are standing in line waiting for approval so that they can move forward as well. Wind energy is an affordable, renewable source of energy that should play a prominent role in Alberta's overall electricity and environmental strategies.

In addition, because Alberta is a deregulated power generation jurisdiction, all Albertans should have the choice to purchase this type of green energy. However, without a developed and expanded transmission system, consumers in the northern half of our province are unable to make that choice. This green power would simply be stuck near its generation sources and only available to a small portion of the population. Really, Mr. Speaker, that's not my idea of how a grid should officially operate.

Expanded transmission lines also have the potential to green Alberta's electrical grid by reducing line loss. Line loss is a significant concern plaguing our provincial grid. In fact, it's estimated that in 2008 alone over \$220 million worth of energy was lost due to line loss. Of course, I'm speaking of our existing overloaded HVAC transmission lines. If you work the figures out, this is enough power to support 350,000 homes for one year. Essentially, upgrading our transmission lines system would reduce these losses and make sure that more of the electricity generated by our power plants – be they coal, natural gas, or wind – actually reach our homes and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, an expanded transmission system also has the advantage of increasing the reliability of our system, specifically through cross-provincial interties. As we all know, an intertie is a connection point linking our transmission system with the transmission system of another jurisdiction. Currently in Alberta we have only two interties, one with Saskatchewan and one with British Columbia. The Saskatchewan intertie is quite small, and the British Columbia intertie is old and overloaded. These interties are intended to help even out the spikes in our electricity needs. For example, in recent years Alberta has had several occasions where it needed more power than it could generate. In order to make up this shortage, Alberta purchased power from its neighbour to the west, British Columbia.

Really, to answer the point made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar earlier, expanding our transmission system would help to ensure that Alberta would have the power it needed without having to buy it from other jurisdictions. In addition, an expanded transmission system could also provide for expanding the amount of interties into our province to ensure that if we did need to buy power, the connections would be there.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, Bill 50 paves the way for a much-needed transmission system upgrade. It will streamline the bureaucracy around critical infrastructure needs while at the same time ensuring that there's adequate public consultation. Ultimately, I believe that Bill 50 will create an electrical system that is more efficient, more robust, and more environmentally friendly.

With that I'd like to extend my full support to Bill 50 and urge all my colleagues to do so with me. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), hon. members. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member mentioned the needs process, and I just wonder if the hon. member is aware that under the current legislation AESO is obligated, as are the companies that operate in this province, if there's a critical situation to report that to the AUC. As of yesterday – I don't know about today – there have never been any documents filed to the AUC saying that there is a critical need to go forward. If in fact there was a critical need, are you saying that AESO is not in compliance with Alberta legislation that currently exists? Or are the needs really not there, and they're just wanting to bypass this so that they don't have to have a needs document anymore, and they're waiting for that and using that false pretense?

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, with regard to needs, I know the hon. member spoke earlier about the 2007 report that suggested that there was not a need there. Also, I had an opportunity to look at that report. I read it, and it was a Band-aid solution and certainly wasn't what Alberta needs in order to have a full gridded transmission system for the province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 2 there was a field policy committee meeting where we heard some issues regarding transmission. One of the presenters name was Dan Balaban of Greengate Power, who indicated that three years from now and in the future a more integrated system will promote more wind power. I'm wondering if this member could comment on his views on that topic.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. An integrated system allows for this because, as everyone knows, wind power generation doesn't peak at 100 per cent at all times. It is variable. Even within the province you'll find a peak time in one area of the province, where perhaps it may be another day before the peak times in another area. If you have an integrated system that has transmission all across the province, you will not only have an opportunity when there are peaks in the southwest; you'll have the peaks in the southeast. Certainly, in other areas like Stettler and in the Provost area there are times when the wind hits there. There are opportunities and also companies who are standing there to put wind farms in so that all of these can be put into the system. You have to have a line in order to move the power someplace, and that's where the integration comes in.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat: exactly how does Medicine Hat keep

their utilities costs so low at this present time, and how is this going to hit them because their jump is going to be huge?

Mr. Mitzel: I'd like to answer that for the hon. member. I think that if you look back in history, certainly because Medicine Hat has had their own system, it has been low, but it has been subsidized by taxes from the province. For the last few years they've been moving to market-based pricing, and that has increased now, so it's going to be market based. So there's not going to be that advantage at all.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Under 29(2)(a). I forget – and the hon. member can help me out – whether it was Mark Twain or Rudyard Kipling who talked about Medicine Hat having all hell for a basement. [interjection] It was Mark Twain. The point is that Medicine Hat has had a wonderful ride based on its geographic basement for some time, and the power costs and the ability to raise revenue locally, whether it's the school board or the hospital, has been considerably greater than any other district within the province. My concern is: are you not somewhat insulated within your own power production?

Mr. Mitzel: I think, Mr. Speaker, that you would call it fiscal responsibility.

In fact, it was Rudyard Kipling; it was not Mark Twain.

As far as the costs, the city of Medicine Hat certainly has its own power generation. It also has its own gas wells. In fact, that's why Medicine Hat is there. When they were drilling a water well, they found gas, and that's what prompted the first industry, that is still going in Alberta. The longest-standing industry in Alberta is still there, and that's a brick plant. That is because of the gas that was there.

It's a bit of geographics. That's the reason it happened for them. A lot happens because of geographics, whether it's water, whether it's where there are resources. We talk about the oil sands or whatever. Geographics determine the profitability, the prosperity of any particular area.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on Bill 50. Bill 50 would bypass regulatory need identification hearings for transmission lines deemed critical by cabinet, and it will impose billions of dollars of costs on consumers without ensuring that the projects are even needed.

According to the Minister of Energy, the sponsor, the intent of the bill is that the bill will address major challenges of how to add critical transmission infrastructure facilities to meet the needs of Albertans and the needs of our province's economy. This bill will enhance the approval process for the projects. Under Bill 50 the government will approve the need for critical transmission infrastructure and the need for, not the actual routing or siting of, those issues. This bill will set out locations for a number of required electricity transmission projects. These include 500-kilowatt direct current lines between Edmonton and Calgary and 500-kV AC lines to the Industrial Heartland region. This bill will also remove the time limit for the winding up of the Balancing Pool.

Mr. Speaker, there are regulatory processes in place for a reason, and we need to enable the public's engagement – we need the public input; we need the public consultation – before we proceed with any big projects. Public input, public consultation is just not an inconvenience. There are consumers out there, there are stakeholders out there who are opposing this unnecessary, undemocratic, and unaccountable change to the regulatory system.

Maybe the regulatory system is a long way from being perfect, particularly regarding transmission hearings, but we shouldn't pretend that simply holding public needs hearings will make everything fine. We do not think the regulators are strong enough. We have criticized the regulators and the government in the recent past for spying on concerned citizens – this occurred in 2007 in central Alberta – and for limiting the ability of consumer advocates to participate in hearings. Nevertheless, ending public interest hearings for transmission lines does absolutely nothing to address these concerns. The solution to the problem is not to avoid it altogether. We should be making the regulatory system better and having good, effective needs hearings, not bypassing the system.

Prior to the deregulation, which started in 1996, Alberta's electrical system consisted of integrated companies, which generated, transmitted, and distributed electricity to consumers. These companies were monopolies in their particular areas, in northern Alberta, Alberta Power, ATCO; in southern Alberta, TransAlta; and a number of municipalities: Calgary, Edmonton, and Medicine Hat. The Energy and Utilities Board regulated these arrangements, managing them to ensure that the prices charged to the consumers by these monopolies were fair. With the advent of deregulation companies in Alberta were required to break their operations and to separate generation, distribution, and transmission functions.

4:40

Today's electricity transmission grid in Alberta is managed by the Alberta Electric System Operator, AESO, an independent, nonprofit body. The transmission system is managed in the public interest as a natural monopoly and within the wider context of the deregulated electricity system, with private companies generating power and private companies selling it to the consumers.

AESO develops a long-term plan for our transmission system, which currently forms a key part of the regulatory process and needs hearings. In 2007 AESO put together a 10-year transmission plan, which listed that 3 and a half billion dollars in transmission needs were for the entire 10-year period. As we hit 2009, all of a sudden it's \$14 billion to \$20 billion. This projection is dramatically different from the projected needs from 2007.

Sure, Mr. Speaker, the transmission lines are required to get electricity from generation facilities to consumers, and demand tends to be located in the urban areas along with key industrial facilities. Although the largest facilities such as the oil sands, upgraders, and processing plants tend to have their own generation on-site, that demand is projected to increase steadily over the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, as the provincial population expands, energy and intense industry drive the economy. Over time the mix of generation sources, the location of demand, and the amount of demand changes. The electrical grid will need to be expanded and replaced. We know that there has been no significant addition to the transmission grid for over 10 years, so the grid we have, certainly, is not built probably for the current demand.

But the debate is not about the aging transmission lines or our rotting wire poles or the system in shambles. We're not going to have blackouts and brownouts. We haven't had any, and if there were any blackouts or brownouts, you know, that was just the mismanagement of the government, not because of the system. So all this fearmongering that we're freezing in the dark and we're freezing in the cold I think is too far-fetched.

The key point here is the cost, the money we're going to spend on these transmission systems. Sure, there is a naturally aging system that needs to be addressed, but with the new transmission coming online, that needs to be connected to a demand, particularly when it comes to wind power. The uncertainty is around where the lines

should be built, how many there should be, and when we should build them.

Perhaps the key factor is the cost. Under Alberta law transmission costs are entirely borne by the consumer, and the generators do not pay their share of the cost. So if the generators were to pay their share of the cost, you know, maybe things would be different. Here they want to have a gold-plated transmission system because they don't have to pay. Thus, it is not a surprise when generators are strong supporters of these transmission lines because it's not going to cost them any money. It will be the Alberta consumer who will be paying, but it allows the same generators to get their product, electricity, to more markets.

Those transmission lines are paid for by Albertans. Residential consumers will bear 17 per cent of the costs, farmers 3 per cent, commercial 26 per cent, and industrial 54. So while we will pay the residential share right away – and this is about \$8 that the government is stating will be on every monthly bill – all the other segments will pass their costs on to consumers, too: the restaurants, the hockey rinks, car washes. The money for these lines has to come from somewhere, and that somewhere will eventually be the consumer. The consumer will be paying more at the restaurant, will be paying more at the hockey rinks, will be paying more at the car washes.

This bill sets out three sets of transmission lines that it deems to be critical infrastructure. There would be no public interest hearing on these lines and the process that would normally take place under the Alberta Utilities Commission's regulatory system. This is because the government deems these lines to be so critical that they feel there's no doubt about the fact that the lines are in the public interest, but we have to hear it from the public if they are in the public interest or not.

The two high-voltage direct current lines between Edmonton and Calgary, one to the west of the cities and the other to the east, would create a massive backbone of electrical system between the two main centres of the province, but current transmission between the two cities would be troubled by the construction of these lines, and according to the briefing by AESO most power will be flowing south from large coal-fired generators around Edmonton to Calgary. AESO's explanation of the construction of two new lines rather than just one is that the rating of transmission capacity is based on the capacity of the second-highest line, the backup in case of transmission failure in the biggest line. If the second one isn't big as well, the system rating will be lower.

Another issue here is that high-voltage direct current is a relatively new technology, and it's not clear whether it is even the most appropriate technology for this particular use. For example, AESO's planning document says that DC for overhead lines is generally more economic than AC when the transmission distance is greater than 700 kilometres. If the DC technology is more economic only over 700 kilometres, then it is unclear why the 300-kilometre distance between Edmonton and Calgary is economically appropriate currently for DC lines. So why are we spending money on DC lines when AC lines are cheaper? Why is the government forcing through these DC lines when AESO's own document states that longer distances are required for DC technology to be economical?

It should also be noted that the government has already given two companies direction to apply for construction approval for these two lines between Edmonton and Calgary. On August 25, 2009, Alberta Energy released a news release stating that two companies had been cleared to apply for approval to construct and operate new critical electrical transmission lines between Edmonton and Calgary.

The government appears to be trying to get a head start on the part of the AUC hearing process that would remain even if Bill 50 passes such as specific siting and environmental assessment for transmis-

sion lines on a high-voltage alternating current line going from the south of Edmonton to the new substation in the Industrial Heartland. This particular line is controversial above and beyond the approval process issues discussed in this bill.

Residents now in Edmonton who live near the proposed line route have been exceedingly outspoken in their opposition to the lines as currently designed. These residents would like to see any new transmission lines buried rather than running above ground in the transportation utility corridor. They are concerned about the health issues that may arise and also the impact on their property values. So is the government planning to bury this line underground? We don't have long before the timeline in the AESO planning document, so the government must have a decision on this. How much is it going to cost? Will it be done underground, or will it be above ground? Those are the questions I think should be answered.

4:50

AESO predicts that these projects will cost \$5.7 billion. When adding already approved transmission lines to the new wind power developments in southern Alberta, the total cost will be \$8.1 billion. With the second phase of critical infrastructure that AESO is looking at within the next 10 years, the lines into northern and northwest Alberta, interties with B.C. and northern Saskatchewan, under this bill would automatically be considered as critical infrastructure.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we have 29(2)(a). The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last part of the hon. member's speech I heard him ask questions about decisions on whether the lines would be built above ground or underground and what the cost implications of that would be and the need for a quick decision on that piece. I'm just wondering if the hon. member could advise whether he understands that those sorts of decisions are still subject to public hearings by the Alberta Utilities Commission with respect to routing of lines, with respect to whether they're built above ground or underground and those sorts of decision-making. Is he aware that it's still in the purview of the Alberta Utilities Commission to have public hearings and make those decisions?

Mr. Kang: How long, you know, will that process last, the public hearings? Is there a time frame put on that? That's the question I ask, Minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm supposed to be asking him the questions. But I'm more than happy to indicate that the Alberta Utilities Commission sets its own time frames with respect to the public hearings process. Perhaps that would help him understand, then, the need for moving ahead quickly now with the critical infrastructure decision so that the Alberta Utilities Commission can get on with its process and that all the other public consultation processes can happen before a build actually starts, some two or three or perhaps four years out, that it's very necessary to start the process now by dispensing with the need for even more public consultation than the 374 meetings that the Minister of Energy referred to earlier and get on with making that decision on critical need that Bill 50 does so that the Utilities Commission can get on with its siting and cost and above ground and below ground and all those other things that are the Utilities Commission's purview.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other hon. members wish to use 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Kang: Well, I think that under Bill 19 the government already has the power to acquire those lands for the utility corridors. My

concern is: will this erode the power of the Alberta Utilities Commission to hold hearings, you know, when we put the word "critical" in there? That's the concern I have, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: You still have two and a half minutes, hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to the hon. member that the clear reading of the bill – there's a question of being the determination with respect to what's critical infrastructure. Making that determination, anywhere in the bill that I read, doesn't detract at all from the power and the mandate that the Alberta Utilities Commission has to have public hearings to determine siting. Once the siting is determined, of course you have to assemble land, and Bill 19 might come into effect then. But there's nothing here that I see that detracts from the power and the mandate. The purpose of the Alberta Utilities Commission, with respect, is to determine the best route and what goes into the build, whether it's above ground or below ground, for example.

Mr. Kang: Well, section 17(2), when we change section 17 and add (2), gives the power to the government to do away with that hearing process. That's plain and clear in this, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to use 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the chair shall now recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod on the bill.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today in the Assembly today to speak on second reading of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act. As we've been discussing today, Alberta's electricity transmission system is aging, congested, inefficient, and undersized. In addition, our transmission system is working at or near its capacity for extended periods of time. In fact, due to inefficiencies within Alberta's transmission system, as was mentioned earlier, \$220 million worth of electricity was lost in 2008. We've already heard that that's enough to power 350,000 homes a year. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Electric System Operator, or AESO, has determined that there is a need for new transmission facilities across the province. Let me repeat that. They've determined that there is a need.

This is a good thing. It is good because it reflects the economic prospects of this province. We all know that today we are still in the midst of an economic downturn. However, it is recognized that Alberta's future is strong and that we will recover from this economic slowdown in the most enviable position in North America. Strong economic recovery does not happen by accident. This government had a plan in years past which led to the elimination of our provincial debt, put billions in savings, and substantially built up our financial assets. In addition, our low tax regime has made it known world-wide that Alberta is among the best places to invest and live. It is because of the planning and the vision of this government in years past that we are in a position today to prosper now and into the future.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Because of this economic growth projected over the next few decades, we need to make sure that we have the electrical infrastructure in place to allow for our economy to continue to prosper and expand. Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, does just that by determining the future need – let's be clear again: the future need – for the development of specific electrical infrastructure, which is of particular

importance in my own constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. My constituency and most of southwestern Alberta enjoy the warm chinook winds that compress and collect energy as they rush down the eastern slopes. This natural process is a huge advantage to the wind energy industry as it provides an ideal geographic location for wind energy developments.

Wind energy developments are developed where the wind is. You can't develop them where there isn't any wind. It won't do much for you. In fact, the Canada Wind Energy Association regards this area as one of the nation's strongest wind power regions in the country. This has led to the development of numerous wind energy projects across the southwest region of Alberta. For example, McBride Lake wind farm south of Fort Macleod is one of the largest wind farms in Canada, containing 114 turbines, which provide approximately 75 megawatts of electricity. In total this wind farm will produce about 235,000 megawatt hours per year of electricity, enough energy to power more than 32,000 homes annually. Also, Mr. Speaker, the Pincher Creek area in my constituency is known as the wind energy capital of Canada due to the significant wind energy developments around that location. All across southwestern Alberta wind energy has been providing green jobs and green power.

In the past 15 years, Mr. Speaker, we have seen a fivefold increase in wind power capacity in southern Alberta. One key element for this increase is the open market that has allowed for these sectors to grow. This open market has allowed for the most modern and technically advanced wind farms in the world. For example, the 300 kilowatt wind turbines that used to be visible on the skyline 15 years ago are now being replaced by much larger three megawatt turbines. Within a short time we have seen one windmill being able to produce 10 times more energy than in the past.

5:00

The open market in Alberta has also attracted many new suppliers to the market. Fifteen years ago we had three utility companies dominating that market. Today there are dozens of new suppliers, and the market itself has over 200 participants, many of which focus on wind power and other forms of green energy. It has become a stable added source of income for landowners as well as municipalities. An example of some quarter sections that I was familiar with in the MD of Willow Creek at a time in the past were taxed at less than \$100 per quarter per year. Now that municipality is receiving 20 times to 30 times that per tower on the quarter section along with the quarter section tax. In some cases there are up to two or three towers on a quarter section. That's quite a significant difference, and with that come the related jobs.

However, Mr. Speaker, the transmission lines in southwestern Alberta are at capacity, which has prevented the development of further wind energy projects. We heard about two weeks ago at a policy field committee meeting that one of the most vocal opponents to Bill 50 had also intervened to block the 240-kilovolt line currently under construction in southern Alberta. This was clearly done in a self-interest or to block wind power from reaching the market, not in the interest of a competitive marketplace for electricity or in the interest of utilizing more green power or providing the best-cost electricity to the consumers. Creating more transmission capacity will encourage new suppliers that can deliver power to Albertans.

The projects outlined in Bill 50, such as the proposed south reinforcement project, would allow for new suppliers to enter this market. The south reinforcement project would create two new double-circuit 240-kilovolt lines along with a new 500-kilovolt substation in southern Alberta. That reinforcement would increase the ability for wind farms to connect to the provincial power system. We currently have the Piikani Nation lands, with vast wind power development potential and with that creation of good, stable jobs, plus new power generation stream for their people, but sadly there

is no capacity on the transmission system without more reinforcement of the southern grid.

Mr. Speaker, we need to be able to introduce new power support, new participants, and encourage efficiencies. However, in order to achieve these objectives, we need to pass Bill 50. Bill 50 will allow the Alberta government to approve the need – once again: the need – for critical transmission infrastructure that AESO has determined. Bill 50 will also still allow for the AUC to conduct more public consultation. In fact, between 2007 and 2009 AESO carried out over 300 public consultations and open houses on various proposals to develop and expand the transmission system. These consultations saw over 2,000 landowners, stakeholders, and members of the general public participate. The public consultations are crucial in developing new transmission lines, and they will continue. Bill 50 will also support the future prosperity of Alberta as well as the current prosperity of Alberta.

For these reasons I support this important bill, and I urge all members of the Assembly here to stand in support of the future power supply for all Albertans and Bill 50. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod mentioned that there was a \$250 million line loss. I'm just wondering if he's aware that the standard line loss is around 7 per cent in even new constructed AC lines, which we are going to continue to run. How is spending and putting in these expensive HVDC lines going to help us in the fact that we're running right now less than 4 per cent line loss in actuality when you look backwards? I do agree with the hon. member that with the south reinforcement line, yes, there is a need there, but we still have a process under the AUC to bring forward those needs, and AESO hasn't made that application to AUC.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. Thank you to the member across the floor. First off, I would point out to him that I said \$220 million worth of line loss, not \$250 million. In that correction I would also say that I guess we would need more cost analysis studies brought forward from your perspective to show me that and prove that fact that you're mentioning.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just two quick questions. I note that old plans by the AESO and other things already showed the south substation being built without the cadillac upgrades to the backbone of the system. I was wondering if you could comment on these additional costs that the cadillac system provides.

Another thing. I was wondering, since you've had your members here today from Pincher Creek, whether you've had a chance to discuss with them sort of incentives like Texas is doing to incent the wind market and like Ontario is doing and how you're going to incorporate those existing incentives with what's been happening.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you. That's an interesting question. It has a couple of points. I'll go to the second one first. Now, I can't quote exactly how much is approved that is not able to get built to the transmission lines currently, but there's a significant amount of wind

power generation that has been approved throughout my constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. It needs no incentive, hon. member. The wind is where it is. To take advantage of it, you have to build in that area. There are permitted operations that are not able to be built because there's no capacity to move that. Now, does that take a cadillac system? I don't know. Moving power is moving power.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Additional questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm just wondering if you can talk to me about the rationale of bringing coal-fired power down to your wind-rich area and the loss of power in the process. Does it not make sense for your wind energy to connect to your local towns and cities such as Lethbridge rather than bringing it all the way down from Wabamun and the line loss associated with it?

Mr. Berger: Well, that's an interesting perspective, once again, because I was trying to move wind power north. I guess that in your estimation we would only be moving coal power south. It takes a mixture to have a balanced power pool to draw on so that we do not suffer any brownouts. Wind power is not one hundred per cent consistent. You do have to have backup. I think you would understand that.

I would say that in Alberta right now, out of all the power that is generated by wind, 72 per cent of it comes from the two municipalities within my Livingstone-Macleod constituency. Just for the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. We're going to move forward.

Mr. Hinman: The hon. member started off his speech by saying that our system was aged. I was wondering if he could bring forward some documents on the age. Many of the houses in this province are over 20 years old, and it's not critical to replace them. I'm wondering if he could bring some documents forward on the age.

I'll be happy to provide the documents showing the line loss to him later on.

Mr. Berger: Apparently, I probably could. I don't have those with me right now, obviously. But I would like to ask the member across the floor who now represents Calgary-Glenmore: does he know how much wind power is actually generated in his former constituency? I'm sure he doesn't, but I'd like to know that because it's locked in as well.

Mr. Hinman: I'd appreciate answering that. The actual numbers aren't at the tip of my hand, but I know that those lines – and I already said to you, sir, that the southern reinforcement lines are needed. That's a totally different idea than putting two high-voltage direct current lines in the middle of this province, where there is no need. To spend billions of dollars on that and declare it a critical situation isn't appropriate, and it's not in the Alberta taxpayers' best interest, and we need to realize that. Where do we need to build it? Yes, where the power is, and then bring it forward from there. Those high-voltage lines are excessive. The university of . . .

The Speaker: Unfortunately and alas, the time has expired for this little exchange.

Now, the next speaker that I have on my list is the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, who must explain – you want to sub? Okay. Calgary-Buffalo, then.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and sorry about the little bit of confusion.

It is again, as always, an honour and a privilege to get up and speak in this House, and today it's about this contentious Bill 50. I believe it's contentious for a reason. You know, although some people aren't as appreciative of the fact that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has a teaching background, I am because today I learned another interesting fact from him, which was that under Alberta law the costs of putting up transmission things are entirely borne by the consumer. This decision was made, apparently, in the '90s by a former member of this House, Mr. Murray Smith, who contravened an EUB decision which said something to the effect of: some of it should be borne by the producer, and some of it should be borne by the user. I didn't know that, so I appreciate the fact that I learned this today from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity because it helps me with where I'm going in today's debate.

5:10

Since all of the costs are now borne by the consumer, we in this House should be concerned with what the consumer has to say. This should not only go to where we can put these transmission lines, whether we can have a hearing to hear whether we can move a transmission line 25 metres around a barn or perhaps a Quonset or perhaps a settlement nearby or something like that. Since the consumers are bearing the costs of this, they should have an opportunity to speak on whether they actually need this power.

Guess what? We had a perfect system that decided this, and this was called the Alberta Utilities Commission. At the Alberta Utilities Commission I believe what this government set up was a tribunal or a panel that dealt with hearing complaints made by both individuals and experts, where they could look at all the submissions made and hear the information presented in a reasonable fashion and make a decision on whether the taxpayer, the end consumer, actually needs the power and whether or not the power generator actually needed that market to be provided. I think it was a fair balance that recognized both the need, if there was, for producing power and the need, then, for the consumer to pay for it. It was a balance that we had struck between these two groups as to hearing the complaint.

What has happened now is that under Bill 50, or what is being put before this House, the Alberta Utilities Commission are no longer deemed the experts. You know who's deemed the experts? It's the cabinet. It's Premier Stelmach. It's the minister of health, it's the Minister of Education, it's the minister of finance who have deemed themselves experts in what Alberta's citizens need and the amount of transportation need and the amount of system-to-be-built need. I don't know. It hasn't been proven to me. Despite cabinet's credentials I don't necessarily see them as being experts on transmission lines. Maybe I'm being short-sighted in this, but I would hazard a guess that even the minister of health would grant me that they are not experts on transmission lines.

With that being the rationale, I can't help but be a little bit worried that this body is now taking away the power from the Alberta Utilities Commission and the power from Alberta citizens to voice their opinions to that body and is making the decision behind closed doors. I just can't help but say that it seems a little bit wonky or a little bit backwards that we are doing it in this fashion.

Let's take a look. I think one of the reasons we set up the Alberta Utilities Commission was to remove the political influence from this decision-making because we all know that governments can be influenced by special-interest groups, by big business, by whomever out there, and they can be strong-armed into maybe making decisions that might not be in the public interest.

We had a bit of a discussion here today in question period on that, on some of this influence. We had AltaLink, who was a sponsor of a recent Progressive Conservative convention, and EPCOR, you know, and some of these other companies. I'm not saying that it happened, but, you know, it leads the average Joe and Jane Albertan to say that, well, the timing of this and given that this Bill 50 is out there and given that the government is all of a sudden changing the rules in the middle of the game – it leads people to maybe think that something is up. I'm not suggesting that anything is, but it just leads people to believe that. I don't like it when politicians change the rules in the middle of the game. It appears like this is what is happening here. I would have preferred to have seen this go through the process that was set up. It would have allowed us to go forward with both expert and lay opinions alike and hear the opinions.

I'd also like to comment on some of the changes that are going to be coming to the Alberta landscape. These have to do with a smart grid. It's my understanding that in the very near future a smart grid is going to enable the end consumer to deal with a lot less power than they are currently using. It's by technologies that are right around the corner that can be implemented in the grid and can be put into place. Estimates are that the average household will be using at least one-half to two-thirds of the power they're currently using. Then with this technology out there – and it comes from some fairly credible sources, some scientific sources out of the United States that have been published in journals that say that this is going to be out there – it begs the question: why do we need this cadillac model?

I think that the reason for this cadillac model is because producers or generators of power, possibly people like some of the people involved, like AltaLink, like ATCO, who I believe have some shares in certain power arrangements that are going to be going up in the process and all of this stuff, want to get these transmission lines built to export power. Why not? The cost of this is being borne by the taxpayer. It's not being borne by the business unit, the people who are going to derive the profits from this. So why not? It's a great opportunity.

AltaLink: "Yeah, let's build the cadillac system. Yeah, let's do that. Of course we want this to happen because – guess what? – we don't have to pay for it. Guess what? You know, we'll tell the Alberta taxpayer their bill might only go up \$8 a month from this, but when it's all said and done, it could go up more. We've heard estimates that it could be \$200. Really, who cares? By then the transmission line is built, we're going to be exporting our power, our shareholders will be happy, and all of that stuff. Really, that's the taxpayers' problem."

Now, I'm hopeful that that doesn't happen, but I'm thinking that if I'm AltaLink and these other organizations, I'm going to be pretty excited to have these things going on and to have the government or the cabinet make this decision for me. Again, I think big business is going to be happy with this decision, but I don't know if the Alberta taxpayer is going to be happy with this decision at the end of the day. I go back to the fact that that's why we had the Alberta Utilities Commission there in the first place: to guard whether it's big-business interests or Joe and Jane Albertan's interests as to what is happening here in Alberta.

I think that process is being undermined here, the traditional voice where people can go and say what they want at these hearings and hire experts. I'm telling you that it wouldn't be easy to host all these hearings on when power plants were going in or whether they were needed or not. It wouldn't be easy, but at least people would have a voice. Sure, this process may get it off the books by Christmas and say that you had your opportunity and that it was a decision that was made and yada yada yada, and we move on. But is the easier decision always the correct one? In this instance I don't think so. I think that the people of Alberta are not going to be well served by it.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this bill, and we'll move on from here.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. There being no activity, then the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting topic in my constituency. I have a pretty large load with the newsprint mill, the pulp mills, the sawmills, and medium-density fibreboard mills and a lot of concerns because all of those forest industries right now are operating on tight margins and are having difficulty staying in business. So a lot of concerns have come to me, specifically from Ron Stern, the CEO and president of Alberta Newsprint, located just outside of Whitecourt within Woodlands county. He asked some very pointed questions, and I need the help of the minister to get some clarification on some of those statements. Maybe later on in the minister's statements or in Committee of the Whole he can clarify what Mr. Stern asked me.

Before I ask the question, I want to read to you part of a letter that Mr. Stern wrote. He states:

Energy is our single largest cost. In 2008, [Alberta Newsprint] consumed 825,000 MWH of electricity. The increase would mean an additional cost of over \$12,000,000 per year or \$50 per tonne [to the] newsprint production . . . These electricity rate increases would transform us from a low cost producer to a high cost producer.

This huge increase will imperil Alberta Newsprint's viability and that of numerous other industrial firms that utilize large amounts of energy . . .

While we can speak with certainty about the impact of such a cost increase for the viability of our business, we can only raise very serious questions about the wisdom of the proposed massive expenditure. While we accept that some transmission enhancements are required . . .

And he states that he's not against transmission enhancements, that they are required.

. . . based on the advice we have received and reviewing AESO publications we are, among other matters, not satisfied that . . . the lowest long-term cost solutions have been properly evaluated and selected.

He asked me: will a ratepayer oversight committee have an opportunity or role in going forward? So I'd like some clarification from the minister on that.

The other point that Mr. Stern makes, and he offers a suggestion:

The single circuit 500 kV AC transmission facility between the Edmonton and Calgary regions [could] be built with direct current towers and wired to allow for future DC operation. Any reconfiguration to DC operation will be linked to key milestones and will provide for inverter stations to be added on an as needed basis.

So he's talking about a staged idea. Again, if the minister can clarify whether a staging of Mr. Stern's suggestion would make sense or could be considered through this bill.

I think, secondly, like most issues, Mr. Speaker, it comes down to dollars and cents and who pays. Mr. Stern and others in my constituency are concerned: who pays? He writes again:

If the undertaking contemplated by Bill 50 is to proceed, then preserving a multitude of jobs across a variety of industries in Alberta must be an important factor in defining who pays for the \$14 billion cost of that undertaking. Alberta's industrial users simply cannot afford . . . and should not be required to pay for transmission capacity that may not be needed until decades from now.

He asks: can a more equitable sharing of costs and benefits be developed if the economic base of Alberta is to be preserved and broadened?

I guess that's the issue that I struggle with. I want to make sure that the vision premium in this bill – you know, can we build for a decade, or can we build for two decades? – is something that we can do while ensuring that Alberta's only newsprint mill remains open and competitive. Companies like Millar Western in Whitecourt, that has been a family business since 1921: can they continue to be competitive? West Fraser, an operation just outside of my community and within Woodlands county, a massive investment in a modern sawmill, medium-density fibreboard, are competing against companies all over the world, and some of those companies that they're competing with have very low-cost energy.

I guess the concerns from my constituents are simple. We know that if the transmission system wasn't upgraded and wasn't built back in the '60s and '70s to allow these companies to locate, we wouldn't have had the prosperity that we do in my constituency. They understand the need to plan the system; they understand the need to have a good, robust transmission policy and a grid, a grid that's intertwined into neighbouring provinces, maybe even intertwined, like the Member for Livingstone-Macleod talked about, into the U.S. so we can get some of their power up into Alberta. Nobody is arguing those points.

I think it comes down to the simple question of who pays? Can we keep that Alberta advantage going within my constituency, within an industry that's very tight today? I hope that the minister can cover off those points so I can go home this weekend and give them the assurance that, yes, the lights will remain on, yes, we'll remain competitive, and this bill will allow them to keep operating with a profit margin, which is good, and will allow them to make the necessary investments in their mills to remain competitive over the next decade or two.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, before we go to 29(2)(a), there were several quotations from a document, that I hope the member will be prepared to table in the House tomorrow at the appropriate time.

Mr. VanderBurg: I have the necessary copies.

The Speaker: Okay. You can do that tomorrow, then.
Standing Order 29(2)(a) now.

Mr. Chase: Very quickly, a comment rather than a question. I appreciate the questions that you asked, and I, too, and members of this caucus are looking for those answers. I think Albertans in general are looking for that sort of assurance that there is some thought behind this.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, do you wish to participate?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, it was a comment. I can tell the member that, you know, I had the opportunity to work on pieces of the transmission policy. I do understand that we are one of the poorest interconnected jurisdictions in North America as far as being able to rely on our neighbours' strengths and weaknesses so we can share generation and share time and maybe shave some of the peak. I do understand his concerns, and I think I made my points very clearly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne for bringing to the House here an actual situation where things are put in jeopardy if things aren't done correctly. I think that's exactly what everybody in this House that

has been speaking against this bill has been trying to address. Under the old system the Alberta Utilities Commission would go through a needs process and such advocates of that can go forward and show that and balance it out. I believe we're making a major error, and I don't want to compromise the good member's situation, but by taking that needs process out and putting it into the minister's decision, we've bypassed a system that has worked and served well, as you said, to develop your own area years ago. Would you be able to comment on that at all?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I understand the comment that the member has made, but I also understand that we've had lots of consultation with Albertans. We've had hearings all over this great province about the need to expand our transmission system, about the need to talk about local distribution, and the need to tie in wind power and tie in all forms of energy. But it's time to get to work. You know, we can have hearing over hearing over hearing. We've created a cottage industry that goes to hearings and fills out a form for expenses. I don't think that's what we ever envisioned when we talked about a well-communicated system that moves on and allows us to build.

Thank you, sir.

5:30

Mr. Hinman: I guess I'd have to agree that we don't want the cottage industry, but to take away that needs process, Mr. Speaker, takes the experts out of the situation. Not just public consultation – that's fine – but to actually have a process where people can appeal if, in fact, they haven't been able to put forth their needs and applications. That's the problem with this bill. It's basically taking it out, it's centralizing the power and the decision-making into the minister's office, and it isn't going to serve the best needs, necessarily, of Albertans. But it may be for those companies that want to have the ability to expand their power lines.

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you like to comment?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, given the time that we have, I can say that I believe the need has been discussed very thoroughly in the province of Alberta: the need for a robust transmission system, the need for the system to be able to accommodate growth. I think this year alone we've had 50,000 new Albertans come to our province. You know, they'll come here looking for work, looking to turn their lights on when they go home at night, looking for an industry that has the surety that the power will remain on. I think all that need has been determined.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East with some degree of reluctance.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Certainly, I owe you an apology and an apology to the House because I did not ensure that I was available for 29(2)(a), which followed up from yesterday afternoon. So I do apologize for that.

The other time that I actually missed by not being in the House was when the Minister of Health and Wellness and the minister of finance got back to me so quickly with answers to my questions. I guess I'm going to have to pay a little more attention to what I'm doing.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I assume that I may go forward?

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. This is a very interesting bill. I sat on municipal council when the deregulation went through the first time around for electricity, and it was very, very confusing. We thought we understood what was happening, and the next thing we knew, the rules were all changed again. I think it took years – I'm going to say at least two years – before it finally ironed itself out where, in fact, not only the people like me, who are certainly not electrical engineers, really understood what was happening. We have very knowledgeable people at the city of Lethbridge, and they struggled with how this was actually shaking down. But in the end the prices went up.

Deregulation is not good for taxpayers. One of the areas in deregulation was, as I say, the deregulation of electricity. I think that, clearly, we have to know that wasn't very successful. The deregulation of long-term care has been less than successful. The deregulation that allowed asset-backed commercial paper into this province I think was exceptionally not successful.

Having said that about deregulation, probably whether we like it or not, it is here. I'd like to perhaps go back and wish that we were in the past because when I speak to people in Manitoba, my family in Quebec, they are appalled at what we pay for electricity, and they're appalled at the fact that we don't own our own utilities and that we will get no return as a citizen of this province when we have to start paying the full cost. There was nothing wrong with half-and-half. There was nothing wrong with companies getting half and us getting half.

One of the other things that we could think about is that I believe that in the future – in fact, it might only be a matter of time – these lines will be bundled and sold, and who will buy them? Will they be people from China, India, Saudi Arabia, the U.S.A.? Who knows who will own these lines that we, the citizens of Alberta, will continue to pay for? I don't have problems if those lines are bundled and sold although I think we have to look at the mess that the subprime mortgage in the States created by bundling things to sell to other groups. I don't have a problem if the lines are sold, but I do have a problem that as a citizen of Alberta I'm not going to get some return. I believe that I should. I think that we could go to the table and be a shareholder and run it as a business. There's no reason that we as citizens of this province should not be shareholders in what's going on in our own province.

We will be getting electricity. Yes, we will. We will be getting heat, which will be based on the electricity that has to blow the fans to get the heat through our houses. But at what cost? What cost to the citizens of this province will these transmission lines be? Will we lose companies to Saskatchewan? Yes, we will lose companies to Saskatchewan. Will we lose people to Saskatchewan or B.C., or will people return to some of the other provinces that they came from? I believe that they will.

The other deep concern I have is that we do see the joblessness going up in this province. We do see people who have marginal jobs, people who often could live at least a decent lifestyle by working in telephone centres. They did the collections for local companies. They may be doing classifieds for newspapers. They may, in fact, even be selling insurance for someone like perhaps Sun Life. Those jobs, Mr. Speaker, are disappearing rapidly. They are disappearing to the Philippines, they are going to India, and they are going to Taiwan. Where are these people going to find jobs? My concern is that if they don't have a job and they are struggling, when their electricity bills go up, they're going to be struggling even more.

Seniors. We are encouraging seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible. As Murray Smith pointed out in his, I thought, very arrogant and condescending manner where he said, "Wear sweaters," trust me; the seniors are now wearing sweaters. They are wearing them already. Is the next question, the next remark, "Wear

two sweaters and long johns"? No. That is not what we should be saying to our seniors, people on fixed incomes, or those that work in marginal jobs that often have to work two jobs just to be able to exist. So I think there's a number of social questions that are around these transmission lines.

I've basically spoken about the residential side of things, and I don't think it's only a serious concern for the residential. I think that we're looking at industry. I think that we're looking at, as the speaker ahead of me has pointed out, small business. Our businesses are going to suffer, especially those that have very, very tight margins at this point in time. I think we can probably extrapolate that to some of our farm operations as well. It's going to weigh heavily on industry. It's increasing their operating costs.

5:40

The following that I'm going to quote is from a white paper by the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta, a group that uses approximately 35 per cent of the province's electricity in different sections, including gas and oil.

As it is currently established, Bill 50 will result in power costs that limit new oil and gas project viability and force other industries to relocate to jurisdictions where electricity is much more cost-competitive. If Bill 50 passes without modifications, large-scale Alberta industry will look to self-generate electricity, leaving residential and commercial consumers to pay for a considerably larger portion of this new and largely unnecessary transmission infrastructure.

I think that for people in Manitoba, Ontario, and certainly in Nelson, B.C., their dream is to get off the grid: please, let us get off the grid. I think we are going to see more and more of this kind of thinking. All we have to do is look to Ontario where the fellow has taken his farm – and I don't remember the exact number of acres that he has taken out of creating food to make a solar farm. He lives off the grid, on top of which he sells back to the grid. I think we're going to see more and more of these innovative, local kinds of ability to make electricity. In California many, many people have solar panels on their garages. The idea is to get off the grid, and now we are trying to make this huge monster grid. And I think it's pretty clear that what we're doing is creating a grid for export.

One of the things where perhaps I got the idea that these lines, of course, will be bundled and sold in time is the MATL line that is running from Lethbridge to Great Falls, where, in fact, they say the electricity created by wind farms in both Canada and the United States will go back and forth. I don't think that's probably true for a minute. I think it'll all be going south. But the point is that that line was sold three times before a shovel even hit the ground. In fact, it's still before the courts whether they're going to go ahead. There's a new wrinkle in how the people are trying to fight that MATL line. [interjection] As my hon. colleague has pointed out, it's in the hands of the lawyers, so I'm sure that it will not be simple. I'm sure that once we've got the lawyers in there, it'll become so complex that they can probably hash around this for a long time.

One of the interesting things that they have brought forward, the argument that was used, is that this is for the public good; therefore, we should be able to go in and take your land for the public good. But the argument is that the profit is not to the public. The profit is to a private company. So the question is: does a private company, whose profits will go straight to them, have the right to take public land and call it the public good?

Mr. Liepert: Shame.

Ms Pastoor: That's right. I totally agree with the Minister of Health and Wellness. It is a shame. Shame, shame, shame. [interjection]

I didn't hear that, but by the way one of my other colleagues is laughing, I have to assume it was clever.

One of the examples that I could use from the last deregulation fiasco, in my mind, is my electrical bill from my cabin. Prior to deregulation if I didn't use any electricity – i.e., I turned it off at the pole – I wasn't charged for it. I still turn the electricity off at the pole – I'm not using electricity – and my bill is now \$30 a month. So thank you for deregulation. My bill went up, and I'm not really getting anything. However, the nice young lady at the end of the telephone, when I complained about that, said that I was paying for the poles and the wires. I wanted to explain to her, but I realized that she was far too young to understand that, in fact, I owned the pole and I owned the wires, which I put in 40 years ago. That argument didn't stand. However, I'm still paying the \$30.

When I look at my own bill, my city bill, I'm paying \$4 for electricity, and I'm paying another \$22 for the three companies that have been created through deregulation that all need a profit, which is why these bills have gone up.

I'm not sure just where this is all going to end up. I think that, clearly, the numbers are here and that this will pass through. They've assured us that we'll be having public hearings. I'm not sure, after some of the other things that have happened in public hearings, that I particularly trust that process.

Some of the other questions I think deserve to be answered. AESO has said that, yes, we need it right now. I'm not sure that I totally agree with that. Because I'm not an electrical engineer, of course, I can't sit at the table with the electrical engineers and necessarily argue that with any sort of scientific degree of credibility. The question is: is this really going to be a smart grid? I think there are other, smarter ways.

The Speaker: Hon member, thank you. The time has now expired.

Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask the hon. member a couple of questions. First of all, she mentioned Ontario and Quebec. Of course, I came from Ontario, so I'm quite familiar with the province. I'm just curious if she's aware of the tax structure that's in Quebec and Ontario as compared to the tax structure in Alberta for citizens.

I'd also like to know if she's aware of the debt that's been accumulated by the Crown corporations in both Ontario and Quebec that deal with the hydro situations of both of those provinces.

Ms Pastoor: Well, I think that the citizens in Ontario and Quebec are very aware of the debt that they're paying for, and they are also very aware that they have cheaper electricity. But I think the thing that's important to them is, yes, they have a debt, but they also own their utilities. I think that sometimes when you own it, you aren't afraid to take the debt. Clearly, this province is going into debt. We are going into debt to put these transmission lines up, so we're not going to be any different. We will have a debt, but we won't own the utility. I think that may be the difference.

Mr. Griffiths: I'm wondering if the hon. member would clarify where we're going into debt when there's \$17 billion put away to cover off the surplus. Where does she figure this debt is coming from?

Ms Pastoor: I think there's a lot of personal debt that's going to come up. The personal debt in this province already is quite high, and I think that this is going to push people into – if all of our citizens are in debt, it does reflect over the whole society.

Yes, we do have the \$17 billion, but I think we've pretty much spent that if we look at some of the other things that we're doing. We will be going into debt when we start selling the capital bonds. That is a debt.

The Speaker: Others? Hon. Government House Leader, were you getting involved in 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hancock: Only from the sidelines.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, are you getting involved in 29(2)(a)?

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Blakeman: The member was talking just before she stopped on a subject I was particularly interested in. Now I've been distracted by the other folks. I'm sorry. Was it on . . .

Ms Pastoor: Smart grid?

Ms Blakeman: The smart grid. Can you just expand on that, please?

5:50

Ms Pastoor: I think that using the term "smart grid" is something that should be looked at. Is this really going to be smarter, or are we actually using old technology? I mean, clearly, part of this is old technology when we are going to lose so much because of the transmission over the great distances that both the east and west lines will be having.

There are better ways. I think there are better ways, and clearly there are people in my area who don't necessarily think they need it – I'm not speaking about the wind people – because they're going to go along the same lines as what Enmax is proposing. Now, however, they want a small nuclear generator to be able to push the electricity for southern Alberta, which is another whole question unto itself. But I do think there's a smarter way.

The Speaker: Maybe we'll get to it in the next answer should you be asked another question.

Section 29(2)(a) is still available. No further participants?

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in second reading debate on Bill 50. There are any number of points that I could choose to reply to that have been made so far in debate this afternoon, and I will get to some clarification that I think is needed for the benefit of members opposite a little later in the speech.

In particular to the question of the determination of need for critical transmission infrastructure, I think what many members opposite fail to appreciate is that, in fact, the determination of need is actually a function of government. For example, in the case of the education system or our transportation infrastructure or our health care infrastructure I have yet to hear members opposite question or do anything but gratefully accept when government determines the need to provide for these and, in fact, to look beyond the term of our individual mandates as members and look to the future and plan accordingly for anticipated needs in the province to support growth, to support the livelihood and an improved quality of life for our own people. That is, I think, Mr. Speaker, the higher principle that's involved in this debate.

I want to talk for a few minutes about some features of the bill that appear to have been overlooked by our hon. colleagues opposite. First of all, Mr. Speaker, the bill does not remove the requirement for the Alberta Utilities Commission, or AUC, to approve the siting of critical transmission lines. Therefore, directly impacted landowners would still have the opportunity to present their concerns during a fair and open hearing conducted by the AUC.

Secondly, the Alberta Electrical System Operator has determined a need for critical transmission infrastructure, as has been pointed out by members on this side of the House, and Bill 50 would assist in ensuring that this need is met.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the House that AESO is a not-for-profit entity. It is independent of any industry affiliations, and it owns no transmission or market assets. Therefore, the allegations of vested interest or potential bias on the part of AESO are clearly unsubstantiated. Furthermore, AESO is governed by an independent board which provides advice and direction for market participants. It has a diverse background in finance, business, electricity, oil and gas, energy management, regulatory affairs, and technology, all very important spheres of expertise which this government has drawn on and would continue to draw upon in the future in making determinations of need under this proposed legislation.

AESO has the statutory mandate, the resources, and the technical expertise to prepare long-term transmission system plans for this province. I think I would agree with hon. members opposite who have suggested that as individuals members, notwithstanding the impressive professional backgrounds represented in the House, none of us really have the expertise to do that on our own. Mr. Speaker, we can second-guess and we can question the need. However, that is a huge risk since electricity is so intricately linked to our province's economic growth as well as our daily lives.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, electricity is, quite simply, a need. It is not a want. The government has a serious responsibility to ensure that critical transmission infrastructure is in place, and this bill would help us to carry out that responsibility. All Albertans require transmission lines. As I pointed out earlier, they are as necessary as hospitals, schools, and roads. The obligation on the part of government to determine current and future needs beyond the electoral mandate of any of us is just as justified. In fact, as many of my colleagues have pointed out, if there is no electricity to power these buildings, and if we cannot light our roads and highways, then they are of consequently no use to Albertans. Transmission lines are vital for the province's economic growth, and Bill 50 would help ensure that Alberta has the transmission in place to support and sustain our future prosperity.

The provincial policy of an energy-only market requires transmission to lead generation, not the other way around. This means that without transmission lines there are no incentives, Mr. Speaker, for companies to build generation plants, which ultimately leads to less competition and freedom of choice for Albertans. I ask members of this House: is this something we should risk? Is this an oversight we are elected to tolerate at the whim of the individual agendas of a minority of stakeholders when the majority clearly supports this government's intent to build more transmission capacity? Some of these stakeholders include the Alberta Federation of Rural Electrification Associations, the Independent Power Producers Society of Alberta, and the Capital Power Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is currently a net importer of electricity. We have been so since 2002. The province does not produce enough power on a continual basis to meet the needs of our industries,

business, residents, and farms. This is unacceptable, and it is unbecoming of this House to pass up the opportunity to provide legislation that will anticipate and meet those needs into the future.

The 2009 long-term transmission system plan states that existing transmission facilities in the northeast were near or at capacity as recently as 2008. This is not good for our economy or our future. Bill 50 would address this issue by ensuring that critical transmission infrastructure is in place ahead of increased demand and planned generation, allowing for future growth. Mr. Speaker, quite clearly, the debate and the ultimate passage of this legislation is our responsibility as members of this House. We cannot ignore the facts.

This brings me to my fourth and final point. The proposed Edmonton to Calgary project addresses reliability issues for consumers in south and central Alberta. The lines have the potential to incorporate biomass from the forestry and waste industries in western Alberta and Grande Prairie and large hydroelectric facilities in northern Alberta. The Edmonton to Calgary project also has the potential to provide capacity for the connection of wind power, as pointed out by my hon. colleague, in southern Alberta so that all Albertans can benefit from competitively priced, clean energy.

Lastly, the power that exporters pay for the use of the transmission system is for when they export power. The rates paid by exporters are included in AESO's tariff, which is approved by the AUC. The payments made by power exporters for the use of transmission lines offsets the cost to Alberta customers for the transmission system. The rate the exporters pay for the use of the transmission system is very similar, Mr. Speaker, to the rate Alberta customers pay for similar levels of service across the province.

Mr. Speaker, our province is not the same today as it was 20 years ago. We will not be the same 20 years hence. The population and our economy continue to grow. This has continued to put a strain on our transmission system. We need to rely on facts to determine the need for new transmission lines. I do not, like my hon. colleagues, want the future of this province to be at the mercy of a 20-year-old transmission system.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. member. You mentioned the expertise of the people on AESO and their background, and then you compared that to the cabinet and their credentials. My question is: are you saying that we're better off to put the needs process – because they're going to say the direction, the amount, and everything else at AESO, yet we're going to have cabinet determine whether or not the needs are necessary. Do you really believe that that is going to be in the best interest of Albertans?

The Speaker: Hon. members, the clock will quickly turn to 6 o'clock, and I must advise that the House will now adjourn until 7:30 this evening. However, I'd ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, recognizing there's still some time left under 29(2)(a), to be in his position tomorrow as we kick off further debate on Bill 50 – or tonight, whenever it is – to fulfill that obligation to the House.

The House stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

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Issue 60e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

[Debate adjourned November 18: Mr. Horne speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: We still have four minutes under 29(2)(a) for question and comment.

Mr. Hehr: Who was it that spoke before?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was the speaker, and whoever can use that four minutes now.

Mr. Hinman: I asked a question that he didn't have time to reply to, I believe.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, reply to the question.

Mr. Horne: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his question a little while earlier, just prior to adjournment. I believe the hon. member's question dealt with how under the proposed legislation government would seek expert advice in the determination of need for critical transmission infrastructure. I believe, hon. member, you were looking for clarification as to whether I thought that expertise was within us as individual members and within cabinet, and I think you perhaps misunderstood my remarks.

My point was that the responsibility for assurance that Alberta has the necessary infrastructure to move forward and to prosper under future economic conditions lies with elected Members of the Legislative Assembly and, in this particular case, with members of government. Obviously, part of that role and that responsibility involves seeking as necessary the required expertise from some of the professionals that you mentioned in order to make that determination of need.

My point, nonetheless, was that this is really not dissimilar to government's determination of need with respect to transportation infrastructure, infrastructure to support the education system, the health care system, none of which seem to have come under question in the current debate. I have every confidence that the government would seek that advice when exercising their authority under the proposed bill.

Thank you.

Mr. Hinman: I'd just like to respond to the hon. member, and I appreciate his forthrightness in coming forward. My question is whether or not he's aware – they've talked about being biased and whether there's bias present. He says that they're competent in doing that and that the AESO is competent in bringing forth its expertise. But we've had two rulings, one in 2007 in the Court of Queen's Bench, where the courts ruled AESO as being biased.

The most recent paper put out, the transmission upgrade discussion paper, by the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate says

that the EDC analyzes many different aspects. Basically, they say in there that the AESO is unconvincing and overstates the sense of urgency and has a case of bias. So we want to take that from their words over the courts?

Mr. Horne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I suppose that if the hon. member wants to discuss the question of bias, we could probably have that in a broader context at some other time. I'm, frankly, not familiar with the information that the hon. member has presented. If he'd care to table it, I'd consider myself enlightened by that, but in the absence of that, in this debate, you know, I simply can't respond.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 54 seconds. The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess I just want to make a comment on what I just heard. The whole idea that there is a body of appointed officials whom you simply have to trust regardless of their qualifications, their experience, and so on: you know, the history of government in Canada is replete with examples of highly qualified professional people that have made tremendous errors. The fact that we should take their word for it on an \$8 billion expenditure beggars the imagination. You know, I can hardly wait for the Minister of Health and Wellness to . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we go back to the motion on the previous question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to frame tonight's participation in discussion with a line from a poem by Welsh poet Dylan Thomas: "Do not go gentle into that [dark] night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Considering that our discussion tonight has to do with rage and night and light, I'll break this discussion down.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do to begin with is suggest that this particular bill, Bill 50, is all about trust. We have a circumstance in this parliament where trust is lacking. It's lacking on both sides, so lack of confidence in our colleagues, whether they be on the government side, or their lack of confidence in us as members of the opposition. But because *Hansard* is an historical record and because a number of people don't have the understanding that underlies the democratic process, I want to begin by reviewing what happened today and link it to what's happened in previous days.

This afternoon, by a parliamentary sleight of hand, the equivalent of closure was invoked. It was a legal circumstance. As to whether it was an ethical one, that will be judged by future readers and participants. Basically, what happened was that any effort, whether it was from a government member or from a member of the opposition, to provide an alternative to Bill 50 in terms of providing extra time, as was the case introduced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – that opportunity to provide alternatives was lost. So we find ourselves now in a debate circumstance where no ability to discuss alternatives in terms of an amendment exists. We had an amendment that we would have appreciated having the opportunity to discuss. Unfortunately, that will not take place.

It hearkens back, Mr. Speaker, to Bill 46. Bill 46 was such a flawed piece of legislation that it took the government 24 amendments to try and get it right, and unfortunately not one single amendment was allowed from members of the opposition. Again, by a parliamentary sleight of hand in that case, closure was used. So we find ourselves tonight with limited options. We can use our 15

minutes to express our concerns to the best of our ability, but we know that at some point tonight the opportunity to discuss further, to provide alternatives in second reading will have evaporated.

What I want to talk about tonight is trust. I want to talk about confidence, and I want to talk about competence because that's at the basis of our discussions on Bill 50. Unfortunately, the general public, Albertans, will not get a chance to vote on something that is going to cost them billions of dollars. The only say they have is through their elected representative, and that's about trust. Now, when the individuals in constituencies throughout this province start receiving the increased electric bills, I would suggest that the trust they have in their elected representatives is going to be severely tarnished and diminished.

7:40

In the quote that I began, "Do not go gentle into that [dark] night," I want to start off with the word "gentle." This government for 38 years has had a very gentle ride. In the last election 72 MLAs from the government side were elected, and that is a cause for celebration among government MLAs, beyond a doubt. But when you look at what is happening with democracy in this province, the fact that less than 40 per cent of eligible voters for whatever reason chose to participate shows a lack of trust in the process. Twenty-one per cent of those eligible voters chose a government and 72 members.

An Hon. Member: How many chose you?

Mr. Chase: Well, a significant number chose me, more the second time than the first time, so obviously I offered something that they bought into. They trusted me, and that's the basis of tonight's conversation.

What we have seen is an erosion of the faith, of the trust in the government at this time. We have a wonderful example from Calgary-Glenmore of the lack of trust that the citizens and constituents of Calgary-Glenmore had in the current government, and that is just a sign of things to come. The hon. member's party has one person championing their cause. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity has the floor.

Mr. Chase: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has one person championing the cause of the Wildrose Alliance Party.

Mr. Liepert: How well did the Liberals do?

Mr. Chase: We did considerably better in Calgary-Glenmore, sir, than your party representative.

The point is that faith is being lost, and it's being lost rapidly. If you look at the latest polling results, your party is sitting at 34. Yes, ours is only at 21. We've got work to do. But the point is . . .

An Hon. Member: Relevance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please address the chair and make it relevant to Bill 50.

Mr. Chase: Yes.

Speaking on Bill 50 and speaking on trust, I will continue where I began: "Do not go gentle into that [dark] night." We're now talking about darkness; we're talking about night. Bill 50 suggests that it's going to get a lot darker sooner than later because Bill 50 suggests that we don't have the transmission lines to provide the light and the heat and the energy necessary for this province to be successful.

Dark also suggests to me a relatively important fact, that 85 per cent plus of our current electricity is through coal power. That coal power continues to be a concern in terms of the number of respiratory ailments in this province, that outnumber any other province's. Our dependency on coal has to be changed, and that is what Bill 50 is talking about. Bill 50 is talking about continuing to do it the old way, continuing a heavy reliance on coal, continuing to put it up the stack and not worrying about the consequences as long as the lights stay on. Well, there are better ways to do things.

One of those better ways. We've had some discussion about natural gas and what happens if natural gas goes up to \$9 or \$10 a gigajoule. Well, guess what? That's where our coal comes into play. Coal, when gasified, is a much more efficient fuel in terms of the power it provides. It is a much cleaner burning fuel. These are the types of innovations that we need to be looking at.

Right now we have a gas glut, and it would seem to make tremendous sense to use that gas to generate electricity currently. There have been tremendous exploratory discoveries both in Alberta in terms of coal-bed methane – again the word "coal" – and there have been several discoveries in the United States about shale, which is loosely related to coal and the coal-bed methane process. So the notion that we continue to fire up inefficient coal-fired generators and then ship that polluted energy all the way down to the southern parts of Alberta makes no sense. The idea of long-distance transmission makes no sense unless the government has it in its mind to put that transmission into the States.

Now, I want to move on to the word "rage." "Do not go gentle into that [dark] night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Rage is what Alberta consumers are experiencing. Murray Smith in the late '90s, my predecessor in Calgary-Varsity – and notice the fact that I said predecessor – was given the plum posting down to Washington. He was rewarded for betraying Albertans by undermining the subsidies on transmission systems. Instead of it being shared with the transmission line companies, the whole cost of transmission lines was borne by the consumer.

Now, Murray's blunder cost us about \$9 billion. This particular blunder is going to cost us anywhere between \$14 billion and potentially \$20 billion. What will we have to show for it? We're going to have very expensive power bills to show for it. We are not going to own the utility. We're not going to share in the profits, that we have paid for to build the transmission, but we are going to pay the bills. We'll never own that right. It won't be a public utility as it was under a regulated system.

This afternoon we had people saying: well, Ontario and Quebec are paying for those utilities. In the case of Ontario, a large part of that bill deals with failed nuclear. In the case of Quebec, Quebec has just recently made a deal to purchase the transmission grids and the power generators in New Brunswick. So poor old Quebec and poor taxpayers, who are on the hook for, primarily, generated, cheap, nonpolluting hydroelectricity. I don't feel sorry for the citizens of Quebec or Ontario, who own their utility and, therefore, derive the direct benefit rather than turning it over to transmission companies who will profit from what should be our utility.

In terms of raging against the dying of the light, part of the light that is dying is the light, the flicker, the last flame of democracy in this province. With Bill 50 what we're seeing is the opportunity to have an independent hearing quashed. The Alberta Utilities Commission, at least a semi-independent body, has lost its opportunity to rule on behalf of the Albertans it was appointed to serve. Instead, what we have is a dictatorial circumstance where the Lieutenant Governor in Council/cabinet/Minister of Energy is going to tell Albertans what they can expect. And what can they expect? They can expect large towers of inefficient, long-distance energy

ranging from the north of Alberta to the south because that's the way it was always done.

7:50

Now, the Member for Livingstone-Macleod talked about wind energy. We've got over 1,800 gigajoules, I think is the correct term, of wind power waiting to be brought on line.

Mr. Berger: Kilowatt.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

It would make absolute sense to connect that wind energy and put it on the grid. It would directly benefit the southern portion of Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious to know if the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity recognizes that the majority of power that goes to Calgary today is a benefit of the power purchase arrangement that comes from the Keephills power plant. I'd just let this member know that the coal in that particular area has the lowest sulphur content of coal in North America, one-quarter of 1 per cent, and he refers to it as dirty power. Maybe Calgary wants to give the power back and use gas-fired.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. There is such a thing as cleaner coal, Mr. Speaker. There's no such thing as clean coal.

Calgary through Enmax is creating a locally generated gas plant to augment the existing gas plants in the area, so it is creating efficiency. It is creating the power where it is required to light up and heat the homes of the million-plus Calgarians. The idea of transporting it from the north just because that was historically the way it was done does not make sense. Neither, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, does it make sense for Medicine Hat to not use the gas they have but to draw power from the northern regions of Alberta. Localized power generation with less line loss is the way to go, and the gasification of coal will allow that to happen. Transport the gas as opposed to the lines of power.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to read the actual quote from Dylan Thomas's poem, the last verse.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

I wonder if the hon. member would like to talk about that for a few minutes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thirty-five seconds to talk on it.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate being corrected. Earlier this afternoon I was not sure about the comment with regard to all hell for a basement in Medicine Hat. I wasn't sure whether it was Rudyard Kipling or Mark Twain. So I appreciate that.

I think what's happened, hon. leader of the third party, is that I took out "good" and accidentally or maybe psychologically inserted "dark" because that's what I am seeing. That good night that Dylan

Thomas experienced years ago in Wales no longer exists in the province of Alberta. We are getting exceedingly darker nights.

I apologize for my misquoting Dylan Thomas, and I appreciate the opportunity to have that clarified: good night.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Yes. Just one quick question. I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Varsity could comment on the price of gas if it were to get around \$9, \$10, \$11, as it has been in the past, sometimes unexpectedly, how that would fit in with the price of energy and his proposal that we should have more local gas generation in Calgary.

Mr. Chase: Actually, I already answered that question, but I'd gladly repeat my answer. At that point we have the option of the gasification of coal. We have 200 years of coal that, if used properly, would provide us energy at a cheaper rate than what you're suggesting gas prices may rise to.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. member if he could talk a little bit more about the advantages of electricity that's either generated by cogeneration or by renewable sources such as wind.

The Deputy Speaker: Thirty-eight seconds.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The benefit is instant. You fire up your generators because you have your gas, and you don't suffer the consequences of a coal-fired generation circumstance that can take up to two and a half months to turn on. The coal-fired generators are being decommissioned, two of them up north, so let's get on with the decommissioning of the other areas and gasify our coal and burn it efficiently, produce power that's cheap and does not require lengthy, expensive transmission lines.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, you wish to speak?

Mr. Hinman: When everyone else is done.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. On the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This, as we all know, is a pretty complex issue. One of the things that I learned about 10 years ago when I spent some time examining issues around power deregulation and some related issues is that the electrical industry is an incredibly complex industry. It's a very strange product, electricity, as I'm sure people have noted in here in the debate. It's something that cannot be stored. Unlike just about any other product, it has to be used the moment it's produced. There's very inelastic demand for it. In other words, we are very dependent on power, whatever the price is. It requires a very, very sophisticated, complex system to generate and deliver. So it's a complex business we're looking at here, and I'm sure that's contributed to the confusion around the debate with Bill 50.

I think it's worth reflecting for a moment on the roots of this matter. I think the roots of this go back to the whole decision to deregulate Alberta's power industry. Alberta, before deregulation, had some of the lowest cost power actually in the world if you really

stacked it up, and it was also some of the most reliable. We had a system where the utility companies, the generators, and the delivery companies were profitable, and everybody was really happy. It's beyond me, other than the interests of some well-connected lobbyists who stood to make a lot of money from this and some hard-core ideologists or ideologues, why we ever deregulated, but we did. And when we deregulated, it's worth remembering what we were promised. We were promised that deregulation would give lower costs, more choice, and higher reliability. In fact, we've gotten the opposite. We've got higher costs, a very restricted choice, and worse reliability. So on all measures, for the great majority of Albertans deregulation has been a failure.

Something else that occurred with deregulation is that the whole planning system that had so effectively worked for Alberta was disbanded. Very little planning occurred, very little investment occurred in things like transmission lines for years and years and years, and now we're desperately short. We feel like we're in a crisis. These are the kinds of issues that would not have arisen and never did arise when we had a regulated power system.

I think it's worth hammering home one more time that the reason that we're facing this kind of turbulent debate and potential crisis with our power system all goes back to the decision made by this government 12 years ago or so to deregulate the power system. Bad move. It cost us billions of dollars. It may be the most expensive policy blunder by any provincial government in Canadian history. I think it's worth noting that the whole trend towards deregulation, which seemed to be getting a bit of momentum around North America eight or 10 years ago, has stalled. Anyways, we should never forget that all these messes are because of very bad policy decisions made in the 1990s and implemented since the year 2000.

8:00

We're in a situation here where it feels to me like we're planning for the future by looking in the rear-view mirror, that we are planning for what lies ahead by what occurred several years ago. That's human nature, isn't it? I mean, we remember what occurred in the past, and we want to make sure that if it wasn't a happy outcome, we avoid that. So we make corrections in our future plans for problems that occurred in the past, and that's what we're doing here.

Ten years ago, almost exactly, Mr. Speaker – the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood might remember the date – there was a very heated debate in the city of Edmonton about selling EPCOR, and that came down to a very close vote. I was involved closely in looking at the case for and against selling. I know the proponents of selling EPCOR used various ways to try to urge the city council of Edmonton to proceed with the sale. One of the things they said was that the power industry was on the brink of a revolution, and they were saying this 10 years ago.

What did they mean by that? Well, they said things like if we don't sell EPCOR right away, it's going to lose value because we're moving to a system of distributed generation in which there will be small generating units throughout the system rather than a handful of big ones with transmission lines. They talked about micro-generation, in which people would actually generate power in their own homes. They talked about solar and wind. They used all of these ideas to try to convince the Edmonton city council that, in fact, 10 years ago EPCOR would have been on the brink of being obsolete. In fact, they were wrong. Ten years ago, wisely, city council said: no, we're not going to buy that; we're going to hang onto EPCOR.

Well, let's move forward 10 years, and let's revisit some of those arguments. I know this is going to circulate around in various ways,

but in fact some of the advances in technologies that were used as a sort of bogeyman 10 years ago are actually now beginning to occur at long last. So we're seeing things like distributed generation – certainly, that has been proposed by Enmax – where you have many more generation plants distributed through the whole system rather than a handful of giant plants out at Lake Wabamun and in that vicinity. That could easily happen, and Enmax wants to proceed with that.

There are also dramatic increases in wind generation, and I think we're all aware of that. More importantly, I think, in the long term will be the development of solar power. That is actually beginning to play out in real life in Edmonton and around Alberta right now. We're seeing very significant decreases in the cost of photovoltaic panels. There are major factories being built and in production in China where they're producing massive volumes of photovoltaic panels at rapidly falling costs. I was just speaking to an electrical engineer yesterday, I guess, who is forecasting that within two or three years photovoltaic power will be directly competitive, without any subsidies, to the existing power base that we have today.

I only have a few more minutes. My point here, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill is going to facilitate and impose a massive, massive investment in a power system that looks very much like it's going to be obsolete, and it's going to be obsolete because of new technologies, because of greater efficiencies. We're going to discover in five or 10 years that billions of dollars have been spent at no cost to the companies, I might add, for something that we don't need. It's going to be left behind. We're solving a problem that existed years ago but will not exist in the foreseeable future.

Now, I'm just going to wrap up briefly, I think, at this round of the debate by talking about some recent developments in Edmonton and in Red Deer as well around net zero energy housing. It's hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, but actually houses are being built in Edmonton right now without furnaces, and these are houses that people live in year-round, perfectly comfortable. How are they doing that? Well, they're doing it through better design. They're doing it through superinsulated building envelopes – foundation walls that are 16 inches thick, ceilings that have a metre of insulation in them – tightly, tightly sealed building envelopes with air exchangers.

These buildings, if they're oriented to the sun to capture passive solar energy, which isn't very difficult – one of the things we have in great volume in this province is sunshine – absorb the sun through the day, allow the sun into the interior of the building. There are concrete floors or other thermal mass that absorb the sun's energy through the day and then radiate it through the house at night. Even in the depths of a January night in Edmonton you can heat an entire house with the equivalent power of a couple of toasters, okay?

This isn't fantasy. These houses exist. There's actually a duplex built like this in Edmonton Riverdale. There's another house just moved into in the last month in Mill Creek. There's another one under construction in my neighbourhood. Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping to build one myself, beginning within the next year. These things are moving along quickly. I can tell you that it's going from the fringe to the mainstream very, very rapidly. At this moment one of Edmonton's largest housing builders is looking seriously at getting into net zero energy housing in a big way – in a big way.

This is the kind of innovation that is occurring. We are on the brink of this kind of innovation, and my concern is that by committing billions and billions and billions of dollars to this old technology, we're going to find that we've done like the French did after World War I and before World War II. They built a huge defence system to defend against trench warfare, and it was completely useless against the new technologies of World War II. This is going to play out over and over. We can see it occurring. You can

actually go down and feel these buildings and walk through them and study the plans and talk to the people who live in them.

That's all being done, Mr. Speaker, without any subsidies, okay? We're not talking about \$700 million in subsidies to these kinds of buildings like is going to CO₂ sequestration. This is occurring without subsidy. In fact, if you had a level cost base, you would find that net zero buildings would be extremely competitive with the existing power system.

This government has ever so reluctantly made some of the right moves. They've allowed, finally, net metering. With these net zero homes, actually, throughout the summer months the power meter runs in reverse, and they generate power and put it on the grid, and that offsets the requirement for further generation at the coal-fired plants. You combine that with superefficient lighting systems, light-emitting diodes, solar tubes, superefficient appliances, and the demand for electricity is going to flatten out and could easily, particularly if this government showed some leadership, begin to diminish.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am not a fan of this legislation. I think that it is the wrong approach. It's an outdated approach. It facilitates coal-fired power, which is contrary to all the evidence we have on greenhouse gas emissions. The Member for Stony Plain spoke about the low sulphur content of coal in the Wabamun area. Fair enough. I think it's also got relatively low mercury content. That's not the issue. The issue is that it's releasing vast amounts of carbon dioxide, and even if we recaptured that, if we were to bill the cost of recapturing that in a real manner back to the consumers, that power would not be affordable. It will not be affordable. This is obsolete. This is a misguided piece of legislation, a failure of leadership, a failure to adapt.

8:10

I'll finish, since we're into quotes tonight – I'm not going to quote Dylan Thomas, but I will paraphrase Charles Darwin, who was born 200 years ago this year. Darwin, actually, did not speak about survival of the fittest. He said that survival does not go to the strongest or the fastest or the smartest; it goes to those who adapt. What this bill is doing is failing to adapt. It's committing us to an old, obsolete way at enormous cost. That's why I think it's a bad bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments or questions. The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about deregulation of the electrical industry, but I'm not sure if the hon. member is aware – and I guess I would ask him that question – that really the only thing that was deregulated was generation and marketing, and that's been reasonably successful in that since deregulation there are over 2,000 to 3,000 megawatts of new electricity. Again, the bottleneck is transmission. That's why we're talking about Bill 50. So the question is: does the hon. member know that transmission/distribution in this province is still regulated?

Dr. Taft: I am aware of that, but it is a completely different regulatory system than it used to be. I'll just speak ever so briefly about two functions that were disbanded or dramatically changed under deregulation that directly affect us. One was the whole planning system for the power industry. The theory under deregulation is that the market will determine investment, but before that under the regulated system there was actually a planning board or a

whole electrical planning branch, I think it was called, that employed engineers and mathematicians and so on, and they planned what transmission was going to be needed, and they planned where generation was going to be needed and what the likely consumption was going to be, and they ensured that things occurred on an orderly basis. That kind of function and that kind of investment has not occurred.

The other thing that was deregulated was the pricing structure. Rather than having a pricing system like we used to have, which blended the costs of coal and hydro and gas and so on into one price, we now have a system in which pricing is at the highest margin, and that's been a real problem.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General brazenly exceeds 15 seconds, and the health minister is mute.

I would like to ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview if, with respect to the regulatory process, it doesn't make sense to plan transmission and generation together.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. I appreciate the question from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Yes, it does make sense to plan generation and transmission together because if you're generating power, you need to have a transmission system. When under deregulation you turn the construction of generation over to the marketplace, then it becomes much more difficult to plan transmission, and hence you get the kind of mess that we have now. So, yeah, that's one of the things that was lost when we dismantled what was an outstanding electrical system.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: This is under 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hinman: Super. I'd just like the knowledgeable member with his experience to expand a little bit on the ruling by the AEUB back in, I think, 1992 on the shared 50-50 on the operator versus the load and zone pricing that they tried to initiate, that Murray Smith vacated and said that we're not going to do that. Do you feel that zone pricing would help in locating new generation electricity?

Dr. Taft: It might. It might. I think that one of the real losses that occurred when Murray Smith unilaterally made his decision and overruled all the advisers is that all responsibility was taken off the corporations for the costs of building this transmission. Essentially, they got a free pass.

In the system that used to exist, where they were responsible for a significant portion of the cost of transmission, they had to raise the capital. Sure, eventually that got paid by the consumer, but they had to raise the capital, and that immediately acted as a kind of governor or limiter on how much they were prepared to go for. If they didn't need to go for a gold-plated Cadillac, they weren't going to. Well, now, when they're not responsible for any of that investment, they're going to go for everything.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Going to the motion on the previous question, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to – well, I'm not so happy to rise to speak to this closure motion of

the government. You know, here we are making a \$14 billion decision, and the government uses a motion which is merely a cloaked version of closure. I think it's a travesty that the government would actually engage in this kind of undemocratic behaviour when we're talking about a \$14 billion decision.

Not only are we talking about a \$14 billion decision, Mr. Speaker; we're talking about a \$14 billion decision that many people in the industry are objecting to. They are saying that this is the wrong decision, that it's not necessary to build this infrastructure, yet here we are late into the night, when normal people are watching TV, watching the game on TV, or even going to bed. Here we are being forced into silence on this outrageous bill.

Having said that, you know, I want to address the question of the bill again because I think this is perhaps one of the most expensive mistakes that this government has ever made. I want to say that that is saying a lot, Mr. Speaker, a \$14 billion mistake.

I just want to indicate that people that have looked at this – and I want to quote from a report from the University of Calgary, from the School of Public Policy. This is an academic paper done by Jeffrey Church from the department of economics, and secondary authors are William Rosehart and John MacCormack from the department of electrical engineering at the University of Calgary. They have taken a look at Bill 50. The title is Transmission Policy in Alberta and Bill 50. Here are a couple of the things that they included in their summary of conclusions, Mr. Speaker.

Our results, showing that the two large [high-voltage DC] lines that are proposed are economically inefficient and unwarranted given the AESO's assumptions and forecasts, point to the benefit of a regulatory process, and raise doubts that the state of reliability and supply adequacy indicate the need for an emergency response.

They also say:

Our conclusion is that the large cost and capacity of the two [high-voltage DC] lines, 4,000 megawatts, is an overbuild that is not warranted by its economics.

This a report that was made by economists and electrical engineers at the University of Calgary.

8:20

They go on to say that

even if all line losses were eliminated if the two HVDC lines were added, raising the benefit of the reduction in line losses by another \$880 million, the net benefit of the two high-voltage DC lines would still be between (\$852 million) and (\$1.06 billion).

They go on to say that

Bill 50 raises an interesting question involving the regulatory approval process for electrical transmission lines: does it warrant suspension of the needs assessment? There are a number of advantages associated with using an independent regulator to assess whether a transmission project is in the public interest. These advantages include the following:

- (a) It is easier for an independent regulator to commit to regulatory policy, therefore reducing political and regulatory risk and encouraging investment.
- (b) It is less likely that the project approval and conditions will be driven by short-term political interests . . .

I'll repeat that: "less likely that the project approval and conditions will be driven by short-term political interests."

. . . and more likely that a focus on long-run benefits and costs can be maintained.

- (c) Regulatory agencies typically have relevant expertise, historic awareness and background knowledge to understand, evaluate and adjudicate complex issues.
- (d) Regulatory processes are designed to subject interested parties' positions to public scrutiny and evaluation. They provide a forum for a public debate and record that reduces the issues and problems caused by asymmetric information and strategic behaviour.

- (e) Regulatory processes guard against private interests having an undue influence, perhaps like subsidizing political parties' conventions.

- (f) Public regulatory processes make explicit the alternatives available and require the regulator, through written decisions, to explain their rationale. This is an important constraint on any political collusion between the decision maker and private interests.

And finally,

- (g) Regulatory processes allow for public participation and monitoring, contributing to accountability, understanding and legitimacy.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that what's happened here is the short-circuiting of a very valuable step in the evaluation of very expensive infrastructure that has been proposed. I think that the whole process has been short-circuited. I think that there's a short over there on the other side.

Yes, I do think, Mr. Speaker, that we need to evaluate and scrutinize the arguments on both sides for this massive expenditure. I'm looking at the proposal that AESO gave to me. For the interties that they're proposing to go with for this, there's \$2 billion. For the additional transmission there's nearly \$4 billion, so that's \$6 billion. And then for the actual projects envisaged in this act that we're going to approve and mandate if we pass this bill tonight, it's over \$8 billion. By my math that's a \$14 billion expenditure provided that none of these projects go over cost, and that's always a distinct possibility.

What are we doing here? Well, I think it's very clear what we're doing. We are building a massive, overbuilt electrical transmission infrastructure so that any entrepreneur who wants to build a plant anywhere in the province can plug into it and make money. That infrastructure is also designed so that it can be added to in the future to extend the transmission of large amounts of electricity into markets outside of this province for a profit and not necessarily benefit the people of Alberta in any way other than to perhaps produce coal pollution and CO₂ in our province. That infrastructure that's being provided for the profit of the companies that may want to build generation and plug into that transmission is being paid for entirely by the electricity consumers of this province. Mr. Speaker, I can't think of a worse decision that we could possibly make than to proceed with this bill.

There's no question that some additional transmission infrastructure may be needed, and certainly older transmission infrastructure may need to be upgraded. But the government and AESO have produced no evidence whatsoever that we are going to be facing brownouts or shortages of electricity in the province, that there are going to be failures in the transmission system. They say that, they try to scare people, but they haven't produced any proof. Knowledgeable people in the industry will tell you and have told me and I'm sure they've told the government that what really happens is that your maintenance costs on an older system tend to rise until you reach a point where it's more economical to replace that infrastructure. We may be at that point, but there's absolutely no evidence of that.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I'm very disappointed about the government's decision to short-circuit the regulatory process. They've decided that these particular projects are too important to be scrutinized, particularly to be scrutinized by the people who will have to pay the bills. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview suggested, this is an extension of the logic of deregulation. When the government went down the road of deregulation, they deregulated and privatized the generation side of the equation. Normally, that had been planned in conjunction with the transmission. So you'd look at what the increase in demand or in load was going to be

and where it was going to be in the province. You'd make projections, and you'd approve generation where it was needed in a timely fashion. You would at the same time approve the appropriate transmission facilities to get that power to where it was needed.

There was system planning. It was efficient because you didn't overbuild. You didn't build more generation than you needed. That has been lost. We have now a transmission administration which is the one regulated component left in the system between the retail marketing of electricity, which is a for-profit, competitive business, and generation, which is also a for-profit business. But there's no way of telling who's going to build which plant and where they're going to build it and when they're going to build it, so you need to provide an infrastructure that is, as they say, robust enough to be able to pick up any generation that might reasonably be built. That's part of the free-enterprise model.

Now, I want to suggest. I know there's a group of folks in our Legislature who've been taking to wearing black, the Prefab Four. I'm not sure what the name is exactly, but they have set themselves a task – a crusade, if you will – to force this government to be more accountable financially. That's a good goal because, you know, we also believe that there are certain things that the government is wasting the public's money on. We have different priorities, but we sure don't think that the government should be wasting the taxpayers' money. It's not their money; it's the taxpayers' money.

8:30

Here we have a massive expenditure. Now, it's not taxpayers, but it's ratepayers. They're a lot of the same people – a lot of the same people, mostly the same people – who are going to have to pay \$14 billion on a massive expenditure that may in fact not be necessary, but we'll never know because we can only take the Minister of Energy's word for it.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that passes the fiscal conservative smell test. I would encourage the Prefab Four to get up in question period and get up in this debate and seriously challenge this massive waste of ratepayers' money because that's exactly what it is. There are lots of people who have considerable expertise in this field who have said exactly what I'm saying today, Mr. Speaker. So I invite the four of them to take a leaf out of our book and actually stand up for the people who pay the bills in this province, the ordinary families of this province, who, in fact, are going to be on the hook for this expenditure. They have no right under this process to challenge what's happening. They have no right to say: "You know, you can't tax me for this project. I don't agree with it. I'm not going to pay."

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would invite the hon. leader of the third party to join our group of four except I do know his politics, and over a period of time he has mentioned that he's very critical of people who want people to pay more as opposed to businesses.

I'm not going to get into that argument, but I do have a quote here, and I have a question for him. On Saturday, November 14, 2009, the *Calgary Herald* page C3 talks about game players.

Who pays for transmission?

- Farm: 4 per cent
- Residential: 16 per cent
- Commercial: 19 per cent
- Industry: 61 per cent

That means that over 80 per cent is being paid for by some sort of business through this plan. You should be happy with this, should you not?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. I don't think that we should be burdening big business in this province with unnecessary costs, and I would expect you to stand up on behalf of those power consumers, because that's what they are, who are going to be charged billions of dollars for this boondoggle. Get up and stand up for those companies because they need somebody in their corner. You know, it should be you more than me, but I'm prepared to do it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, that's a hard act to follow. Actually, though, it's worth making the point that very high power costs have driven some businesses out of Alberta, and more are threatening to leave because of the high power costs.

But my question was to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. You talk about the burden on ratepayers. Do you have any experience or any knowledge of the burden on the public sector or nonprofit groups from higher power rates? I'm thinking of universities or school boards or municipalities because I know they get hit really hard as well.

Mr. Mason: Thanks to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for the question. Of course, municipalities, school boards, universities, health regions, whether there are 16 or one, pay massive amounts of money for their electricity, and when the costs of a \$14 billion infrastructure are added to the rate base and charged back to the consumers based on how much power they use, those institutions are going to have major financial problems. This is coming at the same time as the government is cutting back on some of the funding for those organizations, so it will create a more difficult situation for them. It will make a difficult situation worse, and I think it's a good point.

Now, in terms of the nonprofit sector, which does yeoman's work in this province trying to assist communities and individuals who need help, they're very close to the margin in terms of what they can afford, so these additional utility costs have a negative effect on them as well.

Mr. Speaker, it's right across the board. It's businesses, it's individuals, it's the nonprofit sector, and it's the public sector.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member and leader of the third party made some comments that I think require me to ask a question of him. First of all, you know, he was citing from a document that he obviously has with him. Not a bad reader, actually, but I'm not exactly sure of the understanding behind what it was he was reading. I would just ask the member opposite, the leader of the third party, if he would confirm the co-author of the report that his quotes came from, if he could confirm for me if that same individual was hired by Enmax or the city of Calgary to intervene negatively on transmission upgrades that were being heard at the public hearings that were conducted by the AUC.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I think that if the hon. Minister of Energy wants to bring some allegations against the academic objectivity of this author, he should step outside the Chamber and make those statements.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others? Standing Order 29(2)(a) is out for some seconds.

Next speaker on the previous question motion. Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, do you wish to speak?

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we stand and speak to this question, and I'll have to concur with the previous hon. members in the opposition that it's disappointing that we're not going to be able to continue this debate, but we'll go on into committee, and it will go forward there.

There's much more that needs to be said, and time is probably the most important thing because there are a lot of articles and papers that the experts throughout the province are doing research on. They're coming out almost daily right now, and it seems like the government members are not privy to them. I found one that the government members seem to have left behind out back. It's a memorandum to members of the Alberta government caucus from the Consumers for Competitive Transmission. I urge all of the caucus members, that obviously got this, to read it because it's important information in here.

Mr. Mason: Are you digging through the trash cans, Paul?

Mr. Hinman: No. They're just handing things out there, and they don't recognize people in suits.

In this memorandum from the Consumers for Competitive Transmission they basically represent 80 per cent of the power demand for Alberta. I think that that's significant and something that we should look at. They refer in here that the CCT represents four consumer groups: the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Association, the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta, and the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta. Basically, to paraphrase the report – and like I say, I'm sure that perhaps some of the members were interested, and they've read it – it just goes on to say that this is not in the best interest. This is an overbuild. The best analogy that I can think of is that we've got some hyped-up individuals that want to build a monster truck, and they've gone out and they've bought a 2,000 horsepower engine only to realize that they have no axles, no body, no transmission to hook it up to.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood brought forward the report from the University of Calgary. It points out in many areas the bias of the information that's being brought forward and being proposed by the government. It's not acceptable. We're not in a panic situation where the lights are going to go out. That was over two years ago that Chicken Little started running around and said that the sky is falling, the sky is falling. We've gone into a recession since then. Times have changed.

More importantly, let's go back to the AESO and their report from 2007 to 2008 because back then – again, some of the hon. members have said: oh, that was just a Band-aid. It wasn't a Band-aid. All that was necessary was one 500-kVa line to upgrade between Wabamun and Calgary to ensure the reliability.

8:40

The hon. minister talks about the reliability. Well, I guess I've kind of thought of a new acronym for these high-voltage DC lines. I think that really what they are are high-voltage PC lines, PC standing for those that are politically connected to this government. We'll have a high-voltage, politically connected line that will benefit a few, but it'll be at the cost of the consumers of Alberta. That concerns me. It concerns the residents of Calgary-Glenmore. They're upset when they were talking about the possibility of the bills going up.

There's no question that the AESO has said that, you know, the out-bill is going to cost \$14 billion. Just to do some simple math, 10 per cent of \$14 billion is \$1.4 billion. When this government thought that it had excess money, rather than paying off some of its debt or paying money to the teachers' pension fund or getting rid of some of those, they gave out \$400 to every Albertan, about \$1.4 billion. If we have \$14 billion, that's equivalent to about \$4,000 for every Albertan.

The other thing that seems to get missed in all of this is that we're running a deficit, and if we put another \$14 billion debt on the consumers of Alberta, the interest rate is interesting. I believe that the Alberta Utilities Commission allows a rate of return of about 9 per cent plus taxes. We're actually looking at this \$14 billion that we're going to spend as we develop this huge, massive electrical grid that isn't even functional in many ways, and it's going to be exorbitant. That interest at 9 to 14 per cent as we extrapolate that out over 60 years is mind-boggling. Albertans and businesses in Alberta can't afford that.

One of the hon. government members referred to the pulp and paper industry and what the costs would do, possibly losing the competitiveness of that industry. That's not the only one. I'm sure that many members have received concerns from their residents, from businesses of those residents, realizing that they can't afford this. I've talked to many restaurant owners and other ones that say that the cost of power makes it a give or go every month on whether or not they should keep their business open. If this new rate jumps in, we're going to continue to lose more businesses. That converts to job losses, and we just can't afford to go down here.

The most important thing and often the wisest thing that we need to do in a crisis situation is to sit down and think and reflect on what we're going to do rather than react because when you react, often you increase the problems of the crisis and the damage that's being done.

That's what this is. This is a reaction of this government to a needs application put out in 2004 that was defeated in the Court of Queen's Bench. What they looked at is: "We don't want to have to go through this all again. It's expensive. It's messy." My goodness, democracy is. That's the one thing that I love to paraphrase from old Churchill: democracy is the worst form of government, except for all others. Albertans love their democracy. They want to enshrine it and keep it here, but it seems like with this government, with their centralization of power and decision-making inside the cabinet, we're losing the democratic process. But more important: how are they to be held accountable? There's nothing we can do.

It's interesting. I believe that it was on the 8th of June this year that the order in council gave this authority to the minister already to declare the crisis and to move it forward, and Bill 50 just kind of enshrines and protects that on an ongoing basis. It just is not in the best interest of Albertans. We need to look at it.

Again, I want to go back to the root of the problem, and that, I believe, is the mandate that was given to AESO in how to operate. That mandate says that we are to build transmission lines and to ensure that the flow of electricity is unconstrained. We've had members get up, and they've talked about that we have a shortage or that we're pushing the limits on our power and we don't have the lines to do it. But it's interesting that if you look at AESO's reports, that occurs at 2 o'clock in the morning when we're exporting. We don't hit that peak during our own peak hours. We need to analyze that and realize that that is the essence, and the mandate needs to be changed.

Right now with the unconstrained, it doesn't matter what the cost is of building power lines. It's saying that it's unconstrained. I can assure you that if there's anything the constituents that I represent

want unconstrained, it's 14th Street to 90th Avenue. They get up in the morning, and they're bogged down. This government says: well, we can't afford to spend, you know, the billions of dollars to build those overpasses and that we're going to have to just live with that constraint. Well, I don't think the electrical system is in the same crisis as the traffic in Calgary. If they want to declare it a crisis and they need to spend more money on infrastructure, maybe getting the flow of traffic going in southwest Calgary would be appreciated there.

Mr. Mason: They'll just have to go as electrons.

Mr. Hinman: The heat would be immense. When it just sits there idling, it's not good.

Anyway, there are just multiple problems with this that we're not addressing. Another interesting scenario was when I was talking to one electrical engineer who called me up, you know, and said: nothing has happened since the AESO report, the '07-08 plan, and implementation of Bill 50, that there's been no change, no massive difference. We have a recession. Generation has been announced in the south since then, which will alleviate the problem of constraint on that line, yet now we're in a crisis situation. Again, I want to repeat: we are not in a crisis situation. That's a fallacy. It's fearmongering. Have we got heads in a snowstorm or something, that they can't see? They're acting like we're in all these problems when we're not.

I'd also like to mention and go back, you know, to the needs document that needs to be filed with the AUC when there's a crisis situation or there's a problem known in the electrical grid. There has been no document filed to the AUC saying: there's a need for these upgrades; let's have AESO file that. But AESO's recent history hasn't been that squeaky clean. I've talked a couple of times of the reports that have come out and the court order saying that these people are biased. Again, I believe that the bias, though, really is because of the mandate which they've been constrained to work under, saying that we're supposed to have power lines that are unconstrained for generators. That just doesn't work. We need to back up and realize what the real problems are going forward.

It's also interesting because our own mandate and the laws here in Alberta – I've forgotten the acronym for the U.S. It's FERC. Basically, it looks for the cheapest way possible. We don't do that. A few of the hon. members in the opposition have talked about piping the gas and having local generation. We don't look at the cost.

It's also interesting, though, that report put out by the University of Calgary. There have been several members ask: well, what if gas goes to \$9 or \$12 a gigajoule? In that report from the U of C they actually say that with the cost of this overbuild, this \$14 billion, and the increase that's going to go, gas would have to hit \$65 a gigajoule in order to make this line economically viable. We haven't been there for a while, but the whole dynamic of the gas industry has changed completely in the last two years. Two years ago I was in that same boat, worried: what are we going to do when we run out of natural gas? Now that the U.S. is actually decreasing imports – they figure up to 3.1 tcf per year – we're going to have an abundance of gas because of the technology that's been developed here in Alberta on how to extract tight gas. We're not in the same situation. It could go forward. That's why I believe that we need an open and competitive market.

If a coal generation plant can come on stream and get up and running and they're competitive and they want to bid in there, that's great. But I don't think you're going to see any coal plants come forward because we're in such political instability throughout the

world right now. We don't know what they're going to try to implement for a tax on the coal industry. Those people that have been wanting to try to develop and use clean coal are afraid because they don't know what new tax they're going to get hit with. Again, with the instability of government and changing things, like they did with the new royalty framework, it destroys the confidence of business. Investment is pulled.

I'd have to perhaps debate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in that he says that this is the biggest bungle. The \$14 billion is a lot, but I think the new royalty framework may have cost Albertans a lot more as we go forward. But we can't afford to. So there are two mistakes that the people of Alberta can't afford. We need to look forward, not backwards. Again, in doing that, we realize that we do have time, and we have choice. We just can't all of a sudden declare a crisis when there isn't one and then push this through.

8:50

I want to talk again a little bit about the process that the AEUB used to go through and the Alberta Utilities Commission. What is the power of an actual needs hearing in front of the AUC? I think it's incredible. I think there are a lot of experts that would come forward. In the hearing, though, it's a semijudicial court. They have to follow those things, and it's appealable. It's not just listening. We get caught up on this idea of: "Oh, we've spoken to the public. We've heard from industry. Isn't that wonderful? We've had 327 open hearings." Experts don't always come forward in those areas.

Also interesting is the change and move to the crisis situation since three prominent individuals left the AESO. I'd be very interested that if, in fact, we went to a needs hearing, I think we would see those prominent individuals come back and say that there isn't a need, that we're not in a panic situation. And we should be looking for that. If anything, what we should be doing is looking for an inquiry on what has happened between 2008 and 2009, when this crisis developed, because if we had an inquiry, I really believe we'd find that there has been no crisis. Therefore, we wouldn't need to put in these two high-voltage PC – or is it DC? – lines. I can't remember now.

Again, who is it for? We really want to go back and realize that Alberta is an export province. What we need to look at is the efficiency of our system, the increased costs, increased taxes, losing our efficiency, our competitiveness in order to export our industry. We really do need to address it.

Is my time approximately up? Well, I guess I'll wrap up and see if there are any questions. I appreciate the time to address the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of comments and questions. The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the listening viewers at home, that was quite a rapid-fire, shotgun approach to talking about a piece of legislation. Most of the comments I don't believe had a whole lot to do with what it is we're talking about. However, the individual did mention or tried to mention something to do with the export business in the province. He somehow thinks that there's something derogatory or negative about exporting a commodity. I would like to ask the member, relative to his discussion, if he wouldn't mind explaining to us and to the public and to the House about the export of wheat, beef, oil and gas, petrochemical products. What has that done to disadvantage Albertans, generally, and would he agree or disagree that electricity is a commodity?

Mr. Hinman: Well, I thank the hon. minister for that question, but I'm not going to answer all the ones on the first one. I'm just going to answer the importance of exporting as a general thing. I'm not against export. I'm excited about it. We have a lot of carbon here in the province that we can generate. We can cogenerate up in Fort McMurray. We can possibly go to hydro electricity. But the problem is that right now the ratepayers in Alberta subsidize exported electricity. Merchant lines. Has the minister ever heard of or is he even familiar with the Montana-Alberta tie-line? That is a merchant line, and people want to put that in and pay for it. We don't need more government intervention and building things for industry if, in fact, the cogeneration is great.

If the government is going to be honest with Albertans and say whether or not they're going to have – it just leads to the question, it begs the question: have they said yes to Bruce Power to put in a nuclear facility, and in order to entice them here, they're saying that we're putting in these high-voltage DC lines, or PC lines, because they're politically connected to you, so that they come in? The problem is that subsidizing industry doesn't work. It hasn't worked in the auto industry. It hasn't worked in other industries. Merchant lines: they can put them in. They can export. I'm all for export. We do it with gas, wheat.

Oh, my goodness. Mr. Speaker, he spent more time on the question than I'm getting for the answer. The problem isn't the export. It's the fact that we don't subsidize industry to do that. We want them to be competitive and to choose to be here because of the great tax system that we have and the low costs.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, as a true fiscal conservative – you know, it's notable and noticeable the silence of the Prefab Four on this incredible boondoggle waste of taxpayers' money, which is going to hurt not only individual consumers but businesses as well. Does he think that what they're doing represents true fiscal conservatism in this province?

Mr. Hinman: Well, I thank the hon. member for that question. I was even more thankful to see him get up and realize that he needs to stand in place for businesses when they get overtaxed. That was a huge move forward.

Mr. Mason: Always have. Always have.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you. We're obviously winning.

The true conservatives are slowly bringing people onboard, and I feel that as a true fiscal one, we will make great moves forward here as the budget comes forward in other areas. And why? Because the good people of Calgary-Glenmore say that we need to send Ed a message. We need to be fiscally responsible. We need local health care choices going on, and we don't need a centralized government with that power and decision being put into the cabinet and the Premier's office.

The Deputy Speaker: We have 56 seconds. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: I'm wondering if the Member for Calgary-Glenmore would agree that one of the hazards in exporting electricity is that we end up, through the process of exporting, integrating our transmission system into the same system that California and all the high-

cost markets of the U.S. use. The only way that we can actually make that work is if we pay the same price the people of California pay. Does he realize that the advantage Alberta used to have with low-cost electricity was because we were self-contained? What's the benefit of exporting for the people of Alberta?

Mr. Hinman: That's an excellent question. I guess I'd start with backing up and referring to gas. You know how cheap gas was, natural gas, and everything else. If we didn't export anything, we'd have a massive surplus here in the province of Alberta, and it would be extremely cheap for all commodities. I understand your concern, and that's why we need merchant lines instead of public lines if, in fact, some company wants to set up for electricity.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who wish to speak on the previous question?

Seeing none, the chair shall now put the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the previous question carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:58 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Calahasen	Jablonski	Prins
Campbell	Knight	Quest
Dallas	Leskiw	Rogers
Denis	Liepert	Sherman
Elniski	Lindsay	Tarchuk
Evans	Marz	VanderBurg
Fawcett	McQueen	Vandermeer
Forsyth	Mitzel	Woo-Paw
Hancock	Olson	Xiao
Horne		

9:10

Against the motion:

Hinman	Mason	Taft
Kang	Pastoor	Taylor
MacDonald		

Totals: For – 28 Against – 7

[Motion on previous question on Bill 50 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 49(3) and *Beauchesne* 521(2), I must now call the vote on the original question.

[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 48
Crown's Right of Recovery Act

The Chair: We adjourned the debate on the amendment to it, so now we can continue on. Are there any questions? The hon. Member for Calgary – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Sorry. It's a late night.

Dr. Taft: It's a late night. Maybe we should just all go home.

Mr. Denis: Is that a motion?

Dr. Taft: Would you support it?

Thanks, Mr. Chairman. This is the first chance I've had to rise on Bill 48, and I am aware that there is an amendment. At least, I should confirm. Yes, I'm sure there's an amendment still on the floor, an amendment moved by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. If that member hadn't proposed this amendment, we would have proposed the same thing because I think it gets to the heart of the problem with this bill. I think it's a good amendment, and I'd like to see it supported.

I need to check through *Hansard* from last night, but the amendment effectively proposes to strike the first part of the bill. The amendment proposes to strike out sections 34, 35, 36, and 37 of the bill. I think some of the arguments made last night by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona were pretty much right on the money, and I think it's worth repeating them.

I want to start with a broader point here, Mr. Speaker, which is that the way this bill is presented is very unfortunate. I think there's an attempt here at a sort of trickery that is unbecoming to a Legislature. It's the kind of thing we saw in Bill 44 in the spring. What we have here, effectively, is a bill that tries to do something quite sensible and reasonable and then folds into it something that is quite foolish and unreasonable. The sensible and reasonable thing is to empower the government to take tobacco companies to court to recover damages that tobacco use has caused to people's health and, therefore, added cost to the health care system. The sensible part of this is that this would enable the provincial government to recover the costs of treating Albertans who become sick from the use of tobacco. It's hard to argue against that. I think that part of it's good.

The part that's added on and probably uses the good idea as cover is the part that this amendment proposes to strike, and that's sections 34, 35, 36, and 37. Those portions speak specifically to recovering the health care costs that may result as a result of the commission of a criminal offence. I think it's a mistake to combine that with the tobacco recovery component. I think that the whole notion of empowering the government through this particular means to recover the costs from people who cause health care damages through the commission of a criminal offence is poorly thought through. I cannot see that it's going to be helpful, I cannot imagine that this is somehow going to reduce crime, and I think it is a misguided reaction to addressing a criminal issue.

I think there are lots of examples that we can easily think of. I believe the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona spoke of, say, a teenager breaking into a house, maybe a young drug addict who is breaking into a house to steal a television set or money to pay for the drug dose and injures himself and ends up in the hospital. Is the idea – and, presumably, it is for this government – that the government is then going to take this kid to court or take his family to court to try to recover the costs of that health care treatment? Think this through for a minute. How likely is it that we're going to recover anything from that person? Pretty unlikely. What are the cost-benefit analyses of this? How much is it going to cost to go after somebody like that in court? What are the likelihoods of benefits?

What are the unintended consequences of this? I mean, what is the impact, for example, on the person's family if it's a person on whom other people depend for income? Let's imagine it's a father of children or a mother of children who is caught in this situation. Committing a crime: we all agree that crime should be punished, but if there are significant health costs as a result of some activity from that crime, if there are children of the criminal who is involved in the crime and their parent is hauled up in front of a court to have their assets stripped, what are the consequences of this? What's going to happen to those kids?

Is this even the right approach to crime? Is it the sort of thing that is realistically going to diminish crime rates? I can't imagine that it is, Mr. Chairman. In fact, I think there's a possibility that it will inadvertently make crime problems worse. It will encourage people to fight criminal charges more aggressively. It will discourage them from plea bargaining. It will discourage them from pleading guilty and getting treatment if they've committed their crime because of a drug addiction. I just can't see the rationale in this.

Now, if the Minister of Health and Wellness or the Minister of Justice or anybody else can put forward a compelling case of how this is going to work, I'd be interested.

Mr. Liepert: I'd be happy to.

9:20

Dr. Taft: Okay. The minister has promised he will, so I will look forward to him engaging in this debate.

I think that the notion of this amendment makes sense. I think that there's also a risk from some of the analyses we've read that the constitutionality of this could be challenged, or it could be challenged as violating the Canada Health Act. So I'll look forward to the Minister of Health and Wellness debating on this and explaining why their position makes sense. I welcome him to take the floor.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I was unable to be here last night, and I don't have the privilege of *Hansard* or the Blues in front of me, but I do have the *Hansard* of second reading debate of last week. I read with some interest. It's late at night, so I'm not sure that I have the right words to describe it, but, you know, the hypocrisy of our friends across the way. I'm suggesting that it is all right to go after tobacco companies, but it's a legal product that is being sold, and we're going to go after them if we so choose. That's all right. That's okay for them. It is not all right in their eyes, Mr. Chairman, if someone commits a criminal offence. Somehow that person or that individual is less guilty than the tobacco companies. That is complete hypocrisy.

Let me give you an example, a purely hypothetical example. You have an individual who decides in the middle of the night to break into the Calgary Zoo. He goes one step further and decides he's going to break into the tiger cage and challenge the tiger. Purely hypothetical, Mr. Chairman. Guess what happens? The tiger takes on the character, and he's hospitalized for quite some time. Who's paying his hospital bill? All of us as taxpayers. Because some hypothetical individual decided to take on a tiger in the middle of the night. He's charged, and he's convicted of a criminal offence. Is that any less of a reason to go after an individual for health care costs than it is to go after tobacco companies? I don't think so. Well, why is it?

An Hon. Member: Bleeding hearts.

Mr. Liepert: That's right. Bleeding hearts. That's what we've got over there, Mr. Chairman.

You know what? This amendment – the Member for Edmonton-Centre stands up and says that they'd like to delay this so they could hear from independent thinkers like the John Howard Society. I cannot believe that's who we're going to hear from and get an unbiased opinion on whether what we're doing is right or wrong.

An Hon. Member: How about zookeepers?

Mr. Liepert: You know what the zookeeper would say? The zookeeper would say: go after that guy for his health care costs.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview just talked about: how is this going to be a deterrent to criminal activity? Well, let me tell you, Mr. Chairman. Let's talk to Mothers Against Drunk Driving. That is a criminal offence, and when someone gets behind that wheel, decides to drive that vehicle, ends up in an accident, ends up in our health care system, and costs the system hundreds of thousands of dollars, that's not necessarily a poor individual. That individual may be very wealthy, and if we have the ability to go after that individual for those health care costs because he or she has created a criminal offence, I think we owe it to the taxpayers of Alberta to have that right to make that decision.

I promised the Member for Edmonton-Riverview I'd give him a couple of examples. I have. I don't want to delay it too long. I suggest, Mr. Chairman, that we should defeat this amendment, get it over with, pass this particular piece of legislation, and get on with it.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I think the hon. minister of health is kind of making a zoo out of this proceeding. I think there's a complete disconnect between his approach and what I think is sensible and reasonable to do. This minister is a master of the Trojan Horse to get in the door on what's obviously, you know, an unpopular case. I'll give you an example: the transgender surgery issue. It was a way of introducing delisting of existing services by picking on a vulnerable group that didn't have much political support. Chiropractors might by some be considered to be in the same boat.

Now, no politician has ever lost votes by picking on convicted criminals. You know, they've refined this to a fine art in the United States, but the fact remains that there is criminal law, which prescribes penalties for criminals, and it involves the loss of your personal freedom. It does not take away all of your basic human rights, but it prescribes specifically what the penalties are. What this minister is doing and what's clear from his comments is to turn the health care system into a means of punishment for those individuals who he thinks are not responsible or criminals or whatever. What this looks like to me, Mr. Chairman, is the first step to charging people for their health care costs not based on their medical needs but based on other factors, in this case behaviour.

Now, I think that you could extend this, I suppose. You could say that a government that makes major mistakes in the delivery of health care, for example, is – well, it's not a good example because they're financially irresponsible anyway. [interjections] You could say, yeah. Thanks very much, hon. members. I think there are lots of stupid behaviours. Let me just put it this way: lots of stupid behaviours that might make someone liable, if we took this logic to extreme, for their health care. If somebody graduates from a university and then turns out to be not too bright and makes a bad mistake, maybe the government will be looking to get them to pay back their costs of their education.

This is really going down the wrong road, Mr. Chairman. What we're really seeing here is the thin edge of the wedge, the first attempt to say that the government is not responsible, that the health care system is not responsible for provision of health care to those who need it, that if their behaviour is inadequate in some way that doesn't satisfy the government's sense of what is acceptable behaviour, they can then be charged for their health care costs. I would strongly suspect that if this is passed, there are going to be other examples.

Based on the minister's comments, I think it's clear that he has in mind recovering health care costs from people and eliminating the basic principle that we have, which is one payer. We have a one-payer system. The Premier and the health minister have repeatedly said in the House when we ask them about private health care – they dodge it by saying that it is going to be publicly funded, but this is an exception to that principle. This is not publicly funded. This is charging people, sending them the bill like they do in the United States for their health care. To me this is nothing but a very sneaky way to begin undermining the principle of a single-payer health care system.

I don't think it has anything to do with criminals at all, Mr. Chairman. I think they wanted to bring forward a bill. The camouflage of this bill is charging tobacco companies, which consistently work to produce products that everyone knows are damaging to their health, and it's generally accepted that they have some liabilities. This has been established in the courts, certainly in the United States, and there have been some major settlements. So on the basis of that camouflage, they're slipping in something much more insidious, and that is that we're going to take a category of person and start charging them for their health care.

9:30

Is the next step then, Mr. Chairman, to charge people for other reckless behaviour? Are we going to start charging smokers? Are we going to start charging other people who engage in somewhat risky health behaviors? If someone gets a sexually transmitted disease, are they going to start charging them for their treatment? Where will this lead us? I think that this is a very, very dangerous, slippery slope, and I think this amendment is absolutely essential to preserving the principles upon which our health care system is based, and that is that there is a single payer. Without that principle, Mr. Chairman, we're opening the door to a very, very serious undermining of our public health care system.

I think that people need to look at this not as, you know, punishing criminals, who have already been punished by the courts – and there's legislation to provide for that – but, in fact, to establish a principle that in certain instances people are responsible for their own health care. The minister has used the case of some individuals in the Calgary Zoo who – and I don't know if they were drinking or what the problem was – got into a very, very bad situation. If someone speeds and gets into an accident, are they responsible for their health care? Are they responsible for the health care of the people that they were involved in the accident with? Or what about other people that were in the vehicle? I think this is a dangerous precedent, and I think that all hon. members really need to think very carefully about what is actually intended here.

Maybe some members get this and this is a direction that they'd like to see, but then I think they should just say so. They should stand up and say: "We're Progressive Conservative MLAs, and we don't believe that the health care system is responsible for the cost of necessary medical treatment. We think that depending on your case, either we'll pay for your medical treatment or we won't, depending on our judgment about your behaviour and whether or not it's acceptable to us." If that's what they want to say, I think that they should stand up and say it and let the people of Alberta judge

whether or not that is, in fact, the kind of government that they want to see, the kind of MLAs that they want to see responsible for their health care system because that's exactly what it is.

Mr. Chairman, I would urge all members of the Assembly to support the amendment to Bill 48, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. I think that the people of Alberta will benefit very significantly if we stop this pernicious and insidious section of this legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'll keep my comments brief. I want to say on the record that I appreciate the minister of health wading in and debating. I thought there were good responses there, and I also need to respond. Fundamentally, what we have here are two different approaches. It sort of feels like an Old Testament, New Testament sort of difference; you know, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If somebody does something wrong, you punish them versus an approach in which you try to solve a problem. I feel like on this side in the Official Opposition and the third party we're more interested in solving the problem than just handing out moral judgment.

The example of the drunk driver, I think, gets exactly to the point that I was trying to make about unintended consequences. Let's imagine for a moment, with the Christmas season coming up, at the end of an office day a woman working in the office goes out with some of her friends for a few drinks and makes a terrible mistake in judgment, gets in a bad accident on the way home, which leads to serious health costs. She's on her way home to see her kids and her husband. If the family is bankrupt because of the health costs, who's really paying? The kids and the husband. I think that's exactly the kind of misguided or unintended consequence that's going to too easily happen if this legislation passes.

I also think, just building on what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, that this is a slippery slope. If we start going after criminals for health care costs, who's next? Are we going to go after the obese for health care costs? Are we going to go after smokers for health care costs? Are we going to go after the elderly for health care costs? Where does it stop? This goes against the whole philosophy of sensible health care. It'll be a big win for the lawyers and maybe someday for insurance companies, but it's not good public policy.

I will finish my comments by just saying that there's a clear difference, at least in my mind, between going after big tobacco corporations versus going after individuals. Large tobacco corporations, who make billions of dollars, exist as corporate entities. Totally different legally than going after an individual. There is a big difference there in my mind, Mr. Chairman.

Obviously the minister and I disagree on this one; that's what these debates are about. But I will repeat that I appreciated his getting up and putting his cards on the table.

Thank you.

The Chair: On the amendment, the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: I want to add one last category to my previous comments. You know, what about people who take risks in a recreational sense, for example? What about extreme athletes? What if somebody, you know, goes flying down a steep ski slope and breaks their leg? What about a parachutist who falls and injures himself? There are lots of people whose behaviour costs the health care system money. Is it the government's intention, is it this minister's intention that we will eventually get to the point where all of those people are having to pay for their health care? That's what

they do in the United States. That's not what the people of Alberta want to see.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Let's be clear, Mr. Chairman. And this member knows exactly what's in the legislation. The legislation is very clear: convicted of a criminal offence. I don't recall any skiers going down a hill who have been charged and convicted of a criminal offence. So as is typical with this particular leader, he's – well, we'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mason: You know, we're talking here about the extension of the principle that the minister is establishing in this legislation, and he knows that.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the amendment?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 48 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

9:40

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the Committee of the Whole rise and report Bill 48.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 48. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act

Mr. Liepert: I move third reading of Bill 48.

I think there's been adequate debate on this bill, and I would encourage all members to support Bill 48 in third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to third reading of Bill 48, the Crown's Right of Recovery Act. I want to just indicate that I think there are some positive things in this bill. Certainly, the role of tobacco companies in promoting products which are known to kill has been a very, very serious problem for the health care system. Governments in Canada and the United States have tried to deal with this situation. In British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Ontario they have already launched lawsuits against tobacco companies, and Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador have also introduced legislation allowing them to sue tobacco companies. In 2005 a Supreme Court of Canada ruling unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the B.C. legislation. So, you know, other provinces have gone down this path ahead of Alberta, and I think that there is real merit in doing so.

Provisions regarding tobacco companies have received the support of the Canadian Cancer Society and the Edmonton tobacco reduction network. Mr. Speaker, I do make a very clear and strong distinction between suing tobacco companies, who make their business and make their profits by producing and marketing products that are known to cause cancer and death and all manner of other diseases, many of which are fatal. These companies are not being charged for their care. They're being charged in civil court for liabilities that they incur and costs that they impose on the health care system, that has to take care of the people who have consumed their products, but they are not being charged for their health care. That is a fundamental difference that the minister doesn't see.

When we get into the other provisions of the act, that we tried to amend just now, we have the government deciding to attempt to recover health care costs from individuals based on their behaviour. Of course, they've picked convicted criminals because, you know, who in their right mind would stand up and defend convicted criminals? They are the perfect victim, as far as this government is concerned, because they have almost no social status, and no one is prepared to stand up for them. In fact, what the government is doing is charging them for health care. That's something that we have always opposed in this country. This is a fundamental question which underlies our entire approach to health care in this country. I dare say that we may find that this provision of the act would be challenged and found wanting. I just want to raise that question, that I'm not convinced at all that this legislation will stand up in the courts.

It's unfortunate that the government has chosen to include these provisions because it amounts to, in my view, a poison pill, which makes the act impossible to support. I regret saying that because I strongly support the ability to recover costs from very profitable corporations that market tobacco, but I wouldn't support taking away or charging the CEO or the board members of those companies for their health care. That would be crossing a line and making something entirely different out of a situation.

It's extremely unfortunate that this government has not done what the other provincial governments have done and just given us a straight-up piece of legislation that allows us to sue tobacco companies for the costs that they impose on our health care system. That's what was done in other provinces. But, no, this government and this minister had to mix it up, had to combine a legitimate exercise of the legislative authority of the province of Alberta with another misguided attempt to undermine our health care system. That's what we've seen from this minister time and time again. We saw it when they started to take away things that were funded under the health care system. We've seen it repeatedly when this minister gets into the health care system. We see that it is consistently being

undermined and turned into something very different from what most Albertans, I think, want.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, because he's combined two things here that ought not to have been combined, one of which I strongly support and another which I strongly oppose, I'm unable to support this bill, and I would urge all other members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I haven't had a chance to speak to the parts of this legislation that I like yet, so I want to speak to them briefly now. Our caucus, actually, strongly supports the idea of suing tobacco companies for the damages that they have created. I think people are widely aware that the tobacco industry has for decades practised enormously deceitful marketing on the public, and I think evidence continues to come out from the archives of the tobacco industry that they knew long, long ago that tobacco smoking was causing illness and death. They knew that in the '60s, in the '50s. They had solid scientific evidence, and they kept it buried. They denied it, they lied, they misled, and they profited off death. I don't think there's any other way of putting it. So I have no compunction at all about going after those corporations, and I encourage the government to do so aggressively and squeeze them as hard as possible.

9:50

I want to acknowledge the good efforts of the many antismoking and tobacco-reduction organizations who have put in for many, many years hard hours of effort and countless amounts of time and commitment to fight back against the tobacco industry. We're seeing the results of that. This government has done some of the right things in raising taxes on tobacco and taking other steps to discourage tobacco use. This is one more step in that direction.

But as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said, taking all that good stuff and then folding in the other components that we tried to take out through the amendment in committee just taints what otherwise was a really good idea. It's kind of shameful. It feels like it's underhanded and unbecoming. If the government wanted to deal with that issue concerning recovering costs from criminals, then why not do it in its own piece of legislation? Why sneak it through undercover? I think that reflects badly on this government. It's unnecessary and poorly managed, and I think that for that reason, frankly, I don't feel like I can support this legislation. It's too deep a betrayal of what to me would be good and responsible government, so we will be opposing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 48 read a third time]

Bill 51

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 51, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

The chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 51 read a third time]

Bill 54**Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hereby move Bill 54 for third reading, the Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009.

I had some further comments prepared, but most of them have been repeated in past readings, and I will conclude my comments with that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to rise and get another opportunity to speak on Bill 54. There has been a lot of discussion on this bill. Certainly, a lot of the legislative framework that's presented in this bill is reflective of the all-party committee that was struck. If this bill were to be adopted – and I'm sure it will be – there will be new standards for organizations intended to make compliance easier. There will be new notification standards for organizations. Also, there are some timelines that will be changed, and there will be changed processes for the commissioner as well.

I think, certainly, that when one looks at this, it is at least a step in the right direction. We on this side of the House are pleased that the government has finally gotten around – it's almost two years later – to incorporating some of the suggestions of the all-party committee. But we have to be wary and mindful of some of the discussions that occurred around this bill, and I'm sure all members of the Assembly are.

We have to note the views of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, I believe, before we conclude debate at third reading. We talked about this earlier in debate, but the Information and Privacy Commissioner released a statement near the end of October declaring that his office was extremely disappointed that the government at this time, through this bill had not opted to bring all nonprofits under the scope of PIPA. The commissioner argued that the limitations of the act would create confusion and allow certain nonprofits to operate with very little, if any, supervision. I hope that at some point we can take heed of the concern by the Privacy Commissioner and make sure that his view and his opinion is respected, and hopefully in this case it won't be a serious matter. It could be, but hopefully it won't.

While there is a lot in this bill that is very reasonable, a lot has changed when it comes to the way businesses and nonprofits collect and use personal information. We need to make sure that the debate on this bill is not rushed through the Assembly. I don't think it has been in this case.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for his work on this bill. Hopefully, this will make our information laws sounder in this province, and hopefully the concerns or the cautions that were expressed by the Privacy Commissioner will not turn out to be a significant barrier for our information and privacy laws.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on this bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 54 read a third time]

Bill 55**Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move Bill 55, the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009, for third reading.

This very straightforward bill simply extends the life of the act from 2010 to 2016 but is very important for Albertans. It's very important for Albertans because it keeps in place the mechanism which allows us to decide to hold another provincial Senate selection election in order to make sure that we have elected Senate candidates available for the federal government to appoint if and when a vacancy should come open. Very important for Albertans because we still await the movement by the federal government in reforming the Senate in the way it should be reformed so that we can have an equal, effective, and elected Parliament which represents not only the population basis of the country but also the regional interests of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask for support for this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

10:00

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in third reading to debate this incredibly thin bill. There's really not much to object to in this bill since, as the hon. Government House Leader said just a moment ago, it simply extends the sunset clause for the senatorial elections until December 31, 2016.

I'm of a couple of minds about this. I can't help but notice that we seem to manage fine here in the province of Alberta with just one house of parliament, and all provinces except Quebec manage with just one Legislative Assembly, one legislative body. If one wanted to, I think you could extend that into an argument that, well, you know, we've been watching this triple-E proposal – elected, equal, effective Senate – limp along that now Senator Bert Brown first proposed back in the last century. Just nothing substantial yet, in my view, has come of it, so you could make the point of view that maybe we should just do away with the Senate, or maybe the federal government should just do away with the Senate since, obviously, it's not our job.

To those of us – and I count myself as one – who think that the concept of a triple-E Senate is a darn fine idea, all I would like to say is that I would like to urge the government of the province of Alberta to do within its power whatever it can to cajole, coerce, lean on, persuade the federal government to get going on this. You know, I suppose having Senators-in-waiting – and the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development was a Senator-in-waiting for a number of years and got left at the altar . . .

Mr. MacDonald: I didn't know he was a Senator-in-waiting.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, he was. He was. His period of waiting expired in 2004 if I remember correctly, hon. member. Yeah. September 20, 2004, he sort of lost the gig that he never got, but he got one in here, so I don't suppose it mattered too much to him.

The notion of having Senators-in-waiting that were elected by the people of Alberta is a bit of an improvement, but it's a theoretical improvement, really, in many respects if you don't have a government – we've seen times when we did have a federal government that would appoint an elected Senator from Alberta to a Senate vacancy, and we've seen times when governments wouldn't. When they don't, you know, it doesn't really do much good to have an elected Senator-in-waiting waiting for an appointment that never comes.

Even if every Senator that we elected was appointed to fill Senate vacancies in the federal Senate, even if the other provinces decided to follow our model and start electing their Senators, we still have two very fundamental problems here, that the Senate is not equal and not as effective as it could be. You know, the rationale behind the triple-E Senate has to be the American model, the bicameral houses of Congress, where you have the House of Representatives, which is representative by population, and you have the Senate, where you have an equal number of Senators from every state, and it's a counterbalance on the rep-by-pop approach. Makes sense. California has the same population as Canada, 34 million. Montana has fewer people than cows, you know? It does.

Dr. Taft: So does Alberta, actually.

Mr. Taylor: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview might be right. We might have more cows than people, too.

But the point is that having two Senators from Montana gives the people of Montana the ability to balance off the disadvantage that they have in the House of Representatives when, you know, their representatives are overwhelmed by the number of representatives from the state of California, for instance.

There's some wisdom behind this. I know that from conversations I've had with Senator Brown going back many years, he is a firm

believer and a firm proponent of the entire triple-E concept. One E out of three is not good enough.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Government House Leader and all members of the government to start a massive lobbying effort, even if you have to register, to talk the federal government into taking further action on this so that the concept of the triple-E Senate can come to full fruition.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 55 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:06 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Blakeman
Campbell
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
Kang
MacDonald

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Benito
Bhardwaj
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
Lukaszuk
Notley
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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, November 19, 2009

Issue 60

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 19, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in the constituencies we represent. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Mr. Blackett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 72 enthusiastic and inquisitive grade 6 students from St. Basil Catholic school, located in my constituency of Calgary-North West in my home community of Tuscany. I get to know many of these students personally because I've had a chance to be a parent volunteer in their classes over the years, a soccer coach, and a hockey coach, and I have one special student in that group, my daughter Jasmine Blackett. Accompanying the students are their teachers, Anil Dolan, Marianne Murray, Carolyn Krahn, and teacher's aide Julia Reynolds as well as 13 parent volunteers. I won't go through the whole list. They are seated in the members' and public galleries. I'd ask that they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize and celebrate two people who are involved with Concrete Theatre, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. As you know from hearing me in this Assembly, being able to keep a theatre alive and thriving for 20 years is not an easy feat. Concrete Theatre was formed and has carried on a long-standing tradition in Edmonton of social action theatre and has also come to specialize in theatre for young audiences and actually produces a theatre of new plays for young audiences, called the Sprouts Festival. Today I would like to welcome to the Assembly – and would you please rise – Mieko Ouchi, who was a cofounder and is still artistic director of the theatre. With her today is Debbie Giesbrecht, who is the general manager of the theatre. Please welcome them and congratulate them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of Alberta's registered nursing students, who are in the members' gallery up behind me today. I'd ask them to rise as I introduce them. These students are here because they're concerned about this government's plan to cut beds and services and restrict the hiring of nurses. They have spent four years getting educated as nurses. They want to work, and Alberta needs them. They're here to make sure that we get that message. Please give these bright students, the future of Alberta's health care system, a warm welcome and some real encouragement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you Helen Cashman, a constituent who attends Avalon junior high school. Helen is an avid dancer and volunteer with the Ceilidh Dance Academy, and she's also the co-president of the Avalon junior high school student council. Helen is very interested in politics and had her father contact my office to acquire a seat in the Legislature to view question period. I'd now like Helen and her father, Paul Cashman, who are both seated in the public gallery, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour and privilege to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a very special young lady in my life, who has been a great example. She's caring, loving, very compassionate, always wants to help her fellow beings. She's currently going to school at NAIT to become a respiratory therapist. I'd like to introduce my daughter Janna Hinman, who's here to see the proceedings of this Assembly today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a real privilege for me today to introduce a local businessman and entrepreneur, who just happens to be an amazing father, and he is going to soon be the father of the bride, who is my scheduling assistant, Mr. Doug Hoffman and his daughter Lindsay. She's never seen the House in motion. Glad to have you here. Please join me in welcoming them to the Leg. Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Fifth Anniversary of Elected Members

The Speaker: Hon. members, five years ago this Sunday will mark the anniversary of an election in the province of Alberta. On November 22, 2004, the following members were elected to this Assembly for the first time: the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the hon. Member for Peace River, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. It is their fifth anniversary this Sunday, and if this Assembly had a pension plan for MLAs, they would now be vested.*

Congratulations to all of them.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Recognition of 30 Years of Service

Hon. Ken Kowalski, Speaker

Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important milestone will come to pass over the weekend, and I think it is only fitting that the members of this Assembly take a moment to recog-

*See page 1905, left column, para. 8, and page 1913, right column, para. 7

nize and pay tribute to this historic occasion. Saturday, November 21, 2009, marks the 30th anniversary of the Speaker's service as a member of this Assembly. [Standing ovation] More than a third of that time has been spent in the Speaker's chair, presiding over the proceedings of this House.

Mr. Speaker, they say that leadership is born of great character, which confirms my personal belief that you are quite a character. It is your fairness and objectivity that underline your effectiveness as Speaker of the Legislature of this great province, it is your spirit and commitment that make you an effective representative for your constituents, and it is your humour and your vision that make you a respected colleague and friend to all of us in the House.

Mr. Speaker, you have seen a lot of changes in the last 30 years. In fact, you have been the driving force, really, behind all of these changes over the 30 years, changes that benefit all Albertans. Having occupied many different offices during your political career, you were dubbed by the press at one time as Mr. Everything and Minister of Everything. Wear these titles proudly as they reflect the diverse experience that has shaped your term of service. From the Oldman dam in southern Alberta to the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation in northern Alberta to the reflecting pools right here on the Legislature Grounds, these lasting monuments to your energy and to your enthusiasm stand throughout this province, paying tribute to your dedication and commitment to public service for the betterment of all citizens. Once a teacher of history, Mr. Speaker, your many accomplishments are now a treasured part of Alberta's history.

I speak on behalf of all members of the Assembly when I say: thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and privilege to serve with you. Happy 30th anniversary. [applause]

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to stand and recognize you as the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock and add that at the AAMD and C lunch today I had the privilege of sitting in for you at your table and speaking on your behalf to your constituents.

Dr. Taft: Did you announce new funding?

Dr. Swann: I announced no new funding.

Very few parliamentarians have the privilege of serving for 30 years, and, Mr. Speaker, you should be very proud of this accomplishment. You've established an unusual degree of trust and respect from your constituents and some level of decorum in the Legislature in the province of Alberta.

Even if I weren't a member in the Legislature, I would still be grateful to the Speaker for stepping forward and accepting the challenges of public, political life. As every member here knows, it's not the easiest nor the least stressful calling in the world, but the Speaker has managed it for three decades, and that with a full head of hair, I might add. However long the Speaker serves as MLA, I trust that he continues to serve his constituents with diligence and enjoys peace, health, and happiness in his personal life.

Congratulations on 30 years of service, Mr. Speaker. While our ideologies may differ, I think we can agree that serving the public and upholding the principles of a free and democratic society are both a vital and a special privilege. Whether we've served in this Assembly for 30 years or three, we all have a duty to be true to our values to help the citizens of this great province enjoy a happier, healthier, fuller life. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms. Notley: Yes. I rise to seek the consent of the House to allow the leader of the third party to respond to this statement.

The Speaker: On this occasion may I humbly implore the Assembly to give unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. You use your discretion judiciously, I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

On behalf of the NDP opposition I echo the comments of my colleagues and add our congratulations on your three decades of service as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. It is a rare thing, indeed, for all members of the House to agree on anything, but we do agree that your 30 years of service are something to be recognized and that your accomplishments in those 30 years should be applauded.

Mr. Speaker, you balance the qualities of firmness and flexibility while allowing differences of opinion, at the same time reining in acrimony and hostility. Free speech is the hallmark of our parliamentary system, and the Speaker is its guardian. It is a job that is in good hands with you in the chair, Mr. Speaker.

Congratulations on your anniversary. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, do you seek unanimous consent as well?

Mr. Hinman: I was going to ask for unanimous consent for the hon. independent member of the House.

The Speaker: Would the Assembly agree to such a request?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Boutilier: It's a beautiful day.

Mr. Speaker, indeed, you have a full head of hair.

Second of all, from all the comments that have been made here today, I recall visiting your constituency and speaking at one of your constituency dinners. I remember the constituents in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock saying: he cares. What more can be said of one who serves in public service but that he cares? I know you continue to view this honour and privilege to serve as Speaker and a member for the constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and on behalf of the members and the constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo we say thank you for your public service and continued public service for the many, many years to come.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent for the member of the Wildrose party to offer comments.

The Speaker: Shall such a request be granted?

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and all members of this Assembly. It truly is an honour to be here today as we celebrate your 30th anniversary. It's an awesome milestone. I just regret that

I took off 18 months, that I wasn't able to be recognized with five years. It's been a privilege.

There are a few things that have been mentioned about the hon. Speaker that I'd like to reiterate. Being from southern Alberta, it's just been a major accomplishment to have the Oldman River dam. It's added life to southern Alberta. That was a very controversial and tough and hard-fought battle, and on behalf of all those people in southern Alberta I wish to thank the Speaker for that.

He mentioned earlier the five-year pension plan. Many of the good people that I've known over the years have loved their work so well that they've never retired to go on. I wish the best to the Speaker that he might wish to do that and save Alberta taxpayers any transition money that would be going, that he'll continue in his seat.

It's an honour and a privilege. I've always appreciated the open door and the advice he has given. Though I haven't always agreed with it, it's been beneficial, and like I say, it's always been there, and the expertise was there. I wish you all the best going forward. May you have many more years.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you all very, very much for your kind words and your kindness. I've always viewed it as a privilege to be an elected representative in the province of Alberta. I've been very fortunate. I've been very fortunate to have the constituents that I have and to be able to represent the three different constituencies that I've been able to represent.

As importantly, I've met a lot of outstanding individuals who have chosen to serve in their very unselfish manner as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. You are all part of that, and I think Alberta is well served by your commitment. I'm just a mirror of what you are, and I am just humbled by the fact that I've been able to do this now for 30 years. It's been a choice, a desire, and there still is fire in the belly. Hopefully, there will be good health into the future.

I also want to recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, who was elected five years ago this weekend as well.*

Thank you all very much.

[The Speaker was presented with a gold Mace pin by the Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and the leader of the third party] [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you very much. This is a Mace pin with the number 30 on it. Many of you should be here for 30 years as well.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Education Leadership Recognition Awards

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's kindergarten to grade 12 education system is recognized as one of the best in the world. High curriculum standards, excellent learning resources, well-trained teachers, and strong assessment programs all contribute to its excellent reputation. And students along with the teachers and principals are recognized for this success through various initiatives and events.

School board trustees and superintendents are cornerstones for Alberta's students, teachers, and principals to ensure that they soar to great heights. Without their due diligence and hard work we would have very little to celebrate. That is why the minister's

education leadership recognition awards, also known as the MEL-RAs, are so important. Each year school board trustees and superintendents throughout the province are recognized for the positive impact they have in the lives of students each and every day. These awards recognize jurisdiction leadership teams for significant improvements and/or very high achievement in a number of categories within their jurisdictions.

1:50

Alberta Education is honouring award recipients at five events across the province throughout the month of November. The Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta School Councils' Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and the Alberta Teachers' Association, Mr. Speaker, have played a significant role in creating these awards.

I am pleased and honoured to rise today to recognize all the jurisdiction leadership teams for their continued hard work and dedication to advance all of the passion, talents of the students and youth in Alberta's K to 12 education system and to acknowledge the continued support of education stakeholders within the province. Heartfelt congratulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health System Reform

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The entire October '09 Auditor General's report shows that the transition to one provincial health authority was an utter financial disaster: budgets not being approved, millions of dollars being misreported, and the final result a \$1.3 billion deficit. It's no wonder the minister has no clear idea what is happening in his ministry with the lack of communication during this long transition. This minister takes no accountability for what has happened in this ministry. To the Premier: how can the Premier defend the minister of health's negligence in not ensuring that a board with billions of dollars would have an approved budget and business plan?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I stand by the decision on amalgamating nine regions and two of the other affiliated boards into one rather than doing nine year-end statements, nine budgets. We're all the same taxpayers in the province of Alberta. We now have one board serving all constituents of this province with one financial report and one budget. It does mean that every jurisdiction has to, you know, print their own cheques for their own staff and move staff around and account for the pension and some of the holiday pay, et cetera. They all work within the province of Alberta. It was a good move, and it saved \$650 million in administrative expenses.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. But how can Albertans trust this Premier to deal with a \$1.3 billion deficit in health when his minister of health failed to ensure the Health Services budget even got approved?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is an operating deficit within the Alberta Health Services Board. That is why I've said many times in this House that we're a province of 3 and a half million people

*See page 1903, right column, paragraph 9

spending close to \$13 billion. All Albertans are telling me that there is enough money in the system, to just make sure that we get more value for the dollars that we have invested in health, and that's what we're doing.

Dr. Swann: Well, the complete disconnect between what Alberta Health and Wellness is saying and Alberta Health Services is providing was shown on Tuesday when neither the minister nor the Premier knew what Health Services' plans were for the Sheldon Chumir centre in Calgary. Can the Premier today tell downtown Calgarians what will happen to their 24-hour urgent care service?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member is referring to because he threw out a rumour the other day. We checked on the rumour. It has no fact. The Sheldon Chumir centre is operating 24/7, is going to continue to operate 24/7. Does he know something that we don't know? He's accusing us of not being honest and truthful. Those are the facts.

The Speaker: The hon. leader. Second Official Opposition main question.

Nursing Recruitment

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the lack of a proper business plan and budget by Alberta Health Services Board has led to uncertainty for nurses and nursing students in Alberta. On the Alberta Health Services website there are roughly 195 nursing positions posted, mostly temporary, casual, and part-time. There are nursing students in the gallery that are here to find out some answers to questions they've been asking. To the minister: what does the minister have to say to nursing students graduating this December when they have no jobs in Alberta due to the fiscal mismanagement at Alberta Health Services?

Mr. Liepert: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, this member is trying to leave an impression. He used the term: there are no jobs in Alberta. That is factually incorrect. Hiring will continue through Alberta Health Services as required, and yes, Mr. Speaker, this particular administration has taken a look at the requirements in ensuring that all of our professionals are working to their full capacity. But we also have a situation within Alberta Health Services today where a year ago many of our nurses were working part-time. Now, all of a sudden with the change in the economy many of these nurses have moved to a full-time position, thereby using up some of that gap that was there earlier, the shortage for nurses.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the minister is driving nursing graduates out of the province to find work because the few nursing positions available are limited to internal hires. Yes or no, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Liepert: Well, one of the things that the new CEO had to do was to get control of the organization and ensure that there was an appropriate process in place for hiring because we had different hiring practices in the various regions around the province. That process is ongoing, and as the hiring initiatives take place, there will be plenty of opportunities for our graduates in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Again to the minister: can the minister tell Albertans how much money Alberta Health Services is wasting on full-page advertisements in national nursing publications when Health Services is concentrating on internal hiring?

Mr. Liepert: I'm not aware of any particular advertisements, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of advanced education continues to dodge questions on hefty tuition increases by claiming that no proposal has crossed his desk. Clearly a newspaper hasn't crossed his desk either as proposals from NAIT and from the universities of Calgary and Alberta are being widely discussed, frightening students and affecting their future enrolment decisions. The time for platitudes is over. Will the minister of advanced education continue to dodge this question, or will he clearly state that he intends to allow postsecondary institutions to break his own government's tuition caps?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a darn good thing that this government doesn't base its policy and its decisions on the research of newspaper articles. This government has put more money per capita into their postsecondary than many jurisdictions in North America this year. In fact, on November 2, if he'd care to go back in *Hansard* and read on November 2, I answered the question as it related to proposals that would come from me to postsecondaries, that we would look at them. They had to be real. They had to be fair. They had to be equitable. They had to have a very strong argument on a case by case basis. Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. There has been no proposal cross my desk.

Mr. Chase: Well, I guess my comment would be: University of Calgary, University of Alberta, NAIT, get the minister's address.

The slowdown in this construction industry is squeezing the employment prospects of Alberta's tradesmen and -women. Why would the minister want to place more pressure on Alberta's supply of skilled labour by contemplating significant tuition increases at NAIT? Say it ain't so.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not contemplating significant tuition increases at NAIT. The hon. member is referring to a newspaper report of across-the-board 40 per cent increases in tuition at NAIT. That's a rumour. I would encourage the hon. member to perhaps pick up a phone and call the president of NAIT and ask him what he thinks.

Mr. Chase: As the advanced education minister you have the ultimate say in the approval of a tuition cap being removed. It comes to your desk, and if it hasn't come as of now, I'm sure it'll be arriving shortly.

This government's boom and bust fiscal roller coaster style of management is an abject failure. Will the minister admit that a dedicated postsecondary endowment fund would have protected our postsecondary system from the staff cuts and tuition increases we're now facing?

Mr. Horner: Actually, let me help the hon. member out a little bit because if he's using newspapers for his research, there was a quote that I made in the newspaper that said – and I don't remember the exact quote, but I can kind of give you what the idea was – that this government is not removing the CPI cap on tuition across the board, that under my watch there will not be an across-the-board increase to tuition. If the hon. member wants to go back to the *Calgary*

Herald or the *Edmonton Journal* and find those particular quotes, I'm sure they're available, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:00 Electricity Transmission System

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, change is coming, says the Premier. One change Albertans would love to see is for the government to stop wasting their money on multibillion dollar boondoggles. This government has been trying to scare Albertans with claims that our electricity transmission grid is so old, it's about to fall down, leaving us all sitting in the dark. But a report prepared for the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which I have here today, states that the AESO and government demand forecasts are wrong. Given this, will the Premier reconsider the government's position that \$14 billion of new transmission infrastructure is urgently needed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for the UCA will respond to that question.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make it very clear that neither the UCA board nor I agree with the conclusions reached in that report. There are many reports that are prepared on a regular basis for government. This is just an example of a report that has a particular opinion. What is clear here is getting the facts out and advocating for consumers, which I will continue to do.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. By repressing reports, I guess.

Albertans want real change, and this government won't give it to them. The report says, "This section will show that there is really no such emergency for load and what little congestion there is for generation is manageable." Will the Premier admit that his government has been trying to frighten Albertans into accepting an unnecessary \$14 billion hit on their power bills?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, he's referring to a bill that's before the House. Again, if that member puts his trust in that report, vote accordingly. But if we don't get electricity to every Albertan in a few years, have him take the responsibility and the blame.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has tried to scare Albertans by suggesting that electricity demand will soon outstrip transmission capacity, but the report contradicts this. It says, "Much of the data and logic presented by the AESO is unconvincing and overstates the sense of urgency." Will the Premier finally level with Albertans and admit that this \$14 billion boondoggle is unjustified and a waste of Albertans' hard-earned money?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before in the House, it's our duty to ensure that we have a transmission system that will move electricity to all electricity consumers in the province of Alberta. The transmission lines are congested. They're aging. This is an

issue that not only faces Alberta but faces the rest of Canada and also the United States. The Americans will be making a huge move towards building new transmission, and we're going to have to do that same thing across Canada. We might as well face up to the fact that we sat back and didn't do anything in this area for the last 30, 40 years. We've got to ensure that we don't put the tab on future generations for getting the electricity there.

Again, these people want to burn more coal, create more carbon, and get less electricity to every consumer in this province: absolute nonsense.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Government Spending

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House some very good questions were asked to members of the government. One of them was in fact from the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I'd like to follow up today with the minister of the Treasury relative to his comment that his hands would be tied if he had to keep government spending to the rate of inflation with population growth. I'd like to ask the hon. minister if he could give me an example of where his hands would be tied with this conservative principle of keeping spending under control.

Mr. Snelgrove: If we had to do that as a government, it would probably mean the billion and a half dollars we've spent at Fort McMurray in the last three years would certainly be curtailed. You have to wonder, Mr. Speaker. We're faced in Alberta right now with the pandemic costs that we talked about yesterday. Serious questions. Where would you get the \$100 million to deal with the pandemic if you don't have funds at your disposal to do the right thing at the right time for Albertans? To the hon. member: what roads, what infrastructure in Fort McMurray doesn't he want for them? What support that we've given to that community did he think isn't necessary? Just tell us, and I'll try to get them to stop.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess to the opposite side, conservative principles talk about putting a framework around spending. Again, my question is posed to the minister of Treasury. How are your hands tied relative to singling out the constituency of Fort McMurray when royalties continue to be poured into the revenue and to the general revenue of the government? That actually could create another problem for you, meaning less revenue based on the royalties if you're trying to stop. My question is: give me another example, not regarding nurses or teachers but actual examples of where greater value can be achieved.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, I think the Assembly would recognize that we have started to do things differently. Three years ago next month the government set up ministerial working groups that meet with their deputies. The Premier allowed us to establish an issue-based fund for crime and safe communities, where we make departments come and work together because issues like crime don't stop with Justice or Solicitor General or Health and Wellness. It affects all the departments, and it affects all Albertans. So it's about doing more with less. There is a three-way win. The staff that work on our behalf are more engaged and more effective, the taxpayer has saved money, and the issue, particularly on safe communities, gets dealt with. So we have put in place effective tools of cross-government management.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, my final question. In the *Hansard* it says that the Premier agrees with this conservative value relative to controlling spending, which I think members of this Assembly applaud. Again, my question to the minister of Treasury: can he give me an example why he could not go forward with this population growth and inflation and how he feels that his hands are tied? I believe this can be achieved relative to how we go forward with the flexibility to serve Albertans on important initiatives.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's not about needing legislative guidelines to be fiscally prudent. We set our budget out last year based on the premise of a maximum of the population plus inflation. We have also put into place value reviews and re-engineering government to make sure that – you've got to be clear. It's not about putting a cap on spending if our spending is at unrealistic levels. We need to decide not how much we can spend on education or health care. What do we need to spend to have effective, sustainable health care and education systems when we get there? When this House is comfortable and Albertans are comfortable that we've got the right amount going into health care, going into education, then we can use this House to put the restrictions around what we spend, and we use Albertans to determine that.

I'm not against fiscal conservative principles, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I think most would agree that I believe in them. But I believe you do the work in the House, and if you need legislation, so be it. I don't think we do. I'm open to any suggestions from any member in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Blakeman: Did you say Centre?

The Speaker: Yes.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Sorry. I should have said Gold Bar.

Ms Blakeman: I will cede the floor to my hon. colleague.

Employment Strategies

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, on this day I certainly could have waited, but that's fine.

The minister of finance originally predicted an overall job loss of only 15,000 individuals for the entire year. But we've seen in the month of October an additional 14,900 jobs lost, and we have an unemployment rate in this province of 7 and a half per cent. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Given that \$60 million has been earmarked as training-for-work funds this year, how much of this money will be used to train unemployed Albertans aged 15 to 24, who are experiencing an unemployment rate that is almost double the provincial average?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't track the numbers of individuals according to age. I know individuals come to us with particular needs. They come to us with particular backgrounds. We do their assessment, and if they qualify for retraining support, we provide them with those retraining supports.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record his department tracks the number of young people who are unemployed not only in Alberta, but they break it down by region.

Again to the same minister: why is it necessary to spend millions of dollars recruiting health care professionals from overseas when we could be using the \$45 million health workforce development fund to train unemployed Albertans of all ages right here in this province?

2:10

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we certainly do both of those. We've, first and foremost, put a priority on Albertans. For those individuals that want to enter the health workforce areas, we will support and provide additional assistance to them. Having said that, we know that there is a shortage in particular sectors in the health workforce, and we will continue to recruit to fill those particular positions.

Mr. MacDonald: The minister knows that he's wasting millions and millions of dollars on outfits like Geneva International, recruiting health care professionals when there are people in this province that are ready and willing and able to work. Again to the same minister: given that the Peace Country area, an area the minister represents, has an unemployment rate of 9.1 per cent, does the minister agree with the Premier's claim that some Albertans are unemployed as a result of their own poor attitudes?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think we all need to recognize that the labour conditions out there have changed. We've come from a period of having a huge shortage of workers to one where we've had a surplus of workers. Individuals must recognize that in order to participate fully in the workforce, they have to look at additional training possibilities or upgrading their skills. I truly believe that individuals have to take those types of initiatives on their own to be able to eventually help themselves in the long run.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Family Violence

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A recent Stats Canada survey reported that in 2007 Alberta had the second-highest rate of spousal violence in the country. Whether it's due to economic downturn or other factors, the fact remains that many women and children are in danger of violence in their own homes. My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Given the fact that SafeCom recommended expanding programs for those affected by domestic violence, can the minister tell us what steps the government is taking to help reduce and prevent family violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is taking a lead role in addressing the serious issue of family violence. In fact, several of my colleagues and I this week were able to attend a family violence conference here in Edmonton with 650 individuals very committed to ending the silence and stopping the violence. We have nine ministries that are working on an initiative that have spent nearly \$60 million this past year on raising awareness, on prevention, on supporting victims. Our efforts have included enhanced legislation, increased funding for women's shelters, enhanced services for

immigrant and aboriginal communities, and as well providing our 24-hour family violence line, now in more than 170 languages.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: what is your ministry doing to address this serious issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My ministry has been actively involved in family violence training for police since 1991. We ensure that our front-line police officers are properly trained. They must complete a family violence investigative report when responding to domestic violence calls. This report not only helps them gather critical information in the first 12 hours of attending a family violence complaint, but it also alerts them to situations that may require specific follow-up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: what help does the government provide to the victims of domestic violence?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addition to our front-line police officers and ITRAC, which focuses on domestic violence, our victims' services units provide much-needed support to victims of crimes such as domestic violence. They help ensure that these victims are treated with compassion and respect and help them rebuild their lives. Last year we provided \$25 million in funding for programs and financial benefits that support victims of crime.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Rent Supplement Program

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs has said time and time again that changes to the homeless and eviction prevention fund and the direct-to-tenant rent supplement programs were merely administrative and that people were going to have more and not less support, but the reality is that rent supplements are no longer available for families not already in the program, that there hasn't been money available to support new applicants since the summertime. The fund has dried up, and now families are having to make a hard choice between eating their next meal or keeping a roof over their heads. To the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs: now that families are unable to access rent subsidies and are having to wait over two years to get into affordable housing in many cases, just what are they supposed to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this question. As you know, the rent supplement program is working. It's working very well, in fact. It's helping our most vulnerable people, and that's whether it's paid directly to them or to the landlord. The member is right: given the current economy the demand for all our housing programs is high. But I can tell you that this year we are providing \$140 million to assist 85,000 people that are low income through rent subsidies and social housing.

I can also tell you this, Mr. Speaker, that the waiting list for rent supplements is not growing. That's incorrect. The information you have is incorrect. That wait-list has not grown. In fact, we are assisting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the fact remains that since summertime all of us on this side of the House have been hearing from people in our respective constituencies that people cannot access the money if they're not already in the program. So the program may be working fine for people who got in springtime or earlier, but for people who are falling on hard times now, they're in trouble, and your fund is not supporting them. With the need for Alberta's food banks up a staggering 61 per cent because of the economic downturn, how can the minister justify this failure to adequately fund the direct-to-tenant rent supplement program at this crucial time?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, I really would have liked you to have been there at the luncheon that I had today with the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness because this is the very issue that we talked about, and this member would have benefited from that meeting. The rent supplement program, I can tell you, has increased significantly over the past three years. It was \$18 million assisting 7,500 people three years ago. Today we have \$90 million assisting 40,000 people, and there are 800 people supported, new people and families – that includes families, individuals – each month with this program.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, she is playing with the figures here. She's playing with the figures. Sure, there's been all kinds of money spent over the last three years, and that's precisely why the ministry has turned off the taps or turned them down to drip from flow, because they're trying to stem the amount of money that they're spending. Social workers are getting fed up with this government saying one thing and doing another. How can the minister reconcile . . .

Some Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Taylor: Wait for it; I'll get to it.

. . . her well-advertised commitment to end homelessness with her failure to adequately support rent subsidies that would actually keep families from becoming homeless?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, to talk about the ending homelessness area, that we've really worked extremely hard on with our 10-year plan, it's a \$400 million commitment over three years for capital dollars to build housing for the homeless. That's the first time in Canada that money has ever been committed, and it's a significant contribution. As well, we are assisting a thousand people this year that are homeless with a \$32 million commitment, and that is significant.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Gangs and Organized Crime

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that gangs of various natures are active throughout our province, and most do not limit their operations to a single community. They're highly mobile,

and they threaten the safety and security of Albertans. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. I have constituents who want to know what is being done to combat these increasingly sophisticated gangs.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the primary ways we are tackling this issue is through integrated policing, ALERT, which is the Alberta law enforcement response team. It's a perfect example of how this model works. It brings together Alberta's most sophisticated law enforcement resources to strategically target serious and organized crime. There are more than 30 teams in seven regions around Alberta dedicated to disrupting and dismantling organized crime. We're sharing intelligence and operational information also across provincial boundaries.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. To the same minister: how do you know this strategy is actually making a difference?

Mr. Lindsay: ALERT is making it increasingly difficult for criminals to operate in this province, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in the last few months alone ALERT's integrated teams have put four large drug operations out of business in this province. Since it was established in 2006, ALERT units have arrested more than 2,300 individuals on 5,600 charges relating to drugs, weapons, and violent crime. These units have seized nearly \$4 million in cash and have been responsible for taking approximately 600 kilograms of drugs and more than 300 firearms off our streets. Last year alone they contributed to taking \$85 million of illegal drugs off the streets of this province.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. Well, we know gangs aren't the only issues that cross jurisdictional lines and threaten the safety of our communities. What is being done to deal with these other complex problems?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, ALERT continues to target and arrest those who have no respect for our laws and who use violence and intimidation. While it may be the big drug busts that hit the news, ALERT is involved in other activities, including the ICE teams, that target online child pornography; the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre, which helps reduce and prevent domestic violence and stalking. ALERT also includes SCAN teams, that target problem properties, and the FASST teams, that target criminals who are wanted on outstanding warrants.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Agricultural Assistance

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last decade this government has handed millions of dollars in grants to multinational agricultural corporations not based in Alberta. Taxpayer dollars that could have gone to help sustain our local family-owned and operated farms instead went to fund massive corporate farms. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. This government has awarded Cargill over \$10 million in direct grants in just the last six years. Would the minister tell us what these grants were for?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, the challenges faced by the agriculture industry certainly are not just limited to one sector. Operations of all sizes are impacted, including Cargill. It would be very interesting to note that all companies that receive any funds from this government are taxpayers in Alberta.

Ms Pastoor: Will the minister provide documentation that proves that this money was used solely for initiatives in Alberta and not to fund corporate farms in other provinces or countries?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, under the system the compensation programs are usually on a per-head basis, so it's no surprise that the larger operations receive larger support under the programs. I will tell the hon. member that the programs do have a maximum cap for larger operations.

Ms Pastoor: That may well be the crux of part of this matter, that we should perhaps be looking at a different way to get those grants out and not just on a per head.

What process and regulations are used to determine whether a corporation not based in Alberta is eligible for Alberta taxpayer funded agricultural grants?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any corporation that's not based in Alberta receiving these programs, so I don't understand exactly where she's coming from.

Ms Blakeman: Cargill.

Mr. Groeneveld: Cargill is in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

You know, let it be clear that our payment programs are often structured with other national programs. We work very closely with our federal counterparts and provincial counterparts on eligibility criteria. I'm proud to say that no other jurisdiction in Canada has provided the level of support to the producers in Alberta that the province of Alberta has.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

(continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology is continuing to stress out students and their families by fudging his answers about increasing tuition costs. At the same time that he says that he'll not remove caps on tuition, administrators at the U of A are saying that they will be seeking government approval for increases of \$3,000 or \$4,000 per year for certain professional programs. To the minister: why won't the minister clarify this discrepancy by stating clearly that the government will not allow any university program to increase fees by more than the cost of living?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, continually we get these comments about "Well, the rumour is" or "The administration says that they're going to seek approval," that they're going to come and talk to me. The hon. member is asking for an answer that I can't give because they haven't come to talk to me yet.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly within the ability of this minister to state now that he will not agree to a request to increase fees. He just doesn't want to say it. Now, I don't care if

you call it a market modifier, an increase to the tuition base, or simply what it is, an increase in fees to students, ultimately students will be asked to pay more. Why won't the minister admit right now that if he considers this, he will be breaking his promise to keep increases to what students pay in line with the cost of living?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I'm not hiding anything. I said in this House on November 2, I said in April after we put the budget out there, and we've said during our meetings with the council of chairs and with the presidents and with the students that if a valid, reasonable, fair, and equitable case is made on a case-by-case basis for programs, we will take a look at that. That means we may approve it; we may not approve it. I'm not about to preclude that decision here in the House today.

Ms Notley: What that says to me is that the minister is finally saying that he is considering going around the cost-of-living cap.

So now these proposed hikes will put advanced education out of the reach of many Albertan families regardless of whether they want to send their kids into professional programs or the trades. Why won't the minister admit that this government's broken promise and the resulting 40 to 60 per cent fee hikes will mean that even fewer Albertans will have the chance at a postsecondary education?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only one that's raising a lot of concern and fear in the students' minds across the board in Alberta today is the hon. member because as of today the rule is that the CPI cap is in place at 1 and a half per cent for the 2010-11 student year for tuition increases. That's the maximum allowable across the board. We have always said that if there is a situation where we have to adjust the base on a fair and equitable position, with consultation with the students – we've always made that commitment as well – then we will look at it. Does that mean that I'm going to say yes just because the hon. member says that the *Edmonton Journal* has reported it? Absolutely not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Immigrant Investor Program

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our provincial immigration system needs to attract, in addition to employees, employers to our province, people who bring with them the entrepreneurial spirit, know-how, and resources to create jobs and prosperity in our province. Many provinces have an entrepreneur stream in their provincial nominee programs. My question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Where is our stream?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Ministry of Employment and Immigration is reviewing the Alberta immigrant nominee program, and part of this review includes looking at the viability of such a stream. We know that some other provinces do have a similar stream, and we're using the opportunity to learn from them, to see what their challenges and successes have been. We've found out that one such challenge is ensuring that people commit to building their businesses right here in Alberta for the long term and are not perceived to be buying their way into our country. Our goal is to attract individuals with the expertise and capital to add to Alberta's workforce and the economy.

Mr. Bhullar: My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Mr. Minister, now is the time to lay the seeds for an even more robust economy and prepare for when it's firing on all cylinders again. If this stream is being considered, when do you propose we can actually have it start?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to first make sure that this stream would provide real benefits to Albertans. Developing a new stream, that is being proposed, takes time and involves a lot of market research and business decisions. Since our budget process has yet to be resolved, we're considering whether or not it's feasible to move forward at this time. It should also be noted that we would need to consult with our federal counterpart at Citizenship and Immigration Canada to ensure that any changes are consistent with the federal Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

Mr. Bhullar: My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: Minister, are we participating in the federal government immigrant investor program? If not, why not?

2:30

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, the federal government's immigrant investor program remains a viable option for potential investors that are destined for Alberta, but Alberta differs from other provinces in its decision to not participate in the financial side of the program. Alberta would need to set up a Crown corporation to administer the program. In addition, the investments must be returned after five years. The use of investor funds is complicated. It's time consuming and resource intensive, and it's unclear if the benefits at this time would justify the cost. This decision, though, has not compromised our ability at all to track investment in the province as we speak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Film and Television Support

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. B.C. is enjoying a recession-proof \$1.2 billion film industry that employs over 40,000 people. Compared to B.C.'s tax incentives and funding initiatives, Alberta can't compete. With Alberta having only 3 per cent of Canada's total production in film, we need a lot more than one Calgary film studio and tinkering done to the film development program to be competitive. My questions are to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. When will the minister make Alberta competitive and match B.C.'s tax credit model?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, funny enough, the hon. member hasn't quite got it correct. Actually, Alberta is one of the most competitive regimes for film and television in Canada. We have a labour rate at 29 per cent. That is higher than B.C. That is higher than Ontario and higher than Quebec. We have a film development grant that is a leader in the industry, that Saskatchewan is looking at as a model. We don't care about tax credits here in this particular government. We're not in a race to the bottom. We're not in a race to compete with other jurisdictions which are going in the wrong direction. I think we're going in the right direction.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. If the city of Calgary is providing the seed money for this new film studio, why was the minister making the project announcement? What is this government's budget for this project?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason that this minister, representing this government, was making the announcement was because we took the initiative to work with three levels of government and the private sector and Calgary Economic Development. We took the initiative to go and find an area that we could build a purpose-built television, film, and digital studio. We negotiated with WinSport Canada to get 10 acres of land in Calgary. They gave them \$30,000 of seed money to start this project. We gave them \$75,000 last year to do a feasibility study, which we moved forward today. We haven't yet finalized the funding levels for all three levels of government, and we haven't finalized the commitment for the private sector. We're doing our due diligence and making sure that we have a governance model and a not-for-profit entity that will be able to manage this facility.

Ms Blakeman: Back to the same minister. Why is this special deal made to subsidize the declining horse-racing industry, but the minister won't entertain a tax credit model for the film industry, an industry which has real growth potential and supports green economy sustainable jobs? You should be able to do better than 3 per cent.

Mr. Blackett: Well, funny enough, I had a meeting, Mr. Speaker, with the Canadian Film and Television Production Association along with the president of CBC and some other production companies. I asked a simple question. Do you want cash, or do you want a tax credit? Do you want to get paid out in cash two months after production, or do you want to wait 12 to 18 months after you've finished production? Their answer was: we'll take the cash two months after production.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Underground Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great number of my constituents have sent me e-mails and letters regarding the proposed transmission line. My first question is for the hon. Minister of Energy. Can the minister elaborate on the possibility of burying certain segments of the proposed transmission line in the densely populated areas?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't make comments relative to specific pieces that may be the subject of debate in this House, but generally I would suggest that what has been done – there are two studies initiated in Alberta currently: one that looks at the Edmonton region and one that looks, I think, a bit broader, across the province of Alberta. We haven't got the results of those studies yet, but what I would say is that underground cable is in the city of Edmonton now. It's not as if it can't be done. Depending on the size, depending on the capacity and that sort of thing, it's done, and we have it here now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Can the minister advise what consultation is occurring with respect to the location of the transmission lines?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, I've alluded to this a number of times in the House and in public many times. The consultation process that's in place that goes ahead of any decisions that are made relative to these issues, I think, is relatively well understood. The AESO and the transmission facility operators go out in front of any of these things and propose a number of options and have consultation around the options. That continues to take place today on an ongoing basis with respect to the issues in and around the city of Edmonton.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you. Many of my constituents, while recognizing the importance of new transmission lines, would like to bring forward additional concerns and input. My final supplementary to the same minister: can he advise what avenues are available to my constituents to provide their input?

Mr. Knight: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. The situation as it unfolds, of course, with any transmission development in the province of Alberta is consistent with what's going to happen in this area, and that is that at the correct point in time, when we get to a permit and licensing stage with respect to any of these pieces of infrastructure, the Alberta Utilities Commission holds an open public hearing at which any Albertans at their choice can go and intervene and have their concerns and requests and requirements heard by the Alberta Utilities Commission in a quasi-judicial setting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Métis Settlements Ombudsman

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The annual report of the Métis settlements ombudsman raises concerns regarding declining working relationships, legal challenges that stall and undermine the ombudsman's role, and unease with the ombudsman's connection to the minister's office. Calls that we've received in our office from settlements confirm these concerns. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What actions has the minister taken to address the concerns raised in the Métis settlements ombudsman's most recent annual report?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's true that there were some unavoidable delays in some of the processing and some of the administrative matters in the Métis settlements ombudsman's office over the past several years, partly due to the complexity and partly due to staffing issues and a few other internal things. However, we have a new Métis settlements ombudsman that has taken over after the good work done by the previous one, and some of those streamlines have now taken place. I think you'll see some improvements coming over the next few months.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. That doesn't fit with the calls we're getting to our office. The problems continue. The friction continues. My question again to the same minister: will the minister review the regulations governing the office of the Métis settlements ombudsman now rather than waiting four years until the regulations expire?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I've had several meetings with the Métis Settlements General Council on this matter, and we have agreed to taking a look at what we call a parallel process. As part of that parallel process we'll be probing fairly deeply into the functions and purpose and nature of the Métis settlements ombudsman, who, according to the Métis Settlements Act, carries the investigatory powers of the minister.

Dr. Taft: Okay. It sounds like the minister is already conducting a review. I'm going to give him a suggestion. As it stands now, the minister appoints and effectively delegates authority to the ombudsman. Will the minister consider establishing legislation enshrining the Métis settlements ombudsman as an entity separate from the minister to remove the politics from that position?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and the House that there are no politics with respect to that appointment. The fact is that the Métis Settlements General Council suggests one member to sit on a tribunal. I as minister suggest one person with that background to sit on a tribunal council. The two of them together choose a third person. They review potential applicants. Then they make a recommendation to me, and then the appointment is made. In this most recent case I was very convinced that Mr. John Brosseau had the skills and the experience and the integrity necessary to fill that position. The issue is one of competency, and he certainly has it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Aboriginal Education and Employment

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations recently attended a federal-provincial-territorial meeting of aboriginal affairs ministers and national aboriginal leaders. I'm sure there were a lot of important issues that were discussed. One of the biggest issues for the aboriginal people in my constituency is unemployment. My question for the minister: of what benefit was this meeting for aboriginals in Alberta who are facing tough times and in particular for the aboriginals in my constituency?

2:40

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, this was a very important meeting because it was the first meeting of its kind in more than four years. To bring together federal, provincial, and territorial ministers as well as the five national aboriginal leaders was a feat in itself. Its purpose, really, was to address several issues such as aboriginal economic development – read into that employment, if you like – as well as postsecondary and skills-training opportunities for aboriginals. These are issues that are important to all aboriginals, particularly here in Alberta, of course, from my point of view, but everywhere else. Let me just conclude by saying that the meeting was held partly at the behest of the first ministers and the Prime Minister, who requested we get together and deal with some of these important issues of education, economic development, and others.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before we can get to the higher education levels and skills training he speaks of, I'd submit that there needs to be more done to help the aboriginals with their basic education needs. I'd like to ask the minister: could the minister please clarify for me what this meeting may have accom-

plished in terms of narrowing that gap between aboriginal and nonaboriginal educational outcomes?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it was a very productive meeting with respect to narrowing the gap that exists between aboriginal and nonaboriginal learners. I looked at it from the Alberta perspective. I need to explain, first of all, that the delivery of education on reserves, of course, is a federal responsibility. I'm pleased that the federal minister, the Hon. Chuck Strahl, was there with us, and he heard the concerns that we took forward. As part of our group, nonetheless, we agreed to address matters of education gaps and other gaps with our provincial counterparts: the two ministers in this case, advanced education and basic education in Alberta.

Also, here in Alberta we recently established an aboriginal education partnership council, and among its primary objectives is, in fact, what the member is asking about; that is, narrowing the educational gap that seems to persistently exist between aboriginal learners and nonaboriginal learners.

Mr. Berger: My final question to the same minister would be: what mechanisms will you be able to put in place to measure these outcomes, and what kind of follow-up can be done to ensure that these issues will be addressed and acted upon and achieve some real results?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, very good questions. Besides the aforementioned educational council I want to indicate, too, that we as well as federal, provincial, and territorial ministers and aboriginal leaders agreed to establishing an aboriginal affairs working group, the first of its kind. Its purpose will be, in fact, to track these issues. We will again meet in April of 2010, and as soon as possible thereafter we will provide our recommendations and our results to the Prime Minister and to all of the provincial and territorial Premiers. So there are a few mechanisms in place that will keep the system's checks and balances in place.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

Earlier in the afternoon in a blurry-eyed moment I made an error by congratulating the hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration for his fifth anniversary as an elected person. That was an error. He was actually elected in 2001.*

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce a number of very special guests today. To begin with, to you and through you I'd like to introduce to the Assembly Guy Smith, president-elect of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. AUPE is the largest union in the province, with over 76,000 members serving Albertans in every corner of the province every day of the year.

Guy is here in support of the ongoing campaign to save Alberta Hospital Edmonton and to show his support for the public services and programs that Albertans count on in their everyday lives. With Guy today are nine AUPE members from Alberta Hospital Edmonton, six from the U of A hospital, one more member from Fort

*See page 1903, right column, paragraph 9

Saskatchewan, and we also have two AUPE employees who have assisted these members in their effort to stop the bed closures at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. This group from AUPE is looking forward to seeing a number of their petitions to save Alberta Hospital Edmonton tabled in the House later this afternoon. I would now ask that Guy Smith along with my other guests rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and to the members of the House the deputy mayor of Sundre, Annette Clews. Annette is the mother of a very accomplished teenager, who represented the Alberta branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Quebec last year at the summer games and came in second in Canada. Allan came in second in his competition in track and field. I would ask Annette to rise and the House to give her the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Concrete Theatre

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize and celebrate the 20th anniversary of Concrete Theatre and, in doing so, to focus on their longest running project, *Are We There Yet?*

Now, Concrete Theatre was formed to carry on the long-standing tradition in Edmonton theatre of social action theatre. *Are We There Yet?* was created by Jane Heather and is an innovative piece of theatre that works in important ways as a teaching tool on sexual health for kids. Thanks to Jane Heather for creating it and to the many actors and directors, stage managers, and designers who have toured the show across Alberta to grade 9 students over the last 11 years.

Are We There Yet? is a successful learning tool for young people as they grapple with a bewildering buffet of sexual images in magazines, online, TV, video games, bus shelter ads, you name it. The Edmonton public school board has done a large research project on this show, and it reinforces that in quantitative and qualitative measures positive, measurable change occurs for both male and female students.

The play's messages about the importance of setting personal boundaries are welcomed by young people. Students reported that they learned to be aware of their own limits, to be cognizant of their partner's boundaries, and to give importance to communication. This has been a very successful and long-running project because it honours kids and gives them information to make good decisions.

I'll give the final words to them. "It helped me realize that people have to respect my body and boundaries." "It made me know to stand up for myself and my limits are my limits and if I don't want to go further, I don't have to." Finally, "Yeah it changed things I would do. It made me more knowledgeable of what to do in those types of situations."

Are We There Yet? is a great example of your success, Concrete Theatre, and I hope more Alberta kids have the opportunity to see the show and learn those valuable life lessons. You've made a very, very positive change in Edmonton and in Alberta. Thank you so much, Concrete Theatre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Stella Calahasen

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 28 I had the real pleasure of being invited to attend a book launch at Audreys Books in Edmonton. It was a pleasure to meet Ms Stella Calahasen, the sister of the wonderful Member for Lesser Slave Lake and the author of the book *Dream Catcher*.

This book is a wonderful and unique interpretation of the aboriginal culture and, in particular, the story of the origin of the dream catcher. This book is a creative tool to learn more about the Cree culture and to help future generations of Cree children retain their language and their culture.

Ms Calahasen was raised as part of the Woodland Cree First Nation, in northern Alberta on the shores of Lesser Slave Lake. With a household of 10 children, six of them girls, her parents were firm believers in the use of storytelling to calm the excitement in the household. This age-old tradition was a favourite of the children and, as her sister, our colleague, says, brought a sense of calmness to the otherwise busy home. Stella Calahasen also believes strongly in passing along these stories to her children about the way of life and language of the Cree people and has captured one of these stories in her book, *Dream Catcher*.

It is great to see a fellow Albertan succeed in writing and publishing her work, and it is especially inspiring to see an aboriginal woman publish a book about her heritage and about the beliefs she holds so dear. It is truly a remarkable feat. Congratulations, Stella, and I look forward to more successes like this one in the future.

Hai, hai, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

2:50

CASA House

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise to acknowledge the official opening of CASA House, which I was privileged enough to attend on November 2, 2009. CASA does tremendous work in providing mental health services and is a valued partner to the Alberta government. The new CASA House is located in Sherwood Park, in the hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise's constituency, and is a state of the art facility that expands adolescent treatment beds from 12 to 20. The new CASA House is owned by Alberta Health Services and is leased to CASA to provide the services.

CASA is a major community-based provider of mental health services for infants, children, adolescents, and their families within the Edmonton zone and from central and northern Alberta. The classroom space is expanded from the current two to four on-site classrooms with the addition of an on-site library provided by Edmonton public schools. Three pods, each with its own living area, will serve as the home environment for adolescents after a day of therapy and school. There is also a full-size gymnasium and a games room.

CASA is staffed by professional and highly skilled teams representing many disciplines, including psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, child care counsellors, teachers, and administrative support staff. CASA provides assessment and treatment services for approximately 3,000 infants, children, and adolescents, from birth to age 18, each year through a continuum ranging from consultation in community outreach settings to very intensive treatment programs. These children, youth, and their families are well served, and indeed our whole society is stronger because of the compassionate intervention of CASA staff.

On behalf of Albertans, I extend our deepest appreciation. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Livestock Traceability Program

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to highlight the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development's trade mission to Japan and Asia last week and the important work being accomplished under Alberta's livestock traceability program. The BSE crisis in the beef industry and, more recently, the pork industry's experience with 2009 H1N1 influenza A underline the need for traceability. During the minister's federal-provincial trade mission our trading partners once again emphasized that traceability and age verification are the minimum requirements needed to regain access to these important markets. As many of my colleagues know, Alberta's agriculture industry is export oriented. Our ability to compete in the global market is critical to our success. May I congratulate the minister of agriculture on his recent trade mission.

International missions are critical to building relationships. It is a customary protocol to visit the countries you expect to do business with. The opportunity to update our trade partners on the significant progress of our traceability programs and other industry activity is invaluable. We need to make clear that Alberta has safe, high-quality products for Asia's consumers. Alberta's producers are adapting to changing market conditions so that we will be able to take advantage of opportunities to fulfill the growing global demand for traceability and age-verified products.

Mr. Speaker, may I encourage our livestock and meat industry and all of my colleagues to continue supporting traceability. It is essential to the future success and sustainability of the livestock industry in our province.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Government Policies

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government's drop in support is a reflection of the anger and frustration felt by so many Albertans. They are angry because this Premier didn't level with them in the election about plans to drastically alter the health care system. He didn't mention hospital closures, he didn't talk about laying off nurses, he didn't bring up his plans to close mental health beds, and he broke his promise to provide more long-term care beds for Alberta seniors. To top it all off, this government has conducted the most chaotic and disorganized H1N1 vaccination program in the country by far. And the list goes on: bitumen exports, royalties, tuition, child care, and homelessness are all steps along the trail of broken promises. We have seen dramatic jumps in welfare cases and increases in food bank use, the highest increase in the country.

This government is planning on spending \$14 billion on unneeded electricity lines with 100 per cent of the cost borne by power consumers. This move will significantly raise electricity rates, hurting businesses, homeowners, and leaving seniors in the dark. But we're all in the dark, Mr. Speaker, if we think this government will change. While this Premier promised change, he has delivered more of the same. This is a government that consistently gives us smoke and spin and where the truth comes in a brown paper envelope. It remains the most secretive government in Canada. Despite the fact that we have challenged the Premier this week on

four different areas of needed change – health care reform, long-term care beds, bitumen exports, and electricity deregulation – we have received more of the same.

If Albertans truly want change, Mr. Speaker, they must start with changing this PC government.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a petition today with 54 signatures representing residents of Brooks and area. They ask that the government of Alberta grandfather the rights and status of all currently practising registered massage therapists in Alberta so that they may continue to practise while, when necessary, upgrading to meet newly proclaimed standards of training and to ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage to pay for massage services from current massage therapists.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also rise to present a petition today. The petition has roughly 1,000 names from mostly the Calgary area. It says: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to urge the government of Alberta

grandfather the rights and status of all currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta in a manner that they may continue their practice undisturbed and, when necessary, gradually upgrade to newly-proclaimed standards of training, so as not to force current therapists to lose their ongoing income whilst upgrading and so to ensure that clients of said therapists will be able to use their insurance coverage in order to pay for massage services from current therapists.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital, Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has 983 signatures.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings and the requisite number of copies for each. My first tabling is for the minister's education leadership recognition awards, also known as the MELRA, presentations held for school boards in zone 1 on November 5, 2009.

My second tabling is for the MELRA presentations for zone 5, held on November 6, 2009.

My third and last tabling is for the MELRA presentations held for schools boards in zone 6 on November 9, 2009.

Heartfelt congratulations to all of the leadership teams in the school boards represented by zones 1, 5, and 6.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a letter that I received from the Trico Centre, which is located in the beautiful constituency of Calgary-Egmont. It also deals with charitable casino funding and advocates that the current model be maintained. I'll pass five copies to the Clerk.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am presenting five copies of three different documents today. First, I have the Fusion Canada preliminary research report for Fusion North East Edmonton.

Second, I have five copies of the program from the North Edmonton Seniors Association Remembrance Day tea and tribute, that was held on November 10, 2009.

Finally, I have five copies of the program for the Unity Centre of Northeast Edmonton 15th annual silent auction and pub night.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) states: "At 3 p.m. the items in the ordinary daily routine will be deemed to be concluded and the Speaker shall notify the Assembly."

Mr. Mason: I beg unanimous consent to finish the Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

The Speaker: A request has been made for unanimous consent to waive the standing orders.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: We are going to proceed. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Four tablings today plus one for a colleague. The first is from constituent Sandra Norton, who's commenting on the closure of beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and notes that "community mental health care options are needed, but not at the expense of acute care beds." She notes that she works at the Stanley Milner library and sees every day the struggle of some people with little or no help.

The second is from constituent Melissa Dumenko, who's also concerned about the closure of beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and says: "The promise of putting into place additional community supports is not enough, additional community supports are required just to meet the existing demand, never mind the additional demand after closing acute care beds."

A letter from Jazz Alcock and Brian Alcock, asking that there be no funding cuts to schools.

An e-mail from Kelsey Gill, also a constituent – sorry, the previous people were as well – noting that he's a 24-year-old university student with huge concerns about the future of this province, which he loves dearly, as well as his own future as a human being with human needs for food and water.

Finally, on behalf of my colleague the Member for Calgary-Currie a tabling from a constituent of his, Lesley Washington. This is a letter directed towards the minister and signed by Lesley Washington, noting that they have been advised since summertime that "the direct to tenant rent supplement has no funds in it to support new applicants."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a paper I referred to today in question period prepared for the office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate, which indicates that Bill 50 would result in an overbuild of the transmission system, that AESO's demand forecast is wrong, that Bill 50 will allow critical transmission infrastructure to be built without proper stakeholder involvement, that there's no emergency for load and what little congestion there is for generation is manageable, and that Bill 50 will allow the cabinet to bypass current long-established landowner claims procedures.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of correspondence from Dr. Robert Dickson, Vanessa D'Souza, Evan Goian, Stephen Gordon, Laurel Jackson, Diane Myshchysyn, Carole Jones, Marianna Pankalla, Anne Paul, Reg Paul, Betty Stewart, Jennifer Wicks, and Alysia Yuck, all expressing their concern to the Premier and the Minister of Education and urging the Premier and the minister not to cut funding for schools because Alberta's prosperity depends on knowledge.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the House information regarding questions that I asked yesterday during question period. This is a spreadsheet with the total salary and benefits of senior executives in Executive Council from the year 2002-03 through to 2008-09. There's almost a doubling of the salary and benefits. Of particular note is the last three fiscal years, where we see a 50 per cent increase in salaries and benefits.

Thank you.

Projected Government Business

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the Deputy Government House Leader to please share with those in the Chamber the projected government business for the week commencing November 23.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, November 23, in the afternoon we will proceed with private members' business, and then in the evening and otherwise as per the Order Paper we'll be in second reading on Bill 58, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 59, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 61, the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 62, the Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009. Following that, we hope to go to Committee of the Whole on Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 53, the Professional

Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; as well as bills 58, 59, 60, 61, and 62.

On Tuesday afternoon we hope to be in Committee of the Whole on Bill 50 and otherwise as per the Order Paper. In the evening we will be in Committee of the Whole on bills 50, 53, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, and then third reading on Bill 53; Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009; Bill 57, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009; and bills 58, 59, 60, 61, 62; and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, November 25, in the afternoon we'll be proceeding with third reading of bills 53, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, and 62 and otherwise as per the Order Paper. In the evening we hope to be in third reading on Bill 50 and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, November 26, in the afternoon we anticipate Royal Assent being given to a number of bills here in the Assembly and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

I will table four copies of this for the Assembly's pleasure as well as copies for the two other parties.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 62

Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Liepert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 62, the Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes when government does the right thing, there ends up being some unintended consequences or some clarification that needs to be made, and that's precisely what this particular bill attempts to do. When we moved our ground ambulance system, emergency medical services, from municipal jurisdiction under the jurisdiction of Alberta Health Services, it then brought these particular employees under the Health Information Act. We have had some situations over the period of time since April 1 where our employees, our paramedics primarily, who are typically the first on scene, are uncertain as to whether or not they can divulge information to police authorities to do an investigation without contravening the Health Information Act.

Really, they are not going to be doing anything differently than they currently are doing. It's just that they now fall under a different act. So what this particular amendment will do is that it will clarify that, in essence, our paramedics should continue to do what they've always done. They should ensure that the information that is sought by our police investigators relative to that incident is not compromised. This is a particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, which I think is very important to ensure that public safety continues to be conducted unimpeded.

I would ask that all members of the House support this particular bill as we move it through the House. With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I would adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like call the committee to order.

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce a series of amendments to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. As you know, over the last several months we've been listening to Albertans and considering the feedback that they've provided to us with respect to Bill 50. Most people we have heard from understand the need to upgrade our transmission grid across the province. Most of the people we have heard from understand the need to continue this important work.

Mr. Chairman, am I allowed to continue as the amendments are being distributed?

3:10

The Deputy Chair: Let's pause for a moment while the amendments are being distributed. You proposed the amendments?

Mr. Knight: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Just pause for a moment.

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will continue. It's clear that the province has grown tremendously since we last had major upgrades to our grid. Again, I think that most Albertans understand that some work is necessary relative to that very important infrastructure.

But we've also heard, Mr. Chairman, a number of concerns about the magnitude of the projects and costs to consumers. There has been some misunderstanding around the full cost of AESO's long-term plan, which is something that they propose may be done over a large area of the province over a longer term. It includes about \$14 billion worth of work over many years. There's confusion around that and the actual costs of the critical infrastructure that's identified in Bill 50. These amendments, Mr. Chairman, should make it very clear to all Albertans how this critical infrastructure needs to be built, how much it will cost, and what type of infrastructure needs to be built.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, these changes that we propose would also make it clear that there is a role for consumers in monitoring the cost of these projects, and we will also address a concern about the role of the Alberta Utilities Commission in the permit and licensing process.

Mr. Chairman, amendment A makes it clear that the Alberta Utilities Commission is no longer required to do a needs assessment on the critical infrastructure projects identified in Bill 50; B refers to our plan to build these projects in stages as they are needed to meet demand; C establishes the consumer oversight committee that will provide a role for consumers in monitoring the cost of these projects; D refers to staging of specific projects identified in the legislation; and finally, E is linked to A and ensures that the Alberta Utilities Commission will be required to consider the siting of these projects and consider whether the siting of these projects is in the public interest when the AUC is in hearings and the hearing process commences.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 56
Alberta Investment Management Corporation
Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to get involved again in the debate on Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009. Certainly, we had an opportunity at second reading to get some issues on the record. Even though it's been classified as just some minor changes, I think it's significant that we are removing from AIMCo the direct advice of the deputy minister of finance. If this bill was to become law, say, three years from now or five years from now, I certainly would support it. In second reading I referred to the Alberta Investment Management Corporation's annual report for 2008-09, but I unfortunately neglected to bring it along to the House. It's quite an interesting read. There are messages from the chair, messages from the CEO. There's a list of the board of directors, which is a very interesting list, very accomplished people. We can, I think, be confident that they are going to do their very best to ensure that our \$69 billion in assets are prudently invested.

Now, whenever AIMCo was created, I believe the hon. minister of finance at the time was a gentleman who's retired now from this House, Dr. Oberg, and there was one report that was tabled before the Assembly to justify creating AIMCo. There were naturally comparisons made to what was going on in other jurisdictions. We had a little discussion on this in second reading, but we need to have another careful examination in committee of what exactly we are proceeding to do here, Mr. Chairman.

Now, when we look at the assets under management, we clearly see that there are endowment funds here, there are pension plans, there are short-term government funds and special-purpose government funds, but it's the pension plans that I would like to specifically address now. We look at other jurisdictions; I'm thinking of Ontario, and I'm thinking of British Columbia. I think it's time to look at perhaps making a suggestion through an amendment to Bill 56 to see if the House would be agreeable to amending this bill to give individuals who have an investment or are planning on retiring at some point and are relying on income, hopefully, for a very long time from one of the pension plans, whether it be the local authorities plan, the public service plan, management employees, special forces, members of the judiciary are in here, the management supplementary retirement plan – there are quite a few plans involved in this. I would like to propose that these plans have some direct influence on who is selected to provide investment advice for them and on their behalf, of course, to and through the board.

Now, other provinces have a similar system. I still feel that we should leave the deputy minister directly involved in this operation for up to a five-year period, and then we can cut those ties formally. But my sense of this: the minister of finance obviously doesn't agree, but we really need to just keep an eye on things very closely until this group gets their legs underneath them.

I know that in the last year and a half for everyone with a financial investment there have been some difficult moments. I look forward with anticipation to I believe it's the 30th of November. Monday, November 30, is the day I'm told that the second-quarter fiscal update will come from the minister of finance, and we can see for ourselves just sort of the recovery that has been made with not only the investments under AIMCo but other financial interests that our government holds.

Mr. Chairman, I would like, if you don't mind, please, to have the pages circulate this proposed amendment to Bill 56. I will finish my remarks after the distribution of this amendment.

Thank you.

3:20

The Deputy Chair: We'll pause for a moment while the pages distribute that amendment. This will be amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to continue.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now, the amendment that has been circulated for all members reads that Bill 56, Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009, be amended in section 2 by adding the following after section 4(1).

- (1.1) Of the individuals appointed under subsection (1)
 - (a) one must have had experience with the Local Authorities Pension Plan Board,
 - (b) one must have had experience with the Public Service Pension Plan Board,
 - (c) one must have had experience with the Special Forces Pension Plan Board, and
 - (d) one must have had experience with the Management Employees Pension Plan Board.

Now, of course, the market value of the pension plans discussed here, Mr. Chairman. For the Local Authorities Pension Plan Board it is \$13.2 billion, for the Public Service Pension Plan Board it is \$4.5 billion, for the Special Forces Pension Plan Board it is \$1.1 billion, and for the Management Employees Pension Plan Board it is \$51 million. Those are four boards that have various amounts of money pooled into AIMCo, and I think it would be prudent to legislate or have a mechanism in place where they could have a direct interest and an eye, naturally, on their investment.

Now, Alberta's pension plans are administered by the Alberta Pensions Services Corporation. The seven statutory pension plans are under the direction of these four pension boards, as I mentioned, and of course the government of the province. Currently the Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints the 11 members of AIMCo's board, who are responsible for the investment decisions of the funds under management. Board members must meet specific qualifications as set out in the regulations as noted below.

It's interesting, Mr. Chairman. The Alberta Investment Management Corporation regulation states that

individuals appointed to the board must have proven and demonstrable experience and expertise in investment management, finance, accounting or law or experience as an executive or a director in a senior publicly traded issuer.

Now, someone may be interested to note that this is quite a distinguished group. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre would described them as august, I think, but I'm just going to say that they're very distinguished because they certainly are, this group. The regulations also state that a member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta cannot – cannot – be a member of AIMCo's board.

This amendment as circulated calls for the pension groups under management by AIMCo to be involved in the process of appointing AIMCo's board members. Specifically, this amendment would require the appointment of four board members to AIMCo who have experience with the local authorities pension plan, the public sector pension plan, special forces pension plan, and the management employees pension plan.

A stand-alone provincial corporation to manage Alberta's money is consistent with other jurisdictions such as the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation and the Ontario Teachers'

Pension Plan. There is a difference between how board members are selected, as is highlighted here. Now, there's no requirement for the Deputy Minister of Finance to be a board member of the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation or the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, both of which have the same objectives as independent investment companies such as AIMCo, although, you see, these corporations do have requirements to allow pension groups and other interested parties to be involved in the board appointment process.

It is from this jurisdictional comparison that this amendment to this bill originates, and I think it's a good idea. I talk frequently to retired individuals who live in our constituency, and they have issues, whether retired for five years or 15 years, with their pensions and the administration of their pensions. I think these are important matters. I think they should be addressed through this amendment.

Now, the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation has close to \$75 billion in assets under management. Its clients include public-sector pension plans, the province of British Columbia, publicly administered trust funds, and public bodies. The British Columbia Investment Management Corporation has more specific requirements for who is involved in appointing board members. The board is made up of seven members, four of which are appointed by the four statutory pension plans under management. In British Columbia it's the college pension plan, the public service pension plan, the municipal pension plan, and the teachers' pension plan. The other three are appointed by the Minister of Finance to represent the British Columbia Investment Corporation and other clients.

Now, the following, Mr. Chairman, is from section 19(3) and 19(4) of the British Columbia public-sector pension plan, under which the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation is legislated. As I said, there are seven directors,

- (a) one director appointed by the college board from among its members;
- (b) one director appointed by the municipal board from among its members;
- (c) one director appointed by the public service board from among its members;
- (d) one director appointed by the teachers' board from among its members.

You can see where they're doing things slightly differently than what we had originally started in this province, but I think it would be in the interests of many individuals across this province who at some point are going to rely, if they are not already doing so, on one of our pension plans that I had mentioned earlier.

With that, I would certainly encourage this amendment, for hon. members to give it consideration. I think it's a good amendment to this bill. We've outlined our concerns. This is something that I think we can do to ensure that people as they retire and those who already are retired can have confidence in the investment proceeds of the sometimes significant pools of money that are available. We need to ensure that these pools of money grow and that there are pension and pension benefits for those who are eligible.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, to amendment A1.

Dr. Taft: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I think this is a really good amendment. I think this is an amendment that rises above partisan considerations. I would ask all of the government members here to have a read because this amendment would bring AIMCo in line with the practice in other provinces. It would improve accountability because it would connect some of the management board of

AIMCo more directly to the mandates of some of the funds they're managing. There's nothing here unreasonable; there's nothing here out of line. This is a good idea.

3:30

I think it's worth repeating the point that the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation, which is their equivalent of AIMCo, has almost \$75 billion in assets, so it's actually quite similar to AIMCo. Its board is comprised of representatives of various pension plans that are connected to the fund, and they have a mechanism that allows a diversity of appointments to the board of the B.C. Investment Management Corporation. I won't go into the details of that; I think the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who sponsored this amendment, has spoken to that. As well, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan has a number of members from various interests on their board. So they're not just appointed unilaterally at the whim of cabinet or a minister. They're appointed because they are representing a specific pension fund and have got an interest and roots in a specific pension fund.

One of the concerns I have with the AIMCo board is the same concern I have with all kinds of these government boards that this particular government sets up. All the board members are appointed at the whim of the minister and the cabinet, and we end up with the same people getting appointed to the board. [interjection] I'm getting distracted by one of my colleagues here.

Mr. Liepert: Tell him to behave.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. He's misbehaving here.

I think there's a real problem when we have such centralized control of all of the boards. I think that, in fact, it increases our risks of mismanagement. It doesn't diversify decision-making. It doesn't bring in multiple views, which we tend to think is a good idea on this perspective, and in this particular case it doesn't enhance accountability. In fact, the people on the board don't necessarily have any commitment, other than their paycheque, to the performance of the funds that they are managing.

So I'd urge government members to take a serious look at this amendment. This is eminently reasonable. It's a way to improve the governance of AIMCo and make sure that the assets of the people whose retirement depends on how this fund is managed are actually looked after. With those supportive comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll cede the floor to somebody else.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour and a privilege to rise and speak to this amendment, an amendment that I also feel is very good for many of the reasons that have already been given. So I shall be relatively brief here.

If we look at the way the current AIMCo board is set up, it is made up of 11 members, all of very high stature in the investment community. They have achieved certain levels of expertise and, I believe, are qualified for those roles in a very good way that's referenced by their qualifications. Where I think this amendment will add to a balance of this board is that some of the people with some skin in the game, shall we say, will also be represented at the table. And by "skin in the game" I mean people who have worked long and hard and contributed pension dollars to this fund. By adding, as I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has suggested, a member from the local authorities pension plan, a

member from the public service pension plan, a member from the special forces pension plan, and a member with the experience of the Management Employees Pension Plan Board, I believe you do have people with skin in the game, people who will be having an extra eye on the ball, shall we say, in looking after their members' investments going forward for they've put their hard work, blood, sweat, and tears into saving this money. That's why I think this is a great amendment.

It also brings us in line with what some other provinces are doing in the country, mainly British Columbia and Ontario, which appear to have successful models that recognize that multiple viewpoints are a good thing to have, with multiple levels of checks and balances put into place that allow for additional accountability. Like I said, I think it's important for people with skin in the game, so to speak, to be at the table to see what their money is doing, to hold their investment advisors to account and ask those difficult questions.

Hey, I think the 11 people that we've appointed to the board are excellent people. Just having some extra accountability there would be a good thing. I believe this would be not too difficult a thing to accomplish.

I commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for making this amendment and thinking of what could make our AIMCo board more accountable and run in a better fashion, especially for those people who have put their money and their assets into that pool of money along with the government.

I thank you for allowing these comments to be made. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, on the amendment.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments with respect to the amendment to Bill 56. The amendment I think does a good thing in the sense that it adds a number of positions on the board or focuses the positions on the board on people who have experience with managing the investments relative to public pensions. I think that pensions are a good example of the kind of investment approach we need for the government's assets of billions of dollars of money. In other words, with very large amounts of money you take a long-term view, you're cautious, and you're prudent. That model is used for the investment of pensions, and it's the appropriate model, I think, for the government's investments.

I have a lot of problems with how AIMCo has been established, Mr. Chairman, because, you know, I'm very concerned that the government seems to think that if you get high-rolling, high-risk investors involved in the management of the government's finances, you're going to do a lot better. They have this, I guess, orientation towards high-risk capitalism, that I don't think is appropriate for the public investments and the magnitude that we've seen under the responsibility of AIMCo.

The big problem, I think, is that the act as a whole eliminates the deputy minister as a participant on the board. Now, this is not addressed by this amendment. Maybe it should be, or maybe it's just so contrary to the intent of the act that it might not be in order. Nevertheless, I think it's critical because the minister will now have the same reporting relationship with the AIMCo board that she does with her deputy minister. There will be no opportunity for the finance administration to provide the minister with oversight and information. Now, this may be partly compensated by putting some good board members with pension experience on it. It may compensate for that basic problem or basic flaw. I think that the minister without the support of her department and the senior officials is ill

equipped to oversee the AIMCo board. I think that in that sense the bill is a mistake. I'm not sure that the amendment deals with that particular flaw in the bill, or perhaps it couldn't, but it would strengthen the board, in my view, to do this.

3:40

One of the things that I have experienced in my time in municipal government, Mr. Chairman, is that whenever you appoint a bunch of businesspeople, executives and so on, to manage something that was previously part of the public service, they take a different view of how things are managed. I know a lot of the Conservatives over here in this House think that, you know, if you could just put businesspeople in charge of the operations of government, it would all be run more efficiently, and the taxpayer would get more bang for their buck.

I don't think that that's actually true. In my experience one of the first things that happens when you appoint a bunch of businesspeople to a board to take over a function of government is that you immediately lose control of your compensation costs. In fact, we've already seen this. The top two AIMCo executives have received \$5 million in compensation, and that is in the same year that they lost 17 per cent on the investments. That's a problem. So I have a fundamental issue with the approach.

I would prefer to see investment people who are responsible to a board that has more input and control from the department of finance than we have. But I do think, Mr. Chairman, that in the sense that we can strengthen the board by adding people who have previous experience managing pensions, it's a good thing.

So I'm prepared to support this amendment, and I urge all other members to do so as well.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, I think that if you look at Bill 56 and the discussion about the 11 members, it doesn't preclude any of the people that they're talking about or individuals that may have had experience with the local authorities pension plan. It doesn't preclude any of those people. I think we need to keep in mind that AIMCo needs to be independent, needs to have the opportunity to make investments based on sound financial management practices. I think that if you start to load up a board – and I can accept some of the arguments, some of the discussion about people with skin in the game, but you also don't want to have conflicting skin in the game. I mean, if you make an investment that's good, does that become special forces pension? I mean, I've been around an auction market, and I know that when you buy a bad pen of calves, you don't take them home. So let's not put people in positions where they are in a conflict.

Now, the simple fact is that you have to have a board that has a sole objective ahead of it. I don't want to get into great philosophical differences, but they're there for one reason. They're there to manage your investments; they're there to make you money for your retirement. That's what it's all about. That's it in a nutshell. So pick the best people you can get, put them on the board, and let them do their job. That's what the intent of the bill is. I've said that it doesn't preclude any of the people they've described in the amendment, but the amendment isn't necessary.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, I appreciate the remarks and the participation of the hon. President of the Treasury Board. I understand what he's stating, but if we compare ourselves to B.C., the fact that we have a \$69 billion or a

\$70 billion fund here that we're talking about, all told, and B.C. has a \$75 billion fund, there's not much difference. They started their fund in this way before we did. We were sort of modelled off them, from what I can remember of what Dr. Oberg had said in this House. But I'm specifically thinking of an individual who lives in our constituency and who has been retired for some time with a public-sector pension plan. This gentleman has some issues around that plan, its governance, its direction. In fact, in some parts of this city and across this province there are groups of retired individuals who are seeking relief through legal action for some of the outstanding issues that they have.

I have, as I said before, confidence in the individuals. We have the chairman of this board, a gentleman named Charles Baillie from the Toronto-Dominion Bank, and he's currently chancellor of Queen's University, president of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Dr. Taft: A big supporter of public health care.

Mr. MacDonald: Someone said he is a big supporter of public health care, which is just an excellent thing to hear.

The vice-chair is George Gosbee from Calgary, president and the CEO of Tristone Capital. We have Clive Beddoe, chief executive officer of WestJet, a fine airline, very well managed, in my opinion. It's my airline of choice if I can get a ticket on it. David Bissett is the founder of Bissett Investment Management, which is now a division of Franklin Templeton Investments. This individual has a law degree from Dalhousie University. Virginia Holmes is a former chief executive officer of AXA Investment Managers Limited in London, United Kingdom. International experience.

We have Daryl Katz, the founder and chief executive officer and chairman of the Katz Group. He's also a member of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, has a law degree from the local University of Alberta, and, I'm proud to say, is the owner of the Oilers. I wish him well. He's no different than anyone else. He's always looking for those big power forwards. They're hard to find, and whenever you do find one, you've got to pay them a lot. Frank Layton, QC, currently is counsel with Bennett Jones, again is a graduate of the University of Alberta. Andrea S. Rosen, vice-chair of the TD Bank Financial Group; Mac Van Wieringen, ARC Financial Corp.; and, of course, a board member who I think would be coming off, Mr. Tim Wiles, Deputy Minister of Alberta Finance and Enterprise. We deal as Public Accounts members with Mr. Wiles frequently, and he is an able and capable individual.

When we look at this group and we look at the suggestion we are making and we look at the amount of money that some of the retired individuals have, what's at stake for them, to have their interests at the table I don't think is unreasonable, nor is it unusual, Mr. Chairman. When we look at AIMCo to date and we have a look at what the Auditor General has to say, yes, you look surprised, but the Auditor General devoted considerable attention to the governance of AIMCo in his report that he released in October.

We all know that the corporation started in 2008, the first day of the year, and it was to provide investment management services to various Alberta public-sector pensions and endowment funds and special purpose funds, as I said earlier. But it's the public-sector pensions and those that are planning on or are using those pensions now that we have to consider, and hopefully that's what we're going to do with this amendment.

Now, the Auditor had a lot to say about risk management and the new management's new approach. I'm going to quote directly here from the Auditor's report, Mr. Chairman. This is quite relevant, with due respect to the chair. We're talking about control on AIMCo, and we are talking about increasing the control through this

amendment and making the board even more responsive to those who are going to benefit from this, not just the taxpayers but individuals, as I said before, who are planning on retiring and are relying on that money or who are already retired from the public sector.

3:50

When we look at that, Mr. Chairman, we look at what Mr. Dunn has to say.

As we were auditing internal control systems in the latter part of 2008-2009, the new management at AIMCo was assessing the quality of those systems and by means of a new business plan, identifying the areas of its business that needed a new approach in terms of management and control. By the spring of 2009, subsequent our audit, AIMCo began to introduce new risk management processes. In our opinion, the improvements under way will significantly strengthen the controls that AIMCo needs to manage its business.

That's very good. That is a form of control, and that is an improvement. This amendment is an improvement, and it's control as well because the public-sector pensions have a lot at stake here.

Now, the Auditor goes on with other areas of improvement that he notes in his report. He talks about enterprise risk management, derivative risk management, derivative credit risk monitoring, the corporate bond credit screening process, the internal audit, the recommendations. The Auditor is suggesting: "We recommend that AIMCo re-establish an Internal Audit [committee]." The word "re-establish" certainly caught my eye when I initially read this report. There is nothing the matter with scrutiny and openness and transparency, and I'm not suggesting for a minute that AIMCo won't have openness and transparency.

The first annual report is titled *The Start of Something Big*. We've got a ginger-haired young man here with a tree. I can only assume that this photograph is taken in Alberta, I think down by Canmore somewhere. It's the start of something big. What we can do with this amendment, this small change to the bill, is provide a form of control for public-sector employees who are now retired or who are going to retire in the future. They can have a direct say in the operations of their pension money. I don't think it's unusual, nor is it an unreasonable request.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak again on the amendment, and I do appreciate the hon. minister of the Treasury Board adding his participation to the debate. I understand a little bit of his reason and rationale for trying to get the 11 best people who are talented in the area of investments, hiring them, and letting them to do the best they can with making your money. It does hold some rationale to it.

I guess, you know, a comparison can be made to the early '90s, when Ed Johnston was the coach and general manager of the Pittsburgh Penguins. He had Jaromír Jágr, Mario Lemieux, Kevin Stevens, Larry Murphy, and Paul Coffey on his power play, and he'd put them on the ice. I remember an interview after a game when they didn't do very well. They said, "Coach, are you going to tell them to go practise the power play?" Coach Eddie Johnston said: "Those are five of maybe the seven or eight best players in the world out there. If they don't know how to score a goal on the power play, how the heck am I going to teach them?"

I understand that sort of rationale. It's sort of the rationale that the hon. minister of the Treasury Board was using. You find your 11

best players, give them a puck, and tell them to go out there and score a goal for the Alberta people. I understand that. But what this amendment is trying to do here is have a little bit more substance and control. Sometimes your 11 best players can get so concentrated on scoring that goal and so hell-bent on winning that game that they maybe forget some of the principles of why they're there. I'm not saying that that would necessarily happen in this case. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar said, the amendment adds some people there – the local authorities pension plan, the Public Service Pension Plan Board, the Special Forces Pension Plan Board, and the Management Employees Pension Plan Board – some people with some additional experience who have run pensions, who have some skin in the game, like I mentioned earlier, who can sort of be an additional tool or a resource or a sounding board, shall we say, to some of the investment ideas put forward by the 11 members.

I, too, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, know they're tremendously talented individuals. I know I was at the MAX awards recently, awards by the University of Calgary recognizing entrepreneurship and leadership in the financial markets. George Gosbee was the winner of that award. Interestingly, George and I actually went to school with each other from grade 3 on, so I know of the tremendous talent and success he has had and of both the competence and ability he has.

You know, we're not challenging the credibility of the people who are on the board. We just think that this is an additional layer of a sort of scrutiny, almost a sober second thought that allows for some other people with some other ideas and some people who have worked very hard or people who have knowledge of what their people have done to get the money into a position to be invested.

Those are my comments, and I thank you again. I encourage all members of this House to support this very good amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak on amendment A1?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: On the bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes, specifically on the bill, Mr. Chairman. I think it's worth noting that this piece of legislation follows on the heels of the controversy concerning AIMCo's investment in Precision Drilling and the concern that there is perceived to be government meddling in that decision. Whether there was or not, this is about dealing with a perception. I think this is a way, in a manner of speaking, of the government distancing itself from the board of AIMCo. There are pros and cons to that. I think we need to be careful that the government doesn't distance itself so far that it stops being responsible and accountable, but at the same time we do all agree that we don't want political meddling.

I think it is regrettable that the amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar didn't get any serious attention from the government because that was another way of ensuring accountability in AIMCo, of ensuring that decisions were made for the right reasons, and, frankly, of putting in place the mechanisms that separated the political connections from AIMCo. When you look at the board of directors of AIMCo now, if this piece of legislation moves through, the deputy minister won't be there. How many of those members of the board of directors are active supporters of the PC Party? Certainly, some of them are. Some of them are

donors. Some of them have donated quite a lot of money. I think it's very regrettable for everybody concerned that the perception is going to be there that, you know, one of the ways to get on the board of AIMCo is to be well connected politically. That's not what we want for AIMCo. What we want is a formula for bringing forward members of the board that makes them completely independent of political meddling.

4:00

I think this bill should go a lot farther. I think it's a modest step. I think it's probably motivated purely by political butt-covering. But sometimes the right things happen for questionable reasons, so I'll leave it at that and wish AIMCo management and the board all the best because they've got an enormous responsibility.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Are you ready for the question on Bill 56?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 56 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 57

Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure today to stand up and speak to Bill 57, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009. I'm pleased and encouraged by the debate so far, and I look forward to this discussion during Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Chair, Bill 57 is legislation that will help increase the efficiency of the justice system. Through the amendments of this bill Court of Queen's Bench justices will be able to hear some of the same applications that justices of the peace and provincial court judges can hear now, reducing the amount of time needed for law enforcement to apply for warrants to two different justices.

Right now for warrants authorizing the use of a tracking device or a number recorded under part 15 of the Criminal Code, law enforcement must make application to a provincial court judge or a justice of the peace. But certain applications under part 6 of the Criminal Code for other types of warrants, like applications for wiretaps, can only be made to a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench. In some cases warrants are needed under both parts of the Criminal Code, so law enforcement must make multiple applications to different courts. When this happens, more court time is used, more man-hours are used by law enforcement, two different decision-makers must become familiar with the documentation, which is typically lengthy and complex in these kinds of applications.

Mr. Chair, Bill 57 would give Court of Queen's Bench justices the same jurisdiction as justices of the peace in the cases I've described. Reducing the number of applications law enforcement need to make in complex investigations that involve multiple warrants saves court time, saves law enforcement time, and allows warrants in these cases to be obtained, where appropriate, in a more timely fashion. The Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act will help to increase the

effectiveness and the efficiency of our already very busy justice system, ensuring that more resources are available for Albertans.

I thank all the hon. members for their support so far and urge all members to support this important legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, for bringing this forward as it looks like it will both ease the administration of justice and streamline the process in order for justice to be served more readily and speedily on Alberta's streets. This will likely have an almost entirely positive effect on the administration of warrant applications. Allowing members of the Court of Queen's Bench to hear these applications will undoubtedly streamline the current process.

It's important to note that this change was made after careful consultation within the judiciary, who are supportive of the proposed changes to the warrant application process. In addition, similar measures have been used to harmonize the warrant application process in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. Like I said, as the government has done a good job here in communicating with the judiciary, who have given their blessing to these amendments, who am I to stand in their way?

I'd like to again commend the government for moving on streamlining these applications. Hopefully, this will go to better serve the administration of justice.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

[The clauses of Bill 57 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report progress on Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and report Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009, and Bill 57, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. McFarland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 56, Bill 57. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 50. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Griffiths]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 58 as proposed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. This bill follows initial changes to the act that permit correctional facilities in Alberta to monitor inmate communications, which were previously only telephone based, which passed third reading on December 4, 2007.

This bill will further enhance law enforcement's capability to enable passive recording of inmate communication, which will be stored in a database, not to be listened to unless there are reasonable grounds to do so. Information that appears to threaten an individual or the safety of the facility staff or that is related to a crime or potential crime would be included in these reasonable grounds. Otherwise, privileged conversations will remain privileged; for example, conversations between an inmate and an attorney.

If we look at this bill in its entirety, it is not without, again, some pushes and pulls to where the debate goes. I think the bill does do a decent job of trying to balance public security while recognizing both a person's right to have some personal time with their lawyer as well as a right to communications which shouldn't be listened to. You can see that the amendment allows for the ability of our justice system to listen in on the communications of prisoners. It has been established by the Supreme Court that prisoners already have a lowered expectation of privacy. This being the case, I think this bill genuinely balances public concern for inmates, people who have had difficulty with the law and are continuing to have them, I guess, through informants or otherwise, or for people who are coming into communication with them to continue nefarious deeds.

4:10

Now, I don't know how prevalent this is, but I'm assuming that since other jurisdictions in the province have done so – and the Supreme Court did make that ruling that there is a lessened expectation of privacy by prisoners – that this is somewhat to be expected.

I am somewhat concerned – and I wasn't able to fit an amendment into the language – that some people who may be caught by this bill are people who are going to be spending time in our facilities and are not actually guilty of a crime yet. That is worrisome for me. It is worrisome for me from the standpoint of the basis of innocent till proven guilty, that these people, until such time as they are guilty, should not have their conversations recorded.

Now, that being said, I am in favour, once that has passed, of inmates having their conversations at least passively recorded so that if there are situations where there's a reasonable suspicion of them, then if necessary to stop a crime or to stop the planning of a crime, these tapes can be played to find out if those suspicions were warranted. Again, we're dealing with a very delicate balance here between, I guess, protection of society as well as the ability for people to listen in on what are private communications. I know that some others have some opinions on this.

However, at this point in time I'm prepared to support this bill. I wish there was a mechanism to hive out those people who haven't been found guilty of a crime, and maybe there's a way that the government could look at doing this. But right now, in order to err on the side of safety, I'm willing to say that this bill for me represents at least a moderate step that tries to balance these difficult issues in the name of public safety.

I thank you very much for allowing me to have the opportunity to speak. I'm certain we'll hear from others on this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to my colleague, who as the official critic for this area in our caucus sort of sets the tone and the direction that caucus would go in. It's very kind of him to allow me to contradict him, well, at least to push back a little bit.

I have spent a lot of time becoming familiar, or at least trying to, with the amount of surveillance that we have in our society now. Generally, that sort of monitoring, let's call it, tends to fall into two areas. One is marketing, and one is surveillance. You know, they've now got those chips that they put in your clothing when you buy them, and when you go out and you walk by the store that sells that kind of apparel next time, they know that you're walking by in one of their outfits, and they can phone your cellphone and ask you to pop in because there's a sale on that kind of jacket that you like. Those are called radio frequency identifiers. That's right: RFIDs. So there are lots of ways for sort of putting something on somebody and monitoring their activities or their movement.

As I say, some of it's used for marketing. You know, you have a choice as an individual to say, "No, I'm not going to pop in and buy that jacket because I have another one like it" although it can be pretty persuasive, and there are lots of studies out there and many PhDs have been earned on advertising and the effect of it. Let's face it: it's successful.

The second kind of monitoring you get is surveillance, and I have a lot more trouble with this. I prefer to think of most of our citizens as pretty law abiding, pretty decent people who are just trying to get about their own lives. I understand that there are people that are not law abiding and are not trying to get on with their lives; they're trying to take something from mine. But I think that when we have a technology that is advancing so fast on us that we cannot keep up with it, we've got to be very careful when we pass legislation that gives pretty unfettered control to any government or any body of authority to be able to use monitoring methods on parts of our population. It can get away from us pretty quickly and move far beyond what the legislation anticipated before we could even get in here in some cases and get the legislation back up to deal with it. This is an ongoing argument, but most of us have not lost the right to privacy.

I would argue that even going about your life in a public place should not make you subject to surveillance by authority figures. I don't think it's right that there are cameras in some areas. It's not the taking of the image. See, people always say: well, if you've done nothing wrong, you've got nothing to be afraid of; what's your problem with it? Well, you may well have done nothing wrong, but you may not be in the room when that information is interpreted. You may not have the opportunity to pop up and say: actually, my boss knew that I was out on the street at 2 o'clock in the afternoon going for a coffee at Tim Hortons. The person's wife may not know why they were out in the afternoon going to Tim Hortons at 2

o'clock, and there could be problems there. That individual doesn't get to be in the room when that data is interpreted, and that's a big part of the problem.

I think we've had a couple of changes here. To me they look like they're interlocking or they could interlock. We've had a change in the way our new remand centre is being built, the new remand centre that's in north Edmonton in which, in fact, there will be no direct, face-to-face meetings between inmates and anyone except for their legal representatives. All communication – and I'm making those finger quotation marks again – all of that communication will fall under this bill. Their MLA could go out to visit somebody that's an inmate in a remand centre and will now be also included, also captured, in that monitoring of whatever that inmate is doing because they're not a legal representative, and the only one that's cut out of this or set aside is their legal representative. We're now setting up a remand centre in Edmonton in which all of that communication could be and I'm sure will be captured under this bill, and I think that's problematic.

I think the fact that you're dealing with people who are in a remand centre who are not convicted in a court of law – and that's the dividing line we make. I will point out yet again that a very high proportion of the people that we have in remand centres are people who are dealing with a mental illness and did not have an address. That is why they end up in the remand centre, because one of the criteria is: do you have a fixed address where we can come and find you?

If you're homeless or you're out on the streets for a mental illness . . . [interjection] Well, it will get much worse with Alberta Hospital releasing a number of people, and they're trying to move them into the community because as soon as they go off their meds, they don't return home to their group home, et cetera, et cetera. They're out in the street. They get picked up for vagrancy. Guess what? No fixed address. Yahoo. You're in the remand centre, and any communication that you have with your social worker, with your family member, all of that now is going to be done by video conferencing, where they can monitor it, all of which is subject to this act.

Right there that technology has already moved ahead of what I see being talked about in the debate around this bill. Now, maybe the government is very aware of it. Maybe they planned this. Okay. Fair enough. But fess up that you intended to do this. I think it's wrong that the taping of family members that are visiting people that are not convicted – they are remanded; they're not an offender – are subject to this taping.

4:20

As well, we have to be very careful with the implementation of something like this that we don't subject 90 per cent of the people in order to catch 10 per cent of them. And we do that a lot, where we put in legislation that is going to cover a whole bunch of people. We're just trying to get at a smaller percentage that we're trying to catch, but we cast that net wide enough to catch everybody. I think that's wrong of government to be treating their citizens as though they've done something wrong and subjecting them to that kind of surveillance. And it's surveillance.

There are no limits in this act on how long that surveillance can go on, how long the information is kept, and who is going to look at the information. When I say information, I'm covering what they call communication in this act. A number of these clauses are exactly the same as what we had before, but they were specific to telephone calls. Now "telephone calls" has been removed. Let me give you an example:

that the telephone calls are or will be made to a victim as defined in section 14.3(1) or to another person who would be likely to consider the telephone calls intimidating or threatening.

Okay. That same section reappears as:

that the inmate communication is or will be made to a victim as defined in section 14.3(1) or to another person who would be likely to consider the inmate communication intimidating or threatening.

So the telephone call stuff has been taken out. It's identical except for now we call it communication, and that's repeated in almost all of the clauses that are in this bill. All of the old stuff, telephone calls out, communication in. That covers everything. That covers e-mails. That covers video conferencing. It covers Skype. It covers voice over Internet protocol. It covers every kind of communication that that person's involved with. I mean, an argument could be made that it covers your tattoos because that's a form of communication in saying who you are and what you do. I know I'm getting some funny looks, but it's true. Communication: tattoos would cover for that in some places.

There are no limitations put on how much of this information is going to be collected on an individual, how long it's kept, for whom, who looks at it, who gets to interpret it. Can this pop up 25 years from now in a different trial being used out of context for somebody? Don't know. I have trouble with this bill as a result of that.

I understand that we have a huge problem with gangs now and that we are struggling, casting about trying to find ways to control gang activity and that gang culture inside of our prisons from operating inside of our prisons and remand centres the same way it operates outside. I understand that, and I agree that we need to test a lot of different models to try and find what is the best thing for that. But I'm not sure that this bill does this. I think that in trying to deal with the gang problem, we've thrown a net way too wide and captured far too many other people with a technology that we can't control and that is moving so fast that limitations we fail to put in this act could cause us deep problems down the road. I think it was probably a good idea at the time, but there wasn't enough scrutiny and thought that went into this.

I appreciate what the member for Calgary-Buffalo has said and his comments on it. He is the lawyer; I'm not. You know, he has signalled to our caucus that we should be supportive of this bill, but I want to put my concerns on the record while we are talking about the principle of this bill because I think the principle may be all right, but the implementation of it as described in this act is deeply flawed.

There were a couple of criteria that were in place previously that don't appear anymore. Before what we had was: "Subject to the regulations, the director of a correctional institution may direct . . . where the director believed on reasonable grounds." Those three have now disappeared and don't appear as a trio together again, where all three criteria must be met. It's down to two in most cases and one in some cases. I think we are creating some problems here for ourselves. We're disrespecting our public, and we need to put some limitations on that kind of surveillance.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to that. I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak?

[Motion carried; Bill 58 read a second time]

Bill 59

Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 3: Dr. Sherman]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep my comments ever so brief in light of the time of day. This piece of legislation is an adjustment that I think is part of a very important process for helping us as a society come to terms with how we manage people with mental illness. It's a complicated issue. There's not going to be any final, perfect solution to how we deal with it. But it's, in my view, a bill that's taking steps that need to be taken and that are worth considering, so I think we should move this bill along.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Blakeman: I don't. But I didn't the first time, so I'm just being consistent. I will take the opportunity of this bill in Committee in the Whole to be able to draw out some of the concerns that I see repeated here and allow it to go through second reading today. But I hope that it stays in Committee of the Whole without being rushed through with unseemly haste next week so that I do get an opportunity to speak to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 59 read a second time]

Bill 60

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Quest]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, we considered filibustering on this one, but I don't think we will.

I think this is, again, part of a larger process that we're aware of, expanding the role of health professions, recognizing that the nature of health care delivery is rapidly evolving with midwifery, acupuncture, and so on. I'll keep my comments to that because I think we want to move this along before we run out of time this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 60 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been another invigorating afternoon of great debate and great ideas and suggestions. In that mode and in that vein, I would therefore move that we call it 4:30 and adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:28 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to November 19, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c11]

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c12]

- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c13]
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c9]
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407-08 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cS-23.5]
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1408-09 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c22]
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c31]
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c27]
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409-11 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 cC-2.5]
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]

- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1411 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 1, 2009; SA 2009 c30]
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c14]
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cL-2.5]
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1265 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329 (May 26 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c18]
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329-30 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1527-28 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2010; SA 2009 c29]
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c17]

- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1447-49 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force September 1, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c32]
- 26* Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1265-68 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1330-31 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1412-13 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c36]
- 27* Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve.), 1229-40 (May 25 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1507-10 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.7]
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246-49 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1413 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c20]
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1268-69 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1358-60 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c21]
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1269-73 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1360-63 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528-30 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c35]
- 31* Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1273-75 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1711-13 (Nov. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1773-74 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1275-80 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365 (May 27 eve.), 1449-55 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.5]
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1526-27 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 cF-15.1]

- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1384-87 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2009 cD-17.5]
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1280-81 (May 26 aft.), 1344-45 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524-25 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c24]
- 36* Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1371-84 (May 27 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1503-07 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-26.8]
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c15]
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c34]
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406-07 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c33]
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c16]
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1345-50 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387-90 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525-26 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cP-29.1]
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1350-58 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1455-60 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c23]

- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365-71 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1497-99 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c28]
- 44* Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1283-84, 1294-1329 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1460-80 (Jun. 1 eve., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c26]
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1240-46 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1510 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1523 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c19]
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1706-07 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1708-10 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1716-17 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1772-73 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1852-54 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c8]
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1706 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1710-11 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1735-42 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1843-47 (Nov. 17 eve.), 1897-99 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1899-1900 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
- 49 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1500-01 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1707-08 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1713-16 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1733-35 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
- 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Knight)**
First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1501-02 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1816-36 (Nov. 17 aft.), 1866-86 (Nov. 18 aft.), 1887-96 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1917 (Nov. 19 aft., adjourned, amendments introduced)
- 51 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 1700 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1770 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1847 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1900 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)

- 52* Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health), (May 25 aft., reported to Assembly)
Committee of the Whole -- 1284-94 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1526 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c25]
- 53 Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1742-46 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1837-40 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
- 54 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 1569 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1746-51 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1770-71 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1847-51 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1901 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
- 55 Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009 (Webber)**
First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1751 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1765-70 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1851-52 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1901-02 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
- 56 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1703 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1771-72 (Nov. 5 aft.), 1840-42 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1918-22 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
- 57 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1703 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1842-43 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1922-23 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
- 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1703-04 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned), 1923-25 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
- 59 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Sherman)**
First Reading -- 1666 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1704-05 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned), 1925 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
- 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009 (Quest)**
First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1705 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned), 1925 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
- 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009 (Lukaszuk)**
First Reading -- 1666 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1705-06 (Nov. 3 aft., adjourned)
- 62 Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 1866 (Nov. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1917 (Nov. 19 aft., adjourned)
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services)

203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)

First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1209-15 (May 25 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c10]

204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)

First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft., defeated on division)

205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)

First Reading -- 649-50 (Apr. 15 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 941-46 (May 4 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 1215-22 (May 25 aft.), 1427-33 (Jun. 1 aft., passed on division)
Third Reading -- 1787-93 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)

206* School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1433-38 (Jun. 1 aft.), 1547-55 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1793-1800 (Nov. 16 aft., adjourned, amendments agreed to)

208 Life Leases Act (Mitzel)

First Reading -- 1208 (May 25 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1555-59 (Oct. 26 aft., adjourned)

209 Children's Services Review Committee Act (Chase)

First Reading -- 1610 (Oct. 28 aft., passed)

Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c37]

Pr2* Caritas Health Group Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Elniski)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1530-31 (Jun. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c38]

Pr3* Les Filles de la Sagesse Act Repeal Act (Dallas)

First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c39]

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 23, 2009

Issue 61

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

Kowalski, Hon. Ken, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, Speaker
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 23, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Hon. members and to the guests in the galleries, we'll be led now in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please join in in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a privilege to introduce to you some very special guests who are here to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act, which was passed unanimously by this Assembly one year ago. Its purpose, as we will all recall, is to commemorate the 7 million to 10 million Ukrainians who were exterminated by starvation during the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33.

I'll ask each of these guests to stand as I announce their names and to remain standing, and then we can applaud them all together. I'll begin with His Excellency Bishop David; president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council Daria Luci; vice-president of the League of Ukrainian Canadians Jaroslaw Szewczuk; president of the League of Ukrainian Canadian Women, Edmonton branch, Ivanna Szewczuk; Dr. Peter Savaryn, Order of Canada; and another guest who is seated in one of our other galleries, Mr. Andy Hladyshevsky from the Taras Shevchenko Foundation. Finally, I would like to introduce three of the remaining survivors who thankfully and mercifully are here with us today. Already standing is Dr. Yar Slavutych; next to him, Mrs. Natalia Talanchuk; and the man who spoke so eloquently at your ceremony at noon hour, Mr. Speaker, survivor Mr. Leonid Korownyk. [Remarks in Ukrainian] Thank you very much for coming, and may God bless you for many years. [As submitted] Please let's welcome them with a warm round of applause.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 30

grade 6 students from Swan Hills school, which is located, of course, in the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock constituency. They are accompanied this afternoon by teachers Kara King, Shawna Greenstien, program assistant Alicia Dyck, and vice-principal Angie Bachand. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 27 students from St. Elizabeth elementary school. The group is led by their teachers, Miss Melissa Guzzo, Mrs. Vicki Robertson, and parent helpers Mrs. Loida Mcleod and Mrs. Suzanne Howard. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two school groups today that I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly. The first is from a school in my constituency named Stratford school. There are 46 students from that class. They stand out because they wear uniforms at Stratford. They are accompanied by three adults: Mr. Soldan, the assistant principal at Stratford; Ms Sitter; and Mrs. Friesen. I would ask them all to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

My second school group is from a terrific school in my constituency called Our Lady of Victories school. It's under the Edmonton Catholic school district. There are 35 visitors from that school. They have several teachers and parents with them. I'll quickly go through their names: Mrs. Gall, Ms Sokoloski, Miss Hebert, Miss Mosby, Mrs. Savard, Mrs. Despins, Mrs. Van Horn, and Mrs. Vale. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly seven very special guests from the claims and recoveries group in Alberta Justice who are joining us as part of their public service orientation tour. I had an opportunity to speak to them earlier about some of the work that they do, and I'm very proud of the fact that some of the work that they do has to do with the legislation that was passed unanimously in this House in December on civil forfeiture. They are Shauna Wing, Jaime Tremblay, Will Woudstra, Jason Ewert, Lloyd Roesler, Marilyn Herget, and Steve Jackson. It's a pleasure for me to be able to ask them to rise today to receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a group of five Camrosians who represent the Camrose Sport Development Society and the Royal Bank Cup steering committee. The society is the owner of the Camrose Kodiaks and is host of the 2011 Royal Bank Cup. I'm going to introduce these folks individually and ask them to stay standing as I call out all their names. They are Barry

Fossen, who is the president of the society; Kevin Gurr, who is a director of the society; Kevin Pratt, a director of the society; Ray McIsaac, who is a Kodiaks volunteer and a Camrose alderman; and Shirley Damburger, who is responsible for tournament marketing. Sir, I'd ask that you and all my colleagues offer these folks the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you eight representatives from Arch Enterprises seated today in the public gallery. Arch Enterprises is located in my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie and works to deliver support and services at the ground level for adults with developmental disabilities. This work is crucial in helping to ensure that there are equal opportunities for all Albertans. On October 23 Arch Enterprises celebrated their 30th anniversary, a celebration I was proud to be part of. I would ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

1:40

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of local seniors who were taken advantage of by a home builder who ignored accepted building standards and codes and provided highly misleading information. My guests are Yvonne Byer, Connie Whiteley, Brian Johnson, Beata Wagner, Doris Smith, and Bernice Veitch. I would like my guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through to all hon. members of this Legislative Assembly a long-time resident and author of Edmonton, Mr. Harvey Deutschendorf. Harvey is the author of a book called *The Other Kind of Smart: Simple Ways to Boost Your Emotional Intelligence for Greater Personal Effectiveness and Success*. This book has been endorsed by Lee Iacocca, Robin Sharma, and Brian Tracy. It's Harvey's second book, and he tells me that he's already contemplating a third one as well. He's in the public gallery, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly. If anyone is interested, they can have a look at this book over at Audreys or at Chapters.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly, in the members' gallery, Qassim Tejpar. Qassim's parents emigrated from Tanzania to England and finally to Peace River in 1976. Qassim was born in Edmonton in 1986, interestingly enough, the same year I entered medical school. He graduated from Old Scona high school and is currently one of our bright lights in the U of A second-year medical school class. Qassim also is a student leader who is on General Faculties Council at the U of A, and he hopes to graduate from the U of A med school to serve Albertans. I'd like to ask Qassim to rise and all of our members to welcome him to the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, today is the anniversary of the arrival of his presence on planet Earth 30 years ago, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. Interestingly enough – and I'm not sure what this means, frankly – he has been on Earth for two days less than I have been a member of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Hosting of 2011 Royal Bank Cup

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All successful communities need movers and shakers, people who will roll up their sleeves and get things done. Camrose is really lucky to have an abundance of these kinds of people, and some of them I've just introduced.

Camrose is also very lucky to have played host to a number of high-profile national and international sporting events over the years. As recently as nine days ago the Augustana Faculty of the U of A hosted the national collegiate cross-country running championships. Just under a year ago it was the Continental Cup of Curling, and just a month before that was the World Junior A Hockey Challenge. Of course, there have been the 25 years of the Viking Cup, which in a lot of ways has paved the way for many of these other events.

Just recently Camrose was awarded the right to host the 2011 Royal Bank Cup, which is the national junior A hockey championship. The volunteer machine led by these folks in the gallery today is already in high gear, working at getting us ready for May of 2011.

Now, our hometown Kodiaks will be the host team. Interestingly, in their 12 years of existence, which is a pretty short time, they've had five appearances in the national championship. They've won one gold medal, and they've won two silver medals. That's an achievement that's not even approached by any other franchise. The vast majority of these young men are boys from Alberta, many of them from rural Alberta, and they've been given wonderful opportunities through hockey.

The Kodiaks and the Sport Development Society along with all of their volunteers, supporters, and fans have put Camrose and, more significantly, Alberta on the national and international stage. For that reason, when the Royal Bank Cup 2011 rolls around, I hope that they will have the support of all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Crimes against Humanity

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Holodomor. Just a few days ago Calgarians were disgusted by the spectacle of racist, anti-Semitic propaganda. It's appalling that such hatred can still be spewed by the ignorant, especially as Albertans prepare to memorialize the Holodomor, the terrible Ukrainian famine and genocide. During the dark years of the 1930s and '40s Jews and Ukrainians suffered two superficially different holocausts, but the impacts and the root causes were essentially the same. Fear, ignorance, and outright hatred drove people with power to murder innocents. The Nazis used guns and gas chambers. The Stalinists used starvation. Millions of Jews died. Millions of Ukrainians died. The loss to humanity is immeasurable.

One would hope that such acts are in the past, that they were so terrible that surely they could never be allowed to happen again, but last week's hateful graffiti really makes you stop and think: how far have we really come? In recent memory there has been genocidal violence in Rwanda, the Sudan, and the collection of nations that

used to be Yugoslavia. Much of that violence continues to this day or could break out again at any moment.

Last year the Official Opposition supported the government's Bill 37, the Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act, to mark the fourth Saturday in November as a memorial day to remember the Holodomor. During the bill debate I quoted John Donne.

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

I quoted Donne because his words remind us that no matter where or when human atrocities such as genocide are committed, we are all affected by the loss. We all have a stake in preventing these crimes against humanity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Northern Student Teacher Bursary

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School divisions across this province are facing some significant workforce planning challenges over the next few years. A high number of teacher retirements, growing high student enrolment, and a decreasing supply of qualified teachers in specialized subject areas as well as in certain areas in the province are all leading to the need to plan for our teaching workforce. In northern Alberta these challenges are magnified 10-fold.

Earlier this year Alberta Education announced a new northern student teacher bursary to help address these challenges, Mr. Speaker. The province is working with the Northern Alberta Development Council to sponsor the bursary program, which will provide financial support for up to 55 postsecondary students who are interested in teaching in northern Alberta communities. To qualify, students must be in their last two years of teacher preparation studies, and students who receive two years of bursary funding must upon graduation teach in one of Alberta's northern school jurisdictions for three years.

As many of my colleagues know, northern Alberta communities have a great quality of life to offer. I am so pleased that this bursary program will provide new teachers with an extra incentive to teach in these communities, and I have no doubt that three years will be more than enough time for these communities to become home for the bursary recipients. More information on the northern student teacher bursary is available on the Northern Alberta Development Council's bursaries website at www.benorth.ca.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to rise today to acknowledge the excellent collaboration between the government of Alberta and education stakeholders in this province and encourage students to take advantage of all the financial support available to them for postsecondary studies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Hospital Admissions

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to the most up-to-date information given by the Public Health Agency of Canada, both Alberta's hospitalization rates and death rates are

significantly higher than the Canadian average. Alberta, as of November 14, had 242 hospitalizations per million, 50 per cent higher than the average of 160 hospitalizations across the country. To the Premier: how can the Premier explain the large differences between Alberta's number of hospitalizations for H1N1 and that compared to the Canadian average?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm not a medical doctor nor a medical health professional. I'll ask the minister to respond.

1:50

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to leave any impression by that intro that I am, but I don't have the particular statistics in front of me that the leader is referring to. Until I have them, I'm not going to assume that they are correct. I will say this, as we've said consistently right along: every death is tragic, but on an annual basis some 400 Albertans die of seasonal flu, and we've had some 40 deaths thus far of the H1N1.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the Alberta death rate from H1N1, again to November 14, was 11 per million, while the Canadian average was six per million. What is the Premier's explanation for Alberta having nearly twice the death rate of the rest of the country?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I don't have those numbers in front of me. I think this morning was a major corner that we turned in this province because starting this morning all Albertans are eligible to receive the vaccination in this province. You know, we can continue to drag up all of the statistics and all of the negative comments we want, but the key thing is that some 650,000 Albertans have now been vaccinated, and by Christmas we anticipate every Albertan that wants to be vaccinated can be vaccinated.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this minister is not going to duck responsibility that easily. How can he deny that there's a direct relationship between his role in a poorly planned health restructuring and Alberta's obviously flawed pandemic response?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly, the Alberta Health Services responded when emergencies were starting to see an increase in the number of patients with flu-like symptoms, set up the assessment clinics in four cities in this province. They were of tremendous assistance to ensure that our emergency rooms were not overcrowded. The take-up has subsided to the point where they've closed those four assessment clinics because the number of patients no longer required them. So I think we've reacted appropriately.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government changed its plans for Alberta Hospital Edmonton three times in two months, then announced an implementation advisory team, and then had to wade in to clear up confusion about that team. The confusion around Alberta Hospital is one more sign that Alberta Health Services is in turmoil. My question is to the Premier. Does the mandate of the implementation team allow them to recommend that Alberta Hospital's programs and services remain in place and untouched? Are they able to make that recommendation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I've asked the team to ensure that we provide the best quality program for those in the care of either the Alberta Hospital or any mental illness program that we have available in Alberta. As I said before, I'm of the opinion, shared by many advocates for those that are suffering from mental illness, that they would have a better quality of life in the community. That is the goal, but we want to make sure that the services are in place for those that may choose to live in community-based care because I really do believe they will see a better quality of life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like the Premier has made up his mind before he's got the advice.

Later today we'll be tabling a petition with thousands of names on it defending the role and services of Alberta Hospital Edmonton. In light of all the criticism and opposition this plan has created throughout the province from average citizens right up to all kinds of medical experts and psychiatrists, will the Premier cancel plans to cut beds and services at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and provide the funding that's necessary to keep the important programs at that institution?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, nobody is reducing the number of beds. Those beds may be in a different location. They may be in community-based care. They won't be in an institution. It seems that that is what the opposition wants, to keep people forever and ever in an institution even though they would see a better quality of life in the community.

Dr. Taft: Well, Mr. Speaker, some people do need long-term care in an institution. Alberta Hospital Edmonton provides programs and services that aren't just vital to the patients; they're vital to public safety. One of these is the Phoenix program, which treats pedophiles, including some of the worst of the worst. Will the Premier guarantee the public that the Phoenix program, which treats predatory pedophiles, will not be cut from Alberta Hospital Edmonton?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to earlier was to those individuals that can be rightfully placed in community care, those suffering from mental illness that can be treated. In this particular case, safety of Albertans is of utmost importance, and that is the purpose of the committee, to make sure that nobody is moved unless there is appropriate care in the community.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

New Home Construction and Inspection

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to advocate on behalf of a group of homeowners from Stony Plain seated in the members' gallery who've been victimized as a result as poor home building practices in Alberta. This battle has saddled them with tens of thousands of dollars in costs and an incalculable amount of stress and anxiety. To the Premier. The Official Opposition has been trying to address the government's poor track record on residential construction for years. When is the Premier going to get serious about protecting Albertans from shoddy home and condominium builders?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll be briefed further on the issue of

the particular homeowners in the community that the hon. member is mentioning, but overall there are rules and regulations in place in terms of construction. It's up to not only municipal inspectors to ensure that proper construction is followed. It doesn't matter if it's an individual home or a condominium. We spend a lot of money supporting municipal inspection. We want to make sure that they're doing their job and doing what they're being paid for.

Dr. Swann: Well, that's exactly the question, Mr. Speaker. They're not doing their job.

Again to the Premier. In the case of the group present in the gallery today, municipal inspectors signed off on construction that independent inspectors found glaringly deficient. How can the Premier or any other minister defend our building codes when the inspection system is so obviously flawed?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, is undertaking a review of inspection. All I have to say is that the people that sign on as municipal building inspectors have a responsibility. They just can't simply bill for something that they haven't done. So that means that if they weren't on-site and if they haven't inspected the building properly, they are in breach of their contract, the contract that is given by the municipality.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In an e-mail response to our guests from Folkstone Place, that we will table, we note that you intend to meet with stakeholders as part of the review of residential construction practices. Will you commit to meeting with these residents of Folkstone Place who are present in the Assembly today?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is essential that new homes are being built to the quality that Albertans expect and deserve. We have proactively looked into the concerns. We have consulted with stakeholders to discuss accountability, consumer protection and recourse, worker certification, as well as inspection and enforcement processes. We've examined different ways to ensure that the quality of construction of new homes is what Albertans expect. We want to ensure that Albertans have confidence in the construction, and we will take the necessary action to ensure that that takes place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Health Care Reform

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The health minister has recently been floating the idea of a new health fee and linking it to the end of the single-payer system of medicine. This, no doubt, is part of the PC government's plan to create more private health care in Alberta. Can the Premier please lift the veil of secrecy surrounding his government's plans for health care and tell us what specifically the government has planned for a health care fee? How much, what for, and when?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to health care premiums, which I think he wants this government to bring back. We will not – it was an unfair tax – especially now that we've eliminated it and had an opportunity to speak to Albertans like single moms with a couple of children that had to pay another tax

over and above what they already paid to the government in provincial taxes. That is not coming back. I'll repeat: there will be no new taxes or health care premiums. We will find a way of ensuring a sustainable health system for future generations without creating any new taxes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, perhaps the Premier should check with his health minister because the health minister is talking about new ways of Albertans paying for health care. You know, that sounds to me like a fee. Albertans know that health care is expensive. They don't need a patronizing minister to impose a new fee to realize that. My question is to the Premier. Once again: how much, what for, and when?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the member is going. We do as the ministry of health spend almost \$13 billion on 3 and a half million people. Albertans are telling us: you know, we feel there is enough money in the system; just make sure that we get value for the dollar. That's what we're doing. We're meeting with a committee that's chaired by a member of our caucus to ensure that we bring physicians, nurses, the union together to look at how we can work towards a sustainable health care system, a health care system that is very good in this province, but we also want to ensure that the next generation enjoys the same benefits.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the minister said, and I quote: can it continue to be a one-payer system forever? The single-payer system protects individuals from being charged for health care. This government is planning to force people to pay, leaving most of us with second-class health care and longer waits. Once more to the Premier: will you tell Albertans here and now that you will not impose new fees and promise that no Albertan will have to personally pay for the health care that they need?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it's typical with this particular member. He takes a portion of a quote, and that's what he focuses on.

If the member had been with me at the meeting of the AAMD and C, my comments were this: at some point in time we as Canadians and Albertans are going to have to have the discussion. There was no secret plan. There was no intent to introduce anything. I said we should have the discussion. I know they don't like to discuss these sorts of things, but that's all I'm suggesting, that we should have the discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Water Management

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has experienced rapid growth in recent years. Population growth, an expanding industrial base, and a growing agriculture sector all come with pressures for water availability. Future growth will be dependent on prudent water management. Three reports were released today with recommendations that address water allocation and management in Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. How will the recommendations from the reports released today lead to improvement in the water allocation and transfer system in Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, what we released today was documentation that we received from three different groups in response to our request for some recommendations on how we can improve the water allocation system. Those reports will be used as the basis for us to formulate a broader discussion with the public, first, this fall and target stakeholder discussions with some of the significant water users and consumer groups, and that will then lead to a much broader public discussion in the spring and summer of 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Alberta's Water Act was established more than a hundred years ago at a time when few Albertans were competing for water. First in time, first in right is still an important principle to water users in Alberta. Will long-standing water rights continue to be protected in Alberta's Water Act?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the intent of this review is to determine what is the best system for all water users, not only those who have existing licences but those who find themselves in need of water but without a licence. What I envision and what is envisioned from these recommendations is that we need to be able to facilitate a process for transfers to take place from those users who have water to those users who need water. What that process is will I think constitute the majority of the discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Many jurisdictions around the world have incorporated innovative solutions to manage water shortages, often in a reactionary mode. I'm of the belief that Alberta has an opportunity to take a proactive approach to future growth, facilitated by good water management. Water availability will be a determining factor for where Alberta's future growth takes place. How is this government intending to lead the way in terms of water management to take advantage of the opportunity water availability provides this province, particularly in southern Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, this government recognizes that while we have cause for concern in the future, the pressures that we face today are nowhere near the kinds of pressures that other jurisdictions faced prior to taking action. What we intend to do by moving forward on this process is to be proactive, to make the decisions, to make the policy that will prevent us from ever getting into what a lot of these other jurisdictions found themselves in the past.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Building Construction Review

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The northern Alberta Better Business Bureau ranks home builders as an industry with the third-highest amount of inquiries from consumers. We have with us today six Albertans from Folkstone Place who have evidence of these poor home building practices. To the Minister of Service Alberta. Your ministry has been endlessly studying condo legislation for the past year. What is being done to protect homeowners from poor construction practices now?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said previously

about the review of the Condominium Property Act, the last time it was reviewed was 2000, so we put the wheels in motion to continue reviewing this act. It's really important, and I'm happy to hear that there are people in the House to hear what I have to say. When we do an effective consultation, we need to hear from everyone. There are a number of issues out there besides the issues of the building deficiencies as well as the amount in the reserve fund. Those are some of the many issues that we need input on.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the wheels have been in motion for too long, and it's about time to do something. To the minister again. Service Alberta brought in new condo legislation nine years ago that was supposed to solve a lot of problems we are seeing today. Why should Albertans believe that this government is serious about addressing the shoddy builder issue at all?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will speak about the Condominium Property Act, but the building codes act is with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It's really important to note that the issues have changed so much during these last nine years, especially with all the new buildings that have been built in these last two or three years. So we are looking at any issues of construction deficiencies, reserve funds, and board governance – I've had a number of letters on that, on how individuals can access their boards and get decisions – and it's about the rights of the unit owners, as well, with the Condominium Property Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister again. Albertans making a consumer transaction are supposed to be protected by the Fair Trading Act, but homebuyers like those in the gallery are not getting straight answers from your department about whether the act applies to them or not. Will the minister commit to reviewing Service Alberta's enforcement of the Fair Trading Act?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fair Trading Act is a very comprehensive act that covers many, many different acts that affect consumers. Consequently, we are always looking at that act to make sure it is stronger for consumers, and part of the Condominium Property Act will look at that as it relates to the Fair Trading Act because, ultimately, it's about helping consumers make the best decisions, especially when they are making a major purchase of a home.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Pharmaceutical Strategy

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I met with rural pharmacists in my constituency who have questions and concerns about the government's policy changes in phase 2 of the pharmaceutical strategy. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Rural independent pharmacists have indicated that they did not have any meaningful input into the strategy. They are aware of the pilot sites, but they say they were left out of the discussions. How

are pharmacists, especially rural independent pharmacists, included in the development of the second phase of the pharmaceutical strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:10

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, first off, pharmacists play an important role, especially in smaller communities, rural and remote communities, in the delivery of health care. That being said, as we move towards developing our second phase of the pharmaceutical strategy, it's not possible to involve every pharmacist on an individual basis. So what we did was work with the Pharmacists Association, the chain drugstores, and the College of Pharmacists. Those consultations took place over the course of about a year. In fact, they're still continuing because there are still some areas that need revision.

We've attempted to do our best. Certainly, I have listened to MLAs that pharmacists have been in contact with. That would be pretty comprehensive consultation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, like me, many rural MLAs were contacted by their respective rural pharmacists after the news release announcing phase 2. Pharmacists in my area are concerned that the lost revenue will have a severe negative impact on their business. Over the years they've come to rely on the existing arrangements they have with the companies that manufacture generic drugs. I realize the government has recognized this reduction with the transition fund. Does the minister have any details on how the transition fund helps rural independent pharmacists?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member is absolutely correct. Over the years our pharmacies have relied too much on side deals with the various drug companies. That's what we want to get around. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't really matter if you're a pharmacist and you are today consulting and working with your customers. You get the same kind of side deal as someone who is just simply filling prescriptions. What we want to do is ensure that pharmacists are compensated for delivering health care and working with patients. We have some programs in place to assist with this transition fund, and I'd be happy to elaborate on those in a few minutes.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, the news release also mentioned the compensation that will roll out in July of next year. What's the policy rationale for the compensation for pharmacists? Does the minister have any details regarding this compensation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, the compensation that will come into effect in July of 2010 is based on trials that are going on right now with the Pharmacists Association, to be concluded at the end of this calendar year. That will set up the model of how we will compensate pharmacists for delivering health care in a direct way to the communities.

In the interim, however, we recognize that there is going to be a transition period, so we've put in two transition plans. One is relative to a phasing out over three years of an enhancement of the prescription dispensing fee, and the other one, specifically for rural and remote communities, is modelled after the rural physicians action plan, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government clearly is not listening to Albertans on transmission policy. I suppose all the Minister of Energy can hear is his own pro Bill 50 mega-advertising propaganda campaign. Albertans know that the core failing of this bill is that it cuts those Albertans out of official independent hearings, regulatory hearings into the need for these lines that have the power to tell the government to back down on billion-dollar transmission spending. To the Minister of Energy: why is the minister failing to address the actual failings of Bill 50?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the process that's in place relative to transmission development in the province of Alberta is quite clear. Bill 50 does nothing to interfere with the normal course of events in transmission construction in the province of Alberta. Our Utilities Commission has a mandate to act in the public interest and will continue to do that. There is an opportunity for open, transparent hearings, quasi-judicial hearings, that will take place relative to any of these pieces of infrastructure.

Mr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting admission. The minister, then, I guess, is bringing forward a bill that isn't needed if it doesn't make any changes or interfere in any way with the status quo.

The Speaker: Hon. member, remember that our tradition is that if the bill is going to be up for debate on a particular day, we don't use the question period to debate it. If I look at the Order Paper, this bill is scheduled for tonight. So let's get on to something that . . .

Mr. Taylor: I shall get down to the matter at hand.

Does the minister really think that the kinds of cosmetic changes he tabled on Thursday are fixing the core problems that Albertans have with Bill 50, or is he just trying to give the impression that he's acting while he's not actually taking any action?

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to answer the question without referring to the piece of legislation, so I'll have to just say that what we will do is . . .

The Speaker: Yeah. We'll all come back tonight and debate it.
The hon. member. Third question.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why won't the Minister of Energy, then, just admit that he doesn't really care about the public's concerns on transmission lines and he doesn't care about forcing Albertans to pay billions of dollars without having a say?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is a process in place in the province of Alberta to deal with all of these issues; it doesn't matter if we happen to be talking about building a pipeline, siting a plant, or putting a drilling rig in some location in the province of Alberta. There is a very, very good process in the province of Alberta. As a matter of fact, people from around the world come to see how our regulatory processes take place. What happens with transmission in the province of Alberta is exactly the same as with the other infrastructure that we build.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm fortunate to have several agencies in my constituency that provide supports to Albertans through the persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD, program. Some of these agencies such as Arch have long service records as part of the PDD. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Although I've seen the difference this program can make in the lives of Albertans, how is the PDD program different from other provincial programs?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the PDD program in Alberta is among the very best in Canada. The Alberta government provided almost \$604 million this year to support adult Albertans with developmental disabilities, and that is on top of the payments they receive each month through the AISH program. The PDD program supports about 9,200 people in three key areas: home living supports, involvement in community activities, and involvement in employment and training, including volunteering. The support helps Albertans with developmental disabilities to be as independent as possible and to be included in their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bhardwaj: I haven't asked the question yet.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. It's obvious that PDD makes a big difference in the lives of many people with developmental disabilities. Can the minister share any details of her future policy plans for this particular program?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to supporting those most in need, including those with developmental disabilities. The PDD program is a good program, but I'm committed to making it even better. Five goals that I have for the PDD program are clarity, consistency, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. I asked the PDD community boards to meet with funded individuals, their families, service providers, and stakeholders last year, and I also met with many people and visited programs in eastern Canada and in Massachusetts. This input helped me to establish some priority directions for the PDD program to make it more responsive to individual needs, more focused on achieving positive outcomes for the people it supports, and more sustainable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary is to the same minister. Some of the PDD community boards are making changes to the funding allocated to service providers. My question is to the minister. What is this about, and what does it mean for the coming year?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that some community boards are making in-year adjustments to their service provider contracts in order to meet their budget targets for this year. This is a regular part of business as all community boards must balance their budgets. As for next year the 2010-11 budget has not been finalized; however, like all government departments we will continue to work through the budget process with an eye to protecting those most in need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I asked the Justice minister about bringing in legislation to improve how we conduct elections in this province. The minister said that the government was looking into the matter but would not give any details. Well, today I'd like to ask about an improvement to our electoral system that I think all Albertans overwhelmingly support: bringing in fixed election dates. To the Minister of Justice: will the minister be including fixed election dates in proposed changes to the current election legislation?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the questions from the hon. member last week with respect to ways that we might be able to encourage more people to participate in the electoral process. As I said last week, the former Chief Electoral Officer and his operation have provided us with over 140 recommendations. Justice is currently in the process of reviewing those and, when appropriate, will be tabling necessary legislation to amend the act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week I brought up some of those changes that were recommended in the Chief Electoral Officer's report. One of them was more polling stations. Another one was updating residency requirements. At that time the minister didn't seem to be in favour of those. Now what I'm saying is: what kind of substantive change is the minister looking at importing into these changes that will be forthcoming?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we bring forward the legislation, the member will see what substantive changes we're suggesting.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I guess that's one answer, but she could also say that another way to look at this is that the election is, I guess, relatively soon, somewhat inside of two years. Can we see a date when you say this legislation will be coming in? Can we see it next session or sometime in the remote future? Can you put sort of a timetable on it? Will it be out before the next election?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. member's concern with respect to how we set the legislative agenda. We're fully cognizant of when our deadlines are, and we'll introduce our legislation at the appropriate time.

Opt-out Clause for Electricity Contracts

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans who were duped into signing fixed-term electricity contracts are getting gouged, and this government doesn't seem to care. The recession has temporarily pushed average electricity prices in Alberta to about half what they were last year, but contract consumers, who couldn't risk rolling the dice in this government's utility rate crapshoot, are still paying up to 30 per

cent more and face expensive penalties if they want to opt out. My question is for the Minister of Service Alberta. Why have you failed to protect Albertans from such price discrepancies by not forcing all electricity providers to include no-penalty opt-out clauses in these contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to this whole issue there are a number of different agencies in place that are selling these contracts. Again, it's the power of the consumer and the choices they have to make. Some contractors have different rules for letting people out of a contract. It's really, really important for consumers to do their research and read about the contracts before they sign them. That's what I would encourage consumers to do.

On the UCA website we update on a regular basis what all the companies are offering so that consumers can look at that information.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's also really, really important for the minister in charge of consumer protection to actually think about protecting consumers.

Now, by the time the contract consumers realize that they're paying way more than their neighbours to keep their lights on, the 10-day grace period to cancel their contract has expired, and they face massive penalties to get out. The minister's buyer-beware approach just isn't good enough. Why won't the minister force all electricity marketers to replace their contract exit fees with a 30-day opt-out clause?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, there are different exit fees and different rules that each of the companies have. It's been really important to me, when we've been monitoring many of these companies, to make sure that they are giving the consumer the right information. On many occasions we have intervened and have been able to protect the consumer and get the contracts that have been signed and those contract fees waived as well.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the marketing used by these electricity companies is deliberately confusing. They talk about fixed rates, flex rates, regulated rates, deregulated rates, rate riders, distribution fees, transmission fees, and somewhere in the finest of fine print, penalties. You need a law degree to make sense of it. Why won't the minister stop protecting the electricity marketers and, instead, start protecting consumers by banning these exit penalties and replacing them with 30-day opt-out clauses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that, indeed, this ministry and the Utilities Consumer Advocate do a great job of protecting the consumer. It's unfortunate that we can't protect every consumer because we know people are being taken advantage of. We know there are some overzealous individuals selling contracts at the door, and we investigate those and take those very seriously. It's absolutely shameful that people are being taken advantage of. As minister I am very happy to investigate all of those. We need to keep making sure that consumers have the information they need to make the right decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Queen's Printer

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the minister responsible for Service Alberta. A fundamental rule of law is that citizens are presumed to know the law. In Alberta we have in excess of 600 acts and over a thousand regulations. It is absurd to suggest that we should know all of these laws, but the Queen's Printer conveniently has all the acts and regulations included on their website for public viewing. This is a great service to allow Albertans to access this vital information. The same fee, however, is charged to Albertans to download copies of these laws as to have a printed copy sent to them. These acts and regulations are necessary for the operation of government, and little or no further cost is generated to provide this public information electronically to the public. My question to the hon. minister is: why should Albertans have to pay a fee to download public information from a government website?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Queen's Printer has operated for many years on a cost-neutral basis and does an excellent job of making legislation available to all Albertans who want it. There is a fee if someone wants to make a hard copy of the legislation or to download a copy of the legislation, and the fee is the same for both because of the manpower and associated technical support required to support that service.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you for that answer, Madam Minister. How much revenue is generated on an annual basis from the downloading of acts and regulations from the Queen's Printer website? What are the costs to your department in providing this information to the public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last fiscal year the Queen's Printer spent about \$1.5 million. Its revenue from downloaded items was about \$25,000, only a fraction of the cost of making legislation available to Albertans. It's worth noting that Queen's Printer prices have not increased since the mid-1990s.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Allred: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that emphasized my point. What is the justification, then, for charging the public for accessing this public information which they have, in fact, already paid for through taxation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans can access any piece of legislation for free through the Queen's Printer. Statutes can be viewed online in the HTML version – and they will soon be available in the PDF version – for free. They can also be viewed for free at libraries across the province. Fees are only charged if someone wants a hard copy or to download a copy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Agriculture Supply Management Sponsors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The list of sponsors at the Progressive Conservative Party's annual general meeting this month included a handful of supply management organizations, created under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, that are subject to ongoing government regulations. These same organizations receive millions of taxpayer dollars every year in funding. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: as the minister responsible for this act do you consider this an appropriate use of taxpayer money by these organizations?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, it's a very strange question. I wonder if the hon. member understands how supply management is funded. Supply management, for one thing, is under the direction of the government of Canada. Supply management does not get money from my department. They can apply for the odd grant here and there, very small grants, the same as any other free enterprise operation can. So I just wonder if the hon. member understands how supply management is structured.

Ms Pastoor: Well, I think probably the clear question is: should taxpayers' dollars be given to a political party? Should these be partisan dollars?

My next question would be, though: can the minister please explain why funds intended to assist the livestock and meat industry in Alberta to, quote, become an internationally respected, competitive, and profitable industry, unquote, are being used to give money to political parties? Is that a good use of taxpayers' dollars?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how best to explain this, but I think I can understand the frustration. It's unfortunate that the hon. member calls into question the supply management organizations. The frustration I can probably see; if it's taxpayers' dollars, it could be there. If the hon. member has bought any dairy, chicken, turkey, or eggs in the last while, some of her valuable dollars and her colleagues' probably ended up in the PC coffers if they did indeed make a donation.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Will the minister introduce legislation to ensure that this type of expenditure, sponsorship dollars, which are taxpayers' dollars, does not happen in the future?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, once again, I guess I have to explain that these are not taxpayer dollars for supply management, in no way, shape, or form. They run their own business. Their monies come through how they structured their own organization. I'm sure you don't understand any better because you don't understand a whole heck of a lot of anything.

The Speaker: I think we'll just go to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Drilling Rig Activity

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has considerable energy resources, and as a result the prosperity of many Albertans, including many constituents of Calgary-Mackay, is tied to the health of our oil and gas sector. My questions are for the hon. Minister of Energy. Can the minister please update me on the state of the province's drilling activity in comparison to Saskatchewan and B.C.?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that activity across the three western provinces has certainly declined from a year ago, and we think, of course, that lower commodity prices have probably been the largest contributor to those declines. I can, however, say that, on the positive side, the evidence is that the three-point stimulus package that we've introduced has assisted to put things back to work on the ground in Alberta. Since the spring the number of active rigs in Alberta has increased by 110 rigs, and over the same period of time, in comparison with Saskatchewan and British Columbia, Saskatchewan has added 39 rigs and B.C. has added nine, respectively.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. I have constituents who want to know when the three-point incentive program was implemented and if the minister can comment on how effective it has been to date.

Mr. Knight: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the programs were announced in March as a response to the crisis that we had, caused mostly by a global economic slowdown. The goal of the program, of course, was to have a healthier oil and gas industry in the province of Alberta. Drilling counts, of course, have increased, and we do believe that because of the incentive programs that we put in place, certainly a percentage of that is due to those programs. We can indicate, when this program is concluded, the amount of dollars that were actually involved in the royalty structure relative to the incentive programs. At this point in time that's not possible.

Ms Woo-Paw: My final supplemental is: what other measures would the minister consider in order to ensure that our oil and gas sector remains strong?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, the message that we're going out with is extremely important. We all know that this is probably one of the most important industry players in western Canada. In the way forward, that we're working with, Alberta energy should remain competitive and attractive to investors. Our intention with the competitiveness study is to take a look at the regulatory and fiscal sides of this sector relative to Alberta and compare it to other jurisdictions in Canada and North America to be sure that we maintain our competitive advantage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Homeless Children

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children and Youth Services seems oblivious to the reality that her ministry is in crisis. There are 2,500 new children in the system, yet there are fewer places to house them and less money to support them. We have seen closures at Bosco Homes, an overall decrease in foster placements by 24 homes, and the minister has stated that you are finally down to virtually no use of hotels as placements. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The numbers just don't add up. Where are you putting all those vulnerable children?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the first thing I'd

like to address is that comment about the system being in crisis. The system is not in crisis. It deals with crisis on a daily basis. Our workers are just like police, firefighters, paramedics. They respond to crisis. They respond to emergencies. They make the best decisions they can with the information that they have.

With respect to the member's comments about placements I have said in this House before and I'm pleased to say again that the campaign for foster homes and kinship homes is going quite well. The last time I looked, our numbers were getting close to 800. At the end of the day that's what we need: more placements so that we have more options for these kids.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm hoping the hon. minister will table where the beds that were lost from the YMCA and Bosco Homes have been replaced.

What is being done to ensure that homeless youth, arguably the most vulnerable children in the system, are properly placed and cared for?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the member does raise a very important issue, and it is the homeless. I did internally do some work with the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs last winter and took a look at the services that are out there for the homeless: whether we had gaps, what the inventory was. We collected some pretty good information. The two ministries are working with that. As well, that information is going to the child intervention panel, that is under way, that's taking a look at our capacity to deal with societal issues like the homeless.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm hoping that at some point the minister will table the actual figures because children are being displaced and living on the streets.

Apart from what the minister is unable to provide due to privacy restrictions, will the minister table documents that account for these kids having proper placements? Where are they going? How do we know that they're being cared for?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell this member that between the increased options that we have for placements – that is awfully good news – as well, when it comes to the homeless and going into winter, I have asked all of our regions for their plans on how they're considering the homeless that they might have on the streets. They have been coming back. They are working with community organizations. It is a community issue. I do think that everyone is aware of the issue, and I think we have all the stakeholders properly addressing it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Family Violence

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November is Family Violence Prevention Month. Currently in Alberta we have the second-highest rate of spousal violence in the country. I'd like to draw attention to the concerns many Albertans have about what is being done to address family violence in this province. It often seems that silence surrounds the issue and that we are not engaging

in effective dialogue to confront it. My first question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. What is your ministry doing to confront family violence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had the opportunity here in Alberta last week to host Diverse Voices, which was a western Canadian conference dealing with family violence and domestic violence. One of the things that both myself and my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services were able to talk about was the fact that this is an issue that needs to be publicly discussed. There needs to be much more awareness made of it. But, more importantly, we have to understand that the people that are victims of this act and these crimes are all members of the family.

Under the safe communities innovation fund, Mr. Speaker, we have funded the Red Path Living without Violence pilot project and the integrated domestic violence treatment program, based in Lethbridge, to the tune of over \$1 million. It's to deal not only with the direct victims of family violence but also with the perpetrators.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm really pleased you mentioned the integrated domestic violence treatment program in Lethbridge, with an investment of \$600,000.

My next question is to the same minister. Why do you think these new projects will make an impact?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason that these will first make an impact is because they have been developed by the community. They've been developed by organizations in the community, such as in Lethbridge, where they've identified where they needed extra support to have wraparound approaches that deal with family violence.

Mr. Speaker, there's been a tremendous change in the discussion lately, within the last two years, as to how we talk about family violence and domestic violence. I think the work that communities are doing and communities' understanding really needs to be supported by government to ensure that we take a holistic approach to this and support both victims and perpetrators.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

2:40

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What else is your ministry doing to combat family violence across this province?

Ms Redford: Well, Mr. Speaker, just as in many parts of what we do around safe communities, we know that there's a spectrum. We need to deal with education, awareness, intervention. We also then have to deal with the reality that there are sometimes very serious consequences in these cases. Within the Department of Justice and under safe communities we're supporting initiatives such as the diversion court in Calgary, the HomeFront court, where we try to deal with the entire situation that a family might be facing when these situations arise. We try to understand, through the work that we're doing in domestic violence courts in eight communities, exactly how to fast-track resolutions to family violence and address it through court proceedings where necessary.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today. In 30 seconds from now we will continue with the Routine.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of visitors from the Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Association, who are seated in the members' gallery. I had the privilege of attending their harvest celebration recently. Also, prior to question period along with the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the Member for Edmonton-Decore, and the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview we were pleased to take a picture with this group.

We are joined today by their president and someone very familiar to this Chamber, Mr. Bob Maskell, a former MLA; council members Fred Stephenson, Irene Moir, Earl Anderson, Lois Thomas, Olive Sydor, Elsie Lupul, and John and Laura Walter. Of course, the Walter name is synonymous with the Walterdale Bridge, the John Walter Museum, and they were the family responsible for the first ferry across the North Saskatchewan River. I'd ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to introduce the previous hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who was Bob Maskell, and was going to mention the amount of work that he has done and the commitment and dedication that he has given the province of Alberta in the aspect of education. I wanted to thank him at the same time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and to all the members of the Assembly a group of employees from Alberta Hospital as well as staff from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. They are here today to witness our discussion earlier on Alberta Hospital as well as to watch the tabling of a very, very substantial petition, that will happen in a few minutes. I would ask them all to rise. They're very concerned about the negative consequences that closing Alberta Hospital may have on Alberta's mental health system, and they're wanting us to hear their concerns. Please give them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Water for Life Strategy

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Water is not only a valuable resource; it is a life source. Albertans' quality of life depends on having enough water to meet all of our competing needs. This includes everything from water in our taps to the water we use for development, energy, and recreation. Last year the government

of Alberta released the renewed water for life strategy, a 10-year plan to manage our water resources. It builds on the original water for life strategy, released in 2003, and last week we took another step forward and released the water for life action plan. The action plan sets out clear water management activities and actions. It includes short-, medium-, and long-term actions to be achieved over the next 10 years. The plan will help ensure that we deliver on the goals outlined in the renewed water for life action strategy and continue to build upon Alberta's robust water framework.

Our renewed strategy and action plan exemplify the benefits of taking a partnership approach to protecting our water resources. To achieve a meaningful and fully informed strategy and action plan, the Minister of Environment asked the Water Council to provide recommendations to renew water for life. The council acknowledged that water for life is making good progress and provided some excellent recommendations to help ensure we achieve our three main water for life goals: a safe, secure drinking water supply; healthy aquatic ecosystems; and reliable, quality water supplies for a sustainable economy. Based on the council's recommendations, the action plan emphasizes conservation and education activities, which will continue to involve the efforts of many partners, including the council.

On that note, I would like to recognize the Alberta Water Council for their ongoing hard work and dedication to safeguarding our water resources. The work of the council is critical to ensure the relevance of our water management policy now and for the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Cold Lake Heavy Oil Operations Milestone

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October the Imperial Oil Cold Lake heavy oil operations facility reached its billion barrel mark. The Cold Lake facility joins three other facilities in Canada who have also reached this milestone. However, it is the first in situ operation in the country to accomplish this. To put this into perspective, a billion barrels of oil would supply all of Canada's oil needs for one year. This operation has been producing oil for four decades and averages approximately 145,000 barrels each day.

In September Imperial Oil introduced the Cold Lake Nabiye project, which will help to reduce its environmental footprint with the development of new technology while increasing its daily output by 30,000 barrels. Many of my colleagues had the opportunity to tour this facility in October, and I would encourage all members to visit the various oil and gas operations in my constituency to learn about the technology, operation, and development of these industry powerhouses.

Mr. Speaker, many Bonnyville-Cold Lake residents work in the Alberta oil and gas industry, and many of these are employed by Imperial Oil. My constituents rely on the growth and success of major companies like Imperial Oil for not only employment but sustainability. The growth of this company has contributed immensely to the growth of my constituency and the communities in it.

I would like to congratulate Cold Lake Imperial Oil and their staff on this tremendous milestone and look forward to the many accomplishments that are yet to come.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Underground Electricity Transmission Lines

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-McClung lies in the southwest corner of Edmonton, and it could therefore be impacted by the proposed heartland transmission project. I have received a great number of e-mails and letters from my constituents and also many Edmontonians expressing their concerns about the potential impact of the transmission lines on their health, on the environment, and on the value of their properties. In a moment I will table 1,784 letters and e-mails I have received.

My constituents do recognize that Alberta's transmission network needs to be modernized. My constituents are urging their government, the AESO, Alberta Electric System Operator, and the AUC, Alberta Utilities Commission, to consider the possibility of burying certain segments of the transmission lines in the densely populated areas. AESO has established a comprehensive consultation process through hearings, open houses, and information sessions across our province to ensure that all Albertans are able to have input into this project; that is, to provide secure electricity transmission for the future growth of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the tremendous time and effort many of my constituents and volunteers are taking to ensure that their voices are heard in this Legislature. I very much value the input that my constituents have contributed to the consultation process and encourage all Albertans to do so.

Thank you.

2:50

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee I'd like to table the committee's report recommending the appointment of Mr. Olaf Brian Fjeldheim as the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. Copies of the report are being distributed to all members of the Assembly today.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today, both dealing with Alberta Hospital. The first one says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

This petition has 1,000 signatures.

The second petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the current number of acute care mental health beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

This petition has 672 signatures, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join a number of my colleagues in the Assembly today in tabling a petition with 1,000 names on it. The prayer is that they're petition-

ing the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to “redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.”

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join my colleagues and present a petition with another 910 signatures on it, undersigned residents of Alberta petitioning the Assembly to urge the government to “redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to present 962 signatures, which are part of a package of 5,725 signatures. The prayer reads that they ask the Legislative Assembly to “redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.”

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling 962 signatures urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to “redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.”

Mr. Speaker, by the time all petitions are tabled, there will be almost 40,000 signatures in total.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. This is a petition organized by the Save Alberta Hospital Edmonton group. They can be reached at savealbertahospital.com. This petition has 903 names on it. They're from Medicine Hat, Spruce Grove, Sherwood Park, Edmonton, St. Albert, Stony Plain. They're from all over the province. The petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in Legislature assembled, and reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly . . . to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

I would just like to say thank you to the AUPE for organizing this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Like my colleagues, I'm tabling a petition. This particular one has 988 signatures, and it brings the total to nearly 6,000 for today alone. The prayer reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The impressive thing about this, aside from its numbers, is that it covers Lethbridge, Camrose, Calgary, Milk River, Grande Prairie, High River, Fort McMurray, and many, many other communities all around Alberta. There's a very broad base here.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table 1,784 letters and e-mails I have received from my constituents and also many Edmontonians expressing their concerns about the potential impact of the proposed transmission lines on their health, the environment, and the value of their properties.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, there will be some difficulties with those because of the format and the earlier ruling that I gave with respect to those. They may very well be returned to you so that you might do some better sorting out.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of my e-mail to Pat Cochrane and members of the Calgary board of trustees on Bill 206.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. The first two are with permission from constituents Kenneth A. Mills and Doug MacEachern. They have issues with Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and they cannot understand why our government would consider downgrading it and closing a portion of it.

The second group of tablings I have this afternoon are also from constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They're all very concerned about education funding, and they are urging the government not to cut funding for our public schools. The first one is from Fran Lucas, the second one is from Mr. Keith Wilson, and the third is from Lorraine Wilson on 56th Street. They all have given me permission to table those documents in the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of the letter that I sent to yourself and to key members of this House. The first paragraph states . . .

The Speaker: That's not required. It's the Speaker's job to table that, not yours.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a number of tablings to make here today. The first one is copies of a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and all other MLAs by CC from Ms Yvonne Byer and Ms Connie Whiteley outlining their situation. Also included are photos of Ms Byer's house that indicate some of the true concerns outlined by the residents regarding their homes.

The second one is copies of a letter to the Alberta Liberal caucus, also with photographs included, from Mr. Brian Johnson outlining his issue.

The third one is copies of a letter to the Alberta Liberal caucus, with photos included, outlining the situation of Ms Doris Smith and Ms Beate Wagner regarding their parents' home.

Number four is copies of an e-mail response dated June 12, '09, from the Minister of Municipal Affairs to a letter from Ms Yvonne Byer.

The fifth one is recommendations from five residents of Folkstone Place for legislative changes regarding home inspections and building safety codes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to table the 2008 annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2008. The report represents the audited financial statements for the fiscal year 2007-2008 and the 2008 annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

I'm also tabling the appropriate copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity requesting that Bill 209, Children's Services Review Committee Act, be given early consideration for second reading.

3:00

Now, we're at 3 o'clock, and we have a standing order that says that we can't continue unless we have unanimous consent to conclude the Routine. I need unanimous consent. The Clerk has a number of tablings that are probably appropriate, so would the Assembly be prepared to give unanimous consent?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta annual report 2008-2009.

Statement by the Speaker

Private Members' Public Bills

The Speaker: Hon. members, the chair has to make some comments with respect to the procedure for the remainder of the afternoon because of some interesting requests made of the chair; that is, I need to make some comments about the order of private members' public bills.

As is often the case when session appears to be coming to an end, members become anxious about having their private members' bills considered prior to the end of session. In that vein, on November 18, 2009, the chair tabled a letter from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek dated that same day, requesting that Bill 206 receive early consideration at third reading if it passed committee stage. The letter is recorded as Sessional Paper 638/2009.

The next day, Thursday, November 19, 2009, the chair received a letter from Calgary-Varsity, which was tabled today, asking that Bill 209, which he is sponsoring, receive some consideration today.

The issue about the early consideration of private members' bills has been the subject of several Speakers' rulings over the years. I would refer members to the May 8, 2006, ruling at pages 1356 and 1357 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day and the December 1, 2003, ruling found at page 1968 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day. One feature of both rulings is the chair's request to members and House leaders to have the situation reviewed and clarified.

In 2003 the chair stated the view that "a member should not be able to request early consideration of his or her bill at the next stage until it has passed the previous stage." However, that is not the rule, for reasons that the chair will elaborate upon.

The Speaker's role in determining the order of business for private members' bills stems from Standing Order 9(1), which states that

"all items standing on the Order Paper, except Government Bills and Orders, shall be taken up according to the precedence assigned to each on the Order Paper." The issue for the chair is to determine how to interpret "precedence assigned to each."

As indicated in previous rulings, this issue precedes this Speaker. In his February 11, 1997, ruling, Speaker Schumacher outlined a procedure whereby members could request early consideration of their bills. The ruling is found at page 16 of the *Journals* for that date. As the chair believes this is such an important issue, he will repeat part of that ruling:

- (3) If a Member wants his or her Bill to be considered before the due date, then that Member must make a written request to the Speaker prior to the opening of the House the day before the Member wants the Bill to be considered. For example, if a Member wants a Bill to be considered on a Wednesday . . .

Now, when this ruling was given, private members' business was considered on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and that's the reason I refer to that.

- . . . the letter must be received by the Speaker before the opening of the House on Tuesday on which day the Chair will table the letter.

Well, we now have a situation where we have private members' on Monday, so you have to have it in by Thursday.

- (4) When a Member requests that his or her Bill be considered before its due date, the Bill will be called after debate has concluded on the Private Members' Public Bill that is then before the House or Committee of the Whole assuming that no other Bills have reached their due dates.

So in keeping with previous practices, the business for today will start with Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 206. If this bill is reported by the committee and the report is accepted by the Assembly, then the Assembly will move to third reading consideration of Bill 206 for one hour. If there is time remaining, the Assembly will resume its consideration of Bill 208 at second reading stage. Once that is completed, Bill 209 may be moved for second reading.

As the chair indicated, there is some sympathy for members who feel that their bills have been "bumped" by requests for early consideration. On December 1, 2003, the chair noted that the request for early consideration of Bill 208, which had not passed committee stage when the request for early consideration of the bill at third reading stage was made, might work a hardship on the member who was sponsoring Bill 209 at second reading. The chair – and I quote myself, I guess – noted the procedure for early consideration but stated:

- In an effort to ensure that the system is fair and equitable to all members, the chair would welcome suggestions by members and their House leaders over the winter on this issue of early consideration of private members' public bills so that a procedural policy could be put in place for the spring 2004 session, one that would be very clear at the initiation of the session.

No recommendations were forthcoming, and no changes were made despite the chair's invitation.

The chair renewed that invitation in 2006, but despite an extensive review of the standing orders since then, no changes have been made. The chair sincerely hopes that this issue will be resolved or at least considered by House leaders and members in the near future.

So back to where we are. We're going to go to Committee of the Whole in just a second for consideration of Bill 206. At the conclusion of the consideration of Bill 206 and if the report is accepted, then the Assembly will move to third reading consideration of Bill 206 for one hour. If there's time remaining, we'll then proceed to consideration of Bill 208 at second reading, and if that's completed, then we'll go to Bill 209. But at 5 o'clock we'll adjourn, of course, for motions.

Orders of the Day
Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 206
School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers)
Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I want to begin by repeating my appreciation to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for attempting to address the issue of bullying. I give her full credit because she's tried to wrestle with this issue twice, first in Bill 210, and then she took the comments that were directed towards Bill 210 and attempted to refine them further in Bill 206. Having said that, she further attempted refinement on Bill 206 with amendments, and I was grateful to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for accepting an amendment that I proposed as well.

The problem, Mr. Chair, is a problem that I have pointed out since the beginning of our discussion, that a private member's bill has no ability to ask for funding, and without funding, unfortunately, this bill is doomed to failure.

Today the Alberta School Boards Association heard the following emergent motion:

That the ASBA believes that the proposed amendments to the School Act as detailed in Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, should not be supported.

The background provided is as follows:

As of November 16, 2009, Bill 206 has passed second reading in the Legislature and is currently at the Committee of the Whole stage.

As per the ASBA's review of Bill 206, outlined in an April 29, 2009 Memorandum, the proposed amendments to the School Act detailed in Bill 206 are detrimental to the ability of school administrations to fulfill a school board's statutory duty to provide a safe and caring environment for its students and staff.

- The mandatory protocols provided by these amendments:
- do not provide principals with the discretion to progressively discipline students or take into consideration mitigating factors, especially for special needs or disabled students;
 - removes the principals' current authority to issue student suspensions, especially to immediately remove a student who threatens the safety of staff and students;
 - impacts students' rights to procedural fairness if the student fails to participate in the mandated educational measures program;
 - creates onerous, potentially unworkable tracking and reporting requirements to determine when "bullying" as defined occurs;
 - fails to require parental notification and involvement; and
 - does not provide any guidance or meaning as to what an educational measures program consists of or is meant to do.

Given the above concerns and the short timeline to passage of the Bill, the ASBA should communicate immediately with the Premier, the Minister of Education and all MLAs regarding the lack of support for the passage of Bill 206.

3:10

The vote was taken today. It was taken early on in the ASBA's AGM procedures this morning. The vote, Mr. Chair, was 97 per

cent against this particular piece of legislation, and that 97 per cent of school boards who voted represents 97.6 per cent of students.

Now, I say this with all sincerity. The hon. mover of this bill must feel that she's climbing a mountain with several pounds' worth of pack on her back. I completely understand, Mr. Chair – and, again, I hope my integrity and sincerity come through in what I am attempting to express – that the member put forward this piece of legislation with the best of intentions, but as I pointed out at several stages of discussion, the best of intentions cannot be addressed within the bill in its current state. The only way Bill 206 in a reframed manner could be accepted is if it came forward as a government bill.

What I am encouraging the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to do is to gain the confidence of all her caucus members and sponsor the bill through a government-endorsed procedure because that will solve one of the major problems associated with this, the underlying problem, and that's funding. If it comes as a government-funded bill, there is no problem because the funding will follow. But right now, without the funding for the program to which Bill 206 purports to send students, the educational measures program, without that funding you cannot have the program. The program does not currently exist. How do you send a student who has misbehaved, bullied, to a nonexistent program? Also, the funding does not exist to provide teachers' in-servicing in a nonexistent bullying program. Take it one step further, Mr. Chair. There is no funding for curriculum development at the postsecondary level for students seeking a master of education or for individuals training to be teachers' aides at our local colleges. So while the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a vision, that vision, unfortunately, is impaired by the reality that without funding this cannot go forward.

School boards were concerned on a variety of issues. I highlighted the memorandum, the emergent motion, that went forward today, but their concerns are magnified by the reality of what's happened so far with the Ministry of Education. Mr. Chair, \$80 million of educational cuts have come forward. A significant percentage of those cuts came as clawbacks from the existing school boards. School boards are concerned that because the government is projected to be cutting as much as \$300 million for the 2010 budgeting process, they'll be left with a bill for a nonexistent bullying program. Now, they're concerned about the funding, but they're also concerned about the quasi-judicial relationship that teachers and principals find themselves placed in.

Now, Mr. Chair, that alone should be sufficient; 97 per cent of locally elected, semiautonomous school board representatives, trustees, have voted almost a hundred per cent to bring this to a close. That should be sufficient. But I want to share with you an interpretation by the Calgary Association of Parents and School Councils. This comes under Critics' Concerns.

Though the spirit and intention behind this bill are indisputably positive, critics of this bill have several concerns.

The bill contains no provisions for any kind of teacher and administration training in the identification of bullying, and no anti-bullying education for students. According to Calgary-Varsity Liberal MLA . . . education programs are the only effective way to stop bullying. Calgary Police Services concur: "Focusing resources on addressing the root causes of youth crime and violence will make a significant difference in the long run."

The bill may run into trouble in relation to Bill 44, which passed this spring. Bill 44 allows parents to remove their children from any class that explicitly teaches about sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion. As much of the bullying that occurs in a school setting relates to real or imagined issues surrounding these three topics, the new potential restrictions regarding educating bullies about sexuality, sexual orientation, and religion may make

an “educational measures program” impossible. If a parent chooses to not allow their child to participate in an anti-bullying discussion because of its content, schools may have no other avenue of discipline.

Should the proposed legislation come into effect, critics are concerned that it would result in a mountain of paperwork for school administrators. They believe that administrators will have far less time to effectively administrate their schools because they will spend so much time completing reports and documentation on the smallest of issues.

I look forward to other opportunities, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to rise today and participate in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 206, School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009, brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I applaud the member for sponsoring this groundbreaking legislation that seeks to address the problem of bullying, drugs, and violence in our schools. Most importantly, Bill 206 approaches the problem of bullying in a modern context, where the Internet and gangs are part of the question.

We know full well that kids from time to time do have a tendency to pick on one another. However, there is a point where it becomes a problem: when it is unrelenting and, in some cases, threatening. In these cases, bullying can have severe repercussions for the victims. Aside from physical harm, a victim’s ability to learn is compromised, and their mental health may suffer as well. It is necessary, then, to have in place an appropriate intervention process that can identify and correct these types of situations.

It is also important, Mr. Chairman, that there be a thorough record of severe bullying cases. This valuable information will help school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and government understand the nature of severe bullying. While Bill 206 calls for each case to be specifically documented and dealt with individually, it is important to also consider the big picture for the purposes of analysis and monitoring, and this is the intention of section 7.

Section 7 would require that school boards submit a comprehensive report detailing all cases of bullying and infractions each year. Specifically, Section 7(a) states that “a board shall, within 30 days of the end of a school year, submit a report to the Minister respecting all alleged contraventions of sections 12.1 and 12.2 of which the board is aware . . . [as prescribed] under section 23.1.” These contraventions, as specified in sections 12.1 and 12.2, include possession of banned items, weapons, drug paraphernalia, for example, and bullying at school, on school buses, at school events, online or over the Internet, and any other instances reasonably expected to cause substantial and material disruption at the school. Any such instances, Mr. Chairman, will be forwarded to the board, as outlined in section 23.1, which requires that the school principal advise the board of the possible contraventions of sections 12.1 or 12.2.

3:20

The process of documenting these issues, as specified in section 23.1, is quite simple. The year-end reporting essentially involves compiling the individual reports. Considering this, we can be sure that the year-end reports represent a thorough account of bullying cases in our schools. Moreover, school boards would have ample time to compile the year-end reports as specified within the bill as it clearly states in section 7(a) that the report shall be filed within 30 days of the end of each school year. I am happy to see this amount

of time specified between the end of the school year and the date that the year-end report would be due. We do not want to burden school administrators when they are busy teaching our children, so it is appropriate that year-end reports be collected within a reasonable time frame after the conclusion of classes.

Mr. Chairman, there would be valuable information contained within these reports. These year-end reports can assist relevant government departments and agencies as well as the school board itself in assessing outcomes and possible new trends in bullying and school violence. For example, the information can offer a perspective on successful mediation by law enforcement officers as well as best practices within schools for resolving bullying situations. Additionally, taken together, these reports can offer insight into the specific cause surrounding bullying and destructive behaviour both in and out of the classroom.

Knowledge gained from the year-end reports may be used in conjunction with research on social development amongst youth to further understand the complexities that confront teachers, school administrators, and legislators alike in the field of education. Ultimately, Mr. Chairman, the increased understanding promoted by these year-end reports can help us sustain a world-class education system in Alberta that all students can be part of. I think we can all agree that no student deserves to be sidelined in education because their school has become a place of fear. Bill 206 clearly outlines a practical and reasonable framework for addressing the problem of bullying in our schools, and the provision for the year-end reports in section 7 of the bill is an important piece of that strategy.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this important piece of legislation. Today I stand in support of Bill 206 and urge all of my fellow members to do so as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate this opportunity to speak again. I just want to give a little bit of a quick historical perspective on why I’ve changed my mind about supporting this bill.

I wrote a letter to the hon. member, the proposer of this bill, and at that point I said – and it’s important to have this on the record – that while I support the desire of the MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek to see Bill 206 fast-tracked and passed into law, I hope you will give some consideration to my Bill 209 getting minimal time for debate in second reading.

An Hon. Member: What’s that got to do with it?

Mr. Chase: Mr. Chair, I’ll gladly explain what it has to do. Since this weekend, when I had an opportunity to chat – a lengthy chat, I might add – with a member of the Calgary school board and then again spoke not only with this member but also the chair, there were large holes that I had only spoken to with regard to funding, but they clarified a series of other concerns.

Mr. Chair, so far, in terms of providing this House with information, I have provided you with the Alberta School Boards Association’s 97 per cent report, I have referenced the parent councils’ concerns, and now I’d like to reference the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s concerns because they are the ones directly on the line, having to administer to the best of their ability Bill 206. The Alberta Teachers’ Association’s position on Bill 206:

The Alberta Teachers’ Association was pleased to [be] able to work

with [the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek] to address one aspect of Bill 206 that posed particular difficulty to schools in dealing with bullying. The bill, as originally worded, would have prevented principals from suspending students for bullying and so would have compromised their ability to protect victims and also ensure that appropriate measures were in place before a bully returned to school.

[The hon. member's] amendment addressed this particular issue to the Association's satisfaction.

Nonetheless, the Association continues to be concerned that the Bill as it stands continues to characterize as "bullying" actions and behaviours that are clearly criminal in nature and that should be addressed through the criminal and youth justice processes.

The Association is also concerned that the bill conflates the role of principal and peace officer. Roles should be clearly delineated so that principals and teachers, not peace officers, are making decisions concerning educational matters. Peace officers have a role in making decisions about what measures may be taken to hold bullies accountable for their actions and protect the peace when those actions violate the law.

Such clear delineation of roles does not preclude, and would actually enhance, the ability of educators to work collaboratively with peace officers, social services, health authorities and others to address the problem of bullying generally or in specific situations.

The Association appreciates [the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's] efforts to bring attention to bullying and would welcome an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to work collaboratively with government to develop approaches to bullying that more effectively address this serious problem in advance of new legislative measures being introduced.

Now, the point I'm making, Mr. Chair, is that everyone understands that bullying is a major concern in this province. Everyone understands and appreciates the efforts of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to put forward legislation to address these concerns. But the Alberta School Boards Association by a 97 per cent vote, the parent councils' considerations, the concerns that I've just raised from the Alberta Teachers' Association – these are the people directly involved with the bullies. The parents are the parents in some cases of the bullies and in some cases of the child being bullied. Their concerns are the ones that we need to be addressing. The teachers, who are on the front line, reinforced by the school boards and trustees, need to have legislation that will work on those front lines.

The confusion that the parents association, the ASBA, and the ATA all raised was the mixed roles that were being put upon teachers versus officers of the peace or the police.

Mrs. Forsyth: Peace officers.

Mr. Chase: Peace officers. Thank you. I appreciate that qualification.

With that muddying existing, there are concerns.

Now, when I began the debate on Bill 206 and throughout the debate on Bill 206, I have lauded the hon. member for her efforts, and I'm taking nothing away from those efforts. But, as I say, I believe the answer to this problem is a government bill solution.

3:30

Now, I would like to share with the hon. members a portion of an article written by Scott McKeen of the *Edmonton Journal* surrounding Alex Wedman, whose mother, Betty Wedman, was introduced last week to this House. Alex was the unfortunate young man who was bullied to the point where he committed suicide. This is some of the background that Scott McKeen noted in his November 22, 2009, article.

Bullying thrives in silence. But so does suicide. Consciously

and unconsciously we've taught our children that suicide is too taboo, too scary, to even mention.

We fear that talking about a person's suicide will inspire copy cats. If we talk about it, the thinking goes, other kids, our kids, might see it as a chance to go out in a blaze of glory.

Yet the hush perpetuates the shame and isolation. How can we expect a suicidal kid to reach out when the over-riding message from us is that suicide is too shameful to talk about?

We have come to believe a lie: That suicide is a failing of character in dysfunctional people or their families. Mental illness is still the subject of so much stigma, though depression is a near epidemic in North America.

Alberta leads the country in suicides, with 473 recorded in 2007.

The statistics are believed to be greatly under-reported for a number of reasons, including stigma.

But why does Alberta lead the country? One theory is that it might have something to do with our can-do attitude.

We are self-reliant achievers, don't you know? We pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and create wealth for ourselves and our communities.

That's a lot of pressure for anyone to handle, but especially a kid.

Now, I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is aware of the statistics. She's aware that bullying in its most extreme forms leads to not only physical scars and psychological scars but leads to death, and it was those concerns that prompted the hon. member to stand up and try and do something about it. Again, in all sincerity, I appreciate the efforts. Parents appreciate the efforts.

Mr. Denis: What are you willing to do about it?

Mr. Chase: What I am willing to do about it, hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, is make sure that a bill gets passed through this Legislature that has government support with the appropriate funding. Right now I am saying that this was a wonderful effort with the greatest intent possible, but it has failed because it lacks funding. It also, as a lawyer, has quasi-judicial muddying of roles of peace officers and teachers. I look forward to your defense of this bill, which 97 per cent of school boards this morning spoke against.

Mrs. Forsyth: And it's appalling that they don't know how to read.

Mr. Chase: I hope that was recorded in *Hansard* from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek with regard to Alberta school boards. "It's appalling that they don't know how to read." Those are our locally elected, used to be semi-autonomous representatives until 1994, when the ability to account for half of their funding through the . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just a comment that this hon. member who is bringing forward this bill has a history in this House of bringing forward motions that have come to protect child prostitutes. She has a history of being successful in terms of taking her bills and making sure that they are successful in the end. So it is a pleasure for me to rise and join debate in Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009.

Alberta has one of the greatest public education systems in the world, and part of its success is attributed to providing healthy learning environments for students. These environments help cultivate students' creativity and enable them to achieve their

potential. As a government we are taking measures to foster these productive educational environments, where students feel safe and secure.

Unfortunately, however, for some students school may not be a place where they feel comfortable and respected. In fact, it can be a distressing place due to bullying and repetitive teasing. For these students school can actually become a place of fear rather than a place of inspiration, and this is why I'm pleased to acknowledge the valuable intent of Bill 206 as well as an important provision within it. Section 12.2 of Bill 206 details the places and activities where schools will enforce a bullying ban. More specifically, section 12.2(c) enables school administrators to take actions to impede bullying at any time when it may reasonably cause a substantial and material disruption at school. This is an important clause within Bill 206 because it recognizes that bullying can be perpetrated in many different circumstances.

Some of us in this Assembly may be able to recall instances in which we've observed bullying. I'm sure we can all acknowledge that sometimes these harmful acts occur outside of institutionalized or supervised settings. However, regardless of location the acts of bullying are nonetheless harmful for the victims who bear the ridiculing or physical threats. Bullying in all its forms is a truly serious issue for our school system, whether it occurs in a school or off-site.

Mr. Chairman, parents and teachers know that even with every precaution they take, sometimes students are not within their immediate supervision, and the reality is that those individuals who bully often take advantage of these unsupervised situations. For example, it's not uncommon for some students to walk home from school. The time between leaving a school and reaching the front door of the student's home may only be a matter of minutes, but this represents an opportunity for bullying. This opportunity may allow a bully to intimidate, harass, or abuse their victim. These bullying acts can harm a child physically as well as psychologically. When these children get home, they may have temporary reprieve. But the next day they return to school, and as they walk down the hallway or sit in the classroom, they're reminded of the behaviour that they have been subjected to, often realizing that more bullying may await them.

Teachers and administrators may notice the victimized student as now disengaged or depressed. While the behaviour causing these symptoms may not be happening in the view of the teacher, they can through this legislation take appropriate measures with the administration to help the student who is being victimized. Such a possible situation exemplifies the need for a clause to ban bullying which results in substantial or material disruption.

Mr. Chairman, statistics show that those who are affected by these types of torment are sometimes reluctant to come forward out of fear or the false belief that nothing can be done. Implementing an effective course of action to deter bullying will help to empower victims. If they know that there's something that can be done, they will feel more comfortable coming forward. We want these students to understand that there are supports in place and that help is available. The consequences of inactions are sometimes severe and in any case always harmful.

One parent's testimonial, which was articulated on an antibullying website, speaks with candid conviction to this issue. The parent wrote of her regret of not acting when her child came to express her troubles from bullying. In this case the child, who could no longer withstand the constant ridiculing, took her own life. This story emphasizes how serious this issue is.

While there is no easy solution to this complex social problem, we must be vigilant in our efforts as a government to work towards

reducing bullying in our schools and in our society. This involves educating students, parents, and school administrators about the consequences of bullying and the impact it has on students' well-being and learning experiences. Students must be encouraged to speak out. Through Bill 206 and sections such as 12.2(c) we're setting in place a framework to ensure that if concerns are raised, something will be done.

3:40

Education is the foundation of a productive and prosperous society. As a component of our government's efforts to stop bullying, we are working to inform Albertans of its negative impacts by providing educational resources to build awareness. This initiative will be strengthened through antibullying legislation and will work to ensure that bullying in our school systems is not tolerated or ignored. We know that these are important measures to reducing the instances of bullying in educational settings and society overall. For Alberta students we want schools to be safe and secure learning environments.

I commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for her steadfast dedication to raising awareness on this challenging social issue. I believe that our government is well served to look at any measures we can to work towards the reduction of bullying in our school systems. Therefore, I will be voting in support of this legislation, and I do urge all my hon. colleagues to do so as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: On my list here, the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and contribute to Committee of the Whole on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. This act is being brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, and I'd like to take the time to applaud her for both the intent and wording of this valuable piece of legislation.

Mr. Chairman, as discussed in second reading, the goal of Bill 206 is to ensure the safety of both students and teachers by providing new direction for addressing cases of bullying. In addition, this legislation would require mandatory reporting of all cases of bullying and allow police officers to order mandatory court summonses in severe cases of bullying.

In order to have comprehensive antibullying legislation, there needs to be a comprehensive understanding of the issue of bullying. Mr. Chairman, this brings me to section 12.2 of the bill. This section reads:

No student shall bully another individual

- (a) in a school, on school grounds, on a school bus or at an activity sponsored or approved by a board,
- (b) by means of a school computer or the Internet accessed through a school computer, or
- (c) at any other time where such activity may reasonably be expected to cause a substantial and material disruption at school.

Mr. Chairman, within this section I find that part (b) may require some additional debate. In essence, this section addresses the growing issue of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a new phenomenon that has come about as a side effect from the information and electronic age. Simply put, cyberbullying is any bullying performed using an electronic medium. This could range from hate e-mails to website chat rooms and social media networks, such as Twitter and Facebook and MySpace and any other ones that exist out there. While it is true that cyberbullying does not result in direct physical

assault in many cases, I would argue that the effects of this type of harassment are equally as harmful.

Mr. Chairman, emotional injuries can last a lifetime and can lead to feelings of sadness and helplessness, which can contribute to an overall state of depression. In turn, these negative feelings can lead to aggression and violence. One only needs to look at the chilling examples of Columbine, Taber, and Virginia Tech to understand that violence, hate, and suffering cannot be allowed in our schools.

Bill 206 is a testament to our commitment to keeping our classrooms safe and free from bullying and intolerance. Further, section 12.2(b) recognizes that bullying has evolved with modern technology in that classrooms are no longer being confined to schools. Rather, students can learn how to interact with one another across the globe. A child in Edmonton could be instructed alongside a child in Peace River, in turn could be taught by a teacher in Red Deer. Mr. Chairman, the children in these virtual classrooms need to have the same level of protection as students learning in conventional environments. While these virtual classrooms are protected by this legislation, I feel as though cyberbullying should perhaps be addressed as if it were an extension of conventional bullying.

Bullying no longer stops when a child leaves for home. Now bullies can harass their victims in the classroom and on the playground and then continue this negative behaviour over the Internet. In addition, the Internet allows bullies to remain anonymous. Users can log on to chat rooms or post on websites using an alias, enabling them to harass their target without fear or reprisal. Unfortunately, the protection of being anonymous is not extended to the victims.

Mr. Chairman, not only are cyberbullying targets harassed by anonymous individuals, they are attacked openly in public in the view of the entire world. For example, bullies using an alias can write a harmful or threatening message on a victim's Facebook wall, which can in turn be viewed by all individual friends and peers.

In the past bullying was isolated to schoolyards and local neighbourhoods, but with the global reach of the Internet a child could be harassed by people from across the province. Section 12.2(b) recognizes this unfortunate reality and acts by placing restrictions on the use of school computers. Specifically, this bill gives teachers, principals, and school resource officers direction to help them confront bullies who engage in cyberbullying when using school property.

In turn, addressing cyberbullying at school may help to prevent cyberbullying at home as well. After all, a student who engages in cyberbullying at school is probably more likely to commit the same offence while at home. Furthermore, if school officials are given the powers proposed by Bill 206, it would enable them to address the issue at hand and, hopefully, end the harmful bullying relationship. In my mind the strength of this bill rests in the way it clearly defines bullying, thereby enabling school personnel to actively intervene and engage in cases of bullying.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the easiest and most effective way to end bullying is to get an authority figure involved. Essentially the parameters of section 12.2(b) enable authority figures to become involved in cases of cyberbullying. This section is just one example of the well-thought-out planning that went into this draft legislation, and this is commendable.

I am particularly impressed by how the inclusion of section 12.2(b) recognizes that bullying is continually evolving as a problem as technology does. Cyberbullying is simply the latest link in this evolution, but I believe it has the potential to be one of the most common forms of bullying as we move forward. I do applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for the courage and conviction it took to address such an important issue, and I thank her for the commitment she has shown to Alberta's children, youth, and students.

I just want to add, Mr. Chairman, that as chair of the Youth Secretariat for the province I had the great distinction of meeting with this year's Youth Advisory Panel for the first time this past weekend and came away quite impressed with the number of youth that have been selected from across this province to sit on the panel and provide feedback to government on policies and programs that affect youth in our province.

3:50

As I sat around that table this weekend, I realized how important this issue is. A number of the comments provided to me from the members that sit on this panel expressed real concern about the types of bullying and interactions that youth have amongst their peers and the long-term effects that they have in the lives of these individuals that are bullied. I really do applaud the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in tackling this issue.

It's really unfortunate that we have a member in this Assembly that has deemed this not too long ago to be a bill worth supporting and, because a group of people for whatever reasons they have do not want to support that, then flip-flops on the issue. Mr. Chairman, this issue is way, way, way too important to have that sort of flip-flopping happen.

It's really bothersome, Mr. Chairman, to see that type of thing. There may be challenges in implementing some of this legislation because it's new and because it's innovative. There is no doubt about that. I don't want to speak for the hon. Minister of Education, but I'm pretty sure that he's very much open, if this bill does pass, to working with school boards on how it is implemented at the board level and within the specific schools. For those reasons I would just hope that that hon. member changes his opinion.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo indicated he wanted to speak.

Mr. Chase: Yes, and he's ceded the spot to me.

The Chair: All right. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, then.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. If I correctly understand the Member for Calgary-North Hill, he would like me to flip-flop back to my original position. Now, it's interesting that the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill is a former trustee with the Calgary board of education. So quickly we forget our former allegiances and the concerns presented.

Now, to the hon. member's credit, he brought forward the modern face of bullying, cyberbullying. It is as real and it has the same emotional effect and destruction of character in a lot of ways that physical violence has. Cyberbullying is more the realm of the female than it is of the male in terms of undermining and assassinating character, but it is an important form of bullying that has to be dealt with. Unfortunately, Bill 206 comes short.

It's very important that not only the Member for Calgary-North Hill but all members read the *Hansard*. When they bring up an accusation such as I'm flip-flopping . . .

Mr. Anderson: It's pretty self-evident.

Mr. Chase: The word "self-evident" is used. When further evidence is provided which adds clarification, do we simply put our hand over our mouth, our hands over our eyes, and our hands over our ears and reject that because it's new and relevant current information, or do we stay stuck in our past commitment and go blindly ahead regardless of the consequences? Ninety-seven per cent of Alberta school

boards' representatives said that this is not the vehicle. Yet some members are so attached to this vehicle, which is now wheel-less, that they're continuing to fight for it.

Bullying is a problem beyond a doubt. Where I left off before, the point I was trying to make was that in 1994 when school boards lost the ability to collect the local portion of the education property tax, they surrendered half of their autonomy. We've had examples with this government who actually stepped in and fired school boards. We've had examples from this government where they did external audits of the Calgary board of education, much like Bill 202 was suggesting for cities, and found nothing wrong, and this was the school board that they fired. It is important that all levels of government—federal, provincial, municipal, and in this case, school boards—work together and support each other for the common good of Albertans.

I would like to return the floor to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and appreciate his giving me this opportunity to stand up for my integrity.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm honoured to stand today and participate in the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. First of all, I would like to thank the sponsor of this bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who has worked hard to bring this legislation forward.

Mr. Chairman, just the fact that we're having this conversation. I really wish that we didn't have to talk about this. I'll tell you why: the number one cause of death for young Albertans and young Canadians under the age of 44 is suicide. And not only suicide. We have 60,000 to maybe 100,000 of our young people seeking mental health services every year. Young women attempt suicide three times more often than young men. Young men complete the act of suicide three times more often than young women. Usually they try harsher methods, more violent methods. Despite what we have done to deal with mental health issues over the decades—despite what we have done—this number has not come down.

The causes of children's mental health issues are multiple and many. One of the biggest difficult times in a young person's life, especially a teenage person's life, are those vulnerable teenage years and the years leading up to those years. Working families go through difficult times. One of the most difficult times for hard-working families is what happens to the children when they leave their home. Most of the time they spend in school or in the community with their friends.

Now, bullying is an issue that is very important because school is a place where you should come to learn and grow and aspire to greater heights. But when you have to go to school and worry about whether you're going to get a black eye or get your nose broken and constantly be threatened, the last thing young people are able to do is concentrate on their studies and on the task at hand, which is to learn and to gain knowledge, when really they have to wonder what's the safest way to get home because they want to know if the bully is going to be on this route to home or that route to home or whether they can eat their lunch inside or outside safely. I believe that there has been a lot of good work to address this issue. However, I do believe that there is more work to be done.

Now, this very important bill, Mr. Chairman, would not only protect students and teachers but would also help to ensure that the schools are as safe as possible, making certain that weapons, drugs, and bullying do not have a place in our schools. In our era it was just bullying. Now we're talking about weapons and drugs.

Growing up, I confess to being bullied when I was young, but weapons and drugs weren't an issue in our school at that time. My children are teenagers in school right now, and it concerns me that my children have to possibly contend with somebody bringing a weapon to school.

Schools must be safe in order to foster an environment of learning. Bill 206 intends to enhance this safety by providing school staff, administration, and law enforcement with the tools and the ability to effectively manage situations that involve weapons, drug paraphernalia, and bullying. Specifically, I would like to address the procedures that educators and law enforcement can take when there is a contravention of this act as described in section 23.1. Mr. Chairman, it's vital that proper guidelines are established and that a procedure is in place to deal with bullying, weapons, and drug-related infractions. In the real world when our young people become adults, these are criminal acts. If anyone does this in the real world, you would be going to jail, or you would be going to court.

4:00

The first part of section 23.1 outlines the procedures for teachers to take after becoming aware of bullying. Mr. Chairman, teachers are the ones who know the students best and are often the first line of support for students. Also, they thoroughly understand how bullying can negatively affect not only particular students but an entire learning environment. Teachers know that these kinds of aggressive and threatening behaviours can render a learning environment very toxic. This bill specifies that if a teacher becomes aware that a student may be involved in bullying, the teacher must advise the principal, who, ultimately, is responsible for the environment of that whole school. This first step sets out a clear reporting procedure for notification so that teachers will know who to consult upon becoming aware of bullying situations.

In addition, this bill also gives direction for principals who are made aware of bullying. Under section 23.1 it is stated that once a principal becomes aware that a student may be involved in bullying, he or she must consult with the school board, thereby ensuring their awareness, and may at his or her discretion consult with a peace officer. This is a crucial part, Mr. Chairman. It's at their discretion. These procedures provide flexibility in handling varying bullying situations. If a bullying situation is deemed serious enough to involve law enforcement, this section permits a principal to do so.

This bill also sets out procedures for how a peace officer may go about dealing with these situations. It is clarified under section 23.1 that if the peace officer, after having been consulted by a principal, believes that the student has been involved in a bullying situation that contravenes the act, the principal and the peace officer may determine an educational measures program for the student to participate in. Mr. Chairman, this section strikes a balance that ensures school principals and boards are aware of instances of bullying while also providing them with additional tools they can use to manage a situation when it is merited. These educational measures programs can take many forms such as counselling or therapy. Presently schools are predominantly using school suspension as a means of addressing bullying behaviour.

Mr. Chairman, many teachers and educators would tell you that suspensions and expulsions may not necessarily be a suitable consequence to help the offending youth in all situations. This bill recognizes the complexity of bullying situations and provides the protocols and direction to school administration that allow them to effectively address and manage these issues. Furthermore, section 23.1 of this bill directs a principal to advise school boards of any direction that they have given. Therefore, this bill continues to involve the entire school system, from the teacher to the principal to the school resource officer and the school board.

Bill 206 works to assist schools by both providing them direction for managing bullying situations as well as providing additional tools for dealing with youths involved in committing acts of bullying. With the passage of this bill I believe that learning environments in Alberta schools will benefit. In a world where sound education can assist in economic prosperity, it's imperative that all students receive the best education possible.

Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to speak on behalf of the bully. Hurting people usually hurt people. These bullies are young people. They themselves have many issues, which may be an issue at home with a dysfunctional home environment. The person doing the bullying may have an emotional or mental health issue. Part of this is addressing getting the bully some help. After all, even the young people doing the bullying are still our children. I think we need to take a balanced approach not only to protect one group of children but also to help another group of children. I believe these measures are not here to punish the kids; we need to get them some help.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, all evidence points to the fact that those who bully when they're young end up bullying when they're older, and when they become adults, many of these bullies end up having many visits with the judicial system or the penal system. I can say first-hand that as an inner-city emergency doctor I've seen a lot of violence and the end result of a lot of violence.

Mr. Chairman, I think this will go a long way in ensuring that our educational system can be the best in the world, and I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for introducing this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 206 this afternoon. I was listening intently to many of the speakers beforehand as well as following this a little bit in the papers and some other places of note. I'll make my comments sort of based upon what people have said and what, I guess, people who are in a position of knowledge on what is happening in our school system think should be done to best handle bullying.

I appreciate the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark in that school is often a very difficult place to be, and we should do our best to not only protect children from bullying behaviours but to get the people who are bullies some of the help they may need to live better lives and become better, participating members of the community. In the words of Rodney King: can't we all get along? I think that is essentially what we're trying to do here. There's no doubt that our school system has to be part of that leadership and part of educating our youth and trying to lead them into behaviours that are most productive for our society.

On that note, I can say that the intent of this bill in trying to eliminate or, in fact, reduce bullying behaviours in the school system is an honourable one. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek should be applauded for going through the channels, for working on such a bill, for coming up with some remedies that she believes will add some more teeth, shall we say, to legislation, making bullying not a crime but something that can be followed up by police officer, parent, and teacher alike by combining a lot of resources in your community to deal with an issue that happens at your local school.

It's on that note where we look at some of the merits, and I'll continue on there. The intent of Bill 206 would be to amend the Alberta School Act to provide protections for teachers and students from those students who choose to bring a weapon or a controlled substance or other item identified by the Minister of Education onto school property. It is also meant to prohibit bullying behaviours. Bullying is quite broadly defined to mean repetitive harassment of

an individual to maintain an imbalance of power over that individual through such methods as gestures, verbal or written abuse, stealing the possessions of that individual, threats of actual physical or sexual assault to that individual, or death threats. The bill specifies that no student is to either possess a banned item or to bully another individual in a school, on school grounds, on a school bus, or at an activity sponsored or approved by a board. Use of a school computer or the Internet accessed through a school computer to bully another is also prohibited.

We can see that this legislation is tailored towards stopping the bullying at school. You know, let's face it. The education system is even broader than that in trying to stop bullying behaviour throughout one's life through the education process and making people more accountable both to themselves and to each other.

4:10

If we continue on, the balance of Bill 206 outlines the consequences for engaging in a prohibited act. Essentially, a student who is suspected of having engaged in a prohibited act may possibly be referred to what is called an educational measures program. While that term is not defined in Bill 206, the assumed intention is that such a program would educate a student on the harms that can be caused by engaging in a prohibited act and the consequences for the student in doing so. The bill states that "the board must provide for educational measures programs" – and here's where some of this stuff comes in – presumably at its own cost.

The bill further provides that the community's police officers potentially become involved in the matter and work with the school on assessing and referring a student to an educational measures program. I think that where some of the problem emerges here is: what is this educational measures program? Is it after school? Is it on weekends? Is it taught by teachers? Is it taught by principals? Is it taught by police officers? And, I guess, at the end of the day, who pays for it? That's a question.

I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has brought a decent bill to the front, but with this being one of the remedies that she provides in the bill, to refer someone to an educational measures program, she is referring to a money bill.

The Chair: The chair hesitates to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to standing orders 8(7)(a)(ii) and 8(7)(b), which state that all questions must be decided to conclude the debate on a private member's public bill which has received 120 minutes of debate in Committee of the Whole, the chair must now put the following question to conclude the debate.

[The clauses of Bill 206 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 206.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 206.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

**Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

Bill 206

**School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers)
Amendment Act, 2009**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek to move third reading of Bill 206.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill will deal with a problem that has a very human side. There is the kindergarten student who is beaten up in the schoolyard, the elementary student who is afraid to ride the school bus because they will be tormented with vicious name-calling, the junior high student who is embarrassed and ostracized when lewd photos are posted on Facebook, and the high school student who is brutally assaulted during a hazing incident. These incidents would be serious enough if they were just a one-off, Mr. Speaker, but the reality is that they are often just a piece of an organized campaign of terror, a cruel pattern of behaviour that rapidly turns the victim's life into a living hell, a cycle from one moment of anguish and fear to another.

I've talked before about some of the victims, and I want to remind my colleagues about their stories. There is the seven-year-old child who lives in my constituency that has seen a psychiatrist, and he is suicidal. There is a boy in Edmonton who committed suicide after a series of gruesome attacks, attacks that left him with injuries like an eight-centimetre blood clot in his testicles. When I hear the stories of these victims and their physical and psychological wounds, it seems like something from a conflict in a far-off land. These are the types of injuries that you expect refugees to have, and in a sad way that is what many of these children have become. Refugees in their own schools, they're forced to hide on the playground and alter their walks home. Eventually they have to flee the school and find somewhere else where they can live and learn in peace, but this often doesn't work. The bullies sometimes follow them to a new school, or a whole new set of children bully them, and it's time to stop this.

Bill 206 will go a long way to stopping the problem. It's going to ensure that each and every incident is dealt with, that we have adequate documentation when cases escalate, and that statistics are available to identify trends and allow policy-makers to act.

The second piece of this bill, as I have talked about, deals with drug paraphernalia and weapons. It's going to make it so that simple possession is illegal; no more having to prove intent. The problems of drugs, weapons, and bullying really go hand in hand, Mr. Speaker. We know that hazing incidents, especially, often involve weapons. There are hockey sticks and there are baseball bats, canoe

paddles, and all sorts of other stuff modified to commit assault, and right now it's not illegal to have one of these things at school. Why would you want to have a goalie stick with the blade cut off and holes drilled in it in your locker? We know that the reasons students do this is to commit assault, so let's stop that problem before it happens. And the same goes for drugs. Crack pipes, as far as I know, have nothing to do with the curriculum, but they are part of the problem and part of a culture that can make our schools unsafe and violent places.

I want to end by sharing yet another story by a mom. This story is just one example of the many that I've been inundated with. Her son went to a local school. He was beaten repeatedly. One day in a school class he's surrounded by five students in a corner. They are armed with a metal pipe. They threaten to shove that pipe somewhere not very nice. Fortunately, he had some training in martial arts and was able to defend himself. But our children should not have to defend themselves, Mr. Speaker. We should be defending them.

Bill 206 will defend our children and our teachers and everyone else who works in our schools from the mean-spirited behaviour of bullies, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill in third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you wish to join the debate?

Mr. Hehr: Sure. Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and continue on here in third reading. For those following along, I was cut short on my comments in Committee of the Whole, so I'll try and just get to the point where I was relatively quickly and move on from there.

I think, basically, I can agree with those comments the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has said. Our schools shouldn't be places where children go to be tormented, bullied, or the like. Oftentimes some of the things we see at school are difficult to understand. What I'm getting to is that I think the intent of her bill is fabulous. It's something we should all aspire to, and a school system is actually trying by educating its children to take the bullying out of bullies and, I guess, to protect, then, people who are being bullied and give them the internal strength to stand up for themselves and at the same point in time have the two communities come together, work together, play together, and share together in a better way in the future. I think this bill, the intent of it, would be that, to try and lead to a more productive, more helpful, more caring, more sharing society, which I essentially agree with.

4:20

While I do agree with the intent of the bill, what it comes down to, where I sort of left off, is that the bill states that the board – and I'm assuming those are the various boards around this province – must provide an educational measures program, presumably – and here's where it comes in – at its own cost. This educational measures program is where you would send the bully on whatever recommendation it is to where they can go get some, I guess, behaviour modification class, for lack of a better term, or they can learn more about how their actions are affecting another individual, whatever you may have.

But let's be clear here. This educational measures program does not exist right now in the school system. At least, that's what

individuals at various school boards are under. They recently had their meeting, where 97.6 or 97.8 or 97.4 per cent, anyway at least 97 per cent plus, said that they aren't in favour of this, and one of the reasons was that they don't currently have an educational measures program.

Mrs. Forsyth: Why not?

Mr. Hehr: Exactly. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek asks a very important question: why not? I couldn't agree with her more, that maybe this does have to come in.

But let's also make it clear, then, that this is a money bill. It's going to have an effect of having more costs associated either to a board or the provincial Legislature. If the hon. member is doing it with the intent of passing along these costs to the board, well, then that's something that, you know, the boards are having a difficult time with right now, and I think it should go back. Like the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity states, if this Legislature truly, honestly believes that this is something that is needed, some day it can be implemented. Let's rework it and send it back as a money bill. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity was pretty clear on that, supporting those intents of reworking through some of the bugs and alleviating some of these fears that the school boards have.

I think there are, honestly, also some other things at play here. There are some recommendations here. First, if a teacher or board is aware that a student may have committed a prohibited act, the board or teacher must advise the principal. Secondly, once a principal is aware that a student may have committed a prohibited act, the principal must consult the board and may consult with a police officer. The bill does not provide guidance to a principal as to when a police officer should be consulted, but it should be noted that in order for a referral to be made to an educational measures program, that decision must be jointly made by both the principal and the police officer.

Well, you know, are there provisions in the School Act? Maybe the hon. Minister of Education wants to add his comments to this as to how he sees this provision being worked on, or maybe you guys already have a plan in place on how the police officers are going to be brought in to advise the school system and set up a time that the principal can make in his day to have a weekly meeting with this police officer. It can be addressed in further going through school acts, I guess, in how schools are going to be maintained, but it doesn't seem to be something that can be easily worked out at this time without some money being put into it, let's face it. I'm assuming that most of our principals are pretty busy through the day and that this will be an additional job for them to do.

Thirdly, if a principal determines on reasonable and probable grounds that a student may have committed a prohibited act, the principal may meet and consult with the student and the student's parents and the police officer that the principal may have involved. It should be noted that the bill does not require that the student's parent or guardian be notified before a principal consults with a police officer on the matter. Well, look at this term: reasonable and probable grounds. I know we educate some of our legal practitioners on that. I know we advise our police officers on that. I hope we're going to maybe have a course for our teachers to take to know that criteria and what that criteria in law sort of means.

Fourthly, should a police officer that has been engaged believe on reasonable and probable grounds – they at least will know this – that a student has committed a prohibited act, the police officer and the principal may determine that the student participate in an educational measures program, in which event the principal must direct the student to participate. There is that educational measures

program again. Where is it to fit in the curriculum? What time is it supposed to happen? Is this after school, before school, lunch hour, weekends? Who's supervising it, who's teaching it, who's paying for it, all those things? It seems to me that those should be answered, and we shouldn't just be blindly going along here without having those questions answered. I think that's fair.

I think we bring up some valid concerns. It's not that we don't support, necessarily, that this would be a good thing for school boards to go down. It just looks like there are a lot of unanswered questions, primarily on the funding front of things. What's going to happen?

You can also look at this. There are some concerns brought up by many school boards that a legal interpretation of the bill, should it become law in its current wording, can only be given by the courts, and several potential concerns are noted. There is a concern about the implications of involving police officers and, by extension, the criminal justice system in a board's decision-making process on how to address student behavioural issues.

At one end of the spectrum, where such behaviours may not be traditionally regarded as a particular threat to other students or to operations, such involvement may tend to criminalize behaviours that have previously been effectively addressed through the school working with the students, parents, or guardians. At the other end of the spectrum, Bill 206 may introduce a response process that prevents a board from promptly addressing more serious behavioural issues, that would typically result in immediate suspension from school, in order to ensure that the offending student is withdrawn from the school environment. You see that question emerge because of the "may," "might," and "must" language in the bill that's being proposed: you must enrol in one of these programs that are going on. Significant questions may arise with respect to the capacity of administrators to apply judicial or quasi-judicial tests such as determining reasonable and probable grounds in ways that are fairer from an administrative law perspective.

Thirdly, reference to weapons and controlled substances that are tied to the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act may be problematic in terms of administrators appropriately being able to discuss this.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened with interest to my colleagues in the debate on Bill 206. What all of the speakers have in common and a view I share is that bullying and violence, whether it's actual or threatened, whether it's written or verbal or communicated electronically, are certainly an unacceptable part of our education system, have no part whatsoever in our education system. Where there is a difference of opinion, however, is whether this bill is the correct means of addressing these issues. As MLAs we don't have all of the answers. My own teaching experience is limited to university students, so I don't have any direct experience with bullying in the classroom, and we never had any weapons or drugs, to my knowledge, in our classrooms or in our hallways.

4:30

I have to rely on the information and opinions not only of my colleagues here in the Legislature but also, and perhaps more importantly, on the views and opinions of those who are presently charged with the administration of the School Act. I'm referring, in particular, to the communications that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Varsity pointed out from the Teachers' Association and the school boards. Those individuals are, certainly, most familiar with the operations of the schools as they presently exist and with the

measures that are now in place to deal with bullying and weapons and drugs in the schools. They are also in a position to determine what the implications of the present bill might be to their operations, should it be passed.

I did have a long conversation, Mr. Speaker, with my school trustee from the Calgary board of education, the largest school board in the province of Alberta, who shared with me some of the concerns that she and the other trustees from the Calgary board of education have, both from a practical and a legal standpoint, resulting from this bill.

I also have some hesitation as a result of the communication of the results of the vote this morning from the Alberta School Boards Association, which, according to my information, had voted overwhelmingly, by a percentage of 97 per cent, to oppose the bill. So with the greatest of respect for the intentions of the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Speaker, I'm not prepared to support Bill 206 on third reading. I must defer to the views of those who are charged with the administration of the School Act and with its operations and with the implications that this bill has for the conduct of their operations in Alberta schools.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to participate in third reading of Bill 206, the School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing forward this legislation. This bill would have an immense impact on the lives of many in the province. By strengthening the protection in schools from bullying, Bill 206 would ensure students and staff are even safer on school property.

While we often focus on protecting students that are being bullied, it is also important to understand that bullies are also in need of attention. To this end and in addition to protecting victims of bullying, Bill 206 works with bullies through a new tool such as the educational measures program. Specifically, Bill 206 further compels bullies to participate in such programs.

This brings me to section 23.2, which addresses what happens when a student wilfully ignores the measure that he or she has been instructed to take to help address the problems at hand. Section 23.2 states that "a student who fails to participate in an educational measures program, as directed under section 23.1, is guilty of an offence." To completely understand the wording and meaning of this section, section 23 needs to be examined in further detail.

Essentially, section 23.1 states the course of action that a principal and peace officer must take when an individual has a banned item or bullies another person on school property. In particular, subsection (4) of section 23.1 states that "the principal and the peace officer may determine an educational measures program for the student to participate in, and if such a determination is made, the principal must direct the student to participate in that program." This subsection is crucial to the understanding of section 23.2 as it may compel a student to be enrolled in an educational measures program.

Oftentimes incidents such as bullying can result in suspensions or expulsions. Bill 206 offers an alternative. Mr. Speaker, in my previous career I was never a supporter of suspensions or expulsions as this would have the youth at home by themselves or getting involved in gangs or other antisocial behaviour or even criminal activity. The alternative is an educational measures program. This is used in a broad term so that such a program can be tailored to the student's individual needs. Educational measures programs can get to the core of the behavioural issue whereas suspension may not. In fact, some would say that simply sending a student home without

any additional measures or penalties may further exacerbate the problem. When a student is sent home on a suspension or expulsion, often the parent is not there to supervise. They may be working or unable to effectively parent.

Furthermore, bullying is not limited to a school setting, so removing them from the school may not be the best way to help them control their aggressive behaviour towards others. This is the purpose of an educational measures program, to address the student's issue in a safe, supportive environment. Mr. Speaker, section 23.2 complements this initiative by compelling students to engage in these programs, which are designed to help them. This section accomplishes this through clear and concise wording. The words "fails to participate" are used. This is a strong statement, however. Failing to participate not only means actually showing up but actively participating. Just showing up is not good enough.

The goal of Bill 206 is to address the issues of bullying, and if a student ignores the program set out for them, then the problem cannot be addressed. By failing to comply with an educational measures program, the legislation is clear that the student is guilty of an offence. Mr. Speaker, 23.2 compels the offender to follow the program set out for them or face severe, life-impacting consequences. By using the phrase "guilty of an offence," there can be no question that there are consequences for not participating in the program deemed appropriate for the student. By these means the student cannot ignore the program. The reality is that the principal and the peace officer are looking out for the best interests of all their students and even the bullies.

It is essential that bullying tactics are stopped so as to prevent them from carrying on throughout the student's life. This section ensures that the measures taken to address bullying are enforced. I therefore feel as though it's integral to the overall meaning and impact of the bill. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is clear and concise, and it's important that it is given careful consideration.

Thank you again to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing such an important piece of legislation forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to further debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I noticed previously that the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity stood up and then the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, who by previous practice is a lawyer, introduced some of the concerns with regard to legal implications of the enforcement of the bill. He also made the comment that everyone in this House – I may be paraphrasing, and I hope I'm not straying too far – is concerned about bullying.

There's no doubt that bullying has no place in schools. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays noted, we need to act and we need to act immediately. It's extremely important that we do act. But the more I review Bill 206, that doesn't have any funding, that does not have an educational measures program to refer students to, this is doomed to failure.

I'm going to use the expression of putting the cart before the horse. I'm going to quote from an article published today in the *Calgary Herald* by Sarah McGinnis, the title of which is CBE Urges Boards to Speak Out against Anti-bullying Bill. We already know the results of that CBE vote. It was 97 per cent in opposition to this bill, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill indicated, lest anyone think that it's just my own interpretation of the vote.

This is what is attributed to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: "As for the educational programs to be offered bullies, [the

member] said those have to be developed in conjunction with education stakeholders before her bill – should it receive third reading – is made law.”

Mrs. Forsyth: No, I didn't say that.

Mr. Chase: Well, I'll go on. I'll read the quote, and if it's incorrect, we'll deal with that. It says, and this is in quotes: “The education program has to go into consultations with the people on the ground, the principal and teachers working with these kids. They know the types of educational programs that need to be given to these kids far better than I do.” [interjection] That's accurate. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, for recognizing the accuracy.

4:40

Mrs. Forsyth: And then I said: before it becomes law.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Okay. And then adds: before it becomes law.

The point I'm making is that this all should have been done before we're talking about the legislation. In other words, the consultation, the development of the program, the funding: all of these measures should have been in place, and then the law basically ensured that all this research and development, funded development, is now a law, and it's ready to be delivered at the school level because the educational measures programs have been developed. There will be some, I'm assuming, opportunity with funding provided for teachers to be trained and then the in-servicing of this educational measures program, which is to be developed.

The point I'm making is that all this consultation and collaboration and creation should have preceded the legislation. What we're doing is saying: “Okay. Yes. We still have to do this, we still have to do that, and we still have to do the other thing before it becomes law. But, you know, I'm going to be out there, and I'm going to consult. I'm going to take all these necessary measures.” My point is that these necessary measures should have been taken beforehand so that this thing could quickly get passed into law. Without those measures being taken, we're still in this twilight zone of uncreated programs.

Now, I just want to contrast that with the manner in which the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek approached the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force. To her credit she and her task force toured the entire province. She gave up days of her life. She was so thorough with the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force that it met twice in Calgary.

I had an opportunity at both meetings, the University of Calgary and at a hotel approximately on 19th Street and 16th Avenue, that used to be called the Crossroads – I forget what the name of it is now – to talk about the importance of school resource officers and the need to have school resource officers involved in creating relationships with kids so that the perception of peace officers was enhanced. Beyond a doubt, having resource officers in the schools would definitely be an asset with regard to bullying because you'd have both sides of the matter. You'd have the principal enforcing the School Act, and you would have the resource officer, with considerably greater availability, dealing with the Criminal Code issues, so it would be a partnership. But that has not happened. We're saying that will come at some undetermined point in the future. I want this thing to go through successfully, with funding and with consultation and collaboration. The faster we get it right, the better.

Now, further on in Sarah McGinnis's article it says, “Calgary-Varsity Liberal MLA . . . also presented an amendment calling for principals to take action if, in their opinion, bullying is taking place.”

Like the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, I want action. I want it to take place. I don't want it to be may. I want the action to be must. But the action has to be based on a premise that is supported. There has to be a bullying program. There has to be funding for teacher in-service. There has to be curriculum development at the university.

The quote that's attributed to me, which is accurate, is: “Without funding to create a bullying curriculum, to provide teacher in-servicing and curriculum instruction courses at the education faculty for student teachers, nothing will change.” It's not going to change unless we have some active programming with in-servicing and curriculum instruction to implement the program. Right now we have some potential rules that could work towards improving the current state of bullying, but we've got no program, and we've got no funding for the program.

The article goes on to say, “Aside from these changes, the proposed legislation still does not take into account the anti-bullying efforts currently in place in Alberta schools, or assess how well they are working.” The background information is attributed to Lynn Ferguson. “Bullying is an important issue to be addressed in our schools,” said Ferguson. We all agree. Everybody agrees that we have to address bullying. Then she goes on to say, as quoted, “We have many programs within the CBE to address bullying in a much more preventive manner.”

Basically, what Trustee Ferguson is saying is that we don't have to reinvent the wheel, but we have to consult, we have to collaborate, and we have to evaluate what we currently have and use that as the building blocks, as the starting position. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek noted, we have to do that consultation. I'm not suggesting, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, that it's too late to do that. I agree that it has to be done. I just believe that it would have been better done up front, before bringing in the legislation that lacks the tools or the funding to see the process through.

I am very interested in a bullying bill succeeding. It's absolutely necessary. It is, literally, as we have discussed, a matter between life and death. But when it actually gets into law, let's have it be the best possible bill it can be. Let's have teachers cognizant of bullying aspects that were sort of subtly flying under the radar. Maybe they hadn't realized that there was cyberbullying taking place at home.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill 206. I want to applaud the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I don't think there is anyone in this House who has done more, who has spent more time working on initiatives that work to protect our children, whether it be from bullying or preventing child exploitation or combating child pornography. This hon. member, I think, deserves the thanks of this House for all of her work in this area.

I personally want to thank her. I have four little boys. One of them is now in public school, and three more are closely following behind. I have to say that as a parent it means a lot to me that this House is considering this bill. I just believe that as parents we should never have to be put in a position where instead of worrying about whether our children are learning about, you know, math, science, language arts, et cetera, we're worrying about bullying, drugs, weapons, violence, and all those things that are sometimes, unfortunately, a part of our schools at this time.

I would suggest that this is a bill that does need to be passed. We can't wait any longer. I don't want to berate, by any means, the Member for Calgary-Varsity for his comments today. It's a good debate to have. It's a good thing to talk about in this Legislature.

But I would say that it is very last minute. My view is that with something coming at this late stage, with this type of last-minute opposition to a bill that is so needed – parents agree that it's needed. Most, if not all, of the teachers that I've spoken to have said that it's needed. I don't know what the political agenda could possibly be from these people that they would come in at the last second and try to scuttle this very important bill. At the end of the day, as politicians and as representatives of the people, the parents and kids that we represent, I don't think that there is any good excuse to not pass this bill as is.

I think that we might need to make some changes in the future. Perhaps we will, but the content of the bill is solid. It addresses a need that is there and problems that exist today, and I truly feel that it would be a big mistake to once again delay passage of this bill. If there were issues that needed to be brought up, they should have been brought up previously, sometime during this year, not at the last second, right before this bill is about to hopefully be passed.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I think we all know the tragic stories that have happened because of bullying in our schools. I think of Columbine. I think of Taber. I think that in both those cases there was lots of proof that the shooters, the people that performed these heinous acts, were bullied extensively for long periods of time prior to that. It is a terrible thing for a child to have to undergo.

Unfortunately, children, probably because they don't have that filter quite built in yet and don't quite understand the consequences of their actions, sometimes can be very, very cruel. Sometimes totally unknowingly they can be cruel, and that is why it's so important, as many of the hon. members have said today, to educate our kids at home as parents. That's the first line of defence. We need to understand what our kids are doing online so that not only are we protecting them from bullying, but we are making sure that they never, ever participate in bullying, because a lot of kids do so without understanding the consequences of their actions. As parents and as teachers we need to help them understand those consequences. I believe that this bill does that. We cannot continue to cater to the lowest common denominator in our schools. Our schools need to be free from weapons, bullying, and drugs, and we need to do everything that we can to make sure that that is the case.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do want to again say that I do not feel that we need to wait another minute before voting on this bill and, hopefully, passing it. I think it would be a big mistake to delay it any longer. Our children who are in school right now, at this moment, are waiting for us to pass this bill. I think many teachers and parents are waiting for it, so I would ask every member of this House to make the decision to start toward a final solution, a final successful outcome on this issue by passing this bill into law at this time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: I would like to congratulate and thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for all the hard work she has done on this bill. All the spirit and intent behind this bill are indisputably positive. There are some issues which arose with the passing of the bill. We all know that bullying is a serious problem, and 15 per cent of students in every school are vicious targets of daily physical and emotional assaults. It is a big problem. Only 4 per cent of students report the bullying.

This bill alone will not change the pervasive hidden nature of

bullying. Almost 80 per cent of every school community is made up of a silent majority of students, and these students are the eyes and ears of the school. They know what is going on in the locker rooms, the bus, the gym, and the hallways and on the weekends. These are very caring students who are very capable of dealing with normal day-to-day conflict, but when it escalates into bullying, these students become almost debilitated. Much like adults in the community they are fearful of making the situation worse, fearful of retaliation, fearful of being seen as a rat, and fearful that other adults will not take it seriously. Bill 206 is going to do nothing to dispel this fear. Education and support will.

This bill may run into trouble in relation to Bill 44, which was passed this spring. Bill 44 allows parents to remove their children from any class that explicitly teaches about sexuality, sexual orientation, or religion. As much of the bullying that occurs in the school setting relates to real or imagined issues surrounding these topics, the new potential restrictions regarding educating bullies about sexuality, sexual orientation, and religion may make educational measures programs impossible. So if parents choose to not allow their children to participate in antibullying discussion because of its contents, the school may have no other avenue of discipline.

Should the proposed legislation come into effect, critics are concerned that it will result in a mountain of paperwork for school administrators. They believe that administrators will have far less time to effectively administrate their school because they will spend so much time completing reports and documentation on the smallest issue. According to the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, the intent of this legislation is not to create paperwork. She believes that there is currently lots of inefficiency when dealing with assault and violence cases because police reports often lack proper documentation. The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek hopes that mandating accurate reporting from all these stages will decrease the workload at the back end. She urged that the paperwork process will not be particularly onerous or bureaucratic, just accurate and adequate.

The problem is coming with the funding part of it. It's a good bill; there is no doubt. You know, I congratulate the member. I thank her for all the hard work she has done. According to the Alberta School Boards Association at their fall general meeting, they said:

The mandatory protocols provided by these amendments:

- do not provide principals with the discretion to progressively discipline students or take into consideration mitigating factors, especially for special needs or disabled students;
- removes the principals' current authority to issue student suspensions, especially to immediately remove a student who threatens the safety of staff and students;
- impacts students' rights to procedural fairness if the student fails to participate in the mandated educational measures program;
- creates onerous, potentially unworkable tracking and reporting requirements to determine when "bullying" as defined occurs;
- fails to require parental notification and involvement; and
- does not provide any guidance or meaning as to what an educational measures program consists of or is meant to do.

Given the above concerns and the short time to pass the bill . . .

An Hon. Member: Let's have a vote.

Mr. Kang: Well, I think we should look into what exactly an educational measures program is. Are these programs already in place? For school boards that do not currently have these programs,

where is the funding going to come from? Do these programs have to be expanded if the legislation passes? What if the peace officer and the principal disagree? Who has the authority? Does this section mean that a principal alone cannot determine whether the student must take part in an educational measures program? So what is the motivation behind requiring the involvement of a peace officer in these infractions, and should there be a peace officer . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, I hesitate to interrupt. It's 5 o'clock. The matter of Bill 206 has ended for today.

We'll go on to the next item.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Seniors' Property Taxes

518. Mr. Weadick moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider exempting seniors from paying the education portion of property taxes.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today on the Monday towards the end of this session. Private members' business is that unique opportunity where we as private members get to come forward with ideas or recommendations from our communities that represent the fabric and the fibre of our communities. It's a real pleasure for me to rise today on an issue that has been brought to me many times in my community and that I feel is very important. I rise to open debate on Motion 518.

Mr. Speaker, this motion proposes that the government consider exempting seniors from having to pay education property taxes. Now, when I brought this idea forward over a year ago, we hadn't seen the downturn in the economy. Things were humming along quite nicely in Alberta. Since then we have seen some impact, so I am going to preface my opening remarks by saying that I believe that if we bring this in – I'm hoping everyone will support it – we bring it in at the time when we're back in the black and we've moved the province forward through this recessionary time and we're again showing the kind of surpluses within our province.

Alberta's seniors' community has a very, very strong and proud history in this province. This motion is the result of many discussions with seniors and seniors' organizations in Lethbridge, and I wanted to make a special note of two of those, Mr. Speaker. Lethbridge Senior Citizens Organization represents about 4,000 people in Lethbridge. Nord-Bridge seniors' centre has, I believe, around 2,000 members. These are organizations that work very, very hard night and day to represent and provide services to the seniors in our community. They have met with me and talked to me about how important it is to try to help seniors stay in their own homes.

Our seniors today have experienced a great deal of change in the past few years. Many of our seniors are facing financial hardship today, and I believe this deserves our attention. Mr. Speaker, impacts from the markets as they went down reduced returns on our seniors' investments, and fixed incomes have created significant challenges for the seniors in our communities. As Alberta seniors continue to enrich our communities as our parents and our grandparents, as our neighbours and so forth, it is timely that we look at ways to ensure that our Alberta seniors are able to make the most of their retirement years.

Seniors are also some of our most active and valuable volunteers. They help maintain the fabulous quality of life we enjoy in Alberta,

Mr. Speaker, and we need to help them stay in their own homes. Seventy-one per cent of Alberta's seniors live in their own homes. I can honestly tell you that home is where the heart is, and it's where the heart is for our seniors. I don't want to see our seniors have to leave their own homes due to financial hardship. Motion 518 is aimed at helping alleviate the financial pressures that our senior homeowners are facing. This is about fairness to our seniors. Living in lodges, they do not pay property taxes, so this would be an opportunity to level the playing field.

As the hon. members likely know, property taxes have been a source of education funding since Alberta became a province in 1905. While municipalities are currently in control of their property tax structure and assessment, the province sets its requirement for collecting property tax revenue for education in terms of amounts deposited into the Alberta school foundation. Because of their ability to provide a large and stable resource for education, property taxes have helped ensure that young Albertans receive a quality education and are prepared to lead the province as our previous generations have so capably done.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, over time the general revenue fund has provided an increasing portion of education funding. Over the past 16 years education property taxes themselves have been either reduced or frozen and are now 40 per cent lower than they were in 1993. Currently about 21 per cent of education spending is funded by the education property tax while the remainder comes from general revenue. Although it has been suggested that the education portion of property taxes be abolished altogether, Motion 518 simply proposes we alleviate the burden on our seniors, who in many cases need it the most, Mr. Speaker.

As baby boomers continue to age, Alberta is currently seeing a rapid shift in our seniors' demographics. Seniors now make up just over 10 per cent of our total population, but it's estimated that in the next 20 years that will grow to 20 per cent of our population. This accounts for a sector of the population that is growing at a faster rate than any other in Alberta, and we are committed to helping them maintain the quality of life they deserve. Mr. Speaker, this means helping our seniors age in place. Seniors should be able to remain at home in the communities they know and love. We have committed to this principle through our continuing care strategy. Part of this is helping seniors with home care when they're able to remain at home, alleviating the pressure on seniors' facilities. We must help seniors to age in the right place, and for many of our seniors that right place is right in their own homes.

Although seniors are by no means the only group facing financial challenges due to the high cost of living and of maintaining their properties, they certainly share some unique challenges, including potential expenses for medical assistance and services. By eliminating this portion of the property taxes for seniors, we can ensure that our senior homeowners can retain some extra money, helping them remain in their homes longer and maintain a suitable quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members to join me in supporting Motion 518 in an effort to address the financial pressure of some of our most valuable friends, parents, and grandparents: our seniors. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I speak in favour of Motion 518. What Motion 518 will cause to happen is finally the promise that Premier Klein made back in 1994, 15 years ago, that when we were back in a position of having the debt paid off – well, of course, he didn't anticipate that we were going to go back into debt again. That being said, the promise was made to seniors 15 years ago that the

education portion of the property tax, that they're currently suffering, would finally be removed as it was prior to the harsh treatment they received along with every other member of society and social service back in the 1990s.

This is finally providing that promise. It may be 15 years late, and a number of fixed-income seniors may have had to move from their current dwellings into either continuing care or long-term care, but the notion of keeping seniors in place and aging in place is absolutely wonderful. It's not only ethically and morally defensible, but from an economic standpoint if we can keep a senior in their home with some visiting nurse, whether it be the old-style VON, for example, or through support from the health regions, this is wonderful.

Now, there are programs that currently exist which would make Motion 518 realizable when it comes to aging in place. For example, the Meals on Wheels program is now approaching its 43rd year. It started out operating out of church basements, and it has expanded to deal with the ever-increasing aging population, of which the Member for Lethbridge-East, being a little younger than myself—I can truly appreciate that we're part of that generation, the baby boomers, who are certainly soon going to be requiring that support.

Meals on Wheels provides a series of supports. It not only delivers meals; it delivers the opportunity for seniors to actually do a little bit of stockpiling if they have sufficient independence to be able to warm up their own foods. For those who don't have that type of independence or are nervous about cooking, they can provide the warmed meals right there on the spot.

5:10

Now, to the government's credit they have provided grants. I would suggest that within the last five years, I think, the total of grants for Meals on Wheels is approaching approximately \$6 million, and I stand to be corrected if I've lowballed that amount. But I know that Meals on Wheels has currently purchased a large property which would suit their purpose, but they have not sufficient funding to have the kitchens developed in this large warehouse that was once a sports store. Alderman John Mar has recommended to his city council aldermen that they consider providing some millions of dollars of support in terms of bridge funding so that if that facility isn't actually going to be where the new Meals on Wheels is set up, they could at least either use the money that they've accumulated from the acquisition of the property to purchase another property or use the money that Alderman Mar has suggested to provide the equipment for the existing facility.

Bringing the Meals on Wheels out of their current small location on Macleod Trail and moving it further to the northeast would be of great aid to what Motion 518 from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West is proposing because, obviously, in order to keep seniors in their homes, they're going to need supports. When you consider the economic argument of having a senior take up an acute-care bed at a cost of \$1,900 a day, think of how much farther and how much more humanely we could deal with seniors by supporting programs like Meals on Wheels, supporting programs of visiting home care, visiting services, for example, for cleaning and so on.

Now, the unfortunate part for a senior who lives in the inner city, because at that point it might have been sort of a suburban circumstance when they first bought their home for under \$10,000, is that the property taxes are absolutely undermining their quality of life, yet they're afraid of the costs associated with a continuing care facility, where they're nickel and dimed for every piece of toilet paper, for every Depend, for every kind of service that they need as opposed to the long-term care potential. The hon. Member for

Lethbridge-East has brought up so many questions over the years about the importance of aging in place, and there's no better place within the possibilities of living at home.

I lost my mother two years ago January. My dad had tried very much to accommodate the aging-in-place scenario. My dad, incidentally, is 86. He did everything in his power to keep my mom in that place on 37th Avenue S.W., as much as he could. Then my dad's own well-being was starting to suffer after he had done as much as he could. I helped, my brother helped, my sister helped, our spouses helped, but it was getting to the point where that aging in the house could no longer take place. At that point, regrettably, father sought out some care facility. To their credit, Cedars Villa did the best they could until, unfortunately, my mother passed away.

Given the fact that so many of us are in that sort of squeeze generation, where we have grandchildren, on the one hand, and aging parents, on the other, anything that can be done to support our parents—as I noted, three years from this past Sunday I'm going to be at that pensionable circumstance, and I'd like to think that there was support for me. Mind you, I'm fortunate because I have the benefit of a teacher's pension, and I will have the benefit at the point that I retire of having the allowance that's provided for retiring MLAs. But the majority of fixed-income seniors don't have those benefits. As I say, their properties, while taxed highly, don't have the actual value. It's their location, not their physical structure, that accounts for the cost, and they don't have the money to fix it up. We do have little programs like Snow Angels and so on to assist them, but if Motion 518 goes from the initial stage that's being proposed and actually turns into law, then seniors are going to benefit.

I thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for finally keeping Premier Klein's promise, 15 years late, but for those seniors who still can benefit from it, better late than never.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to address Motion 518, and I want to commend the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West—I would never want to call you the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East—for bringing this forward because I know where that pressure point is coming from. I understand that seniors are very, very vulnerable to changes in the economic climate because they are on fixed incomes, and they're very vulnerable to changes in taxation because they are on fixed incomes. I don't in any way with my comments here today want to undermine the very serious issues that seniors, especially today's seniors, are dealing with in regard to increasing costs of living and fixed incomes, even decreasing incomes if you take into account the problems in the stock market of late.

I don't think that solving this issue by essentially exempting them from property tax is the right move going forward. I think that education, the education of our youth, the education of children, is important to society as a whole, not just to the parents who have their kids in school, not just to nonseniors. It's important to seniors that our children are properly educated and that there is sufficient funding for our public schools to appropriately educate our kids. I don't think that it's fair to exempt them from education taxes.

However, having said that, realizing the pressure that they're under—you know, there's a book that I read last year. No, it would have been two years ago, during the summer. It is called *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey, a very good book. I suggest that if you haven't read it, if anybody in the House hasn't read it, by all means take a look at it. It's very, very profound advice and a very good read. One of the seven habits that he talks

about in that book is synergy. He talks about how we often think of things in society and debates and issues in society as win-lose, how there's always a winner and there's always a loser. So we either tax seniors through property taxes, and then they're the loser, or we don't, and they're the winner. There are a hundred different examples of that that we see every day.

What synergy means is that you find win-win situations or win-win-win situations. There are ways, there are solutions that are out there that allow everybody to win if we're willing to work together and be innovative and get away from the status quo that sometimes we as policy-makers or as people in general fall into.

5:20

I hope that maybe we can find a more synergistic way to deal with this problem. I think everyone in this House understands fully the need to assist our seniors with the escalating costs that they're facing. We also see the need to continue to have property taxes or school education portions of the property taxes paid for the benefit of our kids, for the benefit of schools and education.

Is there a solution? Well, one of the solutions that I think many people in this party have been talking about for some time – I know the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, who's not here today, has done a lot of work on this issue – and others believe we might want look at is something like the program they have in British Columbia where they allow seniors to defer their property taxes as a lien, basically, against their home. In other words, they don't pay the property taxes to the government. That amount that they owe the government in that year: they still owe the government that amount, but it is placed as a lien against the title of their home so that when they sell the home or they pass on and dispose of the home, that asset, to their heirs, the government then collects at that time the outstanding lien, the outstanding property taxes that were due on that home.

It's a fascinating program to look at because I think it accomplishes the synergy that I was talking about. It's a cost-neutral program for the government. They still get the property taxes for education. They might, for the first little bit, have to wait a little longer for it, but it's also cost-neutral in that there is a very respectable rate of interest. It's not too much, but it's enough to cover the costs of inflation and of administering the program. It is cost-neutral to government, so they can continue to make the investments in education that are needed. At the same time, it allows seniors to defer, in some cases, hundreds of dollars in property taxes that they would have otherwise had to pay. They still do have to pay those taxes. It's just that it's when they sell their home or their home is disposed of upon their passing away.

It's a win-win situation there. Of course, by lowering the property tax for them, by essentially allowing them to go several decades in their senior years without paying their property taxes if they so choose – it's a totally optional program, obviously – it frees up a lot of income for them or takes away an expense, I guess you could say. That makes a big, big difference for seniors, especially when housing prices escalate and property taxes, of course, escalate with those housing prices. My understanding of the B.C. program is that it doesn't just apply to the education portion of property taxes, which we've frozen anyway as far as my understanding is right now in Alberta; it also applies to their entire property taxes.

It really is, I think, a win-win scenario for all people involved, especially seniors. I hope that instead of looking at a win-lose proposition that we should have seniors' education portion of property taxes or we should cut those, maybe we should look at a way that all sides can benefit and we can get the same benefits as a

society that we do now from payment of those education property taxes.

Again, I admire and thank the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. It addresses a very key and important issue that seniors are dealing with right now. Although I will be voting against this specific motion, I think that the debate and discussion that he has caused by bringing this motion forward was worth while.

I appreciate the House's attention while I spoke of this. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to commend the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing this forward. I have a large number of seniors in my constituency, and as was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-*Varsity*, my constituency is primarily made up of what you would call inner-city neighborhoods now that 50 years ago, when many of the houses were built, were what would typically be known as suburban communities. Particularly over the last, say, decade those properties have seen exponential increases in their property taxes. When I was door-knocking during the campaign, and when I go around and talk to seniors in my constituency, a number of them brought this particular issue up as a huge concern for them as to how they were going to make ends meet being on a fixed income and seeing these exponential year-over-year increases on their property.

There's no doubt that living in these communities has a distinct advantage and that many of these properties are sought after because of their close proximity to downtown, Mr. Speaker. I know that to get from my place to downtown even in rush hour only takes me about eight to 10 minutes, and that's something that we put a premium on, but that's done a lot to increase the property values in the area, and many of the seniors just can't, with their current financial situations, deal with this. So I do commend the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing this forward because it does recognize a huge issue in my constituency.

I want to also applaud the comments of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere because as I remember going around and talking to seniors during the election campaign over a year and a half ago, it kind of dawned on me that the education portion of the property tax was a tax base where I thought that the government could use some creativity to try to help seniors a little bit better with their financial picture, particularly those that are really struggling with exponential cost increases on their property tax bills. One of the things that I know was discussed in talking with seniors in my area was the thought of: well, if you're going to collect the tax revenue, why isn't it dedicated specifically towards seniors' programs instead of education, or why don't you just cut the tax altogether?

Then, as the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere indicated earlier in his comments, the B.C. government has its own model of how they provide some relief to seniors that are in these difficult positions. Not only do they talk about the education portion of the property tax but the whole entire aspect of property taxes. So these are all good discussions that I think are important to have.

Obviously, as the demographics in our province shift and we have more and more seniors, the programs and benefits that are offered to seniors are going to come under considerable financial constraints, so the thought of dedicating that tax revenue specifically to seniors' programming such as pharmaceuticals or assisted living or long-term care is also another option.

On the other hand, there was a lot of mention leading up to the last election about what to do with this portion of the property tax. I

know the mayor from Calgary had a certain proposal out there as to how the province should forgive this area of property taxes and hand it over to municipalities. Again, I believe that that's probably not needed as our province, our government, has provided municipalities an unprecedented amount of money through the municipal sustainability initiative.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that this is an area where I think we can do some considerable work. I certainly will be supporting this motion because I think it would go to assist those seniors in my area that are just having a hard time in paying their financial obligations. I know that when I get my property tax bills every month, I shake my head. I know that I have to pay it, but it's a tough pill to swallow, Mr. Speaker. I can just imagine what it's like to have lived in those communities your whole, entire life, raise your family and live in that house, and feel like you might have to move out because the property taxes are just too high for you to meet.

5:30

That being said, obviously education is something that's a priority of our government. It's certainly key to our economic recovery moving forward. I don't want this to be construed as the government not supporting education. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that with the funding framework that we have in education today, this money is collected and is put into general revenue. I know that there are some technicalities amongst that, but I believe that the education portion of the property tax – and I can't remember if this is an exact number – only pays for about 20 per cent of the money that we spend on education anyway, and about 80 per cent of it, in fact, comes from general revenue.

The other fact is that it doesn't matter whether you indicate on your property tax bill or your census whether you support the public system or the separate system. The funding flow is based on the students that are enrolled. In fact, I know of many examples where, you know, someone has indicated on their census that they support the separate school system. They have one child in the separate school system, another in the public, and in fact that tax money, that public money, still flows to the appropriate school board where that child is getting their education. Really, this issue around the education portion of the property tax is not really linked to any sort of education funding, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to make it clear, in supporting this motion, that I still strongly support the commitment that this government has made in making education a priority in this province. I believe that on a per capita basis, right from K to our postsecondary institutions, we do provide some of the largest funding blocks in all of Canada.

With that, Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a motion that would go a long way to help the seniors in my area. If not implemented, I would at least urge the government and the minister – I see the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports there, who's been a great advocate for seniors; I know the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has been a huge advocate for seniors and chairs our seniors advisory panel – to look at some innovative ways that might assist seniors, whether it's keeping the tax in place and dedicating it specifically to seniors' programming or whether it's a deferral program, from the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, or whether the government just has that revenue that it could forgo by getting rid of the tax altogether.

I know that the Member for Lethbridge-West mentioned at the beginning of his remarks that the financial picture in this province has certainly changed greatly over the last year, from where it looked like, you know, this revenue might be something that the province could forgo. That might not be an option, Mr. Speaker, but I think that the issue and the intent behind the Member for

Lethbridge-West was to really help those seniors that have built our communities, that still want to live in our communities continue to be contributing members by living in their own homes.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm open to listening to debate from other members.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The chair received notes indicating those who want to speak here: the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the Member for Strathcona, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Any others?

Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege to rise and talk on Motion 518, the education property tax exemption for seniors. I'd like to start by thanking the Member for Lethbridge-West for making this motion. I do recognize that the intent of the motion is really on noble grounds in that many of our seniors, in particular, right now are having a difficult time making ends meet. This would serve to reduce some of the expenditures that some of those seniors are facing at this time.

That being said, I do look at things in an overall picture. Education is very important to our province, very important to most people, including most seniors, and they would recognize the need for some collection of taxation to go towards the provision of a publicly funded education system. So it's definitely a bill that has pluses and minuses.

I must say that my comments are very similar to those of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere. I want to point that out because it's rare that I find myself at times in this Legislature echoing the comments of the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, but on this, essentially, my comments are on all fours with him.

Right now we could tailor this legislation better than the way it is currently crafted. There are many seniors in our province who have done very well over the last number of years and who are able to contribute to the running of the public education of our youth. Accordingly, I think some of the models could be, I guess, switched a little bit to be targeted towards more lower income seniors, people who are having a more difficult time, maybe extending limits of where currently the support needs are. You know, some seniors, who are extremely wealthy, I think could and should continue to pay the tax.

I really like the idea of possibly deferring these taxes as in the B.C. models. Couldn't the Public Affairs Bureau, when they're done with advertising that rolling brownouts may occur, get on the "wouldn't it be nice?" sort of refrain that you hear on TV, where they're selling those deferred mortgage payments? We can roll out that advertisement to our seniors that they don't have to pay their education property taxes for a number of years, that they can essentially be deferred for a long time, and that they're paid back when they eventually leave their homes. I think those are much better ways to run a tax system. I think they're more targeted than an outright, blanket revision of seniors from paying into the system, shall we say.

Like I said, I support the intent of Motion 518, which is to assist seniors who are being squeezed by fixed incomes and rising costs, but those people whom we should help are those people who are truly on fixed incomes who are being squeezed. Some seniors may be on fixed incomes. However, they're not necessarily under the definition of being squeezed.

In conclusion, again I'd like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for recognizing that many seniors are out there in a difficult time and for bringing this motion forward to highlight that fact.

However, I think there are just better ways, both within our tax system and in the way we've set up things, that are available in other jurisdictions, like B.C. and others, that we could learn from.

I thank you very much for allowing me speak on this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A quality education system benefits everyone. Just as the Member for Calgary-Buffalo suggested, this bill has pluses and this bill has minuses. Alberta students become our future doctors, engineers, teachers, tradespeople, police officers. They perform valuable roles in our society, and their roles include caring for and serving our seniors. All Alberta property owners support the system by paying the education portion of their property taxes. Currently there are almost 400,000 seniors in this province, with about 70 per cent owning their own homes and paying property taxes. We do have the education property tax assistance program for seniors to help senior homeowners with their property taxes.

For the 2008 tax year approximately 72,000 seniors' households benefited from the program with an average rebate of \$85. In addition, municipalities such as Edmonton, Strathcona county, St. Albert, Brooks, and Grande Prairie have rebate programs to help with property taxes for low-income seniors. Calgary also has a program to waive increases to municipal property taxes for low-income homeowners.

5:40

We have to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that our population is aging. Within 20 years about 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior. With the focus on keeping our assistance for seniors sustainable, which the Demographic Planning Commission heard is important to Albertans, we need to ensure we continue to assist those seniors who are most in need. It's also important to keep in mind the full picture of government assistance for seniors and not just look at one program.

Across all ministries this government has budgeted more than \$2.5 billion to seniors alone this year through income supplements and assistance with a variety of expenses, including prescription drugs, long-term care, housing, dental work, special needs, and the aids to daily living program as well as eyeglasses. Together these programs and benefits provide seniors in Alberta with one of the most comprehensive benefit packages in the country. These programs are essential in relieving the burden on low-income seniors.

With the current level of assistance available to seniors combined with the benefits of receiving quality and essential services from Albertans educated in our schools, I am not supportive of Motion 518 at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to commend the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing forward this motion. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and add to the debate on Motion 518, which urges the government to consider exempting seniors from paying the education portion of property taxes.

There's a long history of funding education in Alberta, and property tax has been a source of this education funding since 1905. As many of you are already aware, the Alberta school foundation

fund was established in '94. Property tax revenue for education is collected from municipalities four times a year and is deposited in the ASFF for reallocation to school boards. The education property tax funds about 21 per cent of education expenditures, not including capital, while the remainder comes out of general revenues. Currently, in '09, property assessed at \$400,000 has an annual education property tax of \$1,356 for the same year, or \$339 per \$100,000 of the assessed value.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that education property tax has been lowered or frozen every year for the past 16 years. Reductions for 2009 and 2008 were 16 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. Further, I believe you must consider the assistance that's already been put in place for seniors under the education property tax assistance for seniors program, already in place since 2004. The program is not based on income. It protects all seniors, 65 and homeowners, from increases in the education property tax by providing a refund. In 2006 nearly all seniors in Alberta received some income from government transfer payments.

I think it's also important that we examine the demographics of our seniors population in this province. In 1972 there were a total of 123,000 seniors compared to 361,000 in '07, a nearly 300 per cent increase compared to a 200 per cent increase in the population overall. By 2031 it's projected there will be more than 880,000 seniors in Alberta, amounting to 20 per cent of the total population.

Most seniors live in private households. In 2006 about 71 per cent of seniors in Alberta lived in homes which they owned. Of the seniors that owned homes, 20 per cent had a mortgage; the remaining 80 per cent had no mortgage. Such an amendment would exempt seniors from the education property tax and would help senior homeowners who depend on fixed incomes. With additional income some seniors could potentially keep their homes longer, aging in place, and as such it is possible to improve the quality of life of senior homeowners.

Mr. Speaker, everyone benefits from and should support education in their communities. Many seniors are grandparents, and it may be justified that they are supporting the educational well-being of children in Alberta. Other demographics could also benefit from not having to pay the education property tax on a needs-based justification. Essentially, since 2004 seniors have been protected from increases in the education property tax. I think the ideas that were discussed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere earlier definitely have merit. We need to do something to keep our seniors in their own homes.

Mr. Speaker, there is merit to both sides of the argument. Motion 518 could potentially help seniors who are on fixed incomes. At the same time, we do have programs in place to support our aging population with their needs. I think it's an important dialogue. I look forward to continued discussion on this issue and will watch with interest further debate on Motion 518.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and join the discussion on Motion 518, which calls for exempting seniors from paying the education portion of their property tax. Our government recognizes the tremendous contributions seniors have made to our province, and a central focus of our government's economic recovery plan, The Way Forward, is to help seniors by supporting the programs and services they need most, such as health care and housing.

I believe this motion asks our government to consider an important change that could alleviate the tax burden on senior homeowners.

ers. Exempting seniors from this tax would especially help senior Albertans who are living on limited incomes. Senior homeowners could refocus the financial savings from this tax exemption to other priority areas. We know seniors still bear a cost related to home ownership, and with more money in their pockets they may be able to afford important home upgrades. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, seniors who have a less comfortable financial situation are often more reliant on community and financial supports. If we provided them with more savings, we could potentially reduce their dependence on the services and programs. The savings from this exemption for those seniors could largely outweigh the decrease in revenue to the Alberta school foundation fund as seniors represent a small portion of the taxpayers who contribute to this fund.

Alberta has the lowest percentage of seniors in comparison to other provinces. They represent only 11 per cent of our population. With this proportion of our population likely to increase in the years to come, this demographic shift would only slightly slow the increasing portion of education funding from the ASFF over general revenue. Moreover, providing an exemption from the education property tax would greatly assist many seniors throughout the province. These savings will allow seniors an opportunity to improve their quality of life by using their financial savings to supplement other wellness aids. I think this is just one of the many benefits our government should look at when considering whether or not to exempt seniors from this tax.

Mr. Speaker, at the latter point of their life seniors have often already supported their children and grandchildren through the primary and secondary levels of school, fulfilling their obligations to this essential service. Additionally, seniors have contributed to the tax base for years. This motion will assist those seniors who are on below-average incomes and dependent on assistance programs. Mostly and more importantly, the exemption put forth in Motion 518 will strengthen the financial independence of seniors. Alberta's seniors have contributed to building strong communities across this province and continue to help build these communities today. We need to assess every option we have to ensure that they are receiving the support they need and deserve.

I believe this motion proposes a fiscally sound objective that will assist our province's elders, and I am pleased to offer my support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with particular delight that I stand today to support this motion from my colleague from Lethbridge-West. I think it is a very good motion. As we all know, often a private member's motion will move into a private member's bill, or if it's really a good one – and in this case I would hope it would be that – it could move into a government bill, and then the discourse, of course, goes on a totally different level.

The Member for Lethbridge-West and I actually speak to the same seniors, so to put the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere's concern at rest, never, never have we ever been mixed up between who's west and who's east.

5:50

There are any number of ways that we can discuss this, but I think the concept that the member is bringing forward is that in some fashion we have to be able to give our seniors a break on their property tax if, in fact, we want them to stay in their homes. One of the other suggestions that could be brought forward, in addition to the two or three other concepts that are for further debate, could

possibly be that some seniors could be evaluated on a means test, as they will be for their pharmaceutical plan. I know that that's very, very unpopular amongst seniors, particularly the older ones that we have today, who respect their privacy. They have their privacy, and to have to share all of this type of personal information is often very difficult for them, but I think that could be one fair way of at least looking at what we should be doing with these property taxes.

One of the other suggestions that I've heard but in a different fashion when I talked to different seniors' groups is that instead of the money going into general revenue, where basically the education tax goes at this point in time, it would go directly to the minister of seniors, and then from there those dollars could be put out to support seniors' centres, and then the seniors' centres could be providing many more services so that seniors don't have to go to doctors' offices, don't have to go to government offices. The care and the information that they would need would be at their seniors' centres. It was very interesting as I went across the province to four or five different areas, both rural and urban, if a municipality had strong seniors' centres with a large number of members, then they were very much in favour of that idea. But if they didn't have a seniors' centre that provided the extra and didn't have a large membership, they were basically opposed to that idea. I think that the idea has merit, at least to be discussed.

I would like to go back and just say that I'm certainly in support of this motion and thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing it forward. I think it's time that we had this discussion. This is the first step. I'm trusting that next year we will be able to have steps 2, 3, and 4 and actually come to some sort of a consensus where seniors will get the break on the education portion of their property tax. Seniors have paid their dues.

I think that when we look at education – and I realize the importance of it. I think it's also very important that we support our seniors and keep them healthy. In the long run we may be educating our young but at a high, high cost to our health care if we have to look after seniors that can't live in their homes and have to come into the health care system. It is a bit of a catch-22. I think it's something that would certainly require more discussion. In terms of how we level off who is responsible for education, shouldn't it be the parents and, certainly at the postsecondary education level, perhaps the students themselves through loans and whatever? The seniors should get the breaks that they need to be able to live in dignity and respect to the end of their days.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the timing is perfect here. It's five to six. I would like to invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to close the debate on Motion 518.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I won't speak for very long, but I sure appreciate the excellent debate that we've had on this motion. What's really been heartening to hear is the support that there is across the board for our seniors in the province of Alberta.

What I really wanted to take a minute to say is that through our minister of seniors and through the department and through many of our departments we have some of the finest seniors' programs in the country. We've made a real commitment to try to help our seniors stay in their homes. We know that it's cost effective for seniors to stay in their homes, it's cost effective to provide health care and other support services in their homes, and it's a much higher quality of life for seniors to be able to stay in their homes.

This is really an issue that's about fairness. Seniors that live in lodges do not have to pay property tax, so this is something that would allow a level playing field for all of our seniors, allow them

to stay at home longer. I think that's been a goal of this government. I've heard our Premier talk many, many times about how critically important it is to allow our seniors to age with the highest and the best quality of life. When I go out and talk to seniors, that best quality of life is right in their own homes, right in their own communities, with their families, with their children, on their farms, in the places where they grew up, and I think we need to support that. This is a wonderful opportunity to do that. This is a chance for us to give them that little extra bit of help beyond all those wonderful programs. This is just to say thank you for all those years that

you paid taxes, that you supported our children in their education. This is a little bit that we can give back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 518 carried]

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, November 23, 2009

Issue 62e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, November 23, 2009

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 3: Mr. Lukaszuk]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo tonight and join in second reading debate of Bill 61, the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009. I look forward to this debate and seeing how it goes. I think this is, on the face of it anyway, on the surface of it, a pretty noncontroversial bill.

I do find it interesting that we're dealing with a Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act in advance of the report, at least the making public of the report. The Provincial Offences Procedure Review Steering Committee was set up to examine the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, and they're not expected to report to the minister until the spring of 2010. In a sense maybe we're getting the cart before the horse a little bit, but maybe we're not.

On the surface it looks like a pretty straightforward bill. It seeks to make the following changes. It would permit an accused to submit a plea via registered mail.

It would provide for greater reliance on affidavit evidence when prosecuting a Provincial Offences Procedure Act offence, for example speeding, where you have three officers participating in a speed trap. One of them is operating the machinery, one is eyeballing the cars, and one is flagging down the offending automobiles. This should allow the members who are not operating the equipment to offer affidavit evidence.

It provides greater waiver powers regarding time to pay applications. Some language changes allow for considerations based on a reasonableness standard. There's some cleaning up of terminology so that the Provincial Offences Procedure Act is congruent with the Interpretation Act. If people fail to pay their fines, it would also allow for their access to motor vehicle licensing services, hunting licences, fishing licences, municipal licences to be restricted. In addition, bylaw fines would be added to property tax assessments rather than requiring individuals to serve default time in jail.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, at this stage of the debate I think we can support the bill in principle and perhaps get down to a little more detailed examination of it at committee stage. At this point I'll be voting in favour of it and would recommend that my colleagues do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. At first look, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out, it appears to be sort of a cleanup, a generic get it all together into one act, although there are a series of

offences or misdemeanors that are gathered together and mostly of the traffic nature, as was previously brought out.

The changes that are sought within this amendment include the fact it will permit an accused to submit a plea via registered mail, and that makes it somewhat easier to deal with. Obviously, if it's a not guilty plea, there will be a follow-up, but if there's a guilty plea, that speeds up the court processing because a court date can be provided.

It also is to provide for greater reliance on affidavit evidence when prosecuting a POPA offence, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned, the speeding concerns. It provides greater waiver powers regarding time to pay applications. Some language changes allow for consideration based on reasonable standards. Terminology was cleaned up so that the Provincial Offences Procedure Act is congruent with the Interpretation Act. As I say, it's an attempt, almost like an omnibus bill, to bring all the bits and pieces together under one heading.

If the accused fails to pay their fines, it would also allow for access to motor vehicle licensing services, hunting, and so on, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out. It lists right off the bat that there are several ways that we are going to come after you if you don't pay your fine. So those individuals who are driving around with a glove compartment full of tickets, whether they be parking tickets or speeding tickets, know that at some point, every time they attempt to register their vehicle, et cetera, they're going to have one whopping bill to add to that registration.

In general, this is a positive approach, and I would like to at this point thank the hon. member. This will be twice within the same session that I've thanked the hon. member for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker: We have Standing Order 29(2)(a), five minutes of comments and questions.

Seeing none, does any other member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 61 read a second time]

Bill 62 Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009

[Adjourned debate November 19: Mr. Liepert]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's obvious that we need Bill 62 to bring the health services – ambulance, EMS, and so on – from the fragmented circumstances they had throughout the province. In Lethbridge, for example, EMS, fire, and so on were one service. In Calgary we had a separation between the city running the EMS. Now it goes back to Alberta Health Services, which makes tremendous sense.

The question that came up arose from Frank Work, the individual in charge of FOIP. He expressed concerns, which I would appreciate hearing the hon. minister of health discuss or, for example, the hon. House leader, given his legal background. Frank Work expressed concerns about details being revealed of a personal nature that might interfere with a person's civil rights. He also, if I recall his argument correctly, indicated that a lot of the information sharing already exists, and therefore, after a fashion, that portion of the sharing of information was redundant. So he questioned it on two accounts: one, on the civil rights aspects of it, the rights to privacy. And if we already have a health bill that deals with this, why are we then repeating ourselves?

The bill purports to clarify a paramedic's ability to share informa-

tion from the scene of a dispatch call to a peace officer for reasons of investigation. The Information and Privacy Commissioner has publicly stated, as I indicated, that this is not necessary. He also raised concerns about whether or not this information should be collected in the first place when it has to do with injuries being treated.

Now, we had a bill that had similar concerns. It was the crime bill where a person who is injured while undertaking a crime ends up having to pay their own medical bills. In this case it was a doctor's requirement at a convenient point, which wasn't quite specified, that they had to provide this information to the police, and again there were privacy issues with relation to this.

7:40

Now, the government's position is that this bill clarifies and legislates the ability of paramedics to share observational information with police to assist with an investigation. It also suggests that without this change there would be confusion as to whether this sharing of information would be in contravention of the HIA, which paramedics will come under when the Health Information Amendment Act comes into play. Obviously, it's important that we get this right so that when individuals are on the street and dealing in emergent situations, they're not saying: well, does this fit under the HIA, or does it fit under FOIP? They've got to know because, regardless, they're going to act immediately. They're going to do the best they can, but the degree to which they follow up or share the information with police officers will have to be explained to a greater degree so that there's no doubt about the expectation and compulsion of information sharing.

The IPC highlighted the fact that the HIA allows for information to be shared with police when there is a need to avert imminent harm and to protect public safety. So this proposed amendment is not only unnecessary but actually interferes with the HIA and the FOIP. That's the concern, as I say, that the individual in charge of personal information has put forward.

I'm not going to take up a whole lot of time at this point in debating the bill, but I'm hoping that the clarification will be provided that the hon. member, for whom I have great respect, in charge of FOIP has raised about the legality of the sharing of the information and the necessity. Hopefully that discussion and that information will come forthwith.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to get a few remarks on the record about this. It's a little bit of a tangent off, which is what this bill is directly speaking to, about the ability for paramedics to be able to share information with police officers. I still believe that the dual fire-paramedic emergency system will prove in the end to have been the most effective, certainly cost efficient. Most importantly, it will prove to be the fastest response, it will be the highest level of care outside of the hospital, and ultimately it will have saved many lives. I wanted to make sure that I can get that plug in for the dual system, our fire and emergency. It worked very well, and I believe it could have been probably initiated through this province under that system; however, that's not what the government has chosen to do.

By shifting the emergency health services to Alberta Health and Wellness – they weren't really legally considered sort of health service providers, and now by putting them under, they are. However, I think that was just, well, I guess, a legality because they may not have been legal. But, certainly, any of our dual systems

were very, very effective in responding quickly to any emergency, be it motor vehicles or fires. All of the personnel that they needed on-site came together. I also think it's effective to have someone who is dually trained, where, in fact, they can fit into that emergency.

The other has already been mentioned. There's a section in this legislation that states that the proposed provisions of this legislation would override the Health Information Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I think that that's a very serious change in how people can expect to have their privacy respected. I realize that some of this is about helping the police solve crimes, and certainly I would not want to hamper that ability, but often in the heat of the moment, particularly in an emergency, information could be gathered and spread before it really could be determined that, in fact, that would be a legal way of doing it.

I think that people are at the mercy of this bill in many ways. As I say, I understand why they would want to pass on this information. I know that they do share some information, but paramedics would have to be trained over and above what they are trained to understand how it would impact a person's privacy when they share that with the police. Certainly, the police would have the understanding of if it would stand up in court, if that was what they were going to need, or if they needed information from blood tests, which would have been taken sometimes without the knowledge of the person that they are treating. The person could be in a coma or just unable to respond or to give their permission for that. So I think that there are a number of things in here that should be addressed to alleviate that concern that people's privacy, in the end, actually would be at risk.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wish to use the five minutes under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise and join in debate on Bill 62, the Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009. I was just frantically flipping through *Hansard* – unfortunately, I didn't quite get all the way through it before there was the opportunity for me to get up to speak – to try to find out exactly what the rationale is from the government for bringing forward this piece of legislation.

Mr. Liepert: You should talk to your researcher.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, we've only got so much time in the day.

Nonetheless, having gone through it, I see that the Privacy Commissioner has indicated some clear concerns and suggests that there is actually no particular need for this bill because the information can actually be shared in the interests of ensuring public safety and also in the interests of ensuring that there is no imminent danger allowed to take place. So then the question becomes: why is it necessary in this case to override either the Health Information Act or the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act? These are important issues. We brought in both those pieces of legislation in order to ensure that people's privacy is protected. There may well be a sound rationale here, but it's not entirely clear.

Organizations that work with and represent emergency service workers are themselves not entirely clear as to why this was brought into play, and certainly not all of them have been consulted. In addition, my understanding is that the Privacy Commissioner himself was not given the opportunity to meet with the drafters of the legislation before it went ahead. As I say, it may be something

that's necessary, but I'm trying to get a sense of what it is that has changed that this has to be brought in now and what it was that wasn't happening previously that this bill is now trying to correct.

One of the outcomes I see of this bill is that the person who is attended to by an emergency service worker, who then has that emergency service worker share his information with the police, no longer has the ability under the Health Information Act or the freedom of information act to find out what information was actually shared with the police, nor do they have the ability to have the Privacy Commissioner review whether that information was appropriate. So again one asks: why is that? You know, certainly, in most cases you could see that it wouldn't be a big issue, but conversely there are other places where the accident itself is subject to litigation either criminal or civil, and the sharing of that information and the degree to which the information has been shared between parties is something that a person ought to have access to and information about. The fact that their ability to get access to that information through the Health Information Act is now being undermined by this act is a matter that we should be concerned about.

7:50

Now, again, I'm not necessarily saying that we don't support the act. We need to have more opportunity to review it to get a clearer understanding from the sponsor of the legislation about what particular problem this act is designed to correct and to get a clearer understanding of what other options were considered and rejected that might not have required us to once again undermine our privacy and protection legislation, as we seem apt to do these days with quite a bit of frequency.

With those introductory comments in place I look forward to hearing further debate, information about this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes for comments or questions.

Seeing none, does any other hon. member wish to speak on this bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 62 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair shall now call the committee to order.

Bill 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any comments or questions to be offered with respect to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to start the debate with respect to the amendments that we have before us in the House on Bill 50. Of course, Mr. Chairman, I think it's been very widely recognized not only by our colleagues here in the Legislature but certainly by most Albertans that we have an extremely important and serious piece of business in front of us with respect to the transmission infrastructure in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, we came forward, of course, with a piece of legislation, that was tabled in this Legislature in the spring, and let

it sit over the summer in order to give Albertans – and by Albertans I mean all Albertans, including all of the stakeholders relative to the transmission infrastructure – the opportunity to look at the legislation, to make comments on the legislation, to question it, and to propose alternative methods of transmission infrastructure and what might be done with respect to this piece of legislation that would perhaps make it more palatable to all concerned.

Mr. Chairman, we now have, I think, the results of a summer's worth of consultation with Albertans relative to the issue. I must say that AESO had around 40 open, public meetings over the summer with respect to the issue, and the Department of Energy conducted an additional 20 hearings around the province. From those hearings we gathered and coalesced a lot of information relative to this issue, so we came forward with a number of amendments. The amendments that we tabled last week include the opportunity here for us to clarify the issues and concerns that people had brought forward relative to the Alberta Utilities Commission's mandate to operate in the public interest.

Mr. Chairman, amendment A1 deals with that issue. What we have done is clarified the wording to make it very distinct that this piece of legislation deals only with the need that had been demonstrated by AESO for these pieces of critical transmission infrastructure. The amendment indicates that the need will not be heard by the Utilities Commission; however, everything else relative to these pieces of infrastructure will be heard by the AUC, and they must make their decision with the public interest in mind. Public interest would include things such as the economics around the issues, the issues of health if they arise, issues of environmental concern, and the like.

I think that this amendment is a good amendment that allows us to bridge a concern that has been expressed and expressed here on the floor of the Legislature relative to the issue of being sure that we are not – and I would repeat that, Mr. Chairman: we are not removing the AUC's mandated requirement to do their work and come to their conclusions, bearing in mind the public interest.

Mr. Chairman, I think that for the purposes of amendment A1 I would leave my remarks at that and look forward to continued engagement by all members of the Legislature. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Yes, debate will ensue now on the government's amendments to Bill 50. I see that the minister is trying to make some changes to a bill that we on this side of the House feel is very flawed. I see that he has addressed some of the concerns that he has heard, that the AESO has heard, that the Department of Energy has heard, that all government backbenchers, I'm sure, have heard from their constituents and from various people who have weighed in on this very public debate over Bill 50, certainly concerns that we've heard on this side of the House as well.

But these amendments don't address all of the concerns. They are quite specific in not addressing, I think, the concern at the heart of this whole debate. That concern, the heart of the argument on Bill 50, is very simply this: do you want to bypass the independent regulatory needs identification process or not? We do not want to bypass the regulatory process. The people who have been talking to us do not want to bypass the independent regulatory process.

8:00

A number of people, both ordinary Albertans and people who could be deemed to be authorities on the issue of electricity, electrical generation, electricity transmission have spoken out and

made convincing arguments in recent weeks that the independent regulatory process is vital at both the needs identification stage and later on in the siting process. If all you do is wait till later on, after the cabinet, the government, a group of people in this House who are by no means expert in issues of electricity transmission have said, "Well, we're deeming this as critical transmission infrastructure, and it must be built," if you then bring the AUC, the Alberta Utilities Commission, into the process and have them do their due diligence and operate in the public interest as they're supposed to, while that remains important, bringing in the AUC to rule in the public interest on whether the pylons should go in your backyard, Mr. Speaker, or my backyard or Old Man Johnson's backyard after the cabinet has already approved construction is pretty much like closing the barn door after the horse has bolted. You may feel really good for having done that, and you may feel like you've made a difference for the future, but your horse is still missing. That's why it's key that the needs identification process be subject to the full independent regulatory process that it is up until such time as Bill 50 passes or Bill 50 passes unamended.

An independent regulatory process is good, Mr. Chairman, because it takes this whole thing with all the different points of view, all of the different arguments, puts it in front of people who have experience in weighing the relative merits of the different arguments, being able to bring some historical awareness and some background information to bear on the decision that they're about to make and being able to draw on expert opinion and determine whether this expert opinion is relevant or not and then making a ruling, a decision, a written decision, in which they have to lay out their rationale for making that decision. It makes it considerably less likely that the approval or not of the project and the conditions attached to the project or not, to that approval, will be driven by short-term interests, whether they're business interests or whether they're political interests.

The AESO is full of experts, Mr. Chairman. Unfortunately, those experts are essentially on the government payroll. They are not independent, in my view, or arm's length enough to be the only ones charged with making a recommendation – remember, I referred to this before – based within the constraints of their mandate, which basically says: if you detect any congestion whatsoever, the only answer that you're allowed to pursue is to build transmission infrastructure and then make a recommendation to a cabinet that is made up of a bunch of people from different walks of life, not expert in either the regulatory process or being the quasi-judicial weighers of the relative merits of arguments or knowing all that much, really, about electricity.

The heart of the argument is: do you want to bypass the independent regulatory needs identification process or not? The amendments that the government has introduced, I think, Mr. Chairman, make it clear that they do want to bypass the independent regulatory needs identification process, at least the minister does. We do not, so at this time I would like to move a subamendment to the government amendment which addresses this issue. I will give the pages these amendments to pass to the table and then pass around to the members present.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will pause for a few moments for the pages to pass the subamendment out.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Chairman, if I may ask for a piece of advice. This is a relatively long amendment. Do you want me to read it all into the record when we come back? [interjection] I'm asking the

chairman, not the minister of health. I don't take the minister's advice.

The Chair: We will just call it subamendment SA1.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, please continue.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I hereby move subamendment SA1 to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. All members of the House have it in front of them now. I will not read the entire subamendment at this time, but I'm sure that over the course of debate here I'll address the various parts in it.

Now, this subamendment may look fairly complex. Such is the arcane nature of legal linguistics and parliamentary procedure when we come to making law. But the intent and effect of this subamendment is very simple, remarkably simple, remarkably direct. It goes directly to the relevant question up for debate around Bill 50: do you want to bypass the independent regulatory needs identification process or not? The clauses of this subamendment pull out the sections that scrap the regulatory process, so let's debate this right now.

To start with, part A is struck out, and the following is substituted: section 1(3) is struck out. We want to strike out this section, Mr. Chairman, because it prevents the AUC from assessing whether or not the critical transmission lines are necessary for this province. We don't want to build unnecessary lines. We don't want to stick consumers, whether they be individual residential consumers or big industrial power users or anybody in between, with unnecessary bills. The AUC, in our opinion, should be holding hearings. That is what an independent regulator does. Those hearings are what allows Albertans to have their say. This is what proper consultation looks like.

Part B is struck out, and the following is substituted: section 2(6) is amended by striking out the proposed sections 41.2 and 41.3 and substituting "Staged development of CTI referred to in Schedule 41.2(1)." Mr. Chairman, from that point on, if you refer to the government amendment, you will find that the wording is exactly the same as in the government amendment. All we have done here is in effect change the numbering of the section by striking out the proposed 41.2 and 41.3 from the bill, which explicitly bypassed the needs identification process for critical transmission infrastructure. These sections would impact the Electric Utilities Act where it states that needs identification documents must be submitted to the AUC for transmission line applications. Our amendment would ensure that that must still happen for critical transmission infrastructure.

The new 41.2 on staged development comes from the government's own amendment. We would be keeping it, i.e. adding it to the bill, but we need to renumber it to 41.2 from 41.4 because we pulled two sections from the bill, as discussed just a moment ago. So this part remains in.

It would be interesting, as we go ahead and debate this: what does the minister have in mind for a staging time? We can't assess the impact of this proposal without knowing that. For example, a month-long gap between when these different stages start is pretty much the same as no staging whatsoever. A three-year-long gap, on the other hand, between stages starts to urge the question of why forcing these lines through without needs hearings was necessary in the first place.

Part C is amended in the proposed clause (v.5)(B) by striking out "or 41.3." This is a consequential change. The fact that in part B we've scrapped 41.3 is coherent across the rest of the government's amendment.

Part D is amended in clause (a) in the proposed section 1(2) by striking out "section 41.4(1)" and substituting "section 41.2(1)."

Another consequential change, Mr. Chairman. In part B we've changed the section 41.4(1) into 41.2(1) because of the removal of sections 41.2 and 41.3 from the bill. Our amendment here ensures that this again is coherent across the rest of the government's amendment.

It is a bit arcane. It's probably going to be very boring to read tonight's Blues back tomorrow as I described that, but it is necessary and necessarily complex to express, again, a remarkably simple and direct intent and effect, which is that we're pulling out the sections that scrap the regulatory process.

8:10

With that in mind, there is one more section. Part E is struck out, and the following is substituted: section 3 is struck out. Section 3 basically deals with one thing only, that critical transmission infrastructure should bypass the current needs identification process in the regulatory system. The easiest thing to do, Mr. Chair, and the cleanest and simplest thing to do is just pull the entire section as there are no other impacts.

So there it is. On this side of the House I don't think that we have any problem in principle with the government seeking to designate some transmission infrastructure as more urgent than others, some transmission infrastructure as perhaps more critical than others. I think that's their right, their prerogative. If they in their judgment accept the AESO's argument that it is critical to build a new line or two new lines, you know, with the capacity to carry up to 2,000 megawatts each of electricity, perhaps even more, between Edmonton and Calgary, okay. If they wish to designate a line or two going to Fort McMurray as critical transmission infrastructure – in other words, this is their top priority or one of their top priorities – no problem with that. Governments have to prioritize things; individuals have to prioritize things all the time.

In an odd sort of way, Mr. Chair, the minister, through his own amendments with the staging amendments, the staged development of critical transmission infrastructure referred to in the schedule in the bill, has pretty much acknowledged that the sky is not falling, the lights have not gone off, we are not hours away from rolling blackouts. In fact, we have some time to do this all. It has sort of put a question to the word "critical." It sort of puts a question to the whole notion behind this bill that this is so vital and we are so far behind that we have to do this all at once. Well, by the government's own admission now we don't have to do it all at once. We can take our time to do it, which I think gives the sense that we also have some time, through the AESO to transmission facility operators, to organize this thing better.

If it went off the rails a few years ago, and I think we can probably say that it did – I think the minister might agree that it did a few years ago and that we haven't kept up with the pace that we really should have although, parenthetically, Mr. Chairman, we need to re-evaluate that in light of the economic downturn and the fact that the rate of increase in electricity consumption is not going up the way it was – then fine. But we need to send a message to people who are in charge of building this stuff and planning this stuff and proposing this stuff that there is a process which starts with a needs identification hearing and a process leading up to that hearing in front of the AUC, which it properly should in all cases. If that stage of the process of getting a new high-voltage transmission line built takes six months or 24 months or whatever, then you'd best get going on it now if you think you're going to need that line to start construction in two or three or four years.

Mr. Chairman, this is a bill that, as I said in second reading, is flawed in principle. It's a bad bill in principle. I don't argue, I don't know if anybody in this House would argue that we need to

start upgrading our transmission infrastructure. Some of it's getting old, not nearly as much as we've been led to believe by the ads on television and on the radio and in the newspapers, but some of it is getting old, about 40 per cent. We need to upgrade that because the older it gets, the more it's going to cost to maintain. We have had growth in population. We have had growth in our economy. We have had growth in electricity consumption. We need to keep up with that.

But we also need to remember, Mr. Chairman, that this is a bill that proposes a very old-school solution to any problems that we might have currently or might be anticipating in the years to come. This old-school solution says that we are going to continue to burn coal, pretty much the dirtiest way there is to generate electricity, to generate electricity in vast quantities west of Edmonton, and then we're going to ship that electricity all over the province. We're not going to even consider under Bill 50 the possibility that it might be in the public interest, in the consumers' best interests to generate that power a lot closer to where the people live who are going to use it.

I refer back to the report *Transmission Policy in Alberta* and Bill 50, published by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy, co-authored by economist Jeffrey Church, electrical engineering professor William Rosehart, and doctoral student John McCormack of the University of Calgary a couple of weeks ago. I refer back to the study that they did, where they compared the anticipated cost from 2013 through to 2028. Of the two high-voltage power lines between Edmonton and Calgary – and I recognize the minister now wants to stage construction of that so that we wouldn't have them both right off the bat; still, they made the comparison because that's what was being proposed in Bill 50 before the government amendments came down – they compared that against an alternative that locates gas-fired generators in southern Alberta, close to the southern Alberta consumers who are using the power and getting that power from the generation plant to the consumer on the existing grid.

There were variables: the amount of wind power produced, the cost of greenhouse gas emissions, yada yada, line loss, that sort of thing, but they found, in taking those factors into consideration, that the cost of going with Bill 50, with the gold-plated Lexus transmission grid, is anywhere between \$1.1 billion and \$2 billion more than locating generation in southern Alberta. More. Both provide adequate electricity supply, both keep the lights on, both keep the sky from falling, but one costs up to \$2.2 billion more. Now ask yourself, Mr. Chairman, and ask yourselves, hon. members: why would we spend \$2 billion more, \$1 billion more than we have to spend? Is it because there is no cost to generators, no cost of doing business, if you will, of actually getting the power that they generate from wherever they generate it to wherever it's going to be consumed? Essentially, they are charged nothing to be able to sell their power and transmit it from where they generated it to where you're going to turn your lights on, Mr. Chairman, in Calgary-Fort in a few days' time, when you're back home.

It's interesting. You know, we claim we've deregulated electricity. We've got Big Brother out of the way. We've got the public sector out of the way. We've got government out of the way. We're going to let the market take care of this, and the market is going to produce cheaper power for us. We're still waiting for that to happen, and one still wonders if Bill 50 is yet another attempt to try and make lemonade out of lemons, but I won't go there right now, Mr. Chairman. The odd thing is that deregulation as it's practised in this province so far only seems to work – and, by the way, it works great for the people who are generating the power – when the rest of us, the poor schlemiels of Alberta, and the poor big industrial schlemiels are subsidizing this thing.

The arguments have been made that, you know, if you go to

another model, generating the power close to load, then you're creating zones in the province again, and you end up having different prices for electricity. Well, there are already different subsidies. The farther away the stuff is generated from where it's used, the greater the subsidy, in effect. Guess who's paying the subsidy? Us, the consumers, you and me and the big industrial consumers. We're going to be paying the freight if this whole grid is built and we start exporting power down to Vegas to keep the lights on and the casinos humming and the slot machines going all night long. I mean, let the people in Vegas generate their own power.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to more of this.

8:20

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on subamendment SA1.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. For anybody who is sleep deprived, I would suggest that what we're doing tonight is a cure for that deprivation.

What it boils down to is that the government is saying: "We don't need an Alberta Utilities Commission. We bypass it. We have the information. We have the expertise. We know what's right." We're going to do it our way, as the song goes. What I see ourselves doing, whether it's the government or whether it's the opposition, is the equivalent of daisy petal picking, but instead of a daisy, if you can imagine the various steel blades of the old-style windmills that were either used for pumping water or for generating a degree of electricity to an outbuilding. What we're doing is we're picking off a blade at a time, and we're saying, "Nyet, da," or we're saying, "Oui, non" or any other series, "Jawohl, nein," you know, a whole series of languages.

Mr. Denis: Keep the German going.

Mr. Chase: Das ist gut.

Another analogy is that it's the equivalent of a card game. We're each trying to trump each other. With our latest subamendment we're basically trying to return us to where we started from, which was the fact that we need an independent regulatory agent, and that's the Alberta Utilities Commission. We need a referee because without that referee the government will just roll over, whether it's steamrolling or any other type of rolling, individuals who don't agree with their concerns.

I'll give the government credit for this. With the amendments that the hon. Minister of Energy introduced, there's a degree of acknowledgement of the need for staged construction, for potentially sequential project development. I think how that came about is that the government realized this was too big a monetary mouthful for Albertans to swallow at any time. The notion of somewhere between \$14 billion and \$20 billion was just too much to be one large project. What the government has done is basically taken the spoonfuls of electrical energy and tried to sweeten the process by saying, "Well, in the end it may cost this amount, but we're going to do it in a series of one-offs, and the one-offs aren't going to hurt your pocketbook nearly as much." But the cumulative effects stay the same.

Another analogy that comes to mind is the end run, trying to go around the Alberta Utilities Commission or, with the government's amendment, basically running on the spot. Nothing is new; nothing has changed. You're still avoiding prioritizing. You're still avoiding the Alberta Utilities Commission and their expertise. I don't know whether the current members of the Alberta Utilities

Commission are going to be discontinued, as was the case with so many of our former health CEOs. I don't know whether they're going to get bonused when they're laid off. But it makes no sense that we have a commission that is absolutely powerless.

What we're attempting to do with our subamendments to government amendment A1 is to piece by piece give back the Alberta Utilities Commission the authority to not only decide on the need for the placement of lines but also, as has been pointed out, the size of the line, varying from, I gather, 240 kilowatts all the way up to 2,000 kilowatts. Of course, when we go from that 240 to above the 500, my most recent electrical understanding is that the opportunities to bury the lines are severely reduced. I don't pretend to know all the reasoning, but I gather the ground serves as an added insulator, and with the amount of electricity that would be generated in an underground circumstance, no matter how well we attempted to insulate it, convert it when it came up to the above ground lines, if it's over 500, that possibility scientifically and according to physics no longer exists.

So we find that, like a person who's running on the spot, we generate little bits of spark and electricity, but there's no constant current developed, and suffering from the same problem as windmills, running on the spot, as soon as we stop, the energy ends with our ceasing to move. If anybody hasn't made that connection tonight, that's where we're at, a ceasing-to-move situation.

We're looking for the expertise that the government claims that the Lieutenant Governor in Council, or the cabinet, has, and the government does not have any more expertise, given their membership, than we have as opposition members. This is far beyond the grade 12 physics that I had such difficulty in dealing with, and that's why we need the independent judgments that hearings through the Alberta Utilities Commission provide.

What our amendment attempts to accomplish – and I'll go through the bits and pieces and try not to repeat what the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie pointed out. But because of the technical nature of the subamendment it's hard not to go over similar territory, keeping in mind that we want the Alberta Utilities Commission reinstated and that the government wants to bypass it.

Speaking specifically to the various parts of our amendment, we're suggesting that part A is struck out. We want to strike out section 1(3) as it prevents the AUC from assessing whether or not critical transmission lines are necessary for this province. We get into the definitions of what is critical, what is the priority, and unless you can start off with some basis of understanding, how can you go forward in terms of determining what's critical?

As the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie mentioned, that independent referee or the independent judge is extremely important, and without that balance that a judge organization like the Alberta Utilities Commission provides, how do you weigh the benefits? The government's answer is: "We'll do the weighing, and we'll tell you, you know, how many kilograms or, in this case, kilowatts are necessary. Thank you very much. Rest assured, you know, that the lights will be there in the morning." We're past the point of just open trust.

Part B is struck out and the following substituted: section 2(6) is amended by striking out the proposed sections 41.2 and 41.3 and substituting

Staged development of CTI referred to in Schedule

41.2(1) The Independent System Operator, with respect to the critical transmission infrastructure referred to in section 1(1) of the Schedule, shall, subject to the regulations, specify and make available to the public milestones that the Independent System Operator will use to . . .

In other words, it's simply saying that the Independent System Operator has a responsibility. It is outranked by the Alberta Utilities

Commission; therefore, the Independent System Operator has to take its marching orders, or its connecting orders, from a higher body of greater authority.

8:30

One of our problems with Bill 50 is that the so-called Independent System Operator isn't so independent. The bonusing for the independent members on the Independent System Operator was dependent on a particular approval of a set of lines and directions that the government had put forward. So any notion of independence went out the window because they were expected to approve what the government had laid out before them.

"The transmission facilities referred to in section 4 of the Schedule shall be developed in stages in accordance with subsection (3)." Now, that appears to be something that the government believes in within its own amendment, that doing things in stages, dealing with things in sequence, creating a so-called chain of substations and bringing power online as needed makes sense, and we're grateful to the government for realizing that this thing doesn't all have to be done at once. But when it is done in its various pieces, there has to be a plan. That plan, which we have maintained all along and most recently through our subamendment, has to begin and end with approval by the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Section (3) of part B of our subamendment to government amendment A1 suggests:

The facility referred to in section 4(a) of the Schedule shall be developed first, which may initially be energized at 240 kV, and the Independent System Operator shall, subject to the regulations, specify and make available to the public milestones that the Independent System Operator will use to determine the timing of the development of the facilities referred to in section 4(b) and (c) of the Schedule.

Put simply, you've created a needs assessment through an independent regulatory process. It says, "Start here," and then before you get the approval for the next stage, you have to again go through the hearing process. There is a check and balance required. You can't simply just put up as much infrastructure wherever you want to carry whatever load you wish. The process has to be thought out.

Now, what's significant in our amendment is the striking out of the proposed 41.2 and 41.3, which basically give the government a carte blanche on the needs identification process for critical transmission infrastructure. This is rather important, that rather than the government saying, "Here a transmission line, there a transmission line, here and here and there and there," an Old MacDonald had a transmission line song in terms of where things are placed, it's calling for a plan. I know that the government's predecessor Premier was not fond of plans, but our latest development has talked about transparency and accountability, and we would suggest that that involves actually having a plan and, taking it one step further, sticking to it section by section.

Part C is amended in the proposed clause (v.5)(B) by striking out "or 41.3." This is a consequential change to ensure that the fact that in part B we have scrapped 41.3 is coherent across the rest of the government's amendments. In other words, we're doing in our subamendment what we've asked the government to do in its bill, and that's to have a connected relevance, whether it be developing priorities, placements of infrastructure, or the size of the load that is going to be carried by the line. Again, it's planning, and basically what we're asking the government to do is connect the dots, connect the towers, connect the lines.

Part D is again part of the interconnectedness of our subamendment. Part D is amended in clause (a) in the proposed section 1(2) by striking out "section 41.4(1)" and substituting "section 41.2(1)."

Again, without reconnecting to the government's original Bill 50 and its amended A1 circumstance, there would be a gap in the connection, so we're trying for coherency with this D part.

Then we have part E. That's rather simple. We're just saying strike it, lose it. Section 3 basically deals with one thing only, that critical transmission infrastructure should bypass the current needs identification process in the regulatory system. The easiest thing to do is just pull it because if the government isn't going to recognize the need for an independent regulatory process through the Alberta Utilities Commission, then section 3 basically becomes redundant.

At the risk of appearing redundant, I'm going to sit down and let other members engage in the process.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak on subamendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on subamendment A1.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise to speak in favour of this subamendment to amendment A1 put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. This subamendment would of course further amend the amendment put forward by the government, which is an attempt to address the significant problems that have been identified in Bill 50 by a number of stakeholders throughout the province from all sides of the political spectrum, interestingly, most of whom are simply raising concerns because they see the potential for government quite generally to just simply go off the rails without anybody ever knowing about it or getting a full sense of reporting on what's happened.

This subamendment, as has already been stated, would amend the government's amendment to essentially eliminate completely those portions of Bill 50 that would limit the opportunity for public consultation around the construction of what the government has characterized as critical infrastructure. It would also as a result negate the concerns that exist as a result of the amendments proposed by the government last week that we commenced debate on this evening.

Just to talk a little bit, then, about the amendments that were put forward by the government and why, as a result, this subamendment that would eliminate those amendments is worth while. In particular, the government is suggesting that it can address the many and wide-ranging concerns that have been put forward by Albertans with respect to the lack of a public consultation process around the need for these huge capital investments. They believe that we could get around those concerns through the amendments that the government has put forward.

8:40

Just at the outset, one of the concerns that exists for me in the amendments put forward by the government, which would be eliminated were the subamendment to be passed, is this very amorphous notion of suggesting that hearings could go forward on matters relating to whether the project itself meets the public interest, but we would continue as citizens to be turned away at the door, if you will, should we want to raise issues about whether the transmission lines themselves are necessary for serving the needs of Albertans.

I have to say that I think that were that amendment to go forward without the House adopting the subamendments that have been put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, we would basically succeed in creating quite an effective cottage industry for that part of the bar which focuses on administrative law. To me, I cannot for the life of me begin to imagine how many applications we would get to sit through at all levels in the courts while the courts try to decide

whether public interest, which by the minister's own admission can take into account economic considerations, is something that is or is not exactly like needs. So when you get into a consideration of what meets the needs of Albertans and whether that critical infrastructure is actually something that Albertans need and you talk about that, how is that different from where you're talking about public interest if, as the minister himself suggests, public interest also includes arguments around economics?

What we've basically done is we are on the verge, should the government's amendment go forward, an amendment that is a half-hearted attempt to quell political rumblings amongst Albertans who believe quite rightly that this government has gone off on its own little journey and completely forgotten that every now and then they have to look back at the passengers who theoretically elected them – in essence what we are going to do is we are going to create really bad legislation that most people are not going to be able to interpret or apply. We're going to spend a lot of time at the courts asking whether this particular issue that stakeholder A or B or C tries to raise at a public hearing is actually an issue relating to public interest or whether it's an issue that actually goes to the heart of whether or not the transmission line itself is needed by Albertans.

We basically, then, end up with a situation where nobody knows what's going to be going on, where the only people that are really pleased with this amendment are, as I say, the lawyers. Basically, we just wait around for a long time or don't wait around for a long time, depending on whether the government decides to go forward, while this issue is adjudicated over and over and over and over again because the government has decided to go ahead with such a poorly, poorly constructed piece of legislation.

The subamendment that was put forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie would deal in part with that issue by simply trying to get away from this silly distinction that the government is making, where they think they can quell the political unrest by allowing for hearings that consider public interest while still ensuring that Albertans never get to have a transparent assessment of whether or not the transmission lines in question are actually needed. I think that ultimately what we need to do is, you know, if there are transmission lines that represent a critical infrastructure that are necessary to go ahead, still go back to the original question, which is: what is it that the government is so scared of?

In the last three weeks, I believe, we've had three or four respectable, informed, engaged organizations put forward reasoned arguments around why these particular transmission lines are not actually something that are desperately needed right now. That's fine. Maybe they're right; maybe they're not right. But what's happening is that the government is going through this process where they're simply, you know, putting their hands over their ears and closing their eyes and humming really loudly, saying: "Can't hear you. Can't hear you. Don't want to hear you." I don't understand why it is that anyone would think that it is a mark of good governance that you wouldn't want to take that kind of issue that is so important and test it against the transparency and the rigour that would be available through a full public hearing process as is currently in place within our province. It simply doesn't make sense.

Then you get into a situation like this. It is so against common sense to suggest that we don't need to test these arguments notwithstanding that every day we have yet another reputable source suggest that the government's arguments are not accurate, that their science is not accurate and their predictions are not accurate and their economics are not accurate and their forecasts are not accurate. We have so many people suggesting that. The reasonable thing to do would be to say: "Well, you know what? We have a public,

comprehensive, transparent regulatory process. We're not going to answer these issues. We're going to put it to that process, a process in which all Albertans can have complete faith. We will use that process to decide how to go forward." Instead, the government appears to be scared. They appear to be very scared of subjecting their arguments to any kind of substantial testing.

Then that leads one, quite rightly at that point, to question: "Well, what's going on here? It doesn't seem to make sense. What's the issue?" Well, is the issue that in the course of those regulatory hearings they're going to hear that what's really needed is the capacity to export power and that Albertans are going to be asked as consumers to pay for an infrastructure that facilitates and ultimately subsidizes export notwithstanding that they are not consuming good portions of that which will be exported ultimately? Is that something that the government is concerned would come out through a public hearing process?

Of course, at that point Albertans might say: "You know, we subsidize business left, right, and centre in this province. We're doing it all the time, and we're not really interested in having our utility bills go up to do even further subsidization of business. We don't like this." The government is not interested in having that piece of information come out through a transparent, principled, unquestionably ethical regulatory process, so as a result we have this bill in front of us. I don't know. Is that it? Is that not it? I don't know. Again, the only thing we can do is ask: why would the government resort to taking such an authoritarian and antidemocratic step, as they are taking in this case, that would be ameliorated were the subamendment that has been put forward here this evening to pass? You know, we have this issue.

Now, the government itself, of course, has suggested that through their little consultation process, their little committee, cost issues would be addressed. But, Mr. Chair, I have to say that I really have some serious concerns with that issue. Here the government told us that we didn't need to worry about consumers being gouged around power bills because they were going to set up a Utilities Consumer Advocate. Then they set up an advocate, and the advocate went off and got an expert report prepared. That expert report, in fact, concluded that we don't need these transmission lines, that they are excessively expensive, that they are not in the best interest of consumers across Alberta. The government has ignored their own Utilities Consumer Advocate.

If they're prepared to ignore their own Utilities Consumer Advocate, what in heaven's name is the value of yet another committee that's simply going to review bills every now and then and will be appointed by the government and, knowing this particular government, will never be allowed to make anything public, and if they do, it will, of course, come in the form of another brown envelope? Needless to say, the committee that the government is proposing to set up does not in any way address any of the concerns that so many people across the political spectrum and across the province have raised about this piece of legislation.

8:50

Again, that is why this subamendment ought to be passed, because the subamendment would simply eliminate the government's desire to bypass the transparency that comes from a public hearing process such that Albertans are not in a position of having to rely on the brown envelope, which has become the primary and, in fact, I would suggest in many cases, the sole means of ensuring that Albertans are ever given a clear outline about what this government is really trying to do.

As well, the subamendment would get rid of that part of the amendment that talks about the whole staged development issue

under the government's initial set of amendments. Nonetheless, we have good reason to believe that the whole issue of the staged development is, again, another effort on the part of this government to engage in window dressing activities to hopefully, in their eyes, minimize the political problems that this bill is creating for them amongst even their own supporters. I would suggest that it's not going to minimize it because, again, the whole staged development issue is primarily window dressing. Most people argue that at the very least it might reduce costs to consumers in the very short term, but it's very unlikely to make any kind of difference in the long term. In fact, the Consumers for Competitive Transmission have noted that even if there's a reduction in the early years, the remaining cost impact is still very large and will further exacerbate the uncompetitive electricity cost situation.

That is, of course, yet another problem with the government's very communications-focused set of amendments, which I think are, again, as I said, an ineffective attempt to address political opposition to this bill, that do not substantially in any way change what the government is doing, which is to simply move billions and billions of dollars of investment behind closed doors. Whether you're talking about any particular element of the government's amendments, while they do show that the government must be feeling a little bit of political heat, perhaps brought on by the fact that their own membership was tied on whether or not to simply scrap Bill 50 altogether, nonetheless this attempt to turn down the political heat is simply window dressing and from a substantive point of view is not going to address the many concerns we have with respect to the government's decision to move this process so clearly behind closed doors.

The subamendment, as I stated before, would basically take the critical infrastructure piece and subject it once again to the public hearing process, which many Albertans expect should be in place. Again, until such time as the government can give any kind of rational explanation for why it is that in the face of so many competing expert opinions about the need for this type of investment, until they can give any kind of rationale for taking that and moving it behind closed doors, there's just simply no way that we can support that bill, that we can support the amendments, which do not ultimately alter that primary element of Bill 50. As a result, we must support the subamendment in the hopes that we can convince the government to do the right thing and simply manage these kinds of issues in an open, transparent, ethical way that reflects good governance, that is entirely justifiable and not requiring extensive explanation to people who can't help but notice the close relationship between the political arm of this government and the companies which stand to benefit greatly from Bill 50 going forward.

Ultimately, our view is that we need to ensure that Alberta consumers get the best deal possible and that the best infrastructure system is set up to most efficiently and inexpensively and responsibly from an environmental and health point of view provide them with the electricity that they need. It is not our view that it's government's role to move these kinds of decisions behind closed doors so that they can adopt strategies which result in huge subsidies to businesses that stand to make potentially large profits on the export of electricity that would be enabled through the construction of transmission lines, which at this point we can only question the need for given the broad diversity of expert opinion which is out there on the public record notwithstanding the government's desire to ignore it. With that in mind, we'll be supporting the subamendment.

The Chair: On the subamendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: On 29(2)(a)? Just a question.

The Chair: No. There is no 29(2)(a) at Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Hinman: No questions on that?

The Chair: Not in committee.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, okay.

The Chair: Is there any other hon. member wishing to speak on subamendment A1? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on subamendment A1.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour to stand up and speak in favour of the amendment brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie. I'm going to do a little comparison here between the amendments from the government, from the Minister of Energy, and the subamendments brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Currie. The Minister of Energy is proposing that section 1(3) is struck out, and the following is substituted:

(3) Section 17 is amended by renumbering it as section 17(1) and by adding the following after subsection (1):

(2) The Commission shall not under subsection (1) give consideration to whether critical transmission infrastructure as defined in the Electric Utilities Act is required to meet the needs of Alberta.

The concern here is this particular section. However, the change being proposed here by the government does not actually do anything to address the concern.

The concern is that the bill is bypassing the needs identification process. The original wording of the bill is that the existing 17(1) in the Alberta Utilities Commission Act does not apply to critical transmission infrastructure. This amendment is changing that wording, for sure. By specifying that it is the needs identification process in particular that the commission cannot undertake with regard to critical transmission infrastructure, this amendment is trying to clarify that other hearings do still remain, such as for the siting of these lines, but that is not what section 17(1) addresses. This particular section is dealing only with the AUC's role independent of government to assess the need for the transmission lines, and if the commission cannot give consideration under 17(1) to whether the critical transmission infrastructure is required to meet provincial needs, then 17(1) no longer applies. It's as simple as that.

9:00

The amendment makes absolutely no substantive difference to Bill 50. It makes no substantive difference to one of the parts of the bill that does most of the damage to the current regulatory system. Therefore, that is why the Member for Calgary-Currie is proposing that part A be struck out and the following substituted: section 1(3) is struck out. We'd like to strike out this section as it prevents the AUC from assessing whether or not the critical transmission lines are necessary for this province. We don't want to build unnecessary lines.

The AUC should be holding hearings, and they should be going through the public consultation process. That would be the right way to go so Albertans have input as to whether we need certain transmission lines or not. That is what an independent regulator does. We don't want to take the independence of the AUC, which Bill 50 does. Those hearings are what allow Albertans to have their say, and this is what a proper consultation would look like.

Part B. Section 2(6) is amended by adding the following proposed section 41.3. This is coming from the amendments from the Minister of Energy, and that is addressing

Staged development of CTI referred to in Schedule

41.4(1) The Independent System Operator, with respect to the critical transmission infrastructure referred to in section 1(1) of the Schedule, shall, subject to the regulations, specify and make available to the public milestones that the Independent System Operator will use to determine the timing of the stages of the expansion of the terminals referred to in section 1(1)(a) and (b) of the Schedule.

(2) The transmission facilities referred to in section 4 of the Schedule shall be developed in stages in accordance with subsection (3).

(3) The facility referred to in section 4(a) of the Schedule shall be developed first, which may initially be energized at 240kV, and the Independent System Operator shall, subject to the regulations, specify and make available to the public milestones that the Independent System Operator will use to determine the timing of the development of the facilities referred to in section 4(b) and (c) of the Schedule.

This amendment by the government is trying to set out a staged approach to building this transmission infrastructure. This includes bringing the lines between Edmonton and Calgary up to half-capacity first and to full capacity later. Given the government's previous statements about how quite urgent all of the transmission infrastructure is, for them to now say that everything can be staggered over time doesn't make sense. After all, Bill 50 is calling this infrastructure critical. How critical can it be if it can all be staged over time? Why can't it just go through the regulatory process? There are no blackouts, and there are no brownouts there. We haven't had any so far, and there is no urgency to bypass the Alberta Utilities Commission.

The timeline that will be imposed on this staging is not revealed here. With stages that are only a month or so long, this supposedly more steady and measured approach to the critical transmission construction would be mere window dressing. If the stages are in fact substantial, then the question becomes: why is the government claiming that the infrastructure is so critical? Without an understanding of what the stage duration will be, the amendment doesn't appear to make any significant changes to the original bill.

That's why we are having this part B struck out and the following substituted in the amendment proposed by the Member for Calgary-Currie. Section 2(6) is amended by striking out the proposed sections 41.2 and 41.3 and substituting the following:

Staged development of CTI referred to in Schedule

41.2(1) The Independent System Operator, with respect to the critical transmission infrastructure referred to in section 1(1) of the Schedule, shall, subject to the regulations, specify and make available to the public milestones that the Independent System Operator will use to determine the timing of the stages of the expansion of the terminals referred to in section 1(1)(a) and (b) of the Schedule.

(2) The transmission facilities referred to in section 4 of the Schedule shall be developed in stages in accordance with subsection (3).

(3) The facility referred to in section 4(a) of the Schedule shall be developed first . . .

Mr. Hancock: We've got it here, actually. We have it already in front of us.

Mr. Kang: I'm just comparing them both.

In section B here we are keeping some of the proposals from the Minister of Energy.

(3) The facility referred to in section 4(a) of the Schedule shall be developed first, which may initially be energized at 240kV, and the Independent System Operator shall, subject to the regulations, specify and make available to the public milestones that the Inde-

pendent System Operator will use to determine the timing of the development of the facilities referred to in section 4(b) and (c).

The important part of the amendment here is striking out the proposed sections 41.2 and 41.3, which explicitly bypassed the needs identification process, which is very important to have the Alberta Utilities Commission do that. These sections would impact the Electric Utilities Act where it states that needs identification documents must be submitted to the AUC for transmission line applications. This amendment would ensure that that must still happen for the critical transmission infrastructure.

Part C is amended in the proposed clause (v.5)(B) by striking out "or 41.3." This is just a consequential change to ensure that the fact that in part B we have scrapped 41.3 is consistent across the rest of the government's amendment.

Part D is amended in clause (a) in the proposed section 1(2) by striking out "section 41.4(1)" and substituting "section 41.2(1)." This is another consequential change. In part B we have changed the section 41.4(1) to 41.2(1) due to removing sections 41.2 and 41.3 from the bill. This amendment ensures that this is consistent across the rest of the government's amendments.

Part E is struck out and the following is substituted: section 3 is struck out. Section 3 basically deals with one thing only, that critical transmission infrastructure should bypass the current needs identification process in the regulatory system. The easiest thing to do is to just pull this whole section out so there is no impact on the bill.

What the amendment is trying to do is to put some teeth into the Alberta Utilities Commission so that the needs assessment is done before any work proceeds.

For those reasons, I'm supporting this amendment, sir. Thank you very much.

The Chair: On the subamendment does any other hon. member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on subamendment SA1.

9:10

Mr. Hinman: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to stand up and to speak to this amendment on Bill 50. Although I understand, you know, the idea of trying to take this from the independent systems operator, the critical point of this – this is only a Band-aid, at best. I'm going to speak to it, though, and some of the other things that I feel that we really should be doing over and above this amendment, but this is all that we have before us at this point, so we'll speak on that.

You know, the problem that this bill is creating more than anything else in this amendment is trying to address the idea of critical. This government has taken the idea that if we can buffalo the people into thinking that this is critical and that the lights could go out any day – and of course any accident could happen which could put out the electrical grid here in Alberta but no higher risk tomorrow than yesterday. And that's part of life as we go forward. But what really is critical and what this House needs to look at and why we need to have some amendments – and, again, I'm going to keep reiterating that, really, this bill should be tabled for six months. What's critical is to at least wait to see what's going to happen in Copenhagen. It's critical on what the world's agenda is and whether or not they're going to pass a carbon tax. The problem here and what's not being addressed – what's going on here is a push to try and get this through, and it just isn't the right thing to do. So taking the critical area from AESO and putting it back to a regulatory system is vital.

The major difference between a government public hearing process and that of a regulatory hearing where relevant experts are

brought in, where history is looked at, the whole position of the grid is brought in: that is what's critical for Albertans. We can't afford to spend billions of dollars on an infrastructure that really isn't needed, that isn't going to serve any purpose other than the speculation that down the road, perhaps, the Minister of Energy wants a nuclear facility in Grande Prairie. We can't spend billions of dollars on those things. Even in the dream of the PCs we need to look at what are the real needs of Albertans and what is the proper regulatory process that we should be going through.

It's interesting to look at the Netherlands and the system that they've got going there, where contracts with a counterparty have to be there before they enter the market to put bids in. Our whole system needs to be looked at. Why we need to really put a halt on this is so that we can take six months to see what the world's view is on a carbon tax, so that we can look at the problem that the parameters and the guidelines that were given to AESO aren't in the best interests of Albertans anymore.

We don't want this unconstrained power line throughout the province in case there's a nuclear facility that wants to go up somewhere or so they can put in another coal plant or two. That, in fact, is only going to add more gridlock, not help it. It's also interesting when you look at the overall picture, the analysis is that down south there is the possibility for 2,000 or 3,000 megawatts of wind-generated power, yet the constraint from the lines coming south up is there. If, in fact, we add more critical coal production in Genesee 3 and Genesee 4, that does add to the problem of being able to put reliability into our system.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

So if we're really going to look at some of the points that have been brought up, the hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod has referred many times to the wind generation that's down there, that that's an area that we need to look at building up and at a much more cost-effective analysis than these high-voltage DC lines. They're just not going to serve us well. It's interesting to also look at the fact that if we're to put more coal production up north – and I don't believe those companies are willing to step up to do that at this point until we know what the carbon tax is going to be and the outlook – by putting local generation close to the demand, specifically speaking, in Calgary, that actually helps the wind generation in the south. If we add more coal – and they like to have an 85 per cent capacity – that deters any opportunity for more wind to come on down in the south. But if, in fact, we put dispatched energy in the Calgary area, that actually allows for more wind generation to come online in the south. We need to really look at those areas and realize: do we have an opportunity to do that?

It's also interesting when we talk about the critical need and where this government has pushed and said: well, we have to do it now. The industrial users of Alberta and their association, IPCCAA, has identified 2,000 megawatts of industrial demand and that they would be more than happy, my understanding is, to work with AESO during the critical peak periods and to come online and offline and to get some breaks in order to work with that. There are so many areas where we should and could work to increase the efficiency, the cost base, and ensure that we have a grid that is reliable, that does transfer the power that we need, and that industry has the advantage of an efficient, effective system and isn't burdened with \$14 billion of new infrastructure that really doesn't allow for any new efficiencies or growth in any real way that we don't already have.

I often have heard from some of my rural people who say, you know: when we go to town and we need to pick up some parts, we

jump in a pickup and head to town. But this bill is the equivalent of saying: oh, we need to go to town; we're going to go buy a semi and get triple trailers on behind to get it there. This high-voltage DC line: all of the experts that have no connection with AESO, no vested interest, whether it's the Fraser Institute, the University of Calgary, the UCA, the commission, the report, say that these lines are not necessary. They would be the last link that would be put in if, in fact, there was power generation in the billions of dollars that was going forward in northern Alberta. If, in fact, those things were coming online, once the commitment was there, the export connections were made, the licences put up for bid, much as we see TransCanada is putting bids in in Montana and Wyoming right now, they could do the same up through Alberta.

The fact of the matter is that if the goal of this government is to export a pile of electricity or a lot of electrons, then let's be open and honest with Albertans. The situation right now is that we have our lines. When there's excess production and we don't need it – and like I say, the peak hours actually show through the night that when they're peaking their generation, we don't need it – they want to export it. They get a good deal on that, and we want that, that they can generate and produce here in the province. We get some money back, and they get a good deal on their cost of export because the lines aren't being used. But to spend \$5.6 billion on this new critical infrastructure that needs to come forward critically and now, it just isn't so unless we're linking up, like I say, to massive power generation that's new and coming online that this government isn't forthcoming in bringing to the people of Alberta.

We need to do a better job. We need to be open and honest with Albertans. We need to show a long-term plan. Is there, you know, hydroelectric in northern Alberta or in the Territories that we're trying to bring down and want to be part of? Is there a nuclear facility going up in the Grande Prairie area, and therefore we need the high-voltage DC lines? Those are all questions that need to be brought up in a regulatory hearing.

Again, I'm going to go back to this idea that it's critical and that the government needs to go forward. I'd honestly ask the questions to not only the Minister of Energy but to cabinet and caucus. Do they really think that they understand and know all the ins and outs of the electrical grid and can make a better decision than the Alberta Utilities Commission? I don't believe so. Well, I know so, that the Alberta Utilities Commission is in a much better situation, and to take it out of their hands and to put it into the Minister of Energy's hands is not in Albertans' best interest. It's not in the best interest of our business. It's not in the best interest of consumers. We're going to add billions of dollars to the cost of our electrical system.

Once again, our Premier has said that there are going to be no new taxes. Well, then, that means no unnecessary new spending because if there's spending and if there's debt of \$5 billion, \$10 billion, \$15 billion, that's going to reflect on the people of Alberta and the businesses of Alberta. We've been losing businesses in this last year down to the States. I believe that's partially because of the high taxes that are here. The property taxes in our cities have made it such that these companies are no longer viable here. Our dollar is strengthening to the U.S.

All of these things we need to stop. We've got to take a few steps back and realize where we might be in two years from now. Chances are that there will be a lot more problems with a higher dollar, with loss of industry, and again the population growth will slow. For us to spend up to \$15 billion in the next 20 years – and they're saying in the short term just \$4 billion or \$5 billion – just doesn't make sense for Albertans. There is just no reason to pass this through and say that it's critical and that we can and will push this through for Albertans.

9:20

There are just so many disadvantages in taking these first two steps and, like I say, starting with these two high-voltage lines. It just isn't going to serve the purposes that we need. We haven't even looked at some of the many other various areas that we could look at. One of the other ones is the industrial producers. Are we working with them? The Netherlands. Iceland isn't a great example any more; their economy is in trouble. We want to be there for business and for business to realize that we have the lowest cost electrical production possible and are not putting extra pricing into the transmission that isn't necessary. Prebuilding the transmission in advance of these generators that are just possibly coming online isn't right.

I want to go back again and hit on the fact that our policy right now is a congestion-free policy. That isn't good. We've got to go and look at that and realize that the cost of delivering electricity can be substantial, and we need to bring it in line on a needs test. It's just wrong to take this out of the Alberta Utilities Commission and say: "You can't determine the needs. The Minister of Energy is in a far better position, and he's going to do that." The reduced regulatory oversight is going to cost Albertans billions of dollars in the future; again, not in our best interest.

We need to realize that the existence of constraints on the transmission grid isn't the problem that they're saying it is. It happens at 2 or 3 in the morning. We need to absolutely make sure that we go through a process, a regulatory process, not just a public hearing process, to in fact scrutinize all of these demands that this government is saying that industry and the people have here. It just isn't there. So with those and the many other flaws of this bill I would hope that we would continue discussing and realizing our short-sightedness and our desire, it seems like, for a quick political fix when, in fact, a long-term economical fix needs to be looked at.

Once again, I just want to reiterate the importance that if we're looking at spending this kind of money, realize that's going to be a real black mark on business in the province here. We can't afford this infrastructure upgrade. It isn't necessary. We need to remain within the current limits and realize that to redispatch energy locally is far more efficient. Again, it gives us the breathing room to look at what's happening whereas if we jump and start giving, as this government has already given the okay for the engineering of these two high-voltage lines, we're going to get to a critical situation: can we afford to have these industrial businesses here in the province with the added tax of this supercharged infrastructure that's going to be turned over to industry or else, ultimately, as industry is driven out, to the consumers here in the province, which really only use 16 per cent of the electricity that is being produced? So those are all concerns.

I would just like to kind of paraphrase a paragraph here from Transmission Policy in Alberta and Bill 50 by the School of Public Policy, that

there are advantages to using an independent regulator to assess whether a transmission project is in the public interest. It is less likely that project approval and conditions will be driven by short-term political interests and more likely that the regulator's perspective will reflect long-term benefits and costs to the province. Regulatory agencies typically draw on relevant expertise, historical awareness and background knowledge to understand, evaluate and adjudicate complex issues. A public process allows for greater scrutiny of alternative points of view and provides a forum for public debate. The process also requires the regulator, through written decisions . . .

And this is important, "through written decisions."

. . . to provide their rationale for each decision. This is an important

constraint on the potential for collusion between the decision maker and private interests.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

So I would ask that we look at putting this to the side, that we keep looking at these amendments but realize that this is just not in the best interests of Albertans. We need to have a needs process. There's been nothing filed by AESO to the AUC. We need to realize that. Again, it's just not going to work for Albertans. If this government pushes forward with Bill 50, it's going to hurt industry. It's going to hurt the people of Alberta and put us at a disadvantage, when what we want to do is to leap ahead during these tough economic times. Realize that if we need some temporary fix and some more electricity, locally dispatched is a great way to go. More important, though, by using the generation with natural gas, we can and will increase our wind production because it can balance that whereas if we go to more coal and then we're still in this area where we're wondering whether or not there's going to be a carbon tax, it'll be a real detriment to our future.

We need to look short term at this time, realize that we're not in a critical situation. Let's wait and see what the governments around the world are going to sign into as well as our own government because it is going to have an impact on us. Sometimes the prudent thing to do is to wait, to analyze, and to objectively look at the market and where it's going.

With the new technology of the tight gas, it has changed the market. Two years ago the panic was that we can't afford to have gas-driven turbines; it's going to be a disadvantage. That's now changed. We actually now are in the situation of: are we going to be able to demand enough use of the natural gas here to keep a floor price up that's of value? It's far cheaper and more efficient to pipe gas to a local generator than to put up these massive high-voltage lines.

Yes, we do need some upgrades on some of our AC lines. I'm not saying that everything is bad and not necessary, but we need to, like I say, take a fairer look at this because it just seems that the bias is uncontrolled here. It's out of order. Again, we need to back up and realize that we're not in this critical situation, which is the storm that this government seems to want to declare, that the lights are going to go out and industry is going to leave, when it's going to be just the opposite. If this bill passes, if billions of dollars are put forward on these high-voltage lines, we're not going to be able to back out of this.

Again, we're increasing the debt to the Alberta taxpayers, to business. So I'd ask for this government to rethink. I challenge the MLAs that you need to get out and read these independent reports and to get up to speed because we haven't been given all the facts by this government. It's critical on this decision that we take a broader view than the narrow one that's being taken right now.

Again, we really have to question what the real plan is that's in there. What are they going to do? Is it a nuclear facility in the Grande Prairie area? Is it a merchant line that's going to be paid for by taxpayers' dollars? I see many people sitting over there amazed. What's he talking about? You can mark my words that they'll be coming through. If those high-voltage lines go through, it will be to the detriment of the people of Alberta, and it's not going to be in their best interest. We're walking into this. The government is walking into this with blinders on. It's not healthy for the Alberta taxpayers.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on subamendment SA1? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on subamendment SA1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:29 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

For the motion:

Chase	Kang	Pastoor
Hinman	Notley	Taylor

9:40

Against the motion:

Berger	Hancock	Olson
Blackett	Jablonski	Prins
Campbell	Jacobs	Redford
Dallas	Knight	Rodney
DeLong	Leskiw	Sherman
Denis	Liepert	Tarchuk
Drysdale	Marz	Weadick
Fawcett	McQueen	Webber
Forsyth	Oberle	Woo-Paw
Groeneveld		

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 28
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[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: Now we are back to amendment A1. The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to participate in Committee of the Whole for Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, and, in particular, the amendment A1 proposed by the hon. Minister of Energy. As we all know, this legislation, Bill 50 with amendments, will approve the need for critical transmission infrastructure projects, core projects, one of which is the Edmonton to Calgary project, which I will speak to later.

What I want to talk about now is how Alberta is outgrowing its electricity system. On one point I think we can all agree, that electricity is so important to sustaining our economic well-being and our high quality of life. Our system is aging. It's inefficient, and it's congested. It hasn't kept pace with growth in the province. We've come to a place where we need to act immediately.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore earlier stated: "We don't need that much power here in the province. We're meeting our current needs." I think he said that last Tuesday. It's page 1822 of *Hansard*, anyways. Well, I'm not sure what "that much" means to the hon. member, but here are some of the numbers for the rest of the Assembly. Alberta's peak demand in 2008 was 9,806 megawatts. That was a record peak demand even in the midst of an economic crisis. Not only that, our off-peak demand is relatively flat. Our average hourly low is about 8,000 megawatts. That's information that's available to anyone on the Department of Energy's website.

Putting that into context, Saskatchewan's total generating capacity is about 3,641 megawatts. That means that we'd need almost three Saskatchewan's worth of power on our coldest, darkest day. Mr. Chair, Alberta's growth in demand has been unprecedented. While the rest of Canada is looking at about 1 per cent growth in demand,

Alberta's forecast is 3 per cent. That's the two Red Deer size cities analogy that we so often hear about.

That growth means an additional 11,500 megawatts' worth of generation in the next 20 years. We have more than 20,000 megawatts' worth of generation proposals, both thermal and renewables. The challenge for this province is: how do we make sure new generation can connect to the grid? That's where Bill 50 and the critical transmission infrastructure projects come in.

Now back to the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore's comments that we're meeting our current needs. Hon. member, I do agree that we are meeting our current needs, but the question before us is: are our needs being met in the most economical way? Are Albertans getting the best priced, competitive electricity supply, and will we continue to receive reliable electricity service in the future? We've heard so much about costs as they relate to transmission rates. What we don't hear are the costs that relate to energy rates, the amount consumers pay for the energy they use.

Albertans' wholesale electricity market is based on the principles of free, efficient, and open competition. A congested transmission system works against these principles. Congestion is when the Edmonton to Calgary grid is at full capacity and a generator has to be told to produce power because of its location, not because of its competitive price. Remember that in Alberta lowest cost electricity is dispatched first. As demand increases throughout the day, higher priced electricity will come online. With congestion, Albertans are not getting the best price for their electricity. Instead, they are paying a premium for the location of a generator. In addition, imported power may have to be used to meet demand. Alberta is a net importer, and the value of imports last year was about \$266 million.

Now, we've heard some arguments for local generation. What gets left out of the debate is the impact that congestion and local premium-priced generation can have on the price Albertans pay for power. What this comes down to is unconstrained access to a transmission system which is required to facilitate development of new generation. That's the 11,500 megawatts we'll need in the next 20 years. That generation will come from a diverse list of sources: from coal, from natural gas, from hydro, wind, biomass, and cogeneration. New generation encourages competition, which in turn encourages competitive prices, which is a benefit to all consumers. The independent power producers will make decisions about the most economically efficient and innovative ways to add power to the grid.

Let's be clear: customers pay for congestion on the transmission system in the short term by paying higher energy costs. We need new generation and new transmission. The longer we delay, the greater the potential for unreliable service and higher prices.

Mr. Chairman, it is the job of the Alberta Electric System Operator, or AESO, to take a look at the demand for electricity, the forecasts and data from internal and external sources, and the proposals for generation and then come up with a long-term plan for meeting the electricity needs of Albertans. The AESO also consults with Albertans about the social, environmental, and land-use impacts of new transmission.

The Edmonton to Calgary project included in Bill 50, the two high-voltage DC current lines, is one of the projects identified by AESO as critically needed. The two high-capacity, high-efficiency lines in the Edmonton to Calgary project are a central feature of the AESO's long-term plan. This project will address the increased demand for power in southern and central Alberta. The project will also help to alleviate the congestion I spoke about earlier and will facilitate the addition of renewable and low-emission electricity sources like wind and hydro, biomass, and cogeneration. These two lines will connect to other parts of the province, strengthening a key

piece of our electricity infrastructure. The estimated cost for this project is \$3.1 billion, which is about \$3 extra on the average residential consumer bill.

Now, we've heard many comments here in the House and outside on the steps of the Legislature about the cost of HVDC and the misconception that this is an overbuild. There are many benefits to choosing high-voltage direct current technology. Mr. Chairman, using this technology is about prebuilding and reinforcing the foundation of Alberta's economy. When it comes to cost concerns, HVDC gives us the option of staging the construction to meet the grid demand. In other words, you can build the linear piece now and add capacity to it as you need it. You don't have to build it all at once. It can be done in stages. This ensures that cost-efficiency and reliability are taken into account.

9:50

The second benefit is the reduced footprint of HVDC. This technology reduces the rights-of-way and easements needed. We know that the size of the existing towers is an issue for many landowners, and we believe HVDC will address some of those concerns.

Another issue that causes a great deal of concern for landowners is this business of having the power company come back through your land every time it's necessary to add another alternating current line. What landowners have said to us is: if you're going to come onto my land, put up the tower, do it once, and don't bother me again. That was a comment heard over and over again, Mr. Chair, during the consultations that AESO held on its long-term planning and the Edmonton to Calgary project.

While HVDC helps mitigate ongoing disruptions, HVDC is also more efficient, and the line losses are much smaller than they are with high-voltage AC lines. Reinforcing this central piece of infrastructure will have a cost impact. These costs are regulated, Mr. Chairman. In fact, transmission is fully regulated in this province.

One last point, Mr. Chairman. Albertans pay for the electricity service they use. It's consumer based, and those rates must be just and reasonable. If the lines are used to export power, the exporters pay a tariff. Those export payments can help offset and even reduce transmission costs to Albertans.

Bill 50 reflects the long-term planning that has been done. We know we need these lines. We know we need to offer Albertans the opportunity to have a say if they are directly or adversely affected. We also know that we need to act quickly. Delays will only incur higher energy costs to Albertans and the threat of unreliable power service.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I ask that all members support these amendments suggested by the Minister of Energy.

I also ask that we adjourn the debate, Mr. Chair.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 53

Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to table a series of amendments to Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, which extends nonvoting share ownership of professional corporations to immediate family members.

As you know, there has been constructive debate over Bill 53 in this House, and I know we're all on the same page when it comes to

how the tax planning will work and who can benefit. There's been discussion over the interpretation of the current wording of the trust provisions. Under the current wording of Bill 53 there is some confusion that under certain trust structures the child of a professional could continue to be a beneficiary even after that child turns 18. That's not the intent of Bill 53. The inclusion of the trust provision was to provide a legal mechanism for minor children to own nonvoting shares, not to allow children to continue to be a beneficiary once they become adults. The current wording of the bill is that shares can be held by the children of the professional, shares of children could be held in trust, and shares must be transferred once the child turns 18.

The new proposed wording will make it clear that shares can be held by the children of the professional and that shares can only be held in trust for minor children. To achieve this, House amendments are proposed for the four respective acts ensuring that the word "minor" is added before children along with adding clarity that a professional corporation has 90 days after a child turns 18 to comply with the requirement that only minor children are beneficiaries of the trust.

These amendments, Mr. Chairman, should make the intent of Bill 53 abundantly clear to all those affected by the legislation.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I'm just seeking a little bit of clarification with regard to the minor children. When they reach 18, hon. proposer of the amendment, does that mean that they no longer qualify for shares in the corporation because they've reached adulthood? If you wouldn't mind answering, that would help me.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. No. What it means is that at 18 they can no longer be held in trust, and those shares would have to be transferred to the adult child in his name.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on amendment A1.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. I appreciate that clarification. It makes it considerably more understandable. It does indicate that the sharing continues to go on into adulthood, and that was one of the concerns we had, as to who qualified: which members of the family and how much of the extended family could potentially benefit from the incorporated status?

One of the concerns that came up – and I sort of suggested that I was trying to balance the positives and weigh them against the negatives – is that people who are in these tax brackets, doctors, lawyers, accountants, are among the upper echelon of the tax regimes. They're not at the CEO state or quite at that point, but it would be safe to say that their take-home salaries are in the \$200,000-plus category. Then we look at what's happening in Alberta at this point, where I think one of the more recent figures that I heard was over 75,000 Albertans unemployed, like the song: "The rich get rich and the poor get poorer. In the meantime, in between time, ain't we [had] fun?" In terms of the balancing, are we doing our economy and our general population a disservice by allowing people who are already at the upper tax brackets to maintain more of their wealth reserve for their family members but not necessarily then contributing to the well-being of Albertans as a whole?

I suppose what that brings into account is a discussion that I don't want to get into in any great detail on the nature of the flat tax and

the nature of the breaks that we're already giving to people. We know that with the flat tax, for example, the people at the lowest end get a reasonable break if it's a family that's earning under \$23,000. There's a break if there's an individual earning under \$13,000. There's a break, but that break is basically funded by the middle class, that pays the majority of the taxes, and the middle class does not fit into that category of \$200,000-plus. By reducing the tax impact, as I say, in the upper echelons of the upper middle class, we're putting more of a burden onto where most individuals fit in terms of the middle class; in other words, earning under \$200,000. I'm talking about a family's salary, combined incomes as opposed to individuals.

I support the amendment, but I think it brings forward further discussion on the bill as amended, and possibly I'll save my concerns on the bill as amended. I think that this is a good clarification, and I support this particular amendment.

The Chair: On amendment A1, any other member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

10:00

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wonder if I might ask the Member for Lethbridge-West just for a clarification on part of this amendment. It would be on the first page, A, section 1(b)(v), striking out "or breakdown of the common-law relationship" and substituting "breakdown of the common-law relationship or a beneficiary of a trust attaining the age of 18 years." I'm not sure I've got that part through my head.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. In this place we're keeping the breaking down of common-law relationship but adding the beneficiary of a trust reaching the age of 18. That's when the shares would have to be transferred.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So then this is just cleaning up the part to be able to add the minor child.

Mr. Weadick: That's right.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any other member wishing to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, on the bill. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Just briefly on the bill as amended. I appreciate the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West sort of dealing with the potential loopholes of the minor children and their inheritance and what happens in the event of the unfortunate death of a minor child, the breakdown of a common-law relationship. These are all definitive, helpful definitions that have been provided, and they're much appreciated.

I would be interested in the Member for Lethbridge-West or any other members in this House discussing the advantages and disadvantages of allowing families and professionals to establish corporations in terms of the lost tax revenue and if there is a belief that while we may lose in the tax revenue, there is the potential of greater expenditure and investment of the wealth as opposed to it just sitting in a trust account. I'm open to that discussion and debate.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you. I appreciate the question that has been brought forward. The real tax advantages in the legislation fall at the federal level. With the ability to share the shares in the company with members of the family, that allows, when any dividends are paid, those dividends to be paid to those shareholders. So a spouse or a child could receive the benefits of the dividends and create a tax-sharing perspective. It's a very small amount provincially because, of course, we have flat tax. It would bring a few more people in, but it's really trying to create a level playing field.

Other professionals in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have similar provisions to share this. Alberta is one of the only provinces in Canada not to have it. So this will allow us to have a more level playing field with those companies but also within Alberta. Any other professional – engineers, architects – can have professional corporations and can fully share that with their children, with their spouses. They're even allowed to have trusts and other things in there. This doesn't go as far as the other professionals, but it brings it closer. We want to make sure we can attract and keep professionals in Alberta, so we didn't want to create a situation where there is so much disparity that professionals may be lured away from here to maintain their professional trusts.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the clarification. I certainly don't want to make this an argument between sort of a socialist, everybody benefiting and the capitalist, entrepreneurial circumstance, where, you know, you achieve every dollar you can possibly make and keep it close to your family and let the investments accrue interest, et cetera, et cetera. But I'm wondering if there's at some point a balance in terms of almost sort of a favoured status, where the average Albertan does not benefit from the investments accrued to selected professionals.

It's kind of a difficult argument because, you know, we're encouraging people to get the highest level of education and expertise they possibly can get, yet we want not only that expertise to be shared; we also want the economic benefits that have been generated to be shared. So, as I say, the quandary I have is that by allowing certain individuals with professional status to do better than other individuals who don't fit into those professional categories, are we potentially creating a special class of individuals at the expense of the sort of middle-class Albertan?

I know we're talking economic interests and Keynesian philosophies. I'd be interested in how we can see a benefit for all Albertans by providing special tax concessions to selected professionals.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I would encourage the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to look at it from an entirely different perspective, and that is that small business is the generator of our economy. Small business creates more jobs. Small business creates more economic opportunity in this province than big business ever did, and small businesses right across the board, unless they're profes-

sionals, have the ability to organize their affairs so that family members can be shareholders.

In fact, family-run corporations are where small business starts. An entrepreneur with a good idea starts their business. Typically they will bring their family into the business, and their family will be a part of it. That is the nature of Alberta business. That's one of the things, that the innovation and the success, the drive in Alberta, is Albertans getting involved in business, setting up their company, and moving ahead and making something and giving something back. Typically it'll be organized around the family.

If you're a professional, however, you are in a different group. You can't do that. All this really does is bring professional corporations into the same realm as all other small business in the province. It's not about giving a special break to professional corporations. Rather, it's about creating the same platform for professional corporations as already exists for every other small business in the province.

Why would we do that? We would do that because professional corporations, like other small businesses, generate economic activity as well, because it makes a very, very insignificant impact to the tax revenue to the province because we have a flat tax of 10 per cent. So it doesn't really matter whether you're taxing it in the hands of the professional shareholder or other members of the family at lower income levels or those sorts of things. It's not a break that's going to take money out of the provincial tax coffers.

It may take a little bit out of the federal tax coffers and retain it for spreading around again in Alberta because most of the money that comes in actually goes back out even for most small businesses in the province. And the fact of the matter is that most professional corporations are in the realm of small businesses. Lawyers or doctors or accountants are professionals that carry on business in the province. They spend their money the same way everybody else does, to encourage more things to happen. I would just put that perspective to the hon. member, that this isn't about extending a privilege to a certain group of people, being professionals. This is about creating the same platform for professional corporations as exists for all other small businesses in the province.

10:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to thank the hon. House leader for that explanation because it does help. I hadn't realized the extent that small business had breaks that professionals didn't.

A thought. My wife, myself, my daughter at one point were all teaching. Should this professional corporation be extended to teachers? You know, there are so many teachers, as you know from your own family, that several members of a family could in theory, if this were extended, be incorporated. Is that something worth pursuing, or should it be limited to the current professions that are now listed under the bill? Hon. Minister of Education, did you have any thoughts about the idea of extending the professional incorporation to, say, teachers, for example? Are there some natural extensions of the professional categories?

Mr. Hancock: It'd be a wonderful idea except that teachers are paid as opposed to earning income from selling a product or service. The paid professions don't quite fit into the same concept. There's not a similar opportunity. I mean, I would love to look for opportunities for teachers and nurses, for example, as paid professionals. But they do earn a salary as opposed to earning their income by selling services and products.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. I'd like to ask the Minister of Education, too. If somebody became a nurse practitioner, when they would work in a primary health unit, they could in fact be a professional that would contract their service to that primary health centre, which in that case would open it up to having them incorporate themselves.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I think that as new professions come on and they're recognized in terms of their organization, if they required or if they could operate through a professional corporation, then you'd want to extend the same type of opportunity to them.

The only distinction between a professional corporation and other corporations is that professionals cannot hide from their personal liability for their professional advice by putting themselves into a limited liability corporation. That's the distinction between a professional corporation and another corporation. If you're a professional, you have to be responsible for your professional advice, and you have to retain your personal liability for that, but there's no good reason to require you to jump through any other hoops that other businesses wouldn't be required to do.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the bill as amended.

Ms Notley: Thank you for the opportunity to rise. I've already, I think, outlined our caucus's concerns with this bill. There's no question that the exchange between the two opposition members and the Minister of Education highlights, really, the reasons for our concern behind this bill, where the Minister of Education clearly states that you wouldn't consider having teachers enjoy the benefit of this because, of course, they're salaried employees. This sort of goes back to our basic presumption: why is it that you get fabulous tax breaks and income-splitting opportunities if you happen to be a corporation or a small-business owner, but if you are a salaried employee, you're a sitting duck, waiting there to pay whatever premiums and taxes and additional user fees this government can come up with at any time? It makes no sense. A lawyer who works on staff and receives a salary versus a lawyer who has a professional corporation. It makes no sense.

An Hon. Member: Income Tax Act.

Ms Notley: That's my point. My point is that for income tax we should be taxing people on the basis of the income that they actually bring home and they earn and that these little tax loopholes don't make a lot of sense because there's, of course, a disproportionate number of people who get the benefit of these income-splitting opportunities. I would expect that there aren't a heck of a lot of families that enjoy the benefit of these income-splitting opportunities who are making \$25,000 a year. It's an opportunity to defer taxes for a group that represents, effectively, the middle and upper middle and the upper, upper middle class. You know, it just really doesn't make a lot of sense. You can talk about equity between corporation owners, or you can talk about equity within the profession, or you can talk about equity amongst the population as a whole. The boilermaker who makes \$150,000 and the lawyer who makes \$150,000 a year: why does one get to attribute \$75,000 to their spouse while the other one does not?

Mr. Liepert: One's a corporation.

Ms Notley: Exactly. One's a corporation, and one's an employee, and we must grind down employees at all possible opportunities if we are a Tory in Alberta.

Apart from one being a corporation and one not a corporation, I don't quite see the rationale between them. Is there a suggestion that a nurse doesn't contribute to economic activity? Is there a suggestion that if you are an employee, you don't grow the province; you don't generate economic activity? I'd like to hear this government tell the employees across this province that they don't contribute to the economic growth of the province. I'm pretty sure they do. I'm pretty sure they think they do. So what's the difference, other than that one is an opportunity for a select group to defer taxes while another group does not get the opportunity?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Chairman, at the risk of prolonging this debate, I'd like to make two points. First of all, any time any person who owns a company wants to spend the money personally, they have to draw it out of the company, and it's taxable in their hands. So they pay taxes on it just like any other wage earner pays tax on it. If you leave money in your corporation to grow the business and to grow economic activity, then you're growing economic activity. If you take it out for your personal use, it's income and you have to pay tax on it. The hon. member knows that.

The other piece, however, that she mentions is a very important piece, and that is: why cannot wage earners have the ability to split their income with their family? And that's a very good question. Unfortunately, she's in the wrong House to address it because it has to be addressed at the federal level. In my humble opinion, simply as a member of the Legislature, not on behalf of the government, we should be advocating to the federal government to allow a family to file a joint return and share their income, but that would be an argument for another day and another time and another place. That's not in our hands to do. What we do have the opportunity to do is to create a platform for economic activity and the drivers of economic activity, which is small business, to do what they can do and not to get in their way when they're creating opportunities so that we can have those wage earners earn as much as they possibly can so that they can take care of their families.

The Chair: On Bill 53 as amended, any other hon. members wishing to speak on it?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on the bill as amended.

[The clauses of Bill 53 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be made? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's interesting in this legislative fall session that we're having a number of bills that creep into the area of civil rights and sort of the potential loss of privacy, the loss of

rights. If I were Stephen Jenuth, for example, I would have much greater informed reservations than myself as a former teacher. This bill makes changes to the Corrections Act in relation to the monitoring of inmate communications within correctional institutions as well as providing for earned remission in relation to provincial offences. Specifically, this allows for the passive recording of inmate communications. Those that are part of a privileged conversation, i.e. one with an attorney, will remain exempt.

10:20

Now, I'm a little bit mixed up by the terminology "passive recording." It seems that we're either recording or we're not recording. Then it gets a little bit more complicated, again, with the use of the word "passive." Obviously, the information is being actively recorded. But here's where it gets more convoluted. This bill will enable passive recording of inmate communications, which will be stored in a database, not to be listened to unless there are reasonable grounds to do so. You know, I taught English for a number of years. How do we define "reasonable"? Information that appears to threaten an individual: how do we know that that information appears to be threatening an individual if we haven't listened to the recording? Yet we've recorded it passively and are supposedly storing it, so at what point do we go down to the basement and pull out the tapes from November 23? What triggers the mechanism to play back the tape? That's the concern I have.

Various stakeholder groups have already referred to the use of these measures in Alberta remand centres as cruel and unusual. These aren't my terms. These are references that have been made. The Criminal Trial Lawyers Association has been vehemently opposed to the monitoring of remand inmates since similar changes hit the books in 2007. At that time Tom Engel, a well-known member of Edmonton's criminal bar, was in touch with us and encouraged the members of the opposition to make several amendments to the bill as it then was, including one that would have limited the use of communications monitoring to offenders rather than inmates.

I don't want to think that a person can use their jail cell to conduct crime operations and direct their individuals on the outside to perpetrate crimes, whether they be of a violent nature or a monetary nature. Yet at the same time because a person has been incarcerated doesn't mean that all rights are therefore suspended. I believe in restitution. I believe in an opportunity for reformation, which can only come through educational programs being offered in the jail. I do not believe – and I think maybe it comes from being a teacher for so long – that you give up on a person early on in the process. In the case of a repeat offender, obviously, they didn't get the message the first time, the second time, the third time. At that point do we simply say, you know: throw away the key.

It's a different circumstance when the crime is of a violent nature or of a pedophile nature or sexual assault circumstances, and a person will not accept either counselling or medical intervention. But how do we lump all these different offences and offenders into a situation and then talk in terms of terminology such as "passive"?

I see we have the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont here. I know he's got a legal background.

Mr. Rodney: Through the chair.

Mr. Chase: Through the chair, of course. I know we've got a teacher across the way directing another teacher to follow appropriate procedure. Completely appropriate.

Could you share with us your legal expertise as to where civil rights and criminal rights collide?

Mr. Denis: Pay my retainer first.

Mr. Chase: Yeah. That's right. I'm looking for some free legal advice.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I pleased also to speak to the Committee of the Whole about Bill 58, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2009. This bill will expand the monitoring and the recording of inmate communications, and it will also allow offenders of provincial statutes and municipal bylaws to earn remission for sentences. This bill is designed to make our legislation consistent with other jurisdictions, to encourage good behaviour and program participation by inmates, and it will modernize our approach to recording and monitoring inmate communications. Providing incentive for good behaviour and program participation by provincial statute and municipal bylaw offenders will help make provincial remand and correctional facilities safer for inmates, staff, visitors, and, ultimately, the entire community.

When inmates participate in programs to help them get back on track, we all benefit. During the second reading debate the overall tone of the discussion on Bill 58 was quite positive, with very few issues being raised. A few questions were raised, even by the hon. member just speaking, so I'd like to provide some information and clarification around the few issues that did come up. If this hon. member would listen carefully, he'll see that most of his issues will be addressed in what I'm going to say next.

The Member for Calgary-Buffalo also spoke about monitoring and recording inmate communications of those awaiting trial. It's important to note that these communications will not be reviewed unless certain criteria are met. The director of a correctional centre must believe on reasonable grounds that the inmate communication will contain evidence, firstly, of an act that would jeopardize the security of the institution or the safety of any persons or, secondly, if a criminal offence or plan was being hatched to commit a criminal offence within the jail. That's when you would listen to these communications. Communications could also be reviewed if the communication is made to a victim or another person who would find the inmate communication threatening or intimidating to themselves. As well, communications could be reviewed to ensure the security of the institution and the safety of inmates, staff, and the public: everyone involved.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre raised the issue of privacy in light of rapidly advancing technology. As the Member for Calgary-Buffalo indicated, the Supreme Court of Canada says that there is a reduced expectation of privacy for prisoners who are incarcerated. I think that would just be common sense. If you're incarcerated, you've lost some rights. Again, it's important to note that there must be reasonable grounds to review these communications.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre also spoke about the collection and storage of recorded inmate communications. Regulations will be developed regarding the storage and retention of inmate communications.

The final area that was discussed during second reading was around privileged communications. The proposed amendments exempt communications between lawyers and their clients, so there are some communications that are exempt. The regulation which would accompany this proposed legislation may be expanded to include communications with other parties.

I trust this information will assist all of my fellow members in their understanding of Bill 58.

Mr. Chairman, passing the Corrections Amendment Act, 2009, will modernize our approach to inmate communications and align

our legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada. This bill will also help to increase safety both in the community and in our correctional centres. These amendments will encourage inmates to participate in programs to help change their lives and to comply with the rules in our correctional centres. It will also give law enforcement another tool to intercept and prevent crime. Albertans deserve safe communities to live, work, and raise their families, and these amendments further support that goal.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on Bill 58.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do appreciate the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka providing some background to questions that were asked. It's much appreciated. Part of the problem exists, as I've already suggested, in what is reasonable and to what extent is passive simply a collection of information which becomes active once it's actually being listened to.

Another concern that has been brought up is the almost interchangeable use of the terms "offender" and "inmate." Now, a person who is in a remand centre, for example, is an inmate. They can't truly be classified an offender until they've had a chance to appear before a judge and a hearing has been held. Obviously, if they're convicted, they're an offender, but until such time as they are, they're an inmate. The offender is a much more derogatory form of language, so we have to be careful how we're using it. That you're innocent until proven guilty, I believe, is still the case in Alberta. But these definitions have to be dealt with.

10:30

Section 1, definitions, is amended by adding (d.1), inmate communication. This is defined as any communication – oral, written, electronic – between the inmate and any other person. But it specifies, as the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka pointed out, that this will not include any communication that is defined as privileged. Privileged information would include conversation with an attorney, for example. This is where concerns regarding the use of "inmate" rather than a term like "offender" arise. Note that "offender" is not a defined term in the Corrections Act as it is today. When we're sort of flipping back and forth between inmate and offender, we have to make sure that our language is the same throughout so that we're not getting into the definition concerns that I mentioned.

It is troubling that this legislation is written in such a way that it will not need to be revisited as new forms of communication begin to be used. These are concerns that I bring up. Other concerns that come out of this, without wanting to belabour the point: how and for how long will the recordings be stored? Are there circumstances under which recordings will be deleted or not stored at all? For example, a person in a remand centre is having conversations. They're recorded. Then that individual goes before a judge. For lack of evidence or whatever the circumstance may be, they are not held guilty. They're acquitted. Is there anything within the bill that says, now that they're proved to be innocent or, at least, not guilty, the tapes will be erased?

I brought this up with regard to issues dealing with child welfare, where an allegation is made against an individual, and that allegation, when it comes to a court hearing, is proved to be false, yet that record, that accusation, that allegation follows that individual for the rest of their life. Well, similarly, will these taped conversations have a nondetermined life? I would suggest that unless we deal with the person who is found not guilty and start to give them back the rights that were taken away from them, whether it was the loss of their

contact with their child or whether it's the fact they were inappropriately, incorrectly incarcerated, these are issues that are of concern.

I don't believe in a sort of generic, "Well, as long as we don't make too many mistakes on the average, it's okay if we keep these tapes for a lengthy time" or "It's okay if the person's slate is not wiped clean because there are probably more people that we're not catching than those that we're catching." We have to be aware of the balance between civil liberties, a chance to, as they say, be proven innocent and then not have the trappings of allegations or the taped conversations following the individuals. At what point does a person's privacy get restored? That would be a question I would have.

I see that the hon. House leader is back.

Limitations on recordings within this act. Are there any limitations, at which point the recordings would be erased? Do you or the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont have any sense of that? I'm not doing this to prolong. I'm just wondering: anywhere in the act does it state the length of time that the evidence will be collected and set aside even if a person is proven innocent? Maybe that's not something that could be approached because it isn't qualified in this act, and if it isn't, then there's a problem.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just briefly, earlier the Member for Calgary-Varsity had asked me for some legal advice. Tomorrow I can go down to the Law Society and reactivate my licence, he can pay me a retainer, and then I could just pay the fees to my professional corporation.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Through the chair, if the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont had a dental practice on the side, he could have two retainers.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak on Bill 58? Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 58 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 59 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments regarding this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, and I'll be brief. This bill purports to clarify the role of psychiatrists in issuing and overseeing community treatment orders. The bill also clarifies the criteria used by mental health review panels when reviewing community treatment orders, and the bill expands the range of people that the mental health advocate can request information from.

As I mentioned with regard to Bill 58, we're delving more and more into the civil liberties aspects of individuals and the safety of the community versus the privacy of the individual. Psychiatrists are professionals, and I appreciate their professionalism. We have the circumstance where, for example, today we tabled in the area of 6,000 signatures calling for Alberta Hospital to remain open basically at the status it was at the end of September, as the prayer read. My concern is that the farther away we get from the professional, from the psychiatrist, when we get into the so-called community treatment and we don't have the same type of professional connection that an organization like the Alberta Hospital has, then the ability to treat and to deal with community treatment orders gets somewhat watered down.

I recall – I believe it was 2005 – when we debated about a person, for example, who suffers from schizophrenia and doesn't take their meds. We had an interesting debate as to under what circumstance that individual should be committed to an institution and therefore forced to take their medication. It's such a delicate balance, as I say, between the rights of the individual and the safety of the community.

Again, I'm going to reference the Alberta Hospital because a wide variety of needs are met at the Alberta Hospital. We talked in question period, for example, about treatment for pedophiles. That's a very specific problem that requires very specific professional intervention, so the notion of a committed pedophile being in some sort of loose community program without the oversight of a psychiatrist's community treatment order . . . [interjection] Well, this is where I get worried about it.

10:40

On the other hand, hon. House leader, I don't want everybody incarcerated; I don't want everyone institutionalized. But when an institution is providing the variety of services, for example, that Alberta Hospital is currently providing, I'm not sure that the same degree of oversight and professionalism can occur in a community setting. This is where the balance, the privacy, individual rights versus collective rights come into the discussion. I raise this because in general we're supportive.

I would note that Alberta is the only jurisdiction that allows for community treatment orders to be issued without consent when a patient has a history of refusing treatment. A community treatment order is considered necessary to prevent harm to others. Possibly that's a good thing that we're intervening because of the harm that could be done to others. Counselling, medication, supervision, professional oversight – there aren't singular solutions. That's why when an institution such as Alberta Hospital offers this wide range of service where people don't have to be necessarily confined overnight but can receive the guidance when things temporarily break down, as is frequently the case with lesser degrees of mental illness, when we have this one-stop shopping type of facility, my concern is that expanding it into the community without having it as a backup may be the wrong direction to take.

I look forward to others. I note that on deck tonight we do have a doctor who, I am sure, in his front-line emergent circumstances has dealt with the disorientation of individuals suffering from mental illness, and the ability to direct them to the appropriate area within the hospital and for extended treatment, I'm sure, must come up on a fairly regular basis. I know, for example, that in the drop-in centre in Calgary it's estimated that one-third of the individuals are suffering from mental illness. If you could enlighten us as to your experience, that would be most appreciated.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would just like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity for speaking to this bill. It's a very important bill. As a front-line health care provider I will say that our professional organization that represents the emergency doctors of the province was consulted a few years ago. The issue with the Mental Health Amendment Act in 2007 was that they changed the criteria for involuntary admission from danger to harm. When a patient presents to us in the emergency room and they've been in and out of Alberta Hospital and acute-care facilities for mental health reasons where they've actually presented a danger to themselves or others, family members will often bring them in and say, you know: they've stopped taking their medications. Now, on that criteria of danger, it says on the form that we fill out, the legal form to certify patients to a hospital, that they must present a danger to themselves or others, but that pertains to that point in time. At that point in time they may not present a danger, but two or three days later they may.

There have been instances when very sick people have come in very early in their illness. They weren't a danger at that point in time, but the next day they were, and bad outcomes have happened. So that has been changed to the word "likely" to present a danger or harm to themselves or others, or likely to present a deterioration in their physical or emotional well-being. It allows us to intervene early and intervene when the loved ones of the family member know that they do need help and they need to be compliant with their medications.

Part of the issue with the community treatment orders is that we are allowed currently to hold patients against their will, but we can't treat them. The community treatment orders aren't reserved for everyone who's admitted to hospital for the first time or the second time. It's for patients who have chronic psychiatric illness, who have been admitted for over 30 days, who have had more than a couple of admissions. Many of these patients are many of the homeless people and many of the very vulnerable. They get off their medications, they lose insight, and they are unable to have the wherewithal to know that they need to take the medication that works for them.

Really, this is about earlier intervention and prevention because if patients don't take their treatment and they go a long time without it, then they're very sick. Then they need to be admitted for a very long time. So this is really about improving treatment, improving care, and keeping people in the community if at all possible. As I said, this is about actually bringing you into hospital earlier in your illness so we can get you out sooner and, really, to improve the care. This is not about the safety of society and privacy of individuals. It's really about the safety of the patient, safety of the individual involved. That's the primary concern.

With respect to Alberta Hospital, right now patients are not forced to take their medications. As I said, we can hold you against your will, but we can't force you. This isn't about forcing everyone to take medications, just those who absolutely need it. It's not the vast majority of psychiatric patients. It's a small number. Really, many of them are, unfortunately, the ones who are in the revolving psychiatry door, and many of them are homeless.

With respect to oversight, that was a concern for many of my colleagues about civil liberties and oversight, and this is where the mental health advocate will have the ability to get more information, to speak up for those patients so that they do have a voice who advocates for them, an independent voice, independent of government.

Now, sometimes patients need to be apprehended, where the family members say: look, here's a big problem. They bring it to our attention, but we have no legislative tool to ask the authorities

to bring somebody who is likely to present a danger to themselves or others to the facility for treatment.

These are some of the amendments that we've made. I hope I've answered some of the questions for the Member for Calgary-Varsity. I'd be happy to answer more questions on this very important issue and very important piece of legislation for mental health patients.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on Bill 59.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak on this bill in Committee of the Whole. This is a very interesting bill, and it represents an attempt to balance against different issues. In considering my view of the bill as well as the remarks that I might make, I took the time to read over some of the remarks that were made when the legislation that this bill is amending was first introduced.

Of course, at that time, you know, members within this Assembly spent some time balancing their concerns against the need for treatment on one hand and the issue of civil liberties on the other hand. I believe, in fact, that in our caucus we ultimately expressed two different opinions on the merits of this bill.

10:50

However, it's interesting because I think that no matter where you get to in terms of the opinions, there was certainly one point that was made by the former Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, Dr. Raj Pannu. He was quite concerned about the civil liberties issues. He specifically said, you know, that this is the kind of bill that we need to have the capacity to bring back and review periodically because it gives such tremendous authority and there is, unfortunately, no ability to have a fully safeguarding mechanism of oversight. That was in no way a criticism of mechanisms of oversight that currently exist; rather, it was just a concern that because of the nature of the problem that's being dealt with, it was possible for there to be transgressions notwithstanding everybody's best efforts. So he made that point.

I think it's an interesting point that is relevant to this issue now. I think the key thing about this bill that I have some concerns about is the extension of the opportunity to order community treatment and/or medical treatment, which is sort of how it's characterized by the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, or the ability to apprehend patients to doctors who are not psychiatrists. I am a little concerned about this issue, particularly where it arises in very remote communities. It's because of this issue that I would really like to see this Legislature or through some other mechanism have the government report back on how this piece of legislation is actually being utilized.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark talked about his experience in the emergency room, and I've no question that in an urban setting – I've heard a number of tragic stories from people in my constituency about friends and family who needed to be subjected to treatment and kept in care because they weren't receiving treatment and that it was needed for their own best interests. I believe that to be the case, and I believe that there is some capacity here for that to happen in Edmonton.

My concern relates more to those rural areas where, for instance, earlier this fall I along with the leader of the third party travelled across the province and spent some time meeting with people in rural areas and hearing about the state of their health care. One of the most compelling bunch of submissions that we received was in the northwest part of the province, where we heard about the incredible lack of mental health services in the rural areas and in that particular part of the province. That, of course, just reinforced the

information that our caucus released in the spring, which, you know, we received in the standard brown envelope, outlining an internal government report which also identified a tremendous lack of mental health resources in the rural areas.

Here's my concern. I heard from some people who presented to our task force about rural hospitals that have significant numbers of people with mental health issues and in many cases seniors with mental health issues who are in hospitals there. They'd have a number of patients in there and not one person on staff with any kind of mental health expertise. None of the doctors had mental health expertise. None of the nurses had mental health expertise. They might have a community mental health worker that would drive into the town once a week and may or may not ever deal with the people that were actually occupying beds in those hospitals.

So then my concern becomes: to what extent do we find ourselves in the situation where we have overworked rural family doctors who have nowhere near the expertise or the opportunity to develop the expertise in mental health ordering treatment against the will of, often, seniors in these facilities? While everybody thinks they're doing the best that they can – and of course no one is questioning the motivation behind this type of order and this decision to pursue the treatment in that way – at the end of the day we can question whether they have the expertise necessary and required to move forward in that particular way against the will of the patient.

I know that there is the opportunity in theory under the legislation or, perhaps, even the obligation for the physician to consult with a psychiatrist. But if your closest psychiatrist is six hours south and is not ever going to meet the patients that you're calling about, well, then, you know, what kind of safeguards do we have that that family physician is really prescribing treatment in the way that is in the best interests of that patient?

This is a real problem because outside of Edmonton and Calgary there is a dramatic, dramatic shortage of mental health professionals. Within that subspecialty of the medical profession that deals with mental health, we know that the rules are changing and the parameters are constantly shifting, and what's best practice this week will not be best practice a few weeks from now. So it's a very evolving and, frankly, less black-and-white area of expertise than, say, you know, orthopaedics or something like that. There are new drugs always coming out and all that kind of stuff. What we're talking about here is giving to these physicians the opportunity or the obligation, in fact, in some cases to exercise this authority and, I would suggest, without adequate levels of support.

Another concern that I have, again, because we're talking about the rural areas: where somebody who is not necessarily a psychiatrist orders apprehension or orders a community treatment order, I'd really like to know what the success rate is in these rural areas in terms of being able to actually implement that order.

Again, we don't have mental health beds throughout most rural regions of this province, and we certainly don't have community treatment centres in most rural regions of this province. So often it becomes a case of either sending somebody down to Edmonton and disconnecting them from their family, or alternatively the doctor makes an order but nobody follows up on it because nobody has the capacity to follow up on it.

We don't have enough family physicians in our rural areas, and we certainly do not have the expertise and the support services, as well, with respect to mental health. It's not just a question of having somebody that knows how to read what the pharmaceutical companies latest description is of drug A, B, or C that they're marketing. We also need to have, you know, therapists and people that can provide mental health support in our rural areas. Again, we have one of the worst records in the country, if not the worst record

in the country, in terms of substantive provision of mental health services throughout the province and in particular in areas outside of Edmonton and Calgary.

What we would like to see ultimately with a piece of legislation like this is some mechanism through which the government needs to report back to Albertans how often these community treatment orders are used and how effectively they are used and what challenges the professionals have, particularly outside of Edmonton and Calgary, to ensure that that kind of treatment is there. Again, I'm not convinced that we are providing anywhere near the support to professionals. We don't have enough professionals, and we certainly don't have enough beds, whether in the community or outside of the community, to ensure that these orders can be acted on in a way that was intended when the legislation was first drafted.

While I think that at the end of the day this is one of these balancing acts, one of the things that this legislation is trying to balance against is the failure of this government to provide adequate mental health services in most regional areas. I would say that by voting for it and giving to family physicians the ability to do that which psychiatrists ought to be doing, we are effectively admitting failure. While it may be a short-term solution that's better than nothing – and I think of those families who are desperately seeking some type of treatment for their loved ones, so it's for them that I can't quite vote against it – on the flip side I think all of us should know that having to go to this kind of strategy is a reflection of our failure to provide for adequate mental health services across the province.

Thank you.

11:00

The Chair: Any other hon. members wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to stand and speak on Bill 59, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009. I just want to get some clarification here from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. It goes on to say that this bill will clarify the role of psychiatrists in issuing and overseeing community treatment orders. The next one goes on to say that this bill will also clarify the criteria used by the mental health review panel when reviewing CTOs. You know, how broad will the criteria be? What kind of fine line will we be walking here with civil liberties and keeping the best interests of the patient at heart? I have the personal experience of a patient with mental health problems, and it's very hard to handle the situation. This is a good bill. I'm sure the CTOs will definitely help to contain the situation of a patient, but my concern is the criteria. You know, how broad will it be

Those are the questions I have for the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I'd just like to address a couple of the concerns from the hon. members on the other side. First, for the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, the criteria for community treatment orders. The three main criteria to hold a patient against their will are, number one, that they must be suffering from a mental health disorder; number two, that they are likely to present a danger to themselves or others; and, number three, that they cannot be treated other than as a formal patient. By that, I mean that other than filling out the legal form. Patients sometimes don't have insight and think they don't have a problem when, really, they are a danger to or are harmful to themselves or others. They have a

mental health illness. We have to fill out the legal form to treat them. Those are the criteria.

There are many patients who have a psychiatric illness or a mental health illness. This doesn't apply to anyone with a mental health problem. You have to be very sick to fulfill those three specific criteria. For the community treatment orders to be valid, you have to have been admitted to hospital on a number of occasions as a formal patient. If I was depressed or if any other hon. member here had any mental health issues, we cannot just do a community treatment order for them. So I hope that clarifies a concern of the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Now, for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I appreciate her bringing up her concerns and her cautious support for the bill. I'd just like to say that in formulating this legislation, consultations took place with numerous stakeholders: the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, the Mental Health Patient Advocate, Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Medical Association, and the practising psychiatrists. These are the care providers who truly care for those who are vulnerable. Really, the idea here isn't to infringe upon patients' liberties. It's really to provide them the care that they desperately do require.

There are remedies. In fact, there is the Mental Health Review Panel. Secondly, there is the Mental Health Patient Advocate, whose role will be expanded to include the patients who are subject to the community treatment orders. Thirdly, patients can still access their own information even if they are a formal patient. They can get the help of the Privacy Commissioner to get their own medical records and information to help with their advocacy if they are a formal patient and they feel that they do not need to be there. So there are remedies for anyone who is certified as a formal patient.

With respect to rural areas I'm glad that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona brought this up. In fact, it's even more of an issue for those in rural areas. In all rural areas of Canada delivery of health care or any other service is a challenge. The hon. member is right: there aren't psychiatrists in every rural community. In fact, for community treatment orders to be valid, you would have had to have been certified on more than a couple of occasions to a hospital and be determined to have a significant mental health illness. Part of the legislation is that when a patient is discharged from a mental health facility, ongoing treatment recommendations be provided to that individual's family physician. That is a requirement of complying with these community treatment orders, so that way the physician or health care provider in that local rural community has some guidance from a qualified health care professional.

A requirement also is that the physician in the rural area must consult with a psychiatrist before exercising their authority under the act. So there is a psychiatrist, a specialist in the field, who is consulted. I will say that as somebody who was a family physician, we are trained in every field of medicine. We're sort of a jack of all trades, a master of none. All the family medicine physicians in the province train in all aspects of medicine, so they have had training. My first two-month rotation as a medical intern, in 1991, I spent on 9B south at Alberta Hospital. I've had a good chat with many of my colleagues at Alberta Hospital to discuss the issues that we're dealing with in mental health.

Lastly, with the advent of technology there is telehealth and tele mental health in order to improve access to care for rural areas, and that's a very good thing. Again, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the very important questions from the hon. members from across the way. They're raising important issues, and I hope I've addressed some of these issues to answer some of their concerns.

Thank you.

Mr. Kang: My question is: what kind of teeth, you know, are we going to have with the CTOs? The mental health patients say that they are well. They don't want to be in the hospital although they are sick. And then the hospitals and doctors say: we cannot hold them against their will. They may not be harmful to themselves or to others, but once they are out of there, who knows what they could do? What kind of teeth are the CTOs going to have? Will the hospital be able to hold them against their will even if say they are fine and that there's nothing wrong with them? Will there be some sort of assessment procedure followed after that?

That's the concern I have, that most of the time the patients say that there's nothing wrong with them. They just got out of the hospital. You cannot keep them in the hospital. They don't even want to go home; they just want to go wherever. They don't know where they're going to end up.

Dr. Sherman: To the Member for Calgary-McCall, again, I don't like to use the word "teeth." But he does raise a very important issue. As I explained: the three criteria. Part of this act was already proclaimed in September. Originally, before that act was proclaimed, the criteria were that the patient presents a danger to themselves or others.

To give you an example, I had a mother who I talked to. She had brought her son in, and at that point in time he didn't present a danger. We didn't have the ability to hold him against his will. Then two days later he committed suicide. The mother was very concerned because she knew of his mental illness. She was quite concerned and she was quite frustrated because we did not have the legislative ability to hold him although she as his parent and care provider knew that he was going to deteriorate.

11:10

So of the three criteria, one is that you must be suffering from a mental health disorder. This is why new forms came out in September of 2009 – and they're already in the front lines – that they're likely to present a danger to themselves or others and to suffer from physical and mental deterioration. Had that criteria been there, as a front-line health care provider we would have had the ability to listen to the parent and the care providers and say: "You know what? You know this patient really well. This patient has had many issues with the health care system. You're absolutely correct. We need to bring them in." This gives the physician the ability to hold them against their will.

Now, that's just the formal patient. That has nothing to do with the community treatment orders. That's just the ability to hold somebody against their will to protect them so that they don't hurt somebody else or hurt themselves. I hope that answers the question.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I very much appreciate having a professional bringing forward this bill and being able to provide such detailed and eloquent answers.

I want to give you a very specific circumstance without revealing the name. An individual who contacted me in Calgary was transported by the RCMP from St. Albert to I believe it was the University hospital for a psychiatric assessment. The person wasn't uttering threats. They weren't jumping up and down on the countertops, but the MP in St. Albert wasn't sure what to do about this person who was protesting within the office. It wasn't sit down, but she was putting forward a series of concerns. So she's transported to the hospital, and while she's in an observation room she rings the emergency call button. No one comes, so she's concerned

that she has been basically incarcerated within a hospital setting without any ability to have external contact.

In order to get attention, she takes her coat and stands up on the table and covers the camera. Well, that immediately brought a response, and from a security individual at the hospital the response was to toss this very diminutive person down onto the bed. Now, the individual was in that circumstance for three days. Would that fit into the category of a community treatment order? Under what sort of regulation would a person be held when they weren't uttering threats, when they weren't beating up on themselves? Basically, they provided a type of a nuisance to the individual, and I guess they didn't know what to do with them.

The RCMP came in on June 6. Then on June 9 the individual contacted Edmonton police and asked for a follow-up, an investigation in terms of the harm that was done to her when she was tossed down. In terms of dealing with the Edmonton police force, they indicated, for example, that her only avenue for seeking justice with regard to the rough treatment she had at the hospital was basically to get a lawyer and sue the hospital and sue the security service.

I know it's long and involved, but it's a true story. Would a community treatment order fit that circumstance? What other medical sort of reasoning would be allowed to hold a person for three days if not a community treatment order?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity for that question. Typically when police bring a patient into the emergency department, they're brought in under what we call a form 10. If the person has done something, either it's criminal or the police have made a determination that they may be suffering from an emotional or mental illness, so they fill in a form 10 to bring them to us in the front lines. Now, that allows the emergency department to hold the patient until the physician sees them, at which time the physician makes the determination whether the patient – again, those three criteria, suffering from a mental health disorder, is a danger or harm to themselves or others, and cannot be kept other than as a formal patient. Once a physician has made that determination, we fill out the form. That allows us to hold them for 24 hours, and then a psychiatrist would see them. Then the psychiatrist fills out a 72-hour form, but that is not a community treatment order. That is just when a patient has been brought in for assessment.

I can't comment on the specific case, but no, that's not a community treatment order issue whatsoever. The community treatment order issue is that you've got a sick patient who has been admitted as a formal patient, who has been in hospital for a long period of time, usually over 30 days, on numerous occasions, and they're likely to suffer a deterioration. Usually they're brought in by a family member who's concerned. Sometimes the family member comes and tells the doctor, "Here's the problem," but the patient is at home or somewhere else. The community treatment order allows us to fill out an apprehension order so that the police can go bring them for care, for assessment, at which time the medical professional will make the determination whether they're medically and emotionally fit or not. So the issue that you describe is not a community treatment order issue.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate the clarification.

With regard to the form 10, this person was basically held for

three days, so it went beyond that. I guess there were some legitimate observation reasons. My concern is that there are a number of people whose major problem is poverty, and there may be shades of mental illness. But in the way they are sort of dealt with within the system, there seems to be a fair amount of flexibility within the system to hold them beyond the 24-hour period, where they haven't necessarily committed a crime other than to, you know, cause a mini ruckus. I mean by that a series of questions like: "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this?" But they're not, you know, coming with a stapler or anything like this.

Anyway, do not feel that you have to prolong the discussion. This isn't the only case that I've heard of, and I just worry about people being kept within a facility for three days or longer without a community treatment order.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 59 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise to move an amendment to Bill 61, which I would like distributed at this time.

The Chair: We shall pause a bit for distribution of the amendment. The amendment shall be known as amendment A1 to Bill 61.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, please proceed.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The amendment that I've tabled is on behalf of the member of this Assembly for Edmonton-Castle Downs. It just is a couple of housekeeping amendments. In subsection 4(c) it simply adds "or another peace officer." It also adds after subsection 7(c) again "or another peace officer."

More importantly, it also deals with a new section after subsection (4), adding 4.1, which says:

A person who, without lawful excuse, the proof of which lies on the person, fails to comply with any condition of an undertaking entered into before an officer in charge or another peace officer is guilty of an offence.

The term "offence" is defined under the parent statute, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much.

11:20

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on amendment A1?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question on amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill as amended?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 61 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report bills 53, 58, 59, and 61 and report progress on Bill 50.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Marz: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 58, Bill 59. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: Bill 53, Bill 61. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 50. I wish to table all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 56

Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move third reading of Bill 56, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Act, 2009.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Given the hour and the onset of brain freeze and the desire to provide an intelligent response as opposed to just a simple response, the concern that we had, which I first discussed in Committee of the Whole, was that by removing the

deputy minister of finance from the board membership of AIMCo, there was a potential of some of the oversight being lost.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar introduced an amendment which was, unfortunately, defeated. That amendment would have given greater voice to the individuals who are directly involved in the oversight of AIMCo. The hon. member had suggested that of the individuals appointed under subsection (1.1), one must have had experience with the Local Authorities Pension Plan Board, one must have had experience with the Public Service Pension Plan Board, one must have had experience with the Special Forces Pension Plan Board, and one must have had experience with the Management Employees Pension Plan Board. In other words, he wanted the people who were affected by the AIMCo decisions to be represented within the board. Unfortunately, I was not able to participate in the debate at that time, but I would think that we would want the people who are most directly affected involved in the process by which large sums of money are being invested.

For that reason, I am suggesting that our membership will be voting against this particular bill because of lack of representation on the board.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 56?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 56 read a third time]

Bill 57

Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've listened to all of the debate very intently in the House during the course of debate on Bill 57, the Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009. I appreciate the positive support that we've had from all members of the opposition and from members of our party during debate on this very important Criminal Code amendment. This will allow, as you know, Court of Queen's Bench justices to also have justice of the peace power so that they can issue all warrants. I would ask the House to support this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak on Bill 57?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 57 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 11:28 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 24, 2009

Issue 62a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, indeed, today it's my pleasure to introduce a couple of very classy ladies that I've been privileged to know for many years. One of them is a former member of this House. As many of you will remember, Judy Gordon was the MLA for Lacombe-Stettler from '93 to 2004. In fact, she was the first woman in Alberta to take the post of Deputy Chair of Committees. Judy has been the mayor of Lacombe since 2004 and is currently the chair of client services for the Alberta division for the board of directors of the MS Society.

With her is a lady that I had the privilege of going to school with, Joan Ozirny. She obviously paid a lot more attention than I did, Mr. Speaker, because she's been very successful. She is in her ninth year of serving as the MS Society chair of the Government and Community Relations Committee for the Alberta board of directors. All in this room are so terribly indebted to the people of Alberta that work and serve on these committees, that truly make life better for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask Joan and Judy, who are seated in your gallery, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a wonderful group of kids from Belmead elementary school. We have 32 visitors. They're joined by Ms Sachse-Brown, their principal, and by Mrs. Zimmer and Ms Eldershaw. This is a class that believes in leadership. They just had their youth parliament and elections. They believe in happy health and hope and love for our community. We have APPLE Schools projects as part of this project at the school, so this will be one of the healthiest schools in the province thanks to these young people. I'd like to ask them all to rise and ask my colleagues in the Assembly here to give them a warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have this opportunity to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly some 22 very bright, energetic young students from the Bentley elementary school. Today they're accompanied by teachers Joan Gammie, Sharron Juuti, Ian McLaren, and principal Lane Moore. They also have parent helper Mrs. Jacquie Ruud. I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly students from a school that has generated, to my knowledge, at least three members of this Assembly, including the Member for Edmonton-Centre; a former Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, Debby Carlson; and yours truly. So it's got a great record of producing politicians and all kinds of other people. The school I'm referring to is McKernan elementary and junior high. There are 47 visitors from that school with us today, two classes and four adults. The adults include Miss Hurst, Mr. Hordal, Mme Vachon, and Miss Palmer. I hope I get invited to speak to their class about government. I'd ask them to all rise and to receive the warm welcome from this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you and all members of the Assembly took the opportunity today to take part in eye health and wellness day at the Legislature. We have representatives of the Alberta Association of Optometrists, three from that association, and I guess we have three members of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind also joining us here today. With the Association of Optometrists is Dr. Neepun Sharma, who is the president of the association; Dr. Aaron Patel, who is secretary-treasurer; Dr. Kevin Engel, a counsellor with the association; and from the CNIB Cathy McFee, who is the executive director for Alberta; Tim Lait, who is a library volunteer with the CNIB; and someone who is very familiar to all members of this Assembly, Bill McKeown, who is the vice-president of government relations, and I believe he's accompanied by his newest companion, Simba. I would ask all of them if they would rise and receive the warm applause of the members of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the following individuals: Omer Ghaznavi, Dr. Naveed Ahmed, and Evan Chrapko. Mr. Ghaznavi and Dr. Naveed have come from Pakistan to visit us here today, and they represent Karachi Electric Supply Company, which provides electricity to a lot of the population of Pakistan. The purpose of their visit is to secure technology developed in Vegreville which converts cattle manure to electricity. Highmark Renewables has been instrumental in developing this Alberta-based technology. It provides smart, clean energy with low-carbon footprint and is an excellent example of Alberta's innovative and pioneering spirit thanks to the help of Evan and his team. I would encourage members to visit their website at www.highmark.ca. I'll ask my guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a very special guest in the public gallery today. Jody MacPherson is our vice-president of communications for the Alberta Liberal Party, with 20 years of experience in corporate communications and public relations. She hails from Okotoks, where she has lived for the past 15 years. Jody has been working mostly in health care communications and media relations for the past few years and was elected to

her position in the party last April. She is also an activist involved with environmental and land-use issues in her community. I'd like to ask Jody to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Legislature two very special guests here today. Ms Anila Umar, a constituent and recipient of the Governor General's award a few years ago, is here today with Miss Christine Dotzler, for whom she has been a mentor since they met at the Camp Quality program for children and young teens with cancer about a year ago. Miss Dotzler is a resident and student from Camrose composite high school and winner of the provincial gold medal in soccer. Christine is visiting the Alberta Legislature for the first time, and she is celebrating her 18th birthday here with us today. It's been a pleasure and an inspiration to meet Christine and be part of her very special day today. I would like to ask my guests to stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly eight bright, inquisitive students from the grade 10 social studies class at Austin O'Brien high school in Edmonton. These students are part of a select group of students whose class is designed to enhance their in-school experience. They're here today with their teacher, Mr. Brad Buttineau, to broaden their educational and community experiences. Earlier today they enjoyed a tour of the Legislature, and they're happy to be here today to observe first-hand the workings of the Legislature, democracy, and government. I would now ask that my guests, who are seated in the public gallery, rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the House two young men who have driven all the way up here from Red Deer and Sylvan Lake in order to watch question period, and I'm going to tour them around the Legislature. I know they're going to enjoy the parry and thrust of question period. I'd ask them to rise as I introduce them. They are Steven Kwasny, and he is accompanied by his friend Jeff Chipley, who is a very good friend of my friend Kim Amell. I'm glad they're here today. I'd ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to reintroduce one of our guests, who happens to be my constituent. His name is Bill McKeown, and his guide dog is Simba. Now, Bill has been a tireless advocate for the blind at CNIB, and he's been advocating for coverage of a recent drug that we approved, Lucentis, for macular degeneration and advocating to get books for the blind in the libraries. I'd like Bill to rise and receive the warm welcome of my friends here in the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Equal Voice Mentorship Program

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I had the pleasure of hosting Equal Voice here at the Legislature. Equal Voice is an organization dedicated to getting women interested in politics. One of the activities that the group sponsors is the mentorship program called experiences. I have the pleasure of being involved in this program. Experiences gives young women the opportunity to job shadow women in politics and gain a greater understanding of the issue.

I've been mentoring a young woman from Calgary. At the beginning of our mentorship I asked her what she wanted to get from the experience, and I'd like to quote from her e-mail.

I want to be challenged. New challenges provide the experiences to learn and grow. I've already discussed the opportunity to get involved with youth mental health. It would be great if I could attend a meeting or an event with you. There is a lot I don't know about politics, and there's a lot I'd like to learn. Even just observing you at such events would be great. Any way to get involved would be welcomed.

This is exactly the type of thinking that mentorship should promote. If all of the other participants are as intelligent and as enthusiastic, then there is a future that is very bright. I want to thank the staff and the volunteers of Equal Voice for the tremendous work they do. I also want to acknowledge the great work that you do, Mr. Speaker, to promote women in politics. I've been given the opportunity through your office to attend the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Association conference. This is a great opportunity to network with women representatives and focus on issues affecting women.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Length of Legislature Sittings

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This will likely be one of the last members' statements of the legislative session. While some of my colleagues might rejoice at this, I for one am disappointed. This session has lasted a mere four weeks, approximately 16 days. No wonder Albertans are disenchanted with politicians. We hardly ever seem to be on the job in this House debating the issues. Among all Legislatures in this great country, on the average the Alberta Legislature is in session for the shortest period of time. You know, Premier Klein used the words "dome disease" to disparage the work of this Legislature, and I'm sorry to say that the successor administration seems to have taken this philosophy to heart. This administration has done nothing to improve the relevance of this House in the hearts and minds of Albertans.

Now, what I would like to propose is a radical idea, that the length of time that we spend in this Legislature is increased. The Legislature should remain in session longer, and our legislative sittings should become closer to the national average. Further, perhaps our work here would become more relevant, and Albertans would benefit with better legislation.

The processes our Legislature operates under are solid, but they take time to work. Bills need time to be debated, and the opposition will win some and will lose some. We'll lose many more than we ever win, but at the end of the day the more debate we have, the better the end product will be. Debate is not a bad word. Debate about the pros and cons and the heretofores and the what-fors of a

bill isn't wasted time. More debate will make for better bills and better government. At the very least, by having us, the people's elected representatives, spend more time in the Legislature, it would improve the public perception of what, in fact, we do for a living. This in itself would be a step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Jackie Parker Recreation Area

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's future prosperity relies on its strong communities, and I am glad to be part of a government that is investing in our neighbourhoods. On October 30 I had the pleasure of helping to announce joint federal-provincial funding for an important recreation project in my constituency, the Jackie Parker recreation area, named for the former Edmonton Eskimos football legend. It was already a very popular winter outdoor site, with a skating surface, hockey rink, and toboggan hills to give local residents a recreation outlet during the frigid winter months, but thanks to a \$500,000 investment from the Alberta government, the Jackie Parker recreation site will now be just as popular in the summer. The funding will help construct a unique spray park and playground, which will bring together families and children in the Woodvale neighbourhood to enjoy good company and warm weather.

I'd like to recognize the tremendous efforts of the Mill Woods Cultural and Recreation Facility Association, the Mill Woods Lions Club, and the Woodvale Community League in working together on this project. Mr. Speaker, a great deal of grassroots community support was needed to get this project off the ground. I think it's a great example of what can be achieved when engaged citizens take an active role in improving their own neighbourhoods and communities.

Together with the support of this government I believe that there are near-limitless opportunities to invest in communities all over the province to make them safer and stronger for future generations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Anti-Semitic Graffiti in Calgary

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the constituencies of Calgary-Lougheed, Calgary-Elbow, and Calgary-Shaw received a most unwelcome visitor. I rise today to voice my outrage on behalf of all Albertans at the anti-Semitic graffiti that was spray-painted on Jewish institutions and public and private property. I condemn these despicable acts, which took place on sacred ground.

Mr. Speaker, I join with our friends on the Calgary Jewish Community Council in the following message. These were not just acts of simple vandalism. The Calgary Police Service has labelled them as hate crimes and rightly so. The perpetrator or perpetrators planned these crimes. They identified Jewish institutions in a number of locations. They chose a vile symbol, the swastika, which is immediately identifiable with Hitler's attempt to annihilate European Jewry. They chose alarming, hateful language such as "kill Jews" and defaced the Holocaust memorial, which honours the memory of the 6 million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. These acts targeted the Jewish community, but they were also attacks against every Calgarian and Albertan since they are an affront to the very values we all hold dear: respect for difference and acceptance of diversity.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of one's ethnicity, race, religion, orienta-

tion, or creed Albertans must work together to combat racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism. Our Alberta government sends a message to our Jewish community: you do not stand alone. We must stand up for pluralism and acceptance. As Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Abella says: the real measure of your convictions is not in what you stand for but, rather, what you stand up for.

Mr. Speaker, I stand up for our Jewish community, and I say no to hate. I urge all of our colleagues and all Albertans to do the same.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

H1N1 Influenza Pandemic Planning

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government could not answer a single question as to why Alberta has higher hospitalization and death rates from H1N1 when compared to the Canadian average and to other provinces. Again to the Premier: can the Premier answer whether the reason for this sad fact could be that Alberta has more people with chronic conditions that put them at risk than other provinces?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that over the past couple of days this member has raised these issues. I have had the opportunity to discuss them with our chief medical officer of health. It's been well published in media over the last couple of days. In essence, there are a number of factors that relate to some of the statistics that the Leader of the Opposition has brought forward. Probably the most compelling one is that because we have moved to one health region and one reporting system, we have very much a system now that is a next-day system versus one that's much more sporadic. There are a bunch of other reasons I can go into.

1:50

Dr. Swann: Well, that's a difficult one to understand, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister saying, essentially, that the reorganization has caused such disorganization that it can't deliver a standard vaccine program in the province of Alberta that was planned for years?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, exactly what I'm saying is that it has a better reporting process because of the one system, one area that is focused on this particular issue.

There are a number of other issues, Mr. Speaker. As an example, as the member, with his background, would probably know, the wave of H1N1 comes from west to east. Obviously, it hit the western provinces some two weeks earlier than it hit the rest of the country. There are a number of factors that are involved. It's not a simple black-and-white issue.

Dr. Swann: Again to the minister: is the minister suggesting that it had nothing to do with the way the vaccine program was rolled out, open to all Albertans instead of targeted?

Mr. Liepert: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that having no plan does not stop this minister of health from making rash decisions. The minister stated in his speech to the AAMD and C that Albertans need

to see the cost of health care. He has also said that he has no plans in mind for raising revenues. This is of little assurance to Albertans regardless of the Premier saying that there will be no new taxes. To the minister: is your solution going to be simply delisting more services so that Albertans will realize the true cost they have to pay out of pocket rather than through their taxes?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems like this particular member – I'm not sure if he was still in the House yesterday when I answered the question of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. In essence, the question from one of the councillors in that meeting was about us removing health care premiums, which I said and Albertans believe was the right thing to do.

However, I think that as Canadians and as Albertans we have our heads in the sand if we want to continue to say that everything can continue the way it is today. We need to have the discussion, Mr. Speaker. All I talked about was having a discussion. There are no plans to do anything that these particular members are referring to.

Dr. Swann: Well, if delisting is not what the minister has in mind, then, when is the minister going to share your ideas with Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Well, we do that every day in this House, Mr. Speaker. We do that in sessions that this member is referring to. What we're doing is talking to Albertans. I consistently hear from Albertans. What I said to the media was that Albertans consistently say to us that they don't want to see health services diminished. They want to see a more effective, efficient health care system. [interjection] We need to listen to those Albertans and not listen to these folks over here. [interjection]

The Speaker: Okay. Let's pay attention because I do think that the members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood do want to participate in the question period, but if you do it now, I won't recognize you later.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This minister purports to be aware of every dollar spent on health care in this province. Can the minister explain why Alberta Health Services, according to last year's blue book, received an additional \$600 million over and above what was allocated to the former health authorities – over and above what was allocated to the former health authorities? What was the extra \$600 million used for?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I'm having some trouble following the line of questioning, Mr. Speaker. My recollection is that this has all been well through the budgeting process. We debated estimates in this House. I presume what he's referring to is the additional dollars that were allocated. There was some one-time money, I recall, for transitional dollars. I'm going by memory here, but I know we've had those discussions not only in estimates but, I believe, in Public Accounts.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Long-term Electricity Contracts

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta consumers use electricity every minute of every day; therefore, an electricity system that is simple, clear, and predictable is the system that's in their best interests and the system they want. What they've got,

however, is this government's deregulated dog's breakfast, with its 80 per cent deregulated rate structure today moving to 100 per cent price deregulation in a few months' time. They have to make a choice: do I go with ever-increasing price uncertainty, or do I lock into a contract and overpay over the long term? To the Premier: does the Premier think this is the system that's in consumers' best interests?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if we look at all of the new generation that has been added in Alberta over the last number of years – generation coming from green energy, the most per capita kilowatts from wind, and we're now into biomass and will continue to build that availability of electricity generated from biomass – yes, it is in the best interests of the consumer because we not only have affordable energy, but we also have reliable. That's what the hon. member forgot to mention in his opening remarks.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister of Energy said yesterday that he thinks long-term electricity contracts, with their huge penalties for pulling out early, are a bad deal and that he wouldn't sign one even though – even though – this government has been promoting them as a good option for consumers in the past. To the Premier: where's consumer choice now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, one thing that we won't do in this province, as I've seen happening in some other jurisdictions, is that when new generation is added, especially from wind and solar, the actual costs are delayed by a number of years, covered through borrowing money through a Crown corporation. In this province we pay for the electricity we consume now at the end of the month. We don't ask the next generation to pay for the costs of the electricity that we use today. That's not the Alberta way.

Mr. Taylor: This is not only about who's paying what, when. It's also about who's overpaying, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Service Alberta: as the minister responsible for the Utilities Consumer Advocate, will the UCA now properly advise consumers that most long-term electricity contracts are bad deals? To do otherwise would imply that the Minister of Energy doesn't know what he's talking about.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there are many energy marketing providers out there, and the consumer has incredible choice as to what they need to do and what serves them best. With respect to the exit fees that go out, the consumer can make the best choice. As I mentioned previously, the UCA has a tremendous website that you can look at on a day-to-day basis and see what they're offering. So it's the consumer making the best choice they need to make for their family and their needs.

The Speaker: If you're ready, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Health Care Funding

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier continues to promote the billion dollar cut to health care, yet at the same time he's handing a \$2 billion windfall to oil and gas companies to develop carbon capture and storage. I've got an idea where he could find the money for health care, and he wouldn't have to lay off a single nurse, close a single bed, or delist a single service.

Three guesses, Mr. Premier. Why is the Premier sacrificing our health care system to subsidize technology that industry should be paying for?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, the member is wrong. Last year the budget for health care was increased by \$550 million. That is not a reduction in the budget. That was an addition: \$550 million. The budgets are being discussed today. We know the pressures on health, and there'll be another increase. I don't know how large it's going to be, but it'll be a positive, not any of these cuts that the NDP are talking about erroneously and trying to, you know, create this scare in the public that the government is cutting back on dollars going to the health department. That is absolutely wrong.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, apparently the Premier has forgotten about closing Alberta Hospital, closing beds, a hiring freeze on nurses, you know, and he has forgotten about a billion dollar deficit. This carbon capture scheme would be a joke if it weren't costing taxpayers \$2 billion. You can line that up with the \$14 billion that Albertans are going to have to pay for power lines they don't need, and it's clear that the priorities of this government are seriously wrong. The lucky winners are celebrating in their boardrooms with champagne and caviar while Albertans wait in hospital hallways for days without help. Instead of cutting nursing jobs and closing hospital beds, why doesn't the Premier scrap carbon capture and use the money to fund health care?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: I'm glad he stopped to take a breath. We won't have to phone first aid.

Mr. Speaker, in all honesty, we have to ensure as Albertans that we protect our markets. We've seen the latest criticism just today from another Premier, from Ontario. We've seen criticism by an ex-American official that wants to put, of course, the oil sands to bed, to just shut them down. We have to do whatever we can to protect our markets. We have to realize that we export about \$90 billion worth of resources out of this province. Those people that are exporting those resources pay royalties. They also pay taxes to the government, which, in turn, we spend on health care and education.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the connection between carbon capture and storage and what the Premier just talked about I think eludes most people. Enhance Energy just won a \$500 million lottery paid for by people this government clearly doesn't care about: people lying on gurneys in hospital hallways, nurses who can't get jobs, seniors who can't get long-term care, and the mentally ill, whose hospital is being closed by this government. Why won't the Premier admit the obvious, that he cares more for the profits of oil and gas corporations than he does for Albertans trapped in an underfunded health care system?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, here's another flip-flop. At the beginning of the week he was supporting the oil sands; today he wants to shut them down once again. But, you know, let's just set that aside.

Here's the thing that is going to happen. The \$2 billion that we are investing in carbon capture: a lot of it is going back into establishing pipelines to recover more of the resources that are already in the ground. When we drill oil and gas wells, we extract

maybe 15 to 20 per cent of that resource. The other 80 per cent is still in the formation. By using CO₂, we can extract more of the resources using the very same road and the very same well site that was established a number of years ago. So we'll see a tremendous return on the original \$2 billion investment, and that, again, will go back to our children for health care and education.

The Speaker: Was there a point of order raised there, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood?

Mr. Mason: Absolutely.

The Speaker: Okay. We'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion of question period.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mountain Pine Beetle Control

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I read over the weekend in one my weekly newspapers that the municipality of Hinton is disappointed in how the province is directing funds to fight the mountain pine beetle. It argues that the beetle can't be beaten. It argues that money should be spent preparing communities for life after beetles, not on eliminating today's threat. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. I and many of my colleagues in the forest industry think it's vital to continue the war on beetles. Can he tell us what his department is doing to protect the 38,000 jobs that depend on the forest industry?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Member for West Yellowhead is absolutely right: now is not the time to give up on the fight against the beetle. I'm happy to report that we're not. Last weekend we were able to announce an additional \$15 million to deal with beetle control for the remainder of this year. That money was matched by the federal government: \$10 million. I'd like to acknowledge the good work of the federal MP for Yellowhead, Rob Merrifield, who helped get that assistance. So we have an additional \$25 million to continue the fight against the spread of the beetle in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can the minister explain what additional funds and what programs will actually be put in place to fight the beetle infestation?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, that money will be directed where we get the best bang for the buck, and I'm not talking about the deer hunting season. These dollars will be directed to areas where there's the greatest potential to limit the spread of beetles. This means that in light of the summer inflight from British Columbia, which has pushed the leading edge into the Whitecourt-Slave Lake area, our control action will be focused on that area, the leading edge. Behind the leading edge, however, there will still be control action, focusing on salvage, regeneration, and wildfire control. There is money for that, again, a joint federal-provincial program. These are two different programs, two different ways of dealing with beetles, but they have the same objective, which is healthy, sustainable forests.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. What assurances do we have that the control

program is not just throwing good money after bad and would be ultimately effective?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we know that our control methods are working. The hon. member from Grande Prairie took me on a tour in August. We looked at areas where we had control and where we didn't. The difference was obvious. Our control methods do work. This is not a surprise. We've been advised by our counterparts in British Columbia, by the leading scientist from the Canadian Forest Service that Alberta is in the position where the infestation is small enough that management can be effective. If you want to see the alternative, go to British Columbia, where they said, "Let nature take its course," and they did nothing. The result is that they've lost 50 per cent of their pine forest. A young person growing up in the interior of British Columbia today may not see a mature pine forest until he is collecting old age security. We're not prepared to allow that to happen in Alberta. Doing nothing is not an option.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

New Home Construction and Inspection

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a response to concerns raised yesterday by senior citizens from Stony Plain, the Minister of Municipal Affairs said that he has consulted with the stakeholders on a review of residential construction practices. His department's annual report and the website list those stakeholders as industry, warranty companies, municipalities, builders associations, and the Safety Codes Council. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is the Minister of Municipal Affairs excluding home and condo owners from a review that is supposed to protect home and condo owners?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say to the hon. member that I do not believe that we are excluding anybody. Yesterday there was a question that was brought forward by the hon. member opposite asking if I would meet with the members from Stony Plain. I'd be very glad to meet with those individuals. They did bring forward a proposal to my ministry at the time that we were initially looking at the information, the gathering of information. We did use the information that they presented to us and have used it in our discussions.

Mr. Kang: To the same minister again. This review has been bottled up for over a year, and you have given no indication that you intend to release the results any time soon. How many more senior citizens will be hurt by poor construction practices before you take any action, sir?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did ask my parliamentary assistant to do a review. He did that. He did provide a paper to me. We are meeting with a number of ministries that are involved, and it is going through the government process at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now to the Minister of Service Alberta. While Albertans wait for this government to release its recommendations, homeowners need protection now. Will the Minister of Service Alberta finally start cracking down on shoddy home builders by enforcing consumer protection legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, working with the Minister of Municipal Affairs is very important on this as it relates to the Condominium Property Act. As I said yesterday, I'm receiving a number of letters on many issues that people are facing, and they're very serious issues. We want to make sure that we can address all the issues so that when we come forward with help or what needs to be done, we're on the right track. That means working in conjunction with the minister, with the building codes as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Chateau Estates Access Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over a year I've been advocating for a connector road between 84th Street and 100th Street N.E. to help alleviate access issues for my constituents of Chateau Estates. After much effort the land was acquired, and a commitment was made to my constituents to build this road. Can the Minister of Transportation explain why this road hasn't been built yet?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that this hon. member's constituents are very, very lucky to have such a hard-working, strong MLA pushing their strong issue. I will say that that road will be built. There's an issue, though, right now with gas pipelines that cross the road alignment, and we're dealing with that. My officials are working with the pipeline companies to modify the pipeline crossings so that we can get going on the road that the member is talking about. The road will be built.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm glad that the minister's department is working on this connector road, that I've championed for the last year.

Can the minister please tell me why the issues with the gas companies were not addressed prior to making the announcement?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did meet with some of the residents and the businesses. We know that this access road is a very important part of the ring road. When we began the design of the road, we realized that our standard practice for crossing the pipelines would not apply in this case. This is a safety issue. We had to alter our plans, and this caused a bit of a delay, I must admit. However, I want to emphasize to this hon. member – and he's been there lobbying every day for his constituents – that we'll get this road built as soon as we can.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for your enthusiastic support of this project. Would you have any idea as to when the project can be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure this member and his constituents that this government is addressing their access concerns. I've got to say that I can't give them an exact date because that's what gets people into trouble. I told this hon. member before, and then there were some issues that came up, and it created a problem.

All I can say is that we're going to get at it as fast as we can, and hopefully we'll get it built in 2010.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Water Allocation

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's water market is about to get a whole lot bigger. Right now water is free for existing licence holders, but they can and have sold some of that water back to municipalities and to the province for huge profits. Instead of fixing this system, the government is making it easier and cheaper to sell water rights by weakening environmental regulations. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why is the minister willing to spend vast amounts of taxpayer money to expand certain people's ability to sell water?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the preamble that the member brought forward when she suggests that we're weakening the water regulatory system. I might suggest to her that it's quite the opposite. We are in fact strengthening the system. We recognize that we have a finite resource called water, and we have growth pressures from population, from economic development. Somehow we need to balance the two. We need to ensure that those users that have water are incented to conserve that water and share that water with those users that potentially don't have water. That's what it's all about.

Ms Blakeman: There's a better solution than water markets.

Given that the senior water licence holders have first dibs on water and that the licences for environmental protection are considered junior, or back of the line, what or who will protect the environment when the rivers are at their lowest levels?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I believe that that responsibility falls to me, and I don't say so lightly. That's a job that we have to take seriously. In the reports that we tabled yesterday, all of the groups that have provided recommendations to us have made it clear that the number one priority needs to be a process that has a conservation set-aside that ensures that we have sufficient water in the system to have a healthy aquatic ecosystem. That's job number one.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Back to the same minister: given that watering lawns has the same priority under this system as basic human needs, drinking water, and the protection of the ecosystem, why won't the minister fulfill his mandate as an Environment minister and protect Alberta's water? Shut down the water market and overhaul the system.

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member has just made an outstanding argument as to why it's necessary for us to establish a value for water. Clearly, watering lawns should be a conscious decision that someone makes: "Is this the priority? Is this the highest value for this water?" Frankly, today there are no incentives whatsoever for anyone to conserve water, nor are there any disincentives whatsoever for those who choose to waste water.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Hate Crimes

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2008 Alberta hate crimes report was released on November 10, 2009. More and more research is supporting strategies of creating laws that criminalize hate violence, as in the U.S., and those that include the whole society by involving civil organizations and educational institutions to build understanding and co-operation, as in Europe. Hate incidence will grow and become bigger and more difficult to solve if ignored. My question is to the Solicitor General. What is your response to the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee's recommendation on the creation of an Alberta hate crime team under your ministry to ensure a consistent and professional response to all Albertans in relation to the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of hate crimes?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to say that police services in Alberta do a great job keeping Albertans safe from crime, including hate crime. They will continue to actively pursue crimes of this nature. I'm pleased to confirm that police investigations into any kind of crime in Alberta, including hate crimes, all adhere to the same written standards. Investigations are handled in a consistent, professional manner by every police service in Alberta. These standards are clearly outlined in the Provincial Policing Standards Manual, which is issued under the Police Act.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. The Provincial Policing Standards Manual, published by the Solicitor General and Public Security, states that the police service shall have written policy governing the investigation of hate crimes. Can the minister tell me what has been put in place to implement these standards and what performance measures are developed for the purpose of accountability?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the standards for investigating all crimes in Alberta, including hate crimes, are outlined in detail in the Provincial Policing Standards Manual. Under the Police Act every police service in Alberta is held accountable for complying with these standards. We conduct regular audits to ensure compliance with these standards. If these audits identify an area of noncompliance, we hold the police accountable for that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. My last supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. The Alberta report also recommended the need to educate and support communities to stand up to hate so citizens know what they can do about it and how they can support targets of hate crime. As the lead ministry for the SafeCom initiative, what can SafeCom do to address the issue of hate crime in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that hate crimes can have a devastating and long-lasting effect on communities. We saw a great example of that yesterday in the Legislature, where members of this House joined the Premier in honouring those lost during the Ukrainian famine, which was an unimaginable tragedy which unfortunately happened. We know that vandalism

like the kind we've seen in Calgary, which was referred to earlier, will not be tolerated, and our special prosecutions branch works very closely with the police to ensure that we can effectively prosecute hate crime. We also, through the safe communities fund, have the safe communities innovation projects, where we would be very happy to receive submissions from the community on pieces of work that they believe need to be done with respect to community education in this regard.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Agriculture Supply Management Sponsors

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Five organizations established under the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act of Alberta sponsored the Progressive Conservative annual general meeting. These organizations receive provincial government funding and are subject to provincial government regulations. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Alberta Milk is supervised by the Agricultural Products Marketing Council, which is appointed by the government of Alberta. Did this government-appointed board make the decision to be the sponsor for the PC Party's AGM?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I endeavoured to get the message across yesterday, supply management boards do not receive operational funding from the government of Alberta. Supply management organizations' revenue comes from service charges paid for by the producer memberships. That is how the money is spent, and how that money is spent is up to their membership. It has nothing to do with the marketing council.

Ms Pastoor: Alberta Turkey Producers and Alberta Milk have just received over \$660,000 in project funding from the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency. Are these the hundreds and thousands of dollars in grants that the minister referred to yesterday as "the odd grant"?

2:20

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that maybe I talked a little a bit . . .

An Hon. Member: Pretty odd all right.

Mr. Groeneveld: Oh, agriculture again; the chickens are coming to life.

A little time to talk about the supply management thing. The supply management organization sets production quotas for producers, which limits the amount of the commodity produced. They also have the ability to set farm gate prices, which is one reason why supply management is debated at the WTO. The federal government regulates overquota tariffs to prevent import of supply-managed products from other countries. It's unfortunate that these people have to come under this questioning.

Ms Pastoor: I'm not sure that the question is what they do. I think we all understand what their mandate is as to what they do. The question was: with the government money did they sponsor political parties?

My question is: does the minister not think it prudent to stop allowing these government-regulated organizations to sponsor political events?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, what these people do with their private money is up to them. But if you can come up with some proof of wrongdoing, please present it to me. I sit right beside the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. I'll share with her this wrongdoing, and we will investigate it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Environmental Impact of Oil Sands

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Environment dismissed a report calling on the federal government to take control of the cleanup of the oil sands, claiming that this is a provincial responsibility that he didn't want the feds to address. The problem is that the province is completely failing to deal with the many environmental hazards created by oil sands activities. Will the minister acknowledge that calls for more federal action come because of years and years of his government's practice of making empty promises with no real environment protection?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is that this government stands behind its record of protecting the Athabasca River and the watersheds surrounding the Athabasca River. This is one of the most protected and regulated rivers in all of the world, and for this member to say and infer in some way that this government is doing nothing shows her total and complete lack of knowledge of what reality actually is.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very aware of what this government is not doing to protect the environment.

Now, this minister has continuously claimed that seepage from tailings ponds is not finding its way into groundwater supplies. However, this report asserts that as far back as '97 industry itself has been regularly acknowledging ongoing groundwater contamination from tailings ponds. Even though this government has the authority to prosecute for this environmental infraction, all they did was make the oil companies promise to keep them posted about attempts to avoid this in the future. So the minister is not protecting our water supply. Why not?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, we've dealt with this issue of seepage from tailings ponds on numerous occasions in this House. The fact of the matter is that there is seepage from tailings ponds, but there's also a collection system to ensure that any contaminated water that seeps out of the bottom of the pond is captured by wells and reinjected back into the pond. Any seepage that occurs beyond that would travel at a rate, I am told, of about two metres in 50 years. Two metres straight down in 50 years.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the report says that it's getting into the groundwater and it's a problem.

Now, meanwhile, it also notes both federal and provincial reliance on a CEMA process that is stalled and has yet to establish enforceable environment protection standards. The minister doesn't want the feds to take over, but at the same time he refuses to act. The people of Alberta don't care who protects their environment; they just want it done. So the minister needs to decide: will he lead, will he follow, or will he get out of the way? Pick one. Someone has to protect the environment. Why won't you?

Mr. Renner: This minister is taking his job very responsibly. Mr. Speaker, she gave me an option. I choose to be the leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Government Spending Relative to GDP

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have always believed there has to be some formal way to measure when a government is spending too little money, not that that happens very much around the world, and measure when government spending is too high, which can seriously unbalance the economy. Some studies indicate that government spending should fall within a specific range of GDP, some suggestions are between 20 and 30 per cent being fine, others suggest a broader range of 15 to 35 per cent, and still others are very specific at 20 or 22 or 27 per cent. My questions are for the President of the Treasury Board. Given that numerous studies have been done to show healthy percentage ranges of GDP that government spending can and should represent, has the president considered what size or range of GDP this government's spending should be?

Mr. Snelgrove: That's an interesting question. The GDP is certainly one of the fiscal tools that we watch as a government, as business watches as to how it can reflect a healthy economy or investment in the economy. As a provincial government we have continually ranked just by any measure well within the guidelines of healthy spending of GDP. The hon. member makes a very good point. But to measure the amount of GDP from government spending, also one needs to encourage: is it borrowed money that the government is spending? Is it money from outside sources? For example, Alberta receives a negative amount from the federal government. So to compare provincially on the same equation would be very difficult with a province like Quebec, for example, that receives so much external money and borrows so much money to operate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people of my age, my generation and younger, have approached me from all across this province with a concern. It's interesting they're not overly concerned about this downturn in the economy or how we're handling the situation, but they are concerned about the next round of surpluses, and quite frankly some of them have said that they're terrified that without proper planning new surpluses could raise expectations, could lead to new program spending increases, which could mean we aren't prepared for the next downturn. To the President of the Treasury Board: given that I and those of my generation also deeply understand the cyclical nature of our economy and that the global economy, too, has cyclical downturns, what is the minister doing to ensure that we properly prepare not for this time, not for this downturn, but for the next cycle of up and down?

The Speaker: Well, okay. Hon. minister, speculation is not part of the question period.

Mr. Snelgrove: I'm glad he's on our side.

Mr. Speaker, what we're doing besides controlling government spending is simply understanding that the most important thing we can invest in is people. In people that's knowledge; it's the research that comes with knowledge. An educated economy is the solution to growing a bigger pie. We have control over our spending in here. We don't have control over the external forces that drive our commodity prices up and down. We are blessed to have a variety of

commodities to deal with, but by building more of the new commodities – the information commodity, the finance commodity – we'll be able to diversify and expand our economy because I agree with him: we don't want to do this again.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the President of the Board: will the president consider some legislative parameters that would corral and guide government spending and savings decisions without being so binding as to remove the ability of leaders to make important and timely decisions on critical and emerging issues?

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had a discussion about where the appropriate levels of spending are set, and I'm a firm believer in the democratic process of building budgets that Albertans support, believe in, and need. As we face the changing times that we're in, it's very difficult to all of a sudden see something so clear and open that our revenues will be stable, our expenditures will be stable, and the rest of our provincial partners will also be in an area that we can go forward together. I believe you need the political will that comes from internal and not from a legislated source.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Contracted Child Services Agencies

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to those who provide services to our children and youth, there is an extreme imbalance. Individuals who are employed by contracted agencies receive a fraction of the compensation that those employed by the government do while carrying heavy workloads. To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: why does this minister continue to place greater value on some of those who work to protect children while neglecting others?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd first say that we place value on everybody in this province that serves the needs of families and kids. Agencies play a very important role in delivering our services, and I can tell you that this ministry works very close with them in terms of working through their issues. I know that we've talked in the past. I think in the last four years we've given an additional \$53 million towards their staffing issues.

Mr. Chase: Contracted agencies are getting closed down or closing because they don't have the fair compensation. They cannot keep their staff. How does the minister determine when to use a contracted, not-for-profit agency? Has the use of these organizations simply become a cost-cutting measure?

2:30

Ms Tarchuk: Certainly not, Mr. Speaker. We focus on quality. We've been working really closely with our contracted agencies, taking a look at best practices internationally. We have some really exciting pilot projects that are under way right now. I can tell you that with the correspondence and the conversations I've had in the last several weeks, our contracted agencies are pretty excited about the work that's under way.

Mr. Chase: Well, I would suggest the boys and girls clubs who lost considerable programming and Bosco Homes, who have lost their beds, aren't nearly as excited as you would let on to be.

Will the minister conduct a comparative review of the contracting practices and make the findings public to ensure that those working to protect our children are fairly compensated regardless of whether they are employed by a government or a contracted agency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had mentioned yesterday that we have some really good work under way with the child intervention panel. They're taking a look at how we're organized, whether we have the capacity to deal with the issues that were being dealt with. I would suggest that if this member or anybody else in this room has any good ideas, we do have a discussion guide. I would encourage everyone here and all Albertans to take part in that review.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Municipal Franchise Fees

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to address the issue of local access fees on energy bills. On November 18, 2009, the Minister of Municipal Affairs advised that an average home in Calgary had a local access fee of \$12.85 compared to one in Edmonton of \$3.70. It raises the question as to whether Calgary consumers are simply being ripped off. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: is this minister aware of any reason as to why Calgary consumers are paying a local access fee three times that in Edmonton?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I'm not aware of any good reason. This is a decision that is made by the municipality, first of all, how much to charge or whether to charge at all. These fees could be used for the maintenance of a road. They could be used for other lands to access or to operate the utility. Mr. Speaker, it is up to the municipality to justify the fee to their ratepayers and explain what it's being used for.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. I raised this issue before Enmax president Gary Holden at the November 4 policy field committee meeting. Again, some of my constituents are simply saying that Calgary homeowners and tenants are being ripped off. To this same minister: what is the minister prepared to do about this?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I mean, this is a local decision. The decision to implement a fee is left up to mayor and council to decide what that fee should be or if the fee should be charged.

Mr. Denis: Finally, Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for Service Alberta. I know the Utilities Consumer Advocate deals with inquiries on these types of issues. Will this minister commit to an investigation to see why Calgary local access fees are so high and if there are any more hidden fees on electricity bills, and how long will this investigation take?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned last week, it's important to note that these fees are not set by utility

companies but by the municipalities. As I indicated last week, we're very happy to work with Municipal Affairs on this. I believe there needs to be a broader examination of other fees and charges on utility bills. The Utilities Consumer Advocate would certainly be willing to participate in any review process. Consumers need to ask questions, and consumers deserve to have clear and understandable bills.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Government Expenses

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this government we've seen the size of government expand to now include 24 ministries. It's definitely bloated at a time of fiscal restraint. My first question would be to the acting Premier. Will this government commit to reducing the size of the cabinet by four ministries and save the taxpayers of this province at least \$50 million?

Mr. Snelgrove: You know, there are decisions that have to be made when a government runs a province. It's that simple. So if you think that artificially reducing the size of government and turning the decision-making process over to the administration is appropriate, then we probably disagree. We represent a large, diverse province with many competing interests and many issues. I can tell you that even with the number that are here, there are days when I don't know how many of them get their job done. To listen to a lot of the questions over there – they don't have to spend a lot of time practising for those answers. Mr. Speaker, it's not how many govern; it's how you govern.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, other Conservative governments in this province have done more with less size in their cabinet.

Now, again to the acting Premier: will the government commit to cancelling the deputy ministers' retreats that occur at country clubs and other resorts and save a lot of money that way?

Mr. Snelgrove: It never ceases to amaze me. They can take the public service here, as we discussed salaries and rollbacks before, and treat them as if they're just faceless people, and then they pretend to support the union. They can talk about the deputy ministers as if they're some people who aren't completely committed to doing what's right for Albertans, that don't spend probably twice as many hours a day at work than he does. These people put their heart and soul into governing. I have a tremendous respect for our administration, and I support them.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the acting Premier: will this government stop the practice of paying lavish perks for Alberta's international envoys such as the \$59,000 fee for tuition at an elite private school in Washington, DC, and also the \$109,000 high-end apartment that you rent in Beijing? Cut those out and spend the money here in this province on needy people.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, that's the difference, I guess, between us and them. We believe we have products and things to sell around the world, and we need to make sure that our story gets out, from when Murray Smith first went to Washington and opened the doors for our interests to be heard in Washington to the great job Gary Mar is doing now. I can't believe that their suggestion is: "Everybody come home. The sky is falling, and we don't want it to land over in Beijing, where half of the world's people or their markets are

centred. Don't be over there trying to sell to your markets. Don't be in Washington, our biggest neighbour. Come home. Let's all suffer in misery back here without a job or without anything. As long as everybody is unhappy, we're happy."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization for Seniors

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our efforts to combat the H1N1 virus, Alberta Health Services has been doing an excellent job in having administered vaccinations to over 700,000 Albertans. Now clinics have been opened to include all Albertans, which, unfortunately, at times may yet result in potential lineups and lengthier wait times. Seniors in my constituency have expressed concerns about having to wait in lineups and stand in the cold for any length of time to receive the H1N1 vaccinations. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister inform this House if and when seniors will be able to receive their H1N1 flu shot directly at their doctor's office?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, let's be clear, Mr. Speaker: there are no lineups, so anyone – be it senior, be it junior, be it whatever – can go to just about any clinic these days and not have to worry about a lineup. I wanted to clarify that preamble.

Relative to physicians, we have communicated with physicians last week, asked them to notify Alberta Health Services if they wanted to become part of administering the vaccine program. That program is being shipped this week to those physicians and pharmacists who choose to do so. I would think that by the end of this week some of them should be able to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some doctors say that the minimum number of H1N1 doses that they must order is 500, but some doctors say that they are unable to administer in such a short time or store this large quantity due to lack of appropriately required storage. To the minister: can the minister explain why the dosage level has been set at such an unreasonable level for these physicians?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Liepert: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. What the member is referring to is how it comes from the manufacturer. If we ship smaller doses – obviously there is manpower involved to put them into smaller packages. However, what the member is referring to is when we originally asked physicians to place orders. We are working with physicians to try to ensure that they have the ability to get smaller orders.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister inform Albertans, especially seniors and including students, when the H1N1 vaccinations will be available at seniors' facilities and schools throughout the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, with respect to seniors' facilities, Mr. Speaker, as I said, many seniors have already chosen to become vaccinated, but what we will be doing is co-ordinating over the next few weeks both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 vaccine to be administered at seniors' facilities.

Relative to schools, we do not intend in the near future to be administering the vaccine in schools. We have to remember that in order for a schoolchild to be vaccinated, we have to go through the whole process of having parental approval. You know, many school-age children have already been vaccinated because on the weekend there were three days where families with children could come and get vaccinated. I think anyone who has the opportunity or wants to take the opportunity can get vaccinated in a number of areas, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses.

Thirty seconds from now we will continue with the Routine and Members' Statements.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

National Housing Day

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in recognition of National Housing Day, which was celebrated on Sunday, November 22. National Housing Day was an opportunity to raise awareness of homelessness and the need for safe and affordable housing in our communities. Throughout Alberta many organizations and agencies held special events in their communities, and many people took time out of their busy schedules to come together in honour of this very special day. I was pleased to attend the National Housing Day breakfast opening Opportunity Knocks in Calgary, and my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie attended the breakfast here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, homelessness and the need for affordable housing are broad social issues. They touch each and every one of us, and we must work together to address them. Our government is working in partnership with community agencies, the private sector, and other levels of government to meet Albertans' housing needs. We know that we cannot do this alone as the need is great, great in terms of the number of people affected and the profound impact these issues have on individual lives and in our society.

Mr. Speaker, we are making a difference. Our province is leading the way nationally to resolving homelessness and increasing the supply of affordable housing. Albertans are working hard to help our most vulnerable people to ensure that the needs of their local communities are met. They bring creativity, passion, and knowledge through supporting Alberta's 10-year plan to end homelessness and to create the affordable housing that we need.

You can see, Mr. Speaker, that National Housing Day is a very important day, and I would like to ask the Assembly to join me in thanking those who work tirelessly in our communities and give so much to those in need.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Anti-Semitic Graffiti in Calgary

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to state that the type of hate-filled words and symbols recently spray-painted on several Jewish institutions in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore must never be tolerated. Why did so many people come to Canada? Freedom, opportunity, and, for many, to escape persecution.

In 1889 Jacob and Rachel Diamond became two of the first permanent Jewish settlers in what was to become Alberta 16 years

later. Since then some 8,000 Jews have made Calgary their home, and many live in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore. Many residents take part in and enjoy the services of the Calgary Jewish community centre. Some are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jacob and Rachel Diamond, who came to this land of promise over a century ago.

This senseless act of hatred directed towards our Jewish community was not only committed against the Jewish people in Calgary-Glenmore but against all Canadians and against all our collective sense of dignity and respect for others. These despicable acts were committed against all those who come and embrace our democracy along with the freedoms and opportunity Canada has to offer.

I have spoken with members of the Calgary police and commend them for their action, commitment, and dedication to finding those responsible for these criminal acts. We need to send a strong message of deterrent to anybody who wilfully commits so heinous a crime. The defacement of the Jewish institution in our community, particularly the defacement of the Holocaust memorial, is a despicable, cowardly act. For those Jews who escaped Nazi Germany only to be confronted with similar expressions of hate, discrimination, and intolerance here is wrong, and we must condemn it. For such things to happen today, over a century after the arrival of Jacob and Rachel Diamond, is a testament to the work that still has to be done to combat hate in all its forms.

I encourage everyone to attend the rally, Calgary Says No to Hate, at 5 o'clock this Thursday at the Boyce Theatre, sponsored by the Calgary Jewish Community Council.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a petition.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I do have a petition. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly [of Alberta] to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

This petition has 1,410 signatures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to present a petition, which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly [of Alberta] to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

This petition has 985 signatures.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give oral notice of my intention to seek leave to introduce Bill 216, the Alberta Outdoors Weekend Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of a motion to be brought at the appropriate time:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table three reports. The first is the RCMP's annual report for 2008-2009. As Alberta's provincial police force the RCMP play a key role in helping to promote strong and vibrant communities so Albertans feel safe.

The second report I'd like to table is the 2008-2009 Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission annual report. Mr. Speaker, during 2008-09 the AGLC continued to ensure that Alberta's liquor and gaming industries are well regulated and well managed to the benefit of all Albertans.

Finally, I'd like to table copies of the 2008-2009 Charitable Gaming in Review. Last year charitable fundraising events such as casinos, bingos, raffles, and pull tickets raised \$335 million to support over 11,000 community organizations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail I received from a constituent, Samuel Hester, whose spouse is a dentistry student at the University of Alberta. The e-mail details the tuition and fees that dentistry students pay, which total \$40,000 this year. Mr. Hester writes: "Not exactly what I would call affordable education. This is already a real barrier for the working class."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. I am tabling with permission correspondence I have received from the following constituents regarding the government's proposed funding cuts to public education. They urge that we do not cut funding for our schools. These constituents are, individually, Deana Valacco, Brian Alloway, Diane Brouwer, Rosa Bruno, and Janice Stefancik. I appreciate their contacting our office and, again, giving us permission.

2:50

On another matter I also have a tabling from Jo-Anne and Paul Cassidy, constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are deeply concerned by the government's plan to close acute psychiatric care beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton with only a vague promise to replace them with some kind of community treatment.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings on two issues today. The first set is from a number of constituents who all gave permission. They're deeply concerned by the government's plan to close

acute psychiatric beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and are concerned that there's only a vague promise to replace them with some kind of community treatment. These letters are varied, and some of them are very powerful, speaking from personal experience with mental health issues. They are from Andrea Anielski, Bruce and Gladys Loowell, Dawn Noyes, Michelle Huot, Mary Hulbert, Gwendolyn Steckly, and Cathy Falconer.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I have eight letters from individuals who have written to express their opposition to cuts to the education system. Again the letters range quite widely, and they're all expressing individual views. They are from Alex Gillis, George Newton, Teresa Krohman, Theresa Petryga, Morgan Hordal, Brenna MacDougall, and Kate McIntosh.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a joint report by seven environmental organizations that shows that the federal government is failing to enforce and implement numerous laws that are in place to protect the water for tens of thousands of Canadians who live near oil sands operations. This report was referred to by my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona.

I also would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition with 1,967 names. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of the Province of Alberta, hereby petition the Minister of the Environment, to exercise his discretion to require an Environmental Impact Assessment to determine the need for and examine the effect Waste Management Inc.'s proposed Class II Landfill, located within the County of Thorhild, will have on the environment.

The Speaker: Do you have more, hon. member?

Mr. Mason: That's all I have, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of a tax commentary that was given to me by an accountant in Calgary named Jay Schmidt. It's written by Dale W. Franko. It talks about Bill 53, the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, which, I understand, was passed yesterday.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we're all aware, 20 years ago our federal counterparts pledged to end child poverty by 2000. Unfortunately, that didn't take place. They have restarted a pledge as of today. At the Bissell Centre today Public Interest Alberta introduced its latest research report entitled *We Must Do Better: It's Time to Make Alberta Poverty-Free*.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, again has to do with poverty issues. The Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre has been helping thousands of Calgarians with issues of poverty. This is their winter and spring 2009 Connection report celebrating 48 years of service.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in question period I asked a series of questions about the expenditure of government money, \$2 billion, on carbon capture and storage. In his response to my second supplemental question the Premier once again told the House that I was not supportive of Alberta's oil sands. He suggested that we wanted to shut them down. There was nothing with respect to shutting down the oil sands in anything in my questions or the preambles.

Mr. Speaker, this has been the subject of a previous point of order in which I suggested that the Premier was not telling the truth and was subject, and rightly so, to a point of order and a ruling from yourself with respect to unparliamentary language with regard to that untrue statement by the Premier. In the end I was forced, reluctantly, to apologize for using that language.

Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 23, member called to order,

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member; [and]
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder;

is the one which I would like to quote but particularly focus on "(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." This has been a repeated transgression, in my view, on the part of the Premier, and notwithstanding the issue that was raised the last time he did that, he has continued to make that statement even though he knows that it is not true.

Under *Beauchesne's* 494 it says: "It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted." Now, Mr. Speaker, I have repeatedly corrected the Premier, at first politely but with increasing concern that he continues to ignore the statements that I have made, that his claims about me or my party wishing to shut down the oil sands are false.

In the end it was I who ended up apologizing to the Premier, but I would really like it if the Premier, if you find in my favour, would actually show the courtesy and respect that befits his office and come into this Assembly and apologize for what he has done.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know what to do about this. I appeal to you to end this practice of the Premier to impute false or unavowed motives to me because, obviously, the Premier is not going to stop doing that in this House until we get a clear ruling from the chair, which is what I respectfully request.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the Blues at hand, so I don't have the exact comments which the Premier made, but I was listening quite carefully. I believe what the Premier said during the exchange with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is something to the effect that this member is presenting yet another flip-flop. I remembered those words, so I went tracking through the books that I have on this to see if, in fact, the term "flip-flop" had been ruled parliamentary or unparliamentary. If we look under sections 489 and 490 of *Beauchesne*, you will see that "flip-flop" does not appear in either of those two categories. In other words, it's never an issue.

But I take it that that's partly at issue with what the hon. member is raising. Mr. Speaker, in this House, as we all know, there is often a difference of opinion. In fact, it's the normal fare of the day to have a difference of opinion in here, and we have the right to express it. There are disagreements that are very common, and that's exactly

what you see here today. I think it's an issue of consistency, however, that is being driven at here. Sometimes members such as the one who has just spoken support various projects and various initiatives because of the employment opportunities they create, because of the economic benefits they create, because of revenues to the province, and whatever. And then on another occasion you'll hear the very same member talking about the very same issue negatively; in other words, not supporting it.

3:00

Now, whether the exact words somewhere in the member's repertoire included "shutting down the oil sands" or not, that is, to me, not the issue. The issue is that the tone of the questions that have come from this hon. member to the Premier and to other members of the bench in front here have often suggested non-support for oil sands and for oil sands activities, oil sands projects, and so on. That is what is at the heart of the issue here today, in my mind. It's a question of the tone that gets used in question period by the member who just spoke.

I would cite for you examples where this member who has raised the point of order has spoken out about health care and has said, for whatever his reasons might be, that we on this side of the House are somehow privatizing health care. There's no evidence of that, and clearly that's not what we're doing, but he keeps raising it. We sit, and we listen, and we let it go. If I were to stand and raise a point of order every time that I thought this member or some of the other members imputed a false or unavowed motive, Mr. Speaker, I or one of the other House leaders would be on our feet constantly, but we put up with it, and we just let it go. We have that similar sort of disagreement here.

Mr. Speaker, I would understand that today's exchange which is the subject of this point of order did not violate any rules of this House, did not violate any rules of our standing orders nor of any parliamentary tradition. I would argue that there was no imputation of a false or unavowed motive, that there was no malice in what the Premier said, that there was no loss of decorum in this House, that there was no significant interruption other than the member politely rising to his feet to say: I have a point of order. I would therefore ask that the Speaker consider these facts and find that, in fact, there was no point of order, but I will await your decision, of course.

Under 486 of *Beauchesne* it's very clear that tone and manner are important in this House. Under 486 of *Beauchesne* it clearly says:

It is impossible to lay down any specific rules in regard to injurious reflections uttered in debate against particular Members, or to declare beforehand what expressions are or are not contrary to order; much depends upon the tone and manner, and intention, of the person speaking.

And it goes on. I would suggest to you that the Premier's tone was very controlled, very matter of fact and dignified and polite and, ultimately, quite accurate. I would ask that the House consider that.

Mr. Speaker, I'll await your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there any others who would choose to participate? Well, then the chair will deal with the matter. First of all, to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, in your comments you referred to an event of some weeks ago that I need to clarify. The hon. member stated that he was forced to apologize. As I recall, I was the person in the chair. As I recall, I think on five occasions I basically gave the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood an opportunity, invited him to apologize. Invited him to apologize.

The member was in fact named, but the chair, because of his soft nature, chose not to bring to the House the results of a vote that would have evicted the member from the Assembly. If the member would have been evicted from the Assembly, the only way that the

member could have ever returned to the Assembly would have been to come back to the Assembly and to have apologized. That, perhaps, might have followed the definition of the words "forced to apologize." My understanding of that, going back there, was that, in fact, "force" is probably the last word that the hon. member might have used on that occasion to describe what certainly was an opportunity given on five occasions to the hon. member to in fact do the right thing.

It was important to clarify the history because it basically leads to the use of words in this Assembly. Today was no different than some other days. There was no doubt at all that what was said by the Premier was said. The chair heard it, but what was said? Here's the Premier: "Mr. Speaker, here's another flip-flop. At the beginning of the week he was supporting the oil sands; today he wants to shut them down once again. You know, let's just set that aside." So it went, like, bang.

It is also very, very important that when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood quoted from *Beauchesne* 494, he quoted the first sentence of the section but didn't the next two sentences of the section. So let me quote what 494 says.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted.

And everybody agrees to that, absolutely, but here's the next couple of sentences.

It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

So the chair basically has heard the arguments back and forth, and the Deputy Government House Leader certainly did point out the arguments with respect to tone and disreputation of the House and all the rest of that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood certainly has been given the opportunity today to clarify for the record his position on this matter, to basically point out that he thinks that the Premier in this case, the person who was responding, was incorrect in making certain statements. Whether or not the Premier believes he's incorrect is quite secondary to the fact because if he believes he is correct and we have to accept two different versions of the same incident from two different members on the same day, then both members basically have the right to do this.

So I accept that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood had an opportunity to rise in the House to clarify his position with respect to this matter. We've heard the arguments, and these points of order should not be used as advice to carry on debate. So we're now going to end this, and we're going to move forward.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: The chair would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 60

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments? The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009. The Health

Professions Act provides the legislative structure that supports the regulation of health professionals by their health professional government bodies. Bill 60 amendments will keep the regulatory environment current. The amendments in the bill are routine amendments that have been requested by the colleges and reflect the evolution of the Health Professions Act.

There are two categories of amendments in the bill. First, the bill will amend the practice statements of three health professions. The practice statements contained in each profession schedule identify the activities that are subject to the regulatory control of the college. The colleges of acupuncturists, dentistry, and midwifery have requested that their professional practice statements be expanded to include teaching, management, and conducting research. The practice statements of other health professions under the act already include these activities. In response, Bill 60 will amend the practice statements for acupuncturists, dentists, and midwives. These amendments will allow their respective colleges to regulate the practice of members who are engaged in teaching, management, and research.

3:10

Second, the Health Professions Act reserves certain titles for each profession. This bill updates the titles reserved by three health professions. A reserved title may only be used by a qualified and registered health professional. For example, the Alberta College of Paramedics is developing in its regulations under the Health Professions Act the titles paramedic, primary care paramedic, and critical care paramedic, and several other provisional titles are to be added to the list of reserved titles for this profession.

The College of Pharmacists has begun the process to amend its professional regulation to accommodate pharmacy technicians as regulated members. The college has told government that the titles pharmacy technician students and professionally registered pharmacy technicians are required. The bill will also amend the title of schedule 19 to include pharmacy technician. This will clarify that the Alberta College of Pharmacists regulates both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Lastly, Bill 60 will update the titles reserved for registered nurses in schedule 24 to include graduate nurse and graduate nurse practitioner.

The respective colleges for these health professions have either requested or have been consulted on these changes and support them. Mr. Chair, this bill demonstrates our recognition of the important role health professions have in our health system. It also supports this government's continued work with the governing colleges to ensure the legislation meets their needs. I ask the House to support Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009, and to move this bill to the next stage.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of this legislation. I spoke to it briefly in second reading. I just want to reflect on a few things in committee while we're considering the legislation in really great detail here. The hon. Member for Strathcona has explained the bill quite well. I think that this bill reflects the ongoing changes that our health care delivery culture is going through in Canada and in Alberta and probably across the western world. I clearly remember, oh, probably three decades ago, when acupuncture was seen as some weird kind of oriental medical procedure that may or may not be helpful; likewise, other things like massage therapy. Over the last 25 or 30 years things like acupunc-

ture and massage have moved into the mainstream of the health care delivery system and, in fact, are in many ways very helpful in keeping people out of hospitals and off of drugs and keeping people functioning well.

But, clearly, as that has occurred, the public needs to understand, when they're going to somebody: are they just hanging up a shingle to claim they are a massage specialist, or are they actually trained, and what are their standards? Likewise with acupuncture: what's the training; how can I be confident in the people I'm going to provide health services to me?

This bill does take some steps that will protect the public and will ensure proper standards are met in a broadening or broader range of health professions. I think it's also important that this legislation acknowledges that some of these people may well be engaged in research and other activities and that that's legitimate and appropriate, but it also needs to have some oversight. So I think we will probably continue to see the Health Professions Act come back to this Legislature as the years progress and other forms of health care move more from the fringes to the mainstream and demonstrate that they are actually supported by good science, good evidence, and that there does need to be some public protection around them.

I won't go into the details beyond that. The Member for Strathcona made a list of that, and it's readily available, but I did want to say that I think this is a step in the right direction for a stronger, more comprehensive health care delivery system in this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Yes. Thank you very much. Just two points that I wanted to raise in connection with Committee of the Whole debate on Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009. The first is noting the expanded practice scope for midwives and how delighted I am to see the continuing progression of this profession in being able to have its services readily available to Alberta women and their families. My association with this goes back to 1989 with the Advisory Council on Women's Issues and the recommendation that that council made to, in fact, this government that midwives be recognized as a profession, which indeed we see here; that they be registered; that there be a professional scope of practice that would be recognized, and in fact that's happened; and thirdly, that their costs be covered under health care, and that has happened recently. So it's a pretty exciting time there, and I'm pleased to see the ability to "teach, manage and conduct research in the science, techniques and practice of midwifery" added into their scope of practice.

The second thing that I noticed was the concept of a technician level being added under the pharmacy section. I'm aware of a condition that we created in the Health Professions Act some time ago that we were not able to address in a satisfactory manner. It's coming back before this House again currently in the form of some petitions that members have been presenting to the House on behalf of constituents, and that is the profession of massage therapy. What we have in that profession is, essentially, two levels. One is a massage therapist, who has spent a considerable amount of time in training and also in a practicum situation. They've put in – and I'm sorry; I don't remember the exact number of hours – thousands of hours, let's say 2,000 hours, of practice.

Mr. Liepert: Twenty-two hundred.

Ms Blakeman: Twenty-two hundred is the higher level? Okay.

Then there's a secondary level of people offering massage services. It's what I tend to refer to as sort of the EvelineCharles

spas or the spas that you find at the Westin or the hotels, which is sort of a relaxation massage, and those that were able to offer those services and charge for them, in fact, had taken a lesser amount of training.

So we had two levels, and when the Health Professions Act came before us to look at massage, we only accepted the upper level. Now, of course, you have the petitions from members saying that we need to be able to grandfather in all the people that did the secondary level of training and soon will not be able to charge for their services because that's what all of this professional oversight is about. You know, once you're accepted as a profession, you can hang out your shingle, and people know that there's a certain amount of training and practice that lies behind that, and they can trust in that. It's a protection device that the government offers.

The issue that has come to me repeatedly, partly because I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Centre, is that we have a number of people who are working in the sex trades who have trained and qualified in that secondary level of training for massage, and therefore they're absolutely certified. It's not allowing the municipalities to be able to distinguish in any way when they are trying to restrict or rezone massage parlours or people that are offering massage services as a loss leader to bring customers in. This is partly our fault in the provincial Legislature and partly on the doorstep of the city, but it has become a difficulty, particularly for the city people to deal with. They have no ability to distinguish, and therefore they must allow the business licence to be granted. Therefore, the businesses can start there, and they have no way of stopping them.

3:20

As we work our way through this, I'm hoping that we can be alive to the situation that we've created and hopefully address it in a way that will be helpful for those that are trying to plan their communities and to the city officials that are trying to have some control over and assist those people in doing that.

Thanks for the opportunity to just put that little nudge on the table, and again thank you for the expanded scope for the practice of midwifery. We are all very excited about having that available to us in Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Yeah. Mr. Chair, I'd just ask that you call the question.

The Chair: Seeing no other member wishing to speak on the bill, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 60 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 62

Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the chance here to make some comments. This bill has had an interesting though

brief life in our caucus. When it was first tabled, I think last week, I looked through it quickly – it's quite brief – and thought: well, this will be a good bill to support. I believe it was the minister of health whose assistant actually briefed one of our researchers on this bill, and I think that's a gesture to acknowledge.

There was a bit of debate within our caucus, and this is, I suppose, the value of debate. The Member for Edmonton-Centre was more skeptical than I was. As the lead critic for this I was initially going to say: well, let's support it. What tipped me to express concerns was a ruling that came out from the FOIP commissioner, and that ruling happened to be fairly consistent with the views of the Member for Edmonton-Centre. So she won the debate, as she often does in our caucus. I'm sure that won't be a surprise to anybody here.

We are actually not going to support this legislation, and I think there is a principle at stake as well as some specifics. The principle is one of taking the advice of our legislative officers very, very seriously. When the FOIP commissioner or, for that matter, the Auditor General or the Chief Electoral Officer or the Ombudsman or the Ethics Commissioner gives advice or makes rulings, I think this Legislative Assembly needs to listen very, very carefully. It is that principle that drives my withdrawing support for this bill. I think it's important to stand by that principle because it's not just in this case, but it's with the Auditor General's report, that in principle it's too often ignored, and the Chief Electoral Officer's reports are too often ignored. I just feel that's a bad habit that we've formed in this Legislature.

Now, moving to specifics, since we are in committee, section 3, I guess, of this bill moves an amendment to section 40 of the original legislation, and it effectively overrides two very important pieces of legislation, the Health Information Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to briefly refer to and, in fact, quote the comments from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, whose name is Frank Work. On November 20 his office issued a release. The title is Emergency Health Services Amendment Act Raises Concerns. In the second paragraph the commissioner says, "This law goes too far and strips away oversight of decisions made to disclose the information to police." He goes on in the next paragraph and says, "I have heard law enforcement people say that there are 'many' examples of how privacy laws 'adversely' affect investigations into 'serious' crimes." This is not evidence. Then he adds – and I'm putting the quotes in so people will know that I'm using the commissioner's words – "This bill may leave ambulance attendants wondering what their priorities should be . . . treating victims or gathering evidence for police."

Then the commissioner says that he is very concerned that the bill trumps both the Health Information Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. In fact, the bill is absolutely clear, if we pass it, that notwithstanding what is in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act or in the Health Information Act, a whole bunch of things can occur. Really, this legislation is yet one more example of those two very important acts being overridden.

What the commissioner finally says at the end of this release is again a quote. "Government appears to be subjecting privacy laws to death by a thousand cuts by removing accountability safeguards with respect to disclosure of patient information."

Mr. Chairman, I think we should be paying careful attention to the comments of the commissioner. I understand – and this comes up over and over – that sometimes FOIP provisions and Health Information Act provisions can be really frustrating, and sometimes they can even get in the way of good sense and common sense, but we need to be exceedingly careful as a Legislature not to just willy-

nilly begin whacking away and compromising the safeguards that are in those two bills. If I understand the work of the commissioner correctly, there is nothing in existing legislation that doesn't allow for ambulance attendants to co-operate with police and do things like that.

Mr. Chairman, I wanted to get those concerns on record and again repeat, first of all, that the principle of respecting the advice from legislative officers I think is enormously important to respect, and secondly, I think we need to be very, very reluctant in this Assembly to override the safeguards of two fundamental pieces of legislation. Because of those reasons I will not be supporting Bill 62.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise today as Minister of Justice and Attorney General to speak to this very important amendment. My primary concern in this province has to be that justice is done and that criminals are held responsible for their crimes, and anything that interferes with that is of serious concern to me. Sound police investigations are essential to our ability to prosecute criminals, but they're also essential to something else, and that is the ability to resolve these investigations to support effective prosecutions so that victims can have confidence in the justice system. We have to make sure that victims have enough confidence in the system and that the community has enough confidence in the system to know that investigations will take place, that prosecutions can be effective, and victims can get on with their lives.

It struck me yesterday, when I was listening to some comments around this, that there seems to be a bit of a presumption that this would be some inappropriate power that would somehow allow the police to compel paramedics to provide information. This clearly sets out a framework where paramedics will continue to do their jobs in very confusing situations, but when they are asked a question, they will be able to make a decision to share information that may assist in an investigation without having the suggested penalty of a \$50,000 fine hanging over their head. That, I think, is fundamental to why we need to address this situation.

3:30

Bill 62 reflects the option that has been chosen by the parties that are involved in this who have identified this concern: Alberta Justice, Alberta Health Services, the Department of Health and Wellness, and the Solicitor General and Public Security. Alberta Justice has worked closely with Alberta Health and Wellness to ensure that Bill 62 reflects the realities on the ground and the needs of the justice system while protecting health information privacy. It ensures that police have the opportunity to investigate serious crime by clarifying for ambulance attendants what information they can disclose to police at an incident. I've had the opportunity to speak to police and prosecutors across this province about this in the last month, and it's clear that there is an issue and there is a barrier to effective investigation that we must overcome.

Some of the most complex cases for police to investigate and for the Crown to prosecute are gang violence, both in terms of investigating people that are committing violence associated with gangs and investigating so that we are able to prosecute people who have created victims of gang violence. We can't afford to throw up additional roadblocks for law enforcement. It would be an unacceptable situation to have delays, compromised crime scenes, or a loss of evidence because these barriers do not allow for information to be disclosed to police.

Our police officers deserve every tool possible to do their jobs effectively, and just as we've talked about in this Legislature before with respect to other legislation, we have a justice system that has checks and balances. All of that is still there. Police and emergency health workers are front-line support. They're front-line responders. They have to make quick decisions under tremendous pressure. Bill 62 helps them to do their job. It makes it clear what information they can disclose to police at the scene of an incident. These amendments set out very specifically what can be included, and that, I presume, will become an important part of the training that emergency medical workers will have before they go out into the field.

In order to strike a balance between the protection of patient privacy and the larger goal of safe communities, EMS personnel must be able to provide the police with the information necessary to conduct an investigation. We've had discussions with EMS about this. Their concern was that it still had to be within their discretion. That is preserved in this legislation.

Without this critical information police will not be able to investigate some crimes, we will not have effective prosecutions, and we will not be able to prosecute offenders of those often very serious crimes. Our first concern should always be that criminals are brought to justice, that people can have confidence in the emergency service system, the first responders system, and the justice system, and that our communities are safe.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. Well, yes, it was me that raised concerns about this bill. There were two sections in particular that flagged it for me. The first was, as a number of people have already noticed, section 3, which is amending section 40 in the Emergency Health Services Act, which basically overrides the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Health Information Act. As soon as I see that in another piece of legislation, the warning bells go off for me.

The second thing that flagged it is the list of information that an ambulance attendant may disclose to a peace officer. It starts with the name of a patient or another individual, the date of birth, and then information about the nature of the injury. And that was enough for me. I did, of course, read through the rest of the list, but that was enough for me because that is where you have personally identifying health information. You can tell who this is about.

When that information is disclosed – it's given from one person to another person about a third person – that third person should have the ability to have all of the protections and processes that have been built into the Health Information Act available to them. What this act does is take those away or take some of them away. Granted, the person may not be conscious, and therefore, you know, they may not be able to give permission to disclose personal health information about them between a second party and a third party. In some other instances outside the scope of this act that would be the end of it. Nobody is going to talk about that information. But it also includes some other processes about that individual's ability to go and find out what was said, to correct information about what was said, et cetera, et cetera. By overriding the act that gives them those processes and those protections, you've now taken that away from those individuals. That's when I go: no, no, no.

The minister talked about how there are checks and balances in the justice system and none of those have been taken away. Well, I'll argue a bit with that because in fact we ended up with a privacy information act and a Health Information Act because those checks

and balances were not there. People readily disclosed other people's personal information all over the place because they could. There were no checks and balances. So we put those checks and balances in place, and they are called the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Health Information Act. That's what they were. So it's not acceptable to me to then have a bill that comes in and goes: "Well, no. Sorry. We're going to skip around that. We're going to remove it." That, in effect, takes away those very checks and balances that supposedly are there. This is people's personal health information that we're talking about.

I've talked about the consent issue. I've talked about the other processes that should be available to someone that would be removed because of the overrides that are allowed here, that it goes around the oversight. I talked about processes other people – I think the Privacy Commissioner talks about that oversight that is in place.

I want to shift gears a bit here and talk about another piece of this. This is basically going to one kind of a professional and asking them to give over information that is very important to another profession. We have medical personnel, first responders in many cases. That's what we're talking about here. They are not trained investigators. You know, they don't go to school and take classes on how to collect certain kinds of information, where to keep it, how to protect it, when you hand it over, all of those things. They are not investigators. They are not corrections personnel. They are not military personnel. They are not police. They are not trained to be investigators in matters that are going to end up in a criminal court. They are medical personnel. So the argument that this information that they collect and will be asked to hand over is critical to how the justice system works just does not sit right with me.

I would tend to say that if you have situations where something will not go forward, as the Minister of Justice was saying, because this information was not collected, then I would say: figure out another way to do this. But to go to a different profession and say, "We absolutely have to have you do all of this research, this investigation, and hand over that information, and it's critical for – what's it called? – the provision of justice" seems to me to be wrong. I can't think of any other area where you would be going to one kind of a professional and saying: "We really need you to hand over information. You don't understand why it's being collected or how it's going to be used, but it's really important, and it's going to be used in a court of law, and you've got to do it and hand it over to us."

3:40

I think there's a flaw here in expecting one group of professionals to essentially do the work that another group of professionals are highly trained to do with a great deal of attention to detail and the specific manner in which they are supposed to do things. To me those two things don't go together. If it's that critical and it's got to stand up in court and you've got a whole group of people that have been trained to do this, to then say, "Well, we'll get these people to do it, too," just does not make sense to me. I think that there is another problem that needs to be addressed if we're all depending on this information.

A little in the same way that the threat of power outages is getting a little old with me as to why we have to do certain things with our electricity system – you know, every time somebody wants to get something, they threaten that if we don't do it, it'll be a power outage. It's just gotten old with me. As soon as somebody threatens me with that, it's old. I'm sorry. I'm getting to that point when somebody says: this is vital to investigation and to stopping gangs. I understand that this is a critical problem. I understand that gangs are really causing us problems in our remand centres and in our

correction institutes and in our court systems. I live in Edmonton. I've listened to this stuff long enough. I can read the news. But as an average citizen I'm thinking that there's a larger problem if that is the threat that is constantly being used against me. As a legislator when people say, "This has got to happen in order for us to be able to deal with the gang problem," it's just wearing a bit thin. It may well be true. The minister may be able to get up and give me facts and figures on it, but just as somebody off the street it's wearing a bit thin.

Once again, when I look at this piece of legislation, I'm not willing to support it. I'm not willing to support it because it does not honour the purpose and intent of two pieces of legislation that we put in place to protect people's personal information. To me this looks like it's going around it because it's easier to do that than to address the problem in another way. I will not accept taking a step back from protecting people's personal information, particularly their health information, because it's easier to do that than to do something else. I just think this is one beachhead we've got to protect. We've got to take a stand here. We can't let this be eroded.

Now, you know, Mr. Chair, I'm on this side. I've got eight colleagues here and two more and then two independents. I'm not going to win this one.

Mr. Liepert: Nor should you.

Ms Blakeman: There are 70 people on the other side. They're going to win it. I don't agree with the minister of health's assertion that I shouldn't win this. I think I'm right on this one. He disagrees with me. You have more votes, and you're going to win this. I still don't think it's right that you're going to win this, but you're going to win it. That's what the 70 votes are for.

I still think it's wrong what's being done here. I think it shows a willingness to take an easy way out rather than to continue to address the complexity of this issue. It is complex, and it's not easy. That probably also means that it's expensive. I still do not see that to be a reason why we take a step back from the legislation that we've put in place and the officers that we've put in place to be standing up and protecting people's personal and private information. It's just not good enough for me. I do not see a compelling reason that's been presented from any of the other speakers that I've heard or that I read in *Hansard*. I don't see the compelling reason that would make me take a step back for protecting people's personal health information, so I'm not willing to support it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I think it's important that I get up and speak because I cannot believe what I'm hearing this particular member say. First of all, the member in her remarks talked about training ambulance attendants to become investigators. That's not their job. Well, she obviously didn't read the legislation because nobody is suggesting that ambulance attendants are going to be investigators. What the legislation clearly states – and I wish she would stay because I would like to respond to some of her comments.

Mr. Mason: Well, respond a little more nicely.

Mr. Liepert: We'll see how nice you are, member.

Mr. Chairman, we have a situation here. As I've said, we are not asking for ambulance attendants to have investigative powers. Frankly, what we are doing with this legislation is maintaining the status quo. The status quo today is that ambulance attendants have always co-operated with police, ensured that police had the appropri-

ate information to conduct an investigation. What has changed is that we have moved ambulance attendants into the health services area and, therefore, now will fall under the Health Information Act. So all we're attempting to do by this legislation is preserve the status quo, and those who always want to preserve the status quo in health care I think would welcome this.

This is not what I know. This is what the chief of police has told me, has told the Minister of Justice, and frankly has told the world through the media. I'll give the member an example. This particular member who just spoke, Mr. Chairman, is a strong advocate for battered women, for women's shelters, for women's rights, and I think that's a noble way of handling her role. I recall hearing the chief of police in Calgary give specific examples of where their investigation could not proceed because ambulance attendants were not only not able to give information, but they were not able to even call the police if they saw a situation that they believed should be investigated. And I think that's wrong. I believe all clear-thinking people in this House would think this is wrong. So to stand on her high horse here in this House and hide behind some cloak of privacy of information is just plain wrong.

I think we need to get that on the record, Mr. Chairman. I would strongly encourage all members of this House to support this legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be able to rise again to speak to this bill now in Committee of the Whole. I certainly appreciate the minister clarifying once again the primary rationale behind this bill in that it was basically designed to deal with the fact that these municipal employees have been moved over to Alberta Health Services and now are subject to an act which previously they were not subject to. I now get the rationale for what's driving this.

Unfortunately, I still remain concerned about what it is that this bill is purporting to do, and the reason is this. In the past we had the Health Information Act that applied to health care providers regardless of whether they were doctors or nurses or community counsellors or psychiatrists or whoever. Those health care providers were governed by the Health Information Act in terms of when and under what circumstances they released information that came to them in the course of their treatment of patients. And be clear: oftentimes those people would be treating people who hadn't necessarily come to them voluntarily but came to them in emergent situations.

For instance, a psych nurse or a psychiatrist or an emergency room doctor would have a victim of a crime brought in directly to the hospital by the police or by themselves who might just come into the hospital. Those people were still governed by the Health Information Act. They would still in that case be, effectively, the first responders. They were governed by the Health Information Act, and the Health Information Act set out certain conditions under which that information those professionals garnered as a result of their interaction with the patient could be released to the police. They were the issues around imminent danger and public safety, those kinds of issues.

3:50

To go back to the minister's statements about, you know, women who are in abusive relationships. The fact of the matter is that psych nurses and emergency room doctors and family doctors and a plethora of other health care professionals become aware of those kinds of issues and have concerns around those kinds of issues in the

course of conducting their jobs as health care professionals and have for some time under the Alberta Health Services rubric or the rubric for what was previously the regional health boards. That conflict that those health care professionals had to deal with when they became aware of this kind of information, the kind of information that the health minister gave as an example, and they wanted to deal with what they believed was in the best interest of the victim or the patient and what was also the patient's desire with respect to disclosure, all of that kind of balancing was considered and debated and analyzed very extensively when the Health Information Act itself was put into place. All we've done here is moved ambulance attendants into that group of people.

Now, ambulance attendants were not previously exempted from that group of people because of some special nature in terms of the job that they do. No. They were exempted because of an historical organizational background where they happened to be municipal employees and, as a result, were exempted. That's why they were not covered by the Health Information Act before. Then the government comes along and decides, for a number of policy reasons that they've argued rather extensively, that they want the ambulance attendants to be centrally employed through Alberta Health Services and governed through the same contracts and all that kind of stuff, with essentially the same employer as with other health care professionals. There's an interesting debate on that, whether that's the best thing to do or not the best thing to do, what it does to regional sensitivity and their ability to work with other service providers, all those kinds of things. But there was ultimately a decision made that they needed to come together and work as part of a seamless group of health care professionals.

Well, if you're working as part of a seamless group of health care professionals, why would you not have these people subject to the same rules and regulations that you had previously decided, after some great deal of research and consideration, needed to be subject to the Health Information Act? What's the rationale? Yes, it may require a change in the way they do business, but presumably the Health Information Act was already designed to deal with these kinds of issues, the kinds of examples that the health minister put forward to the Legislature, when they decided whether it ought to apply to nurses, psych nurses, emergency room doctors, family physicians, and any one of a number of other health care professionals who've become aware of information that may also have a bearing on a criminal investigation.

What we're doing, for whatever reasons, is sort of a very quick response. We've brought these ambulance workers into Alberta Health Services, and suddenly we went: "Oh, well. This is something we haven't thought about. This is creating a bit of a problem. Oh, well. Let's just change the legislation." But then we get into the issue of the fact that an officer of this Legislature, the Privacy Commissioner, has clearly identified to this Legislature that he has concerns around the implications of this decision for the privacy of patients. And there's good reason for that because, of course, we've also embarked on the whole electronic health information thing. At what point do we have the ambulance driver who gets to access the electronic health information and then has that in their mind when they come across a person who has been, you know, a victim of an accident or an injury or whatever, and then they have information through the system which is otherwise governed by the Health Information Act – they are not governed by the Health Information Act.

I mean, it doesn't make sense, and I don't believe that the government has really thought this through. I think this was a very reactive response to a problem that they hadn't anticipated. They haven't thought the implications through, which, of course, is the

point that the Privacy Commissioner himself is making. There are larger implications to what this does to the regime of privacy protection and particularly the protection of personal health information. So that's the concern that I have.

Again, the degree to which the government fully consulted with the Privacy Commissioner on this issue is also of some concern to us because he is an officer of the Legislature, and I would assume that role would command some respect on issues like this because, certainly, it's in his mandate. We ask him to provide assessment and comment on issues like this, yet it appears as though his concerns were ignored in the course of drafting and, ultimately, introducing this legislation.

I understand that there is an issue around balancing public safety, imminent danger, the need for the police to get information against the privacy rights of patients, but I also believe that that balancing act was completed under the Health Information Act as it relates to other health care professionals. I have yet to hear any kind of compelling distinction or rationale for why ambulance attendants would be treated differently than other health care professionals. I think that there are a variety of circumstances in which other health care professionals are, for all intents and purposes, first responders, and in those cases it's believed that they can still function under the Health Information Act.

The other thing that is of concern to me is that even if, ultimately, the government were to decide to move forward with this, why is it that the patient who has had their information shared with the police has no opportunity to find out what information has been shared with the police? That's a fundamental guarantee that they would have under the Health Information Act. It would not negate the ability of the ambulance attendant and the police officer to communicate with one another. It would, at least after the fact, provide the patient with the minimal right of knowing what information about them has been disclosed without their permission to other bodies.

It's concerning to me that other elements of the Health Information Act have not been preserved for the interests of the patient in this question. Again, I believe that's because this particular piece of legislation was drafted quickly and sloppily, without full consideration of the overall consequences.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there other hon. members wishing to speak on the bill?

Seeing none, the chair shall now call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 62 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Chair: We will continue debate on amendment A1. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise again to continue debate on government amendment A1. Having had a subamendment of mine thoroughly debated by members of the

opposition benches – and I don't believe debated by anybody on the government side – yesterday, last night, and then defeated, we will continue debate on the government amendment.

If I can refer you to some of the points that I made yesterday, we think that this government amendment, while it addresses some of the concerns that have been expressed by a whole raft of Albertans, both big and small, both corporate and private, does not address some of the key problems. One of the key problems that it most assuredly does not address, does not even acknowledge, is this notion that the needs identification hearing by the Alberta Utilities Commission would be done away with in cases where high-voltage transmission lines are designated as critical transmission infrastructure.

4:00

If you turn to page 11 of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, there is a schedule there of critical transmission infrastructure, and it spells out what the government believes or proposes to call critical transmission infrastructure, transmission infrastructure not yet built but which is of such pressing need that it must be labelled as critical transmission infrastructure and, therefore, would not be subject to this needs identification hearing. There are a number of items in here.

- 1 Two high voltage direct current transmission facilities between the Edmonton and Calgary regions, with a minimum capacity of 2000 megawatts each.

Then it gives a general description of where the government foresees or projects those two lines going.

- 2 One double circuit 500 kV alternating current transmission facility connecting to the 500 kV transmission system on the south side of the City of Edmonton and to a new substation to be built in the Gibbons-Redwater region.
- 3 A new 240 kV substation to be built in the southeast area of the City of Calgary.
- 4 Two single circuit 500 kV alternating current transmission facilities from the Edmonton region to the Fort McMurray region.

Again, Mr. Chair, it gives some general description of what the government would see as the routing, not the siting but the routing, of those two lines. I make the point that it's not the siting, because the government makes the point repeatedly whenever anybody, be they members of the opposition or members of the public at large, brings up the notion that, you know, it really is kind of critical that an independent regulatory body like the Alberta Utilities Commission weighs in on all of this, hears the evidence from all sides, and then makes an impartial independent decision based on the facts as to whether these lines are needed or not. They say, "Oh, but don't worry about that because that will all come up at the siting hearings. The siting hearings will still be there. They'll still be in place. The AUC will still preside over those. They'll still call experts. They'll still bring the historical background and the other background into it. Everything will be good. You have nothing to worry about, absolutely nothing to worry about." Well, okay.

There are a few things to worry about. One of the things to worry about is that if you look elsewhere in the bill – and it may take me a second to lay my hands on that elsewhere, but I will get to that – it defines critical transmission infrastructure on page 6 as to what could conceivably be critical transmission infrastructure. It says that it "may contain any other matter that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary." Essentially, Mr. Chairman, what you have here is a scenario where the AESO comes in every couple of years with a 10-year plan, with a 10-year projection of the high-voltage transmission lines that we need to build in this province to make sure that there is zero congestion anywhere in the system. There can't ever be any congestion.

As the bill reads now, I mean, you have these few pieces designated in the schedule as critical transmission infrastructure today, but there's really nothing to stop the AESO from coming to the government two years hence with their next 10-year plan and saying, "Well, you know, the next raft of stuff we want to build: now, that's critical." So everybody who thought they were going to get a needs identification hearing in front of the AUC about those lines now discovers, "No, sorry; it's not going to happen" because suddenly in the last two years they've become critical.

Well, here's the basic contradiction. In the government amendment, section B, section 2(6) is amended by adding the following after the proposed section 41.3: "Staged development of CTI [critical transmission infrastructure] referred to in Schedule." Then it goes on to spell out that, in fact, not all of this critical infrastructure would be built simultaneously. If the amendment as it reads today is adopted, the amendment would set out a staged approach to building this transmission infrastructure, which includes bringing the lines between Edmonton and Calgary up to half capacity first and full capacity later, which includes building one, then the other of the lines between Calgary and Edmonton and the lines between Edmonton and Fort McMurray.

Given the government's previous statements about how urgent all of this transmission infrastructure is, for them to now say that everything can be staggered over time suggests that, oh, maybe things aren't quite as urgent as we thought they were. Bill 50 calls this infrastructure critical. A question. If I wanted to ask a nasty question – and, Mr. Chairman, I would never want to ask a nasty question – the nasty question would be: how critical can this infrastructure be if it can be staged over some time? Why can't it just go through the regular process?

I got to thinking. I got to thinking: "Well, you know, this is a bad bill, in my opinion. The principle of this bill is bad, but part of our job as opposition MLAs is to try and make things a little less evil." We tried to make this bill a lot less evil last night by bringing in our subamendment A1, that would have removed all the offending sections in the bill and the government amendment to that bill that scrapped the regulatory process at the needs identification level so that that stayed in. I mean, I have nothing against the concept of designating critical transmission infrastructure. That's nothing more than priorities, and that's okay. But I got to thinking: well, I tried to do the right thing, and we got voted down, so now I'm going to try and take a badly flawed bill and make it a little less evil, a little less flawed.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce another subamendment, if I could, to Bill 50, to the government amendments to Bill 50, limiting the amount of critical transmission infrastructure. I will pass these to the pages to distribute, and I'll await your call to continue debate.

The Chair: We will pause for the pages to distribute the amendment.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, please proceed.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. I would like to move that amendment A1 to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be amended as follows.

The Chair: It is now known as SA2.

Mr. Taylor: We will now refer to it as SA2. Hon. members, you have it in front of you, and I don't think that I necessarily need to read it for you. It'll be in the record as it is, and you can read it for yourselves. Let me speak to it briefly and then, hopefully, get some debate going.

Again, I admit, Mr. Chair that I would prefer to not be bringing this subamendment in because this subamendment does not do everything that I would like a subamendment to do. We tried that before and failed on that. This subamendment merely takes a bill that I still see as fundamentally and badly flawed and tries to make it a little less so.

Essentially, section 2 is amended (a) in subsection 2(a) by striking out the proposed clause (f.1) and substituting the following:

(f.1) "critical transmission infrastructure" means a transmission facility designated under the Schedule as critical transmission infrastructure;

and (b) in subsection 6 by striking out the proposed section 41.1 and in the proposed section 41.3 by striking out "and an order under section 41.1(1)."

4:10

So what does all this do? Well, what this does is limit the amount of critical transmission infrastructure to only those lines in what would be the schedule to the Electric Utilities Act, section 2(13) of Bill 50. Okay? Just what's listed in the schedule on page 11 of this bill. Well, why would we want to do that? Well, for this reason: by bringing in a government amendment that seeks to stage the development of the various pieces of transmission infrastructure that the government has designated as critical in this bill, the government is acknowledging that not all of the most critical of critical transmission infrastructure needs to be built right away, that you can do it in stages. You can do first one, then another, then another, then another. Well, if that is true – and I believe it to be – then it follows logically that the other pieces of the grid as proposed in the AESO's 10-year plan, all of which could become critical transmission infrastructure the way the bill reads now, do not need to ever be labelled as critical.

What they need to have done is that they need to be subjected to a process that gets everybody going and working in a timely and organized fashion so that when today the AESO says, "You know what? Three or four years down the road we're going to need that line from point A to point B," they start the process now, taking into consideration, doing the backdating, doing the math, how long it takes to go through the needs identification process and get approval there, then how long it takes to let the contract, to go through the siting hearings, to actually start building the thing to the point where you flip the switch and you energize the line and everything is good and Bob's your uncle, right? Whatever that period of time is, I'm sure it's very, very predictable, very easy to project that over a timeline.

I understand from conversations that I've had with the minister and conversations that I've had with other people that part of the reason we're dealing with Bill 50 right now is because that process kind of went off the rails about three or four years ago. So as much as I would far rather we just vote this whole bill down as a bad bill and start again, I realize that's not going to happen. When my subamendment was defeated last night, I realized that the wagons had been drawn into the circle, the ranks had been closed, and this thing was going through in one form or another come you-know-what or high water.

So now I'm saying, well, then, why don't we take a more logical approach to this and say: we're going to cut you some slack. For the sake of argument here we're going to say: "Okay. Let's say that the high-voltage lines between Edmonton and Calgary, the high-voltage lines between Edmonton and Fort McMurray, the lines to the Gibbons-Redwater area, the new substation in the southeast Calgary area, all those things – let's accept it for argument's sake – are critical transmission infrastructure and that you're behind the eight ball on this. You should have started this process two or three or

four years ago. We'll cut you some slack to fast-track this process, but the rest you can organize so that it can all go through the full process that it's supposed to go through," which means that it gets a full, independent regulatory hearing in front of an independent Alberta Utilities Commission. That commission decides whether that line and its social, economic, and environmental impacts are in the public interest should it be built in the first place. [A cellphone rang] That's not me. I'm very glad to hear that that's not my phone ringing.

You know, I think this is a subamendment that everyone in this House and everyone involved in the electrical transmission industry and the generating industry feeding into those lines and the distribution industry coming out the other end of those lines should be able to live with. This is nothing more than a subamendment that says: we recognize that you may have gotten behind the eight ball a few years ago and that now you need to play catch-up so that things don't go off the rails and we don't find ourselves in a situation where we might experience critical power shortages. But having done this, on the advice of the experts you keep referring to at the AESO, you've already laid out what those really, truly critical pieces of transmission infrastructure are. Even at that, through your own amendments you are now proposing that they're not all of equal criticality, that some can be built first and others can follow. Let's cut you that slack, let you do that, but let's put in effect a sunset clause on this notion of criticality and say that once this is done, Bill 50 is done for all intents and purposes, and everything else can proceed the way it's supposed to proceed.

This subamendment of mine would kill the automatic regulatory needs hearings bypass after this list on page 11 of the bill is built or after the process to get it approved for building is started. The government would instead have to add the infrastructure to the schedule through legislation, limiting their ability to just jam things through without public scrutiny, or they would have to just simply say to the transmission facility operators: "Okay. Do you want to build a line from Peace River because someday somebody might put a nuclear plant up there or because, you know, a nuclear plant has been licensed for there or whatever? Or do you want to build a line from the Northwest Territories because the Slave River hydroelectric project is under way or is about to become under way? Okay. Best get going on getting that organized now so that the lines are ready to be energized when the dam is built, or when the nuclear plant is built and the power is ready to start flowing, it's got someplace to go."

Much of the government's rationale is that the current needs identification approvals process takes some time, and we need this critical transmission infrastructure too badly now to go through that whole process. If that is the case and this subamendment in effect gives them that bye – right? – then there should be no need for the government to have to leave the door open for any more transmission projects to get bundled through as critical transmission. The government, the AESO, the transmission facility operators should have all learned their lesson and can in the future put the needs identification document into the process early enough to go through the process as it should.

That is the rationale behind this subamendment, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to debate on this. I hope that members from all sides will join the debate on this subamendment since we only got members from the opposition side to debate my last subamendment. Let's have at her, and we'll see where we go with this.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party on subamendment SA2.

Mr. Mason: Yes, on subamendment SA2. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to rise and respond to this amendment by my colleague from Calgary-Currie. I'm afraid that I can't support this subamendment. I regret that. I think there have been a number of amendments, and there may be some others that we can agree on with our colleagues from the Liberal opposition, but this isn't one of them. This subamendment essentially allows the government to go ahead with a critical infrastructure that it has already designated and sets that as the limit. No more after that.

But, you know, in deciding whether or not to support this, you have to consider what it is that will be allowed if this subamendment were by some amazing stroke of political something to be passed. We're talking, Mr. Chairman, about \$14 billion worth of infrastructure expenditures which by and large are not necessary and which will continue to escape proper regulatory scrutiny and which many believe are designed to facilitate the export of electricity for profit by electricity companies, yet the infrastructure is paid for in its entirety by the ratepayers of this province. If we pass this subamendment, then we're going to allow all of that to go ahead. It is literally like closing the barn door once all of the horses, all 14 billion of them, are out the gate.

4:20

Based on the explanation I just heard from my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie, I don't think that I can support this subamendment. You know, if we look at how the government has structured the electricity system now, they've created an unregulated, for-profit, private system for the generation of electricity. New generation is not planned as it once was and as it is in other jurisdictions. It's not planned with the transmission necessary to get the new power generation into the grid and into the places where electricity needs it. Instead, it leaves it up to individual private companies on an entrepreneurial basis to build the power plants.

Mr. Chairman, a big, coal-fired, modern plant would cost you half a billion dollars. You know, they want these investors to make these decisions without a guarantee that they're going to be able to earn money on their investment. That's a huge risk to take, especially with lots of new types of generation coming on stream: the cogeneration that we were seeing in industrial sites up around Fort McMurray, the potential for wind power in southern Alberta, lots of microgeneration that can be in place. It puts the investors and investor-owned utilities in a real quandary on whether or not they're going to build and where they're going to build and when they're going to build.

To encourage them to do that because they've created a dysfunctional system where it's unlikely that most investors are prepared to take major risks on large-scale production, they have to provide some surety because they've done away with the regulated rate of return. What they're doing is making sure that there is a transmission system in place that will carry the power from wherever somebody wants to build it and transmit it to market. The way they're doing that is taking away the financial responsibility from the generators and placing it firmly on the electricity consumers. That relieves a significant burden and relieves part of the risk from the system.

They're trying to make it possible for their system to work, Mr. Chairman, but what they've done with this deregulation system is create a system and then try to figure out how it's going to work once they've done it. It's a bit like jumping off a cliff and knitting the parachute on the way down; you'd better be a pretty fast knitter.

The situation is that the AESO has to guess where people are going to make their investments. They have to, you know, provide a transmission system that's accessible to whoever might want to

build something wherever they might want to build it because there's no planning. There's no system planning to match generation and transmission, so they have to overbuild the system. That's the first flaw in the problem and why I can't support the subamendment: because it still requires us to build a transmission system that is sufficiently robust, as they like to say, that no matter who builds what where, there is going to be a transmission line that they can connect to somewhere nearby. So it's hugely overbuilt.

The second reason is that it's increasingly clear that the critical infrastructure envisaged in this act is designed for the export of electricity to the American market. There is no other reason why you would build direct current transmission lines between Edmonton and Calgary because the distance between Edmonton and Calgary is not sufficient to justify that expense.

Direct current lines are much more expensive, and they are designed for long-distance transmission of electricity because the line loss is substantially less than in AC lines. You would never in your right mind build a DC line for a distance of 370 kilometres or whatever the distance is between Edmonton and Calgary – I used to know it as 200 miles; it was easier – but that's what this bill is doing. It's requiring these lines to be built and to be approved. The only reason for that kind of expenditure and that kind of line is a much longer distance of transmission than the distance between Edmonton and Calgary.

We know that they're building lines in the United States that will come up to the Alberta border that this will connect to. So if you can imagine, Mr. Chairman, what this actually is doing is building an infrastructure for an export of electricity for a profit by large electricity producers, and we have to pay for it so that they can get their electricity to market. We have to take the CO₂, we have to take the fly ash, we have to take all of the environmental consequences if some of this production is actually coal fired, and we don't benefit by it. The investors who own the utility benefit from that. That is just absolutely wrong.

I couldn't think of a more clear example of where this government picks the pocket of the ordinary Albertan in order to help their friends in the large energy corporate sector. We see it today with the CO₂ collection and sequestration proposal, the new CO₂ gas pipeline. You know, again the taxpayers are being hit in order to subsidize this government's friends in the energy industry. I don't think it's any different with respect to Bill 50.

You know, on balance it'd be great to limit the capacity of the government to add more infrastructure in the future. But for goodness sakes, they're overbuilding so much that I don't see any chance that they're going to have to build any new transmission infrastructure for the next 50 years because they're going from about a billion dollars' worth of infrastructure now for transmission to about \$14 billion, so 14 times what we currently have all in in terms of our investment. This is an enormous investment.

The government's amendment still does not allow the electricity commission to disallow this because it's not needed. To me that says it's not needed. Otherwise, you wouldn't have to put that in a piece of legislation to tie the hands of the commission. I think that's clear. So with respect to my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie, I think this really is a question of trying to close the barn door after the horses are out. While it's useful in order to provide additional debate and time for additional debate, I think that's where its usefulness really ends, Mr. Chairman.

I thank my colleague for that opportunity, but I will not be supporting the subamendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on subamendment SA2.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to rise and speak towards the subamendment that was put on the table by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie. I say that honestly and truthfully. We all know his amendment is trying to put lipstick on a pig, but at least he's trying to give it a little bit of colour, a little bit of flair, and a little bit of limits, allow it the ability to go out in public and not feel as embarrassed as really it should be. I really admire him for at least trying to save at least some of this from going forward.

4:30

Let's face it. If we look at even what the government has put forward so far on Bill 50, with its amendment, what is being proposed right now, as the hon. member from the third party indicated, is just not very good for the Alberta taxpayer, not very good for individuals in terms of receiving power, but it appears to be very good for people who are going to be in the business of exporting the power.

We look at this subamendment, and just to be clear, it is a subamendment that recognizes right off the hop that Bill 50 is a bad bill. I recognize that. This subamendment at least tries to take a bad bill that we would vote down to where we would hopefully say to the government: "Let's scrap it. Let's start again. Let's go back to using the Alberta Utilities Commission, where people can have their voice heard, where people can have a proper needs assessment, where people can have a proper placement assessment, and do it all in the one place where the government set it up." We recognize that this subamendment does not allow the Alberta people as much of an opportunity as throwing Bill 50 out the door would. However, it is at least a recognition of trying to save a little bit of what is done here towards the Alberta people.

The subamendment will limit the amount of critical transmission infrastructure to only those lines listed in what would be the schedule to the Electric Utilities Act, section 2(13) of Bill 50. Currently Bill 50 has an alternate definition of critical transmission infrastructure that allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to define any intertie, lines serving renewable power, or even, in particular, lines they consider necessary to be critical transmission infrastructure. All of that new critical infrastructure would then also bypass the regulatory needs hearing and be added onto Albertans' bills without a fair hearing. With this subamendment that automatic bypass would not happen. The government would instead have to add the infrastructure to the schedule through legislation, limiting their ability to just jam things through without public scrutiny.

What this amendment is trying to do. Let's just say, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie indicated, that the government has been asleep for the last eight to 10 years and didn't have any knowledge of the need, that Alberta's population was growing, that businesses were going to want to come here, that we had oil sands development, that lots of people were doing this, that, and the other thing, and that maybe our existing transmission lines would need to be restructured. Maybe the government was out shining shoes, shining carrots, shining whatever to keep things on the go, but they were not paying attention to what was happening in the transmission game. Let's just say that that happened. Okay? This amendment says: "Okay. This got away from you. You have to, you know, now try and do it."

We're going to give them that. We're going to recognize that, yes, they have been asleep, and they're going to now have to have this critical infrastructure. Okay. We do the line between Calgary and Edmonton. We do the line up to the Peace River country, and we strengthen a couple of lines going elsewhere. That would be fair enough. But with any of the other stuff that's going to happen, the

additional tie-ins at other parts of the juncture, what this amendment will allow people to do is to bring the Alberta Utilities Commission back into play.

The Alberta Utilities Commission was set up, in particular, so that people would have a voice at a regulatory hearing to both hear and have a needs assessment, for that body to decide what kind of transmission would be best for that area – what kind would be cheapest for that area and what kind was needed for that area – as well as to hear some environmental impact studies as well as placement studies. This was really a great forum for Albertans to go to and get the whole evidence before the court, so to speak, and the court in this sense would be the Alberta Utilities Commission.

What this bill does is it allows at least some of that to partake at some point in the future. We all remember why the Alberta Utilities Commission was set up in the first place. It was to take the decision-making hands out of the politicians' pockets. Okay? That's why it was set up. They realized that governments feel pressure from individuals, feel pressure from big business, feel pressure from many sources of people, yet they don't know the transmission business that well. But guess what? That's why they set up the Alberta Utilities Commission. They are experts in the area. They are the people we've set up to hear these issues: to hear a needs assessment, to hear whether or not this type of transmission is good for a particular area, to understand the economics of it and to go forth from there.

That is why I will be supporting this amendment. It at least recognizes that the government has probably made a mistake and realizes: let's limit the mistake to actually just reinforcing the line, as they've indicated, where they want to, in section 2(13) of Bill 50. The other stuff, that they add on later, the tie-ins, some other things of that nature, will still be subject to a fair hearing, a fair hearing where Albertans can have their voices heard and present their arguments to the Alberta Utilities Commission.

I thank you for allowing me, Mr. Chair, to speak to this subamendment on this Bill 50.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity on subamendment SA2.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes. Speaking to the amendment in sort of a literary, poetic fashion, full of analogy and intrigue, if Bill 50 had a theme song, it would be a Joni Mitchell music box anthem: round and round in *The Circle Game*.

The Alberta Armageddon horseman of the
electrical apocalypse merry-go-round
has been going round and round, up and down,
with no opportunity for Albertans to get on board,
but they still have to pay for the ticket
to power the government's spinning wheel.
The government grinder cranks out the tune
to which Albertans must dance:
brownouts, brownshirts; blackouts, blackshirts;
ATCO, AltaLink, shares rising,
coins in the cup: clink, clink, clink.
Science be damned. Government always knows best.
Utility Commission hearings: give it up; take a rest.
Hand over your wallets. Submit to our will.
Subsidize private transmission lines. Don't be so shrill.
Our amendment calls . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, please.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think we should invoke *Beauchesne* 459, relevance, and just remind the member that we're talking about a specific amendment. This is a serious and an important issue, and if he could please address the amendment, I'm sure the chair would be equally happy, as would the members.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, please stay on subamendment SA2.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Speaking to subamendment and the bypassing of the Alberta Utilities Commission, the failure to create priorities or stages to justify it, I'll continue, and you can call relevance as many times as it's necessary to do so.

Hand over your wallets. Submit to our will.

Subsidize private transmission lines. Don't be so shrill.

Our amendment calls for stages . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, please stay on subamendment SA2, and then we can proceed on without other information too wide.

4:40

Mr. Chase: That's fine. I'm working on it, and the fact that I am using poetry versus prose . . .

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: With respect to the . . .

Mr. Liepert: Has he got a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Maybe the hon. health minister could go through the chair and be recognized.

Mr. Chairman, on the point of order that was raised, the rules require that a great deal of latitude should be allowed members in trying to make their point. They don't always come directly to it at the beginning, but as long as they get to it by the end, I think that satisfies the rules.

The Chair: The chair has reminded the hon. member speaking to stay with the subject matter, please, amendment SA2, that we are talking about.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Yes. Meanwhile, back at amendment SA2, I am trying to raise the level of debate. I have pointed out that this has been circuitous. I have talked about the merry-go-round image. I am going to continue, and if someone finds it objectionable, I'll start reading from this long treatise of what needs to be accomplished, what hasn't been done.

Speaking to the amendment:

Our amendment calls for stages.

Isn't that nice? Hold back your rage.

Transmission is a value at five times the price.

We put on our thinking caps. All will be well.

Pay up now, or you can go to –

Follow the transmission lines down to Montana or Vegas.

Whatever money we charge you will lighten your wages.

Who needs hearings or oversight?

We're omniscient. Give up the fight.

Who wouldn't want a lovely transmission tower
popping up in the back 40, providing nuclear power?

What's that you say? We don't need more transmission?
Get lost, you whiners. We shut down your commission.
Bill 50 may be dubious, it may not be right,
but we don't care. We have the might.
Today we've managed to steamroll the opposition.
Although closure wasn't called . . .

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Chairman, I don't know if this member is having a little bit of fun at the expense of everyone in the House or if he's just having fun all by himself. Either way, the fact is that under *Beauchesne* 459 relevance is a very serious matter in this House, and the fact that he has ignored that not once, not twice, is an affront to all members in this House, to the parliamentary tradition of what we're trying to do here in this reasoned and wonderful debate.

I think, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, you should perhaps, if you wish, remind him once again to talk to the subamendment. That is what we're trying to talk about. They have said oftentimes that it's a serious bill and that it's a serious amendment, and it's probably a serious subamendment, so let's hear the points for or against the subamendment and get on with it. Otherwise, he can save his poetry for another time.

The Chair: Hon. members, we have a point of order raised by the Deputy Government House Leader. Let's deal with the point of order.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, on the point of order.

Mr. Hehr: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been listening with intent, actually, to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's what I find, actually, intriguing remarks. Although they're not in a traditional format that we hear in this House, I see nothing in I believe it's 459 that says that arguments need to flow in any standard form. Because he chooses to use a very creative form, poetry, that goes through both the strengths and weaknesses of an amendment and what he sees as some of the things that other average Albertans have pointed out – that these transmission lines are being set up to ship power to the United States, that the average taxpayer is going to be saddled with large additional costs – those are all things I've heard in his poem.

If the hon. members on both sides of the House would continue to listen and see how the hon. member has creatively – I will give him that. It is creative, but he is still speaking on the amendment. He's still talking about the subsection that has been brought up here. I've heard it referenced twice in his poem, which I think is very good. Actually, I enjoy his format and the way he has brought these points to this House.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party on the point of order.

Mr. Mason: Thanks. I'll join in the submissions to you, sir, with respect to this. *Beauchesne* 511 says:

The freedom of speech accorded to Members of Parliament is a fundamental right without which they would be hampered in the performance of their duties. The Speaker should interfere with that freedom of speech only in exceptional cases where it is clear that to do otherwise could be harmful to specific individuals.

I would argue that the hon. member is making arguments in a different form, and it may be a little bit elliptical for some on the other side; nevertheless, I think that, necessarily, his right to do so

should be protected unless the hon. members can show clear cause that it's not going to deal with the subamendment before us. But I suspect, having heard the hon. member in the past many times, that in his own way he's going to make a point that is relevant to this. I think that his creativity should not be stifled by those on the other side, who might just want to loosen their ties a little bit since we're in committee and relax.

Mr. Oberle: It's right and proper that the hon. leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, should point out the importance of free speech in this Chamber. I know that nobody would move to curtail the freedom of speech that each of us enjoys here. However, that occurs within the context of being relevant to the topic at hand, and that's very clear in *Beauchesne* and in other references. Mr. Chairman, all of us are constantly enthralled by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity's amazing ability to lyrically string together nonsensical facts, but the fact of the matter is that we're having a serious debate in here. If he could stick to the point and use the other tools available to him – like Members' Statements, like question period – to exercise his freedom of speech, the whole place would be better off for it.

The Chair: Are you on the point of order?

Mr. Chase: No. I'm continuing.

The Chair: Let us deal with the point of order first, and then we will continue. The chair has heard the arguments or the points from different perspectives here. The chair makes a conclusion that in front of the chair we have amendment SA2. From what I heard from the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, you have a very large latitude in expressing this amendment SA2. That has riled up some other members, okay? From that perspective, to go further in Committee of the Whole on the serious matter of Bill 50, I call on you to continue to focus on SA2 specifically. If the matter is not dealt with, then I have to recognize another member.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll come to a conclusion. The conclusion has to do with both governance and transmission. I must admit that I feel somewhat Chase-tised by the government today.

Two lines, Mr. Chair, and then I'll gladly sit down and release the floor.

It's time to roll over; give up the fight;
reach for the switch; turn off the light.

The Chair: Any other hon. members to speak on amendment SA2? Seeing none, the chair shall call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA2 lost]

The Chair: We are now back to amendment A1. The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

4:50

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I did have an opportunity to speak in second reading with regard to the bill. I'm glad that the minister has responded with amendments that have gone partially in favour of what I spoke on on behalf of my constituents.

Again, Mr. Ron Stern writes me a letter with regard to the amendments, and he talks about:

Any further substantial increase [in electricity costs] will put the viability of a number of energy intensive plants at risk. These plants are the very ones that diversify Alberta's economy. Uncompetitive electricity costs will result in closures with an accompanying loss of thousands of jobs.

He does appreciate the changes made and, like the Consumers for Competitive Transmission, does acknowledge and appreciate that amendments to Bill 50 are helpful, especially the oversight committee. I think the oversight committee has an opportunity to work with the regulators and the planners to make sure that we have a well-planned system that's staged and that will address the economics that industry will face.

He also writes in his letter that he is looking forward to continuing to work with the government and with the planners "to find ways to lower costs while still providing the appropriate transmission upgrades." They are "relieved to know that the Government has that attitude and open-mindedness and look forward to working together in a detailed manner to find better, more economical and more competitive transmission solutions for Alberta."

I guess to sum it up, Mr. Chairman, the people I consulted with in my constituency that have a very large load are concerned. They're optimistic about the changes, and they're also grateful for the ability to work ahead, you know, raising their concerns with both the ministry and with AESO.

I will table the appropriate copies, Mr. Chairman, of the letter from Mr. Ron Stern that laid out his further concerns.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for giving me this opportunity to speak. I'm pleased to rise today in this Assembly to speak to the amendments on Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, during this Committee of the Whole. Over the summer this government held 20 information sessions in order to hear from Albertans as well as stakeholders on exactly what their concerns were about this bill. We all remember that the bill was introduced in the spring, and we had that opportunity through the summer to comment on it.

Now, these stakeholders that made these comments included residents; landowners; businesses; local, municipal, and provincial government officials; industry; aboriginal groups; and advocacy and environmental groups. There really is no truth to the allegations by some that there have been no consultations or discussions of needs or other concerns related to Bill 50. There have been many meetings. In fact, in the last few years there have been close to 300 meetings in total dealing with the needs and the issues regarding Bill 50 and the transmission lines.

As a government we have heard a few concerns from these meetings regarding Bill 50, and because of this we have proposed amendments to address them. I would like to highlight how these amendments to Bill 50 would provide benefits to Albertans. Mr. Chairman, the first amendment would change section 17 of the Alberta Utilities Commission Act in order to clarify that the AUC would have to consider the public interest when siting critical transmission infrastructure. The public interest includes the social, economic, and environmental effects that the transmission projects may have on specific areas as well as the rest of Alberta in general. The AUC already does this when siting transmission lines and facilities. However, the proposed amendment would ensure that the public interest is taken into account during the siting of critical transmission infrastructure as well. In this way Albertans would be guaranteed that their concerns and opinions are valued and taken into consideration. This amendment further proves that the interests of Albertans remain an absolute top priority for this government.

Mr. Chairman, since Bill 50 does not change the siting process for transmission facilities, this amendment would ensure that landowners' issues will be heard, impacts will be mitigated, and affected landowners will receive fair compensation. This amendment clarifies that the AUC would continue to address public concerns about where transmission facilities are located. Full consideration would be given to a number of issues, including safety, environmental impact, and the effect on nearby land and property owners.

Mr. Chairman, the second amendment would provide cabinet with regulation-making authority to establish a cost oversight committee. This committee would be made up of representatives of customers and the Alberta Electric System Operator, also known as AESO. Committee members would be able to access and assess transmission facility project costs, scope, and timeline information during the construction of these critical transmission projects. This committee would then pass this information on to Albertans. It would allow Albertans to be more informed about the cost of new transmission lines as well as any proposed changes to their electricity bills. It would also allow for more information to flow between transmission and generation companies and Albertans. This would help customers be more effective in AUC hearings, where the AUC determines practical transmission costs that are included in the customers' rates which are proposed by transmission and generation companies.

This committee would essentially monitor transmission projects during construction and relay information back to Albertans in a timely and transparent manner, and that's exactly what Albertans want. It would assist customers in monitoring and understanding variances and raising concerns during project construction and help them raise any issues concerning proposed rate increases by transmission and distribution companies.

Mr. Chairman, the third proposed amendment clarifies that the AESO must develop the Edmonton to Calgary and the Edmonton to Fort McMurray critical transmission infrastructure projects in stages. Under this amendment AESO is directed to develop these specified projects in stages to ensure optimal timing, cost efficiency, and reliability for Albertans. This way we can make certain that we are taking advantage of the economic situation such as cheaper labour and availability. These plans and these projects would be built as demand warrants.

Now, I just want to talk about the HVDC line between Edmonton and Calgary. This line can be staged in several sections. The last line in this corridor was built 37 years ago. As these new lines are being built, old lines can be taken down. Nobody complained – well, maybe people complained 37 years ago that they were being overbuilt then, but people are not complaining now about that because the lines are actually built, and they're using them. There are six of these lines between Edmonton and Calgary, and as we build the new ones in stages, the old ones can be taken down so that the footprint would not increase. Some of the old lines will continue to be used because they will serve central Alberta where the HVDC lines can't. My own hometown will continue to be served by the older lines, but if we were down to two lines or four lines, that would probably be adequate for that area.

Furthermore, building these two critical transmission projects in stages would help us induce and manage investment. Wholesale transactions of electricity today earn about \$7 billion a year. Staging these two big projects would help put these investments into the context of the economy that they are intended to serve in the future over the next 20 to 30 years.

Mr. Chairman, these three amendments would ensure that we are developing critical transmission lines efficiently and effectively while continuing to put the interest of Albertans at the centre of all siting decisions. It would help make certain that we achieve our

transmission needs while protecting public interest. The fact remains that we still must pass Bill 50 since there is a need for critical transmission infrastructure. No one disagrees with the premise that there is a need.

Mr. Chairman, I have personally met with numerous stakeholders concerning Bill 50, and I feel that these amendments have addressed the major issues that have been identified not only through personal meetings with these people but through committees and caucus meetings as well. Therefore, we have to do everything possible to ensure that this bill reflects the wishes of Albertans as well as achieves the province's transmission needs. This government has achieved this through the three proposed amendments, and these amendments will strengthen the bill as they will address the concerns raised by Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

5:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. Speaking directly to the amendment as opposed to singing or poeticizing to it. The hon. member spoke about transparency and accountability. I would like to know where Albertans can find the minutes or the records of the various meetings that have been held. Have the minutes been put on a website by the Minister of Energy? We're hearing that Albertans have been involved since the beginning of the process, but no one's yet tabled any evidence of which way Albertans are thinking. Apparently, they're coming to these invitation events en masse and expressing their concerns.

The session that I attended with Gary Holden of Enmax had a very good turnout. There were a number of individuals from a variety of professions represented. The point that was being made was the importance of local transmission.

Very early on in second reading I talked about innovation and technology improving our current transmission lines. Nobody suggested that I was whistling in the dark when I talked about a product that's been put out by 3M, which by simply restringing our current transmission lines would carry three times the load and, therefore, would not require the extended footprint that is being contemplated with Bill 50, whether it's done in stages or not.

Now, the hon. member also talked about Bill 50 not being a part of determining the placement of the lines. Well, Bill 46, Bill 36, and Bill 19, I believe, already did that. Those were the bills that talked about basically providing whatever was market price at the time. It provided a resolution within I believe it was a two-year period for the value of the land, the exchange to be taking place. That was, I think, one of the amendments from Bill 46. There had been concern, and that amendment addressed the concern that the farmer's land or the rancher's back 40 or the cottage owner's land could be held up for years and years and years because the transmission line hadn't necessarily been approved or slotted.

Albertans want to have sustainable electricity. We're not arguing that there is a need for upgrading of our transmission lines, but the government has yet to convince the opposition and the ratepayers, the people who will be out of pocket considerably more coin, that the vastness of this project is necessary.

Now, the government responded to the vastness of concerns by trying to put forward the amendment that we're now discussing, the notion of doing things in developmental stages. But it's at the government's whim at what speed we go through these various developmental stages. The government, by doing the end run around the Alberta Utilities Commission and with a combination of the previous bills I mentioned – 46, 36, and, again, I'm thinking it was 19 – already can dispossess individuals of land. They can move

the tower to the right so many metres, to the left so many metres, and there's no choice given to the landowner other than to submit and, you know: here's how much we're going to give you for your land.

There has been discussion about: do we go AC, do we go DC, and where is it appropriate to use one style or the other for the transmission lines? The point is that the direct current can only flow for certain lengths with certain limited amounts of kilowattage. Therefore, the notion that we can bury lines over 240 kilowatts or over 500 kilowatts becomes a moot argument. According to physics and science the heat that is conducted through the lines with the extra grounding of the burying underneath would create such heat as to basically burn out the lines. So we're stuck in terms of large transmission, the 2,000 kilowatts that are being talked about.

As I say, no one is arguing against the need for some transmission lines. But the way the opposition argument goes is: build the transmission where the need is as opposed to hauling it all the way down from northern Alberta from coal-fired generating plants. The Gary Holden, Enmax solution is: build it locally. In the case of Calgary he's saying: use natural gas. I've previously spoken that if natural gas becomes sufficiently expensive, then we can gasify coal.

The Premier today in question period sort of defended the use of \$2 billion worth in sequestration. Well, I'd like to think that that sequestration would be applied to the gasification of coal if it turns out that it's a scientifically viable option. There has been so much discussion about sequestration and under what circumstances and how you keep the CO₂ under the ground. If it were to suddenly emerge, as it has in other countries, there is an explosive element to it. That science remains to be developed.

Albertans want their government to look out for their best interests, and simply inviting them to have a say but then not listening to what was said is disconcerting for Albertans. Albertans have not been told or explained to why it is that they have to pick up the entire bill for transmission lines they don't own. Yes, they get some power from that transmission line, but unlike a public utility, they're not direct shareholders. Why, they ask, do we have to subsidize AltaLink? Aren't they sufficiently profitable? Why do we have to subsidize ATCO? Why are these big players being provided subsidies when the government of Alberta says that we're no longer in the business of being in business? Yet these independent, private companies are given a carte blanche utilities monopoly. That is what is happening. There may be more than one, but together they're a corporate monopoly.

We've had individuals talk about what happens if these power lines are owned outside of Alberta. You know, we can be held for ransom by some foreign owner for the transmission of our own power. These are questions that to date the government hasn't answered.

We realize that at the end of the day Bill 50 by sheer numbers is going to pass. I hope that when hon. government members return to their constituencies, which I'm assuming will probably happen on a more permanent basis by the end of this week, their constituents come in and they ask them the questions that I'm asking now. I hope the members are able to provide them with answers.

5:10

I know that the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka had quite an interesting experience with regard to the debate over Bill 46. There were over 350 people in attendance, and they didn't like the answers they were hearing. The answers had to do with the placement of the transmission lines.

In the end it's the electorate that decides our political fate. If we've represented them in a democratic fashion and they see our worth, we'll be here again, but I really hope the government does a

better job in consultation as they roll out the so-called priority stages without a critical needs assessment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the last opportunity to participate in this power debate.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's an honour for me to rise and speak to amendment A1 to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. In speaking to this bill we talked to many constituents of Edmonton-Meadowlark. Right in the middle of my constituency is a transportation utility corridor, and this is a big issue for the good folks that I represent. In speaking to the bill we asked the constituents what their position was. I had to go to a town hall meeting at the Belmead Community League where we had 300 to 400 people. It was standing room only. You couldn't get into the room. My constituents were quite passionate and vocal about the issue. We had another meeting with about 1,300 people. Tonight, as we speak, there's another meeting where many of my constituents will be discussing this important issue.

Now, my constituents had many concerns, but the citizen group that represents most of my constituents doesn't question the need for this infrastructure to be built. Their main issue is how it's built.

In discussing the need, I'd just like to tell you a brief little story, a tale of two cities that I've lived in, one Edmonton and one a little village in which I was born. This wasn't an issue there because we didn't have transmission lines. In fact, we didn't have light bulbs. Just a candle was your light. When the sun came up, you had light. When the sun went down, you didn't. Then my family moved to another city in India. The advantage there was that you had some electricity, but it only came on for a couple of hours every day. That was great. People were really happy because it was better than having nothing.

Having moved to this country, I think it's been fantastic that we've always had energy. We've always had power. It's always been very reliable. Part of the issue that it has been reliable is that they built redundancy into the system 20 years ago. The fantastic thing is that we haven't faced any of these issues that many of my relatives in my motherland have to face today on a daily basis. In order to meet the needs that they currently have over there, they're building a record number of nuclear plants all over that nation, in India. We're not. So we have to look at where we came from.

Really, we don't need to look at our current needs. The lights aren't going out today. The lights are fine. We have security because of the system that we built 20 years ago. Our population has increased from 2.5 million to 3.5 million people. As you look at what we've done, the homes are bigger. We're heating larger homes. There are more lights in the homes. If you look in your own home, every member of the family has an electronic gizmo in the home. The computers are on all day long. The cellphones are plugged in. The stoves, the ranges – in the olden days the homes used to have just 60-amp service; now we're up to a hundred and some, 200-amp service. So we have more people in each home who are actually consuming more energy. Now, if we look in the future in greening our growth and greening our economy and greening our automobile fleet, we're having a lot of hybrid vehicles. In the future we'll be plugging our vehicles into the grid as well.

So my constituents have not questioned the need to build more energy. Now, my understanding is that during the peak hours we're purchasing energy from the neighbouring province at a very high rate, and then we're selling them energy at a very cheap price at the end of the day. Also, I'm told that since these lines are old – it was

great technology 20 years ago, but with the advent of all the modern-day scientific research we have new lines, and they're losing less energy. So we can save an extra up to \$220 million, maybe a little bit more, maybe a little bit less, in energy. We're producing a lot of energy that we're losing.

Now, we're moving toward cleaner forms of energy production with carbon capture and storage. We have natural gas and cogeneration. We have wind power in the south. My understanding is that we produce amongst the most wind power energy in the country. We have biomass and solar power energy, another greener source of energy, so it's more power on the grid. It only makes sense that just as you upgrade your home – you upgrade your furnace; you upgrade the wires in your house – we as a province upgrade our infrastructure, be it roadways or electrical infrastructure or even our gas lines to move a very critical thing that we need, which is energy.

We do live in a global marketplace. Within India's and China's emerging economies the worldwide consumption of energy will only increase in the long term. That's why I talk about the other world. They have 400 million people that came out of poverty into the middle class. We are an energy-producing province, and sometimes it takes a little bit of energy to get the other energy out so we can actually run our economies.

On that argument, the need, my constituents, the vast majority of them, have not questioned the need in Edmonton-Meadowlark. These are good people who I know may be impacted by some of the infrastructure projects that may be built. Of these projects the heartland region project could affect my constituents. Their main issue is – and that's where the amendments to the bill come in – the public interest. What's their public interest? The issues that they've addressed are, one, the health issues. Whether they're perceived or realistic health issues, I've come to the conclusion that their concerns of health will probably not agree with Health Canada's concerns on electromagnetic frequency. I think both sides are probably going to have to agree to disagree.

A big issue for them is declining property values. My constituents did understand that they purchased their homes on a utility corridor. They expected the Anthony Henday, and it's there. They have 240 kV lines, and they are there. What they're telling me is that they didn't expect to have 500 kV lines on these big towers in their backyards. You know, one of my good constituents, Wes Ursuliak, and his wife purchased their home, and they planned to raise their children backing onto the west end TUC. If this line is overhead, it'll be about 60 metres away from his home in his backyard, and he's quite concerned about that.

So the major part of the amendment I'd like to speak in favour of is the decision-making process to consider putting these transmission lines in and the siting and how they're placed, that the public interest be represented. In addition to the economic issues that concern my constituents, there's also quality of life, to include the social, economic, and environmental effects where these lines are placed. I made a commitment and promise to my constituents to bring this out into the House here.

For a number of my constituents costing is an issue, to pay for the lines. I'm glad that the Minister of Energy has introduced an amendment that addresses the costing, scope, and scheduling of these lines.

5:20

Do we need all these lines right away, tomorrow? No. As I said, right now there are no brownouts, so I think it's a wise decision to do these in stages and bring them on as we need them.

Mr. Chairman, the position I have taken on this is that I do believe that the infrastructure needs to be upgraded. In voicing my constituents' concerns, I'm hoping that the decision is made to locate them

underground. My constituents and I have not suggested that they be put in the other end of town in another TUC, and we've not said they should be put in a rural area, in somebody else's backyard. We've said: please do them in our backyard; we're just asking that they be done underground in our backyard. I think Alberta can show some leadership. This has been done elsewhere in the world. I believe this may be the future for the rest of the country. Many of these other 200 kV lines are being placed underground. My constituents do realize it will cost more, but if you spread the cost amongst all Albertans, the cost will be minimal.

Mr. Chairman, these are just my thoughts I'd like to express to you and to my colleagues here in the Assembly. I'd like to thank you for the honour of standing up and speaking to the amendments, amendment A1 to Bill 50, as well as to the bill and as well as to speak up for my constituents.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise in committee on Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. This is the stage at which we discuss the impacts of the bill and, in this case, the amendments recommended by the government. There are three basic questions that come to mind in addressing these amendments. First of all, do they address the need to massively upgrade our infrastructure urgently and the contention around that urgency situation?

Secondly, if so, what type of electricity generation, and where is it going to be located? Does it address some of those questions that people are asking? Those have implications for other concerns, like cost and land value and health implications.

The third question is: how will the decisions be made in relation to this major new infrastructure investment? If these amendments don't address those key questions in a way that honours the public spirit of debate and public decision-making and public interest in the long term, then it behooves us on this side of the House to reject them.

The peripheral issues such as how it's going to increase consumer cost, whether they're buried or not, and some of the health concerns have clearly to do with a priori decisions around those first three questions. Do we need it? If so, where and what type? How will the decisions be made?

As I look at these amendments, section 1(3) being struck out, our concern is that the bill is actually, again, bypassing the needs identification process. The original wording of the bill is that the existing 17(1) in the Alberta Utilities Commission Act does not apply to critical transmission infrastructure. This amendment is changing that wording by specifying that it is the needs identification process in particular that the commission cannot undertake with regard to critical transmission infrastructure. This amendment is trying to clarify that other hearings do still remain such as for the siting of these lines. But that is not what section 17(1) addresses. My colleagues have indicated this, and I reinforce it here. This particular section is dealing only with the Alberta Utilities Commission's role independent of government to assess the need for transmission lines. If the commission cannot give consideration under 17(1) to whether the critical transmission infrastructure is required to meet the provincial needs, then indeed 17(1) no longer applies. It's as simple as that. We cannot support that.

Amendment section 2(6) is trying to set out a staged approach to building the transmission infrastructure. This includes bringing the lines between Edmonton and Calgary up to half capacity first, then full capacity later. Given the government's previous statements

about quite how urgent all this transmission infrastructure is, for them now to say that it can be staggered over time is a contradiction in terms. After all, Bill 50 is calling this critical infrastructure. Therefore, why can it not, then, go through a regular process through the Alberta Utilities Commission, including public hearings? The timeline that will be imposed on this staging isn't revealed here, but the question becomes: why is the government claiming the infrastructure is critical? Without an understanding of what the stage duration will be, this amendment, therefore, doesn't appear to have any significant changes to the original intent of the bill, and we can't support it.

In part C, section 2(12)(b), the committee that is being proposed would give more public information on the lines but only once construction has started. While having more information is good, these lines then would be a fait accompli and the costs going onto consumers' bills anyway, whether the amounts are higher than originally quoted or not. All this committee will provide is more data. Surely, we can consider this, as it does provide more information, but to what extent this addresses the fundamental questions I began with is questionable.

Under amendment D, section 2(13), the amendment adjusts the proposed schedule that lists the first batch of critical transmission infrastructure, the four projects discussed in greater detail in the main bill. The changes are not particularly significant, with part (a) proposing the lines from Edmonton to Calgary in two stages rather than one and part (b) adjusting in a minor way the makeup of the Edmonton-Fort McMurray lines to allow for staging of that line.

The change to the Edmonton-Calgary lines could be seen as reacting to the criticism that this very expensive technology – some would say extravagant – is clearly an indication of overbuilding. The two levels of capacity backed off that particular gold-plated type plan at least initially, but the desire is still there to go up to a minimum capacity of 2,000 megawatts in the near term. As long as we have no idea as to how long it will be between these two stages of construction, then we have to see these lines as going to the full amount as soon as possible. It contradicts some of the earlier references.

Notwithstanding that, the change here to the schedule is not particularly important with regard to the principle of the bill. However, in its implementation the staging discussion in amendment B may well have some impacts that we need to be, I think, discussing in public contexts. That's where a public hearing would add some information here that's relevant to the public interest.

Under part E, section 3(3), it's difficult to know how this is going to apply in a substantive way to this bill. It removes one of the restrictions that section 3 places on the Alberta Utilities Commission, but it leaves in place others of equal force. What remains in the bill is the fact that "the Commission shall not refuse an approval of a transmission line . . . on the basis that, in its opinion, it does not meet the needs of Alberta." So the commission is still completely prevented from saying whether or not the transmission lines are needed.

As discussed under amendment A, the government seems to be trying to make clear that siting concerns are still the purview of the Alberta Utilities Commission. In that sense they can rule on the public interest of the transmission line, but when it comes to whether or not the line is actually going to be built rather than where, the Alberta Utilities Commission is barred. This is clearly not acceptable, not honouring the public process and the public interest, in our view, and not fixing the fundamental flaw, and, in our perspective, attempts to fiddle around with it and make it somehow more palatable.

Mr. Chairman, those are my main concerns about these amendments. They fundamentally fail the test of whether we have in place an ability to assess the need for the massive upgrade that is being proposed and, if so, whether there is going to be enough information, both scientific and public values expressed, around what type of infrastructure and where it should be located in the long-term public interest and, finally, how those decisions will ultimately be made in the public interest.

Thank you.

5:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in committee to address some of the issues that I feel are important in the amendments to Bill 50. Most importantly, I'd like to point out the staging aspect. I believe this is the most important amendment we have for various different reasons.

Now, to go back a little bit, I'd like to make the House aware that in my particular constituency right now we have a total of 374 megawatts of wind power produced. That is 72 per cent of the province's wind power. In the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner we have 147 megawatts of wind power produced, capability right now. We have much more in both of these constituencies that have been applied for and approved but have no way of actually reaching a transmission line to be exported up the province to the need.

Now, everybody on the other side of House likes to wax eloquent about green power, the need for more green power. The fact is that if we go back a couple of years to February 10, 2007, the leader at the time of the Alliance made the comment to Todd Babiak of the *Edmonton Journal* that we have a cap on wind power in this province, and it doesn't make any sense that at the same time we have what he termed a small environmental disaster taking place, the oil sands. That's a direct quote that I can give to the chair if need be.

When we look at the staging aspect of this – we have all this locked-in wind power, and everybody likes to speak highly of green power – we have the ability to take green power from the south. Staged lines: we run enough lines across the south part of the province – I might add that we have the Peigan Nation there, the Piikani Nation, and the ability to produce I'm not sure exactly how much wind power, but it's significant, probably touches right along the lines of, let's say, the MD of Pincher Creek. It's already got 225 megawatts. We could easily have that much more on the Peigan-Piikani lands. It gives an opportunity for the nation to have an income stream, the ability to move that power up the province to a part of the province where that power is needed.

Now, if we think further than just today, which I hope we all do in this House or we're wasting our time being here – we're here for the future. In saying that, this power can be produced down there, taken across the south side of the province, moved up the east side directly into our oil sands area, where, hopefully some of our members of the opposition are aware, most of our machinery is run on electricity. Now, isn't that a novel concept? We have green power extracting carbon for other uses. Wow. That's almost a carbon credit, I would think. But we've also got an income stream for the people down there as well as the ability to utilize all this green power.

So we put all these things together and say: there's the staging end; we've got to go down once across the bottom, tie up all of our wind power, then take it up the province. All of you realize that there is not a city at the bottom of a wind generation tower. There's no point in putting them up if you can't transmit it, so transmission is of the utmost importance.

Now, at a policy field committee meeting a couple of weeks back Mr. Holden, that is oft mentioned here by the Member for Calgary-Varsity, had made the comment that he was fully in favour of wind power. It's his favourite thing, apparently, although Enmax and Mr. Holden intervened on the 240-kilovolt line that is currently being built across the south and tried to block it. I can't quite figure out why you would block something that you are vehemently in favour of because it would also apply as a backup to the city of Calgary. Like I've said before, there are no cities at the bottom of the wind towers.

We got that question out. There was never an answer other than that Enmax is fully in favour of wind power and that it's a great mix with their gas power. The reality is that that power production in the south end of the province is the only competition to the current area held by Enmax. I think that was more the reason for the blocking than anything else.

Not to stick on that point, another issue that has been brought forward was, I think, someone mentioned Bill 19. Bill 19 says that the first thing you have to do is go out and talk to the people, find the best route for that. I don't know where that comment comes from. We're talking about a needs bill here. This establishes the need. It says nothing about the siting; it's over here or over there. For the hon. member to bring that up – I have to say that another question I've heard in here was: what's the average age of our lines? Well, for everyone's information, it's 38 years. I can attest to that personally because I've driven around one my whole life that we'd farm around. Is it fun? No. But people need power. I'm sure that some of the power shipped on that line may have even gone into Calgary-Varsity's constituency. Do I like going around it? No. But we all need power. We know that.

We have to look to the future, build for the future, not stay stuck here where we can't do anything, we just have to stay where we are. Nobody moves; nobody gets hurt. We talk about how we can fire it by gas if we don't have the transmission lines, and we've made the discussion of coal. At that same policy field committee our Member for Calgary-Currie brought up the comment that in Ontario you bring coal from far, far away, unload it off the boat after it floats across the Great Lakes, and then you produce power. Well, that's wonderful. Now let's look at their carbon footprint. First off, we've taken the coal from the ground wherever it was mined, we've shipped it across the lake, we've unloaded it, we've reloaded it, we've burned it, and we've created power.

Here in Alberta all of our power generation is at the mine mouth. Carbon use is at the bare minimum. The transmission is the intelligent thing to do. To back up, to mix the different generation, you have to have transmission, but you don't want to haul the coal down to fire a plant as an alternative to gas when gas shoots through the roof again. Once again, we have to look to the future. The price of gas today will not be there forever. Are we going to tie our wagon to one thing only? Not this side of the House. Not my idea.

In saying all of this, the amendment, especially the staged part, is the most important thing we're dealing with here this afternoon in the amendments. But I urge everyone to look to the future, not today and not the past, and say: how do we make this the best for all Albertans? Give them the opportunity to grow and prosper and have a great economy in the future by moving forward with this, not running with our heads in the sand, hoping that the whole issue will go away, that no one will burn power in the future and we'll all live happily ever after. That utopia does not exist, hon. members. We have to look to the future and move in that direction.

I thank you for the time to address this bill this afternoon.

Mr. Chase: I agree with the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod that putting all our eggs in one basket is not the way to go. Gas will probably at some point – I don't know how far into the future because I don't have that ability to predict. I'm sure gas prices will go up. In so doing, they're going to help with our economy's recovery. That will be the other side of the balance of the coin.

You mentioned how capping didn't make sense, but this government capped wind power for a number of years. I think it was 2006 or 2007 . . .

Mr. Berger: Because there was no transmission to get it out.

Mr. Chase: I don't agree.

The Chair: The member has the floor.

Mr. Chase: Through the chair, of course.

If the government was wanting to bring that power online and develop the transmission lines, then that would have happened. But where the government has been for years and years and years has been subsidizing nonrenewable resources. That's been the preferred option. It's only been recently that the caps were taken off wind power generation.

5:40

Now, I am not, you know, waving a singular flag for Enmax and gas power. I don't have any shares in Enmax. It's a city of Calgary owned circumstance, so I guess my taxes help contribute to our local utility.

Going back to the notion of not one type of energy source being the answer, I have big hopes in the future for wind, but the problem is that the wind power is only there when the wind blows. I know that where the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod lives, it blows most of the time. I worked out of Coleman, and I worked out of Rocky Mountain House when I worked for – I'm temporarily forgetting the name of the gas company that I worked for, but we dealt with the lines. No. It's not coming. The point is that until we can come up with a way to store electrical energy, it's only one of the types of options.

The notion of the east-west transmission line. I mean, we've already got some established corridors that would do the least amount of disruption. Something that we've been recommending for some time is the twinning of highway 3 so that you would have the potential of running those transmission lines along an already acquired access that would be of value both from an economic point of view for land transportation as well as power transportation. There are certain routes that make more sense than others.

Also, that tie-in running east to west: we could tie in to both B.C. and Saskatchewan. Instead of exporting our power down to the States, we could have mutual trade agreements just like TILMA with Saskatchewan and B.C. for a more favourable back and forth in our transmission lines. I would suggest that east-west line makes considerably more sense than a long-distance north-south. I'm not in opposition to what you've suggested, hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. I think that east-west transmission makes a lot of sense.

I also think, as I mentioned before, that by relining our transmission lines with – you know, it seems like I have shares in 3M, but I don't. I'm certain that there are other companies with similar quality products. By simply changing the style of wire and increasing the ability of the lines to carry, there is less disruption, as I pointed out earlier.

What we need to be doing is using to the best of our ability all kinds of possibilities. That Alberta apparently has the largest number of sunshine hours in Canada is what I've heard. We would have the potential of solar energy, wind energy, the green types of energy that the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod spoke so favourably for, and I agree. I would much rather, when we had that opportunity to use renewable energy, whether it's wind or solar – there's been a fair amount of advancement in the river run style of energy. It doesn't have the same quantities that the other energy has, but it's considerably better than a dam circumstance, which requires flooding.

But what's been proposed, this north-south, at various times as that same type of transportation of power, there's been talk about the transportation of water. We've got our population in the south, and people have talked about intrabasin transfers of water from the north to the south, but whenever that happens, that's when we get a drought up north and sufficient rainfall for crops and so on down south. So it questions messing with Mother Nature and the effects of doing so.

It's important to know that we're not opposed to what can be defined by all individuals as critical transmission. We're not opposed to the notion of stages, providing they get a hearing, that the priority is established, that it's backed by science, that individuals feel that they've had an opportunity to hear from expert witnesses. You know, going back to what I said way back in the second reading aspects, the Compton hearing on the southeast sour gas wells was an education experience. Another education experience in terms of environmental hearings was what occurred with the Black Diamond-Turner Valley potential of combining and drawing from the reservoir that was in Turner Valley. Of course, there was controversy about that reservoir because of the number of oil and gas explorations. In fact, they had to actually move their reservoir from its initial plan – and that was a rather expensive circumstance – because there was a well on the very edge of the reservoir, and there were concerns about the potential of gas seepage.

The point is that without the Alberta Utilities Commission and a hearing process, citizens are left out. They have no opportunity to be informed. They have no opportunity to participate. With this government and its renewed leader – I would suggest renewed as of the November convention – the talk about transparency and accountability and democratic renewal: that has to go from the talk stage to the walk stage, and it's for those reasons that we need to involve our citizenry. We have to provide them with the light of information and the opportunity to discuss where the transmission lines should go and to what extent and with what speed they need to be brought online. The one-sided hearing process, where information is just taken in but doesn't seem to be recorded – it certainly hasn't been transmitted – becomes more of a PR circumstance than it has to do with science or power transmission.

Now, I don't want to take up the whole discussion. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall has put a lot of preparatory work into his concerns. I'll sit down, Mr. Chair. I thank all government members for the greater patience they showed to my prose than to my poetry.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to speak on Bill 50. The concerns are that the bill, if passed, will bypass the regulatory needs identification hearing for transmission lines deemed to be critical by the cabinet and will impose billions of dollars of costs on consumers without ensuring that the projects are even needed.

5:50

We have been talking about the amendments put forward by the Minister of Energy. He's trying to correct the bill. The reasons given for Bill 50 are that we need to speed up the multibillion-dollar upgrades, to expand the aging and inadequate electricity network. Under the present law the Alberta Utilities Commission determines if the proposed transmission lines are in the public interest and satisfy the needs identification requirements and also where the lines are going to go in order to determine the siting of lines. But if the bill becomes law, it will strip the Alberta Utilities Commission's regulatory authority. Cabinet will have full control on how the projects are determined, and the commission will be prohibited from refusing to approve any projects which are deemed to be critical by the provincial government. The cabinet will set the criteria that the commission has to apply in the siting of the projects. So under Bill 50 any new proposed projects coming to the AUC for a public hearing will end, and public consultation is the only way to determine the viability, the feasibility, and the transparency of any project.

The Minister of Energy insists that to avoid blackouts in the province, we need to build the very critically needed transmission lines, and in the amendment proposed by the minister, now he wants to do staged development. If the need was so critical before, then why is the minister backtracking on the proposed bill? This goes to show that the minister is not even sure what he wants to do with the bill.

All the upgrades are needed. We need abundant, low-cost power for our future growth, for job creation. We understand that. All the upgrades are needed for our aging transmission network, but with the slowing of the economy, the growth in demand for power has also slowed. As the member pointed out yesterday, we had a peak demand of almost 9,800 megawatts in 2008, but this dropped down to almost 8,000. The projections are that an additional 11,500 megawatts of power will be needed in 20 years, but we don't need that tomorrow.

We're talking about zero congestion here. If we're talking about zero congestion, we should be talking about zero congestion around the Calgary airport. Barlow Trail will be closing in 2011, and they're going to divert 50,000 cars from Barlow to Deerfoot Trail, so we should be worrying about the congestion around the airport. The airport is the hub for not only Calgary but Alberta. Instead of spending \$16 billion to \$20 billion, maybe the government should be giving \$100 million – I asked the Minister of Transportation to give serious consideration to having zero congestion around the airport by giving maybe \$60 million for the airport tunnel. That will go a long way to helping not only the residents of Calgary northeast but Calgarians and Albertans as a whole. We cannot be building 20-lane or 50-lane highways to have zero congestion. I think that's too far-fetched.

It's going to cost us billions and billions of dollars, and when the issue comes about burying the lines underground, who knows what kind of costs will be incurred or if it will even help to solve the problem? I think we shouldn't be going full speed ahead with the bill.

With these amendments I think the minister has tried to address some of the issues. In amendment A he wants to strike out section 1(3) and under section (3) amend section 17. He wants to amend it,

but that amendment is not addressing the concerns. The original wording of the bill is that the existing section 17(1) in the Alberta Utilities Commission Act "does not apply to critical transmission infrastructure." This amendment is changing that wording, for sure, by specifying that it is the needs identification process, in particular, that the commission cannot undertake.

With regard to the critical transmission infrastructure this amendment is trying to clarify that other hearings do still remain such as for the siting of these lines. But that is not what section 17(1) addresses. This particular section is dealing only with an agency's role independent of government to assess the need for the transmission lines. If the commission cannot give consideration under section 17(1) to whether the critical transmission infrastructure is required to meet the provincial needs, then section 1 no longer applies. It's as simple as that.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I believe that as elected representatives we all want the best for our constituents. We want the best for all Albertans. We don't want the power to go out. We want it to be sustainable and predictable, but we haven't come to what the balance is between sustainability and predictability.

One of the most intriguing pieces of legislation that the government has introduced but not finished up on is the land-use strategy. My feeling is that if we had a handle on the land-use strategy and we talked about designated corridors, areas of protection – the idea was to divide the province into five or, potentially, six sections – then the discussions we're having about where transmission corridors might theoretically be placed would be an open and transparent process. Along with the placement of transmission lines we would also have protected areas and corridors for the rapid rail, for example, that people have various opinions on. But if we could establish particular corridors that were defined well in advance so that speculation didn't occur, then it would fit into this overall plan where the lines would be drawn. That doesn't change the fact that we believe the cost of the transmission lines should not be borne solely by the public, but that discussion would certainly help tremendously in terms of future planning for the province.

It's important that we work together on this. Unfortunately – some might say fortunately – this session is rapidly drawing to a close and leaving several bits of unfinished business that will go unattended. The opportunities to further debate, for example, Bill 206, the opportunity to even enter into discussions on Bill 209: these are all lost opportunities. But I guess we'll have another crack at it, probably, mid-February.

I wish everyone well in the discussion that will continue tonight, and I'm hoping that it will be fruitful. Possibly the government has more amendments to this bill that may bring it into line or at least closer into line with what Albertans have been telling this government and, certainly, telling opposition members.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but it's 6 o'clock, and Standing Order 4(4) requires that we recess until 7:30.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, November 24, 2009

Issue 63e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the committee is back to order. Please be seated.

Bill 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: When we adjourned this afternoon, we were on amendment A1. Are there any comments or questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just can't tell you how thrilled I am. I've tried really hard to listen to all of this debate – we're now, I think, more than a week into the debate on this bill – on the Tannoy if I was back at the Annex, and if not, I have tried to follow along by reading *Hansard*. I cannot believe I did that, but I tried.

Currently we are speaking to the government amendment which is on the floor with no subamendments. It doesn't seem to me that anybody has actually spoken directly to the government amendment that is on the floor, so I'd like to do that. Once the amendment has been dealt with, I'd like the opportunity to seek the chairman's permission to stand again and just speak more generally on the clause debate in Committee of the Whole.

Going back, I was going through my file, and I was noticing that, you know, I started to collect e-mails and letters and such from people back in the summer, which makes sense because the minister put this on the floor in the spring session so that there would be the opportunity for people to give him some feedback to the bill, thus all the wonderful people that I've had an opportunity to correspond with. But in listening to the debate and reading the correspondence, these are the issues that I've been hearing over and over again: the question of need, the question of crisis, the question of public consultation, the question of cost, the question of cost paid by others – I think we could refer to that now as the Lexus argument – the reliability of the line, and the question of whether the lines are for us or for export. There have been sort of subquestions there about how fast this needs to proceed, who pays, and who decides. As I see it, those are the issues that are live in this particular discussion.

What we saw coming forward in the government amendment was an attempt, I think, to address some of the criticism that had been levelled over the summer and, indeed, some of the issues that I just highlighted in that sort of shopping list. The first is section A, which deals with the needs question, as I understand it. I'm sure that if I'm wrong, the minister will be happy to correct me. He certainly didn't hold back from correcting anyone else. I think that what I see in the government's attempt to correct this is that we didn't really correct the problem with this amendment. The bill continues to bypass the needs identification process. So the changes that are being proposed by the government don't actually do anything to address that concern.

We have the original wording that the Alberta Utilities Commission Act does not apply to critical transmission infrastructure. Now we have a subamendment here that's being put in under section (2), which is being added under the original section. It clarifies, essentially, that other hearings are still in play, that they remain, that

they're accessible, such as for the siting of the lines. The minister has been very clear that that continues to be available, but it's not what's being addressed here. The section actually only deals with the AUC's role independent of government to assess the need for the transmission lines. If the commission cannot give consideration under 17(1) to whether that critical transmission infrastructure, which is a term I keep seeing come up, is required to meet provincial needs, then 17(1) itself no longer applies. It should be as simple as that. So I'm arguing that there's no substantive difference made to Bill 50 by what we see in what we're calling amendment A.

If I can go on to section B of the amendment, which is amending section 2(6), appearing at the bottom of page 7, if you have a paper copy of the bill. Otherwise, it's essentially appearing under subsection (9). What's happening here is that there's a whole other piece being added in on staged development, 41.4 The previous section was 41.3. This is a whole big section that gets stuck into the bill as an amendment.

What we've got here is mostly around language: critical transmission infrastructure, CTI. Okay. It's subject to regulations, to "specify and make available to the public milestones that the Independent System Operator will use to determine the timing of the stages of the expansion of the terminals." But what's missing here is what the timing is.

It's one thing to come forward in the act and say: "All right. We're going to give stages. We're going to implement stages, or milestones, into the bill." Fair enough. But part of this was the issue around a sort of larger understanding of timing. If you tell me that you're going to do this in stages but you don't tell me how far apart the stages are – they could be a week apart, a month apart. I don't mean to be frivolous but quite genuine in saying that you haven't resolved the problem. To tell me that this is going to be staged and then not tell me what the increments are in the staging is not helpful. It doesn't move the issue ahead, or it doesn't resolve the issue that people were concerned about. So it talks about those milestones.

The second piece of it is that the facilities that are referred to "shall be developed in stages in accordance with subsection (3)." Subsection (3) talks about that the schedule shall be developed first, may initially be energized at 240 kV, and the ISO shall, subject to the regulations, specify, et cetera, et cetera. It says it's going to be staged and then doesn't tell us how far apart or even give us an example. Is it a year, or is it five-year increments? Nothing. If you don't give me those increments, it didn't make this meaningful. So that's not going to help.

Moving on to the next section, which would appear as amendment C, which, for people following along on the paper bill, appears on page 10. Again, it's another whole piece that gets inserted. It's under section 2(12)(b), and following (1)(v.4), we're inserting section (v.5). This talks about the establishment of a committee with the ISO, representatives of customers, and other persons determined by the regulation, which again gives us no detail, to provide records to customers in relation to construction of transmission facilities. This one I think is getting a little closer to what I was looking for in that it's supposed to be giving these records in relation to costs, scope, and construction schedules of the transmission facilities.

The second piece of it is that the records of the ISO, transmission facility officers, and persons directed under different sections must be provided to the committee for the purposes of doing the first, which is to provide that to the public that have asked for it. Essentially, this is giving the public more information on the lines, but again what's missing here is a timeline. I take it that this information gets passed on but once everything has already been approved.

7:40

Do you know what it reminds me of, Mr. Chairman? It's the whole process that we get involved with in trying to get information around P3s, especially around P3s but also around any kind of contract that the government does. We have a process in which the requests for proposals, or the old-fashioned concept of tendered bids, are always closed. We see the very initial request that the government puts out, but it's not very specific. We have no idea how the various entities are responding and what they are agreeing that they will do or not do to what level. We don't get to see that because it's always a closed process. From that the successful bidder is chosen, and they enter into a contract with the government. Then when we try to get information at that stage, we're told: "You can't see the contract. It's a contract with a third party, business product, blah blah blah. Sorry. You can't see it." So the public, the media, the opposition never get a chance in that process to see things.

When we were trying to determine, for example, how cost-effective it was and what was included and not included in the contracts for some of the P3s – the courthouse is one that comes to mind, and of course that one didn't proceed – we actually couldn't get any information about it. This process is a little bit similar, to me, because it says that the information will be provided, but it's provided once all the deals are made, all the contracts are out, and the thing is under construction. "Now you can have the information about it." Nice but not very useful because what are the people that now get this information supposed to do with it? Stand on the highway or down the middle of the right-of-way and go: "Excuse me. I've now got information, and I wish you hadn't done this. I have information that says that you could be doing it cheaper. Whoa. Stop. Don't put that up." You know, it's kind of lip service. It's addressing part of what people were so angry about but not in a way that ends up being meaningful.

You know, if pressed, I would say that, yes, I would support this particular section of the amendment more than I would support the previous two, but I kind of wonder what difference it would make.

Let me move on to D, section 2(13), which is appearing on page 12 of the hard copy. I'm sorry if I back up a bit. Here they're replacing the sections that you see currently and giving what is in effect a staging of the line that is supposed to go up to Fort McMurray. If you read the two of them, what was and what will be in this amendment, you get two different versions of it, but essentially it creates a staging for that line.

There's something else in here. In section (2) it talks about that the terminals should have an initial capacity of at least 1,000 megawatts each and be expandable to a minimum capacity of 2,000 megawatts each. Interesting. Remember that earlier I was talking about a reference that will turn up. This is the reference that turns up. It proposes that the lines can go forward in stages rather than all at once, and it's adjusting, as I said, in a minor way the connection between Edmonton and Fort McMurray to allow for the staging of that. Now, unless I've missed something, this is not dealing with the one that goes between Edmonton and Calgary.

I think the argument here is that it can get at that charge of overbuilding, the kind of Lexus complaint that we've heard, that with these lines, which are the HVDC lines, which are the more expensive technology, if it was felt they were overbuilding: you could see this amendment as addressing that. It allows it to kind of back off of that gold-plated status. But we're still getting that jump from 1,000 to 2,000 and no details in there about a minimum of one year in increments or a minimum of six months or five years. There's no timing involved with that. So, again, part of the same problem. You get a gold-plated approach, but it's a staged gold-

plated approach. It doesn't really change the principle of the bill. Again, if I was pressed to it, it does include the staging, it does deal with the gold-plated, but it doesn't have a huge effect on the final shape of the bill.

Section E is amending section 19, which is on the bottom of page 12, and striking out "or is not in the public interest." Again, this is looking to me as though it's a cosmetic change that does not address any of the major issues that have been brought forward. It removes one of the restrictions in section 3 that was placed on the Alberta Utilities Commission, but it leaves in place others of equal import and force. So it's not even one step forward, two steps back; it's one step sideways, and another one back. It's just another dance step that leaves you standing in exactly the same position where you were.

The commission is still prevented from saying whether or not the transmission lines are needed. You know, what it reminded me of is a toggle switch. What you get is an off/on position. All we're allowing in a number of places in this bill is for the agencies in power to say yes/no but not anything else and not to deal with anything else.

I think the government – well, the government clearly set out in this bill to do something very specific. They feel justified in doing it. But, frankly, based on everything I've seen since and listening to the debate that's happened, there are a lot of experts not in this House – and that's not casting aspersions – who are questioning whether this is needed and how fast it proceeds and how expensive it is. There were a lot of them.

We had the University of Calgary School of Public Policy. I mean, there are statements like: "It is less likely that project approval and conditions will be driven by short-term political interests and more likely that the regulator's perspective will reflect long-term benefits and costs to the province." Then it goes on to talk about: "A public process allows for greater scrutiny of alternative points of view and . . . [requirements] to provide . . . rationale." So they don't seem very keen on it.

We had the Environmental Law Centre saying, "Instead of enhancing the transmission approval process, Bill 50 would make the problem of needs assessment and approval for transmission infrastructure in Alberta worse."

We had EDC Associates for the Utilities Consumer Advocate: "Much of the data and logic presented by AESO is unconvincing and overstates the sense of urgency."

We had the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta: "Forcing a new transmission build program on existing ratepayers that will treble and potentially quadruple transmission costs in the next 10 years, without any cost control or oversight mechanisms . . ." They go on.

7:50

One that I would have thought would have been a favourite of this government, which is the Fraser Institute, you know, with commentary like: "That's nonsense . . . Although transmission upgrades in Alberta are needed, the growth in demand for electricity has actually slowed in recent years and the network operators have determined there's no imminent adequacy gap under even the worst scenario." [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired] I'll look for another opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, before we continue, may we revert to Introduction of Guests? Are you agreed?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly in this House tonight the 10th LDS Connors Hill Scout group with the Northern Lights Council. Slader Oviatt is one of the leaders here today. He's a very good friend of mine since kindergarten, when we both lived right by Sherwood Park, and actually we both attended Fultonvale in that constituency. He's also a very accomplished outdoorsman. If you want the most random trivia that you have ever heard, in 2004 he actually carried the flag of Sealand. I bet you that no one here knows where Sealand is, but he actually carried the flag of Sealand to the summit of Mt. Muztagh Ata, at an altitude of almost 25,000 feet. It's one of the biggest peaks in the world, in China. We're really grateful to have him. Slader is joined by fellow Scout and Venture leaders Bill Kwatic and Matt Burgess and the Scouts – you can put your hand up when I call your name – Andrew Gayleard, Grayson Gross, Mark West, John DeMaris, Dan Sherman, Dallin Backstrom, Scott LaVoy, and James DeMaris. Could we give them a warm welcome.

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

(continued)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do appreciate the opportunity to stand and debate some of the merits of Bill 50. I want to thank the member opposite for presenting opinions and a case in a manner in which it allows, I think, for some constructive debate relative to the issues that you bring up.

Initially you had three questions: how fast, who pays, and who decides? I think, Mr. Chairman, I can go through that, and perhaps there'll be a better understanding at the end of our debate on the relative merits of what we're doing and, of course, perhaps the downside of some of the issues we had prior to the amendments that we have in front of us.

How fast? The situation that we have in front of us, of course, is a culmination of about a decade's worth of work in the province of Alberta by a number of stakeholders. Of course, these have changed over a period of time because prior to 2003 and the new Electric Utilities Act we didn't have the structure that we have today, so this even precedes some of that. How fast is a good question because the initial AESO documentation that indicated the requirement for critical transmission infrastructure had a number of pieces of infrastructure in it that appeared as though they had to all be pretty much put together at the same time. We know that with these amendments and the staging that's going to take place, how fast will be addressed by the amendments. The pieces of infrastructure will be staged over a period of time, probably starting dates spread out over likely something in the neighbourhood of five years. However, that again will be determined by an assessment that would be taken to the AUC after the initial pieces are constructed, so there'll be trigger points that have to be met.

The second thing, Mr. Chairman: who pays? There has only ever in the province of Alberta – well, better not say ever. I believe that since about 1948 – and I think we were talking about this the other day – there was a decision and determination made by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, I believe, in that period of time, that the system in Alberta would be constructed by others other than the government. So it's always been an independently owned system.

There was a short period of time where there was almost on an experimental basis an opportunity to see if it would make a difference or make things more economic, more efficient if the generators were responsible to pay for part of the transmission system. It was short-lived, but there was a period of time. If my memory serves me right, it would have probably been something in the neighbourhood of five years. I don't recall exactly. It occurs to me that it was prior to the 2003 Electric Utilities Act and maybe sometime just after, something like that.

Anyway, what happened in those days was the system was vertically integrated, so you had a generator, transmitter, distributor, and retailer all piled up. The idea was that if the generator was responsible for part of the transmission costs, they would be more responsible in their business operations as an integrated company to be sure that the transmission costs were not exorbitant. However, I must say that it didn't really achieve anything because, in fact, what happened then was that those costs in those days under the regulated system were downloaded to the generator, the generator took it to the regulator with those costs rolled in, and the consumer still paid the bill. It was no different, really, than it is today. At the end of that scheme the consumers paid for generation, transmission, distribution, and retailing, the same way they pay for it today.

Who decides? Mr. Chairman, in order to address that concern, I have to deviate a bit from the amendment, but I need to address the question because I think it's very important. It is part and parcel of Bill 50 with respect to critical transmission. It's part and parcel not really of the amendment, but it belongs here. So if you would allow me, I need to explain to the House what AESO is. There's been a lot of talk around that AESO is an arm of the government, that AESO does whatever it is the minister wants, whatever the cabinet wants, whatever the government wants, or whatever somebody wants. But let's be clear about this. AESO is a legal entity that's created by the Electric Utilities Act. It specifically provides in the legislation specified that AESO is not part of a ministry, is not a provincial corporation, and is not an agent of the Crown. Its duties and responsibilities are those derived from the Electric Utilities Act and the related regulation, together referred to as the existing legislation.

Now, the connection. AESO board members are appointed by the minister, and thereafter their conduct is governed by the existing legislation. Short of making new legislation or amending the existing legislation, there is no role, no authority for the minister or the government of Alberta to interfere with or to be active in the day-to-day workings of the AESO. They are an independent body. The AESO under legislation must, by law, operate according to a mandate. Their mandate as they approach transmission planning includes things like, by the way, the Edmonton to Calgary reinforcement project. This is where people really feel the AESO is just out there doing something that I directed or somebody directed or because my friends want to do something. That's not the case.

8:00

The AESO under legislation are directed. They must assess the needs of market participants and plan transmission systems to meet the needs. They must make arrangements to expand the transmission system. They must forecast the needs of Alberta and develop plans to meet those needs. They must proceed with timely implementation of expansion. They must prepare and submit approvals to the AUC, and they're doing that. They must forecast future need and plan for transmission to be in place to meet the needs. They must plan a transmission system that can accommodate 100 per cent of the required energy use under normal conditions and 95 per cent under abnormal conditions in the transmission regulations. They must arrange to expand the transmission system so all the foregoing

2 per cent criteria can be accommodated. Exceptions may be permitted but only for limited periods of time and with the approval of AUC.

There's another issue that came up about nonwire solutions. Nonwire solutions under the legislation may be an acceptable exception but only in very limited circumstances and for limited periods of time. Geographic separation of transmission lines must be considered for reliability as well as locating lines in a way that reduces the size of the right-of-way required even if these indications may result in additional costs. It's the legislation that they operate under. We have not directed them to do anything.

That, I think, Mr. Chairman, leads into the rest of who decides. We have a system in the province. Since the Electric Utilities Act of 2003 this business had been set up with a number of units, and I know the member opposite knows them. The changes that took place in '06 with respect to splitting the EUB into the ERCB for an energy regulator and the Alberta Utilities Commission for a utility regulator set up a situation where who decides at the end of the day is always – always – the Alberta Utilities Commission. None of these pieces of infrastructure – not noncritical, not critical – can be constructed, can be commissioned, or can be energized without the authority of the AUC. What Bill 50 does with respect to that, who decides – and please remember what I said about the AUC's responsibility. We have never determined the need. The government of Alberta has never determined the need. The need was determined by AESO independently.

What Bill 50 allows the government to do is approve the need that the AESO determined. After that process takes place, the permit and licensing procedures that go forward will be determined under the existing system that's been in place since 2003. We think it is a very, very good system. It allows for any Albertan – any Albertan – to approach the AUC and ask to be an intervenor, ask for status at the hearings. Some – some – individuals may not be awarded costs, but many will be. We have things like the consumer's advocate. They have a mandate to go before the AUC to act on behalf of consumers in Alberta.

There will be a number of intervenors whose costs would be applied for and covered. I can think of people like, I'm sure, the industrial power consumers, probably people like the chemical producers, perhaps municipalities, and there may be others. But the decision point takes place there, in a quasi-judicial setting away from politicians and away from the possible situation that you might find in some jurisdictions where politics would enter into that decision. The decision rests solely with the AUC. I've explained, I think, Mr. Chairman, that we're not bypassing the needs. AESO identifies needs; we only approve.

The costs. Again, there was quite a bit of discussion there. If I may, the cost oversight committee, something that has never been here, will be here now. I tell you, I really think this is a very good piece of business. What has happened in the past is that you get through needs identification, you get through P and L, you start into procurement, construction, commissioning, and energizing. Mr. Chairman, what happened in the past, before this amendment, is that at the end of all of that and the piece of infrastructure is energized, the AUC then holds a tariff hearing. In the tariff hearing all of the wrapped-up costs, all the costs with respect to that piece of infrastructure, are brought to the AUC, and they make a determination there whether those costs are justified and right for that piece of infrastructure. When they reach an agreement that it is correct, then those costs are rolled into the rate base.

The way this works now – at that point, remember, none of the people that go to intervene in the tariff hearing would have had any opportunity to see the costs beforehand – with this committee they

will be able to track the costs from procurement through construction through commissioning and energizing. When they go to the tariff hearings, they have all of the relevant information that they require to make a proper intervention on behalf of Albertans.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that is definitely a major piece of the amendments that we have in here, the other piece, of course, being talking about the AUC's need to operate in the public interest and the situation with respect to timing. There's the staging. I believe that I've covered most of the points.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, and my thanks to the minister for engaging in that. I guess a couple of observations in response. I think the question of who pays is really a question of a deregulation sandwich or a regulation sandwich. We have the generators as a private entity and deregulated. We have the transmission in the middle, which is handled by a not-for-profit society, which is AESO. Then you have the retail, which is also private-sector driven. Those become your deregulation sandwich. In your regulation sandwich you have the distributor in there as well. I personally prefer a regulated sandwich, but we've moved beyond that in this province, and I don't know how you would try and get back there again. I think that a regulated one ends up being better for the consumer.

Part of what I'm sensing in people's frustration around this bill is the sense that they're going to end up paying, and they don't have a lot of input. Now, the minister clearly disagrees with me and has walked through a system that he believes actually enhances their ability. But I'm thinking back to things like the Boston Tea Party because the point of that was that they threw their tea in the harbour because they were not going to pay taxes on it. They'd rather have thrown it in the harbour than pay taxes on it. The point of it was, you know, no taxation without representation.

What I see happening here is that there is a requirement that the consumer pays. The consumers are looking at this. They are looking at the current situation, they are looking at what the government is putting in place with Bill 50, and they feel that they do not get access into the decision-making process at the critical time, that there is no appeal process that is evident, and that they don't have a meaningful opportunity to halt the way things are going. I think that's the crux of everything. I think that's why people are so frustrated with this bill out there, outside of this building. They feel they are going to end up paying for something.

My colleague has made the point that most of the consumers of electricity in Alberta are not, you know, you and me. They're not individuals. They are the industrial sector and the commercial sector. Those are the people that are really going to end up paying. I think that when we listen to some of the arguments that have been made, including the ones that have been made by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, who, to give him credit, actually debated this bill and spoke on the record more than once, his point was, you know – and that's always interesting because I find that if there's actually a good argument, people just present the good argument. But when they're a little uncertain about their argument, they end up getting up and trying to belittle their opponent, get up and say, "Well, you're not smart enough to grasp this" and "This is beyond you."

8:10

It was interesting because both times the Member for Livingstone-Macleod did that. He started to make an argument and then went off into just bashing anyone that didn't agree with him: they were stupid

if they didn't agree with him, and did they not understand this? I listened to every word you said, member, and I followed it up.

Mr. Berger: I never said the word "stupid."

Ms Blakeman: No, you didn't use the word "stupid." That's true. You didn't use the word "stupid," but you certainly questioned people's intelligence and that if they were not going to go along with this, they were somehow – I mean, this was the last that you were talking about this afternoon, that if people didn't support this, we were somehow demanding that we go backwards and that there be no improvement. Nobody has said that on this side. That's not what part of the debate is. But it does indicate to me that, you know, if there were really good arguments there, you'd deliver the arguments as you believe them.

The Minister of Energy just did that, and he managed to do it without ever insulting my intelligence, my parentage, my belief system, or anything else. He believed in his arguments, and he put them on the record. I was really interested that not very many members of the government caucus, to be fair, actually spoke on this bill, but for a number of those that did, that was the way they approached it. Rather than putting the argument out, it was about insulting the people that had spoken against the bill, which is always an indicator to me that things aren't going well.

I got way off topic there, Mr. Chairman: Boston Tea Party, representation.

I think the fact that AESO is independent, fair enough. But who sits there to make those decisions, who are the decision-makers, is decided by the government. The government totally controls who ends up being appointed to that decision-making body. I'll just take a bit of a flyer here in my imagination, but I cannot imagine the Minister of Energy even on his most generous day, you know, appointing a known Liberal to that group, for example. I think the political process is involved in this by the appointees to AESO. Although it is supposedly nonpolitical and protected from that, I would argue that who gets on there is the political control. The minister says: well, from then on they're governed by the legislation. Yeah. But how they choose to work their way through that legislation is always in itself a political process.

The other thing: my understanding, and I could be wrong here, on the hearings that he was talking about. Were not those the hearings in which only landowners who were directly affected could participate? I think that there's a number of problems with those hearings in that they have been changed from what people believed they should have been entitled to, whether their costs are covered, how much notice they get, et cetera, et cetera, so their ability to directly affect the outcome is pretty limited.

I'll go on. I think the tariff hearings are part of what I was talking about before. You may get all of that information, but you get it after the fact. The deal is done. The car has been driven off the lot and is out of sight. The fact that you know how much the tires were and how much the windshield was: great. But the car is gone; it's already happened and moved away. I don't see that as, you know, a meaningful participation in the process. Further to that, if it's determined that something was too much, does the consumer get their money back? I doubt it.

I'm going back to my original take on the government motion, which is what is still before us on the floor. I think that, as I often feel with the government, they were trying to address something, but it was more about, "How can we look like we're addressing this?" than "How can we actually do it?" I still don't see a solid appeal process in here. I still don't see the incremental time that I was

asking about that makes those stages meaningful. So I think that Bill 50 is not satisfying the criticisms that have been directed at it.

I'm sure there are others that want to participate in this debate, and I will give the floor to them at this point while I go through the rest of my notes and dig out the next go-round.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Liepert: Oh, he showed up.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You bet, hon. Member for Calgary-West, the Minister of Health and Wellness, I certainly did show up.

Mr. Liepert: I wondered where you were.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, if you want to know where I was, I was at Rexall Place, Mr. Chairman, listening to a rather interesting presentation on our transmission system in this province or our lack of transmission planning in this province. There were many people at the meeting. There was a crowd on Wayne Gretzky Drive that was looking to find a place to park. How was it? It was a busy, busy place. I didn't see any Conservative MLAs there, but that doesn't mean they weren't. It was a big crowd.

Mr. Quest: We were here.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, you're here, and you're welcome to participate, hon. member, in the debate, in the discussion on Bill 50.

Certainly, Mr. Chairman, when we look at the amendments that were proposed last Thursday by the hon. Minister of Energy, if the government thinks this is going to silence the thousands of people who have issues with this bill and with this transmission policy, they are going to be disappointed because the amendments that have been tossed out, whether it's A or whether it's B, C, D, or E, are certainly not what is going to satisfy the people I talked to earlier this evening. The people I talked to have been following this process for quite some time. Some of them have been attending meetings for close to a year.

Last summer there was a meeting in Morinville. There were well over a thousand people, I'm told, at the Agriplex. I would have gone, but I didn't have an opportunity. I did meet one of the landowners. Which constituency did this gentleman live in? I believe it would be Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, Mr. Chairman. This individual had land that was going to be intersected or divided down the middle by one of the transmission proposals, and he was very upset. Not only was he upset at how he was going to work on his land, how he was going to get from one piece to the other, but he was upset at this government because he feels that this government is no longer listening to him nor representing his best interests. He was very, very disappointed.

Now, the amendments this evening, Mr. Chairman: are they going to address any of the issues that other citizens who attended this meeting had, other citizens who are very concerned about the size of their bill? If we look at the long-term transmission system plan, we will see where AESO is estimating the monthly cost to be \$8. We had received correspondence from St. Albert where the hon. member there had quoted the same figure of \$8 a month for the cost of these proposed transmission upgrades. But people tonight at the meeting at Rexall Place were not satisfied nor convinced that was the total monthly cost.

8:20

We look at the estimate in the long-term transmission systems plan, and to their credit the board has it broken down. We've got to realize, Mr. Chairman, that the total bill has grown and grown and grown, and we know why. We have eliminated the long-term planning function for a long period of time. This long-term planning function was to grow or expand the transmission and distribution system as the population grew and as the economy grew.

We talked a little bit about this at second reading. Mr. Chairman, that's why we're in the trouble we are now. That's why we have a flawed bill and we have these amendments that are essentially a public relations exercise. The minister and his colleagues are hopeful that this is going to satisfy all the questions that people have raised since June, when this bill was first introduced. They certainly are not.

We heard earlier the minister talk about the needs application, AESO's role in all of this. He's correct, but ultimately the minister is responsible for appointing the board. Now, the AESO may be – may be – independent, but certainly it is the minister and it is this government that are calling the shots and writing or setting the rules by which they operate. Regardless of whether it's the transmission plan or if we look at the latest annual report of AESO, we can see where the problems are.

Now, one of the problems that was outlined to me earlier this evening was the energy policy of this government and the desire to export large volumes of electricity.

Mr. Liepert: There you go.

Mr. MacDonald: There you go.

Now, surely the minister of health has had a chance to read the annual report of the AESO, Mr. Chairman. [interjection] I'm not so certain that he has read all of the fine details in the annual report of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. If he has some spare time, he could certainly have a look at this, and he would see precisely what I'm talking about, and that is the difference – he's distracting me. I agree. Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Tie it into the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: I will tie it into the amendment through the interties that are proposed in this transmission plan. There are four. There's a potential fifth one over in Saskatchewan, between Fort McMurray and northwestern Saskatchewan, but we'll get to that in a minute.

Now, we look, Mr. Chairman, at the chart that outlines the import of electricity over a period of time and the export of electricity from Alberta over a period of time, the intertie statistics from 2004 through to 2008. Citizens from St. Albert, actually, that I talked to tonight asked directly about the government's plans for exporting electricity. You can go on the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie's computer, and you can see within two to three minutes what this government has proposed for electricity exports. If we look at 2004, we were in thousands of megawatts. Over a million were exported. It has declined significantly through to 2008, where we're about half that capacity. That's for total exports. Whether it's year over year or whatever, it's gone down. We need the power here. We need the power here, and the minister knows that.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I'm having difficulty seeing how you're going to tie all of that into this amendment here.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

The Deputy Chair: Please see if you can get to that.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay.

Now, when we look at imports of electricity, and we start at 2004 . . .

Mr. Knight: There's nothing about imports in the bill or the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: But, hon. minister, we're talking about the interties here.

Mr. Knight: Well, now we can have a discussion.

Mr. MacDonald: You bet, and we should have a long discussion.

The Deputy Chair: Please address the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Yes. See, they're distracting me again.

The Deputy Chair: Okay, then. Focus on the chair.

Mr. MacDonald: They're rascals, Mr. Chairman, pure and simple. They're just rascals. Yes.

Now, Mr. Chairman, when we compare 2004 to 2005, 2008, we can see where our reliance on the interties for imports of electricity is very, very important. Regardless of how often this government and its spokespersons say that deregulation has been a success and we have all this generation capacity that's been created, that intertie report changes that because clearly that has not happened.

Mr. Chairman, we can talk and we can tell people and we can explain to people that what the government has done to date is working, that electricity deregulation is in our best interest – it's in the public interest; it's in their economic interest – but that's not so. That information on the flow of electricity into this province and out of this province through the interties tells the real story. It tells the real story.

Now, if someone were to look at this amendment who was at the meeting tonight in Rexall Place, for instance, and they were to see this and they were to read this and it was the staged development of CTI referred to in schedule whatever, Mr. Chairman, the critical transmission infrastructure includes those interties. The question of who pays for them and where has never been, to my knowledge, addressed by this government.

Now, this amendment, as we see it here: if you look at – and I'll be specific – amendment B, “subject to the regulations,” Mr. Chairman, you can clearly see that this regulation could be a blank cheque. We have no idea.

When we look at what started out as a possible \$2 billion tab – and whenever we brought this up in question period about eight years ago, we received the same skepticism from the members across the way as I did when I started my remarks and the skepticism I received from the Minister of Health and Wellness. Eight years ago government members scoffed: it's impossible; that bill will never reach \$2 billion. Now they anticipate that it could be \$14 billion. It could go as high as \$20 billion. That's in eight years.

Mr. Liepert: You should have let us build it then.

Mr. MacDonald: Didn't want to build any infrastructure then. The reason why, hon. member, there was no infrastructure built was because of the chaos and confusion that was created because of

electricity deregulation. Investors weren't going to put their money down. Sorry. Investor uncertainty. You look at the generation side: same thing. Capital Power, as they're called, Mr. Chairman, and TransAlta had a joint venture to reduce risk. This huge bill that we're now looking at as a result of no long-term planning, this megabill, has grown and grown and grown. Generators, of course, don't have to pay a cent of it. That's another reason why consumers, not taxpayers but consumers, are so skeptical of this proposal.

8:30

Now, when we look at the critical transmission infrastructure and we look at the decisions around deciding what is to be critical transmission infrastructure, again, we have to be very, very leery, Mr. Chairman. I would like to point out to hon. members that we're looking at a problem, and I touched on this in second reading. The generation reserve margin is, in my view, a problem that is equal to if not greater than the neglect of the transmission and distribution system that has occurred under the watch of this government. Since generation of electricity is a competitive business in Alberta – and whether that's a good thing or a bad thing depends on who you talk to – the amount of generation developed in this province is determined by market participants, supposedly based on market signals. The Premier today in question period obviously hadn't heard of a location-based credit, the trusty old LBCs, which were a subsidy by this government initiated because we needed very quickly to site some generation in specific locations because of the transmission neglect.

Now, it's interesting to note – and maybe tomorrow the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie can ask the Premier why there is no adequacy reserve margin requirement defined by an authoritative body in Alberta. Perhaps the Minister of Energy in the course of debate this evening can tell us that, and we won't have to ask that in question period tomorrow. This is very, very important, Mr. Chairman, and it gets back to the staged development of this supposedly critical transmission infrastructure.

Now, the AESO, which the hon. members for Grande Prairie-Smoky and Edmonton-Centre discussed in their debate, expects that the market will continue to send the necessary signals to generation developers, motivating them to develop additional supply as it is required. Well, we hope so. I don't think we can blame anyone but this government when the lights go out. But they're looking for a scapegoat, and incredibly they were even going to try to pin it on the New Democrats here the other day, which I found interesting, to say the least.

The AESO, Mr. Chairman, uses a reserve margin as a proxy for the amount of generation added to the system due to these market signals. These market signals, in my view, are not a development of free enterprise. I'll never be convinced of that. I could present a lot of information here, but an effective reserve margin of 10 per cent is considered appropriate for the purposes of estimating the generation capacity that will be installed to meet total Alberta peak load. I would ask members here who have their computers and have them turned on to go to the AESO website and, before we go any further with discussion on amendment B as we know it, have a look at the long-term metrics that are reported there. You will see on the graph where in two to three years we are going to be operating with very little, if any, reserve margin. Very little, if any, Mr. Chairman. I think that is a major cause for concern. With our severe climate we could and we probably will run short of electricity in that time frame.

Now, while the government and while the cabinet are determining which lines should be built . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009, and Bill 62, the Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009, and report progress on Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 60, Bill 62. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 50. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 53

Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, on behalf of my colleague for Lethbridge-West.

The Acting Speaker: Do any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we had many questions earlier on Bill 53. I certainly understand the member's interest and his earnestness to tee up a meeting, but it was after session started, and it was very difficult to do. When we look at how this act is going to amend a number of statutes that govern or regulate various professions, we have to be very, very careful that we can afford this at this time. Earlier in debate we had asked a number of questions about how this will affect corporate taxes in this province. I wasn't satisfied with the answers. I reviewed *Hansard* – and I will apologize if somehow I missed it – and I looked at the debate as it progressed on Bill 53, and I did not see the details, the answers, the information that I was seeking from second reading.

8:40

Certainly, whenever you compare our tax structure to other provinces', not just on the personal level but certainly at the

corporate level, we have some room. Fortunately, we have a competitive taxation system. I hope we continue to maintain that. With this government I'm never sure, Mr. Speaker, of that, but hopefully we will maintain that robust competitive advantage. But with this bill, when you compare all the tax rates and you see how we are in this province – and you only have to look at the annual report of the province of Alberta to recognize that we're very competitive, particularly with our western neighbours – on what this series of amendments will do I'm still waiting for the answers from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West. Until I receive those, I will not be enthusiastically supporting this bill. I need more information.

I know this bill will allow income sharing by members who have a registered professional corporation with their spouses and children. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with that. I know other jurisdictions have successfully completed that. But when you look at our tax rates and you look at their tax rates, it is only fair to get the details as to exactly how much money this government anticipates losing. It's not a million dollars. That's the information we received at the time of the brief. I have been waiting patiently for that information. I have yet to receive it, and hopefully I will before we conclude debate on the Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. Until I get that information, I will reserve judgment on this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping that there would have been answers back from the sponsoring member. The questions that I'd raised in Committee of the Whole fit into two sort of categories. One was around making the set-up for small businesses the same for Albertan companies as they are for B.C. companies. In other words, it was about TILMA. It was my understanding that this was supposed to harmonize – that's the word I'm looking for – and this was one of the areas that was supposed to be adjusted. It's being adjusted, but it's not being adjusted to harmonize with TILMA. I didn't get an answer about why the adjustments were being made in this bill, but they weren't being made so that they harmonized with B.C. What was the thought process behind that?

The second piece was sort of a part A and a part B, which was around there being no allowable use of holding companies, which is something that's pretty common for small businesses. Without that, they have to do a sort of little jig every couple of years to stay in adherence. I was curious about why that didn't happen.

Then there's the use of family trusts. It's very limited in this bill. My question was: why wasn't it more? Indeed, a number of issues have been raised by an accountant that had approached me with some very specific questions.

Then the last part was: what was the government expecting from the forgone revenue? That is somewhat linked to the question of my colleague who spoke previously. You know, forgone revenue is revenue that you give up when you put in something like an incentive. Tax incentives – let's face it – are a way that government can drive change. An incentive will cause people to want to do something. A disincentive will cause people to not want to do something. When you give up what would have been revenue into the general coffers by offering a tax incentive or disincentive, but in most cases an incentive, it means there's less money coming into the coffers. You have to have a way of measuring the effectiveness of that program, so you need to be able to say: "Okay. We've got X

number of dollars not coming into the coffers. That's okay because the difference in that money we expect is going to get us X, Y, and Z."

We have not had anything put in front of us that would be able to justify that, and that's what I was looking for. Surely, a member of the government would not be bringing forward a bill without having considered that. You start to say: "Well, then, why are you not bringing it forward? You must have considered it. Why didn't you bring it forward? Why can't you answer my questions?"

I didn't start out having huge problems with this bill, but the more information that's being not delivered, the more problems I have with it. I think at one point there was probably an agreement that there would have been support for it, but that's kind of ebbing away now, both because it didn't do what it purported to do and it also fails to be able to set before me as a legislator some measurable targets to be able to say: this is what we expect to gain by having this bill in place. You know, if we're going to forgo, as my colleague said, a million dollars worth of tax revenue – other people say it's more. Fine. Whatever. Whichever it is, what are we getting for that? What do the people of Alberta get for the fact that they weren't able to collect that money into the general coffers and use it in another way. Okay. Then what are they getting? What are we getting for that forgone revenue?

It's the same as paying it out. Not taking it in is the same as paying it out, and when we pay it out, we have performance measurements about what benefit the taxpayer gets for that money that's paid out. If you don't bring the money in deliberately as a policy, you should be able to measure that as well. This is not new. This is a fairly accepted accounting practice, so why can't I get that information on this bill? That's all I was looking for, and I didn't get it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mainly, the questions that I wanted to ask have been asked by the two previous speakers, my colleagues. I do think it's important. The bill itself I can understand. It's just bringing us in line with the rest of the provinces. It's bringing the professional people in our province in line with the tax exemptions that the ordinary small businessperson gets already in this province.

I think that if you're going to bring a bill of this magnitude forward, the numbers really should be there to see if, in fact, we may be losing valuable tax revenue dollars. Some of it is conjecture, of course, because what they're trying to do is offset the money that they would lose in terms of the ability to retain our professionals and, in fact, recruit professionals into this province. Certainly, I think we need doctors. I'm sure that this freeze on doctors and nurses isn't going to last forever and that we will be looking for more doctors and nurses to come into our province. I think that nurse practitioners may well incorporate themselves as well, which would put them under this bill.

I think that there is some information missing for us to really be able to make a very informed decision on how we should vote on this bill. As I say, the concept of the bill I think is fair in terms of how we sit in the rest of Canada, but we really should have those numbers to understand what it's going to cost us as taxpayers.

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a third time]

8:50

**Bill 58
Corrections Amendment Act, 2009**

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and move third reading of Bill 58, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill will allow offenders of provincial statutes and municipal bylaw offences to earn remission for sentences and will expand the monitoring and recording of inmate communications. Mr. Speaker, allowing provincial statutes and municipal bylaw offenders to earn remission will encourage good inmate behaviour, reduce the offender population in our facilities, and make our legislation consistent with other jurisdictions.

The proposed Corrections Amendment Act will also allow for recording and monitoring of all inmate communications rather than just phone calls. Using the term "inmate communications" broadens the scope of communications that can be monitored and recorded. These amendments will provide us with greater opportunities to intercept and report active or planned criminal activity. I'm confident that this legislation will serve Albertans well as we modernize our approach to inmate communications and align our legislation with other jurisdictions in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaking in third reading to the anticipated effect of the implementation of Bill 58, the Corrections Amendment Act, 2009, I had a couple more questions. I wondered if there had been legal advice that had been given on the constitutionality of this bill. I know that we are dealing with people who, when convicted, have lost some of their rights of an expectation of privacy. This also covers, my understanding is, people in a remand centre.

My colleague had looked at an amendment that would have tried to change the language to indicate that it only affected those who'd been tried and convicted in a court of law. The problem was that, of course, you can only amend the parts of the act that are open in front of you. We would have had to go into a number of other consequential acts in order to correct that term in all of the areas. So it became more problematic, and we weren't able to do it. But you can see why we were trying to do it.

People in the remand centre have not been convicted. The first reaction I get is: well, they wouldn't be in the remand centre if they hadn't done something wrong. Not true. People are in the remand centre because there's a concern about failure to appear. Why do you get those concerns? Well, it's basically that courts want to know that if they let you go, you're going to come back or that they can find you to bring you back. People of no fixed address automatically get put in the remand centre. So anybody that's homeless, anybody that's on the street, whether they're guilty of that crime or not, is in the remand centre. There's a group of people – and it's not a small group of people – in our remand centre that doesn't fit into that category of: well, if they were in there, it's pretty much guaranteed they were bad. No. Actually, we can pretty much guarantee that they were homeless, and that's how they ended up in the remand centre. They get captured under this legislation.

I have an additional concern that we are far too quick to place people under surveillance for the convenience of the state. Let me put it that way. I don't think that the government and their agencies, like the corrections service and the police, come at this with any

kind of subterfuge or ill will. They're trying to get a certain job done, and it's easier to get their job done if everything is laid out in front of them. I've spoken before in the House of how the police have said to me that, you know, they wouldn't mind it if everybody had a chip that could identify where they were on planet Earth. They'd find that kind of convenient because they feel it would help them get the bad guys earlier.

It just doesn't work. I mean, with the number of closed-captioned cameras that we've got, did it make our crime rate drop? No, it didn't. Guess what? The crime rate just moved over a block. Most criminals, particularly the ones that get caught, are pretty stupid, but the ones that don't get caught are not so stupid. Now we've ended up basically keeping our law-abiding citizens under surveillance. What was the point of that? They're decent people going about their life, but those are the ones that are showing up in the closed-captioned cameras.

I've gotten a bit off the specific purpose of the effect of Bill 58, but I have concerns about this. What I see is a very concerted effort from the government to place people in the remand centre and in corrections – and I think it's important to distinguish between those two – into facilities now where everything they do is under surveillance, including an area that used to not be, or at least not with the level of intimacy that they are now able to watch somebody's life. That was about the communication.

What this act has done is change everything from telephone calls to communication, which covers everything, particularly the familial video conferencing that will now be in place at the new Edmonton Remand Centre. All of those will be watched. All of those families who have not done anything wrong will be under surveillance, even if we get reassurances that: oh, we're not going to keep the stuff that is on the family. Really? Somebody is going to go through those tapes and watch all of that, so somebody else has heard that conversation between a husband and wife, a mother and a son, a father and a daughter, whoever, siblings, that they had every right to expect that their portion of was not going to be listened to by somebody else.

There you have a decent citizen who has now been listened to, has been under surveillance by an official, and they have done nothing wrong. There's no reason why they should be under surveillance, but they will be because of what's in this act. None of us ever expects to see ourselves in that position, but part of what I try to do is look at legislation and go: well, how would I feel if it happened to me? I'll tell you that I wouldn't be very happy if I went to visit someone, a brother, a nephew, a father – sorry that I'm naming all the males in my family; that's not very fair – my aunt, my cousin because they were in a remand centre, and I'm now on surveillance and somebody has listened to things that I said in confidence or in an intimate way to someone that was in those circumstances. How fair is that to me? It's not. But that's what this bill does. It captures that.

I think we should not give up our right to privacy without a fight. I don't think we should impose that or, rather, take it away from others without a great deal of thought. What I see here is ease. This is about ease of managing people who are in an apprehended situation. They're in a remand centre or a corrections facility. It's going to make it easier for them to monitor the communication. It's going to make it easier to watch people.

I'll be very interested to see if there's a way of coming back to me in a year or two or three and saying: "You know what? We're able to show to you that because we watched this, these intimate conversations between people, and we watched all of that communication from people that were incarcerated or in a remand centre, we've been able to reduce gang violence in corrections facilities by

50 per cent.” I’d be very interested if that’s able to happen because, frankly, I doubt it.

There are a lot of other ways of passing information and communicating that wouldn’t necessarily be caught on a camera or a telephone or even Internet communication, websites, whatever, or tracking, you know. This will allow them to go and track where people have been when they go online on a prison computer because it’s about communication. If you’re online and you’re communicating one way or another, you’re sending cookies out. That would count.

I mean, the discussion of gangs and trying to get at gangs has already been discussed once in this House. Clearly, it’s an issue that people are really concerned about. I think this is subjecting a whole bunch of decent people to surveillance by the state, and I don’t think that’s a good idea. I don’t support it, and I never will.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

9:00

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I believe, had a couple questions in her discussion, so I want to assure the hon. member that, yes, we did seek legal opinion before proceeding with this bill.

In regard to her comments on remand, people are not only kept in remand because of concerns of failure to appear. They are also kept in remand for concerns of public safety and their own safety. I’ll also state that, yes, both remand and sentenced inmates will be monitored if reasonable grounds indicate that that would be necessary. We have been monitoring inmates’ communications in our correction facilities for a long time, Mr. Speaker, and in regard to this concern, this act really just brings that practice up to date to include all methods of communication.

The Acting Speaker: Standing order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much. Could I ask the minister how his department or his staff distinguishes between people in the remand centre who are in there on a concern about failure to appear and people who are in there because they’re considered bad guys? I don’t see how you can distinguish that. But please go ahead and enlighten me about how you manage to do that. Otherwise you are snooping on legitimate communication of someone who has not been convicted and is in a remand centre on a mental health issue or homelessness, where they have no fixed address, and that’s why they’re in the remand centre. How do you distinguish between those people? I bet you that you can’t, and you’re spying on those people the same as you’re spying on everybody else.

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, it’s not a matter of spying on anybody. It’s a matter of monitoring communications to ensure the safety of the facility, the safety of the people that we have in there. I don’t believe there’s a designation per se between whether somebody is in there because they may fail to appear or whether they are in there for serious charges. If the supervisors of that facility have reasonable grounds to suspect that the safety of that person, the safety of the public could be at risk, then those conversations are monitored.

Ms Blakeman: Is there a review process in place that is able to be monitored by an outside source or by an advocate or a prison ombudsman, that is able to look at that decision-making process and decide that it was valid? Or what scrutiny does that decision-making

process and the criteria that the – I’m sorry, I missed the name of the authority figure that the minister referenced. But he said: well, I mean, the person can just make that decision on who’s likely to be a problem. Well, is that decision reviewable? Is it appealable? Who looks at it outside of that particular facility?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The person who I was referring to was the director of the facility, who makes the decisions as to whether or not those recordings will be monitored. Yes, his decision can be reviewed if there’s a complaint that comes forward. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it could involve the place of jurisdiction.

The Acting Speaker: On 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: How would an individual who had been incarcerated even know that they had been monitored and then be able to complain and ask for a review of the criteria upon which the decision was made to monitor them in the first place? Is there some indication of that, or do you just have to find out by accident?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, conversations are monitored, and if there was something going on that shouldn’t have been going on in regard to the issues that I raised, that person will certainly be aware of that because it would be brought to their attention. At that point in time they would have the option of going to an appeal process if they didn’t agree with it.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2008-09 the provincial adult in-house custody population averaged 2,800 persons. Of the persons housed in provincial correctional facilities, 57 per cent were being held in remand and only 43 per cent had been sentenced. We can go back any number of years and compare the numbers of adults in custody, sentenced and in remand, in this province. The ones that are held in remand, do you think this monitoring is fair to them and their families?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. Solicitor General, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Lindsay: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar’s numbers are right in regard to the percentages of people held in remand versus sentenced. Absolutely, we believe it’s fair to record those conversations and monitor them, again, if there are reasonable grounds to review those conversations. It’s all in managing the facility in the proper manner.

The Acting Speaker: On 29(2)(a) the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I just wonder if I could ask a question further to that. I think that before very long the people on the street, who actually communicate with each other quite well, will be saying: okay, I’m not going to do anything until I can speak . . .

The Acting Speaker: The 29(2)(a) is finished.

Any other members wish to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, to the motion.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. I just wanted to clarify something. Clearly, people on the street communicate well, so the first thing they're going to learn how to do is say: I want to talk to my lawyer. So if they get the lawyer, will that lawyer-client be – I mean, that's confidential, so from then on, at least, they'll be able to talk to someone in confidentiality. Is that how that would work?

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. member on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Lindsay: Yes. To answer the question . . .

The Acting Speaker: We've moved to the motion. You're speaking on 29(2)(a), the five-minute question-and-answer period, with the hon. member, right?

Mr. Lindsay: Right.

In response to the question asked, Mr. Speaker, yes, the client-lawyer conversations are confidential and are not monitored.

Ms Pastoor: So when the people, who clearly communicate on the streets – I mean, that's going to be the first thing they say: I want my lawyer. Look at all of the extra work that's going to happen around that one tiny request when they don't want to be monitored otherwise.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hearing none, does the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill wish to close debate?

Mr. Fawcett: No.

[Motion carried; Bill 58 read a third time]

Bill 59 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and move third reading of Bill 59, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009.

This bill supports the implementation of community treatment orders. These CTOs are outlined in the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, which is expected to come into force early in 2010. Bill 59 demonstrates our recognition of the important role of mental health services in our health system.

I ask the House to support Bill 59, the Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I apologize; I just haven't been able to get ahead on my reading on this one. I had a lot of concerns about the community treatment orders when they came forward under the Mental Health Amendment Act previously. I understand that this act was to address concerns specifically that were brought forward by the professional staff who were assessing and making the community treatment orders because they were having some trouble in the way the amending act had been done.

9:10

I didn't agree with the way the community treatment orders came through in the first place. I have some additional concerns now about how this rolls out when we move people from very – what's the word I'm looking for? – careful observation that they would be receiving, for example, as a patient in the Alberta Hospital Edmonton. They're moved into some sort of community treatment. I'm now seeing that this was probably linked, that these were not so much strings on a pearl but maybe sausages on a link of a longer term plan from the government to implement the community treatment orders, which allowed them to force people to take medication or to take their treatment, and this is going to specifically apply to people that are going to be released from Alberta Hospital Edmonton. So it was probably a much longer plan than I had anticipated at the time.

I think what we all agree is that we need to keep some beds for the intensive kind of treatment that some people will need, which is usually a fairly long time to get stabilized. People are in Alberta Hospital Edmonton for a year or two. They come into the community carefully and will sometimes end up back in Alberta Hospital for a six-month stint, and then they're out for years at a time. There has to be some facility in which they can find that sort of intensive treatment and protection, frankly. But I'm distressed now to see how the community treatment orders fit into that deinstitutionalization plan. I said at the time that it was a scimitar that hung over people's heads, and I think that's what I'm seeing here.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Seeing none, does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark wish to close?

Dr. Sherman: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 59 read a third time]

Bill 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise tonight and move third reading of Bill 60, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009.

The Health Professions Act provides a legislative structure that supports the regulation of health professionals by their health profession and governing bodies. This legislation is at the request of or in consultation with all the colleges and professions affected.

I'll take my seat and see if there's any further discussion.

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 60 read a third time]

Bill 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs and to

move third reading of the Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 61 read a third time]

Bill 62

Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I'd move third reading of Bill 62, the Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 62 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

(continued)

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Deputy Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there any comments or questions to be offered further with respect to this amendment to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I haven't actually spoken to the government amendment yet. I've sort of referred to it, alluded to it a couple of times during committee debate so far as I brought forward our own subamendments to amendment A1. Those subamendments, of course, went down to defeat one by one as they were presented to the House.

I'll just very briefly comment on these government amendments and make the point again that while the Minister of Energy has brought, in his amendment A1, a number of changes to Bill 50 – and I do believe him when he says that these changes were brought about by some of the feedback that he and the government and government backbenchers have gotten from the people who've been on their backs about this very, very flawed bill – the amendments do not address one of the most fundamental flaws with the bill, which is the attempt to reduce the amount of public consultation that can take place. I don't mean public consultation over the course of the spring and summer and fall about Bill 50. I mean public consultation about the power lines that are designated, according to the schedule on page 11 of this bill, as critical transmission infrastructure.

Once this bill passes, should this bill pass – and what are the chances of it failing, I wonder? – and these lines are declared critical transmission infrastructure, that declaration bypasses the Alberta Utilities Commission and its ability to hold independent, impartial, needs identification hearings to determine whether this stuff is really all that critical or not.

As I made the point at an earlier opportunity to speak to this, the very fact that the minister is proposing as part of his package of amendments in A1 the staged development of critical transmission

infrastructure – albeit with acknowledgement of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre's questions about the timing of the staging, there's nothing in here about this, so this could be nothing more than a legislative sleight of hand, I suppose. Realistically, I think that the fact that the minister is talking about staging development of these allegedly incredibly critical, we've got to have now or else the lights go off power lines suggests that they're not all that critical. They're not so critical that they couldn't be subjected to the usual impartial regulatory hearing process, which I believe they should be.

9:20

This government amendment does not address the issue of public consultation. It certainly does not in any kind of meaningful way that I'm aware of address the issue of the incredible cost of over-building the system. It does speak to this notion that there would be an oversight committee. Amendment C talks about

the establishment of a committee comprising the Independent System Operator, representatives of customers, and other persons determined by the regulation, to provide records to customers in relation to the construction of transmission facilities, including records relating to the costs, scope and construction schedules of proposed transmission facilities.

Well, that's nice. I mean, I'm not going to object in principle to that. I'm not going to object to that. I don't think anybody on our side of the House would object to the notion of a little more oversight.

But let's be honest here, Mr. Chairman. The committee would give more public information on the lines and the costs of the lines but only once construction has started. So it's sort of like a quicker update, a quicker warning that you're about to get stuck with a bill for something you didn't want in the first place, and the bill is going to be higher than you thought it was, that sort of thing.

In amendment E, section 3(3) is amended in the proposed section 19(1.1) by striking out "or is not in the public interest." You know, how you read this proposed amendment as anything other than a purely cosmetic change is unclear. I know that there were some conflicts between the lawyers speaking for the Alberta Utilities Commission and the lawyers in the Department of Energy and I think maybe even the lawyers in the Ministry of Justice about whether the bill as it was originally written would take away the AUC's right, across the board, to operate in the public interest. I know there was some concern about that. Still, while this amendment may clarify that bit of muddiness, and I'm not even sure how muddy that muddy bit was to begin with, it doesn't address the fundamental problem of the AUC, which, I believe, is uniquely positioned, relative to any of us in this House, relative to AESO, or relative to anyone who might be a stakeholder or a proponent or a participant in any proposed expansion of transmission infrastructure in this province, to sit back, take a step back, and take an arm's-length view of what's being requested, what's being asked for here in terms of the size and scope of the bill and say that this is or isn't necessary, that this is or is not something that is needed. The AUC still cannot speak to that if this bill passes.

So in a sense, Mr. Chairman, it doesn't matter. It certainly doesn't matter as much that they can go back to addressing matters of the public interest around the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the line once the siting hearings begin if the need has already been dictated to them and to us, the people of Alberta, that this line is going through because of some electrical engineers at AESO, which I remain unconvinced is as impartial and arm's length from government as government would like us to believe – if it was, I don't see why it spent so much money on radio and television and newspaper advertising promoting this pig in a poke – or from the politicians themselves, no matter who's in government, no matter

who's in power, because politicians are not experts by definition. A group of us are not going to be experts on issues of electricity transmission.

So the AUC can't do that needs hearing anymore. It's simply dictated to the people of Alberta, the power consumers of Alberta, that because the AESO recommended it, cabinet says: "Well, okay, it must be critical, then, so we're just going to ram this one through. You might have some say as to where the pylon goes that's closest to your property, but otherwise, you know, shut up about it." That's really what it boils down to.

Mr. Chairman, while I commend to a point the minister's efforts to try and take this very flawed piece of legislation and amend it in such a way that a quick reading of the amendments might persuade somebody who hasn't been paying really close attention that now suddenly this bill proposes to be not as flawed as it was before the amendments were brought down, there's no way I could possibly support amendment A1 because it does not do what needs to be done.

Mr. Chairman, what really needs to be done is that this bill needs to be ripped up, thrown in the garbage, and the minister needs to go back to square one and start again. But like I said before, what are the chances of that happening? Failing that, these amendments do not do what needs to be done to make this bill anywhere near a palatable piece of legislation, in my opinion, and I will be voting against the government amendments when the time comes.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: To the amendment.

Mr. MacDonald: Definitely to the amendment. Earlier, whenever we had a chance to discuss the amendment and we also had an opportunity to listen with interest to the discussion or the debate between the hon. members for Grande Prairie-Smoky and Edmonton-Centre, that was an interesting and informative dialogue. When we look at *Hansard* and we read the discussions that occurred between the two members, we also have to consider the role of AESO, the publications that they produce, the reasons why they produce those publications. Obviously, they're trying to sell Albertans on electricity – the distribution of it, the transmission of it, and before that the generation of it, certainly – and how the electricity supply and the price affect the economy.

This discussion that occurred when I entered the Legislative Assembly this evening and the discussion I heard in the previous hour and a half at Rexall Place regarding Bill 50 and the proposed amendments that we had before us in the House: it's like two different worlds. You have the consumers, who are faced with higher bills and towering infrastructure, some of it at 500 kV capacity. Mr. Chairman, you link all this together, and it is two worlds. It's a world where one group of individuals feel that their idea and their idea alone is the right and the proper one. That, of course, is Bill 50. Then we have public questions and very few answers, and in order to satisfy some of the questions, we bring forward these amendments. Again, these amendments are not going to satisfy the individuals I talked to this evening.

Now, we need to correct some of the misinformation that has been spread by the government.

Mr. Liepert: That you're spreading.

Ms Blakeman: It's competing misinformation.

Mr. MacDonald: No, it's not.

Now, I'm going to have a look. I took the opportunity, Mr. Chairman . . . [interjection] You see that? It's getting late in the evening.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Now, the long-term adequacy metrics from this summer on the AESO website: I referred to them earlier, and I got a copy. We know we need more generation in this province, we know we need more transmission lines, but do we need what's proposed here in the critical transmission infrastructure, the blank cheque that has been offered here with this amendment?

9:30

Mr. Chairman, we look at generation projects that have moved to active construction. I talked earlier about TransAlta. This one is a 66-megawatt project. We have generation projects moved to regulatory approval. We have MEG Energy. We have Imperial Oil Kearl cogeneration, phase 1. We have the Morinville compressor station, which is only eight megawatts. We have Imperial Oil. We also have under this generation projects that have been announced, applied for AESO interconnection, and/or applied for regulatory approval. We have a windfall power-generating station up in Fort Nelson, and we have project 921, whatever that is. It's 165 megawatts. Generation projects that have been retired: Rosedale, just down the street here, 8, 9, and 10. There are 209 megawatts that are in the vicinity of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre's residence.

Ms Blakeman: Not anymore. They've taken it out.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. They've taken it out. The generators, I think, have been sent to some tropical island if I remember correctly.

Ms Blakeman: That's true, yeah. We sold it to somebody in the Caribbean.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

There are a lot of changes to generation projects, and all these changes are occurring at the same time we are changing Bill 50. We can talk about investor uncertainty, and this is another example of it. There's a list of generation projects that are under active construction. There's a total here of over a thousand megawatts. I mentioned TransAlta's Summerview 2; Keephills 3; the peaking plant over at Clover Bar; the Crossfield energy farm by Enmax, a 120-megawatt facility in Crossfield. We've got a wind farm at Blue Trail. Christina Lake, Horizon: there are a number of projects.

There are also projects with regulatory approval. There are 745 megawatts.

Then there's the wish list here, which is quite a long one. There are 316 megawatts, I believe. No, there are not; I apologize. There are a lot more than that on the wish list, and they're not added up. I would estimate the wish list to be at least 2,000.

The projects that are to be retired in the near future are TransAlta Wabamun 4. We talked about this previously. The city of Medicine Hat has 37 megawatts of gas-fired generation that they would like to retire.

Now, we look at – and I've got the details here for hon. members – our reserve margin, without intertie capacity and with intertie

capacity. We talked about the AESO suggesting that we have 10 per cent. Well, by 2012 we're not going to have it. We're certainly not going to have it without intertie capacity. The intertie capacity: will it or will it not be considered critical transmission infrastructure? How will all this be decided? I can only guess, Mr. Chairman.

When we look overall at these amendments, certainly the Capital Region Board had questions. Did the minister consult with the Capital Region Board regarding these amendments? Are these five amendments as proposed going to satisfy their concerns regarding this bill, or will that just be an issue that's set aside or a series of questions that's set aside?

Now, I heard earlier this evening, before I came here, that Bill 50 is unnecessary. Citizens certainly expressed the view that existing laws regarding, Mr. Chairman, whether it's rights-of-way or whether it's what's to the benefit of the public – the public interest or the public good is not or doesn't appear to be a priority with either the bill or the amendments. A political fix is what we're looking at.

When we look at the critical transmission infrastructure as it's discussed and as it's defined here, there is no reason why, when the government is looking at this, they couldn't ask this question, and the question would be: what is an analysis of the true needs of the Alberta electrical system? What exactly is needed? Is Enmax in their proposal? Are they right? Is it a balance between generation capacity that is sited, as we said earlier, on the edge of the load or on the edge of the metropolitan areas? Is the \$14 billion that's anticipated in transmission upgrades in the long-term transmission system planned by AESO the critical transmission infrastructure that's needed, or is it something less?

Now, earlier in debate there had been a lot of discussion about line losses, and I find that, Mr. Chairman, quite an interesting argument to pursue. I think the value of the electricity lost last year, in 2008, as a result of line loss was about \$220 million. The year before it was less than that. I thought to myself: why would there be such a difference? Why would there be close to a \$40 million difference in line loss? Well, the value of the line loss was determined by the price of the electricity. Now, it didn't really go up or down. It remains fairly constant. I think it's in terawatts. That's the measure that's used to indicate that.

There seemed to be a perception by some members in the debate here, not only on this amendment, Mr. Chairman, but throughout the entire debate on Bill 50, that the increase in line loss was forcing this \$14 billion proposed infrastructure upgrade onto the ratepayers' bills. Well, I think we should have a little clarification on that. When we look at the proposed amendments and we look at the bill, what the government wants us to believe and accept, but I don't think we should because I think it is unacceptable, is that their project is needed because they simply say so. Trust us, and fork over the cash on a monthly basis on your bill regardless of whether you're an industrial, a commercial, or a residential consumer of power.

9:40

Now, we need to think carefully before we proceed any further with Bill 50 or even proceed with these amendments. There are those that have thought that they could help out the government with some suggestions as to what to do to get us out of this mess that has been created because we have no long-term planning, directly as a result of the chaos and confusion from deregulation.

We have a big bill to pay. We know who is going to pay it. It's going to be those consumers that I spoke about just a minute ago: commercial, residential, and, mostly, industrial consumers. I believe they are 61 per cent of the total consumption. Now, we know in this House that transmission lines should be built. There should be a

plan so that as the economy expands, as the population grows we don't have this panic that we have now, Mr. Chairman.

Now, transmission lines don't generate electricity. As I said before, they consume power. Yes, transmission lines, as has been noted to me by an electrical engineer, can reduce losses, but the reduction in losses is not usually sufficient to justify the cost. This gets back to that comment I made earlier, Mr. Chairman, that the line loss for the year 2008 was about \$220 million. The year before it was about \$40 million less. New transmission lines should only be built when they are part of the lowest cost addition to the power system. By the lowest cost we should always consider, of course, those who are paying the rates, or the monthly bills: the consumers. New lines must be part of the most economical generation and transmission addition to the system.

I looked through the annual report of AESO, and last year we see where their manpower budget had increased dramatically, but there's a reason for that. I think they hired over 20 people, and they were certainly needed. Some of these people have unique skills and unique educations. Their expertise is in demand. When we look at that, the AESO can easily, I think, get additional skills if they need them.

I think there needs to be an evaluation of the long-term and present worth of any number of generation and transmission options for a range of load-growth patterns. I don't think this has been done. You look at the transmission plan, and you have options there. I'm not going to say that it's like a Christmas catalogue, but there are options there, and there are prices for this and for that.

I'm not going to digress, Mr. Chairman, but someone asked me about the nuclear option.

Ms Blakeman: You're not?

Mr. MacDonald: No, I certainly am not.

There was a bet placed on where the nuclear reactors would be. Clearly, if you have a look at the long-term transmission systems plan in this province, the reactor is not going to be, in my view, constructed in the Peace River country. I know Lac Cardinal has very little water there, but that's not the reason. I think it's going to be built over in northwestern Saskatchewan, almost due east of the oil sands developments by Fort McMurray. If we pass these amendments and then we proceed to pass Bill 50, part of that intertie or a portion of that line will be paid for by Alberta ratepayers. Who will benefit from that transmission line? That's hard to say. Maybe the government members can assure not only this member but the House and ratepayers in general that there will be some benefit to that.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak to amendment A1?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Deputy Chair: That takes us back to Bill 50 as amended. Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted an opportunity to be able to speak a bit more generally while we were in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. MacDonald: Oh, yeah. Be general.

Ms Blakeman: Don't get lippy.

See, one of my observations about this bill is that it was created to address very specific circumstances, but it doesn't address those very specific circumstances and stop. There's been an argument that there was a need. There's also been an argument that that need has not been accurately reflected, so we've got battling experts here. If there was a situation where we needed the four lines that have been discussed, it needed to be done by the government in a way where they identified that this was critical, all the language that we've heard: that there was a reliability problem, that the need had been determined, that there was a crisis, that the cost was within reason and needed to be paid by the consumers so that the generators could take advantage of the transmission system. All of that has been established.

I still look at this bill and go: it was created for very, very narrow circumstances, almost a snapshot in time. Yet the bill makes this possible forever. I would have been much happier to support this bill if it had had a sunset clause or it had been established to say: "This is all we're going to do, these four lines over this period of time. The staging is going to happen in, you know, one-year increments or five-year increments, and that's it. We're done." This is where I think the critical mistake has been made. Aside from all the arguments of the battling opinions and battling experts, I think the critical mistake is that a bill has been created that will last for a long time, until, essentially, it's amended or – what's it called when they actually just get rid of it, where they completely cut a bill and just annihilate it?

Mr. MacDonald: Repealed.

Ms Blakeman: Repealed. Where the bill is repealed. Thank you. That's what I was looking for.

That's not what's happening here. We've created a bill in perpetuity for something that was to address a very specific need. That, I think, is where we're going to get into trouble somewhere down the road.

One of the issues that hasn't been addressed here, to my mind, is the concept of protection. It's something I've been thinking a lot about recently. This government party's philosophy is about less government and less regulations, and in some ways I agree with that. I think we certainly need to look at red tape for not-for-profits and for small businesses, for example. But I think that there's a role for government to play in protection.

9:50

It has to be government that sets up that protection that no one else will do. We should not be expecting the private sector to offer that protection. It's not their job. Their job is to go out there and make as much money as they can for their shareholders. That's what they're supposed to do. They're not supposed to check themselves and go, "Oh, gee; maybe I should be doing it this way" or whatever. They're just supposed to go for it. They will be limited by the legislation that's put into place, but it allows them, you know, to go full bore within those limitations. But you've got to have the limitations, and those limitations are protection.

What I see happening in a number of different areas in Alberta, but this is a good example of it, is where we don't see that protection for the consumers, for Albertans. You know, what limits, what requirements need to be in place to protect the consumers, the citizens, and the environment? Let's go a little further and have environment cover assets as well. What limits would need to be in place?

Let's look at this another way. Whenever there's a disaster, the first thing that happens is that people turn around and say: "Where

was the government on this? Why didn't we have better building codes that would have stopped the buildings from sliding down the hill on us and killing us all? Why didn't the government look after this?" Ultimately, it is the government that's responsible. Sure enough, the next time around they put better legislation in place that does deal with those things, but they don't turn around and say, you know, "Where was the private sector on this one?" They don't turn around and say, "God had something to do with it." They turn around and say, "Why didn't the government protect us?"

That's my question around this bill: where has the government abdicated its responsibility of protection for the consumer with this bill? Part of that is the concerns that have been expressed repeatedly about a lack of access and a door in – a meaningful door in; let me qualify that – for the public around transmission lines and how they're going to be determined now. The government will be very quick to say that, well, AESO determines need. But, you know what? AESO has that toggle switch I talked about earlier tonight. It's an on-off switch. AESO determines more transmission lines or no transmission lines. That's all the toggle switch does. It doesn't determine anything else. It's just an on-off switch and nothing more.

That information then goes to the government. I will refer people to go back in the evening to the Minister of Energy's responses to my initial questions because he walks through that process pretty clearly. It goes back to a process in which a number of other regulators come into play in which there is meant to be public opportunity for comment. My concern there is that by the time, in a number of these stages, the public actually gets the information, I would call it too late. Nice to get the information, thank you, but it's too late for the public or the ratepayers, consumers, the landowners to be able to take that information and use it to change the course of affairs. They are only allowed to get that information when the process has moved to a place where they can't stop it and they can't affect the outcome. There's also a lack of an appeal process.

There were two things going on in the conversations around public consultation with this bill. One was the hearings that the government held over the summer. Fair enough; they had 20 of them. But if you just listen to the government members, you would think that it was 20 hearings in which people raised their hands and celebrated how wonderful and kind this government was. From what I've read in the newspaper reports and from some of the reports of people who were at these hearings, people were not happy with what the government was proposing and made that very clear. It's a bit sly to try and pretend that the people's reaction to what happened to this process was one of happiness and delight. I would argue that it wasn't.

Second is the concept of public consultation as this bill is implemented and rolls out in the future. That I've already referred to in that they get the information too late, and there is no opportunity for appeal in most of these processes.

In both of those areas I would argue that the government has failed to protect citizens and consumers. They failed to give them an access point that is meaningful. I would argue that what they have done here is that they failed to protect the consumers' money because the citizens have very little input – some would argue none, no input – into decisions being made which will cause them to expend their money.

When I look back, when I started in 1997, we were in the thick of the debate about deregulation. I was told over and over and over again that this was the bee's knees, this was the way of the future, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Well, we had reliable, predictable, stable, cheap electricity. Boy, do we not have that now. We went through all kinds of things. Yet again I'm being threatened with brownouts if I don't go along with this, with outages if I don't go along with it.

Well, how is that predictable and stable electricity? It's not. The one thing that the electricity rates, what the consumers pay, have not done is go down.

So you can articulate that amount of money to me in any way you want. You can break it apart on the bill or roll it all into one lump sum, which has been the argument, that we're paying the same amount of money; it's just split apart or rolled up. Frankly, it's just gone up. Every consumer looks at their bill, and that's why people get so irate when they go: how come I paid eight bucks for gas and \$12 for delivery, and then the prices, the different fees, just keep adding on from that? We're pretty sure we weren't paying all of that when it was a regulated system.

The government, I think, has failed to protect the consumer, and the cost is going up and up and up. Let's face it. We're a northern province. With the exception of a few places in southern Alberta, we can't do without electricity and energy.

Mr. MacDonald: What do you mean, southern Alberta?

Ms Blakeman: Well, that's possible in some places. But for most places in this province, we need that stuff, particularly around our positioning re the sun. I mean, you can spend some nights in the year, a few of them, where the sun goes down at about 11 and gets up at 2 in the morning. Fair enough. But most of the time you need that electricity to have the lights on in this place.

The other interesting part of this is that at this point our utilities, our electrical suppliers, are about two generations removed from us. You know, 20 years ago the electricity utility and all the utilities, actually most of them, were owned by the city. So they were quite close to me. I was a citizen of the city, and the utility company was owned by the city.

Mr. MacDonald: Are we getting a Christmas card this year?

Ms Blakeman: Not if you behave like that.

Now they're rolled out, and they're one generation out from us. In fact, the city of Edmonton is two generations out because they've now created Capital Power and rolled it off even further. Enmax is another example of how that's happened in Calgary. It won't be long before that's rolled out again. We have companies from Russia, China, India, any number of other places that are buying our utility companies, and they're one layer out again. We don't have any control over those companies. We have no consumer loyalty or citizen loyalty anymore. But we do need protection. That's about all that's left. We need the government to make sure that we're going to be treated fairly and that there are consumer protections built into that for us.

I've talked earlier about that kind of cornerstone of democracy in the marketplace, which is that concept of no payment without representation. I think that's lacking in what we're seeing before us in this bill. I would also argue that businesses are incredibly important to this province. It's where a great deal of our wealth is generated. But, frankly, businesses are not citizens. They do not vote. I think it's important that we honour and recognize the position of citizen here and their ability and their access to be able to influence government in their policy-making. What we've got is that clearly business has access to influence government policy, but citizens don't have access to influence government policy.

10:00

Those were some of the issues that I wanted to raise while we were still in committee. I think the bottom line is that the public is paying significantly more for electricity, and most of them would say that they weren't getting a lot more. It's not necessarily more reliable than it was 20 years ago. The price is certainly higher. I think that with this bill we've put in place a number of processes we're going to find very difficult to control out in the future. Really, this bill was invented to address some very specific problems that were quite time limited, and now we've put a bill in place that rolls out without an end in the future. I think we should've done a better job with that, and I would argue that the government has failed the citizens and the consumers in offering adequate protection.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 50 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, all members, for that exciting and very informative debate as always. On that note, I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 50.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you to all members. I would move that we now adjourn until tomorrow at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:03 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
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Campbell
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 25, 2009

Issue 63a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 25, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, the procession was led today for the last time by Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms Ed Richard. Mr. Richard will be retiring following this session. Prior to serving the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Richard spent 32 years with the Edmonton Police Service. Upon his retirement as staff sergeant in 1997 he joined the Legislative Assembly security service. In November of 1999 he was appointed to the position of Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms. On behalf of all members I would like to express appreciation for Mr. Richard's committed service to this House and wish him the very best in his retirement.

Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are many of Ed's family and friends, including his wife of 41 years, Jane Richard, his children, and five of his seven grandchildren. I would now ask all of them to rise, including the distinguished Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms, to receive once again the warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation] Hon. members, that was a very, very nice acknowledgement of Mr. Richard's very dedicated service. Thank you.

Also in the Speaker's gallery today is a former Member of the Legislative Assembly, the former Member for Edmonton-Manning, who served in the 26th Legislature, Mr. Dan Backs. We ask him to rise.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 80 visitors to both galleries. These are visitors from Muriel Martin school in St. Albert. They are a hugely curious group of young people who certainly have assured the future of our province. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Jody Bialowas, Mrs. Katie Boyd, Mr. Rick Lof, Mlle Danielle Jean; parent helpers Mrs. Michelle Borrett, Mrs. Leanne Svenson, Mr. Bill Nelson, Mme Yolande Pejot, Mrs. Debbie Anderson, and Mrs. Tana Farrell. I believe, as I said, they're in both galleries. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all members 49 very distinguished students from Keheewin elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford. I believe they are also seated in both the members' and public galleries. They are accompanied

today by teachers Mrs. Renie Wolodko, Mr. Mark Leenders, Miss Mona Kamar and by parents Mrs. Lisa Severin, Ms Cheryl Harts-horne, and Mrs. Christa Winters. I'd ask the students to rise and receive our traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a fine group of southern Albertans. They are here today to show their overwhelming support for the future Alberta police and peace officer training college at Fort Macleod and to attend a meeting arranged at my request with the Solicitor General and Finance minister.

This project is of great significance to southern Alberta as you will see by the group of esteemed individuals I'm about to introduce. I would now ask them to rise as I call their names: Mayor Shawn Patience, Fort Macleod; Sharon Monical, Christine Trowbridge, Brian Reach, and Gord Wolstenholme, councillors for the town of Fort Macleod. Gord's father, George Wolstenholme, was an MLA here for the constituency of Highwood from 1975 to 1982. Also, we have Jordan No Chief, councillor of Piikani Nation; Mayor Rob Steel, town of Claresholm; Mayor John Irwin, Crowsnest Pass; Mayor Barry Johnson, town of Stavely; Mayor Melva Stinson, town of Granum; Mayor Dennis Cassie, Coalhurst; Henry Van Hierden, reeve of the MD of Willow Creek; and support staff Barry Elliott, Fort Macleod, and Martin Ebel, economic development, Fort Macleod. Also in the gallery we have Tracy Edwards, president of Lethbridge Community College. I think I have them all. Please give them the resounding welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you Edmonton's own Juventus U14 soccer team, who recently won the Canadian national championships for U14 boys' soccer. Congratulations to the players and coaches Kurt Bosch, Rob Mosele, Tony Mayall, and Richard Harris on this tremendous accomplishment. As a former coach for the Juventus Soccer Club I know first-hand how much time and hard work goes into coaching. Your dedication to these kids is greatly appreciated, and it is nice to see that hard work being paid off with the national championships. We have parents and other coaches in both galleries. I'd ask all of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you today and through you to all members of the Assembly two people who are very important, integral, in fact, to the operations of HIV Edmonton. They, of course, are responsible for the cards and the red AIDS ribbons that you received on your desks today. I would ask James Mabey to please rise. James is one of our emerging leaders, our up-and-comers in Edmonton, and was recognized as one of the Top 40 under 40. He's the vice-chair of HIV Edmonton. With him today is John Gee. John Gee will be a familiar face to this Assembly because for a number of years he supported my predecessor, Michael Henry, running the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. John has given a great deal of time as a volunteer and as a staff member for various inner-city agencies and is currently the operations co-ordinator for HIV Edmonton. Please welcome these two gentlemen to the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly an outstanding Albertan from the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency, Mr. Andre Harpe. Andre is very active in the constituency and has served on several community and provincial boards. We had a full house today, so I hope Mr. Harpe is seated in the members' gallery. I can't see him behind me, but I would ask that he please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Jiravej Sireelert, a grade 11 exchange student from Chang Mai in Thailand. Jiravej, also known here as Kevin, is currently attending Archbishop MacDonald high school and was sponsored as a Rotary exchange student by the Rotary Club in Thailand and is being hosted by the Rotary Club of Edmonton Northeast. Jiravej is spending an entire year here in Canada as part of the Rotary exchange program, and he's accompanied today by a member of the hosting Rotary Club, Karin Olson, who also is my wife. I would now ask that my guests, who are seated in the public gallery, rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly members from the Camrose green energy action team. The team members take a political action approach to sustainable energy issues. The group collected signatures on a petition, which I will be tabling later today, asking this Assembly to reject nuclear power in this province. I would now ask that my guests, Denise Dufresne and Ellen Parker, who are seated in the public gallery, rise to receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Climate Change

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we are all aware, there is a significant climate change milestone approaching. Alberta will be part of the Canadian delegation attending the December climate change summit in Copenhagen. This is an important opportunity for Alberta to share its perspective on reducing emissions while maintaining a strong economy. It is a time to share details about our ongoing work to address climate change and our renewed commitments moving forward.

Alberta continues to take action now to reduce greenhouse gases while planning for a clean energy future. We are a global energy supplier with a commitment to responsible development.

Alberta's most well-known investment is our unprecedented \$2 billion commitment to carbon capture and storage, but this is only part of the picture. Another example is Alberta's Ecotrust projects. Alberta's Ecotrust projects are technology-based projects that tackle climate change and clean air. We have already announced two Ecotrust projects. On October 1 the province distributed \$7.45 million so that waste energy from Edmonton could be transferred to

1,600 homes in Strathcona county. On October 14 I had the tremendous pleasure of announcing a second Ecotrust investment of \$20 million to support the creation of the Drayton Valley Energy Campus.

These are innovative projects that will help move Alberta towards a clean energy future, and I'm excited to say that there are more Ecotrust grant announcements yet to come. Mr. Speaker, significant progress can be made and will be made in tackling climate change through deliberate, meaningful, and ongoing investments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

AIDS Awareness

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. AIDS Awareness Week started November 23 and culminates on December 1, World AIDS Day. In honour of this and with the kind permission and assistance of the Speaker you have each received a red ribbon symbolizing the fight against AIDS. Please wear it to signal your support of the campaign to increase awareness, provide support and help, and advocate for those living with AIDS. On the same card is the pin for HIV Edmonton, which is embarking on a campaign to celebrate 25 years since its inception in 1984.

Last week I attended a wonderful event honouring Edmonton's Michael Phair and the few individuals who gathered around his kitchen table to develop a plan to deal with the arrival in Edmonton of the first public case of AIDS. Michael did a retrospective of how AIDS affected Edmonton, what steps were taken, how networks were built, even the toll that the constant death of friends had on those very activists. It was a subtle reminder that we have come a long way and that we still have a way to go.

For their 25th anniversary campaign HIV Edmonton has planned a legacy garden, a coffee-table book to commemorate the champions of the HIV/AIDS movement in Edmonton, and a gala. I look forward to celebrating with you.

AIDS started out affecting what we thought was one specific group and now kills people from every walk of life. It particularly preys on the vulnerable, but no one is safe unless they take the precautions.

For this year HIV Edmonton is working with Starbucks on a World AIDS Day fundraiser, so please consider getting your coffee from them next Tuesday, December 1. As well, there is a vigil at the Citadel Theatre on December 1, and events are also planned for Calgary and elsewhere across Alberta.

Please support AIDS research. Congratulations to HIV Edmonton on 25 years of support for that community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Movember Movement

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the month of November thousands of men and women world-wide raise awareness about the risks men face in terms of prostate cancer, thereby seeking to increase early detection, diagnosis, and effective treatment. This movement is referred to as Movember and takes place in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and in Canada.

Created in Australia, Movember was inspired by the women's health movement and the idea that men were lacking a way to actively engage themselves in their own health. The rules of Movember are simple: men grow moustaches, women wear fake ones, no one can shave from the 1st to the 30th of the month, and

everyone works together to raise money to change the face of men's health. Mr. Speaker, this is an incredible cause, that I stood for right away. Movember is in its sixth consecutive year and has raised over \$60 million for prostate cancer.

I am a member of the LAO Team Mo, and to date my team has raised \$590 for this cause, a number which we hope to double in the final days of this month. Indeed, on Saturday I will be auctioning off my moustache to raise further funds for this cause. If you'd like some information on how to get involved with that, please come and see me later.

To learn more about Movember and to donate to the LAO Team Mo and the fine moustaches like mine across Canada, please visit www.movember.com.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I take it that if one were to use tweezers and individually pluck out the whiskers, there would be double value, right?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Violence against Women

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 25, 1960, Rafael Trujillo, then the dictator of the Dominican Republic, ordered the assassination of three female political activists known as the Mirabal sisters. Their deaths united a nation against their oppressive dictator, who was overthrown the following year. In commemoration of the sacrifice of these three sisters the United Nations General Assembly designated November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Today also marks the launch of the White Ribbon Campaign, supported by more than 55 countries, to raise awareness of the need to end violence against women. In Canada the campaign runs until December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Mr. Speaker, acts of violence against women impact Albertans of all backgrounds, cultures, and faiths and often go unnoticed and unreported. As elected members we must continue to work to ensure greater understanding of and education on these issues. It is an undertaking I know we can achieve because Alberta has a strong tradition of advocating for women's rights. It was five courageous women from Alberta who advocated for women's right to vote, and three of those distinguished women served in this Legislature. I am proud to serve as the MLA for a constituency that bears the name of one of those women, Nellie McClung.

Mr. Speaker, let us recommit ourselves today to continue to fight for a society free of violence against women.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Agriculture Supply Management Sponsors

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the last week this government has dodged the issue of government-directed organizations funding Conservative Party events. The refusal to even acknowledge how improper this type of sponsorship is reveals just how arrogant this government has become. Here's the issue. The minister of agriculture appoints the board that oversees Alberta Milk. Alberta Milk gives the minister's political party contributions. Now, to the minister: how is this appropriate?

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I can answer that question quite adequately. Since the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has brought this up the last couple of days, I'm a little bit curious myself to see how that operation works. These grants are for specific purposes with measurable outcomes that also require financial documentation. They are not association funding. The association applies for the grant, but the industry benefits. The government of Alberta does not give these people any operational money.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to the Premier, then. Your minister appoints the board that oversees Alberta Milk. That organization gives money to your political party. Is this appropriate?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the boards are elected from the membership of the milk producers. The government does not appoint the milk producers' board, the egg producers' board, the turkey producers' board, the chicken producers' board. These are all boards in supply management, and they are elected from within their membership.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, this government is clearly out of touch with the people of Alberta and the ethical stance of most Albertans. This government has just cut education, cut health care, cut core public services but isn't at all concerned about government organizations funding political parties. Why are your priorities so backwards, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, first of all, these are not government organizations. These are producer groups, and it's their money.

Secondly, again, he keeps raising this issue of cuts to budgets. May I again remind the opposition that last year's budget in health was increased by \$550 million? This is not a cut; it's an increase. As I said yesterday, we're working, looking at how much to increase the health budget for next year. There are no cuts to the budget, so again the information is wrong.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Education Funding

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the government considering massive cuts, stakeholder groups have been speaking out for public education, only to receive a scolding by the Minister of Education. But teachers, school trustees, and parents are not to blame. They're not to blame for creating a climate of fear around education. The actions of the minister are creating a climate of fear. To the Premier. School boards and trustees are fighting for our children's education. This is commendable. Why is the government chastising them?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe the government is chastising anybody. The Minister of Education yesterday indicated that we have the most robust prebudget consultation that has ever happened with school boards in this province leading up to a new budget. What I said to the school board trustees yesterday and what I said to the ATA before is that it would be preferable if they

engaged in a more positive way to engage the public positively about education. I have never used numbers in the discussion in terms of budget cuts. That is a number that the ATA made up and is using for their advertising process. All I'm saying is that I don't need 10,000 of exactly the same e-mail to tell me that people care about education in this province. People do care about education in this province.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, no good deed goes unpunished. Unlike this government, school boards know how to balance their budgets. How can the Premier defend raiding the school boards' savings and now threatening drastic cuts?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, school boards in the province of Alberta have accumulated roughly 400 and some million dollars' worth of surpluses in their budgets. The minister has met with them and asked, as we proceed with budgeting for the next year, that we may have to go to them and ask them to use some of their surpluses that they have accumulated over the years and keep any reductions in staffing or anything out of the classroom. I think it's a very reasonable ask, and most school boards that I talked to thought it was a reasonable approach.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, if the Alberta Teachers' Association's estimate of \$340 million in cuts is, quote, greatly exaggerated, as your minister has claimed, then Mr. Premier, why not simply level with Albertans by saying how much you're planning to cut?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the budgeting process is an ongoing process. It hasn't come to a finite conclusion. It's totally imprudent, in my view – and I think the school boards share this; we've just spent all morning talking about how we go forward – to start from numbers and figure out what you want to do. What you really need to do is start with: what are the outcomes that you want to achieve? Then apply the resources you have to make sure you achieve them. That's what school boards are engaged with me in doing.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mental Health Innovation Fund

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health reported a budget surplus of almost \$350 million in the annual report for 2008-09. He also reported that almost \$25 million of that surplus was from cutting from the mental health innovation fund. To the Premier: if mental health is such an important service to the Premier, how can he support a minister of health who made such cuts to the mental health innovation fund?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt about it that as we work through next year's budget in health, all of the areas will be looked at. This is one area, mental health, where we see an increase. It's something that perhaps people don't talk about a lot, and having met with a number of groups, including the minister of health, who has met with many, it is a scenario that we'll be looking at very closely to see how we can work through the challenges. Again, with our agencies that are out there, those support groups are putting together a good plan for next year.

Dr. Swann: The mental health innovation fund is meant to enhance the development and delivery of mental health services in the community. How can the Premier deny that cutting the spending of

this fund is directly at odds with his plan to close beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton and shift them to the community?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the annual report in front of me, but I highly doubt that it said: we cut. What we have done as part of our amalgamation of the Mental Health Board, nine health regions, the Cancer Board, and AADAC is that there's been a consolidation of funds. It's as much an accounting measure as it is anything else. If the hon. member can produce a document that we produced that said that we've cut, then I'd ask him to produce it and table it in the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, any money cut from mental health and addictions will just show up in housing, in children's services, Solicitor General, Justice, and other core programs. Does the Premier truly not see the connection between cost savings of properly funding mental health and addiction services?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think the member was in the House when we did our budget estimates last year. In fact, we have significantly increased our funding to support the children's mental health strategy, that we announced last year. You know, the Leader of the Opposition can try and twist the figures whichever way he wants, but in fact our mental health funding has increased and not decreased.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Nursing Workforce

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Health Services hatchetman Stephen Duckett has finally shed some light on this government's secret plan to cut the number of registered nurses working in Alberta hospitals. At a recent meeting senior nursing leaders and educators were told that there will be significant reductions in the numbers of registered nurses, accomplished by a hiring freeze and layoffs, and this is coming down the pipeline in Alberta hospitals. Fewer RNs will lead to increased patient mortality, increased hospital stays, and increased health care costs. My question is to the Premier. How can you support a policy that puts the lives of Albertans at risk by laying off nurses?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I think that we've all been in this House long enough to know that this particular member consistently uses information that is suspect. I'll use that term. You know, we've had his secret report by someone that we were going to be cutting long-term care beds. False. We have his secret report on mental health beds. False. Now we've got another particular situation here that is inaccurate. I would suggest that maybe he check his facts.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult with the most secretive government in Canada, but we get government reports that say what they're doing because they're sure not telling the people of Alberta what they're planning to do. You know, the truth in Alberta comes in a brown paper envelope because this government is so secretive. It's clear that layoffs of nurses are coming. This minister knows it, but he won't admit it. Why won't

the Premier stand up in his place and ask his health minister to tell what the plan really is for nursing in Alberta? Come on; let's have it.

2:00

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, let me tell this member what the plan for nursing is in Alberta. You know, I have several meetings a year with the college of registered nurses, and every meeting they say that they want nurses to work more to their scope of training, their scope of practice. We want to make sure that nurses are part of the health care delivery system at the front end of the system, not the back end of the system. That's exactly what we're doing. I have another meeting next week with the same college, and it's my understanding that the college has been asked by Alberta Health Services because the particular documentation that the member refers to is actually incorrect, and they'll be adjusting that.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, did senior officials of Alberta Health Services tell senior nursing educators and leaders that there would be layoffs among nurses or not? Does the minister know? If he doesn't know, why doesn't he know?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I will say what I do know, and I will table in the House the NDP news release of earlier today. I'll ask all members to take a look at this particular release, which is entitled Duckett's Move to Cut RNs Puts Patients at Greater Risk of Death. Now, how responsible is that of that particular member to make that accusation?

Government Spending

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, this government had over eight months to prepare its last budget. With a projected deficit of \$4.7 billion and plunging revenues, they did nothing. This government spent \$25 million on a new slogan, gave over \$40 million in bonuses to top management, ignoring front-line providers, and over \$13 million in raises to the Premier's Executive Council, almost the same amount as the cuts being made to education. It would appear that patronage payments and slick ad campaigns are more important than core programs for Albertans such as education. [interjections] Will the Premier please explain the priority of his spending?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I didn't quite hear the question because there was a little bit of a disturbance there, but I think he was talking about how we're working on next year's budget. Of course, for next year's budget we're ensuring that we will maintain the programs that Albertans endear, and those are health, education, supports for seniors, and of course we will build the infrastructure that's necessary as well. We're going to see 50,000 more Albertans move to this province, and we want to make sure that there is the school space and the hospital space available and any other needs that they may rely on government for.

Mr. Hinman: Perhaps his caucus would give the Premier some respect so he could listen to the questions.

Mr. Speaker, the current Executive Council and cabinet are failing Albertans in these tough economic times. Saskatchewan's conservative government is doing better. It is Grey Cup time, and Saskatchewan will be playing instead of Calgary. They will have their best talent on the field. Why doesn't this Premier have his best talent in cabinet and Executive Council? He has better. Will the Premier do the right thing and release his cabinet and Executive Council and appoint those with the best talent, experience, and competency,

currently relegated to the backbenches, in place of his second-string cabinet ministers?

Mr. Stelmach: I'm not quite sure if there was a question in there or an oral statement. One thing, though, is that our two neighbouring provinces at the end of this year will be adding to their debt. This province will not be adding to the debt. We'll be using a cash surplus fund that we very wisely set up a number of years ago to help cushion the blow of the rapid drop of our revenue stream. Mr. Speaker, I know no other jurisdiction in the country of Canada or, indeed, in North America is in such a good fiscal position as the province of Alberta.

Mr. Hinman: Well, Mr. Speaker, if one listens, one may learn. That wasn't an answer that was acceptable to Albertans.

The exorbitant bonuses and wage increases were wrong and need to be returned to the taxpayers of Alberta. They are running a multibillion-dollar deficit at taxpayers' expense. Will the Premier do the right thing: release his cabinet and Executive Council, and appoint new ministers and Executive Council members at the salary rates that were in place before the last election?

Mr. Stelmach: Actually, there are a number of things in that statement that the member made. First of all, the bonuses that he was referring to: last March I said that those would come to an end. They were more a supplementary payment, I think, to deputies, to senior management within government. So that's about \$44 million that will not occur this year. Also, between cabinet and the Premier's office we have taken a reduction in the remuneration to those positions.

The other is that in terms of the overall government services we will ensure that we get the most value for dollar for every dollar that's spent on those services. We are going through a value review. All departments are pitching in. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has met with municipalities trying to narrow down the 77 different grants that there are and then 13 ministries down to one ministry and maybe four or five grants.

Then, of course, when we talk about giving money back, I think the hon. member did receive a relocation allowance, and since he's back in the building, maybe he wants to give it back.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

PDD Community Board Funding

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports said in this House that "some community boards are making in-year adjustments to their service provider contracts in order to meet their budget targets for this year." To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: can the minister tell the vulnerable people who rely on PDD supports how much each community board must recoup from the service providers in the middle of this fiscal year to meet their budget goals?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's important for me to tell you that, especially in these difficult economic times, supporting Albertans most in need is a priority of this government, and our commitment remains to assisting the most vulnerable Albertans. We continue to focus on supporting PDD clients with the resources available. Funding for the PDD program alone has more than doubled since 1999 while the number of individuals served has increased by about 21 per cent. As part of this, this year's budget

includes an increase to address the increasing complexity of client needs and caseload growth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't quite the answer I was looking for.

How can the minister defend this adjustment – read cut – when it makes it impossible for service providers to plan long-term program goals, let alone short-term goals, when they are told to hand back money to the government in the middle of a fiscal year?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that some community boards are making the in-year adjustments to their service provider contracts in order to meet their budget targets for this year. This is a process that we're doing throughout our different departments. It's a regular part of our business. All community boards are expected to balance their budgets.

As for next year our budget has not been finalized. As I said, like most government departments this is a process that we're in right now. We have increased the amount of money that has gone into our PDD budget. I want to remind everyone in this room that 95 per cent of our PDD clients also collect AISH benefits. That's another \$704 million that this government puts out for our AISH clients on top of the \$604 million that we put into PDD.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Partly answered my third question. If the minister is taking this action right now, in the middle of this fiscal year – I realize that the budget is being discussed right now, but these service providers need the information now so that they can properly plan. Are there any plans to work on a three-year budget plan rather than year by year by year? These people don't know what's going on, and we are losing service providers to the vulnerable people in this province.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the way that we fund our service providers really hasn't changed over the years. I think that all of them are aware of the pressures that we are under. I visited a number of the service providers in the last 18 months, and I can tell you that we have some excellent service providers that are very innovative and creative. They've been able to look at their own budgets and see where they can stretch those dollars so that we get the best outcomes possible for all of our PDD clients.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

2:10 Municipal Accountability

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past spring I introduced Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009. Issues raised with this bill were about accountability and transparency of municipalities. All of my questions are for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What is the minister doing to ensure that municipalities are accountable and transparent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans expect all levels of government, whether it be federal, provincial, or

municipal, to be responsible and accountable with their tax dollars. I also want to emphasize that this is a priority for municipal leaders. What we have in place is the Municipal Government Act, that sets standards for financial reporting. We have the accountability framework, that is improving the reporting on grants, and more recently Bill 23, which improves assessment appeal systems. Ensuring that we have accountable municipalities is a priority for this government and also a priority for me.

Mr. Johnston: My first supplemental to the same minister: what is the minister willing to do to ensure greater accountability and transparency in municipalities?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are some potential actions that we can take with the existing resources such as adopting cyclical municipal corporate reviews, requiring management letters to be made public, and developing a web portal to support better public access to information. A fourth is to ensure the independence of municipal auditors. There is no doubt that this process has sharpened our focus.

Mr. Johnston: No more questions, Mr. Speaker.

Domestic Violence

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, continuing to take the same action and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. At this time we have more women who are assaulted in domestic situations than ever before. Fifty per cent, half, of those women who approach shelters have to be turned away. Understandably, women with children get first access to shelters and services, but it guarantees that women without children will be turned away. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. What new approaches have been developed to specifically assist women without children who suffer domestic assault and violence?

Mr. Snelgrove: I think, Mr. Speaker, that it would be fair to say that Treasury Board doesn't get into the interministerial stuff. I will say that there is a sexual assault shelter in Lloydminster that I am very familiar with. I know that they have been working with the minister, with the department. The circumstances around so many are changing because there are so many different family stresses or situations. I don't have any specific response for her. She might be able to reappropriate her question to them, but I can tell you that we are very aware of the importance in our communities of these centres.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Solicitor General. Victims of domestic assault are victims of crime. So given that the victims of crime fund has amassed a considerable surplus in the range of \$40 million, which continues to grow, what new programs for the prevention of domestic assault and violence have been piloted or funded through this mountain of money?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't have the specifics on any particular program, but I will say that we have increased funding substantially over the last couple of years to victims of violence, including victims of family violence, so we are doing what we can.

Ms Blakeman: You fund \$4 million a year and with a \$40 million surplus.

To the President of the Treasury Board. As politicians we have utterly failed to deliver on promises to reduce child poverty and domestic assault. I'll remind everyone that children are not Cabbage Patch dolls. Poor children come from poor families. If they are single-parent families, 80 per cent of them will be headed by women. With all the resources that Alberta has compared to other provinces, why are we not leaders in these areas?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's really unfair to suggest that we're not leaders in caring for those in Alberta that are vulnerable. Not only on the issue that the hon. member brings up, we have probably, well, some of the biggest support programs, departments in the country. We fund the social aspect of vulnerable Albertans far in excess of any other province in this country. So to pick out a specific program and say, "There, you're not quite giving them as much as I'd like; therefore, you don't care about women and children in those areas" is just unfair, and it's not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1976 Premier Peter Lougheed created the Alberta heritage fund. In this very room he eloquently asked this question:

Are we prepared as a province to put aside substantial sums of current revenues from the sale of non-replaceable . . . oil production for the sake of our children and for our grandchildren and not make it available for current revenue needs; to use it for that day when . . . the wells may have [run] dry?

My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. What is this government's plan to grow the heritage fund sufficient to replace our province's reliance on nonrenewable resources for our children and grandchildren?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The vision created by then Premier Lougheed continues in the kinds of work we've done today. At the end of the first quarter the heritage fund, which is our strongest savings portfolio, had grown to over \$14 billion. There was \$7 billion over the last four and a half years that had been saved and put into endowments and other kinds of savings funds and \$17 billion that were put in the sustainability fund, in part last year reflecting a need for more short-term savings. But over the longer term we can count on moving past inflation-proofing in the good years to actually salting away more dollars into the heritage fund for the future of our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Anderson: That's good to hear.

Over the course of the heritage fund's history \$30.9 billion in heritage fund earnings have been transferred to the province's general revenue account. Conversely, deposits into the heritage fund from general revenue over that period have only been \$16 billion, leaving a net withdrawal from the fund of \$14.9 billion. To the minister: after we are out of deficit, is this government committed to leaving annual interest earnings from the heritage fund in the heritage fund for the benefit of future generations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I add to the response I gave previously that in the last four and a half years the amount of

money that we have provided has been the equivalent of 48 per cent of the resource revenues that have been accrued by the province, so we are moving in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just point out that the general revenue fund today is having the benefit of the interest accruals. That's true. But over the future, as we get back into a position of sustainability and once we have paid down this current deficit, we will return to the original premise of providing more dollars for the heritage fund from resource revenues.

Mr. Anderson: Since Alberta became debt free in 2004, nonrenewable resource revenue to the end of 2008 has amounted to \$47 billion. In that same time period, however, only \$3.9 billion of that \$47 billion in revenues was invested in the heritage fund. To the minister: now that debt in Alberta is no longer a serious problem, after we are out of deficit, will this government commit to substantially increasing the amount of resource revenues directly invested in the heritage fund?

Ms Evans: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, that is the fond hope of everybody in this Assembly. I'd like to point out that when we have hit the deficit situation, the authors of the FIPAC report, headed by Jack Mintz, support what we're currently doing, which is paying off the sustainability fund once we are at a position to turn around before we go back and put the money into the heritage fund. I don't think there's anybody in here that is more dedicated to providing those savings for the future than our Premier. Unfortunately, today we find ourselves in a situation of planning ahead rather than acknowledging our ability to do it in the present.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Contracted Children's Services Agencies

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 209, Children's Services Review Committee Act, which did not receive debate this session, was intended to review systemic issues that contracted agencies under Children and Youth Services face with the objective of correcting the identified imbalances. When it comes to social services delivery, contracted service providers are treated by this government as second-class citizens despite their front-line, equally emergent roles. High staff turnovers result in detrimentally fragmented support for the most vulnerable. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given that your ministry has similar issues with regard to contracted agencies, does the minister recognize an unfair imbalance in compensation between those employed by the government and those employed by agencies?

2:20

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, if you look at the history of our agencies and of our institutions that we no longer want to continue into the future, you'll see that we started off by looking after all of our people with disabilities in certain areas. It became very clear that the best possible outcomes for our persons with disabilities were by living in their own communities. People stepped forward and became agencies to say: we want to look after our people with disabilities in our own communities, so let us do that. That's kind of the history of our contracted agencies. We have admitted that there is a gap between what's being paid in the older type care that we're giving to some of our PDD clients and the agencies that now look after in most cases our PDD clients. There is a gap. We have been trying to close that gap, and we are still working towards that goal.

Mr. Chase: I very much appreciate that response because, Mr. Speaker, admission is the first stage towards correction.

Does the minister agree that the contracted agencies in Seniors and Community Supports also face the same workload imbalances as those in Children and Youth Services, where contracted agencies are often left to do more with less?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, our contracted agencies do an excellent job. They have the same goal that we have, which is to make our citizens with disabilities a priority and to give them the best care possible so that we reach the best outcomes possible for them. They do have to take the dollars that we're able to give them and make them work for those best possible outcomes. Once again, when you look at the total number of dollars, \$604 million for the PDD program alone for 9,200 people, I think that what we need to do is to work together to ensure that those dollars are working towards the best possible outcomes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate, as I noted, the minister's admission that there are discrepancies, that there are imbalances. Therefore, I'm asking: is the minister taking any action whatsoever to correct the systemic issues that are unfair not only to those employed by contracted agencies but also to the vulnerable individuals who receive services from them? When will these discrepancies be addressed?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I did admit that there was a gap in the pay scales between government paid and agency paid, but there is no gap in the care. The care that our PDD clients are receiving through our agencies is the best care that you could receive anywhere. I've visited many of them, and I know that even if they feel that they're not being paid enough – and you know what? I don't know if we could ever pay them enough because what they do is a tremendous – a tremendous – service to all Albertans, especially those with PDD. I appreciate the work that they've done so much, and knowing how much heart they put into it, we're working towards making things better.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Education Funding (continued)

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have witnessed first-hand the devastation when this government begins sharpening its knife. It's no wonder, then, that school trustees speak out when the government starts to talk about cutting their budget. But the Minister of Education wants them to shut their mouths and let him control what they say to the public, and he told them so yesterday. How dare the minister scold democratically elected school trustees for doing their job and defending the education system?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the hon. member go to www.davehancock.ca and read what I actually said before she forms a question that postulates what I didn't say.

What I did say to school board trustees is that I had engaged them this year in the most extensive prebudget consultation they've ever had, in a positive discussion about looking through the lens of: are we doing the right things, and are we doing them in the right way? When we're saying that we're doing the right things, are we achieving the outcomes we want to achieve? We ought to be able to

look at everything we do to determine whether or not it's helping us to achieve our outcomes. They're all engaged in that process.

What I was concerned about was whether or not when they signed on to an ad campaign about stopping the cuts – and don't get me wrong. I love the engagement of Albertans in discussing education and its importance. But when they engage in that process, did they use public money that ought to be going to the classroom?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I actually have a copy of what the minister said yesterday, so I did actually read it. This minister's if you can't say something nice, don't say something at all approach is not only profoundly condescending; it also serves to oppress any form of democratic debate.

Now, we've seen it all before. When Lyle Oberg was challenged, his response was to send in the auditors. This government thinks that school trustees work for them, not for the people who elected them. How can this minister be so arrogant as to think it's appropriate to lecture and intimidate elected officials who are working to ensure that our children receive a decent education?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I just met with the school board chairs and superintendents this morning, all morning, talking, again, in the process of discussion about what we need to do and how we can do it better and how we can do it collaboratively. Not one of them was intimidated by me; I can assure you of that. They all engaged in a very frank, open, and honest discussion. Not one backed away from the challenge to discuss education in a forward-thinking, robust, optimistic manner about what we can do to make sure that every child in this province has an opportunity to succeed to the best of their abilities. That's what we're engaged in. It's not patronizing. It's open, honest, frank discussion about what's important.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite what the minister says, Alberta school trustees obviously don't believe the government is listening to their concerns, and the only way they could get the government's attention was by launching the Stop the Cuts campaign. Frankly, if the minister got 10,000 e-mails, I hope to goodness that he's finally getting the message. Rather than listening to their message, why did the minister choose to scold and bully and to get them to toe the Conservative line?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, over the course of this year we've engaged in Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans. It has been a process that has been going on for a full year of consultation with trustees, with parents, with teachers, and with the public. We had setting the direction for children with special needs, in which we engaged with trustees, with teachers, with school boards, with the public. We've had the School Act review. We're engaging with trustees, with the public, with school boards, with teachers. We now have, as I said before several times today, the most robust prebudget discussion that we've ever had in this province on education about how we go forward with the resources we have to achieve the outcomes we need to achieve. There can't be any more honest, open, frank, and responsive approach that I can think of. It's taken all of my time this year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffer.

Collection of Personal Information in Licensed Premises

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I don't know exactly how I can follow that, but I'll do my best.

Recent amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act strive to make bars and restaurants safer in Alberta. Collecting personal informa-

tion such as a person's age, name, and photograph is directly and reasonably related to increasing safety and security. However, the office of the Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner has stated in recent guidelines: "It is against the law to scan or photocopy the entire face of a patron's driver's licence." A question to the Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General. In light of the recent amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Act, are owners of licensed premises permitted to scan drivers' licences of patrons in order to capture a person's name, age, or photograph?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont points out, the Gaming and Liquor Act was amended to allow bar operators to help them deal with problem patrons and make licensed premises safer. What it comes down to is that licensees should only consider collecting the age, the photograph, and the name of the patron if there are incidents of violence or other unacceptable behaviour in and around their premises, attempts by gang members and their associates or drug dealers to enter their premises, or significant numbers of attempts by minors to enter the premises. Scanning of a driver's licence is not permitted as some information on a driver's licence is not allowed to be collected under this legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the same minister consider expressly allowing the scanning of drivers' licences in order to capture the name, age, and photograph of a patron in regulations made to the Gaming and Liquor Act? [interjections]

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, spring must be coming. I hear some chirping in the room here.

The common-sense guidelines on the collection of limited personal information – name, age, and photograph – were developed with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It was important to work with the commissioner to have guidelines that would help licensees comply with the Personal Information Protection Act when collecting information under the Gaming and Liquor Act. The guidelines clearly state: "Should a licensee use scanning technology to collect a patron's name, age and photograph, the technology must be programmed to only collect this limited, specific information." So it is a possibility.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Denis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose that if the opposition is upset here, I must be onto something good. To the Minister of Service Alberta: will this minister consider revising the Personal Information Protection Act or regulations made pursuant to the act in order to make it clear that a reasonable purpose for the collection of personal information from drivers' licences is, in fact, to make licensed premises safer for Albertans?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member is aware, we just recently completed a set of amendments to this legislation. It's important to note that when legislation is reviewed on an ongoing basis, anything to do on this matter of drivers' licences will be done in consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We have the most secure drivers' licences in North America. We want to ensure that Albertans have a good, secure document and that they know it's safe and secure as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste Anne.

Earned Remission for Convicted Criminals

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government recently passed legislation that allows prisoners in provincial custody time off for good behaviour. At the same time the Justice minister has been advocating for the federal government to get tough on crime by eliminating two-for-one sentencing. To the Solicitor General. I guess the rationale for providing convicted criminals time off for good behaviour is to increase the effectiveness of our prison system. It also would seem the same rationale for two-for-one sentencing at the federal level. Accordingly, can the Solicitor General rationalize this apparent sucking and blowing at the same time on this issue?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Speaker, the only sucking and blowing seems to be coming from the other side of House. Let me say that we're talking about earned remission. It's earned remission to encourage improved safety in the facility and to encourage our inmates to participate in programs so that they're better prepared when they come out to contribute to society. Earned remission is exactly that. It's earned remission to give them time off for good behaviour and to get involved in programs that are going to help them lead their lives in a more meaningful way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I guess while I'm on the point of clarifying things, I hope the Solicitor General can answer me: aren't these two mechanisms just giving prisoners time off for behaviour after they've been convicted criminals?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, earned remission is simply what we said it is in the legislation. It's about earning the ability to get out before your complete sentence has expired. It puts it in the same parallel as federal legislation. Before this legislation was passed in this House, provincial and municipal sentences were not allowed any time off. So it was an imbalance where somebody could be incarcerated for impaired driving, for example, for six months, someone else under provincial legislation for six months, and the impaired driver, which is a more serious charge, could get out sooner than someone under provincial legislation.

Mr. Hehr: Well, Mr. Speaker, while some individuals may look at this legislation and say that it's an appropriate way to run a prison system, I'm not so sure that the average Albertan would share their view. Again to the Solicitor General: how much public consultation did your department do prior to implementing this legislation that will see convicted criminals get time off for good behaviour?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, we have consulted with Albertans, and the Albertans that I talked to do believe in fair and balanced sentences.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

AgriRecovery Program

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cattle producers in Alberta are facing many challenges. Dry conditions this summer in some parts of the province added existing pressures by contributing to reduce the availability of feed. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I understand that the Alberta

Beef Producers recently sent yourself and the federal agriculture minister a letter requesting funding under AgriRecovery. Minister, can you tell me what the status of this request is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since receiving this request from ABP, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, better known as the AFSC, has been working closely with the government and particularly the federal government officials. They're assessing if this qualifies for a response under AgriRecovery. While this assessment is under way, there are other programs that are kicking in and responding and helping to address the drought situation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you. Can the minister also tell us what the criteria for AgriRecovery is and when a decision is made on this request?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AgriRecovery is meant to provide additional support to producers when a significant and unique disaster occurs and when existing programming does not address the situation. So the assessment will look at the severity and impact of the drought and to what extent it may be covered under the already existing programs.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, I guess, back to the same minister, then. If AgriRecovery is to provide assistance when other programs aren't applicable, in this situation what programs are?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, Alberta producers have access to probably some of the most comprehensive programs in the country. This fall we introduced the cattle price insurance program, the first of its kind in Alberta, available only in Alberta. It'll help address the impact of the drought in future years. AgriInsurance and AgriStability are also available under Growing Forward, that is now in the new program. The AFSC also provides production insurance, hay insurance, pasture insurance, all of which respond to the effects of the drought. The truth of the matter is that people have to have an uptake of this insurance to protect themselves.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shelter numbers are up, rent subsidies have run out, people are waiting the same two years to get into affordable housing, and food bank use has increased in the province of Alberta by 61 per cent. Despite these facts, the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs returns from luncheons boasting about the great job she's doing. To the minister: will the minister admit that changes to the homelessness and eviction prevention program were more about improving the department's bottom line than keeping people in their homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to speak to the rent supplement program that we offer to Albertans in need. It is based on a priority list. It's a program that has \$90 million, that assists 40,000 Albertans. For the emergency side of the program I

would refer to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, who administers that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was reported that a disabled mother and daughter who lost their home in Camrose because of a fire may also lose their rent subsidy because they can't find an accessible apartment soon enough. What does the minister have to say to this family?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, something that would be that serious, that I personally have not heard about as the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, I'd ask the hon. member to give me that information, and that individual will be assisted immediately. But I have to tell you that with the staff that we have – they're excellent in the work that they do – I somehow think that they would have assisted this individual already. If not, hon. member, I'll look into that for you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will share that information with the minister.

Some disabled people, Mr. Speaker, have been denied a spot on the waiting list for accessible housing in Calgary because they're receiving rent subsidies for their current inaccessible, expensive housing. Why is waiting on a waiting list for affordable, accessible housing while collecting a rent subsidy considered double-dipping by this ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's another case where I would invite the hon. member to give me the information, and I will look into that and get back to you, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Hunting and Angling Promotion

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hunting and angling have played an important role in shaping Alberta's social, cultural, and environmental heritage. While most Albertans do not object to angling, there appears to be a bit of an antihunter sentiment among the general population. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What have you done to encourage and support more youth to participate in hunting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. Alberta's hunters and anglers are our best conservation stewards. They put their money where their mouth is, right into the habitat that fish and wildlife depend on. That's why we have put a lot of initiative into recruitment of the next generation of hunters. In the last three years we've introduced Provincial Hunting Day and Waterfowler Heritage Days, which create new youth-only hunting opportunities. We have free fishing weekends for youth and family.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the groups that do a great job of training the next generation of hunters: Alberta Hunter Education Instructors' Association, Hunting for Tomorrow, and all the Alberta fish and game clubs around the province. They've trained thousands of Alberta youth in responsible and safe hunting practices.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister: have any of the programs and initiatives you have mentioned brought in more youth, and how have the fish and game associations of the province contributed substantially to the training of youth in both fishing and hunting?

2:40

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, that's another excellent question. I couldn't have thought of it myself. I'm happy to report that resident youth hunters, under the age of 18, have increased 20 per cent in the last three years, from 5,300 to over 6,400. Resident hunters in the next age category, 18 to 30, have increased by four and a half thousand. This is part of an overall positive trend in hunting and angling. In 2008 we sold 3,000 more WIN cards, 12,000 more sport fishing licences, and 39,000 more bird and big game licences than we did in 2006. This is contrary to trends in other jurisdictions in North America. These young hunters are conservationists in training. The future is bright.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Prins: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Our youth hunters are very Internet savvy, so is your department doing anything to communicate with them online, and have you considered what other jurisdictions, even some parts of Alberta, are doing by allowing or enabling young hunters to train in restricted or controlled and regulated areas for efficiency and safety and security reasons?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka must be reading my mind. I'm again happy to report to the House that this past year Sustainable Resource Development launched a new website, My Wild Alberta, that provides hunting, fishing, and trapping information to all Albertans. In the last less than 12 months we've had over 200,000 visits to this website.

Part of this website connects hunters and anglers to other partners. One of those is the AlbertaRELM system, which is a new online licensing system. Now Internet licences through the RELM constitute 19 per cent of all sales. Our goal is to reach 50 per cent by 2011. This is a realistic goal. For those hunters that participate in the draw system, 54 per cent of draws, over half, now go through the RELM system. So we're definitely into the electronic age.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 94 questions and responses today.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with Members' Statements, but in the interim might we revert briefly to the Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to members for the Introduction of Guests. It is an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Legislature some members of the Alberta Graduate Council, or AGC. This

enthusiastic group is the provincial organization dedicated to representing and advancing the interests of Alberta's approximately 11,000 university graduate students. I had a great meeting with them yesterday. We talked about where we're headed in terms of research and innovation and funding in our postsecondary institutions. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I would ask each to stand as I call their name to receive the welcome of the Assembly. They are Jessica Mino, Rob Chernish, Richard Querel, and Floribert Kamabu. If I could ask all hon. members to give them the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for introductions.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it's petitions and introductions.

The Speaker: Well, no. They're two separate. Do you want to deal with introductions now?

Mr. Sandhu: No.

The Speaker: Okay. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, did you have an introduction?

Hon. Member for Strathcona, did you have an introduction? Proceed.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Conrad Kreilein, who is visiting here from Kempen in Germany. I met Conrad a few months ago on a family trip over to Europe and learned that he had planned to travel to the U.S. and Canada, so of course we invited him to visit our incredible province. Here he is just a little bit late for summer. He's seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that he rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Okay. In a few seconds we're back to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Ron Morgan

Mr. Boutillier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night Fort McMurray lost one of its city fathers who served in building our city over the past 30 years as a native Albertan and resident of Fort McMurray. Alderman Ron Morgan was my friend and colleague and, certainly, a mentor to many. He died last night after spending over two years in the Northern Lights regional hospital. He was only 73 years old.

He served on city council, spanning from 1971 to 2001. He was the longest serving elected councillor in our city's history. He watched Fort McMurray and the neighbouring communities grow from a small town and hamlet to a new town under the province's New Towns Act to a city council and then to a regional council, which he was so proud of. He watched GCOS, Great Canadian Oil Sands, now Suncor, blossom. He watched Syncrude blossom. He watched the town grow from 5,000 citizens to now over a hundred thousand citizens. He had a reputation as a very proud alderman who treated every citizen fairly and with respect.

I had the honour of calling Alderman Ron Morgan my friend and colleague and mentor. When we formed the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo in the mid-90s, he was ever so proud.

He was considered the father of little league baseball. Recently a park was named in his honour in recognition of his great, outstanding community service in helping our youth. He was a very proud father, leaving behind six children, grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Flags are being lowered today in the region on behalf of and in respect for the Morgan family.

Recently while visiting Ron in the hospital, he said: you know, Guy, a city without a history is a city without a heart. I can only say today – and I'm sure members of this Assembly will join me – that to those who knew him, Ron Morgan had a heart. To his family and friends we offer our thanks for him serving Alberta and Fort McMurray. [applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past spring I introduced Bill 202, the Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009. I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to the Assembly for considering this bill. Brought forward with this bill was the opportunity to highlight several areas that I believe needed improving; namely, accountability and transparency of municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 was referred to the all-party Standing Committee on Community Services. The committee had the opportunity to hear from Albertans from all across the province. I would like to thank all those that took the time to share their thoughts and concerns with the committee. Yesterday the Standing Committee on Community Services met to issue its final report on Bill 202, which will be tabled today by the chair.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the recommendations that are being put forth with this report. And I am pleased that the Minister of Municipal Affairs was able to bring a viable option to the committee that not only addressed the intent of Bill 202 but also the concerns that were raised by municipalities with regard to the bill. Not only is the minister committed to bringing forward meaningful and important changes, but I also believe that as a result of Bill 202, municipalities will take steps to further improve their accountability and transparency to their citizens. Though Bill 202 has not been passed, I am pleased that the notions of accountability and transparency in municipalities came to the forefront.

Thank you again to the Assembly and the committee for consideration of Bill 202. I look forward to seeing the minister's recommendations implemented.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Community Services it is my honour today to table copies of the committee's report on Bill 202, Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays and referred to the committee on March 16, 2009. Bill 202 raised many important matters, and the

hon. Member for Calgary-Hays should be commended for his work in bringing the bill forward.

I would like to extend the committee's sincere appreciation to the organizations, municipalities, and individual Albertans who took the time to provide the committee with their submissions and presentations. I would like to thank the minister and officials from Alberta Municipal Affairs for their input on the bill and to acknowledge the support provided to the committee by the staff of the Legislative Assembly Office. I must also thank my fellow committee members, representing all parties in the Assembly, who worked together over the past several months to carry out a meaningful review of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, the report recommends that Bill 202 not proceed. I would request the concurrence of the Assembly with respect to the report on Bill 202, Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009.

2:50

The Speaker: This is a request that needs the approval of the Assembly. All those in the Assembly who concur with the report, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Those opposed, please say no. The request is carried.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 2,797 concerned Albertans. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that present today or earlier today in the gallery were Mr. Guy Smith, president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Mr. Dave Scragg, Mr. Doug Lehman, and Mr. Mark Reiter. They're here to observe the petition. As I table this, I'd like to express appreciation on behalf of the House for their commitment and that of their colleagues to serving Albertans with mental illness and mental health and for their co-operation in the review process currently under way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 3,000 concerned Albertans. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

Also in attendance today for this presentation are Mark Wells, from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and current Alberta Hospital employees Jose De Sousa, Willy Gardener, and David Climenhaga. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert. We're on petitions here now.

Mr. Allred: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a petition received in my office from constituents across Alberta. This petition states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

A total of 525 individuals signed their names to this petition. I'm pleased to present this on their behalf to ensure that their voices are heard in this Assembly and province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present roughly 200 signatures on a petition, mostly from Calgary. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds." This brings the total petitions I've submitted relating to this item to about 1,500. I'll pass it to the page.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to present to the Assembly the requisite number of copies of a petition pertaining to the Alberta Hospital. This one says:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital [as has been mentioned in this House] as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 . . .

In closing, I want to also mention Guy Smith and those who are here from the Alberta union of public employees. I have petitions of 6,615 to submit to the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition received in my office from constituents in Calgary. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to maintain the current policy for distribution of charitable gaming proceeds." I'm pleased to forward on their comments to all members for their consideration. A total of 100 individuals have signed this petition.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Petitions.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions. The first one that I'd like to introduce reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, object to the development and use of nuclear power in Alberta, and we petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to develop an energy policy which encourages conservation, promotes the use of safe, clean, renewable energy sources and explicitly rejects nuclear power in this province.

This petition has 285 signatures, which are in addition to the 1,032 signatures presented on this petition last month.

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to Alberta Hospital. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital Edmonton as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009 at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The petition has 1,516 signatures.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that we've had a very productive fall sitting of the Alberta Legislature and given that we anticipate all legislation before the Assembly being completed as much as possible very soon, I would propose on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader the following motion. "Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the Legislative Assembly stand adjourned on November 26, 2009, upon completion of Royal Assent by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor."

The Speaker: Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill 216

Alberta Outdoors Weekend Act

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 216, Alberta Outdoors Weekend Act.

This would designate the first weekend in May of each year as Alberta outdoors weekend in recognition of the importance of outdoor recreation to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 216 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period today the minister of health referred to the Alberta NDP's news release and offered to table it. On his behalf I'd like to make that tabling now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. My first tabling is the appropriate number of copies regarding the minister's education leadership recognition awards, known as the MELRA, presentations to the Alberta School Boards Association zone 2/3 recipients for November 27, 2009.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is regarding the minister's education leadership recognition awards, known as the MELRA, presentations to the Alberta School Boards Association zone 4 recipients on November 30, 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to express appreciation, thanks, and congratulations to all the school board jurisdictions across the province for their hard work this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. The first is a set of letters, most of them individual letters from constituents concerning education cuts and imposing education cuts. They are from Aaron Johnson, Nancy Antoniuk, Heather Jamieson, Rebecca Verveda, Harlan James, and Marie Jahner.

My second set of tablings, Mr. Speaker, is documents from quite an impressive meeting last night at Rexall Place, focusing on the burying of power lines in the Edmonton region. There are two sets of documents. One deals with the myths of power lines, and the other provides a lot of background to the meeting. I must say that of all the many, many public meetings I've been to in my life, that was one of the most elaborately organized.

My third set of tablings is correspondence CCed to me from Norm Dick who is very concerned about nongroup drug benefits and very upset with the government and the reply that he received from the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Thank you.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must now advise that under Standing Order 7(7) we've arrived at the conclusion of the daily Routine.

Well, I sat down hoping somebody would ask if there would be unanimous consent to conclude the Routine, but nobody did. I take it, Edmonton-Riverview, that you're requesting such?

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, it would be my great delight to request the unanimous consent of the Assembly to finish the Routine. Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, letters from constituents Jeff Jenkins, Megan Berry, Jordana Hinton, and Laura Van Geel, all expressing their concerns about cuts to public education funding.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the required five copies of my letter and cheque dated November 17, 2009, regarding my donation to the Lethbridge Food Bank as per my pledge in the Assembly on April 2, 2004. Half of my MLA indexed pay raise of \$146.25 is donated monthly to a food bank in southern Alberta because AISH should be similarly increased and indexed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of e-mails from Calgary-Varsity constituents Maureen Coulombe, Megan McCulloch, Diane Stinert, Bev Montgomery, and Hillary Johnstone, which were sent to the Minister of Education and the Premier urging them not to cut funding to education because the future prosperity of Alberta will depend on the knowledge and skills of its future generation. I applaud them for taking part in the democratic process.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling is a letter to the Premier on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition from Donna Lowry regarding concerns over the closure of beds at Alberta Hospital. Donna states: "We are a family who, for over 35 years, have suffered with and over the mental illness of a daughter."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three sets of tablings. The first is a letter from the Forest Lawn high school parents' association providing their input on the redistribution of casino funding.

The second is a letter from the James Short parents' association doing the same.

The third is 95 letters from parents from the Monterey Park elementary school in my constituency providing input on the casino funding review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of an academic paper entitled The Impact of Nurse Staffing on Hospital Costs and Patient Length of Stay.

I also have another academic paper entitled The Impact of Hospital Nursing Characteristics on 30-day Mortality. Both papers were referred to by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in his questions today. Both papers show evidence that a higher ratio of RNs is linked to reduced costs and length of hospital stays and is also related to improved patient care and lower mortality rates.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Bill McAree, Whitecourt town councillor and operations supervisor of Associated Ambulance, with regard to Bill 62.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Chief Electoral Officer Appointment

21. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Olaf Brian Fjeldheim be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would note that there was a lot of work done by the committee members, and the report has already been tabled in the Assembly. I think that at this point everyone here is just looking forward to perhaps a few other comments, if necessary, but at the conclusion support for this particular report.

Thank you to all members of that committee.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is an important motion, and it's one that I speak to with some gravity. Just to repeat, it says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Olaf Brian Fjeldheim be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all know that elections are the foundation of our democratic process. They're the mechanisms by which every single one of us attains and holds onto or loses our seats. The administration of the electoral process has to be not only in fact but in appearance impeccable if we are to maintain the credibility of our voting process. It is the job of whomever we as an Assembly appoint to this position to make sure that that administration is conducted properly.

I think it is worth noting that this recommendation, as I understand it, was not the unanimous choice of the committee. I expect that that is a reflection of different views of how an election needs to be run and whether we need to step forward into the future or step backward into the past. The concern that we feel with this appointment is that while Mr. Fjeldheim is an honourable gentleman and unquestionably has experience in running an election, it is time in this province to embrace a future new approach to elections. With Mr. Fjeldheim's history of running elections in this province, going backward, we're concerned that an attitude of innovation and freshness and openness may be more difficult to achieve.

Now, I fully understand that he is going to be appointed, and I wish him the very, very best because although the general public doesn't realize it, he is one of the most important officials in this province.

I want to lay out a series of challenges to Mr. Fjeldheim when he becomes Chief Electoral Officer. I think that if we look back at the elections in Alberta in, say, 2001 and 2004, there were a number of concerns, and those concerns are reflected in many documents. One of the most important documents was submitted to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices in October 2006 by the then Chief Electoral Officer, Lorne Gibson, who only held his position for a relatively brief period. This report contains quite a number of recommendations, very fundamental recommendations for cleaning up what is a deeply flawed election process in Alberta.

The recommendations are fairly wide ranging. They include setting fixed election dates. They include a new, nonpartisan process for appointing returning officers. They include new ways of managing and building election lists and voter lists. In fact, what this document involves is a complete modernization and overhaul of Alberta's election processes. These recommendations were, in my belief, in my understanding, completely ignored by this government in the lead-up to the last election. In fact, that was an election that was plagued by many, many serious problems.

The report of the Chief Electoral Officer after the 2008 general election repeats many of those same concerns. I won't go through them; these are all there for the public to read. They address fundamental issues of how voters were identified on voter lists and note that a very significant percentage of voters had to be sworn in. It was, in fact, a swear-in rate – I'm quoting from page 52 of this report – of 26.9 per cent of voters. That's simply unacceptable. The appointment process for returning officers: again, completely unacceptable. Massive lineups at polling stations, delays in appointing returning officers, and on, and on, and on.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, the challenge that Mr. Fjeldheim faces now is to break with the past and to lead a modernization, a complete overhaul of Alberta's electoral process and to do it with the force of character that demands that this government listen. He has a challenge to defend democracy and build democracy in this province because we are watching election by election the voter process in Alberta decline. It turns up in an obvious number like the voter turnout, which was just over 40 per cent in the last election, the lowest in the recorded history of elections in this country from Confederation onwards.

It also turns up in the real experiences of people trying to fulfill what is, after all, the first right in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That first right is the right to vote in federal and provincial elections. Mr. Speaker, we in our office alone had an enormous number of complaints on election day from people who were not able to fulfill that right. They went to voting stations to vote, and they were turned away, or they were sent to other election stations and then sent to yet another one. They were denied access because of ID issues. They were denied access for all kinds of reasons. We also have well-documented cases, for example, of outright election fraud. We have a well-documented case of a returning officer opening a ballot box in the middle of election day, breaking the seal on a ballot box in the middle of election day. These kinds of irregularities are unbecoming of any democracy.

My challenge and our challenge in the opposition to Mr. Fjeldheim: don't return to the past; use this mandate you are certain to get today and build to the future and challenge all of us as members of this Assembly to bring Alberta into a leadership position nationally and internally in terms of election administration.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to drive home those points today because in many ways nothing is more fundamental to the value of democracy than how we run our elections. As we watch the corrosion of that process, as we watch widespread breakdowns of administration, we also witness the decline of democracy. We all need to stand up for that, and the person we charge with doing that day in, day out with every fibre of his being is the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Speaker, I needed to get those comments on the record. This issue, believe me, will not go away. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the ability here to speak on this motion. As always, I really appreciated the comments of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. They were quick and to the point and really highlighted some of the difficulty that has happened in prior elections, the most recent one in 2008. I, too, for the record realize that Mr. Fjeldheim is going to get this motion, and I, too, wish him well in pursuing what I hope is a brighter future for democracy here in Alberta. We can look back to the past, even the last election, and realize to a person here in this Legislature that it was not run in the best way possible. This was highly evident not only in the run-up to the election but, as well, in the aftermath, where we had many comments in the newspapers and otherwise that made brash predictions like: this was the worst-run election ever. Now, I have not been here in Alberta for the full 100 years of its time, nor have I taken part in all of their elections, but I think it's safe to say that some of those comments were warranted. Going back over a little bit of the history, we can see that.

In 2006 the former Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Lorne Gibson, had put a report together, a comprehensive report that outlined a detailed process that would modernize the Alberta electoral process. Some of the points in there were crystal clear as to how to improve democracy. Who can argue with returning officers being appointed by a neutral proceeding on merit? Who can argue with set election dates? Who can argue with an increase in polling stations? Who can argue with better mechanisms for allowing people to get signed up to take part in elections? All of these goals were put into a report in 2006 that outlined a way for this government to act in a way that, I would feel, was in the best interests of democracy, by allowing and encouraging as many people as possible to participate in the election. Well, that was ignored.

Then came the election in 2008 – and I brought up some of those points here – which by anyone's account was not that well participated in, nor was it that well run. I don't know whether it was a chicken-or-egg thing that led to that happening. Nevertheless, it is what it is. We have an opportunity now to go ahead and fight for a better day in democracy.

After that election we also had another report, that was drafted by the next Chief Electoral Officer, which had many of the same recommendations put into place. During this legislative session I've asked the Justice minister: when will these recommendations be put into place? Will these recommendations be put into place before the next election, or are we simply going to go from 2006 to 2008 to 2012, never quite getting to the point where we put in electoral reform and some recommendations made by these past Chief Electoral Officers?

So on this note I'm encouraging Mr. Fjeldheim to be bold, to look at these recommendations, to act on many of these recommendations to improve not only democracy as it stands on election day but democracy as it stands in its lead-ups and its run-ups and its aftermath in all accounts. I am hopeful that his appointment will signal a day where we can look to Albertans participating more in elections, where we can go from a 41 per cent participation rate to something higher. These are difficult challenges for the new Chief Electoral Officer. I wish him well in this regard, and hopefully he will be able to implement some of these changes to make Alberta democracy work in a much better fashion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, appreciate an opportunity to get on the record with Government Motion 21, which is the appointment, of course, of Mr. Fjeldheim to the position of Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta. I was on the committee. I had the opportunity to participate in a lot of the discussion that occurred surrounding this appointment.

3:20

The first thing I would like to say is that a lot of the discussions went on in camera, or behind closed doors, and I think that if we're going to restore confidence in the entire process, more of these discussions should go on in public. There is absolutely nothing the matter with having a public hearing. Individuals other than those that are on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices could participate because there are many interested parties who have more than just a passing interest, if I can say, in the five legislative offices as we know them. I think that the office of the Chief Electoral Officer would be more widely known than some of the others for obvious reasons.

Hon. members previous had talked about elections and the conduct at election time of the office and the planning and the processes that lead up to E-day, and those are important comments. It's a very important time for not only the Chief Electoral Officer but his or her employees. I can understand where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is coming from because first-hand I saw problems with the last election. We brought them forward; we got them on the record. I couldn't believe that a ballot box at a mobile poll in our constituency was literally taken door to door in a seniors' residence, and selected people got to vote. I brought that to the attention of Elections Alberta, and as a result of that, I was – zap – selected for a random audit. I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview was also one of the individuals or the constituencies or the campaigns that was chosen for this random audit.

I welcome an audit any time of our constituency's and our campaign's books. In fact, now that it's obvious that Mr. Fjeldheim is going to be reappointed, I hope this is going to be one of the focuses of his term, if I can use that word. I think each financial statement, not only from the party but from each constituency and during election time from each campaign, has to be audited. I can say, unfortunately, and I'm disappointed to say this – and this is one of the reasons why I did not support the candidacy of Mr. Fjeldheim – that my research certainly indicates this was not done in the past when he held the job as Chief Electoral Officer. I would say that the financial disclosure statements for every party, whether it was my own, whether it was the New Democrats, or whether it was the Progressive Conservative Party or the Wildrose Alliance or the Green, were just rubber-stamped, filed, put in a room, and between the hours of 8:30 and noon and 1 and 4 the general public could come in and have a look at them.

Now, I'm disappointed in that because I have seen errors in a lot of those disclosure statements. The biggest error I found was, of course, in the reporting of what we call the foundation fund, which is a large party trust fund that the Progressive Conservative Party has. Not only when Mr. Fjeldheim was working previously as Chief Electoral Officer but even before his time, that fund was not reported in a timely fashion or an accurate fashion according to the act. Nothing was done about it. We identified this, we brought it to Elections Alberta's attention, and basically we were told: thank you very much for the trouble, but we're not going to look into this. I found that very, very disappointing, Mr. Speaker. I was disappointed in Elections Alberta at that time, and unfortunately I continue to be.

Now, it's very important that all political parties file financial statements, that they do it accurately. I know there are a lot of volunteers involved in this and that mistakes will be made, but that's where the audit process would and should come into play, and it hasn't in the past. I would just like to remind hon. members that there have been some gaps in the past. There has been a lack of enforcement, and whenever that lack of enforcement has been identified, it's essentially been ignored, and I am very, very disappointed in that.

I would also like to add, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, on this motion, Motion 21, that we seriously consider in this House, when future legislative officers are recruited and their credentials are examined, that more of the meetings be held in public and that there be less emphasis put on discussions and deliberations in camera. I don't think it's in the interests of an open and transparent democracy. You look at our neighbours to the south and you look at some other jurisdictions, even in this country, where there is a very open and transparent process in the examination of the qualifications of various candidates for various legislative offices.

With that, I will cede the floor to any other hon. member who would like to participate in the discussion on Motion 21. I certainly wish the gentleman well in the next five years as he administers the Elections Act and our financial disclosures as we know them. I will certainly be visiting the office. I will be certainly visiting the room where all the filings are placed, and hopefully on my next visit I will see a complete audit done of each and every filing that's put in there, not just the people who complain, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and myself.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I'll speak very quickly, Mr. Speaker. The frustration that was experienced in Calgary-Varsity came from

the head of our elections group, and her frustration was twofold. In one case it was how little time was given to train people who were brought on, so I would encourage our new appointee to make sure that the election is announced in sufficient time for trained individuals to be on the spot in the various polling stations.

Another frustration, that the individual and I shared, was the lack of updated census information. There had been recently a municipal census as well as a federal census, but for whatever reason that census information wasn't shared at the provincial level. So as many as a quarter of the individuals in a very sustainable, lack-of-movement community, that represents Calgary-Varsity, weren't on the voters list, and that caused the lineups.

Another recommendation that I would make to this individual is to consider the notion of allowing students to vote where they spend the majority of their time as opposed to having to send a sealed vote back to their constituency. Obviously, I'm speaking as a representative for the University of Calgary, where thousands of students were not well accommodated. Speaking of those students, for whatever reason the decision was made to close the polling station in the heart of the university centre at MacEwan hall. If we want young people, especially those 18 to 24 to participate, which has not been the case, then we have to make it easier for them.

Mr. Speaker, my last piece – well, actually two pieces of advice. The hon. Premier has talked openly about the possibility of the election, and he even gave a month, March 2010. The need for fixed elections would cause a lot of the problems that we're seeing to be dealt with.

3:30

My last comment, Mr. Speaker. We have TILMA. What I'd like to import from B.C. in terms of sharing is the idea of a citizens' assembly with a mandate to look at proportional representation. The last turnout, the worst in the nation's history, shows the lack of engagement, so anything that our new electoral officer can provide in terms of increasing engagement will be much welcomed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to get up and speak to Government Motion 21. In particular, as a member of the committee that reviewed the potential applicants and ultimately decided on the successful applicant in terms of the recommendation, anyway, with respect to the Chief Electoral Officer, I was able to attend all of the meetings but as a result of a very last-minute illness was not able to attend the meeting where the committee members went on the record with respect to their votes about the report and the recommendation that is now before the Assembly.

I'm pleased to be able to put on the record that, with all due respect to the candidate who is being put forward, I would have been unable to support the notion that the recommendation come forward here and, unfortunately, cannot support this motion at this time. Just for the record, then, is the fact that we have members who were on the committee who, coincidentally, were also members of the opposition who were not in support of this particular recommendation. I believe one member has already talked about how this particular appointment may well reflect a step backwards. I think that's a good overarching assessment of where this Assembly will go should they approve this motion.

I'd like to speak just briefly also on one issue and also mirror the comments made by a previous speaker about the fact that much of the deliberations on this issue were held in camera. While I understand the need to maintain the confidentiality of the people

who apply, in particular those who apply who are not ultimately selected, I also at the same time believe we need to balance that against members of the committee having an opportunity to discuss substantively the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates that they observed and that are coming before the Assembly.

Unfortunately, we're not really in a position to do that in this setting because of the degree to which the decisions are all made in camera. I would like members to consider for future deliberations the possibility of moving the deliberation piece out of camera so that we can have a more transparent discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates that come forward and so that all members of the Assembly can be aware of those and so that the people of the province, should they be following the debate in the House, can also be aware of those strengths and weaknesses. As a result, I feel somewhat limited in the degree to which I can engage in that discussion.

What I will say, however, is that in going into the process as a representative of our caucus and as an individual member, there were certain characteristics and objectives that I was hoping to see reflected in the choice that we ultimately made. I was hoping to see a candidate selected who was very willing to consider issues of changing past patterns with respect to enforcement practices and becoming more vigilant in terms of making recommendations with respect to enforcement of the acts over which that officer has authority.

I also was hoping to have a person come forward who would be exceptionally enthusiastic about the issue of promoting an enhanced voter turnout or voter participation because as every speaker has already identified, we have a serious problem in Alberta. That anybody would ever undermine, negate, or dismiss the fact that we had probably less than 40 per cent of Albertans come out to cast a ballot is shocking to me. It is something which is a measure of an incredible malaise on the part of democracy in this province.

You know, while it's tempting for some folks who perceive themselves to have benefited from it – and I include myself in that category as well because, of course, I too was elected. The fact of the matter is that as people who are elected officials, it would seem to me that one of our first priorities ought to be to protect and enhance democracy and that we should be selecting someone who would also do that. I guess that at the end of the day I'm simply not convinced that that particular objective is one that will be a priority for this candidate. I hope I am wrong. I certainly want to urge that candidate to make that a priority.

The final issue that I would want to see, frankly, is having an electoral officer who is not concerned about the implications to one party versus another party when going about the job of reporting their findings, their reviews, and their recommendations. Clearly, that, I think, was at least one characteristic of the former Chief Electoral Officer in that the recommendations and observations that he included in his previous reports were sometimes embarrassing to particular members of this Legislature. Nonetheless, those reports were put forward in a way that was geared towards that person doing the best job that they felt they could to fulfill their mandate and to strengthen the legislation over which they have authority. I would want to see somebody who was prepared to engage in that same level of activity if it became necessary. Certainly, we know that this particular candidate did not ever engage in that kind of approach while he was in his previous position, so there is that concern.

I certainly hope that the candidate who has been selected and who I suspect the majority of members of this Assembly will vote to put in place will prove me wrong and will demonstrate a commitment to the things I was concerned about notwithstanding my doubts with respect to that. I do wish him the best of luck in his job. He has a

tremendous challenge ahead of him. We have, as has been stated, scored a historic low in the country with respect to our last election. I would believe it to be the case that regardless of what is or is not in the legislation around our elections, no Chief Electoral Officer could feel that they had done or were doing their job were they not very focused on undoing what I would suggest is a blight that we should all be very concerned about. That is, of course, the low levels of voter participation in the last election.

I wish him the best of luck. Unfortunately, we will not be able to support this motion.

The Speaker: Others, or should I call on the Deputy Government House Leader to close the debate?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 50

Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon in the Legislature and move third reading of Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009.

Mr. Speaker, I fully realize the importance of this piece of legislation. I think that we have had a realization not only of the members of the Legislature here but members of the public and members of the industry community in the province of Alberta, members engaged in commerce in the province of Alberta, that this issue is extremely important for all Albertans.

3:40

I do appreciate, Mr. Speaker, that we've had an opportunity here to debate the merits of Bill 50, and I look forward, again, to additional comments of any members of the Assembly with relation to this piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join in third reading debate on Bill 50. This is a bill that we said from the outset we thought was a bad bill in principle. We tried to amend it and failed, and we still think it's a bad bill.

Here's one reason why. The AESO is mandated to make sure that we have an unconstrained transmission system in the province of Alberta, to make sure that there is zero congestion anywhere in the system. Yesterday in Calgary there was a meeting called the 10th annual Alberta Power Summit. A number of people were there. One of the speakers was Dr. Richard Tabors of Charles River Associates and MIT, the LEES laboratory. That's Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They know a thing or two about making the lights go on and stay on.

I want to provide the House here with two quotes from his presentation. Quote one: You can never achieve an unconstrained transmission system even when you ignore the cost. Economic markets move far more quickly than engineering construction projects. End quote.

Quote two: Nothing can be further from the truth than assuming that private-sector generation will be built just because the government has invested billions of dollars in transmission. The decision of generators is based on far shorter term corporate financial decisions. End quote.

We are talking here about billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker. We're talking in the absolute best-case scenario maybe \$5 billion, and the much more likely scenario is anywhere between \$14 billion and \$20 billion.

This is a bad bill. It has failed a number of tests, as far as I'm concerned. It has failed to provide for appropriate and responsible public input. It has failed to provide an objective basis for deciding what kinds of transmission infrastructure are or are not critical, what kinds of transmission infrastructure should or should not be built in the public interest and the public need. It has failed to take into consideration that there are options, there are alternatives to building these massive power lines that I believe will deliver power to the people at considerably lower cost than this version.

I mentioned that we tried to amend this in committee. We brought in a subamendment to the government amendment that would have removed the sections that prevent the Alberta Utilities Commission from holding needs identification hearings on lines that the government has arbitrarily declared critical. That amendment failed.

We looked at the government amendment with its willingness to, among other things, stage the construction of these critical transmission infrastructure lines, the ones identified in the schedule on page 11 of Bill 50, the ones that supposedly we cannot live without. Suddenly the government amendment says: well, we can live without some of them for a little longer than we can live without others, so we'll stage the building here. Of course, as I mentioned yesterday in the House, the government has not seen fit to tell us what the time intervals between the stages would be, so the whole thing might be a bit bogus.

Through our second amendment we tried to put a sunset clause, in effect, into the bill and say, "Okay, let's assume" – and it's a giant leap of faith, I believe – "that the government really is correct in its assertion that we absolutely, positively must have these particular critical high-voltage power lines or else the lights are going to go off, and the sky is going to fall." Given that it has said that we can stage these, it has essentially telegraphed the message to any and all who would be involved in the planning, the proposal, the construction, and the design of high-voltage transmission lines that there is time to get your act together and follow a planning process that will involve a needs identification hearing, and if you think you're going to need that power line five or 10 years down the road, best get organized and get things going now. That got voted down as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're back where we began when we started second reading debate on Bill 50. This is, we believe, a fatally flawed bill. It denies Albertans, big and small, the opportunity to be involved in the process of identifying whether these lines are needed, and then it turns around and sticks us with the bill for them, and sticks us with that bill for something on the order of 40 years.

So we feel that we have no choice but to move that the motion for third reading of Bill 50, Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence."

The Speaker: Okay. We'll have it circulated. Just a second, sir, until it's circulated to everybody.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie would concur that this would be viewed as a hoist amendment?

Mr. Taylor: Yes.

The Speaker: Proceed, please.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief as I proceed because we have already given this bill extensive debate in this House. Those of us on the opposition benches, all parties in the opposition, have participated, I think, in a vigorous debate regarding the merits or lack thereof of this bill. We've had a difficult time, although not thoroughly pointless, engaging members of the government. To a person those who have spoken, and not too many have, have spoken in favour of the bill despite the fact that we know that they know that there is tremendous popular opposition to this bill. There is enough popular opposition to this bill that the government brought in its own package of amendments designed to address some of those concerns, but clearly not the ones that we think and that the people who oppose this think are the most vital concerns.

We tried to amend the government amendment, because that's the procedure that we have to go through as we make law in this Assembly, to make this very bad bill, first, a better bill, and then when that failed, a less bad bill. That second subamendment of ours was, by definition, a compromise. We did everything that we could do on this side of the House to try and make this thing work in the public interest. It still does not work in the public interest in our opinion, and therefore we are advocating that the bill be hoisted, and that is the intent of this amendment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that we, from this point on, will be debating the amendment, and I'm sure that there are others in the House who would like to get on the record about this. I think I'm clearly on the record, as are many others in this House, in terms of our opposition to the bill. So I don't feel that I need to say anything more about this. I'll turn it over now to my colleagues on all sides of the House to speak for or against the amendment.

Thank you.

3:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, the process is pretty straightforward. There will be no 29(2)(a) applied to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie – he's the second person who's spoken – but 29(2)(a) will apply to speakers beginning now.

Secondly, the process is that all members may participate in this amendment. Once all members have participated, the question will be called. If the question is carried, if November 25, 2009 the amendment is in the affirmative, then that's the end of the matter: the bill disappears from the Order Paper. If defeated, then the question is immediately put on the motion for third reading.

So who would like to participate further? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, followed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Please proceed.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak in opposition to this amendment because I have been following the debates in the House very closely. I've been listening to the concerns of constituents who have come to my office and sent me e-mails on what they thought Bill 50 was. I've heard about, you know: why are you stopping the public process of where we're going to put power lines? Bill 50 has nothing to do with that. There's been a lot of debate. As the hon. member said, there's been extensive debate in this House on Bill 50.

When Albertans turn on their taps for water, they want good, clean water. They want to make sure that it's there. They want us to plan ahead to put the infrastructure in place so that when they turn those taps on, they have healthy, clean, good water.

When Albertans are stuck in traffic, and they're trying to figure out how they're going to get to work on time or they're trying to get to where their loved ones might be on time, they expect us to plan ahead so that that doesn't happen. They expect us to figure out that there's going to be a need for future infrastructure, and they expect us to make it happen, Mr. Speaker.

Now, when Albertans go to turn the light switch on, they expect the power to be there. They expect the light to go on. Mr. Speaker, they expect us to plan ahead, to say that we're going to need transmission or we're not going to need transmission. They expect us to hire the experts that know what the load is going to be on the system. They expect us to hire the experts to give us good advice, and that's what the Alberta Utilities Commission is all about. They do want to have a say in where those lines are going to be located, totally separate to what Bill 50 is all about. They also want us to ensure that there's going to be an open and fair tendering process to build that infrastructure, and under the regulated electrical system, that's important. Bill 50 is going to allow us to do that.

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Speaker, has recently endorsed Bill 50, and I think that's an important step. It shows that the economic concerns of the capital region should be addressed by this as well.

So whether the hon. member believes that this is an important piece of legislation or not is his opinion. But introducing an amendment to effectively hoist the bill and kill the bill, I believe that's the wrong thing to do. I believe that the debate in this House has clearly pointed to the need for this legislation. As such, I am a hundred per cent in favour of us moving forward with the legislation and, therefore, opposed to the amendment and would encourage all members to defeat this amendment so that we can proceed with what Albertans need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me some time to put it out on the record.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the next speaker is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the amendment to Bill 50, the Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009. I don't think there's any question about the need for more infrastructure. The question is the process for establishing that infrastructure. I won't belabour the fact that Albertans are concerned that we're subverting a process that was established as little as 18 months ago to determine need and other elements of public consultation, including science and advisory input. This is major.

I think all we're suggesting is that in the interests of good governance, bringing power to the people in both a literal sense and a figurative sense, both sides rethink this and that in the interests of long-term stability and long-term, I think, public trust we postpone this decision because of the widespread concerns and, indeed, opposition to this reversion to a cabinet decision rather than having the very utility that we decided would be the regulator in this particular area of our development be directly involved. This really undermines, in many peoples' eyes, including my own, that this government has the long-term best interests of Albertans if they set up a commission to do this and then in the next instant take that power away on a particularly important set of infrastructure.

So I'm simply appealing to the common sense of the Legislature. We lose nothing by postponing it. We can bring it back again in the

new year and, given an opportunity to reassess both the process and the public concerns about it, do it better.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Any members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to speak in favour of the amendment proposed by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Currie. I've taken part in, I believe, all stages of the debate. I've actually, prior to coming into this House for this sitting, listened to many individuals, some arguing that Bill 50 or this critical infrastructure is necessary, some arguing that, no, it's not necessary, others saying they were unsure.

Some of these people on both sides of the argument are all very qualified. Mr. Gary Holden from Enmax: his qualifications are pretty decent in this regard. He has run a fairly successful company in his own right. He has some ideas on how the electrical system could best run over the next 40 to 50 years. Let's face it: he put his neck squarely on the line in taking on a government that has a lot of power and a lot of influence in this process, and I believe he did that because he thought Bill 50 was flawed. I also heard from some other people, people from AltaLink and some other individuals also, Mr. Steve Snyder, very smart individuals who say: no, Bill 50 is the right way to go; it's necessary that we do all this stuff for various reasons. I've also kept apprised of the two university professors who put together that university paper that appeared to me to be relatively clear, relatively concise, and contained some decent arguments on why we don't need Bill 50.

Basically, what I'm saying is that we've got a lot of experts on this situation. Here's what I've learned from this process. I've learned that I as a politician sitting here in the Legislative Assembly am not an expert on electrical transmission.

Mr. Rodney: Agreed.

Mr. Hehr: I thank the hon. member for agreeing with me on that statement.

However, if I look around this House, I don't see too many experts on electrical grid transmission.

Mr. Rodney: Agreed.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you again, hon. member, for agreeing with me.

More importantly, I don't see too many on the front bench. I know the Premier is not an expert on transmission lines and all this business. So that's what I've learned.

Looking at what I've learned and what was in place beforehand, just a mere 18 months ago we set up the Alberta Utilities Commission. Here's why I believe we set up that commission. That commission was set up to have a lot of very smart people who deal on a regular basis with people wanting to put in transmission lines, power, all sorts of stuff that is beyond me, an average Joe politician who has no idea about it, a person who is paid to listen to many sides of the argument and try and come up with an idea. But on this one I would never be an expert and never make the right call. That's why the Alberta Utilities Commission, I believe, was set up.

It takes it out of the hands of politicians and allows it to be made by a body that weighs scientific evidence and consumer need and makes these decisions in the best interests of both the consumer and business alike on keeping on the power, the lights, the heat, and all that good stuff in Alberta. Despite the government's protests –

methinks they protest too much – I don't think that we are in a real critical shortage, with brownouts, blackouts, despite the abundance of money we've spent on these advertisements by the Public Affairs Bureau. I simply don't buy it. Other people don't buy it.

4:00

I believe that the reason this is really done is to take away people's ability to complain, ordinary people's, average Joe and Jane Alberta's, ability to go to the Alberta Utilities Commission and say: "I don't like X happening. I don't like Y happening. I don't think we need this power." They don't want to get into hearing the debate line by line, session by session, all the way down the row. I'll agree with them that this is probably a little bit of a difficult task and would stir some debate amongst many communities and may hold the government from time to time in some heat in various communities.

That said, I think it was set up as the right process. It's the right process to allow for both experts and lay people alike to discuss utilities and transmission lines here in Alberta. What the government has done in this House is take away that process, that ability for average Joe and Jane Alberta to get their ideas across as to whether they need the electricity and then to go ahead and see what is the best way for that power to be delivered, the best way and most cost-efficient way.

On this boondoggle we have going on right now, it's only the taxpayers who are paying for the transmission lines. They're the only ones with any skin in the game. They're the ones who are constructing what, by anyone's account, are star-studded transmission lines that can handle, apparently, electricity for the next 40 to 50 years and do all sorts of things. I have even heard it can sing and dance from some people. The Alberta citizens are going to be paying for this.

I hope that it won't be a boondoggle, but my suspicions are that at the end of the day the Alberta taxpayer is going to be subsidizing quite a bit when we had a system that would have heard their voices, heard their concerns, maybe come to the same conclusion, maybe not. But the thing was that we had set up this process for the correct reasons, to take the decision-making out of the hands of politicians and into the hands of experts.

I thank you for allowing me to put my comments on the record.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo points out that he's not an expert.

An Hon. Member: Agreed.

Mr. Oberle: There was some agreement in the House on that point.

He then turns around and tells us that we're talking about electrical transmission that we don't need and power that we're not short of. Well, how exactly did he determine that if he's not an expert on the subject?

Mr. Speaker, he rightly points out that, in fact, none of us in this House are experts on the subject, and we shouldn't be determining need. I would point out that that's exactly what's happening here. We at no time laid out any charts or maps or kilowatt hours or anything else in this House in this discussion of Bill 50.

What we're doing here is passing a bill that allows the minister to approve a need designated by the AESO, who are, in fact, the experts, some 250 people involved over there. It doesn't put the decision of need on the floor of this House. It allows the AESO to

forward expressions of need and the minister to approve them. That's what we're approving here. That only applies for critical infrastructure, by the way. The rest of the AUC approval process, the rate hearings, all of that, and all of the avenues for public input are all still there.

Mr. Speaker, I urge members to defeat this amendment. Let's move on with a bill that's right for Albertans. Our job here is to make sure there's a system in place that when somebody flicks their light switch, there's going to be power.

That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore. [interjections] Hon. members, I called for 29(2)(a). No one spoke. I recognized the next speaker. He has spoken. This is the decision I made. Now 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Peace River if he's aware that AESO seems to be biased. They were ruled biased by the courts. [interjections] No, they were ruled biased by the courts. The AUC has rejected many of their reports going forward. The AUC is the ultimate one who decides that, and by empowering AESO – and this bill will say that the AUC must receive anything from AESO that they declare a needs document – it's just wrong to bring that forward and act like AESO is the ultimate authority when they've been proven wrong twice in just the last few years. Why does the hon. member think that AESO should have the ultimate authority to declare needs when, in fact, they've been shown that they haven't been able to do that in the past?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can only respond that should the AUC come up with a decision this member didn't like, he'd be standing here making the exact opposite argument. This member as well argues that he's not an expert on the power system but proceeds to tell us how to properly construct one. I can't help it. I think this bill is right for Albertans.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My only comment in response, I guess, to the hon. member would be that, again, you know, "I think" doesn't really count for much. We had an expert. A way to go through this was through the Alberta Utilities Commission, and despite the fact that he deems we haven't usurped that right, we have. We used to have a needs assessment that went to the Alberta Utilities Commission. It wasn't decided by the AESO at the end of the day but by a body that's created, put together by this government to do this sort of stuff and given one mandate to do. I'd like to point out that in 2007 the AESO gave us an exact different plan as to what the type of need was for around this province.

I'll tell you what. To be honest with you, given that the AESO has changed their opinions twice in the last two years, I feel much more comfortable with this going forward to the AUC, where the things are. Would this not be better at the AUC than at the AESO? Why wouldn't it be better at the AUC?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, the exact opposite question could be asked, and I would also submit that this member, should the AUC come forth with a decision he didn't appreciate, would be also standing there making the exact opposite argument. It's simple.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess another question it begs in his response to say that we're not experts. The regulatory process of the AUC brings in experts and is a far different hearing than AESO, and it's challengeable in the courts. Even in the past that challenge is critical, but they've never filed a needs identification document to the AUC, which is currently what is mandatory under our laws here in Alberta. If AESO, in fact, said this crisis was there, why have they failed to file a needs document in front of the AUC? It hasn't been done. It's not proposed. It isn't a crisis.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak for any particular organization here, and we don't. These are independent bodies of this House. I point out again that should the AUC come up with a decision that this member doesn't agree with, then he would be standing here making the opposite argument. The fact remains that all of the access to the AUC regarding siting hearings and rate hearings is still available and will proceed, and everybody has a chance to appear before those as intervenors.

4:10

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Taft: On 29(2)(a) to the hon. Member for Peace River. I am curious to know because this member's constituency may well be the home of a major nuclear generating station in the future: does the bill or the provisions of Bill 50 relate in any way to the plans to develop a major nuclear plant in the Peace River area?

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, had the member read the bill, I guess, then he would know that, no, it doesn't.

Mr. Hinman: I'd like to ask one other further question. Is the member aware of the mandate or the policy which AESO has mandated to say unconstrained power lines in the province – watching the cost is irrelevant, just unconstrained power.

The Acting Speaker: The next speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-*Varsity*.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we're talking about today with the hoist amendment is credibility. This government under its new leadership proposed an improvement in transparency and accountability, yet what we've seen since the Premier took over is more and more decisions being taken out of the legislation process, where discussion can take place, and being moved into regulation. All we're getting is: trust us. We had a system where people could bring forward their concerns, where they could present scientific evidence, and that was the Alberta Utilities Commission.

I've referenced previously – and I won't go into detail – the type of hearing that occurred with the Compton circumstance. People brought forward best evidence. They testified, they explained their position, and they had that opportunity to do so because it was provided. Well, taking away the Alberta Utilities Commission's responsibility and putting the decision behind closed doors into the cabinet's domain takes away the authority of the people.

If we're truly interested in what people's concerns are, whether it be need or staging or cost, then people need to have that opportunity. I would suggest that the limited time that has been provided for

debate may provide more information for people to consider the need for transmission or the placement of transmission, but they have no voice. That voice has been taken away from them because there's no hearing process.

Now, with other issues previously in this province – and I go back to I believe it was 2001. Along with an election there was a plebiscite with regard to the election of Senators. So we have instruments that can be used to allow people to voice their concerns, and if we don't use the existing instruments that we have, then people are going to be feeling shut out of the process. Why would they then want to cast a vote when less and less and less opportunity is being afforded for that vote to mean anything?

In terms of talk versus action – what is being said as opposed to what is being done – I give the Premier credit for creating standing policy committees. We all have an opportunity during standing policy committees to express our viewpoints, and as is the situation within this Assembly, there is the opportunity for votes to be taken. You know, the reality is that the government has earned a majority both in this House and, therefore, on the committees. But the beauty of the process – and it's the same beauty of the Assembly process – is that there's a *Hansard*. There's a record. The public is made aware of what is being discussed, but in this particular situation we do our best to interpret what our constituents believe. I find it rather difficult to believe that in 13 constituencies people are very opposed to the lack of accountability, the lack of an opportunity to have their views heard in the form of the Alberta Utilities Commission, but in the remainder of the province, the 70 other seats, that problem doesn't exist. So it concerns me that we're not allowing any kind of democratic participation.

Now, we've had other individuals talk about science-based evidence. We've had a little bit of slagging going on about: you're not an expert; what do you know? I freely admit and I'm sure members opposite would rise in chorus to say that I don't know a whole lot about electricity. But with regard to my hon. young colleague from Calgary-Buffalo he's gone through in depth the reports that have been provided by experts. I've read through the material but I doubt very much to the extent that the young gentleman has, yet he's basically being beat up because he's not an electrical genius.

It's our job as parliamentarians to provide leadership, not only representation. It's our job to provide information of value so that individuals can decide what it is that is necessary. Taking that opportunity away and simply saying, "We're doing what's in your best interest; just trust us," or using the fearmongering that is so frequently targeted at the opposition when we raise an opposing viewpoint, suggesting that any time soon the lights are going to go off and we're going to be in brownouts and blackouts – if that is the case, if that is the sort of Armageddon apocalyptic circumstance, then lay out that evidence. Argue your case. It should be third-party, peer-reviewed evidence that can stand up and give Albertans the type of direction that justifies the costs that are associated with this project.

All kinds of costs have been thrown out there. We've heard: it's only going to add \$8 to your bill. We've heard that by the time the projects are finished, even given the ongoing reduced labour and materials costs, it might be in the area of \$14 billion, and it might go as far as \$20 billion. We've heard the government talk about: "We've heard what your concerns are. We're not going to build it all at once; we're going to build it in stages." But there aren't any definitions. You know, what's a stage? What is critical transmission? What is a needs assessment?

It's pretty hard to carry on a debate or a discussion of philosophy without some sort of definition and common understanding, and that

is not provided in Bill 50. Bill 50 says simply: trust us; we're acting in your best interest. Yet the interests that appear to be acted upon are the interests of private utility companies. We're being asked to pay the bill to increase the share value of companies like AltaLink and ATCO, but we don't have any say or any share in the direction of the company. The benefit we get back is that, yes, our lights are going to go on and, yes, our heat is going to go on. But at what cost? The bottom line here is that we have no idea of what the cost will be. The government appears to believe that it is better to do things the old way than to look at innovation and possibly new ways of dealing with things.

4:20

Yesterday in committee I was pleased when the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod talked about the availability of a significant amount of wind power, which is southern-based and would definitely, without lengthy transmission lines, feed into the communities of Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Calgary. Hooking up to that transmission makes absolute sense as opposed to bringing it all the way down south. Another transmission line that makes sense is taking it from Wabamun, for example, a reasonably short distance to Edmonton. A reasonably short distance although, obviously, a longer distance would be to Fort McMurray to help out with the oil sands projects. There are some smart routes. To suggest that Wabamun coal-fired power is the answer to Lethbridge's circumstance is not correct.

We've also heard the argument that gas is going to go through the ceiling, and therefore we need these coal-fired projects. Even though they belch and we have the highest respiratory disease counts in Alberta, we're supposed to do it because that's the way it was done.

I've offered alternatives in this debate. I've talked about the gasification of coal. I have talked about, as has the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, bringing on wind power. Yesterday I talked about solar power. We also have geothermal. A lot of this power transmission can be built close to the areas where it's required, as Enmax is proposing.

The government is basically ignoring all the signs and saying that the type of transmission lines, which they have not clearly defined nor clearly located, are necessary, "So trust us." I have much greater faith in a collective discussion where experts judge the value of the information given and then come up with a ruling rather than any individual member in this House, no matter how intelligent they are, making a singular decision with the help of their cabinet members or, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore pointed out, putting so much faith in AESO versus the Alberta Utilities Commission, which has an oversight governance role.

To the hon. Member for Peace River: is it a crime to oppose a particular decision? You're saying that if we're opposing AESO, at some point we might oppose a decision made by the Alberta Utilities Commission. So what? The point is that if the argument we make has a degree of sense, then it should be considered. There is no chance for that consideration to take place because the Alberta Utilities Commission has been taken out of the game, and the government's closed-door dictatorship has replaced it.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, on the amendment the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been lots of discussion. There has been lots of debate pro and con about the bill,

but the majority of it, according to the newspapers, news releases, and all the hearings, has been against the bill. According to government, you know, Bill 50 will streamline the process of approval of new transmission lines by eliminating the public hearing process. Although we need the upgrades – nothing has been done for the last 20 years – we are not in dire straits. The demand for electricity has gone down as the demand in growth has gone down. We need an abundant, low-cost supply of power for job creation, for our economic growth.

This bill has not only been opposed from this side of the House. This bill has also been criticized by the Tory Party constituency associations and the usually pro-Conservative organizations like the Fraser Institute as well as economic and landowner groups and lots of industry consultants and also a Calgary-based utility, Enmax.

According to the Minister of Energy, you know, he insists that we need these projects, that they are very, very critical to prevent blackouts and that we don't want to be freezing in the cold on dark nights. But lots in industry are questioning the exaggeration by the minister.

There's going to be a shortcut in the process if Bill 50 is passed. There's criticism about the cost of all those new transmission lines. It goes from \$5 billion to \$14 billion to \$20 billion to \$25 billion, so we are not even sure about the costs. In the year 2007 AESO said that it would be 3 and a half billion dollars. In three years we haven't doubled in population or we haven't doubled in industry growth, but all of a sudden there's a big demand for power. I don't think AESO has really done their homework.

The University of Calgary School of Public Policy is saying that those two large HVDC lines that are proposed are economically inefficient because the DC lines, as was said before, are good for long hauls, not for short hauls.

The Alberta Electric System Operator assumes those forecasts. Also, it raises doubts that the state of the reliability and the supply adequacy indicates the need for an emergency process. There's really no critical issue here. You know, if it was so critical, then there would not be any amendments put forth by the Minister of Energy to build it in stages. Even in stage building there's no clear indication: will it be a year apart, two years apart, five years apart?

All the reports are saying that it is better to have an independent regulator like the Alberta Utilities Commission determine the need for projects rather than having the Alberta cabinet or AESO unilaterally making that determination. It is less likely that the project's approval and the decisions will be driven by short-term political interest and more likely that if the regulators do it, their perspective will affect the long-term benefits and the cost to the province.

Regulatory agencies typically get all the experts in, and there will be historical awareness, background knowledge to understand and evaluate, and there will be an open and transparent consultation process, a public process that will allow for a greater scrutiny of the alternative points of view and provide a forum for public debate. The process also requires the regulators, through written decisions, to provide their rationale for each decision. Passing Bill 50 will bypass all that about the public hearing process.

4:30

According to the Environmental Law Centre, the bill would make problems for needs assessment and approval for transmission infrastructure in Alberta even worse. Here we are trying to speed up the process, but we are getting the opposite reaction from the stakeholders and from the people who are concerned about Bill 50. Even the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta says that forcing a new transmission build program on existing ratepayers

will treble and potentially quadruple transmission costs in the next 10 years. Are we trying to fix the deregulation mess here? It's not clear. It's just a matter of trust.

By giving it more time and considering the bill, maybe we can come up with a better bill. The Member for Calgary-Currie tried to bring in subamendments to the amendments from the Minister of Energy, and we tried to fix it, but all those amendments were defeated. I think this is a bad bill. I think we should put it off for now and come back in maybe six months, a year to consider it. We are not in dire straits.

For those reasons I support this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, on the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to rise to support the amendment from the Member for Calgary-Currie on a perhaps different principle than has been raised before now. We've heard a lot of talk about the needs of the electrical system and who's an expert and who isn't and what routes and what capacities and all of that. I think there's clearly a concern here that this particular legislation short-circuits, shall we say, the due process that is normally in place and that because of that short-circuiting, it may well lead to errors in the routing or other technical decisions and market decisions. But that's been hashed out, and I think those are legitimate points.

What I want to do, though, Mr. Speaker, is reflect on this particular bill in the context of a much larger pattern that this government is following, and that is a pattern of centralization and politicization that is antidemocratic and, I think, is also jeopardizing the long-term political culture and economic prosperity of this province. I'm going to range widely, but take my word for it, it all relates back to this pattern and the reason that I cannot support Bill 50.

Now, Bill 50 takes control away from the due process of a quasi-judicial body and removes decision-making from the purview of that quasi-judicial body and puts it directly into the hands of cabinet. That is an unacceptable step, here, Mr. Speaker, but it is part of a larger pattern, and it's a pattern that gets played out over and over and over to the point where it's clearly an operating culture of this particular government, probably an inevitable one after this party has been in power for half a lifetime.

We've seen it played out, Mr. Speaker, as recently as this spring, when through a single, unexpected act of this government all the regional health authority boards were dissolved, and the Cancer Board was dissolved, and AADAC was dissolved. There was an enormous centralizing of control into the hands of the minister and his hand-appointed board, who were recruited at the public expense of over \$130,000 by the minister's campaign manager. Now that's, in my view, an abuse of power.

There was a day, Mr. Speaker, when health boards were a broad reflection of our society. They contained through separate nomination processes members of local city councils, representatives of faith groups, representatives of a range of organizations. Today we have one health board whose members are hand-picked by the minister of health. Of course, he was just following the pattern that this government has really refined to an art. They deepened this pattern years ago with school boards, when they effectively removed any local decision-making power from the school boards by removing their local taxation authority.

I think many Albertans would be shocked to learn that the school superintendents hired by each of their school boards actually have to

be signed off individually and approved by our Minister of Education. So we have a pattern in which school boards, which are the original form of local government and which precede the government of Alberta and, in fact, the existence of the province of Alberta, have been brought to heel through the consolidating, centralizing, and politicizing processes of this government.

We watched the same thing happen with community lottery boards. There was a time, 10 years ago or so, when community lottery funds were distributed by local boards, and in the face of great controversy and opposition this government emasculated, in fact dissolved, those boards, and brought control of lottery funding right into the hands of MLAs, government MLAs, I must say, not opposition MLAs. I've never been consulted on how lottery funds are handed out, but we do know through internal correspondence that government MLAs have access to all kinds of lottery funds to hand out. So we've seen the centralization and the consolidation and politicization of lottery funds, Mr. Speaker.

We're watching this same thing occur with land use. A piece of legislation went through this spring which gives the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development very heavy-handed powers over how people live on and use their lands and how land may or may not be managed by local governments or by individual landowners. So the very land that we walk on now is under the too-direct control, in my opinion, of the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Again, what do we see? A pattern of centralizing control and of politicization. It was one of my own constituents who said to me: boy, that land use bill is a surefire way to lead to corruption. You know, favours and speculation and so on: a stage is set for them to occur, and that's a real problem.

We watched this same pattern play out, Mr. Speaker, in the centralization of control over research funds. Now, Alberta has had a very proud history of independent research funds. The most famous example is the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, but there are several others. The oldest is the world-famous Alberta Research Council, which has been around, I believe, since the 1920s. There are several others: ingenuity funds, engineering funds, and so on. All of those existed. They were controlled by independent boards or separate boards, and they were functioning close to the front lines. What did we see there? Just like in Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, we saw all of that control centralized. If you read the government's background paper on that, why? Because this government wants those research funds to serve the mandates set by the Premier. Talk about centralizing control. As if people in the Premier's office or this cabinet are going to be able to decide where the real innovations in scientific discoveries are. They aren't. That's not how it works.

4:40

The same pattern played out in great controversy in the agriculture sector with the red meat strategy last year, where we watched the beef producers and the pork producers and all kinds of people lose their right to elect their own directors and control their own organizations because of the pattern and the habits and the culture of this government to centralize control, to mistrust its own citizens, and to politicize decision-making.

Well, that pattern is playing out once again in Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, where this specific legislation spells out that it's no longer quasi-judicial bodies of experts weighing the public interest and hearing a range of testimony from all kinds of experts but, rather, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the Premier and his cabinet, who will decide where transmission lines are routed and what their nature will be. Every time this pattern plays out is another nail in the coffin of healthy democracy in this province. Every time this pattern plays

out, we subject our electrical system or our health system or our school boards or our red meat producers or our research funds or you name it to the risk that if a particular interest captures the attention and the commitment of a single cabinet minister, we can see a whole sector rearranged, as we saw happen in the health system and as we are seeing happen now to our electrical system.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is bad legislation based on undemocratic, dangerous principles, and everyone who goes along with supporting this legislation is behaving in an undemocratic manner and putting the long-term viability of our electrical system not at less risk but at greater risk. That's why I support this amendment, and I oppose this bill.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, are there other members who wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak at third reading here this afternoon on the amendment as proposed. I believe that it is necessary. When I had the opportunity to attend the well-organized meeting at Rexall Place last night, it's clear that consumers are not ready for this bill, for this legislation, and they're certainly not ready for the significant costs that are going to be downloaded onto their bills as a result of this legislation if we don't come to our senses and realize that this amendment certainly may not be in the interests of the generators or those that own part or all of our transmission system, but certainly it's in the interests of consumers.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, in debate, there is no doubt that we need to upgrade our transmission system in this province. The reason why it's in such a state of confusion and chaos is this government's former electricity policy deregulation. The hon. member talked earlier about the Charles River Associates group from Massachusetts appearing in Calgary quite recently. Well, this is the same group that advised this very same government on how to proceed with electricity deregulation and how to set up what is now a folly – that is, the power purchase arrangements, the auctions – that allowed our generation capacity, that was paid for by consumers through their monthly bills, to be sold off for a song to various enterprises, including formerly EPCOR, Enmax. There are quite a few organizations, including, of all outfits, Enron. Enron was a successful bidder on some of the power purchase arrangements.

When we consider what's going on now and the haste that this government is in to do what they want with the transmission system and to send the bill to the consumers, essentially what we're doing with this legislation is again allowing the government to proceed in what they consider to be a benevolent way and that they will do what's best for consumers. It may not be in the public interest, but the consumers will pay the bill.

This is what we're getting with Bill 50. Now, Bill 50, as it stands, if it was to move through this House even further and become law, is undemocratic, it's an unreasonable approach to transmission, and it's so typical of this government. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview articulated many different policies and programs that this government controls but discreetly controls. As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt the regulatory process needs strengthening, but the regulatory process can't be bypassed. Bill 50: that will occur. Why not improve the process so all Albertans can be involved in the discussion? Albertans are expected to pay the dramatic increases in the bill – some people say that it's \$300 a month; the Premier, I think, was quoted in the paper saying that it's

a \$100 a month – but this is the same government who promised that if we'd stick with deregulation, we would see our power bills go down.

I know that whenever the Minister of Transportation is poring over his department's budgets, he is looking at the power bills in various offices and depots that are under his ministry throughout the province, and I know he's very concerned about the increase in the power consumption in the bill. I know he's not confident, like the Minister of Energy, in signing a long-term contract because he knows the taxpayers would be ripped off on a monthly basis for the duration of the contract. I know that, Mr. Speaker, to be true.

Now, the chief executive officer of Enmax is indicating that many of the lines that are proposed in Bill 50 are unnecessary and that more generation can come on stream in and around Calgary. This has been one of the proposals that the Alberta Liberals have been suggesting to the government for a number of years: build the generation on the edge of the load. But, no, we're going to build a transmission system and then see where the promoters and the developers of the generation capacity want to site their plants. It does not make economic sense, but then again we have this government with its big majority that just wants to bulldoze over the normal regulatory process to get these lines built.

Now, this is not the first time that this government has used sort of a discreet, sly way to avoid the regulatory process or override it. When Murray Smith was the Minister of Energy, going back quite a few years now, of course, on behalf of the government he overruled what we had at the time, the EUB, and downloaded all the costs that we're discussing in Bill 50 onto the bills of consumers. Before that, the regulatory process had suggested it be equally divided, 50-50, between consumers and generators. But, hey, we've got to protect those that make donations to us: that would be the attitude of this government. I think it is disrespectful and it is neglectful, if I could use that term, towards consumers.

4:50

Now, Mr. David Gray, who is executive director of the Utilities Consumer Advocate office, has recently, after he left office, made very clear how much of a bad deal power deregulation is and continues to be. He indicates that it could well result in power and gas bill hikes of hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and we know that to be true. I certainly wish he had spoken out more when he was in office, but who knows what would have happened to him. He could have been removed from office.

Now, with this deregulated system, how it was designed, consumers were the big losers. The generators and those with the generation assets were the big winners. The same thing is going to happen with Bill 50, Mr. Speaker, unless we take the sound suggestion that has been presented to the House by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie and hoist this legislation and go back to the drawing board. This government has gone back to the drawing board on many, many different issues, and there's no harm in admitting this was a mistake. No one is asking for the resignation of the Minister of Energy for this Bill 50. What the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is presenting to this House this afternoon is like a mulligan in golf, and I really believe we should take it.

If the government would like, I could set up some meetings with them for their benefit where they can hear directly from some professional engineers who have other alternatives than to force all these costs onto the bills of consumers. They can fix this problem once and for all, but the government will have to finally admit that this rigid ideology they have towards deregulation simply has not worked, will not work. Please, let's unplug deregulation and go back to a system where power is provided to consumers at the lowest cost possible. Not only does that apply to generation; it applies to transmission as well.

With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to another hon. colleague, and I thank you for the opportunity to participate in the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Minister of Transportation under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Ouellette: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I believe I have to stand when I listen to some of that rhetoric from him saying that he knows exactly what I'm thinking. Let me tell you one thing for sure: he absolutely doesn't know. Never mind what I'm thinking; I don't think he knows much about anything that he's talking about here today. Let me tell you that everything he's talking about is the regulated side. Everything to do with transmission and distribution in this province is regulated. Is he saying there's a problem with that? Maybe we should be deregulating that side. Would that make the hon. member a little happier? He keeps talking about deregulation and how bad it is, and what we're dealing with here is regulation. Maybe he can answer me. Maybe he wants that deregulated, then, so that it works a little more smoothly for him.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to answer that. Nowhere in my remarks at third reading or committee or at second reading did I say that the transmission system in this province was not regulated. Certainly, whenever we talk about the generation side, we all know that that is deregulated, and we all know what has happened. But what we do know with the regulated system: there are certain parties, certain corporations who are going to benefit economically from this bill as it is currently written if it is not withdrawn from this Assembly, and it's consumers that are going to pay billions of dollars unnecessarily because of this folly.

If we can compare deregulation to regulation and we compare the record of this government, we can clearly see that with the rigid ideology, the *Father Knows Best* attitude that we had back in 2000, when we initiated electricity deregulation, we know what that has cost consumers. Now we're seeing the bill for this regulated transmission and distribution system that this government is proposing. The only winners in this will be the owners of the transmission and distribution system, and it is owned by individual for-profit outfits. It's not owned by a public utility, for instance.

The minister can carefully review *Hansard*, and he will clearly see that this member did not once refer to the transmission system as a deregulated part of the whole electricity system in this province, so sorry about that.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Seeing none, I recognize, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad of the opportunity to speak in third reading in favour of the hoist motion that is before us on the floor. I, as you know, listened to most of the debate and tried to keep up on *Hansard* for that which I wasn't present for or able to listen to on the program sound and had a good exchange with the Minister of Energy in Committee of the Whole back and forth on some of the observations that I had made or that I had heard others make, but I'll admit that coming into this, I wasn't exactly warm to the idea. To be honest, I think the government failed to make their case around this bill, and that's why I'm supporting the hoist motion.

I don't think this bill is savable, and I don't think it should pass. I think it should be sent back. Somebody else was referring to a mulligan, the golf term, where it's like a do over, but it's completely without any kind of recrimination or bias. Indeed, I think that's what we do need to do here.

Really, I came at this from two ways. There are two sorts of responses that wash back against me. One is that this bill was actually created to address a very specific set of circumstances: you needed the four lines; you needed to be able to do them now. Well, to be fair, that was about opportunities not taken in the past. For us to have to be put into a hurry-up mode because there was a failure to plan or to put things in place from the government, really I don't think that the cost, the burden of that should be borne by the consumers and by the citizens. If the government was able to make that case of urgency, which, I would argue, they didn't, but if they were able to make that case for urgency, then it should have been specific to the problem at hand. What we've ended up with is a bill that goes far beyond that.

I find that kind of decision-making problematic, whether it's done by the government or whether it's done by almost anybody or even in your home life. You know, if you make a very broad policy decision based on one little problem in your house or in your personal life, you find that when you go to apply that to the next situation, it doesn't fit exactly, yet you gave very specific parameters to your policy because it was designed around one problem. Now you're trying to apply it to other ones, and it doesn't work. That was the initial point that I had a problem with, that it was designed for a very specific set of circumstances, and it doesn't stop there.

5:00

I would have been warmer to this idea if it had had a very specific sunset clause in it, which essentially was one of the subamendments that my colleague was trying to make to make this bill a bit more palatable, and that was not acceptable to the government. They want, you know, all or nothing.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Then I thought: well, okay; if you're going to try and make the case for this whole thing, then make the case. I think government failed to make the case. I think they failed to make the case on need. There have been battling experts, but I'm impressed enough with the experts that I've heard that make the point about the AESO and that their case is unconvincing and overstates the urgency.

I think the government failed to make the case for the level of expense that is going to be required for what is anticipated in these lines and the kind of lines they are. I think the government failed to make the case that consumers should be paying a hundred per cent of the cost when they have no legislative input to the need, to the cost, or almost anything else.

This is where they pop up on the other side and say: oh, they get to have input on the siting; the AUC can still do the siting hearings. Well, I don't mean to be disrespectful, but whoop-de-do. You know, that's a pretty small compensation for the fact that we've now committed a whole bunch of people to an awful lot of money over a very long period of time, but hey, here's the prize in the cereal box; you're going to get to decide where it goes. It doesn't quite make the case for me, Mr. Speaker.

I think that there were other options that were available, and the government failed to consider them. I think there's also an argument that the government failed to make the case to show why consumers should pay for lines that were built for export, and clearly one of the lines is built for export. We hear from the Member for Calgary-Glenmore that, you know, there are some negotiations going on in Las Vegas around one of these lines that is definitely going to tie into what we're doing. Why on earth are the consumers in Alberta paying for that? Where is the protection that we would expect the government to be making on our behalf as consumers and as citizens? That's a role that only the government can play. I've talked about that before, too.

I think the other and the final point for me is that the government has failed to show why the consumers are paying today for overbuilt lines which will not be used for some time to come. There were some modifications that the government made through their amendments. I feel that they danced around the real issues. You know, yes, we're going to get provided some information, but we only get provided that information once construction is already started. Again, it doesn't come up to the mark on participation, particularly for those that are footing the bill.

Having watched this long process – and we've now been debating this for a week and a day – I think the government failed to make the case. Therefore, I am in support of the hoist motion that's in front of us, and I urge my colleagues in the Assembly to do the same.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the debate.

Ms Notley: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak on the amendment of the bill, which of course is the last opportunity to speak to the bill in third reading, having already outlined our concerns in second reading and in Committee of the Whole.

I am speaking in favour of this amendment. It seeks to achieve the same objectives I sought when introducing the amendment in second reading to have the matter simply referred to committee and not addressed. Nonetheless, here we are. All of our efforts collectively to have this bill referred in a way that would result in its garnering a great deal more consideration and not going forward in its current form have been unsuccessful to date. It's for that reason, of course, that I'm supporting this last effort to hoist.

There are a number of general sorts of technical issues which, of course, have been canvassed at some length around why the actual lines that are contained within this bill don't make sense and why the very need for them, which the bill short-circuits the assessment of, ought to be questioned. You know, we've heard critics raise issues around whether or not the north-south line is long enough to justify at this point DC construction. If it's not, what exactly do we have planned further down the road?

We know that the demand forecasts that have been relied on by AESO are traditionally very volatile and that there are good reasons, which a number of experts have identified, for us to consider whether those demand forecasts ought to be reviewed and completed again because we don't know whether they remain valid.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

We know that there are other options that are out there to address the kinds of concerns that the government identifies as underlying this particular bill or the substance of the bill, which are the lines in question separate and apart from the justification for why it is we don't need to engage in a needs assessment. But we have heard that there are other options that are out there; for instance, looking at new generation build patterns and, therefore, changing the need in that respect.

We also know that AESO, that the government continually refers to and says is above board, this expert group that is completely independent and whose word is set in concrete, never make a mistake, never change their position. What they say now is exactly what we need because they are absolutely right. They are the complete experts, and they are uninfluenced by any outside influence. Except we have a problem. In 2007 AESO suggested that we needed to build about \$3.5 billion worth of infrastructure, and now,

a mere two years later, that has multiplied three- or fourfold. Apparently they have changed their mind, and apparently what they told us before wasn't correct. Fine. If their mind can change that dramatically in two years, one wonders why it is that we should be accepting everything they say with blind faith.

Nonetheless, all of this sort of leads to the question of whether or not this level of construction that's being advocated by the government through this bill is really something that's being undertaken to deal with electricity reliability issues or whether, in fact, it's being done to address future export plans. If we are really dealing with future export plans, then what we need to consider is the fact that, you know, maybe Alberta consumers want to pay for this infrastructure because they believe it's really important for them to chip in in order to subsidize the company investments that will ultimately bring them profits for export. Or maybe they won't. But they need to know if that's what they're actually being asked to do, and of course they don't because we're not getting any kind of clear explanation from this government with respect to this.

Yet many experts, not the government's experts but other people who are experts – and I don't believe anybody really has been very successful at undermining the credibility of a number of the people who've weighed in on this issue in opposition to it – have suggested that the bill that is being proposed by this government cannot possibly be focused solely on addressing reliability issues, that in fact it can only be seen to be a matter of building infrastructure that will support export but doing so on the dime of the Alberta consumer. Then the question becomes: when it's exported, does the external consumer to whom it's exported pay the infrastructure costs, and if they do, does the company to whom it's paid give them back to the consumer in Alberta? I don't know. We don't know. We don't know any of this, so it's really not a good thing.

5:10

We have issues around whether or not the actual lines identified in the bill are necessary, but the bigger problem with the bill ultimately is that it, of course, removes the ability of the public to engage in assessment of whether these lines are necessary. As we've said repeatedly before, this is a bad thing.

It's not only bad for consumers, as I've just outlined, but it's also bad, frankly, for the environment. The reality is that this whole area in this province – as much as this government wants to pretend that the way it was 50 years ago is the way it will be 50 years from now and that there will be no change and if we stick our heads into the sand and pretend that there are no environmental issues and that there aren't other places in the world where people are furiously working on more sustainable energy strategies, strategies that may well profoundly impact the economic plans that this government has today, if we continue to do that, we're going to make really bad plans. We're going to do that by asking Alberta consumers to pay for the cost of our really bad plans.

For instance, we have an energy strategy document that the government introduced back in whenever it was, January or February of this year, which actually states in the very heart of it that we can't expect renewable energy to play any kind of major role in Alberta's energy future for at least 50 years. Really. Fifty years. So the government is making plans on the assumption that renewable energy will not be a key component of our energy strategy for at least 50 years. This is the kind of presumption and assumption that will underlie this government's decision to compel consumers to spend \$14 billion on an infrastructure plan that assumes that renewable energy will not be a key part of our energy strategy for 50 years. Absolutely shocking, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely shocking.

The rate at which technology and public opinion and, frankly, absolute obligation are changing such that we need to review our approach to and reliance on renewable energy is exponential. We

thought it changed a lot in the '90s, but we didn't really know what we were talking about until we saw how much it has changed in that last nine years. Just watch in the next 10 years how much more it will change after that. That issue is something that's not going to go away, yet we're planning on the basis of a strategy that assumes that renewable energy is not something this province will be particularly involved in for at least 50 years.

This process and the decision of the government to negate the needs assessment component of the transmission infrastructure that they're designing and to keep experts who are independent and not on the government payroll out of the process is, in fact, something that will ultimately hurt the environment because it's going to push us into a strategy which responds only to the very, very blinkered analysis of this government on that particular issue, which refuses to acknowledge and adjust to the reality of changing opinions and technology as they relate to environmental issues.

Now, as I mentioned before, the other piece to this legislation which is so important, of course, is the decision of the government to effectively take what is a public and transparent issue and move it behind closed doors. You know, I just want to sort of quote. I guess it was in 2007, after the government was quite embarrassed, as it should have been, by the shenanigans that occurred at the EUB the last time one of these transmission lines was being considered. After that arose and after, you know, there was a lot of denial about what had arisen and when, ultimately, it could not be hidden any longer and when it came out that there had been such inappropriate action at the EUB, the chair of the EUB ultimately agreed to scrap the hearings around that application. He said that the board was going to go back to square one. In 2007 what he said was that the new panel will perform a fresh review of every issue, including whether the project is necessary. Then it went on to a whole bunch of other issues.

I recall that, of course, the government relied on that kind of assertion quite a bit to try and swim through the political controversy that had been created by that whole debacle. Yet here we are now, two years later, breaking that promise, backing out on that and saying: "No, we aren't going to go back to the drawing board. We're tired of consulting with people. We're tired of independent experts having an opportunity to publicly state their opinion. It's messy. It's embarrassing for us. We just don't want to be bothered to do it." That's what brings us to the point that we're at right now.

Of course, throughout this session and previously, certainly, members of this caucus, of the NDP caucus, have often characterized this government as secretive. Of course, members on the other side take great fun because we, apparently, say that quite a bit, and sometimes they'll think it's very fun to start, you know, shushing us because we say it so much. Maybe it's a laughing matter, but maybe it's what's really going on. For anyone to suggest . . . [interjection] Indeed, it happens now, and that's great. It's all very amusing, but here's the deal. You're taking something that is quasi-judicial, transparent, public hearings, full record, everyone has access to it, and you're taking that out of the public, and you're sliding it behind closed doors, and that's it. We're done. But somehow you think we're making it up when we call the government secretive. I don't think so.

I think this is a monumental symbol of what is probably the biggest characteristic of this government right now, which is their desire to dispense with any sort of open debate or opposition or challenge and instead to just sort of run it like a corporation and see the voters as inconvenient irritants to be pushed aside at the earliest opportunity. That is ultimately why we have concerns about this bill and why it is that I have to support this amendment.

The final point that I just want to make, of course, is that repeatedly throughout this debate government, who, of course, do have

loads of resources at their disposal to have people write them speaking notes and talking points – and they can reach into their ministries and get more speaking notes and talking points on various technical issues, and then after they've gotten all those resources allocated to them, they can get up and say: oh, the opposition doesn't know what it's talking about when it, you know, gets into the merits of this particular bill. They can say that.

They say that if you're not an electrical engineer, you really ought not to be even out here questioning this bill. There may be something to that, which, of course, goes back to the original position, which is why there should be independent electrical engineers, independent scientists, independent researchers, independent stakeholders, who do have an opportunity to contribute to an independent process that evaluates need. That's what this government is eliminating. In the same way that the opposition members are not necessarily experts on every element of what this bill purports to do, neither are members of the cabinet. That's why this ought not to be a decision of cabinet but rather should remain a decision that is reached through a more transparent and rigorous public process.

That is what the outcome would be were the amendment passed, and that's why I support it.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available.

Seeing none, any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore on the amendment.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the time that's allotted to be able to discuss the importance of the hoisting of Bill 50. I wish to speak to that. I speak in support of this. It is critical that this bill be hoisted and brought back in six months' time, and I wish to expound on why it is so critical, that this bill is not in the best interest of Alberta taxpayers and industry here. We want to restore the Alberta advantage, not continue to undermine it as this bill will do, surely, as it goes forward.

5:20

I stand to speak on behalf of what I call the true fiscally conservative and socially responsible Albertans throughout this province. They're very concerned with the way this government is unnecessarily spending taxpayers' dollars. There are three or four points this government has brought up on this bill. This government declares that it's required, they claim that it's needed, they claim that it's critical, and they use this fourth reinforcement that it's important. Nothing could be further from accuracy as far as the electrical system currently in place in Alberta could be.

Therefore, that's why this needs to be hoisted, why it needs to go through a proper regulatory process. Though I'm not one in favour of government red tape and the long problems that that can cause, it still is critical. I really appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Riverview as he discussed the undemocratic process that's going forward, the centralization of power and decision-making that's being put into the cabinet of this government. [interjection] As the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar wants to declare – what was that? Commies? It's a concern, and when we have these good members bringing that up, I think that Albertans need to take a step forward and realize that we have a real problem here at the Alberta Legislature with the current government and the direction that they wish to go in centralizing power and decision-making into cabinet and the Premier's office.

We need to ask some critical questions. It disturbs myself and many Albertans that have contacted me, the casual commitment of \$3.135 billion to put in these high-voltage, they say, DC lines. To me they're still PC lines. They're politically connected companies that are going to put these lines in place for their political friends.

It's not for the people of Alberta. There are just so many things that people have sent to me. This bill has so many flaws, Mr. Speaker, and they've been brought up so many times. Because of all the flaws we need, again, to hoist this bill and come back in six months. It needs to go before a regulatory hearing. It needs to go through a needs process, and it hasn't done that. It would fail to do that, and that's why this government is pushing it through.

They have embarked on a multimillion dollar advertising campaign. Their own members tried to institute a policy change to oppose this bill at their AGM. The government's corporate partners of Bill 50 are conducting their own public relations campaign to influence newspapers throughout the province. If we go back to 2004, the projected cost of a single AC line between Calgary and Edmonton was less than \$500 million. This government is committed to a massive overbuild at the cost of Alberta taxpayers and Alberta industry. This government wants to commit to a 4,000-megawatt politically connected line that isn't in Alberta's interest.

Is this government even aware of the local generation options that are out there? I've heard from some government members when I was speaking to them that they're concerned about a monopoly in the south. It's very easy to open it up for a competitive bid. When we look at the possibility of 3,000 megawatts of wind generation in the south, the most important thing that could happen, if that's what we wanted to do, is to have a dispatch ready between Calgary and southern Alberta. If there was a dispatch capacity to match that wind generation, it would easily allow us to continue developing that, and I believe that that's a choice that many Albertans would look at. The cost of that southern line upgrade is being overlooked, and we're putting first these two high-voltage PC lines that just are not required.

It's interesting when you listen and talk to the experts and the reports. These high-voltage lines, DC lines, are very questionable over short distances. I equate this to investing at this point for a short distance. Again, of course, though, if the hon. members from northern Alberta know that they're bringing in nuclear power, well, then that changes the whole dynamic of investment to build these lines because we're going to export, and those exporters are going to pay their fair transmission fees, and we're aware of that. Then that would change this discussion. But they continue to say: "Oh, nothing of the sort. There's no purpose." Three hundred kilometres, though, for an HVDC line? It's not economically viable. Is there another agenda in the back? They continue to fail. They're really putting their foot in their mouth by saying: "Oh, no. We just want this short high-voltage DC line".

The other question. There are so many things that are not proven yet when it comes to the technology of these high-voltage DC lines that could possibly have a dramatic effect on our pipelines in the ground. We have a tremendous amount of underground pipelines for our gas and oil industry. There are questions, and there hasn't been enough research yet to see what that would do to the lifespan of those pipes in the ground. It's something else that needs to be discussed, and it would probably only be discussed in front of a needs hearing and a regulatory process. Very, very concerning.

Why has this government eliminated the independent regulator? Does it see itself above the requirement for independent, arm's-lengths review? What does this mean for landowners and other stakeholders with legitimate concerns? There are so many areas.

There are a few other areas I guess I want to go over here briefly. This is going to be a new tax. For the government to spend \$3.15 billion, up to \$14 billion, is a debt on Alberta taxpayers, and that debt must be paid; therefore, that is a new tax.

This is a huge overbuild. We need to address the line loss. We need to address zone pricing. We need to address congestion. We need to address the age. This government continues to propagate

that these lines are old and rickety after 20 years. We need to address the short supply that this government says we're into. We need to discuss the centralized decision-making. Again, the good Member for Edmonton-Riverview did an awesome job today of reviewing all of the things this government has done in the last year to centralize power and decision-making.

We need to address and look at the cost of energy, Mr. Speaker. Energy is critical for our competitiveness going forward into the future. I have spoken at length about the loss of the Alberta advantage, the \$25 million this government spent on a new logo because they knew the Alberta advantage was gone, a total waste of taxpayers' money. All of these areas are of great concern.

Let's just talk for a minute about why this bill needs to be hoisted so that we're not taxed with an immediate \$3 billion. The cost of energy is critical. Agricultural people are under immense pressure right now trying to make ends meet, and the cost of energy is critical to them. Whether they're drying their grain, whether they're irrigating, whether they're running their harvesting and seeding equipment, all of that is related to power. They have a lot of electrical power that's involved in grain drying and in irrigation, and we can't afford an increase on the line cost to those companies.

The forestry and pulp industry, again, is at a critical point. With our rising dollar our competitiveness in exporting is being undermined. They cannot afford an increased tax and cost to the electricity that they use in their pulp and paper, in their production of plywood and other wood products. We need to look at the running of high-tech equipment. Even such simple things as the magnetic resonance imaging equipment takes a lot of power. If our power bills go up, our costs go up.

It's interesting – oh, I don't see it in the report that I have in front of me right now. I've got so many expert reports. But the building operators . . . [interjections] They laugh at the idea of reading the experts' reports. It is comical.

Ms Pastoor: They can't understand it.

Mr. Hinman: Well, the good Member for Lethbridge-East says that they don't understand it. She's been here longer than me, wiser than me. Perhaps she spends more time over there.

But the bottom line is that the experts' reports are critical. Why does this government laugh, and laugh out loud, at the idea of doing some research and looking at the things? They're not willing to answer the questions. The questions are critical, Mr. Speaker. Let's go over some of the questions that are brought up, some critical questions about transmission bills. There are so many that should be asked. Are the north-south lines mainly for export? That really does need to be addressed. Bill 50 is a huge blow to competitiveness because it actually forbids competition for wires and forces uneconomic choices.

5:30

Is our infrastructure old? No. The answer is it's not. Even AltaLink, when they're promoting their own company, brags about how new their lines are. They don't need upgrading.

AESO's 10-year plan. There are many reports out that say it could cost as much as \$1,700 a year for a family of four. Are these questions going to be asked by the minister? Absolutely not. [interjections] They even laugh in here. There's no chance in the future that they're going to ask these. We need to ask these questions, Mr. Speaker.

Another: what is the actual cost? Who pays for the electrical transmission? It's interesting that 61 per cent of the electricity being used is industry. If those lines go in there, it's going to be a huge cost to industry. We need to look at that.

Like I mentioned earlier, dispatch capacity between Calgary and

southern Alberta is critical if we want wind generation to come on, yet there is nothing in the future talking about that or a competitive bid for it to come forward. This bill needs to be hoisted. It needs to be come back in six months.

It's interesting, you know, that TransCanada had a video out in Oakville, Ontario, about a generation project that they posted in September of 2009. This is what they had to say. "A new gas-fired power plant needs to be up and running by 2013." Again, if it's critical and we have a supply shortage, the only quick and fast answer is to put in gas-fired generation. If it's critical, that's what we need to do. But they say, "to ensure a reliable and adequate supply of electricity for the area. Placing it close to the demand eliminates the need for costly upgrades to the transmission system." What a novel idea. Who would have possibly thought of that? Obviously not this government and for sure not the minister. They're not looking at that.

Why does our electrical policy forbid alternatives to wire? We need to ask that question. What is the easiest and most efficient way to get power around the province? The transmission regulation prohibits the Alberta Electric System Operator from considering economic alternatives to wires except in unusual circumstances. That isn't in the best interest to say that wires are the only solution. That would be like talking to our communications people and saying that there is no more wireless technology being allowed; you have to look at wires and lines and fibre optics. This is a draconian bill. It's going backwards. It's not looking to the forwardness.

It's interesting that the New Zealand Electricity Commission concluded that an Alberta model would result in overbuilt transmission and higher prices for consumers. I think I read somewhere where the report actually said that our system was nuts in the direction that we were going forward, a major concern.

Why does the minister need to have the power of Bill 50? It's interesting that Bill 50 gives it authority to designate critical transmission infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, and to decide who gets to build it. They don't even put it up for an open, competitive bid. They're just going to say: you guys build it; here it is. We get to declare it. But on June 8 through order in council they gave that to them. Then what did they do? They gave the go-ahead to two companies to start doing the engineering for these high-voltage DC lines. On August 25 they gave the go-ahead. The question is: was this action even legal? Was it ethical? Was it necessary? I don't believe that it was. Again, if you pass it, it can be legal. But is it just? No, I don't believe it is.

Mr. Speaker, there are just so many areas that need to be looked at. We need to have a competitive electrical grid. There is no question about it. There is no question that there are areas that need to be boosted.

Again, I'll say: between Calgary and Edmonton less than \$500 million. We look between Calgary and southern Alberta and the huge opportunity for wind. Let the free market come in there and decide if they want to do it.

Line loss, something that many members keep bringing up and talking about: regardless of how much electricity is transmitted, industry experts claim that the normal transmission system should experience its losses in the range of 5 to 7 per cent. [Mr. Hinman's speaking time expired]

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Well, you've mentioned the concerns over singular development already preapproved prior to Bill 50. You've talked about the insider experience of companies like ATCO and AltaLink. Are you concerned that this government is getting back in the business of being a business, that they claim they've left long ago?

Mr. Hinman: Well, thank the hon. member for that question. There's no question in my mind when you look at the power that is given to the minister in Bill 50 that this is a blatant abuse of democracy and the rule of law. In a needs process – I mean, the hon. member said that, oh, we'd complain if the AUC had it. Well, what's interesting in a regulatory needs hearing is that that can still be challenged, and it's interesting that it has been challenged in the last five years, and they lost in a court of law. So not only are we losing the democratic process; they're bypassing the rule of law, which jeopardizes incredibly the safety of the people and, I want to say, the economic soundness of our province and the Alberta advantage that we have.

You just have to look and read between the lines. Why would they be doing all these things? Either they're ignorant of the facts going forward and they're being told we need these things and they buy it, or else they understand very well the old PC way, their political connections, and what we need to do to reward these people in order to keep them as our friends. They can't have any friends that are just friends; they've got to always reward them, it seems like, in this time and era and this economic downturn.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) the hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, the hon. member opposite has on a couple of occasions indicated something to do with the fact that some of AESO's work, and he talks about other people's work, has been overturned – overturned – by a court of law. I'd like to ask the member if he would argue with the fact that in 2007 a decision or application was vacated – a decision or application was vacated – due to irregularities with the then EUB. It had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with AESO.

Mr. Hinman: Well, I believe the member is mistaken when he said that it has nothing to do with the other thing. That was a needs hearing. [interjections] Again, they like to cackle like chickens who laid an egg, and they don't know what the egg even has in it. It's a major problem, Mr. Speaker. It was vacated – and I don't know if I've got the document right here – but the reason why it was vacated was because of the bias of the information that AESO put forward. The reason why it was vacated was because they showed the bias of AESO in the evidence that they brought forward and said that they didn't show the needs. Again, the root of this whole thing is because of their inability to show the needs, that they're vacating all of this precedent that's been set for years and passing Bill 50 so they can just declare it. We need to go back to a needs process. It won't pass the smell test for the AUC, and it certainly won't pass in the courts with these high-voltage PC DC lines.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. The hon. member was talking earlier about the line losses, and he was interrupted, naturally, by the members across the way. The AESO report, the latest annual report, indicates there is \$220 million of value in electricity lost throughout the province in line losses, and the government maintains that it's of significant interest that we try to reduce those line losses.

Mr. Hinman: Excellent question. Thank you, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. It's interesting because AESO's own reports show that in 2007, 2008, and 2009 the year to date measured 4.1 per cent, 3.8 per cent, and 3.5 per cent respectively, far below the 5 to 7

per cent that's tolerable under a good electrical grid system. So that line loss is just natural. It's no different than saying that our car doesn't get 200 miles per gallon unless we were to drive it in a vacuum with no resistance. There's resistance. The average is 5 to 7 per cent, and we're running almost half of that here in the province. The critical needs; again, it doesn't pass on the congestion on it.

The Acting Speaker: Section 29(2)(a) is still available. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Taft: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I noticed the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was getting a lot of grief. [Dr. Taft's speaking time expired]

5:40

The Acting Speaker: Do any other members wish to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment lost]

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Mitzel
Allred	Hancock	Oberle
Amery	Hayden	Ouellette
Benito	Horner	Prins
Bhardwaj	Johnson	Rodney
Bhullar	Johnston	Sarich
Campbell	Knight	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Lukaszuk	Vandermeer
Doerksen	Lund	Xiao
Elniski	Marz	Zwozdesky
Fritz	McFarland	

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Swann
Chase	Mason	Taft
Hinman	Notley	Taylor
Kang	Pastoor	

Totals:	For – 32	Against – 11
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[Motion carried; Bill 50 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:53 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Select Special Auditor General Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Blakeman
Campbell
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Horne
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mrs. Forsyth
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
Kang
MacDonald

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr
Benito
Bhardwaj
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
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Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Second Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday, November 26, 2009

Issue 64

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 26, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant that we, the members of our province's Legislature, fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to introduce to you a group of very distinguished Albertans who work very hard on behalf of the Last Post Fund. Founded in 1909, the fund is sustained by private donations and by Veterans Affairs Canada. It seeks to ensure that no eligible veteran is denied a dignified funeral and burial for lack of funds. The group who are in the Speaker's gallery ensure that this is done regardless of circumstance. As I call out their names, if they would rise, please. Here to commemorate the Last Post Fund's centennial year are Jim Corbett, president; Brigadier General Bill Buckham, past president, and his wife, Keatha; Bill Rawluk, chairman; Lieutenant Colonel Brian Murphy, past president and honorary legal counsel; counsellors Mary Jane Belec and Rick Morrissey; Major Ken Usher, Alberta branch manager; and Susan MacEachran, who has received assistance from the fund for the burial of her late husband, Grant, earlier this year. I would invite our guests to receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some 24 grade 6 and 7 students along with their teachers, Mr. Dean Townsend, Mr. Ian Murdoch, Mrs. Alanna Merklene, as well as helpers Mrs. Darlene Duncan, Mrs. Clare Cole, and Mrs. Norma Nicolay. Many of these students are neighbours of mine as Condor is a hamlet about 20 miles east of Rocky Mountain House. I would like them to stand and have the Assembly give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my privilege today to introduce to you 61 students from St. Joseph's Collegiate school in Brooks. These students have travelled on two buses about five hours to get here yesterday and will travel home this evening. They are very excited to learn and eager to change the world. It was my privilege to speak to these students in their classroom about three weeks ago. They are accompanied today by four teachers, Mrs. Calin Musgrove, Mr. Jason Andrusiak, Miss Angela Bidyk, and Ms Marie Cailliau, and parents and helpers Mr. Mike Hollinda, Ms Trena Tait, Ms Leanne Anderson, and Mrs. Patty Schimmel and also bus drivers Mr. Garry Stein and Mr. Richard Young. I would ask them all to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of Albertans who represent my ministry's corporate services division. Corporate services is responsible for various corporate functions, including finance, administration, corporate planning, performance management, legal and legislative services. They've announced a great deal of tools and management systems to support our department in the implementation of our business plan. We have thirteen visitors today in the gallery. I'll ask them to rise as I call their names: Ms Edith Wong, Ms Alyssa Moritz, Mr. Michael Bell, Mr. Benedict Dy, Mrs. Alicia Garcia, Mrs. June Sawchuk, Mr. Shane Stuber, Ms Cheryl Vaillant, Mr. Terence Fung, Mr. Michael Rivest, Mr. Jas Deol, Mrs. Emilie Mahabir, and Mr. James Fan. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that all members give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't see my guests in the members' gallery, but they may be in the visitors' gallery, so I'll introduce them anyway. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests, Miss Luanne Whitmarsh and Mr. Brandon Powell from Calgary. There you are. Luanne Whitmarsh is the CEO of the Kerby Centre and leads 40 staff and over 600 volunteers at the centre. Luanne is a registered social worker who feels passionately and energetically about the people and programs at the centre. Brandon Powell is a strategic planning consultant with expertise in business, economic development, and urban and regional planning. Brandon has been consulting with the Kerby Centre over the past year to help them rebrand and to provide strategic planning for the centre's future. Please join me in welcoming Luanne and Brandon with the warm traditional welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Elizabeth DesCamp. Elizabeth is visiting from Calgary with Luanne and Brandon. Elizabeth is the director of the older adult program with Calgary Family Services, and she's shown an outstanding commitment to seniors in the community. Elizabeth and her staff have made a tremendous impact on the lives of seniors in Calgary. They've significantly increased their quality of life, especially through the elder friendly communities program. Elizabeth is standing here in the Assembly. Would you please join me in giving her the recognition that she so deserves.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly communications staff from the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, or ALMA. Joining us today are communications officers Carmen Palamarchuk and Nicole Paradis-Clancy, administrative assistant Amrit Matharu, and communications co-ordinator Gen Handley. ALMA is a bridge organization focused on achieving an internationally competitive and profitable livestock and meat industry for Alberta producers. They're seated in the members' gallery. I see that they're standing already, so I'd ask the House to please give them the usual warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the month of November thousands of men and women worldwide, myself included, have been growing moustaches or wearing fake ones to raise awareness and support for prostate cancer. I spoke about Movember in a member's statement yesterday. This afternoon I have the distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the other two members of my LAO Team Mo, who between the three of us have raised just a hair over \$1,200. These two gentlemen have worked hard all month to raise funds for this important cause by growing and grooming their 'staches, and it's not been easy for them to grow a moustache that small. I would ask both Mr. Ryan Algar, legislative assistant, and Mr. Graeme Ireland, assistant to the director of government members' caucus, to please rise so we can see their moustaches way down here and receive the traditional greeting.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's obviously hard to follow, and quite frankly I don't think I want to follow that. [interjection] Yeah, and no amount of money, sir, will make me do that.

1:40

It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some absolutely inspirational individuals working in the area of adult literacy, here today. At work, home, school, and play literacy helps build meaningful connections with others and supports everyone's ability to make good decisions throughout their lives. Today's guests are led by Ms Carol Aube-Girard of the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association, Margaret Rutherford of Edmonton public library, Candice Jackson from Literacy Alberta, Delena Tsang from Star Literacy, Adrienne Laughington from the Centre for Family Literacy, Rachel Posch from Edmonton John Howard Society, Susan Skaret from the learning centre, and Bonnie Caron and Iris Ayers from Project Adult Literacy Society. They're also joined by Beverly MacKinnon, the 2005 Canada Post literacy award recipient, as well as many students from the learning centre and from PALS. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Legislature two very able advocates from the Alberta Graduate Council. With us today are Mr. Ryan McCarthy from the University of Calgary, whom I had the chance to meet about two years ago as a presenter at a leadership program. With Ryan is Mr. Christopher Skappak from the University of Alberta and chair of the Alberta Graduate Council. During my meeting with a representative from the council earlier this week I discovered that Christopher is the Chris that my son has talked about ever since he started university here in Edmonton six years ago. I see that you also have other colleagues here with you, and I would like to ask all of you to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On September 16 the Rozsa Foundation of Calgary awarded their 2009 award for

arts administration. Of the nine nominees, five were from Edmonton, including the recipient of the award. Today I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly those five Edmontonians for their amazing, creative hard work on behalf of Edmonton's premier arts organizations and festivals. Joining us today in the public gallery is Shelley Switzer, who is the producer for the Edmonton street performers. She was also recognized in the spring with a mayor's award for innovative artistic direction. With her are, also, Penny Ritco, executive director of the Citadel Theatre – Penny, please rise – Mary Phillips-Rickey, the general manager for Edmonton Opera. Unfortunately, we're missing Todd Janes, who is the general manager for Latitude 53, but we do have the recipient of this year's Rosza award for arts administration, Tom McFall, who is the executive director of the Alberta Craft Council. As a special treat Penny's sister Marilyn Kennedy, who is visiting from Ontario, was also able to join us today. Please welcome these distinguished arts administrators.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Last Post Fund

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great honour to rise today and mark a very important anniversary, the 100th anniversary of the Last Post Fund.

Mr. Speaker, I take you back to the year 1909 in Montreal. A veteran named Arthur H.D. Hair, moved by a powerful sense of patriotism after finding out a soldier was buried without a proper funeral, acted to ensure that every soldier was buried with dignity. Mr. Hair's actions launched a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the honour of our veterans.

Over the past 100 years the Last Post Fund has never deviated from their principles, principles of dignity, compassion, and respect that presided over its birth. In co-operation with Veterans Affairs Canada the Last Post Fund ensures that no eligible veteran is deprived of a dignified funeral, burial, and headstone for lack of financial resources, as befit those who have served their country in wartime or in peace.

Since 2009 is the centennial year, the Last Post Fund organized a series of commemorative ceremonies across the country to honour the thousands of veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives to serve our great country. Mr. Speaker, the most important of these ceremonies took place this year on June 21 at the National Field of Honour, located in Pointe-Claire, Quebec. On that day the first cemetery in Canada entirely devoted to veterans was designated as a national historic site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

Through the course of its history the Last Post Fund has arranged funerals and, where necessary, burial and a grave marker for more than 145,000 veterans – 145,000 veterans. This is an astonishing number and shows that this fund plays an integral role in honouring our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, as noted earlier, the Last Post Fund is a nonprofit organization, and any donations to the Last Post Fund allow this organization to continue its work, from establishing commemorative projects across Canada to placing markers for veterans who lie in unmarked graves to supporting the Last Post Fund's National Field of Honour.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to pay tribute to Mr. Arthur Hair and his associates, who started this worthwhile organization, and all those who donate and assist the fund in their goals. I would like to end with this quote from the Last Post Fund: "To honour and protect in

death seems but a small return to those who have protected their country in life.”

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Arts Administrators

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I was able to introduce four of the five Edmonton arts managers who were nominated for the Rozsa awards. I am proud, proud fit to bursting, of these wonderful administrators. All of them work in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

As an arts administrator in my life before politics I so admire the skills, discipline, imagination, and talent these dedicated people have. They run organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets. They account for every penny to several levels of government and to the private-sector donors. They do more with less year after year after year.

Given the field, it is high praise indeed to honour Tom McFall as the recipient of the 2009 Rozsa award. For 10 years Tom has reinvigorated the Alberta Craft Council. He's created a centre of excellence by developing strategic plans with the board, establishing a downtown gallery and a shop to showcase and, more importantly, sell his members' fine crafts. Under his direction Alberta has increased its international reputation with Alberta fine craft artists exhibiting at the Smithsonian and now in South Korea at the 2009 Cheongju International Craft Biennale in Cheongju.

Like his colleagues, Tom is passionate, savvy to the market he works in, and collaborative with other artists and arts organizations in Edmonton and in Alberta. That is the secret weapon, Mr. Speaker. Alberta artists work together to survive in what can be a hostile environment. Tom has also volunteered his time with various art advocacy efforts and continues to provide leadership when asked.

I urge my colleagues to support these people and their organizations directly. Consider buying theatre tickets for volunteer recognition. Use the Craft Council items for silent auction contributions. Advertise in a festival brochure.

My admiration and respect to all of you, my administrative colleagues, and especially to you, Tom. It's very impressive. I know your staff and your family are very, very proud of your work. We are all grateful for what you all have brought to Edmonton and to Alberta.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Chronic Pain

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share information about National Pain Awareness Week, which is recognized during every first week of November. The goal of the campaign is to increase awareness of the debilitating effects of chronic pain and promote the need for more research into effective treatment for chronic pain.

National Pain Awareness Week was created by the Canadian Pain Coalition, a patient-led organization which includes clinicians, researchers, and educators. Six million Canadians suffer from chronic pain, which interferes with quality of life and productivity and which places huge demands and costs on our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure many of us here today have a personal experience in this regard. People in pain miss work. They spend time in the hospital, and they visit their doctor often.

According to the Pain Coalition in Canada there's a large gap between what is known and what is practised in the treatment of

pain. Activities and events during National Pain Awareness Week aim to make the public and health care professionals aware of the need for greater knowledge of the causes and treatments of chronic pain, including a number of methods that cost nothing extra: prevention, good nutrition, and a regular exercise regime.

In Alberta we have a number of excellent centres and clinics that provide pain assessment and management for a wide range of health conditions. Additionally, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research supports numerous research studies that investigate how pain can be better treated and controlled, but the truth is that every Albertan needs to become more informed about this significant health concern and actively seek new and better ways to avoid and conquer chronic pain.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mental Health Innovation Fund

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister of health said that he did not cut the mental health innovation fund. However, the Health and Wellness annual report, which the minister signed off on, shows the fund was completely unspent last year. To the Premier. This fund was budgeted for but not spent. You say it was a reduction, but reducing spending by 100 per cent is a cut. How can the Premier deny this?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to look into what the member raised yesterday, and there was a three-year commitment of funding of \$75 million to the mental health innovation fund, which was distributed at previous regional health authorities and now to Alberta Health Services. It went for some 36 projects. However, all \$75 million was not allocated. There simply was a surplus of some \$25 million, and that's going to be flowed as we move forward into the next budget year. So for the hon. leader to say that when you have a surplus, that's a cut, I mean, that math just doesn't make any sense at all.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier is concerned about the state of mental health treatment in Alberta and getting people out of hospital, into community, this is a fund that would help that. Can the Premier explain why this money specifically budgeted to improve mental health was not spent?

Mr. Stelmach: As the minister indicated, there was \$75 million available. It was available to those authorities that presented good, worthwhile projects, and the money that was expended was expended on those projects. There's \$25 million that's in surplus. It may be used for other worthwhile projects that may come forward, but as the minister said, the money will flow forward.

Dr. Swann: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the mental health innovation fund was not spent, and it's not budgeted for in '09-10. Could the Premier explain why the program has now been permanently cut?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it hasn't been permanently cut. What I said earlier was that we have extended the \$25 million into the next budget year. In addition, we've committed, through our children's

mental health strategy, three-year funding of \$50 million. I will repeat what I said yesterday. Going forward, we are allocating additional dollars to mental health in this province, not less.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Budget

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Today's quarter update proves this government has taken no action to stop the fiscal swings our province is plagued with. We have a \$4.3 billion structural deficit, and the government is just sitting on its hands hoping things will get better. The only action taken was to cut core public services without providing any details as to the impact these cuts will have on Albertans. To the Premier: outside of relying on natural gas prices to increase, how is the government going to remove the structural deficit he got us into?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the issues we're facing as the province of Alberta are external factors created by a world economic recession that, again, was placed upon our shoulders by some of the irregular banking regulations across the country. We have done a very good job in preparing for this by setting aside \$17 billion in the surplus gas fund. We call it the sustainability fund. We will use that fund to cover three-quarters of the anticipated deficit over this year and next year, and the other quarter will come from trimming our spending.

Dr. Swann: We now know that millions and millions of dollars will be cut from education, health care, and children's services, but we don't know how. Why is this government so secretive about where they're finding these cuts?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we took a very progressive step forward when we decided that it was probably more prudent to take some thoughtful reflection and look very carefully into government and see what we can do better. It's absolutely a tribute to the public service and to our administrative directors that we've been able to remove nearly a billion dollars out of government spending, and they don't even know where it happened.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, when faced with a need for fiscal constraint, why did this government choose the core public services of health and education as the biggest places to cut rather than reducing the bloated size of this cabinet?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, it would take a Liberal to think we could cut \$180 million out of the cabinet.

Let me deal with the health issue because that's the largest percentage of dollars. You know, we have a \$12.8 billion operating budget in health care, Mr. Speaker, and if you take 1 and a half per cent variance, that's \$120 million. This particular department is strictly run on demand: public demand, physicians' demand. We have to make some projections. What we've been able to find is less demand by physicians on the electronic medical records, less cost for prescription drugs because more generics are coming on stream. I guess I would ask the Leader of the Opposition: does he not want us to show those savings to Albertans?

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my questions to the Premier, not the minister of health, who can't budget to save his life. To the Premier: why is this government cutting \$80 million from public education when it continues to support horse racing and ineligible farm fuels to the tune of \$65 million?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to education the minister has had a good dialogue with school boards. The school boards are sitting at about 400 and some million dollars' worth of surplus. He's asked school boards to dip into those surpluses starting this year to take any reductions or any kind of cutbacks out of the classroom. He's been able to do that, and school boards are co-operating. That just shows that the government has a good working relationship with the school boards and is leading in this plan.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't believe that because I saw evidence of the working relationship between the school boards and the Minister of Education the other morning at breakfast.

Again to the Premier: why is the government cutting \$188 million out of the health budget when you could shrink the size of cabinet by four and save \$54 million and leave the public health care budget alone?

Mr. Stelmach: I know that we're nearing the last few hours of this session. But, boy, if you took \$54 million for four ministers and you divided that by 23, then multiplied it again by the \$54 million, that is – I don't know where they're getting these figures.

Once again yesterday just all kinds of misinformation and, you know, blue skying everything. Again, the same evidence here. We know that we have to find \$2 billion in our budget. We will do that. I said yesterday that we were going to do that while protecting the core services of this government. We're getting a good buy-in from municipalities, from school boards, from the Alberta Medical Association, everyone. They're all working together as Albertans to make sure that at the end of two years we're back in the black and we're putting money back into the sustainability fund.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. The Premier knows he has no intent of protecting public services. Why is this government spending millions of dollars on marketing firms, branding campaigns, and the Public Affairs Bureau while it's cutting the budget of public health care, public education, and children's services?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our exports value at about \$100 billion. We have to be very diligent to ensure that we have the correct factual information out in all our markets, whether it be on what we're doing on air emissions, climate change, water strategy, just ensuring that the markets that we export to don't close the doors because of continued misinformation, most of that misinformation, quite frankly, coming from the party opposite.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:00

Support for Alberta Families

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has failed Alberta families. The rollout of the H1N1 vaccine was a failure of leadership that ignored high-risk populations and became a national embarrassment. Health care faces cuts and chaos while

energy companies receive billion-dollar subsidies for enhanced oil recovery. Why is the Premier forcing struggling Alberta families to pay the price of this government's bungling, its secrecy, and its misplaced priorities?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's the difference with a government that looks forward to the future and actually puts some common sense into where we spend our money. The \$2 billion that we have set aside for carbon capture and storage will in the end reduce the cost of coal-fired electricity because we will reduce the amount of carbon that will be put into the air. Secondly, the other project that was just announced the other day: we will use carbon dioxide to go back to the established oil fields and get more of the resource that's in the ground, and we'll do that without building any more roads, destroying any more trees, or drilling any more wells. There's about 60 per cent, at least, of the resource in the ground, and we're going to use carbon to extract it. Then, in fact, we'll get much more than the \$2 billion in royalties.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's failure to protect public health care is undeniable, and what's worse is that it's deliberate. Operating under a veil of secrecy, this government has an agenda to privatize health care, which is causing increased hospital wait times, worse care for seniors, and bed closures. The Premier has failed Albertans, and he's taking the province in the wrong direction. To the Premier. Why won't you admit your secret? Families get less while your corporate sponsors of this Progressive Conservative government get more.

Mr. Stelmach: Looks like even the leader is getting tired.

Mr. Speaker, we have, I believe, found good balance in our budgeting process given the fact that we are facing a significant drop in the price of natural gas. For natural gas every dollar change in gigajoule of one unit is about a loss of \$1.1 billion to our budget. The other is that for every penny increase in the Canadian dollar compared to the American dollar annualized we lose about \$221 million. Those are the kind of balls in the air that we're balancing to make sure that we have the correct projections, protect our programs, yet at the end of two years ensure that we have money to put back into the sustainability fund to protect us for another recession or economic downturn that may come for the next generation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This Premier insists on putting his corporate friends ahead of ordinary Albertans. Every month Alberta families will look at their electricity bill and be reminded that this government is picking their pockets to benefit power companies. In the meantime, services are being cut across the board. When will the Premier admit that he's failing Alberta families by forcing them to pay more for less?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I guess, the hon. member doesn't get a chance to look at his bill, but he'll find that the price of electricity actually has dropped. That's a plus. We have the most generation increase here in Alberta compared to other provinces, oh, and, by the way, the most green energy generated per capita, no matter how you measure it, right here in the province of Alberta, which really is known for its energy on the hydrocarbon side. We've done a tremendous job leading the nation in terms of generation and also keeping the costs low.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Funding for Fort McMurray Area

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week in this House the minister of the Treasury Board – I don't call him president because it sounds too expensive – the word that he said was that he may consider cutting funding to Fort McMurray, the goose that's laying the golden egg. I know he didn't really mean that because he understands the value. My question to him from the folks in the coffee shop is this: have you decided to give more money to the Minister of Transportation? We actually see work being done on highway 63 that we hadn't seen all summer long. Have you given him some more money?

Mr. Snelgrove: Magically – magically – there is a very comprehensive plan, Mr. Speaker, that deals with the infrastructure rollout all across Alberta. You know, one of the things that happens in many different provinces is that you may have areas of high economic activity, but it's localized. In Alberta we've got growth that covers the province. Naturally, a great deal of it stems from Fort McMurray. We've allowed the Minister of Transportation – we've encouraged it. He's the one lobbying for it. We have been building infrastructure in Fort McMurray at a terrific pace, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While driving back to my constituency last weekend, around the Wandering River area I saw about 30 to 40 kilometres of clear-cutting that's going on, which is evidence of work that citizens that I speak to in the coffee shop can see. To the Minister of Transportation: I'd like to know what the plan is relative to the dollars that are being spent on highway 63, such an important corridor to the oil sands development in transporting goods and also to citizens.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've got to give this hon. member kudos. He's always out there fighting for his constituents. He's sometimes not sure what they want, but he's always out there fighting for them anyway.

I will say that the President of the Treasury Board actually doesn't give anybody anything. He's a real – I don't know what you would call the President of the Treasury Board. He likes to make sure he gets things done right, but sometimes you have to talk about people being a little tight, you know? Anyway, I will say to the hon. member that we're working very, very hard on the highway to Fort McMurray. We are doing about 35 kilometres of brushing there right now. The second phase on our two interchanges up there is just getting under way. Our five-lane bridge is coming along very strong. We're doing a lot of work in that hon. member's constituency.

Mr. Boutilier: The first part of the response, I think, was bordering on the G-word, gibberish. The second part of the answer was pretty good. That is comforting to know.

My question is again to the Minister of Transportation. I know the Treasury Board is recognizing the golden goose. We want to continue to feed the golden goose that generates revenues. I have to ask you: do you support the golden goose being fed relative to highway 63, and in fact what can you do to enhance the funding to help the oil sands in the future in terms of growing the business to ultimately generate more revenue for all Albertans, including Fort McMurray?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't really call it the golden goose. I actually honestly believe that we have to look after all Albertans. I do believe that Fort McMurray is a huge opportunity for this province. I think we do everything in our power to keep all the people that work up there safe. We want to generate as much economic development as we can for them, but in the meantime, we're going to keep up with the infrastructure that's needed for those people to have a good quality of life.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Climate Change

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. People want this government to be strong on the environment, to be a leader, to protect us, and to do something concrete on climate change. What citizens see is a lot of talk, lots of pretty pictures, and very little action. To the Minister of Environment: will the Premier go to Copenhagen and show leadership and not just protectionism for business as usual, like Alberta's coal-fired power plants?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's good timing that the member should ask this question. I just returned as little as half an hour ago from Ottawa, where provincial environment ministers met with the federal minister, and we talked about just that issue: what is Canada's position going to be in Copenhagen? I don't have a lot of time to go through a large position in 35 seconds, but if she will ask some supplementary questions, I'll be more than happy to provide a little bit more information.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I hope it's about action, not just talk.

Back to the same minister: given that Alberta has excelled at doing as little as possible and the U.S. target is much tougher, is Alberta prepared to leap from doing as little as possible to the U.S.'s more demanding standards?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has indicated that we support the position that has been adopted by Canada, and that position is that there would be a 20 per cent reduction. The United States just came out yesterday and announced that they would be aiming towards a 17 per cent reduction by 2020. There's a one-year difference in the base year between the two. You do the math, and it works out to about the same thing. Alberta is prepared and is committed, and in fact Albertans expect the government of Alberta to meet that commitment.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Back to the same minister. Well, given that this government would have Alberta's emissions continue to increase until 2020, how will the minister ensure that Alberta meets its part of the federal target of a 20 per cent reduction below 2006 levels by 2020?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, part of the plan – and the member knows very well – is the application of technology. That technology takes some time. Technology such as carbon capture and storage, technology such as transformational technology that greens energy production takes some time. The fact of the matter is that this world, this Earth, is going to be dependent to some extent on hydrocarbons for the next 15 to 20 and perhaps even 30 years. What we need to

do in Alberta is ensure that we have the same degree of effort, the same commitment to CO₂ reduction that the rest of the world is taking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

H1N1 Influenza Immunization Program

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Canada's top doctor bluntly stated her frustration with the nasty politicking that has erupted around the H1N1 response. Yesterday, Anne Doig stated that both doctors and patients are frustrated that politicians waged a war of words alleging mismanagement of the nation's response to H1N1. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Mr. Minister, you have been quoted saying Alberta's vaccination program has been a success. On what basis are you making these assertions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member's preamble refers to something I'm going to table later in the House, five copies. Yes. It is some comments made by the head of the Canadian Medical Association, and I'm going to table them for the purposes of the Leader of the Opposition, who reminds us constantly that he is a physician, so that and he can see what the head of the Canadian Medical Association thinks about some of his antics over the last few weeks.

What has been a success, Mr. Speaker, is that as of the end of day yesterday some 800,000 Albertans have been vaccinated with the H1N1 vaccine. That's roughly 24 per cent of our population. I want to take this opportunity as this Legislature winds down to encourage all members, all Albertans to continue to go and receive their vaccinations. I'm going to go on Saturday to get mine, and I hope that everyone in this Assembly by the end of this weekend is vaccinated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is to the same minister. H1N1 has dominated the news. My constituents from Edmonton-Ellerslie, especially those with a chronic illness, are asking how they will be able to receive the seasonal flu vaccine with such a great focus on the H1N1 program.

Mr. Liepert: Well, the member is absolutely correct that during the rollout of the H1N1 vaccine program we had to temporarily suspend the seasonal flu vaccination. But I am pleased to say that starting on Monday, Mr. Speaker, at all the mass immunization clinics you can receive both your H1N1 and your seasonal flu vaccine. In addition to that, we are now in the process of getting our H1N1 vaccine out to physicians and pharmacists, those that want to administer the vaccine. At the same time, you can go to those particular physicians and pharmacists, and you'll also be able to receive your seasonal flu vaccine.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Postsecondary Education Costs

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the session concluding, the minister of advanced education has one final chance to provide clarity and comfort to postsecondary students concerned about the

affordability of their education, which would also provide a sense of job security for support staff and for untenured professors. If the minister of advanced education is going to entertain sizable increases to tuition, will he also revisit lifetime student loan limits to ensure that graduate students do not find themselves unable to borrow to finance their education?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, all things are being reviewed, and we will be reviewing lifetime loan limits. They are also a cost pressure that we have in our department, and I would reiterate again as I'm sure the hon. member will be going back to the headlines to do his research: there are no proposals in my department at present for any increases above the CPI maximum for tuition.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The beauty of *Hansard* is that we have a historical record, so when I ask the minister in the spring why he didn't follow through with his review, it'll be there on record. Will the minister admit that a provincial arts and culture endowment, as we have urged for some time, would have helped to cushion vulnerable graduate students in the social sciences and the humanities from the worst of the downturn?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, our comprehensive research institutions are struggling with the endowments that they have, that they've become somewhat dependent on in some areas. Certainly, we're reviewing all of the funding mechanisms that we have for our postsecondaries. In fact, we've been working with our postsecondary partners over the last 12 to 15 months on the potential of a new funding framework that we might be able to use that would help all faculties. We intend that in the new year we're going to be looking at that as potentially being brought forward as part of our budget process. The hon. member will have ample time to debate my budget here in this House in the spring.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Yes, postsecondary institutions are struggling with the recession's effect on endowment funds, but the logic that they would have suffered even greater losses had their endowments been higher is a little bit abstract. Instead of giving institutions arbitrary one-off exemptions to raise tuition above provincial caps, why doesn't the minister simply return the setting of tuition rates to the provincial Legislature, where they were, rightfully, before they became the sole discretion of the minister under Bill 40?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have something in the thousands of different programs that are offered throughout the 26 postsecondary institutions in the province. We have thousands of various different tuition levels. I don't believe that anyone has ever brought forward into this House a list of all of the tuitions and then asked this House to debate whether or not those tuitions are higher or lower or correct. I believe that the process that we have in place with the CPI cap is a very valid process. It's one that protects students from across-the-board increases higher than what the consumer price index is and will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Big Prairie Road Bridge

Mr. Marz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past month a bridge on the Big Prairie Road over the Little Red Deer River was totally destroyed by fire set by vandals. The cost of the removal of the rubble is over \$70,000 alone, which I understand has been made available to the county of Mountain View by the Minister of Transportation, and I appreciate that. The people are concerned that the creosote-treated lumber that's now in the river – and the river is freezing up – has not yet been cleaned up. To the Minister of Transportation: when can the community expect this cleanup and removal to be completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to tell the hon. member that I am aware of this unfortunate incident. My department has been working with the county, providing advice on how to deal with the removal of the truss and burned material from the waterway. We have provided \$84,000 through the local bridge program. I understand that the county has received quotes for the project, and I'm sure the work is going to begin, if it hasn't already, very shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thanks for that, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the replacement costs are well over \$2 million for a new bridge. Could the minister explain whose responsibility it is to replace this bridge?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, this bridge is a local bridge, so the county would be responsible for its replacement. That said, the county can apply for provincial funding under the local bridge program, but I have to tell you that the program has been fully committed for the '09-10 year. We have also asked the county to provide information on other crossings in the area to evaluate priorities that could assist with future funding decisions.

Mr. Marz: Again, thanks for that to the Minister of Transportation. But, you know, the constituents regularly use this bridge for daily trips to work, moving agricultural equipment, also for emergency services. They're very concerned about the reliability of detours because of the constant flooding of the river. Is there any other assistance aside from what the minister already stated, such as an emergent fund that maybe could be accessed for this type of structure?

2:20

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we would review any funding request based on priorities and available budget. The county can also use some of the provincial grant funding that is available to municipalities. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we give hundreds of millions of dollars to municipalities every year to try to help with their infrastructure. They could use the rural transportation grant money, the AMIP money, the MSI money, the new deals for cities and communities. There are a bunch of different grants that I'm sure would be eligible in order to do that project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The '08-09 annual report for Seniors and Community Supports showed that \$42 million was unspent in AISH supports last year. This is money that was debated

in budget and was meant to support Alberta's most vulnerable people. To the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: what is the minister's reason for such a large amount from AISH supports not going to those who need it most and whose workers are quitting because of lack of funding?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As anybody knows if you've ever been involved in the budget process, you have to do projections for the year ahead. One of our projections included an increase in the caseload for AISH clients and an increase in the caseload of seniors who might be going into assisted living facilities because we have a supplementary accommodation benefit for them. In that year the uptake that we expected didn't happen, and that's why we had that extra money in the budget that she saw in the report that she received the other day.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Perhaps part of the uptake was because some of the rules had been changed, and it's more difficult to get into these programs.

Can the minister explain what happened to the \$42 million from AISH and the \$54 million from income support for seniors that went unspent last year? Is this money still on your books, or has it gone back to general revenue?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind everybody that in last year's budget, announced for April 1, we gave an increase of \$100 in the AISH allowance for each of our 40,000 AISH members. That would be \$1,188 per month.

Getting back to the question that I was just asked, what we did was reallocate the money within the budget. We used some of that money for lodge modernization improvement. We have lots of lodges throughout this province that need some modernization. We've put money towards that, and we've put money towards more capital projects for assisted living for our seniors.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you to the minister for that. I actually have two questions, so now I'm in a quandary. I'm going to go to my true, standard question that I ask every six months. Why will the minister not commit to indexing AISH supports in the same way that MLA salaries are?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we all know that projecting our budgets is a very difficult exercise. Projecting the future is a very difficult exercise. I want to make sure that the programs that we have for our most vulnerable people in this province are sustainable into the future. I think the way that we conduct our AISH program, which is a review every two years and this year an increase of a hundred dollars per month, an increase probably never seen before, are the reasons why I want to be able to maintain the flexibility of having that review every two years and giving more than a cost-of-living increase when necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Support for Children in Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the most recently released quarterly report, the Ministry of Children and

Youth Services admits that there were 37 incidents of abuse to 58 children in the minister's care between January and March alone. The majority of these involved some form of abuse at the hands of foster parents. Now, the minister has known for years that they don't have enough foster parents or adequate resources but this year could only point to a net increase of 37 foster parents. Since the minister so clearly has so much more work to do to protect our children, on what planet could she have concluded that her ministry could afford to hand over \$16 million to the Provincial Treasurer?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, they're correct in that we had \$16 million. I'm pleased to say those savings are being made without impacting any children or families in this province. About \$5 million of that will be savings through the hiring freeze. Again, those positions have nothing to do with front-line workers, which is great. The rest of the savings are all discretionary funding. So I can assure this member that it is not going to impact families and children in this province.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, no impact means no improvement.

Now, in his annual report the advocate expressed considerable concern about how kinship care is failing Alberta's children. Since he works directly for the minister, his criticisms have to be tempered. So when he expresses concern, we know it's an issue screaming for attention. The report suggests that funding, support, and placement of kids in inappropriate situations are areas of current ministry neglect. Clearly, the minister has more work to do. Clearly, you couldn't afford to lose that money. How can you justify reducing your budget by one single cent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are so many things that I could address there. First of all, I know that the advocate is very supportive of our kinship program. As far as improvements, what we're all about is continuous improvement. I've said before that this is a very immense system. It is a high-risk business. What's really important and what I do not support is undervaluing or discrediting our staff. What I do focus on is minimizing risks, which is very important, and maximizing our strengths. How we do that is through our commitment to continuous improvement.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are chronic problems, and there is no evidence of improvement. Now, this government is fond of comparing our current deficit and money management issues to a family budget, but every responsible parent knows that you don't increase your mortgage payments if it means that you're not going to be able to feed your kids. The minister is the de facto parent for roughly 9,000 of Alberta's children, but she's not acting responsibly. Why isn't the minister advocating for enough money to address the long-standing failures of her ministry rather than writing a cheque to the minister of finance for funds she can't afford to lose?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we are acting responsibly. Again, when we talk about improvement, I mean, we've done nothing this year but demonstrate over and over the commitment to improvement. That was through the foster care review, through the work that's being done through the kinship review, the advocacy review, and it's not just reviewing the system; we actually have been acting on all recommendations that are coming forward. I would suggest to this member – I know that she's

well aware, and I've mentioned it to the House before – that right now under way we have a child intervention panel that's taking a look at our entire system to really check out whether we have the capacity to deal with all kinds of social issues that are emerging. I would suggest that there is a call for public input. If anyone goes to our website, there is a discussion guide. We're seeking advice, and I would suggest that this member, if she's got any feedback to provide, goes ahead and does that. We'd welcome it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Rocky Mountain World Heritage Sites

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents and, for that matter, constituents from Livingstone-Macleod to north of Peace River are concerned by media reports this week that more provincial parks may be included in a new Parks Canada submission to expand Canadian Rocky Mountain parks world heritage sites in Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Could the minister please explain what is happening and how this report came about?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. I've seen the media stories that have been arising from the national parks draft management plan document, which mentions a proposal to include provincial parks in the expanded world heritage sites. But in this province we are implementing the plan for parks, and we're using the government's land-use framework as the vehicle for how we decide these policies. We're not actively working on this. I have not allocated any budget to it. The hon. member is right: we would extensively be consulting with his constituents if this was in fact happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Does your department plan to move forward on the expansion of the Rocky Mountain sites under a UN designation, and if so, what limitation would it put on the province to manage its own provincial parks and wilderness areas?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear first. We manage the provincial parks. Even if there was a world heritage designation put on it, we would still manage the provincial parks. But as to the UNESCO designation, it is a good thing. There are 15 in this country. We have five. We're really proud of that. It tells the whole world: we've got some special stuff here you want to come see. So it's not a bad thing. But let me reiterate to this member: we manage the provincial parks, and we will continue to.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Secondary Ticket Sales

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the Grey Cup approaching, this government has chosen to leave ticket buyers totally unprotected from inflated ticket prices from secondary ticket sales. A Service Alberta spokesman has even admitted that Alberta has recently scrapped its only antiscalping law. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why won't the minister protect Grey Cup fans from being ripped off?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to ticket reselling, that is indeed under the Fair Trading Act, and the Fair Trading Act does have protection under that act. I have to say that of the 140,000 calls we get to our consumer line, we've only had about 20 calls on ticket reselling. That's really important to note here. With respect to the Grey Cup event happening in Calgary, it's really important for consumers, if they are going to purchase a ticket, to know that it is a valid ticket and to do their homework.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister clearly doesn't understand the Fair Trading Act. As we have already argued on another issue, the Fair Trading Act only requires a corporation to disclose just how much they are charging consumers but doesn't protect against scalping practices. So to the minister again: given that Internet sales sites like Ticketmaster have nearly a monopoly on tickets for major venues, how can the minister say that people should simply choose not to buy tickets from Internet scalping sites? Won't the minister admit that the government has to take some action on this?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the issue of Ticketmaster right now, the federal Competition Bureau is looking at that very issue as we speak. With respect to the price of tickets, as Minister of Service Alberta it's not my job to tell Albertans what they should be paying for tickets, and that's what's really important here. The consumers have the power in their hands to buy valid tickets, and I would encourage them to purchase tickets from reputable sources.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All that Ticketmaster has done is to change the way consumers are directed to secondary websites. That doesn't solve the problem. To the same minister again: given that the governments of Saskatchewan and Ontario have introduced legislation to crack down on secondary ticket sales, why is Alberta moving in the opposite direction by eliminating Internet scalping protection for consumers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed aware of the new legislation that has been proposed in Saskatchewan. It's really important to note that here in Alberta with the whole ticket reselling business, there are new ways of approaching it, paperless tickets. There are a number of issues. With respect to protecting consumers, the regulations that Service Alberta has recently developed with respect to heat submetering, payday loans, and gift cards, those are the regulations that protect consumers and protect their pocketbooks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Oil Sands Global Image

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as the climate change fearmongering and rhetoric heats up leading up to the Copenhagen summit in a couple weeks, hilarity has ensued with an individual,

who shall remain unnamed, spreading convenient lies about Alberta's oil sands operations. Could the hon. Minister of Energy provide this Assembly and all Albertans assurances that these convenient lies are just that?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the government of the province of Alberta works extremely hard developing policy and working with our industry partners to address the concerns around greenhouse gas emissions. We do have energy input reduction programs. I would suggest that perhaps some individuals may want to park their airplanes and look a little closer to home with respect to the greenhouse gas emission problem. Now, the Jacobs report will indicate that mined bitumen feedstock into U.S. refineries, in fact, is more CO₂ friendly than California thermal-assisted heavy production.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the hon. Minister of Energy as well. What is the minister doing to protect the ingenuity, risk, and hard work of Albertans in developing one of the world's most innovative energy and environmental operations from the convenient mistruths of someone who is only interested in self-promotion and turning a profit based on fear and misinformation?

Mr. Knight: Well, I think that now we have a situation here where the world – the world – is recognizing the work that the province of Alberta is doing under the leadership of this Premier with carbon capture and storage. It's stellar work moving ahead. It is an inconvenient truth that individuals have had periods of time – one I could think of, eight years – to ratify international treaties that would help to clean up issues that they have. He did nothing. He had his chance, and he did not lead. Mr. Speaker, this government will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Contracted Children's Services Agencies

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In responding to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the children's minister referenced an internal review that is being conducted. I hope that review will be tabled early in the next spring session and not sanitized like previous child advocate reports.

Social agencies now have a timeline placed on their funding to help children with a range of disorders from fetal alcohol syndrome to drug addiction and behavioural problems. To the minister: if the funding is limited by time rather than progress, how will these agencies be able to care for children without provincial funding once their time runs out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually not sure which review you were speaking to. If it was the child intervention panel review, we do expect a report in the spring and recommendations, and certainly that would be public.

I didn't quite catch the second question. Maybe you could forward me some more information on what you're speaking about with timelines.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The reason you didn't hear the second question was that your hon. members were shouting.

How can the minister be sure that funding based on unfeasible time limits will not negatively impact quality of care for these kids? Hopefully, the Member for Calgary-Egmont didn't prevent you from hearing that question.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I assume the member – are you talking about contracted agencies? [interjection] No, I didn't understand the question.

Anyways, again, if you want to give me some details. I can tell you that our contracts with contracted agencies are focused on what's best for the child, and timelines do not enter that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Outcomes-based. Social workers, doctors, psychologists, and agency service providers working under the auspices of the ministry have no clearly established responsibilities. Without clear roles and responsibilities we have seen that kids fall through cracks that, Ms Minister, have now become crevasses. Why is the minister not clearly defining these roles for outcomes-based options?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that he identified what he is talking about with outcomes-based. I think what's really important to state here is that we are not moving forward on outcomes-based formulas without working with our contracted agencies. I said the other day that, you know, our agencies are fairly enthusiastic about that. They're passing on those opinions. We're finding that where outcomes-based exists elsewhere, they're seeing awfully good results. So I certainly would stand behind the movement of working with our contracted agencies to try to improve outcomes for kids.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Oil Sands Air Quality Monitoring

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Acid rain and its effect on our lands and waterways are serious concerns of my constituents and all Albertans. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Claims were made in the media this past summer that we have stopped testing for acid rain in the Fort McMurray region. How are my constituents who live in close proximity to industrial development like the Cold Lake oil sands and Fort McMurray oil sands being protected if the government is putting less of a priority on testing for acid rain?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this member and her constituents that testing, in fact, does remain a priority for this government. We do need to be vigilant. Acid deposition sampling has been in place in this province for in excess of 30 years. We have been reviewing that program, and we've determined that there are 12 areas in this province that have intensive emissions that warrant regular, ongoing monitoring. In other areas in the province probably intermittent monitoring is appropriate. I can assure the hon. member that the results of all of this monitoring are indicating that we do not have an issue. We do not have a problem with acid rain and acid deposition, and our job is to keep it that way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplementary is to the same minister. Factors contributing to acid rain such as industrial development are expected to increase in coming years. What is the government doing to ensure that our lands and water resources are protected in the future in areas like Fort McMurray and Cold Lake?

2:40

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we take our responsibility extremely seriously. I mentioned that we have been testing for 30 years, and that testing has indicated that there is not a concern with acid deposition that would pose any risk to the environment. That being said, it's a known fact that there is expanding industrial development in this province, and it's absolutely essential that we be vigilant to ensure that this situation that currently exists continues to stay in place. I will assure the member that that will be the case.

The Speaker: Well, the time has expired. Hon. members, we have a very, very full Routine to get through before 3 o'clock. That was 90 questions and responses today. I'm not going to stop the Routine. We're going to continue to move very quickly.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Helping Our Students to Succeed Project

Ms Calahasen: Thank you. The helping our students to succeed, otherwise known as HOSTS, project operates in three High Prairie schools and serves grades 6 to 9 students and their families. Grades 6 to 9 is a crucial time in a child's life as they begin to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally. Unfortunately, it is estimated that 10 to 20 per cent of Canadian youth are affected by mental illness resulting from anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, and other mental health issues.

However, research shows that community-based mental health services such as the HOSTS project that support families and communities are part of prevention and early detection as well as part of the solution in avoiding the much greater downstream costs resulting from the prevalence of mental health illness in Canada. Consistent with the best practice literature regarding child and youth mental health services, the primary goal of the HOSTS project is to promote resiliency skills in students, skills which enable youth to bounce back from life's setbacks and challenges. Toward this goal, the HOSTS project provides one-on-one support for students at risk, develops and implements prevention and health promotion initiatives within the schools, and connects students and their families with community resources and services.

Over the past two and a half years the HOSTS team has built strong relationships within the High Prairie region and with the staff and students in their schools. These relationships have allowed HOSTS to play a vital front-line role in prevention and early detection of youth mental health issues in the High Prairie region. More so, the HOSTS project has come to serve a critical role in the lives of students who are at risk of falling through the cracks. The success of the HOSTS project in High Prairie has been facilitated by its foundation in community partnerships, which have allowed the development of a truly unique and dynamic team approach to mental health capacity building within the schools.

The team consists of a project co-ordinator; a youth success coach; an aboriginal mentorship coach; a health and wellness coach, who is contracted through Alberta Health Services; and an addictions counsellor, who is contracted through Alberta mental health and addictions services. This complement of roles has fostered a holistic approach to student mental health and well-being. As a result, the students and families of the High Prairie region are the lucky recipients.

Congratulations. You truly are making a difference.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next Thursday, December 3, marks the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Proclaimed by the United Nations in 1982, this day is dedicated to improving the understanding of disability issues and affirming our commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities. It is also a day set aside to celebrate the courage and achievements of our fellow Albertans who live with disabilities and in particular their many contributions to our economy, our culture, and an improved quality of life for all.

Around the province the International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebrations will feature presentations of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities awards of excellence. These awards honour and recognize Albertans with disabilities and those who support them in four categories: education, employment, community, and public awareness. Mr. Speaker, as a province we have a collective responsibility to ensure that people with disabilities receive the supports and services they need to participate to the fullest possible extent in community life. The focal point for much of this work in Alberta is the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I am very proud to serve with such a distinguished group of Albertans. Under the able leadership of Chair Marlin Styner of Red Deer, the council continues work in critical areas, including the expansion of sustainable employment opportunities for disabled persons and the development of standards for universal, barrier-free design. I look forward to providing further updates to the House on this work in the new year.

Mr. Speaker, as parliamentarians we have the opportunity and, I believe, the duty to support the work of the council and that of other community organizations working in this area. I invite all members to participate, if possible, in their local communities in events on December 3.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Carbon Emissions Reduction

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the world's leaders gather in Copenhagen to discuss a new climate protocol, this government continues to promote its laughable intensity emissions limits. Reductions based on intensity targets are insulting to the Copenhagen process and endorsed only by the remnants of the failed Bush administration. The government is always willing to capitulate to industry while the issue of climate change remains at the environmental forefront internationally.

There is a marked unwillingness and an inability to balance environmental needs with industry demands, and any attempts by this government in recent months to dispel this notion are merely window dressing. While the Premier ignores the threat of climate

change in the hope that it will just go away, our largest trading partners are moving to introduce absolute reductions of greenhouse gases, and it is likely that these plans will penalize imports from countries that refuse to acknowledge environmental realities and take meaningful steps to clean them up, countries like Canada, provinces like Alberta. This lack of leadership paves the way for the federal government to ignore the imminent need to act, and all of this leads to Alberta's and, indeed, Canada's embarrassment on the international stage.

We have a responsibility not only provincially but nationally and internationally to ensure that we are adhering to a meaningful emissions reductions scheme. Instead of concrete actions with viable solutions, this Premier prefers to waste taxpayers' money by committing a total of \$2 billion of provincial money to a carbon capture and storage project that is more focused on enhanced oil recovery than it is on environmental protection, that is still experimental, and that is yet another subsidy for very profitable oil and gas corporations. What this government needs to do is realign its priorities and come up with concrete, enforceable targets which will take into account the social and political and environmental issues at stake in the ongoing development of the tar sands.

The world will be watching us next week in Copenhagen and asking questions that this government won't be able to answer, primarily because our Premier can't be bothered to attend. The international community will be demanding that we act in an environmentally responsible and sustainable way. We all know we can. We need to. The cost of inaction is unacceptable.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka as chair of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the report of the Standing Committee on Resources and Environment, which provides a summary of the public presentations received by the committee at its November 2 and November 4, 2009, meetings respecting various issues within the Resources and Environment Committee mandate.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and present a petition from the good people of Chateau Estates, whom I very happily represent. It states: "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to build a road to replace 84th Street that will connect Chateau Estates Park to 16th Avenue."

The second petition, Mr. Speaker, with 72 signatures representing residents of Calgary and area, states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to:

- Grandfather the rights and status of all currently-practicing Registered Massage Therapists . . . in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting two petitions today. Actually, they are of the same nature. The first one, with

5,778 signatures, represents residents of Edmonton and area, and it states:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta or its representatives, including Boards and Commissions, to locate double circuit 500kV transmission power lines 800 metres away from homes, schools, daycares, hospitals and [even] environmentally sensitive areas or locate them underground.

That's the first one.

The second one, with 1,088 signatures, represents the residents of Edmonton and area, and it states:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta or its representatives, including Boards and Commissions, to locate double circuit high voltage transmission lines (550 KV) away from residential neighborhoods or locate them underground.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to represent the voice of my constituents. I will keep continuing to do so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore it's my pleasure today to table the member's petition – and I read – pertaining to:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to redevelop Alberta Hospital [as has been mentioned in this House] as necessary in order to maintain all services, programs, and beds operating as of September 1, 2009.

I submit today over 5,000 signatures.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I thought I'd help the opposition out a little bit since they do the bulk of their research through the local media. I would table five copies of a story that's in the media quoting Anne Doig, the president of the Canadian Medical Association, who is urging on behalf of doctors and patients politicians to quit waging a war of words alleging mismanagement of the nation's response to H1N1: "As a family physician whose primary focus is her patients, I say this partisan political posturing must stop."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder in his position as deputy chair of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act and as deputy chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund it is my pleasure to table the 2009-10 second-quarter update to the fund. Copies will be distributed to the members this afternoon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition with 674 names mainly from Strathcona county and the Edmonton area. It reads: "We, the undersigned, are opposed to the construction of a high voltage power line across or within sight of the Country Side Golf Course in Strathcona County."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Dr. Sherman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling five copies of a petition with 120 signatures from students at NorQuest College asking for continued support of the Alberta Works learners' program and oversight of educational institutions who administer the Alberta Works learners' program. The petition states:

We the undersigned Residents of Alberta, Petition the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will increase the Alberta works Learners fund and pass legislation that will make Educational Institutions Responsible for properly monitoring incoming and outgoing students based on their career goals.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Speaking of mismanagement, I have a tabling today that summarizes the wasteful spending of this government. It totals \$577 million, including one item of \$1.7 million in lottery grants to golf courses based on a 10-year average. It's a summary of spending cuts that could be made without gutting public health care, public education, or children's services.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Xiao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just right before we started this session, two little children came to my office to drop off the signatures they collected in my constituency. Their names are Jessie and Cassidy. They collected 102 signatures, and it states: "Bury powerlines, please." I'd like to table these signatures.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today dealing with funding shortfalls. My first tabling is a budget submission from the Alberta Graduate Council. This report outlines the priorities of Alberta's graduate students such as continuing current scholarships, increasing base funding, maintaining tuition levels, supporting international students, and providing operating funding for research.

My second set of tablings includes five copies of the brochure entitled *Solutions: All That's Missing Is U*, from Homeless Awareness Week, which took place September 14 through 20 in Calgary, which illustrates that homelessness is still a growing problem, with the number of people needing a place to sleep in Calgary growing at a rate five times the rate of population growth this year.

Next, I have five copies of the list of 2009 FCSS-funded programs and services, all of which have worked tirelessly for years on making funding dollars stretch as far as they can and providing services that are obviously essential to society and which save untold dollars in government spending through their involvement in the not-for-profit sector.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of the 2008 report on Calgary's FCSS program and 2009 funding recommendations, which I received after having the pleasure of meeting with Alderman Connelly; Martin Hornstein, the executive director of the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta, Calgary chapter; and Debra Hartley, social planner, family and community support services with the city, and which highlighted how FCSS-funded agencies are facing increasing demands for services without increased funding resources and focusing on how preventative

services save dollars over time and are one of the best investments government can make.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition which was circulated in the area of Norwood school in his riding. The petition reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to do more to protect our community schools in Edmonton's inner city. Our City Centre Education Project schools are an integral part of our communities and are essential to the revitalization of our neighborhoods. Don't close our schools.

The petition has approximately 1,300 signatures.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter from Mr. Ron Stern, president and CEO of Alberta Newsprint Company. Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I do, I just want to congratulate those that have sacrificed their facial hair for some money. I will say that in our caucus we raised a hundred dollars to shave the Minister of Municipal Affairs very quickly, and then we took a look and raised \$500 to not shave. So that's it.

On behalf of the minister of finance, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2009-10 quarterly budget report for the second quarter. This quarterly report has already been provided to all MLAs. We have also made this report public as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. Accordingly, I wish to table the required number of copies of the second-quarter fiscal update, 2009-10, which serves as our amended fiscal plan.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Snelgrove, President of the Treasury Board, report of selected payments to the Members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly, year ended March 31, 2009.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Liepert, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Facilities Review Committee Act the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee annual report 2008-2009. Pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists annual report 2008-2009; the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report, June 1, 2008, to May 31, 2009; the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2008-2009, with attached financial statements; the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta annual report 2008-2009; and the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta annual report 2009.

Projected Government Business

Ms Blakeman: Well, I'd be very interested to hear from the Government House Leader what projected government business he anticipates for next week. I'm assuming it's more along the lines of returning to our constituencies and going back to work there.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, in anticipation of the Assembly adjourning this afternoon right after completion of Royal Assent by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I am going to advise the House that there is no projected government business to report.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Page Recognition

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and all hon. members. Each day of the session we are served by the dedicated efforts of our pages. Daily they show patience and understanding of our many demands. On behalf of all members of this Assembly and as Deputy Speaker I would like to present each page a Christmas gift to say thank you and to wish a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to our pages and their families. Now, I would like to ask the head page, Conor Smyth, to receive his gift and to distribute our gifts to other pages. I would ask all members to show our sincere appreciation for the pages. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(7) now kicks in as the chair is to advise all members of the Assembly that we've arrived at 3 o'clock. If we want to continue the Routine, there have been several here asking for permission to revert to introductions. Is anybody opposed to waiving the Routine to deal with the introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:00

Introduction of Guests (continued)

The Speaker: Thank you very much. First of all, the hon. Minister of Energy, who should be smiling today because he is currently celebrating his 44th wedding anniversary with his very young bride.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Swan Hills, 44 years ago today. First church wedding in Swan Hills, and there was no church.

It gives me great pleasure and it's an honour for me to be able to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of my department staff. They're in the members' gallery. As I read out their names I'd ask them to stand, please: Tim Grant, Rhonda Duncan, Ian McKay, Bevan Laing, Jason Adam, Murray Anderson, Susan Sangalla, Matthew Good, and Kristin Stolarz. They were instrumental, of course, in the work that's been done relative to the transmission system and the bill that we had recently before the House, and I would ask all members of the Assembly to give them a warm and generous welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly our government members' caucus staff. This is a fantastic group of young professionals. I find it absolutely invigorating to work with them. This is me invigorated. From my own office we have Lisa Stachniak and Graeme Ireland. From the research and communications branch we have Jeri Romaniuk, Nickolas Bailey, Chad Barber, Ryan Barberio, Elizabeth Clement, Andre Despins, Kim Gaudet, Josh McGregor, Natalie Sigalet, Jonathan Koehli, Christine Myatt, Brock Harrison, Eldon McIlwain, and Patrick Naud. And we have legislative assistants Jan Aldous, Ryan Algar, Emly Anderson, Tracy Arnell, Courtney Banman, Lianne Bell, Colin

Connon, Lindsay Cooke, Tawny Elliott, Damon Enns, Ashley Geis, Sarah Desharnais, Kate Jenvey, Wendy King, Robyn Kowalski, Jonathan Huckabay, Hana Marinkovic, Brock Mulligan, Renee Reitsma, Marshall Thiessen, and Dianne Wills. I would like to ask that all members join me in thanking these dedicated individuals, and I ask that we give them the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Adjournment of Fall Session

23. Mr. Zwozdesky moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the Legislative Assembly stand adjourned on November 26, 2009, upon completion of Royal Assent by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that motion is neither debatable nor amendable, so I ask for your concurrence.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

Royal Assent

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Hon. members, in the year 2009 we started sitting on February 10. Today is November 26, but to the end of sitting yesterday afternoon in 2009 we sat for 63 days, including 10 evening sittings. In 2008 we sat 56 days, which included 36 evening sittings. The number of minutes this year that we've sat is 17,342, compared to 18,665 in 2008. The number of hours we have sat in 2009 is 289 hours and two minutes, compared to 311 hours and five minutes in 2008. Interestingly enough, while we sat fewer hours, more words were spoken. This year in 2009 to 6 o'clock yesterday afternoon 2,317,404 words were spoken. Oh, sorry. That's incorrect. A few less than last year, which was 2,455,104.

The number of words spoken by members in standing committee meetings this year was 1,188,234, compared to 898,705 last year. The number of hours of committee meetings to date this year, in 2009, is 140 hours, 57 minutes not counting meetings held in camera, compared to 110 hours, 23 minutes for 2008. So there's a substantial increase.

In Oral Question Period we had 14 occasions this year in which 17 sets of questions and answers were asked, as compared to 2008, when there were 11. This year we had 11 opportunities when 18 sets of questions and answers were provided. Last year it was 24. This year we had one occasion on which 19 sets of questions and answers were provided. Last year we had two. Last year we had two occasions on which 21 sets of questions and answers were given as compared to this year. The total number of questions and answers as of yesterday was 6,080, an average of 96.51 per day. Last year there were fewer questions asked, 5,643, but they averaged 102.6 questions and answers per day.

Government bills that have received royal assent to now is 46, but in a few minutes from now there'll be 16 more added, so that makes

62. Last year it was 52. The number of government bills presumed to be left on the Order Paper this year is zero compared to one last year.

Private members' bills which received royal assent this year is two, the same as last year. We've now had 46 private members' bills passed since the changes were made.

In terms of sessional papers to noon of today it was 696, compared to 641 for 2008.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne] [applause]

His Honour: Standing ovation. What did I do? Thank you very much, hon. members. Please be seated.

3:10

The Speaker: May it please His Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 31 Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act
- 49 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2)
- 50 Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009
- 51 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009
- 53 Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009
- 54 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009

- 55 Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009
- 56 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009
- 57 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009
- 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009
- 59 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009
- 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009
- 61 Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009
- 62 Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Speaker: Your Honour, on behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta may we wish you the very best of the festive season, the best of wishes to both yourself and Mrs. Kwong. Let there be peace, happiness, and good health in your family.

Thank you.

His Honour: Thank you very much.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber] [applause]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

As we await the return of the Premier, may I extend to all of you the very, very best for the upcoming festive season. May there be peace in your family. May there be happiness in your family. May there be safety in your family.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would like to just make this motion formally again, that we conclude now and adjourn until an appointed time in the new year in accordance with the standing orders.

I, too, would like to wish everyone a very successful and happy and merry Christmas and festive season and thank them for their outstanding support in the House over the last couple of months.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:16 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 23]

Bill Status Report for the 27th Legislature - 2nd Session (2009)

Activity to November 26, 2009

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 200 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills with lower numbers are Government Bills. Bills numbered Pr1, etc., are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If it comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned a chapter number until the conclusion of the fall sittings.

1 Employment Standards (Reservist Leave) Amendment Act, 2009 (Stelmach)

First Reading -- 6 (Feb. 10 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 90-93 (Feb. 17 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 503-4 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 583-84 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c4]

2 Lobbyists Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)

First Reading -- 9 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 93-94 (Feb. 17 aft.), 121-23 (Feb. 18 aft.), 212-14 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 575-79 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c5]

3 Credit Union Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 123-24 (Feb. 18 aft.), 202-03 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 579-80 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 609-10 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c3]

4 Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2009 (Bhullar)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 124 (Feb. 18 aft.), 353-56 (Mar. 11 aft.), 585-86 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 680-83 (Apr. 16 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 912-15 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c11]

5 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)

First Reading -- 17 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 125 (Feb. 18 aft.), 214-15 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 506-07 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 585 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c6]

6 Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)

First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 356-60 (Mar. 11 aft.), 586 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 633-38 (Apr. 14 aft.), 861-65 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)

Third Reading -- 899-900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c12]

- 7 Public Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 437-38 (Mar. 17 aft.), 439-40 (Mar. 17 aft.), 586-87 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 865-70 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 900 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c13]
- 8 Feeder Associations Guarantee Act (\$) (Groeneveld)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 203-08 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 580-83 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 610 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cF-11.1]
- 9 Government Organization Amendment Act, 2009 (Campbell)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 360-61 (Mar. 11 aft.), 587-88 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 895-97 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 915-17 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c9]
- 10 Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act (Dallas)**
First Reading -- 18 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 361-62 (Mar. 11 aft.), 588 (Apr. 8 aft.), 889-91 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 920-21 (Apr. 30 aft.), 980-83 (May 5 aft.), 1118-20 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407-08 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cS-23.5]
- 11 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2009 (VanderBurg)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 362-63 (Mar. 11 aft.), 891-92 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 983 (May 5 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1408-09 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c22]
- 12 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2009 (Berger)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 383-85 (Mar. 12 aft.), 892-95 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1120-21 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c31]
- 13 Justice of the Peace Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
First Reading -- 19 (Feb. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385 (Mar. 12 aft.), 895 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1121-22 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c27]
- 14 Carbon Capture and Storage Funding Act (\$) (Knight)**
First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 208-10 (Mar. 3 aft.), 884-89 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 921-22 (Apr. 30 aft.), 1114-18 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1409-11 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 cC-2.5]
- 15 Dunvegan Hydro Development Act (Oberle)**
First Reading -- 105-06 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 210-11 (Mar. 3 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 504-06 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 584-85 (Apr. 8 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 cD-18]

- 16 Peace Officer Amendment Act, 2009 (Lindsay)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 385-86 (Mar. 12 aft.), 919-20 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1122 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1411 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 1, 2009; SA 2009 c30]
- 17 Securities Amendment Act, 2009 (Fawcett)**
First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 386-87 (Mar. 12 aft.), 622-26 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 737 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 917-19 (Apr. 30 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c14]
- 18* Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement Implementation Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Stevens)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 211-12 (Mar. 3 aft.), 349-52 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 381-83 (Mar. 12 aft.), 446-54 (Mar. 17 aft., amendments agreed to), 472--81 (Mar. 18 aft.), 482-83 (Mar. 18 aft.), 574-75 (Apr. 8 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 604-09 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Apr. 20 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 20, 2009; SA 2009 c7]
- 19* Land Assembly Project Area Act (Hayden)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 438-39 (Mar. 17 aft.), 626-33 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 683-90 (Apr. 16 aft.), 737-53 (Apr. 21 aft., amendments agreed to), 770-84 (Apr. 22 aft.), 797-806 (Apr. 23 aft.), 857-61 (Apr. 28 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 897-99 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cL-2.5]
- 20 Civil Enforcement Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 161 (Mar. 2 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1265 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329 (May 26 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c18]
- 21 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 377-80 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 440-43, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 468-71 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c2]
- 22 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
First Reading -- 344 (Mar. 11 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 380-81 (Mar. 12 aft.), 386 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 443-46, 454 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 471-72 (Mar. 18 aft.), 481-82 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Mar. 23 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 23, 2009; SA 2009 c1]
- 23* Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (Danyluk)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1329-30 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1527-28 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2010; SA 2009 c29]
- 24 Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 735-36 (Apr. 21 aft.), 969-70 (May 5 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1412 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c17]

- 25 Teachers' Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 283 (Mar. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767 (Apr. 22 aft.), 970-72 (May 5 aft.), 1105-06 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1167-69 (May 13 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1447-49 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force September 1, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c32]
- 26* Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009 (Mitzel)**
First Reading -- 303 (Mar. 10 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1265-68 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1330-31 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1412-13 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c36]
- 27* Alberta Research and Innovation Act (\$) (Horner)**
First Reading -- 466 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 767-69 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1003-06 (May 6 aft.), 1094-98 (May 12 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1170-73 (May 13 eve.), 1229-40 (May 25 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1507-10 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.7]
- 28 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 769-70 (Apr. 22 aft.), 1006-07 (May 6 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1246-49 (May 25 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1413 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c20]
- 29 Family Law Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 851-52 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1268-69 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1358-60 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c21]
- 30 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2009 (Drysdale)**
First Reading -- 401 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 736-37 (Apr. 21 aft.), 1269-73 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1360-63 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1528-30 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c35]
- 31* Rules of Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
First Reading -- 402 (Mar. 16 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 852-53 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1273-75 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1711-13 (Nov. 3 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1773-74 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c53]
- 32 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act (Horne)**
First Reading -- 467 (Mar. 18 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1275-80 (May 26 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1365 (May 27 eve.), 1449-55 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-31.5]
- 33 Fiscal Responsibility Act (Evans)**
First Reading -- 545 (Apr. 7 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 853-54 (Apr. 28 aft.), 972-79 (May 5 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 998-1003 (May 6 aft.), 1109-14 (May 12 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1526-27 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 cF-15.1]

- 34 Drug Program Act (\$) (Liepert)**
First Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 979-80 (May 5 aft.), 1014-15 (May 6 aft.), 1194-95 (May 14 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1384-87 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation, with exceptions; SA 2009 cD-17.5]
- 35 Gas Utilities Amendment Act, 2009 (McFarland)**
First Reading -- 591 (Apr. 9 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1280-81 (May 26 aft.), 1344-45 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1524-25 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c24]
- 36* Alberta Land Stewardship Act (\$) (Morton)**
First Reading -- 818-19 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 882 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1134-40 (May 13 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1371-84 (May 27 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1503-07 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cA-26.8]
- 37 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (\$) (Evans)**
First Reading -- 701 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 854-55 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c15]
- 38 Tourism Levy Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1106 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1187-88 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c34]
- 39 Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 855-56 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1107-08 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1188-90 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1406-07 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c33]
- 40 Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2009 (Brown)**
First Reading -- 702 (Apr. 20 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1108 (May 12 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1190 (May 14 aft., passed)
Third Reading -- 1407 (May 28 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009, with exceptions; SA 2009 c16]
- 41 Protection for Persons in Care Act (Brown)**
First Reading -- 766 (Apr. 22 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 856 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1345-50 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1387-90 (May 27 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525-26 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cP-29.1]
- 42 Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
First Reading -- 734 (Apr. 21 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 857 (Apr. 28 aft.), 1350-58 (May 27 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 1455-60 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1525 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c23]

- 43 Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Griffiths)**
 First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 883 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1149-53 (May 13 aft.), 1155-61 (May 13 eve., passed on division)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1365-71 (May 27 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1497-99 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c28]
- 44* Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009 (Blackett)**
 First Reading -- 850 (Apr. 28 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 883-84 (Apr. 29 aft.), 1007-14 (May 6 aft.), 1036-38 (May 7 aft.), 1140-47 (May 13 aft.), 1161-66 (May 13 eve.), 1173-74 (May 13 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1283-84, 1294-1329 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 1460-80 (Jun. 1 eve., passed on division)
 Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c26]
- 45 Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
 First Reading -- 933-34 (May 4 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1098-1103 (May 12 aft.), 1147-49 (May 13 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1240-46 (May 25 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1510 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1523 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c19]
- 46 Gunshot and Stab Wound Mandatory Disclosure Act (Quest)**
 First Reading -- 966 (May 5 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1706-07 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1708-10 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1716-17 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1772-73 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1852-54 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cG-12]
- 47 Appropriation Act, 2009 (\$) (Snelgrove)**
 First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1085-94 (May 12 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1166-67 (May 13 eve.), 1169 (May 13 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1190-94 (May 14 aft.), 1195 (May 14 aft., passed on division)
 Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force May 26, 2009; SA 2009 c8]
- 48 Crown's Right of Recovery Act (Liepert)**
 First Reading -- 1049 (May 11 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1706 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1710-11 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1735-42 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1843-47 (Nov. 17 eve.), 1897-99 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1899-1900 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 cC-35]
- 49 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) (Lukaszuk)**
 First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1500-01 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1707-08 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1713-16 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1733-35 (Nov. 4 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c49]
- 50* Electric Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Knight)**
 First Reading -- 1426 (Jun. 1 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1501-02 (Jun. 2 aft.), 1816-36 (Nov. 17 aft.), 1866-86 (Nov. 18 aft.), 1887-96 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1917 (Nov. 19 aft.), 1963-74 (Nov. 23 eve.), 2004-16 (Nov. 24 aft.), 2017-23, 2028-32 (Nov. 24 eve., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 2050-62 (Nov. 25 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c44]
- 51 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Redford)**
 First Reading -- 1700 (Nov. 3 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1770 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1847 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1900 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c48]

- 52* Health Information Amendment Act, 2009 (Rogers)**
 First Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 436 (Mar. 17 aft., reinstated), 437 (Mar. 17 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Health), (May 25 aft., reported to Assembly)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1284-94 (May 26 eve., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 1526 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c25]
- 53* Professional Corporations Statutes Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
 First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1742-46 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1837-40 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1974-77 (Nov. 23 eve., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 2023-24 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c51]
- 54 Personal Information Protection Amendment Act, 2009 (Denis)**
 First Reading -- 1569 (Oct. 27 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1746-51 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1770-71 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1847-51 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1901 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c50]
- 55 Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 2009 (Webber)**
 First Reading -- 1546 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1751 (Nov. 4 aft.), 1765-70 (Nov. 5 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1851-52 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1901-02 (Nov. 18 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c54]
- 56 Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2009 (Evans)**
 First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1703 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1771-72 (Nov. 5 aft.), 1840-42 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1918-22 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1984 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c40]
- 57 Court of Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2009 (Weadick)**
 First Reading -- 1633 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1703 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1842-43 (Nov. 17 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1984 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c42]
- 58 Corrections Amendment Act, 2009 (Griffiths)**
 First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1703-04 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1923-25 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1977-79 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 2025-27 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c41]
- 59 Mental Health Amendment Act, 2009 (Sherman)**
 First Reading -- 1666 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1704-05 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1925 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1979-83 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 2027 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force January 1, 2010; SA 2009 c47]
- 60 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2009 (Quest)**
 First Reading -- 1642 (Oct. 29 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1705 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1925 (Nov. 19 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1998-2000 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 2027 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c46]

- 61* Provincial Offences Procedure Amendment Act, 2009 (Lukaszuk)**
 First Reading -- 1666 (Nov. 2 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1705-06 (Nov. 3 aft.), 1961 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1983-84 (Nov. 23 eve., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 2027-28 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c52]
- 62 Emergency Health Services Amendment Act, 2009 (Liepert)**
 First Reading -- 1866 (Nov. 18 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1917 (Nov. 19 aft.), 1961-63 (Nov. 23 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 2000-04 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Third Reading -- 2028 (Nov. 24 eve., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force November 26, 2009; SA 2009 c45]
- 201 Traffic Safety (Vehicles with Unlawfully Possessed Firearms) Amendment Act, 2009 (Hehr)**
 First Reading -- 106 (Feb. 18 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 165-76 (Mar. 2 aft.), 284-86 (Mar. 9 aft., defeated on division)
- 202 Municipal Government (Municipal Auditor General) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnston)**
 First Reading -- 138 (Feb. 19 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 286-96 (Mar. 9 aft.), 406-08 (Mar. 16 aft., referred to Standing Committee on Community Services), (Nov. 25 aft., reported to Assembly, not proceeded with)
- 203* Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009 (Johnson)**
 First Reading -- 251-52 (Mar. 5 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 408-16 (Mar. 16 aft.), 829-31 (Apr. 27 aft., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1053-64 (May 11 aft., passed with amendments)
 Third Reading -- 1209-15 (May 25 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (May 26 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c10]
- 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act (Blakeman)**
 First Reading -- 498 (Mar. 19 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 831-32 (Apr. 27 aft.), 934-41 (May 4 aft., defeated on division)
- 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009 (Anderson)**
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 Third Reading -- 1787-93 (Nov. 16 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- 2077 (Nov. 26 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2009 c43]
- 206* School (Enhanced Protection of Students and Teachers) Amendment Act, 2009 (Forsyth)**
 First Reading -- 621 (Apr. 14 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1433-38 (Jun. 1 aft.), 1547-55 (Oct. 26 aft., passed)
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- 208 Life Leases Act (Mitzel)**
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- 209 Children's Services Review Committee Act (Chase)**
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 First Reading -- 2045 (Nov. 25 aft., passed)
- Pr1 Beverly Anne Cormier Adoption Termination Act (Anderson)**
 First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)
 Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)
 Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed)
 Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)
 Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 4, 2009; SA 2009 c37]

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First Reading -- 376 (Mar. 12 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

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Third Reading -- 1532 (Jun. 3 aft., passed)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 4 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force April 1, 2009; SA 2009 c38]

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Second Reading -- 1480 (Jun. 1 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1502 (Jun. 2 aft., passed with amendments)

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund
Blakeman
Campbell
Lukaszuk
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Rogers

Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee

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MacDonald
Marz
Notley
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski
Blakeman
Campbell
DeLong
Denis
Johnston
Kang
MacDonald

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Bhardwaj
Chase
Johnson
Johnston
Lukaszuk
Notley
Rodney
Sarich

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McFarland
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Weadick
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Rogers

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Fawcett
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Rogers
Taylor
VanderBurg
Weadick

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Forsyth

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NOTE: Effective with the fiscal year 2009-10, main estimates for each department are dealt with in policy field committees. The indexes for main estimates are therefore no longer incorporated into the Hansard index but will be included with the separate proceedings for each policy field committee.

For an outline of departments and the committees their estimates are referred to see after the table following.

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Advanced Education & Technology	Standing Committee on the Economy
Agriculture and Rural Development	Standing Committee on Resources and Environment
Children and Youth Services	Standing Committee on Health
Culture and Community Spirit	Standing Committee on Community Services
Education	Standing Committee on Community Services
Employment and Immigration	Standing Committee on the Economy
Energy	Standing Committee on Resources and Environment
Environment	Standing Committee on Resources and Environment
Finance and Enterprise	Standing Committee on the Economy
Health and Wellness	Standing Committee on Health
Housing and Urban Affairs	Standing Committee on Community Services
Infrastructure	Standing Committee on the Economy
Internat’nl & Intergov’tl Relations	Standing Committee on Resources and Environment
Justice and Attorney General	Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services
Municipal Affairs	Standing Committee on Community Services
Seniors & Community Supports	Standing Committee on Health
Service Alberta	Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services
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- Chiropractic services coverage, letters re (SP192, 272, 359/09: Tabled) ... *Taft* 622, 966, 1208
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- No. 203 Local Authorities Election (Finance and Contribution Disclosure) Amendment Act, 2009
- No. 204 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act
- No. 205 Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure (Third Party Advertising) Amendment Act, 2009
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